LET'S START THEIR STORY WITH A BIG ESTABLISHING SHOT TO SHOW WHERE THE ACTION IS TAKING PLACE. THEN A MIDDLE SHOT TO INTRODUCE CHARACTERS A AND B, AND THEN A CLOSE-UP ON CHARACTER A.

THREE MOMENTS, ACCOMMODATING THREE DIFFERENT FRAMES ON THE SAME SCENE.

WE COULD HAVE DONE MANY MORE FRAMES, BUT THREE GETS THE JOB DONE.

NO FIREWORKS IN THE IMAGES DEPARTMENT. JUST A FEW RECOGNIZABLE DETAILS, BUT OUR CHOICE OF IMAGE IS AT LEAST SPECIFIC. WE KNOW WE'RE IN A MIAMI-LIKE CITY; WE KNOW CHARACTER A IS A SERIOUS GUY.

WE KNOW WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW -- FOR NOW.

NOW AS A STARTS FOLLOWING B, NOTICE HOW BOTH ARE SHOWN IN FRAME, TO REINFORCE THEIR RELATIVE POSITIONS. ALSO, DESPITE CHANGING VIEWING ANGLES, BOTH MAINTAIN A LEFT-TO-RIGHT FORWARD FLOW, TRACKING THE READER'S USUAL READING DIRECTION.
No matter what working method you choose, making comics comes down to a series of decisions -- and each decision you make can be informed by, and evaluated on the basis of, these five categories.

Choice of moment
Choice of frame
Choice of image
Choice of word
Choice of flow

Example: Let's improvise a simple story, told as clearly as possible, and see how our five kinds of choices can be made in real time.

We'll start with a few throwaway characters.

An undercover cop.
A hapless doofus.
A mysterious woman.
A scruffy guy.
Next, by showing characters A and B from character C's point of view, we give readers a clear sense of where all three characters are in relation to one another.

It wasn't practical to show all three characters in a single frame—they'd be too small in a long-shot—but the visual fragments still add up to a single idea.

The double-circular shape of the binoculars in the first panel tells us we've introduced a third point of view.

Then we pick a long enough angle to show C's position on the roof—plus a close enough angle to show C's face and the binoculars clearly.

We've arrived at the next important location, so the camera pulls back again for another establishing shot.

Also, with D's introduction, comes our first dialogue.
The next two moments are framed a bit too close to show us exactly what is being bought or for how much and the words aren’t very specific either. Choice of frame and choice of word are both holding out on us!

Because of that deliberate lack of information, we only know what character A knows. In fact, panel two here is shot from A’s point of view, so his discovery feels like our own.

Now, as soon as words enter, the pictures alone wouldn’t quite tell the whole story.

Without “police!” for example, you might miss the badge and just assume that character A was a crook.

Notice too how many of these action to action choices are composed for left-to-right flow resulting in a sense of forward momentum.

Yet, when character A turns his head against the flow, it helps put on the brakes just as the action slows down.
OR -- AS HAPPENS NEXT --
THE CAMERA CAN SHARE INFORMATION WITH
READERS THAT CHARACTER A DOES NOT HAVE.
SPECIFICALLY, THE AMOUNT OF MONEY B GOT, AND
THE PRESENCE OF A GUN IN PANEL 4.

CAN WE GO NOW?
GOTTA TAKE YOU
BACK TO THE STATION.
SORRY, KID.

JUST A FEW
QUESTIONS...
YOU UNDERSTAND...
OH, YEAH.

NOTICE HOW
MOMENT, FRAME AND IMAGE
ACCOMMODATE EACH OTHER: ADDING
MOMENTS TO INCLUDE ANGLES WHICH
REVEAL MEANINGFUL DETAILS.

GOTTA TAKE YOU
BACK TO THE STATION
JUST A FEW
QUESTIONS...

HERE ALSO, WE SEE HOW WORDS AND PICTURES
CAN OPERATE ON DIFFERENT PLANES: ONE
RELAYING DIALOGUE THAT ALL CAN HEAR; THE
OTHER SHOWING INFORMATION (THE AMOUNT OF
MONEY) THAT ONLY SOME KNOW ABOUT.

AND BY LETTING READERS “IN ON THE SECRET,”
OUR CHOICE OF FRAME AND IMAGE MAY LEAVE
THEM FEELING A BIT LIKE COLLABORATORS.

NEXT, IT’S WORTH PULLING BACK THE
FRAME, NOT FOR A NEW SCENE, BUT BECAUSE OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCENE IS CHANGING.

ALSO WITH
PHYSICAL CONFLICTS,
THE LOCATIONS
OF CHARACTERS
MATTER.

WHAT TN...?
BANG!

