HOW TO DRAW GREAT-LOOKING COMIC BOOK WOMEN

CHRISTOPHER HART

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This book is dedicated to anyone who has ever read a comic and thought, "Man, I'd like to draw like that"—because that's where it all begins.
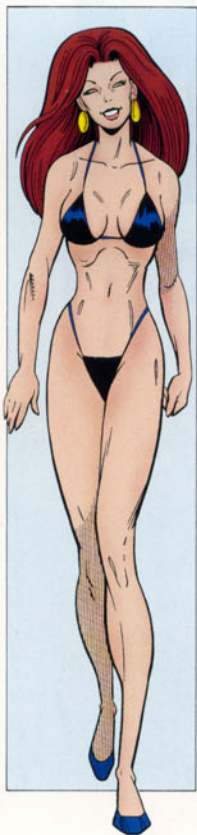
Special thanks to Bobbie Chase, at Marvel Comics, and Renae Geerlings, at Top Cow, for the interviews and use of the accompanying artwork. Thanks also to Harriet Pierce for helping this book be what it was meant to be.

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Grant Miehm, Derec Aucion, Tom Grindberg, Andy Kuhn, Drew Johnson, Rich Faber, Gray Morrow, Christopher Hart

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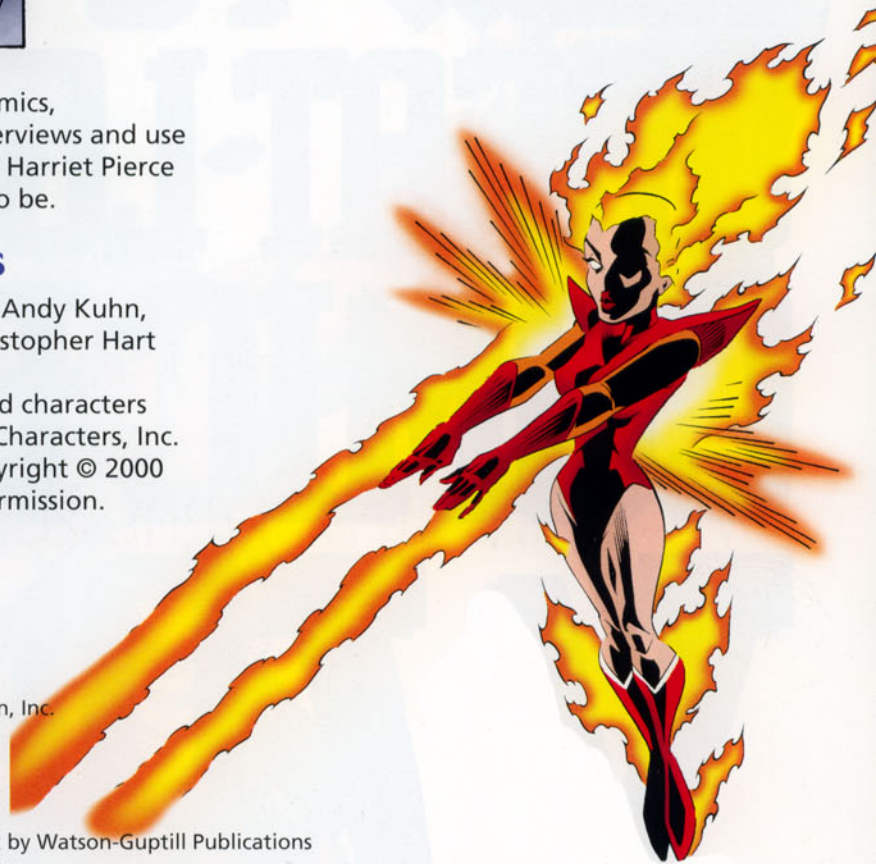
C⊕NTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever run into difficulty trying to draw great-looking comic book women? You're not alone. Many aspiring artists, as well as seasoned professionals, have struggled with this problem. The great-looking women of comics pose certain unique challenges. On the one hand, they must be tough and rugged. On the other hand, they must also be beautiful and *sexy*.

The step-by-step approach of this book makes all your goals attainable. All those mystifying drawing concepts are fully explained and accompanied by breathtaking illustrations. For example, you'll learn which are the major muscles of the body and how to draw them. You'll see where to add curves to highlight a female character's attractiveness. And you'll learn how to create amazing super powers—not just super strength, but cutting-edge powers like shape-shifting and flying spikes.

But of course, there's more: sections on forced perspective (the technique that lets you draw comic book characters who pop off the page and come right at you!); fabulous costume design; an in-depth look at designing comic book panels; plus, a chapter on the professional tricks of the trade, complete with a list of comic book publishers to whom you can submit your stuff; and a whole lot more.

I've gathered together the top comic book artists in the field today to create for you, in a single package, the widest range of art instruction possible. You'll have at your disposal the work of many artists, instead of being limited to only one artist's personal drawing style. These illustrators are among the elite who have penciled and inked such world famous characters as *X-Men, Batman, Catwoman, Superman, Supergirl, Spider-Man, Venom, Avengers, Aquaman, Captain America, Daredevil, Green Lantern,* and many others.

Plus, I've included two exclusive interviews: one from Bobbie Chase, editor at world-famous Marvel Comics, and the other from Renae Geerlings, editor at Top Cow, a prestigious independent comics publisher. They'll tell you exactly how to land your first job in the industry, what to include in a portfolio, and the common pitfalls artists should avoid. Rather than read what some author tells you he *thinks* the editors are looking for, wouldn't it make more sense to hear it from the editors themselves? That's what I thought.

So, be forewarned: You're not getting a trace-the-action-figures type of book. This is the real thing. These are comic book women at their finest. These are the art techniques used by the top pros. You're riding the cutting edge. Are you ready?

BASICS

L ET'S LAY THE FOUNDATION early, and lock it in place. The most common problem among new artists is that they're so eager to move beyond the basics that they never really master them.
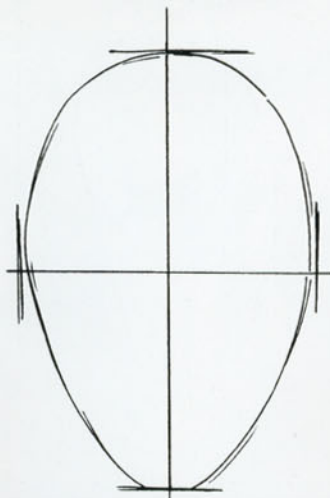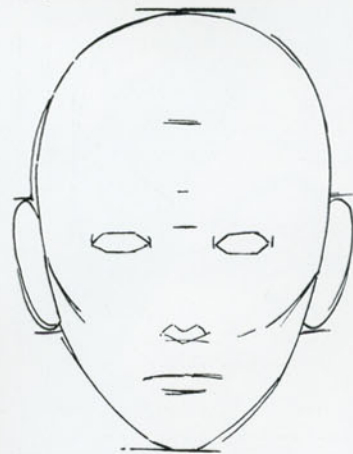
HEAD SHOTS

Start with an egg-shaped outline.

Draw two guidelines, one horizontal and the other vertical, dividing the egg in half in both directions.

Place the eyes on the horizontal guideline. Mark some short guidelines to indicate the placement of the hairline on the forehead, the eyebrows, the nose, the ears, and the mouth.

FRONT VIEW

Drawing the front view of the head gives you the opportunity to show all the features clearly. These are idealized features, because comic book women are perfect in every way. Note that the head is egg shaped, narrowing at the chin.

Add gently curving cheekbones that protrude slightly past the outline of the face. Sketch in the bridge of the nose and nostrils, fill in the eyes and eyebrows, and complete the hairline.

Now, attack the details—but keep a light touch. Square out the jawline slightly, and soften the cheekbones.
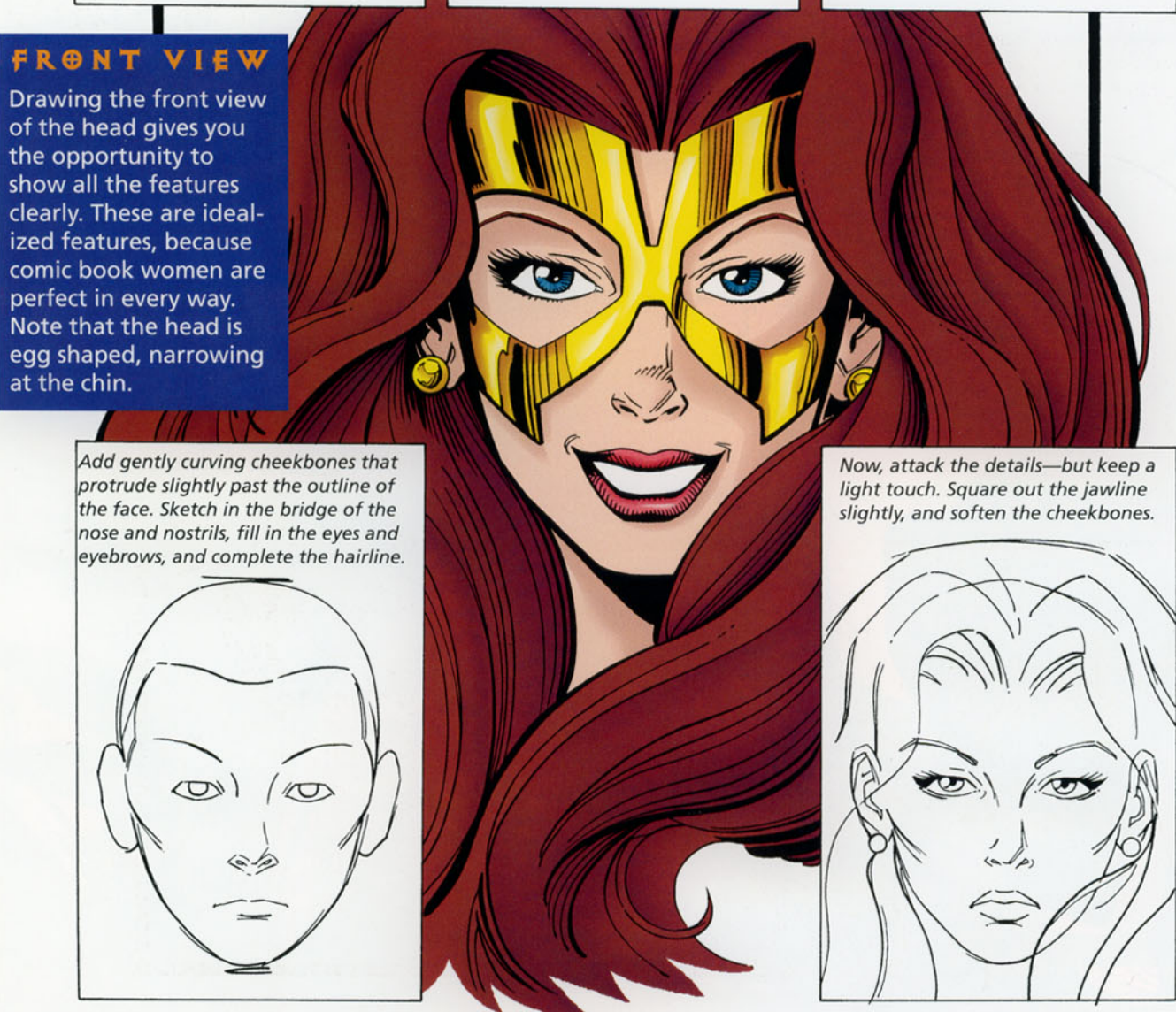
Start with two overlapping egg shapes.

As with the front view, draw a horizontal and a vertical guideline, dividing the head in half in both directions.

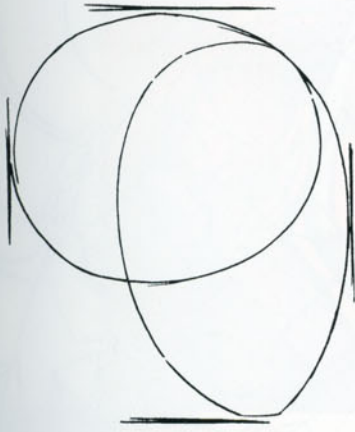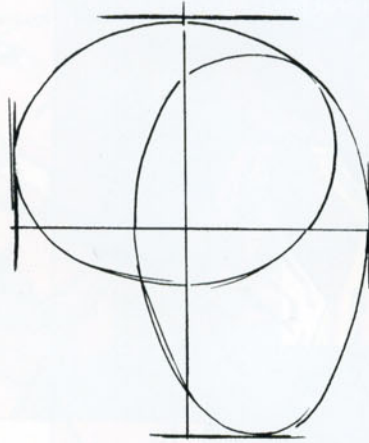Place the eye on the horizontal guideline and the ear on the vertical one. Don't draw a hard angle where the forehead meets the bridge of the nose; however, do draw a hard angle where the bottom of the nose meets the plane of the face.
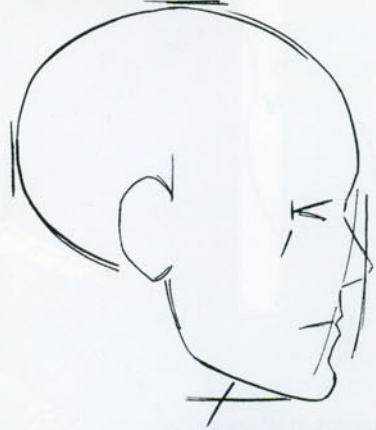
If you think you've hit a snag, check the position of the eye. That's where most people run into problems. The eye should fall at the point where the bridge of the nose meets the forehead.

Sketch in details like the hair and an earring.

SIDE VIEW

What is it with profiles? On the one hand, you have to chisel the out-line of the face to create the hard angles of the forehead, nose, and chin. But, on the other hand, you have to keep the profile soft and appealing. How can you do both at the same time? Take a look.

DYNAMIC HEAD ANGLES

You've got to be able to draw your characters from different angles, because they're not always going to throw a punch or fly off a building in a perfect frontal or profile shot; their heads are going to tilt and turn away from the reader. So, when drawing the head from different angles, work with the basic oval head shape, but focus on the *planes* of the face, which are the small flat areas. For example, the chin is one plane. The cheekbone is another. The pocket under the eyebrow is yet another. Each plane falls at a different angle from the others. Planes reflect the bone structure underneath the face. You need to indicate them to keep the face looking solid in these more challenging angles so that the head doesn't turn into one big glob.

HIGH ANGLE
Looking *down* at the character.
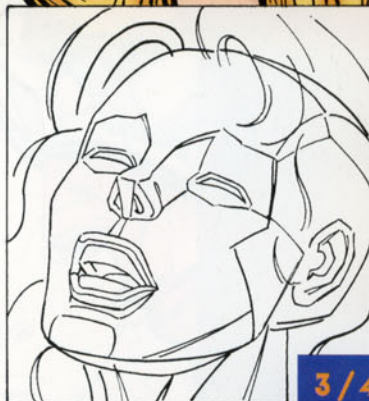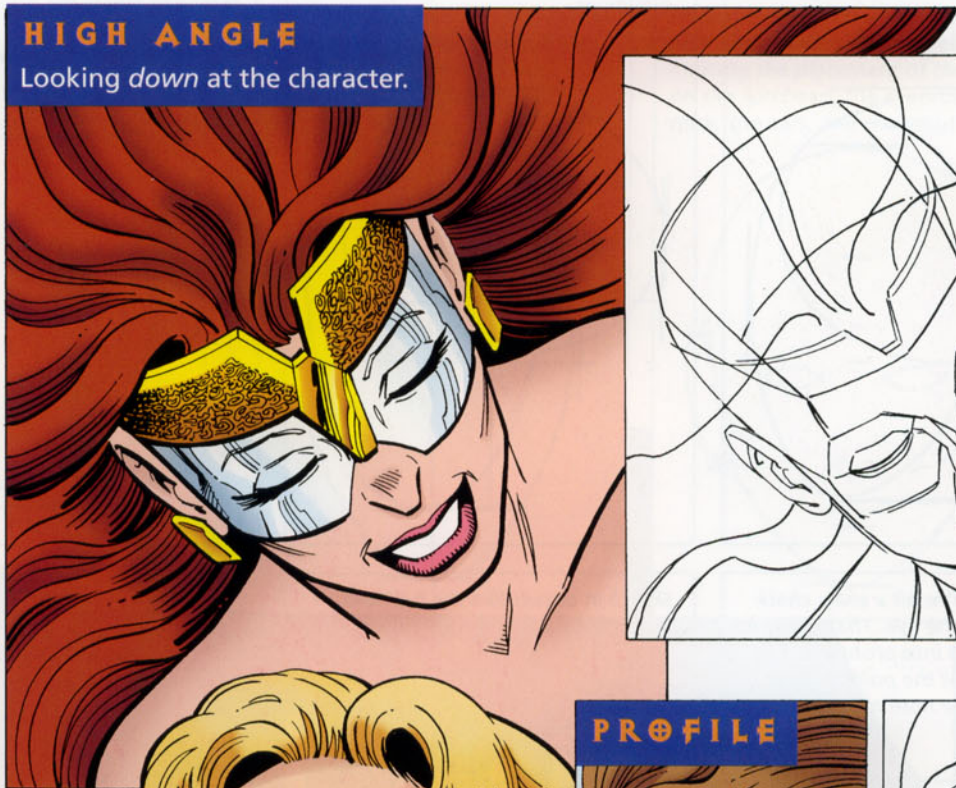
PROFILE

3/4 VIEW
Slight low angle.

7/8 VIEW
Rear right.

3/4 VIEW
More of one
side of the face
is visible than
the other.
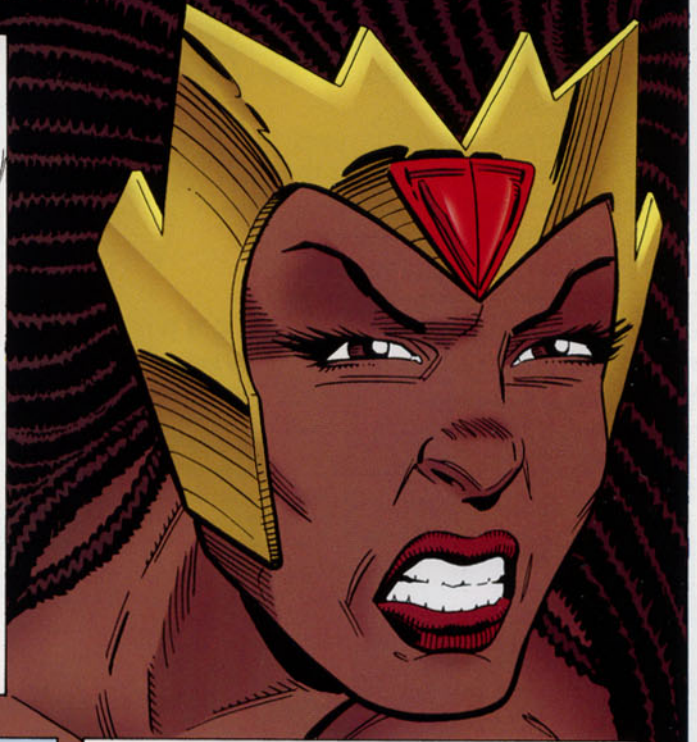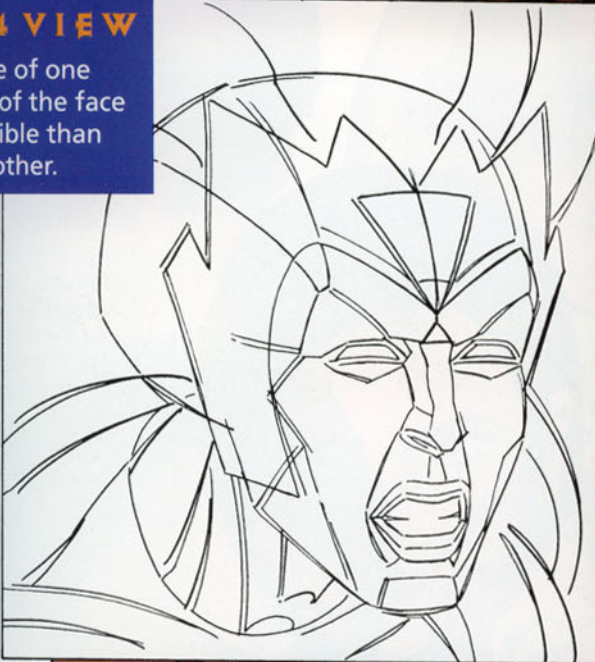
LOST IN HER EYES

In comic books, the eyes of a drop-dead gorgeous woman are deadlier than any weapon. A sidelong glance from a dangerous blonde can mean betrayal. A flirtatious glint from a smoldering brunette can make even the toughest guy go weak.

However, you've got to be able to draw the shape of the eye before you can infuse it with emotion. So, here are the basics. The lashes should always be bigger on the top eyelid, smaller on the bottom, and should lengthen as they travel away from the nose toward the ear. A shine on the pupil is like a shine on a new car—it just looks good, so include it as often as possible.

It's not just the shape of the eyes that defines the expressions, but the direction, as well. Sometimes the eyes look straight at you, sometimes they look off to one side. The eyelids, including the often-overlooked lower lids, are also used in creating expressions. Details such as the wrinkles near the bridge of the nose, the shape of the eyebrows, and the wrinkles above the eyebrows all add intensity.

SAD
The eyes look down, showing only the upper eyelids. The lashes are at their longest here, sweeping down and away toward the ears.

FULL LASHES

IRIS
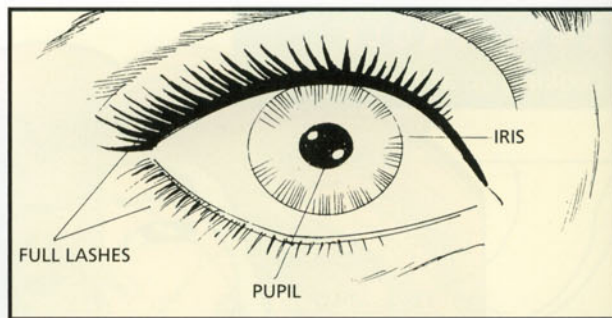
PUPIL

FIERY
My favorite, the fiery expression has the lower eyelids pushing up on the eyes, while the eyebrows push down on them.

SCHEMING
Do not, repeat, do not turn your back on this woman. The heavy upper eyelids hit right at the tops of the pupils. Note that one eyebrow lifts higher than the other.
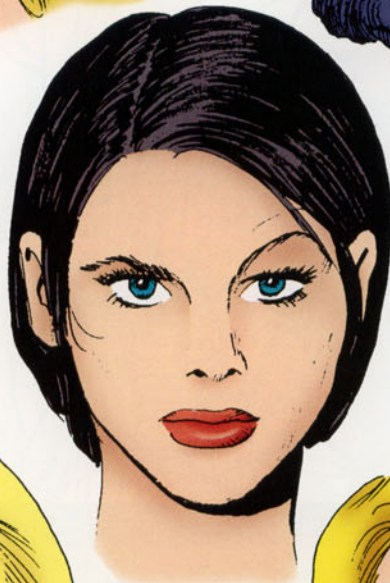
FLIRTATIOUS
She peaks sideways through heavy lashes, eyebrows up.
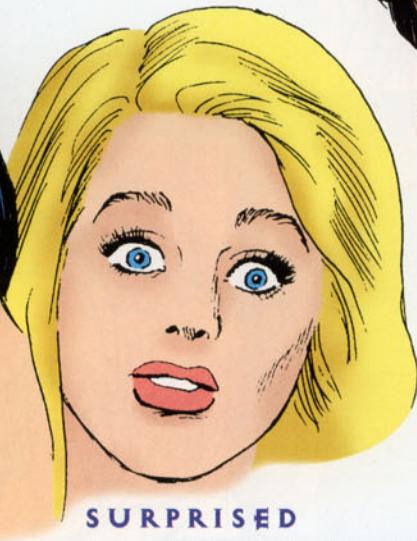
SURPRISED
The eyelids are way up off the irises here, revealing lots of the whites of the eyes. The eyebrows rise to their highest point. Go heavy on the top and bottom lashes.
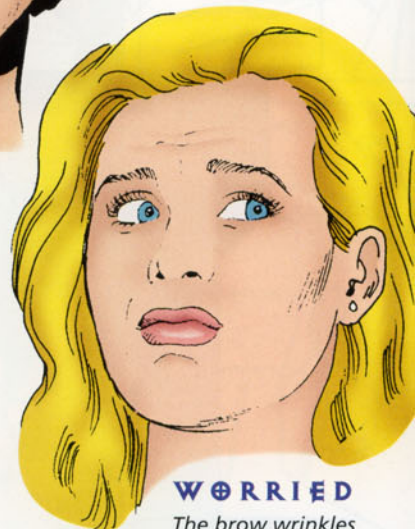
WORRIED
The brow wrinkles slightly here, and the eyes, wide open, dart to one side.

LOWER LIP IS FULLER THAN THE UPPER LIP
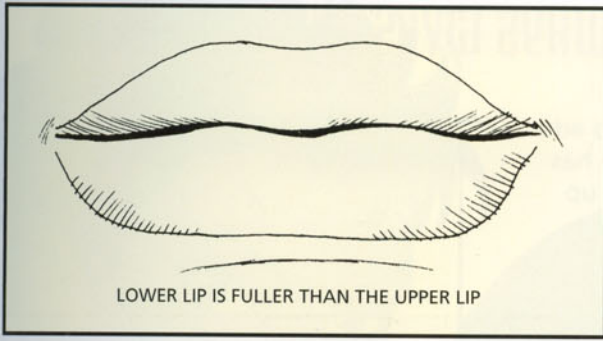
Full, sensuous, pouty lips—without 'em, you're just wasting everybody's time. The lower lip is usually fuller than the upper one, and the upper lip often dips slightly in the middle.

POUTY

The upper lip disappears under the pushed-out lower lip.

ANGRY

The upper lip rises for a perfect snarl.
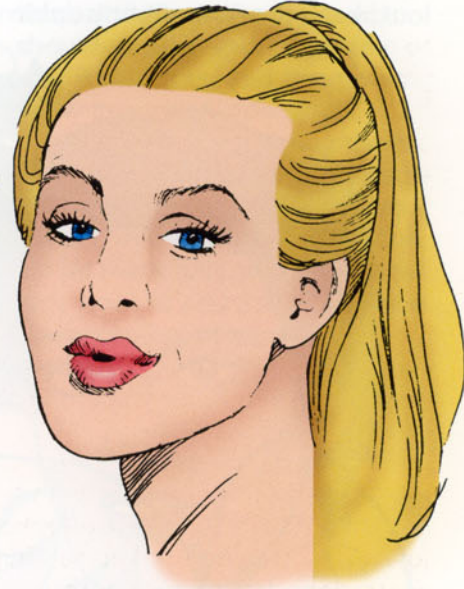
SEXY

Like she's almost blowing you a kiss.

AMUSED

Use a smile that shows only the upper teeth.

ANXIOUS

Biting the lower lip is a common comic book way to depict feminine fear.

Delineate the teeth only at the edges, not in between; drawing the outline of each tooth looks scraggly and draws attention away from the lips.

FEARSOME

Hey, if you've got to have someone suck your blood, why not her? There are worse ways to go. Baring the teeth is an animalistic way of showing bad intentions.

THE FEMININE NOSE: THE PART THAT ALWAYS GIVES YOU TROUBLE

How many times have you drawn a pretty woman's face, only to add the nose and ruin the whole thing? This part of the female face has been known to drive lesser artists completely insane. Don't end up as just another statistic. The secret lies in drawing less, not more. Keep the nose subtle and light, with as little detail as possible. Any attempt to etch in the nose with a heavy hand will surely backfire. For an attractive look, keep the nose slightly upturned.

THE SEPTUM IS SOMETIMES SHOWN WITH A SLIGHT INDENTATION.
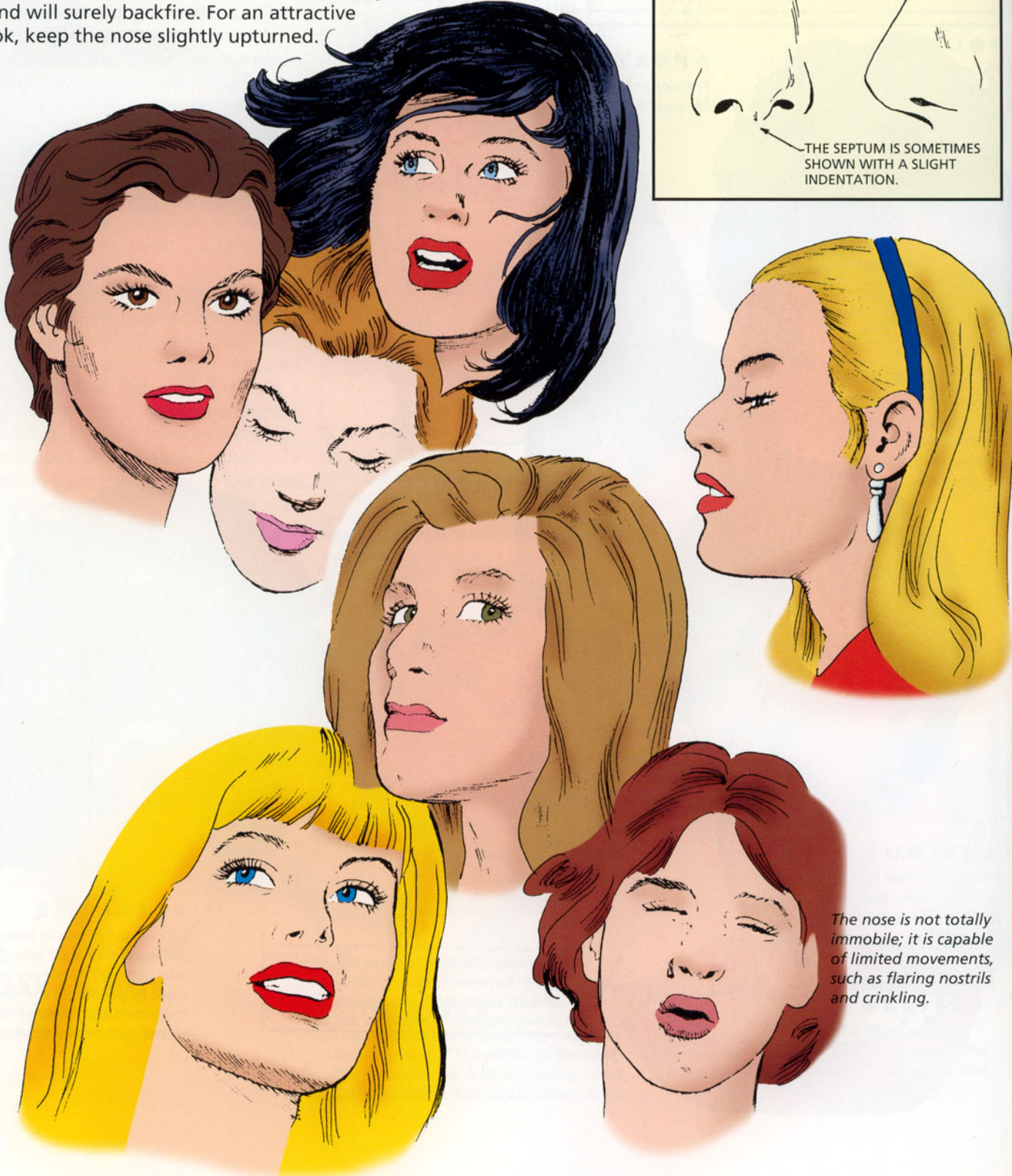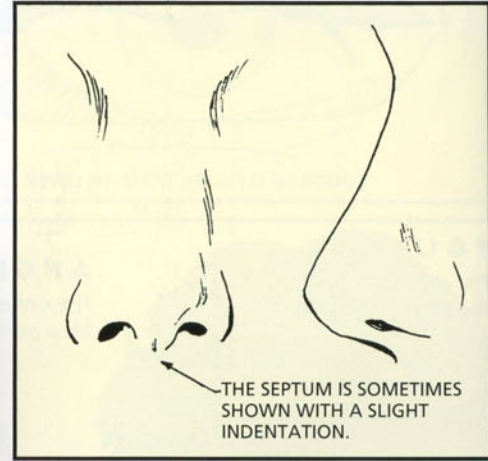
The nose is not totally immobile; it is capable of limited movements, such as flaring nostrils and crinkling.

A woman's hairstyle makes a statement about her attitude. It's personal and unique, like her style of dress or the way she walks. Comic book women should be stylish and, generally, severe. Pay attention to the way the hair falls on the face and shoulders or, in short cuts, the way it stands up and flops over. Draw groups of individual strands with care, curving them in one direction and then balancing them off with more strands curving in the opposite direction. On jet black hair, sometimes you may want to add a shine; a shine on slicked-back hair makes it look wet.
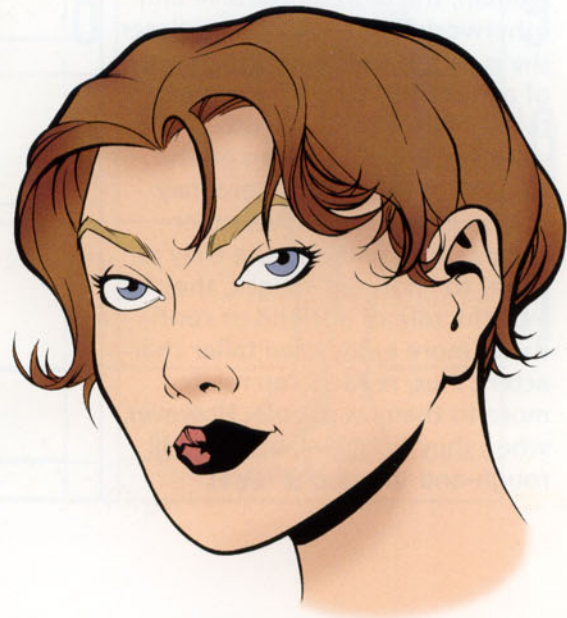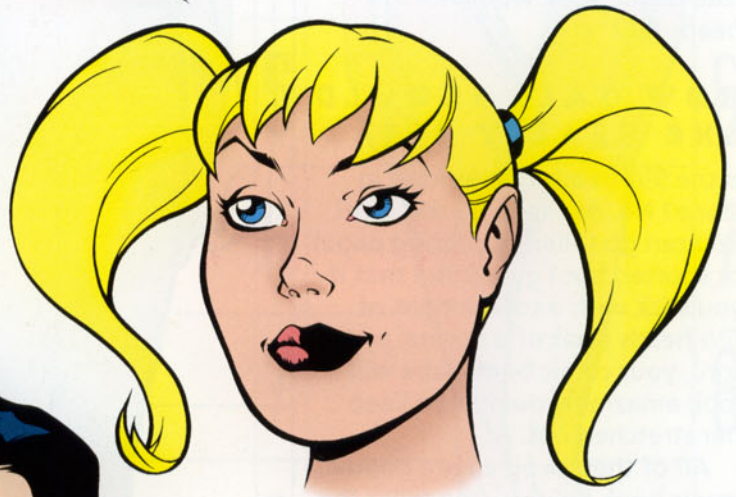
IDEALIZED PROPORTIONS

Comic book women, like the women depicted in fashion illustrations, are much taller than real women but also have well-muscled, well-endowed frames. Avoid making your comic book women too skinny or too bulky; they're neither beanpoles nor bodybuilders. Despite their obvious physical strength, comic book women are *first and always* feminine, with sweeping curved forms, wide shoulders, thin waists, wide hips, and shapely legs.

To determine the height of a figure, artists consider how many head lengths fit in the total body length, with the average person being approximately 6½ head lengths tall. However, the idealized comic book woman is *9½ heads tall!*

HOW TALL SHOULD SHE REALLY BE?

Is the 9½-heads rule written in stone? No. As I said, it's the *ideal*. You can go taller (see facing page) or shorter, but I guarantee that if you stick with a total height of 6½ heads (that of a normal person), your comic book babe will look amazingly dumpy. So keep her stretched out.

