

Russ Manning and Perfect Pages

by Jeff Singh

I have really grown to appreciate the art of Russ Manning as I have grown in my knowledge of comic art. When I began, his art didn't seem to stand out to me. As I learned more about inking, panel design, layouts and storytelling, I could see flaws in other artists work but not with Russ. The more I looked at his art, the more perfect a comic artist he was. I must admit, I am not familiar with his entire body of work. For me, Russ Manning is the guy that did Tarzan, Magnus Robot Fighter, Star Wars dailies and had Dave Stevens assist him at one time. I am sure he did more work than that but that is what I know. Rather than prove my ignorance and attempting to write a mini-biography, I thought I'd share the one piece of art I own by Russ Manning. I think it is a great page from Magnus Robot Fighter #8 by Gold Key. It is one of those pages that when you own it, you have no need for another example. I don't have a lot of pages like that but when I get one I tend to hang on to it. This is one of those pages.



From a content point of view, it is all there: Magnus, Leeja, good robots, bad robots, peril, a rescue and skis. And not just any skis, jet skis! There are nice images of Magnus rendered in Manning's perfect style. What else could I want? Nothing. I am done. No more Russ Manning art needed.

This page also got me thinking. What other pages do I have that singularly satisfy my need to own art by that artist? Before I get there, I have to say there are some artists like Bill Sienkiewicz, Alex Raymond, Seth Fisher... (it's going to be a long list) that even the best piece by them would not be enough for me to be satisfied with. There is also a long list of artists I don't need any art from that include such big names as John Byrne (sorry David), Sal Buscema, Herb Trimpe and

Todd McFarlane. OK, now back to my original train of thought. I think I have a few that come to mind. Although they may not be my only example, they are enough that if I only had this one piece I would need no other.

The first is a Steve Dillon page from Preacher. I like Steve's art but the reason I wanted a page other than that all the cool kids had them is that I enjoyed the comic. I read it long after it had come out which meant finding a page with good content was going to be more of a challenge. I got lucky with this one. With the exception of the glaring and ugly dedication by Garth Ennis who obviously had no problems with vandalizing art. It is a perfect page. Nice art. Everyone is there including Arseface, one of the more fun characters from the series. There is some fun dialogue with Arseface mumbling and then dribbling his coffee. It is also early enough that Jessie does not have an eye patch. It is a perfect page. Slam dunk and done!



Next up, a Halo Jones page by Ian Gibson. Halo Jones is my favorite Alan Moore material. I read the North American reprints when I was a teen and the story and character stuck with me. I got the page I have from Ian Gibson directly on ebay almost 15 years ago. I had another nice page and a cover which I parted with. I regret that but with the page I have I am satisfied. I still own a few other pieces by Ian as I like his work but I don't need them. This page would be enough for me. It has a great portrait of Halo in all of Ian's glorious style. This page also features Halo's robotic dog Toby, Rodice, some nice backgrounds and important story related dialogue. Ian's quirky and unique style shine through on this page. It is clean, with slick inks and nice flow. There is little more in an Ian Gibson page I could ask for. Wait, it gets a little better, it is also personalizes to me and not defaced like the Preacher page. Perfect. P.S. I no longer get pages personalized. My perspective on owning art has changed since 2002. I now subscribe to the caretaker philosophy of only being in possession of art.

