MAKING COMICS

STORYTELLING SECRETS OF COMICS, MANGA AND GRAPHIC NOVELS
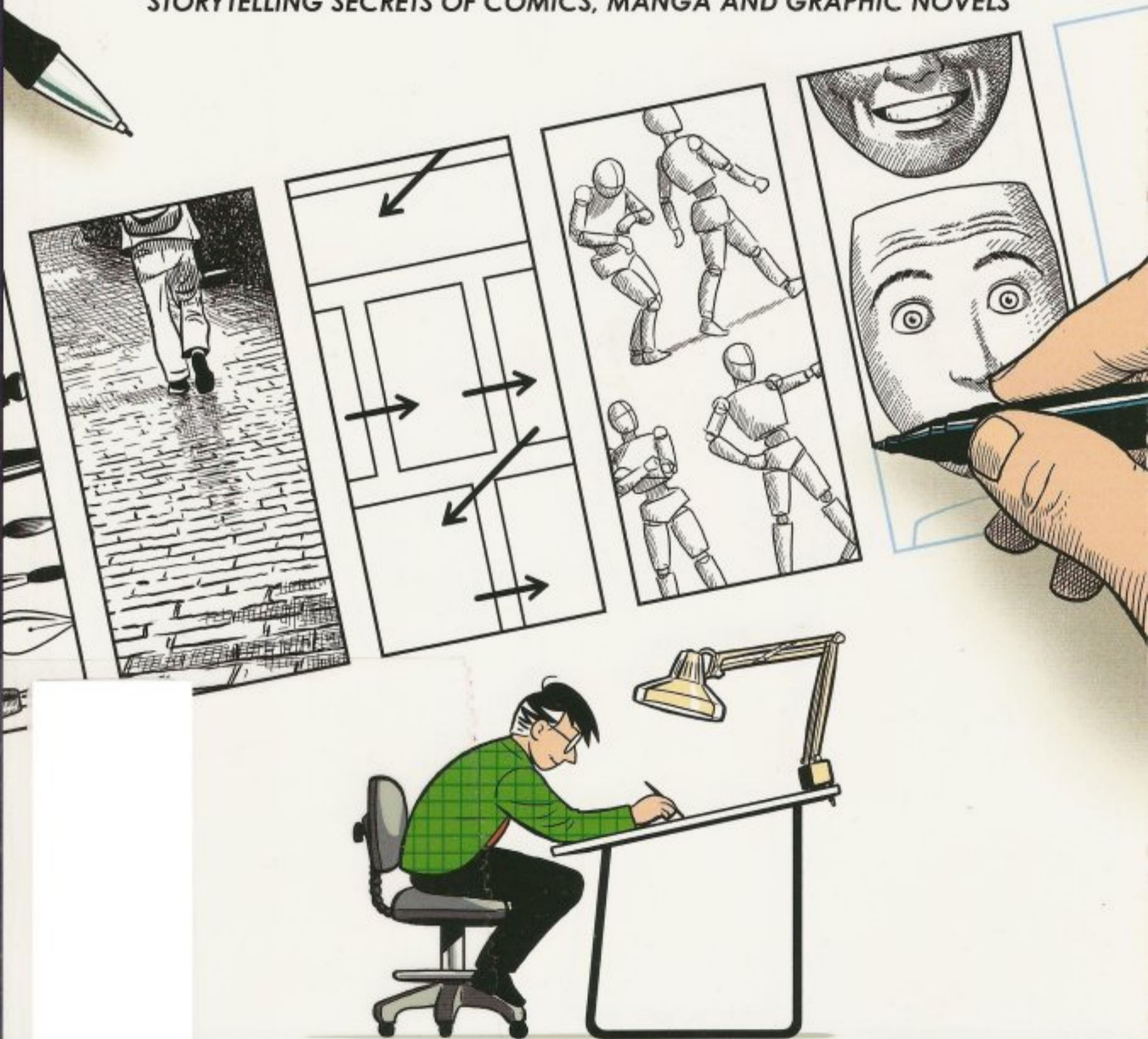
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Chapter One

Writing with Pictures

Clarity, Persuasion and Intensity

FOR AS LONG AS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TELLING STORIES TO ONE ANOTHER, STORYTELLERS LIKE YOU AND ME HAVE WANTED **TWO THINGS** FROM OUR AUDIENCES.

WE WANT THEM TO **UNDERSTAND** WHAT WE HAVE TO TELL THEM --

-- AND WE WANT THEM TO **CARE** ENOUGH TO STICK AROUND 'TIL WE'RE **DONE**.

TO ACHIEVE THAT FIRST GOAL, YOU'LL NEED TO LEARN THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATING WITH **CLARITY** --
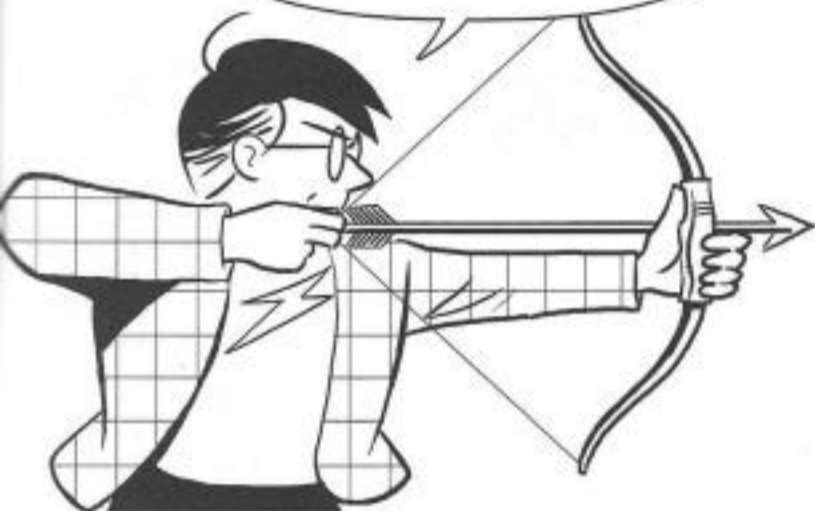
-- AND TO ACHIEVE THE SECOND GOAL, YOU'LL NEED TO LEARN WHICH ELEMENTS OF A WORK CAN **PERSUADE** YOUR AUDIENCE TO STAY WITH YOU.

IF THE STORY YOU HAVE IN MIND IS **COMPELLING**, IN AND OF ITSELF, THEN **TELLING IT STRAIGHT** WITH A MAXIMUM OF CLARITY MAY BE THE ONLY PERSUASION YOUR AUDIENCE WILL NEED.

It was a dark and stormy night...

tap tap tap

IN **COMICS**, THAT STORY WILL NEED TO TAKE THE FORM OF **IMAGES IN SEQUENCE**, PERHAPS WITH **WORDS** --

HMM... DARK NIGHT...

AND STORMY TOO.

YES... IT IS.

DARK AND STORMY AND NIGHT

NOW, WHAT?

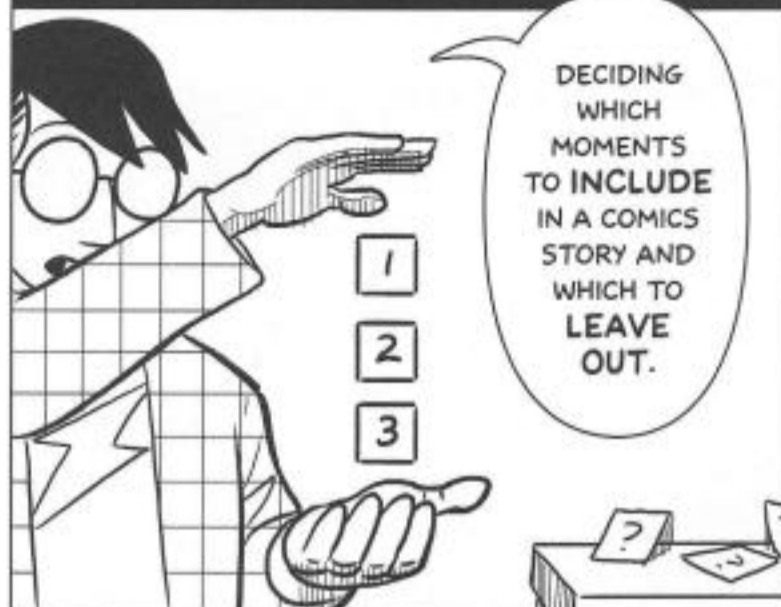SHH! JUST KEEP STALLING. WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF ROOM HERE

COMICS REQUIRES US TO MAKE A CONSTANT STREAM OF **CHOICES** REGARDING IMAGERY, PACING, DIALOGUE, COMPOSITION, GESTURE AND A TON OF OTHER OPTIONS --
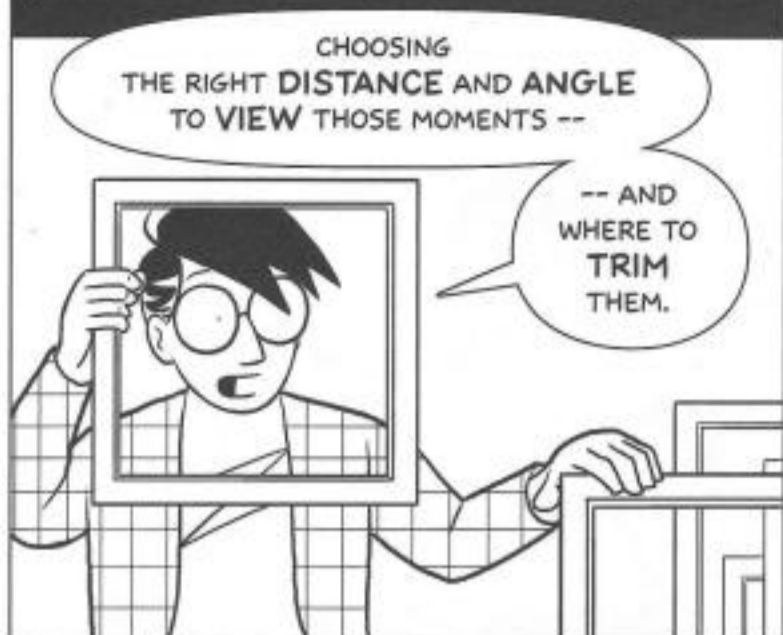
-- SO LET'S START BY EXAMINING HOW THAT CONVERSION IS DONE WHEN **CLARITY** AND **COMMUNICATION** ARE THE PRIMARY **GOALS**.

-- AND THESE CHOICES BREAK DOWN INTO FIVE **BASIC TYPES**.

APOLOGIES TO C. SCHULZ.

CHOICE OF MOMENT

DECIDING WHICH MOMENTS TO **INCLUDE** IN A COMICS STORY AND WHICH TO **LEAVE OUT**.

CHOICE OF FRAME

CHOOSING THE RIGHT **DISTANCE** AND **ANGLE** TO **VIEW** THOSE MOMENTS --

-- AND WHERE TO **TRIM** THEM.

CHOICE OF IMAGE

RENDERING THE CHARACTERS, OBJECTS AND ENVIRONMENTS IN THOSE FRAMES **CLEARLY**.

CHOICE OF WORD

PICKING WORDS THAT ADD **VALUABLE INFORMATION** AND **WORK WELL** WITH THE IMAGES AROUND THEM.

HEY!

BANDS WITH NAMES L MY ZERO, ZERO S RO... WH

CHOICE OF FLOW

GUIDING READERS **THROUGH** AND **BETWEEN** PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN.

THESE ARE THE **FIVE ARENAS** WHERE YOUR CHOICES CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN **CLEAR, CONVINCING STORYTELLING** AND A **CONFUSING MESS**.

CHOICE OF MOMENT

CHOICE OF FRAME

CHOICE OF IMAGE

CHOICE OF WORD

CHOICE OF FLOW

EVEN WITH ROUGH SKETCHES LIKE THESE, A CASUAL READER SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO "READ" THE ACTION CLEARLY.

OUR **CHOICE OF MOMENT** -- THE SELECTION PROCESS THAT LED TO THESE EIGHT PANELS -- PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN INSURING THAT CLARITY.

THE MOMENTS CHOSEN IN THE ABOVE SEQUENCE REPRESENT THE MOST DIRECT, EFFICIENT ROUTE TO COMMUNICATING OUR SIMPLE PLOT.

ANY NUMBER OF MOMENTS COULD HAVE BEEN USED TO REPRESENT "A MAN IS WALKING," BUT ALL WE REALLY NEEDED IN THIS CASE WAS **ONE**, SO THAT'S WHAT WAS CHOSEN.

A MAN IS WALKING

EACH PANEL FURTHERS THE "PLOT."

"A man is walking."

"He finds a key on the ground."

"He takes it with him, then he comes to a locked door."

"He unlocks the door."

CLIK!

"Then a hungry lion jumps out."

AND IN THIS CASE, EIGHT PANELS IS WHAT WE NEEDED TO GET THE JOB DONE.

REMOVE ONE AND THE MEANING IS ALTERED.
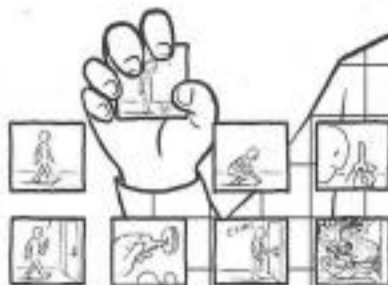
A KEY FOUND --

-- BECOMES A KEY RETRIEVED.

OR A KEY FOUND --

-- BECOMES THE FINDING OF AN UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT.

WHEN CLARITY IS YOUR **SOLE** PURPOSE --

-- YOUR STORY'S MOMENTS SHOULD BE LIKE A **DOT-TO-DOT PUZZLE.** REMOVE ONE DOT AND YOU **CHANGE** THE **SHAPE** OF THE **STORY.**

CLIK!

2

1

3

5

7

6

8
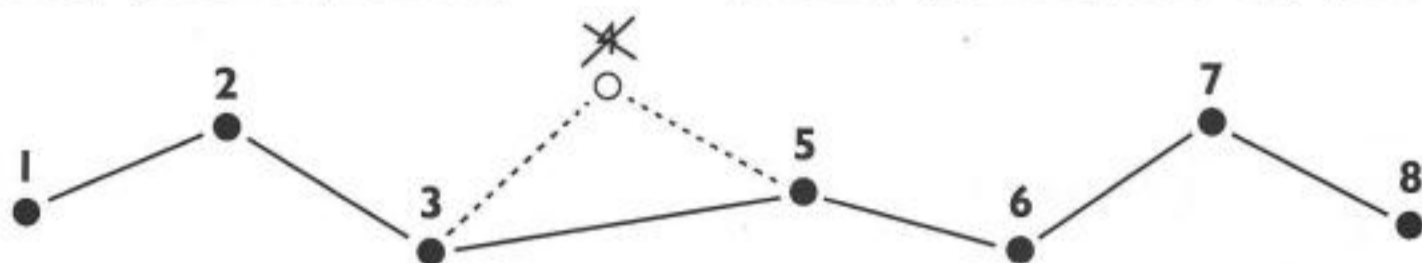
OR IF THAT'S **NOT** THE CASE, MAYBE THAT PARTICULAR "DOT" WASN'T NEEDED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

EACH PANEL SHOWS A COMPLETE **ACTION,** BECAUSE WE'RE ADAPTING A PLOT THAT'S ANCHORED ENTIRELY **IN** ACTIONS.

1

3

4
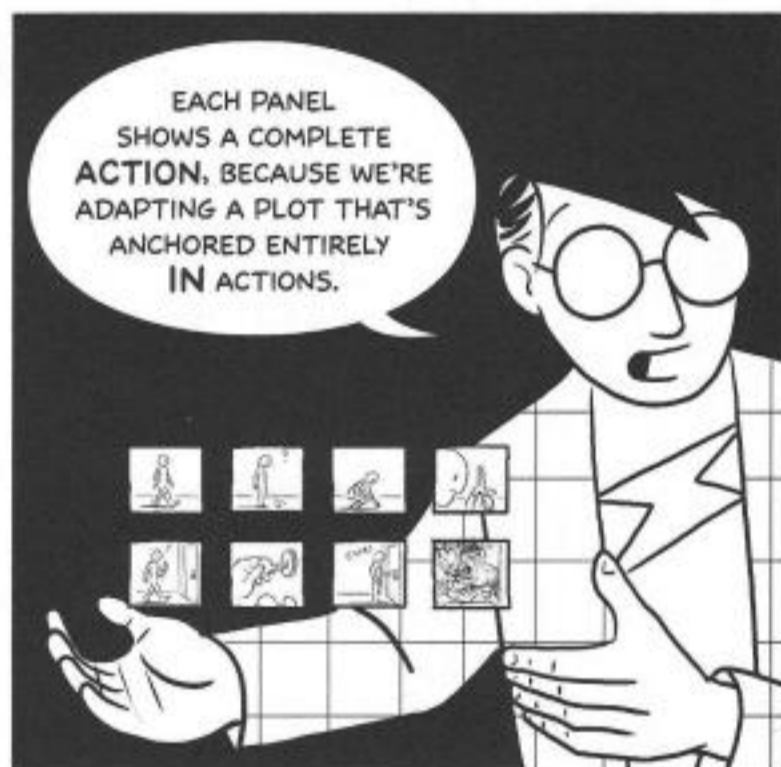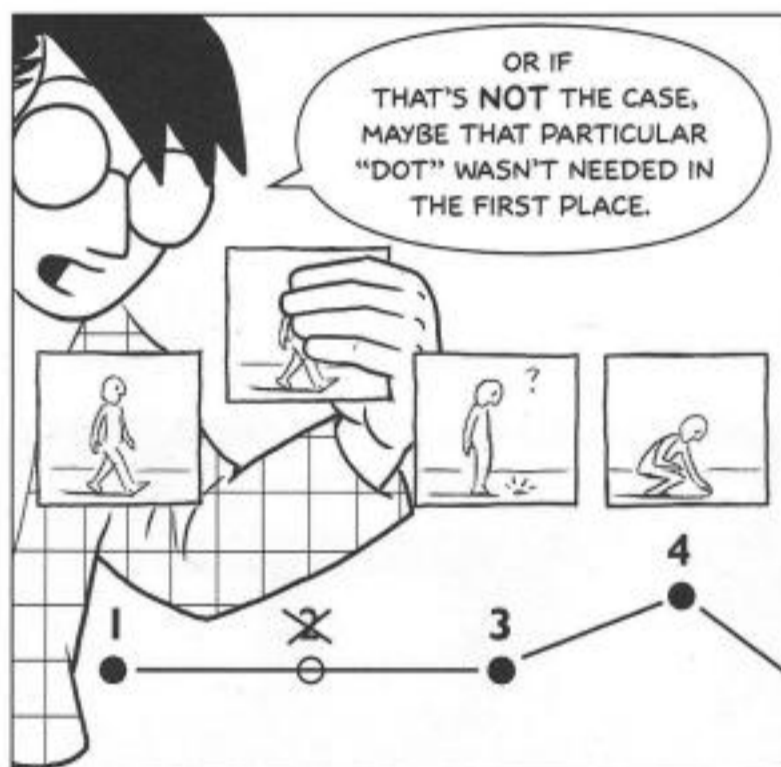
"HE FINDS A KEY ON THE GROUND" BREAKS DOWN INTO THREE SUCH ACTIONS: **SEEING, REACHING DOWN** AND **EXAMINING** (I.E., GIVING READERS A CLEAR VIEW OF THE KEY ITSELF).

