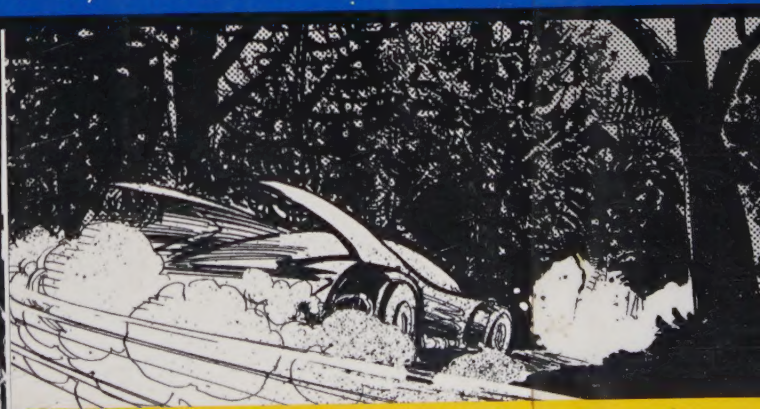
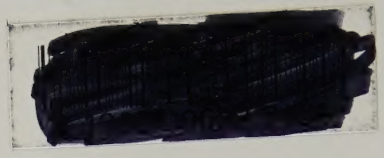
The DC Comics Guide to INKING Comics

KLAUS JANSON
Introduction by Frank Miller





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Dedicated to my editor Steve Korté, for his unending patience.

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INTRODUCTION

Drawing is a physical act. It isn't pecking away at a keyboard like I'm doing right now, trying to arrange a fixed, immutable 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks into coherent sequence. No. When you draw, your every move is a first-time event. Something the world has never seen before, big or small, for better or worse.

Drawing is a physical act. Sure, your mind must be fully engaged. You must avoid distractions. But the same could be said of a boxer or a basketball player.

And just as the point guard has to keep the basketball moving down the court, dribbling, bobbing and weaving, the comic book cartoonist should move vigorously across the page. Your reader is moving through a story, not lingering in a museum. Use your wits and your smarts, but don't dither. Use them now.

Make a mistake? Fix it. Do something just plain stupid? Do it over. But keep moving. The reader will.

Drawing is a physical act. If you're drawing for reproduction, it's a series of physical acts, the most purely sensual of which is inking. When it goes well, in those moments a cartoonist lives for, the black hitting the bristol makes the page feel alive.

It's the ink that makes the brick feel ragged, hard and cruel, the ink that makes the flesh seem warm or cold, firm or soft.

As Will Eisner recently said to me, inking is sexy.

Inking is drawing. So draw. Don't just dutifully, painstakingly execute tapered lines somewhere between the eye and the jawbone. Feel the cheekbone those lines are supposed to describe. Drawing is intimate. Tactile. Especially when you're drawing with ink.

As Klaus Janson will point out once I shut up, comic-book penciling and inking are a single craft, separated shortly after birth. It was surely a forced separation, and "inker" has the ring of a false distinction, making this step in cartooning sound purely technical. Nonsense. It's as spontaneous and personal as any other. It's just as much an act of drawing as what we do with the pencil.

So, yeah. A false distinction. An artificial wall, set up to facilitate a factory-style system. Yet the law of unintended consequence can cut either way. Good can come of it.

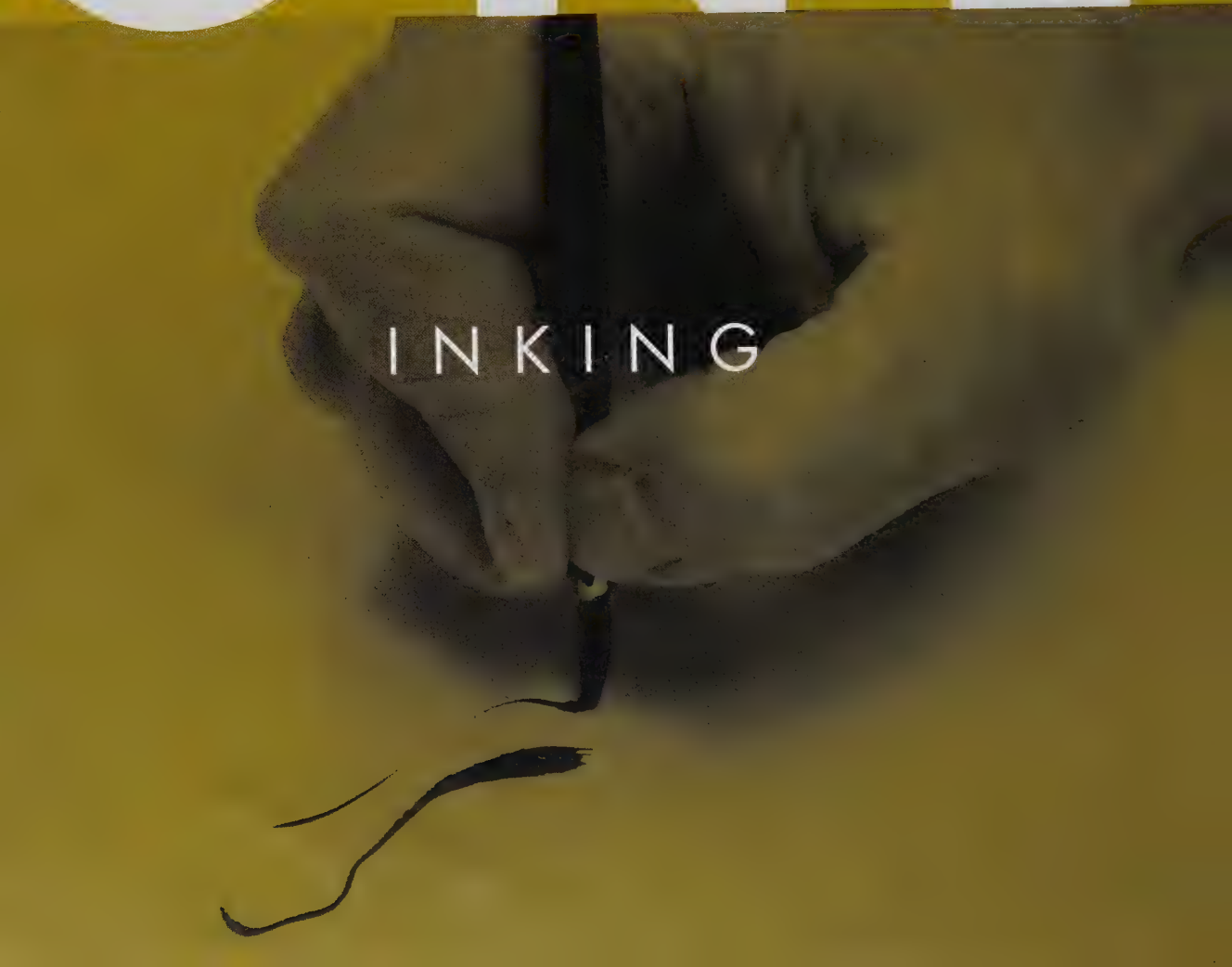
I enjoyed a many-year collaboration with Klaus. I don't think there's a chance either of us was, at that time, capable of anything approaching the punch and verve of our partnership. As Klaus notes, a third artist, neither and both of us, was created in our joyful, monthly game of creative mumblety-peg.

Let Klaus take you through the paces, here. Then go take a brisk walk, or go for a swim, or hit the gym. Get your blood up.

Then come back to your board and attack the page.

Frank Miller
New York City

PART ONE



INKING

Comic book inking is an extremely esoteric and frequently misunderstood art form. It was born out of creative and financial necessity during the earliest days of comic book publishing. As soon as the monetary potential of comic books was realized, publishers naturally made an effort to get as much work out of the talent as possible. The more pages an artist could draw, the more books the publishing houses could print. The more books on the racks, the more profits could be made. Publishers reasoned that they could get two or more pencilled stories from a popular artist in the time it usually took for that same artist to pencil *and* ink one story. Artists also found that their income doubled or tripled as they concentrated just on penciling. It became more efficient and profitable for publishers to hire another artist and pay that person a lower rate to "ink" the pencilled pages. The assembly line method of working that proved so successful with automakers in Detroit found its way into comic book publishing. Comic book inking was born.

The materials needed to create art can often be very rudimentary and inexpensive. In order to draw, the artist needs paper and a pencil. Pen, brush, ink and paper are also affordable and uncomplicated for the artist working in ink. But everyone has probably struggled at some point with the most basic tool of drawing: a pencil. Do not let the simplicity or affordability of these supplies deceive or lull you. Art is very difficult. It demands humility and respect. It also requires a tremendous amount of practice, determination and commitment on the part of the artist. Your ability to achieve an understanding of this craft and your ability to make a living is largely a result of your determination and your will. Talent makes an appearance somewhere. But talent with no drive or hunger is pretty darn useless. The amount of passion and stamina required to become and remain an artist has to last a lifetime. You have to want this more than *anything* else.

ONE
INK AND PAPER

From the first moment we hold an object in our hands, the tools for drawing are always at our disposal. Crayons and coloring books surround us even before we can walk. Pencils are introduced to us long before we enter first grade. To hold a pencil in our hands is as familiar as walking. There's no adjustment required for the artist to use a pencil to draw. The experience and familiarity are already present after years of every day use.

Inking is another experience entirely. Not only is it a discipline that requires new and unfamiliar tools, it also demands we develop a language separate from that of the pencil. A beginner inker requires five items in order to start working: ink, paper, a brush, a pen, and a drawing board. At this early stage of your artistic development, keep the amount of gadgets you purchase to a minimum. Stick to these basic items for now.

INK

Let's start at the beginning with ink. There are several brands and types of ink available on the market. If there are no art stores near you, try the local stationery store or the Internet. One of the criteria for choosing a specific type of ink is the question of how it will interact with the tool you use. For example, Higgins makes a fine product with its Black Magic brand of ink. It is a rich dense black ink that leaves almost no stroke marks on the page. The benefits that are obvious on the paper, however, might become detrimental to the life of your brush and pen. If the ink is too thick, you may have difficulty getting the ink to travel smoothly from the pen to paper. This will greatly interrupt the flow, strength and sweep of your line. If the ink does not interact well with your pen tip, inking becomes impossible.

Thick ink also causes a brush to clog up quicker. It's true that all brushes eventually fall into disrepair, but it is prudent to get as much life out of your brush as possible. For best overall results I recommend trying ink that is not as viscous.

Higgins Black India Ink and Pelikan Drawing Ink are excellent choices that respond very well to both the brush and pen. They are watery enough to flow freely when used with a crowquill, and they also enable a brush to move more gracefully across the page because the drag of the ink on the paper is diminished. As you may have guessed, though, there is a disad-

It's a good idea for a beginner inker to try a variety of inks from different manufacturers.

vantage to these inks. It's almost impossible to get a deep, even black on the page. Because of the ink's lighter viscosity, which benefits the longevity of your pen and brush, the areas which are supposed to be black will instead look like an area of varying grays. The black on your page of artwork needs to be dark and consistent enough to reproduce as black in a comic book. If not, the black area will develop blotches of gray that are too light to reproduce as black and break up in the printed version.

One option is to go over the same areas twice with the same ink to make sure the area gets dark enough. I don't mind doing this because it also allows me to touch up some of the artwork. It can be very time-consuming, though. When there's a deadline looming it may be unwise spending time darkening areas that should have been dark enough on the first pass.

Another option is to try mixing inks to see if you can come up with some combination or formula that works for you. If you take this route, remember to write down the proportions of inks to each other or you will have to repeat the process of experimentation all over again.

You can also mix your dense ink with water. Again, remember to write down your proportions.

One other option is probably the simplest: Use two different types of inks for two separate tasks. I will use the Higgins Black India Ink or Pelikan Drawing Ink for brush and pen work and the Black Magic Ink for filling in large black areas. The quality of printing is so good today that even using the India Ink to fill in the black areas is not much of a risk. But remember that the larger the continuous black area is, the more of a chance that it could break up in print. When in doubt, use the Black Magic and you'll eliminate the possibility of unpleasant surprises.

One of the most useful inking tips I ever learned was not about the *type* of ink but the *amount*. You should always have two bottles of ink on your table. One bottle is used to ink and the other is used to refill the first one. Always keep the inking bottle filled to the rim. The brush and pen only need to dip right below the rim to pick up more than enough ink to perform. This eliminates any question about the level of ink inside the bottle and the probing with a brush or pen that goes on when the artist is uncertain where the ink level is. It also guarantees that the artist has control over the amount of ink being used and speeds up the inking by quite a bit!

Make certain that your bottle of ink is sitting on some kind of disposable surface and not on your desk. There will always be a bit of spillover ink when you work and I'm sure that you don't want that on your table. Use any type of surface that is handy and cheap. I found that plastic ashtrays are very effective, especially the ones that have a lip. As the ink continues to spill over the rim of the bottle, it hardens around the base, welding it to the ashtray. Eventually the bottle and ashtray become one solid form.

Keep the bottle of ink within arm's reach but out of the way. Secure it on a flat immovable surface. If you choose not to place the bottle in an ashtray or small dish, please tape the bottle down! If you work with your table at an angle, do not under any circumstance place your ink bottle on that table. Cap the bottle when you are not using it. I can't guarantee a lot in life, but this I can: unless your ink bottle is secured and out of the way, you will spill it.

This bottle of ink and ashtray holder have turned crusty after many months of use.

PAPER

Non-comic book artists who work in pen and ink consider their choice of paper as important a decision as the ink and tools that they use. The type of paper chosen has a determining role to play in the look of the inked work. Comic book inking is a craft separate from that approach. In comic books, the inker has no say in the choice of paper. And although the penciller can draw on any type of surface he wants, he most often picks from the two types of paper the publishing houses supply. One is a smooth "plate" finish paper that works well with both pen and brush. The other kind of paper supplied by the publishers has a rougher "kid" finish to the surface. Each type of surface has its advantages and limitations.

In this close-up, you can see the wide variety of lines that inking with a brush offers. This includes the dry brush effect, which is impossible to do with a pen.

The rougher paper allows specks of white to shine through even the darkest areas of the page. The valleys within the paper create a unique staccato-like line. The textured paper is also especially good for larger pieces that require a bolder scope and stroke. A brush is the tool of choice for this kind of paper texture. Pen points almost always get caught on the surface irregularities and leave a splatter mark. Detailed penwork is difficult to maintain.

The most appropriate paper for a pen point has always been the smooth paper. This surface allows a pen to glide across the paper uninterrupted, creating a more elegant line. It also allows the brush to leave crisper marks because the surface creates no irregular edges on the line itself. The plate finish allows for a more tightly defined "wet" look while the kid finish is best for "dry brush" effects.

The type of paper chosen is usually for the benefit of the pencils and not the inks. Pencils may look great on a specific surface texture, but it is the inker who needs to be versatile enough to work on whatever different surfaces a penciller may choose, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the pencils. That's part of the job. It's rare for a comic book inker to have any say in the choice of paper, and this is another way that the classic approach of working in pen and ink differs from comic book inking. The notion that an artist would abdicate a decision of such importance is a result of the assembly line approach to comics. I strongly encourage young artists to experiment with as many different types of paper as you can. The varied results will directly influence the work you do for comic books.

Top left: This drawing was inked with a pen. *Bottom left*: This drawing was inked with a brush. Note the differences created by different tools, especially that the drawing inked by pen has more fine line details than the one inked by brush.

TWO
BRUSHES AND PENS

Beginner inkers often engage in a brush vs. pen discussion as if to imply that one is somehow superior to the other. I think this is a natural, if frivolous, debate based on the inability to master one or the other. Any competent and ambitious artist needs to know how to use both. I can't imagine anyone prepared to make a living as an inker entering the comics industry with one hand tied behind his or her back. There is no question about the necessity of learning *all* the different tools and techniques of inking. The choice of which tools to use is up to the individual tastes of the artist. But that decision should not be based on the inability to master a particular tool. That can only limit your artistic language and expression.

BRUSHES

There are many different types and sizes of brushes available. Visit your local art supply shop or go online to order your supplies. Stay away from brushes used for applying acrylics or oils. You can recognize these by their square tip and the longer handles. What you need is a brush small enough to fit in the hand like a pencil or pen. You will find an assortment of companies that manufacture the brushes you need.

It's a good idea to keep a variety of brushes on hand for different inking demands.

Hold the brush sideways and read the printing on the handle. The first thing you will see is a number to indicate the size of the tip; a larger number means a larger tip. The brush number that works best is an individual choice, and experimentation is always necessary. It would be safe to say, however, that a beginner inker should stay below number three. The thicker the brush, the more difficult it is to achieve and maintain a workable point. The next piece of information on the brush handle is the name of the company that produces the brush. Unless you know the history of the manufacturer and their reputation, this information is useless. What you need to know is the quality of their product. A good shortcut to finding the better brushes is to glance at the prices. An unfortunate rule of thumb with brushes: the higher the cost, the better the brush.

Here are two of my favorite brushes. Note that they both have points. A brush without a point is worthless.

Following the company's name is the series number. This simply allows both the customer and the company to easily distinguish among similar looking brushes. The last bits of information on the brush are the type of hair that makes up the head of the brush and the country of origin. Brushes that are made from sable hair are generally the most expensive brushes you can buy. They are also the best. They are very durable and remain responsive far longer than any other type of brush.

The ability of the brush to form and maintain a point is the most important characteristic of an inking brush. If you have an art supply store nearby, take advantage of that proximity. While in the store, make sure that you test the brush for a point before making your purchase. Ask for a cup of water from the art store. Dip your brush into the water, drag and twirl the brush along a surface (your hand, a paper towel, or even your shirtsleeve) to form a point. Tap the brush against your other hand with a quick gentle snap. If the point remains, it is acceptable and appropriate for good ink work. If the hair of the brush opens or can't maintain a point after a few taps, leave it in the store. That means the brush cannot maintain a point during the rigors of inking and is not suitable for your needs. If there is no supply store in your area, you will have to go online or order through a catalogue. When you are unable to test the brush, order small quantities so that you do not waste money on items that may prove useless. Once you have decided you know what brush works best for you, you can reasonably expect some consistency in the product.

My current favorite brush is one produced by the French manufacturer Raphael. It is made of Kolinsky sable that is reputedly the best sable with which to ink. I use the number four almost exclusively when I do brush work. It's a very versatile brush that allows both a delicate and bold line within the same stroke. The Raphael unfortunately comes at a fairly steep price: around twenty dollars a brush depending on the size.

There are good brushes made by other companies that might work for you. Winsor & Newton Series 7 is a high quality brush that is my second choice. I've also used a brush made by Rekab, Series 013, that does pretty well in a pinch. No matter what your ultimate choice will be, do yourself a favor and do not try to save money by buying the cheapest brushes. The inferior quality will guarantee a shorter life span and just cost you more money in the long run. A genius can create art with a stick and pudding, but none of us who set professionalism as a goal should ever be in a position where we fault our tools for unprofessional work.

Once you choose a brush, it's time to begin inking. Learning how to use a brush with any degree of facility requires practice. Inking is a difficult and unforgiving art form. All the mistakes are visible. Any indecision or inability reveals itself. It is quite impossible to learn a craft as difficult as inking without practice. Patience is a necessity at this stage. Brushwork is more difficult than penwork and can take a very long time to master. Once a certain level of practice has taken place (a lot!), we can start to apply our abilities to the pencilled page.

Keeping the equipment you use in top working order is another way to maintain the quality of your work. Brushes in particular are very easy to destroy. Whenever the brush is dipped into ink, the ink is absorbed into the body of the brush. When the ink hardens, it slowly pushes the hairs further and further apart. This is most obvious at the base of the brush tip where the hair meets the ferrule (the metal section of the brush). Eventually, the brush contains enough ink in between the hairs that it is unable to form a point.

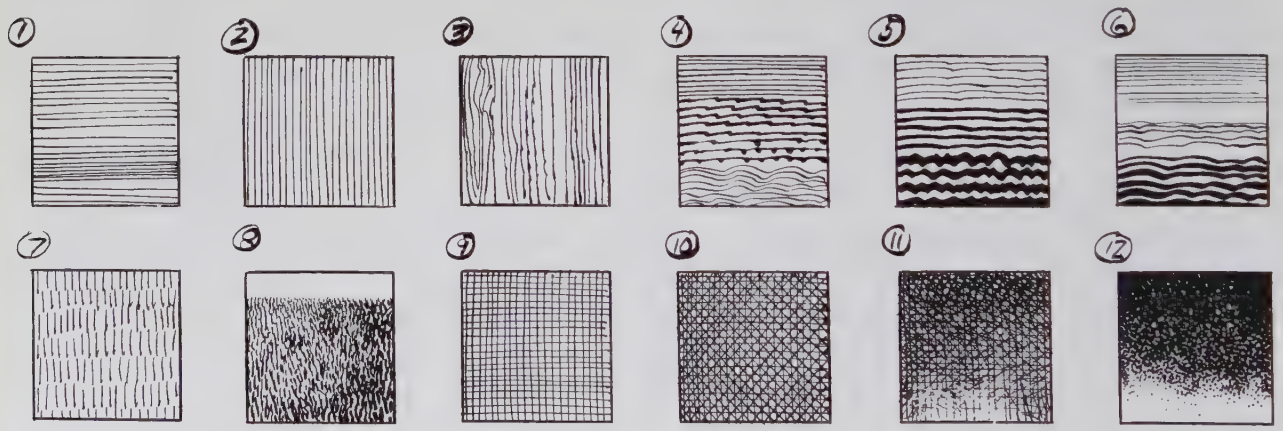
There are several ways of cleaning a brush. The most important thing to remember is the need for a mild cleaning after every use. Every inker needs to have a rag or two at the working station. I find that old towels are pretty good although my favorite rags to use are old winter socks because of their thickness and texture. Stay away from smoother materials like cotton as they have less ability to pull the ink off the brush.

When the brush is ready to be put down for the day, swirl it in a jar of water to rid it of excess ink. Twirl and drag the brush across the rag. The texture of the fibers will pull off the ink from the brush far better than just the water can by itself. Repeat a few times to make sure the brush is as clean as possible. It will always retain some ink so don't worry if you can't remove it all. In some cases the ink solidifies around the base of the tip where it serves as an extension of the ferrule. This usually happens when the brush is not cleaned well enough. If this occurs with your brush, do not break the hardened ink. Leave it as it is. As a result, the brush can actually achieve a thinner line because the hardened ink compresses the hair into a tighter and smaller tip.

I also recommend the purchase of brush cleaner from your art supply store. Follow the directions on the label. This allows for a much more thorough cleaning of the brush than just plain water and a rag. Every now and then it's okay to clean your brush using a mild bar of soap that can be purchased from the grocery store. Please keep in mind that every cleaning wears down the brush. No matter how well maintained, at a certain time, the life of the brush is over. This becomes painfully obvious when the brush loses its snap and ability to come to a point. The hair just wears out. Don't throw away the brush. We can still find uses for it later on.

PENS

Comparisons between brushes and pens are inevitable. There are many differences. But pens and brushes are merely tools you employ in the inking process. Any line the inker draws is a combination of what the tool can produce and what is inside the head of the artist. If you want to draw a fat line,



These are just some of the textures that can be achieved with either pen or brush. Note that in some of these examples the line itself becomes the object that you are inking, rather than just describing it. In example three, the lines replicate the texture and grain of wood. In example six, the lines appear to be an ocean with sky in the background.

you will find a way to do it no matter what instrument you use. If the pen is mightier than the sword, then the brain is mightier than the pen.

There are certain characteristics that separate the brush and the pen. The brush is definitely the more versatile but more difficult of the two. There is nothing that the pen can achieve that the brush can't duplicate. In fact, the brush can create a much greater variety of lines and marks than the pen. The brush can negotiate a quick turn and even come back on itself. In that same maneuver the pen would catch on the paper fiber and splatter or even break. The brush stroke tends to be elegant and consistent. The pen line is often irregular and rough. The brush is more organic, and the pen can be quite cold. It is through the experience of inking that the artist develops the ability to pick the tool for the desired effect.

Having lauded the brush and its versatility, let us not dismiss the mighty pen. A pen line cannot be imitated in its angularity and sheer brittle power. The tensile strength of the metal will always create a stronger and more forceful line than a brush. The rough nature of the pen line gives it an energy and vibrancy that the brush cannot match. And practically speaking, a pen nib doesn't need as much care as a brush. The pen is also easier to master and perhaps can offer a shorter route to a paying livelihood.

There are two different types of pens that serve the same function:

1) A mechanical pen, which has its own supply of ink within the body of the pen

2) A nib pen, which must be dipped into ink in order to function

Working with nibs also requires that you purchase separate holders in which the pen tip must be inserted. Penholders primarily come in two sizes, small and large. I prefer the longer and wider holder. I recommend the Koh-I-Noor holders (number 127N) that come from Germany. They have a wider tip made of cork for a more comfortable and secure grip. Experiment with both sizes to find the right one for you.

Metal nibs have been in use at least since the Romans, and bronze nibs were found in the ruins of Pompeii. All these nibs were handmade and one of a kind, and therefore too expensive for the general population of artists to use. It wasn't until 1825, when Joseph Gillott introduced a manufacturing process to create steel nibs, that nibs were mass produced.

Top: Mechanical pens have their own their supplies of ink. *Middle*: A pen nib offers greater flexibility than a mechanical pen. The nib is inserted into a pen holder. *Bottom*: Experiment with different pen holders to find ones that work best for you.

Before the mass production of the steel nib, pens were made of quills and reeds. Both the quill and reed were cut and shaved by the artist to shape a nib that would truly reflect his or her individual vision. This gave the artist the opportunity to have even more artistic control over the work than anyone using a steel nib. A large amount of pen nibs are now available to substitute for the flexibility of the quill. A young artist might be confused faced with a wall of choices. Remember that the nib has only two requirements:

1) With a minimum of pressure from the artist, the pen has to be able to draw a smooth line. The ink needs to flow evenly off the nib for the duration of the stroke.

2) The nib has to be able to close its point when pressure is relieved. This stops the flow of ink onto the paper and holds the ink in the cup of the nib.

There are several types of pen nibs you might want to explore. They all have varying characteristics that may appeal to you or not. I use a Hunt number 103. I like this nib in particular for its strength and tensile ability. The nib spreads open but not too easily. When the pressure is off, it snaps back to produce a thin even line. A Hunt 100 is a bit more flexible and allows an even wider range of line weight. A Gillott 170 has a bit more give than the Hunt 103, but I seem to break them more often. I've used other pen nibs also but always have these two on hand as my regular inking nibs. Remember that you have to be comfortable with the equipment in order to produce your best work.

The advantage to the flexible nibs is their ability to produce lines and squiggles that have a far greater variety and texture than the consistent line produced by a pen. In some of my ink work I often will produce lines and marks that are somewhat like jazz in that they are improvised and organic and spontaneous. It's beneficial to work with a nib that has enough flexibility to keep up with those demands.

There may be times, however, when you want a flat consistent line. For that I recommend either mechanical pens or lettering pens. The lettering nibs have an oval at the tip rather than a point called a spoon-bill tip. Speedball is a reliable manufacturer whose pens come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Top: The Superman figure was inked with a combination of pen and brush. *Bottom*: In this close-up, you can see that the chest muscles are feathered with a brush, as is the outline of the figure. The abdominals are inked with a pen.

Style A has a square point, Style B has a round tip, Style C has a flat tip, and Style D has an oval tip. They can be useful particularly for work that needs a consistent line weight. These tips can also be sanded with fine sandpaper to adjust the width and quality of the line.

Mechanical pens offer a wide range of possibilities to the beginning inker. Rotring produces two types of pens that are very useful: the Rapidograph and the Rapidoliner. Both types are refillable with cartridges of ink so they can have a fairly long lifespan if you take care of them properly. Mechanical pens in general are fairly high maintenance. They tend to clog easily and seem to require a lot of cleaning. Tap water is usually enough to do the job. If needed, let the parts soak in a cup of water overnight. Every purchase of a mechanical pen comes with instructions on how to disassemble and clean the pen. Don't be intimidated. It's important to keep your pens in top working order.

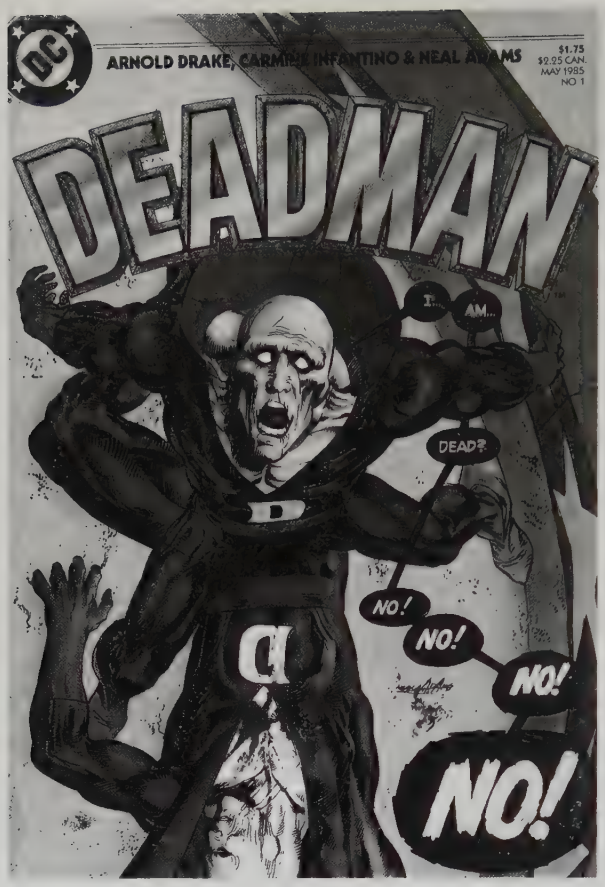
Top: Rotring and Rapidograph mechanical pens. *Bottom*: Disposable waterproof markers cannot be refilled with ink and are discarded when they are empty.

