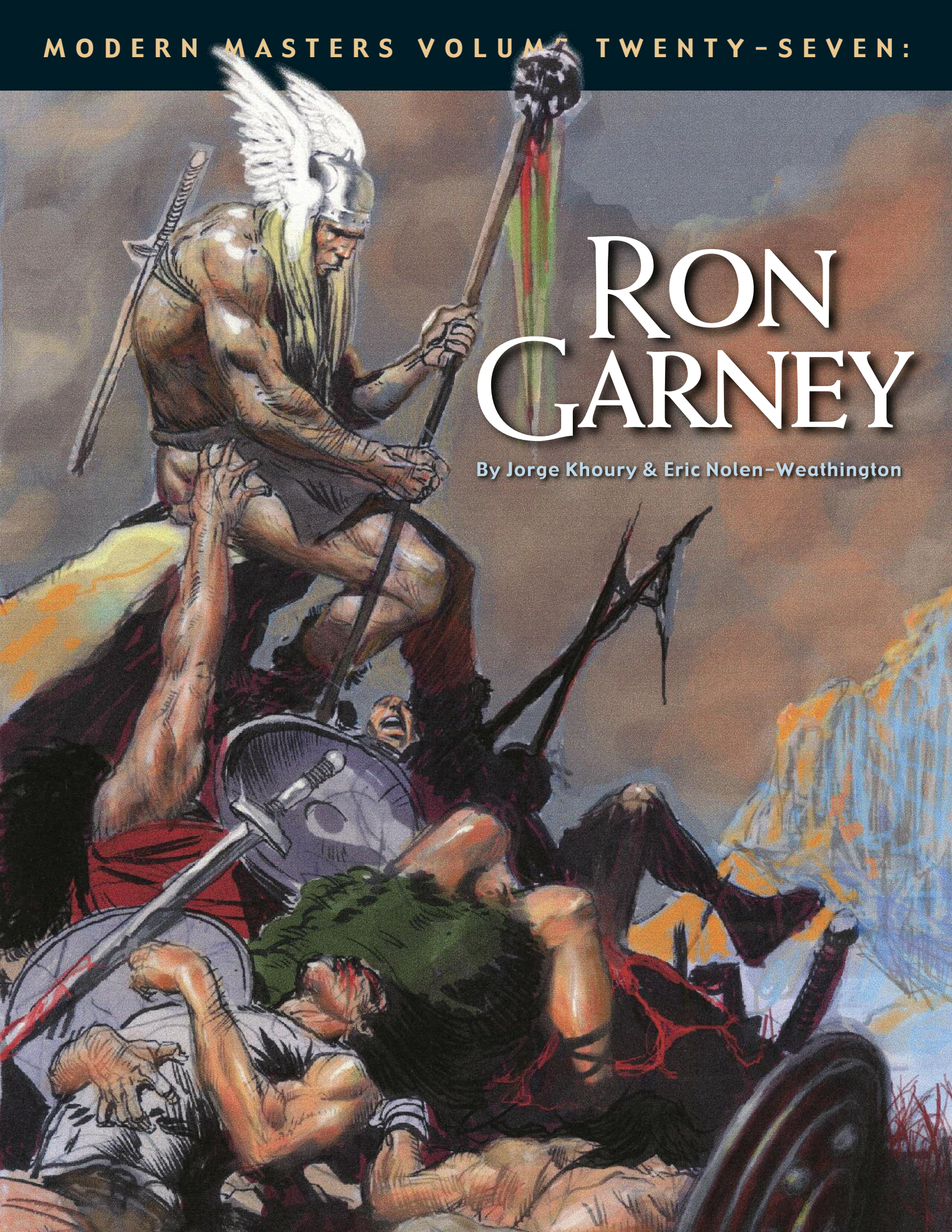


MODERN MASTERS VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN:

RON GARNEY

By Jorge Khoury & Eric Nolen-Weathington



MODERN MASTERS VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN: RON GARNEY

edited by Jorge Khoury and Eric Nolen-Weathington
front cover by Ron Garney
all interviews in this book were conducted by Jorge Khoury
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Dedication

My efforts in this book are dedicated to Ron Garney, the consummate professional and Marvel's best comic book artist. — Jorge

Acknowledgements

Ron Garney, for giving so much of his time and his enthusiasm to this book.

Spencer Beck, for his considerable help in gathering the artwork for this book. Anyone interested in purchasing original artwork by Ron (as well as many other great comic book artists) should visit Spencer's website: www.theartistschoice.com.

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Modern Masters Volume Twenty-Seven:

RON GARNEY

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Part 1 ■ Ron Throws His Hat into the Ring

MODERN MASTERS: Who was the artist in the family? Where do you think that comes from?

RON GARNEY: My grandmother was a painter, and my father had some artistic ability. I think what influenced me to draw early on was seeing my grandmother painting. When I was only three I was taught how to draw Bugs Bunny. I think I saw the attention I got from it. I think somewhere I have some of the drawings I did at three years old of Superman and Batman. I started there and kept drawing.

MM: Were you interested in comics as a child? Do you remember having books around?

RON: Yeah, sure. I mean, I grew up in a very rural area, so there wasn't a lot of access to them, but every now and then my mother would come home with some comics or a *Famous Monsters* magazine—I got into that kind of thing for a while.

I was really into *Star Trek* early on—in the early '70s I got into it after it went into syndication. And *Godzilla*—on Saturdays I would watch *Godzilla* movies on *Chiller Theater*. Lots of different things like that.

MM: You were into Batman, too, right?

RON: Yeah, the *Batman* TV show, the Adam West thing. I loved the opening credits with the comic book stuff. I just thought that was the coolest thing. You see all the villains going by to the left in this sort of graphic shape, and then with a "Biff!" and a "Pow!" they'd be flying off to the right. That was pretty cool, you know? I was drawn to it early on, that sort of graphic, comic book look.

MM: Did you recognize different art styles early on?

RON: Yeah, definitely. I remember looking at Kirby's stuff, gosh, as far back as '60-something. I remember reading the

Thing versus the Hulk on the George Washington Bridge. For some reason the image of the Thing wrapping up the Hulk in one of the suspension cables from the bridge has always stuck in my head. You really felt the Hulk being wrapped up in this thing. There was just something about Kirby's work that had so much weight to it. I can remember looking at that, thinking he really felt it when he was being squeezed by the Thing. And I also very vividly remember John Buscema's stuff. Those two guys, more than anyone else, I remember.

MM: Were there any art teachers that were important to you growing up?

RON: My art teacher in grammar school, and actually he became my art teacher in high school, somewhat, too—

MM: The same person?

RON: Yeah, yeah. He worked at both schools. His name was David Orrell. I just talked to him again on Facebook recently. I hadn't spo-

ken to the guy since probably the late '70s, and I found him on Facebook, funny enough.

MM: Did you send him some of your comics?

RON: Yeah, he asked me to. Maybe I could send him one of these books, too. So, yeah, yeah, he was very influential. I remember him telling me to squint my eyes because it would make the composition make more sense. It helps you eliminate some of the distracting details. You can see the composition as a whole if you just squinted your eyes at the piece. I never forgot that, and I do it to this day. If you see me drawing sketches at conventions, people wonder what I'm doing with my eyes. It became a habit, and I can't get out of it. I've tried to get out of it, and I can't.

MM: Early on, where did the desire to draw come from? Was it just the attention you were getting fueling that?



RON: Back when I was growing up, there weren't many people around me that drew. I was the only guy at the school. I got the art award when I left grammar school. I don't remember what happened in high school, but there was a guy one year ahead of me—his name was Jim Lawson—and he actually draws *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I don't know if he knows we went to the same school. I mean, because he was older than me, I remember seeing his drawings in high school, thinking how cool they were. Especially coming from an area where nobody else drew pictures.

MM: He works for Peter Laird now, right?

RON: Yeah, and he went to Valley Regional High School. I might have talked to him once or twice, but I don't know if he'd remember me, because I was younger than him, but I remember him and his distinct Kurtzman style, and thinking how great he was. I had forgotten about him and years later rediscovered him, found out that he was doing all that. It was cool to see that he went into the same field I went into.

MM: Did you get to a point where you were tired of comics as a kid?

RON: Yeah, I wasn't into comics that much, I would say, right around high school. I really got into music. I started getting into girls. I was always into sports. I played sports all through grammar school, but that didn't stop me from geeking out, as they say. Now it's hip to be a geek, but back then it wasn't. But, yeah, I was into girls, into sports. I got to high school and played a little basketball, but I got more into music at that point.

As you're growing up, you're developing new friendships. You go to a new school, and you develop new friendships with different people based on things you're into. A couple of my friends were in a band, so I was all, "I gotta learn guitar." I could play guitar, but not really well at that point. So I really started focusing on that, because my friends at that time were into it. There weren't a lot of guys my age who were into comic books and that kind of thing where I grew up. So the exposure to music and sports was more prevalent back then, as opposed to *Star Trek*. I was the only *Star Trek* fan in my whole grammar school, you know? I was looked at as, "Who's this kid talking about the f-ing Enterprise?" That's was my experience.



MM: But you didn't stop drawing?

RON: Oh, no, I kept drawing. That's what I was really good at. I would draw from TV shows. Like, I remember this guy had a TV show—Captain Bob I think his name was—and he would draw wildlife, which I loved to draw—manatees, dolphins, alligators—and he would teach you how to do all that stuff. I would sit there on Sunday with my sketchpad and draw along with him, and I had them all pinned up in my room. And then, in high school, I drew and painted and sculpted and all that stuff. That's when I really got into Frazetta; that was my junior year.

MM: What was it about him? Just his technique?

Previous Page: The Hulk temporarily gets the worst of it in his rematch with the Thing in *Fantastic Four* #25, drawn by Jack Kirby with inks by George Roussos.
Above: Ron got to do his own take on the classic rivalry in *Hulk* #9. Inks by Sal Buscema.

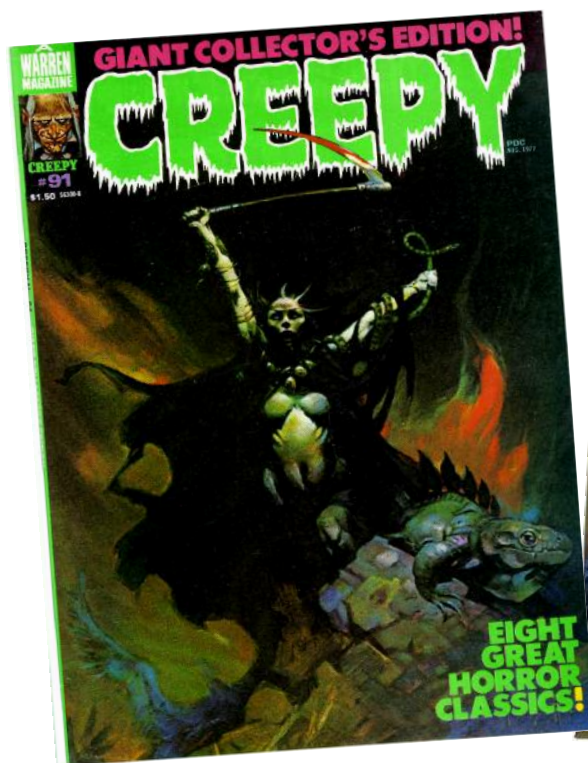
Hulk, Thing TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Right: Frank Frazetta's cover of *Creepy* #91 and Boris Vallejo's cover of *Eerie* #34.

Below: One of Ron's fantasy paintings from the early '80s.

Next Page: A 1979 pen-&-ink illustration.

