

RICH BUCKLER'S™

# SECRETS OF DRAWING COMICS



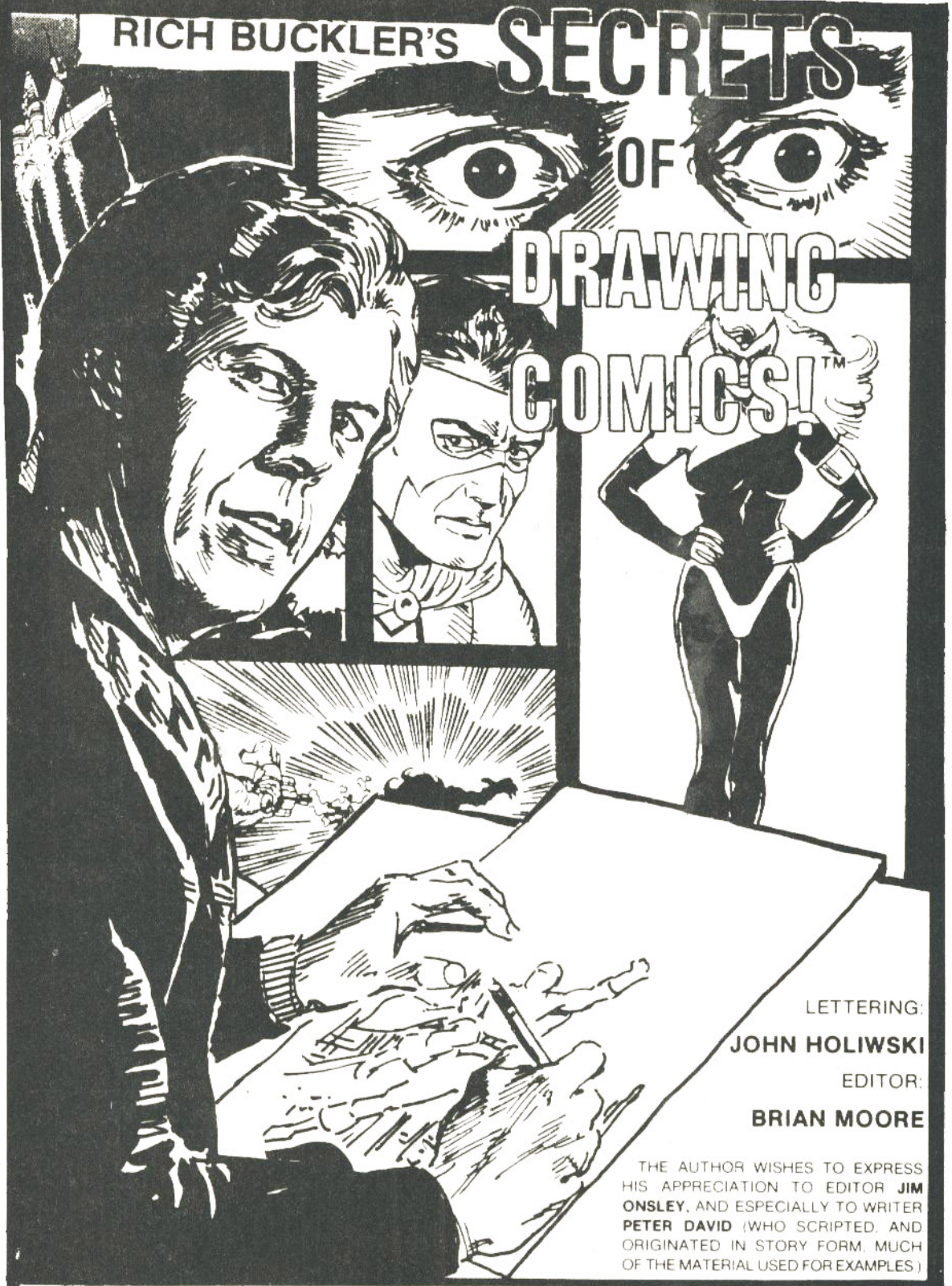
RICH BUCKLER'S

# SECRETS

OF

# DRAWING

# COMICS!™



LETTERING:

**JOHN HOLIWSKI**

EDITOR:

**BRIAN MOORE**

THE AUTHOR WISHES TO EXPRESS HIS APPRECIATION TO EDITOR **JIM ONSLEY**, AND ESPECIALLY TO WRITER **PETER DAVID** (WHO SCRIPTED, AND ORIGINATED IN STORY FORM, MUCH OF THE MATERIAL USED FOR EXAMPLES)

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# MANIPULATING TIME AND SPACE:

A FILM DIRECTOR FRIEND OF MINE WAS ONCE ASKED "WHAT IS A DIRECTOR?" HE REPLIED, IN EARNEST "A DIRECTOR IS A MASTER OF *PSYCHIC LEDGERMAIN*" A COMIC BOOK ARTIST IS NO LESS A SLEIGHT OF HAND ARTIST. HE MUST MANIPULATE WHAT THE AUDIENCE SEES AND HOW THINGS ARE PERCEIVED. THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED BY A CAREFUL *MANIPULATION OF TIME AND SPACE*. (WHICH SOUNDS *ESOTERIC* BUT REALLY THERE IS NOTHING MAGICAL ABOUT IT.) LET ME EXPLAIN...



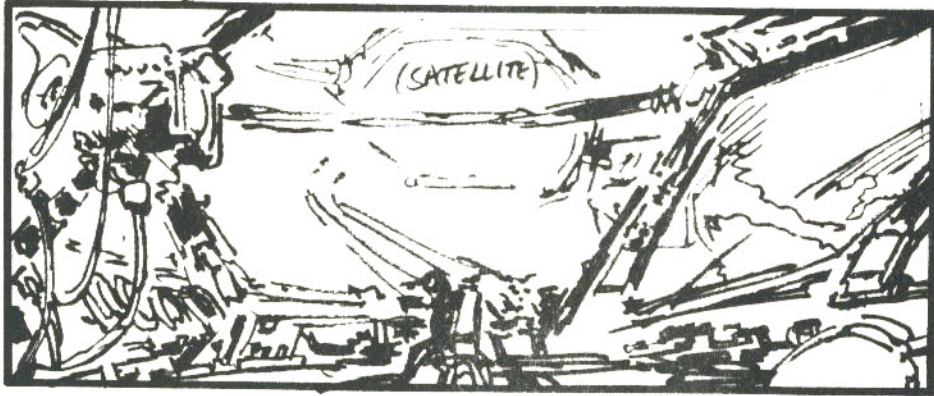
TAKE THE FOLLOWING SCENARIO :

THREE MEN SIT IN A BAR. AS THE T.V. IS SHOWING A NEWSCAST. THE REPORTER SAYS THE POLICE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT ONE VILLIAN WAS A COP. THIS INFURIATES THE PATRONS WHO REACT WITH HOSTILITY.

