WORKING METHODS

Comic Creators Detail Their Storytelling and Artistic Processes

BY JOHN LOWE

CONTENTS

PADDY

Script by

SCOTT HAMPTON

Artists

SCOTT HAMPTON

TIM LEVINS

Script: *Paddy*

Note: This segment is seen as a flashback with captions for dialogue until we cut to present-day.

Panel 1: Black panel with a small point of light. This is a tunnel opening.

Voice: *What happened then, Paddy? Once you were in the car.*
Paddy: *He said she'd have to be dispatched. That was the word he used, "dispatched"—*

Panel 2: We now see the tunnel opening clearly. Vague hint of the city.

Paddy: *Like a telegram full of bad news.*

Panel 3: POV int. car. We exit the tunnel and see that we are on a curving two-way street along the edge of Central Park in New York City.

Paddy: *He gives me the low-down, how she's the prosecution's star witness, blah, blah. You know the drill.*
2: *Hands me a photo.*

Panel 4: Our first good look at the car and its occupants: A goon is driving. Another goon is riding shotgun and keeping an eye out. Yet another goon (Paddy) is looking at a snapshot. The fourth guy is the Big Boss: classier, older than the others. The time period is the 1930s or '40s. Classic gangster period.

Paddy: *And I know her.*

Panel 5: The snapshot held in Paddy's hand.

Voice: *Well?*
Paddy: *Not really. To say hello to. She lived on the street.*

Panel 6: The car pulls to the curb outside a subway entrance.
Paddy: *She was a neighbor.*

PAGE 2

Paddy makes his way down into the subway and waits for the woman to show up. It's rush hour; lots of people are getting off work. He sees the woman coming onto the platform from a stairway.

The woman waits among the crowd at the edge of the platform for the train. Paddy moves into position behind her.

Voice: *So, what did you do?*

The train is entering the station. He pushes her.

Paddy: *My job.*

PAGE 3

Panel 1: Many years later. Paddy is much older but recognizable, leaning against a large oak desk in a nicely appointed office. Young (mid-twenties) goons are clustered around him. Another older guy stands by the door.

Older guy: *All right boys, let's break it up. It's still a workin' day.*

Panel 2: Paddy stands and takes a drag on a cigarette. The others start to leave the room. Older guy singles one out.

Older guy: *You've got the Keller delivery, right?*
Goon: *Right, no sweat.*

Panel 3: Older guy speaks to Paddy from the door as the others finish exiting. Paddy is behind the desk, looking out the window.

Older guy: *Okay if I take off? I promised Marsha I'd give her a ride to LaGuardia.*
Paddy: *Sure.*
Older guy: *I'll be back in a couple of hours.*

Panel 4: Ext. Guys are leaving big, nice house and getting into cars. Some are laughing or smiling. Paddy watches from an upper-story window.

Panel 5: Back in the office. Paddy is alone as he takes another drag on a cigarette while pulling a snapshot from a drawer.

Panel 6: Paddy sits behind the desk and contemplates the snapshot.

Scott Hampton

Known for his artistic diversity, Scott Hampton has illustrated such iconic properties as *Batman*, *Sandman*, *Black Widow*, *Hellraiser*, and *Star Trek*. He has also worked on creator-owned projects such as *The Upturned Stone*.

Scott began his career by following in the footsteps of his brother, fellow comic book creator Bo Hampton. Both Scott and Bo studied under the great Will Eisner in 1976. Scott's first professional comics work was the six-page story *Godfather Death*, released by Epic Illustrated in 1982. His work on *Silverheels* from Pacific Comics in 1983 is regarded as the first continuing painted comic. Recent works include *Spookhouse*, released in 2004 by IDW Publishing, featuring sequential adaptations of his favorite ghost stories; and *Batman: Gotham County Line*, from DC Comics in 2005.

Scott Hampton is also pursuing a passion outside of comics: filmmaking. He completed his first short independent film, *The Tontine*, in April, 2006. He lives with his wife Letitia in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

THE SCRIPT

John Lowe: When you wrote the script for Paddy, did you write it for other artists or for yourself?

Scott Hampton: *Both for myself and as an exercise for other artists.*

JL: It's a full script. Do you always work that way?

SH: *That's the way I usually do them.*

JL: I know some artist/writers will use pictures as well as words in their scripts, but you prefer to write all the words first.

SH: *Absolutely. I really don't confer with the visual part of my brain when I do it, because I'm mostly thinking about telling a good story. The challenge later on is to make the story work visually.*

JL: Do you approach everything you write like this?

SH: *As long as I'm writing for myself, I do. If I'm writing for someone else, I have to think about the visuals at the same time. That's what I did with my* Legends of the Dark Knight *job. I was supposed to write that for Kent Williams but he took on another project, so I ended up doing the art on it myself.*

JL: We should mention that you originally slated *Paddy* as a four-page script, with two pages in between as a way to help build the suspense. For our purposes in this book, we decided to condense the script to three pages.

Also, you initially planned to do it all in a six-panel grid, but then you changed it to accommodate the plot. Those bits that were condensed into page two are especially interesting because they contain no dialogue, which leaves a lot of room for interpretation by different artists. It's really up to each artist to decide how to show pacing and story there.

SH: *Exactly. I thought that would be really effective as an exercise. It seems very specific and you might think everyone would approach it in exactly the same way. Not so.*

When I wrote this script, I was very conscious of trying to make something that would allow certain decision-making opportunities on the part of the artist. I wanted it to have a great deal of flexibility in that way. For example, an artist could turn the woman into a little fourteen year-old girl. The back-story could be interpreted differently. I hope other artists will take it in different directions than I did. Something that seems quite specific can actually have a lot of room for play.

ROUGHS

JL: What are the first steps you take when approaching this or any story?

SH: *I take the script and block off what I think are natural tiers. I break it down in that way, from page to page. Then I start doing the roughs. I'll do up a rough that's a quarter of a piece of 8.5″ x 11″ typing paper, so I get four on a page.*

JL: Do you have a little template that you make for yourself to do those?

SH: *Yes. From that point, I'll just get the roughs where I like them. Sometimes I'll do multiple roughs, depending on the complexity. Then I transfer the best one over—usually with the Artograph, because it will enlarge. And boom: I start working.*

JL: When you're working out your storytelling, do you stick to basic shapes?

SH: *Not really. I draw most of the stuff. It'll be fairly rough— it won't be super-tight—but it'll be there. In between the four or five lines will be the real line. But no, they're not just shapes, unless of course there's some sort of dense background like a bunch of trees.*

JL: Right, a generic background. But if you showed the roughs to an editor or someone else, they'd definitely be able to read them?

SH: *Oh, yeah.*

JL: And they're done very small with pencil, right?

SH: *Right.*

Working small allows Scott to develop storytelling and compositional choices quickly.
It also prevents him from wasting too much time and effort on a drawing that may ultimately be eliminated.

JL: How do you go about placing the word balloons? Do you leave space for dialogue placement in the thumbnails?

SH: *I don't leave space; I put the captions and balloons right into my thumbnails and I try not to let anything important get up in that area.*

RESEARCH AND REFERENCES

JL: With a story like this, do you do a great deal of research prior to drawing your thumbnails, or do you research after your thumbnails in order to get the finishing touches on your drawing?

SH: *It varies a little bit. Every once in a while, I lay it all out and then search out my reference. But I usually look at the script and get an idea in my head of roughly what I'm looking for. Then I go through books I have, find my reference, and cull it. I may find just what I'm looking for, or something that's approximate. I often make a note to myself that says, "Put in a castle from this book, page 62, here." I won't even draw that on the rough.*

**JL:** You'll just note the reference so you can draw it later.

SH: *Right.*

JL: Is that how you approached this story? There's a very specific time period here, so the cars and the background were all researched and referenced. Am I correct?