All of these women are popular comic book heights. The taller the woman, the more impressive and otherworldly she seems. The closer she is to 9½ heads tall, the more of a "regular" person she appears to be, her costume notwithstanding. So, the women on the left and in the middle here may not be as imbued with a supernatural aura, but because they're closer to "normal" height, they fit into the role of a friend or confidante more easily than taller characters. Plus, readers can relate more to them as people. However, when they fight evil, they're still rough-and-tumble hellcats!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

FRONT   SIDE
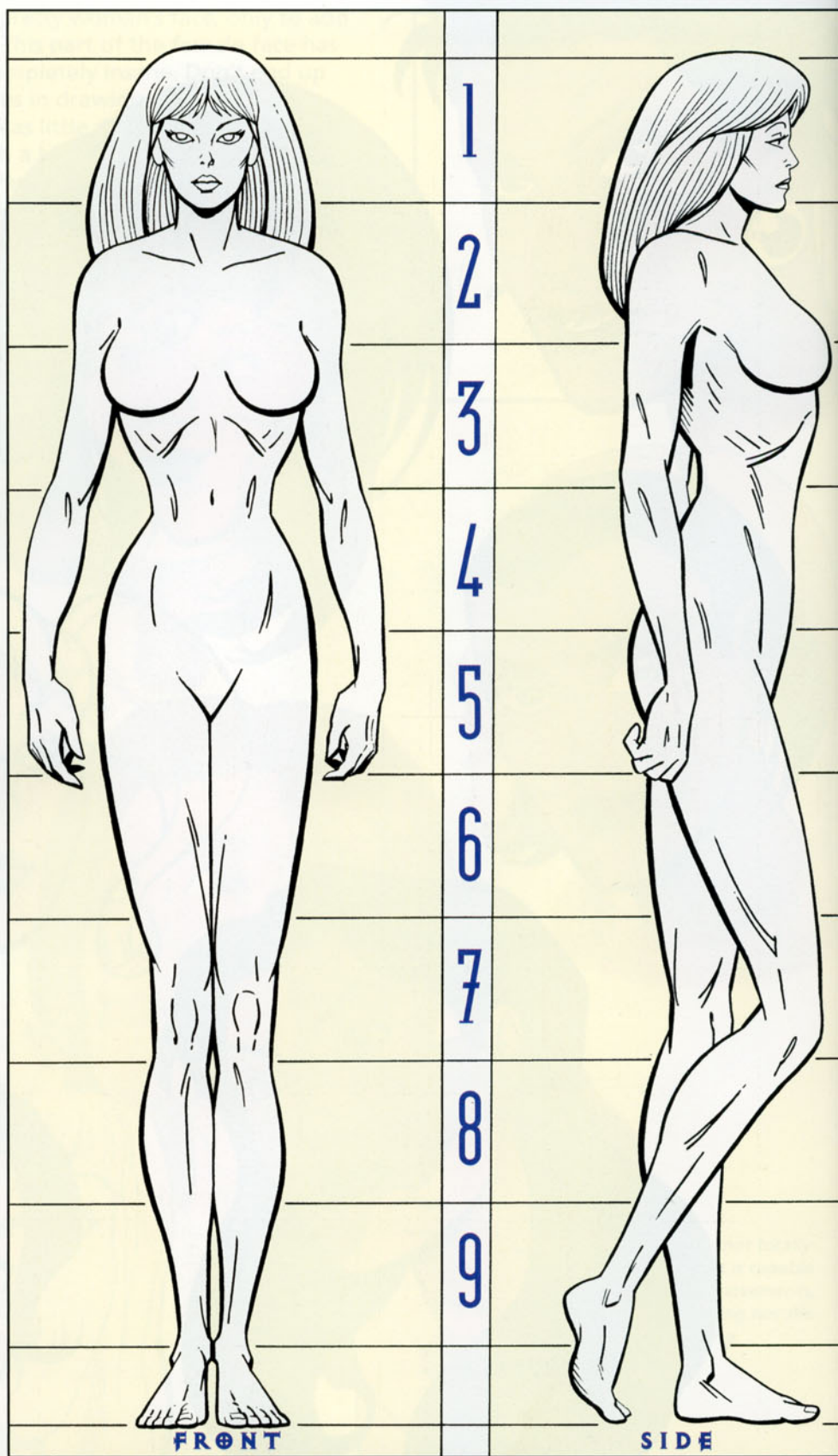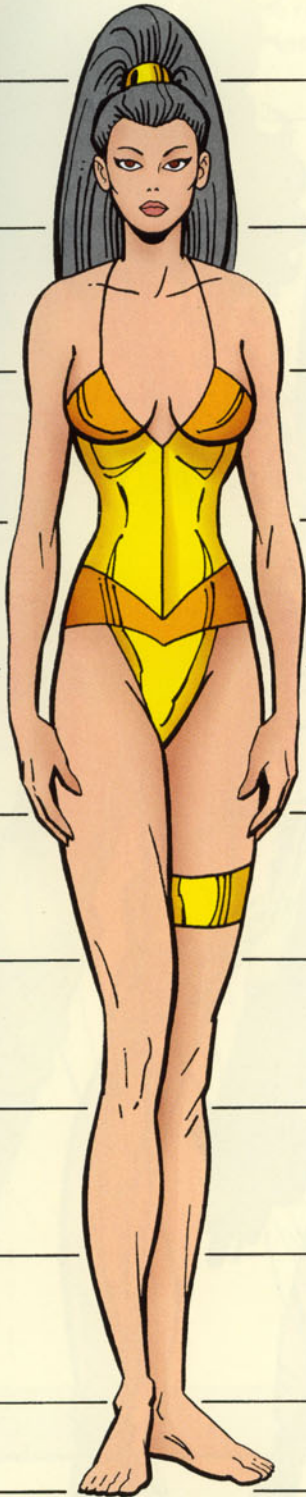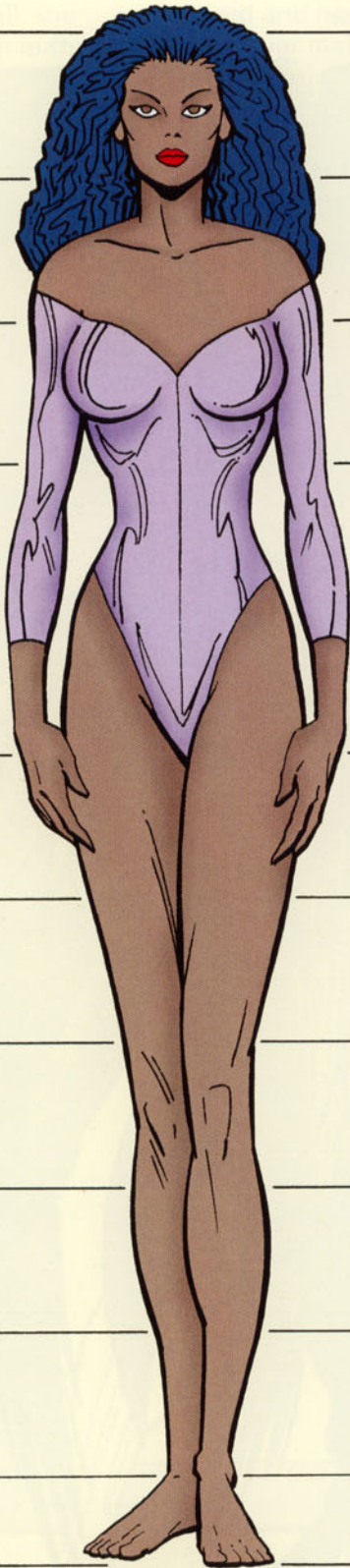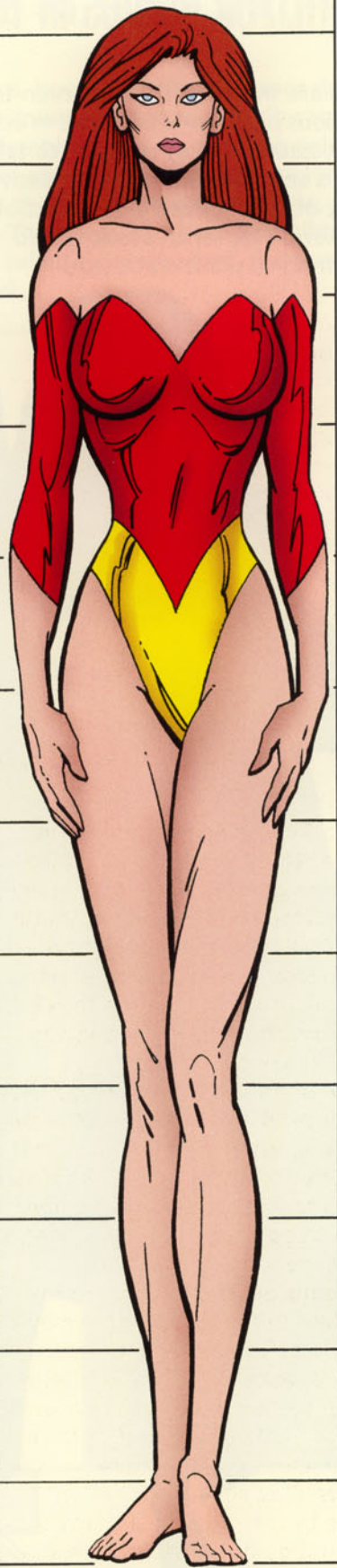
9½ HEADS   10½ HEADS   11½ HEADS

IDEALIZED BODIES IN FULL BATTLE GEAR

Here are the same three women from the previous page, only this time in action poses and costumes. They're ready to take on the world and win. Quite an impressive array of talent. Even a construction worker on his lunch break would be afraid to whistle at them.

A woman's skeleton is strikingly similar to that of a man, but there are some differences. Most importantly, the female pelvis is short and wide. (After all, she delivers the babies, so she needs more room in that area.) The male pelvis is long and narrow. The female rib cage is smaller than the male rib cage. And all the bones in a woman's limbs have less thickness than those of a man.

Despite these things, however, both skeletons do have some important common aspects. The rib cage is round and has considerable depth, as does the pelvis. Wherever major bones meet, the joints they create are bulbous, whether they're the shoulder, elbow, hip, knee, or ankle joints. The knees also have a small bone that covers the joint, called a patella. And, the heel bone sticks out in back.
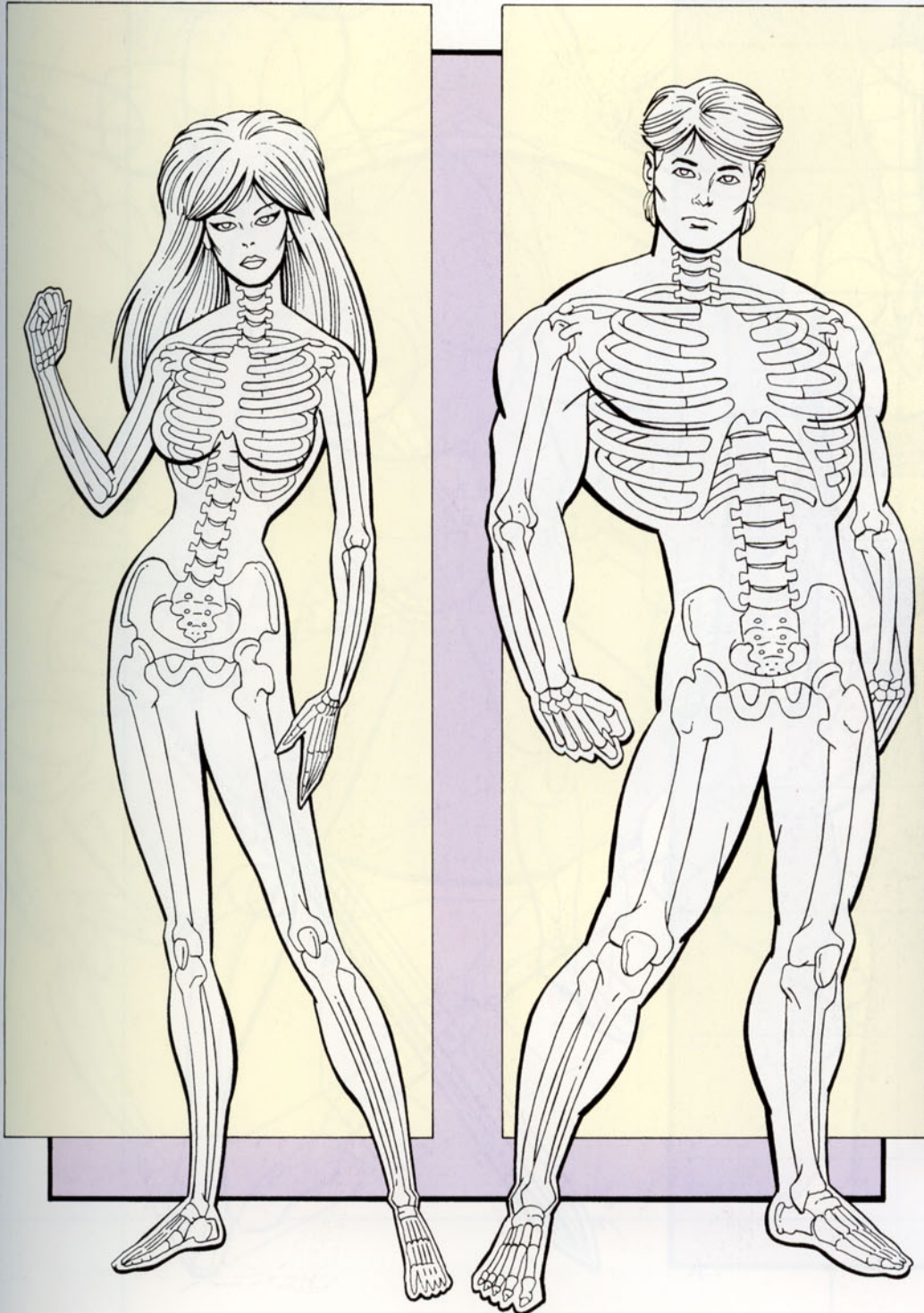
THE BONES THAT "SHOW THROUGH"

You need a working familiarity of the skeleton to better understand the movements of the human figure, but equally important is the idea that some bones *show through* (or push through) the skin in certain areas, and you need to indicate them in your drawings. They are the shoulder blades, cheekbones, collarbone, ribs, hips, elbows, knee joints, calf bones, and hands.

SECTIONS OF THE BODY

Rarely will an artist sketch out the entire skeleton as a precursor to drawing the body. It's too intricate, not necessary, and besides, we don't wanna do it! We do, however, need some sort of a foundation, so we use an anatomical shorthand, dividing the body up into sections that fit together like Lego. We're still aware of the skeleton, but we don't need to draw each rib and bone. We're only interested in the major body masses, how they fit together, and their correct proportions. A wooden artist's mannequin, which you can find at any art supply store, provides a good guide to the basic body masses.
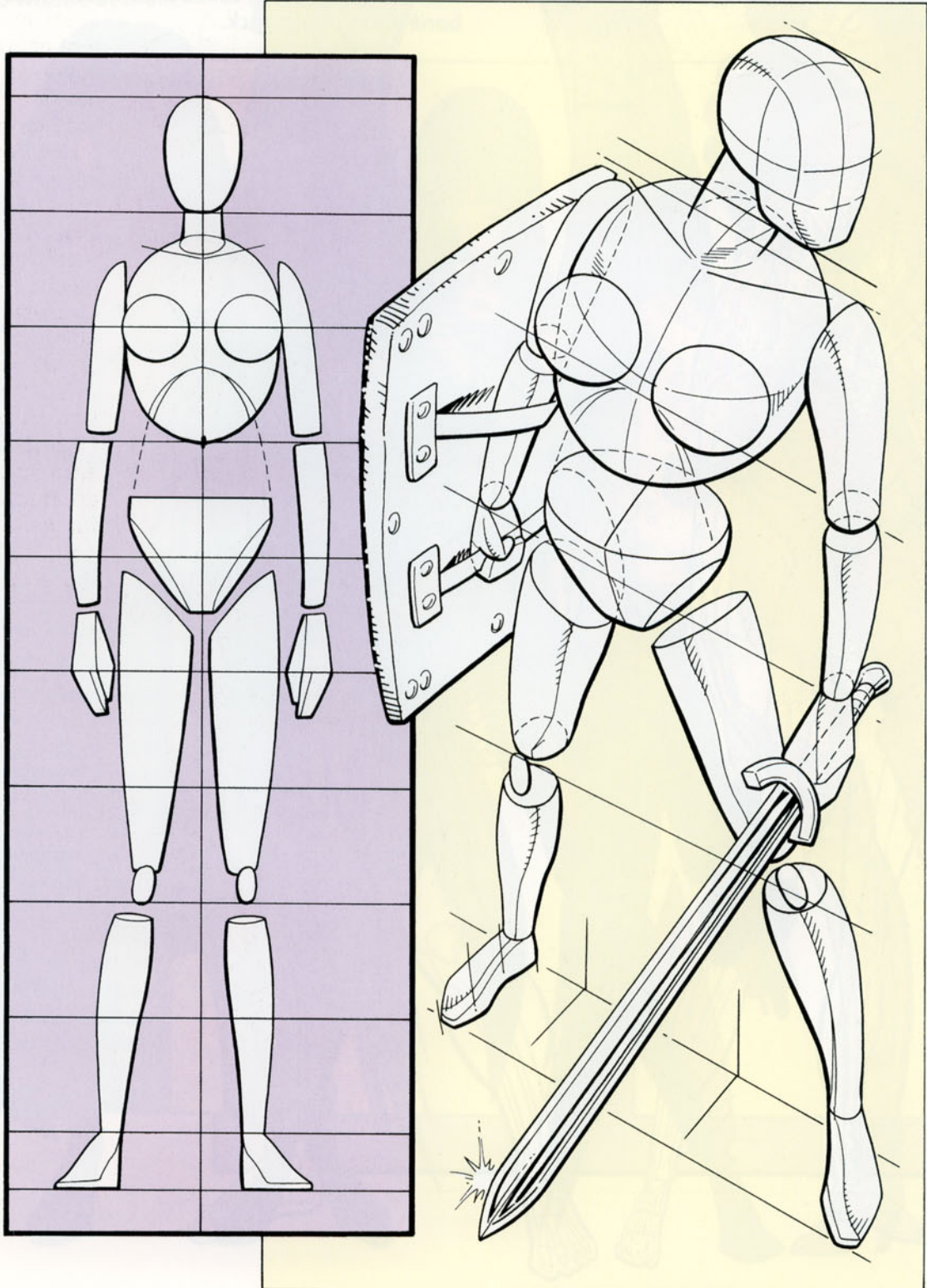
Simplifying the body into basic masses isn't only useful as a guide for creating static poses; it can also help you create every imaginable motion, by breaking down difficult action poses into their most basic forms. Whenever you're having trouble drawing a challenging pose, break it down, or block it out using an artist's mannequin. These figures can be moved, twisted, and turned into various poses for artistic reference. They make a great foundation for your eye-popping female characters.
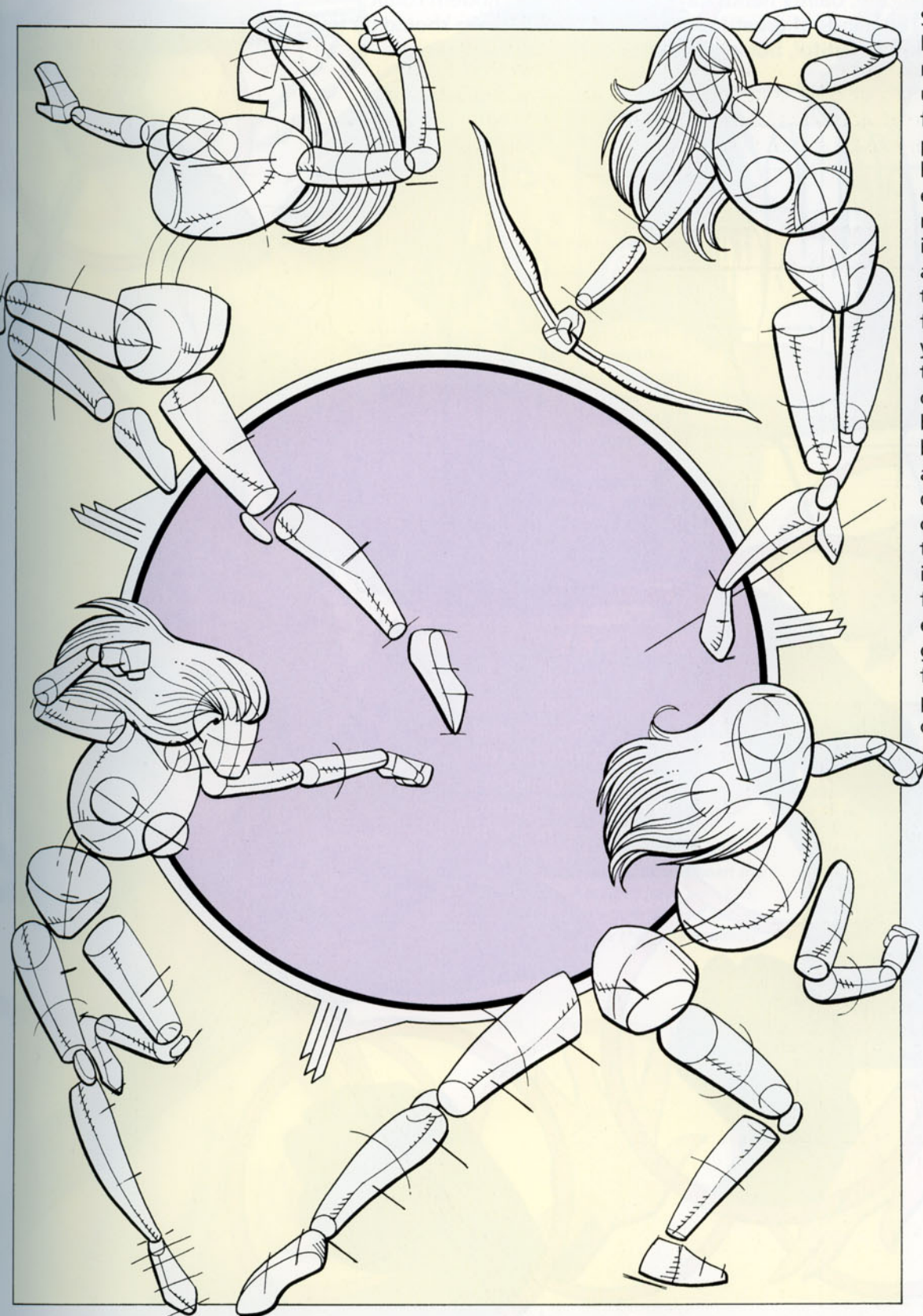
HANDS WITH AN ATTITUDE

Very delicate, dainty hands have no place in the modern comic book. The hands of great-looking comic book women should be sleek and beautiful, but also strong, confident, and dramatic.

1/2

1/2

The knuckle at the base of the middle finger is half-way down the length of the hand.

1/2 The lower knuckle of the thumb is halfway 1/2 between the wrist and top of thumb.

In comic book poses, the wrist is almost always bent, with the hand appearing at an angle to the arm.

NAILS

The current style for long nails is slightly tapered but cut off abruptly at the ends. Don't make the nails pointy.

GLOVED HANDS

Hands in gloves are very cool, but you must show how the light hits them; or else the hands will look like black blobs. Add highlights to each finger and the thumb, as well as to the heel of the palm and the back of the hand.

Just because she's a woman, doesn't mean she shouldn't have knuckles. She's gonna need 'em to throw those haymakers!

ANIMATION-STYLE HANDS

Female characters in animation usually have fingers without any nails, because the characters move so quickly that you don't notice the lack of nails. Avoid this technique (below) in comic book illustration, where readers have time to pour over every page and detail.
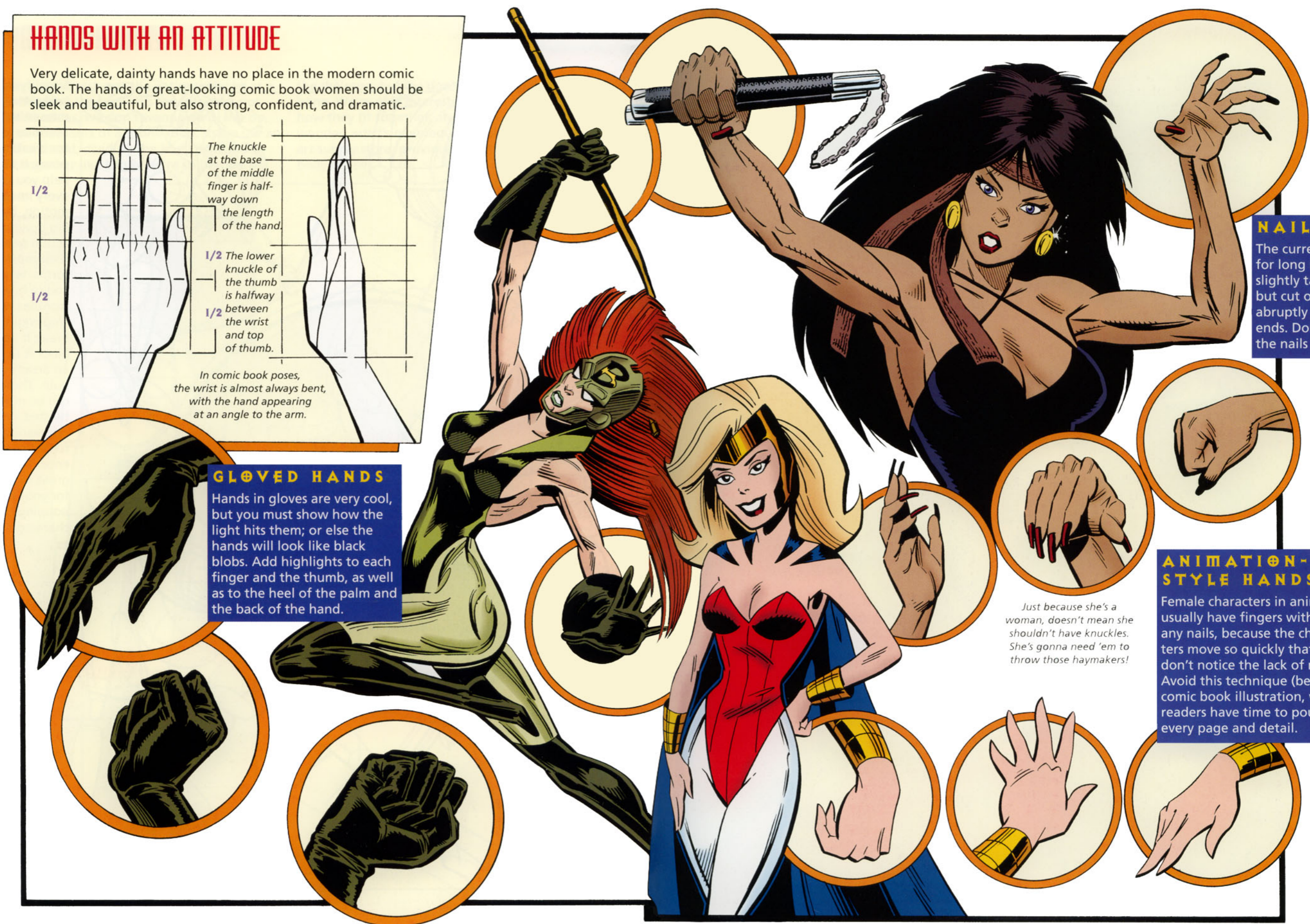
the Body

SOFT BODIES ARE OUT. Hard bodies are in. However, you've got to make sure your comic book babe doesn't look like those overdeveloped bodybuilding women you see on TV in those muscle-contest pose-downs. She should look muscular, but not totally cut. She still has to have some soft flesh on her for the curves.

ISOLATING THE DIFFERENT MUSCLE GROUPS

Women have the same muscles as men, but women's muscles should be longer and leaner, and not bunch as much when contracted. Here's the deal: A comic book woman should look like a gymnast; a comic book man should look like a piano mover.

The best way to study muscles is individually, one at a time. A good way to see one muscle individually is to flex it, while leaving the other muscles relaxed, and the best way to do this is to lift weights (an activity in which you can focus specifically on each muscle group).
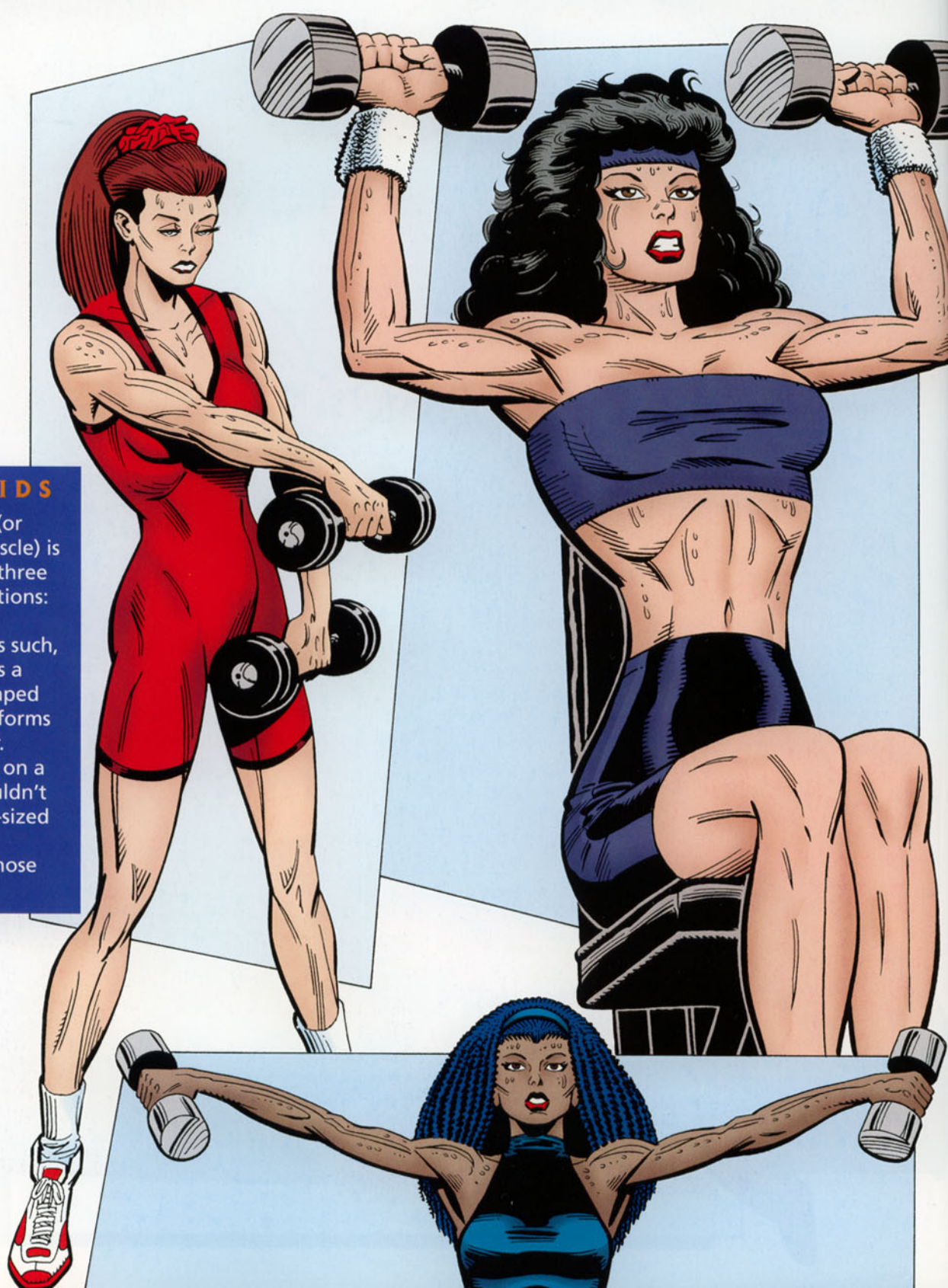
DELTOIDS

The deltoid (or shoulder muscle) is made up of three separate sections: rear, middle, and front. As such, the deltoid is a teardrop-shaped muscle that forms the shoulder. The deltoids on a woman shouldn't be as melon-sized or as deeply defined as those on a man.

BACK

Here's a good rear look at the deltoids and also at the back muscles, as they crush together along the spinal column. Note that the shoulder blades are prominent on a muscular, well-defined person.

ABS

Unlike a man's abdominal muscles, which are usually represented as a washboard stomach, a woman's abs are best depicted as longer lines running vertically up and down the torso. Don't isolate each abdominal muscle or your comic book gal will look too masculine.

TRAPS

The trapezius muscles —or traps, as they're called—are the large, flat, triangular muscles on each side of the upper back. They flex only in pulling motions, such as this upright rowing exercise. Keep them small on female characters. Or, omit them completely. A woman's neck should never have developed traps—which you see on male bodybuilders and professional wrestlers.

PRESSING MOTIONS

Pressing motions involve the shoulder (front deltoid), chest (pectoral), and forearm (extensor digitorum) muscles. But don't sweat it—no comic book artist can name all the muscles in Latin. Most can't even do it in English. However, they can draw them, and that's the point. Note that you should keep a woman's forearm muscles to a minimum, which is the opposite of the approach taken for comic book guys.
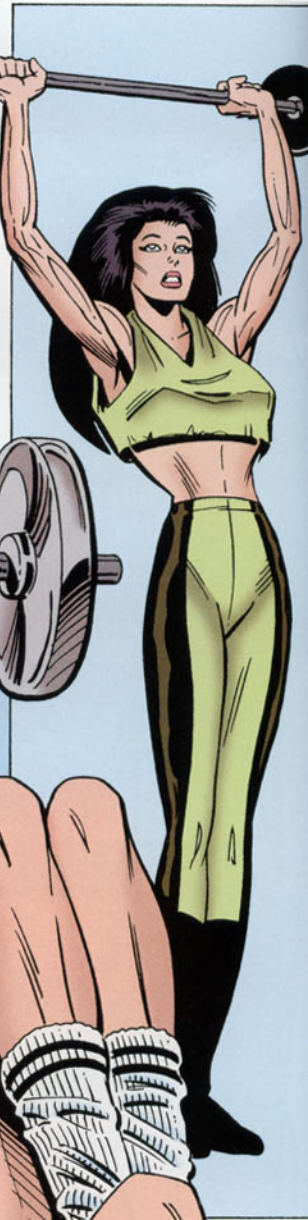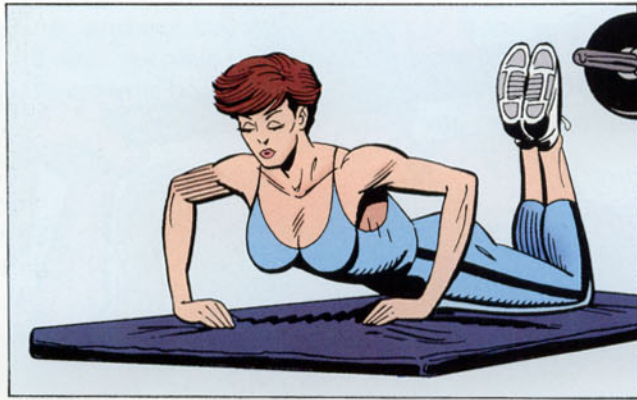
LEG MUSCLES

CALVES

The largest part of the calf muscle is about halfway up the lower leg. Even though the calf is a combination of several muscle groups, it's most appealing if you draw it as a single mass.
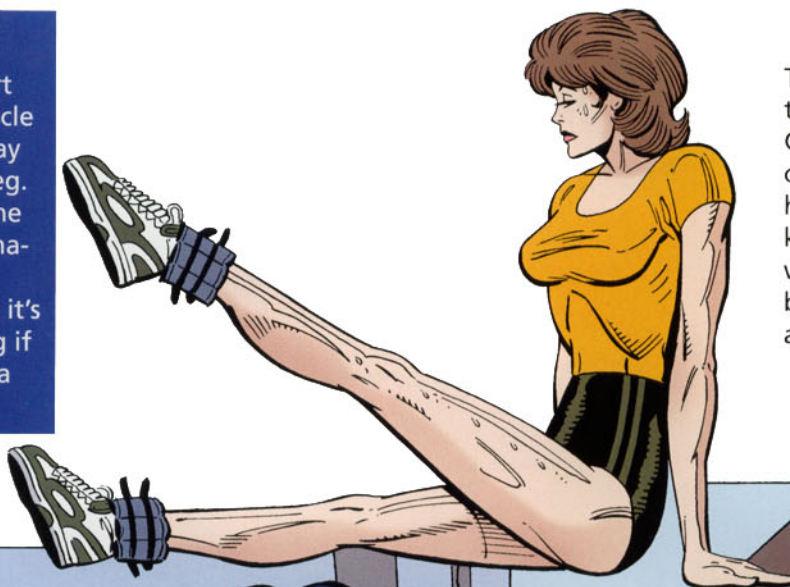
The leg muscles are some of the longest muscles of the body. Comic book artists are basically concerned with the three groups highlighted below. As you draw, keep in mind that the comic book woman's thighs and calves should be muscular, but not as defined and striated as those of a man.