IF THE PLOT CALLED FOR THE MAN TO **"SLOWLY"** REACH DOWN, A CERTAIN NUMBER OF **EXTRA "DOTS"** MIGHT HAVE BEEN NECESSARY TO SHOW THE FINDING OF THE KEY --
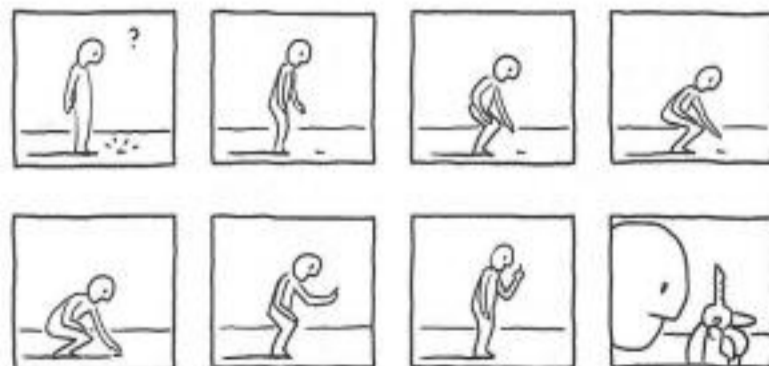
-- BUT BECAUSE WE'RE ILLUSTRATING THE **FACT** OF THESE ACTIONS, RATHER THAN THEIR **QUALITY,** ONE PANEL PER ACTION SEEMS TO BE ENOUGH.

14

CONSIDER WHAT YOU WANT FROM EACH PART OF YOUR STORY: DO YOU WANT TO JUMP AHEAD TO A **KEY EVENT?** DO YOU WANT TO PUT ON THE BRAKES AND FOCUS ON **SMALLER MOMENTS?** DO YOU WANT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO **CONVERSATIONS** AND **FACES?**

DEPENDING ON YOUR ANSWERS, YOU'LL FIND THAT CERTAIN TYPES OF TRANSITIONS **BETWEEN** PANELS MAY GET THE JOB DONE BETTER THAN OTHERS.

THESE PANEL TO PANEL **TRANSITIONS** COME IN **SIX** VARIETIES*, INCLUDING:

1. MOMENT TO MOMENT

A SINGLE ACTION PORTRAYED IN A SERIES OF MOMENTS.

2. ACTION TO ACTION

A SINGLE SUBJECT (PERSON, OBJECT, ETC...) IN A SERIES OF ACTIONS.

3. SUBJECT TO SUBJECT

A SERIES OF CHANGING SUBJECTS WITHIN A SINGLE SCENE.

4. SCENE TO SCENE

TRANSITIONS ACROSS SIGNIFICANT DISTANCES OF TIME AND/OR SPACE.

5. ASPECT TO ASPECT

TRANSITIONS FROM ONE ASPECT OF A PLACE, IDEA OR MOOD TO ANOTHER.

6. NON SEQUITUR

A SERIES OF SEEMINGLY NONSENSICAL, UNRELATED IMAGES AND/OR WORDS.

* SEE UNDERSTANDING COMICS PAGES 70-89 FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIX TRANSITIONS.

15
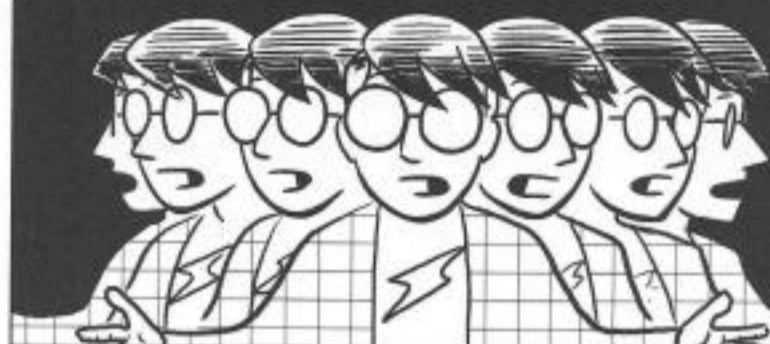
* ALTHOUGH THEY PRIMARILY RELATE TO CHOICE OF MOMENT, TRANSITIONS THREE AND FIVE ALSO TOUCH ON THE UPCOMING TOPIC CHOICE OF FRAME.

4

SCENE TO SCENE JUMPS CAN HELP COMPRESS A STORY DOWN TO A MANAGEABLE LENGTH, WHILE STILL ALLOWING FOR A RANGE OF TIME-SPANS AND A BREADTH OF LOCATIONS. LOOK HARD AT YOUR STORIES AND YOU MAY FIND YOU CAN CUT A LOT OUT.

I'M GONNA SIT RIGHT HERE 'TIL SOMETHING GOOD COMES ON!

SUIT YOURSELF.

CLICK!

ONE YEAR LATER...

MEANWHILE, IN PARIS...

THIEF!! COME BACK!

5

SOMETIMES IT MAY SUIT YOUR NARRATIVE TO HAVE TIME STAND STILL AND LET THE EYE WANDER.

ASPECT TO ASPECT TRANSITIONS DO JUST THAT, AND THEY'VE BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY IN JAPAN -- AND RECENTLY, IN NORTH AMERICA -- TO CREATE A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE AND MOOD.

CLOSED

6

AND FINALLY THE NON SEQUITUR, WHICH, THOUGH IT MAY NOT DO ANYTHING TO ADVANCE A STORY --

-- HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN EXPERIMENTAL COMICS, PROVIDING THE OCCASIONAL NONSENSE GAG IN OTHERWISE RATIONAL STORIES.

AND THE WINNER IS...

KILL → TA

ASSESS KILL

RT

CHICKEN PEPSI?

CHICKEN PEPSI...

OW!

SEZ YOU.
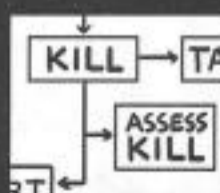
IF YOU HAVE A STORY THAT'S VERY **PLOT-DRIVEN**, YOU MAY FIND THAT A LOT OF **ACTION TO ACTION** TRANSITIONS WITH A FEW **SUBJECT TO SUBJECTS** AND **SCENE TO SCENES** ARE ALL YOU NEED.

THESE TEND TO CLARIFY THE **FACTS** OF A SCENE: WHO DOES WHAT, WHERE IT'S DONE, HOW IT'S DONE AND SO FORTH.

BANG!

AAARGH!

HE HIT ROSCOE! RUN AWAY!

LATER... CURSE THAT MEDDLING CARTOONIST!!

2. ACTION   3. SUBJECT   2. ACTION   4. SCENE

TRANSITIONS **ONE** AND **FIVE**, ON THE OTHER HAND, HELP CLARIFY THE **NATURE** OF AN ACTION, IDEA OR MOOD, AND WORK WELL IN MORE NUANCED OR EMOTIONALLY-DRIVEN STORES.

1. MOMENT TO MOMENT

5. ASPECT TO ASPECT

WHATEVER YOUR CHOICE OF MOMENT, THOUGH, CLARITY MEANS LETTING THESE TECHNIQUES OPERATE QUIETLY IN THE BACKGROUND AND LETTING THE **CONTENT** OF THE WORK SPEAK FOR ITSELF.

OF COURSE, CHOOSING THE RIGHT **MOMENT** IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.
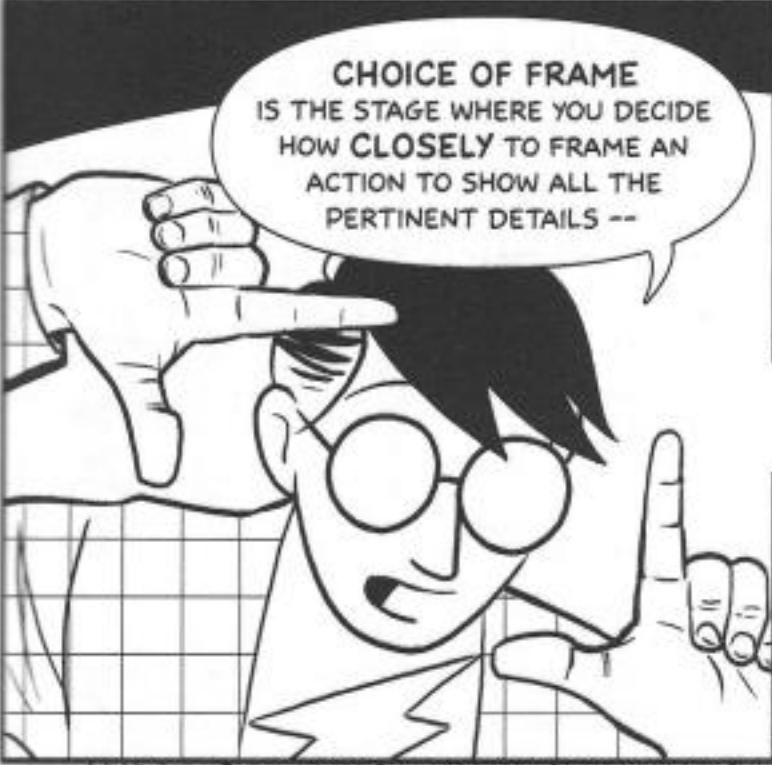
ONCE YOU'VE PICKED THE RIGHT MOMENTS FOR THE JOB, YOU'LL NEED TO SHOW YOUR READERS WHERE THAT MOMENT'S **FOCUS** LIES.

AND THAT'S WHEN PICKING THE RIGHT **VIEW** OF THAT MOMENT CAN BE CRUCIAL.
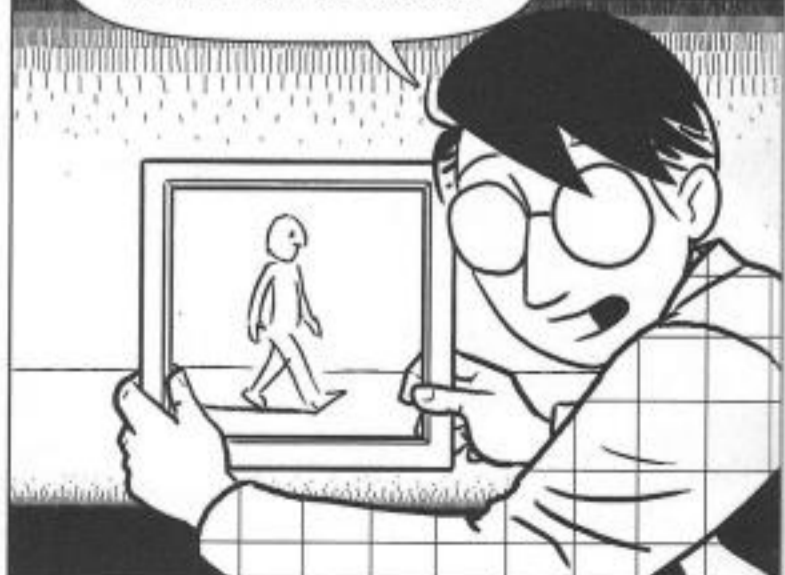
CHOICE OF FRAME IS THE STAGE WHERE YOU DECIDE HOW **CLOSELY** TO FRAME AN ACTION TO SHOW ALL THE PERTINENT DETAILS --

-- OR HOW FAR TO **PULL BACK** TO LET THE READER KNOW WHERE AN ACTION IS TAKING PLACE --

-- AND MAYBE GIVE A SENSE OF **BEING THERE** IN THE PROCESS.

IT'S THE STAGE WHERE YOU DECIDE HOW COMPOSITIONAL FACTORS LIKE **CROPPING, BALANCE** AND **TILT** AFFECT YOUR READERS' IMPRESSIONS OF YOUR WORLD --

-- AND THEIR SENSE OF POSITION **WITHIN** THAT WORLD.

19

THE CHOICE OF MOMENT FOR OUR ORIGINAL EXAMPLE WAS PRETTY **SIMPLE** (JUST STRAIGHT ACTION TO ACTION) --

-- AND THE CHOICE OF **FRAME** FOR THOSE PANELS WAS TOO.
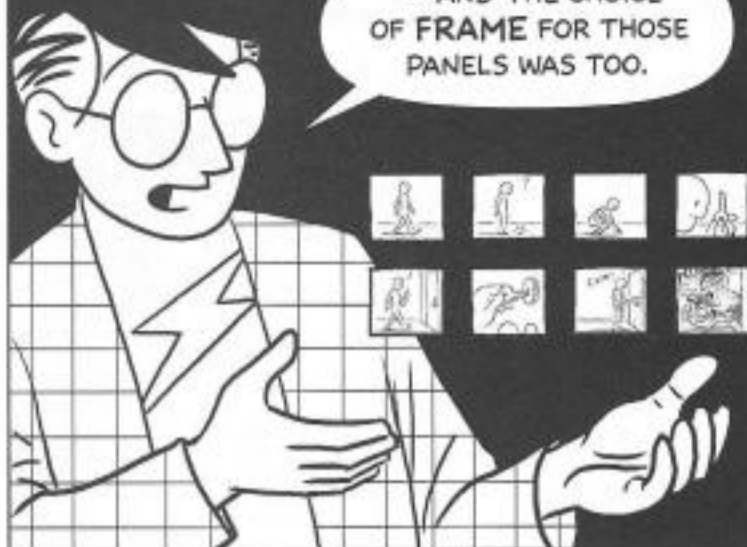
TWO OUT OF THE EIGHT PANELS FEATURED **CLOSE-UPS** TO SHOW A FEW IMPORTANT DETAILS --

-- BUT OTHERWISE, THE ACTION WAS SHOWN FROM A FIXED MIDDLE **DISTANCE** AND FIXED VIEWING **ANGLE**.

OUR TALE COULD HAVE BEEN SHOT FROM **MANY** ANGLES AND DISTANCES, BUT BY OFFERING A VIEW OF THE ACTION THAT BARELY CHANGES --
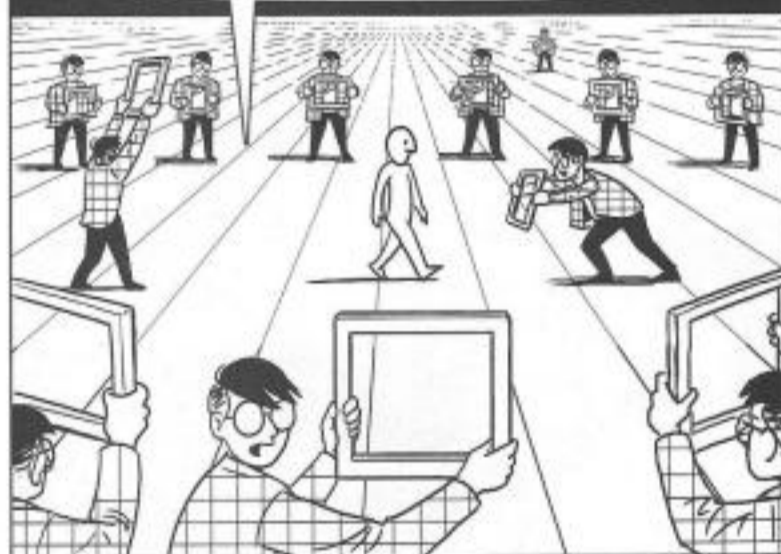
-- THE READER IS ENCOURAGED TO FOCUS ON WHAT **DOES** CHANGE, SUCH AS THE **POSITION** AND **ATTITUDE** OF THE CHARACTER, AS WELL AS HIS UNCHANGING FORWARD **STANCE** --

WALK

STOP ?

