

Dean Mullaney

WANTED


Like millions of other Americans, Will Eisner enjoyed listening to radio programs. As a writer, he listened with perhaps a more attentive ear than most. He once revealed that he paced the seven-page *Spirit* stories as if they were half-hour radio dramas. Anthology shows such as *Suspense*, *Inner Sanctum*, *Mysterious Traveler*, and *Adventures by Morse* would weave an air of adventure, a whiff of mystery every week, and would often employ the convenient trope of an ordinary, nearly invisible person thrust into an extraordinary situation.

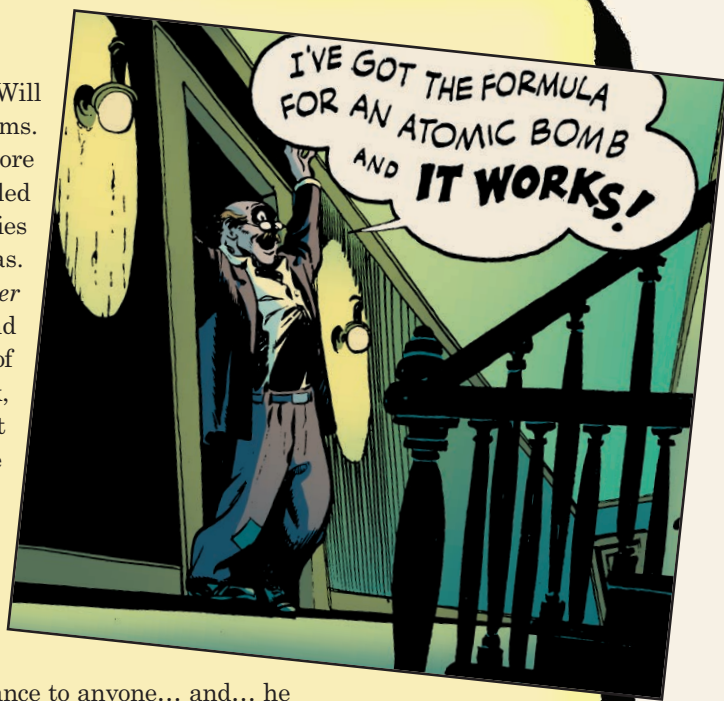
It's a trope that Eisner would also effectively use from time to time. Mortimer J. Titmouse, the protagonist in "Wanted," is one such nebbish. "Nothing he ever did was of any importance to anyone... and... he knew it!" Indeed, the hapless man is literally moved by the story's omniscient narrator as a pawn in someone else's hand.

Another structural component Eisner often employed to good effect was the use of heavy expository text on the first pages, allowing him to quickly set the stage for the tale to come. By the time the reader reaches the bottom of page two in this story, Mortimer Titmouse is a fully rounded character. (Part of the introduction's effectiveness is due to Abe Kanegson, whom Eisner called "the best letterer I ever had.")

Will was at the height of his post-War creativity in 1947. He could have simply told a touching story of a man who wants to be remembered for having done something important; but he layers in other elements, such as a tongue-in-cheek meta-reference warning to readers who are bored with the saturation of atomic bomb stories in popular culture. (The fear of the atomic bomb became much more real after the Soviet Union successfully tested their own nuclear bomb—code named "First Lightning"—two years later, on August 29, 1949 at Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan.)

The cartoonist also brings in the Octopus, who by the time of this, his fourth appearance in the series, is firmly established as the *Spirit*'s primary nemesis. The Octopus is not the story's protagonist, however. It's more like a warm-up for the grenade-thrower's three-part epic that would culminate a month later in "Showdown with the Octopus."

Unlike the popular radio dramas that Will Eisner would sometimes listen to while he inked *The Spirit*, "Wanted" doesn't wrap up in a neat package so much as leave the reader wondering if—or when—an atomic bomb will "reduce us to a smudge." 



WANTED



(MORTIMER J. TITMOUSE, 5 FT. 5½ INCHES TALL, OF SLIGHT BUILD, LIGHT HAIR, NEARSIGHTED, NERVOUS TWITCH OF RIGHT EYE (BOTH EYES ARE GREY))

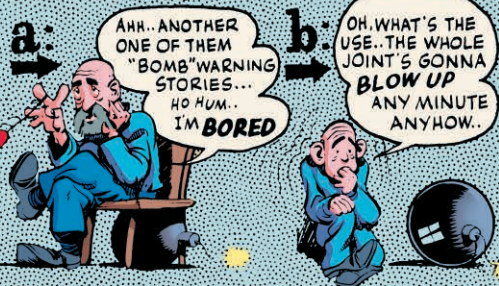
WE ARE EMPLOYING OUR SPACE THIS WEEK
FOR THE BENEFIT OF THIS CIVILIZATION
WHICH, IN OUR OWN OPINION, IS CERTAINLY
DOOMED UNLESS THIS MAN IS FOUND AT ONCE!

