TWOMORROWS

DRAW!

THE PROFESSIONAL
"HOW-TO" MAGAZINE
ON COMICS
AND CARTOONING

SUPERSTAR ARTIST
DOUG BRAITHWAITE
INTERVIEW & DEMO

WRITE NOW's
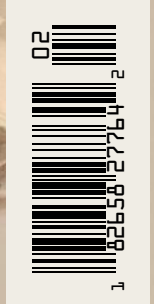**DANNY FINGEROTH**
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ROUGH STUFF's
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CRITIQUES A
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WORK

PLUS:
MIKE MANLEY
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COMIC ART BOOTCAMP

DRAW!

DRAW! (edited by top comics artist **MIKE MANLEY**) is the professional **"HOW-TO"** magazine on comics, cartooning, and animation. Each issue features in-depth **INTERVIEWS** and **DEMOS** from top pros on all aspects of graphic storytelling. **NOTE:** Contains nudity for purposes of figure drawing. **INTENDED FOR MATURE READERS.**

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Features an in-depth interview and demo by **R.M. GUERA** (the artist of Vertigo's Scalped), behind-the-scenes in the Batcave with Cartoon Network's **JAMES TUCKER** on the new hit show "Batman: The Brave and the Bold," plus product reviews by **JAMAR NICHOLAS,** and Comic Book Boot Camp's "Anatomy: Part 2" by **BRET BLEVINS** and **MIKE MANLEY!**

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DRAW! #20

WALTER SIMONSON interview and demo, Rough Stuff's **BOB McLEOD** gives a "Rough Critique" of a newcomer's work, Write Now's **DANNY FINGEROTH** spotlights writer/artist **AL JAFFEE, JAMAR NICHOLAS** reviews the best art supplies and tool technology, **MIKE MANLEY** and **BRET BLEVINS** offer "Comic Art Bootcamp" lessons, plus Web links, book reviews, and more!

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DRAW!

THE PROFESSIONAL "HOW-TO" MAGAZINE ON COMICS & CARTOONING

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Watercolor by Bret Blevins

Welcome back everyone! It's been a little while since the last issue came out, but many things have been happening here at *DRAW!* central since our last issue. This issue we also welcome two new regular contributors to the pages of *DRAW!* to sit at the table every month: Danny (*Write Now!*) Fingeroth and Bob (*Rough Stuff*) McLeod. The "Rough Critique" lessons Bob started in *Rough Stuff* will continue here in *DRAW!*, and Danny will offer regular interviews with comic personalities and artists. So while those two fellows' respective TwoMorrows magazines have stopped publication for now, it's great that both Danny and Bob can continue to bring their great contributions to the study, appreciation, and learning of the art form to the pages of *DRAW!*

Also while we were away, I started a new regular job (one, it seems, of many). I am the new artist on the *Judge Parker* newspaper strip, and I decided to do an article this issue on doing the strip and all that entails. There are many more things underway here, and I plan on making the *DRAW!* magazine blog much more active this year. So stop on by **http://draw-magazine.blogspot.com** and leave a comment to let me know what you are looking for as far as learning, articles, tips, and interviews.

MIKE

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SHINING THE LIGHT ON...

DOUG BRAITHWAITE

Interview conducted by **Mike Manley**

F rom *The Punisher* to *Thor* and *Wolverine*, Doug Braithwaite has been one of the top artist/pencilers in the business for two decades. *DRAW!* catches up with this busy, in-demand artist to talk about his work and his process.

DRAW!: How do you start your day, etc.?

DOUG BRAITHWAITE: My day usually starts around 10:30 a.m., once I've had breakfast, read the mail, and fed and watered the two stray, feral cats that we are currently caring for. Once I've tended to all that I will start work (I'm sure this routine sounds familiar to most creators—with the exception of dealing with wild cats).

I work at home, and my studio is the top floor of the house. I used to share a studio in London a few years back, and it was great fun. I shared with four other artists, and while I found in the beginning it was great having other people's energy and enthusiasm to bounce off of, after six years of it, I now find I'm more comfortable having my own creative space to work in. I can do things at my own pace, play my own music, or have complete silence when it's necessary. Generally fewer distractions all around, it's something to do with getting older, I think.

Anyway, once I'm ensconced in the studio I might check my e-mails, but recently I've been leaving them to later on in the day,

mainly because that's when the offices in America open (which are five hours behind us here in the UK), but more importantly because I like to concentrate and get my head into my work early. And I find that two hours can easily be lost answering e-mails first thing in the morning; they have a terrible way of eating into work time.

DRAW!: Who were the artists you were sharing the studio with? Did you work with any of them? I have shared a studio many times and I find the company a great booster, especially on the days when you get in a rut.

DB: Originally I shared the studio with four other creators, and it changed a bit over the years as people moved on, but the original crowd was Kev Hopgood, who worked for Marvel and is best known to fans for his work on *Iron Man* and *War Machine* in the '90s (he later went on to work in advertising and games design); Steve White, who was an editor for Marvel UK and lately for Titan publishing (he is also a fantastic wildlife and dinosaur

artist); John Tomlinson, ex-editor at Marvel UK and *2000AD* (he used the studio as a base to do his writing); and Brian Williamson, another artist at Marvel UK, who, I think, is currently working on *Dr. Who*.

Clockwork Studios in south London was where we had studio space, and it was in a building totally devoted, thanks to the owner Noel Perkins, to artists and artisans. It was a very creative environment in which to work. There must have been about 15 or so people over two floors of the building, and there was everything from potters to milliners, actors, illustrators, sculptors, fashion designers, and in a little corner of the building, us comics boys. I never went to art school, but my wife, who did, said the smells of paint and clay, and the atmosphere generally, reminded her of her art school days.

It was an open plan building with lightweight panels dividing spaces, and the building in itself was interesting in that it was a large warehouse space that had once belonged to Fred Karno of Karno's Army and had been known as the Fun Factory at the early part of the 1900s. For those who have never heard of Fred Karno or his army, and their significance, it was his theatrical company that took Stan Laurel and Charlie Chaplin to the States in a comedy show in 1910. Fred Karno trained his artists, wrote and rehearsed the sketches and created the scenery and costumes in the building we were in. In a tall narrow building next door to the studio was where the backdrops for stage shows were created and hung from a vaulted ceiling. Karno had lived in the large Victorian house next door and Noel rented this out to some of the artists from the studio. There was a garden out the back that adjoined our studio, and it was a nice place to hang out in the summer. It was an inspiring environment, knowing such great comedic talents had once walked around and trained in the very building we worked in.

I often wondered why more people interested in the history of the building didn't visit, but I now know they had changed the name of the road many years before, so it wasn't so easy to find. It was a great place to work and I spent six years there and only left when I moved out of London. As you mentioned, having so many creative people around you had the effect of boosting your own creativity and, of course, there were many laughs to be had on a daily basis.

