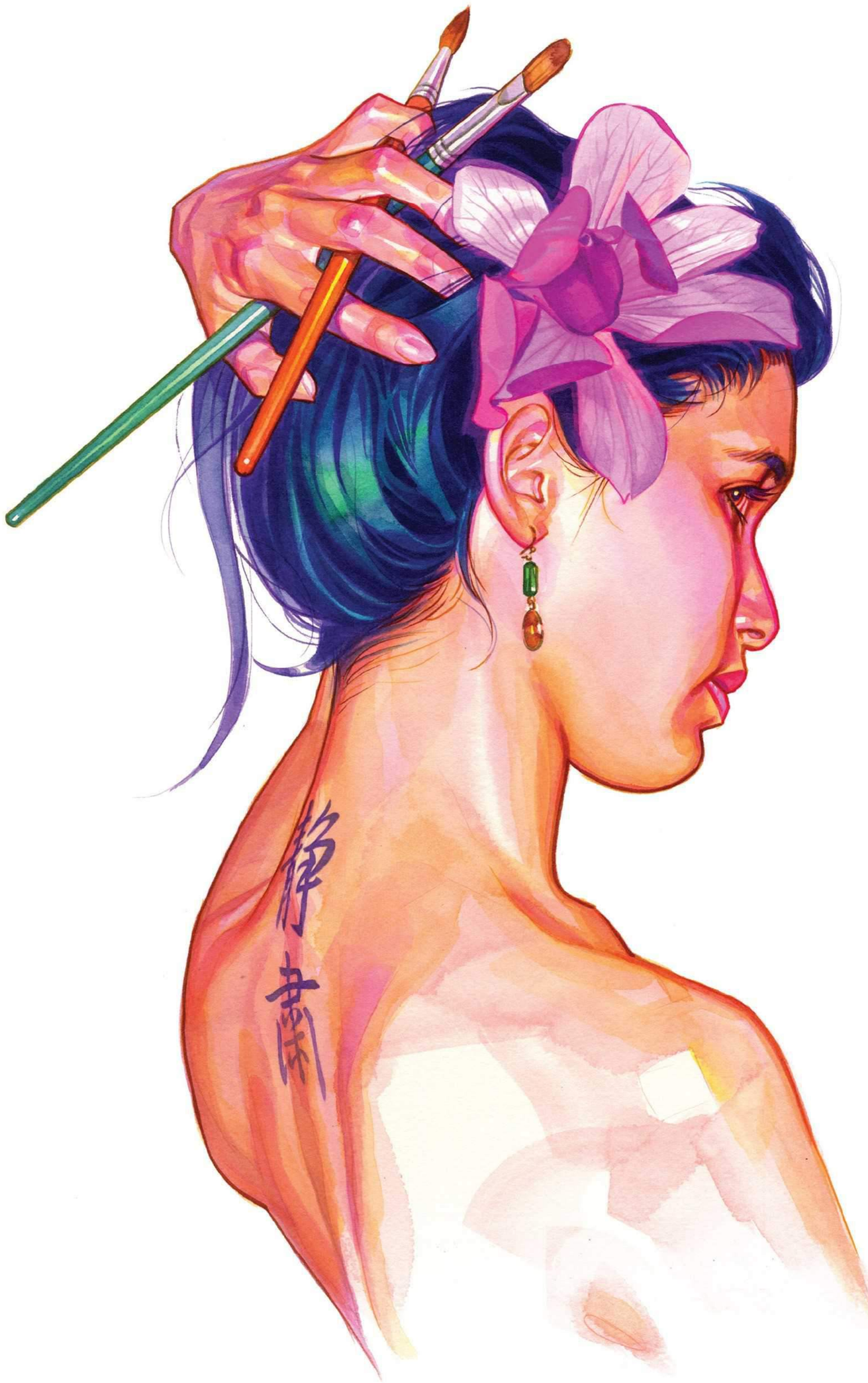




THE SIGNATURE ART OF

BRIAN STELFREEZE™



THE SIGNATURE ART OF BRIAN STELFREEZE™

BOOM! STUDIOS™

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FEATURING THE ART OF
BRIAN STELFREEZE

DESIGNER
SCOTT NEWMAN
WITH MICHELLE ANKLEY

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
JASMINE AMIRI

EDITOR
ERIC HARBURN

SPECIAL THANKS
MICHELLE POUST





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PERSONA OF INTEREST

"Brian Stelfreeze" is a character. Now, I know you think you know what I mean, and that's actually true, too. He's a total character—unique and interesting and entertaining as hell. What a character that guy is, right?

But here's what I really mean: There's the character named "Brian Stelfreeze" that draws comics, and appears at conventions and signings. A lot of people are fans of that character, the same way they're fans of, say, TV's "Jerry Seinfeld." But "Jerry" is necessarily only a hint of the real Jerry, and in that same way, "Brian" is only an aspect of the Brian I know. People tend to assign the traits they want or need to the characters they follow, and for years, I've noticed that no two people seem to know "Brian" in exactly the same way. To a lot of people, he's the knowledgeable Sensei imparting wisdom and craft to hungry students. To fans, he's the Entertainer who can wow you with things other people just can't do. To some, he's a Life Coach—a beacon for people who need advice. To others, he's something of a Hero—and to at least a couple of people, believe it or not, he's actually kind of a Villain.

Here's what's indisputable to everyone who knows about "Brian Stelfreeze": He's Just Brilliant. I've never met another soul who disputed that, who even could dispute it. As an artist, as a storyteller, as an observer of the world, as a thinker of things.

And all these traits of "Brian" are present in Brian. But my friend is so much more than that, in ways that only a few really know. And I'm really lucky to be one of those few.

I'm not sure of the year I first met Brian—maybe 1989…or was it 1990?—but I know it was at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. I'm pretty sure I stood there for at least an hour, watching him paint. I had never seen anyone paint at a con before. He probably doesn't remember I was there, because I was just another fan in the crowd and he was being "Brian." I started seeking out whatever work of his I could find, and at that point there was only *CyCops*, his futuristic series with writer Julie Woodcock. But that was all it took. It was some of the most distinctive and exciting comics work I had ever seen, and he lived only a few hours from me. So, a mutual friend took me over to "Brian's" place one day, and we've been in each other's airspace ever since. One day, he outlined an idea he had been talking about with a few other artists we knew for a studio situation in Atlanta. He told me that when I was ready, I was exactly the kind of person he wanted in the group. Sign me up, I thought.

When I made the move to Atlanta to join Gaijin Studios, I discovered a whole cast of characters along with "Brian." And it would be fun to say that he and I were immediately inseparable best pals, but to be honest, I don't think we were. We certainly liked and respected each other, but in those early days, I think we were still characters to each other, as well. Neither of us had really, truly gotten past the façades yet.

I ended up being there for 18 years. Studiomates came and went. And somewhere along the way, "Brian" and "Cully" got to know each other as Brian and Cully, and we started to really depend on and confide in each other. Other than his partner in life, the truly fine oil painter Stine Walsh, I think I may have spent more consistent, daily time with the guy than anyone else in his adult life. We've seen each other at our best and our absolute worst. We've supported each other. We've educated each other. We've pissed each other off. We've amused each other to no end.

I guess what I'm getting at is that the character—the Sensei, the Entertainer, the Life Coach, the Just Brilliant Hero and Villain—yeah, that is all him, for sure. It's all in there, and it informs the Image. But like one of his amazing paintings, there's so much more color at work than what the image would have you believe at first glance. He taught me how to look at color in art, and he's taught me how to look at color in a soul.

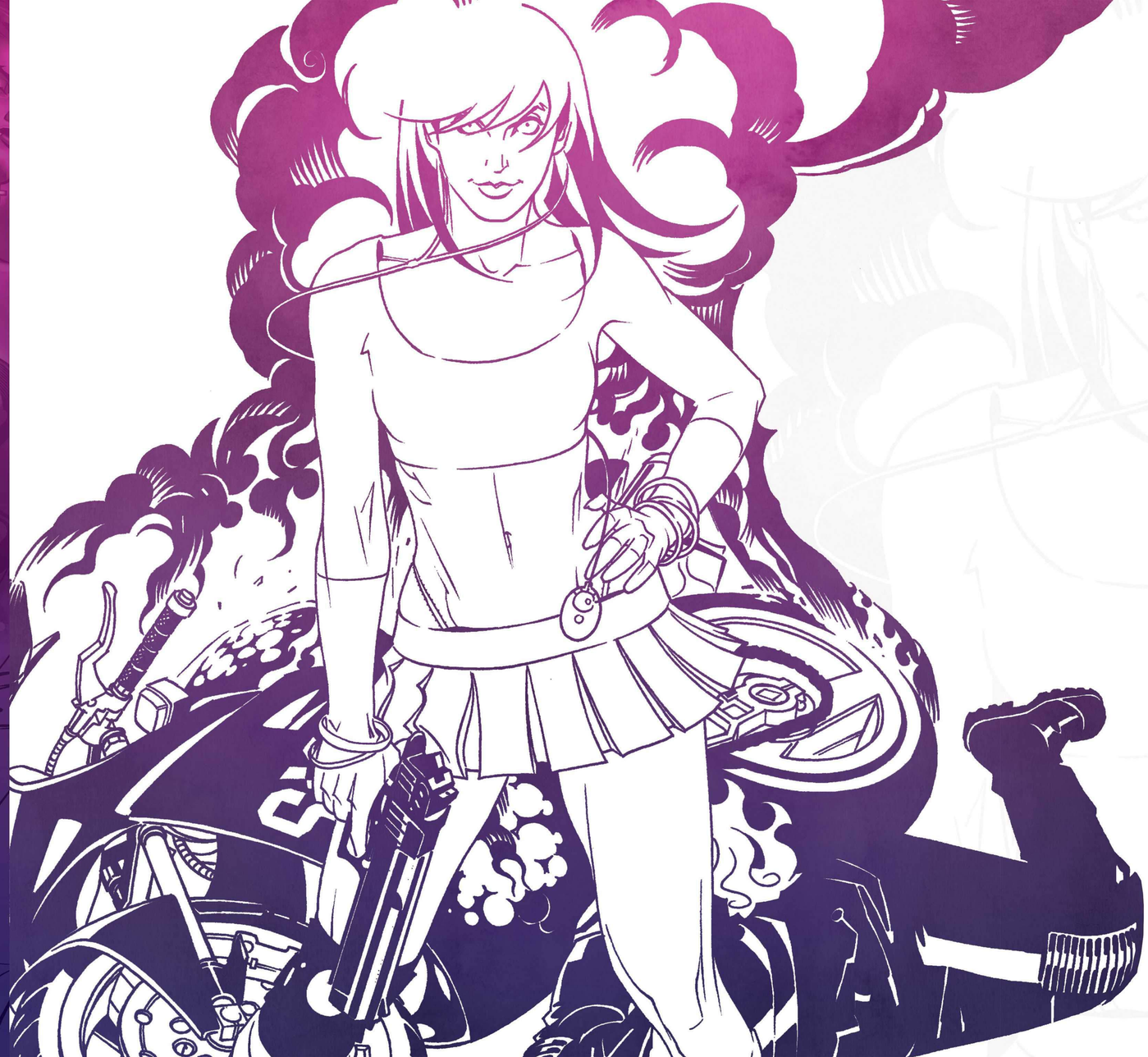
I'm realizing as I write this that I'm doing a lot of explaining that describes feelings rather than specifics, and I don't know if I can do better than that. The best characters are those that make you want to know more, walking the line between flux and familiarity in a constant state of promise. They don't just tell you who they are—they hint at who they might be.

Brian Stelfreeze lives for making characters alive. And if it's true that we all exist in each other's stories, I can only say that I'm thankful for his huge part in mine.

—CULLY HAMNER

Writer/Illustrator: *Red, Blue Beetle, Green Lantern*


PERSONAL ILLUSTRATIONS
ORIGINAL AND COMMISSIONED PIECES
Camaro
SS



ABSINTHE AND HEROIN

"Brian, I think I've gone too far this time. I think everyone's gonna hate it."

"Then you've won!"

Let's back up for a minute and start with a little background first. Brian and I became friends back in the early '90s. We lived in different states at the time, so we visited mostly at cons and the like. Those cons gave us the chance to have many a late night discussion about storytelling, comics, and the fact that we were both temporarily classified as "mentally-challenged" in the fifth grade…that's a story for another time. In 2003, I was fortunate enough to move to Atlanta, Georgia, home of the Brian Stelfreeze. A few years afterwards, we became studio mates at Gaijin Studios. During our time together at Gaijin, Brian became more family to me than my own family.

Now that that's out of the way, let's get all philosophical-like. If you've ever spent any time talking to Brian, you know he's some sort of Yoda-level maharishi on the subject of visual storytelling. Some of the stuff he says is mind-blowingly brilliant, some of it is the most ludicrous, disturbing witchcraft your ears will ever absorb. If he has a superpower, that's it. Well, one day back in 2006, Brian broke my brain.

At the time, Brian and I were working on the *Gun Candy* comic book. We were both doing some things in that book that neither of us had attempted before, really pushing for something new. One late night I was typing away on the script and started laughing out loud at what I had just thrown down. The laughter quickly gave way to horrifying panic. A single thought raced over and over through my mind: "I'd gone too far." My gut was telling me I'd gotten too carried away. For the next two days, I obsessed over that one page of script. I couldn't stop thinking that every person I knew, and all the ones I didn't, were going to crucify me for it. Finally, I decided to duck over into Brian's office and see what the all-powerful story-Yoda had to say.

"Dude, I think I may have pushed it too far."

Brian rolled back from his desk and simply said, "That's not possible."

I confessed that I was certain everybody would hate it and that I'd ruin the book and his reputation. He stared blankly at me for a second while his voodoo charged to full power.

"Doug, I'm going to tell you my secret. The absolute worst thing, the most soul-crushing comment anyone can make about my work is that it is 'okay,' or even worse, if they act indifferent to it. I want people to either avidly love what I've put on the page or hate it with the deepest, darkest part of their soul. Anything in between is artistic death."

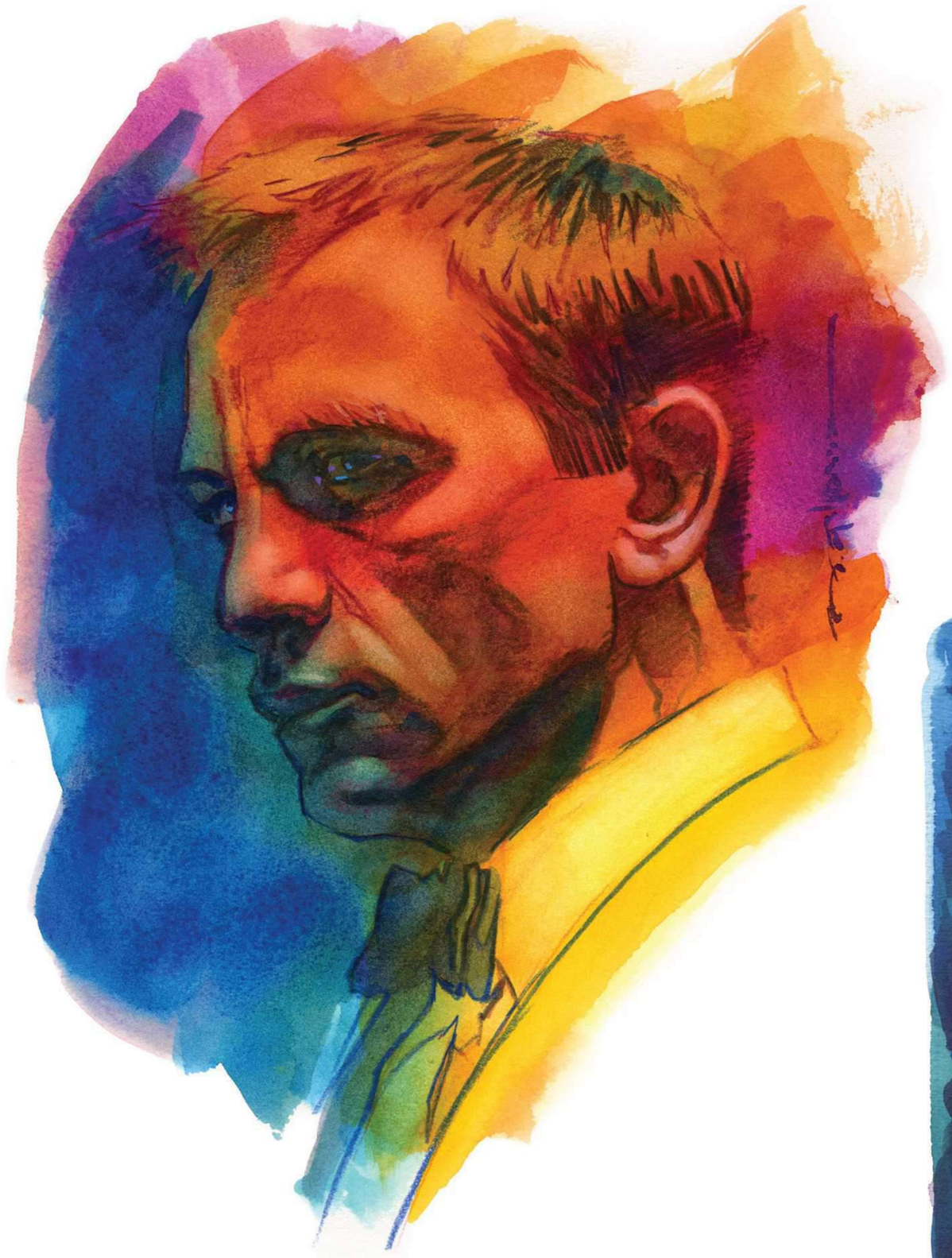
That hit me like a shot of absinthe laced with heroin. My heart was telling me he was right, but my brain felt like it was having seizures. It scared the bejesus out of me to even contemplate having somebody "hate" my work, much less consider that a triumphant success. I told him I had to think about it for a bit and teetered out of his office. I'm sure to Brian it looked like a drunk fifth grader running to his mommy, which wasn't far from the truth. The following few days are still a blur to me. I didn't mention it again while we were in the studio, I didn't talk to anyone about it, I didn't write a single word, all I did was obsess over Brian's "secret."

Finally my head fog cleared, and I came to the realization that Brian was undeniably right. It is still one of the best pieces of advice I've ever received. A creative should never strive to please everyone with their work. That's not possible, no matter how hard you try. They should give caution a kick in the ass and simply let their freak flag fly. No holding back. What Brian taught me that day has inspired, and haunted, me every day since. Now, every time I put fingertips to keyboard I go all out. And I hope everybody hates it!!

—DOUG WAGNER
Managing Editor, 12 Gauge
Writer: *Gun Candy*



BATMAN
Watercolor
DC Comics
2008

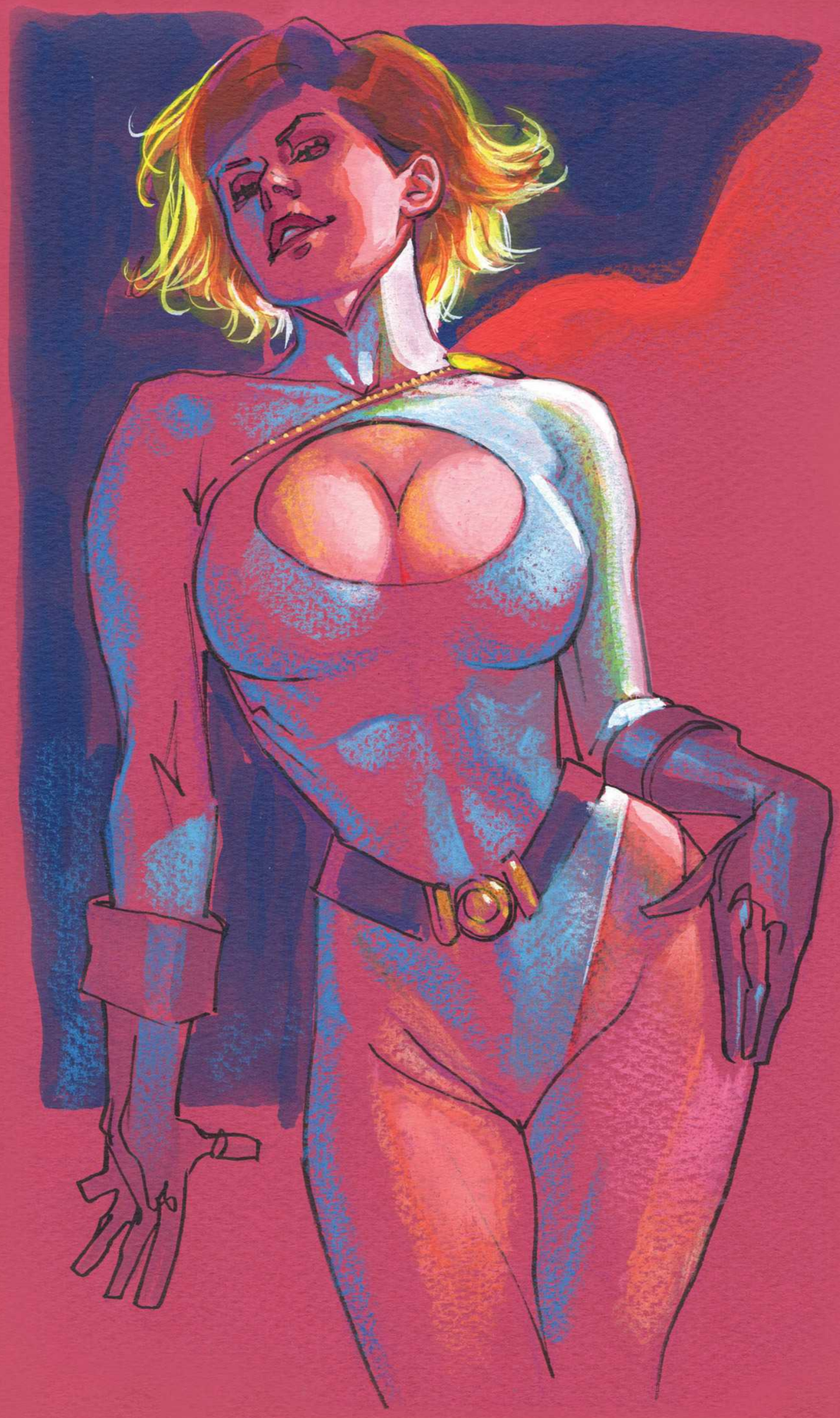




(Left) **JAMES BOND**
Watercolor
MGM
2011

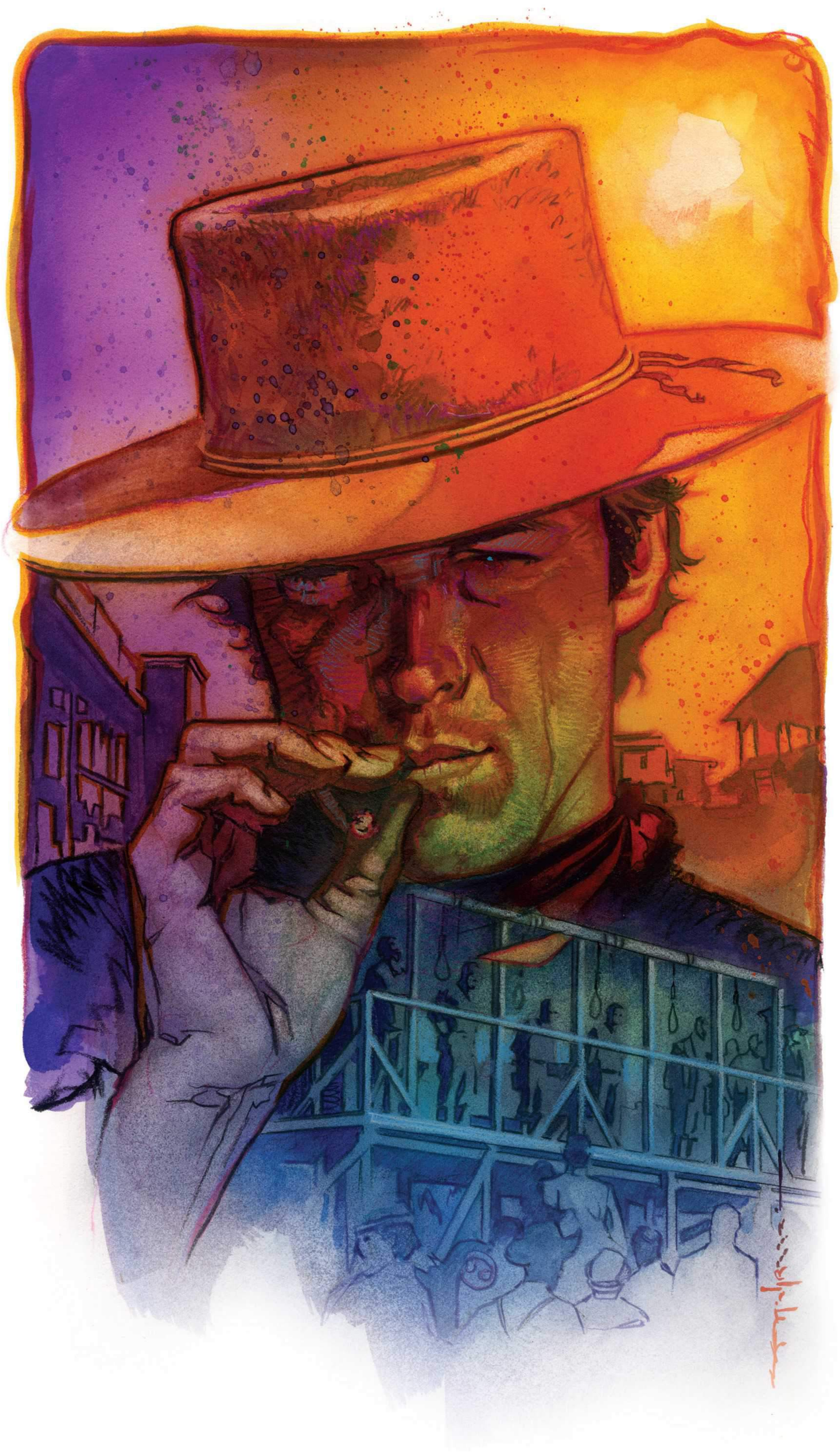
(Right) **LUCILLE BALL**
Watercolor
2008





(Left) **VIXEN**
Mixed media
DC Comics
2014

(Right) **POWER GIRL**
Mixed media
DC Comics
2014

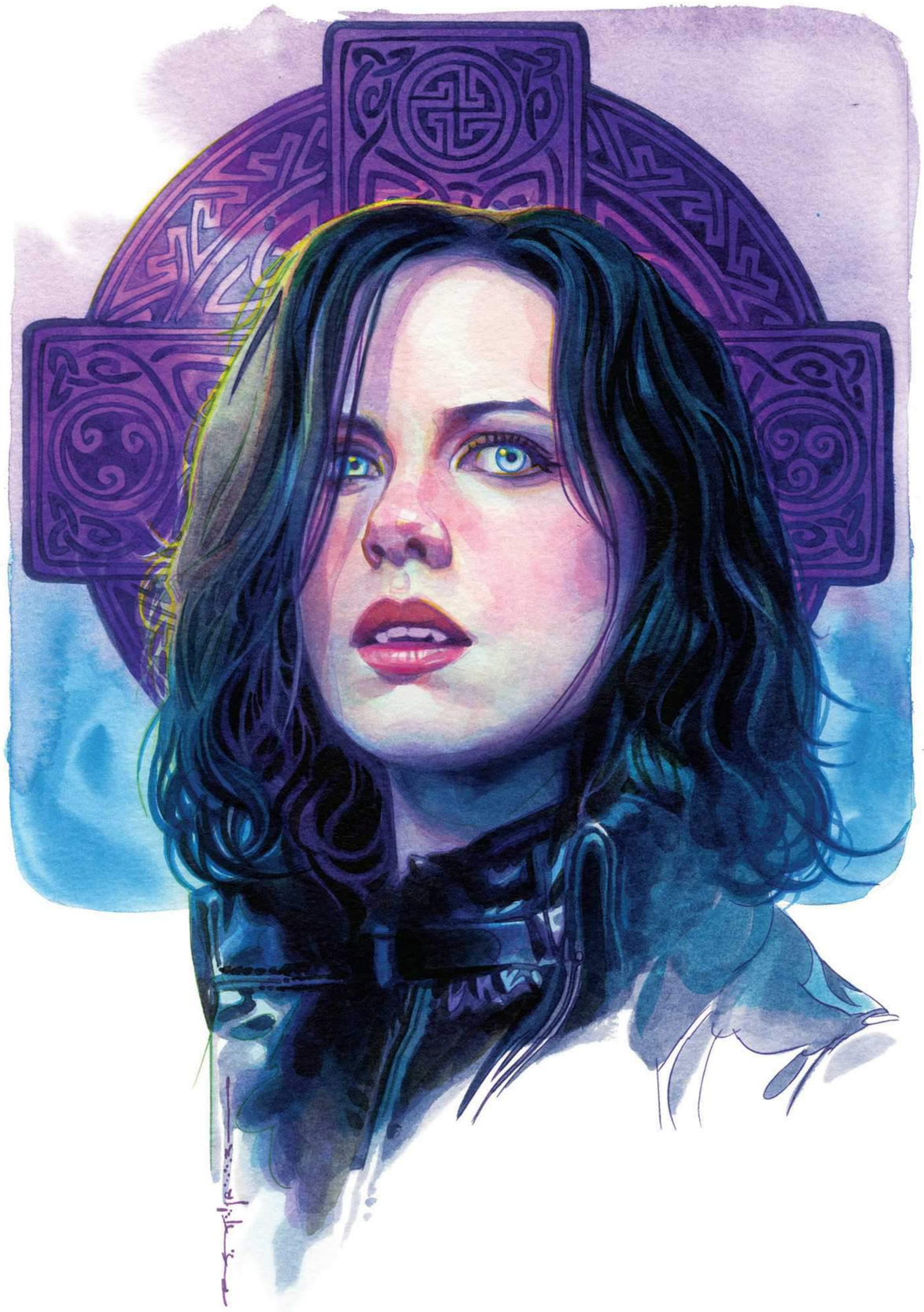


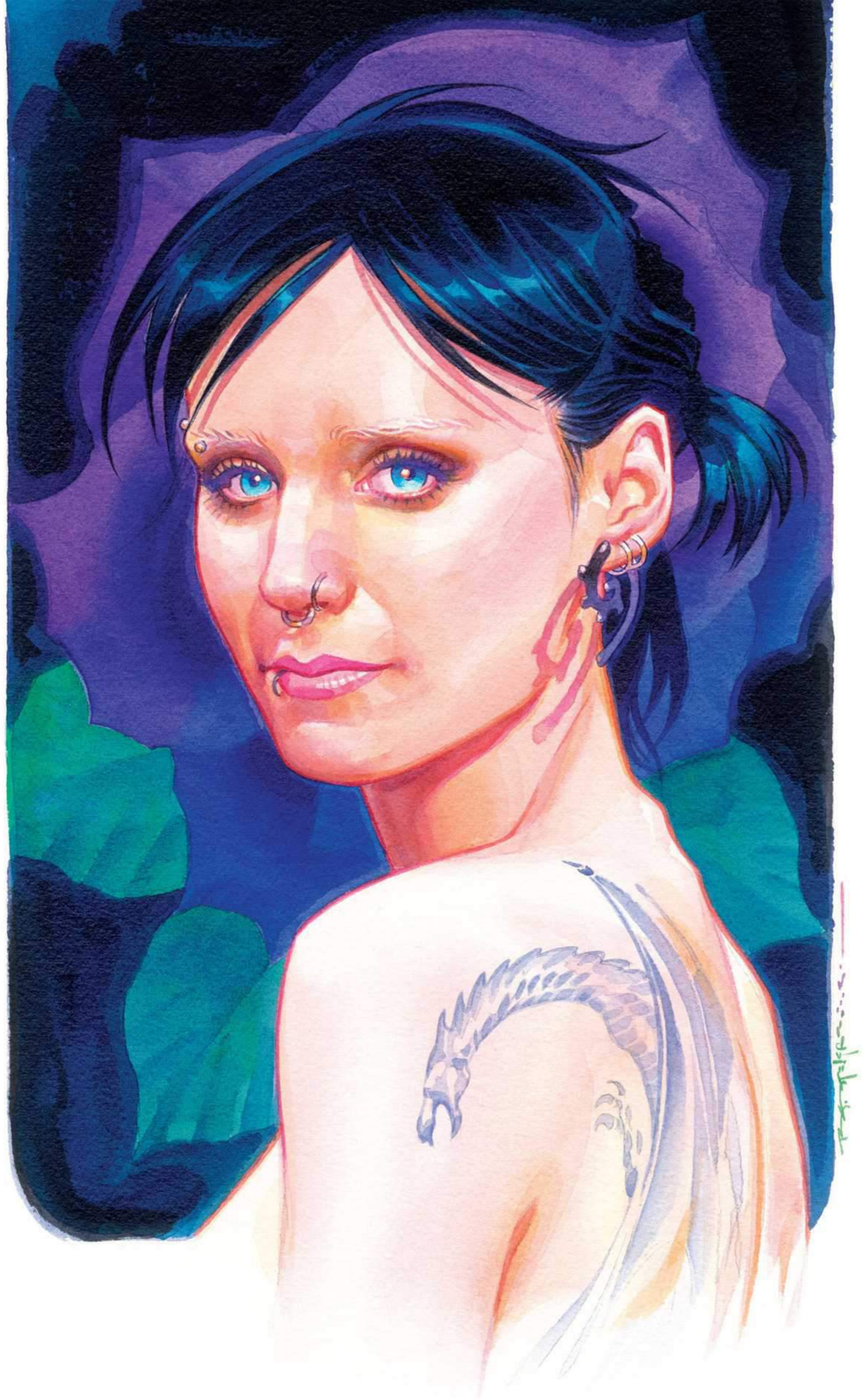
CLINT EASTWOOD
Watercolor, gouache
2013

BATGIRL
Watercolor
DC Comics
2009



VAMPIRELLA
Watercolor
Dynamite Entertainment
2012





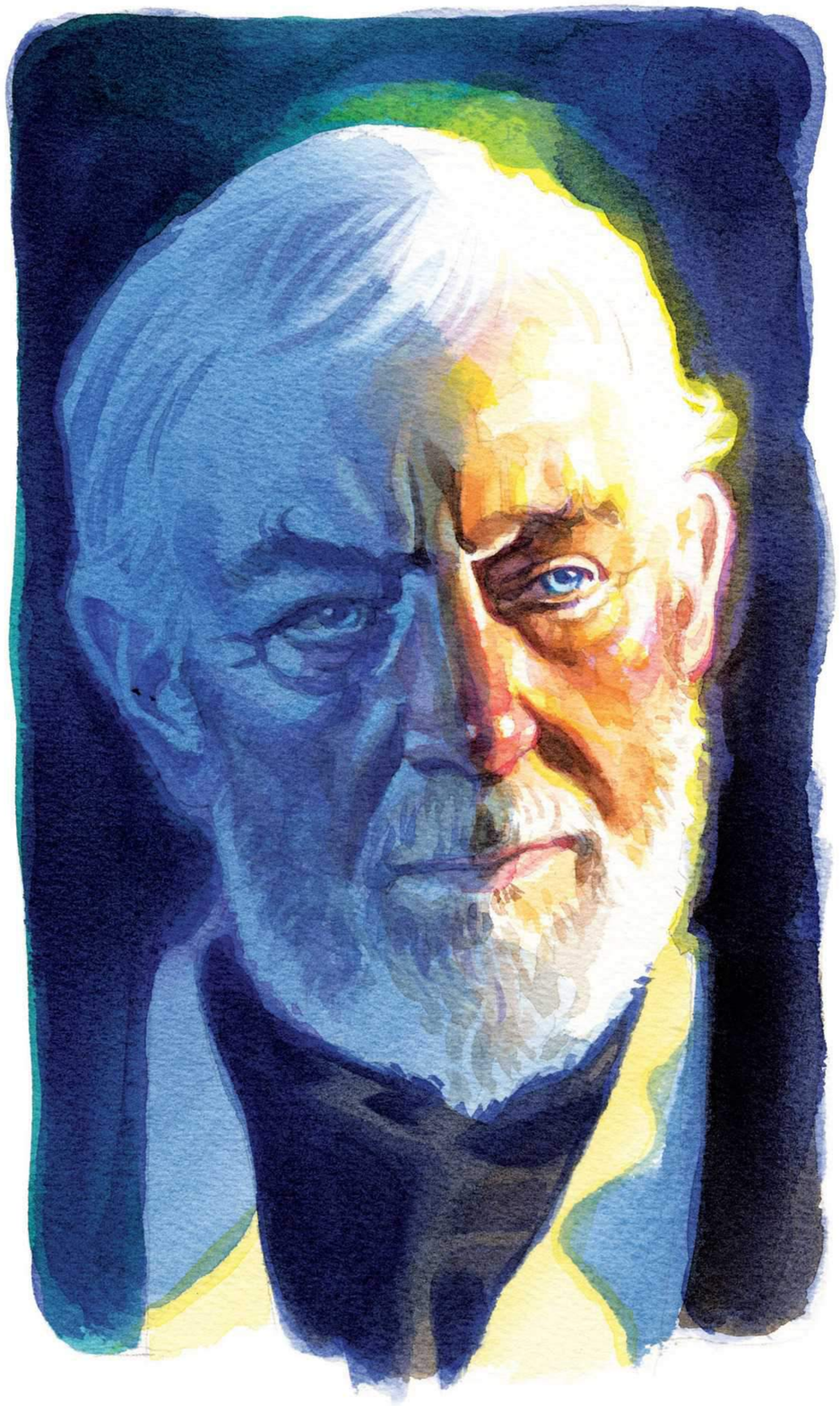
(Left) **SELENE**
Watercolor
Screen Gems
2010

(Right) **LISBETH SALANDER**
Watercolor on paper
MGM
2011



DAREDEVIL & BLACK WIDOW
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2014





(Left) **SUPERBOY**
Watercolor
DC Comics
2003

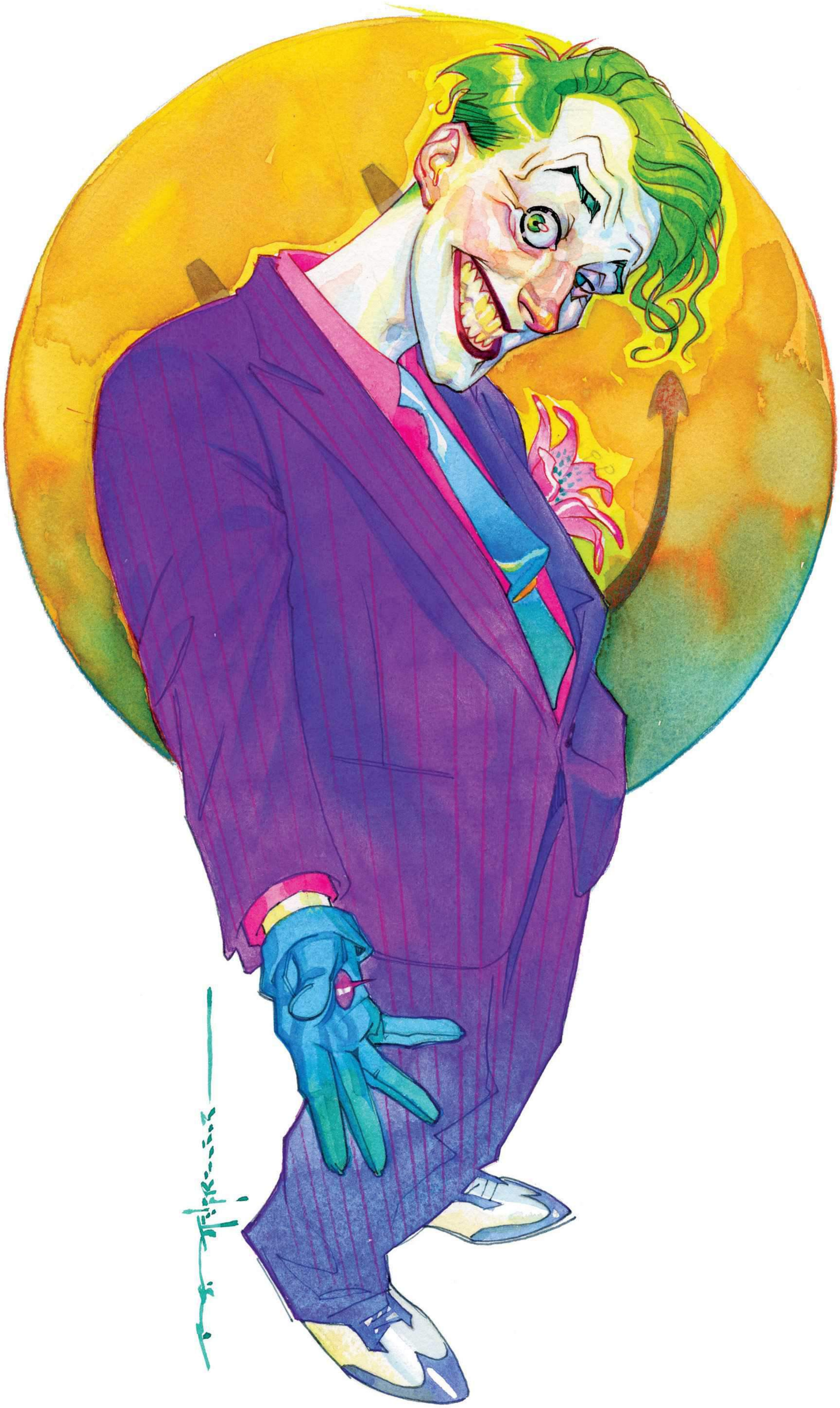
(Right) **OBI WAN KENOBI**
Watercolor
Disney
2006





(Above) **URSULA**
Watercolor, acrylic
Disney
2014

(Below) **SOPHIA LOREN**
Watercolor on paper
2010



JOKER
Watercolor
DC Comics
2006



BLACK WIDOW
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2006





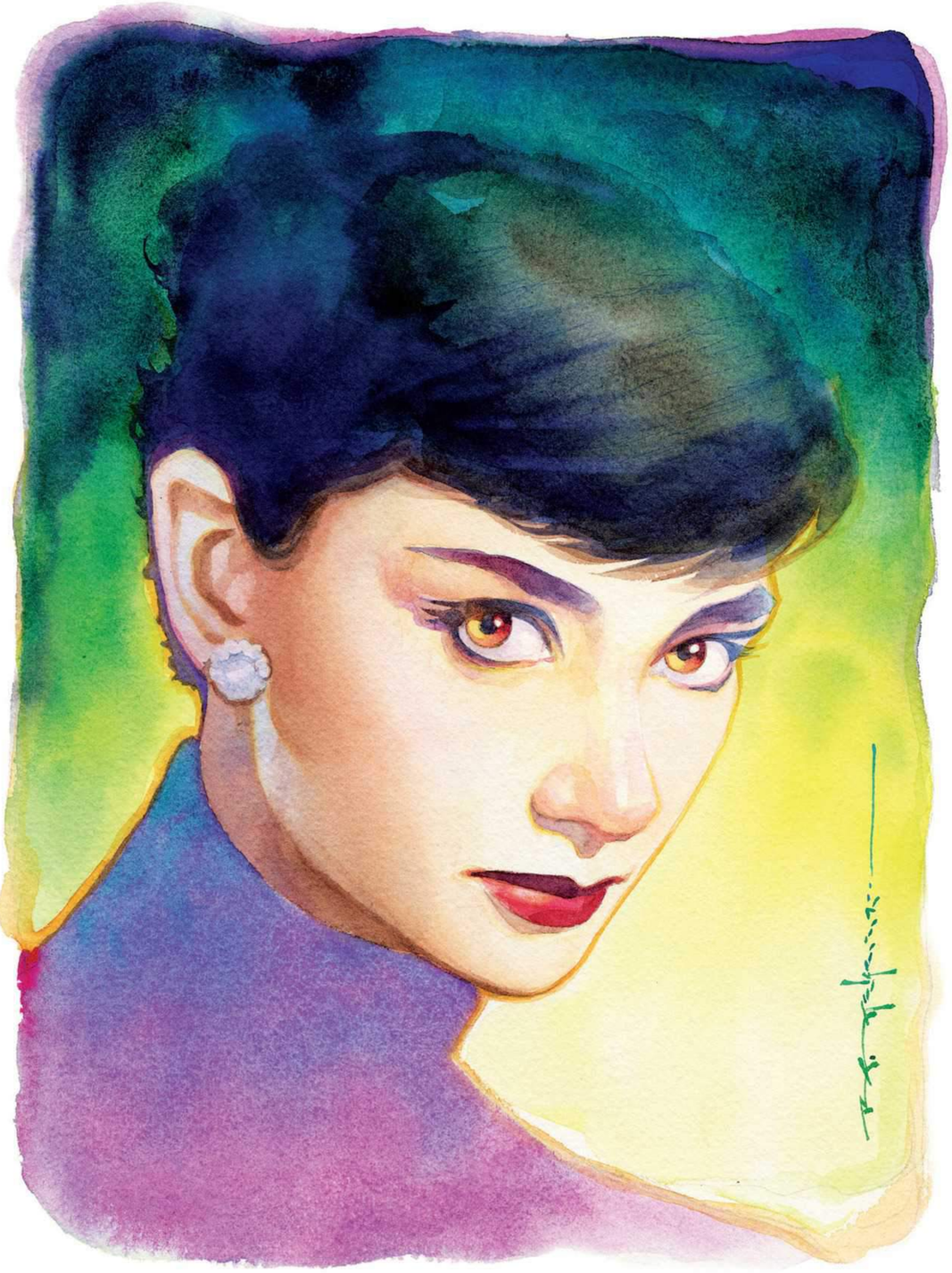
(Left) **DAUGHTERS OF THE DRAGON**
Watercolor, acrylic
Marvel Comics
2010

(Right) **JULIE NEWMAR AS CATWOMAN**
Acrylic
DC Comics
2014



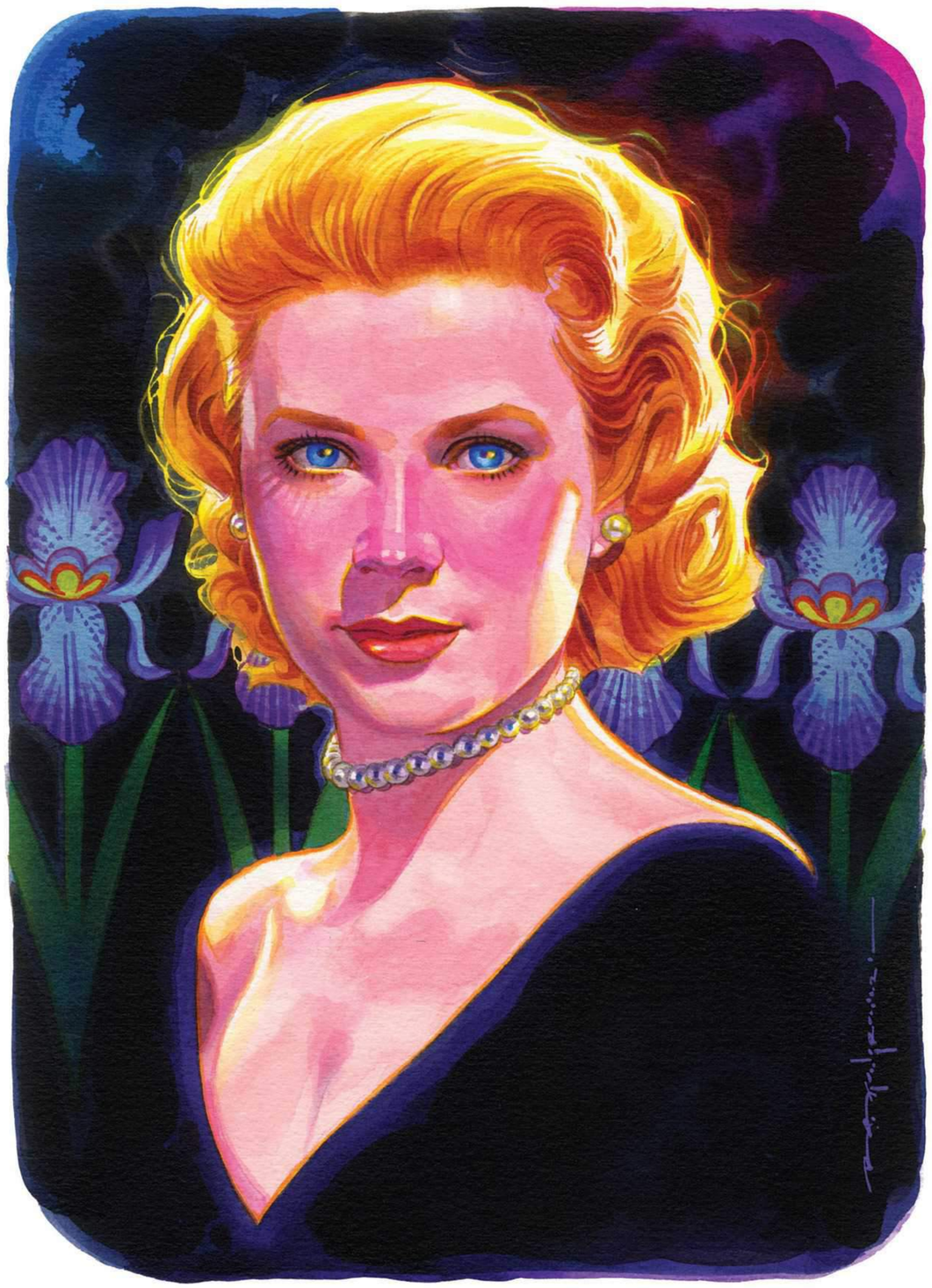
NEAPOLITAN
Watercolor
2008





(Left) **INGRID BERGMAN**
Watercolor on paper
2007

(Right) **AUDREY HEPBURN**
Watercolor on paper
2004





(Left) **GRACE KELLY**
Watercolor on paper
2010

(Right) **VESPER LYND**
Watercolor on paper
MGM
2008

THE PROCESS

I try to come up with a driving theme for all the portraits I do. Sometimes I'm struck right away with an idea, but other times it can take more than a year. When I was asked to do a portrait of Christian Bale as Batman, the theme presented itself immediately: precision. There is an exacting method to Bale's acting. He's at his best when the characters are sharp and refined to the point of insanity. This made him a perfect choice for Bruce Wayne. This was the theme that I wanted to embody when I embarked on this portrait.

With this in mind, I wanted to plan every stage before making my first mark. This involved tackling a few design sketches and mapping out my color theory and black/white/grey composition ahead of time. The plan here is to lay out a detailed roadmap and follow it every step of the way.

- The first step was to get a really solid drawing on the board and establish the major shadow values of his face. I wanted to get this right before attempting anything else.

- With a solid likeness in place, I went on to the darker design elements. This image is heavily influenced by both J.C. Leyendecker and Coles Phillips, but I wanted to add a subtle pattern to the graphic elements.

- Continued to establish the graphic pattern of darks around the rendered elements.

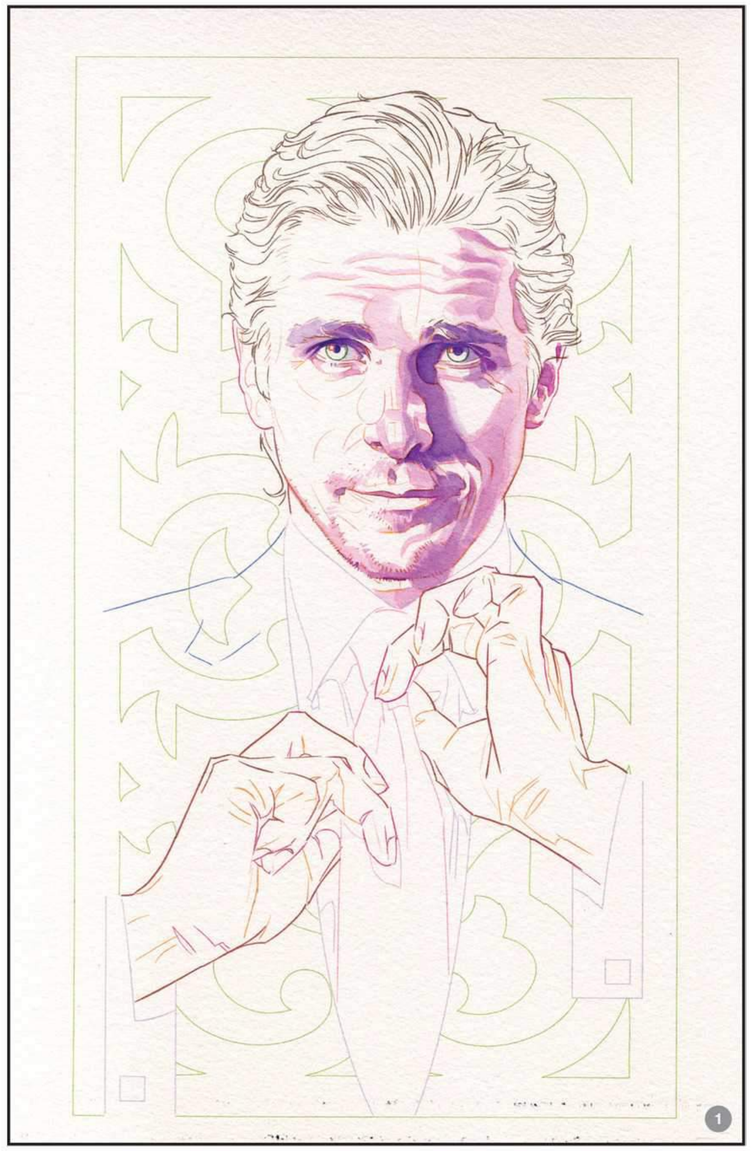
- On most occasions I try to complete all background elements before finalizing my subject. This makes sure that the subject always dominates the background.

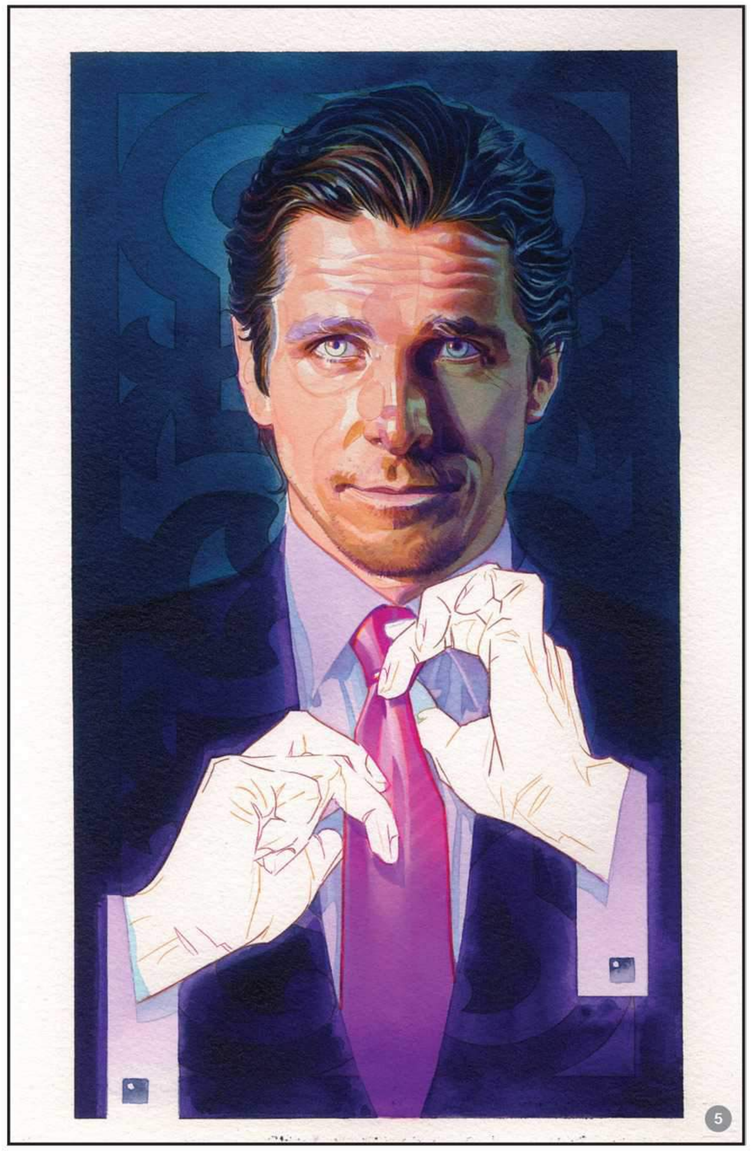
- After I'd finalized the background I completed work on the shirt and tie. Technically, these too are background elements for this portrait.

- I established the base flesh tones and shadows on the hands. This is more about capturing the highlights and establishing the value in the light.

- Adding in the blush of color and temperature is my favorite part of portraiture. At this stage I add in reds, yellows, and oranges to establish those little color changes under the skin.

- This is a detail shot before I tackle my deep shadows and dark values.



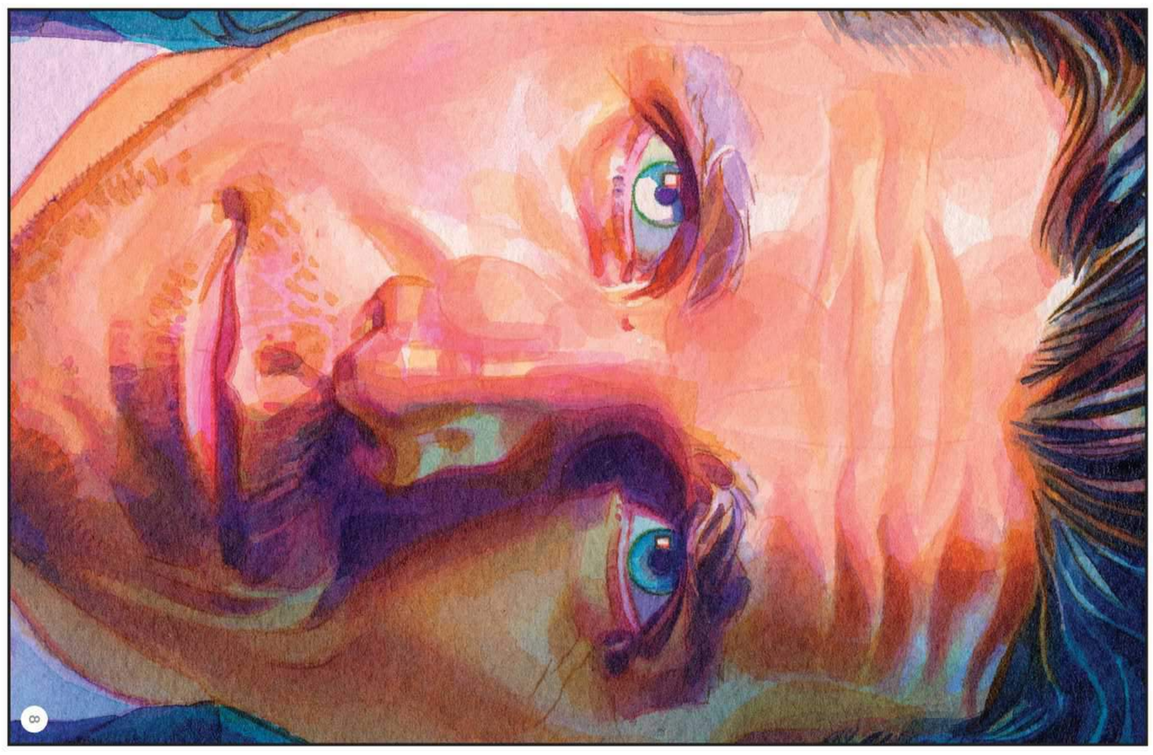



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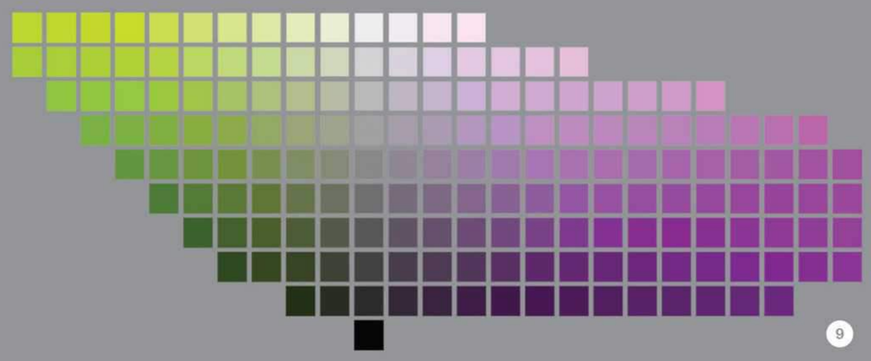

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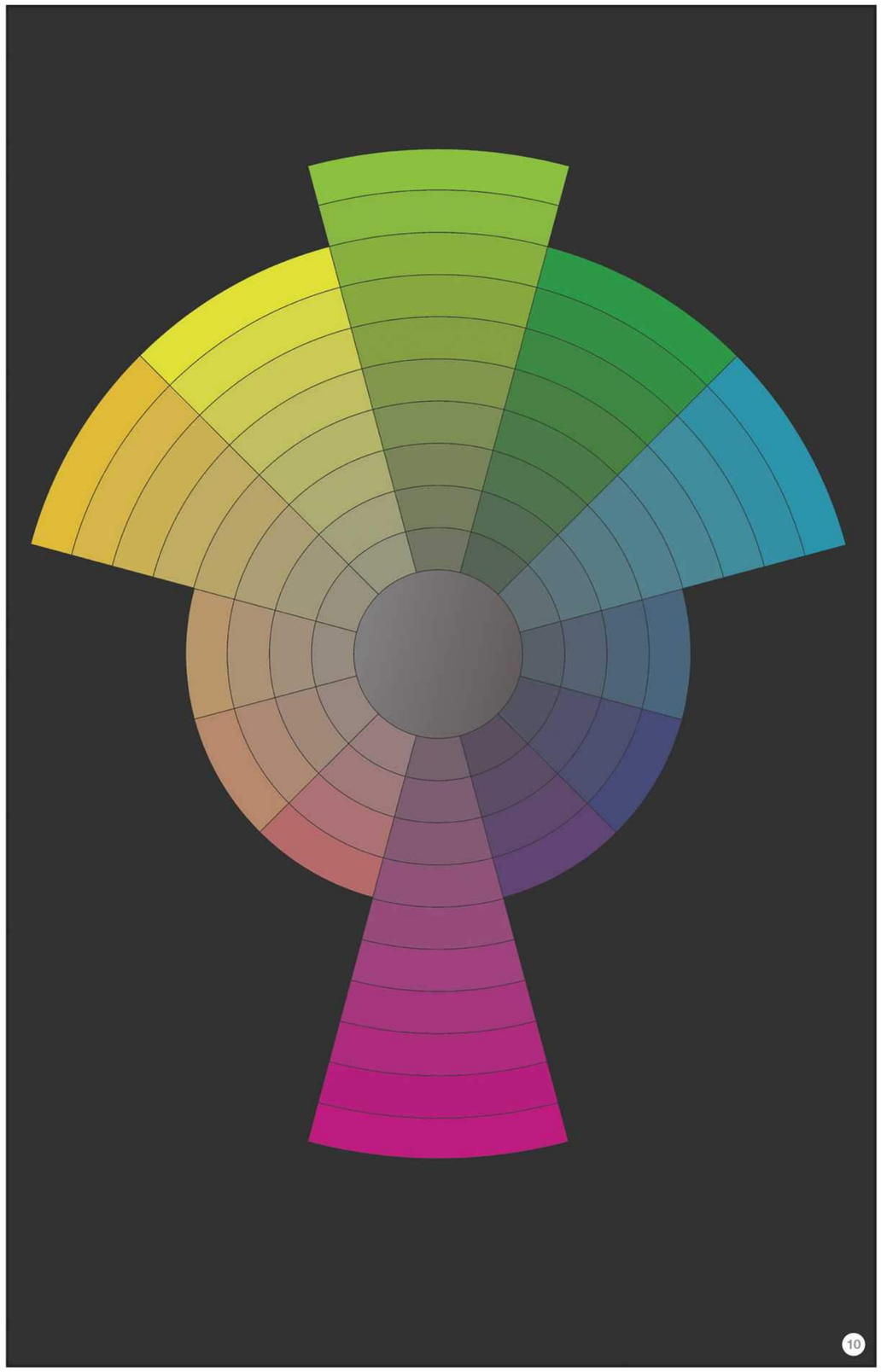


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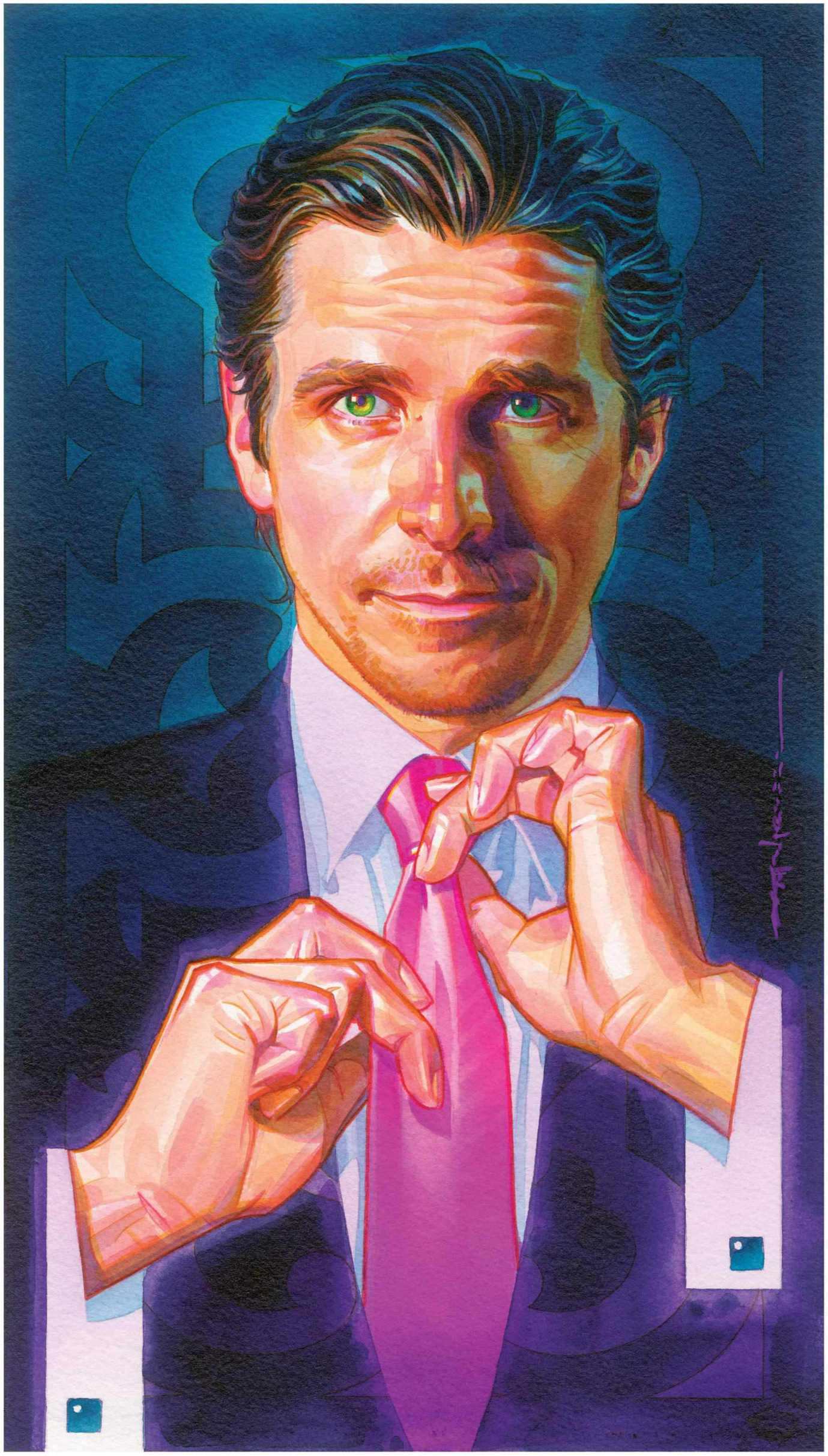
- This is a page from the Munsell Color Booklet. These were the dominant colors I wanted to use throughout this illustration. I pinned this to my desk to make sure I stayed in this neighborhood.

