ROY THOMAS' EVER-RELEVANT COMICS FANZINE

Alter Ego™

DENNIS O'NEIL & THE SILVER AGE OF COMICS WRITING

TWOMORROWS
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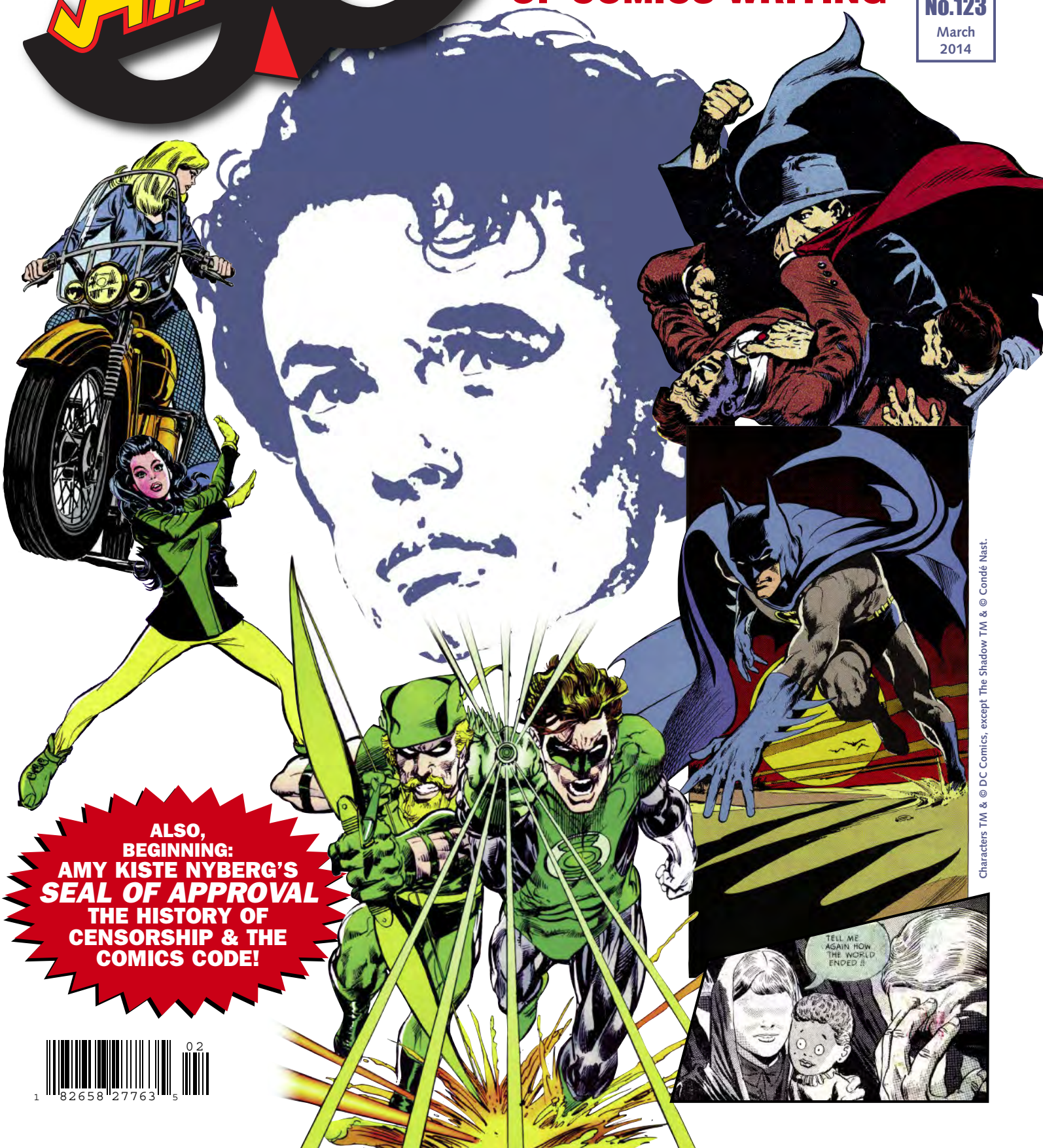

ALSO, BEGINNING:
AMY KISTE NYBERG'S
SEAL OF APPROVAL
THE HISTORY OF CENSORSHIP & THE COMICS CODE!

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Vol. 3, No. 123 / March 2014

Alter Ego™

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Lee Ames & George Gladir

Contents

On Our Cover: *It's not that writer and editor Dennis O'Neil didn't turn out a lot of quality work that* wasn't *done in collaboration with artist* **Neal Adams**... *but when we began to ponder which heroes to feature on this issue's cover, the first three who came to mind were, of course, Batman, Green Lantern, and Green Arrow—and we tossed in Black Canary for good measure, all drawn by Neal. Add to the mix a* **Mike Sekowsky** *Wonder Woman, a* **Michael W. Kaluta** *Shadow, and a panel from the Charlton classic "Children of Doom" by* **Pat Boyette**, *and all we needed as the icing on the cake was a good photo or drawing of this issue's interview subject. And no photo could possibly be as iconic for Denny's first ten years in comics as the portrait Neal Adams (him again!) drew in 1971 on the occasion of O'Neil and himself winning ACBA Awards for their groundbreaking "*Green Lantern/Green Arrow*" comic. Thanks to layout supervisor* **Chris Day** *for putting it all together!* [The Shadow TM Conde Nast; other art elements © DC Comics.]

Above: *In the final "Doctor Strange" episode drawn and plotted by* **Steve Ditko**—*in* Strange Tales *#146 (July 1966)—near-neophyte scripter* **Denny O'Neil** *got the opportunity to give a moniker to a mysterious and beautiful woman who'd been involved in Doc's other-dimensional adventures off and on for the past year or more, but whom neither Steve nor scripter/editor Stan Lee ever got around to giving a name! Denny chose "Clea," the title character in one of the celebrated Alexandria Quartet of novels written by Lawrence Durrell. She's more than made a name for herself in the years since!* [© Marvel Characters, Inc.]

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FIRST PRINTING.

"I Feel Like My Career Has Gone Full Circle"

Award-Winning Writer & Editor DENNIS O'NEIL On His First Decade In Comics

Interview Conducted by Richard J. Arndt

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

INTERVIEWER'S INTRODUCTION: *Denny O'Neil began his career in comics in 1965 as a scripter for Marvel Comics. However, he was soon doing most of his early work for Charlton, under the name "Sergius O'Shaugnessy." In 1968 Charlton editor Dick Giordano moved to DC Comics, taking with him a number of writers and artists, including O'Neil, who soon found himself writing the likes of* Beware The Creeper, Wonder Woman, Justice League of America, *and, by 1969, "Batman" stories with artist Neal Adams. Their five-year collaboration on* Batman *and* Detective Comics *(with Adams spelled by artists such as Irv Novick and Bob Brown) and their simultaneous run on "*Green Lantern/Green Arrow*" were revolutionary in terms of how all three characters were perceived. O'Neil also revamped* Superman *for the 1970s, reducing his powers and making him more human. Following these ventures, he worked as an editor/writer at various times for both DC and Marvel, scripting dozens of both companies' most important characters and contributing such landmarks as the 1970s adaptations of* The Shadow *with artist Michael Kaluta and* Superman vs. Muhammad Ali, *again with Neal Adams. O'Neil was the editor of* Daredevil *during Frank Miller's tenure on the character. In addition to his comics work, O'Neil scripted several episodes of the highly acclaimed* Batman: The Animated Series *on TV and has written a number of novels, including one about* Richard Dragon, *a martial arts master, which also appeared as a comic novel at DC. This interview took place by phone during July of 2011.*

Denny's Ditko Daze

Denny O'Neil in 1969 (top of page), and with his charming wife Marifran (right) in a photo taken specifically for the interview at 4:36 p.m. on Aug. 13, 2013. Thanks, guys! On p. 24 of this interview, Denny opines as how "It's been my fate to rain on Steve Ditko's parade time and again." As Exhibits 1-3 of same, below we present the splash pages from three stories scripted by O'Neil (twice as "Sergius O'Shaugnessy") and drawn by Ditko (two of which the artist also plotted) at the three color comic book companies for which Denny worked during his first decade in the field: "Doctor Strange" for Marvel's *Strange Tales* #145 (June 1966)... the middle splash of a three-part tale illustrated by a trio of artists for Charlton's *Space Adventures* #2 (July 1968)... and DC's *Beware The Creeper* #3 (Sept.-Oct. 1968). Thanks for the scans to Barry Pearl and Jim Ludwig. ["Dr. Strange" page © Marvel Characters, Inc.; *Space Adventures* #2 page © the respective copyright holders; *Beware The Creeper* page © DC Comics.]

"I Did A Couple of [Newspaper] Stories On [Comics' Big Resurgence]"

RICHARD ARNDT: *Can you tell us about your early life?*

DENNIS O'NEIL: I feel like my career has gone full circle. My first entry into the comics field came with *Alter Ego* back in the 1960s, and now here I am 50 years later talking with one of Roy's reporters. About three years ago he and I went to a convention in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and I had the weird experience of being interviewed by the paper I worked for when Roy re-introduced me to comics.

RA: *What [news]paper was that?*

O'NEIL: It was, and still is, called the *Southeast Missourian*. It was a conservative paper when I worked for it and is, I think, today, *very* conservative. But that's okay. I didn't see the article, if any, that they wrote. They also interviewed Roy and Gary Friedrich. We were the big cheeses that weekend.

But, getting back to your question, I grew up in North St. Louis, a blue-collar neighborhood. I went to a military high school, [*laughs*] which has been the bane of my life. People who now know me can't believe that I ever went to a military high school. I'm not sure that *I* can believe it, but I have pictures. I actually did. I went to St. Louis University, majoring in English and minoring in creative writing and philosophy. I went into the Navy, participated in the Cuban blockade [in 1962]—my little sliver of history—and just moved around for a period of about a year. I did some substitute teaching, picked up a load of groceries for my father once a week. I lived with a bunch of people in a big old house near Forest Park in St. Louis. Then I decided I wanted to write again. I'd been a journalist in the Navy. I'd been the editor of my Junior Achievement newspaper—a paper boy—that's a good point on your résumé. [*laughter*] I answered an *Editor & Publisher* [magazine] ad for a beat reporter in Cape Girardeau. One afternoon my father drove me the 120 miles and I talked with the editor for a bit and he decided to hire me.

Almost immediately I alienated almost everybody that I depended on to do my job. I made a joke—this was a very racially turbulent time. My girlfriend was a Catholic Worker and I'd become involved in the peace movement and the civil rights movement [which were very intertwined at the time]. I was never a major player but I attended some of the demonstrations, and the people, my friends I hung out with, [were involved]. Cape Girardeau was a mixed place when it came to stuff like that, soooo, one day I made up a phony AP story: "Martin Luther King is coming to Cape Girardeau to stage a rally." I slipped it onto the clipboard that all of the cops had to read before going on duty and the s*** really hit the fan. I finished my beat—I had to go around to the firehouses and the hospitals –and I got back to the office and a radio reporter called me and said, "I don't know if you put that Martin Luther King story on the clipboard. I don't want to know, but if you did, don't admit it under any circumstances." So I went through my day and was going to my apartment that night and saw one of the two police detectives that I got reports from leaving my apartment. He'd been evidently been searching for drugs or evidence of God knows what. I don't know why I made up the joke. I don't know what I hoped to gain. I made instant enemies of everybody that I depended on to do my job. So… the next day I was no longer on the police beat, no longer the cop reporter. I was a district news editor.

RA: *I guess you were lucky to keep a job. How did Roy get you re-acquainted with comics?*

O'NEIL: One of my jobs was, twice a month, to fill a children's page, which ran on Saturdays. This was during the summer, and there was very little in the way of school or children's activities to write about. But… I was beginning to see comic books again. I was commuting back and forth to St. Louis a lot, spending some time in bus stations, and, because I knew practically no one in Cape Girardeau, it was pretty lonely. I was standing around looking at newsstands a lot. On impulse, I bought some comic books and read them. I thought that they were way different and way better than the books I remembered reading when I was a kid. Comics were a major part of my life when I was a little kid. Once a week my father bought me a comic book after Sunday mass when he stopped to pick up milk for the family. I traded them with the other kids. I really loved reading them, but they just went out of my life totally when I was about ten years old. I was dealing with high school and girls, and I thought maybe I wanted to be an actor, so I was doing a lot of amateur theatre stuff and just had no reason to think about comic books. Suddenly, here they were again. I did some very rudimentary reporting and found out that my hunch was right. Comics were in the middle of a big resurgence. I did a couple of stories on that and Roy Thomas got in touch with me.

His parents were subscribers to the paper. They lived in Jackson, Missouri… eight miles away. So, one Sunday, coming back from my weekly visit to St. Louis, I stopped off in Arnold, Missouri, and interviewed Roy. I was just captivated. For two hours he opened up this whole sub-culture I had no inkling had ever existed and that I was really responding to. My girlfriend was not responding similarly, [*laughs*] but I was just knocked out by the whole bit. Roy

[*Continued on p. 8*]

Sketch 22

A talented young artist did this color sketch of Dennis O'Neil (on right) and Roy Thomas at a small comics convention held in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, circa 2007-2008. Another major con guest was fellow writer Gary Friedrich, who'd set up shop across the aisle from where Denny and Roy signed comics and collected money for the comics industry's Hero Initiative charity, on whose Dispersement Board they've both sat since its inception. All three writers had lived in "Cape" at one time or another; both Gary and Roy grew up in nearby Jackson, the county seat. The artist got Denny and Roy to autograph the original sketch—but alas, though he gave RT his verbal okay to use it in *Alter Ego*, he neglected to sign it… so we can't give him proper credit till he contacts us! [© 2014 the respective copyright holder.]