AT FIRST GLANCE, THE SAME DESCRIPTION SEEMS TO HAVE ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR THREE OR FOUR PANELS. AS YOU CAN SEE, I WORKED EVERYTHING OUT IN *ONE* PANEL. SURE, I COULD HAVE SHOWN EACH ACTION SEPARATELY IN A SEQUENCE. BUT I DIDN'T. THERE ARE TWO REASONS FOR THIS:

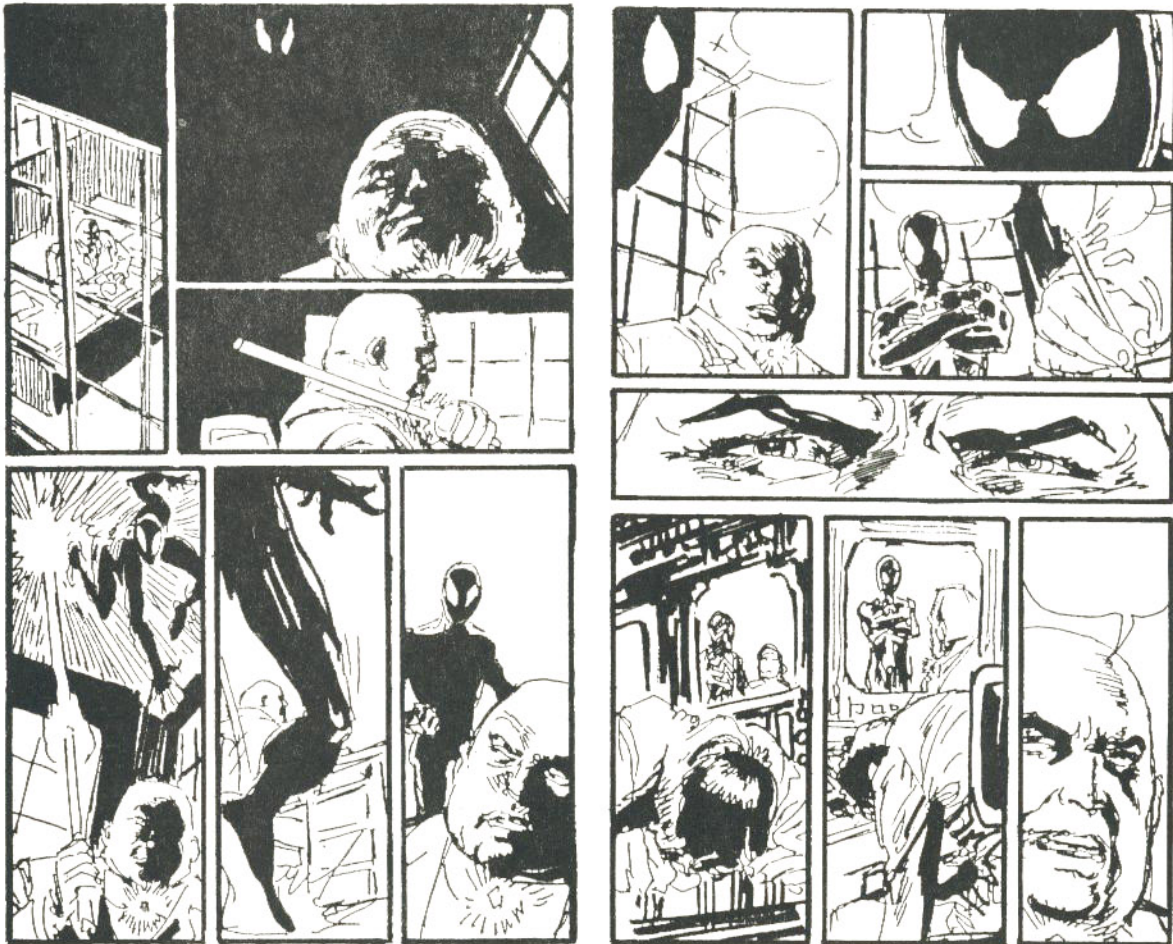
- (1) I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH ROOM ON THE PAGE IT APPEARED ON.
- (2) THE STORY PACING WAS VERY RAPID - A SEQUENCE WOULD HAVE SLOWED THE PACE AND CALLED UNDUE ATTENTION TO ITSELF.

# BASIC LAYOUT:



# PAGE LAYOUT:

THE CHOICE THE FILM DIRECTOR MAKES IN PLACING HIS CAMERA IS NEVER ARBITRARY. HOW YOU CHOOSE TO LAYOUT A PANEL SHOULD NOT BE ARBITRARY EITHER. THE BORDERS OF YOUR PANELS ARE LIKE A MOTION PICTURE FRAME, BUT WITH ONE VERY IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE: COMIC BOOK PANELS CAN TAKE ON ANY RECTANGULAR SHAPE AND SIZE. ( I SAY RECTANGULAR BECAUSE SQUARE-SHAPED PANELS TEND TO LOOK STATIC, AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED.) SO THE COMICS ARTIST WORKING WITH PICTURE UNITS THAT COME IN VARIOUS SHAPES AND SIZES -- EACH TYPE SERVING A DIFFERENT PURPOSE. AS A GENERAL RULE, MOST STORY PAGES AVERAGE BETWEEN FIVE AND EIGHT PANELS EACH.

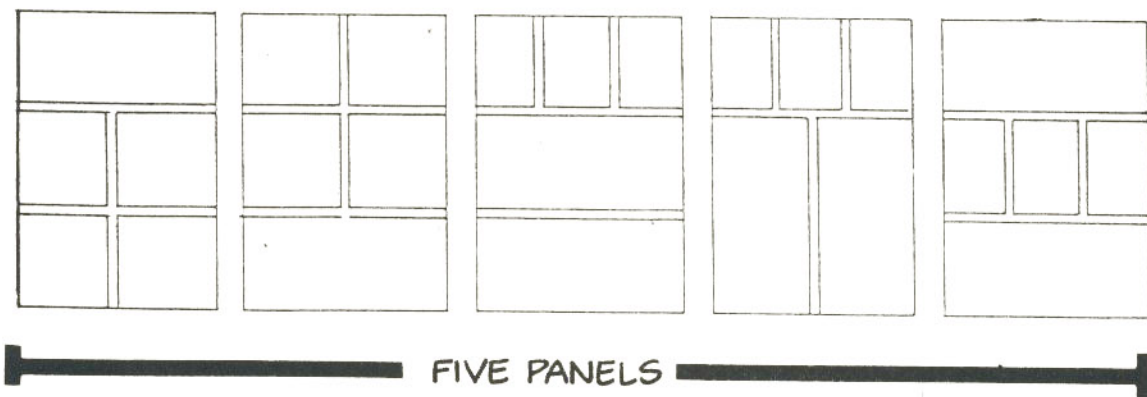
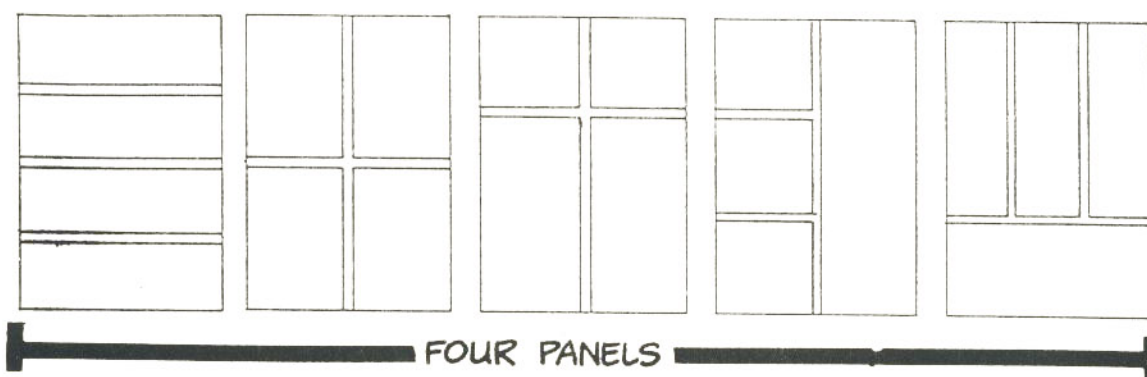
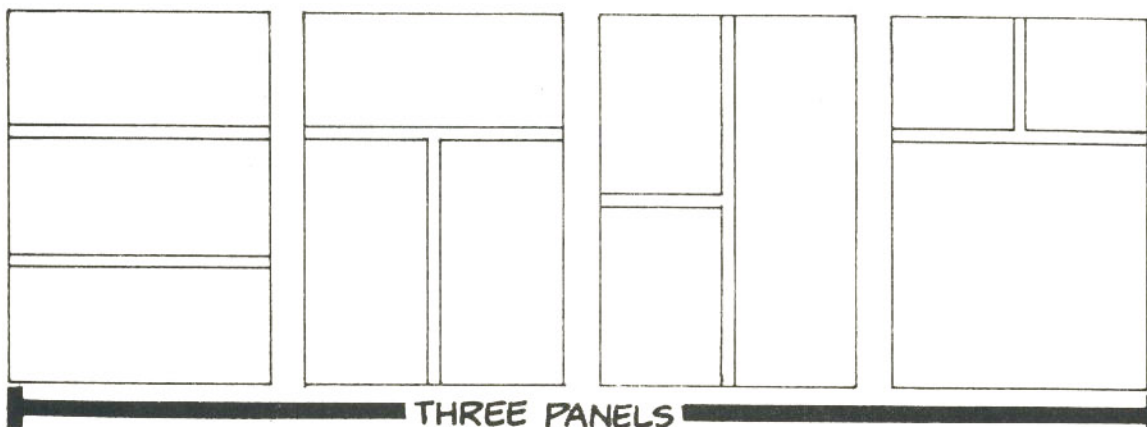


