

MODERN MASTERS VOLUME EIGHT:

WALTER SIMONSON



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By Eric Nolen-Weathington
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Walter Simonson
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Modern Masters Volume Eight:

WALTER SIMONSON

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Introduction

Walter Simonson is the nicest guy in comics. It wouldn't matter if he was the meanest man in comics. He is one of the masters of this genre, both as a writer and, of course, as an artist. Only his old friend and colleague Howard Chaykin is his living equal in original story-telling powers. They have quite a lot in common and I have had the pleasure of working with both of them. What we all three have in common is that if you want our best work delivered on time, you had better lie about the deadline. In fact Walter, like me, assumes you are lying about the deadline and once told me, in an aggrieved tone, to explain his lateness, "Hey, they gave me the right deadline... who does that?"

Like me, he is used to using adrenaline not merely to get his work to the publisher, but also to solve narrative problems. My scripts tend to require a lot of narrative solutions and not only has he never let me down, he has always improved on the story, the character or the image. He is not only the nicest guy in comics, he is probably the most conscientious guy in comics, as far as interpreting another's story is concerned. Many times he has called me and said modestly, "Tell me I'm an idiot for suggesting it, but how about if we—?" And I don't remember ever turning a suggestion down. He is, in other words, an absolute joy to collaborate with.

Although I first met Walter in 1979, when Howard Chaykin introduced us at their old Upstart office, we didn't start working together until the '90s, when DC was doing a twelve-issue series, *Michael Moorcock's Multiverse*, which still exists in collected form and which I'd recommend to anyone who wants to marvel at some superb artwork, even if they don't think much of the writing or ideas. We became natural collaborators. I tend to demand a lot of work from the artists with whom I work, packing a lot of narratives into a very small space. I get grumpy about artists who simplify or do what I

regard as a skimmed job. I want depth and texture and a dozen narratives working at once. Walter's own models are some of the finest daily comic strip artists ever to be reproduced on cheap newsprint. In his own introduction to the *On Stage* strips of Leonard Starr, Walter shows how he understands both the problems and the solutions of keeping a narrative going not only on a day-to-day basis but also of incorporating a Sunday page which might or might not be seen by the same reader and had to be produced so that it could exist as a narrative of its own.

I have written and edited all kinds of comics since the age of 16, from 64-pagers to serial strips and have had the privilege of working with some of the greatest artists in the business, including Frank Bellamy, the Embleton brothers, Don Lawrence, Jim Cawthorn, Mal

Dean, and Howard Chaykin, all of whom were also admired masters of their craft. All of them taught me something. It was a joy to work with them and until I started working with Walter I had already enjoyed some great high points. With Walter it has all been high points. He is a great-hearted man by nature, constantly entertaining at the house he shares with his wonderful wife Louise and their two dogs (and their vast



library), and is notoriously generous with his time as he is with his hospitality. He has a tremendous work ethic but at root will always put human relationships first. His wide circle of friends and relations will confirm that.

I am always in awe of someone with a talent for draughtsmanship, something I value enormously in an artist. In fact I hate artists who, in fantastic art especially, hide their weaknesses with a lot of baroque flourishes or distorted perspective. I don't know an incident where Walter has "faked it"... that is, obscured a panel's weakness in some way. I don't know a time when he has "lifted"... that is, copying another artist's work because he is unable to draw what is demanded of him. I know, for instance, that if you want crows in a story, then by God Simonson

Part 1: "Well, This is Nice. What Else Can You Do?"

MODERN MASTERS: You were born in Tennessee?

WALTER SIMONSON: That's right.

MM: When was that?

WALTER: September 2, 1946, in Knoxville.

MM: Then you moved to Maryland?

WALTER: My dad worked for the Department of Agriculture in Soil Classification & Correlation. He was promoted and we moved to Washington, DC. My parents took a home in the Maryland suburbs. I really grew up in College Park. I was just a little over two-and-a-half when my parents moved. My only memory of Tennessee is I can remember being in the back seat of a car on my knees and watching a white house disappear around a corner. I know, for whatever reason, that's the house I lived in the day we moved.

MM: Any siblings?

WALTER: I have one younger brother named Bruce. He's three-and-a-half years younger than I am. He's a professor of Geology at Oberlin College in Ohio.

MM: Were you always into art when you were growing up?

WALTER: As far as I can remember. What my mom told me is that apparently I began drawing younger than I can remember. And then I quit. My mom was very sad because it's always nice to have artistic children. But when I was four years old, I had a barely diagnosable case of mono. Mostly mono just wipes you out and you're in bed for several weeks while you're recovering. Of course,

you're just bored stiff and we didn't have a television then, but we had a radio. My mom brought me pencil and paper to while away the time in hopes that I'd begin to draw again, which I did. After that, as far as I know, I never stopped. I really don't remember not drawing.

MM: When did you start reading comics?

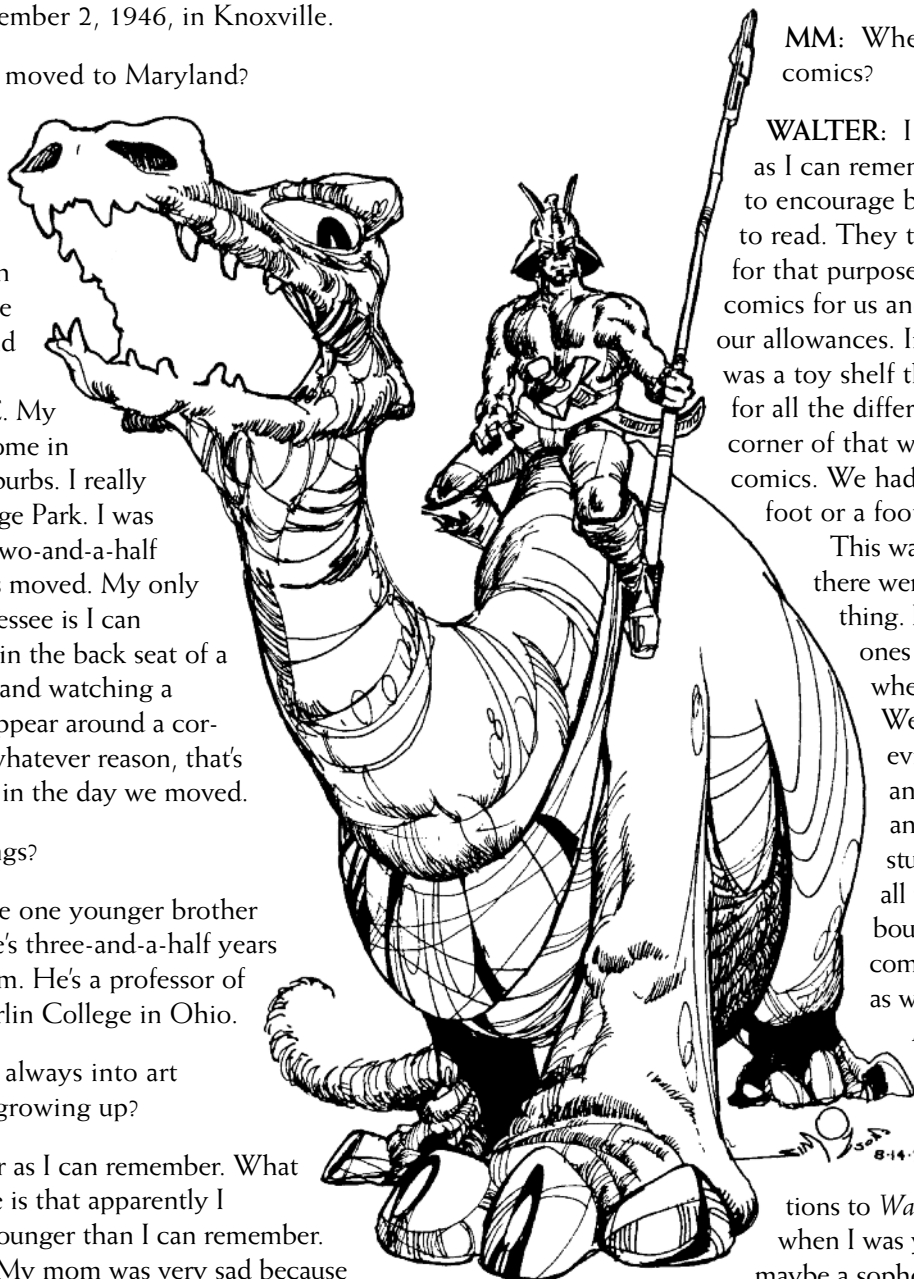
WALTER: I read them from as young as I can remember. My parents wanted to encourage both me and my brother to read. They thought comics were fine for that purpose, so they bought some comics for us and we bought some with our allowances. In the dining room there was a toy shelf that my father had built for all the different toys we had, and one corner of that was reserved for all our comics. We had a pile of comics about a foot or a foot-and-a-half high.

This was the '50s, and in the '50s there were comics about everything. Dell and DC were the ones primarily distributed where we lived. There were Western comics based on television shows like *Cheyenne* and *Sugarfoot*; *Little Ida Iodine* and *Little Lulu*; the Duck stuff—Carl Barks' Ducks—all the Disney comics. We bought *Classics Illustrated* comics. We read super-heroes as well. Later on, some of the *Mystery in Space*. I was in high school by that time. I really read comics a lot when I was a kid. We had subscrip-

tions to *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* when I was young. Then, when I was maybe a sophomore in high school, I

had a subscription for a while to *Turok, Son of Stone*. Hey, Indians and dinosaurs, it couldn't be better.

MM: Did you have any favorites?



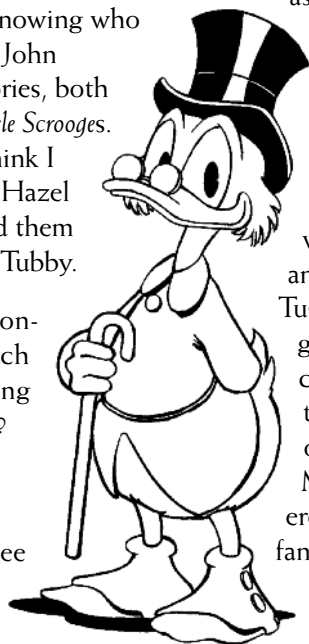


WALTER: I liked them all. I didn't have favorites in that sense, but I clearly liked *Turok* because I got a subscription to it. That was the work of Alberto Giolitti. He did a lot of comics for Dell. Incredibly solid drawing. Nice blacks, nice design, good storytelling. He was really a good comic book artist.

I was a big fan, without knowing who they were, of Carl Barks and John Stanley. I loved the Duck stories, both the *Donald Ducks* and the *Uncle Scrooges*. And I love the *Little Lulus*. I think I particularly loved the *Witch Hazel* stories in *Little Lulu*, but I liked them all. Including her bouts with Tubby.

MM: Hearing you talk at conventions, you seem very much a storyteller. Is that something you've always wanted to do?

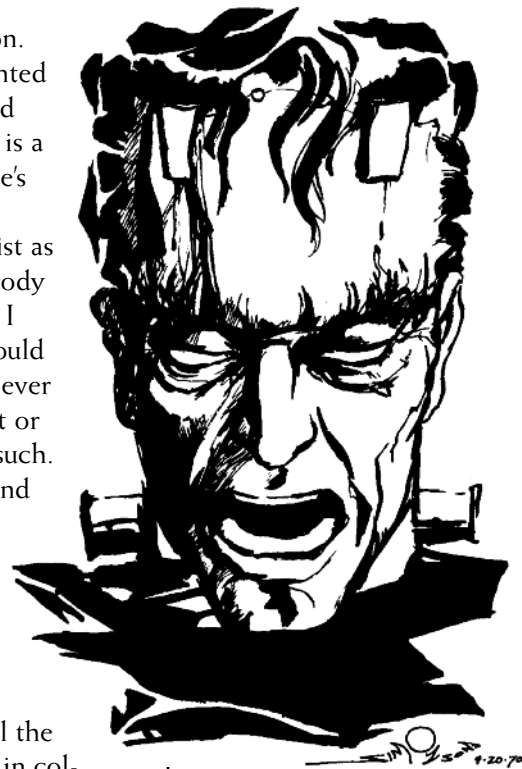
WALTER: I saw the movie *Fantasia* when I was in third grade. My dad took me to see it. I was entranced by the dinosaurs in Stravinsky's



"Rite of Spring" adaptation. From that point on, I wanted to be a paleontologist and study dinosaurs. My dad is a scientist, and although he's younger than I am, my brother became a scientist as well. I didn't know anybody who did art for a living. I had no idea how that could be done. I don't think I ever thought about doing art or doing storytelling and such. I was certainly chatty and told enough stories of my own when I was younger. I drew little spacemen climbing across my school notes, stuff like that.