3-PAGE INTERLUDE:
A St. Louisan In The *Southeast Missourian*

What's the Reason?

Publishers Revive Super-Hero Comics; Demand Flourishes

By DENNIS O'NEAL
Missourian Staff Writer

Look at the corner newsstand. Comic book super heroes—some that were popular over 20 years ago—are once more powing the sinister and saving the fair. Not only have sales suddenly revived but they are flourishing. The question is "Why?"

Superman is back rescuing Lois Lane for the 9,000th time, the Shadow is clouding men's minds, Captain America is single-handedly destroying a Nazi fegiment, Batman and Robin are tied to a ticking bomb while the retreating Joker cackles triumphantly (foolish Joker—Batman is already untying the knots with his teeth).

Over in the corner, The Phantom is snooping; he's just clobbered The Giant of the Jungle, and anyway, he only comes out every second month.

Comic books have been a part of the American literary fare since 1911, when readers of the Chicago American could exchange six coupons clipped from daily editions of the newspaper for a four-color pamphlet of reprints of the popular Mutt and Jeff cartoons.

In 1935 the first non-premium comic book, "New Fun," was sold. With the appearance of Action Comics in 1939, featuring faster-than-a-speeding-bullet Superman, the genre gained wide spread attention. Superman got his own publication the following year, and what is now called by fans "the golden age of comics," was begun.

During and immediately after World War II, comics ranked just a shade below ice cream, and quite a bit above yo-yos in the hierarchy of childhood preoccupations. Any sunny afternoon there was certain to be a group of youngsters sprawled on someone's front steps, reading comics with intense concentration, (the secret of which was unknown to their teachers); or a lad, bent on bartering with fellow aficionados, pulling a wagonload of the books.

PUNISHMENT, REWARD

Comics became instruments of punishment and reward, not unlike Santa Claus. If Johnny was a bad boy, his comics would be locked in Daddy's closet (where Daddy might examine them after Johnny was in bed); if Johnny was good, Daddy might buy him an extra comic, after Sunday morning services.

There were, and are, several kinds of comics: "funny books," usually featuring animal characters, westerns, "horror" comics and what must be called, for lack of a better term, "fantasy" comics, direct descendants of the Superman magazines.

Unlike some of their imitators, Superman's creators don't tell us much about their brainchild's personal preoccupations, but it is interesting to speculate about what the Man of Steel was thinking during the early years of the last decade.

In the 40's he was acknowledged leader of a veritable army of union-suited crime fighters, all dressed more or less like him, all dedicated to combating those evil villians who were constantly devising schemes to blow up the earth or perhaps extinguish the sun. Villians obviously somewhat difficult for the cop on the beat to handle. Then, one by one, the heroes began to return.

Sitting at his reporter's desk at the Metropolis Daily Planet, during one of those long afternoons when news was sparse, Superman — alias Clark Kent, "mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper" — might have regretted his proteges' leaving the good fight and the newsstands. And his creators probably wondered whether waning popularity of other heroes would lead to Superman's own undoing. Where mad secientists' Krypton guns failed, plunging sales would succeed, for even Superman could not defeat the laws of economics.

THINGS SLOW

He might have telephoned his old friend, and first imitator, Batman.

"Bats, this is Supe," he could have said. "How's it going?"

"Slow, Man of Steel, old buddy. Not like the old days."

"Cowled crimefighter, old chum," Superman might have continued, "I've been thinking about going into some other line of work. I mean, this super hero thing has about had it, what with television and all. Anyway, it's lonely, with only you and I left. You know any chicken farms I could get cheap?"

"Hey, Supe, that's no way to talk. Heck fire, you're only 17 years old, comic-book wise. You got lots of great years left."

"I don't know. Ever since I sued Captain Marvel and made him retire, there's been no zip left. Villains aren't what they used to be — imagine, that clod Luthor tried to nail me with another silly death ray last night —and, well, the lack of competition and all, I'm thinking about popping the question to Lois Lane and hanging up the old cape."

"Look Supe, let's give it another few years. Maybe something will happen, huh?"

Something did happen, but no one is quite certain what that something was. Around 1963, sales began climbing and Superman's friends began reappearing.

Sociologists have noted that the sudden interest in comic book fantasy was not an isolated phenomenon. Paperback book publishers began to reprint dime novels, which are generally accepted as comic books' spiritual ancestors, radio stations exhumed recordings of old adventure shows, fantasy became a television commodity, film makers showed an interest in adventure-fantasy scripts.

EXPLANATIONS VARY

Few have the same explanation for what seems to be an unparalled hunger for fantasy in America. Jacob S. Liebowitz, president of National Periodical Publication Inc., largest comic book publishers, told New York Times writer Leonard Sloane that the comic revival is "pure nostalgia."

"Many men in their twenties and thirties are having a rebirth of interest in the costumed fantasy heroes of their youth," he said.

The Missourian asked Jack Schiff, general editor of National's magazines, to elaborate on Mr. Leibowitz's statement.

"Interest in comic books has been pretty constant over the years, but it may seem to have become more of a craze because of the rise of 'fans' and fanzine magazines and clubs," he said. "The latter, it is true, was generated by the revival of many of the heroes with whom the new generation of readers was not familiar," said Mr. Schiff.

The crux of the question, ignored by Mr. Schiff's statement, is why "old heroes" were revived.

Matthew H. Murphy, an editor at another large comic book publishing house, Western Printing and Lithographing Co., has an answer.

"At the present, there are many pressures and anxieties which make for a desire to divert for a while from reality. Entertainment," he said, "in all forms, is enjoying a boom period. Paperback books, radio serials, motion pictures, television, the theater, ballet, music — almost any type of entertainment finds wide acceptance today."

There is logic in Mr. Murphy's explanation. Comic books first became popular during a period of great national uneasiness, as the world teetered on the brink of a war, and the headlines on the front page of the paper you are reading are similar to those which concerned people when Superman first appeared.

LOW POINT IN 50'S

But during the early 50's, when comics were least popular, the country was also involved in armed conflict — there was the draft, there were mushroom clouds on everyone's horizon—in short, there was considerable anxiety. Why a low point in comic sales then?

An answer may lie somewhere between Mr. Shiff's and Mr. Murphy's theories. Perhaps fear plus nostalgia equals comic books. During the Korean action, the nostalgia part of the equation was missing because those who are now young adults were then adolescents, a notoriously un-nostalgic group.

Children always play, but the form their play takes is more often than not shaped by the adult world around them. Many grade schoolers take to comics now because their older brothers and fathers indicated approval of the magazines.

Adults approve them with a vengeance. The "fanzines" Mr. Shiff mentioned are publications issued by comic book collectors which carry articles on weighty topics such as "The First Great 100 Days of The Human Torch." Comic book fans have their own clubs, their own federation and are becoming something of an economic power.

Comic books published in the 30's and 40's are worth 20 times or more their original dime price. A volume one, number one Superman brings $100. The New York Times reported other typical prices: Captain Marvel, No. 38, $3; Amazing Man, No. 8, $6; Tarzan, No. 5, with one panel snipped out, $25.

"Like stamps and coins, old comic books have a monetary value based on their rarity and the demand for them," the Times article stated. "The scarcity of many such books can be attributed in large measure to the waste-paper collection drives of World War II."

POP ART A REASON

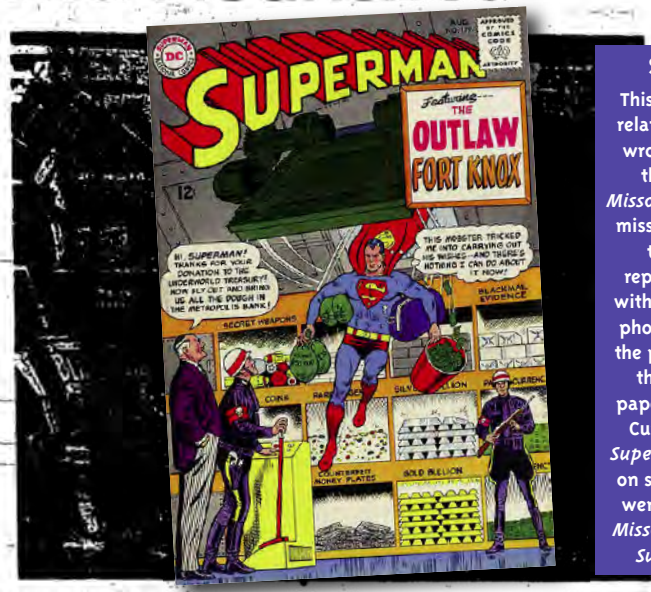
Another reason for the interest in — and high prices of—vintage comic books is the rise or the so-called "pop art" movement, the practitioners of which study techniques of early cartoonists.

It has been suggested that comic book publishers are in the pop artists' debt. Both Mr. Shiff and Mr. Murphy disagree.

"I do not believe the pop art craze has really helped us," Mr. Shiff said. "The shoe is on the other foot. It seems to me," he said.

Mr. Murphy said, "Pop art is derived from comics and is influenced by what is done in comics, rather than the other way round."

In 1948, educators and psychologists attacked comics on grounds that they contributed to juvenile delinquency and helped lower national taste. The Missourian asked Cape Girardeau teachers for their opinions. Next week we will examine some of their answers and answers of comic publishers.

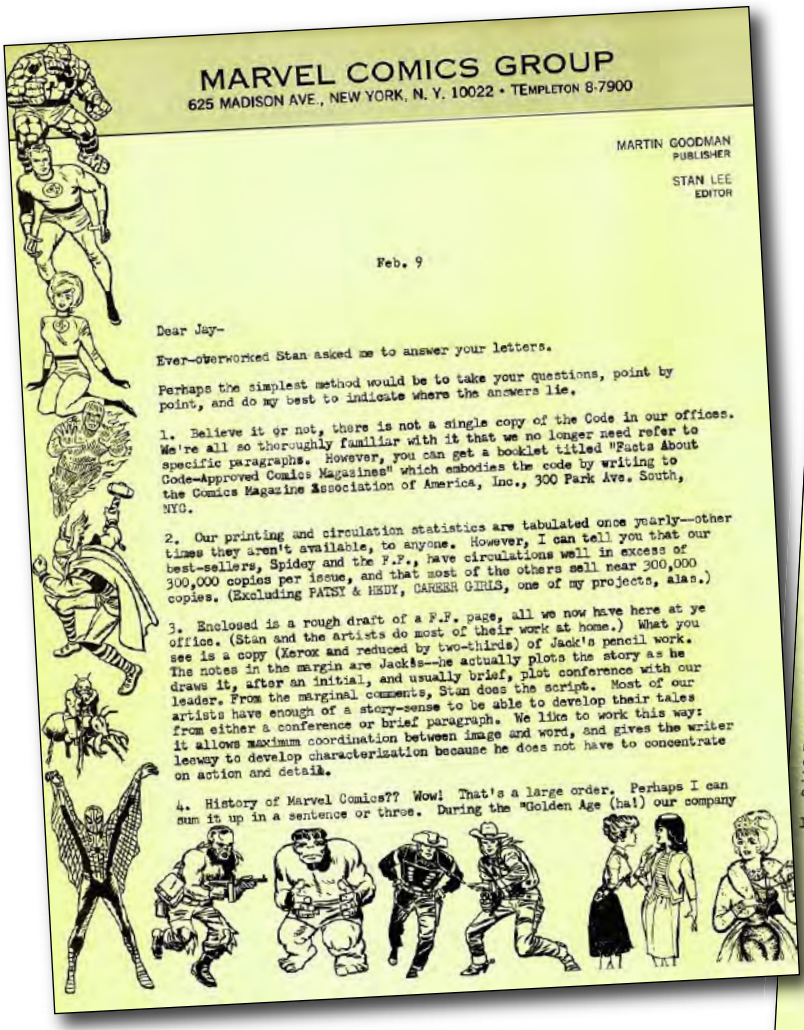


Saturday, May 15, 1965

This is the first of the three articles related to comics that Denny O'Neil wrote in 1965, while a reporter for the Cape Girardeau *Southeast Missourian* (though his last name got misspelled in his byline). It and the two that follow it have been reprinted by special arrangement with the newspaper. The newsstand photo that originally accompanied the piece did not reproduce well on the photocopy supplied by the paper, so we've covered it with the Curt Swan/George Klein cover of *Superman* #179 (Aug. 1965), an issue on sale around the time the articles were printed. [Article © *Southeast Missourian* or successors in interest; *Superman* cover © DC Comics.]

Why the Revival?

A surge of revived super-hero comicbooks is evidenced at many Cape Girardeau newsstands. And it is not uncommon to find young people of various ages thumbing through revived editions of "Superman" or "Tarzan" with the same enthusiasm original editions generated years ago. Sharing the common interest is Bob Welker, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jake Welker, 1512 Bend Road.



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MARTIN GOODMAN
PUBLISHER

STAN LEE
EDITOR

Feb. 9

Dear Jay-

Ever-overworked Stan asked me to answer your letters.

