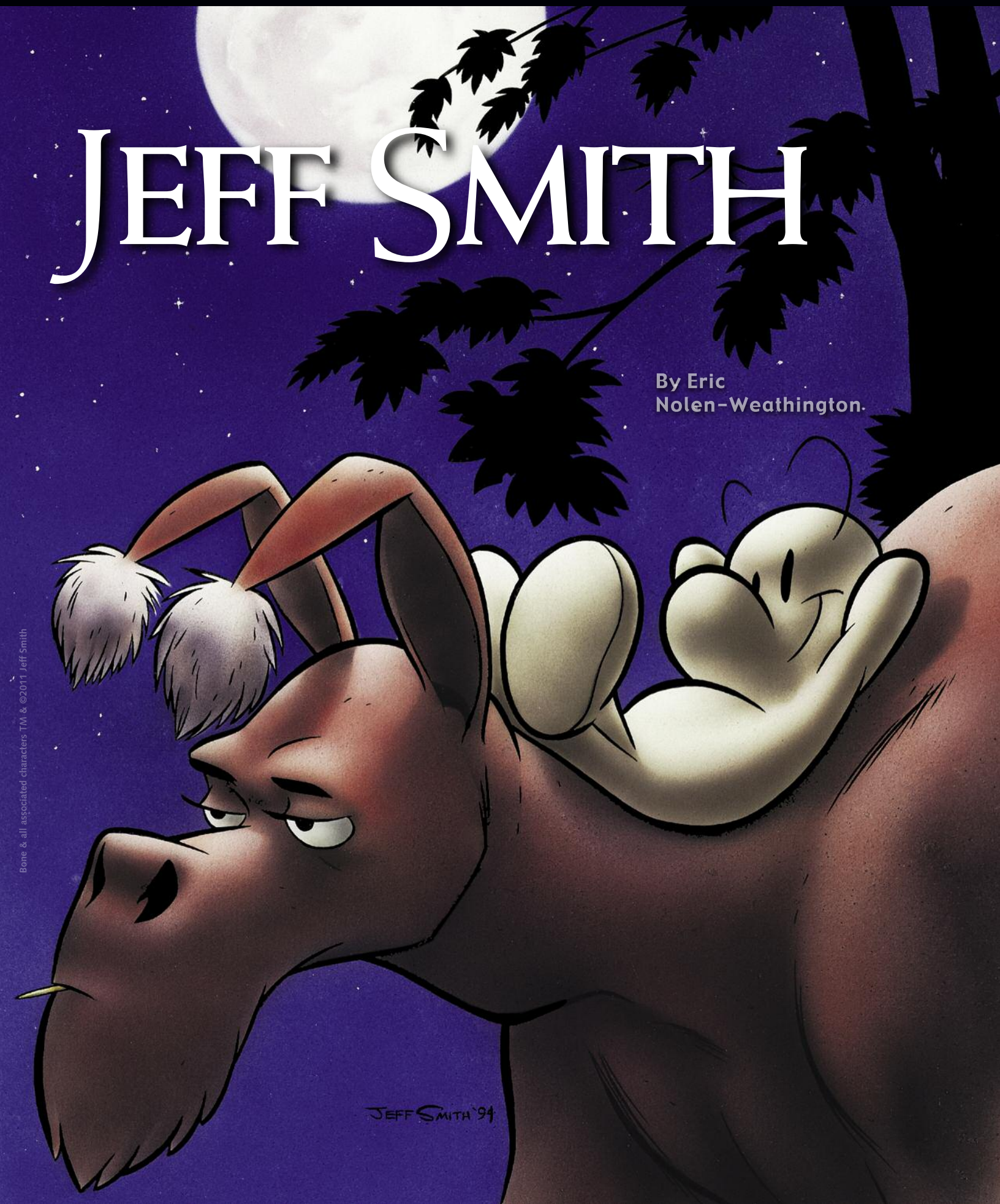
MODERN MASTERS VOLUME TWENTY-FIVE:

JEFF SMITH

By Eric Nolen-Weathington



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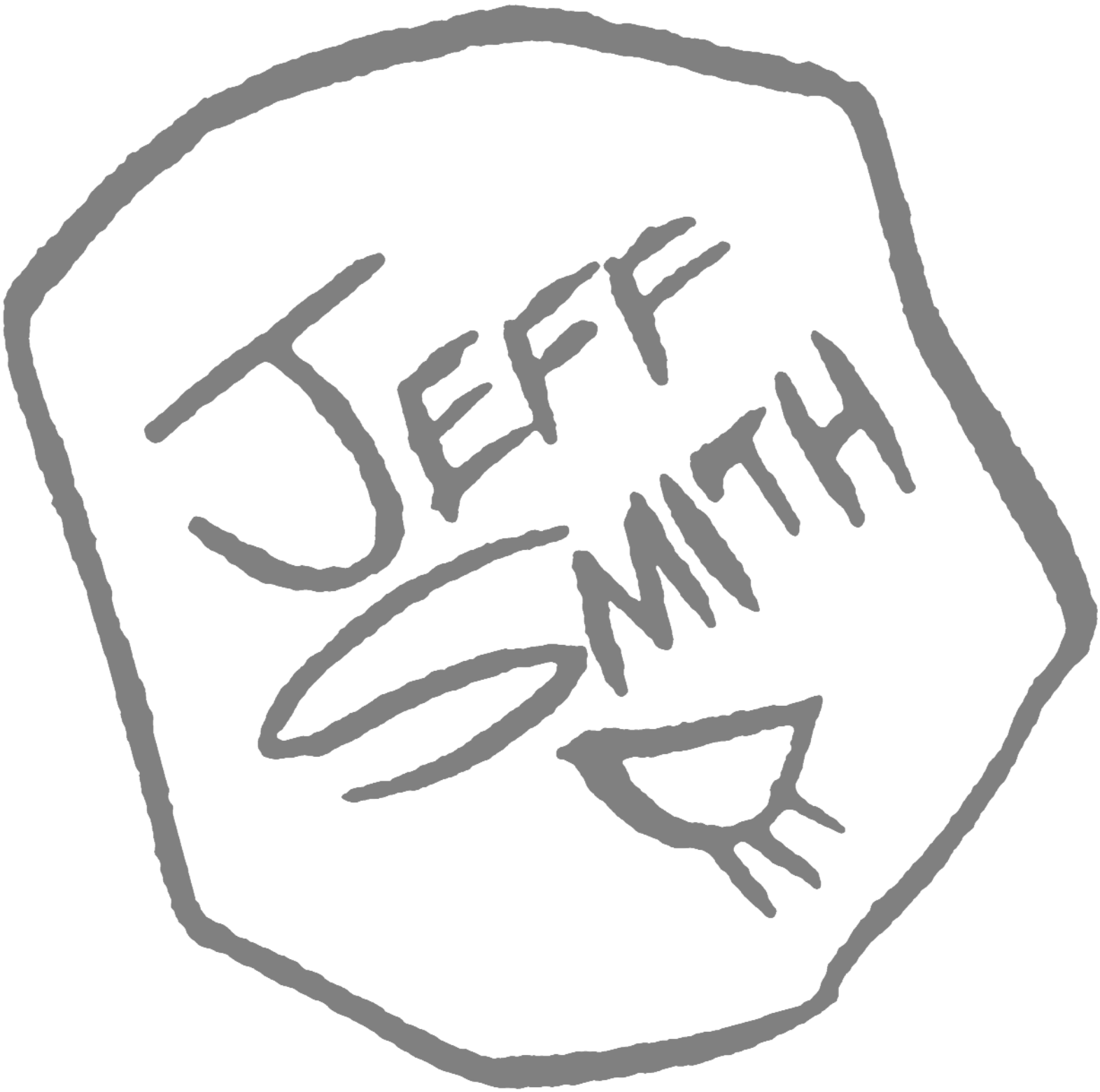

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Dedication

To the Thorn in my side, Donna, and my little rat creatures, Iain and Caper.

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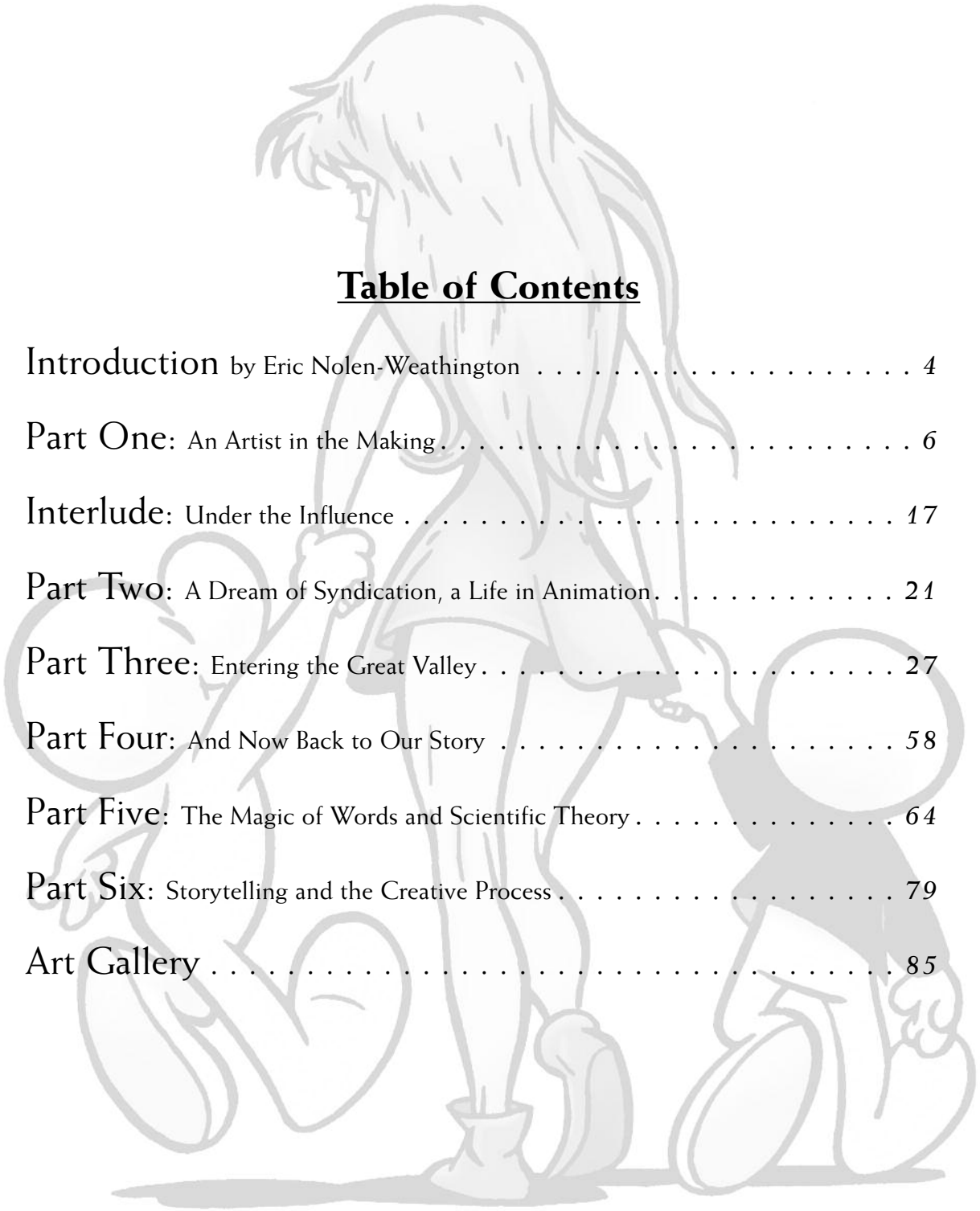

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Introduction

Jeff Smith is an anomaly. That is to say, he has beaten the odds. He became a success in the comic book field long before he drew a single page for DC or Marvel. That is a rarity in this day and age, though it is becoming somewhat less so—in large part *because* of his success.

Bone was on library shelves before libraries had separate sections for graphic novels. *Bone* is prominently displayed in major bookstore chains. *Bone* is even sold at school book fairs.

Just over a year ago, I was giving a lecture on interviewing to the eighth grade Language Arts classes at my son's school. At the end, while taking questions, one of the kids wanted to know if I had ever interviewed anyone famous. I said, "Well, you've probably never heard of most of the people I've interviewed, but I'm going to be interviewing Jeff Smith soon. How many of you have read any of the *Bone* books?" Out of about a hundred 13-year-old kids, over a third of them raised their hands.

Let me repeat that: *Over a third of them raised their hands*. Talk about reaching your audience!

And how many 13-year-olds do you suppose are reading DC or Marvel comics? Surely not one out of every three. That's not to say one-third of all 13-year-olds in America have read *Bone*, but given the wide economic diversity of the school, I'd wager it's not all that far from the truth.

So what makes *Bone* so special? There aren't any super-heroes, and the main characters are weird looking. It's got lots of funny jokes and talking animals. And the art is *so* cartoony. In other words, it has every ingredient that typically kills the sales of a comic book in the direct market. And yet *Bone* sold quite well in the direct market.

Again, what makes *Bone* so special? Was it a matter of luck or good timing? Perhaps a bit of each was involved, but at the crux of Jeff's success lies his extraordinary talent as a cartoonist and storyteller.

Jeff was 31 when *Bone* #1 hit the shelves. Early readers of the series never saw the growing pains of a new artist finding and developing his style. Jeff had already worked through those issues. In fact, he had already spent decades analyzing the work of his predecessors—not just their artwork, but their writing, as well. He had spent hour upon hour, day upon day honing his craft. But most importantly, he had come to realize that pretty pictures and clever words were not enough if he truly wanted to make an impact with his audience.

And so, when *Bone* #1 finally came to be, readers discovered a rich, new world filled with amusing, horrible, wonderful characters and a beautifully drawn story with depth and meaning that was well worth reading.

Really, that's what every reader, regardless of age, wants from any book, graphic or otherwise. And, boy, does Jeff deliver.

Eric Nolen-Weathington

Part 1: A Cartoonist in the Making

MODERN MASTERS: You were born in McKee's Rock, Pennsylvania, on February 27, 1960. But you moved to Columbus, Ohio, when you were pretty young.

JEFF SMITH: Right. I was, like, two, so I have no memory of Pennsylvania.

MM: Was the move because of a job?