The width of the pen line is printed in millimeters on the side of the pen. They range from .25 mm to 2.0 mm. I find the smaller widths are very handy to ink small faces or figures. There's no need for too much variety of line weight at that scale so the mechanical pen is ideal in those situations.

I sometimes use these mechanical pens to rule straight lines on backgrounds to great effect. In addition to being faster to use than the dipping pen, the non-varying line weight doesn't call attention to itself. When the line weights are all equal, no one line or area is going to pop out at the reader. It's only when a thin line is next to a thick line that either one has a chance of standing out. Lines of the same consistency become a pattern and seem to fall into the background in unison.

There is also a great line of markers available that need no care at all. They are called pigma markers. Pigma is a generic name, not a company name. You will find several companies that make pigma markers but I find that the Japanese Sakura company makes the best ones. Many artists use the pigma markers as an addition to their brush and pen work. The pens come in different line widths that allow a wide variety of effects and can produce a very consistent waterproof line that is especially helpful when ruling straight lines. When the marker runs dry, it is disposable. There is nothing to refill. These are among the best markers you will find.

Although markers of high quality can be purchased, be aware that they are no substitute for a pen or a brush. Sometimes the ink is not as "waterproof" as advertised, and marker ink often fades with time, leaving the original pages discolored and distorted. There are any number of artists, including Neal Adams and Mike Mignola, who use markers to handle their ink work. The late Gil Kane also switched from pen and brush to markers. The obvious talent of these individuals notwithstanding, I prefer a more classic approach to the process and look of my ink work. Markers are especially useful in situations where the art is not printed, like storyboards or layouts. But for art that is printed, I feel nothing is equal to the variety of lines and marks an artist can produce from the classic combination of pen and brush.



Pen nibs are unique in that they must be cleaned before the inking process begins. During the manufacturing process, a slight film of grease covers the pen tip. It remains until you remove it. Although it is imperceptible to the human eye or touch, it will prevent the free and easy flow of the ink onto the paper. The ink congeals within the nib and stays there. Try an experiment. Use a nib without cleaning it and you will see how temperamental and ineffectual the nib can be.

There are several ways to take care of this. One way is to "erase" the problem. Get a large eraser and cut off a small sliver. Lay the nib down, being careful not to bend it, and "erase" the grease off the nib. Make sure you can reach and clean inside the nib's underside. Flip it over and do the topside also. This usually is enough to prepare the pen tip for work.

Just to be sure, though, I insert the tip into its holder, light a match and *quickly* run the match over both sides of the nib. Be careful with your discarded match. There is no reason for the tip not to be functioning well after all of that.

After you use your pen, try to clean the ink that accumulates on it. I usually scratch off the ink with a razor blade at the beginning of another inking day to see if I can prolong the life of the nib as much as possible. You might use a wet cloth or paper towel after the ink is scratched off to guarantee all extraneous ink particles are gone. Every nib will react differently. Some can last all week, some die after a minute or two. Regardless of what technique you use, maintain the tools of your trade to the best of your abilities.

Top: Neal Adams inked this cover of *Deadman* #1 (May 1985) using both brush and marker. Neal is a master at putting an ink line down on paper and has the talent to make any tool or piece of equipment do what he wants it to do. *Bottom*: Mike Mignola probably used a marker to ink this cover of *The Shadow Strikes* #31 (May 1992). Mike switched from brushes to markers early on in his career, but his work shows none of the shortcomings of working with markers.

This Gil Kane-inked page from *The Ring of the Nibelung* (1989) is another example of working with a marker. Gil always managed to adapt his style to the tools that he used. Script by Roy Thomas.

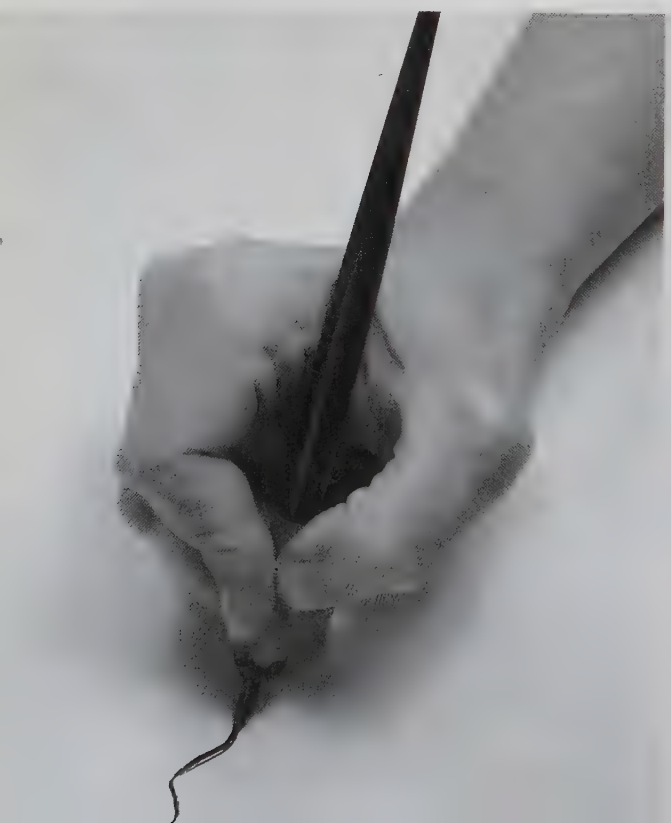
CHOOSING YOUR TOOLS

Both the brush and the pen are versatile enough to offer a very wide variety of lines and squiggles that the artist can use. In addition to their intrinsic versatility, they can both be manipulated in such a way to increase their vocabulary. Holding the tools in different ways gives the artist more choices. The pen is most often held close to the nib, the way you might hold a ballpoint pen to write a letter. Moving the hand away from the pen point will allow less control over the pen itself. The resulting line appears looser and more spontaneous. The farther up the shaft you go the less control you have over the pen. Although the pen line is influenced by different positions of the hand, this technique works best with a brush, as the soft hair of the brush responds better to various hand positions.

The brittle and tenacious nature of the metal pen does not allow a wide range of experimentation. The pen is often best used by holding it close to its point allowing the artist maximum control. This technique emerges from the classical school of working in pen and ink where the inker is the same artist as the penciller. As soon as the comic book inker starts to work on someone else's pencils the vision of the penciller supercedes the individual expression of the inker. It becomes more difficult for the inker to use a technique that creates a spontaneous and uncontrolled line. Experiment and see how best to incorporate this approach into your own comic book inking.

The angle at which the brush is held also plays a very important role in the ability of the inker to get the line he desires. Holding the brush at any angle automatically thickens the line. Think of it this way: once the brush is tilted, the tip of the brush no longer produces the line. If you angle the brush, you are inking with its *side*. If you need a very thin line, I recommend that you hold the brush straight up and down as a calligrapher would. Using that approach insures that only the thin tip of the brush will draw the line.

The amount of ink will also affect the brush stroke. The more ink on the hairs of the brush, the "wetter" the look of the inks. Never having watched Joe Kubert ink, I can still make a pretty safe guess



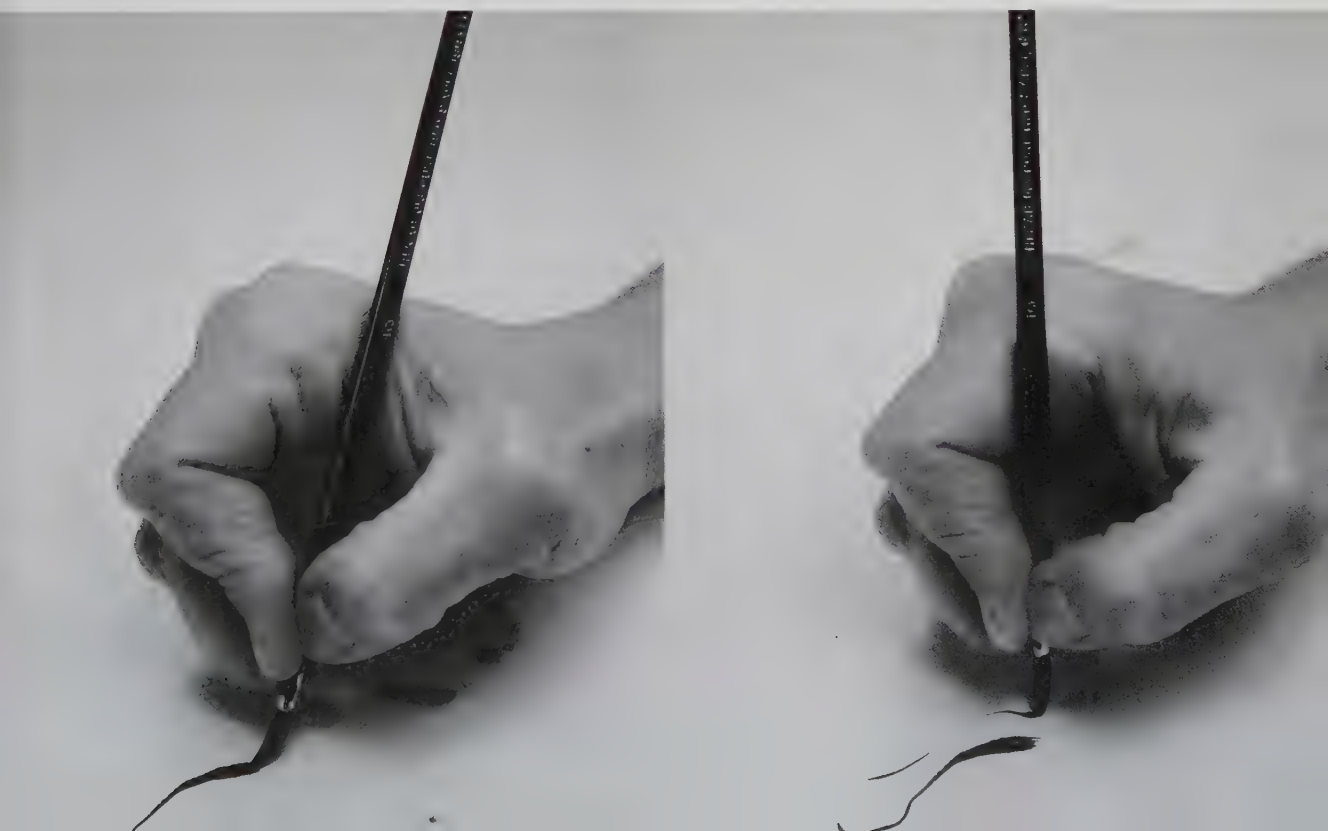
that he loads the brush up with plenty of ink. Tom Palmer also has a very wet look to his brushwork that contrasts nicely with his linework.

A common question among beginner inkers is *when* to use a specific tool. After years of practice and concentration, the artist should be able to adapt any tool to any requirement. For example, hair should look like hair whether you use a brush or pen. There is an elementary rule of thumb, however, that is useful for beginner and professional alike. Use the nature of the inked object as a guide to which tool you choose. In other words, the hard metal of the pen point might best be used to ink drawings of hard and metallic shapes. You would use a pen to ink a building or a car or a toaster, for instance. A pen could ink anything that requires a sharp edge or an angle to it. The metallic quality of the nib transfers some of that quality onto the paper.

Conversely, any shape that has a softer element to it can be handled very well with a brush. The hair of a brush is perfect to ink the hair of a character. Clothing is another example of a texture or form that might be more suitably handled with the softer edges of a brush. The connection between the implement used and the object drawn is surprisingly obvious to the eye of the observer.

No matter what choices you make, the most important factor will always be the artist. An individual with imagination, technique and an objective can use any tool to make art. The world will pay an artist for two things: the facility that is in your hand and the imagination that is inside your head. Ultimately the head is more valuable. Whether you use a pen or brush is not as important as the artistic vision you follow.

In the first picture, the pen is held very close to the nib, allowing much greater control and facility over the ink line. In the second picture, the hand is moved farther from the pen point, which allows the pen to be "looser" and provides a more spontaneous line. In the first picture, the hand is held close to the brush's ferrule, and the brush is held at an angle. This allows a wider ink line because you're inking with the side of the brush. In the second picture, the brush is held vertically upright, which allows the brush to provide the thinnest line possible because you're inking with only the point.



THREE
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

OTHER TOOLS

Besides the basic materials of ink, pen and brush, the inker requires additional support from a secondary grouping of equipment. These include a ruler, some templates, an inking compass, some French curves, a flexi-curve, a few erasers, an erasing brush and some white-out.

RULERS

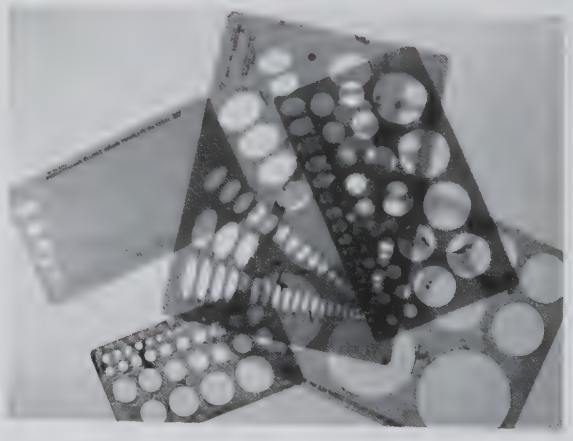
When non-artists react to comic book artwork, they often say, "I can't even draw a straight line." Well, let me introduce you to something that can: the ruler!

There are a wide variety of straight edges on the market, so many that you might find yourself confused. Realistically, you only need one ruler with a metal, beveled edge. A metal ruler is more durable and reliable than one made of plastic or wood. The strength of the metal ensures that the line you draw is absolutely straight. Make certain that the ruler has a raised edge. It makes no difference what kind of ruler you use when you draw with a pencil, but using ink with a penciling straight edge will guarantee disaster. The ink will bleed under the ruler to create a big black splotch. When using a raised straight edge, the point of your nib never touches the ruler. The side of the pen tip glides across the metal edge leaving the point unencumbered. If you don't have access to a raised edge, tape a penny to each end of any ruler or straight edge. That will raise it enough to use a pen.

A variety of rulers for different inking jobs: 12-inch, 18-inch, metal and see-through plastic.

TEMPLATES

One of the more difficult inking techniques is the challenge of drawing a freehand circular or oval shape. Any line that is not a straight line is more likely to look unconvincing unless you use some help. Templates are made of plastic and usually come in square or rectangular shapes. Within these sheets are punched-out circles or ovals of varying



A number of templates are available to the artist to ensure perfect oval, circle or curved lines.

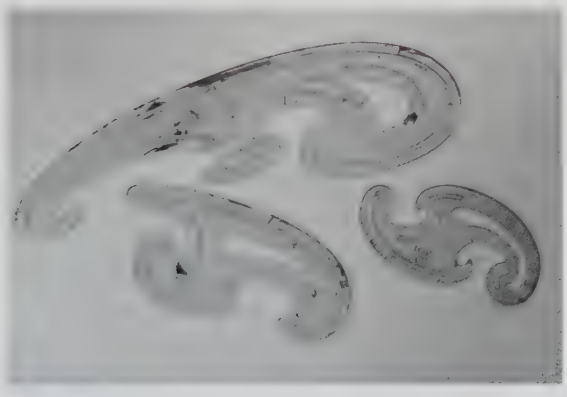
sizes. The inker finds the circle or oval that best corresponds to the shape drawn on the penciled comic page. Using a marker or Rapidograph, you can trace the inside of the circle or oval onto the paper. It is not advisable to use a pen nib or a brush when using templates. Because all templates lack raised edges and touch directly on the paper surface, pens and brushes will bleed ink under them.

The inking compass is available to provide the inker any size of circle and also gives an extra-thick ink line when needed.

INKING COMPASS

The inker will also run into situations where a template proves to be too small to meet the needs of the drawn shape. In that case, an inking compass is used. A good compass can double both as a penciling and inking utensil by interchanging the parts. The part of the compass leg that holds the drawing lead can be removed and replaced with a specific inking tool. The line width is adjustable by turning a small screw attached to the inking clamp.

Don't try to substitute a compass for the templates. In theory, any circle size could be inked using a compass. But in practice, it doesn't work out that way. There are, for instance, circles that are too small for the compass to manifest a smooth line. The legs get in the way of each other which causes the line to jump and stutter. Secondly, the compass has less ability to ink a thin line than a Rapidograph and a template. The inking clamp can only get thin up to a point, and then the ink stops to flow. Decide which tool is the best for the individual problem and make your decision accordingly.



The French curve is another tool that provides a variety of smooth curves and arcs. Be careful when inking with these, as the ink will bleed underneath.

FRENCH CURVE

Any line that isn't ruled is either going to be drawn freehand or use some mechanical help. A French curve supplies the inker with a seemingly endless array of curves and swirls to aid in inking. Like the templates, French curves are made of plastic and do not have raised edges. They are especially helpful in inking items made of metal, like a car or airplane. A curve achieved in nature is very easy to duplicate using a freehand technique because nature rarely supplies us with smooth defined edges. The inconsistent or wavering line even helps to achieve an organic look. Metal requires a more consistent line to achieve the illusion of strength and temper. Although not impossible, it is very difficult to maintain that level of consistency without the aid of templates or French curves.

FLEXI-CURVE

Another weapon in the inking arsenal is the flexible curve. Unlike French curves, the flexi-curve is malleable and can be twisted to fit the specific shape of the penciled line. In spite of the prolific variety of templates and French curves, there are going to be times when you run up against a situation where they will not be appropriate. The flexi-curve is the solution to those problems. It also has a raised edge against which a pen nib can be used.

The flexi-curve supplies a specific line for those moments when a French curve just won't do.

ERASERS

One of the more menial jobs of an inker is to erase the pencil lines on the pages after they have been inked. The eraser should correspond to the type of pencils that was used. You should have at least two types of erasers at hand: soft and hard. Some penciller repeatedly go over certain areas of their work because they are "working out" the drawing. The result is often indentations where the pencil dug into the paper. This usually requires a harder eraser to pick up the lead that is lying within the grooves. An artist like John Buscema would glide his pencil across a page with a grace and ease unmatched by anyone. If the page was erased before it was inked, the paper would look as clean as new. Pencils of that type need only a soft eraser to remove the lead from the paper.

Erasers are probably the most valuable tool in any art job. You will need a variety of erasers to remove the different pencil leads that an artist might use.

One tip before going on: Always stand when you have a lot of erasing to do. Lay the page flat on a hard surface. Hold it down with one hand as you erase with the other. Keep your two hands in close proximity. If you work with your hands too far apart, the paper is likely to bend or tear. Get some weight behind your erasing hand. Lean your shoulder and body into it. Follow the grooves if the penciller dug into the paper. Make sure that the entire reproduced area of the artwork is clean. Get the lead out!

ERASING BRUSH

Whenever you erase pencils, whether it's a small area that needs to be redrawn or an entire page after it's inked, you will wind up with tiny shards of eraser on your page. Rather than blowing on them (which doesn't eliminate the smaller particles) or wiping them away with your hand (which *always* smears lead back onto the page), use an erasing

An erasing brush works great to remove eraser shavings from your page. Best of all, it will not smear any pencil lead that remains.

brush. They are about the size of a small hand broom that you might find accompanying a dustpan. The erasing brush is thinner, however, which prevents any unnecessary dirt or lead being re-introduced onto the page. These brushes are great. One sweep across the erased page and it is clean!

Keep a selection of different types of white-out. You will be able to re-ink on top of some of them, but not all.

WHITE-OUT

As you are inking, there will inevitably come the smudge, spill, smear or mistake. Luckily we can rely on several brands of white paint to help us remedy our errors. The first type of corrective fluid I recommend is called Liquid Paper. This was used originally to correct typing mistakes and is found in stationery and office supply stores around the country. One of the advantages to Liquid Paper is its ability to dry waterproof. This allows the artist to "re-ink" the area as many times as needed. Be careful not to overdo it, though. The more applications you use on the paper, the more the page will look like a relief map. The continuing application of the liquid will cause a build-up on the page, making it more and more difficult to work on. If you find yourself re-applying Liquid Paper, stop! Get a single-edged razor blade and scratch off the corrective layers until you are down to the paper again. Apply one layer and then re-ink. Inking on a mound of white-out distorts the drawing for the reproductive process.

Pelikan Graphic White is a great product to use when you are not going to ink over the corrected area. It comes in a wide mouth bottle for easy access and can be diluted with water to adjust to your particular needs. I've never found it to be useful in any circumstance where I had to re-ink something. Instead of forming a hard seal on the paper surface like Liquid Paper, it is rather porous and loses its shape easily. When you apply a liquid on top of it, it starts to mix with the ink and turns to gray. It has a lot of flexibility, however, and you can get a pretty thin line using Graphic White. It is very useful whenever you need to take out or touch up a line and can be used even when using it to draw white on black.

My favorite corrective white at the moment is gouache. In particular I recommend Winsor & Newton Permanent White. Make certain that you have a non-porous surface like a ceramic dish. Squeeze a half-inch out of the tube onto the ceramic and spill a small amount of water onto it. Mix the water a bit with the gouache and experiment with the thickness of it by applying it over a black area. It may take two coats before it effectively eliminates the black. It tends to go on very smoothly and stay that way. After it dries, the surface can also be re-inked. Re-apply water as needed to ensure the liquidity of the gouache. Otherwise it will harden and become unusable. To eliminate bumps in the application, be sure to clean your plate before using. It's the caked-up gouache from prior use that creates little "pebbles" in the gouache. Overall its versatility and durability makes it a very useful addition to your inking routine.

Gouache is my favorite white-out. It is extremely fluid and easy to work with, and you can ink on top of it.

PART TWO

There is one very important difference that separates comic book inkers from other artists who traditionally work in pen and ink: the fact that the comic book inker is often working with pencils drawn by another artist. The history of creating inked artwork easily stretches back several thousand years, but it was only with the arrival of comic books in the 1930's that inking became a craft separate and apart from penciling.

A comic book inker has many responsibilities, but the primary one is to the story itself. The inker is working to make the story credible and believable. Before you start inking, ask yourself some questions. What type of story is it? What is the mood or tone of the story? Is it scary and dark? Will it need a lot of blacks? Does it take place during the day? Is a clean and open look the best choice? What can I do to best serve this assignment?

FOUR
WHAT IS INKING?

Outside of the comic book industry, inking as a job description doesn't really exist. An artist who uses a pencil to draw is the same artist who uses ink to draw. The pen or brush is equivalent to the pencil in the sense that all three implements are used to *draw*. Pen-and-ink work reached its zenith in mass culture during the heyday of magazine publishing from the 1910s to the 1950s. Many of our finest artists and illustrators worked in pen and ink during this period, including Franklin Booth, James Montgomery Flagg and Rockwell Kent. You can see the influence these illustrators had on comic book art being produced by artists like Mike Kaluta, Bernie Wrightson, Alfredo Alcala and Moebius. It is well worth the effort to discover all these artists, and I urge everyone to do so. By the 1960s, pen-and-ink illustrations fell from favor and all but disappeared, superceded by the convenience and economics of photography.

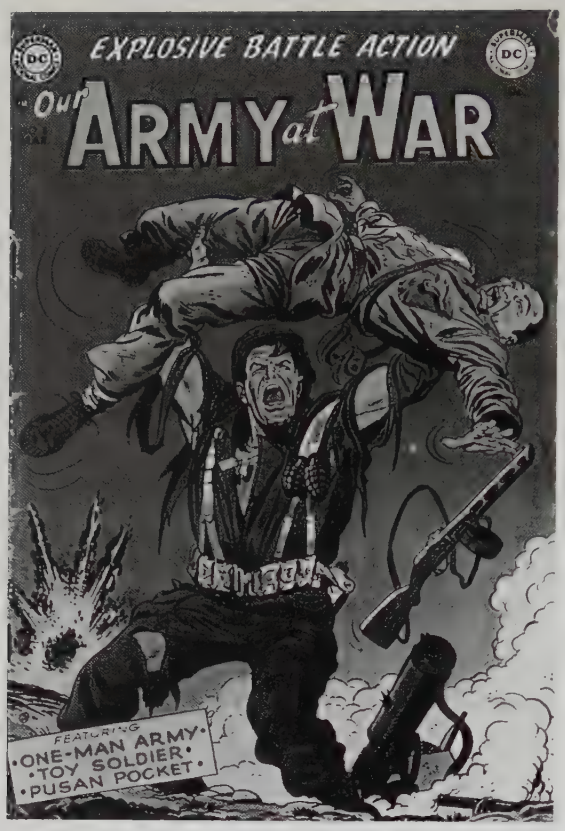
Moebius is able to convey light, dark and texture with the simplest of lines in this page from *Batman Black and White* (1996).

Even within the comic book industry itself, inking has been a misunderstood art form. It is not uncommon to hear comic book professionals who are not artists admit to a lack of understanding about inking. Much of the problem stems from people who have no art education or exposure to the language of art. It is a field that requires training, practice and study as much as any other career choice. A hospital, for instance, would not hire an electrician to perform an operation on a patient. Yet many publishers will hire editors to oversee a visual medium who seem to have no knowledge of art.

As a result, the notion that inkers are simply tracers has gained a strong foothold within the industry. The combination of economic necessity and lack of understanding has created an artificial separation between pencils and inks. There have been periods of time when the comic industry was satisfied with what "works" and nothing more. If the line was dark enough to be reproduced, then it was considered good art. As a result, the assessment of what inkers do has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Today there is a third generation of comic book professionals who feel that inkers are not really artists.

Luckily, there has been a revolution, if not always in the editorial offices, then at least in the production department. Technological progress has shifted the emphasis away from what is expedient art to what is actually effective art. The advancement of both the coloring and printing process demands a better and more informed quality of work. When I was starting out, there was a term that I often heard: hacking. It meant that the individual was turning out inferior work to just get it done and get a paycheck. Certainly deadlines and life can always encroach upon any project. But it is interesting that the phrase "hacking" is not heard anymore. I want to believe that it is because the act itself is on the way out.

As printing technology has evolved, so has the artist's ink line. Here's a progression of covers, starting with *More Fun* #10 (March 1936) by Vincent Sullivan; *World's Finest* #30 (October 1947) by Win Mortimer.



Our Army at War #8 (March 1953) by Irv Novick; *Batman* #171 (May 1965), pencils by Carmine Infantino and inks by Murphy Anderson.

What is "good" inking? What are the responsibilities of the inker? What part does drawing play in comic book inking? Is it enough to be a good tracer? How much freedom should an inker have to interpret someone else's pencils? Let's go back a bit and examine the evolutionary arc of this unique branch of comic art and see if we can't develop some perspective.

The demand for artists to produce work in ink is a direct result of the invention of the printing press. Although working in ink was an art form that existed prior to mass media, it was the demand for illustrations that could be reproduced on a mass scale that necessitated ink drawings. The ability to print pencilled drawings did not exist. It was only the black line of ink that could be reproduced. This was true even after the invention of photography in 1815, as the earliest printing presses lacked the technology to reprint photos. It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that newspapers developed the ability to reproduce photographs.

What publishers used before that time were ink drawings. The printing technology was good enough to reproduce black marks on white newsprint. Whether the black marks were letters of the alphabet or squiggles of line drawings, the early demand for illustrations to accompany news articles were supplied by ink drawings. A current example of this type of artwork can still be seen in *The Wall Street Journal*, which has carried on the tradition of using ink-drawn portraits instead of photographs to illustrate their reporting.

