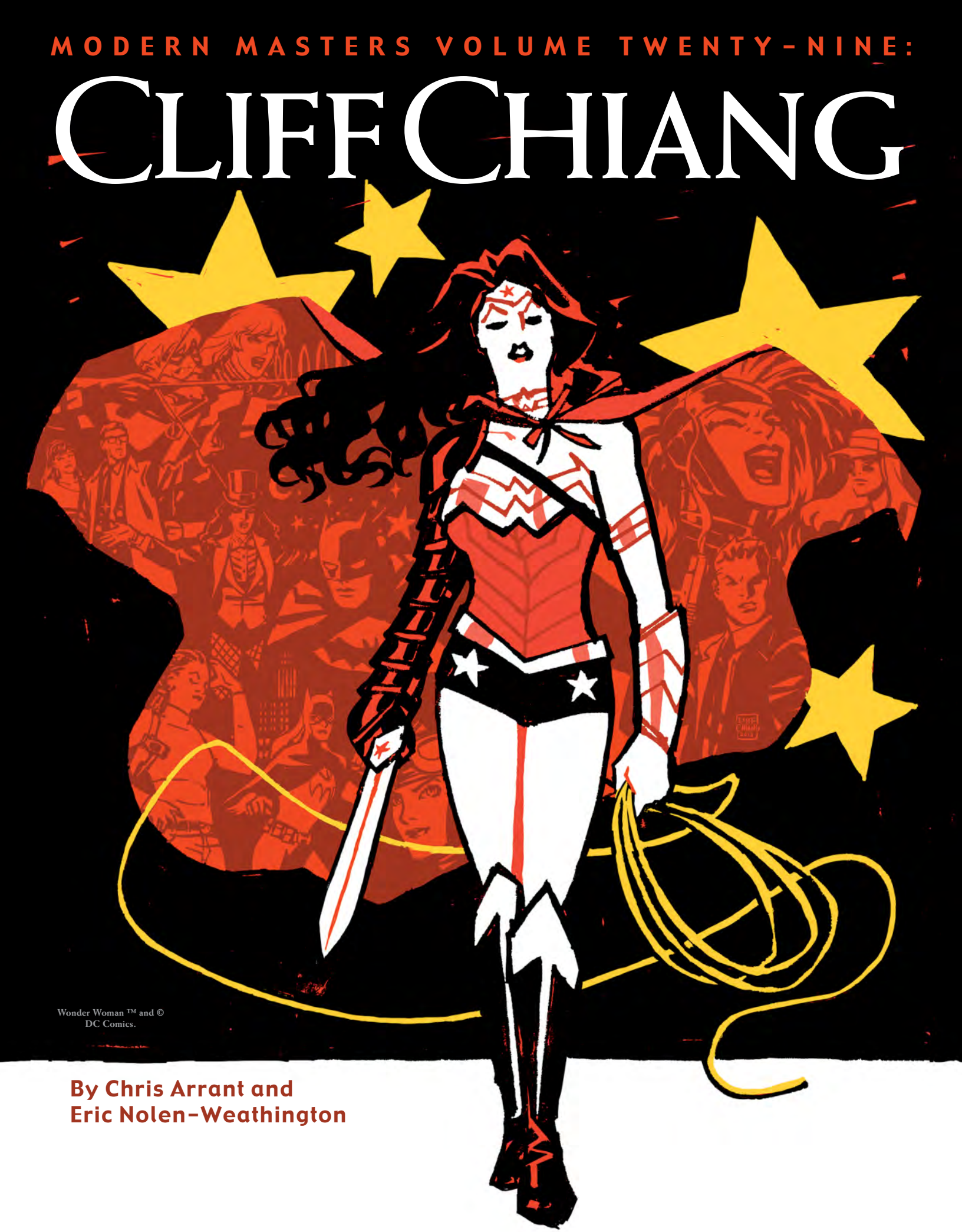
MODERN MASTERS VOLUME TWENTY-NINE:

CLIFF CHIANG



Wonder Woman ™ and © DC Comics.

By Chris Arrant and Eric Nolen-Weathington

Modern Masters Volume Twenty-Nine:

CLIFF CHIANG

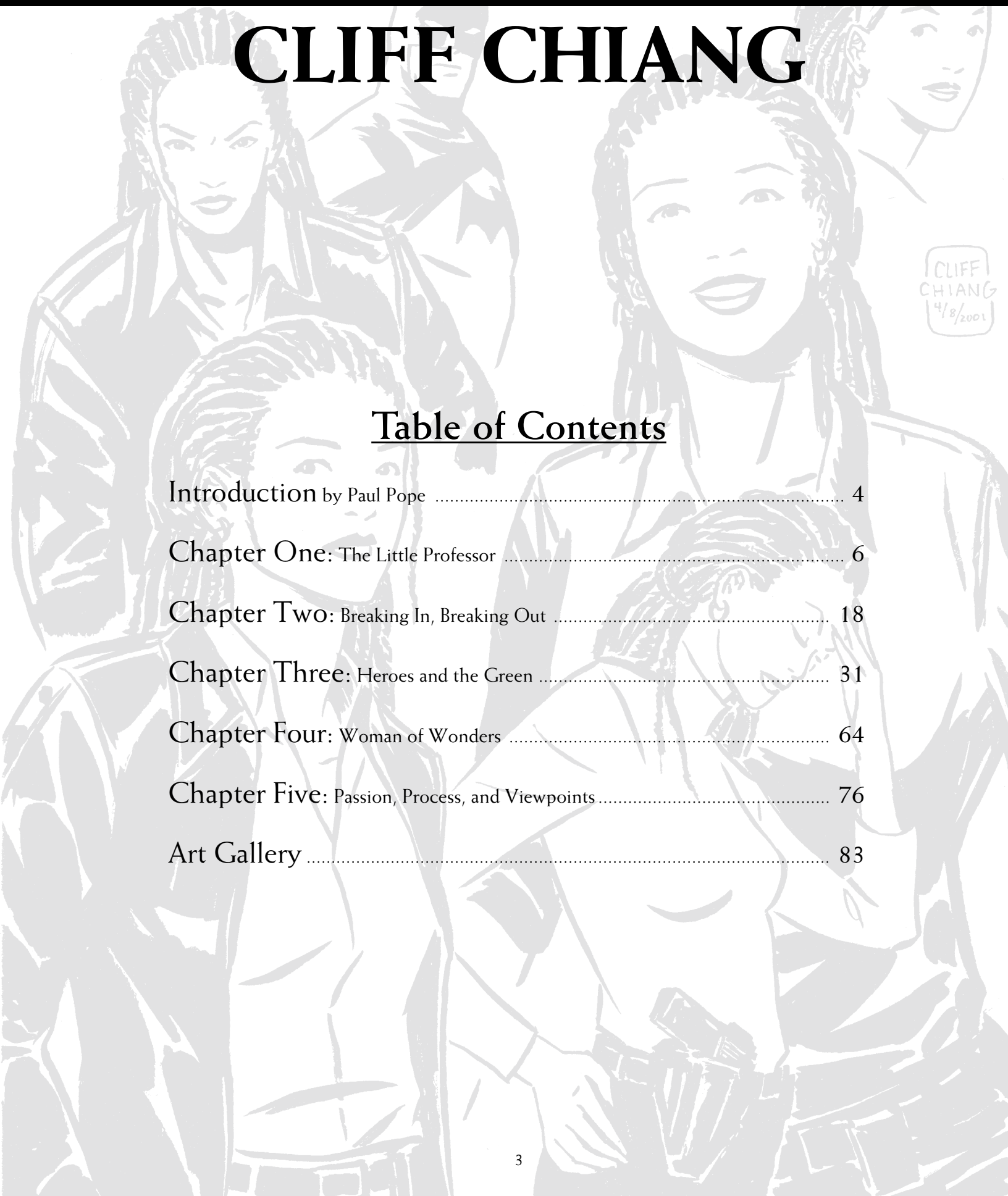


Table of Contents

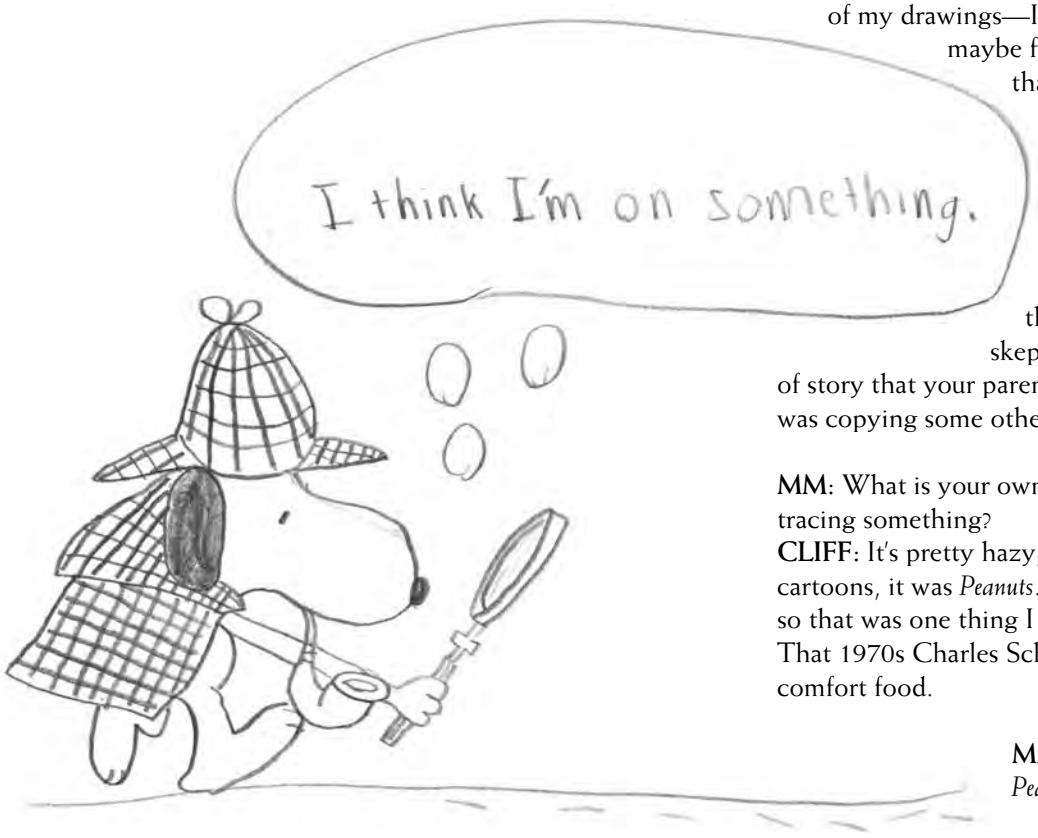
Part 1: The Little Professor

MODERN MASTERS: Tell us about the young Cliff Chiang. When and where were you born?
CLIFF CHIANG: I grew up in New Jersey, but I was born in Manhattan in 1974. I pretty much lived in the suburbs for most of my life until becoming an adult.

My earliest memory of anything relating to comics would be watching cartoons. I watched a lot of television as a kid when my grandparents or neighbors babysat me while my parents went to work in New York. My grandparents didn't really speak that much English, so I conversed with them in sort of broken Taiwanese and watched a lot of TV. I remember watching *Speed Racer*, *Sesame Street*, and *Electric Company*.

MM: What did your parents do for a living in New York?
CLIFF: My dad was a civil engineer. He'd work on things like hydroelectric dams. My mom worked in the financial department for Pan Am Airlines. That's what she ended up doing as a career, but she'd been a music major and had gotten her Master's in education to teach music as well. Once she got married, it seemed less practical for her to do that though.

MM: Even though she didn't end up doing it as a living, was music a big part of your household?