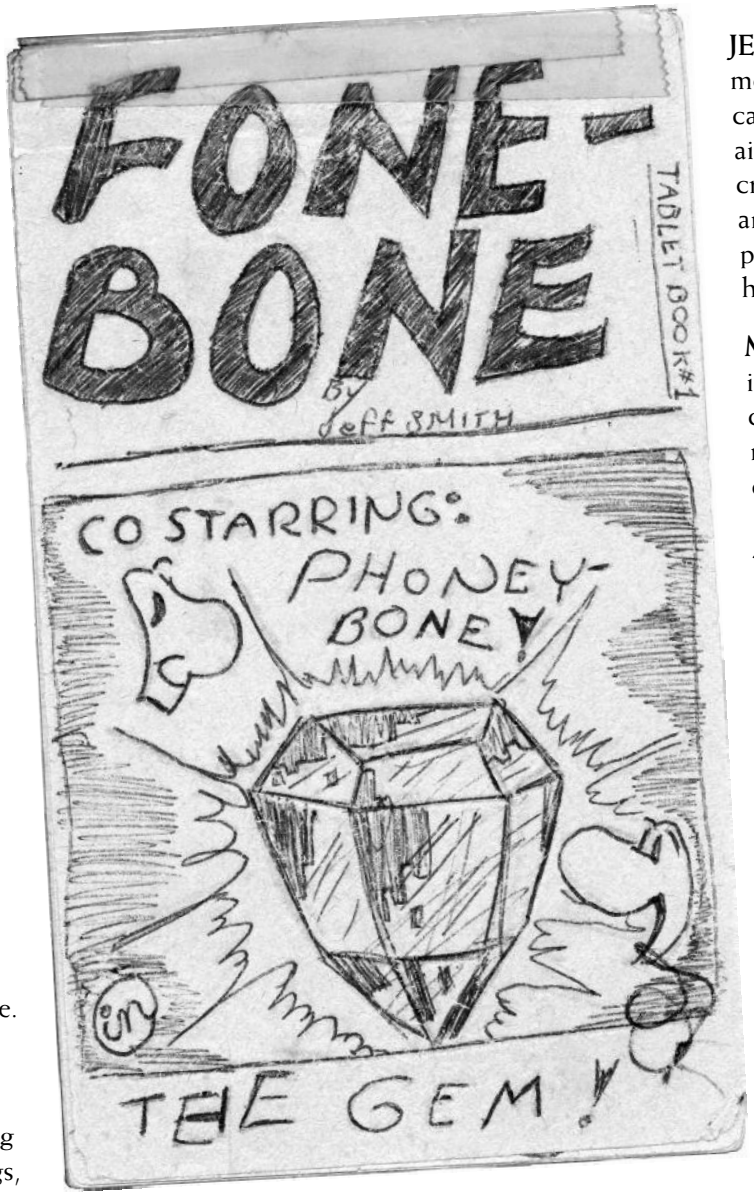
JEFF: Yeah, my dad got transferred to a Columbus plant. He worked for Borden's Ice Cream.

MM: Did your mother work as well?

JEFF: Part-time. She was mostly a stay-at-home mom. She'd make a little money doing paintings, though. She would paint little plaques with flowers. They were pretty nice. She would sell them in local shops. She would pile me and my brother in the car once a week and drive around to all these shops that were selling them and pick up money for any that sold and drop more off.

MM: So you were actively exposed to art at an early age.

JEFF: Yeah. My mom had paints, and she encouraged me to draw. She would bring me home markers and things, and I loved that. My grandparents, especially my grandmothers, were really into creativity—stories, reading, clay, all sorts of stuff like that.



MM: Did you see them much? Were they in the area?

JEFF: No, they were in New England. Both my parents originally came from Connecticut. But I would see them at least once a year on vacations while I was growing up.

MM: You said you have a brother. Was he interested in art as well?

JEFF: A little. Not as much as me. In fact, he's an aeronautical engineer now. He liked airplanes. My dad made ice cream, I make comic books, and my brother makes airplanes. We're all quite happy. [*laughter*]

MM: What captured your imagination first, was it the comic strips you saw in the newspaper, comic books, cartoons on TV...?

JEFF: I think it all happened simultaneously, because it just seems like there was more of it in the culture in the '60s. The Sunday newspaper comics section was such a bigger deal back then than it is now. *Peanuts* was coming into its heyday with Snoopy flying in his Sopwith Camel fighting the Red Baron. Saturday morning cartoons were really still dominated by reruns of theatrical shorts, like *Bugs Bunny* and *Heckle & Jeckyl*. The quality was much higher and they were a little more sophisticated. Both the newspaper strips and the theatrical cartoons were aimed not just at kids, but at the adults who were also sitting there.

Even before I could read, my dad would read *Mad* magazine to me. He loved *Mad* magazine, and I was a

Previous Page: Cover art to "The Gem," one of Jeff's first Bone stories written and drawn when he was ten years old. This homemade comic measures about 3" x 5" and was drawn with a blue ballpoint pen.
Left: The first two pages of "The Gem." Each page of the 21-page story (!) consists of two half-page panels.
Below: In this panel from page 11 of "The Gem," Jeff is already experimenting with light and shadow.

huge fan of Don Martin and "Spy vs. Spy." I just got into that stuff.

MM: When you first started drawing, were you imitating what you were seeing in the comic strips and cartoons, or were you creating your own characters right away?

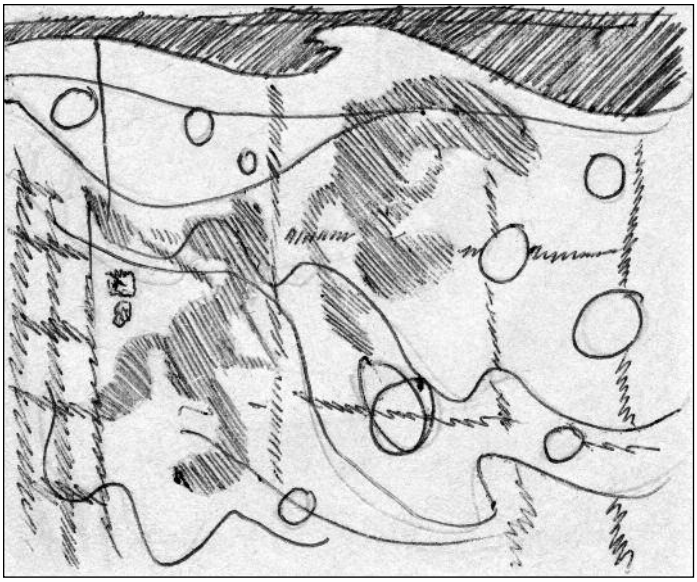
JEFF: That's a good question. I think I was trying to draw my own characters, but of course I was trying to draw Woody Woodpecker and Donald Duck and Huckleberry Hound and whatever I was looking at, trying to figure out things like, "How do you draw an eye?" and understanding that there's the white part and then there's the black part—the pupil—and that points towards what he's looking at. Very obvious stuff, but I remember being three or four and trying to figure out those little tricks.

MM: Did you ever trace?

JEFF: You know, I really didn't. And as a result my drawings weren't very good. [*laughter*]

MM: When did you start getting a sense of thickness of lines and that type of thing?

JEFF: That probably wasn't until I was in the fourth grade, about nine years old. That was when I discovered Walt Kelly and *Pogo*. That really changed everything. That was when I began to see the real quality of artwork and look beyond just the construction of the drawing. I really wanted to know the techniques that Walt



Above: Panels from pages 12 and 17 of "The Gem." In the first panel, Jeff plays with underwater distortion. In the second, he shows an early understanding of perspective. **Next Page:** When Neal Adams burst onto the comics scene in 1967, he brought a rarely-before-seen sense of realism to the artwork, including hairy chests and nipples. This made quite an impact on Jeff as a young, aspiring cartoonist.

Kelly was using to make these beautiful drawings. I'd go to the library and try to find books that would explain it.

MM: What kind of tools were you using? Did you discover that artists used special pens and brushes at that point?

JEFF: Yeah, for sure. I have a memory of going to the library to xerox a comic page I had made, and it didn't reproduce, because back then you put your dime in and there were no adjustments. The pencil wasn't dark enough. The librarian came over to help me and explained to me that there's a process of inking that makes the artwork dark enough to reproduce. I think I ended up trying crowquill pens. That took a long time to learn how to use.

MM: What were you doing to practice your inking, just making comics?

JEFF: Just making comics. I had a real good friend, Jim Kammerud. We grew up together, read comics together, drew comics together, and Jim was always trying to find new materials. He would find things like Rapidographs. He was the first person I knew to use a brush. When he did that... wow! It looked like the Walt Kelly line. "You did it, Jim. You found it."

MM: It must have been good to have like-minded friends you could share information with.

JEFF: Oh, absolutely. We were just two friends and that's what we were interested in. We both read science fiction and Conan, we rode our bikes around to different drug stores to find the next issue of *Batman* with Neal Adams artwork. That was just our thing to do.

MM: So you were paying attention to the creators at that point.

JEFF: In 1968 or '69—whenever Neal Adams kind of came onto the scene—that was a thunderclap in our little brains. I mean, he was drawing in such a dynamic way. No other comic book looked anything like that. And there was acting. Neal Adams' characters would squint and wince and be surprised and frown and laugh. And they had hairy chests. Prior to that, if Superman had his shirt off, he would just be smooth and wouldn't even have nipples. Here, all of a sudden, Batman is a man. It was awesome.

MM: Did that inspire you to look for anatomy books, or were you just looking at comic book anatomy?

JEFF: I did get anatomy books. Of course, the first one I got was the Burne Hogarth book—another comic book guy. And even more over-the-top and dynamic than Neal Adams. But I did really want to figure out how the body works, and those anatomy books would show you how to do foreshortening—concepts I was seeing in Neal Adams' pages.

MM: Were you getting any encouragement from outside your family? Were there any teachers that helped you along the way?

Part 2: A Dream of Syndication, a Life in Animation

MM: So how did you end up going into animation after college rather than comic strips?

JEFF: My first goal was to do a comic strip. That's what I really wanted to do, was do *Bone* as a daily comic strip. But I just couldn't sell it. I got a little encouragement from a couple of the New York syndicates. I would try sending them submissions and they would make suggestions and I'd rework them, but nothing happened.

During that time I needed to do something to make a living. One of my friends from when I was young, Jim Kammerud, was going to school at OSU, too, and he and I took an animation class. We met a fellow classmate named Marty Fuller, who was really into animation. He really understood and could do it. He understood intuitively how far to make the drawings change. He had keys to the camera room; he was trusted by the university. [*laughter*] We had a lot of fun. We did a couple of student projects together.

After that, I think Marty suggested we form a little animation company, because he had contacts with some ad agencies around town, and he thought we could eke out a living at it. So that's what we did. I said, "What the heck. Let's try that while I try to get my comic strip published."

MM: It was just the three of you at the beginning?

JEFF: Yeah, just the three of us.

MM: Were you getting enough work to be comfortable?

JEFF: We did it for, like, seven years. In the beginning it was a little slow, but with only the three of us, we could survive on a lot less. By the end we had maybe eight permanent people and 30 to 50 people we'd bring in depending on what the project needed.

MM: By the end you were working on national accounts, right, not just local advertising?

JEFF: We did things for White Castle and McDonald's, but a lot of corporate headquarters are in Columbus—Warner Cable, Wendy's—so all the major ad agencies have big branches here. We were also starting to do movies. When a studio would get close to their crunch time, they would start looking for little studios like ours to do five to ten minutes of film—15 minutes if they really trusted you.

MM: Would you be producing full animation or just the keys or...?

JEFF: It would just depend on the job. Sometimes they'd send the storyboards already done. Sometimes they'd send the keys, and we'd just do the in-betweens. Sometimes we'd do the whole thing.

MM: You were still hoping to do something with *Bone*, so what were you getting from these animation jobs? Obviously, you were drawing all day.

Above: Jeff and childhood friend, Jim Kammerud—two of the three co-founders of Character Builders.

JEFF: I don't think you can underestimate that. I mean, just the sheer amount of drawing is going to improve your quality level at some point, but also the fact that it's animation and you're drawing in three dimensions in your mind. The character has to be able to turn around and look one way then turn and look the other way, so his head has to be three-dimensional in your mind. So my level of construction skills really went up.

MM: You had to think about foreground and background.

JEFF: Yes, you had to think composition the whole time, especially being a small house like we were. We were doing our own stuff. If I was doing a 30-second commercial, I was probably designing the characters, but I was also doing the main layout, so I was constantly thinking, "Where is my guy going to be on this background? I've got to make sure that it's not cluttered in his path." You're constantly thinking about composition and readability and things like that.

MM: During that time, were you getting more analytical about the cartoons you were watching? Did you go back and study things like the old *Looney Tunes* shorts?

JEFF: Oh, yeah. With VCRs, you could get copies of Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck cartoons to watch at home for the first time, and we were. I sure wish we had digital at that time, but we could slow it down and back it up. We could look at them pretty much frame by frame and see exactly what Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng were doing. If Bugs was going to hammer something—a big, fast movement like that—the hammer would be up in the air in one shot, and then the middle shot would be a huge smear. The hammer would still be up in the air, but it's grown and mushes all the way down to where it's going to end up, so it's like one giant, curved hammer. Then in the final drawing the hammer is down on the ground. That gives it such speed and solidity. We were completely taking apart and deconstructing all the cartoons.

MM: Do you have a favorite director?

JEFF: On any given day it might be a different guy. I'm a big Chuck Jones fan, but I like Friz Freleng an awful lot.

MM: Really? That's not a typical answer. I'm more of a Bob Clampett guy, myself.

JEFF: I came to Clampett late. His work wasn't very available back then. I do like Clampett. What I like about Friz is he's just funny. And he's fast, and he sets up jokes and pays them off.

MM: Chuck Jones really emphasized the dialogue and the timing of the dialogue. That's something that's very important in *Bone*, as well.

JEFF: I think there's a connection between Jones and Walt Kelly. They're very intelligent, and they assume *you* are intelligent. It kind of tickles your imagination that way. Imagine making a cartoon where the punchline is "pronoun trouble," or "acoustically perfect." [*laughter*] But I got it. I understood it—or if I didn't I looked it up.

MM: What else did you get from working in animation that you could adapt to a static page?