BEND

EXAMINE

WALK

UNLOCK
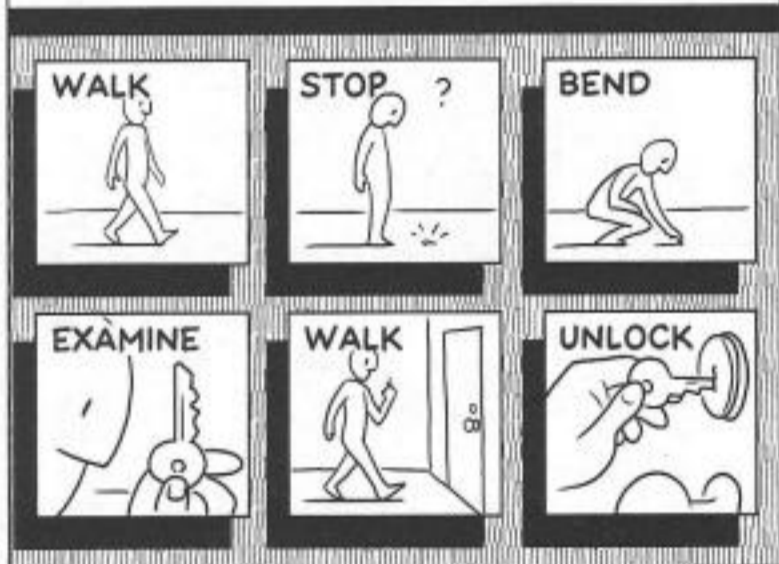
-- INSTEAD OF BEING **DISTRACTED** BY NEEDLESSLY VARYING SHOTS, IRRELEVANT TO THE NARRATIVE.
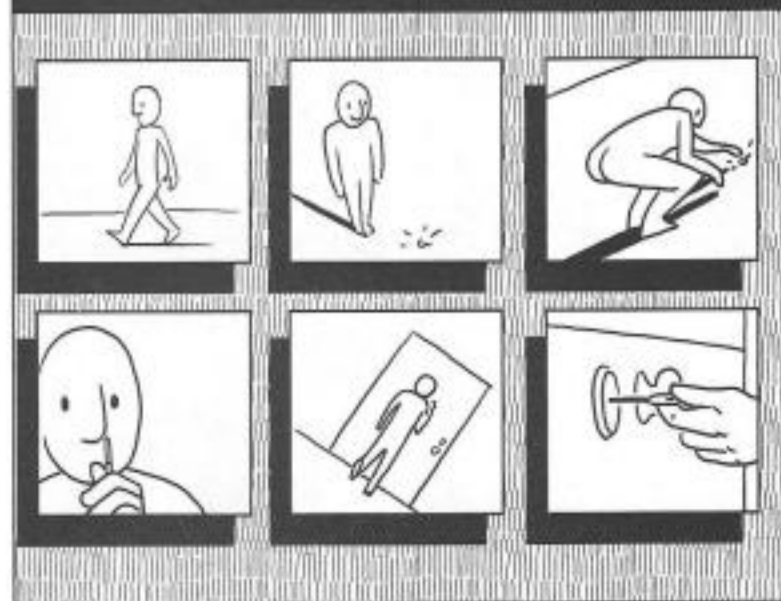
READERS **LIKE** CHANGE AND VARIETY, SO IT'S TEMPTING TO VARY ANGLES A LOT. JUST MAKE SURE THAT THE CHANGES IN YOUR **ARTWORK** --

-- AREN'T DISTRACTING READERS FROM MORE IMPORTANT CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN YOUR **STORY**.

THAT SAID, SOME SCENES REQUIRE FREQUENT **CHANGES** OF FRAME, SUCH AS THE FLIP-FLOPPING ANGLES OF SUBJECT TO SUBJECT TRANSITIONS USED TO CAPTURE THE RHYTHM OF TWO PEOPLE IN **CONVERSATION**.

WHY DO *I* HAVE TO GET MAULED BY THE HUNGRY LION *?!*

BECAUSE IT'S *FUNNY!*

TO *YOU*, MAYBE.

I'M *TIRED* OF BEING A THROW-AWAY CHARACTER.

BUT, LOOK AT ALL THE *PANELS* YOU'VE BEEN IN! IT'S ONLY PAGE 21!

YOU MEAN I HAVE TO KEEP *DOING THIS?!*

HEY, AT LEAST YOU *GET* TO APPEAR AGAIN. THIS IS MY LAST PANEL *EVER!*

OH, DORIS...

=SNIFF=

AND THERE'S NO NEED TO KEEP EVERY PANEL AT **EYE LEVEL**.

A "WORM'S EYE" VIEW CAN GIVE WEIGHT AND GRANDEUR TO OBJECTS --

-- AND **CHARACTERS** --

-- WHILE GETTING **ABOVE** A SCENE CAN GIVE READERS ACCESS TO A WEALTH OF INFO ABOUT A SETTING --

-- AND A SENSE OF "RISING ABOVE IT ALL" EMOTIONALLY AS WELL.

CONCEPTS LIKE "A MAN IS WALKING" DON'T REQUIRE PULLING BACK THE FRAME MUCH, BUT IF YOU WANT YOUR READERS TO KNOW **WHERE** THAT MAN IS WALKING --

-- YOU MAY WANT TO INVEST SOME SPACE IN A **WIDER VIEW.**

BEWA HUNG LION
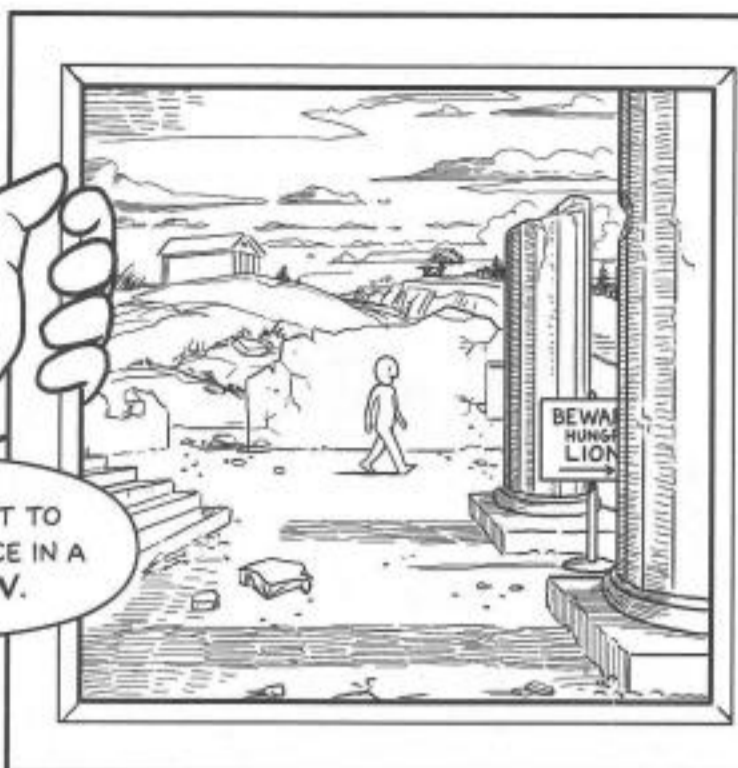
READERS NEED THAT INFORMATION ESPECIALLY WHEN MOVING FROM **SCENE TO SCENE** --

-- HENCE THE TRADITION OF THE **ESTABLISHING SHOT:** A BIG LONG-SHOT PANEL OR TWO AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH NEW SCENE, USUALLY FOLLOWED BY SOME MIDDLE GROUND AND CLOSE-UP PANELS OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS.

UH-OH. LOOK AT THE TIME!

ALMOST DAWN... I BETTER GET ON THE ROAD.

REMEMBER TO SAY **HI** FOR ME.

IF I HURRY, I CAN MAKE IT THERE BY **SUNDOWN.**

DON'T HURRY **TOO** MUCH.

DRIVE **SAFELY,** OKAY?

DON'T I **ALWAYS?**

ON THE OTHER HAND, BECAUSE READERS **WANT** AND **EXPECT** THAT SENSE OF PLACE, A CLEVER STORYTELLER CAN CHOOSE TO **DELAY** THE ESTABLISHING SHOT TO INCREASE **SUSPENSE** --

-- OR TO MIRROR THE THOUGHTS OF A CHARACTER WHO'S TEMPORARILY **UNAWARE** OF HIS OR HER SURROUNDINGS.

DRAWING DETAILED ESTABLISHING SHOTS CAN BE **HARD WORK** BUT THEY'RE WORTH THE EFFORT IF, BY DOING SO, YOU CAN CREATE A STRONG **SENSE OF PLACE** IN THE IMAGINATIONS OF YOUR READERS.
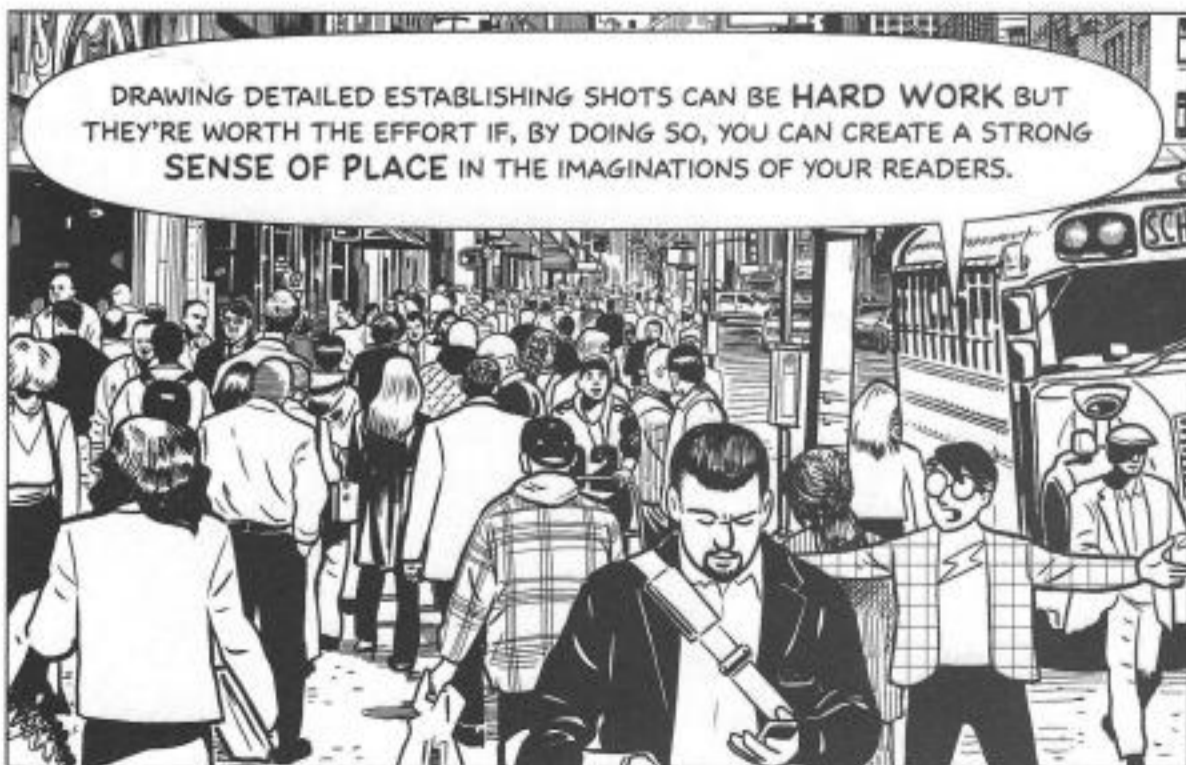
LOOK FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC IN **CHAPTER FOUR.**

23

CHOOSING HOW TO **FRAME** MOMENTS IN COMICS IS LIKE CHOOSING **CAMERA ANGLES** IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM.

THERE ARE **DIFFERENCES** --

--SUCH AS THE ROLE THAT **SIZE, SHAPE** AND **POSITION** HAVE ON COMICS PANELS --
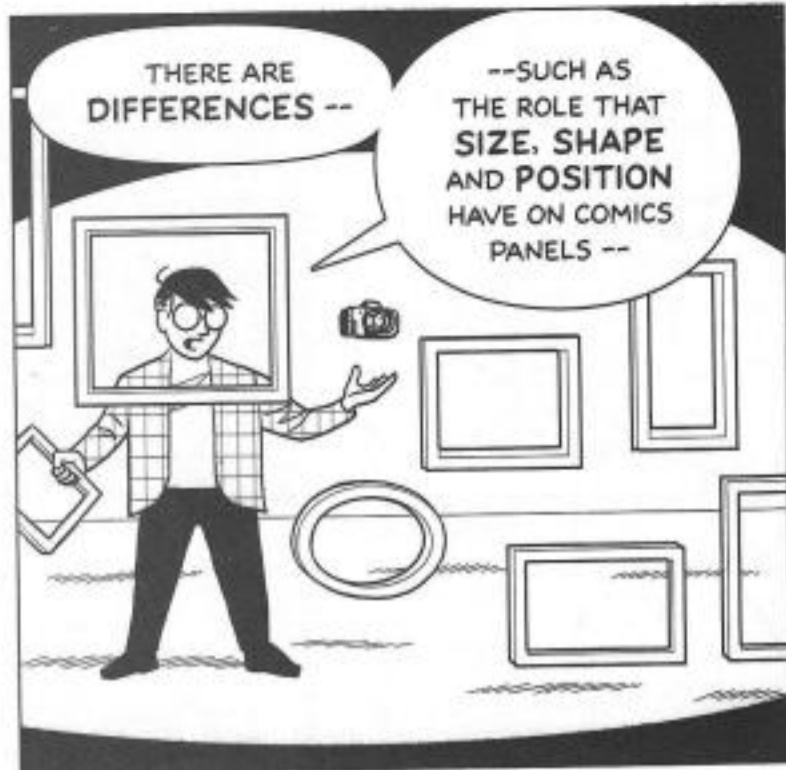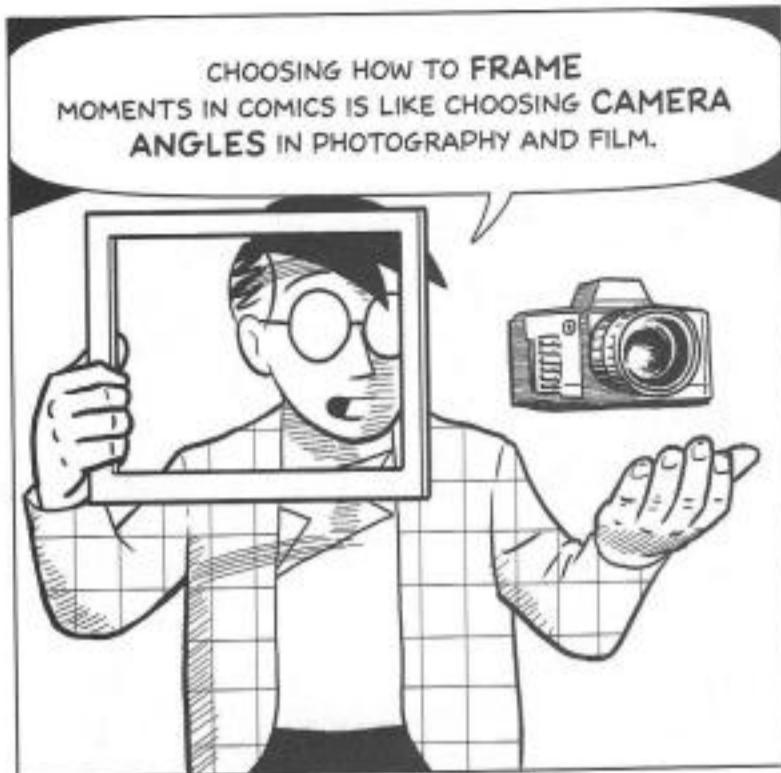
-- BUT TO THINK OF THAT FRAME AS **THE READER'S CAMERA** IS A USEFUL METAPHOR.

THIS IS THE DEVICE BY WHICH YOU CAN GRAB THE READER BY THE SHOULDER, GUIDE THEM TO THE RIGHT SPOT --

-- AND TELL THEM **"YOU ARE HERE..."**

"NOW **LOOK.**"

READERS WILL ASSIGN IMPORTANCE TO CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS PLACED IN THE **CENTER** --

YOU CAN'T KILL **ALL** OF US, FRANK.

NOT THAT HE'S *SUGGESTING* ANYTHING!

-- AND SOME COMICS ARTISTS OBLIGE BY PUTTING THEIR MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS THERE.
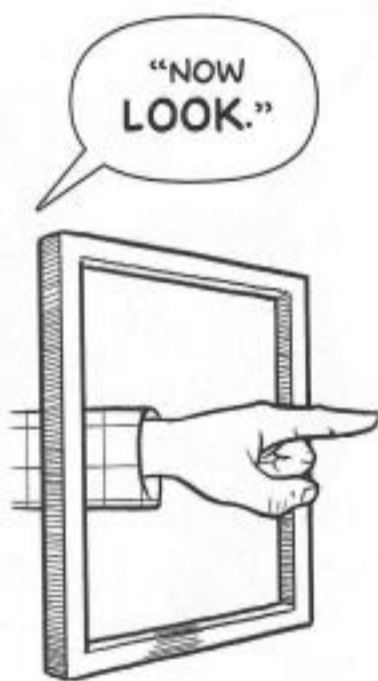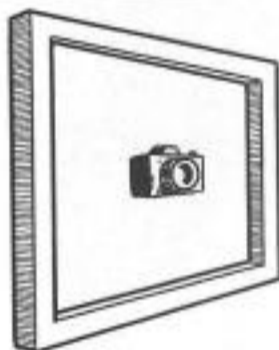
BUT THAT CENTER CAN ALSO POINT US TOWARD LESS TANGIBLE IDEAS, SUCH AS THE **MOTION** OF AN **OBJECT** --

-- A MYSTERIOUS **ABSENCE** --

LILY?

Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh I: Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss

-- A **DISTANCE** ABOUT TO BE **CROSSED** --
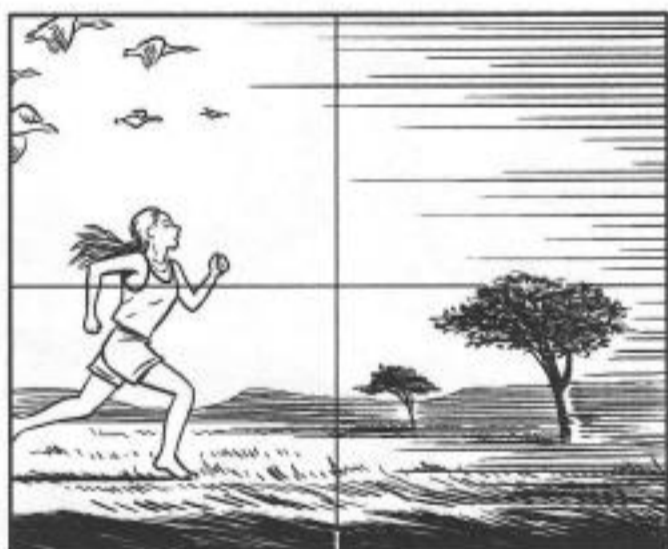
-- A DISTANCE CROSSED **ALREADY** --

OH, SPEEDY! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? EVERYBODY'S BEEN GOING CRAZY LOOKING FOR YOU! POOR LITOS. IT'S SO TERRIBLE, BUT HE'S GONNA BE OK...

I KNOW. I JUST HAD TO SEE YOU.

-- OR THE UNSEEN OBJECT OF A CHARACTER'S **ATTENTION**.

HERE IT COMES.

THOSE ARE JUST A **FEW** OF THE REASONS THAT AN ARTIST MIGHT CHOOSE A SEEMINGLY **OFF-CENTER** COMPOSITION. WE'LL CONSIDER OTHERS LATER.

25

NEXT UP IS YOUR **CHOICE OF IMAGE:** CREATING PICTURES TO **FILL** THOSE FRAMES AND BRING THE WORLD OF YOUR STORY TO LIFE **VISUALLY.**

AFTER ALL THAT **PLANNING, CHOOSING, ARRANGING** AND **SKETCHING** THINGS OUT, HERE'S THE PART OF THE PROCESS WHERE YOU GET TO PICK UP YOUR PEN, BRUSH OR DIGITAL STYLUS AND FINALLY **DRAW** SOMETHING!

✓ CHOICE OF MOMENT
✓ CHOICE OF FRAME
✓ CHOICE OF IMAGE
CHOICE OF WORD
CHOICE OF FLOW

NO MATTER WHAT **STYLE** OF IMAGE YOU CHOOSE, YOUR PICTURES' FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT JOB IS TO COMMUNICATE **QUICKLY, CLEARLY** AND **COMPELLINGLY** WITH THE READER.

Panel 1: DON'T JUST RELY ON STOCK **GENERIC** FEATURES; A DRESS, A CAR, A SMILE... GET READY TO GET **SPECIFIC**.

Panel 2: CAN YOU DRAW A **MOPED** CLEARLY ENOUGH THAT READERS CAN TELL THEY'RE NOT LOOKING AT A MOTORCYCLE OR A BICYCLE? HA! HA! HA! HA! **SHUT UP!** PUT! PUT!

Panel 3: CAN YOU DRAW AN EXPRESSION OF **MOCK DISAPPROVAL** THAT WON'T BE MISTAKEN FOR THE **REAL THING?**

Panel 4: CAN YOU DRAW A **SCORPION** THAT'S CLEARLY ABOUT TO **STRIKE?**

Panel 5: CAN YOU DRAW A PICTURE OF **MARK TWAIN** THAT DOESN'T WIND UP LOOKING LIKE **ALBERT EINSTEIN?** TWAIN EINSTEIN

Panel 6: EVEN WHEN WORKING IN A MINIMAL STYLE LIKE STICK FIGURE MASTER MATT FEAZELL, YOUR PICTURES CAN STILL INCORPORATE A WEALTH OF **REAL LIFE DETAILS.** IF I ASKED YOU TO DRAW A CLOCK, A WATER BOTTLE OR A SHOE IN JUST A FEW LINES, HOW **SPECIFIC** COULD **YOU** GET?

27

PANEL SIX: ART BY MATT FEAZELL (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258)

CHOICE OF IMAGE IS WHERE ALL THOSE TRADITIONAL HOW-TO-DRAW BOOKS CAN BE HELPFUL --

-- AND DRAWING FROM LIFE EVEN MORE SO.

CLASSIC DRAWING SKILLS LIKE ANATOMY AND PERSPECTIVE CAN HELP YOU TO RENDER THE FORMS IN YOUR WORLD CONVINCINGLY --

-- BUT IN COMICS, THOSE CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS CAN BE FAR MORE THAN JUST PRETTY PICTURES.

HOW YOU DRAW THE INTERIOR OF AN APARTMENT, FOR EXAMPLE, CAN TELL YOUR READERS A LOT ABOUT THE CHARACTER WHO LIVES IN IT.

PANEL FOUR: ART BY JASON LUTES (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

28

THE **STANCES** AND **EXPRESSIONS** OF CHARACTERS -- EVEN WHEN SILENT AND IN THE BACKGROUND -- CAN GIVE READERS A WEALTH OF INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR **EMOTIONS** AND **ATTITUDES**.

A **TOAST!**

CONGRATULATIONS!!
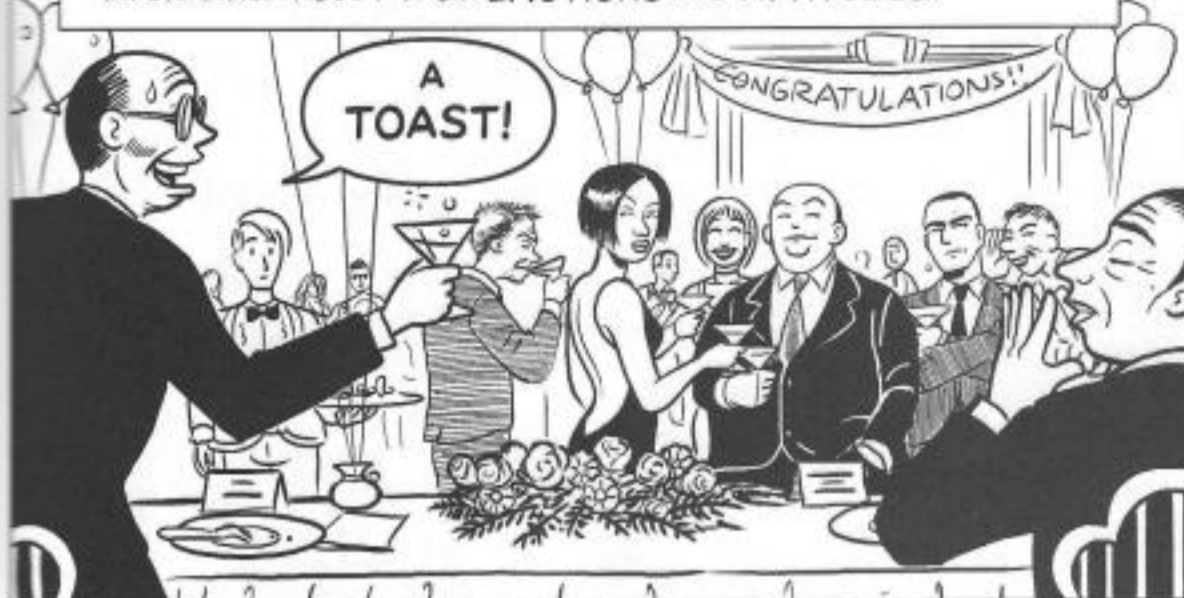
A MINOR DETAIL IN THE **ART** CAN FORESHADOW MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN A **STORY**.

AN **ABSTRACT, EXPRESSIONISTIC** OR **SYMBOLIC** IMAGE CAN STRENGTHEN THE RECOUNTING OF AN INTENSELY FELT **EMOTION**.

I wanted to burn my memories.

AN EXTREME **STYLISTIC** CHOICE CAN INVEST EVERY MOMENT OF A STORY WITH AN OVERRIDING **MOOD**.

THE ULTIMATE TEST OF CLARITY IN COMICS ARTWORK IS IN HOW WELL IT DELIVERS ON THE **BASIC INTENT** OF EACH PANEL.
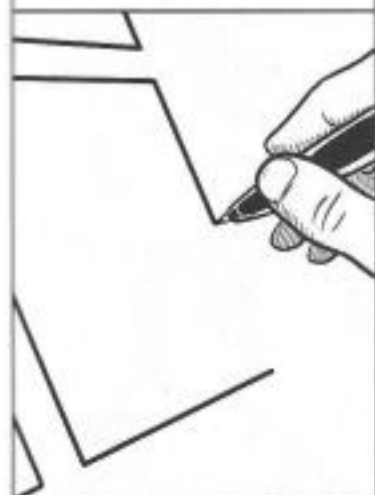
YOU MIGHT ALREADY BE ABLE TO DRAW LIKE MICHELANGELO, BUT IF IT DOESN'T **COMMUNICATE**, IT'LL JUST DIE ON THE PAGE --

-- WHILE A CRUDER BUT **MORE** COMMUNICATIVE STYLE WILL WIN FANS BY THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS.

QUESTION NUMBER ONE: WILL READERS **GET THE MESSAGE?**

29

OW!

THE NEXT ASPECT OF **CLARITY** IN COMICS STORYTELLING IS YOUR **CHOICE OF WORD.**

E OF MOMENT
E OF FRAME
OF IMAGE
OF WORD
OF

SUDDEN
MARGERI
AND THE
PENGUI

WHILE...

SOON...

LATER...

WORDS CAN BE A **POWERFUL ALLY** IN THE STRUGGLE TO COMMUNICATE.

THEY BRING WITH THEM AN UNPARALLELED LEVEL OF **SPECIFICITY.**

THERE'S NO IMAGE SO **VAGUE** THAT WORDS CAN'T LOCK IT INTO A DESIRED **MEANING.**

"On the bright side, I got my caffeine. On the not-so-bright side, we got mugged on the way home."

AND SOME SPECIFIC CONCEPTS AND NAMES CAN **ONLY** BE CLEARLY EXPRESSED THROUGH WORDS.

OH HEY, **LOOK!** IT'S **KELLY DONOVAN,** TWIN BROTHER OF THE GUY WHO PLAYED **XANDER** ON *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER,* PLUS **HUMPHREY BOGART** WEARING A **FREDDIE MERCURY MASK** AND A ROBOT DUPLICATE OF FORMER U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL **BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI!**

TRY DOING **THAT** WITH **JUST PICTURES!**

I WAS **IN** A COUPLE OF EPISODES...

PLAY IT, SAM.

I BRING YOU
SCLICKE
MESSAGES OF PEACE.

SPECIAL THANKS TO KELLY DONOVAN (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

30

WORDS CAN BE USED TO **COMPRESS** A STORY, SUMMING UP VAST CHANGES IN A SINGLE CAPTION AS SEEN IN **SCENE-TO-SCENE** TRANSITIONS.

TEN YEARS LATER...

IS THAT ALL??

SHAKE! SHAKE!

KLINK! KLINKKO — KLINK!

MEANWHILE...

ARPER IMAG

CAN WE AFFORD THIS?

YOU BET!

ONLY $9,999

NEW MONKEY CAR!

A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY...

OH, JUST IGNORE HIM THIS TIME.

DANGER! DANGER!

BEEP! BOOP!

A LONG TIME LATER, AND MUCH MUCH CLOSER...

HI! MAY I TAKE YOUR ORDER?

SHUT-UP! SHUT-UP! SHUT UP!
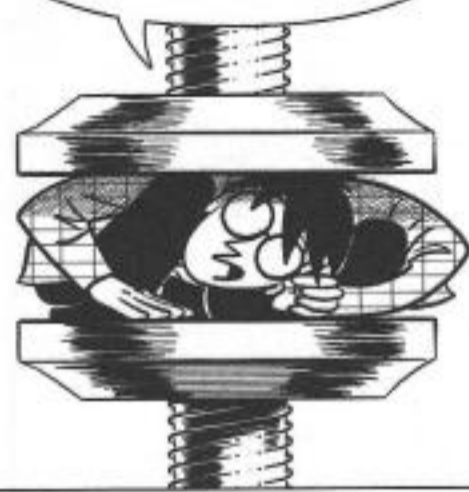
AND OF COURSE, WORDS TAKE **CENTER STAGE** WHEN REPRODUCING THE FINE ART OF **CONVERSATION.**

Well, you know what they say, "The best things come to those who wait."

Makes me wonder if "they" work for DMV...

So who're you waiting for, anyhow?

Words alone have been telling stories clearly for millennia. They've done just fine without pictures...

BUT IN **COMICS,** THE TWO HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER **SEAMLESSLY** ENOUGH THAT READERS BARELY NOTICE WHEN SWITCHING FROM ONE TO ANOTHER.

I HAVE A WHOLE **CHAPTER** ON THIS SUBJECT, BUT FOR NOW, SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT THE SECRET OF COMMUNICATING CLEARLY WITH WORDS IS JUST TO LET WORDS DO WHAT WORDS DO **BEST** --

-- AND WHEN A **PICTURE** IS THE BETTER SOLUTION, TO LET THEM **GET OUT OF THE WAY.**

FINALLY, AFTER CHOOSING JUST THE RIGHT MOMENTS, FRAMES, IMAGES AND WORDS, ALL THAT'S LEFT IS YOUR **CHOICE OF FLOW**: HOW YOU **GUIDE** YOUR AUDIENCE **THROUGH** YOUR WORK FROM BEGINNING TO END.

BOTH **BETWEEN** PANELS AND **WITHIN** THEM.
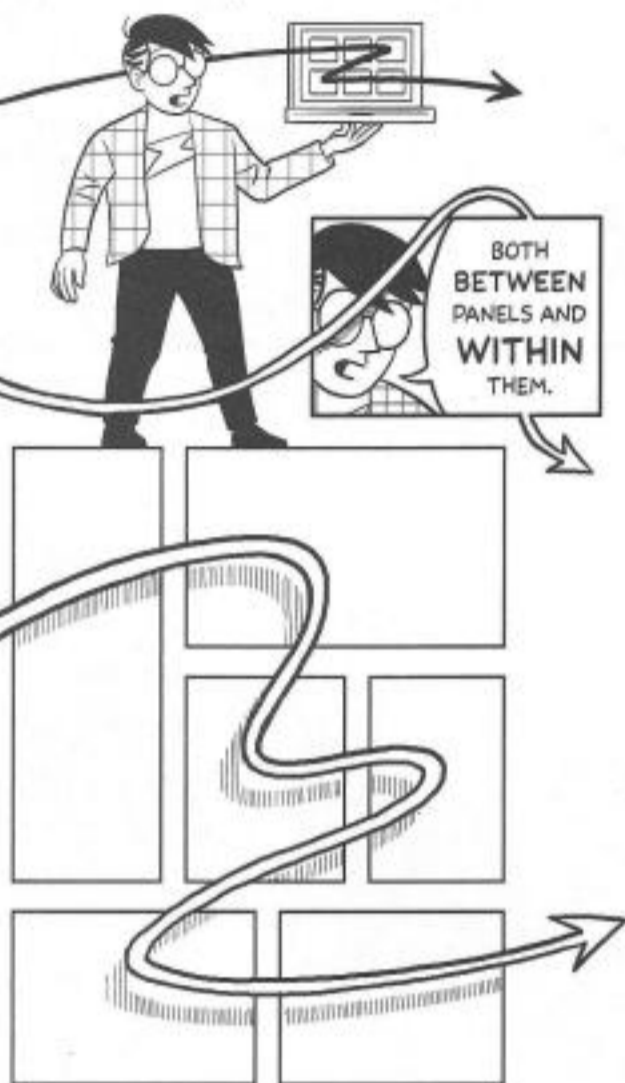
BETWEEN PANELS, YOUR CHOICE OF FLOW WILL RELY ON THE UNWRITTEN CONTRACT BETWEEN ARTISTS AND READERS WHICH STATES THAT PANELS ARE READ **LEFT-TO-RIGHT** FIRST, THEN **UP-TO-DOWN*** --
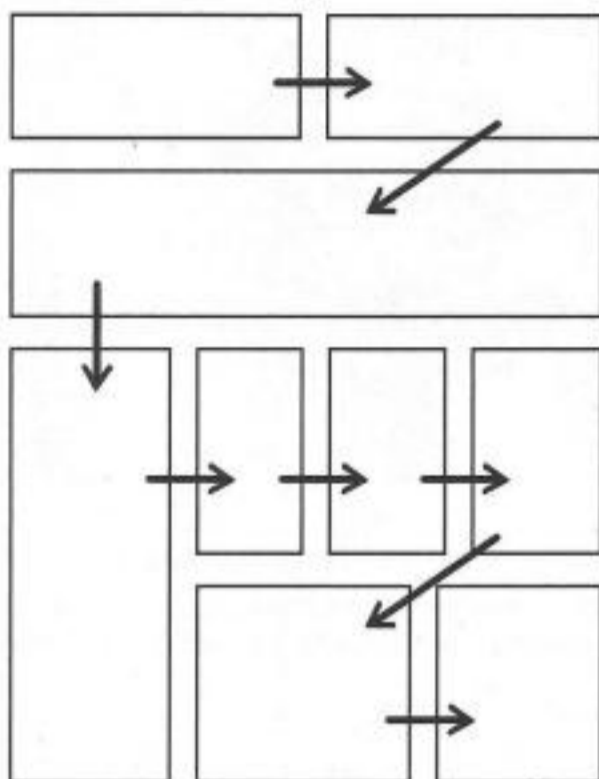
-- AND THAT **WITHIN** EACH PANEL, THE SAME PRINCIPLES WILL APPLY TO **CAPTIONS** AND **WORD BALLOONS.**

IT ALSO MEANS BEING ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ANY PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS THAT CAN **HELP** -- OR **HINDER** -- THAT FLOW.

