CHOICE OF MOMENT

DECIDING WHICH MOMENTS TO **INCLUDE** IN A COMICS STORY AND WHICH TO **LEAVE OUT.**

1
2
3

CHOICE OF FRAME

CHOOSING THE RIGHT **DISTANCE** AND **ANGLE** TO **VIEW** THOSE MOMENTS --

-- AND WHERE TO **TRIM** THEM.

CHOICE OF IMAGE

RENDERING THE CHARACTERS, OBJECTS AND ENVIRONMENTS IN THOSE FRAMES **CLEARLY.**

CHOICE OF WORD

PICKING WORDS THAT ADD **VALUABLE INFORMATION** AND **WORK WELL** WITH THE IMAGES AROUND THEM.

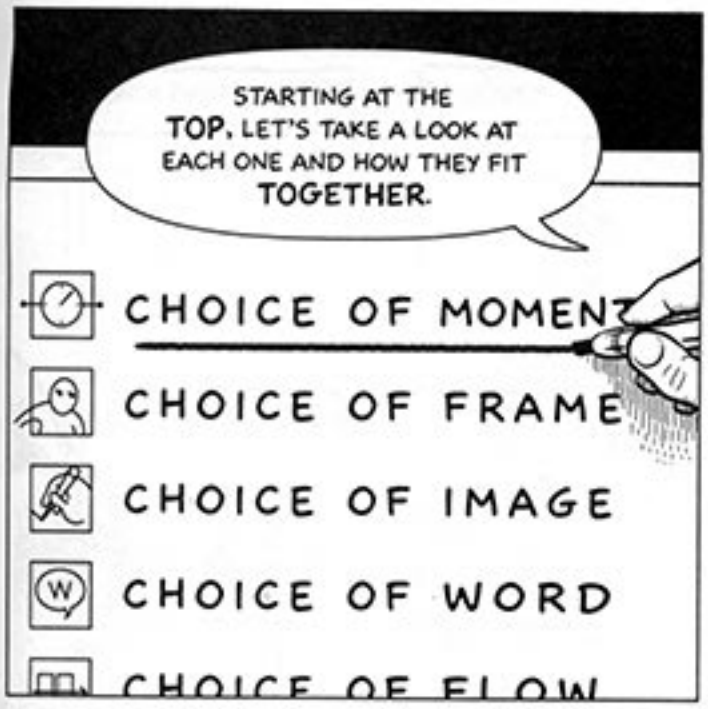
HEY!

CHOICE OF FLOW

GUIDING READERS **THROUGH** AND **BETWEEN** PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN.

THESE ARE THE **FIVE ARENAS** WHERE YOUR CHOICES CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN **CLEAR, CONVINCING STORYTELLING** AND A **CONFUSING MESS.**

- CHOICE OF MOMENT
- CHOICE OF FRAME
- CHOICE OF IMAGE
- CHOICE OF WORD
- CHOICE OF FLOW


STARTING AT THE TOP, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT EACH ONE AND HOW THEY FIT TOGETHER.
CHOICE OF MOMENT
CHOICE OF FRAME
CHOICE OF IMAGE
CHOICE OF WORD

THESE EARLY CHOICES ARE COMICS' ROUGH PLANNING STAGE WHERE A STORY'S EVENTS ARE FIRST BROKEN DOWN INTO READABLE CHUNKS.
?
2
3
4
5
6

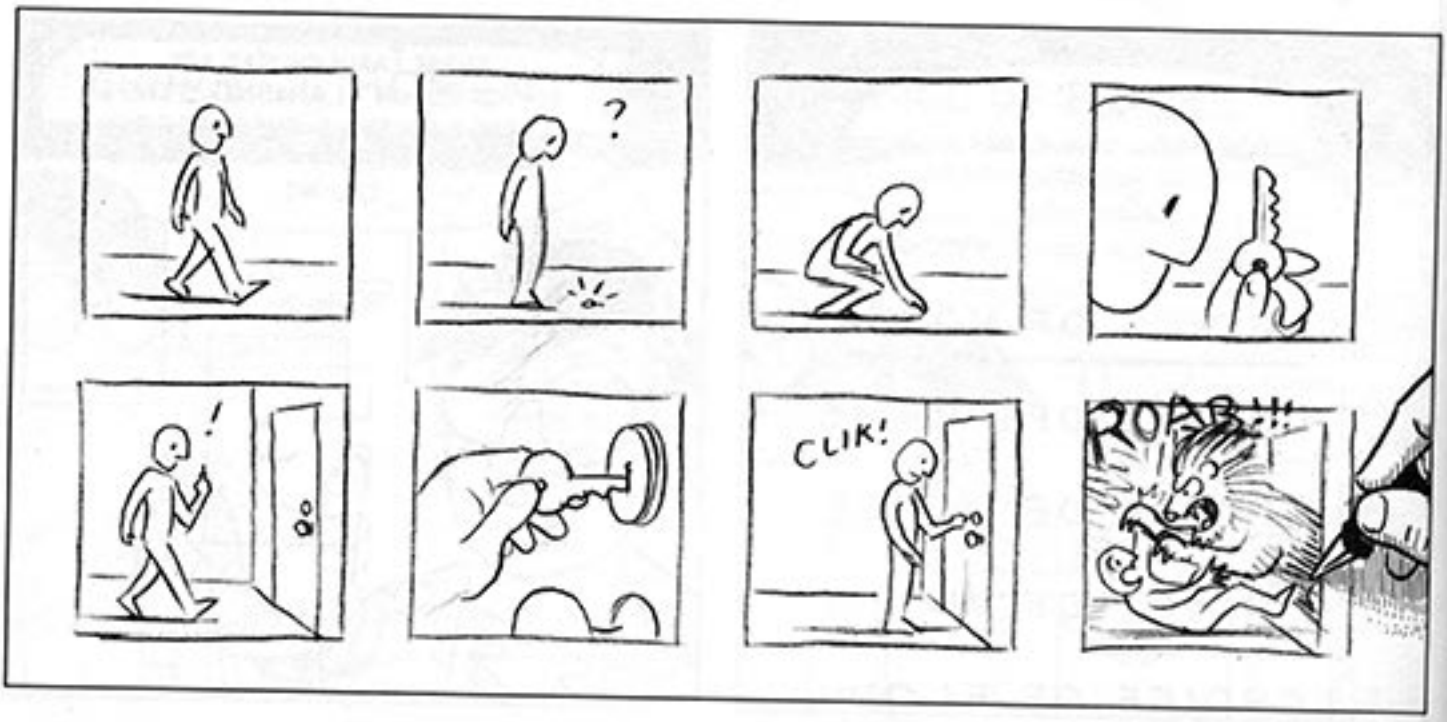
SUPPOSE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT YOU WANTED TO SHOW A MAN WALKING...

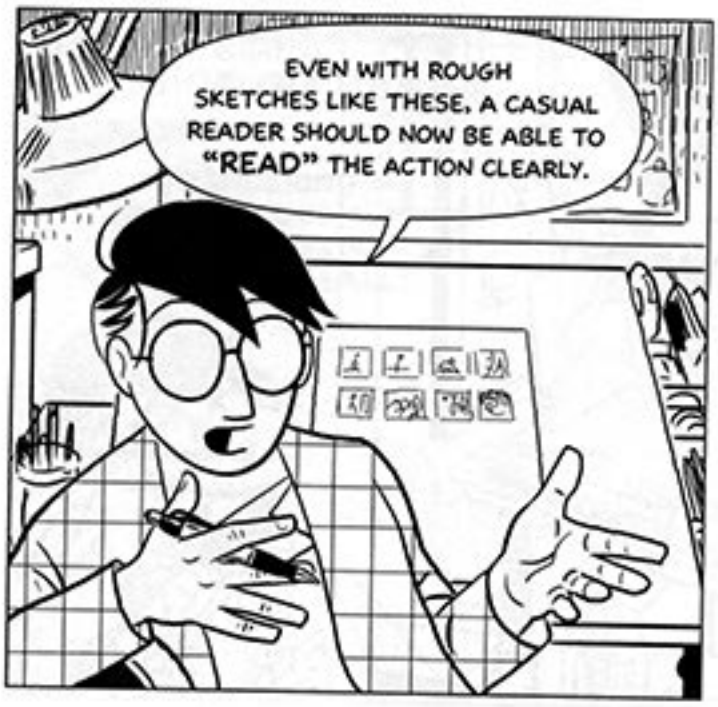
NOTHING FANCY, JUST A SKETCH.

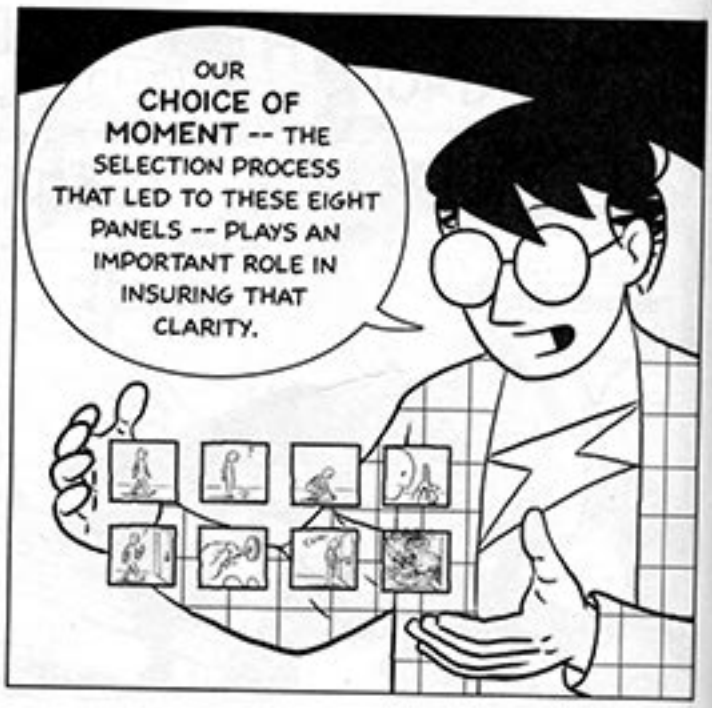
THEN, LET'S SAY THE MAN FINDS A KEY ON THE GROUND, PICKS IT UP, TAKES IT WITH HIM AND COMES TO A DOOR.