- This color wheel shows the color patterns I used throughout the painting.

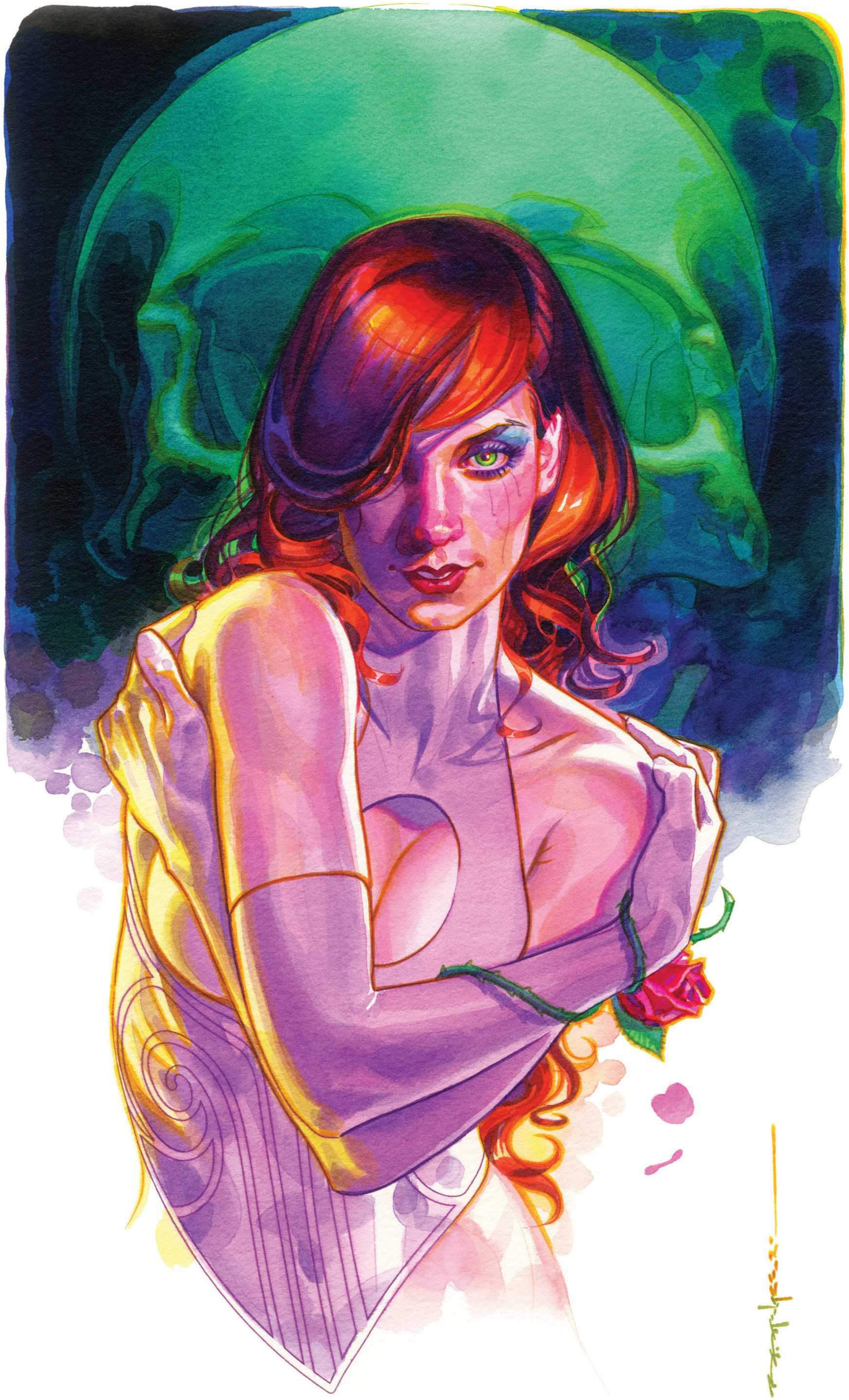
- The last thing I add in is the bright green with a slight bit of alizarin crimson of his eyes. Hopefully this establishes the subject of this image.



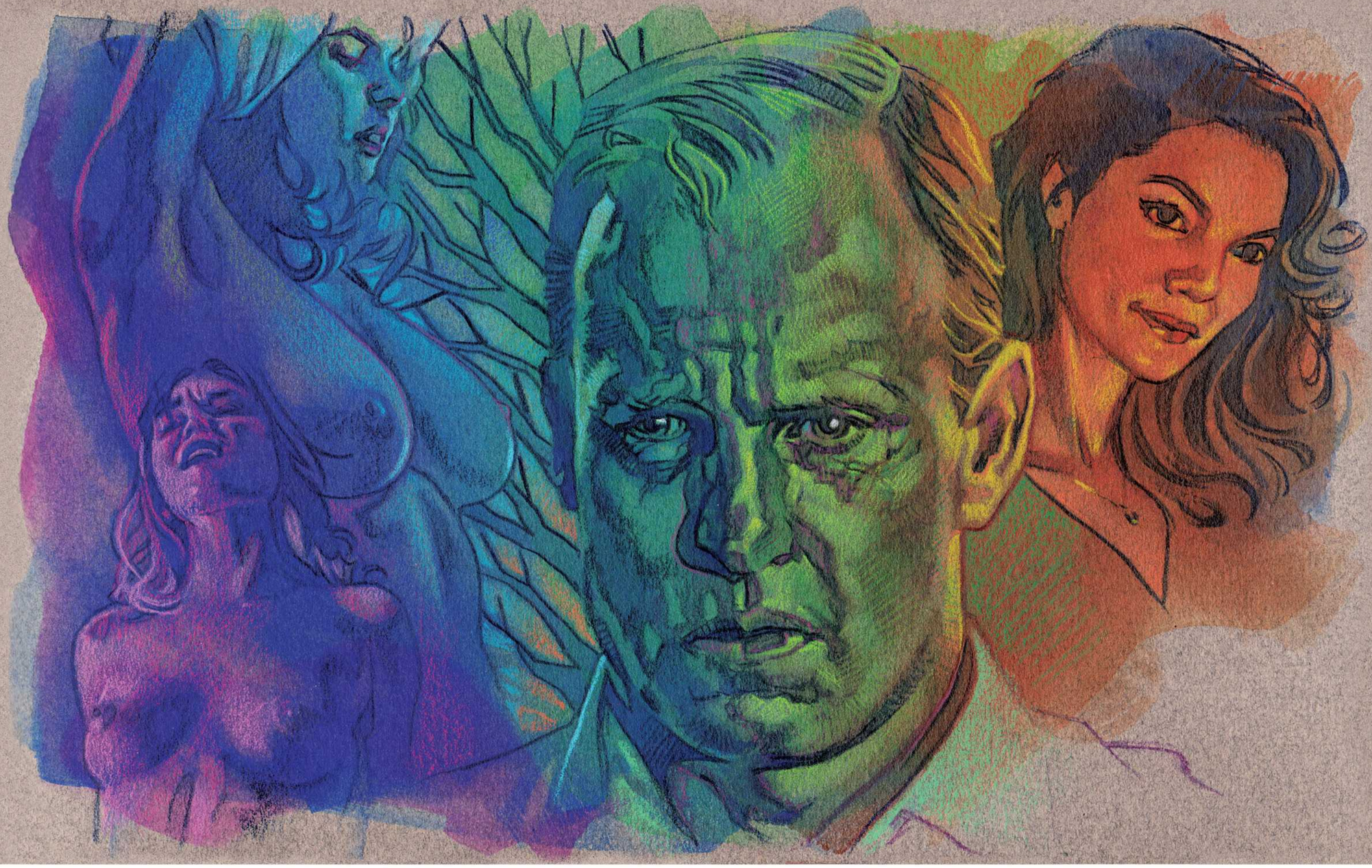
10



CHRISTIAN BALE
Watercolor, acylic
2012



DAWN
Watercolor
Sirius Entertainment
2010





(Above)
DETECTIVE HART
Mixed media
HBO
2014

(Below)
DETECTIVE COHLE
Mixed media
HBO
2014



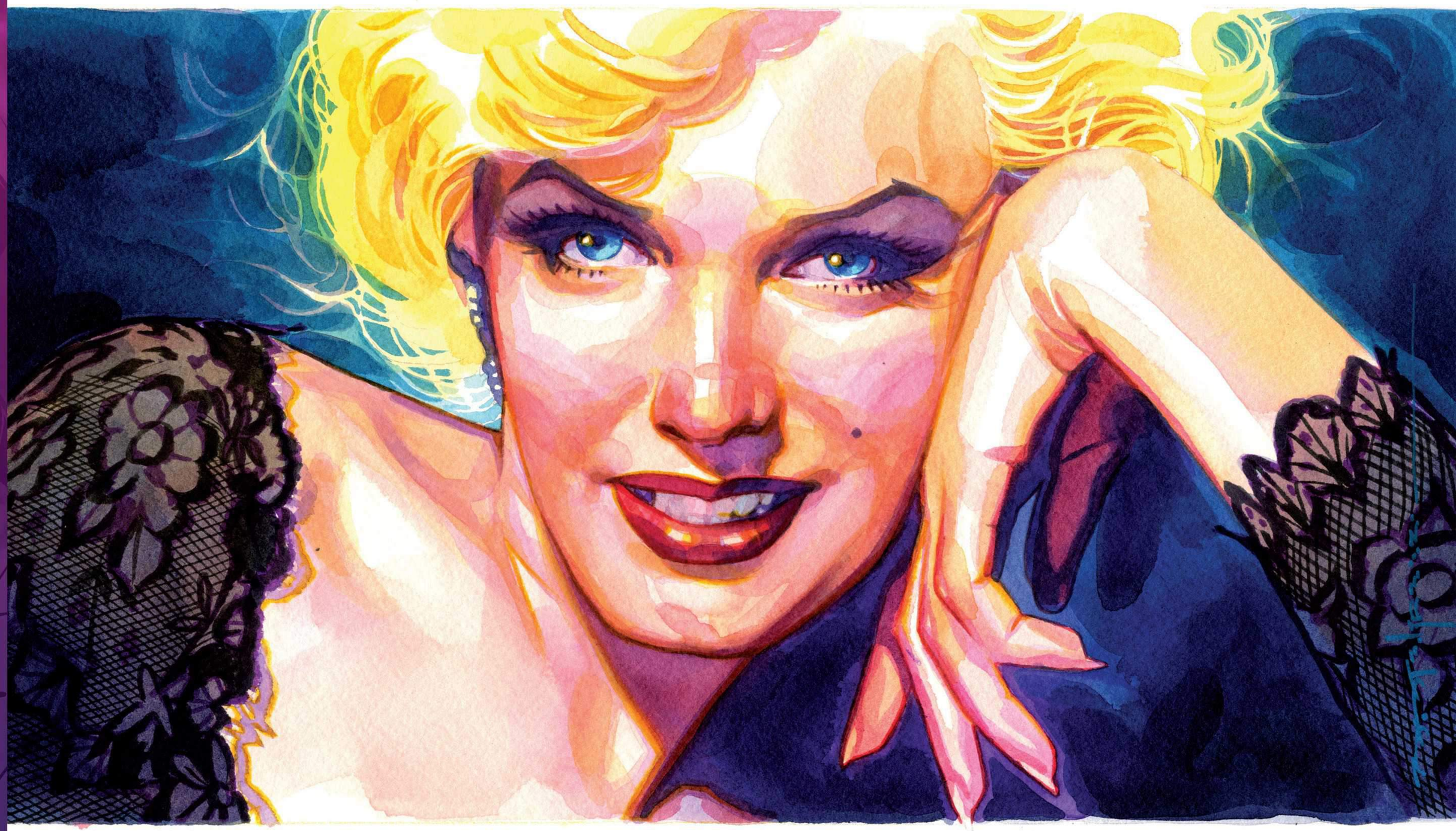


(Left) **PSALMS FROM THE STUDIO**
Sketchbook Cover
Watercolor
2012

(Right) **NICK FURY**
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2015

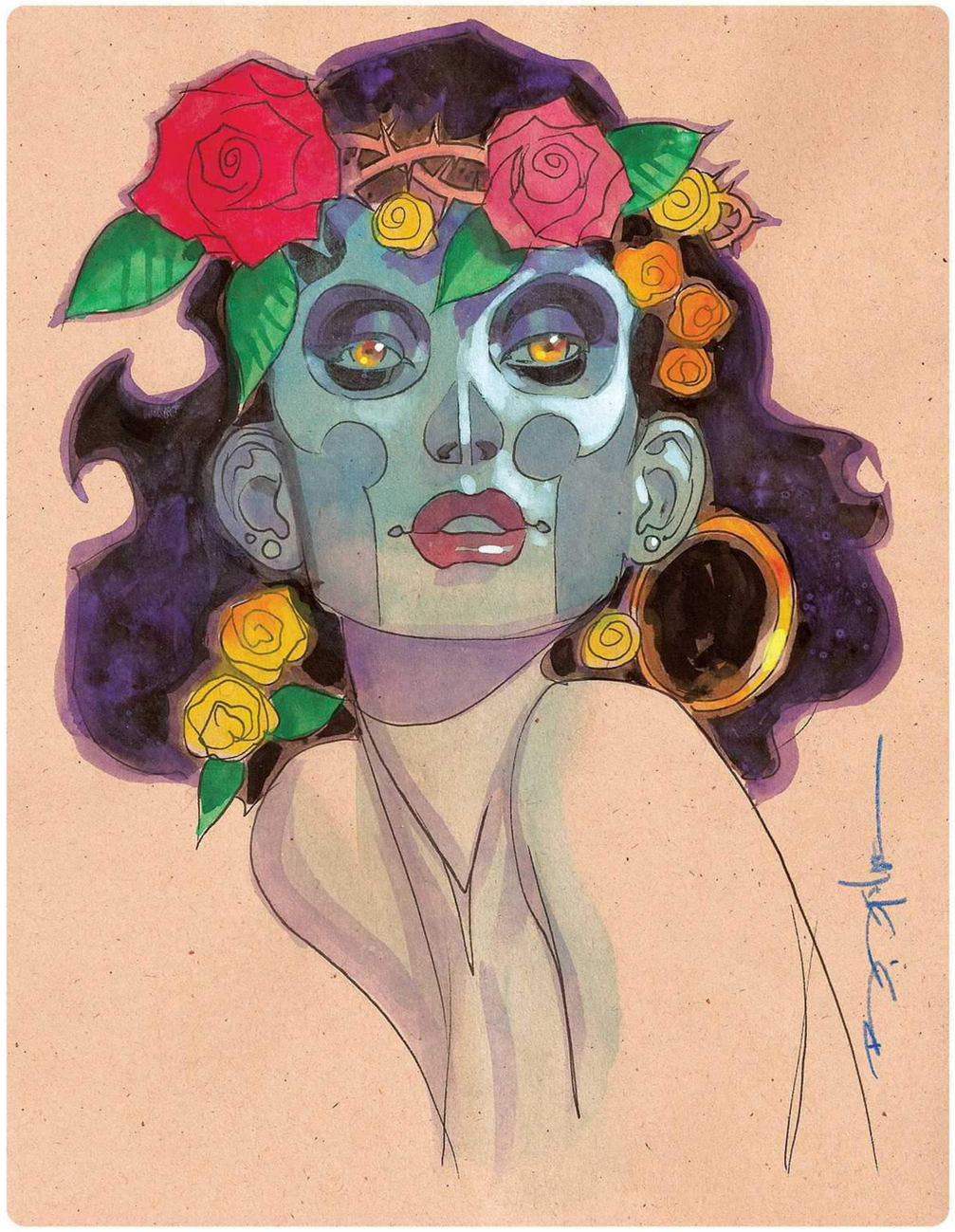


POISON IVY
Watercolor
DC Comics
2009



MARILYN MONROE
Watercolor
2012





(Left) **JAMES BOND**
Watercolor
MGM
2006

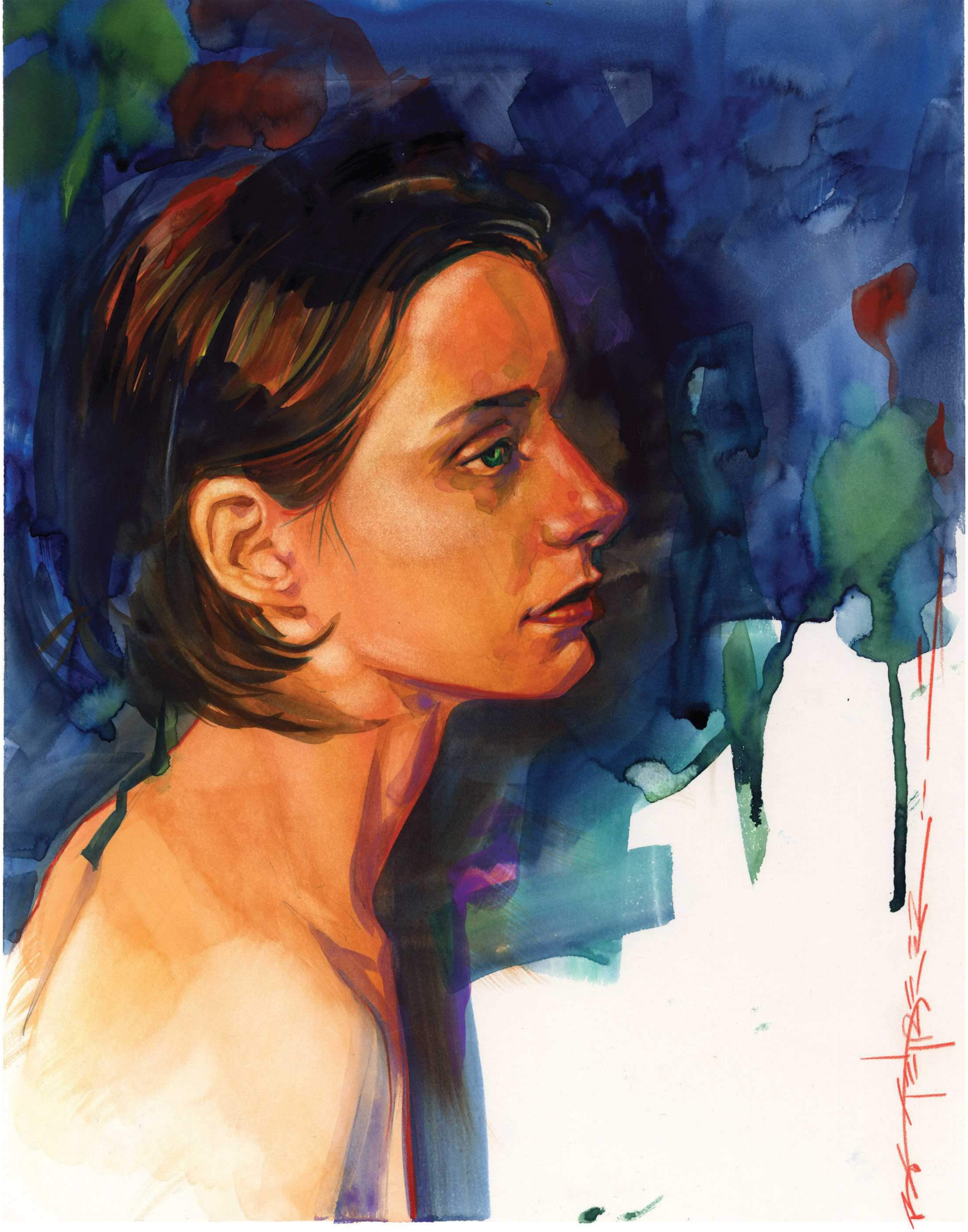
(Right) **MUERTA**
Watercolor
2011



ELEKTRA
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2009

(Left) **PENNY**
Watercolor
Mutant Enemy Productions
2009

(Right) **EMMA STONE AS GWEN STACY**
Watercolor on paper
Sony Pictures
2015



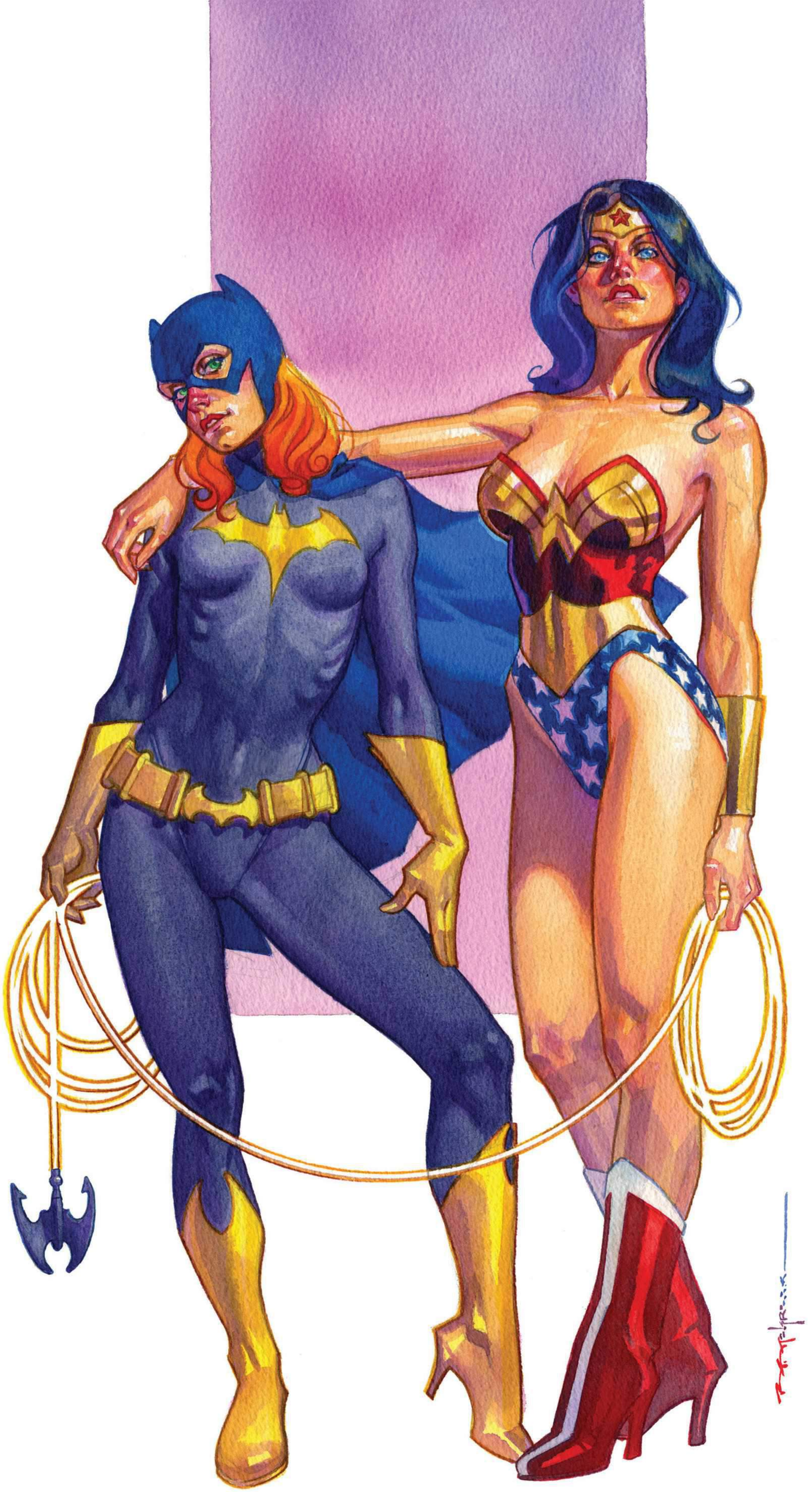
MEGGAN
Gouache
1993



GHOST ORCHID
Watercolor
12 Gauge
2007



FURIOSA
Watercolor
Warner Bros. Pictures
2015

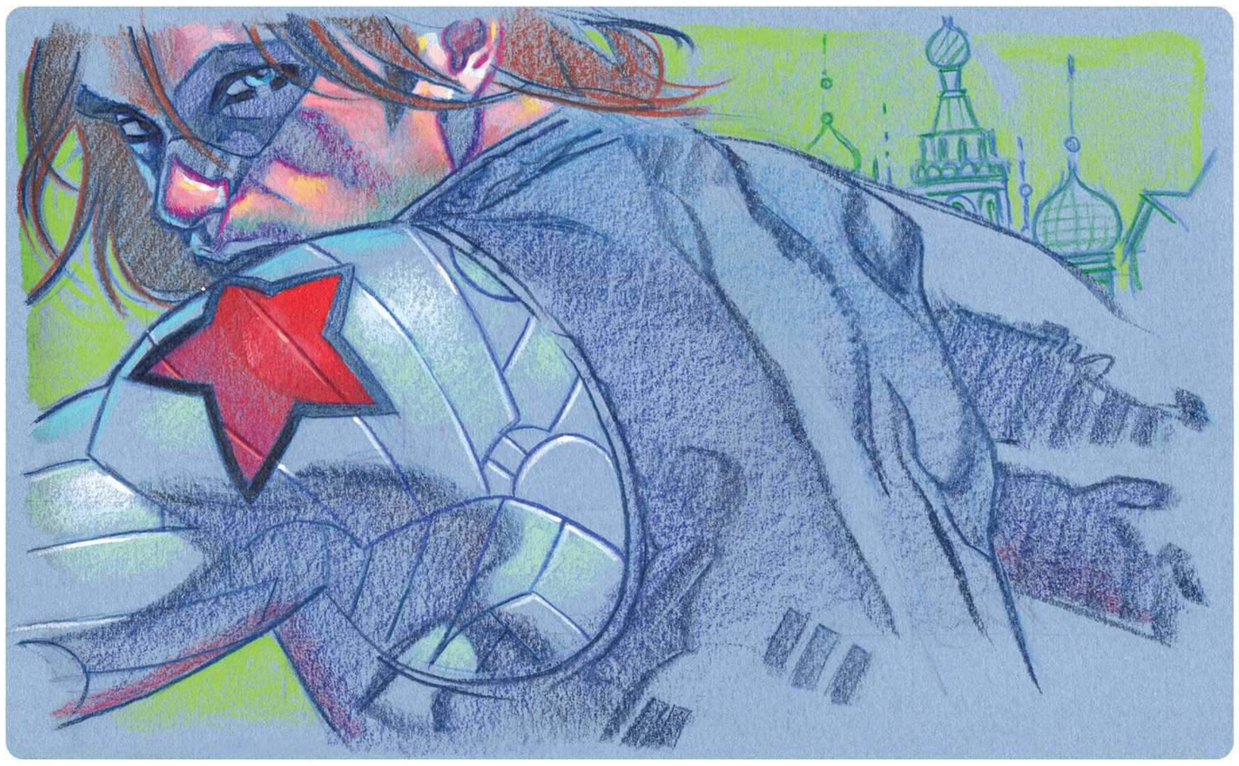


BATGIRL & WONDER WOMAN
Watercolor
DC Comics
2008



CATWOMAN
Watercolor
DC Comics
2009





(Above) **AMY POND**
Watercolor
BBC
2010

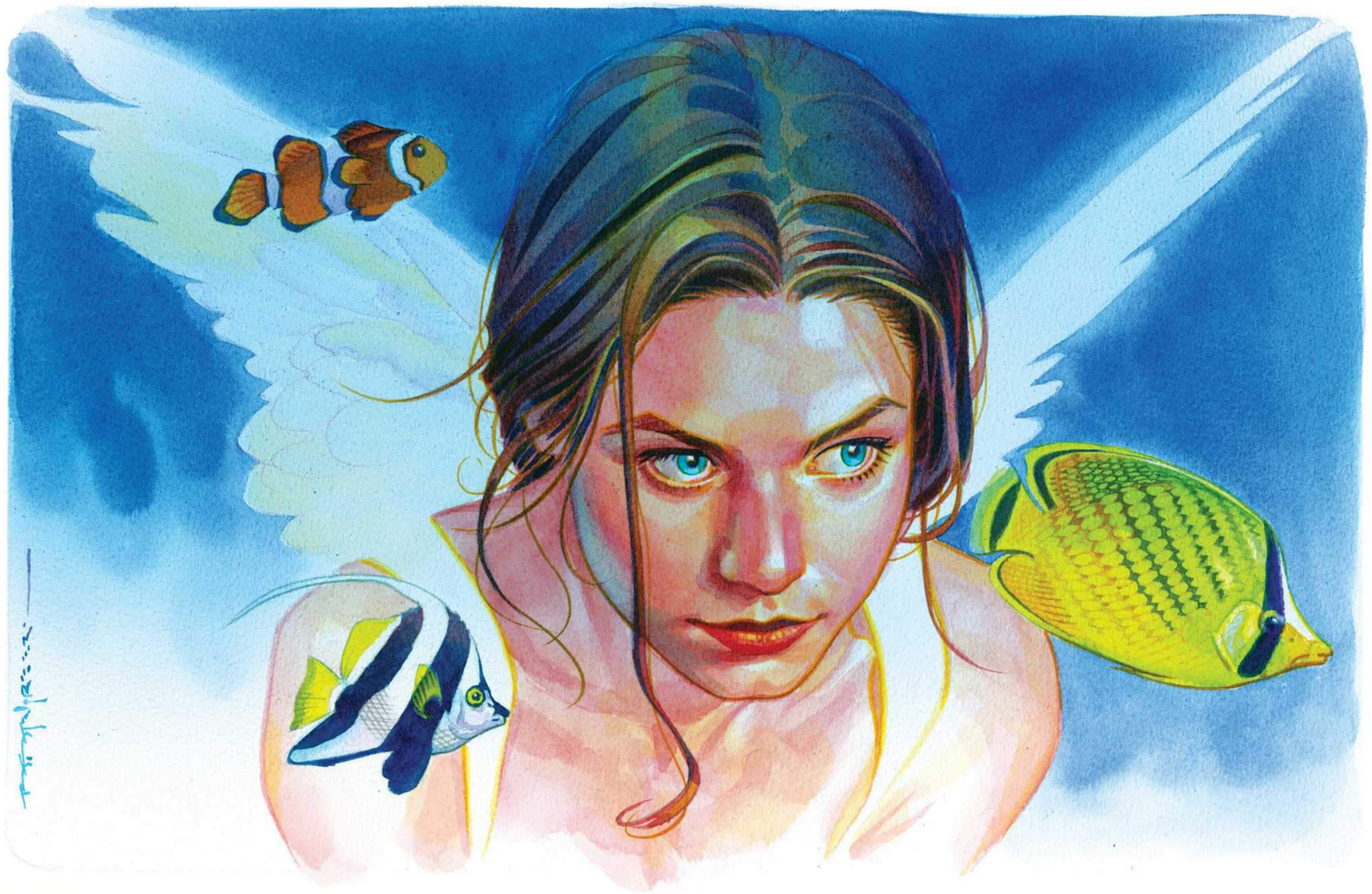
(Below) **WINTER SOLDIER**
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2014

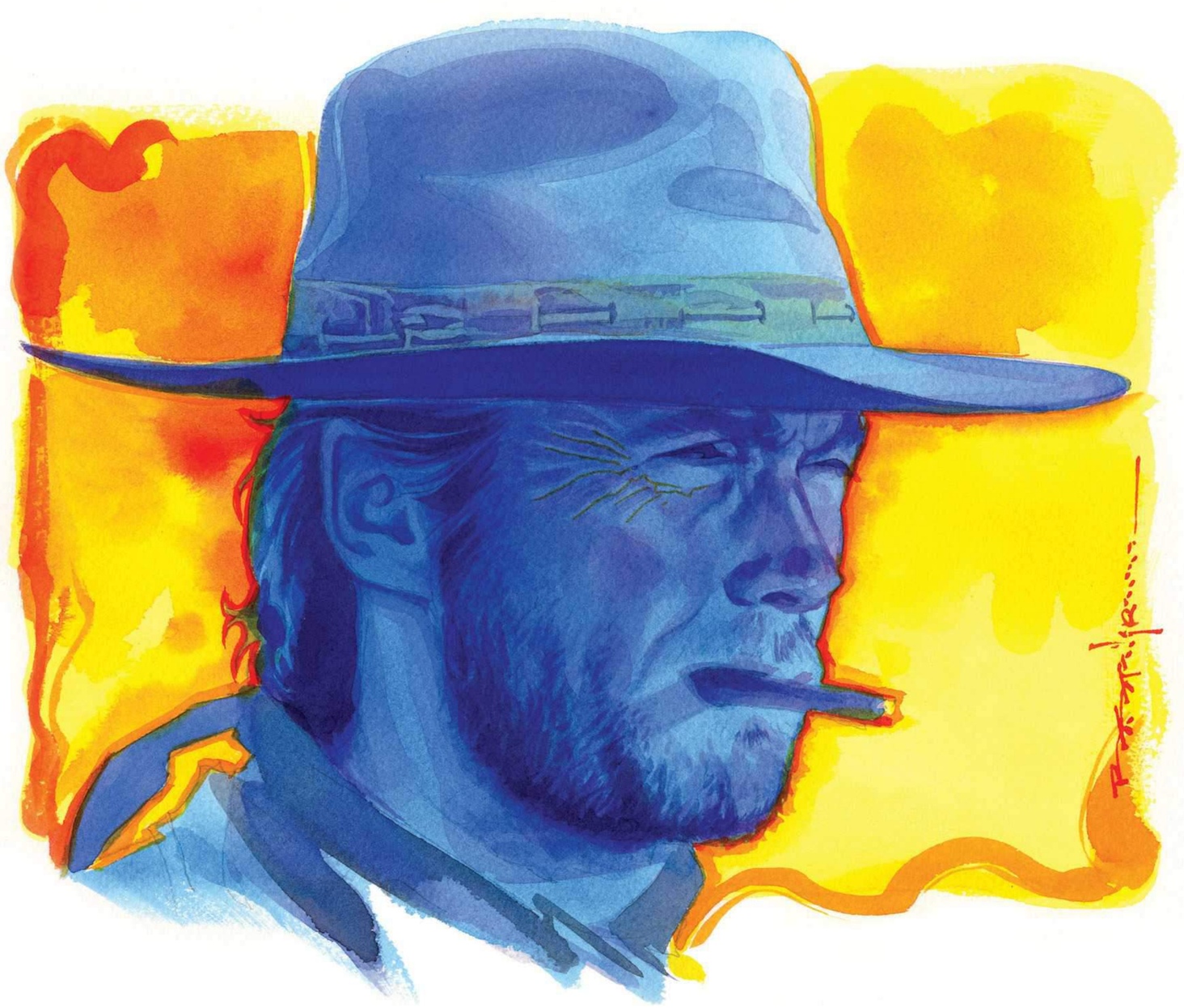
(Left) **BLACK CAT**
Watercolor, ink
Marvel Comics
2011

(Right) **SUPERGIRL**
Watercolor, ink
DC Comics
2012



RITA HAYWORTH
Watercolor
2010





(Above) **CLAIRE DANES AS JULIET**
Watercolor
Twentieth Century Fox
2012

(Below) **CLINT EASTWOOD AS THE MAN WITH NO NAME**
Watercolor
United Artists
2007

THE PROCESS

I taught an illustration techniques class at the Portfolio Center in Atlanta, GA. I noticed some students preferred traditional work while others exclusively wanted to work digital. This project seemed like a cool way of bringing them together.

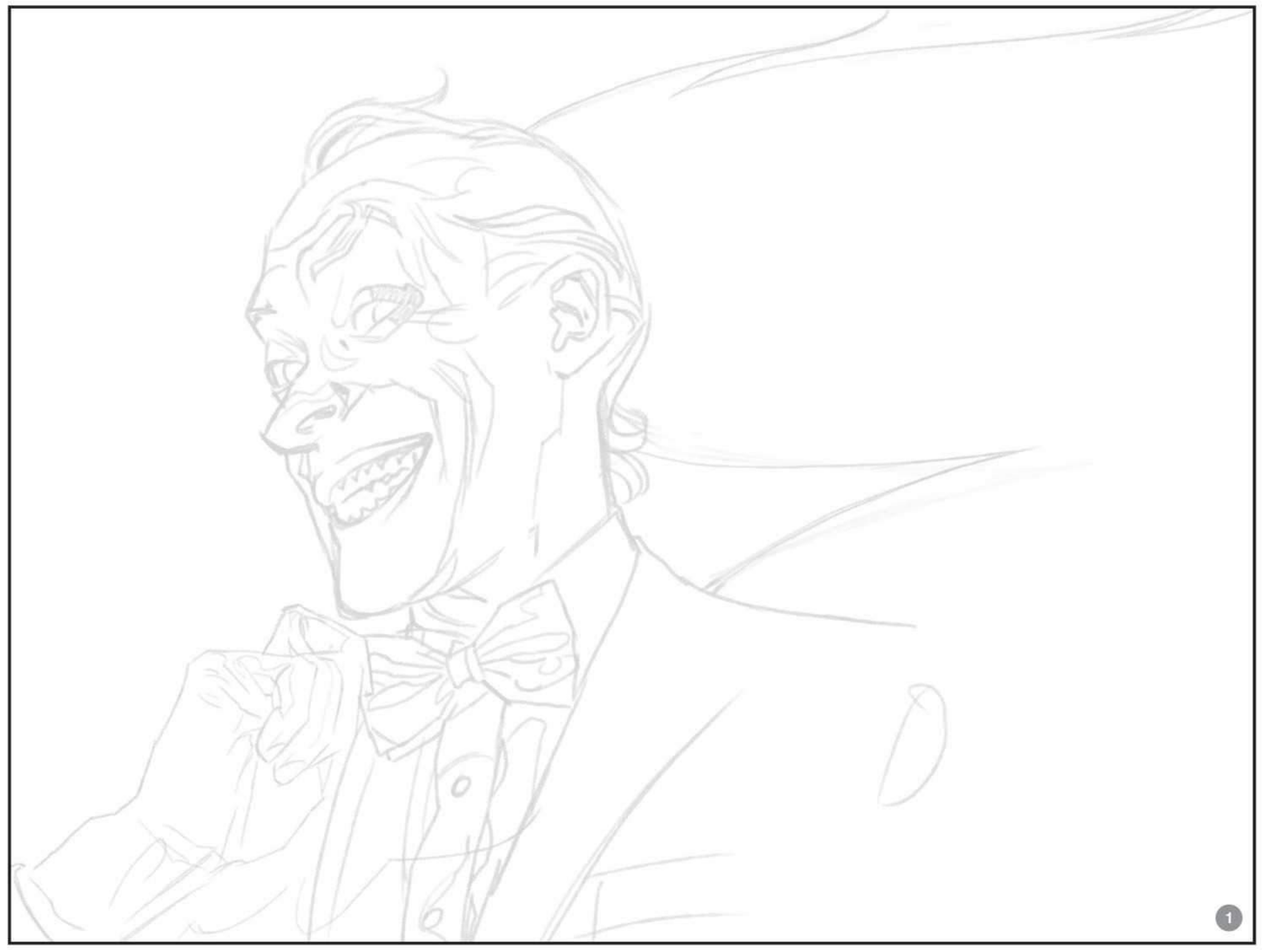
- This technique starts with a light sketch to establish the design.

- I used charcoal pencils to develop the light sketch into a detailed drawing.

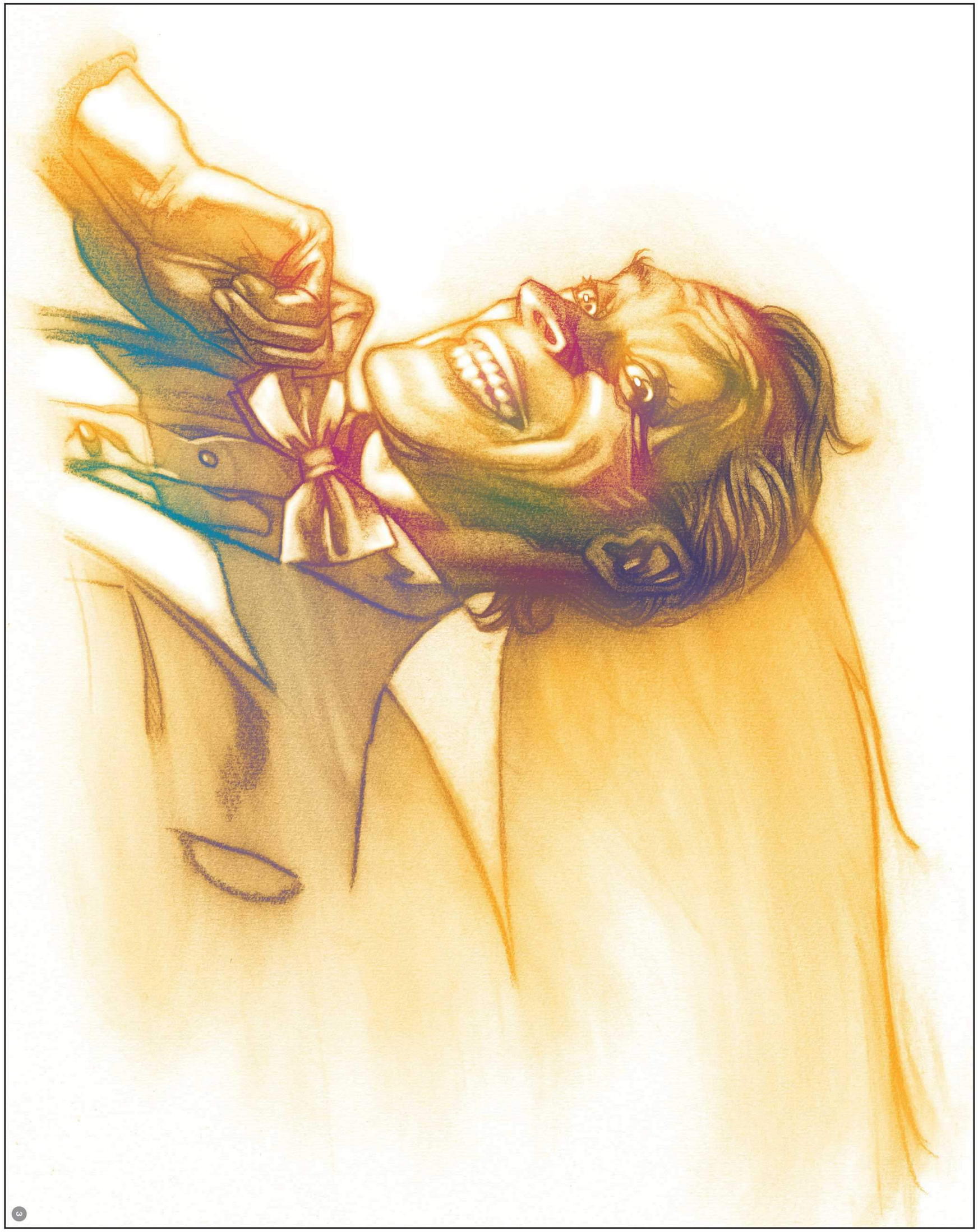
- I scanned the finished drawing then opened it in Photoshop, locked transparent pixels, and colorized the drawing. After completing this, I printed that image onto Strathmore 500 Bristol.

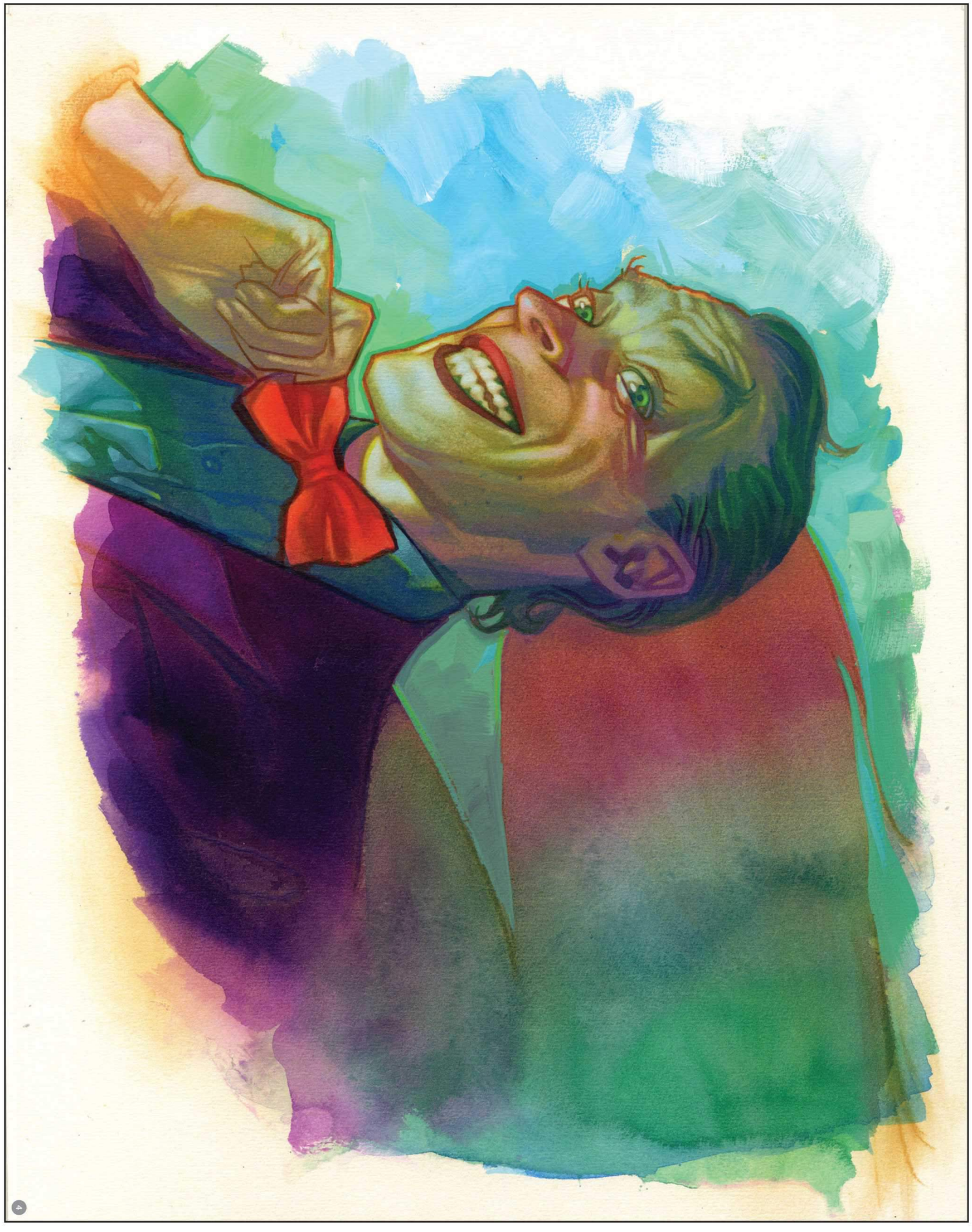
- After giving the image a light coating of fixative, I used acrylic and gouache to set up my colors. At this stage the printed image becomes my underpainting for the traditional painting.

- With colors in place I finish out things with my final dark values with fluid acrylics.









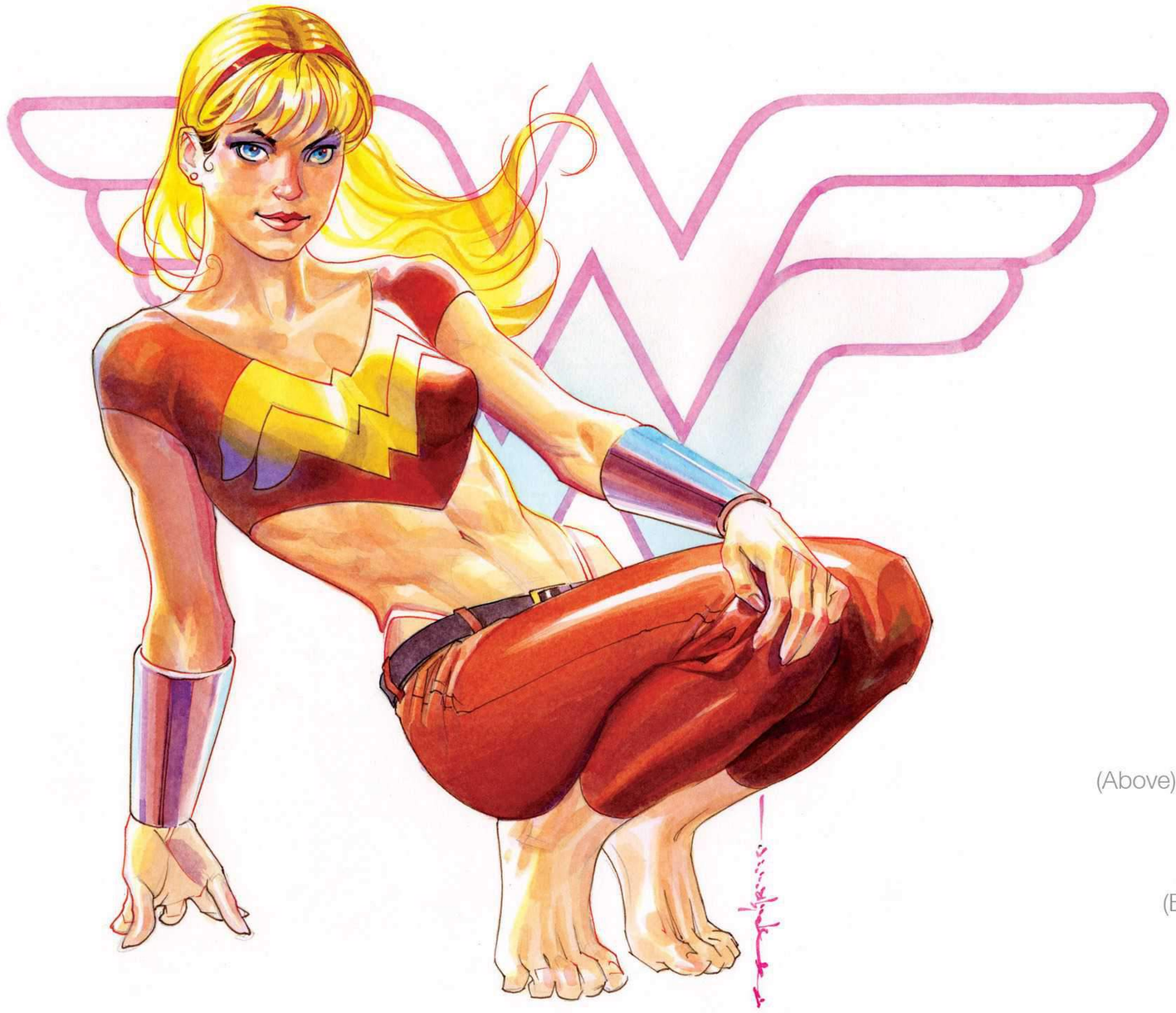


JOKER
Mixed media
DC Comics
2000



LACI WRIST LICK
Watercolor
12 Gauge
2007





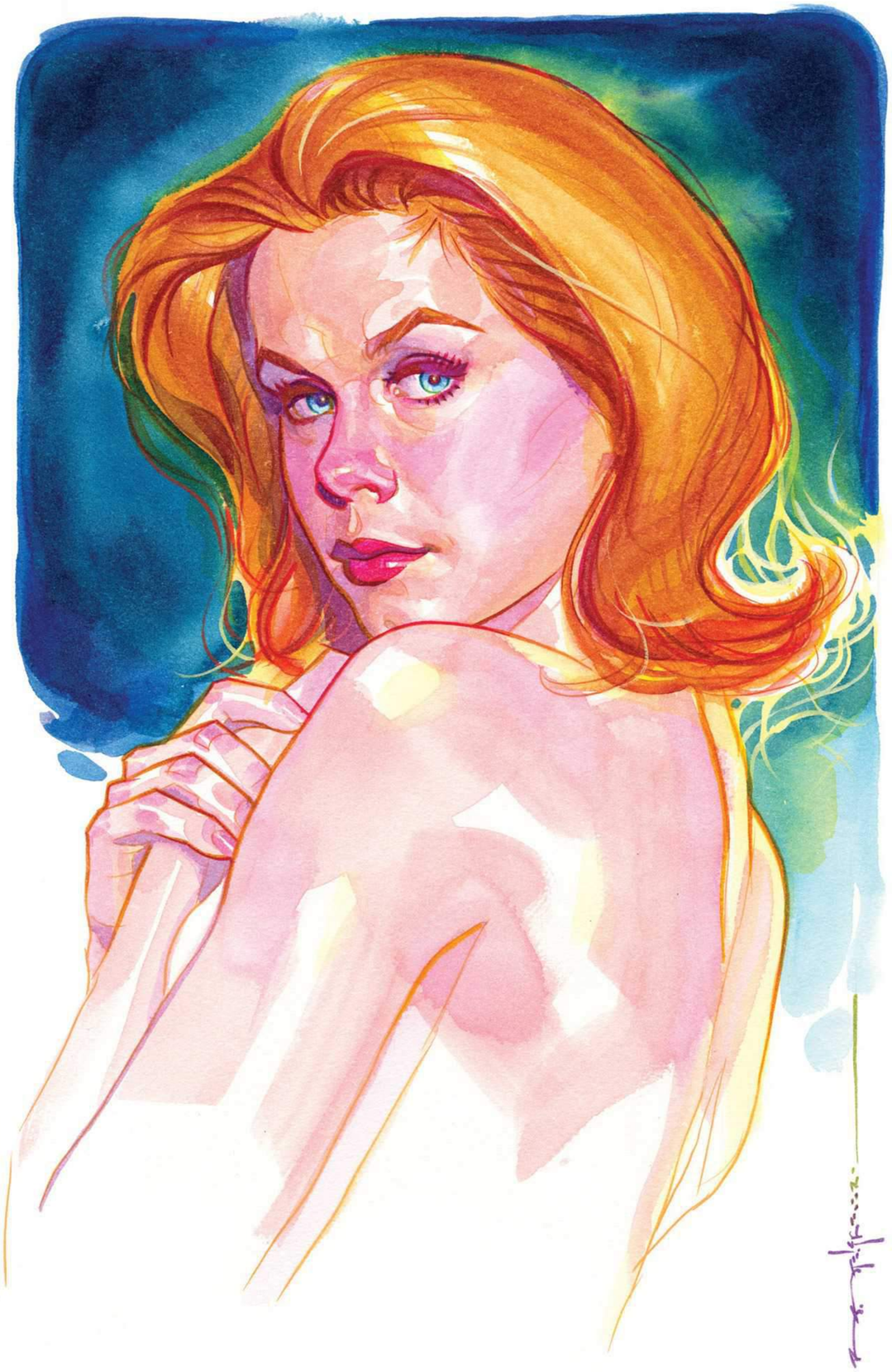
(Above) **LACI WITH CHERRY**
Watercolor
12 Gauge
2006

(Below) **WONDER GIRL**
Watercolor
DC Comics
2005



BATGIRL
Watercolor, color pencil
DC Comics
2009





(Left) **FRANK SINATRA**
Watercolor
2012

(Right) **ELIZABETH MONTGOMERY**
Watercolor
2009



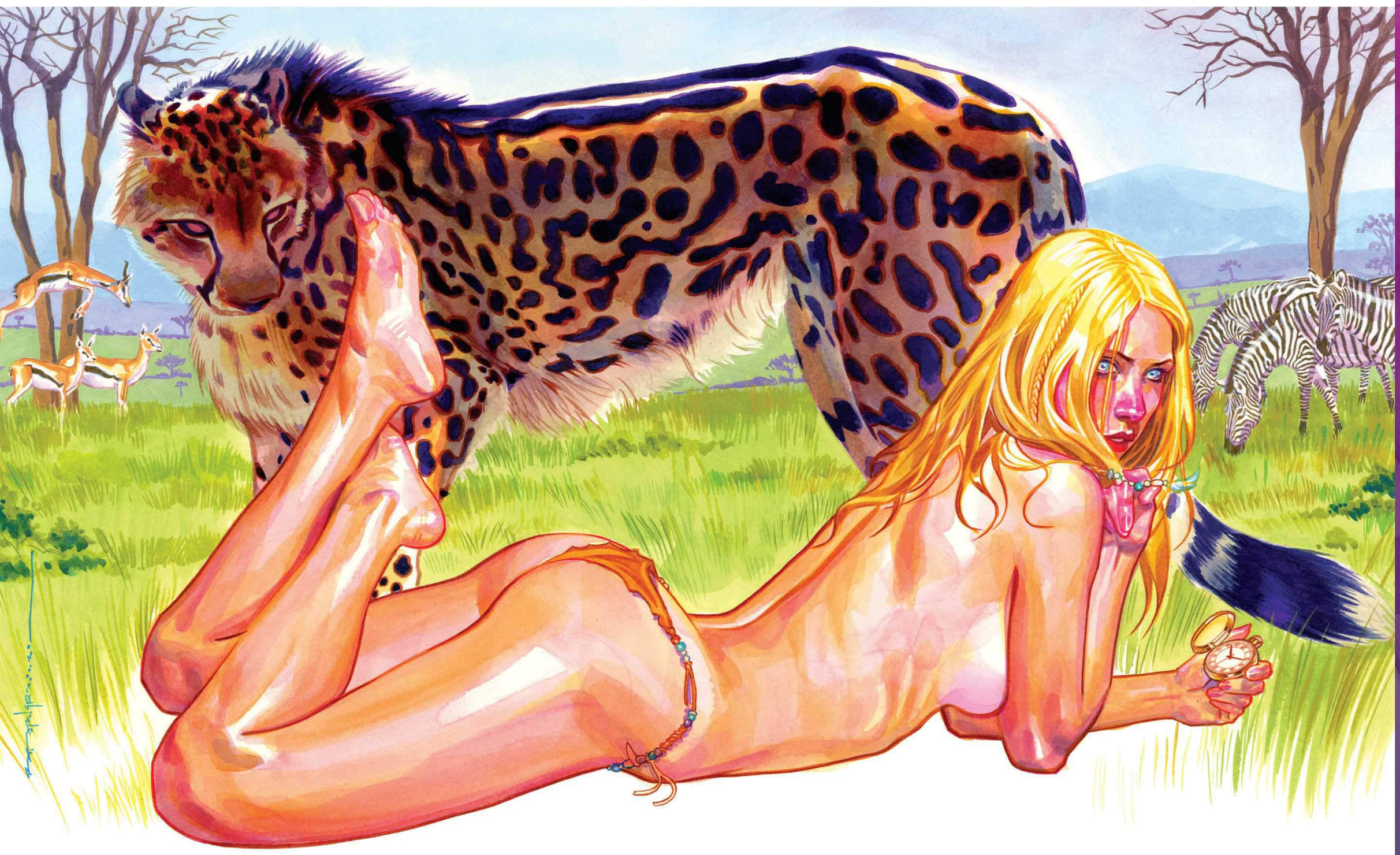
(Left) **ENCHANTRESS**
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2009



(Right) **JUNGLE GIRL**
Watercolor
2002

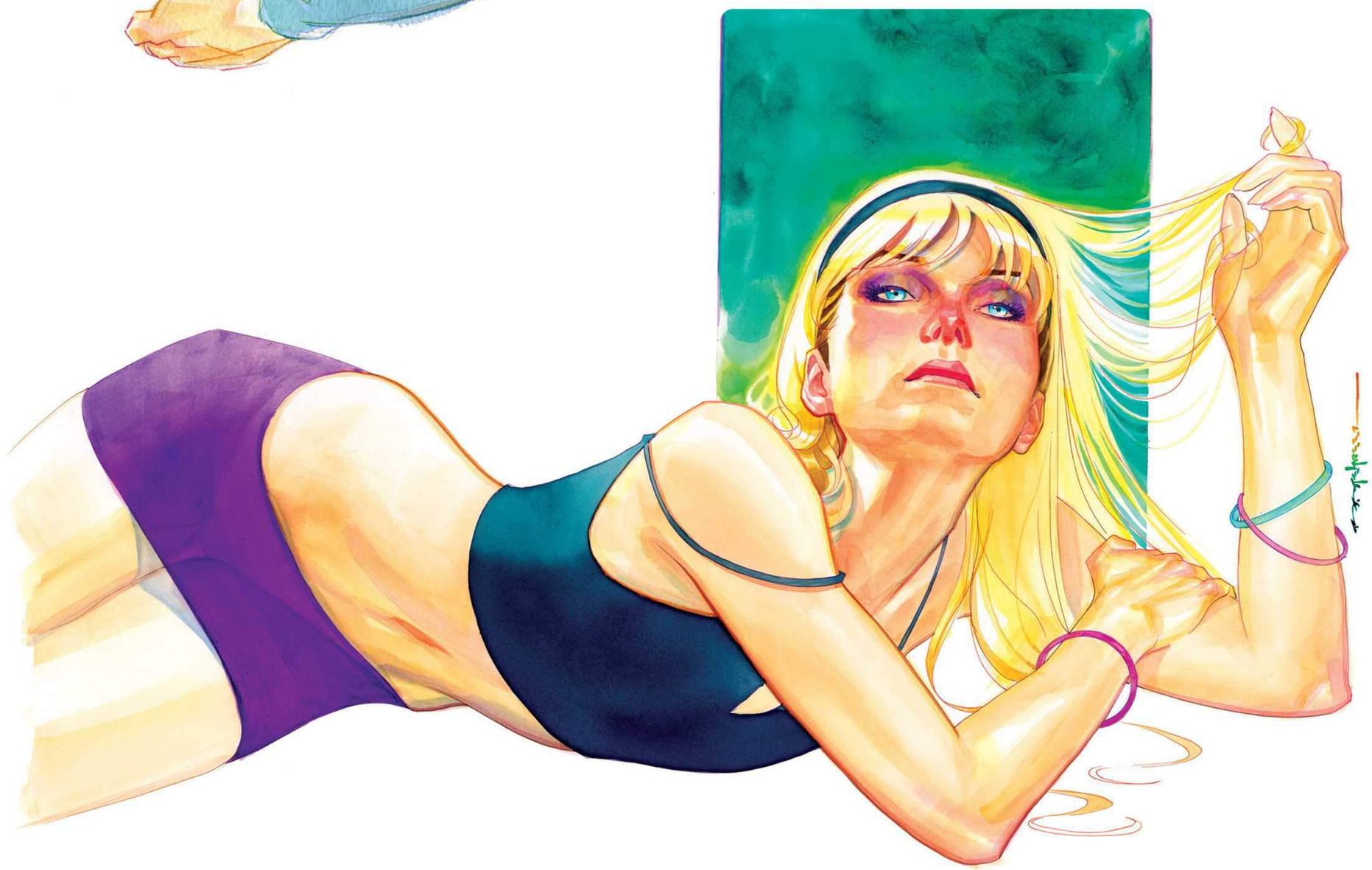
(Above) **BLACK LEOPARD**
Watercolor
2006

