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ALL "BLEED" ART MUST EXTEND TO THE OUTERMOST DOTTED LINE.

ALL LETTERING AND ESSENTIAL ART MUST FALL WITHIN THE SOLID "LIVE AREA".

The Art of

COMIC BOOK

Inking™



TO CREATE TWO-PAGE SPREAD, CUT ONE BOARD ALONG RIGHT HAND TRIM (INDICATED BY BLACK CROP MARKS), AND CUT ANOTHER BOARD ALONG ITS LEFT HAND TRIM. BUTT CUT EDGES TOGETHER, TAPE ON BACK.

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CUT ANOTHER BOARD ALONG ITS LEFT HAND TRIM. BUTT CUT EDGES TOGETHER, TAPE ON BACK.

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editor • Chris Warner
book design • Debra Bailey

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THE ART OF COMIC-BOOK INKING™

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David Olbrich gets his own paragraph, because without Dave's representation, *The Art of Comic-Book Inking* would not have been published. His wisdom, endurance, and professionalism were a constant source of encouragement. Thanks, Dave — "You da man!"

And a very special thanks to all the artists who contributed to this project. Without their efforts, this book would be pretty lame! My deepest appreciation to Steve Rude. Over the years, inking Steve has been the hardest and most satisfying work I've done in comics. His contribution to this book cannot be overstated. Steve, thank you for taking me to "art school"!

This book is dedicated to the memory of Nestor Redondo.

Nestor's art has always been an inspiration to me. When he agreed to contribute to this book, I was thrilled and honored. Unfortunately, he passed away before the book was completed. His elegant ink line and incredible drawing ability were equaled only by his strength of character. Do yourself a favor and track down his work. You're in for a treat.

This book is also dedicated to hard-working inkers everywhere.

Most inkers toil their entire careers in anonymity. The very nature of the work demands their invisibility, because the inker's first priority is to bring out the attributes of the penciller, sometimes at the expense of the inker's own artistic expression. So if you're a fan or a comics professional, take an opportunity to acknowledge your favorite inkers' contributions. I guarantee they'll appreciate it!

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FOREWORD

What is a Comic-Book Inker?

“What does an inker do? Are you responsible for the coloring? Don’t you just trace over the lines? How much of the linework is done by computer?”

You would not believe how many times I’ve heard these questions in my quarter-century comic-book inking career. By writing this book, I hope to demystify a very important part of the comic-book creative process. If you’ve purchased this book solely for the art by our spectacular roster of contributors, you’ll get your money’s worth. But *The Art of Comic-Book Inking* is mainly intended for —

- people who want to become inkers
- working inkers who haven’t had professional training
- pencillers who want their work to be more inker-friendly
- the majority of editors working in comics today

Inkers are ultimately responsible for the stylistic look of most comic-book art, including that uniquely American genre, superhero comics.

Inking is important largely because pencil lines are much harder to reproduce than bold, black line art. It’s also more difficult to create a variety of line weights and textures with a pencil than with a brush or crow-quill pen.

Of course, printing and imaging technologies are more sophisticated now than during the Golden Age of comics (1930s–1940s), so it’s possible to reproduce pencil art more accurately than ever before. But the inked line is still easiest to reproduce and — in an ironically high-tech twist — generally most compatible with computer coloring. The contour ink line continues to be essential to the art form of comics.

Following are the comic-book inker’s primary job responsibilities as I see them. These goals are the foundation of my inking approach:

1. The inker’s main purpose is to translate the penciller’s graphite pencil lines into reproducible, black, ink lines.

This goal seems so basic and self-evident that it’s sometimes overlooked. Nevertheless, it should be the inker’s number-one priority.

2. The inker must honor the penciller’s original intent while adjusting any obvious mistakes.

Staying true to the integrity of the pencil work is very important. However, sometimes even the most godlike pencil artists make mistakes. The inker is responsible for identifying these mistakes and fixing them when possible. The inked line is what’s reproduced in the finished comic book, since pencil lines are erased after inking. So the excuse that a mistake was “in the pencils” just doesn’t cut the mustard!

3. The inker determines the look of the finished art.

Inking involves many decisions about line weights, contour styles, solid blacks, textures, and other artistic concerns. These combined decisions result in what most people visualize when they think of comic-book art — i.e., inked pages. Line weights (see Chapter III) are especially important, since they factor into almost every aspect of drawing. The use of varying line weights is a defining element of comic-book inking, particularly in mainstream American comics.

For those of you considering a career as a comics inker, be forewarned that inkers are often underappreciated and overlooked when the art

in a comic is being lauded. Let's be realistic: the star of the comic-book creative team is the penciller. Most people buy the comic to see his or her art. Remember, job responsibility number two is to make the penciller look good. The better you do that job, the more your penciller will appreciate you — and the more chance you'll have of consistently working on good projects with talented pencil artists.

For pencillers reading this book to get some inking insights, my main comment is that *inking is not tracing*. If you expect the inks to be exactly like the pencils, you should just use a harder lead and dig grooves in the paper when you draw, then pour ink on the page and wipe off the excess.

I worked with a penciller for a while who had (and still has) a tendency to get facial proportions kind of squirrely — the eyes out of place, or the nose out of line with the mouth. I was fixing them in the inks, and he told me not to. He wanted me to ink it exactly the way he'd drawn it. When I told him his proportions were wrong, he said he didn't care. "That's part of my charm!" was his reply. Unfortunately, his ego interfered with the art. There's a difference between idiosyncratic art and sloppy draftsmanship, and inkers as well as pencillers should be able to tell them apart.

Inkers can be thought of as another pair of eyes. They can help the art read more clearly by fixing problems that the penciller may not have seen. They are part of the art team and will have their own creative statement to make. As long as they stay true to the pencils, the penciller should appreciate their contribution.

The other group of comic-book professionals I hope will read this book are editors. Since editors assemble art teams, they should understand the value of a good inker. The right combination can yield awesome results, and the wise editor has the opportunity to orchestrate this magic.

The wrong stylistic combination, on the other hand, can be disastrous even if both penciller and inker are brilliant.

The inker should be part of the creative process from the very beginning. Ideally, an inker should be selected before the penciller has started drawing since the inking helps determine the art's overall style. Editors should also listen to their pencillers when choosing inkers. I'm amazed by how often editors totally disregard pencillers' wish lists, instead picking inkers (apparently at random) from their usual "stable." Good pencillers know what suits their own art the best — and good editors know that if they hook up two artists who want to work together, that team is likely to be more motivated and will produce better work.

Although I wrote the how-to section of this book, that doesn't mean I'm saying that mine is the only way to ink. It's one man's approach. Art, by its nature, is intuitive. That's why I included contributions from top artists in the comics industry — to help give an idea of how the same basic techniques can be applied to a wide variety of styles.

Some of the reasons why I first wrote this book back in 1997 were to make reviewing portfolios a little easier and to help take the mystery out of the inking process, especially for non-inker comics professionals. Since then, I have seen a noticeable improvement in portfolios, but when it comes to understanding the inking process, some comics pros (including editors) are still faking it. If you're a pro and are reading this book, I'm not referring to you, but you probably know someone who is inker challenged, so please help them out by recommending this book to them. You might even save a starving inker — like me!

—Gary Martin, Portland OR

THE MARVEY COMICS BOOTH AT
THE COMICS CONVENTION.

THANKS FOR LOOKING AT MY INKS.
I'VE WORKED IN COMICS SINCE 1980,
BUT I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING FOR
MARVEY IN AWHILE.

WE'RE NOT FAMILIAR WITH
YOUR STUFF. WHO ELSE HAVE
YOU WORKED FOR?



I'VE DONE A LOT OF WORK FOR B.C.,
DARKEST HORSEY, AND MILDSTORM.
I WAS NOMINATED FOR A HARVEY
AWARD, AND I AUTHORED A BOOK
ABOUT COMIC-BOOK INKING. AS
YOU CAN SEE, MY INFLUENCES
ARE FOSTER AND RAYMOND.



YOUR WORK'S NOT BAD. BUT IT
NEEDS TO BE MORE-- GRITTY.

THAT'S REALLY VAGUE. WHAT
DO YOU MEAN BY GRITTY?

DON'T QUESTION OUR JUDGE-
MENT! WE'RE MARVEY EDITORS!



NEXT!

WHO'S FOSTER
AND RAYMOND?

BEATS ME!



MARTIN '00

GLOSSARY

Below is a list of terms commonly used in describing comic-book art. Because these words can mean different things to different people, I'm providing my own definitions — so at least you'll know what I mean when I use them.

blue-line: as used here, art printed (or drawn) in non-photographable blue

contour line: the outline of a figure or object; also known as a *holding line*

crosshatching: sets of parallel lines that cross at angles to form a textural pattern

crow quill (or croquille): a type of metal dip-pen nib useful for sharp, fine linework

cursive line: a flowing, elegant ink line that is thin on one end, thicker in the middle, then thin again on the other end

dead-weight line: a line with a consistent width, not varying in thickness

feathering: a series of lines that are thin on one end and thicker at the other end and often connecting

halftone: gray values transformed into small, solid black dots that can be printed to reproduce these values; shading film can add these tones to line art

line art: art composed entirely of black graphics, as in the ink illustrations used in most comics; compare with continuous tone art, such as a painting or photograph

line weight: the thickness of an ink line

loose: as used here, an inking style that is less controlled and more spontaneous and free-flowing, or a pencilling style that is rough and sketchy

negative space: white space, as on an inked page

Rapidograph: a popular brand of technical pen, often used as a generic term for any technical pen

slick: a controlled inking style that is smooth and precise

spotting blacks: deciding where to place solid blacks on an incomplete pencilled page and then filling them in

terse line: a contour line that is thin on one end and thicker at the opposite end

tight: as used here, a pencilling style that is clear and precise

white-out: a thinned white paint used for making corrections to inked art

zip: clear, sticky-backed shading film with dots, lines, patterns, or textures printed on the surface, used to achieve gray tones and effects over line art; named after Zip-a-Tone, a sadly defunct brand of such film. These effects are now commonly added to electronically scanned art by computer.

***“I feel that when I’ve done my
job correctly, my contribution
should be invisible. Hopefully, unless
there’s a return to check the credit
box, the reader should have forgotten
I’ve ever been there.”***

—Terry Austin



ALL "BLEED" ART MUST EXTEND TO THE OUTER MARGINS

ESSENTIAL ART MUST FALL WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE BOARD

The Art of

COMIC BOOK

Inking



USE ART BOARD ALONG ITS LEFT HAND TRIM. BUTT CUT TOGETHER, TAP & BACK.



I

BEFORE YOU START

Learn to Draw!

A prerequisite to becoming a comic-book inker is *knowing how to draw*. The process of inking a comic-book page includes making dozens of drawing decisions as you translate the pencils into inks. You must also be able to identify and fix mistakes when you come across them.

Above all, *do not make comic books your only source of art training!* Superhero anatomy in particular is exaggerated and stylized. You need to learn how to draw real people before you experiment with developing your own style, whether exaggerated or naturalistic.

I strongly recommend taking some life-drawing classes from an art school, local studio, or community college. Drawing from a live model is the best way to learn about the human figure. If this is not an option for you, there are many fine anatomy books designed for artists as well as countless sources of visual information on art history and illustration techniques.

Get out and draw the world around you, too. Public parks, cafés, zoos — anywhere you can hang around long enough to fill a few sketchbook pages.

Study the Real Thing

Of course, you can still learn from comic-book art in addition to other sources. The best way to study inked art up close is to collect original pages. The original can give you much more information than a page printed in a comic book. This can be an expensive form of education, but you can cut costs by buying “dialogue pages” without big action or splash panels. You can usually pick up such pages from professional artists at local comics conventions, or sometimes from art dealers.

After you've obtained some good-quality original art, you can practice by putting tracing paper over the page and trying to ink on top of the existing lines. This is good control practice, and it helps you get into the inker's head to figure out why he or she made certain inking decisions.

Do Your Math

Generally speaking, artists and mathematics don't mix very well. But like it or not, before you launch into a career as a comic-book inker, you need to think about how much money you'll make. A good starting rate for inking is \$100 per page. If you can only ink one page a day and are fortunate enough to get a regular gig of 22 pages a month (plus covers), that adds up to about \$28,000 a year. Subtract one-third for the I.R.S. because you will now be self-employed and paying quarterly tax estimates. If you're single and still living at home, this isn't bad. But if you have a family and a mortgage, you should now qualify for food stamps! At the other end of the scale, if you've been inking for a while and can do two pages a day at a top rate of \$150 per page, that's about \$80,000 a year. Only the best and the fastest can do this.

A word about royalties. Only a select few creators are lucky enough to receive royalty payments on a regular basis; the days of the giant royalty check are long gone. This is not income you can count on.

II GETTING STARTED

Tools of the Trade

You'll need the right equipment if you want to ink professionally. Following is my list of useful tools and supplies. As you experiment, you may find that you prefer another brand of brush or ink. Use whatever works best for you.

Drawing table: An adjustable surface angle is a must.

Good light source: A full-spectrum, Chromalux light bulb helps reduce eyestrain, and a swing-arm, adjustable lamp puts the light where you need it.

Inking brushes: Winsor & Newton series 7 or Raphael 8404, both in numbers 2 or 3.

Crow-quill pens: Hunt 102 is the industry standard; use Hunt 107 for a flatter line, Hunt 512 for a bolder line. Rotring pens combine crow-quill tips with ink cartridges like those in technical pens.

India (black) ink: Higgins, FW, Black Magic, or Pelikan waterproof drawing ink.

Erasers: Higgins, Magic Rub, or Staedtler Puraplast.

Technical pens: Staedtler disposable or Rotring Rapidoliner, in sizes 0.3, 0.35, and 0.7 mm.

White ink: FW White and Pro White (opaque watercolors) work on most black inks; standard white-outs like Liquid Paper do not.

Nonphoto-blue pencil: Also called "non-repro blue." Look for one that won't show up on photocopies.

Black crayon or grease pencil: Used for a rough or "toothy" effect.

Old toothbrush: For splatter effects.

Old sponge: Good for adding texture.

Tracing paper: Handy for practice inks and inking on overlay. Some types repel ink, so try out different brands.

Masking film: Also known as frisket; for masking off art when you apply splatter or other effects. You can buy this ready-made or make



your own by very lightly spraying repositionable glue on one side of a sheet of tracing paper. (Be extra careful with the do-it-yourself version!)

Zip-a-Tone: A brand name for shading film, often used as a generic term; other brands include Format and Chartpak. Shading film comes in a wide variety of dot patterns and textures printed on a transparent sheet with adhesive on the back side.

Ruler: The see-through kind with a beveled edge is best; a T-square can also come in handy.

Circle and ellipse templates: As many sizes and shapes as you can get your hands on, to aid in inking everything from the moon to a frying pan.

French curves: Two or three different shapes.

Compass: Get one that'll hold a technical pen.

X-acto knife: You'll need this for cutting things like masking film and Zip-a-Tone.

White artist's tape: For taping together double-page spreads; also for covering up the occasional large ink splotch, especially in gutters.

Lap board: Good for erasing pages and X-acto cutting.

Draftsman's brush: Brushing eraser crumbs off your pages is better than blowing them off. (Spitting on pages is bad!)

Container of water: Keep one close at hand for rinsing out brushes and diluting ink.

Paper towels: Use them to wipe off brushes, blot sponges, or in case of emergency.

Beverage: Your choice. Lime-Aid out of a peanut-butter jar is a Terry Austin fave!

Brushes vs. Pens

What are the advantages of inking with a brush over inking with a crow-quill pen? Versatility, for one: A brush is capable of both a finer line and a much bolder line than a pen. It can also hold more ink, so you don't need to dip into the inkwell as often.

Despite that, pen lines take longer to dry than brush lines because the crow-quill pen lays down a thicker bead of ink on the paper. It's easy to forget where these wet lines are and plop your hand right down on top of them, thus smearing your page all to heck! With a brush, you can ink an entire panel in one go, then move on to the next one. With a pen, you have to ink part of the panel, then work on different areas of the page while you wait for your lines to dry.

The main advantages of the crow-quill pen are that it takes less time to learn how to use and you can ink faster with it. (Remember, speed = \$\$\$!) Also, if you like a harder-looking line, this is the instrument for you.

It takes longer to learn how to control a brush — much longer. It took me about three years of inking professionally before my brush started doing what I wanted it to. Inking comic books with a brush is an old tradition, but I fear it's a dying art. The satisfaction of mastering this craft is well worth the time and effort involved.

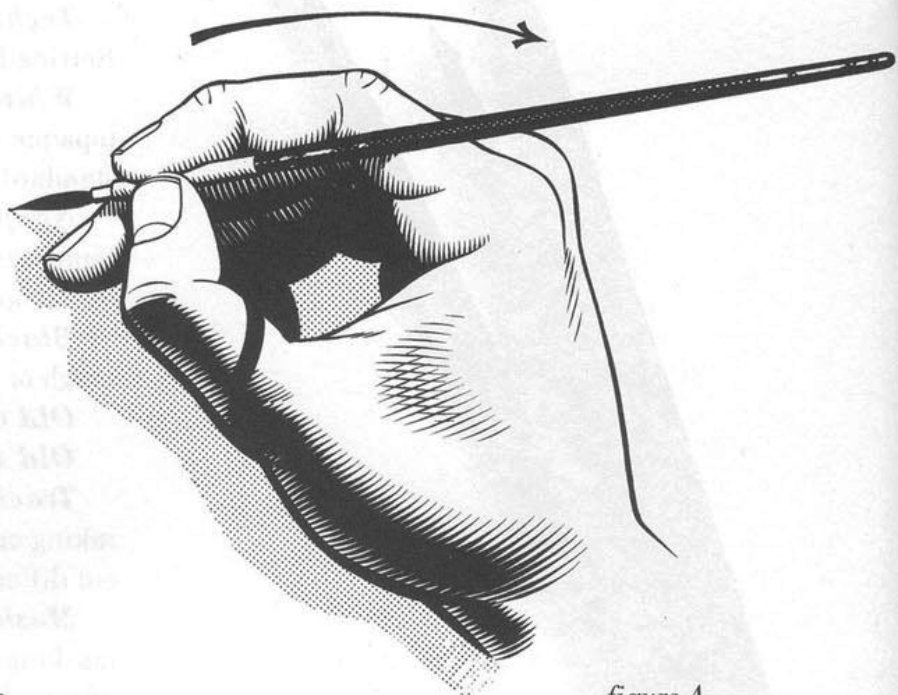


figure A

Inking With a Brush

First, saturate your brush with ink. Wipe it off two or three times on the ink-bottle rim, then roll it on a scrap of paper to get a fine point. Grasp it between your thumb and forefinger and rest it on your middle finger (see fig. A). Plant the side of your hand (at the wrist) on the paper; this is the pivot point. Now rest your middle finger down on the paper. Do not move the brush or your fingers when inking — only move your wrist at the pivot point with the brush in this locked position. Ink lines from left to right in a horizontal direction, using the natural curve of your wrist. (This is for a right-handed person; you lefties do the opposite.) Just rotate the page as you work to keep the lines horizontal. Some inkers like to go vertically by dragging their hand down the page when they ink a line. Again, experiment until you find the working method most comfortable for you.

The secret to controlling your brush is controlling the ink flow. Bold lines need more ink in the brush and more pressure on the brush stroke. Thin lines and detail work take very little ink in the brush and a very light touch on the brush stroke. Don't do detail work with a brush full of ink.

For detail work on a face (e.g., a nostril), first outline the shape, then fill it in. Don't try to do this with one stroke; you risk losing the shape the penciller has put down, thus changing the features.

Do not use technical pens or felt-tip markers when inking figures. Tech pens produce a flat, dead line that will not add variety or life to your figure work. Markers contain a different kind of ink that will fade over time, making your originals green and worthless.

For a more controlled technique when feathering (see Chapter VI), use slow, even strokes and ink into the blacks, thin to thick. For a looser approach, increase your hand speed and ink out of the blacks when feathering, starting at the

thick end and moving toward the thin end of each feather line.

All the lines in figures 1–13 were inked with a Winsor & Newton series 7 #2 brush and reproduced at original size. These are some of the types of lines you will be inking in comics, whether with a pen or a brush. Practice them over and over again until you're sick of doing them — then do some more! Look for consistency in line quality and spacing. When you've started getting a handle on these line techniques, you'll be ready to ink figures.



figure 1

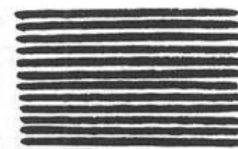


figure 2



figure 3

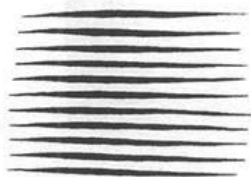


figure 4



figure 5

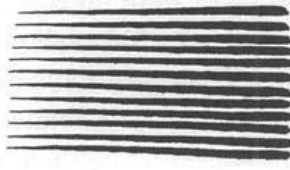


figure 6

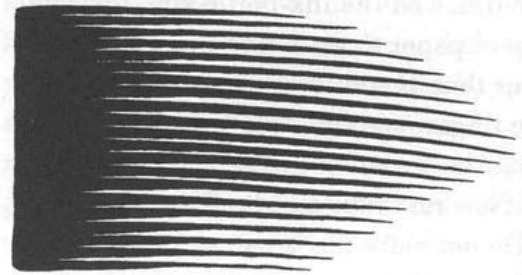


figure 11

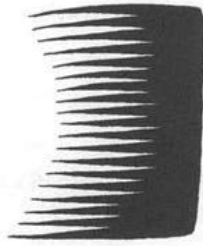


figure 7

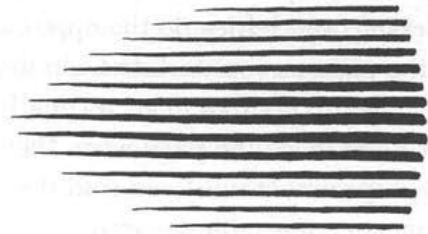


figure 12



figure 8

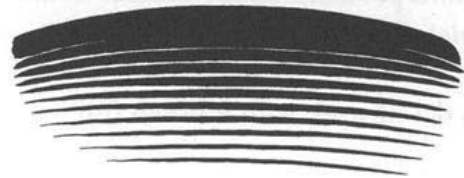


figure 13



figure 9



figure 10

III LINE WEIGHTS

Establishing the Light Source

The first thing you need to do when inking a comic-book panel is determine which direction the light is coming from. This is most important because it's the cornerstone of all your subsequent line-weight decisions. The penciller's placement of shadows will eliminate some of your guesswork. But (and this is a big "but") sometimes there are no clues as to the direction of the light. In such cases, our hero — the inker — must step in to save the day!

The easiest way to indicate the light source is simply to use a heavy line weight on the dark side of an object and a thinner line weight on its light side. This works with almost everything: a leg, arm, or body; a lamppost or telephone pole; a tree, shrubbery, or even the castle Anthrax. The exceptions are objects that are not solid, such as clouds, fire, or smoke.

This pencil drawing of a post sticking in the ground (fig. 14) is flat and indistinct. By adding a heavy line weight and a shadow, not only have we planted the post firmly into the ground, we've also given it mass and form. The same technique can be used with figures. Notice how the little man in figure 14 looks more three-dimensional when he's inked with varying line weights and a shadow.

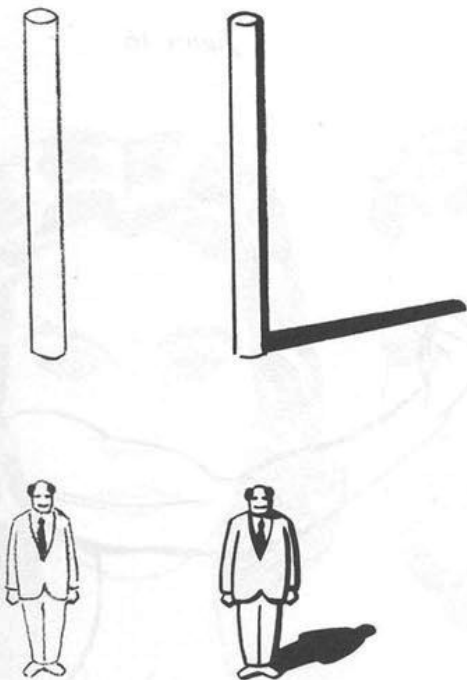


figure 14

Now look at the arm in figure 15. Even though this arm is inked, it still looks flat and weak. In figures 16–18, the arrows show which direction light is coming from. Adding heavy line weights to the dark side of each arm suggests weight and volume.

Varying your line weights works like a charm when there's only one light source in a panel. But when the penciller has added a secondary light source to a figure, your line-weight decisions become more complicated. I almost always base my line weights on the primary light source, then use the secondary light source to help determine how to handle highlights and other such details.

For the most part, light sources should stay consistent from panel to panel within each scene. Shadows on figures and objects shouldn't move around randomly. Also watch out for lighting schemes that may conflict with common sense and/or information in the story — for example, shadows pointing west when characters are riding toward an off-panel sunset. Keep in mind, though, that comic-book art often uses “inconsistent” lighting for dramatic effect, and you don't want to undercut the drama just for the sake of establishing “realistic” light sources. If you do find lighting inconsistencies, always consult with your editor or penciller before making significant changes to the pencil art.

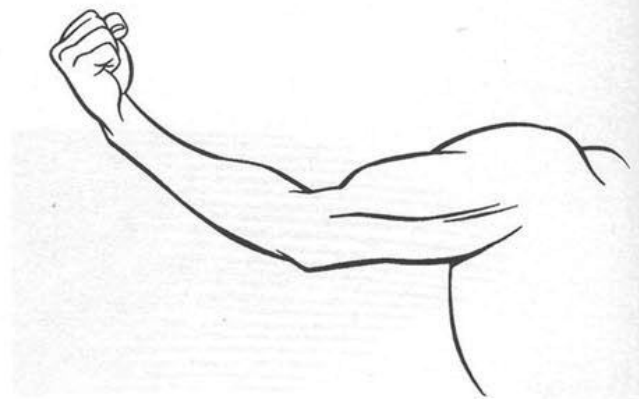


figure 15

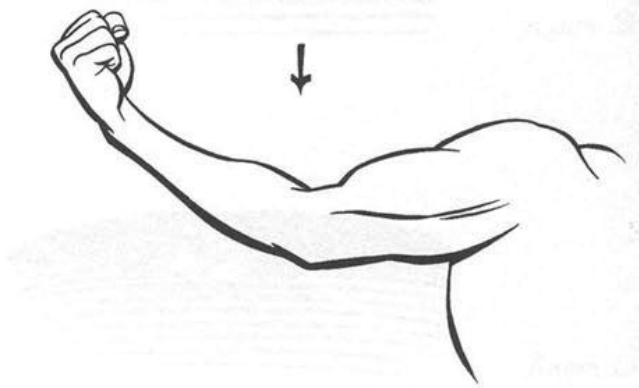


figure 16

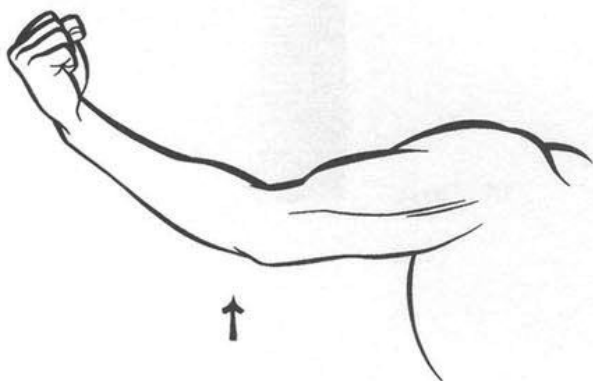


figure 18

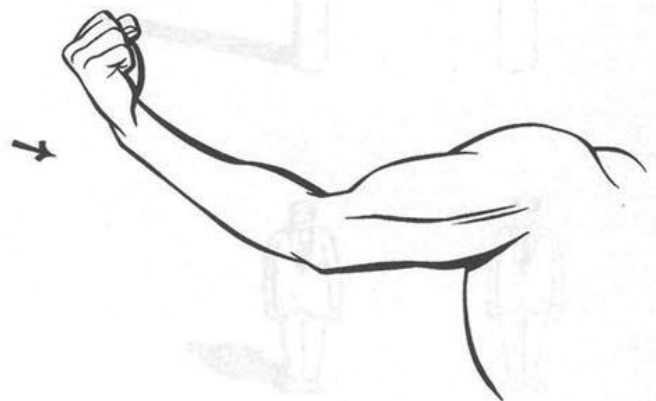


figure 17

Inking Faces

The importance of getting the faces right when inking a comic book cannot be overemphasized. Facial expressions communicate most of the emotional drama in a story. Besides, comic-book readers may miss some of the art details on a page, but they always look at faces!

One of the things I enjoy most about being an inker is working with excellent pencil artists like Steve Rude. Look at the pencilled heads (fig. B, fig. C) that Steve has provided. They're very well drawn, but with the techniques we learned in Chapter II, we can add mass, form, and volume.

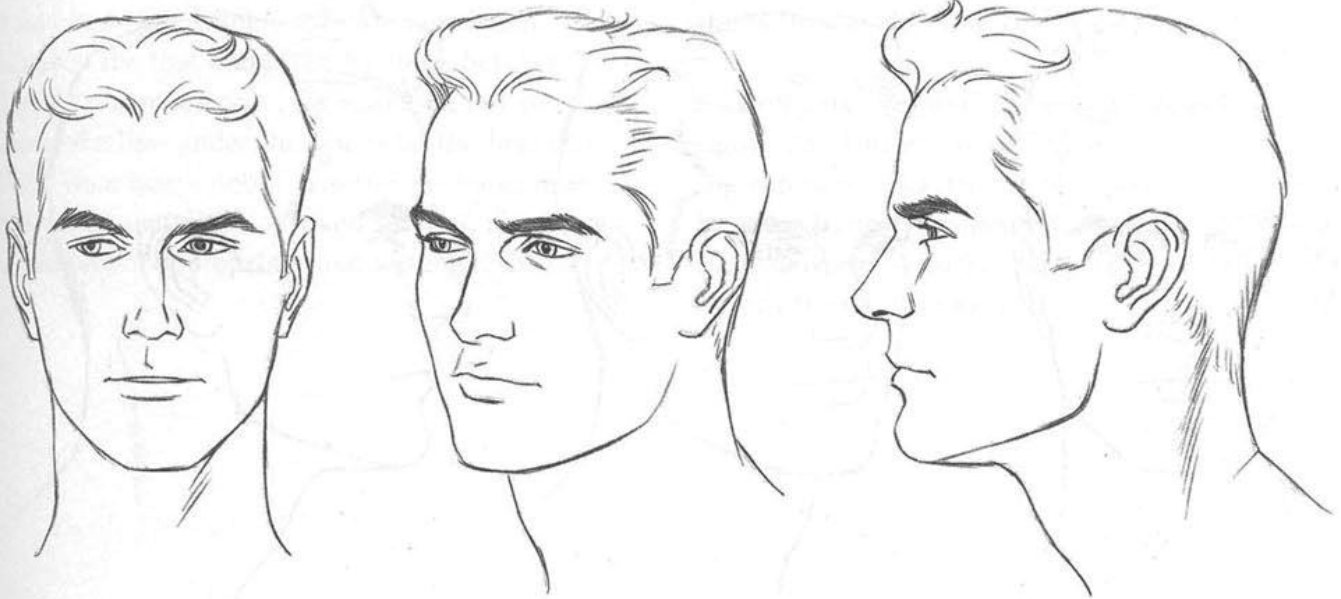


figure B

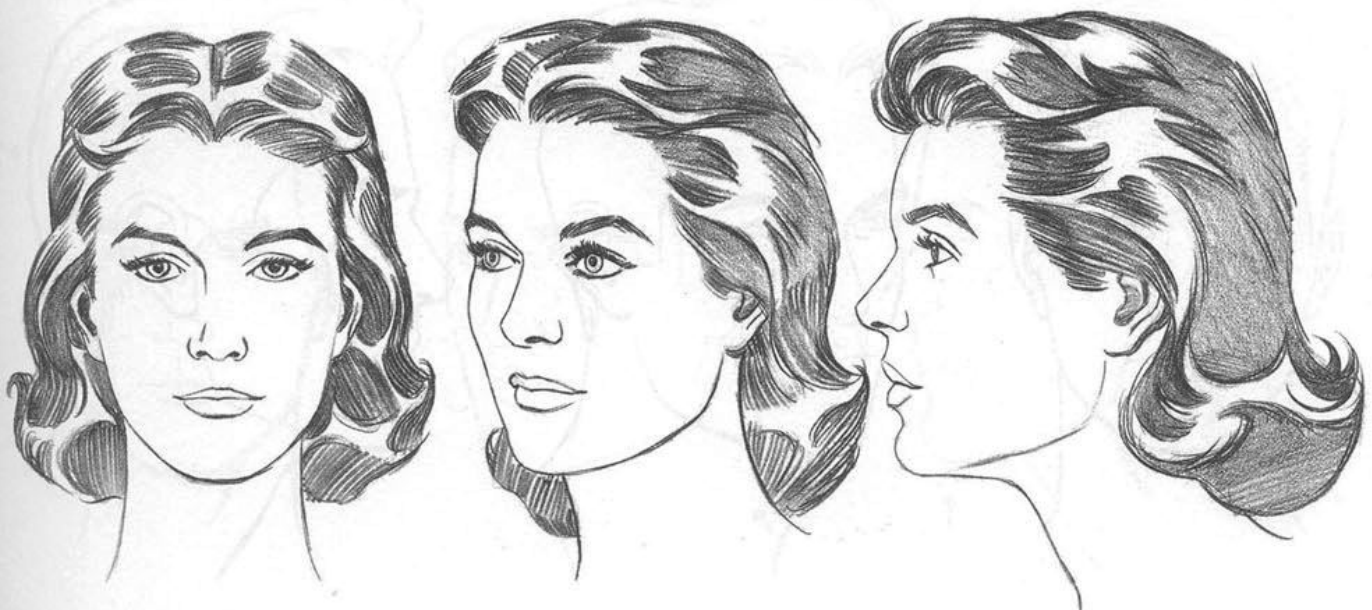


figure C

In figures 19–21, we decide that the light is coming from above, which is pretty standard daytime lighting in comics. We then add heavier line weights accordingly: the underside of the top eyelid, under the nose, under the top lip, under the bottom lip, and under the jaw line. These are the natural places where shadows fall on a face lit

from above. We can't add shading in these places without changing the pencil drawing, but we can suggest shadows by using heavy line weights.

