



99

WAYS TO TELL A STORY

EXERCISES IN STYLE

MATT MADDEN

An exploration of storytelling that will amuse and delight you, and inspire your own creative work—your novel, your comic, even your film



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CHAMBERLAIN BROS.

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The author would like to acknowledge his debt to Raymond Queneau,
whose influence extends well beyond the inspiration for this book.

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Each comic in this book presents the same story—recounts exactly the same events—but takes a different approach to telling the tale. You will find varying points of view, different styles of drawing, homages and parodies, as well as interpretations that may challenge your idea of what exactly narrative is. For example, can a map tell a story? How about a page full of advertisements? I'm not suggesting that there's a definite answer, only that it's exciting to consider how many ways a story can be told, how art and text interact, and how these comics relate to other visual and narrative media.

This book was inspired by Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* in which he spun ninety-nine variations out of a basic, two-part text relating two chance encounters with a mildly irritating character during the course of a day. He started by telling it in every conceivable tense, then by doing it in free verse, and then as a sonnet, as a telegram, in pig latin, as a series of exclamations, in an indifferent voice . . . you name it, he did it.

From the first time I read *Exercises in Style*, I thought it would be fun and challenging to apply the idea to a visual narrative, but dismissed it as a crazy notion. However, years went by and still the concept kept coming back to nudge me toward the drawing table. Six years ago, I finally gave in and put pen to paper. The reaction among my peers, friends, and family to the first few exercises was instantaneous and enthusiastic: I knew I had no choice but to see this through to the end.

Although there is a certain sequence to these pages, it is perfectly allowable to read the exercises in random order. Nor is there any requirement to read every comic in one sitting (or ever). Your first dive into these pages will make you want to come back from time to time in order to browse through the book, look up a favorite comic, or show it to a friend, much as you would with a collection of poetry or drawings.

Can a story, however simple or mundane, be separated from the manner in which it is told? Is there an essential nugget from which all stylistic and physical characteristics can be stripped? What would that core look like? This book begins with a comic I named "Template" because it has the least overt manipulation of formal elements. Yet even a moment's consideration yields a series of questions: Why is it drawn in pen and not with a brush? Why is it told in eight panels and how were they chosen? The style is not "cartoony," yet it is not quite "realistic"—Why? Suddenly it's clear that what appear to be merely "stylistic" choices are in fact an essential part of the story. In reading these comics you have the opportunity to question the effects that ways of telling have on what is being told, and, just as important, to enjoy the rich variety of approaches available to the artist, in comics and in other media.

Rather than rehashing the eternal battle between form and content, style and substance, I hope this work questions those tired dichotomies and suggests a different model: form *as* content, and substance inseparable from style.

—Matt Madden



I was working at the computer...



and I got up to get something out of the fridge.



I went into the dining room.



From up in the studio, Jessica asked me what time it was.



I told her it was around one...



I heard her say thanks from upstairs.