SH: *You bet.*

JL: What referencing tools do you use? Probably use the Internet, right?

SH: *No, I never use the Internet and I'll tell you why. As far as I'm concerned, 72 dpi jpegs aren't clear enough. If I'm going to use reference, it's usually not for a person. I'll either shoot my own photo reference on a person or I'll just make it up. But environments such as architecture and cars often need to be fairly exact. I want to be clear, so I go to print.*

One of Scott's favorite reference sources for 1930's environmental photography is the Dover Publications book *New York in the Thirties* by Berenice Abbott. Panel one on page two of Scott's story is a perfect example of using reference photos to create a believable, detail-rich environment.

Scott often sketches right on top of his reference images to approximate the settings and poses he plans to draw.

JL: Let's talk about this story specifically. You worked with exteriors from the 1940s. Did you use the library? Is that your reference tool of choice?

SH: *That's often where I go. I also have a number of books of my own. I took out my Dover books with photographs by Berenice Abbott, who did all these photographs in the thirties and forties. I use her photos as the basis for my backgrounds and cars all the time.*

JL: Is Abbott's work in one Dover book or a series?

SH: *It's a series of books, but then she's also been collected in one big book, with larger photographs.*

JL: But where there's an interior, like the one on page three, you've said you often set up your own reference. Is

that correct?

SH: *Exactly.*

JL: Did you actually set up the interior for that panel in your own house?

SH: *That's right. I use my own house if it will work. I have a staircase that allowed me to get some angles from above fairly easily. I used my dining room table as the desk for the main character. I just made it a little smaller in my drawing. And I had my wife, Letitia, shoot me standing around in overcoats in a number of different postures so I could be the henchmen.*

JL: You were all the henchmen?

SH: *All the henchmen and the main character. I think once or*

twice I might have asked Letitia to fill in as a person.

JL: I remember that when you began your comic career, you would never use reference. You thought it was cheating in some ways.

SH: *Essentially, yeah.*

JL: But now you realize that, for someone who can draw, reference is almost essential to getting natural poses, rather than the generic, repeatable poses that the brain calls up from memory.

SH: *That's exactly right. First, I think it's important to be able to draw most anything from your head. You don't want to use reference as a crutch, but as something that gives you greater verisimilitude and variety. You're right; we do fall into patterns when we draw from our heads.*

As much as I love the work of artists like Mike Mignola, Kevin Nowlan and Mark Schultz, sometimes I see that the choices they're making are the same ones they normally make. And I find that in myself. I decided I had to give myself permission to use the reference, both as a refining tool and as a time-saver, because I have to work fast!

I thought to myself, "Okay, I'll use these reference tools to make my process more fun." And oddly enough, it gives me something to do besides just sit down to a blank piece of paper and draw, which is sometimes painful. So reference speeds me up.

Reference can add that extra element of realism that we sometimes want. But the key is never to be a slave to the reference. Say my background is a castle. I might change the lighting on it or I might not, but I'm not going to break my back to make it different if it's more or less what I need.

CHARACTER DESIGN

JL: Did you design the characters prior to going to the page, or did you just have a good idea in your head of what they were going to look like?

SH: *I had an idea.*

Scott uses an Artograph to transfer his small pencil sketch onto two-ply Bristol board (Strathmore 500 series).

Next, he refines the pencils 60–75 percent, saving the rest of the detail for the inking stage.

Using a Hunt 102 crow quill, he inks the figures and backgrounds in FW Acrylic ink. Sometimes he clips the ends of cheap brushes to square them off.

The exact use for this 5¢ sign is uncertain. One thing for sure though, a nickel went a long way when this was in use! Measures 10" x 7 1/2", and dates to around 1930. Marked "70-G" at the bottom. *Courtesy of Bob Knudsen Jr.*

Blue Coal. Dates to around the 1940s, and measures 10" x 10". *Courtesy of Rod Krupka.*

Kirk's Flake Soap sign. Measures 40" x 15". Dates to the 1915 era. *Courtesy of Dan Reynolds.*

Scott uses the public library and his personal book collection to seek out reference materials for environmental details like cars, buildings and signs.

JL: Right. This is just a three-page story. If it were larger—say, a graphic novel—would you design out characters in advance?

SH: *Sadly, no. [John laughs.] That's why they generally start to look better after a couple of pages. [Laughter.] I basically have to do it that way. I'm running at full speed from the very beginning.*

JL: So it's very organic. You don't do turnarounds or any of that stuff?

SH: *No. I just don't have the time, and often I don't have the patience. I have a sense of what I want, so I'll go in and start doing it.*

GOING TO THE BOARD

JL: After you have your rough pencils, I assume you take them to the Artograph and project them onto board. What type of surface do you prefer to work on?

SH: *Rough. It tends to be two-ply Bristol board because that's what we get from the company. But if I want to get some better effects with the paint, I'll sometimes pull out my own four- or five-ply paper.*

JL: Do you still use Strathmore Bristol?

SH: *You bet. I use the Strathmore 500 series, not 400. The 400 is bad stuff.*

JL: When you're projecting those drawings down and sketching them in, do you still work loosely with pencil on your board?

SH: *When I'm putting down the work from the Artograph, I'm just laying it out. I refine it once I turn off the machine.*

JL: So you sort out your placement first. Then you finish up your drawing.

SH: *Right.*

JL: With this project, was the choice of medium solely budgetary, or was it dependent on the story?

The final panel is completed on a piece of two-ply Bristol board. Scott will scan this drawing and use Adobe Photoshop to place it in his page layout.

SH: *I tend to get hired for painted jobs, so I have to paint. But if I can choose, I base it on the story. I'm doing a bunch of stories for this solo book right now. I'm making them up as I go, and after I've written each one, I ask myself, "All right, how do I approach this? Would it be better if it were monochrome, full-color, or a mix of both?" If it's my choice, I choose based on what represents the story best.*

JL: So, when a company hires you to freelance, it's generally because you're known for painting.

SH: *Right. But for this* Batman *story with Steve Niles that*

Joey Cavalieri hooked me up with, they specifically asked me if I could do it in black and white. Why? Because of these Paddy *pages!*

JL: Will you work the *Batman* story in a similar fashion? You used a lot of ink wash with *Paddy*. You warmed and cooled some things. Will do that for the *Batman* story?