CLIFF: Yeah, there was always a piano in the house—a pretty large grand piano actually. She would play it, and I'd always hear her singing. She was an opera singer too, when she came over in the 1960s. She performed with—I think it was called the New York Opera. One of her mentors was encouraging her to go pro and get an agent. Apparently there was some interest from a record company to sign her, but it meant she would have to tour a lot, and my dad didn't like that. She'd given birth to my older brother already, and I was on the way soon. It just didn't seem like a good idea to them at the time. She put all of that on hold and basically became an accountant.

MM: You mentioned an older brother. How many children are in your family?
CLIFF: I have a brother six years older than me, and another brother four years younger.

MM: Are there family stories of you drawing as a child that they look to as evidence of your later career?
CLIFF: My mom claims that I was always drawing from an early age, but I don't remember when I started drawing or how much I really drew. It's something you just do as a kid, you know? All kids draw and mess around with paper.

She tells a story where one of her friends looked at one of my drawings—I was only a couple of years old, maybe four at the oldest. They noticed that I was drawing airplanes, but I was drawing them in some sort of primitive perspective. You weren't getting a flat airplane. The wing was kind of disappearing behind the fuselage, and her friend was surprised by that. "There's something going on here." I'm really skeptical of that. It sounds like the kind of story that your parents tell—tall tales. I'm guessing that I was copying some other drawing.

MM: What is your own earliest memory of drawing or tracing something?
CLIFF: It's pretty hazy, but along with watching a lot of cartoons, it was *Peanuts*. I was really big on Snoopy as a kid, so that was one thing I would read all the time and draw. That 1970s Charles Schulz hits me in a weird spot; it's like comfort food.

MM: Do you still feel that way toward *Peanuts*?

CLIFF: Yeah, I recently bought a lot of those great collections from Fantagraphics, but I stopped once they hit the 1980s when I wasn't reading that stuff anymore. I read a lot of *Peanuts*. I would pick up those little paperback collections in airport bookstores. Because my mom worked for Pan Am, we'd get employee discounts, so we'd go to Disney World every year. Sometimes we'd travel internationally, but every summer we took some sort of vacation where we were flying, so I had lots of opportunities to hit airport bookstores, and I tried to pick up as many consecutive *Peanuts* volumes as I could to try to follow the stories.

MM: Is that your first memory of reading comics—the *Peanuts* strip collections?
CLIFF: Yeah, it probably is.

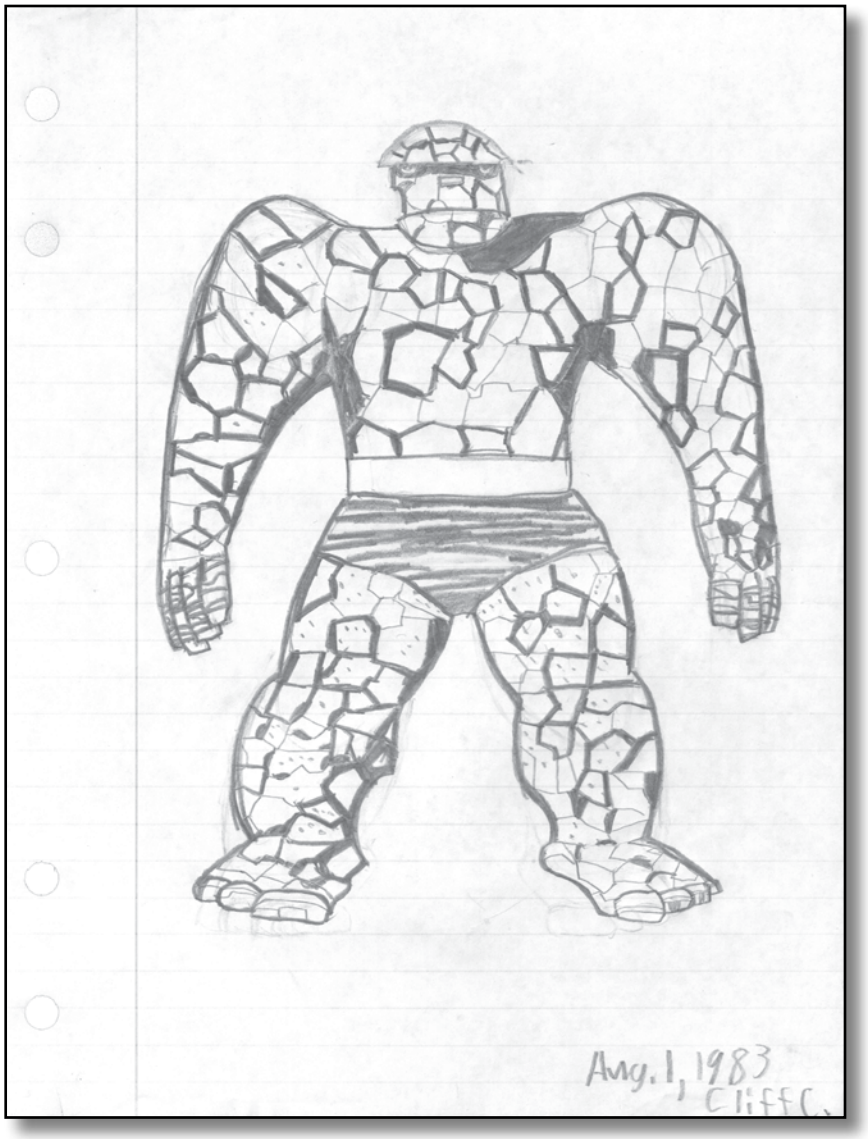
MM: Do you remember the point where you transitioned into comic books?
CLIFF: We didn't have comics around the house for a while. I remember going to a family friend's house and meeting their kids for the first time. It was kind of awkward because we had nothing in common and our parents just expected us to hang out. They were a little bit older, and they had a couple of comics lying around. There was an *Iron Man* comic, and it was pretty magical—the colors. Maybe I had caught some of those cheesey 1960s Marvel cartoons in reruns, because I had some inkling of what those characters were, but seeing the actual comic and getting to look at it….

The kid was older, probably a teenager, and he had the comics on a table. I picked up the *Iron Man* comic and said, "Can I have this?" He said, "What do you mean, 'have it'? Do you want to take it?" I didn't understand, because I just wanted to borrow it so I could draw from it in another room. Once I explained that to him, he was like, "Oh, yeah, sure. No problem." And I think that made comics seem more special seeing his reaction of not wanting to give it up.

I just wanted to look at it more in-depth. That was the first comic I saw. It wasn't until a few years later that my older brother Joe started buying them. He was probably in high school at that point. So I was reading what he was reading. This was 1983, or so, and the first comics he brought home were *Uncanny X-Men* and *Fantastic Four*.

MM: With that *Iron Man* comic, you said you wanted to examine it further, but you also mentioned wanting to draw it. Were you actively processing the art by redrawing the comics? Did that help you understand it?
CLIFF: I never really thought about that to be honest. Probably, yeah, taking things and redrawing them was a way of assimilating it. I never really made that connection before. Part of me felt like I could own that comic by bringing that drawing home with me.

MM: Did you have a special place you drew, or special pencils or paper you used only for drawing when you were at this age?
CLIFF: No. There was always lots of office paper. Dad would bring back old letterhead from work. Actually, because of his job there were lots of pencils and erasers—not normal pencils with the pink eraser tip, but the blue Ticonderoga drafting pencils and the classic gum erasers—graph paper, protractors, compasses, and rulers that my dad always had around.



Previous Page: Snoopy is on the case in this 1983 drawing.
Above: Another of Cliff's childhood drawings from 1983, this one featuring The Thing hot on the heels of Cliff's first exposure to *Fantastic Four*.

Dad worked a lot, and we didn't really entertain a lot, so the dining room kind of became this mass of blueprints and pencils and pens and notes and notebooks. But I could use his pencils and mess around with some old graph paper, although I didn't like drawing on the graph paper.

MM: After your brother started bringing comics into the house in 1983, did you become much of a comic collector yourself? Did you have a stack that you would read and reread?

CLIFF: We had a limited budget for comics. In fact, there was no budget for comics at first, when we were getting into it. My brother brought back an issue of *Uncanny X-Men*, and it's funny because the first *X-Men* comics I ever read are still my favorite. Part of that is nostalgia, and part of that is that they're Paul Smith issues. He brought back that and an issue of *Fantastic Four*, which John Byrne was writing and drawing, and those were just so great.

Right after he brought those home we went on one of the few road trips we took to Florida. I think my parents had grown tired of the idea of flying there for some reason. So we were on this 20-hour car trip from New Jersey to Florida, and we stopped off as much as we could at every 7-11 along the way in order to find back issues and to make sure we didn't miss the new issues coming out. It wasn't so much about collecting as it was about wanting more of the story. Those comics were so great at implying a larger world and a larger backstory.

I think when you get interested, you're trying to inhale that stuff and get as much as you can. There were always compelling snippets in the dialogue. "Oh, so-and-so was in Japan," or references to Dark Phoenix. "Wow! That sounds really cool, and I have no idea who that is." [*laughter*] We just wanted to read as much of it as possible. It wasn't a habit yet, but we were begging money from our parents to buy comics. Luckily, they did not have any prejudice against comics. To them it was just reading, and they were happy with that.

MM: Was there any other art in the household? Were you being encouraged at home or in school to draw or work with clay or other mediums?

CLIFF: I was too young to recognize whether or not they were being supportive of it. As a kid, I would get engrossed in things really easily and kind of get lost in books, science, and things like that. My family would sometimes call me "the little professor." [*laughter*] I would play with calculators and things like that. There's definitely part of me that was into learning and reading.

MM: It seems like your parents were big into work and having a career. Was there a point where you realized there were people making comics for a living?

CLIFF: When I was reading comics, I was very aware of who was working on them. Once Paul Smith left *Uncanny X-Men*, I kept reading because I liked the characters, but I wasn't in love with the art anymore. I'd buy anything John Byrne did; I followed him to *Alpha Flight*. So I was always aware there were people who had jobs in comics, but I don't think I actually thought of it as a possible profession for me. I didn't think about what I was going to do as an adult; I was living in the moment. You know when you ask young kids what they want to do, and they'll tell you crazy things like, "I want to be an astronaut," or, "I want to be a firefighter"? I don't think I could have answered that. I liked drawing; I liked science; I liked reading. Comics was a hobby. The idea of guys making money drawing these things was the furthest thing from my mind.

MM: At what point did you first think you wanted to do comics—not necessarily as a career, but—

CLIFF: I would say that I never really considered art as an actual career until I was out of college. It was always a possibility, but I never actively pursued it or did anything to make it a reality.

MM: Can you describe yourself as a teenager? Did you have a job or any special extracurricular activities?

CLIFF: I did really well in school, so they always put me in "gifted" programs with lots of testing. One of the results of that was going away to a sleep-away summer school for a couple of years, if our family's finances allowed.

One program was the CTY academic summer camp at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania. I would take a math class in the morning for three hours, then an English

class in the afternoon for three hours. There would be activities in the evenings, and every weekend there'd be a dance. You would socialize with other nerds, get crushes—the same kind of things that happen at every summer camp only you'd have to pay more and you'd get a certificate at the end.

But the good thing about it was that it prepared me for being on my own in college. It wasn't like I was being thrown into the deep end of the pool as far as having to manage your own time. "Oh, I remember this." And you'd meet smart kids who were into Dungeons & Dragons and who you could talk with about comics. And we'd go to the university bookstore and see the weird stuff they were selling. There were a lot of comics at the camps.

I got out of comics around the time I hit eighth grade. I became much more interested in hanging out with my friends and trying to talk to girls. I think my younger brother might have kept up his subscriptions.

MM: Comics or not, did you keep drawing in high school?
CLIFF: I had some mandatory art classes at some point. I took one that was ostensibly advertising art. I learned how to do paste-ups with rubber cement. It was almost a trade class, but I kept drawing, and the teacher was very encouraging. I enjoyed it when I was in class, but I didn't do a lot of drawing at home really.