LEG BICEPS

This is the rear muscle of the upper leg. It's actually a grouping of two large muscles, but you don't need to define the two separate muscles in your drawings.
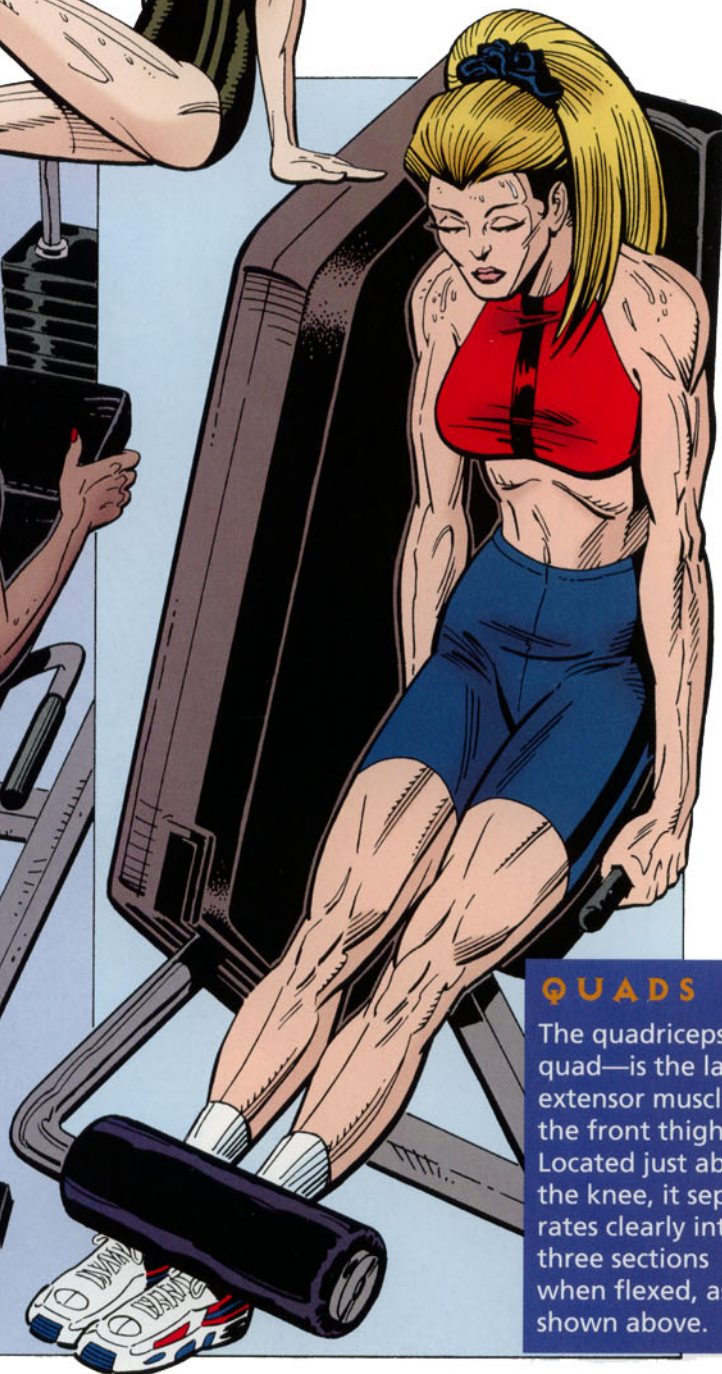
QUADS

The quadriceps—or quad—is the larger extensor muscle of the front thigh. Located just above the knee, it separates clearly into three sections when flexed, as shown above.

THE MUSCLES IN ACTION

Now that you've had a look at the individual muscles on the preceding pages, see if you can identify them at work on this page. Muscles are like reservists in the army: you call up the ones you need depending on the task at hand.
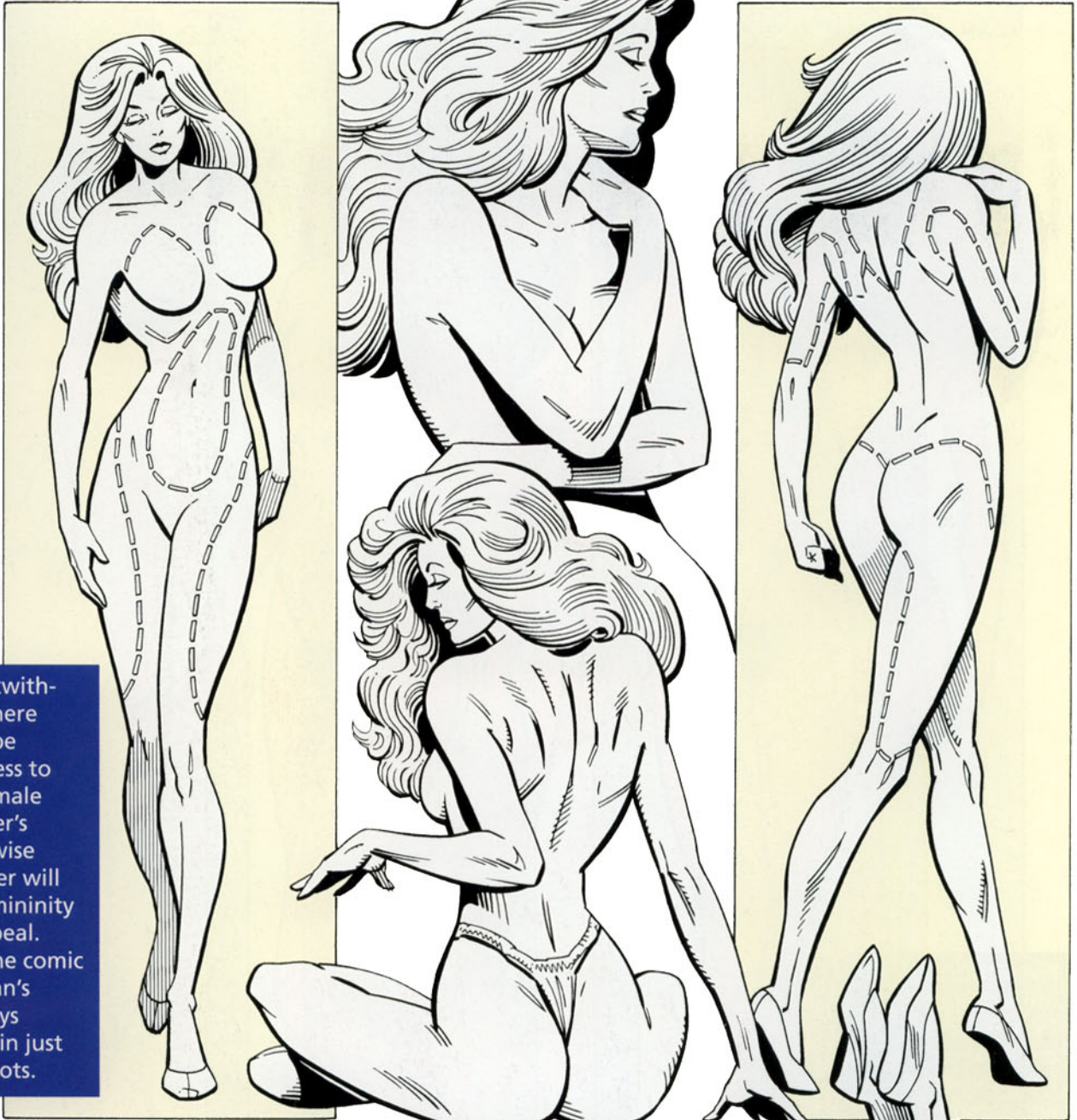
Muscles notwith-standing, there still has to be some softness to the buff female crime fighter's bod, otherwise the character will lose her femininity and sex appeal. However, the comic book woman's curves always seem to be in just the right spots.

CHARACTER "TURNAROUNDS"
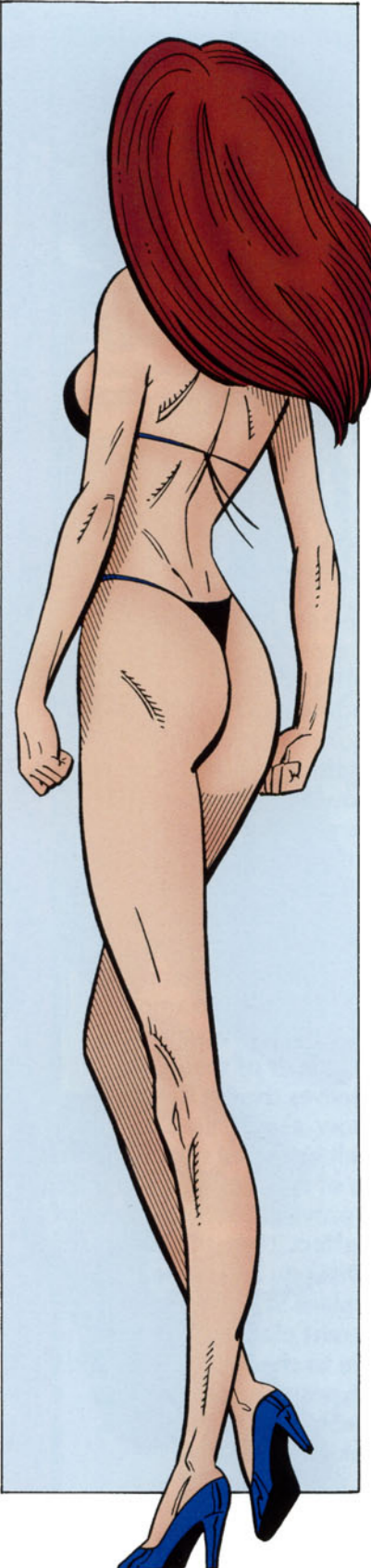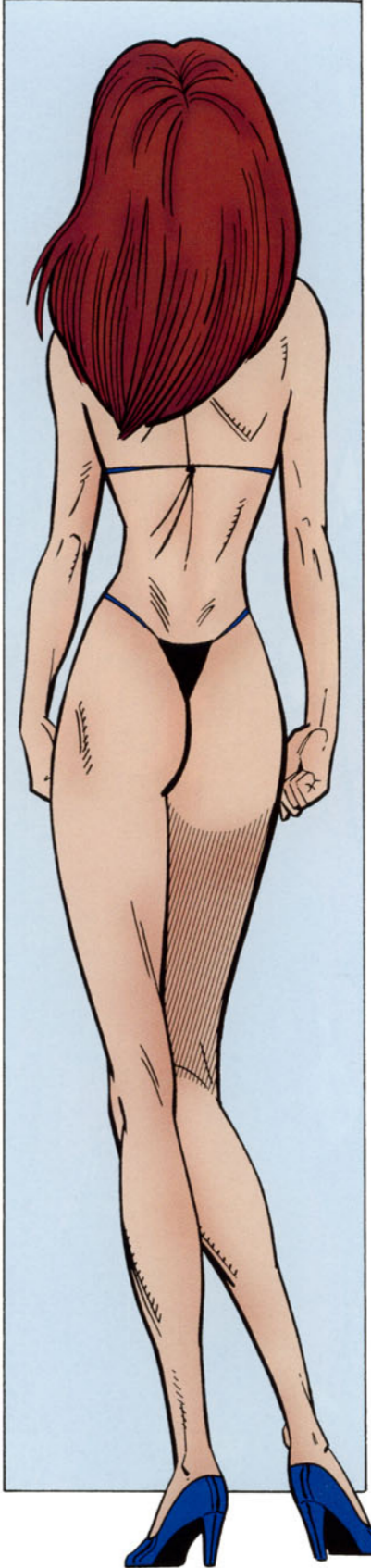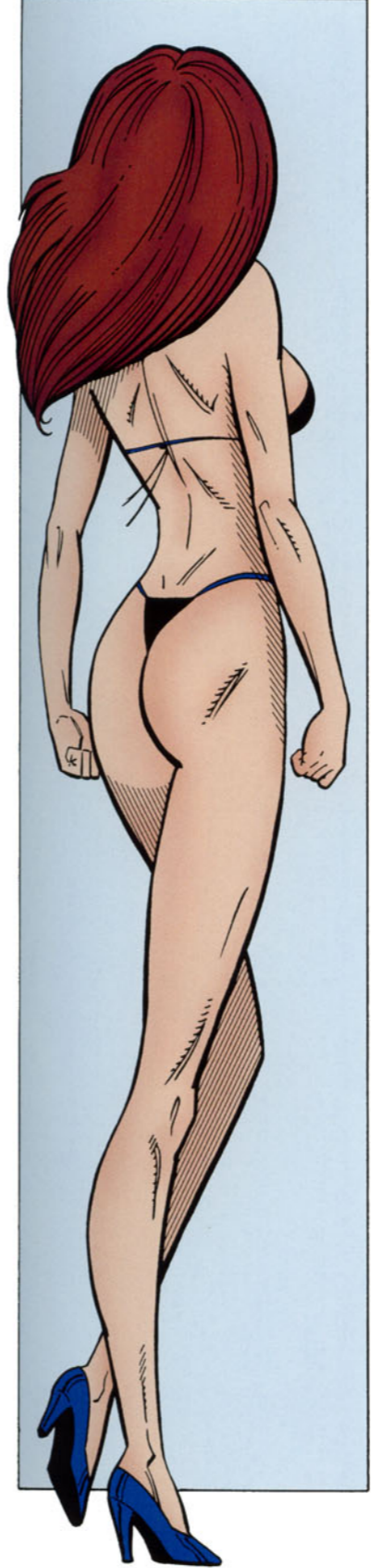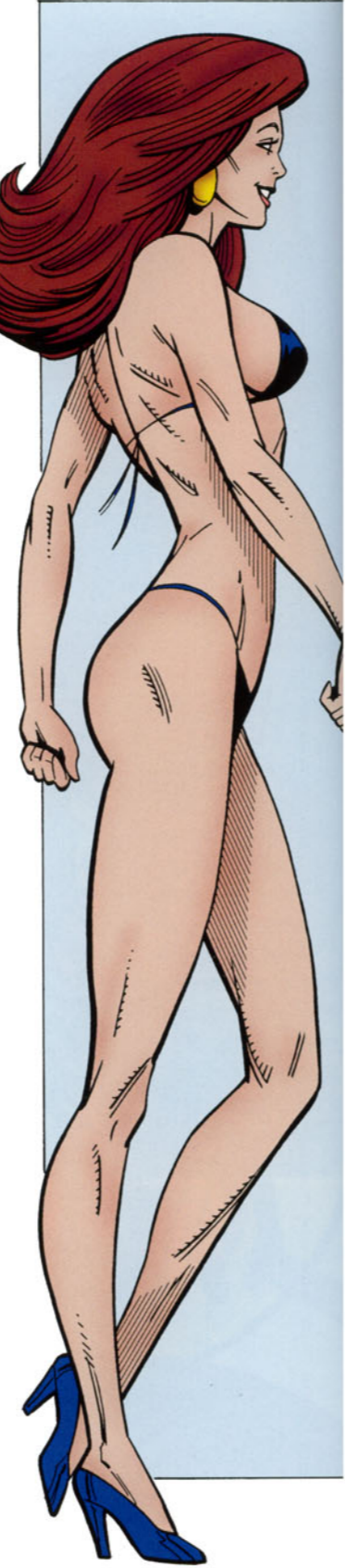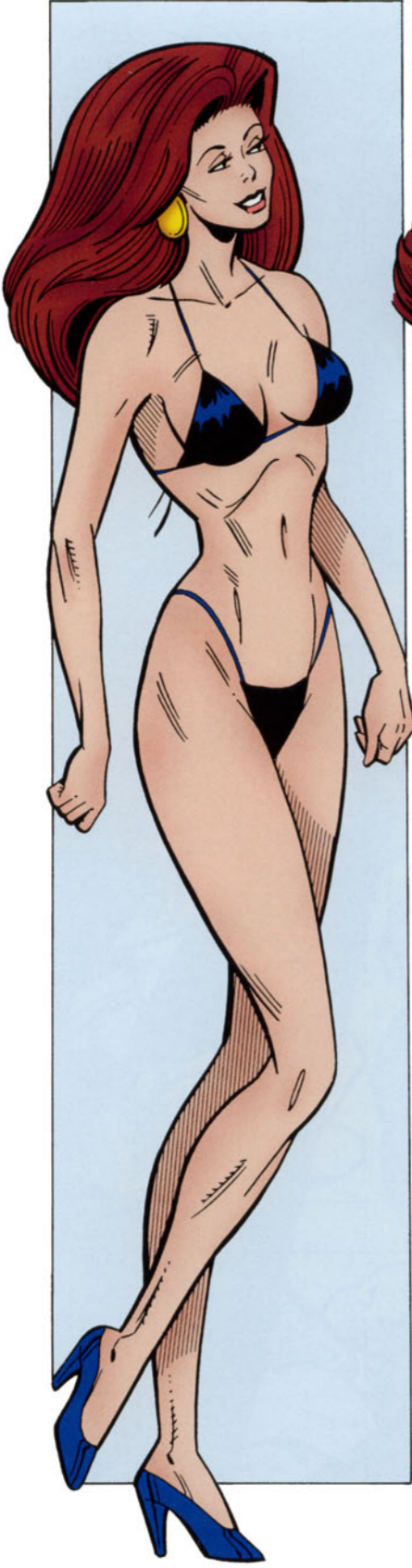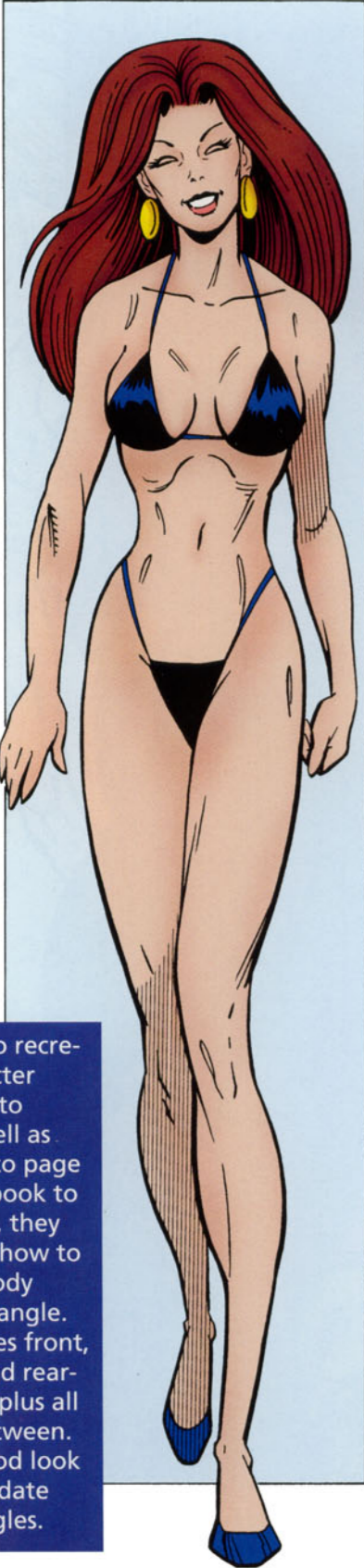
For artists to recreate a character from panel to panel, as well as from page to page and comic book to comic book, they must know how to draw the body from every angle. That includes front, 3/4, side, and rear-view shots, plus all those in between. Here's a good look at a dream date from all angles.

THE PLANES OF THE BODY

When light shines down on a person from above (usually from indoor overhead lighting or from the sun), any parts of the body that protrude on the figure will cast shadows on other parts of the body. Since the surface of the body is filled with hills and valleys of muscles, bones, and fatty areas, these surfaces, or planes, will either be illuminated by the light or fall into shadow. This effect adds a moodier, more dramatic feeling to your work and also makes your characters seem more realistic and three-dimensional.

THE PLANES OF THE BODY IN REFLECTIVE COSTUMES

The planes of the body look especially awesome in reflective outfits (opposite page). The shiny, reflective look is created through the use of flowing, swirling lines of varying thicknesses, and if you look closely, you'll notice that these lines are grouped in specific areas relating to the various planes and angles of the body. For example, light falls from above onto the top half of the breast but leaves the bottom half in shadow, as indicated by the aforementioned swirling lines. Parts of the thighs and stomach also provide good examples of this effect. Note that the planes of the body may appear to be in one place in one pose and in a different place in another. This is due to changes in light and body position, and to the movement of the costume. So, experiment.
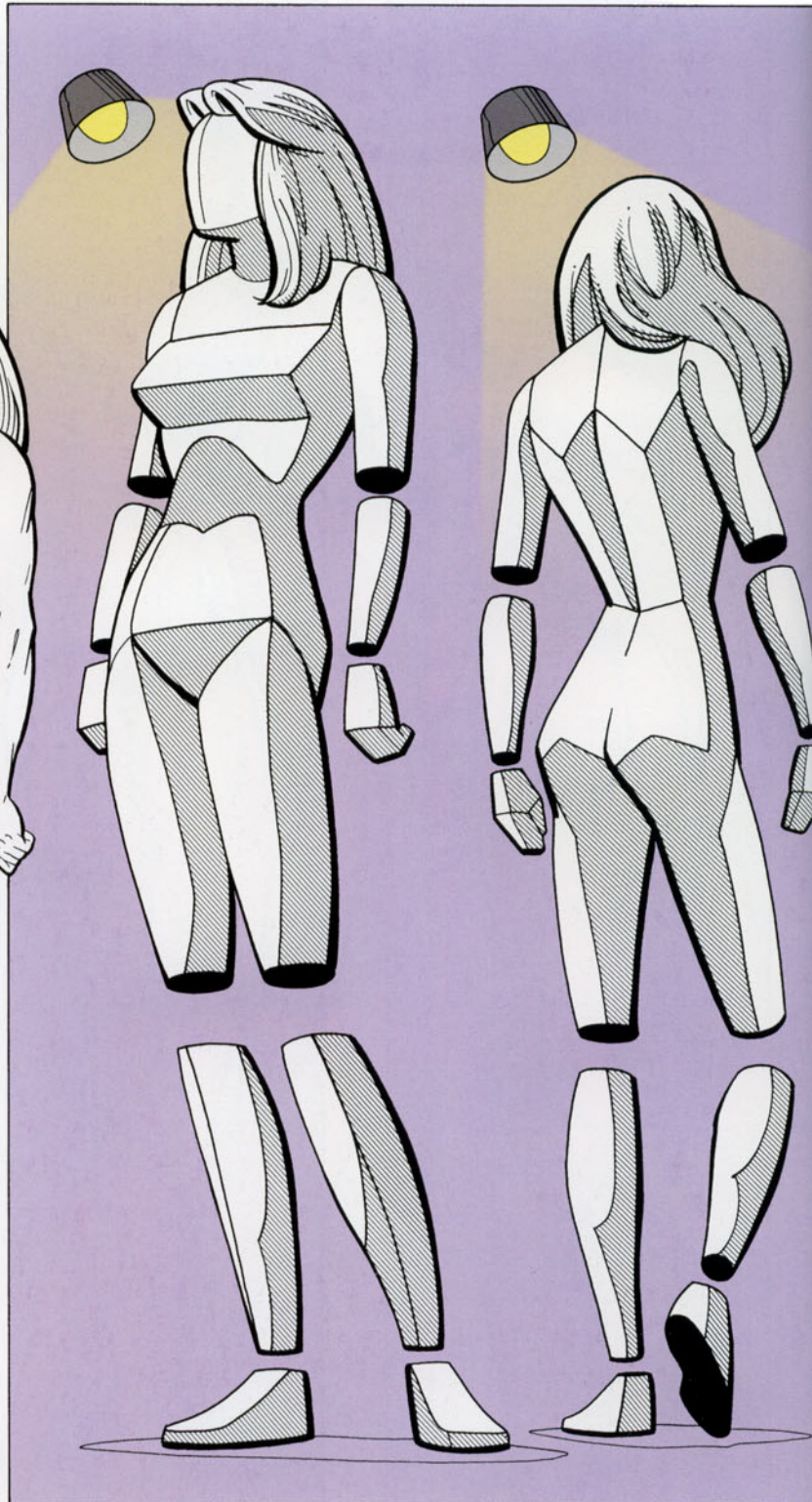
THE POINT OF BALANCE

To find the point of balance—the place where the weight of the body is in equilibrium, or equally balanced on either side of the body—draw a straight line from the base of the neck to the floor in your drawings. You can generally divide the body in two along this line, with half the mass falling on one side of the line and half on the other. Of course, there are always exceptions, such as the pose in the lower left-hand corner here, in which the majority of the body mass falls to the left of the point of balance. Since the heroine is thrusting so much of her energy and weight onto her left (our right) hand and foot, her body mass is unevenly distributed; as a result, she is off-balance and would fall if she weren't steadying herself on the rock.

PERFECT EQUILIBRIUM

DYNAMIC

STATIC

DYNAMIC

STATIC

DYNAMIC

STATIC

After learning to draw the figure, the next step is learning to draw the figure in dramatic, eye-catching poses. You don't want to draw a great-looking woman, only to have her stand stiffly, like the lady who ladles out corn soup in the high school cafeteria. First and foremost, a pose must have a thrust—a sense of motion or direction—to it. It has to "want to be" something. The body must seem to be striving, reaching, stretching, or curving. This is true even if the character is just standing still. Compare the dynamic and static poses in these three figure pairs.
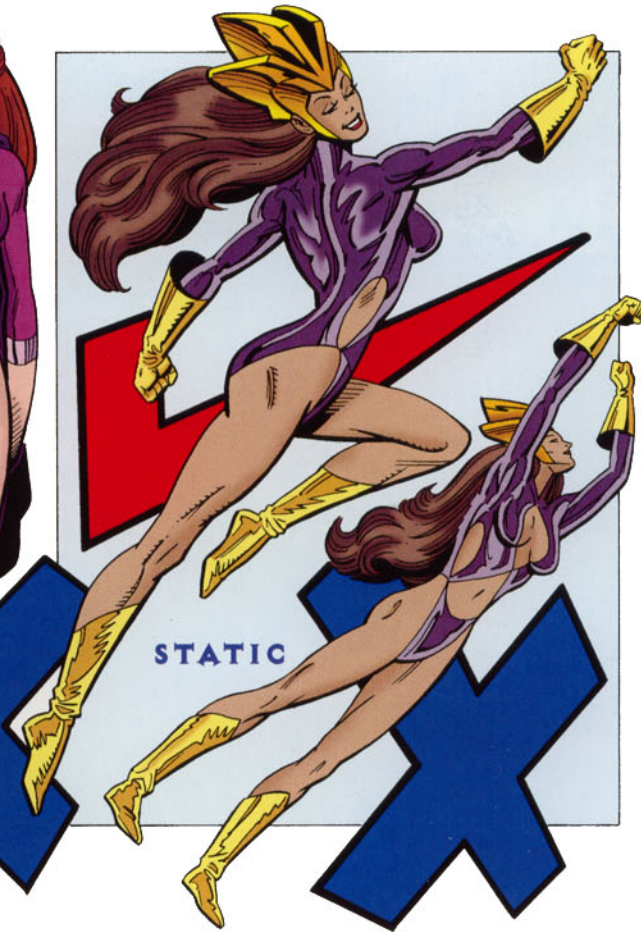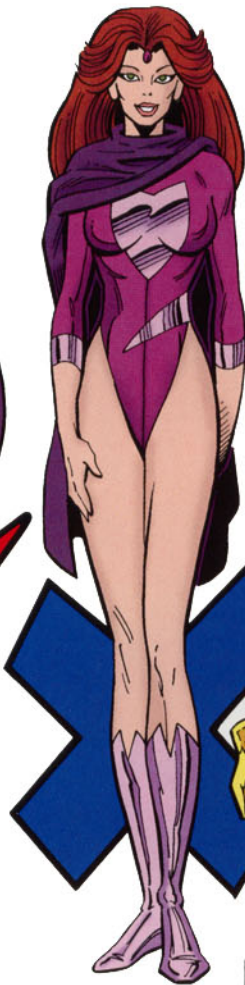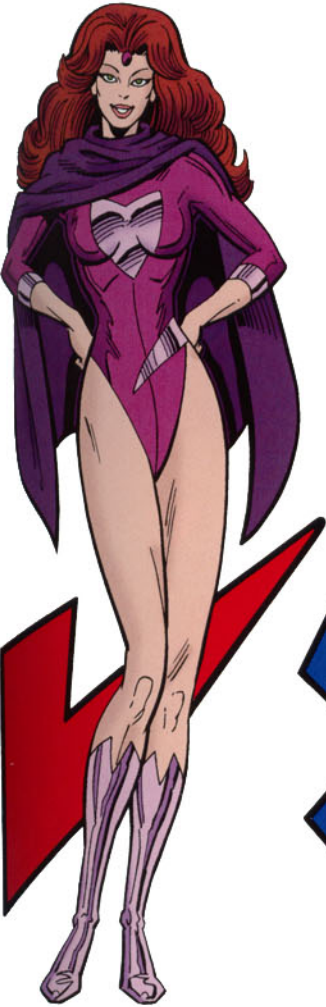
AMAZING ACTION POSES

With comic book action poses, it's either all or nothing. When a character leaps, punches, or kicks, there can be no reservation whatsoever. Her entire body must be 100-percent committed to the action, and this is equally true of the character on the *receiving end* of the punishment.

There's no power to the punch shown here, because the puncher is standing straight up, rather than throwing her whole body into the action. Compare with the larger example to see what a difference body language makes.
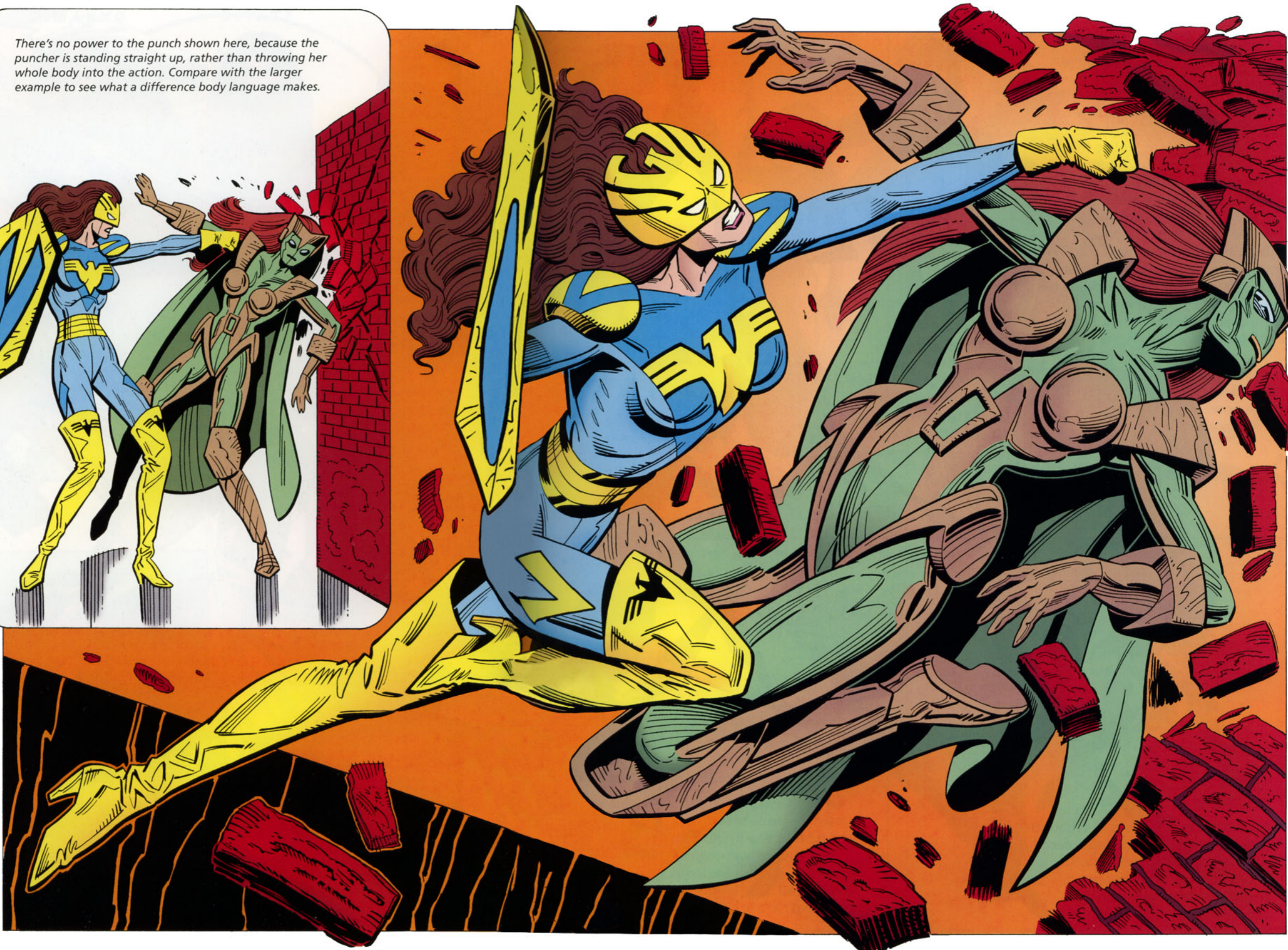
SILHOUETTES

Silhouettes can be very effective design and storytelling elements. Artists use them to create dramatic and moody moments, and as a change in visual pacing. Silhouettes can be sexy, dynamic, and stylish. You see only the outline of the shape and, therefore, notice the figure's curves that much more.

The secret to drawing good silhouettes is to keep as many of the limbs away from the body as possible. If the arms are pressed against the body, they won't show and will be subsumed by the blackness. This will destroy the outline of the body. Of course, there can be some overlapping of forms, but you should strive for silhouettes that show clearly where the limbs are. In this way, your silhouettes will successfully convey the emotions of the pose.

SEXY

Silhouetted woman are shrouded in mystery; hence, the imagination is left to wonder what's within the shadows, teased by the attractive outline of the body.

ACTION

To indicate action poses in silhouette, pose the character with legs placed wide apart for balance, or with limbs bent and body coiled up, or with the body performing a specific action.

M⊕⊕D

Silhouettes are good for creating subtle moods that are based on body gesture and attitude, rather than on facial expression or costume. There's a pensive feeling to these poses, as if something auspicious were in the air. The characters are light on their feet—fingertips outstretched and heads held high.

ARM P⊕SITI⊕NS

The arms become especially important in silhouettes, because they create a sense of symmetry or balance. Positioning one arm up and one down forms a single, flowing line; and this would be less apparent if the figure were bathed in light, as we would then be distracted by the patterns and folds of the clothing.

FORCED PERSPECTIVE

This is an exaggerated application of the principles of foreground and background perspective, which tell us that an object that is closer to us appears larger than an object that is farther away. This is true not just for objects, but for the body, as well. To show forced perspective, you need to choose a pose that places some parts of the body closer to the reader and others farther away. In this way, you can exaggerate the parts that are nearer the reader. A flat pose (one in which the body is all on one plane) won't do, because there's no reason to exaggerate anything— no one part of the body is closer to the reader than any other.

You must have a reason for using forced perspective—for example, to make a character look more impressive or to breathe more life into a static scene. Or, perhaps the scene you're drawing requires it, because you're looking up or down at a character, which, by default, results in an extreme sense of perspective.
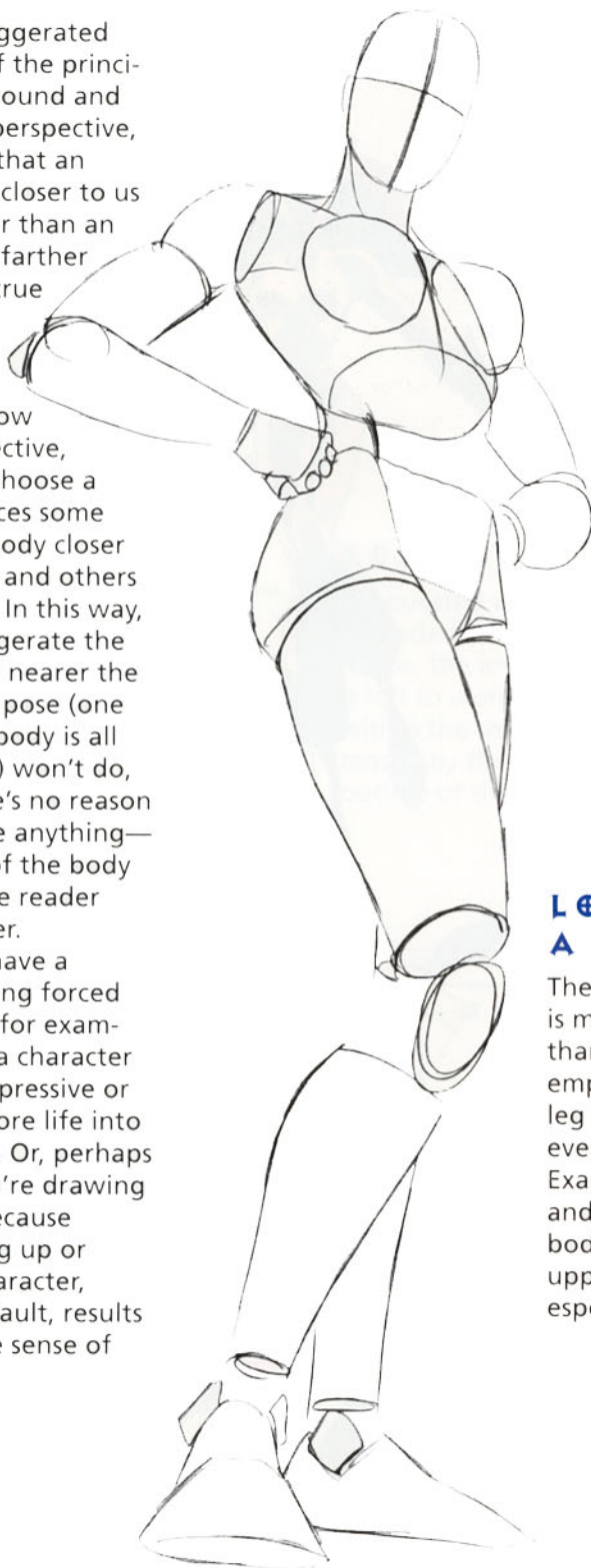
LOOKING UP AT A CHARACTER

The lower half of the figure is much nearer to the reader than the upper half. To emphasize this, place one leg forward, bringing her even closer to the reader. Exaggerate the near leg and the lower half of the body, while reducing the upper half of the body, especially the head.

LOOKING DOWN AT A CHARACTER

Staging a scene in which you look down at a character requires you to use forced perspective—you can't draw her as a flat figure. So, enlarge the top half of the body, which is closer to the reader, and reduce the lower half, which is farther away. The result is highly effective, making her treacherous walk along the tree seem that much more precarious.

ACTION POSES

Figures in more active poses, such as flying or reaching, require the use of forced perspective due to the extreme nature of the positions. Remember that while it's always fun to exaggerate the body parts that are closer to you, it's just as important to *reduce* those parts that are farther away.