CHOICE OF <u>MOMENT</u>

CHOICE OF <u>FRAME</u>

CHOICE OF <u>IMAGE</u>

CHOICE OF <u>WORD</u>

CHOICE OF <u>FLOW</u>

THE EASIEST WAY TO AVOID PANEL-TO-PANEL CONFUSION IS TO JUST **KEEP IT SIMPLE,** BUT IF YOU LIKE TO MIX THINGS UP, KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR CERTAIN INHERENTLY **CONFUSING** ARRANGEMENTS LIKE THIS ONE --

-- IN WHICH HABIT WILL SEND YOUR READERS **LEFT TO RIGHT,** LEAVING THE LOWER LEFT-HAND PANEL **UNREAD** --
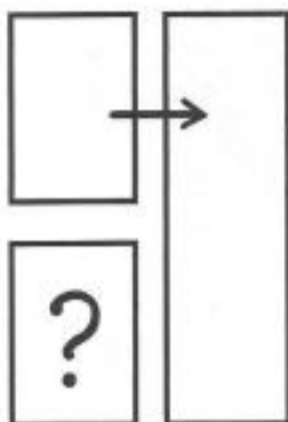
-- AND PRODUCING JUST ENOUGH SPLIT-SECOND CONFUSION TO YANK READERS OUT OF THE WORLD OF THE STORY.

SURE, THERE ARE WAYS TO **COMPEL** READERS' EYES TO MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

JUST MAKE SURE YOUR LAYOUT IS SERVING YOUR **STORY** --

-- INSTEAD OF THE **OTHER WAY AROUND** --

-- **UNLESS,** OF COURSE, YOU WANT TO GO THE **EXPERIMENTAL** ROUTE, AS I SOMETIMES DO, BUT THAT'S A WHOLE OTHER BOOK!
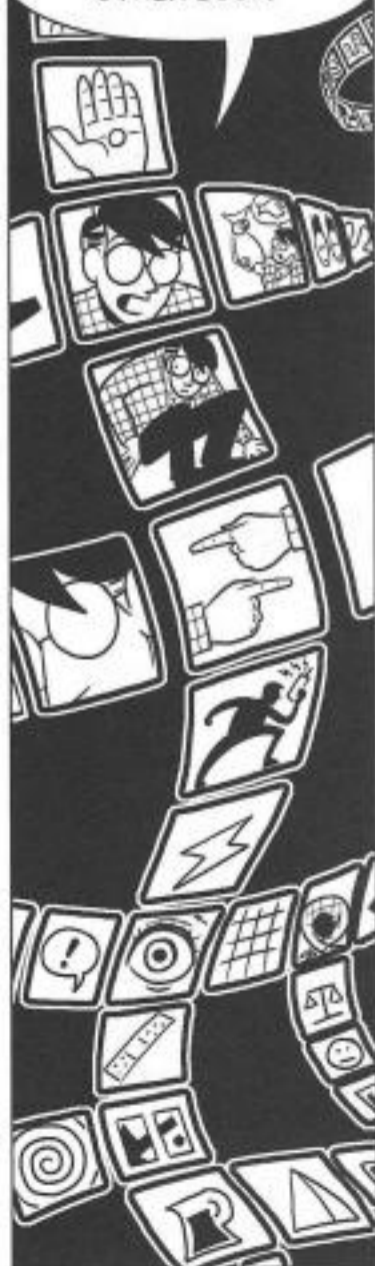
ANOTHER SOURCE OF "WHICH COMES NEXT?" CONFUSION OCCURS WHEN PANEL ARRANGEMENTS ARE OBSCURED BY TOO MANY **"FOURTH WALL"** BREAKS AND **BORDERLESS** IMAGES.

!!!

THE **COMPOSITIONS** AND **MOTION** IN YOUR FRAMES CAN HELP GUIDE THE READERS' EYES, BUT MAKE SURE THEY'RE BEING GUIDED IN THE **RIGHT DIRECTION!**

33

HOW YOUR **CHOICE OF FRAME** CHANGES FROM PANEL TO PANEL CAN ALSO AFFECT THE **READING FLOW.**
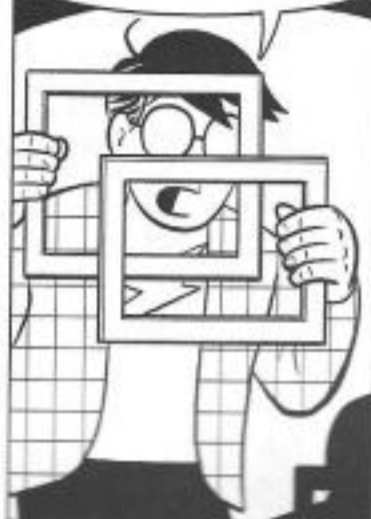
BY ROTATING THE **VIEWING ANGLE** TOO FAR BETWEEN PANELS, CHARACTERS CAN SEEM TO **SWITCH PLACES,** CREATING **CONFUSION.**

THESE WOODS ARE *HAUNTED!* WE MUST RETREAT!

IT'S *TRUE!* THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE!

I'LL TELL THE CAPTAIN!

AND I'LL START THE TANK!

WAIT!! WHO SAID THAT?!

YOU DID, YOU MORON!

CONSIDER SHOWING YOUR WORK-IN-PROGRESS TO A FRIEND TO CATCH SUCH MIX-UPS IN THE ROUGH PLANNING STAGE -- AND IN THE **FINISHED ART,** OF COURSE.

DUDE, THIS GIRL'S BREAST DOES NOT LOOK RIGHT.

THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE MY **DAD!**

CHOICE OF FLOW IS PARTIALLY ABOUT CLEARING YOUR READERS' PATHS OF **OBSTACLES** TO A SMOOTH READING EXPERIENCE.

EQUALLY IMPORTANT THOUGH, IS HOW THE SIGHTS ALONG THAT PATH **DRAW THE READERS' EYES.**

FUMP!

NOT ALL PICTURES ARE CREATED **EQUAL.** READERS FOCUS ON AREAS OF **CHANGE** AND RELEVANCE TO THE **STORY**--

-- WHILE BACKGROUND DETAILS AND REPEATED ELEMENTS JUST FADE FROM VIEW AND ARE **IGNORED.**

LOOKING AT THE **TABLE-CLOTH** IN THAT LAST PANEL?

TAP! TAP!

DIDN'T THINK SO.

THERE'S NO WAY TO **FORCE** READERS TO TAKE A **SPECIFIC PATH**, BUT WITH EXPERIENCE, YOU CAN RELIABLY **PREDICT** WHAT THEY'LL PAY ATTENTION TO -- AND BE DISTRACTED **BY** -- AND **USE** THAT KNOWLEDGE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.
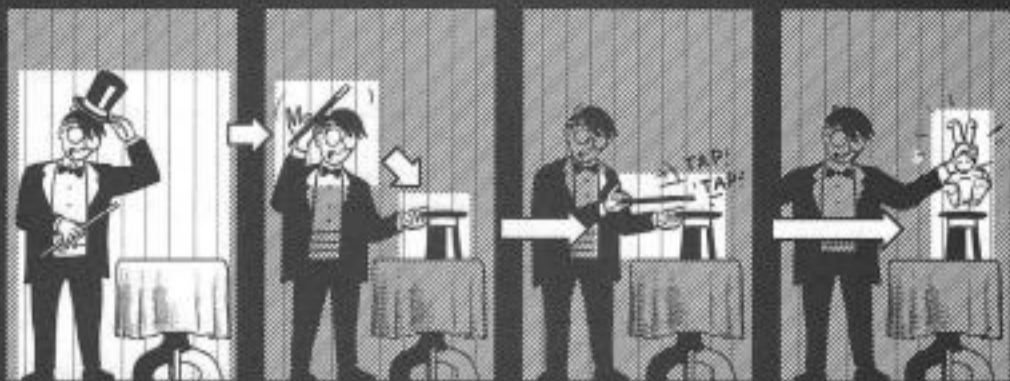
YOUR READERS ARE **HUMANS**, JUST LIKE YOU AND ME, AND WE ALL **SORT INFORMATION** THE SAME WAY.

EVERY DAY, OUR **FIVE SENSES** TAKE IN AN OVERWHELMING AMOUNT OF **INFORMATION**, YET WE QUICKLY SEPARATE OUT WHAT WE **CARE** ABOUT FROM THE CHAOS AND DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TOWARD IT.

ICE CREAM

AND AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S THAT FLOW OF SELECTED MOMENTS THAT WE REMEMBER --

-- AND ALL THOSE **OTHER** SENSATIONS ARE LEFT ON THE **CUTTING ROOM FLOOR.**

IN COMICS, YOU CAN DO A LOT OF THAT "CUTTING" **BEFOREHAND** TO INSURE THAT THE FLOW OF IMAGES READERS SEE ARE EXACTLY THE ONES YOU **WANT** THEM TO SEE, IN THE **ORDER** THAT BEST SERVES YOUR **STORYTELLING GOALS.**

35

WEBCOMICS HAVE INTRODUCED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR -- AND POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO -- FLOW.

DAILY STRIPS AND SCREEN-FITTING COMICS PAGES FLOW IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS THEIR PAPER AND INK COUSINS, AND READING THEM IS A PRETTY INTUITIVE PROCESS.
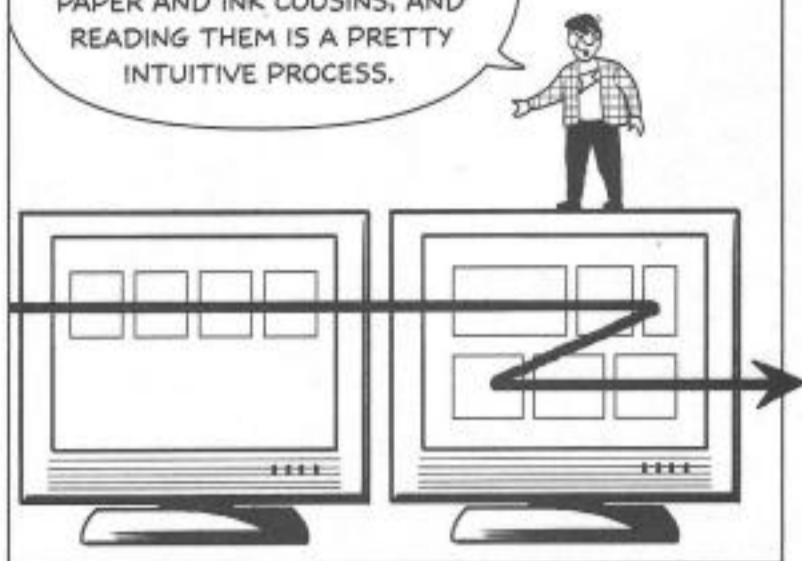
BUT MANY MULTI-PAGE WEBCOMICS YANK READERS OUT OF THE STORY BY CONSTANTLY FORCING THEM TO SCROLL, THEN HUNT, THEN CLICK, THEN SCROLL.
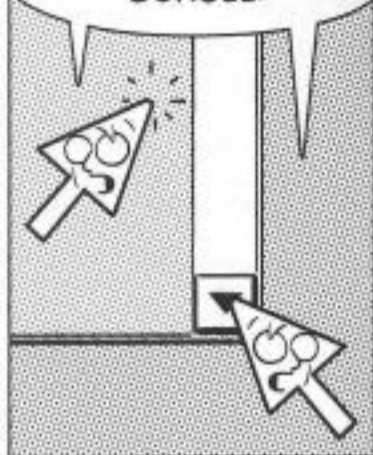
SOME NEW EXPERIMENTAL FORMATS ARE DISTRACTING BY THEIR NATURE, OF COURSE, BUT EVEN THESE CAN ALLOW FOR SMOOTH READING IF ALL THE NAVIGATING IS DONE WITH A SINGLE CONTROL LIKE AN ARROW KEY.

NO MATTER WHAT SHAPE YOUR COMICS TAKE, AS LONG AS NAVIGATING THROUGH THEM IS A SIMPLE, INTUITIVE PROCESS, THAT PROCESS WILL BE TRANSPARENT TO THE READER --

-- AND THE READING FLOW CAN CONTINUE UNINTERRUPTED.

WE'LL GET DOWN TO SOME NUTS AND BOLTS REGARDING THIS TOPIC IN CHAPTER FIVE, AND ITS ONLINE EXTENSION, "CHAPTER FIVE AND A HALF."

FOR NOW, THOUGH, WHETHER YOU WORK IN PRINT, THE WEB OR BOTH: IMPROVING FLOW CAN HELP YOUR AUDIENCE ENTER THE WORLD OF YOUR STORY AND PASS FROM ONE END TO THE OTHER WITHOUT EVER BEING TORN AWAY BY THE WORLD OUTSIDE.

DO THAT, AND YOUR STORYTELLING CAN PUT ITS FULL WEIGHT BEHIND THE "STORY" WITHOUT THE "TELLING" GETTING IN THE WAY.

TOGETHER THESE FIVE KINDS OF **CHOICES** ARE WHAT COMMUNICATING THROUGH COMICS REQUIRES --

CLARITY

-- AND COMMUNICATING WITH **CLARITY** MEANS MAKING READER COMPREHENSION YOUR ULTIMATE **GOAL**.

CHOICE OF MOMENT

GOALS:

"CONNECTING THE DOTS," SHOWING THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER AND CUTTING THOSE THAT DON'T.

TOOLS:

THE SIX TRANSITIONS:
1. MOMENT TO MOMENT
2. ACTION TO ACTION
3. SUBJECT TO SUBJECT
3. SCENE TO SCENE
4. ASPECT TO ASPECT
5. NON SEQUITUR

MINIMIZING PANEL COUNT FOR EFFICIENCY, OR ADDING PANELS FOR EMPHASIS. CHARACTER OF MOMENT, MOOD AND IDEA.

CHOICE OF FRAME

GOALS:

SHOWING READERS WHAT THEY NEED TO SEE. CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE, POSITION AND FOCUS.

TOOLS:

FRAME SIZE AND SHAPE.

CHOICE OF "CAMERA" ANGLES, DISTANCE, HEIGHT, BALANCE AND CENTERING.

THE "ESTABLISHING SHOT." REVEALING AND WITHOLDING INFORMATION. DIRECTING READER FOCUS.

CHOICE OF IMAGE

GOALS:

CLEARLY AND QUICKLY EVOKING THE APPEARANCE OF CHARACTERS, OBJECTS, ENVIRONMENTS AND SYMBOLS.

TOOLS:

EVERY ARTISTIC/ GRAPHIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.

RESEMBLANCE, SPECIFICITY, EXPRESSION, BODY LANGUAGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD.

STYLISTIC AND EXPRESSIONISTIC DEVICES TO AFFECT MOOD AND EMOTION.

CHOICE OF WORD

GOALS:

CLEARLY AND PERSUASIVELY COMMUNICATING IDEAS, VOICES AND SOUNDS IN SEAMLESS COMBINATION WITH IMAGES.

TOOLS:

EVERY LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.

RANGE, SPECIFICITY, THE HUMAN VOICE, ABSTRACT CONCEPTS, THE EVOCATION OF OTHER SENSES.

BALLOONS, SOUND EFFECTS AND WORD / PICTURE INTEGRATION*

CHOICE OF FLOW

GOALS:

GUIDING READERS BETWEEN AND WITHIN PANELS, AND CREATING A TRANSPARENT AND INTUITIVE READING EXPERIENCE.

TOOLS:

THE ARRANGE- MENT OF PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN, AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF ELEMENTS WITHIN A PANEL.

DIRECTING THE EYE THROUGH READER EXPECTATIONS AND CONTENT.

USING MOMENT, FRAME, IMAGE AND WORD IN TANDEM.

THESE AREN'T "STEPS" THAT HAVE TO BE TAKEN IN SOME PREDETERMINED ORDER.

MOST COMICS ARTISTS JUGGLE **ALL FIVE** AS NEEDED.

DECISIONS HAVING TO DO WITH MOMENT, FRAME AND FLOW ARE LIKELY TO BE MADE IN THE **PLANNING STAGES** OF A COMIC, WHILE IMAGE AND WORD DECISIONS ARE USUALLY BEING MADE RIGHT UP TO THE **FINISH LINE** --

-- BUT YOU'LL FIND THESE CHOICES CAN FIT INTO ANY NUMBER OF **WORKING METHODS**.

* SEE CHAPTER THREE: "THE POWER OF WORDS" FOR MORE ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORD/PICTURE INTEGRATION AND OTHER TECHNIQUES RELATED TO CHOICE OF WORD.

YOU MIGHT WANT TO START WITH **ROUGH SKETCHES** OF THE WHOLE COMIC --

MOMENT | FRAME
FLOW

-- THEN COME UP WITH THE **DIALOGUE** AND **NARRATION** --

WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE YOU ARE...

WORD

-- THEN CREATE THE **FINISHED ART.**

IMAGE

OR YOU MIGHT START WITH A **FULL SCRIPT**, WRITTEN BY YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE --

TAP! TAP! TAP!

MOMENT | WORD
FRAME

-- THEN USE THAT TO DO YOUR ROUGH SKETCHED **LAYOUT** --

FRAME
FLOW

-- THEN CREATE THE **FINISHED ART.**

IMAGE

YOU MIGHT EVEN CREATE ONE **FINISHED PANEL** WITH NO IDEA WHAT HAPPENS NEXT --

I'M SO LONELY.

MOMENT | FRAME
IMAGE | WORD

-- THEN DO THE SAME WITH **PANEL TWO** AND **JUST KEEP GOING!**

I'M SO LONELY.

I LOVE YOU!! MARRY ME!!

WHA--?! JENNIFER ANISTON?!

