



#20  
SPRING 2011  
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# DRAW!

THE PROFESSIONAL  
"HOW-TO" MAGAZINE  
ON COMICS  
AND CARTOONING

THE UNPARALLELED  
**WALTER  
SIMONSON**  
INTERVIEW & DEMO

ROUGH STUFF's  
**BOB McLEOD**  
CRITIQUES A  
NEWCOMER'S  
WORK

WRITE NOW's  
**DANNY  
FINGEROTH**  
SPOTLIGHTS  
WRITER/ARTIST  
**AL JAFFEE**

LACKADAISY'S  
**TRACY  
BUTLER**

REVIEWS OF  
MUST-HAVE  
**ART TOOLS**



PLUS:  
MIKE MANLEY  
AND BRET  
BLEVINS

**COMIC ART BOOTCAMP**





# DRAW!

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THE PROFESSIONAL  
"HOW-TO" MAGAZINE ON  
COMICS & CARTOONING

**SPRING 2011**  
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## CONTENTS

3

### WALTER SIMONSON

Mike Manley interviews the legendary writer and artist .....



22

### ROUGH CRITIQUE

Bob McLeod gives practical advice and tips on how to improve your work

27

### TRACY BUTLER

Mike Manley speaks with the creator and artist of the webcomic, *Lackadaisy* .....



42

### UNDER THE COVERS

Publisher John Morrow and colorist Tom Ziuko show how this issue's cover was (re)created.

44

### AL JAFFEE

Danny Fingerth interviews the *Mad*-man cartoonist .....



58

### THE CRUSTY CRITIC

Jamar Nicholas reviews the tools of the trade. First up: brush pens.



60

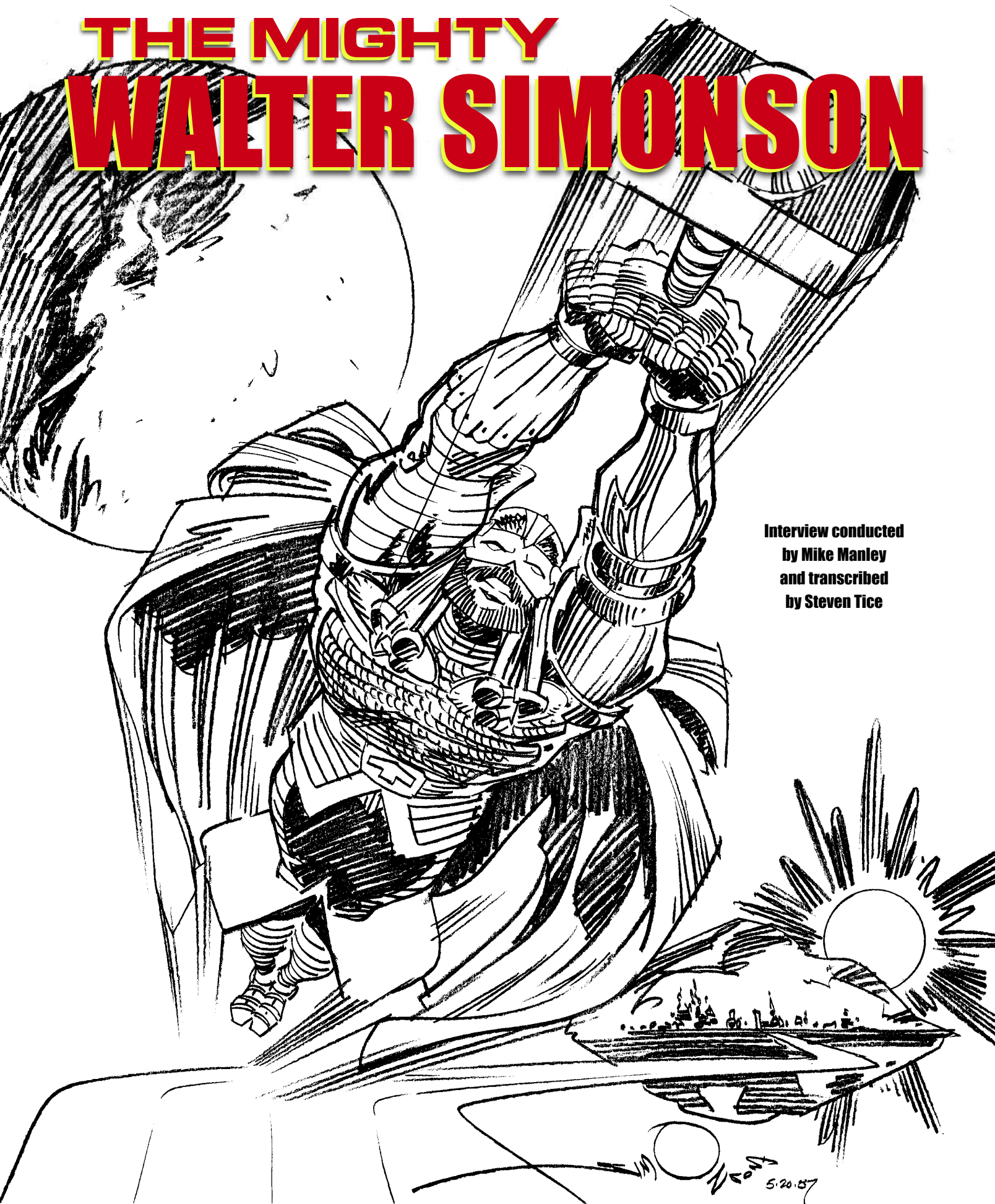
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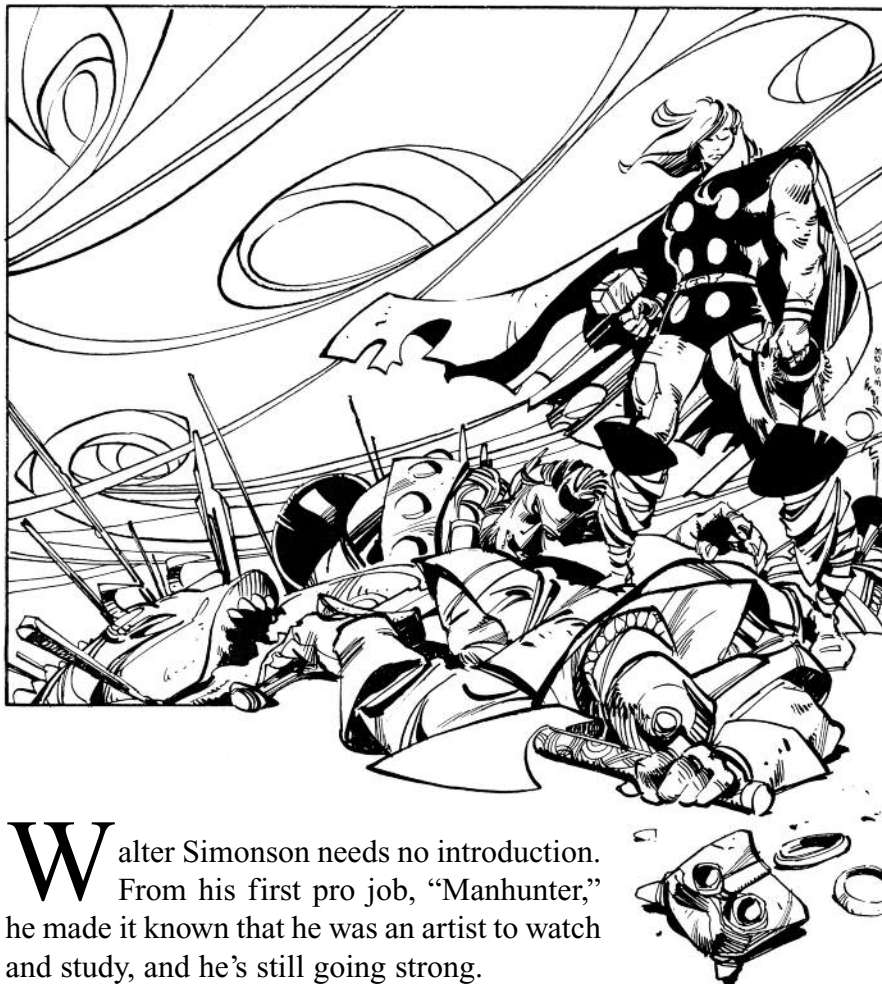
"Emotional Design" by Bret Blevins and Mike Manley .....

WHOSOEVER WIELDS THIS PENCIL...

# THE MIGHTY WALTER SIMONSON

Interview conducted  
by Mike Manley  
and transcribed  
by Steven Tice





**W**alter Simonson needs no introduction. From his first pro job, “Manhunter,” he made it known that he was an artist to watch and study, and he’s still going strong.

**DRAW!:** You have the honor of being the only professional I ever wrote a fan letter to.

**WALTER SIMONSON:** Oh, is that true?

**DRAW!:** Yeah, yeah, it’s true!

**WS:** That’s funny.

**DRAW!:** And that was after I met you for the first time. You might remember that convention; it was in, I think, Novi, Michigan, or somewhere near there. And you were there with Al Milgrom...

**WS:** What year was this?

**DRAW!:** This must have been about 1980. Right after you did that last Cylon story for *Battlestar Galactica*.

**WS:** Oh, yeah, okay. That’s probably ’79 or ’80, I suppose.

**DRAW!:** You were there, Al Milgrom, Terry Austin, Mike Vosburg.

**WS:** All the Michigan boys, except for me.

**DRAW!:** All the Michigan boys, yeah. And I remember meeting you there, and you were such a nice guy. I remember you taking lots of time with me. You were very patient, looking at my horrible samples. And I remember we started talking about, I think it was Bernie Fuchs or Bob Peak or something else, and I was like, “Wow! This guy knows other stuff besides comic books!”

**WS:** Oh, how funny.

**DRAW!:** I remember writing you a letter after that.

**WS:** Wow. Well, it may be still in a file somewhere.

**DRAW!:** You can haul it out someday and embarrass me with all my horrible spelling.

**WS:** That’s very funny. How old were you at the time?

**DRAW!:** Let’s see. If it was ’80, I was 18, 19.

**WS:** Okay. Well, that’s old enough to have a portfolio.

**DRAW!:** Yeah, 17, 18, 19, somewhere in there.

**WS:** That’s a riot. Well, I’m very honored.

**DRAW!:** You also had done a *National Lampoon* cover, I think?

**WS:** I did, right around that time.

**DRAW!:** Have you done a lot of color work since then?

**WS:** No, I don’t do very much color work. I haven’t colored in a long time. I did some in the ’70s and early ’80s, but not in comics. For other areas of commercial art, but not really in comics. I colored some of my actual earlier stories. I haven’t done that in a long time, either. I did more color back in those days, but I haven’t done much in a long time. I’m still trying to figure out black-&-white.