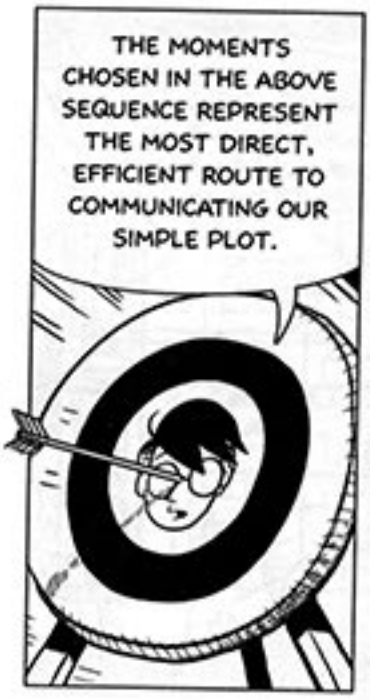
SO, HE UNLOCKS THE DOOR AND THEN A... I DUNNO... A HUNGRY LION JUMPS OUT!

HERE'S HOW A SEQUENCE LIKE THAT MIGHT TAKE SHAPE IN COMICS FORM.


?
!
CLIK!
ROAR!!!


EVEN WITH ROUGH SKETCHES LIKE THESE, A CASUAL READER SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO "READ" THE ACTION CLEARLY.


OUR CHOICE OF MOMENT -- THE SELECTION PROCESS THAT LED TO THESE EIGHT PANELS -- PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN INSURING THAT CLARITY.


THE MOMENTS CHOSEN IN THE ABOVE SEQUENCE REPRESENT THE MOST DIRECT, EFFICIENT ROUTE TO COMMUNICATING OUR SIMPLE PLOT.

ANY NUMBER OF MOMENTS COULD HAVE BEEN USED TO REPRESENT "A MAN IS WALKING," BUT ALL WE REALLY NEEDED IN THIS CASE WAS ONE. SO THAT'S WHAT WAS CHOSEN.
A MAN IS WALKING

EACH PANEL FURTHERS THE "PLOT."

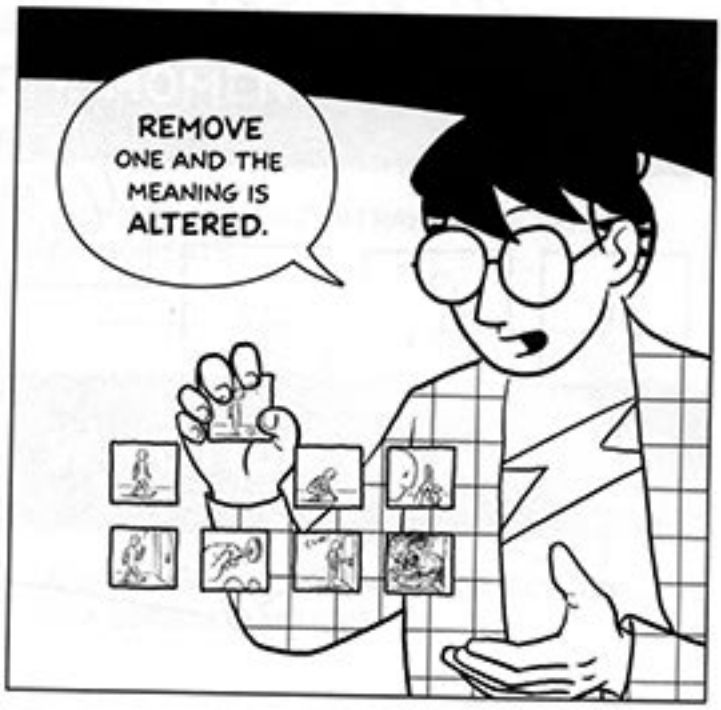
"A man is walking."

"He finds a key on the ground."

"He takes it with him, then he comes to a locked door."

"He unlocks the door."

"Then a hungry lion jumps out."

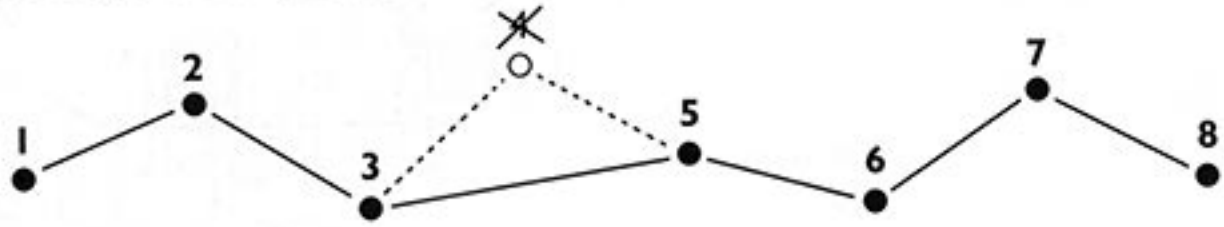


-- BECOMES A KEY **RETRIEVED.**

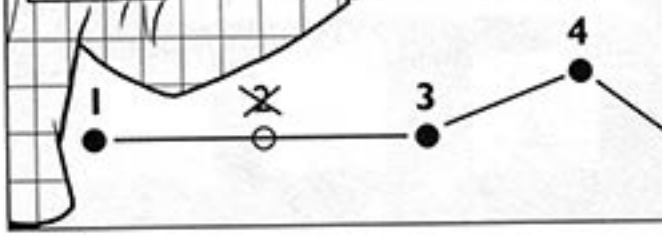
-- BECOMES THE FINDING OF AN **UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT.**

WHEN CLARITY IS YOUR **SOLE PURPOSE** --

-- YOUR STORY'S MOMENTS SHOULD BE LIKE A **DOT-TO-DOT PUZZLE.** REMOVE ONE DOT AND YOU **CHANGE** THE **SHAPE** OF THE **STORY.**

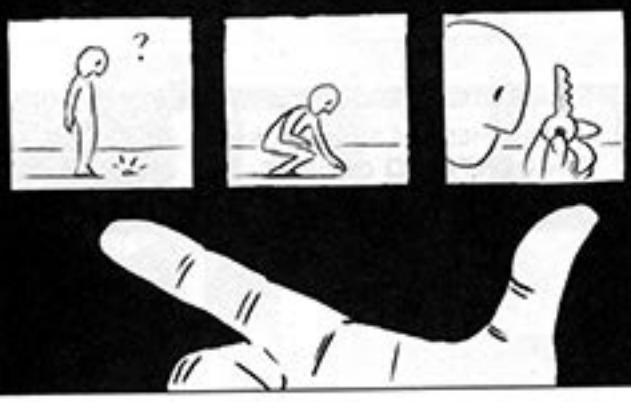


OR IF THAT'S **NOT** THE CASE, MAYBE THAT PARTICULAR "DOT" WASN'T NEEDED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

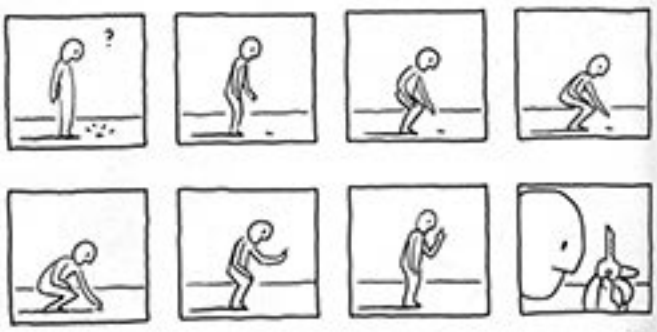


EACH PANEL SHOWS A COMPLETE **ACTION,** BECAUSE WE'RE ADAPTING A PLOT THAT'S ANCHORED ENTIRELY **IN** ACTIONS.

"HE FINDS A KEY ON THE GROUND" BREAKS DOWN INTO THREE SUCH ACTIONS: **SEEING, REACHING DOWN** AND **EXAMINING** (I.E., GIVING READERS A CLEAR VIEW OF THE KEY ITSELF).



IF THE PLOT CALLED FOR THE MAN TO **"SLOWLY"** REACH DOWN, A CERTAIN NUMBER OF **EXTRA** "DOTS" MIGHT HAVE BEEN NECESSARY TO SHOW THE FINDING OF THE KEY --

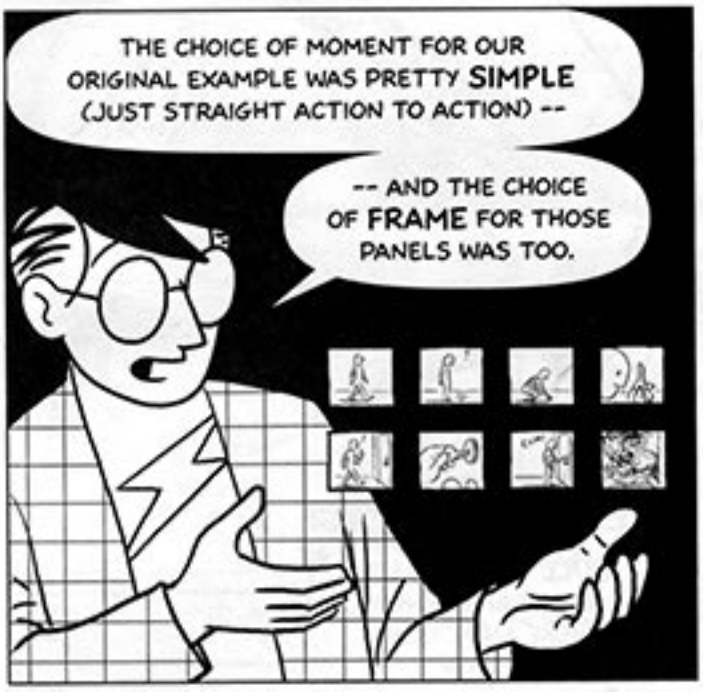


-- BUT BECAUSE WE'RE ILLUSTRATING THE **FACT** OF THESE ACTIONS, RATHER THAN THEIR **QUALITY,** ONE PANEL PER ACTION SEEMS TO BE ENOUGH.

CHOICE OF FRAME IS THE STAGE WHERE YOU DECIDE HOW CLOSELY TO FRAME AN ACTION TO SHOW ALL THE PERTINENT DETAILS --
-- OR HOW FAR TO PULL BACK TO LET THE READER KNOW WHERE AN ACTION IS TAKING PLACE --
-- AND MAYBE GIVE A SENSE OF BEING THERE IN THE PROCESS.