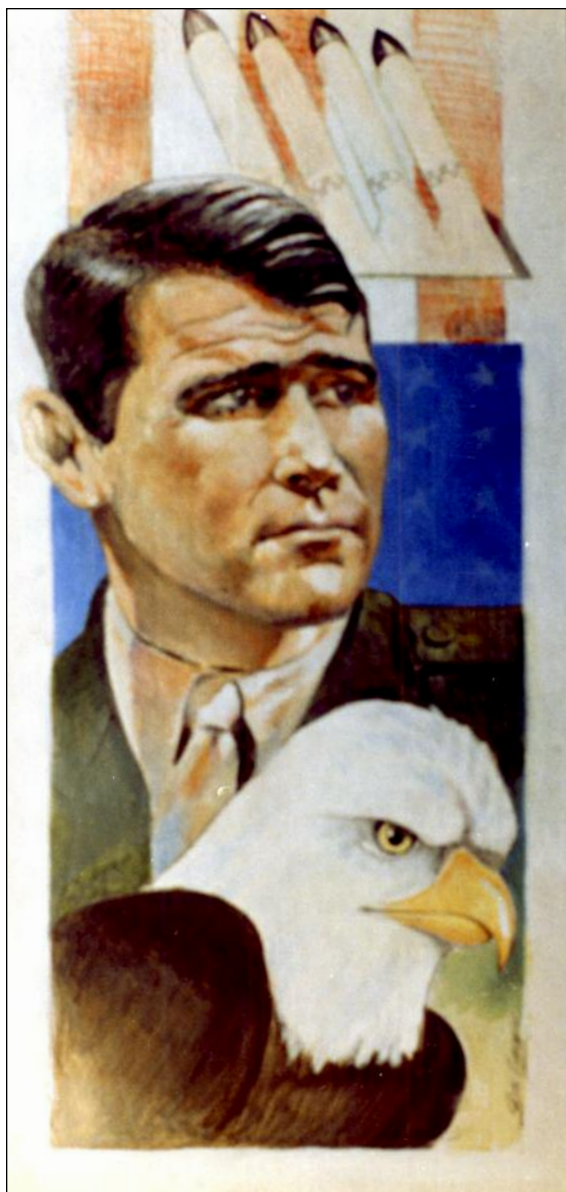
Creepy, *Eerie* © New Comic Company.



RON: Oh, yeah. I don't remember what the first thing I saw of his was, but I was just floored by it. I started getting into *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines, too, and Boris [Vallejo]. A lot of Boris' covers were on those magazines. It was through these periodicals that I first saw things by Frazetta, then I actively started seeking him out. I would go to a bookstore and see if they had any of his books, or I would place orders through the magazines to have the books sent to me. I got into it, and that's what really got me into the painting. I started doing fantasy illustration like Frazetta. I was doing that all the way through college, and then all my paintings were stolen, and that sucked the wind out of me. Then I became a nightclub manager and a bouncer, and I got really distracted for a while there from all that stuff.

MM: Did you have a plan after high school for what you were going to do?

RON: Well, if I had never gone to college, I probably would have been a fantasy illustrator. I was looking at guys like Don Maitz, Michael Whelan, and Frank Frazetta. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a book cover artist, a painter like that. But then I decided to go to college after high school, and that was an eye-opening experience, because all of a sudden I was around people who could draw and paint as well as I could. I saw so many talented people that it was a little bit intimidating. Very eye-opening. It made me realize how much harder I really needed to work. But, then, with college came the other distractions, as well—again, girls and partying and stuff like that. I made it through college, but don't ask me how. [laughs]



Above Left: Mid-'80s painting of Lt. Col. Oliver North, best known for his involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair.

Above Right and Next Page: A three-page sequence featuring Hulk and Thing (are you sensing a pattern?) from one of Ron's portfolio samples which helped him land a job at Marvel Comics.

Hulk, Thing ™ and © Marvel Characters, Inc.



and read these things. I was so into it.

The reason I started trying out for Marvel is because of something I said to the guy behind the counter. I said, "Boy, I would love to draw there. I'm an artist. How would I go about drawing for Marvel?" And he said, "You have to send stuff in. But..." and he pointed me over to this *Marvel Comics Try-Out Book* they had for sale that I hadn't even seen sitting there. It was this huge book, and I was like, "Oh, wow! I'm going to enter this." Everything was there in it. It had the paper, it had the story. I think John Romita, Jr. had drawn it. You could ink it and send it in, or you had blank pages you could pencil, and they had a whole script in there. So I brought it home and I worked my ass off on it. I was determined to win it. I sent it in, but I didn't win. Actually, I think Mark Bagley won it.

MM: Mark Bagley won it, and I think Erik Larsen came in fourth place or something.

RON: Oh, did he? It's funny how the timing works; they both worked on Spider-Man at the same time.

MM: Did you get a letter?

RON: I did get a letter, basically saying, "Thanks, but no thanks."

MM: Did that experience make you want to quit?

RON: No, because my ego was bruised. I was used to winning awards. I was always being noted as the best artist in the class. So I knew I was a good artist, I just was clearly not good enough at drawing comics. I had a lot to learn. Up to that point I had predominantly

been a painter, so my sensibility wasn't about tightness of line. It was more about the painted cover. It wasn't so tight. I was more of an abstract thinker when it came to color and form, and that's what I was really into. When you look at Frazetta's stuff, none of it looks really tight when you look at it closely. The arrangement of color and the way he laid the brush down is a technique all unto itself, and it's completely different than doing a tight pencil drawing.

MM: Did you find yourself struggling with that *Marvel Tryout* book, or did it come relatively easy for you?

RON: Well, the only thing I struggled with was having no feedback on it to tell me what was good. You know, all my friends and family, and I don't know how serious they thought I was about it, but they always supported me. "It looks great," you know? So I was always second-guessing myself, and redoing it, and redoing it, and redoing it. As a matter of fact, I redid so much that I might have even sent the thing in late, [laughs] past the deadline, which may be the reason I got a "no, thank you" letter. I think I might have sent it out the day before the deadline. So, you know, I didn't have any feedback to tell me this was good, or that was good, and I was second-guessing myself a lot.

When I got the rejection letter, I was crushed by it, because I didn't know what else I was going to do with my life at that point. I didn't want to work as a nightclub manager forever, but what was I going to do? I had started doing graphic design for a newspaper in New Haven and odd jobs here and there, but I was really giving up on the idea of an art career. But that letter lit a fire under me that pushed me to keep working at it until I got in.

A couple of years went by. I kept working on samples, because I was determined. And then, just by chance, somebody told me that Zeck happened to live, like, ten minutes away. [laughs] I looked him up in the phone book, and, sure enough, there he was. I wouldn't suggest that anyone else do that.

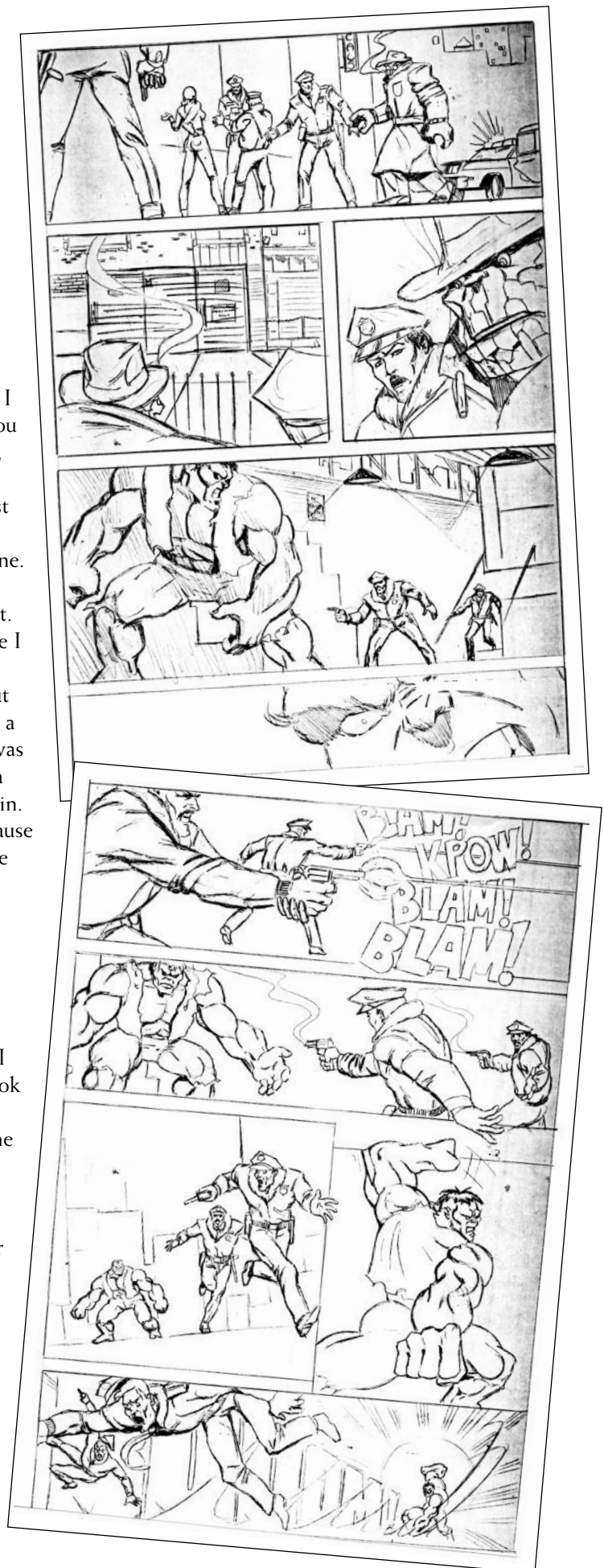
MM: To you? [laughter]

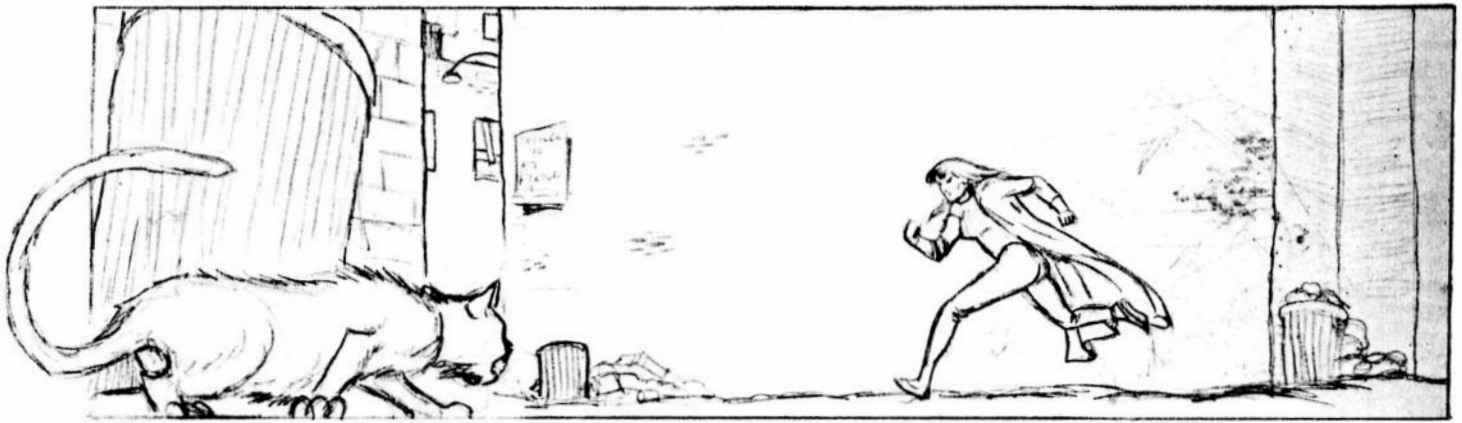
RON: Yeah, please don't do that to me. But I did it to him. I called, left him a message on his answering machine, and said I was an artist interested in drawing for Marvel, and could he look at my stuff? He called me back and said, "Yeah, send me some stuff. I'd be happy to look at it." So I sent it to him, and then he called me back, and I was so in awe that this guy from Marvel Comics had called me back. I think I saved the answering machine message, because the fact that this guy who actually did work for Marvel was calling me meant I was one step closer to working for Marvel.