**DRAW!:** When you colored your stories in the beginning, did you color them and have somebody give you a hand doing the codes?

**WS:** Nah, the codes just weren't that tough. I mean, once you figured out it was R2, R3, and R—that was the three grades of red—it just wasn't that tough. And we had a sheet from Chemical Color that had all the combinations and permutations of the various colors. It was a series of circles in a kind of rectangular pattern. It might have been five down, and seven or eight across, and it showed all the different combinations. So coding that stuff wasn't brain surgery.

**DRAW!:** I think I still have one that I got from Carl Potts or Nel Yomtov or somebody at Marvel years ago.

**WS:** Yeah. I probably still have it. In the old days, they printed it up on newsprint, so it was on the same kind of paper and you could see how the colors would look in print. But the first time I got one, probably from Jack Adler at DC, he X-ed out a whole bunch of them down in the lower-right-hand corner—all the browns that were not that far apart, and all the ones that were the 75% and 100% color variations of magenta, cyan, and yellow, but they were all not that far apart from each other. He said, "Don't use any of these colors," and X-ed them out. They weren't so different, so that wasn't that much of a hardship, either. It was the old days.

**DRAW!:** Printing is different now. When you were doing a story that was being printed on newsprint, as opposed to now, where you can basically draw with anything and get anything reproduced, has that affected the way you approach your work, because the coloring is so different?

**WS:** Nah. Not really. [laughter]

**DRAW!:** You're not supposed to say that, Walt!

**WS:** You know, I do what I do. I do the kind of drawing I do, I ink it, I try to do the best drawing I can manage, I try to do the best compositions I can manage, and the best storytelling, and the color, that's really somebody else's job. I try to get good colorists to work over me. I've been very lucky in that regard, but I haven't really done fewer black or done more blacks. Probably the only thing I've done, actually, in the modern era of color, is, when I remember to, I generally tell whoever's coloring my stuff, "Don't knock my blacks out in color." Because, at least when computer color first came in, everybody wanted to knock blacks out in color. It became blue, it became brown, it became something else. My work is shape- and design-oriented, and no color has the strength of black. So if you start knocking out my blacks, you start screwing up my compositions.

I work with, in a lot of ways, mostly the older colorists. Steve Oliff was one of the early guys to work with computers, and he worked before computers came in, so he has the sensibilities from the time when you only had, effectively, 35 or 40 colors, tops. Generally I try to keep the rendering from being too render-y. Again, I haven't made a fuss about that. I mean, mostly I



(previous page) Artwork for an ad in *Thor* #336 to promote the Walter's then-upcoming run.  
(above) Walter drew this illustration of the Lord of the Nazgul (as well as many other Tolkien-inspired images) in 1965 at the tender age of 19.

THOR™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

haven't had a problem with it. The blacks is the one area where I really have said, "Look, please don't knock my blacks out. Or, if you do, get a hold of me first, send me a shot of it and show me what it looks like, and I'll decide then." Because I also believe in the empirical evidence of what's going on rather than just laying down a law. If you over-render my stuff—since it's not drawn in a way to be highly rendered—what happens is you'll take large areas of shape that I've created—negative areas or even positive areas—if you do a lot of color rendering inside there, you basically break up those shapes that are really crucial to the composition of the drawing. When you start breaking that stuff up, then the drawing doesn't look as good.

I haven't done that much work on the computer. I've worked on these long projects that take me a while to get done. The last monthly book I worked on was *Orion* for DC in the early 2000s, and there Tatjana Wood did the bulk of the coloring. Of course, Tatjana colors old school. She would be a little cranky with me, because I would try my best, but apparently I was not error-free

in forgetting to draw in various costume lines on characters from time to time. I would try to get them right, I would work hard, but you'd have Mister Miracle or somebody, and somehow I'd forget to point some line around the arm or whatever it was, I don't even remember anymore, and she would fuss at me, in a very gentle way. She would fix it for me in the color, which is very nice. I tried to keep it straight, but it was kind of hard to do. And then I did the *Elric* book with Mike Moorcock that came out from DC, about 200 pages long, and Steve Oliff colored that. He colored it with a much more modern sensibility, but it was still... It had echoes of the past in a way that I liked and was happy with. And I also think Steve has very pretty color, the kind of color I like.

I don't work with a lot of really modern, young guys who have carved out a whole swath in the industry. So I don't know what would happen... I'll get that way eventually, but we'll see. I want

them to work as hard at the stuff into making it proper, as I do, myself. And I really haven't changed what I do in order to accommodate the fact that you're going to have eight billion colors on your work. In the old days, in newsprint comics, it was difficult, although not impossible, to screw up a page with color. It was not easy. I mean, the coloring was pale enough, and the printing was bad enough, that it was hard to do that. You couldn't really destroy a page with color. And now it's remarkably easy. You could really completely destroy a page with color without batting an eye. So it's worth keeping closer track of. I have, to some extent, but I've also mostly worked with guys who are younger than me, but older than a lot of the young colorists, who understand the old stuff. Sort of like one foot in both camps—the old material, the new material—and they find some pretty good balance. I like that. So I've been lucky in that regard, so far.



Klaus Janson applied the Zip-a-tone to Walter's work here for Marvel's *Battlestar Galactica* #4. BATTLESTAR GALACTICA™ AND © UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS, INC.

**DRAW!:** Do you use less Zip-a-tone and things like that, maybe, than you used to?

**WS:** I never use Zip. I used Zip once in a blue moon back in the old days, but very rarely. K-tones—mostly in the old days, on newsprint, unless you were like Tom Palmer, who was a magician with the stuff, or Wally Wood—just made the color look kind of dirty. And, also, it was newsprint printing. So I very rarely used it. I used Zip-a-tone on a few of the very few black-&-white jobs that I did, jobs that were for Marvel magazines or for Warren. I would occasionally use Zip on stuff like that, but I didn't use Zip very much.

It'd be interesting to go back and do it now. Of course, now, I haven't developed a facility for it, but now... Well, two things have happened. One, I think there's a lot more Zip. It went through a period there, 20 years ago, or 30 years ago, where Zip-a-tone became very hard to find. Shading tone was rare; it was almost impossible to get. And then—this is my take, anyway—came the influx of manga into America, and the fact that lots of stories began to realize you can get sheets or preprinted pads of paper now preprinted for newspaper strip proportions, or comic book pages, or manga pages, or whatever. So now, thanks to the Web, there's a lot of Zip-a-tone available. And other brand names, obviously. And, of course, as some friends of mine do, you can just manufacture your own K-tone sheets, essentially, or patterns, in the computer, and lay that in. I have not done that because I haven't used Zip very much. If I'm using it, I prefer it on black-&-white jobs. I haven't done a black-&-white job in a long time.

**DRAW!:** Yeah, that's what I did. I did two X-9 stories for King Features, and I made up my own Zip in Photoshop, so when I scanned my pages in, I basically was able to make a sheet of 20% and 30% of the right line screen, and then I could just bring that in on the layer and erase off what I didn't want, which was a lot easier than having to cut it with an X-acto knife.





Walter's layout for Marvel's *Star Wars* #62, page 22.

STAR WARS™ AND © LUCASFILM LLC.

my résumé, "I worked for Wallace Wood," so it was very neat for me. It was fun to see it come out. By the time it's done, of course, it looks like Woody's stuff. But my job was to provide pencils that he was able to ink and shape in a direction he wanted to go. That was completely fine with me. I understood that in the beginning. I mean, I knew guys like Larry Hama and Ralph Reese, guys who worked for Woody, so I knew how he worked, somewhat. I knew what to expect. It wasn't like I went in there without knowing how this was going to play out as far as the way the work would look. But that was fine. I may be able to send you a page of pencils and a page of my layouts and a page of Woody's finishes on that.

**DRAW!:** I think that would be really interesting, because I remember seeing the stuff that García-López did, and then your stuff, and you can tell that somewhere under the Wally Wood there is some García-López, and somewhere under there there's Walt Simonson. It's sort of like Wally Wood drawings in positions that Wally Wood would never draw.

**WS:** Would mostly not draw, but it still looked a lot like Woody. So, anyway, that's how that worked out. In the case of *Star Wars*, when Tom Palmer was inking it, you'll have to ask Tom. I don't know if I was doing pencils or layouts for that book. I mean, it might have been layouts. I can't remember. It may also have been pencils, at least early on, in the first part of that series, I don't know. I came on right after the adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back*, which Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson did. And I did one issue right before that, or somewhere in there, that I actually penciled and inked. I think it was *Star Wars* #49. Then #50 was a special double issue, and I took over after #51. Maybe the movie was right before that.

Tom may have been brought on board with me. He was really a perfect guy for it, and it was great, because his son, Tom Jr., who was very young at the time, was a giant *Star Wars* fan. Still is, I believe. Hi, Tom! So when Tom Sr. would ink spaceships, Tom Jr. was watching over his shoulder, and they had to be right. [Mike laughs] He was the small consultant. Again, I'm not sure if I was doing pencils or layouts there, but Tom brings his own brand of finish to the work, the same way Woody did, and it really seemed incredibly appropriate for *Star Wars*. And he did a lot of work. The first splash page we did together, I think I had a Y-Wing flying into a planet. When that came back, he had actually transferred my drawing to Kraftint and then done the Kraftint thing on it. It was really elaborate, and it was gorgeous. And it just got the world's worst printing. It was just awful. But it sure looked great in the original; it looked fabulous. Tom really brought a whole new game to that stuff that I just didn't have, so it was quite a combination of the two of us.

And then DeZuniga's stuff, that was about '77, '78. I did *Thor* for a year. Len Wein wrote it. I think I was doing layouts. I went through a period—'76, '77, I probably started on *Hercules* somewhere in there—where I decided I wanted to learn how to think faster about what I was doing. So I set aside doing pencils and inks for a while, while I did layouts for books like *The Rampaging Hulk* for Marvel, which was finished by Alfredo Alcalá; *Thor*, which was finished by Tony; Woody's stuff; and so on. It was a way of my trying to concentrate not so much on the drawing and the finishing of the drawing of the panels and so on, but to think about the page as an element of design, and to really try to figure out how to tackle that in a quick way.