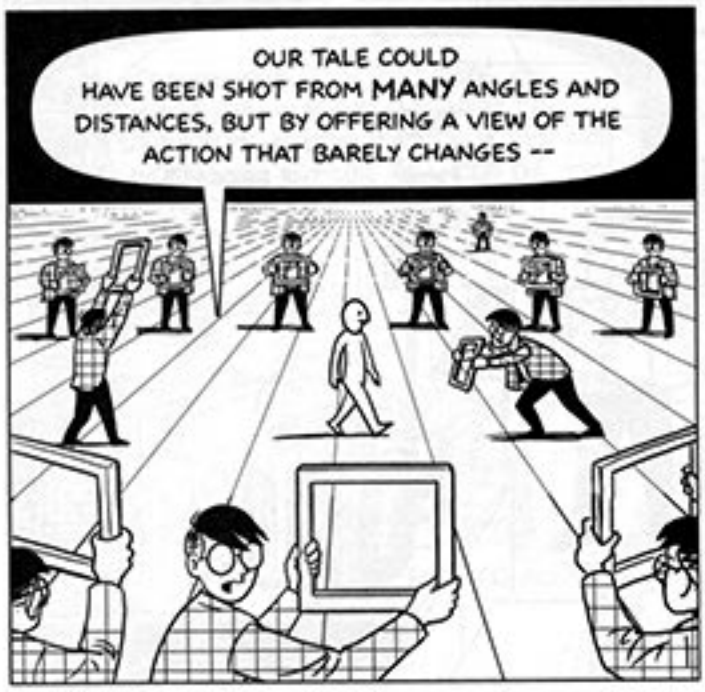
IT'S THE STAGE WHERE YOU DECIDE HOW COMPOSITIONAL FACTORS LIKE CROPPING, BALANCE AND TILT AFFECT YOUR READERS' IMPRESSIONS OF YOUR WORLD --

-- AND THEIR SENSE OF POSITION WITHIN THAT WORLD.



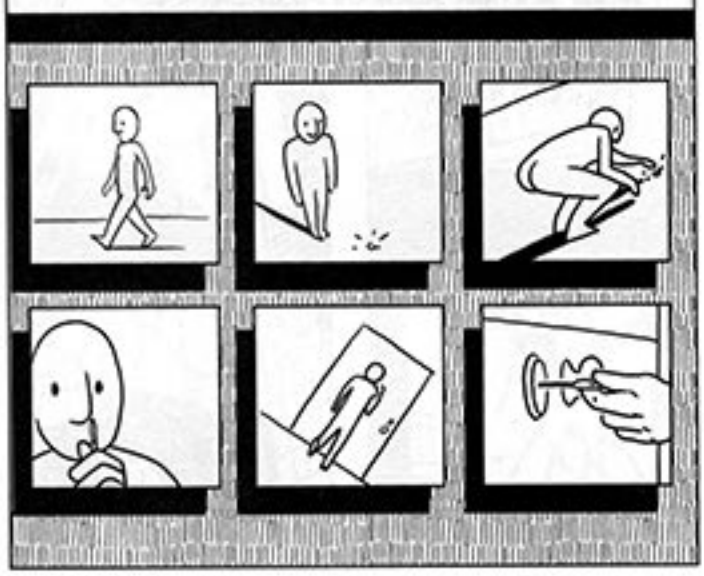
TWO OUT OF THE EIGHT PANELS FEATURED **CLOSE-UPS** TO SHOW A FEW IMPORTANT DETAILS --

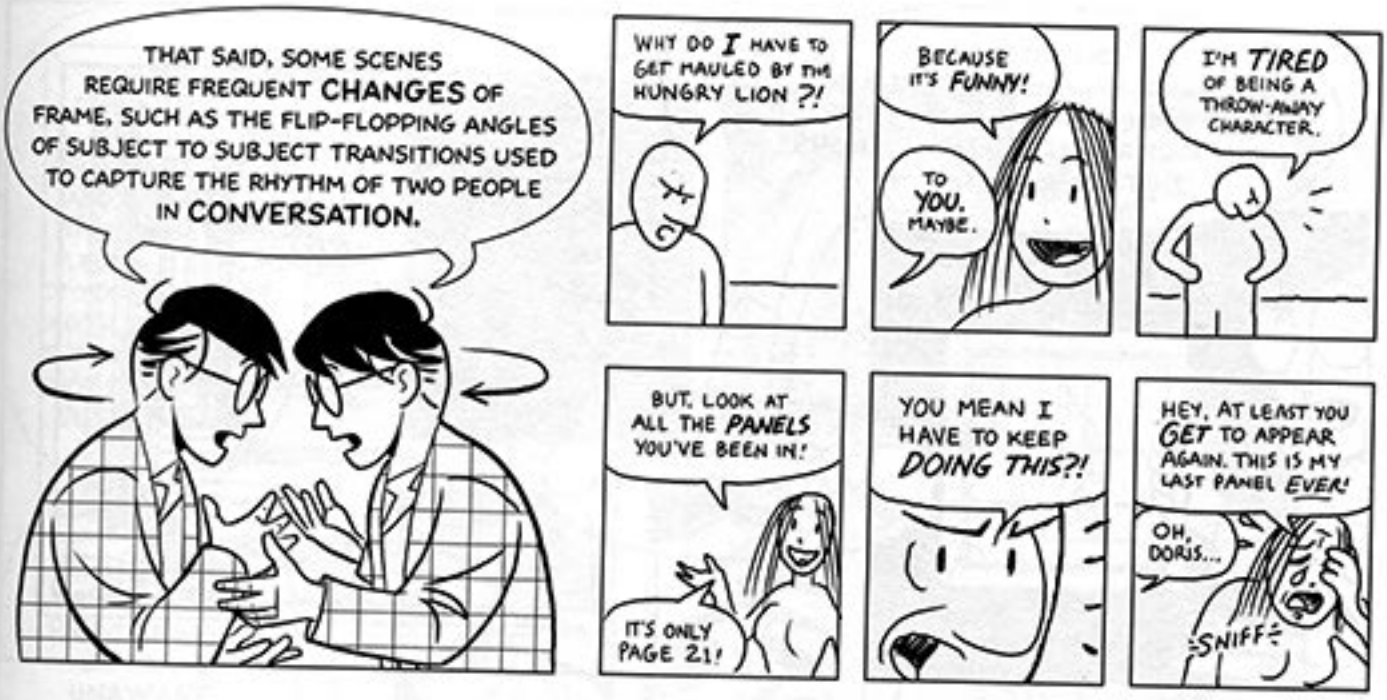
-- BUT OTHERWISE, THE ACTION WAS SHOWN FROM A FIXED MIDDLE **DISTANCE** AND FIXED VIEWING **ANGLE**.