Perhaps the simplest method would be to take your questions, point by point, and do my best to indicate where the answers lie.

1. Believe it or not, there is not a single copy of the Code in our offices. We're all so thoroughly familiar with it that we no longer need refer to specific paragraphs. However, you can get a booklet titled "Facts About Code-Approved Comics Magazines" which embodies the code by writing to the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc., 300 Park Ave. South, NYC.

2. Our printing and circulation statistics are tabulated once yearly--other times they aren't available, to anyone. However, I can tell you that our best-sellers, Spidey and the F.F., have circulations well in excess of 300,000 copies per issue, and that most of the others sell near 300,000 copies. (Excluding PATSY & HEDY, CAREER GIRLS, one of my projects, alas.)

3. Enclosed is a rough draft of a F.F. page, all we now have here at ye office. (Stan and the artists do most of their work at home.) What you see is a copy (Xerox and reduced by two-thirds) of Jack's pencil work. The notes in the margin are Jack's--he actually plots the story as he draws it, after an initial, and usually brief, plot conference with our leader. From the marginal comments, Stan does the script. Most of our artists have enough of a story-sense to be able to develop their tales from either a conference or brief paragraph. We like to work this way: it allows maximum coordination between image and word, and gives the writer leeway to develop characterization because he does not have to concentrate on action and detail.

4. History of Marvel Comics?? Wow! That's a large order. Perhaps I can sum it up in a sentence or three. During the "Golden Age (ha!) our company was pretty much like most others. We had good men--Stan, Bill Everett, Kirby, etc.--and a few original ideas, but most of our products were pretty much standard comic book stuff. Being a commercial enterprise, our stories followed the market: when Romance books were the biggest sellers, we did Romance; when spooks were the rage, we did supernatural stuff. As you probably know, during the 50s, comics all but died. For reasons still debated by both us and sociologists, interest began to revive in the early years of the present decade. At that time, Marvel Comics had a staff of one man--Mr. Lee--and whatever free-lance artists were available. Then...the milestone, the creation of the Fantastic Four, mostly as a lark: Stan thought he'd have a bit of fun, writing about super-beings with more than their share of human frailty. He half-expected that he'd have to revert to one-dimensional WHAMHAMPOW writing after a few months. But in giving his characters human frailty, he also gave them just plain humanity, something almost utterly new in comics, which led to reader identification, which in turn led to soaring circulation and our present position (we blushingly admit) as the leader in the industry. Our circulation, since 1962, has about quadrupled, and the staff has also grown. It now consists of Stan, Flo Steinberg, secretary and ray of sunshine during the dark hours before Deadline, Roy Thomas and myself, assistant writers, idea men, disciples, Marie Severin, staff artist, Sol Brodsky, art supervisor and production chief, Stan Goldberg, colorist and drawer of Millie the Model, Bill Everett, artist, John Romita, artist. Jack, Jay Gavin, Don Heck, Larry Lieber, Frank Giacoia, Gene Colan, Carl Hubbel, Dick Ayers and Mickey Demeo are technically free-lance artists, but their main work is for Marvel.

5. Mr. Goodman insists that we keep sketches and editorial comments for reference and reprint. And also, I suspect, so our little secrets re: characterization don't fall into Dire Conspiratorial hands.

6. We don't handle the foreign editions of our books: we merely lease rights to various companies.

7. Accessories? See the comics. The only new item in the works is a Thing sweatshirt. We have sold rights to our characters to Aurora Plastics (models), Milton Bradley (games), Ben Cooper (costumes), and currently a Capt. America pilot film is being shot in an animation process similar to that used by Hanna-Barbera. A producer named Robert Kranz is interested in the live television rights to several Marvel heroes.

8. If we figured out exactly what we're doing right, we'd bottle it. Our whole operation is really based on the story instinct of one man, an instinct which operates, I suspect, mostly on the subconscious level. Stan's tools are the best: he's been in the business over 20 years, he knows the technical aspects perfectly. But so do other editors: what literally makes Marvel Comics is this imagination. And that we don't control, we only offer homage and gratitude to it.

I hope this potpurri is useful to you. Thanks for your interest, and good luck.

Cordially,

Dennis O'Neil
Staff Writer

Take A Letter!

One of Denny's duties as an editorial assistant was answering fan mail—sometimes at length, if Stan (or the assistant himself) thought it worthwhile. Reproduced above is a remarkable two-page letter Denny sent in 1966 to reader Jay DeNatale, who posted it on tumblr a couple of years back, along with a scan of the photocopy of a page of Kirby pencils from *Fantastic Four* #47 (Feb. 1966) that Denny sent with the letter. Thanks to Sean Howe, author of *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, for forwarding this material to us. If anybody knows where we can reach Jay D., please let us know—we owe him a copy of this issue! [Art © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

particular a magazine, now long gone, named *Newsfront*. One of the most interesting days I ever had in my life was for *Pageant* magazine, interviewing LBJ's [President Lyndon B. Johnson's] Chief of Protocol. [I figured that *Pageant*] would not appreciate my name appearing at Charlton. With Stan, it would be working for the competition. I now think it wouldn't have made any difference to any of them, but that was the reason for the pseudonym.

RA: *You also worked on a title called* Go-Go.

O'NEIL: *Go-Go*? I have no idea what that title would have been! [*laughs*]

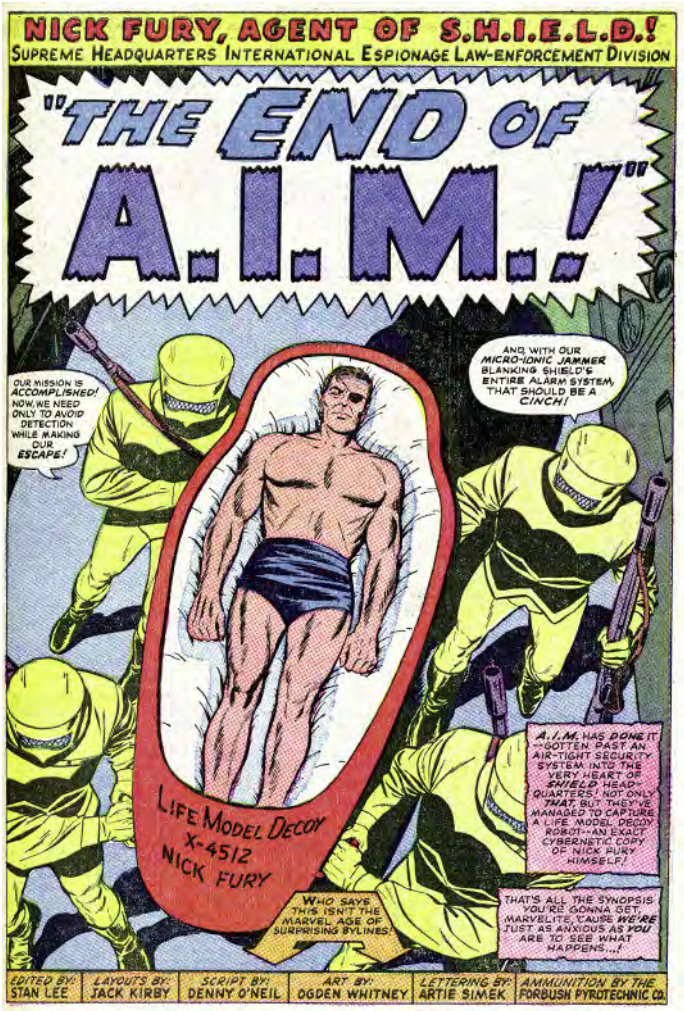
RA: *Looks to be a title similar to* Millie the Model *and* Patsy.

O'NEIL: I've no idea! [*more laughter*] I'd heard from Steve Skeates that there was this guy named Giordano who worked for this little publisher in Connecticut. Giordano was in town to talk to freelancers one morning a week. Charlton rented one room in a 5th Avenue office building. Acting on that information from Skeates, I went up there and talked to Dick. I didn't know him and he didn't know me. The money was less than half the beginning page rate that I was making at Marvel, but I was going to do it under a pseudonym and who cares? If you say I wrote something called *Go-Go*, I will go to my grave believing it, but I don't remember it at all.

At Charlton, you wrote a little bit of everything. I'm actually grateful for that. I'm kind of making fun of it, but I got to write super-heroes, Westerns, cops, teen-ager stuff, science-fiction, mystery stories. Anything, really, you had time for. It was a chance to see what kind of muscles you had. An opportunity to stretch. You learned by doing while getting paid for it and not having much at stake. Not *much* money maybe, but still getting paid. Nobody in the business knew who was reading Charlton comics. You realize now that they did have a following, but, at the time, who knew?

RA: *That's one of the things I hear a lot from former Charlton writers and artists. That they didn't get much money, but they got a lot of freedom, because the higher-ups in the publishing branch didn't take a lot of time supervising the comics.*

O'NEIL: I think that's exactly right. I don't remember many comments from Dick, or even the kind of editing I did later myself, where the story was talked out between the editor and writer before the writer went home and wrote it. I think Dick and I would



Don't Yield—Write "S.H.I.E.L.D."!

Denny recalls Stan and Roy as having co-plotted the "S.H.I.E.L.D." story he dialogued over Jack Kirby breakdowns for *Strange Tales* #149—the same issue which contained his final "Doctor Strange." Roy doesn't remember having any part in the plotting of that tale—though he *was* directed later by Stan to do a bit of rewriting on the finished yarn. RT has no idea of how much (let alone precisely *what*) he added to it. Finished art (over the Kirby layouts) by Ogden Whitney. Thanks to Barry Pearl. [© Marvel Characters, Inc.]

agree on characters, say for a filler story, and the only real restriction was that the story be eight pages long to go in the back of a Western. I'd go home and do the script. Maybe it would be twelve pages for a super-hero title. Same thing. Dick was a great Zen editor. He was very non-directive and, at Charlton, he was able to pay us laughably little but he always got good work off the people who worked for him. I don't know how he did that. Weezie Simonson can do that, too. Totally non-directive, and yet you did some of your best stuff for them.

"Grass" Green. Photo courtesy of Bill Schelly.

RA: *Bob Toomey, a DC and Warren writer, told me something similar about Weezie, when she was Louise Jones at Warren. If you brought in a story she liked, she'd be so cheerful and happy while telling you how much she liked it (and getting your check cut) that you worked double-hard so that she'd like the next one the same way.*

Now, the first Charlton job I think you really shone on was a six-part science-fiction series, with each part illustrated by a different artist, that appeared in Space Adventures Presents U.F.O. *#60 (Oct. 1967) and* Space Adventures *#2 (July 1968). It was an intriguing yarn about a normal guy who becomes involved in an alien invasion. It was an interesting story that holds together pretty well, even with a different artist on every chapter. It also was a storyline totally unlike anything Marvel, or for that matter DC, would have given you in those years.*

O'NEIL: Charlton was a Hallelujah gig, because there were no rules. Yes, it had to be reputable, had to be able to pass the Comics Code, etc, etc. We wouldn't have been able to get away with half the stuff that nowadays is routinely appearing in super-hero comics. But Dick didn't have a template for the "right" way to do comics. I'd had that template, to some degree, at Marvel. I'm not criticizing, mind you. My job [at Marvel] was to imitate Stan Lee. Everybody starts off imitating someone, so I really was being asked to imitate the guy who was arguably the best comic book writer in the world at that time. It was a great way to learn the business. But, as far as I was able, I was doing the Marvel house style. At Charlton, there *was* no house style. I might have wished the money was a little better, because by that time I had an infant son and a non-working wife and bucks were not in great supply; but, having said that, it was in many ways a great next step for me. "OK, I've done Stan, now let's see what I can do on my own." During my run at Charlton, I did stories that, occasionally, make people's best lists. "Children of Doom," for example.

Go-Go—And Hold The Checks!

One of Sergius O'Shaugnessy's (i.e., Denny O'Neil's) few straight humor assignments for Charlton or elsewhere was this parody of famed disc jockey "Murray the K" Kaufman in *Go-Go* #9 (Oct. 1967). Pencils by Richard "Grass" Green; inker uncertain. Thanks to Michael T. Gilbert. [© the respective copyright holders.]

experiences with authority figures. I haven't told you any of my problems with Navy authority figures and I probably won't, but *hrrrr!*

Still, Julie gave me an assignment—*Green Lantern* #64 [Oct. 1968]—and, as was customary in those days, I talked out the plot with him. They don't do that much anymore, and it's a loss. I was still wet behind the ears, so I went home and did the script. While doing the script, which was a time travel story, I had Green Lantern back in the very earliest years of the planet Earth. There was another planetoid floating nearby, so Green Lantern captures it with his ring and puts it in orbit around the Earth, giving the Earth its moon. It was basically a half-page throwaway bit, but I had not discussed it with Julie. I hadn't yet realized that if you change what you say you're going to deliver, it's a good idea to run that by the person you're delivering to. I just went ahead and wrote it, and he really liked that touch. Shortly thereafter Dick left DC and I settled into a long, comfortable, and productive relationship with Julie.