When I was doing "Manhunter," Archie Goodwin and I were telling 20-page stories, basically, in eight pages. If you go back and look at the "Manhunter" stuff, it's 10, 12, 14, 15 panels on a page. No matter how you cut it, that's not going to happen very fast. *The Rampaging Hulk* was a 40-page story or thereabouts, and they'd be big because it was the Hulk breaking stuff, so I wanted big panels. *Hercules* was a little like that, a little more story in that stuff, I think. A little shorter, too. And *Thor* was me and Len Wein doing kind of the Lee-Kirby riff on the character with some of the old foes, and a bunch of Asgardian stuff, and some new guys we invented. But, again, for *Thor* I wanted a sense of scale, I wanted something bigger. I did one annual that Ernie Chan inked. But those were layouts, because there I didn't have to think so much about how I was going to finish the drawings, but I could give the shapes, and the design, and the compositions, and the storytelling my full attention and let those guys do the finishing work.

**DRAW!:** When you start approaching your page, are you thinking sort of rhythmically, like you want to get to a certain point at the bottom of each page to flip the page, and you sort of work back and forth? I'm interested in your process, because I've always really admired your layouts. I think, besides Kubert, you're one of the best guys with layouts, and I learned a lot by studying your stuff in the beginning, by studying how you laid out a page.

**WS:** Okay, well, now you're just scaring me. [laughter] You know, I've gone through a lot of stages. I probably couldn't even remember them all at this point. Howard Chaykin remembers this, because he's mentioned it a couple times. I kind of





# ROUGH Critique

**Constructive  
analysis and  
criticism of a  
newcomer's work  
by  
BOB McLEOD**

**B**ack in the Dark Ages, before I finally broke into comics and began my now 37-year-long career, I got compliments on my art all the time. In fact, I can't remember any criticism at all until I got my first rejection letter from Warren Publications at age 19 (curious readers can see the letter and my art submission on my web site at <http://www.bobmcleod.com/rejection.jpg>). All of those wonderful compliments from family, friends, and teachers had taught me absolutely nothing! Well, they did teach me that I could draw better than my family, friends, and most of my teachers! But it wasn't until I got that rejection letter that I realized I wasn't actually the best artist on earth (next to Mort Drucker, my art god) and in fact I had a lot to learn. I would soon also have a comic strip (<http://www.bobmcleod.com/nosey.html>) rejected by several newspaper syndicates, and a few years later when I traveled to New York attempting to get work in comics, Marvel Comics would refuse to even look at my samples, and DC Comics editor Joe Orlando would tell me I needed to go back to school and learn how to draw! We don't like to hear it, but only criticism is what makes us begin to recognize our faults, and only then can we improve on them and become better artists, or, in some cases, perhaps wisely decide to become writers instead! And constructive criticism gives us a jumpstart on that improvement by showing us exactly what to work on and study. So that's my goal here in my "Rough Critique." Anyone I'd bother to critique in a magazine has talent and potential, so there's nothing to gain by compliments; that's what family, friends, and at least elementary school teachers are for. I'm here to try to get you to that next level and get published! Which brings us to this issue's art sample submission by the talented Jason Dennis.

Comic art styles are constantly changing, and in recent years manga has taken a firm foothold on American comics. Many artists still work in more traditional styles, but several of the hottest artists in the last decade are incorporating many elements of the manga style. A lot of people in comics put down manga,

but to me it's just another style. There's nothing wrong with manga as long as it's well done. Jason's art isn't manga, but it has some of that influence. His figures are a blend of cartoony exaggeration and dramatic realism, and that's fine and probably even preferable for superhero comics. You could say the same about some top artists in my generation, such as the great Michael Golden, and the following generation's Todd McFarlane.

Jason does have a lot going for him. I really like the way he's moving the camera all around, showing up-shots and down-shots, close-ups and long-shots, etc. He also knows just when to use a close-up, and when to pull back, and how to animate his figures. I like that he's drawing a good amount of backgrounds, and adding a lot of weighty blacks and dramatic lighting, then balancing it with a fine-line rendering technique. He's leaving the right amount of room around the figures for dialogue balloons.

And no boring six-square-panel grids for him! He's trying hard to be innovative in his panel layouts as well. He's obviously done a lot of studying on visual storytelling and put in a lot of months (no doubt years!) working on his figure drawing, and is probably sitting there thinking he's ready for Marvel to hand him an X-

*Man* script. Okay then, enough with the compliments. So far, I haven't taught him anything or told him anything he doesn't already know. Let's get Rough!

Jason sent me three pages, and I'd like to use all three of them, because they can each teach Jason and you some different things. We'll go page by page, okay? For those of you who may not be familiar with standard comic art procedures, I should mention that Jason has put an X wherever he wants the inker to fill in black, rather than take the time to fill in those areas in pencil. Most editors actually now prefer that the penciler doesn't do this.

The first step in drawing a page is deciding on your panel layout—what shape the panels will be, and how big they'll be. I used to just start drawing the first panel and then work my way down, panel by panel, kind of making each of them work with the space I had left. That's not a good way to go. It's much better to

**"Anyone I'd bother to critique in a magazine has talent and potential, so there's nothing to gain by compliments."**

do a thumbnail and plan out the page, giving more space to important panels and action scenes, and less space to talking heads and close-ups. On page one, there's a dramatic battle with Wolverine, but it's squeezed into small panels, while a figure sitting in a chair and a close-up use up over half the page. Jason's done a fine job composing it, but wouldn't it be better to have the third panel, the most dramatic scene, dominate the page? Isn't that the panel we want to see the most?

Also, the panels on the right overlap the panel on the left. Is this a good idea? It certainly can be, and is done routinely by almost everyone today. But hold on, you must take care when overlapping panels or using inset panels (small panels inserted into larger ones) so that you don't obscure anything important in the underlying panel and don't confuse the order in which the panels should be read. Here, the third panel intrudes excessively into panel one and obscures a lot of one figure's head. It overlaps so far into the panel that it grabs our attention and leads our eye to view it before the second panel. Because we naturally tend to read left to right and top to bottom, we first look at the central figure in panel one, then our eye moves to the figure on the lower left, then the middle, then the lower right, then right up Wolverine's leg into panel three. It's rarely a good idea to overlap a panel by more than 2/8" or 3/8" for this reason.

I should say, before I go any further, that you may see things like this being done in some manga and even some mainstream comics. My students love to point out that they see printed comics with artists doing stuff like this. Believe me, just because something is printed in a comic doesn't make it a good thing to do. Professionals do things they shouldn't all the time. And fans often go nuts over bad art, as long as it has lots of little lines everywhere. There are no hard rules in art. But there are soft rules, developed by thousands of artists over time through trial and error to help you make better art. We older artists have tried most everything you're going to try, and we've learned the hard way what works and what doesn't. Once you know what you're doing, you can bend and break the rules as you see fit. But it's important to be in control, rather than do something in ignorance or by accident. You don't have to follow all my advice, but I promise everything I tell you will make your art better. It's up to you how good you want to be.

Linear perspective is something that plays a huge role in how we construct scenes, and far too many artists neglect studying it. Most people can see something's not quite right, but they don't understand what. There's a lot more to perspective than simply having lines go to a vanishing point, though that's at least a good start, and Jason could really benefit from doing at least that much. In fig.1 (see right), by following the general direction of his background lines, we see the horizon must be far below the figures (all objects parallel to the ground recede to points on the horizon where they vanish, thus "vanishing points"). A simple rule is that we can obviously only see the bottom

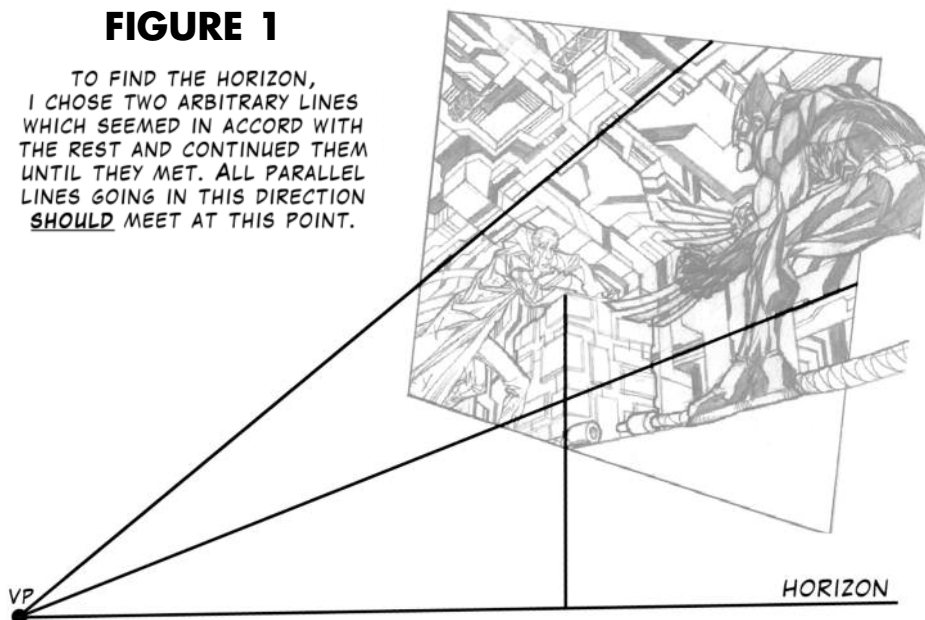


Page 1 of Jason's sample story.

X-MEN™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

## FIGURE 1

TO FIND THE HORIZON, I CHOSE TWO ARBITRARY LINES WHICH SEEMED IN ACCORD WITH THE REST AND CONTINUED THEM UNTIL THEY MET. ALL PARALLEL LINES GOING IN THIS DIRECTION SHOULD MEET AT THIS POINT.



All lines and objects parallel to the ground and each other recede toward the horizon to a common point where they vanish from our vision, called a "vanishing point" (VP). So this background would suggest the horizon is below the picture frame.