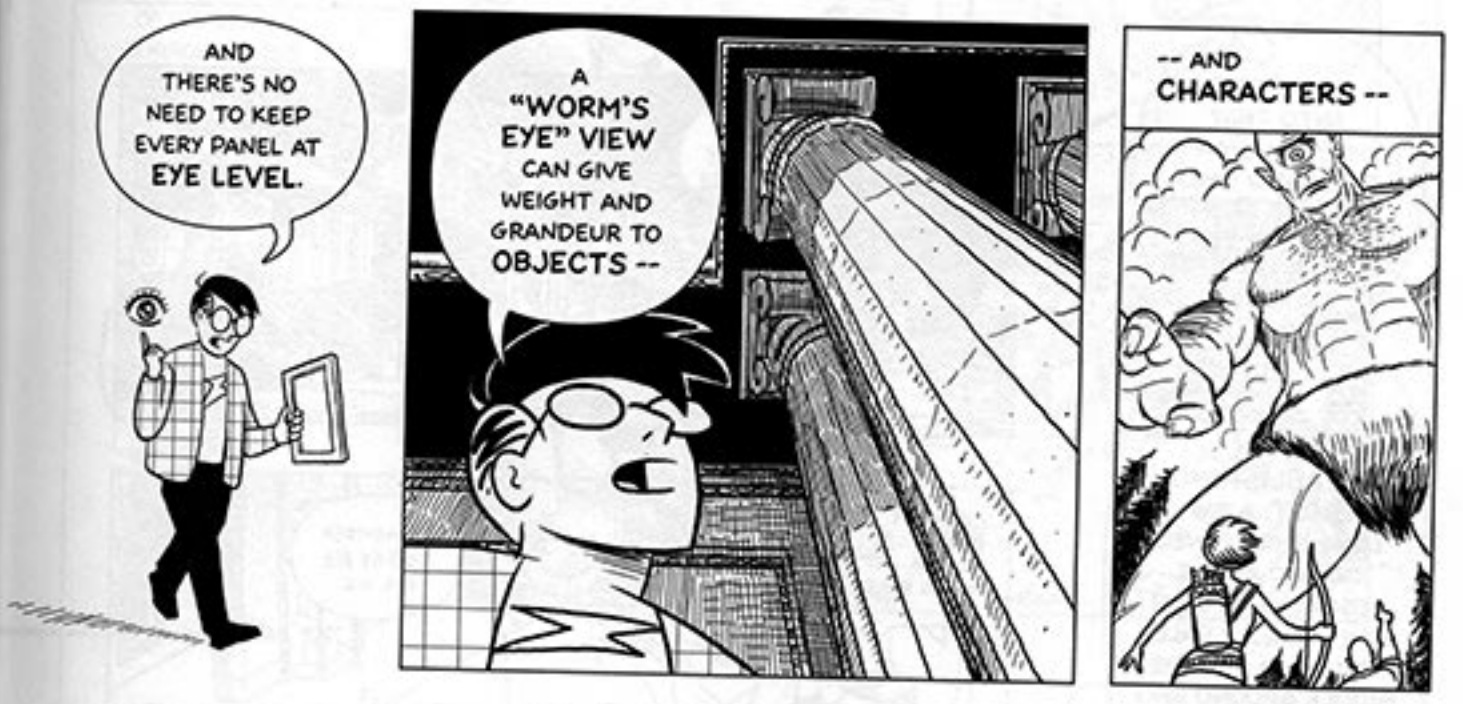


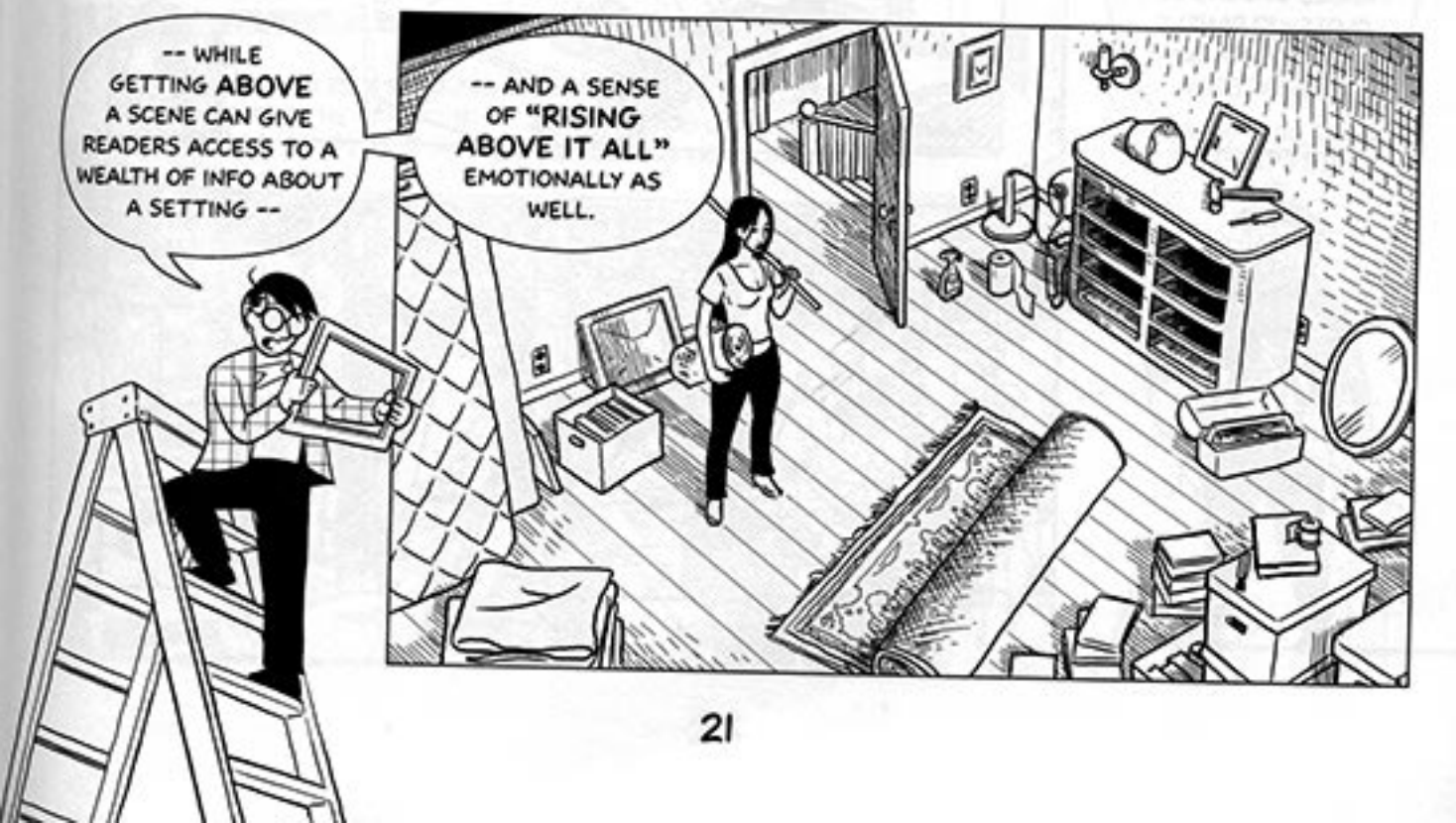
-- THE READER IS ENCOURAGED TO FOCUS ON WHAT **DOES** CHANGE, SUCH AS THE **POSITION** AND **ATTITUDE** OF THE CHARACTER, AS WELL AS HIS UNCHANGING FORWARD **STANCE** --

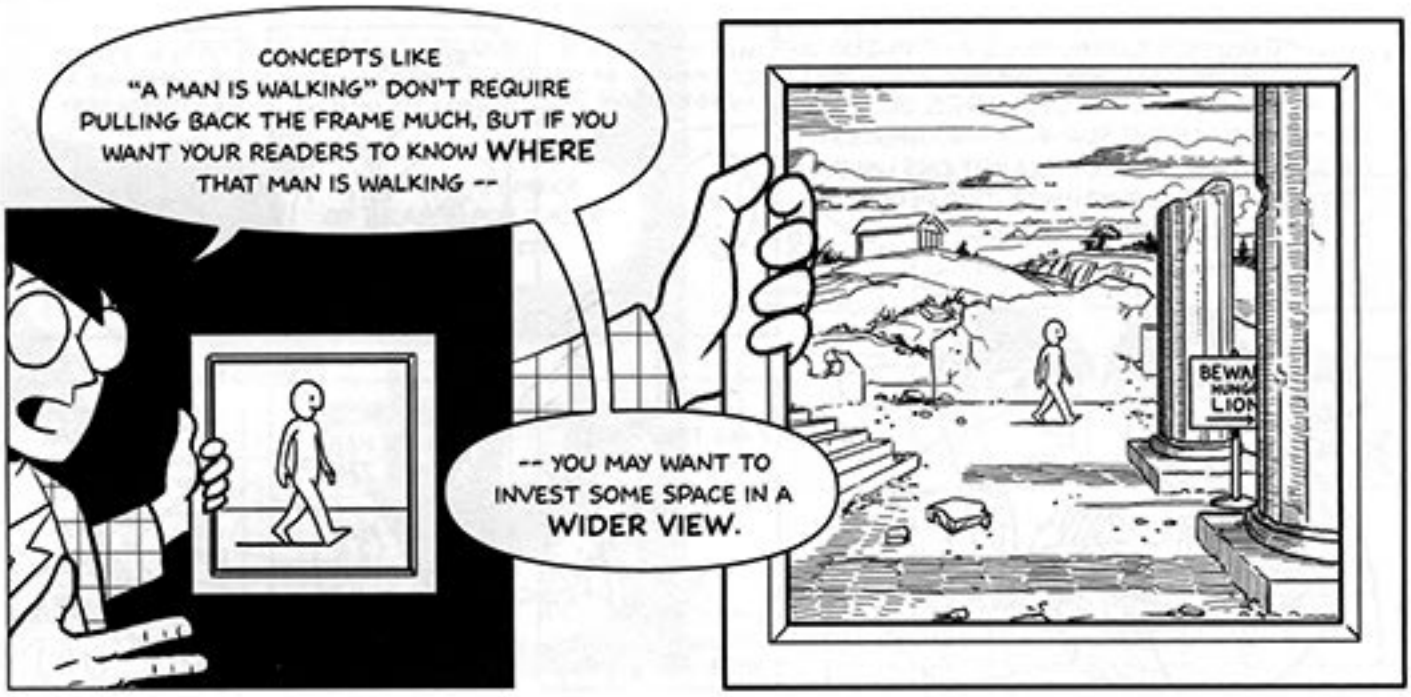
-- INSTEAD OF BEING **DISTRACTED** BY NEEDLESSLY VARYING SHOTS, IRRELEVANT TO THE NARRATIVE.

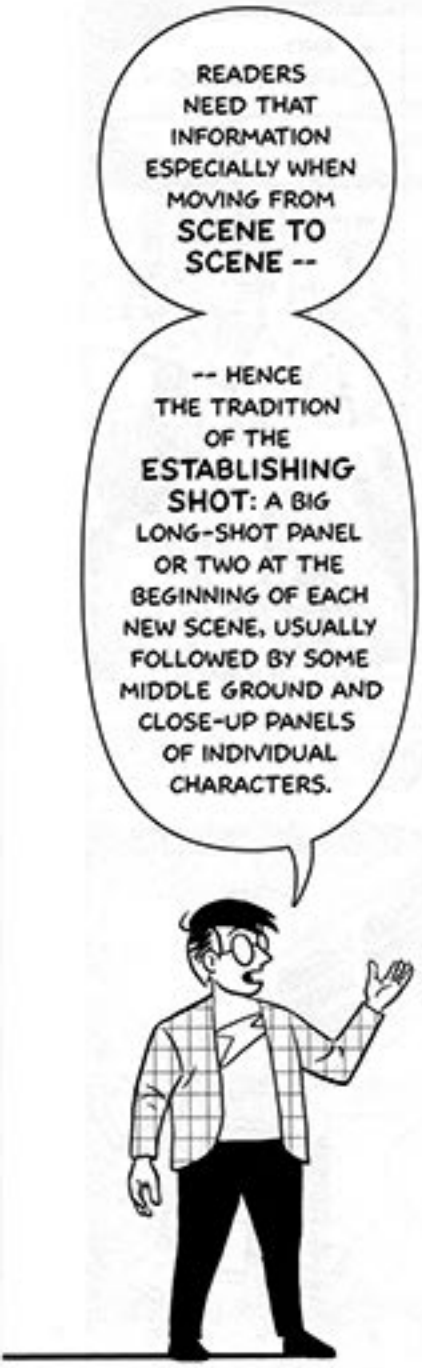



THAT SAID, SOME SCENES REQUIRE FREQUENT CHANGES OF FRAME, SUCH AS THE FLIP-FLOPPING ANGLES OF SUBJECT TO SUBJECT TRANSITIONS USED TO CAPTURE THE RHYTHM OF TWO PEOPLE IN CONVERSATION.
WHY DO I HAVE TO GET MAULED BY THE HUNGRY LION ?!
BECAUSE IT'S FUNNY!
TO YOU, MAYBE.
I'M TIRED OF BEING A THROW-AWAY CHARACTER.
BUT, LOOK AT ALL THE PANELS YOU'VE BEEN IN!
IT'S ONLY PAGE 21!
YOU MEAN I HAVE TO KEEP DOING THIS?!
HEY, AT LEAST YOU GET TO APPEAR AGAIN. THIS IS MY LAST PANEL EVER!
OH, DORIS...
SNIFF


AND THERE'S NO NEED TO KEEP EVERY PANEL AT EYE LEVEL.
A "WORM'S EYE" VIEW CAN GIVE WEIGHT AND GRANDEUR TO OBJECTS --
-- AND CHARACTERS --