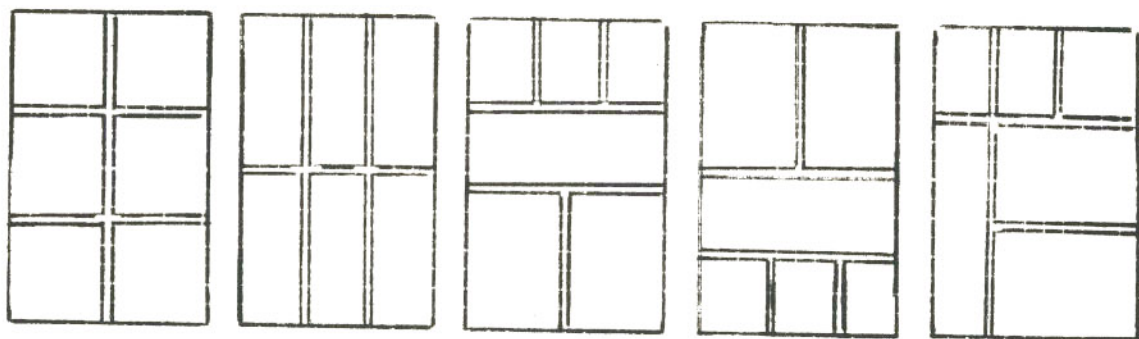
EVERY ARTIST WORKS DIFFERENTLY, I WORK UP MY PAGES IN A 3-STEP METHOD. FIRST I DO A 'THUMBNAIL' SKETCH, THEN A TIGHT LAYOUT (USUALLY TWICE THE SIZE OF A THUMBNAIL). I POLISH UP THE DRAWING IN THE SECOND LAYOUT AND ADD LIGHTING EFFECTS. THEN THE FINAL PENCIL VERSION IS TRACED OFF ON A LIGHT BOX ( AFTER PHOTOSTATING THE LAYOUT UP TO PAGE SIZE ) DURING WHICH I REPOSITION FIGURES AND ADD DETAIL.



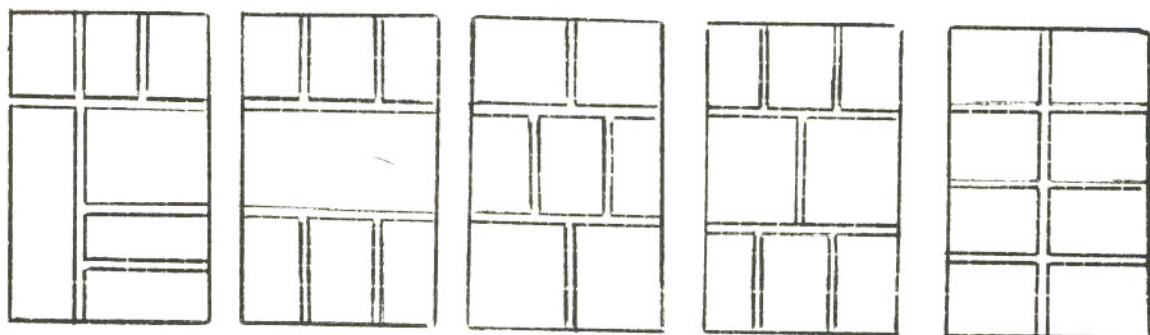
MOST OF THE WORK IS IN THE THINKING, EACH PAGE PRESENTS A DIFFERENT SET OF PROBLEMS. THERE IS NO WAY YOU CAN ANTICIPATE EVERY STORY-TELLING PROBLEM. YOU ENCOUNTER THE PROBLEMS AS YOU GO ALONG. THAT'S WHY IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO DO THUMBNAILS FIRST AND SAVE YOURSELF A LOT OF HEADACHES (AND A LOT OF ERASERS!) FOR ME, THE PLANNING STAGES ARE MOST CRUCIAL. OFTEN WHAT GOES INTO THE PANELS DICTATES WHAT SIZE AND SHAPE THEY WILL TAKE. I KNOW, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT IF I HAVE AN ACTION THAT SWEEPS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, I WILL PROBABLY NEED A WIDE HORIZONTAL PANEL.

THE PANEL CONFIGURATIONS ON THESE PAGES REPRESENT THE MORE OR LESS STANDARD PAGE LAYOUTS MOST OFTEN USED BY PROFESSIONALS. THEY ARE GIVEN ONLY AS A ROUGH GUIDE. WHEN CHOOSING A PANEL BREAKDOWN, YOU WILL INEVITABLY SHIFT SOME OF THE BORDER TO ACCOMODATE YOUR LAYOUT IDEA. YOU WILL PROBABLY DO A LOT OF ERASING AT FIRST, BUT DON'T GET DISCOURAGED. HELPFUL HINT: **DO NOT** TRY TO "CRAM" YOUR DRAWING INTO PRE-SELECTED PAGE DESIGN, THESE DIAGRAMS ARE ONLY MEANT TO GET YOU STARTED.