Detail from a page of Doug's pencils for *Universe X.*

DRAW!: What kind of process do you go through for doing your pencilling, breaking down your pages, etc.?

DB: When I get a new script, I will usually settle down and spend some time reading it through and making notes. I tend to read a script through two or three times before I draw anything, playing the story and scenes through my head so I get a good visual feel of the pacing and choreography and the staging of the characters. Then I'll make notes for what reference I'll need from the editors or writer, which usually tends to be for flashback scenes or costume reference for specific characters. On the final readthrough of a script I will start to make tiny visual notes in the margins, pinpointing the key moments of impact and beats within the frames of the story. These visual notes tend to be very sketchy, squiggly things that would look non-descript to anyone looking over my shoulder at the time, but are pretty clear to me. Until quite recently I would then do all of my workings out on the final page and would always be correcting the art as I went along, which, on some pages, could be pretty labor intensive. I didn't think this was unusual, as I felt at the time that was the way that worked best for me. I liked the fluidity and movement of the line — working very lightly with the pencil and gradually building up to solid form. Hard work, but I suppose you always have to "suffer for your craft" and all that—you live and you learn.

I now lay out the pages separately from the final boards. In hindsight, with the exception of a few inkers, it must have been pretty intimidating for the person inking my work when faced with all the workings out and construction lines on the page with the drawing, even though I tried to clean them up as much as I could without losing the essence of my work. I thought it would be more of a help to the inkers to see some of my workings out, help them understand forms and the like, rather than be a hindrance.

DRAW!: Talk a bit more about this first step, because I think it's really an important one, maybe the most important, and it's where artists really differ in their thinking. As you read the script and images appear, is it like watching a movie that you pull stills from, or do you see it gelling even from the beginning as comic drawing? Do you imagine the flow of images as panels on pages or is it still hazy?

DB: Most of the time when I read a script the imagery comes to me pretty easily. I may have to re-read sections to clarify what the writer is after, but on the whole it's a pretty fluid process. The story comes to life in my head, much as you would watch a film or see the story being played out when you read a novel, but for certain frames I still see in traditional comic terms. Those frames tend to be the impact images. It's funny that being the case, but I see those frames being handled with the exaggerations and dynamics of traditional comic art. I can't see those images being handled any other way. I prefer plotting the story sequentially from beginning to end, without jumping to the impact scenes that tend to be more exciting to draw, as I find jumping around disrupts the flow of the storytelling. Some artists are good at that and prefer jumping to the "money shots" and worrying about the less exciting images later. I prefer building up to the impact points in the story, as I am always reassessing the frames as I

draw them, and if I draw it sequentially it's better suited to the pacing of the story. I don't enjoy working on half-completed scripts, I like to be able to plan the story out in full before I begin to draw up the pages.

These days I put in another stage in the process—I now work out each page as a thumbnail. I work out the individual pages on 9mm x 6mm panels, several of them to an A4 page. These panels are scaled down from the art boards, and I work out the composition, panels and perspective all at the same size. After all these years of working in the business I've found out that it is far quicker and easier doing all my workings out at that size. I tried to do it this way years ago, but it didn't suit me then, and now it does, but I can't say why. Once I'm happy with that stage I will scale up the small images on a photocopier and then light-box onto the final art boards, giving myself a rough layout of the page to work on. Once I've done that I jump straight in and start drawing up the page, adding all the details.

I use no reference for my figure work when I'm drawing; clothing, musculature, characterisation (expressions) and light sources are all from my head. I was taught you had to be competent in your understanding of anatomy, perspective, drapery and lighting to be a good draftsman... old school, I suppose. I had to study these elements so I could use them without reference, so I could plot out a story properly, and that knowledge has always stood me in good stead. I love portraying the human form and feel I have a real affinity with it. I love the sheer variety, the dynamics, elegance, motion and emotion it can portray, and I hope to convey that excitement to the reader, and to do that it has to come directly from my head. A lot of people say my work is realistic. I would say it is to an extent, but only in the sense that it feels right to me when I work this way; it allows me to express what I see in my mind and put my point across as a storyteller. I always try to be true to the realities of the human form and the real world around me, but filtered through the stylized art of the comic book.

DRAW!: It's interesting that you mention that, because many, many years ago I saw some *Punisher* pages by you that Al Williamson was inking. He termed what you were describing as "scientific drawing," and I suppose with the light record of your construction process still seen throughout the pages it could have looked that way. As much as clean pencils

can be fun, I also like seeing the process, the searching for a form or drawing.

DB: Artists like the late, great Al Williamson (and I'll mention more about his importance to me later) and more recently Bill Reinhold, both instinctively understood what I was trying to achieve by working that way — that is, working things out directly on the page and leaving some of that construction visible. My problem was thinking everyone would think like Al, so I had some hit and miss inking over the years. Sometimes I've had to clean my pencils up when an inker hasn't understood the way I work, but

Pencils for *Wolverine: Origin* #45, page 11.
ALL CHARACTERS ™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

DRAW!: When you are drawing right on the board are you using a hard pencils, say a 3H, to rough out? I seem to remember seeing pages by you long ago when I was sharing Al Williamson's studio, and they were very clean, and the pencils looked like they were done with a hard lead. Inking the *Wolverine* pages that you penciled, I found that, for me, sometimes those lines searching for the form gave me slight insights to what you were thinking as well.

DB: I'm glad you saw it that way, Mike. Some of those *Wolverine* pages had to be drawn quicker than usual due to tight deadlines, and I tended to leave a lot more "info" on them. Considering it was our first time working together you did a great job, and I thought you interpreted them very well. Big thanks to Bill for recommending you to me.

It's great to hear you worked alongside Al. That must have been an amazing experience. Al Williamson has a special place in my heart. When I first started working for Marvel, about 1990 I think, my first job was on *Punisher* on "Eurohit," written by Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning. I was lucky enough for Al Williamson to be inking that whole storyline. We all went out to the States during the New York Comic-Con, and Al was at the show and wanted to meet me (and vice versa), so Don Daley, our editor, arranged for us to see him at the show, but when we got there, unsurprisingly, there was a huge crush of people at his table, so Don just pushed me through to the front and introduced me. Al put down his pen, got down on his hands and knees and crawled under the table and gave me the biggest bear hug! We got on famously after that. When he knew I was travelling to the States he would always try and arrange for me to visit his home, and on occasion he even drove up to New York from his place in Pennsylvania to pick me up, which really was kind.

Unfortunately, I only managed to visit Al's studio in town a couple of times, but I found his collection at home to be inspirational. He had a real who's who of American illustration and comic strip art.