(Below) **WHITE TIGER**
Watercolor
2008



KING CHEETAH
Watercolor
2009

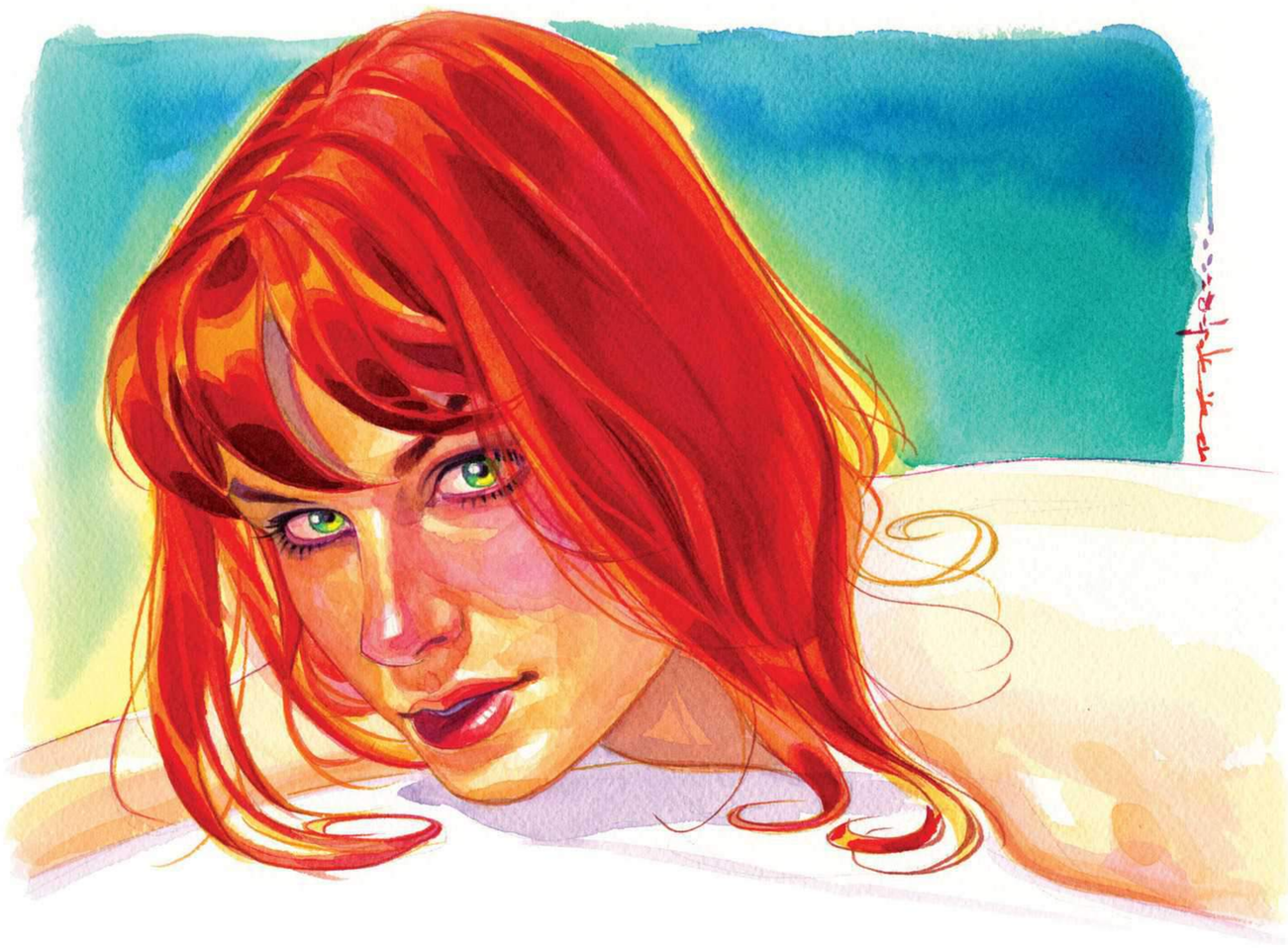




(Above) **ROSE RED**
Watercolor
DC Comics
2007

(Below) **GWEN STACY**
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2005



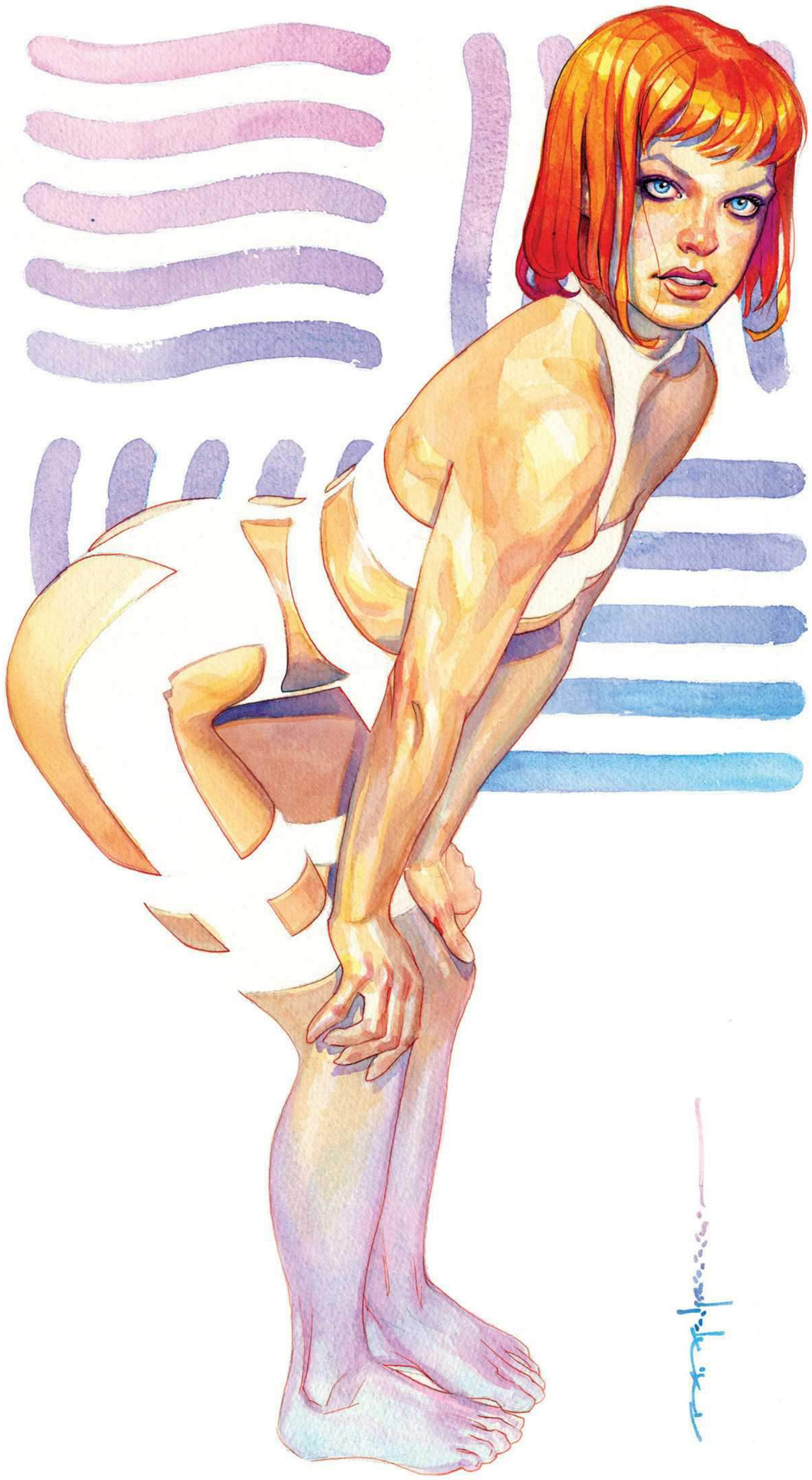


(Above) **HARLEY QUINN & POISON IVY**
Watercolor
DC Comics
2005

(Below) **MARY JANE**
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2007



AFRO SPY
Color pencil, digital
2013





(Left) **LEELOO**
Watercolor
Columbia Pictures
2004

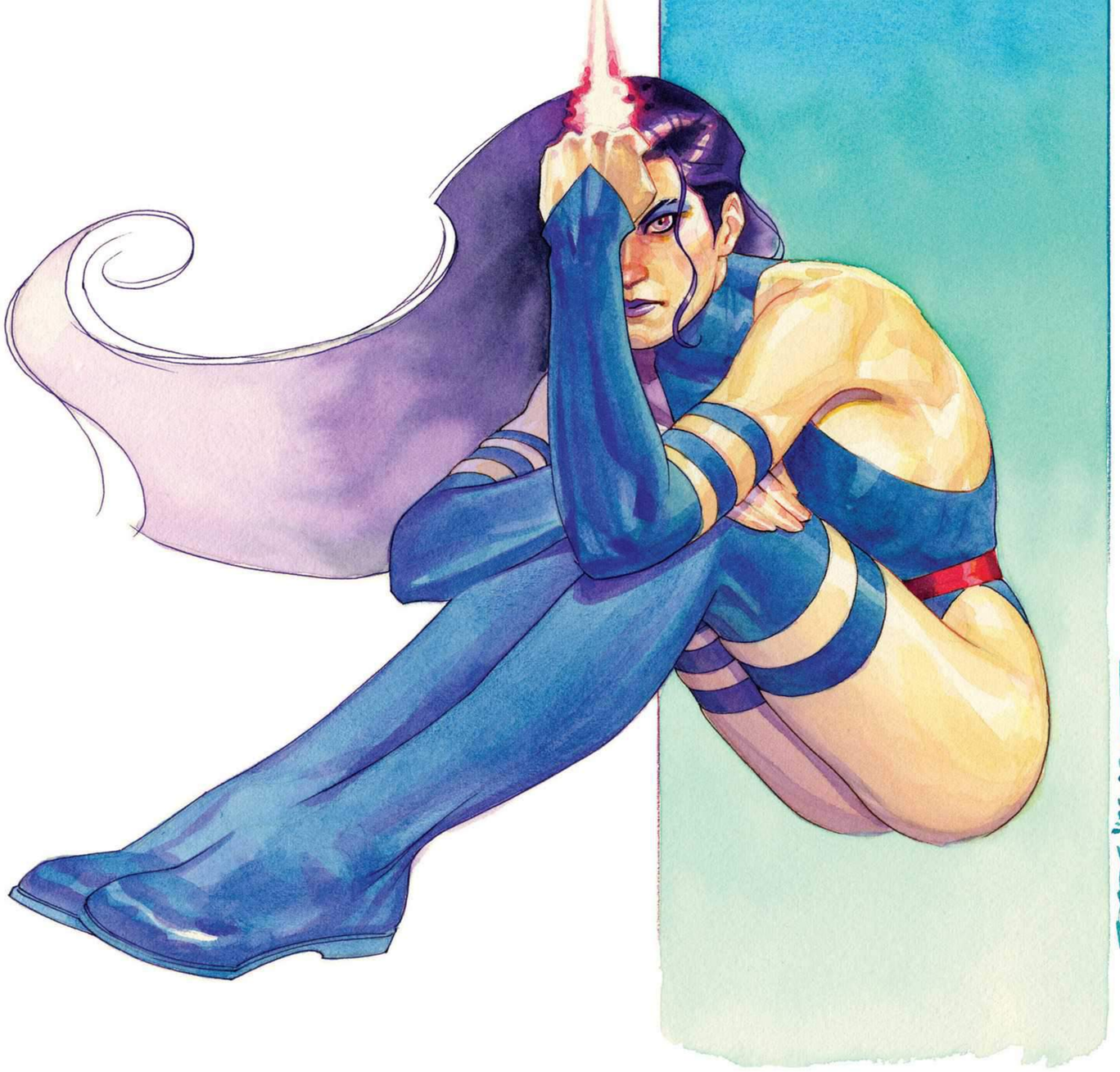
(Right) **FATHOM WEDDING**
Watercolor
Aspen MLT
2013

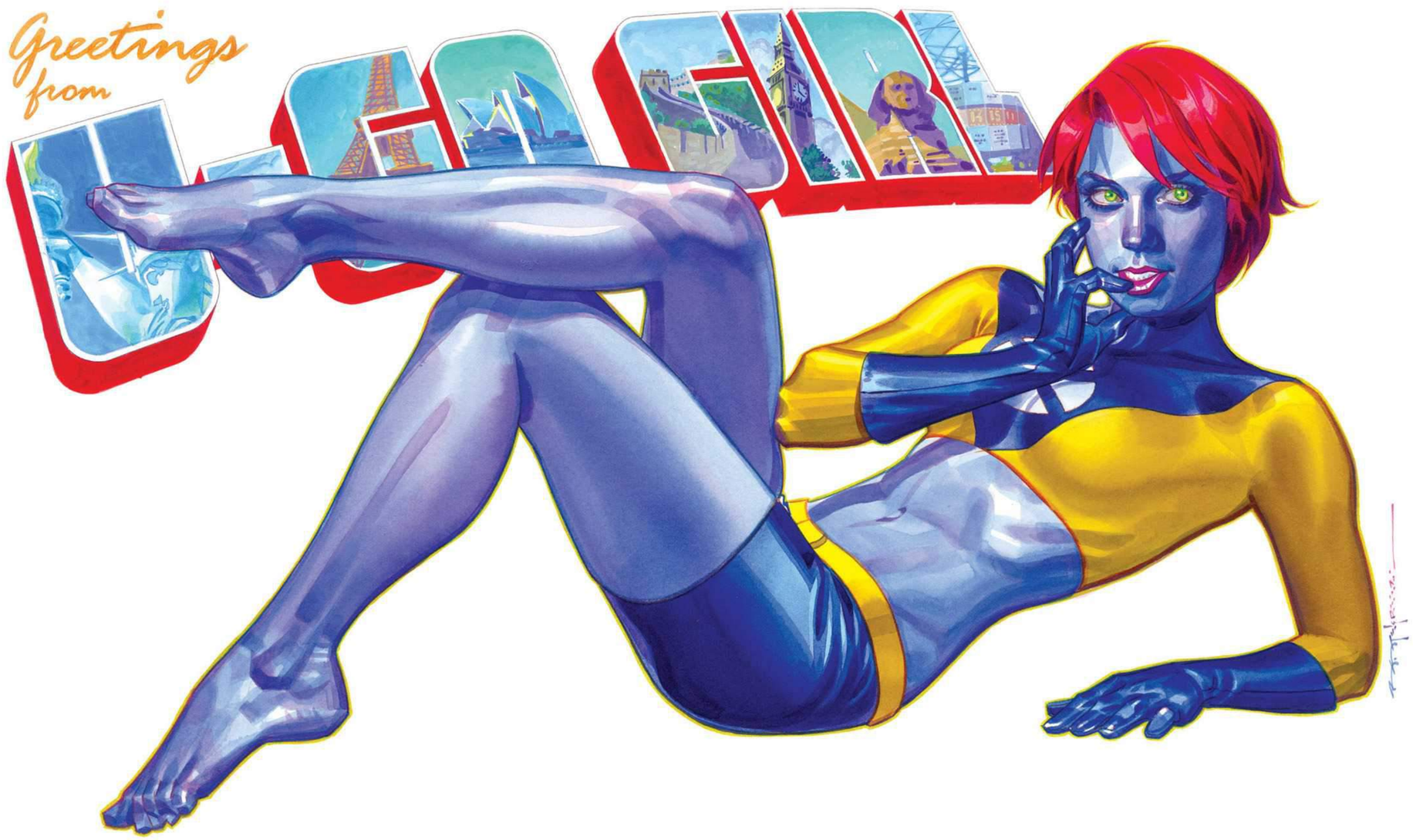




(Above) **BATGIRL**
Digital color, ink
DC Comics
2002

(Below) **JAMES BROWN**
Watercolor
2007





(Above) **PSYLOCKE**
Watercolor
Marvel Comics
2004

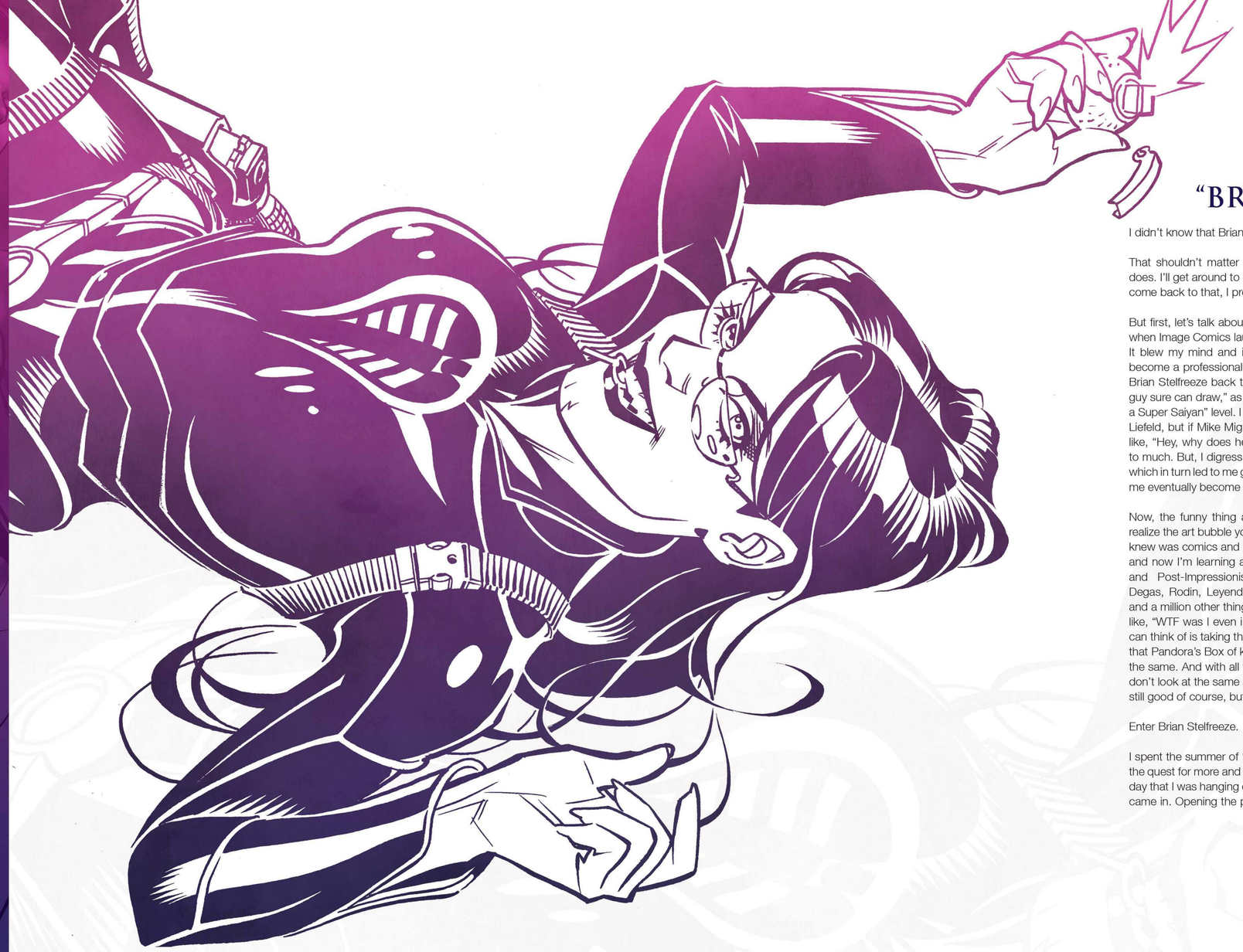
(Below) **U-GO GIRL**
Watercolor
2012



BARBARELLA
Watercolor
Paramount Pictures
2012



PRINCESS MONONOKE
Watercolor
Studio Ghibli
2013



"BRIAN STELFREEZE IS BLACK?!"

I didn't know that Brian Stelfreeze was black.

That shouldn't matter at all in the scheme of things, but it does. I'll get around to explaining why, but it's important. We'll come back to that, I promise.

But first, let's talk about me because I'm conceited. I was 13 when Image Comics launched. It was the Big Bang to my life. It blew my mind and it was the catalyst for me wanting to become a professional artist. I'm fairly certain I was aware of Brian Stelfreeze back then, but more on a level of "Hey, that guy sure can draw," as opposed to my current "Yo, this guy is a Super Saiyan" level. I was that kid who was in love with Rob Liefeld, but if Mike Mignola did a fill-in on *X-Force* I would be like, "Hey, why does he draw funny like that?" I wasn't open to much. But, I digress. Image made me want to be an artist, which in turn led to me going to art school, which in turn helped me eventually become a professional artist in my own right.

Now, the funny thing about art school is that it makes you realize the art bubble you've been living in prior to arriving. All I knew was comics and cartoons and anime and video games, and now I'm learning about the Renaissance, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, color theory and chiaroscuro, Degas, Rodin, Leyendecker, blue periods and rose periods and a million other things, to the point where your brain is just like, "WTF was I even into before?" The closest comparison I can think of is taking the red pill in *The Matrix*. Once you open that Pandora's Box of knowledge, you don't look at the world the same. And with all that newfound knowledge, you maybe don't look at the same art you once liked in the same light. It's still good of course, but different.

Enter Brian Stelfreeze.

I spent the summer of '99 interning at DC Comics, forever on the quest for more and more knowledge. It was on a particular day that I was hanging out in Joe Illidge's office and a package came in. Opening the package, it was one of Brian's Batman covers, and I'm pretty sure it was an original. Seeing this was like the second Big Bang in my life, and like seeing Brian's artwork for the first time. The colors, the vibrancy, the mood, the composition. This guy was doing all the art school stuff I was learning about — in comics! It never occurred to me that other comic book guys knew all this classical mumbo jumbo. He knew this stuff hardcore! This guy was officially my hero for life.

And then I found out he was black.

It's hard to explain, but society has kind of conditioned people to think that "white" is the default, and when someone is not, it takes you a second to process. And for someone like me (oh hey, I'm black too BTW) to see someone who's such a master at their craft, just happen to be black? It affects something in your brain. Because up until this point, even though I was working at getting into the industry, I still had massive fears that I was never really going to be good enough to do this for a living. It seemed like an impossible dream. But this guy, he's kinda like you, and he's at the top of his game. So you think "Hey, maybe I can do it too."

And that's why diversity is important, for just that very moment. I'll never forget that moment, and it's part of the reason why I love Brian Stelfreeze. And I've never told him this stuff to his face, because every time I meet him I'm in such awe of his brilliance all I can really do is babble and stutter and sound like an idiot. He's also the nicest guy in the world, and forever imparting knowledge and wisdom on us mere mortals. Brian Stelfreeze being who he is is so important, and I'm very thankful that we've all been blessed with his presence. Thank you, Brian. Or should I say, Morpheus.

—KHARY RANDOLPH

Illustrator: *Robin War, Tech Jacket, Charismagic*



COMICS WORK

COVERS AND SEQUENTIAL PAGES

BRIAN STELFREEZE: THE ARISTOTLE (OR PERHAPS ANNE SULLIVAN) OF COMICS

There are many things you could say about Brian Stelfreeze, and over the 25 years I've known him, I've said pretty much all of them myself, including (especially) the not-fit-for-print stuff. But when I think about this extraordinary guy, what first comes to mind is usually just what a phenomenal teacher he is. One of the hidden secrets of the industry is that Brian is one of the greatest comic book instructors ever.

This was first made crystal clear to me when I saw him in action at a comic book convention in New York City in the early '90s. I was behind the DC Comics booth, and a kid—I say kid, but he was probably around 20 years old, I'd guess—came up and asked if I'd look at his portfolio. I don't remember how Brian ended up looking instead, if I asked Brian to or the kid did or maybe Brian even volunteered; it was one of the first comic cons held at the Javits Center, if I'm remembering correctly, and pretty quiet. But I remember observing a complete master class in comic booking take place over the next fifteen minutes.

Brian went through the portfolio, giving little bits of praise here, an appreciative chuckle there, or maybe just the occasional "yes!" When he was done, he said, "Man! There is some really nice stuff here. Now, let's make it better."

And he started at the beginning and showed the young artist the various things he was doing right in terms of storytelling, anatomy, and perspective, giving the kind of informed, educated praise that would make any aspiring creator right chuffed.

And then Brian got to a particular sequence. "This! This is so nice, right here. The way you pay off the previous panel and set up the next? Sweet! But then look at this next panel. It was going to be so great! And yet…it is not. Look at that. See what you did there? You set this up to be paid off…and you screwed it up. You just screwed it up. Those first two panels? So good! And this one, so not. But! Then with the panel after that, you very nearly redeem yourself with that bit there. So what you have to do is redo that panel and burn the original. Erase all evidence it ever existed. Replace it with something better and, man, this page is gonna sing."

I glanced at the kid's face, and I could see that this was having the kind of impact it should—Brian's praise for what the kid had done right was so emphatic and so detailed (more detailed than I'm going into here) that the very blunt criticism wasn't debilitating—far from it. The bluntness of both the praise and the criticism made it clear how honest Brian was being with both.

Then Brian got to another troublesome panel. "Okay. Now, I see what you were going for here, but your perspective? It's all wrong. It's hideous. I can tell by the rest of the panels that you've got a solid understanding of perspective, but this one just got away from you. I think the problem is that you were going for something a little harder than you can pull off right now. So here's what you do."

Brian pulled out a sheet of tracing paper and laid it over the kid's page. "See, if you want to be as clear as possible, you could just go the Kubrick route, and redo this panel with one-point perspective." And he quickly drew the vanishing point for such a shot and sketched in the perspective lines and where the characters would go.

"But you probably, for this panel, want two-point perspective. So you're gonna want to have it more like this." And pulled out another sheet of tracing paper, and he drew in two vanishing points and the perspective lines and quickly roughed in the characters' positions.

"The thing is, for this shot, I can see you were kinda wanting to go with a three-point perspective, and that's where things went wrong because you are just not quite there yet. But, for when you are ready for that, here's how that would look." And Brian took another sheet of tracing paper and drew the three vanishing points, the grid, and the characters. I glanced up and the kid looked shell-shocked, but not in a bad way; more

like he'd just won the Golden Ticket to Wonka's. Which, in a sense, he very much had.

"Okay? You with me? Now, I personally get bored easily. So what I like to do? Is go for the four-point perspective. Which would look like this." More tracing paper. Vanishing points, grid, characters.

"And once you've mastered that, you decide to blow their minds and you move on…to the five-point perspective. Like so." Another sheet of paper, vanishing points, perspective grid, character positions perfectly proportioned and with far more life to them than any quick rough sketch has any business possessing.

"Of course, once you've got that down, you go for…yes, the six-point perspective." And Brian pulls out yet another sheet of tracing paper and quickly tosses down the vanishing points, the perspective grid, the remarkably good character sketches he could have sold for twice the price of a nice Manhattan dinner, and adds, "…but you're not ready for that yet.

"I, of course," he added, "occasionally like to throw down the 13-point perspective, just to mess with people." I've never been entirely sure if he was kidding about that or not. I mean, I'm sure he could pull it off, if he wanted. I'm just not sure he's ever bothered.

I looked up and there were now dozens of people crowding around, watching this unreal scene—including three different very, *very* well-established professional comic book artists, all three of whom were at the time always in the Top 10 list of Hottest Comic Book Pencillers (and all these years later are still pretty much at the top of the heap—these were and are some heavy hitters), and all three of those guys, just like everyone else, was watching with open mouths and jaws on the floor.

Brian handed the portfolio back to the kid, offered some more words of support, shook his hand, then said to me, "That was fun," and looked around in a mild "Anyone else?" kind of manner.

It was *awesome*. Brian was and is more than secure enough that he never, ever slams another artist just to make himself feel better; he knows who he is and what he can do. But he's also a gentleman through and through, and treats people with immense courtesy. But even beyond that, he's got enough respect for the art itself to not pull punches, but to tell the truth, in hopes of making both the artist and the art form better—something he himself has been doing his entire career.

It was just another day in the life of Brian Stelfreeze, the Great and Terrible. But I've never forgotten the experience and I'd be very surprised if it didn't have the same effect on others watching, especially the young artist receiving what had to be the single best lesson he'd ever received. Which, of course, is exactly what Brian was going for. It's what all the best teachers are going for. And that's what Brian is: the damn best.

—SCOTT PETERSON
Writer/Editor, formerly of Wildstorm/DC Comics

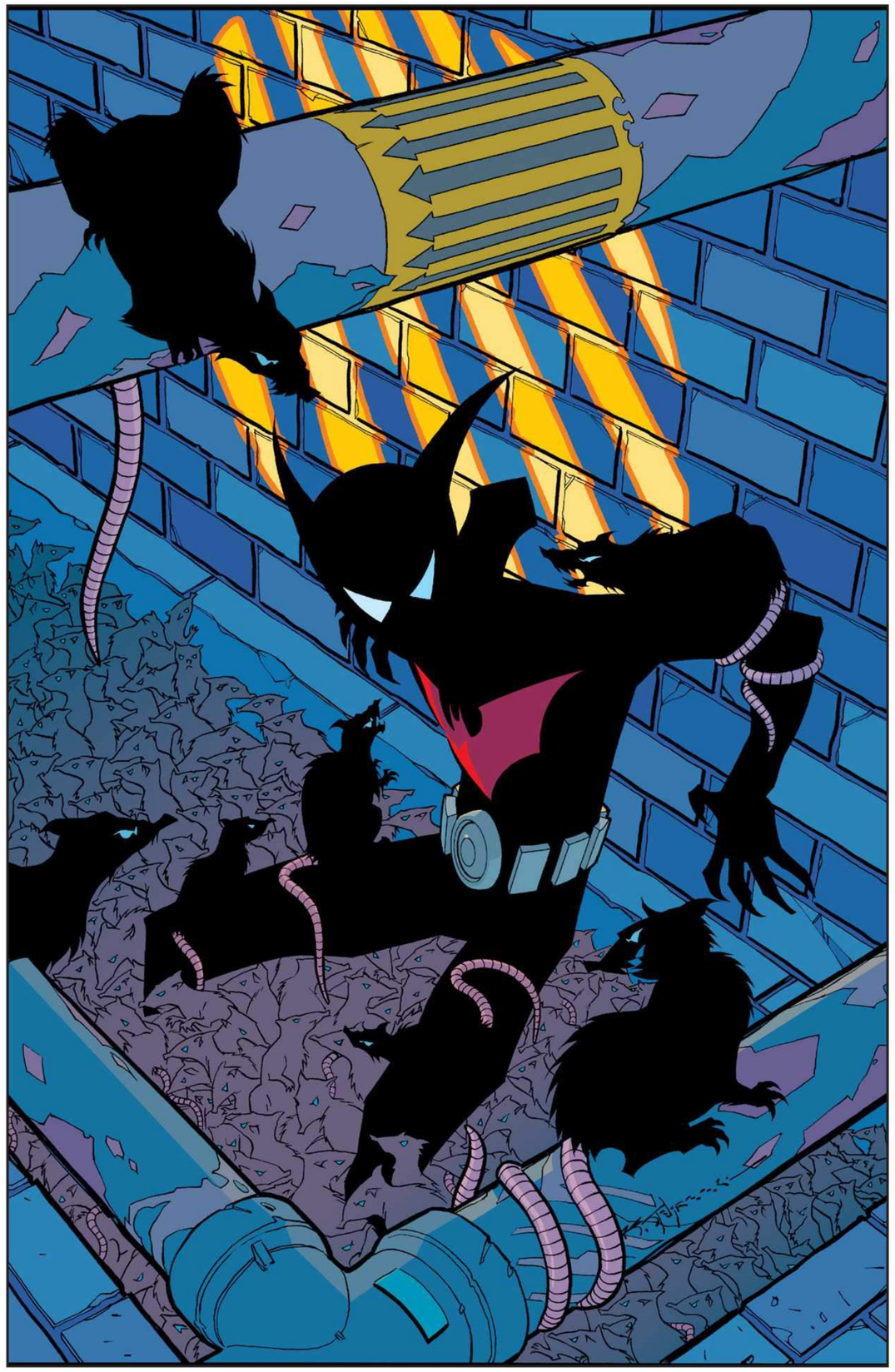




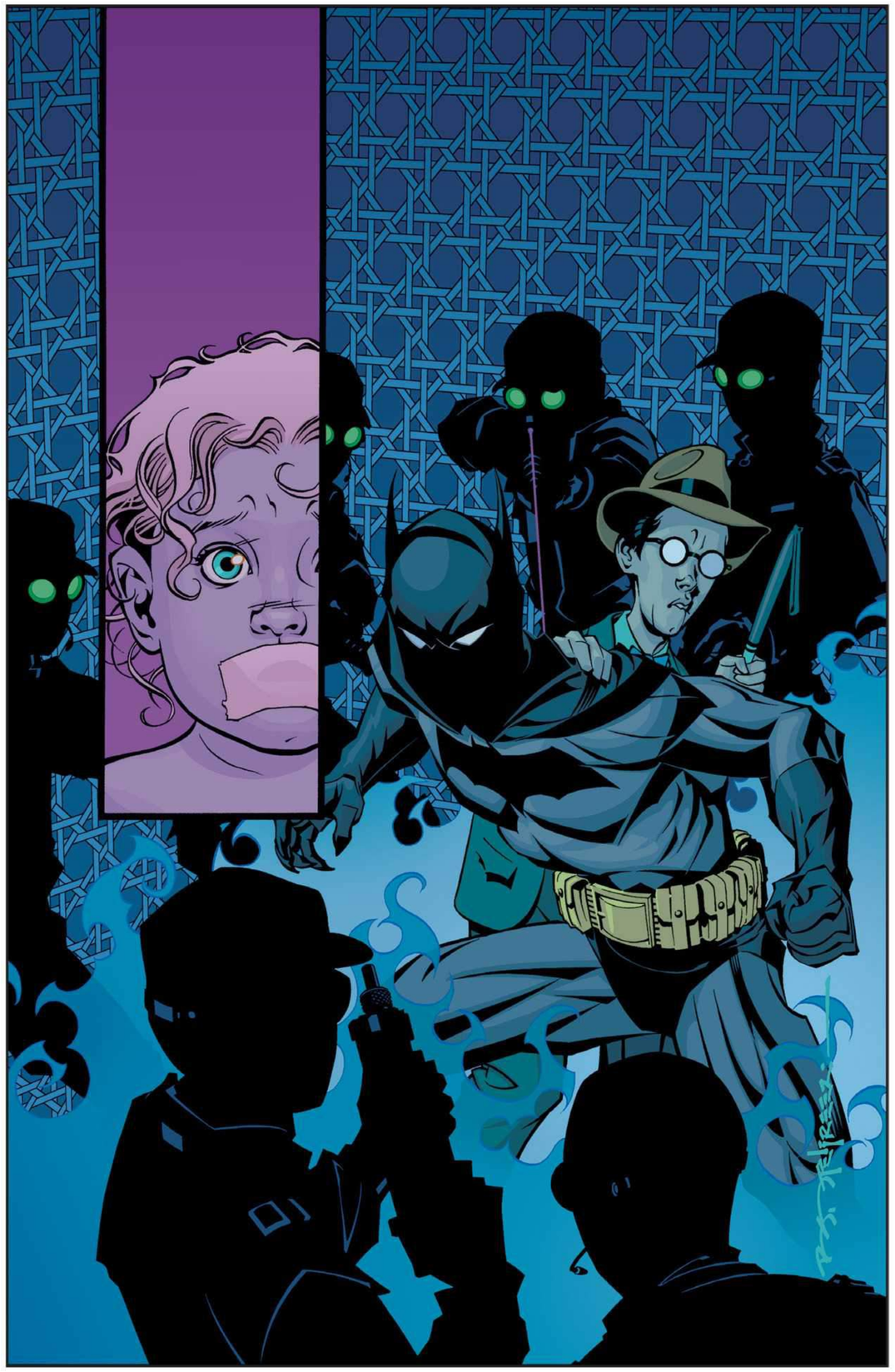
UNPUBLISHED BATMAN STORY
Written by Chuck Dixon
DC Comics


"HE SHOULD BE THE ONE WHO'S IN HERE, LOCKED AWAY FROM HUMANITY.
"HE'S THE REAL MENACE TO SOCIETY!
YOU HAVE A HISTORY OF SIGHTINGS OF THIS HUMAN BAT.
WERE YOU TERRIFIED OF BATS AS A CHILD?
LOOK, DOC. I GOT MY PROBLEMS. I KNOW THAT.
I'M PATHOLOGICAL. I'M A SOCIOPATH. I HAVE CHRONIC PERSONALITY DISORDERS.
BUT I DO NOT "SEE" THINGS!
I'M NOT CRAZY!
GUNTHER.


THE BATMAN IS REAL!
REAL!
Manifestation of guilt anxiety- seeks to blame "hallucination" Parent figure? Possible benefit of hypnotherapy Dr. E. Vigna
I MAY BE MAKING SOME PROGRESS WITH NIGMA.
WATCH THAT ONE, DARIA. HE'S TRICKY.
I THINK SOME HYPNOSIS MAY UNCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND THESE FANTASIES OF HIS.
WHAT FANTASIES?
HE HAS A RECURRING SCENARIO WHERE HE IS PURSUED AND PERSECUTED BY A GIANT BAT CREATURE.
WELL, IF YOU FIGURE HIS FANTASY OUT YOU CAN GET TO WORK ON THE OTHERS.
OTHERS?
I FORGOT.
YOU'RE NEW HERE, LANDINGS.



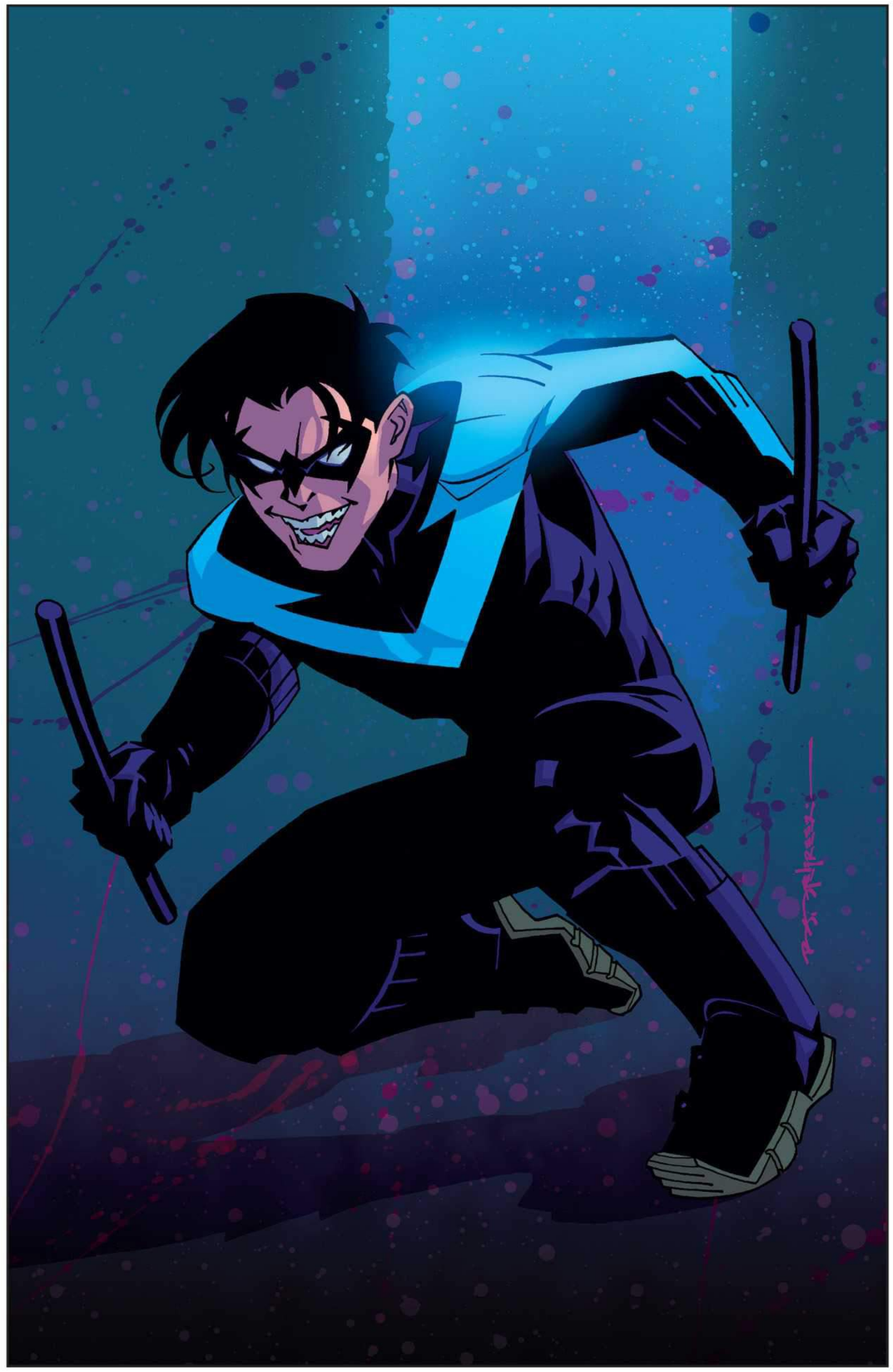
BATMAN BEYOND #17
Cover
DC Comics
2001



LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT #165
Cover
DC Comics
2003



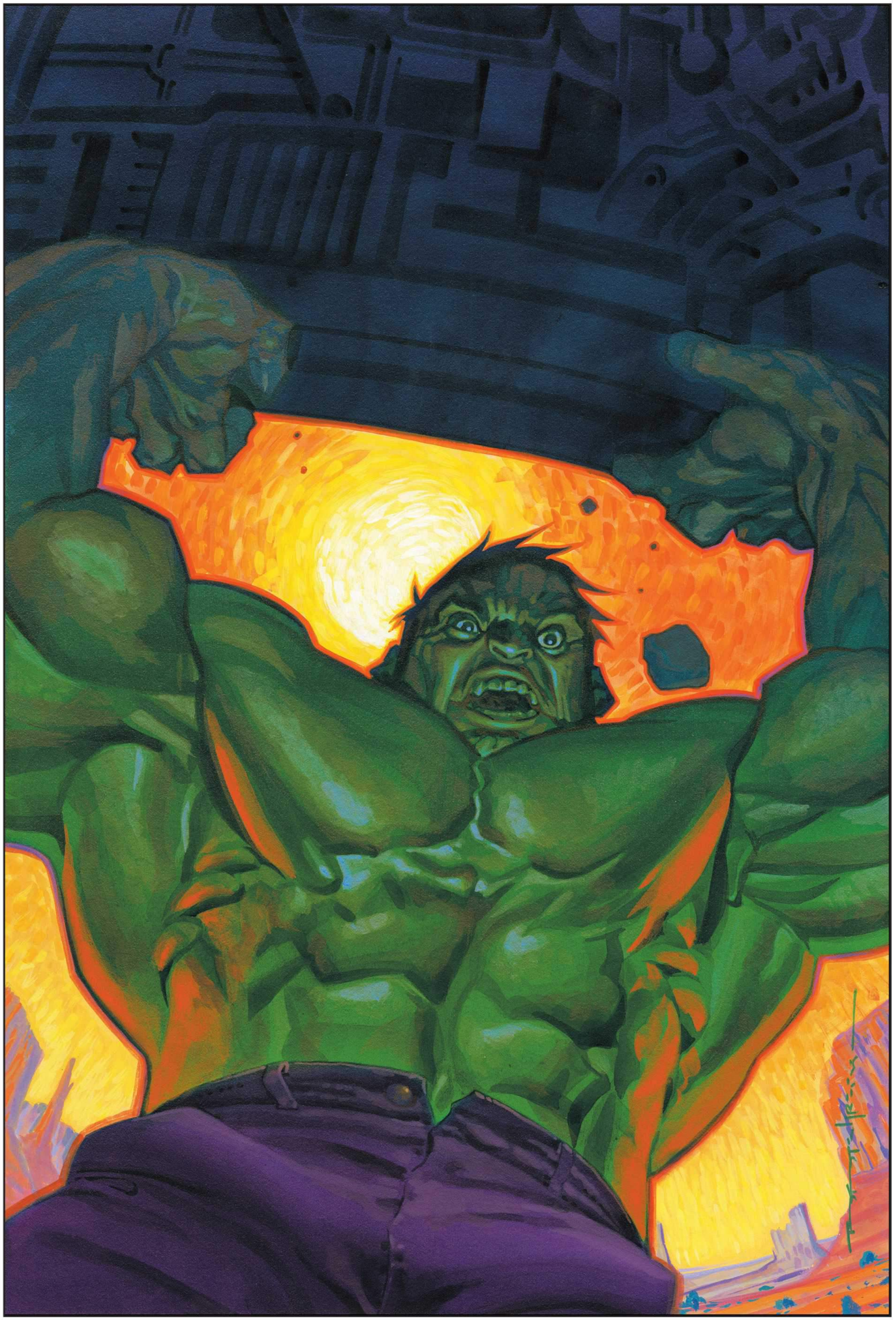
LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT #164
Cover
DC Comics
2003



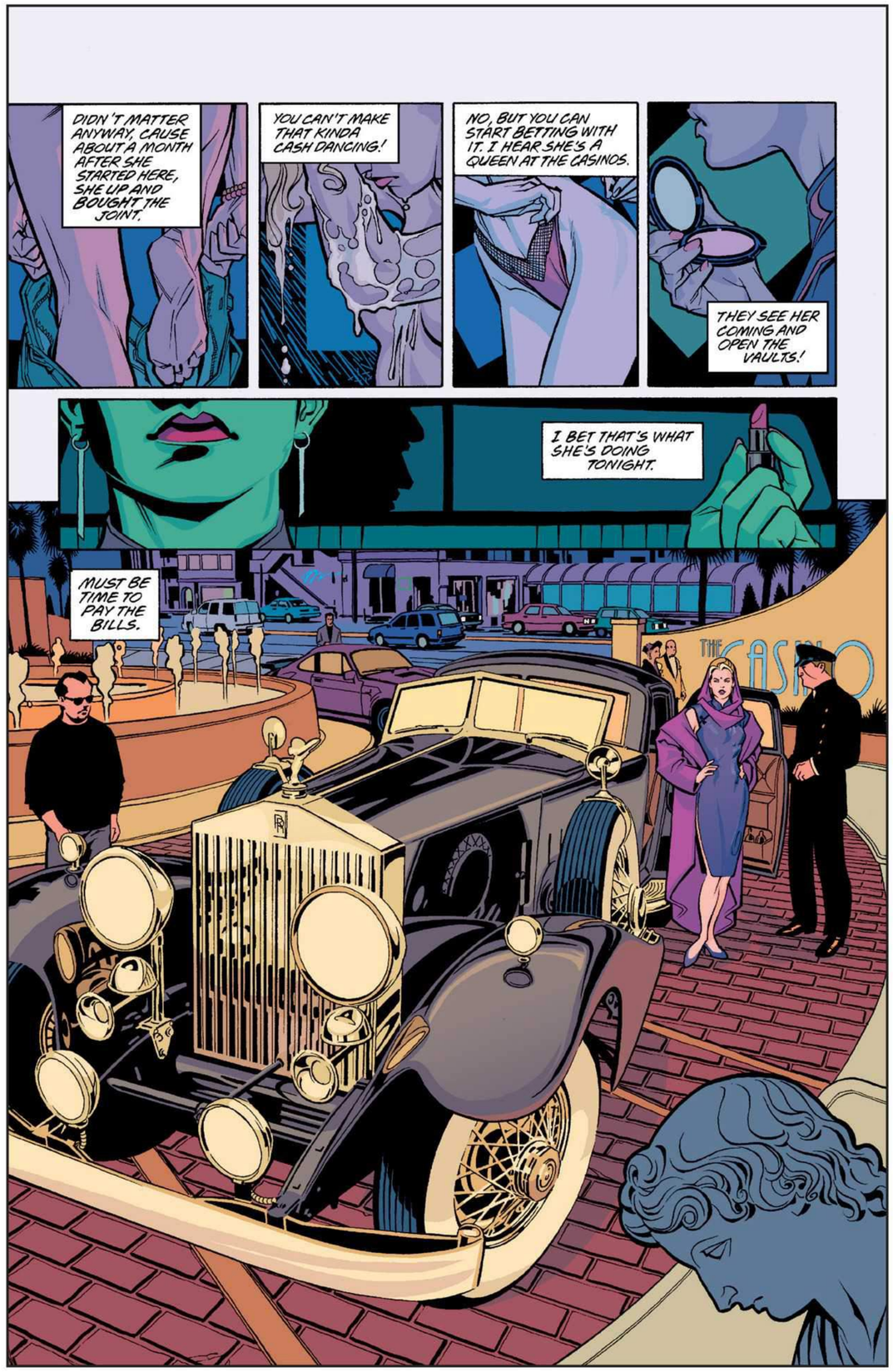
NIGHTWING
Trading Card
DC Comics

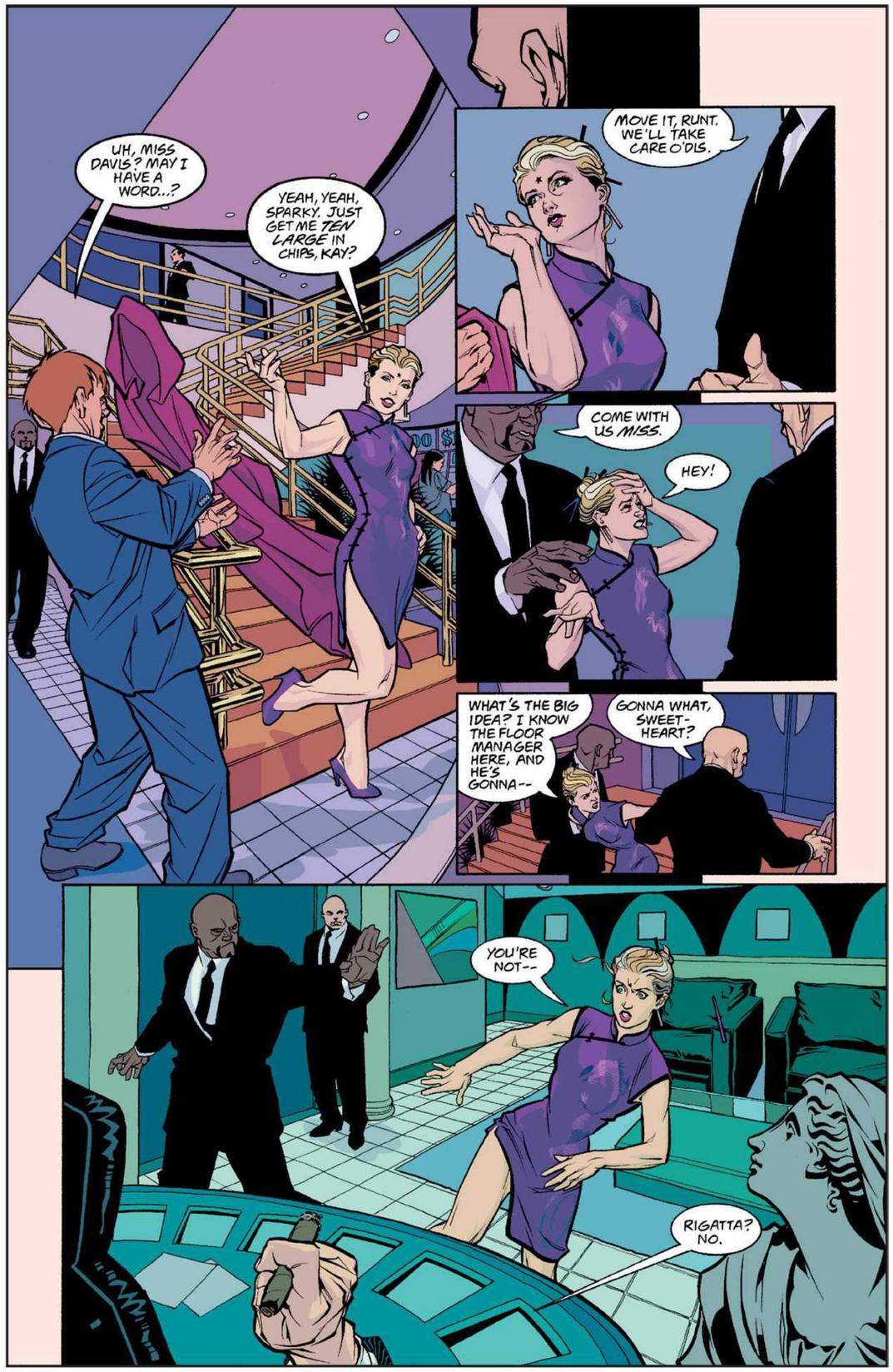


BATMAN #35
Monster Variant Cover
DC Comics
2014

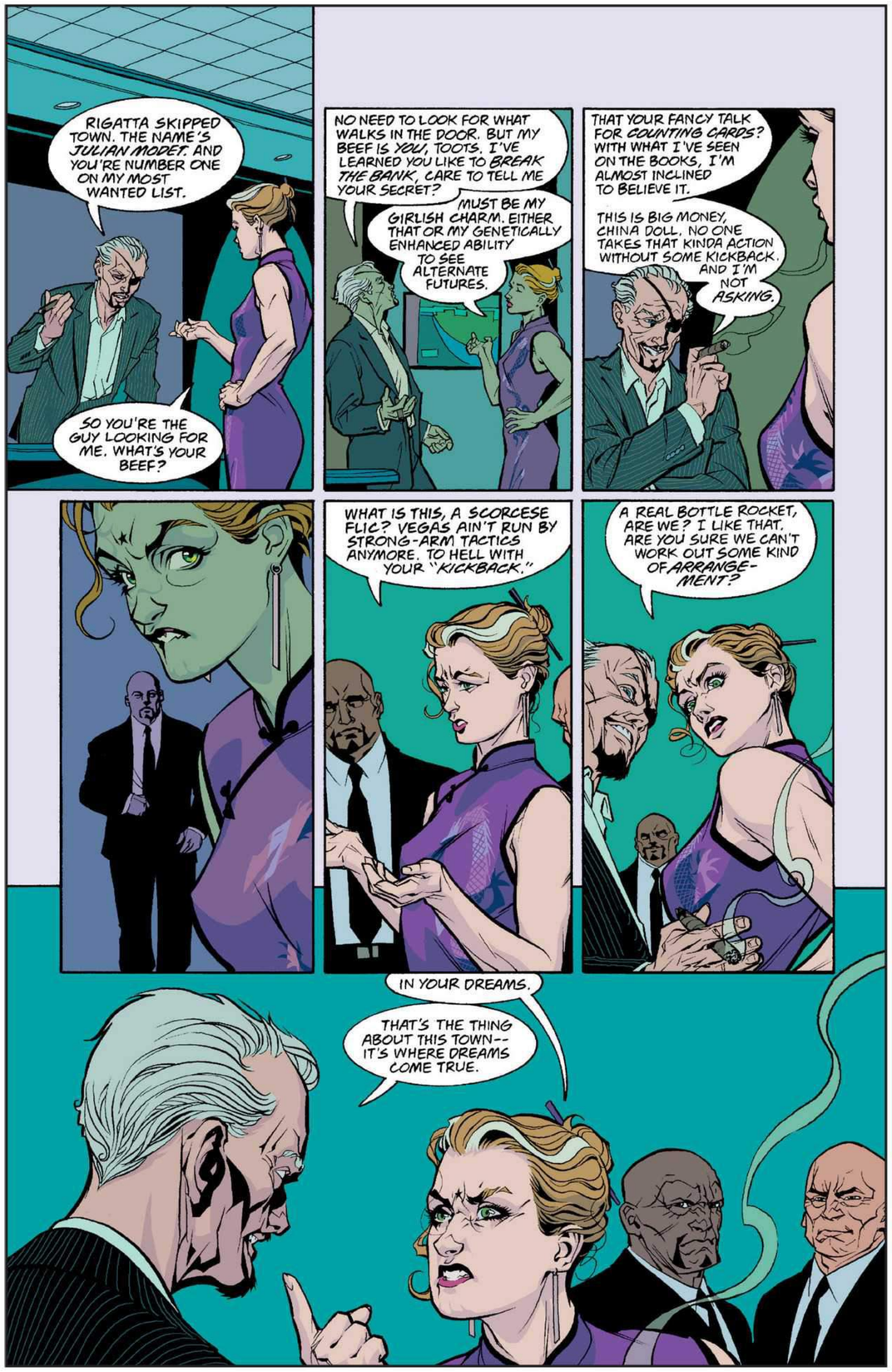


THE INCREDIBLE HULK
Acrylic
Marvel Comics
2003

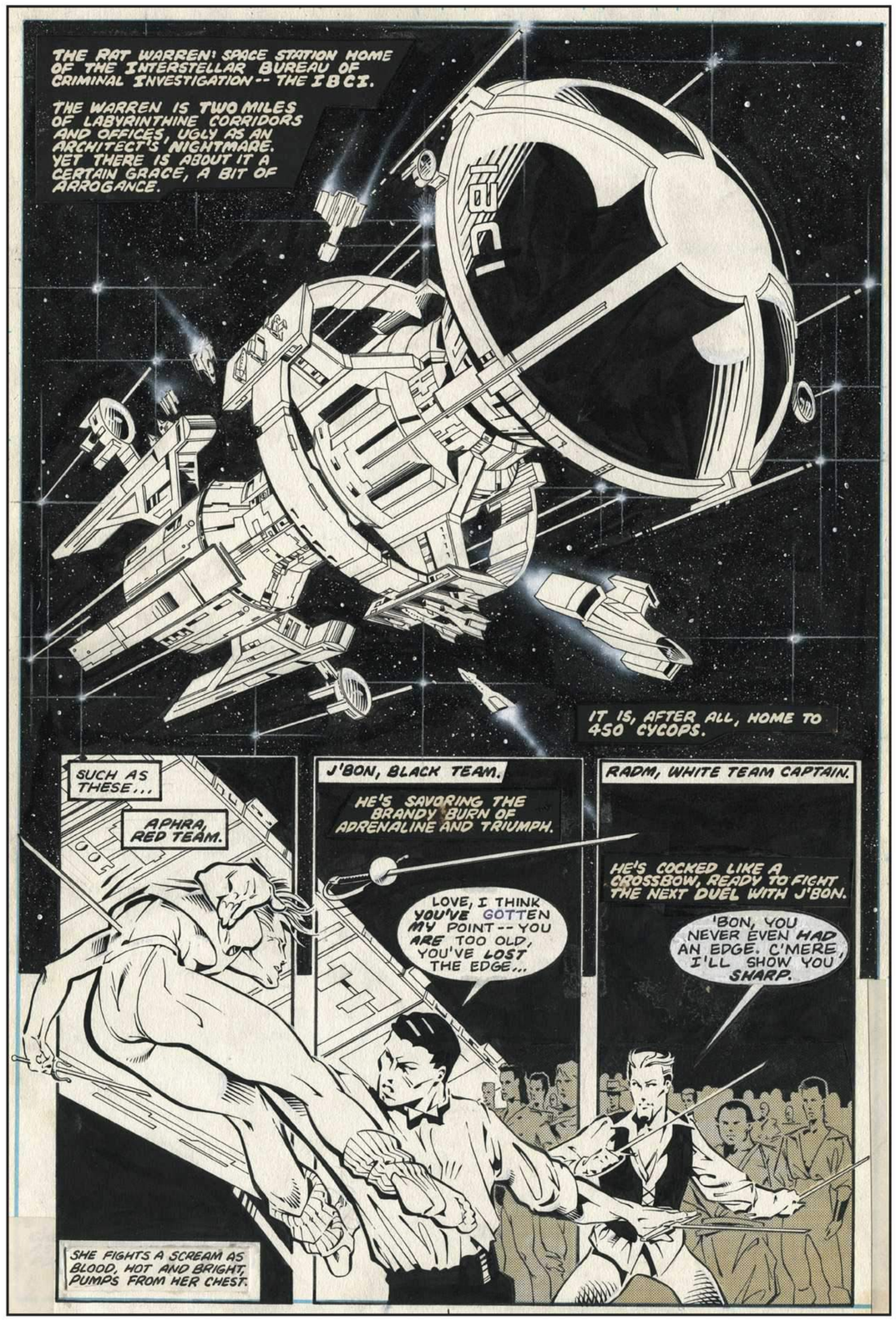




WILDSTORM PRESENTS PAGES
Written by Brian Azzarello, with inks by Karl Story and letters by John Costanza
DC Comics
2010

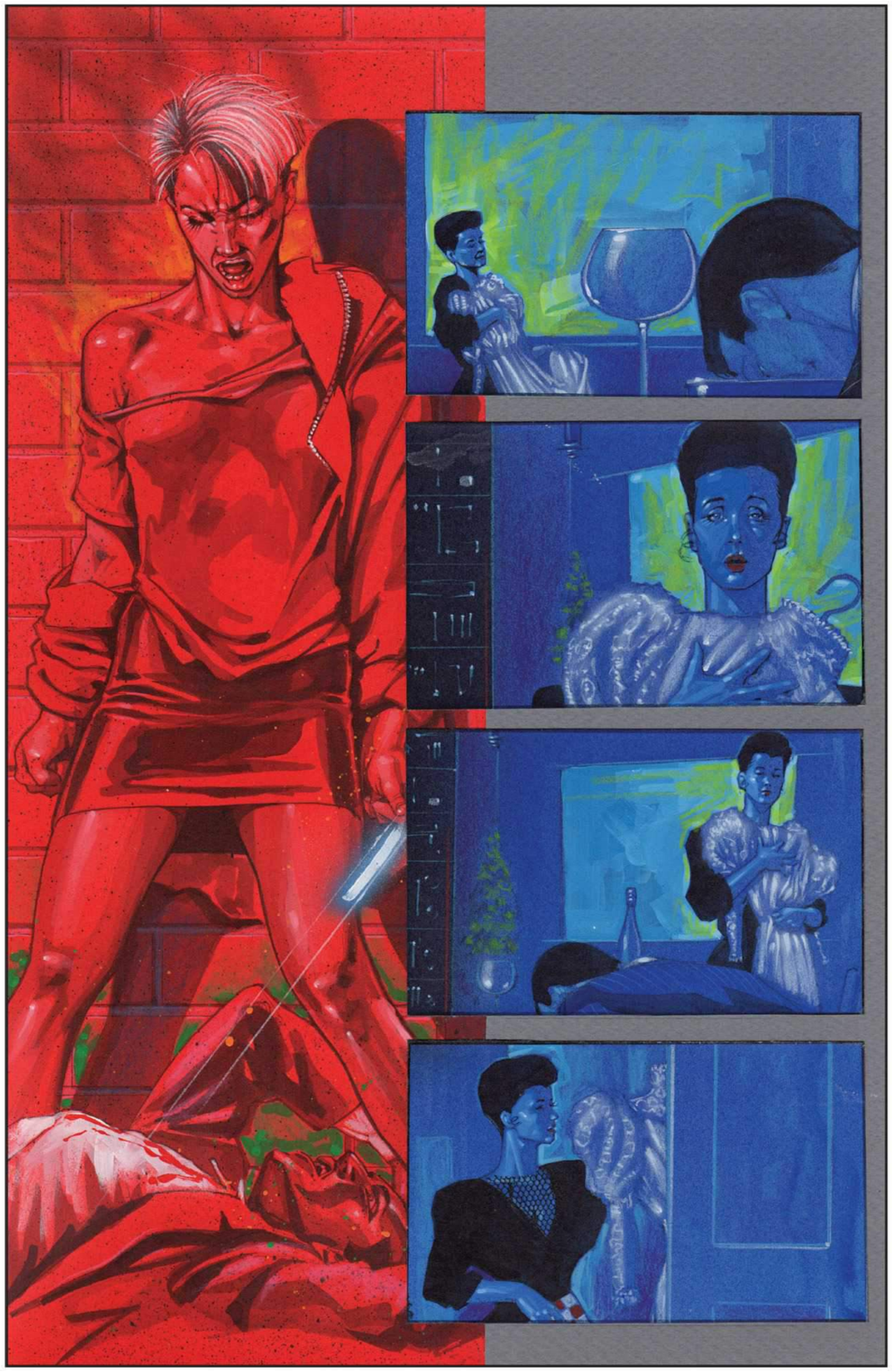

RIGATTA SKIPPED TOWN. THE NAME'S JULIAN MODET. AND YOU'RE NUMBER ONE ON MY MOST WANTED LIST.
SO YOU'RE THE GUY LOOKING FOR ME. WHAT'S YOUR BEEF?
NO NEED TO LOOK FOR WHAT WALKS IN THE DOOR. BUT MY BEEF IS YOU, TOOTS. I'VE LEARNED YOU LIKE TO BREAK THE BANK, CARE TO TELL ME YOUR SECRET?
MUST BE MY GIRLISH CHARM. EITHER THAT OR MY GENETICALLY ENHANCED ABILITY TO SEE ALTERNATE FUTURES.
THAT YOUR FANCY TALK FOR COUNTING CARDS? WITH WHAT I'VE SEEN ON THE BOOKS, I'M ALMOST INCLINED TO BELIEVE IT.
THIS IS BIG MONEY, CHINA DOLL. NO ONE TAKES THAT KINDA ACTION WITHOUT SOME KICKBACK. AND I'M NOT ASKING.
WHAT IS THIS, A SCORCESE FLIC? VEGAS AIN'T RUN BY STRONG-ARM TACTICS ANYMORE. TO HELL WITH YOUR "KICKBACK."
A REAL BOTTLE ROCKET, ARE WE? I LIKE THAT. ARE YOU SURE WE CAN'T WORK OUT SOME KIND OF ARRANGE-MENT?
IN YOUR DREAMS.
THAT'S THE THING ABOUT THIS TOWN-- IT'S WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE.

