MOBILE APPLICATION

DC COMICS REFRAMER

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CHAPTER I

DISCOVERY

DISCOVERY

CREATIVE BRIEF

DC Comics is one of the oldest comic book publishers in the United States. The challenge of this project is to identify the ideal platform for creating and distributing digital comics market.

The target audience is no longer the niche collector of comics, but the mainstream audience already engaged by DC Entertainment properties in film, television, and video games.

Iconic DC brands on television have millions of dedicated viewers; yet sales of individual comic books often fail to reach even 100k units a month. There is clearly need for a new approach.

DISCOVERY

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

WHO I'M LOOKING AT AND WHY

The purpose of this competitive analysis is to identify the trends and techniques used by comic publishers in producing and marketing digital content. Each approach is considered in order to understand the current market.

It is easy to assume that a great deal of attention has been given to digital distribution outlets. That is a mistake. Publishers derive a majority of their income from physical sales in comic book stores, and this market has been vocal in their opposition to any channel of distribution that could adversely affect their businesses.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

DARK HORSE COMICS

Dark Horse Comics is based in Portland, Oregon and is best known for publishing a mix of creator-owned and licensed properties, as well as US editions of foreign comics. The most well known comics they produce include Mike Mignola's **Hellboy**, Joss Whedon's **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, and material for 20th Century Fox's **Alien** and **Predator** franchises.

Dark Horse operates an independent application on both iOS and Android that serves as a digital storefront, selling issues of books at their print-based price point.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

DARK HORSE COMICS

The reader/player in the Dark Horse application, presents users with the full size image of the original comic book page. Using a swipe gesture moves and enlarges the page by sections, creating a reading order.

The art is presented in its original format, and this zoom-and-traverse method increases to size of the lettering, which would be too difficult to read at a reduce scale.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

DARK HORSE COMICS

Comics are purchased individually, with an average price point of $3.99 per new book. Books older than one-month often drop to either $2.99 or $1.99.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

DARK HORSE COMICS

The zoom-and-traverse method of reading comics can be problematic. A physical gesture, the finger tap or swipe, has been added for virtually every eye movement one would have made reading a printed page.

The price of content is also steep. A single new comic book is priced well above the average smartphone app. And the equivalent of two new books, or roughly 20-30 minutes of reading time, a user could similarly purchase a month of Netflix.

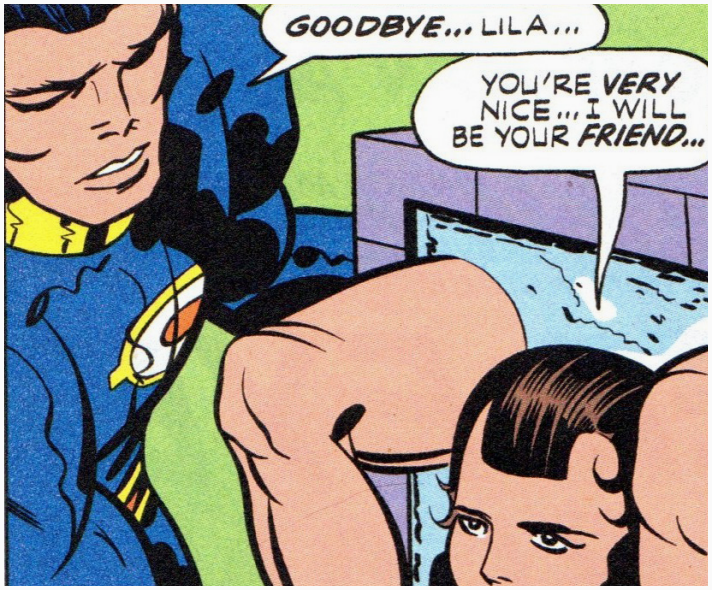
COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

COMIXOLOGY

Comixology is located in New York City, New York, and is a cloud-based digital comic distribution platform. Founded in 2007, Comixology patented "guided-view technology", the zoom-and-traverse technology that has become the primary tool for reading digital comics.

Comixology distributes comics from most major pubishers through their branded app. They also operate publishers self-branded apps, built on their Comixology cloud-based platform.

The patented "guided-view technology" is similar to the Dark Horse Comics app except that it "letter-boxes", or hides the surrounding panels from the panel being read.



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

COMIXOLOGY

"Guided-view", or zoom-and-traverse, displays art and type in relation to the panel, not the printed page. This results in inconsistent line weight and variations in type size on mobile screens.

In this example, the largest panel on the printed page appears the smallest in the application. This is counter to the intent of the artist, who chose to have panel size increase as the hero recedes into the background.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

COMIXOLOGY

Comixology is an improvement over the Dark Horse Comics application, in that it has a larger library of content. The price point for comics is nearly identical.

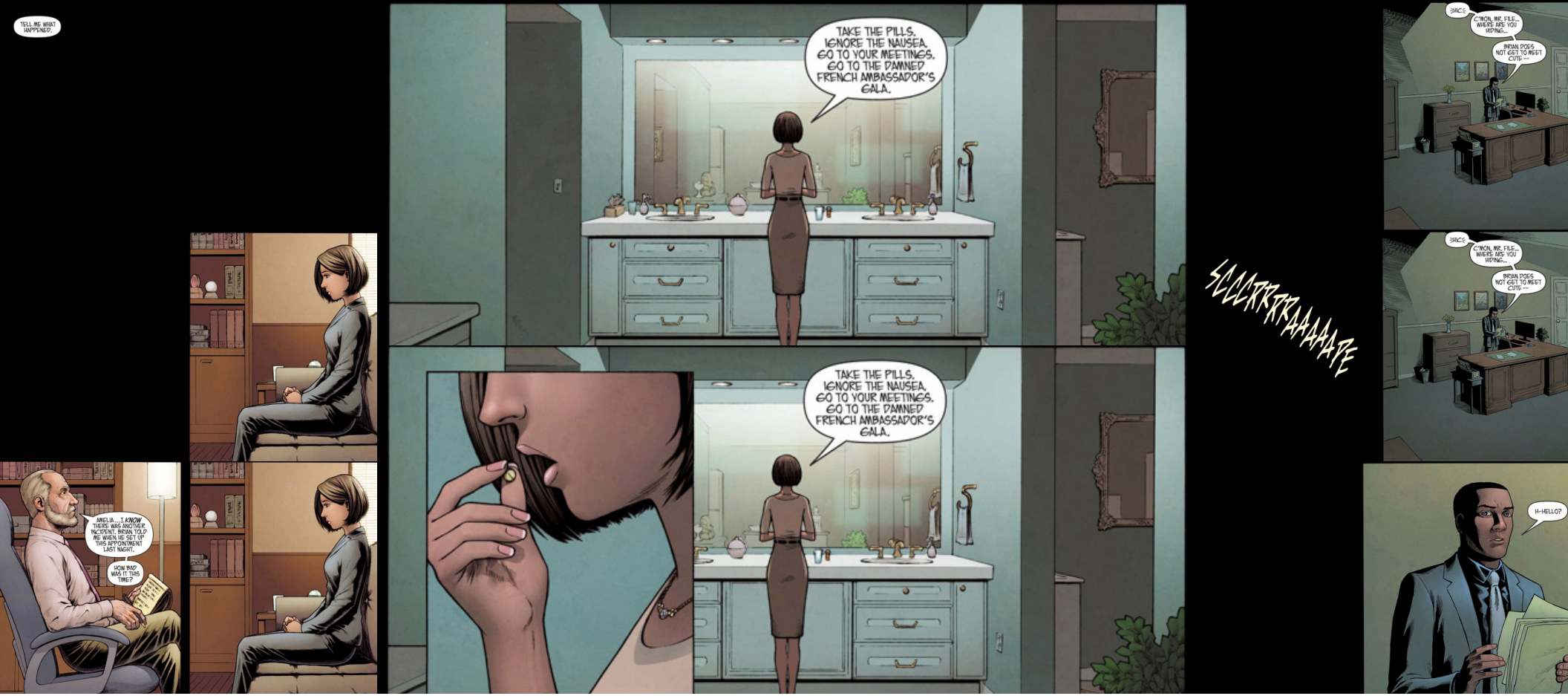
The only substantial difference in user experience is the letter-boxing of content. This avoids partial panels being displayed on screen.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

THRILLBENT COMICS

Thrillbent was founded in 2013 by writer Mark Waid as an experiment in digital storytelling. The idea was to find new ways to tell traditional comics stories without "breaking" what it is that makes comics unique.

