Introduction

Jason, whose real name is John Arne Sæterøy, was born in 1965 in Molde, Norway. Inspired by Belgian comics, such as Tintin by Hergé, and American superheroes, such as Batman and Spider-man, he began drawing comics and later publishing them in his teens. His early comics, such as the graphic novel *Lomma Full av Regn* ("Pocket Full of Rain"), were drawn in a representational style, which he ultimately found unsatisfying. By 1997, when he published the first issue of *Mjau Mjau* ("Meow Meow"), he had simplified his drawing style, and his characters began to feature the distinctive animal head/human body style, which he continues to employ today. Attracted by the French "Nouvelle Bande Dessinée" ("new comics"), Jason left Norway in 2001 to live in France and other parts of Europe. Jason is often associated with this movement since he, like other artists from the Nouvelle Bande Dessinée, such as Sfar, Christophe Blain, Dupuy-Berbérian, Marjane Satrapi, and David B., focuses on storytelling techniques unique to comic art, emphasizes personal graphic expression, and avoids cinematic techniques often utilized in American and European fantasy and science-fiction comics. Jason's comics have been translated in several languages and have won several awards, most notably for his highly acclaimed graphic novel, *Vent litt* ("Hey Wait!"). He still publishes issues of *Mjau Mjau*, and other graphic novels, as well as strips on Serializer.net

References

Jason's website (www.mjaumjau.net)
Serializer.net (www.serializer.net)

Study Questions

Because the characters do not have names, to facilitate the discussion, we will give them the following names:

Igor
The Scientist
The Pervert
1) Jason uses animal heads for his characters. How does this affect your ability to identify with the protagonists? Think of other artworks that substitute animals for humans. What do these have in common with You Can't Get There From Here?

2) How would you describe the style of Jason's art (line style, colors, depth, etc.)? How does it affect the content of You Can't Get There From Here? To facilitate your reflections, consider what Jason did NOT choose as in "what if Jason had used an abundance of thin, engraving-like lines? What if he had used only black and white, or many colors? Or a more realistic style?"

3) You Can't Get There From Here has very little dialogue. What did your mind's ear hear in the "silent" or "wordless" part of the story, and why? Other narrative visual art forms work without words, (e.g. silent movies and pantomime). Compare them with You Can't Get There From Here.

4) Every page, except three of them, has the same panel layout. What advantages or disadvantages might there have been in utilizing more extravagant panel compositions, as in superhero or manga comics.

5) To affect the reader’s perception of narrative time, a comic artist can vary panel sizes. Larger panels tend to slow down the tempo and smaller panels tend to accelerate it. Did you have the impression in You Can't Get There From Here that the pace of the story is uniform or varied? What portions of the story moved more quickly? Which less quickly? How was this achieved, given the consistency of the panel sizes?
6) Jason’s characters frequently look at something or someone throughout the story. Describe these various gazes (e.g. eyeing with envy, staring back, looking through one's mind's eye, etc.). What narrative purposes do these gazes serve?

7) Jason drew on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for inspiration. Critics studying Shelley's *Frankenstein* have long held that the scientist, Doctor Frankenstein, is a metaphor for the artist and that the creature is a metaphor for the artwork. Review *You Can't Get There From Here* while keeping in mind these metaphorical relationships (scientist=artist and creature=work of art). What new layers of meaning do you uncover?

8) Comics frequently employ visual metaphors (using one object to qualify another, as in "this man is a snake"). Locate and discuss Jason’s use of at least one such visual metaphor in *You Can't Get There From Here*.

9) Review page 20 in Part 1 in which the Bride is hit in the head with the croquet ball. In panel 4, we see a close-up of the Scientist looking down (presumably) at the Pervert and the Bride playing croquet. In panel 5, we see an extreme close-up of the Scientist’s eyes and eyebrows. What does the next panel (panel 6) represent (e.g. a microscopic furrow on the scientist's forehead, a crack in his skull below the skin, etc.)? How do all these possibilities affect and enrich the scene? Find other simple drawings that can be read in multiple ways.

10) In Part 2, Jason uses a technique film editors call "parallel editing," where the story jumps back and forth between two scenes in progress. How does parallel editing affect narration? Read only the pages of the two men in the café, and next, only the chase sequence of the Pervert and the Bride. Is the story more effective or less effective read this way?

**Studio Exercises**

Create a one-page wordless comic with two protagonists. One of these protagonists is a classic horror story creature (e.g. a ghost, a vampire, a werewolf, etc.). The other protagonist is a human being or an animal. They each want different things and have different desires, and therefore they must confront each other in some way.

Examples:
- a ghost wants to know what time it is and so it has to get it from a passerby (by force, seduction, wit, etc.)
- a vampire wants a kiss from an attractive human, but must hurry because the sun is about rise

**Version 1:** use only panels that show the characters from head-to-toe and draw only silhouettes (in other words, you fill with black all the outlines of your characters and props -- it should basically look like a black paper cut-out). Suggestion: draw several
tiny thumbnails first until you get a sequence of panels that clearly communicates your plot (and remove everything that confuses it), and then draw the fully inked page.

**Version 2:** redraw Version 1 with the same number of panels, but do without the silhouette requirement. Since you can now show new details (e.g. complete facial expressions), see how you can use this extra freedom to underscore and build extra meaning onto your original storyline.

**Version 3:** redraw the story using the same number of panels, but without either the “silhouette” or “head-to-toe” requirements.