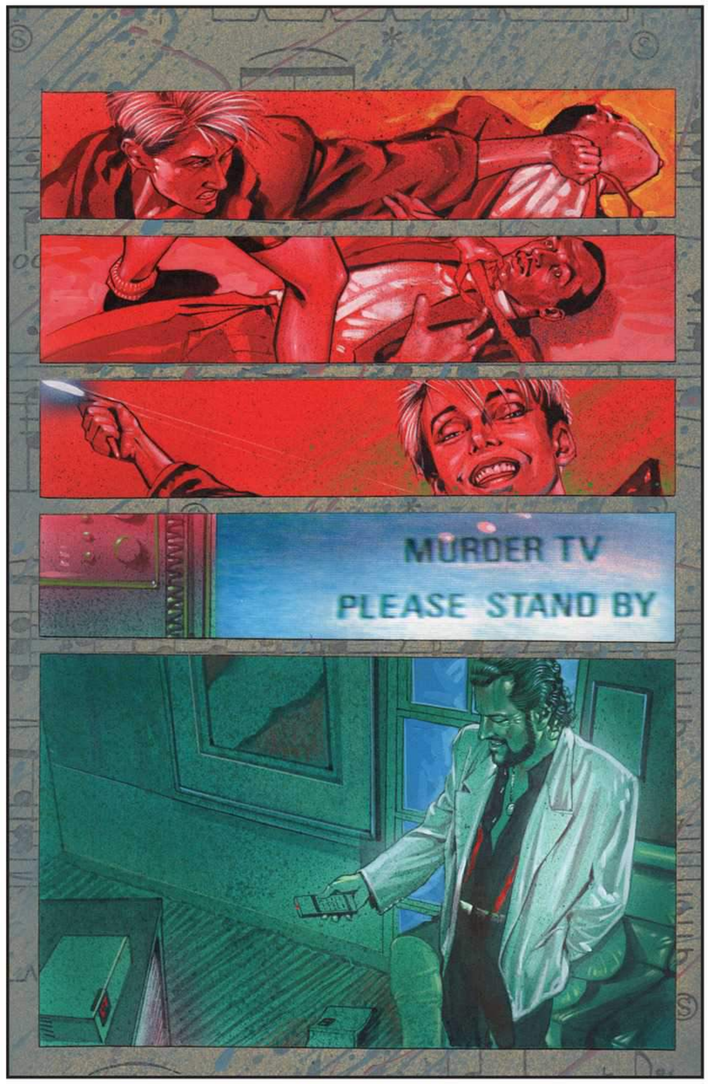

NOT YOURS.
BITCH!
BINGO!

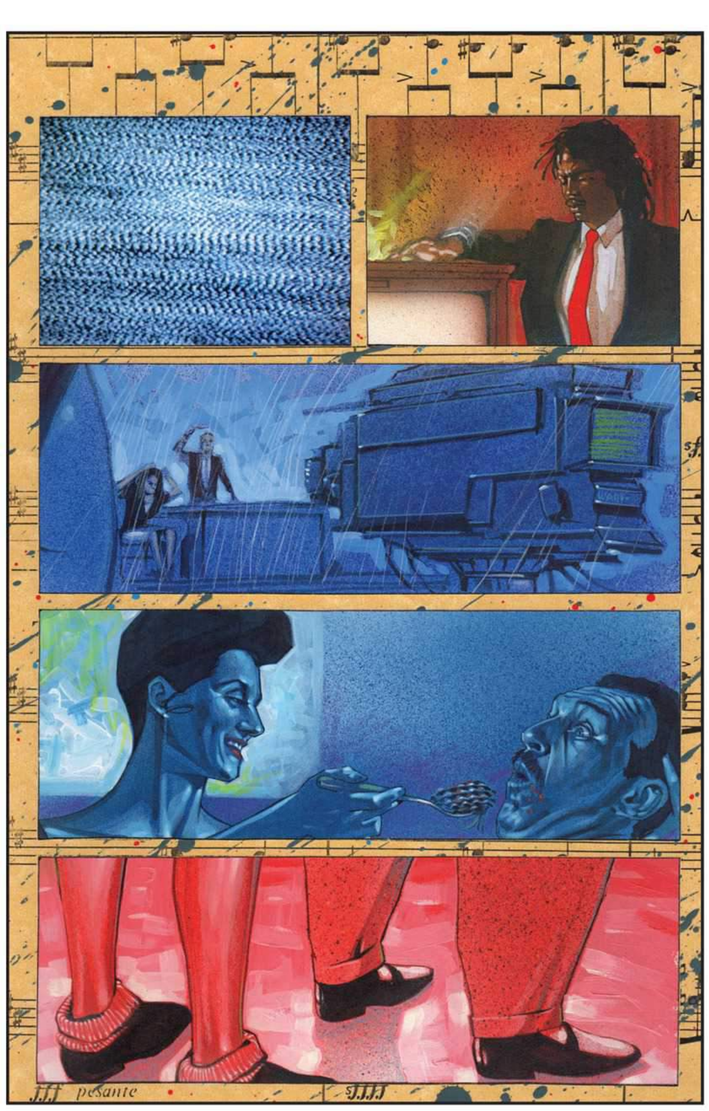




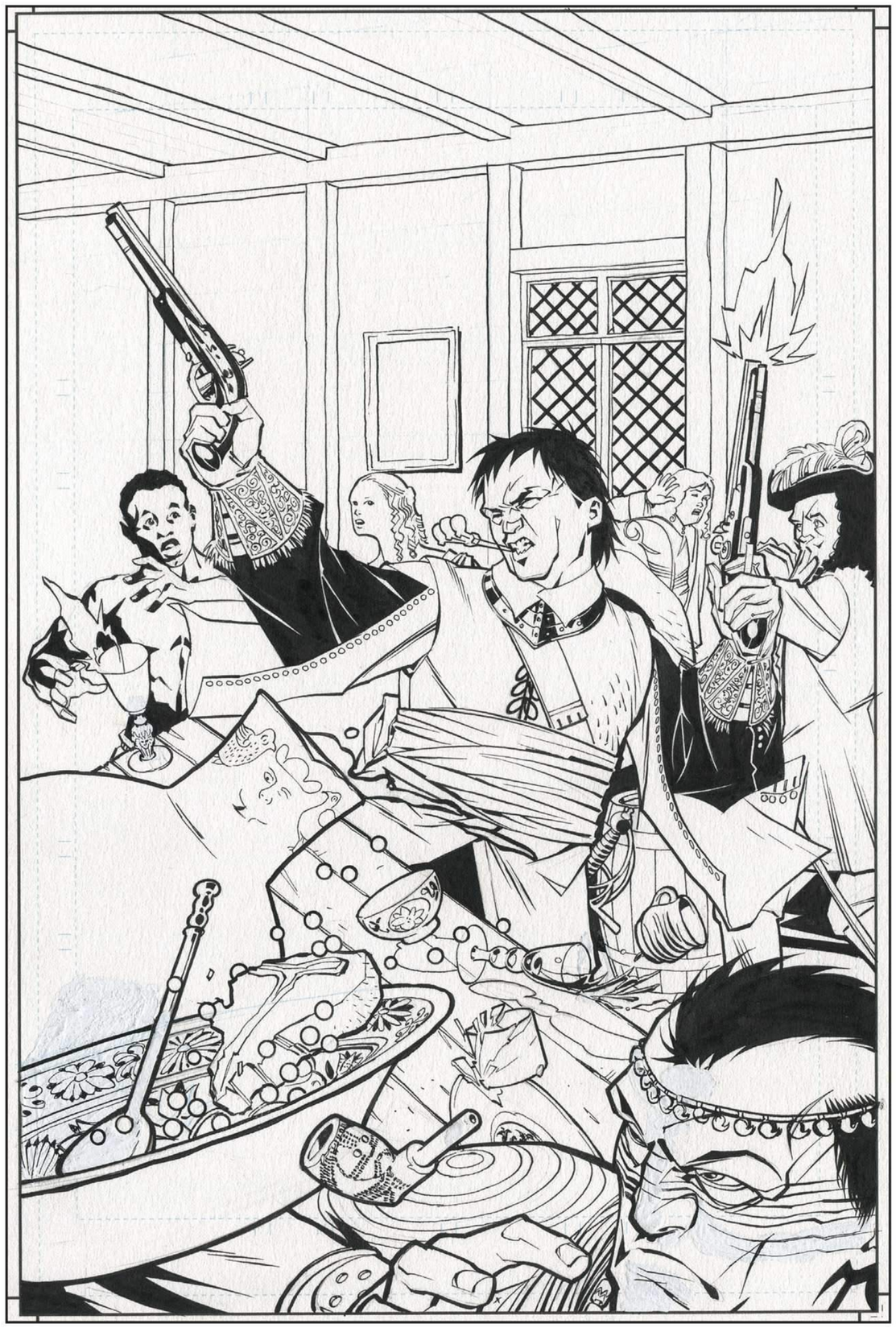
CYCOPS
Various Artwork
Pen, ink
Comics Interview
1988







"THIS YEAR'S GIRL"
Unpublished Work
1992



COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG EXHIBIT
Cover
Pen, ink
2000



MATADOR PITCH IMAGE
Pen, ink
DC Comics
2004







THE BATMAN CHRONICLES #5
Various Artwork
Pen, ink
DC Comics
1996

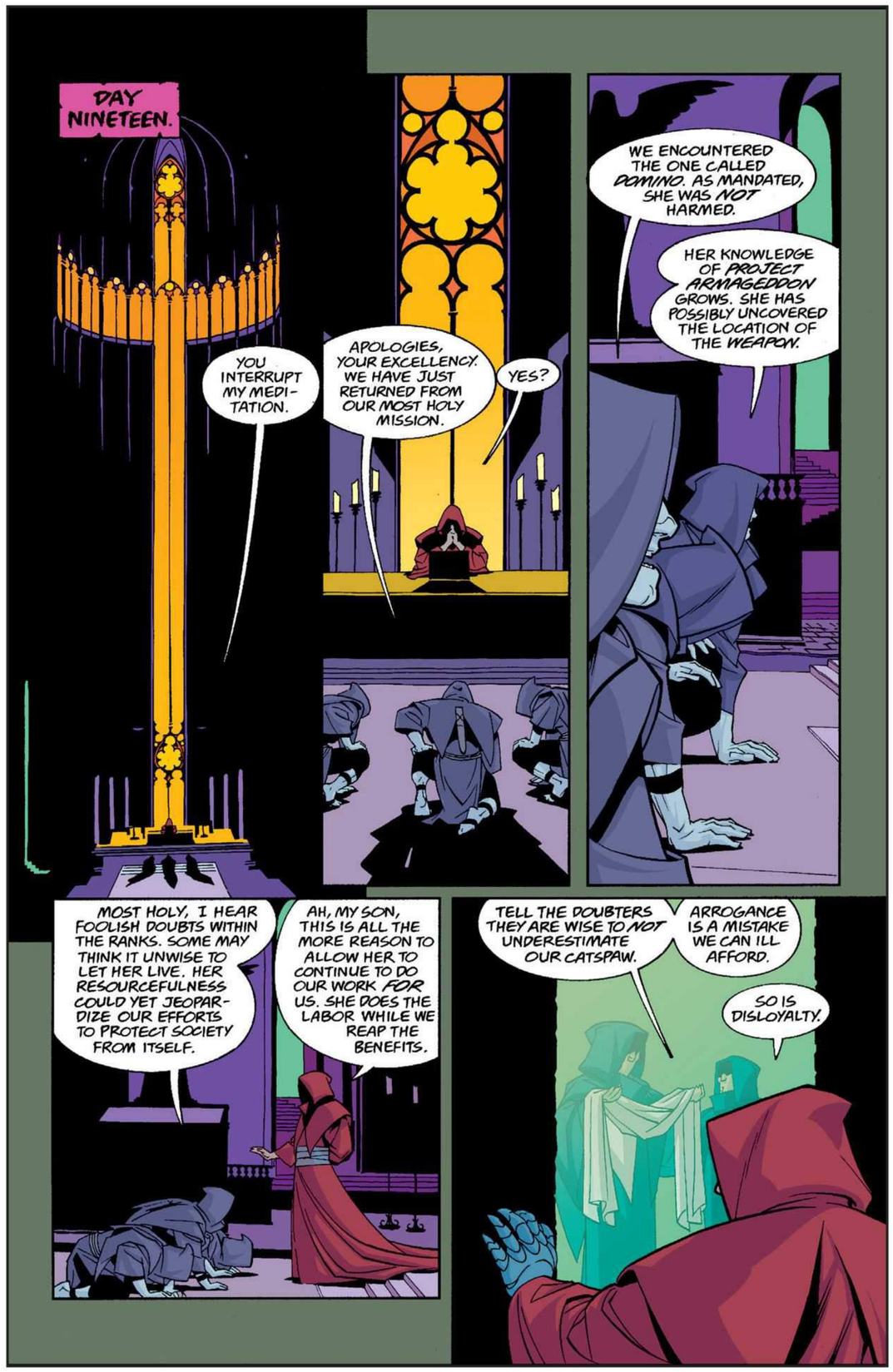




DOMINO #2 PAGES 5-8
Written with Joe Pruett
Marvel Comics
2003

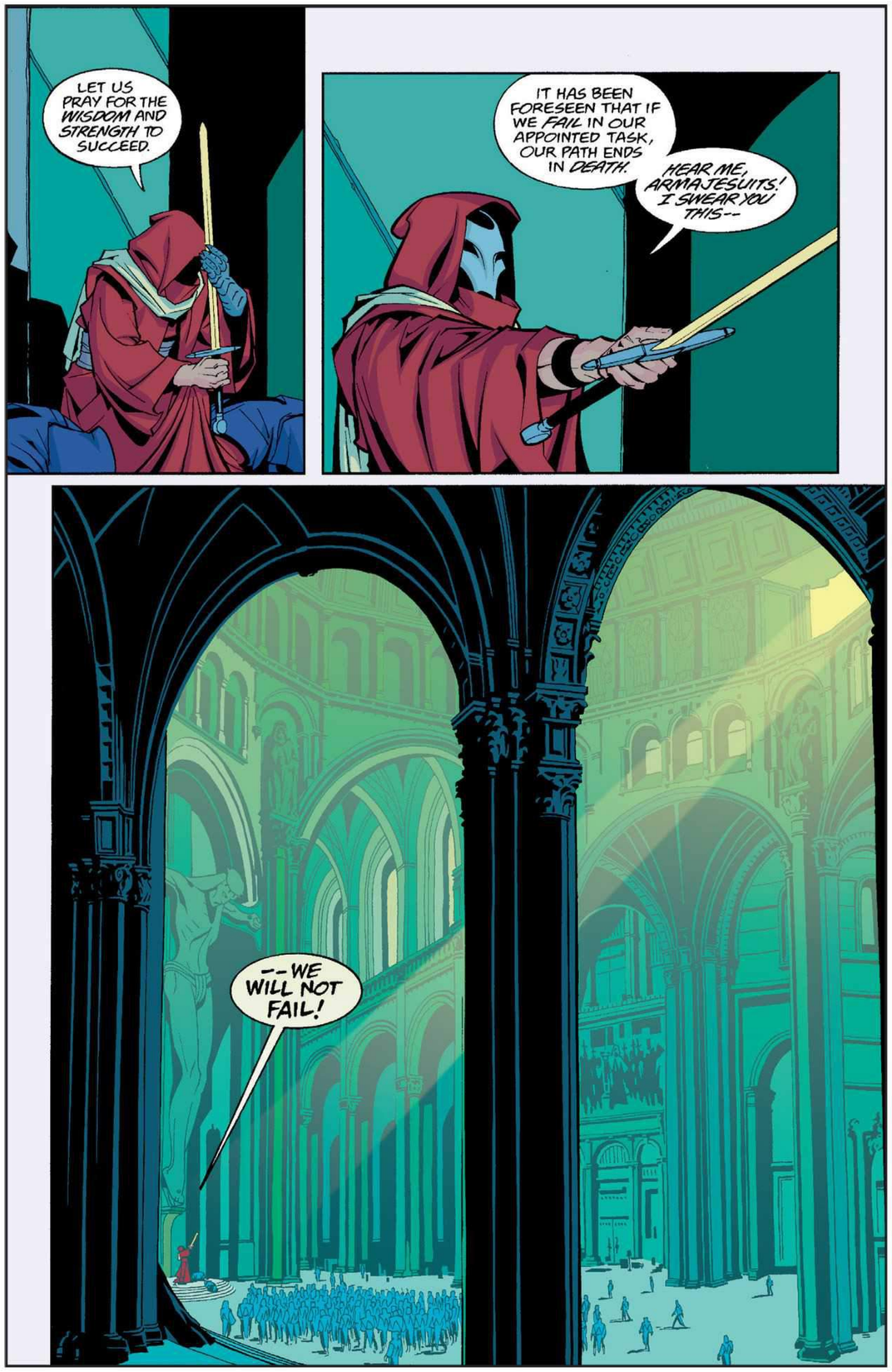

DOMINO, YOU'VE GOT YOUR HANDS FULL.
OR MAYBE NOT.


HA!

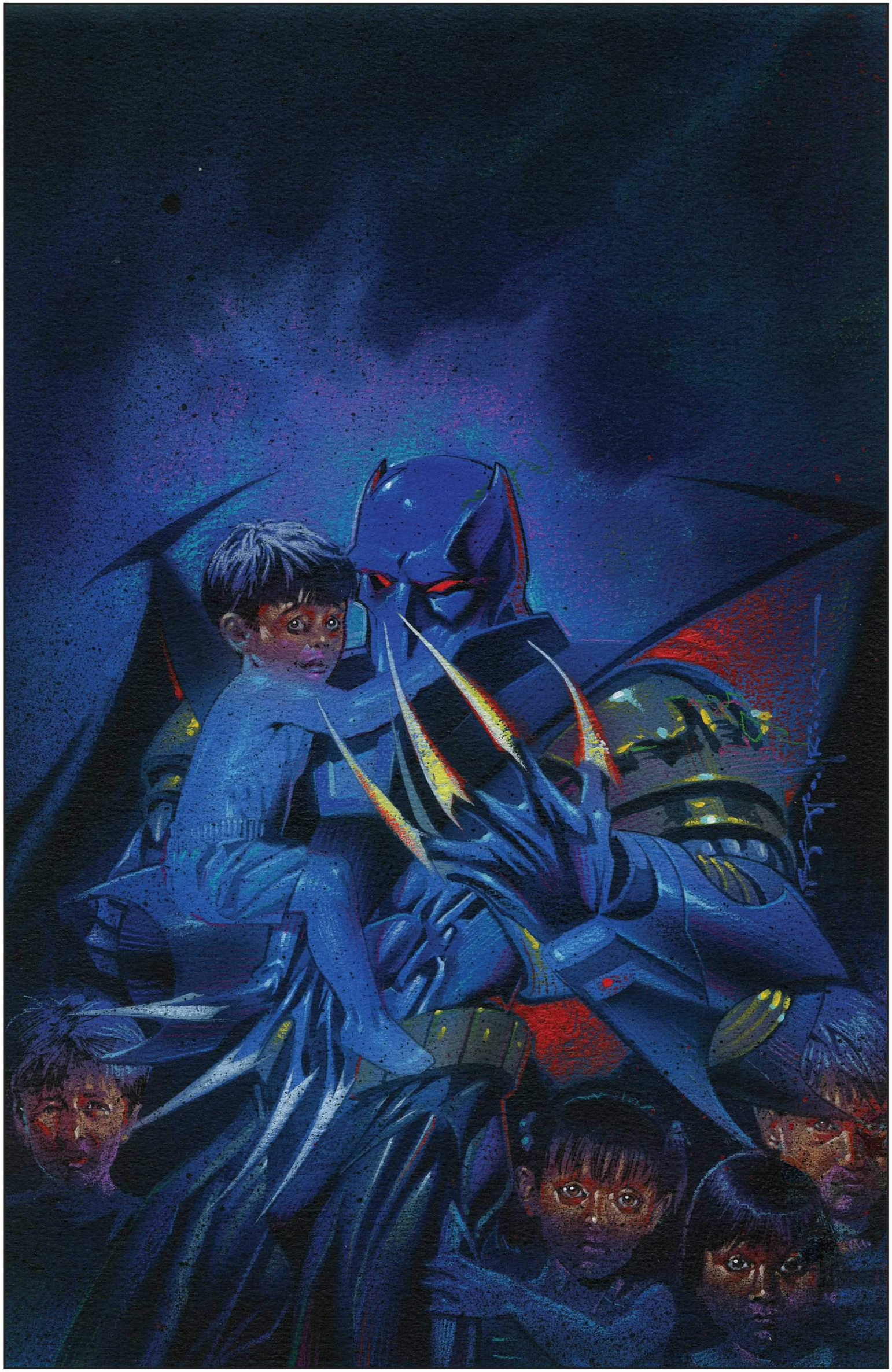




DOMINO #3 PAGES 5-8
Written with Joe Pruett
Marvel Comics
2003


LET US PRAY FOR THE WISDOM AND STRENGTH TO SUCCEED.
IT HAS BEEN FORESEEN THAT IF WE FAIL IN OUR APPOINTED TASK, OUR PATH ENDS IN DEATH.
HEAR ME, ARMAJESUITS! I SWEAR YOU THIS--
--WE WILL NOT FAIL!


DAY TWENTY.
THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES.
SO, DOMINO, WHICH FRIGHTENS YOU MORE?
FINDING THE WOMAN BEHIND THOSE YELLOWED MEMORIES AND FADED PHOTOS--
--FACING A WEAPON SUPPOSEDLY CAPABLE OF DESTROYING ENTIRE CIVILIZATIONS--



SHADOW OF THE BAT #24
Cover
DC Comics
1994



SHADOW OF THE BAT #42
Cover
DC Comics
1995

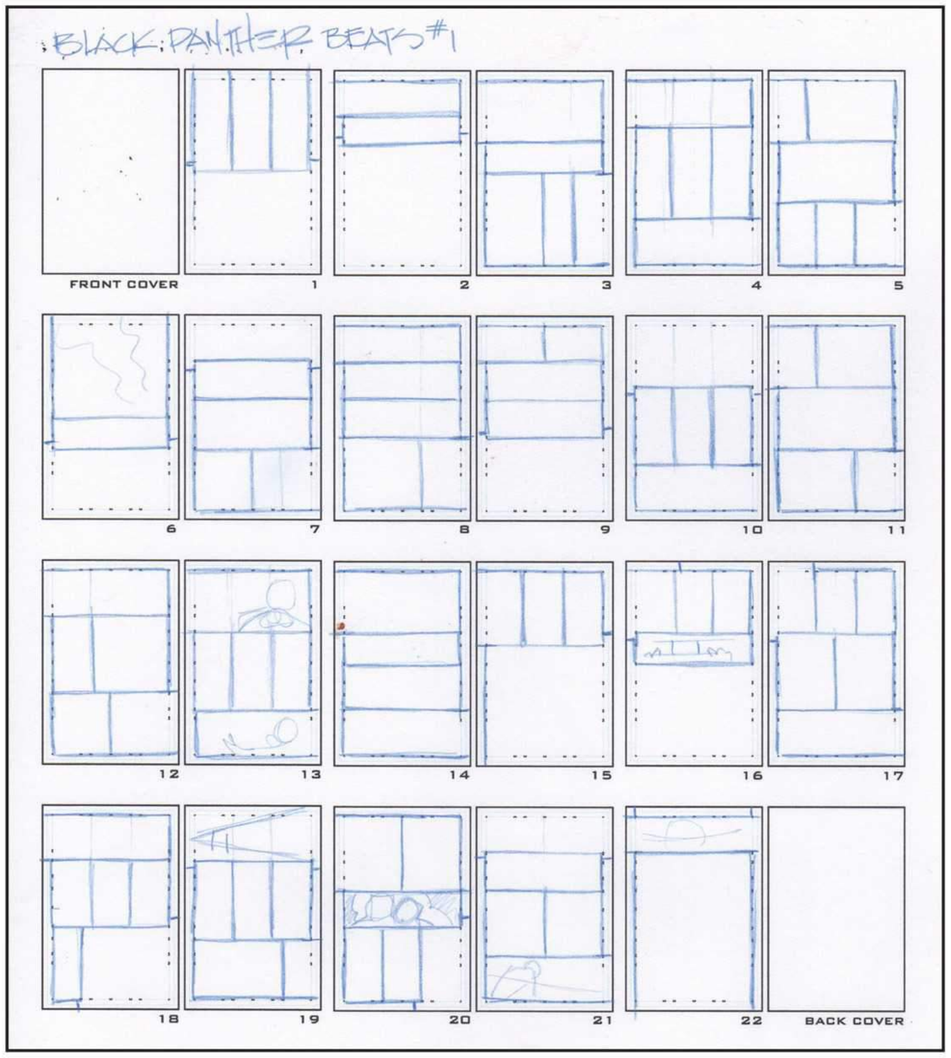
THE PROCESS

The first step in the process is to read the script multiple times and make notes with every pass. I want to get as much of the story in my head at once so I can have a gestalt view of the story. This allows me to visually foreshadow and allude to other parts of the telling.

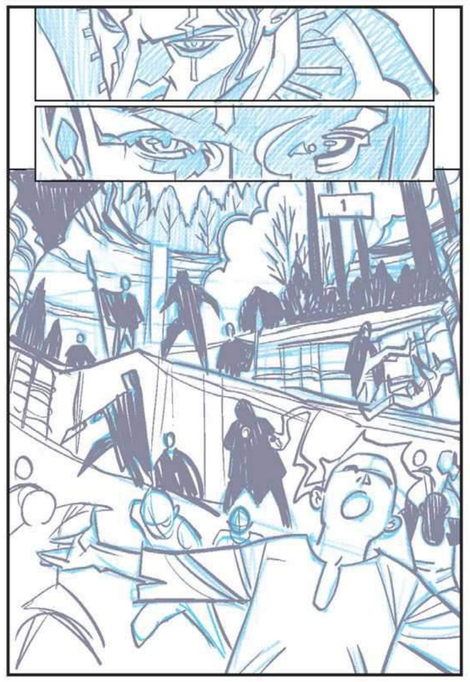
From there I try to determine the panel sequencing of an entire issue. This consists of drawing small thumbnails of just the panels. At this point, I'm thinking more like a musician and less like an artist, so I try to avoid thinking too much about the art. I'm reading the script and trying to determine rhythmic changes in action or emotion. This is a trick I learned from Jim Steranko after a late night storytelling argument. Seriously, you can learn more from that guy in a single argument than you can from four years of any art program. At this stage I'm trying to achieve a sense of storytelling without art.

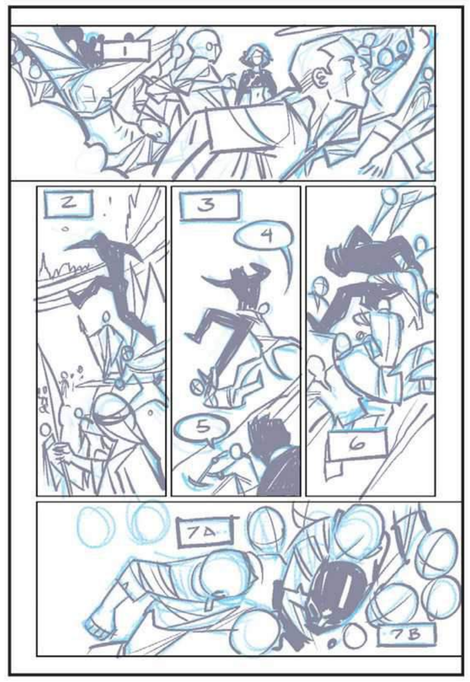
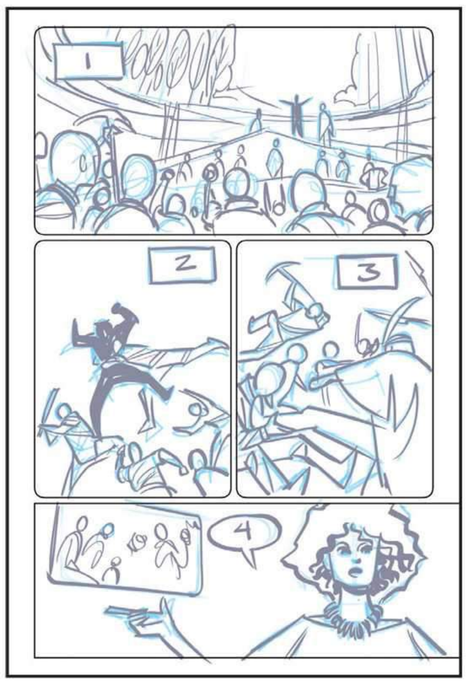
Now it's onto the thumbnails. I don't want this to be about quality of art so I try to reduce figures to shapes rather than drawings. I want the characters and backgrounds to be design elements on the page to help direct the reader through the story. The most important thing I try to achieve is giving every page a purpose: a beginning, middle, and end. I want an event to happen so that the reader feels a sense of closure on every page. I'm also staging characters so they form "S" or "Z" patterns across and down the page. This helps create a sense of movement even when very little is happening. I try not to spend too much time in this phase. If I give it too much consideration I'll just start drawing.

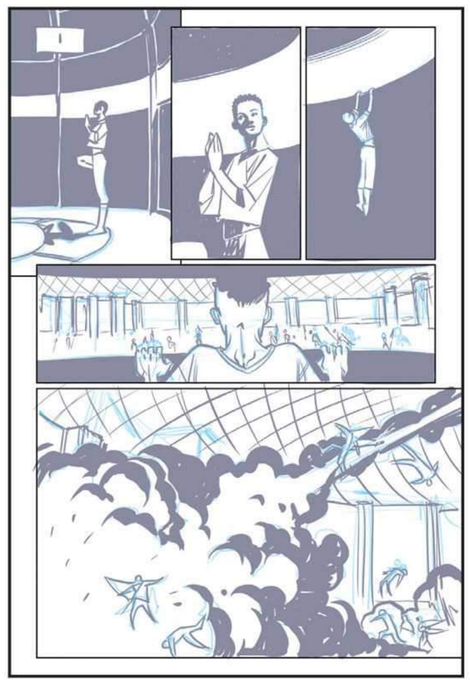
And now it's onto the layouts. This by far is the most fun stage of storytelling. It's equal parts story and art and trying to create a rhythmic play between the two. I work on these at about half the size of a printed comic so as not to give in too much to the art. I'm still thinking of building my characters as shapes, but I'm considering the initial acting. Think of it as shapes with attitude. I also try to tackle this stage without reference so I'm still thinking more like a storyteller. This is also a good stage to give considerations to compositional spotting of blacks.

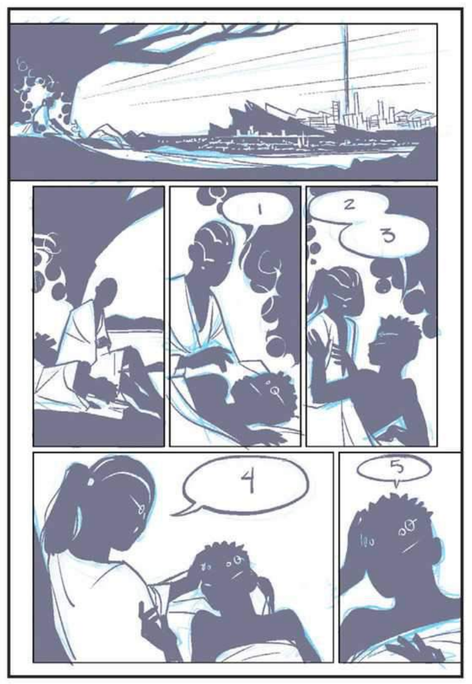




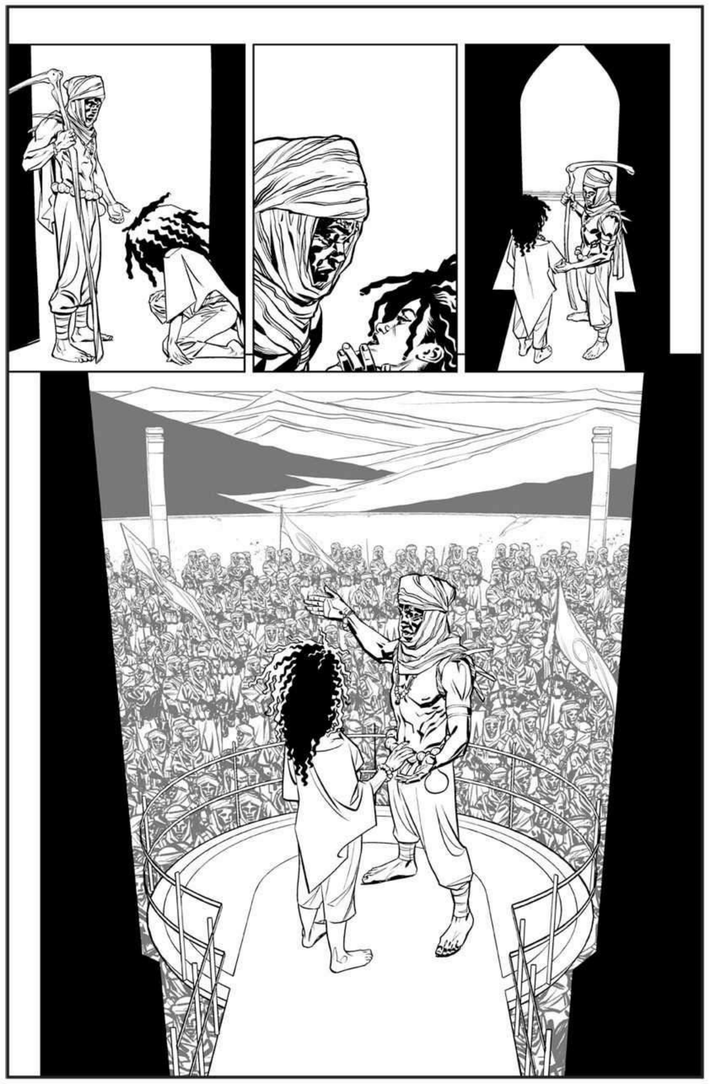




BLACK PANTHER #1 LAYOUTS
Digital
Marvel Comics
2015

Finally, the finished page. I don't treat penciling and inking as separate things so there's never truly a penciled stage. Sometimes I can go right from the layouts, but on most occasions I have to tighten things up. This is the time I bring in reference. A note on using reference, I can draw a lot of things out of my head, but I am very quick to pick up reference for anything I have the slightest question about. I don't take any pride from not needing reference nor do I feel any shame when I do. Comics are about storytelling and not one's freakish ability to draw.

I usually try to get my layouts lettered before I go to finishes. This way I can see the dialogue on the page and tune the acting and composition to reflect the script. Comic book storytelling is a unique and uncharted art form. Art is about passing on a gift of experience, and comics offer a host of ways to guide a reader through your story. This is the thing that gets me excited about comic book storytelling. It's more than just drawing pretty pictures. With every page, I find myself asking the question, "How can I make the reader feel what's going on and how can I make it real?"















BLACK PANTHER #1 PAGES
Digital inks
Marvel Comics
2015



THE RIDE: DIE VALKYRIE
Chapter images
12 Gauge
2005





THE RIDE: DIE VALKYRIE #2 PAGES 19-20
Written with Doug Wagner
12 Gauge
2007





THE RIDE: DIE VALKYRIE #2 PAGES 21-22
Written with Doug Wagner
12 Gauge
2007



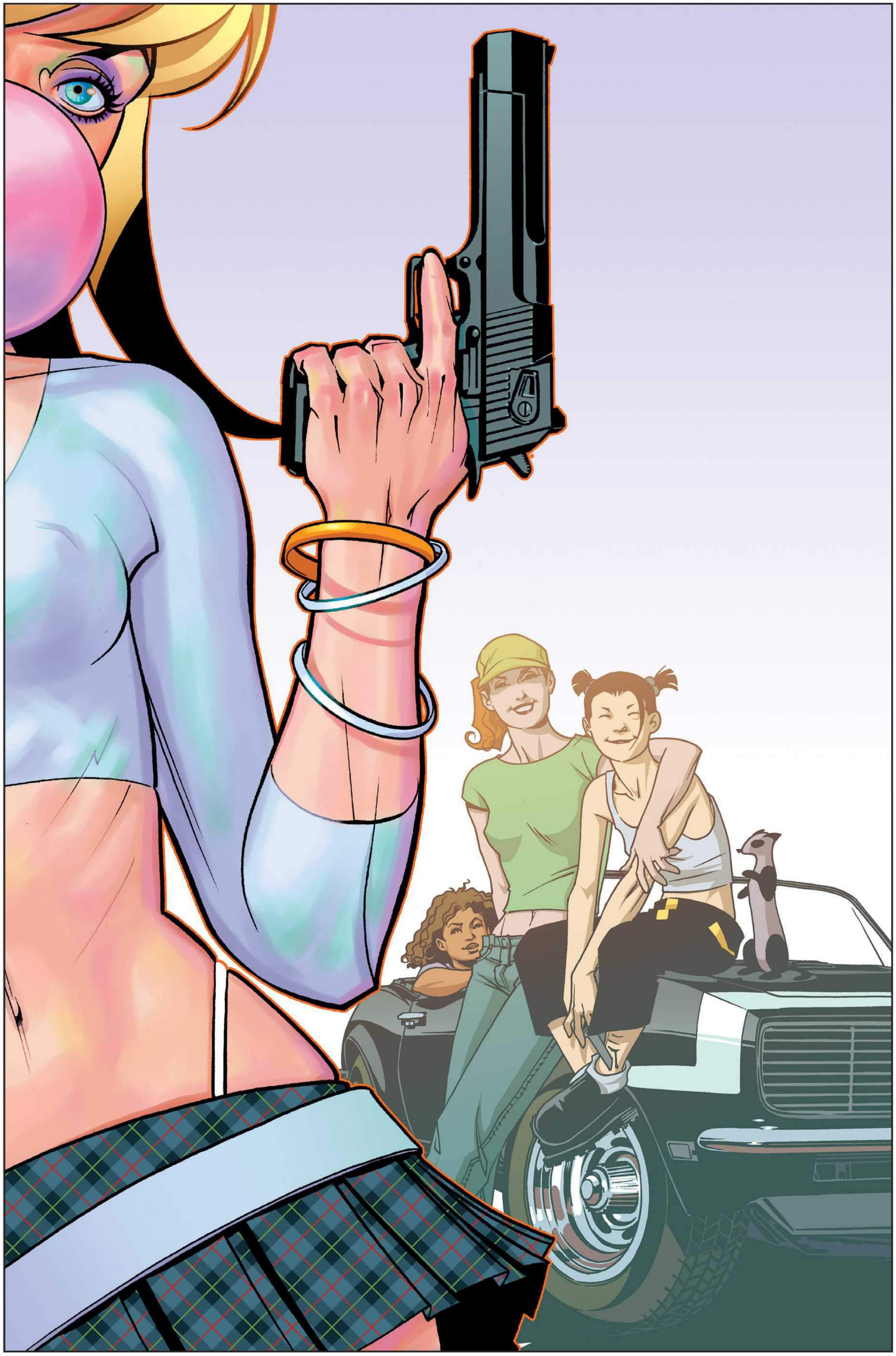


THE RIDE: DIE VALKYRIE #3 PAGES 10-11
Written with Doug Wagner
12 Gauge
2008





THE RIDE: DIE VALKYRIE #3 PAGES 12-13
Written with Doug Wagner
12 Gauge
2008



THE RIDE: DIE VALKYRIE TPB
Pen, ink, digital colors
12 Gauge
2008





GUN CANDY #2 PAGES 1-4
Written with Doug Wagner
12 Gauge
2006









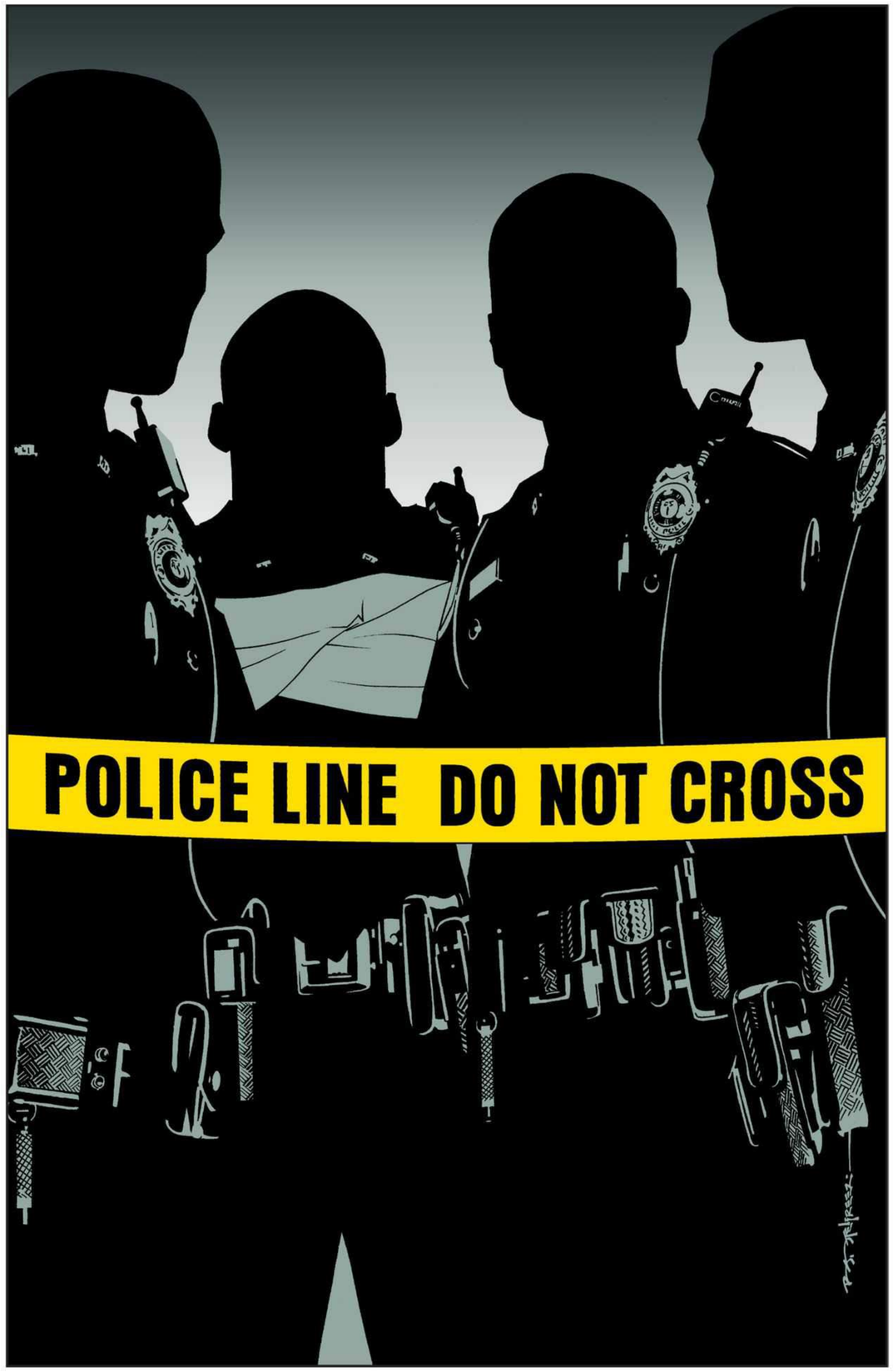
GUN CANDY #2 PAGES 5-6
Written with Doug Wagner
12 Gauge
2006





MATADOR SERIES COVERS
DC Comics
2005-2006





MATADOR SERIES COVERS
DC Comics
2005-2006




POLICE
POLICE
POLICE

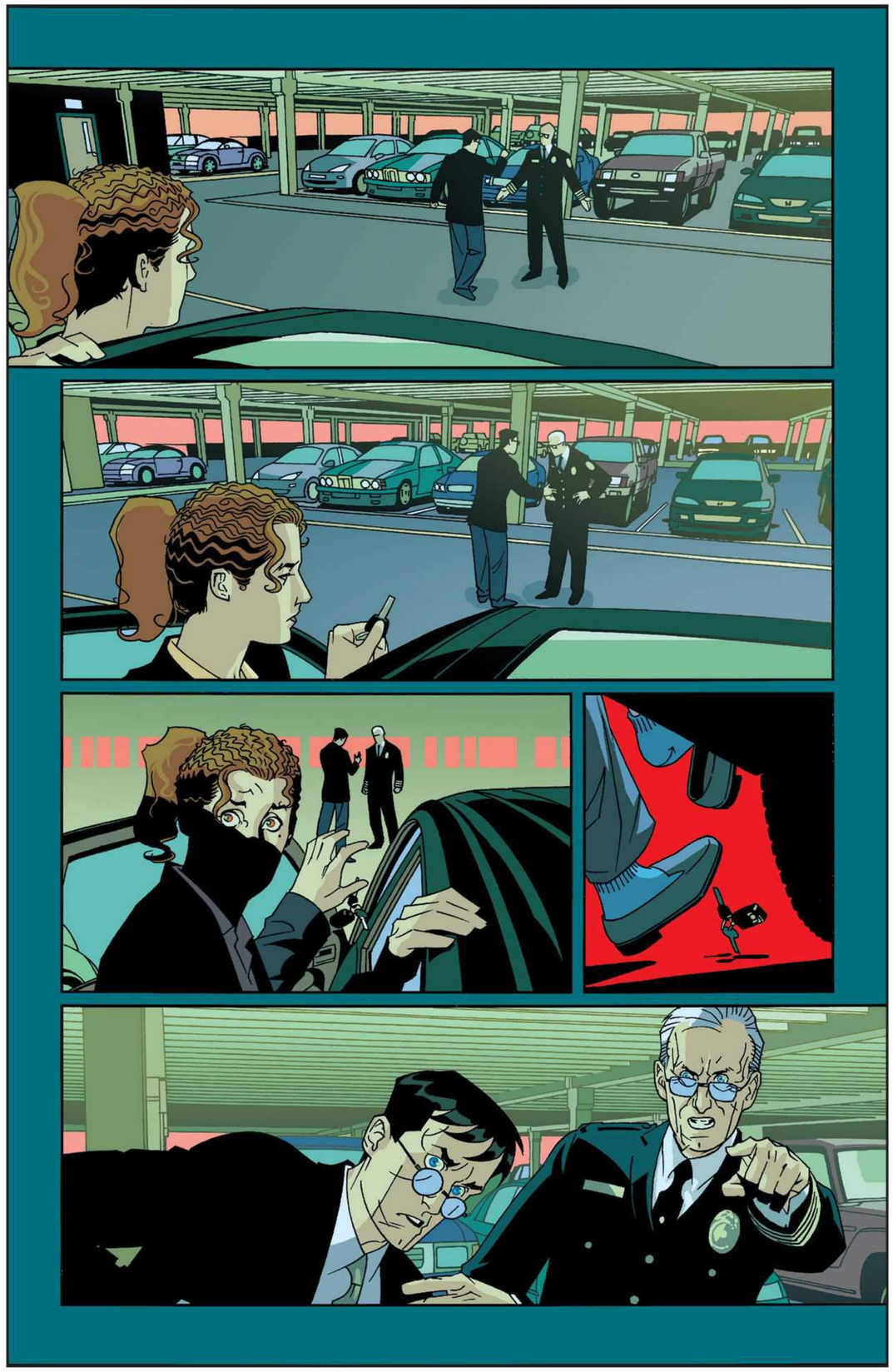




MATADOR #1 PAGES 20-23
Written with Devin Grayson
DC Comics
2005









MATADOR #3 PAGES 19-22
Written with Devin Grayson
DC Comics
2005

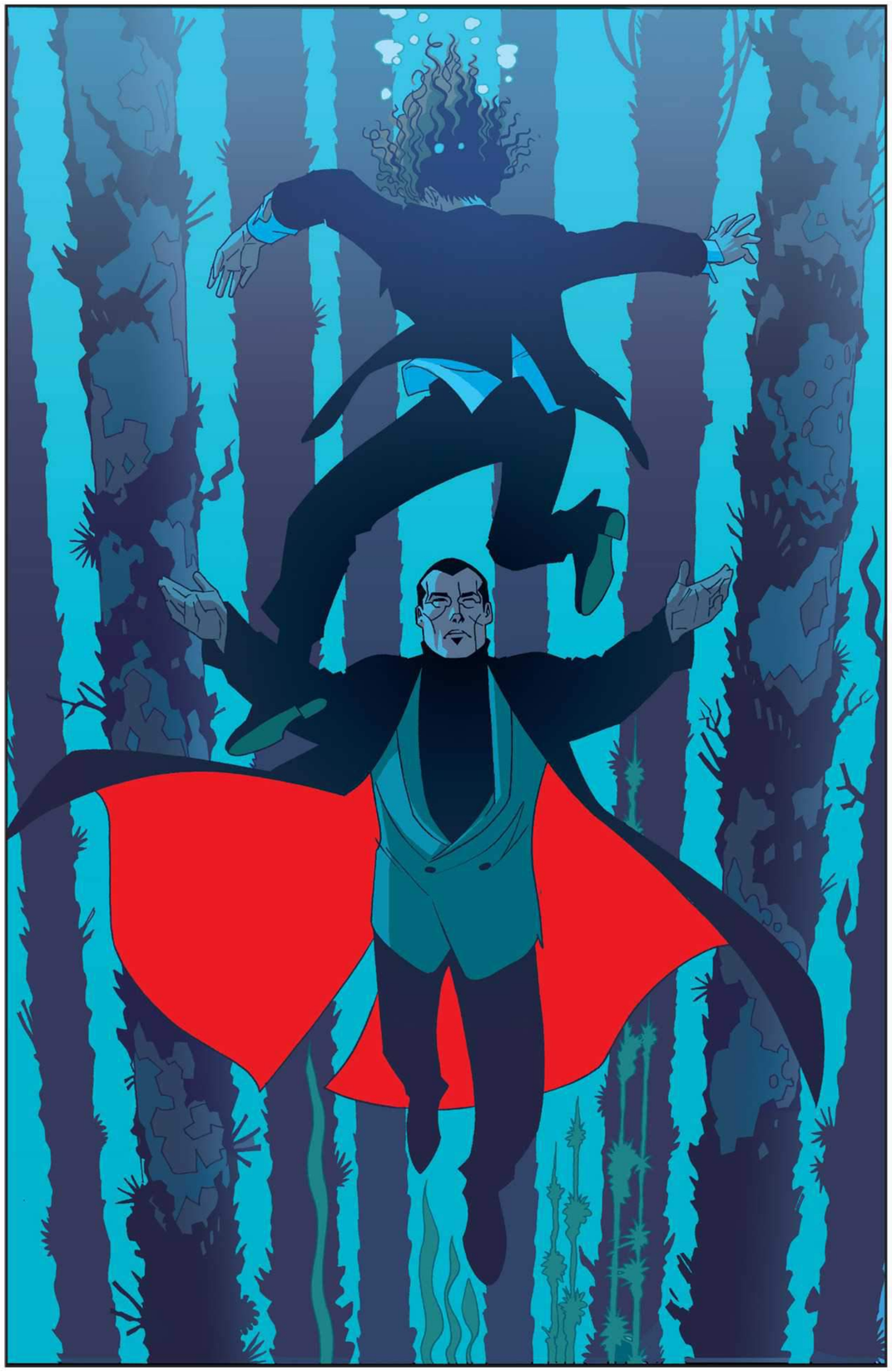


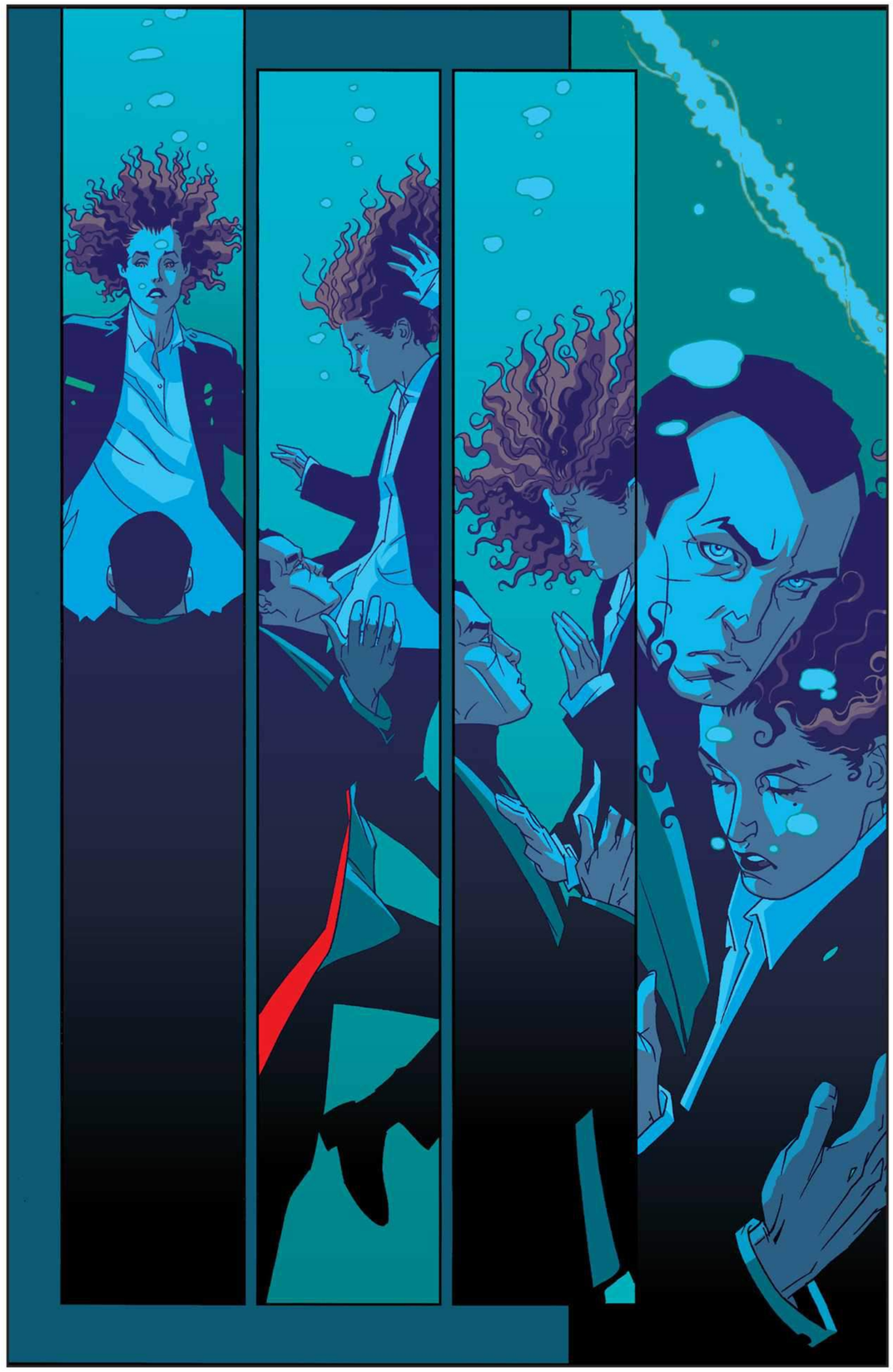






MATADOR #4 PAGES 19-22
Written with Devin Grayson
DC Comics
2005







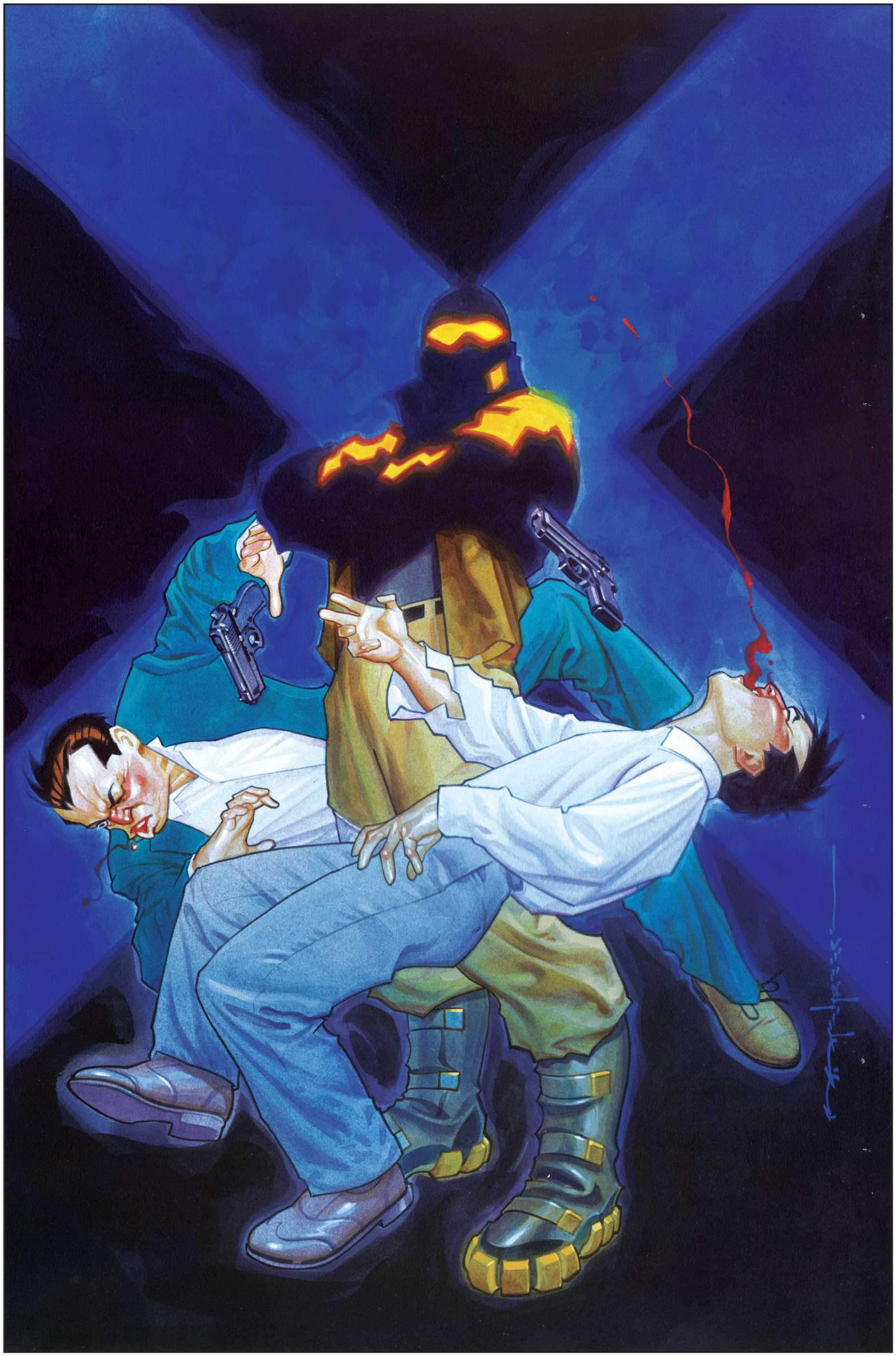
THE FLASH #244
Cover
DC Comics
2008



THE FLASH #247
Cover
DC Comics
2009



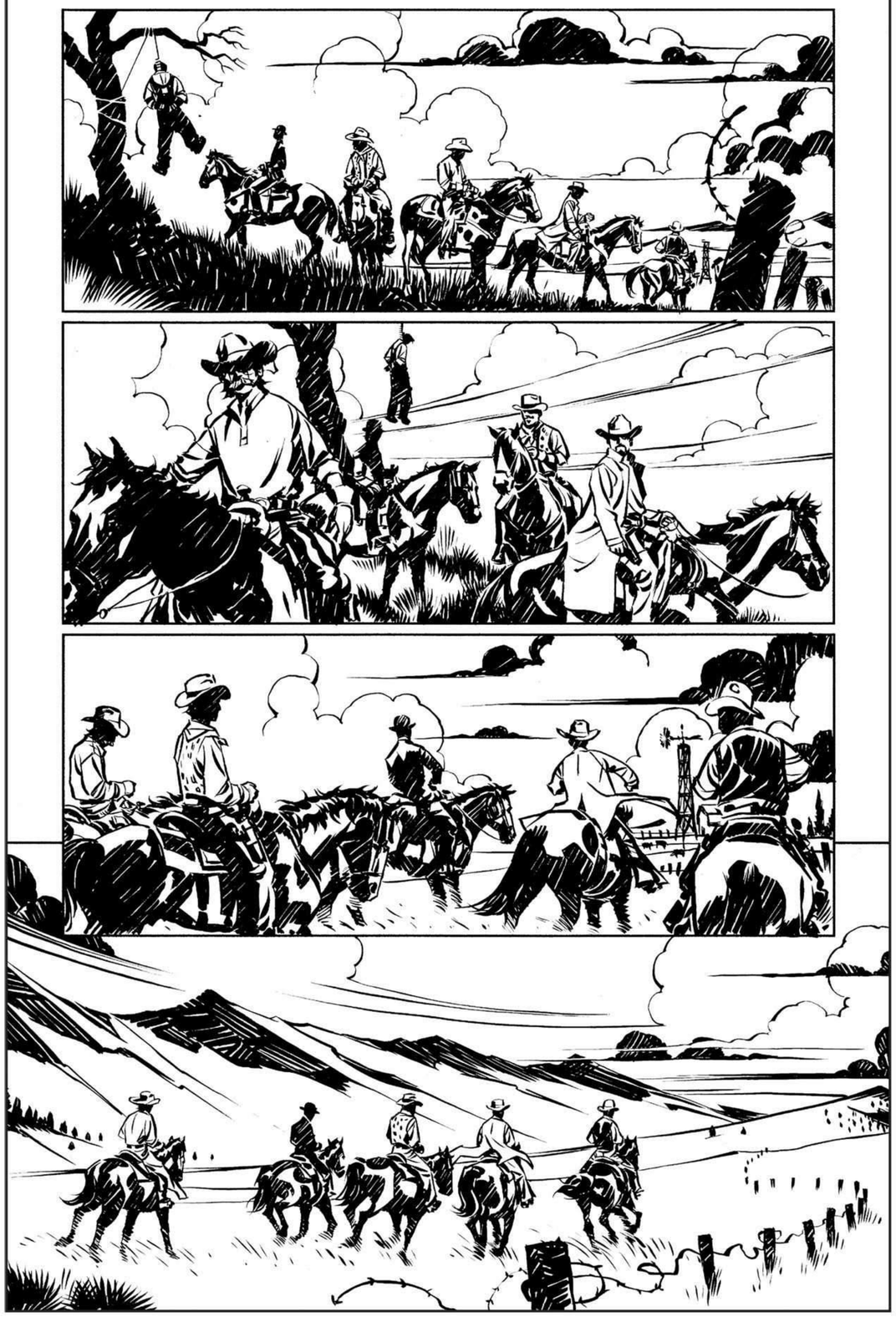
DEATHBLOW #3
Variant Cover
DC Comics
2007



AGENT X
Acrylics
Marvel Comics
2003



JONAH HEX #60
Cover
DC Comics
2010





JONAH HEX #60 PAGES 10-11
Written by Justin Gray & Jimmy Palmiotti
DC Comics
2010