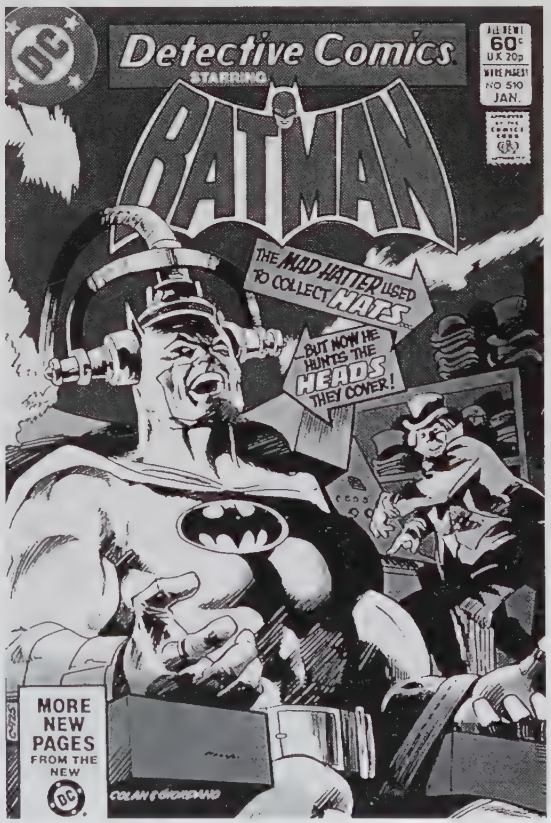
So it makes sense that the first comic books were also drawn in ink, because that's what the printing technology would allow at the time. The only requirement for the inker was that his work had

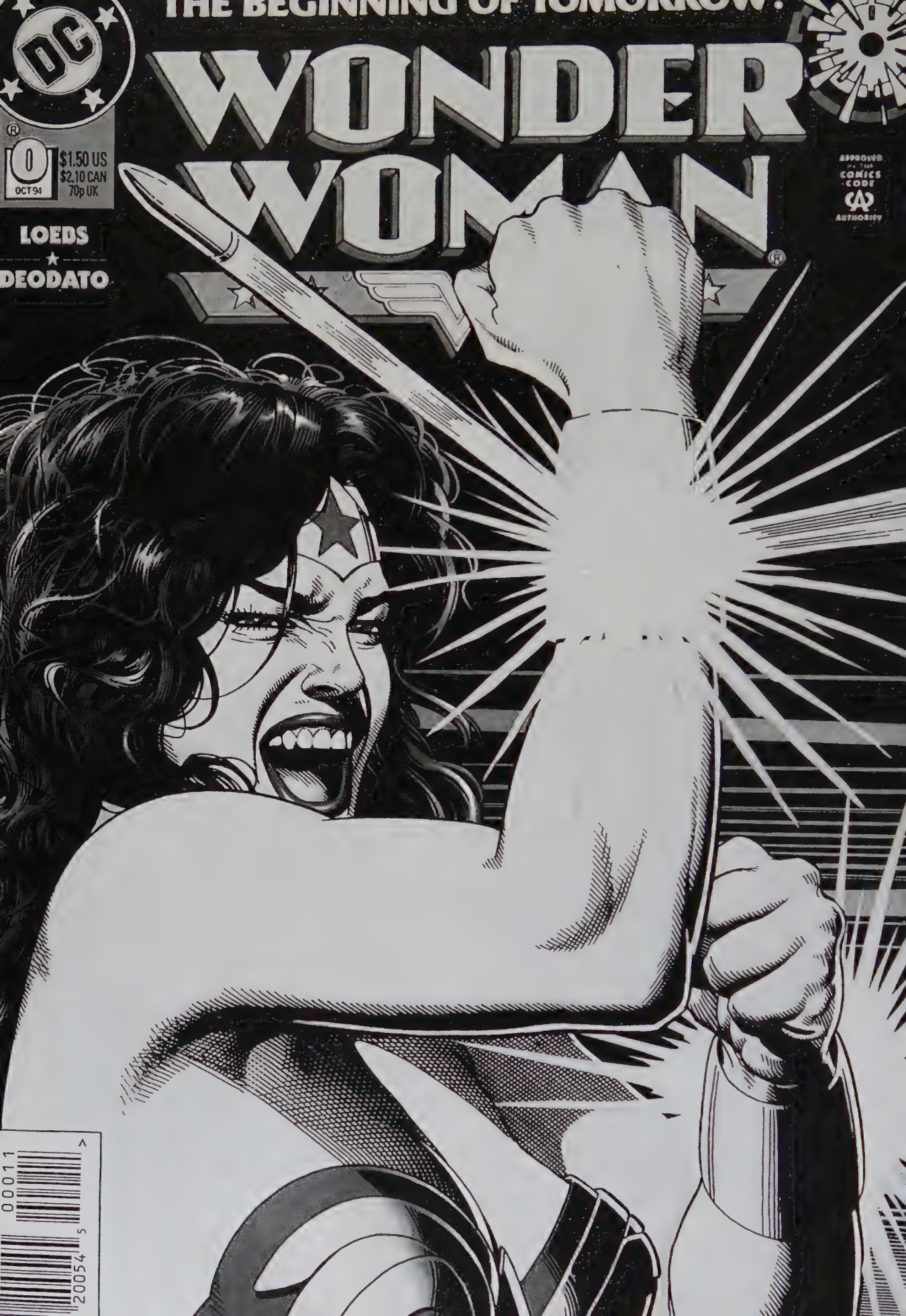
to be clear enough to be understood *after* it was reproduced. Because of the primitive nature of the printing process there was no need for inking that had finesse or subtlety, and as a result most inkers drew with heavy lines. I'm exaggerating a bit, but the comic books of the mid- to late-thirties were a process of experimentation and learning for everyone.

As printing technology developed, artists were able to play with a much wider range of line work and textures. Even though the art became more complicated, the primary responsibility of the inker did not change. It still remains the same to this day: clarity. The line work has to be capable of being reproduced on a mass scale. The most basic obligation of the artist as penciller or inker has to be the ability to be printed. The second obligation is the ability to communicate the story information in a clear and understandable way. Anything less than that constitutes a failure in storytelling.

With today's technologically superior printing process, it's almost impossible to draw a line so thin that it will "drop out" when it is printed. That was certainly not the case in previous decades, and inkers would have to compensate by using a heavier line that would be easier to print. For the first forty years in the history of comics, metal plates were used to print comic books. For a while in the late seventies and early eighties, printers began to use plastic plates instead of metal. This often resulted in lines that printed as wiggles because the plastic melted from the heat and friction of the printing process. It took several years before printers developed a formula that created plastic that did not melt. Almost simultaneously, the technology of camera reproduction became available. Finally, comic books were printed using the same method as glossy high end magazines.

Superman #263 (April 1973), pencils and inks by Neal Adams; *Detective Comics* #510 (January 1982), pencils by Gene Colan and inks by Dick Giordano.

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In terms of clarity, this just about answered every complaint that artists had regarding the quality of reproduction. Any type of black line on a white surface will reproduce very well using this process. But if clarity is no longer a technical issue, why is it still a concern for the inker? Clear storytelling involves much more than just the ability to be reproduced. It also requires the ability to transfer information from the visuals to the reader. If technology has leveled the playing field in the comic book industry, it has also focused more attention on the craft itself. Let's look at some of the obligations of an inker.

Spectre #22 (December 2002) by P. Craig Russell.

Opposite: *Wonder Woman* #0 (October 1994) by Brian Bolland.

THINGS SHOULD LOOK LIKE WHAT THEY ARE

At a very early point in my career, I had the opportunity to ink a Man Thing story over John Buscema's pencils. John was an idol of mine as a kid and I was thrilled, of course, to have a chance to ink his drawings. I did a fairly mediocre job on his breakdowns but I learned a lot. My editor went over a few pages with me, and I'll never forget what he said when we got to a large shot of the main character. He pointed to the hands and said, "What are those? Are they supposed to be fingers? They look like carrots." It's a funny thing to be able to point to such a specific moment, but some door in my head opened up and I really, really got what he was saying.

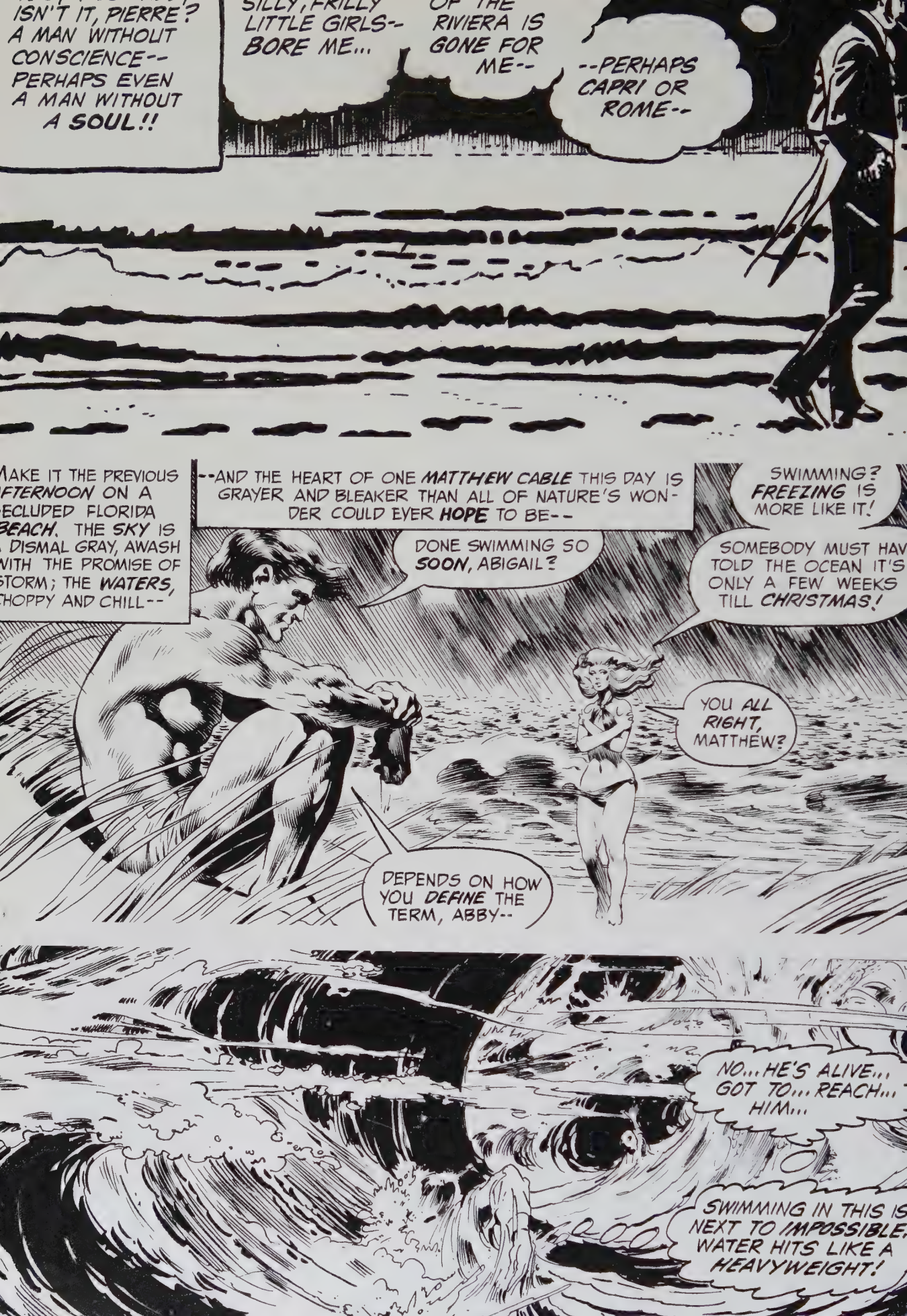
Opposite: This shows a great variety of textures working in harmony. Note that each individual shape has its own textural identity. The grass is inked differently than the trees, which are in turn inked differently than the bricks and the tile on the roof. Each shape is identified by its own individual inking technique. From *Steel* #39 (June 1997). Script by Christopher Priest, pencils by Denys Cowan and inks by Tom Palmer.

Right: This is an example of how *not* to ink—the antithesis of the Cowan/Palmer *Steel* page. Here the turban is inked the same way as the background. It fails to provide separation because the turban seems to be a part of the background.

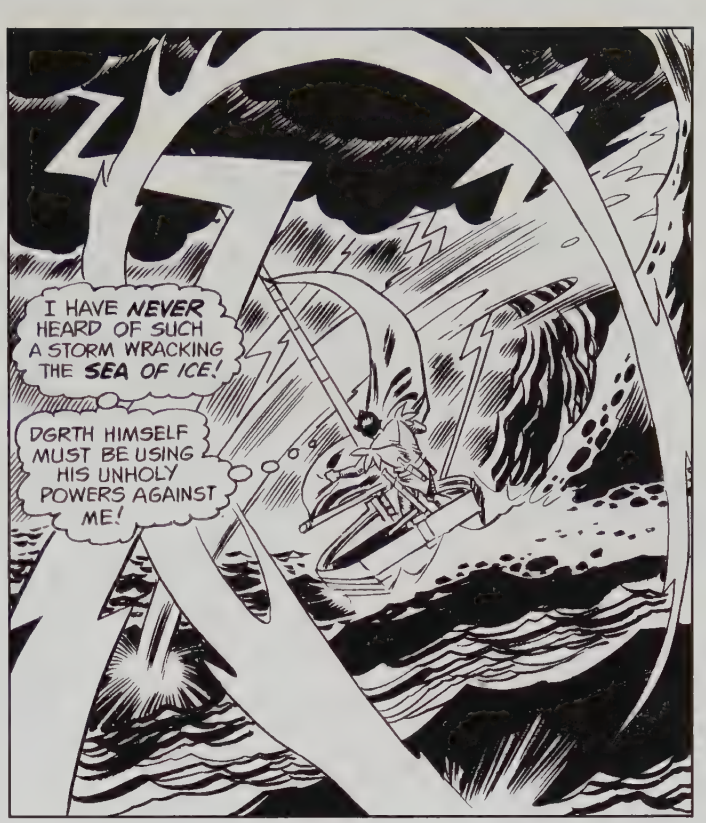
Below: This is a great example of how to ink hair. Note especially the ability to separate where the light hits the hair and where the hair is in shadow. Using the light source as a basis for your inking is critical to achieve volume and form. Here the inking of both heads of hair creates the illusion of depth. From *Wonder Woman* #193 (April 1971). Script by Dennis O'Neil, pencils by Mike Sekowsky and inks by Dick Giordano.

Things should look like what they are. Fingers need to look like fingers and carrots should look like carrots. They should not look the same! Anything else is being unclear. There's that word again: *clarity*. It's vitally important for an inker to be able to capture or mimic the look of what he's drawing. The ability to do so gives the shape on the paper *identity*. This allows the reader to differentiate among the varying shapes on the paper. It gives the form its own way of being recognized and it makes it easier to discern and follow the shapes from panel to panel. This approach to storytelling is not the only way of giving an object its own identity, but it is the way an *inker* gives it identity. Both pencillers and colorists have a responsibility to make an effort in their unique way to also accomplish this goal, but the inker should be no less vital in the process.

Let me give you an example. I was looking at a comic book recently that took place in Turkey. It was set in a rocky environment and involved some of the local population. The men in the story wore turbans. The inker rendered the cloth of the turbans in exactly the same way he rendered the background boulders. Since some of the rocks were the same shape and size as the turbans, this made for some visual confusion. There seemed to be no difference in the approach of the inker as he inked the rocks in the background and the turbans of the locals. Often the faces seemed cut off in mid forehead because the turban would blend in with the boulders behind them.


ISN'T IT, PIERRE? A MAN WITHOUT CONSCIENCE-- PERHAPS EVEN A MAN WITHOUT A SOUL!!
SILLY, FRILLY LITTLE GIRLS-- BORE ME...
OF THE RIVIERA IS GONE FOR ME--
--PERHAPS CAPRI OR ROME--
AKE IT THE PREVIOUS FTERNOON ON A ECLUDED FLORIDA BEACH. THE SKY IS DISMAL GRAY, AWASH WITH THE PROMISE OF STORM; THE WATERS, CHOPPY AND CHILL--
--AND THE HEART OF ONE MATTHEW CABLE THIS DAY IS GRAYER AND BLEAKER THAN ALL OF NATURE'S WONDER COULD EVER HOPE TO BE--
SWIMMING? FREEZING IS MORE LIKE IT!
DONE SWIMMING SO SOON, ABIGAIL?
SOMEBODY MUST HAV TOLD THE OCEAN IT'S ONLY A FEW WEEKS TILL CHRISTMAS!
YOU ALL RIGHT, MATTHEW?
DEPENDS ON HOW YOU DEFINE THE TERM, ABBY--
NO... HE'S ALIVE... GOT TO... REACH... HIM...
SWIMMING IN THIS IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE. WATER HITS LIKE A HEAVYWEIGHT!

On these two pages are several examples of ways to ink water. *Opposite, top*: In this panel, Alex Toth uses far fewer details, from *Witching Hour* #10 (September 1970), pencils by Gerry Conway. Alex manages to convey the feeling of water by using a very broad line. *Opposite, middle*: Berni Wrightson's approach to inking water and rain is to show many details. From *Swamp Thing* #9 (April 1974), script by Len Wein. *Opposite, bottom*: This panel is from *The Brave and the Bold* #93 (January 1971), script by Dennis O'Neil and art by Neal Adams. Neil's approach is almost the direct opposite of Alex Toth's. Whereas Alex approaches the work in a more suggestive way, Neal describes the water by literally drawing it rather than suggesting it. Notice how Neal conveys even the wind by drawing the whitecaps being blown by the wind across the panel. *Right*: In this terrific panel, inker Wally Wood uses both thick and thin lines to convey the height and depth of the waves. From *Stalker* #3 (November 1975), script by Paul Levitz and pencils by Steve Ditko.



Now I know that some will say that color will fix that for you. This is true in only one situation: when the inking is done in a dead line with no texture at all. Once the inker introduces any amount of line work that can be interpreted as an identifying mark, there must be an effort to separate shapes and objects from each other. It is a storytelling disaster to use the same approach to ink turbans and boulders within the same panel. The cloth of the turbans needs to be inked differently from the rocks and boulders in the background.

Secondly, the notion that an inker, or any one involved in an assembly line process, would pass the buck to the other guy down the line is offensive to me as a professional. Each member of the process has a job to do. As an inker, you need to have enough respect for yourself, your work and the medium of sequential art to fulfill your obligations. This means that when you hand in the black-and-white pages to your editor, they could be printed as is and succeed in their storytelling obligations.

Remember that storytelling involves being able to relate to and identify what is being drawn in the comic book. If pencillers, inkers and colorists work toward the same goal, clarity is a clear and attainable objective. If any one member of the creative team fails in that obligation, it creates a disconnect between the reader and the story.

In his inks Wally Wood is able to unify a very complicated background through his use of shadow and black on the machinery. From *All Star Comics* #64 (February 1977) script by Paul Levitz and pencils by Wally Wood.

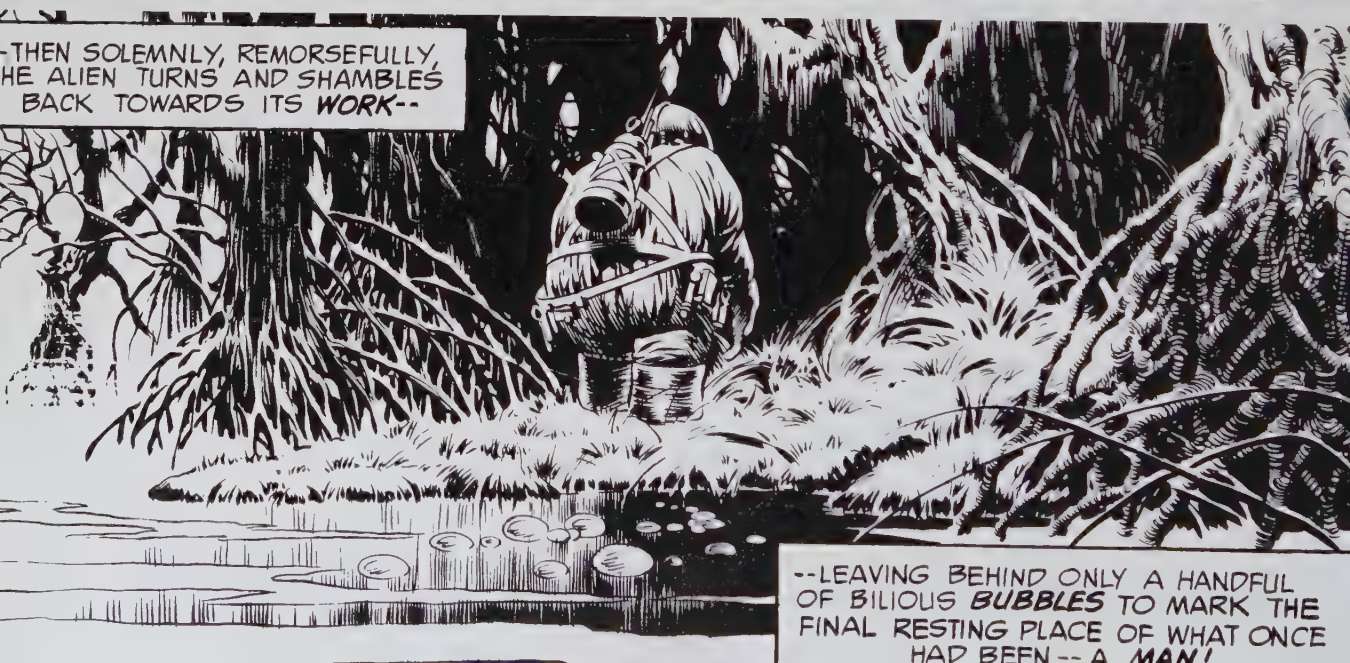
Opposite: Here are three approaches to a very common scene in comics: explosions. In the top panel, Wally Wood uses white paint to show the bursts of water. From *Hercules Unbound* #4 (May 1976), script by Gerry Conway and pencils by José Luis García-López. In the middle panel, Dick Giordano inks the outline of the blast and then fills in the blast lines. From *Batman* #255 (April 1974), script by Len Wein and pencils by Neal Adams. In the bottom panel, the explosion is done in a consistent line weight. From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), script and pencils by Frank Miller and inks by Klaus Janson.


TRAABOOM
--BATMA
AAA
BOOM


YOU ARE ALL SO BEAUTIFUL, MY DARLING ONES.
LOVE EACH ONE OF YOU MADLY AND PASSIONATELY--
THAT'S WHY I'VE BROUGHT YOU HERE-- SO YOU CAN GROW IN A NURTURING, ATTENTIVE ENVIRONMENT.

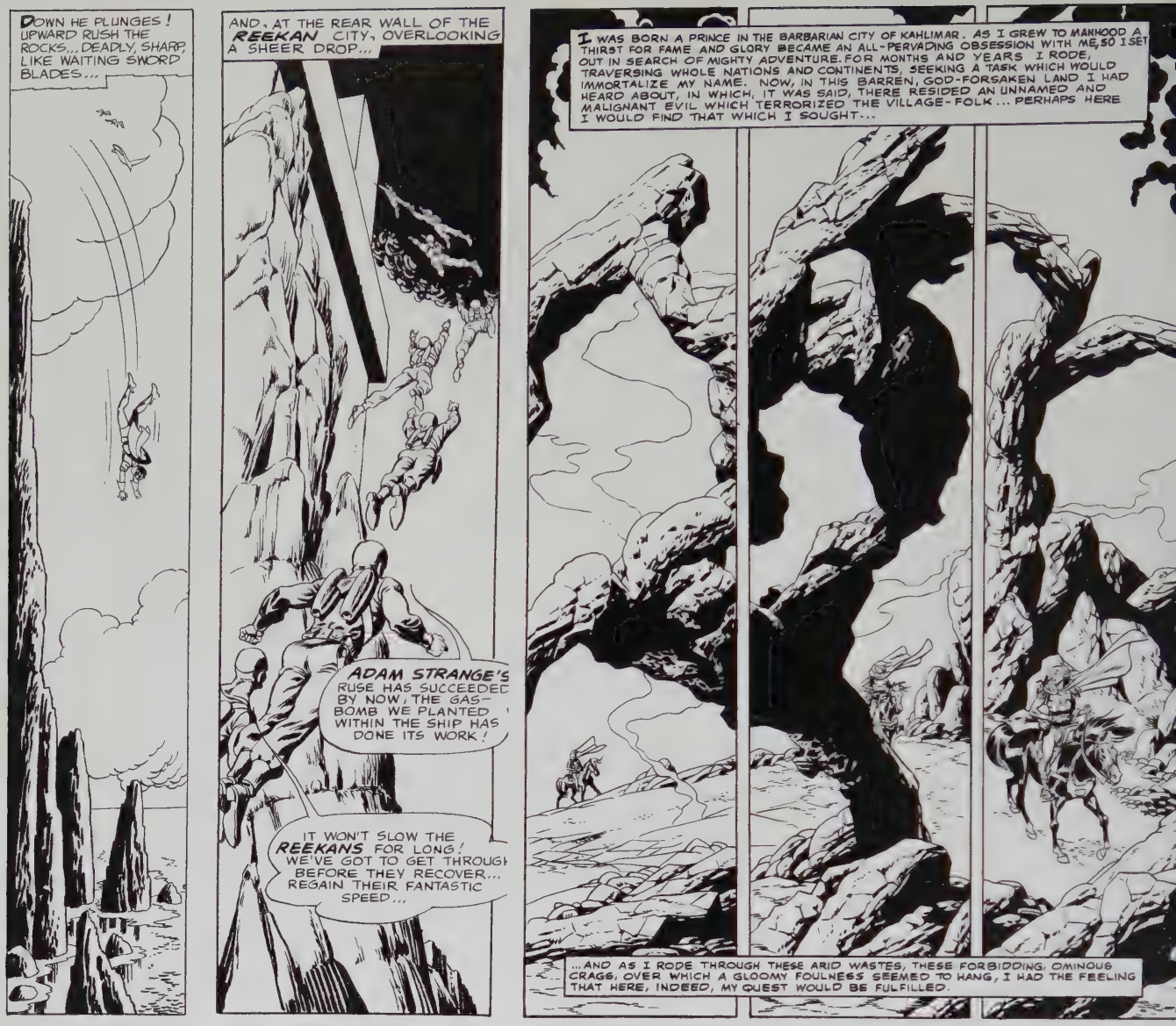

NU--
--NOT ANY-MORE.


BRING A MACHETE?


-THEN SOLEMNLY, REMORSEFULLY, HE ALIEN TURNS AND SHAMBLES BACK TOWARDS ITS WORK--
--LEAVING BEHIND ONLY A HANDFUL OF BILIOUS BUBBLES TO MARK THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF WHAT ONCE HAD BEEN -- A MAN!

Two different approaches to inking brick texture. The top panel is more loose and expressionistic. From *Just Imagine Stan Lee Creating Catwoman* (2002) script by Stan Lee, pencils by Chris Bachalo and inks by Richard Friend. In the bottom panel, Mike Mignola's approach is more organized, accurate and clean. From *Batman Legends of Dark Knight* #54 (November 1993), script by Dan Raspler.

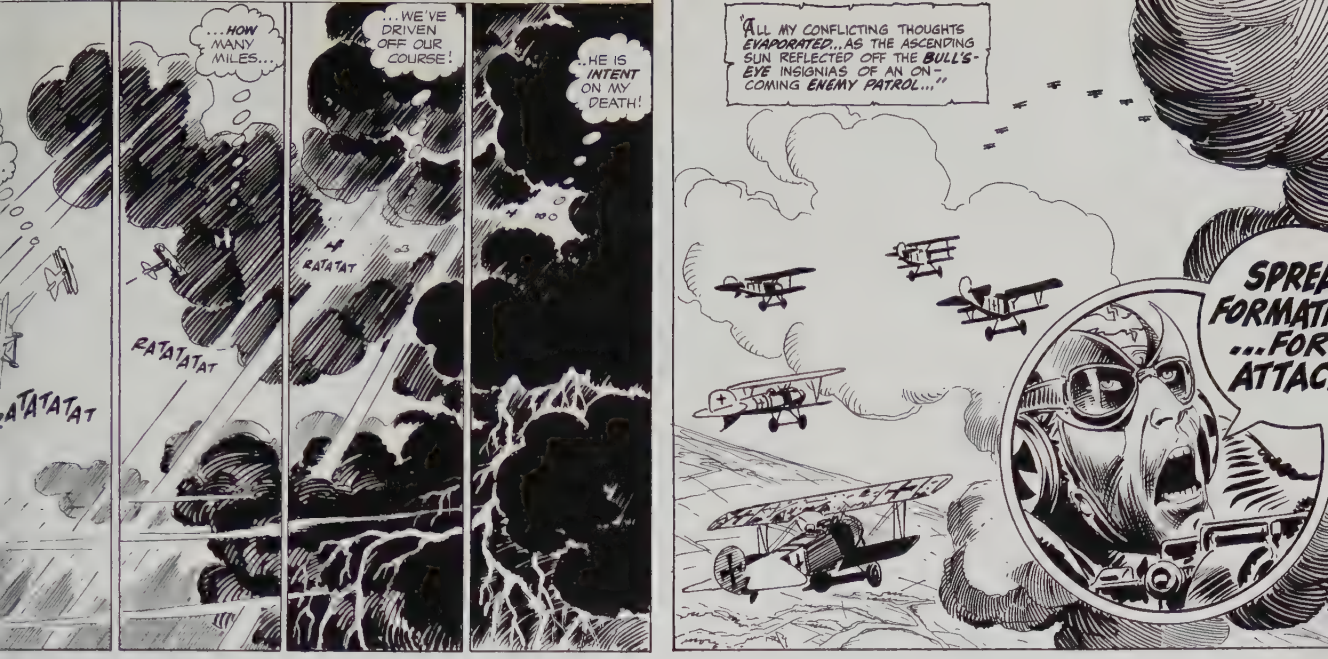
Opposite: Here are four examples of how to ink foliage and nature. *Top*: The first panel, by P. Craig Russell, is ornate, structured and detailed. From *Batman Legends of Dark Knight* #42 (February 1993), script by John Francis Moore. *Middle*: In the next panel below, José Luis García-López inks the background foliage in an entirely impressionistic approach. He seems to just suggest a background, rather than drawing it out in detail. From *Batman: Legends of Dark Knight* #153 (May 2000), script by J. M. DeMatteis and pencils by Trevor Von Eeden. *Bottom*: In this panel, Berni Wrightson is concerned with showing volume and depth. For volume, notice the right side of the panel, where his feathering on the tree trunk follows the form of the trunk itself. For depth, notice the left side of the panel, where the tree farthest from the camera seems to fade into the distance. From *Swamp Thing* #9 (April 1974), script by Len Wein. *Right*: In the right-hand panel, inker Bill Sienkiewicz reveals a similar but more impressionistic approach. From *Batman Shadow of the Bat* #88 (August 1999), script by Greg Rucka and pencils by Dan Jurgens.