His inks on my first *Punisher* story were a real master class in inking, and I have to say that without Al's guidance and inspiration I don't think I would be the artist I am now. He opened my eyes to the world of American illustration and was so generous with his time. We spent hours discussing comic art and illustration, and he was more than happy to answer all my questions. And, being the raconteur he was, it was always a great laugh to

luckily Bill "got" my pencils, though I have to say he has developed his style the more he's worked with me. There's also the problem that, much as the working out adds to the enjoyment of the drawing for someone such as yourself, who happens to see it, not a lot of that working out is seen by the comic reader once it has been inked and colored. I've done a few jobs recently where they have just colored over my pencils and, although not exactly what I was after, it certainly gives things a different quality, but I need to get the pencil line strong enough to be seen through the colors. Some people like this method of working, while others hate it, but for the moment it's something I'm experimenting with.

be around him and hear his reminisces about the days he worked alongside other greats like Krenkel, Frazetta, Torres, and Wood, and about the great respect and affection he held for his long-time collaborator and friend, Archie Goodwin, another lovely guy with whom I was also lucky enough to work with. These are stories I know many pros have heard, and I'm sure we can all share similar tales, but they were all so special to me. Can you imagine, me, an English kid, just broken into the mainstream, meeting one of his heroes and finding out he was a great guy? Al meant a lot to many people in this business and inspired everyone he came in contact with, but I will never forget what he did for me. Thank you, Al. And God bless.

I would have handled those pages you saw at Al's with an HB lead, and I did pencil a lot tighter back then, as I think I had more time to do the pages. I think Marvel was a bit unsure where the story would fit into the schedule, and it may have been originally intended as an inventory story (which wasn't unusual at that time), so we would have been on a fairly loose deadline.

I have always used a mechanical pencil, with 0.5 HB leads, and Pentel is my preferred make, because I found I got nice subtleties and contrast with their leads. Nowadays I use F leads, a pretty unusual choice, and I have to try hard to track them down in the UK. I prefer them because they don't leave much graphite on the board, but they are still dark enough to use for shading and putting down strong lines. I started using this lead on the *Justice* series, as I was working on art board that was different to the usual boards provided by DC; it was Strathmore 500 series Bristol board. Originally, I found that my usual HB lead was leaving too much residue on the page and things could get pretty murky, so I tried various other leads. The F lead turned out to be the best option, and I've stuck with it ever since.

rough CRITIQUE

Constructive analysis & criticism of a newcomer's work by BOB McLEOD

I'm a strong believer in constructive criticism. If an artist can't take criticism and look objectively at his own work, he's not going to go very far. We all tend to be a bit blind to our own weaknesses, because we focus mostly on what we enjoy and do well. But realizing what we don't do well is what helps get us to that next level. To that end, I offer my Rough Critique to artists struggling to break into the big leagues of comic art.

This cool Superman vs. Bizarro sample page was submitted by Chris Hanchey, who took a correspondence lesson from me a few years ago and has improved to the point where he's now penciling a new series for Arcana called *The Infinites*. Congrats on getting that first paying gig, Chris! So this sample page is about three years old, but offers a chance for me to point out some things that should be helpful to a lot of beginning pencilers still looking for that big break. Thanks go to Chris for allowing us to use it.

First of all, you need to understand the format and define your working space. See that blue dotted line near the edge, where it says "trim" in the corners? That means that the art will likely be cropped along that line when the comic is printed. So anything outside that line isn't going to be printed! So for example, Bizarro's toes, knee, cape tip and hand will all be cropped off in the printed comic. Superman's forefinger in the lower left panel will be cut off. That dotted line should be considered the edge of the page in the comic. Even a panel border drawn on that line may be cropped off. So never draw anything beyond that line that you want to be seen in the printed comic. And hands are important and should be placed within the panel whenever possible. Hands and faces are primary focal points and should always be placed carefully and deliberately. Beyond that, a good rule is to never crop anything that doesn't need to be cropped, and those hands could easily have been placed further within the panel.

Your next consideration is how many panels to have on the page, and what shape and size they should be. For an action sequence, you want to be able to show large figures up close, so the reader is close to the action and involved emotionally in the scene. Who wants to watch a fight from a block away? So four or five panels is preferable. Six panels should be the maximum. Here we have five, but because the lower four are all about the same size, it doesn't allow panel three to have the impact it deserves. Giving extra space to panel one makes the rest of the page seem anti-climactic. Gutters, by the way (the

Here's how the page would look cropped at the trim lines.
SUPERMAN, BIZARRO ™ AND © DC COMICS

etc. That juxtaposition offers the most impact and makes the sequence much more interesting. Keeping the same camera angle panel to panel steadies the action, which works against the excitement Chris is trying to generate here.

After deciding on the viewing angle, you need to decide where to place the figures in the panel, and beyond that where to place the main focal points. Chris does a decent job of that here, except for panel three, as I mentioned above. You want to place figures and focal points off-center, but well within the panel, cropping only where necessary. When you must crop a figure, as in panel four, never crop at a joint, such as an ankle, knee, wrist, elbow, waist, or neck. Bizarro's legs and Superman's elbow are not what we need to see in this panel, so the figures should have been placed more to the right and lower, cropping Bizarro mid-thigh and mid-forearm.

Here's where you need to think like a movie director and camera man, and focus on what tells the story and only what tells the story. Everything else should be cropped out. Don't crop figures for no reason, but when you want to move close and have to crop, go ahead and move as close as you can. This used to be a major problem for Chris (see my critique in *Rough Stuff* #6, available from Twomorrows), but he's getting much better at it. You obviously can't show the whole world in every panel, so you're already choosing what to show. Be very deliberate and show only what tells the story—nothing else!

Next, keeping in mind how close to focus, you decide how big to draw the figures. The goal should be variety, showing large figures and small figures, and balancing them around the page. Avoid drawing figures the same size in adjacent panels, such as panels three and five, and the small figures in panels one and two. I try never to draw heads the same size in any two panels. Once you decide on the camera angle, the placement and size of the figure, you just need to work out the pose. The figure as a whole, and particularly the arms and legs, should be posed on diagonals, not horizontals or verticals. Chris has done a pretty good job of this, except for Superman's pose in panel one, which seems deliberate, and the two parallel right arms in panel four, which I'm sure wasn't intentional. The left arms are also parallel, by the way, and that's a no-no. Unless done for some purpose, repetitive angles are

space between panels), should be at least 1/8 of an inch wide, or the panels blend into each other too much. Some artists just draw a line between panels rather than a gutter, but in that case you need to make sure the areas of the two panels that touch are visually different enough that they don't blend into each other.

The angled shape of the panels is a good choice. That lends a chaotic feel to the sequence, which befits an action page. But repeating the same angle with the building in panel one and the middle panel gutters in the bottom two tiers works against that chaos. Angled panels also present the problem of using the corner areas effectively. In panel three, the figures should be moving further into that corner, rather than being centered in the panel. That stops the movement of Superman into Bizarro's body. By placing them in the middle of the panel, the action seems frozen. That first panel action works well because you can feel Bizarro's movement from Superman over to the right side of the panel.