In the three-quarter angle (fig. 20), we must modify our approach since some of the face's profile is exposed: the forehead, eye socket,



figure 19



figure 20

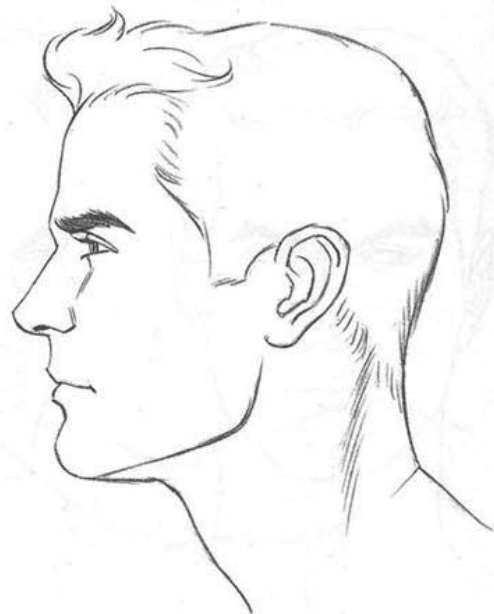


figure 21

cheekbone, and jaw line. Notice how different line weights in these areas help define the face's shape and lighting in the following manner.

- forehead: facing light source (thin line)
- eye socket: in shadow (heavy line)
- cheekbone: top facing light (thin line); bottom in shadow (heavy line)
- jaw line: in deep shadow (extra-heavy line)

With a full profile (fig. 21), these line weights are even more important. Again, note where they are and how their thicknesses are consistent. You don't want the line under the lip to be heavier than that under the nose, for example, but you do want the line under the jaw to be the heaviest weight. Note how a detail like the ear looks more three-dimensional in the inked version, thanks to the addition of appropriate line weights.

Check out figures 22–24 to see how we can shift the light source (indicated by arrows) simply by shifting the heavy line weights to the dark side of each head. Figure 22 uses a sidelight, whereas figures 23–24 are lit from below.

Underlighting can help create a spooky atmosphere, a shocked expression, and more. For an underlit look, reverse the line weights used in the top-lit face: everything that was thin is now thick, and everything that was thick becomes thin. Don't forget details such as a thick line on the bottom eyelid and less black in the nostrils.

Compare the profile shot in figure 24 with figure 21. Notice how different the same drawing can look when line weights are reversed. We haven't changed the pencils to establish various light sources — we just suggest them with the inker's friend, line weight!



figure 22



figure 23

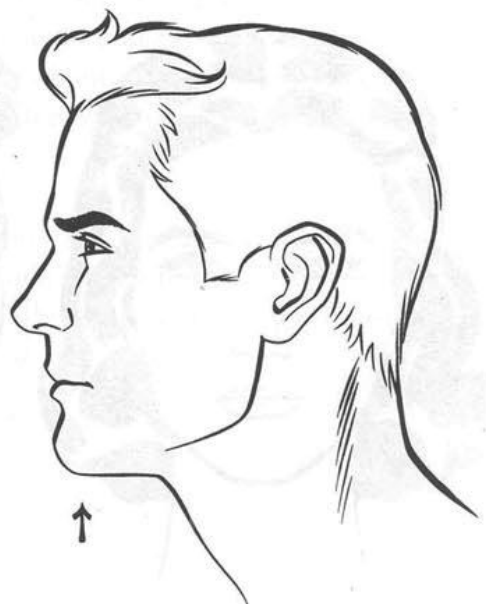


figure 24

When inking a female face (figs. 25–27), the same rules apply — but even more so because idealized female features are simpler than male faces. In fact, you can make faces more feminine by adding extra thickness to the upper eyelid and below the bottom lip to give the appearance of eye makeup and fuller lips. In the three-quarter angle (fig. 26), note how the cheekbone and jaw lines are rounder and less angular than those on the male face. This suggests a soft, fleshy texture. The same rules apply in the full profile (fig. 27), but the angles are rounder.

Inking Hair

While we're looking at figures 19–27, let's talk about hair. Hair happens to be one of the more difficult things to translate into black ink because its texture is wispy and solid at the same time.

Blond hair is comparatively simple. Your lines should be cursive and elegant, with weights determined by the primary light source.

Dark hair is trickier. Look at the female heads (figs. 25–27). I inked their hair with three different techniques. For figure 25, I used a dry brush (see Chapter X), which gives a very soft, almost frizzy look. In figure 26, I employed the bolder approach of massing together the blacks, producing a wetter or slicker look. And finally, in figure 27, I used feathering for a more heavily styled, “salon” look.

With dark hair, it's especially important to follow the penciller's white highlight patterns, or negative space. These patterns actually define the hair's shape, so pay as much attention to them as to the black patterns.



figure 25



figure 26



figure 27

IV CONTOUR LINES

The contour line plays many roles in comic-book art, including —

- “holding” the color inside figures and objects
- delineating form
- indicating texture
- acting as a design element
- creating the illusion of depth within panels

That last function is another crucial point that tends to get overlooked. You can add depth to a panel simply by outlining foreground figures with heavy contour lines, inking the middle ground with medium-weight lines, and using fine lines for backgrounds. This helps give the impression that objects in the panel are on separate planes, some closer to the reader and some further away.

There are different styles of contour lines, each of which can have a very different effect on the same pencil art. When you work with a penciller for the first time, it's important to determine which style works best for that penciller. I highly recommend that you communicate with your penciller about what kind of approach you should take. Remember, the penciller and inker are a team.

To examine a few contour styles, let's start with Steve Rude's pencilled male figure (fig. D). It's intentionally vague, offering few clues about light source or contour style.

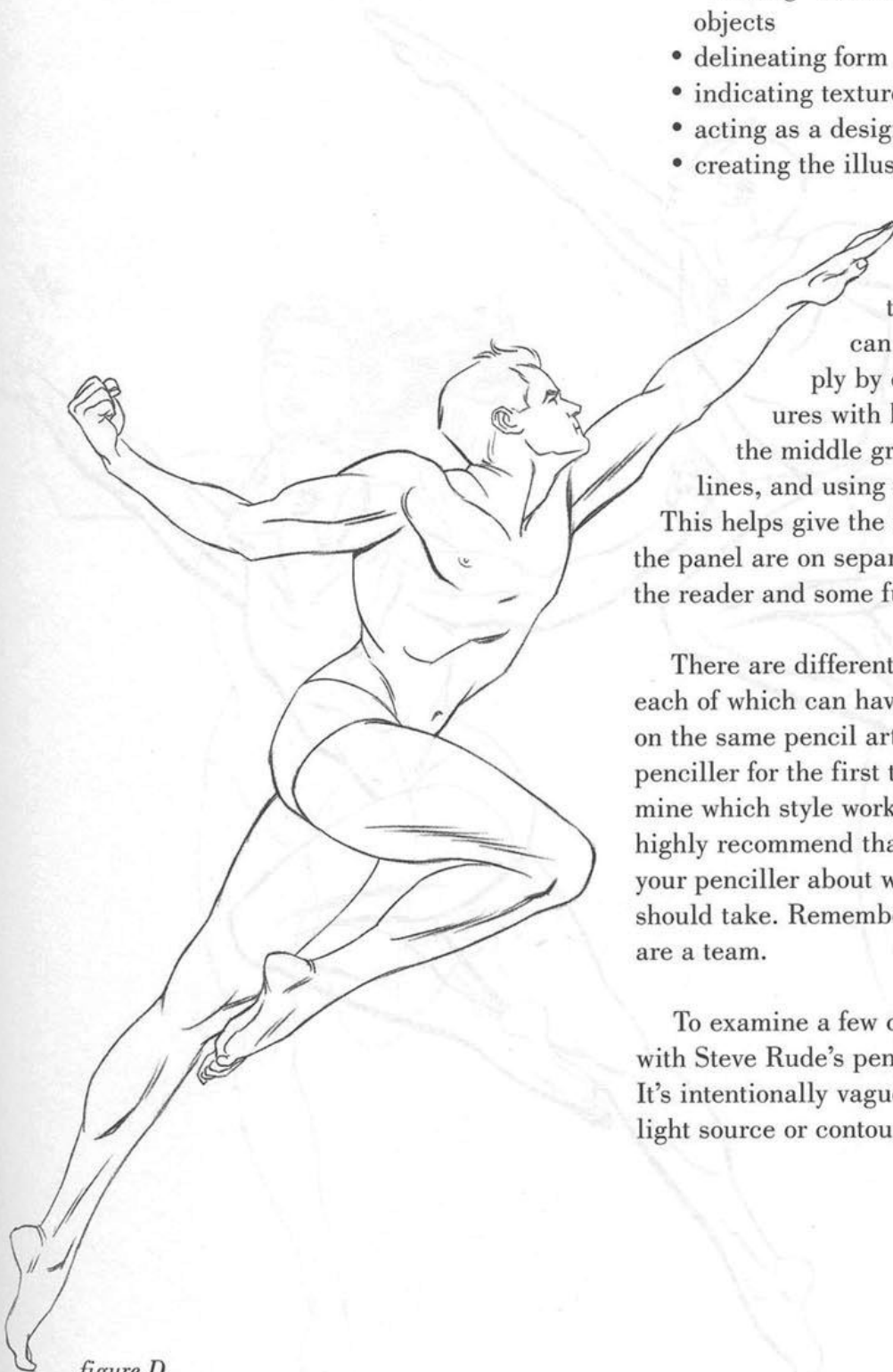


figure D

I know from working with Steve that he prefers a cursive line, so all I need to do is decide where to beef up the line weights to indicate light direction. The results are shown in figure 28. The inked figure has mass and texture, rendered in classic, cursive style.

If you want a harder, leaner look, try a more angular or terse approach (fig. 29). Klaus Janson uses this method very well. Notice how the line weights are heaviest at the bottom part of each brush stroke, as opposed to the cursive line, in which the middle portion of the stroke is heaviest.



figure 28

figure 29

Steve's illustration of a woman (fig. E) has also been left vague. I usually ink female figures with a cursive line (fig. 30); it adds soft texture and feminine elegance to their forms.

When inking contours, keep working on making your line weights consistent. Your thinner lines

(facing the light source) should all be more or less the same width as should your heavier lines (away from light source). As an example, in figure 30 you wouldn't want the line under her right arm to be noticeably thicker than the one under her left arm.



figure E



figure 30

In contrast, figure 31 is inked with a dead-weight contour line. This style is used very effectively by Dave Stevens and Adam Hughes. It creates a stylized design, juxtaposing bold contour lines with thinner, interior detail lines.

To ink a small figure (fig. 32), you must identify details that won't reproduce, then eliminate them or translate them into basic shapes. Use a very thin line for the light-source side and, of course, a thicker one on the dark side.



figure 31

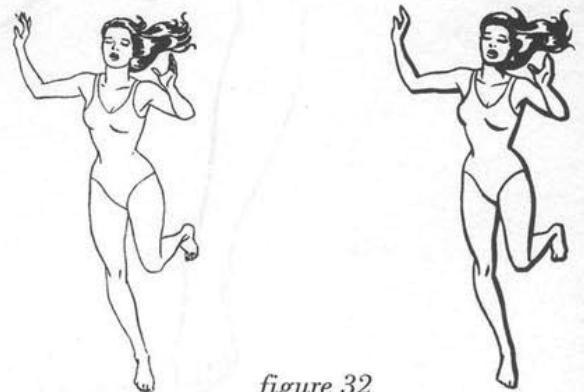


figure 32

V SPOTTING BLACKS

The penciller usually indicates where to place solid blacks, either with small *X* marks or by shading the areas in pencil. However, sometimes he or she may indicate too much black or not enough, making the panel look flat and/or unbalanced. The best way to solve the depth problem is to layer three values — black, gray, and white — into the foreground, middleground, and background.

Figure 33 is a panel of outline silhouettes. Adding depth (fig. 34) is simply a matter of putting black in the first plane (foreground), gray in the second plane (middleground), and white in the third (background). See figures 35–39 for more alternatives; notice how using different value arrangements affects the panel's design by changing the visual "weight" of each compositional element.

Make sure you don't use the same values for objects that are next to each other but in different planes (fig. 40). This effectively places both figures in the same plane, creating the illusion that the small figure is standing on the large figure's shoulder.



figure 33



figure 34



figure 35



figure 36



figure 37



figure 38



figure 39



figure 40

I realize that these guidelines are somewhat oversimplified, and you want to know how to apply them to a fully pencilled comics panel. What if you were inking a pencilled panel like the one in figure 41? This panel is over-rendered; if you squint your eyes, it looks gray and flat. To give it depth, we need to add a black value and a white value. I used the example in figure 38 as a guide. The inked panel (fig. 42) now has blacks in the foreground, whites in the middle ground, and grays in the background. It reads more clearly than the pencilled version, with relatively minor changes to the art. (Note: Adding blacks to faces can be tricky, since a misplaced shadow may alter the original construction. Check out the facial-shadow guide in Chapter IX.)

Omitting line detail when you're inking is sometimes an improvement on the pencil art — but sometimes it can interfere with a penciller's stylistic choices. As always, talk to your editor or penciller before making any drastic changes.



figure 41



figure 42

VI FEATHERING

Feathering has three main functions in comic-book inking:

- softening a hard, black edge
- graduating values from light to dark
- giving form and volume to objects and figures

When inking over pencilled feather lines, the ink artist is actually interpreting the pencil artist's intent. A pencil is not as good at making clear, thick-and-thin strokes as a brush or crow-quill pen. The inker must understand what effect the penciller is trying to achieve rather than just ink over the lines without knowing why they are there.

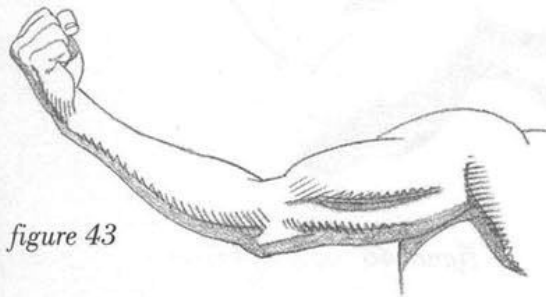


figure 43

figure 44A

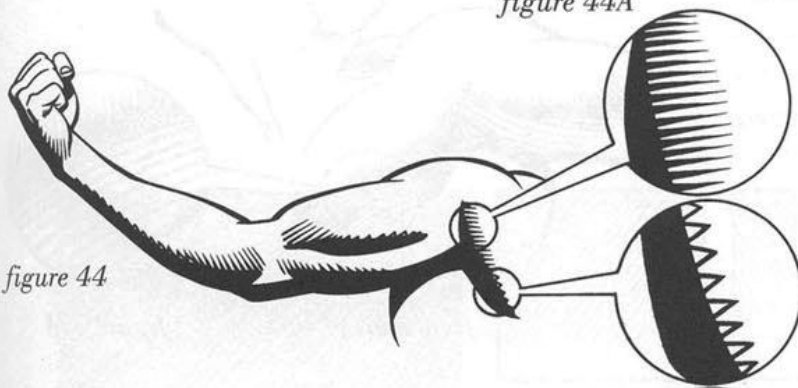


figure 44

figure 44B

figure 45A

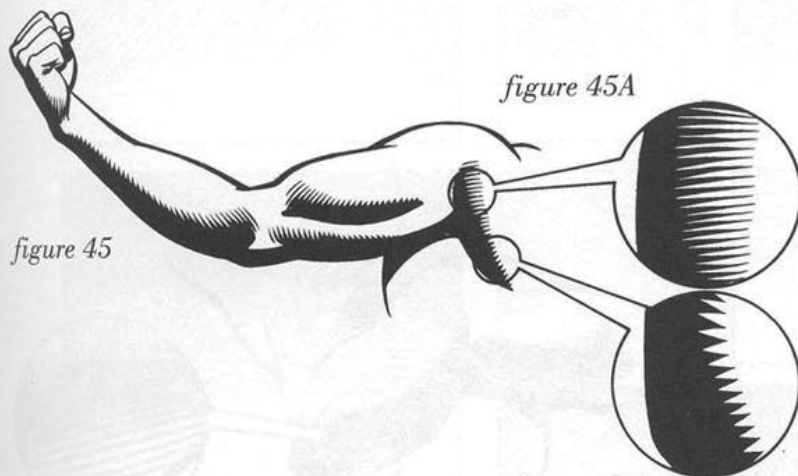


figure 45

figure 45B

Figure 43 shows an arm with feathering coming out of the blacks. If we ink it exactly like the pencils, the result is figure 44. We've accomplished only one out of the three purposes: softening a black edge.

In figure 45, the inked feathering serves all three functions. For a closer peek at how the lines graduate from light to dark, look at the magnified circles. In figure 44A, we see that the thick part of the feather line doesn't blend smoothly into the black edge but instead meets it at right angles. (Always keep in mind that organic shapes do not contain right angles!) Compare it to figure 45A, in which the negative space looks like little white needles poking into the black. This achieves function number two by giving the appearance of a more natural, gradual, light-to-dark fade. Also compare figure 44B with figure 45B.

The third function, lending volume and form, is accomplished by curving feather lines around the muscle. Look at the forearm in figure 45 and see how much more three-dimensional it looks than the version in figure 44. Rudy Nebres (see page 106) is the man to study for this technique.

Figure 46 includes examples of horizontal feathering. Inking the pencils literally (fig. 47) is the textbook way of how not to do it — the lines look more like ornamental stripes than like shading. Unfortunately, this method is often used in comics today.

By following all three feathering guidelines, we get improved results (fig. 48). Again, compare the magnified circles (figs. 47A–48A). Figure 48A shows that the feathering functions better because the thick lines blend into the black, getting thinner as they graduate out from the dark areas. Scott Williams rules at this type of inking.

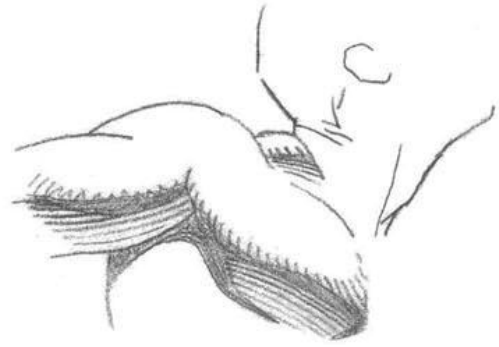


figure 46

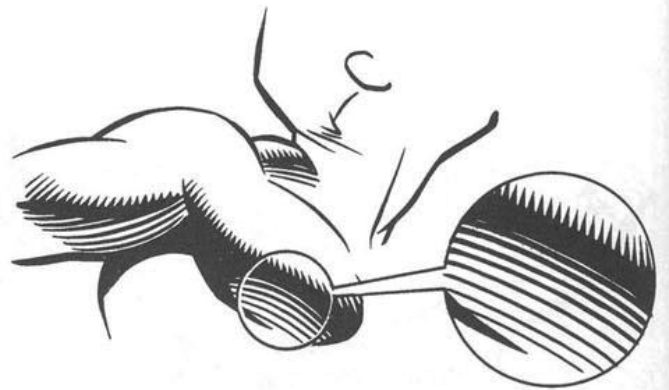


figure 47

figure 47A

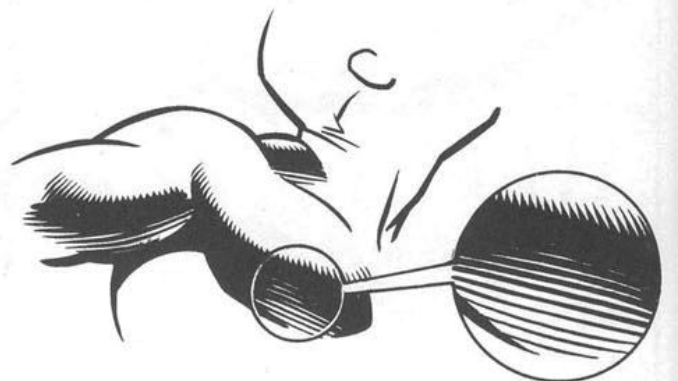


figure 48

figure 48A

VII CROSSHATCHING

Crosshatching is a time-honored technique of graduating light to dark by simply drawing layers of parallel, intersecting lines. It's surprising how many ink artists don't handle crosshatching well, given its long history.

On this page are examples of standard cross-hatch patterns. The pattern in figure 49 is the most common form of hatching in comics. In the top row of smaller panels next to it, we see each layer of lines separately (note their direction and length). The second row of panels shows the step-by-step effect of combining these layers. Notice how each layer further softens the black edge until the lines fade into it almost seamlessly.

The next example (fig. 50) is more complicated. This pattern produces a more random effect and softer edges. The two rows of smaller panels again demonstrate how to achieve this

figure 49

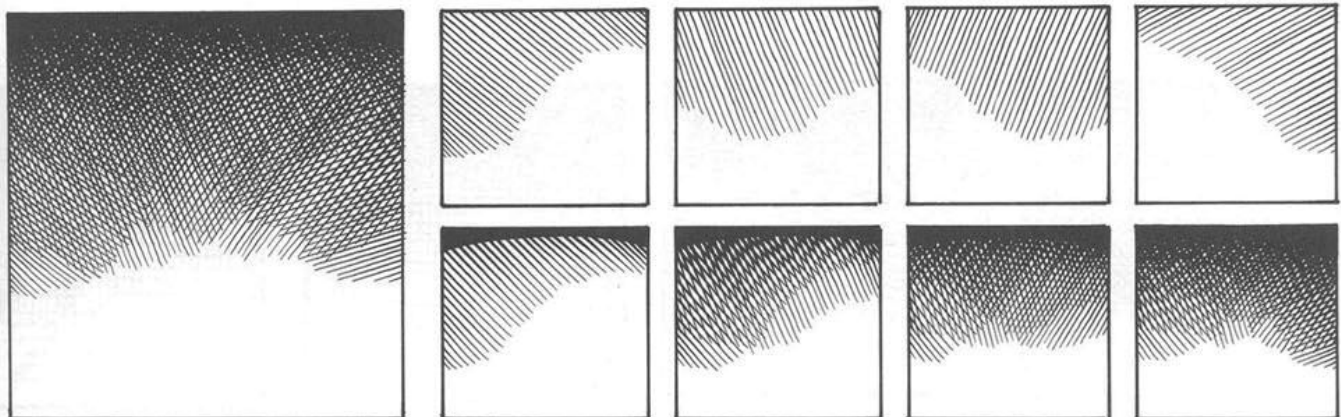
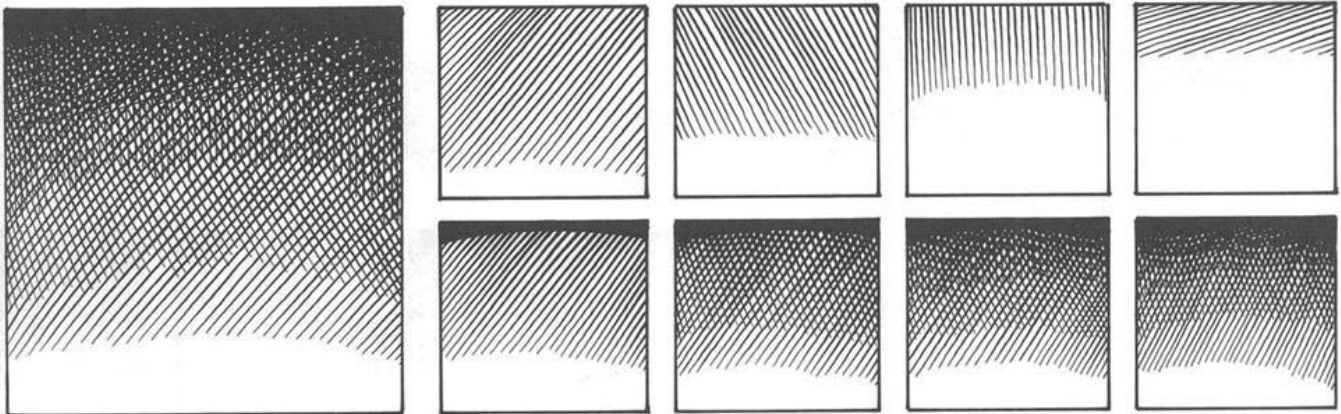


figure 50

look with overlapping layers of linework. Our goal is still the seamless light-to-dark fade. (See Chapter XI for a look at how this technique can be used in illustration.)

The same goes for figure 51. This pattern uses rows of shorter or broken lines that get heavier as they merge into the black, making for a particularly organic texture.

Figure 52 is an example of bad crosshatching. First, the lines are all the same length, so both the outer gray edge and the inner black edge are too hard. Second, the lines intersect at right angles, creating a mathematical pattern that looks monotonous and unnatural.

Figure 53 shows what happens when the lines in two layers get close to being parallel. This results in a moiré pattern that can be cool if it's the effect you're trying to achieve; however, it can also be rather jarring to the eye, and it doesn't work with every art style.

The example in figure 54 is a popular hatching technique, but it has the same problems as figure 52. In figure 55, we've solved these problems by using feathering methods from the previous chapter.

Now that you know the basics about feathering and crosshatching, I'll offer one last piece of advice: don't overuse them. Excessive crosshatching is not a sign of artistic skill; in fact, it's often just the opposite, since overly detailed linework sometimes just distracts the eye from poor construction and composition. It actually takes more skill and talent to render a figure with as few lines as possible. Alex Toth is a master of the "less is more" approach.

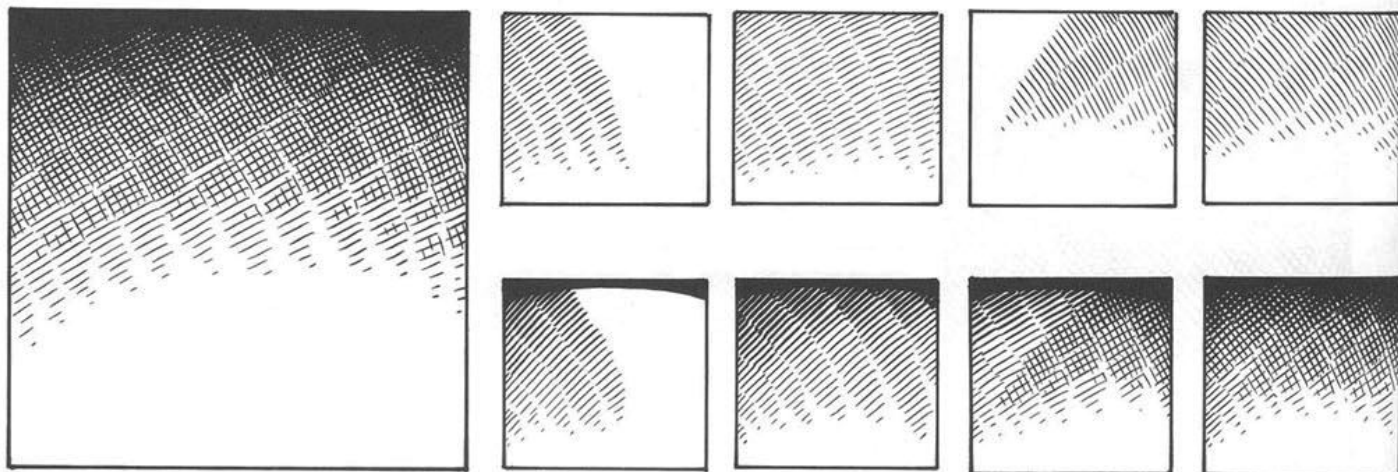


figure 51

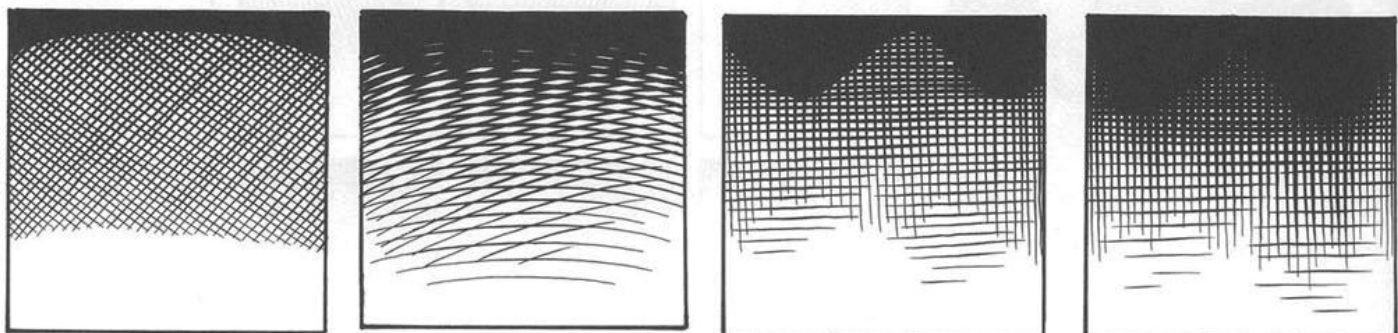


figure 52

figure 53

figure 54

figure 55

VIII

ESTABLISHING YOUR STYLE

Every inker has his or her own style. Yours will be determined by your contour and line-weight choices, combined with your texture and feathering techniques.