# Cats, Gats, and all that Jazz



## an interview with **TRACY BUTLER**

*Conducted by Mike Manley  
Transcribed by Steven Tice*

**DRAW!:** You're done with your busy workday, I take it?

**TRACY BUTLER:** No, actually, my day job ends at about seven at night, and then I come home and I start on my comic art, so... [laughs] It's on to job #2.

**DRAW!:** Where do you work?

**TB:** I actually work for a small game development company during the day called Simutronics, located in the St. Louis area. There aren't many game development companies in this area anymore—they all moved to the West Coast—but we're still hanging on out here, and making online roleplaying games, and Facebook games, and occasionally working with 3-D software for an MO development tool.

**DRAW!:** And what do you do with the company?

**TB:** I'm an artist there. I started as a studio artist doing a lot of their illustration, promotional, graphic design sort of work, and I moved into 3-D animation gradually. I've been with the company for ten years now. So, yeah, I moved on to character animation, character design, things of that nature.

**DRAW!:** So you actually animate, as well?

**TB:** Mm-hm. Yup. In-3D, not traditional cel animation.

**DRAW!:** What program are you using for that?

**TB:** Our primary operating tool is 3-D Studio Max. We use a little bit of Maya, as well, but those are generally the industry standards in the games.

**DRAW!:** Did you go to school for this?

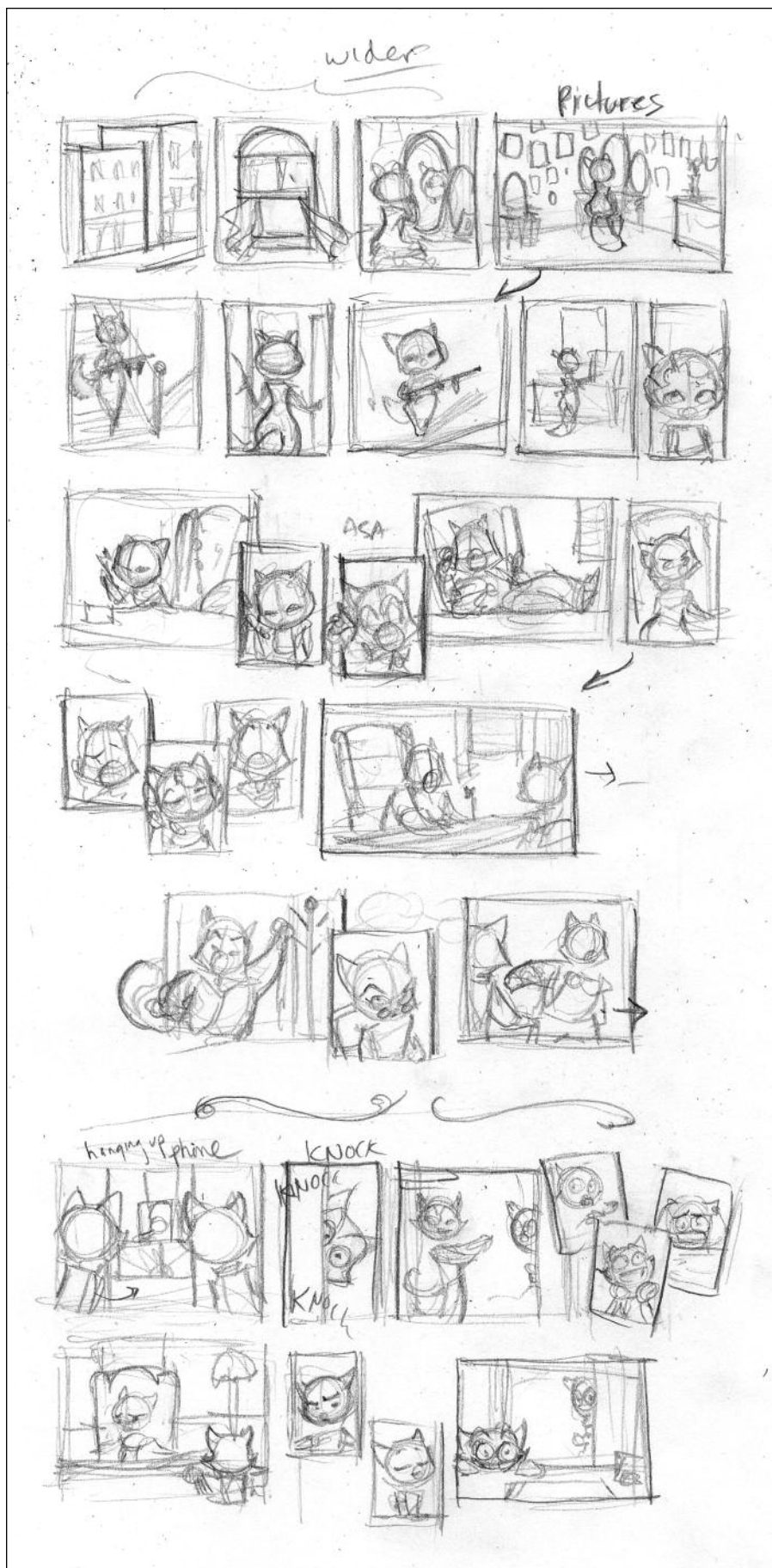
**TB:** I did not, actually. I desperately wanted to when I was a teenager, but had parents who did not believe that art was a lucrative career choice, so I ended up going to school for a short time for biology. But I kind of drifted into art, anyway. I put up a website while I was in college, and the company happened to take notice of it. One of the lead programmers saw my art online, and they flew me out for an interview, and the rest is history, I guess.

**DRAW!:** That's great.

**TB:** Yeah. I learned 3-D on the job, basically. I kind of just saw some of the other artists there working with it, and got curious, and kind of fell in love with the whole process.

**DRAW!:** Did you find that it was much of a learning curve?

**TB:** Oh, definitely, yeah. It starts out very slow, because the software is rather daunting. I mean, 3-D Studio Max and Maya and the other programs that Autodesk produces are extremely elaborate things. They do so many different things that just getting into the tool and learning how to use it is the hardest part. Once you



Thumbnails for the *Lackadaisy* web strip. Tracy typically works on three or four pages at a time.

LACKADAISY™ AND © TRACY BUTLER.

get used to the interface and the general working paradigm, it becomes much easier and much more intuitive. You reach that point where you just take off and you figure out how to do things in the way you're comfortable. All the possibilities start opening up for you, and you realize, "Oh, I can read things this way, or model this way, if I choose," and it's a lot of fun.

**DRAW!:** It sounds like you to multiple jobs there.

**TB:** Yeah. Because it's a small company, the staff there wears numerous hats, basically. We don't tend to get pigeonholed into one task only. With larger companies, either you're concept artist or you're a texture artist or you're a modeler. But with the small company that I work for, I enjoy the varying experiences I get, because we have only a limited number of people to work on things, so I get to get my hands on all kinds of different tools and types of art. So it's been a big learning experience for me. I didn't go to art school, but I think I've learned more working there than I would have in four years of school.

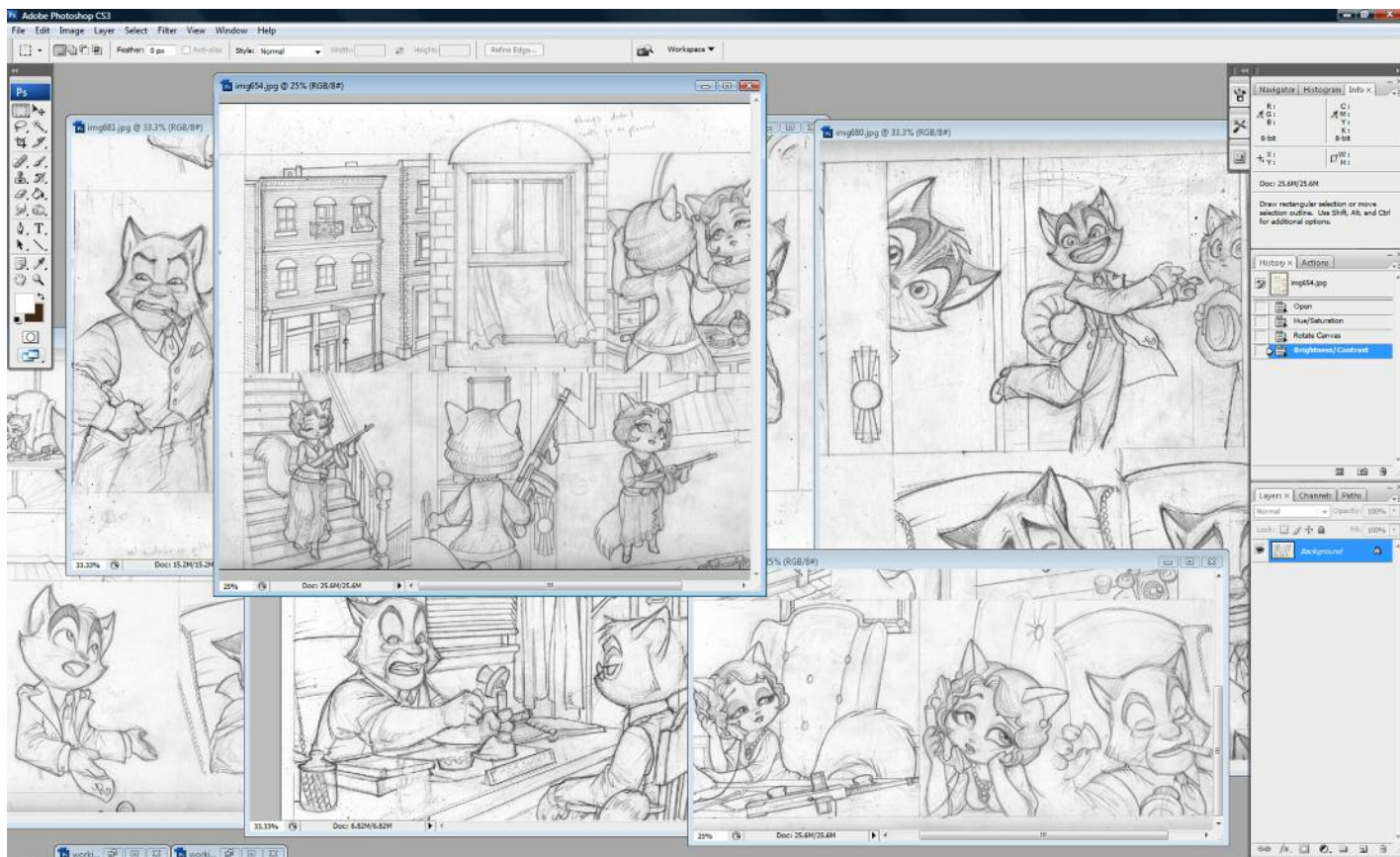
**DRAW!:** Well, yeah. Working on the job, actually working every day, sort of trumps school, because you're dealing with the real world, and you're also dealing with real world consequences, the good and the bad.