FLYING—REAR VIEW
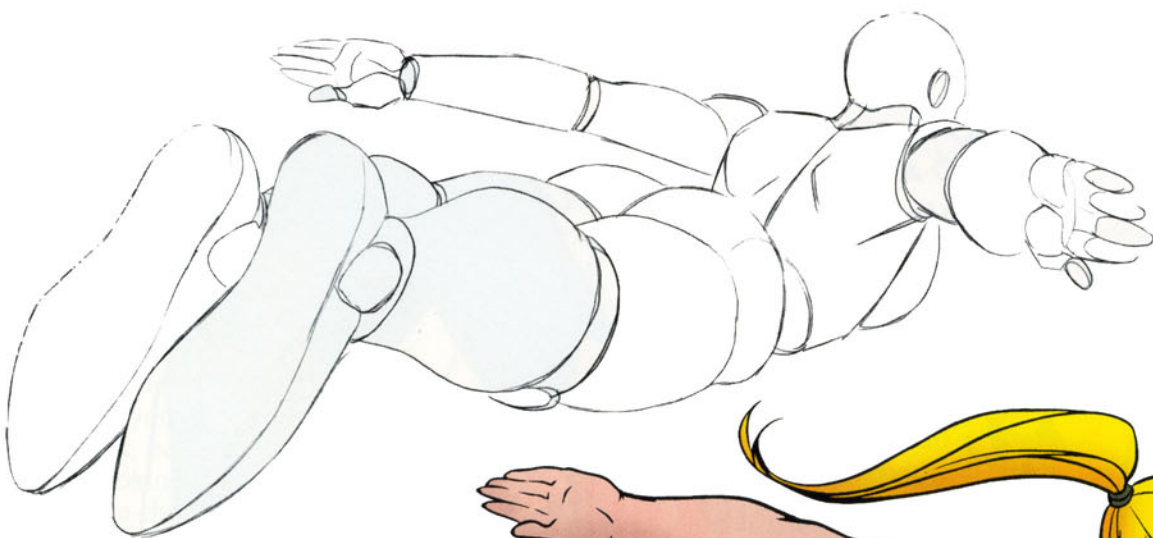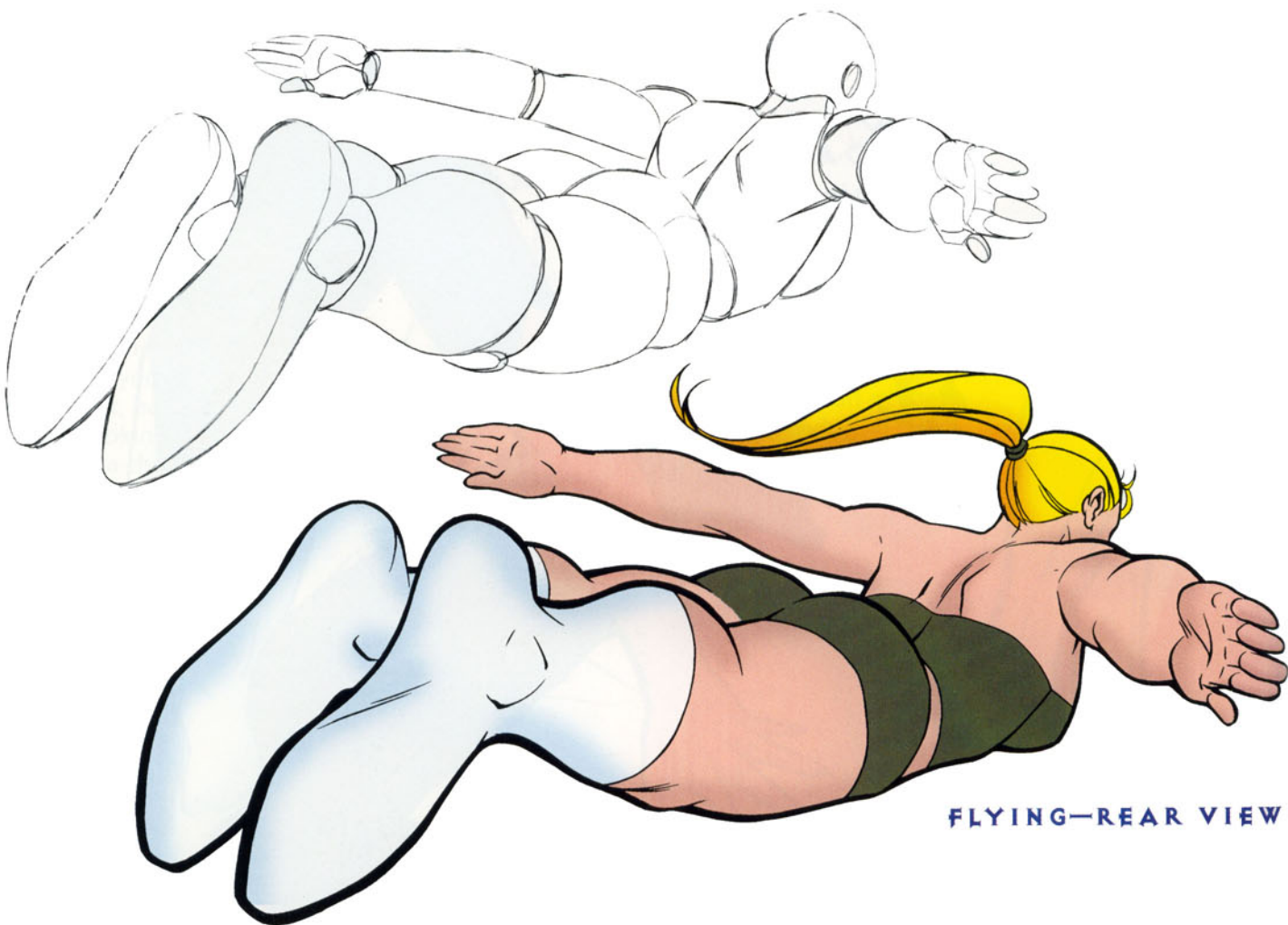
FLYING—ASCENDING

REACHING

47

SUPER POWERS, WEAPONS, AND KILLER OUTFITS

WHEN YOU THINK OF SUPER POWERS, you probably think of Herculean strength or maybe flying ability. That's old stuff! Yesterday's news. Here are the latest, cutting-edge powers your comic book babes must have in order to survive in an action hero-eat-action hero world.

SPECIAL TALENTS

SHAPE-SHIFTING

This is a more dramatic version of morphing or evolving. Provoked to respond with great force, this character summons all her energy and violently changes form into an awesome monster. Note the motion lines around the character, which indicate a process in action.

ATOMIC PUNCH

This goes way past ordinary super strength; it's a power so great that each blow splits atoms, creating a small nuclear explosion.

SUPER SPIKES

Characters now have weapons as part of their bodies. The spikes grow out of this well-protected babe and shoot out at anyone who tries to get in her way. Hey, it beats a can of pepper spray.
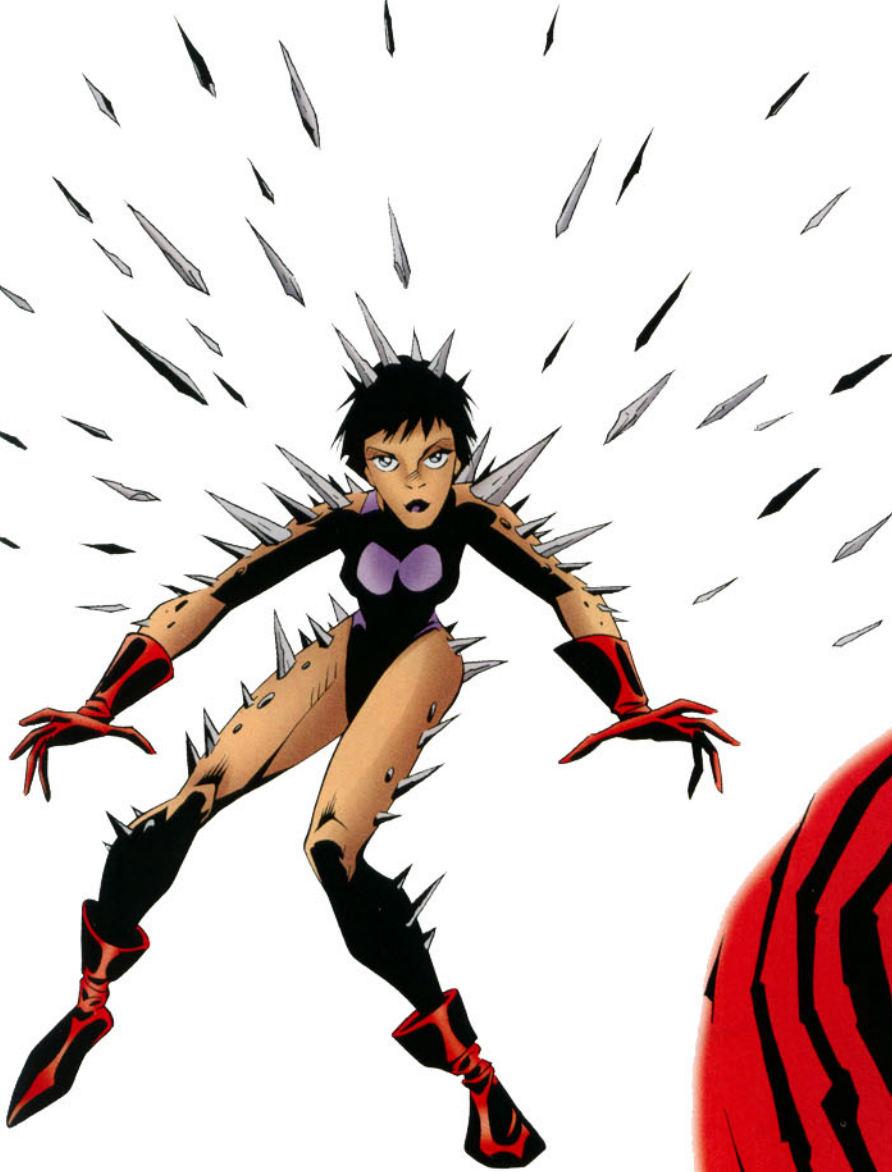
HYPNOTISM

Don't stare at her eyes! Too late. You're a slave. See how easy that was? Now, go get me a pizza with extra cheese. Well, I didn't say it worked every time. All it takes to indicate these irresistible, mesmerizing powers are diabolical hand gestures, a deadpan stare into readers' eyes, and a background of swirling, expanding concentric circles.

ULTRA-MENTAL

Talk about using your brains! By focusing her huge mental powers into a single, high-powered beam, this gal can force anyone to do her bidding.
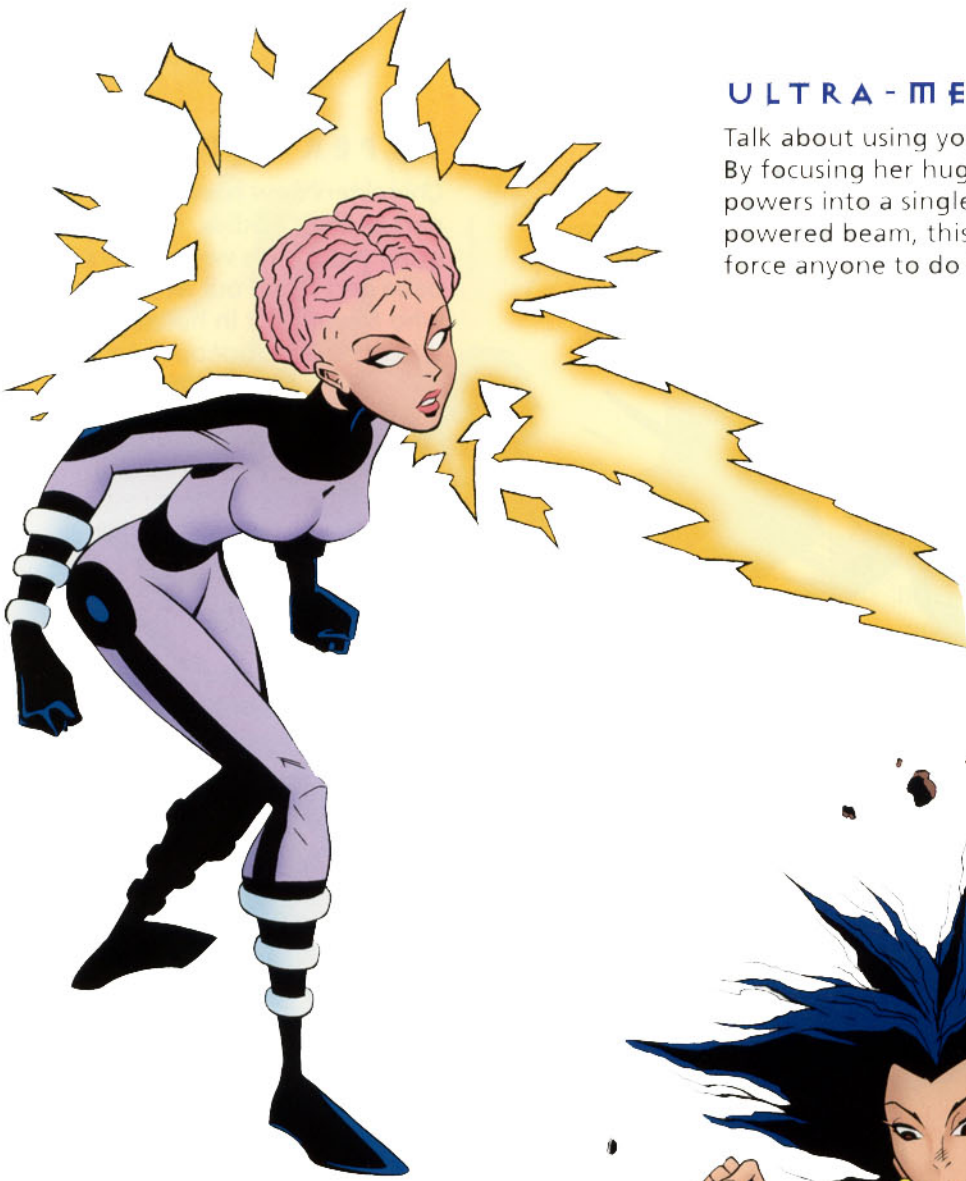
EARTH SUMMONING

With transcendent powers, an earth summoner can create a whirlpool of rock and sand, burying the bad guys alive in a swirling vortex from which there is no escape. Mwa-ha-ha-ha!

BEAM BLASTING

Power beams always come in handy when you're walking to a desolate parking garage after work. Note that a power beam emits a burst of energy at its origin. In addition, the area surrounding the power beam should be filled with a darker pattern to emphasize and contrast with the beam.

PYRO-TERROR

This character sprays powerful, hot flame. She's better than any ordinary flamethrowers because she never runs out of juice and can vary the width of the spray by combining the beams from both her hands into one wide burst. Bring marshmallows.

FIGHTING WOMEN

Why talk things out and come to a peaceful resolution when you could just as easily kick butt and win? When you stage fight scenes for women, you have to be a little more creative than you might be with male characters, who can just pound each other into submission. This is because women generally have less girth and physical weight than men and must, therefore, be more inventive in their martial arts moves to have any real effect.

THE DOUBLE KICK

The rule in drawing comic book fights is: Be flashy. If a single kick will do, then a double kick will do even better. Note that most kicks are executed with the heels, not with the tips of the toes, so draw kicking characters with their feet pulled back and flexed, not pointed.
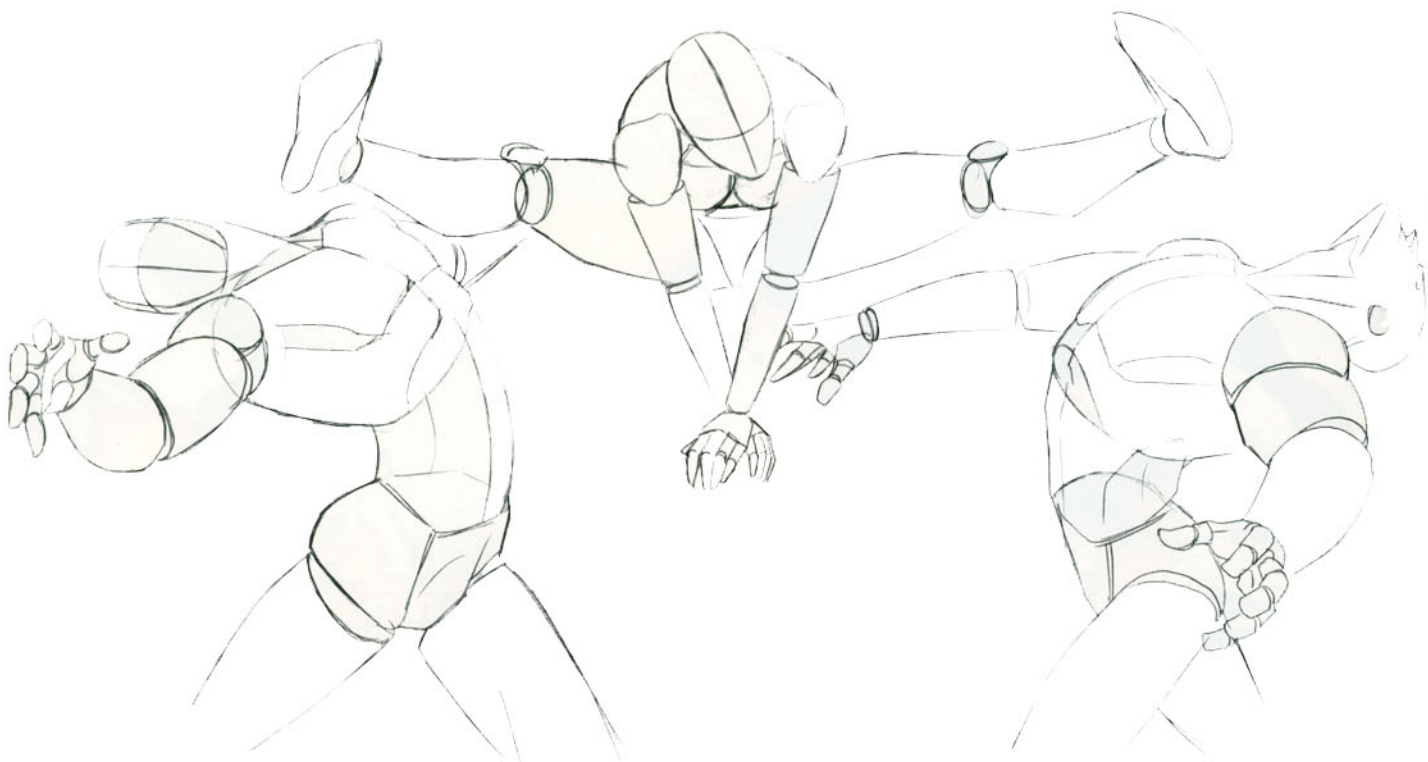
THE POWER PUNCH

Notice all the space between these two women. You might think this would defeat the purpose of a fight scene, and beginning artists tend to draw their fighters closer together—but that would lessen the impact. Only a terrific blow could send the victim reeling backward like this. Closing the distance between the figures would minimize the power of the punch. By adding space, you add impact. Also, note how far apart the puncher's legs are. The harder the punch, the wider the puncher's footing.

AND DON'T CALL ME "SWEETIE!"

Some guys never learn. This advanced martial arts move combines a choke (leg wrap), grappling (hair pull), and a strike (punch). It makes for a dramatic panel because it's unique. But equally important is that it's not so complex that you can't see what's going on. You can use martial arts magazines as reference material when drawing these types of moves.

TAKE THAT!

These three moves are techniques that every female fighter should have in her martial arts arsenal. Used primarily in fighting multiple opponents, these moves must be quick; your heroine must be able to immediately take on the next assailant and continue fighting.

ELBOW PUNCH

KNEE STRIKE

JUDO FLIP

1

2
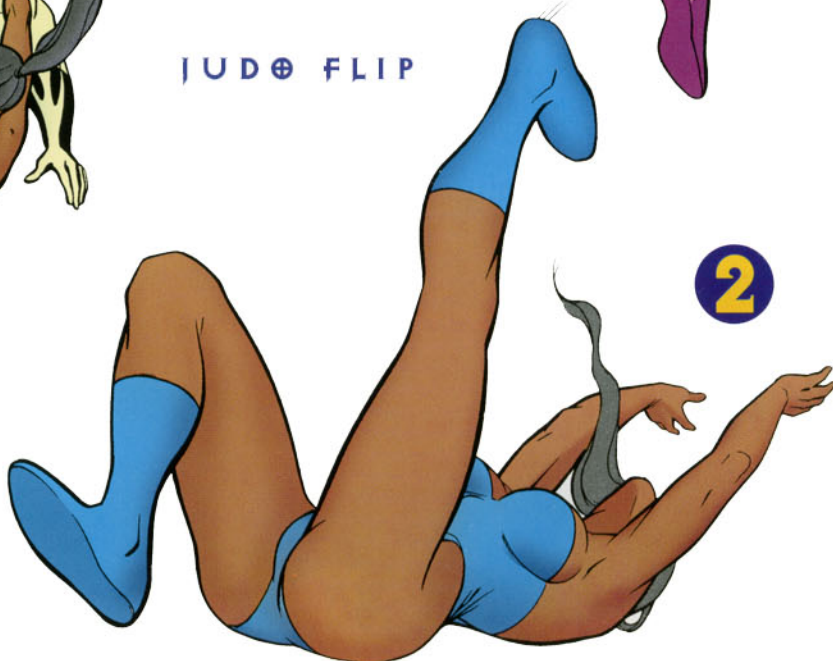
WEAPONS

All your weapons should boast lots of firepower. Your character could carry one monster weapon, or wear several of them on thigh belts and shoulder straps. The fun of drawing cutting-edge weaponry is that you get to make up your own designs. It's not about whether the weapons will work, it's about whether they *look good*. Most weapons are high-tech guns of some sort. Some gadgetry on them—such as viewfinders, supply packs, retractable flaps, and the like—is good. But don't make these gizmos too complicated; keep in mind that the weapon still has to look like a gun.

Often, when a character carries a weapon into battle, she also wears protective clothing. This, rather than just sticking a gun in her hands, creates a real fighting look. She'll usually have some kind of head gear or visor and, perhaps, knee shields, some arm bracelets, and boots.

OVERSIZED WEAPONS

With the exception of mystery and western genres, comic book weapons should always tend toward the oversized. (Note the equally large holster.) The reason for this is simple: If you carry a small gun, you're fighting a small villain; if you carry a monster gun . . . well, you get the idea. Big weapons create big moments—and an even bigger struggle to survive. Your comic book woman can't just injure the nefarious creatures rising up from the mire and then hope to survive; she has to blow them to smithereens!

Some beginning artists worry that giving their characters big weapons will lessen the drama (because a character with a big weapon may appear invincible) and will kill any suspense about the outcome of the scene. However, this just isn't true. In the scene here, our heroine has a huge weapon, but this is still an even-money fight at best.

Rocket packs are a cool, high-tech way to travel. Of course, you don't get the free bag of peanuts, but you can't have everything. Rocket packs allow the entire figure to remain clearly in view, which is an advantage over, say, having a character mostly covered in an enclosed helicopter.
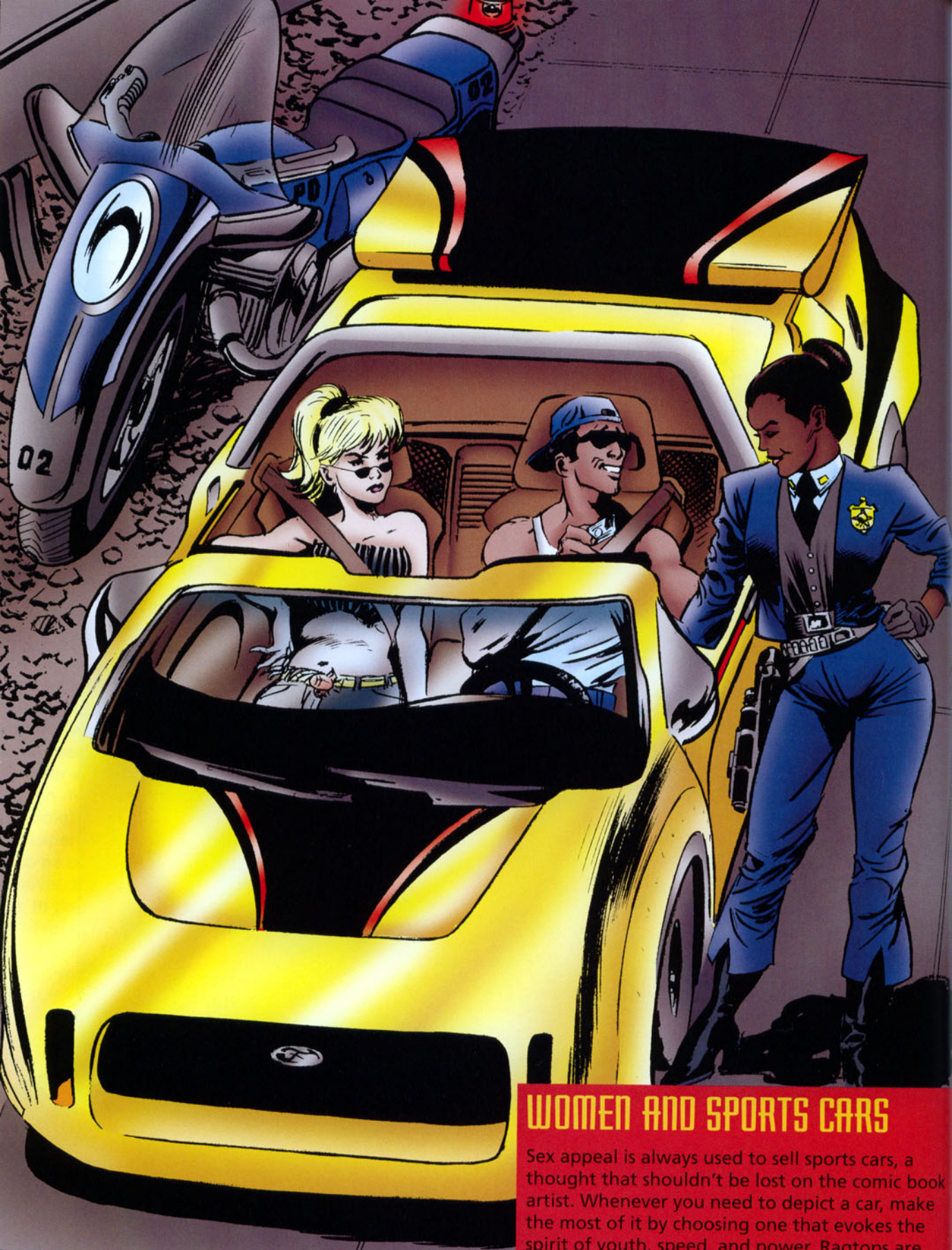
WOMEN AND SPORTS CARS

Sex appeal is always used to sell sports cars, a thought that shouldn't be lost on the comic book artist. Whenever you need to depict a car, make the most of it by choosing one that evokes the spirit of youth, speed, and power. Ragtops are always a good choice, because they allow a better view of the characters. A hardtop wouldn't permit the type of shot demonstrated here.

Always block out the figures in the car at the beginning sketch stage. If you don't, you may start to sketch a car with the people in it and realize that, while the angle of the shot makes the car look pretty, it doesn't show the people effectively. If you're still at an early drawing stage, you can easily scrap your initial sketch and begin again. If you'd finished the car *first*, however, before drawing the people in it, you'd have wasted a lot of time before realizing that the angle didn't work. By then, you might be tempted to use a less effective image so as not to waste what you'd drawn.

Note the hair blowing in the wind as the car makes a sharp turn.
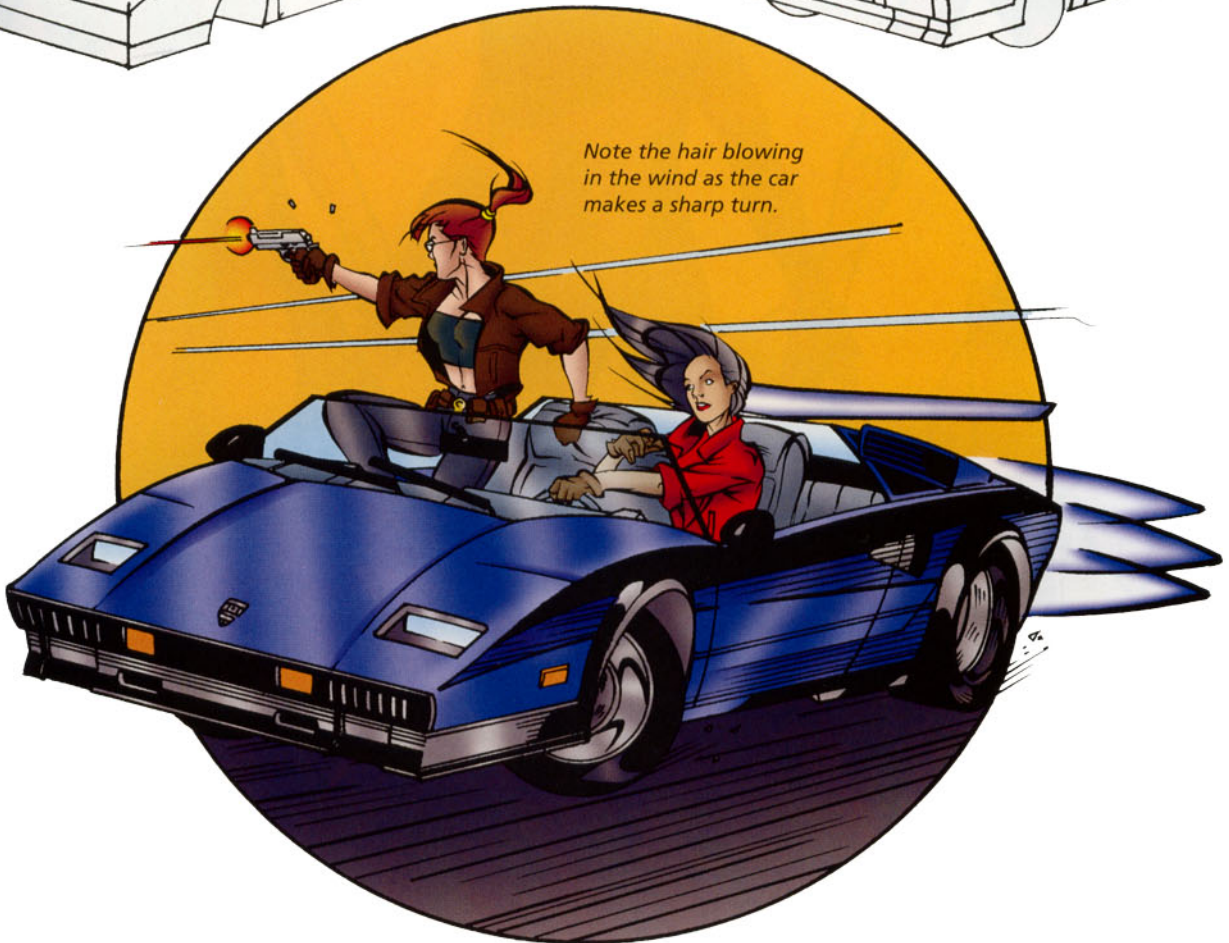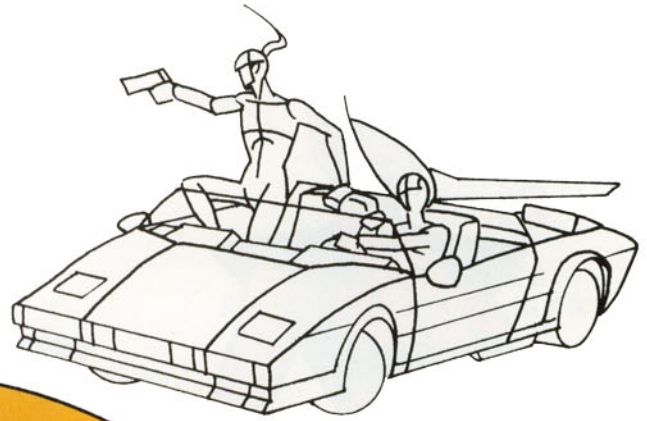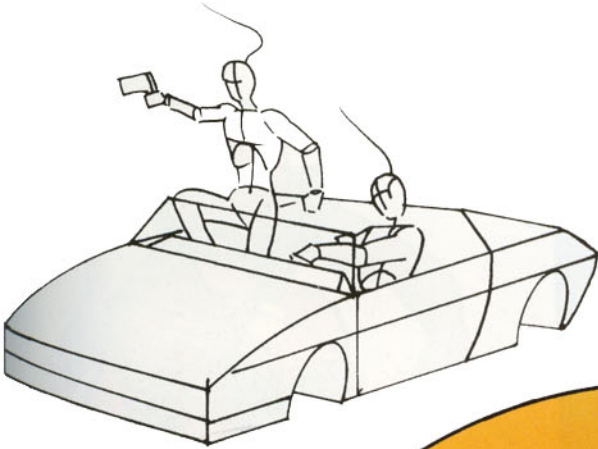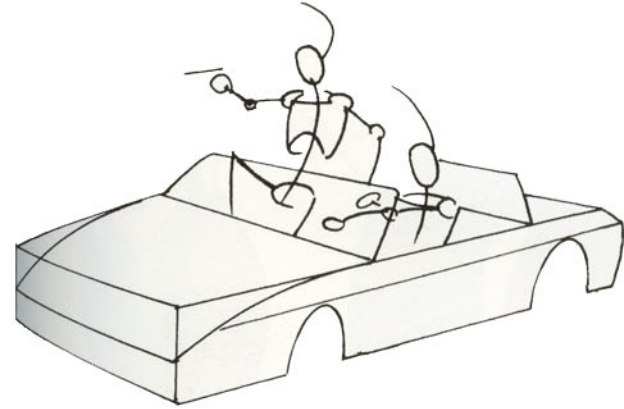
GREAT-LOOKING COSTUMES

What a difference an outfit makes. Fashion is one of the most powerful weapons in the comic book artist's arsenal. A "bad-gal" expression, for example, doesn't necessarily indicate that your character is evil—she could just be having a bad day. But a bad-gal *costume* on a woman with a nasty disposition means only one thing: She's trouble. The costume defines the character, clarifies her role, and, of course, highlights her physical attributes, of which there should be many. As shown here, fashion is such a powerful tool that by simply changing the costume, you can alter the character.
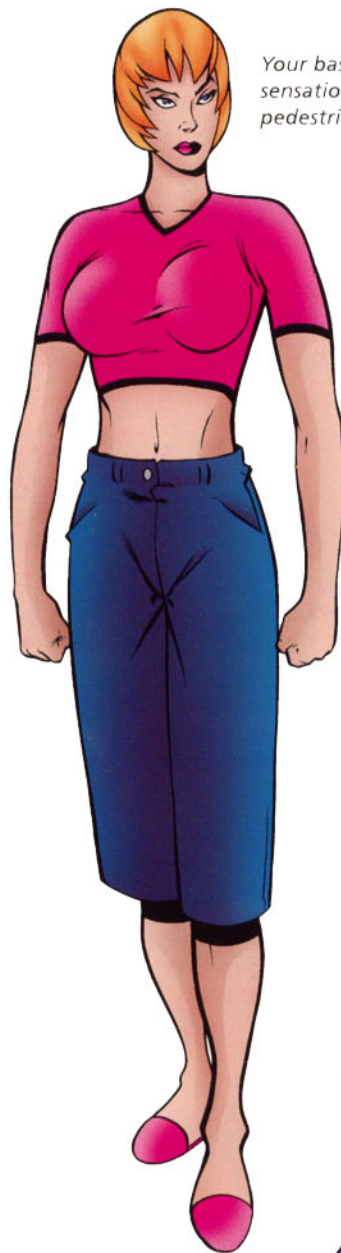
Your basic, sensationally built pedestrian.

Same babe, new costume. Now she's a super crime fighter, no doubt about it.
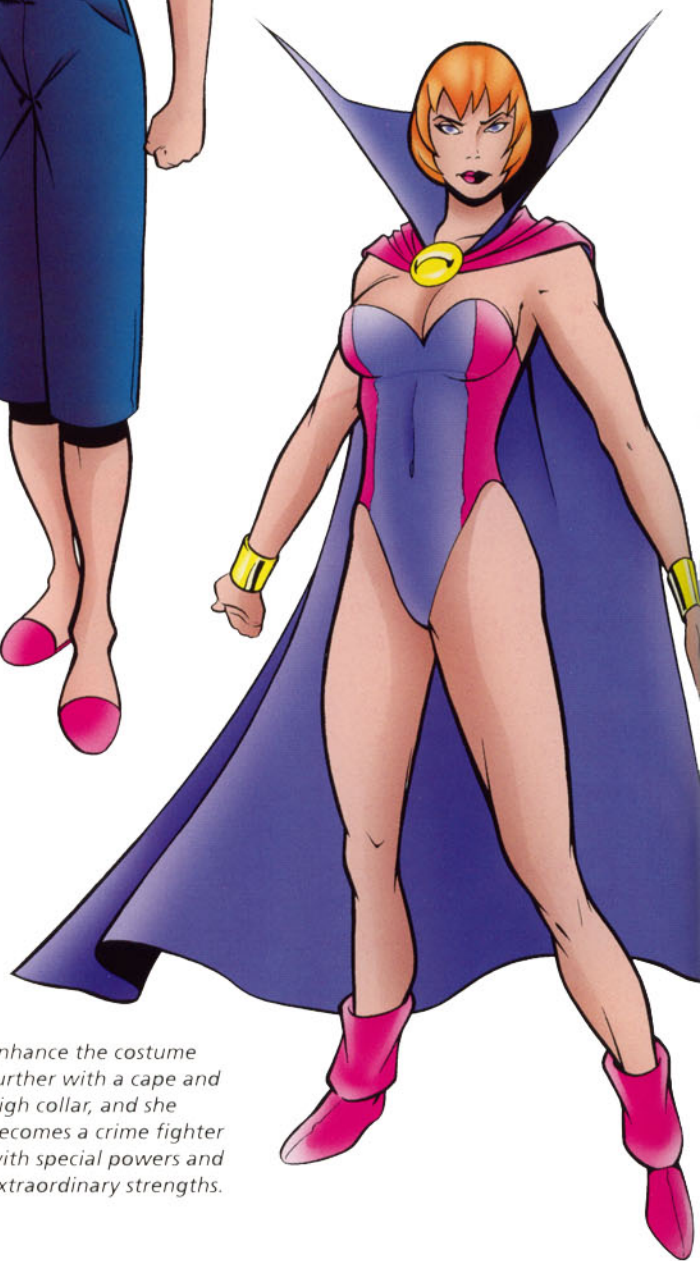
Enhance the costume further with a cape and high collar, and she becomes a crime fighter with special powers and extraordinary strengths.