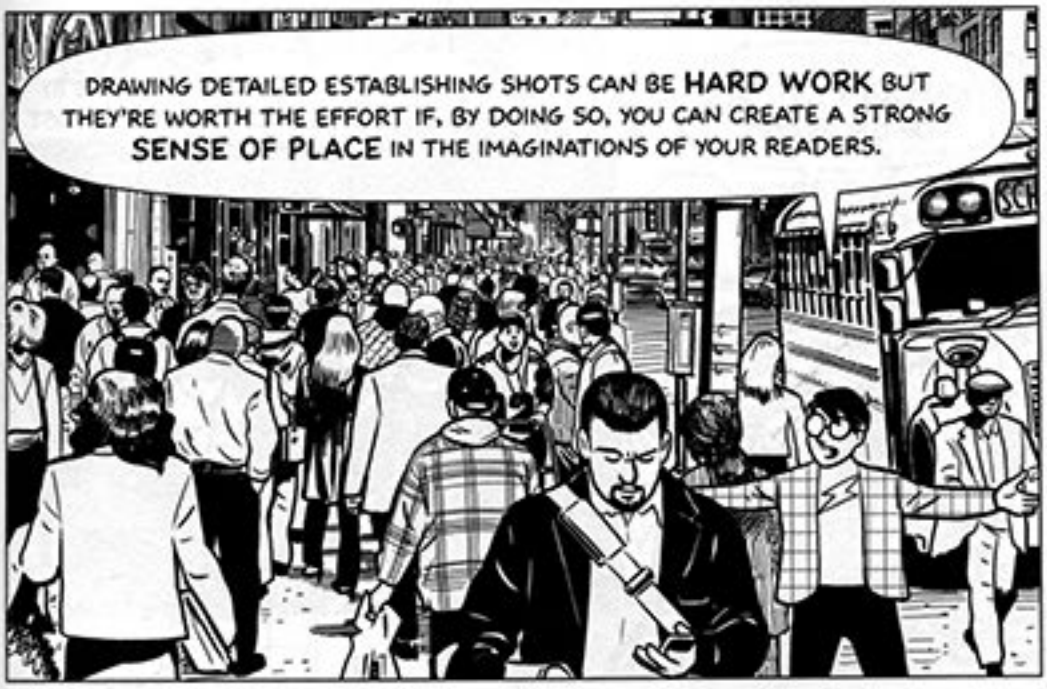

-- WHILE GETTING ABOVE A SCENE CAN GIVE READERS ACCESS TO A WEALTH OF INFO ABOUT A SETTING --
-- AND A SENSE OF "RISING ABOVE IT ALL" EMOTIONALLY AS WELL.


CONCEPTS LIKE "A MAN IS WALKING" DON'T REQUIRE PULLING BACK THE FRAME MUCH, BUT IF YOU WANT YOUR READERS TO KNOW WHERE THAT MAN IS WALKING --
-- YOU MAY WANT TO INVEST SOME SPACE IN A WIDER VIEW.

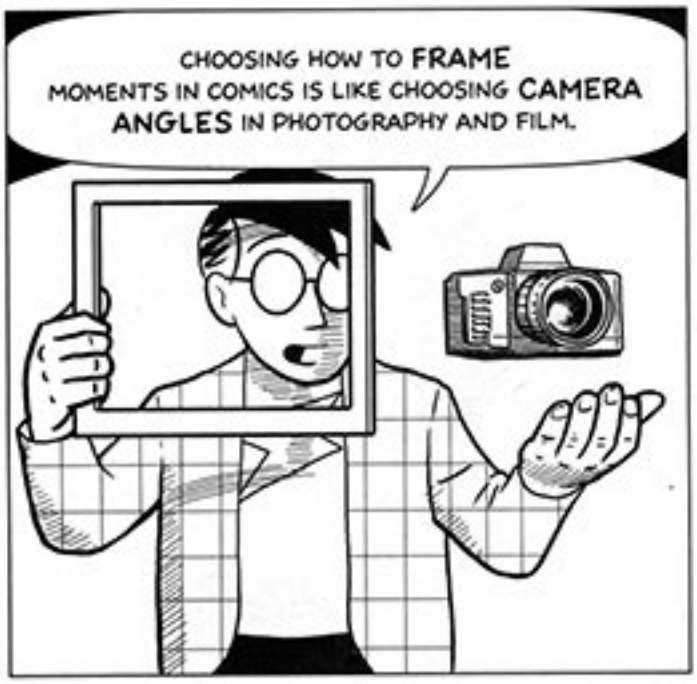

READERS NEED THAT INFORMATION ESPECIALLY WHEN MOVING FROM SCENE TO SCENE --
-- HENCE THE TRADITION OF THE ESTABLISHING SHOT: A BIG LONG-SHOT PANEL OR TWO AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH NEW SCENE, USUALLY FOLLOWED BY SOME MIDDLE GROUND AND CLOSE-UP PANELS OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS.

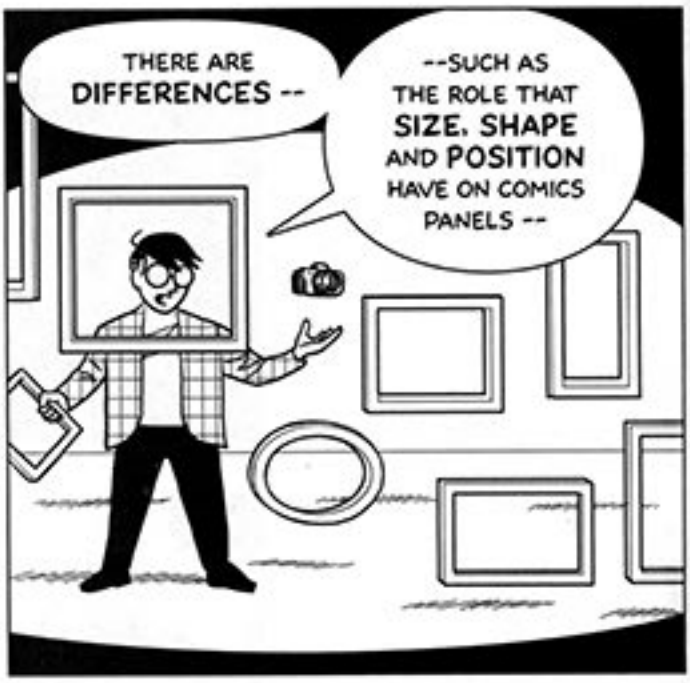
UH-OH. LOOK AT THE TIME!
ALMOST DAWN... I BETTER GET ON THE ROAD.
REMEMBER TO SAY HI FOR ME.
IF I HURRY, I CAN MAKE IT THERE BY SUNDOWN.
DON'T HURRY TOO MUCH.
DRIVE SAFELY, OKAY?
DON'T I ALWAYS?

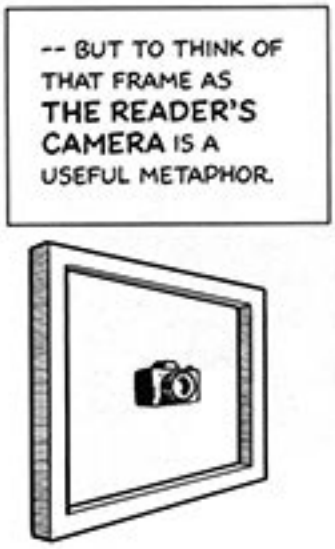
ON THE OTHER HAND, BECAUSE READERS WANT AND EXPECT THAT SENSE OF PLACE, A CLEVER STORYTELLER CAN CHOOSE TO DELAY THE ESTABLISHING SHOT TO INCREASE SUSPENSE --
-- OR TO MIRROR THE THOUGHTS OF A CHARACTER WHO'S TEMPORARILY UNAWARE OF HIS OR HER SURROUNDINGS.


DRAWING DETAILED ESTABLISHING SHOTS CAN BE HARD WORK BUT THEY'RE WORTH THE EFFORT IF, BY DOING SO, YOU CAN CREATE A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE IN THE IMAGINATIONS OF YOUR READERS.

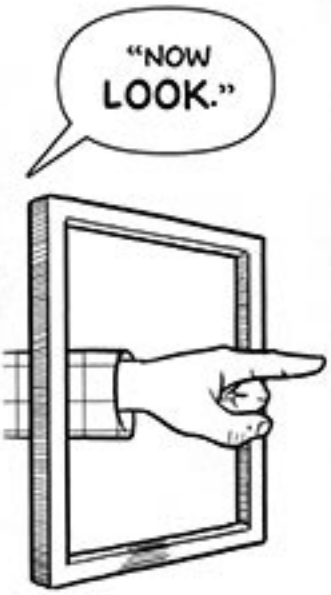
LOOK FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC IN CHAPTER FOUR.


CHOOSING HOW TO FRAME MOMENTS IN COMICS IS LIKE CHOOSING CAMERA ANGLES IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM.


THERE ARE DIFFERENCES --
--SUCH AS THE ROLE THAT SIZE, SHAPE AND POSITION HAVE ON COMICS PANELS --


-- BUT TO THINK OF THAT FRAME AS THE READER'S CAMERA IS A USEFUL METAPHOR.

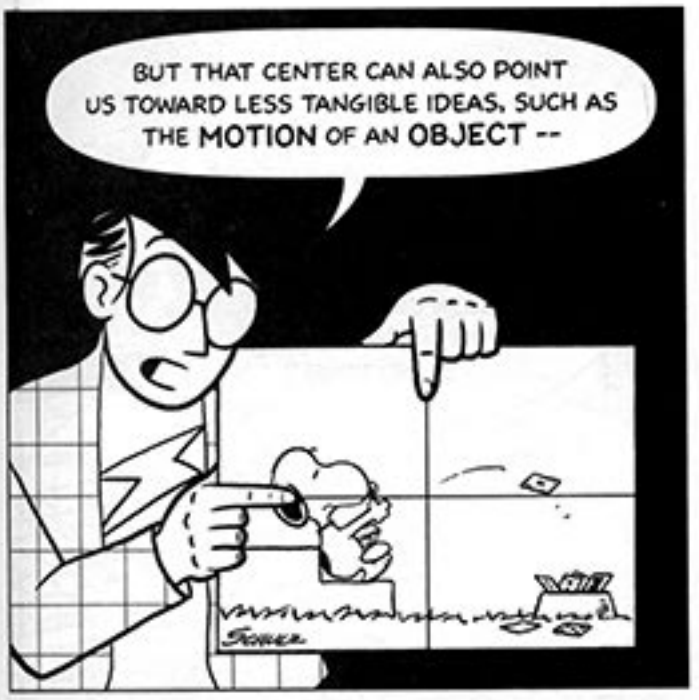
THIS IS THE DEVICE BY WHICH YOU CAN GRAB THE READER BY THE SHOULDER, GUIDE THEM TO THE RIGHT SPOT --
-- AND TELL THEM "YOU ARE HERE..."