MOMENT | FRAME
IMAGE | WORD
+ FLOW

NO MATTER WHAT **WORKING METHOD** YOU CHOOSE, MAKING COMICS COMES DOWN TO A SERIES OF **DECISIONS** --

-- AND EACH DECISION YOU MAKE CAN BE INFORMED BY, AND EVALUATED ON THE BASIS OF, THESE **FIVE CATEGORIES.**
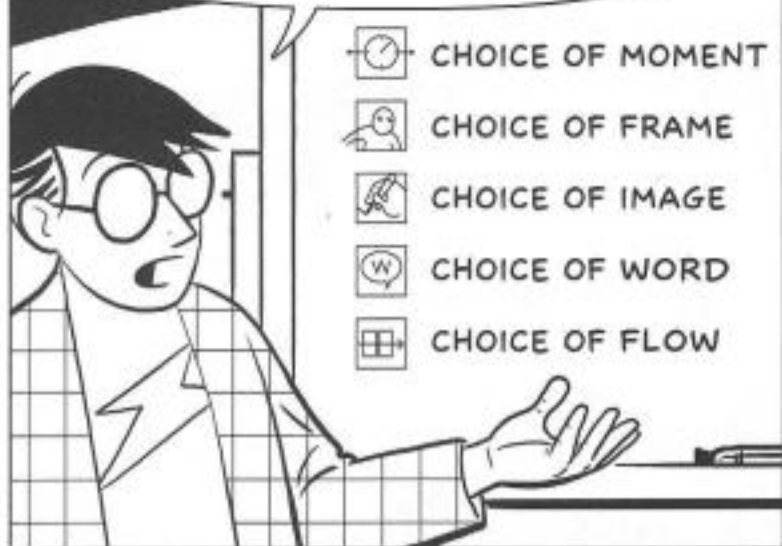
CHOICE OF MOMENT

CHOICE OF FRAME

CHOICE OF IMAGE

CHOICE OF WORD

CHOICE OF FLOW

EXAMPLE: LET'S **IMPROVISE** A **SIMPLE STORY,** TOLD AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE, AND SEE HOW OUR FIVE KINDS OF CHOICES CAN BE MADE IN **REAL TIME.**

WE'LL START WITH A FEW **THROWAWAY CHARACTERS.**

AN UNDERCOVER COP.

A.

A HAPLESS DOOFUS.

B.

A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN.

C.

A SCRUFFY GUY.

D.

LET'S START THEIR STORY WITH A BIG **ESTABLISHING SHOT** TO SHOW WHERE THE ACTION IS TAKING PLACE, THEN A **MIDDLE SHOT** TO INTRODUCE CHARACTERS **A** AND **B**, AND THEN A **CLOSE-UP** ON CHARACTER **A**.

THREE **MOMENTS**, ACCOMMODATING THREE DIFFERENT **FRAMES** ON THE SAME SCENE.

WE COULD HAVE DONE MANY **MORE** FRAMES, BUT THREE GETS THE JOB DONE.

NO FIREWORKS IN THE **IMAGES** DEPARTMENT. JUST A FEW RECOGNIZABLE DETAILS, BUT OUR CHOICE OF IMAGE IS AT LEAST **SPECIFIC**. WE KNOW WE'RE IN A MIAMI-LIKE CITY; WE KNOW CHARACTER **A** IS A SERIOUS GUY.

WE KNOW WHAT WE **NEED** TO KNOW -- FOR NOW.

NOW AS **A** STARTS FOLLOWING **B**, NOTICE HOW BOTH ARE SHOWN **IN FRAME**, TO REINFORCE THEIR RELATIVE **POSITIONS**. ALSO, DESPITE CHANGING VIEWING ANGLES, BOTH MAINTAIN A LEFT-TO-RIGHT FORWARD **FLOW**, TRACKING THE READER'S USUAL READING DIRECTION.

NEXT, BY SHOWING CHARACTERS A AND B FROM CHARACTER C'S POINT OF VIEW, WE GIVE READERS A CLEAR SENSE OF **WHERE** ALL THREE CHARACTERS ARE IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER.

IT WASN'T PRACTICAL TO SHOW ALL THREE CHARACTERS IN A SINGLE FRAME -- THEY'D BE TOO SMALL IN A LONG-SHOT -- BUT THE VISUAL FRAGMENTS STILL ADD UP TO A **SINGLE IDEA.**

C

A → B
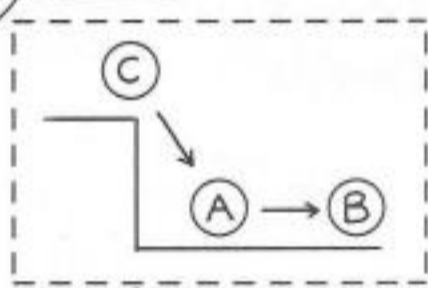
THE DOUBLE-CIRCULAR SHAPE OF THE BINOCULARS IN THE FIRST PANEL TELLS US WE'VE INTRODUCED A THIRD **POINT OF VIEW.**

THEN WE PICK A LONG ENOUGH ANGLE TO SHOW C'S POSITION ON THE ROOF --

-- PLUS A **CLOSE** ENOUGH ANGLE TO SHOW C'S FACE AND THE BINOCULARS CLEARLY.

WE'VE ARRIVED AT THE NEXT IMPORTANT LOCATION, SO THE CAMERA PULLS BACK AGAIN FOR ANOTHER **ESTABLISHING SHOT.**

ALSO, WITH D'S INTRODUCTION, COMES OUR FIRST **DIALOGUE.**

GOT IT!

LET'S SEE.

THAT'S IT! GOOD JOB.

GOT THE **CASH?**

THE NEXT TWO MOMENTS ARE FRAMED A BIT TOO **CLOSE** TO SHOW US EXACTLY **WHAT** IS BEING BOUGHT OR FOR **HOW MUCH** AND THE **WORDS** AREN'T VERY SPECIFIC EITHER. CHOICE OF **FRAME** AND CHOICE OF **WORD** ARE BOTH **HOLDING OUT** ON US!

HERE YOU GO.

THANKS!

CLICK! ?!

POLICE! YOU'RE UNDER ARREST--

WHOA!

WHAT THE--?

BECAUSE OF THAT DELIBERATE **LACK** OF INFORMATION, WE ONLY KNOW WHAT CHARACTER **A** KNOWS. IN FACT, PANEL TWO HERE IS SHOT FROM A'S **POINT OF VIEW**, SO HIS DISCOVERY FEELS LIKE **OUR OWN**.

--FOR THE ILLEGAL POSESSION OF --

?!

Steel Magnolias

I SWEAR I DIDN'T STEAL IT!

≠sigh≠

RELAX, KID. IT LOOKS LIKE I'VE BEEN *TRICKED*.

NOW, AS SOON AS **WORDS** ENTER, THE PICTURES ALONE WOULDN'T QUITE TELL THE WHOLE STORY.

WITHOUT **"POLICE!"** FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MIGHT MISS THE BADGE AND JUST ASSUME THAT CHARACTER **A** WAS A **CROOK**.

NOTICE TOO HOW MANY OF THESE **ACTION TO ACTION** CHOICES ARE COMPOSED FOR LEFT-TO-RIGHT **FLOW** RESULTING IN A SENSE OF **FORWARD MOMENTUM**.

HERE YOU GO.

THANKS

CLICK! ?!

YET, WHEN CHARACTER **A** TURNS HIS HEAD **AGAINST** THE FLOW, IT HELPS PUT ON THE **BRAKES** JUST AS THE ACTION SLOWS DOWN.

RELAX, KID. IT LOOKS LIKE I'VE BEEN *TRICKED*.

OR -- AS HAPPENS NEXT --
THE CAMERA CAN SHARE INFORMATION WITH
READERS THAT CHARACTER **A** DOES **NOT** HAVE.
SPECIFICALLY, THE AMOUNT OF MONEY **B** GOT, AND
THE PRESENCE OF A **GUN** IN PANEL **4.**

CAN WE GO NOW?

SORRY, KID.

GOTTA TAKE YOU BACK TO THE STATION.

JUST A FEW QUESTIONS...

YOU UNDERSTAND...

OH, YEAH.

CLICK

NOTICE HOW
MOMENT, FRAME AND **IMAGE**
ACCOMMODATE EACH OTHER: ADDING
MOMENTS TO INCLUDE ANGLES WHICH
REVEAL MEANINGFUL **DETAILS.**

HERE ALSO, WE SEE HOW **WORDS** AND **PICTURES**
CAN OPERATE ON **DIFFERENT PLANES:** ONE
RELAYING DIALOGUE THAT **ALL** CAN HEAR; THE
OTHER SHOWING INFORMATION (THE AMOUNT OF
MONEY) THAT ONLY **SOME** KNOW ABOUT.

GOTTA TAKE YOU BACK TO THE STATION.

JUST A FEW QUESTIONS...

AND BY LETTING READERS "IN ON THE SECRET,"
OUR CHOICE OF **FRAME** AND **IMAGE** MAY LEAVE
THEM FEELING A BIT LIKE **COLLABORATORS.**

NEXT, IT'S WORTH **PULLING BACK** THE
FRAME, NOT FOR A NEW SCENE, BUT BECAUSE OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCENE IS CHANGING.

ALSO WITH
PHYSICAL CONFLICTS,
THE **LOCATIONS**
OF CHARACTERS
MATTER.

WHAT TH··?!

BANG!

GET OUTTA HERE!

AND AS THE SCENERY STARTS SHIFTING FAST, IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE FRAMING THE ACTION WITH **LONG-SHOTS** AND **MIDDLE-SHOTS** TO ALLOW READERS TO TAKE IT ALL IN.

DUDE, IS SOMEONE _STANDING_ ON THAT TRUCK?!

UH-OH...

HAVING KEPT ALL FRAMES AT THE SAME HEIGHT TO THIS POINT, ADDING A **DOUBLE-HEIGHT** PANEL CAN CHANGE THE **FLOW** OF ACTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE A VERTICAL SHIFT.

AH!

TED!

AND FINALLY, A FEW **CLOSE-UPS** AS WE MOVE IN FOR SOME CHARACTERIZATION --

-- OR WHAT **PASSES** FOR IT WITH A **THROW-AWAY STORY** LIKE THIS ONE.*

HI, JACK!

!!

I THINK YOU HAVE SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO ME.

NO WAY!!

⌐sigh⌐

IN THE POUCH...

GOOD BOY.

THIS RELATIONSHIP IS _NOT WORKING_, DORIS!

TO BE CONT·· OH, NEVERMIND.

* OBVIOUSLY, THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD STORYTELLING AND A GOOD **STORY**. I'M OFFERING THIS AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE FORMER ONLY.

44

NOTE THAT THE **VISUALS** IN THESE PANELS DON'T FEATURE MANY FANCY CAMERA ANGLES OR STUNNING IMAGERY. IF WE HAD TO RATE THE **DRAMATIC** CONTENT IN THE ART, WE MIGHT SAY "LOW" TO "MODERATE."

IN OTHER WORDS, THE CHOICES OF **MOMENT, FRAME, LINE** AND **FLOW** IN THESE EXAMPLES ARE GOVERNED BY **CLARITY** --

-- FAR MORE THAN THEY ARE BY --

--INTENSITY!!

NOW, DEFINING "INTENSITY" IS A SUBJECTIVE BUSINESS. FOR SOME PEOPLE, A COMIC FILLED WITH NOTHING BUT PANELS OF ONE PERSON ASLEEP IN THEIR BED, SHOT FROM THE SAME ANGLE AGAIN AND AGAIN, MIGHT BE CONSIDERED "INTENSE."

BUT FOR NOW, WE'LL USE IT TO REFER TO THOSE **VISUAL TECHNIQUES** WHICH ADD **CONTRAST, DYNAMISM, GRAPHIC EXCITEMENT** OR A SENSE OF **URGENCY** TO A PANEL.

TECHNIQUES SUCH AS...

EXTREME **DEPTH CUES.** THE SENSE OF GREAT DISTANCES, EXTREME CLOSENESS AND THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THEM.

WILD VARIATIONS OF **FRAME SIZE AND SHAPE.**

GRAPHIC CONTRAST. BOLD JUXTAPOSITIONS OF COLOR, SHAPE AND BRIGHTNESS.

EXAGGERATED **POSES** AND **EXPRESSIONS!!**

RRIIP!!

VIRTUOSO DRAWING TECHNIQUE.

BREAKING THE FOURTH WALL. BORDERLESS AND BORDER-BREAKING CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS.

HI YAH!

DIAGONALS. TILTED SUBJECTS, ANGLES --

-- AND **SO FORTH.** YOU GET THE IDEA.

46

NOW, THE WAY I'VE ILLUSTRATED THEM HERE, THESE QUALITIES MAY RECALL CERTAIN **GENRES** OF COMICS.

PARTICULARLY THOSE INVOLVING A HIGH INCIDENCE OF **HITTING, BLEEDING, COLLISIONS, EXPLOSIONS** OR PEOPLE SAYING "OH MY GOD, NO!" ON A REGULAR BASIS.

TAKE *THAT!*

PREPARE TO *FIRE!*

SKREE!

OH MY GOD, *NO!*

BUT WHILE THE "EXAGGERATED POSES AND EXPRESSIONS" --

-- OR "VIRTUOSO DRAWING TECHNIQUES" OF OTHER GENRES MIGHT TAKE ON **DIFFERENT FLAVORS** --

-- THE BASIC **EFFECT** OF SUCH TECHNIQUES STAYS CONSTANT: **ATTRACTING** AND/OR **EXCITING** READERS AS SOON AS THEY PICK A COMIC OFF THE SHELF OR LOAD IT INTO THEIR BROWSER.

THIS IDEA OF ADDING A LITTLE **PIZAZZ** TO A STORYTELLER'S STYLE IS A TIME-HONORED TRADITION.

CLARITY WITHOUT ANY PRESENTATIONAL FLAIR WHATSOEVER CAN BE A BITTER PILL FOR SOME TO SWALLOW.

THING IS, WHILE **CLARITY** AND **INTENSITY** CAN GO HAND IN HAND, YOU CAN ONLY LEAN ON ONE SIDE SO HARD BEFORE THE OTHER STARTS TO **SUFFER.**

CLARITY

INTENSITY

47

FOR EXAMPLE, IF WE TAKE THE **BASIC COMPOSITIONS** FOUND IN OUR SAMPLE STORY, AND APPLY EVEN **A FEW** OF THESE DYNAMIC EFFECTS --
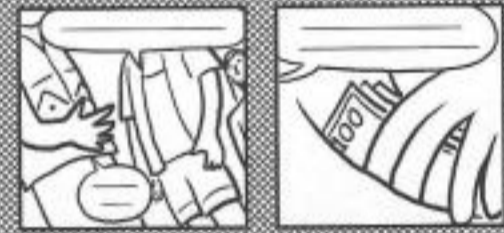
-- SPECIFICALLY, MORE EXTREME **DEPTH CUES**, SOME **DIAGONALS**, MORE EXAGGERATED **POSTURES**, AND ONE OR TWO **FOURTH WALL BREAKS** --

-- THESE PANELS START TO FEEL A LITTLE MORE **LIVELY**, WITHOUT SACRIFICING MUCH **CLARITY** IN THE PROCESS.

BUT RAMP UP THOSE SAME ELEMENTS **TOO MUCH** AND YOU GET AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE **JUMBLE.**

IN SUCH CASES, THE **INTENSITY** OF THE WORK AS A **WHOLE** CAN ACTUALLY GO **DOWN.**

BANG!

CLICK

AFTER ALL, IF **EVERY** PANEL IS TURNED UP TO **FULL VOLUME** AT **ALL TIMES,** ANY HOPE OF **DRAMATIC CONTRAST** IS **LOST!**

IN FACT, THERE'S **NO SINGLE LEVEL** OF INTENSITY THAT'S LIKELY TO WORK IN EVERY PANEL. IT'S IN THE **VARIATION** BETWEEN PANELS THAT **TRUE** DYNAMIC EFFECTS ARE CREATED.

BOOM!