(ANY INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST OF
MR. TITMOUSE SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED AT ONCE
TO COMMISSIONER DOLAN, POLICE HEADQUARTERS,
CENTRAL CITY, OR **THE**

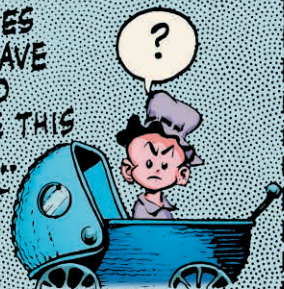
By Will Eisner

THE SPIRIT

BEFORE THIS STORY BEGINS, WE WOULD LIKE (OUT OF CONSIDERATION FOR OUR REGULAR PATRONS) TO WARN AWAY THOSE READERS WHO MAY FALL INTO THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:



... NOW, THAT LEAVES ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT HEARD OR READ ABOUT THINGS LIKE THIS IN THEIR WHOLE LIFE.. ..OR, TYPE C: ➔



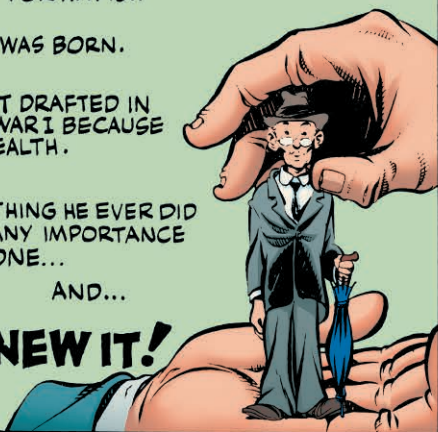
AND SO, WHILE ALL THOSE "a"s AND "b"s SHUFFLE TO THE NEAREST EXIT (OR TURN TO THE FINANCIAL PAGES) WE ASK THE "c" GROUP TO COME IN CLOSER AND MAKE A CIRCLE ABOUT US WHILE WE TELL YOU OF
MORTIMER J. TITMOUSE AND THE LOST THOUGHT!

OF ALL THE NEW ARRIVALS UPON EARTH MORTIMER J. TITMOUSE WAS PROBABLY THE LEAST UNUSUAL ... AND THE MOST ONE COULD SAY FOR HIM IS..

- 1- THAT HE WAS BORN.
- 2- HE WASN'T DRAFTED IN WORLD WAR I BECAUSE OF ILL HEALTH.
- 3- THAT NOTHING HE EVER DID WAS OF ANY IMPORTANCE TO ANYONE...

AND...

HE KNEW IT!



... AND DEEP IN MORTIMER'S BRAIN LAY A TINY STONE OF HIS INCOMPETENCE WHICH, TRY AS HE MIGHT, WOULD NEVER LET HIM FORGET!!

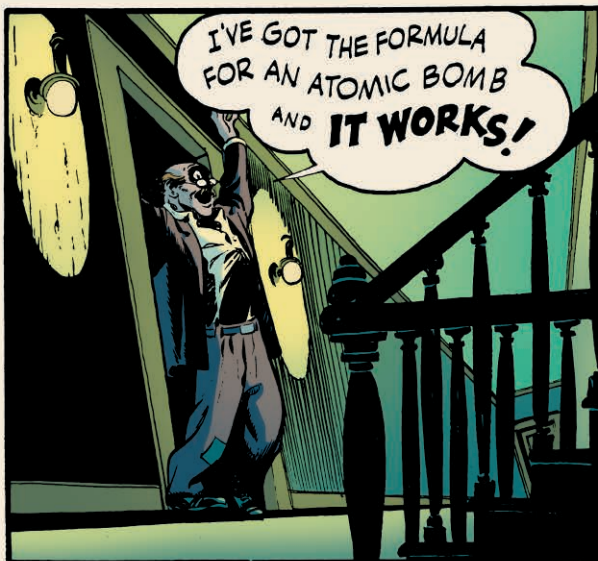
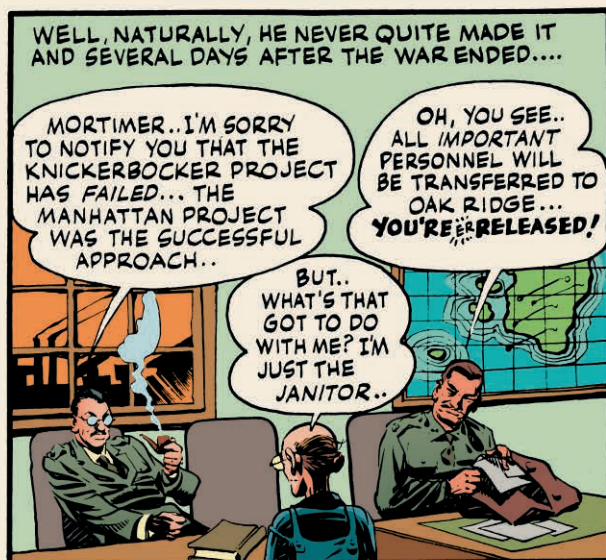
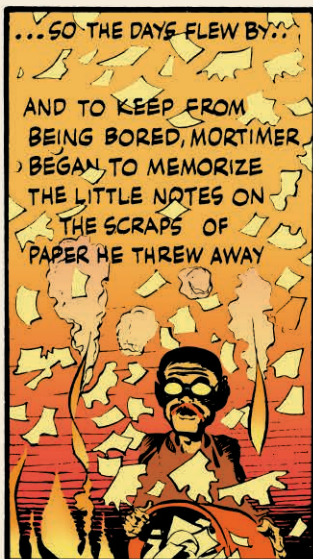