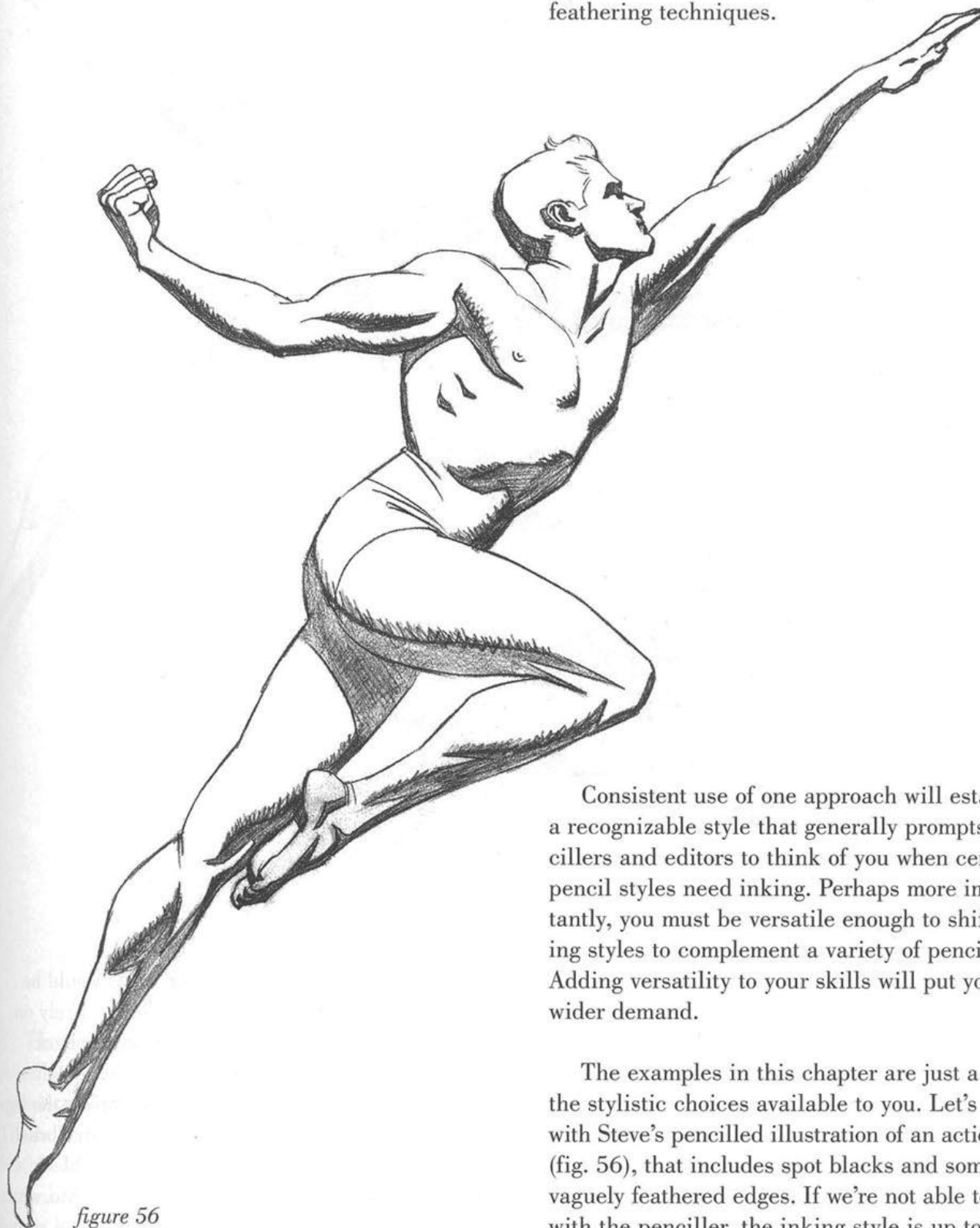


figure 56

Consistent use of one approach will establish a recognizable style that generally prompts pencillers and editors to think of you when certain pencil styles need inking. Perhaps more importantly, you must be versatile enough to shift inking styles to complement a variety of pencil art. Adding versatility to your skills will put you in wider demand.

The examples in this chapter are just a few of the stylistic choices available to you. Let's start with Steve's pencilled illustration of an action guy (fig. 56), that includes spot blacks and some vaguely feathered edges. If we're not able to check with the penciller, the inking style is up to us.



figure 56A

My first choice of styles (fig. 56A) would be the approach I use when inking *Nexus*. I rely on the blacks within the figure — plus any background blacks that intersect with it — to define its shape. After filling in blacks, I complete the figure with cursive contour lines. I use a dry-brush technique (see Chapter X) to soften the black edges. This approach is simple and graphic, and I know that it's the one Steve prefers.



figure 56B



figure 56C

The next example (fig. 56B) is sort of a Neal Adams approach, for which Tom Palmer set a standard when he inked Neal in the early 1970s. The bold, terse contours are set off by delicate feather lines. In this style, the feathering lines are inked out from the black, resulting in a looser look.

Contrasting with the last approach, figure 56C employs a rendering technique that Rudy Nebres has mastered. The contour lines are not as important here because the form is defined by feathering. Notice how the tight, controlled, feather lines curve around muscle shapes, lending mass and roundness to the figure.



figure 56D

figure 56E

Figure 56D showcases a style mentioned in Chapter IV and used so well by Dave Stevens and Adam Hughes. The feathering lines are short, controlled, and regular. A dead-weight contour line is the defining design element.

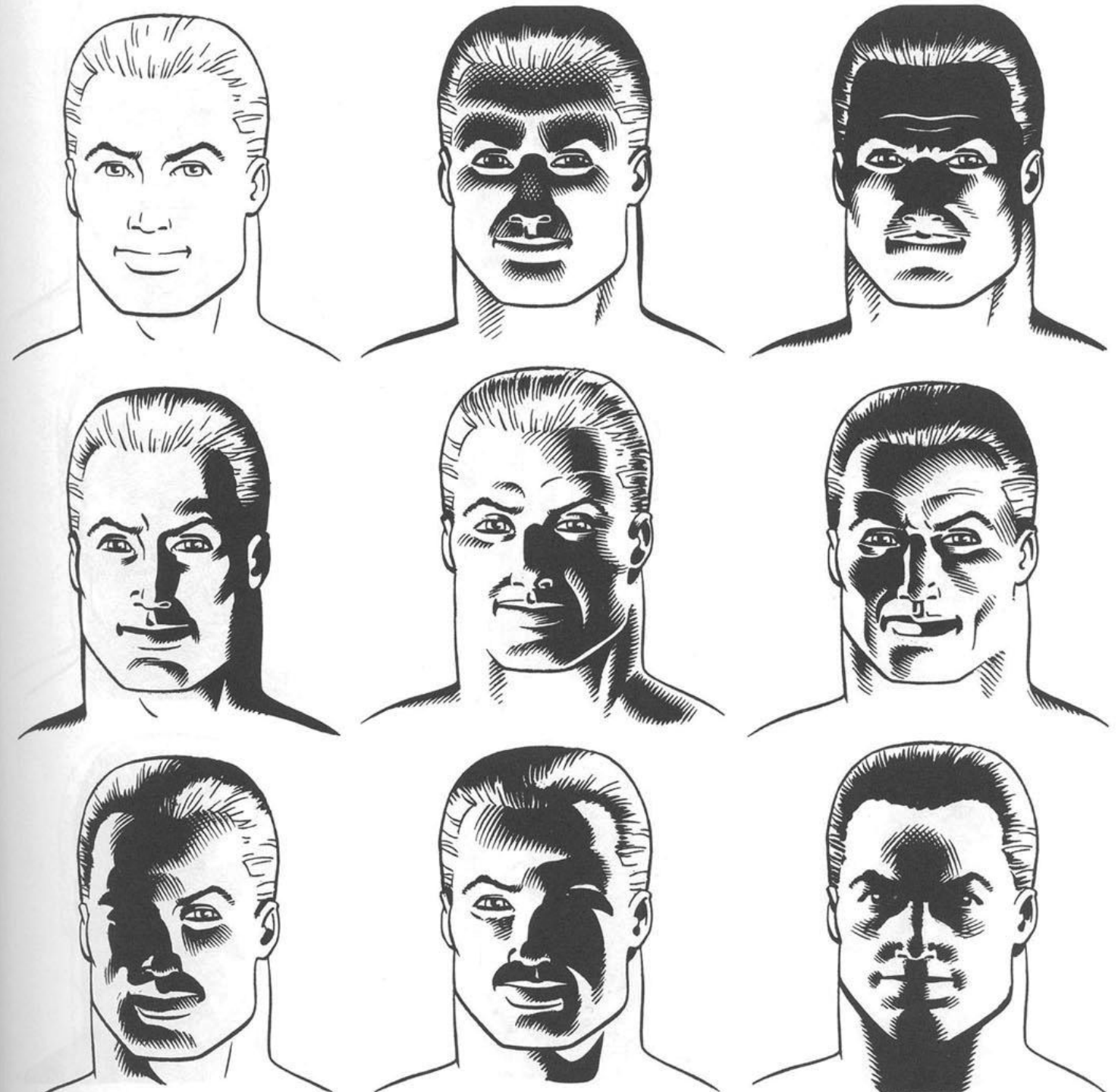
The last example (fig. 56E) is frequently called the “Image look.” Scott Williams popularized this inking style in the late 1980s, but most of his imitators don’t have the skill to pull it off.

Note that the contour style is crisp and angular, and the secondary light source is indicated by horizontal feathering.

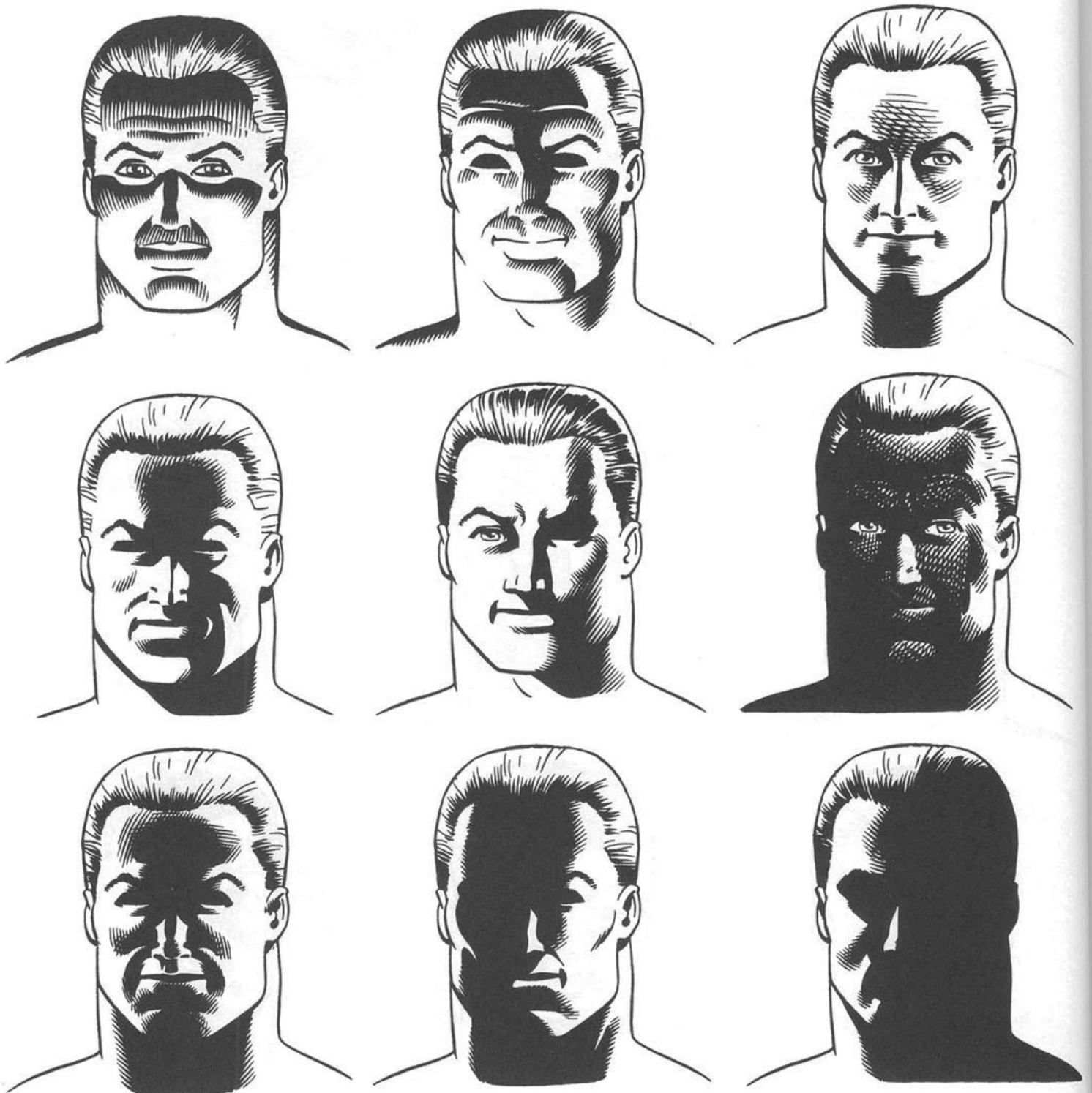
These inking-style examples are simplified, of course. Use them as starting points, and don’t be afraid to invent your own combination of techniques from different sources — that’s what developing your own style is all about!

IX FACIAL-SHADOW GUIDE

Four or five years ago, I started keeping a file of light and shadow patterns on the male face. I photocopied a simple drawing of a male head twelve times on one sheet of paper then made several copies of this sheet. Whenever I come across an interesting shadow pattern on a face,

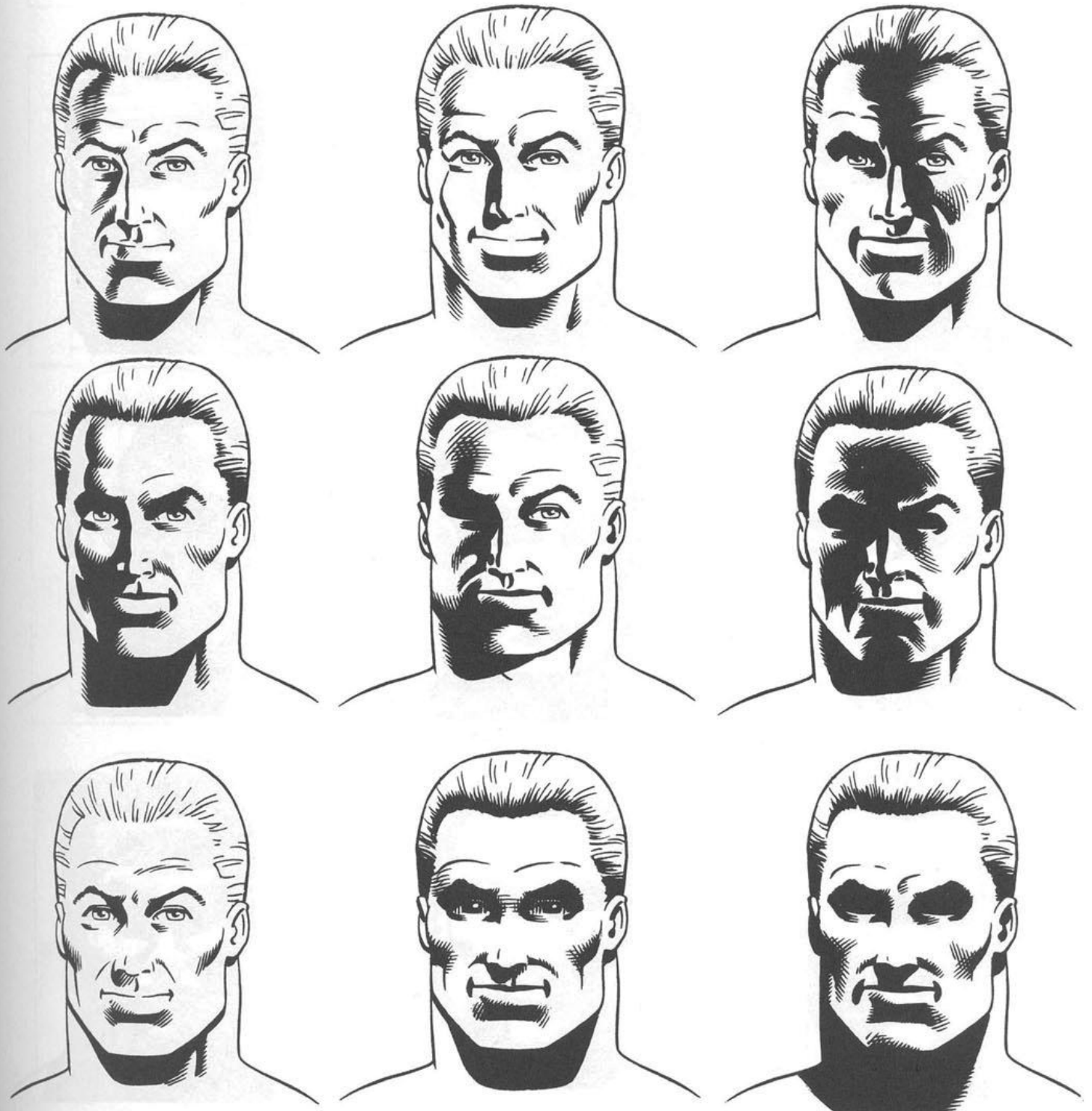


from a photo or comic book, I draw the pattern on my sheet of heads. This guide helps me understand the planes of the face. It's also helpful to have several choices at my fingertips when I need reference for adding blacks to a head.



The artists whose works I based these drawings on include Michael Golden, Dave Gibbons, Kevin Nowlan, Wally Wood, and Bernie Wrightson.

The light sources on these heads fall into three categories: underlight, backlight, and toplight.



The first drawing (see page 41) is the original, unshadowed head that I started with. Notice how shadows can create different emotions and moods on the same face — underlighting, for example, usually makes a face look more menacing or mysterious.

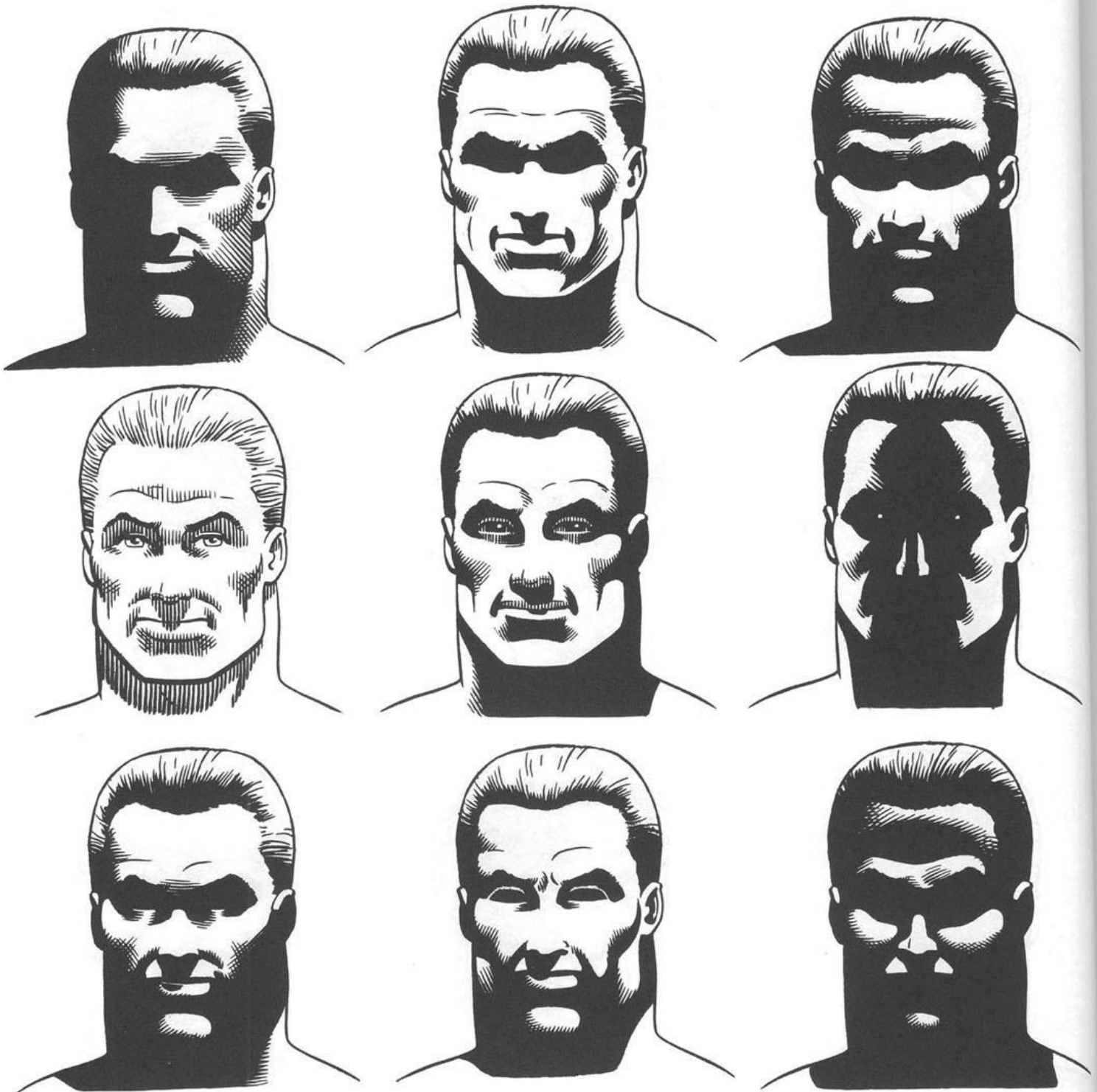




figure 57

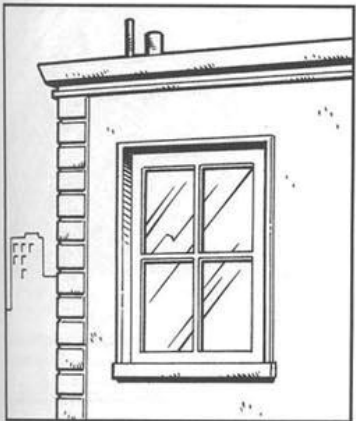


figure 58

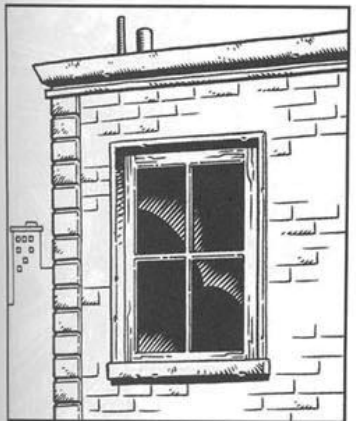


figure 59



figure 60

X INKING BACKGROUNDS

One task you'll eventually face as an inker is trying to make dull or blank backgrounds more interesting. Some pencillers don't spend much time on backgrounds, so their panels lack depth and detail. These are usually the same pencillers who only want to draw splash pages where Captain Stupendous is oozing with dynamic pyrotechnics. But good illustrators — inkers as well as pencillers — have to be able to draw trucks, dogs, coffee cups, and other real-world items just as convincingly as they draw imaginary environments. Backgrounds help define a story's mood and sense of place.

In figure 57, we see what an uninspired penciller (we'll call him Biff) may give you. This is a barely adequate drawing of a building's corner window. Your first step is to determine the time of day and the light source, since Biff apparently hasn't done so. The script tells us that it's daytime, so we establish that the light is from above and to the right.

Now look at figure 58. I've dropped in shadows under the ledges by using heavy line weights as determined by our light source. Notice how three-dimensional the surface of the building now appears. The heavier contour line on its left edge also serves to create depth between the foreground and background buildings. To make the buildings less featureless, I added extra lines and texture marks around the window frame, inside the moldings of each glass pane, between the bricks, and elsewhere.

In figure 59, the building looks old and weathered. This effect is best achieved by inking as much of the architecture as you can without using a ruler. Your lines will be less crisp and straight, making the building seem older. Breaking up your lines and putting dents in the corner edges of raised surfaces also helps create a worn look. We can give our building more personality by adding

details such as bricks and some woodgrain on the window frame. Lastly, we “turn off” the lights by adding black inside the window.

What if it’s nighttime, yet good old Biff gives us the same lighting that he uses for day scenes? In figure 60, we make our building much more interesting by lighting it from the streetlights below. To do this, simply place your heavier line weights on the upper edges of raised surfaces. Add a little shading in the form of texture marks to the upper part of the building, then darken the night sky (in this case, I’ve used Zip-a-Tone). Include a few stars — but not too many since this is an urban scene! Finish by turning on the light inside the window to show that someone’s home.

By adding varied line weights and a little detail to the backgrounds, we have helped out Biff considerably and improved the overall look of the art.

Let’s look at another example of how we can add depth with contour-line weight. In figure 61, Biff has given us a better background drawing by adding more detail and some blacks in the foreground. The panel still looks flat, though, so in figure 62 we create space between the objects in the room by making their contours heavier. Notice the line weight inside the door frame, the thicker lines around the middleground control panel, and the heaviest line weight around the foreground control panel and chair.

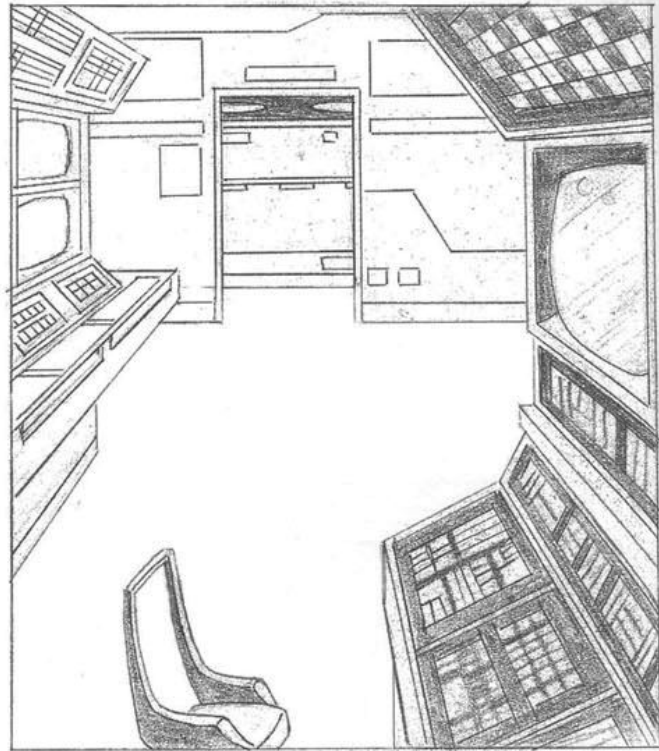


figure 61

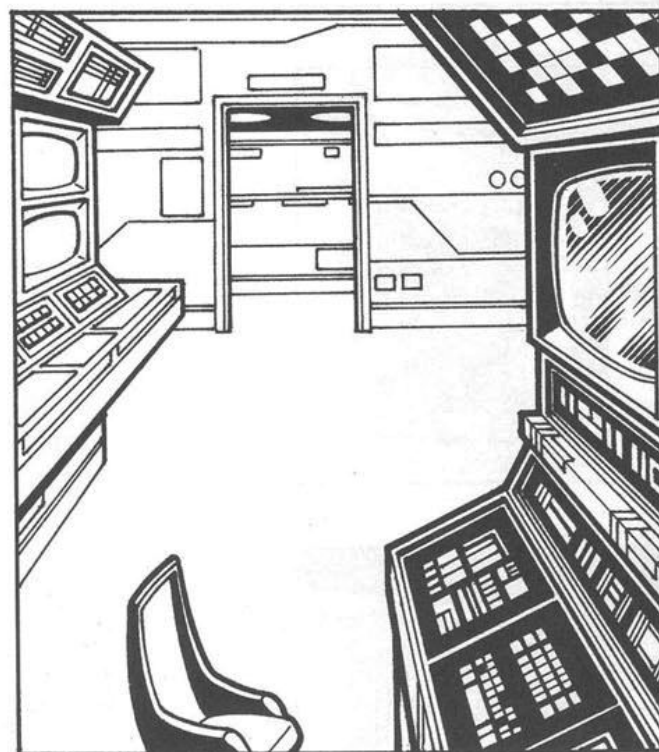
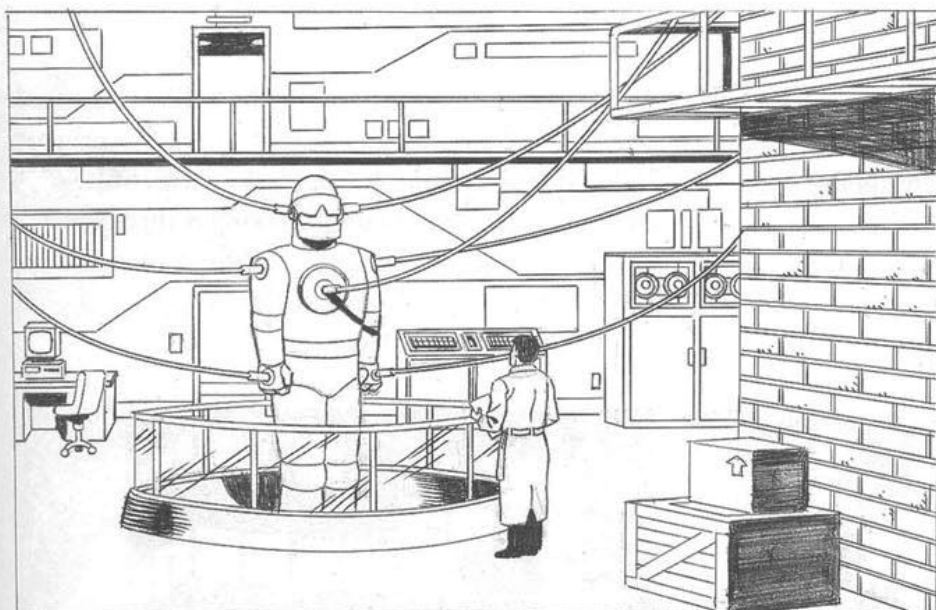
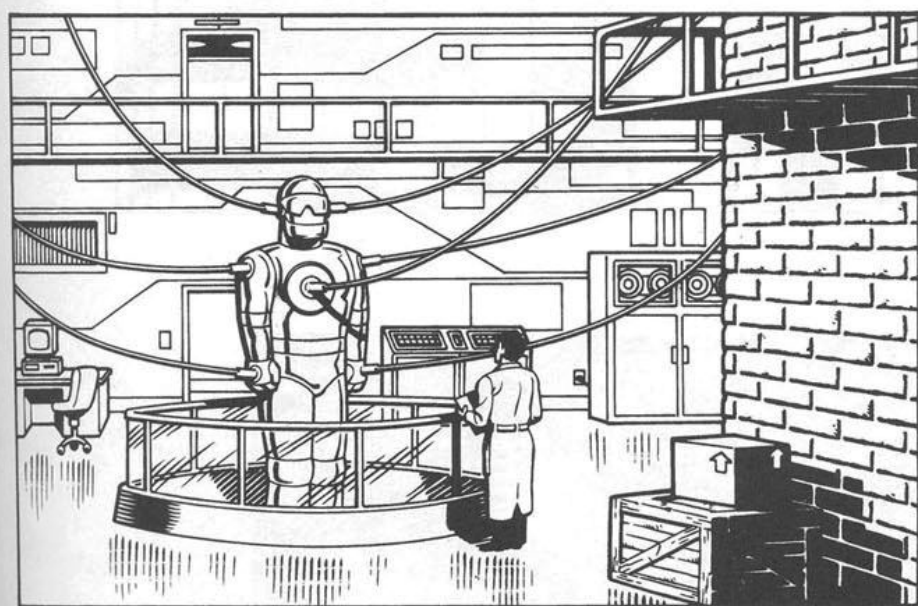


figure 62

*figure 63**figure 64*

Biff has gone all out with this next panel (fig. 63). Still, it could use some depth and texture. In figure 64, we've created depth by emphasizing the separate planes of background, middleground, and foreground. Objects now have mass because we've added heavier line weights on their dark sides. (Not the evil sides, but the sides with less light!) Compare the different contour line weights used in the inked panel; besides adding depth, the line weights help the reader distinguish between individual objects.