MM: Not that you were working to become a practicing artist, but do you remember any breakthroughs during that time? Did you take any figure drawing classes?
CLIFF: I liked reading, and I'd get a lot of magazines. When I was younger, there was a kids' magazine called *Dynamite* that had, for several months, excerpts on how to draw comics by Joe Kubert. This was probably around the time he was starting the Kubert School. I saw these, and I was fascinated, because, as a kid, you don't know where to start drawing comics; all you see is the finished drawing. How to get from A to B is a complete mystery, but I looked at this thing, and it was the classic spheres and cylinders to build up a mannequin figure, then adding details to it. By looking at that, I realized, "Oh, it doesn't show up out of thin air. You can build these things to make them look solid." That was an eye-opener. Up to that point I would just draw the pictures and hope things worked okay.

MM: You said you got out of comics just before going into high school. Did you still see them from time to time? Was there still some interest there?
CLIFF: I got out of comics around the time the direct market started taking over, and it was getting harder to find them. The comics I was subscribing to got kind of crappy so I was losing interest. Every now and then we'd go to the mall, and there was a comic shop there—a dedicated direct-market comic shop. It was a lot like The Android's Dungeon from *The Simpsons*. [*laughter*] It was in the basement of the Bergen Mall for years. None of the shops wanted to be in the basement. It was dank and kind of moldy. [*laughter*] The shop was at the end of this dimly lit hallway. I'd go in there, and I remember seeing all these cool comics that I hadn't had access to—things like *Dark Knight Returns*, *Ronin*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. But the only place I could get them was at this mall—where

Previous Page: The first two comics Cliff's older brother Joe brought home: *Uncanny X-Men* #173 and *Fantastic Four* #259.
Above: A 2010 convention commission flashing back to the Death of Jean Grey storyline.

Part 2: Breaking In, Breaking Out

MM: You graduated in 1996, and your first job in comics was editing for *Disney Adventures* magazine. How'd you get from college to Disney?

CLIFF: After getting out of college, I worked for an advertising agency for six months. I knew that comics was a difficult field to get into, and it certainly wasn't guaranteed I would find my way into comics. So I applied to a minority recruitment program for advertising agencies, the idea being that agencies were a little too homogenous and they needed more people of color in order to function more effectively. A lot of agencies would hire smaller companies that specialize in the black community or other very specific cultural perspectives that you need to have to understand the psychology of those buyers, and this was a way to bring that diversity in-house.

So I came in as a junior graphic designer for a direct mailing company. I did six months of designing junk mail, like the inserts you get with your credit card statement. This wasn't interesting, creative stuff. I wanted to go to an ad agency and draw polar bears drinking Coke. It was a bad six months.

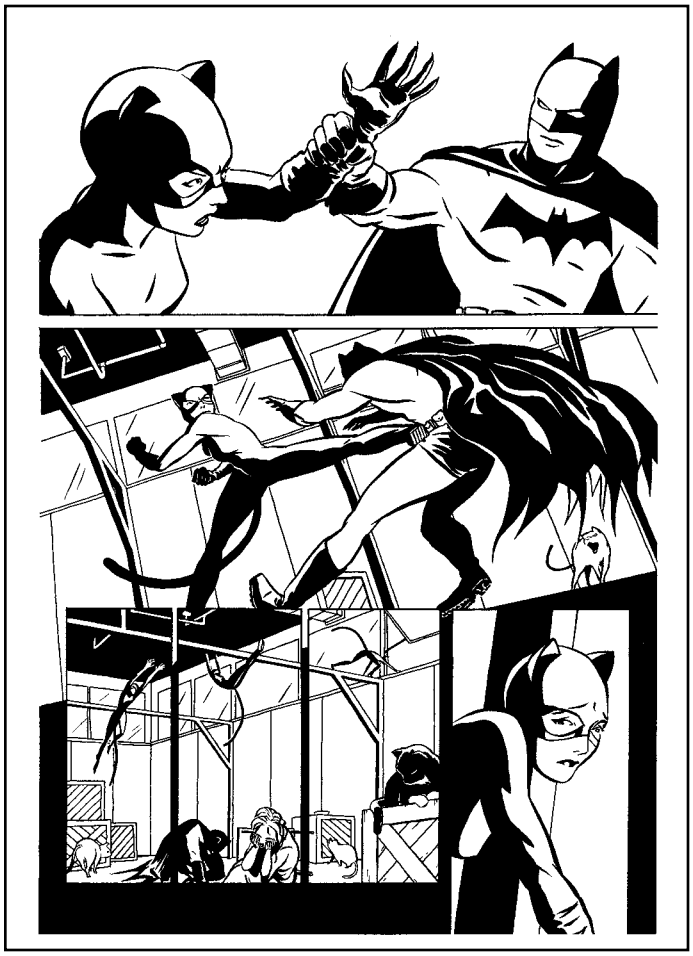
The summer before my senior year, I had interned at Marvel and at a gallery in SoHo called Thread Waxing Space, and spent time going back and forth between the two. You can't intern at Marvel unless you get college credit for it, and luckily I could. I interned at Marvel for Joey Cavelieri, who was working on the 2099 books at that point, and I met Matt Idelson, who was working next door assisting Ralph Macchio. I learned there how you put comics together.

I was Xeroxing a lot of the day. Penciled pages would come in from Humberto Ramos to then go out to an inker. Inked *Spider-Man 2099* pages would come in from Al Williamson. I had to mail comp copies out to Warren Ellis. I got a real sense of how the office worked, what editors needed from freelancers, and I got to see what full-size pencils looked like and what inks looked like.

Nobody talked to me. I barely ever talked with Joey, and it wasn't because he was being unfriendly, but with the pace of the office, everybody was just trying to get stuff in on deadline. I recognize that now, having worked at Vertigo and having had interns. You just need to give them busy work and get things off your table, and in your spare time you try to teach them something.

I'd work at Marvel that part of the week, and the other part of the week I'd go to these interesting art exhibits at Thread Waxing Space. I'd watch as the artists set up their installations, so I got this high/low, commercial/non-commercial education in art that summer. More importantly at the time, I went back to college that year with some contacts in the industry.

Joey knew that I wanted to draw. I brought in some horrible Daredevil sample pages while I was interning, and he ripped them apart—kindly. I remember working on them after the internship had ended. I had gotten my wisdom teeth taken out, so I was home for a few days on



painkillers. I had nothing to do, so I feverishly drew this over-rendered, two-page Daredevil sequence. I needed to finish it so I could show it to Joey the following week. I think he'd agreed to meet with me for dinner or lunch or something like that. Basically he said, "These aren't very good, but keep working at it."

That winter, Joey was let go as part of what was later called "Marvel-cution." I read about it online and my heart sank. "I guess I won't be working for Marvel." But he ended up at DC a few months later, and I stayed in contact with him. I told him, "I would like to work in comics. I know my art is not good enough, but I would like to get a job in editorial." Since he was just starting up his office at DC, I think there was an assistant spot, but it had just been filled. But he told me he would keep me in mind if he heard of any openings.

After six months of working at the ad agency, I got a call from Joey. "It's not at DC or Marvel, but my friend Heidi MacDonald is the editor of *Disney Adventures* magazine, and she needs an assistant. I recommended you. Go meet with Heidi and see what happens." I was super-psyched, because I was having a horrible time at the ad agency, watching the clock tick.

My favorite part of that ad job was not even one of my duties: I would make comps of fold-outs and things like that, and try to get as creative as possible. They had a whole dedicated bullpen department of guys with rubber cement, X-Acto knives, and cardboard that would put together what the envelopes should look like, inserts and things like that. We were pitching to American Airlines, so I made this cool folder that looked a little bit like an airplane, and I was trying to come up with all these kitschy die-cuts. It was for a pitch meeting, so they wanted it as flashy as possible. That was my favorite part of the job, and I was not supposed to be doing it, but there were always turnaround problems getting things from these guys, so I would just go down there and do them myself.

Anyway, I met with Heidi, and she was great. She asked me, "Why do you want to do this?" and I gave her my spiel about film. "I love storytelling, but I hate cameras and the idea of working with actors. I've been reading all these great comics, some of which have an auteur vision. I'd like to do that." She looked at me and said, "You're a smart guy, and you really have some talent. Go away. You might have a future doing this,

Previous Page: Cliff would often spend his time after work putting together mini-comics. This image is the cover art for the first issue of Cliff's *Life of Grime* mini-comic. He never finished the second issue.

Above: Sample pages in the *Batman Adventures* style from 1998.

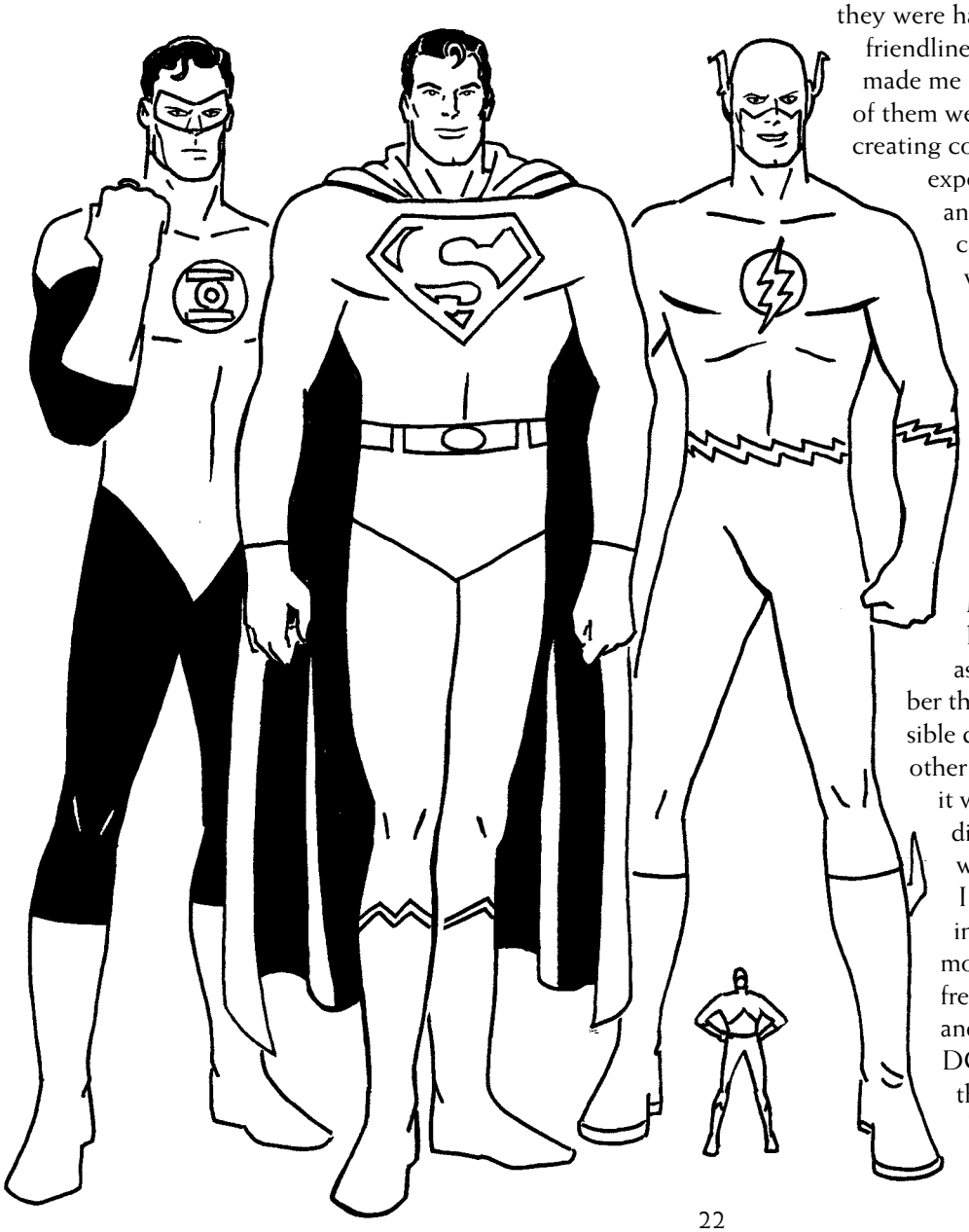
There was never any kind of romantic interest while we were both in the office, but years later it ballooned, and now we're together. I can't tell you how awesome it is to be able to talk about my work in such an "inside baseball" way with her. She knows everybody that I work with. She knows the minutiae of comic-book production, so it is really great that she can sympathize with my problems and suggest solutions.