Once you've decided on the size of your panels, the next problem is the angle from which to view each scene. Beginners tend to show everything straight-on, as if the camera was sitting on an immoveable tripod. Chris wisely offers some variety with the two down-shots in the middle panels. But it would be even better to have one of the panels as an up-shot. The best artists follow a close-up with a long shot, a down-shot with an up-shot,

Moving Superman and Bizarro further into the corner and out of the center of the panel increases the sense of moment and action.
SUPERMAN, BIZARRO ™ AND © DC COMICS

poor design. Notice that in panel one, while Superman appears to be standing vertically and knocking Bizarro away with little effort, he's actually leaning diagonally to his right, because the background is tilted to the left. So as long as we're tilting him, why not tilt him on a diagonal that enhances the design?

Remember when posing your figures to place the heads and hands and other focal points carefully. When I refer to focal points, I mean the primary things the reader looks at—the centers of interest. These are almost always eyes, faces, heads, hands, and feet. So obviously, you need to place the centers of interest very carefully, never randomly. You want them off-center, away from the panel border, and you don't want anything distracting from them. Which leads to the next problem to be solved: backgrounds.

Chris is just knocking himself out drawing complex backgrounds here, which is one of his strengths. But just as a page full of close-ups lessens the impact of each one, and a page with no backgrounds looks empty, a page with too many complex backgrounds lessens the impact of each one and looks crowded, not allowing enough rest for the eye of the viewer. So those first three panels compete far too much with each other, lessening the impact of Bizarro flying through the air in panel one, and all that amazing work in panel three. And panel five by contrast appears to have shifted to the Twilight Zone.

So when should you draw backgrounds? And equally as importantly, when shouldn't you? Here are some simple guidelines: Never follow one detailed background with another equally detailed one because each one detracts from the other. Close-ups rarely need a background, long shots always do. Medium shots usually need some background. The amount depends on adjacent panels, and whether the setting needs to be established, or whether some background element is relevant. On this page, panel two could have had a much simpler background, and an up-shot would have allowed sky to separate it better from the first panel. Great as it is, the background in panel three doesn't need to be there, and in fact shouldn't be, because the action is so intense the background detracts from it too much. Rather than panel one, this is where the figures should be larger and possibly extending beyond the panel border. And if you're going to tilt the background, don't tilt it at the same angle as the panel next to it! That's just poor design. Panel four should be a close-up and not have a background, and panel five does need a back-

ground, but a simple one that doesn't detract from the figures, such as the clouds in panel four.

When adding a background, keep in mind that you don't want it to conflict with or detract from your focal points. So in panel one, for example, Superman should be surrounded by sky, with no buildings touching him, except perhaps the tip of his cape overlapping a building to help create depth. Bizarro's left hand should also be surrounded by air, not touching the edge of the building. In panel two, Superman's hand shouldn't be so close to the corner of the building and Bizarro's foot shouldn't appear to be pushing against the wall. Bizarro's left hand gets totally lost in the building in panel three, and his face seems to be buried in his cape, it's so perfectly centered on it. Consider everything you draw in a panel as a shape. In panel one, for instance, Bizzaro is a shape, and the building behind him is a shape. You don't want to place one large shape behind another one. That's poor design.

While on the subject of backgrounds, I'm compelled to mention perspective, one of my pet peeves. I have nothing against "sighting" perspective, without actually using a ruler to make every line go to the vanishing points. But I do object to making errors in perspective out of ignorance, which is far too commonplace in comics. In panel one, he's using one-point perspective, and seems to be in good control of that. But in panel two, the close building is not "square," because the wall going off to the right should recede to the same vanishing point as the rest of the planes parallel to it in that panel, and it doesn't. So consequently, it appears to be sloping downward. The verticals in that panel should all be receding to a point far below, but don't. So actually, none of the buildings are squared. Neither are the buildings in panel three, which don't adhere to vanishing points either.

Wow, that's a lot of things to think about just drawing comics, isn't it?! But wait, we're not finished. Not by a long shot. What about anatomy? Do you need perfect anatomy in comics? No, actually you don't. I can probably count the number of comic artists who draw correct anatomy on one hand. But you do need to meet a certain standard. The figures need to be believable within the fantasy world you establish. So with such realistic backgrounds, the figures need to be as realistic as possible, and

the more incorrect their anatomy, the more obvious and distracting it becomes. Both heads are too small in panel one, and both left legs have been amputated below the knee (another of my pet peeves). In panel two, note the difference in size of Superman's upper arms. Again his head is too small (it's about the size of his fists!), and his left forearm really needs work.

Superman's thumb is dislocated in panel three, and the anatomy overall is just wrong.

In panel four, Bizarro's head isn't attached to his neck properly, nor is his neck attached to his spine, his ribs are broken, his abdominals are off-center, and his buttock is sliding down his leg. Note the difference in the length of the first joints of Superman's fingers on his right hand. In panel five, Bizarro's right leg is not attached to his hip correctly, his ribs are once more broken, his right foot is painfully small, and Superman's patella is dislocated. Figure drawing is a huge part of drawing comic books. I don't think it's too much to ask that artists have a basic understanding of human anatomy. Someone who draws as well as Chris should easily be able to solve these issues with a little study.

So, we've covered composition, design, perspective, anatomy, what's left? What about lighting and tonal values? Chris is doing a pretty good job here using high-contrast lighting to give the illusion of three-dimensional form. But be careful. See how Bizarro's right knee appears to have a hole in it? See how the muscle of his right forearm is sinking visually into the dark of his cape? In panel five, why does Superman's right vastus medialis (the muscle on the inside of his lower thigh) get less light than his semitendinosus (the back of his upper thigh)?

Shadows should be consistent with the light source, and remember that contrast is what creates the illusion of depth. So place black or grey next to white, white or grey next to black. Don't put black next to black, white next to white, or grey next to grey. This simple rule eludes so many artists. A high level of

These changes to the page make it visually more exciting and also easier to follow.
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detail or rendering creates a grey, so be careful not to put rendering next to rendering because it flattens the forms. It's important to think about where to put rendering and where not to. This used to be the inker's worry, but with today's ever-tighter pencils, it's become the penciler's worry. Rendering both sides of a form flattens the form. So only render the side of the form away from the light. Chris is doing a pretty good job of that. Use rendering to soften the transition of black into white. Until you get skilled at rendering, the less the better. All the tonal work can be done in color in today's comics, so some artists use little or no rendering at all. When placing blacks, remember that black ink on white paper really attracts the eye, so don't isolate blacks where they'll distract from the focal points. Try to balance them around the panel and the page as a whole. Surround dark focal points with light, and light focal points with dark.

I think that about covers it. Thanks again to Chris for consenting to this Rough Critique, and I'm looking forward to seeing his new series, *The Infinites*! If you'd like me to give a Rough Critique to your sample page next time, e-mail me at mcleod.bob@gmail.com.