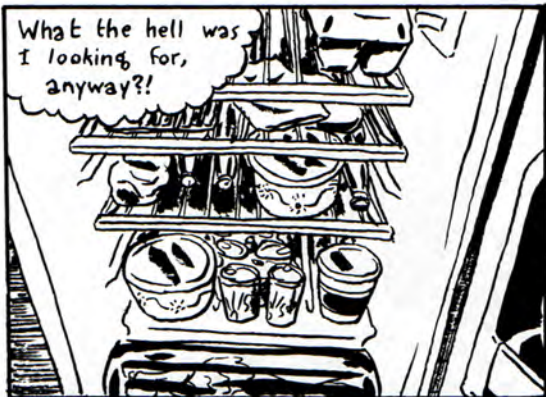
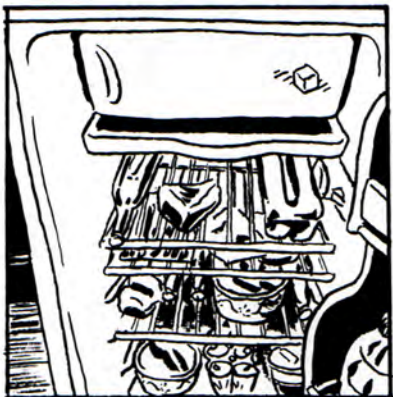
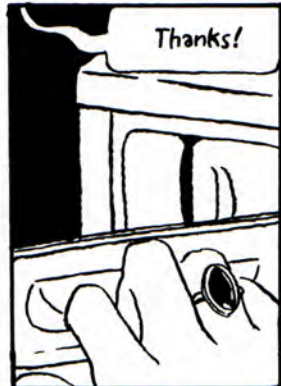
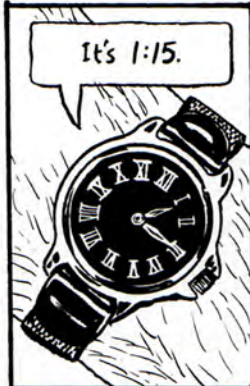
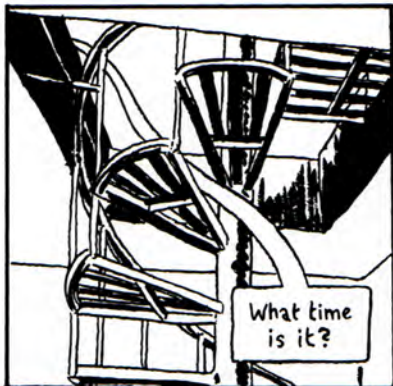
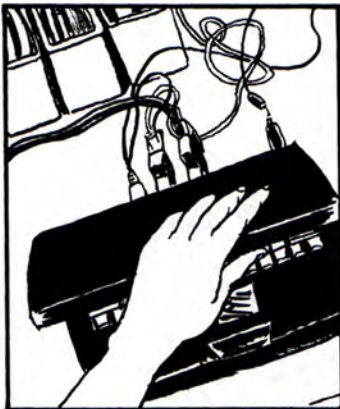


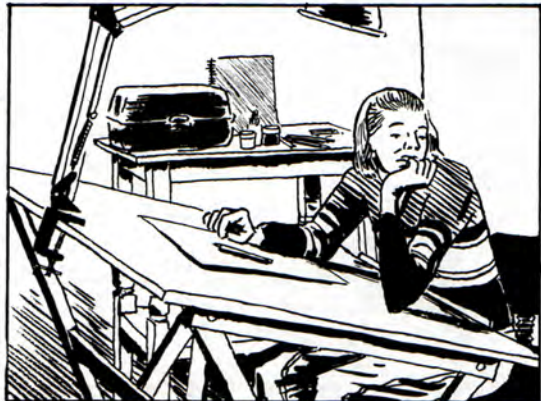
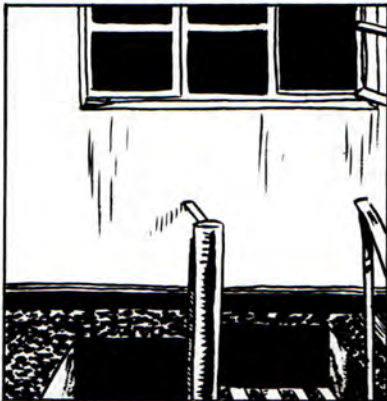
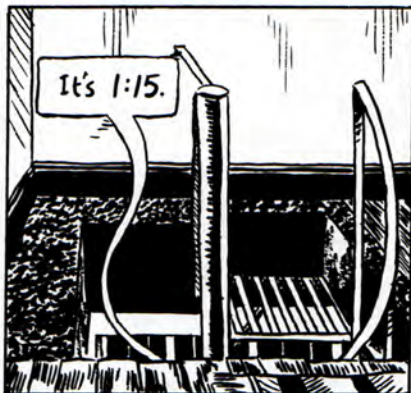
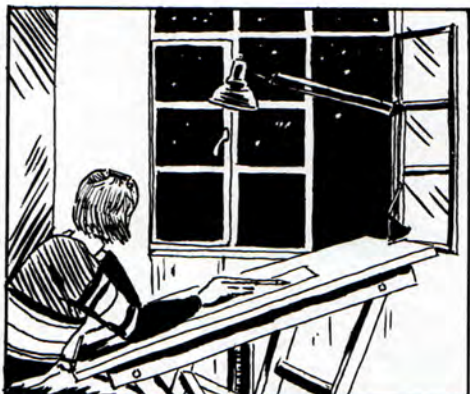
I guess I got distracted because when I opened the refrigerator door ...