Action heroines just never seem to have enough closet space. Here are some accessories that can add zip to a costume's design.
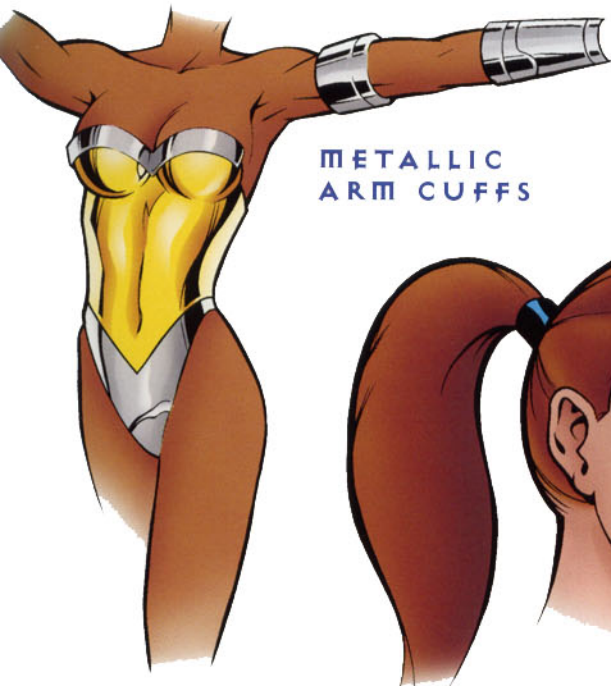
METALLIC ARM CUFFS
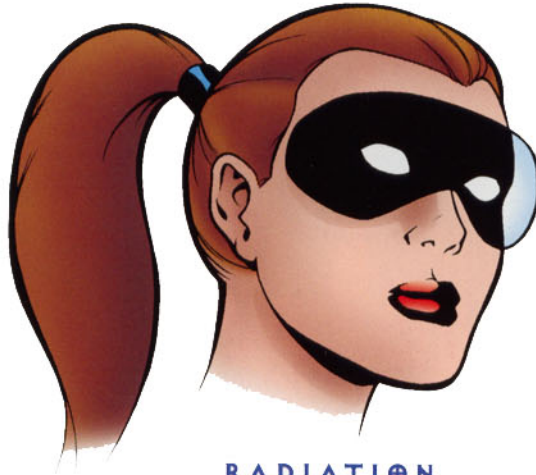
RADIATION GOGGLES

CHOKER WITH HANGING ORNAMENT
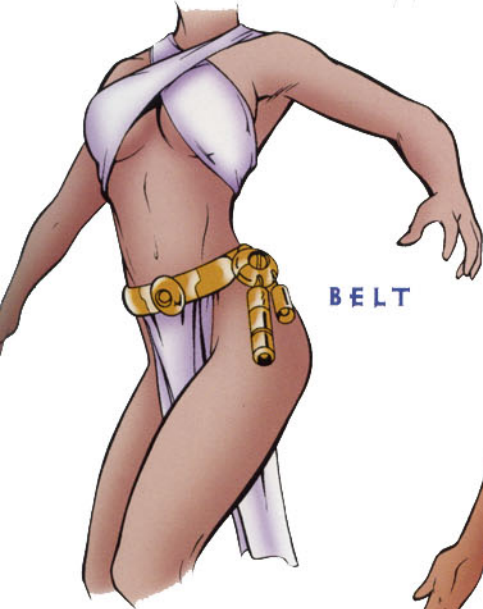
BELT

FLARED SHOULDER PADS

WRIST GUARDS
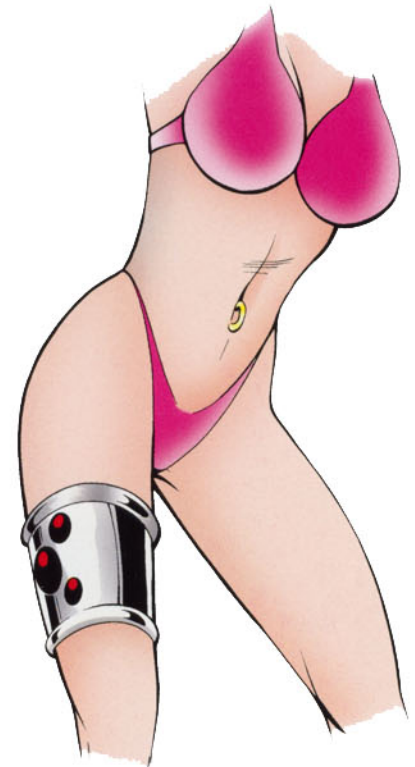
THIGH CUFF AND (YEEⓄOWCH!) NAVEL RING

woMen TO DIE FOR

GREAT-LOOKING COMIC book women will surely catch a person's eye, but to keep readers turning page after page, and coming back issue after issue, you have to develop *dynamic and varied* characters. In this chapter, you'll find just about every type of beauty to ever grace the pages of a comic book.

THE VALLEY GIRL
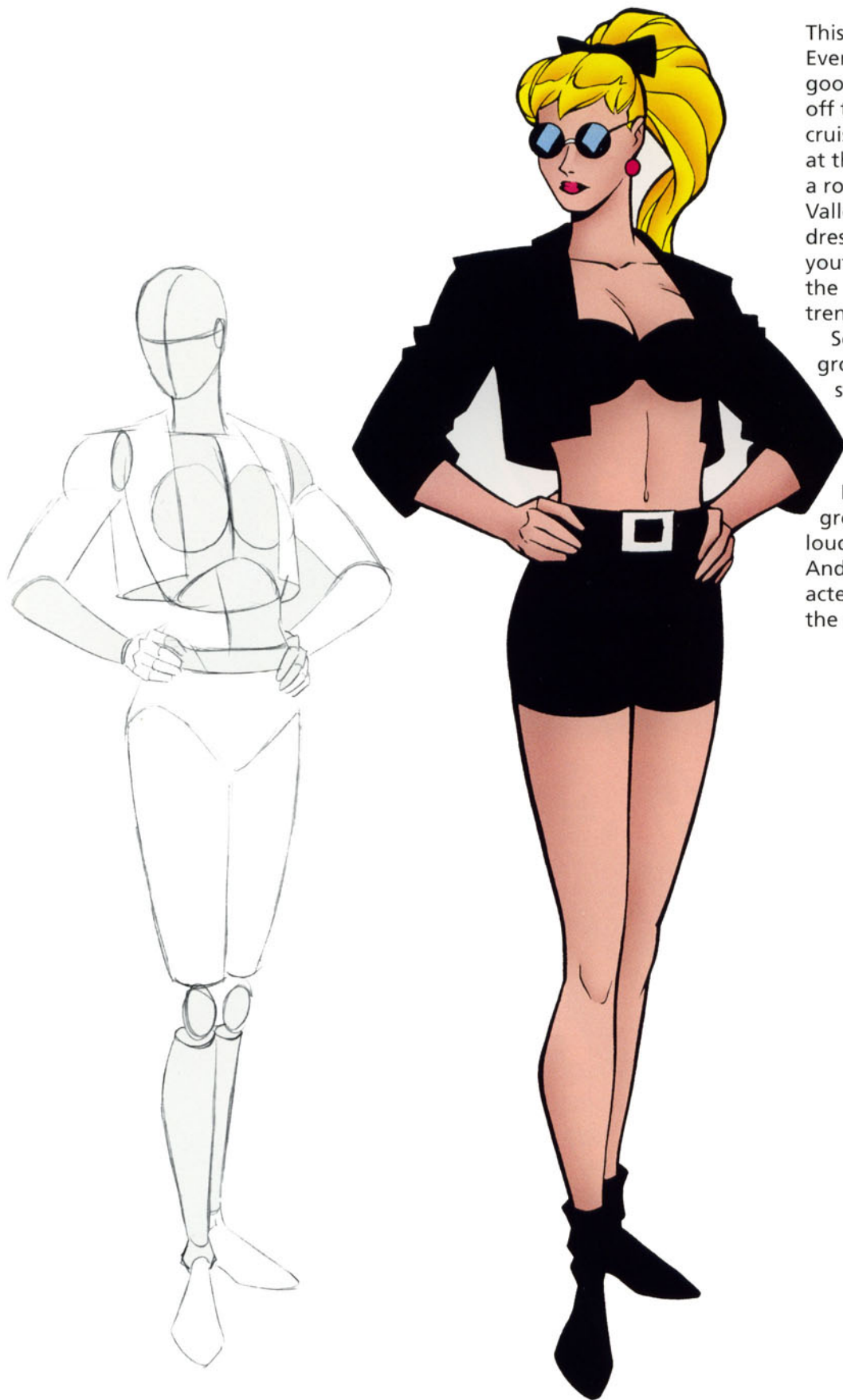
This is, like, a totally cool character! Every suburb needs a few of these good-looking gals who never take off their sunglasses. They're out cruisin' around on a Saturday night, at the mall shopping for gum, or at a rock concert meeting the roadies. Valley girl characters are flirts, so dress them to reflect that, but add youthful touches, such as bows in the hair, oversized belt buckles, trendy boots, and young hairstyles.

Sometimes, valley girls are grouped together in comic book stories, just as they are in horror flicks when a band of girls goes camping together and "something bad" happens. It helps the story, because a group of girls together can scream louder than one girl by herself. And, you can kill off these characters one by one, heightening the suspense.
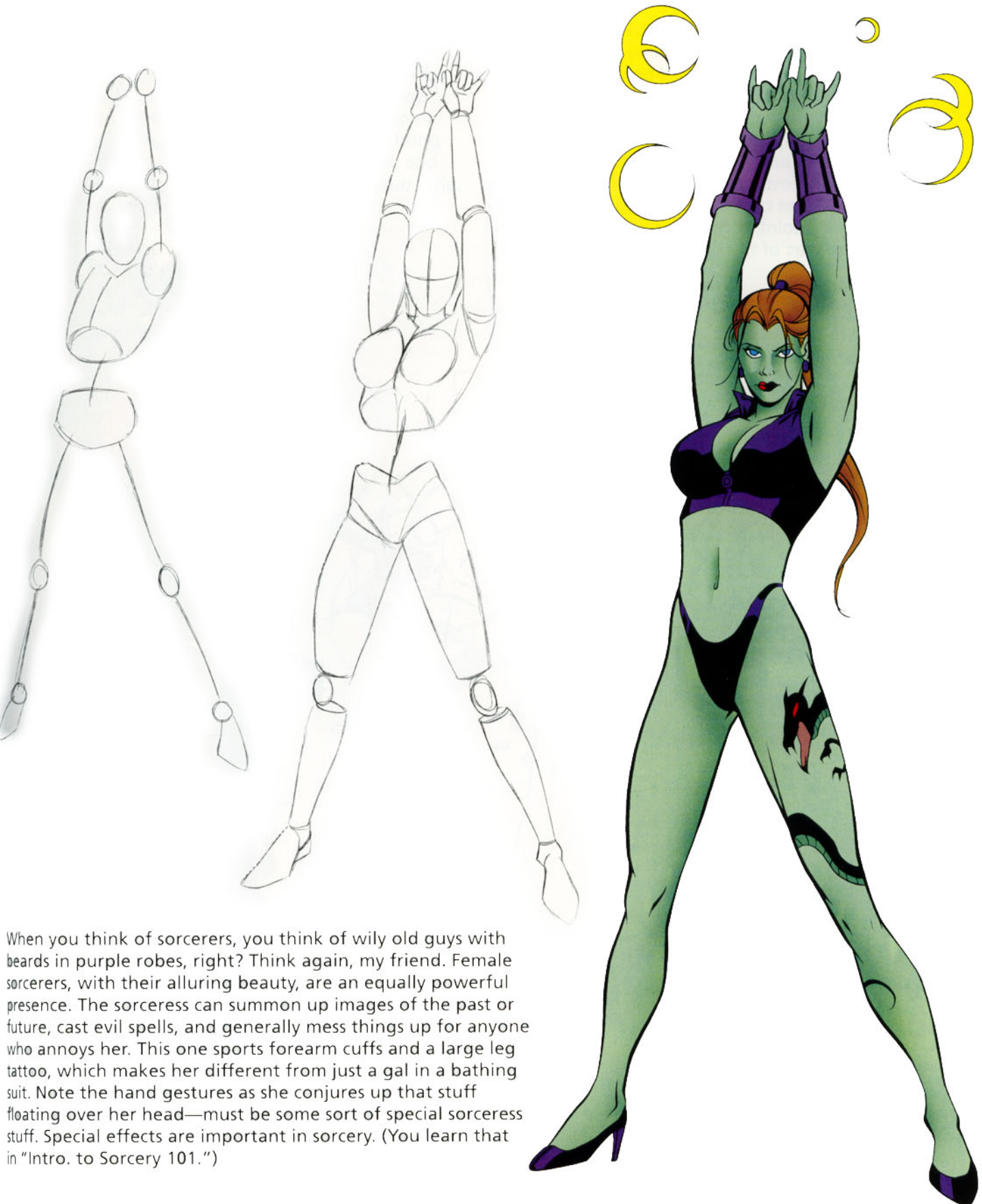
When you think of sorcerers, you think of wily old guys with beards in purple robes, right? Think again, my friend. Female sorcerers, with their alluring beauty, are an equally powerful presence. The sorceress can summon up images of the past or future, cast evil spells, and generally mess things up for anyone who annoys her. This one sports forearm cuffs and a large leg tattoo, which makes her different from just a gal in a bathing suit. Note the hand gestures as she conjures up that stuff floating over her head—must be some sort of special sorceress stuff. Special effects are important in sorcery. (You learn that in "Intro. to Sorcery 101.")

THE GANG MEMBER

We all know that girls are better behaved than boys, right? Well, not every girl. Some girls, it seems, grow up to be bad. The gorgeous women of comic book street gangs would rather rob you than date you. And compared to some dates I've had, that'd probably be cheaper in the end. But I digress. Torn jeans and well-worn street clothes are the signature costume for this character, with a large weapon that comes in handy when she's trying to make a point. A reckless or aloof attitude is also part of the statement.
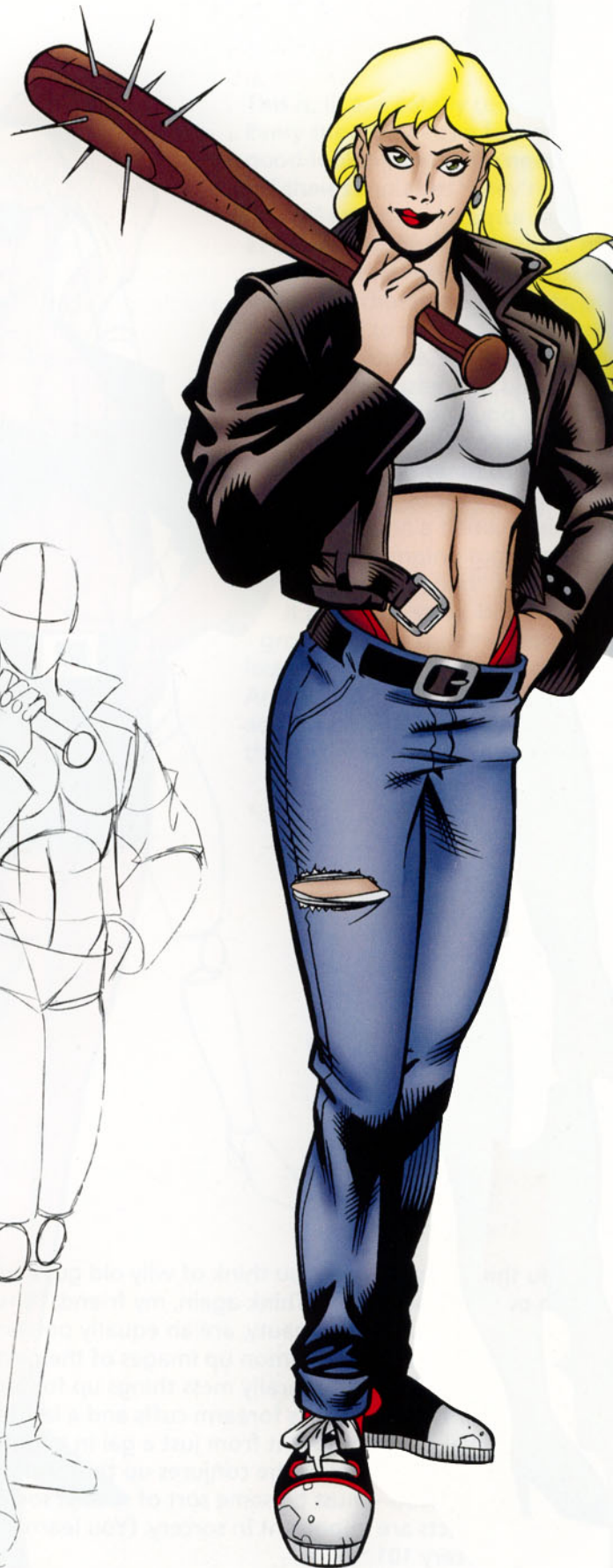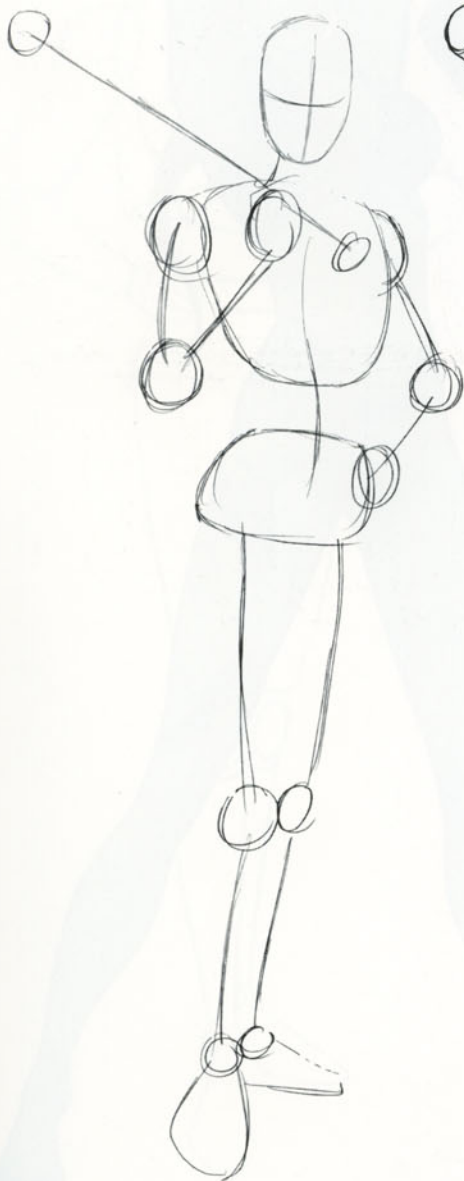
ALTERNATE APPROACH

This is a different approach to the gang member character, as drawn by a different artist. No two artists draw in exactly the same style, nor should they. Many times, comic book editors will require you to draw already established characters exactly as the previous artist did. However, when the opportunity presents itself to introduce a new character or take the comic book in a new direction, seize that moment to bring fresh vision to the work, break out of the mold, and create something different. Something with *your* style.
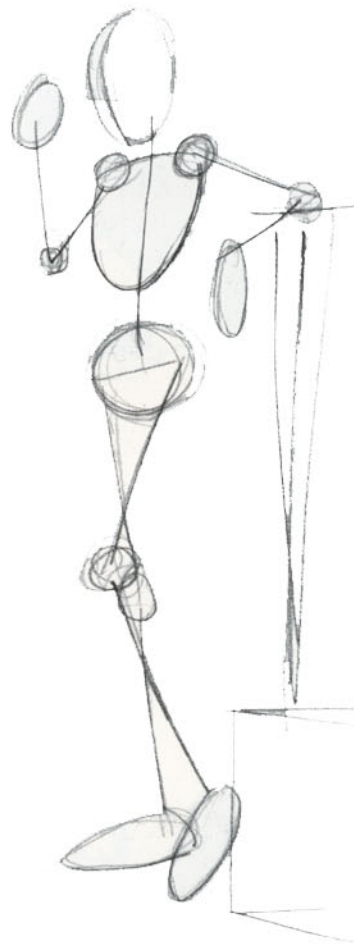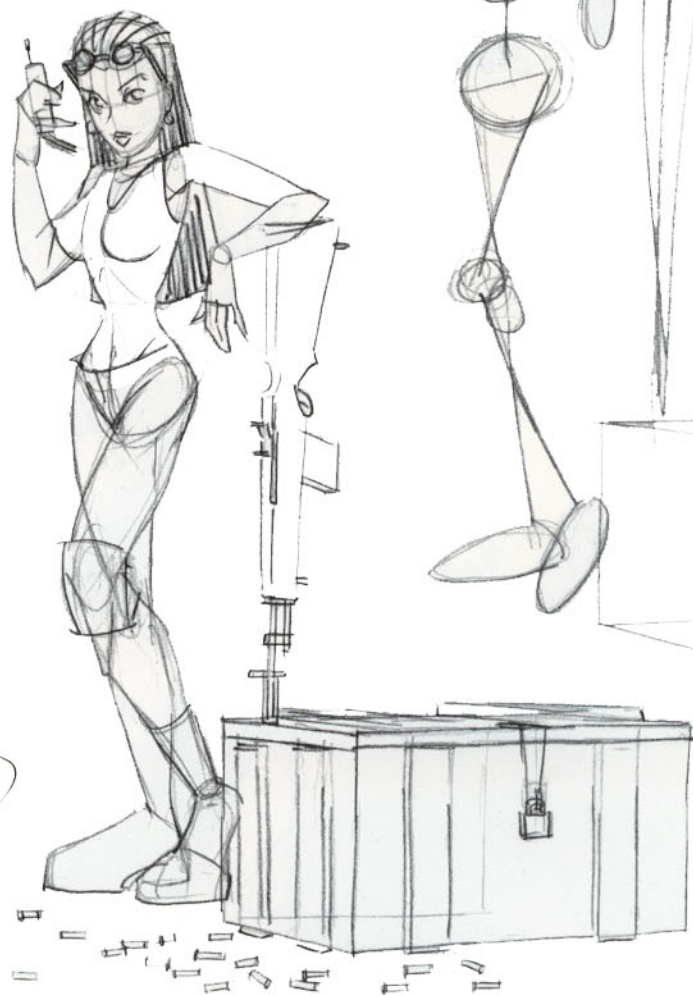
THE FEMALE VAMPIRE

Vampire women are always depicted wearing eerie clothing, usually capes or long tattered gowns. Their eyelashes should be jet black and lengthy. Their fingernails are way too long. Plus, they've got fangs. And, whereas most people who like animals own a dog or cat, vampire women have bats. It's not that I don't think bats make cuddly house pets; it's the running to the blood bank every few days for their food that I really find tiresome.
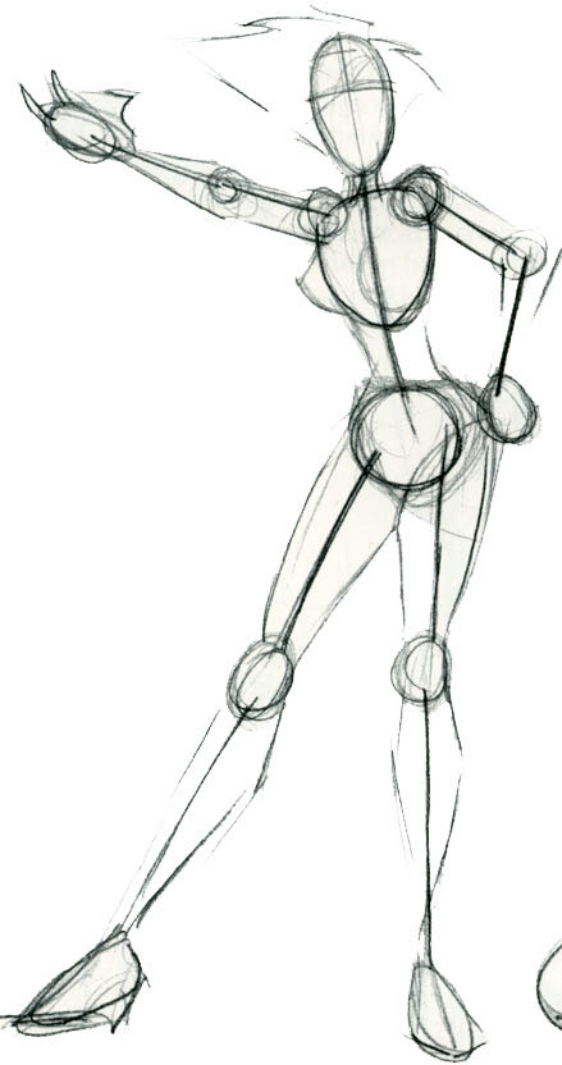
PREHISTORIC BABE

Primeval clothes are very provocative without being flashy. The prehistoric woman wears minimal leather garments with leather straps to keep them from falling apart. She should always have long, flowing hair, because these were the days before hair salons. Resist the impulse to make prehistoric women brutish and overly muscular; go for pretty and serene, as if they lived in a pastoral hamlet among the waterfalls. It's the garden-of-Eden idea.
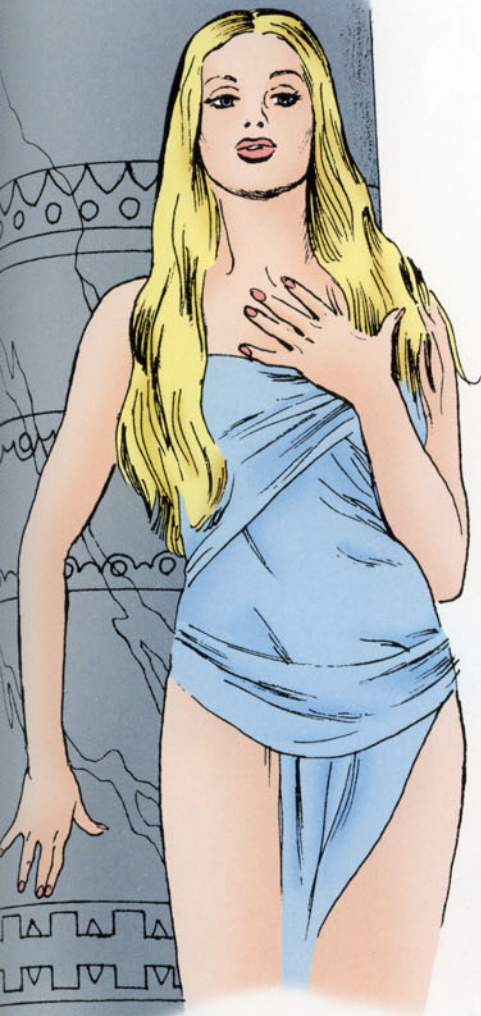
THE GODDESS

Up in the clouds, on some heavenly plane, resides this beautiful goddess. Of course, any mere mortal who happens to accidentally find his way here (perhaps by parachuting from a burning plane) couldn't help but find her irresistible. And naturally, she would find him highly intriguing due to all his earthly passions, which the gods seem to lack. Her father, the head honcho of the gods, would warn the mortal that his daughter is off-limits. But when the mortal ignores the warning, Big Daddy tries to take revenge, and the climactic chase/fight scene is on.

Go for a Gothic look in the costume and jewelry: long robes and bejeweled belts, necklaces, and headdresses. Leave the shoulders and thighs uncovered.
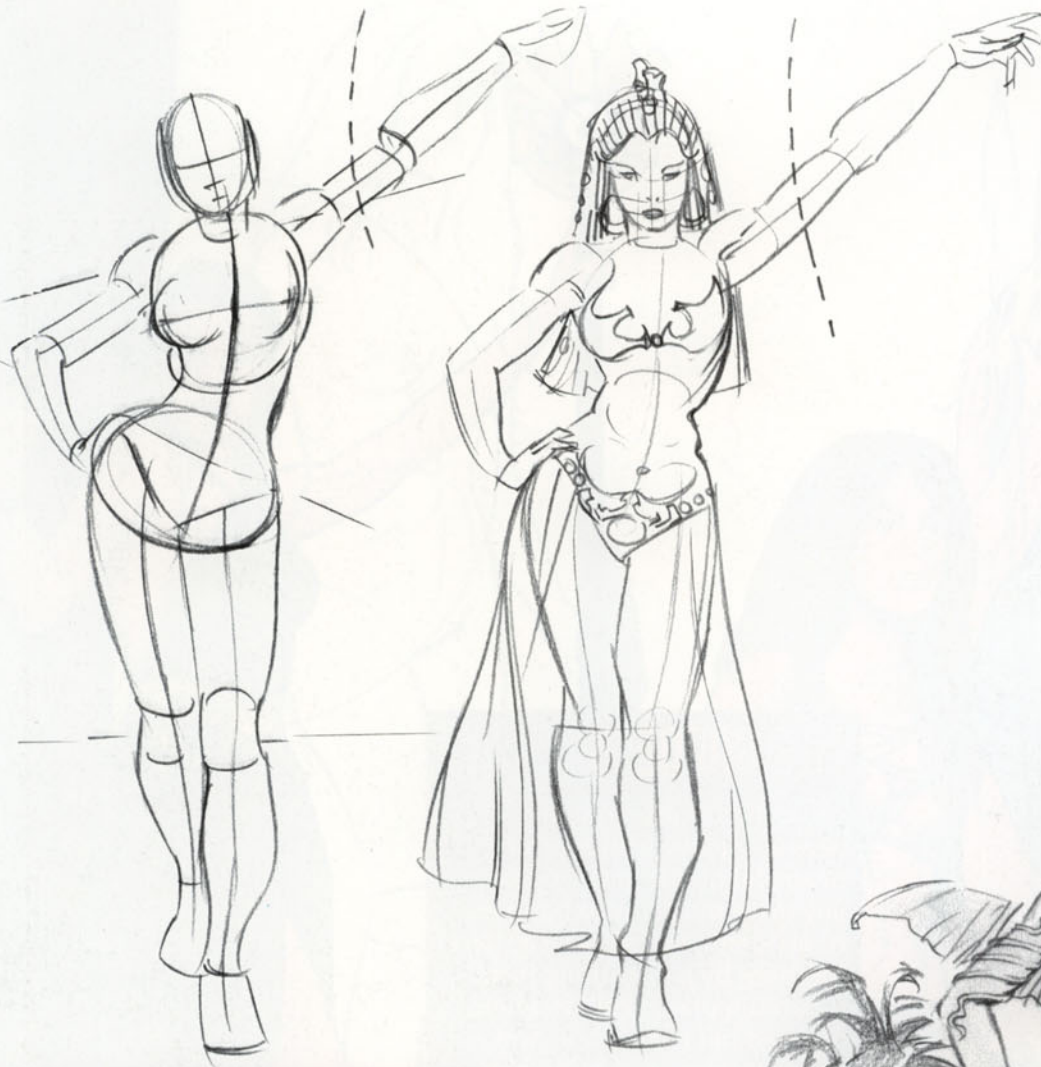
THE EGYPTIAN QUEEN

Similar in attire to the goddess character, the Egyptian queen nonetheless has her own unique qualities. Her eyes are almond shaped. Her earrings are longer and hoop shaped. Her jewelry is Egyptian in nature, with shapes based on the serpent form. And, her headdress is long in the back (this goes for headdresses on men as well, as shown here).

The Egyptian queen has an attractive figure, with strong curves reminiscent of middle eastern belly dancers. The see-through dress is a nice, provocative touch.

THE WARRIOR

A classic comic book genre, "sword and sorcery" takes place in some mythic period in the past. It has elements of knights, magic, and fantasy, and is depicted as a brutal time of battles, heroes, villains, and legends. You'll have to use your imagination in creating armor for women because, in reality, armor for women was never devised; men did all the fighting, so armor was a guy thing. To start, don't cover this character from head to toe in iron like knights of old—you want to show off her figure as much as possible. Your best bet is to design a suit that protects her torso but leaves her arms and legs exposed, and the armored part should be formfitting. Be sure to add a bit of whimsy to the design to maintain the element of fantasy; for example, the wings on her helmet and the intricate designs on her leg plates.

PRINCESS FROM ANOTHER PLANET

Talk about a princess! When she turned 16, her father bought her a starship cruiser while her classmates only got shuttle crafts.

SCUBA GIRL

Yeah, right. You saw a city under water. And I caught a tuna *this* big. Sometimes it's best to keep these things to yourself. Be that as it may, scuba-diving getups are very sexy, both in and out of the water. They're practically painted on the body, and they're also cut very high on the thigh.

AQUA BABE
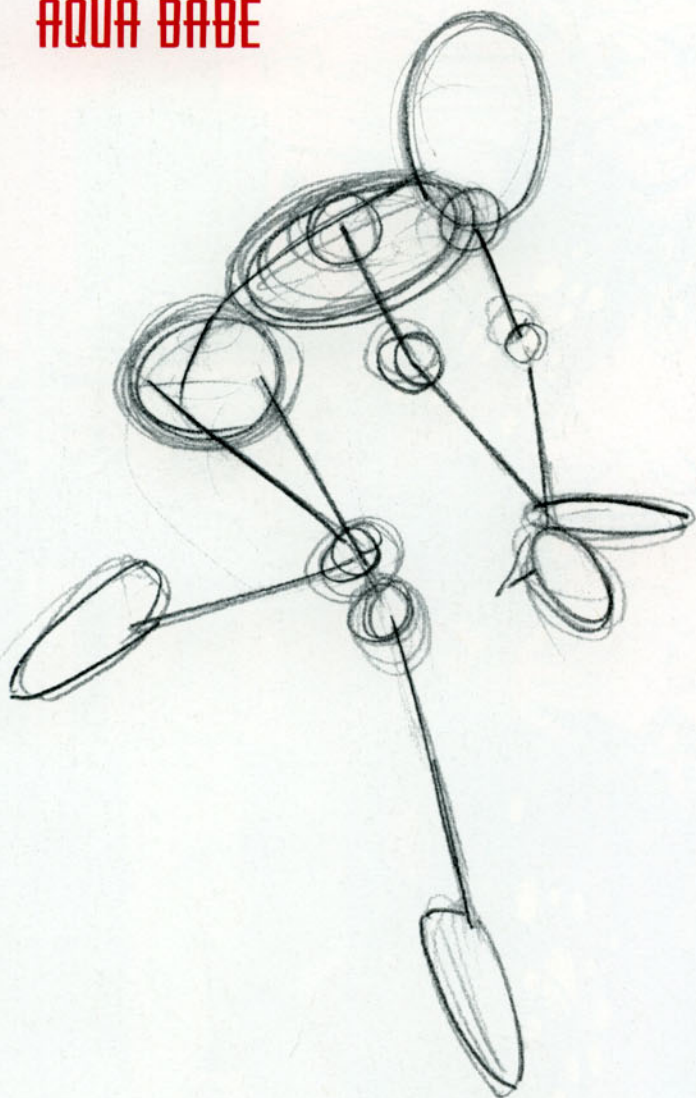
A sea-based creature must be different from an ordinary person, because she ain't one. Scales, ears, and elfin eyes all indicate that this is a *strange* being rather than a *human* being. Be sure her hair floats and flows gently up and away from the face, so that the scene reads as being underwater.

THE FIGHTER PILOT

Real uniforms are not necessarily designed to look good on women. Ever see a sexy postal clerk? So, it's up to you to design a uniform that's as attractive as the character. This pilot has her equipment bag in one hand, a Spartan but stylish outfit that reveals her form, and a tag on her chest that identifies her rank. Her cap also places her in the military. Note that a landing field is a good place to stage an air force scene.

SPACE GALS

Not everything that happens in comic books happens on Earth. Earth is just one polluted little ball of dirt in a galaxy populated by hostile alien creatures. It's Earth versus the "bad guys." (Humans, in case you couldn't guess, are the "good guys.") Note the enemy spaceships overhead, designed to look like sharks with gills—predators of the sky.

THE STARSHIP COMMANDER

Resourceful, unyielding, and courageous. These are the hallmarks of a good starship commander. Space suits are always formfitting and minimalist in design. For reasons yet unknown, most space commanders wear cool boots. Must be a job perk.