WELCOME TO THE WEIRD WORLD OF...

R. SIKORYAK!

**Interview conducted
and transcribed by
Danny Fingeroth**

R. Sikoryak is the author of *Masterpiece Comics* — an anthology of his "mash-up" parodies — and he's adapted the classics for anthologies such as *Drawn & Quarterly*, *Raw*, and the new *Hotwire* (published by Fantagraphics).

His cartoons and illustrations have also appeared in *The Onion*, *The New Yorker*, *Nickelodeon Magazine*, *Mad*, *Wired*, and *Fortune*, among other publications; on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and in *The Daily Show Presents America (The Book)*; and *Our Dumb World: The Onion's Atlas of the Planet Earth*. He's also on occasion worked for Marvel (*Unstable Molecules*), DC (*Bizarro Comics*) and Dark Horse (*The Escapist*). He's recently drawn storyboards for the Comedy Central series *Ugly Americans*.

Sikoryak is the co-author, with Michael Smith, of *The Seduction of Mike* (Fantagraphics), a comic book funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. He was awarded artists' fellowships from The New York Foundation for the Arts and The American Antiquarian Society for his comics adaptations of the classics. He is in the speakers program of the New York Council of the Humanities and teaches in the illustration department at Parsons School of Design.

Since 1997, he has presented his cartoon slide show series, *Carousel*, around the United States and Canada.

He lives in New York City with his wife Kriota Willberg.

DANNY FINGEROTH: I'm here with R. Sikoryak in his downtown Manhattan Bohemian digs. Hello, R. Can we call you Bob?

R. SIKORYAK: Sure.

DF: What is the origin on the "R"? Why "R. Sikoryak" and not Robert or Bob?

RS: "Bob" seemed too informal, and "Robert" seemed too formal, so I thought "R." was a good compromise.

DF: It has some gender ambiguity.

RS: Well, my work has a lot of ambiguity in terms of who actually made it, so that appeals to me, too.

DF: Tell me your secret origin. What's your background, and how did you know you wanted to be an artist, and all that stuff?

RS: I always was interested in drawing. I knew I wanted to be some sort of artist type since I was a young kid. The word "artist" just always seems so pretentious to me, but there's no way around it — other than saying you're a "graphic novelist." [*laughs*] I have two older brothers, and they were really into comics and media, so I was exposed, like radiation, to all this stuff at a very early age, and I guess that's where my "superpowers" came from. They had a big comics collection, which I then became involved in and started collecting. I was very much into reading newspaper comics, specifically *Peanuts*, but I read just about everything except *Mary Worth*. I only really got into that later.

I grew up in central New Jersey. We got a great newspaper,

the *Star Ledger*, which has a big comics section, so I saw a lot of great strips there. And this was in the '70s, mainly, when there was a more thriving newspaper comic strip field than there is now.

DF: Have strips moved to the Web?

RS: For sure. Back then, that's where you'd see the comics, in the newspaper. My brothers and I would collaborate on stuff. Whatever hobby they were into, I'd sort of piggyback onto. They would make movies, and they would write stories, and they would make comics. And I'd hang around, to watch or contribute. For whatever reason, comics seemed the most graspable to me in terms of actually figuring out a way to make them myself. You could really do it all yourself. So I got very much involved in doing that. My brothers and I would do parody comics, and I would do newspaper comic strip style cartoons.

DF: A lot of kids want to be artists and love comics, but did you ever consider another branch of art, or was it always comics that latched onto you?

RS: Well, I got into comics at a really early age, as I said. I guess I just got sucked in. I was really into *Peanuts*, and I was really into a lot of the Marvel comics that I was reading. Those just captured me somehow. I did a lot of different kinds of art in college, and afterwards a lot of performance art and crazy theater productions, but they're even harder to fund than comics.

I went to Parsons School of Design, and I actually teach there now. I had some really great teachers there, including Steven Guarnaccia, who is now the chair of the Illustration department.
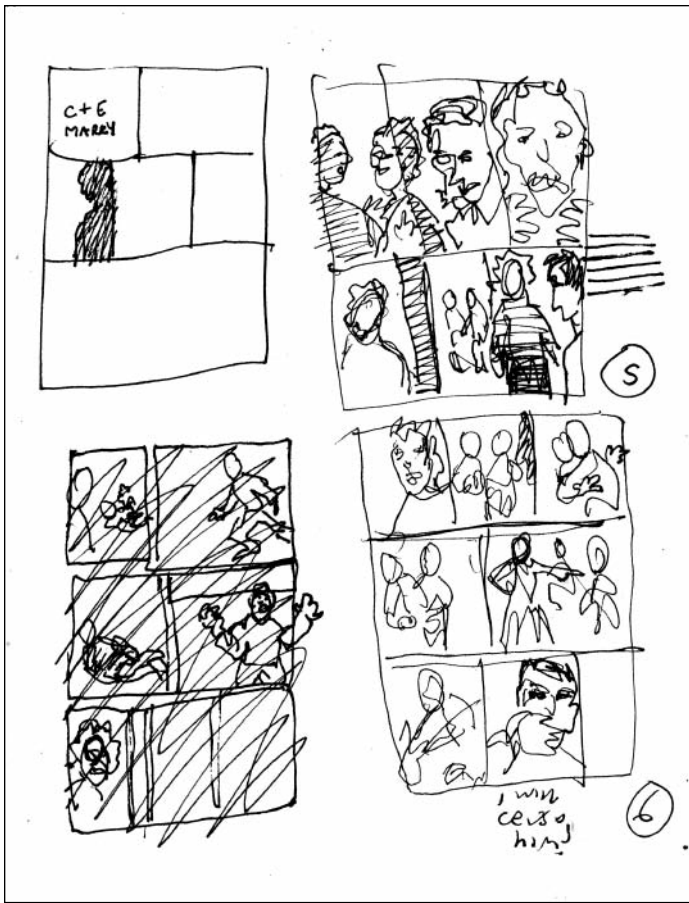
More of Bob's visual notes.
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He was into a lot of great work and knew Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly at *Raw* magazine. Through Steven, I ended up interning for *Raw*. So that was further immersion in the comics world. I imagine that I could have gone into animation, but the opportunity didn't arise, and comics were something that, the more I got in, the harder it was to get out.

DF: *Raw* was a cutting-edge magazine, kind of the next step beyond the underground, a fine arts approach to comics. What was it like, day to day, working there?

RS: I had mentioned to Steven that I was excited by what they were doing, so he put me in touch with them. I started, really, just helping around the office in 1986. I was studying a little bit about postmodern art, which was happening in the '80s, and was into the gallery scene in New York City, so what Art and Francoise were doing dovetailed with a lot of the other artists that I was interested in, such as the pop artists, and other 20th century artists, who owed a debt to the Dada movement. Specifically, people like Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, and — from an earlier generation — Marcel Duchamp, a lot of artists who approached art in a way where they were kind of thinking about dismantling the idea of "art" while they were making art. And that was definitely what *Raw* was doing, as well. They were comics, but they were comics about comics.