Above: Two different inkers, Murphy Anderson and Jim Mooney, approach the problems of identifying rock in a similar way. *Left*: *Strange Adventures* #222 (February 1970), script by Dennis O'Neil and pencils by Gil Kane. *Right*: *Batman* #255 (April 1974), script by France E. Herron.

Above, far right: In this page from *House of Mystery* #180 (June 1969), Gil Kane and Wally Wood are able to communicate both the texture and volume of the rock structure. This shows a different approach, where the goal was to provide texture and depth through the use of detail and line weight.

Right: Joe Kubert not only uses white paint on top of his line work to indicate snow, but he is also aware that a heavy snowstorm would obliterate the blacks. So he does this entire scene with just line work and no blacks. From *Star Spangled War Stories* #143 (March 1969), script by Robert Kanigher.



Top left: In this example, Joe Kubert uses two different types of lines to communicate two different types of circumstances. The clouds in the background are inked to show the light coming through them. Kubert uses a straight line for this effect. The clouds in the foreground are inked in a way to describe the form of the clouds. From *Star Spangled War Stories* #140 (September 1968), script by Robert Kanigher.

Top right: This is a terrific example of how to convey form and volume in a difficult subject: clouds. Most beginner inkers think that clouds and smoke have no solidity or form, but penciller/inker Joe Kubert disproves that with his excellent line work. From *Star Spangled War Stories* #149 (March 1970), script by Robert Kanigher.

Bottom left: Here's a combination approach to inking snow by using white paint on black and also using black ink to draw the snow itself. From *Batman: Death and The Maiden* (2003), art by Klaus Janson.

THE ILLUSION OF THIRD DIMENSION

Comics are an exciting and wonderful medium in which to play. The accumulation and juxtaposition of drawn images for the purpose of communicating a larger story is unique to comics. Becoming a comic book artist can easily become an artistic exploration that lasts a lifetime. Like any art form, however, sequential art has both advantages and limitations built into the medium. The portability of comic books is one advantage. The ability to go back and review scenes or images already read is another plus. The assimilation of fragmented information into a coalesced whole is a great advantage to the medium.

When we compare comics to reality, the printed page has:

1) No sound

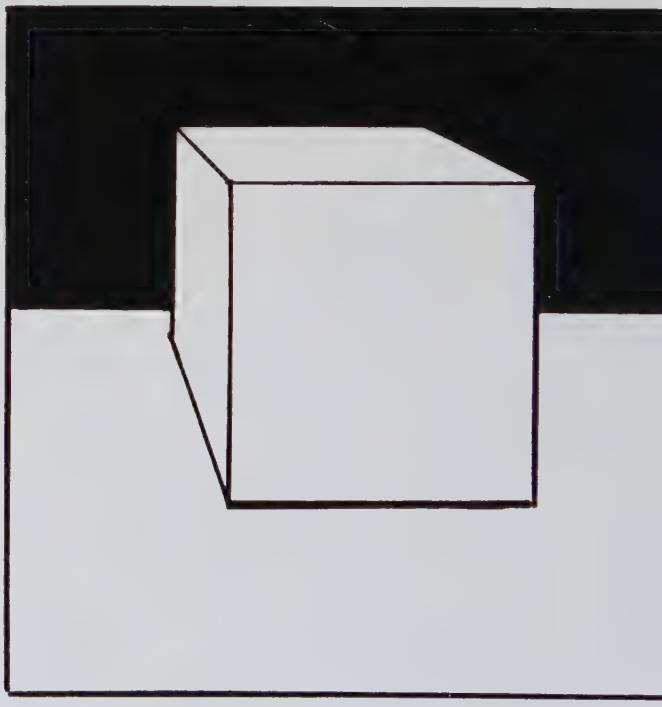
2) No movement

3) No third dimension

I tend to view this situation as a challenge and not a problem. The ability of the artist to overcome these limitations is part of the job of being a good storyteller. This applies to all the participants in the process: writers, pencillers, inkers, colorists, letterers and editors. Let's take a look at how the inker can contribute to creating the look of a three-dimensional image.

What exactly is the third dimension? The first two dimensions are height and width. The third is depth. The two-dimensional paper upon which comic books are drawn and printed can *never* be truly three-dimensional. By its very nature, paper will always have only height and width. Any attempt at introducing depth has to be an illusion. This is similar to watching a magician saw an assistant in half. The audience knows that what is being seen is not true, but it appears to be happening. In artwork, inkers in particular have a very large role to play in the creation of that illusion.

One of the more recognizable ways of aiding the penciller to create the illusion of depth is by paying attention to relationships between the foreground and background. In a typical comic book there are plenty of panels and images that have backgrounds. It is the responsibility of the inker to make sure that the foreground and background are separated enough to have some sense of depth and distance. In our everyday lives, we are so accustomed to seeing three dimensions that we take it for granted. We don't question it. In comics, however, without a convincing representation of that reality, the reader can easily become confused by flat or stiff images and not even know why. So how does the inker accomplish the trick of separating the foreground and background? By inking the two planes differently.



In this illustration, the illusion of depth is created by placing the box in perspective and by making it a white box in front of a black background.

One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is to ink the foreground with a heavier line than the line width used to ink the background elements. If there are any large black shapes in a panel, they can be included on the foreground plane. Backgrounds can be inked with a lighter line and smaller or no blacks. This approach approximates the reality of *atmospheric perspective* where objects in the distance are perceived as farther away by observing them through the haze of the atmosphere itself. The ultimate example of this technique is the use of a silhouette in the foreground and line work with no blacks in the background.

It is also possible to create a separation by using black in the distance and light lines in the foreground. Whichever approach the inker uses, the most important thing for the inker to remember is to remain consistent. Once you have decided to separate a foreground from a background, and you have decided how to ink the individual planes, don't mix up the approaches. If the heavier line weights are placed in the foreground, do not use those weights in the background. Any introduction of the same approach in the background brings the planes together and dilutes the illusion of depth.

There will be times when you may want to put blacks in both the foreground and the background. There is nothing wrong with this approach. This often happens because the demands of a particular mood or scene require the artist to do so. It just means that depth in this specific scene is not as important as other considerations. I would recommend using as many different approaches as possible. Variety is a key element in creating interesting sequential images. It is very important that the artist have a range of options from which to choose to solve storytelling problems such as the illusion of depth.

In the first drawing, the illusion of depth is created by placing the heaviest black shapes in the foreground and by using just line work in the background. The second drawing does just the opposite by putting white in the foreground and black in the background. The contrast between black and white shapes is one of the primary techniques to create the illusion of depth.


HOURS LATER... UNDER A DARK MANTLE OF FOLLIAGE DEEP IN THE BLACK FOREST...
ONLY ONE OTHER LIVING THING KNOWS WHY I COME HERE, SCHATZI!
AND-- SOMEHOW-- HE ALWAYS KNOWS WHEN I AM HERE!


BEFORE LONG, ANTHRO IS DEEP IN THE FOREST.. GLOOM DESCENDS LIKE AN ETERNAL DARKNESS..
WOULD YOU BELIEVE... I'M DOING ALL THIS FOR A MERE WOMAN?


BY THE TIME THEY GET UNTIED, I'LL BE LONG GONE.
SORRY THAT FURGO FREAK WASN'T THERE WHEN I CRASHED OUT...
...HE'S MY MAIN TARGET!
BUT I'LL GET HIM SOONER OR LATER!
IF HE DOESN'T GET ME FIRST!
SKIN FLICK PROD
CLUB CHRISENDA
gallery
NIRVANA
DANNA

LINE WEIGHT

Although we touched upon line weight in the first section, there is much more to the theory of line density than a heavier line in the foreground and a thinner line in the background. Line weight must also be taken into consideration when inking a form or shape on one plane. A choice has to be made when inking the human form, for instance. There are only two ways that the inker can approach inking a figure:

1) A dead line

A dead line refers to a line that has no variation in its thickness. It has the same weight throughout the inked shape. This makes it easier to separate planes and shapes. If the inker uses a mechanical pen, the line that flows from the pen is going to remain the same width unless the artist draws over it again to thicken it. Using mechanical pens, the inker can establish the illusion of depth by using a thicker pen point for the foreground plane and a thinner pen point for the backgrounds. A dead line doesn't necessarily mean a *thin* line. The line can have different weights between thick and thin, but cannot vary within the one line itself.

Penciller and inker Kevin Nowlan places large black shapes in the foreground and smaller black shapes in the background so that the size and scale of the black shapes create the illusion of depth. From *Secret Origins* #39 (April 1989), script by Jan Strnad.

Opposite, top left: Artist Joe Kubert has made a deliberate choice of black-and-white placement. The heaviest blacks are in the foreground. Gray and white spaces are restricted to the background, thus creating the black-and-white contrast. From *Star Spangled War Stories* #148 (January 1970), script by Robert Kanigher.

Opposite, top right: This is the opposite of the previous panel by Joe Kubert. Inker Wally Wood puts the white of the tree trunks in the foreground and uses black silhouettes in the background. From *Anthro* #6 (August 1969), script and pencils by Howie Post.

Opposite, bottom: This is an excellent example of black-and-white shapes in a complex pattern that nonetheless establish a solid foreground/background relationship. From *Just Imagine Stan Lee Creating Catwoman* (2002), script by Stan Lee, pencils by Chris Bachalo and inks by Richard Friend.

Mike Mignola's skill at creating interesting black-and-white relationships on a two-dimensional surface is seen at its best in this cover for *Aquaman* # 6 (February 1995).

This is an example of using size and scale to create depth. Notice that the ground beneath the Flash is solid black, but the illusion of depth is primarily created by the different sizes of the two characters. From *The Flash* #179 (December 2001) by Jim Lee.


YEARS HE HAS
N A PROUD MAN! HE HAS
RN THE POWER RING OF
GUARDIANS, AND USED IT
L, AND NEVER DOUBTED THE
TEOUSNESS OF HIS CAUSE...
THE NEXT DOZEN SECONDS,
VENT WILL OCCUR WHICH
SIGNAL THE END OF HIS
DEUR, AND THE BEGINNING
E A LONG TORMENT...
E WILL BE NO HAPPY ENDING,
THIS IS NOT A HAPPY TALE...
A SIMPLE ONE. BUT WHAT YOU
ABOUT TO WITNESS IS, PERHAPS,
INEVITABLE--
NAME, OF COURSE, IS--
GREEN LANTERN
--AND OFTEN HE HAS VOWED THAT--
NO EVIL SHALL ESCAP
MY SIGHT!
...HE HAS BEEN FOOLING HIMSELF...
JULIE SCHWARTZ
EDITOR

2) A weighted line

A weighted line is an individual line that has a variation of thickness. It can go from thin to fat in one stroke or vice versa. This particular style of inking is the more prevalent approach in comic books. The advantage to a weighted line is the ability to create form, shape and volume in the space of one shape on one plane. The best way to organize the varied line is to establish a light source. Let's use the human body as an example.

Draw a man standing on his feet. Establish the light source. Let's say for the sake of the example that the light is coming from above the figure. This automatically means that the lighter ink line is on the part of the body that is turned toward the light. The thicker line is that which is turned away from the light. I often assume that a thicker line represents the beginnings of a shadow, which is a good rule of thumb to follow.

Opposite: Neal Adams is one of the best artists at using line weight to create depth, volume and form. Here he uses a variety of line to avoid a flat, two-dimensional appearance. From *Green Lantern* #76 (April 1970), script by Dennis O'Neil.

Bottom, left: Through an excellent use of line weight, inker Dick Giordano manages to push the man's fist even farther into the foreground by using a heavy black ink line around it, giving the fist greater weight and solidity. From *Batman* #216 (November 1969), script by Frank Robbins and pencils by Irv Novick.

Below: This simple drawing shows how line weight can communicate form and depth. Note that the shoulder and tricep muscles, which are closest to the reader, have the heaviest lines. Below those heavy lines emerge the thinner lines of the muscles that lie underneath. The contrast between the thick and thin lines creates the illusion of depth in the figure.

This is another example of extremely effective line technique employed by Neal Adams. Note in the foreground figure that the line weight of the shoulder serves to create distance between the head and shoulder. From *The House of Mystery* #186 (June 1970).

As we ink the shoulder of our figure, the lighter line would be on top. As we ink along the shoulder's curve, the line becomes thicker. It has the most weight and thickness at the bottom of the curve, away from the light, where the shoulder meets the bicep. As we continue inking the arm, the lighter line is once again used to ink the top of the tricep, and the heavier line is at its bottom. If we continue with the light source in mind, it creates a fairly accurate and interesting portrayal of "reality."

In addition to the illusion of reality, the varied line also does another job. Because of the establishment of a light source, no thin (or thick) line will touch another thin (or thick) line. It is always the opposites that touch. A thin line will emerge from a thick line or vice versa. The thinner line at the top of the tricep has to come from the thicker line of the shoulder bottom. This is the real advantage of using the weighted line. What this approach creates is its own foreground/background relationship within a shape that is only on one plane. The heavier line always looks like it is in front of a thin line. In this case, the shoulder muscle will look as if it is in front of the tricep muscle because of the thin/thick relationship. If this technique is done conscientiously, it can bring a tremendous feeling of

Opposite: Compare the pencils with the inks, and you will see the inker's deliberate effort to apply the technique of contrasting line weights to create the illusion of depth. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #28 (May 2000), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Gil Kane and inks by Klaus Janson.

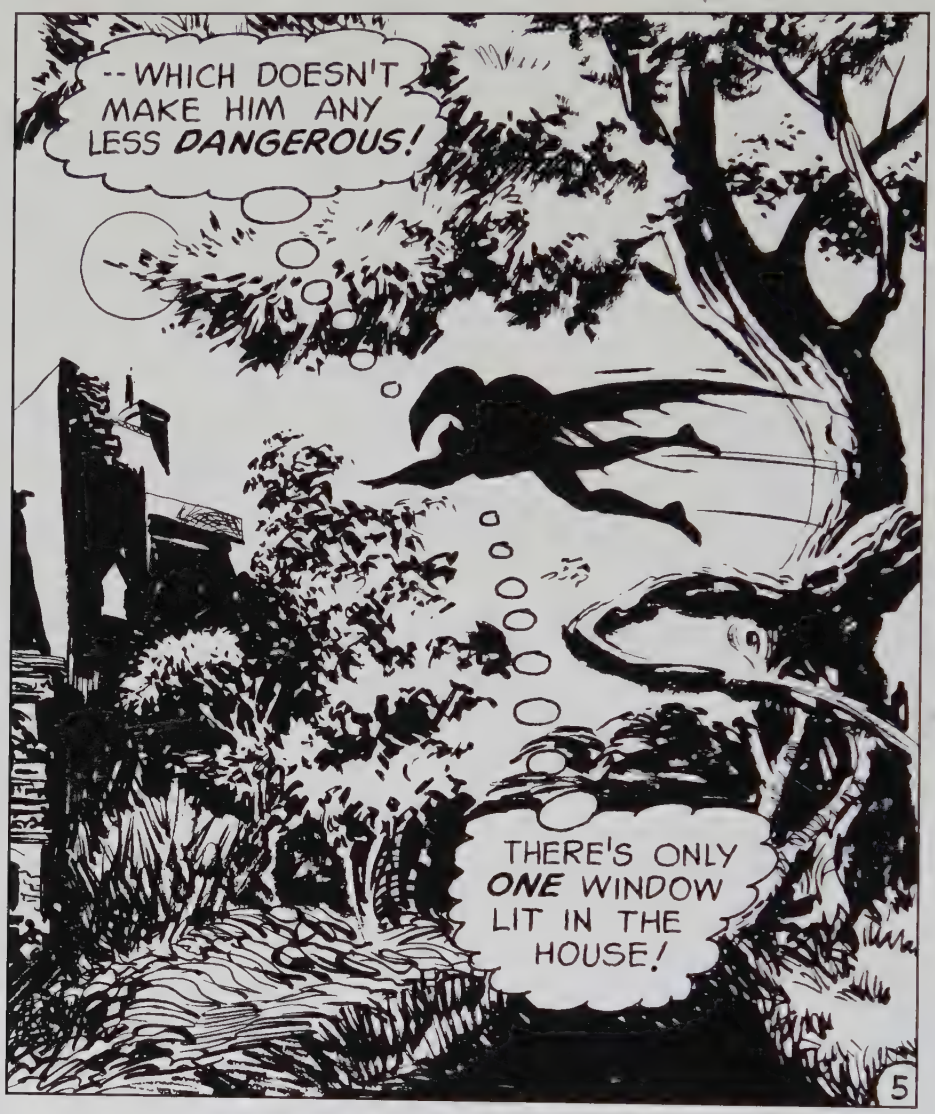

MY POWER RING'S GONE, TOO!
AIN'T THAT A SHAME!
AN OLD FAVE --A BUZZSAW TATTOO!
WHEN I CUT YOU DOWN, NO ONE WILL EVER CALL ME SMALL TIME AGAIN!
PAL, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW WRONG YOU ARE!


MY POWER RING'S GONE, TOO!
AIN'T THAT A SHAME!
AN OLD FAVE --A BUZZSAW TATTOO!
WHEN I CUT YOU DOWN, NO ONE WILL EVER CALL ME SMALL TIME AGAIN!
PAL, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW WRONG YOU ARE!

life and reality to your work. Not only does it approximate real life to a great degree, but the constant contrast of thin with thick lines creates a subtle vibration within the shape that gives the figure the illusion of some movement.

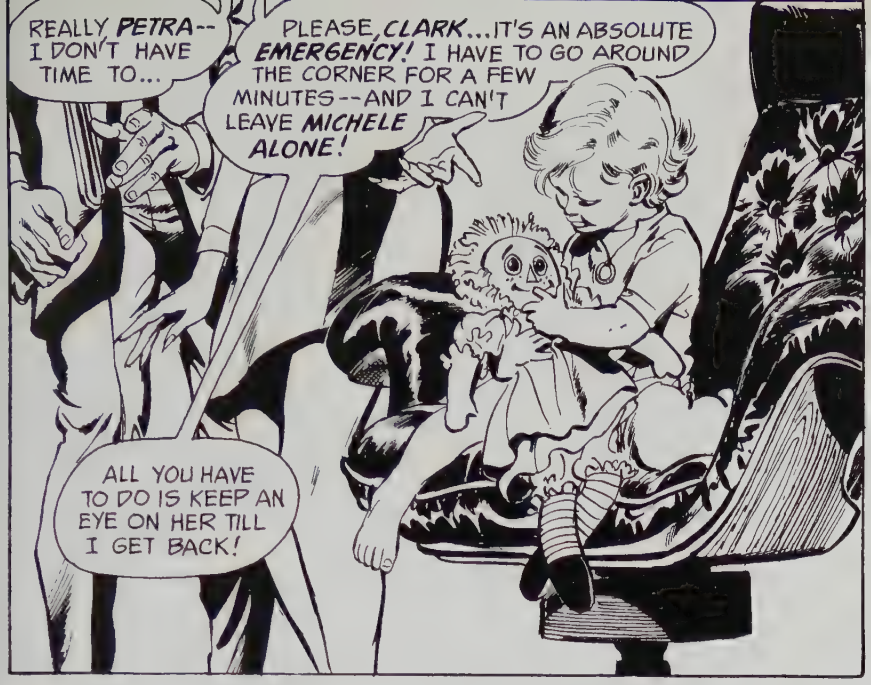
As we continue further into this book, we will see that there is more complexity and subtlety to this art form. Let's summarize the guidelines we've established for good comic book inking:

1) Clarity: The primary and most important objective above all others is and always will be clarity. Every mark and squiggle is made in the service of being clearly understood.



Inker Dick Giordano makes a conscientious effort to give the different shapes in this panel their own identities by applying different inking techniques. The leaves in the tree are inked in a different way than the leaves on the shrubs or the grass on the ground. From *Batman* #227 (December 1970), script by Dennis O'Neil and pencils by Irv Novick.

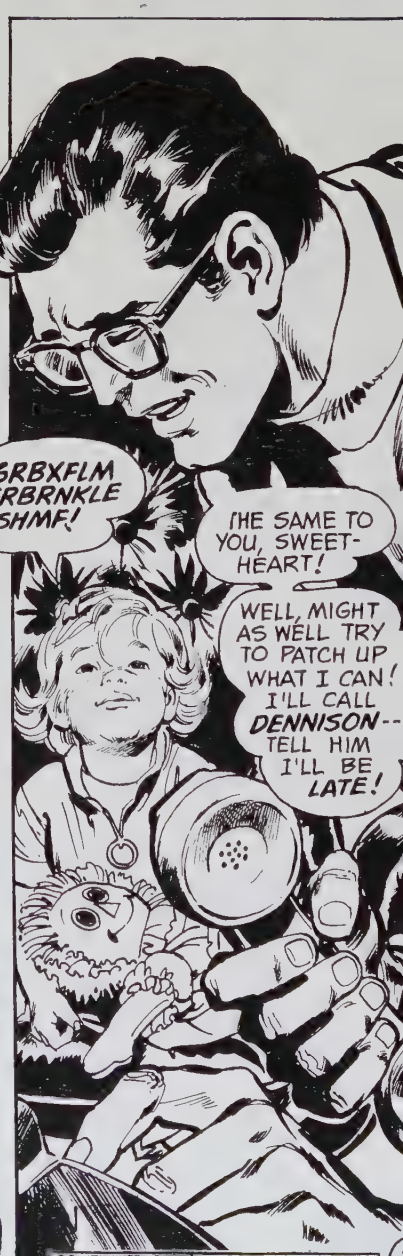
Opposite: In a page pencilled and inked by Neal Adams, the various textures are inked in a very deliberate fashion. The leather of the chair in the first panel is inked differently than the wood grain of the chair. In panel three, the reflections on the shiny surfaces are inked differently than the pattern on the floor. The floor pattern is inked differently than the carpet pattern. Neal is a master of giving shapes and surfaces their own identities by applying very specific textures to them. From *Superman* #254 (July 1972), script by Len Wein.


REALLY PETRA--I DON'T HAVE TIME TO...
PLEASE, CLARK...IT'S AN ABSOLUTE EMERGENCY! I HAVE TO GO AROUND THE CORNER FOR A FEW MINUTES--AND I CAN'T LEAVE MICHELE ALONE!
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS KEEP AN EYE ON HER TILL I GET BACK!


BUT I HAVE AN INTERVIEW THIS...
SHE WON'T BE ANY TROUBLE! MICHELE IS SO QUIET, YOU HARDLY KNOW SHE'S THERE! JUST TELL HER A STORY OR SOMETHING!


OH, WHAT'S THE USE? I...
THANKS, CLARK! YOU'RE REALLY A DOLL TO HELP OUT LIKE THIS!

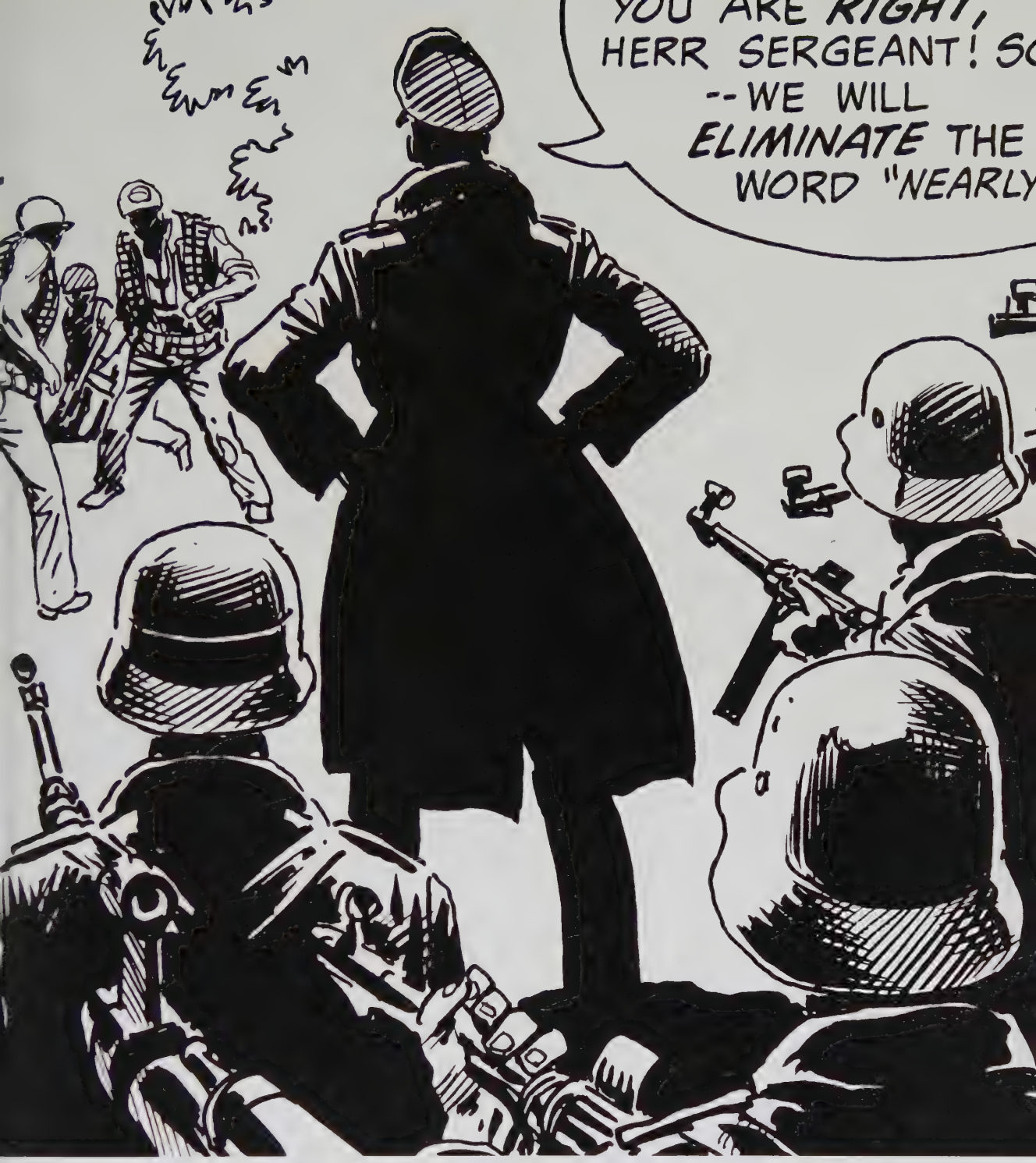

BOLT THE DOOR BEHIND ME, CLARK! I'LL BE BACK AS SOON AS I CAN!
I FEEL LIKE I'VE JUST BEEN DRAFTED--
--AND I'M NOT EVEN CERTAIN HOW!
KLIK


GRBXFLM FRBRNKLE SHMF!
THE SAME TO YOU, SWEETHEART!
WELL, MIGHT AS WELL TRY TO PATCH UP WHAT I CAN! I'LL CALL DENNISON--TELL HIM I'LL BE LATE!

Neal Adams creates the illusion of depth by isolating what the reader needs to see. He drops out all the blacks in the background except for the head peeking through the ceiling. From *Weird Western Tales* #13 (September 1972), script by Cary Bates.

2) Things should look like what they are: It is the responsibility of the inker to give the various shapes and forms of a panel an identity that helps in the creation of clear storytelling. The trunk of a tree needs to look different than the wood paneling in your dad's basement. The blankets or sheets of a bed need to look different from the lines you use to ink a car. It is *extremely* important that elements in your drawing have their own identity. This lays the groundwork for creating compositional *patterns* that we will examine later.

3) The third dimension: The illusion of depth and form is critical in establishing a convincing approximation of our everyday reality. The penciller can use the contrasting sizes of shapes to create foreground and background depth, but the inker uses line weight and contrasting tone to aid in this objective. Whether you choose to use a varied or consistent line weight, the inker has an obligation to create a solution that enhances the illusion of three dimensions.



A simple but highly effective way to create depth is to place the heaviest blacks in the foreground, use no blacks in the background, and overlap the primary figure over the background figures. This example from *Our Army at War* #217 (March 1970) is by Joe Kubert.

FIVE
TO TRACE OR NOT TO TRACE

Throughout the history of comic book publishing, the contribution of the inker has suffered in comparison to that of the penciller. Perhaps the best example to illustrate this point is a scene in the movie *Chasing Amy*, written and directed by Kevin Smith. A young fan walks up to a comic book professional at a convention and asks him what he does. The man explains that he draws in ink over the pencils of another artist. The fan responds by arguing that what the inker really does is trace the pencils. More conversation ensues, and each participant becomes more adamant about their position. Finally the inker jumps over the table to strangle the kid. I've actually seen this happen in real life.

However entertaining or amusing the "inker as tracer" argument is, it is a distraction from a more in-depth analysis of the contributions of the inker specifically and of comic books in general. One of the qualities of good art is the coherence of the artistic vision and the ability to follow it. This is most easily accomplished when a singular vision is at work. As the amount of people involved in producing a comic book increases, the opportunity for a coherent vision decreases in direct proportion. What remains is a mixture of individual segments that often fails to coalesce into a solid and unified approach. Mainstream comics are not designed to be "art." They are a mass-produced commodity that mostly employs a utilitarian approach to their creation. Comic books are a business that operates for the same reason all businesses do: to make a profit.