It wasn't really until the end of my senior year in college when I was a geology major that I decided that paleontology was not really what I wanted to pursue professionally. At the time, I had no other ideas. It wasn't like I put it aside in order to do comics. I put it aside because I could tell it was not where I wanted to go. Although I still liked dinosaurs, the outdoor life of the paleontologist I learned from experience just was not gonna be the kind of life I wanted to live. So I took some time off. I re-applied to college. I went back to school. I went to art school this time, again as an undergraduate—I was treated as a transfer student. I went to the Rhode Island School of Design [RISD]. I was an Illustration major there.

When I was in college the first time, that was the mid-'60s when Marvel was doing its "Golden Age" work. That was when Stan and Jack and Ditko and Don Heck and George Tuska and all these guys were doing just great work. I had kinda quit reading comics by the end of high school. At the end of my freshman year/beginning of my sophomore year I discovered Marvel Comics. In particular I discovered *Thor*. I had been a Norse mythology fan from when I was a small boy. My parents had, and I still have, a book from about 1893 about Norse myths.



Previous Page: Back cover art for the *Star Slammers: Chapter IV* mini-comic, which was published as part of an effort to bring the World Science Fiction Convention to Washington, DC.

Above: Before he turned pro, Walter often contributed artwork to various fanzines, such as this cover to *Gore Creatures* #18 and this illustration of the coolest creature of them all, Frankenstein's monster.

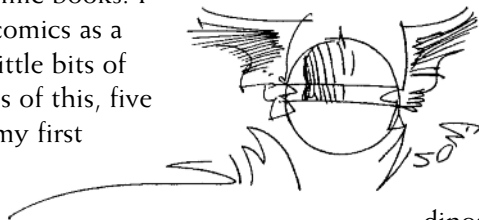
Left: Walter shows he's a bit of a "duck man" himself.

Star Slammers™ and ©2006 Walter Simonson. Uncle Scrooge™ and ©2006 Walt Disney. Gore Creatures™ and ©2006 respective owner.



So when I discovered the *Thor* comic, I was quite taken with it. Very quickly, I began reading all the Marvel Comics, which back in those days cost about 15¢. There were like eleven of them so you could literally buy all the comics and get everything. I began branching out; I read more DCs. By the time I went to art school I had begun to become interested in comic books and in trying to draw comic books. I hadn't really quite thought of comics as a profession, but I began doing little bits of my own continuity—four pages of this, five pages of that. That was really my first crack at trying to do continuity and telling a story. I found I enjoyed it.

Once as a child, I had tried to do a comic. I couldn't letter very well. My pages were the same size as comic book pages because who knew that comic book pages were drawn big? So I drew them small on manilla paper and I colored them with crayons. I put them in my dad's typewriter and typed in the captions so the printing would look good. I made it through about a page-and-a-half before I burned out on it. The comic was modestly entitled *The Origin of Life* [laughter], because I had read some stuff about the origins of life that I thought was really cool so I wanted to do a comic book of it.



MM: A noticeable element of your art is your signature. How did you develop that?

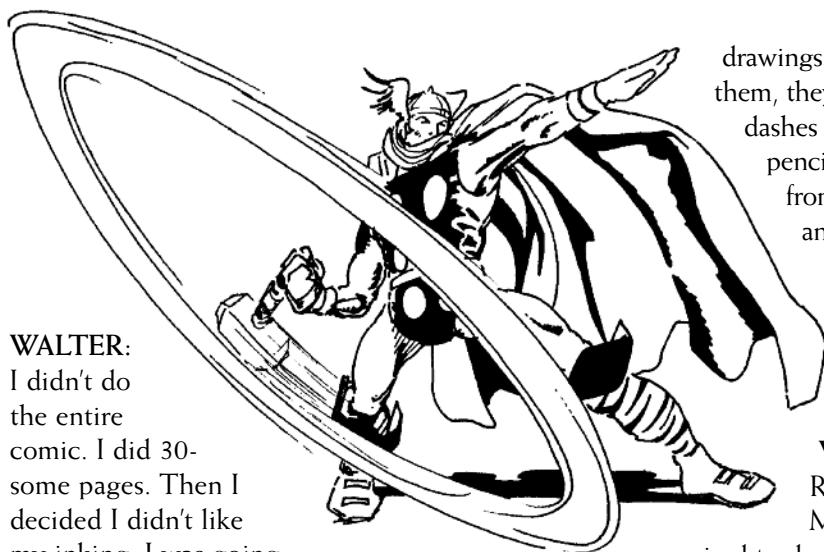
WALTER: Pretty simply, really. Somewhere in the summer of my junior year in high school I had been drawing a lot of pictures. I drew tons of dinosaurs. Tanks. Big things that broke stuff. And it occurred to me that really

cool artists have signatures that are really nifty. I decided that I needed a better signature. At the time, I was block printing the word Simonson with a dash at either end.

Just not very cool. I think I thought about maybe trying to fit it inside the silhouette of an animal somehow. My mom suggested a

dinosaur since I was a big dinosaur fan. I drew some outlines of dinosaurs and tried to fit the word Simonson inside them. As you can imagine, it didn't fit too well inside lots of them. But the first one I tried was what was then called a Brontosaurus—now it's called an Apatosaurus. That worked okay. My early signatures were much more in proportion with the actual dinosaurs. Of course the signature drags its tail on the ground and we now think the Apatosaurus didn't. What that really means is that my signature is the only remaining Brontosaurus in captivity. [laughter]

MM: You did a whole "Thor Annual" at one point.



WALTER: I didn't do the entire comic. I did 30-some pages. Then I decided I didn't like my inking. I was going to quit drawing it until I got my inking better, then I would go back and finish the comic.

MM: How old were you when you were doing that?

WALTER: I was a sophomore in art school so I was 22, 23 probably. Fourteen years later, I got the gig to do *Thor* at Marvel Comics—to write and draw it—and I told that story. That was the story I had done in the "Annual." My inking was better. [laughter]

MM: Who are some of your artistic influences?

WALTER: Oh, man. Kind of the usual suspects for reading American comics. Kirby and Ditko clearly. Not so much artistically exactly, but Archie Goodwin was really a mentor for me when I first got started in comics. I learned a great deal working with Archie; I took a lot from him. Jim Holdaway, who was the original artist on *Modesty Blaise*—an English newspaper strip—was a gigantic influence. It isn't so obvious in my stuff in some ways, but there's a lot of Holdaway, especially his approach to pen work that really is in my stuff. Moebius and Mezieres from France, Palacios from Spain. Many others.

Beyond that, American illustrators, especially out of the Howard Pyle school—the N.C. Wyeths and Pyle himself. They did work where you see the picture at two levels. You see the picture both as depth—the actual picture you're being shown—and you're also aware simultaneously of the picture as surface because they use bold brush strokes. The work of Van Gogh is a good example of that. If you've ever seen any of Van Gogh's

drawings, if you get close to them, they're full of dots and dashes and just slashes with the pencil. Yet when you back up from them, they coalesce and become a picture.

MM: How did you go from the Rhode Island School of Design into comics?

WALTER: I was at RISD for three years. My senior year we were

required to do a degree project of some kind. As a junior I had a teacher named Tom Sgouros. Tom was the head of the Illustration department and taught the juniors. He had his students do a series of individual assignments over a week or two weeks, one right after the other. But Tom also had students do an over-arching project that you worked on over the two semesters.

I had spent the year between college and RISD living at home, working in a bookstore right across from the University of Maryland in College Park. While I was at the Maryland Book Exchange, I took care of all the science fiction. My ambition at the time—the field was smaller then—was to try and have at least one copy of every science-fiction paperback that was then in print in the store. I ended up meeting a few guys who came by to browse the collection who belonged to the Washington Science Fiction Association—WSFA for short. Eventually I went to some meetings, I joined up and became a member. I knew a lot of the guys.

About the time I was a junior at RISD, about 1970, WSFA was gearing up to

Previous Page: Pages 24 and 25 from Walter's "Thor Annual," much of which was later used—though redrawn—when he took over *Thor*.

Left: Panel detail from Walter's "Thor Annual."

Below: The cover to the *Star Slammers: Chapter IV* mini-comic.

Surtur, Thor TM and ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc. *Star Slammers* TM and ©2006 Walter Simonson.



Part 2: Enter Manhunter... and DC Comics

MM: How did you move from Archie being your editor to working with him on "Manhunter"?

WALTER: Archie, as I said, kept feeding me little stories. Then I got a couple other gigs. I helped Howard Chaykin on *Sword of Sorcery*. He was penciling *Sword of Sorcery*, which was the Fafhrd and Grey Mouser stuff of Fritz Leiber. Right after I got here, he was working on issue #3. I went out to his house in Queens and ghosted some panels for him. So probably the first stuff I ever had in print were three panels of ghost work that were in *Sword of Sorcery* #3. Eventually I did some other work for Denny O'Neil on *Sword of Sorcery* myself—I penciled and inked one issue. So I had other things I was doing in the middle of all this.

Finally, Archie gave me a little three-page job on the Alamo. A friend of mine named Don Krarr had written it. The Mexican army had come to the Alamo, but they hadn't completely closed around them, and a guy named James Butler Bonham volunteered to leave the Alamo and find reinforcements.