DC and Vertigo mean a lot to me. It's where I got my start as an artist, it's where I met my wife, and it's where I met a lot of my good friends whom I work with now. Those two years in the trenches at Vertigo were absolutely crucial.

MM: What exactly did you do as an editor at Vertigo? The job duties, especially at the assistant and associate level, are pretty murky to outsiders.

CLIFF: When you're an assistant editor, you're support staff for the main editor. Editors have to deal with a lot of larger issues that go into book editing, doing reports, and working with writers and artists, and long-range planning. So my job entailed following up. Editors would figure out a schedule for everybody, and it was up to me to call the freelancers and check in, to remind people about deadlines, to make sure they all had supplies, and make sure they all got paid. This was years before the Internet and scanners made art submission easy, so all the artwork was mailed to DC's offices. Pages would come in by FedEx Express morning delivery, so usually by noon we'd have them in our offices. My job was to Xerox them at 100%; in case any art got lost, you had some sort of copy you could print from or re-create. And then it got shrunk down, sent to letterers, and compiled. If a book was done, I had to route it for proofreading. So a lot of logistical stuff, but it was great. I'd sit there in the morning and look over art. I knew the scripts really well, so I was able to identify what choices artists would make to interpret those scripts. I got to see so many different artists' work each day, and it became a crash course on comic storytelling.

I was also having conversations with professional comic creators on a daily basis. I had to call them to make sure they had checks and vouchers, and to check in to see if they were having any problems. You develop a friendliness with them, and my own curiosity made me ask questions about their work. Many of them were more than happy to talk, because creating comics can sometimes be a very solitary experience. I think a lot of artists, then and now, have a wired headset so they can plug it in and gab away while working. A lot of them were more than happy to chat and break down their process.



MM: Did your co-workers at DC know you ultimately wanted to segue into drawing comics yourself?

CLIFF: I think it was pretty well known. As soon as I got there, even during the interview, I told Stuart Moore that I loved art and would hopefully someday be drawing comics as well. I showed samples, and I remember them being liked, so it wasn't an impossible dream. When I was getting to know other editors during my first month there, it was something I might mention, but I didn't want to push it too hard. It was a workplace, not an audition. So mostly I figured it would be rude to be humping for work while there, plus DC's more restrictive policy on staffers doing freelance made it a little more difficult and not something to be done lightly. DC wanted to avoid editors assigning themselves, or each other, gigs on DC books, so any freelance work would need to cleared with the brass.

heart sank. I told Tony I'd see what I could do on the rest of the pages.

I left his office and went to talk to some friends in the shipping/copy room, trying to collect myself. I was really disappointed and distraught. Tony came in and started Xeroxing the pages, shrinking them down. He looked at them in the bright florescent light of the shipping room, and he came over and said, "You know what? I'm an ass. These look great. I just needed to shrink them down, and they're awesome." I felt so much better after that. If I had gone home without hearing that, I probably would have been second-guessing everything. I have a lot of respect for Tony that he was very honest in his criticism, and yet was able to take it back when he felt he was wrong. I also learned that when you show editors artwork, you want to show it print size, especially when you're working in a brushy, clean style.

I knew what those pages would look like shrunk down. I read somewhere about Alex Toth using a reducing glass, which is the opposite of a magnifying glass, so he could see what his art would look like shrunken down and tightened up. I had also seen pages from Darwyn Cooke and Michael Lark, so I knew what it should look like at full size. All that experience from Vertigo was informing me artistically. I was trying to put it all together, and with each job I was trying to find some element I could take, almost as an academic lesson.

The whole thing about period stuff is drawing it convincingly. It doesn't help to have a very exaggerated style. You want people to feel the scratchy wool costume. [*laughs*] A lot of the Golden Age stuff was pretty rough, but if you go back to it with a different sense of proportion and detail, you can bring it to life, almost as if it was a film. I tried to bring to it a sense of being observed, like photojournalism. I was looking at a lot of John Paul Leon stuff at the time too. I was trying to figure out how his figures have such weight and believability to them, and I was trying to impart that in my own way. A kind of casual realism.

MM: After that you did some pages in *Martian Manhunter* and *Wonder Woman*. What was it like for you, who are more interested in characterization, to be doing so many superhero stories over a short period of time?

CLIFF: I was just thrilled to be working. One of the great things when you're starting out is you can learn from everything. Every choice feels like a big step forward. Even though it was only a couple of pages of *Martian Manhunter*, I was thinking, "What's the goal with these two pages? What do I need to get across to the reader?" It was all useful. I was open-minded and trying different things.

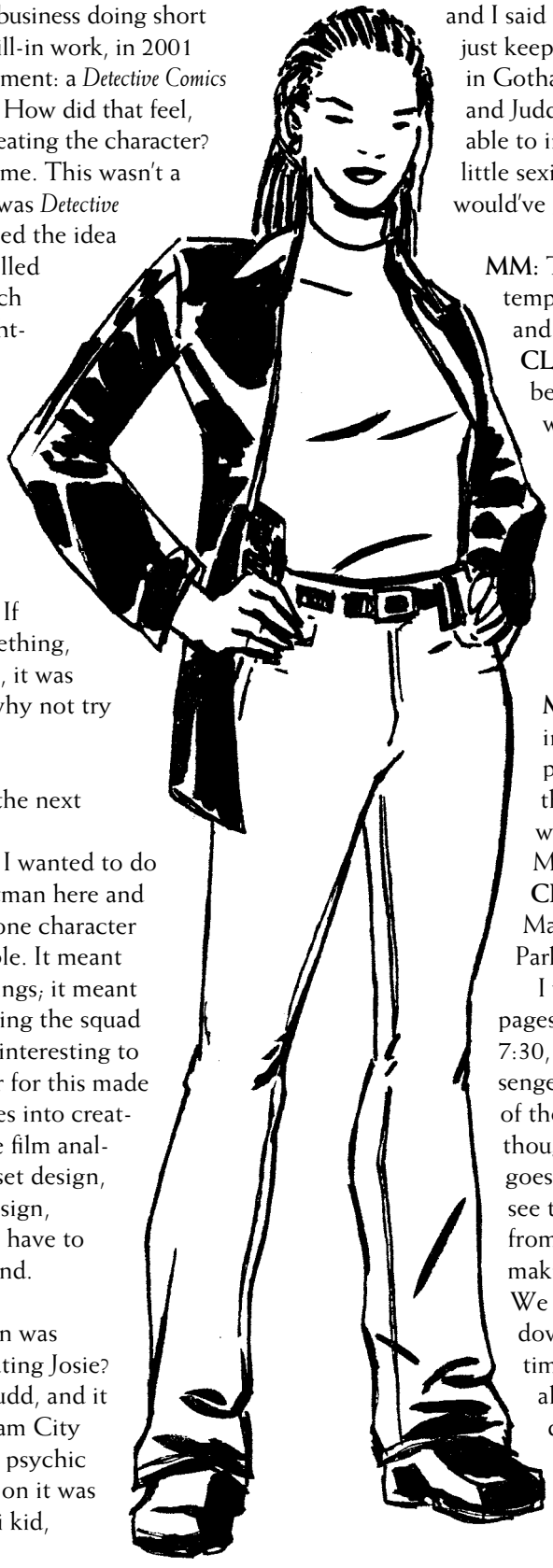
The *Wonder Woman* flashback sequence in some ways came out of the *Golden Age Secret Files* story. Pete Tomasi was now an editor, and he had seen it and liked it, and I knew the writer, Phil Jimenez, from working at Vertigo. Phil had always been really enthusiastic and supportive of my art, and for this *Wonder Woman* one-shot, he needed somebody who would bring a certain kind of life to it and be really diligent about the details. They also

Previous Page and Above: The opening splash page and page 20 of the feature story in *Golden Age Secret Files & Origins* #1.

Part 3: Heroes and the Green

MM: After several years in the business doing short stories, guest issues, and some fill-in work, in 2001 you got your first regular assignment: a *Detective Comics* backup strip called "Josie Mac." How did that feel, especially since you were co-creating the character?
CLIFF: That was a big deal to me. This wasn't a short story or a one-shot, this was *Detective Comics*, a flagship title, and I liked the idea of working in short and controlled bursts. They let me take as much time as I needed with each eight-page chapter. I didn't have to worry about rushing anything. I did them over about two or three weeks each.

I was surprised when they asked me, actually. What I've always appreciated about my editor, Matt Idelson, is that he likes taking chances. If he has a gut feeling about something, he'll go with it. Even if it stunk, it was only eight pages a month, so why not try this out?



MM: It was sort of moving to the next level for you.
CLIFF: It was the kind of stuff I wanted to do at that point too—drawing Batman here and there, but mostly focusing on one character and making her world believable. It meant drawing a lot of day-to-day things; it meant drawing her brownstone, drawing the squad room.... All that stuff is really interesting to me. Trying to be a set designer for this made me realize how much work goes into creating a comic. Going back to the film analogy, you're doing everything: set design, costume design, production design, cinematography, lighting. You have to keep all those disciplines in mind.

MM: Was kind of collaboration was there with Judd Winick in creating Josie?
CLIFF: I got an outline from Judd, and it was just the synopsis—a Gotham City cop, Josie MacDonald, has the psychic ability to talk to objects. Early on it was just her protecting the Anotelli kid, and I said to Matt, "I can see how you'd want to just keep this a crime story, but it's a gang war in Gotham City. Let's have Batman in it." He and Judd thought it was a good idea, so I was able to influence the project a bit and make it a little sexier. Without Batman, I don't know if it would've gotten as much attention.

MM: That story seems to have been a rough template for *Gotham Central* in terms of tone and subject matter.
CLIFF: "Josie Mac" came out about a year before *Gotham Central*, but I know they were already working on *Gotham Central* at the same time we were developing "Josie Mac." We just came out sooner because it was only eight pages a month. There was a mutual feeling that you could do interesting stories in Batman's world without having Batman be the main focus.

MM: During the time you were working on "Josie Mac," before it had been published, 9/11 happened. What was that day like for you as someone who worked in New York and was born in Manhattan?
CLIFF: My wife, Jenny, was working at Marvel then as well. They looked down Park Avenue and saw the smoke rising.

I was coming into the city to drop off pages that morning. I got on the bus around 7:30, and someone called one of the bus passengers and said a plane had flown into one of the World Trade Center towers. Everyone thought it was crazy. Part of the bus route goes along the Hudson River, and you can see the skyline. We saw smoke coming from the towers, and then everyone started making calls to find out what was going on. We got to the tunnel, and they had shut down all traffic, so we turned back. By the time we got back to the part of the route along the Hudson, both towers were down. It was surreal.

MM: It must have been hard for you being on a bus full of strangers.

CLIFF: Nobody was thinking about themselves at that point. My older brother was working on Wall Street as an e-trader, so we were pretty worried about him. We managed to get word from him early, but then we didn't hear from him for the rest of the day. After the second plane, he had gone up to the roof of his building, smelled the air, and said, "This is not good." He considered leaving, but it was too chaotic out on the street. When the towers came down, there was too much dust and debris, and he had to stay inside for a couple of hours. Eventually he wrapped something around his face and walked uptown 70 blocks to a friend's apartment. We finally talked to him around 9:00 p.m.

Being on the bus, there was definitely a sense of helplessness. It was hard to get through to anyone on the phone, so you had to rely on other passengers' radios for news. I've never been so glad to get off a bus.

MM: How did that experience affect your piece in the 9/11 anthology that came out later? I believe this was the first time you both wrote and drew something.