JEFF: One thing is, if you're storyboarding, you have to be very aware of, "Where does your scene begin? What happened right before your scene? What happens at the end?" There is a real process of beginning, middle, and end, and you do your work all at once. You don't just start at the beginning and start drawing until you get to the end. You learn to figure out ahead of time what you're going to do, where your guy is going to go, what has to be accomplished in the scene. You know what your first drawing is, you know what your last drawing is, and you know what your middle drawing is. Then you keep breaking it down to the middle. That's a structural process I brought directly into comics. I always approach each scene or each issue of a comic—any given section of the story—in that way. I want to know where it begins, what the end is, and what's in the middle. Then I'll break down the first half the same way and the second half the same way, and just keep breaking it down like that.

Recently, in an interview with John Canemaker, I said, "Comics are just like storyboards." And I saw somewhere on the web that, "That was a horrible thing for you to say. Comics are their own medium," and how dare I say comics are just storyboards for movies. Of course, that's not at all what I meant. I meant from an artistic standpoint, when you do a storyboard, you need to see the motion or the movement or the story that you are telling, and you need to pick the moment that is most expressive and most important and put that on the storyboard. And that is very similar artistically to what you do when you decide what to draw in a panel of a comic. Then there are all sorts of subtle differences between animation and comics. In comics, there are different kinds of timing that happen between any two given panels. It's much more subtle and rich than what storyboards are, because they are just an outline for a separate, larger thing.

MM: Also, when you're talking about animation, you have the same format—the same screen size—for every shot. Did you find that challenging early on when you

Previous Page: Animation cel from a commercial produced by Character Builders. **Above and Left:** Jeff sculpting and painting pieces for a commercial.

moved to the comic book format, where you can make the panels any size you need to make the story work?

JEFF: I had a strange epiphany when I did my first comic. The first comic I ever drew was *Bone* #1. Before that I had just been drawing comic strips, first for *The Lantern* for four years, and then for about two years I was drawing batches of strips that I'd send out every month to the syndicates—and have them rejected. [*laughter*] But, again, they were just three or four similar sized panels. Once I finally decided I'd do *Bone* as a comic book, and I sat down and started to draw, I was surprised at the freedom I suddenly had. Previously with the strips, I'd felt very constrained by those four little regular boxes. There are rules to comics: especially if you have a continuing story, you have to give up your first panel just to bring the reader back to what you were talking about yesterday. Then you just have a couple of panels left to move the story forward.

Below and Next Page: Jeff created a claymation (stop-motion animation in which clay figures are moved slightly for each frame of film) commercial promoting White Castle's kids' meal.

White Castle logo ™ White Castle Management Co. Photo © Jeff Smith.

MM: And your last panel has to set up the next day's strip.

JEFF: Yeah, *and* have something interesting happen. It's a good exercise. It really forces you to be disciplined, but having done that first and then diving into comics, it was like going from a wading pool to the ocean. I never found it confusing or complicated, I just thought it was glorious. [*laughter*] My pages and panels were very instinctual. I didn't pattern them after anybody's layouts. I just wanted them to be very clear to make sure the reader could always follow the story. I thought the best thing to do was to keep the panels fairly regular in order not to lose anybody. If I do change the size of the panels, it's for a reason. I do it for shock or to change the pace of the action.

MM: As you were trying to sell *Bone* to the newspaper syndicates, what kind of feedback were you getting from them? What were their reasons for rejecting the strip?

JEFF: The main reason I was given was that continuity strips were out of vogue. I told you that I read *Thimble Theatre*, which while it was funny, there would be *very* long adventures. Popeye would go on sea voyages or go rule a country, and it would take months. The same with *Dick Tracy*—all those strips. I really wanted to do something like that, and I thought that *Doonesbury* was the perfect model. It was funny every day, it was relevant, the characters were really, really strong, and yet the story progressed. Something would happen. Joanie would get pregnant and have a baby or whatever. I thought that's what I was doing. I thought I was doing the *Doonesbury* version of modern continuity. But apparently my characters were so weird, it didn't really make sense. Nobody really understood what it was about.

I would get suggestions like, "Why don't you get rid of all the dragons and fantasy and humans, and just do the Bones in Boneville?" That they could get their heads around. I got all sorts of suggestions. One story I've told quite a bit was that an editor at King Features suggested that I make the Bones talk in thought balloons, because *Garfield* was very popular and he talks in thought balloons. I was like, "Really? You're the editor of comic strips and you don't understand that nobody can hear a thought balloon?" That was very depressing for me. [*laughter*]

MM: Did you ever get any useful suggestions?

JEFF: No. Except maybe for, "You should go and find something else to do for a living." [*laughter*] Which I did do.

Part 3: Entering the Great Valley

MM: Let's talk a bit more about how *Bone* developed. The origins of the Bone characters go all the way back to when you were very young. Fone Bone was one of the very first characters you created, right?

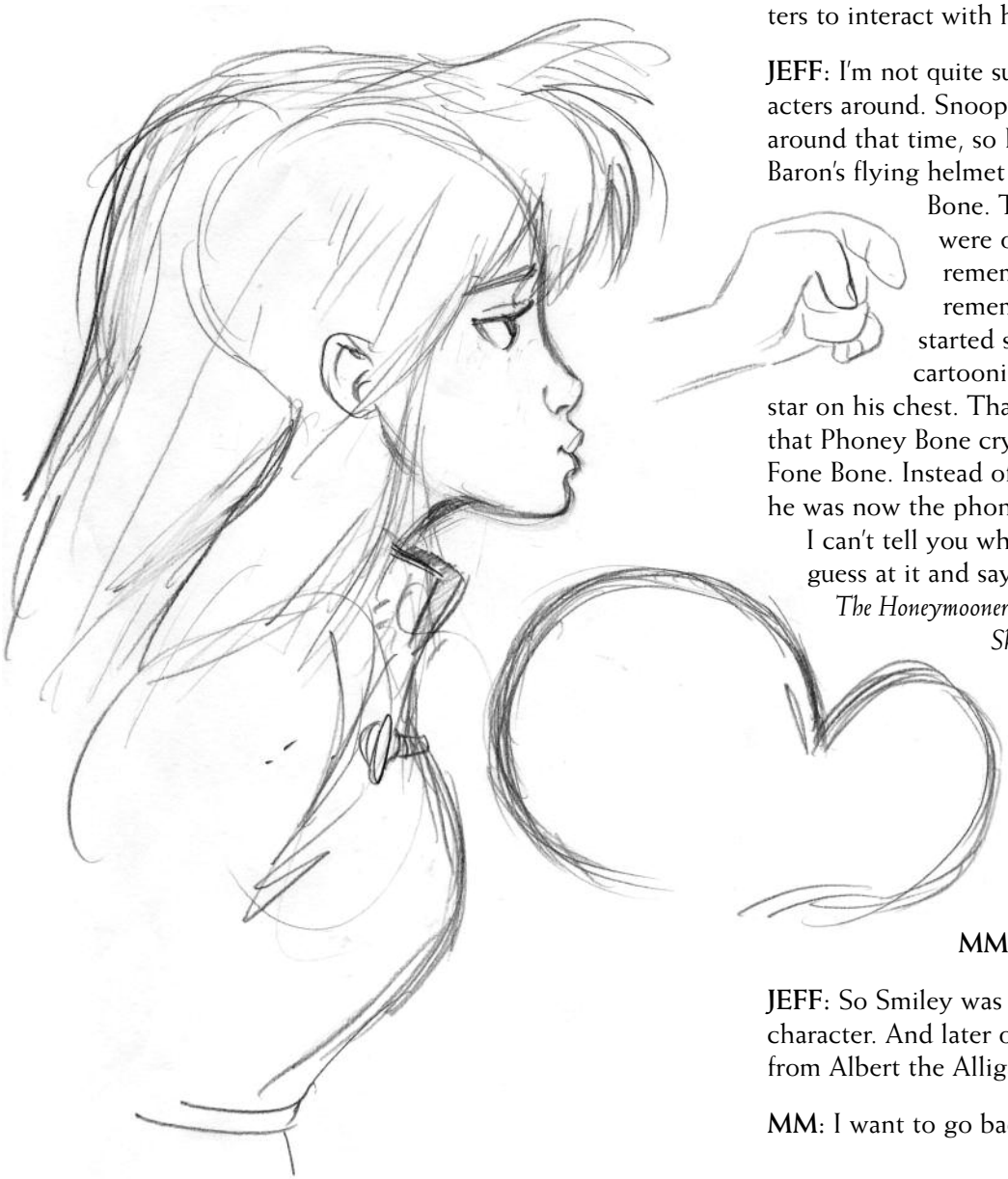
JEFF: Long before I was trying to write stories, I was fascinated with idea of trying to make a cartoon character—something like Top Cat or Huckleberry Hound or Woody Woodpecker. I knew that Disney had made Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, because I saw them every Sunday night on *The Wonderful World of Disney*. I knew that Walter Lantz had made up Woody Woodpecker, and I knew that Charles Schulz had made up Snoopy. So I was fascinated with the idea of coming up with a little character of my own.

I was probably about five when I did the very first drawing of Fone Bone, and he was really angry. His mouth was wide open and was as big as the rest of his entire body. I don't know what I liked about him, but I thought it would be fun to figure out what he would look like if that giant mouth was closed. That just caught my interest, and I've been drawing him ever since.

MM: At what point did you start creating other characters to interact with him?

JEFF: I'm not quite sure. There were always other characters around. Snoopy was doing his Red Baron thing around that time, so I had a pilot Bone. He had the Red Baron's flying helmet and goggles. There was a mailman Bone. There was a female Bone. There were other characters around, but I don't remember doing much with them. I do remember that the angry character started showing up again, and one of my cartooning friends, Mike Brooks, drew a star on his chest. That was pretty much the moment that Phoney Bone crystallized as being separate from Fone Bone. Instead of just being "the angry Fone Bone," he was now the phony Bone.

I can't tell you where Smiley came from. I'd have to guess at it and say he was the Goofy type character. *The Honeymooners* was on TV—*The Jackie Gleason Show*.



MM: You can definitely see a lot of Art Carney in Smiley.

JEFF: I was a big Art Carney fan. I thought his Ed Norton character was really interesting; he was kind of a cartoon character.

MM: He was.

JEFF: So Smiley was kind of an Ed Norton, Goofy type character. And later on I added the cigar, which came from Albert the Alligator in *Pogo*.

MM: I want to go back to the female Bone you drew.

JEFF: I kind of pictured it to be like the world of Duckburg, where there were ducks with 1950s hair on the ladies and hats on the men. I thought that's what Boneville was, too.

MM: So your female Bone had hair and wore a dress?

JEFF: Yeah, yeah. And, in fact, I just finished a story for *Bone: Tall Tales* which is about the early days of the frontier hero Big Johnson Bone. There's a pie-eating contest, and he meets Gobbling Gertie. So there's now a lot of different kinds of Bones—lady Bones, old Bones, short Bones, fat Bones—that you see in the crowd. But that's the way it was back then in my imagination, too.

MM: At what point did you start adding human characters to the mix?

JEFF: That was probably from the *Heavy Metal* influence. That was done for the college strip. I was reading *Heavy Metal*, and there were a lot of beautiful women and fantasy stories. Richard Corben was doing "Den." I was really into Bilal and Moebius. I somehow got this idea of a *Heavy Metal* fantasy world with monsters and dragons and my traditional three-fingered, bigfoot cartoon characters stumble into it.

MM: Your college strip was called *Thorn*, so was she the first human character you created?

JEFF: By the time I actually drew up some strips for the school paper, I pretty much had the cast and the basic situation figured out, but the cast grew even while I was going to CCAD. I think at that point I was drawing Fone Bone with a broadsword fighting a giant dragon. Somehow that dragon eventually became the Great Red Dragon. At first he was just a monster, but he developed a personality and worked his way into the story.

I think Thorn started out as the princess who was being rescued. Gran'ma Ben came about because this girl I was dating in high school had a grandmother with a farm up in northern Ohio. She raised steer, and she *was* Gran'ma Ben. As a matter of fact, the father of the girl I was dating was named Ben. Her father didn't like me, and I didn't really like him very much, so I was kind of making fun of him when I drew this little old lady with his face. [*laughter*] She didn't look quite as much like Popeye back then as she does now.

The characters just filtered in over a period of four or five years there between going to CCAD and OSU. I had a lot of friends and roommates, and we had a lot of adventures that filtered in as well.

MM: What was your visual inspiration behind the Great Red Dragon? He's certainly not a typical looking dragon with those tufts on his ears.

JEFF: He was a combination of my big, 100-pound Labrador named Commander and Zonker from *Doonesbury*. When I was creating the characters in the mid-'80s before I started working on the *Thorn* strip, I was playing with the characters and they were evolving, especially the fantasy characters beyond the three cousins. And one of those was the Great Red Dragon, who started out in a drawing I was doing just for fun where Fone Bone was being chased by a giant dragon with floppy, hairy ears.