They currently publish a small library of genre titles, with new material released in frequent, if modest, amounts.



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

THRILLBENT COMICS

Thrillbent is an improvement on Comixology in that it is designed for a mobile screen, and that content is offered on a subscription model for $3.99 a month. Thrillbent relies extensively on negative space to approximate page turns, and uses subtle changes in panel transitions.

This user experience is can be frustrating, as each subtle transition equals adds a physical gesture, an action that affects the storytelling pace.

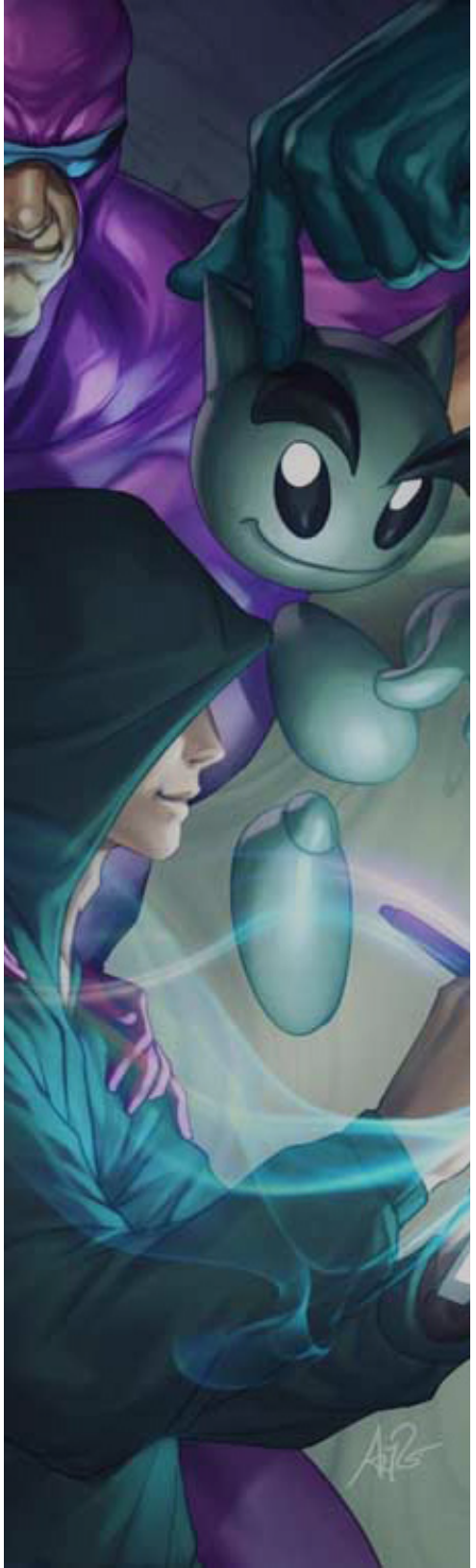
COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

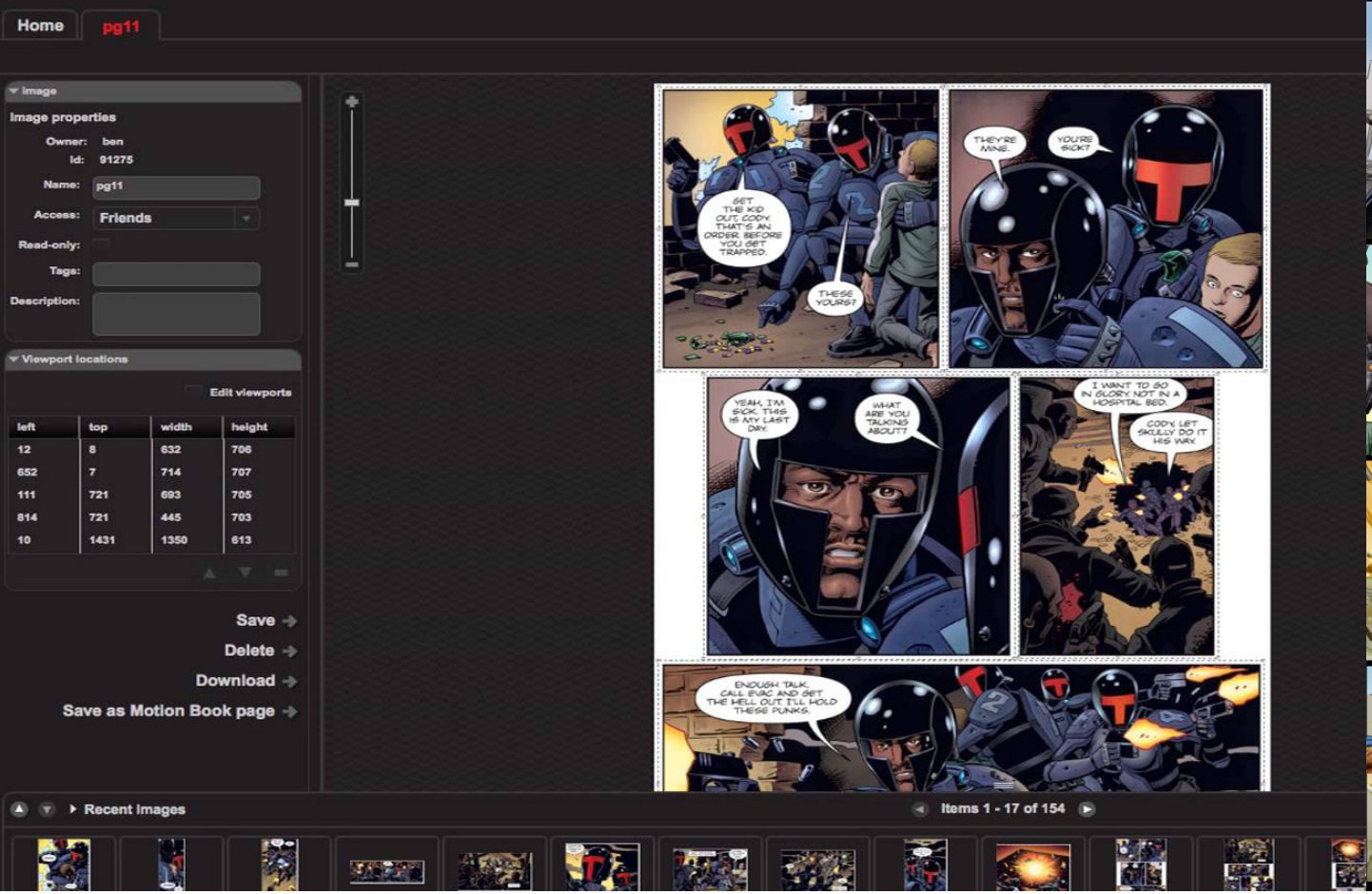
MADEFIRE COMICS

Madefire Comics is a digital-first comics producer based out of Berkeley, California. The Madefire platform is relatively new, having launched in 2012 after securing $7million in venture capital.

Madefire Comics has approached the industry with an unclear set of objectives. On one hand their focus is to create a web-based tool that allows user to create and sell their own comics, with Madefire receiving a percentage of the transaction.

On the other hand, the staff is preoccupied with creating original intellectual property (IP), either as a method of demonstrating the value of their platform, or as part of the trend to create and move IP into the Hollywood film and TV preproduction process, commonly and affectionately referred to as developmental hell.