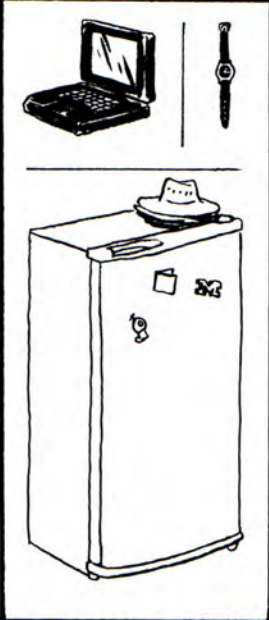
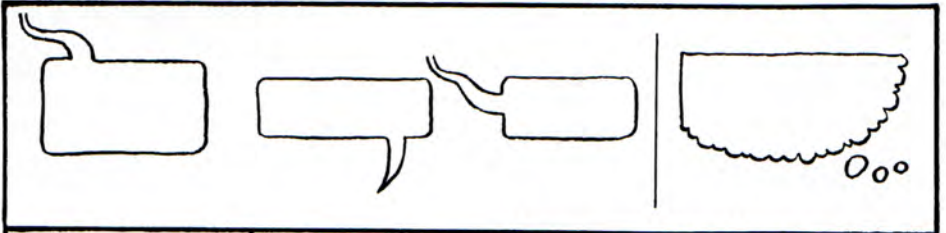


I couldn't for the life of me remember what I had come looking for!







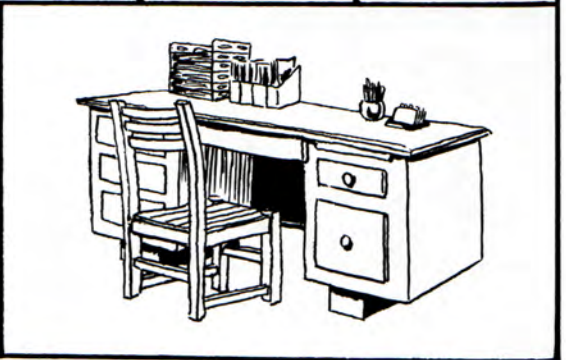
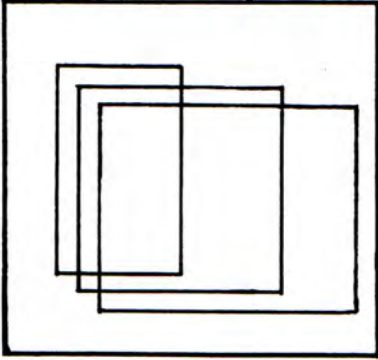


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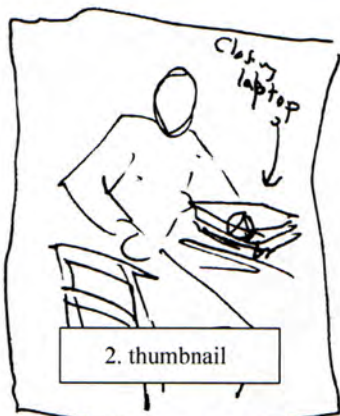
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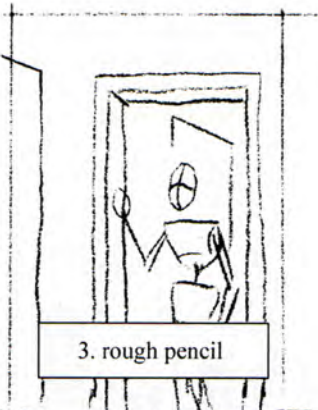