RA: *You were also responsible for the Diana Rigg-styled version of* Wonder Woman, *where she gave up her powers and costume and appeared as a white cat-suited judo-master.*

O'NEIL: I did the changeover. It was a point at which I was still

Jeepers, *Creepers!*

On this page from *Beware The Creeper* #2 (July-Aug. 1968), Jack Ryder changes to his eldritch alter ego. Thanks to Lynn Walker. With #4, Denny would finally leave behind his "Sergius O'Shaugnessy" pseudonym—at least for the most part. [© DC Comics.]

Three (Relatively) New Kids On The Block

(L. to r.:) Steve Skeates, Denny O'Neil, and Mike Friedrich at the DC offices, 1969. Mike succeeded Denny as scripter of *Justice League of America*. Of course, by '69 all three were hardened comic book veterans, Denny and Steve since '65 and Mike since '68. Photo courtesy of the late Jerry G. Bails, who may have taken it on one of his trips to New York comics conventions.

one of the flavors of the week. I changed all three of DC's major characters—Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman, but the only successful one, in my opinion, was Batman. [The Wonder Woman changeover] was Denny's Folly!

RA: *Actually, I liked those stories.*

O'NEIL: They have their fans, and DC reprinted them all, to my great surprise. I thought I was being a feminist. I thought I was serving the cause of feminism, but Gloria Steinem wrote a piece in the first issue of *Ms.* [magazine] setting the world straight on that. Gloria, as far as I know, is still a very nice lady. She didn't do a hatchet job. She didn't mention my name, but I think she did find a sympathetic ear with Jenette Kahn later. Anyway, I now see exactly what Gloria was complaining about. I just didn't see it at the time. I was just absolutely, utterly blind. I did *Wonder Woman* for a while, both at the start and the end of that changeover, and towards the end I enlisted SF writer Samuel R. Delany's help. By that time, I knew Chip [Delaney's nickname] well, and once I became aware of him as a writer, I somehow found out he lived just a block or two from me. We kind of became friends, and he became interested in comics. He'd come over, read through my collection of comics, and became interested in it as an art form. I gave him a shot at writing a couple of the *Wonder Woman* issues. I think he was interested in the character. One of the best science-fiction writers of the 20th century making a brief foray into the comics field. Working on super-hero stuff.

I found out I wasn't doing *Wonder Woman* anymore the way you often found out you weren't doing something in those days. I saw an artist working on a script that I hadn't written. They sometimes didn't bother to tell you that you didn't have a given assignment anymore.

RA: *One of the books that you worked on in 1968-1969 that I personally liked was* Bat Lash.

O'NEIL: Twenty years ahead of its time. I wondered if they would ever get around to reprinting it, and they finally did, a couple of years ago. It was such a natural title. It's something I feel absolutely no hesitation in bragging about, because I had very little

Jerry Grandenetti
Photo by daughter Jennifer Pederson.

Nightmaster Of His Fate

"Nightmaster" became the first out-and-out sword-and-sorcery hero-feature in modern comics—with DC beating Marvel to the punch by a year, thanks to Dennis O'Neil. Seen above are the page in *Showcase* #82 (May 1969) in which young singer Jimmy Rook learns the legend of the otherworld Nightmaster, whose persona he'll shortly assume—with pencils by Jerry Grandenetti & inks by Dick Giordano—as well as the splash page of #83 (June '69), illustrated by Bernie (then Berni) Wrightson. Issue #84 contained the final O'Neil/Wrightson "Nightmaster." [© DC Comics.]

Bernie Wrightson
Photo from *Monsters and Heroes* #3 (March 1968); thanks to Bob Bailey.

words, and the "Batman" tale was six pages long. Bill Finger always acknowledged that The Shadow and Gibson were inspirations for The Batman. The dark, obsessed, vengeance-ridden loner version of Batman just absolutely went away in the 1950s.

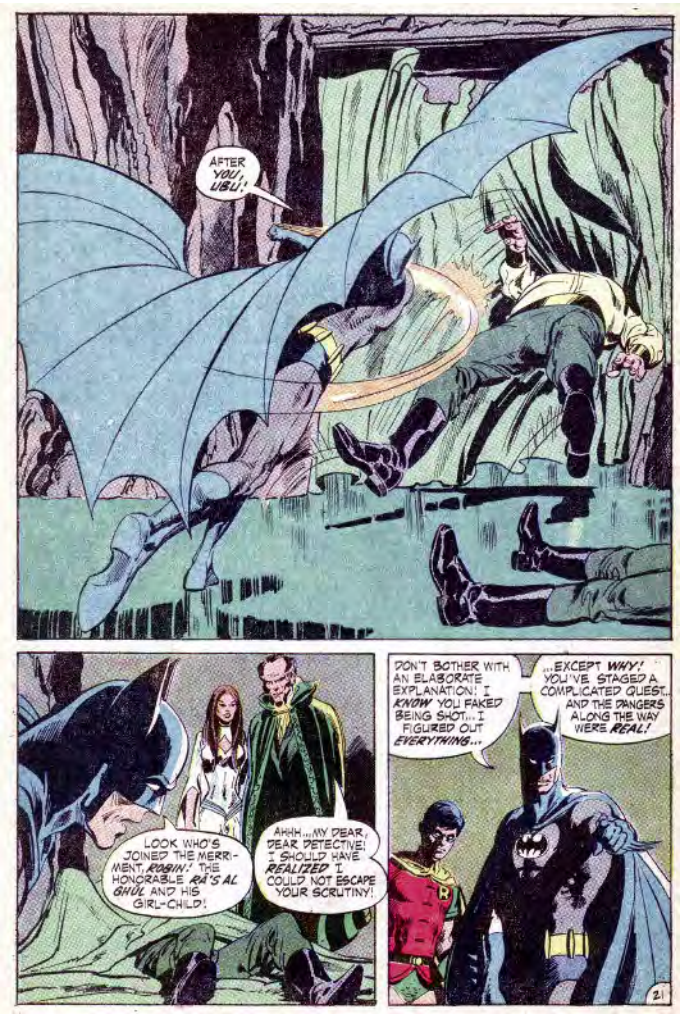
Yet it never really became much of anything else. It's not like someone said, "I have a new way to do this character, so we will re-invent it." It's just that, if aliens were working in *Superman*, then they might work in *Batman*. If you could build an entire story around Lois trying to find out Superman's identity, then something similar should work in *Batman*. Also, I don't know that anyone was taking comics seriously, as a job, by then. The few people who were surviving though the various implosions of the 1950s were probably shell-shocked, wanting to keep their jobs, and listening to the overwhelming credo of not offending anyone. I think I've gotten off the path here—what was the question?

RA: *We started off talking about "The Secret of the Waiting Graves." One of the things that interested me was that it was not a typical "Batman" story at all. It's more of a "Zorro" tale, set in the Great Southwest, more supernatural than either crime- or detective-oriented.*

O'NEIL: Actually, I did a "Batman" story before that one—the first time Julie offered me a "Batman" shot, it was during the camp craze. The comics were, in a very half-hearted way, trying to… see, the TV show was really a comedy show. It actually boosted the circulation of the comics, which doesn't always happen, but it did then. I don't think many of the comic book guys "got" camp. I didn't like it, the TV show. I saw one of the early shows and talked about it to Stan Lee the next morning, and he told me the only thing he liked about it was the animated opening sequence.

But for various reasons during this time, and with varying success, the comics at this time were trying to be campy. I just knew that wasn't my thing. I'm not judging it, but I don't respond to the campy stories very well. So I did a story for Julie, who loved New Orleans jazz, and I kinda like it myself, not to the extent that Julie did, though. But we did a story about an old trumpet player and it ran as a fill-in. It was not campy. We played it totally straight.

Then Batman fell off my radar until after the Adam West show had bitten the dust. It was a huge hit for one season, kind of a



Batman Flies Again

Two dramatic pages from issues of *Batman*—written by O'Neil, penciled by Adams, & inked by Giordano: #232 (June 1971) and #234 (Aug. '71). What can we say? You can't improve on perfection. [© DC Comics.]

qualified hit for its second year, and for the third year it was like somebody turned off the light. Its audience just… went away.

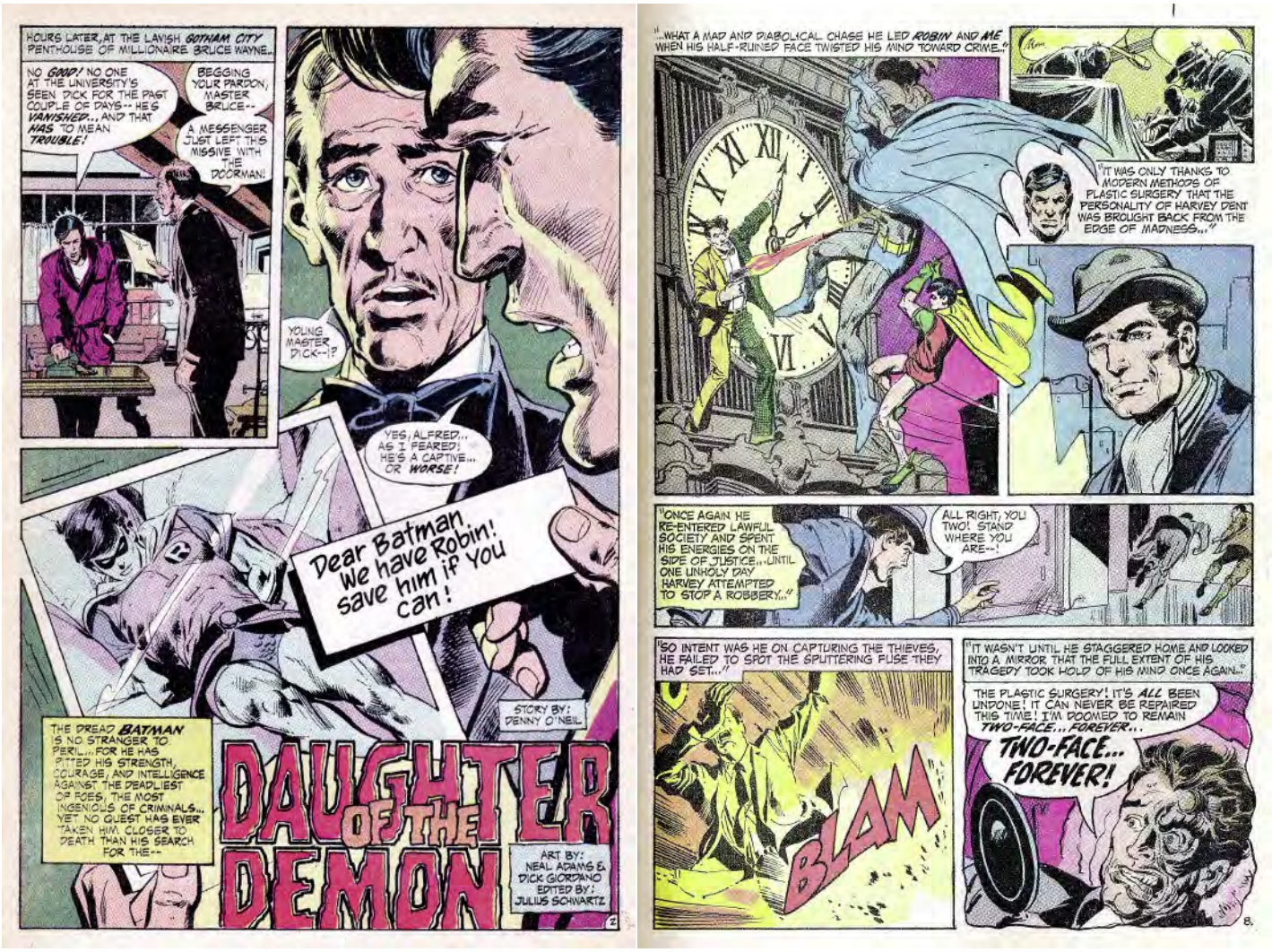
RA: *I think its target audience just grew up. I remember as a kid watching* Gilligan's Island *religiously for its first season, every episode, then not watching it for the long summer re-run season, and never really watching it again. I'd just outgrown it. Its audience was where I was* then, *not where I was now.*

O'NEIL: I was living in Greenwich Village at the time, and the really hip literary bars had it on. It was being watched by college professors and journalists and novelists, etc. The joke [the show] was telling was basically "Ha-ha. I loved this stuff when I was seven years old. Look how stupid it is now." It's a one-line joke. And not a great one-line joke. But yes, I can see where the novelty of it wore off. It could carry a TV show for a while, and it did, but when it was over, it was over. DC wasn't going to stop publishing *Batman* because the show was over, so Neal and I, who were very much flavors-of-the-week at that point, got our tool kit together. We'd both been doing comic books long enough to know how to do them, and we had 16 pages of *Detective Comics* to fill with "Batman"—"Do something!" I wrote "Secret of the Waiting Graves" and people have been generous enough to say that that story was a turning point in the history of… whatever. I lucked into [having] Neal, who did a wonderful art job. Which he usually did.