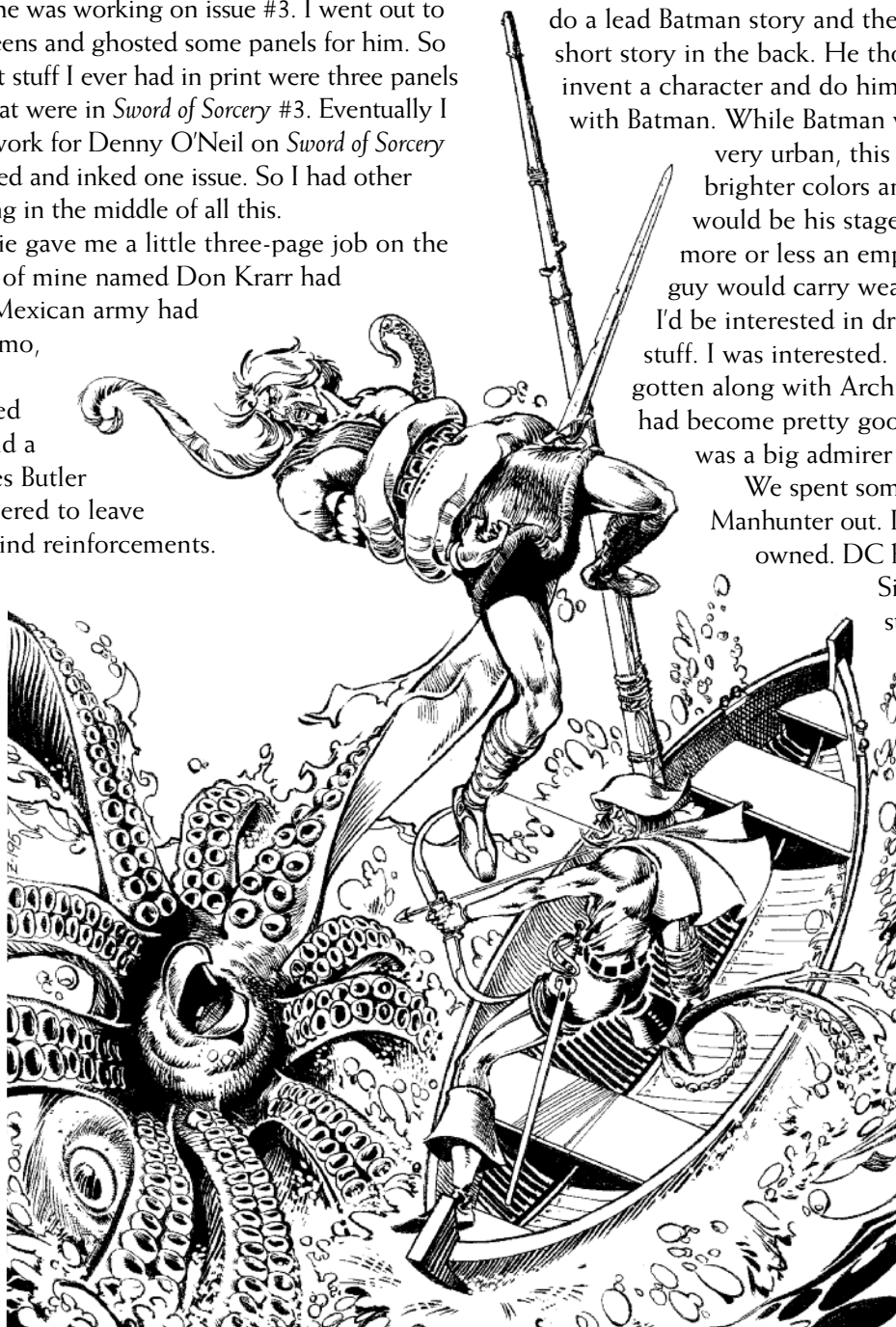
Bonham went out and learned that there were no relief troops coming. Instead of saying adios, he broke through Mexican lines and rode back into the Alamo to tell them that there was no help coming. On the last day, he was killed along with the others. Two things came out of that

job. One was that Don got an invitation to the Butler Bonham family reunion in Texas. The other was that—Archie told me this many years later; I didn't realize it at the time—that job is what persuaded him that I could draw stuff besides science fiction.

He had had an idea for doing a back-up story for *Detective Comics*, which he was editing. He was going to do a lead Batman story and then have an eight-page short story in the back. He thought he would try to invent a character and do him in a way that contrasted with Batman. While Batman was dark and grim and very urban, this would be a guy in brighter colors and the whole world would be his stage. Where Batman was more or less an empty hand combatant, this guy would carry weaponry. He asked me if I'd be interested in drawing it. I liked Archie's stuff. I was interested. I thought, "Cool!" I had gotten along with Archie really well, and we had become pretty good friends by that time. I was a big admirer of his work.

We spent some time working Manhunter out. It was a character DC owned. DC had published the

Simon/Kirby "Manhunter" stories back in the '40s, so they had a trademark on the name. Archie essentially came up with a new character with a healing factor, clones, and a lot of plot ideas. He showed me a long list of possible names he'd written out for the character. Eventually, we settled on Paul Kirk because that was the name of the Simon/Kirby Manhunter in the '40s. We didn't really do it at the time because we had planned to link the characters together. We did link





them together later, but in the beginning we just thought one name is as good as another, and why the heck not?

The clone idea was Archie's. I had no ideas as far as what the character was about or how he worked or any of that stuff. My input was in design; I designed the character. His face was a combination of Charles Bronson and Bela Lugosi. I used Bronson's eyes, which are slightly turned down at the outside. I used the very strong nose, thin lips, and chin of Lugosi. That's where the face came from.

Initially, "Manhunter" was full script, but eventually we were working Marvel style. Somewhere around the third issue we thought it would be kinda fun to actually make it the same guy from the old Kirby "Manhunter," because we only had eight pages. We were doing 20-page stories in eight pages. I was doing a lot of panels on the page. We thought making him the other character would open up his backstory,

given our limited space.

Eventually, Archie was going to leave DC. He got a job at Warren, where he had been before, and Julie [Schwartz] was taking over *Detective*. He was going to maybe run "Elongated Man" as a back-up feature. "Manhunter" was coming to an end whether Archie was there or not, and I didn't want to do the character without Archie because the two of us worked so closely together on that character. We knew from about the fifth chapter on that the series was ending. We had already talked about doing a Batman crossover with "Manhunter" because he was in *Detective Comics*. "Let's go out in a blaze of glory. We'll put Batman in the story, we'll use the whole 20-page story, and we'll wrap up our series."

MM: Could you talk a little bit more about designing Manhunter?

WALTER: Some of the elements I can remember, some I have no idea where they came from. I have no idea where the boots came from. I don't know what the hell I was thinking. It's comics, you don't really have to run in them. You try to run in those in real life, you'd kill yourself in five seconds, I don't care how much practice you've had. [laughter]

The flared shoulder thing he wore came from the movie *Yojimbo* by [Akira] Kurosawa. I had a little black-&-white TV back then, and during the time I was working on the Manhunter designs, *Yojimbo* was on. Right in the beginning of the film there's a kind of town crier who walks through the town. He's wearing a shoulder thing like that. I think it drops off as a cape in the back. I



Previous Page: Cover art for *Sword of Sorcery* #5, featuring Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser.

Left: Page 3 of "Decision," a tale of The Alamo in *Star Spangled War Stories* #172.

Below: Preliminary head sketches of Paul Kirk, the Manhunter.

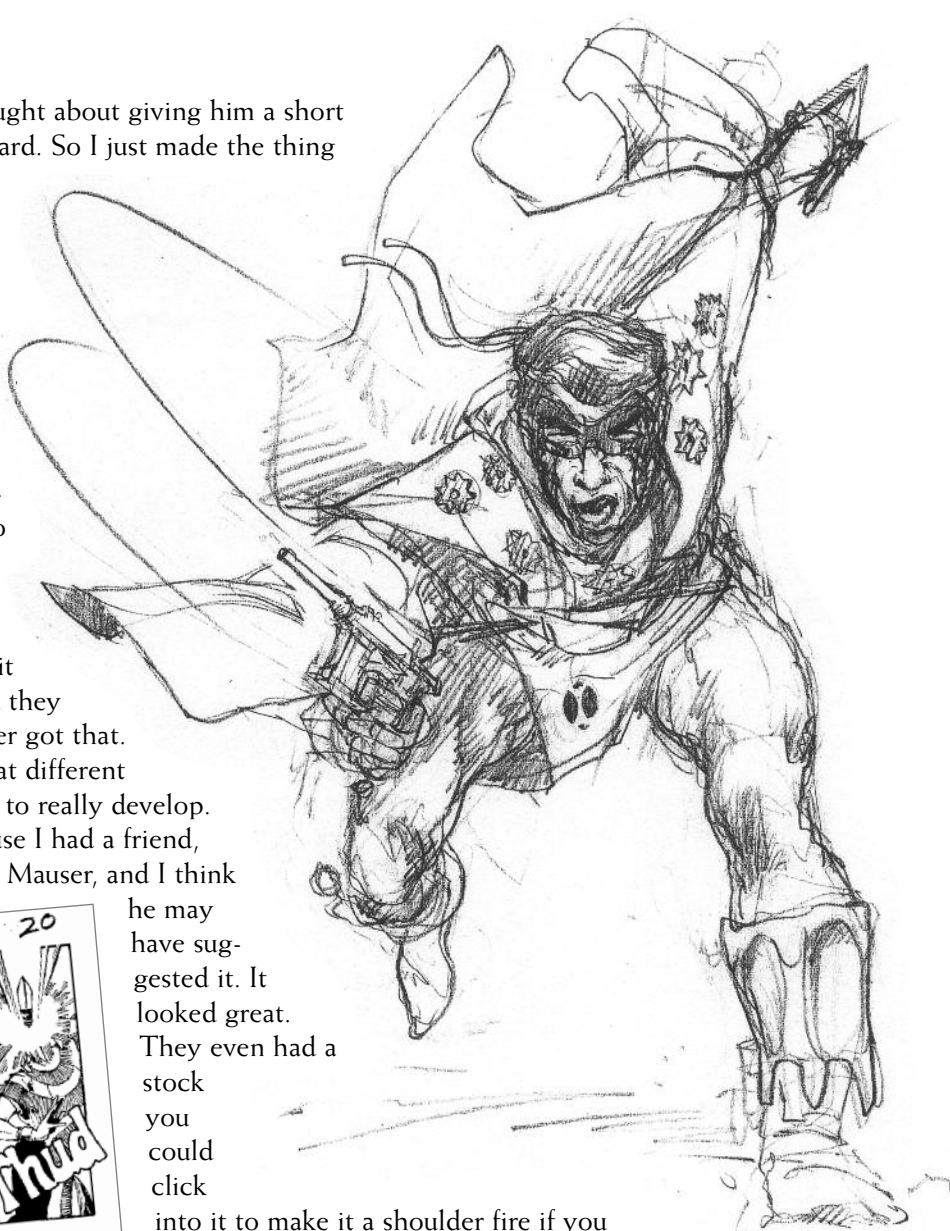
Fafhrd & the Grey Mouser TM and ©2006 Fritz Leiber. Manhunter, *Star Spangled War Stories* TM and ©2006 DC Comics.

have an old drawing of Manhunter where I thought about giving him a short cape, but in the end it seemed a little too awkward. So I just made the thing symmetrical front and back.

Because we were giving him Eastern martial arts fighting skills, we gave him throwing stars. Initially I drew him with nine throwing stars, because nine is a mystic number in the East. He had three on each shoulder, he had one on his belt, and one on the back of each of his gauntlets. Somewhere along the way I realized that drawing nine of these every time I drew the character was just going to be a nightmare. [laughter] I quickly abandoned that for two throwing stars, one on each shoulder.

Archie had a book called *Asian Fighting Arts*, or something of that sort, with all kinds of stuff from China, Okinawa, and Japan. You name it, it was in there. They had weapons from India and they showed the Bunti dagger. That's how Manhunter got that. The idea was he might have different weapons at different times. The strip didn't run long enough for that to really develop.