We've also given this panel some texture in the inking stage. The crate in the foreground now looks like wood, for example, and the brick wall looks rougher. Bricks should not be inked with a ruler — you want them to look a bit uneven since that's how real bricks look. Try inking just the shadow sides of the bricks and notice how this raises each brick from the surface. The glass has been made more transparent-looking by breaking up the blacks and

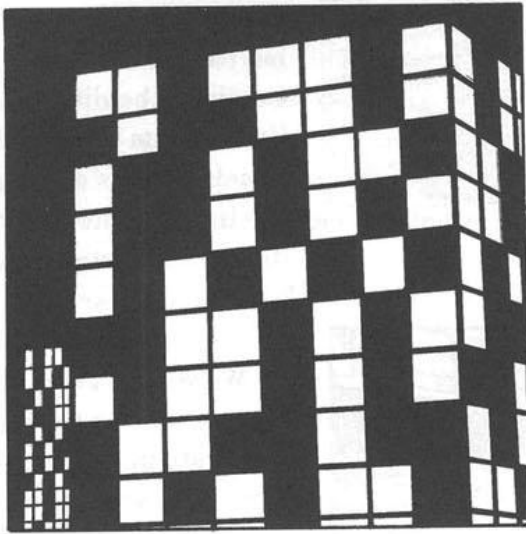
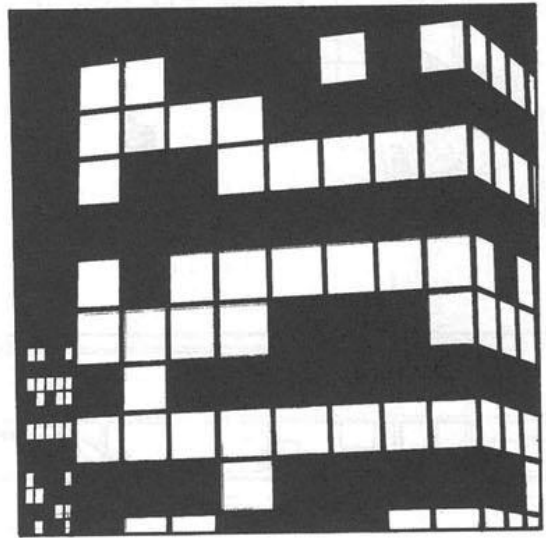
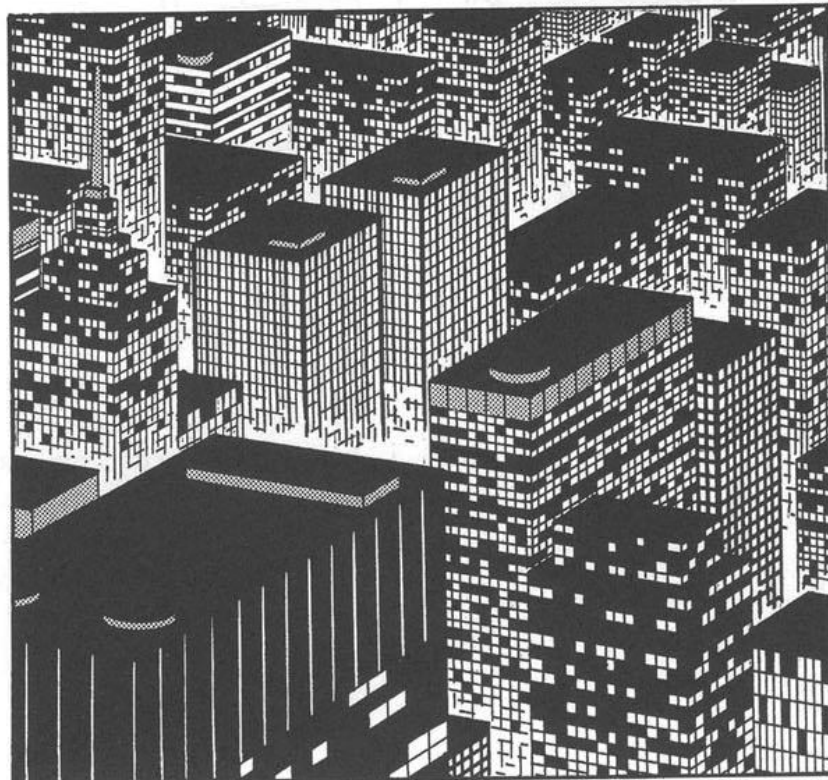
thinning the lines behind it. The floor is now shiny because we've added reflection lines under the objects touching it. For excellent, detailed, background inking, you can't beat Terry Austin's work.

Following are more tips on adding detail to your backgrounds.

Night Buildings

In the real world, lights rarely run in vertical patterns on office buildings at night (fig. 65). Think about it: office space is usually rented along a horizontal axis, with one or more floors grouped together. The lights on an office building should run mainly in a horizontal direction (fig. 65A). Besides, if you draw them running

vertically, your buildings will look like crossword puzzles! Also remember that at night, the primary light source is coming from below (fig. 66), so rooftops should be black. Leaving a little white space between buildings in different planes helps give the panel depth and perspective.

*figure 65**figure 65A**figure 66*

Trees and Bushes

Guess what? The same principles of line weights and blacks apply to organic objects as well as figures and buildings. Think of trees and bushes as spherical objects, then place blacks on them accordingly (figs. 67–68). Remember to layer your values and vary your contour lines to create depth between foreground, middleground, and background. Keep leaf patterns random, with detail diminishing as the image fades into the distance.

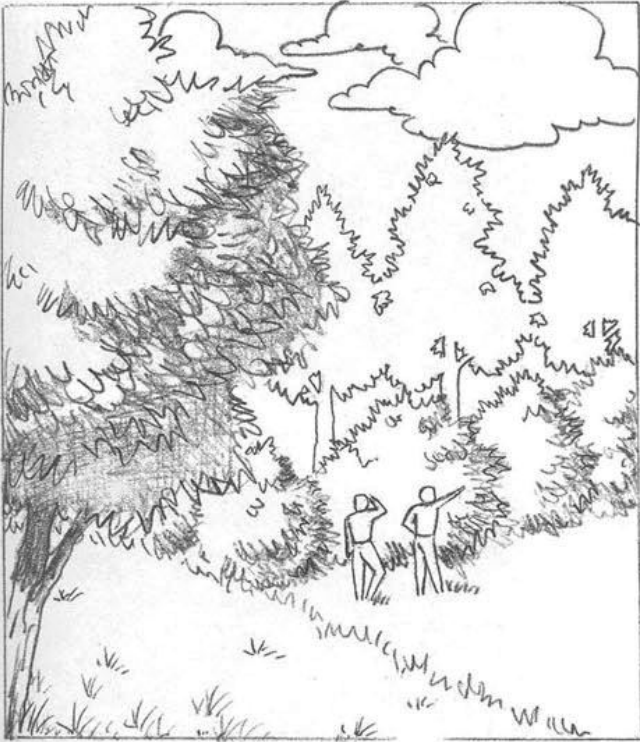


figure 67



figure 68

Outer Space

When a penciller wants an outer-space background, he or she usually just writes “black with stars” or “BWS.” It is the inker’s job to create the space scene. All some inkers will do is put white dots on a black background, as shown in figure 69. Haven’t they ever looked up into a night sky? Stars don’t look like that!

When inking outer space, keep these characteristics in mind:

- stars are round
- stars come in various sizes
- stars are grouped together in more or less random patterns
- some parts of space contain no stars at all.

The example in figure 70 follows these guidelines. I use two different methods of placing stars on a black background. One way is to water down some white ink, dip a toothbrush into the mixture, and spray on stars by flicking the bristles with your thumb. The disadvantages of this technique are that you have to mask off everything you don’t want showered with stars, and it’s easy to get carried away and put down too many. The method I prefer is to hand-place each star with a brush loaded up with white ink. Just be careful not to be too mathematical in your patterns — try to keep them random. Check an astronomy book to get some idea of how real stars arrange themselves.

Figure 71 is a night sky in the city. Put fewer stars in urban skies, along with a few twinkles. A city-lights effect is achieved with Zip-a-Tone that has a quick fade pattern. (See the next section for more about Zip-a-Tone.)

Figure 72 shows an example of deep space. This gives you the opportunity to play God and create planets, novas, star clusters, black holes, and energy fields. Way cool!

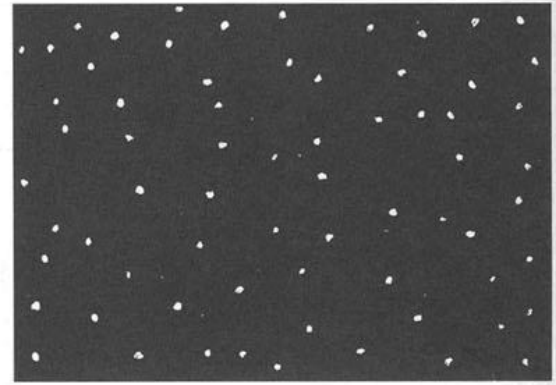


figure 69

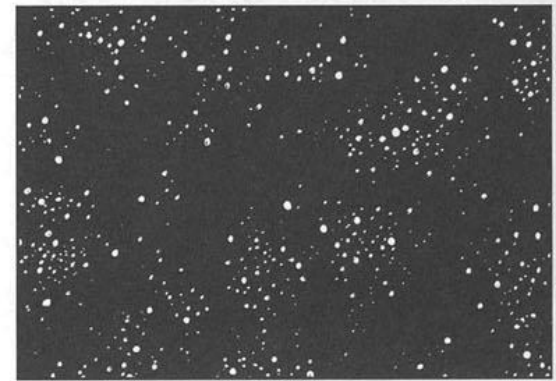


figure 70



figure 71



figure 72

Special Effects

Here are some tricks that'll help create different textures in your backgrounds.

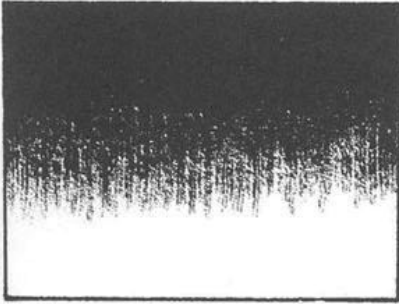


figure 73

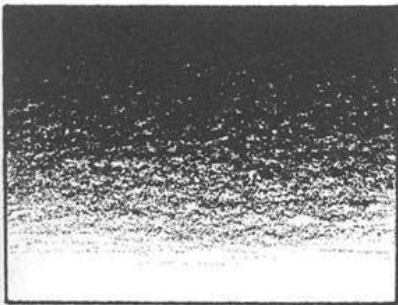


figure 74

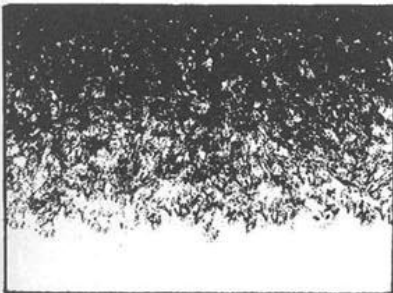


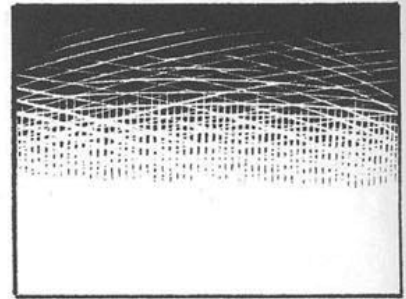
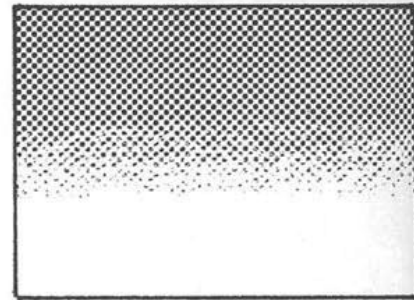
figure 75



figure 76

- **Dry brush (fig. 73):**
Wipe most of the ink out of your brush until it won't ink a line without breaking up. Then ink out from the black, using a quick, feathering motion. When the brush runs dry, just repeat the process.
- **Black crayon or grease pencil (fig. 74):**
If you were ever a kid, you know how to use these. Just make sure you apply them after you've erased the page — erasers will smear 'em all over the place.
- **Sponge (fig. 75):**
Take a small piece of an old sponge and dip it into ink. Soak most of the ink out of the sponge with a paper towel until there's only a little left. Blot the paper with the sponge, rotating it so you don't get a repeating pattern.
- **Splatter (fig. 76):**
This is the old toothbrush trick I mentioned earlier. Dip the bristles in some ink and flick them with your thumb. Always use masking film to cover up everything on the page that you don't want sprayed with ink!

- **White feather lines (fig. 77):**
You can use white ink to correct mistakes as well as to add negative-space details. Thin your white ink with water (if necessary) and lay it down with a clean brush or pen. A white-on-black crosshatch pattern like the one seen here creates a unique fade effect.
- **Zip-a-Tone (fig. 78):**
Various patterns and textures come printed on transparent sheets with adhesive backs. First, figure out approximately where you're going to place a particular Zip pattern. If need be, trim the sheet down to fit the panel or page you're working on. After exposing the adhesive, carefully lay the sticky side down on the art and use an X-acto knife to cut away the areas you don't want. (See the Zip-a-Tone illustration in Chapter XI.)

*figure 77**figure 78*

XI

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

This chapter includes a few of my attempts at experimenting with different illustration methods. I hope you expose yourself to the wide variety of inking techniques that have been developed over the years. Studying some of the great pen-and-ink illustrators will broaden your capabilities as a comic-book inker. Some of my favorites are:

- Franklin Booth
- Walter Appleton Clark
- Joseph Clement Coll
- Charles Dana Gibson
- Frank Godwin
- Howard Pyle

To me, Franklin Booth has always been the greatest of pen illustrators. No one can match his line control and consistency. If you have trouble finding his work, buy a copy of Bernie Wrightson's *Frankenstein* book, which features an excellent homage to Booth.

I drew figure 79 in this style. Since I have better control with a brush than a crow-quill pen, I only used my Winsor & Newton series 7 #2 on this piece.

This (fig. 80) is my ultimate Zip-a-Tone illustration, "ultimate" because I never again want to spend two ten-hour days Zipping one piece of artwork! I used a very labor-intensive process whereby I laid down layers of Zip, matching the dot patterns to create a fade effect. This piece was done for the *Studiosaurus Pinup Portfolio*.

Figure 81 is my Burne Hogarth homage. I used a crosshatching technique described earlier (see Chapter VII, fig. 50). The original image is 11" x 15". I used my trusty #2 brush for the crosshatching and a sponge for the hair. My original goal was to produce two of these pieces — one male and one female — but my hand hurt so badly after finishing this one that I gave up on that scheme.

Figures 79, 80, and 81 follow on the next three pages.



figure 79



figure 80

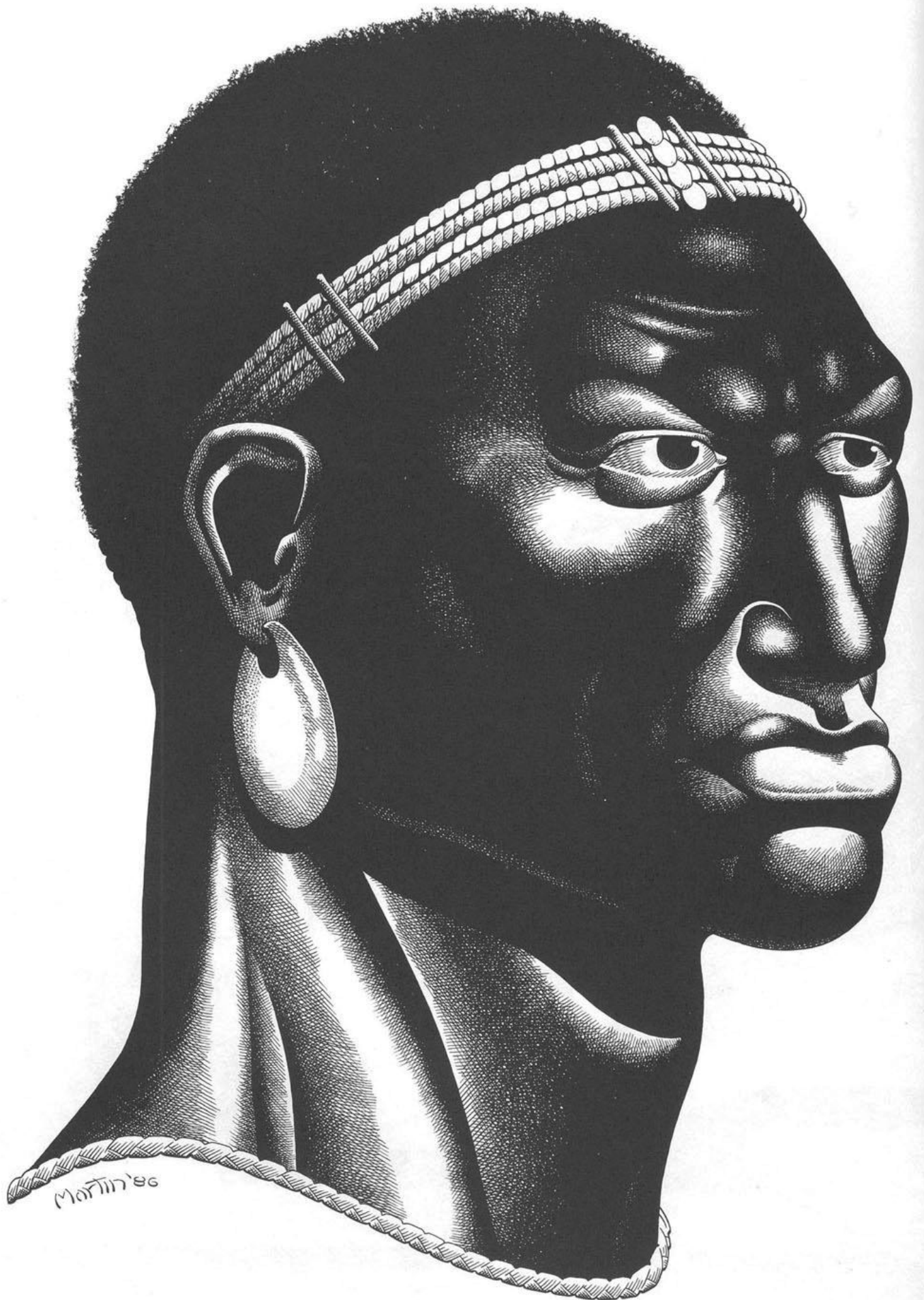


figure 81

XII CARTOON INKING

Cartoon inking can be simplified into three basic elements: (1) contrasting thickness between contour and interior lines, (2) consistency in line weights, (3) spontaneity and fluidity. Study great cartoonists like Walt Kelly, Jack Davis, Steve Purcell, or Bruce Timm and you'll notice they all have these three inking qualities.

Figure 82 is a drawing of the lovable Skyboy, sidekick to Captain Stupendous. The first rule says there should be a contrasting thickness between the contour and interior lines. But figure 83 has a holding line that is thin and timid. Compare it to the thickness of figure 84, where the cartoon comes to life. Another benefit of this bold contour is clearly demonstrated in figure 85. The thin contour doesn't hold up when reduced. (Deciding how thick you should go isn't easy. When I'm inking a cartoon that's going to be reduced for publication, I use a simple visual test: if the contour seems a bit too thick in its original size, then it will probably look just right when reduced.)



figure 82



figure 83



figure 84



figure 85

In figure 86, the ends of the cursive lines (where they join another line) in the contours are too thin. This is a common problem with pen inking. This weakens the contour, giving the cartoon a frail appearance. In figure 87 Captain Stupendous wants to show off his guns. We see another example of a frail looking contour in figure 88. The ends of those cursive contour lines are too thin. Help the Captain look strong by beefing up his contour as in figure 89!



figure 86



figure 87



figure 88



figure 89



figure 90



figure 91

Another example of breaking rule #1 is figure 90. There is little contrast between contour and interior, because Skyboy's interior lines are too thick. Figure 91 is the correct technique. A simple way to approach rule #1 is to think of the art in coloring books: thick on the outside, thin on the inside.

The adorable La Nina (fig. 92) will help me demonstrate rule #2. In figure 93, I inked her with inconsistent line weights. Look at her thigh. It has a thick line on the top and a thin one on the bottom. Then another thick line on her calf. This type of inconsistency drives me nuts! She has a nice, thick line on her cheek, but a thin one under her chin. Ugh! I see this type of error all too often. Figure 94 correctly shows rule #2, with consistent line weights!



figure 92



figure 93



figure 94

Figure 95 is a profile of La Nina. I inked her in figure 96 with a dead-weight contour line. In my opinion, using a dead-weight line for cartoon inking is a mistake. It obeys rule #1 (thick outside, thin inside) but breaks rule #3 (spontaneity and fluidity). You want a nice, thick holding line, but not at the expense of the cartoon's energy. (A nagging flaw in my own inking is that I get too concerned with line quality and not enough with the life of the drawing. When I concentrate on line quality, my hand slows down, and this kills spontaneity.) Figure 97 has a bold contour, but still an open fluidity, even to the point of dropping out some contour line work entirely. This technique allows your eye to fill in where the lines are missing and helps maintain the spontaneity.

When inking cartoon backgrounds, use the same principles as in figure inking. Avoid using a straight edge or ruler. If you have the control, ink all your straight lines freehand. Then your lively figures will fit nicely into your cartoon backgrounds.



figure 95



figure 96



figure 97

XIII

TEXTURE REFERENCE GUIDE

Your editor is cracking the whip because you're behind schedule. Now you're staring at a page where the penciller has lovingly rendered every detail of Captain Stupendous, but only drawn a vague impression of the vast ocean he's flying over. Poring through your comics or art-book collection for an ocean reference is not an efficient use of your time! Now you can just flip to this handy Texture Reference Guide — while making a note to send its author a cash gratuity!

Some of the great texture men who have influenced me:

- Hal Foster
- Frank Frazetta
- Michael Golden
- Rudy Nebres
- Hal Foster
- Terry Austin

And did I mention Hal Foster?

Water

Figure 98 is a stormy ocean. Notice how the shape of the waves are defined by light against dark.

Figure 99 is a calmer ocean. The waves taper into the distance at a diagonal pattern. Again, use light against dark to define the waves.

Figure 100 is the ocean from a distance. Depth is created by fading the detail into the horizon.

Figure 101 is a river or stream. The waves flow in a horizontal direction.



figure 98

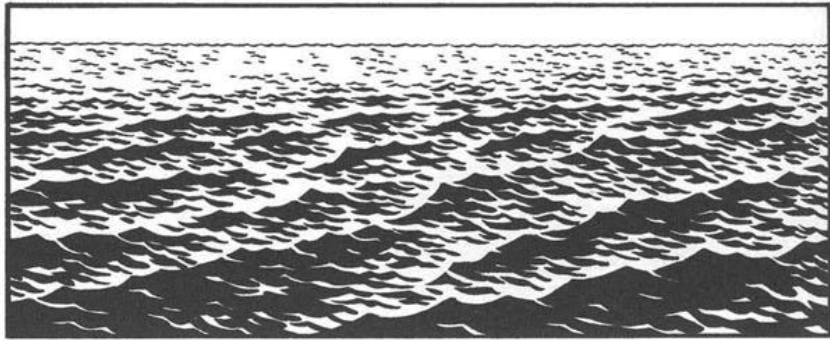


figure 99

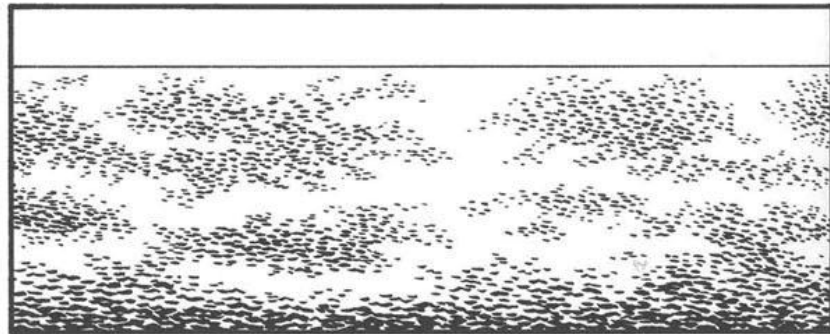


figure 100

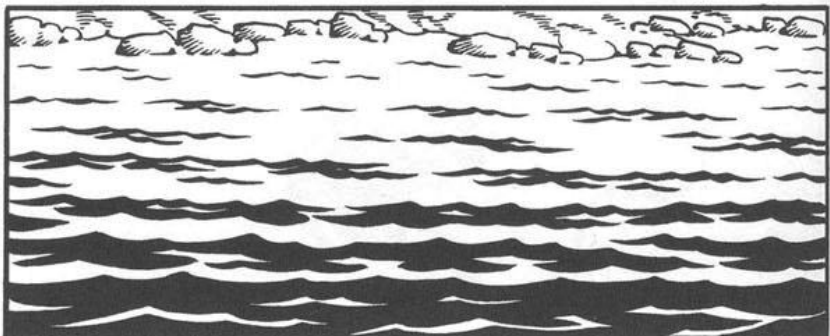
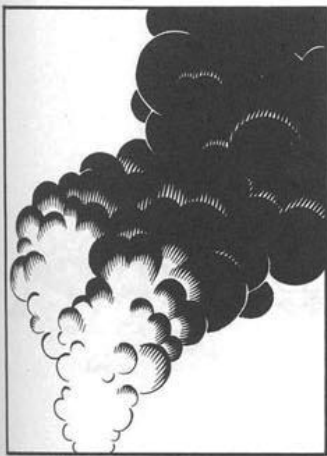
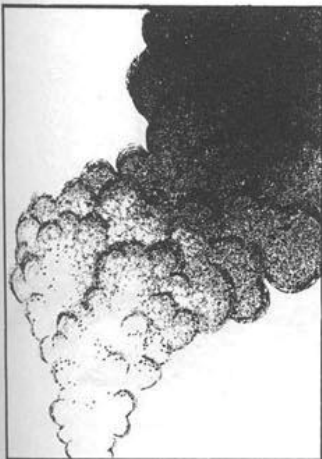


figure 101

Fire and Smoke

Even though fire is used often in comic-book art, it is frequently poorly drawn, probably more than any other texture. But fire is easy to master when you know this simple technique.

Figure 102 is a common example of how some pencillers draw fire – tentative and undefined. To make this fire look more threatening, figure 103 is inked with a series of thin lines that are concave and convex. Use lines that are connecting, because the colorist needs a continuous holding line to fill in with bright colors. Disney is a great resource for awesome fire.

*figure 102**figure 103**figure 104**figure 105**figure 106**figure 107*

Smoke can be heavy and black, especially when its source is an oil fire. Figure 104 is an example of dark, billowing smoke, where the light source radiates from the fire. Figure 105 is the same smoke pattern but done with dry brush. Figure 106 was done with the old splatter method. Figure 107 shows what I call the “Kirby energy ball” technique (named after Jack Kirby, of course). The key to this cool-looking smoke is not where you place the black circles, but how you use the negative space around them.

Rocks

Rocks are another ordinary background item you see often in comics, but sometimes they're not drawn with much detail. Figure 108 is just such an example. Figures 109–112 are several texture choices all done with the same system. First I establish the light source. Then I lay in

the texture pattern on the shadow side. Next I ink the rocks' contours, leaving out redundant lines. This helps mass them together. Lastly, to roughen them up I might add a few more texture details, not forgetting the surrounding dirt.

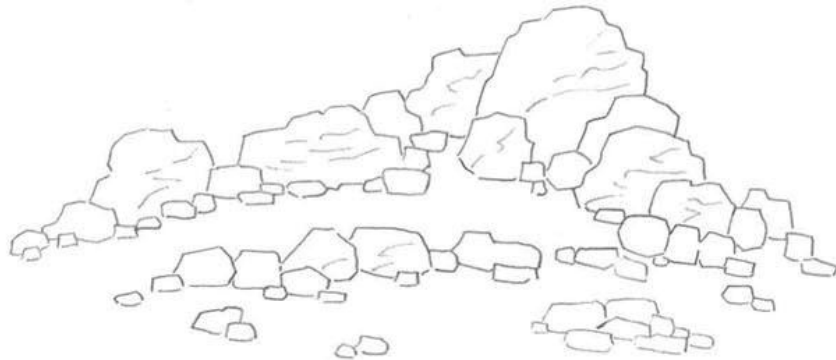


figure 108



figure 109



figure 110



figure 111



figure 112

Wood

Wood is another texture that is taken for granted but can, when given a little attention, really add character to your backgrounds. Figure 113 is a sample of this. The first board could be made of

anything. The second board is definitely made of wood and could probably give you a splinter! Figure 114 is an example of several techniques that show off the great textural qualities of wood.

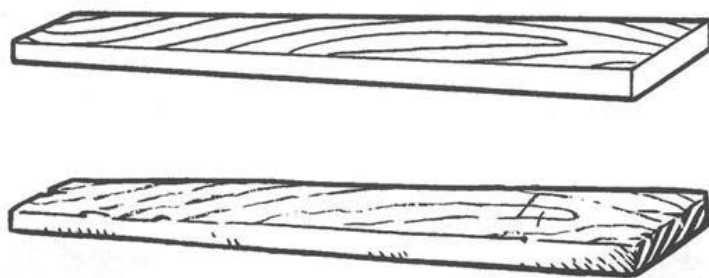


figure 113

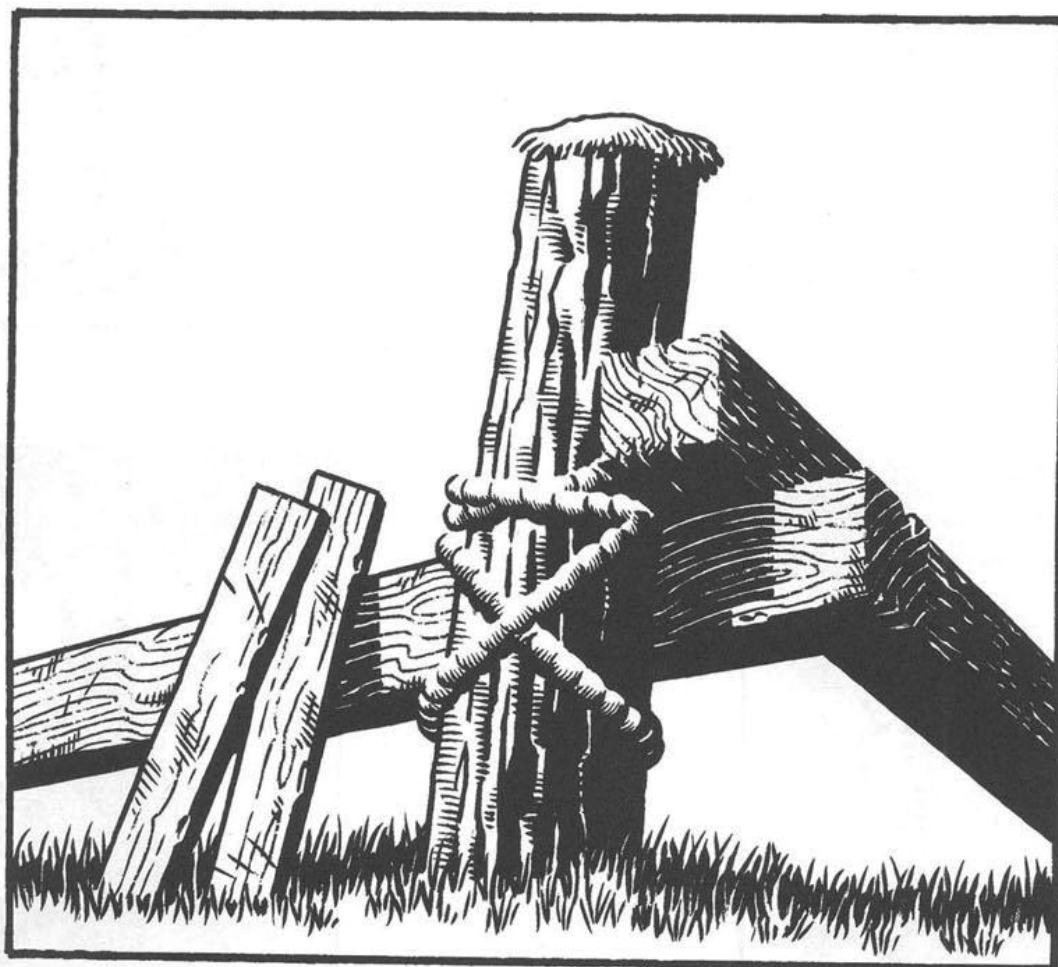


figure 114

Trees and Bushes

The texturing most artists use on their trees can be quite distinctive, almost creating an artistic signature. (A fan once identified a background I inked by the tiles on a roof!) On pages 102–117, there is a tree limb that is inked by seven different artists. The excellent texturing approaches used are characteristic of those individual artists — you can identify each artist's work by the tree limb alone! The point is, you should experiment with different techniques. You may find a distinguishing texture of your own! Use figures 115–119 as a starting point.



figure 115

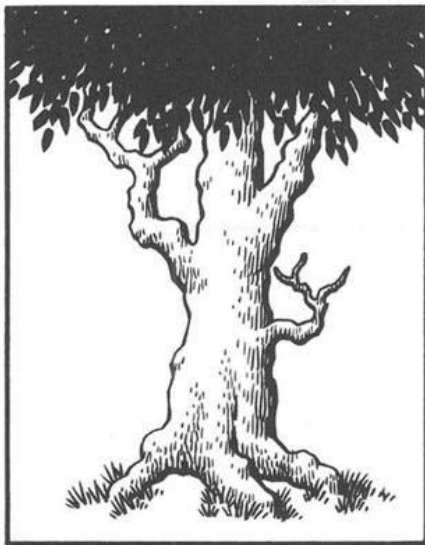


figure 116



figure 117



figure 118

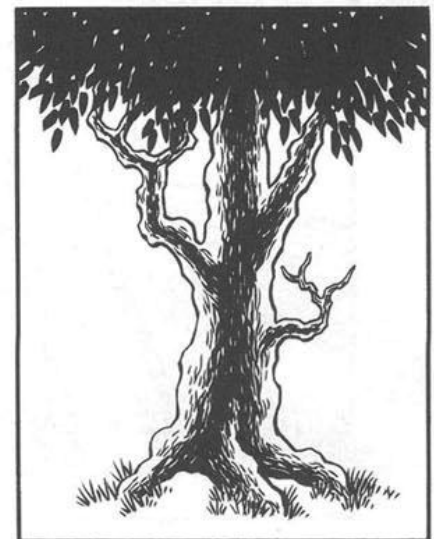
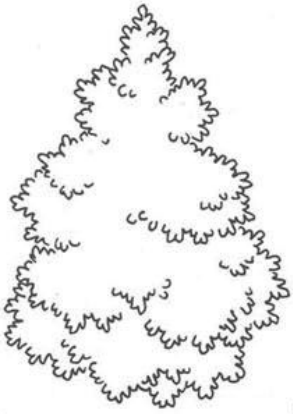
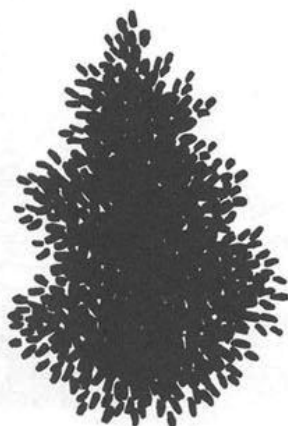
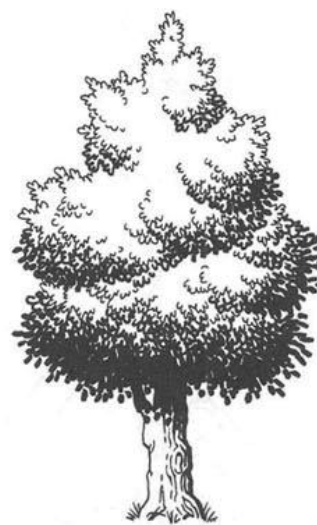


figure 119

*figure 120**figure 121**figure 122**figure 123*

Adding detail to the foliage of your trees and bushes is easily accomplished if you use a layering system. It's also a great way to build up their tonal values to create depth within the panel. Figures 120–125 are the four basic layers I used to build up the flat, pencilled tree (fig. 124) into the full, lush tree (fig. 125). You can use any number of these layers depending on your depth or detail needs.