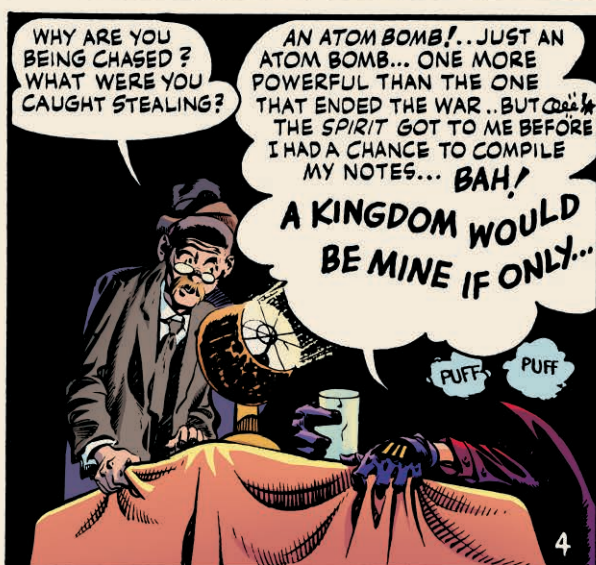
THEN CAME WORLD WAR II ... AND SEEING A CHANCE TO BE OF SOME IMPORTANCE, HE GOT A JOB IN AN ATOMIC PLANT...