SH: *I don't think so. What I will do, though, is a good bit of dry brush. I've seen Robert Fawcett's work. Dry brush works.*
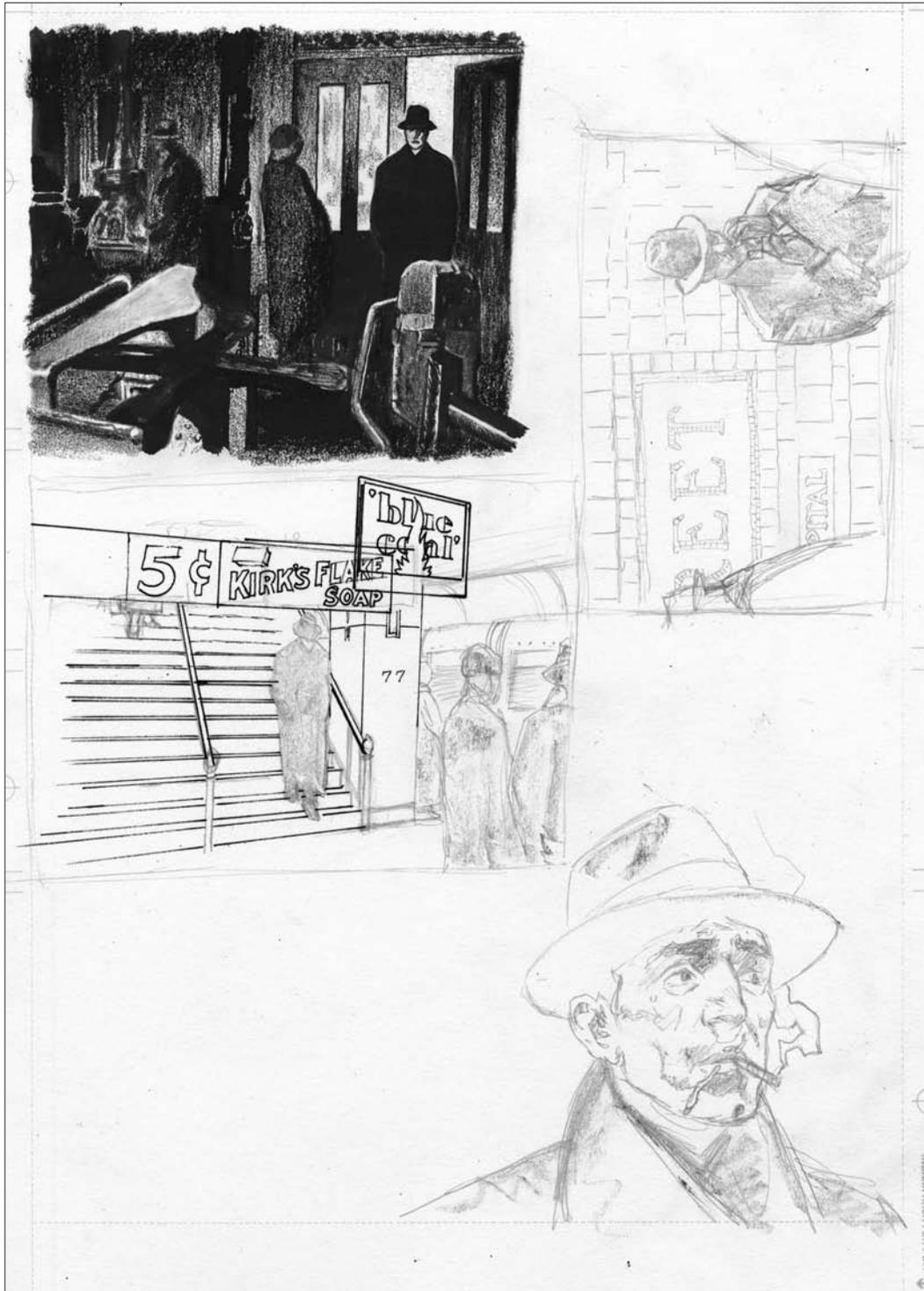
Many of the steps in Scott's process can be seen on this piece of board.
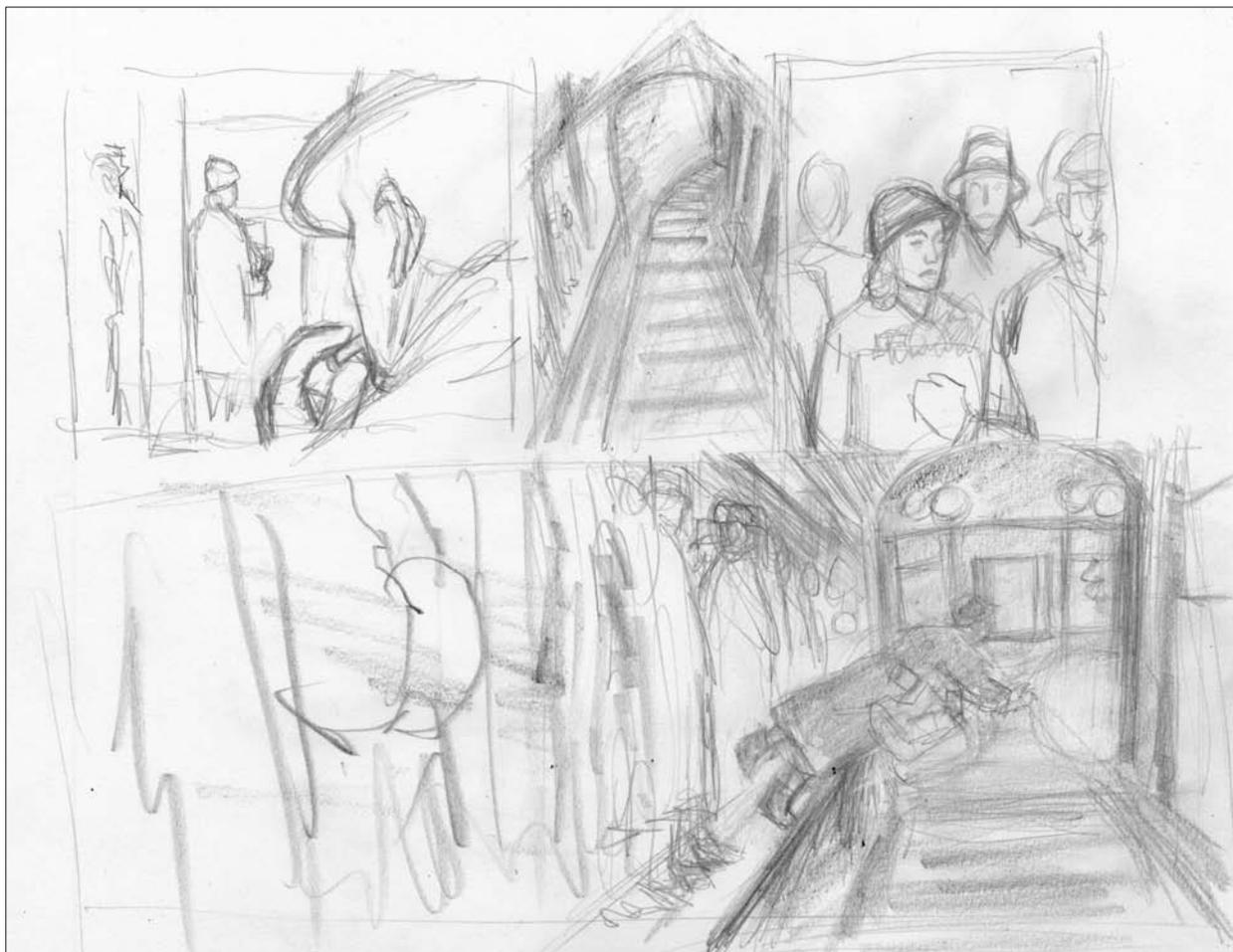
To increase the tension and urgency of a moment, Scott cuts between points of view.
Although he doesn't show all the action, Scott uses isolated images to imply that Paddy pushes the woman in front of a passing train.

INKING

JL: How much will you refine the drawings in pencil before you go to ink?

SH: *I'd say maybe 70 percent. I absolutely have to have some things tight—like eyeballs. Crossed and improperly placed eyes will screw up a face. The eyes are the focus of almost any panel, so I have to be exact. But with everything else, there's room to just kind of make it up as I go or play with it.*

JL: What specific tools do you use to ink with?