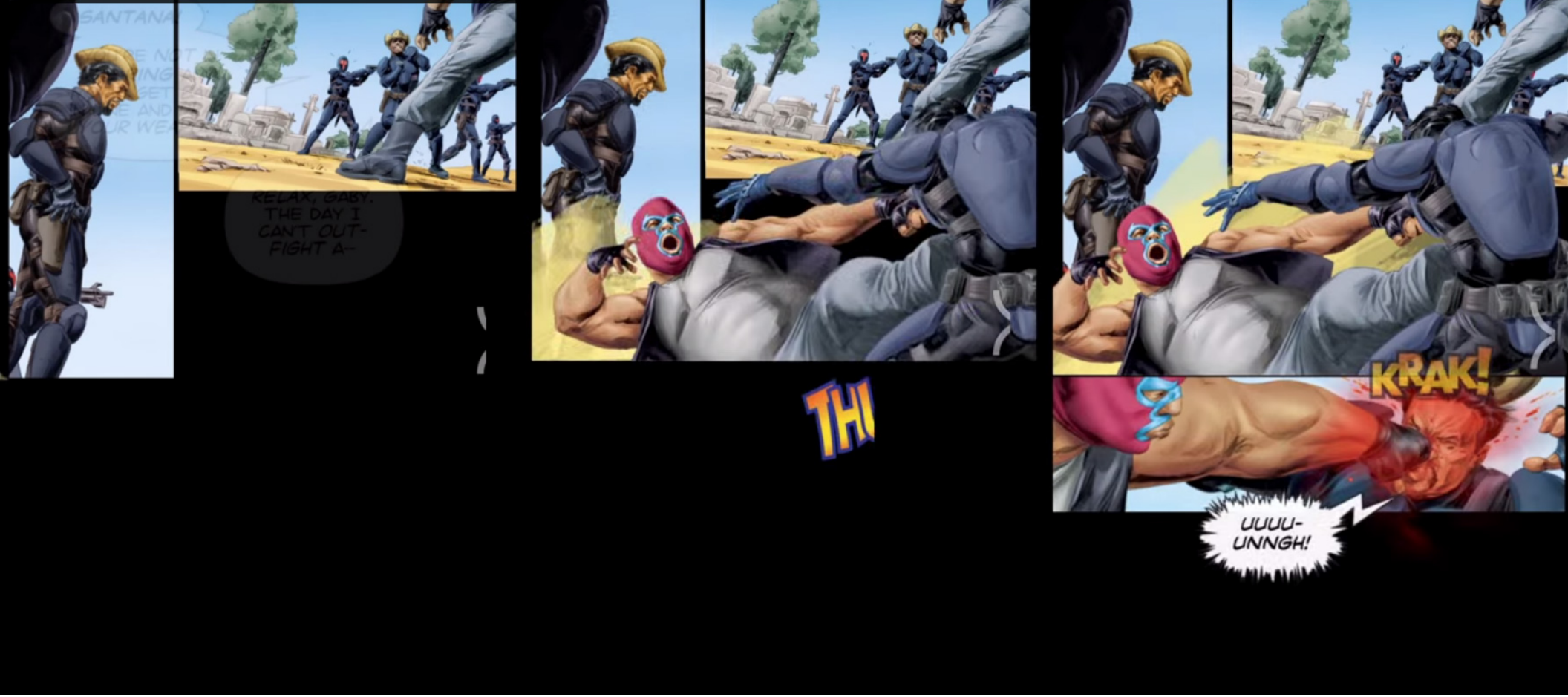


COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

MADEFIRE COMICS

Madefire takes advantage of the digital medium by incorporating motion and sound into the story. The most common motion is linear: all moving elements enter the frame with a clear start and stop point. There are no looped notions. Sound effects accompany the actions, and music is looped in the background.

The motion adds a level of pacing that changes how one "reads" the page, and if used to often, can draw attention to areas where it is not used. This is often a detriment.



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

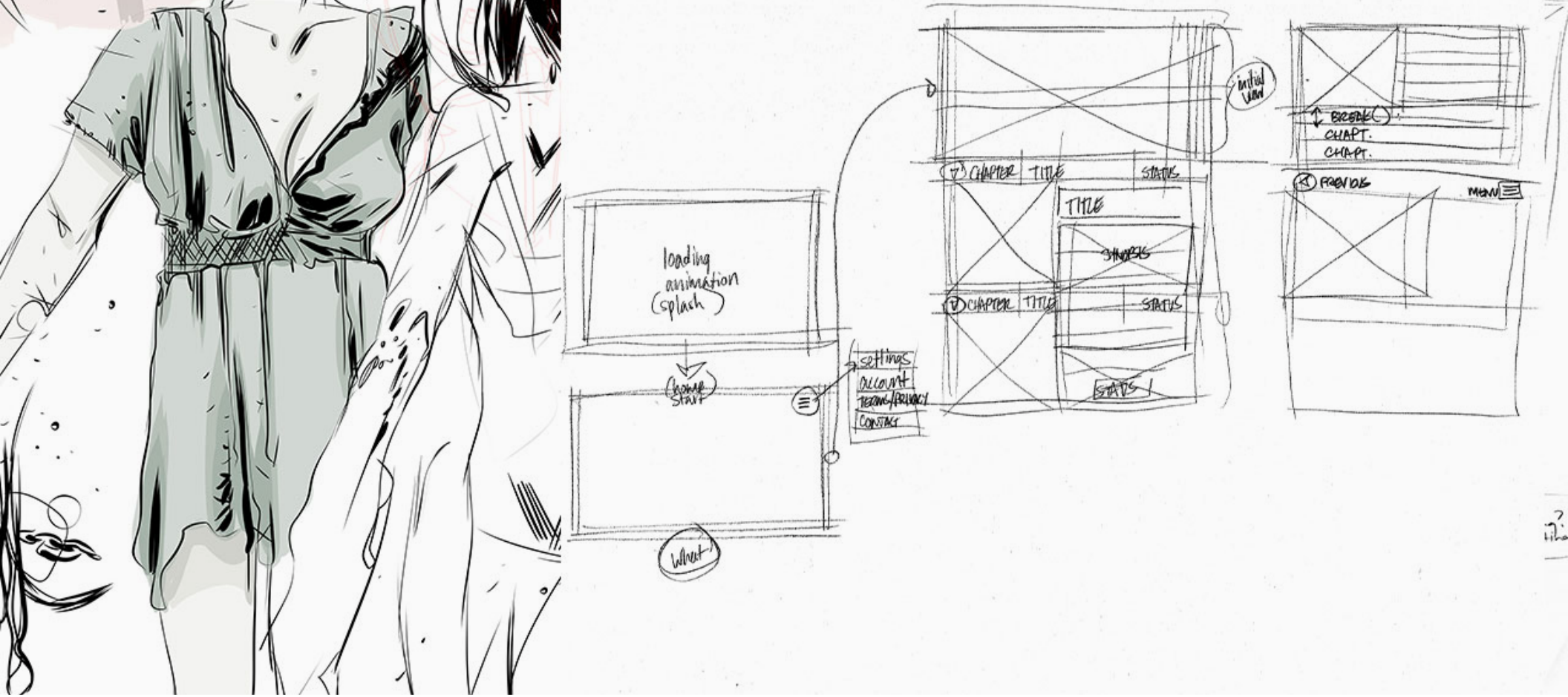
MADEFIRE COMICS

The page is designed and displayed exactly like a print comic, with each gesture adding content. Unfortunately users need to use a pinch and drag gesture to enlarge content, notably to make type legible.

A majority of the Madefire library is free of charge, those new content is increasingly monetized, at prices comparable to similar applications.