DF: That's what Spiegelman had been doing since the beginning of his career.

RS: Yeah, pretty much. I first saw his book, *Breakdowns*, in college before I met him, which collects a lot of his experimental comics from the '70s. It was recently reprinted by Pantheon, but there was a rather obscure, small printing in the '70s. When I saw those strips it really blew my mind. To give one example, he took panels from the strip *Rex Morgan, M.D.* and collaged them into his own drawings to make a surreal, abstract narrative out of the most straight-laced soap-opera comic. That was just one of the things that he did, but that idea of taking old strips and making something new and strange with them totally thrilled me.

Anyway, when I began working for *Raw*, I was really just helping them around the office, shipping out book orders, things like that. The day I started working for them was the release party of *Raw* #8, and that was the same month that the first collected paperback of *Maus* [which had been serialized in *Raw*] came out, so Art was about to become some kind of comics celebrity just as I started working there. It was really interesting to see that happen. I was about 21 at the time, so very young and impressionable and excited to be there. I always admired Art's and Francoise's intelligence in how they put their anthologies together. They're very smart, they're very well-informed — not just knowing the medium, but also smart about how to take that knowledge and make something exciting out of it.
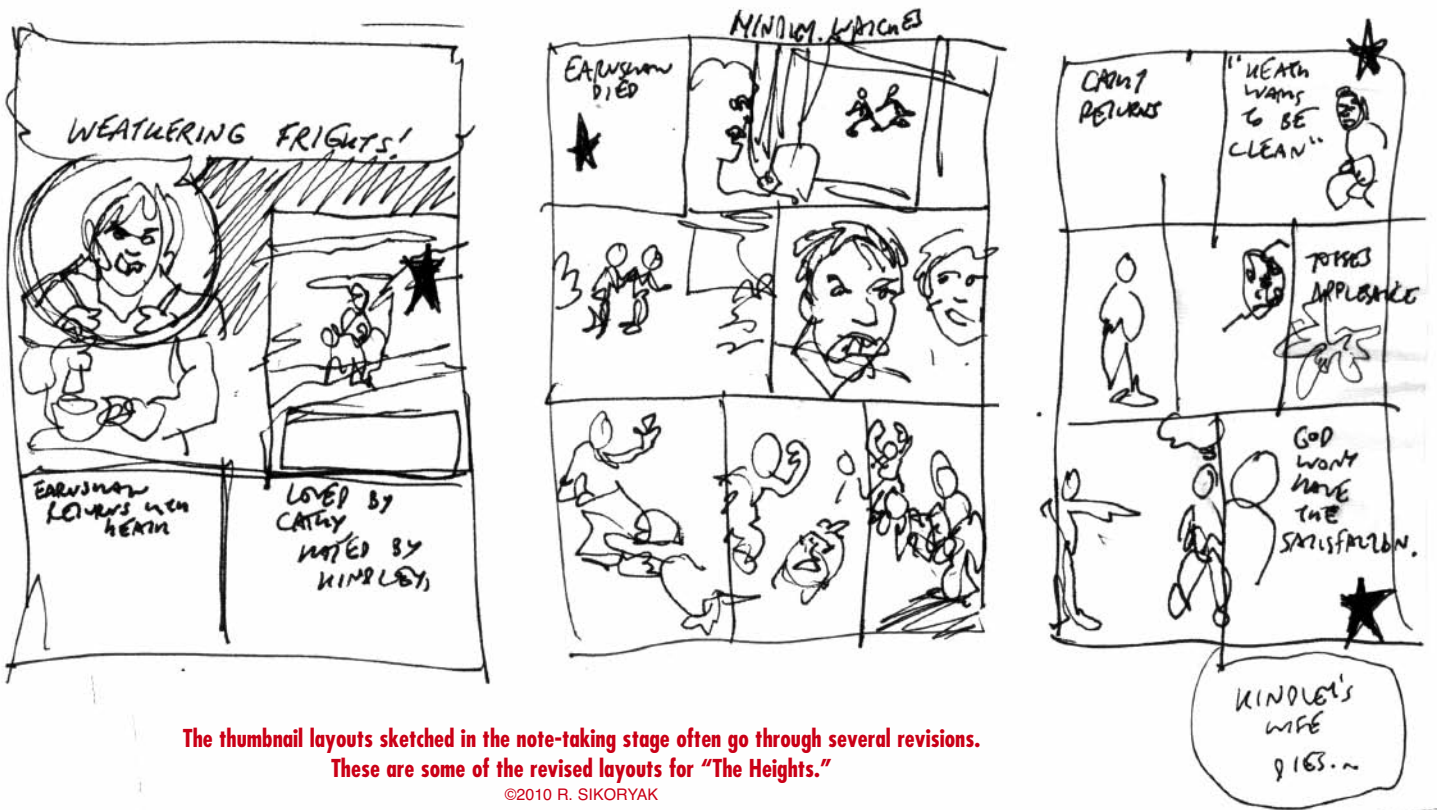
The thumbnail layouts sketched in the note-taking stage often go through several revisions. These are some of the revised layouts for "The Heights."
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At that point, they had gotten a contract with Pantheon to start doing books with individual artists, so they did a book with Gary Panter, who was another artist who I was really excited about. He's also someone who shifts his style and really plays around with the conventions of comics, and then makes them into something totally his own. Pretty much all the artists there I really admired, and their work really spoke to me.

DF: When you say "the office," I have a feeling it wasn't an office in the sense of a Marvel Comics or an ad agency or something like that.

RS: Right. They'd just gotten a working space in the building where they were living, and that was "the office." The early issues were all done in their loft, so they were just starting to expand somewhat. It was still a small operation. Most of it was not funded by their comics, but by a map of the neighborhood — SoHo — that they put out. A lot of my job was editing this map of the local businesses. This was a business that Francoise was running that they had started in the '70s, and they were still doing it. I think they put out about twelve annual maps, and they would hire salespeople — not me, luckily — to go around to businesses to try to get them to advertise in their map.

DF: This was not an arty, ironic map? This was a real tourist guide map?

RS: A real map. And it's funny, because it has a cover by Art Spiegelman, and it's about the tamest image you can imagine Art Spiegelman doing, if you've ever seen his *New Yorker* covers, which are often very provocative and very stark and startling, and, for *The New Yorker*, sometimes rather experimental. But the map had a very nicely designed generic cover that was meant to appeal to tourists, or to anyone who was coming through the neighborhood. It would advertise the art galleries and the little boutiques.

DF: As an intern, was there an active kind of an instruction going on? Did they ever say, "Here's how you do this, here's how you draw that?"