RA: *From that point on until late 1972, you and Neal did a story almost every month, or every other month, in either* Batman *or* Detective. *Never in any steady title, just back and forth, although you were also writing "Batman" stories for Irv Norvick or Bob Brown [to draw].*

O'NEIL: Julie Schwartz was probably trying to fulfill his editorial obligations. I mean, comic book editing was relatively easy, and the old-timers, if there *are* any older than me nowadays, [*chuckles*] will tell you that. There were no expectations. There were no advertising or public relations to fulfill. Nowadays, if Mark Waid is promised as a writer on a story and then the story is written by someone else, there's a big fuss. But back then, there was no advance advertising. Nobody was paying any attention to any of it. So if it was a "Batman" story and it was of the right length, it could go into either *Batman* or *Detective*, whichever needed a "Batman" story. I imagine that's how Julie operated. I might have been aware of [the needs of *Detective*] only in that the stories had to be shorter, but it made no difference to me as a writer which story appeared in which title. As an editor, I did try to make a distinction between the various "Batman" titles, but back then, it was just writing stories. Some I liked, some I've forgotten.

RA: *You, Neal, and, I suppose, Dick Giordano, because he inked most of those stories, are credited with turning Batman back into the Dark Knight, a role he hadn't really inhabited since the first year of his adventures, but I think that people forget that a lot of those stories, far more*



Pages Of Power

A pulse-pounding potpourri of O'Neil/Adams/Giordano pages from issues of *Batman*. (Clockwise, from top left, on this and facing page:)

#232 (June 1971) — the capture of Robin, an episode that Bob Bailey (who sent all the scans in this montage) informs us was utilized—minus Robin!—for the plot of the 1992 film *Batman Returns*.

#234 (Aug. '71) — the return of Two-Face, a classic villain then unseen in comics for years due to the squeamishness of the Comics Code.

#243 (Aug '72) — a cinematic sequence, well realized in both script and art.

#244 (Sept. '72) — a celebrated kiss between Batman and Talia, daughter of Ra's Al Ghul.

#245 (Oct. '72) — showing that a good stiff elbow can be as visually interesting as any punch-throwing free-for-all.

#251 (Sept. '73) — one of Adams' most famous full-page action shots. You may recognize it from this issue's cover. [© DC Comics.]

than the ones Neal illustrated, were done by Irv Novick.

O'NEIL: Yeah, a bunch of people worked on those turning-point stories. Irv did a lot of them. He did the first prequel, the first Talia story, before Neal and I debuted Ra's Al Ghul. Neal took it from there. Remember, I wasn't the official "Batman" writer—Frank Robbins was doing a lot of them, Mike Friedrich wrote some—nor was Neal Adams the official "Batman" artist. We were a couple of freelancers, who knew each other from parties and poker games. I don't think Neal played poker, but we saw each other around, and we reported to the same editors and we got assignments together. I was beginning to be aware of [the value] of a continuity for a character or a title. To use a fancy word, to develop the mythos around a character.

"*Green Lantern* Is Floundering"

RA: *It was only a couple of months after that initial "Batman" story that you and Neal started on "*Green Lantern/Green Arrow.*"*

O'NEIL: Again, that was Julie coming to me and saying, "*Green Lantern* is floundering, but we want to continue publishing the title." He asked me what I had to save it. By that time, I worked on the *Justice League* with him and had done a socially relevant story about that river in Ohio that was so polluted that it burst into flames. That was the springboard. I'd also done "Children of Doom" for Charlton. I was still very much involved and interested in civil rights and peace and beginning to be worried about the environment. So I thought it over for a while. I realized that I was always going to be concerned about this stuff and I was never going to be the fiery leader who could galvanize the masses into

Did They Sell These Issues At The Local *Drug*store?

Neal Adams' powerful covers for "*Green Lantern/Green Arrow*" #85 & 86 (Aug.-Sept. & Oct.-Nov. 1971) are the most commonly reprinted artifacts from the so-called "drug issues," and that's certainly understandable. But it was the story and art *inside* those comics that really delivered the goods. Here are the two final pages from #85. Script by O'Neil, pencils by Adams, inks by Giordano. Thanks to Bob Bailey. [© DC Comics.]

sure of getting two issues in a row. He told me he just didn't bother to ask if doing the continued stories was OK. And that nobody ever said anything. I think initially that "*Green Lantern/Green Arrow*" was like that. I don't think there was any point in him asking permission. We weren't breaking any laws. We weren't showing naked ladies. No excessive gore. We were really doing the standard comic book, in most ways, as that term was understood at the time. So, he did it, and we got a *lot* of media attention. In those days, comic companies did not have a public relations department. I think they would have considered such a thing a colossal waste of money, and they may have been right.

So we kind of blundered through. I did some television and Neal and I went on the radio. We found ourselves going places that comic book people were not normally invited to. I don't remember details at all any more, just that there was a big flurry of attention. We continued doing the stories with very little, if any, input from the company—the corporation. It was mostly my going in to talk to Julie Schwartz once a month, agreeing on a story, and sending the script to Neal. The exception was the drug stories, where Neal and I went around Manhattan, talking to the folks involved in the drug rehabilitation business. Don't remember if we used anything specific from that in the story, but in that sense it was a collaboration. The rest of it was my scripts and Neal's art. We had a sense that we were pushing the envelope. The average comic book is forgotten in about a year. Those stories might last a little bit longer than that.

We had no idea that somebody was going to print them in hardcover, slipcase editions 45 years later for 75 bucks!

RA: *Well, those issues have been reprinted a lot and in a lot of different formats—Baxter paper, black-&-white trade paperbacks, the hardcovers. I think a new edition of color paperbacks is coming out…*

O'NEIL: Yeah, there's a new softcover edition on its way. I was surprised that the hardcover edition sold out, because I thought that anyone who wanted to read the stories has read them by now. It's not like they haven't been available.

RA: *You must be cultivating a new audience of readers, not just nostalgia readers for new editions to keep coming out.*

O'NEIL: Yeah. It's always a pleasant surprise when I get the royalty checks. [*laughter*] In the bad old days, there wouldn't have *been* a royalty check. The first reprint of those was by Warner Books, a standard paperback format, cheap little paperbacks. Chip Delany wrote the introduction to one, and I think I wrote the introduction to the other. I think that Neal and I got 250 bucks apiece

problems I had writing *Justice League*, and the reason I quit that, was how a writer could contrive ways to get these enormously powered people in trouble. If they were not going to be in trouble, what is the story going to be about? The Weisinger answer to that in the 1950s was sometimes to ignore the super-powers altogether. A story would be about Lois trying to find out Clark's secret identity. There were also "Batman" stories based around secret identities. Donald Westlake, in the introduction to one of his short story collections, pointed out those were the ultimate in self-referential stories, because what the bad guys were doing was trying to find out the good guys' secret identities. If the good guy didn't have a secret identity, the bad guys wouldn't be criminals.

RA: *By that token, Lois was a villain.*

O'NEIL: Yes, and, to put it charitably, those stories were trivial. I think I knew and know enough that, for stories to matter to the reader, you had to have some way to get the good guy in trouble for this kind of heroic fiction. It being comic books, you can't blow off lots of pages explaining that notion. It has to be something that can be grasped in a couple of panels. So the deal I made with Julie was that I would modify Superman. Not take him all the way back to how he was with Siegel and Shuster, but… my Superman was still going to be able to fly, for example. He was *not* going to be capable of blowing out stars by taking a deep breath. Where he got the breath from in deep space was never gone into, by the way. I don't really care.

That was the revision we made. Julie also had some ideas about updating Clark Kent. One of the weirdest assignments I ever had was to write an article for *Gentlemen's Quarterly* on Clark Kent's new wardrobe. So

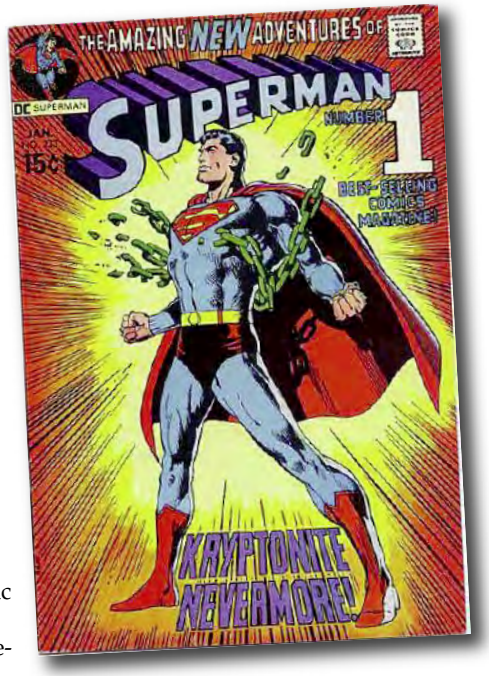
Green Jobs

(Above:) The 1983 display ad for the launching of a boxed reprinting of the O'Neil/Adams "*Green Lantern/Green Arrow*" utilized a new GL-GA drawing by the artist, and the heads of Denny and Neal the latter had drawn for DC's announcement of its near-sweep of the comics industry's first Shazam Awards in 1970. [© DC Comics.]

(At right:) A pair of Adams sketches—of erstwhile comrades GL and GA—done at a 2013 comics convention. Thanks to Jerry K. Boyd—and to Kris Adams (and ultimately her dad, Neal) for permission to print them here. [Green Lantern & Green Arrow TM & © 2014 DC Comics.]

blue jeans, t-shirt, shaggy-haired me wrote a story for a fashion magazine, once upon a time.

I stuck with *Superman* for about a year, 13 or so issues. Then, for some reason, it was starting to be really difficult for me to write. I guess I must have been confident enough at that point to realize that I wasn't stuck with any given assignment. Apparently, in that era, there was a pecking order for writers. For example, the *Spider-Man* writer had more clout than the writer for, say, *Power Man*. I was never aware of that, and I often wanted to go to characters who were not high profile. The assumption being that, with *Batman* at the time or *Green Lantern*, both of whom were on shaky ground, I would have more freedom. If something is working well, then people notice that you know how to do it and that will be what they want from you. If something isn't working well, it gives a new writer some elbow room to experiment. I did those issues and then politely begged off. I forgot about it until one day I was on Amazon's website a couple of years ago, and saw my name. I found out I'd written a book that was coming out, and it was the collection of those "Superman" stories. I didn't know about it until that point. I guess on Amazon's database I'm connected with comic books. DC sent me a copy, but I haven't re-read the stuff, but I guess it's nothing to be ashamed of. Certainly a number of intelligent people have told me that they like it.



RA: *I don't know that I'm so intelligent, but I enjoyed it. I re-read it prior to putting it in my school library. One of the things I found quite amusing was that, while I'd forgotten a lot of the storyline, I still had a vivid memory of the panel where Superman chomps on the green Kryptonite. I think it must have become a bit of an iconic image. There's a very comical expression on Superman's face, and it's possible that this may be one of the first times a reader could see that this demi-god, who'd been around for over 30 years at that point, had a rather sly sense of humor.* [**NOTE:** *See p. 50.*]

O'NEIL: It's just a three-panel sequence, but it really worked. Curt did a great job. One of our better moments.

RA: *At this point you're writing "Superman," "Green Lantern/Green Arrow," and "Batman"…*

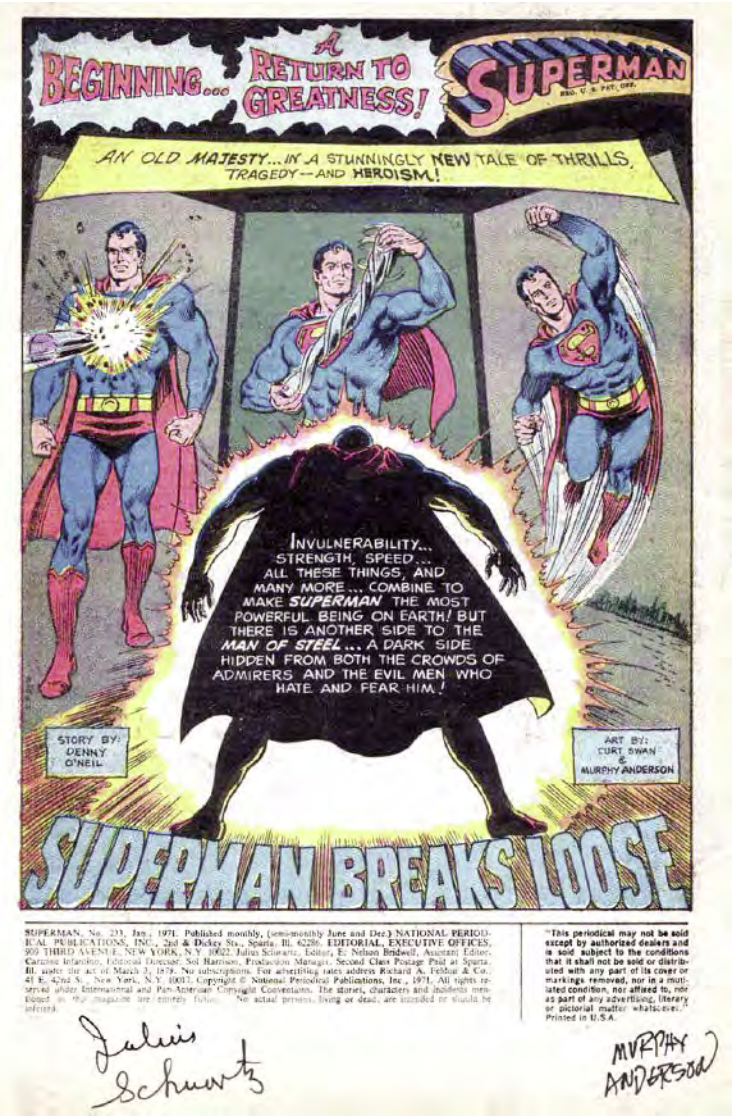
O'NEIL: I was a busy little freelancer!