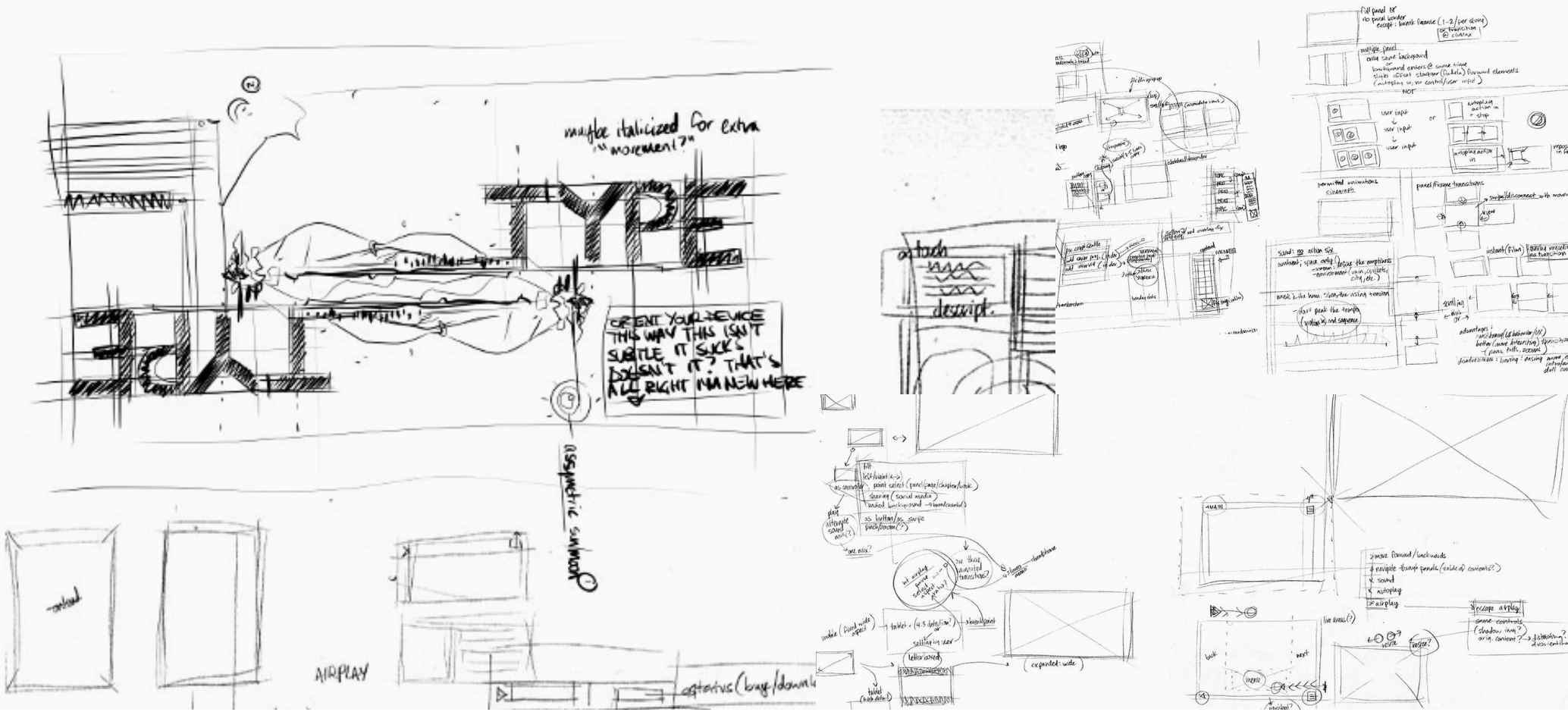
CHAPTER II

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT



CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

IDEATION



CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

IDEATION

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

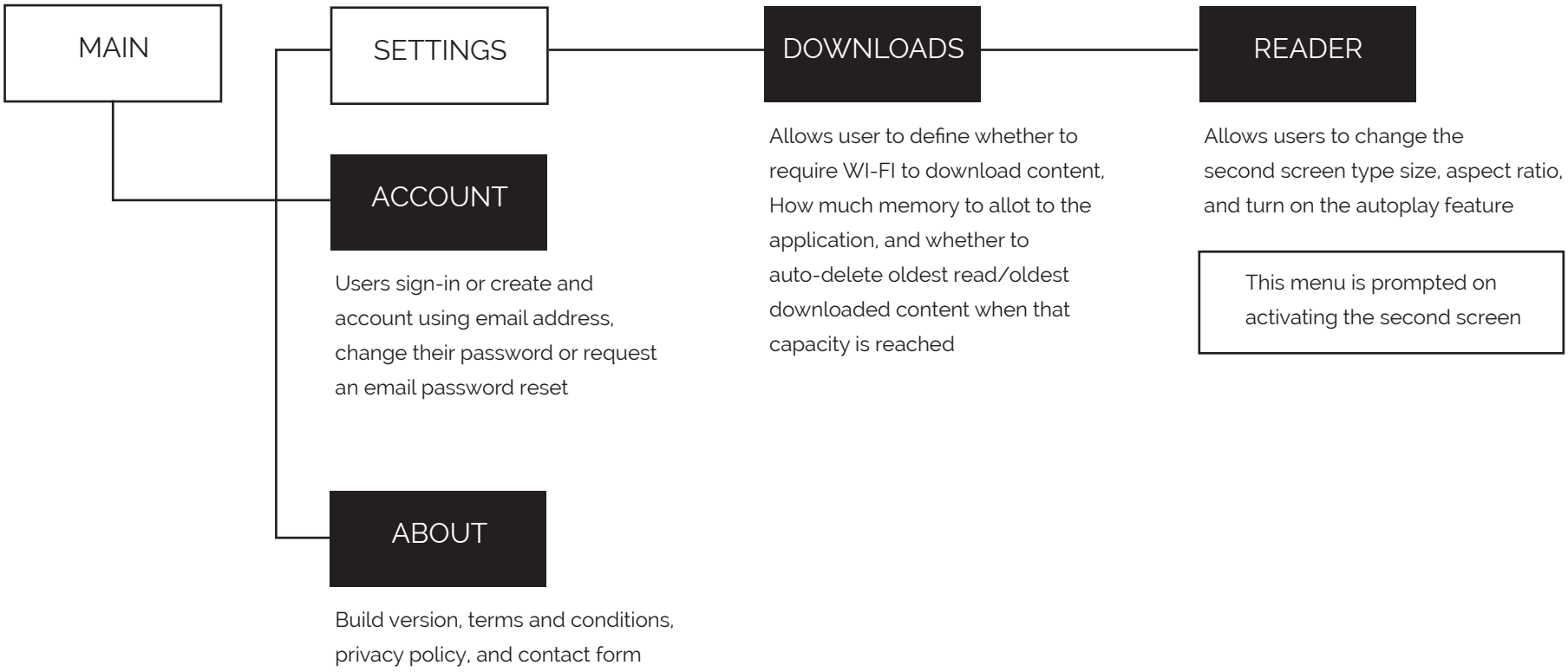
INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

The organizing principle behind the information architecture is similar to most media applications. Content is prominently displayed, each chapter or issue nested inside a specific title's page.

The menus are specific to the section of the application being used, either the library or the reader. The main menu affords users all functions and settings of the application, with a limited reader/player specifc menu available while reading a comic.

INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

MENU OPTIONS



INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

IN-READER MENU OPTIONS

Allows user to select and choose a second screen from available detected displays

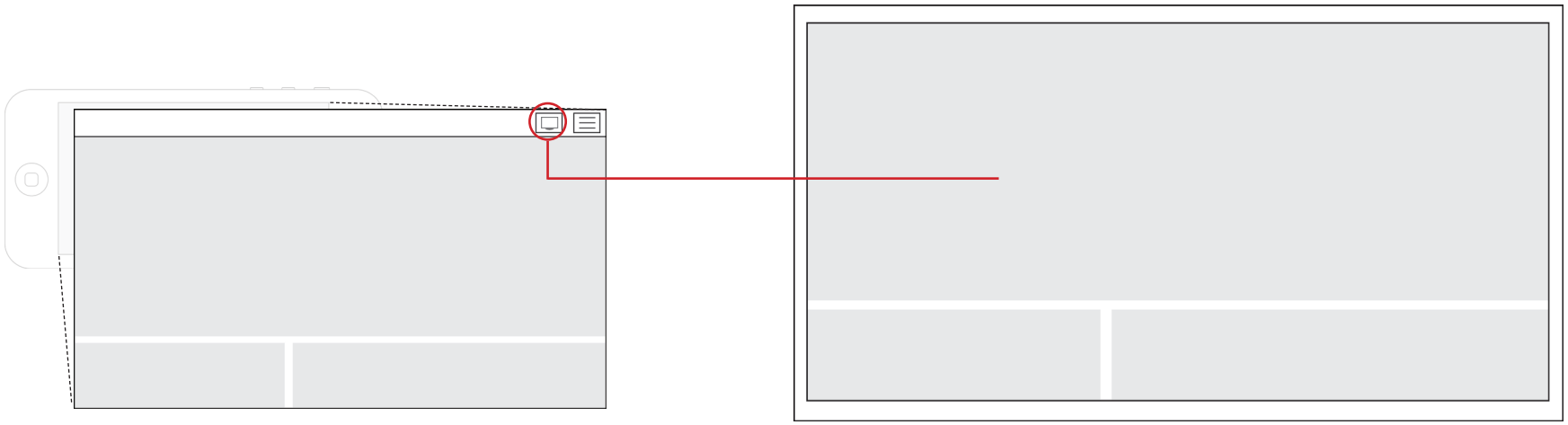
User selects an aspect ratio that mirrors their selected format;
4:3 | 21:9 | 16:9 | 2.39:1,
As well as manipulate the type size of the story text