The Broomhandle Mauser came about because I had a friend, Steve Mitchell, who had a replica Broomhandle Mauser, and I think

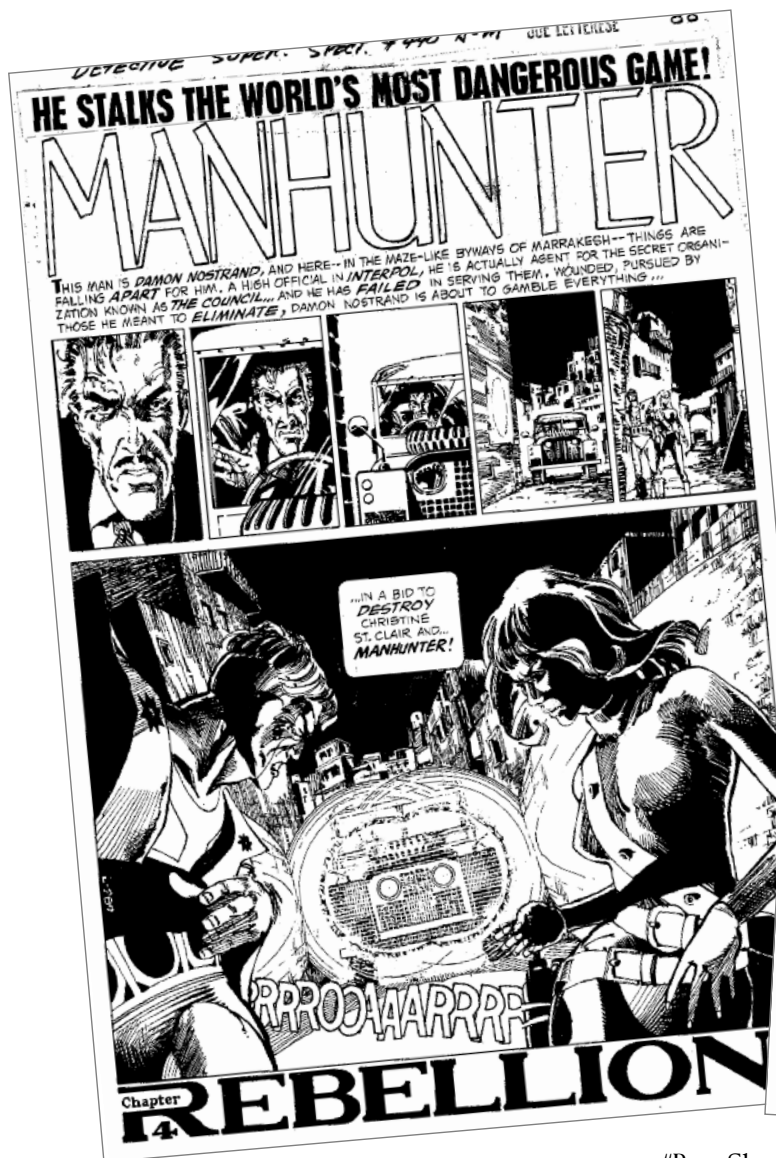


he may have suggested it. It looked great. They even had a stock you could click into it to make it a shoulder fire if you needed to.

MM: Something that I think really worked for the story is that things got unveiled as you went along. Did that have to do with the way you were working together on the story?

WALTER: It was really Archie's doing. The idea of creating a puzzle at the beginning and then gradually solving it, I think that was probably Archie's initial idea for the story structure. It wasn't created originally to be a limited series. Archie did not know when we started that he'd be leaving DC. I'm not sure how it would have played out if we'd done 25 episodes instead of seven. My work gets a lot better from the first episode to the last episode. I got control of the figure work and my inking in a way that's clearly visible by about the middle of the third episode. The difference in the inking between the first and last episode is quite strong.

MM: Did you ever hear any reaction to killing Paul Kirk?



WALTER: Not from fans. I think we might have gotten some letters, but I wouldn't have seen them. Most of the reaction I got from that strip was professional. We got a lot of professional recognition out of the strip. That's what made my professional reputation. When I started that strip I was just one more new guy doing comics. When it was over, people knew who I was professionally. I didn't have any problem finding work after that.

MM: And you won a few awards for that, too.

WALTER: The Academy of Comic Book Arts (ACBA) was awarding the Shazam Award. It was a block of lucite with a little Shazam arrow inside. In '73 and '74, between us Archie and I won six awards, all really because of "Manhunter." Archie won "Best Writer" two years in a row. We won

"Best Short Story" two years in a row. We won "Best Long Story" for the final story with Batman. Jim Starlin and I shared "Outstanding New Talent."

MM: You did eventually return to Manhunter for the *Special Edition*. That seems like it would have been a tough story for a couple reasons: You were telling it wordlessly, and you were working on it after Archie passed away.

WALTER: Those are good reasons why it was tough. It was difficult. DC had asked Archie when he went back to work for them in '89 or so if we would do a new Manhunter story together. They could reprint the original series and put a new story in for the new packaging. That seemed okay except that we couldn't think of a new story that we wanted to do. The problem is that the original series ends in a rather final note. Neither one of us wanted to undo that

Previous Page: Early Manhunter design sketch featuring a short cape and nine strategically placed shuriken, and the death knell for Paul Kirk in *Detective Comics* #443.

Above: By the time *Detective Comics* #440 hit the stands, Walter's art had improved by leaps and bounds. The first two pages of that issue's chapter of "Manhunter."

Manhunter™ and ©2006 DC Comics.

Part 3: In Space, No One Can Hear You Draw

MM: You worked on a couple of movie adaptations with Archie, *Close Encounters* and *Alien*. You've said that *Close Encounters* was a tough experience. How so?

WALTER: It was the worst experience of my comics career. However, if that's the worst experience, I'm in fine, fine shape. In my humble opinion, I think Columbia was really, really concerned about doing everything that Steven Spielberg wanted done. And because there was a lot of secrecy around the film, there was a berserko concern about keeping everything under wraps. What it amounted to was I was drawing *Close Encounters* with no reference.

The film company allowed us to see a couple minutes of footage of the scene where Richard Dreyfuss and Melinda Dillon see the UFOs on the country roads zooming around. We saw some stills of the actors in their costumes. And we saw some really, really blurry 8" x 10"s of pieces of the mother ship. That was it. And I wasn't given any of the reference. I could see it, then go home and work on the comic the next month-and-a-half remembering clearly what I had seen. Also, Marvel didn't have likeness rights, so we couldn't use Dreyfuss or Teri Garr or anybody else in the comic. We just had to work from nothing. We had a script and that was it. Even the script we had wasn't the final script. It made it very difficult to do. On the balance it worked out pretty well, all things considered.

MM: How did that compare with your experience on *Alien*?

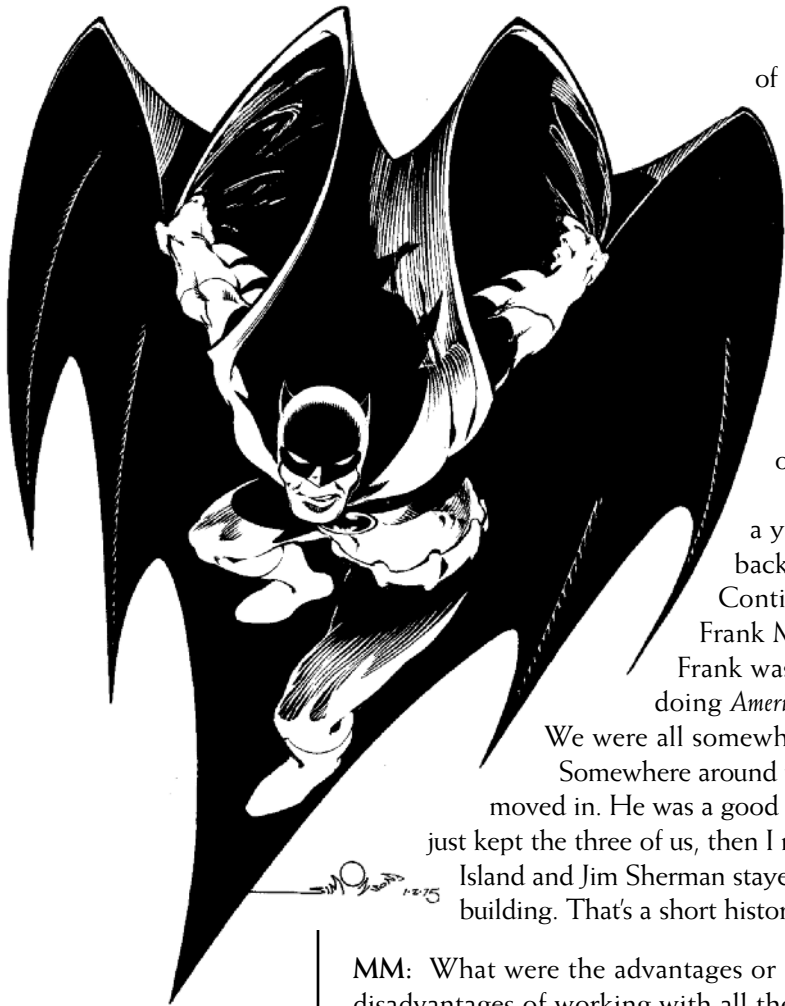
WALTER: *Alien* was one of the best experiences I ever had in comics doing a movie adaptation. Charlie Lippincott was our liaison with 20th Century Fox and Charlie was a comics fan. What that meant was he kinda knew what we needed to do a good comic book. They didn't want a lot of stuff out there, but Archie and I had three different script revisions a couple months apart each. We ended up with some photographs. Early on, 20th Century flew me over to England to see a rough cut of the film. I saw a two-hour version of the film in December of

'78. That was all principle photography—they were still doing the special effects. We got a tour of the model shop. We could have taken pictures, but I didn't have a camera. I was kicking myself later for that, because they got kind of stropky about sending us reference. We had reference on the actors. Honestly, as far as I'm concerned, it made all the difference in the way the stuff looked.

The other thing that was very cool was nobody had likeness approvals back then or nobody exercised them. Now, that's one of the difficult things in doing movie adaptations because everybody has likeness approvals and a lot of your creative energy goes into making these guys look like they think they look. I want to tell

the story. I think the important part of this is the story, but I'm an old retro guy. [laughter] In *Alien* I was able to draw these characters as comic characters that looked kind of like the actors and actresses without going





Above: This 1975 Batman illustration was done for a Street Enterprises portfolio.

Right: A page from *Batman* #300. Inks by Dick Giordano.

Next Page Top: Upstart Studio compadres Howard Chaykin and Walter (with an assist by Frank Miller) came up with some very funny one-pagers for *Heavy Metal*.

Next Page Bottom: Walter enters the world of *Battlestar Galactica*. Opening splash of *Battlestar Galactica* #4. Inks by Klaus Janson.

Batman™ and ©2006 DC Comics. *Battlestar Galactica*™ and ©2006 Universal City Studios.

of our own apartments. We thought we could split the cost on something. The initial members were Howard Chaykin, me, Val Mayerick, and Jim Starlin. I'm not sure, it's possible that Howard's wife at the time was the one who came up with the name Upstart. Maybe Starlin.

We looked around for a while and found a place on West 29th Street. We had about 1000 square feet. It was on the front of the building, and it had these big, old windows and a big, clunky tile balcony out front with a giant wall you could kind of peek over and see down to 29th Street. You got a lot of views of the roofs of New York. It was very cool. It was a nice place to work.

The membership rotated some over the years. Within a year of our being there, Val Mayerick decided to move back to Ohio. Jim Sherman came in. We knew Jim from Continuity. Not long after that, Starlin moved upstate and Frank Miller took that spot. That was the stable for a while. Frank was doing his *Daredevil* work at that time, Howard was doing *American Flagg*, I was doing *Thor*—it was a cool place to be.

We were all somewhat competitive.

Somewhere around the time *Ronin* started, Frank left and Gary Hallgren moved in. He was a good guy. Howard moved out to the West Coast about '85. We just kept the three of us, then I moved in '87. Ultimately, I think Gary moved out to Long Island and Jim Sherman stayed and took it over as his apartment. He may still be in the building. That's a short history of Upstart. Some cool work came out of there.

MM: What were the advantages or disadvantages of working with all the other guys around?

WALTER: Mostly it was the advantage of the location. And it was mostly fun, at least for me. It was inspiring to see *Daredevil* coming along. It was inspiring to see *American Flagg* getting done. It was annoying on both those counts as well. [laughter] Mainly it was getting to see other guys at work. If you had problems, you could talk 'em over with them. When you're a freelancer, if you're working at home it's kind of a lonely life. You're used to your own company, it's not lonely in that sense, but you spend a lot of time with yourself and your wife and your dogs. Being part of a studio means that you get out and you get to interact with other creative people. That can fire your own juices up.

MM: You did a few issues of *Detective* around this time with Steve Englehart, where you introduced Dr. Phosphorus.

WALTER: In two chapters, yes. I think it was done as layouts rather than tight pencils. Allen Milgrom inked it. I don't



Part 4: "It's Nice to Be Best Known for Something"

MM: You were kind of offered *Thor* out of the blue?