SIX PANELS



SEVEN PANELS

EIGHT PANELS

# GETTING IDEAS:

I NEVER KNOW WHAT TO DRAW UNTIL I SET MYSELF TO THE TASK OF DOING IT. THAT SOUNDS LIKE A PARADOX, OR A NON-ANSWER, BUT IT IS TRUE. THINK ABOUT IT. DURING A CONVERSATION, DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY BEFORE YOU SAY IT? USUALLY NOT. INSTINCT IS A DETERMINING FACTOR HERE-- BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN DON'T THINK.

DRAWING IS A CREATIVE PROCESS. YOU LEARN BY DOING IT. YOU CAN STUDY ALL THE BOOKS ON DRAWING THAT HAVE EVER BEEN PUBLISHED, BUT STILL NOT LEARN TO DRAW UNTIL YOU START DRAWING. YOU KNOW IF A DRAWING WILL WORK *AFTER* YOU'VE DONE IT, NOT BEFORE. NEVER WAIT FOR INSPIRATION! SOME ARTIST WAIT AND WAIT UNTIL THEY FINALLY GET THAT WONDEROUS BURST OF ILLUMINATION. I THINK THAT'S DANGEROUS. WHAT I DO IS THIS-- I SIMPLY TELL MYSELF THAT WHATEVER IS REQUIRED FOR THE DRAWING, *I CAN DO IT!* (OF COURSE THAT'S NOT TO SAY I NEVER STUDIED. I HAVE-- BUT, IF I WERE ALWAYS AFRAID OF MAKING MISTAKES I NEVER WOULD HAVE TRIED IN THE FIRST PLACE!)



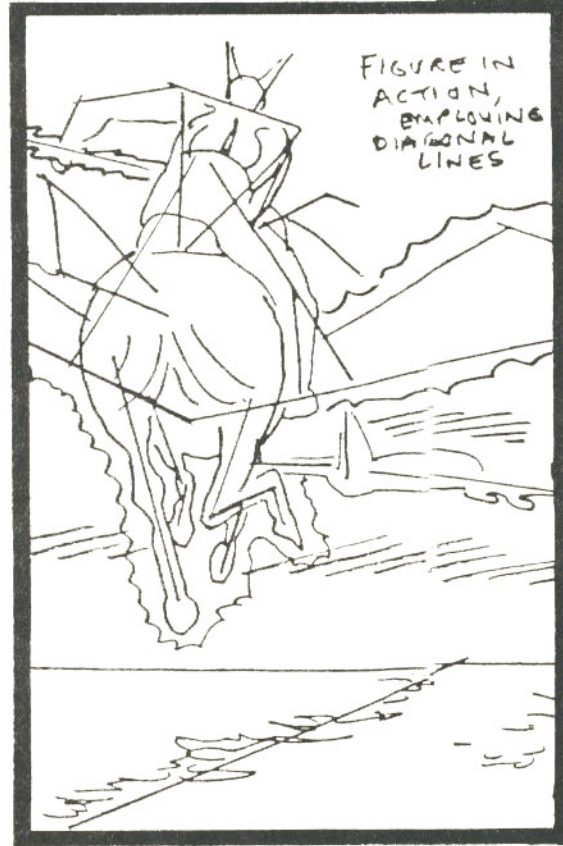
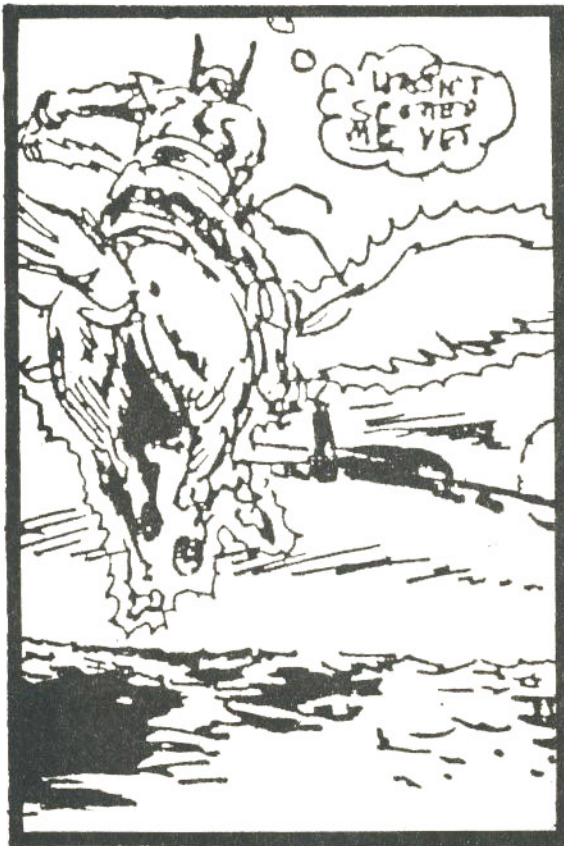


FIG. 1

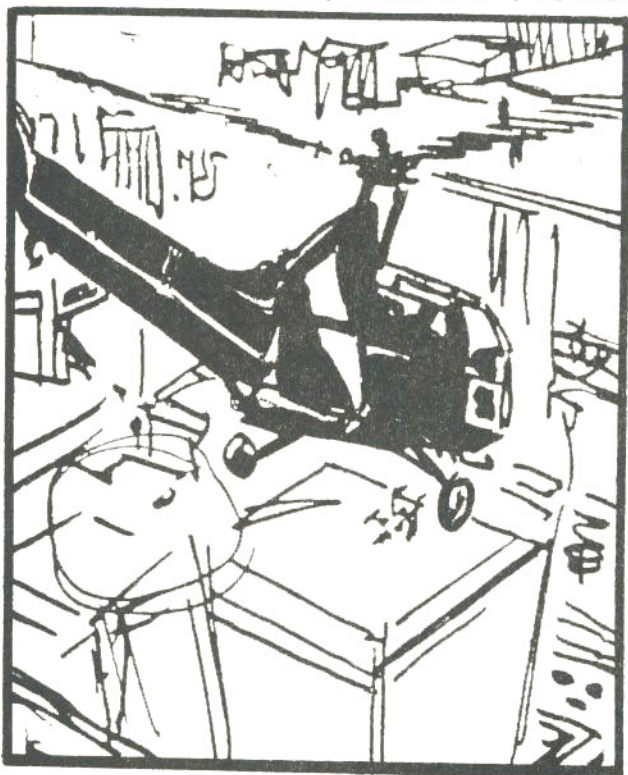
FIG 2

THIS EXAMPLE SHOWN IN FIG. 1 DEMONSTRATES THE USE OF COMPOSITIONAL LINES. FIG. 2 IS A DIAGRAM OF THIS SAME PANEL. NOTICE HOW THESE "INVISIBLE" LINES ACT AS ARROWS THAT CONTROL READING DIRECTION. THE DIAGONAL LINES WORK IN COUNTERPOINT TO THE TRANQUIL BACKGROUND. THERE IS A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF MOVEMENT "HIDDEN" IN THIS PICTURE, WHICH AFFECTS THE READER ON A PSYCHOLOGICAL LEVEL.

# PSYCHOLOGY OF COMPOSITIONAL LINES:

IN WRITING, LETTERS ARE ORGANIZED TO FORM WORDS. IN PART, LINES ARE USED TO CONSTRUCT FORMS AND SHAPES. JUST AS WORDS, IN ADDITION TO THEIR LITERAL MEANINGS, HAVE CONNOTATIONS. SO WITH VISUAL STATEMENTS, THE LINES AND FORMS CONVEY "HIDDEN" OR SUBLIMINAL MEANINGS.