"NOW LOOK."

READERS WILL ASSIGN IMPORTANCE TO CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS PLACED IN THE CENTER --

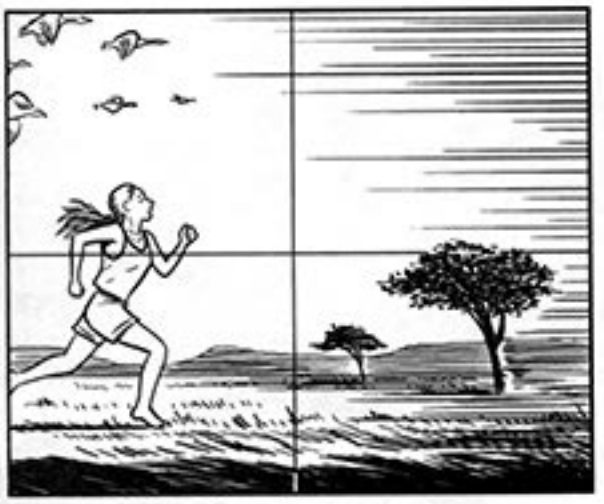
YOU CAN'T KILL ALL OF US, FRANK.
NOT THAT HE'S SUGGESTING ANYTHING!

-- AND SOME COMICS ARTISTS OBLIGE BY PUTTING THEIR MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS THERE.



-- A MYSTERIOUS **ABSENCE** --

-- A **DISTANCE** ABOUT TO BE **CROSSED** --



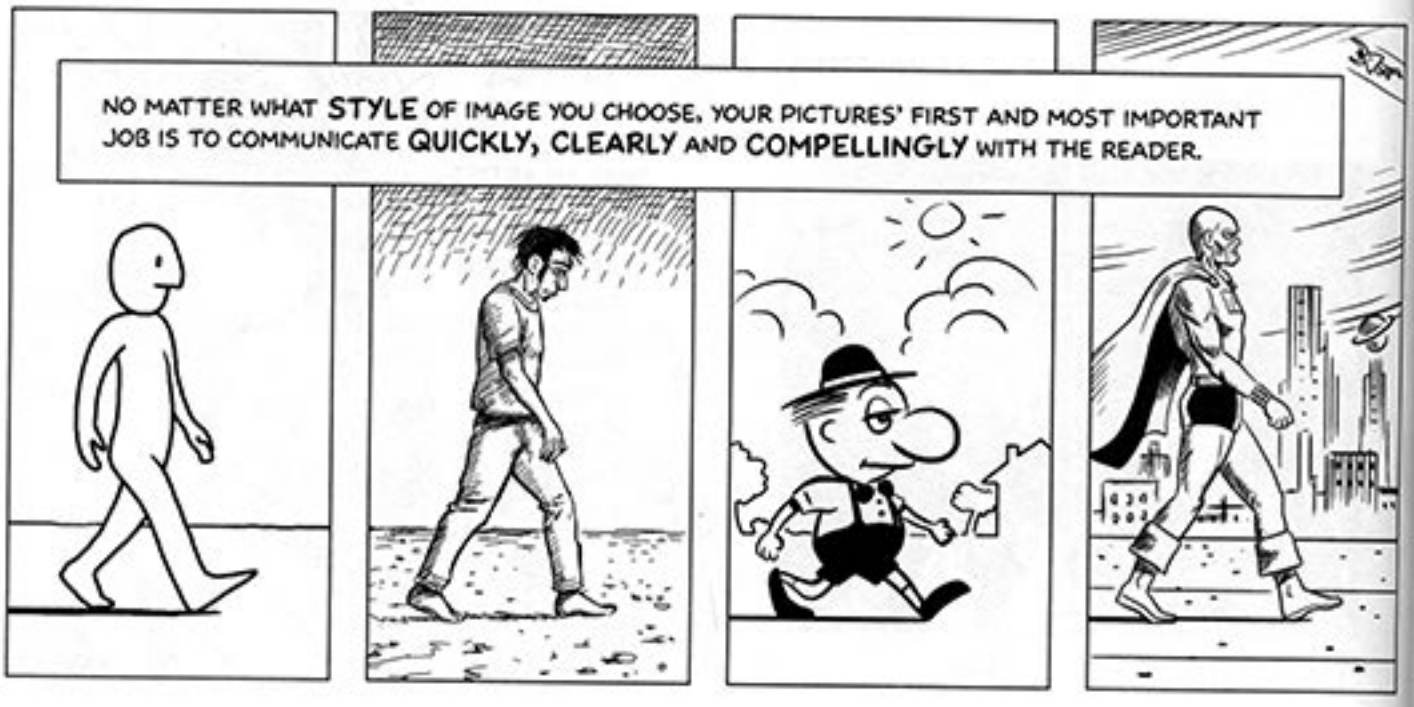
-- A DISTANCE CROSSED **ALREADY** --

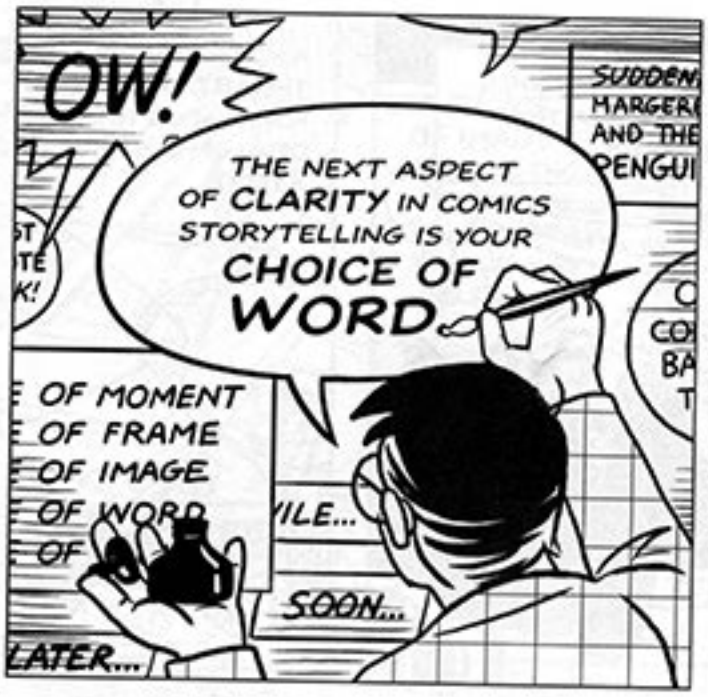
-- OR THE UNSEEN OBJECT OF A CHARACTER'S **ATTENTION.**

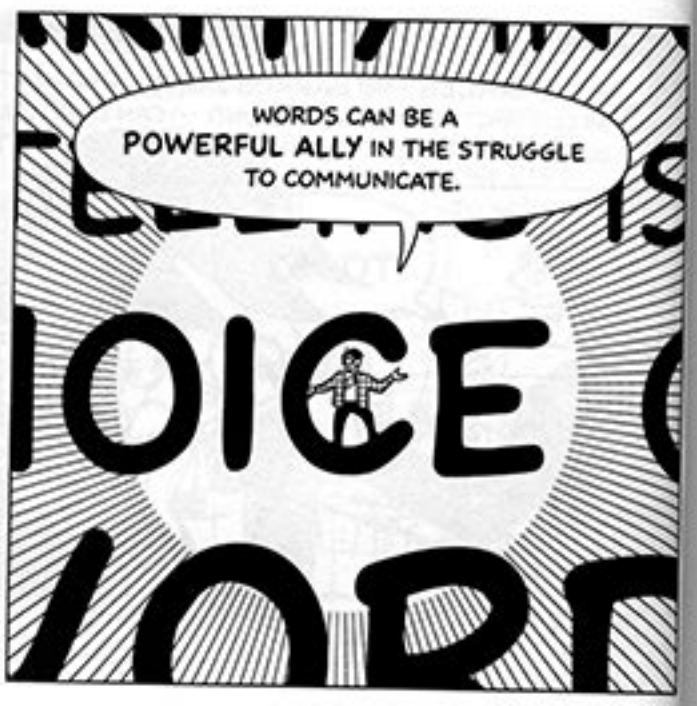
PANEL ONE: ART BY CHARLES SCHULZ. PANEL FOUR: ART BY JAIME HERNANDEZ (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