MORE SPACE GALS

Come here often? It's amazing the kinds of creatures you meet on your average, methane-filled planetary object. Looks like this alien wasn't expecting anyone for dinner—or worse, maybe he was!
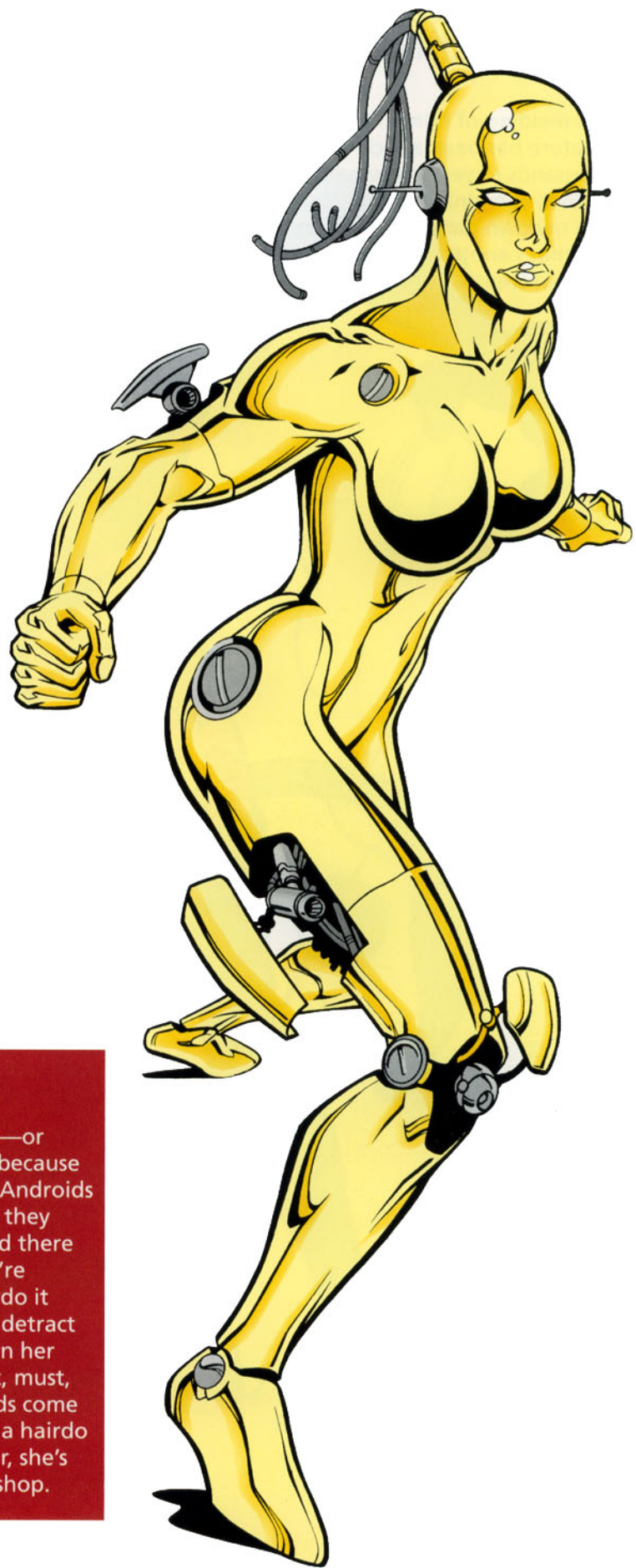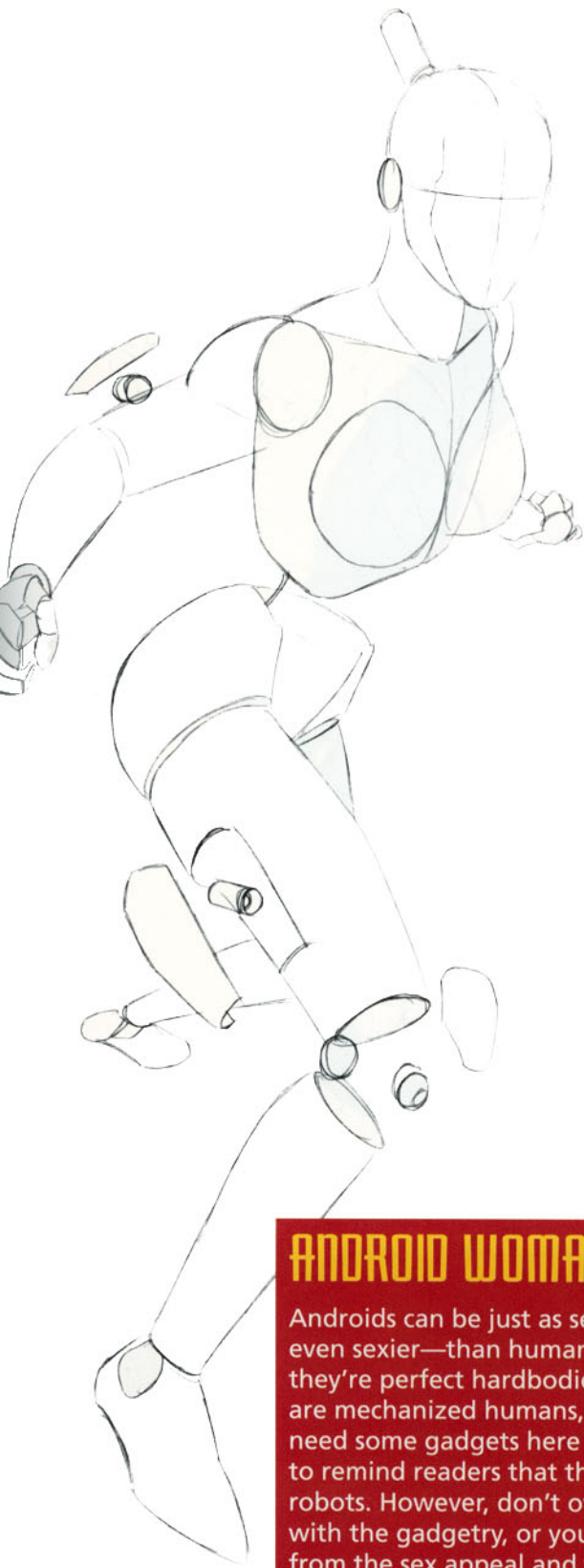
ANDROID WOMAN

Androids can be just as sexy—or even sexier—than humans, because they're perfect hardbodies. Androids are mechanized humans, so they need some gadgets here and there to remind readers that they're robots. However, don't overdo it with the gadgetry, or you'll detract from the sex appeal and turn her into R2D2. The surface must, must, must look shiny—all androids come with a spit shine. Never put a hairdo or clothes on her. Remember, she's a machine. Machines don't shop.

ALIEN CREATURE

The melding of human and animal forms into one creature has been a technique used by artists for thousands of years. Nowadays, artists take it one step further, combining human and alien features. I also do it in my own garage laboratory with surprising results, but that's another book. Using reptiles for reference, you can create any number of eerily sexy alien babes.
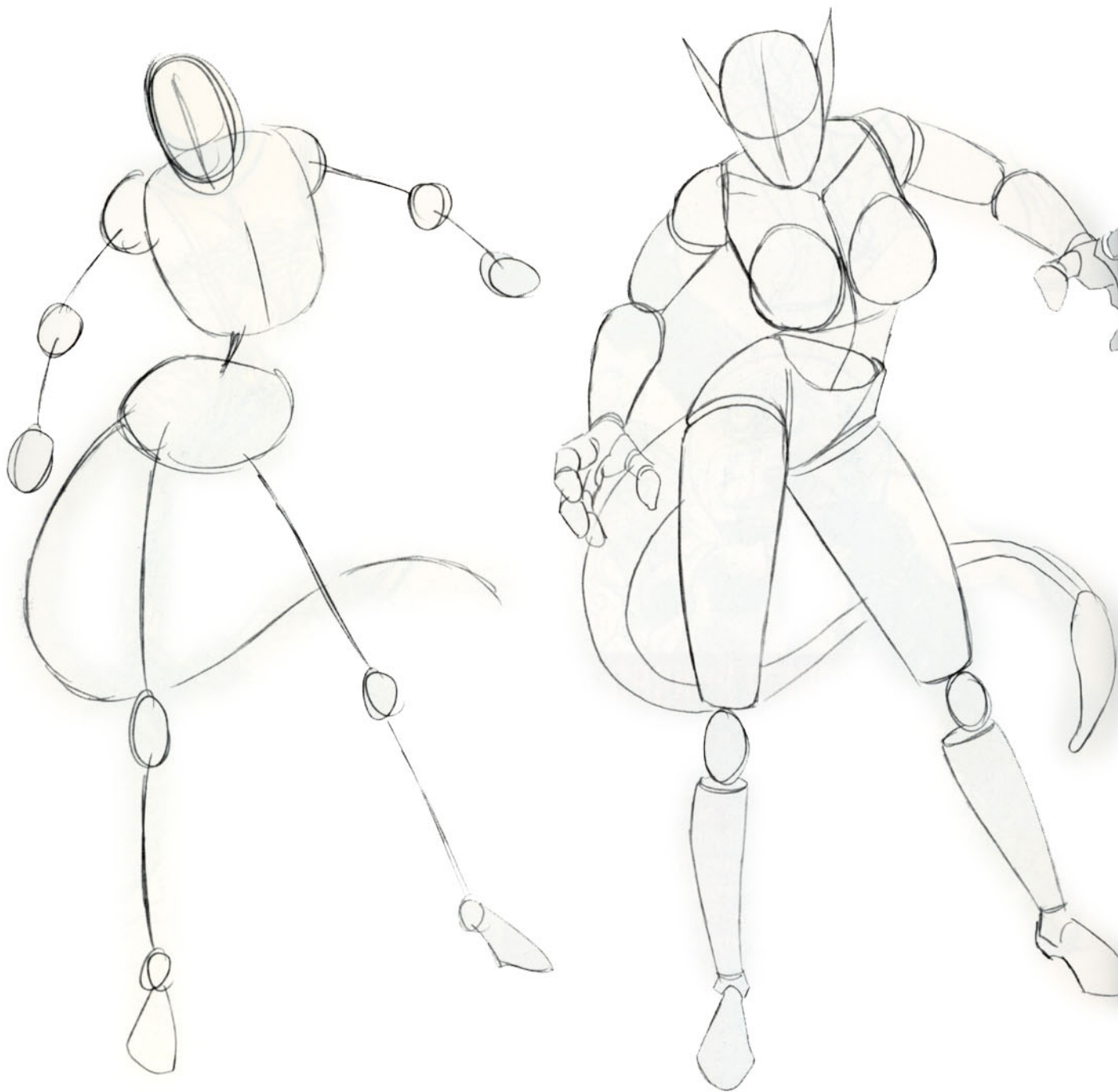
THE NINJA ASSASSIN

On a stealthy mission, this lady wears the outfit of the ninja—karate uniform, hood, and face mask. The boots are specially designed for added traction, with a separation for the big toe. The hair must be in a bun or ponytail—not long and flowing, which would draw attention to this elusive warrior. The ninja is big on the ancient art of hand-to-hand combat; she doesn't carry an Uzi. Plus, she secretly stores many more unseen weapons on her person. Therefore, she always has another trick up her sleeve.

She can make toast just by standing *close to* a loaf of bread! She floats like a specter, imbued with powers far beyond our own. Bursts of energy emanate from her fists and emit powerful flashes of light that act like spotlights, hitting her on both sides and leaving only the middle of her body in shadow. This light/shadow/light combo is an extremely dramatic look.

FANTASTIC SPECIAL EFFECTS

SPECIAL EFFECTS ALLOW THE COMIC BOOK ARTIST, as a storyteller, to create heavy-duty mood and atmosphere. The artist must invent ways to make the characters leap off the page and seem real. So, special effects don't just happen in a story; the artist must stage them carefully so that they have the most impact on the reader.

EXPLOSIONS

Explosions can really rock your world. The blowout on the previous page is one of the most popular types: the explosive blast. It denotes power and energy. It's close to both the reader and the character—the heroine's pose tells us she's flying fast to get the heck out of there! Blast lines give the feeling that the flaming destruction could catch up to her any second. The image also breaks the panel border to show that she's really bookin'. (Note that the smoke cloud is really a *spiral* of smoke.)

ATOMIC INFERNO

This is the other popular explosion type. It decimates a lot of land. It's not the urgent I-gotta-escape-it explosion; it's the I-just-got-outta-there-and-boy-am-I-glad type. Viewed from afar, it casts a harsh, fiery light on the heroine as she strides away from a job well done, her hair blowing in the blast's wind. Note how the explosion serves to backlight her figure, illuminating the edge of her form while throwing the front of her body into deep, sinister shadows.

SMOKE

In comic books, where there's smoke, there's mood and tension. Here are some popular types of smoke.

BACKGROUND

You can use background smoke as a tool to make a stealthy crime fighter pop out against a starry sky.

FOREGROUND

Using foreground smoke, you can frame the important features of a character. Here, her eyes are framed, indicating suspicion and alertness.

AS A TOOL

You can also use smoke (or fog) as a prop or tool. This character is obviously a sorceress, with smoke welling up around her, caressing her. The placement and motion of the smoke tell readers she controls it. She's a powerful figure, capable of manipulating the natural forces of the earth to serve her evil purposes.

RAIN

Slick, wet streets. Windblown downpours. Overcast skies. Ahh, another perfect day in comic book land. Rain can indicate a number of different moods and evoke a variety of feelings, as these panels show. It's a great emotional prop and definitely belongs in your repertoire.

IMPENDING DARKNESS

This scene evokes a strong mood with a dark storm raining down on the city as the heroine waits for her enemy to strike . . . somewhere out there.

PATHOS

You just know something bad's going to happen, and the rain works as a great metaphor for tears and sorrow. It amplifies the raw emotion coming from the character.

URGENCY

In this panel, you can sense
the impending fight, and the
rain makes the environment
even harsher. Plus, placing
the center of the falling rain
at the character's feet creates
the feeling that the reader
is rushing toward her, as
if from the point of view
of her opponent. Her body
language shows that she's
coiled up and ready for a
major fight.

LIGHTNING

Lightning punctuates an important moment in a story. It can be an omen or serve to strengthen the climax of a scene. Here are a few types.
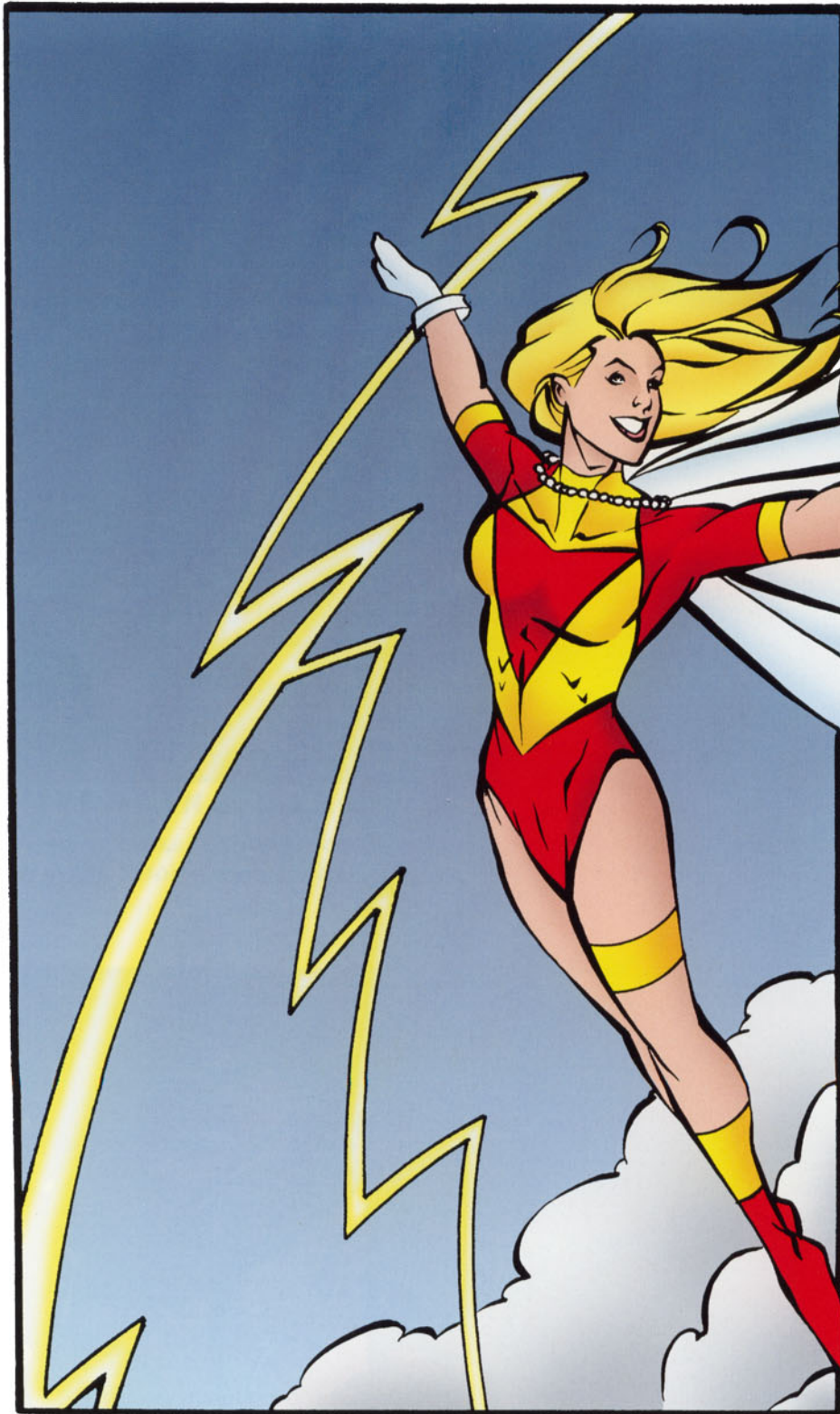
TRIUMPHANT

This panel focuses on the glory of a fighting heroine. The lightning brightens the night sky and illuminates the character as she soars upward. It also frames her body and divides up the panel into interesting shapes.

PORTENTOUS

This is the other side of the coin: the dark, stealthy crime fighter. We're not going for glory here, but it's still an important moment in the story. Perhaps she has just realized that, although the creature who's destroying her city is also capable of destroying her, she has no choice but to fight it. The lightning not only leads the reader's eye to her but also serves to heighten the tension of the moment. In addition, it serves as a light source in an otherwise dark rooftop scene.

THE FULL MOON

Everyone *knows* that weird things happen during a full moon, and comic book artists must know how to use this superstition to their advantage.

FRAMING THE FACE

You can also use the moon to frame your heroine's face and create ultra-dramatic lighting. A few simple craters on the moon's surface add texture and contribute to the feeling of the moon looming large and bright in the night sky. And, for extra motion in a panel, you can throw in some smoke.

AS A LIGHT SOURCE

As a visual effect, the moon is cool because you can change its size, shape, texture, and color. Here, it's a powerful light source that helps create suspense and an eerie mood.

AS A SPOTLIGHT

The moon makes a great spotlight. Here, it emphasizes the character and also creates a feeling of danger and excitement as she leaps from the panel.

WATER

Fountains of water and plumes of cascading waves rising and falling create fantastic, mystical comic book environments. Water special effects should be glorious and huge, like the ocean itself.

CRASHING WAVES

What's the name of the game with water? Motion. The panel opposite offers a striking—yet still— shot of our techno-mermaid. However, the crashing waves around her add motion and vigor to the scene.
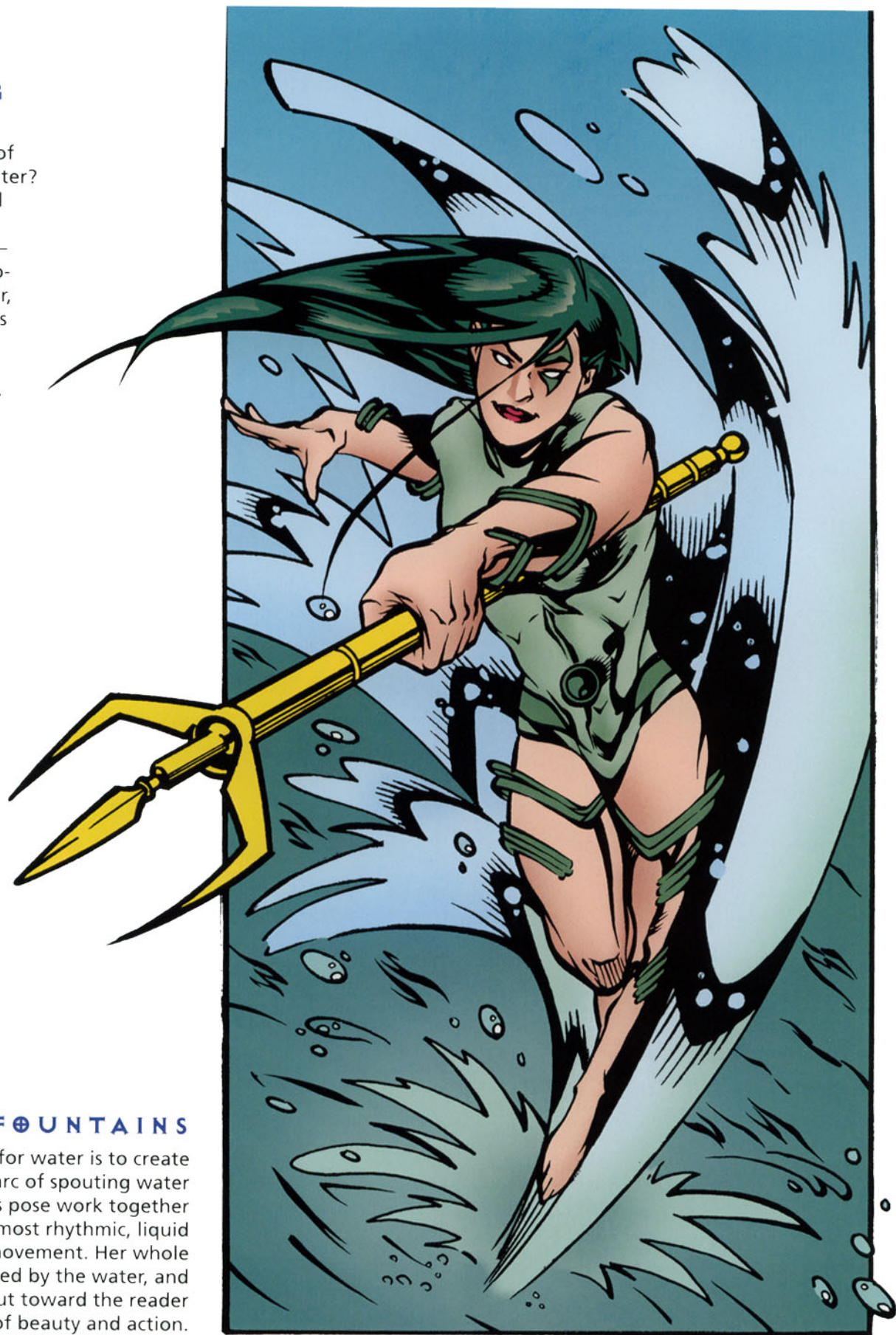
FOUNTAINS

The other big use for water is to create flow. Here, the arc of spouting water and the figure's pose work together to create an almost rhythmic, liquid feel to her movement. Her whole body is surrounded by the water, and she flows out toward the reader in a fountain of beauty and action.

DYNAMIC

COMIC BOOK

LAYOUTS

WHETHER YOU CALL IT STAGING OR LAYOUT, it all boils down to the same thing: When you draw a scene, you must arrange it for maximum impact. The scariest bad gal won't look intimidating if she's just standing on a street corner; but, if she's flying right toward you, that's a different story. Here are the secrets professional artists use for creating dynamic comic book layouts.

VANISHING LINES

Vanishing lines (seen here and on page 107) are invisible guidelines the artist sketches lightly on a drawing to guide the direction, perspective, and placement of everything in the image. As these lines recede into the background, they eventually converge at a single point called the *vanishing point*. Following these vanishing lines will help you position your characters, props, and scenery correctly within your scenes.

There's also something else to consider. Just as things appear smaller as they recede into the distance, the opposite is also true: Things appear bigger as they get closer to us. This can have a huge impact on the viewer. By greatly exaggerating the size of the things in the foreground of your drawings, you can bowl over your readers with your images.

USING DIAGONAL LINES TO CREATE EXCITEMENT

Horizontal lines create a feeling of stability and serenity. This is great if you like to meditate and eat wheat germ cookies. But for comic book fans, it's a bore. We want action, violence, chaos! When you stage a scene along *diagonal* lines, rather than horizontal ones, things suddenly look severe, tense, dramatic. Observe how the vanishing lines of the buildings in this drawing all recede diagonally and should eventually converge somewhere off the lower right side of the page.
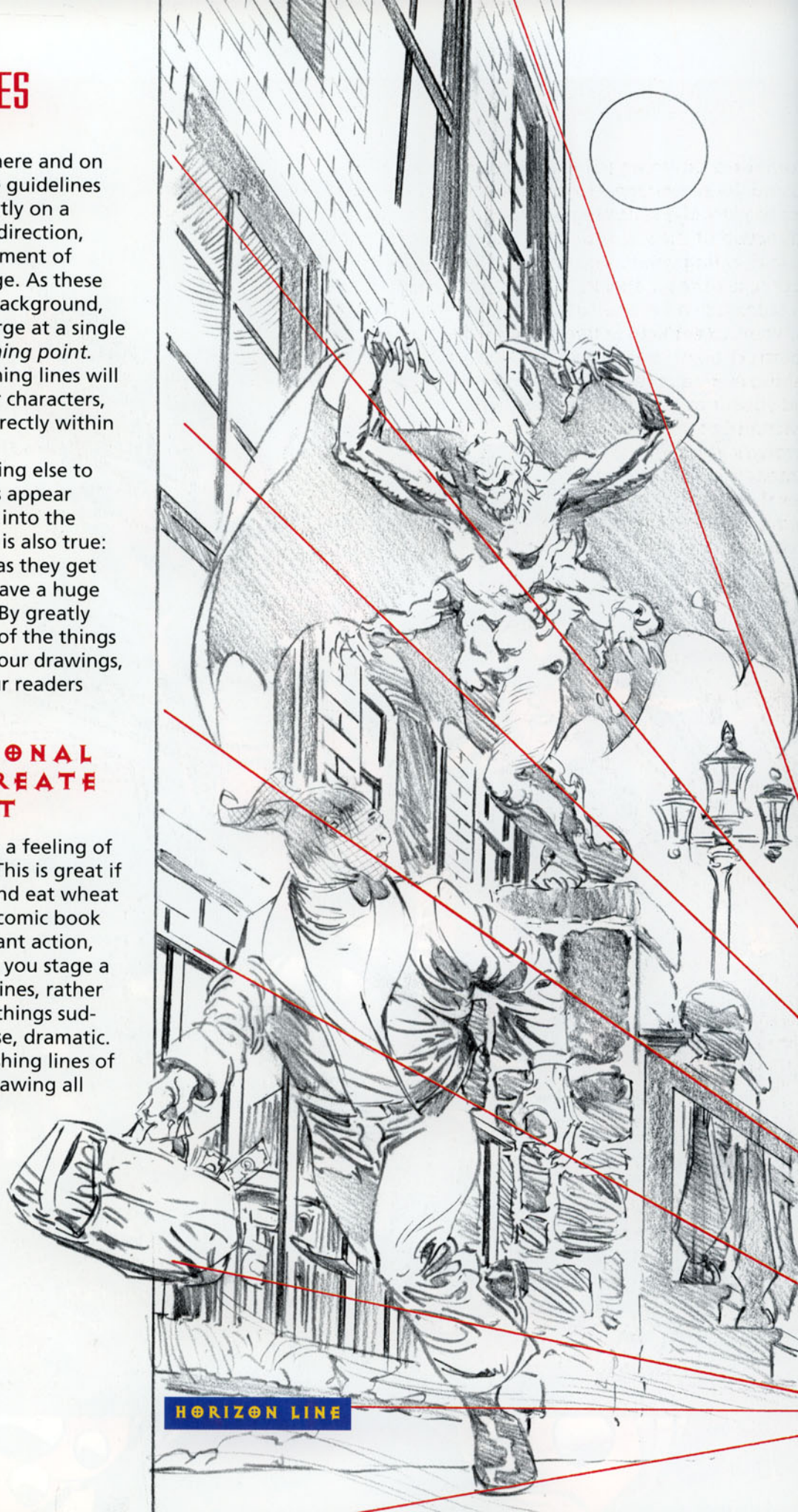
HORIZON LINE

THE VANISHING POINT

You can use a vanishing point—the place where all your vanishing lines converge—to add focus to a scene. You decide where to place the vanishing point, and this determines both the direction of the scene and the placement of the vanishing lines. In deciding where the vanishing point goes, consider the purpose of the scene. In this case, two characters have been captured and are surrounded by an angry mob; so, you'd want to emphasize that the crowd is bent on the destruction of the two victims. Placing the vanishing point above the victims makes the crowd appear to converge toward them. The victims become the focal point of the crowd's attention, and this heightens the pressure and makes the threat of the mob that much more palpable and imminent.

In this illustration, the vanishing point is located off the page.
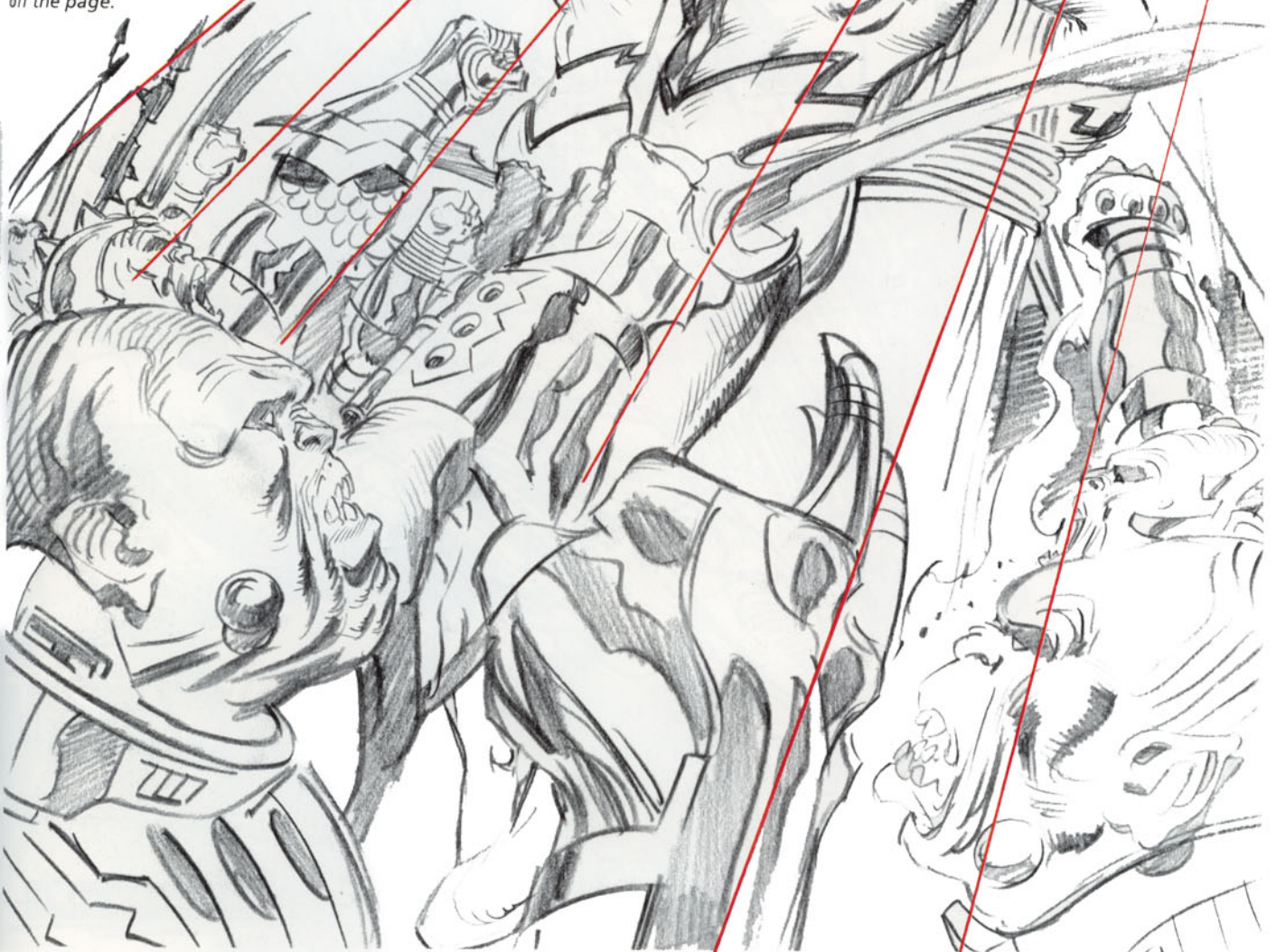
VANISHING LINES AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

Explosions become more awesome if you use vanishing lines to direct the blast. The vanishing point becomes the origin of the explosion, with everything else in the scene emanating from that spot, along the vanishing lines.

A NOTE ABOUT THE HORIZON LINE

To understand and organize your composition, it's a good idea to identify the horizon line (where the sky and ground meet). The vanishing point usually appears on the horizon line, but you can place it in other spots to create added drama, as on the previous page.

HORIZON LINE

VANISHING POINT

LAYERING TO CREATE DEPTH

In terms of creating a dynamic layout for this scene, the spaceships are necessary because they alone act as a gauge to show just how far away the planet surface is from the astronauts in the foreground. The spaceships all fall on vanishing lines heading toward the vanishing point on the planet surface. But equally important, the spaceships are also *layered,* appearing one after another, which provides visual stepping stones for judging spatial relationships.
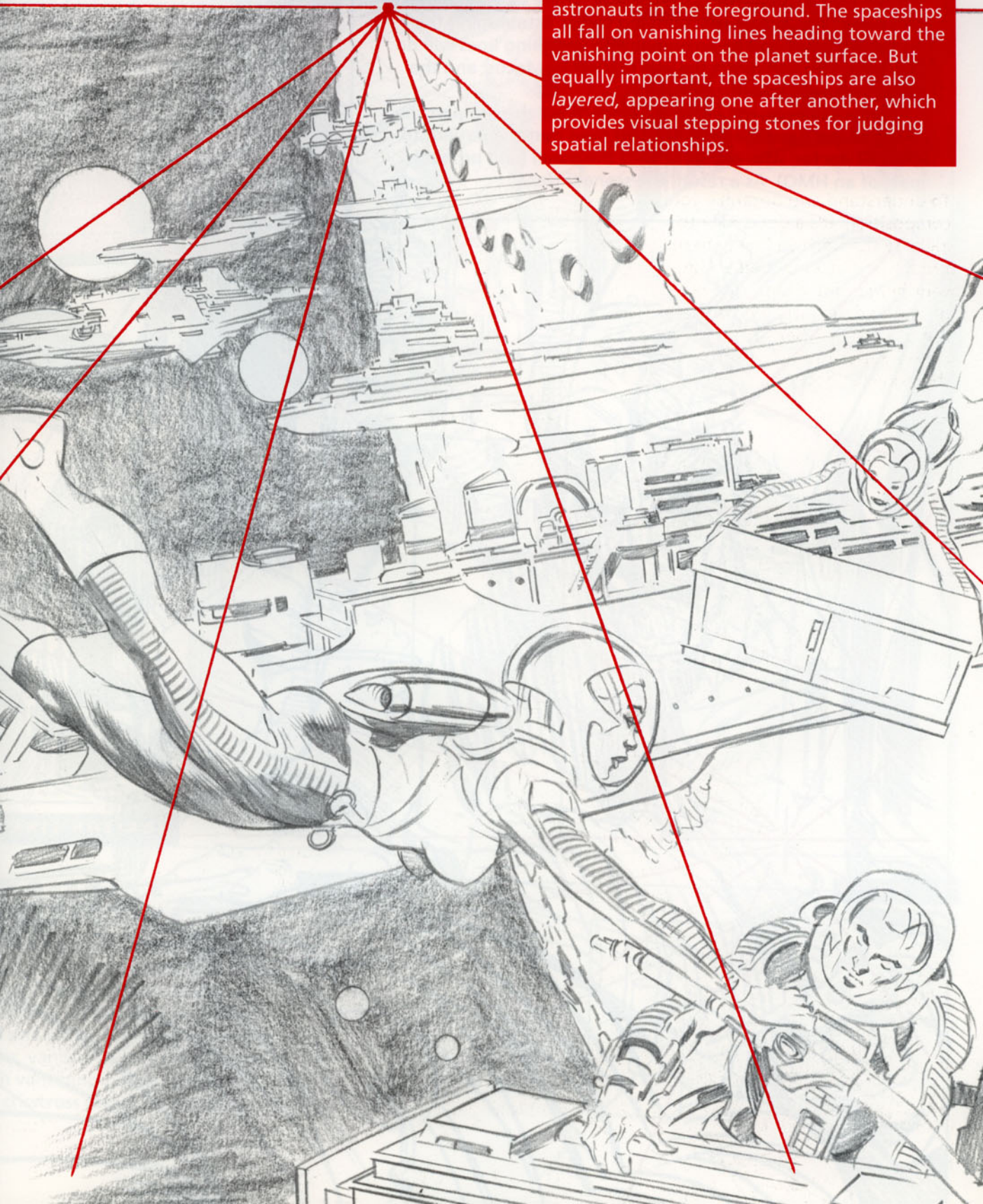
CLARIFYING A CLUTTERED SCENE

Say you draw a comic book panel showing an evil scientist. You draw all the laboratory gizmos and medical stuff, and it looks great. But, it also looks cramped. And suddenly you realize that the scene has no focus. Your masterpiece has turned into a collage of clutter! Relax. There's a way to make this work. You just need a unifying factor. Establishing the vanishing point and its accompanying vanishing lines will do the trick. This will direct the eye to a central focus, and the scene naturally prioritizes itself.