Exercises in Style
panel 1:
M working at computer
viewed from behind.
panel 2:
M gets up from comput
shuts laptop

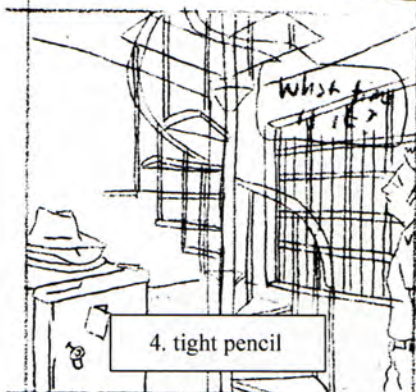
1. script



2. thumbnail



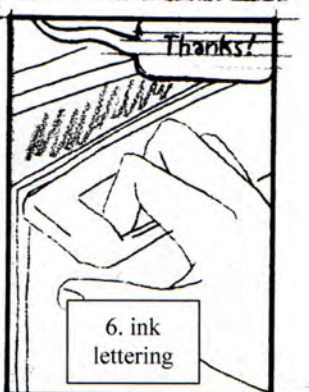
3. rough pencil



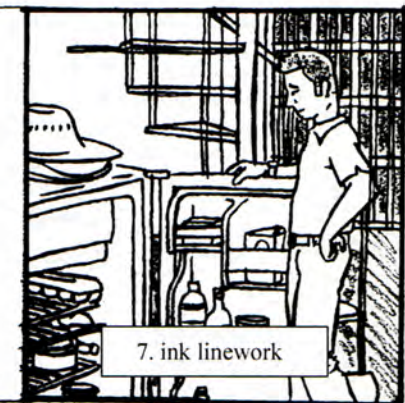
4. tight pencil



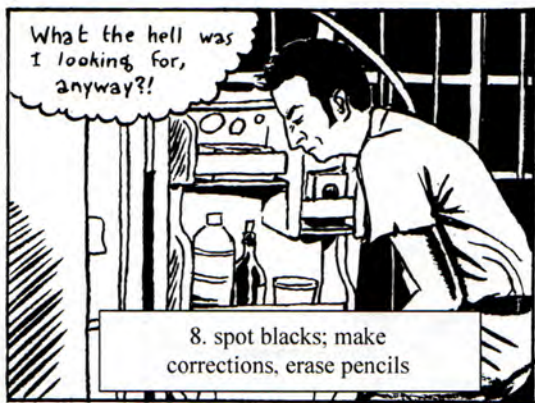
5. pencil
lettering



6. ink
lettering



7. ink linework



8. spot blacks; make
corrections, erase pencils

TIME TO
WORK!

THE
BOSS

WHAT THE HELL
WAS I LOOKING
FOR, ANYWAY?