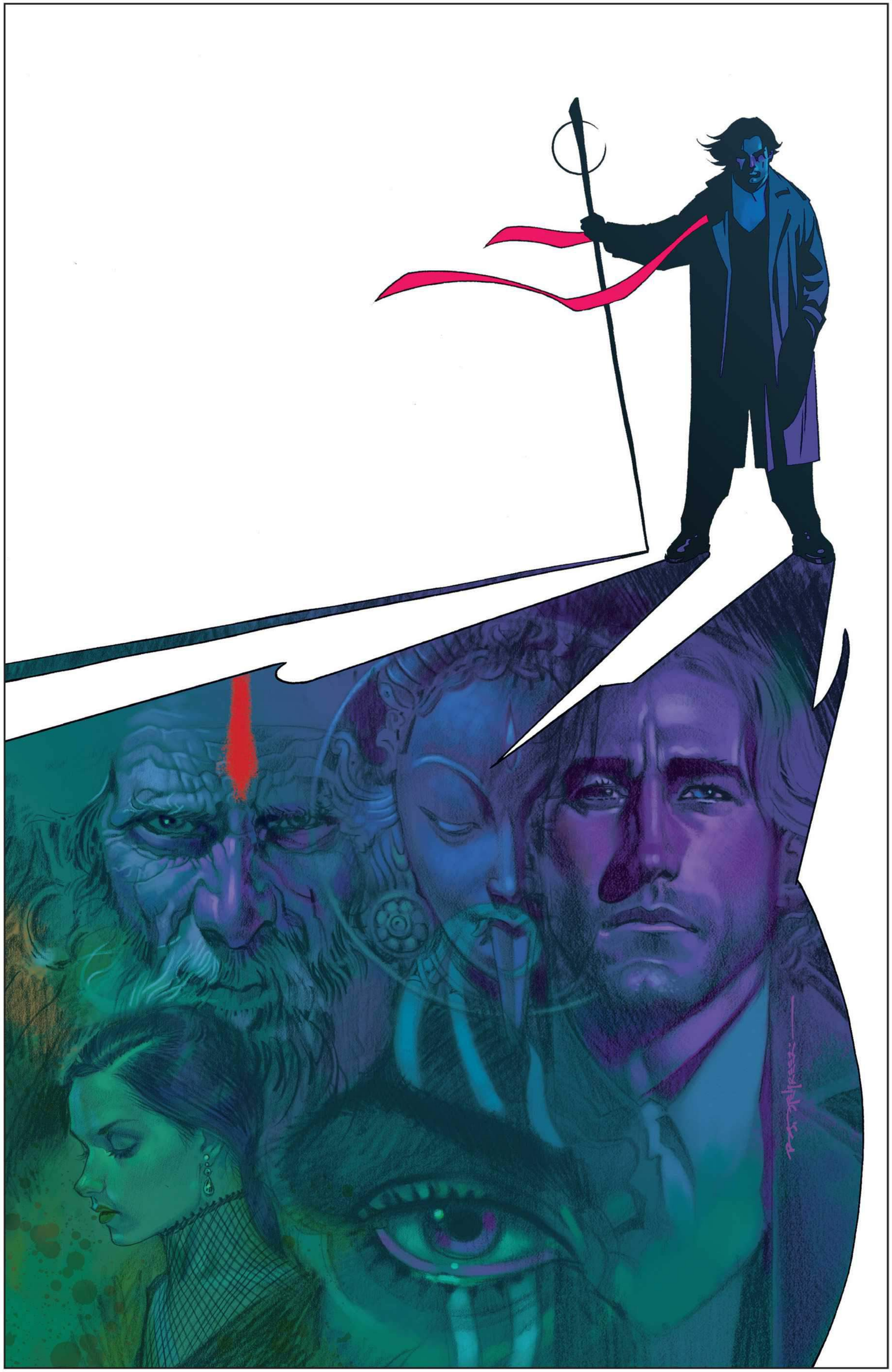




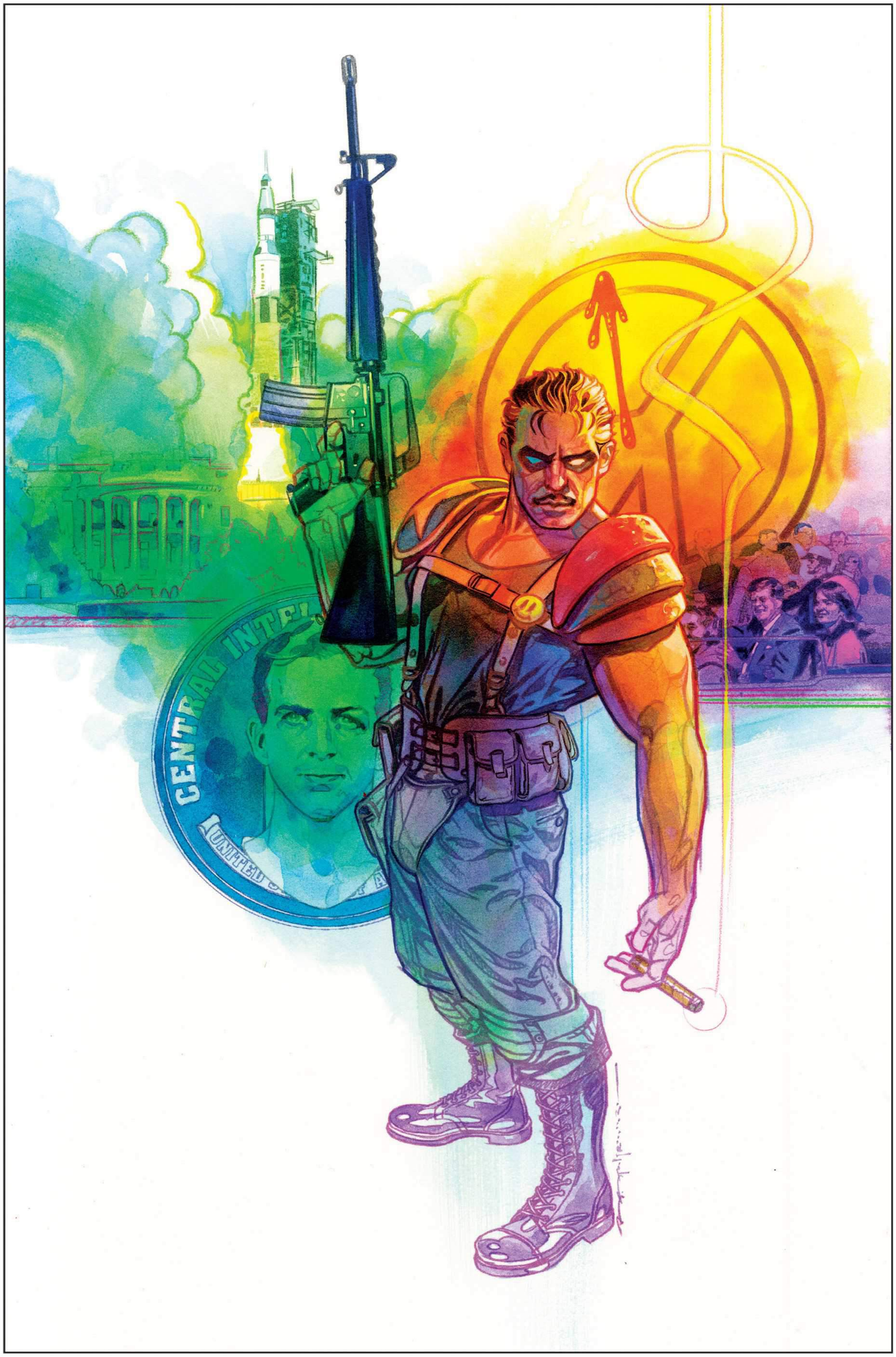
JONAH HEX #60 PAGES 12-15
Written by Justin Gray & Jimmy Palmiotti
DC Comics
2010







THE SADHU:
THE SILENT ONES VOL.1 TPB
Cover
Virgin Comics
2007



BEFORE WATCHMEN: COMEDIAN #4
Variant Cover
DC Comics
2013



BROKEN TRINITY: ANGELUS #1
Cover
Top Cow
2008





BROKEN TRINITY: ANGELUS #1
Interior art
Top Cow
2008

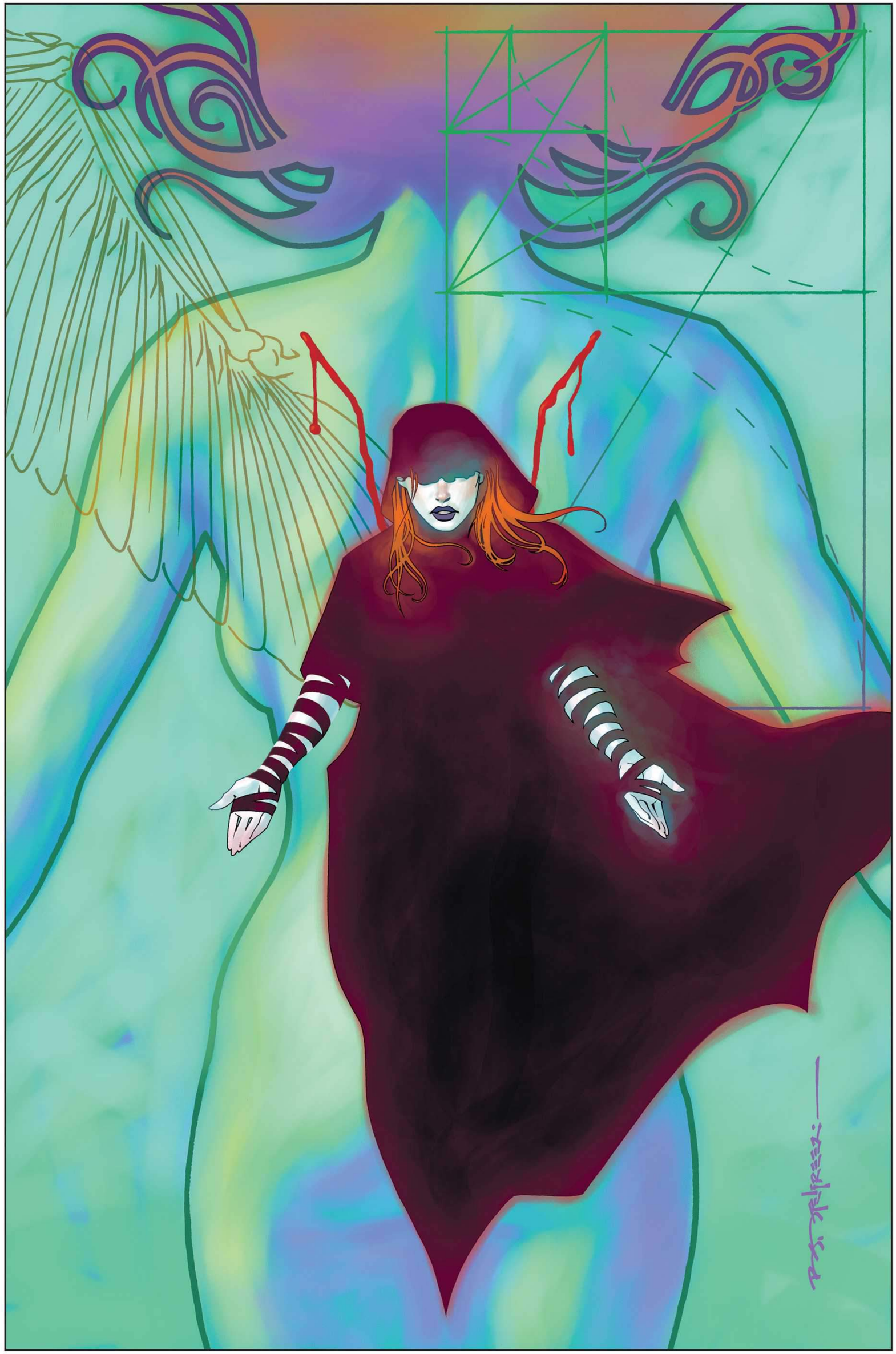




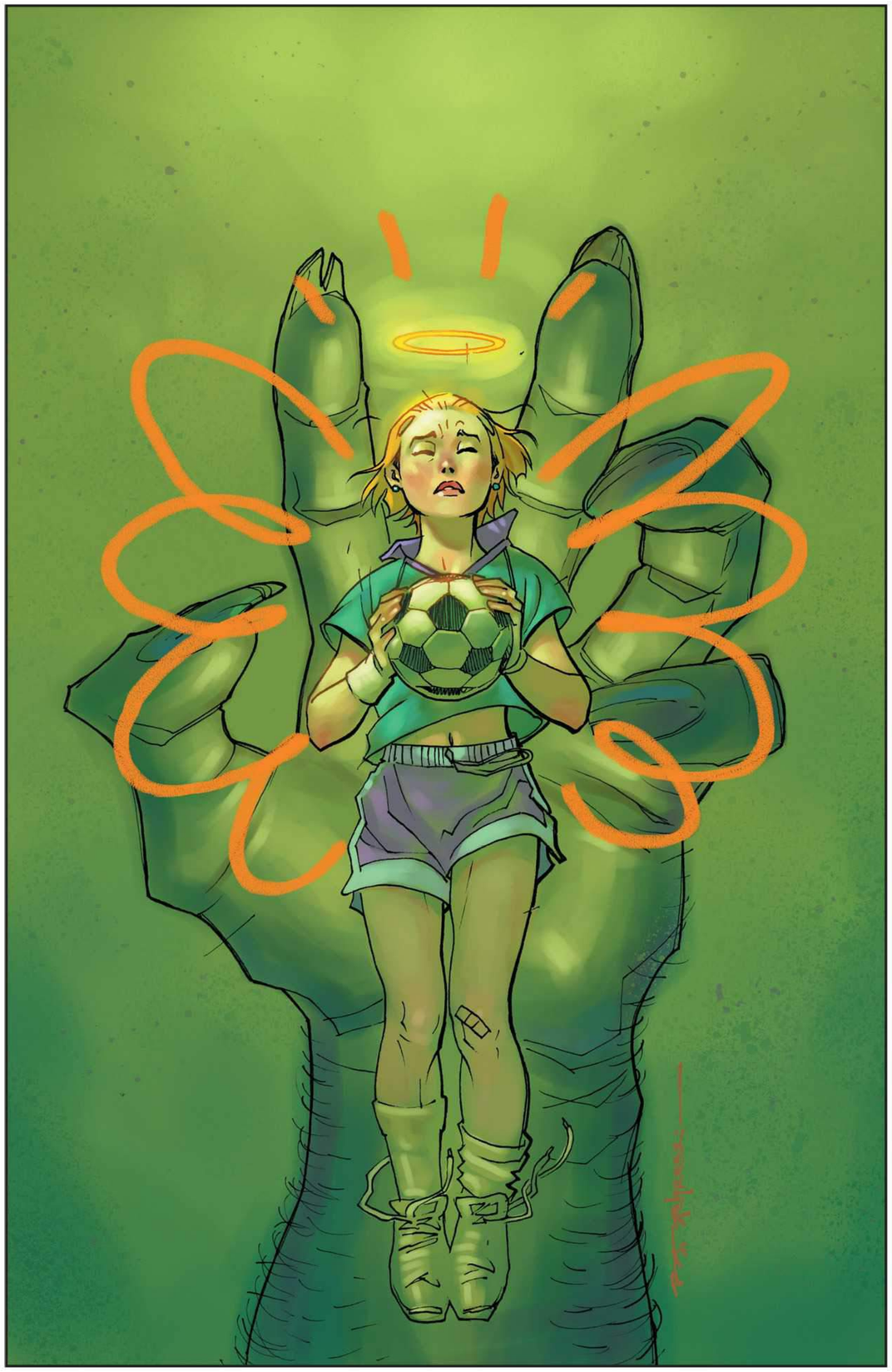
BROKEN TRINITY: ANGELUS #1
Interior art
Top Cow
2008







FALLEN ANGEL #1
Cover
DC Comics
2004

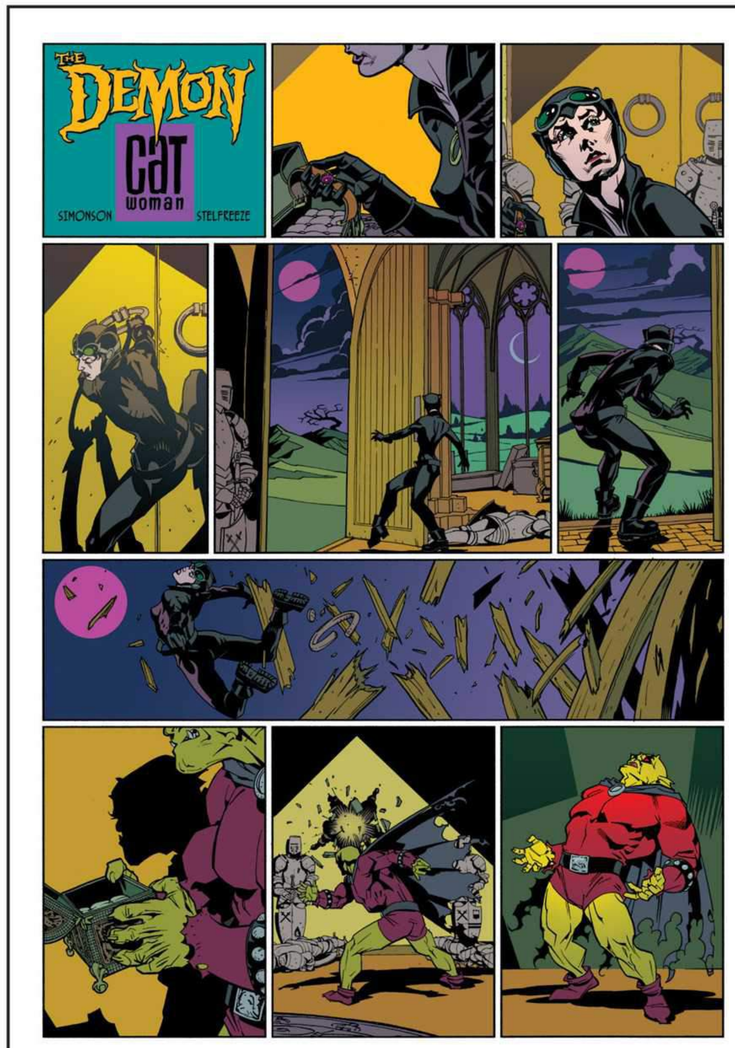


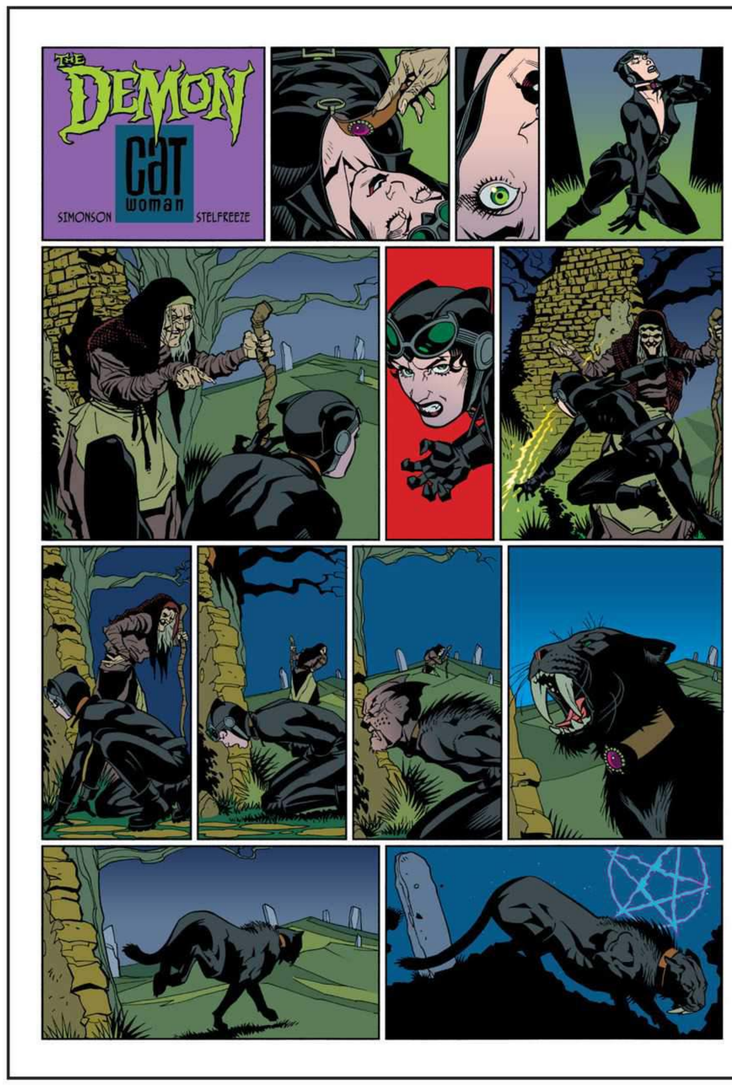
FALLEN ANGEL #3
Cover
DC Comics
2004

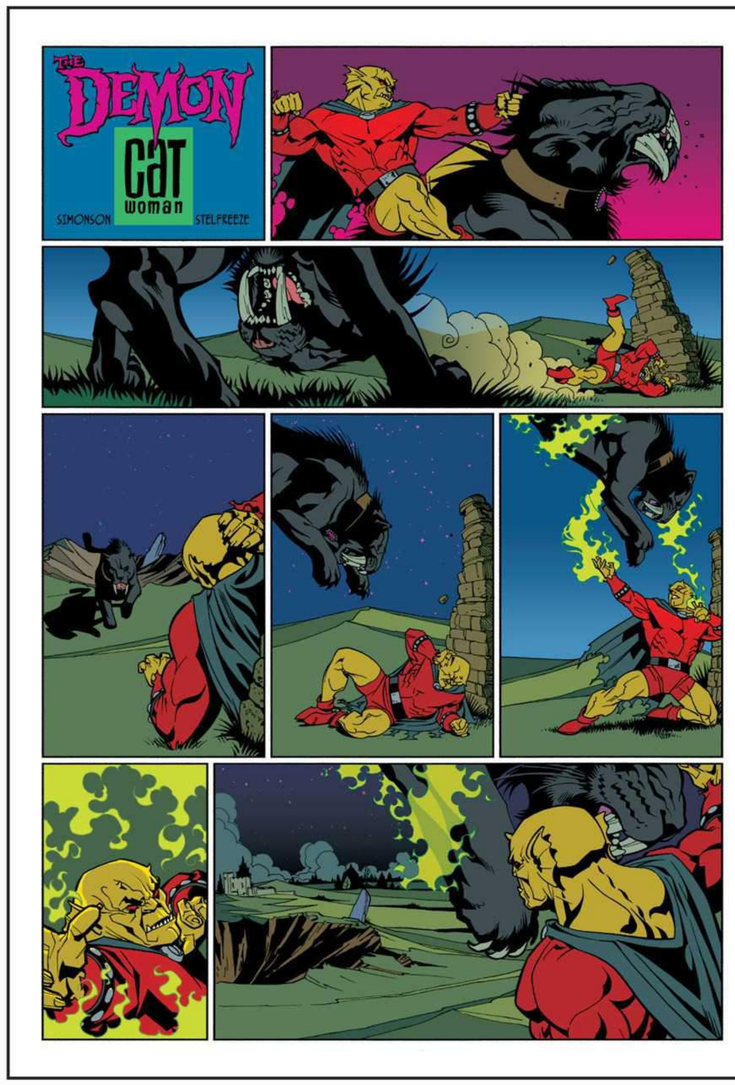


FALLEN ANGEL #6
Cover
DC Comics
2004

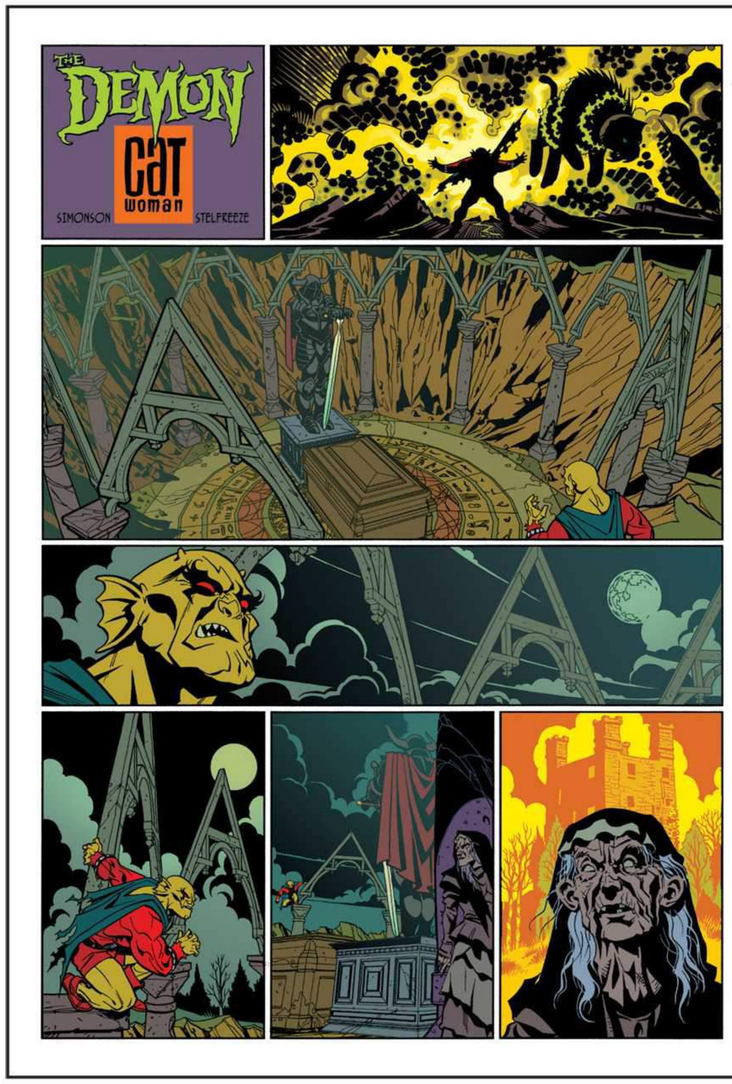


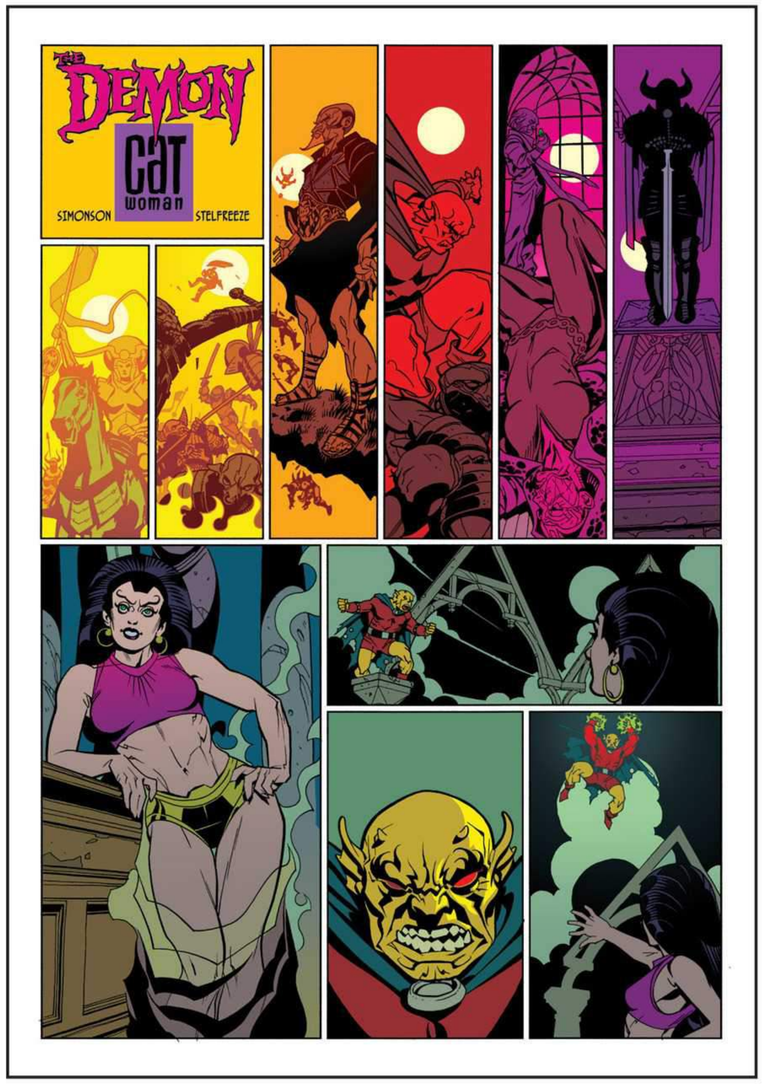


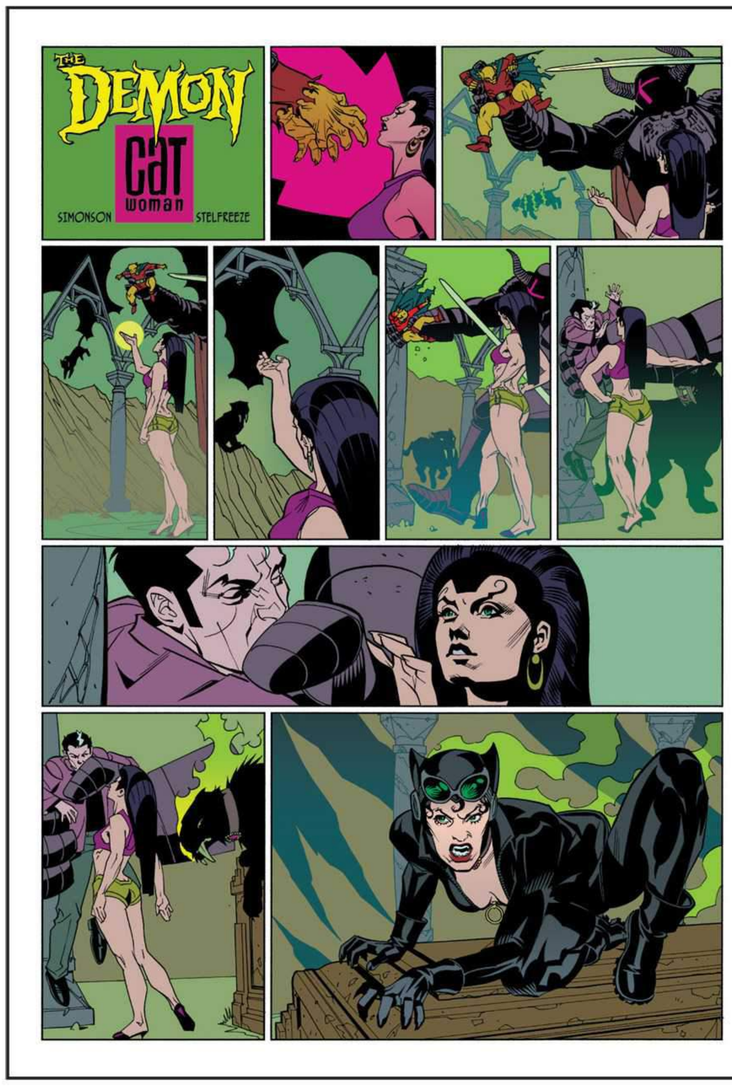




WEDNESDAY COMICS: THE DEMON & CATWOMAN
Written by Walter Simonson
DC Comics
2009

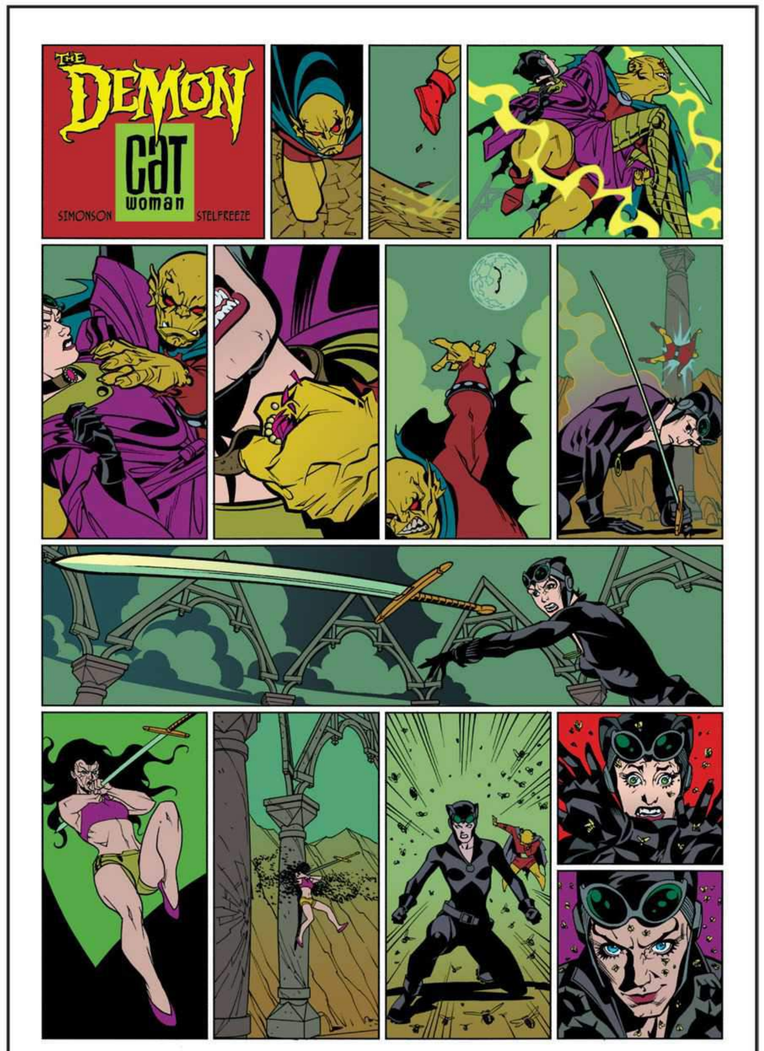

THE DEMON
CAT WOMAN
SIMONSON
STELFREEZE

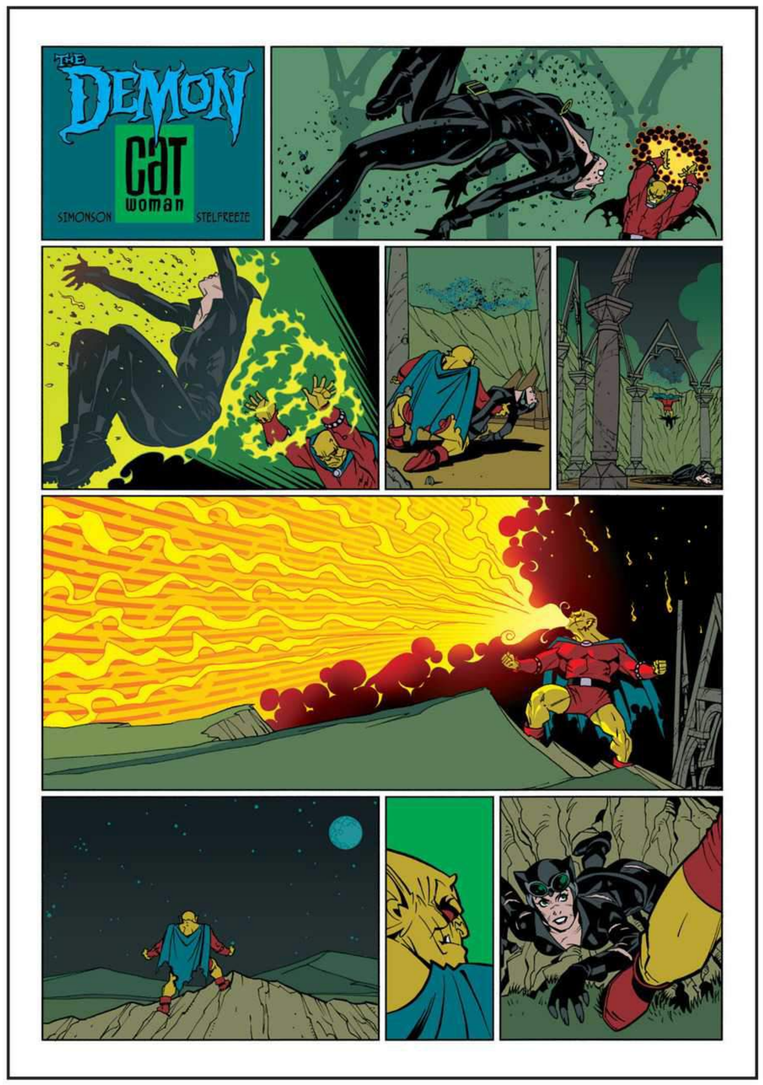

THE DEMON
CAT WOMAN
SIMONSON
STELFREEZE

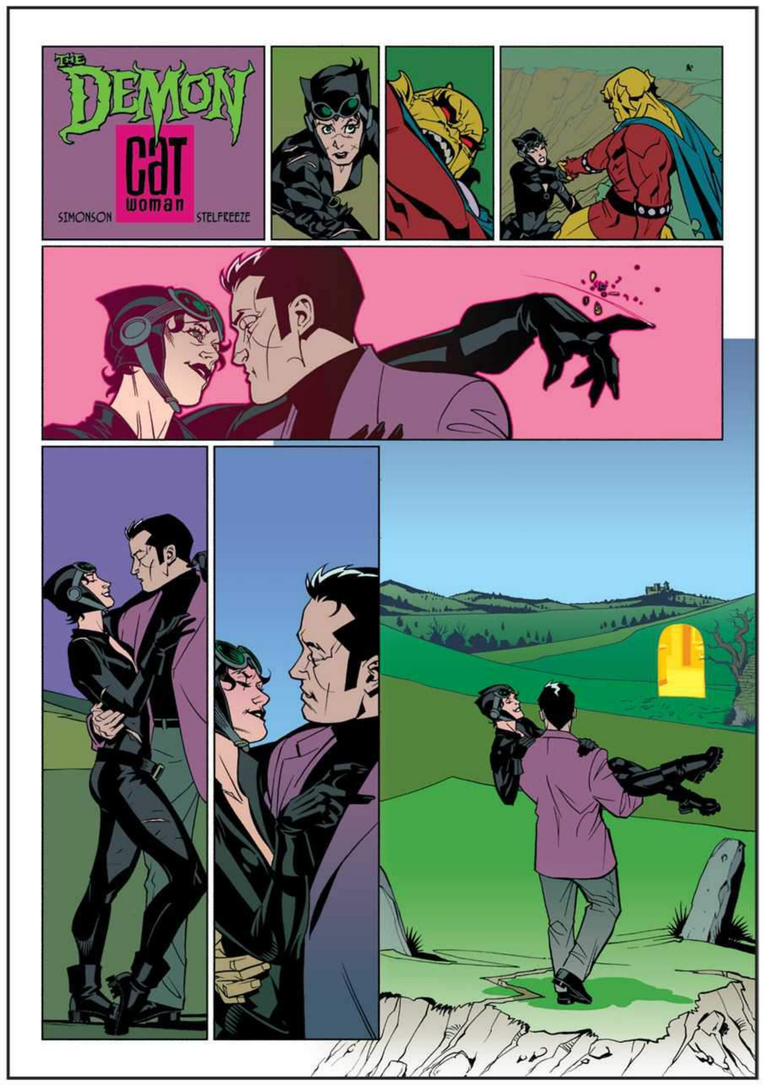

THE DEMON
CAT WOMAN
SIMONSON
STELFREEZE


THE DEMON
CAT WOMAN
SIMONSON
STELFREEZE









WEDNESDAY COMICS: THE DEMON & CATWOMAN
Written by Walter Simonson
DC Comics
2009

STELFREEZE, CATWOMAN, THE DEMON, AND ME

A few years ago, I had a chance to write a strip that Brian drew, a Demon/Catwoman series for DC Comics in their *Wednesday Comics* anthology release.

I'd been an admirer of Brian's stuff for years. I think it was a hot picture of She-Hulk for the cover of some Marvel magazine that first brought his work to my attention. We became friends afterwards, and I once bought him dinner at a Thai restaurant in my old neighborhood on Manhattan's West Side. I think I was hoping that some of his enormous talent would rub off on me during the meal. Alas, my work remained unchanged.

But writing the Demon/Catwoman story for him gave me a chance to examine his art and his storytelling in the close way that only actual collaboration affords. There was a grace to his graphic line, a subtle and sophisticated beauty in his color, and a joy to his drawing that made studying his art and writing the script a genuine pleasure. I supposed if I were to sum up the whole of his craft in a single word, it would be "lyrical". And that encompassing lyricism is the beauty of Brian's work.

—WALTER SIMONSON

Writer/Illustrator: *Thor, Fantastic Four, Wednesday Comics*

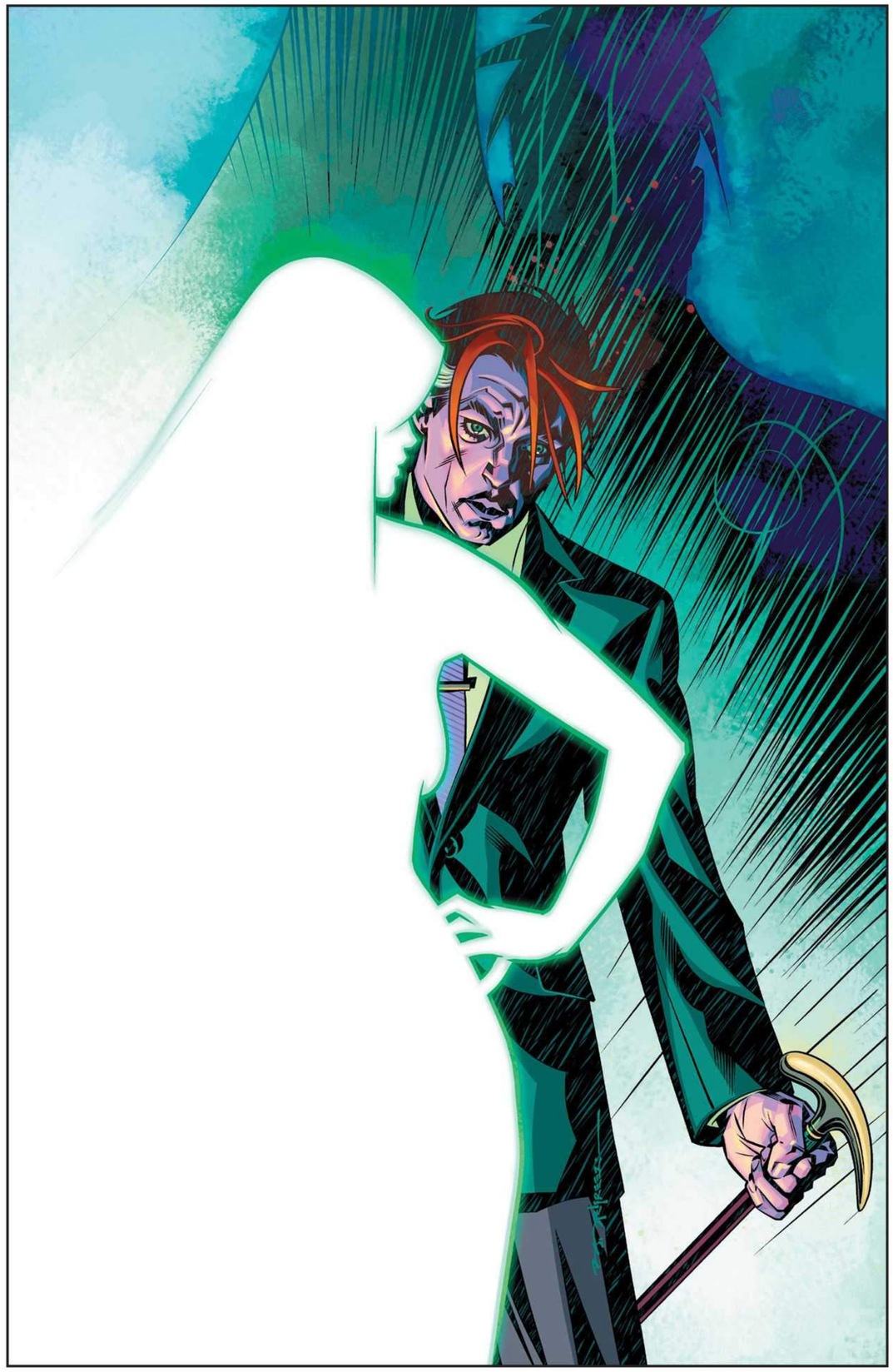




DAY MEN SERIES COVERS
BOOM! Studios
2013-2015

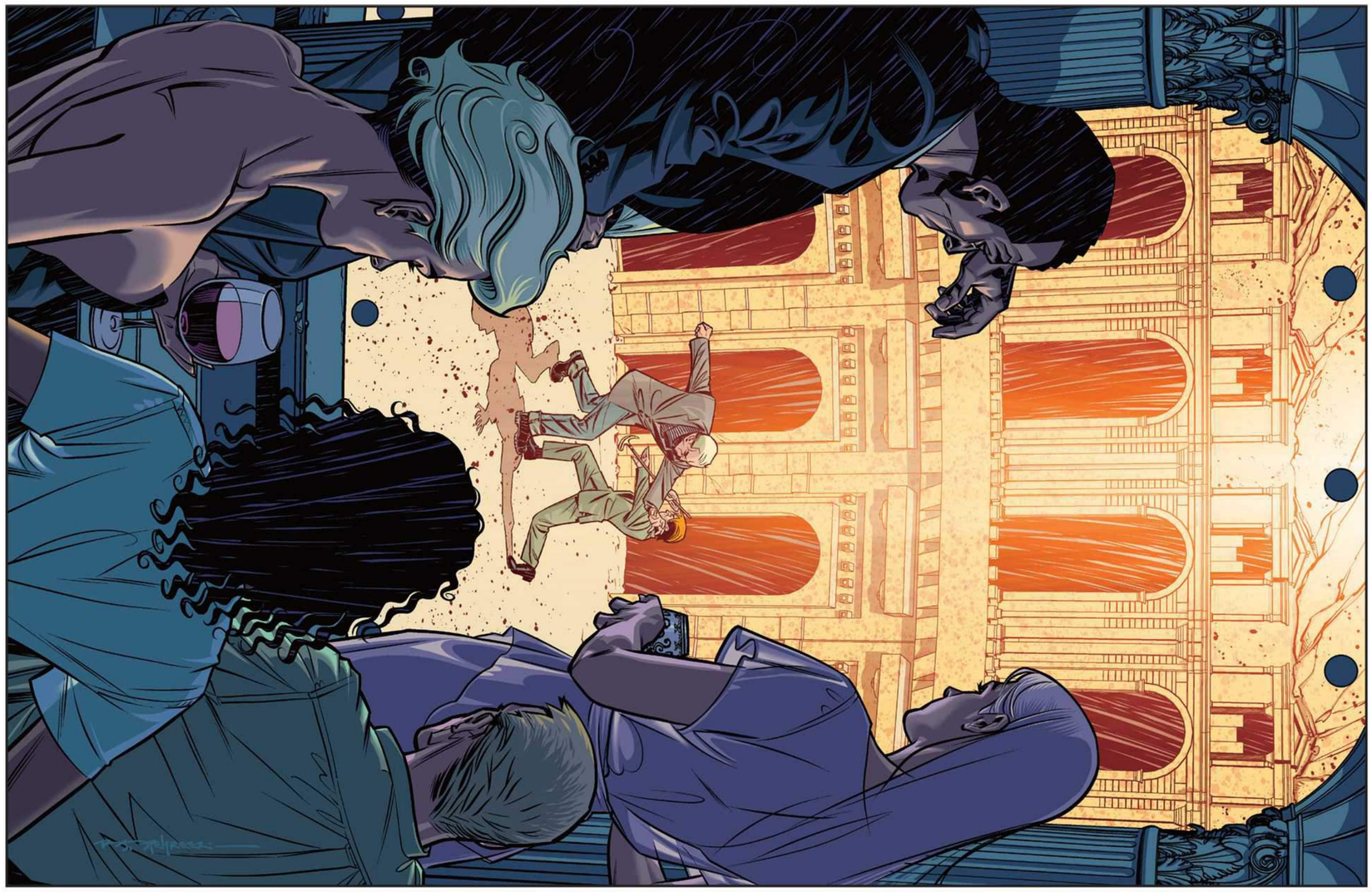


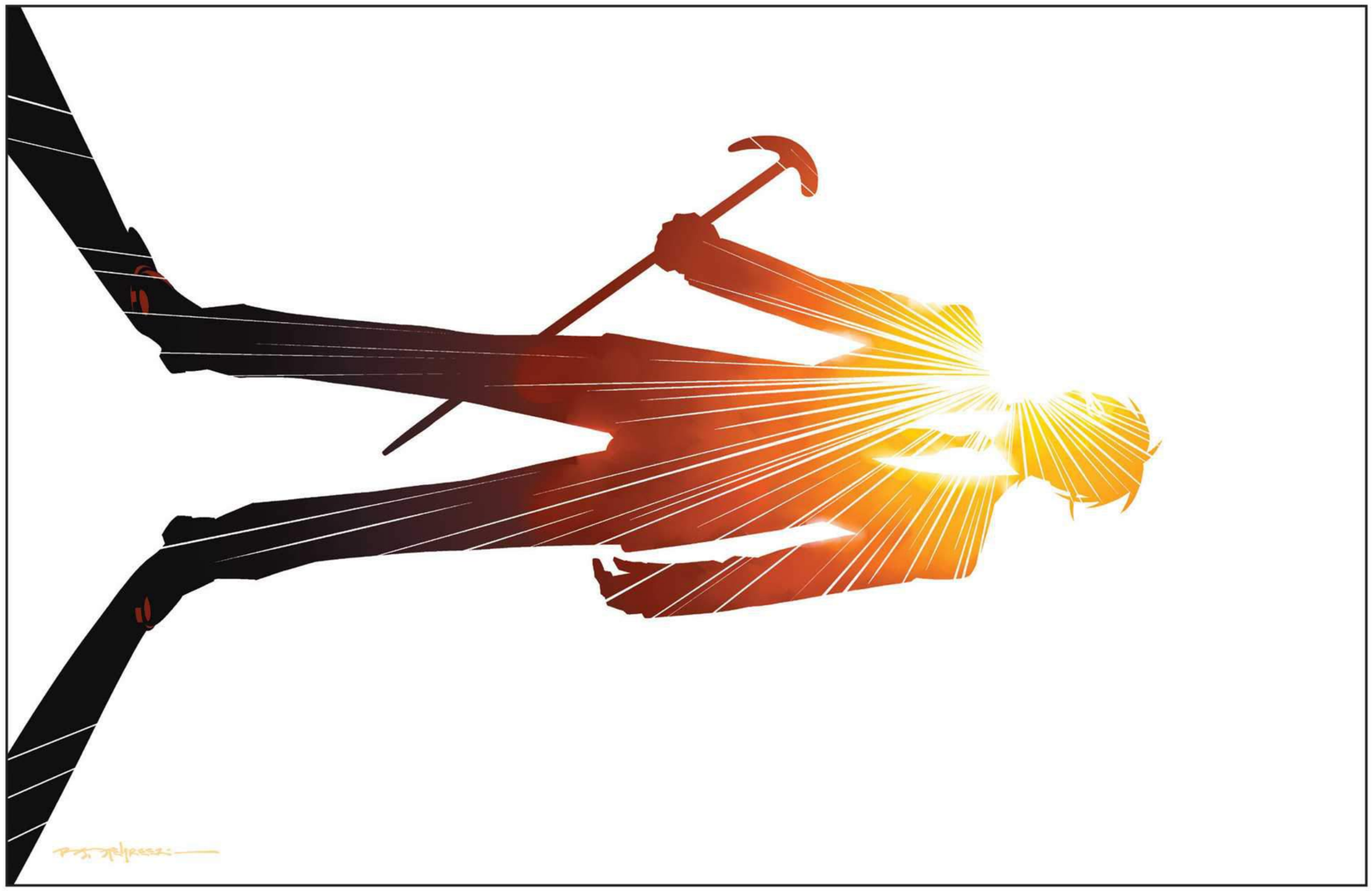




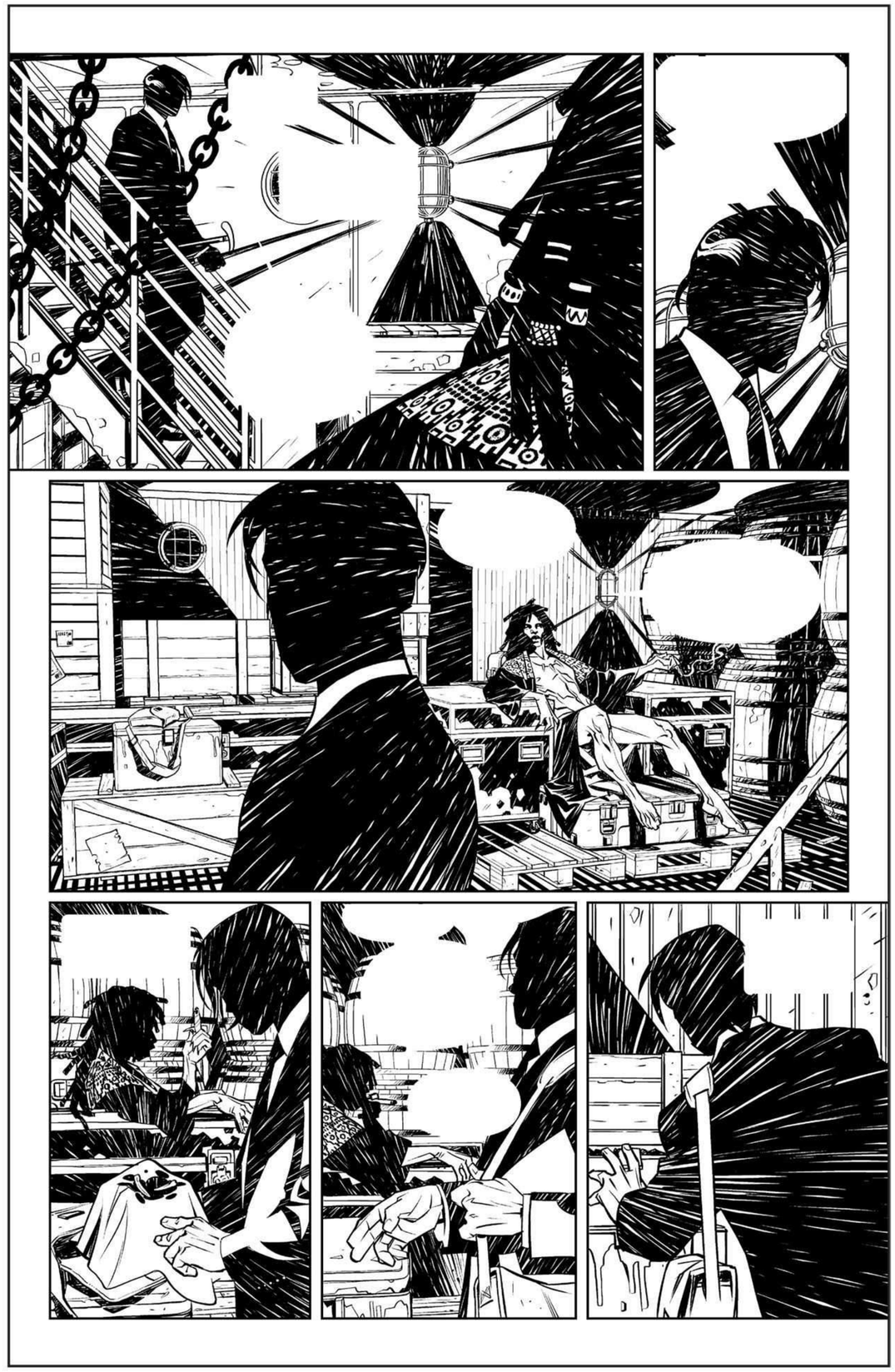


DAY MEN SERIES COVERS
BOOM! Studios
2013-2015

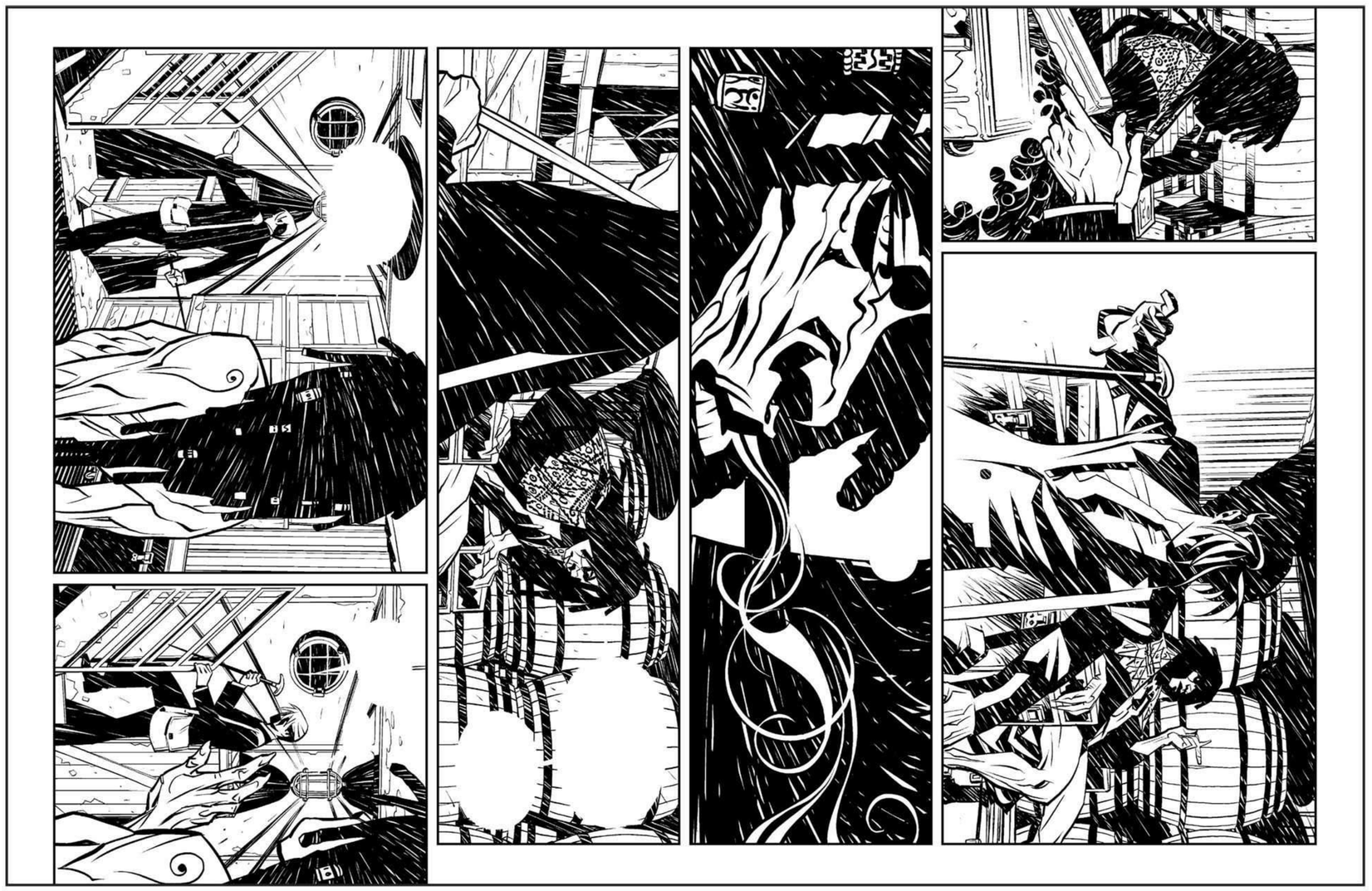








DAY MEN #1 PAGES 1-4
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson
BOOM! Studios
2013



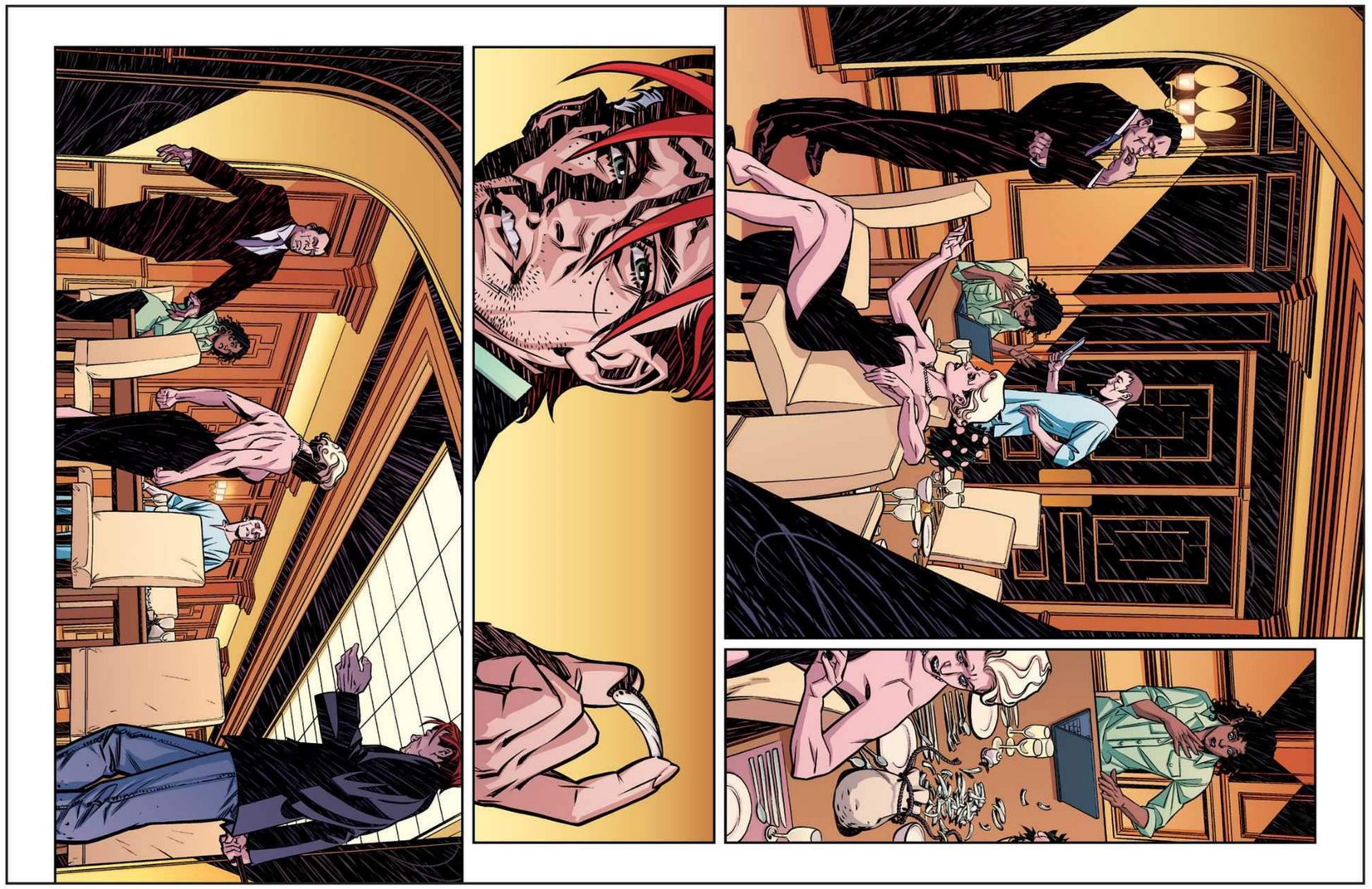






DAY MEN #3 PAGES 15-18
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson, with colors by Darrin Moore
BOOM! Studios
2014









DAY MEN #3 PAGES 19-20
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson, with colors by Darrin Moore
BOOM! Studios
2014



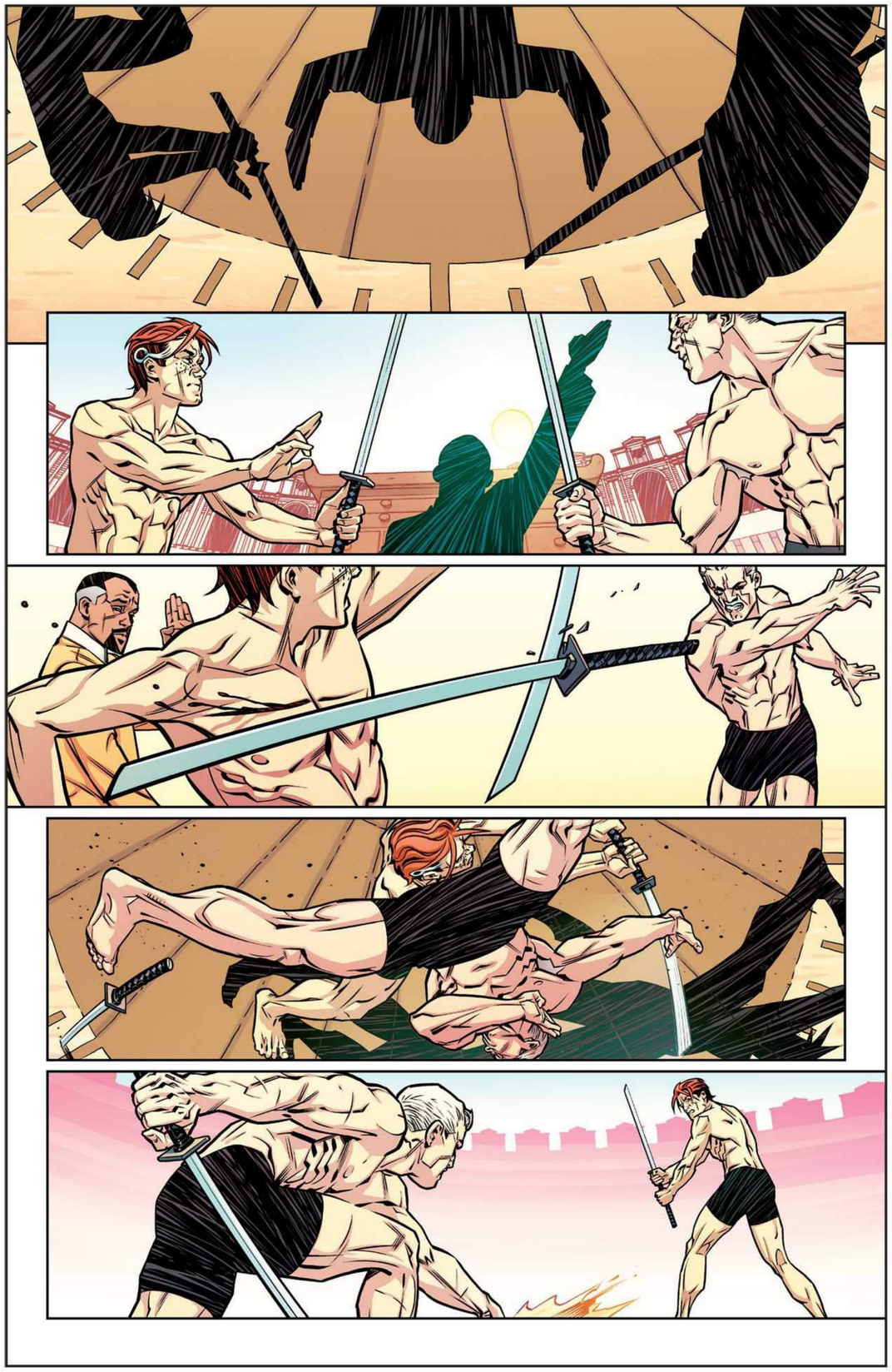


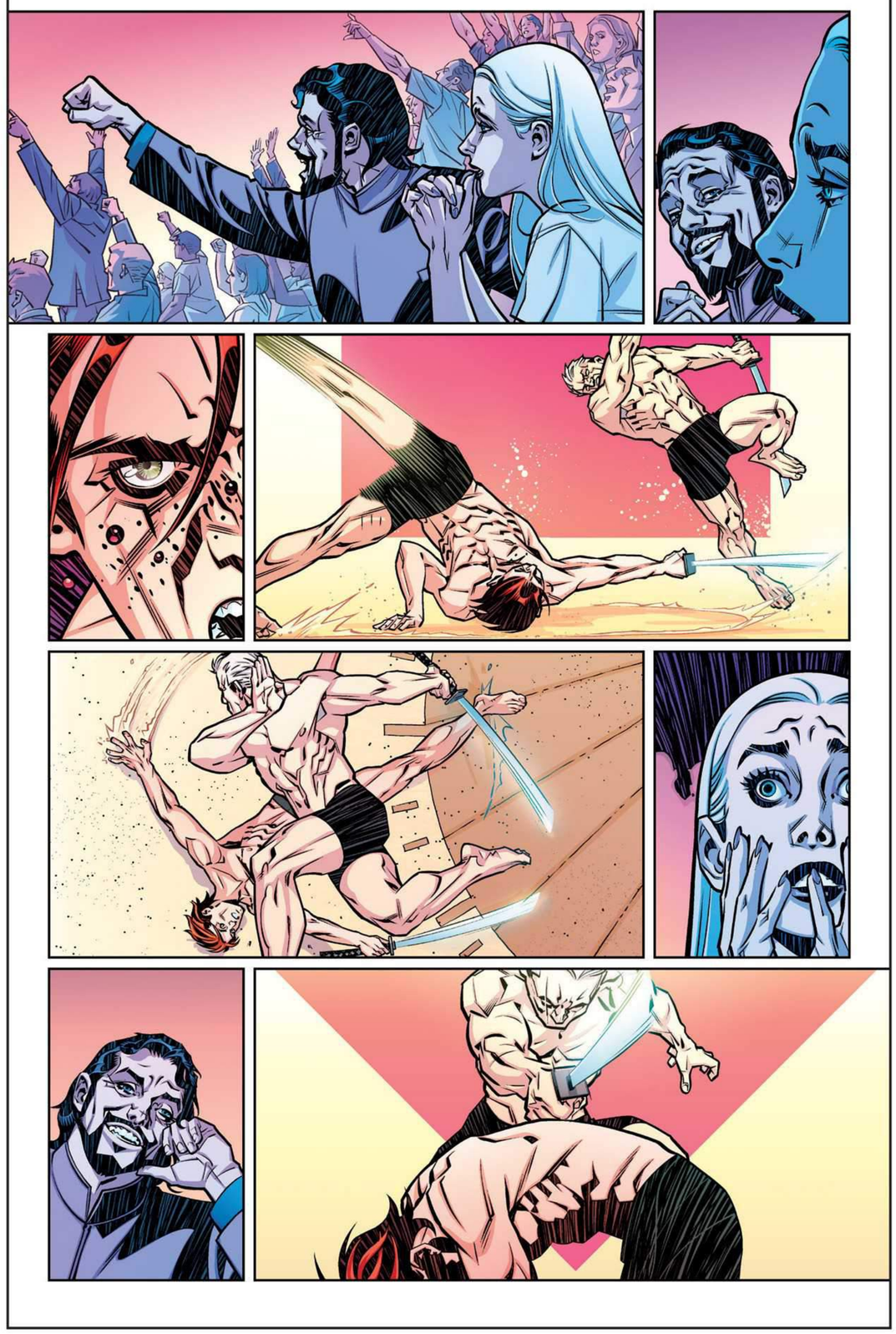
DAY MEN #6 PAGES 10-11
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson
BOOM! Studios
2015





DAY MEN #6 PAGES 12-13
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson
BOOM! Studios
2015



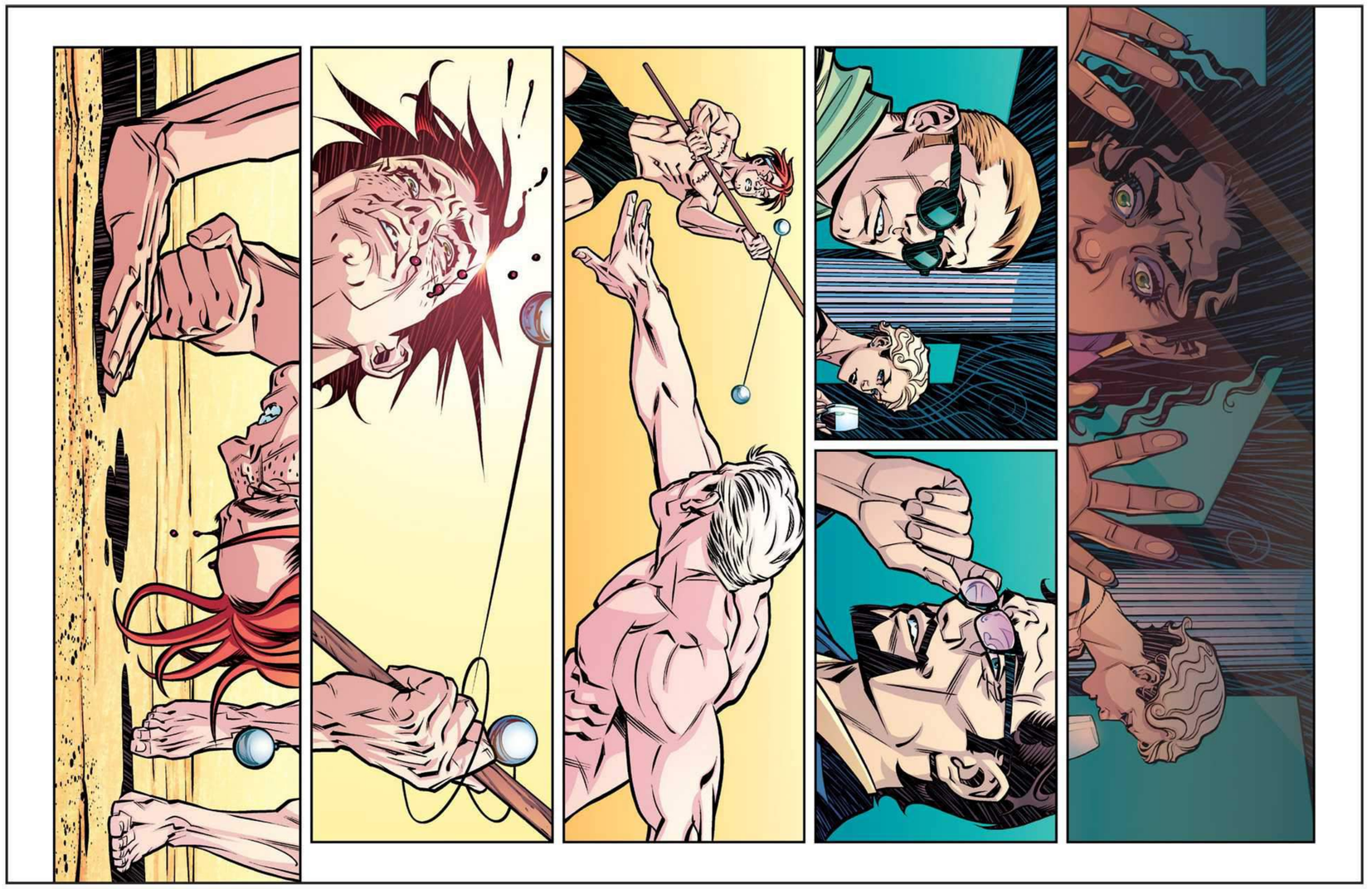


DAY MEN #7 PAGES 12-13
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson, with colors by Darrin Moore
BOOM! Studios
2015





DAY MEN #7 PAGES 14-17
Written by Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson, with colors by Darrin Moore
BOOM! Studios
2015





DAY MEN VOL. 1 HC
Wraparound Cover
BOOM! Studios
2014



SOMEONE TO WALK WITH IN THE DARK

I was excited about Brian Stelfreeze's art before I even saw it. That's because then DC Bat Office editor Scott Peterson lit up when he mentioned it, and I was instantly intrigued. He showed me a board from an Oracle story he had done with Brian (*Showcase '94* #12), a page from right near the beginning of the comic consisting of nothing but Oracle typing in her clock tower. That's something Oracle did a lot of, it was essential to her character, but it was also an artistic death trap. A superhero in civilian clothing typing away at a keyboard—throwaway page, right? Well, not in Brian Stelfreeze's hands it's not.