Different inkers have different approaches to similar problems. Compare the face of Green Arrow inked by Dick Giordano to the opposite panel, where the very similar head is inked by Bill Sienkiewicz. The first panel is from *Green Lantern* #86 (November 1971), script by Dennis O'Neil and pencils by Neal Adams. The second panel is from *Green Lantern Legacy* (2002), script by Joe Kelly and pencils by Brent Anderson.

The opportunity to create good art in this environment is challenging but not impossible, even with the traditional assembly line approach. It is achievable not just through the vision of the penciller or inker, but primarily the editor. A savvy editor has the overall picture of a book in his or her head and hires the writer, penciller, inker and colorist to fulfill that picture. Mainstream comic books that have attained a level of greatness always have strong editors at the helm with a strong vision. DC editor Julie Schwartz is an example. His was the editorial vision that sewed together the individual pieces into a credible whole.

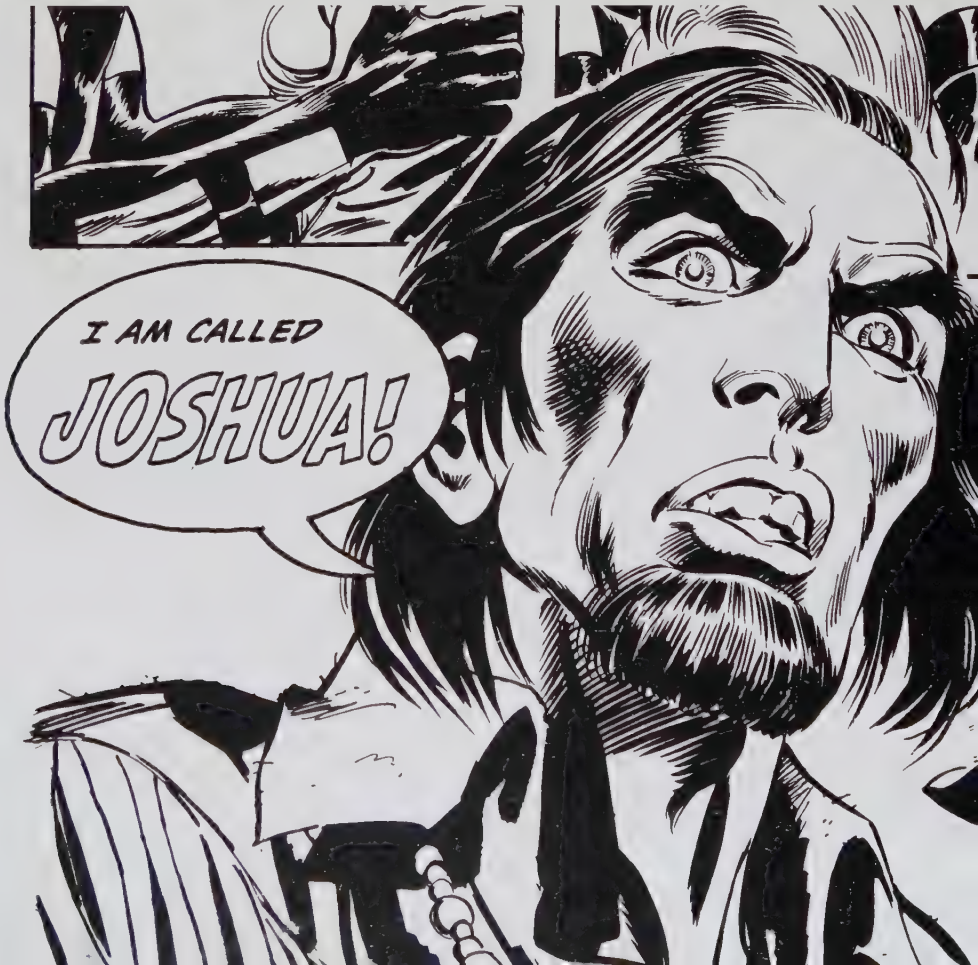
The assembly line method of producing comic books has nothing at all to do with the worth and value of the medium. Sequential art and film both run the gamut from the individual auteur to the collective communal effort. There may be questions about the artistic value and potential of monthly comic books but sequential art as a medium without any doubt deserves to be on the same level as all other art forms.

In the early days of comics, inkers were hired to mimic the style of the credited artists. Inkers worked for the penciller and often received no credit. There were even occasions when the credited artist never touched the paper that art was drawn upon. It was in the interest of the original artist and the character with which he was associated to maintain an identifiable look that became attached to his name. It was at this point that the notion of inkers as "tracers" took hold. Inkers were specifically brought on board based on their ability to adhere to a certain look.

As the fragmentation of artistic responsibilities became more prevalent, it was more difficult to pursue an individual vision. The system could no longer accommodate that need, and a different kind of inker was created—one that was no longer hired by the artist to mimic a particular style but rather an ink artist with his own individual and unique approach. Inkers became personalities with recognizable styles that were in demand in their own right separate from that of any penciller. This approach to the artistic relationship between the penciller and inker brought about a revolution in comic art. It was no longer necessary to rely on the strength of the penciller to produce good work. Instead, the best comic art became an amalgam of the two individual artists that resulted in the creation of a third style.

Here are similar faces that were inked by different artists. The example above is inked by Vince Colletta and the one on the right is inked by Mike Royer. Notice how Mike's technique appears to be much "wetter" than Vince's "dryer" inking style. From *Jack Kirby's Forever People*, script and pencils by Jack Kirby.

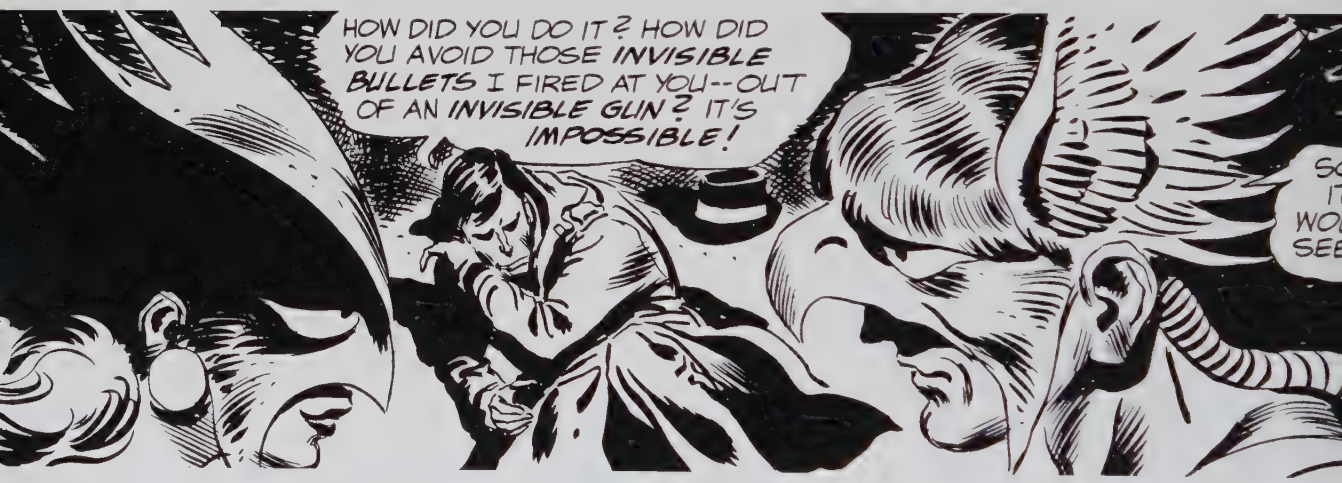
Neal Adams pencilled and inked the first head; the second is pencilled by Neal and inked by Frank Giačoia. Compare the two panels and you will see that Neal's inks have greater control and the ability to create form, volume and depth, whereas Frank's approach looks a bit flatter. From *Green Lantern* #85 (September 1971) and *Green Lantern* #78 (July 1970), scripts by Dennis O'Neil.



I would hold up the work of Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott as a prime example of how successfully that approach worked. Both Kirby and Sinnott were accomplished artists in their own right. Each had artistic strengths and weaknesses. When they were put together, the weaknesses seemed to disappear within their working relationship. It was a combination of the best parts of each. No one could ever claim that Joe Sinnott traced Kirby's pencils. Nor could that be said about other Kirby inkers, including Vince Colletta, Mike Royer, Dick Ayers, and Chic Stone. Otherwise, all those Kirby-pencilled stories would look the same, wouldn't they? Each of those artists brought his own individual style and contribution to the work. Some may have been a better combination than others, but none of them traced for a living.

The "trace or not to trace" argument is an inauthentic and misleading debate. The truth is that inking has nothing to do with tracing. I can't emphasize this enough. A minute spent arguing about tracing is a minute you will never get back. Don't waste your time! Focus on the real challenges of inking and comic art.

The legitimate way to categorize inkers is not remotely connected to tracing. It is quite the opposite. Inkers are divided into two classifications: those that can draw and those that cannot. The ability to draw is the single most important talent to become a successful inker. There is no experience that can shape and form an inker more than learning how to draw. You can apply meticulous and time-consuming line technique, dazzle with special effects, and add spiffy lighting and textures, but it all pales in comparison to the knowledge that you acquire with drawing. Each and every line must have a reason to exist on the page; it must serve a purpose. It must inform. Knowledge of drawing has the capacity to give meaning to every line committed to paper.



This is why when we speak of good inking, it has nothing to do with tracing. The inkers who possess knowledge of drawing are too informed as artists themselves. It's not *possible* to suspend years of accumulated knowledge and sit down to trace. The hand and the eye will not allow it. An artist's experience is destined to reveal itself. It is certainly possible for an inker to work in tandem with a penciller. They can both have similar goals and work to achieve a unified vision. But that vision cannot be articulated unless both the penciller and inker are knowledgeable about what they are doing. It's really impossible to do justice to pencils when "tracing."

One of the more recent trends in comics is the rise of super-tight pencils and the demand for inkers to be faithful to them. There is nothing wrong or inappropriate about this situation. A penciller has the right to use an inker who will remain true to the pencils. But being true to the pencil art is not tracing. Tracing with no knowledge of drawing or lighting or depth will result in work that is stiff and dead. The tightest pencils will only suffer as a result of this tracing approach. Inkers who are less developed in their drawing skills can only rise to the level of their inexperience. Inking is an active, organic process that requires you to make decisions in every panel. If the inker is lacking in drawing ability, he does not have the ability to assess the pencilled art and cannot make informed decisions regarding his approach. That inker can only offer his own brand of inexperience.

Here's another example of similar heads being inked by different artists. The first is pencilled and inked by Joe Kubert; the second is pencilled by Joe Kubert and inked by Murphy Anderson. Although very similar, the first panel has more variation in line weight. From *The Brave and the Bold* #44 (November 1962) and *Atom and Hawkman* #40 (January 1969), script by Gardner Fox.

Next page: In his cover pencils for *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Frank Miller uses a relatively consistent line weight throughout the figure. In the inked version, there is a greater variety of line weights, especially in Batman's hands.


FM
JANSON 96

SIX
HOW TO INK

Before you sit down to start inking a job, make sure that your workspace is set up in a way conducive for your best inking. Always work with plenty of light. Some artists prefer using only one lamp for illumination. I have grown accustomed to using two. This practice makes it easier to eliminate shadows cast from your hand as it travels across the paper. I also use a third lamp that has a built in magnifying glass that I use for those very small faces that can become blurry as the workday progresses. This is a very useful tool and has helped my detail work immeasurably.

Whether you work on a flat surface like a desk or have an artist's table that tilts at an angle is up to you. I prefer the tilted board because it allows the angle of my head to correlate to the angle of the artwork. This eliminates the possibility of any perceptual distortion that a flat desk might create, especially on the parts of the page that recede away from the artist.

Working in pen and ink requires a certain amount of training and practice before the hand develops enough facility. You always want to feel that the brush or pen is an extension of your arm. When you hold the pen or brush in your hand, lock your wrist into the forearm. Do not let the hand move independently of the arm. It will weaken and hurt your inking tremendously if only the hand does the movement. Think of the hand and forearm from the elbow down as one unit. When you draw a line, you will have the strength and momentum of your body behind each stroke.

The ability to ink long smooth lines free hand depends on the combination of locking the wrist and eye-hand coordination. When you need to draw a line that is too large to cover without moving your forearm, always look at the place where the line will stop. Place your brush or pen at the beginning of the line, look at the endpoint, and move your hand and arm without taking your eye off the point where the line will end. This will take a bit of practice, but the results are guaranteed.

Work in an environment that does not have visual distractions. What this usually means is not watching television while you're working. It's pretty difficult to look at two things at the same time and the work will automatically suffer as a result. I often listen to music, however, and have found that it can benefit the work. Movie soundtracks and instrumentals are ideal for working and can be an aid to establishing a certain feel or mood within myself that spills over onto the art. If I know that a project is going to take a long time, I might even make a tape of songs or sounds that I associate with the specific job. Even when I have to put the work aside for a long time, the tape quickly brings back my thoughts and feelings about the job as soon I hear it. There's no reason not to enjoy the process.

Every inker works at a different speed. On the following pages you will see my progress at the end of each hour as I ink a comic book page. I started with this fully pencilled page.

Once you have gathered all the tools and materials needed for inking, you are ready to proceed. The first step is really simple: look at your job. Of course everyone *looks* at the pencils, but what I really mean is for you to *study* and *evaluate* the pencils that you are about to ink. It's important before you sit down to ink that you are totally familiar with both the strengths and weaknesses of the pencilled pages. Do the blacks make sense? Do the textures work? Is the information clear? This step is critical in determining your approach to the work. Each job and each penciller is different, and every story you ink is going to have its own individual personality and context. The inker faces several responsibilities, but the primary one is *always* to the story itself.

Your best approach is to concentrate on the storytelling. Do what you need to do to help the communication, and don't complicate matters. If you want to indulge your artistic needs, do it in areas that are secondary so the storytelling won't be affected. I often do some of my best work on secondary characters and backgrounds where I feel less constricted by story demands.

Your second responsibility is to the penciller. The inker has an obligation to make the penciller look as good as possible. Your job is to follow up what he has done and emphasize the strong points and minimize any problems. This is the time when any drawing experience the inker has becomes important. How are the faces? Are they solidly drawn? Do the characters remain consistent? Is the anatomy of the body correct? How can you best help that along? Is the clothing identifiable? Do they have a texture or design that might help in recognizing characters in a panel? How are the backgrounds? Do they have depth? What can you do to make them more interesting?

The third responsibility the inker has is to himself. What do you want to do? What problems are you working on? What do you want to focus on for your own development? What can you learn from this job? What do you find interesting about this assignment? You have an obligation to learn new things every time you accept a job. It can revolve around an artistic development like rendering a face effectively or identifying wool efficiently. Perhaps you can learn something about yourself in the process. Maybe you can appreciate how to be more disciplined. Or you can learn how to ink faster. Or learn how to be patient when detail and rendering seem to take too long. It's critical to the development of every artist to be aware and awake. Challenging yourself in a consistent way will only make you a better artist.

The problems of a pencilled job are as varied as the penciller and the job itself. Every time you sit at the board, it's going to be a different situation. Every panel can literally have another unique problem for the inker to solve. In order to construct a plan, a few minutes of studying the artwork to devise an approach is well worth doing. The penciller deserves no less respect than for the inker to analyze and evaluate the work in the service of the penciller and the assignment.

One hour later, I had most of the first panel inked. At this point, I tried inking solely in brush to see if the end result would match what I saw in my head.

Once the inker has determined how best to approach the inking on a particular job, he can start to put lines on paper. Pick an area of the page in which to warm up or start somewhere besides the first page. Do not ink the important parts of the page unless you warm up first. The ability of the hand to immediately cooperate with your goals is not always a given. Make sure you take some time to break in your tools, your hand and your mind. The three have to work as a team.

I usually warm up by ruling some straight lines or doing some pen or brush texture. If you have to use a scrap piece of paper, by all means do that. If you want, you can lay a piece of tracing paper over the pencils and practice inking on that. Once I determine that the tools are functioning properly and I am in a reasonably prepared state of mind, I start work in earnest. I approach the work very methodically, from left to right and top to bottom. Through experience I have learned that it is best not to avoid any panels or areas that might not appeal to me for whatever reason. I once heard of an inker whose approach to inking was based on what he liked to ink. He would go through an entire job and ink the heads first. Then he would ink his second favorite thing and so on down the line. Eventually he was left with an entire book of panels and objects that he hated. This method is guaranteed to slow you down and hurt the quality of the work.

The only time I vary my left to right and top to bottom approach to inking is when the penciller uses a softer lead that might smudge. If you start at the top of the page you must place your hand and forearm on the rest of the page. There's no way of getting around that. You can tape a piece of tracing paper on top of the area not to be inked to protect it but I prefer not to. It doesn't feel right to me. I like the physical contact between the paper and myself. In those instances I will start at the bottom right and work up to the top left of the page. This insures that no pencils are smudged in the process of inking.

Don't be afraid to move the paper around. There is no law that requires you to keep the page stationary. Your left hand (assuming you are right handed) is the hand that controls the position of the artwork. Don't be afraid to ink the page while it's sideways or upside down. Sometimes the page can move around on the drawing board like a pinwheel.

What follows is the traditional approach to comic book inking that to some degree mirrors the assembly line approach to the production of comics. Indeed, I think it was created to break the process down to its most fundamental steps in order to have different people perform the different functions. It is a valid method that still works very well today. Even the most strident individualist working in pen and ink adheres to these principles in some capacity. The important factor to remember is not the precise sequence in which inking can be approached, but that it is necessary to have some way of organizing the process.

Two hours later, although I wasn't entirely satisfied, I made the decision to go ahead with the brush. My concern was that that the brush line was a bit too thick. Sometimes when I ink with less variety of line weights, I feel that the shapes in the panel become one gray mass—or mess.

1) Line work comes first. If you are going to use both pen and brush, you are probably going to start with the pen. As long as you use both tools, the one that produces the thinner line will be used initially. This will let you place either a solid black area or a thicker brush line on top of the pen line if you need to adjust it.

2) Brush work comes second. Because the brush line is usually heavier than any pen work, the fatter lines and black areas are done second.

3) Erasing the pencil lines. Assuming that all the work has been done in those two steps, it is necessary before the pages see print that the inker erase all the pencil lines. This is the responsibility of the inker and is part of the job description. Do not hand in pages that are not cleaned up. Be aware of how much pencil is on the back of the page too. When you lay the pages on top of each other, the lead on the back of the page which was rubbed off from the page underneath, will often rub back onto a cleaned page. If you need to, erase the back of the page also.

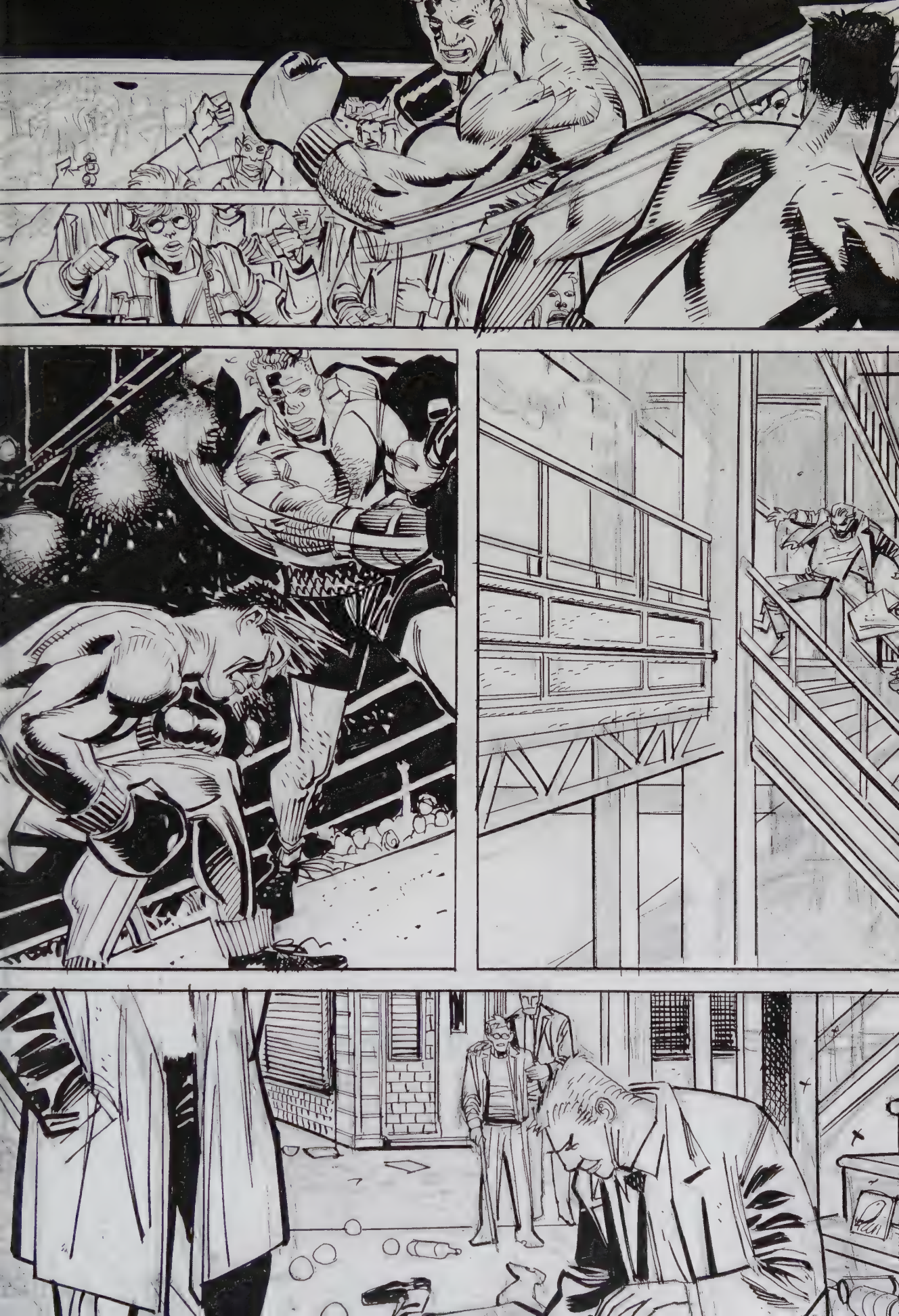
4) Correcting, cleaning and adjusting with white paint. After the pencils are erased, you are more than likely going to notice lines that stray beyond the panel border or parts of the artwork that might need some tweaking. All of the spaces between panels need to be cleaned up. Unless you are working in a style that allows for extraneous lines outside the borders, they should be eliminated. It is a visual distraction that makes the reader aware of panels and borders. Clean up your pages as much as possible.

In addition, there will be lots of times when you will need to go over an ink line to either thicken or thin it. If you need to thicken it, then you will use brush or pen. If you need to thin the line, then you will use white paint. There is nothing wrong in "working" the line at any stage of the process. I often go over a line many times to get the look that I'm after. The most important line is always the one you see in your head. Achieving that goal is not always possible in one clean stroke. So don't be surprised or afraid to struggle for the line you need.

Having listed the methodology in four simple steps, I will be the first to tell you it's neither that rigid nor simple. For example, the first two steps can be reversed. An equally valid approach to comic book inking is to do the black areas with a brush first and the line work second. This allows the artist to work from dark to light rather than the reverse. Whatever method comes closest to pleasing the inker and fulfilling his responsibilities can be adopted.

When I ink exclusively in brush, for instance, the approach is much less formalized. If there is no reason to divide the inking into brush or pen, there is no reason to create an arbitrary division of responsibilities. I'll often just fill in blacks as I am inking the scene.

Three hours later, I started ruling the straight lines for the backgrounds and used the pen to do some of the smaller figure work and the textures, including the brickwork and cross-hatching.



Next page: Four hours later, most of the page was finished. The blacks had been completely filled in. Any pen work that I needed to do was done, and the textures and effects were completed.

Five hours later, I was done. I spent the last hour doing corrections and making adjustments with white-out. During this period of inking, I usually eliminate any extraneous lines that flow beyond the panel borders and introduce some white-on-black effects, such as making speed lines more clear. For example, in the second panel, I applied some white paint to the area where the boxer gets hit and sweat falls off his head.

SOME COMMON MISTAKES

Comic book inking shares some of the most basic objectives that all art has in common. The illusion of depth on a two-dimensional piece of paper, for example, is one of those very specific goals. Artists also have the responsibility of convincing the viewer that the created world is inherently believable. Once the comic book reader starts to read the first page of a story he willingly gives himself over to the artist or writer. A partnership is created between the artist and the reader. If anything happens that causes the reader to be removed from the created reality of a story, it can only cause harm to the story. One of the most serious transgressions that a sequential artist can commit is to somehow make the audience aware that he is looking at a drawing. The reader is immediately pulled out of the reality of the created world and thrust back into his own. Anything the artist does to create this break between the story and the reader is a mistake. Let's look at some examples of common errors.

1) If you look closely at the shoulder in the snippet of art on the next page, you will notice that it stops right at the panel border. I'm guessing that the decision was made for the sake of neatness. Although I applaud any effort to keep the pages in pristine shape, this is a situation where it actually hurts the ink work. I very much recommend that inkers ink through the panel borders wherever necessary. The problem with stopping directly on the border line is simply that it *looks* like a line. It reminds the reader that what he's looking at is a line. Art requires a certain suspension of belief on the part of the viewer. Every time the reader is reminded that he is looking at a drawing is a moment where he is not paying attention to the story. You've lost him.

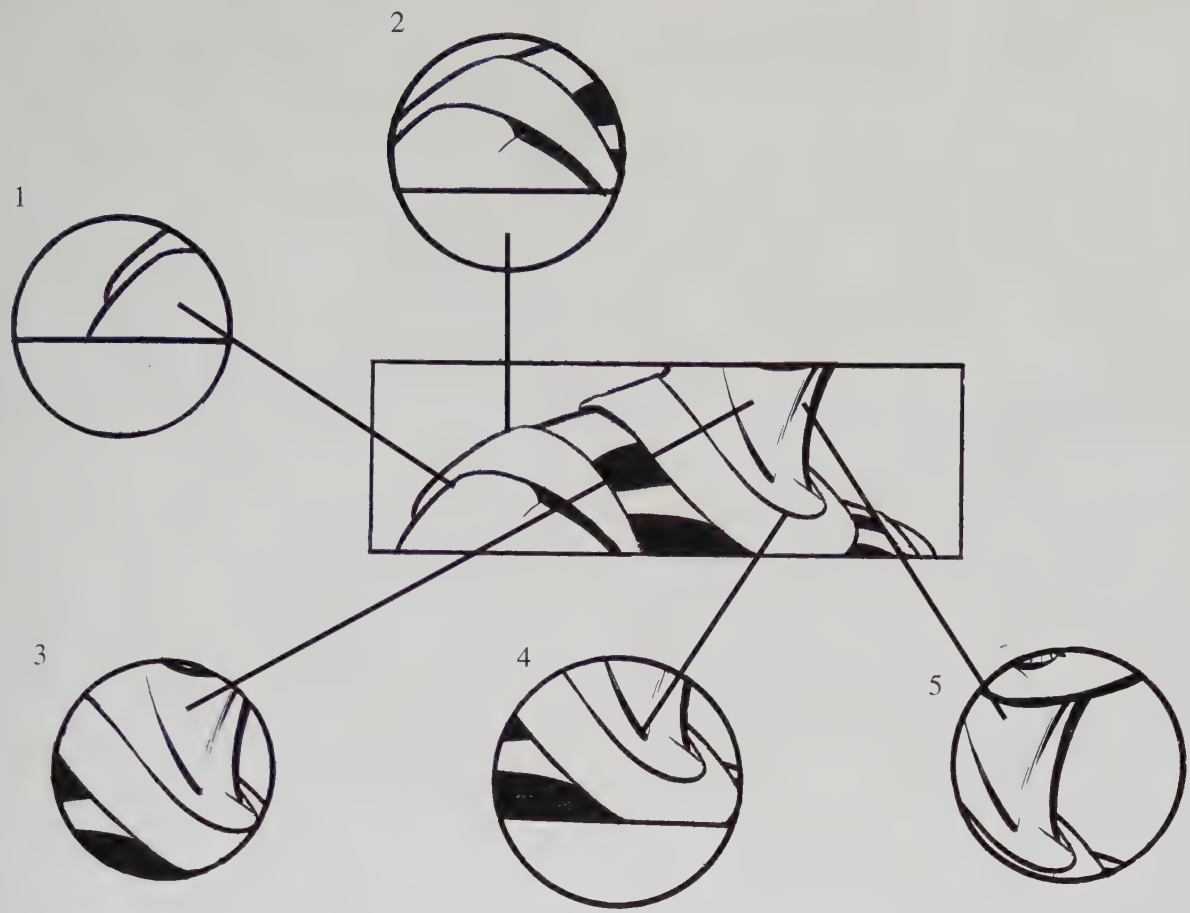
Also, the fact that the line in this example gets thinner because the artist was slowing the stroke down to stop on the panel border creates a reality of its own. The line weakens as it approaches the border in *reaction* to the border. It calls attention to itself as a result. In order for technique to be effective it needs to be invisible. The viewer can't be aware of it. The solution in this case is to boldly run the line through the panel border and white out the excess later.