**TB:** Right, yeah. You get thrown right into the pit where people are criticizing your art, and you have to have meetings every week where the art goes up on the big projector screen in the conference room and people—not just artists, but programmers and other people involved in the game development process—are basically tearing your art to shreds. [laughs] It's a little intimidating, but it really brings reality right up to the forefront. You can't really live in denial at that point on where your weaknesses are.

**DRAW!:** How did you come up with *Lackadaisy*? Because your day job sounds, from the tone of your voice and everything, very fulfilling.

**TB:** It actually is. I'm not entirely sure how to explain where *Lackadaisy* came from. I've been living in the St. Louis area for a while, saving money and everything, and finally bought a house of my own. It happened to be about a hundred years old, and I was really fascinated by the history of the house and the neighborhood, and I started researching that, and that expanded into researching the history of the St. Louis area in general. I was listening





Once the pages have been penciled, they are scanned and adjusted in Photoshop.

LACKADAISY™ AND © TRACY BUTLER.

to a lot of jazz music at the time, and I think those things just kind of congealed into a storyline formulating in my head. I had some characters that I wasn't really doing anything with; they didn't really have any context, but I enjoyed drawing them all through high school in my notes while I was supposed to be paying attention in class. So I kind of merged those two things together and came up with this comic. It didn't exactly start as a comic. I think I was thinking of maybe just doing some artwork in that vein to start with, but there was a story there, so I figured, well, there's got to be some way I can put this on paper. So I started doing the comic, my first foray into that realm of art, really. My first serious foray into it, anyway.

**DRAW!:** So you hadn't done comics, or long-form comics, before this?

**TB:** No. No, not at all. Probably when I was in high school I did a very informal bit of comic drawing just for my friends, but it was very loosely done, and I wouldn't call it a serious project at all. *Lackadaisy* is definitely the first time I've actually seriously taken on a comic project and endeavored to tell a whole story in that form. It's a new experience, a lot of learning.

**DRAW!:** What did you find to be the most challenging aspect of it? I mean, you're an animator and illustrator, so you're used to doing a volume of work, but comics is definitely a different form.

**TB:** Oh, yeah. As an artist, I'm much more comfortable drawing and painting and such than I am writing, and I think probably the story writing aspect of it, and writing dialogue, has proven to be the absolute most challenging portion of it for me. I don't consider

myself a writer by nature, but this kind of forced me to start doing things that I wouldn't otherwise do. If I want to get the story out there, I've got to write it and make sure that I do it right. So it's a challenge, but I think that's what keeps me interested in doing it—it's always forcing me to try something new. I also tend to be very organic-oriented when it comes to drawing; I like drawing animals and anatomy and people and cartoon characters, but I tend to avoid doing perspective drawing and things like that—landscapes, cityscapes, backgrounds, and vehicles—and this comic has really forced me to do that, because the whole story takes place in a city in the 1920s, and so I really had to get my perspective drawing down. [laughs]

**DRAW!:** Well, you started right off the bat giving yourself one of the most difficult things to deal with, which is drawing historical fiction. You have to do research.

**TB:** Yeah. That's an ongoing difficulty, too, but I enjoy that, as well. There're just so many facets to doing a comic that, if you're just doing illustration, it's just one thing you can focus on, but if it's a comic, you're writing, you're drawing, you're researching history, and it's opened up so many new and different things for me that I probably never would have even been interested in or looked at, given a glance, had I not started the comic.

**DRAW!:** You started the comic first, and then you approached Fourth Dimension Entertainment after you'd already been producing it for a while?

**TB:** I actually started putting it on the web. It was a web comic to start with, and I didn't approach any publishers, actually. I didn't

# IS THIS AN AL JAFFEE INTERVIEW?

Interview conducted in person  
by Danny Fingeroth on April 28, 2010  
and transcribed by Steven Tice



Born in 1921, Al Jaffee was a member of the first graduating class of New York's High School of Music and Art (where his classmates included future *Mad* magazine colleagues Will Elder, Harvey Kurtzman, Al Feldstein, and John Severin). Jaffee worked as an editor, writer and artist for Stan Lee at Timely (later Marvel) Comics during the 1940s.

Then, in 1955, Jaffee joined "the Usual Gang of Idiots" at *Mad* where he's been a mainstay ever since, entertaining generations with his "Mad Fold-Ins" and "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions." Al has also created innumerable cartoons, comics, and illustrations for other publications, such as *Humbug*, *Trump*, *Esquire*, and *Playboy*.

His biography, *Al Jaffee's Mad Life*, by Mary-Lou Weisman, with 70 new illustrations by Al, was released in the fall. It tells of Al's amazing—and harrowing—life's journey, from Savannah, Georgia to a small village in Lithuania, to the pages of *Mad*. The recent retrospective show of Al's work—"Is This the Al Jaffee Art Exhibit?" co-curated by Danny Fingeroth and Arie Kaplan—was a crowd-drawing and pleasing event at New York's Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art (MoCCA).

Despite repeated requests, Jaffee refuses to retire and is frighteningly active, including still doing the "Fold-Ins" for *Mad*.

Danny spoke to Al in April 2010 in the *Mad*-man's Manhattan studio.





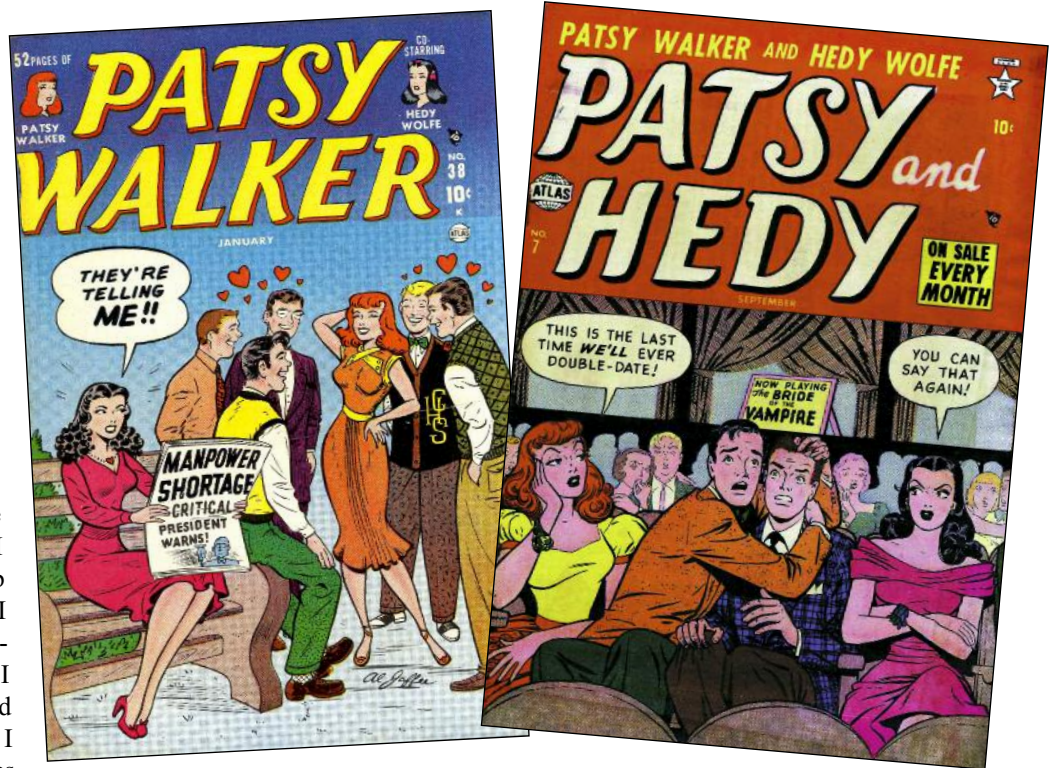
**DANNY FINGEROTH:** Let's start at the beginning, Al. Can you talk a little bit about your background and how you got into comics in the first place?

**AL JAFFEE:** I got into comics primarily because it was the only thing I knew how to do. I wasn't really trying to do anything but artwork. I graduated from high school at the tail end of the Great Depression. And if people think that the economy is bad now, just imagine what it was like when it was twenty times worse. Jobs were few and far between, and we just scrambled to try and figure out how to make a living. I think I probably would have taken a job working in a department store if I could get one. But I truly loved drawing, and it's one of the things that I found that I could do easily. Not good drawing, but funny drawing. What I mean by "good" drawing... Superheroes were the rage at the time that I was trying to enter into the field. There was Superman, of course, and Batman, and one of my favorites, the Spirit by Will Eisner, which just was magnificent.

But there were many, many others that all required the knowledge of anatomy, and memory. Anatomy and memory. The reason I don't know anatomy is because I can't remember the muscles. But even though I had taken a lot of courses in school in figure drawing and all of that, anatomy was not something that was appealing to me. What was appealing to me was the emotional heart of a drawing, not the clinical, surgical-looking posturing of a muscled person. I was more interested in the funny expressions, or the emotional expressions, emotional movement that told a story rather than just posturing like a clay figure. But humorous drawing was just not being bought by anybody. The [humor comic book feature] I remember was by Sheldon Mayer at DC. He was doing something called "Scribbly," but he could get away with that because he was the editor of the magazine it appeared in. There was practically no place to sell humor stuff until I met Stan Lee and he started producing what we called "animated" comic books: comics based on animals, rabbits, pigs. He asked me to create a humor feature for Timely [later Marvel] Comics, and I created "Silly Seal," and then we added Ziggy Pig to it. They did a lot with those two. Later on, I went on to draw "Super Rabbit," and then I did teenage stuff. This is the kind of stuff I could write and I could draw.

**DF:** The teenage stuff was realistic. It had real anatomy, so you've done that.

**AJ:** When Stan came to me and said, "I want you to do a teenage comic for me, and we'll call it 'Jeanie,'" I said, "But, Stan, I draw rabbits and pigs and stuff like that. I don't know how to draw pretty girls. I've never even tried it!" He said, "You can do it. I want you to do it. Write a script and illustrate it, and bring it to



Al Jaffee covers for *Patsy Walker* #38 and *Patsy and Hedy* #7, both from 1952.