MM: It's a small world, right?

RON: Yeah, it's like one of those "meant to be" scenarios where you go, "What the heck? What are the odds of this?" I happen to be working at a bar, my friend picks up *Secret Wars*, it's Mike Zeck's work, then I find out Zeck lives basically next door.

MM: Did he tell you how much he loathed doing that series?





RON: Yeah. We had conversations about it, and about problems he was having with editorial and the editor-in-chief at the time—Jim Shooter, I guess it was—and some of the things that were going on there. We actually became quite friendly. He gave me a critique on my work, and he thought I had a ton of potential. He said, “I’m really interested, because I see something in your work.” So I kept at it, I kept working on the samples.

In the meantime, I invited him out to the bars where I worked, and he ended up inviting me to a small, local convention here in Connecticut. So I went, and he invited me to sit behind the table with him, and I drew sketches for people. I didn’t even work for Marvel at that point, but it was just the coolest thing ever. I was like, “Wow, this is awesome!” I was there with him, Mike DeCarlo—who I think was inking *Batman*—and a couple other local guys. It was cool, y’know? To even be invited was very gracious of him. And then he invited me to come play volleyball, so I was on a volleyball team with him. Because we were all local, we started to hang out together.

MM: When did you start getting your portfolio ready?

RON: I worked on the samples, and when I brought them to him again, he seemed to think I was ready to take some in. He brought me and this one other guy—I think his name

was Larry Alexander—into New York together on the train. I got to go to the Marvel offices, and it was just, “Whoa.” I went to DC with him, and he showed me around there. Mike walked me around the offices and introduced me to editors, and then he started showing the editors my work

because he thought I was good.

And it paid off. Marvel said, “Oh, we’ll call you if we’re interested.” I could tell Ralph Macchio had an interest. You know how editors are, they’ll act like they’ve seen it all, but I remember Ralph’s face when he started looking through my stuff. He was pausing and looking, and he was like, “Wow, these are really good.”

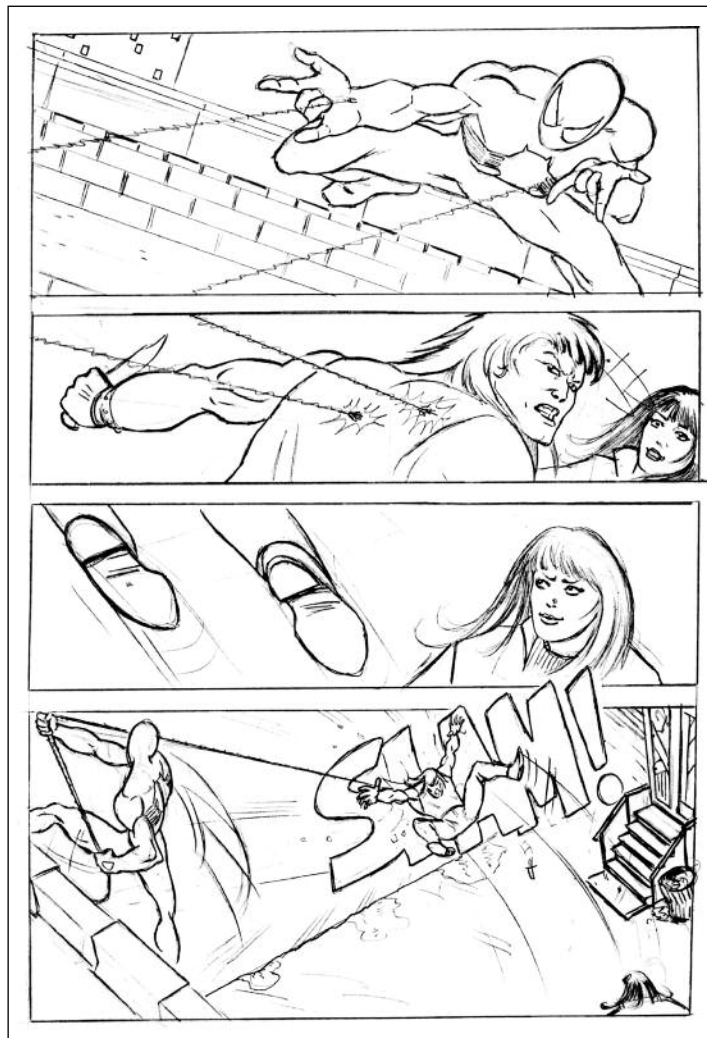
MM: But he didn’t want to be the first guy to hire you.

RON: Yeah, he didn’t say much, he just was looking like, “What the hell? This guy is pretty good.” I think they get so many submissions that they just get desensitized to it, and a lot of the artists they see are probably not ready. I guess I *was* ready, because when Mike took me over to DC an editor immediately offered me an *Animal Man* series. But first I had to do

an eight-page sample sequence to show them I could do the work on time and that kind of thing.

MM: This was the Grant Morrison series, right?

RON: Yeah, it was! So, I did the eight-page sample and got



it in on time. I was pulling all-nighters, which I wasn't used to, but I had to make it good. I sent it in, and then I got dogged, because the guy who was initially supposed to draw the series but had turned it down, changed his mind and decided to take the job. I think his name was Chas Truog. So he got the job.

But within a day of my visit, I got a few offers from Marvel on my answering machine: one from Bobbie Chase and one from Danny Fingeroth. I guess Ralph had shown my stuff to Bobbie and Danny or something. I don't know. Anyway, those two were the first—actually, all three of them, because Ralph offered me a *Daredevil* story. So right away I had all these offers on my answering machine. I didn't know how to say no. I didn't want to overextend myself, but I didn't want to turn anything down, either. So I took a *G.I. Joe* story that Bobbie had offered. That was my very first comic credit: *G.I. Joe* #110 [March, 1991].

MM: You did get paid for those *Animal Man* samples, right?

RON: I did. I got paid for the samples. And when that issue came out, Chas Truog's layouts looked a lot like mine, interestingly.

So I drew the *G.I. Joe* story, not knowing that Bobbie wanted to offer the book to me as a regular gig. I finished the issue in good time, and I think part of the problem she was having with the regular artist was that he wasn't turning his stuff in on time. I was so determined to work for Marvel and succeed that I did everything on time; I pulled all-nighters and I got it all in. So, evidently, Bobbie was going to offer me the book as the regular artist. In the meantime, Danny Fingeroth had called me and offered me *Moon Knight* as a regular gig without my even having to try out for it.

MM: Did you feel like you were ready for such a load of work?

RON: No. [laughter] I wasn't ready. I didn't know what to think.

MM: When I read that *G.I. Joe* comic, it was like, "They gave this guy a whole war to draw in one issue."

RON: It was awful. That turned me off to it quite a bit, actually. It's funny you mention that, because they had licenses for the vehicles and the action figures and stuff like that, and they wanted it pretty accurate, so I had to



reference everything, and that was a task. I had never drawn a comic book before—a full, 22-page comic book. The opening scenes were just hundreds of tanks, battalions, the SAW-Vipers, and all this stuff. [laughter] I remember reading the script, going, "How am I gonna draw all this stuff? Oh, my God, I've never had to do this in my life." It was really eye-opening. I wasn't prepared for the amount of work you had to—

MM: Did you ask Mike for help?

RON: No, I was on my own. At that point, Mike had helped me so much. And I didn't want so much of Mike's help, because if Mike came in and started redrawing things for me, then it's him, not me. But on a couple of occasions I asked him, "What can I do with this?" He was very helpful. Mike was known

Previous Page: A panel and page from another of Ron's samples, this time featuring Spidey. You can see that Ron has already developed an eye for interesting camera angles.

Above: The first page of Ron's professional debut in *G.I. Joe* #110. Talk about diving in at the deep end! *G.I. Joe* featured a large cast and a ton of vehicles, all of which had to be drawn to model. Inks by Fred Fredericks.

Spider-Man™ and © Marvel Characters, Inc. *G.I. Joe*™ and © Hasbro.

Right: You can see a little of Ron's Mike Zeck influence in this drawing of the Joes' commander.

Below: Panels from *Moon Knight* #27, Ron's second issue on the title. Inks by the legendary embellisher, Tom Palmer.

Next Page: This page from *Captain America* #450 is one of Ron's favorite pages of the entire series. The foreshortening of the Cap figure is tricky to capture from this angle, and Ron shows his command of perspective by getting it just right. Inks by Scott Koblish.

Captain America, Moon Knight
™ and © Marvel Characters,
Inc. G.I. Joe ™ and © Hasbro.

for that, actually. He used to help out a lot of guys. He helped Jerry Ordway quite a bit.

MM: And it's the only book that you did that has a little bit of his influence in it. Like, some of the faces look like his.

RON: Yeah, I know. Well, not surprisingly, because he was the main influence on me at that point in my life, as far as helping me with camera shots, how to set up pages, and stuff.

MM: How many copies of this comic did you buy when it came out?
[laughs]

RON: I don't remember. I know it was a few. But I remember the thrill I got walking into the comic shop and seeing it there. It's just the coolest thing ever to see your name on

something. I can't explain it. It was like seeing your name on a movie screen or something. It was just the coolest thing. And here I had achieved it. I had made the commitment to get into Marvel years and years earlier, and I didn't quit. I could have quit, but I

didn't. So here I was achieving it—actually achieving it—starting out pretty well. But the editors ended up getting in an argument; they had it out at a meeting, because they both wanted to offer me a regular book. So it was kind of like, "Wow." I went from getting turned

down on the *Marvel Comics Try-Out Book* to having editors offer me all kinds of stuff. It was the best experience of my life, and I was very honored and grateful.



Part 2: From Unknown to Suddenly in Demand

MM: Was everything starting to come together, what you learned from art school, what you'd learned from Mike, what art techniques you'd learned at school?

RON: The craft and applying what I was taught? Yeah, I was particularly good at graphic design—like designing logos—when I was in college. I see that to this day, some of the impact that had on me. I always did well in figure drawing classes, probably because of the Frazetta influence. And Buscema, who was a great figure drawer. I was always drawing figures anyway. So I think that definitely started showing through. Even if you look at *G.I. Joe*, for a first comic, when I look back at it, I think it looks pretty seasoned for somebody who had never worked before. Some areas need a lot of work, but, you know, for a first comic, I thought it was pretty good. But I think a lot of that, too, was due in part to Zeck's help.

It's about making choices. Mike helped me make choices. There were certain times that I couldn't make a choice. I remember in a sample page I had drawn, it was just a simple page of Mary Jane and Peter Parker putting up their Christmas tree together, and Peter's up on the wall because the tree is so high. He's up on the ceiling and the wall, trying to put the angel on top of the tree. I couldn't figure out how to do that angle. Mike simplified it for me. He said, "Just go from the angel down. Draw a picture of the angel up close and do it from that perspective, looking down at the floor. I had been doing it in reverse with Mary Jane looking up, and I didn't think to zoom in on the angel and make that the focus, close up, and then reverse the camera so you see Peter putting it there with Mary Jane in the background. So it was stuff like that. And, of course, it made so much more compositional sense—and it made sense for the story, because the angel is the focus of the panel. He helped me with a lot of that kind of thing.