*figure 124**figure 125*

Metal

When I first started working in comics, there wasn't much metal reference out there, except maybe Bob Layton's *Iron Man*. Bob was the first to realize that Tony Stark would spend most of his spare time polishing up that suit of armor, because it always had a high sheen! Nowadays there's an abundance of metal-clad characters sashaying around the comic-book universe, so the need to command the look of metal is imperative. Creating metal texture is simply adding reflections and highlights to create the appearance of a

shiny surface. The type of reflective patterns you use can also establish a stylistic signature.

Figure 126 is a warrior dude wearing armor without metal texture. Figures 127–130 show a variety of reflective patterns that help his armor look like metal. Adding a few highlights makes it extra shiny, but be careful! You can easily get carried away and add too much reflection, as in figure 130. With metal, sometimes less is more!



figure 127



figure 126



figure 128



figure 129



figure 130

Putting It All Together

Figures 131 and 132 use all the textures in this chapter. I wanted to show how depth is created by layering values and diminishing detail as objects fade into the background.



figure 131



figure 132

“My approach to inking is simply to try to imagine how the penciller would have completed his statement in ink if he’d desired to, or been able to.”

—Mike Royer



XIV PRACTICAL TIPS

Showing Samples

If you're trying to break into comics as an inker, I recommend that you start by showing your samples to professional comic-book artists as often as possible. You can find pros at comics conventions, book signings, or local studios. Most pro artists don't mind critiquing portfolios, because they were in your shoes when they were just starting out.

Sometimes artists use portfolio review as a means of finding assistants. At minimum, assisting a professional inker usually involves filling in blacks, inking backgrounds, and erasing pages. It's a great way to enter the field and learn about the craft from the ground up.

Why do this instead of first showing your samples to editors? For one thing, artists can be more specific about how to improve your work. In addition, if you wait until professional artists tell you that your work is ready to be seen by editors, you'll have a better chance of being hired. (To find an editor at a comics convention, hang out near the freelancers — they're always trying to get editors to buy their meals. When it's time to eat, just follow the crowd. Either that, or stop by the publishers' booths and ask to talk to editors.)

When assembling your portfolio, always start with your best, most recent pages. Update your portfolio as you do new work, removing the older material. Do not include inking samples over your buddy's amateurish pencil art. It's hard for other people to discern your relative skill level when you're working over nonprofessional pencils. (Your buddy will have to break in on his or her own.)

The best approach is to ink on heavy tracing paper over photocopies of professionally pencilled comic-book pages. You can obtain such copies

by requesting them, usually in writing, from submissions editors at comic-book publishing companies. You may have to wait awhile, but be patient; publishers, especially the larger ones, receive dozens of submissions and requests each week. Local artists are another potential source of photocopies.

Your portfolio should include original, inked pages (or full-size copies), along with facing copies of the corresponding pencils. You absolutely must show actual storytelling *pages*, not just pinups or splash pages. Inking a page of sequential panels is different from inking a single illustration.

Before submitting samples to a comic-book publisher, contact the submissions editor to get guidelines — then follow the guidelines. One universal rule is that you should *never* send original art in your sample packages. Send 8-1/2" x 11" copies of each inked page followed by the pencilled version. Enclose a cover letter with your name, address, and phone number. It is also a good idea to stamp your contact info on the backs of your sample pages, in case the letter gets separated from them. Once again, be patient — but don't be afraid to be persistent, too, if you initially get no response.

Essential Reading

Everyone who works in comics, or aspires to, should read *Comics and Sequential Art* by Will Eisner and *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud. 'Nuff said!

Reproduction

When you're working on an original comic-book page with a 10" x 15" image area, it's tough to visualize how it will look when reduced down to about 6" x 9" (60% of original size) and saturated with color. However, you do need to be aware of how your inking techniques will reproduce at a smaller size if for no other reason than to save yourself from slaving over

line details that won't be seen in the printed comic.

Seeing your work in print is the only way to learn about the many variables — reduction, coloring, paper stock, etc. — that affect how your inking reproduces. The next best method is to compare your original pages to reduced photocopies. Most copiers have a preset, 64% reduction feature, which is close enough for our purposes. This will help you see the drastic effect that reduction has on your ink lines.

Watch out for details that close up or bleed together when reduced, as well as any lines that break up or vanish altogether. An ink line thinner than about 0.3 millimeters usually won't reproduce well, and the minimum space between lines should be about 0.7 mm. The line width of technical pens is measured in millimeters, so you can use them for reference. (A #0 Staedtler tech pen, for example, has a 0.35 mm tip.)

Checking Proportions

As you ink faces and figures, sometimes you'll notice that the proportions or construction are out of alignment. It's not always easy to spot precisely what's causing the problem. A good way to find out is to look at the image in reverse: hold your page up to a mirror or turn it over and hold it up to a light. This makes it much easier to pinpoint what's wrong.

Watch Your Posture

Hunching over a drawing table for eight to ten hours a day may lead to chronic back and neck pain that can prematurely end your career. I used to get knots in my neck that were so bad, they prevented me from working for days at a time. I solved this problem by raising the surface angle of my drawing table to about 60 degrees. That way, I could sit upright and still work close to the page. It took some time to get used to this, but it saved my back and my comics career.

Erasing Pages

Another way to prevent work-related pain is to not let your inked, unerased pages stack up. Erase your pages one at a time as you finish them. This will save you major armache.

When I'm inking a page, I mark an X in ink on each area that will be solid black. I then fill in blacks *after* I erase the page. This helps keep the blacks nice and dark.

Working with Editors

Just like artists, editors have different working styles. Editors and assistant editors at different companies also have different job responsibilities. Identifying and adapting to these differences will make your relationship with them much smoother. There are good editors and bad editors, and you should learn how to work with both. This topic deserves its own book, but I'll limit myself to a few basic suggestions.

When an editor offers you an inking job, there are a few things you should think about before saying yes, even if every fiber of your being cries out to accept immediately! First, find out the deadline and page count. (Wait until after you've talked scheduling to ask about page rates.) Then look at your calendar to see if you can finish the job within the allotted time. Be realistic! Don't forget to allow for some time off — man does not live by inking alone. Remember that you'll occasionally run into unexpected delays. And any projects you're already working on, of course, must be taken into consideration as well. It's very easy to get yourself overcommitted by accepting too much work. When a job is due, the last thing your editor wants to hear from you is that you're late because you're working on something else for another company. You will be abducted by aliens before this editor gives you another assignment.

If you don't have time in your schedule to take on a new job, it's okay to turn it down. Tell the editor why you're saying no, and you'll earn

points for honesty and professionalism. This editor will most likely keep you in mind for future gigs.

When I'm offered a job that I do have time to ink, and if I've never seen the penciller's work, I ask to look at samples before I make my decision. Many times in the past, I have regretted not doing this. Sometimes the pencils just aren't very good, which means a lot of correcting on my part; other times, I may not like the penciller's style. It's far easier to motivate myself and give 100% in the inks if I respect the pencil art.

Once you've started a job, do *not* ignore deadlines, even if you think meeting the deadline will force you to compromise the quality of your work. The most important thing to an editor is getting the work in on time — you won't keep getting assignments if you develop a reputation for being late. Do the absolute best work you can under the time restraints.

Believe it or not, neatness counts. Even when you're doing a rush job, take time to erase the pencil marks from your inked pages and to white out any stray ink lines or splotches. Remember that in some cases you may be required to ink panel borders, sound effects, and/or signage.

If, for some reason, you won't make the deadline, call your editor as soon as possible. He or she may be able to buy you a little more time or, as a last resort, find someone to help you. More importantly, the editor needs to know when your work is coming in so he or she can adjust the production schedule! Hiding from your editor by not returning phone calls only exacerbates the problem and ensures your entry on his or her blacklist.

You may be strongly tempted to fabricate some whopping lie to excuse your tardiness. *Resist this temptation!* No matter how clever and creative you think you are, editors have heard it all.

On the other hand, if you find yourself working with an uncommunicative or irresponsible

editor, don't respond in kind. Maintain a professional demeanor and send any important requests or information in writing. Communicating with your editor from the start will make both of your jobs much easier. Ideally, an editor should be more than just someone who sends you work and nags you to get it done — a good editor is your liaison with the publisher and can either solve problems for you or point you in the right direction to solve them for yourself.

Is This the Future?

Aspiring inkers and working professionals alike always need to keep one eye on new technology, lest it catch them unawares. Computer-inking programs are already in use today. Though they're not yet cost- or time-effective, I'm sure they will be in the near future. If digital inking can save publishers money, you can bet that it'll affect the availability of traditional inking jobs.

As with computer coloring, the quality of the finished work will still depend on the computer operator's skill. Those who don't possess the skill to ink by hand will be able to ink electronically, but this will detract from the overall quality of comics art just as unskilled use of digital coloring has. The best results will come from artists who are skilled in both physical inking and computer use.

XV

SECRETS OF THE STARS

Okay, now the fun really starts! This is where we compare inking styles from the best in the industry and read about some of the methods that helped them achieve their status.

All of the images feature what would be considered finished pencils by industry standards, with the exception of Steve Rude's "Sundra and Jil" (page 104), which is an example of an unfinished layout.

This is the part of the book that I've been looking forward to the most. Even though I contributed to this section — Hey, I wrote the book! — I will be studying these inked pages for years to come.

Before you read the rest of this chapter, you should know a little about the processes behind it. Normally, comic-book artists ink directly on the original pencilled page, but for this book, we needed to reproduce the original pencils so you could compare them to the inked versions. Consequently, none of the artists in this book inked on the original pencilled pages, which made their task more difficult.

Each inker was provided with a photocopy of the page to be inked. The pieces were done by inking on tracing paper over the copy, or by putting the copy under regular comics art board and inking on a light box, or by inking on a nonphoto-blue copy of the copy.

To keep myself from being influenced by what everyone else was doing, I inked my pages before the others started to come in. I have to admit that I was tempted to change a few details on my pages when I saw what some of the other artists had done. But none of the other contributors had this advantage, so I resisted the temptation. My Sunday-school teacher would be proud!



THE MOTH

by
Steve Rude

Inks by

Gary Martin
Mark Farmer
Joe Rubinstein
Karl Story
William Stout





Gary Martin

Since the Moth page was drawn in Steve's Jack Kirby style, I tried to ink it as if I was inking the King himself. My contour lines are bolder than I would normally use. And to contrast this boldness, I like to use delicate feathering lines within the figures.

I used my series 7 #2 Winsor & Newton brush for everything except the ruled lines, where I used a .35 technical pen.

This page is so complete that my only contributions are small details. In panel one, I added leaves to the bushes with white-out.

The thug in panel two has a thick contour for separation, as well as the Moth in panel five.

A cool approach that Steve uses in panel three is the "light emanating from the force of the blow technique" that Jack used so well. This is where the light source actually radiates out from the punch or kick epicenter to show its power. So notice how I used this light source to determine my line weights.

In panel four, to achieve the looseness that Steve has in his pencils on the arm that is holding the throat, I used white-out on the black sleeve for feathering.





Mark Farmer

The most important part of inking is to talk to the penciller. This allows the artist to let you know what he expects, whether he's seen anything of yours in the past that he may like to see repeated on his own work, and at the same time point out things you should be aware of in the pencils.

When approaching the page, I tend to throw down all the major outlines first, gradually working smaller and finer on the remaining middle distance and background figures. Some days, when feeling particularly alert, I may decide to just ink faces all day. I still make the mistake of feeling a page is completed even though I still have the backgrounds to do . . . that's the work best left till 2:00 in the morning when your concentration's starting to wane. Occasionally, I may start at the bottom of a page, especially if the pencils appear easily smudged, but usually I start at the top and work down, covering "sensitive" areas as I go.

Most of my work is done with a brush for both speed and accuracy — Winsor & Newton series 7 numbers 00, 0, and 1. I use a dip pen for really fine lines and texture effects, Gillot 170 nib. I use Rapidograph pens for straight lines on things such as machinery or buildings in backgrounds, numbers MO5 and MO35. I also use Fountain Pentel pens for their ease of use and the fact that a line dries almost as soon as it's put down on paper.

The most important tool I use is white gouache, for correcting mistakes and giving a page a little polish once it's erased and I can see where the weight of the line isn't as accurate as I'd like it to be.

The actual pencil style here, so familiar to Steve Rude fans out there, was no problem, but I'm not sure my inking suits his pencils . . . I feel he needs someone with a looser technique. My efforts look a little sterile when applied to such highly finished pencils.

The future of inking? I'm just waiting for a computer software package to replace us (the same way that lettering has become a typing skill instead of a calligraphic one). Then I can wash out my brushes for one last time, sit back, and watch the comics medium lose yet a little more of its soul.





Joe Rubinstein

My materials are —

Inks:

- Pelikan Yellow Label Ink for brush work
- Higgins regular ink for pen work

Pens:

- Hunt 108 mostly on this page
- Gillot 170 for some of the backgrounds

Brushes:

- Raphael 8404 and 8408 #2 and #3

I use a Koh-I-Noor pencil holder (claw grip) to hold my pen points, Magic Rub erasers, Pelikan graphic white for touchups, single-edged razor blades, a Koh-I-Noor electric eraser (dark gray erasers), and an 18" raised metal ruler for backgrounds (but I do as much as possible freehand).

My philosophy of inking is to follow the pencils as closely as possible if I respect the work, and in the case of Steve Rude, I do respect the pencils.

An inker is not a tracer, the movie *Chasing Amy* aside. He/she is an artist with ink (if done right), just as the penciller is an artist with graphite.

Inking is far too boring if you do it the same way all the time.

The better inkers know how to draw (and very often can pencil comics as well), and the better inkers (in my opinion) don't overwhelm the penciller's work — they give it the respect it deserves and let the pencils dictate how to proceed: with brush or pen, angular or fluid, sensual or brittle, bold or precise, etc., which leads to my inking on Steve's page.

Steve is so tight and good that he didn't leave much room for interpretation or self-expression (nor should he have). If the penciller had been less exacting and informative than Steve, I would have been forced to make my own choices — about line weights and degrees of detail, etc. — consequently causing the work to become more "mine" than "his."

Like an actor in a very well-written play, I make the part my own, but ultimately, I hit the lines right and don't bump into the furniture.





Karl Story

My tools:

- Raphael 8404 sable brushes usually a #2 or 3
- T. Ishikawa Zebra 2586 quills
- Brause 511 quills
- Rotring Rapidograph pens .18, .25, .35, .50, and .70
- Higgins Black Magic india ink
- White acrylic paint
- And the full complement of various templates, straightedges, compasses, and other drafting tools of the trade.

My approach to inking is to try to make the penciller look as good as possible. Pretty simple. To do this, I cannot ink every penciller in the same way, so I try to adjust my style to fit the particulars of each individual penciller. Sometimes this takes a few pages to get acclimated with a new style. Having never worked over Steve Rude before, I found it a bit awkward at first, especially working over a blue line of the actual pencils. It took me back to when I inked sample pages over photocopies with vellum or mylar overlays.

I try to go for a clean look with my finished inks. I am primarily a brush inker, finding it to be the most versatile of available tools. Brush is used for organics, such as the characters,

animals, and other non-manmade things. A quill is used for very small figures and rough or broken things like shattered glass or rubble. Technical pens are used for all things artificial like buildings, guns, cars, etc. This is only a basic outline, and I frequently break it to get the best results.

The finished page should be clear and easy to understand. I use line weight to distinguish depth in the page, thicker outlines on the figures and objects in the foreground, and thinner in the background. The artwork should be able to stand on its own in black and white even if it is to be colored later.





William Stout

Eighty-five percent of the art here was inked with a Winsor & Newton series 7 #1 brush. (Before purchasing your brush, dip it in water and flick the body of the brush sharply against your arm; the brush should come to a perfect point with no split hairs.) The rest of the art was inked with a Hunt 102 crow-quill pen. The exterior panel borders were inked with a 5-1/2 B Speedball pen (the heavier line helps slightly to unify the look of the pages), the interior borders with a 6 B.

I used Higgins T-100 Drafting Film Ink, though I usually use the intensely black (and ruinous to pens and brushes) Pelikan Drawing Ink for Matte Drafting Film. These inks take a sandblaster to remove, but they don't gray out when you erase your pencils. I do very little white-out work, but when I do, I use Winsor & Newton Designer's Gouache Permanent White.

I use a #3 Rapidograph and ellipse guides when that kind of precision is needed. For straight lines I use a crow quill and a clear plastic triangle with several layers of thin, white tape on the underside to raise the edge and keep ink from creeping under. Occasionally I make use of a French curve for inking long, precise curves.

I have three different inking approaches:

1.) Stay as true to the pencils as possible. The only deviation would be to use a ruler or ellipse

guide where mechanical elements requiring precision were drawn freehand by the penciller.

2.) Aid in achieving a particular sought-after style suggested in the pencils.

3.) Imprint my own style upon the pencils. I do this if the pencils are vague (as when I'm given what amounts to layouts to ink) or weak in drawing.

Steve Rude's drawing is clear and strong, requiring little more than a clean interpretation of his lines; however, Steve looked to be deviating somewhat from his style and taking a Jack Kirby approach, so I combined approaches 1 and 2.

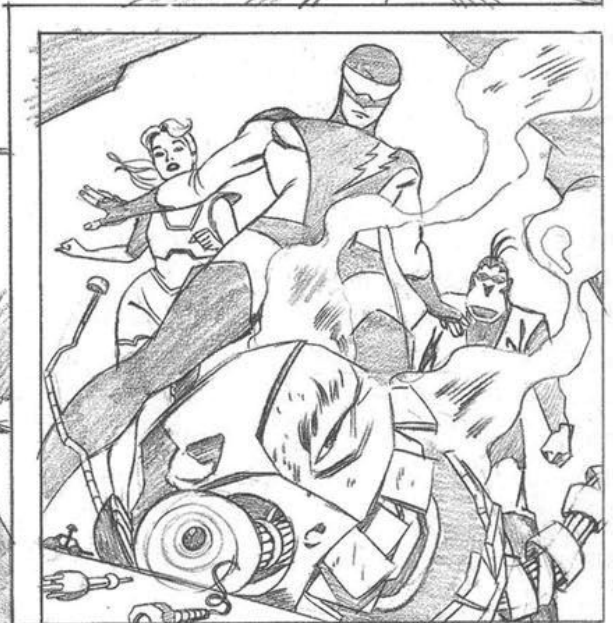
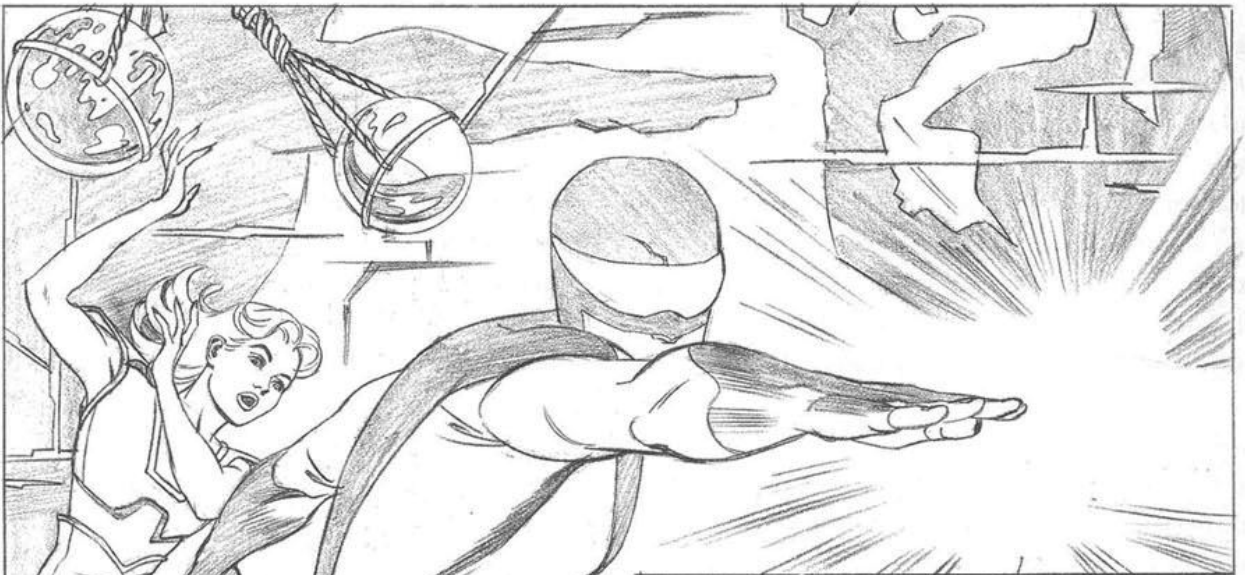
Panel one: I deviated from Steve's pencilling of the bushes, because for me they were not clearly readable as bushes. Since this page is a "cartooned" style (as opposed to a realistic style), I redrew and then inked what are generally accepted as cartoon symbols for realistically cartooned bushes. This whole panel was inked with a pen except for a bit of the Moth.

Panel two: This is all brush except for the window, gun, and picture frame. I really like Steve's indication of the Moth guy's palms and fingertips pressing on the glass.

Panel three: This is seventy percent brush inking. I got a little carried away and used my circle template not only for the chandelier bulbs but for the spilled fruit as well. The power streaks emanating from the impact center were all inked using my triangle edge.

Panel four: The drawing was a bit off on two of the hands, so I redrew them correctly in Steve's style. I feathered one side of each of the crease highlights on the black coat because they needed contrast and because without the feathering, there were too many hard edges, causing the crease to look artificial. About eighty percent of this panel is brushwork.

Panel five: About eighty percent brushwork, this panel was pretty much inked "as is" with only a few additions of feathering on the hero's knees to sweeten the form.



NEXUS

by
Steve Rude

Inks by

Gary Martin
Terry Austin
Tom Palmer
Steve Rude
P. Craig Russell
Scott Williams





Gary Martin

I admit I have an unfair advantage over the other artists when I inked this Nexus page. By my estimate, I have inked about 400 of Steve's pages. Inking a page of someone you have never inked before (especially over a Xerox) is very difficult, because it takes several pages before you start to feel confident in your approach. In my case, when I first started inking Steve in 1991, it took me about two issues before I felt like I was getting it right.

Steve wanted my inks to be more loose, somewhere between Alex Raymond and Mike Royer. My natural approach is to be very controlled, so I had to work really hard to loosen up for him. Steve does not like slick feathering. He prefers dry brush, so I try to use it as much as possible.

One of the things that I always have trouble with is inking Sundra's face. Her face has such simple features that just one subtle mistake throws off everything.

Of course, I used my trusty Winsor & Newton series 7 #2 brush on 98% of this page. And a Rotring Rapidoliner .35 technical pen to template the circles.

In panel one, I added a white contour line on the bottom of the large hand in the foreground and a heavy black contour on the top of the hand.

This helps pop out the hand from the middle-ground. I put Zip-a-Tone on the wall to push it back.

The creepy guy in panel two was missing an eyebrow (see the pencils). So, I grew it back. And I softened some of the edges on his black areas with dry brush for texture.

Panel three has a strong light source, so I added a heavy contour on the left side of the figures. And I removed the shadow below Sundra's knee to be consistent with the light. Notice the contour line weight on Nexus' raised arm. (The heavy part is away from the light, and the thin part is toward the light.) I added white Zip on the hanging spheres for separation.

In panel four, for depth, I added a heavy contour to the severed head. (Cool! I got to write the phrase, "severed head"!)





Terry Austin

The main function of an inker is the same as the rest of his collaborators in the process, namely that of storyteller. My job is to take whatever elements the penciller has decided best serve the function of telling the writer's story and clarify those elements in order to support that storytelling. This is accomplished by ordering space in the panel — usually by varying line weights on objects to correspond to their relative positions in the panel — and organizing a sequence of dark-to-light areas to indicate a sort of atmospheric perspective and by using different kinds of lines and textures to contrast the various materials things are made of. These days, you can tell the folks masquerading as inkers: there are a million lines everywhere and all of 'em look the same.

I have no use for inkers who decide they know more than the penciller and start “correcting” things. Presumably those pencils — albeit enhanced by my ability to manipulate the elements listed above — are what the editor wants to see. When I've done my job correctly, my contribution should be invisible. Hopefully, unless there's a return to check the credits, the reader should have forgotten I've ever been there.

Gary asked us to be specific about the tools we used, which I generally refuse to do, because I don't think it helps those trying to learn to ink. My advice is to try anything and everything then

narrow that down to the things that produce the desired effect. Use an old fence post if it works for you.

On to the page. Steve's pencils are really quite lovely, very tight. I prefer tight pencils, as that allows me to concentrate on line weights, textures, and the like without having to stop and figure out “Is that his other arm or a branch of a tree he's standing in front of?” or some such.

Panel one: Steve is genius enough at design that he can load heavy black areas in the foreground and background in the same panel and make it work. All I did was add a bit of feathering out of the shadow on the foreground hand to add a hint of detail to differentiate it from the simpler linear figures of Nexus and friends. I also left a slight halo around the hand to pop it forward and — as an experiment, since I've never inked Steve before — I tried a hint of rougher texture in the black of the stone wall behind them, confident that if this were for publication in an actual comic book, that whole area would likely be eventually covered with lettering anyway.

Panel two: I haloed the floating figure to pop it forward and roughened the linework/texture of the wooden table.

Panel three: I added the grays in between the background shadow sections to contrast with the stark black-and-white areas and pulled a couple minor blast lines — in white — across the hand area of Nexus' shadow to help reinforce the illusion that it is the furthest element in the composition, existing well behind the action.

Panel four: I added the gray tone to the foreground to bring it forward and to help anchor the smashed head to the ground/foreground.

In conclusion, I'd just like to add that I suspect inking is much the same as dancing: if you think too much about what you're doing, it spoils the flow, robs the process of whatever magic there is. But then again, what do I know — I can't dance a lick!





Tom Palmer

This was a difficult assignment. Steve Rude rendered a very tight-pencilled page, leaving little for the inker to demonstrate beyond basic, technical skills, or so it seems. I have been assured that styles will emerge based on other submissions and that the tight pencils were intentional.

Normally, at least in recent years, I have worked over breakdowns or layouts, providing finishing inks. Working over breakdowns or layouts usually requires some pencilling by the inker — sketching in areas not defined, or plotting light and shadow on figures or backgrounds. Either way, I find the involvement taps my interest and energies.

I enjoyed this chance to work with Steve Rude. The collaboration was rewarding for me. I have admired his work for some time, and once I got into the inking I did not feel restricted, but challenged to do my best.

I chose to trace my version on Bristol board over a light table, using a photocopy of the pencilled page as my guide — not a usual procedure, but convenient when an original is not available. I find this practice analogous to staring into a brightly lit TV screen for hours!

Some may define inking as tracing every line exactly in weight and character, and by definition, I suppose there is some truth in that. Inking

Steve's page, I wanted to transcribe his careful pencilling, but I also wanted to apply some of my own technique for this book's interpretation.

I began by tracing most of the linework in pen, using straight edges and templates to capture the mechanical elements of the circles and ellipses correctly. I then added the dense blacks with brush and removed the Bristol board from my light table. I used a brush to render the energy flare, and the edge of a wood ruler to guide my brush for straight lines.

The last stage had me sit back and take an overall look at the page and see how each panel related to the whole. The hand in the first panel is the same hand of the creature in panel two. Taking some license, I broke the panel border with the creature's index finger in the second panel, which not only gave a connection to the first hand but a dimensional quality to the figure overall.

I took a single-edged razorblade and scratched radiating lines into the large, black, wall shadows in panel three. Breaking up the solid black brought the Nexus character forward, the blacks of his costume now dominating. I used a brush in the last panel to finish details but decided at one point to leave well enough alone. I was satisfied with the results. Hope Steve felt the same.

I am constantly trying new materials and discarding those that fail to achieve the results I want. On this assignment, I used a Hunt 102 artist's pen point and a Gillott 303 pen point for the free-hand rendering and a Staedtler Marsmatic .70 technical pen for the hard or mechanical elements. A #4 Isabey 6227 Kolinsky sable was the brush I used throughout.

I find Pelikan drawing ink free flowing with pen or brush and Design Higgins Black Magic a dense black for large passages. I have a jar of Pelikan Graphic White for last-minute touchup and white-out.



S. RUDE '96



Steve Rude

Main tool used: Cosmos-Extra #4 brush

I was asked to ink two pages of my own work for this book. Both pages were inked on vellum — a thicker version of tracing paper — that was spray mounted over Xeroxes of my pencils. I used a Cosmos brush #4 for 95% of the work. A small, stiff pen nib filled in some detail areas.

All the figures, even the tiny ones, were done with a brush. Believe me, it's not as easy as it looks. Professionals and amateurs alike know that one misplaced line can change everything. Be prepared to white out what needs to be corrected.

Two completely different approaches were used to ink these pages. Here, on the Nexus page, everything was outlined first and blacks filled in after. On the Sundra page (see page 112), the black areas were "spotted" first and outlines saved for last. Both approaches produce different results.

The two things I look for in all my work — pencilled, painted, or inked — are *readability* and *emotion*. These two qualities combined must have a certain impact for me; a well-drawn figure with anatomical correctness and mechanical feathering can be boring, so achieving this impact can be a challenge for me, since I like

realistic-looking figures. I'm always open to new ways of conveying the "emotion" of a scene better.

Perhaps you'll invent a new way that will become the standard for other inkers to follow.

If you like my style of inking, the following are several old masters you can refer to: Noel Sickles and Milton Caniff for black spotting, Roy Crane for simplicity and overall page design, and Alex Raymond for cursive, yet accurate inking. Also, see *Rip Kirby*.

Take care and good luck!





P. Craig Russell

My materials are simple. A Hunt 108 Flexible Crow Quill. That's it.

Sometimes people have a hard time learning to use a pen and give up too soon, but I can offer at least two suggestions for making it work.

One: The type of paper you use needs to be smooth. A paper with too much tooth is hopeless. This can be a problem if you're so cheap you'll only use paper provided by the publishing houses (though recent years have seen an improvement from most of them, I still buy my own — a nice, two-ply, slick Strathmore — by the sheet, not in pads).

Two: It took me years to realize that students were holding the pen like a pencil, almost straight up and down. This causes the point to splay and catch in the paper. You must hold the pen at a much lower angle than you would a pencil so it can glide across the page.