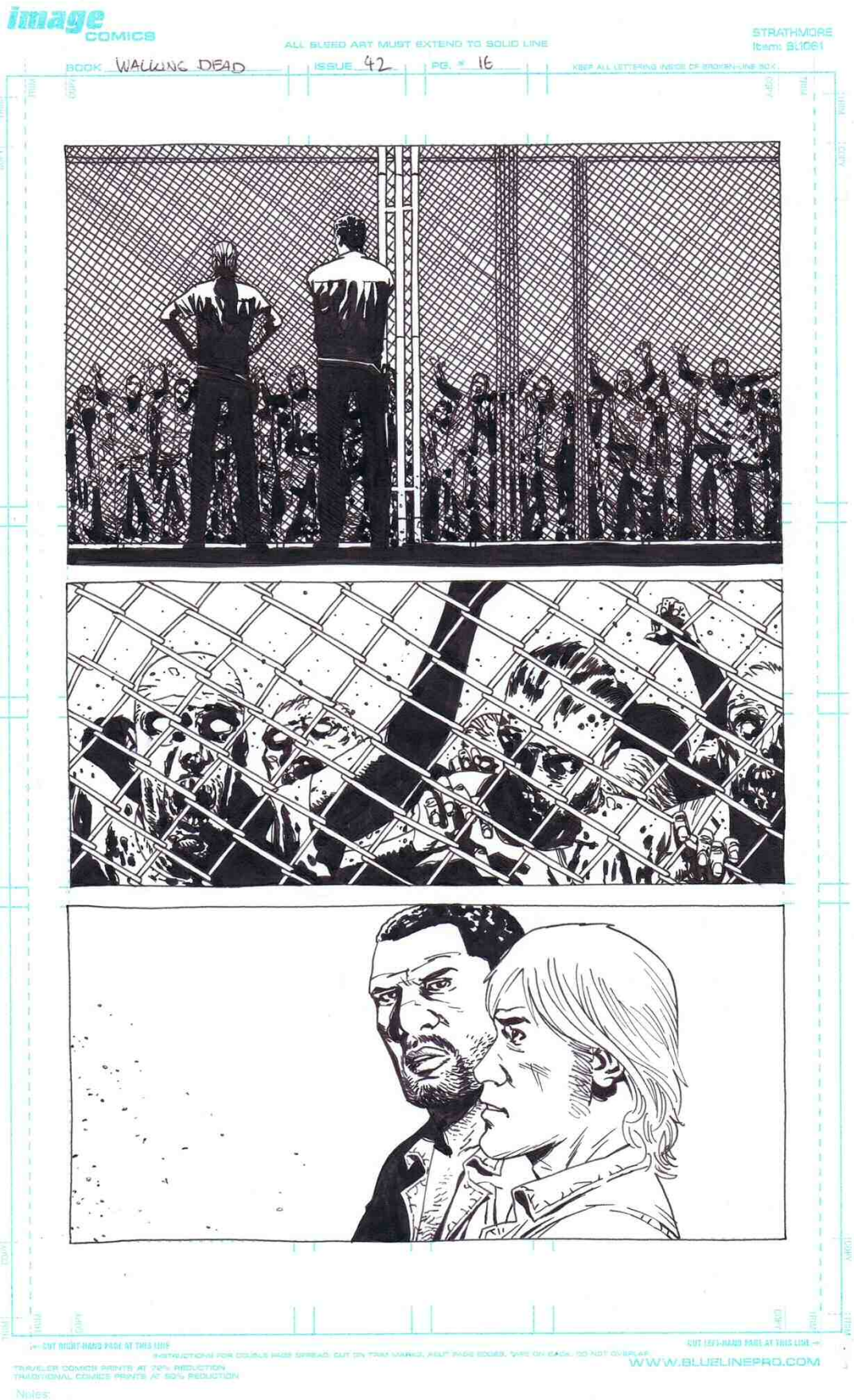


Next up, my Alex Toth page from Sinister House of Secret Love #3. I never really got into anything Toth worked on. My appreciation of his art and his contribution to comics is more academic. He was important. He was hugely influential and I

agreed with a lot of what he said about page design, focusing on the simple elements and deconstructing images. I like illustrators too, so I don't think his rules applied universally but I certainly respect what he aspired to in his artwork. I think the page I have is a good example of this. I like the content of this page being Horror based. Nice panel layouts with very clear shapes and storytelling. It is a page that is from Toth's prime and exemplifies a lot of what he spoke of in his philosophy of comic art. Owning this page as a singular example satisfies my need for Toth to the point where no other Toth art is required.



The Walking Dead is an amazing comic series. I first picked it up at a comic convention where I had set up and things were a bit slow. I asked the graphic novel seller next to me what was good and he said try the Walking Dead. I said I don't like zombies. He said it is not about zombies, it is about human interaction and survival. The zombies are just a genre to tell a good story. So, I bought the first trade and read it. By the end of the convention I had bought and read the first 8 trades. I was a fan. By this point, everyone else had already discovered the series and so the art was all gone. Even though the series is based on a zombie apocalypse, there are surprisingly few good pages with zombies on them. Although I do own a few pages, this one is such a great one I don't need to own another. It has the main character Rick and zombies on it. The image of a chain link fence keeping zombies out has become iconic with this series. The fence is a metaphor, zombies are a metaphor and Rick never truly gives up. Another perfect page. Next!





Lastly, here is a cover to DMZ #8 by Brian Wood. Brian created the series and did the art for a few covers before passing on the art chores to others. This is one of only a few pieces out there by Brian and it is another perfect page. It features the two main characters, Matty and Zee plus the cityscapes which Wood is known for. After having discovered DMZ, I went back and read other works by Brian and really got a sense of his vision and style. Although his early work was really good, it all came together for this series. Here is a singular image that captures all of that. This piece definitively checks off a box on my want list for good.

I probably have a few more but this was an interesting exercise for me. One thing I learned from this is that with the exception of the Toth, I was a fan of the comic books before I was a fan of the art or artist. Most of my collecting is based on art and not nostalgia. In all of these examples, love of the material preceded the search for art. I suspect that is why a single page with good content will do. With other artists I collect, because I like their art, I am looking for different elements and examples of their work and so my collection has a desire and capacity for

multiple examples. With these perfect pages, content is a much more important factor. For this reason, I think Toth fits this profile too. Although I did not read much of his comic work, I did read about him and his ideal and from that I was familiar with his work so the nostalgia factor may have been at work in a bit of a different way. I challenge other members to think of pieces like this in their collections, perfect pieces that singularly meet all your needs for a particular artist. Is it the art or is it the content that makes the page the one?