SH: *Often, I do my linework with a Hunt 102 crow quill. But if I'm going for something that's more in the Fawcett vein, like a few panels in* Paddy, *then I'll do almost all of it with brush.*

When it comes to brushes, I use a really nice brush like a Series Seven No. 2 or No.3 Winsor Newton. But I'm also finding it effective to clip the ends off of a little cheap brush like a Yasutomo Silverado. I clip them ever so slightly, just to make them a little bit more squared-off. They're great. They're acrylic brushes; black with white tips. Fawcett once said that when other painters are about to throw their brushes away, that's when he can really get the most out of those brushes. I

Scott Hampton's *Paddy*

The final pages rest on Jim's drawing table in his studio. The plastic tray attached to the left side of the table allows Jim to keep all of his drawing and inking tools within arm's reach.

LETTERING

JL: You have an interesting lettering style. After you put your word balloons in, you rough in the placement in the pencil stage. Then, I guess, you do the lettering. Do you do your lettering before you ink the figures?

JM: *My lettering style is so half-assed. Most people are shocked when they hear how I do it. Sean Konot laughs at me, but he loves my lettering work. When I'm in penciling mode, I rough in the balloon based on how much space I think I'll need. Then I do the lettering in the pen-drawing stage. I don't pencil out the words. I just write straight in pen.*

JL: Are you serious?

JM: *I don't rule it out; I just use my eye.*

JL: You do the letters before you put the balloons around them, right?

JM: *Yes. I do lettering, and then I edit the balloon to make it fit around that letter.*

JL: Your lettering is very unique, yet it's still very legible. Has your penmanship always been good?

JM: *No, that's something I had to work at. Back in art school, when I was lettering my own comics, Evan Dorkin was like, "Your lettering sucks. You need to work on that. It's inconsistent." It's a process that evolved over the years. And with this latest* Grrl Scouts *series for Image, I really worked hard to make the lettering part of the art. The lettering and the balloons are as important as the drawing in the panel. I want them to be integral to the design of the page. That's something I*

Pat draws several potential character designs on the backs of old e-mails before settling on his final characters.

THUMBNAILS

JL: You did your thumbnails before you did the character designs, right?

PQ: *Right. If I don't have a character design in mind by the layout phase, I can just drop stick figures into the compositions and see where things are going. Since these designs came about while I was working on the thumbnails, I did make some spe-* *cific accommodations—the same way you would if you were trying to work Batman's cape into a shot, or make space for a big figure like the Hulk.*

JL: So you're just working out the story with very generic shapes. And then you go back and adjust accordingly once you have your characters.

PQ: *Yeah. This stage is like setting up the cinematography and choreography. Once I have all my visual notes and panel doo-*

After enlarging the thumbnails, Pat transfers the page layout to an 11" x 17" piece of two-ply Bristol board using a blue pencil and a lightbox.

He draws the panel in detail with a blue pencil, then indicates shadow placement.

Pat uses a 0.3 mechanical pencil with a 2H lead to complete his drawings on the Bristol board. A 2H is less likely to smudge than a softer lead.

GOING TO THE BOARD

JL: Once the thumbnails are done, you enlarge them on the photocopier, right?

PQ: *To save a little cash, I used to scan the pages and blow them up to 8.5" x 11" using the scanner and printer, then take the enlarged versions of the thumbnails over to the copy place and blow them up to 11" x 17".*

Now I have a 13" x 19" printer at home and I do this all in-house. This method helps a lot when doing a "tight" or "enhanced" pencil gig, where the publisher doesn't hire an inker. They just scan the pencils, which means the pencils have to be very tight. Stray marks from under-drawings might not be acceptable.

JL: Okay. But if an artist wanted to, he or she could just take these to the copy place and blow them up twice. That's what you used to do before you scanned everything in, right?

PQ: *Yeah, I guess I did that with the* Green Lantern *stuff.*

JL: Do you remember the percentage you used to enlarge it?

PQ: *No, that's the biggest pain. Now I have templates in Photoshop. When I use a photocopier to enlarge the drawing to 11" x 17", I may blow it up at three different sizes, which also allows me to play with panel size a little bit. That's also the point where I double-check the dialogue. I'll verify, "Okay, I can make this panel bigger, because the panels below don't have as much dialogue. I don't have to worry about crowding the space." If I work digitally in Photoshop I can make all the changes there. Photoshop is also great for duplicating panels and flipping compositions.*

JL: When you draw the thumbnails, you leave room for the dialogue and work out the compositions. Then, when you blow up the copies, you refine them even more, right?

PQ: *Right. Especially when I get to the finished version, because then I re-read the dialogue to consider gesture and facial expression. But I have to admit my biggest weakness—hold the*

TIME TROUBLING

Script by

MARK KNEECE

Artists

MARK SCHULTZ

CHRIS BRUNNER

KELSEY SHANNON

Script: *Time Troubling*

PAGE 1

Panel 1: A large spaceship is getting pummeled in the vicinity of earth. You choose the source of the catastrophe: meteor shower, photon torpedoes fired from an enemy ship, etc. Half the ship is getting blown to hell and back.

From inside the ship: *Aaghhh!*

Panel 2: Cut to what's left of the interior of the blasted ship. Wreckage is everywhere. A man and a woman stand over a stunned and injured alien (or robot—you choose). The woman is reaching out to help the creature. The man is pulling something from his belt.

Woman: *Are you all right?*

Panel 3: Close-up of the man now examining a high-tech looking gadget. We need to establish a small teleportation device in this panel.

Man: *We can warp to another dimensional time zone if I can program this before—*
Woman: *No time!*

Panel 4: The three of them run toward an escape pod. Both are helping the small alien (robot) along.

Woman: *Get to the escape pod now!*

Panel 5: Cut to an egg-shaped pod beginning a fiery descent into the atmosphere as the ship explodes in the background.

Panel 6: Over the shoulder shot of an unidentifiable creature (Neanderthal) watching the pod landing hard in a savanna-like grassy area.

PAGE 2

Panel 1: The trio now stands outside in a rough semi-circle. The pod door is open behind them with smoke coming out—the pod is done-for. The alien/robot looks better, though charred and obviously still injured. The man is still fooling with the time warp device. The grass to one side of them is waist high.

Alien/robot: *Aghhh… my head…*
Woman: *Hey—for the edge of the galaxy—this isn't so bad.*
Man: *Alright! I think I got it set up, but I can't be s…*

Panel 2: The alien/robot is hit with a spear (or rock)

SFX: *Fwatch! (or another appropriate sound)*

Panel 3: The couple turns in shock to witness the alien/robot collapse. Other spears and rocks are hitting the ground around them.

Alien/Robot: … *huuuungh*…
SFX: *thunk! thunk! tang!*

Panel 4: A crowd of Neanderthals has risen from the tall grass and is advancing towards them. Several are carrying spears, handmade knives, or rocks.

Off panel: *Oh God!*

Panel 5: The group of space travelers huddle together. They are overpowered and surrounded by cavemen. The biggest and hairiest Neanderthal is sniffing at the woman who, still holding the alien/robot, cringes in disgust. The man has the teleportation device in his hand.

Panel 6: The man covertly presses the button on the time warp device.

Man (thought balloon): *Please work*…

Panel 7: Sound effect panel

SFX: *Tzzzip.*

PAGE 3

Panel 1: The group of space travelers in the same position, but looking around in amazement.

SFX: *Hoooooonk!*

Panel 2: Pull back to reveal that they are standing in the middle of a busy street within the massive city of Chicago (you choose the decade: 1920's–1960's) towering around them. A cab is bearing down on them. Trucks, traffic, etc. hem them in.