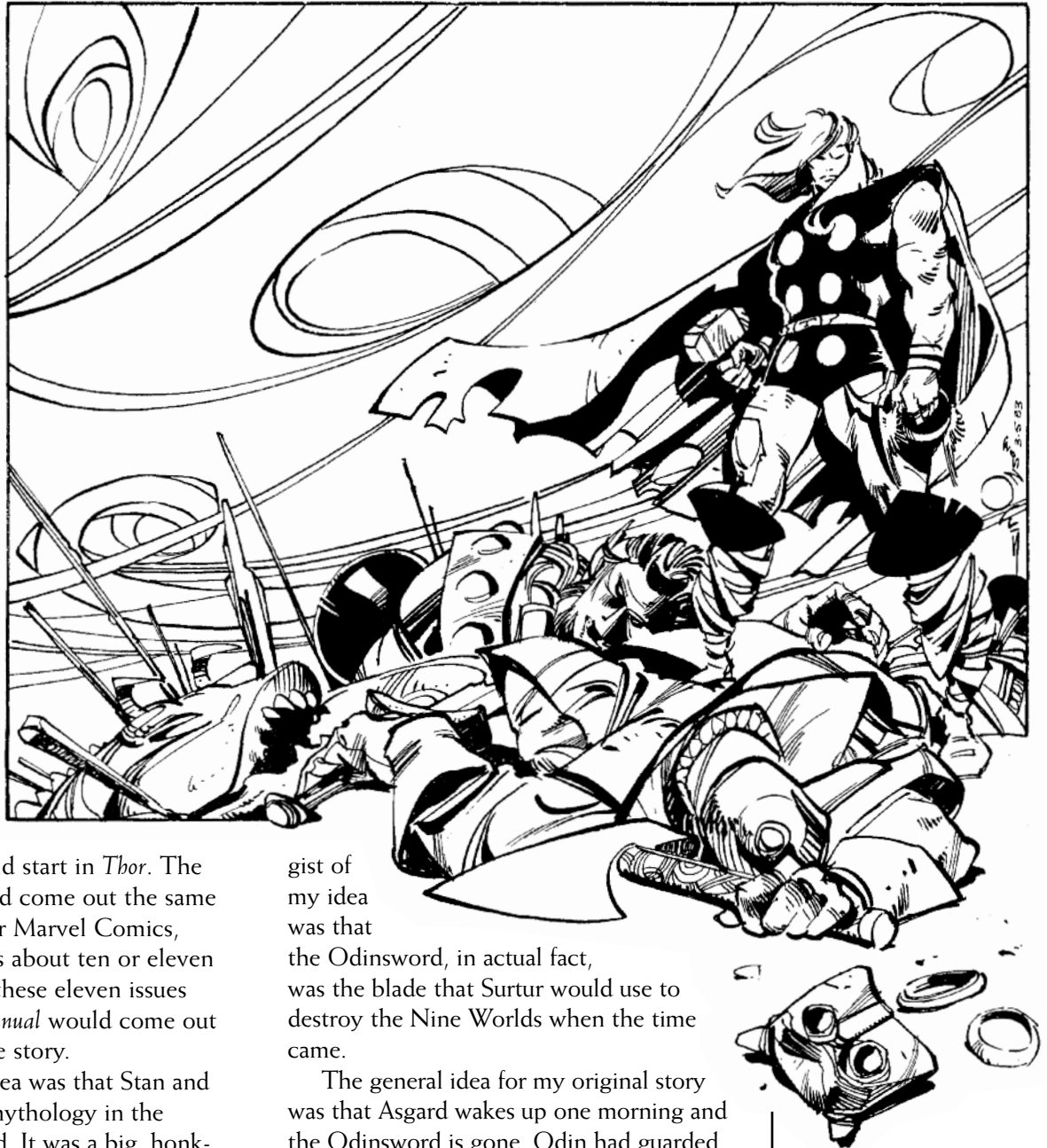
WALTER: More or less. Mark Gruenwald offered it to me. Mark and I had talked about a *Thor* idea that I had had back when I was in college. I was a big *Thor* fan back then—this was the mid-'60s. I came up with an idea for a big *Thor* story. I combined Norse mythology with "Marvel Norse mythology" with "Walter mythology" and put together a storyline.

The idea was that in the summer when the annuals were available, one month the story would start in *Thor*. The rest of the story would come out the same month in all the other Marvel Comics, which at the time was about ten or eleven titles. A month after these eleven issues came out, the *Thor Annual* would come out with the climax of the story.

The basis of the idea was that Stan and Jack had in the *Thor* mythology in the comics the Odinsword. It was a big, honking sword that sat in the middle of Asgard. Their story was that if it were ever withdrawn from its scabbard, the universe would end. My story was that the nature of the Odinsword had moved into folk legend among the gods. Only Odin really knew what the sword was at that point. The other thing that Jack and Stan had done was create an Eternal Flame burning in Asgard. The

gist of my idea was that the Odinsword, in actual fact, was the blade that Surtur would use to destroy the Nine Worlds when the time came.

The general idea for my original story was that Asgard wakes up one morning and the Odinsword is gone. Odin had guarded the sword, had kept it from Surtur all these millennia. It was not just a sword, but in some way part of Surtur's essence. Surtur, in the meantime, lusted for the sword and built up spell after spell in Muspelheim, where he lived, until eventually the sword winks out of existence in Asgard and into Surtur's hand. But the Eternal Flame with which he has to light the sword is not part of Surtur,



Previous Page: Page from the *Star Slammers* graphic novel.

Above: Promotional art from *Thor* #336 heralding Walter's new direction.

Star Slammers™ and ©2006 Walter Simonson. Thor™ and ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Right: Surtur plans come together. Page 29 of *Thor* #345.

Below: Pencils for Surtur's entry in the *Marvel Universe* series.

Next Page: There's a new sheriff in town! Page 25 of *Thor* #339.

Beta Ray Bill, Surtur™ and ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.

so he now has to go to Asgard to light the sword.

Surtur finally reaches Asgard, breaks the rainbow bridge. Much of what's actually in the confrontation with Surtur, Thor, Odin, and Heimdall in the comic is right from the "Annual" I drew as a student. I was delighted to do the book. I thought I would do my Surtur story. I had to make some adjustments because the Odinsword had been destroyed in *Thor* #300. I knew more about writing by then, so I didn't try to write one 13- or 14-episode story. I tried to write shorter chapters that were complete stories, and they would advance the overall plot toward Surtur, which I did with Beta Ray Bill, Malekith the Accursed, and others that I did over that batch of issues.

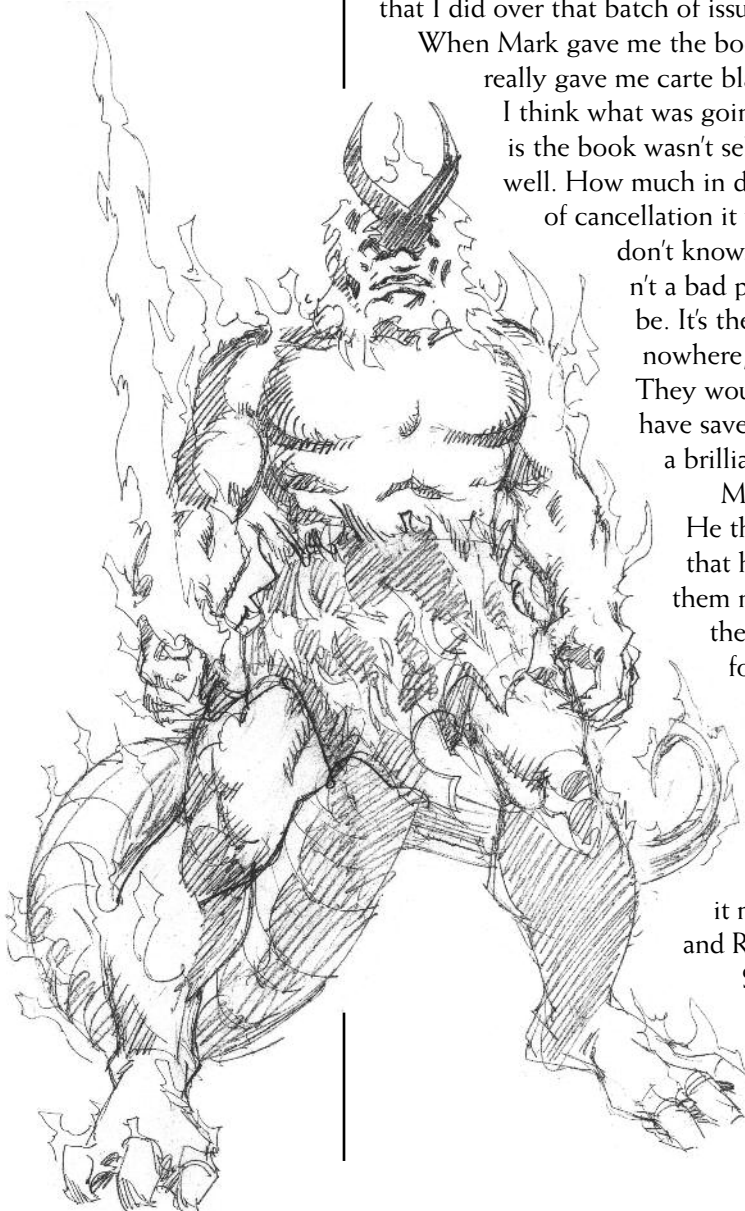
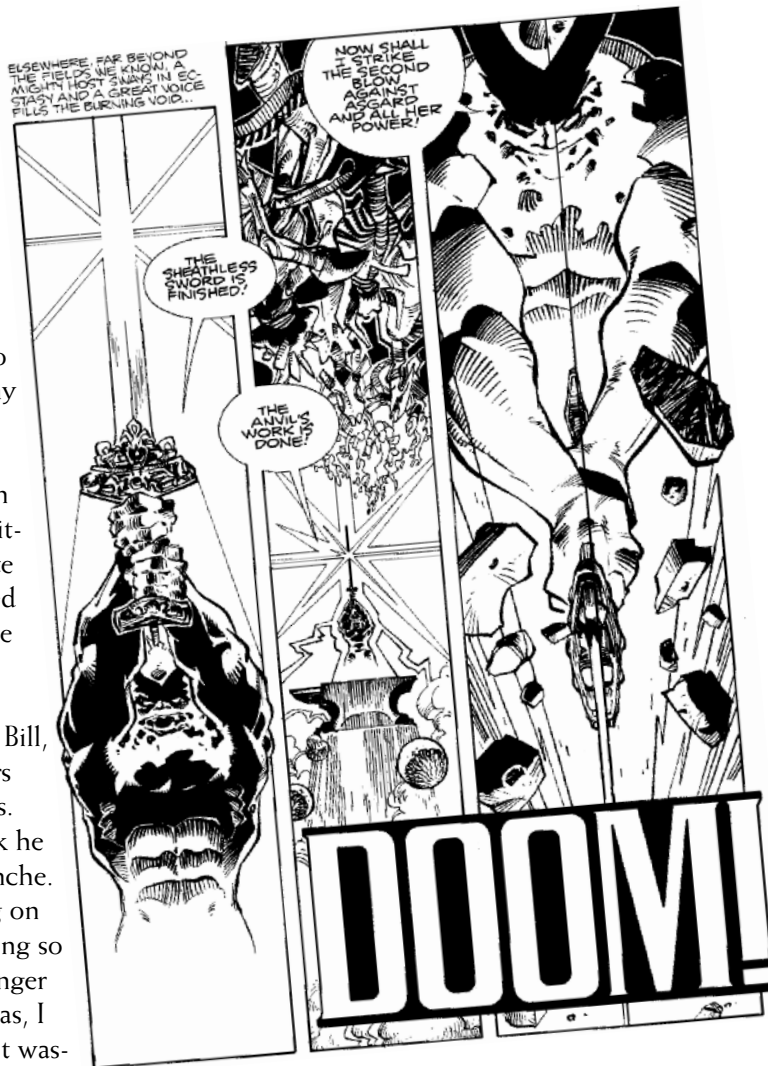
When Mark gave me the book he really gave me carte blanche. I think what was going on is the book wasn't selling so well. How much in danger of cancellation it was, I

don't know. It wasn't a bad place to

be. It's the kind thing where if the book had not sold and gone nowhere, nobody would have said, "Simonson, what a terrible guy." They would have said, "The book was tanking anyway. Nobody could have saved it." As the book did better, they go, "Wow. Simonson. What a brilliant talent!" [laughter] It was a no lose situation in that regard.