PATSY WALKER™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

me." And I did. I sweated it out. Believe me, it was very difficult. I looked in magazines to see how girls moved, and how they dressed, and how they looked. And then I looked at some of the women's magazines and started copying really terrific artists like Stan Drake. After a while Stan Lee wanted me to take over several *Patsy Walker* comic books. I guess I was getting better at it as I went along, and eventually I felt very comfortable with it.

**DF:** You've minimized, in your modesty, your talent in that area. I think it was more realistic than, say, the Archie stuff, wasn't it?

**AJ:** *Patsy Walker*? It was realistic. But it was also highly stylized, and they wore a lot of clothes, so you can't tell what the anatomy was like. But if I had to draw somebody in his underwear the way Superman and Batman are—although, in all honesty, and I'm not bragging when I say this, if I had to learn to draw a Superman-like feature, I would learn to do it. It's just a matter of time.

**DF:** Did you ever try to do any superheroes for Stan?

**AJ:** No, but he once asked me to do a crime story, a Bonnie-and-Clyde-like crime story. And I did it, and I thought that it came out very successfully. So sometimes I even surprised myself. Maybe the innate ability is in there somewhere, but you just have to feel motivated enough to want to do it.

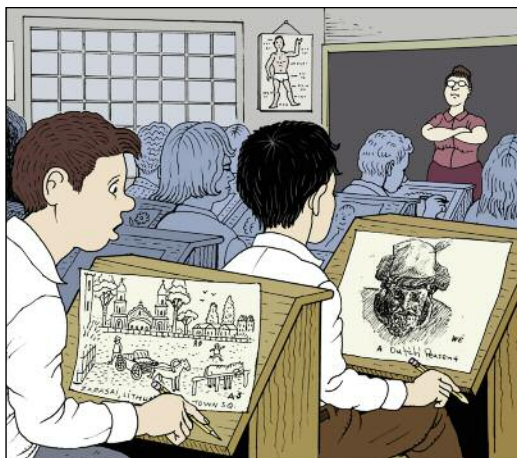
**DF:** Did you have your first formal art training at The High School of Music and Art?

**AJ:** Yes, I had four years of very, very fine training there.

**DF:** You had some well known classmates there, as well.

**AJ:** Well, the ones that come to mind were Will Elder, who was my best friend. I also knew Johnny Severin, Harvey Kurtzman. I didn't know Al Feldstein. He is a number of years younger than





Illustrations done for Al Jaffee's biography, *Al Jaffee's Mad Life*. The first depicts his father taking back custody of Al and his two brothers from his mother—who had taken them from their hometown of Savannah, Georgia to live in a stiel in Lithuania—thereby saving them from poor living conditions and the rise of Nazi Germany. The second shows the beginning of the friendship between Al and Will Elder.

© AL JAFFEE.

I am. But there were a number of others who came out of Music and Art who went on to become pretty well known artists in other fields, not comic books, but magazine illustration, and so on.

**DF:** How did you end up at Music and Art? Were they teaching you art in junior high school, as well?

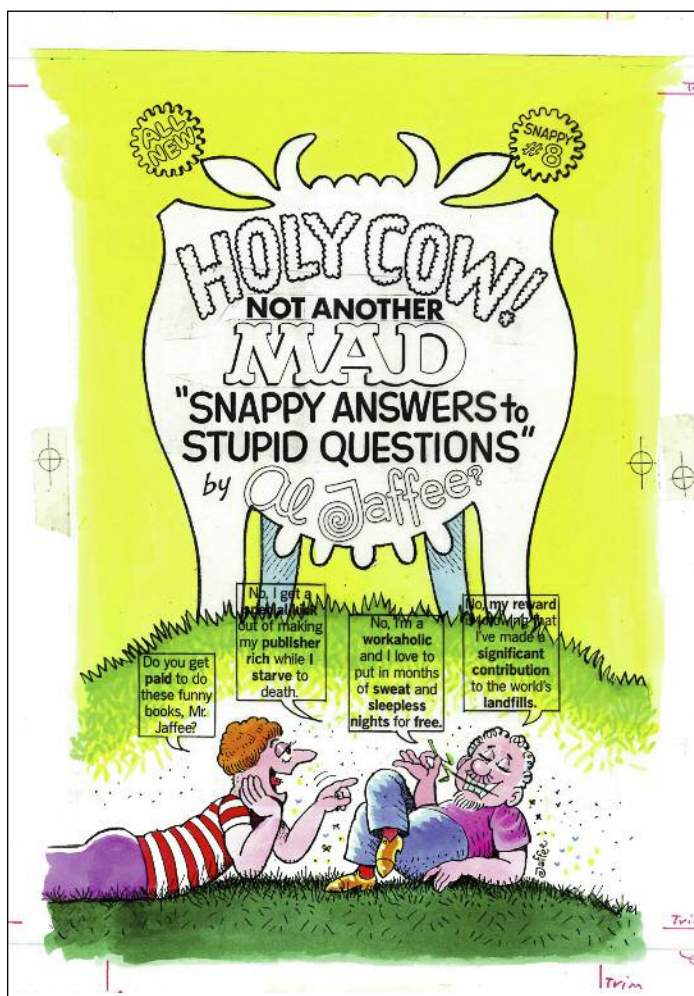
**AJ:** New York City junior high schools, at the time, did have classes in both music and art. They called it “music appreciation” and “art appreciation.” It wasn’t strictly for teaching you to draw. It was similar to gym. When we went to gym, they weren’t teaching

you how to become a baseball player or football player, but those who had talent eventually did become competent baseball players and football players. The rest became fat and pudgy. So when we went to art class, very few people in art class could draw, but the teacher wanted them to understand what art is, and we would be shown pictures by Michelangelo and Rembrandt and some modern artists’ work. And then you also had the freedom to create an assignment. For example, a teacher would say, “Draw a scene that appeals to you. It can be nothing more than a park and trees, or flowers, or a picture of your friend, or a cartoon. Whatever you want.”

So, at one point, I was in a math class and a monitor came in and said, “You have to go up to the art classroom now.” And I went up to the art classroom, and there were about 50 kids there. No one knew what it was all about, because the kids were pulled out of all kinds of classes, including gym and shop and what-have-you. And the teacher said, “You have a pencil and you have paper. Draw whatever comes into your mind.”

Well, the only thing I could think of drawing was a picture of the town square in a little town in Europe that I had lived in as a child for six years. And so I drew the scene with the horses and the church, all that kind of stuff, as well as I could. And then suddenly I looked over the shoulder of the little, skinny kid in front of me, and I saw that he was drawing the most beautiful portrait of what looked like a peasant of some sort. And, at the end of this class, the teacher collected all the papers and announced, “Everyone can leave except Al Jaffee and Will Elder.” Will was the kid sitting in front of me. Our names were slightly different at that time, but you can read my book [*Al Jaffee's Mad Life*] and you’ll find out what they were.

We were called down to the principal’s office, and we sort of felt nervous about it, because usually that meant some kind of punishment. And while we were sitting there, this little kid, Willie Elder, says to me, in this thick Bronx accent, “You know, I tink they’re gonna send us to aht school.” And sure enough, the principal calls us in and says, “A new high school in music and art has been created by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, and you two have been chosen to go there.” This really was a seminal moment in both our lives. Willie, of course, went on to be one of the founders of *Mad* magazine with Harvey Kurtzman, and also did wonderful work in “Little Annie Fanny” and *Humbug* and *Trump*, and was a brilliant artist, and also a very fine painter, as a hobby. I tried to keep up with Willie, and eventually followed him to *Mad*.



Cover art for a collection of Al's “Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions.”

© EC PUBLICATIONS.



**DF:** Was there a philosophy or point of view about art that they imparted to you at Music and Art?

**AJ:** Music and Art was primarily devoted to classical music and fine art. I had classes, for example, in everything from wood engraving, to etching, to pastels, to oil painting, to watercoloring. There were also classes in industrial design, which I didn't take, but I did take a class in type design. So we got everything, and I really enjoyed all these classes. I learned things that I never dreamt I would ever know. But cartooning came to me very naturally, and I did a lot of cartoons for fun in class, which the other kids admired—but the teachers didn't, and they would lean on you if you did that. I remember Willie Elder brought in a beautiful rendition of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, and the teacher grabbed it out of his hands and said, "You're not bringing this kind of stuff into this art school again!" But Willie learned a lot about fine art there, and so did I. I imagine that we might have had some luck becoming fine artists if comic books hadn't come along.

**DF:** You alluded to your childhood in Lithuania. There were aspects of it that were fairly traumatic. Do you think that affected your art?

**AJ:** Art has kind of saved my life in many, many ways. I had a dysfunctional childhood. I was ripped out of my hometown in Savannah, Georgia, and transplanted into a little town in Lithuania, and then I eventually was ripped out of Lithuania and brought back to America and planted in the Bronx. In each one of these cases, I was an alien. I arrived in strange places with strange-speaking people, and customs that I was not familiar with. And the only way I could ingratiate myself and become part of the gang in each—the little gangs in Lithuania, the little gangs in the Bronx—was to draw funny pictures. Being a cartoonist is almost like having a universal language. You can make friends anywhere in the world.

I remember, on one of the trips that *Mad* took us on, to Suriname, in South America, I went on a trip in a canoe with [*Mad* publisher] Bill Gaines and a couple of other *Mad* men. We shot the rapids, and everyone had a very exciting time. We arrived in a native village where people were living in the jungle the way their ancestors in Africa had been living for thousands of years. We were taken into a rudimentary classroom. There was a teacher and a whole bunch of little kids who were dressed in handmade clothes. It was very primitive. We were introduced by the teacher and told that we'd come from a faraway country, but there was no real communication until Jack Davis went up to the



Al's "Mad Fold-In" for the back cover of *Mad* #186.

© EC PUBLICATIONS.

blackboard and drew a picture of Mickey Mouse. And there was still absolutely no reaction from the kids, even to Mickey Mouse. But quick-thinking Jack turned around, and—he's one of the fastest artists in the world—drew an absolutely perfect caricature of the teacher, and the kids collapsed on the dirt floor, laughing hysterically. So that's what I mean by universal language. There are places where even Mickey Mouse and Superman are not known. But just the ability to make a drawing of something funny, or of someone and make it look funny, gives you entree to hordes of people. And this has been the story of my life. It's opened up a lot of doors for me. I could entertain my little friends and be part of their group very quickly instead of having to work my tail off doing it. So cartooning has been very good to me.