Driver: *Move it, you stupid jerks!*
SFX: *Hoooooonk! Hoooonk!*

Panel 3: A cab is about to clobber them. The passengers look horrified. The spaceman has the teleportation device in his hand.

Cab Driver: *Get out of the road!*
Man 1 (thought): *One warp left!*

Panel 4: Sound effect panel

SFX: *Skreeeech!*
SFX: *Ceerasssh!*

Panel 5: The cab driver, his cab smashed into a telephone pole behind him (maybe a chain-reaction pileup behind him, if possible), has his hands gesticulating wildly, trying to explain to an obviously skeptical policeman writing out a citation.

Cab Driver: *Ghosts! It was ghosts!*
Policeman: *Uh huh*…

Panel 6: You, the artist, choose an environment in which the space travelers are placed.

One of them says: Hmm… well, it could be worse…

Mark Schultz
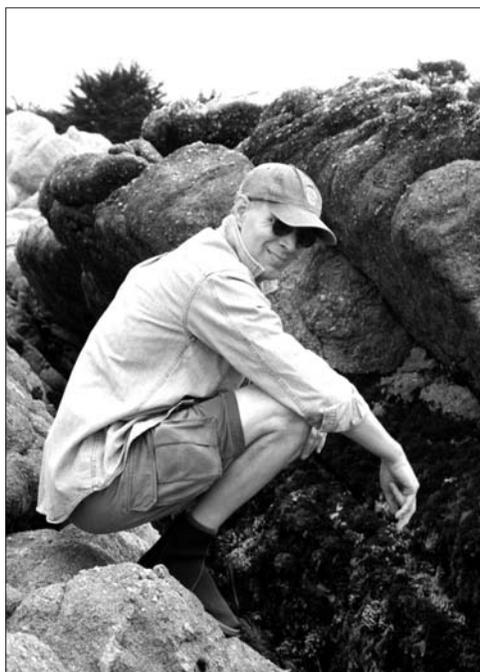
Mark Schultz has been cartooning and illustrating for over twenty years. He is best known as the creator of the award-winning speculative adventure comic book, *Xenozoic Tales.*

Mark is also widely recognized for co-creating and co-writing *Sub-Human*, an underwater adventure series for Dark Horse Comics, and for scripting a five-year span of DC Comics' *Superman*, *Man of Steel*. He has scripted and/or drawn many other popular fictional icons, including *Flash Gordon*, *Tarzan*, *The Spirit*, *Star Wars*, *Aliens* and *Predator*.

As an illustrator, Mark depicted the adventures of *Robert E. Howard's Conan of Cimmeria* for the highly regarded Wandering Star/Del Rey editions of Howard's works. He also illustrated the autobiography of the famed painter of prehistoric life, Charles R. Knight.

Schultz has been awarded five Harvey Awards, two Eisners, an Inkpot, a Spectrum, and three Haxturs (the last from the Salon Internacional del Comic del Princpado de Asturias). He is currently working on a cautionary storybook tentatively titled *Storms at Sea*, as well as writing the *Prince Valiant* comic strip for the Sunday comics. He lives with his wife/letterer, Denise, and their two cats in the mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania.

THE SCRIPT

John Lowe: When you receive a script, what are the first steps you take?

Mark Schultz: *I've gotta tell you, this is a pretty unique situation for me. Up to this point I've always worked from my own script. I've never actually penciled someone else's script.*

The first job I had in the industry was inking over Val Semeiks' pencils for a back-up story in Savage Sword of Conan—*Val's first story. At the same time I got that job, Kitchen Sink accepted my* Xenozoic *proposal and offered to give me my own book. Of course I accepted, and for years I only did artwork based on my own writing.*

After that, I started writing scripts for other properties. I was a scriptwriter dealing with pencilers. I may have penciled a spot panel or two, but this Time Troubling *script is the first actual storytelling I've ever done based on a script I didn't write.*

As a scriptwriter, I want to hear from the artist so we can discuss what's working for him and what isn't. If we collaborate from the beginning, we can produce a strip that works for both of us. When I got Mark's script, I called him because I had a few ideas and questions for him.

JL: Did your questions jump out at you right away or did they emerge after you started the thumbnails?

MS: *I could tell right away. It wasn't so much that there were problems with the storytelling, it was that Mark had divided the story information into so many panels. One of the pages had seven panels on it. I could see very easy ways to consolidate that information into fewer panels and eliminate crowding on the page.*

I suggested the changes to Mark and asked for his input. He was very cool about it. He agreed that the changes wouldn't effect what he was trying to communicate. It's definitely wise to make sure any changes work for the writer because he may have a certain rhythm in mind for the page.

JL: Let's talk about those changes.

MS: *Well, since I haven't drawn continuity in at least six years, I wanted to make the compositions and the panel breakdowns much more formal than usual. I wanted to get back to grid breakdowns and let the information in the panel tell the story, rather than using dynamic panels as a storytelling element.*

The older I get, the more conservative I become, and I'm starting to see dynamic panels as extraneous to the story. Looking back, I wonder why the hell I did Xenozoic Tales *the way I did. It's confusing. I should have kept it simple. Mark's script offered the opportunity to rethink my choices.*

I really wanted to keep the basic six-panel grid, so I asked Mark
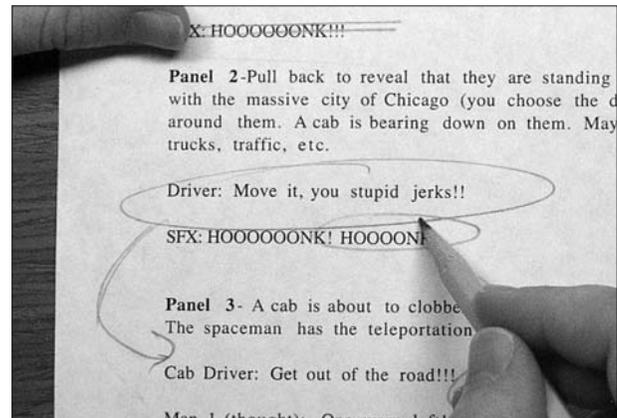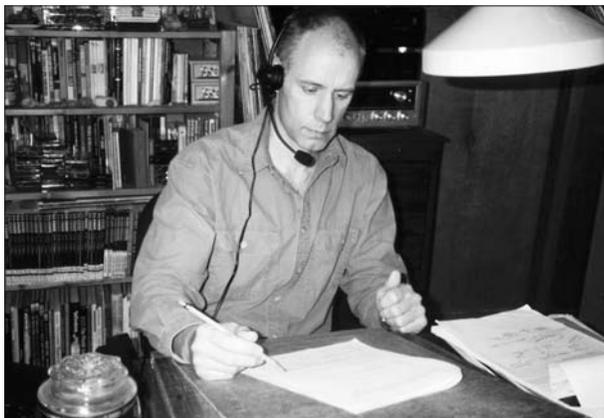
Mark first reads through the script, then calls the writer to get a sense of his intent and to discuss the possibility of making a few minor variations. A writer himself, Mark believes the results are better when writers and artists work together.

JL: So if you get it completely right on tracing paper, do you just lightbox the tracing paper?

MS: *Absolutely. I keep it as simple as possible.*

JL: When you working at your board, you use a little hand-held mirror. Is that to check proportions and view the face in a different way?

MS: *Right. That's a major reason. I also use it if I'm drawing expressions. I look at my own face. I set up the light and the mirror look at my face or hands to check the lighting. But mostly I use it to look at a drawing in reverse, to make sure the eyes aren't sliding off the side of the face and the nose isn't crooked.*

JL: You use the mirror quite a bit, right?