*STRAIGHT LINES* USUALLY DENOTES STRENGTH, MASCULINITY. *CURVED LINES* - GENTLENESS, FEMINITY. *HORIZONTAL LINES* - DYNAMIC ACTION, VIOLENT FORCE.



I SAID EARLIER THAT "ACTING IS REACTING". ONE ACTOR "PLAYS OFF" THE OTHER ACTOR. THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO COMPOSITION AFFECTING THE OTHER ELEMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE HELICOPTER IN FIG. 1 IS DESCENDING TO THE BUILDING BELOW. "MOTION LINES" WOULD HAVE MADE THE CHOPPER APPEAR TO BE MOVING TOO FAST SO INSTEAD I POSITIONED THE BUILDING SO THAT IT "INTERACTED" WITH THE HELICOPTER. THE IMPRESSION IS ONE OF "IMPENDING MOVEMENT" AS THE READERS' "MIND'S" EYE IS DIRECTED FROM THE HELICOPTER TO THE BUILDING WHERE IT IS OBVIOUSLY ABOUT TO LAND. THE ROTARY BLADES, RENDERED HERE

TO APPEAR BLURRED, ARE ANOTHER ELEMENT THAT "INTERACTS" WITH THE STATIONARY BACKGROUND ELEMENTS -- AND THE DOWN ANGLE REINFORCES THE IMPLIED MOVEMENT IN THE PANEL.



USE *DIAGONAL* COMPOSITIONAL LINES FOR DYNAMIC ACTION. HERE WE SEE TWO FIGURES IN MOTION. IN EACH COMPOSITION THERE IS PLENTY OF "NEGATIVE SPACE" AROUND THE FIGURES (SO THE CHARACTERS HAVE ROOM TO MOVE) NOTE HOW THE FIGURE ON THE RIGHT GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF SPEED AND CONTROLLED MOVEMENT BECAUSE OF THE OBLIQUE ANGLE AND DIAGONAL POSITIONING OF ARMS AND LEGS.



THE INITIAL PLANNING STAGES ARE THE MOST CRUCIAL, WHEN I FIRST STARTED I WORE OUT A LOT OF ERASERS, SMUDGED A LOT OF PAGES AND FUDGED A LOT OF GOOD IDEAS BECAUSE I THOUGHT EVERYONE WORKED THAT WAY-- BY "INSTINCT"

IT WAS JOHN ROMITA WHO INTRODUCED ME TO A BETTER WAY, WHICH I CALL THE "*THINK BEFORE YOU DRAW*" APPROACH. EACH PERSON OR OBJECT IN A COMPOSITION IS AN IDEA. EACH PANEL IS A COMBINATION OF IDEAS, EACH IDEA "PLAYING-OFF" THE OTHER.



# CROPPING:

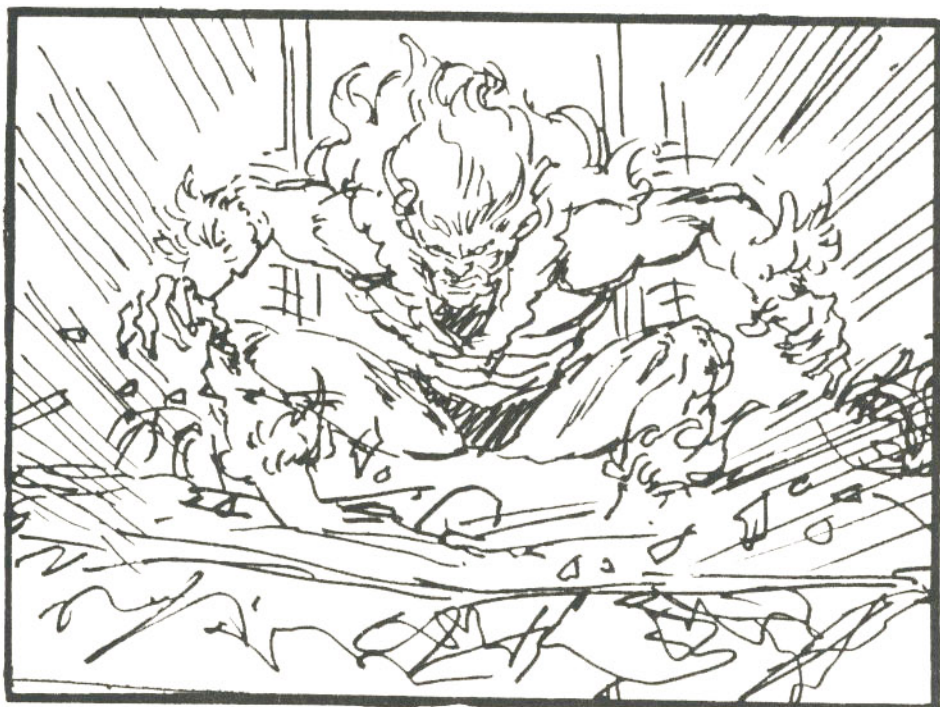
SOMETIMES I GET AN IDEA THAT WORKS BEAUTIFULLY. THE DRAWING IS WELL EXECUTED, *BUT* IT DOESN'T FIT INTO THE SPACE I HAVE ALLOWED. WHAT TO DO? THE ANSWER IS *CROP* IT! WHAT IS "CROPPING"? IT'S THE PROCESS OF PLACING A RECTANGULAR BORDER AROUND A DRAWING TO *FRAME* IT.





IN THIS LAYOUT OUR HERO APPEAR TO BE SMASHING INTO THE PANEL BORDER. WHEN I DID THE FINAL PENCIL VERSION, I ALLOWED MORE SPACE IN FRONT OF THE FLYING FIGURE. **NEVER OBJECTIFY YOUR PANEL BORDERS!**

CROPPING IS SOMETHING YOU, AS THE ARTIST, SHOULD ALWAYS BE AWARE OF-- BUT THERE ARE PITFALLS! BE CAREFUL HOW YOU USE IT. IMPROPER CROPPING CAN CALL ATTENTION TO ITSELF IN THE WORST WAY (SEE EXAMPLE ABOVE) CROPPING IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF COMPOSITION--AND ONLY ONE OF MANY DECISIONS YOU WILL HAVE TO MAKE AS YOU DEVELOP YOUR LAYOUT IDEA. WHETHER YOU CROP **BEFORE** OR **AFTER** YOU DEVELOP YOUR DRAWINGS, ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT THE BORDER AROUND YOUR PANEL **LIMITS** WHAT YOUR READER **SEES**. BE SELECTIVE.