**DF:** You worked briefly for Will Eisner?

**AJ:** Yes. Will Eisner was a hero to all of us aspiring cartoonists. I know that Joe Kubert eventually went to work for him, and so did Jules Feiffer. Anybody who had any kind of talent wanted to be discovered by Will Eisner. I don't know what inspired me to do it,





COMIC ART BOOTCAMP

# Emotional DESIGN

by  
**BRET BLEVINS**  
and  
**MIKE MANLEY**



In recent years in my role as a teacher, I have come to focus on a series of issues that the young artist faces in developing their own vocabulary on their way to becoming a mature artist in command of their skills and medium of choice. Just this evening as I write this article, one of my former students sent me his work, asking for some help with how to solve a storytelling problem. What both Bret and I hope to demonstrate in this article are the same principles I used with my student to help him solve his problem and make his story clear, interesting, and emotionally involving—what I have come to call the building blocks of Emotional Storytelling.

As storytellers, taking a script and transforming it into a narrative or story is not an easy task. It's hard work to cast a spell over today's readers, who are really quite sophisticated and easily bored, as well. As visual artists, we work in a world that is just blasted by visual images from every device and platform possible. I think one of the chief questions we face as modern storytellers is: "How do we tell an interesting story that will cut through the 'chatter' and grab the imaginations of the readers?" Our success in weaving that magic spell over the viewer or reader—who takes our lines, shapes, colors, balloons, and panels and creates in their mind an exciting comic—lies in our ability to manipulate them visually into having the emotional response we as storytellers desire. That's right; outright manipulate them, just as a magician does.

Our first and most important tool in



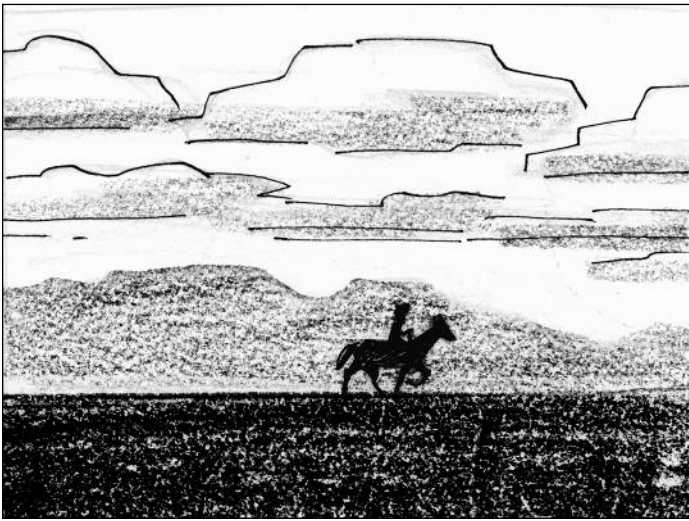
our magic kit is design: arrangement of the elements within a design (panel, meta-panel or comic page).

By careful thought—and often trial and error through sketches, thumbnails, and layouts—we create work, images that communicate specific moods, feeling, action, and emotions in the mind of the reader, when and where we want it. I didn't write, "eye," as the *mind* is the chief instrument here; it interprets what the eye sees, not the other way around.

The success of a story on an emotional level in a comic is built on the emotional design in the panels and all of the great cartoonists did this—no manner of rendering or flashy drawing will overcome bad design. This is one of the most important lessons to learn as a cartoonist or visual storyteller, and it's one you can improve on for the rest of your life, the possibilities are endless.



Let's start with something simple: two basic examples of drawings or comic panels which give the reader a specific feeling and how that feeling can be changed greatly by just a few adjustments.

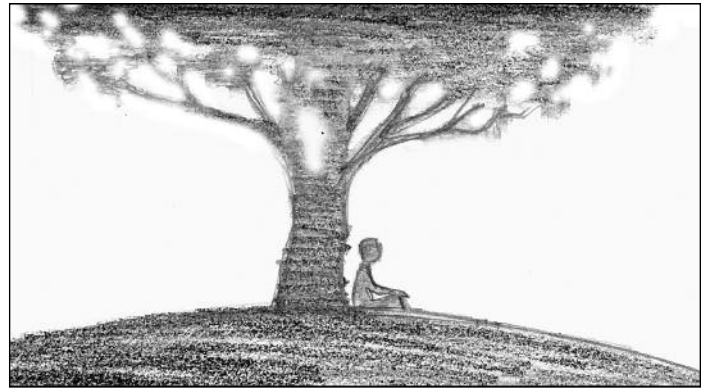


First we see a lone rider on the horizon, the sky dominating the composition. Now let's take that same drawing and reverse some of the elements in the design.

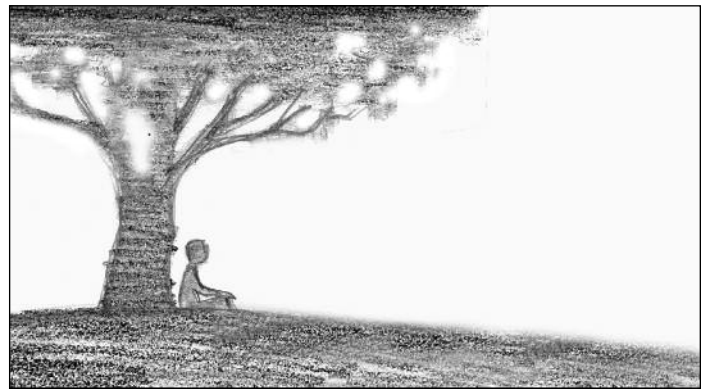


Clearly the second composition has a very different emotional feeling than the first. If you asked yourself what emotion each drawing created, what would they be? Isolation, fear, danger, tranquillity? This goes to the emotional heart of the reader, and what you want them to feel. This has to be a conscious and informed decision on your part as the storyteller or you might end up creating a drawing that has either the wrong or an unclear emotional note in the story. Often the trip-up in this issue comes from an artist's personality. We are all seduced as artists by different things, and many artists, especially younger artists, are seduced by craft, by finish, or by the cool shot—the awesome detailed drawing or bit of cleverness.

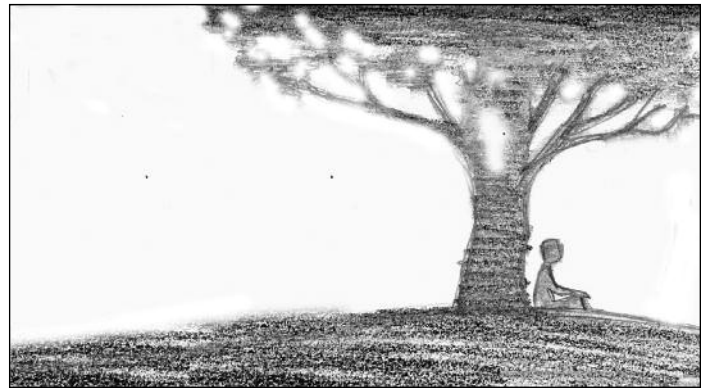
It's easy to understand. Who doesn't like good drawing? And most people like flashy drawing. But the good storyteller will not choose flashy drawing at the expense of the design of a panel or the emotional need of the story. The great storytellers combine both!



Here is another example, a person sitting at a tree. If we place the elements in the middle we get one kind of emotional feeling. Symmetrical compositions tend to give a feeling of harmony or stability, even calmness.



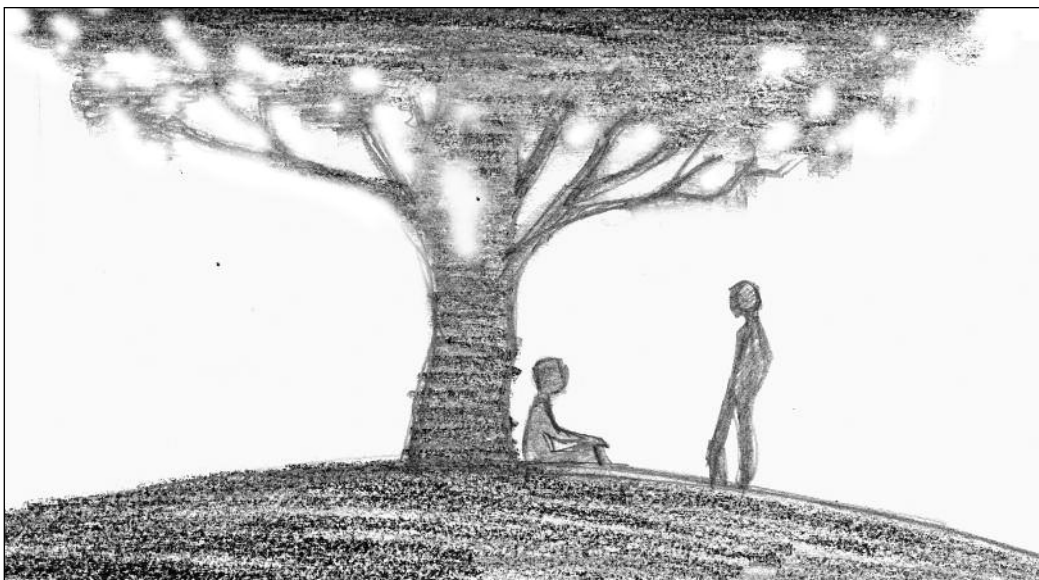
However, if we shift the tree and person to the left, look at how this composition creates a question because of the dominance of the negative space.



And if we shift the tree over to the other side, we create a slightly different mood and emotional feeling in the viewer.

What emotions does each composition create? Are you aware of them and are you choosing to arrange the elements in the composition to give the reader a specific emotion? This, my friends, is really the heart of it. Are you aware and in control, or are you flying by the seat of your pants?

Think for a moment. We have all read a lot of comics by now, some of us literally thousands of issues and stories. Now think about the ones that come to your mind the most. Why do they



stand out? I think it's because they carved an emotional groove in our memory as much as a visual one. We remember key panels or pages, and those have left an emotional groove in our memory.