CLIFF: I didn't draw a story, per se. Being in New York, I was having trouble processing it. The idea of the tribute books made sense to me, but I, personally, couldn't wrap my head around doing a story. So I did a pin-up of my reaction to the first responders and the people who volunteered afterwards. That kind of heroism made me want to contribute to the book.

I was dreading the kind of stuff that would appear, because superhero comics are so rarely subtle. I thought they might focus on the violence and loss of life—or that they would be overly sentimental. I imagined a book full of crying firemen, which to me would be equally dishonest. When you have something that over the top, it doesn't resonate; it doesn't reflect the reality of what happened. So I tried to make a very plain image. You don't know if it's happening right during the attack and the guy's just figured out he needs to go help, or if it's days or weeks later. The idea was that people were offering to help, and their service involved personal sacrifice. But no, I could not see myself working on a longer story. I wanted to draw something, and I did what I could.

Previous Page: Batman takes advantage of Josie Mac's unique abilities in this page from *Detective Comics* #770. **Above:** Cliff's earliest concept drawings of Josie Mac and the opening page of "Josie Mac" from *Detective Comics* #771.

someone else to finish the book. But Tommy's work is so unique, and they had a hard time finding someone to fill-in.

I had seen the artwork when I briefly returned to staff to work for Schreck while they were between assistants. I saw the book in a drawer and thought it was fantastic. Being a fan of Tommy's, being aware of what his influences were, I felt I could do a decent job of continuing in that style. I've never used very much reference, but finding ways to incorporate reference into my work was one of the big things I learned with *Batman: The Golden Streets of Gotham*. I had many of the same books that Tommy had, so I could see how he used reference. The collage aspect of working with reference was new to me, but I appreciated it, and hopefully the artist change wasn't too big of a switch. And it's helped by the fact that Dave Stewart colored the whole thing.

MM: With all the detail you put into the work, and the research you had to do, and the fact they wanted to get the project out the door, and that you were coming on for Tommy, whose work you admired, did you consider this book to be more of a challenge?
CLIFF: Yeah, there was a lot of self-imposed pressure. I didn't have any published work that looked like Tommy's, but I showed Bob some sketches, which tend to be a lot looser and brushy, more like what Tommy was doing, so Bob had faith that I could do it. I just wanted to maintain the quality Tommy had established. And this was a passion project for Jan Van Meter, so I couldn't let her down either. But I welcomed the challenge. At that time in my career, taking this on was pretty ambitious. I actually worked on *Golden Streets* at the same time as "Josie Mac," since eight pages monthly wasn't too hard of a grind. Now that I think of it, I actually enjoyed switching gears between the two projects.

MM: With "Josie Mac" you drew a little bit of Batman, but it wasn't a Batman story. With this you were drawing a Batman story, but it wasn't the Batman everyone knows. What was your approach in coming to terms with how a pauper Batman should look?
CLIFF: That was one of my first real design challenges, coming up with a look that evoked Batman but still made sense in the world of the story. The gag here is that Bruce

Previous Page: A crime scene investigator recreates Grendel's actions in a story for Matt Wagner's *Grendel: Red, White, & Black* #4.
Above: The original layout and revised pencils for the cover of *Batman: The Golden Streets of Gotham*.

So I did a couple of cover treatments using the idea of 1920s Paris and Art Deco poster design, trying to do something more graphic. That first cover was a tricky balancing act. In my mind, we needed the cover to be interesting—show the unique locale and show that it's a female protagonist. It should have some period elements but not announce overtly it's a period book, because that might be a turn-off to some. The first cover showed a tiny Creeper leaping off of a building and above her was a large title, announcing "Beware the Creeper." I sent it to Will; I also sent it to Darwyn Cooke. Darwyn sent it back with a note that said, "I hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of tweaking this a little bit." He had enlarged the Creeper and laid her right on top of the text. It was such a simple solution, and it worked beautifully. It made me reassess my design choices. There are always simple solutions to give something more impact.

MM: People started seeing you in a different light after *The Creeper*, but you zigged instead of zagged into a less-costumed and more realistic vein. You started on *Human Target* with issue #6 in March 2004. Can you talk about being approached to do *Human Target* and your thinking as you joined the series?

CLIFF: Yeah. Funny thing is that the first person to approach me about *Human Target* was Darwyn. He and Peter Milligan were set to do a monthly *Human Target* series, but I think Darwyn was also preparing *New Frontier* at the time. I saw him in Los Angeles after San Diego 2002. It was me, him, and Dave Bullock—I think we had gone for pancakes somewhere. He was saying that they wanted him to do this monthly and he knew he couldn't do it all by himself, but maybe if he penciled and I inked and then we'd swap places every few issues…? This sounded like a really great idea, but once *New Frontier* was up and running, he realized he wouldn't have the bandwidth to work on two monthly books. He pulled out of the project, but he'd spoken with Karen Berger about my interest. By that time I was already working on *The Creeper*, so I wasn't available for a monthly, but on one of my visits to the Vertigo offices, Karen asked if I had any ideas on who could do the book. I thought Javier Pulido was perfect because he had done that really great *Human Target* graphic novel for them. I didn't hear anything about it for another six months or so, when she asked me to alternate arcs with Javier.

MM: Did you have any trepidation about joining a series after it has been started, especially given you would be part of a rotating team of artists on the book?

CLIFF: It wasn't so much trepidation as I wanted to honor the work that had been done before. I really did love that

CLIFF: Yeah. I've almost always colored my covers; there may be one or two I didn't color.

MM: There's a *Batgirl* very early on that you didn't color?
CLIFF: Yeah, that's right.

MM: How did these covers affect your sequential art? You can't take the same amount of time to do individual pages, but were there things you learned about composition and storytelling that you could take back to the sequential art?
CLIFF: I can't think explicitly of any things that I learned on covers that I could apply to the interior. Maybe I should think about it harder. In my head, the challenges are so different. When you're drawing a cover, the last thing you want is for it to look like a splash page. That's something that can happen a lot until you turn that switch. But as a result I've kept them so separate in my head that some of the things I've learned about being graphic on covers have not translated to the interior work. A big part of that is color, so when I am not coloring the interior, those tools aren't there for me. But I think the cover work made me better at composing images, how to weight things to draw the eye.

One of the things that did help my sequential work is looking at a lot of Eduardo Risso's work. He often designs a large master panel on a page and then uses black to simplify an area but also give you a sense of light and shadow. Then you can overlay the other simpler panels on the page on top of that and move them around a little bit to give you the best composition. It anchors the page and at the same time allows other panels to breathe.

MM: How did you move from working with Vertigo to the Bat titles?
CLIFF: Well, I knew the editors already from having worked with Matt Idelson on "Josie Mac" and Bob Schreck on *Batman: Golden Streets of Gotham*. I kept in touch with those guys, and they were my first stop when *Human Target* ended. Maybe they had some Batman work I could do.

The *Nightwing* stuff was a little breather; I was just penciling, which I hadn't done since the *Wonder Woman* issue. Ande Parks is a fantastic inker, and I thought it was a good opportunity to learn how other people would interpret my pencils. Maybe pick up some tricks in the process. And it's Nightwing, so

Previous Page and Below: The cover for *Green Arrow* #53: three sketch ideas, finished pencils, and inks.

Green Arrow © DC Comics.

1

2

3

4

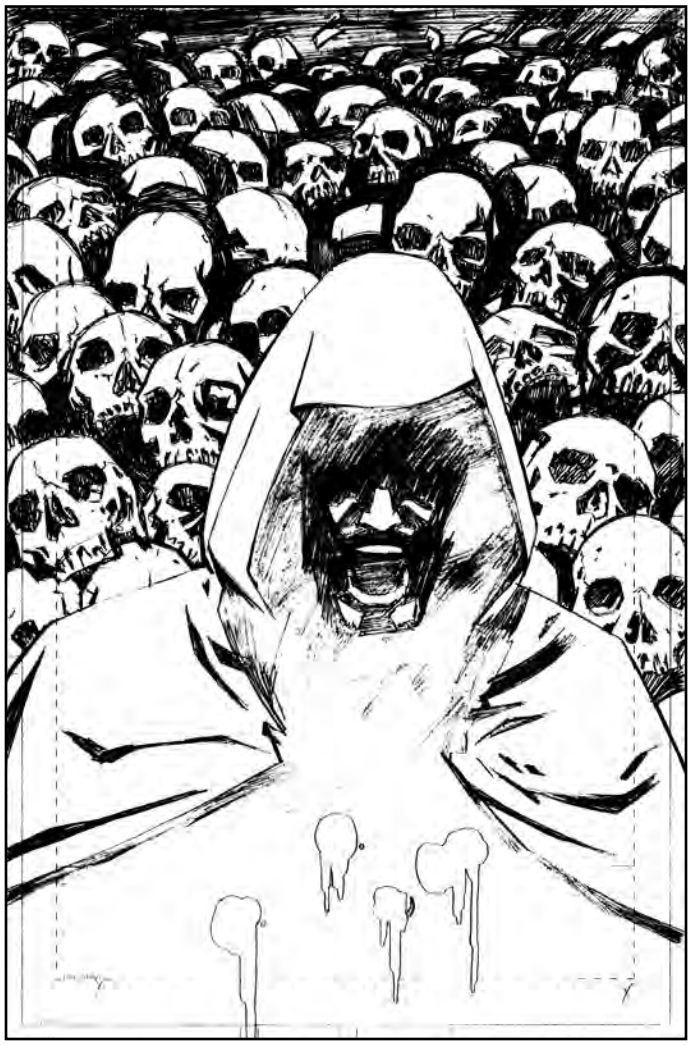
it was an opportunity to try to work on more conventional mainstream superhero stuff.

I started looking at a lot of Kevin Nowlan, which was really helpful to me to rationalize the two parts of my personality—the part that really loves the shadowy Vertigo material and the brighter superhero stuff. Nowlan's atmospheric drafting and figurework straddle the two easily. So Nightwing was me trying to figure that out in pencil and then seeing how Andy worked with that, which affected how I would attempt things later.

MM: You were already doing action work from *Human Target* and had done a variation of Batman before, but when it came to doing straight-up superheroes in the DC universe, were there any growing pains?

CLIFF: It wasn't the easiest transition. You go from doing a kind of normal reality that you want to be believable in *Human Target* to working with superheroes that have to be exaggerated. A lot of it was me learning how to showcase the physical side of the characters, learning the superhero proportions. How far do you push it to make a character like Nightwing look strong while keeping him sexy and bring out the panache that Nightwing has? I also wanted to get better at anatomy. I realized I would be doing more superhero work eventually, so I had to think more about muscle groups and how light would hit different kinds of fabrics. It was new to me on a professional level but it's not like I had never read superhero comics. So it was trying to take the ideas I had when I was growing up and reading this stuff and putting them in action—"If I could draw superheroes, this is what I would do."

Previous Page and This Page: Cliff colored the covers for the *Crisis Aftermath: The Spectre* mini-series himself, so he worked out his sketch ideas in color in Photoshop. Going from sketch 1 to 2, Cliff enlarged and repositioned the scene (drawn on a separate layer) inside the Spectre. In sketch 3, he lightened the palette and added skulls and a spotlight to the background. In sketch 4, he changed Spectre's head. In the final sketch, he enlarged the new Spectre head, replaced the scene in the Spectre's form with bullet wounds, and reused the skull background. From there, pencils and inks.



for Bruce to team up with his childhood hero, "Zorro."