LOSS OF
RURAL JOBS

SOCIAL LADDER

FALSE
PROMISE
OF
MATERIAL
WEALTH

ICE

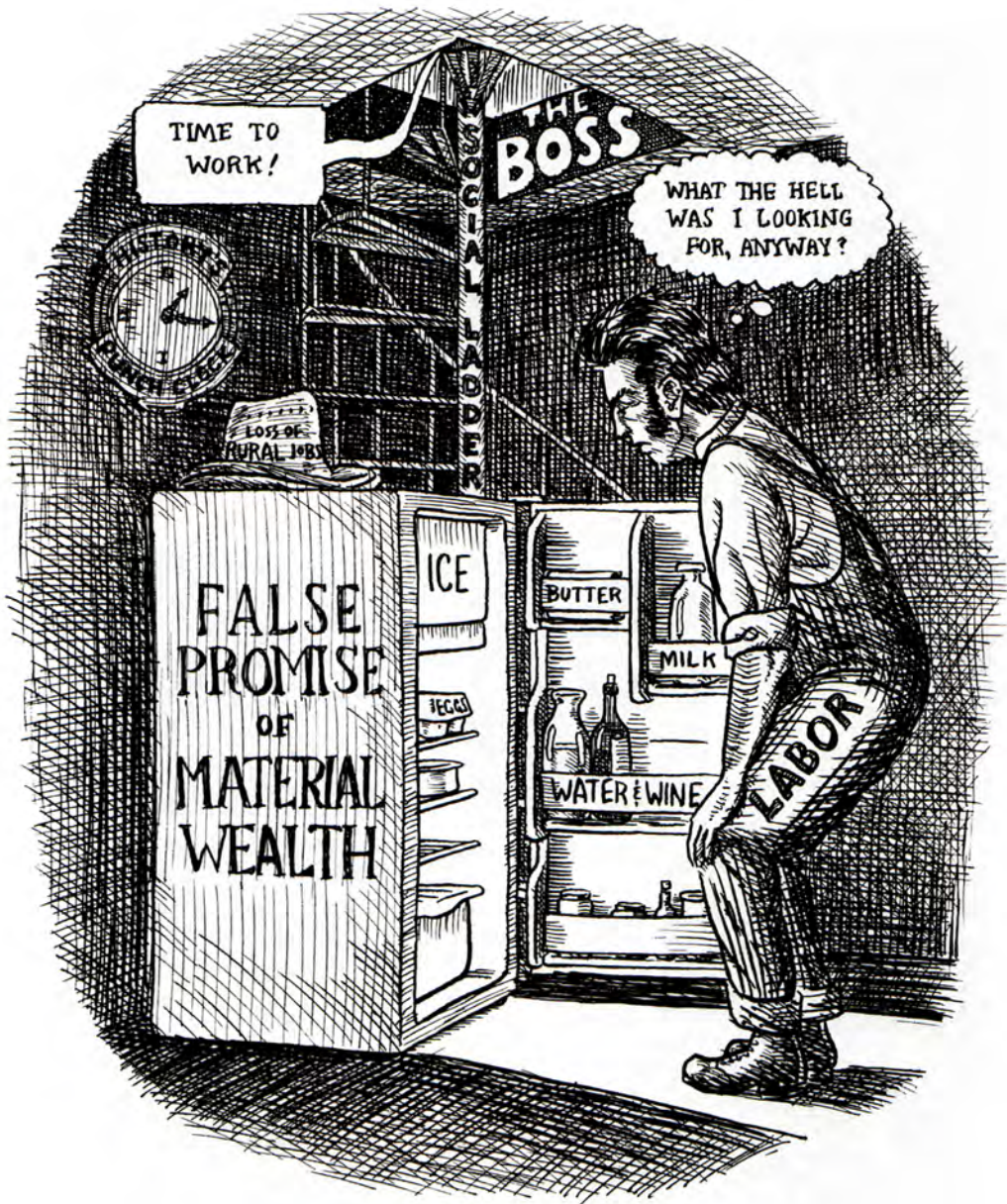
BUTTER

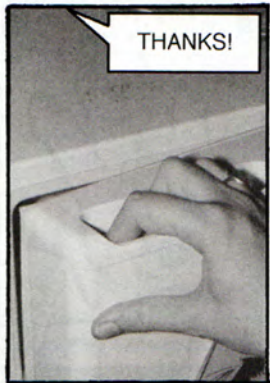
MILK

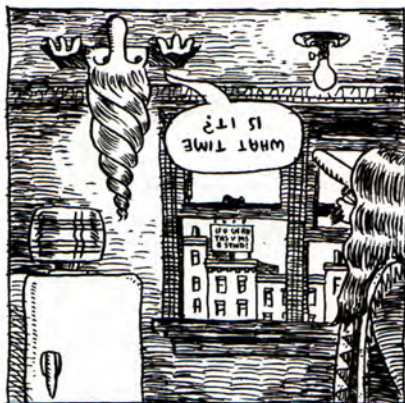
EGGS