It's hard to know where to start, and this is *one* page. The scale is nothing short of thrilling. There are three inset panels across the top starting close in on her hands and pulling slowly back, until the fourth panel, really a splash, shows her in relation to the clock face of the tower in which she lived and worked. You can see everything: the mechanics of the clock itself, the industrial chic of the building with its steel beams and brick walls, the way she sits across from it, small but undaunted, shielded but exposed, looking out and seeing nothing because the clock face is opaque and yet also seeing everything because her monitors track the entire world. Every detail is accounted for: her Cray computer, her messy desk (including ergonomic keyboard and Batgirl doll), and her streamlined wheelchair. And then there are her hands. They are in a different, and no doubt accurate, position in each panel, her fingers strong and graceful. These are static panels, of course, she's not actually moving. Except that she absolutely is, and it's breathtaking.

Stelfreeze had come up in conversation that day because editor Darren Vincenzo had arranged for us to work together on a little Nightwing/Oracle piece for *DCU Holiday Bash* #2 that became "Old Lane." Two minutes into our first phone conversation about that story, I knew I'd found my artistic soul mate.

Brian isn't just an artist, he's a storyteller; a deeply empathetic observer of human nature wildly in love with that place where universal truths split off into individual triumphs and shortcomings. A master of negative space, he is as unafraid of darkness as you might imagine, completely willing to crawl into the farthest corners of the human psyche and watch everything that unfolds there with unstinting compassion. He is so attentive to and supportive of the characters he works with that you almost come to envy them; if he ever drew you, you would learn things about yourself from that portrait that had utterly eluded you, things that would make you better able to move through the world exactly as you are.

A few years into our friendship, Brian came to me with a carefully cultivated set of inquiries into character and trope that would form the basis for *Matador*. Izzy, the protagonist, had made herself known to him somehow and he wanted me to meet her. He'd probably say that his ideas about her and the journey he wanted to take her on were vague at that point, and there's some truth to that. But it's also true that there was already flesh and blood there, I could feel it.

He told me that he wanted to explore aspects of female identity that were often overlooked in our medium. Forget about feminine wiles, daddy issues, and whatever the hell was meant by "strong female character" that week; he wanted to dig into active, everyday coping skills like intuition as an origin point for analysis, familial obligation as an anchor (in both senses of the word), multitasking…fricking *multitasking!* For a second I panicked, thinking he'd come to the wrong writer. I have always been more comfortable with male characters, always felt awkwardly bereft of insight into—or maybe, more horrifically, interest in—the internal life of female characters. But I wanted to go on the journey with him, and the woman he wanted to tell a story about? I wanted to know her too.

Mapping out that narrative with him was one of the single most thrilling experiences of my professional career. We made each other laugh and groan, finished each other's sentences, goaded each other and those characters into increasingly riskier territory with total mutual trust. We tried to play with

music in a silent medium, tried to turn tropes upside-down to see what was underneath them, tried to make the unthinkable inevitable. It is, of course, totally arguable whether or not we succeeded, but I remain fiercely proud of, and personally profoundly touched by, that exploration.

There's so much more I'd love to say about Brian and his work; his clean, expressive lines, his inspired use of color, his unparalleled feel for contrast, but I'll leave that to people who can discuss visual art more articulately than I can because I have to share one more story about his generosity.

I can't write about Brian without at least mentioning "Desire," the Thompson Award-winning short story we did together in *Batman 80-Page Giant* #1. It's only ten pages long, but it's notable for having no copy. Doing a comic story with no words was a cool idea; professionally, it was an exciting challenge. Personally, though, it was a leap of faith for me, one I could not have achieved with anyone else.

Unlike the vast majority of my colleagues, I did not grow up reading comics. They simply weren't valued in my family, so when I began to write them professionally I had a lot to prove—not just to the fans but also to the people in my personal life, the parents and friends and loved ones who had yet to fall as head-over-heels in love with the medium as I had. My solution to this divide between the worlds I lived in was to try to build a bridge of words. I was convinced that verbosity was the best way to prove that comics were literary and early in my career, especially, my scripts were very copy-heavy. Over time I got better at trusting and honoring the medium as well as the artists with whom I worked, but that was an evolution that might not have occurred without "Desire." I honestly can't remember whose idea it was to tell the story without dialog; he might have floated it, I may have offhandedly asked if it had been done before, maybe our editor suggested it. What I do remember was how excited I was to try it, and how overwhelmed I was with the pages that came back.

It turned out that there was a better way to entice people who weren't used to reading comics, a stronger case to make for the medium as a dynamic art form than cramming it full of multisyllabic words and lofty references. It turned out that I could say nothing at all and still be heard loud and clear as long as I had someone standing next to me attentive enough to listen to the silence and generous enough to amplify it. If you know anyone, anywhere who doesn't understand the kind of magic that can be created with a comic, who scoffs at the cultural value of the medium, or doesn't believe that you can read art, just show them a page by Brian Stelfreeze. It doesn't matter which one you choose.

Everything worth saying about anything will be on it.

—DEVIN GRAYSON

Writer: *Matador, Nightwing, The Titans*



SKETCHBOOK

DESIGNS, LAYOUTS, AND MORE



BUT ENOUGH ABOUT BRIAN...

I learned a lot from my time sharing a studio with Brian Stelfreeze. In fact, I moved – although some still prefer the term "escaped" – all the way from New Jersey to Atlanta, Georgia just to learn from Brian.

I've been drawing since I was a toddler. We have Neolithic cave paintings and fossil records to substantiate this; please visit www.smithsonian.org for more on this. Yes, I've been drawing pretty much my entire life.

But I never painted.

Apart from some stunning Crayola interpretations of Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons from my neonascent Early Period, I never really attempted much with color. YES, my typing paper adaptation of *Star Wars* (1977) WAS drawn with one of those pens that had red, blue, green, and black ink all in one single body (thank the Maker nobody had an orange lightsaber in that one), but that was more of an attempt at avant-garde quadro-chromatic storytelling than anything else. I was a precocious 10-year-old.

When I visited Atlanta in the late 1900s to confer, converse, and otherwise hob-nob with my brother wizards, Brian took time apart from his illuminated manuscripts to inculcate me in the polychromatic multiverse that is Color Illustration. I was a quick study, but then, you know this.

Brian introduced me to the basic precepts, hallowed by time and consecrated by usage, of the underdrawing, the glaze of transparent color, the bold finishing moves of opaque color. It was a glorious time. For Brian, I mean. Knowing that, had a meteor chosen that point in space and time to strike down upon him, his life up to that point would not have been ill-spent nor in vain. He, like some Jamaican John the Baptist, had ushered in my Christ-like epoch of full-color hoo-has and sweater muffins.

Okay, I'm just being a smart-ass. I just wanted to get you in an advanced state of gripped-ness for standard art book boilerplate of praise and wonder for the cat the whole tome is dedicated to. Brian's a great guy and a bona fide genius. I bet others in this book are saying the same thing.

But! I feel Brian's greatest gift is the gift of teaching. He's a natural instructor. He makes learning fun, especially when one is struggling. Starting to learn one's drawing skills 20+ years before doing the same with color creates a painful schism. It's like learning how to hit a baseball, spending decades improving that skill, and then one day someone lets you have a mitt. Can you imagine how tough it'd be playing baseball being a pretty decent slugger but with NO IDEA how to catch a ball and throw it to someone else? That's what it's like learning the principles of painting years after you've started learning how to draw.

Brian took the pain out of that schism. He makes it a voyage of discovery, where you really can't make any mistakes. Whatever you get on the canvas, for good or ill, is something he teaches you to work with. He's like Bob Ross, only with a much more manageable afro.

But the greatest thing Brian Stelfreeze taught was how to teach myself. That's the one thing missing, I think, from education: the ability to learn. It's a skill, one that has to be learnt and fostered, like any other. If you can go into a museum or look at an art book and start asking questions of the dead painter, you're learning. "Why did you choose that composition, I wonder…?" "What made you go for that particular color theory…?" Even if your answers are COMPLETELY WRONG – meaning, you didn't manage to successfully Sherlock the motives of a centuries-old skeleton – you came up with SOMETHING. And that something helped you inform your own craft, your own art.

Brian has taught many, and he's taught us much, but the ability to learn from art – not just artists but actual ART – is, I think, his Great Gift.

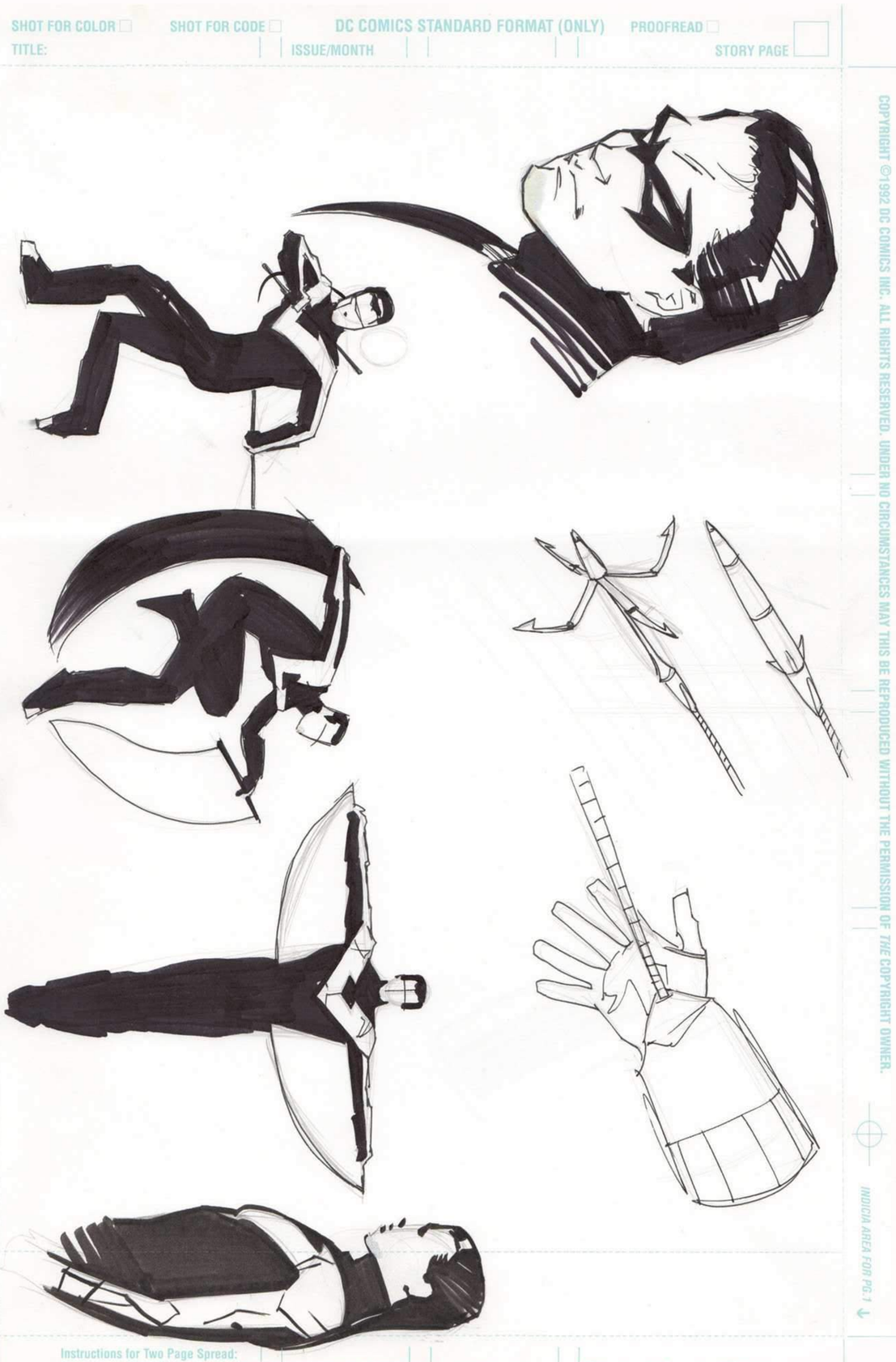
Also: he's a master painter, illustrator, and storyteller. Even if the boobs are too small.

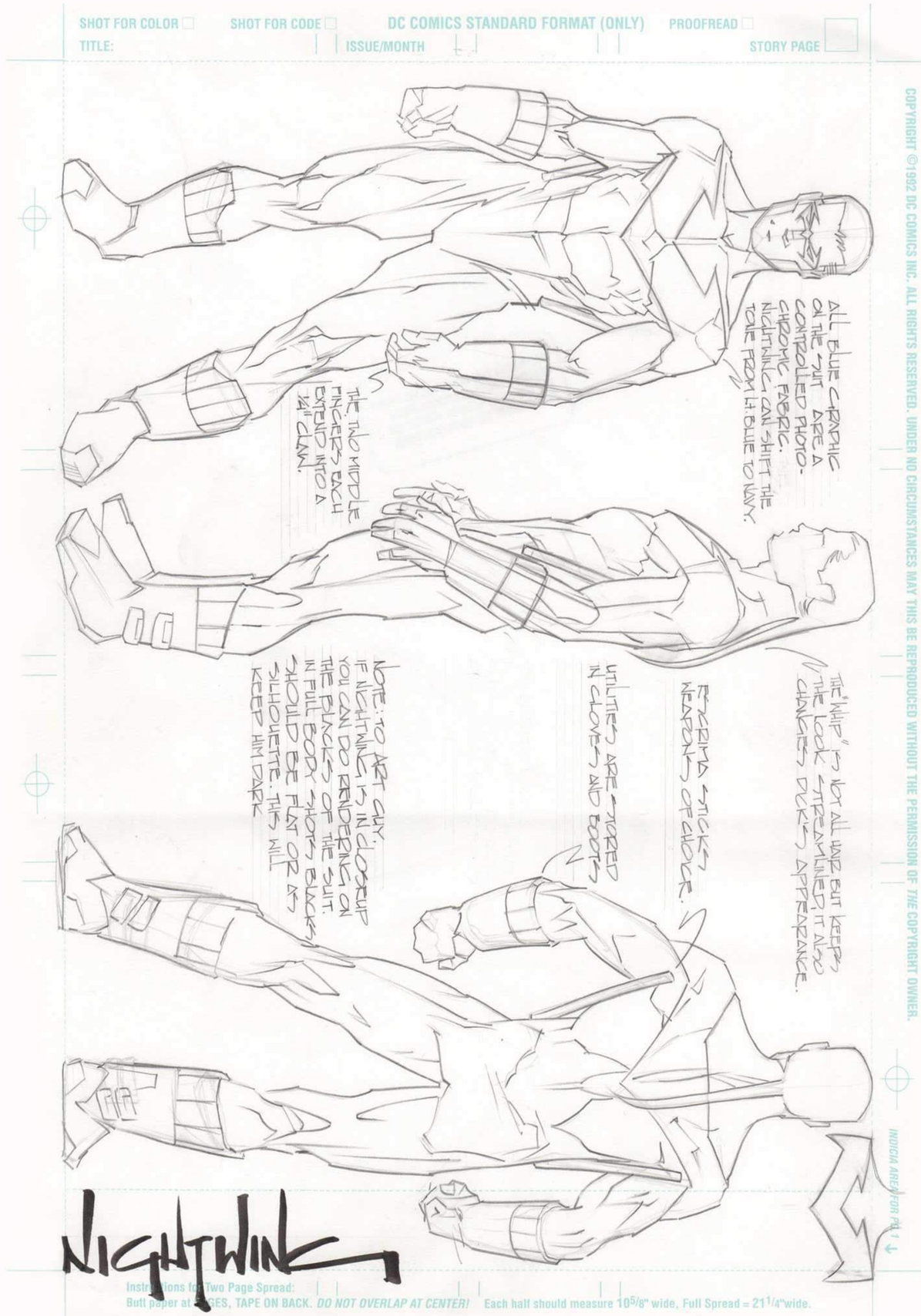
—ADAM HUGHES

Writer/Illustrator: *Wonder Woman, Catwoman, Betty & Veronica*

NIGHTWING COSTUME DESIGNS

DC Comics
1995







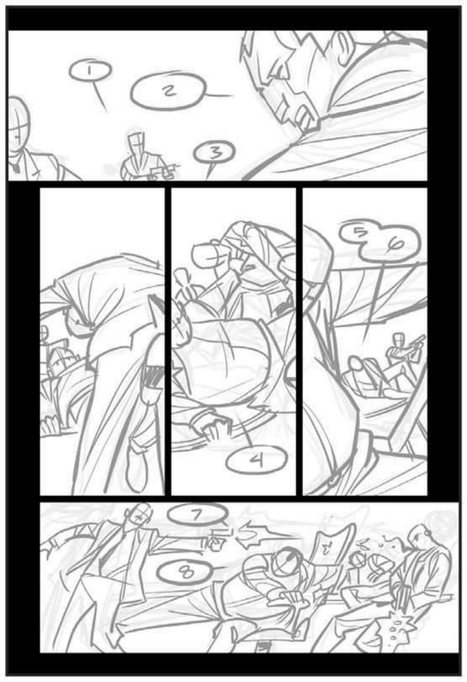
(Left) **NOVEMBER**
Ink
2010

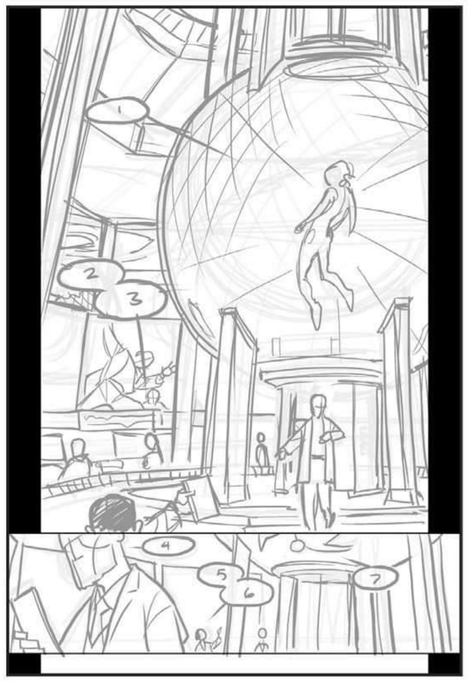


(Right) **WHITE QUEEN**
Ink
Marvel Comics
2013

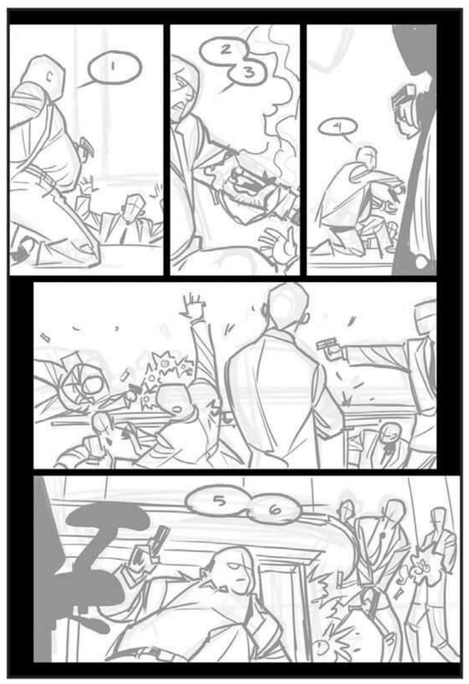




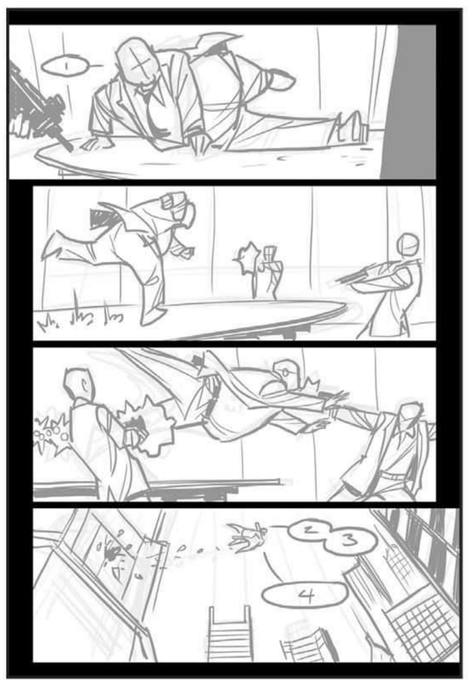


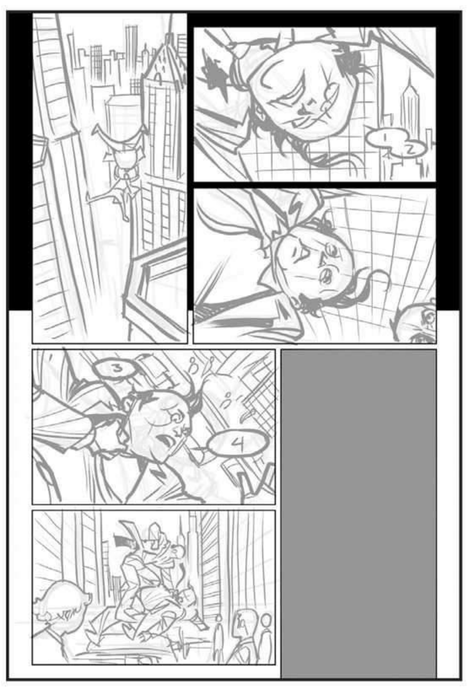


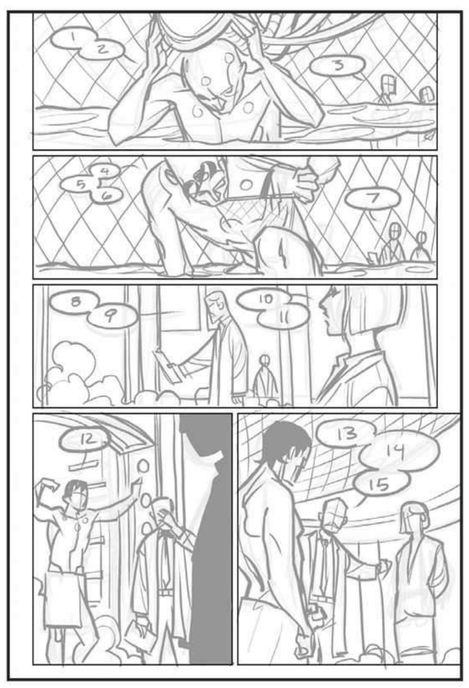


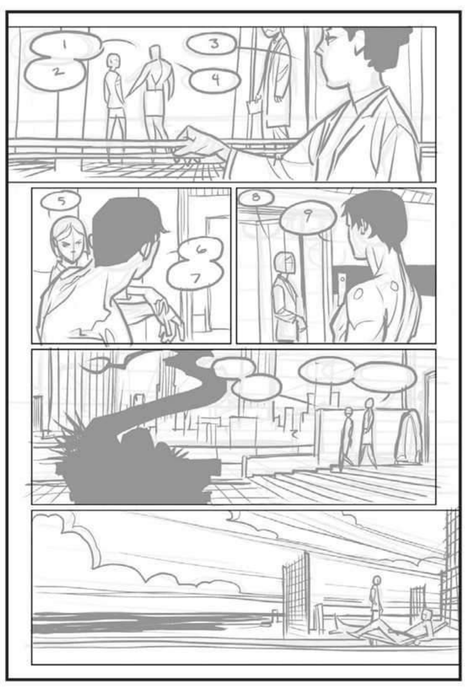


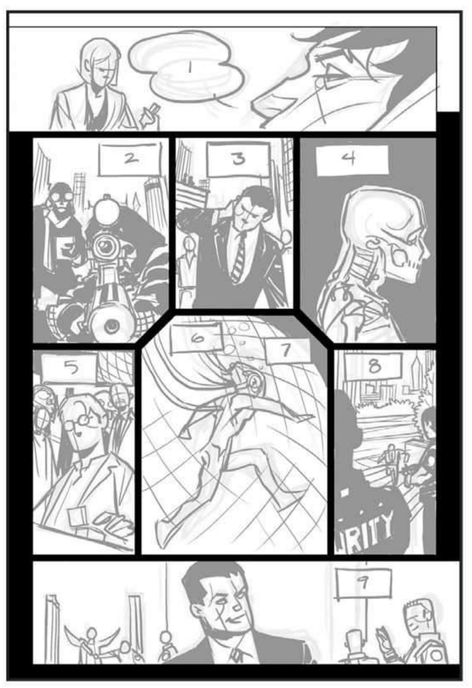




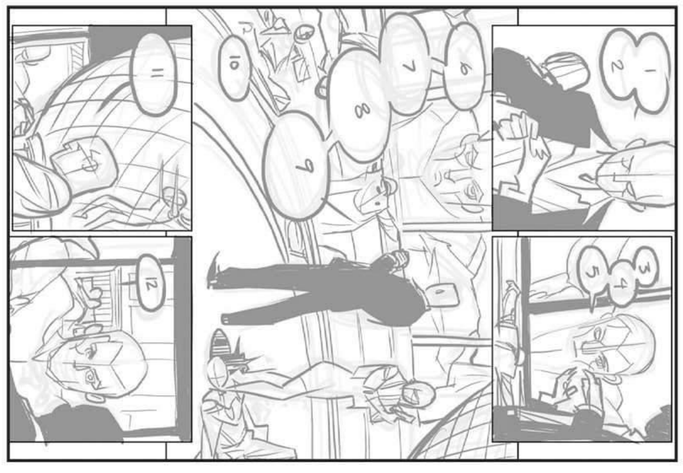


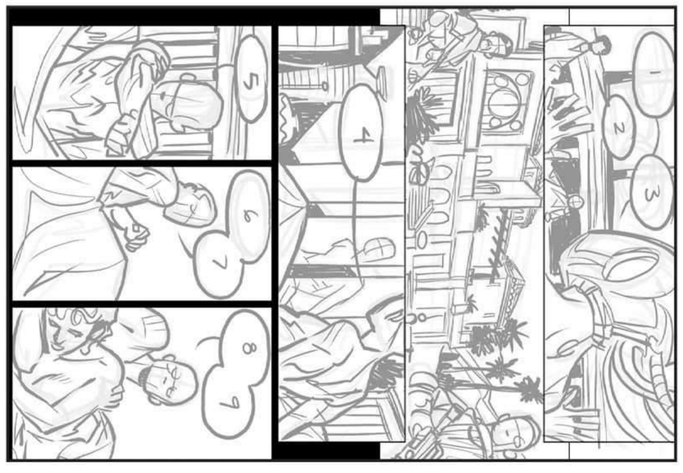


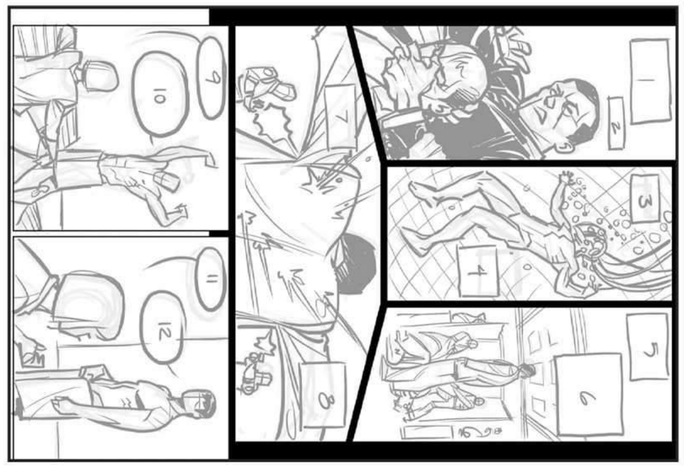




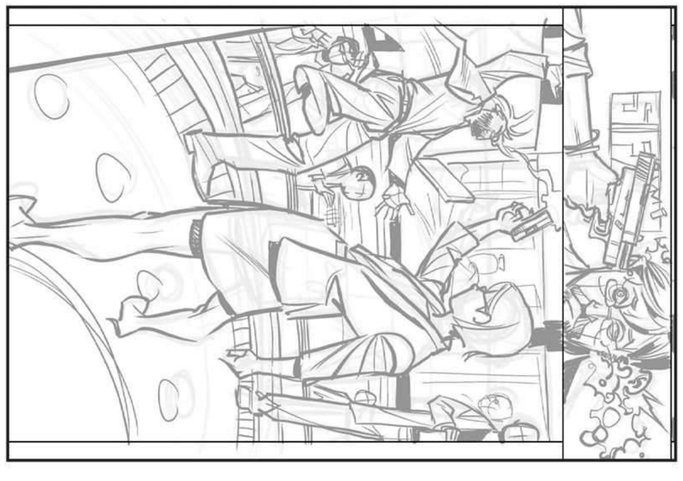
HARDCORE: PILOT SEASON #1 LAYOUTS
Digital
Top Cow
2012

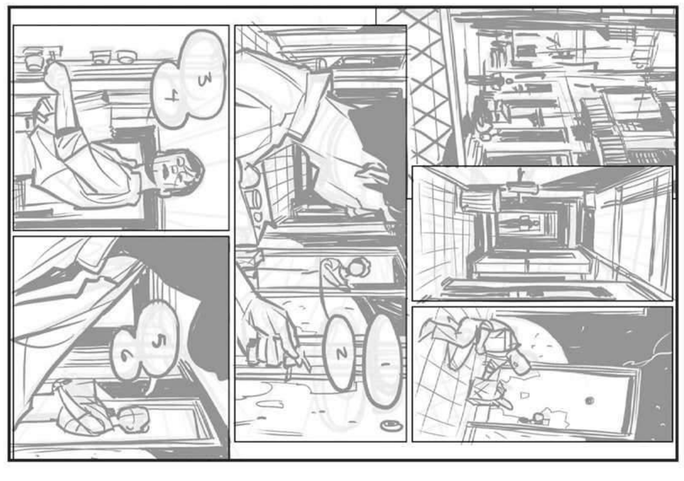




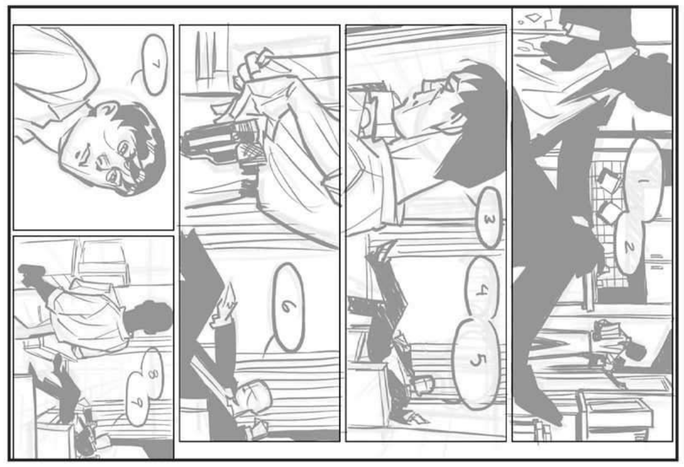


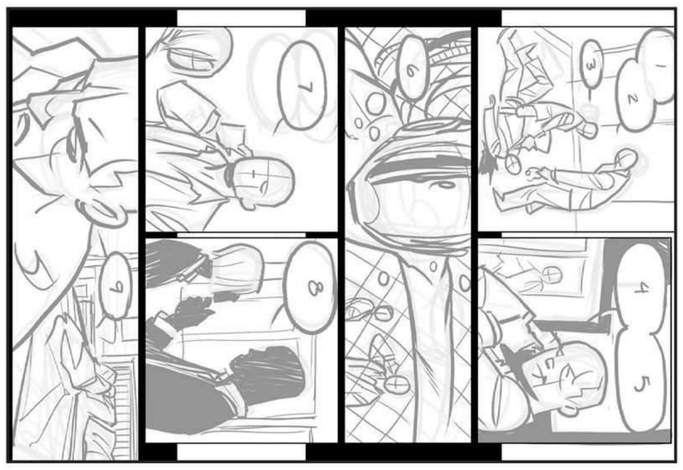


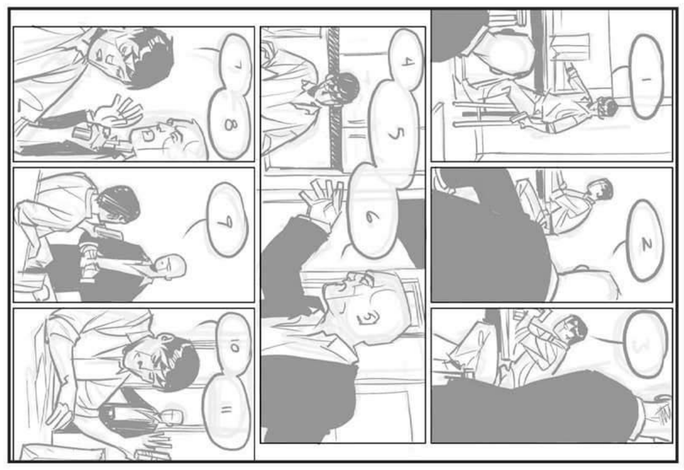


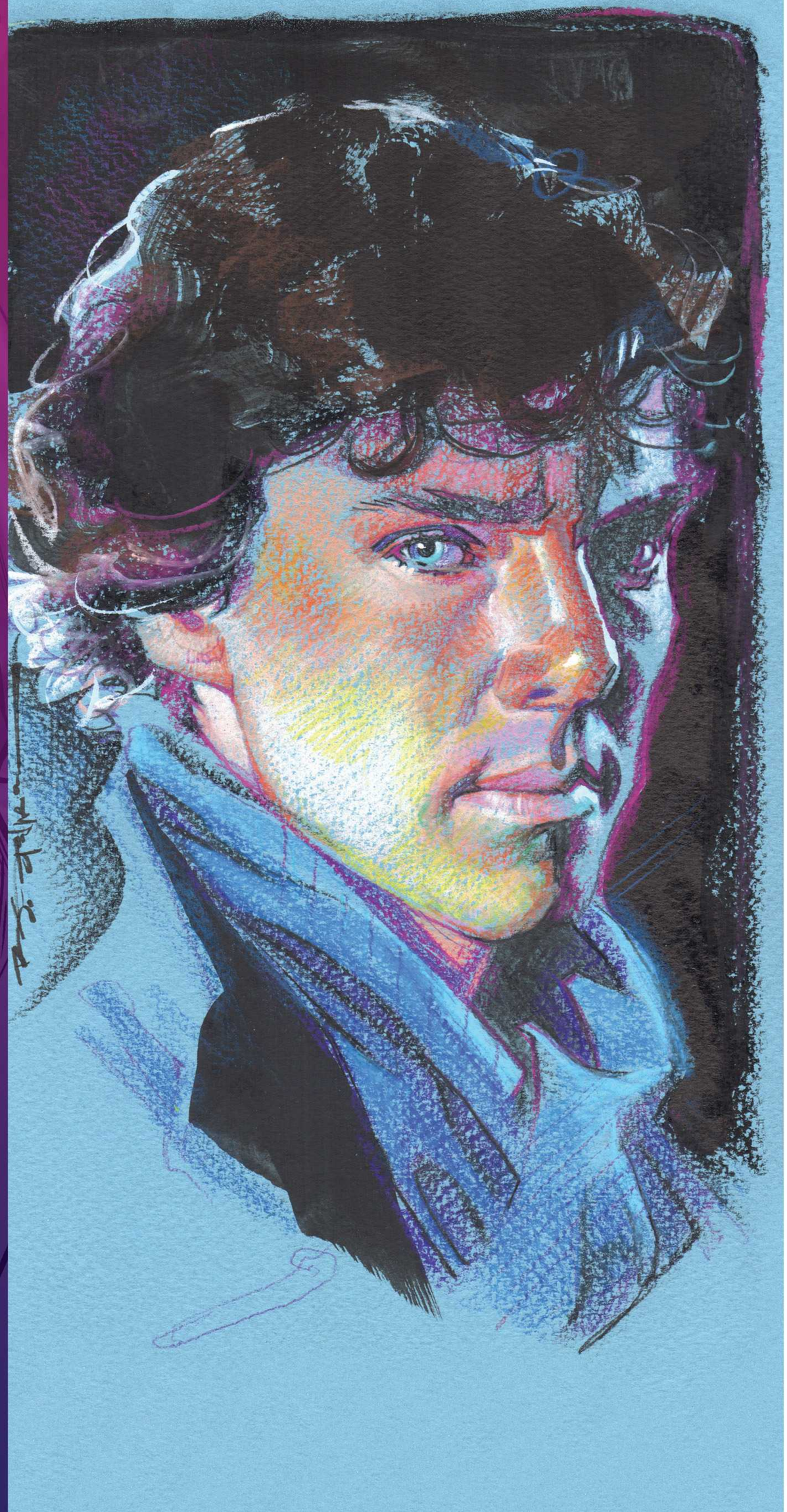














(Left) **SHERLOCK**
Watercolor
BBC
2013

(Right) **WATSON**
Watercolor
BBC
2014



LUPIN III
Watercolor
Taito Corporation
2015

THE PROCESS

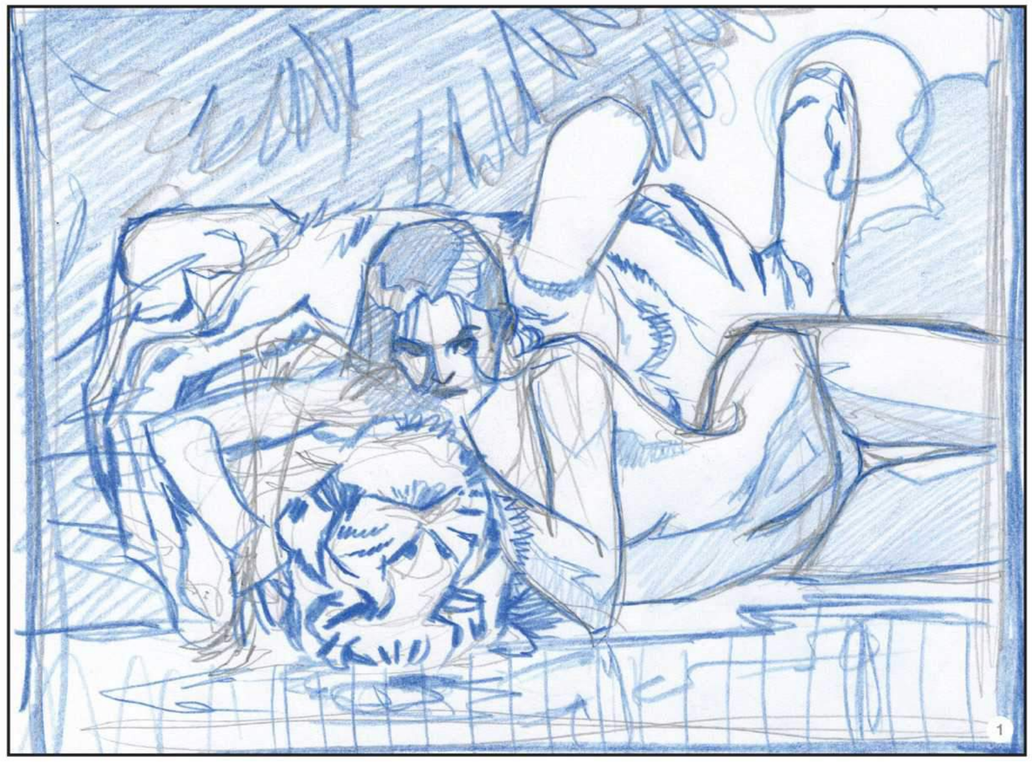
When painting, I often go through a number of thumbnails until I settle on something that really works. I'm looking for a collection of shapes that tell the story. The idea here is to really get it to work and make it as clear as possible. Generally, I find I can predict any potential pitfalls at this point and it's easy to make changes to thumbnails. I also use this opportunity to establish my dark, medium, and light values. If I can't get the image to work as a thumbnail, no amount of detail to finishing will save it. It's worth considering, in the modern age most people's first impression of your work is a thumbnail jpeg on a website or search result, so it's a good idea to make sure things work when they're reduced to their essential design.

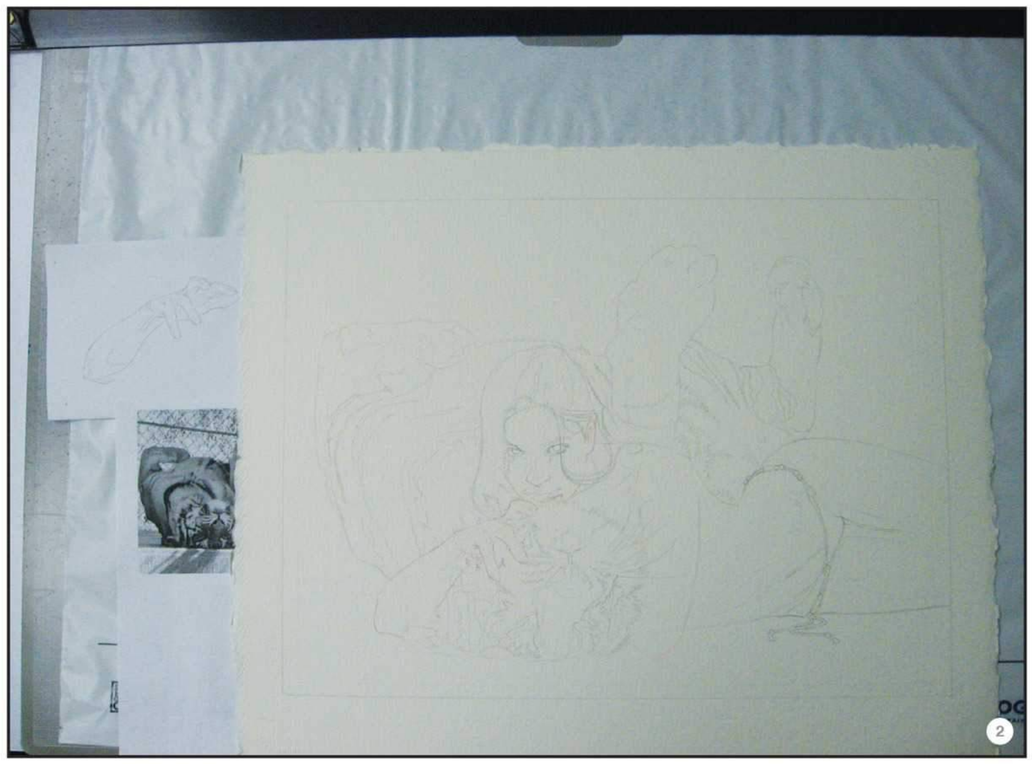
After gathering whatever reference material I need, I attack the drawing. For this image, I did the drawing separately on tracing paper and transferred it to a sheet of watercolor paper. Often too much erasing will mar the surface of watercolor paper and cause unpredictable behavior. I'll sometimes reinforce this drawing with Faber Castrell Colored Pitt Pens to prevent losing my edges.

I wanted to use an organic wet-on-wet technique for the background, so I thought it would be best to isolate the characters with blur painter's tape. I'll occasionally use liquid mask for this same thing, but I find it's not as dependable. With the painter's tape in place, I'm free to flood the background with as many layers as necessary. Here I'm using acrylics for my darkest values and watercolors for the medium and lighter values.

I try to let each stage of value completely dry before applying the next. I often find it's helpful to tilt the board around to get the pigment to go where you need it. And again, my foreground characters are protected so there's no need for much caution.

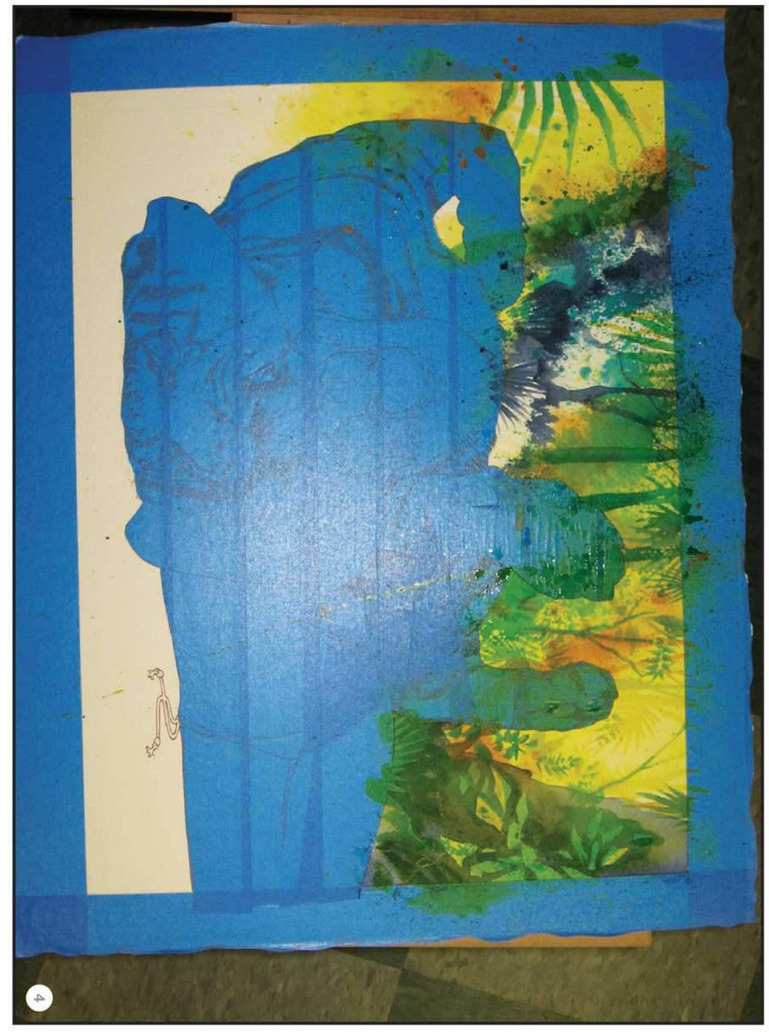
Here is the image after carefully, and I stress *carefully*, removing the painter's tape from the foreground. Having the background in place makes it much easier to judge the values needed for the foreground characters. I find when you're painting on a white board it's easier to underestimate how dark you need your foreground characters.

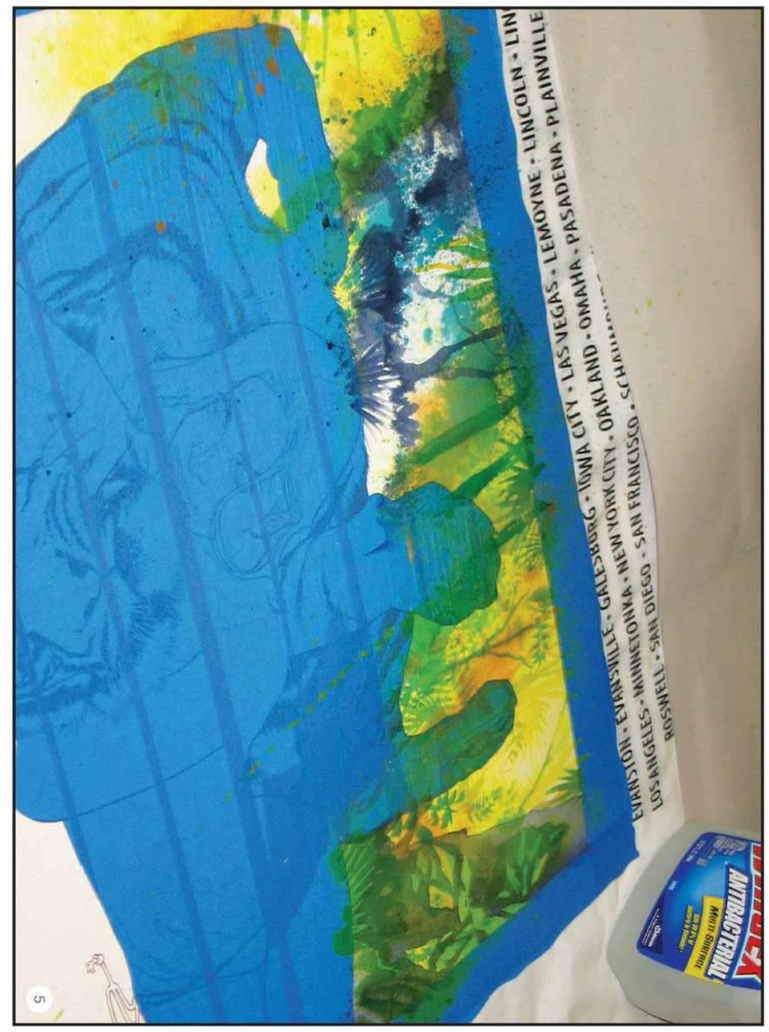







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4


5
EVANSTON • EVANSVILLE • GALESBURG • IOWA CITY • LAS VEGAS • LEMOYNE • LINCOLN • LIN
LOS ANGELES • MINNETONKA • NEW YORK CITY • OAKLAND • OMAHA • PASADENA • PLAINVILLE
ROSWELL • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO • SCHAUMBURG
ANTIBACTERIAL

For this stage I'm treating the tiger as a background element. I want it to stand out against my deep background, but I don't want it to overpower the jungle girl. I'm also bringing in violet and blue so the tiger forms a cool barrier separating the warm values of the background and the girl.

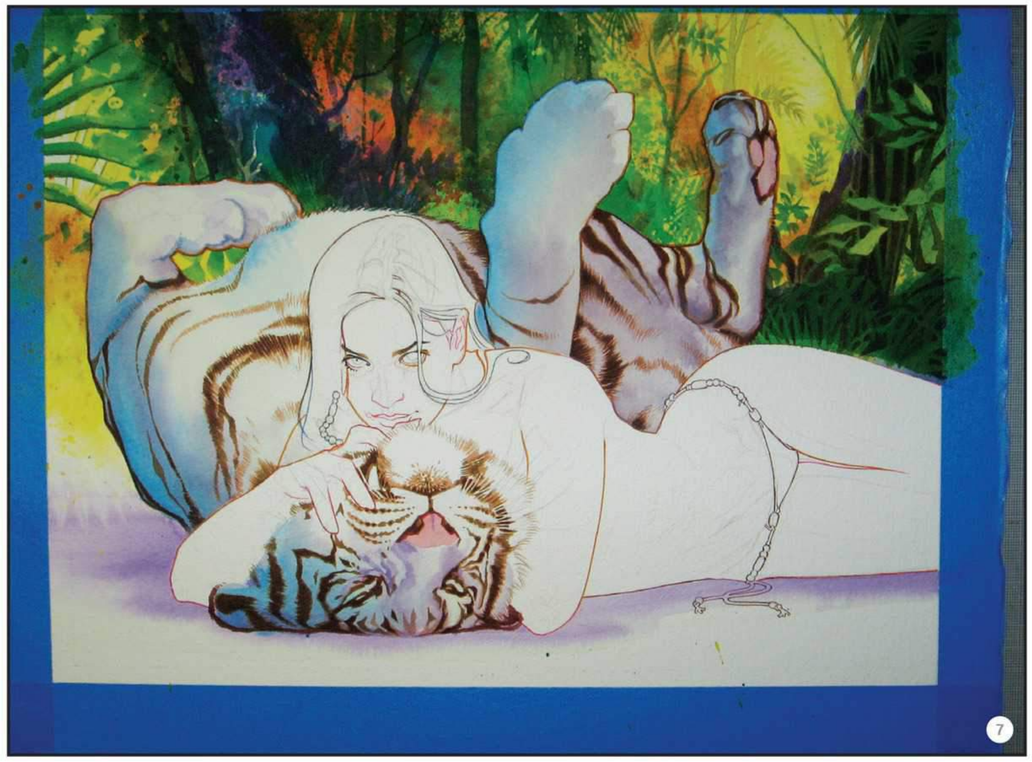
Establishing her shadows, I handle all her medium shadow values with a violet fluid acrylic. This violet is just enough to cool her flesh tones, but not enough to discolor my subsequent colors. This is the stage that really adds dimension to the image.

I want the attention on her eyes, so I'm setting up a gradient of green on her lower torso and legs. This will push her legs into the background and reduce the contrast.

Building the flesh tones. With the medium shadow values established in acrylics, I switch over to watercolors for the lighter flesh tones. At this point I'm working traditionally from light to dark with watercolors. It's important to pay close attention to temperature shifts in the skin as things get warmer and darker near boney areas and cooler on fleshy or fatty places.

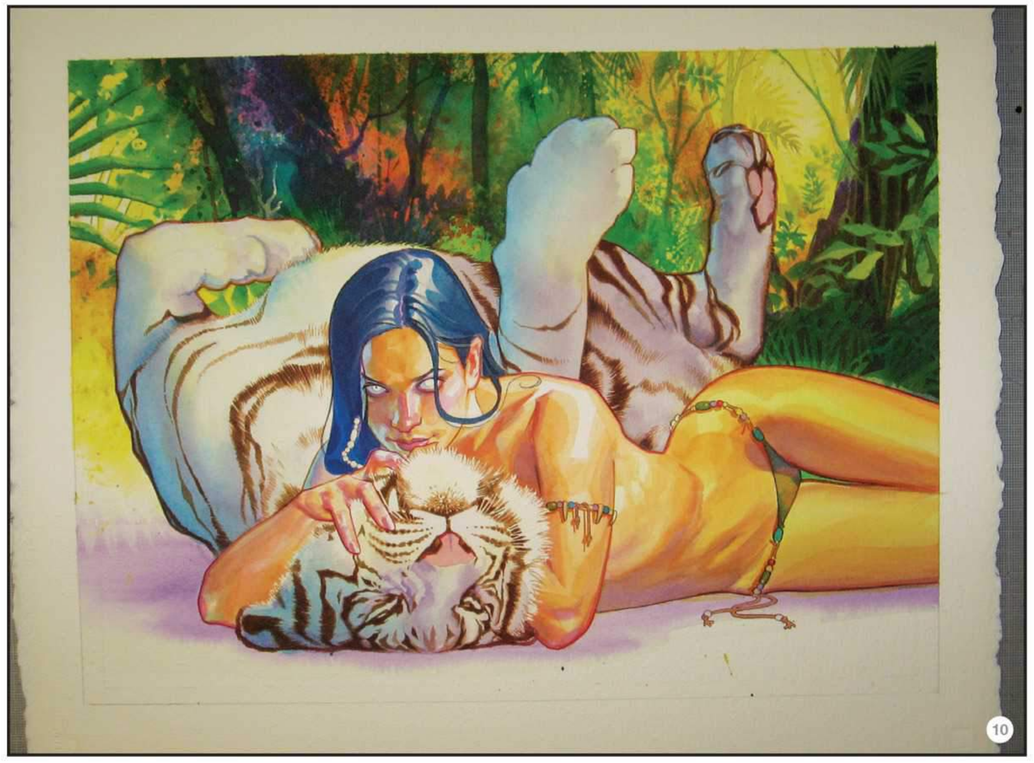
Now it's onto capturing the deepest shadow areas and defining my edges. I try to spend a lot of time looking at the piece from a distance to get away from the details and see if the big picture is working.

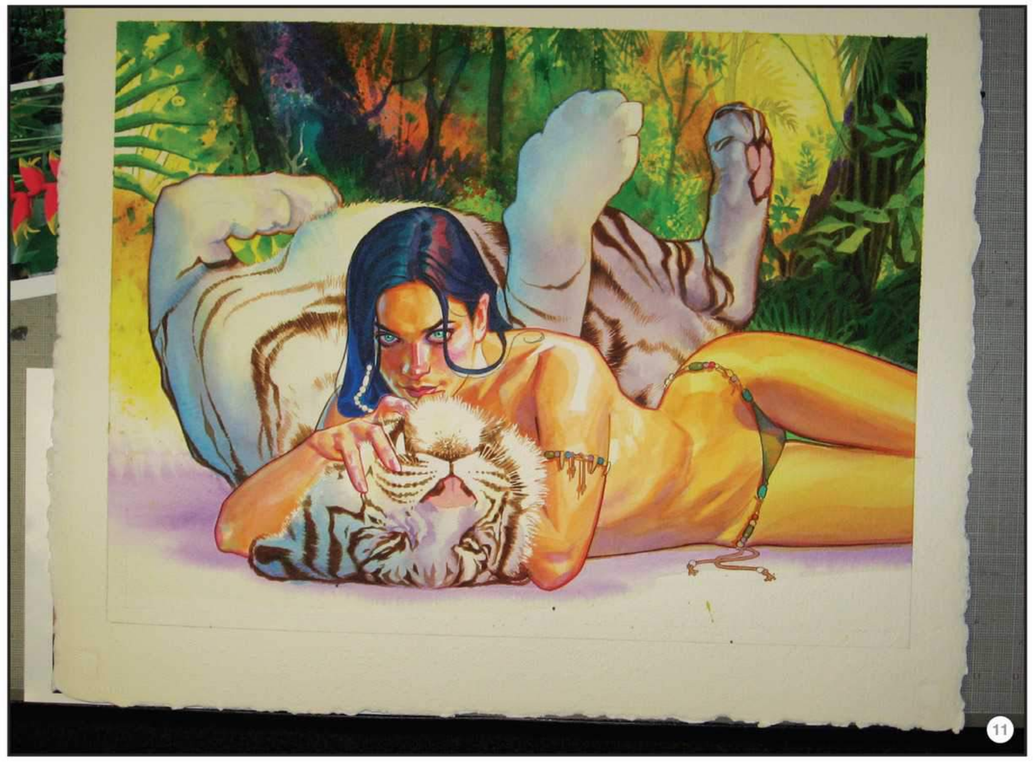
And finally, I place my purest subject color, in this case her eyes, and make sure it balances with everything else. Thanks to a well-planned thumbnail, this image was a pleasure to complete.