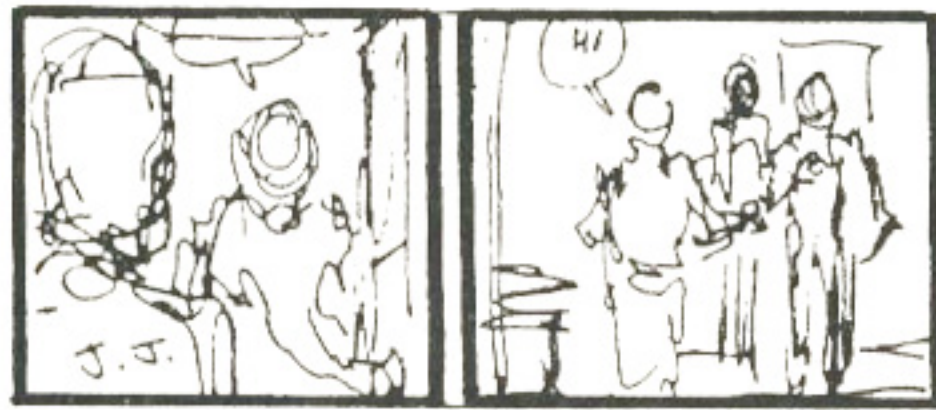


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OPENS DOOR



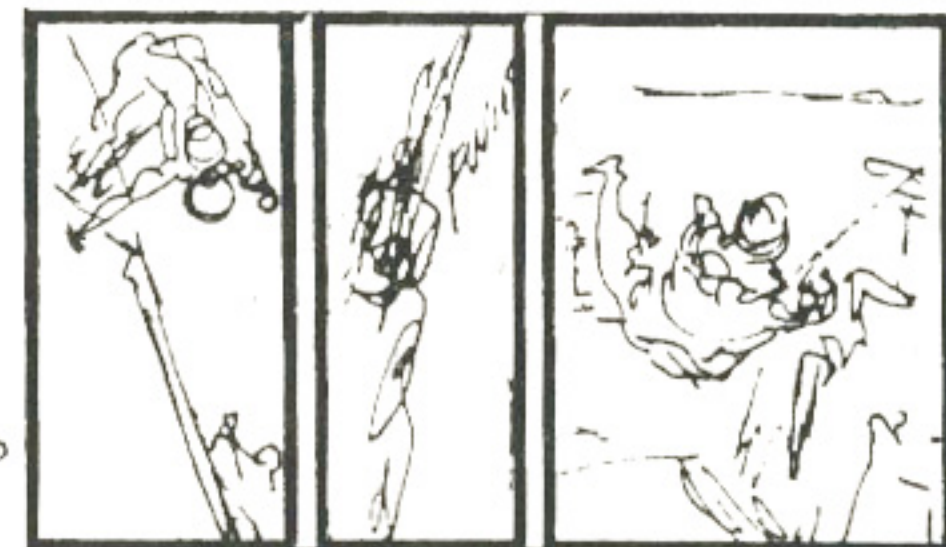
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INSIDE CAR



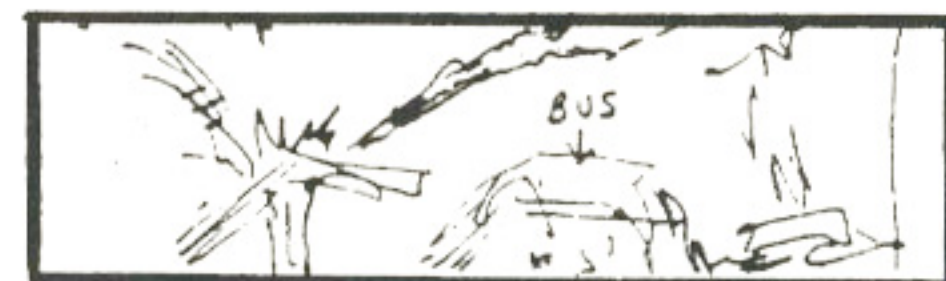
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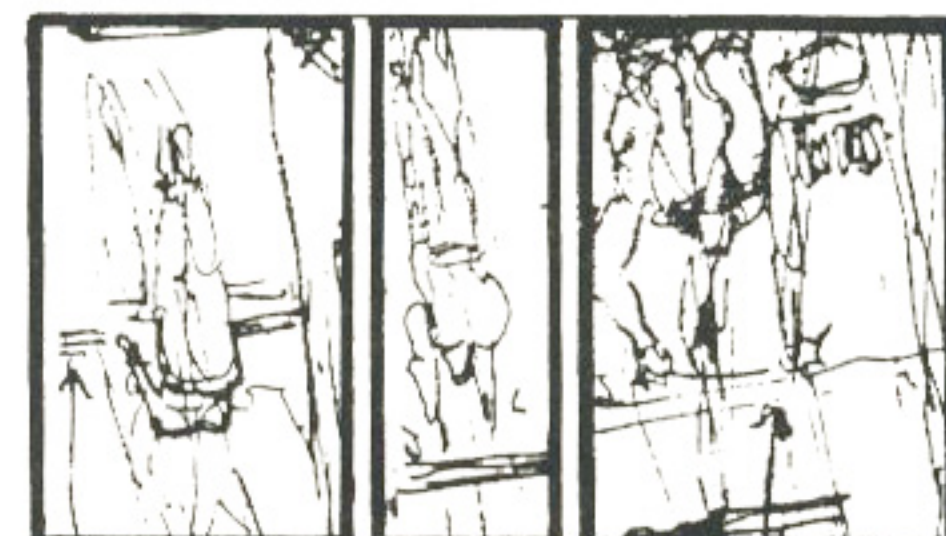
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I HATED THIS

AKO'



BLOG



DANISH EX. LINE SHOT.

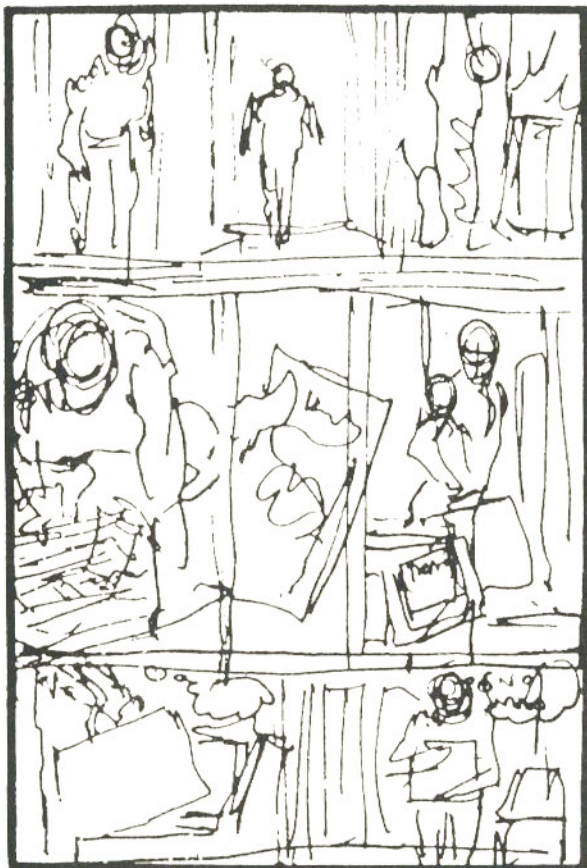
C/U UP-LIGHTING

FLAGPOLE RIG

SEQUENCE

THUMBNAIL SKETCHES ARE HELPFUL WHEN YOU'RE IN THE PLANNING STAGES. THESE ARE THE ACTUAL SIZES I WORKED IN. THE FINAL PENCIL PAGES CAME OUT SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. BECAUSE OF CHANGES I MADE IN THE PACING (OR "READING TIME") OF THE STORY. DON'T BE AFRAID TO CUT AND PASTE AT THIS STAGE. SINCE YOUR IDEAS ARE PUT DOWN QUICKLY, IT DOESN'T COST YOU MUCH IN TERMS OF TIME TO SCRAP A SHOT OR TWO OR NIX A WHOLE PAGE AND START OVER. I WORKED THESE OUT FAST (ABOUT 10-15 MINUTES EACH).