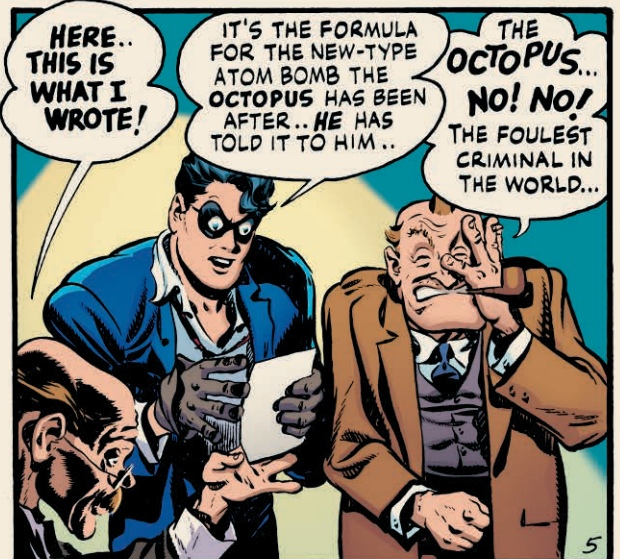


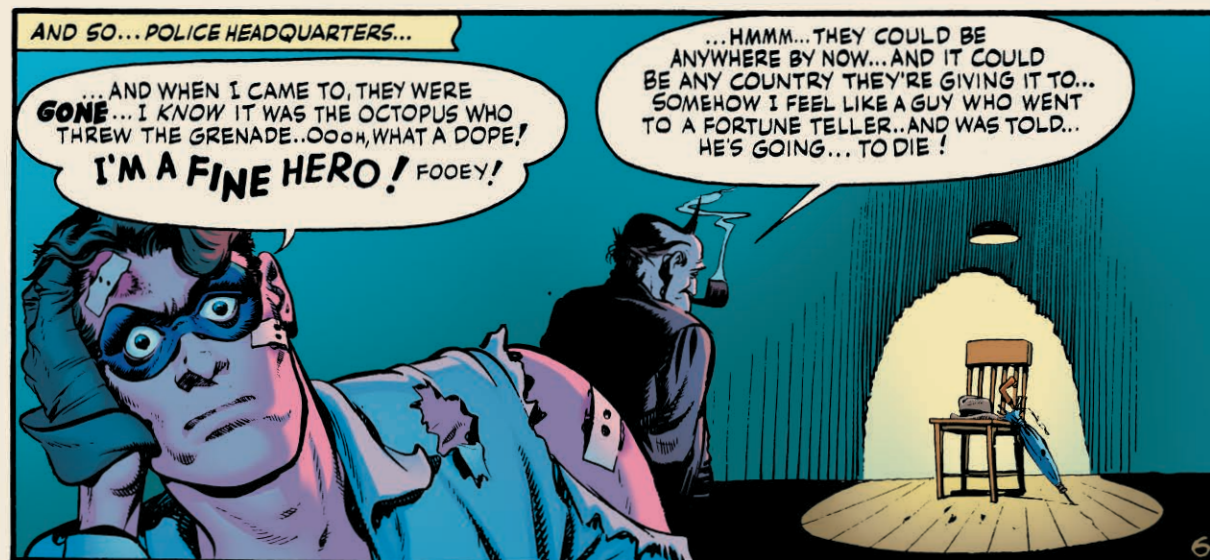
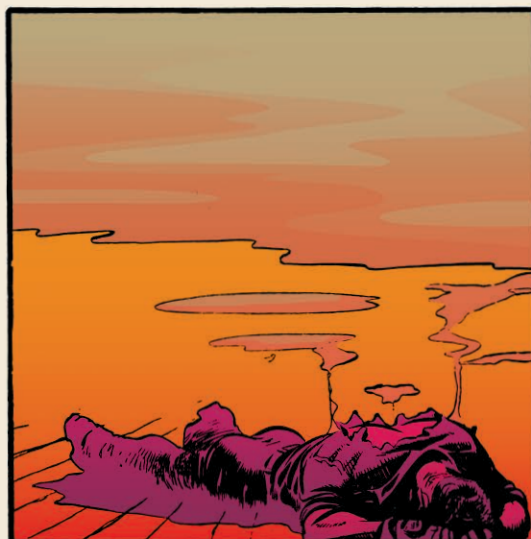
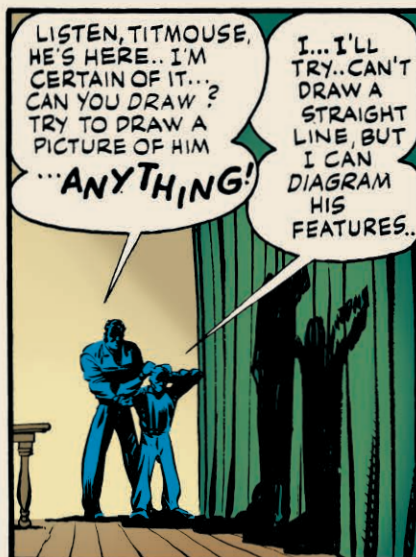
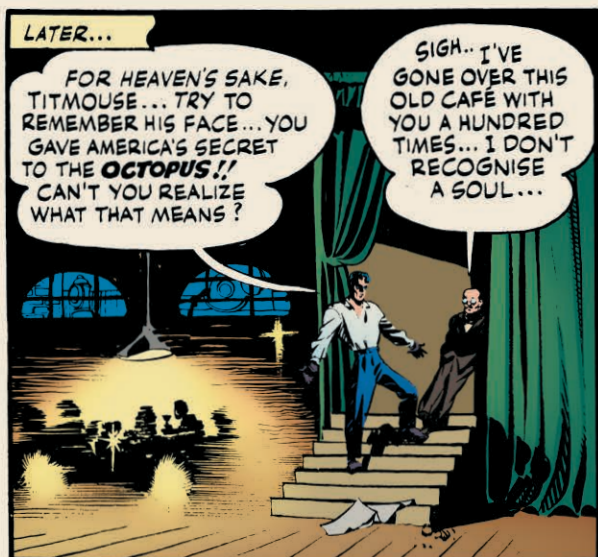
...AND SO... MORTIMER WAS BACK AGAIN... HIS LAST CHANCE AT CONSEQUENCE GONE...











AND SOMEWHERE...SOMEWHERE ON THIS TATTERED GLOBE WALKS MORTIMER
TITMOUSE...AT LARGE WITH PROBABLY THE GREATEST, MOST DEADLY SECRET ANY
ONE MAN EVER POSSESSED...CAN WE GET TO HIM IN TIME?

WILL HE BE FOUND BEFORE
THE THEORY BECOMES A REALITY
AND THE REALITY A
LARGE EXPLOSION THAT
WILL REDUCE US TO A SMUDGE?