MS: *Absolutely. I'm always checking myself with that. It's one of my major tools.*

STORYTELLING

JL: Sometimes you change your composition when you move from the tracing paper to the board. For example, you sketched the last panel on page one in such a way that the Neanderthals are crowding the panel while the rocket

pod comes down. But you decided to alter that quite drastically on the final page.

MS: *Right. That one gave me some trouble.*

JL: What didn't you like about the initial composition? What made you decide to change it? And what kind of process did you go through to come up with the new image?

MS: *The image I had bored me. It looked good at the size of a thumbnail, but when I started to play around with it upsized, the relationship between the size of the Neanderthal and the size of the falling ship was not quite right. The pod has to be big enough to be recognizable, but you want to feel that it's different from the big spaceship from which it detached. The script also called for a hint that these cavemen are hiding in the grass and watching the ship come down. I had to solve the problem of how to show grass tall enough to hide an anthropoid figure, but still imply something crouching in the middle of that grass and looking up at the falling ship. I played around with that a lot, and I just couldn't make it work. Eventually, I compromised by showing a group of cavemen in the tall grass, not so much hiding as watching at a distance.*

JL: I think the size relationship works better in the final version. It's more effective to show a group of people than to show just two. Also, you're able to introduce the spears, which are not only a great design element; they
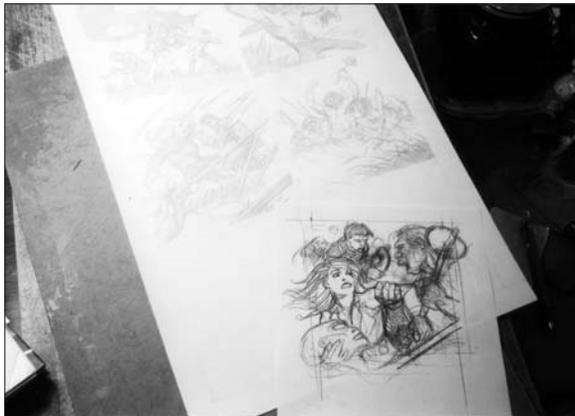
Working double-sized on 12" x 18" Bristol board, Mark uses a mechanical pencil with H lead to finish one panel at a time.

When Mark is happy with an image, he transfers it to the final board. He often covers previously drawn panels with tracing paper to avoid smudging them with his hand.

Mark keeps a small, hand-held mirror on hand to make sure his drawings look correct in reverse.
This is a good way to check the proportions and placement of facial features.

also prepare us for the events on page two. The alien gets whacked with the spear, instead of the tomahawk-type weapon in the earlier version.

MS: *That's a good point, too. But to be honest with you, I doubt I thought it out that far. It's one of those subconscious things. I didn't think about it, but you're right: It is better storytelling to introduce those spears.*

JL: Right; they link up the action. We know exactly who's hitting who on page two.

MS: *Right.*

JL: Moving to page two, in panel one; I see that you've

put the ship a little farther in the distance, moving the travelers away from it.

MS: *This panel got to do a lot of the storytelling without much overt explanation. It was important, to keep the reader from thinking, "Why don't they just crawl back into their spaceship and fly away if there's danger?"*

Mark also specified in the script that this is actually not a ship but an escape pod. It's very clear that the pod can't be re-launched. I hope I pulled that off by showing a lot of smoke pouring out of it. The smoke also made a great compositional element.

JL: It works, and that sweep of smoke provides a nice

Thumbnails   Pencils


From thumbnails to final drawings:

A. Mark makes the figures more prominent and establishes a distance between them and the ship.

B. He reduces the alien to a hand in the foreground to simplify the panel.

C. He zooms in on the action to heighten the tension of the scene and focus on the characters' expressions.

Mark Schultz' *Time Troubling*
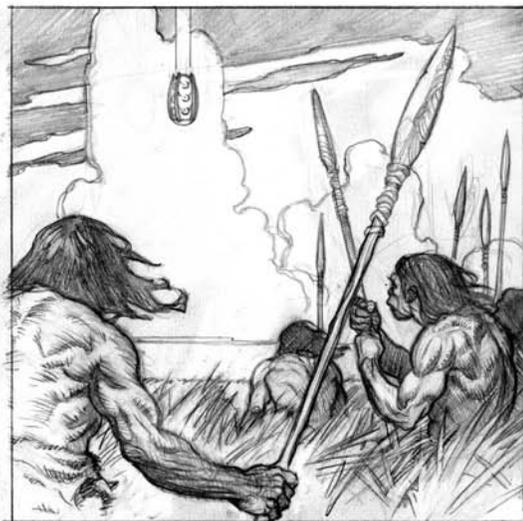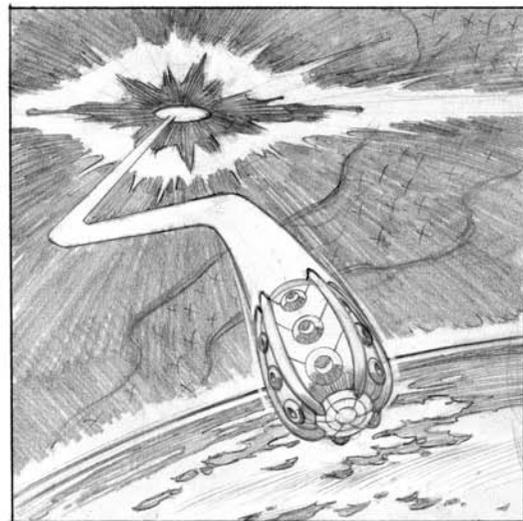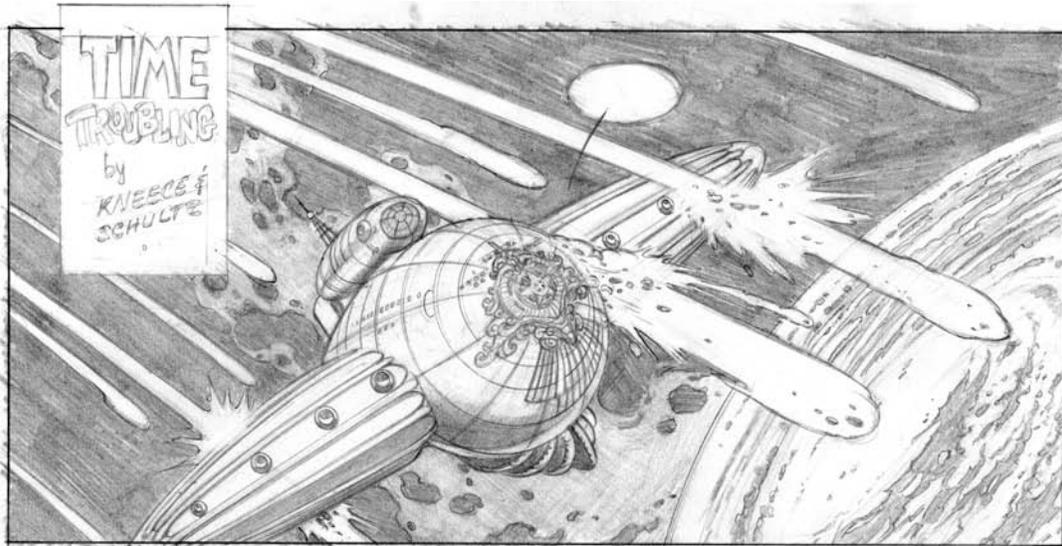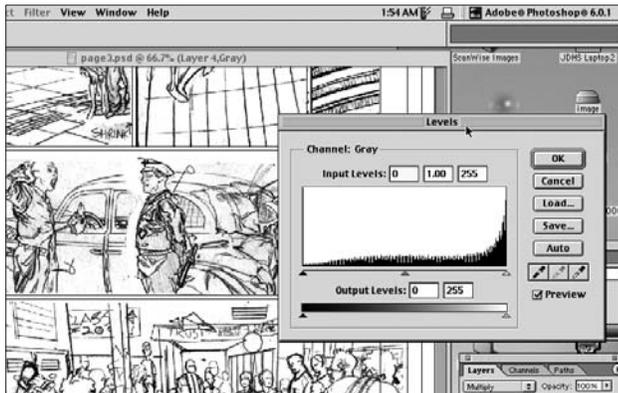
To drop out the lighter pencil work that he doesn't need, Chris adjusts the light, middle, and dark values of the drawing using the "Levels" tool under the "Image/Adjustments" menu in Photoshop.
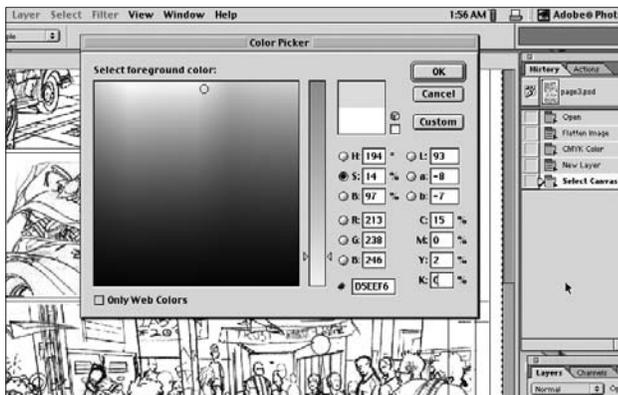
For inking purposes, the linework will be printed out as non-photo blue. On a layer above the drawing, Chris fills the canvas with 15 percent cyan and 2 percent yellow. He then changes the layer mode to "Hard Light."
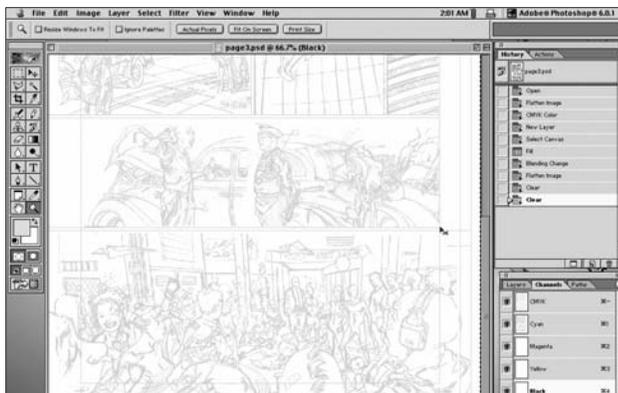
The linework is now ready to be printed onto Bristol board using a wide-format color printer. From there, the inking stage begins.