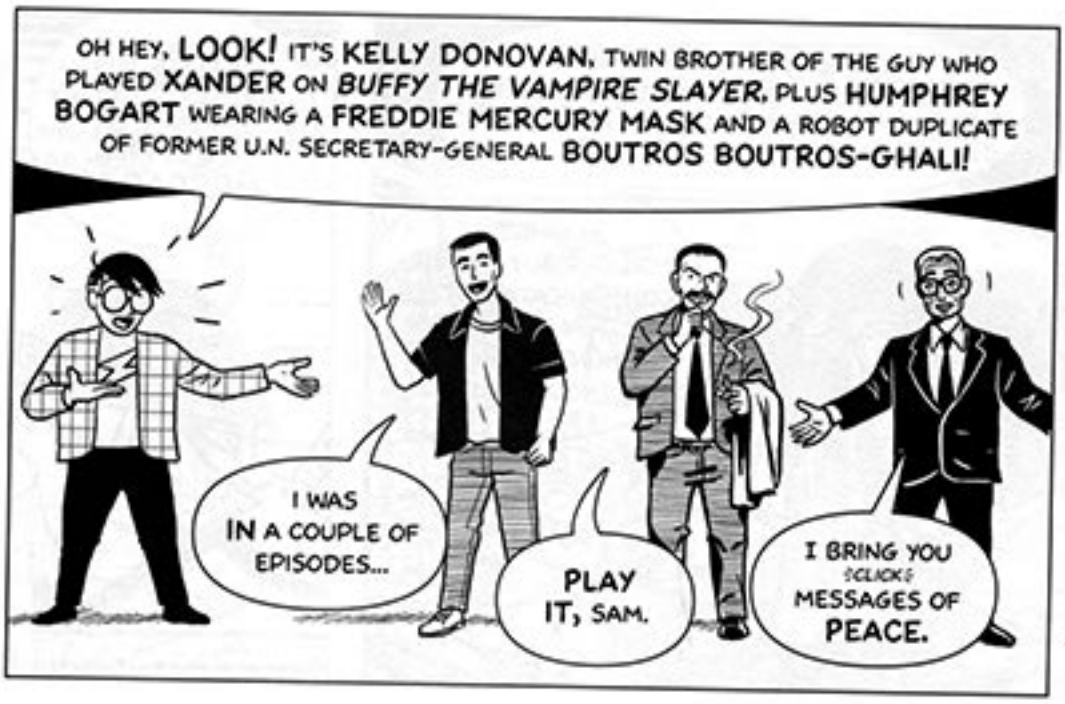
NEXT UP IS YOUR
CHOICE OF IMAGE:
CREATING PICTURES TO FILL THOSE FRAMES AND BRING THE WORLD OF YOUR STORY TO LIFE VISUALLY.
CHOICE OF MOMEN
CHOICE OF FRAME
CHOICE OF IMAGE
CHOICE OF WORD
CHOICE OF FLOW

AFTER ALL THAT PLANNING, CHOOSING, ARRANGING AND SKETCHING THINGS OUT, HERE'S THE PART OF THE PROCESS WHERE YOU GET TO PICK UP YOUR PEN, BRUSH OR DIGITAL STYLUS AND FINALLY DRAW SOMETHING!

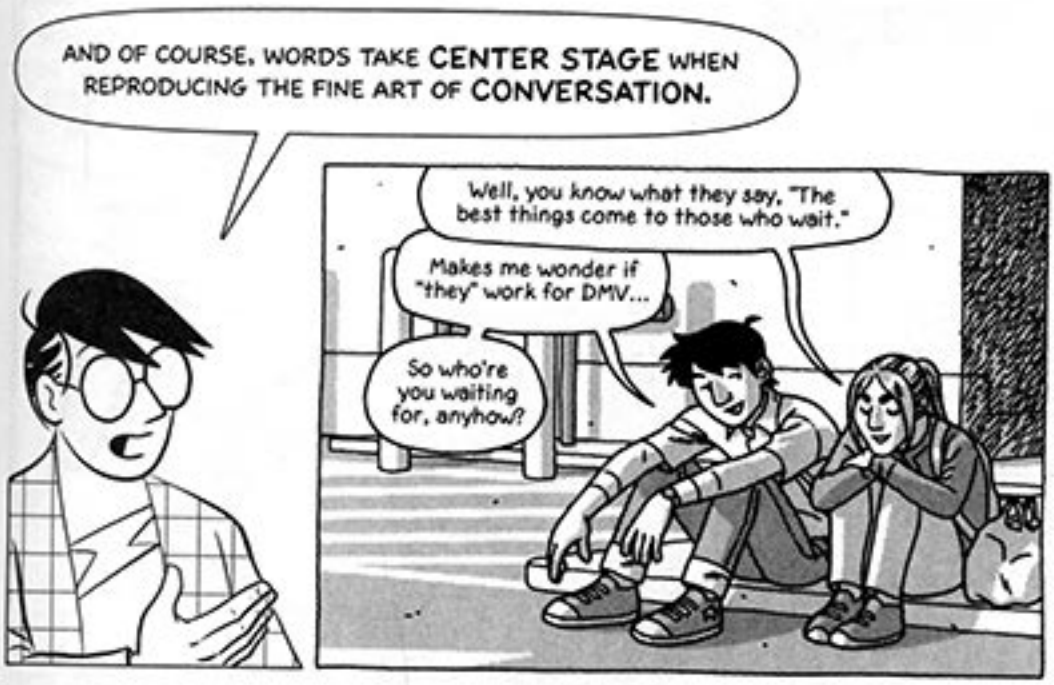

NO MATTER WHAT STYLE OF IMAGE YOU CHOOSE, YOUR PICTURES' FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT JOB IS TO COMMUNICATE QUICKLY, CLEARLY AND COMPELLINGLY WITH THE READER.







SPECIAL THANKS TO KELLY DONOVAN (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).



Words alone have been telling stories clearly for millennia. They've done just fine without pictures...

PANEL TWO: ART BY DEREK KIRK KIM (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

FINALLY, AFTER CHOOSING JUST THE RIGHT MOMENTS, FRAMES, IMAGES AND WORDS, ALL THAT'S LEFT IS YOUR **CHOICE OF FLOW:** HOW YOU **GUIDE** YOUR AUDIENCE **THROUGH** YOUR WORK FROM BEGINNING TO END.

BOTH **BETWEEN** PANELS AND **WITHIN** THEM.

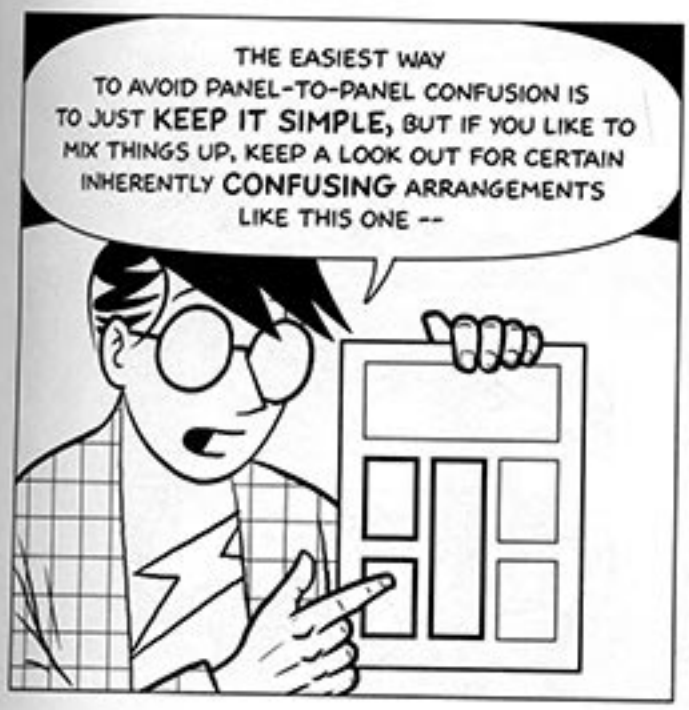
BETWEEN PANELS, YOUR CHOICE OF FLOW WILL RELY ON THE UNWRITTEN CONTRACT BETWEEN ARTISTS AND READERS WHICH STATES THAT PANELS ARE READ **LEFT-TO-RIGHT** FIRST, THEN **UP-TO-DOWN*** --

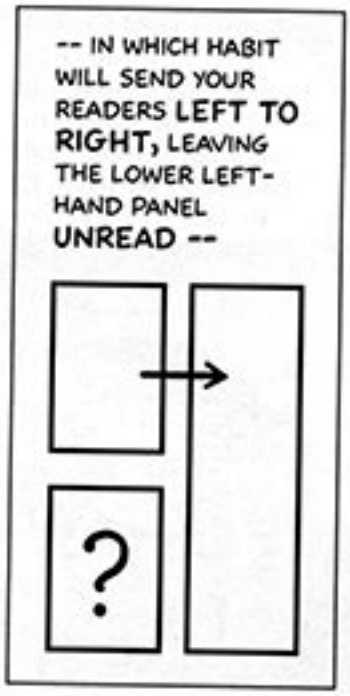
-- AND THAT **WITHIN** EACH PANEL, THE SAME PRINCIPLES WILL APPLY TO **CAPTIONS** AND **WORD BALLOONS.**

IT ALSO MEANS BEING ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ANY PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS THAT CAN **HELP** -- OR **HINDER** -- THAT FLOW.

CHOICE OF MOMENT
CHOICE OF FRAME
CHOICE OF IMAGE
CHOICE OF WORD
CHOICE OF FLOW

* OR RIGHT-TO-LEFT IN SOME CULTURES, OF COURSE.


THE EASIEST WAY TO AVOID PANEL-TO-PANEL CONFUSION IS TO JUST KEEP IT SIMPLE, BUT IF YOU LIKE TO MIX THINGS UP, KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR CERTAIN INHERENTLY CONFUSING ARRANGEMENTS LIKE THIS ONE --