MM: That idea carries on throughout your career. There's a page in *Captain America*—I think you did an overhead shot where he hands the shield to Bill Clinton. I remember Ralph Macchio looking at that like, "Wow, how did he do that?"

RON: Oh, really?

MM: Yeah, because they were really intrigued. They'd never seen that angle, that overhead camera shot where you could see the Oval Office. It was cool.

RON: I chose an extreme downshot so you saw the desk and Bill Clinton, and then the angle of Cap—I mean, it was tough to pull off. To get that foreshortening just right and make him look like he was standing was the actual challenge of it.



Below: Ron plays with the camera angles in this page from *Captain America #445*. Inks by Scott Koblish.

Next Page: This version of the cover art for *Captain America #454* was rejected. For the final version, the pile of dead soldiers Cap is standing on was changed to a hilltop. The Cap figure remained unchanged.

Captain America™ and ©
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See, a lot of times, for me, the payoff is worth the effort. That angle, again, that's where my directorial interest came in. I love playing with camera angles. That's how my mind works. It's like, "Oh, I get to play director here, and I can put the camera anywhere. Let me find the most interesting place to put it." Sometimes I'm good at it, sometimes I'm not so good at it. I have moments where I could have done better, but that one shot I was particularly proud of because it worked. And even [Mark] Waid called me and said, "You know, I didn't even think of that angle. I wasn't thinking of that set-up for that page when I wrote it, but man, the way you drew it here was remarkable. It's better than what I had pictured."

My stuff was stylized, and it had a cartoony feel to it. It had a look, definitely, but it wasn't overly rendered and stylized like Jim Lee. But I made up for it with my camera shots, camera angles, and interesting ways of looking at the story, of moving the camera along, and that's where I had the most fun. I think that holds true to this day. I've gotten more stylized over the years, but it's not something I've ever predominantly focused on, which is very obvious. There are a lot of guys out there who do that, who are very stylized. My style comes from just having fun being a director and moving the story through the pages, getting it to come to life, making it look like you're watching a movie. That's what I try to go for. That's where the fun lies for me, and I think it shows sometimes. My friend Howard said to me recently about something I did, that it was just like he was watching a movie. That's a high compliment and high praise, and it's gratifying to hear that because that's where my interests are.

MM: During my internship on your *Captain America* run, you were like our quarterback. When your pages came in, that was something that everyone looked forward to.

RON: Quarterback?

MM: Yeah, because you were the star of our roster. We had to make sure that we took care of you.

RON: Really? I wish somebody had told me that.

MM: Well, that's the problem. The guys in editorial don't generally articulate that kind of thing.

RON: Wow, but it's nice to hear. Yeah, and then I got the rug pulled out from under me.

MM: Well, it wasn't Ralph's fault. That move came from the top.

RON: What did Ralph do when he first heard that?

MM: It was weird. I think he kind of knew it was coming. Maybe he didn't know, because he was surprised. He didn't know what to say. I think he was the guy that called you. It was either him or Matt Idelson.

RON: I think it was Ralph who called me and told me.





MM: We thought we were going to keep doing what we were doing. I remember it was early December [1995] when it happened. Bob Harras came down and told us [about "Heroes Reborn"] before they told everybody else.

RON: I think the problem with all that crap back then was the money that was rolling in. It brought out the worst in people, and all of a sudden the company saw something it had never seen before with Jim Lee. They'd had successes, but not like Todd McFarlane and Jim Lee. All of a sudden they exploded, and the money rolled in. I mean, it wasn't just those guys, it was the timing of everything that happened. Greed is like food, water, and sex. It's an immediate gratification that you need taken care of, and when it comes to money and the fix that you get from making that kind of money, they needed it right then and there, y'know? So they didn't see that in the long run maybe Mark's and my run could have grown to that height. Maybe not.

MM: I do remember this: *Captain America* was the only book that was going up in sales at Marvel at that time. It was the envy of the whole office, because it was the only one that was doing something.

RON: Yeah, I know. And after that my career was just a rollercoaster ride there. I was unhappy with Marvel at that stage. The environment was just too unstable. And it started showing in my work. I was getting things done quickly, because the editors needed the stuff, and I was caught between wanting to be a really good artist and wanting to please the editors, so my work was very inconsistent.

That's the other criticism I have of it is that they'd call me up, "Oh, we need it by next week, Ron." "I don't know." "Okay, whatever." And I would play the good soldier, and I would get the stuff done in, like, eight days, or nine days. And the work suffered for it. I had the potential to be much better, I thought, but there were just too many ups and downs.

MM: Let's back up a bit. Right after *G.I. Joe* you did two issues of *Daredevil*.

RON: Yeah. I had already started *Moon Knight*, so I was doing *Daredevil* while I was doing *Moon Knight*. And that was like, "What am I doing? I'm killing myself, here." But I

couldn't say no. I was always very insecure about getting work back then, because I had struggled so hard to get there, and I didn't want to go back to bartending and not having a career, so I didn't want to say no. I wanted to be a good soldier, like I said. So I said yes to Ralph. I did his book, and I did *Moon Knight*. I kind of overextended myself.

MM: The *Marvel Holiday Special* [1991] story, too.

RON: I did that, too, yeah! What was I thinking? But I was willing to take it all on because I was so honored to get the work.

MM: At the same time, I've read you had problems getting used to working on your own, the isolation and so on.

RON: Yeah, that was difficult. You go from being a very social animal, being in a nightclub, being around girls all the time, hot women—and just people. Even if some of the atmosphere was negative—you'd get into fights or whatever—you're around people all the time, so to go from that to being at home all day sitting in a chair with no one around you all day and night, that was a tough, tough adjustment.

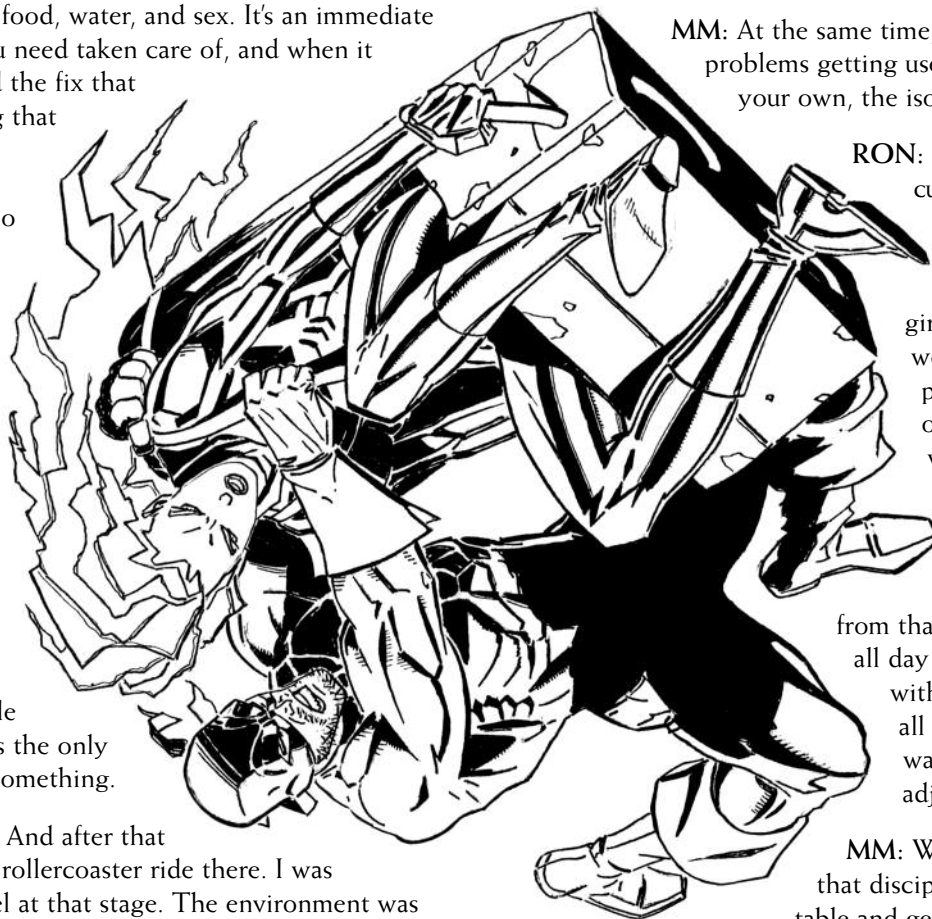
MM: What did it take to get that discipline to stay at the table and get the work done?

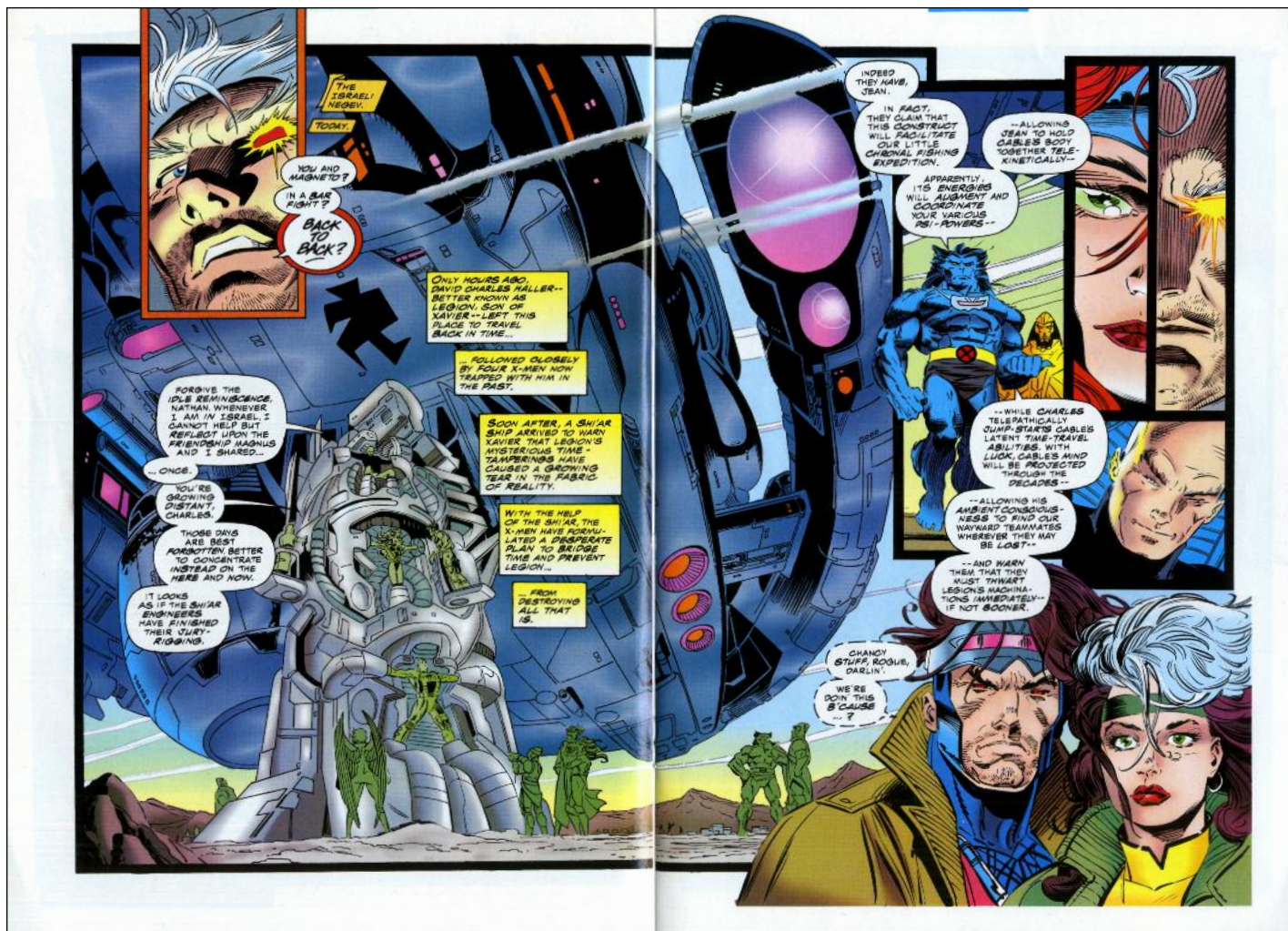
RON: The fear of not having that job, of not succeeding.