49

DEPTH CONTRAST

GRAPHIC CONTRAST

POW

DIAGONALS

EXTREME POSES

4TH WALL BREAKS

FRAME VARIATION

SURFACE APPEAL
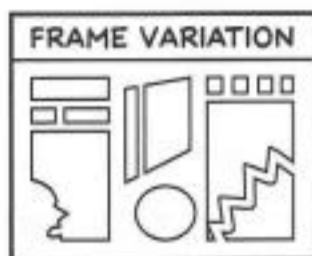
WHEN MAKING COMICS FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT'S TEMPTING TO TRY TO MAKE EVERY MOMENT OF A STORY HIT LIKE A **THUNDERSTORM**.
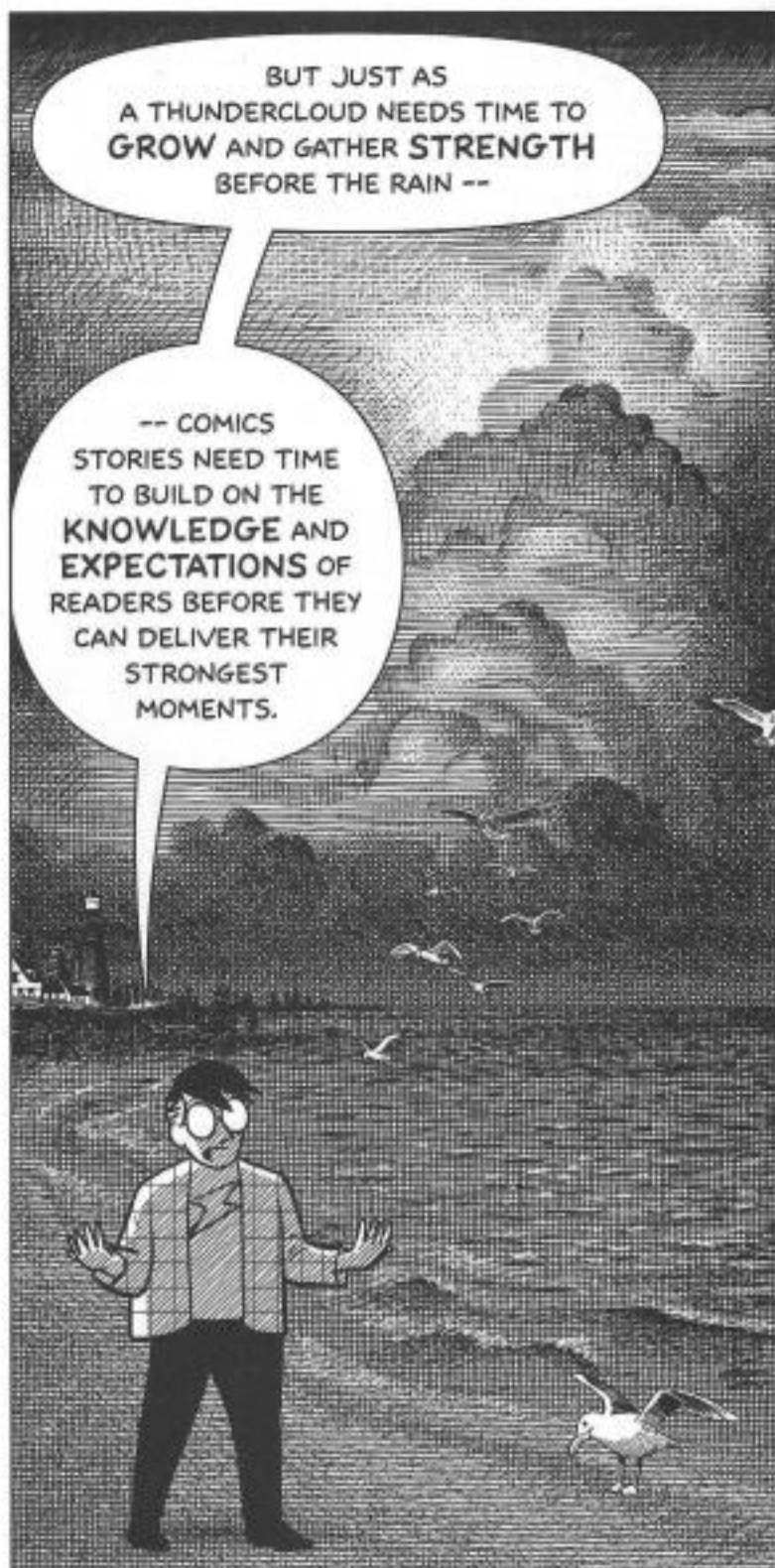
BUT JUST AS A THUNDERCLOUD NEEDS TIME TO **GROW** AND GATHER **STRENGTH** BEFORE THE RAIN --

-- COMICS STORIES NEED TIME TO BUILD ON THE **KNOWLEDGE** AND **EXPECTATIONS** OF READERS BEFORE THEY CAN DELIVER THEIR STRONGEST MOMENTS.

READERS CRAVE DRAMATIC CHANGES, BUT TO **HIGHLIGHT** CHANGE REQUIRES AN **UN**CHANGING **POINT** OF REFERENCE.

THE FIXED, QUIET **BACKGROUND** SETS THE STAGE FOR THE CACOPHONOUS INTRUDER.

PASS THE TEA, DEAR.

RIGHT AWAY, DEAR.

CRASH!!

AAH!!

EEE!

THE FIXED CAMERA **ANGLE** DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE **ZOOM.**

THE FIXED **THREE-BY-THREE PANEL GRID** PREPARES FOR THE IMPACT OF THE **FULL-PAGE PANEL.**

CRASH!

AND THE FIXED **MIDDLE GROUND** SHOT CONTRIBUTES TO THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE **CLOSE-UP.**

BEN THINKS SHE BOUGHT IT FOR KYLE.

SHE'S NEVER SHOWN ANY *INTEREST* IN KYLE.

YUP.

OR *ANY* BOY, FOR THAT MATTER.
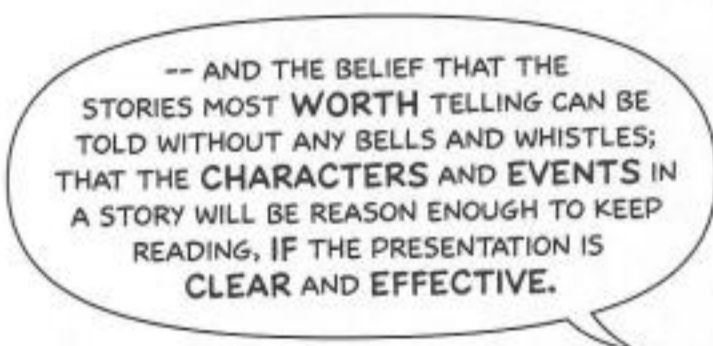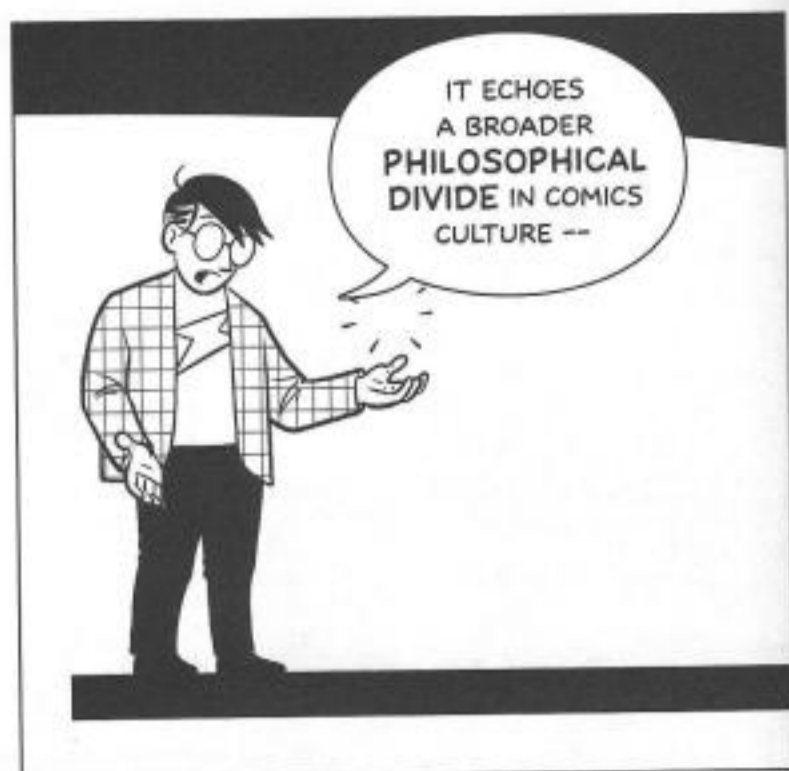
MMM.

BUT THEN *WHO*--?

OH MY GOD, OF COURSE!

IN SHORT, SOMETIMES JUST **TELLING IT STRAIGHT,** WITH CLARITY AS YOUR GUIDE, IS THE BEST WAY FOR STORIES TO GATHER STEAM --

CLIK!

-- AND THEN **STRIKE LIKE LIGHTNING** WHEN IT COUNTS.

51

FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN **INTENSITY** AND **CLARITY** IS MORE THAN JUST A **PRACTICAL** CHALLENGE.

INTENSITY   CLARITY

IT ECHOES A BROADER **PHILOSOPHICAL DIVIDE** IN COMICS CULTURE --

-- BETWEEN THE JOY OF TELLING STORIES WITH A STRONG **PERSONAL** FLAIR, MAKING OLD STORIES SEEM **NEW**, TAKING READERS ON A **THRILLING RIDE** AND CELEBRATING **VIRTUOSITY OF TECHNIQUE** --

-- AND THE BELIEF THAT THE STORIES MOST **WORTH** TELLING CAN BE TOLD WITHOUT ANY BELLS AND WHISTLES; THAT THE **CHARACTERS** AND **EVENTS** IN A STORY WILL BE REASON ENOUGH TO KEEP READING, **IF** THE PRESENTATION IS **CLEAR** AND **EFFECTIVE**.

COMICS HAS SEEN PLENTY OF GREAT TALENTS ON **BOTH** ENDS OF THE SCALE. THERE'S NO "RIGHT" CHOICE.

BUT WHICHEVER SIDE YOU PLAN TO LEAN TOWARD --

-- THE PRINCIPLES OF **PURE, CLEAR STORYTELLING** SHOULD BE YOUR **STARTING POINT**.

TWO GOALS:

YOU WANT READERS TO **UNDERSTAND** WHAT YOU HAVE TO TELL THEM --

-- AND YOU WANT THEM TO **CARE.**

CLARITY IS THE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE GOAL OF **UNDERSTANDING** --

⊙ **MOMENT**

◻ **FRAME**

◻ **IMAGE**

Ⓦ **WORD**

⊞ **FLOW**

-- BUT THERE ARE **TWO PATHS** YOU CAN TAKE TO GET YOUR READERS TO **CARE.**

ONE RELIES ON THE **INTENSITY** OF YOUR PRESENTATION --

-- WHILE THE OTHER RELIES ON THE CONTENT OF **THE STORY ITSELF.**

THE HUMAN BEINGS THAT LIVE **WITHIN** THAT STORY.

THE **IDEAS** EXPRESSED THROUGH THEM AND BETWEEN THEM.

AND THE SENSATIONS OF THE **WORLD** YOUR STORY BRINGS TO LIFE.

TAKE A BREAK. MAYBE TRY SOME OF THE **EXERCISES** LISTED IN THE FOLLOWING NOTES PAGES.

THEN WE'LL SEE WHERE THAT **SECOND PATH** LEADS.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: WRITING WITH PICTURES*

PAGE 1 - GUESSING WHAT YOU WANT

OKAY, I'M STARTING WITH SOME BIG ASSUMPTIONS HERE! THE KIND OF COMIC I DESCRIBE ON PAGE ONE ISN'T THE ONLY KIND OUT THERE. (IN FACT, I'LL TALK ABOUT THE VERY DIFFERENT GOALS SOME CARTOONISTS HAVE IN CHAPTER SIX.) BUT I DO THINK THIS IS THE GOAL MOST OF US START WITH: TO TELL A STORY THAT SWALLOWS THE READER WHOLE, USUALLY BECAUSE THAT'S THE EXPERIENCE WE HAD AS READERS THAT LED US TO COMICS IN THE FIRST PLACE.

TELLING STORIES IS WHY COMICS EXISTS, AND THE DRIVE TO MAKE THOSE STORIES MEMORABLE, MOVING AND INTOXICATING IS WHAT GIVES COMICS ITS CURRENT SHAPE, EVEN IF TOO MANY ARTISTS FAIL AT THAT MISSION.

IT'S LIKE LEARNING ABOUT SEX. EVEN IF MAKING BABIES IS THE LAST THING ON YOUR MIND, UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SEXUALITY STILL STARTS WITH THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM.

PAGE 2, PANEL 2 - TEACHING MYSELF

NO JOKE. I'M PLANNING A MAJOR GRAPHIC NOVEL AS MY NEXT BIG PROJECT AND CREATING THIS BOOK HAS HELPED ME PREPARE FOR IT. I HAVE A LOT OF BAD HABITS TO GET RID OF!
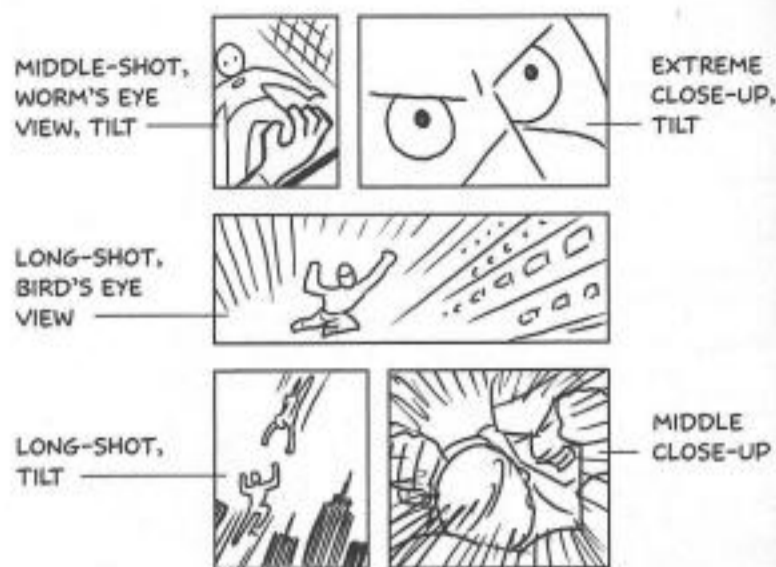
PAGE 5, PANEL 1 - ON MY EXAMPLES

THIS BOOK IS BLACK AND WHITE SO MOST OF MY EXAMPLES COME FROM GRAPHIC NOVELS, MANGA OR COMIC STRIPS WHICH FEATURE REPRODUCIBLE BLACK LINE ART. MOST WEBCOMICS, SUPERHERO COMICS AND CLASSIC EUROPEAN COMICS ARE IN COLOR AND HARDER TO REPRODUCE, SO YOU WON'T SEE AS MUCH OF THAT WORK REPRESENTED UNLESS THOSE SUBJECTS COME UP DIRECTLY. IT'S NOT MY PERSONAL PREFERENCE, JUST KEEPING THE EXAMPLES AS SHARP AND READABLE AS POSSIBLE. MOST OF THESE IDEAS SHOULD APPLY TO ALL KINDS OF COMICS. THAT SAID, IF I CAN PICK A COMIC I ADMIRE TO MAKE A GIVEN POINT, I PROBABLY WILL.

PAGE 19-25 - FRAMES AND GENRES

CHOICE OF FRAME CAN DIFFER FROM GENRE TO GENRE. SUPERHERO COMICS TEND TO FEATURE CONTRASTING DISTANCES, CHANGES OF HEIGHT AND LOTS OF DIAGONALS TO KEEP THINGS LOOKING DYNAMIC (AT LEAST

SINCE KIRBY REINVENTED THE GENRE, WHICH WE'LL DISCUSS IN CHAPTER SIX):

MIDDLE-SHOT, WORM'S EYE VIEW, TILT

EXTREME CLOSE-UP, TILT

LONG-SHOT, BIRD'S EYE VIEW

LONG-SHOT, TILT

MIDDLE CLOSE-UP

IN A DAILY GAG STRIP, ON THE OTHER HAND, AN ARTIST MIGHT GO FOR MONTHS WITHOUT EVER MOVING THE "CAMERA" TO GIVE THE COMIC A MUNDANE, DOWN TO EARTH FEELING ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT DRAMATIC STAGING WOULD UNDERCUT THE HUMOR:

FIXED MIDDLE-SHOT, FIXED ANGLE, NO TILT

### PAGE 29 - DRAWING STYLES AND MOOD

FOR A WHOLE CHAPTER ON HOW DRAWING STYLES CAN AFFECT MOOD, SEE UNDERSTANDING COMICS, CHAPTER FIVE, "LIVING IN LINE."

PAGE 36 - FLOW AND PANEL SHAPE

FLOW CAN BE AFFECTED BY PANEL SHAPE IN VARIOUS WAYS. YOUR READERS INSTINCTIVELY KNOW THAT AS THEIR EYES MOVE ACROSS A ROW OF PANELS, THEY'RE MOVING FORWARD IN TIME, SO A ROW OF NARROW PANELS WHICH DIVIDE THE READING FLOW INTO SHORT BURSTS ARE USEFUL FOR FAST, CHOPPY SEQUENCES:

WHILE WIDER PANELS CAN BE USED FOR MOMENTS THAT SHOULD PASS MORE SLOWLY.
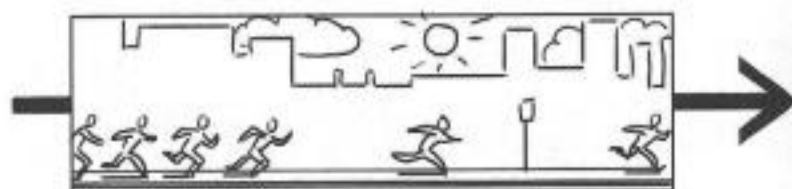
* WILL EISNER HAS REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS "A WRITER WHO WRITES WITH PICTURES" AND I'VE HEARD ART SPIEGELMAN TALK ABOUT COMICS AS A FORM OF "PICTURE WRITING" SO THIS ISN'T MY TERM.

PAGE 37 - CATEGORIES AND LIMITATIONS

ARTISTS HAVE BEEN DRAWING WONDERFUL COMICS STORIES FOR WELL OVER A HUNDRED YEARS WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT TERMS LIKE MY FIVE CHOICES, OF COURSE. A LOT OF PURE INSTINCT GOES INTO MAKING COMICS. THESE IDEAS ARE MEANT TO **SUPPLEMENT** AND **INFORM** THOSE INSTINCTS, NOT **REPLACE** THEM.

IF YOU'RE CREATING A COMIC, AND A PARTICULAR PANEL OR PAGE DESIGN JUST FEELS RIGHT TO YOU, GO FOR IT. JUST BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T GO DOWN ONE OF MY NERDY CHECKLISTS FIRST DOESN'T MAKE IT ANY LESS VALID.

BUT, WHEN YOU COME BACK TO THAT COMIC AND SOMETHING NO LONGER FEELS QUITE RIGHT, OR WHEN A FRIEND READS IT AND DOESN'T GET IT, THAT'S WHEN I CAN PROMISE THAT YOUR SOLUTION LIES IN ONE OF THOSE FIVE COLUMNS. THAT'S WHEN YOU MAY WANT TO RECONSIDER SOME OF THE CHOICES YOU'VE MADE AND CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES.