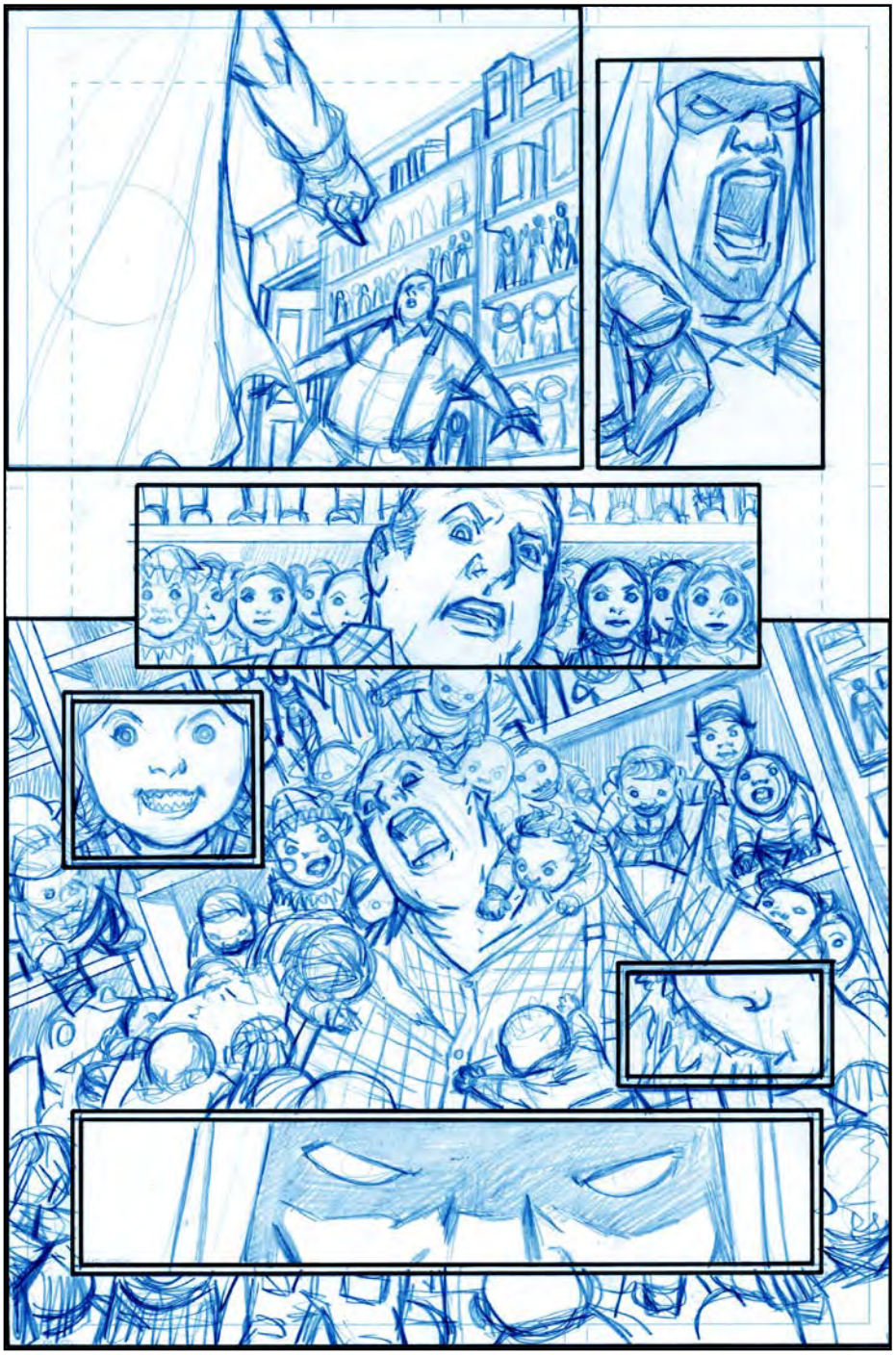
I approached it a little differently from some of the other things I had worked on. I inked over layouts, trying to homage or at least capture the feel of the Alex Toth *Zorro* comics, make it a love letter to that. Unfortunately, Tyrone Power in a Zorro costume was a "no" for the legal department. It got all the way to the printer when they realized they didn't have permission from Zorro Productions to use Zorro. We went up and down trying to explain it wasn't the character Zorro but a guy in a Zorro costume, but they didn't care—it was a comic book, it was Zorro. At the last minute they had to pull it, and it never came out.

MM: So are those pages sitting in a drawer somewhere at DC all these years later?

CLIFF: I'm still holding on to them because I have a real sentimental attachment to them. It's lettered on the boards by John Workman. I toyed with the notion of sending it to Alex Toth to see if he would enjoy it, because his work means a lot to me. But I never acted on that. I don't know if I could've handled an honest critique from him.

MM: Has there been any talk about…?
CLIFF: I've thought about it but it's not been high on my priority list. I should ask Nick Barrucci over at Dynamite since he has the Zorro license now. Maybe with DC's permission, they could print it with an acknowledgment.

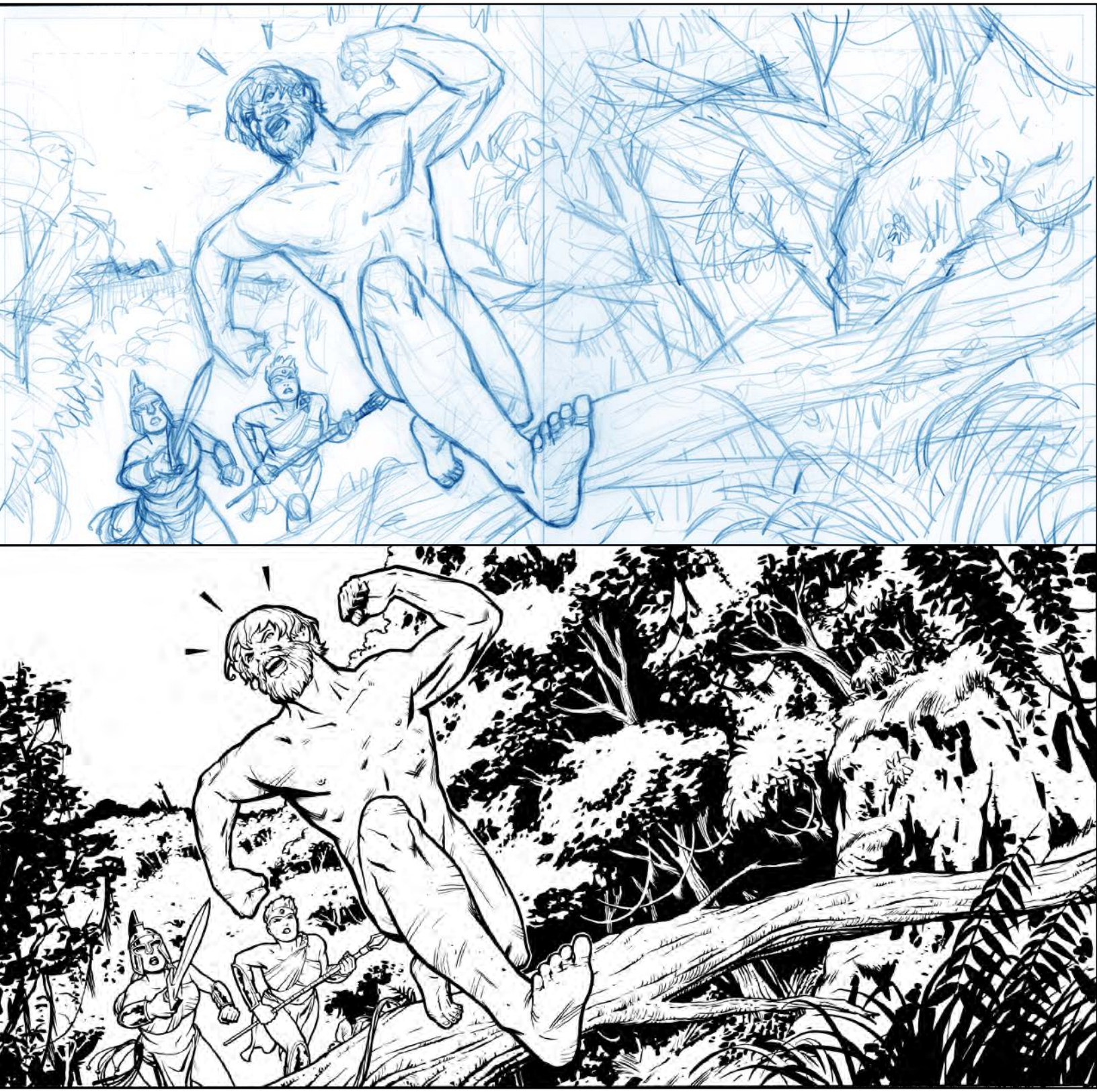
MM: How many pages is the entire story?
CLIFF: Eight pages.



MM: Although you didn't get to do Batman then, you did get another caped hero in Gotham, the Spectre for *Crisis Aftermath: The Spectre*. You've told me in the past that the subject matter and tone of this story really affected you since you were looking at it and thinking about it all day. Can you talk about that?
CLIFF: It was a really dark story. After he's murdered, Detective Crispus Allen, from *Gotham Central*, returns as the host for the Spectre and is forced to dispense God's judgment. The old "Spectre" comics did all sorts of crazy stuff, like the Spectre turning criminals into wax candles and then melting them. Very lurid and ironic punishments. We did some of that in the book, but primarily it was about Crispus coming to terms with his death and learning to submit to God's will.

I enjoy dark material, but somehow this felt relentless to me. Will Pfeifer did a great job with the script, but as the artist I had to inhabit that world for months, and it was bleak. By the time I'm done with a book, I've read the script at least ten times as I go over each page and try to figure out the storytelling. And mentally I do my best to put myself in the character's shoes. But this was such a sad story, with a really touching but downbeat ending, and by the end I was emotionally drained.

MM: Although not Batman, you could feel him—and his city, Gotham—all over this. How'd you go about developing the tone and atmosphere of the book?



characters. It was fun to do, and it felt like the book had a distinct visual identity.

MM: It felt like Chaykin's *American Flagg!* work, with lots of clean slick lines. Your storytelling was very different from "Doctor 13" and things you had done before.

CLIFF: Well, the scripts were very different. The pacing was different because we had a full 22 pages compared to "Doctor 13's" 16-page chapters. The "Doctor 13" scripts were very dense, while Judd's were very open and needed fewer panels per page. It felt like a bigger canvas that I was required to fill. There were a lot of panels where I just had to come up with something and make it look pretty. It was actually more difficult, somehow, when you don't have a lot of things going on. You just have to fill up the page with something, and it made me think differently about page layout.

Part 4: Woman of Wonders

Below: Promotional art for the release of *Wonder Woman* #1.
Next Page: Cover art for the *Red Sonja: Monster Island* one-shot.

MM: Before we jump into this, I wanted to talk about something rather overdue. You're almost exclusively known for your DC work, but you've done some other work from time to time as well. You did a *Red Sonja* cover, a pin-up for *X-Men Unlimited*, and some *Marvel Team-Up* trading cards. We talked earlier about how you didn't look outside DC when you started because it was comfortable. Can you talk about what it was like to look outside DC?

CLIFF: Well, I've been exclusive with DC since 2003. As a result I haven't had to look for outside work. But occasionally some illustration work will come my way. It's great because it spices things up a little bit.

MM: I hate to discuss it as a binary sort of thing, either Marvel or DC, but have you thought about doing more Marvel work?

CLIFF: Before the exclusive contract, I thought about getting some Marvel work. But I was also afraid that Marvel's audience might have different tastes, and I didn't want to squander an opportunity with a bad showing. To me, my art just didn't feel appropriate for a Marvel superhero book for a long time, and by then I was exclusive. Early on, Axel mentioned a J. Jonah Jameson arc for *Tangled Web*, but I was already working on something else. I don't like juggling too many projects at once. I like to make sure everything gets the time and attention it needs.

I once did some Fantastic Four pieces for an editor, character sheets to show a visual approach. I never heard back about those, though I did get a call from James Sturm when he was looking for someone to work over his layouts on *Fantastic Four:Unstable Molecules*. It was tempting, as I do enjoy and respect Sturm's work, but I would've felt like just another pair of hands if I weren't handling the storytelling myself. Pencilling is such a grind. You're doing a lot of precise busywork, but for me the reward for all that work is getting to figure out storytelling and lay down the final ink lines.