MM: Did you have any problems with deadlines early on when you accepted all these projects?

RON: I think I was good with deadlines, and that's why I was getting offered so much. But it stifled my potential for growth. I mean, I wasn't taking as much time as I needed to do the stuff well. With the first *G.I. Joe* issue, this one issue I did, it was all I had to do, and I worked hard at it, and it looked pretty good. But when I was on both *Moon Knight* and *Daredevil*—plus all the different inkers I was working with—stuff can get watered down and not look quite as good.

MM: I thought that first issue of *Daredevil* looked great. And you didn't have much to work with.





working with, I just didn't want to go down that road because it was too frustrating. So I turned the job down because they didn't give me a choice of at least a list of guys I could work with on it. So that was that, and it was around that time, on the *Hearts of Darkness* sequel, I was offered *Captain America*.

MM: But, before that, you did an issue of *X-Men*. You mentioned that Bob Harras was talking to you about possibly doing the *X-Men*, too? When was that?

RON: It was earlier. Actually, it was the first time I worked with Mark Waid. It was on *Uncanny X-Men* #321. Everybody wanted to work on *X-Men* at that time, and I actually was offered *X-Men* while I was on *Ghost Rider*.

MM: You didn't take it?

RON: Oh, I did, but Bob Harras had a habit of changing his mind every other day. Which is understandable, he was the editor-in-chief, and those were his big books. My *Ghost Rider* book was the very first Marvel book that got

the Photoshop coloring. It was very exciting to see, and I remember Bob coming up to me at the San Diego convention. He walked up to me, put his arm around me, and asked me if I was happy on *Ghost Rider*. I said, "Well, why?" He said, "How would you feel about doing *Uncanny X-Men*?" And I was like, "Oh, of course! Are you kidding me?" And then he was like, "All right, well, I'll be talking with you in about a week or so." Then I never heard from Bob again. I was going to the city, to Marvel, and I would see him, but he was sort of avoiding me. [laughs] I guess over that week he had other people in mind, or maybe somebody said, "I don't want to use Garney. I want Madureira," or whoever it might have been, and he just changed his mind about it.

MM: Were you happy with that issue of *Uncanny X-Men*? Because there were, like, three inkers in there.

RON: No, it was two: Dan Green and Joe Rubinstein.

MM: Isn't Tim Townsend's name on it?

Previous Page: Morbius drinking blood from a decapitated rat wasn't exactly what Ron wanted to draw. *Ghost Rider* was a little more to his liking, especially when the Hulk and Spider-Man were brought in for guest appearances, but he was ready to move on to something more upbeat. **Above:** A two-page spread from Ron's fill-in issue of *Uncanny X-Men* #321, plotted by Scott Lobdell and scripted by Ron's soon-to-be partner Mark Waid.

Hulk, Vengeance, X-Men™ and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Part 3: The Good Soldier

MM: How did you hear *Captain America* was available?

RON: Ralph Macchio called me up and asked me if I would be interested. He said they were revamping a bunch of books, and he gave me a choice of a couple of them. It was *Avengers*, something else, and then *Cap*.

MM: *Avengers*, *Thor*, and *Cap*. Those were his books, at the time.

RON: Yeah, I think that's what it was. As soon as he said "*Cap*," I just had it in my head. I knew what I could do with it. It was one of those things where I started having those flashes. That was probably the first time where somebody offered me a character that I started getting that flash in my head of what it would look like. So I went with that, because that's basically your artistic instincts speaking to you. Right away I said, "I'll do *Cap*." Then he said, "We're really looking for a new face on *Cap*. We want to give an actual look to him." And I said, "I know exactly what to do." And that's when I did that promo piece of him running over the city, over London. It was a shot of Steve Rogers on the left, and then *Cap* over on the right, running over a cityscape.

MM: This was before Mark Waid was brought on board, right?

RON: I think so. But I had worked with Waid on that *X-Men* issue, and I liked the story he'd written, so when I was told it was him, I was happy about it.

MM: How did this collaboration start? Did they introduce you guys to one another?

RON: Me and Mark? Yeah, I went in to the city for a meeting to meet Mark.

MM: Was there any awkwardness in having Mark Gruenwald [*Captain America's* writer for the previous ten years] present in those meetings?



RON: No, not really. Mark had been on the book for so long, and I think even he knew that it needed—I'm sure he wasn't happy, because he loved that character. I know he wasn't. It's a bittersweet thing. But I think he knew. I got pretty friendly with Mark before he died, and I talked to him a little bit about it. I think he had a sensible head about it. He had been on it a long time, and it was time to move on.

MM: What sort of approach did you have to *Cap*? Did you start looking at World War II films or looking at all the Kirby work?

RON: Not at all. The funny thing is that I did not look at one single person's work when I was on *Cap*. I had in my head what to do with it. It just came to me as soon as it was offered

to me. I could see it. I take that back. There was a European artist named Enrico Marini who did a book called *Gypsy*. I loved the faces and the way the guy drew, and I remember thinking what a great *Cap* this guy would do. So, once I got on *Cap*, I did look at that book a few times and think, "Wow, that's a great face." But as far as the style and everything else, I had in my head what I wanted to do with it.

Below: Cap revived and ready for action. *Captain America* #445, page 12.
Inks by Scott Koblish.
Next Page: Cover art for *Captain America* #447.

Captain America™ and ©
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MM: You wanted to make it cartoonier than what you had done before?

RON: It was sort of a backlash. I wanted to do something completely fresh and different than everything that was out there. I think I'd been trying too hard to follow in everyone else's footsteps. Everybody was doing Jim Lee riffs, and probably it was my artistic ego, I finally got sick of that. I went to the mountaintop and said, "Be yourself and stop aping everyone else. Stop trying to be Andy Kubert or Jim Lee or Marc Silvestri," or whoever it was who I might have been experimenting with at that time. "Just be yourself."

MM: So you were reacting to all the books of the time.

RON: It was such an eyesore. The shelves were flooded with Jim Lee clones, and it was awful. Literally, my eyes hurt from looking at some of that stuff because it was so third-generation Scott Williams.

MM: You wanted your art cleaner.

RON: Exactly. I just went the opposite way that everybody was going, because I just couldn't stand it. I wanted to have fun with it, and I wanted it to look clean and be easy to read and easy to follow. With most of the books I would open up, I couldn't tell what was going on. And if I can't read it, I can't imagine the average reader can read it. So that was always my focus: clean, clear storytelling.

My whole thought about *Cap* was giving it a fresh sense of adventure, where we travel to different places—just have it be something different. I loved European art at the time. There were those large format books, and the compositions and the storytelling in those were so easy to read and so pleasing. That's sort of the way I wanted to go with it.

MM: The first two storylines came from your first conversations with Mark?

RON: Yeah, pretty much. I sat down with Mark, and he asked me, "So, what do you want to do with it? Where do you want to go? What do you want to draw?"—that kind of thing. *True Lies* had come out recently, and I liked the idea of secret agents. I liked James Bond. That was always fun for me. And I said to him, "Well, you know, I would love it if we could do a *True Lies* sort of secret agent character, where he gets to go on adventures outside the US. Maybe not have him just be about the US, but he's defending the US by going on these covert missions and working for the President or what have you. And then maybe he gets extricated, somehow, and he has to clear his name."

MM: Which was more fun to draw, "Operation: Rebirth" or "Man Without a Country"?

RON: The more fun for me to draw was the second story, "Man Without a Country." I loved the sense of adventure of it. The first one was more of a traditional Cosmic Cube/Red Skull story. Don't get me wrong, I loved it, but "Man Without a Country" spawned



Part 4: Branching Out in Art and in Life

MM: I wanted to ask about your artistic influences—your top five guys. Who are the guys that get you going?

RON: The top five? I'm just thinking about the people who had influence on me in my life, when I was very young. It's a wide range, but I remember being influenced by Norman Rockwell—the stories he told in his paintings, those *Saturday Evening Post* covers—even though he was just churning them out to make money. Sometimes the artists themselves aren't really aware of their own brilliance, and I think he was like that. I was very affected by the realism, and the caricature within the faces, and the stories that were told inside of just one composition.

My grandmother was a painter, and I remember as a very young boy sitting transfixed looking at, feeling the mood of the oil paint, the light that she used. That was very influential, because I ended up wanting to be a painter, and I was for a long time.

MM: Was this just a hobby for her?

RON: It was her hobby, but she had art showings—gallery shows and stuff. Leading from that into comic books, John Buscema was probably my biggest influence. Out of all the comic artists I know, right from the get-go, the image that pops into my head is his work. He took Kirby's compositions and really expanded on them—the compositions within the panel, the frame—to create a point of focus. And the way he arranged shapes... I think he even alludes to it in his *How to Draw the Marvel Way* book that he did with Stan Lee about how if you broke down his shapes, how they would work as an

abstract composition. They do, and that's one of the things I found beautiful about his work, not to mention his draftsmanship.

I can remember reading the *Prince Valiant* Sunday strips and being amazed at Hal Foster's work. There are just so many.

MM: Are there any current artists that if you see their name on a book, you'll buy it right away?

RON: There are certain guys that have affected me over the years, like J.R., or Lee Weeks, or, obviously, Mike Mignola. A lot of the same guys most people like. Travis Charest. I'll always buy their stuff.