RA: *You might have been writing* Wonder Woman, *or at least the tail end of your run on that title, at this time too!*

O'NEIL: If that's true, and it well may be, that load may have been right about to the top of my capacity. One of the reasons I eventually became an editor was that I had financial obligations and that I didn't think I could write enough stuff to meet those obligations. I couldn't write six or seven stories a month like I used to. So how else, knowing what I know about comic books, could I make a living? The answer was to edit.

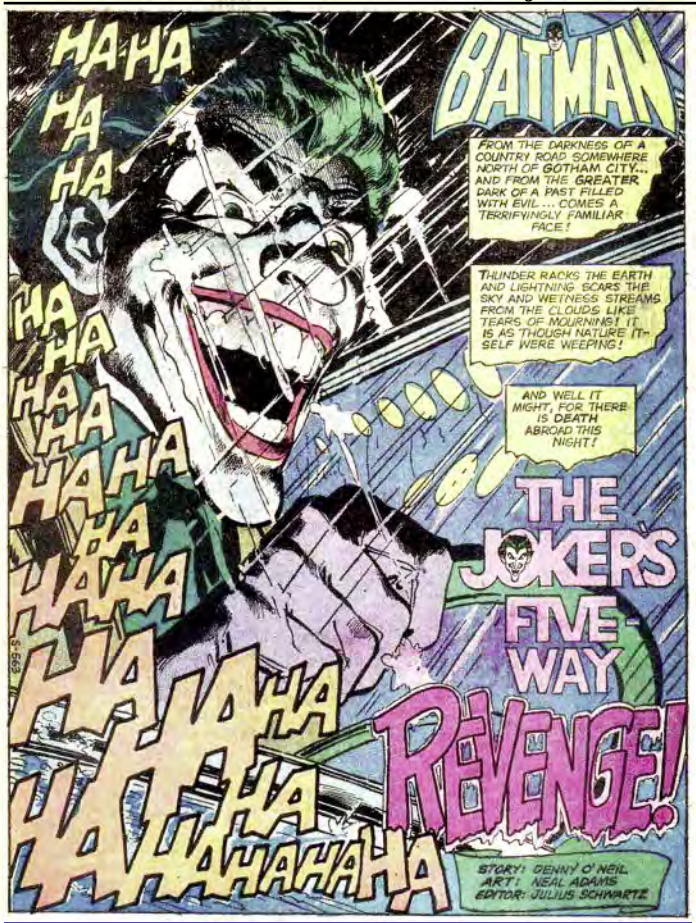
"I Had A Fair Amount To Do With The *Batman* [Animated] Series"

RA: *This was the same time you began tying the Deadman mythos into "Batman" by taking his Society of Assassins, renaming them the League of Assassins, and creating Talia, and then Ra's Al Ghul. Clearly those two characters, Al Ghul and his daughter Talia, have become iconic members of Batman's Rogues' Gallery. In fact, one of the problems that Superman*



Kryptonite No More!

Neal Adams' iconic cover for *Superman* #233 (Jan. 1971), with its reinterpretation of a classic late-'30s/early-'40s image of the Man of Steel—and #233's splash page, scripted by O'Neil with art by Curt Swan & Murphy Anderson. This page, scanned by Bob Bailey from his collection, has been autographed by Anderson and editor Julius Schwartz. The most famous scene in the issue, undoubtedly, is the sequence in which a retrofitted Superman chews up a piece of kryptonite, now that the substance has been deprived of its ability to harm him. The cure, however, proved as impermanent as most things in comic book series. Still, this multi-issue O'Neil/Schwartz "re-launch" of Superman following the retirement of longtime Man of Steel editor Mort Weisinger has recently been collected between hard covers. [© DC Comics.]



The Joker Is Wild—*Again!*

If any clown-face had ever looked any scarier up to this point, we don't wanna see it! The Neal Adams/Dick Giordano splash page of *Batman* #251 (Sept. 1973); script by O'Neil. The trio redefined The Joker for a new generation of comics readers—and for everyone who's come since. Thanks to Bob Bailey. [© DC Comics.]

know to solve this blah, blah, blah." It was a classic detective story in that the hero was given a problem, there was a small setting—I mean they didn't cover much territory geographically—and you could get to the identity of the murderer before Batman did if you were really paying attention. That was the only time I *really* thought I brought that off.

There wasn't enough material in the actual comic story to fill a television show, so when I wrote my adaptation, I thought [it would be easier because] it was a 22-page script for an approximately 20-minute television show. I thought it would be found money, easy as pie to write. I found out, though, that I had to add a lot. Comic books are a very compressed narrative form, and I didn't fully realize that until I started working with comics and television simultaneously. The trick, of course, was not to just pad the story but to add incidents that were a tight part of the plot. I think I managed that. I don't know—it's the viewer who's the final judge.

There were other changes made by the editor that I didn't understand the need or reason for, but that's working in television. Everybody who's ever worked in television has stories like that. Alan was not the editor for that episode, by the way.

RA: *Another episode was adapted from the Joker story you did with Neal—"The Joker's Five-Way Revenge!" from* Batman *#251 (Sept. 1973). It was also the last "Batman" story you and Neal worked on together.*

O'NEIL: Was that the last one Neal and I did? I didn't realize that.

RA: *Yes, at least in the 1970s. It was also the story that brought The Joker back for the first time since 1968. He hadn't been seen in quite a while at that point.*

O'NEIL: Yes, The Joker was a goldmine, waiting there to be exploited.

RA: *He's never taken a breather since then, either. He's been used constantly ever since.*

O'NEIL: Over-used, really. There's something scary about clowns, and a clown who is a maniacal serial killer is also a perfect protagonist for Batman. But, of course, over the years he got watered down to practically a real clown. No actual menace, not really threatening. So, when given a chance to write a Joker story, the obvious way to go [for me] was to take him back to what he really is. He is, in mythological terms, a trickster character. Only, trickster characters in mythology often have benevolent aspects, and The Joker doesn't. He's an entity you can't ever predict. You can't figure him out. He makes no sense at all. In one of the novels I wrote, the reader thinks he's going to push an old lady in front of a bus and he gives her a $100 bill instead, than goes on his merry way. You just don't know. He's a fascinating character. I think he's the best trickster character in all of popular culture. Great kudos to the people who invented him. The inside joke in that story, the "Five-Way Revenge" story, is that the character Bigger Melvin was a friend of ours, Steve Mitchell.

RA: *The artist?*

O'NEIL: Yeah, the inker. I think he's been a filmmaker for a few years now. Steve is a multi-talented guy.

RA: *Now, Batman's look was partly based on The Shadow, and his detective skills and gadgets seem inspired to some degree by Doc Savage, but I've noticed that Batman's Rogues' Gallery seem to have a lot more in common with Dick Tracy's Rogues' Gallery than anything in the pulp field.*

O'NEIL: Well, it's really basic theatre. This is something I learned from Eric Van Lustbader—you look at medieval paintings and the devil is often a bat. You can always tell the demons and devils in miracle plays. They look like demons and devils. There's no masquerade. Comics are, among many other things, an iconic medium. I think it's a mistake, once you've established an icon, to violate it. You mentioned Dick Tracy, always with the hat and trenchcoat with the very sharp features. The villains in both *Tracy* and "Batman" don't necessarily wear their villain ways on their sleeves but on their faces. For an iconic medium, it's a good way to go. With Two-Face, a lot of us—Andy Helfer and the guys who worked on the last *Batman* movie—found a way to make him a tragic figure, without making the disfigurement an emblem of evil but an emblem of tragedy. That's a perfectly legitimate way to go.

RA: *But wasn't Two-Face originally a tragic figure, back in the 1940s? Two-Face actually didn't appear all that often in the early days. The Harvey Dent version of Two-Face only appeared four times prior to the Comics Code outlawing him for almost twenty years. The original three-part story in 1942-1943 and his revival in 1954.*

O'NEIL: As Harvey Dent or as Two-Face?

RA: *As Harvey Dent. He appeared a number of times after the initial stories just as Harvey Dent—actually in the early appearances he was Harvey* Kent, *which was changed to avoid readers thinking he was related to Clark Kent—but as Two-Face, he just had the four appearances.*

O'NEIL: Really?

Michael W. Kaluta in the early '70s. Thanks to Sean Howe.

Shadows On The Wall

Two startlingly different yet effective renditions of the pulp-magazine-spawned hero The Shadow: from *The Shadow* #1 (Oct.-Nov. 1973), with art by Michael W. Kaluta—and #5 (June-July '74), with art by Frank Robbins. The writer in both cases was Dennis O'Neil.

Frank Robbins, a few years earlier.

"The Shadow"

RA: *Of course, you also worked on DC's adaptation of* The Shadow. *Do you have any knowledge of the art problems DC had trying to get an artist for the book?*

O'NEIL: Do I!

RA: *I've heard that Jim Steranko was the first artist approached.*

O'NEIL: Yeah, he was the logical guy to go to, both because of his art style and because of his identification with the character. He'd been painting the paperback covers for some time at that point. I think Jim would have done a fine job, but I could not, as an editor, meet his conditions. It was nothing more complicated than that. I couldn't give him the freedom he felt he needed. At least, that was my perception. He wanted me to go a little further than I felt comfortable going as an editor.

RA: *Did he want to write the scripts as well as drawing them?*

O'NEIL: Yeah, he wanted to essentially deliver a package.

RA: *At that time, the early 1970s, having a single person as the writer/artist on a book was almost unheard of at either of the two main comic companies. There was Jack Kirby on the Fourth World stuff and that would have been it.*

O'NEIL: It would have been a huge violation of procedure. Nowadays, it probably would have been fine, and I have no doubt that Jim would have done a terrific job. I've a little regret to this day that we couldn't find a way to make that work. The next artist I approached was another household name, and time passed and along comes a story, complete art, inked, lettered, that had nothing to do with the script that I sent him. He had decided that he could do a better job. I heard he gave it to his next-door neighbor to write. That may or may not be true. Anyway, it was not the job I assigned him.

RA: *Was this [name of artist]?*

O'NEIL: I'm not going to mention names. I'm not an uncharitable fellow. Anyway, I couldn't cede that much editorial prerogative to a freelance artist whom I'd never met. I think he probably did, and this won't surprise you, a terrific job, but it's not the way we did comics back then.

RA: *It also seems like much the same reason you didn't use Jim Steranko, because he wanted to deliver a package.*

O'NEIL: Yeah. Whether or not my script was any good—I don't think it was bad—that just was not the way business was done. So then I guess I went to Bernie [Wrightson]. He was, and I suppose still is, very devoted to the character and would have done a good

Seal Of Approval

The History Of The Comics Code

by Amy Kiste Nyberg

A/E

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: *With this issue, after a decade of attempting to acquire the rights to do so, we begin at last our serialization of Dr. Amy Nyberg's 1998 book* Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code. *This groundbreaking study was originally published by University Press of Mississippi as part of its Studies in Popular Culture series, under the general editorship of M. Thomas Inge. Amy, since 1993 a professor in the Department of Communication at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, has a prior background as a professional journalist. She is married to comic book artist John Nyberg… who, by sheer coincidence, was the inker of an* Elric of Melniboné *series or two I scripted for First Comics circa 1990.*

Ever since I first read Seal of Approval, *I've wanted to make it available to* Alter Ego*'s audience in an illustrated format—since there were very few reproductions of comic art and no photos whatsoever in the original edition. I wish to thank Tom Inge for his considerable help in arranging for this book to be reprinted over the course of several issues of* A/E. *The text is © 1998 University Press of Mississippi; the book is still available through them at* **www.upress.state.ms.us**. *My thanks to William Biggins and Vijah Shah, the University Press' past and present acquisitions editors, for their help, as well.*

Signed, Sealed, & Delivered

(Clockwise from top center:) Dr. Amy Kiste Nyberg—the Comics Code seal—and the cover of the University Press of Mississippi edition of her 1998 book *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*. The cover illustration is by John Nyberg; photo courtesy of AKN. [Art © 1998 University Press of Mississippi.]

Seal of Approval, *being an academic work, is heavily "footnoted"—though in the MLA style that, instead of placing small raised numbers after pieces of text, lists book or article titles or author names and page numbers between parentheses: e.g., "(Hart 154-156)," which refers to pp. 154-156 of whichever book by an author or editor named Hart is listed in the bibliography. When the parentheses contain only page numbers, it is because the name of the author, editor, or work is given in the main text almost immediately preceding the note. Nyberg's bibliography will be printed at the conclusion of our serialization, some months from now.*

In addition, there are a handful of notes in the book that are treated as footnotes in the more traditional sense. Those are reprinted in this serialization with the footnoted text at the bottom of the page on which the number appears.

One final note: We have, by and large, left the author's spellings of terms and names just as they appear in the University Press of Mississippi edition—e.g., "superhero" rather than the "super-hero" ordinarily used in this magazine; the non-capitalization of the term "comics code" (though we did capitalize that term in our captions); and "E.C." instead of the period-less "EC" we ordinarily use (though we've kept them in our captions). Seal of Approval *refers to "DC" Comics without the use of periods, so we've left that spelling, as well. Where we've felt a need to point out a possible error of fact or two in the book (though we certainly didn't find many!), we have done so in accompanying art captions, leaving the original text intact. Not so incidentally, a thank-you to Brian K. Morris for retyping the entire book specifically for* Alter Ego.