PHOTOSHOP

JL: Once you got these pencils finished, you scanned them into the computer, is that correct?

CB: *I scanned them in at 300 dpi and cleaned them up a bit.*

JL: Once the pencils were scanned in, then you opened them in Photoshop and enlarged the images to the standard size.

CB: *Yeah, I have a file of a template in Photoshop that's the exact dimensions of the page, so I can print it out at any size and keep the proportions the same.*

JL: You told me that you had a sequence set up to change all the lines to non-photo blue. Do you remember that?

CB: *Yeah, there are a lot of different ways to do it in Photoshop. I tried to get the image as dark as possible and toggle the contrast to eliminate as much gray as I could. Then I put a layer on top of that and applied non-photo blue with the "paintbucket" tool. On my screen, the C is 15 and I think the Y is 2. Then I changed the layer mode from "normal" to "hard" light. That shift turns all the black into non-photo blue.*

JL: So you print that out on Bristol board?

CB: *Yes.*

**JL:** What printer do you use?

CB: *It's an HP 9800 Deskjet. You might need a printer with a rear-feed to handle the thick stock paper and size.*

INKING

JL: Now you start inking?

CB: *Yeah. The inking stage is really just a process of making it pretty. The inking is all improvisation. All the important information is already there, and it's time to have fun and draw. It's like a doodle.*