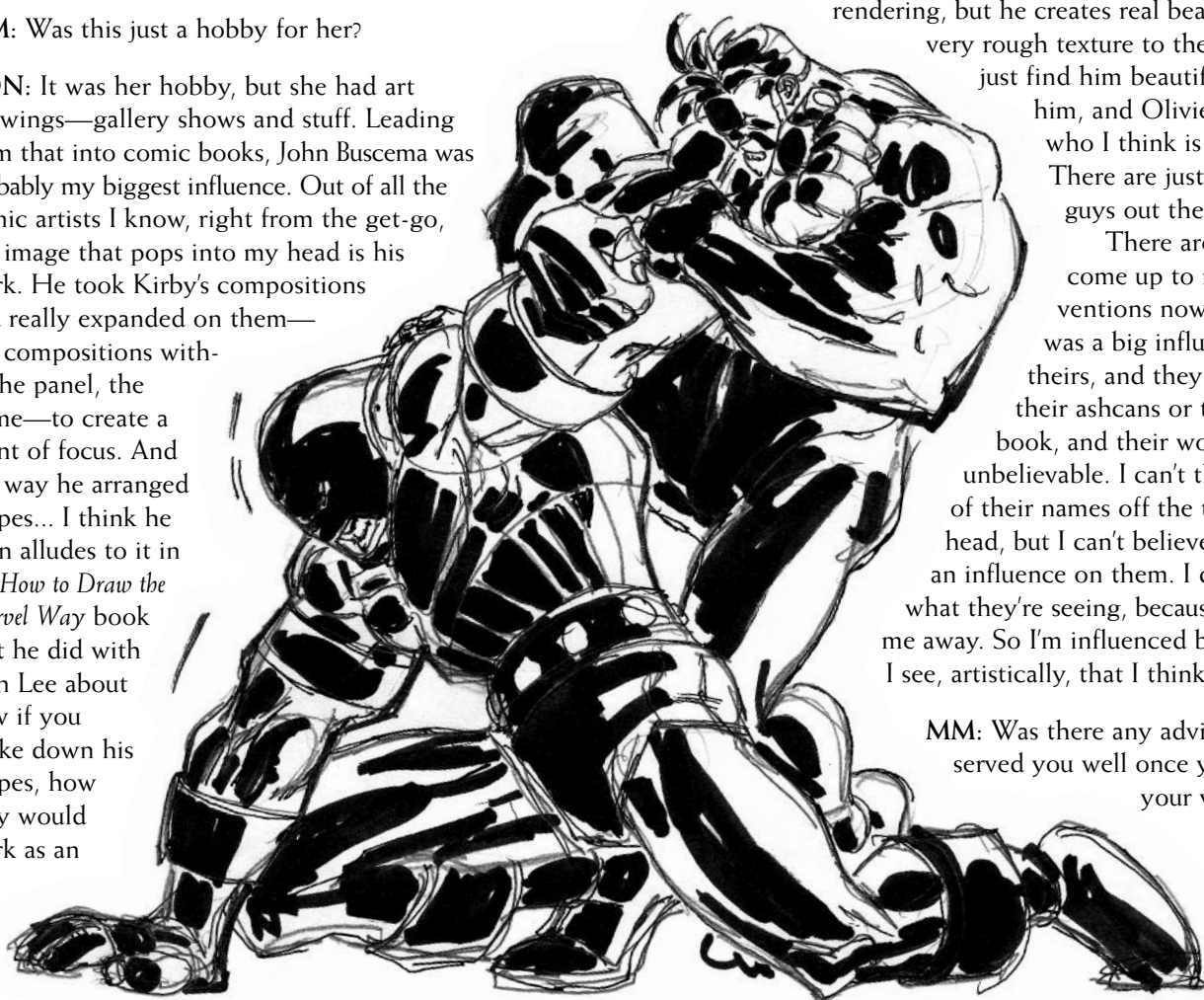
MM: Of the newer artists, is there anybody you're excited about? The guys you see that are working at Marvel now?

RON: Leinil Yu and Olivier Coipel. I love Leinil Yu's work.

It's breathtaking, to me. Some people don't like his rendering, but he creates real beauty with a very rough texture to the work, and I just find him beautiful. So there's him, and Olivier Coipel, who I think is brilliant... There are just so many guys out there.

There are guys who come up to me at conventions now who say I was a big influence of theirs, and they show me their ashcans or their sketchbook, and their work is so unbelievable. I can't think of any of their names off the top of my head, but I can't believe I could be an influence on them. I don't know what they're seeing, because they blow me away. So I'm influenced by everything I see, artistically, that I think is good.

MM: Was there any advice that served you well once you got on your way?



RON: I've always asked questions. I tend to sponge a lot of little things. Like, I can remember John Romita, Sr. being at Marvel, and I had a *Ghost Rider* cover I was working on. I brought it into his office and asked him, "What's wrong with this figure?" He drew one little line around the kneecap of Ghost Rider's bent leg that changed the whole thing and fixed it. It was just one little change. And I never forgot that. I still use that little thing in my work. It's amazing how much you can actually learn if you just ask the right questions. If you're open to the criticism, the stuff will make sense, and you'll retain it.

MM: And you never stopped wanting to learn. You kept at it.

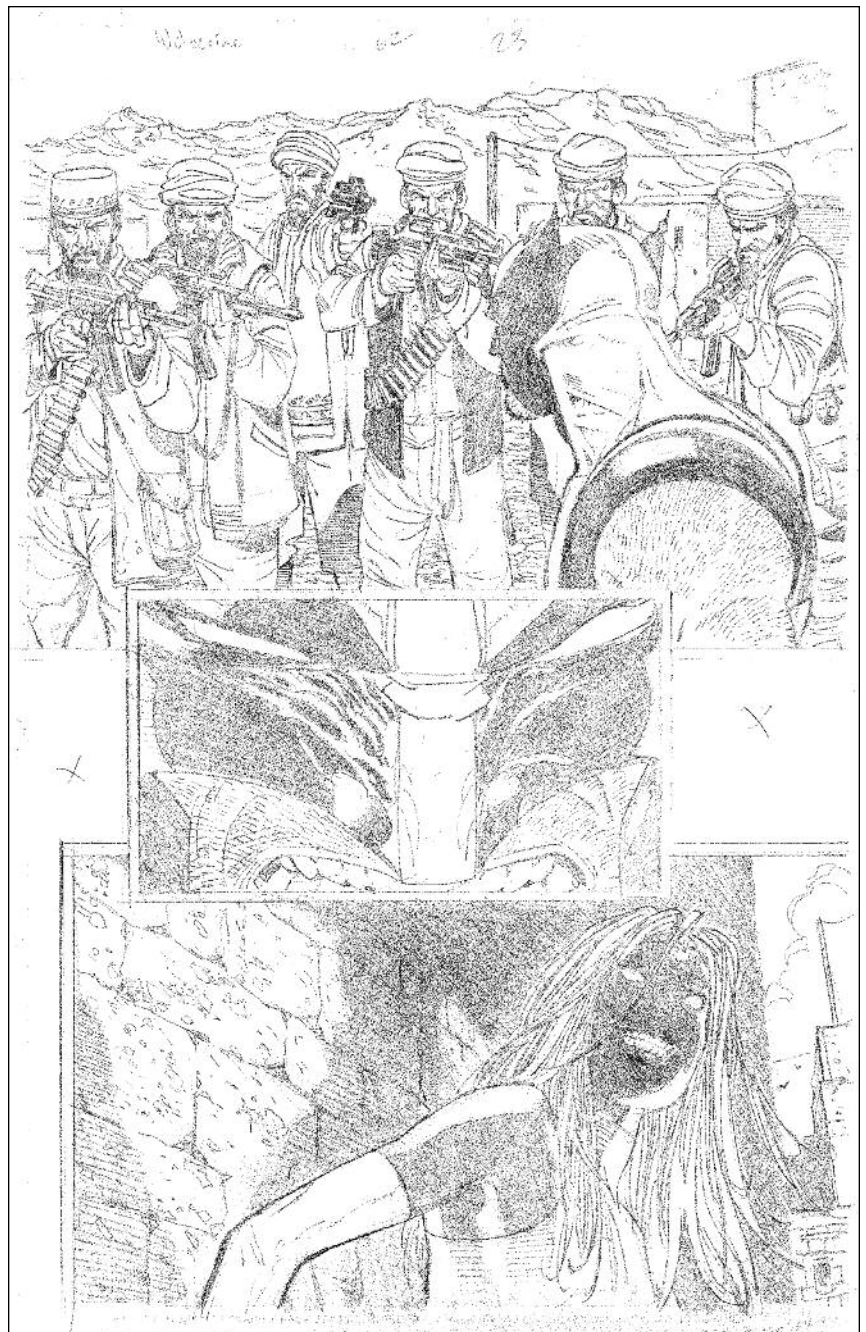
RON: Yeah, I would pick up drawing books. There's a book on anatomy by Mayberry Brown that's just phenomenal. I learned all about S curves, and the form, and the way rib cages work—stuff like that. I love that stuff. I could look at those figure drawings all day long, as opposed to a comic book even. I just love the natural drawing—it's so classic and impressive—of those figures and the way they sit. Because it's very tricky the way gravity works, and the way gravity pulls your ribcage down, or bends your bones, or the way drapery falls. Stuff like that, to me, is fascinating.

MM: Do you have time to go to the malls and see how people move about?

RON: I used to do that. I used to go to the tops of buildings and draw the streets and the people, and go to parking garages and sit on the edge and just watch people and draw them. I would always take a sketchbook on the train with me, and I would draw people on the train, their faces and heads. It helps. What you're doing in those moments is creating a catalog in your brain. As you observe you start taking snapshots with your mind and with your sketchbook. You create a catalog, and the more you do it, the more you can use it as reference, and it starts to come out on its own and you don't have to reference so much.

MM: And it's good for picking up trends and fashion, too, right?

RON: Yeah, yeah. That's actually a weakness of mine, keeping up with that stuff. There are guys that do that stuff very well, like Chris Bachalo, who's very trendy and a terrific artist.



MM: Your *Wolverine* books looked pretty cool and modern.

RON: Well, I made a concerted effort.

MM: Back in the '80s, the way some of those comics were illustrated, they could have just as well been drawn in the '60s. There wasn't a lot of effort being made to keep up with the times.

RON: Well, the new guys that were coming into the business at the time changed that. Guys like Chris Bachalo who some editor took a risk on and gave them work, who had a more insightful, detailed, contemporary view of the world in their art.

Previous Page: In this rough sketch of Hulk and Juggernaut for *Hulk* #6, Ron grouped the figures into a powerful triangle shape.

Above: We see Afghans on the news every night, so when a story is set in that environment (as was *Wolverine* #62) it is important to research the clothing worn there.

Hulk, Juggernaut, Mystique, Wolverine TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.



Above: Ron's breakdowns, which measure at about 5" x 8", and the finished art for page 17 of *JLA* #114. As you can see, the layouts are often tweaked or changed after the breakdown stage.

Next Page: Ron's layouts for *JLA* #115, page 21, shown here at full size. The layouts are a mix of pencil, pen, and marker and will be used as the basis for the finished pencils.

JLA and all related characters TM and © DC Comics.

MM: Even Todd McFarlane had a little bit of that.

RON: Yeah, sure. Todd's great. Actually, speaking of John Romita, I remember having a conversation with John Romita about Todd McFarlane, and us both agreeing that we liked his work. Todd was getting slammed for his lack of draftsmanship, which is fair. He's certainly got his host of problems, but what he brought to the table was far more interesting and he could get away with it, whereas there were other artists who couldn't get away with it because they didn't have what Todd had. What Todd had was a very creative, ingenious sort of view of depicting his artistic language. It was very different, fresh, and very interesting to look at. Yeah, I could look back and pick it all apart, but it was still fun.



MM: He thought outside the box.

RON: Exactly. Exactly. More of an innovator.

MM: Do you think experience has made you faster? There was a comment I read where you said you dwell on things more now than before.

RON: I wouldn't say I'm faster. I *could* be. When push comes to shove, I'm faster than I used to be because I can draw better.

MM: But you dwell more now on what you're doing?

RON: Well, I'll get to a point where I do a breakdown of something, and it's a slow build-up. I sit there, and I look at it, and then I put it aside, and I go ahead and start doing breakdowns on other pages. I don't do one page at a time because I can't. If I muscle through one page, there'll be so much wrong with it when I go back to it that it'll drive me crazy that I spent all that time on it without seeing all the things that needed to be fixed. So what I do is I get the breakdown done, and the basic shell of the drawing that I need to work on, and I put it aside. Then I go back to it a day or two later, and I start spotting all the mistakes. It could be that I'm looking at a



Interlude: Friends and Colleagues

MM: What sort of an initial impression did Ron leave with you the first time you met/talked to him?