Mark emphasized that he didn't care what I did with the book. He thought it should be shaken up. He gave me a piece of paper that had about five or six of his ideas for *Thor*. I remember none of them now except in one of them Thor died and somebody else found the hammer and became the new Thor. I don't think I swiped that for Beta Ray Bill literally, but it's similar in some ways.

The other basic idea was that when I get on books, I try to do some story that's about the book's core concerns. Most comics have thematic material that runs through them. I'm probably most familiar with *Thor*. In *Thor*, for example, almost anybody who stayed on *Thor* for any length of time did a Ragnarok story. It's bound up in Norse mythology. I did it myself twice in the time I was doing the book. I did "Ragnarok and Roll," a title Howard Chaykin provided me with, which was the Surtur story, and I did "The Midgard Serpent," which was part of the Ragnarok story. Those are the great themes and they need to be re-done from time to time. They need to be rethought. In a way, I think super-hero comics tell a few simple truths. There's evil in the world that needs to be fought. Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't. I think



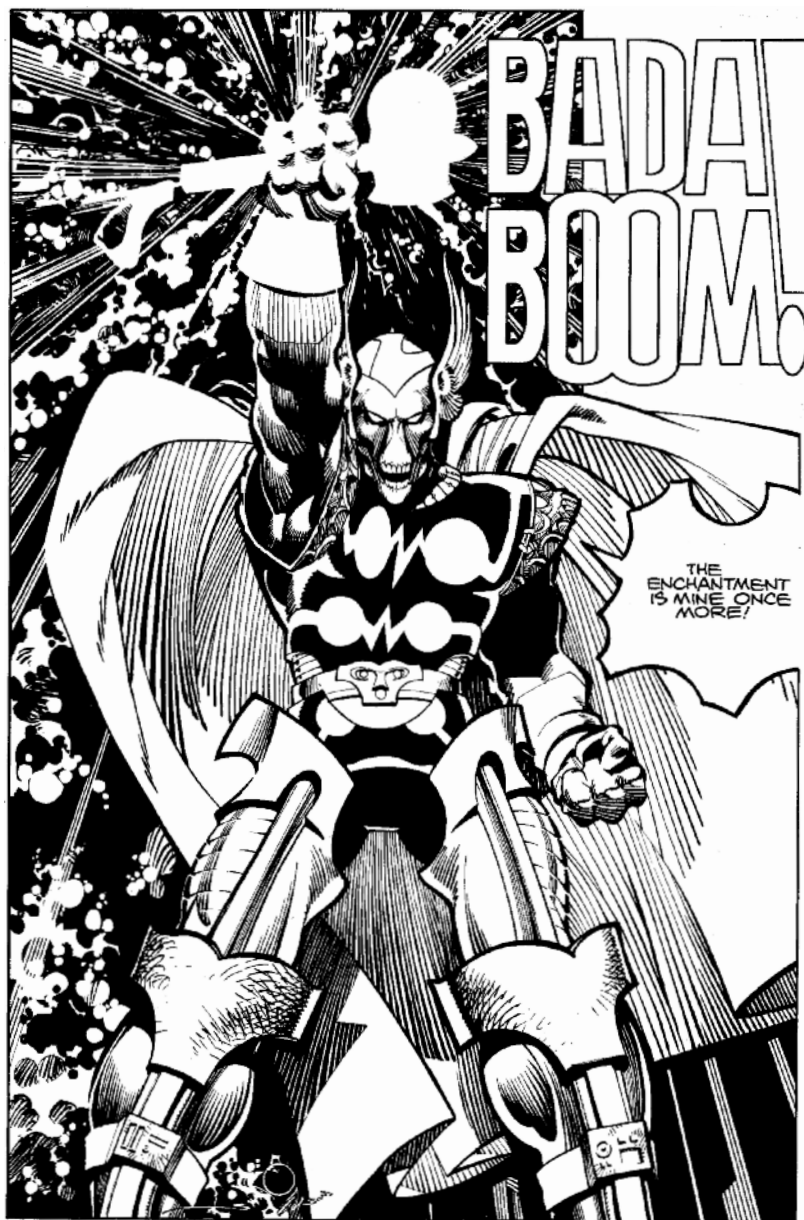
those themes are bound up in the comic through the mythology. I think that's why the story eventually comes back. Each book has its own themes and its own identity.

When I did *Thor*, I thought about what I wanted to do, and I also prefer to do some story that hasn't been done before if that's possible. In *Thor*, I thought it would be fun to do a story in which somebody else picked up the hammer. The very first issue of *Thor* shows an inscription on Thor's hammer suggesting that anybody who was worthy could possess the power of Thor. The idea is the inscription on the hammer suggests that somebody besides Thor and Odin could pick it up. Stan and Jack once had Loki pick it up. He had some extra juice from the Norn Queen. Apparently that just nullified the inscription and he walked around carrying the hammer. At the time I was going "Wait a minute. Does this actually work like that?" I just ignored that. [laughter] My own feeling was that there weren't any characters in the Marvel Universe who could pick it up or they would have by that time. I thought I needed to invent somebody new to pick up the hammer. That's where Beta Ray Bill came from. I know existing characters have picked up the hammer since I wrote my story. I knew that writing my story would be letting the genie out of the bottle. Once you do a story and people like it, somebody will go back and do their own version.

I chose an alien because that seems further away from humanity. He's got a little humanity in him, but that seems more exotic. I made him look like a monster because in short form comics, symbols are very important. You use symbols to get at meaning. One of the ways that manifests itself in simple form is that, mostly, bad guys are ugly and good guys are handsome. Except, of course, if they're bad girls, in which case they're beautiful but don't wear a lot of clothes. [laughter] I drew Bill as a monster, because readers would think he was evil. In fact, that was pretty much what happened. When Beta Ray Bill appeared and picked up the hammer, I got a lot of crabby letters. Fans knew the inscription. They knew that only the worthy could pick up the hammer. I didn't get any letters from people saying, "You're toying with us. This guy must be worthy." Nobody. There may be 85,000 guys out there now who say, "I knew that," but really, nobody got it.

It turns out Beta Ray Bill really was a noble guy who had gone through hell to become what he was. He served a noble purpose and was a being for whom the hammer was going to be incredibly useful in the defense of his people. I designed him as a monster to mislead the reader. What you want to do many times is play fair with the reader but mislead them at the same time, so when you get where you actually want to go, they'll be surprised by it, but it won't seem like a *deus ex machina*.

I've said elsewhere that I used a horse's skull for the basis of Bill's facial design. That's because I wanted to combine the aspects of death that a skull represents with the beauty of the living horse. When Bill's own hammer was forged I used a more Norse motif, a war hammer motif, for the design. When Bill and Thor went out to fight their duel without hammers, Odin slightly stacked the deck in Bill's favor by putting them in a fiery world. Thor's a Norse god. He's from the land of ice and snow. He would have been more comfortable in an icy, snowy realm. Bill comes from a fiery place. What Odin's really doing is hazarding the life of his son to try to find another warrior to stand by him at Ragnarok. I thought that's the kind of guy Odin was. He was very powerful, but he thought long term. He was always planning. He was really trying, even knowing they were doomed in the long run, to set the odds more in his favor when the Twilight came. He's willing to gamble in the face of fate. He's willing to gamble his son's life.



Right: One of the most memorable covers of all time—*Thor* #337.

Below: Pencils for the Beta Ray Bill entry in *Marvel Universe*.

Next Page: Bill gets a hammer of his own in *Thor* #339.

Beta Ray Bill, Thor and all related characters TM and ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.

MM: Where did Beta Ray Bill's name come from?

WALTER: A lot of old science fiction. When aliens and humans meet, everybody can talk because everybody's carrying universal translators which somehow seem to be able to work under any conditions, which I thought was great. I loved that stuff. But I think there are some words that just wouldn't translate. I didn't know what the machine would do. Would it give you gobbledygook?

I wanted a couple different things for a name for Bill. One is I wanted a common name even though Bill is, as a representative of his own people, not a common guy. He went through hell to become chosen as a gladiator for his people, but he was kind of an everyman. In that regard, I wanted an everyman kind of name. My original idea was to call him Beta Ray Jones. I picked Beta Ray because it has a science-fictiony sound to it. I didn't go with Jones,

because at

that time there

were too many Joneses in the Marvel Universe. There was Rick Jones, Marvel was doing *Indiana Jones*, they had Louise Jones as an editor. I don't know if Bruce Jones was writing for them at that time, but there seemed like a lot of Joneses floating around. I thought one more Jones was one Jones too many. [laughter] I thought Bill was a very common name. Also, it had the advantage of having that Marvel alliteration that so many names had. I just liked Beta Ray Bill.

I figure that whatever Beta Ray Bill's real name is, it doesn't come out of the translator in any kind of comprehensible form. It comes out as Beta Ray Bill. Whatever his real name is, that's not it. It's something that human vocal chords can't pronounce.

MM: The cover to *Thor* #337 has become one of your most recognizable pieces.

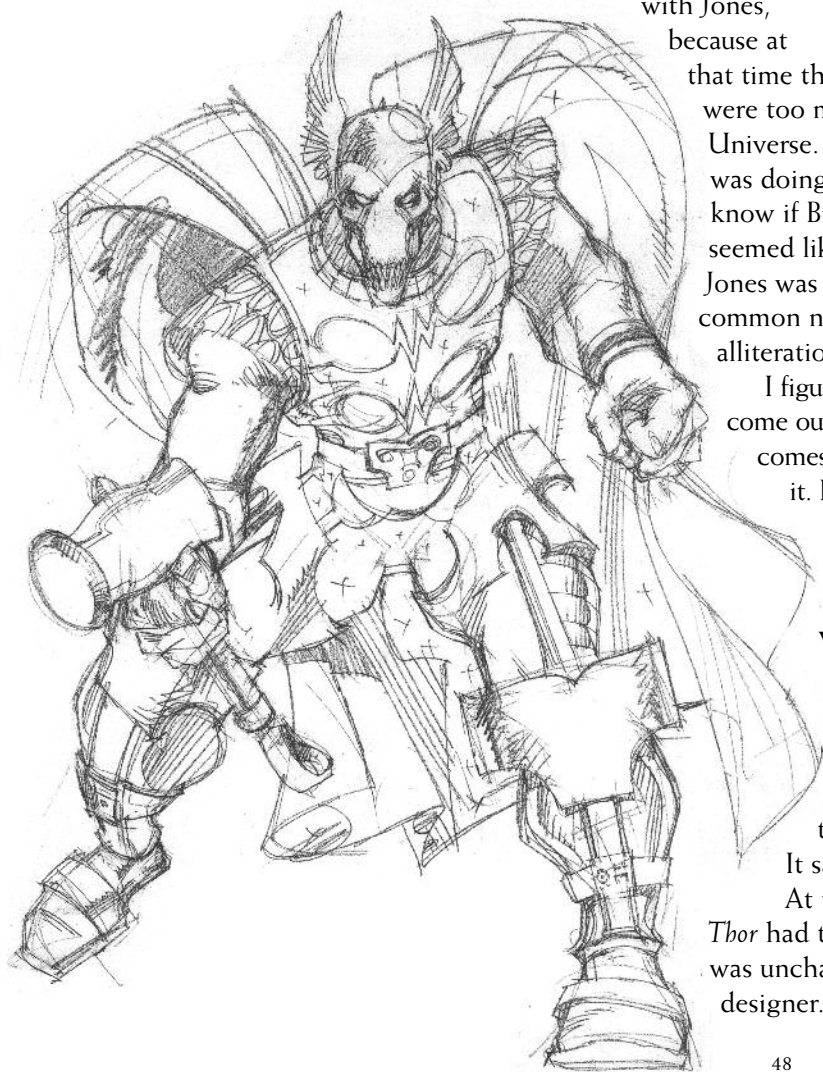
WALTER: [laughs] And it's so simple, too!