My intent as an inker is to always respect the integrity of the penciller. I am here to help them "realize" their pencil drawings. I'm not here to impose my own vision — I can do that with my own work. This is supposing, of course, that the penciller has clearly stated his intentions in his drawings, has said what he meant to say clearly. I don't mean to imply that it's just a question of

going over the lines with ink. The inker needs to be so sensitive to the forms he is inking that it feels as if he is drawing them himself. It's not unlike the conductor who feels he has actually composed the music he is conducting as he conducts it. This is why the more an inker knows about drawing, the better he will understand and translate into ink another artist's work.

I haven't addressed the question of what to do with sloppy, poorly thought-out pencils. I don't want to. It's too depressing. Don't make me.





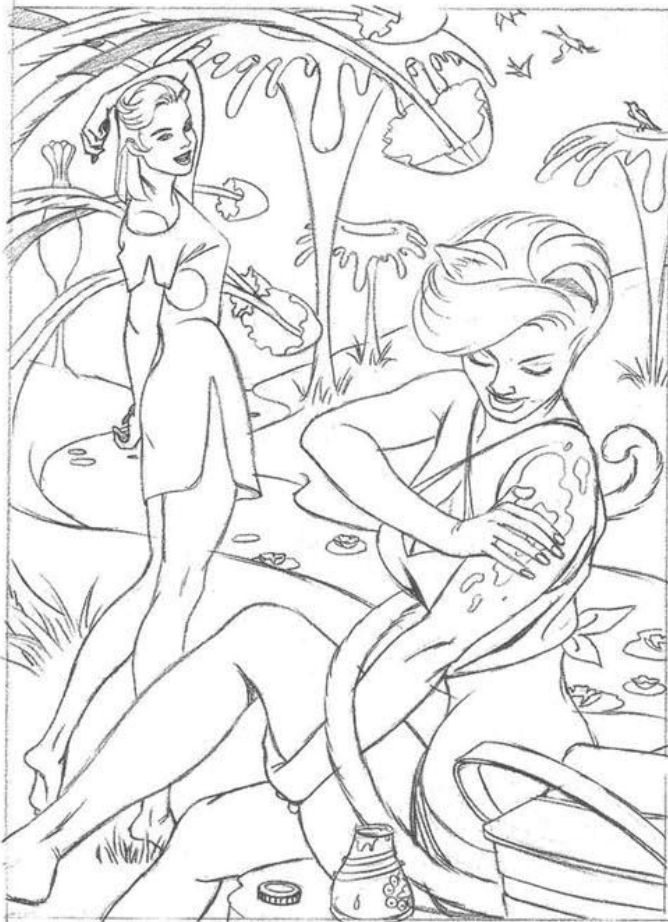
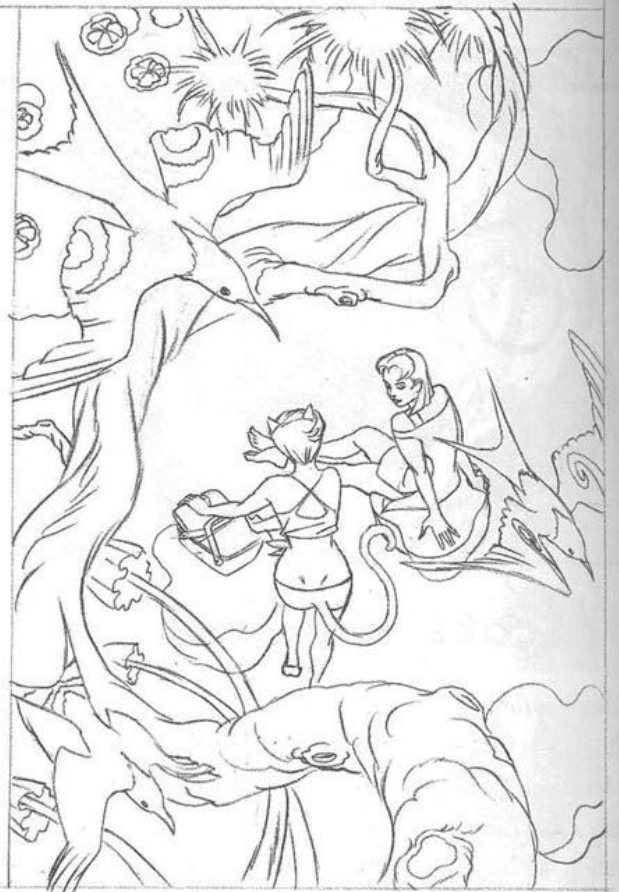
Scott Williams

Inking comic books is a strange little profession. It is an art form that is easily and frequently misunderstood, generally underappreciated, tediously laborious, and can contribute to sleep deprivation — late pencillers and a pesky little thing called a deadline being the contributing factors.

So, what's the upside here? Why ink comics? Why not *pencil* comics? Why not soak up some of that fame and glory and fortune for yourself? Why be a bottom feeder when you could be the star? Is it because you get to work side by side with other incredibly talented artists and create something as a team that is better than could be created individually? Absolutely. Is it because yours is the line that is actually reproduced by the camera and seen by the masses and the incredible control and power that gives you? Positively. Is it because inking is easier than pencilling? Yeah, that too. Starting at ground zero, with a blank sheet of paper staring back at you, is a lot more intimidating than staring at one that has all its storytelling, camera angles, designs, and lighting already worked out. Does that mean that inking is just about tracing somebody else's line? At times, yes. Some artists pencil so tightly and completely that their work is practically camera ready before the inker ever gets his hands on it. Although the finished image is usually impressive in such a case, the inking process is usually

tedious and dull, with no room for inspiration, interpretation, or spontaneity.

Ideally, there is a middle ground for inkers, where the pencils are complete and draftsmanship solid, but the inker is left enough room for decisions regarding line weights and contours, bounce and energy, as well as texture, depth, and crispness. It is here the inker can display his personality and sense of aesthetics. The inker's hand in things should be evident — subservient — but not dominated by the pencils. The inker should also have some idea of what the penciller is going for and some knowledge of how he has been inked before. Artistic respect has to come from both sides. Then, and only then, does the marriage of two distinct styles give us its best to enjoy, and this best reads like a roll call: Kirby and Sinnott, Adams and Palmer, Byrne and Austin, Miller and Janson . . .



SUNDRA AND JIL

by
Steve Rude

Inks by

**Brian Bolland
Rudy Nebres
Kevin Nowlan
Jerry Ordway
Steve Rude
Mark Schultz
Dave Stevens**





Brian Bolland

With the exception of the panel borders and a straight horizontal line in panel three, for which I used a Rapidograph, everything was inked with a Winsor & Newton series 16 #3 sable brush. I've never been able to work with a pen of any sort. Sometimes I scribble a texture with a Rapidograph because I have the vague idea that working with pen should be quicker, but I usually go back to the brush to get the same effect just as easily and quickly — which, compared to most artists, is not very quickly at all.

I believe that it's not the job of an inker to redraw the work of the penciller. If someone was inking me, I'd expect him to reproduce in ink everything I'd drawn in pencil — or better still, everything I intended to draw — or better, if I'd failed to get something right in pencil, he'd be able to pull it off in ink. In other words, he'd have to be able to read my mind and be super-human!

Having said that, I've taken one or two liberties with Steve's pencils, partly because I pencilled this all again on a lightbox before inking, and partly because it would be dull if all versions of this page looked exactly the same.

Panel one: I took a tracing of the right (our left) eye of the foreground figure and flipped it so that the two eyes were symmetrical. I moved all

of the background figure except for her right arm a shade to the right (our right) in order to slightly elongate her upper right arm.

Panel two: On the light box, I somehow managed to lose the face of the seated figure, and couldn't quite get it back.

Panel three: I mucked about with the right arm of the seated figure, also her left hand and the joint at which her left leg joins her hip. I had trouble working out the picnic basket throughout the whole page. I added a handle here. I moved the left leg of the standing figure, and I'm afraid I didn't make a very good job of her face.

Panel four: I moved the right leg of the standing figure and did something to the left hand and arm of the foreground figure.

I added some shadows here and there, and I blacked in the sky throughout and the stream in panel three. I don't feel comfortable unless there's something of a balance between black and white. My earliest influences were artists like Eric Bradbury and Jesus Blasco, who worked in British comics in the sixties and didn't have the benefit of color, but their expert use of black and line tone was all the "color" they needed. I also added in panel three a horizon line and a landscape and its reflection. Hey, I was out of control.





Rudy Nebres

As a true believer in Good Anatomy, I approach my work with a particular eye on the anatomy of the figure. I enjoy inking over pencils where the penciller has an eye for accurate anatomy. Anatomy need not be overly accurate, but dynamic enough in its presentation to please the viewers' eyes. Steve's work has both these qualities.

The first thing I do is outline the pencils with a good, thin pen, usually a Pentel fountain pen. After the initial "outline" inking is done, I use a brush — a Winsor & Newton Series 7 #2 — for the various renderings and special effects. Clean pencils make the rendering much easier.

By the way, Steve is a good penciller.





Kevin Nowlan

I generally use these tools for most of my work:

- Hunt 102 crow quill
- Raphael or Winsor & Newton sable brushes, #3 or #4
- Rapidograph pens #0, #1, and #4
- Pelikan or Higgins Black Magic ink
- Pro White paint for corrections.

First, let me get my apology out of the way. Steve Rude is one of the finest illustrators working today. His characters are wonderfully animated. They have natural gestures and eloquent expressions. He draws with such beautiful clarity . . . it's painful to watch a moron like me pick up a pen and destroy one of his pages.

My biggest frustration with this piece was my inability to preserve much of Steve's style. I'm a lousy mimic, so when I added the rendering and shadows, it started looking less and less like a Steve Rude page. I'd like to think I would have done a better job if I had been inking Steve's finished pencils instead of doing finishes over a layout . . . but I don't know.

Well, anyway, here's what I did. I like big, fat panel borders, so I began by ruling them with a #4 Rapidograph. Then, I inked all of the line work with a Hunt 102 quill pen. The long, curved stems and the picnic basket were inked with a

#1 Rapidograph and a French curve. The bottle and lid were inked with a #0 and an ellipse template.

Next, I pencilled some shadows and inked them with the Raphael brush. Some of the additional details and textures in the background were inked with the quill pen.

Finally, I went back and added a few more shadows and thickened up some of the outlines.





Jerry Ordway

Let me state right up front that I have mixed feelings about the results I achieved inking this page. Steve Rude is an excellent draftsman and storyteller, and I felt a bit intimidated treating this page as “layouts.” My first instinct was to just ink what was there, adding line weights, etc., but as I looked at the results, I saw the need to drop some black areas into the page for contrast and depth. This is what a finisher is supposed to do, after all.

My favorite technique for deciding where black areas need to be spotted is to squint at the page from an arm’s length. If nothing pops out at me, I start in on the piece with a Grumbacher #4 Sable Essence brush loaded with Pelikan drawing ink — the only brand I like. Since this page was inked onto two-ply Strathmore Bristol board using a light box, I had to be extra careful in checking my line weights. Light boxing always plays havoc with my eyes, and I sometimes ink too thick with my Hunt 102 crow-quill pen tip. Again, squinting is a good remedy for this!

My thoughts on inking in general all apply to this assignment. First, I’ve never liked inking unlettered pages because that’s important information about the story that may help in my choices on rendering. In this case, I really had to stare at the page a while to figure out what I was looking at — are those splashes in panel

three supposed to be water, or flowers, or flowers squirting water? I don’t know, but they must be solid, or that bird would have fallen in, right? Another problem that faced me on this page was that I hadn’t inked Steve Rude before, and I never seem to find my rhythm on any job until I’ve inked four or five pages. Oh, well . . .

When I first started as an inker, I was pretty desperate to make anything I inked my own. I loved jobs that needed a lot of work, a lot of fixing, because I was trying to prove to my editor that I could handle a pencil! I wouldn’t have wanted to ink a Steve Rude back then. I would have felt guilty trying to overpower the pencils. A few years into my career, I did get to do regular pencilling. After that, when I returned to inking, on *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, I had a different attitude. George Perez was the big “draw” there, so I attempted to restrain myself to just polishing up what he had put down! The same was true of my inking on *Fantastic Four* over John Byrne. His stuff was very complete, and he would indicate all kinds of surface textures on things, so I had fun making my pen lines bounce all over the place. I know he appreciated that I didn’t ink every background object with the same texture.

Metal is shiny, rocks are grainy and rough, cloth is soft, etc. You have to be able to communicate these things in your inking. You also have to think, “Would a wall just be made up of chunks of rock, or would it be 2’ x 4’ lumber, plaster, insulation, electric wiring, plumbing pipe, and a lot of dust?” Think about what you’re inking! Again, having a copy of the plot or script helps, too.

If you want to be a good inker, I can’t stress how important it is for you to really be able to draw. Inking is not just tracing, and it’s not all just technical proficiency. To be able to understand what a penciller puts down on the board, you have to speak the same language. The best inkers are all fine artists in their own right.

Good luck!





Steve Rude

Main tool used: Cosmos-Extra #4 brush

I was asked to ink two pages of my own work for this book. Both pages were inked on vellum — a thicker version of tracing paper — that was spray mounted over Xeroxes of my pencils. I used a Cosmos brush #4 for 95% of the work. A small, stiff pen nib filled in some detail areas.

All the figures, even the tiny ones, were done with a brush. Believe me, it's not as easy as it looks. Professionals and amateurs alike know that one misplaced line can change everything. Be prepared to white out what needs to be corrected.

Two completely different approaches were used to ink these pages. Here, on the Sundra page, the black areas were “spotted” first and outlines saved for last. On the Nexus page (see page 96), everything was outlined first and blacks filled in after. Both approaches produce different results.

The Sundra page is referred to as a “layout” page, where the page is either drawn tight or sketchy, and it's up to the inker to fill in where the black areas will go. By spotting the blacks first, I could decide if adding certain shadow areas would make the page read better and help the figures stand out more. Using this approach,

an inker's abilities are really called into play, as you will see by the different examples provided here. No two inkers' work will look alike. Feel free to add, subtract, or delete anything to help the overall finish of a page.





Mark Schultz

I should begin with a caveat: I seldom ink the pencils of anyone other than myself, so I'm not sure how much practical experience I can offer to those who wish to make a profession out of finishing other people's pencils. Inking Steve Rude's page for this book was a unique experience for me.

I have no preference in India inks, since I slightly water my ink anyway to help it flow smoothly. The brush I use is an industry standard, the Winsor & Newton series 7 #2, although I'd probably use a #3 or #4 if they weren't so expensive.

I never got the hang of using a pen and don't use one except when an absolute dead-weight line is called for. In that rare case, I'll use a Hunt 102 or 107 crow quill against a straight-edge. As an aside here, let me mention that while I sometimes make elaborate use of ellipse templates where needed when pencilling, I ink my circles and ovals freehand with a brush to try to keep the lines vibrant.

For correcting ink mistakes, I use an electric eraser. I don't use the eraser strips labeled as for ink correction, however. They are far too abrasive and will eat up even the best paper. I use the pink eraser strips designated by the manufacturer for pencil corrections. The eraser

will, with patience, gently remove ink missteps with minimum damage to a good board. I prefer the electric eraser over white-out for correcting my mistakes because I hate trying to ink over the thick white-out surface. However, when white-out is required for negative effects like stars, or blades of grass against a dark background, I use Pro White, watered down a bit, like my ink.

In the production-line system in which many comic books are assembled, it is often unrealistic because of deadline considerations to expect the penciller to provide completely realized pencils. In this case, the inker must make drawing decisions. When I inked the page reproduced here, I had to make choices concerning the placement of blacks, as Steve's pencils were totally linear. As I knew the finished piece was to be reproduced in black and white, I felt free to incorporate heavy areas of black to help create drama and contrast. If the page were to be reproduced in color, I probably would have used much less black to allow the color more prominence. In any regard, I tried to work with Steve's pencils, to build on them and work to their spirit. The inker's stylistic tendencies should never overwhelm the penciller's.

Treated carefully, a good, round sable brush will keep its point a long time. When I've lost the point off a brush, I don't retire it; I put it on drybrush detail, a technique where the inker purposely forces the hairs of the brush to flatten and separate. This, combined with a minimum of ink loaded on the split hairs, allows for all sorts of unique line effects. Depending on how you force the hairs to split, you can create fuzzy, craggy, or vibrant line characteristics. It's not an exact science; it takes practice and patience, but the variety of effects you can achieve makes this technique worth the effort.

Study, study, study the masters of ink technique: Goya, Tuetpolo, Van Gogh, Hokusai, Coll, Dan Smith, Stoops, Sickles, Foster, Raymond, etc. Keep digging and discovering, and you'll never stop improving.





Dave Stevens

Although I really don't hire myself out as an inker, I have, on occasion, stepped in at a friend's request to help out with a job or two. I've enjoyed collaborating with quite a few of my peers and several of my elders on the odd cover, pinup page, or short story. So, I may not have the same perspective of someone who does this for a living, but . . .

For me, the process of inking basically comes down to choices. I think most good inkers operate by instinct. I know that when I look at a pencilled page, I look first for the strong areas — where the penciller really rose to the occasion and did his best to spell everything out, thereby making my job pure pleasure — and then for the weak spots — sketchy, loose areas that he obviously drew (or *didn't*) on autopilot, requiring me to step in and take up the slack. Then, I start to sort of “feel” my way through it with the brush, trying to strike a balance between linework and black areas.

Unfortunately, I've never been very good at “spotting blacks” in my own storytelling, so as an inker, I'm not able to contribute as much as say, Kevin Nolan, who is absolutely brilliant when it comes to dramatic lighting and rich blacks.

As far as breaking the rest of it down, it becomes a process of refinement: what to leave in,

what to leave out, and what to add. Obviously, I leave in all the artist's best efforts, clarifying detail if needed. I tend to leave out any unnecessary clutter, meaningless detail, or simple drawing mistakes. I add only what I think will help make the scene richer, or the characters more real, to the reader. Anything more becomes selfish and inappropriate for the job. And it is the *penciller's* vision that we're embellishing.

Sometimes, I've been specifically *asked* to bring more to the table, to give a job my own “look,” and in those cases, I've pulled out all the stops and hoped for the best. But in general, inking must *serve* the pencils rather than smother them. I think everyone included here would agree.



Anderson '01

GHOST

by

Brent Anderson

Inks by

Gary Martin

Steve Leialoha

Mike Royer

Brent Anderson





Gary Martin

Back in the late seventies when I was still living in my hometown of San Jose, California, I had big dreams of breaking into comics as a penciller. I thought I was pretty close to realizing this goal until I meet Brent Anderson. I'd seen him hanging around local comic-book shops and some Bay Area comic cons, but I hadn't seen his work yet. Then one day he came into my workplace (a packaging company) to inquire about shrink-wrapping. Wanting to check out my competition, I introduced myself and was soon riffling through his portfolio. That's when I realized I had to seriously re-evaluate my career goals! The pages I held in my sweaty little hands that he had lovingly pencilled and inked were jaw-dropping gorgeous! They were these wonderful comics pages of a kid and some horses for a *Boys' Life* type of magazine. After seeing Brent's art, I thought I might have a slight chance of entering comics if I gave up my pencilling dream and concentrated exclusively on inking. There's nothing like seeing genuine talent to put things into a realistic perspective!

When the time came to ink this page, I wasn't as intimidated as I could have been, since I've inked a few of Brent's pages in the past. His style reminds me of Neal Adams', so my approach was to use bold contours and delicate feathering. You would think that a realistic pencil style would require a more subtle contour line, but a

thick contour sublimely contrasts the thin interior lines. See how well this works with the close-up of Ghost at the bottom of the page.

As you can see in the pencils, there's a lot of room for interpretation. In panel two, Brent used the side of his pencil for a gray tone along Ghost's nose and to the left of her eye. I was tempted to solve this problem with a screen tone — as Tom Palmer used it when he inked Neal Adams and Gene Colan — but screens don't always work with today's digital scanning and coloring, so I try to stay away from them. Still, I couldn't resist with the gray sky in panel three, along with white feathering on top to soften the edge. I used dry brush on the guns and to roughen the edges of the muzzle flash.





Steve Leialoha

Brent Anderson and I have worked together twice before. I once helped him with some inking over his pencils; the goal was to keep it in Brent's style. And Brent pencilled a few pages of a book I was drawing, so the finished art needed to resemble my solo efforts. This time, I thought I'd work somewhere in the middle, neither slavishly following Brent's style nor obliterating his look for my own.

I always start by making a good photocopy of the pencils to refer back to. As the inking progresses, things may get hard to see or the pencils may smear, ink spills, or who-knows-what. It's good insurance. I inked most of this with a Raphael 8404 #3 brush, my favorite. I also used a Hunt 102 crow quill, a few Sharpie markers, and a drafting pen for the panel borders.

I analyze every line Brent's drawn. Since the piece is mostly straightforward line work, all I need to do is decide on the line weight as I go along. I'm familiar with Adam Hughes' fabulous Ghost covers with his nod towards Alphonse Mucha (one of my favorites), so I'm thinking: a hint of graphic 2-D outlines, keep it simple, don't get fussy . . .

Rendering gray areas is the biggest challenge in inking and something I enjoy. Brent uses this to great effect, double-lighting the faces and little

bits here and there. It's the interpretive-dance portion of the program: neither black nor white. The inker must decide on the rendering techniques: pen crosshatching, halftone zip/computer effects, dry brush, making it black, or just leaving it white. I start off by inking just the outlines of the topmost objects (cape & cowl edges) and the panel borders. Then, since I've never inked on this particular paper, I begin inking areas that are the least demanding of concentration and stylistic certainty — the big gun at lower left. Then I ink up some of the capes and the figure in the first panel, getting a feel for Brent's line. Taking a break from the figures, I ink some of the buildings. Another area to attend to: perspective. Brent has used several vanishing points, but they look right, so I get out my rulers and triangles and go to it. My motto is: "If it looks right, then it's good enough." (Sometimes "correcting" a drawing will kill its energy!) I can't decide how best to ink the sky behind the figure. It should be a smooth gradation, and I don't think it should be done in ink. I usually work with color in mind so I leave it as is (and ordinarily would leave instructions for the colorist). As I go along there are things I don't like in my inking, so I try not to repeat them. By the time I've inked everything except the faces, I've worked through enough different situations that I'm confident enough to finish them. I want bold lines in panel two, and I know this wouldn't have worked had I inked it earlier. As I ink, I notice the guns don't match, and so I add the hammer to the gun in the middle. The foreground gun has no ejector port, but I've already inked it and like the way it looks.

The last thing, after finishing up the buildings, is the white-out: time to fix lines that went astray, or were too thick or fussy, and to add the gunflash. A little drybrush and it's finished. There are a few spots I know should be better, but there's a point of diminishing return, and I'm there, so I leave them. Before sending the piece to Gary, I make photocopies for my files and as insurance should we never see the originals again. The copies flatten out the tones of the ink, so suddenly I see a lot more things that need correcting. Okay. Now it's *really* finished!





Mike Royer

The question has been asked, “What do you think about when you’re inking?” Or was it actually “What were you thinking!?!”? It’s all one’s point of view. I can tell you what I feel when presented with pencils by someone as talented as Brent Anderson – abject terror! Well, more accurately, *intimidation* best describes my mental approach to inking assignments of this caliber.

If I look at pencils and say to myself, “Shoot, I can do this!” the inking process becomes just a job. With pencils like Anderson’s, my thoughts are “Jeez . . . can I do this . . . meet this challenge . . . not lose the pencil artist’s *statement!*!” I’d better not screw up something this well done!

Embellishment is a term I have a problem with. Having no real discernable “surface” style of my own (a result of years of inking others’ pencils and two decades of my own “funny animal” pencils, most often inked by others), my approach to inking is to simply try to imagine how the penciller would have completed his statement in ink if he’d desired to, or been able to.

Of course, this method can backfire. Years ago, after completing two *Ka-Zar* stories for Marvel, I was read the riot act by the late John Verpoorten because I turned in pages that looked like they’d been inked by Don Heck, who had pencilled them. John had neglected to inform me

he wanted a Joe Sinnott ink job! There’s only one Sinnott. He has the ability to turn everything he touches into Joe Sinnott.

As for myself, I’d prefer that the reader be unaware of anyone else’s participation in the pencil artist’s statement wherever possible.

When I was asked to contribute to this volume and found I would be among those inking Anderson, I was delighted, then immediately consumed by the aforementioned panic. When the page, blue-lined on two-ply bristol, arrived at my board, I studied it for quite awhile and then grabbed myself by my boot straps (I’m a cowboy at heart) and told myself, “You can’t play around with this page! You’ve got to approach it as if it’s only one page of an entire book and there is a *deadline* that must be met!”

In reality, this piece is intended for a book on *inking*, but if one spends more than the “normal” amount of time on it, one is not being *honest* with the reader holding this completed volume about the task of professional production inking. There is this omnipotent invisible clock at the top of the drawing board, and it is inexorably ticking the minutes and hours away. One just has to do it!

What kinds of tools do I use? Simply put, *anything* and *everything* that works at any given moment: Winsor & Newton Series 7 #3 sable brushes, Gillote 1290 and 291 and Speedball C-6 pen points, Staedtler 0.1 and 0.05 Pigment Liner drawing pens, etc. As for ink, I prefer Pelikan, but I still use Higgins if I run out of my first choice.

The “muse” can prove elusive sometimes, and if the brush won’t pull a line the way I feel it should, I’ll grab a pen. One of my goals is that when looking at the inked page when printed, one can’t tell for certain *which* tools were employed. I also feel a page should “read” well without color.

Just one man’s thoughts.





Brent E. Anderson

I don't usually pencil this tight if I'm inking my own work, because I like to keep the drawing fresh and alive, working directly in ink as I go, keeping the pencil art as loose and sketchy a guideline as possible. I'm an "organic" inker: skritchy, shaky, hatchy. I've tried to ink "tight" and "clean" at times, and maybe successfully (especially over tight pencils), but there's a loss of organic warmth if the inks are too mechanical.

I rely on a wide range of pen points, but only use one or two kinds on any given assignment. On this page, I start by ruling the borders with a Rapidograph #2¹/₂. Then, using a Hunt 22 Extra Fine flexible nib, I ink all the areas of the drawing I'm the most comfortable with first, being careful not to turn my hand or wrist into any wet areas. (Electric erasing and touch-up are not my favorite part of inking.) Since the character is a ghost, I use few thick lines and no heavy blacks on the main figure, except for the area around her face, where I want the audience to look first. (High contrast draws the eye to the area of the picture where it is employed.) I also keep the ink lines moving in the direction of the form, but this dictum is often difficult to follow when in a hurry, because it often drives one's hand directly into still-wet ink. (Side note: One inker trick is to work on several pages simultaneously to let wet areas dry before risking an accidental smudge.)

I need to find the right texture for each area of the drawing, and different tools are required for each different texture. Flexible pen points give long, sweeping, flowing lines, while stiffer pen nibs can be pushed and pulled across the paper. Be careful not to snag the paper or you're likely to get an unintended spatter effect. Flat, wide lettering nibs, such as the B, C, and FB Speedball nibs are great for push-and-pull techniques. To ink manufactured/mechanical objects and textures, I use technical pens, usually Rapidograph #s 2¹/₂ and #1. (My #2 pooped out on me long ago, but I haven't missed it!)

I also use the larger Rapidograph to outline the black areas. I fill these areas using the Speedball lettering pens and/or a brush. The pens give better initial coverage over the pencil. Since pencil graphite can resist the ink, it's a good idea to erase the pencil before filling the area, especially if the penciller uses a soft (#1 or B) pencil, as I do. (Note: ink an X inside the fill area so you don't overlook it after erasure. Even doing this, I've inadvertently had Xs printed in some of my comics!) I use a Design kneaded rubber eraser for erasing the pencil, but they get dirty fast, so keep a good supply on hand. After erasing, my ink work usually appears thin, brittle, and/or fragile to me, so I beef up some of the linework.

To finish up, I decide to spatter a few stars in panel one and around the gun blast at the bottom. I use Dr. Martin's Bleed Proof White and an old stiff toothbrush to deliver the spatter. Using low-tack white artist's tape and scrap paper, I mask off areas I don't want spattered. Experiment with the consistency of the white-out on the brush and the angle of the spatter before hitting the original with it. Erasing, inking, or working over a spattered area is a royal pain in the butt! Make it the last thing you do. I occasionally use a Pentel K106 Milky gel roller for small touch-ups and white on black art. And now it's done!



GHOST

by

Terry Dodson

Inks by

Gary Martin

Alex Garner

Michael Bair

Rachel Dodson





Gary Martin

Terry Dodson is often praised for his excellent work, so I'm going to take a minute to talk about someone who tends to get overlooked. The entire time I was inking Terry's page, I felt the intimidating specter of Rachel Dodson hovering over me. And I wouldn't be surprised if Alex Garner and Michael Bair felt the same way — they both mentioned their admiration of Rachel's inks when I assigned them this page.

I had the opportunity to ink some of Terry's early work (before he became the pencilling studmuffin he is today). Now, Rachel inks practically everything he does, and rightly so, because she inks him far better than I ever did. In fact, I think she's the best inker he's ever had!

Ironically, at one time Rachel was my lowly assistant. Years ago, before they were married, Terry told me he wanted Rachel to learn about inking, so eventually she could ink all of Terry's stuff. I thought this was pretty naive, because admittedly she didn't know much about comics. But she had some artistic experience, and I needed the help, so I hired her to do my background work. Not only was she the best assistant I ever had, but she picked up brush inking so quickly I didn't get a chance to fully exploit her with my slave wages. Am I taking credit for her talent? No! Am I bitter and hoping she'll break her arm so I can get another crack at Terry? Yes!!

I think of Terry's work as a cross between that of Michael Golden and Adam Hughes: Michael's textures and Adam's feathering and contours. In the first panel I added blacks to the building on which Ghost is standing. This helps frame the two figures below. The car needed a little help, so I straightened it out a bit. Putting blacks on the front of the building in the background was a challenge. It took Terry only a few seconds to put down Xs to indicate the blacks, but it took me quite awhile to figure out how to do it. This looks like a run-down neighborhood, so I gave the building some texture and littered up the place. One of the subtle changes I made in the bottom panel was the expression of the smoker dude. I made him a little more surprised that some strange broad with a snappy outfit was passing through the roof of his car. Terry sometimes draws hands that look like they're wearing surgical gloves, so I added more character to the big hand in the bottom corner. (Neal Adams once told me the two things readers notice most are faces and hands.)

Inking this page reminded me how much I enjoy Terry's work. So if any of you know some bone-breaking thugs I can hire, let me know!





Alex Garner

My initial thought when I heard that I was inking Terry Dodson was that this was probably all a big mistake. Terry, who I think is a terrific artist, has a style that, in my opinion, really favors a brush look. His style is very smooth and fluid, and crow-quill inkers like myself would have a bit of a struggle to try to mimic that sort of line work. However, I do like a challenge, so here we go.

Usually the first thing I do, before I start inking, is study the pencils. In my head, I try to visualize the finished piece so I can maintain some consistency of style throughout. This is where I make my game plan.

First, I wanted to limit the amount of dead-weight lines I normally use in favor of more fluid, fluctuating weights. Though I use a brush sparingly, I wanted to have as much of the brushy feel as I could without abandoning the quill techniques that work well for me. I tried to do this more with the characters and less with the backgrounds in order to give a little variety to the textures. On my page, the characters would have a soft look and the backgrounds more of a broken-up, angular look.

Next, I wanted to address the depth of the page. This is mostly accomplished by varying the line weights of the contours, giving the fore-

ground contours the heaviest weights to pop them out a little more. I also added a few halos around some of the contours as an added technique to separate the elements on the page, a big key of inking. On a finished page, all elements should be easily distinguished from one another.

The extra part of my plan was to figure out a way to stay somewhat loose on pencils I'm unaccustomed to. Since I haven't inked Terry's work before (much less anything else for a few years now), I needed to do the small things that I felt comfortable with to shake off the rust and do a competent job. This meant that I couldn't stay absolutely rigid over his pencils and that I had to improvise sometimes, especially since the blue-line page I worked on wasn't completely legible in all areas.

Now, even though I wanted to be loose, I tried my best to stay true to the overall structure and appearance of what Terry put down. I've found that deviation from the structure of the drawing, especially in areas such as faces, tends to be the biggest complaint among most pencillers. Inkers need to know when to pick their moments to express themselves and not always be looking to change the drawing that's there. It should be a compromise of styles that complement rather than conflict with each other.