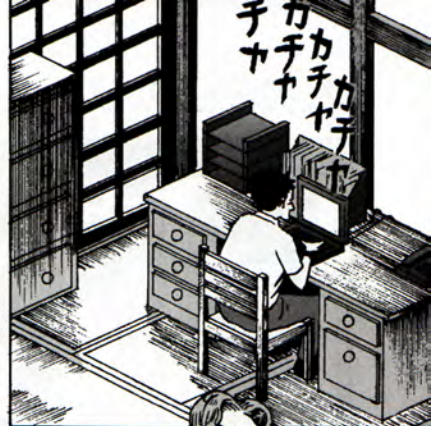
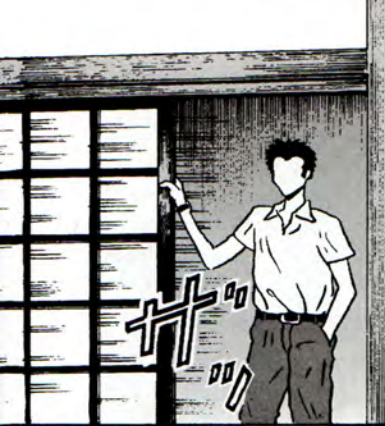
WATER & WINE

LABOR

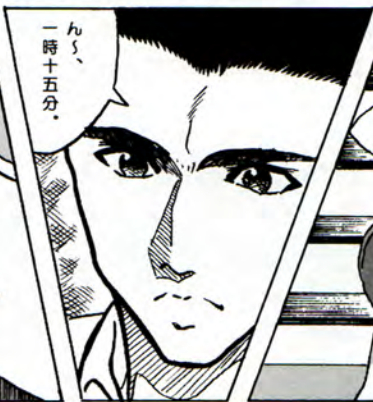




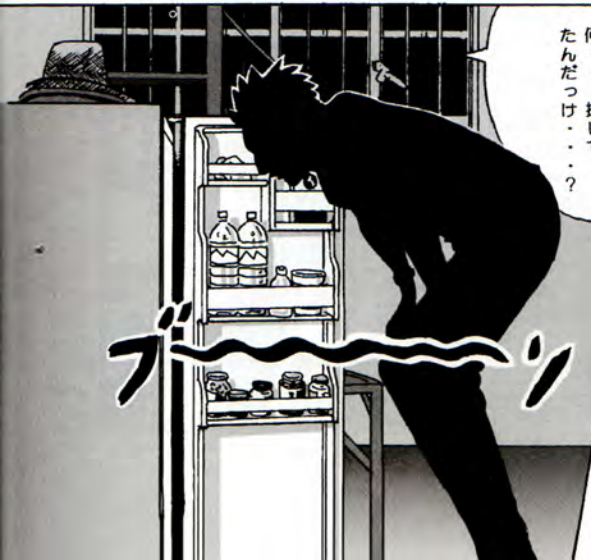




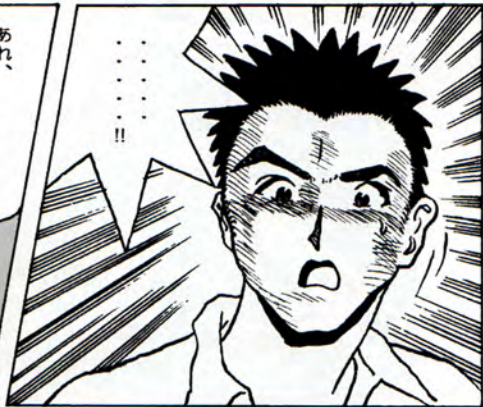
サンキュー!