Another problem with that specific line is the weight of it. It is not consistent with the line weight established on the neck or trapezius. It is a general rule of art that the contour of a figure should stand out from the background. One of the ways to accomplish that goal is to use a heavy line on the contour of the body. This approach may not always be the first choice but some effort has to be made to make the characters visually noticeable.

Add to this the fact that the shoulder is actually turning in the direction of the reader, so that it is in front of the other two contour lines, and you might be able to see that a thinner line at this specific point is a mistake. It is neither consistent with the established contour weight nor does the choice help in the illusion of three-dimensionality. A thicker line is definitely needed here.

2) This is a good example of the need for the inker to think about what he is doing. This fat line seems to serve no purpose at all. I'm guessing that it is supposed to be a shadow of the shirt or sweater. Does it make any sense that the edge of the sweater arm casts a shadow on only half the shoulder? And what of the short thin line that emerges from the top? What does it tell us?

Lines need to have purpose. They cannot be applied to the paper in a random and arbitrary way. There has to be some thought given to what you want to say and how you are going to say that in ink.



If you want to cast a shadow or use a heavier line to delineate and differentiate the sweater from the body, do not break up the line into different weights. Keep it simple. And if the thin line that emerges from the top of the fat line is meant to be an indication of some muscular striation, it's unnecessary. The fact that the shadow has a curve to it on the top indicates the curve of the shoulder by itself. Anything else is superfluous. Lines have to have meaning.

3) Here is another area where line weights change for no particular reason. There's no reason to have a heavier line weight on the top of the sweater neck than on the bottom. It serves no purpose and does not give the reader any useful information. Think before you ink!

4) This line on the neck is full of misinformation. I think that it is supposed to represent the sternomastoid, which is the muscle that controls the side to side motion of the neck. Look at the weight and stroke of the line closely. Notice that little hook at the bottom of the weighted line? What is that telling us? If we follow the anatomical construction of the neck, that part of the sternomastoid is *behind* the larger line. We are looking into the neck. And the bolder weighted line seems to be connected to the thinner smaller line for no reason. If it had any chance of making sense these lines would have to have a space between them. And the line weights should have been reversed.

5) These lines are used to represent the other side of the sternomastoid muscle. The absence of an organized inking theory and the lack of anatomical knowledge diminish the ability of the line to be

useful or informative. This is the first use of feathering, which is the application of parallel lines to another line that can either soften the original line or create an indication of form. There will be more on feathering in Chapter Nine, but in this example I don't think it works very well. Feathering, too, has to mean something. How is the inker using feathering in this case? He's not really softening the edge of a black nor is he indicating shape or form. He's not using the line to communicate information. What he's doing is feathering the line *itself* just for the sake of doing it. Lines have to have meaning, and these lines have no purpose.

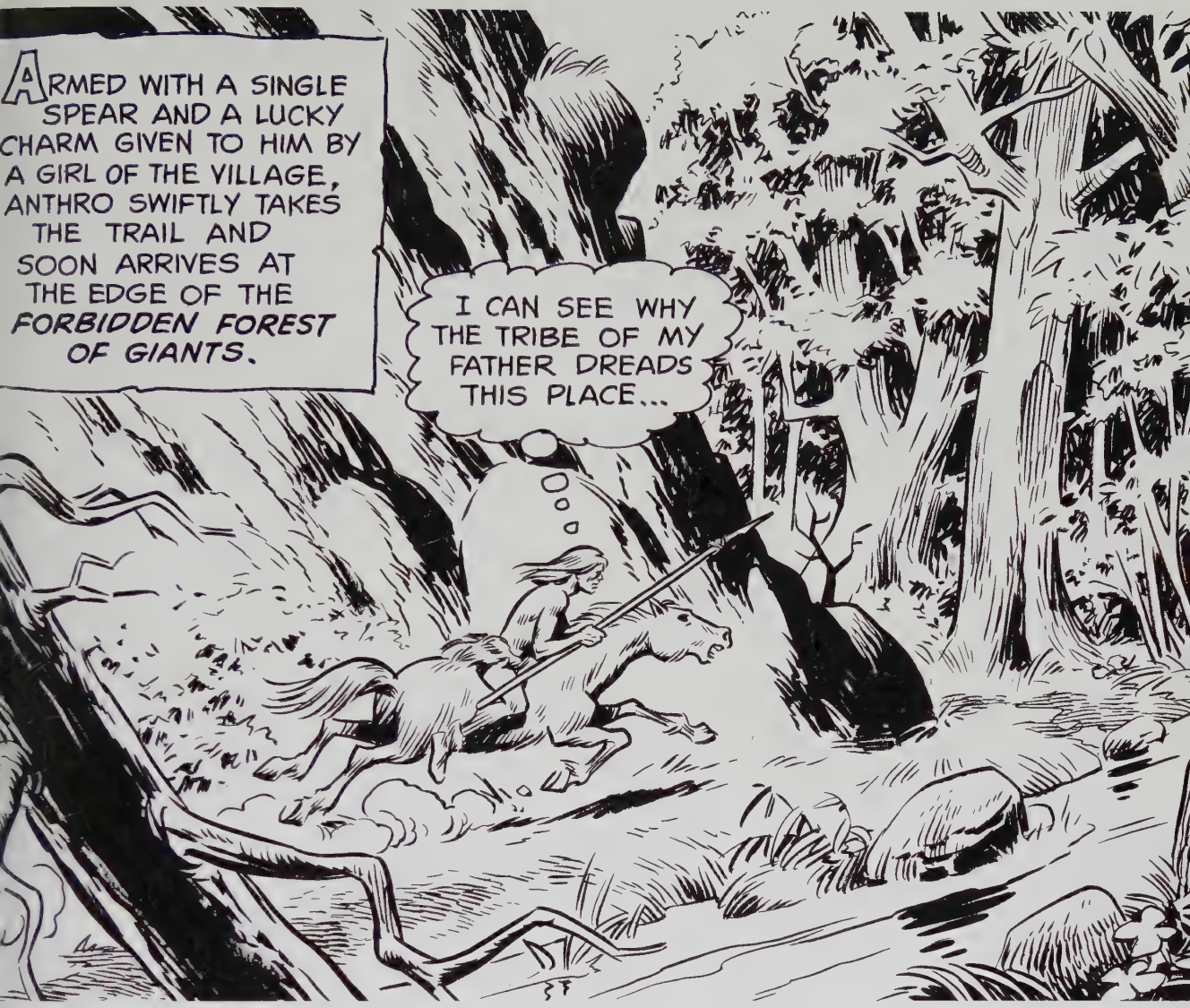
In addition, do not *ever* allow a tangent to be created. A tangent is established when the contours of two subjects touch each other. Even worse, do not *ever* let a tangent be created by having a balloon or caption rub against a line contained within the panel. Always overlap. If two figures are standing in close proximity to each other, make sure that one figure is in front of the other, unless of course they are clearly separated. Sometimes after a balloon is lettered, a figure or background line will wind up as a tangent against the balloon. Avoid this at all costs. It draws attention to the mechanics of comics itself and catapults the reader out of the story. The suspension of belief is shattered.

Often times, balloons and captions are at the fringes of the panel. The action mostly takes place in the middle of the design where the eyes of the reader fall naturally. If the caption or balloon do not meet the panel border, there will be art in between the lettering and the panel border. Try to eliminate any reason for the reader to look in that area. Use black to fill it in if you can. A framing device keeps the reader contained within the panel. Otherwise the eye can easily wander. Remember that the theory of inking involves using black and white relationships to manipulate and control the focus of the reader.

In this example pencilled by Mike Sekowsky and inked by Dick Giordano, note how the variety of line weights is used to communicate information about the subject. Notice especially the line weights on Wonder Woman's arms and the coat draped over her forearm. The tourists on the left are beautifully inked with no wasted lines. The feathering on the woman tourist's arms and breasts both follow the form of her body. From *Wonder Woman* #194 (June 1971), script by Dennis O'Neil.

This page from *Batman* #255 (April 1974), by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, is a complete lesson in the use of line weights. Some of the best examples can be found in areas that may require a second glance. In the first panel, the splendid inking of Milo's lowered arm fully describes the form of the anatomy underneath the lab coat. In the second panel, the heavy line that surrounds the figure is softened by the repeating thin lines emerging from the forearm. Observe the wide variety of lines throughout the page. There is feathering done in the same weight and also a progressively heavier line weight on the faces and on the hand in the last panel.

One of the most common errors made by inkers is not filling in all the blacks. Look between the two word balloons, and you will see that the black of the cliff is missing. Carefully examining a page after you finish should alleviate any of these oversights. From *Detective Comics* #395 (January 1970), pencils by Neal Adams and inks by Dick Giordano.

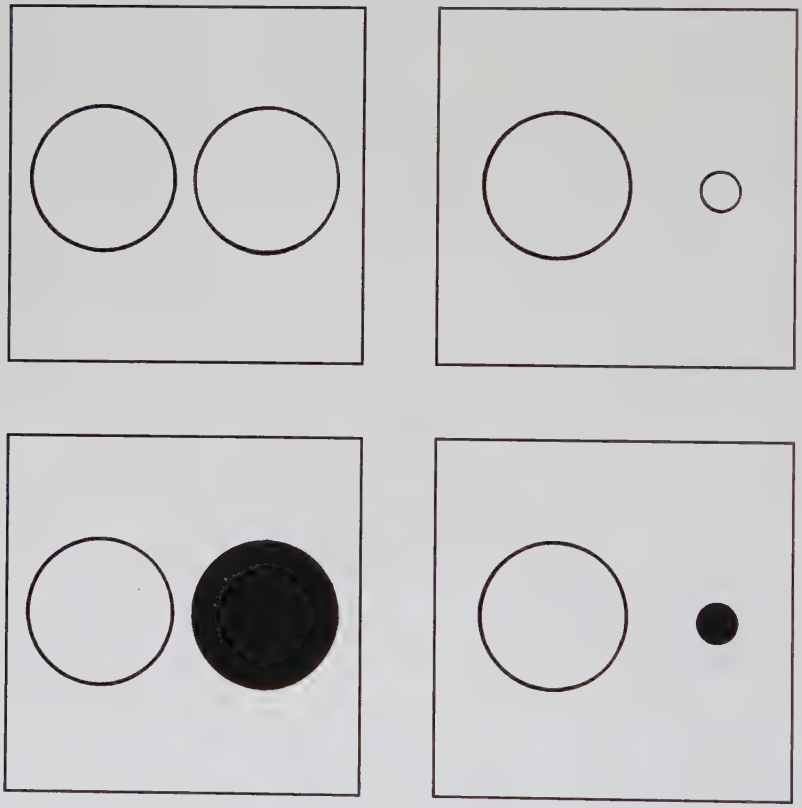


The most critical part of this panel is the area where the spear overlaps the edge of the cliff. That small area creates the illusion of foreground and background very nicely. Had the spear been inside the shape of the cliff, that illusion would not have existed. From *Anthro* #6 (August 1969), script and pencils by Howie Post and inks by Wally Wood.

SEVEN
LIGHT AND DARK

Any kind of artistic expression requires organization as a prerequisite to communication. An organized structure within the image allows access to the information presented in that image. Organization allows the viewer to *understand*. It is a fact that the human brain, confronted with a vision of chaos, reacts with an attempt to find some structure. If the brain does not find structure, it creates one. To ignore the storytelling potential of organization is to alienate and ultimately lose the audience.

A penciller uses composition as one way to introduce a visual order to a page or panel. The single most important way for an inker to organize a drawing is through the consideration of *light*. There are two ways that light can guide an artist to prudent decision making: the creation of a light source and exploiting the contrast between a light and dark space.



The relationship between light and dark is crucial for any work that is done on a two-dimensional surface. The first panel, with two circles of the same size next to each other is boring. Once contrast in scale is introduced in the second panel, it becomes a bit more lively. In the third panel, where we make one circle black, the contrast becomes even more interesting. And in the fourth panel, the addition of a difference in scale makes this the most visually interesting of all.

Opposite: Here we see inker Wally Wood's effective use of black-and-white relationships. Using techniques such as framing and contrast, he creates a very effective page. From *All Star Comics* #62 (October 1976), script by Paul Levitz and pencils by Keith Giffen.


EACH TIME HE CONSIDERS HIS SURROUNDINGS: THE QUIET OFFICE OF THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY STAR, A MAJOR METROPOLITAN NEWSPAPER...
THIS TIME, HE NOTES THAT THE NEXT DAY'S PAPER IS ALREADY ON THE PRESS... PERHAPS EVEN BEING PLACED IN TRUCKS FOR DELIVERY AT DAWN...
THIS TIME HE KNOWS HIS WORK HERE IS DONE... HIS DISGUISE UNDISCOVERED FOR ANOTHER DAY.
HE MOVES SWIFTLY, SURELY, THROUGH THE DARKNESS... AS THOUGH HE KNOWS THE PATH BY HEART...
OR, PERHAPS ...SOMETHING MORE...
PRIVAT
FINALLY, A FAMILIAR DOOR... A STORE ROOM OPENS ONCE MORE...
STORE ROOM
A WHITE SHIRT IS UNBUTTONED IN A TIME-WORN GESTURE...
A FIGURE TRANSFORMED...
THE GENTLY AGING MAN WHO WAS ONCE A MILD-MANNERED REPORTER IS REBORN...
WHOOSH
AND A LIVING LEGEND LIVES AGAIN!
LOOK... UP IN THE SKY!...
CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING.

THE LIGHT SOURCE

If the penciller has not indicated an obvious source of light, then the inker needs to decide where it is before he inks the scene. Whatever decision is made should be logical. Try to discern what the penciller had in mind in the first place. There will be some clues in the drawing. This does not mean that every panel has to have dramatic lighting that calls attention to itself, but even the most ordinary and unspectacular scenes will still have a light source of some kind.

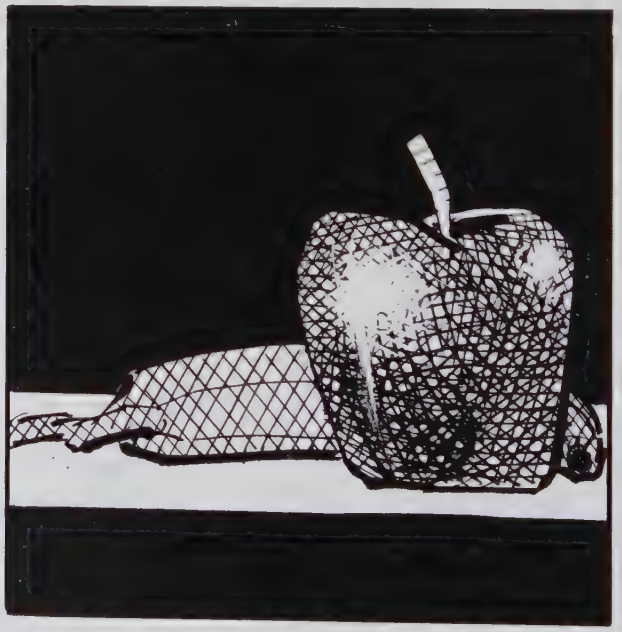
Nature and drawing do not have the same method of illuminating a scene. Reality is black. It is the imposition of light which allows us to see what otherwise would remain lost in the darkness. Nature uses light to extract form and definition from the black. An artist, whether a penciller or inker, uses a contrary method. We introduce darkness onto white. The white of the paper represents light and the black of the pencil or ink indicates dark.

Introducing a light source acts as a guide for the artist to use throughout that panel. Once the source has been established, the shadows and line weights will correspond accordingly. If a man stands in a room with a light source on the ceiling, it makes sense that a heavier line than the one used to define the top of his head will represent the bottom of his nose and chin. The farther away the light is from the man, the subtler the line weight. Conversely, if the light source will directly above the head, the more extreme the facial shadows. Remember that a heavy ink line is really the beginning of a shadow.

Establishing a light source in any piece of artwork is essential to creating a believable image. A light source provides the organizing element that every panel and page must have. These are examples of different light sources on a face. Notice how faithfully the line weight follows the light source.

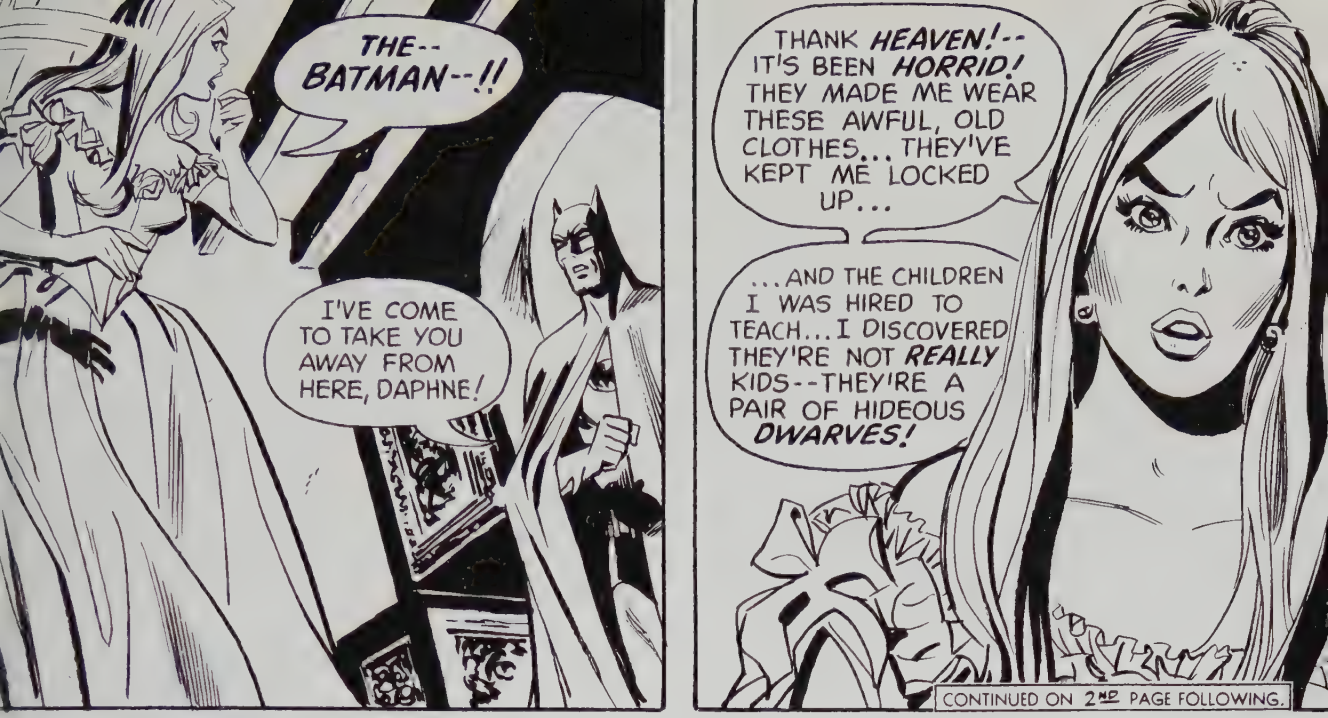
Light creates a great variety of gray tones between the extremes of black and white. An artist creates a *tone* as soon as two or more ink lines are next to each other. The result is a mix of black lines and white spaces that combine to form a particular tone. Pen and ink work by definition excludes color. A gray tone allows the artist to *represent* values of nature. We use the values of dark and light that approximate the amount of light contained within our subjects. A red wagon, for example, interpreted in black and white line, would have a tone that was darker than a yellow banana.

In addition to using a light source for guidance, the artist has a responsibility to control the various tones and values in a drawing. A light source is only as good as the artist using it. A good inker should be familiar with composition and design. The creation of a black, white or gray area, how to use them and how they relate to each other comes neither from nature nor a light source but from the decision-making process of the artist. For the penciller and inker, the motivation for how to place blacks is not about duplicating reality. It's about creating effective and interesting compositions and making them look real.



Above: Joe Kubert masterfully uses a combination of black, white and gray to represent the reality of three dimensions. From *Star Spangled War Stories* #149 (March 1970), script by Robert Kanigher.

Right: This is a simple example of how line work can replicate color.

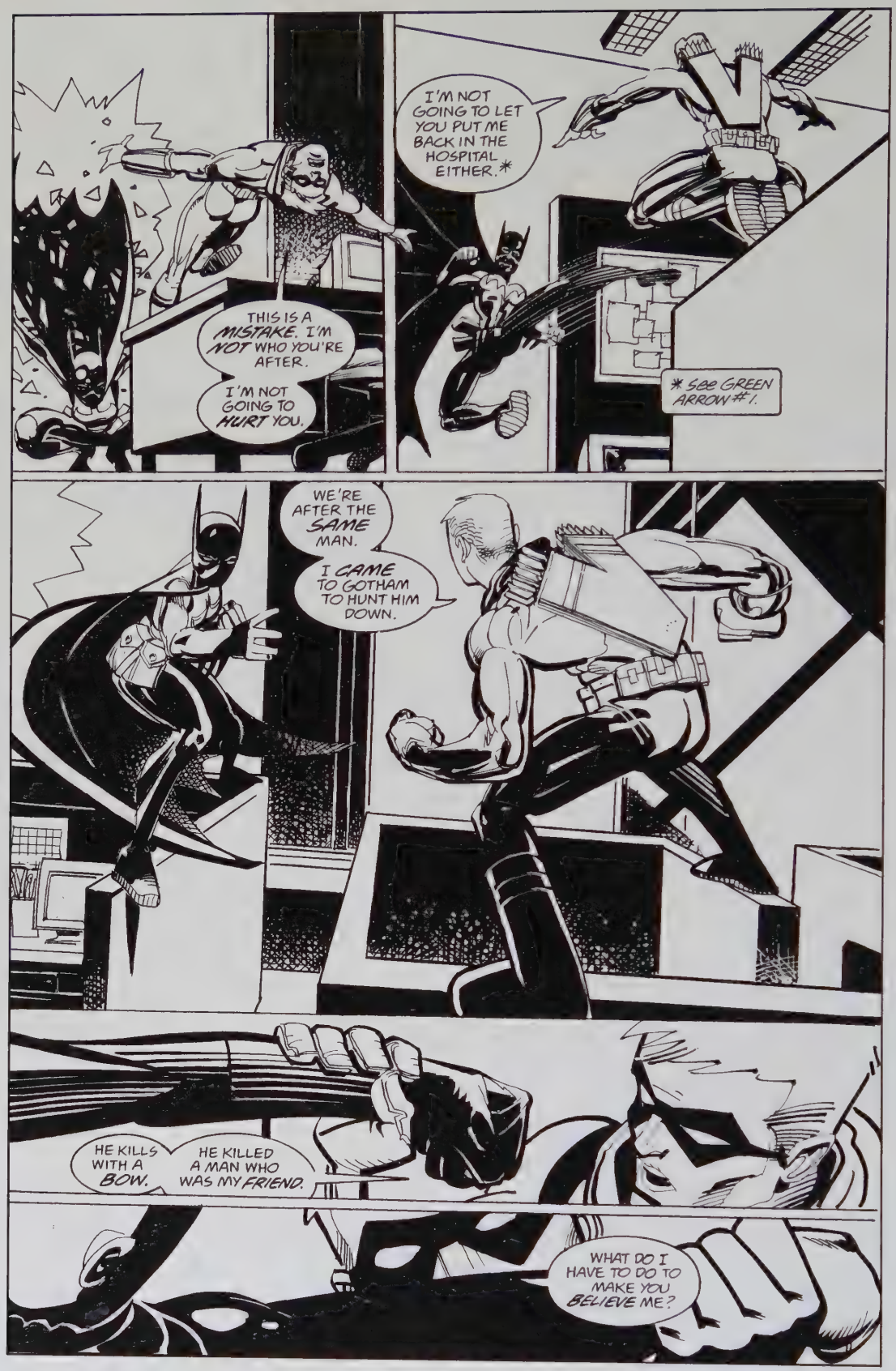


Inker Dick Giordano faithfully follows a light source, especially in the second panel where the figure is lit from the left side of the panel. From *Batman* #227 (December 1970), script by Dennis O'Neil and pencils by Irv Novick.

With a wide spectrum of tones between black and white, it is tempting for the ink artist to use all of them. This is a sure recipe for confusion. All the values of nature cannot be replicated in gray tones. It is up to the discretion of the artist to simplify the range of tone and value. Comic art is *not* the recreation of reality. It is the *interpretation* of reality. The medium of sequential art is not reality either. Although drawing reality requires skill and study, it does not employ the decision-making process of the artist. The act of editing reality into a more effective image uses the experience and vision of the individual artist. When the artist starts to filter reality through his personal vision, it signals the beginning of work that characterizes the emergence of an artistic point of view.

Comic book art works best using exaggeration to make its point. Part of that process involves editing an endless range of tones in nature to a handful that work as an effective image for the reader. Remember that the artist acts as a filter through which complexities are simplified into an effective image. A panel with one black, one white and one gray is much more efficient than a panel with a series of grays. In a panel of grays, nothing stands out.

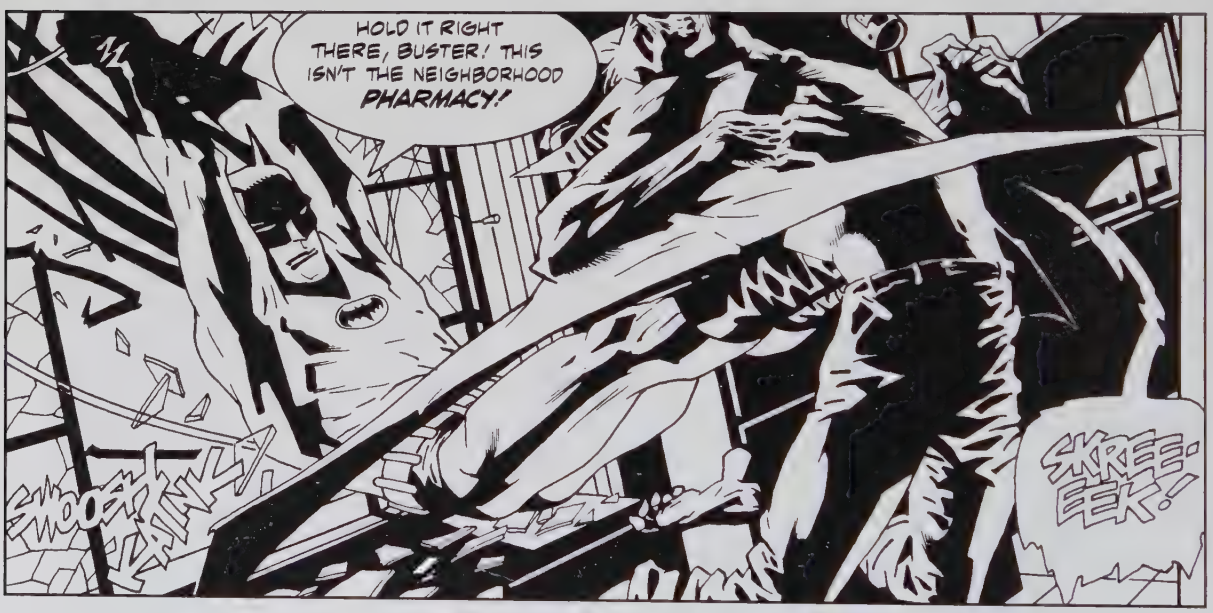
In this panel, inker Neal Adams uses two different light sources to create volume on the figure. From *House of Secrets* #85 (May 1970), script by Gerry Conway and pencils by Gil Kane.



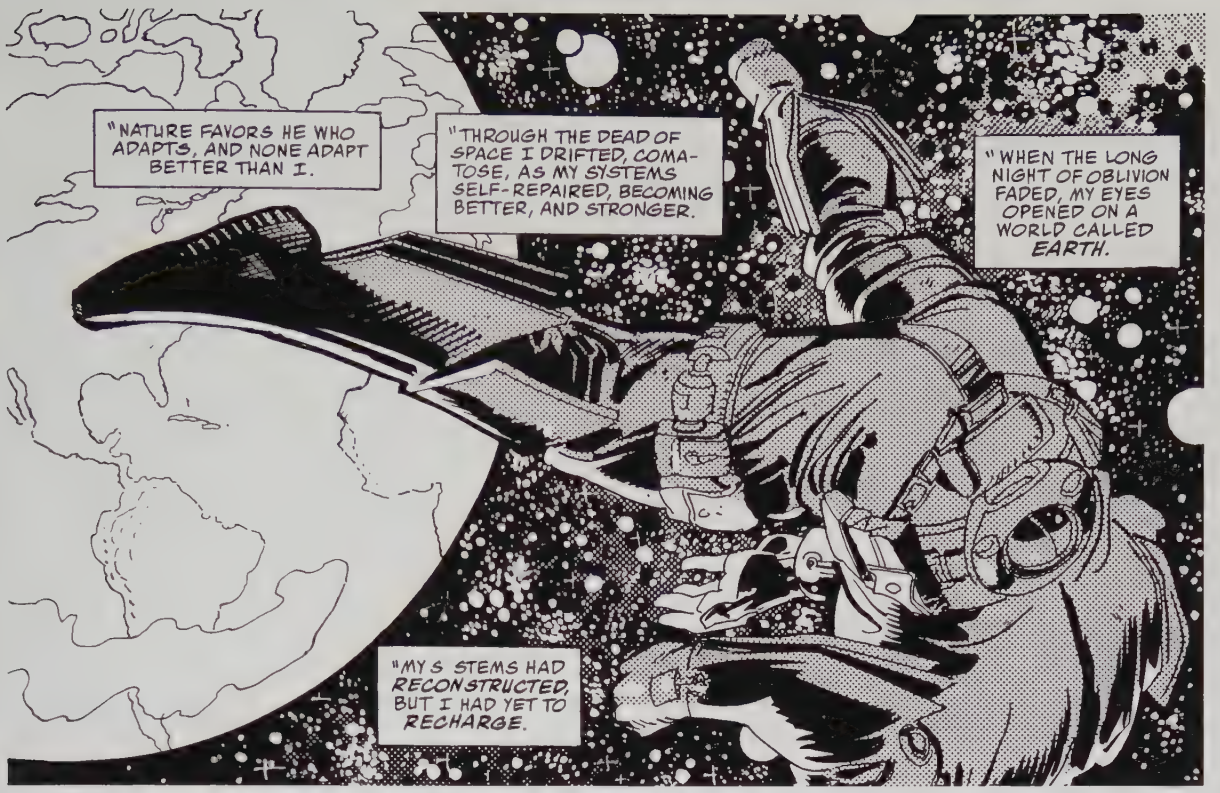
In this page, the black-and-white placement adheres to an individual light source, and it is used both to frame and contrast shapes. From *Batgirl* #30 (September 2002), script by Kelley Puckett, pencils by Damion Scott and inks by Klaus Janson.