In this example, the vanishing lines direct the eye past the nurse to the bandaged patient and then past the patient to the evil doctor, who is the focus of the panel (and probably part of an HMO). As a result, the scene is clear.
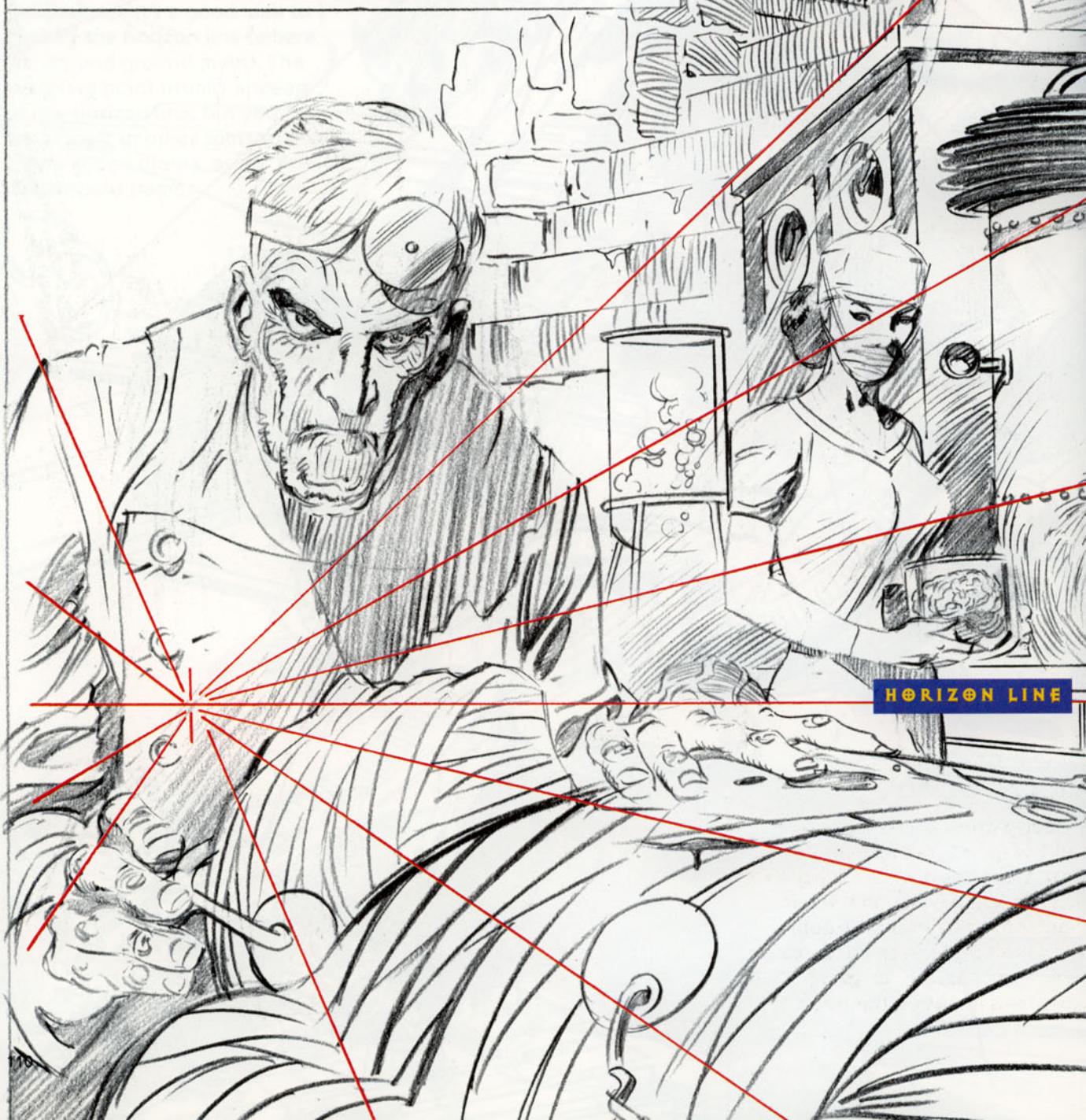
HORIZON LINE

USING FLOOR PATTERNS TO UNIFY A SCENE

Nothing in this illustration comes at the reader with great force. This type of panel serves to remind readers of what's going on in a scene. It's a *pacing shot* in which the characters ponder their fate. (Should they save the creature held captive in the tank or kill it while they still have the chance?) To counter the relative calm of this kind of image, add interest with a floor pattern. Here, the floor pattern creates a unifying element with the use of converging vanishing lines.
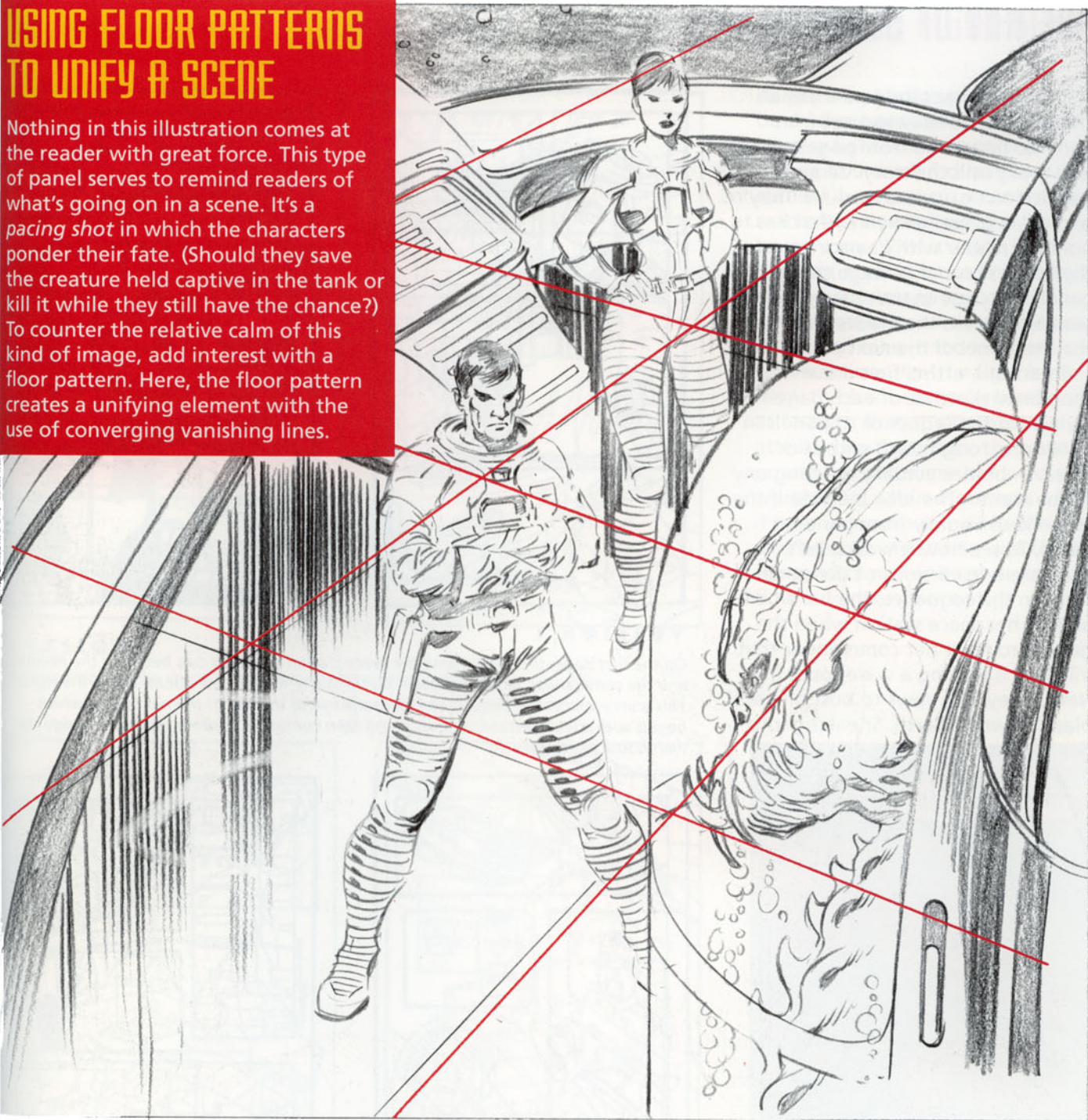
TWO-POINT PERSPECTIVE

The floor pattern above makes use of two-point perspective. This is when there are two vanishing points in a scene—one on the left and one on the right. In the above scene, vanishing lines converge to both vanishing points, creating the crisscross effect on the floor.

LEFT V.P.

RIGHT V.P.
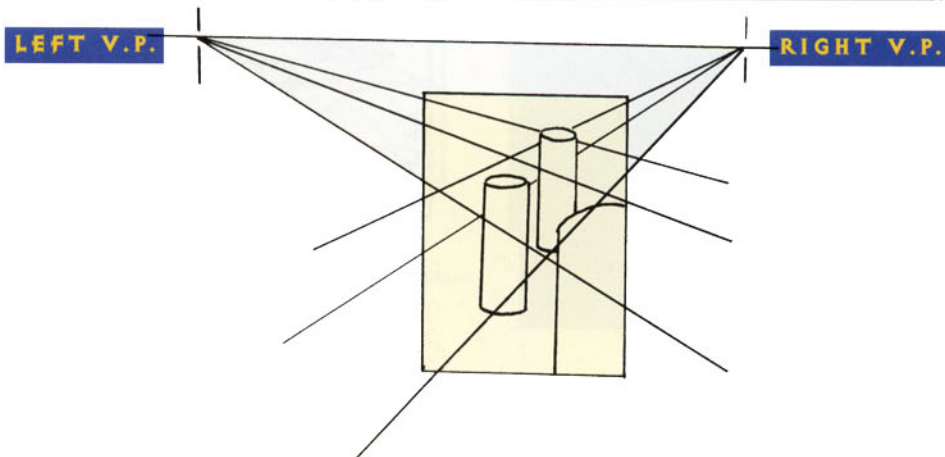
THE ART OF STORYTELLING

It's not just what's inside the panels that counts. It's how you get from panel to panel and from page to page that really tells the story. Comic book panels don't exist in a vacuum. They're part of an overall storyline that has to hold the reader with its pacing and rhythm. It's crucial to stage the last panel on a page in such a way that it seamlessly leads the reader's eye to the first panel of the next page.

To do this, artists first draw thumbnail sketches of each page—laying out the sequence of panels in miniature, rough form with stick figures—before actually drawing any of the scenes. The idea is to see if the story flows visually from panel to panel. To see how it works, let's compare two versions of the same story. In this sequence, the heroine is aboard her space station when she gets word from her commander that Villain X is looting a warehouse in New Jersey. She vows to bust him and blasts down to Earth. Sneaking into the warehouse unseen, she spies Villain X, who also spots her. A confrontation and fight ensue.
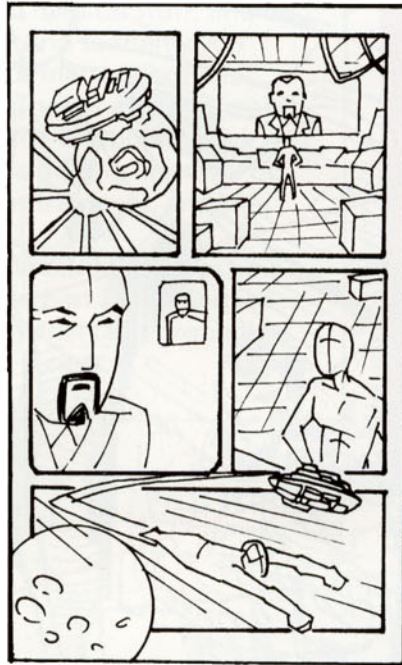
THE HEROINE

VERSION 1

On the first page, the artist shows the space station and then cuts between the heroine and the commander. In the last panel on the page, the heroine zooms off to the right. This is very important, because she leads the eye to the top of the next page, which begins with a wide, establishing shot and then continues to show the action inside the warehouse with Villain X.
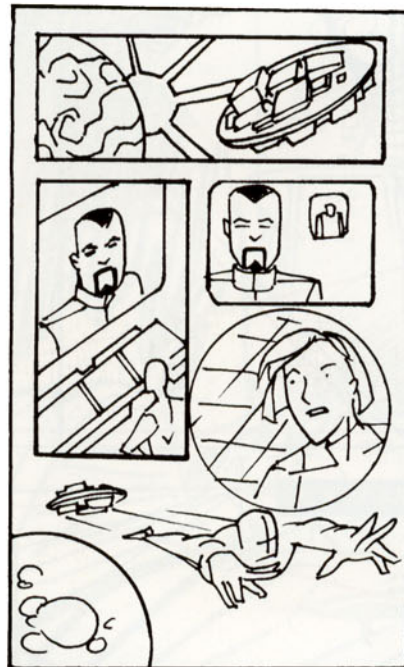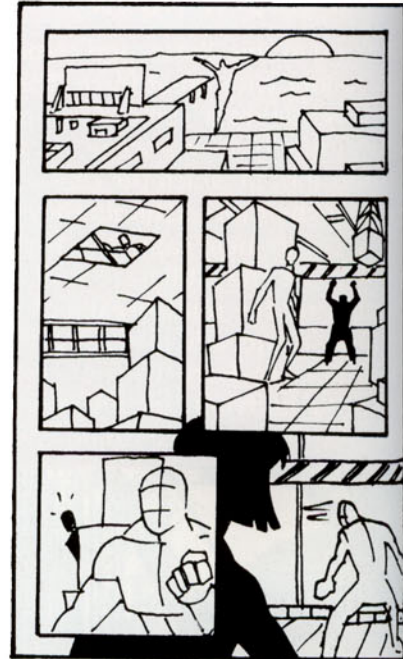
VERSION 2

This sequence shows off a little more scenery in setting up the locations, which are important for this type of story—one in which the main character must fly from one location to another. However, the heroine still flies out to the right of the last panel on the first page, leading readers to the top of the next page.

As with any section of a comic book, there are various ways to stage a fight scene. In combat scenes, you don't indicate as much scenery, because you want the reader's eye to fly over the fast-paced scene. This is unlike the detailed approach used to illustrate the previous scene (opposite), in which we wanted readers to slow down and take in the locations and conversations. For the fight scene here, the basic story elements go as follows: first, the heroine is attacked by the villain; then, she powers up and slams him across the warehouse; when she checks to see if he's unconscious, he lifts the crate overhead to smash her; and finally, she sends a power burst across the floor and takes him out.

VERSION 1

This rendition of the scene is more basic, with simple panels.

VERSION 2

This version uses more advanced panel design. (Note: You should keep your thumbnail sketches loose; you're just jotting down different ideas and seeing which shots look the most dynamic. At this stage, you have the freedom to cut, paste, erase, and rearrange.)
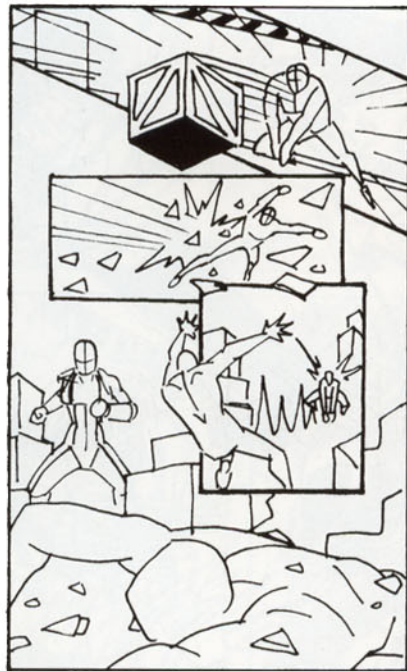
THE VILLAIN

THE CHASE SEQUENCE PANEL BY PANEL

Now let's move beyond thumbnail sketches to flesh out four pages that will constitute an entire chase sequence. This section should have rhythm, pacing, tension, and action. Note the panel designs, choices of shots, and how each panel sets up the next. The sequence starts big, grabbing the reader's attention with a *splash panel*—one huge panel that fills the page. The heroine is depicted from behind, which indicates that she's being chased. The readers have, in this case, the same point of view as the bad guys who are chasing her.

The second page begins with a shot of the bad guys' feet running to the right; this leads the eye naturally to the next panel, an overhead view that gives us the feeling the heroine is being watched.
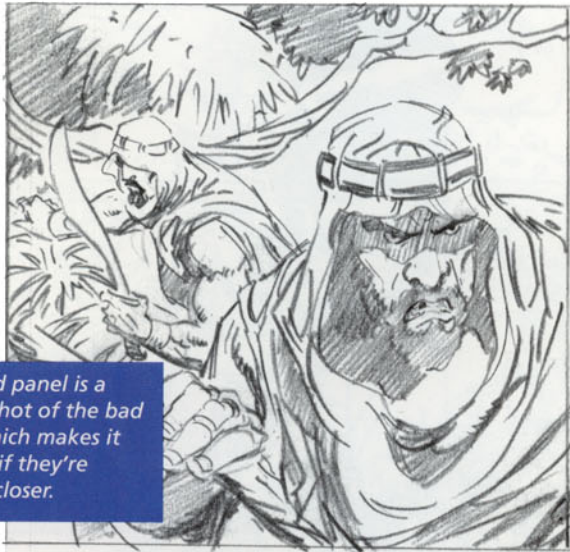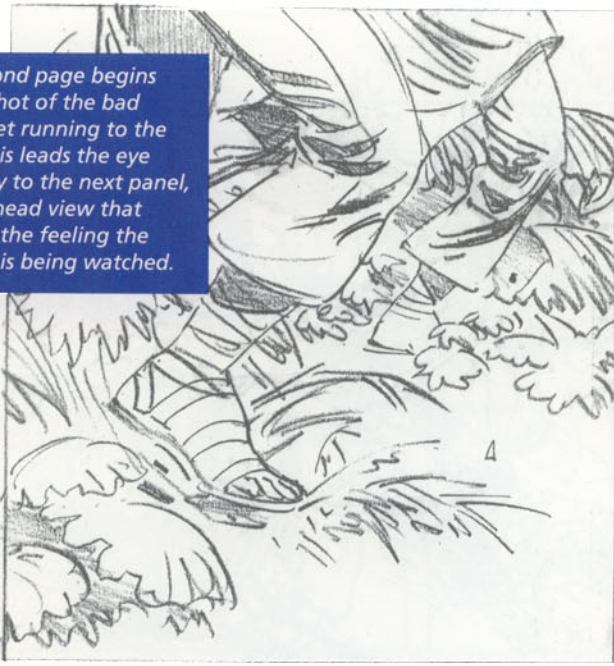
The third panel is a tighter shot of the bad guys, which makes it seem as if they're getting closer.
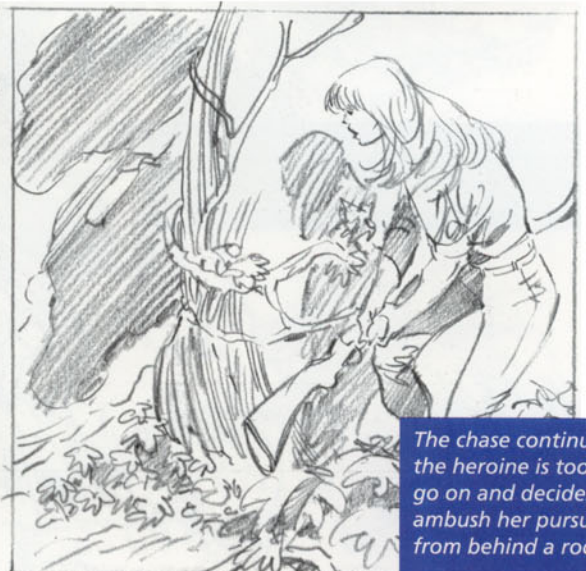
The chase continues until the heroine is too tired to go on and decides to ambush her pursuers from behind a rock.

The first panel here is a stunner: Instead of overtaking her pursuers, the heroine is ambushed by one of them. This is a double switch.

She turns, lands a blow, then picks up her rifle and finishes the job by clubbing him over the head with it.

She should be safe. But hey, where's the other guy? The close-up shot of her face is a nice change of pace, visually, and lets you know she's in trouble again.

The last panel is a pull-back-and-reveal shot: The bad guy may have her, but look what's coming after him—a creature rising up from the swamp.

Note the dramatic opening panel on this page. (All opening panels should be "grabbers" because if you can get readers to begin a page, you can generally keep them reading to the end of it.) The attack by the creature gives the heroine enough time to escape, she makes it to her horse, and the last panel is a large panoramic shot, which punctuates the end of the sequence.

DESIGNING A BRILLIANT COVER

The cover sells the comic book. To get readers to pick up the book, a cover must stand out among dozens of competing titles. It has to be exciting—but that alone won't do it. It also must clearly establish the main character so that people will recognize which comic book it is. Plus, it must be dramatic so that people will want to read the book to find out what happens. In addition, the image must leave enough room for the title— but not so much room that there's dead space.

The example here is a good cover: The main character is in danger. We can see her clearly. The bad guy is about to pounce. But, she also has a gun. Will she fire it in time? Better buy the book to find out.

Here are the typical initial steps an artist goes through before deciding on a cover idea. The artist roughs out a few versions, and the editor notes his or her comments on them. At this stage, the artist throws a bunch of ideas at the editor. When the editor likes one, the artist then refines it and sends it back for more comments until he or she gets the go-ahead to do the finished version. Here are some typical editor's comments.

CAN'T SEE THE GIRL
— ED

LOOKS TOO MUCH LIKE AN INTERIOR PANEL
— ED

SHE'S TOO INACTIVE
— ED

GOOD POSE, BUT LEAVE ROOM FOR TITLE
— ED

GOOD. BETTER IF YOU CAN GIVE HIM A WEAPON, TOO.
— ED.

PERF!
— ED

TRICKS

of the

TRADE

*Y*OU'RE DRAWING. You're getting good at it. You want to keep growing as an artist. You may even want to set up a studio in your home, get published, buy a yacht, and sail to Bermuda. So, what should you do next? Here are some tried-and-true pointers.

TRIED AND TRUE POINTERS

SKETCHING FROM LIFE

Whether you take your sketchpad down to the mall or enroll in an actual life-drawing class, the most important thing for you to learn to draw is *people*. All types of people. Young, old, good-looking, weird-looking, even scary. And drawing from life is the best way to do this.

Carry your sketchbook with you. It's a simple trick used by just about all professional artists at some point in their careers. Take it to the park, to a rock concert, to a ball game, anyplace there are crowds you can observe. Fill up dozens of sketchbooks, and keep them for reference.

LIFE-DRAWING CLASSES

Drawing from life won't help you with techniques such as layout, costume design, idealization of features, or some of the other comic book-related instruction provided in this book. But, what it will do is give you a solid foundation in anatomy. Many artists continue to hone their skills throughout their careers by taking occasional life-drawing classes. Chances are there's a place near you that offers classes. You don't have to enroll full time; many colleges and art schools offer continuing education classes at night, once a week. There are also local art centers in many towns.
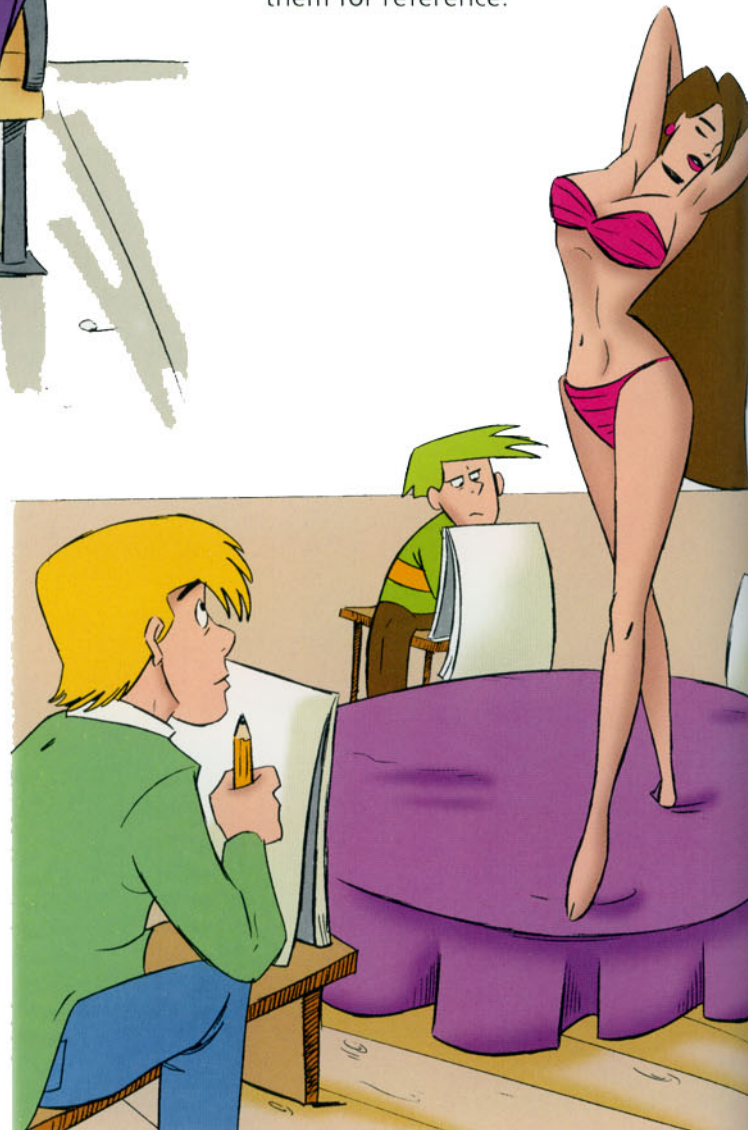
A COMFORTABLE DRAWING DESK

Sounds obvious, doesn't it? It isn't. You sit at a desk in an art store for 30 seconds. It's neat looking but not that comfortable. However, the salesperson assures you it's adjustable; so you buy it, confident that when you get home, you can get it into the perfect position.

As a professional comic book artist, you'll spend many hours a day at that desk. Don't buy it before you're sure it feels good *while you're still in the store*. Make all adjustments right then and there, and spend some time sitting at it. Take along a list of all the things you want in a desk, and see if that model can handle it. Things to consider: Where will my electric pencil sharpener go? Can a lightbox fit on it? Does it have enough built-in spaces for pens, pencils, and rulers? And most importantly, does it wobble when you lean on it? The wobble is the kiss of death.

PICTORIAL REFERENCE FILES

It's a good idea to keep files of visual reference materials on things you might need to draw but come across only infrequently. For example, you might see a magazine article about a cool, amphibious water vehicle, and clip it out and file it. Then, if you ever need to draw something like that, you won't have to waste half a day going to the library for reference.

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINES

IDEAS FOR OUTRAGEOUS COSTUMES

Go to a large newsstand that has an extensive selection of international magazines. Look at the European women's fashion magazines. The models are very cutting edge, very weird, but sexy. Notice what the runway models are wearing: wild designs and signature pieces never really intended for the consumer but meant to please fashion industry insiders and press. These outfits can give you ideas, because comic book women also wear wild, sexy clothes. European magazines can be expensive, because they're imported and have a limited circulation in the United States, but they're a good buy for your reference files.

KEEP CURRENT

Things are always changing. Know your market. Know the trends. Know the names of current comic book artists, writers, editors, and publishers. When you buy a comic book, read the credits. Follow other people's careers in the industry. It will give you ideas and make you more conversant with the pros in your field. If an editor is looking for a drawing style like so-and-so, you'll know who so-and-so is and won't need it explained to you.
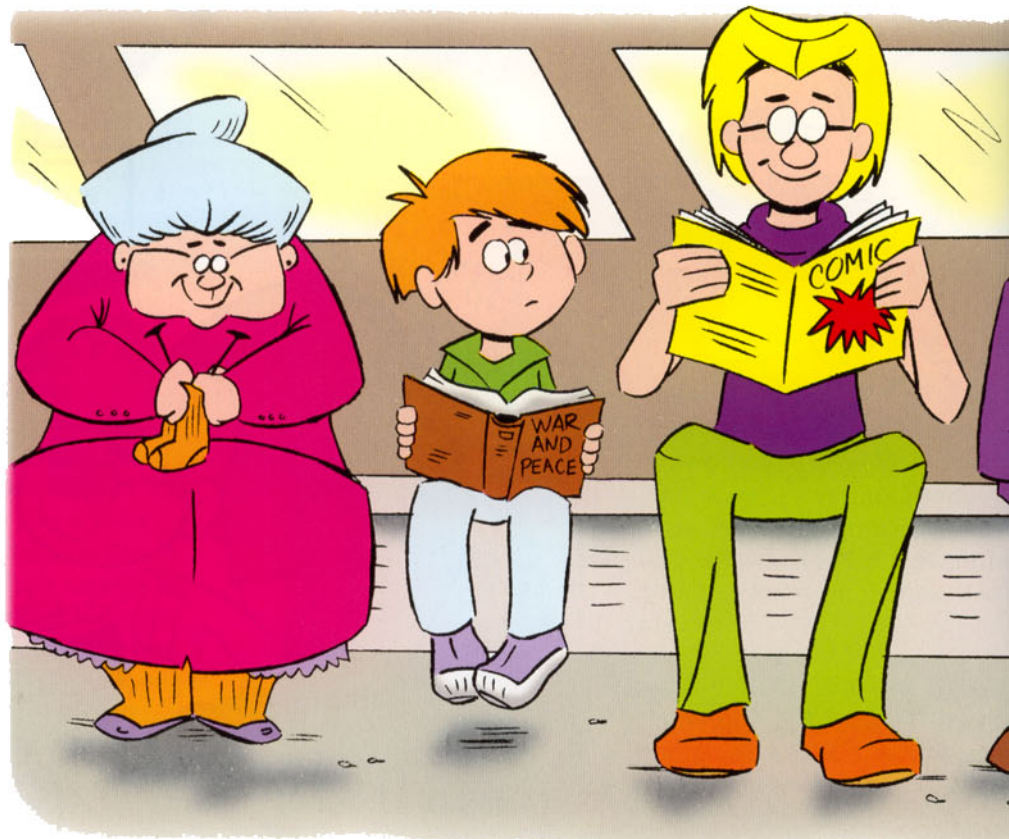
DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH YOUR WORK

Obviously, your work will suffer if you're such a perfectionist that you feel compelled to fine-tune every drawing you begin. Understand that everything you draw won't be perfect, nor should it be. You should feel free to make mistakes, because in those mistakes will lie some flashes of brilliance. And rest assured that even when you feel a drawing is perfect, your editor will want changes and more changes. And you'll have to make them. So you can get jazzed about your drawings, but don't fall in love with them until they go to the printer.
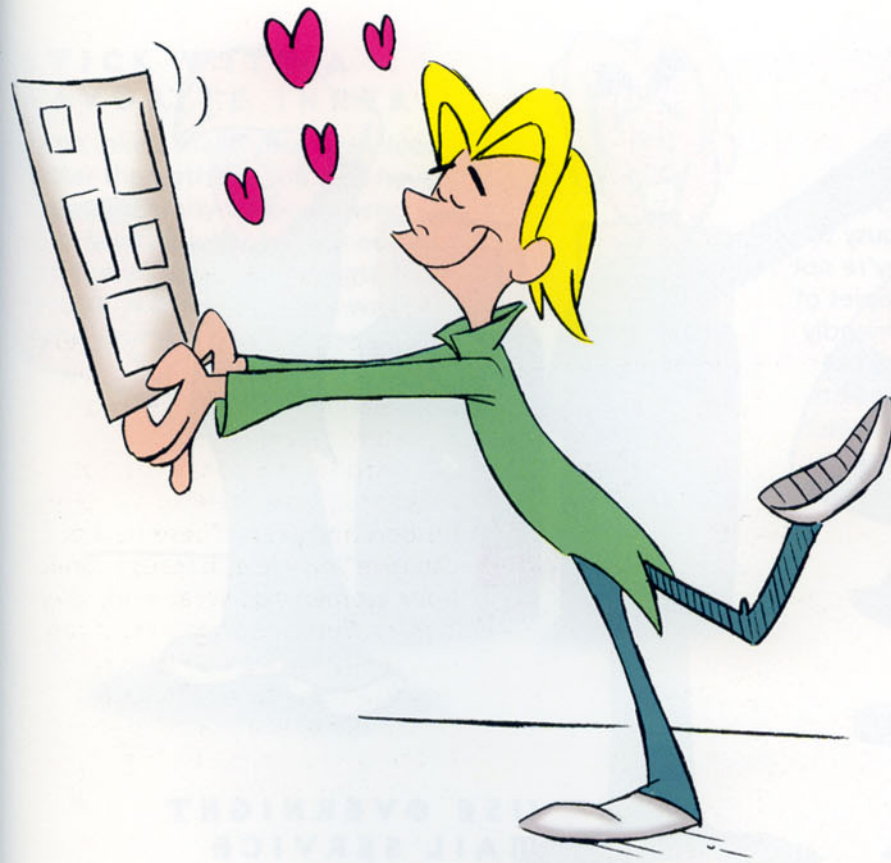
UPDATE YOUR PORTFOLIO

Always replace the good drawings in your portfolio with better ones. Also update your portfolio if your style needs to become more contemporary to fit in with a current trend, or if the drawings no longer represent the type of work for which you're becoming known. Think of your portfolio as a living, breathing thing that should be constantly changing.

USE THE PHONE

When you publish something noteworthy, make phone calls to apprise editors of what you're doing. If you can take them out to lunch, so much the better. If they're too busy to take your calls, or you sense they're not that approachable, mail them copies of your newest stuff with a brief, friendly note. Keep yourself in their mind but not in their face. Don't be pushy. Also, remember that many executives switch jobs, so unless you keep in contact, you'll *lose* contact.

USE OVERNIGHT MAIL SERVICE

When you send your work to a publisher as part of a contracted job, you have to send originals. However, you don't want your artwork damaged or lost in the mail. So, send originals via an overnight delivery service. I really, really recommend against sending anything by snail mail, because if there's an unexplained delay, or if something gets lost, it has been my experience that it's extremely difficult to track it down and retrieve it.

FILE YOUR TAXES

If you're working as an independent contractor "for hire" as most freelance comic book artists do, you're going to have to file your taxes quarterly rather than annually. Check with an accountant so that you don't fall behind and have to pay penalties.
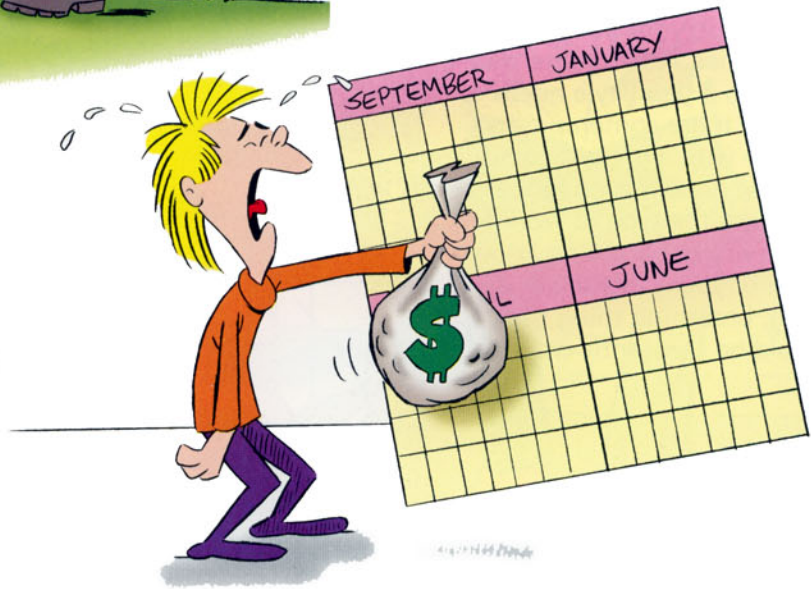
STICK WITH A FAVORITE INKER

Some inkers make your work look better than others. You may have the opportunity to recommend your favorite inker to your editor, and the inker can reciprocate the gesture. It'll help you find work and make your work look its best.

INVESTIGATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN ANIMATION

There are many animated television shows that feature action-hero characters, and these shows need animators who can draw in a comic book style. Never rule out any possibilities. Check the credits at the beginning or end of a show to find the name of the studio. Call them up and ask them to direct you to the person responsible for hiring animators and storyboard artists for that particular show.

MERCHANDISING

Much business is done by licensing characters. Artists are constantly needed to illustrate everything from toy boxes to cards to games with action figures on them.

$19.95 too

COMIC BOOK PUBLISHERS

Here are the names and addresses of many of the top comic book publishers today. When sending submissions, address them to the Submissions Editor and include a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of your artwork. (For details on exactly what to submit, see the interviews starting on page 130.) You can also request a copy of a company's submissions guidelines before sending anything in.