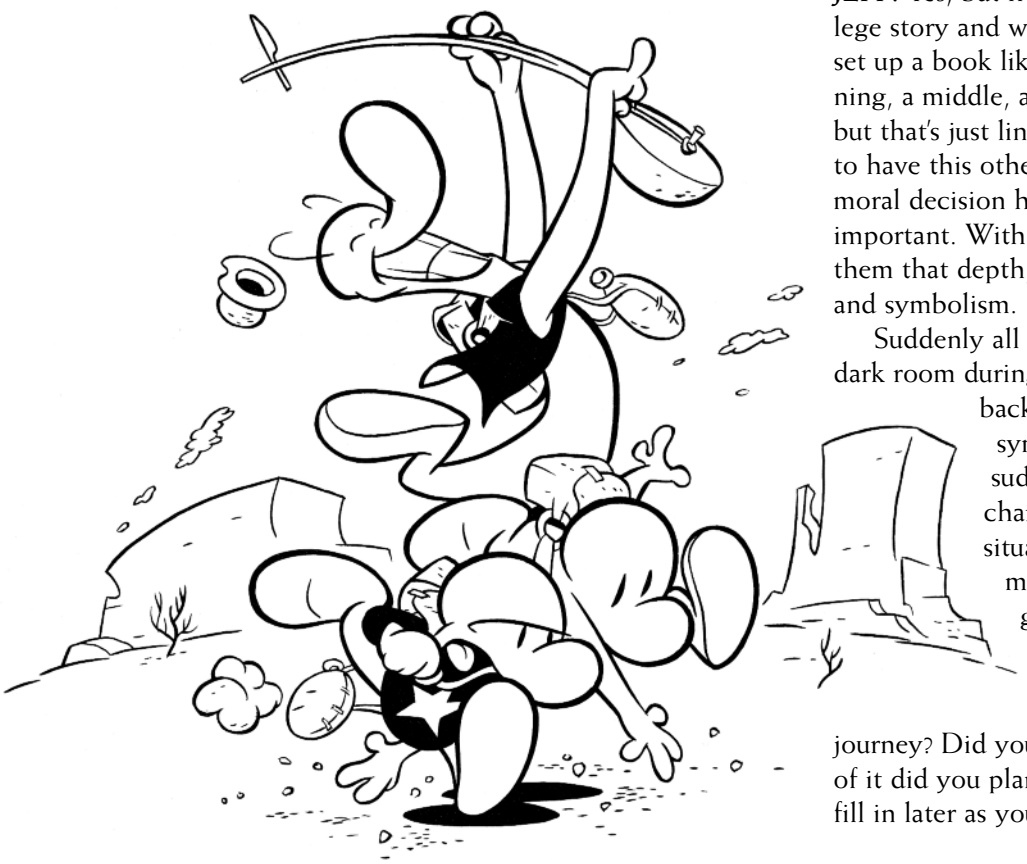
Previous Page: Jeff's pencils for a new Big Johnson Bone tale done for Scholastic's *Bone: Tall Tales* collection, in which Johnson meets and loses a woman after his own heart.
Above: Part Zonker, part Labrador retriever, all Great Red Dragon.

The way the dragon sat was based on my Labrador, but, as I've said, at that time I was completely captivated by *Doonesbury*. I loved the subtle acting Trudeau would draw—the twitch of an eyebrow, the upturn of a little smile. Zonker was this kind of magical character. He was the Snoopy, so to speak, of *Doonesbury*. I started drawing the dragon in profile, just like Trudeau drew a lot of his characters, and if you look at a picture of the dragon next to one of Zonker, you'll see it pretty quickly. He has the same heavy-lidded eyes, the cigarette hanging out of his mouth. Cigarettes weren't as alarmingly evil in the '70s and '80s. [*laughter*]

MM: Did you have most of the story worked out when you started pitching *Bone* to the syndicates?

JEFF: By that time I'd done the strip on a daily basis for four years. That was really good training in terms of discipline, making sure you get the work turned in on time, and I learned a lot about the art of moving the characters from one panel to the next. That's tricky stuff that nobody can really teach you, and back then nobody was even *trying* to teach you.

But the strip was a fish out of water story. It was humorous, yet the storylines would go on for weeks at a time, à là *Doonesbury*. I didn't really have an ending in mind; I didn't really have a story. It was just these three guys come from Boneville, a modern city with appliances and cars and libraries, and they're stuck in this pre-technological, fairy tale forest with monsters and dragons and princesses. That's all it was, and it was fine, but ultimately it really wasn't going anywhere. When I sent it to the syndicates I got a little bit of interest, but they were telling me I needed to focus the strip. "Just do the Bones in Boneville. It's very distracting to have all these humans running around. What's going on? What is it all for?" At least I think that's what they were trying to say. They might have been trying to tell me that I just wasn't very funny. [*laughter*]



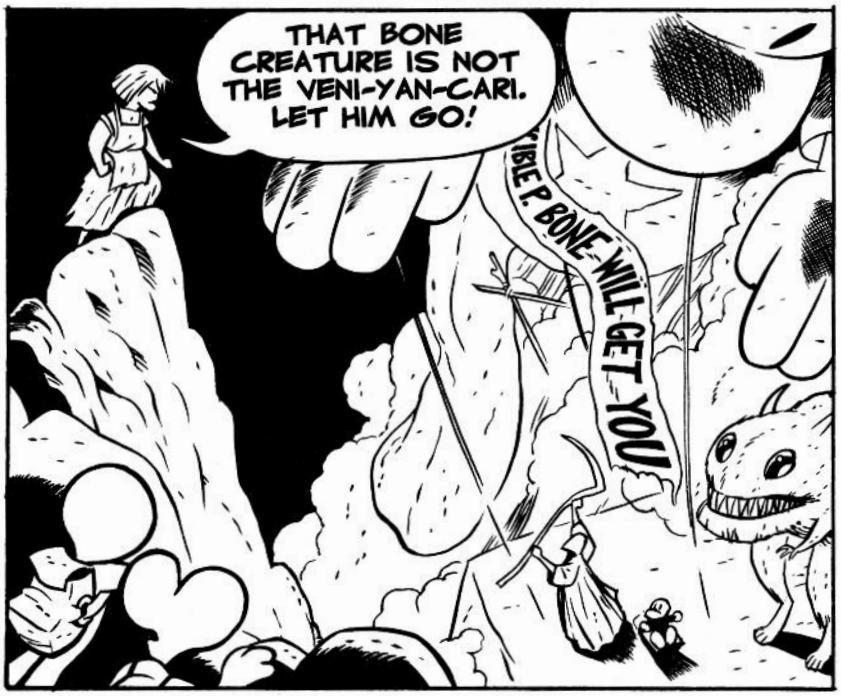
But during the time between doing the comic strip and doing the comic book, I discovered mythology and fairy tales. Going back to *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*, they both have a depth to them that at first I didn't quite understand. I looked at the strips I had done for *The Lantern*, which had the same characters that ended up in *Bone*, but there was just no point to any of it other than humor. What made *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* such good stories, as far as I could see, Eric, was that they had characters and situations just as strange as what I had, but you cared about those characters. There was a point to the stories. So I started reading books *about* Tolkein and George Lucas to try to find out what they were up to and who influenced them. That's what led me to mythology and Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. I started reading the myths—Hindu myths, Greek myths, and Norse myths.

MM: And you saw the structure of the hero's journey, the hero's quest.

JEFF: Yes, but here's the key: When I looked at my college story and what I wanted to do, I saw that you could set up a book like *Huckleberry Finn* and give it a beginning, a middle, and an end and have a literary structure, but that's just linear. You have to have depth. You have to have this other axis, which in *Huckleberry Finn* is this moral decision he has to make. That's so incredibly important. With *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*, what gave them that depth, that other axis, was mythology, motifs, and symbolism.

Suddenly all my memories spent watching slides in a dark room during my History of Art class came flooding back and I remembered all the talk about symbolism and cultural references. All of a sudden I got excited. "Okay, I have the characters. I like my characters. I like the situation. Now I need to put symbolism and motifs into it. I need to give it a mythology." That changed everything.

MM: Where did you start? Did you start with your mapping out the hero's journey? Did you start with the backstory? How much of it did you plan out, and how much did you leave to fill in later as you got further into the story?



JEFF: I think it was all of that. By the time I got to the comic book, I knew the characters inside and out, so I had the basics. "Here's this doofy outsider who stumbles into this situation and falls in love with a girl." The story had sort of uncovered itself by accident as I did the strips for four years. I did the Roque Ja bit in the college strip, and he had talked about a coming war and having to pick one side or the other. And the Hooded One was there; she had revealed herself to be Gran'ma's jealous sister. So I had some of these ideas come out without any real plan or structure.

When you start reading mythology, you see the jealous sibling stories, and you can use that and start making plans and putting it all together. I think it really came together when I figured out what the ending was. I decided it had to be a big, mythological battle of good versus evil as the heroes make their stand. But I had to decide, "Are the Bones going to stay? Are they going to leave and then return? What kind of changes are the characters going to go through?" Figuring out the ending was the key. Then I decided to put the Roque Ja story smack dab in the middle, and wing it from there.

MM: What made you decide to self-publish? Was it because of the negative experience with the syndicates?

JEFF: Yeah, I think so. I'm not sure I analyzed it very deeply. I had just had the miserable two-year experience with the syndicates where they just didn't understand my comic, and as far as I could tell they didn't even understand comics at all. Here I looked at the comic book market, and I didn't quite grasp the lay of the land at first. I didn't know who the different publishers were or anything. I think the first comic I saw where a light bulb went on in my head was *The Tick*. That was published by New England Comics, which was the name of a comic book store. It was kind of like it was self-published. It was in black-&-white, written and drawn by this guy named Ben Edlund, and it was very funny. I could tell from the whole package that he was having a blast doing it, and it was kind of successful.

I kept getting it as it came out, and at some point I said, "Okay, if King Features isn't going to publish *Bone*, I can't imagine that Marvel would. I need to go this underground route. If I can make enough money to pay for the printing and justify my doing it, that'll be fine, and I can keep doing animation."

MM: This was after the black-&-white boom and bust, but indies were starting to come back a bit. You mentioned *The Tick*, but there were a few other titles that were doing well.

Previous Page: The Bones flee Boneville in this frontis piece from the first volume of *The Complete Bone Adventures*. **Above:** It's a family reunion, but not a happy one. Stories of jealous siblings run rampant throughout mythological and religious texts, going all the way back to Cain and Abel.

Part 4: And Now Back to Our Story

MM: You mentioned the variant covers you had when you came back to *Bone*, but you also reprinted issue #1, this time in color, which came packaged with a small Fone Bone PVC figure.

JEFF: That was for the tenth anniversary of *Bone* #1, which we're coming up on the 20th anniversary next year. I can't believe it. I'll have to color something else and get a new figure. [*laughter*]

We wanted to do something fun to celebrate, so we decided to color the issue, and we put some fun things in it. We flew R.C. Harvey into town, and he sat down and did a little interview with me which we included in the book. And we included the little figurine, which was a hard thing to run through the distribution system.

MM: Steve Hamaker did the coloring and designed the figurine.

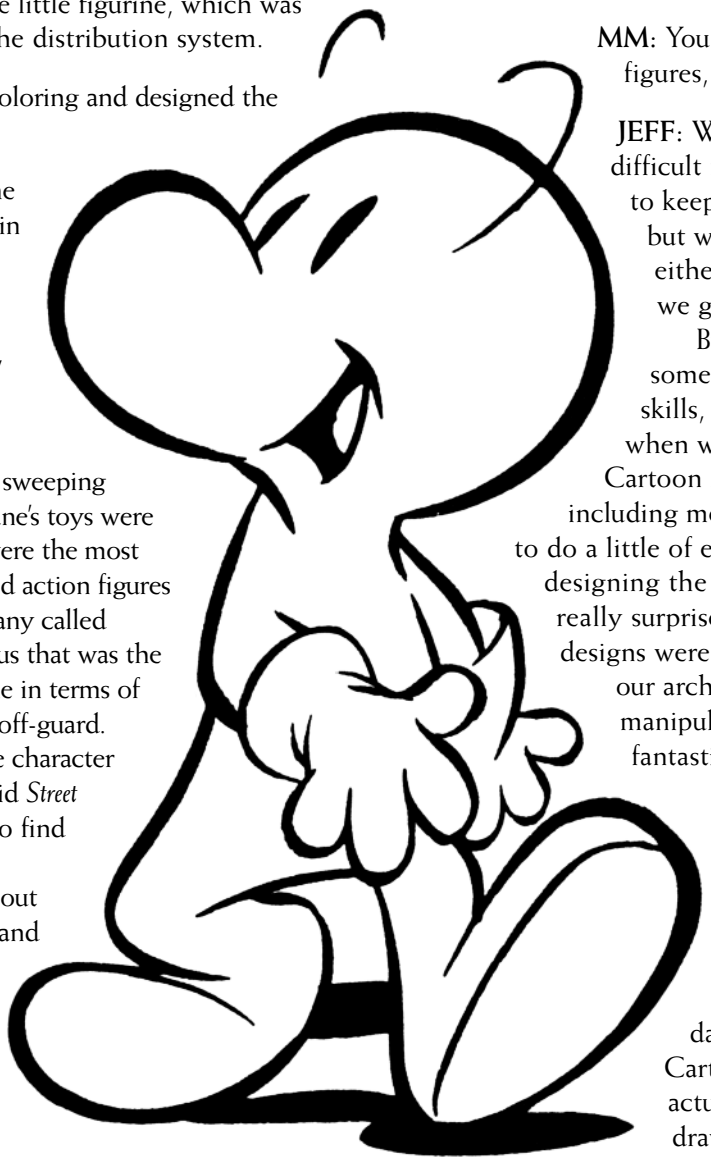
JEFF: Yeah, he worked with the model makers and the factory in Hong Kong. He did everything.

MM: How did you meet him, and what led him to become part of the team?

JEFF: In 1999, toys were really sweeping the comic book stores. McFarlane's toys were blowing people's minds; they were the most high-quality, beautifully sculpted action figures anyone had ever seen. A company called ReSaurus started up in Columbus that was the first company to rival McFarlane in terms of quality. They caught everyone off-guard. Duke Nukem was a video game character they started with. Then they did *Street Fighter* figures. I was surprised to find they were in Columbus.

They were trying to figure out what their next toy would be, and somebody said, "Well, Jeff Smith is right here in town. Let's call him." They came over and gave me a presentation and I was very impressed with all the little details in their design drawings. Fone Bone would have a backpack, and in the backpack would be a copy of Moby-Dick that would actually open so you could see the words, "Call me Ishmael." I was blown away by the level of detail, so of course I agreed to it, and the person in charge of the project was Steve Hamaker.

Then they got very involved in merchandising and doing toys for the American *Godzilla* movie. They ended up having to buy a lot of those toys back. At some point I got a call from Steve saying, "Oh, my God, they're laying everybody off." So I said, "Put all your stuff in a box and come over here, and we'll hire you." He came straight over from the office, and he's worked with us for ten years now.