TOM PALMER: We met at a Marvel Christmas party in 1992 which was held at the historic Players Club in Gramercy Park at a time when you could have that sort of thing in a small venue. I don't remember how we started talking. He was new at Marvel and was meeting everyone at the party, but we hit it off immediately and have remained friends to this day. I suppose we're kindred spirits in some way, although we have different backgrounds.

DAN PANOSIAN: I met Ron at one of the Greenberg Comic Book Conventions at the Penta in New York City in 1991. I doubt he remembers our first encounter. I had just started working for both Marvel and DC Comics and noticed this guy just slightly older than me behind the Marvel Comics booth wearing a really nice Marvel Comics leather jacket. He was signing comic books and I thought, "I wanna be where he is! I want that jacket and I wanna be behind that booth!" Ron's a big, handsome guy with a natural charisma, so it was hard to miss him. Once I took a look at his work I was really impressed. For a young guy, he drew a lot like a mixture of Mike Zeck and Gene Colan! At least that's how I perceived it at the time.

TIM TOWNSEND: I first met Ron back in... oh... 1994 I believe it was. He and I shared the same close group of friends, but up until that point we hadn't crossed paths. I was attending San Diego Comic-Con with Dan Panosian and Jeff Johnson. Ron was there as well, and soon thereafter the planets aligned and the mountains shook. I'm sure most people have experienced meeting someone and having things just "click." This is how it was with Ron. Dan, Ron, Jeff, and I all share the same bizarre sense of humor and penchant for spectacle. Translation: We liked to have fun and raise hell.

I vividly recall on the second day or so that weekend walking through the lobby of the Marriott with the guys. Suddenly we began to hear this beautiful piano music. As I turned to look around I immediately noticed that Ron was no longer with us. There he was, seated at the grand piano off to the side of the lobby, tickling the ivories and doing it well. Here was this big, burly, hell-raising party-animal turned sensitive musician. As soon as he'd started, he popped up and fell right back in to step, as if it had never happened. That was the moment I realized there was a lot more to this guy than met the eye.

MM: How has his artwork matured over the years?

JASON AARON: Ron is an all-around great artist. He can draw anything. But in particular, I think he's one of the best at interpreting action scenes. When he draws people fighting, I buy it. I buy every movement of it. Whether the fighters have super-strength or unbreakable claws or are just a couple of Joes off the street. No matter the circumstances, Ron draws a world I can believe. And one that I can lose myself in as a reader.

TOM: I don't recall the timeline or issue numbers, but we were first connected on *Moon Knight*, which was something I was working on. Ron came in and penciled an issue which I inked, and my first impression was that he was an experienced comic artist. I'm not sure if it was his first assignment



Part 5: The Real Ron Garney Shines Through

MM: What type of music did you play, and what instrument?

RON: I think the first thing I ever played was guitar back in fourth grade—just messing around—then I picked up drums. By the time I got to high school, I started playing guitar more. And from guitars you learn some bass, too, so over the years I've been playing all those instruments.

MM: When were you in the band?

RON: I had a band back in 2000 with Howard Porter. We worked all day on comics, and he was married, but I wasn't, so we just got together on Wednesday nights and started jamming together. From there it just kept going, and the next thing you know we were playing venues all over the county. We were the hired band for a couple of clubs every month, so it was amazing how fast we were growing. We recorded a couple of CDs, too.

MM: What happened?

RON: Personalities. It was like one of those VH1 *Behind the Music* things, except on a smaller scale. There were too many personalities and personal conflicts going on. A few days before a gig the drummer and bass player quit the band to start up a death metal band. We liked doing STP [Stone Temple Pilots] and Nirvana, The Beatles, all kinds of stuff, but they wanted to do death metal exclusively, so that fell apart.

MM: Do you still play these days?

RON: I still play, and I have a baby grand piano in my house. Most days I'll sit down and tinker with it. The nerves in my first two left hand fingers got injured doing jujitsu, so I can't really play guitar as well as I used to.

MM: Did you guys try to get a recording deal?

RON: It was going in that direction. To be perfectly frank, I thought we had a rare collection of talented guys. We had a lead singer who had a lot of stage presence, and he had a powerful voice that could project well. And the drummer was one of the few drummers I'd ever met who could actually play off sheet music for drums. The bass player was a young kid, he was a prodigy. He plays with very established musicians now, and he's only in his 20s. It's amazing how musically talented he is.

MM: Do you read music?

RON: I can read some, yeah. I don't, as a general rule, play off music sheets. I can tell what notes are, what they mean and everything, but I could never sit down

and play the piano off sheet music. It would take me a long time to actually make the connection from my eyes to the keys; it would take a lot of practice for me, because I just don't do it normally. I did take a semester of beginner lessons in college, but at that point I had been playing around with it on my own for a few years. For the most part, I taught myself.





MM: It's different when you learn by ear than when they're trying to teach you to read music.

RON: Yeah, the course was good because it taught me all the basics: where the notes were and how to look at the keys and read them, what the sharps were, and the flats, and chords, chord structure. I love the piano probably the most out of any instrument. I love the sound of it.

MM: On a podcast, I heard Simone Bianchi was a little disappointed when he worked with Warren Ellis because he just got scripts, and not a chance to collaborate with the writer personally. Do you find that's usually the case these days, that you can't get that access?

RON: I can't speak for all of them, but over the last bunch of years most of the writers I've worked with I haven't even spoken to. I do speak with Jason Aaron, which is good.

But even there it's not like I'm saying, "Listen, I want to draw this, I want to draw that." But at least with Jason I'll make a couple of suggestions as far as panel count or something like that just for my own sake. I didn't talk to Judd Winick, or maybe I talked to him once. With Straczynski, I worked with his scripts for over a year and I never even got one email from the guy saying he liked it or didn't like it or anything, and I found that kind of offensive. I'm not saying we have to talk every week, but at least acknowledge the guy who's spending hours and hours and hours on your script. I worked with Jeph Loeb, and I remember him calling me up and talking to me, asking me what I wanted to draw. He told me he was going to structure the script to be a lot of double-page spreads, because he loved my double-page spreads. Which I was flattered by, it was very nice of him to say. But most of the time I don't really speak much with the writers.

Previous Page: Ron didn't talk much with Judd Winick during their brief collaboration on *Green Arrow*. Breakdowns for page 4 of issue #55.

Above: Ron did confer with Jeph Loeb when working on the *JLA: Our World at War* one-shot. Jeph really must have liked Ron's double-page spreads, because he wrote in eight of them into the 38-page story. Inks by Mark Morales.

Black Lightning, Flash, Green Arrow, Green Lantern™ and © DC Comics.

Below and Next Page:

Ultimate Captain America isn't your father's Captain America. He's more cynical and will do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Captain America™ and ©
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MM: He works to the strengths of the artist.

RON: That's what I've heard. I didn't really talk to him too much about it after that. Once or twice. I had my head up my ass back then, too. I actually had a good relationship with some guys like that early on in my career. I worked with Terry Kavanagh on *Moon Knight*, and Howard Mackie a little bit. That's back when it was plot-first. And with Mark Waid it was plot-first, and we talked a lot and came up with some good ideas. And he utilized a lot of them. But Mark was good like that. He would call up, "Hey, what do you want to draw this month?" And, usually, based on that, it would give him ideas.

MM: It's a creative step that gets the artist excited about the book.

RON: Yeah, you can get good ideas and story ideas from these collaborations, but a lot of the writers now have become control freaks. Obviously, it's their craft, so I understand in one sense. But, in another sense, I don't, because we, as artists, spend the most time with the script. I spend up to six to eight weeks sometimes on a script, so I'm, in the long run, much closer to the story than they are in some ways, at least visually. It's a collaborative effort, but a lot of these guys don't want to approach it that way. They want to just send their scripts off, and they don't want to make changes. The artists have become more like work horses, and I don't like that. I find that a little bit offensive.

MM: What was the appeal to come back to Cap with *Ultimate Captain America*?

RON: It wasn't Steve Rogers, exactly. It wasn't the same. It's a different universe, so his personality is a little different, so that was fun. I was coming right out of *Wolverine*, a gritty title, understanding that this Cap was a little bit grittier, so it made sense to me, but I also love the character of Captain America. He's fun to draw. And also working with Jason, a guy I worked well with, on that character was an idea I liked, because I knew I would have fun with Jason's scripts.

MM: Were you conscious of making this Cap different from past interpretations?

RON: I don't know. I draw him the way I draw him, and if it works, it works. Visually he doesn't have to be very different. I made his hairstyle a little different. I didn't give him quite the military cut. His hair is a little longer, and I have it styled differently than the military cut because it's a different universe. But the way he looks and holds himself is still the same, it's just his attitude that's different. The only way I can describe it is that the way he handles situations is probably the way a real soldier would. When he kicks Bruce Banner out of the helicopter in *Ultimates* with Hitch and Millar, that's something Steve Rogers in the Marvel universe probably wouldn't do. This guy is more of a hard-nosed soldier.

MM: When they announced the mini-series at New York Comic-Con 2010, they were promoting the fact you were coming back to Cap.



RON: Yeah, I wasn't there for the panel, but I heard that people were getting excited. That was a nice feeling. I would have liked being there when they announced it to see the reaction.

MM: What do you think the future of the industry is? Are you going to do your creator-owned book?

RON: Yeah, I'm going to do a creator-owned book at some point, maybe with Jason, maybe not. We've been talking about this thing we want to do together for a while, so I'm hoping that gets done. I like the idea.

MM: Looking to the future, do you still see yourself doing comics?

RON: Well, I obviously want to do creator-owned stuff. I do have other ideas for where I want my life to go. But I'm sure I'll be drawing comics for a long time. I don't know what the future holds, I don't know what my future projects are at this point, and I don't know where the industry's headed. Sales have consistently dropped. The technology keeps changing and

growing, so it's hard to predict whether printed comics are going to die or not. It's hard to say how each generation is going to react, and what it's going to be like in 20 years.

MM: What do you think of digital comics?

RON: I love the motion comics. I think those look really, really cool. I haven't seen that with anything I've done yet, but I would love to see it. To hear it and to see it actually performing in front of you, it's the next best thing to watching a movie. I love the idea of that. And the digital comics are fine. It's a cool idea to be able to get one on your iPad, to be able to download it and flip through it right there. I'm sure that's the wave of the future. Personally, I love seeing the printed version and having it on a shelf. I don't know if that will ever lose its appeal. Not for me, it won't. I'll always love the idea of having something on a shelf, and being able to pick it up and read it again and again. On the iPad, it's a colder experience. You can't just look at it on the shelf and go, "Oh, I want to read

that again." It's on a computer harddrive somewhere. As people's attention spans get smaller and smaller, the idea of an application comic like that is more appealing, but I don't think printed comics will ever lose their appeal.

MM: How did you start working with Jason Keith? Was he the first person to give your pencils the digital treatment?

RON: No, Matt Milla was doing my covers. It started when I was the cover artist on *Spider-Man*. At first I was inking them, but when I got to "Back in Black" I really wanted a much grittier view artistically, because of what *Spider-Man* was going through. I thought the roughness of the pencils would make his emotional world a little more con-

vincing, and Matt Milla was very nicely coloring those. I liked the effect, and when I got to do "Get Mystique," I made the suggestion, "Why don't you just color my pencils?"

MM: You didn't get any resistance?

RON: No, not really. Marvel was supportive of it. I think they've become more supportive over the years of artists' sensibilities and how

they want to grow, artistically, and I think that's in large part because of Quesada being an artist himself. And maybe because they liked what they saw in the *Spider-Man* covers.

MM: How does the process work? Does the colorist send you files when he's done so you can look over it?