And now we turn the floor over, as indeed we should, to Amy Kiste Nyberg, who begins with an introductory overview, which will then be greatly expanded and illuminated in the ensuing chapters in future issues….

Introduction

The comics code seal of approval bears the message "Approved by the comics code authority" and first appeared on the covers of comic books in the mid-1950s. The comics code is a set of regulatory guidelines primarily concerned with sex, violence, and language drawn up by publishers and enforced by the "code authority," a euphemism for the censor employed by the publishers. Comic books passing the pre-publication review process are entitled to carry the seal of approval. This study of the origins and history of the comics code examines how and why such a code came into being and the code's significance both historically and to comic book publishing today [1998].

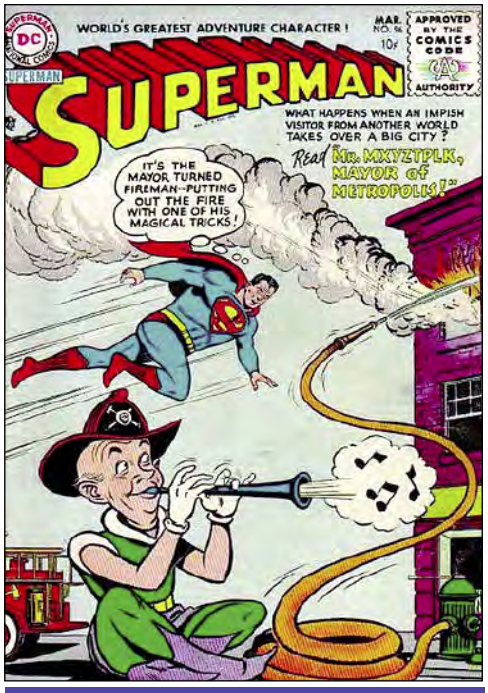
The code was originally implemented in response to a public outcry over comic books in postwar America when comic book content was linked to a rise in juvenile delinquency, and this book begins with a chronology of the controversy that provided the impetus for industry self-regulation. The chronology is followed by a detailed account of how the code was implemented, enforced, and modified. Along the way, this examination of the comics code also explores the evolution of a medium and the public's attitude toward comic books since the introduction of the modern comic in the mid-1930s. The perception of comic books and their audience is central to understanding the comics code both in postwar America and today. What this book does not do, quite intentionally, is provide a detailed analysis of the comics themselves. While some examples of crime and horror comics are discussed in relation to the criticism they generated, the histories of the characters, their creators, and their stories have been told elsewhere. Rather, I approach the history of the comic book code from the perspective of the industry, identifying the events that led to the creation of the code, examining ways in which it was formulated and implemented, and analyzing the impact it had on comic book publishing.

To begin, it is important to recognize that the postwar comic book controversy has its roots in earlier attitudes toward comic books and toward popular culture more generally. Most of the investigations of the comics code to date have focused on criticisms of comic books in the postwar period, specifically 1948 to 1954, but by limiting their study to this time frame, researchers have failed to recognize important links between the campaign against comic books and previous efforts to control children's culture. Far from being an isolated instance of Cold War hysteria, the debate over comic books fits into a broad pattern of efforts to control children's culture. As film, radio, and comic books each were introduced and became part of children's leisure activities, guardians of children's morality renewed their attacks on the mass media.

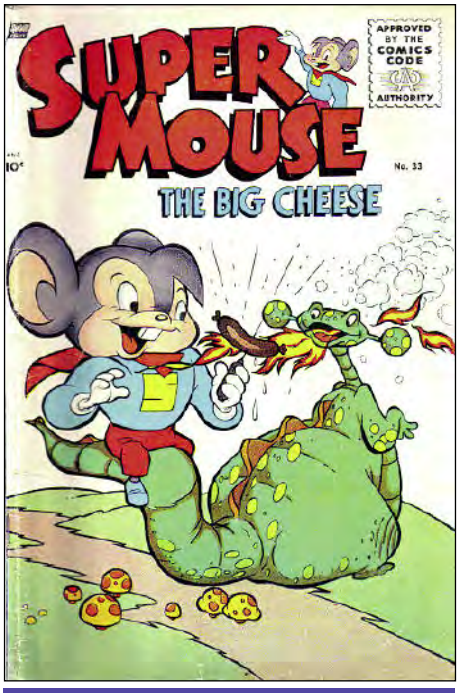
From the outset, symbols of social authority over childhood and children's reading, particularly teachers and librarians, defined comic book reading as a problem. They expressed fears that the comic book was leading children away from better literature and creating a generation of semi-literates. When academic researchers began to test some of the assumptions educators were making about comic books, however, their findings demonstrated that comic book reading made little difference in the acquisition of reading skills, in academic achievement, or in social adjustment. Despite these research findings, the criticism of comic books persisted because the fears about comic books, rather than being based on empirical evidence, were rooted in adult beliefs and attitudes about children's leisure time activities. Adults' concern

The Guys Who Came In With The Code

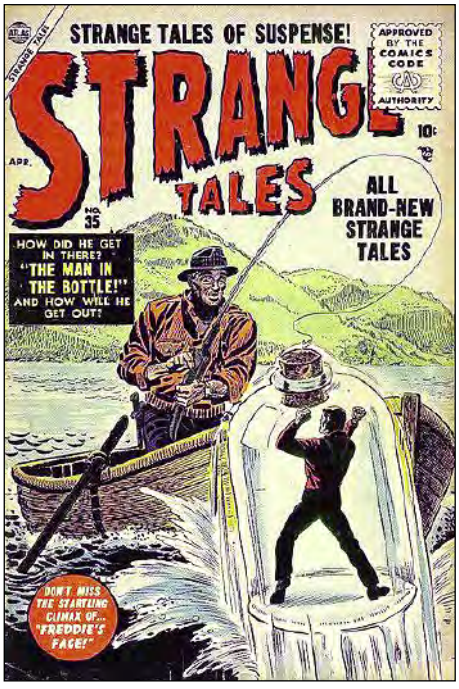
(Across bottom of this page and the next two:) The first Comics Code-approved issues of ten comics, from ten of the surviving publishers, all but two dated March or April of 1955 and going on sale at the turn of the year:



National/DC's *Superman* #96 (March '55), art by Al Plastino [© DC Comics]...



Standard/Pines' *Supermouse* #33 (March '55), artist unknown [© the respective copyright holders]...



Timely's (the future Marvel's) *Strange Tales* #35 (April '55), art by Carl Burgos & Sol Brodsky [© Marvel Characters, Inc.]...

YOU HIT THE *COMIC SHOP* ***RELIGIOUSLY*** EVERY WEEK. YOU ***DOUBLE-BAG*** YOUR PRIZED *DEVIL DINOSAUR* COLLECTION. YOUR ULTRA-RARE COPY OF *SHAZAM* #1 IS SAFELY ***SLABBED.*** YOU NEVER MISS AN ISSUE OF *ALTER EGO!* BUT ARE YOU A FAN? I MEAN ***REALLY*** A FAN?

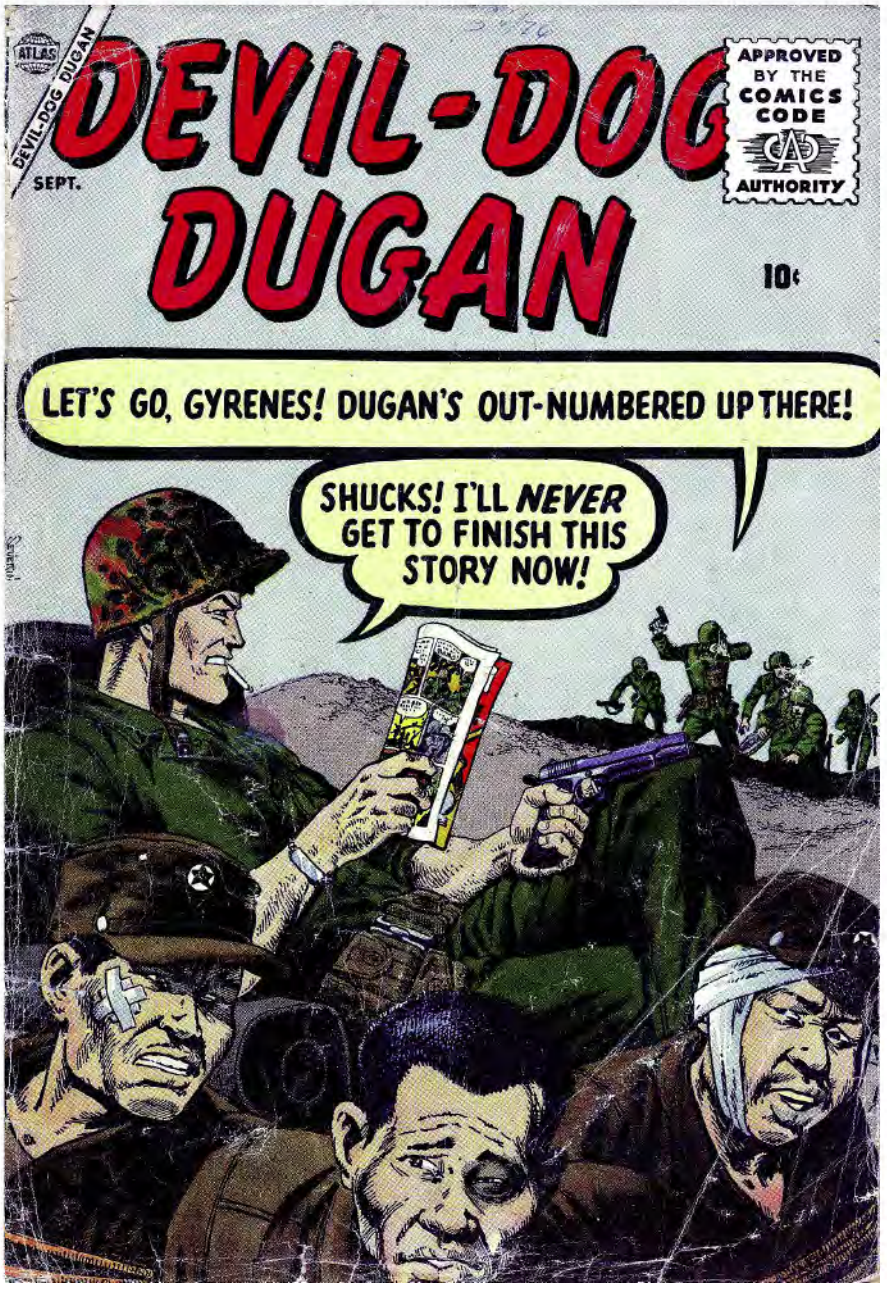
NOT COMPARED TO *DEVIL-DOG DUGAN* YOU'RE NOT! WHILE HIS PLATOON'S STILL CATCHING Z'S, THIS JOKER'S BEATING THE HELL OUT OF BLOODTHIRSTY *COMMIES!* AND *WHY?* FOR *GOD?* FOR *COUNTRY?* ***NAH!***

HE JUST WANTS TO ***READ*** HIS *COMIC BOOK* IN PEACE!

AND HE'S NOT ALONE! THE COMICS ARE ***FILLED*** WITH COMIC BOOK *NUTS* SO *EXTREME* YOU'LL ***SCREAM...***

NOW THAT'S A FAN!

(PART 2)



Devil-Doggone Funny!

John Severin drew this amusing cover for *Devil-Dog Dugan* #2 (Sept. 1956). [© Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Now *That's* A Fan!

by Michael T. Gilbert

Comic book readers are an obsessive lot. You'll find us slabbing dog-eared *Big Boy* giveaways, buying 40 variant covers of the latest *Superman* reboot, and braving tornadoes on new comics day. But that's nothing compared to the fanatics you'll find in the comics themselves!

Cookie An' The Commies!