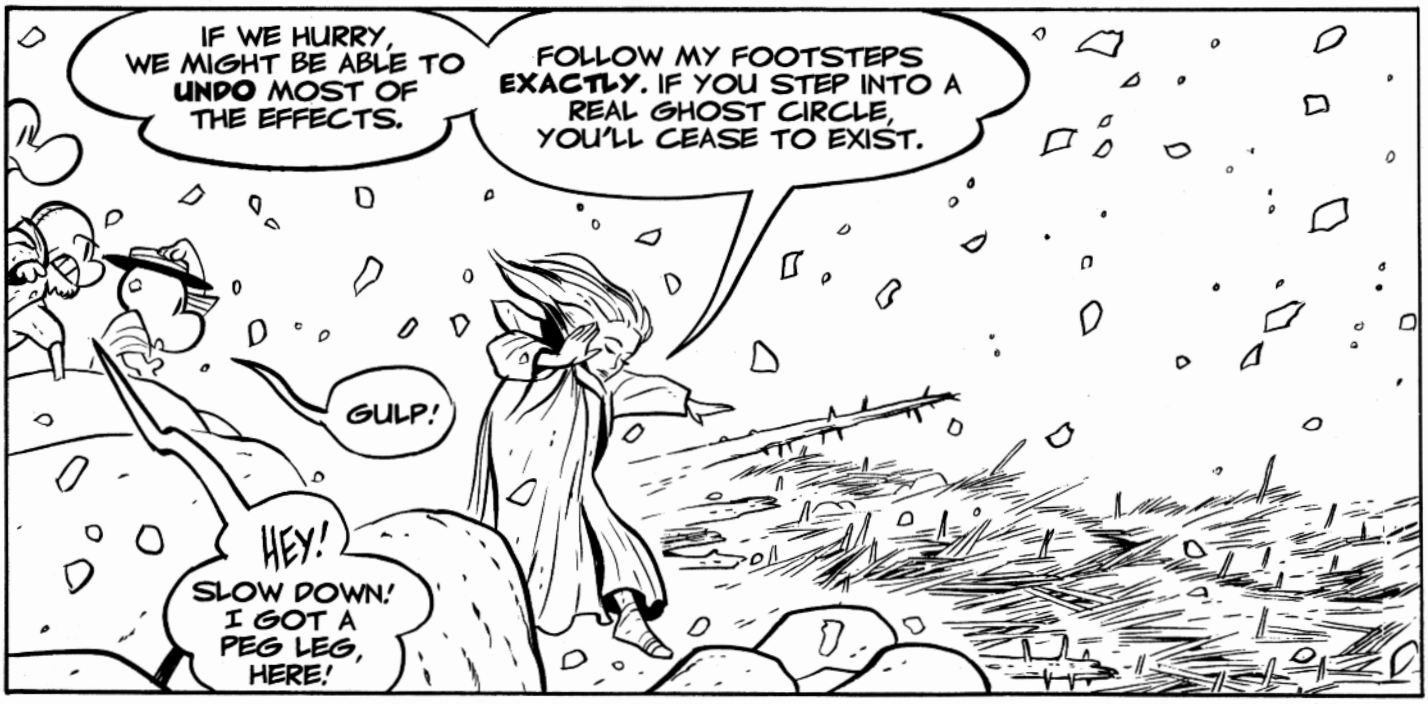


MM: You did a second series of *Bone* figures, too.

JEFF: We did. But that was just too difficult for a little company like ours to keep up. We didn't lose money, but we didn't make any money either. It was just a nightmare, and we gave that up after a year.

But Steve turned out to have some great coloring and design skills, which we didn't know about when we hired him. Because Cartoon Books is only five people including me and Vijaya, everybody has to do a little of everything. Steve ended up designing the toy packages, and I was really surprised at how good all his designs were. He would find images from our archives, scan them in and manipulate them, and they looked fantastic.

At some point Steve said, "Let me take a shot at coloring some of the covers." Once he did that, we started talking about the tenth anniversary issue, which he colored. These days he does every art job for Cartoon Books except for the actual comics. I still write and draw the comics by hand.



MM: Is he in charge of pagination, as well?

JEFF: We have somebody else who handles that: Tom Gaadt. He does all our digital layout and pre-prep and all that. He also does the web page and deals with the letters pages.

MM: You had the basic ending for *Bone* worked out very early on. At what point did you know how you were going to get there?

JEFF: As you say, I had the basic idea for the ending in mind before I started, but during the one-year hiatus in 2000 when I was working on the *Bone* screenplay, I was also thinking about the ending. Originally, I had thought that the Bone cousins and Thorn would enter the ghost circles and work their way down to Atheia, get there, and then have to mount a journey back up through the valley to near Gran'ma Ben's cabin and have the final battle there. But I realized that the stand had to be in Atheia—that all the evil characters would follow them to Atheia and trap them there. So it was just before I started work on the last arc that I could really see the ending and it was making sense. I knew, "From this point on, I'm just working towards the end." Before that it was always kind of magical. "What new branch of the road will crop up that I can follow?"

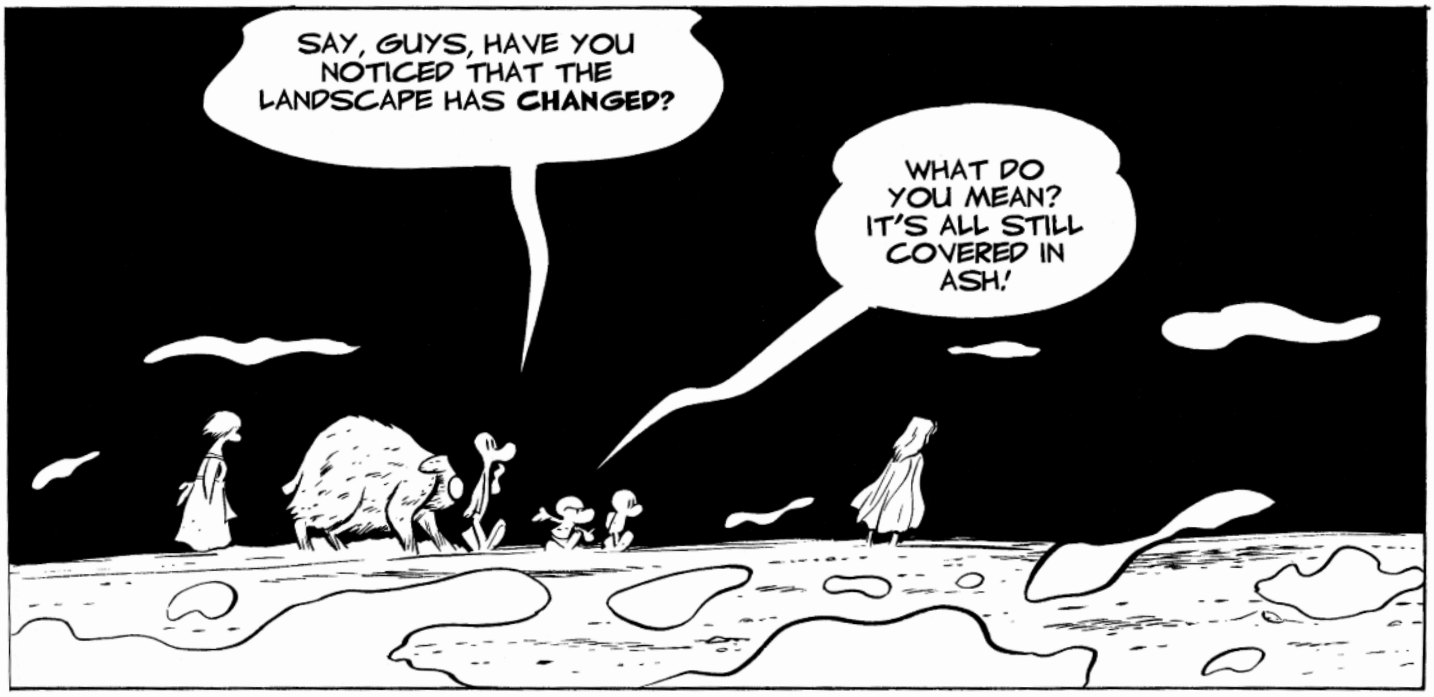
MM: Once you figured out the path you needed to take, did it become difficult to keep up your enthusiasm? Most creative people get more enjoyment from coming up with an idea than from executing that idea.

JEFF: I would say no. I enjoyed it greatly. Because at that point I had been doing it for ten years, and it was working. That's the most amazing thing to me is that the story was working and I was able to keep my audience and entertain them with a single story for twelve years. So I was not losing any enthusiasm for the project at all. It was, however, becoming technically more difficult to write, because once you start trying to tie all the story threads together, well, you have to tie all the story threads together. [*laughter*] It would have been very easy to have done it in a cheap, easy way, but it wouldn't have felt real. It was a lot of work at the end.

MM: It sounds like you were tweaking the storyline as you went along all the way to the last issue.

JEFF: Oh, very much. For example, when I said they were going to go back up to the top in the original storyline, the queen of the dragons was going to be immobile—a giant, stone mountain. That had to change when I decided to have all the evil creatures follow them South. Suddenly, Mim became animated again, which was far more exciting and interesting.

Previous Page: This detail from *Bone* #4 was used as the design for the PVC figure that was included with the 10th anniversary color edition of *Bone* #1.
Above: Thorn leads the Bones, Gran'ma Ben, and Bartleby down into the Valley through the mine-field of ghost circles.



Above: For several issues, the central cast of *Bone* wandered through an empty wasteland. It was both literally and figuratively one of the darkest moments of the series, and Jeff was worried he might lose some of his readership. **Next Page:** More worrying for Jeff, though, was the scene in which Thorn flies. Thankfully, his friends convinced him to through with it.

MM: Very few people will be completely satisfied with how a long epic ends, because they all have their own ideas of what should happen. After years of emotional investment, people tend to feel some ownership of the story. You saw that recently with the ending of *Lost*. What kind of feedback were you getting during those last four or five issues?

JEFF: I got a little bit of pushback from readers, not during the last few issues, but during the beginning of the final story arc, where I spent five or six issues in the ghost circles. I had a handful of characters walking through pages and pages of nothing but ash and black. I was a little worried, because people were not getting it. Normally I can pull some humor out of any situation, but this was the darkest moment of the story. And it took a year.

But my memory of the feedback during the last push, the last four or five issues, was that it was quite uplifting. People were saying, "Wow, I can't believe where this is going." I remember being nervous about the scene where Thorn flies at the end, and almost chickening out and not wanting to do it. "That's too far." I called Frank Miller, Paul Pope, and Terry Moore—three people I talked with a lot back then—and they all were very much in favor of her flying. Frank was like, "She's going to fly, damn it." [*laughter*] The key for me was when I realized I could have Bartleby say, "It's just like a dream." Then you don't know. Did she really fly, or did she make people see her as flying with a spell or something?" That was the trick for me, but it went over gangbusters. I felt like I was getting pushed along by everyone, but in a good way.

Over the six years since the book ended, I've heard people say, "Oh, I wish Fone Bone and Thorn had stayed together," but I've never heard anyone say, "That was a horrible ending. I wish I'd never read it."

MM: 2004 was a really big year for you. Even before the series ended, you worked out the deal with Scholastic. How did that come about? Did they approach you?

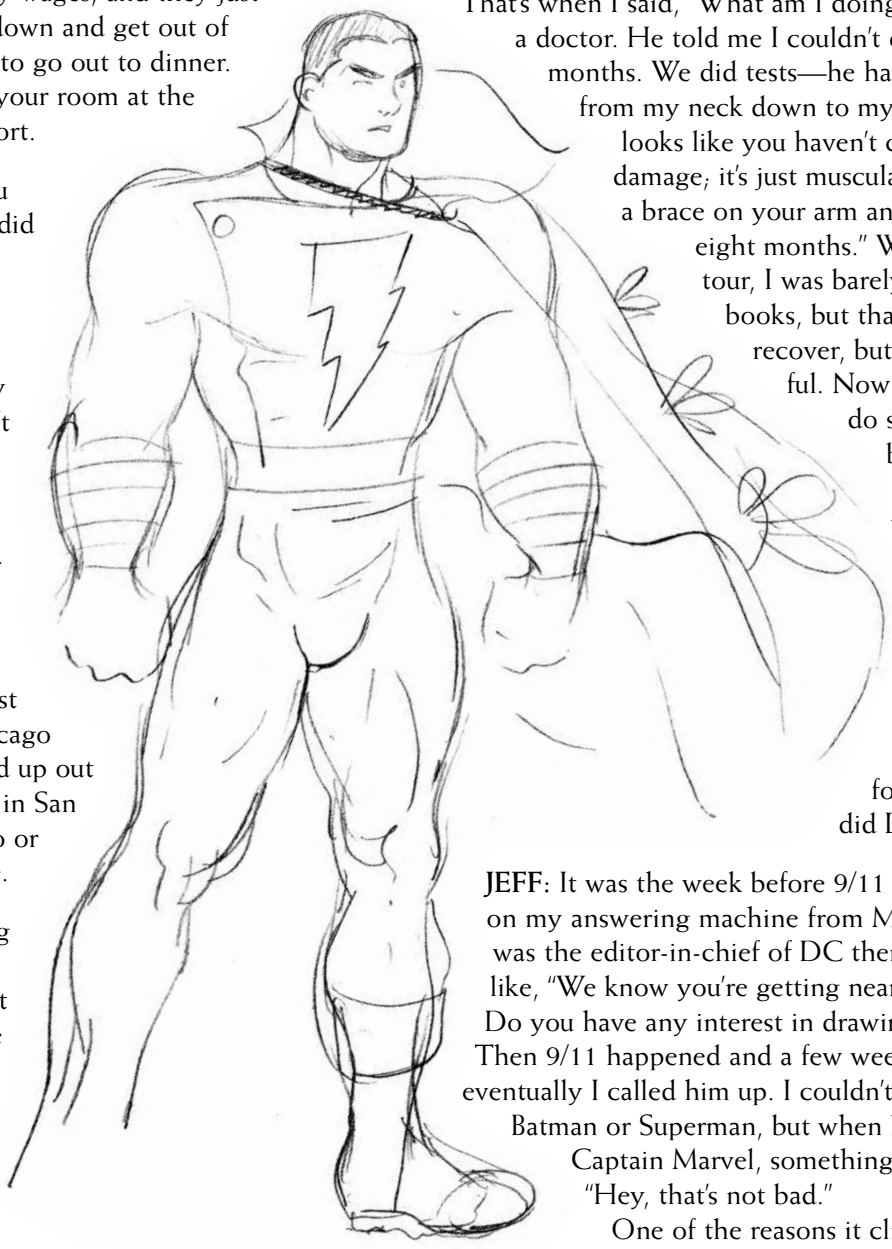
JEFF: Yes. We got a phone call one day. The publisher at the time was a woman named, Jean Feiwel, who is no longer with the company, and I miss her dearly. She was awesome. She called and asked to talk with Vijaya, and they were on the phone for, like, an hour. The rest of us were outside of her door asking each other, "What's going on?" Vijaya came out and said, "Wow. We need to talk about this. Scholastic wants to publish *Bone*, and they *get* it. I think we should give them a serious shot."