For training purposes what I suggest is to go find some of those favorite comic issues and do some dissection of them. Find that key scene or panel and take it apart, break it down, and study the compositions. How was that panel or page designed, and why do you think the artist was so successful in creating, along with the writer, such a strong comic? By studying the formal aspects of the work of the great artists before us, we can learn from them—as they learned from their heroes. It is your charge to do this, to take from the greats their secrets, which they have left here for us to learn from.

Effective emotional storytelling arises from choices that convey sensations to your audience: reader, listener, or viewer, and all the senses can be invoked visually—sight obviously, but also sound, touch, scent, and taste. An image of rotting, moldy food or a bloody knife evokes unpleasant associations of scent, taste, and touch. A pleasing image of delicious fruit or flowers will strike a pleasant chord. A convincing image of someone screaming in pain evokes memory of disturbing sounds. A delighted, laughing child or water flowing over rocks will suggest appealing sound. All of our physical experience can be suggested by powerful visual representation, and as a visual storyteller these are the means of affecting your audience.

In specific technical terms this means a combination of two elements: your CHOICE of content/subject matter, and HOW it is presented in the language of visual art—composition, emphasis, and treatment (technique and style).

The first element of CHOICE seems obvious, but it is no small accomplishment to consistently choose the best focus and content for any given scene or image. Most people feel confident they can explain themselves clearly in a succinct manner, but they are often wrong. Clear communication of complex information requires consideration and careful arrangement, and most of us are too constantly busy or distracted to prepare all our thoughts for utmost clarity. In the give and take of conversation, confusion can eventually be cleared away, but as a visual storyteller for a phantom audience, clarity is essential, and many of the common errors found in poor storytelling are a result of the

artist *assuming* that the initial choice they've made is clear and effective, without realizing that further thought would improve both the clarity and the impact of their work. To create fine storytelling you must acknowledge the difficulty of the task and respect the effort it demands—telling a story well is not as easy to accomplish as it appears to be from the other side—enjoying it as a reader/viewer in its carefully constructed final form.

The second element of HOW information is presented becomes much less concrete than choice of content, much more open to an endless variety of approach, accent, and stylistic treatment. This is why we all have favorite creators that we prefer to others who may possess equal or even greater talent. Some quality or characteristic of their expression has a particular, more affecting appeal or resonance with our own sensibilities and personality. Content may be the initial attraction to a work or artist, but it is HOW they communicate the content that grabs us and forms our preferences. Craftsmanship can be parsed into its technical components and easily studied, but the mysterious cumulative effects of tone, mood, and the distinct atmosphere of a creator's personal approach is the gestalt that excites and intrigues us.

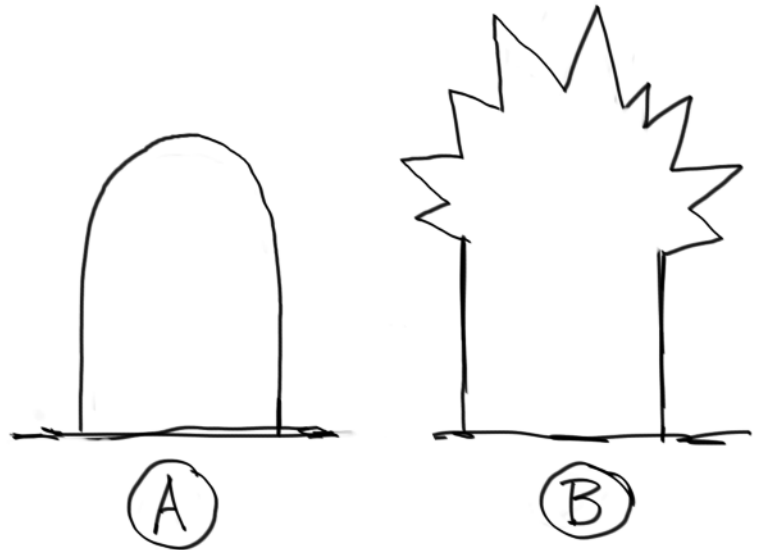
Here we run up against the difficulty of trying to explain something that is largely intuitive and subconscious. The choices any authentic creator makes are the result of a lifetime of experience, much of it unconscious. Another unquantifiable element we might invoke here is the concept of taste—personal taste, good taste, poor taste, these are concepts that cannot be narrowed to a fixed set of definitions, but we all have an opinion on where a particular artwork ranks in our particular standards of good or bad. This illustrates the difficulties of discussing the subject of emotional storytelling. No two sets of criteria are identical, and it's possible for an intelligent viewer to admire or respect work that he or she doesn't enjoy, or even like. Talent and quality may be obvious, but the character of the work does not necessarily appeal to each individual's taste.

Thus it is impossible to declare unequivocally that my preferences are always "right." I can only describe why the examples presented here have a certain affect on me. I can also safely say that the principles underlying the construction of these images are fundamental to most visual communication throughout the world, because their basic tenets arise from common physical experience and emotional empathy, as we shall see...



I'll explain one very basic and simple example of "shape communication," but there are many and are easily recognizable once you know what you are looking for. Fig. A is the most common shape for a tombstone around the world—you won't see the starburst grave marker, fig. B, anywhere that I know of. The reason is found in our own body language. Death is sad, and sadness is felt and shown in the body by a drooping, heavy, downward pull. The typical tombstone shape resembles the silhouette formed by stooped shoulders of a human frame with the chin on the chest. The starburst shape suggests exuberance, an opening out of life, energy flying out from a center, and is inappropriate for expressing the typical attitude toward death. Most trees grow up and out, spreading their branches skyward, but the Weeping Willow is so named because its dropping branches suggest sadness and falling tears.

This is one simple visual motif—most are obvious. Horizontal shapes and lines suggest vastness, quiet, calm. Vertical shapes and lines suggest height, aspiration, and strength. A pyramid suggests great weight, stability, solidity; an inverted pyramid suggests instability, danger, and unpredictability. Straight lines are static, curved lines are rhythmic, and so on...



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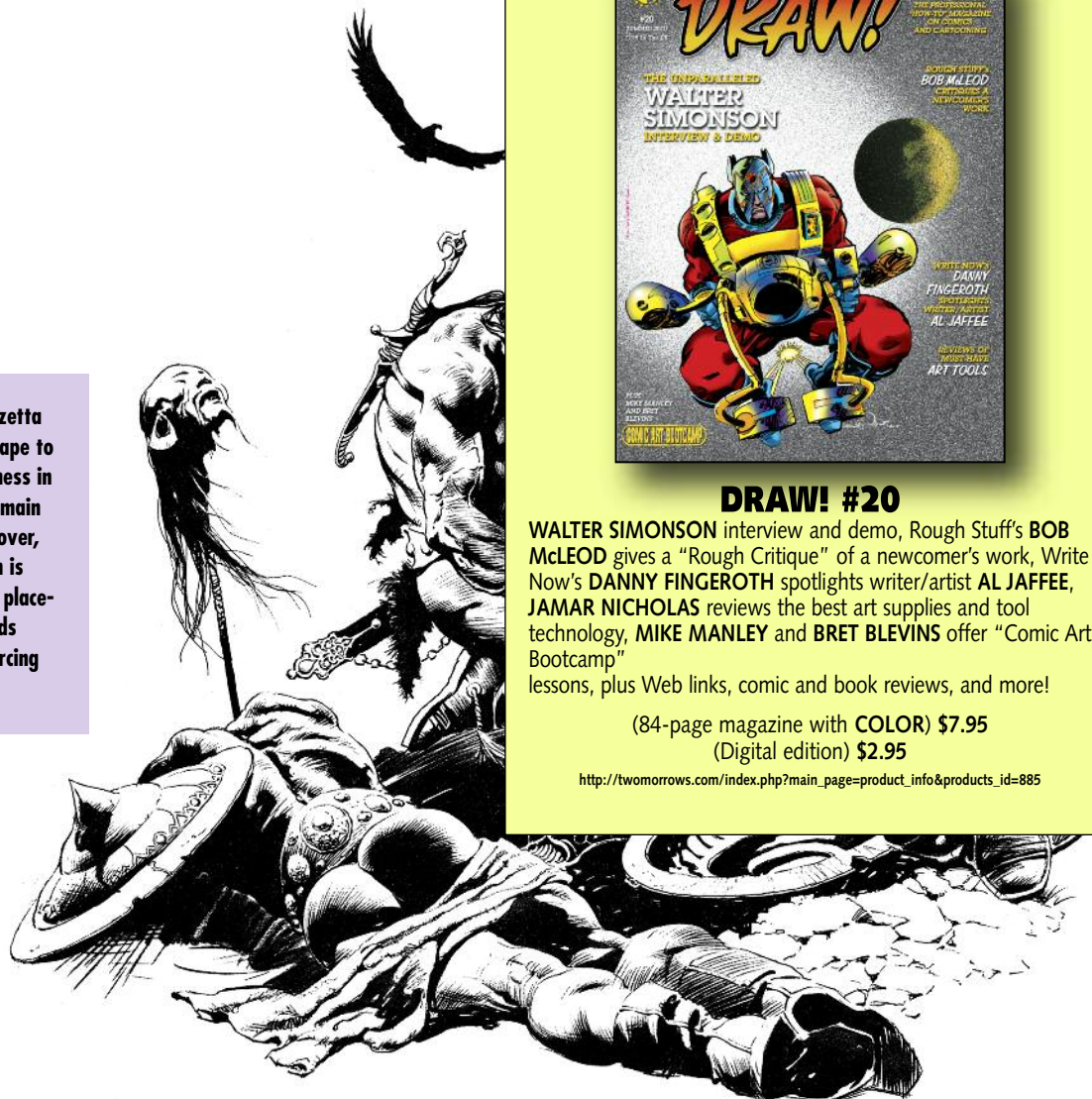
### **DRAW! #20**

WALTER SIMONSON interview and demo, Rough Stuff's BOB McLEOD gives a "Rough Critique" of a newcomer's work, Write Now's DANNY FINGEROTH spotlights writer/artist AL JAFFEE, JAMAR NICHOLAS reviews the best art supplies and tool technology, MIKE MANLEY and BRET BLEVINS offer "Comic Art Bootcamp" lessons, plus Web links, comic and book reviews, and more!

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Note how effectively Frazetta uses the "tombstone" shape to suggest anguish and sadness in this mourning scene. The main grieving figure is arched over, and everything about him is dropping downward. The placement of the three buzzards repeats the shape, reinforcing the effect.



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