This is a book about inking, however, so I decided to bulldoze my style over Terry's pencils a little bit more than I normally would. Sorry, Terry. Did I always make the right decisions on this page? No. I made mistakes here and there, some of which I'm sure I won't notice until later. I think every inker needs to ink a good five to six pages of one penciller's work to get comfortable with a particular style.

Best of Luck!





Michael Bair

Tools:

- Windsor & Newton Series 7 #2
- Pigma Micron pens, 005 to 08
- Pro White and lots of triangles, templates, and French curves

By being born a couple of days into the sixties, I was there for the transition of the standard American comic book. The new wave (Jim Steranko, Neal Adams, and the guys from The Studio) plus some European stuff created (hard fought, I'm sure) new possibilities of style and approach. Mike Kaluta's and Bernie Wrightson's styles actually defined the books themselves and inspired artists to abandon house styles and develop their own artistic character. One could make the case that Barry Windsor-Smith's "Red Nails" *Conan* story had a major impact on the birth of the Image style of the nineties.

For me, I liked the Warren and other black-and-white magazines of the early seventies. The Spanish and Filipino artists brought a high level of design, technique, and draftsmanship that lasts to this day. Alfredo Alcalá's pen and brushwork was the equal of Wrightson's *Frankenstein* style. Tony DeZuniga rendered a decorative realism with juicy bolts of black, while Rudy Nebres made anatomy and reflective light a high art. Nestor Redondo delivered grace and elegance.

Alex Nino experimented with styles, storytelling, and page design. Jose Gonzalez and Esteban Maroto had lush drawing coupled with an almost supernatural ability to delineate the most beautiful women that comics had ever seen.

Comics had a dialogue with the graytone because of these fine artists. The vocabulary of style had risen from the flat black-and-white rendering of newsstand comic books. Directional lines, mood, temperature, forms being turned, rounded — the age of embellishing kicked into high gear.

Mark Beachum, Mark Texiera, and Alan Weiss are three of the finest artists in the industry, and I was lucky to have worked with them. Alan generously conveyed discipline and commitment. The two Marks provided an unbridled gusto towards the artwork itself, while never being intimidated by technique. They could take a stick-figure layout, a line for rhythm, or the tightest pencils and turn them into a complete drawing.

By much trial and error, I learned pencils were just one level to a finish. "Dog tricks" and pseudo-styles are to be avoided, and any technique should be rendered with understanding. A drawing, whether finished by the artist or by an inker, becomes a hybrid. Pencils are the intent, the inks the finish. The unifying precept between pencils and inks is that the various layers produce the realized drawing.

P.S. Terry Dodson's page had power, charm, and style and was a joy to ink!





Rachel Dodson

My materials:

- FW Acrylic Artist's Ink, Black (India)
- Windsor & Newton series 7 #1, #2, and #3 brushes, Gillot 170 pen nib
- Koh-I-Noor Rapidograph technical pens .25, .30, .35, and .80
- Pro White (for corrections)
- Staedtler Mars plastic Grand eraser

I started off by ruling the borders using the .80 technical pen. I then started inking what looked to be the most fun, which happened to be the large Ghost head in the center of the page. Taking into consideration the light source, the eyes, mouth, and nose were inked first so they wouldn't smear. Then I continued on to the contour of the face and up into the hair. I saved the gun for last, using the .30 tech pen, the nib, and straight edge.

I then moved to the two figures in the bottom panel. The foreground figure was inked first, starting again with the face to keep the details of the eyes and nose from smudging, moving to the hat and then down the figure. The black stripes on the shirt were filled in with an old #3 brush. The figure with the cigarette was inked the same way. The cigarette was inked with the Gillot 170. The whiskers on this figure were inked with the #2 brush, and I kept a white outline around the

chin to form whiskers. The suit of the Ghost figure was fun to ink because of the variety of line weights I used. This figure was inked with the #2 brush and the guns were inked with the .25 tech pen. I used a lot of white-out on this figure to thin down some of the interior line weights on the cape and the left side of the body. The interior figure lines were kept much lighter and thinner than the contour lines. I left the background for later.

The first panel was inked last. The figure was inked first because it was closest to the viewer. Then I used the Gillot 170 to ink the foreground building. The nib was used along with a straight edge to draw in the feather lines on the building. When I use the straight edge with the inking nib, I have to be careful not to let the ink get sucked under the straight edge. An old trick to keep this from happening is to tape pennies to the bottom of the straight edge. Also, don't load the nib up with too much ink. I added a white outline around the left half of the Ghost figure to help pop it out away from the building. Since I don't enjoy inking cars, I saved this for very last. Most of the car was inked with the .25 technical pen, French curves, and oval templates. Then I came back and thickened the outside line of the car with a brush. I also added a few more lines to the background building's facade to make it more interesting.

Then I went back and finished the background of the bottom panel using the nib and technical pens.

When the page looked like it was complete, I erased it with the Staedtler Grand eraser. Since the acrylic ink can get quite thick, I had to be careful not to smear the ink as I erased the page. After the page is erased, I stand back and look at the page to see if I need to do any other corrections. I put a white outline around the middle Ghost figure to separate it from the first panel.



GHOST

by

Randy Green

Inks by

Gary Martin

Karl Kesel

Hilary Barta

Randy Green





Gary Martin

Randy Green is one of those guys whose art has, to me, a certain indefinable appeal. But after meeting him, I've enjoyed his work even more. I don't know about you, but when I become a fan of someone's art and later discover firsthand that the artist is a jerk, the art becomes tainted. I don't like it as much anymore. Conversely, when an artist turns out to be someone I want to hang out with, the pleasure I get from the work increases. So, if you ever meet Randy at a comic con, I'm sure his amiable Southern charm will have the same effect on you!

Inking this page was a pure joy, and it reminded me of why I got into comics in the first place. Even though inking Randy's crisp, angular lines could be easily achieved with a pen — you know me, brush guy all the way! — I tried my best to mimic pen lines with my Winsor & Newton. Also, the sharp angles on Randy's figures can be overly exaggerated with a pen. This compromises the soft flesh texture a female figure should have. (Would you want to be with a woman who could cut your face with the tip of her nose?)

In panel two, I put a crosshatch pattern on the pillar to add some space between it and the Ghost figure. For the same reason, I put a white halo on her right side to separate her from the Devil Dude. (A physical separation, not a spiritual one!) White halos are a neat device to add space

between objects. I used one again around Ghost in the bottom panel. Some artists don't like white halos because "You don't see them in real life." But I say, "You don't see black contours either!" (They then realize "The Spock of Inking" has crushed their logic, and they scamper away!) For the background fog, I used dry brush and some X-acto scraping. Lastly, I put a little texture on the headstones.





Karl Kesel

My first rule of inking: Do No Harm. If you hand in inks that are worse than the pencils you were given, you're not just failing at your job, you're committing a crime. Sometimes that means you need to become a better inker. Sometimes it means you're just not a good match for the penciller. If you and the penciller aren't clicking as a team, move on as fast as you can. I don't think anyone gets into comics to do work he or she doesn't enjoy. There are a lot of other places you can do that, and they pay a lot more money!

My second rule of inking: Try to figure out what the penciller is saying and how to say that in ink. Pencils leave a soft mark on paper; ink has a hard edge. Simply trace the pencils and nine times out of ten you'll lose something — an energy, a life, a feeling. Capturing that feeling is the inker's toughest job.

There's a great graphic quality to Randy Green's work, and from the solid blacks to the linear folds of cloth, it screamed to be inked with a pen. Unfortunately, I'm a brush man — I enjoy the feel of the brush, I enjoy the lines it produces, and I've worked with it more, so I have better control over it. My pen work is a lot rougher, to my mind, and wouldn't produce the graceful linework I saw in the pencils. So I bounced between the pen and brush as I inked the page — something I do a lot. Believe it or

not, it's not uncommon for me to ink one eye on a face with a pen and the other with a brush. Whatever moves me at the time.

When I ink a page, there's usually something I see and instantly know exactly how it will look in ink. I see the finished figure/object/panel/whatever perfectly clear in my mind. That's the first thing I ink on the page. This especially helps me decide how to ink a new penciller (one who's new to me, at least). I usually err on the side of being too faithful to the pencils at the start, trying to capture extremely minor changes in the pencils — sometimes even inking construction lines if they're visible and I feel they add to the character of the work. The more I work with someone, the more I learn their visual "language" and the more I know what to accent and what to ignore.

I had a lot of fun inking Randy Green. His work has a lot of life and energy, and he has a great sense of design. I haven't inked many people who work in Randy's style — a sort of J. Scott Campbell look, if you ask me — so I hope I didn't mangle it too much. Any penciller/inker team takes awhile to really gel. Given another half-dozen pages, I think I would have worked out the kinks I see in my inks on this page. I'd like them to be a bit sharper and more graphic, a little more Walt Simonson feel — but I'm probably the only one who would notice the difference.





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Hilary Barta

Successful inking is usually about compatibility: pairing pencillers with inkers who will bring out their strengths and/or compensate for their weaknesses. Often an inker has a dynamic style, which, while dominating the pencils, still finishes the work with flair and a consistent look. The end result might not be the best example of the penciller's work, but it can still make a great comic.

Here are a few comments before I started inking: At first glance, this looks like a page that is unlikely to bring out a wide range of approaches in inking. Randy is one of those pencillers whose pencil line seems to indicate an exact ink line, with little room for interpretation other than the usual gestural differences. His line work suggests he'd like to be inked by pen. If possible, a pen held by Scott Williams. I've inked Randy before, and because I'm generally much more of a brush inker, I find inking him an interesting challenge.

His style is composed of solid blacks and thin, repeated parallel line work. Except for a couple of places on the devil character's face, there isn't much blending, or "feathering," of these two elements. A very clear, crisp style. The line weight and variation is critical here, especially on a character like Ghost, who lacks the usual black shadows for definition. Time to start inking.

I started out inking with a brush for most of the outlines and some of the line work. I use a Pentel Color Brush or similar Japanese brush. I used to use sable brushes like everyone else, but I like these for two reasons. They have a fat handle that makes for an easier grip, less likely to cramp your hand. And they're cheaper. These brushes come with replaceable ink cartridges. I never use them because the ink doesn't dry fast enough. I just dip them like a regular brush. Mark Nelson, who turned me on to them, swears by the cartridge ink. I use Koh-I-Noor ink.

I ended up doing a lot of pen work, which I'm not as comfortable with. I used a Hunt crow quill, and — I'm almost embarrassed to say — a Rapidograph. Being a brush guy, I wouldn't put much stock in my choice of pen.

I was inking over a blue-line of the pencils printed on art board. While it was nice not to have to erase the pencils, it was hard to read some of the line work, making it tough on some of the facial details.

Over the last couple years I've been concentrating on pencilling and, except for my own work, haven't inked that much. Add to that the differences in our styles, and I felt like an odd choice for this book. Sometimes, inking someone with a style different from your own is like trying to learn a foreign language. In a case like this, with only one page and no time to get a handle on the style, it's like learning that language phonetically: I've inked the lines, but it's probably mimicry more than understanding.





Randy Green

For those of you who have been playing around or inking with markers and have finally decided to go legit and use brushes and/or pen and ink, let me say . . . I feel your pain. Inking requires skill and a lot of practice . . . and maybe a little white-out.

On the very rare occasion I ink my own pencils, I usually take the easy, speedy route and basically redraw over the pencils with Micron markers. I'm mostly satisfied with the results, even though it takes longer to ink than to pencil because I have to build up line weights. I've always wanted to learn how to ink properly and to use the right tools, but this was actually the first time I've used a brush and a crow-quill pen and inked an actual comics page, so there were plenty of first-time mistakes to be made. In all, I was very encouraged by the results, especially in the overall improvement in quality and appearance achieved by using ink instead of markers. The lines were much more smooth and intact and the ink more dense, which means better reproduction. With practice, the smooth, tapered lines made possible with a brush are a much greater benefit than the immediate control offered by markers. Also, I used a black china-marker pencil to get a grainy effect where I wanted a different texture, and this was fairly successful.

Here's what I look for and appreciate in someone

who is inking my stuff. My pencils are fairly tight. I give the inker as much information as possible for how I want the finished piece to look. I try to include line weights, details, spotted blacks, even highlights. I want the inker to include everything I've drawn and, with his or her own particular flair, to make it better, to improve upon what I've drawn but without adding or subtracting any information. I compare it to football: I take the ball straight down the field as far as possible, and I then want the inker to take it the rest of the way, but always going the same direction. The inker should never deviate from the pencils unless the editor or penciller has mandated a correction. What might look like an obvious mistake may have been deliberate.

Also, the inked piece should retain the style of the penciller. If the pencils are organic and sketchy, then don't ink them too slick or rubbery; if the pencils are slick and hard-edged, don't make them organic or loose. Some pencillers, either veterans with a very loose style or amateurs just breaking in, might actually like an inker to come behind them and fix, add, or tighten up the art — or not. So the best thing to do is communicate with your penciller and find out what they want. If you're unable or not willing to ink it that way, don't take the job. I know a lot of frustrated inkers who try to force their "square peg" style onto a "round hole" penciller, and neither are happy with the end result.

Finally, spend the right amount of time on a page. Spend more time on a page with a lot of figures and detail than you would on a relatively simple page with little detail. Don't ink too slow, but especially don't ink too fast. Pencillers are not impressed by speed — editors, maybe, but not pencillers. If I spend a whole day pencilling a page, I don't want someone spending a couple of hours slapping ink down on it. Also, be open-minded to learning new techniques and working to improve your skills. Have fun, and good luck!



GHOST

by

Adam Warren

Inks by

Gary Martin

Al Gordon

Randy Emberlin

Adam Warren





Gary Martin

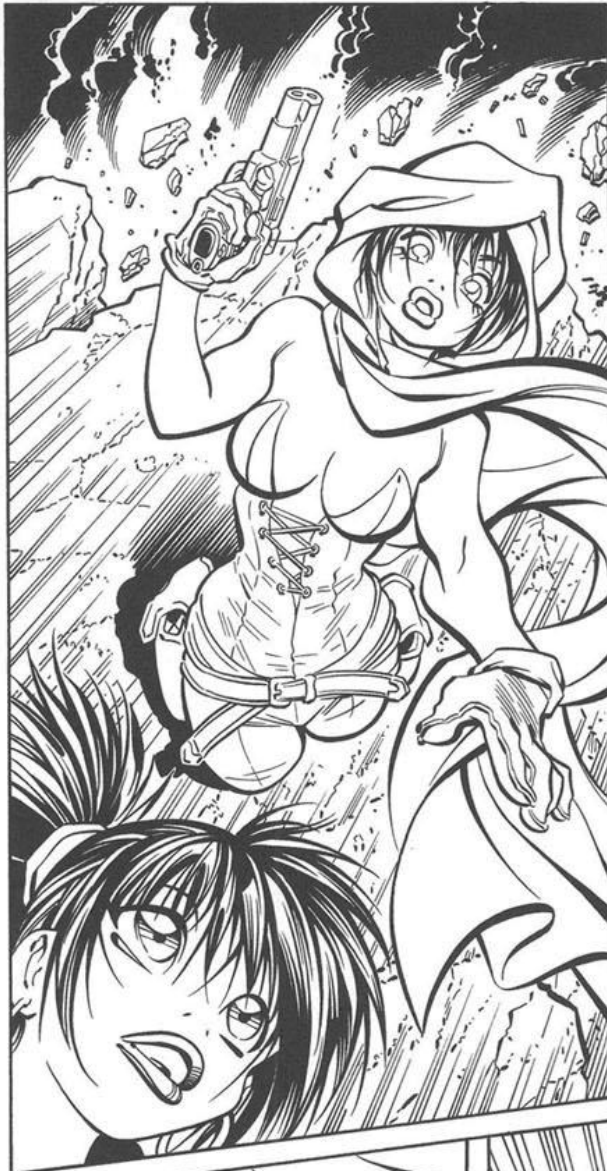
Adam Warren is the type of artist who has what I call “Penciller Intimidation Factor” (P.I.F.). I have three conditions that give an artist P.I.F.: (1) I love their work; (2) I’ve always wanted to ink them; (3) they command great respect among fans and professionals within the comic-book industry.

When I get to ink someone like Adam, before I lay down my first brush stroke, I realize who I’m about to ink and I start to panic! My symptoms include massive insecurities, uncontrollable shaking of the extremities, and a crushing fear that I’m going to ruin his pencil art and be forever hated by the artist and his devoted fans! Other artists I’ve inked in the past who have P.I.F. are Steve Rude, Paul Gulacy, Dave Gibbons, Steve Ditko, and Jack Kirby. (When you’re a new inker or trying to break into comics, P.I.F. occurs with *everyone* you ink.)

You would think an inking geezer like me would be immune to these symptoms by now. But, unfortunately, they never go away. To overcome these insecurities, the natural tendency is to ink the page exactly as it was pencilled, line-for-line. The result of this gambit is that you cease fulfilling the role of an inker and become a Xerox machine. Trust me, this is not what most pencillers want. The way you defeat Penciller Intimidation Factor is to fight through your

emotional baggage and rely on your knowledge of art. Don’t ink everything literally. *Interpret* the penciller’s intent, and make any necessary adjustments.

Adam’s page was drawn so well that my only contributions were line clarity and contour thickness (see the chapter on Cartoon Inking). I made one minor adjustment in panel one. At first, I couldn’t tell that Ghost was ascending through the rock slab — I thought she was just kneeling on it. So, to help the effect of her rising through the rock, I broke up the line on the bottom of her thighs. In panel two, I gave Ghost an extra-bold contour and a white halo to help separate her from the Bitchin’ Biker-jacket Babe. When I inked the gun in panel three it looked too flat. I beefed up the contour to give it that in-your-face, 3-D effect.





Al Gordon

I've been doing this inking thing for a few years now, and I remember when reading through Gary's first book that I found myself muttering under my breath, "Wow, so that's what he's thinking about when he does all that crazy stuff." This sorta supports my belief that the more you know, the more you can learn. So, with that in mind, I'll blather on about what I "know" about inking.

First off, I guess I should say that inking someone I'm familiar with and inking someone I'm not are two very different animals. It takes me anywhere from a couple of pages to a couple of issues to warm up and feel even remotely comfortable and confident with any given penciller. But I have to say in the converse that I also feel that sometimes "accidents" in all kinds of "art" create something very cool that the artist would never have thought of.

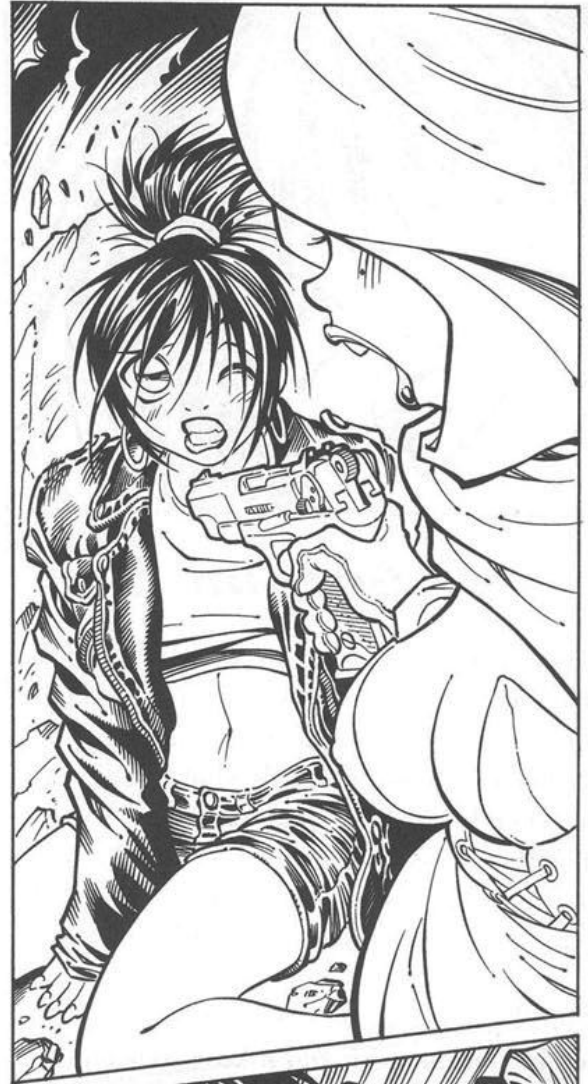
I'm not one who believes that any specific tool of drawing or inking has been imbued with magical properties. That said, I usually work with a #2 or #3 Raphael 8404 brush because, in my opinion, they're better than anything else I've used; a Hunt 102 crow quill, now made somewhat unsuccessfully by Speedball; and numbers 000, 00, and 0 Koh-I-Noor Rapidograph pens (now maybe those companies will send me some free stuff). Besides using the Rapidographs mostly (although not all of the time) for straight lines on

buildings and other such less personal objects, I like to switch tools to see what the artwork will look like when working at cross-purposes, such as doing drapery with a Rapidograph. (For the uninitiated, *drapery* is pretty much what it sounds like: it's the way stuff, mostly clothes — and drapes, for instance — hang, or "drape," from something.) This is a fun (but time-consuming) exercise inasmuch as you have to sculpt the line much like you're working in clay because of the flat, inexpressive non-weight of a Rapidograph's line. I did an issue of *Gen 13* almost entirely with a few different sized Rapidographs because the bristol the art was drawn on would tear with a crow quill and the ink would erase off of it when I used a brush.

The page printed here is not a perfect example of what I might do had I been working over actual pencils. The pencil image was printed on the paper in non-photo blue, and working in this fashion was a little difficult because the blue-line is unerasable, and the finished inks can give the impression that there's more detail on the page than there truly is.

Actually, most of this piece came out on paper the way I was picturing it in my mind when I initially looked at it — which isn't bad for working over someone new — except for the leather jacket in the last panel. I played much too long with the lines on that jacket, it becoming more abstract the more time I spent (mostly due to the pencil lines dropping out from the Xerox . . . at least that's the story I'm holding to). If I were Adam Warren, I'd be looking to smack me a good one at the next convention.

I enjoyed doing the hair and drapery on this drawing quite a bit. Funtime.





Randy Emberlin

What can I say that hasn't already been said more eloquently by so many of the wonderful inkers who have contributed to these volumes? I can only share my thought process and tools of the trade, and if it is redundant, so be it. My approach usually takes one of three different paths:

1. If the pencils are tight, if the drawing is complete with crisp, clean pencil line weights intact, I will try to be precise and stay as true to the pencils as I can.

2. If the pencils are loose, as in breakdowns or layouts, then I will impose my own style choice.

3. Sometimes a penciller or editor wants me to execute a certain type of look. This may mean mimicking a very old or very new style. In inking, at least for me, variety can be the spice of life, because I find it refreshing and stimulating to work with various artists in their distinctive styles.

Different styles may require the use of different tools. In the case of this Adam Warren artwork, I primarily used a Hunt 102 crow-quill pen. Since the pencils were tight and crisp, I could concentrate on varying line weights, making decisions on some textures (such as the

leather jacket), and inking with overall precision. Since this page is largely devoid of backgrounds, the figures and their contours become the focus. Sometimes, I may use my Raphael 8404 #3 sable brush if I want a softer, smoother look, but I chose the crow quill here for a more razor-sharp line.

Some explosion lines in panels one and four were freehanded with a crow quill, but the longer lines were ruled with a .25 or .35 Rotring technical pen. The page was bordered using an 18" cork-backed metal ruler and a .80 technical pen. A .25 Rotring was used to ink parts of the guns and, in conjunction with ellipse and circle templates, the orbits of the large "Manga Eyes."

Pro White was used to correct some errant over-lapping lines and as a white line to separate some locks of hair from the faces of figures. I generally don't use white lines around figures to separate them from other objects or the background. Layer-ing blacks and whites should be the first choice to achieve that effect.

My choice of ink is Higgins Black Magic, slightly diluted with tap water. It seems to hold its black better after being erased. Since I was inking a blue-line piece of art, there was no need for erasing; however, were I erasing a page, my first choice is the Staedtler Mars Puroplast eraser. It requires a little more "elbow grease," but virtually does not affect the ink as you remove the pencils. Other-wise, a Magic Rub or an Art Gum is fine.

One other tool I've found almost indispensable is a nine-inch rolling ruler, model #492 made by Put-Lines. It is useful for doing buildings and all sorts of mechanical and architectural objects that require a multiplicity of parallel lines.

As a final word, I should say that good inkers are generally good artists in their own right and know how to draw. This enables them to better understand what the penciller is striving for and how to interpret it in ink.





Adam Warren

I have an odd fondness for the process of inking, despite the fact that I haven't inked a full issue of a comic in years. This is because I find inking to be somehow meditative yet not intellectually demanding, a task that I can perform efficiently while tired, distracted, talking on the phone (with headset, of course), liquored-up, or in practically any other waking condition.

And now, the tedious minutiae of my technique. For the bulk of the work, including almost all character art and most backgrounds, I ink with Japanese Zebra pen tips, which are somewhat similar to American crow quills but considerably more flexible and smoother-inking. I'm especially fond of them because they give me brush-like fluidity and effortless line variation without sacrificing the greater precision and control that a pen tip offers. I used to ink with the less-flexible but still-useful Hunt EF104, which would likely be much easier to find in American art supply stores, and before that I used to ink with a brush, but the less said about that, the better.

As it often takes a fair bit of inking before a pen tip is properly "broken-in" and becomes fully as flexible and smooth-inking as I'd like, I usually work with two pen-holders, one mounted with a brand-new, fresh pen tip in the process of being broken in, the other holding a "mature,"

fully flexible and supple pen tip nearing the end of its usability. I alternate between the two pen tips as I ink the page, using the mature tip for parts that the overly sharp, fresh tip would tear up (such as heavily crosshatched areas), eventually removing the soon-to-be worn-out tip and rotating in a new one. I find that this process makes for a smoother transition than just working with a single tip and having to replace it and start over from scratch.

For my pen inking, I generally use Higgins Black Magic as my ink of choice, though I've been partial to Koh-I-Noor Ultradraw technical-pen ink in the past. Inks of a given type can vary maddeningly from bottle to bottle: a brand of ink that performed well in the past can sometimes refuse to flow and will bead up uselessly on your pen tip with a different batch. Many artists actually mix different inks together to brew a combination that works best for their technique. Another important aspect of ink choice is that certain inks can come right off the page when you erase the pencil lines after inking, sometimes leading to the tedious job of redoing faded-out ink lines. No fun.

I employ a Koh-I-Noor .35 Rapidograph for technical inking, speed lines, and (with a handy French curve) some of the longer, curving lines, such as on parts of Ghost's cloak in panel two; a larger .80 Rapidograph suffices to ink the panel borders. Finally, I use a pair of aging Winsor & Newton brushes to fill in the blacks and apply white correction paint; incidentally, finding white-out that works best for you can be just as difficult as finding an ink you like.

None of these specific art supplies are "magic bullets" that will immediately ramp up your skills to godlike levels, believe me. Practice and experiment with whatever tools you can find rather than obsessing over acquiring a particular pen-tip, say, in the hopes that this will instantly transform you into King of All Inkers. Anyway, good luck, and happy inking! Whee!



CONAN

by
Jack Kirby

Inks by
Gary Martin
Bill Reinhold
Danny Miki
John Beatty





Gary Martin

Bold and slick! That's the style that makes my heart flutter when looking at the great Jack Kirby inkers of the past. So, a cross between Joe Sinnott and Mike Royer was the approach I was shooting for. (Side note: after completing this page — which took me most of a day — I recalled some interviews I've read in *The Kirby Collector*. To keep up with Kirby's prolific production, Joe Sinnott and Mike Royer had to ink an average of *three pages a day!* DANG! My hand is cramping just thinking about it!)

The emotional impact of Kirby's powerful pencils has always appealed to me. But I must confess, his unique anatomy and patented squiggles baffle my mere-mortal brain. As a general rule when inking, if you can't interpret a pencil line, it's usually a good idea to change it into something identifiable. But with Kirby, changing his squiggles into a more recognizable muscle shape — as I've seen other inkers do — is a big mistake. This will only water down key elements that define the King's dynamic style. Therefore, the best strategy when interpreting a pencil artist who leans toward the abstract is to ink them as literally as possible.

Having said that, here are a few changes (adjustments) I made while inking this page. If you look at the pencils, Conan's left eye seems a little low. I raised it a tad, but I think I should

have raised it a bit more. The female's head looked flat to me, so I enhanced her hairdo. I slimmed down her shoulders a smidgen, to make her more feminine. (With delts like those, she wouldn't need Conan to rescue her!) To separate the ground from the serpent's underbelly, I removed a black portion to open up that area.

I used a Winsor & Newton series 7 #2 brush to ink ninety-five percent of this page and a #3 for Conan's bold contours. I used a technical pen to rule the sword and scabbard and a Speedball C-6 pen nib on the foliage.





Bill Reinhold

Jack Kirby is still amazing to me. I grew up in the sixties reading many of his books. His fantastic imagination and unique style are unparalleled! It's funny, but I sort of got a warm-up inking Kirby by inking a Steve Rude job several years ago. That story hosted a number of Kirby creations, and Steve handled much of it in a Kirby style. So in preparation for that job, I really studied for the first time Jack's work in detail with an artist's eye.

Approaching this piece, it's hard not to think about all the great work other inkers have done with Kirby. I must say that I don't have one favorite. I feel his inkers have portrayed different strengths in handling Kirby's pencils. I suppose I have in mind my favorite aspects of several different Kirby inkers, and hopefully I bring a little of myself to it as well. Because Kirby's work has such a strong language to it, I felt that in inking this piece I had no choice but to be as true as possible to the pencils.

My tools on this include —

- Raphael 8404 #4 brush.
- Hunt 108 flexible crow quill
- Speedball B-5 pen nib (for "Kirby dots")
- Inks are Koh-i-noor Universal for brush and Higgins Regular for pen.

I used mostly brush on this piece. I think the boldness of Kirby's work calls for it. I started with some bold contouring on the figure, quickly moving to the larger black shapes of shadow. I personally like to use a little dry-brush to soften the edges of the shadow and with some of the larger brushstrokes.

Conan's facial features are done with the 108. Much of his hair I outlined with my pen then rendered the large shapes with brush. I continued to embellish with the 108, which is most evident with the hair on his arms, some of the finer lined Kirby squiggle lines, and striating lines on top of his right upper leg and calf. The creature is mostly brush, with some of the smaller lines on its head done with pen, along with the striations on its neck. The girl I inked with the 108 pen first then finished with brush on her hair and shadows.

Background elements: The rocky cliff with grassy top is all brush, as are the bushes lower right and most of the rocks and rocky ground. The trees near the girl are done with the 108 pen on the light side and brush for shadow. The large blades of grass in the foreground were done with the 108. Finally, I worked on the part of the sky with the star field. I used my brush to do the feathered edge of space, along with the upper right with the white planetoids and stars. Then I used the B-5 pen to do the negative shapes (sometimes called "Kirby dots"). This pen, traditionally a lettering pen, works well because the tip is circular.

I made a few changes and embellishments. For instance, I felt the need to redraw Conan's hands, and I embellished the anatomy on his right upper leg and forearms. With any changes I made, I tried to keep the Kirby flavor. I felt the need to keep Jack's work true to his own style as much as possible. Usually I'm happy to collaborate with another artist, like two musicians jamming, but in this case I wanted the viewer to think KIRBY!





Danny Miki

Jack Kirby had a unique style, and to alter that would be criminal. Inking this was a little less intimidating because everything was pretty much all there. I just had to focus on keeping Kirby's energy and feel.

Pencillers should realize that you can't get too upset at who inks you if all your info is not there. Pencil loose, and you get a surprise, unless you know your inker and what or how well he works over you. Pencil tight, and a good inker will keep your energy and maybe add a little more, unless you instruct him not to stray.

I think going too thin on Kirby wouldn't do him justice. His lines are bold and strong. I may have not inked really thick, but you can see that Kirby kind of takes me out of my common style and environment. The ability to adjust and adapt is very important in an inker. You need be ready for any terrain, like different pencillers or different types of paper. Some papers are more toothy than others, some are real slick, and some bleed. I really dislike paper that bleeds, but you'll never know what boards your penciller may use, and believe me, you can tell and feel a difference.

On this piece, I used both a Hunt 102 nib and a brush. I started with the contours first, using the nib and some brush. I nibbed some pullouts and brushed some pullouts. Sometimes the direc-

tion of the pullouts or hatches determines what I use at the time. Brush strokes worked the best on Conan and the girl's fur loins, hair, and the big chunks of blacks. On the backgrounds over the rock area, I used the brush to lay in chunks of blacks first, then used the nib and added the textures around them. On the rocks I added more detail, but it didn't overpower the main focus, and it blended in well. I also used the nib on the bushes in the bottom right corner.