What had happened, I learned later, was that they had been wanting to get into graphic novels, and the consultants they had hired—among whom were Art Spiegelman

Part 5: The Magic of Words and Scientific Theory

MM: In 2005 you did some touring to promote the Scholastic editions. Is that right?

JEFF: I went on a tour in February of 2005 to promote the first book from Scholastic, which was weird, because that was my first real author's tour. I didn't like it at all. It wasn't like comics where you go into a city and the guys who own the comic book store are comic book fans and want to go out to dinner with you and you have a great time. In the bookstore world, they're just teenagers making hourly wages, and they just want to shut the store down and get out of there. They don't want to go out to dinner. So you just go back to your room at the Holiday Inn at the airport.



MM: How long did you tour? How many stops did you make?

JEFF: It was about a month—two two-week periods. It was probably close to 20 stops. I don't really remember, because some of them were visits to schools where I'd talk to a gymnasium full of kids, and others were in a Barnes & Noble or something. We did some on the East Coast, some in the Chicago area, and then we ended up out West. The last one was in San Francisco, and I did two or three appearances there.

MM: Were you working on any projects during that time, or did you set everything aside for the tour?

JEFF: I think I was working on *Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil* by then. I had worked out the script, but I had given myself carpal tunnel syndrome as I finished up *Bone*. I was pulling all-nighters, and my arm was getting so tired and numb. I would have to wrap my arm in two or three Ace bandages starting at my shoulder and armpit and going down to my fingers and thumb in order to finish.

There was a point during the very last issue when I couldn't close my hand enough to hold a pencil. I found a tennis ball and jammed a pencil through it, because I could hold the tennis ball, and I finished up like that. That's when I said, "What am I doing?" and I went to see a doctor. He told me I couldn't draw for eight months. We did tests—he had needles in my arm from my neck down to my wrist. He said, "It looks like you haven't caused any nerve damage; it's just muscular. I want you to put a brace on your arm and not draw for eight months." When I was out on tour, I was barely able to sign books, but that was it. I did recover, but I have to be careful. Now whenever I draw or do signings, I wear a brace on my hand.

MM: It sounds like you started working on *Shazam!* pretty much right after you finished *Bone*. Were you looking to do something for DC or Marvel, or did DC come to you?

JEFF: It was the week before 9/11 that I got a message on my answering machine from Mike Carlin, who was the editor-in-chief of DC then. It said something like, "We know you're getting near the end of *Bone*. Do you have any interest in drawing a super-hero?" Then 9/11 happened and a few weeks went by, but eventually I called him up. I couldn't see myself drawing Batman or Superman, but when he suggested Captain Marvel, something clicked. I was like, "Hey, that's not bad."

One of the reasons it clicked for me was

that back in 2000 I'd started thinking of a science-fiction story I wanted to do, which became *RASL*. Part of the story in *RASL* was that he was going to be from another dimension, but from a few months in the future. He would be trying to warn New York City that religious fundamentalists were going to blow up buildings, but nobody would believe he was from another dimension. When that really happened, there didn't seem to be much point to that story. It would just be weird. So suddenly I didn't have the next story I was going to work on. DC's offer was well timed, and Captain Marvel seemed to be a good thing to work on after twelve years on *Bone*. I thought it would be a nice change to work for a couple of years on a clearly defined character.

MM: Did they let you do pretty much whatever you wanted to do?

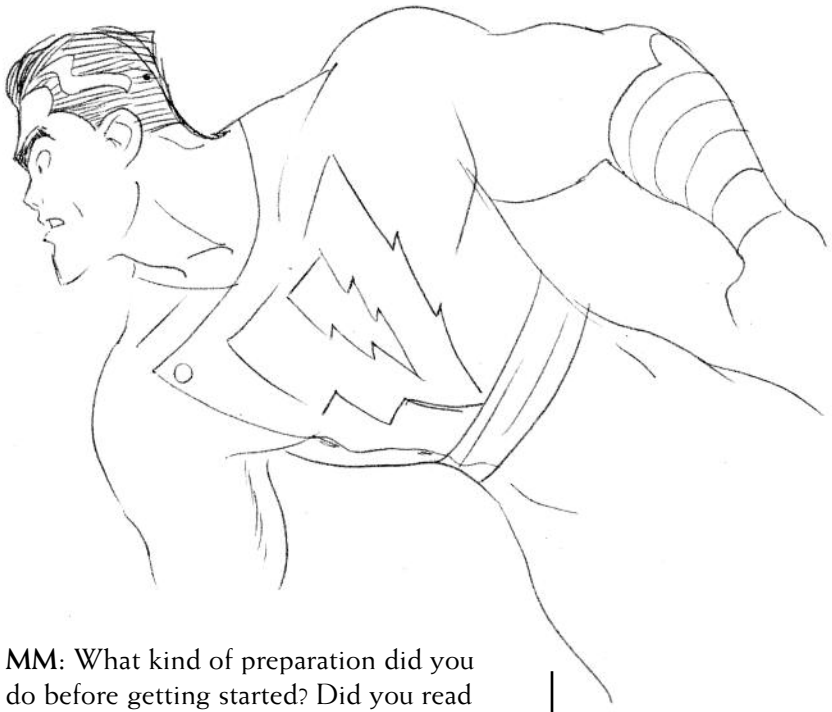
JEFF: I'd have to say so. It was pretty clear that nothing was happening with Captain Marvel and hadn't for a long time—not since Jerry Ordway's *Power of Shazam!* series. Everybody in comics pretty much knew my stuff and knew I wouldn't do anything crazy and that it was a good match.

My idea was, "Let me come up with a story and how I want to handle it, and if you guys like it, we'll do it. If you don't like it, then we'll just part ways. Nobody's hurt." And that's how we did it.

MM: The way the comics were presented with all the editorial material—the title, the credits, and so on—only on the inside covers, it really looked like the focus was on it being one book. Was DC looking at the project as a way to break into the children's market?

JEFF: Maybe. I never asked them about it, but I've always thought they were kind of hoping to get that presence in the bookstore market that I had begun to stake out. That makes some kind of sense.

Their original idea, though, was to relaunch it as a comic book. They wanted me to do it as a monthly. But I said, "You don't want me to do a monthly comic. That would be bad." [*laughter*] So I suggested that I do a prestige format mini-series, and that way it would have a beginning, a middle, and an end, which I like more anyway.



MM: What kind of preparation did you do before getting started? Did you read the original Golden Age Monster Society story?

JEFF: Yeah, I did. I called up my friend, Rory Root, who owns Comic Relief in Berkeley, and put him on the job. "See if you can find me one of those." I knew there was a giant, oversized collection, and he found it for me. I read that while I was on the road at some comic book shows, and I bought a couple of Golden Age *Captain Marvel*s. I also watched the Republic movie serial, *Adventures of Captain Marvel*. It's well regarded, and generally thought to be the best serial ever made.

From all those sources I picked up something that I thought was a little more magical than what I had seen in the comics, which seemed to portray Billy Batson as a young teenager who turns into an adult super-hero but retains his teenage mind—sort of like Tom Hanks' *Big* crossed with Superman. When I read the early *Whiz* comics, he looks much younger. I thought it would be a bigger change if he was a younger kid and then become an adult with a different personality. That was really how he was portrayed in the Golden Age comics.

MM: There was some debate amongst the fans about that aspect, because when DC brought him back they went in the other direction and that's the Captain Marvel most of them knew.

Previous Page and Above: Design sketches of the Big Red Cheese done in preparation for *Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil*. Drawn in late 2001, these early sketches harkened back to C.C. Beck's Golden Age work for Fawcett's various Captain Marvel series.


IT'S GOOD AND IT'S REAL HOT!
I BROUGHT YOUR CHANGE. YOU WANT TO COUNT IT?
NO, NO, YOU KEEP IT! IT IS YOUR TIP FOR RUNNING ERRANDS FOR ME.
BUT ALL I DID WAS PICK UP A FEW GROCERIES. ARE YOU SURE?
YOU KNOW HOW HARD IT IS FOR ME TO GO INTO THE CITY, BILLY. IT HELPS WHEN YOU DO IT.
WOW! THANKS, TALKY! I WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITHOUT YOU.
RAIN'S COMIN . . . I CAN FEEL IT IN MY HIP. COLD, WINTER RAIN.
THAT'S NOT GOOD FOR PEOPLE LIKE US.
YOU KNOW, BILLY, LIVING THIS WAY - - OUTSIDE IN THE COLD - - IS ALL RIGHT FOR ME, I'M A WANDERER. I CHOSE THIS LIFE A LONG, LONG TIME AGO . . . BUT YOU DO NOT DESERVE THIS.
7

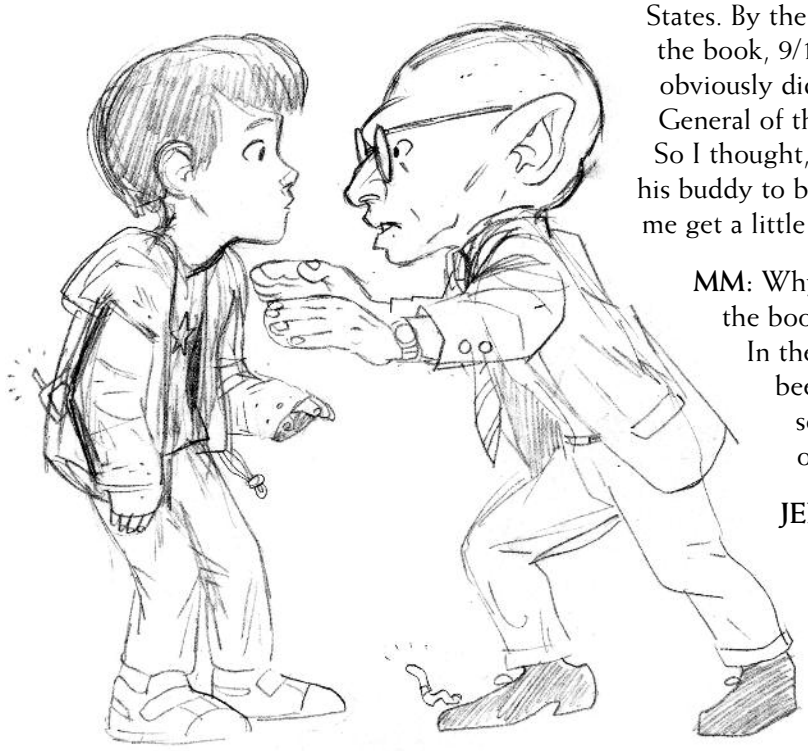
JEFF: There was some debate, but I don't care. [*laughter*] DC asked me to make him corny and go back to the Golden Age concept, and I had a blast doing just that.

MM: Well, you didn't go to far into the cornier aspects. You played Talky Tawny fairly straight. He's a tiger who can literally transform into a man. He doesn't stand upright and wear human clothes when he's in tiger form.

JEFF: Well, there was another element to my research I forgot to mention. I kept thinking, "What is this super-hero? He's a magic word." I started looking up magic words, and I came across "alakazam," which is what "Shazam" is evoking in sound. I started looking at Aladdin and genies, and I found these ifrits, which are genie-type spirits that can change back and forth between man and animal. As soon as I saw that, I said, "That's my explanation for Talky Tawny. It ties him into Captain Marvel's magic." In my mind Captain Marvel is sort of like Billy Batson's genie that he can pull out of a bottle by saying, "Shazam."

MM: Was it your idea to use the secret codes at the end of each issue?

JEFF: Yeah, I saw that they had done that in the reprint book. Someone showed me their Captain Marvel membership card



that had the code on it, which was really cool. I just wanted to play with, "What made Captain Marvel so much fun in the '40s that he outsold Superman and Mickey Mouse on the newsstands?" I went for all the fun stuff I could find and just had a ball.

MM: Your Sivana was very short and looked like a little goblin. But the biggest change was that you made him the Attorney General instead of a mad scientist.

JEFF: When DC first called me, Lex Luthor was their President of the United States. By the time I started working on the book, 9/11 had happened, and I obviously didn't like our Attorney General of the United States. [*laughter*] So I thought, "Maybe Lex Luthor hired his buddy to be Attorney General." It let me get a little laugh in there on the side.

MM: Why did you bring Mary into the book and make her so young? In the original stories, Billy has been Captain Marvel for some time before he finds out he has a sister.

JEFF: I didn't want to straight-up regurgitate what had been done. I think what DC wanted from me was to somehow update it or give it a new twist. It didn't

Previous Page: Partially inked pencils for page 7 of *Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil* #1. At this point Talky Tawny has yet to reveal his wilder side.
Above: Another early design sketch for *Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil.*
Left: This unused sketch was for a scene in *Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil* #4.

Part 6: Storytelling and the Creative Process

MM: You keep a fairly strict schedule for the most part, right?

JEFF: Well, I work every day, yeah. I consider it a job. Cartoon Books is made up of five people: Vijaya and I; our production manager who runs the office, Kathleen Glosan; my art assistant, Steve Hamaker, who does the coloring and everything else we need done in terms of artwork that isn't the actual comics; and Tom Gaadt, who runs the web page, goes to all the shows, and handles all the mail orders. We pretty much run from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. What they do during the day, I have no idea. [*laughter*] I have a little studio over my garage, which is where I do a lot of my writing and drawing. I go to the studio around 10:00 and usually try to write in the morning. In the afternoon, I'll go over to the office to do things like this, talk on the telephone, do interviews, have meetings about what's coming up—stuff like that.

MM: How much of your day is actually spent at the drawing board?

JEFF: I'd say a good three hours most days, until it gets into the deadline period, then it could be 20 hours a day for a week or two at a stretch.

MM: Ideas can come to you at any given time. Do you carry a notebook or sketchbook around with you?

JEFF: Yeah, I do. I carry a little notebook in my back pocket, so if I have an idea or think of something funny or interesting I can work with, I can jot it down. I didn't used to. In fact, just the opposite. In the early days of working on *Bone*, I believed that if I had an idea, if it was good enough then I would remember it the next day. And that worked for years and years, but now I don't remember things that I know are good ideas. I have to wear glasses when I draw now, too.

MM: Do you draw outside of work? Will you draw something just for fun?