RS: A lot of it was learning on the job. I was doing a lot of production work. And when I say I was exposed to these artists, I would often be photostatting their artwork, so I would meet them occasionally. The night I started working for them, they had that party, and I met a lot of people, but that was kind of all a blur to me. Then when they started publishing issues again in 1989, I was very involved with that. I was doing hand separations of the coloring — they taught me how to do that sort of thing. I was learning to do photostats and paste-ups, getting type set, and speccing type, and a lot of other stuff that's completely irrelevant now.

ART EDUCATION

DF: You had some stuff printed in *Raw*, right?

RS: Amazingly, I did. I was doing much of the production work. Sometimes they would publish foreign strips, so after they were translated, I'd often do the hand-lettering in the style of the original artist. While I was working there, I also was sitting in on some classes at SVA [the School of Visual Arts] because Art was still teaching there. I was actually moonlighting at SVA while I was going to Parsons and trying to apply some of my work at SVA to my classes at Parsons, which didn't always work. But I was sitting in on a lot of different classes. I was sitting in on a painting class, I was sitting in on an animation class, and I was sitting in on some comics classes at SVA. A lot of my teachers taught at both places.

DF: Who were some of your teachers, besides Art?

RS: I had a lot of great teachers at Parsons. Steven Guarnaccia taught a satiric illustration class that was wonderful. I studied with the animator Howard Beckerman and sat in on his incredible
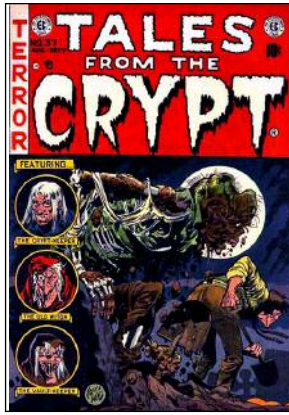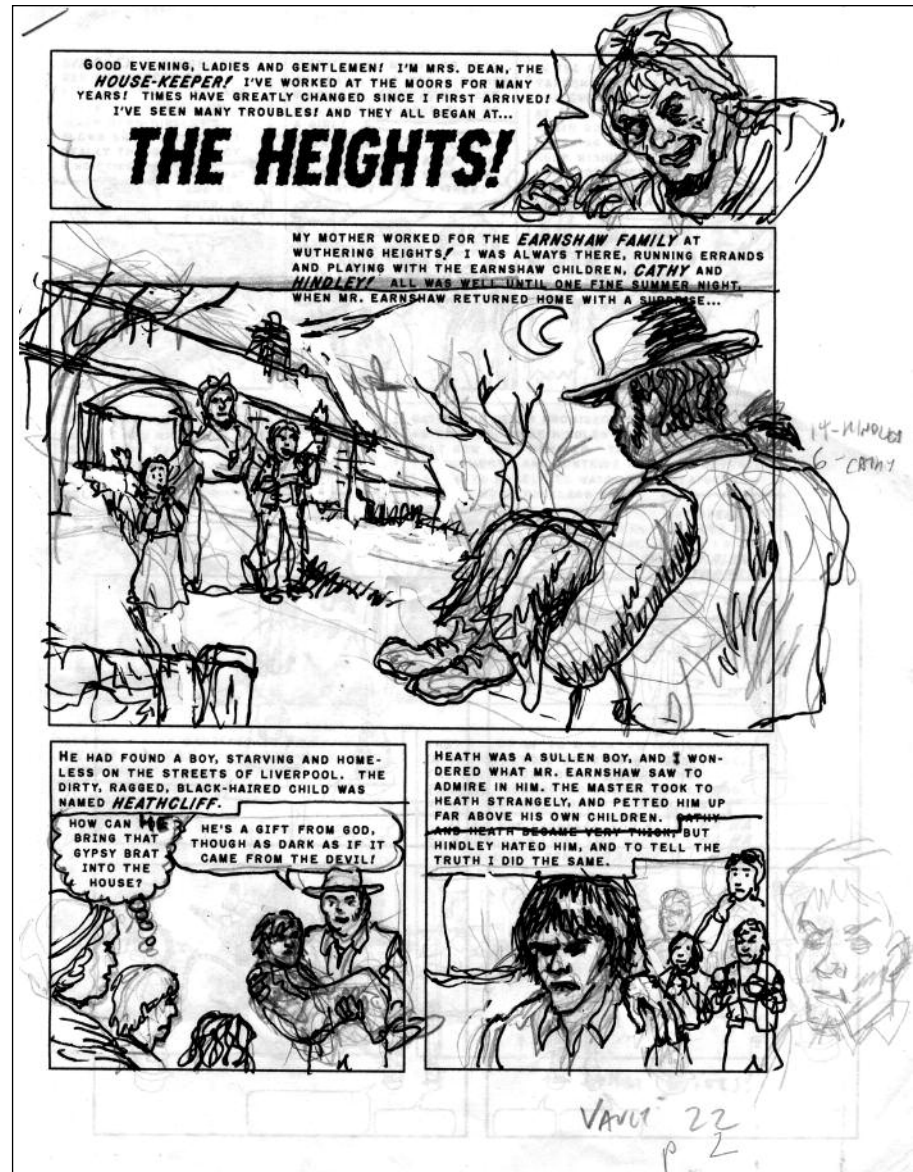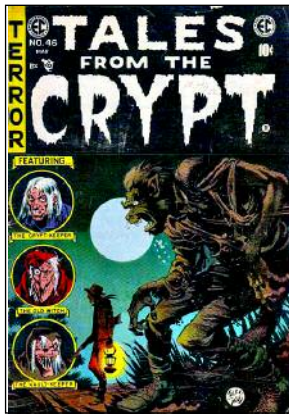
Bob usually picks a specific artist's style to emulate. In this case, he's chosen Jack Davis, who excelled at drawing both humor and horror stories for EC (some of his horror covers are shown on the left). Bob is still refining the layout and tightening the sketches at this point.

history of animation class at SVA. That exposed me to a lot of different films that — this is before the Internet — I would never have had any access to. Maybe if I drew fast enough I could have found a career in animation at an earlier time, because that was also fascinating to me. In any case, I also was sitting in on classes with Art. He taught a six-week, condensed version of his history of comics class at SVA, and through that class I met Paul Karasik and Mark Newgarden, who were previously students of his at SVA and also were involved in *Raw* and were teaching a class at SVA.