# BREAKING DOWN THE SCRIPT:



IN MOVIE MAKING, THE CONTINUITY IS HANDLED BY A SCRIPT SUPERVISOR, THIS PERSON BREAKS DOWN THE SCRIPT AND MAKES DETAILED NOTES OF THE REQUIREMENTS ("PROPS", CLOTHING, BITS.) OF EACH SCENE.

IN COMICS, THIS DECISION MAKING PROCESS IS DONE BY THE ARTIST, WHAT I DO IS MARK UP MY SCRIPT OR PLOT AND FILL THE BORDERS WITH NOTES. IF A SPECIFIC "PROP" IS REQUIRED IN THE SCENE, I CIRCLE IT EACH TIME IT WILL SHOW UP.

IN THE SEQUENCE ON THIS PAGE, I NEEDED A SUITCASE FULL OF MONEY, NOTE, AND A TRASH CONTAINER. I NOTED THAT THE TRASH CONTAINER HAD TO BE BIG ENOUGH TO FIT THE SUITCASE INTO. WHICH MEANT THAT I WOULD HAVE TO MAKE THE SUBJECT WALK OUT OF THE NARROW HALLWAY AND INTO AN ALCOVE WHERE THERE WOULD LOGICALLY BE SUCH A CONTAINER.





IN ORDER TO SHOW WHAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE NOTE, A CLOSE-UP WOULD BE NEEDED.

THIS IS HOW THE LOGIC WENT FOR BREAKING DOWN THE SCENE.

TWO PANELS TO SHOW THE SUBJECT LEAVING THE APARTMENT—FIRST AN *ESTABLISHING SHOT*, THEN A *REVERSE* AS HE WALKS DOWN THE HALL AND REALIZES HE FORGOT SOMETHING. AN *INSERT* TO SHOW THE SUITCASE "MAGICALLY" APPEAR NEXT TO HIM ( I DECIDED TO FOCUS ON THE SUITCASE, SO I MOVED MY CAMERA IN CLOSE.) THEN A *MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT*. ANGLING DOWN TO FEATURE THE OPEN SUITCASE FULL OF MONEY. (BACKGROUND IN THIS SHOT WOULD BE DISTRACTING, SO IT WAS ELIMINATED.) I LEFT ROOM IN THE CLOSE UP OF THE NOTE FOR THE WRITER TO SUPPLY DIALOGUE OR THOUGHT BALLOONS THAT WOULD "BRIDGE" THIS PANEL WITH THE SUCCEEDING ONE.

WHEN WORKING FROM A STORY PLOT, THE PROCESS IS A LITTLE MORE DIFFICULT SINCE THE WRITER DOES NOT BREAK UP THE PAGES INTO PANELS (THIS IS LEFT UP TO THE ARTIST) ALSO, ACTUAL DIALOGUE IS KEPT TO A MINIMUM—SO IT'S UP TO THE ARTIST TO BRING OUT THE EMOTIONS AND DRAMA THAT IS IMPLIED BY THE WRITER.

THE FIRST STEP SHOULD BE TO BREAK UP THE PAGE INTO PANEL. I DO THIS RIGHT ON THE TYPEWRITTEN PAGE



DOWN SHOT

BIG PANEL: SLOWMOTION LOWER UP SHOT

OFF-PANEL

PAGE 12

① He fires at her as she runs away. ② She stops in her tracks, now realizing they mean business.

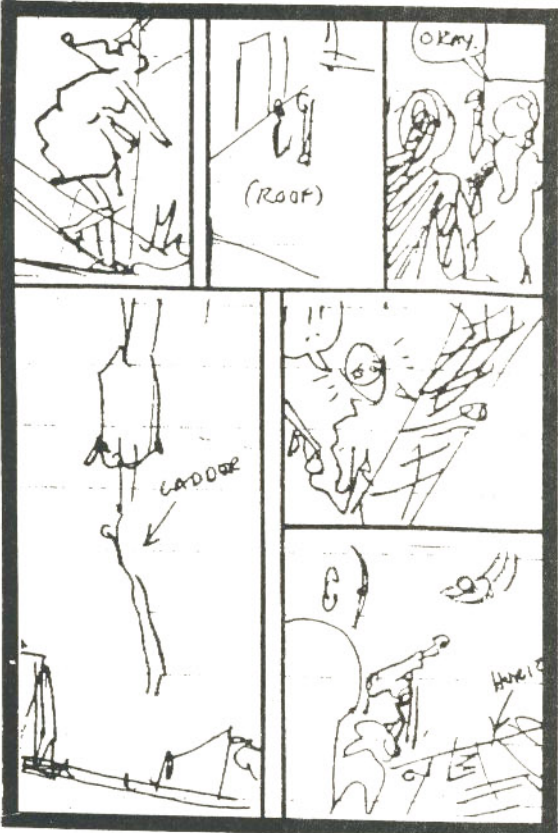
③ The main baddie tells her at gun point to give up--she says "okay - I really give up, I'll go quietly." She walks back to the rope ladder dangling from the copter--but she's still tough, he says "no tricks."

④ The kidnapers get her into the chopper, and just as they're about to take off, Iron Man yells from off-panel for them to stop. "Your mama!" yells the main baddie and opens fire.

BAD GUY REA

O.T.S. (CLOSE ON GUN)

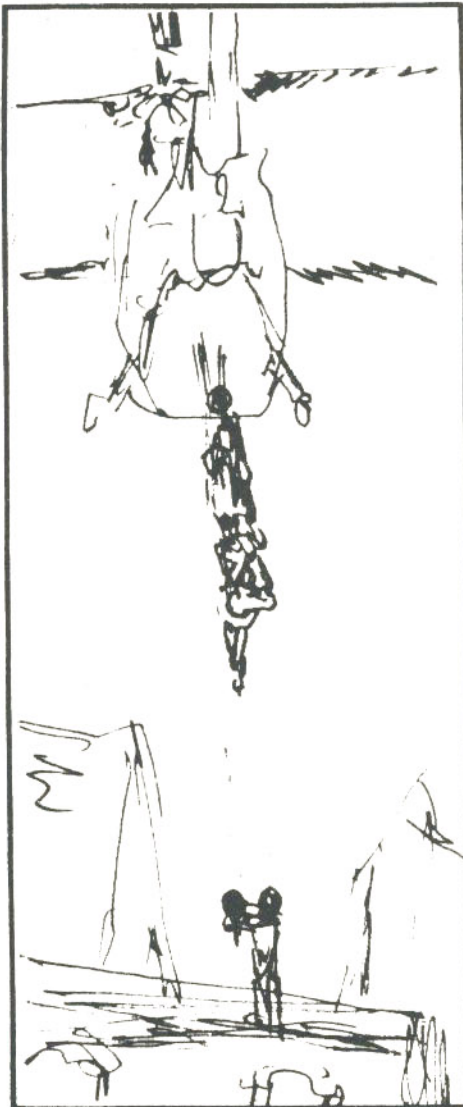
THUMBNAIL: DOWN SHOT



THE SECOND STEP IS TO DO A "THUMBNAIL" SKETCH.