Inker Kevin Nowlan uses light to create depth and contrast on the page, creating a visually exciting image. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #6 (July 1998), script by Kelley Puckett and pencils by Dave Taylor.

In this panel, penciller Gil Kane leaves the placement of blacks up to the inker. *Opposite*: In the inked panel, the light source is used to create as much contrast between black and white as possible. For example, the leg that overlaps the planet earth is the darkest, creating a feeling of depth. The secondary light source, emanating from the planet, is used to highlight and create the rest of the form. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #28 (May 2000), script by Steven Grant and inks by Klaus Janson.

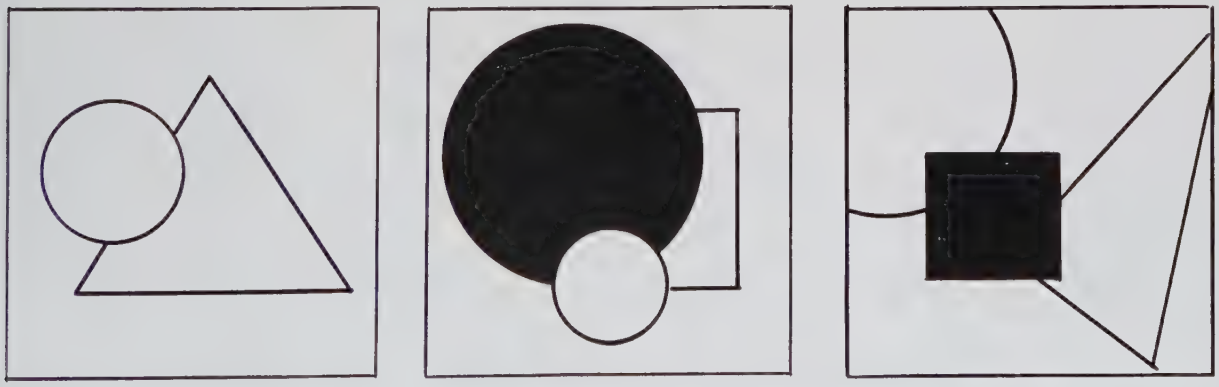


Penciller and inker Kevin Nowlan also uses two different light sources. From *Secret Origins* #39 (April 1989), script by Jan Strnad.



LIGHT AND DARK

In addition to using a light source to organize and define your line weights, the inker can also exploit the contrast between light and dark. The theory of contrast is one of the most important tools of artistic expression. For example, two same size circles in a panel are less interesting than one large circle and one small circle. If you go further and replace the smaller circle with a triangular shape, you establish a greater contrast between shapes.



Creating interesting spatial relationships is the responsibility of both the penciller and inker. Every panel has a unique problem to solve. The best artists are able to come up with creative solutions to new problems as spontaneously as they arise. Here are just three spatial relationships out of the infinite number possible.

In addition to both size and shape, contrast can also be established by value. Even in the panel with circles of the same size, the scene becomes more dynamic when there is black and white contrast. In the following examples, notice that the panels with the highest degree of contrast have the highest degree of excitement.

There are several ways that an inker can use contrast to manipulate the focus and information of the panel:

1) The use of *framing* is a simple solution for a variety of situations. In order to call attention to a certain part of a panel or image, surround that piece of information with a compositional shape or frame to isolate it. As an example, let's look at the pages pencilled by Gil Kane (opposite page). You will notice that there are almost no blacks indicated in the pencilled version. The inked page, however, does include a certain amount of solid black in each panel. In each instance, the black shape is used to direct the reader's eye.

In the first panel, the blast lines on the ceiling of the opera house form a type of frame surrounding Green Lantern. The lines, in fact, point to the most important information in the panel: Green Lantern replacing the roof.

In the second panel, the black is added primarily to highlight the villain's gun. The black also offers an extreme contrast to the white figure itself, forcing the viewer to see it more clearly. Notice too how the floating money becomes more obvious against the black. Look at the bag the man is hold-

Kevin Nowlan's excellent use of black and white makes these two panels work very effectively. In the first panel, the black shadow on the door serves to separate the hand from the background. The black-and-white contrast forces the eye of the reader to look at the hand as it inserts the key. In the second panel, the shadow on the door does the same thing, but here it is the entire figure of the woman that is separated from the background. Imagine this panel without that black shadow, and picture how the woman's figure would not be as clear. The Batman figure in the same panel is rendered with the use of framing in mind. From *Secret Origins* #39 (April 1989), script by Jan Strnad.

ing. It becomes less noticeable as a result of the black shapes introduced onto it. The gray that is created does not pop against the black as obviously as if it had remained white.

The third panel is a classic example of framing and contrast. The figure is obviously centered by the black frame around it. Gil Kane has drawn the speed lines against a white background. I know from my own experience how easy it can be for small thin lines like those to be lost in that situation. By adding black behind them and contrasting the white lines against that value, no matter how thin the line may be, it will always be visible and clear.

2) Direct *contrast* between black and white is very effective in creating clarity. As long as the black isolates the white of the speed lines, they will always be read clearly by the audience.

Another example of contrast is found in panel four. The inked gun is much darker than the pencilled gun. By increasing the contrast between it and the background, the gun becomes a bit more obvious. Try to make the threat to our hero as clearly as you can. It's an important ingredient in creating excitement. That excitement keeps the reader involved in the story and glued to the page.

Here the inked page has more blacks than the pencilled page. The additional blacks are used solely to frame and isolate the main focus of the panel. It is the job of both the penciller and inker to lead the eye of the reader to the primary storytelling information. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #28 (May 2000), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Gil Kane and inks by Klaus Janson.

In the same panel you can see that the lines that are used to shade the underside of the character's nose are at an angle. The inked version follows the contour of the face. I decided to emphasize the form and shape of the head with all of the feathering, shading and line work. Notice how the head at this angle is divided into two planes. Each plane is shaded and feathered at its respective angle. Note the lines under the mouth and chin and compare that to the direction of the lines next to the bottom of his ear. Feathering should respond to the organic shape of the subject.

If you have a keen eye, you may already have spotted two tangents in the pencilled version of this panel. The pinky finger touches the border on the left side of the panel. And the top of the gun barrel is touching the face. Both tangents were eliminated in the inking without much change to the artwork at all.

Although it was not necessary to add more blacks to this page, notice the use of line weight and light source in the inked panels. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #28 (May 2000), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Gil Kane and inks by Klaus Janson.

The next page of *Legends of the DC Universe* #28 (opposite page) has an example of contrast that effectively separates shapes.

3) Contrast in value or line weight helps to clarify spatial relationships among shapes. In the first panel of the next page, the pencils maintain a fairly consistent line weight. Except for a small struggle to define the area below Green Lantern's knee, the lines used to draw our hero in the foreground are no different from the lines used to draw the unconscious villain. By emphasizing the contour with a heavier line weight, the Green Lantern figure more clearly appears to be in front of his opponent. The weighted line separates the two shapes. In panel two of the same page, the line that draws the neck and trapezius of Green Lantern was made thicker to contrast the thinner lines used to ink the Atom.

Take a look at the third panel (below). That piece of machinery in the foreground was left white. Which do you prefer, the white version or the black one? How do you feel if it were gray? When introducing black into a panel you must always consider the amount of black you use. If it is too overwhelming, the eye has a tendency to be drawn there to the exclusion of more important information.

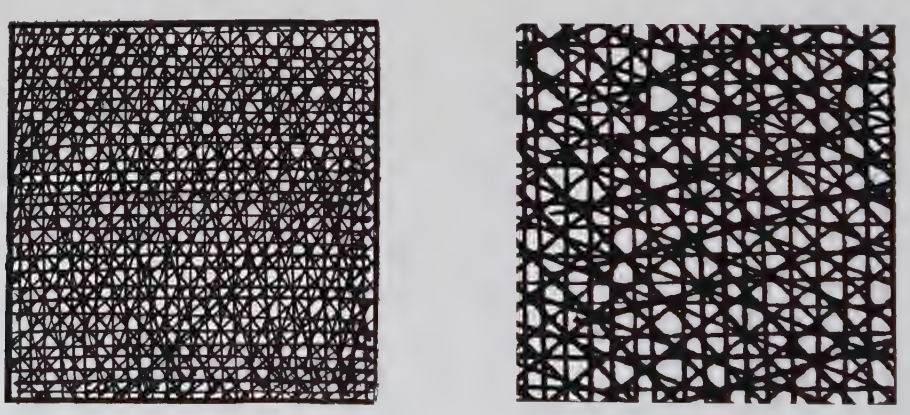
Different shapes within the panel need to be separated for the sake of clarity. Either the penciller or the inker chooses how this will be done. In the finished third panel (opposite page), the foreground machine is white. On this page, the same panel is shown with the machine in black (left) and in gray (right). Which one do you think works best?

EIGHT
TEXTURES

Texture refers to the visual or tactile characteristic of a surface. A solid black or white on paper is flat. It has no texture. Once the artist starts creating a gray tone, he is *interpreting* a tactile quality to create a more convincing representation of the object or surface. You would not, for instance, ink burlap the same way you might ink the bark of a tree. It is the responsibility of the inker to convey the look and feel of the material represented.

One of the most interesting theories about working in ink is the notion that there are only two colors with which to work: black and white. Any gray tone is an illusion created by manipulating black and white. When the need for a gray tone arises, the artist will draw black lines in varying degrees of proximity onto the white of the paper. The combination of black lines and white spaces poking through them cause the eye to read the area as a gray. This is comparable to the school of art known as "pointillism." The famous painting by Georges Seurat titled "A Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte" is a great example of pointillism. When viewed from a distance, the painting and its contents are quite obvious. When viewed from a closer angle, the painting loses all form and is reduced to an apparently incomprehensible jumble of dots and dashes—points of color to be exact.

When an artist working in ink wants to create a gray tone, a series of black lines with intermittent white spaces are applied to the paper. If we were to enlarge the gray area, all we would see are the black lines and white spaces. Reduced to its normal size, the black and white lines combine to give the illusion of a tone that is in between black and white. In the same way that the points of color merge to form a coherent painting in Seurat's painting, the dots and dashes of black line and white space merge to form a coherent gray tone.



The first panel shows cross-hatching. The second panel shows a magnified view of that same cross-hatching. When the art is reduced, the black cross-hatching lines combine to create the illusion of gray.

Opposite: In this excellent page by Berni Wrightson, we see how a variety of textures combine to create a very believable environment. Notice how specific each texture is. From *Swamp Thing* #4 (May 1973), script by Len Wein.


--THIS!!

Top: Very specific textures are used to create a believable interpretation of realty. From *Wonder Woman Annual* #6 (1997), script and pencils by John Byrne and inks by Tom Palmer.

Middle and Bottom: The pencils suggests some texture in the background, and the inks carry the texture one step further. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #29 (June 2000), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Gil Kane and inks by Klaus Janson.

Opposite: This is a wonderful example of gray, black and white relationships, using zip-a-tone. From *Secret Origins* #39 (April 1989), script by Jan Strnad and art by Kevin Nowlan.


THE BLACKOUT GANG CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE. IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THAT MAN-BAT'S HELP I'D HAVE BEEN IN SERIOUS TROUBLE!
THE GANG WAS OPERATING IN TOTAL DARKNESS BY WEARING INFRA-RED GOGGLES—
—AND I HAD TO COME BARGING IN WITHOUT ANY FLARES! I GUESS THIS IS WHAT COMES OF BEING OVER-ANXIOUS!
WAP!
WOK
CRACK!
BUMP
WUMP
MIND'S... MUDDLED!
GOING... DOWN!
WAP!
WOK
LET HIM BE!!
NO!
NO!
AAARGH!
SOMEONE ELSE HAD JOINED THE FRAY! I HEARD THE DULL THUD OF BATTERED FLESH, THE CRACK OF BONE—
—AND TERRIFIED SCREAMS THAT DIED IN FRIGHTFUL SUCCESSION, ONE BY ONE!

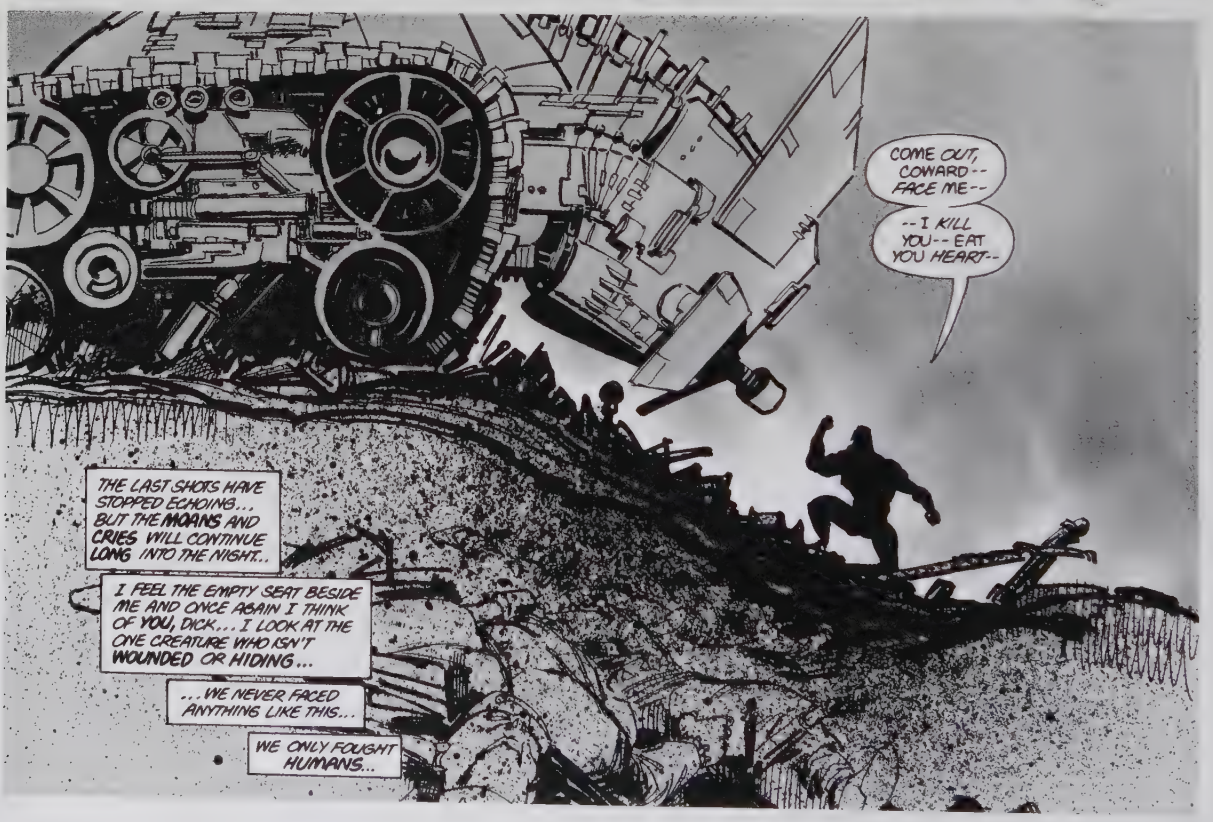
2.

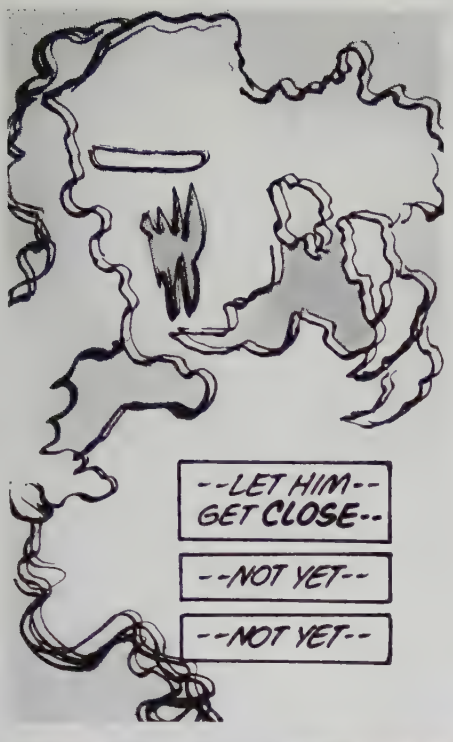
The dry brush technique was used in both these panels. *Top*: *Batman Black and White* (1996), script and art by Kent Williams. *Middle*: *Strange Adventures* #2 (December 1999), script and art by Klaus Janson.

Bottom: A feeling of depth and texture is created through a combination of black-and- white line work, dry brush on the ground, and spatter. From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), script and pencils by Frank Miller and inks by Klaus Janson.

Opposite, top: The use of split brush is shown in this panel from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), script and pencils by Frank Miller and inks by Klaus Janson.

Opposite, bottom: Richard Corben uses a stippling technique in these three panels to create his grays. From *Hellblazer* #150 (July 2000), script by Brian Azzarello.



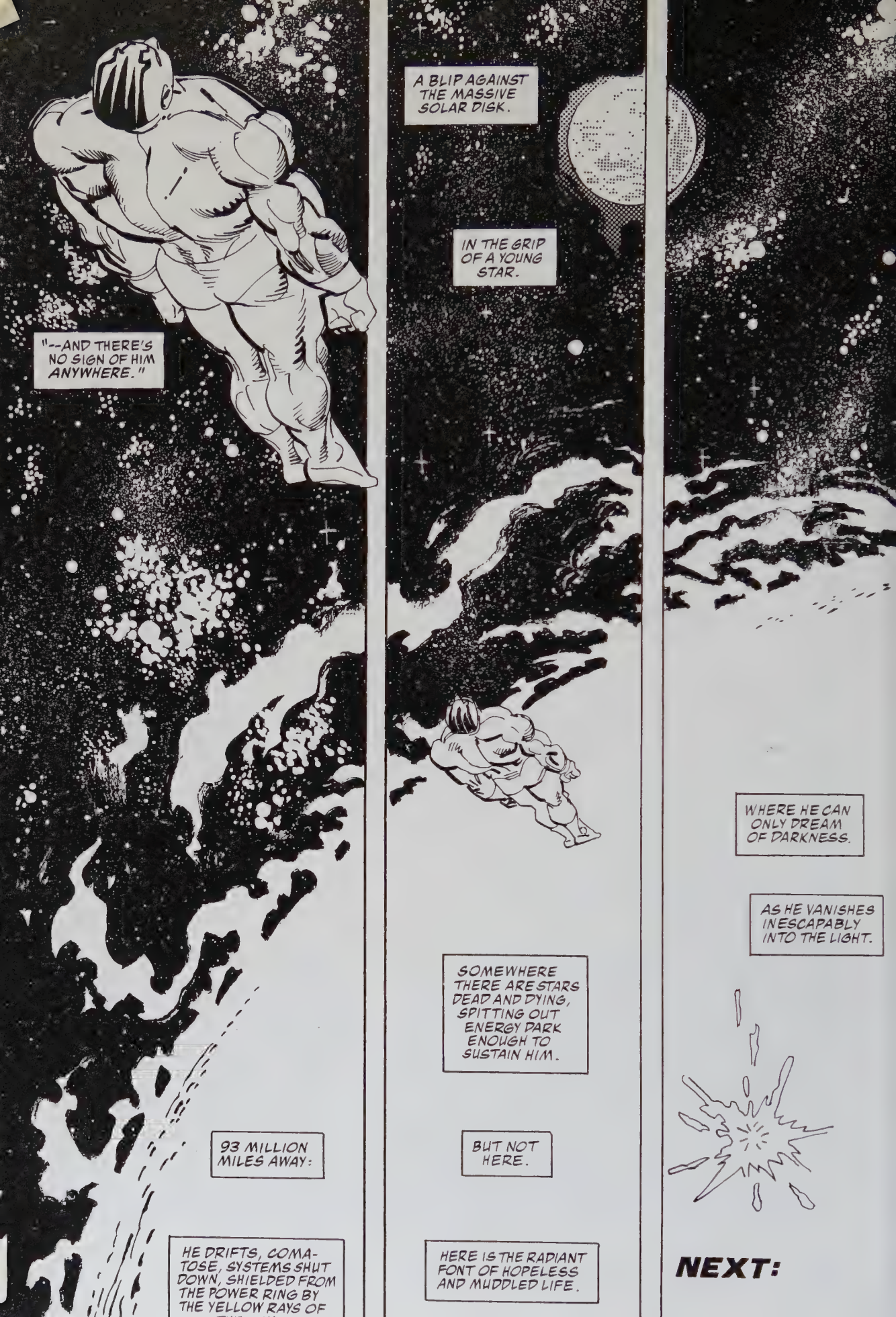


No matter what texture you choose to use, it is an illusion of black and white space. I consider *any* gray area a texture. Even the flattest most perfect gray has a quality to it that is dependent on the technique used to create it. A mechanical gray achieved by zip-a-tone or computer still retains some of its natural qualities. It is still a series of black dots. And the dots have a different quality than a gray achieved by spatter or line work or any other means.

The endless variety of texture and how to use them are limited only by the imagination of the inker. You will find that not all textures are appropriate for all occasions. This part of inking is particularly fun and expressive. Be bold and experiment freely. The only reason to inhibit yourself in the area of texture is when it overpowers, distracts or interferes with the storytelling.

This page reveals the control and vision of artist Berni Wrightson with his varying degrees of gray created by cross-hatching. From *Swamp Thing* #4 (May 1973), script by Len Wein.

Several textures are created throughout the page with cross-hatching, zip-a-tone, dry brush, and ink on cloth. From *Batman: Death and the Maiden* (2003), inks by Klaus Janson.


"--AND THERE'S NO SIGN OF HIM ANYWHERE."
93 MILLION MILES AWAY:
HE DRIFTS, COMATOSE, SYSTEMS SHUT DOWN, SHIELDED FROM THE POWER RING BY THE YELLOW RAYS OF
A BLIP AGAINST THE MASSIVE SOLAR DISK.
IN THE GRIP OF A YOUNG STAR.
BUT NOT HERE.
SOMEWHERE THERE ARE STARS DEAD AND DYING, SPITTING OUT ENERGY DARK ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN HIM.
HERE IS THE RADIANT FONT OF HOPELESS AND MUDDLED LIFE.
WHERE HE CAN ONLY DREAM OF DARKNESS.
AS HE VANISHES INESCAPABLY INTO THE LIGHT.
NEXT:

NINE
FEATHERING

When I first learned a bit of pen and ink history, it was obvious that so many terms we use today had their genesis in times long ago when artists used the quills of birds to work in ink. The quill of a crow was specifically used for very fine pen lines. Today's "crowquills" maintain that same quality. Even the word "pen" descends from the Latin word penna, meaning feather.

In comic book inking, to feather means to soften. We've already mentioned the fact that inking someone else's pencils is a practice unique to comics. Feathering is a technique that seems to have developed solely for comic book reproduction. In no other artistic medium is feathering used in precisely the same way we use it in comics. Although the concept of softening remains constant through all artistic mediums, the feathering technique is unique to comic books.

The word *feathering* is derived from the structure of a feather itself. Notice in this drawing that the ribs emanating from the spine of the feature emerge in a consistent direction.

This is an example of minimal feathering. Artist Kent Williams does not create grays with line work but rather with varying black-and-white line work and dry brush. From *Batman Black and White* (1996) script by Kent Williams.

Opposite: The different textures used on this page consist of zip-a-tone around the planet, dry brush to delineate the sun, and white spatter for the outer space background. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #29 (June 2000), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Gil Kane and inks by Klaus Janson.

Specifically, feathering refers to the repetitive lines that emerge at an angle from a heavier line. When those smaller lines connect to a thicker line, they create a gray that softens the larger mass. The point at which black meets white can sometimes be very dramatic and jarring. Feathering is used to give a softer edge to that meeting. It creates a smoother transition between black and white areas. The structure of a feathered line can sometimes be reminiscent of the structure of a feather itself. Both the feather and the line emerge at an angle, both are repetitive and both connect to a primary source like the backbone of a feather.

The first responsibility of feathering is to soften the transition between black and white. The second responsibility is to communicate form and volume. The smaller lines that soften a bigger line must also follow the specific form of that specific mass. If we introduce feathering into a flexed bicep, for instance, the feathering needs to follow that shape. The curve of the arm will determine the direction of your line. This is part of the reason why we say that every line has to mean something. It must describe a form or shape or direction that has some connection to the image being drawn. Any line or mark that is applied without some intentional thought behind it is extraneous and unnecessary. It is within the very definition of inking that the lines describe the form and shape of the subject.

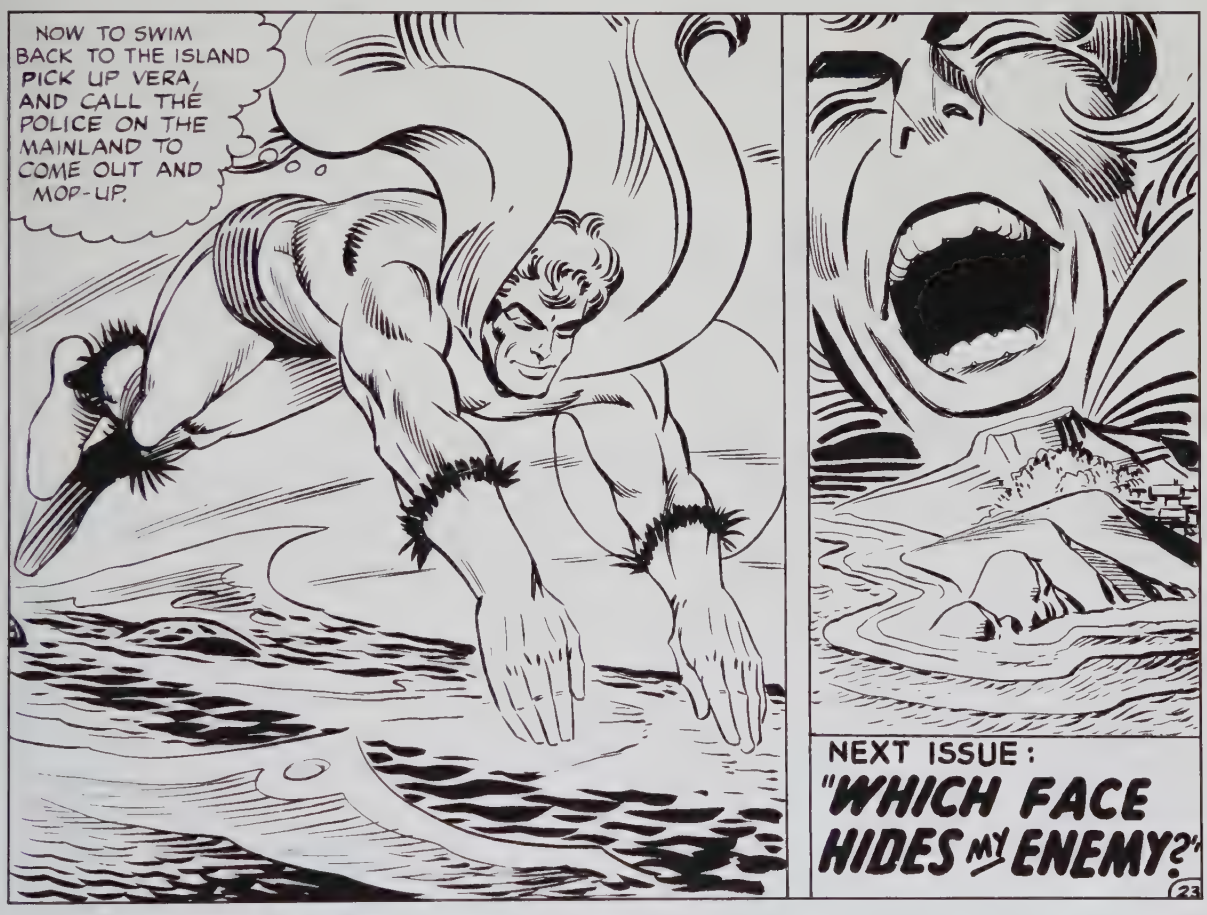
Below: This is a classic approach to feathering, wherein the line work follows the form of the shape that is being inked.