GET OUTTA HERE!
AND AS THE SCENERY STARTS SHIFTING FAST, IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE FRAMING THE ACTION WITH LONG-SHOTS AND MIDDLE-SHOTS TO ALLOW READERS TO TAKE IT ALL IN.

HAVING KEPT ALL FRAMES AT THE SAME HEIGHT TO THIS POINT, ADDING A DOUBLE-HEIGHT PANEL CAN CHANGE THE FLOW OF ACTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE A VERTICAL SHIFT.

AND FINALLY, A FEW CLOSE-UPS AS WE MOVE IN FOR SOME CHARACTERIZATION -- OR WHAT PASSES FOR IT WITH A THROW-AWAY STORY LIKE THIS ONE.*

I THINK YOU HAVE SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO ME. NO WAY!!

THIS RELATIONSHIP IS NOT WORKING, DORIS!

GOOD BOY

* OBVIOUSLY, THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD STORYTELLING AND A GOOD STORY. I'M OFFERING THIS AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE FORMER ONLY.
**Extreme Depth Cues.**
The sense of great distances, extreme closeness and the contrast between them.

**Wild Variations of Frame Size and Shape.**

**Graphic Contrast.**
Bold juxtapositions of color, shape and brightness.

**Exaggerated Poses and Expressions!!**

**Virtuoso Drawing Technique.**

**Breaking the Fourth Wall.**
Borderless and border-breaking characters and objects.

**Diagonals.**
Tilted subjects, angles --

-- And so forth. You get the idea.
Now, the way I've illustrated them here, these qualities may recall certain genres of comics.

Particularly those involving a high incidence of hitting, bleeding, collisions, explosions or people saying "Oh my god, no!" on a regular basis.

But while the "exaggerated poses and expressions" --

--- OR "VIRTUOSO DRAWING TECHNIQUES" OF OTHER GENRES MIGHT TAKE ON DIFFERENT FLAVORS ---

-- THE BASIC EFFECT OF SUCH TECHNIQUES STAYS CONSTANT: ATTRACTING AND/OR EXCITING READERS AS SOON AS THEY PICK A COMIC OFF THE SHELF OR LOAD IT INTO THEIR BROWSER.

This idea of adding a little pizazz to a storyteller's style is a time-honored tradition.

Clarity without any presentational flair whatsoever can be a bitter pill for some to swallow.

Thing is, while clarity and intensity can go hand in hand, you can only lean on one side so hard before the other starts to suffer.

CLARITY

INTENSITY
WE TAKE THE BASIC COMPOSITIONS FOUND IN OUR SAMPLE STORY AND APPLY EVEN A FEW OF THESE DYNAMIC EFFECTS...

MORE EXTREMELY, MORE DIAGONALS, MORE EVAGGERATED POSTURES, AND ONE OR TWO FOURTH WALL BREAKS...

- THESE PANELS START TO FEEL LITTLE MORE LIVELY WITHOUT SACRIFICING MUCH CLARITY IN THE PROCESS.
But ramp up those same elements too much and you get an incomprehensible jumble.

In such cases, the intensity of the work as a whole can actually go down.

After all, if every panel is turned up to full volume at all times, any hope of dramatic contrast is lost!

In fact, there's no single level of intensity that's likely to work in every panel. It's in the variation between panels that true dynamic effects are created.
But just as a thundercloud needs time to grow and gather strength before the rain --

-- comics stories need time to build on the knowledge and expectations of readers before they can deliver their strongest moments.

When making comics for the first time, it's tempting to try to make every moment of a story hit like a thunderstorm.

Readers crave dramatic changes, but to highlight change requires an unchanging point of reference.

The fixed, quiet background sets the stage for the cacophonous intruder.

CRASH!!
THE FIXED CAMERA ANGLE DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE ZOOM.

THE FIXED THREE-BY-THREE PANEL GRID Prepares for the Impact of the Full-Page Panel.

AND THE FIXED MIDDLE GROUND SHOT CONTRIBUTES TO THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE CLOSE-UP.

Ben thinks she bought it for Kyle. She's never shown any interest in Kyle.

Or any boy, for that matter.

Hmm.

But then who...?

Oh my God. Of course!

--- And then Strike Like Lightning when it counts.

In short, sometimes just telling it straight, with clarity as your guide, is the best way for stories to gather steam...
Finding the right balance between intensity and clarity is more than just a practical challenge.

-- Between the joy of telling stories with a strong personal flair, making old stories seem new, taking readers on a thrilling ride and celebrating virtuosity of technique --

-- And the belief that the stories most worth telling can be told without any bells and whistles; that the characters and events in a story will be reason enough to keep reading, if the presentation is clear and effective.

Comics has seen plenty of great talents on both ends of the scale. There's no "right" choice.

But whichever side you plan to lean toward --

-- The principles of pure, clear storytelling should be your starting point.