IF YOU TAKE THINGS A STEP AT A TIME, THE WHOLE THING BECOMES A PROCESS OF SELECTION.

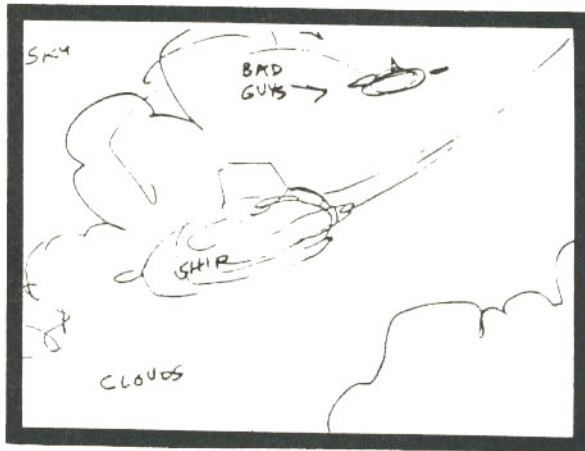
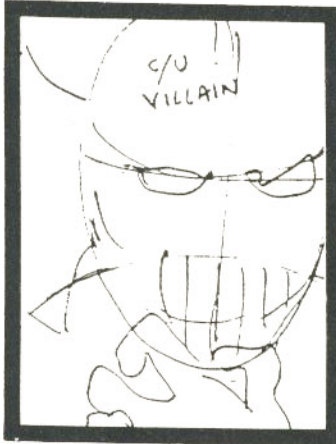
ONCE YOUR PAGE IS BROKEN DOWN INTO COMPONENTS (INDIVIDUAL PANELS) YOU CAN TACKLE THESE ONE BY ONE. EACH PANEL POSES A SEPARATE PROBLEM—SORT OF A QUESTION WITH MANY DIFFERENT ANSWERS.



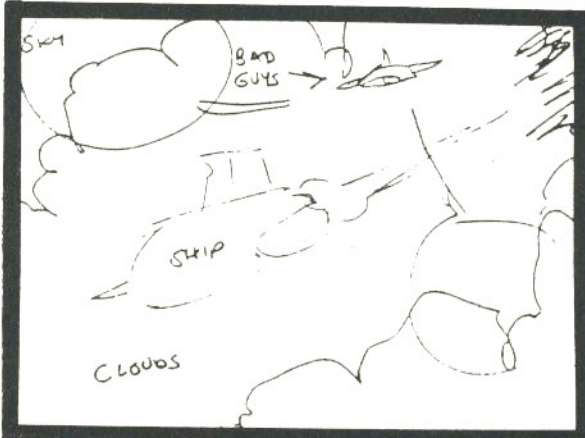
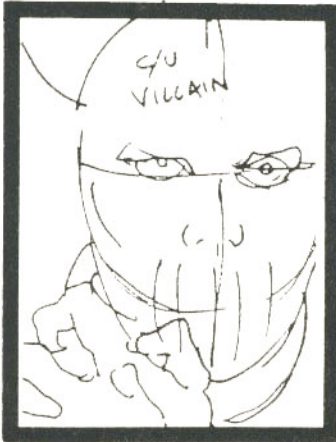




THERE ARE ALWAYS MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO SET UP YOUR SHOTS-- THE *RIGHT* ANGLE IS DETERMINED BY YOUR "CAMERA" POINT OF VIEW.



STAGE ONE IS LITTLE MORE THAN "DOODLES" WITH LITTLE ATTENTION PAID TO THE ACTUAL DRAWING.



IN STAGE TWO THE DRAWING IS LIGHTLY INDICATED BY BASIC SHAPES, THE IDEA BEGINS TO DEVELOP LIKE A PHOTOGRAPHED IMAGE COMING SLOWLY INTO FOCUS.

THE FINAL VERSION IS TRACED ON A LIGHT BOARD.

# FROM STORY PLOT TO FINISHED PAGE

THIS SCENE FROM A RECENT MARVEL COMIC WAS PENCILLED FROM A STUDY PLOT. THE FINAL DIALOGUE DIFFERED ONLY SLIGHTLY FROM THE PLOT VERSION. I HAVE INCLUDED BOTH THE LAYOUT VERSION AND THE FINISHED PAGE FOR COMPARISON.

PAGE 1- THE PANEL BORDERS HAVE A RIPPLE EFFECT INDICATING THAT THIS IS A FLASHBACK. A CONSIDERABLY YOUNGER JUDGE HORACE ROSENTHAL IS AT THE PODIUM OF AN EMPTY CLASSROOM, PUTTING PAPERS INTO A BRIEFCASE. FROM BEHIND HIM COMES A HESITANT VOICE, SAYING "YOUR HONOR? I JUST WANT TO THANK YOU FOR COMING TO LECTURE AS A GUEST IN OUR CLASS TODAY."

HE TURNS AND SEES A YOUNG MATT MURDOCK  
"REALLY. AND IS THAT ALL YOU WANTED TO SAY?"

"YES, SIR. NO, SIR. I THINK YOUR DECISION ON THE BERRINGER CASE WAS COMPLETELY WRONG, SIR."

"THEN WHY WAIT UNTIL CLASS WAS OVER TO SAY SO?" HE PACKS HIS PAPERS AS HE CONTINUES "IT'S BECAUSE YOU YOUNG PEOPLE HAVEN'T ENOUGH GUTS, THAT'S WHY. AFRAID TO SPEAK YOUR MIND, AFRAID TO DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO, WHAT YOU SHOULD DO, TO REMAIN TRUE TO YOURSELF. IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND THE CORRECTNESS OF WHAT YOU DO, THEN THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IS HALLOW, NOTHING ELSE MATTERS EXCEPT DOING WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN." HE LOOKS AT A DOWNCAST MURDOCK, SNAPS CLOSED HIS BRIEFCASE, AND THEN SAY "SO, WHERE DO YOU THINK I MADE MY 'MISTAKE', MR..."

"MURDOCK. MATT MURDOCK."





YOUR HONOR? JUDGE ROSENTHAL, SIR?



I JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR COMING TO LECTURE IN OUR CLASS TODAY.



REALLY? IS THAT ALL? YOU APPEAR TO HAVE A BONE TO PICK.



NO SIR, YES SIR. I THINK YOUR DECISION ON THE BERRINGER CASE WAS COMPLETELY WRONG, SIR.

IS THAT A FACT?



THEN WHY WAIT UNTIL CLASS WAS OVER TO SAY SO? DON'T ANSWER...

IT'S BECAUSE YOU YOUNG LAW STUDENTS HAVEN'T ENOUGH GUTS, THAT'S WHY.

AFRAID TO SPEAK YOUR MIND. AFRAID TO DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

...WHAT YOU SHOULD DO TO REMAIN TRUE TO YOURSELF.



IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN YOURSELF THEN THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IS HOLLOW. NOTHING MATTERS EXCEPT WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN.



SO...WHAT WAS MY "ERROR", MR...?



MURDOCK, MATT MURDOCK.

**MORE NEXT ISSUE!**

PLUS SOME SENSATIONAL (NEVER PUBLISHED) PAGES!