MM: Do you think you're more attuned to the DC characters?

CLIFF: No, not really, I grew up reading Marvel. I didn't really read DC books. It's not a question of interest in the characters; it's just that career-wise, having good working relationships is more important to me than drawing, say, Spider-Man or Superman. It's not the company or the characters; it's the quality of the script and the quality of the people you work with. That's your life, not getting to say, "Hey, I get to draw my favorite character." That's only fulfilling in a limited sort of way.

MM: Okay, picking up from where we were, your project with Brian Azzarello on *Bat-Man* had been put on hold, so you jumped over to the *Wonder Woman* book he had mentioned to you previously. Despite the events of how you came to be on the book, you took to it pretty quickly. How did it all come together?
CLIFF: We had our first *Wonder Woman* conversation in January 2011 and had mapped out the story and an approach. It was fun breaking it down and figuring it out, but later that week I told Brian I'd rather do *The Bat-Man*. Three months later, we were back on *Wonder Woman*, but I did have three or four months to digest that stuff in the back of my mind. Even as I was doing prep on *The Bat-Man*, I kept having ideas for *Wonder Woman*. Once we started officially, it was just getting our hands dirty, talking about the character design, locations, and the overall feel of the book.

Once the book had been announced, Brian, as he usually does, likes to poke the bear a little bit, so he said to the comics press that *Wonder Woman* wasn't a superhero book but a horror book. It was a great comment because it helped people realign their thinking about the book, even if it wasn't 100% true. I think it has horror elements and that's what distinguishes it from previous runs, but the comment helped people realize that this wasn't going to be *Super Friends*. It wasn't going to be strictly capes and tights. It was going to be more macabre and there would be mystery. It would use mythology in a way that contemporized it and made it fresh. I think that comment helped people judge the book on its own merits.

MM: It prepared people to not just expect the same *Wonder Woman* as before and not be surprised at the difference. It forced them to approach the book with a more open mind.

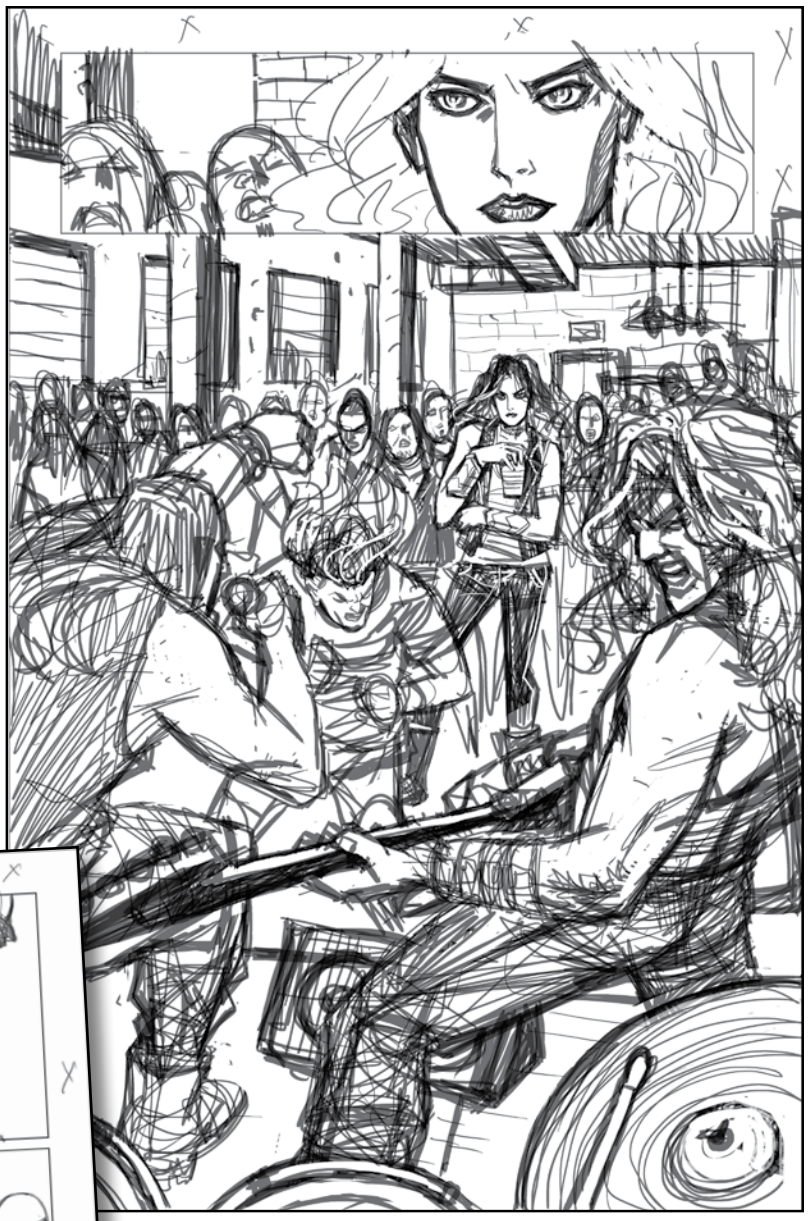
CLIFF: Yes. His saying that made me want to take more chances with the artwork too. We talked about the story being a little bit darker, and I worked on doing that with my style, which I think is generally pretty approachable. Even with the heavier inking, I think it is pretty friendly. So I was trying my best to accommodate and add atmosphere.

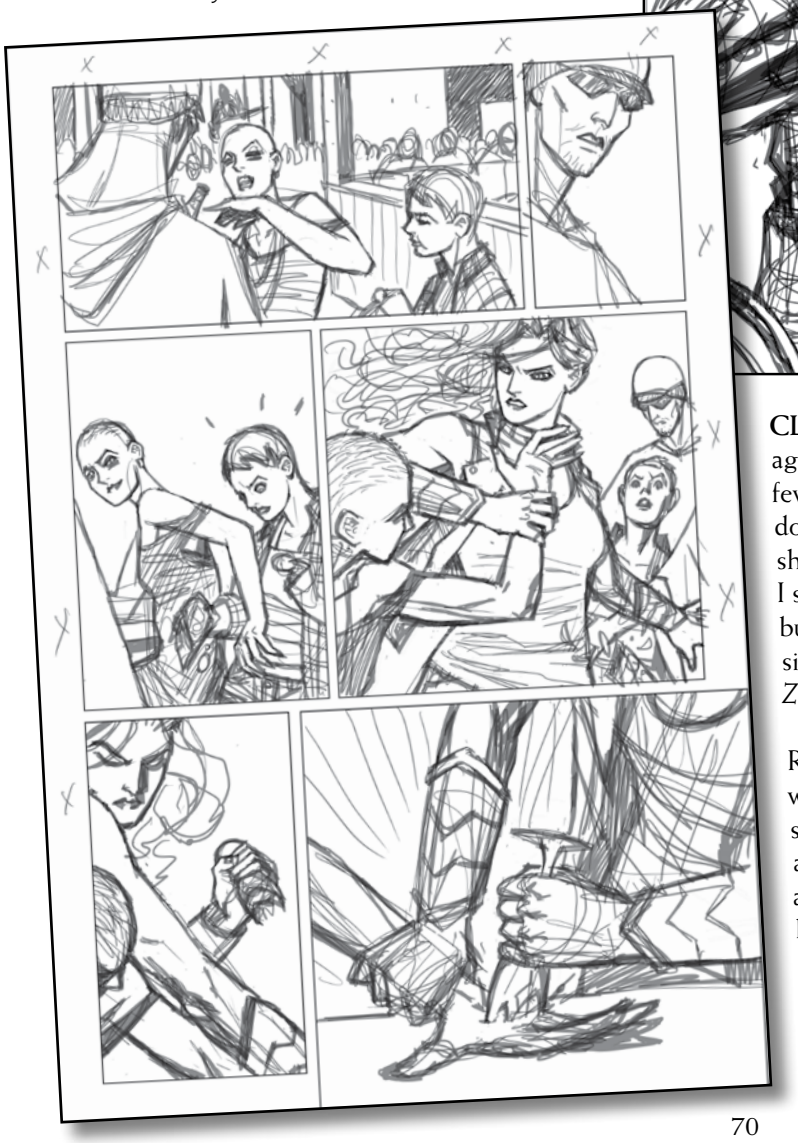
MM: You were doing new takes on a lot of key aspects of Wonder Woman, revising the costume not only for her but the other characters, and creating new roles. What was it like trying to figure out what yours and Brian's *Wonder Woman* would be and also what it wouldn't be?
CLIFF: We knew what it wouldn't be first. We said, "The gods are not going to be guys

Previous Page: Cover art for the first issue of the new *Wonder Woman*. **Above:** "A god walks into a bar…" only he doesn't look like your typical mythological entity. Brian and Cliff wanted to contemporize the Greek pantheon a bit, as seen in the characters of Apollo and War in this page from *Wonder Woman* #4. This issue also marked Cliff's first go at penciling digitally in Photoshop.

CLIFF: Yes. Darwyn's version of Wonder Woman is one of our favorites. We discussed it at the beginning, and we felt like that was the best take on it that we could remember. We loved it, and in a lot ways that's the way we felt Wonder Woman should be done. Very strong…. I like the idea of an aggressive Wonder Woman. I like confidence in Wonder Woman. What we've done is make that character a bit quieter. She's not loud. She's more like the Man with No Name. She's more liable to act first and then try to explain later. She doesn't speak that much, but when she does, it's meaningful. She's not without emotion but she's not bubbling over with it. She's very internal in that way; she's very guarded about expressing herself unnecessarily. But she has no qualms about letting people know what she thinks. I think this all made for a character that is interesting and subtle as opposed to being an over the top caricature of the idea of feminism.

MM: You talked about keeping your style approachable but giving it more grit, making it more threatening. When you were drawing the pages, did you have something specific in mind in terms of the style and structure?





CLIFF: You know, it was tough because we were encouraged and wanted ourselves to do something new. We had fewer direct influences. Visually, I was trying to continue doing what I had done with *Zatanna*, using an almost shaky, organic line style combined with bold black shapes. I still think it could be pushed further in that direction, but I'm trying to speed things up for deadlines as well as simplify for clarity. It's trying to combine the way I drew *Zatanna* with a noir-ish sensibility.

It's hard to work with Brian and not feel Eduardo Risso's shadow. Eduardo is a friend, and I love his work so much and learn so much from it. It's a constant source of inspiration. Whenever I get stuck on a page, I'll look at one of Eduardo's and I'll immediately have new ideas of ways to compose the page. I look at Eduardo and Marcelo Frusin a lot as I work, because they're able to draw with a minimal amount of fussiness in their artwork, but huge amounts of atmosphere. Brian's dialogue hits like a truck with the right storytelling.

Previous Page: Brian and Cliff waste no time in establishing Diana's confidence and lack of self-consciousness with this scene from *Wonder Woman* #1.
Left: Underground singer/songwriter Wesley Willis—minus the callus on his forehead—serves as the inspiration for Milan. Rock over Paradise Island. Rock on Apokolips.
Below: War, on the other hand, is a blending of John Hurt, Father Christmas, and a healthy dose of Brian Azzarello himself.

lives, and these are the places he has to visit. War is no longer a macho thing. Instead you have kids running around with guns and gangs committing atrocities. When we first talked about War, we knew he was going to be a man in a rumply suit, much like an older C.I.A. operative pulling strings in a foreign country.

The initial inspiration for War was actor John Hurt, but very skinny, very frail. So we talked about it, but he wasn't showing up until issue #4, so I got to work on other things. Truthfully, I had been putting off War's design because a lot counted on getting it right. And so when I started issue #4, we talked about John Hurt but I also asked for any other inspiration. Brian mentioned Father Christmas with that big, long beard. I couldn't resist being a wiseass. "A tired, old man with a crazy beard? That sounds like you, Brian." He laughed. "Yeah, he should look like me."