Users sign-in or create and account using email address, change their password or request an email password reset

Users sign-in or create and account using email address, change their password or request an email password reset

LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

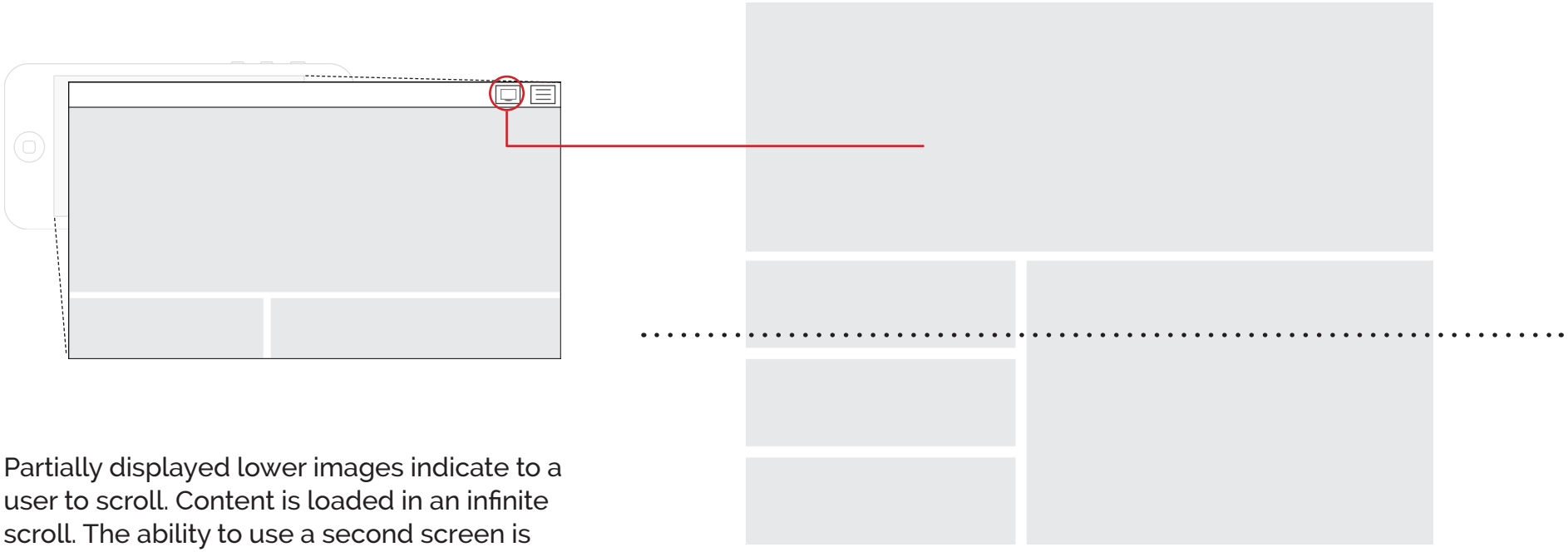
HOME SCREEN DISPLAY



The home screen shown on mobile, and as displayed on a second screen. On the projected screen the application navigation header is not displayed. Gray areas represent images, clickable areas that lead to a title's specific page

LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

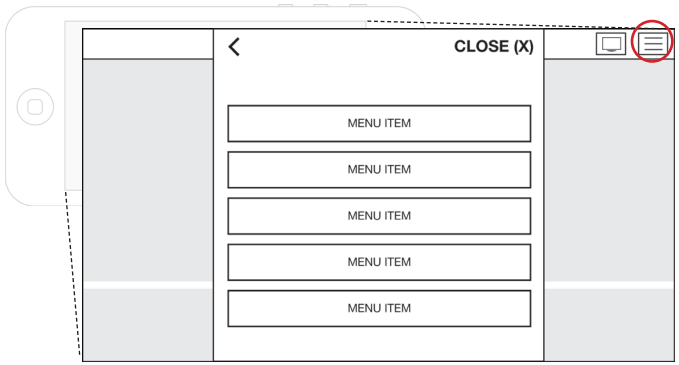
HOME SCREEN DISPLAY

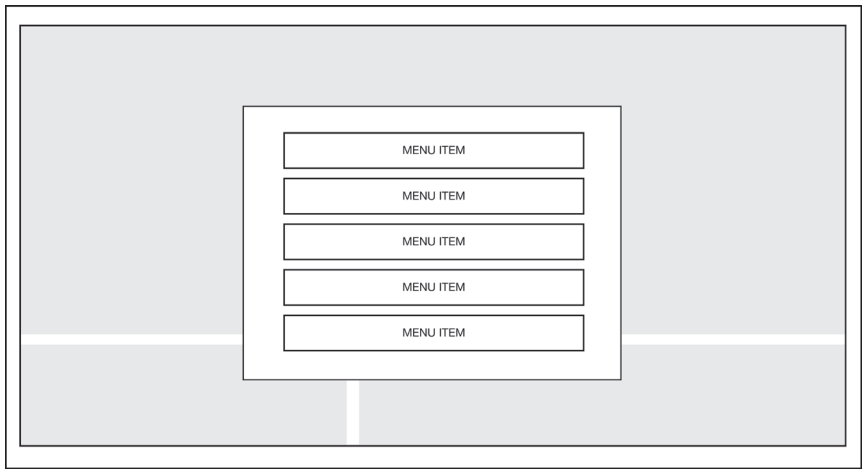


Partially displayed lower images indicate to a user to scroll. Content is loaded in an infinite scroll. The ability to use a second screen is always available, using the indicated icon.

LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

MENU DISPLAY

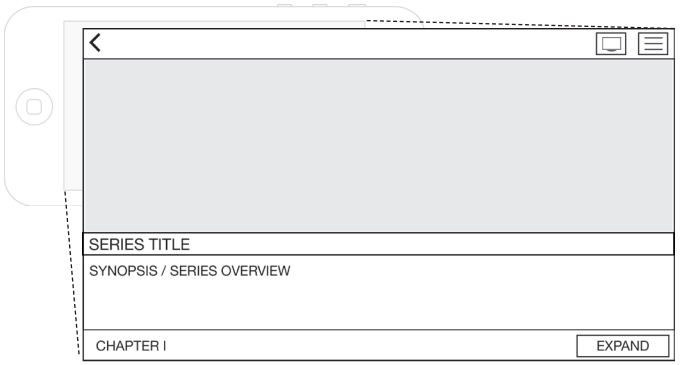


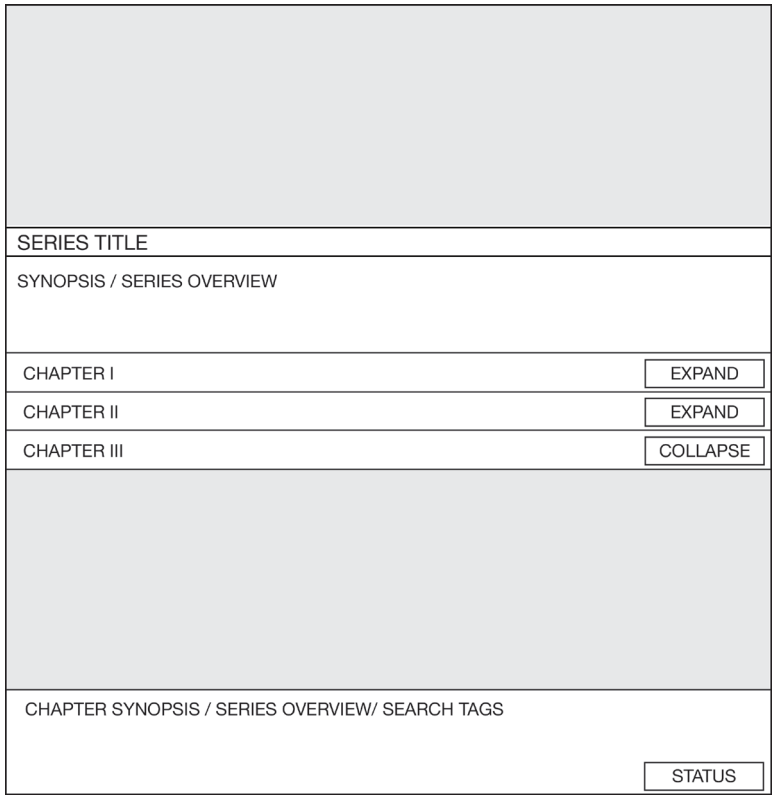


Menu options are displayed on both the mobile device and the second screen, and accessed through a fixed icon at the top right.

LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

STORY/CHAPTER DISPLAY

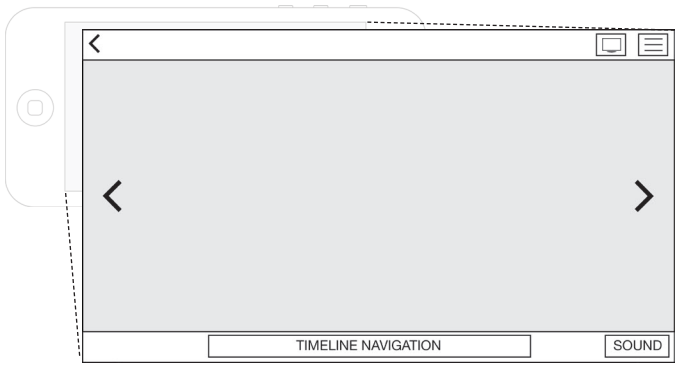




The story page provides a synopsis, as well as a sub-menu of nested content. Expanding nested content provides a specific issue synopsis, as well as the status of the story, such as whether it is downloaded to the device memory and available for reading.

LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

READER INTERFACE

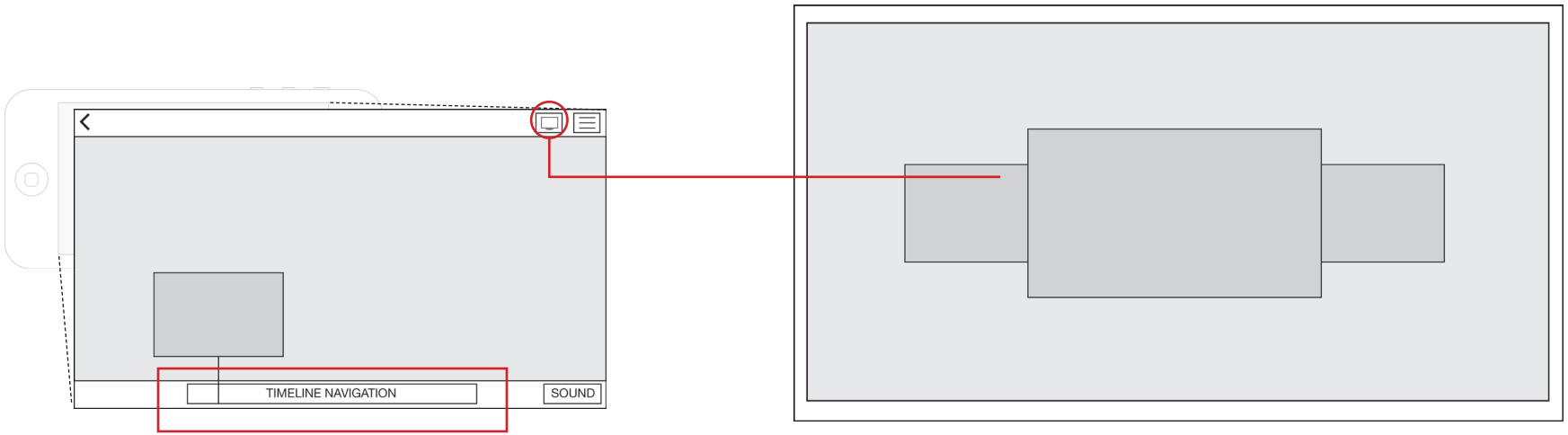


Reader controls are visible on launching the reader, then fade from view while remaining functional. A prolonged touch event in the center of the screen restores UI visibility.

While using the second screen, story content on the reader is hidden, leaving the mobile device to act solely as a remote control. The reason for this is explained in adaptive content.

LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

TIMELINE NAVIGATION



Timeline navigation functions similarly to most media players, with a thumbnail available as users scroll horizontally on the indicated area. On a second screen display, before and after current position screens are displayed for ease of use.

CHAPTER III

HIGH FIDELITY MOCKUPS

ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING SCALE

Comics are a visual medium. The purpose of **DC Comics Reframer** is to provide the best possible user experience regardless of which screen is used to access the content.

To do this, **Reframer** adapts content to the screen being used,

ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING SCALE

The first example of adaptive content is scaling content for device and aspect ratio. This adaptive method is used a majority of the time, when the visual composition is suitable and legible across large and small screens.

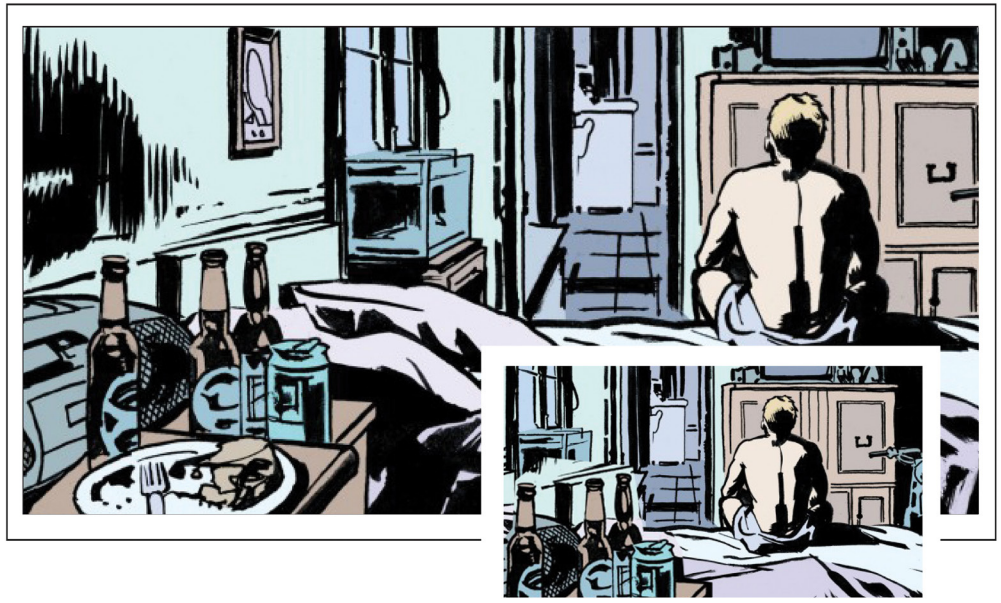
Slight adjustments on the edges of the frame ensures the relative content is clearly visible, with no negative space overlap.

ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING SCALE

The second methods of scaling is cropping the artwork for mobile screens. In this example, foreground content that would normally be outside the frame is included through specific crops. This is done to keep important story elements in frame.

This prevents the inclusion of extra panels (and corresponding gestures), which may afford undue importance to the story element and slow pacing.