There are three basic shapes of a feathered line:

1) The type of line that emerges from a black area thick at the bottom and pointy at the tip is the classic execution. This is a variation in length of the "blast" line that follows the same structure.

2) The second way to shape your feathering is to form a series of triangles. This effect allows more white space into the feathered line. This approach needs to be used with caution because too much of it can create a very busy look in your subject. Remember that this tehnique doubles the amount of feathered lines on your page.

3) The final choice of line type is the non-weighted (dead) line. Not all of your feathering will be attached to a heavier or wider black. Very often the feathered line may connect to a line of equal weight. Sometimes there is no anchor at all and the series of lines imply a form without being attached to another line.

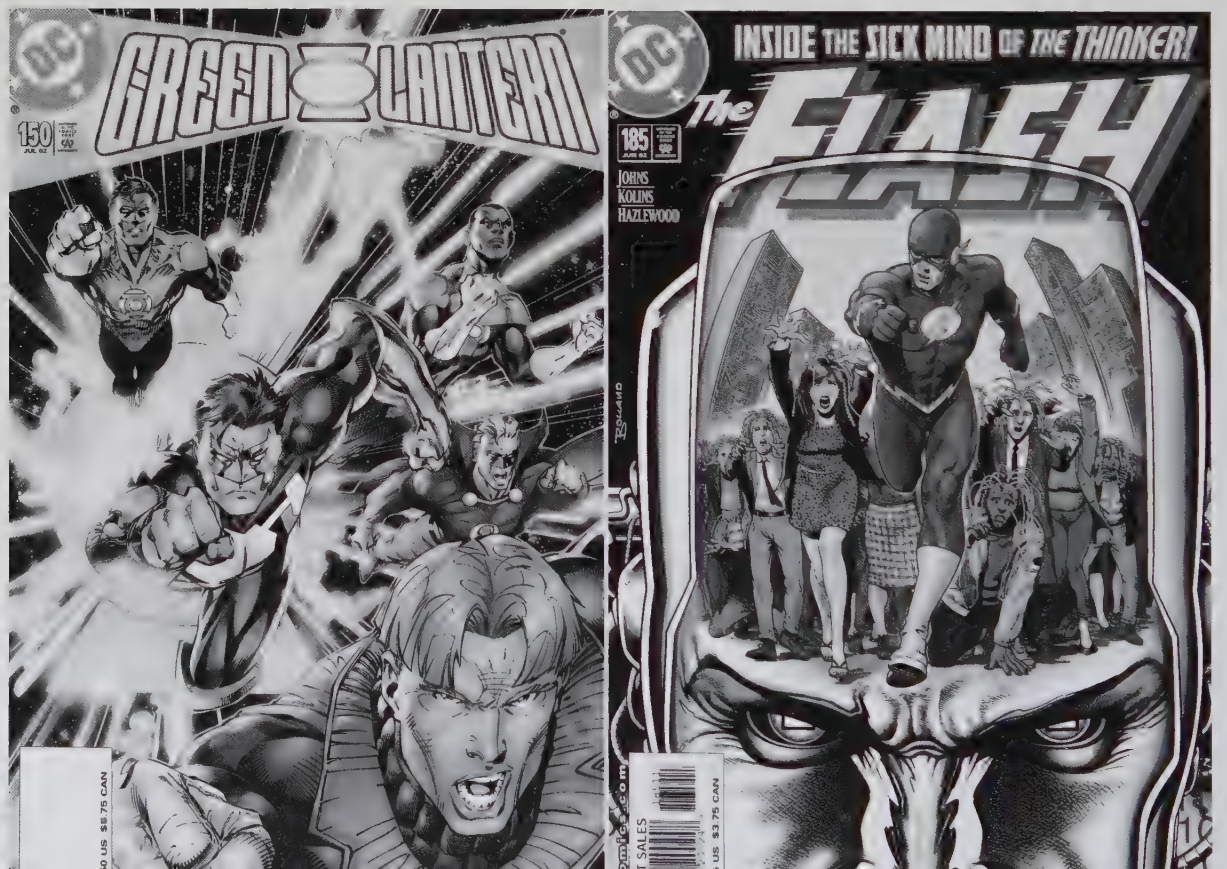


Above: This is a minimalist approach to feathering by Steve Ditko. From *Beware the Creeper* #3 (October 1968), script by Sergius O'Shaugnessy.

Opposite, top and bottom right: Here are two examples of similar pages, with the top showing more feathering. I think that the bottom drawing is stronger because the gray of feathering in the top page has diluted the black-and-white relationship. In addition, the figure in the bottom page is placed more fully in front of panels one and three. From *Batman: Death and the Maiden* (2003) by Klaus Janson.

The first panel is an example of a feathering technique which is achieved by spreading the thickness of the line as it approaches the solid black shape. In the second panel, this same approach is used except that the feathered lines are hollow. In the third panel, the feathering technique is not concerned with "bleeding" the feathered line into the black shape. In this panel, the feathered line is a dead (non-weighted) line.

It's important to consider the differences between a pencil and a pen or brush. It is the rare penciller that will draw every page so tightly that there is never any ambiguity about the feathered areas. Some pencillers may indicate some type of gray but it is not as easy to feather with a pencil than with a pen or brush. A penciller will often imply a gray area with the side of the pencil and no line work at all. Sometimes, the inker's job is to *interpret* what the penciller wants. Sometimes it's the inker's decision whether a certain passage is black or gray or what type of feathering to use.



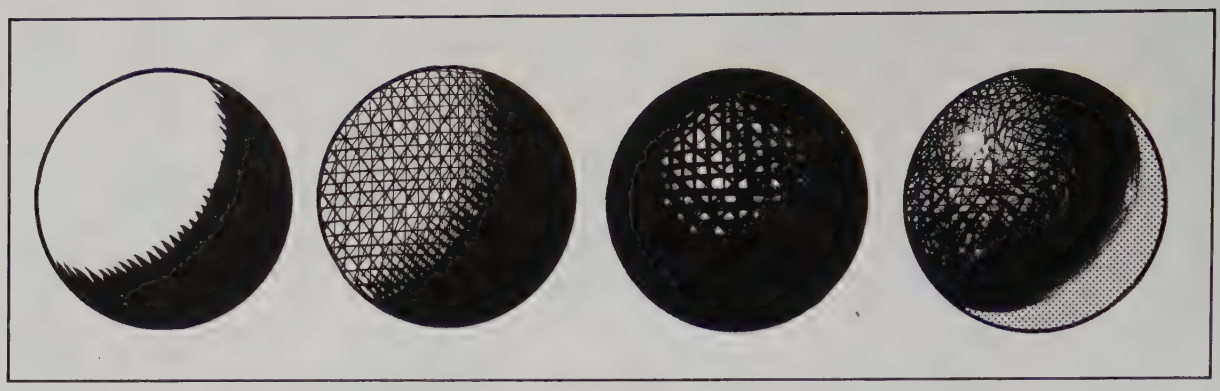
How does an inker proceed with a job that may be ambiguous? The first task is to determine the light source in your drawing. Feathering a figure is impossible without establishing a light source. Not only does light determine where and how you apply thick and thin lines, but it also dictates what side of the form to feather. If the light were coming from above your subject, the bottom of the form would be where the feathering takes place. A simple example would be the exercise where we indicate form and volume on a ball. With the light still coming from above, the lower half of the ball would receive the line work that communicates to the viewer the shape of the object.

The human body is much more complex, however. Imagine a series of shapes and mass of different sizes all stacked on top of one another. In spite of the complexity of the human form, using light to organize your feathering will allow you to treat the body as a unit. You can pull the most disorganized shapes together if you let a light source guide you.

Opposite left bottom: Employing all the feathering techniques, Neal Adams creates gray through a variety of approaches. From *The Flash* #219 (January 1973), script by Dennis O'Neil.

This is another example of a multitude of feathered lines. Notice especially the application of a dead line, a weighted line and a hollowed line. From *Batman: Death and the Maiden* (2003) by Klaus Janson.

Opposite left top: Here are two examples of feathering techniques in action. The first is from *Green Lantern* #150 (July 2002), pencils by Jim Lee and inks by Scott Williams. The second is from *The Flash* #185 (June 2002) by Brian Bolland.



Try to keep in mind these summarized tips:

1) A series of repetitive lines is known as feathering.

2) Feathering has several duties. It describes the transition from light to dark; it defines form and volume because the linework follows the plane of the inked shape; when feathering is applied to a black shape or area it serves to soften that shape.

3) Use a light source to guide your line placement and weight. Never feather the form where the light hits it directly. Feather the side of the shape closest to the light.

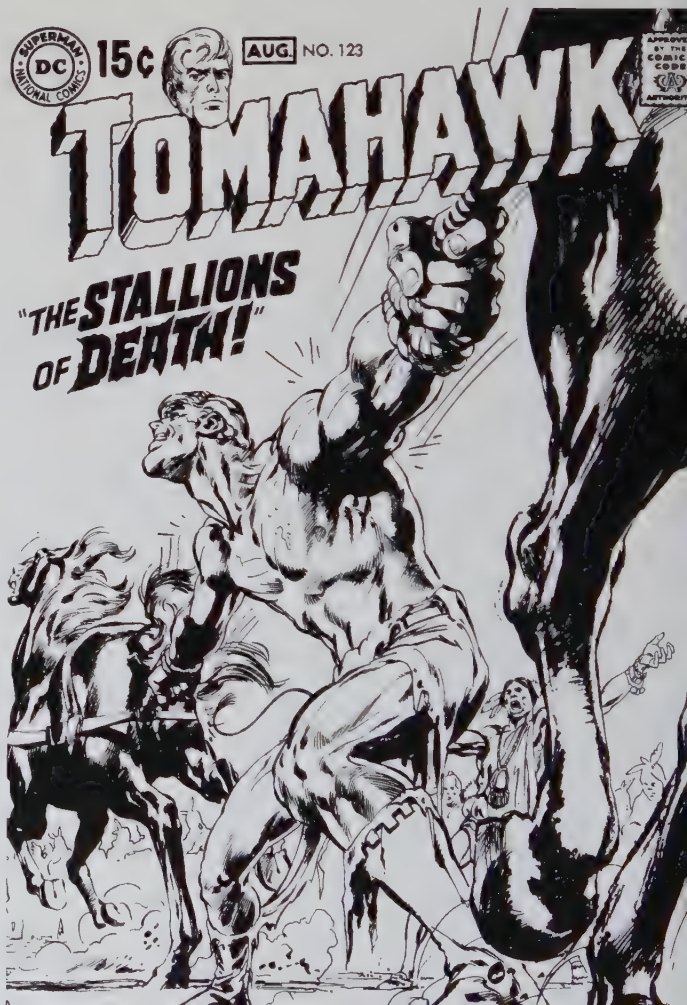
4) Ink the body as an organized single shape.

Inking cannot be disorganized and capricious. Use these tips faithfully and you will find yourself doing much better work in no time!

There are several techniques to create gray. The first circle has a simple white/black demarcation, softened by the application of feathering. The second example adds gray to the circle. In the third example, the circle is black with the light source creating a gray area where it hits the oval. The fourth example has a secondary light source coming from the right, which is not as strong as the primary light source on the left, and therefore gray.

This is a superb example by Neal Adams of line weight, feathering, texture and composition. From *Tomahawk* #123 (August 1969).

Opposite: Bill Sienkiewicz is a master at using inks to create texture and form. Notice in this panel how the line weight is primarily around the outline of the figure. The interior feathering is lighter and more delicate, so as not to distract from the shape and form of the body silhouette. From *Green Lantern Legacy* (2002), script by Joe Kelly and pencils by Brent Anderson.




Beware my power...
STOP

TEN
HOW FAR CAN AN INKER GO?

The most frequently asked questions about inking concern the freedom and limitations of the craft. How much leeway does an inker have? What exactly does an inker add—if anything—to the art? Isn't the safest approach simply to follow the original pencil lines and be done with it?

Obviously, if one artist does both the pencils and inks, the question of how much freedom the inker has is irrelevant. The artist can do whatever he wants because it is one person following a singular artistic vision. In comic book inking, though, it is more common that the penciller and inker are *not* the same. Because of that fact, some boundaries and limitations are imposed upon the inker. Under ideal circumstances, the inker would follow the artistic vision of the penciller. Notice I said the artistic *vision*. I think that finding an inker that is sympathetic to the penciller's goals is more important than finding an inker that traces the pencils. The best pencil/ink teams have always been when two people shared a common goal. The approaches taken by the individual penciller or inker may differ from each other, but if the goal is the same, the resulting art becomes a third and separate entity apart from the penciller or inker. The collaboration has its own identity.

Take a look at some of the more successful art teams in the history of comics. One of the prime examples is the collaboration between Neal Adams and his two best inkers: Dick Giordano and Tom Palmer. Both Giordano and Palmer are artists in their own right. They each have an enormous knowledge of art, drawing and producing comics. They can draw quite well by themselves. Although they have differences in their styles, when Giordano and Palmer inked the artwork of Neal Adams they both shared a common goal with the pencils. In its essence they both "agreed" with the vision of Adams. They each interpreted the

pencils in individual ways and produced work that was stylistically different from each other but in agreement with the agenda of the penciller. The result was work that combined the best of all the talent, maintained its individuality, and yet created a third entity separate from their individual styles.

I can tell you about one penciller/inker team from personal experience. I always enjoyed working on the pencils of Frank Miller because of the very collaborative nature of the work that we did together. I think the team of Miller and Janson created a third entity different from the individuals involved. One of Frank's strengths is his ability to tell a story in a very visual way. Part of that advantage comes from writing his own stories, but that takes nothing away from his storytelling achievement. Frank makes full use of sequential images. He takes advantage of the opportunities that sequential art allows and does so in a visually economic way. How his sequential images add up to communicate information is one of his artistic strong points.

The inking that I do has a tendency to be focused on texture and light and depth. At least, that was what I was thinking when I collaborated

Left and opposite: Here are three Green Lantern heads penciled by Neal Adams and three different inking styles and approaches by (left to right) Frank Giacoia, Dan Adkins and Dick Giordano. Compare and notice the similarities and differences. From *Green Lantern* #78 (July 1970), *Green Lantern* #79 (August 1970) and *The Flash* #218 (November 1972), scripts by Dennis O'Neil.

Top: Wally Wood was renowned for his placement of blacks, as shown in this panel from *Stalker* #1 (July 1975), script by Paul Levitz and pencils by Steve Ditko.

with Frank on Daredevil and *The Dark Knight Returns*. I think Frank was more than happy to let me play in those specific areas. As the inker, I had no say in the layouts and design of the page. Frank was better at that than I was at that point anyway. It was never a case of us sitting down and formalizing this division of responsibilities. Rather it was two professionals taking advantage of the other person's strengths. The fact that it happened without a lot of planning on our part didn't mean that we weren't sympathetic to each other. It was quite the opposite. We communicated through the pencils and inks. It was a lot like playing music together. Wherever there was a hole to fill in the song, one of us would drop something in that space. The collective work proved that we were in agreement over what kind of comics we thought worked. Our goals were very much the same. And the collaboration that resulted was probably better than either one of us individually. I would also add it was a helluva lot of fun. That's my definition of a successful comic book pencil/ink team.

From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) script and pencils by Frank Miller and inks by Klaus Janson.

Having established what the potential of an artistic team could be, we are still left with the question of how much input an inker has. The examples cited earlier are cases where the penciller and inker spoke to each other one way or another. I would always recommend communication between all parties involved, and that includes the editor. Someone has to lay down a defining vision for the book. And regardless of whether that person is the editor or the penciller, the inker needs to respect that and work to fulfill that agenda. When everything is said and done, though, from a purely technical point of view the inker has three areas that allow a fair amount of input:

1) The first is in the area of line weights. Line weight allows the inker to choose how the viewer perceives the image. It can inform the angle of the figure or shape, it can determine the amount of depth within the figure and the panel both and it allows the inker an opportunity to interpret the pencil line to his own liking. When I use the word "interpret" I really mean to say that the inker is able, within certain limits, to push the pencils a bit by using line weight. Let me give you an example.

The inker studies the pages before inking and notices that one of the heads on the page is a little too small. It looks like there might not be enough of a chin on the head. The inker can legitimately add a heavier line on the outside of the chin line to give it more length. As long as the ink line still touches the pencil line, no matter how thick the ink line may be, the inker is technically following the pencils. Remember the important qualifier in this example. The ink line has to cover the pencil line in order to qualify as inking and not redrawing. This allows the inker to make subtle adjustments to the art without changing the pencils.

2) "Spotting blacks" is a traditional term that was used in the infancy of comics and illustration that still applies to the comic books of today. It simply means that the inker is introducing some black area into the image. This is a relatively common practice for the inker to follow. The critical factor is not the act of introducing a black area but the reason for doing it. *Never* add blacks to a page or panel unless you have a very good reason to do so. If an editor or penciller asks you why you added blacks, you should have some pretty sound thinking to back it up.

Another factor that is involved in your decision making process is the size of the black area that you introduce. The larger the shape, the more I would advise you to be cautious. It's common practice for inkers to drop a black inside the cuff of a sports jacket or a small shadow to help in separating shapes, but adding black to eliminate a background is another situation entirely. Don't ever go that far.

One of the biggest secrets in effective inking is this: The inker has tremendous power over what the viewer sees, how he sees it and when he sees it. Line weights and placement of black areas *always* have an effect on the viewer and how he reads a panel; these two components are crucial in establishing clarity. Both have the ability to separate figures and shapes from each other so that the reader can see the panel in a more understandable way.

For example, imagine a crowd scene. Two civilians are caught up in a mob, but they must be recognizable to the reader. You don't want the reader to spend a lot of time searching for those two characters in the crowd. They must be made visible to the audience in order to understand the panel and go on to the next one. I don't think you would approach the panel by doing a dead line with no varying line weights or blacks anywhere. If all lines in a panel are equal, there is no "difference" that makes the couple stand out. So you manipulate the scene by using perhaps a heavier line or by laying some shadows around them so they "pop" from the crowd more. This is well within the rights of the inker.

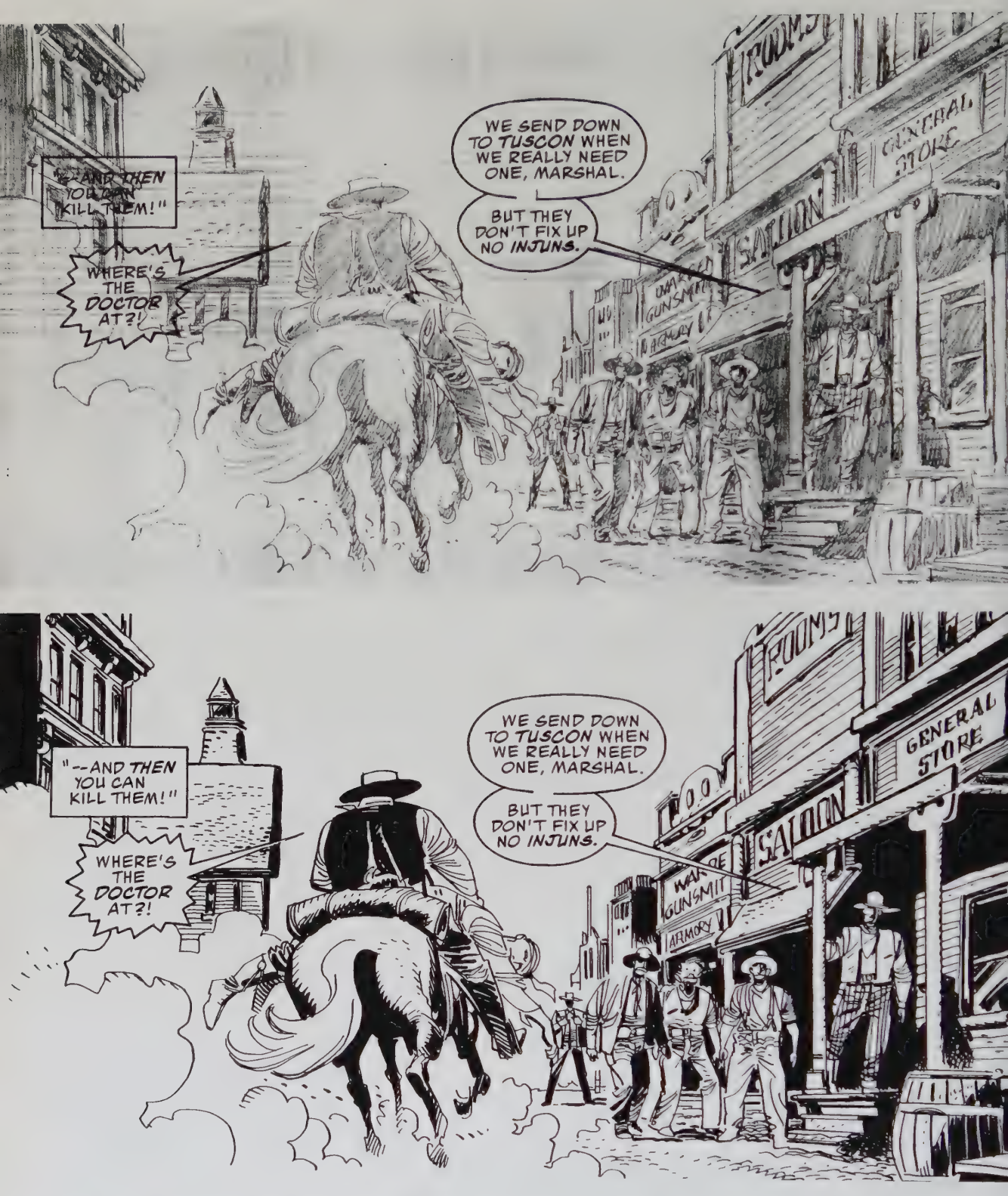
Above: It wasn't necessary to place additional blacks on this page. Instead the focus was on line weights. Sometimes the inker can help the pencils achieve greater visual impact, but it's just as important to know when to leave a panel alone. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #28 (May 2000) script by Steven Grant, pencils by Gil Kane and inks by Klaus Janson.

Opposite, top: This is a brilliant example of composition and black placement inspired by the illustrators and architects of the 1930's. The angle of the house contrasting with the angle of the car, and the placement of the blacks, all contribute to making this image both arresting and iconic. From *The Brave and the Bold* #44 (November 1962), script by Gardner Fox and art by Joe Kubert.

3) This brings us to the subject of depth. The illusion of a three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional piece of paper is critical to the re-creation of our daily reality. Some of the ways a penciller can aid in this goal (including composition, design and the relationship of small shapes to big shapes) can *only* be done in the pencils. But a lot can be achieved by an alert and intelligent inker.

Whenever there is more than one plane in a panel, there should be some difference between them. There needs to be a separation of the foreground plane from the secondary plane. Otherwise there would only be a highly ineffective jumble of information. One way is to use a heavier line weight on the foreground and a thinner weight on the background. This is very effective when done with intent and purpose.

Below: The use of black clouds in the background serves as a frame for the foreground figure. From *Beware the Creeper* #1 (June 1968), script by Sergius O'Shaugnessy and art by Steve Ditko.

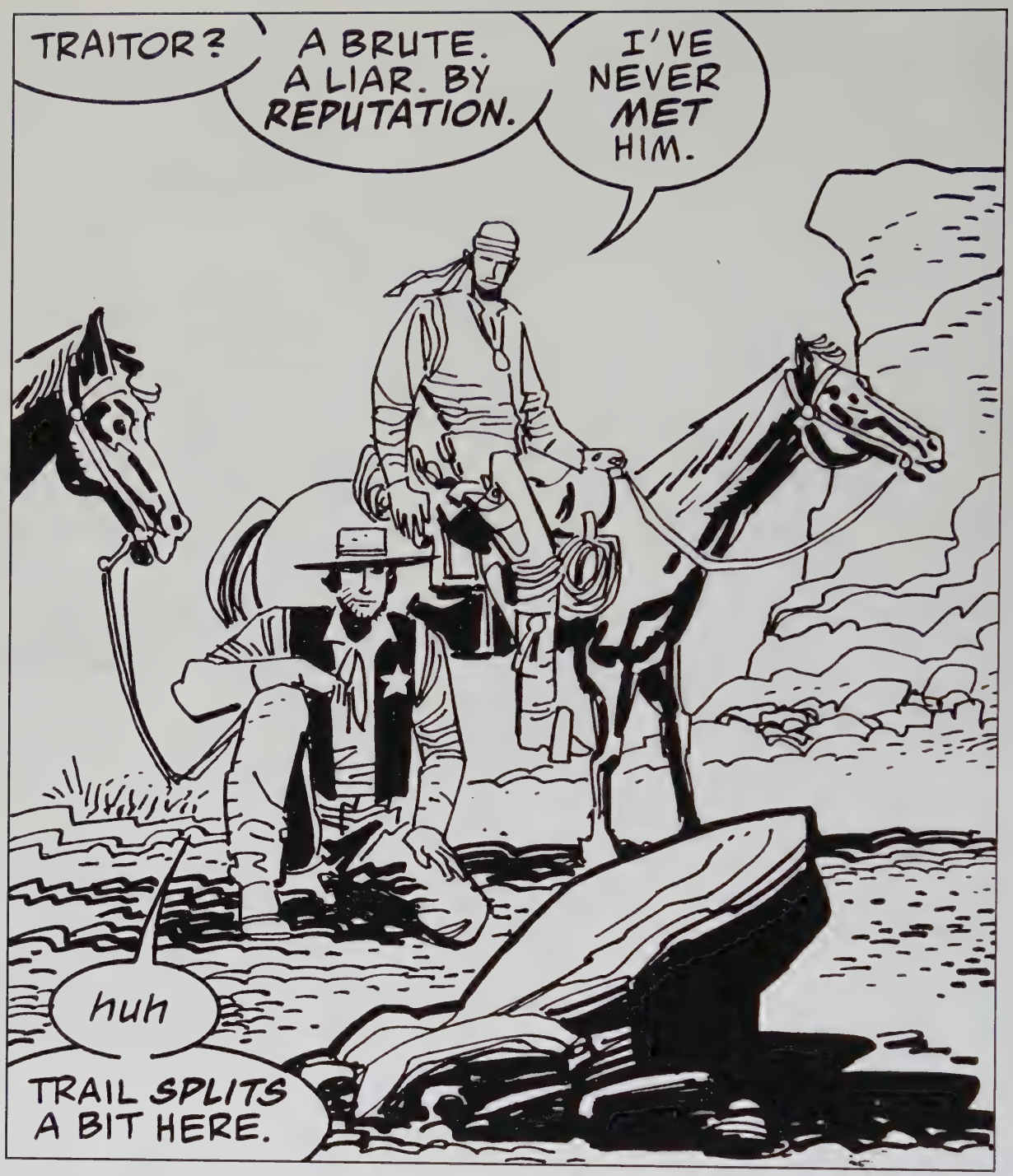


This Green Lantern story takes place in the old west. It's important to consider your environment and era when inking. Obviously, the approach to inking a western story will not be the same as inking a science fiction story. The goal here was to create an environment that felt dusty and rough. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #21 (October 1999), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Mike Zeck and inks by Klaus Janson.

The approach to inking this page is the opposite of inking a western story. Inker Jesse Delperdang's very slick style and bold use of black gives this page a very modern look. From *Birds of Prey* #41 (May 2002), script by Chuck Dixon and pencils by Rick Leonardi.

Another way is to introduce solid black areas into one of the planes. Ideally, the foreground has the most weight so normally the larger black areas would be located there. The background would then have smaller black areas (or none) relying on thinner line work to realize the background. You could also resolve the problem in reverse: clean line work in the foreground and some black as a background. Although the choices you make as an inker are very important, remember that the goal of your thinking is to separate and clarify the relationship of the two planes.

The same approach needs to be taken when there are three planes: foreground, middle and back. That would be a perfect opportunity to introduce some gray into the panel. The foreground could be heavy with solid blacks or even a silhouette, the middle ground is gray and the back plane can be done in line work with no grays or blacks.



Above and opposite: Both of these panels have similar agendas, and that is to create depth with line work. Notice in the first panel that the foreground rubble is inked with a heavier line than the background rubble. In the second panel, the illusion of depth is created in a similar way where the lightest lines recede into the background, whereas the heaviest lines are placed in the foreground. From *Legends of the DC Universe* #21 (October 1999), script by Steven Grant, pencils by Mike Zeck and inks by Klaus Janson.

Line weights, spotting blacks and the realization of a third dimension are all within the province of inkers. Do not approach these freedoms in a haphazard or random way. They must only be used after considerable thought. Once you have embarked on this approach to inking, you must have a defendable theory that justifies your choices.

Lastly, I would suggest that beginner inkers rein in some of their more creative impulses for the first couple of jobs. Editors and pencillers really don't want some new guy with a know-it-all attitude telling them how to fix the pencils. I know that because that was how I lost a few early jobs. Follow any instructions given to you by the editor or art director. Conversely, no new inker should be given a job that requires too many decisions. Follow the pencils if you think that is the safest approach. You need to insure that you will get more work before you develop a voice of your own.

Be patient. Your own voice will come in time.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Klaus Janson's artwork has brought to life such characters as Batman, Punisher, Daredevil, and Spawn. Although he is renowned as a comic book penciller, Janson first won acclaim as an inker, and revolutionized this rarefied art form. This book represents the theories Janson has learned and applied while teaching at the famed School of Visual Arts for the last eleven years. He lives in New York City.

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