PAGE 38 - ART STAGES

CREATING FINISHED ART HAS TRADITIONALLY INCLUDED SOME KIND OF UNDER-DRAWING WITH LIGHT (HARD) PENCIL AND/OR LIGHT BLUE PENCIL TO GET DETAILS AND PROPORTIONS RIGHT, FOLLOWED BY FINISHED INK DRAWINGS. IN THE INDUSTRY OVER THE YEARS, THESE SEPARATE TASKS -- OFTEN PERFORMED BY SEPARATE ARTISTS -- BECAME KNOWN AS "PENCILLING" (SIC) AND "INKING."
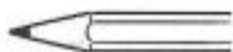
A LOT OF LONE COMICS ARTISTS STILL SPLIT THEIR COMICS ART INTO THESE SEPARATE STAGES. IT MAKES SENSE TO HAVE A NON-PERMANENT WAY TO WORK OUT WHERE LINES ARE GOING TO GO BEFORE INK HITS PAPER. STILL, I'M RELUCTANT TO USE THE TERMS BECAUSE THEY DON'T FIT WELL WITH OTHER TYPES OF FINISHED ART LIKE PAINT OR DIGITAL MEDIA.

THAT SAID, MOST CARTOONISTS GO THROUGH A FEW STAGES ON THEIR WAY TO FINISHED ART, INCLUDING:

• A ROUGH LAYOUT STAGE WHEN THEY FIGURE OUT WHERE EVERYTHING IS GOING TO GO ON THE PAGE.
• A PENCILLING-LIKE STAGE WHEN THEY WORK OUT THE PROPORTIONS AND DETAILS OF CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS IN THEIR STORY
• A FINISHED ART STAGE WHEN RENDERING DECISIONS ARE MADE FINAL.

PAGE 46 - INTENSITY BOOSTERS

ALTHOUGH THESE TECHNIQUES ARE DISCUSSED HERE AS WAYS TO PUNCH UP THE SURFACE APPEAL OF A WORK, THERE ARE ALSO PLENTY OF STRAIGHTFORWARD NARRATIVE USES, INCLUDING:

EXTREME DEPTH CUES TO IMPLY THE EXTREME SIZE OR MASS OF A CHARACTER OR OBJECT:

TILTED ANGLES TO REFLECT A CHARACTER'S SENSE OF DISORIENTATION:

OR HYPER-RENDERING TO SHOW IMPORTANT DETAILS OF AN OBJECT:

PAGE 47, PANEL 7 - CLARITY WITHOUT INTENSITY

IT'S ACTUALLY PRETTY INTERESTING WHEN CARTOON-ISTS TRY DIALING DOWN THE INTENSITY NEARLY ALL THE WAY. CHESTER BROWN'S *LOUIS RIEL* INCLUDES STATIC CHARACTER POSTURES, VERY FEW CLOSE-UPS AND SOME DELIBERATELY MONOTONOUS LAYOUTS, BUT THE DRAMATIC EVENTS STILL PULL THE READER IN:
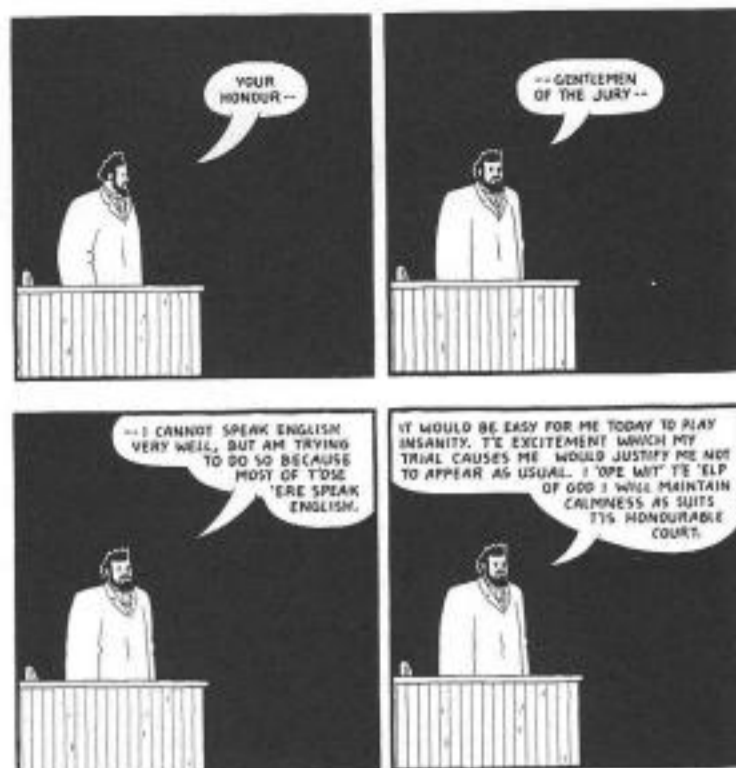
GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE "ALTERNATIVE COMICS" SCENE, INCREASINGLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE LITERATE GRAPHIC NOVEL MOVEMENT, USES THE DYNAMIC ACCENTS DISCUSSED ON PAGE 46 ONLY SPARINGLY, CREATING MOODS MORE AKIN TO A STAGE PLAY THAN A HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER. BROWN'S *LOUIS RIEL* IS AN EXTREME EXAMPLE, BUT LOOK AT MATURE GRAPHIC NOVELS LIKE SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS*, WARE'S *JIMMY CORRIGAN* OR MARJANE SATRAPI'S *PERSEPOLIS* FOR EXAMPLES OF THAT GENRE'S MORE RESTRAINED ANGLES AND COMPOSITIONS.

OPTIONAL EXERCISES

NOTE: IF YOU'D LIKE TO EXPLORE SOME OF THESE TOPICS FURTHER (OR IF YOU'RE A TEACHER WHO'D LIKE TO INCORPORATE SOME OF THESE IDEAS INTO A CLASSROOM SETTING) I'VE INCLUDED SUGGESTIONS FOR EXERCISES IN THE NOTES SECTIONS OF THE FIRST FOUR CHAPTERS. THEY AREN'T NECESSARY TO GRASP THE IDEAS IN THIS BOOK, BUT YOU MIGHT FIND THEM USEFUL FOR GETTING A MORE HANDS-ON UNDERSTAND-ING OF THE COMICS-MAKING PROCESS.

1 - CHOICE OF MOMENT (PAGES 11-18)

PICK A FAVORITE MOVIE AND TRY ROUGHLY BREAKING DOWN THE STORY INTO JUST SIXTEEN KEY MOMENTS USING ONLY PICTURES, NO WORDS. MAKE SURE THEY'RE CLEAR ENOUGH AND CONNECTED ENOUGH THAT A FRIEND WHO HASN'T SEEN THE MOVIE CAN TELL YOU WHAT'S GOING ON WITHOUT ANY ADDITIONAL EXPLANA-TION. QUESTION: IF YOU HAD TO CUT TO JUST EIGHT PANELS, WHICH ONES WOULD YOU DROP? HOW MANY PANELS WOULD BE ENOUGH TO SHOW ALL OF THE KEY MOMENTS OF THE STORY?

ABOVE: ART BY CHESTER BROWN
(SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

2 - CHOICE OF MOMENT/CONNECTING THE DOTS (PAGES 13-14)

PICK A FEW OF YOUR FAVORITE COMICS AND TRY TO FIND AT LEAST ONE PANEL THAT COULD HAVE BEEN CUT WITHOUT ADVERSELY AFFECTING THE CLARITY OF THE STORY. CONSIDER WHAT MIGHT HAVE PROMPTED THE CREATOR(S) OF THE COMIC TO INCLUDE IT IN THE FIRST PLACE. WAS IT MEANT TO SLOW DOWN THE ACTION? OR FILL SPACE BEFORE A PAGE TURN? WAS IT GENUINELY USELESS OR WAS THERE A SUBTLER PURPOSE IN MIND?

3 - THE SIX TRANSITIONS (PAGES 15-18)

PICK ONE OF THESE THREE MINI-PLOTS AND CREATE A ROUGH SINGLE PAGE COMIC ABOUT IT USING ONLY ONE OF THE TRANSITION TYPES FROM PAGES 16 AND 17:

- THE QUEEN DIED AND THE KING DIED OF GRIEF AFTER HER.
- BOY MEETS GIRL, BOY LOSES GIRL.
- DOG EATS DOG, DOG BURPS, DOG FIGURE SKATES.

THEN TRY DRAWING A NEW PAGE OF THE SAME PLOT USING A DIFFERENT KIND OF TRANSITION AND SEE HOW IT AFFECTS THE STORYTELLING STYLE AND MOOD OF YOUR COMIC.

4 - CHOICE OF FRAME (PAGES 19-25)

BUY THE LATEST COMIC BY YOUR FAVORITE CREATOR. DON'T LOOK INSIDE, BUT INSTEAD GET A COMICS-SAVVY FRIEND TO COPY JUST THE PANEL BORDERS FROM A FEW PAGES AND WRITE A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN EACH PANEL. TRY TO GUESS HOW YOUR FAVORITE CREATOR COMPOSED EACH PANEL AND DRAW A ROUGH VERSION INSIDE THE BORDERS. THEN TAKE A LOOK AT THE PRINTED COMIC AND COMPARE YOUR ROUGH VERSION TO THE REAL THING.

5 - CHOICE OF FRAME (PAGES 19-25)

SKETCH A 16-PANEL GRID ON A PIECE OF TYPING PAPER WITH A SIMPLE STANDING FIGURE IN THE FIRST PANEL:
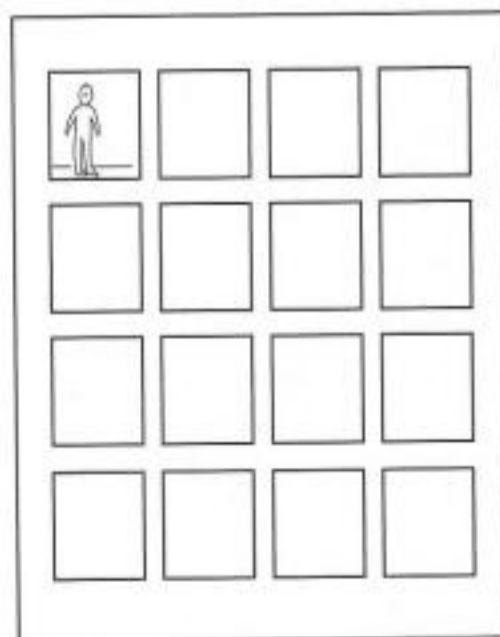
ASK A FRIEND TO DECIDE WHAT YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD DO IN PANEL TWO. DRAW THE SUGGESTION AND CONSIDER WHETHER IT WAS NECESSARY TO CHANGE THE VIEWING ANGLE. IF YOUR CHARACTER ENCOUNTERS AN ELEPHANT, DO YOU HAVE TO PULL BACK? IF HE/SHE CLIPS A TOENAIL, DO YOU HAVE TO PULL IN? DO ANY OF THE SUGGESTIONS REQUIRE A TILT OR ROTATION OF VIEWING ANGLE? DO ANY REQUIRE A CHANGE OF ELEVATION? REPEAT UNTIL THE PAGE IS FILLED!

6 - CHOICE OF IMAGE (PAGES 26-29)

TEST YOUR VISUAL MEMORY. TRY MAKING SIMPLE DRAWINGS OF FIVE COMPLEX ITEMS FROM MEMORY (EXAMPLES: A FIRE HYDRANT, YOUR FAVORITE SKYSCRAPER, A PAIR OF SCISSORS, A SNEAKER, A GAME CONTROLLER...). THEN FIND THE REAL THING OR CHECK THE WEB FOR PHOTOS. STUDY THE DIFFERENCES. THEN DRAW THE SAME ITEMS AGAIN FROM MEMORY AND SEE IF YOU CAN CAPTURE THEM MORE EFFECTIVELY.

ALTHOUGH DRAWING FROM MEMORY ISN'T AS NECESSARY TODAY AS IT WAS FOR MY GENERATION (YOU CAN PRETTY MUCH FIND A PHOTO OF ANYTHING ONLINE) PRACTICING IT CAN HELP ISOLATE THE MOST IMPOR-TANT STRUCTURAL DETAILS OF SUBJECTS THAT CAN JOG READERS MEMORIES WITHOUT OVERLOADING THEM WITH UNNECESSARY DETAILS.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF ASKED TO QUICKLY SKETCH A BICYCLE FROM MEMORY, A LOT OF PEOPLE MIGHT SKETCH SOMETHING LIKE THIS:
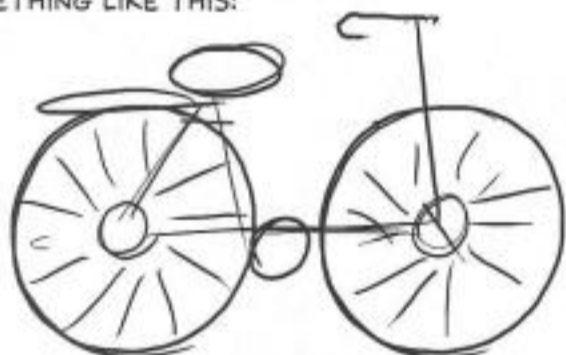
BUT WITH REFERENCE, THE SAME NUMBER OF LINES MIGHT BETTER CAPTURE THE BASIC SHAPES OF A REAL BICYCLE:

7 - CHOICE OF IMAGE (PAGES 26-29)

CAN YOU DRAW AN UNOCCUPIED ROOM WITH ENOUGH DETAIL THAT A FRIEND CAN TELL YOU AT LEAST TEN MEANINGFUL THINGS ABOUT THE KIND OF PERSON THAT LIVES THERE, JUST BY LOOKING AT YOUR DRAWING?

[NOTE: SEE CHAPTER 3 FOR CHOICE OF WORD EXERCISES.]

8 - CHOICE OF FLOW (PAGES 32-36)

FIND A COMIC OR GRAPHIC NOVEL WITH A LOT OF VARIATIONS IN FRAME SIZE AND SHAPE. PICK AT LEAST TEN PAGES AND CONSIDER HOW YOU MIGHT ARRANGE THE SAME PANELS IF YOU HAD TO FIT THEM ONTO THE PAGES OF A DIFFERENTLY-SHAPED BOOK. WOULD SOME PANELS HAVE TO BE ADDED OR SUBTRACTED? HOW DOES THE NEW LAYOUT AFFECT TURN-OF-PAGE MOMENTS? CAN YOU KEEP THE READING ORDER EASY TO FOLLOW?

9 - CLARITY VERSUS INTENSITY (PAGES 45-52)

CAN YOU FIND A COMIC WHERE THE CLARITY OF SOME SCENES COULD BE IMPROVED BY DIALING DOWN THE INTENSITY OF SOME LAYOUTS? CAN YOU DO A ROUGH SKETCH OF YOUR IMPROVED VERSION? CONVERSELY, CAN YOU FIND A COMIC WHICH COULD BENEFIT FROM THE **ADDITION** OF SOME INTENSITY, WITHOUT SACRIFICING CLARITY IN THE PROCESS? HOW WOULD YOU GO ABOUT IT?

10 - LOOSENING-UP EXERCISES

A. QUANTO COMICS (INVENTED BY THE LEGENDARY DEWAN BROTHERS, TED AND BRIAN). GET TOGETHER WITH ONE OR MORE COMICS-MAKING FRIENDS. GET A FEW BLACK MARKERS AND SOME PLAIN WHITE PAPER. EACH ARTIST TAKES A FEW MINUTES MAKING A TITLE LOGO ON THE TOP OF A PAGE (TITLES SHOULD BE SOMETHING GENERAL LIKE "IS THAT YOUR DAD?," "BLIND DATE," "IGNORE IT AND IT WILL GO AWAY," "CLOSED MONDAYS," ETC.; AVOID OVERLY SPECIFIC TITLES LIKE "POPE BENEDICT AND JAMIROQUAI GO SKYDIVING OVER PENNSYLVANIA"). EACH ARTIST THEN TRADES PAGES AND DRAWS A ONE-PAGE COMIC TO MATCH SOMEONE ELSE'S TITLE. REPEAT UNTIL SLEEPY.

B. THE 24-HOUR COMIC (BEGUN IN 1990 AS A CHALLENGE TO MY PAL STEVE BISSETTE). DRAW AN ENTIRE 24 PAGE COMIC BOOK IN A SINGLE 24-HOUR PERIOD. NO SCRIPT. NO PREPARATION. ONCE THE CLOCK STARTS TICKING, IT DOESN'T STOP UNTIL YOU'RE DONE. GREAT SHOCK THERAPY FOR THE CREATIVELY BLOCKED. OVER 1,000 ARTISTS HAVE GIVEN IT A TRY SO FAR!

SUGGESTIONS: START IN THE MORNING, AFTER A FULL NIGHT'S SLEEP. PLAN TO HAVE PLENTY OF FOOD, CAFFEINE AND MUSIC AT THE READY. AND IF YOU DON'T DO IT AT HOME, YOU MIGHT WANT TO HAVE A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER GIVE YOU A RIDE WHEN YOU'RE DONE.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR COMIC IN THE COMPANY OF OTHER CRAZY ARTISTS, CHECK OUT 24HOURCOMICS.COM FOR DETAILS ON 24-HOUR COMICS DAY, AN ANNUAL CELEBRATION DURING WHICH GROUP EVENTS ARE HELD AT COMICS STORES AND OTHER LOCATIONS IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES.

ADDITIONAL NOTES (INCLUDING MORE DETAILS ON THE 24-HOUR COMICS CHALLENGE) CAN BE FOUND AT: WWW.SCOTTMCCLOUD.COM/MAKINGCOMICS