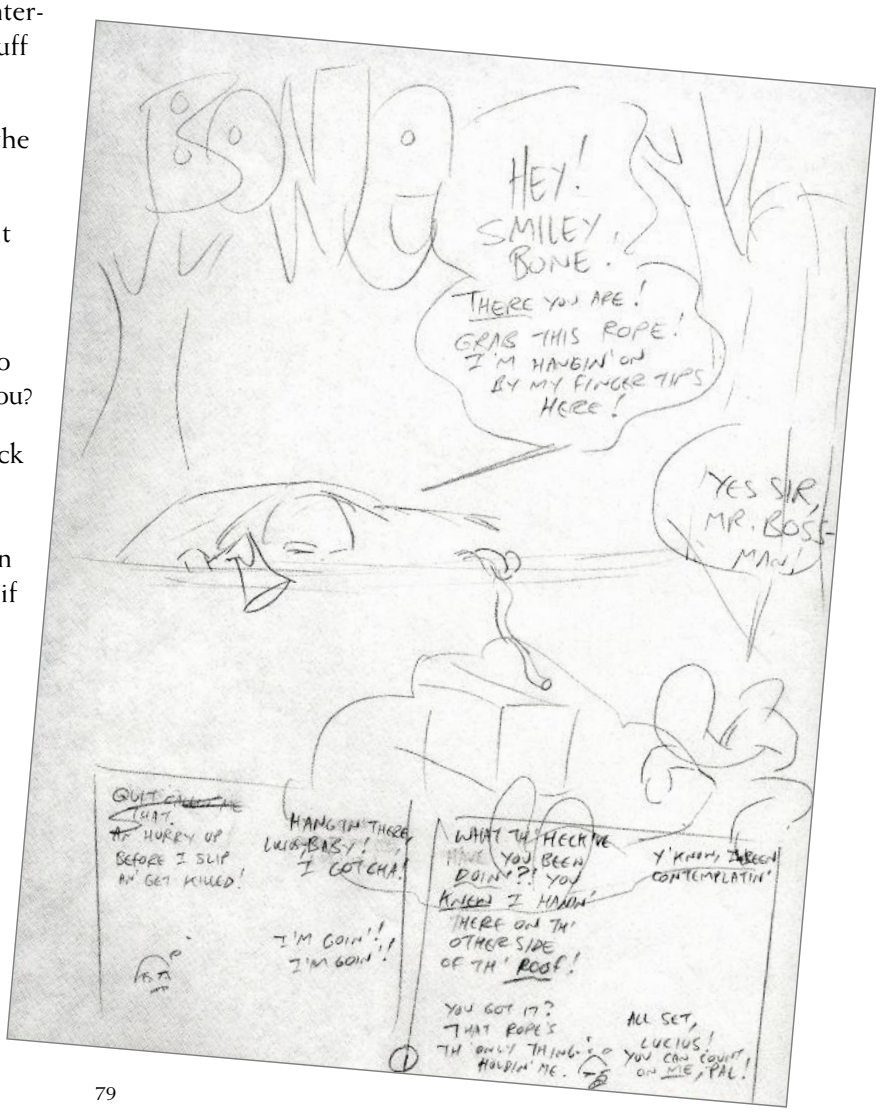
JEFF: No, not really—not since I started the comic books. I look at other artists who have these fantastic notebooks, and they're just filled with wonderful drawings of places they've been or character studies. I'm a little jealous, but everything I draw goes into the books.

MM: I suppose you don't experiment with other mediums then—paint, for instance?

JEFF: Not since college.

MM: When you sit down to write, what are you actually doing? You're doing thumbnails and sketching out ideas more than coming up with dialogue?

JEFF: I might jot down a quick list of four things that I want to have happen, and then I might add one of those ideas from my notebook. "Oh, that's a neat moment. I want to get that in there." I write down how I want to begin and how I want to end, and then I write an outline



with a guestimate of how many pages each thing will take. Then I'll start working out the comic on 8-1/2" x 11" sheets of paper, writing and drawing at the same time.

MM: At this stage are you just doing gesture drawings, or are you drawing more detailed images than that?

JEFF: Just gesture drawings. It's almost not enough for anyone but me to understand. I write and draw almost simultaneously. It's enough that if somebody really looked at it they could follow it.

MM: Are you worried about composition at all at this stage, or just the broad action?

JEFF: I move organically as I write. I can see the scene and the picture as I'm going, and that's what I'm drawing. I'm trying to lock in what I can see in terms of the composition—where someone is standing, what their expression is. I want enough of a drawing that I can tell those things, and then I write out the dialogue.

MM: Do you look at composition more in terms of individual panels or whole pages?

JEFF: I'm doing both at the same time. Sometimes I work straight ahead, but sometimes I'll work on a couple of scenes out of order knowing I have, say, a page and a half to get this idea across. I have a limited amount of panels to convey this idea, so I'll have to work a little harder to edit the idea and make sure it's clean.

MM: But for the most part you work from the beginning of an issue straight through to the end.

JEFF: Pretty much, because I want the comic to read as if it's happening in front of the reader. I want the reader to experience everything as the character experiences it. If there are surprises, I want it to appear on the page as I'm writing it. That way I don't forget to have my characters react to it.

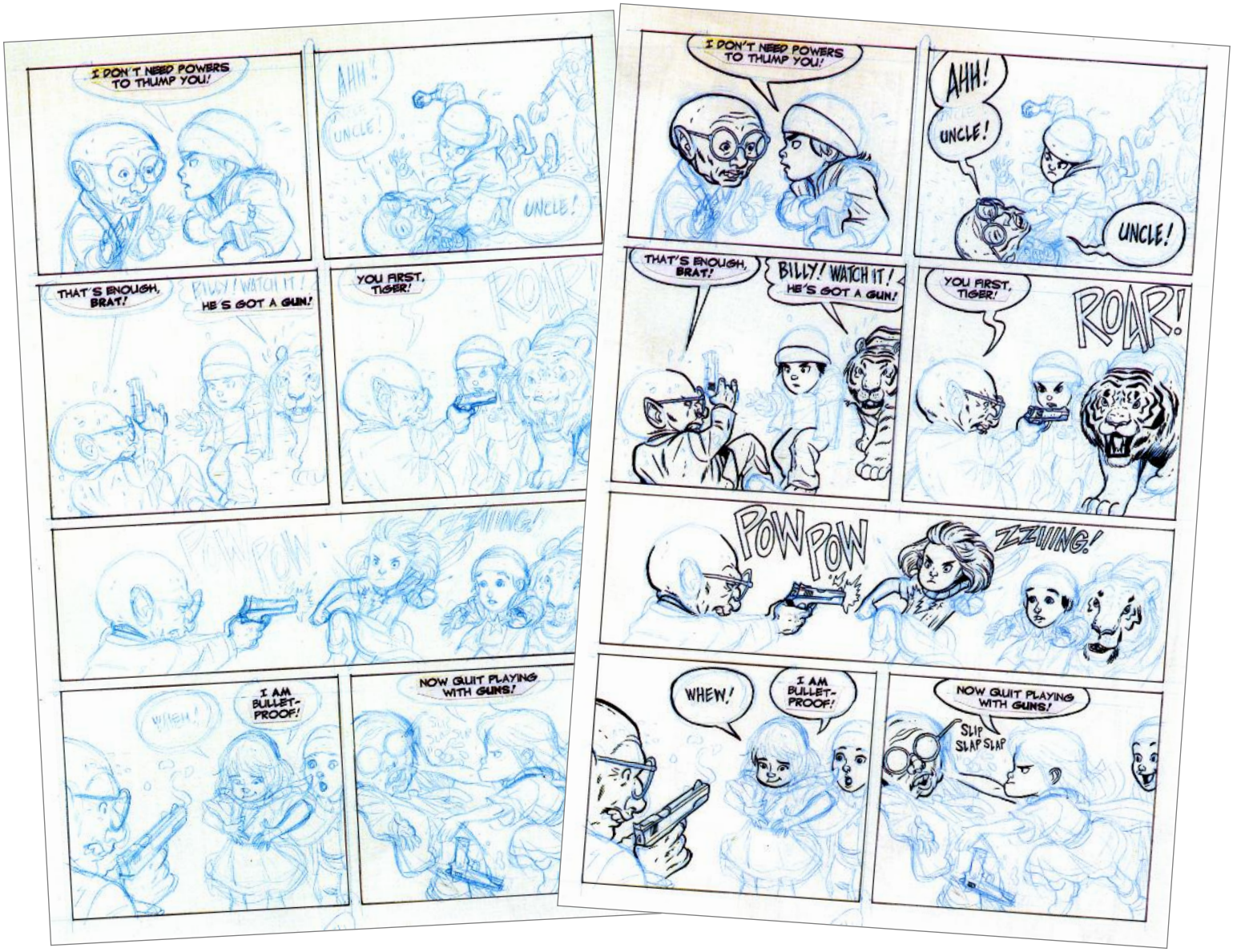
MM: Since you work with the collection in mind more than many creators, do you worry much if an individual issue doesn't have a big cliffhanger at the end?

JEFF: Usually that's part of the overall plan. I do worry if there's a cliffhanger or not. I think that's an intrinsic and enjoyable part of our little artform of comic books. I tried during *Bone* to keep in mind that it was all going to be together in the end, but, of course, that was a fairly novel approach at the time. Only Neil Gaiman and Dave Sim were thinking that way while they were doing their books. But I always try to have a cliffhanger, because I really want you to come back. That's a tried and true convention of comic strips and comic books. You've got to come back. And I like that; that's a fun element for me. But I don't want to overdo it, because I think it can get a little trite after a while.

MM: Do you prefer to finish the writing of an issue before you start drawing on the boards?

JEFF: It depends. That's more often the case with *RASL* than it was with *Bone*. *RASL* is a much scarier process for me. I know where the story ends, and I kind of have the third act mapped out, but see, that's exactly it, Eric. I think I have something mapped out, and when I get there [*laughs*] it's never what I think. Even within an issue, I'll think this is what I'm doing. Then I start writing it and I'm like, "Oh, my God. Where is—? What? Oh, no." There is physics and consequences and parallel universe paradoxes. Holy crap! [*laughter*] So RASL has been a much more fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants than *Bone* was—even though it's planned.

MM: Once you've finished the writing, you've also got a layout. Do you lightbox those layouts or are they just a reference for you?



JEFF: Once I have the pages done—and, again, they're just rough, sketched comics—I enlarge them a couple of times on the copier until they're 10" x 15"—the size I draw at. I have a light table, and I'll quickly trace off those fast suggestions of compositions. It doesn't take any time at all, maybe five minutes a page, to do. Now I have my panels set up, and I just have to clean them up and draw. The tracings give me an idea of where to start, and it works out pretty well.

That fast, get-it-down shape of a gesture drawing really conveys a lot of energy and emotion. What I'm doing when I'm enlarging my tiny, fast scripts is I'm saving that energy. In the early issues I would try to painstakingly recapture that energy I could feel in my script, but I'd draw it and it would feel stiff. That's when I started tracing them up, and now a lot of that emotion and energy stays on the page.

MM: I assume then that you are doing most of your actual drawing in the inks and that you don't tighten up your pencils.

JEFF: Yeah, that's one of the luxuries of inking yourself, I suppose.

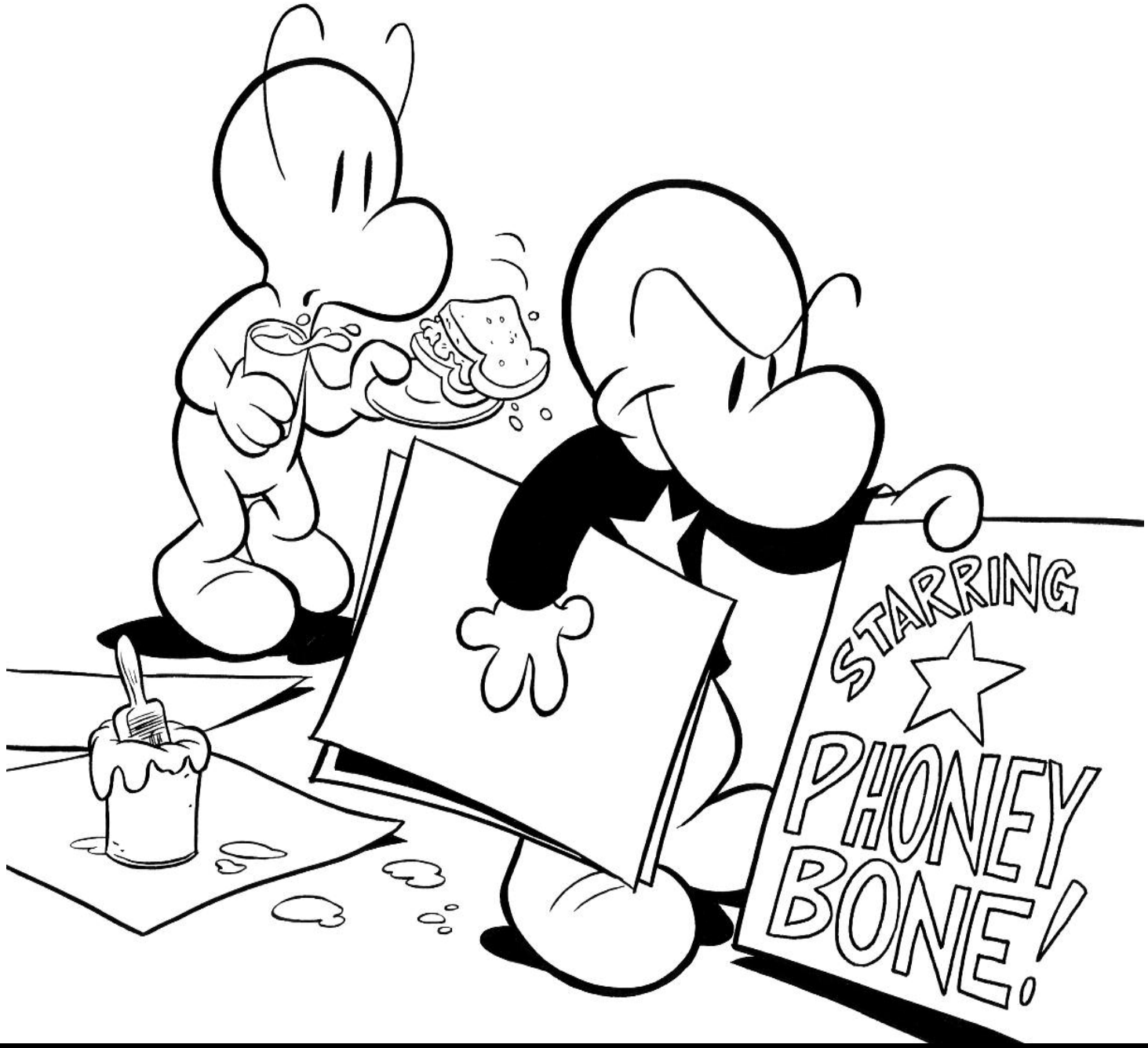
MM: As you pencil over these loose gesture drawings, do you make many changes?