JL: When you did these pages, your inking tool of choice
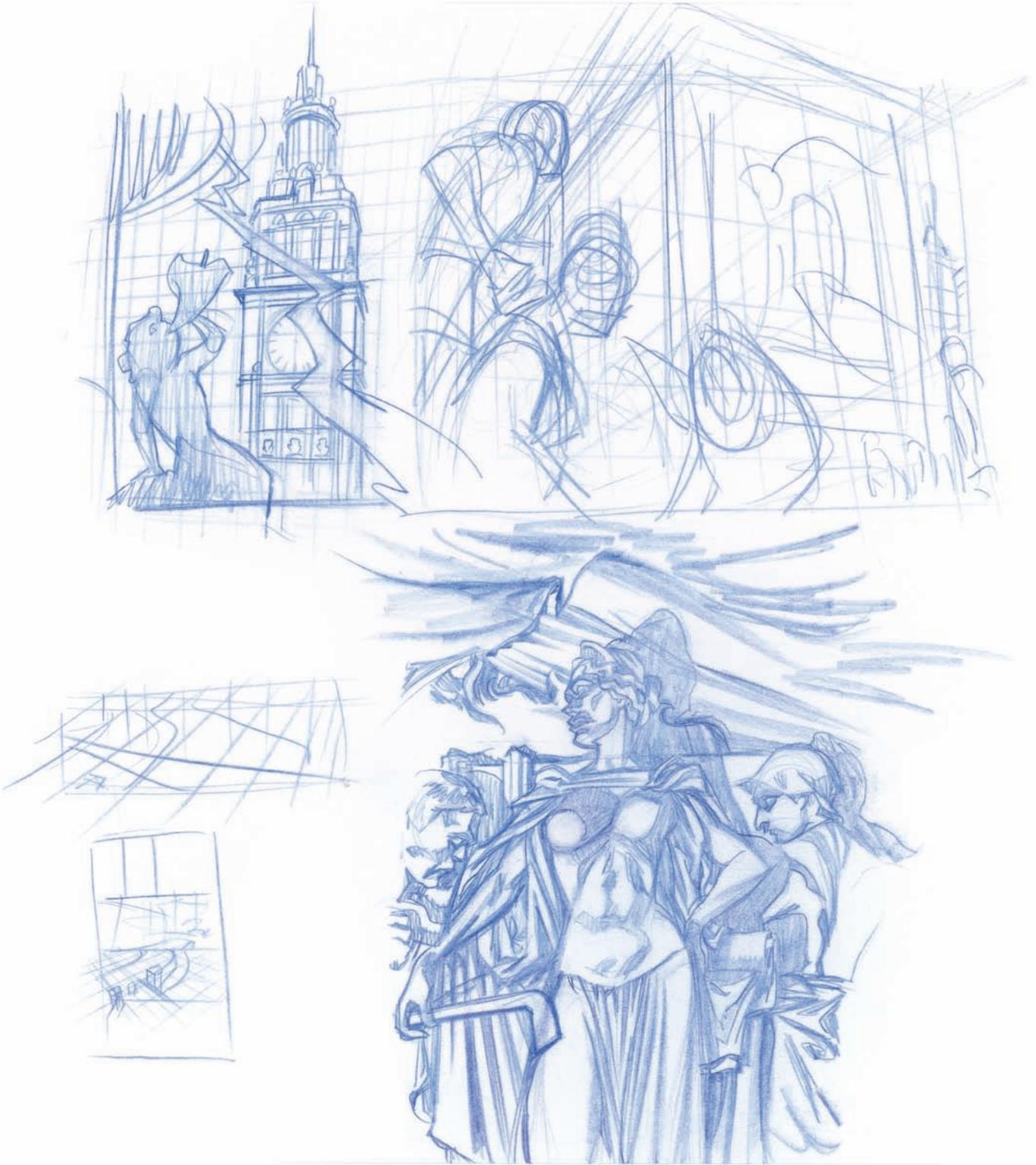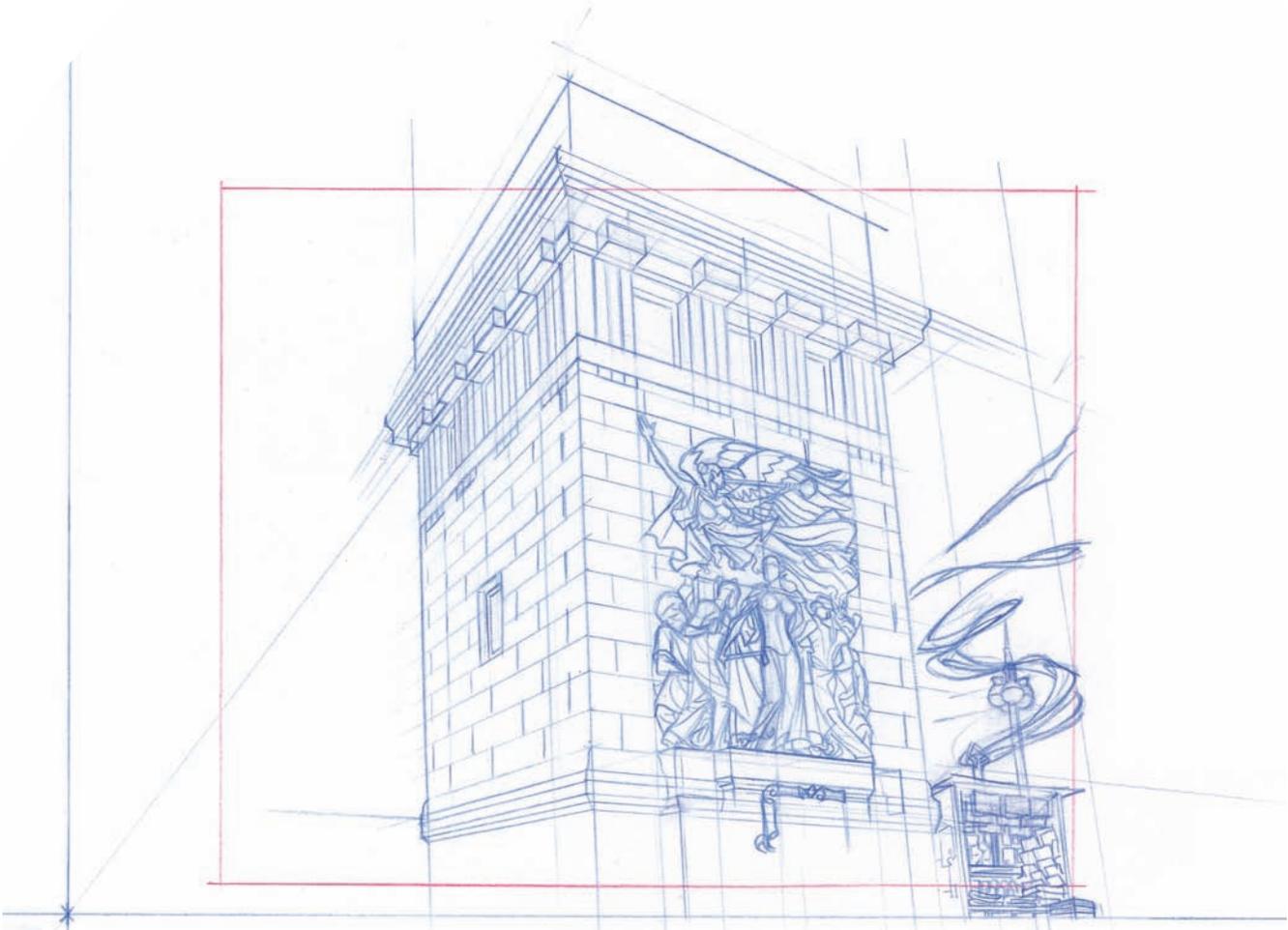
Kelsey usually constructs his environments by indicating a horizon line, then gesturing a grid freehand on the page.
But to accurately represent this highly recognizable bridge and bas-relief, he uses a ruler and perspective points.

KS: *The first storytelling I ever did was in a book called* Template no. 5. *It was a backup that I did for Head Press. It's funny because Bob Muncie, the publisher of Head Press, previously owned a comic book store in Dallas called Kaboom Comics. I used to go in there and enter his art contest and I won it a couple of times. Then years later, after he sold the place and started his own publishing company, I ended up working with him and he didn't even remember me from his store.*

COMPOSING THE PANELS

JL: So you scan your drawings and sketches and arrange

them on the page in Photoshop?

KS: *Yes. Sometimes I'll draw the background and then every character separately. I've often been in the situation where the backgrounds are perfect, and all the characters are perfect, but the last guy on the panel just won't get right. I end up with all this smudging. That's why I've developed the habit of doing everything separately.*

JL: In panel four on the third page where you have those cars, you drew out all the mechanical stuff on one page, and then overlaid the characters. Did you use a red pencil here to distinguish between the two?

KS: *Oh, no. It was all the same blue pencil. I changed the color*

Kelsey uses color and lighting as storytelling tools to lead the eye in the direction of the action.

only see the stairwell because of the way you used the color to light the rooms. When I first looked at it in the pencils, I thought she was just running and he was trying to help her. Then I got a little lost in the pencils of panel three because I wondered how she got over there. But it all became very clear once I saw the colors: she's running down toward that little pod you indicated in panel two.

KS: *Oh, yeah. Color in comics is almost like music in a film. It supplies subtext, but it also helps bring the reader from one place to the next by changing the lighting. Artists don't take advantage of lighting as much they could.*

JL: You show the characters landing at the end of page one. On page two, you use warm colors like red-orange for the planet, which makes the space travelers seem cool in comparison. You've clearly established the man in the foreground, and the glow coming off that little time machine really draws the eye to it.

KS: *You may have noticed that the light is red on the machine until it actually works. Then it turns green.*

JL: Yes, that's wonderful. Also on page two, you reduced the seven panels to six by removing a sound effect panel.

KS: *Yeah. It seems more efficient to put the sound effect in the panel, you know? Also, I'm not a big fan of sound effects. I try to make all the art look like sound effects so the sounds register in the brain.*

JL: So readers can add their own.

KS: *Yeah. I don't mind sound effects if they're done by a really good letterer like Ken Bruzenak, though. A letterer like that can do whatever he wants and it still looks cool.*

JL: All right.

KS: *I changed the second page a lot. In panel five, the script had a Neanderthal sniff the woman. To me, that took the focus away from the whole. Instead of focusing on what the Neanderthals do, I wanted to keep the action moving as fast as possible. I didn't even put Neanderthals in that last panel, because for me the story is: They arrive, a danger presents itself, they huddle to-*