When I drew War the first time I did a caricature of Brian to see what it would look like. It started as a joke, but it really worked. We needed War to be striking, and that's Brian. He has that crazy wiry beard and the kind of sinister look which War needed. And the metatextual implications of it were pretty great too. War is Wonder Woman's mentor, and for him to look like Brian—who shepherded this *Wonder Woman* project—it was a nice parallel. This is his Grant Morrison/King Mob moment, although a bit less glam.

Part 5: Passion, Process, and Viewpoints

MM: As a comic fan, what is your experience as a reader like now? Do you have a regular store?

CLIFF: I have a regular store—Bergen Street Comics—and they have a well-curated variety of stuff. I find myself less and less interested in superhero comics because all of it feels a little too familiar to me now. I think people are still doing great work, but I can accept now that most of it is not for me. When I think about the books that have gotten me most excited creatively in the last few years, they've not been superheroes; they've been European or manga. *Pluto*, by Naoki Urasawa, was fantastic. Every now and then I find a book that really inspires me to write and draw, makes me want to create comics. Reading *Pluto* was like reading "Batman: Year One." It was the same experience for me—taking an older story as a starting point and updating it with a more complex storytelling style, with modern sensibilities and interests, evolving the subtext, and making it so much richer. I really loved *Pluto* and have tried to track down as much of Urasawa's work as I can.

I really like Christophe Blain's work. *Gipi* is another, and again, his books make me want to draw. *Garage Band* is such a great expression of what it's like to be young, a little aimless, and love making music. I'm still waiting for that third *Gipi* volume in the Ignatz line from Fantagraphics. The little crime stories he does? They're fantastic. My Italian friends hate his work, but I think maybe they're too close to it. They complain he's writing about himself all the time, but I probably have similar complaints about some American cartoonists. I find his stuff to be really moving and inspirational. *The Innocents* is as perfect a comic as I can imagine.

MM: It's interesting that you talk about *Pluto*, since it is a reimagining of *Astro Boy*, sort of in the way that you and

PAGE 21: PANEL 1

This page, Cliff, is four page-wide panels on top of each other. The backgrounds are largely black, or at least dark and featureless, with the figures of Allen and the Spectre in the middle in straightforward head-and-shoulder shots. In this first one, Allen stands with his back to us.

Caption: THE MOST IMPORTANT MATTERS OF ALL, AS IT TURNS OUT.

Allen: OKAY.

Allen: WE CAN'T PREVENT CRIMES. WE CAN ONLY PUNISH THEM.

Allen: FINE.

21:2

Same basic shot, with Allen starting to turn and face us.

Allen: SO LET'S PUNISH A CRIME.

Allen: LET'S PUNISH A MURDERER.

21:3

Head-and-shoulder shot of the Spectre, staring out at Allen (off panel) and the reader.

SILENT PANEL

21:4

Same basic shot as 21:1 and 21:2, except Allen is facing us.

Allen: LET'S PUNISH JIM CORRIGAN.

Brian are reimagining *Wonder Woman*. Did you read *Astro Boy* or have that connection to it?

CLIFF: It's funny because just recently I finally read the original *Astro Boy* story that *Pluto* was based on. Like *Akira*, it's one of the classics of manga. It's in the manga canon. And talking about Osamu Tezuka is like talking about Jack Kirby. Because of that, I figured that Urasawa was just retelling Tezuka's story with just a few modern flourishes, but no. He added a ton. He added so much depth and so much more story to what's there. It's an incredible achievement. *Astro Boy* is really just a starting point for the story, and *Pluto* is so much more than what I got out of the original manga.

MM: As a comics reader, do you stick to print or have you jumped on the digital bandwagon? I know that for your work you sometimes only have digital work to go by, but when you're not at work do you prefer the tactile experience?

CLIFF: I like reading manga on the iPad. I find it works really well on the iPad because of the smaller page size and faster pacing. I'm currently reading *Bakuman*, which I just think is fantastic. It's such a romantic view of comics as a creative endeavor. If I feel less than inspired, I think about those characters. They're so driven and so idealistic. What would Muto Ashirogi do?

I like print as well, but I have a small apartment and I'm running out of space for all of it. As I get older, I realize there are fewer and fewer comics I want to own. I'm okay with reading and getting rid of them now, because I don't need to hold on to them as reference. I think that was a habit that carried over when I was younger. Everything I read felt relevant to my own work, so I held on to all of it because I didn't know if I could use it in the future.

MM: Taking into consideration your work station and your drawing board, I'm interested to know which books are within arm's reach of you when drawing?

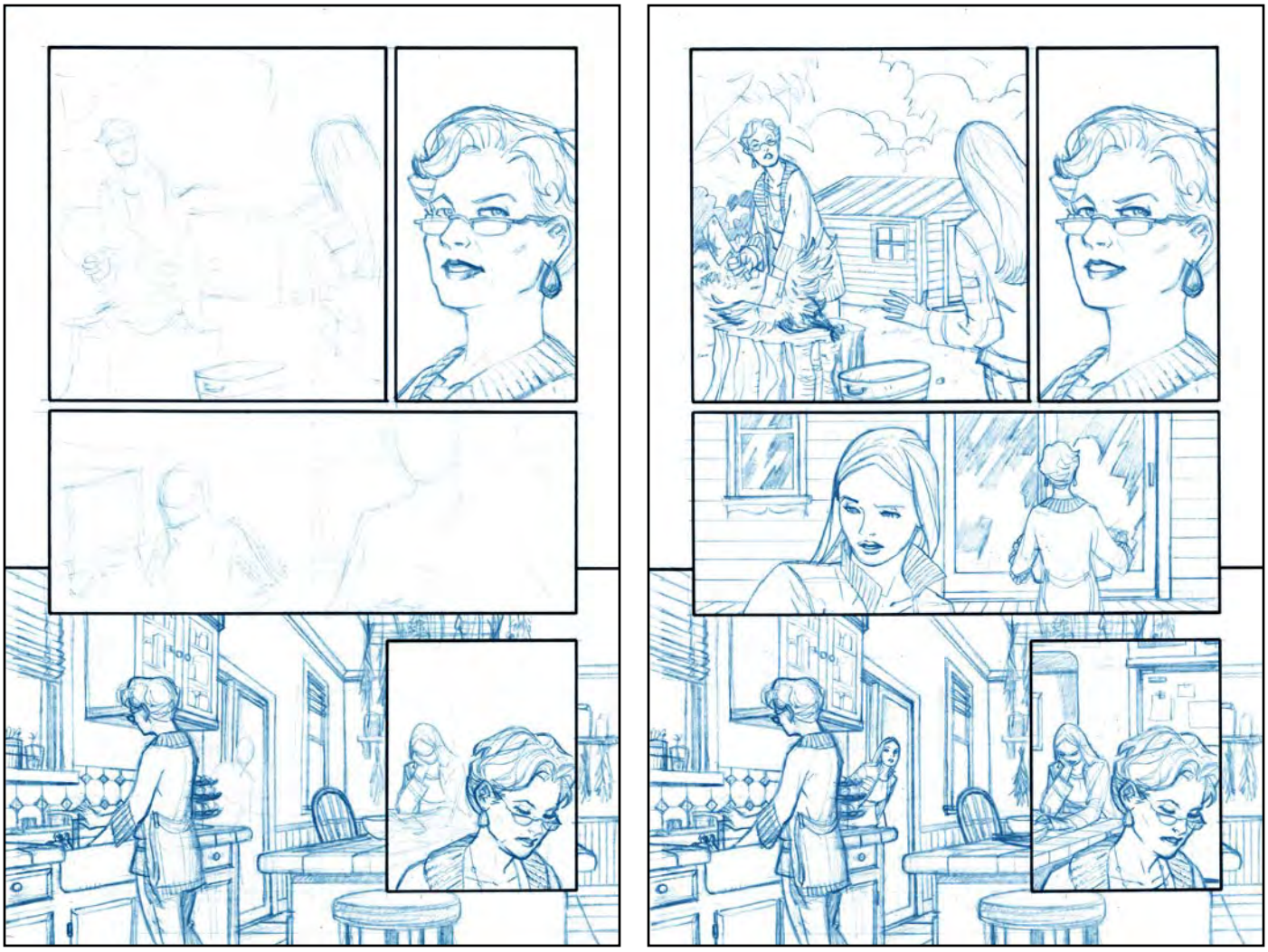
CLIFF: In all my studio set-ups I've always had a couple of bookcases nearby for reference. Walt Simonson has bookcases lining the walls of his studio, but he also has this little library cart that he keeps next to his drafting table, and every day he'll pick out books to put on it and the others go back on the shelves. Seeing how Walt would use his library provided a model for me.

Nine times out of ten, I'll be thinking of a specific panel or book, and after I find it, I realize it's not how I remembered it at all. You spend 20 minutes looking for the right panel or the right sequence or the right issue, and it's not what you wanted! But hopefully that search process helps you clarify your thinking. You're looking for inspiration, and when you can't find it, it forces you to ask, "Well, what am I looking for? What am I trying to achieve here?"

MM: What would you say are the big things that you have around to look at in reference to your *Wonder Woman* work?

CLIFF: You know, it's changed a lot over the years. There were years when all I had was Toth and Jordi Bernet around, *Zorro* and *Torpedo*.

Previous Page and Above: *Crisis Aftermath: The Spectre* #2, page 21, from script to inks. The script calls for four wide panels, but the difference in height between Allen and the Spectre makes that impractical. Cliff went instead with one large downshot panel (providing dynamic impact) and five small inset panels. The two panels with the cigarette not only add visual interest, but help the pacing of the scene.



Above: A progression of pencils for page 21 of *Greendale*.
Next Page: Sketch ideas, pencils, and inks for the cover or *Green Arrow and Black Canary* #7.

Other years, it was Steve Rude's *Nexus* and *World's Finest*. These days, I look at Eduardo and Marcelo a lot, as I have in the past. I have a wonderful book that my friend Davide Gianfelice gave me—a copy of Massimo Carnevale's black-and-white work on *Dylan Dog*. It's a small volume but it's fantastic. That's been inspirational as well. That, and I keep around the few volumes I have of Dino Battaglia's work.

But it always changes. Hopefully all of these informed my work to some degree. Maybe I should keep other stuff out that I could absorb through osmosis.

MM: What materials do you use now as opposed to when you started? I know you went from inking with a pen to inking with a brush. What's your set-up like?
CLIFF: Whenever possible, I try to set up near a window so that I have somewhere to look out from. It's crucial that I have a wall as well to put some artwork on. I keep a photostat of a page from "Batman: Year One" up on the wall. I have an original page from *Human Target*. I have an unused *100 Bullets* page given to me by Eduardo; he gave me the original after he redrew it completely, which was a great gift because it's an outtake. He decided, "I know a better way to do this, and I'm going to do it." That kind of commitment to quality is a reminder for me to love and respect what I do to the point where I'm willing to start over to get it right.

When I was drawing *Human Target* in my first studio apartment, the computer was on the other side of the room. Over the years it's crept closer and closer. In my last apartment, when I was working on *Greendale*, I had a little computer hutch behind my drawing desk, and I could just spin around like I was in a tank. [*laughter*] Now it's right next to me. I don't know if that's had a good effect on my productivity. Certainly the less time I spend online the better, but it's become invaluable for searching for reference.

I'm doing more digital work. I pencil my pages digitally, then print them out and ink traditionally. The computer has become a really important tool for me, though I can't give up the feel of ink on paper. Right now

Cliff Chiang

Art Gallery


WILDCAT '62
FIRST IMPRESSIONS
CLIFF CHIANG 1/9/01
&
JOEY CAVALIERI
REMEMBER CATSUIT IS CLOTHING.
WRINKLES!
TEXTURE!
DON'T BE AFRAID TO RENDER!
CLEAN, NOT SIMPLISTIC
OOOOF!!


CLIFF
CHIANG
2011
C2E2!


CLIFF
CHIANG
2005

Thor © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Mysterio, Spider-Man © Marvel Characters, Inc.