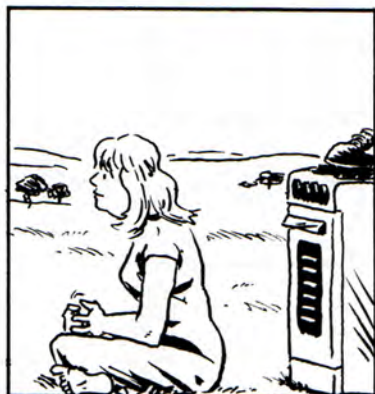
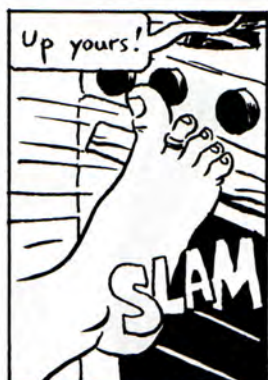


ん、
一時十五分。



あれ、
何・・・探して
たんだっけ・・・?







YESTERDAY I ACCEPTED AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE FROM BRADLEY BENTON, BRANCH MANAGER FOR THE ENTIRE EASTERN DIVISION!



I WAS THROUGH WITH THOSE WILD TYPES I USED TO DATE -- AND THE DAMAGE THEY DID TO MY REPUTATION...



TONIGHT I WAS GOING TO MEET BRADLEY'S PARENTS -- MY FUTURE IN-LAWS!



THEN SUDDENLY A HUSKY, MASCULINE VOICE PENETRATED MY INNOCENT BLISS...



I COULD FEEL MY HEART BEGINNING TO BEAT IN EXCITED, CONFUSED PALPITATIONS...

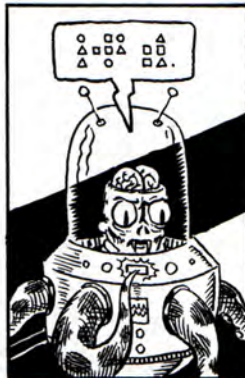
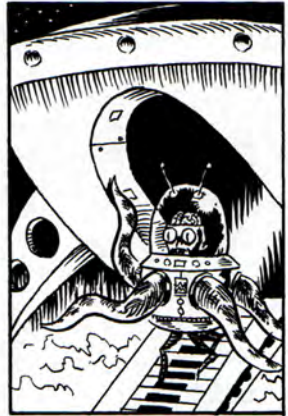
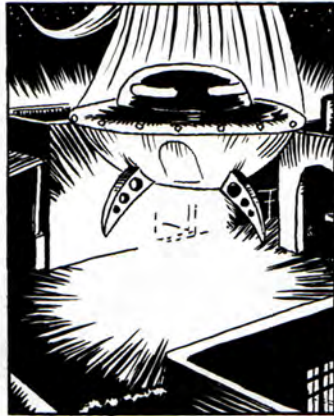


NO! I PROMISED MYSELF TO BRADLEY BENTON!



AND YET THE STRANGER'S THANKS PIERCED ME LIKE ARROWS LACED WITH SOME STRANGE ELIXIR!









1. *MOMENT-TO-MOMENT*



2. *ACTION-TO-ACTION*



3. *SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT*



4. *SCENE-TO-SCENE*



5. *ASPECT-TO-ASPECT*



6. *NON-SEQUITUR*

And God said, let there be light, and there was light.



And God said, let there be a firmament, and it was so.



And God created the Earth and the seas and saw that it was good.



And God said let there be lights to divide the days, hours, and minutes, that the time might be known.



And God filled the waters and the earth with creatures, and it was 1:15 on the fifth day.



And God created man in His own image.



And on the seventh day He rested from all His work which He had made.



Yet on the eighth day, He did wonder what the hell He was looking for, anyway...





Matt Madden started self-publishing minicomics in the early 1990s. He produced his first graphic novel, *Black Candy* (Black Eye Books) in 1998, and in 2001 published *Odds Off* (Highwater Books). Madden lives in Brooklyn with his wife, the author and cartoonist Jessica Abel. He works in comics and illustration, and teaches at both the School of Visual Arts and Yale University. His latest works appear in *A Fine Mess*, his bi-annual series published by Alternative Comics. You can learn more about him at www.mattmadden.com or www.exercisesinstyle.com.