MM: What do you think there is about it that caught people's attention?

WALTER: Maybe I hit on all the right symbols at the right moment. I'm not sure. It's a very simple cover.

It says in one gesture exactly what the book was about.

At the time I was doing it, I remember being told that *Thor* had the only logo that Marvel had left from the '60s that was unchanged. I knew a guy named Alex Jay who was a graphic designer. I talked to him about doing a new logo for *Thor*. He



Part 5: "X" Marks the Spot

MM: During your run on *Thor* you also drew one of the most reprinted issues of *X-Men*, issue #17, where Rogue joined. How did that happen?

WALTER: Pretty simply, actually. It was a complete coincidence that was the issue I did. Weezie was editing the *X-Men* back then. Paul Smith had gotten on the book. As I remember it, Paul could do one issue a month. Somewhere in there they decided to do a double issue. The problem with that was that was almost two books. I guess the expectation was that Paul would not be able to do that much work in a single month, so they were instantly a month behind and needed a fill-in. Weezie called me to see if I would draw an issue of the *X-Men*. It was a fill-in in terms of the art. It was not a fill-in in terms of the writing. Chris just wrote what would have been the next issue. I did the pencils and Bob Wiacek inked it. That's exactly what happened. It was just the luck of the draw it happened to be the issue where Rogue quit being a bad girl and became a good girl.

MM: Also during your run on *Thor*, you started your run on *X-Factor*. Did that happen because Weezie was writing it?

WALTER: Yeah, I think so. She was writing it and Jackson Guice had gotten off the book. I don't think there was a regular penciler after Jackson, so the book was open. I don't know if Weezie asked me or if the editor asked me. In any case, I got tipped as the regular penciler from issue #10 on.

One of the reasons I did it was because Weezie was writing it. I'd worked with her as an editor on *Galactica*. I watched her write other stuff and watched her as an editor. I really liked what she did and *X-Factor* allowed me to have a chance to work with her as a writer.

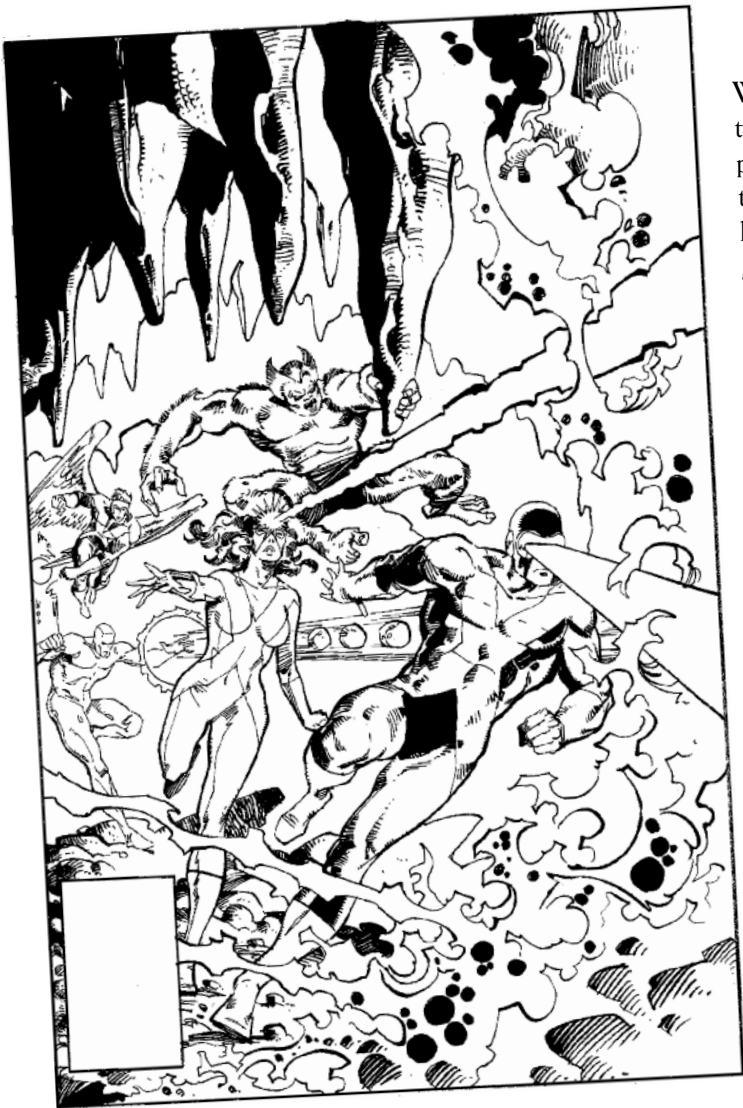
MM: How did you two work together on the book?

WALTER: Very easily. We probably talked over plots, but Weezie was the writer and I was the artist. We worked

together really easily. That would turn out to be true whether we were writing the same comic, as in the case of *Meltdown*, whether I was drawing and she was writing, or whether I was writing and she was editing. Working with her was just a breeze. It was really such a pleasure. I'd love to do it again sometime.

MM: Could you tell me some about creating the Death/Archangel character?





WALTER: When we were doing *X-Factor*, one of the things that we thought about pretty early on after I'd got on as the penciler—and maybe Weezie'd thought about this before—was that the original X-Men who became X-Factor were very much like the guys they'd been back in the early '60s. The Beast was a guy who could leap 15 feet into the air and grab hold of a bar. Angel's a guy who could fly for an hour at 60 miles an hour. Iceman could do ice. Jean Grey was telepathic, and Cyclops had his beams. What they seemed to us at that time was somewhat underpowered for where comics had gone. They really seemed out of sync in some ways with where the bad guys were by the mid- to late '80s. One of the projects we undertook was kind of a reclamation project where we decided to juice up the characters in a way that would make them more powerful on their own terms and therefore more in sync with how we viewed the Marvel Universe at the time.

Some of the characters like Cyclops and Jean Grey, you didn't have to do anything. In the old days, Cyclops could knock over a toothpick, these days he could knock over a building. In other words, since his was a visual power of that sort, you didn't actually have to stick his finger in an electric socket and juice him up any more. You could do whatever you wanted to do and that would work. With telepathy and telekinetic powers, Jean Grey was the same way. But we needed something else for the other characters. Archangel's story was our Angel story where we cut off his wings. We did horrible things to him. He got kidnapped by Apocalypse and came back as this new guy with these techno wings and a new outfit and was much more powerful.

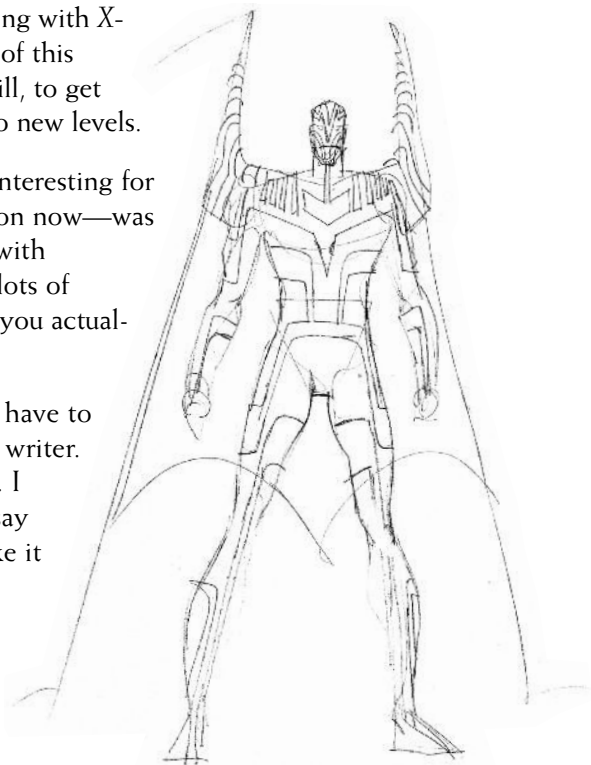
We did that with Iceman. His was in a crossover with *Thor*.

We did the same sort of thing with the Beast where we turned him back into the furry Beast and he could then be more powerful and faster. The Angel/Archangel storyline was neat, but it wasn't isolated in the context of what we were doing with *X-Factor* in general. It was part of this retraining program, if you will, to get these characters upgraded to new levels.

MM: One thing I found interesting for the time—it's more common now—was you had this huge battle with Apocalypse in issue #25, lots of destruction. Then in #26 you actually had the clean-up.

WALTER: [laughs] You'd have to ask my wife. She was the writer. It just seemed reasonable. I don't know what else to say about it, but it seemed like it was a nice follow-up.

Something I will say about those issues is if you go back and look at issues #24, #25 and



Part 6: Let's Do the Time Warp Again

MM: Also in '89 you began working on *Fantastic Four*. You started out only writing that. Had you always intended to draw that as well?

WALTER: Yes. What happened was I had been the writer of *The Avengers*. I wrote eleven issues of *The Avengers*, but I had a problem. The problem was Marvel had reached an editorial position where if characters were in other books, you had to take into account what was happening in the other books. From my days on *Thor*, I kinda like having a long-range story idea. I write shorter stories but I'll be heading for some goal.

What happened with *The Avengers* was I found very quickly that I kept having to alter my stories in the midst of writing them. I'd have an issue out, be writing a new plot, and they'd say, "Oh, by the way, next issue *Thor*'s out in space. You can't use him."

The breaking point came because I put Reed and Sue in *The Avengers*. Steve Englehart had been writing the *FF* for some time. He wrote Reed and Sue out of the *FF*. I thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting to have these guys in the Avengers?" You've got Captain America and Reed, both accustomed to the habit of command. You've got some interesting character interactions. I got permission to do this six months in

advance. I got to issue #300, where I was going to do a new team, and I was told right about then, "Oh, by the way, we're putting Reed and Sue back in the *FF*. You can use them for an issue, and that's it." End of story.

I was pretty annoyed. I'd been working up storylines with permission for months, and watched it be eviscerated. So I thought, "This just isn't working out. Whatever you have to have to write this book, I don't have it. I don't know if I'm not flexible enough or if the conditions have changed, but I simply can't write stories like this." So I got

off *The Avengers* with issue #300 having just put a new team together. I had a whole bunch of stories lined up to do. About five seconds after I quit, I was offered *Fantastic Four*, because Steve had left the title. The editorial

powers that be had decided that the *Fantastic Four* should be Reed, Sue, Johnny and Ben. I think it was Ralph Macchio who offered me the *FF*.

Ironically, I had all these stories lined up for *Avengers*. They were stories that, among other things, involved Reed and Sue. I just pulled the stories over to the *Fantastic Four*. For the first story arc, a lot of which would have been in *The Avengers*, I borrowed *Thor* and *Iron Man*. Because it was a

guest-star situation, unlike *The Avengers*, I got to use some of the original *Avengers*

in this story the way I couldn't have used them in *The Avengers* itself. I did





Above: Iron Man and Thor drop in to say hi. Panel from *Fantastic Four* #337.

Right: Not long before he took over *Fantastic Four*, Walter was able to warm up on Galactus in this cover to *Silver Surfer* #10.

Next Page: The Thing kicks some Jurassic in *FF* #345.

Fantastic Four, Eternity, Galactus, Iron Man, Silver Surfer, Thor TM and ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.

my initial story with Galactus and the Dreaming Celestial. Then I just blew Thor and Iron Man off the time sled. They presumably went right back to Earth, because they were in their own books the next month. Then I was off and running with the *Fantastic Four*.