ACCLAIM COMICS
One Acclaim Plaza
Glen Cove, NY 11542
www.acclain.net/comics/submit.html
Website lists submissions guidelines.

ARCHIE COMIC PUBLICATIONS
325 Fayette Avenue
Mamaroneck, NY 10543
(914) 381-5155
www.archiecomics.com

CHANTING MONKS STUDIOS
360-AW Merrick Road, Suite 350
Valley Stream, NY 11580
(516) 285-5545
www.mediasi.com/chantingmonks

CHAOS COMICS
7655 East Gelding Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
(888) CHAOS13, ext. 556
www.chaoscomics.com

DARK HORSE COMICS
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222
www.darkhorse.com
Website lists submissions guidelines.

DC COMICS
1700 Broadway
New York, NY 10019
www.dccomics.com/guides/guides.htm
Website lists submissions guidelines.

DISNEY COMICS
500 S. Buena Vista Street
Burbank, CA 91521
(818) 567-5739
www.westbrabant.net/dcw

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS
7563 Lake City Way
Seattle, WA 98155
(206) 524-1967
www.fantagraphics.com

GLADSTONE PUBLISHING
P.O. Box 2079
Prescott, AZ 86302
(602) 776-1300

HARRIS PUBLICATIONS
1115 Broadway, 8th floor
New York, NY 10010
(212) 807-7100

IMAGE COMICS
1440 North Harbor Road, #305
Fullerton, CA 92635
(714) 871-8802

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016
attn: Darren Auck
www.marvelcomics.com/community
Website lists submissions guidelines.

SIRIUS ENTERTAINMENT, INC.
P.O. Box 128
Stanhope, NJ 07874
(201) 347-6611
sirius.edgeglobal.com

TOP COW PRODUCTIONS, INC.
1223 Wilshire Boulevard #496
Santa Monica, CA 90401
(310) 286-0758
www.topcow.com/topcow/tcp/faqidx.html
Website lists submissions guidelines.

ADDITIONAL ADDRESS RESOURCE

In addition to the addresses listed here, the Indy Magazine Internet database is an excellent source of comic book publishers and industry addresses. You can find it at:

www.nexilis-hobbies.com/indy world/reference/industry.shtml

Note that industry addresses change, so it's best to see if a company has its own website and then use the address listed there.

RECOMMENDED READING

If you're looking to keep current on the comics business, refine your drawing skills, and learn new techniques, here's the master recommended reading list.

MAGAZINES

Comic Book Profiles
As You Like It Publications
Dept. W
P.O. Box 2055
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
www.comicsfun.com/cbprofiles
In-depth coverage of industry professionals.

The Comics
Robin Snyder
2284 Yew Street Road, #B6
Bellingham, WA 98226
www.comicsfun.com/thecomics/index.htm
Contains information from comic book publishers, artists, and writers, and covers upcoming industry trends while also providing a history of the comics business.

Comics Buyer's Guide
Krause Publications
700 E. State Street
Iola, WI 54990
www.krause.com/comics/bg
For professionals and fans alike, features news about comics and profiles of comic book artists and writers.

Wizard
Wizard Press
PO Box 656
Yorktown Heights, NY 10598
www.wizardworld.com
All the latest on comic book characters, publishing, industry news, artists, and writers.

BOOKS

Chelsea, David. *Perspective! For Comic Book Artists.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications,1997.

Haines, Lurene. *The Business of Comics.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications,1998.

Hale, Robert Beverly. *Albinus on Anatomy.* Mineola (New York): Dover Publications, 1989.

Hart, Christopher. *How to Draw Animation.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1997.

Hart, Christopher. *How to Draw Comic Book Bad Guys and Gals.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications,1998.

Hart, Christopher. *How to Draw Comic Book Heroes and Villains.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications,1995.

Hogarth, Burne. *Dynamic Figure Drawing.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1996.

The Interviews

HERE THEY ARE! Invaluable, exclusive interviews with two top comic book editors: Bobbie Chase at world-renowned Marvel Comics; and Renae Geerlings at prestigious independent comics publisher Top Cow Productions. They reveal exactly how to land a job in the industry, as well as what to put in—and leave out of—your portfolio. They explain what they look for when hiring artists. And, they also describe the common mistakes aspiring artists make and tell you how to avoid making them. Everything you need to know about the business, and how to get started working in it, is here.

STRONG WOMEN

AN INTERVIEW WITH BOBBIE CHASE, EDITOR, MARVEL COMICS

Chris Hart: Tell me about your background and how you came to work at Marvel, as well as about some of the comic books you've worked on.
Bobbie Chase: I've been at Marvel for 14 years. It was basically my first real job out of college. I was an English major with a theater minor. I did theater design, which is actually very applicable when it comes to this job.

I didn't know anything about comic books. The person who hired me thought that this was a good thing, because sometimes people come in with preconceived notions about the characters and with 20 years of love of comic books, and they want to see a specific thing or have stories go a certain way. So, I came in here really as a novice, not knowing who the Fantastic Four were or any of the characters, having heard of Spider-Man, basically. That was it.

I've worked on just about every major Marvel character. Right now I'm working on *Fantastic Four, Iron Man, Captain America,* and *Warlock.* I edited *The Incredible Hulk* for 10 years.

CH: I loved all those characters when I was a kid. But something was almost especially dangerous about The Hulk.
BC: Yes, well, Hulk has always been an incredibly difficult character. In fact, for years a lot of people wouldn't consider writing *The Incredible Hulk,* because it was hard to think of a major character —almost a protagonist—who was almost a villain in the series. He could be very hard to play. He could be very hard to make sympathetic. But of course, he's also a lot of fun because he's a lot of kids' first power fantasy.

CH: How important is it for a comic book artist to be able to draw very attractive comic book women?
BC: Very attractive comic book women *and men.* There's an exaggeration on both ends. The physical attributes of male and female characters are
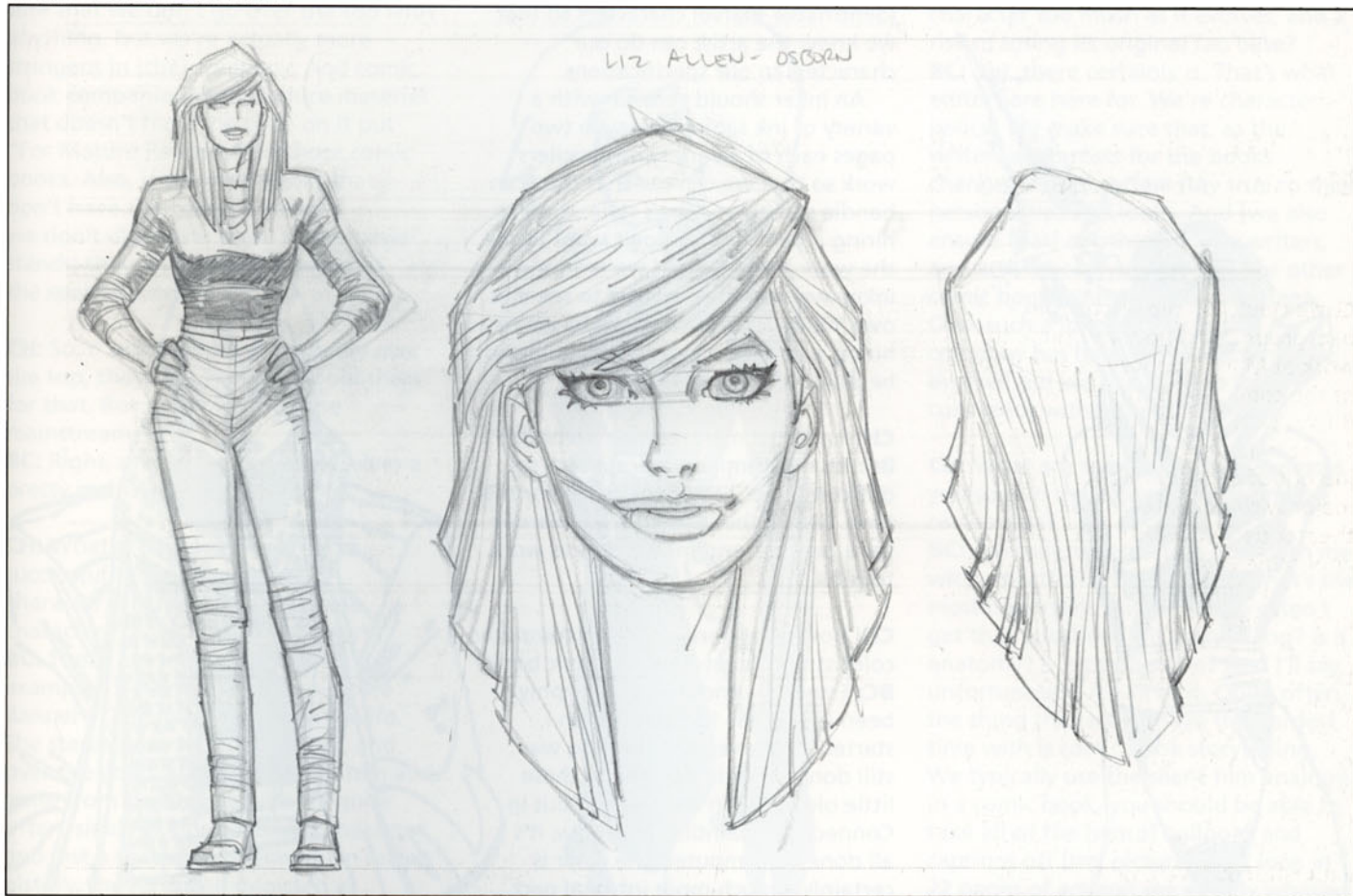
LIZ ALLEN - OSBORN

exaggerated and enhanced. The advice I give a lot of artists just starting out is: Take the elongated form of the fashion figure, and add muscles on top of this. Some artists start out drawing from muscle magazines. But that doesn't quite accurately depict the way comic book heroes and heroines look, because [in comics] you get those elongated forms and they're much larger than life.

CH: And they're so much more feminine. They're not masculine versions of women. They have this incredible strength and incredible femininity at the same time.
BC: Oh yes. Of course, the characters are most often written by men, so there is some skewing of how women actually react, but a lot of guys actually get it very well.

CH: When it comes to drawing female comic book characters, what do you look for in an artist?
BC: I like to see someone who will treat the female form with a certain amount of respect. I don't like to see too much

exaggerated anatomy, too many exaggerated breast shots, or poses that are a little bit too cheesy or "pin up."

Also, there's a whole school of artists now who are learning to draw from studying other comic book art, and I think that's a terrible shortcoming. There are certain comic book shortcuts that you can get from looking at a comic book, in terms of moving characters, but life drawing is absolutely essential.

**CH:** How have the female characters in comics changed in the past 10 years?
BC: There are a lot more women in combat, rather than women as cannon fodder. In other words, if we were talking about *The Incredible Hulk,* the Betty Banner character was the woman in danger, the woman who wanted to be rescued. Now, however, there are a lot more [female characters] who are actually team leaders, who are put in supervisory roles.

CH: How important is it for someone trying to get into the business to network at comic book conventions?

BC: It's not essential, but it helps because you get the chance to actually speak to an editor—you know, the person who could possibly be hiring you. If I get work into the office, I respond. It takes me an incredibly long amount of time, but I do respond to all of the submissions I get. However, it's usually a letter with maybe a little extra note saying, "This would be helpful for you." But that's rare, because there just isn't the time. So, a comic book convention is a great place to meet 10 editors, get 10 opinions on your work, and absorb it.

CH: When someone gets a portfolio together and meets you, an editor, at a convention or in an interview, what exactly do you want to see? How many pieces should there be? Should they be in color?
BC: If a penciler is coming in with a portfolio, it should only be of penciled work. At least five pages of continuous panel-to-panel storytelling so that we can see that he or she understands all of the aspects of putting together a story. Also, the work should show
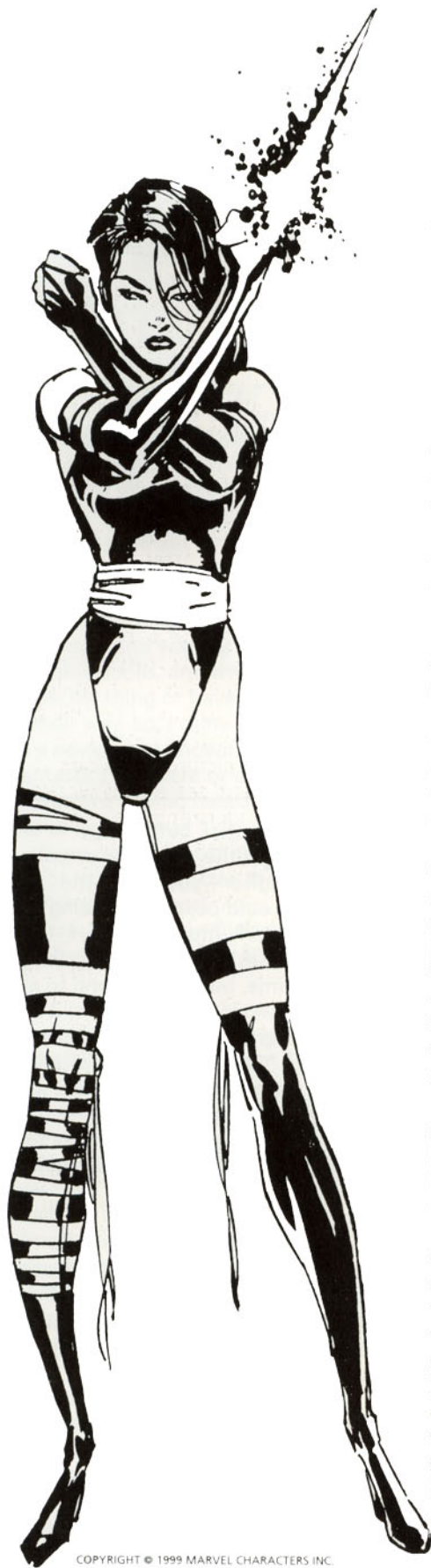
identifiable Marvel characters so that we know the artist can do our characters to our specifications.

An inker should come in with a variety of ink samples, maybe two pages each of a variety of pencilers' work so that we can see that they can handle somebody else's style. If we're hiring a penciler, we don't want to see the work inked. And if we're hiring an inker, we don't really want to see inks over *that* inker's pencils, unless we're hiring a penciler-inker who is going to be doing the whole job.

CH: And how many people do both?
BC: It's not common, because it's so difficult to do 22 pages in one month's time. Really, the industry's standard is for a penciler-and-inker team to work together.

**CH:** How important is a good computer colorist to a great-looking comic book?
BC: Essential. And that's really only been in the last 10 years. When I started at Marvel, the coloring was still done on little flat cels by these little old ladies in a workshop out in Connecticut, painting cels. Now, it's all done by computer. The color is certainly a much more integral part of the art scene than ever before.

CH: Can you offer any tips on designing eye-catching costumes for female characters?
BC: We're getting away from spandex. We were recently redesigning a character's costume. For years, she just wore a bathing suit. This is a woman who . . . well, she's a sea-based character. She's an Atlantian. She lives underwater. So the bathing suit seemed to make sense. But she did all her fighting in Manhattan. We gave her something a little bit more utilitarian and functional—pants.

CH: Is it difficult, in this politically correct age, to portray sexy female comic book characters without offending someone, somewhere?
BC: Our society is certainly crazier about sex than violence. Every once in a while someone will say, "Oh, it's terrible," but we also police ourselves. We have a comics code. We send [our material] to the Comics Code Authority to make
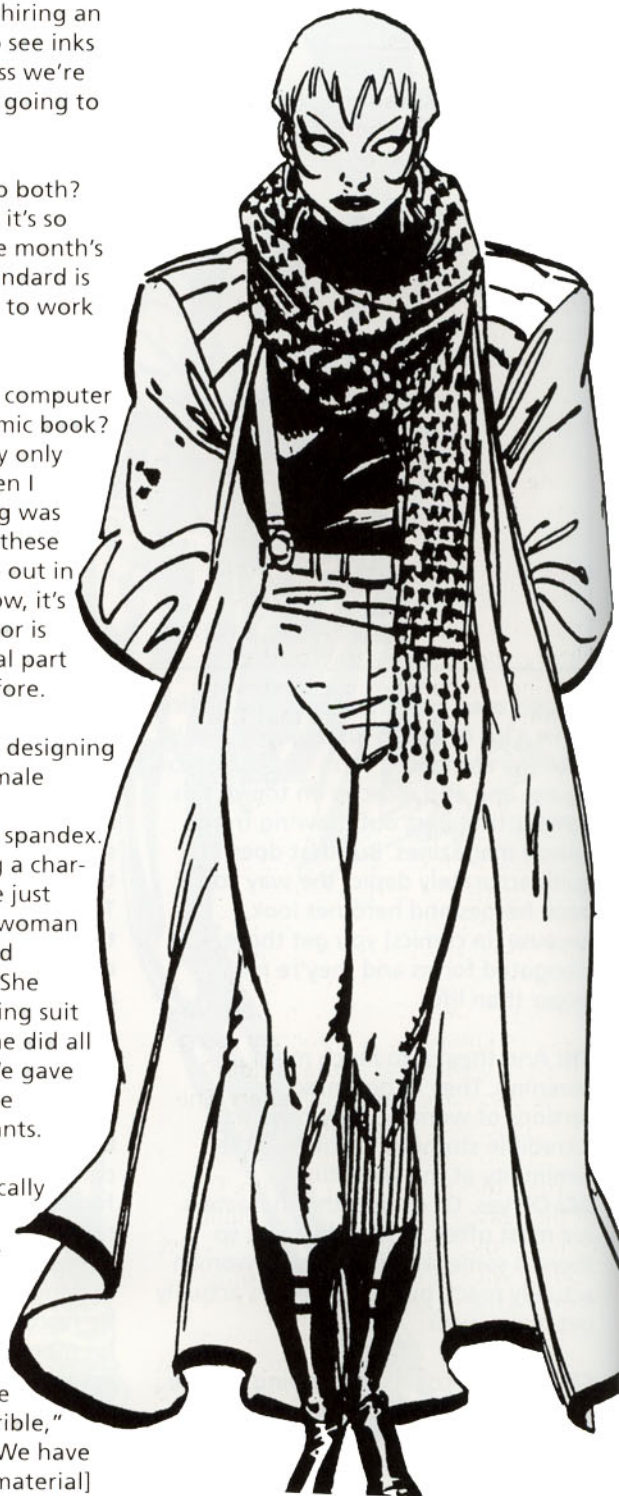
sure that we don't go over the top with anything, but we're actually more stringent in [the] company. And comic book companies who produce material that doesn't have the code on it put "For Mature Readers" on those comic books. Also, if we have books that don't have the code on them, we don't distribute them to the news-stands; they only get distributed to the specialty stores.

CH: So, if artists want to go really over the top, they can. There are publishers for that. But it wouldn't be the mainstream.
BC: Right, and we consider ourselves a pretty mainstream company.

CH: What are some of your most successful female comic book characters? And, how have those characters changed over the years?
BC: There are lots. Betty Banner [for example]. Betty Ross Banner—Bruce Banner's (The Incredible Hulk's) wife. She started out as his girlfriend, and over the years, she has married him and gone from good little wife to, quite often, sidekick. She's a tough character and just a very strong woman. In recent history, she has been depicted as working for help hotlines and even working with some teams that The Hulk has been associated with.

Sue Storm, the original Invisible Girl in the Fantastic Four, is now Sue Storm Richards, married to Mr. Fantastic. [Now she's] The Invisible Woman—she was undated, from "girl" to "woman," over the years. Gone from, "I'm going to faint because I've used my powers," to being the tough leader of the group who says, "Okay, Ben you go here. And Reed, you go here. And Johnny you go here and we'll meet in the middle."

We also have Jennifer Walters (She Hulk) who is The Incredible Hulk's cousin and another tough heroine.

Then there's the X-Men team. One of the reasons it's our most popular comic book franchise is because it's just riddled with so many good, strong female characters. Kitty Pride, Marvel Girls, Storm, so many women. Lots of new women in the team now. In fact, it tends to be very heavily skewed toward females in the group. And they all have very unique personalities and abilities.

CH: Is there a danger in changing a

character too much as it evolves, and a risk of losing its original fan base?
BC: Yes, there certainly is. That's what editors are here for. We're character police. We make sure that, as the writers and artists for the books change, the characters stay true to their personalities and looks. And [we also ensure that] as other editors, writers, and artists borrow characters for other comic books, they're also consistent. Over such a long history as this company has had, the characters have evolved but we like to keep them consistent within the time frame.

CH: What are some typical weaknesses you spot in the artwork of beginning cartoonists?
BC: Typically, when artists approach me with a portfolio, they'll say, "What's the most important thing?" Quite often I get that question. Is it storytelling? Is it anatomy? Is it perspective? And I'll say, unfortunately, it's all of it. Quite often, the thing that artists have the hardest time with is comic book storytelling. We typically use the silent film analogy. In a comic book, you should be able to take all of the [word] balloons and captions off [the pictures] and look at 22 pages of art and see exactly what's going on and understand the story. A lot of artists have a hard time accomplishing that, because they don't put the time in to do establishing shots and [work on] backgrounds and perspective, and make characters move in a linear fashion. They concentrate on doing more pin-up type work, which is great for covers and an occasional break-out shot. Obviously, it needs to be dynamic looking, but artists can't sacrifice storytelling.

And that also brings up other shortcomings, in terms of artists learning to draw from [the work of] other comic book artists. Quite often, they'll leave out backgrounds and establishing shots simply because they don't understand the perspective and the more complicated issues of drawing. Because they concentrated so hard on learning how to draw comic book figures.

CH: What gives Marvel characters their special appeal?
BC: Marvel Comics has always prided itself on having the best characters in the comic book industry. [The

TURBO

MASK FROM DESIGN

①

②

①

THIS DESIGN ALSO COULD WORK WITHOUT THE CABLES

ON THIS ONE, I LIKE #1 WITHOUT THE CABLES

Steve

ARTHUR STACY

JILL STACY

PAUL STACY

characters] have these great powers, but they also have great limitations and complicated lives and emotions and shortcomings—day-to-day problems that readers can identify with.

A character like Spider-Man has such limitations. His web fluid runs out, and he can't accomplish things. Or, he'll find himself in the middle of a battle situation, and there's no film in his camera. The only way he makes a living is delivering shots of fights to The Daily Bugle, and he's under a deadline, and he doesn't have any shots for his editor, and he can't make any money. Or, he has another fight with Doctor Octopus and he has a date with his girlfriend. And of course,

she's going to be furious with him. You know, these simple life problems.

CH: How does a comic book editor interact with the artists? Does the editor work with them intermittently during the drawing process, or only after the work is handed in?
BC: Depends on the artist. It's the editor's job to hire the art team, put together people who will work best together. Sometimes, you'll work with someone new who needs more attention. There's a lot less correction work done on comic books than there used to be. Artists who've been in the business for a long time say that, in the

old days, they'd turn in their 22 pages and get back 22 pages to make corrections on. Art is a lot more complicated—the line work is a lot more complicated—now. It takes a lot longer for an artist to draw a comic book. We tend to go with the art we get in, although that usually means we tend to do a lot of up-front work with a comic book—working on character designs and sketches and making sure the characters are right so that the work comes in and is usually fine. Some artists, obviously, need more help. Usually, we work with people who are professional enough to get it in and have it be great.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DRAWING

AN INTERVIEW WITH RENAE GEERLINGS,
EDITOR, TOP COW PRODUCTIONS

Chris Hart: How did you come to work at Top Cow?

Renae Geerlings: I actually came to Los Angeles to do acting and singing. And I was temping. I ended up having to temp 40 hours a week, because you don't make much money temping. So I ended up temping all the time without even being able to audition. I came into this building one day, and it was Top Cow Productions, and I remember laughing about the name.

I walked in and it was full of boxes, and all this art work was hanging off the walls. I thought, "What the heck is this place?" It was so disorganized and just a little studio at the time. Then I found out that they produced comic books. I thought that was cool. I was only there for two days answering phones. But I had so much fun that I ended up saying I wanted to go back there and work again.

Meanwhile, I called an old friend of mine who was into comic books and said, "Hey, by the way, I worked at this place called Top Cow Productions." And there was silence on the other end of the phone, and he said, "Marc Silvestri?" Totally awestruck. I had no idea who [Marc Silvestri] was. I'd only read comic books through either ex-boyfriends or my brother. It was really a boy thing. But I ended up getting into *Sandman, Batman, Dark Knight,* different *Batman* titles. My brother liked *Iron Man* and *Spider-Man.* I remember my friend from high school was really into *X-Men.* And that's, of course, how he knew Marc Silvestri, because Marc drew Wolverine. So, he explained to me that I was working with this, sort of, god.

I called back the temp agency. I said I'd like to work there again. I ended up getting a two-week opening and got to know everybody. It was so much fun.

They ended up calling me and asking me back as the president's assistant for a couple of weeks. Then he had to go to a convention, so I asked, "Does anybody else here need help?" Because I couldn't afford missing a couple days of a paycheck. They said Editorial needed help. I worked for them for two days, and that was how I got in.

CH: In this competitive climate, populated by giants like Marvel and DC Comics, how is Top Cow able to compete so well?
RG: Marc [Silvestri] and Todd McFarlane and Rob Liefeld—those guys who were giants at Marvel and DC when they made their own companies—not only moved on from Marvel and DC, but they moved on from [making] that [typical kind] of [comic] book. The market has changed. Instead of 8-year-olds to 14-year-olds reading the books, now you've got anywhere from 12- to 50-year-olds [reading them].

CH: What have been your most popular female characters, and what do you think makes them so popular?
RG: Definitely Witchblade. Although [penciler] Michael Turner has moved on from the book, *Witchblade* put us over the top. In this book, you get a woman who's a professional, a cop. Not only is she a cop, but she's also extremely pretty. But, she's not stupid-pretty, she's not a sidekick to some guy. I think readers latched on to her because of her whole vulnerability. She was multifaceted. And on top of that, she was intelligent and strong. And she was on her own. Battling against Ian Nottingham. Battling and winning against these male characters, these extremely strong male characters. A lot of women read *Witchblade*. [The character] is perfect. Large breasted, small hipped, very thin, tall, long hair. Yet, female readers still get into her because they don't look at her and think, "Oh, she's just got big breasts." It goes beyond that. It's her personality, her strength, her intelligence.

Deep inside, all of us, all women, want to be beautiful. It's easy to hate beautiful women. However, this woman you can't hate, because she's not aware of her beauty necessarily. Yeah, she wears short skirts, but she also wears torn jeans and she's a cop. She hangs with the guys. Most of her friends are male. And she's a little alienated from most of the females in the book.

CH: For people who are thinking, "How can I get my first job?" do you, as an editor, and do independent publishing houses, such as Top Cow, keep an eye out for new, self-published comics that might hold promise?
RG: We're always looking for new talent. The independent comic books are so difficult because there are so many, and it's so hard to keep up, especially as an editor, when you're not just focusing on finding new talent but you've also got to get five books out this week. So, it's hard as the submissions are stacking up. We go through these submissions, and we do look at them. It's hard to find exactly what we need because, usually, we're looking for something we need *now*. At times, we find somebody and say, "There's a lot of talent here. We can't necessarily use him now, but we can bring him in." But that's harder to do; that's taking a real chance.

CH: So, if artists get rejection letters from you saying that you can't use their work right now but that you liked it, they shouldn't just walk away, they should keep in touch.
RG: Definitely. In fact, that's one of the most important things I tell people. Keep trying, and try again. I may look at your submission one week, and say I can't use this right now. It also depends on the frame of mind, where we are. What are we looking for right now? But, two weeks later we've got a whole different frame of mind on what we're looking for. And perhaps this person has now improved slightly: they've studied anatomy, studied storytelling, they've worked on it. So the next time, we may pull out [their work] and say, "This is what we're looking for now." But we are always, always looking.

CH: What are some of the mistakes you would advise aspiring comic book artists to avoid making when trying to land their first job? What submissions look amateurish to you and what gets your serious attention?
RG: One of the first things we look at is: Are they drawing bodies [that are] anatomically correct? Are the thighs three times longer than the calves?

And sometimes, that's a stylistic choice, and that can work. But, if it looks like they're just doing this because they don't know. . . . It's hard, because art is so subjective.

CH: Not just the art, but what about their overall package and how they submit it?
RG: We say, three pages of sequential art. Pin-ups are fine to send in, but we can't really tell how someone is at telling a story from that. Do you always tell a story from the same angle? Do you show the same shot in every scene? How do you lay the panels out? Is it interesting? Does it catch the eye? Does it lead the eye through the story? Is it dynamic? Is it creating a mood?

Also, it's amazing how many people draw really buff bodies and really poorly drawn faces. Faces are so important. We get a lot of guys who are good at drawing square faces, but when it comes to female faces, [square faces] are just not pretty.

And also backgrounds—that's usually one of the important things we look at, because when we pull someone in as a new artist, we're not going to throw them on a book. We don't know how they work and what other things they can do. So, we usually use them to help on backgrounds for other artists.

CH: Almost like an apprenticeship.
RG: Exactly. The more detailed the backgrounds, the more time it looks like they've spent on it, the more it will catch our eye. And a lot of people forget about the backgrounds. They don't do backgrounds. They'll do a lot of figures, or they'll do big fight scenes, but we're not going to pull someone in to do a fight scene immediately. We're going to pull them in to do a background, so that helps us a lot.

CH: Do comic book artists usually work through agents or through word of mouth?
RG: It depends. We've gotten a few more artists that work through agents. Sometimes it helps. Sometimes it's really irritating. I end up having to talk to the artist myself, and when there's an agent, it just means that instead of making one phone call, I have to make two. And there's the whole rumor

game of, I said this to the agent and the agent said something slightly different to the artist and the artist comes back to me and I have to correct it. It gets a little difficult. But on the other hand, it's also nice to know that not only am I on their case about their deadlines, but so is their agent. And it helps for book keeping, and the agent takes care of things like vouchering for them. It can help. It can keep things a little more organized.

CH: If you were in high school or college right now and were seriously considering getting into comic book art as a profession, what would be your next move?
RG: We get letters from really young kids, 11 and 14, writing, "I really want to be a comic book artist." That's perfect, because we usually pull people in at a really young age. The thing is, if you're 25 years old and can't see things correctly, you can still teach yourself, through a lot of hard work, to be able to see something and to recreate it. But usually it's there when you're younger. That's the sort of talent that people tend to have. I'm not saying that you can't train yourself to do that. It's just a lot harder the older you get. It's harder and harder to train yourself to do that. It takes a little more time.

We get a lot of young kids saying we want to be comic book artists and I just tell them to keep drawing. Submit, submit, submit. Send your stuff. Sending your stuff through the mail is the hardest way to get in, because I'm not looking at you face to face. I'm most likely going to send you a form letter because I have 80 submissions to go through, and I don't have time to sit down and write a critique of every single one. Whereas, if they bring [their drawings] to a convention. . . . And a lot of it is knowing somebody. Say you have a friend who knows somebody at Top Cow and they can bring you in, people will take a look at it and tell you what they think. You just really need to be a go-getter. And you really need to go to a convention and pull somebody aside and say, "What do I need to do?"

CH: Are there any particular art schools that impress you?
RG: The name of the school doesn't impress me at all. In fact, most of the people we hire in, we hire straight out of high school. Or straight out of college. It doesn't matter where you went to school. What matters is what you did with it. What you can do. You could be 17 years old and in high school, and if you're drawing mind-

blowing things, I'm going to do my best to get you in here.

CH: If I were to talk to you five years from now, where would you envision Top Cow to be as far as story lines and female characters are concerned?
RG: Right now, for example, *Spirit of the Tao* has a very young character. She was an engineering student and found out all of these things about herself. And her best is friend Lance, so it's a girl-guy, yin-yang thing. All the characters are very well written. You can't side with any of them—there's no clear-cut good and bad. She's not the "evil" character; she's not the "good little girl" character. [Characters] are tending to go that way in comic books, instead of being so stereotyped. She's a normal human being.

Fathom, another book that is huge right now, is similar. She was just this normal young woman who finds out she has these amazing powers, and she's still not sure where they're going.

I think the key to this type of storytelling is that everybody feels that there's something ahead for them. Everybody feels that somewhere inside there's something really special. And these characters find that thing out. The reader goes, "Yeah, I could have that. I just don't know about it yet."

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From classic superheroines to today's modern women and everything in between, female characters provide a strong and consistent presence in comic books and are an integral part of many story lines. This latest offering from well-known author Christopher Hart is truly the ultimate book on how to draw sexy heroines, beau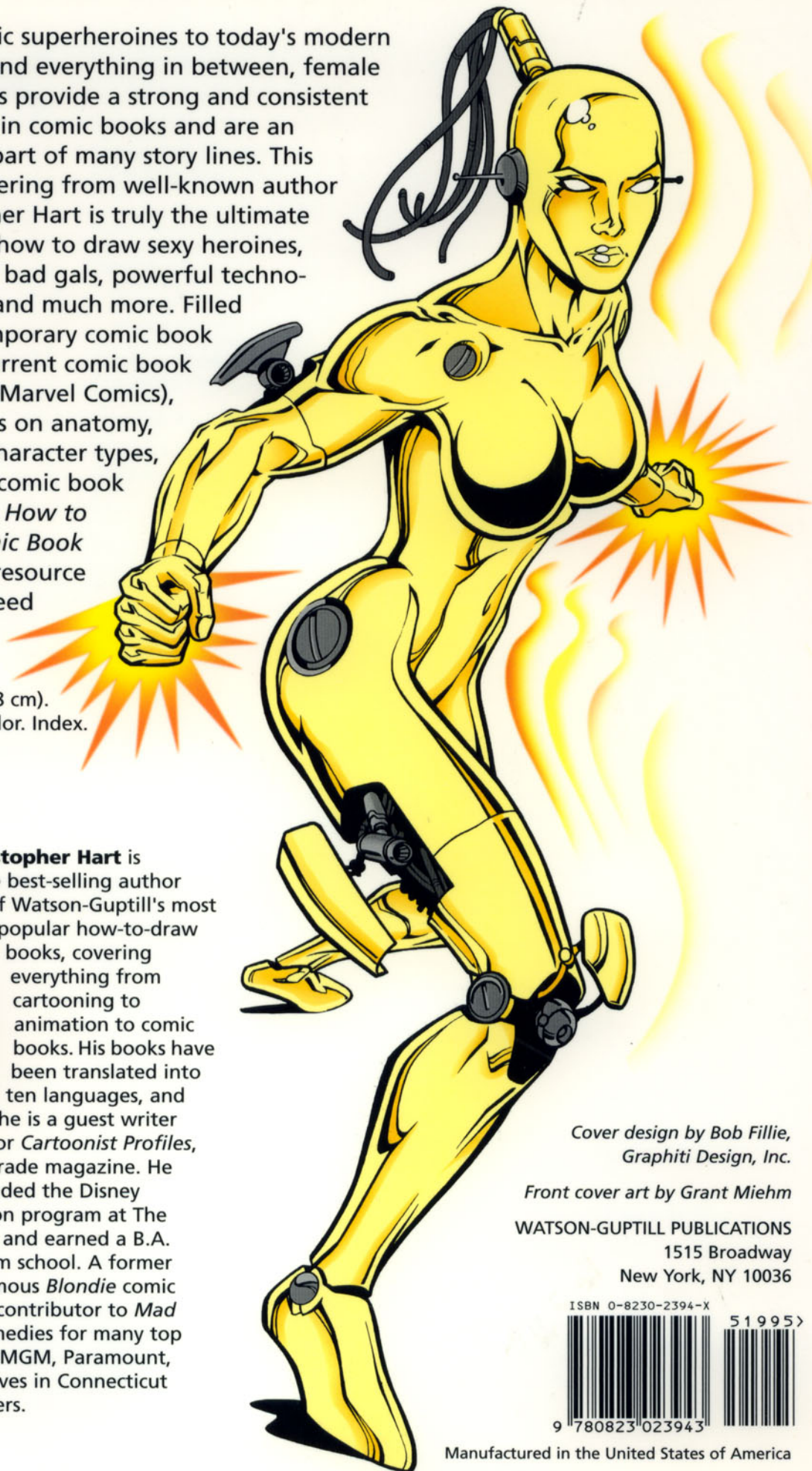tiful bad gals, powerful techno-babes, appealing aliens, and much more. Filled with art from top contemporary comic book artists, interviews with current comic book editors (including one at Marvel Comics), and featuring instructions on anatomy, action poses, costumes, character types, perspective, storytelling, comic book layout, and cover design, *How to Draw Great-Looking Comic Book Women* is an invaluable resource and the only book you need on this popular topic.

144 pages. 8½ x 11" (21.5 x 28 cm). 310 illustrations, 200 in full color. Index.

Christopher Hart is the best-selling author of Watson-Guptill's most popular how-to-draw books, covering everything from cartooning to animation to comic books. His books have been translated into ten languages, and he is a guest writer for *Cartoonist Profiles*, a trade magazine. He attended the Disney animation program at The California Institute of the Arts and earned a B.A. from New York University's film school. A former staff member of the world-famous *Blondie* comic strip, Hart has been a regular contributor to *Mad Magazine* and has written comedies for many top film and TV studios, including MGM, Paramount, Fox, NBC, and Showtime. He lives in Connecticut with his wife and two daughters.