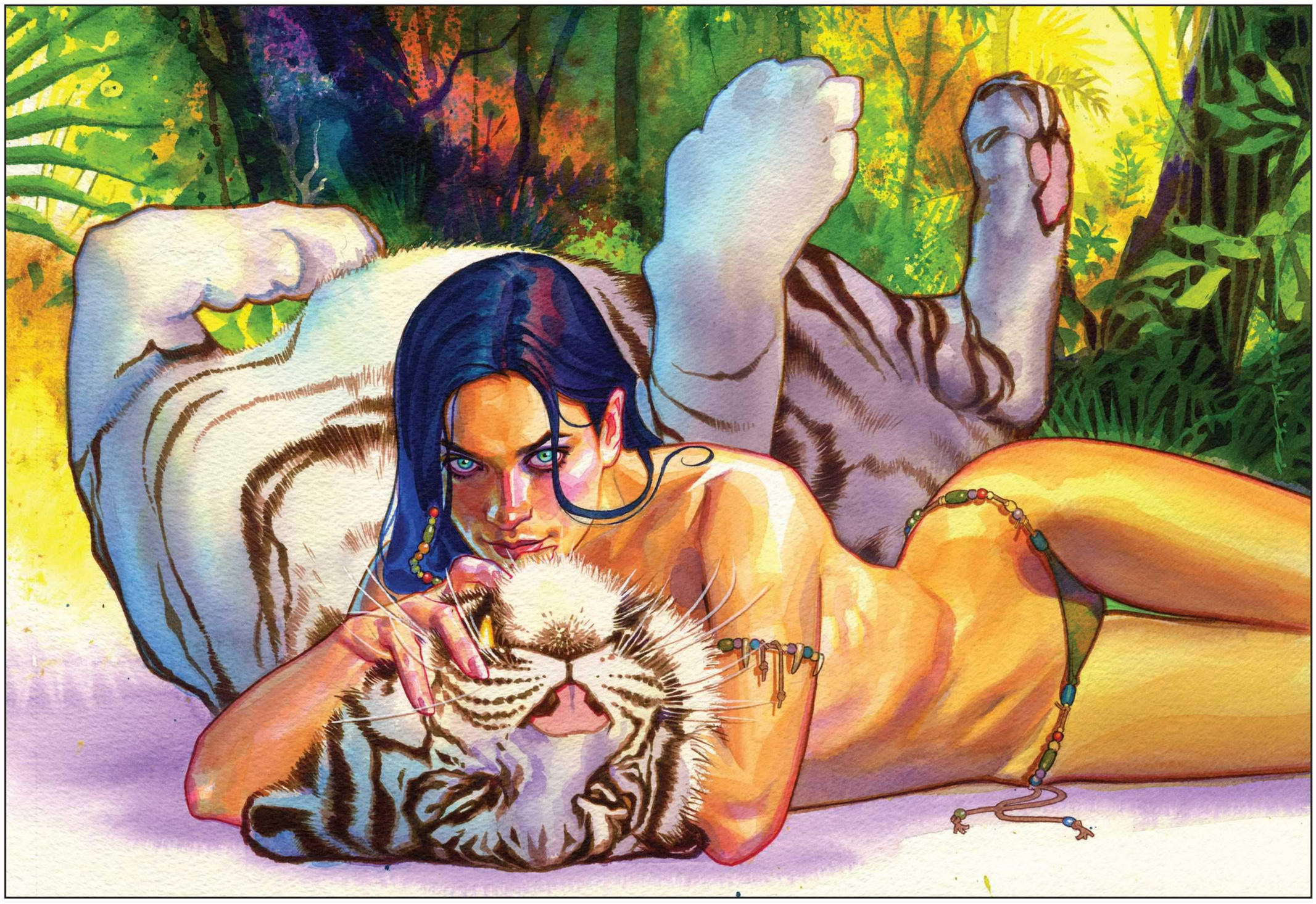

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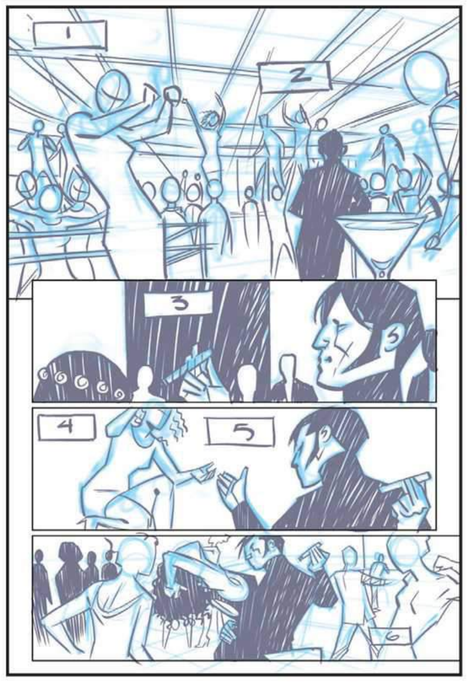
WHITE TIGER
Watercolor
2008



ARTEMIS
Trading Card
2000



DRAKE CHARACTER DESIGNS
Ink
2012



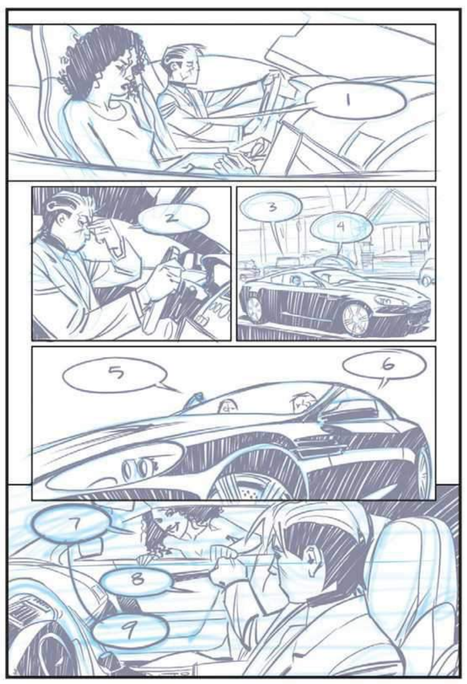




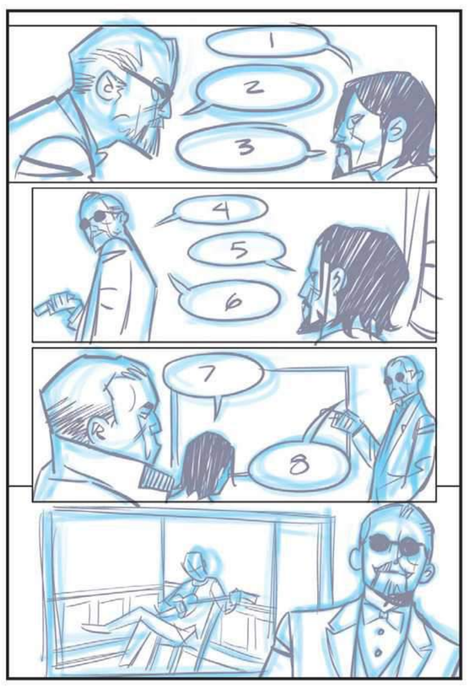




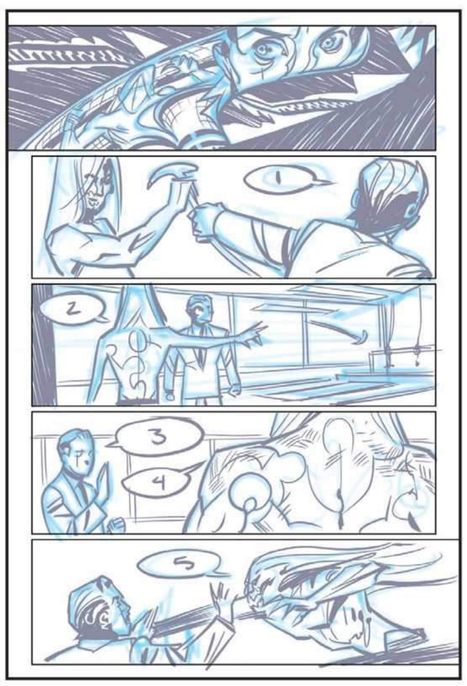






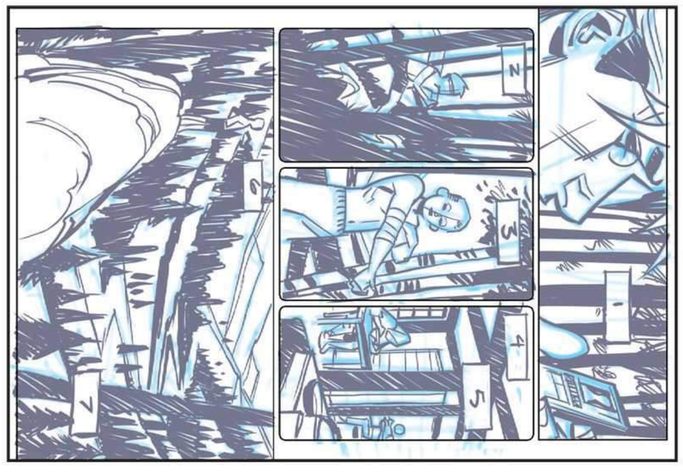


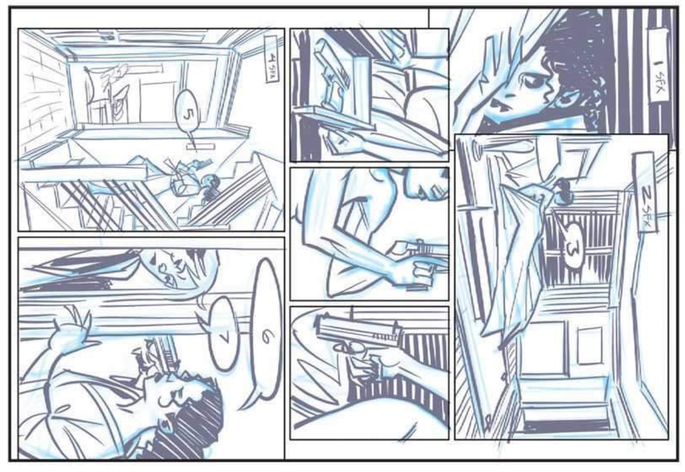


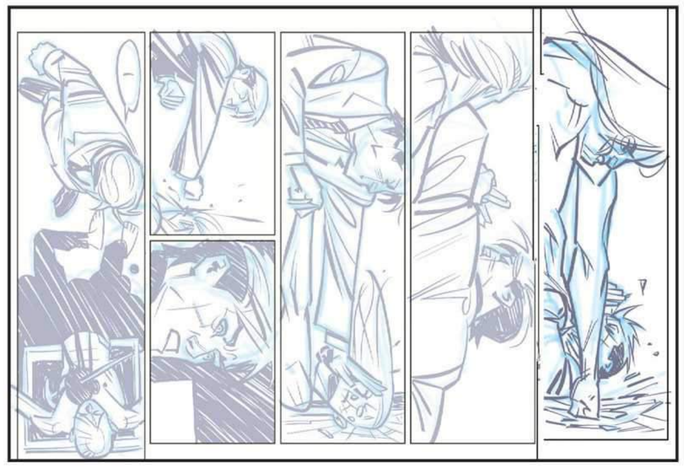


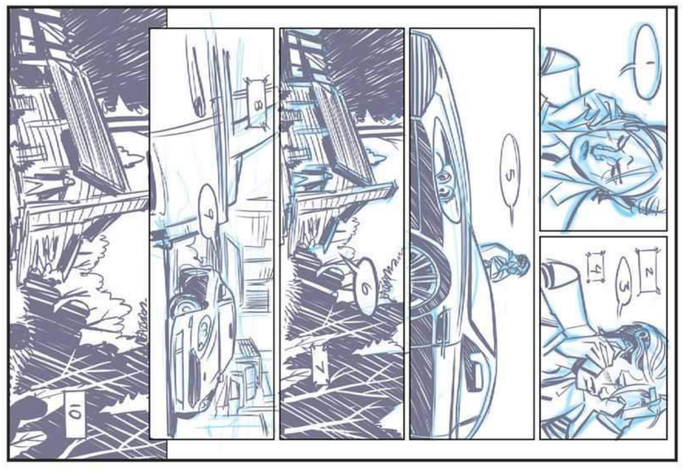


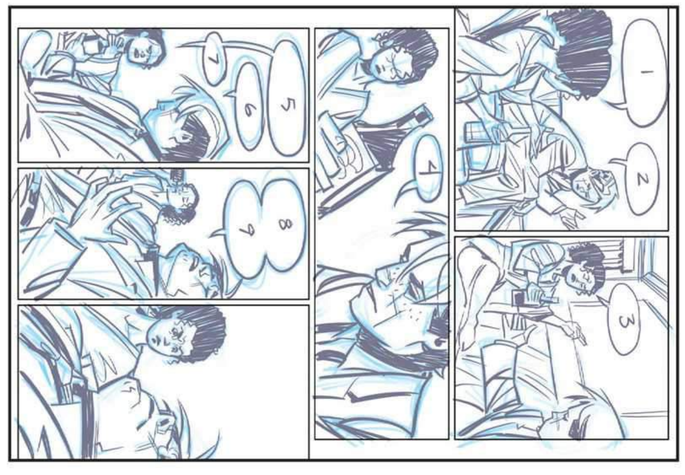
DAY MEN #5 LAYOUTS
Digital
BOOM! Studios
2014



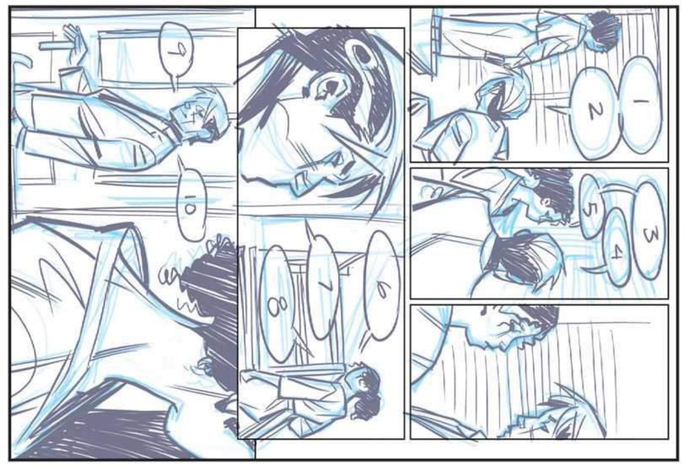


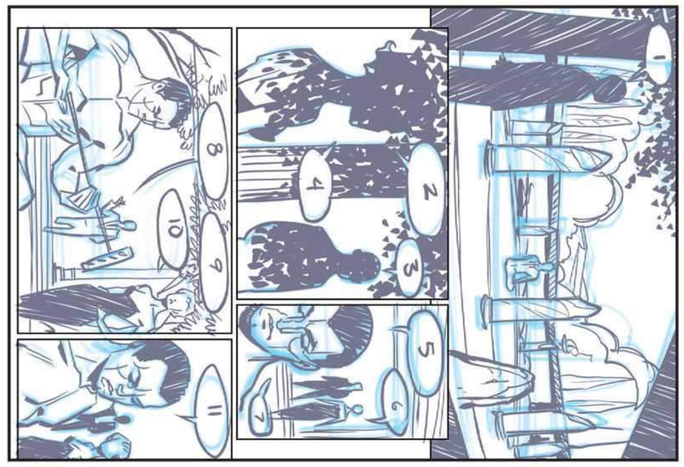


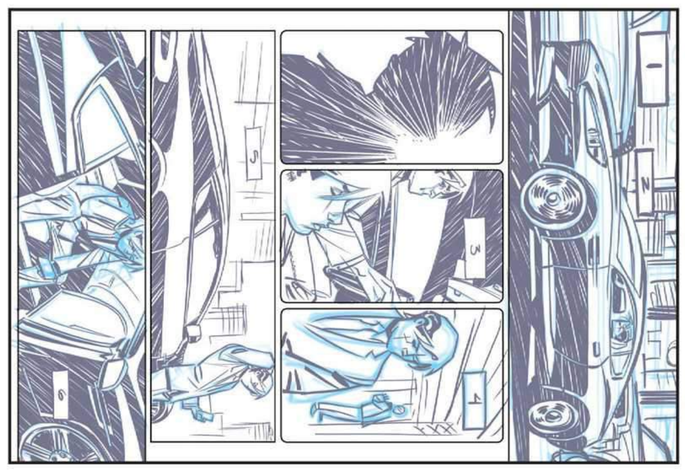








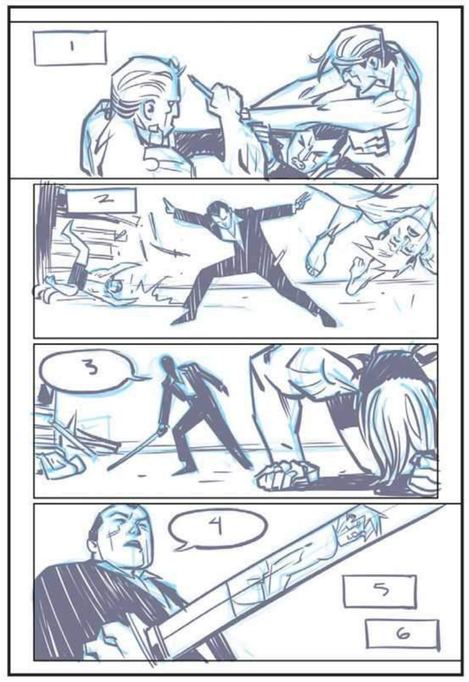






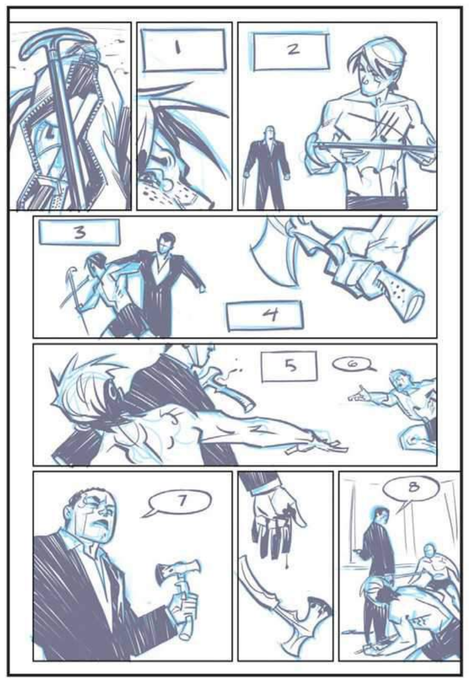
















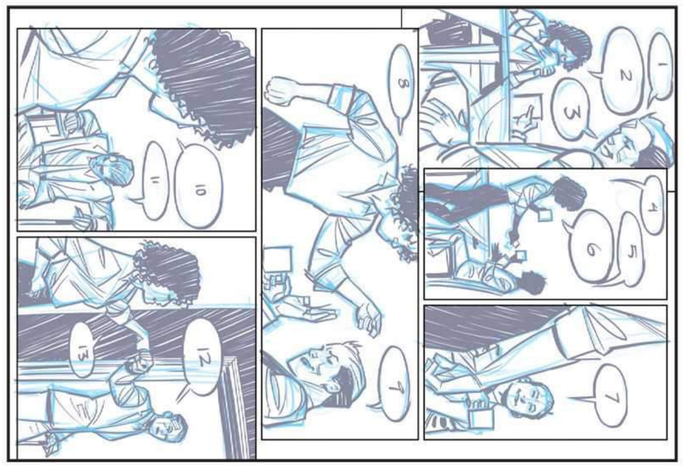


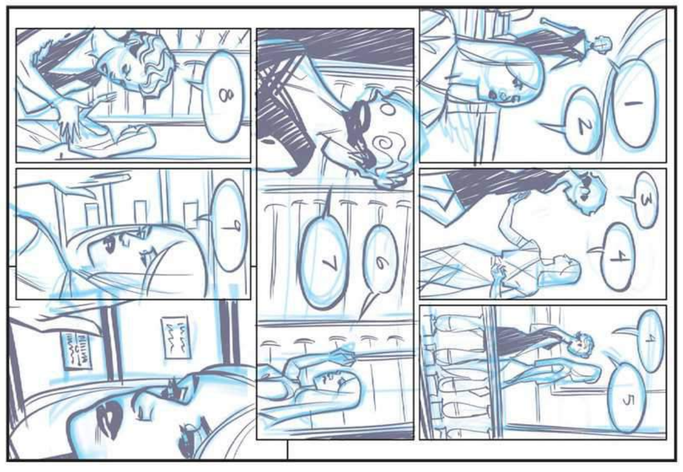






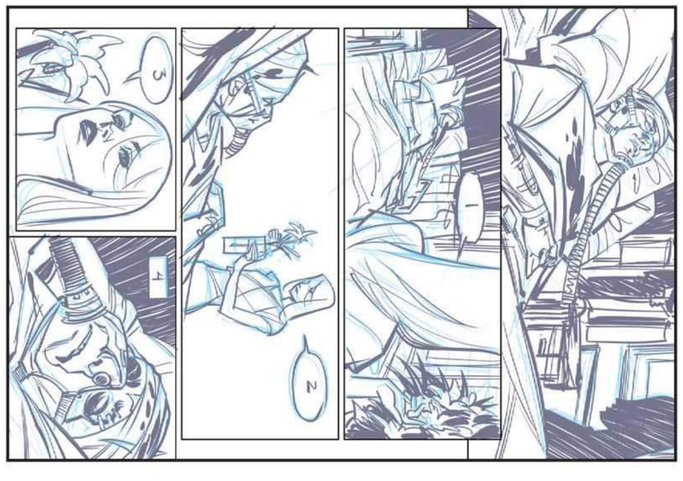
DAY MEN #8 LAYOUTS
Digital
BOOM! Studios
2015

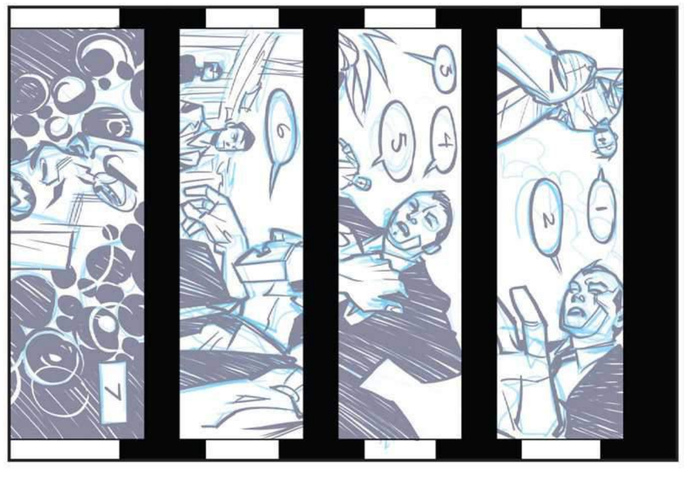






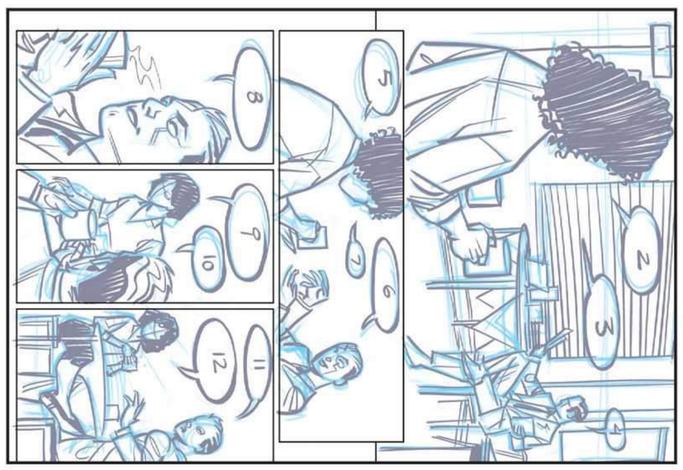


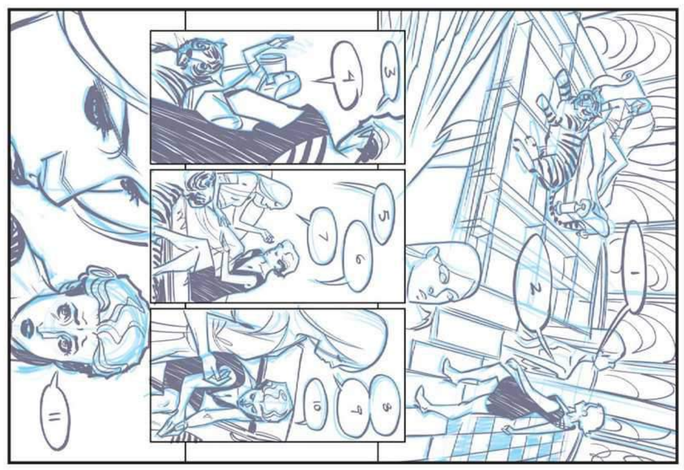












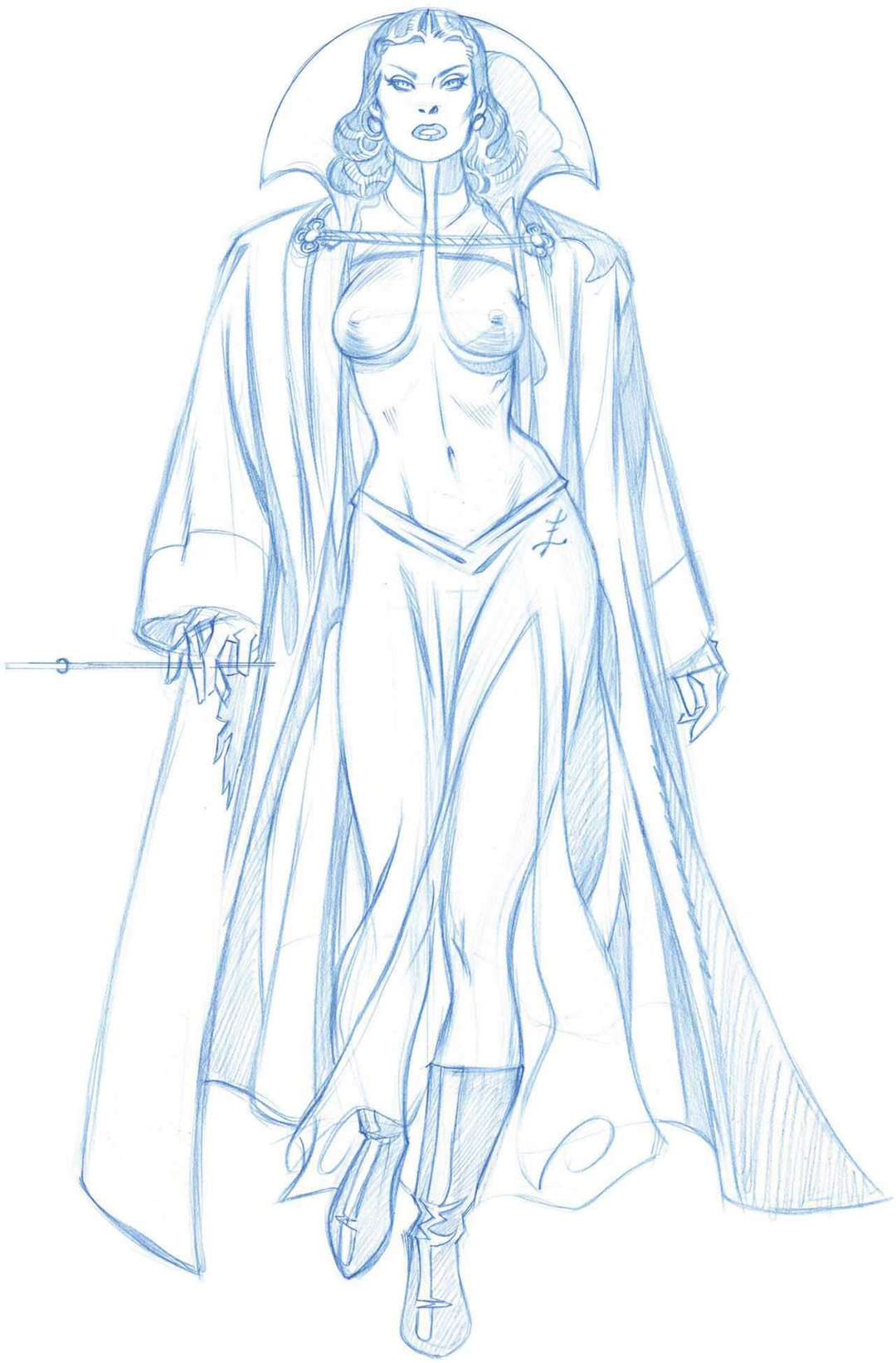


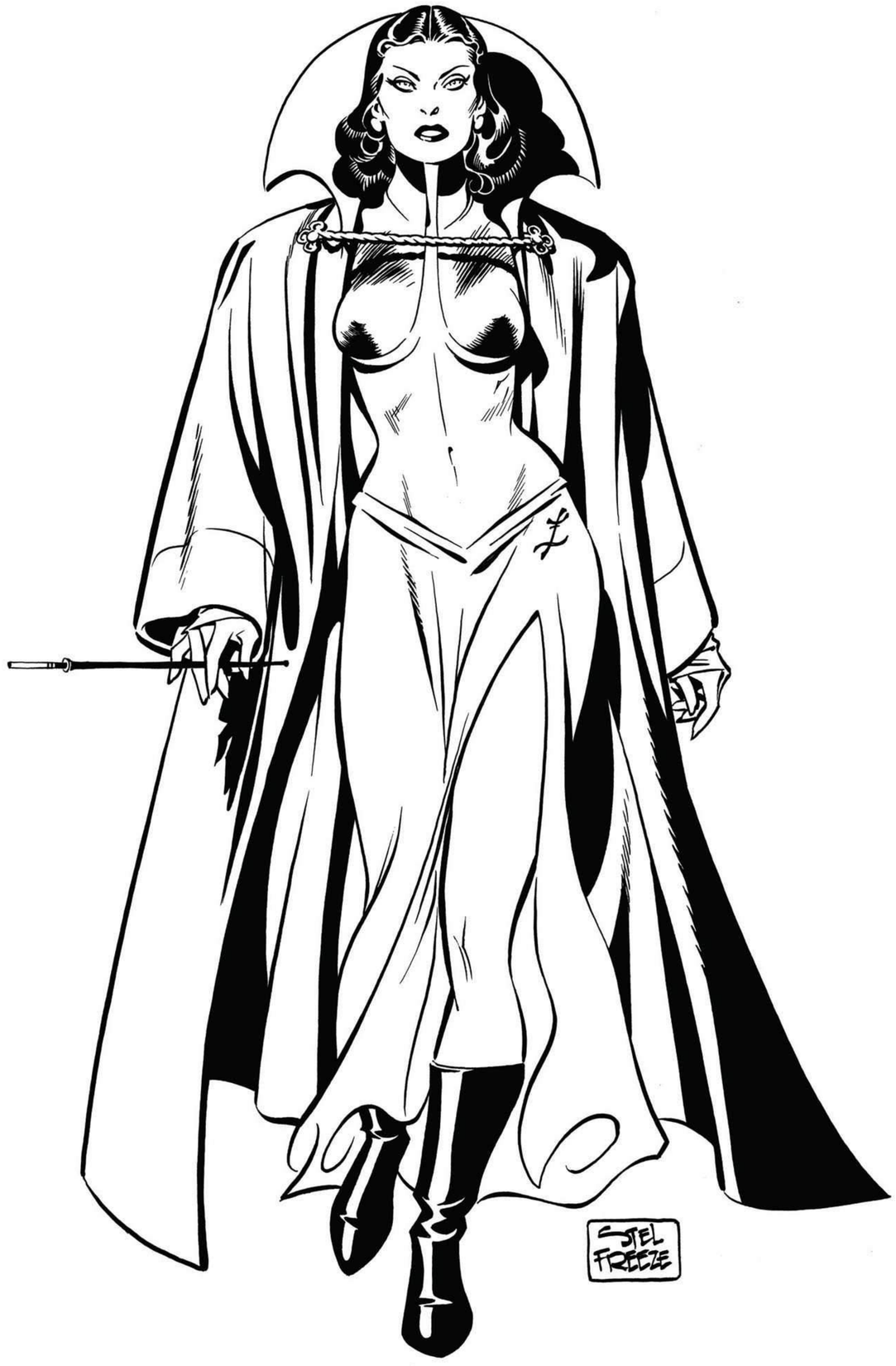






SINISTRIKE CHARACTER DESIGNS
Ink, marker
1984

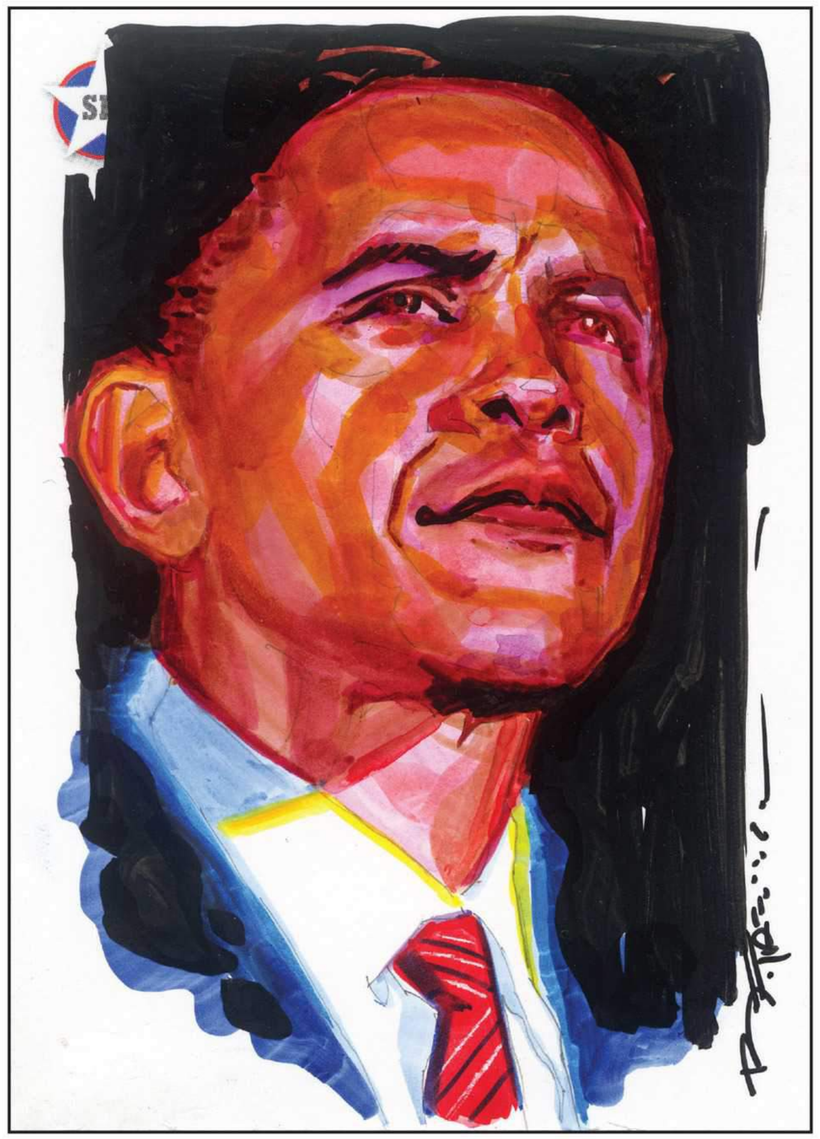


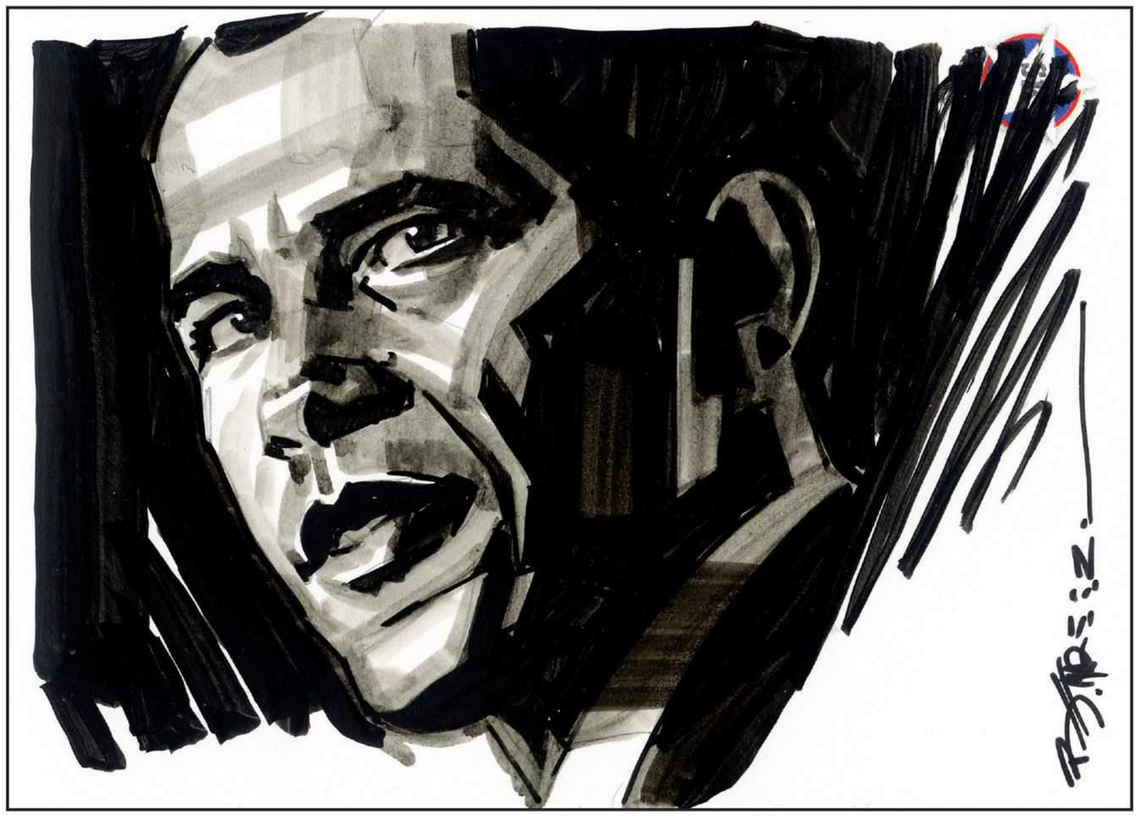


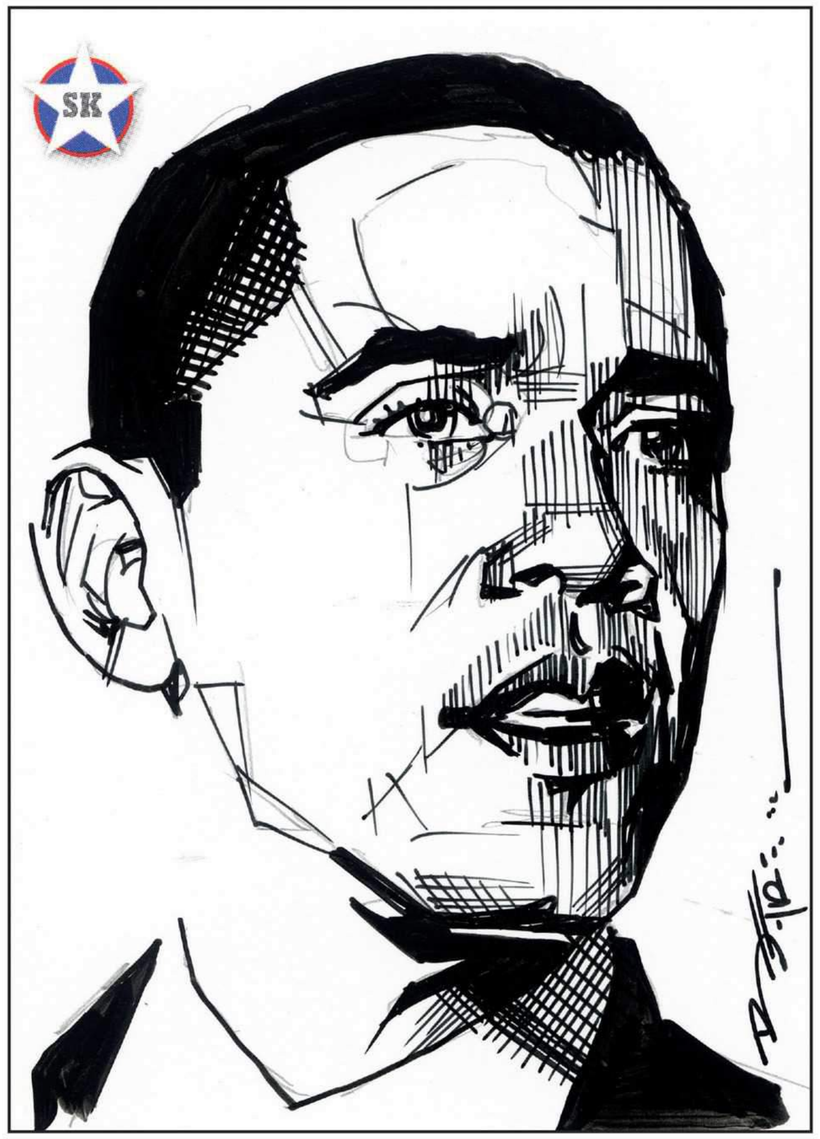
(Left) **DRAGON LADY**
Col-erase pencil
2008

(Right) **DRAGON LADY**
Ink
2008







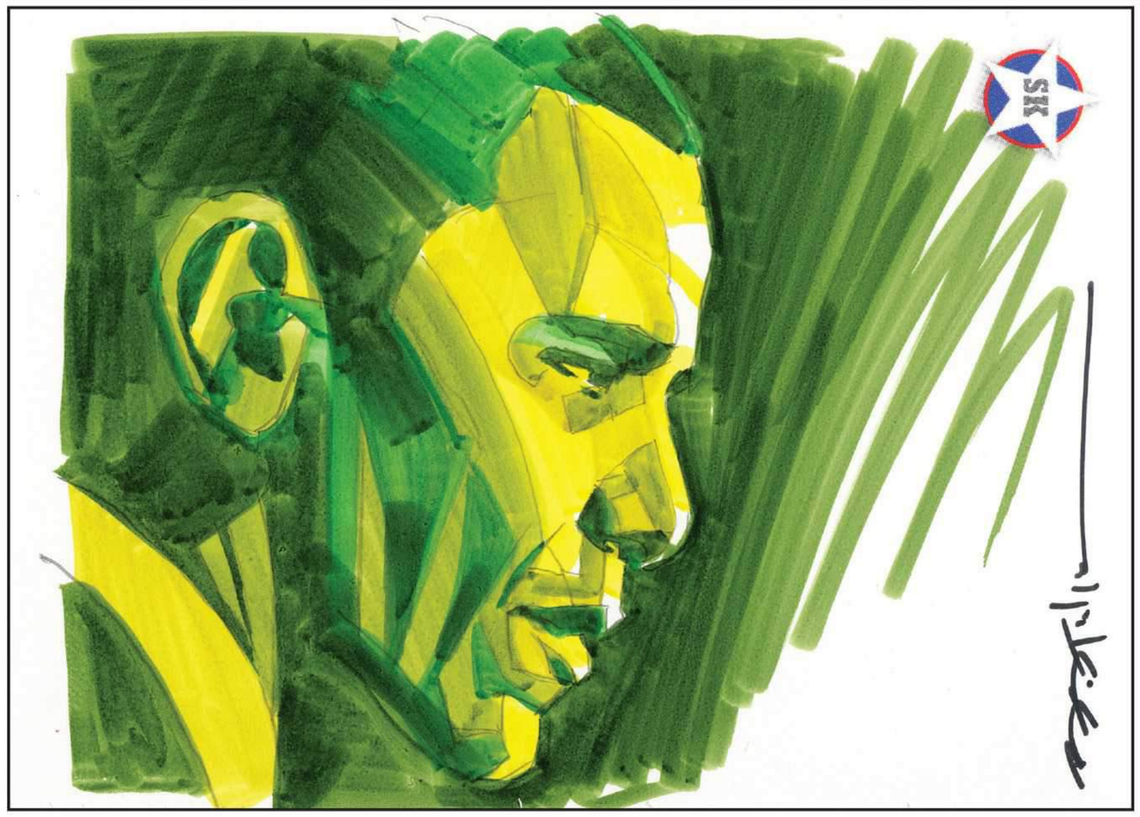


BARACK OBAMA SKETCHCARDS
2008









THE PROCESS

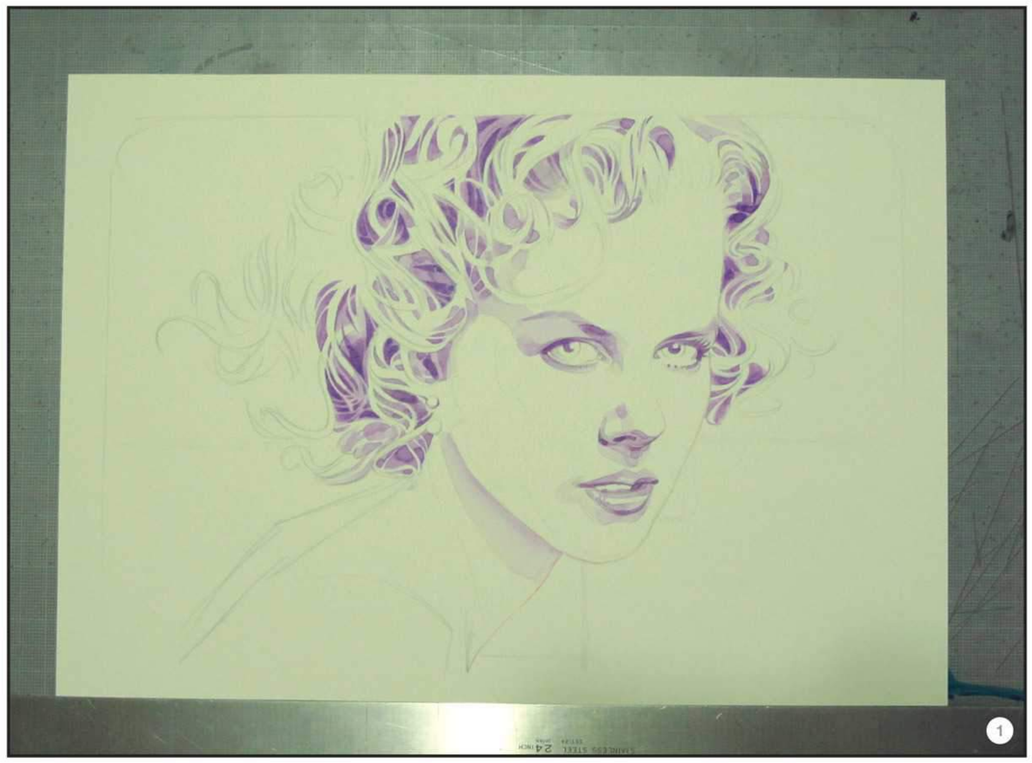
I don't get the opportunity to play with this technique very often, but it is one of my favorites. This is a variation on a technique created by Burt Silverman in his landmark book *Breaking the Rules of Watercolor*. It's a volatile combination of acrylics, watercolors, and permanent white designers' gouache. This is all performed on Strathmore plate surface illustration board. The joy of this technique is the juxtaposition of chaos and structure. It's a constant system of making a mess and then cleaning it up. The actress Nicole Kidman was a perfect subject for this technique. She always strikes me as a beautiful Michelangelo sculpture loaded with dynamite.

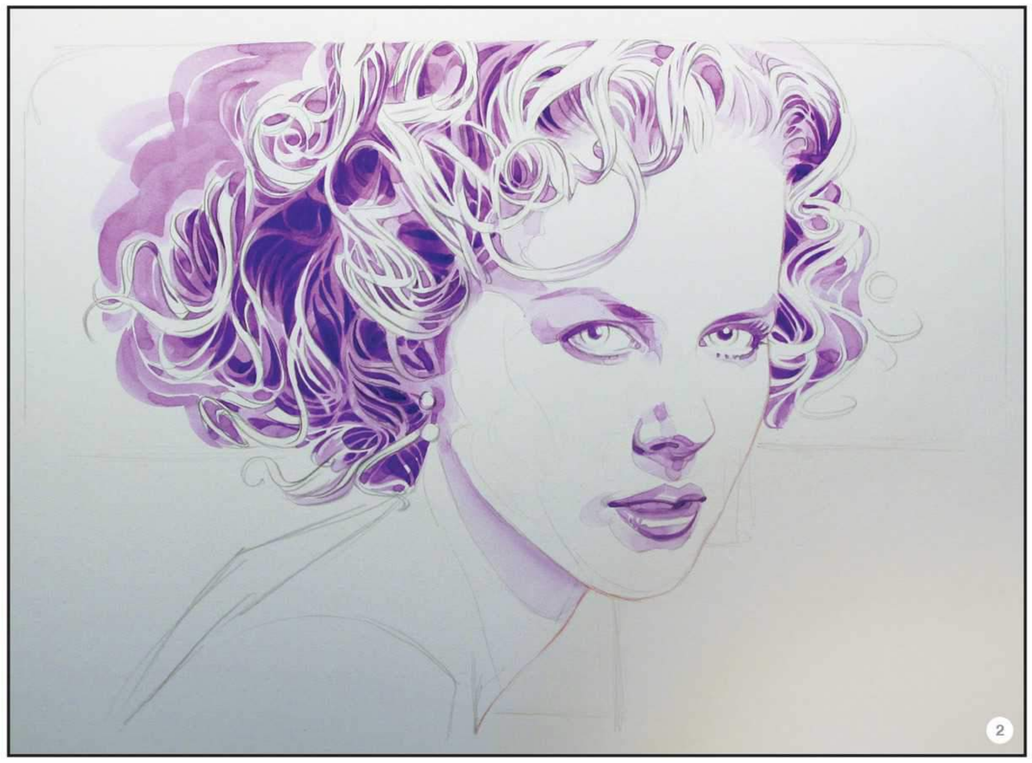
- The first stage is to complete a drawing separately. Using an eraser on the plate surface will alter its absorbency. So, I transfer the finished drawing onto the board using a graphite sheet. I only want the darkest areas where shadow and light meet represented in the drawing. All of the lighter values and details are handled in the painting process.

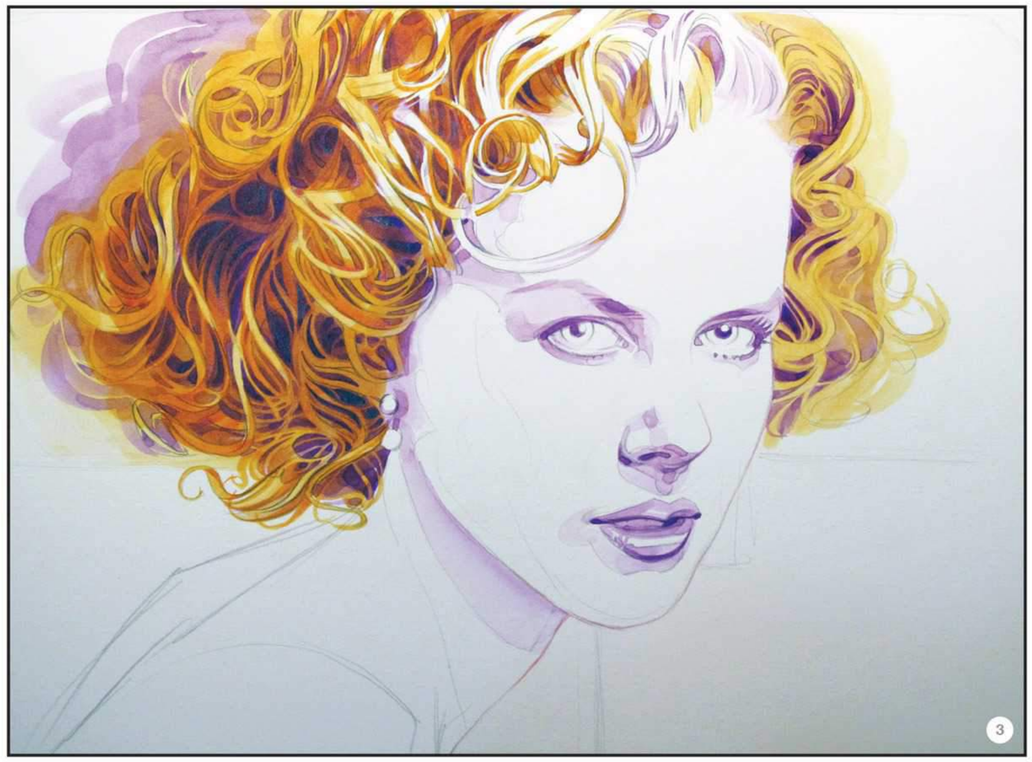
- I continue on with dioxazine purple fluid acrylics to set up my darkest values. This is a wonderfully subtle, warm violet and I often use it when tackling portraits. I find it easier to think of this stage as part of the drawing rather than part of the painting process. This provides a scaffolding for subsequent paint layers.

- Now I'm switching over to watercolors. The purple acrylic of the last layer provides a great color base for the yellow ochre on this layer. Her hair color will migrate to a more reddish tint, so I'm thinking of these yellows as highlights.

- Continuing to step away from my highlights and introducing alizarin crimson into the mix. It's a great cool red that allows an easy transition into reds or violets. I've added a light wash across her face before you get too deep into rendering her hair. I find it's easier to balance the color and value of her hair if I have at least a tint of her flesh tone in place. I'll go back and forth between background in an effort to achieve balance.



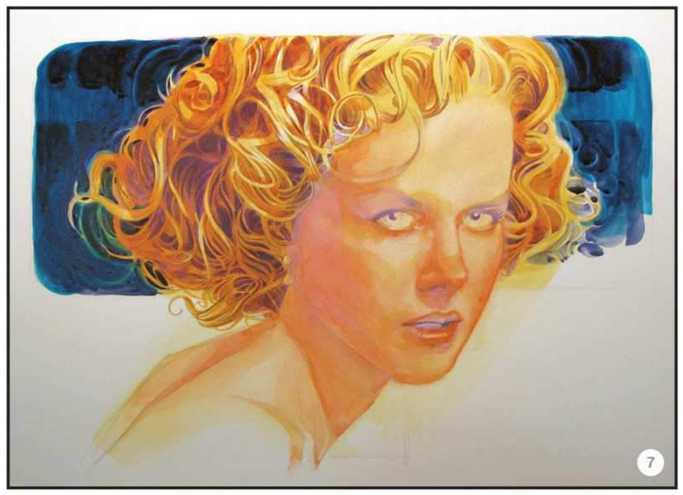


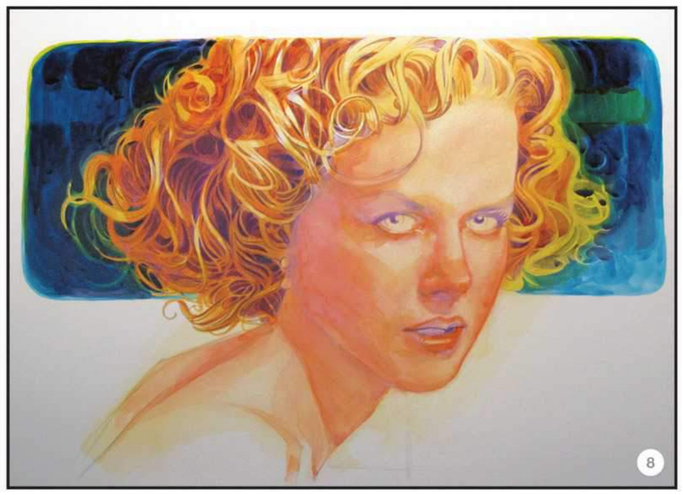


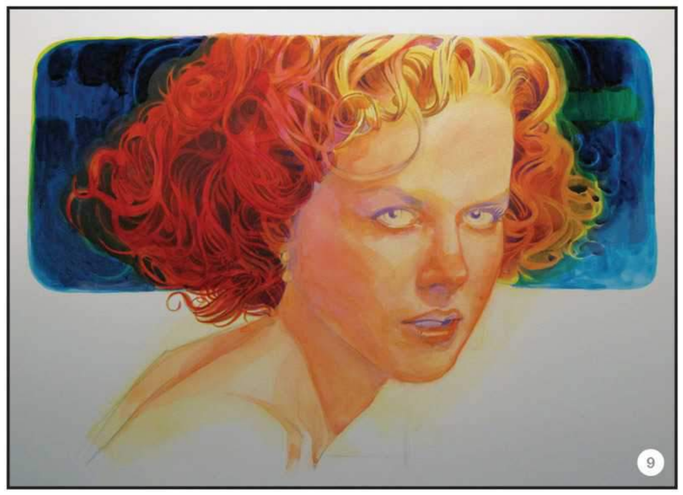


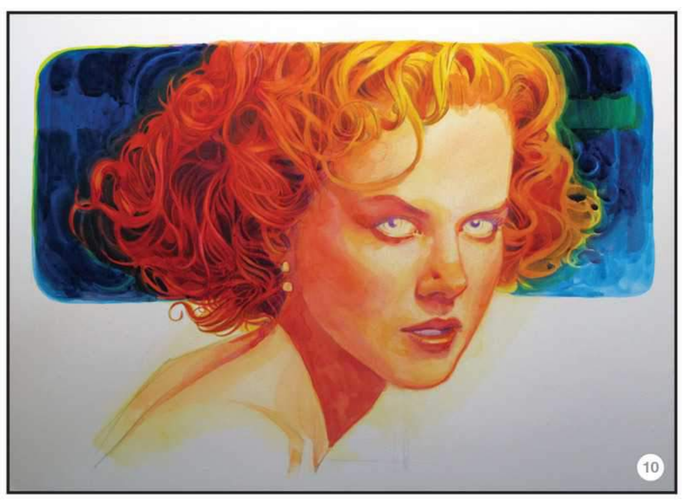


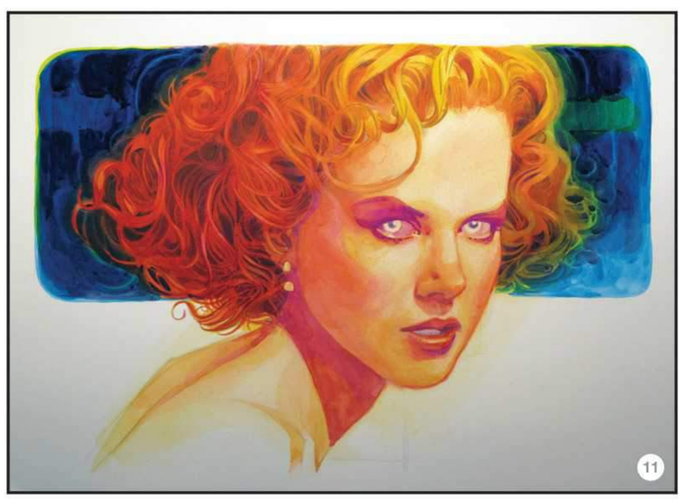












- This is where the technique gets a little strange. I'm handling the hair with a relatively straight light to dark watercolor technique, nothing too strange to see here. But the flesh tones are an entirely different story. I'm adding just a bit of permanent white to all my colors for the flesh tones to give them a slight bit of opacity and weight. This technique requires lifting or scrubbing out colors from the surface to achieve rendering. Watercolors right out of the tube are too thin and have a tendency to really cling to paper. Normally this is a good thing but this technique is a little different. I want to wash the colors in place and then carefully remove them after allowing some drying time. The permanent white thickens the watercolors enough to add a little more control during the lifting process.

- It's important to float the colors rather than paint them. The plate surface board makes it all too easy to accidentally damage previous layers, so I try to be very strict about working from my lighter values to darker ones. I'm also using a very specific brush for this technique. Normally I'm a fan of comedically inexpensive brushes, but this method requires extreme subtleties, and that requires a really good brush. I'm using an Isabey black squirrel mop. It's an unbelievably soft brush and it holds quite a bit of water for every stroke. The softness of the brush allows me to "float" the watercolors into place without scrubbing paint off of previous layers. I'll use standard synthetic brushes to scrub colors away.

- Now I'm setting up my background graphic. I have my basic chroma for the flesh tones in place, so now I can balance my background values. I'm handling the first layer with Paynes gray. It's a cool neutral color which will desaturate all my subsequent background colors. This guarantees nothing in the background will compete with her eyes.

- Now I'm formally building from background to foreground. I've added a tint of turquoise to the Paynes gray so the background complements my flesh tones.

- I'm adding more alizarin crimson into her hair to allow a smooth transition into the cool background colors.

- Here's where I try to transition those cooler colors into the darker values of her flesh tones.

- I'm taking every opportunity to push the neutral blues and violets into my shadows.

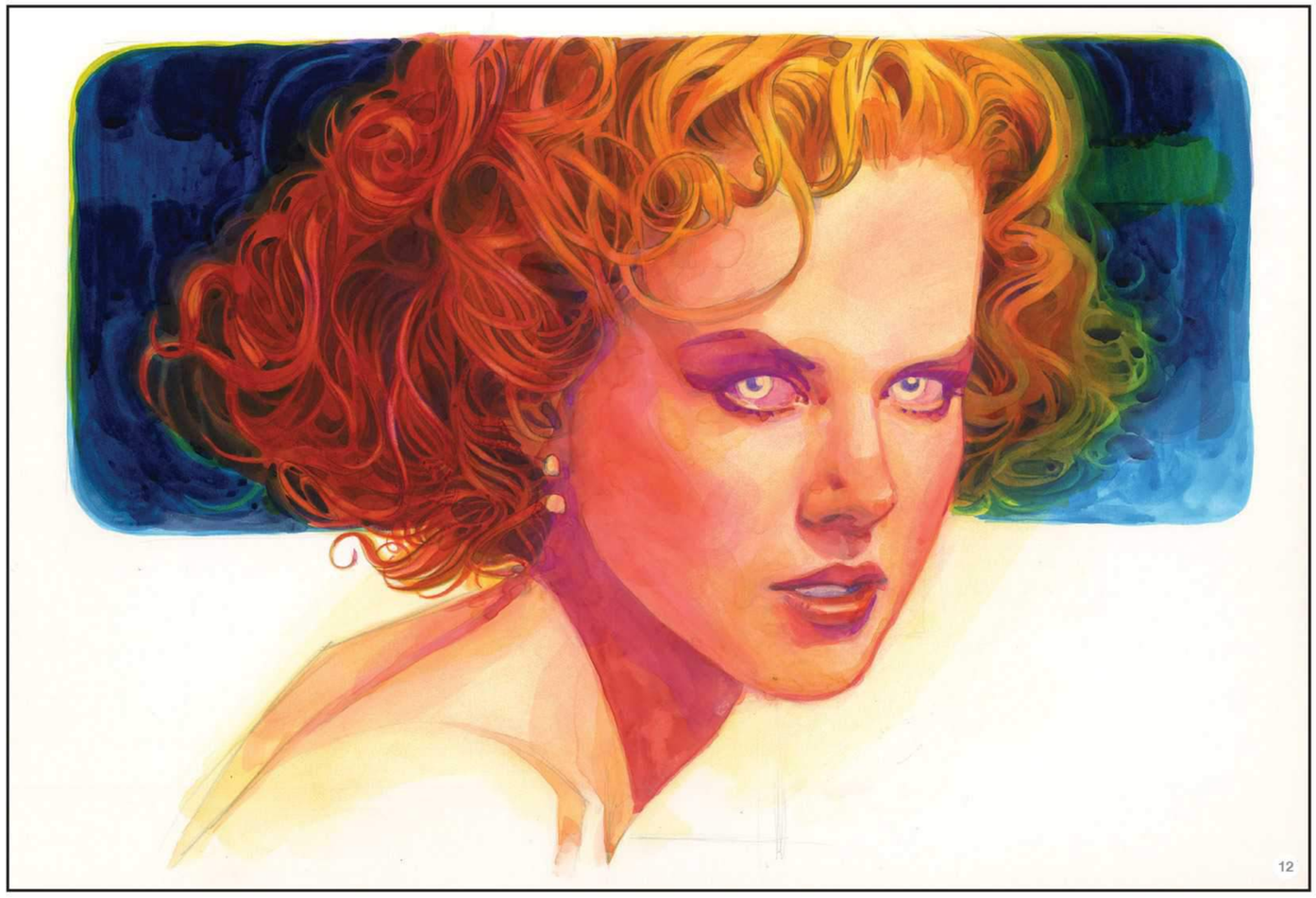
- Here I'm trying to move from the shadows into the warmer values on her flesh tones. I'm just moving 90% of all the color I'm putting down with this technique. I'm also making it a point to get as rich and warm as I can with my colors before they go into the relatively cool shadows.

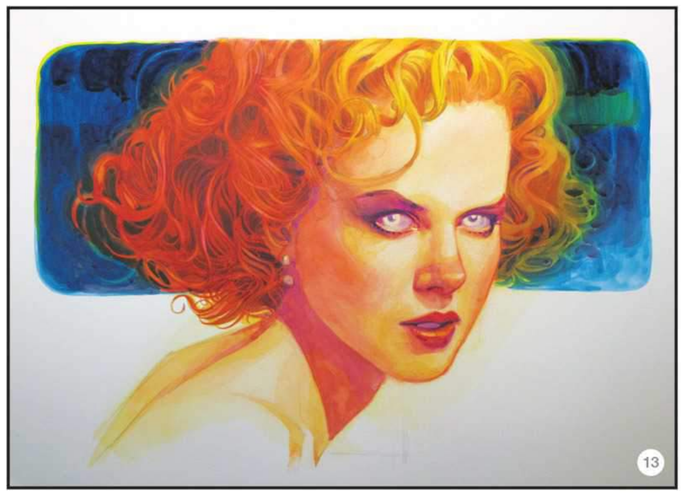
- At this stage I'm really trying to solidify my edges. Most of my edges before this point are naturally a little soft but now I'm paying careful attention to areas where extreme values meet.

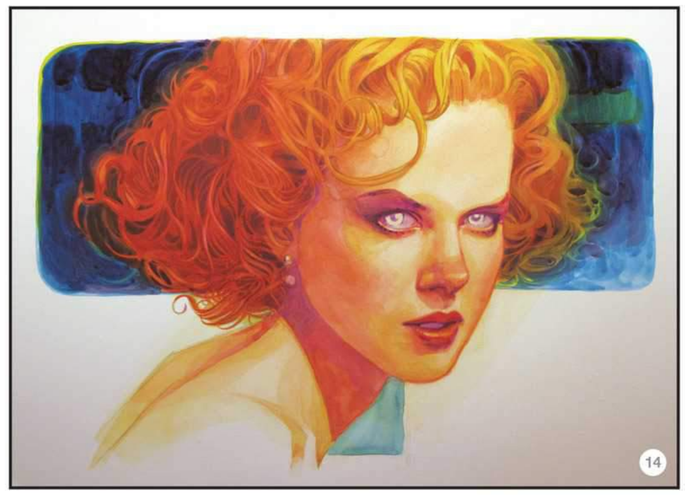
- Here's where I focus on the landmarks of the portrait, eyes, mouth, and nose. This requires a lot of squinting and stepping away from my painting to gauge things from a distance. Sometimes I'll place a copy of my reference a distance across the studio. This allows me to more clearly see the value patterns created by the landmarks. Getting a likeness right is more about capturing those value patterns than it is about the details. I also find it a little more difficult to see those patterns if my absolute darks are established. I try to hold off on those fun details for as long as possible.