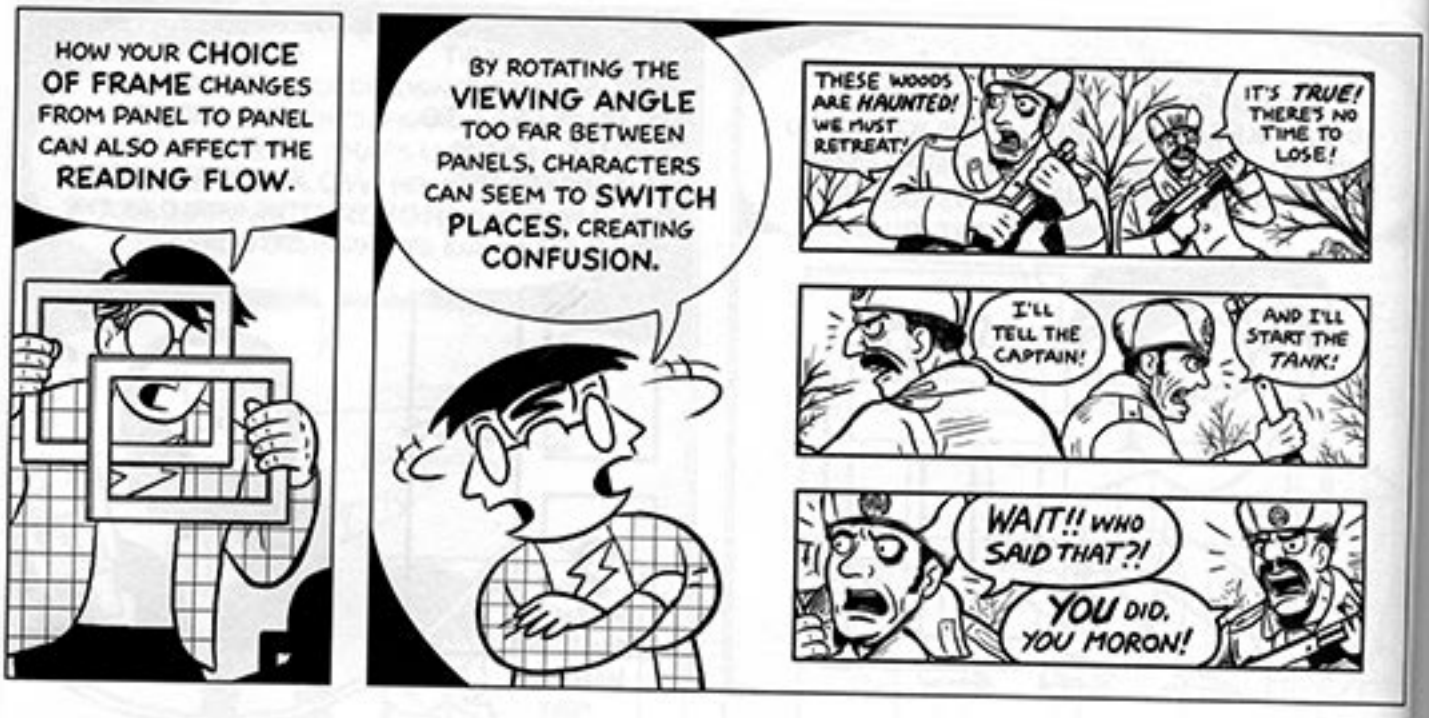

-- IN WHICH HABIT WILL SEND YOUR READERS LEFT TO RIGHT, LEAVING THE LOWER LEFT-HAND PANEL UNREAD --
?

-- AND PRODUCING JUST ENOUGH SPLIT-SECOND CONFUSION TO YANK READERS OUT OF THE WORLD OF THE STORY.
?

SURE, THERE ARE WAYS TO COMPEL READERS' EYES TO MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
JUST MAKE SURE YOUR LAYOUT IS SERVING YOUR STORY --
-- INSTEAD OF THE OTHER WAY AROUND --

-- UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU WANT TO GO THE EXPERIMENTAL ROUTE, AS I SOMETIMES DO, BUT THAT'S A WHOLE OTHER BOOK!

ANOTHER SOURCE OF "WHICH COMES NEXT?" CONFUSION OCCURS WHEN PANEL ARRANGEMENTS ARE OBSCURED BY TOO MANY "FOURTH WALL" BREAKS AND BORDERLESS IMAGES.
!!!
THE COMPOSITIONS AND MOTION IN YOUR FRAMES CAN HELP GUIDE THE READERS' EYES, BUT MAKE SURE THEY'RE BEING GUIDED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!


HOW YOUR CHOICE OF FRAME CHANGES FROM PANEL TO PANEL CAN ALSO AFFECT THE READING FLOW.
BY ROTATING THE VIEWING ANGLE TOO FAR BETWEEN PANELS, CHARACTERS CAN SEEM TO SWITCH PLACES, CREATING CONFUSION.
THESE WOODS ARE HAUNTED! WE MUST RETREAT!
IT'S TRUE! THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE!
I'LL TELL THE CAPTAIN!
AND I'LL START THE TANK!
WAIT!! WHO SAID THAT?!
YOU DID, YOU MORON!

CONSIDER SHOWING YOUR WORK-IN-PROGRESS TO A FRIEND TO CATCH SUCH MIX-UPS IN THE ROUGH PLANNING STAGE -- AND IN THE FINISHED ART, OF COURSE.
DUDE, THIS GIRL'S BREAST DOES NOT LOOK RIGHT.
THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE MY DAD!

CHOICE OF FLOW IS PARTIALLY ABOUT CLEARING YOUR READERS' PATHS OF OBSTACLES TO A SMOOTH READING EXPERIENCE.
EQUALLY IMPORTANT THOUGH, IS HOW THE SIGHTS ALONG THAT PATH DRAW THE READERS' EYES.
FUMP!

NOT ALL PICTURES ARE CREATED EQUAL. READERS FOCUS ON AREAS OF CHANGE AND RELEVANCE TO THE STORY--

-- WHILE BACKGROUND DETAILS AND REPEATED ELEMENTS JUST FADE FROM VIEW AND ARE IGNORED.

LOOKING AT THE TABLE-CLOTH IN THAT LAST PANEL?
TAP! TAP!

DIDN'T THINK SO.

THERE'S NO WAY TO **FORCE** READERS TO TAKE A **SPECIFIC PATH.** BUT WITH EXPERIENCE, YOU CAN RELIABLY **PREDICT** WHAT THEY'LL PAY ATTENTION TO -- AND BE DISTRACTED **BY** -- AND **USE** THAT KNOWLEDGE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.

TAP! TAP!

YOUR READERS ARE **HUMANS,** JUST LIKE YOU AND ME, AND WE ALL **SORT INFORMATION** THE SAME WAY.

EVERY DAY, OUR **FIVE SENSES** TAKE IN AN OVERWHELMING AMOUNT OF **INFORMATION,** YET WE QUICKLY SEPARATE OUT WHAT WE **CARE** ABOUT FROM THE CHAOS AND DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TOWARD IT.

AND AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S THAT FLOW OF SELECTED MOMENTS THAT WE REMEMBER --

-- AND ALL THOSE **OTHER** SENSATIONS ARE LEFT ON THE **CUTTING ROOM FLOOR.**

IN COMICS, YOU CAN DO A LOT OF THAT "CUTTING" **BEFOREHAND** TO INSURE THAT THE FLOW OF IMAGES READERS SEE ARE EXACTLY THE ONES YOU **WANT** THEM TO SEE, IN THE **ORDER** THAT BEST SERVES YOUR **STORYTELLING GOALS.**

TOGETHER THESE FIVE KINDS OF **CHOICES** ARE WHAT COMMUNICATING THROUGH COMICS REQUIRES --

CLARITY

-- AND COMMUNICATING WITH **CLARITY** MEANS MAKING READER COMPREHENSION YOUR ULTIMATE **GOAL**.

CHOICE OF MOMENT

GOALS:

"CONNECTING THE DOTS." SHOWING THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER AND CUTTING THOSE THAT DON'T.

TOOLS:

THE SIX TRANSITIONS:
1. MOMENT TO MOMENT
2. ACTION TO ACTION
3. SUBJECT TO SUBJECT
3. SCENE TO SCENE
4. ASPECT TO ASPECT
5. NON SEQUITUR

MINIMIZING PANEL COUNT FOR EFFICIENCY, OR ADDING PANELS FOR EMPHASIS. CHARACTER OF MOMENT, MOOD AND IDEA.

CHOICE OF FRAME

GOALS:

SHOWING READERS WHAT THEY NEED TO SEE. CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE, POSITION AND FOCUS.

TOOLS:

FRAME SIZE AND SHAPE.

CHOICE OF "CAMERA" ANGLES, DISTANCE, HEIGHT, BALANCE AND CENTERING.

THE "ESTABLISHING SHOT." REVEALING AND WITHOLDING INFORMATION. DIRECTING READER FOCUS.

CHOICE OF IMAGE

GOALS:

CLEARLY AND QUICKLY EVOKING THE APPEARANCE OF CHARACTERS, OBJECTS, ENVIRONMENTS AND SYMBOLS.

TOOLS:

EVERY ARTISTIC/ GRAPHIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.

RESEMBLANCE, SPECIFICITY, EXPRESSION, BODY LANGUAGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD.

STYLISTIC AND EXPRESSIONISTIC DEVICES TO AFFECT MOOD AND EMOTION.

CHOICE OF WORD

GOALS:

CLEARLY AND PERSUASIVELY COMMUNICATING IDEAS, VOICES AND SOUNDS IN SEAMLESS COMBINATION WITH IMAGES.

TOOLS:

EVERY LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.

RANGE, SPECIFICITY, THE HUMAN VOICE, ABSTRACT CONCEPTS, THE EVOCATION OF OTHER SENSES.

BALLOONS, SOUND EFFECTS AND WORD / PICTURE INTEGRATION*

CHOICE OF FLOW

GOALS:

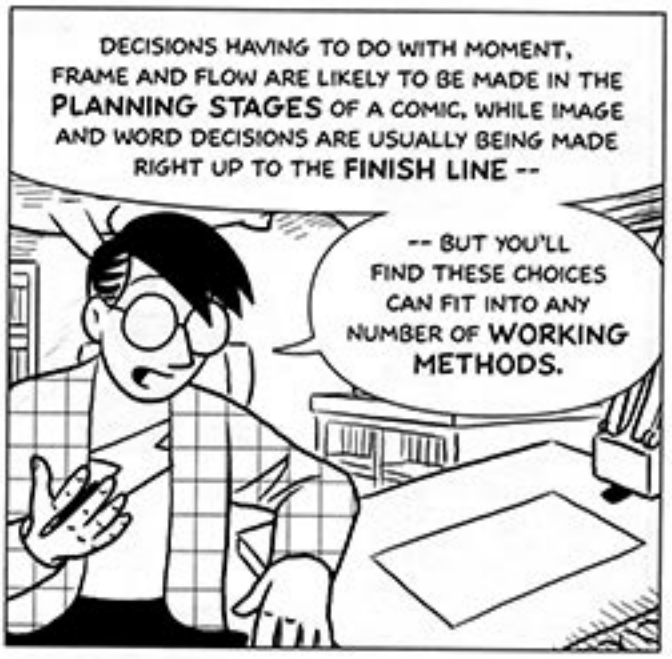
GUIDING READERS BETWEEN AND WITHIN PANELS, AND CREATING A TRANSPARENT AND INTUITIVE READING EXPERIENCE.

TOOLS:

THE ARRANGEMENT OF PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN, AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF ELEMENTS WITHIN A PANEL.

DIRECTING THE EYE THROUGH READER EXPECTATIONS AND CONTENT.

USING MOMENT, FRAME, IMAGE AND WORD IN TANDEM.



* SEE CHAPTER THREE: "THE POWER OF WORDS" FOR MORE ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORD/PICTURE INTEGRATION AND OTHER TECHNIQUES RELATED TO CHOICE OF WORD.