OF COURSE, COMICS IS A VISUAL MEDIUM --

-- SO THAT INTERNAL VARIETY OF CHARACTER TYPES WILL NEED AN OUTWARD VARIETY OF VISUAL DESIGNS TO MATCH.

VARIETY AND DISTINCTION IN CHARACTER DESIGN ARE IMPORTANT FOR A FEW REASONS.

ON A PURELY PRACTICAL LEVEL, THEY HELP THE READER KEEP TRACK OF WHO'S WHO. A CAST OF CHARACTERS THAT ALL LOOK THE SAME CAN BE CONFUSING.

AND EVEN IF DETAILS LIKE FACIAL HAIR AND CLOTHING ARE THROWN IN TO DISTINGUISH THEM, TOO MUCH SIMILARITY IN CHARACTERS' UNDERLYING APPEARANCE CAN LEAD TO A BLAND COOKIE-CUTTER LOOK.

I AM SPARTACUS!

I AM SPARTACUS!

YEAH, LIKE ANYONE CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

I AM SPARTACUS!

NO! IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

NO, IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

NO, IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

NO, IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

SOME STRIVE TO MAKE EVERY ONE OF THEIR CHARACTERS BEAUTIFUL, AND IN DOING SO RELY ON THE SAME IDEAL FACE AND BODY REPEATEDLY.

BUT BEAUTY IS MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN GIVEN A BASIS FOR COMPARISON --

-- AND THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF BEAUTY TO CHOOSE FROM.
Now, drawing people is hard for some of us, so I understand why many artists rely on the same basic face and figure again and again. Getting it right once is difficult enough without having to reinvent the wheel each time.

But adding variety doesn't require you to be a master draftsman. It just means taking a closer look at your artwork and asking yourself a few questions.

Such as: "Are all of my characters the same weight and build?"

"Do I know each character's height? Do they all stand eye to eye?"

"Do I keep drawing the same nose and upper lips over and over?"

"Does every woman I draw have the same bust or hips?"

Deeper differences of face and body type help readers keep track of your cast, and gives them a unique visual reminder of characters' different personalities.

As your readers get to know your cast, those features will come to symbolize what each character means to them -- just as real-life photos of our friends and family can recall the whole person in our memories.
CARTOONY STYLES ACCOMMODATE MORE DRAMATIC VARIATIONS IN BODY TYPES, SO SUCH EXTREME DIFFERENCES HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH ALL-AGES TITLES.

-- AND EVEN REALISTICALLY PROPORTIONED FIGURES CAN SHOW DISTINCT VARIATIONS IN SHAPE, SIZE AND OTHER FEATURES.

But in some comics cultures, dramatic stories have also benefited from them --

Pay special attention to eyes. I found when doing ZOT! that I could highlight characters' unique qualities by giving each one a unique and easily recognized pair of eyes.

As with inner drives, sometimes a character's outer appearance can be built around a single idea.

Such thematic "casting" can be openly acknowledged, as in Neil Gaiman's Sandman series --

-- or just under the surface, as in Lee and Kirby's Fantastic Four.
EISNER SUGGESTS USING ANIMALS* AS A BASIS FOR CHARACTERS, IN PART TO TAP INTO READERS' PRIMORDIAL REACTIONS, AND LUCKILY THERE ARE A LOT OF ANIMALS OUT THERE TO CHOOSE FROM!

ANYTHING GOES. EVEN AFTER ONE SET OF THEMES HAS BEEN USED, IT CAN ALWAYS BE USED AGAIN -- SO LONG AS YOUR TAKE ON IT IS FRESH.

EARTH  AIR  FIRE  WATER

USE YOUR IMAGINATION AND YOU CAN PROBABLY COME UP WITH MANY SUCH THEMATIC GROUPS TO USE.

YOU MAY EVEN WANT TO TAP SOME OF THE VARIOUS PHYSICAL STEREOTYPES CARTOONISTS HAVE USED OVER THE YEARS, THE FACE AND BODY TYPES THAT CAN MARK A CHARACTER AS "HEROIC" OR "BRUTISH" OR "NERDY," ETC.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:
- THE FOUR SEASONS
- CHESS PIECES
- THE FIVE SENSES
- MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES
- COUNTRIES/STATES
- CULTURAL ERAS
- THE PLANETS
- HISTORICAL FIGURES
- TREES/PLANTS
- TOYS
- TAROT CARDS
- THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS
- SONGS
- HAND TOOLS
- ASTROLOGICAL SIGNS

OF COURSE, YOU COULD ALSO CONTRADICT THOSE ASSUMPTIONS, GIVE YOUR READERS A SURPRISE, AND PUNCTURE SOME REAL-LIFE STEREOTYPES IN THE PROCESS!

AT TIMES, I THINK POETRY IS CIVILIZATION'S ONLY RATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE FUTILITY OF LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION.

THESE HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING INSTANTLY RECOGNIZABLE AND CONFORMING TO READER EXPECTATIONS.

EKK!!
A MOUSE!

HEY!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!