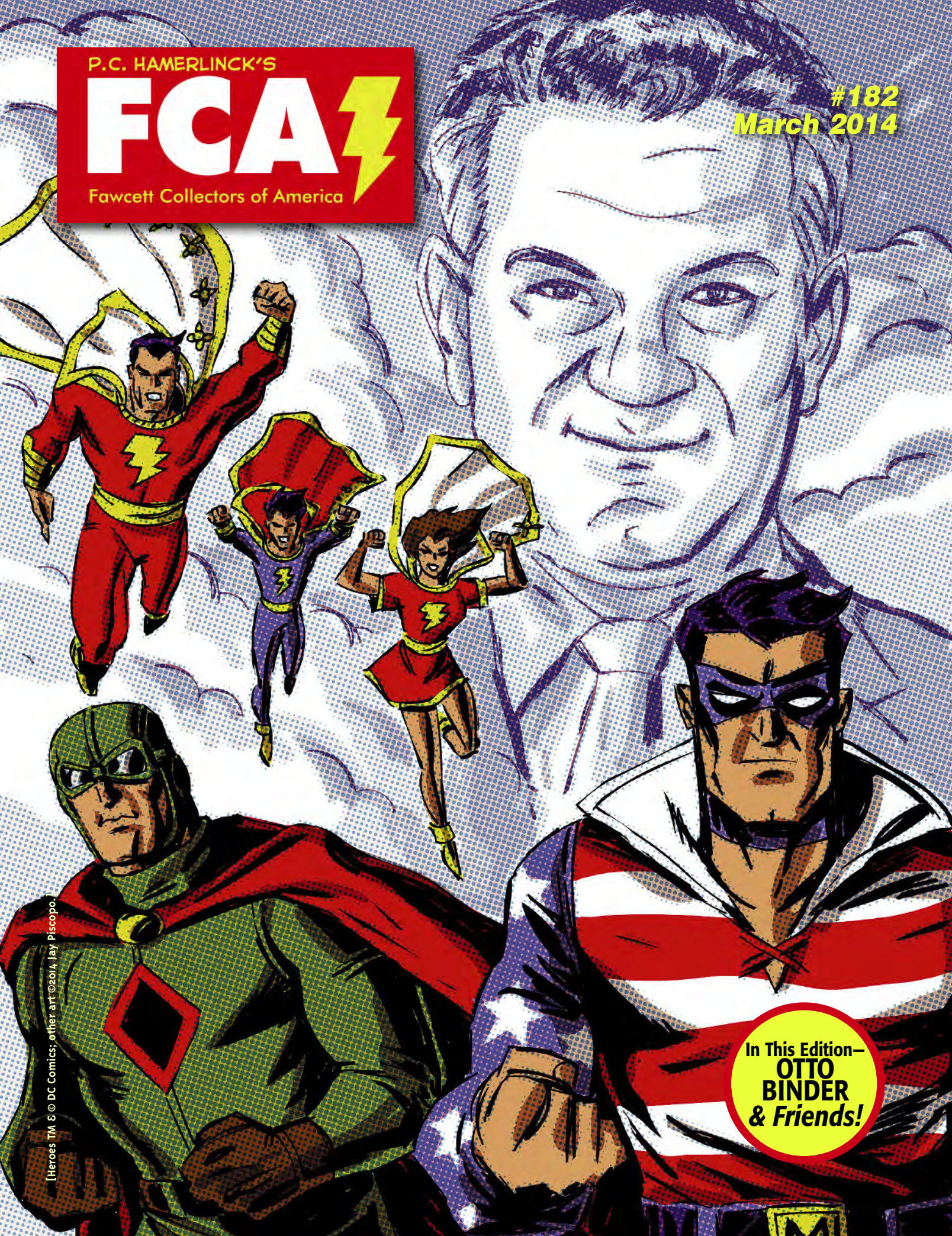
Take for example the Dave Berg-illustrated "Cookie an' the Commies!" from *Combat Kelly* #16. This joker's so busy reading the latest issue of his brother-in-arms, *Combat Casey*, that Cookie barely notices a bloodthirsty Red about to shish-kabob him! No worries, though. Cookie not only massacres his attacker, he also slaughters about six-dozen buck-toothed Commies. He probably thought they were trying to steal his comics!

By story's end, Cookie's resting with a copy of his beloved *Combat Casey* comic. "He ain't afraid of nothin'!" sighs Cookie. "I wish I was like him!" I'm guessing that, over in his own book, Combat Casey's thinking the same thing about Cookie! Now ***that's*** a fan!

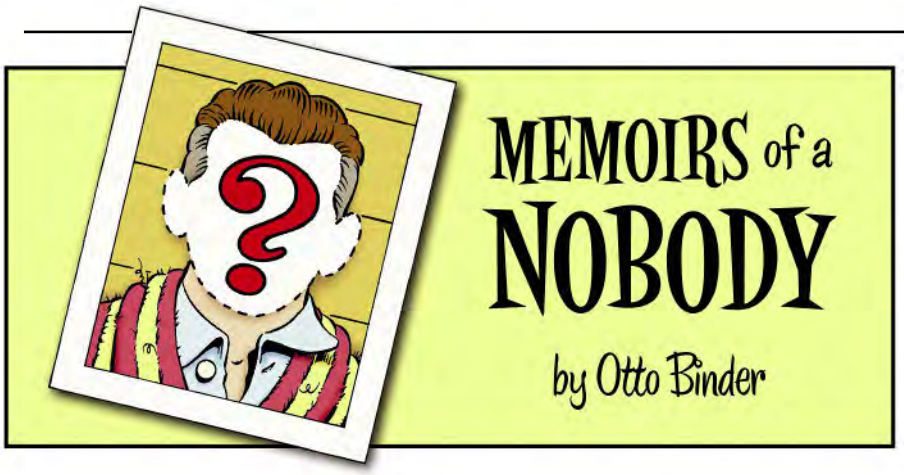
This'll Kill Ya!

Mad Magazine's Dave Berg drew "Cookie an' the Commies" for *Combat Kelly* #16 (Oct. 1953). Seen here are its splash and final two panels. [© Marvel Characters, Inc].

P.C. HAMERLINCK'S
FCA
Fawcett Collectors of America
#182
March 2014



In This Edition–
OTTO BINDER & *Friends!*



Part IV

Abridged & Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck

***FCA* EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:** *Otto Oscar Binder (1911-1974), the prolific science-fiction and comic book writer renowned for authoring over half of the Marvel Family saga for Fawcett Publications, wrote* Memoirs of a Nobody *in 1948 at the age of 37, during what was arguably the most imaginative period within the repertoire of "Captain Marvel" stories.*

Aside from intermittent details about himself, Binder's capricious chronicle resembles very little in the way of anything that is indeed autobiographical. Unearthed several years ago from Binder's file materials at Texas A&M University, Memoirs *is self-described by its author as "ramblings through the untracked wilderness of my mind." Binder's potpourri of stray philosophical beliefs, pet peeves, theories, and anecdotes was written in freewheeling fashion and devoid of any charted course—other than allowing his mind to flow with no restricting parameters. The abridged manuscript—serialized here within the pages of* FCA*—will nonetheless provide glimpses into the idiosyncratic and fanciful mind of Otto O. Binder.*

In his fourth excerpt, Otto concludes "The Modern Pied Piper"—a chapter pertaining to his four-colored profession. **—P.C. Hamerlinck.**

Now let me tell you about artists. Queer fellows, those artists. Temperamental? A writer gives them a perfectly simple scene to illustrate, such as …

SCENE: Show front and back view of a big mansion. Burglars rushing out with swag, eight of them, armed with pistols, rifles, bombs and machine-guns. But hero comes leaping from airplane, felling them all with one mighty blow. Also show fire on the roof, and mob scene in distance. Fill up rest of space with tenement background, wash hanging on the line, and two women gossiping while their lazy husbands sit on the fire escape, and a gang of kids play baseball in the street.

BURGLAR: We've got the swag, which consists of a complete set of Rogers silverware, plenty of jewelry, and a sack of gold! Let's lam now before Captain Cruncher shows up — Ulps! He's already here!

HERO: Hello, gents! Think you're going to get away, eh? All your bullets and bombs are missing me, as usual. And now, take this!

SOUND: POW! BAM! WHACK! THUD! WHAM! SOK!

2nd BURGLAR: Aghhhh!

3rd BURGLAR: Ghaaaa!

4th BURGLAR: Yiiiii!

5th BURGLAR: Nnngggg!

6th BURGLAR: Erkkkk!

7th BURGLAR: Owwwww!

8th BURGLAR: We're licked! Take us to jail!

WATCHER: Look! It's the great Captain Cruncher in action! Gee whiz! Oh boy! Yayyyyy!

As I was saying, you give an artist a neat, simple scene like that and he blows his top. Insists it will make the panel too crowded, and there's too much wording. So the artist cuts it down to a close-up of the crook's face, showing pain, as hero's fist smacks him on chin. Crook says, "Ug!" Hero says, "All eight of you will get the same!"

But actually, that's a good device sometimes used by artists simplifying a scene down to its essentials. It's not that they're lazy—no more than you or I. But scenes that take in too big a scope come out a mess. A good example is where a writer may ask for a mob scene of a crook's car mowing down people at a busy intersection. The artist can simply show two people talking, one pointing offstage excitedly and saying: "Holy smoke! Look! That crook's car is mowing down all those people!" The reader's imagination supplies the rest. Tricks of the trade.

Another trick the writer uses quite often, to save time and needless repetition, is to shorten words and names down to a sort of code. For instance, your hero, Captain Cruncher, becomes just "CC" in the script. The villain, who may be Snatcher Snyde, becomes "SS." And all superfluous words are left out. A typical description for a scene may then reduce to this:

"CC leaps from bg to st where SS guns RT and VB, while inv misfires, flames to offstage. Don't fgt SS's R.K.T.G. & CC clk."

All as clear as day, but the artist comes to me and says he can't

Tokyo TKO

In the WWII-archived tale "Tokyo Takeoff" (*Wow Comics* #40, Jan. 1946), scripter Otto Binder exercised the fine art of the fist-on-chin sound-bite as The Phantom Eagle and his Phoenix Squadron disembarked in the Land of the Rising Sun. The story was skillfully illustrated by our late comrade/ *FCA* columnist, Marc Swayze. [Phantom Eagle TM & © 2014 the respective copyright holders.]

Otto Binder's Magic Words

The Writer's Plan to Save *Captain Marvel Adventures*

by Brian Cremins

Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck

Over the course of their illustrious crime-fighting career, Billy Batson and Captain Marvel saved the world—and often the universe—from countless villains: the terrible Ibac, the devious Mr. Mind, the diabolical Black Adam. Once they even saved Dr. Sivana and the lovely Beautia from Attila the Hun and his awful table manners (in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #20, Jan. '43). By 1952, however, Billy and the Captain were struggling. No magic word or talking tiger could save them from the crime, horror, and romance comics that had been growing in popularity since the war. And while Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* would not appear until 1954, The Marvel Family and Fawcett Publications had another, more immediate threat to face: the ongoing legal battle with DC Comics and its allegations of copyright infringement.

With the help of a magic word, Billy and his alter ego managed to solve even the most complex problems. But who would rescue Billy, and Mary Marvel, and Captain Marvel Jr., and Mr. Tawny? Would Fawcett's writers and artists bring new life, energy, and momentum to The Marvel Family?

While the boy reporter and the World's Mightiest Mortal were busy with King Kull and the Seven Sins in the October 1952 issue of *Captain Marvel Adventures* (#137), Otto Binder set out to answer those questions. How might he, C.C. Beck, and editors Wendell Crowley and Will Lieberson save the fantastic world they'd created for Fawcett Publications? Binder didn't speak a magic word, but he did the next best thing: he sat down at his typewriter.

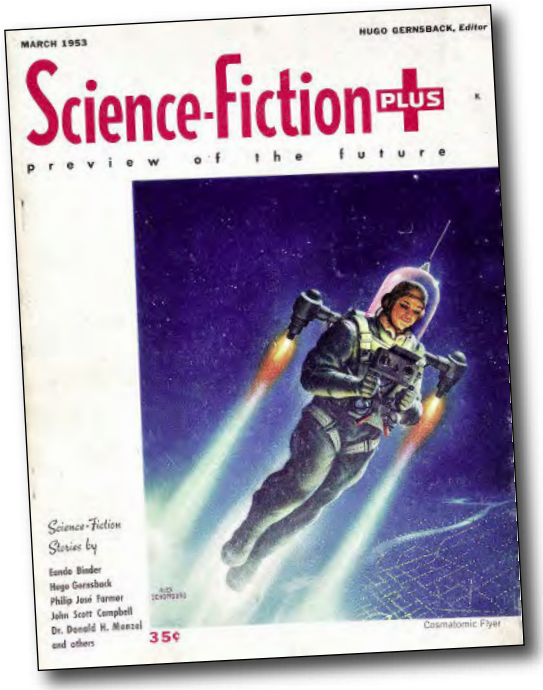
While Binder may not have succeeded in reviving Captain Marvel's fortunes, he did leave behind a list of ideas for Beck and for the Fawcett editors. That typewritten list of ideas, stapled to a copy of a letter Binder had written to a science-fiction editor, survives in the Otto Binder Collection at Texas A&M University's Cushing Memorial Library and Archives. It has never before been published.

This past summer, I reque
items of correspondence and
the *Memoirs of a Nobody* text,
and friends, and query letter
asked to see Binder's letters
Sam Moskowitz. In the early
for *Science Fiction Plus* and as
under the "Eando Binder" by
his brother Earl had invented
to Bill Schelly's *Words of Won*
harkened back to the 'good c
1930s." Binder and Moskowi
the short-lived magazine. As
his papers, notably those con
Adelbert Kline's literary ager
writer, to Moskowitz.

Binder's letters to Moskow
Captain Marvel writer's crea
his pragmatic approach to th
markets. As I finished readin
15, 1952, letter to Moskowitz,
items. Someone, maybe Bind

Deadly Times

By the time "Captain Marvel Battles King Kull and the Seven Sins" appeared in print (*Captain Marvel Adventures* #137, Oct. 1952; art by C.C. Beck) the tale's writer, Otto O. Binder, was already contemplating the course of the Captain's continuing exploits... but the hero's journey was destined for an ill-fated end. [Shazam hero TM & © DC Comics.]



Literature Out Of This World

In the early 1950s, Sam Moskowitz, editor for Hugo Gernsback's magazine *Science-Fiction Plus*, hired Otto Binder to write new stories under his "Eando Binder" byline. A Binder tale appears in the March 1953 issue of *SFP*, which features a painted cover by another comic book legend, Alex Schomburg. [TM & © the respective copyright holders.]