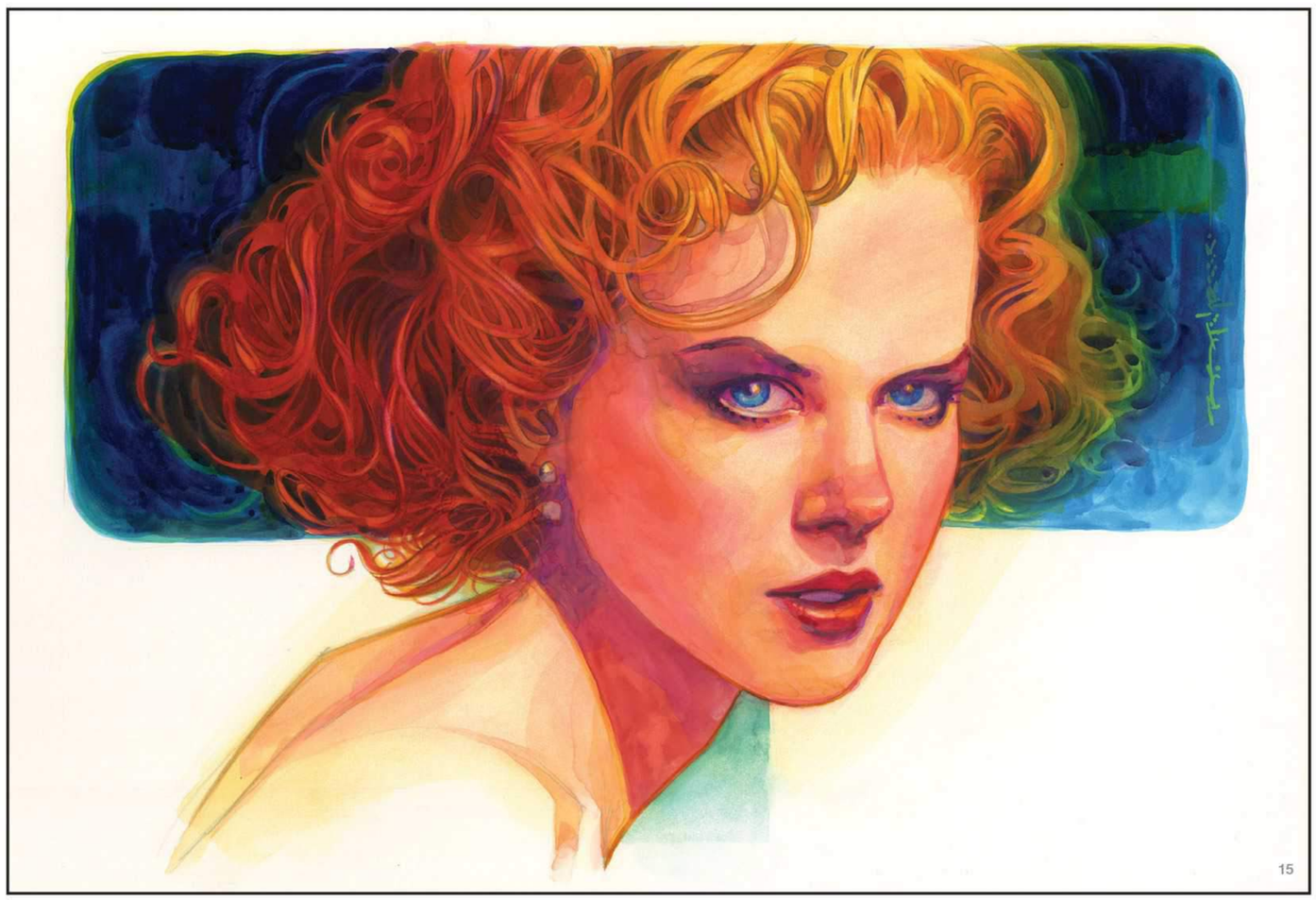
- Now it's all about the absolute darks. I'm working from background to foreground here as well. First I'll establish the edges and negative space along the outside of her hair where it meets the background, then I'll go in for the darker values in the negative space in the hair. This is also a good time to take care of the cast shadows, like those on her forehead and along her hairline.

- Finally, I wrap things up with her eyes. This is the subject of the image so I give it the most pure color and highest contrast between light and dark values. This technique is a symphony of carefully controlled accidents. In a way I have to think of the watercolors less as a medium but more as a partner, or collaborator. Sometimes I may not approve of what the watercolors choose to do, and it will often be counter to my decisions, but I try to remain open-minded. Often times I create my favorite images through this uncomfortable partnership.


12


13


14


15



NICOLE KIDMAN
Watercolor
2010

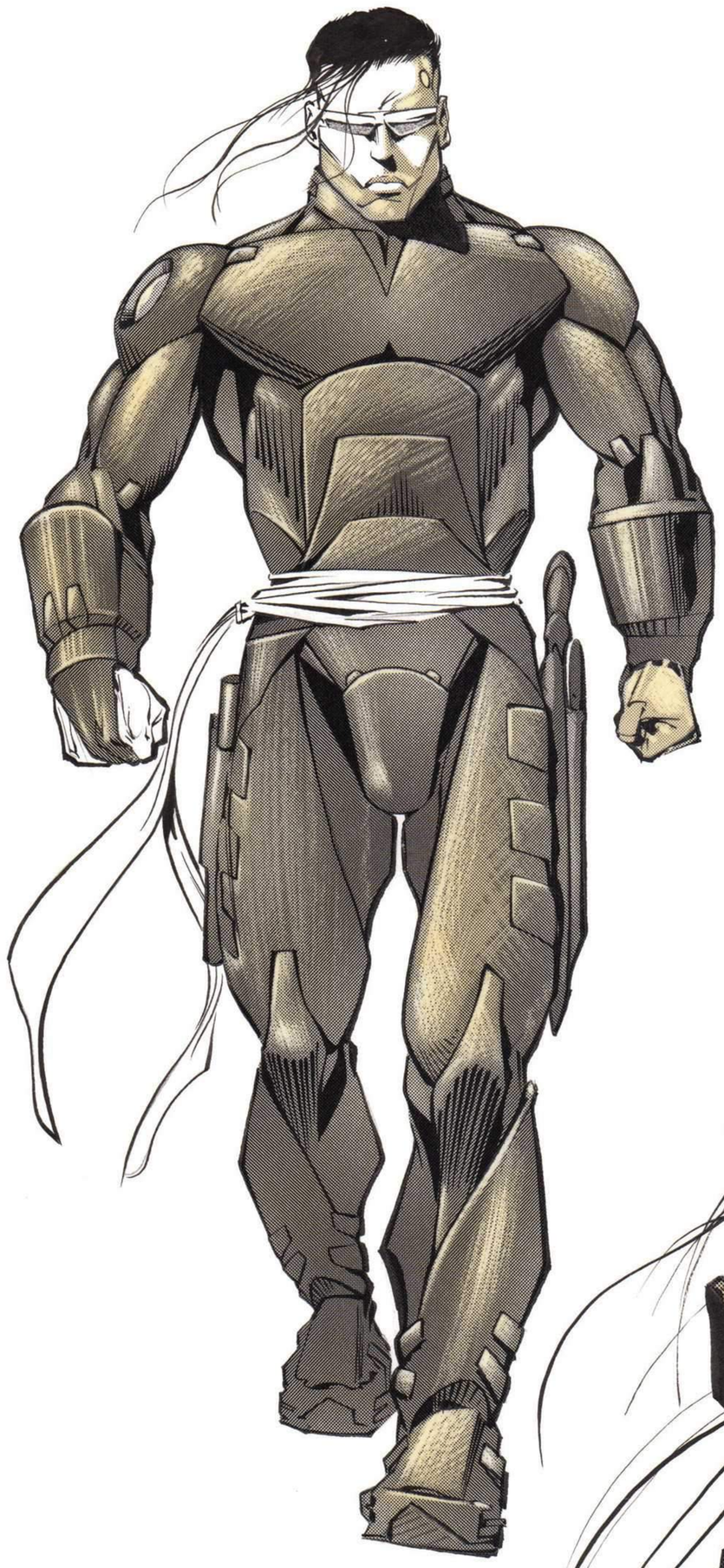




(Left) **BATGIRL**
Pencil, ink
DC Comics
2002

(Right) **DAZZLER**
Pencil, ink
Marvel Comics
2003

BOOK | TITLE | PAGE







MAXIMUM VELOCITY CHARACTER DESIGNS
Ink
1992



LOIS LANE
Ink
DC Comics
2013



JAQ
CHARACTER DESIGNS
Col-erase pencil, ink, digital color
2000



MARY JANE
Ink with watercolor
Marvel Comics
2010



(Left) **BURN NOTICE**
Ink
USA Network
2009



(Right) **7 DAYS TO HELL CHARACTER DESIGNS**
Non-photo pencil, ink
Top Cow
2012



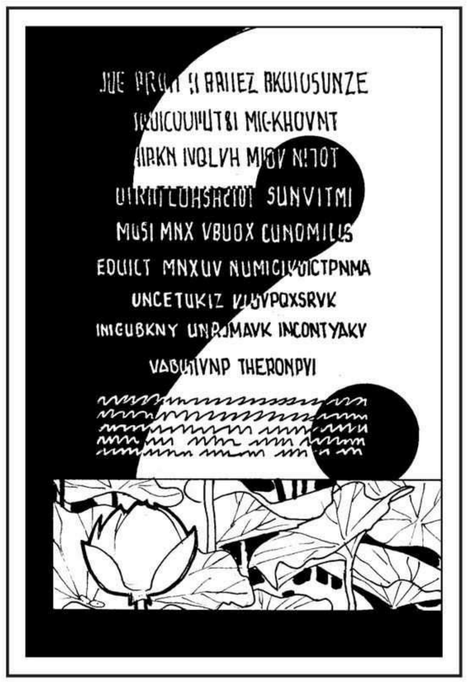


(Left) **SELENE**
Underdrawing
Screen Gems
2010

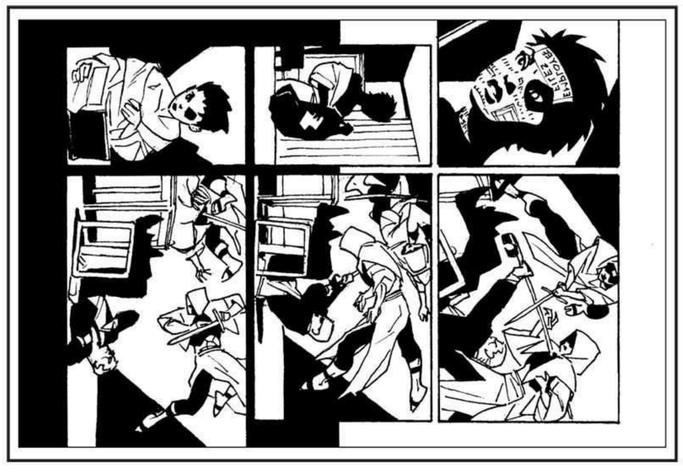
(Right) **NAOMI WATTS**
Ink
2010

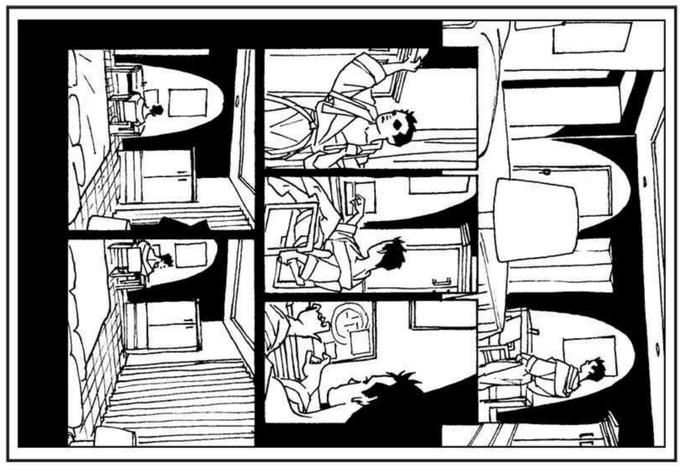
(Left) **LACI WITH GUN CANDY**
Ink
12 Gauge
2008

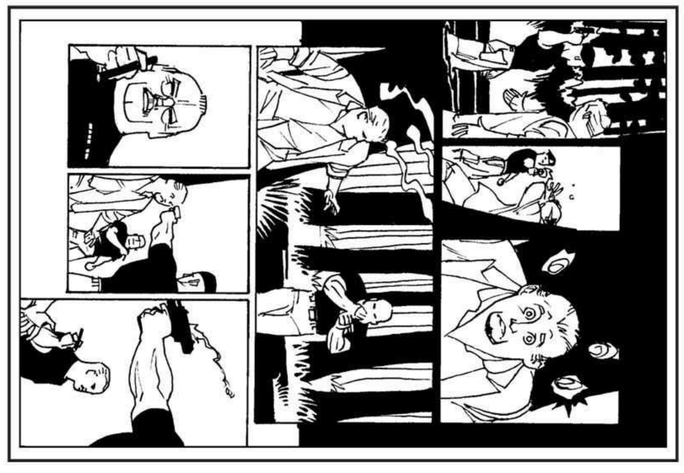
(Right) **LACI ON THE PROWL**
Ink
12 Gauge
2008



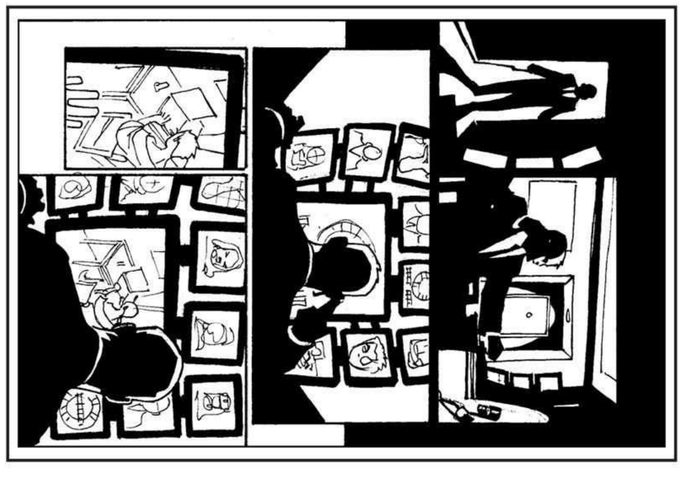
DOMINO #2 LAYOUTS
Pitt marker
Marvel Comics
2003

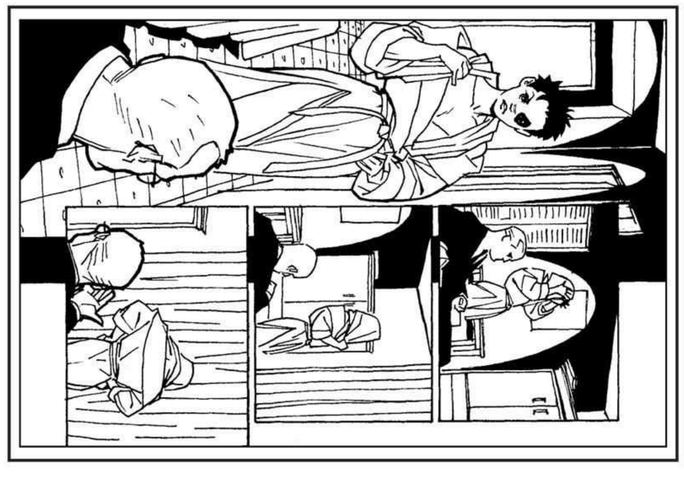


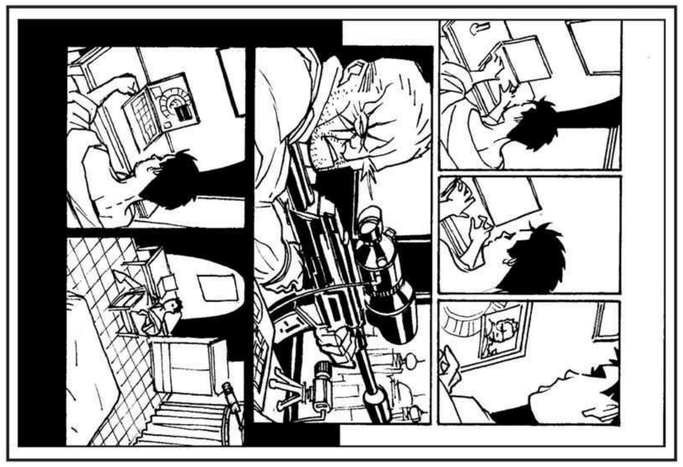


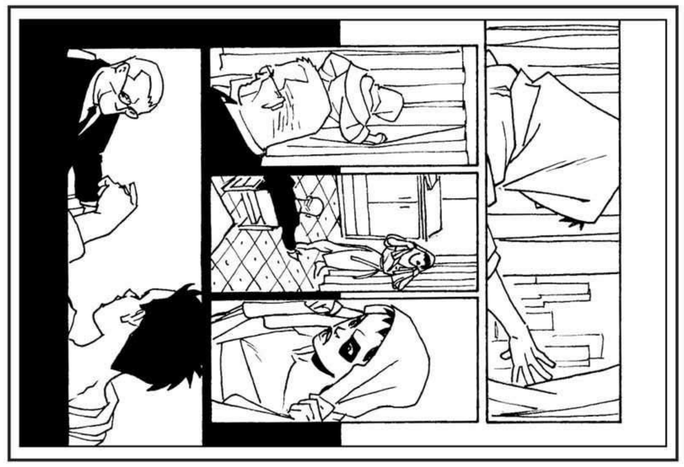


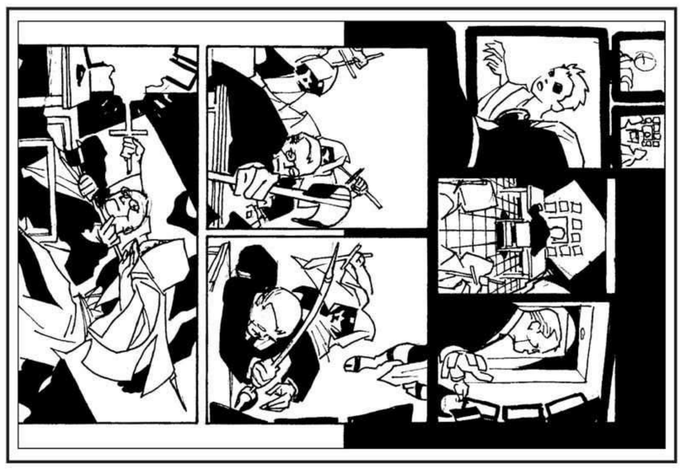


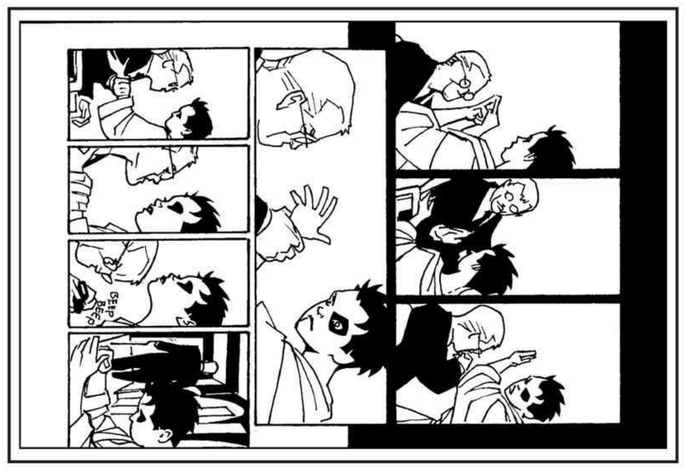














(Left) **SUPERGIRL**
Ink
DC Comics
2013

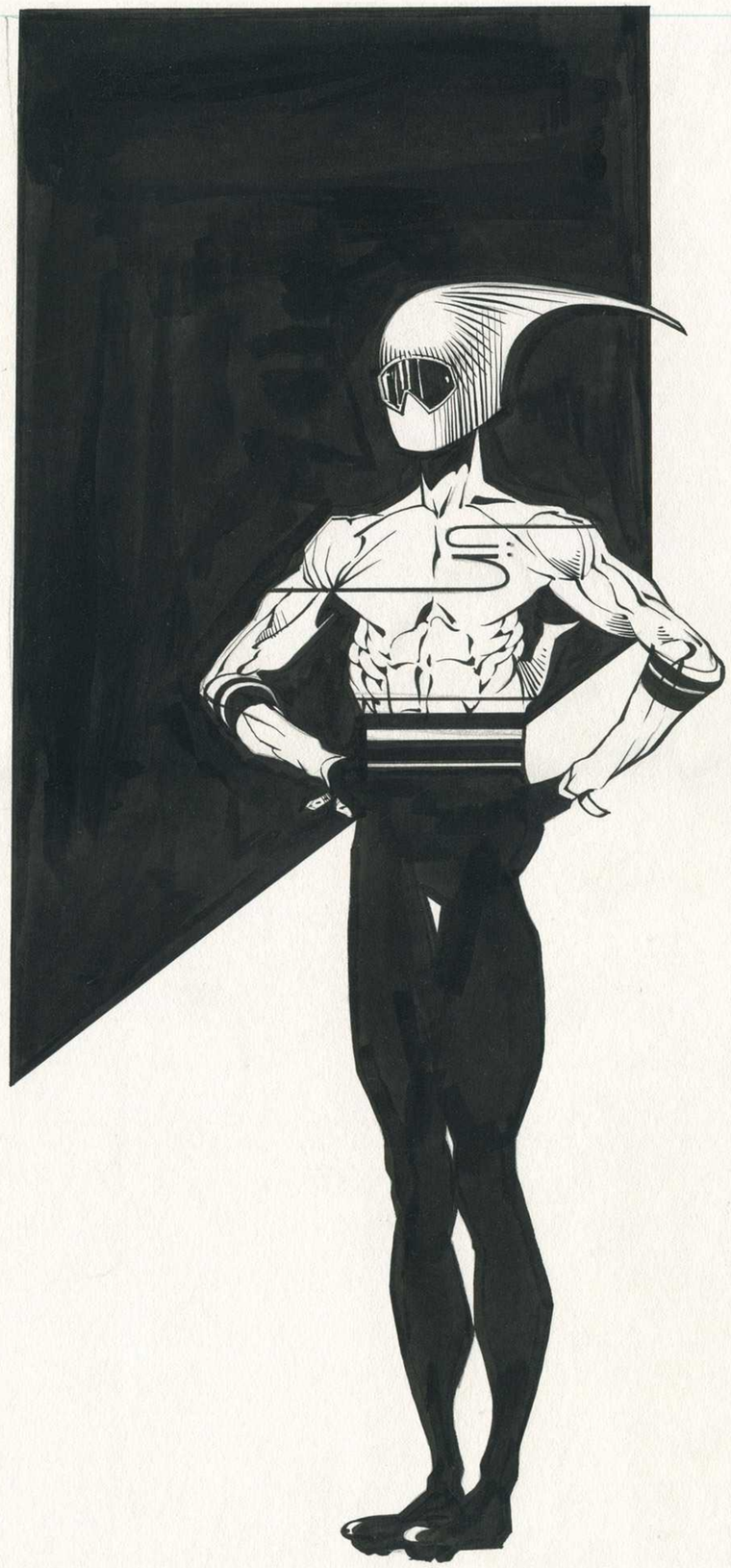
(Right) **ELEKTRA**
Ink
Marvel Comics
2013





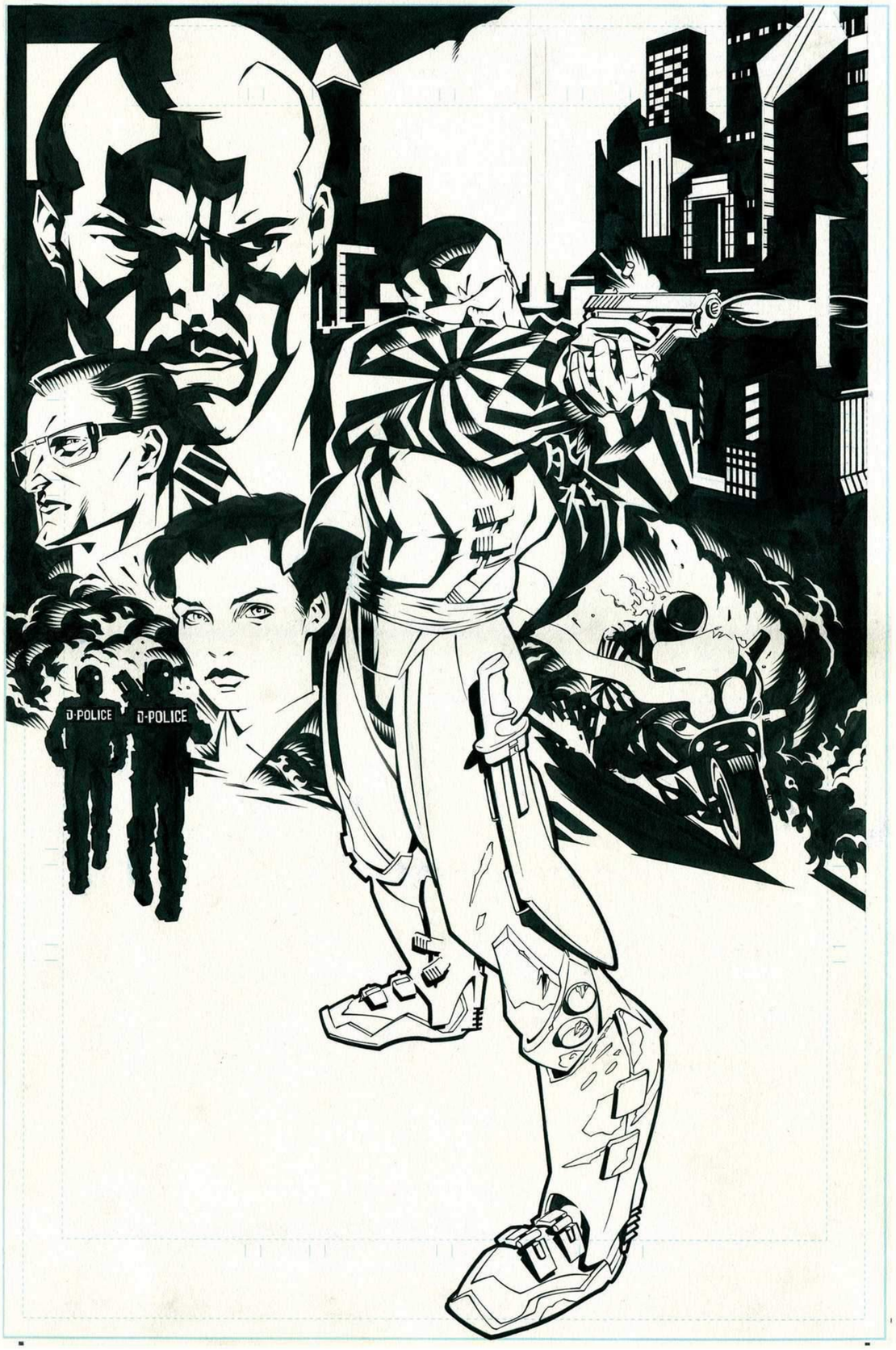
(Above) **CATWOMAN**
Ink
DC Comics
2011

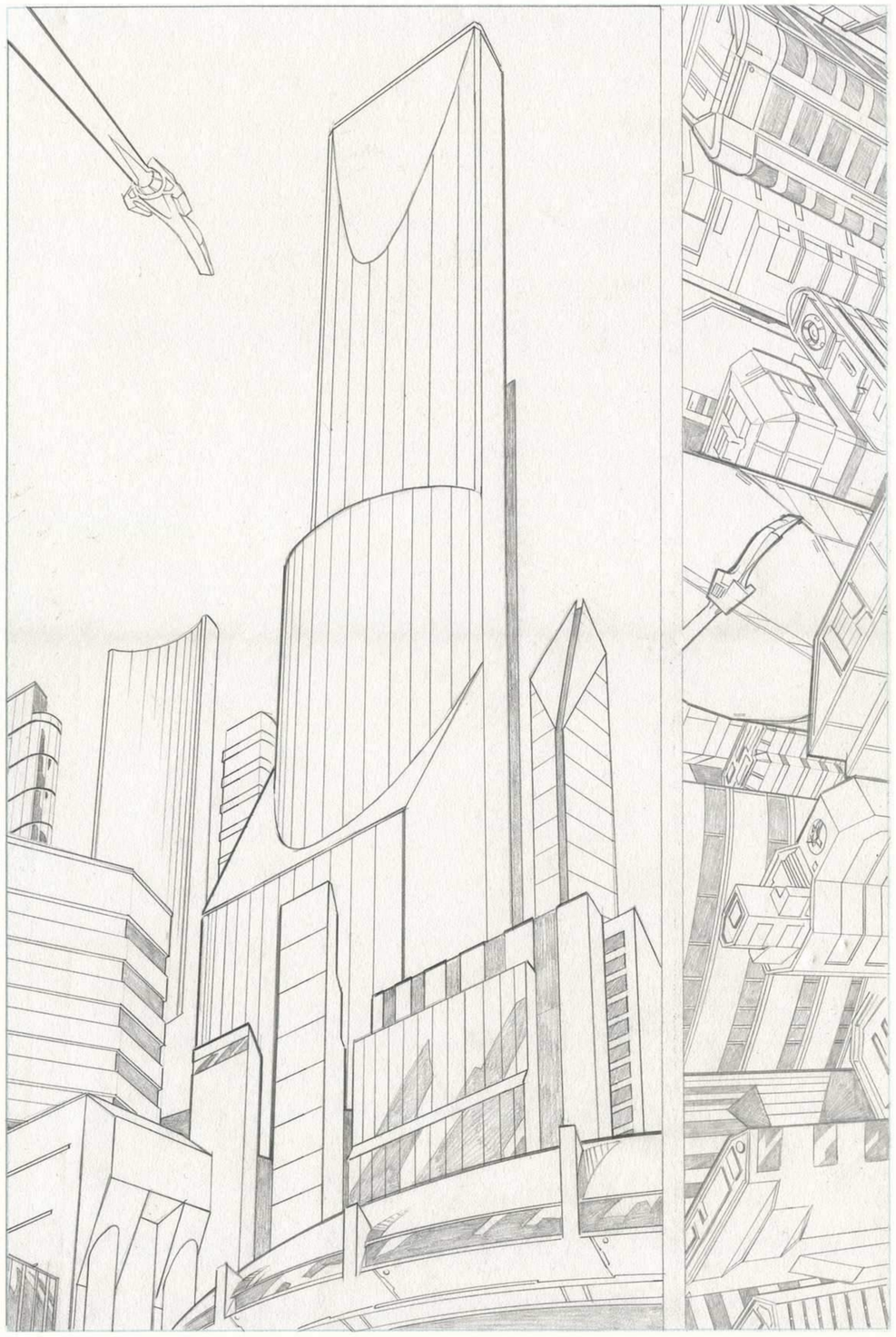
(Below) **VIOLA**
Ink
2010



(Left) **DIABOLICS CHARACTER DESIGN**
Ink
1985

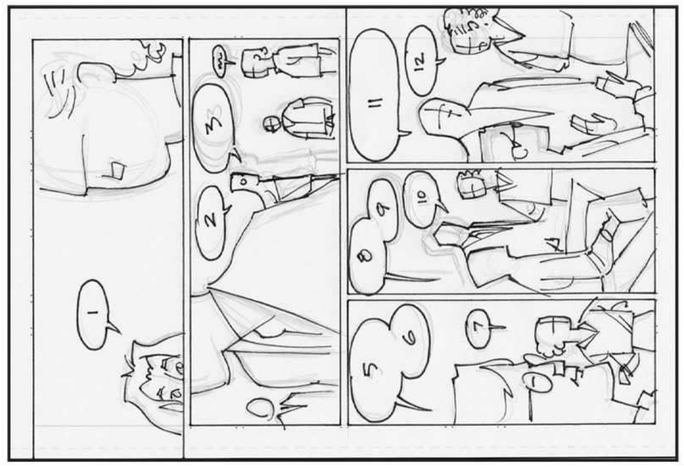
(Right) **CAPTAIN SPINNER CHARACTER DESIGN**
Ink
1984

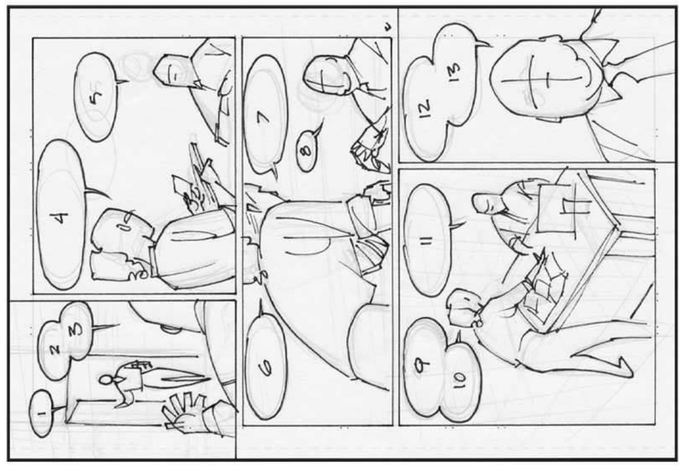


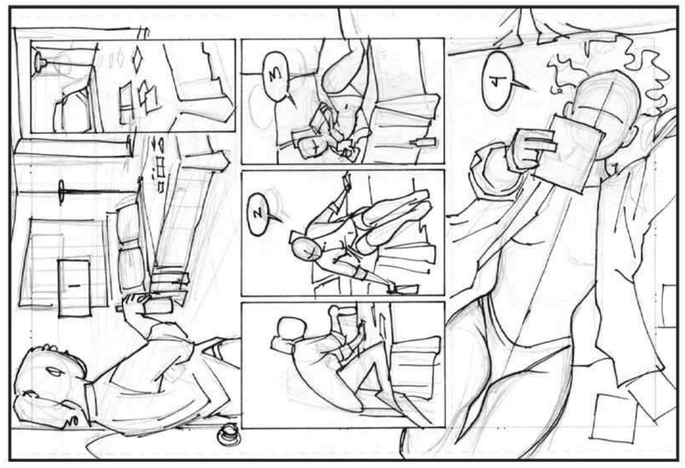


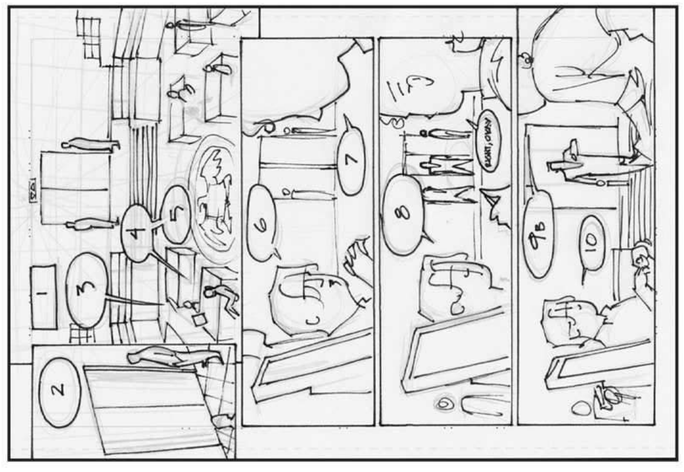
(Left) **MAXIMUM VELOCITY**
Back Cover
Ink
1991

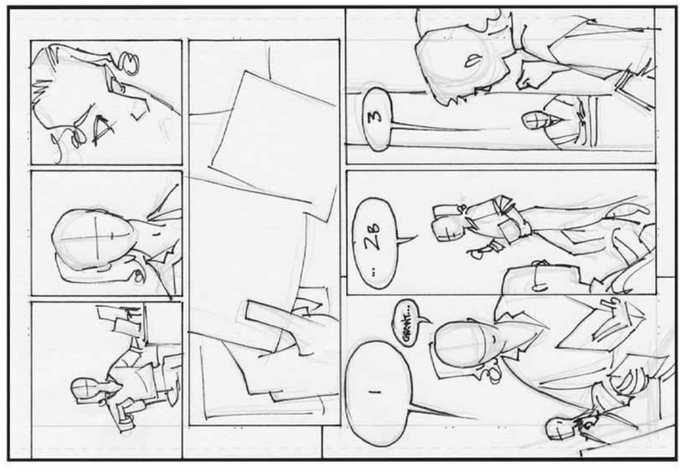
(Right) **MAXIMUM VELOCITY**
Unused first page
Pencil
1991

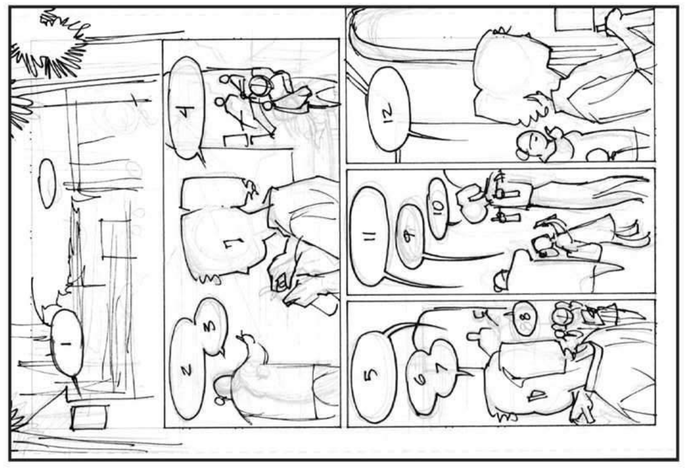


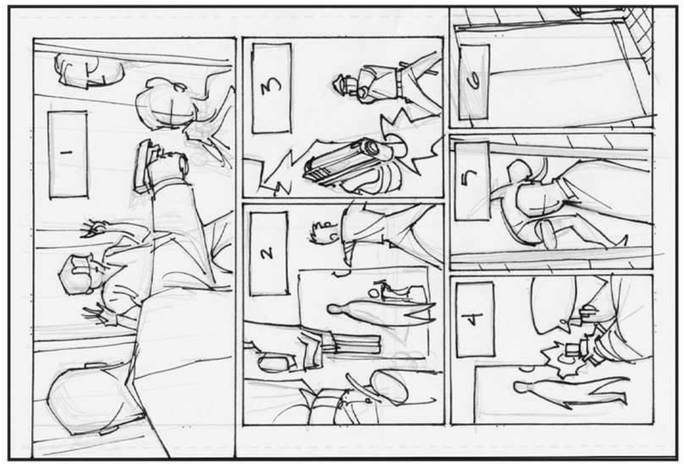


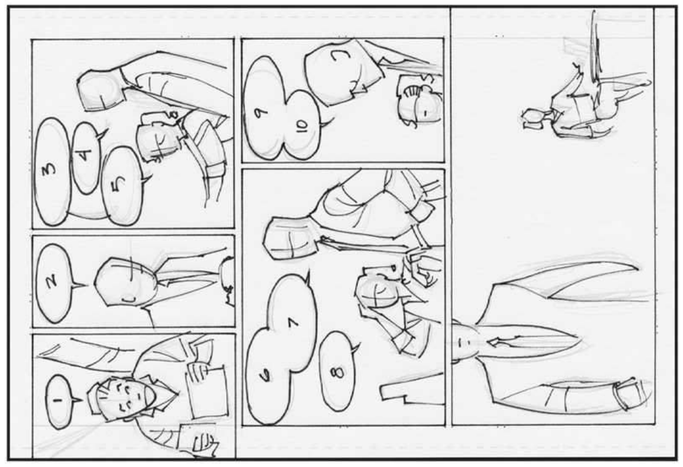


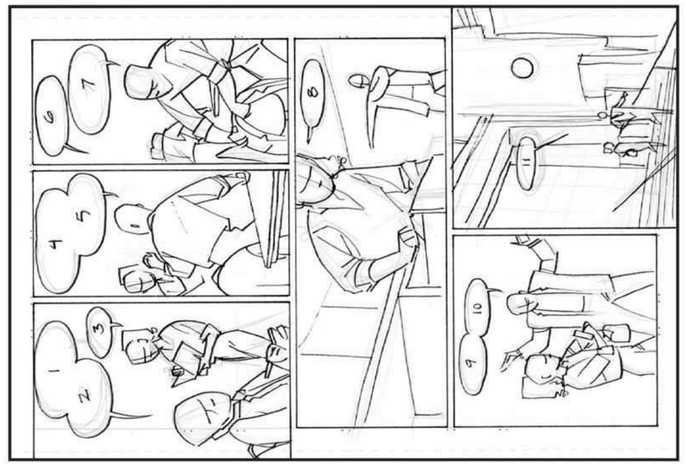


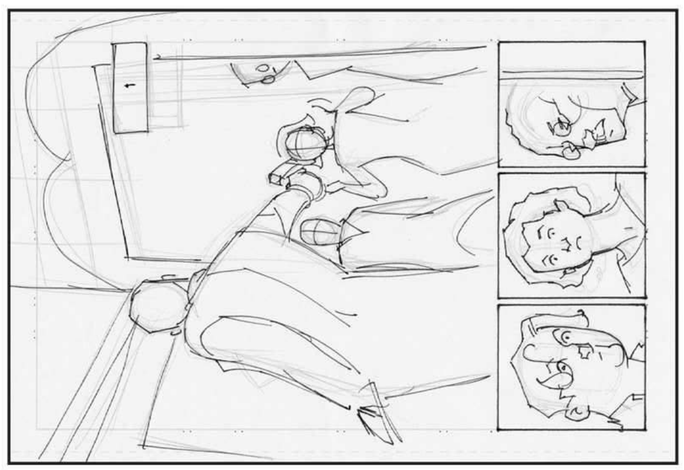


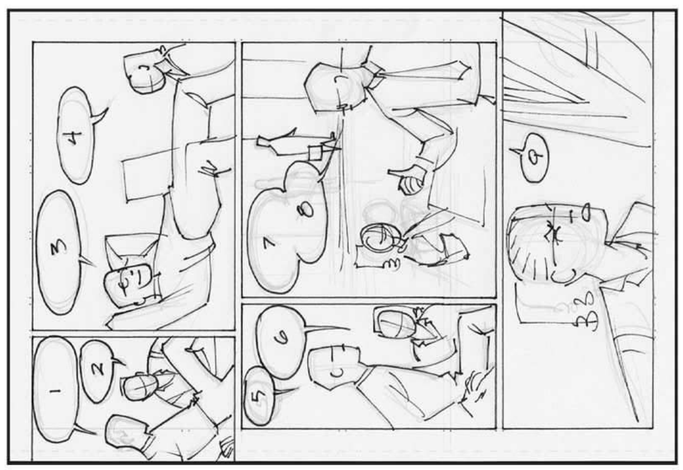


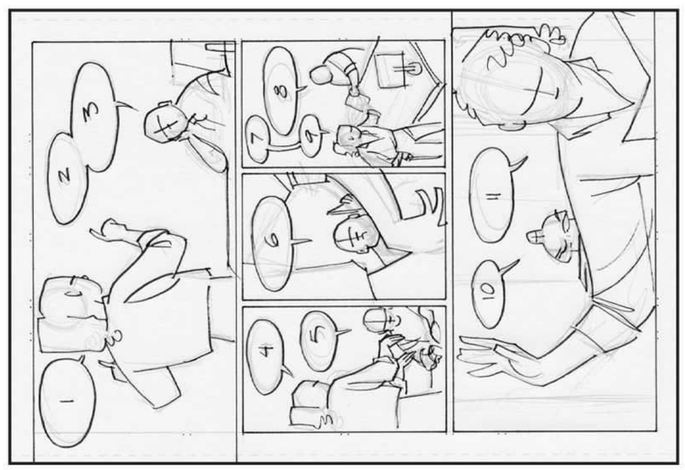




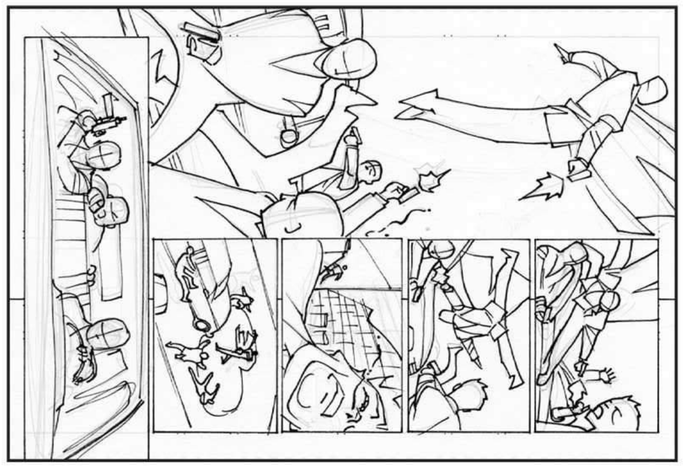


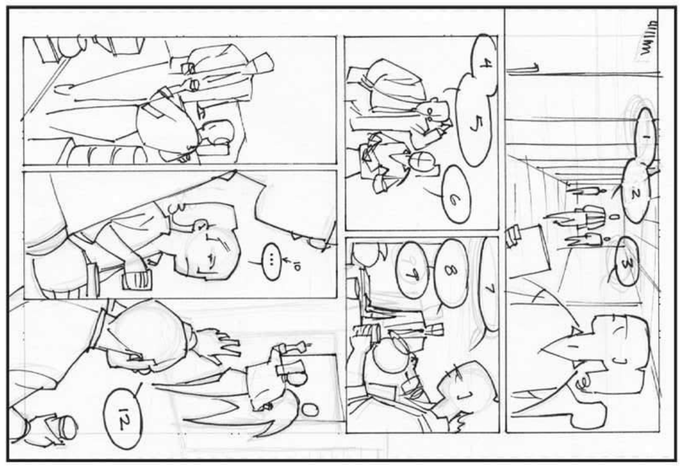


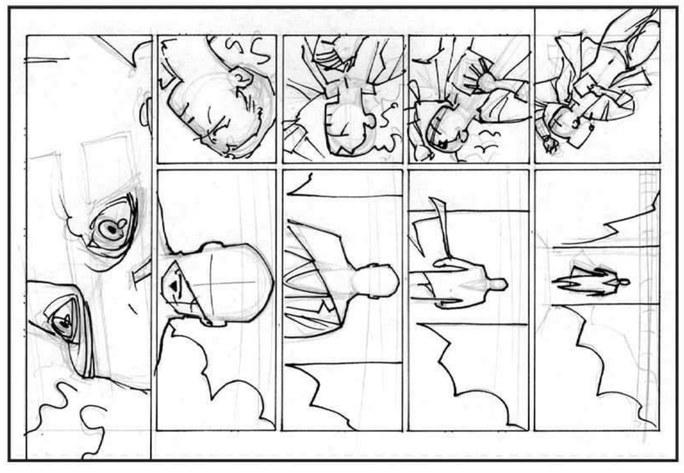


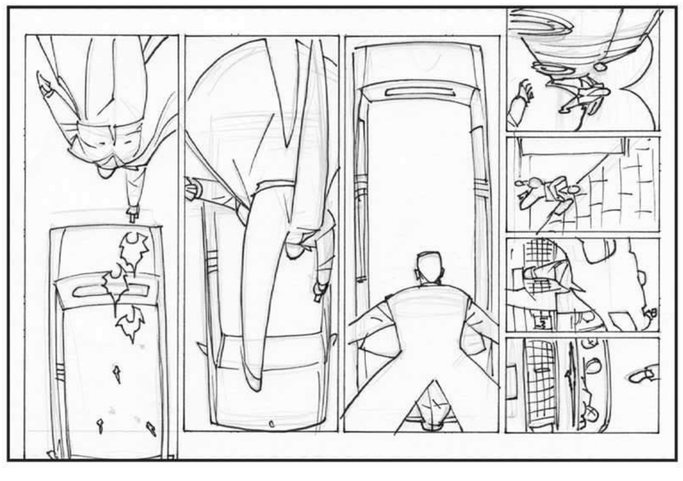


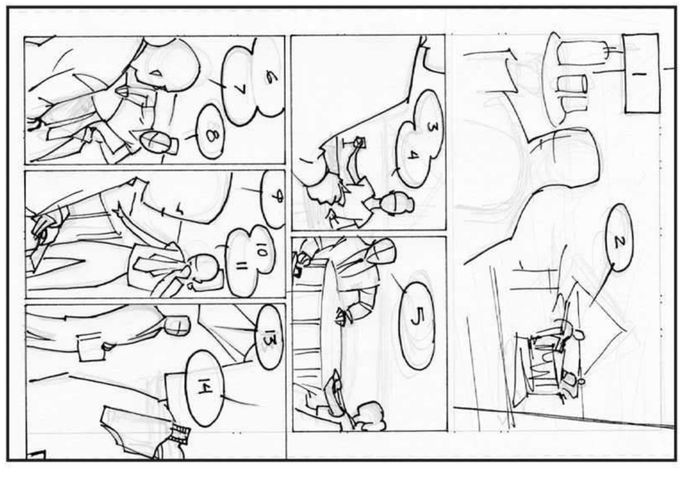
MATADOR #1 LAYOUTS
Pencil, Pitt marker
DC Comics
2005

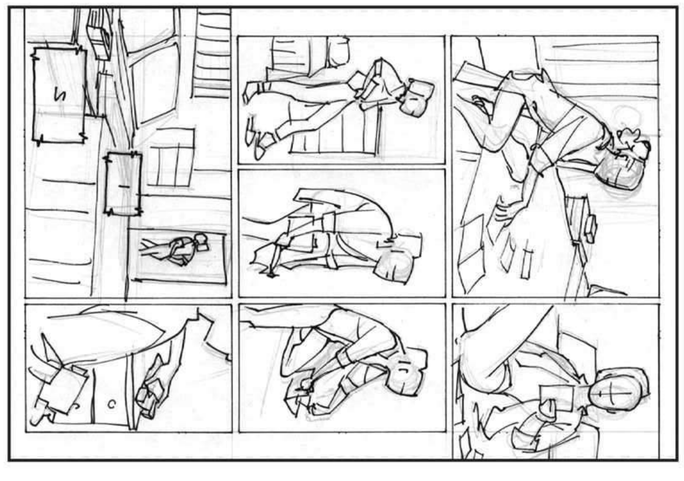


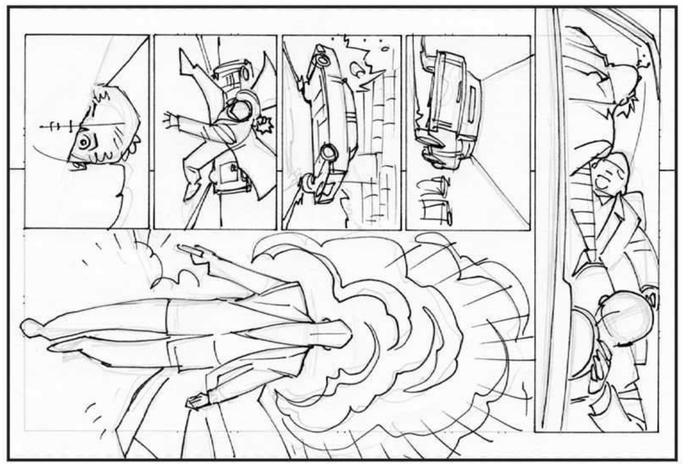


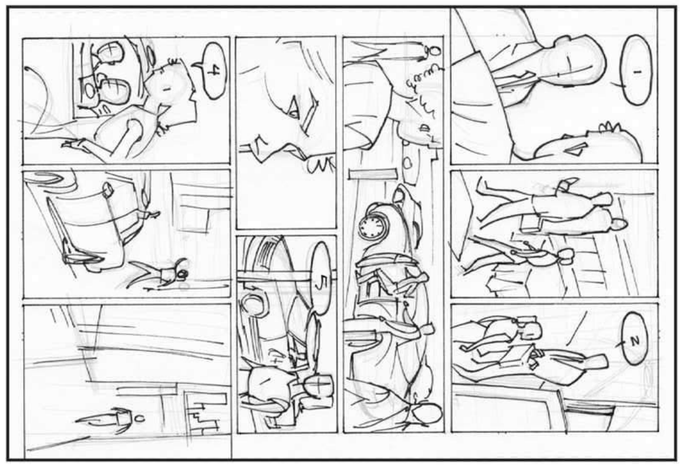


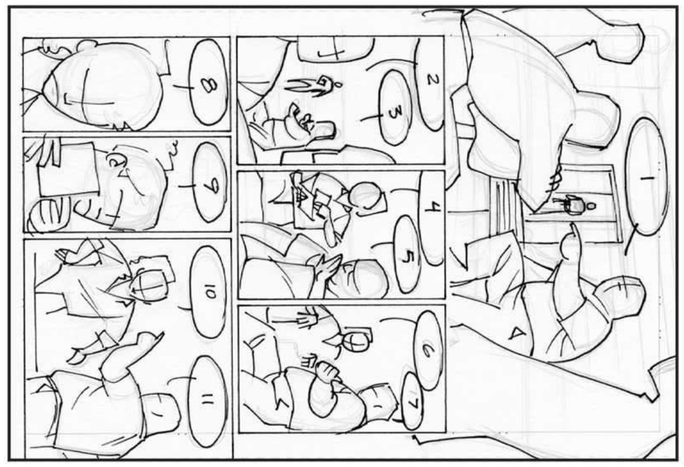


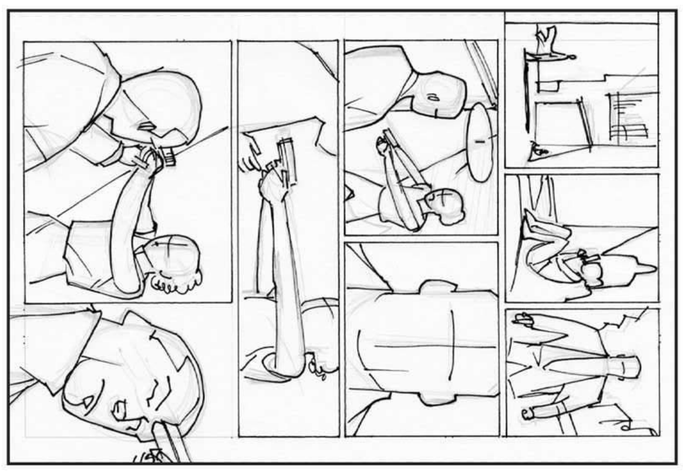


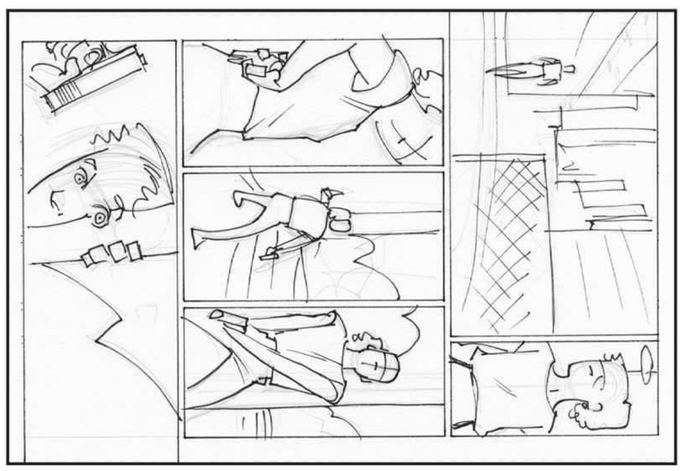


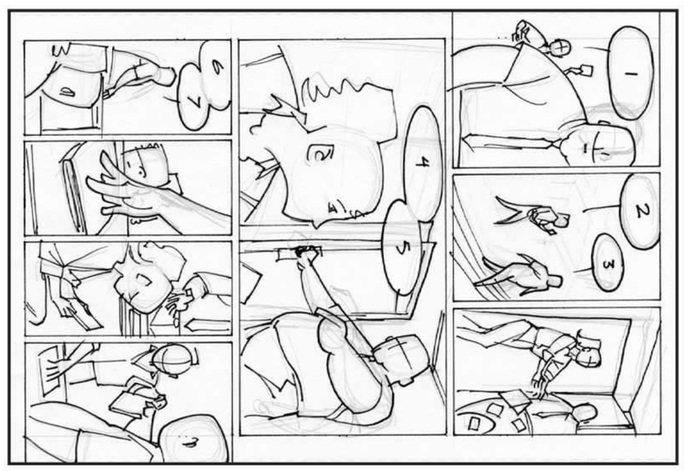














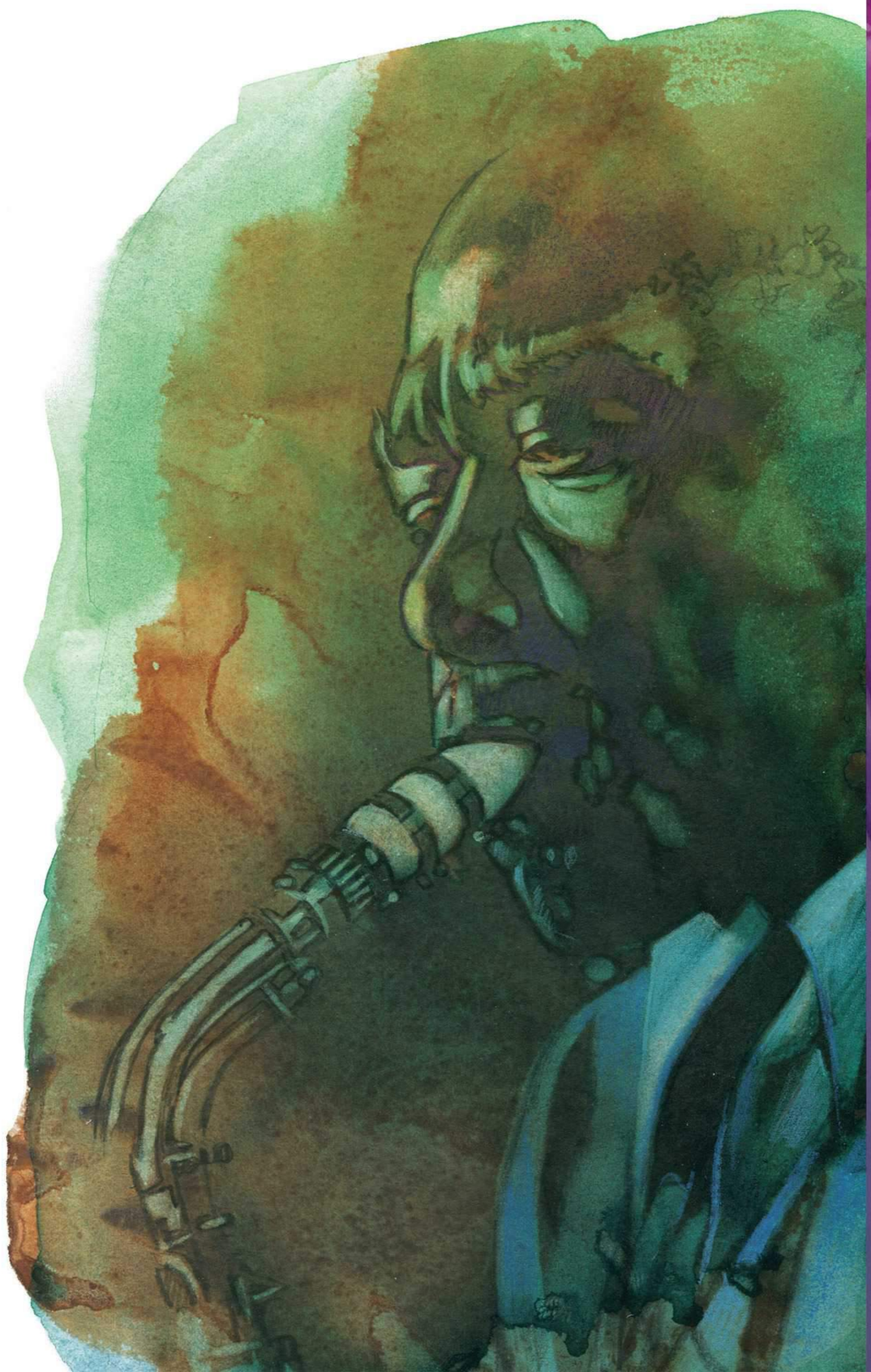
JERRY GARCIA
Col-erase pencil, ink
2011

ELEKTRA #35
Process Cover
Marvel Comics
2004



THELONIUS MONK
Watercolor, gouache
2015





(Left) **MUDDY WATERS**
Ink wash
2015

(Right) **CHARLIE PARKER**
Acrylic, gouache
2015



THE MAGIC OF MASTERY

I am awed by mastery. Be it a luthier hand-crafting the perfect archtop guitar or a parkour runner effortlessly gliding over rooftops, there is something about mastery of a craft that I find, in the truest sense of the word, awesome. There is something otherworldly about it. Something magical, even supernatural. There is sorcery at work and it is easy for the rest of us to look upon those gifted few with confused wonder as they channel the unfathomable. How does one come to hold dominion over such mysteries? I can't tell you.

But Brian Stelfreeze can. And that is what sets him above and beyond.

During a recent San Diego Comic-Con, he and I shared a hotel room. As I spent an afternoon relaxing from a busy morning at the show, Brian sat at the desk, diligently working. We were getting close to wrapping up the final issues of *Day Men* and so our conversation focused on storytelling. What we liked, what influenced us, what work inspired us. And, as any discussion with Brian will be, it was enlightening. But what impressed me most that afternoon wasn't our talk. It was the parade of artists who came to the room and the conversations they had with Brian. These were not newcomers looking for ways to break into the industry. These were established artists, people considered to be the best in the industry, all seeking his guidance.

Brian's talents go far beyond his ability to make beautiful art. He is a master storyteller, an inspiring teacher, and a generous mentor. He is a learned man with few equals and certainly no betters. And when his acolytes come before him, begging the great sorcerer for his secrets, he doesn't cast them back down the mountain. Instead, he lays bare his spellbook and bids them feast upon his knowledge.

—MICHAEL ALAN NELSON
Writer: *Day Men, Hexed, Supergirl*

THE MASTER AT WORK

You can't help but feel like you're playing with house money.

It gives you a little bit of swagger. It's like playing bass with Eric Clapton next to you on lead guitar. Or having David Ortiz batting in your lineup. Or walking into a rowdy saloon with your pal Wyatt Earp. Creating a brand new comic book series, a brand new mythology, is a rare experience when Brian Stelfreeze is the artist.

In my time as an editor—and specifically as the Editor-in-Chief of BOOM! Studios—I've had the pleasure of working with more amazing artists than I can count. I work with comic book art and comic book *artists* virtually every day of my life. So it's easy to recognize when you're working with a master, when you're dealing with somebody special. And Brian is just that.

Take away all the accolades, the decades of experience, the career highlights, and what you're left with is a thinking man's artist. He's a visual storyteller in a true sense of the phrase. His talent is unimpeachable; his style bleeds cool. We know this. But there's a commitment to storytelling that makes Brian the artist that he is.

When we worked on *Day Men*, it was the first long-form series Brian had drawn in over seven years. He said once, and I'm paraphrasing, that he believes sequential art and the extended story is the true hallmark of comic book art. The monthly grind will "test your mettle." There comes a time when you have to get back in that saddle. It's not easy to answer the call, and some artists don't. Many reach a point in their careers where it's easier to survive on the occasional single image or one-shot. But Brian understands that it's the endurance and the pain and the burden of commitment that will really tell you where you're at as an artist, and ultimately define your career. So I'm sure it came as a surprise to exactly nobody who knows him that Brian journeyed back into the gauntlet of long-form storytelling. It was inevitable. He's an artist's artist.

The thing you have to understand about Brian is that he possesses the vocabulary to communicate why he does what he does. It's not simple to do, nor is it commonplace. He can actually break down the theory behind his choices and the craft he uses to achieve them. There's secrets and knowledge to be found in his art, if you're looking. Because there's one more thing that Brian is...

Brian Stelfreeze is a teacher. And class is always in session.

—MATT GAGNON
Editor-in-Chief, BOOM! Studios
Writer/Creator: *Day Men*



ACCIDENTS AND PROMISES

I owe my career to an accident of timing, miscommunication, and a group of wise old men.

In the early ‘80s, I was a student at the Art Institute of Atlanta, and in pursuit of a career in the field of illustration. I started getting restless during my second year of school and decided to seek a professional opinion of my portfolio. After almost an entire day of rejections, an art director put me in touch with an illustration studio, Whole Hog Studios. One week later I was there for my scheduled appointment and eager for a review, but I was offered a job instead. It seemed the studio had an opening for a new member and in the process of reviewing portfolios to fill that position. I had no prior knowledge of this, but of course I accepted and started work immediately. Bob Boyd, the head of the studio, later said he hired me not necessarily for the quality of my work, but more for the promise my portfolio showed.

It was a gift to stand in their court and receive what seemed like endless torrents of information. A font of amassed knowledge of picture-making techniques passed from one generation of illustrators to the next, and I was becoming a link in that great chain.

This started a journey in education and experience that continues to this day. The illustrators in that studio taught me far more than I could learn at any school or university, and equipped me with the best tools for a perpetual career in the field. It is impossible to return their generosity, so I try to pay it forward.

Now, I make it a point to pass on this knowledge, and always take a moment to review student’s work and answer any questions they may have. I’ve been on the adventure they wish to start, and I’ve taken ample notes along the way. I believe this too fulfills part of that promise.

—BRIAN STELFREEZE







Brian Stelfreeze is the quintessential "artist's artist"—celebrated by his peers and readers alike for his stunning, decades-long illustration career, ranging from his seminal cover work for DC's *Shadow of the Bat* to his heralded run on Marvel's *Black Panther* with author Ta-Nehisi Coates. Documented in exquisite detail with never-before-seen sketches, fan-favorite classic pieces, and commentary from colleagues, collaborators, and Stelfreeze himself, *The Signature Art of Brian Stelfreeze* provides fans with an unprecedented look behind the drawing board to truly see a master at work.

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