JEFF: I have to make changes; things are not always in proportion, and sometimes they're a little too cartoony, especially for *RASL*. I have to sit there and draw a real drawing on top, but it still has the flavor and energy. You can control it, you just have to do some construction around it. That's a fun part of the job. I enjoy that quite a bit.

MM: Do you have to warm up before you start penciling?

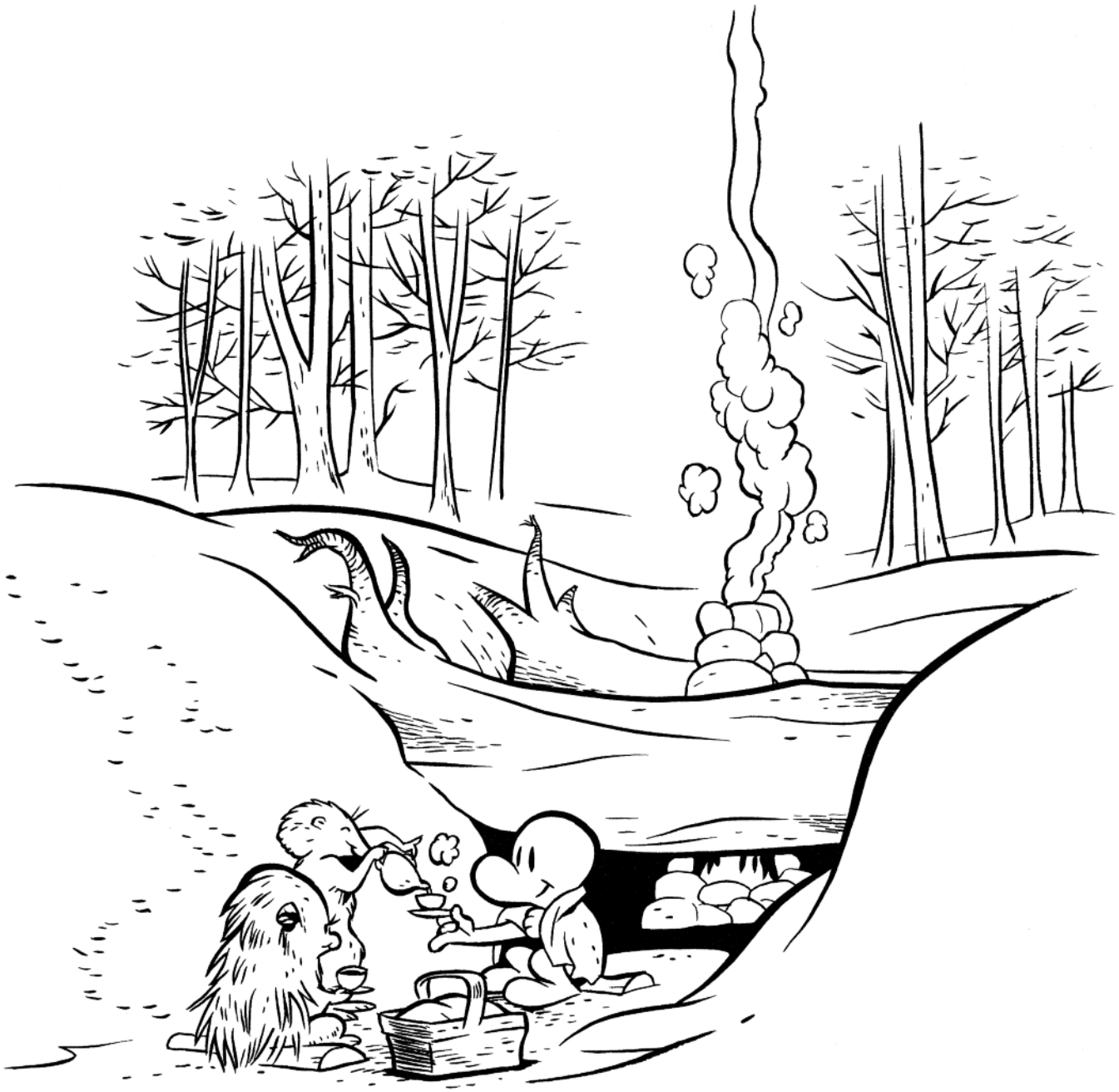
Previous Page and Above: Thumbnails, pencils, and partial inks for *Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil* #4, page 41. As you can see, Jeff's pencils are fairly loose, and he pastes in the lettering before he begins inking. When inking, he starts with the faces, where most of the acting is shown, and goes from there.

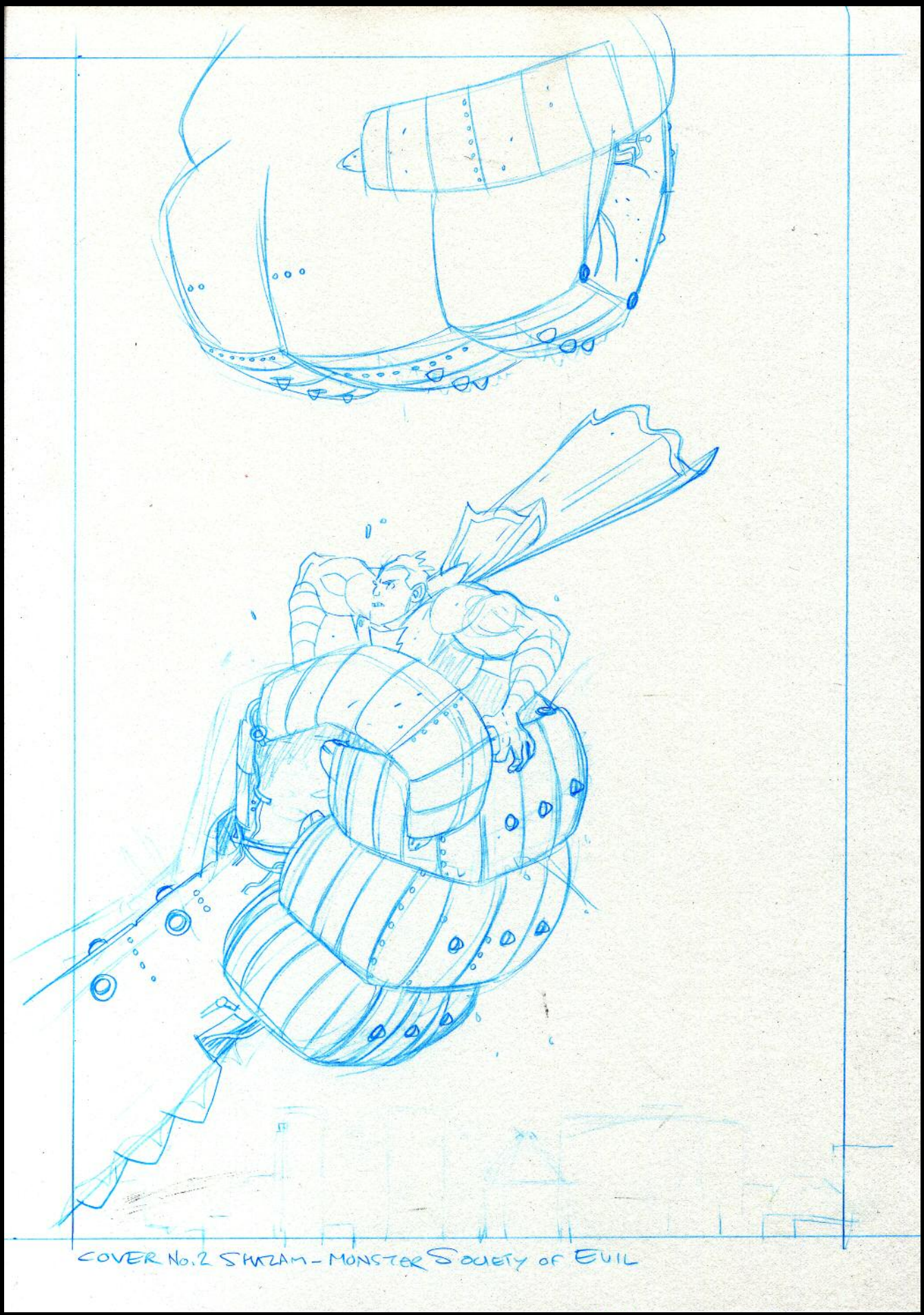
Jeff Smith

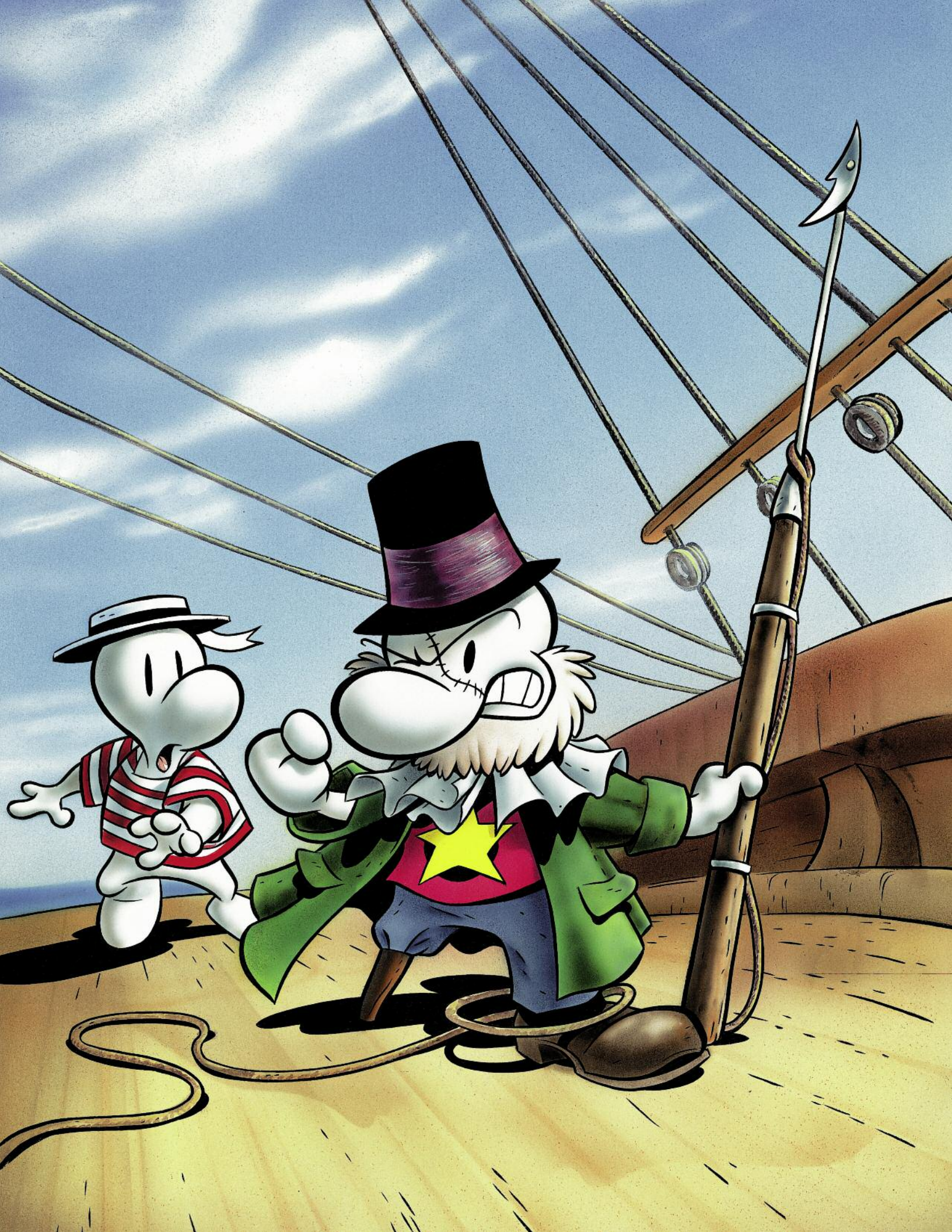


Art Gallery

Previous Page and Below: Illustrations done for *The Complete Bone Adventures* Vol. 1. These images appeared between the first and second issues and served to show the passage of time in the story.




COVER No. 2 SHAZAM - MONSTER SOCIETY OF EVIL



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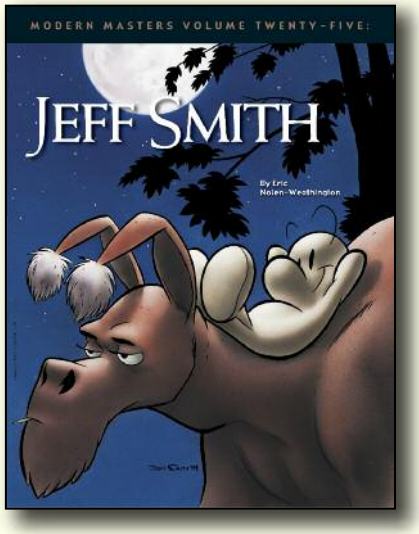
MODERN MASTERS: JEFF SMITH



At the age of five, Jeff Smith dreamt up a cute, little character he named Fone Bone. More than a decade later, Bone became an overnight success, rocketing Smith to a level few independent cartoonists achieve. Published worldwide and winner of countless awards, Bone would seemingly be a career unto itself, but Jeff Smith isn't one to rest on his laurels. DC's Shazam: Monster Society of Evil and his newest creator-owned series RASL are proof that he is still one of the best cartoonists in the business. Now, Eric Nolen-Weathington explores the career of Jeff Smith, a true Modern Master, through a career-spanning interview with the artist, a discussion of his creative process, and mountains of rare and unseen art, including a huge gallery of commissioned pieces, plus 8 pages of full color work.

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