RON: I scan the pencils in and I make some adjustments to the darkness. I do leave him some room to make adjustments—not a whole lot—on the lightness of the pencils. Then I try to clean it up as much as I can and leave the rest to him. He sends me the colored piece, and then I make correction notes. Sometimes I love what he does and don't have any, and then other times I see things that probably affect me differently when I look at them and aren't what I'm thinking in my head of how it should be. And then there are times when I look at something, say I'm not crazy about it, and then it grows on me, and I change my mind about it. So it's all a process.



Part 6: Storytelling and the Creative Process

MM: Schedule-wise, how do you start your day, in terms of when you're working on a book?

RON: Well, in general I try to structure my day like a regular job. I get up at 5:30 a.m. or so, and with kids it's been different, but over the years my normal schedule has been to get up early, have breakfast, walk the dog, and then sit down and work until mid-day, walk the dog again, have some lunch, and then work until three or four. I take the rest of the afternoon off and go to the gym or whatever I want to do to just relax for a while, and then I work for a few hours at night. I still try to keep to that schedule. I like working at night—my drawing comes out a lot easier—but I try as best I can to get up and start early in the morning. If I wait too long, like, let's say 9:00 or 10:00 rolls around, I tend to be very unproductive, so I need to start very early. I take my breaks throughout the day, and then I work at night for a couple of hours. Even if it's for just two hours, as long as I get some night work in, it's good.

MM: You don't do late nights anymore?

RON: No, I don't pull all-nighters anymore. I gave that up because it was really unhealthy. It was killing me, and nobody really gave a crap—nobody really understood that you would be doing that. The editors don't care that you're pulling all-nighters, they just care that you get the work in. But you're pulling all-nighters, trying to be a good soldier, and all it does is kill you slowly. So I made the promise to myself that I won't do that anymore. Nobody's worth that, no company, nothing. Nothing's worth your health and well-being. So if I don't get it done, then too bad, y'know? You'll have to adjust, because I'm not going to make those kinds of sacrifices anymore. I did it a lot early on in my career, and it took too much out of me, so I won't do it anymore.

MM: How many pages do you set yourself as a goal for a day's work?

RON: I try to get a page done a day. What I tend to do is work like a production line. Like, right now I have 15 pages of layouts that I've gotten done in the course of a couple of weeks, just trying to get all the storytelling on the boards, and get it all worked out to the point where I'm happy with what it looks like and how it reads. I can't do one page at a time, so I'll go through the 15, and I'll read through them and keep adjusting them until it gets to the point where I can read it and it's interesting to me and it works. Once I'm happy with those pages, I go back and I do the tight penciling. Once I have everything laid out—the figures are all in place, the compositions are all in place, the storytelling's in place—then I do all the tight work. That always comes at the tail end. It's always a push the last couple of weeks to get the tight penciling done.

MM: Are you working in your own office separate from the rest of the house?

RON: Nah, I have an office above my garage. It's at the end of the house, but it's like Grand Central in here. My kids are always running in and out, getting their fingers into stuff. [laughs] It's definitely been a challenge trying to keep my productivity level up. It's definitely gone down over the last few years, since I have a three-and-a-half-year-old, a one-and-a-half-year-old, and an 11-year-old; the productivity has definitely gone down, and I do the best I can to keep working through that. I

don't want to be the type of guy who puts a lock on my door. I want my kids to always have access. I never want to have my door closed to my children. But it's challenging.

MM: Do you usually have a TV on, or music?

RON: Yeah. I didn't used to. It just depends on my mood. Sometimes I put music on, but more often I have the TV on for background noise, because sometimes when you're alone in a room with your thoughts, your drawing, that drives you a little nuts. Your personality has a tendency to over-think things, especially if you're a deep person, and





most artists I know are. If you're left in a room all day by yourself, just thinking, without any distraction, you can go crazy. You read into things, or things that bother you become magnified—they bother you even more. I've found that it's best to have some kind of background noise to distract me from myself. You can't be alone in a room by yourself in a career like this. It's just not mentally or emotionally healthy, and that's part of what contributed to my somewhat of a downfall at the end of the '90s, early 2000s, where I had to get out and stop working for a while, because I was cooped up too much.

Now it's different with a family and a dog and the distractions and all. I rescued myself from that abyss. And it's a much better career for it. I do much better work, and I'm emotionally healthier—mentally, spiritually—if you want to call it that, and it's definitely better. It's a good career to have if you have a family, but if you're by yourself living in the hills somewhere, it's the worst career you can have, because it sucks too much of your life away.

MM: Before you do your breakdowns, how long does it take you to soak in the script, to start visualizing the story?

RON: I tend to read through it, peruse it a little bit. I don't read it. I have to read it in layers almost. I look through it and get an overall feel for what it is I'm going to have to accomplish. And there are things in it that I might get intimidated by for the amount of drawing I'm going to have to do, so actually I have to prepare myself for that, and it takes me a week or so to get into a rhythm between each issue.

As I start laying it out, I have to go through and figure out what shots work. It's not easy. You think you might have a shot of a doctor giving a kid a serum injection, and it's just, how do you that fit that into the page? Should it be a big panel? Should it be a small panel? Should it be vertical? Horizontal? There are so many options. Square? Could I do it in a circle? And how is it going to fit into the composition of the rest of the page? How am I going to fit all these elements together to make it flow? It's a real craft, this comic book stuff, and it's really not just about laying panels down and drawing in the panels. The panels all have to work together, to unify, to create a theme all the way through. It's a daunting task sometimes.

MM: Do you sometimes think, "Give me something to do here. Give me something interesting"?

Previous Page: How could you lock this little guy out of your office? There are definite advantages and disadvantages with working from home, and kids fall into both categories.

Above: Breakdowns are a quick way to get down ideas, and they often get tweaked before the artist is satisfied with the storytelling. Here are two different takes on page 15 of *JLA* #103. Ron would add one more small panel at the start of the middle tier of the layout on the right in the final pencils.

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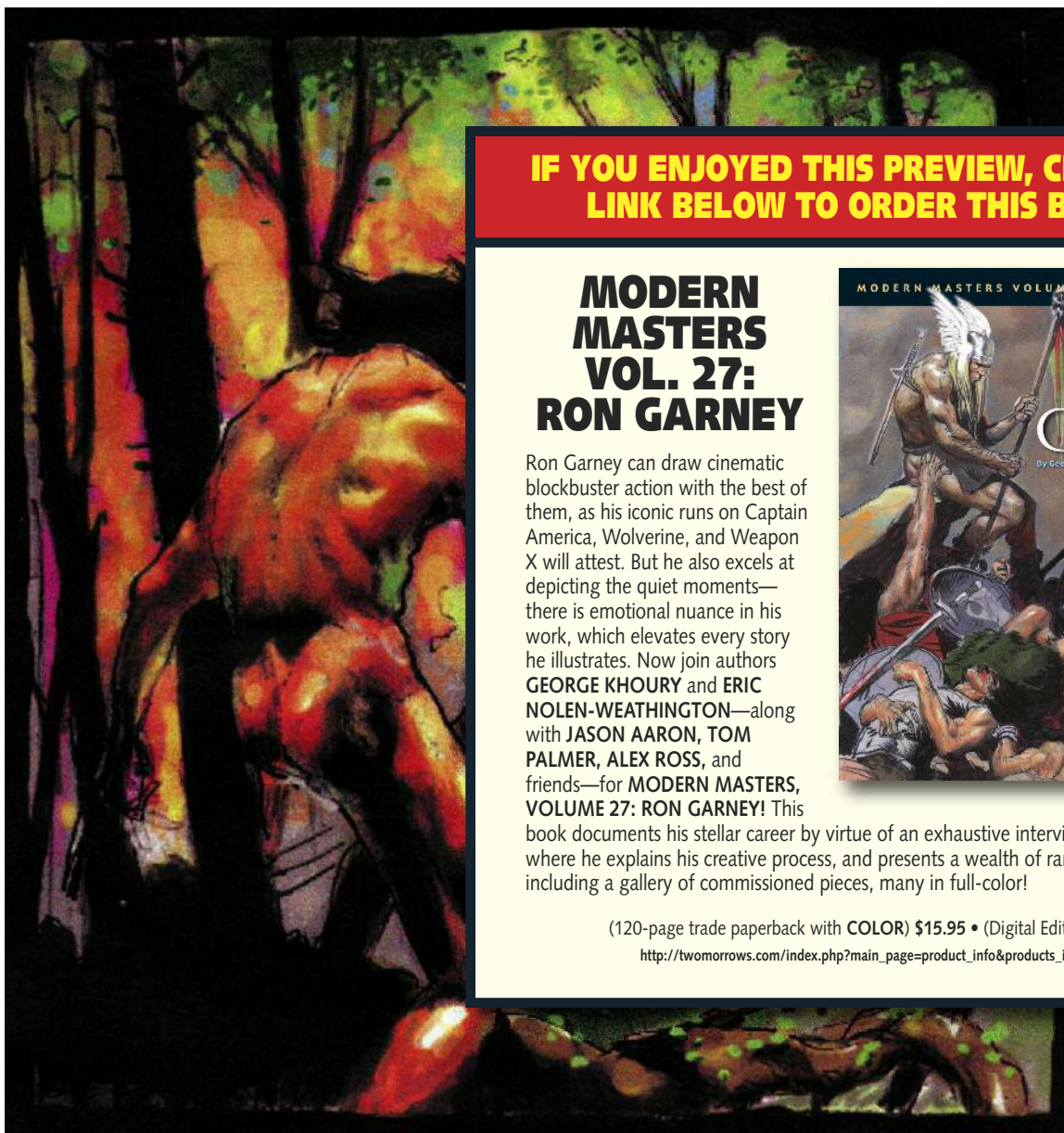
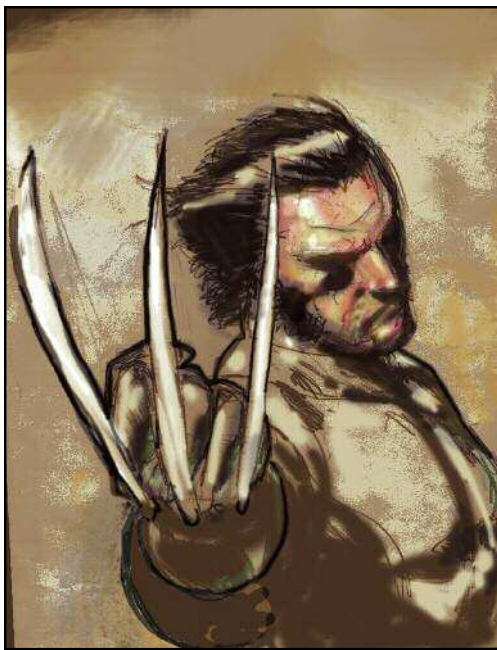
Ron Garney



Art Gallery



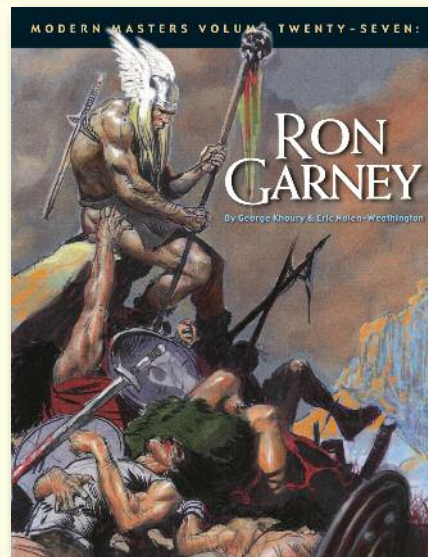




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