MM: You talked before about not wanting to bring back Galactus for the 43rd time unless you could do something different with him. You did definitely do something different with him by having him eat the universe.

WALTER: He was doing what he was built to do—eat everything. [laughter] It gave me a shot at that. It also gave me a shot to do something that hadn't been done before, which was use the Ultimate Nullifier. It was a device from the original Galactus story. I think it had been mentioned a couple of times, but I don't think it had ever been used before.

The FF are in an alternate universe where Galactus is devouring the entire universe and it turns out that the Ultimate Nullifier is Galactus' last failsafe against

destroying everything. He sends them back to get it. They get it from his headquarters, bring it back to him, and he uses it and destroys everything in that universe, but not every universe everywhere else. Reed and the crew get out just in time.

When they use the Nullifier, stuff just gets white. I have a big circle expanding with nothing in it until finally a double page spread of nothing except down in the corner is the time sled racing away trying to get out of the boundary of the universe before it all disappears. Two things about that. One is that on the back of one of those pages was an ad for the *Dick Tracy* movie with Warren Beatty which was all black, so it shows through this blank page beautifully. It's like, "Hi! We're racing away from a giant





picture of Dick Tracy." [laughter] The other thing is that Marvel reprinted the story a few years ago in some paperback and they dropped the extra page, which I have to say I was very annoyed about. It's a double-page spread. I know there's nothing there. That's the storytelling decision to make that sequence more powerful. Half a space of nothing is not as effective.

MM: You had a lot of fun playing with time in your run on *Fantastic Four*. Are time travel stories things you're interested in?

WALTER: I always loved time travel stories. I love *The Time Machine*, by H.G. Wells. When I was a kid I read a book called *Twists in Time*, by Murray Leinster. It's six short stories that are probably the first time stories I ever read. The year-and-a-half I was on the *Fantastic Four* I was able to do a lot of time fiddling. The entire run turns out to be one giant time fiddle in order to get back to where they started.

MM: One of my favorite parts in the time travel story was the dinosaur island with the FF and soldiers.

WALTER: It was great. I'm known for being a dinosaur

fan, but in fact I've very rarely drawn dinosaurs in the comics I've done. What that story was, aside from being a treat to draw dinosaurs, is that when I was a kid I belonged to the Weekly Reader Book Club. One of the books I read back then was called *Dangerous Island*. Essentially, three little kids on a raft get washed out to sea by accident. After drifting for a time, they end up on a little island. One morning they wake up and they discover the island is sinking back into the ocean. It was very scary. I loved the book and when I did the *FF* I thought of that book and the sinking island, or in this case the time-displaced island. That's what that was inspired by.

MM: And you got to draw the Thing fighting a T-rex.

WALTER: What could be better, honestly? [laughter]

MM: One of your better known *Fantastic Four* stories was the one drawn by Arthur Adams.

WALTER: That was fun. We did a three-issue arc that was supposed to buy me some time. In actual fact, I did other stuff and didn't end up getting any time out of it. [laughter] I talked to Arthur about doing it. We were old pals. He was game to do it.

Part 7: Gods and Champions

MM: The next series you worked on was *Michael Moorcock's Multiverse*. Did Michael contact you about that or did DC?

WALTER: I think probably Stuart Moore at DC called up out of the blue and asked if I'd be interested in doing it. I knew Michael's work and I'd read his books back in the '60s and '70s. I'm a big Elric fan, and I'd met him at Upstart some years earlier. I jumped at the chance to work with him and do some new material rather than doing an adaptation of existing work.

MM: Did you work Marvel style on this?

WALTER: That was full script. The way we ended up working, I pretty much had complete freedom to break the stuff down as I saw fit. I had the script so I could make sure that all the words were there and everything read properly.

MM: You did some rather interesting page designs in that book. For example, you had Rose walking down a road and the road became a panel border.

WALTER: Michael's stuff is pretty high concept and I thought it seemed appropriate. I worked pretty hard to make the page layouts unusual, but I thought they fit the story he was giving me. He was doing three stories at once with three different artists and the "Moonbeams and Roses" story I was doing was in some ways the spiciest. I was trying to reflect that to a certain degree in the way the book was laid out.

MM: The art itself was very complex. Did it take you longer to do than other projects?

WALTER: It took as long as a regular issue and I was only doing eight to twelve pages a month. I could never have done the whole comic in a month with all that stuff in it. I was just barely able to keep afloat with the shorter chunks. The last issue I did all but one page because the stories all collapsed into one thread by the end of it. I did the entire thread where it all came together.

MM: I just have to ask: How did it feel to help save the multiverse?

WALTER: It felt great. Y'know I got a headache when that was done. Playing a game with the gods. It was tough. [*laughter*] It was really fun. That was a riot when Michael put me in the comic.



Right: Cover art for *Jack Kirby's Fourth World* #3.

Below: Walter tells the story of Kanto's origin.

Next Page: Justeen's first appearance—from *Orion* #1, and Darkseid and Orion have at it in a two-page spread from *Orion* #5.

New Gods and all related characters™ and ©2006 DC Comics.

MM: You did nearly all the covers for *Jack Kirby's Fourth World*.

WALTER: Yeah. John Byrne asked me to do the covers for the book. And I said sure. New Gods stuff? I love it.

MM: When you're only the cover artist, what kind of direction do you get about what to do with the covers?

WALTER: It varies as the times, places, and circumstances dictate. I think on that stuff John was far enough ahead we mostly knew what the stories were going to be. I tried to find a good hook in the story, I probably talked to Paul Kupperberg, who was the editor, and I probably talked to John. John may have had some ideas. I don't remember now. I would do up a sketch from whatever the ideas were, show it to Paul and be off and running.

MM: In *Jack Kirby's Fourth World* you did a "Tales of the New Gods" back-up. Was that something John asked you to do?



WALTER: He did a few back-ups himself and we were talking on a regular basis because I was doing the covers. I don't know now if he asked me to do a Kanto story or if I brought Kanto to him. I like the character Kanto. I thought it would be fun to do a semi-origin story about why this New God was walking around in Renaissance clothes and with Renaissance manners. That gave me a chance to do it.

MM: That led into you doing *Orion*. You went for the big stuff right away with the Anti-Life Equation and the battle with Darkseid. Did you just want to get that out of the way so you could move onto something else?

WALTER: That's exactly right. I picked up from the end of John's run and took care of some story threads. John had some stuff he suggested. I wanted to get the Darkseid/Orion fight out, because once that's done, then you're not sure what going to happen next. That's the condition every comic book reader should be in. You should not know

what's going to happen next.

MM: You added a new character to the New Gods pantheon—Justeen. What can you say about her creation?

WALTER: I borrowed the title of one of the real de Sade's books. I've never read the books, but I used to work in a bookstore in the late '60s when Grove Press was issuing all that stuff. So I knew the titles.

Desaad was a character who had been around a long time and I thought Justeen was a little like doing Lorelei in *Thor*. She served some of the same purposes as Desaad, but you give her a different spin. She obviously has a crush on Darkseid. She's ruthless in pursuing what she wants, which is to be Darkseid's right-hand girl. You could have her do stuff that Desaad would be doing, but when she's doing it, it's new and it's a little different.

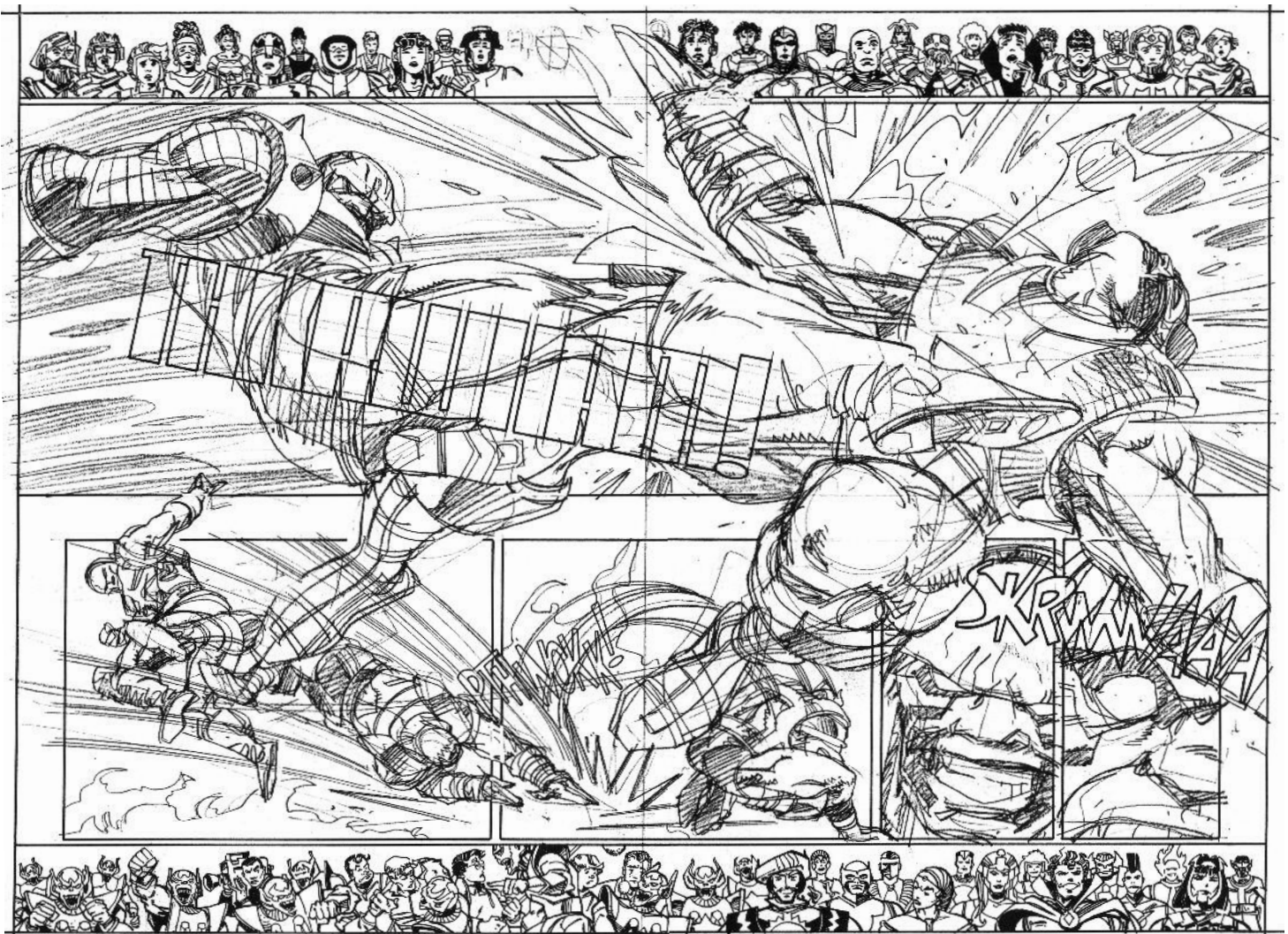
The same's true with Lorelei. I introduced Lorelei into *Thor* because the Enchantress had been around for so long and gone through the



same motions a million times. I thought having her younger, cuter sister as part of the *Thor* mix would give me a bit different quality to the stories when she was involved with them rather than just using the Enchantress. Eventually, when I cleaned Desaad's clock, then I had Justeen to step in. [laughter]

MM: Your page layout was a bit more ornate in *Orion*. Was that a result of doing *Multiverse*?

WALTER: Some yes, some no. I had some long-range plans for *Orion* that never came to fruition. We had two years and I'm delighted, but I had about a five-year plan. Part of that involved bringing back the Old Gods. We were going to find out who the Old Gods were, what they were about. So, especially in the early issues of *Orion*, I have all these heads in the corners watching. Those were the Old Gods watching before they would send one of their representatives back to discuss things with Orion. That's what that was about. It was ornate but it had some story value that was never used in the comic.



Unused pencils for a cover to a reprint collection of the "Manhunter" strip.

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