Through the class with Paul and Mark, I got into their comics anthology, *Bad News*. The strip I did was based on the anecdotes of composer John Cage, who incorporated "found" sounds into his music. I tried to incorporate the styles of different comics into his stories. So each of his anecdotes, which were taken from a book that he had written, are all done in the style of different strips. There's a *Mutt and Jeff* parody, a *Barnaby* parody, and

Pogo, *Mary Worth*, *Krazy Kat*, and so on. Anyway, Art saw that story and invited me to do a page for *Raw*, which kind of flabbergasted me. I was thrilled, and I wracked my brains to try and figure out what to do for that, and I hit upon the idea that would turn out to obsess me for the rest of my life, the "mash-up." The first strip that I did for them was a version of *Dante's Inferno* done in the style of *Bazooka Joe*. By the time this *Raw* came out, I was actually doing freelance bubble gum card writing for Topps and I was writing gags for the backs of Garbage Pail Kids cards. I had written some *Bazooka Joe*s, too — made a fairly good living for a couple months writing *Bazooka Joe*s. Sadly, none of those ever saw print, because Topps had decided to update the characters. But I was getting paid around 50 bucks, for *Bazooka Joe* gags — and if you've ever read *Bazooka Joe*, you know the gags weren't that hard to write.

So, I was immersed in the world of *Bazooka Joe*, and through college I was immersed in a lot of literature. I was really excited

by the one literature survey class I had to take as a freshman at Parsons. I was trying to think of something that could be kind of epic, but wouldn't be too pretentious, and that's how I came up with "*Bazooka Joe* meets *Dante's Inferno*."

DOING THE "MASH-UP"

DF: The question you must always get is, when most people say they're going to be a comics artist, they seem to fall into two categories: (a) I'm going to be my own person and have my own style, or (b) I'm going to spend my career imitating one, or a combination, of people. "I'm going to be Jack Kirby and Gil Kane's love child that they never had." But you have established a niche that's not either of those. Any thoughts as to why?

RS: I guess I really just wanted to be Will Elder, who, of course, did all of the old *Mad* parodies in the early years. The comic book parodies. He was really great at imitating other styles. He did "Ping Pong," "Gasoline Valley," "Woman Wonder." He did a quarter of all the early *Mad* stories. As I said, when I was a kid, with my brothers, we would often do *Mad*-style parodies of superhero comics. By the time the '70s rolled around, there was *Saturday Night Live*, and the humor style of *Mad* was all over the culture by that point: *National Lampoon*, *Saturday Night Live*, and even *Wacky Packages*. The culture was already eating itself, and maybe that accounts for the approach I took, because that's what a lot of the stuff that I found funny was already up to.

DF: How did you first come up with the "mash-ups" idea?

RS: Post-modernism was in the air in the '80s in New York, with Kenny Scharf putting the Jetsons in his paintings and things like that.

DF: Was the idea there's almost nothing new to say, so why not go back and say whatever you have to say disguised as someone else?

RS: I always felt that my work was derivative and not very original, so I just kind of embraced that. There's a great quote from Marcel Duchamp to the effect that you should steal from dead artists rather than the living. I think his idea was that your work would be more exciting if you adapted your contemporary sensibility to the style of another era. A lot of the artists I parody are alive, but I generally "steal" from people who are very established. They're so well known that you're meant to recognize the homage. I wouldn't want readers to think I was just ripping someone off. What I do is not merely a knock-off of a successful artist, it's obviously commentary on their work.

DF: And you're also not imitating, say, an obscure French comic from the 1920s. You're doing something where people recognize that you're homaging.

RS: Right, right. Duchamp probably would applaud ripping off a French cartoonist from the '20s. I think that's kind of what his quote was about. But that's not what interests me. I was

really trying to find a way to make the kind of comics I was interested in approachable to a wider audience. In the back of my mind I thought, "Well, maybe I can play with these conventions and I can also create something that the layperson will understand." I was interested in reaching an audience that would recognize trappings of famous comics, think, "Oh, that looks familiar," and then, as they started to read, would hopefully go, "Oh my God! What the h*ll is that?" So I wanted to get two responses — have a veneer that people could recognize and approach, and then, when they actually read the strip, hopefully something else would happen and it would become something new they wouldn't see at first glance.

DF: But you're also not doing, say, *The Terminator* in the style of *Peanuts*, or *Saving Private Ryan* in the style of *Nancy*. You're picking things that have more of a highbrow aim.

RS: Yes. That's something else that was really going on. There was a show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1990, the "High/Low" exhibit, and its subtitle was "Modern Art and Popular Culture." There was this sense of a divide between high culture and low culture, which everyone seemed to be talking about in the '80s, if they weren't talking about nuclear war. It was

This next draft is very similar to the first. The big difference is that the perspective of the opening splash panel has switched.
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With the third draft, Bob reverts back to the layout of the first draft, tightening up the sketches and cleaning up the captions and word balloons.

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in a way they never did before, so things that might have seemed esoteric once upon a time perhaps aren't so esoteric anymore.

RS: Right. You can download the entire text of *Dante's Inferno* from the Gutenberg version, or you can go to YouTube and watch *Transformers* cartoons from the '80s, and they're all free! It's all just culture, and there's not much distinction between those things. Or, at least, it doesn't feel like there is. [*laughs*]

DF: You started in this niche or genre of doing parodies, and then in between doing those pieces, you actually have a career that seems to pay quite a bit better doing commercial work. How did that evolve? What was your first commercial work?

RS: Well, I actually went to school at Parsons for illustration. I knew I wanted to do comics, but I felt like I could make a living in illustration, which seemed more true in the '80s than it does now. But that's all right, I'm still finding work. Because I knew Steven Guarnaccia and all the other teachers at Parsons, I made some great contacts in terms of art directors. Because *Raw* was a part-time or occasional full-time job, I didn't need to do too much freelance work at first. But working there ended up being a great opportunity for me in a way you wouldn't expect. One day I was in the office and I got a call from *Esquire* magazine. "We need someone who can do a Jack Kirby parody." And I said, "Well, that would be me." They didn't know who I was. I think I had had one strip published in *Raw* at that point. And I am not an egomaniac, but I am the guy to call if you want a parody, and while I wouldn't say what I did for them looked exactly like Jack Kirby, it did the job. That was my first job for *Esquire*, and I subsequently did a number of parodies for them.

something that was in the air, and it seemed like combining high and low was a natural thing to do. I'm not saying I came up with anything new or I put it together differently. *Mad* has done this, too. But I think those issues of what is valuable in culture and what isn't were a lot more important then than now. And when I started the strips, I thought, "Oh, I'm making fun of the high culture, the high literature, by putting it in the form of these comic strips." But lately I've heard from a lot of teachers who say, "Oh, this would be a great way to introduce these classics to the kids in my class." That seems so bizarre to me. But I think that pop culture has now become the cultural canon. It's hard to know what part of what I'm doing is canonical when *Peanuts* is canon as much as Kafka is canon.

DF: With the Internet and cable TV and DVDs, people have access to the entire history of culture literally at their fingertips

DF: Of course, what comes to my mind — no criticism of you — is that Jack Kirby was still alive then. They could have called him and gotten the real thing.

RS: Well, it's also kind of strange that a lot of my freelance work is doing comics parodies, but I often don't write them — but they pay a lot better than my personal work.