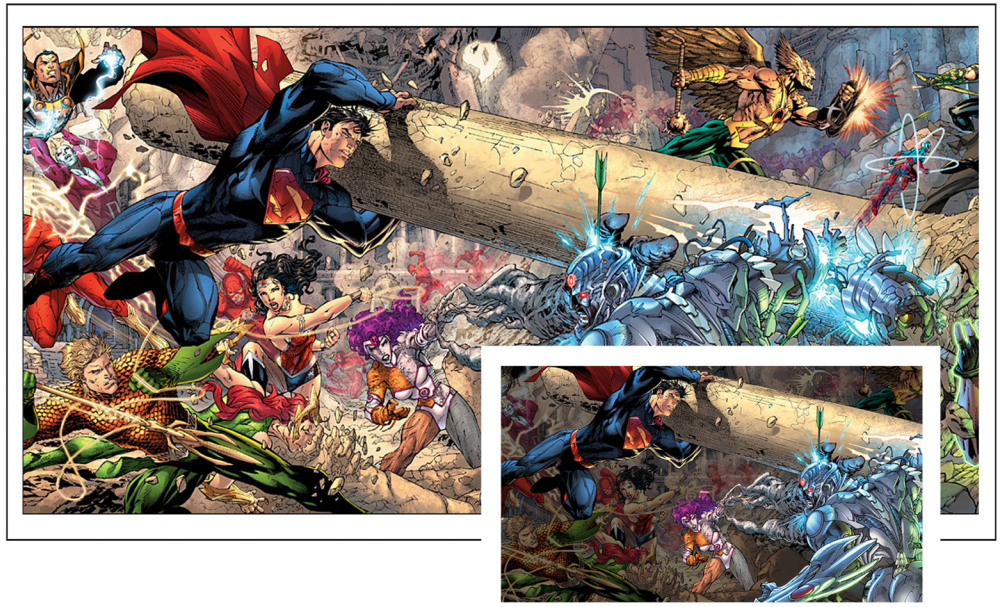


ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING COLOR

Color is problematic for users on mobile displays. Optical mixing occurs when small areas of color lose their identities and are perceived as a blend of colors rather than separate hues.

For such compositions on Reframer, compositions where this is likely to occur are switched out with color corrected images. In this example, the foreground elements are isolated, their vibrant hues standing out against the background.



ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING SCALE AND COLOR

In some instances, both scale adjustments and color adjustments are needed. This example shows how multiple techniques can be used to create a mobile-friendly composition.

ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING DEPTH

Some compositions take advantage of the second screen display, and are difficult to adjust for a mobile device. In these cases the composition is replaced with an alternative.

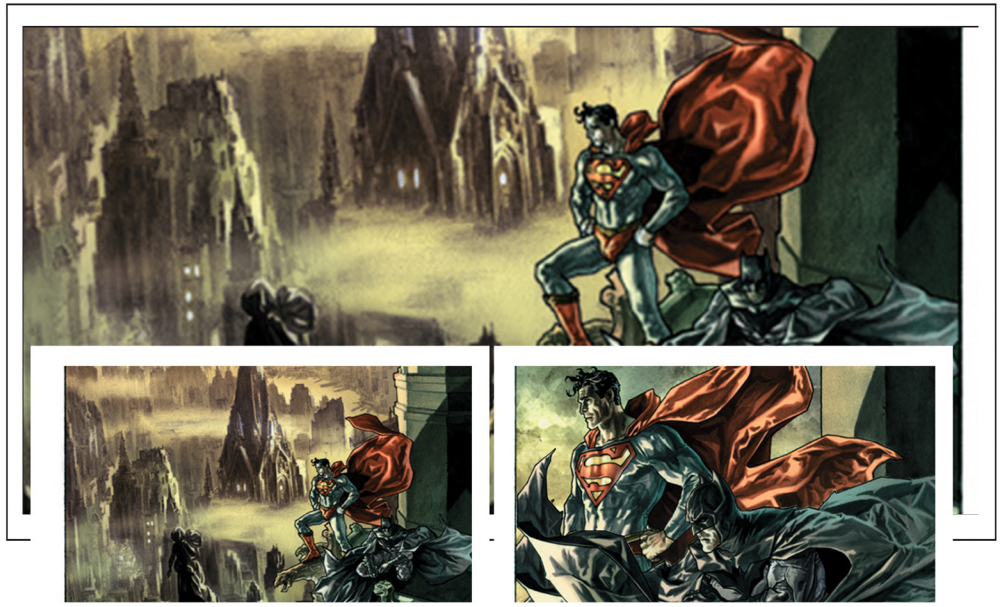
Care is taken to ensure this does not impact the story, as the viewer's position in the picture place can impact how a story is told.

ADAPTIVE CONTENT

ADJUSTING DEPTH II

When story conditions require orienting the viewer to a space, additional panels are added, as in this example. The original panel in this case is left intact, though the action will be carried out on subsequent mobile friendly compositions.

This is why the reader/player display is not actively displaying content when using a second screen. Discrepancies in the compositions being shown on screen, their different numbers and different layouts would distract users from the story and content.

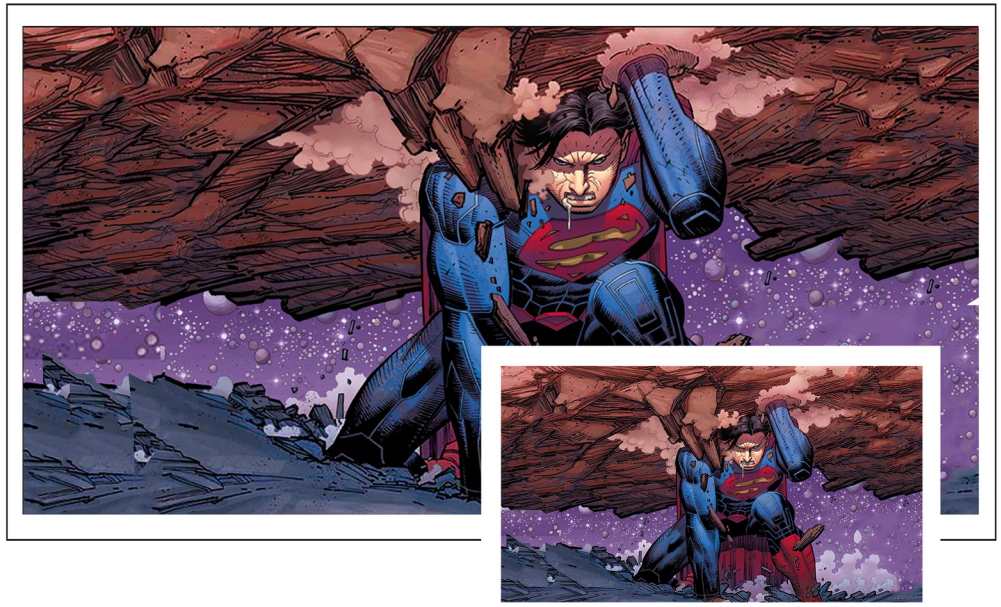


ADAPTIVE CONTENT

NON-LINEAR MOTION

Non-linear motion is defined in **Reframer** as motion components that loop, or have no fixed start and end point. This inherently adds the element of time to a composition, for the actions occur at a certain rate, and is not used where large amounts of text create a dissonance between words and actions.

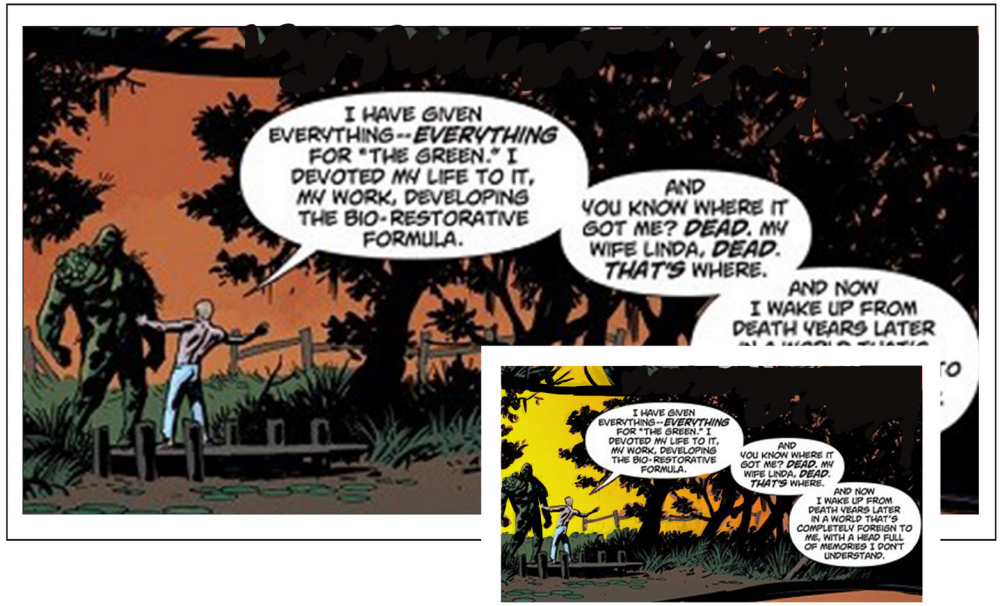
The intent is that the user maintains control of story pacing, and non-linear motion can be used to dramatic effect. The example to the right is meant to illustrate that particle animations, such as falling rocks/debris, can accomplish this. A user can enter and exit this frame without losing their natural reading rhythm.