On the serpent I went a little more organic, adding "dits", a little grit, and a tad of saliva. I made the tail and the tip of the sword slightly lose their holding lines as they go into the famous "Kirby Crackle," letting the blacks do the framing. This effect always looked cool to me. What can I say, I love doing Kirby Crackle! On this, I did the pullouts with brush first and then added the solid blacks and the big circle blacks. Then I went in with white-out and added the inner white circles and in some white circles, added little black circles. It's a fun layering process. Okay, I know that in the old school, using no white-out was the thing. But I have to say that white-out and white FW acrylic ink are my best friends, especially since I'm famous for inker's elbow and smudges.

I had a great time inking Kirby again. This piece was fun, and having fun while you're inking is important.





John Beatty

Inking tools:

- Pelican yellow label drawing ink
- #2 or 3 sable brush, Winsor & Newton or Raphael
- Hunt 102 crow-quill pen
- Faber-Castell PITT marker and marker brush

As I do whenever I begin to ink someone, be it a story or a cover, pinup, etc., I like to study the pencils first and see what, if anything is in need of a quick added detail, such as something left off a costume or a missing finger, etc . . . I also use this study time to look at what is going on in the work and what are the important parts that will need to be pulled out by me as the inker as the dominant parts of the page.

Jack Kirby: wonderful and powerful. I just put it down as Jack did. The raw power and design can carry the work in any style.

I used some wet, fast brush strokes in almost a painterly way on the main figure and the background also. No use to be subtle with this one!

This is my first time inking Jack, except for one piece I did for the inked version of Kirby's sketchbook, *Heroes and Villains*.

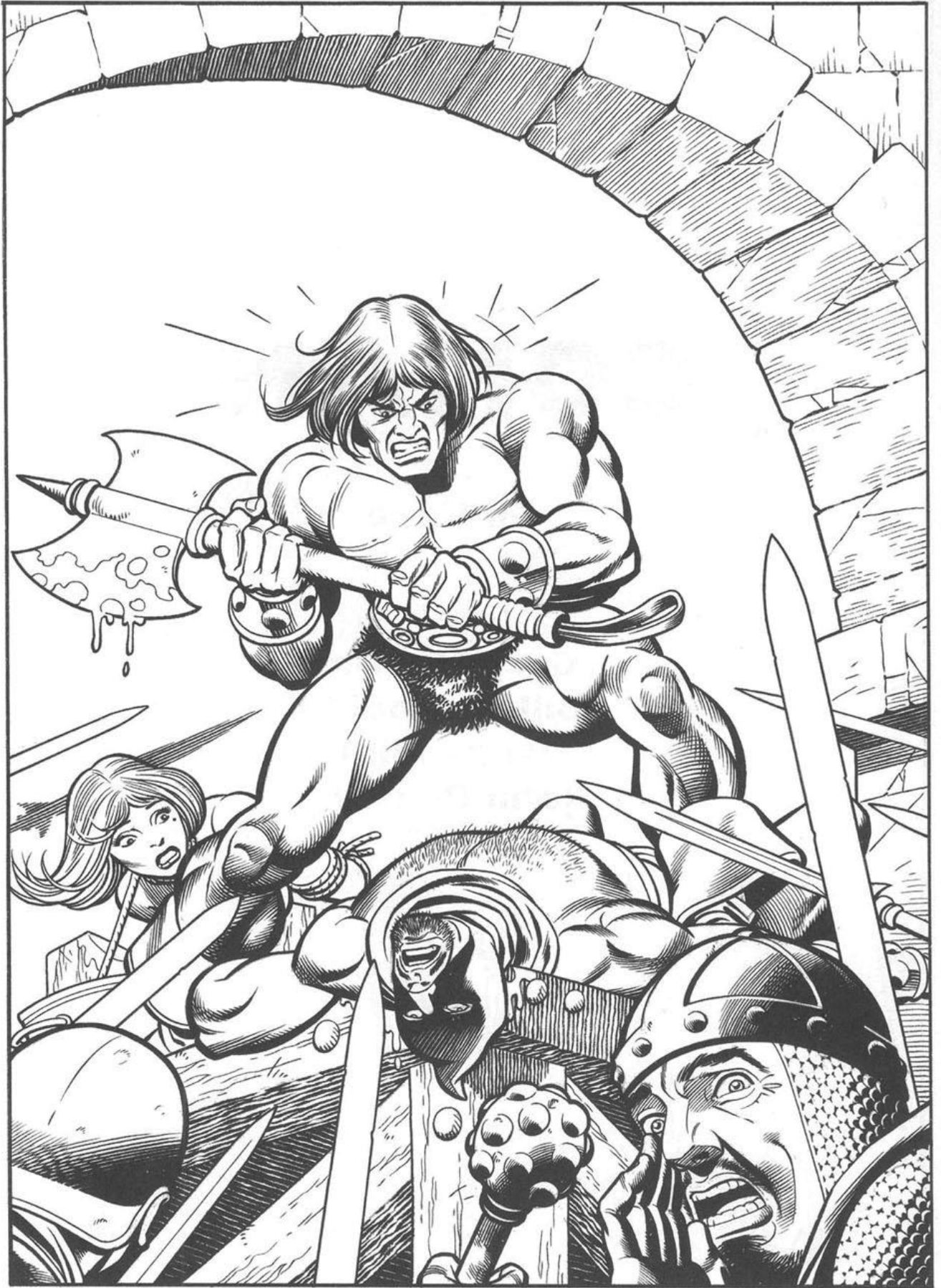
I think I did "okay"!



CONAN

by
Gil Kane

Inks by
Gary Martin
Bill Reinhold
Danny Miki
John Beatty





Gary Martin

On a Friday afternoon early in my career, I was loitering in a DC Comics editor's office in New York City, waiting for my modest check to come down from accounting. For a young pro like yours truly, this was the coolest spot in town. I had a curbside view of the parade of freelancers who would pass through the DC offices to pick up their respective paychecks. (Why so many artists had to personally pick up their checks, rather than wait for them to be delivered by mail is a peculiar phenomenon.) On this particular day, none other than Gil Kane came into the very office I had planted myself, to turn in a cover. Before placing it on the desk, he paused, scanning it one last time with his critical gaze. Not satisfied, he produced a black marker and started to noodle.

Suddenly, Gil stopped drawing and flew into a tirade! Everyone within range of Gil's booming voice had their ear hairs singed as Gil angrily vented. He applied white-out to his drawing error and continued to mutter his discontent. If I hope to make the slightest contribution to our beloved art form, I must always remember the lesson Gil taught me that day. Even in the twilight of his career, his pursuit of perfection and unbridled passion still burned white-hot!

Before slapping ink down on this magnificent drawing, I decided to seek creative influence

from the finest example of Gil Kane inking I'd ever seen. I pawed through my comics and pulled out *What If #3* ("What If The Avengers Had Never Been?"), published in 1977. Klaus Janson's sublime technique (contrasting bold and delicate ink strokes) was the inspiration I needed.

You'll notice I added more blacks and detail to the soldiers in the foreground. This enhances the illusion of depth. Looking at Conan's eyes, it seems to me he has an expression of pure evil. I pulled down the corners (of the eyes) so he looks less demonic. I can't figure out what material Conan's Speedos are made from. Hence, I gave them a fur texture. The stone arch behind Conan needed to be finished because Gil left it open for the title. (This piece was originally used for a cover.)

Everything was inked with my usual #2 sable brush except for the swords, where I used a tech pen to rule the lines.





Bill Reinhold

Gil Kane is one of my comic-book artist heroes. He had a great influence on me as a penciller early in my career. I think half of my education in anatomy came from looking at Gil's work. I feel that he wrote the book on modern superhero action. Now, I must say that my favorite inker on Gil was himself. Some other artists did a fine job inking him, but with Gil, it was pure Gil Kane. He did a wonderful job inking with markers, but I knew I had to be myself inking this, especially since I felt the pencils were not fully realized, and a lot was being left up to the inker/finisher. Artists from Gil's era didn't do the tight pencils we think of today. To them, pencilling was a step in the process that wasn't finished until inked. To them, tight pencils would be redundant. Also, most of the inkers then were artists in their own right.

First, my tools:

- Raphael 8404 #4 brush
- Hunt 108 flexible crow quill
- Hunt Globe 513 pen point
- Inks are Koh-i-Noor Universal for brush and Higgins Regular for pen

The direction of light is hinted at in the pencils but not demonstrated to any great degree. I felt the figure needed weight. So the first thing I did was knock out some of the larger shapes with the brush on the shadow side of Conan's figure. I continued to

use the brush anywhere I felt comfortable, like the contouring on the foreground figures and much of the executioner.

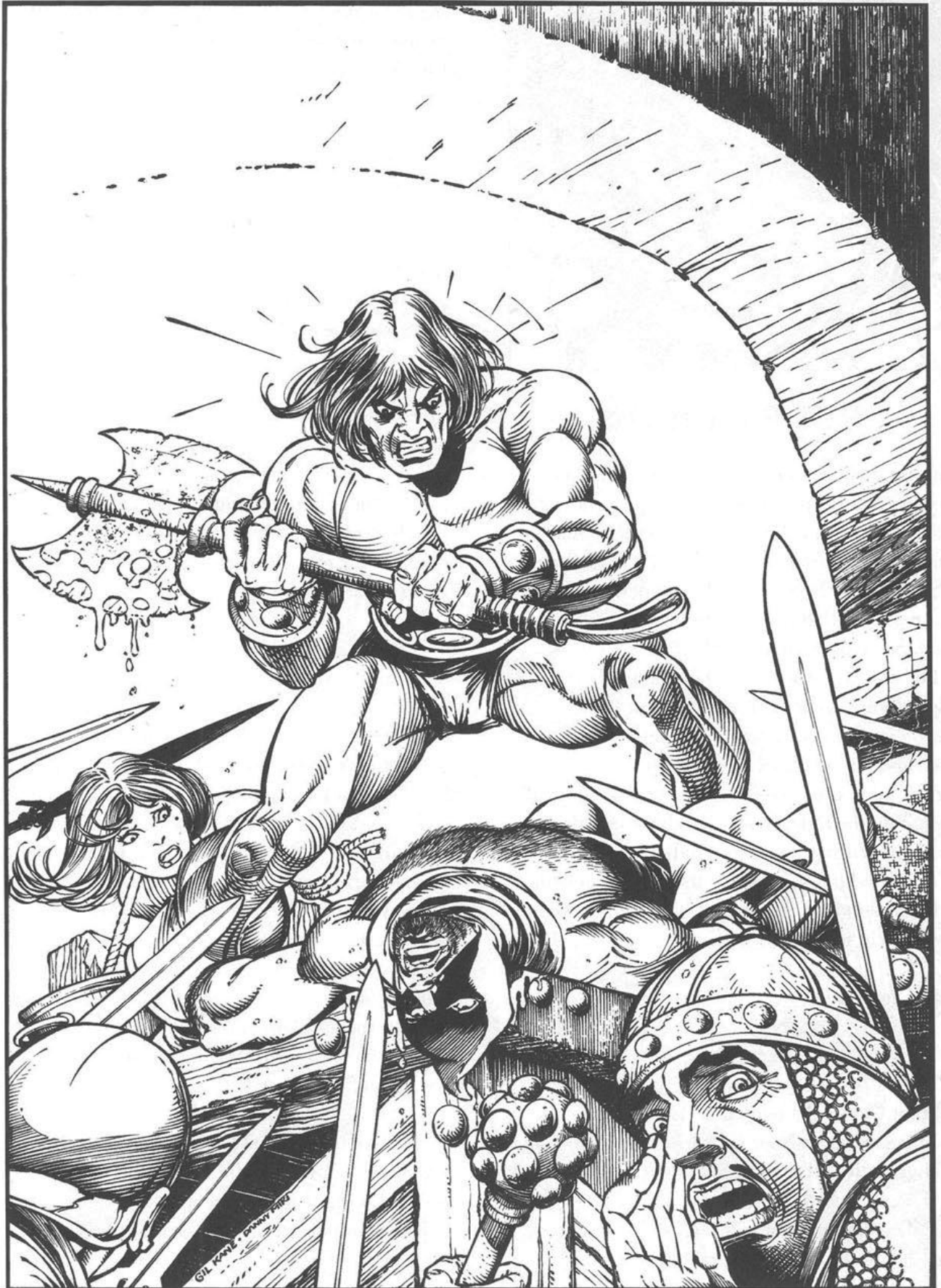
I let myself warm up on miscellaneous details, like the textured stonework and wood, before attempting the details of the figures and faces. Starting on the smaller lines of Conan's figure, I used my 108 on his shoulders, hands, and other details on the figure. Most of the lines on top of the executioner's figure, and nearly all of the girl, are done with the 108.

The only place I used the 513 pen point was in drawing straight lines with a raised ruler on some of the swords.

On the foreground face, I used more brush for the shadows and then used the 108 pen point for the drawing of the features and much of the fine-line rendering.

I made a few additions and changes to the art: Conan's figure seemed a little bare. Most of Gil Kane's versions of Conan had him wearing a necklace similar to the one I've drawn. Also, Gil usually gave him more clothing than he has here. I feel Conan looks strange in almost underwear, so I added the fur loincloth, which I referenced from another Conan piece Gil did. I felt the need to slightly redraw Conan's left hand because of the way it gripped the axe handle. A tangent I perceived — made by Conan's left ankle, the executioner's bicep, and the top of the foreground figure's helmet — I thought needed to be broken up with the addition of a point on the helmet. And finally the arch, finishing a drawing left open for a cover logo.

I'd like to point out that for this piece I did little actual inking. Rarely did I follow lines precisely, mostly taking them as direction and description of form. On more finished pencils, I may be more faithful, but I'm happier when pencils are not tightly delineated. I find it more interesting to work on pencils where the rendering is open to interpretation, leaving room for spontaneity.





Danny Miki

Though this piece looked simple, there was a lot to keep in mind. I wanted to keep Kane's style, the integrity of his pencils, and his unique way of shading. I tried to stay very faithful, especially to the faces, adding only texture, a little depth, line weights, and some minor blacks.

The top part of the piece wasn't quite all there. It may have been intended for text or just unfinished. I continued the structure just a tad and added more dark textures at the top right corner to frame the illustration a bit. I thickened up the left arm of the executioner a bit and slightly changed the direction of the hatches on Conan's left shin. I did some fine-tuning of the hair on the chest of the executioner, added a tad on the chin of the guy yelling, and added some grit on the helmet and weapons.

For this piece, I used mostly a Hunt 102 nib and a Raphael 8404 #1 brush for most pull-outs. I use a variety of inks. For blacks and brush work, I like Rapidograph universal ink. For nib work, I like FW acrylic black ink or Speedball acrylic black ink. They may take longer to dry but seem to have more of a controlled flow.





John Beatty

Another first-time ink job! Gil Kane's work is so linear to me that I decided to treat it more in that vein, using linework that I normally would not do in most cases.

I'm not sure how successful I pulled this one off. There are parts I like and, as usual, parts that I missed . . . given more pages over Gil, I'm sure that I would be able to adapt and bring more to his work than just on this one piece.

Gil lets the inker have room to bring a style to the table, and I like that. It's just a matter of working on it and seeing what works and what doesn't. I would like to have had the chance to ink Gil during my inking career to see what I could have developed over his wonderful drawing and terrific design sense!





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CONAN

by

John Buscema

Inks by

Gary Martin

Bill Reinhold

Danny Miki

John Beatty





Gary Martin

I've always wanted to ink John Buscema, but when the time came to step up to the tee and swing away (with an ink-filled brush as my club of choice), I wasn't so confident. If I were to successfully render John's illustrative pencilling style, I would need to significantly loosen up my usually taut inking technique.

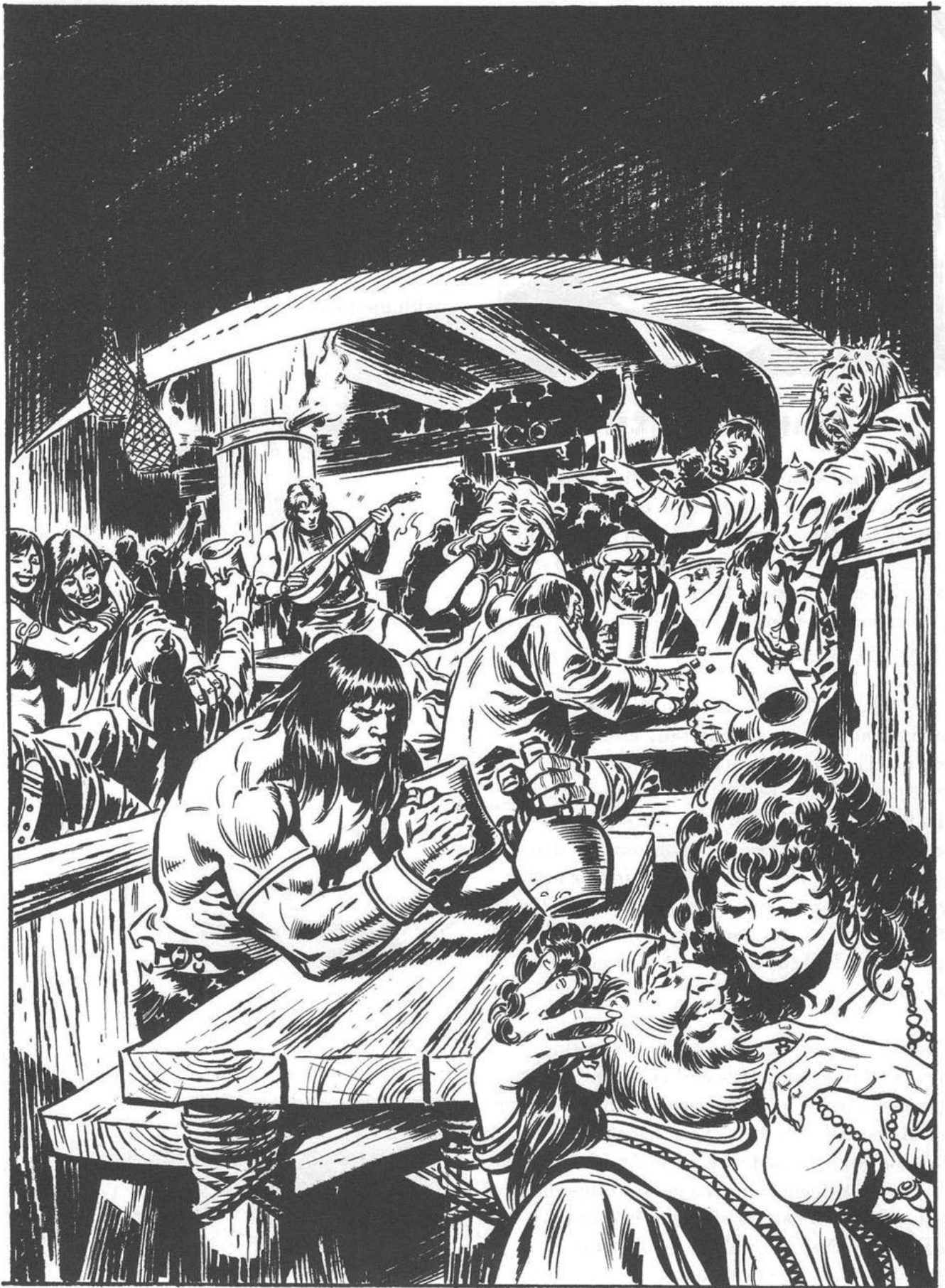
For me, this is more problematic than it sounds. Some artists are naturally loose when they ink. Their hand flies over the page with reckless abandon. They get so loose they practically fall out of their chair! I'm the exact opposite. My natural tendency is to be controlled and methodical. (If I zone out when I'm inking and my hand switches to automatic pilot, my ink lines get tighter and slicker, not sloppier.) So for this page, I dusted off the left side of my brain and cranked up the Mozart!

Tom Palmer inspired my approach for this page. His inking on John's earlier *Conan* work combined a free-flowing looseness with a delicate control that today's comics professionals still talk about with hushed reverence. And I couldn't help but be influenced by the great Philippine artists who were masters of texture: Alfredo Alcala, Rudy Nebres, and the incomparable Nestor Redondo. You can clearly see the result of this influence in how I finished the stone archway. John left this area open in the original

pencils for the splash-page title copy.

One small adjustment I made to John's exceptional composition was to add more black to Conan's hair. This helps separate Conan from the figures in the middleground. Speaking of hair, the biggest problem I had with this piece was inking the hair of the tawdry wench in the foreground. After several tries (and layers of white-out) I conceded, even though I wasn't satisfied with the final result. (Sometimes the priorities of looming deadlines will supersede your ambitions for perfection.)

This page was inked entirely with a Winsor & Newton series 7 #2 brush.





Bill Reinhold

John Buscema is an artist I enjoyed immensely back in my early days of reading comics. He worked often with the best inkers in the business, but I always got excited when he inked his own work. That was when you saw his best come through; sometimes not as pretty as when other artists inked him, but powerful and full of life!

I looked at other artists' interpretations of his *Conan* work, but mostly his own. Especially with Conan himself, I wanted it clear that this was John Buscema's Conan! Because the pencils are complete here, with light and shadow indicated, anything I did wouldn't change it drastically. But the linework still leaves room for interpretation.

My tools:

- Raphael 8404 #4 brush
- Hunt 108 flexible crow quill
- Hunt Globe 513 pen point
- Grumbacher 6142 1" Flat Aquarelle brush
- Grumbacher 196 #8 brush
- Inks are Koh-i-Noor Universal for brush and Higgins Regular for pen.

I started with my brush, inking the table and booth area at which Conan is sitting, contouring it and then doing the deep shadowed areas and wood grain within the shadow. Then I worked on contouring Conan's figure and much of the

shadow on his figure and face, saving further work on Conan's face and hair for later.

Next, I began to do some contouring on the foreground figures and a bit here and there on the background figures. Now I felt the need to work on the foreground figures more and the middle plane with Conan and the drunken man hanging over the railing; I used the 108 to detail their figures and faces and then used my brush for the woman's hair and larger shapes in shadowed areas. I looked to Buscema's Conan as to how to handle his hair: he kept it very black with highlights kept within.

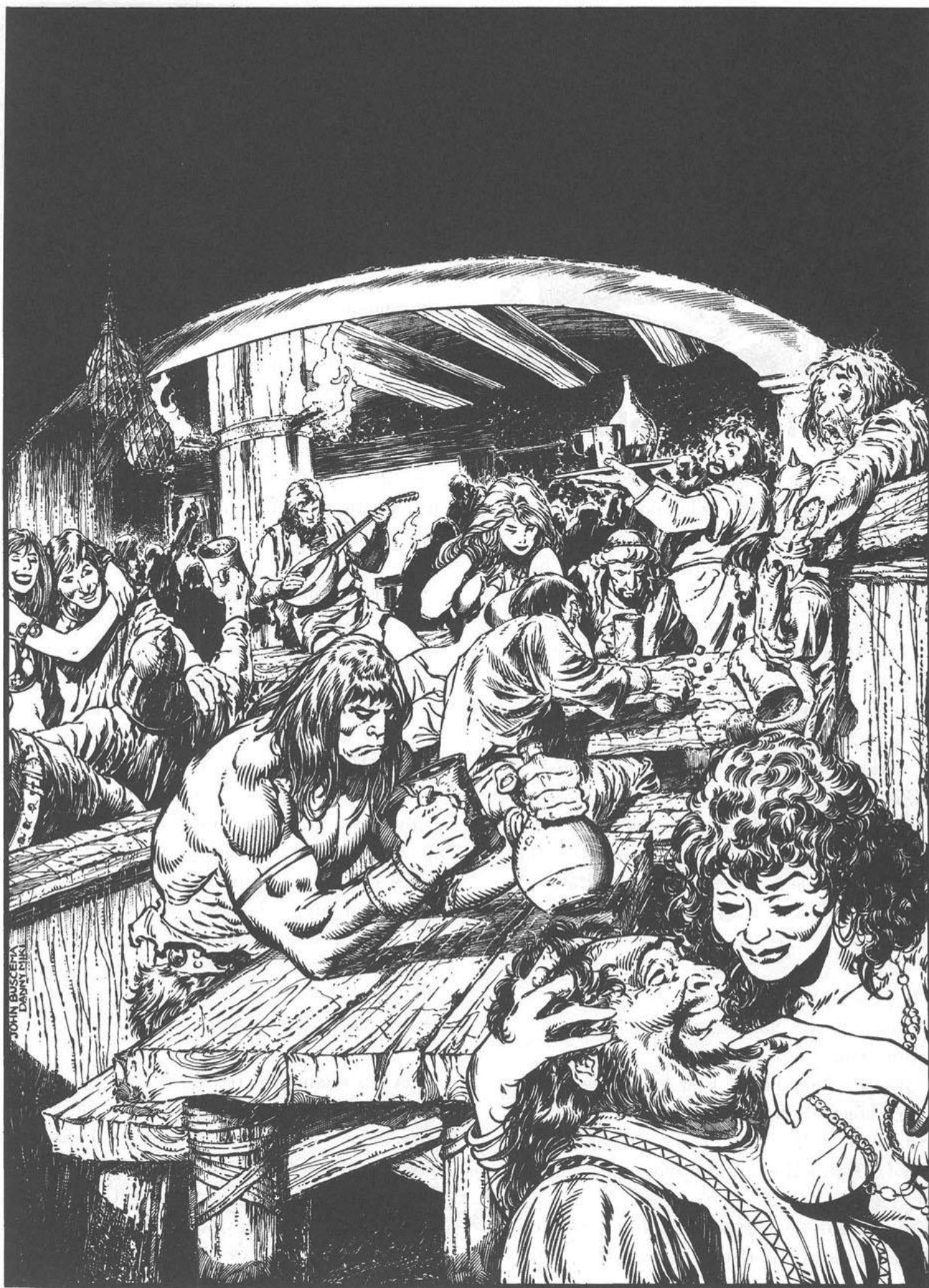
I had fun doing the texture of the wood grain with the 108. It's such a flexible pen point that just a little pressure changes the width of line in a very organic way.

Much of the background figures I contoured with the 513 pen point. Smaller details on faces, etc. are the 108. Then brush for shadows. One exception is the man in the center throwing dice. Just about all of him was done with the 108 pen.

Lastly, the large black area above the arch. Originally, I suspect it held a logo and title. The copy I received of the pencils seems to show an action of pencil line filling it in. I wanted to retain some of that instead of just making it flat black. I first took my 1" flat brush moving in a diagonal direction. I went smaller then with the #8 filling more, and finally with the 8404 #4 to finish the crosshatching. All the while I kept little ink on the brushes to get a softened, drybrush blend.

A few changes: I redrew Conan's hand holding the bottle. It didn't look right, so I held a bottle myself to check it out in the mirror. I shortened the arm of the girl who's standing all the way to the left. How the drunk guy was standing by the railing was a slight mystery to me, so I had his stomach with a belt peek out from behind it.

Now that I'm all warmed up to John Buscema, I wish I had more of his pages to ink!





Danny Miki

I love John Buscema's art and have always wanted to ink over him. Let me tell you, this was my biggest challenge yet. This challenge reminded me of when I was a part of the "Brush Off" in *Wizard* #48, over Greg Capullo. That was my first experience over Capullo and led me to be his inker on *Spawn*. When I saw Buscema's piece arrive, it gave me that same overwhelming feeling: "I can't screw this up; the world is watching!" Greg Capullo is still one of my all-time favorite artists, and knowing that Buscema was Greg's influence gave me shivers. Talk about pressure!

I got this piece in advance, had a little time to study my approach, and this one boggled the hell out of me. It was pencilled semi-loose, but all the information was there. I didn't know how to approach it. When that happens, sometimes you just have to jump in or you're going to stare at the piece all day. Once I started getting a groove, I couldn't get enough, and it started flowing well. I didn't plan to do all the detail, but the nib had a mind of its own. Once again, I used both nib and brush. This piece was done mostly in nib because of the delicate structures and people. Of course I used the brush on a lot of the hatch work but used less pressure to keep in continuity with the nib. The old man's hair in the foreground was done in brush.

With all the faces on this piece, I had to be very careful to keep the individual emotions. I inked this piece from the foreground back. I couldn't really tell what was going on in some cases, and taking each item or figure at a time made it clearer to see what was going on. When you ink, your nib is like a needle, and you have to put together points from a pencil, which is much fatter; so, finishing lines and connecting and completing was the task here. My favorite figure to ink in this piece was the drunken old man.

I went to town on the tables. I mean, it's a dark world there — sword fights, gashes out of tables, drunks stabbing their knives into the tabletops. This, to me, is what it would have looked like. It was texture heaven. Even the hanging glass jugs, patterns on the walls, and the torches in the background had me thinking about what to do and how to make it all come together. I also tightened up and added strings to the lute. I know, I know . . . the nib made me do it.

Most likely, all the linework won't show up in the actual printing. In some instances I inked really thin and it may get washed out. I've only inked like this over Capullo, and I've been surprised that my linework is at all visible in the actual printing.

The top part of the piece was probably intended for script or titles. I tried experimenting on copies, doing some kind of texture there. It kept taking away from the main scene, so I just decided to make it solid black. I thought about adding one or two more torches on each side so I could add some glowing highlights, but I would be drawing and adding art to an existing piece. Most often it's not the inker's duty to draw, erase, and do what they will over their artist. Be loyal to the art, have communication with your penciller, find out what they want, and sometimes it's okay to play a bit with the inks.





John Beatty

I tried to draw as much attention to Conan by using the blacks on the page to frame him. Also, using detail in the foreground and using more simple shapes with less detail in the background help to establish depth.

I used a lot of dry brush, trying to make the work more organic and less slick, keeping with the feel of what I was inking as far as atmosphere and textures.

This is the first time that I ever inked a John Buscema piece, and it was quite hard to keep the flow of his masterful pencil work while inking. He's a tough one to try and pull off only doing one page. Inking more pages would have helped me work out various ways of making the work better. But for one shot, my first shot, I was fairly pleased with the overall look!

*“Pencils leave a soft mark on paper;
ink has a hard edge. Simply trace
the pencils and nine times out of ten
you’ll lose something — an energy,
a life, a feeling. Capturing that
feeling is the inker’s toughest job.”*

—Karl Kesel



AFTERWORD

I would like to pass along one of the lessons I learned while working on *The Art of Comic-Book Inking*. While putting this book together, one of my tasks was to assign and gather pencils and inks from thirty-four different artists. Brent Anderson described this challenge as “trying to wrangle a bunch of stray cats”! But what a treat it was to have several lengthy phone conversations with these talented professionals discussing the nuances of inking. (Am I an inking geek, or what?) Surprisingly, some of the artists started doubting their abilities when they realized that people would be studying their pages for years to come. I actually had to give pep talks to reassure them, and I’m talking about the guys who are the most successful of this talented group! This puzzled me at first. Then I realized their insecurity is what makes them great — they are rarely satisfied with their own work. All great artists have in common this unending drive to improve. When inking for a living, when you have to produce every day, it’s easy to learn enough techniques to put your hand on automatic pilot, especially when your artistic contributions are taken for granted. Never stop studying your craft. Continue to explore new approaches to embellishing pencil art. Your attitude will stay fresh, and your excellent work will be its own reward.

I can’t end this book without mentioning some of the artists whose inking abilities I admire. The list below includes artists from both past and present. If it had been possible, I would have included their work in this book.

Dan Adkins	Walt Kelly
Alfredo Alcala	Rick Magyar
Murphy Anderson	Jerome Moore
Brett Breeding	Paul Neary
Reed Crandall	Art Nichols
Jack Davis	Bruce Patterson
Hal Foster	Alex Raymond
Michael Golden	John Severin
Floyd Gottfredson	Joe Sinnott
Jaime Hernandez	Bob Smith
Dennis Janke	Bob Wiacek
Klaus Janson	Al Williamson

The one man who, I think, did the best comic-book inking ever was Frank Frazetta. Even after all these years, no one has come close to touching his abilities.

I hope this book has been helpful to you and made inking less of a mystery. It would be nice if I never again had to hear those dreaded words: “Don’t you just trace over the pencil lines?”

Please feel free to e-mail me (inkart@earthlink.net) with your comments or questions!

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.

Remove the bristol-board inserts at the perforation and practice your own inks on the pencils of Steve Rude, Brent Anderson, Terry Dodson, Randy Green, Adam Warren, Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, and John Buscema.

If you want to use these pages as samples, refer to chapter XIV, "Practical Tips," on how to present your work to prospective publishers.



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