ADAPTIVE CONTENT

NON-LINEAR MOTION

This second example of non-linear motion is in the subtle shifting of background gradients. This effect adds atmosphere to a text heavy panel, and has a positive effect on the sense of time while still leaving the rate that time passes to the user.



HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UP

HOME SCREEN

The home screen captures users' attention with high intensity imagery associated with the content within each story. The tiles load on an infinite scroll, each tiles representing a book as opposed to an individual issue or chapter.

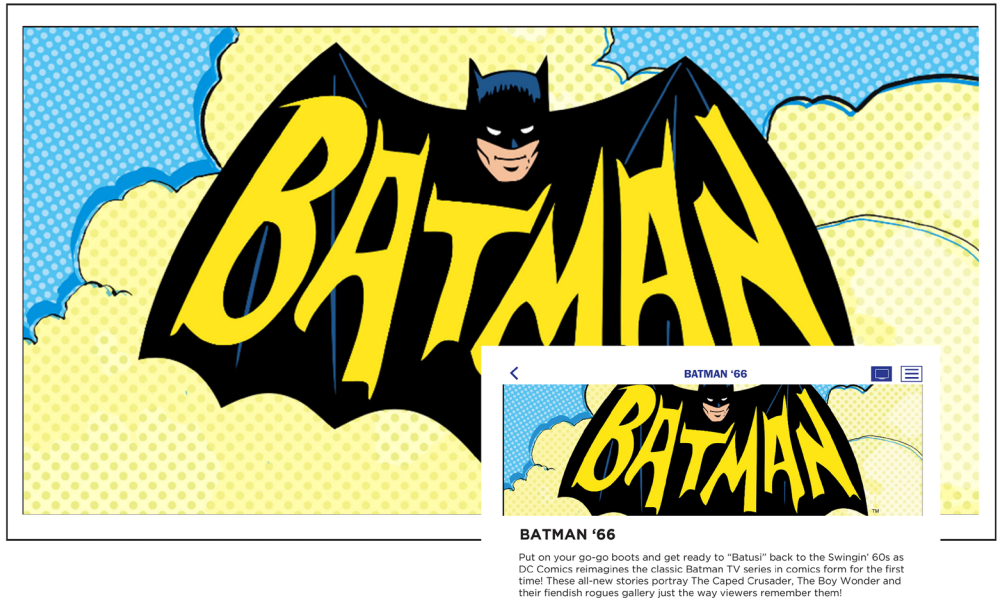
Content is loaded based on the most recent uploaded story. The latest release occupies the main splash image. The tiles are loaded in a random grid below this main tile. The random grid is chosen as the application launches, allowing for a dynamic look and feel every time a user engages **Reframer**.

HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UP

STORY/CHAPTER SELECT

The story page contains all the chapters/issues in a series of nested drop down containers. The second screen displays the main image associated with the story. This image mirrors the current selection.

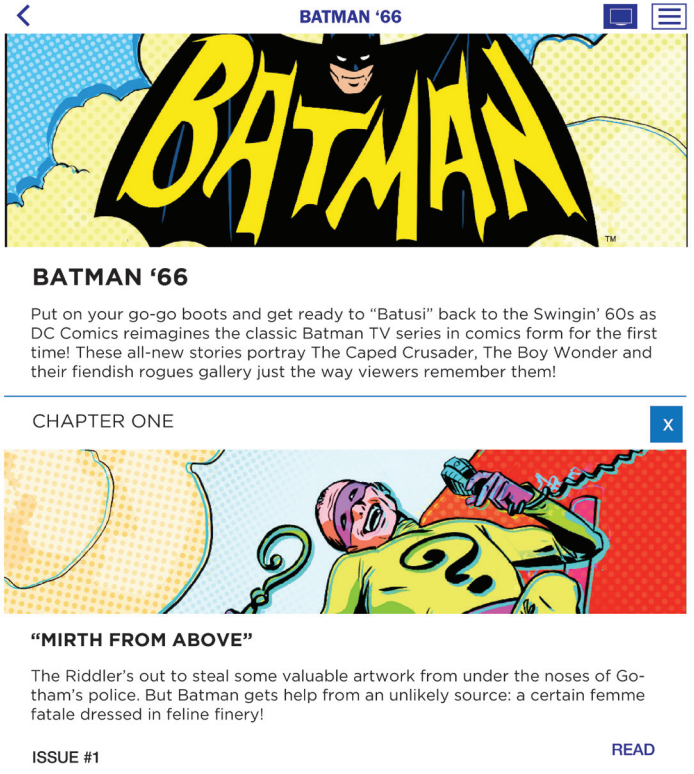
When a chapter/issue drop-down is selected, the second screen will display that associated image. The synopsis and status of that story are not displayed on the second screen.



HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UP

CHAPTER SELECTION

This is an example of an expanded chapter/issue from the selected book. The “read” status indicates the chapter has been saved to the mobile device and is available.

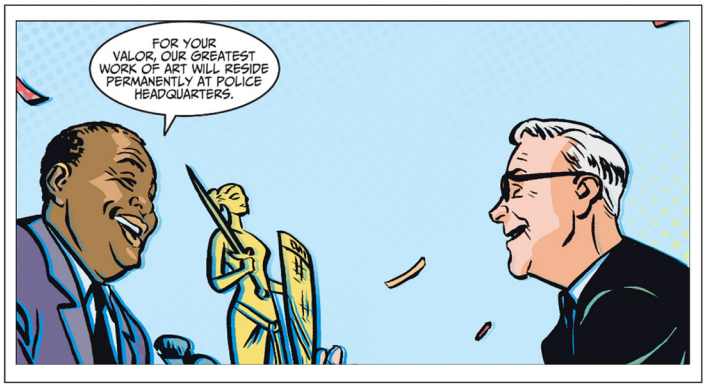


HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UP

READER INTERFACE

The UI interface appears briefly when the player/ reader is launched, orienting the user to the control layout. Swiping or tapping advances the panels. The hidden UI allows for the seamless, full-screen transition of panels.

Panels appear instantaneously, even on swipe, with no transitions, such as fades.



HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UP

READER INTERFACE

A double tap or long touch gesture will cause the UI to regain visibility. This is done so the user can access the timeline, second screen and menu icons, or to leave the story.

The story is automatically bookmarked upon leaving chapter or closing the application, allowing the user to resume where they stopped.

HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UP

TIMELINE NAVIGATION

The timeline allows users to move within a story. A thumbnail of the current panel is displayed when the vertical position bar is tapped. The user then drags the bar to the desired position and releases. Tapping outside the bar without moving the bar's position will return the player to its default configuration (visible, then fade out).

Additional thumbnails are provided on the second screen are an ease-of-use function when using the mobile device as a controller, keeping the user from having to shift focus between screens.

ADDENDUM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HELLBOY & RELATED CHARACTERS © MIKE MIGNOLA
WRITTEN BY MIKE MIGNOLA, ART BY DUNCAN
FEGREDO WITH COLORS BY DAVE STEWART

OMAC & RELATED CHARACTERS © DC COMICS
WITH WRITING AND ART BY JACK KIRBY (THE KING)

TESTAMENT & RELATED CHARACTERS © DAVE
GIBBONS, WITH WRITING AND ART BY DAVE GIBBONS

THE EIGHTH SEAL ©MARK WAID

ALL OTHER CHARACTERS © DC COMICS;
ART BY JACK KIRBY, JIM LEE, LEE BERMEJO,
SAM KEITH, YANICK PAQUETTE, JP LEON,
JONATHAN CASE, MIKE ALLRED, JOHN ROMITA JR, DAN
HIPP, BECKY CLOONAN