

INTRODUCTION

DICK TRACY, TINTIN AND SERIOUS COMICS

Larry Hancock and Michael Cherkas, the creators of *The Silent Invasion*, have described their long-form graphic novel as a “science fiction mystery.” It is that, and more — in particular, it is one of the most disturbing, and ultimately terrifying, works ever to grace the comics medium.

To a casual reader, to a potential buyer browsing through this volume, the terror of *The Silent Invasion*, the ability of this narrative to be profoundly disturbing, will not be readily apparent. The artwork, by Cherkas, is “cartoony,” and less-than-realistic comic art, whether termed “big foot” (in the jargon of the daily newspaper strips) or “expressionistic” (when some reviewer is searching for a word to justify liking a mere comic book), is strongly associated, in the American mind, with humor.

While I cannot claim to be an expert where European comics are concerned, I can recognize readily enough that some of Cherkas’ influences stem from foreign shores. And in Europe (to name one of several continents the following pertains to), graphic storytelling (a.k.a. comics) is regarded as a valid narrative form for stories to be read by grown-ups.

Nonetheless, many European cartoonists favor a non-realistic approach to their artwork; springing from the draftsman-like but humorous approach of the Belgian comics genius Hergé (creator of Tintin), any number of European cartoonists have brought a stylish, moody, design-oriented approach to work of a serious — that is, non-humorous — nature. This contrast between the comic and serious has enlivened the works of such cartoonists as Serge Clerc, Yves Chaland and Joost Swarte.

There have been American stylists, as well, of course, and the obvious influence upon Cherkas is Chester Gould, that frustrated gag-a-day artist who couldn’t sell a strip to the Tribune Company Syndicate until he broke from form (his own and the field’s) with a certain wild, violent story strip. Gould, a “big foot” cartoonist of the *Mutt and Jeff* school, preceded such men as Alex Raymond, Hal Foster and Milton Caniff onto the comics pages; being first, and being his own man, led Gould down dark, surrealistic paths that often got him dismissed as a “bad” artist.

Oddly enough, one of the other chief stylists of the story strip was Will Gould — no relation to Chet — whose Red Barry was one of King Features’ “answers” to the popular Dick Tracy (another “answer,” significantly, was Alex Raymond and Dashiell Hammett’s *Secret Agent X-9*). Possibly because his popular strip ran only a short time, apparently due to frequently missed deadlines, Will Gould is little-known these days. And, not surprisingly, both Goulds are highly regarded as anything but “bad” artists in Europe.

Meanwhile, back in the present, the story strip is almost dead in the water (not to mention the newspapers), and the comic book field is dominated by super-hero strips drawn by artists who are descendants, in one way, shape or form, of Raymond and Caniff (although some of them probably don’t know it). A few brave souls are venturing into less commercially safe territory, sometimes at Marvel and DC Comics, but more often at

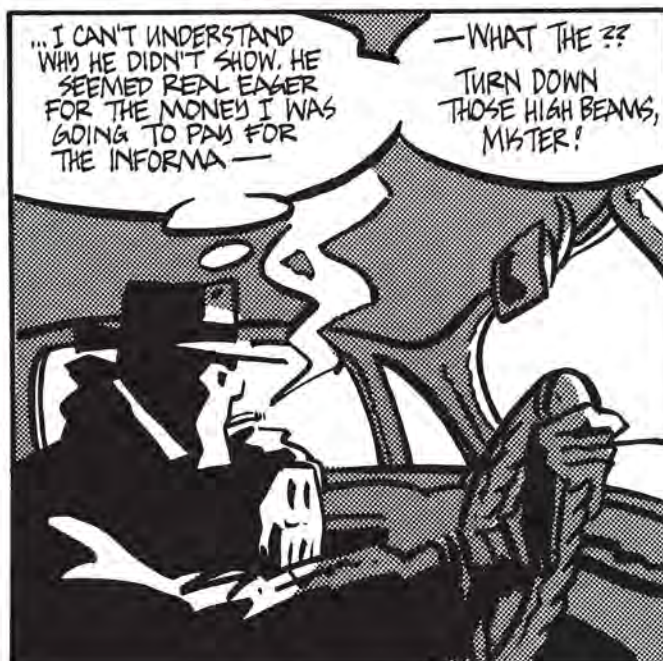
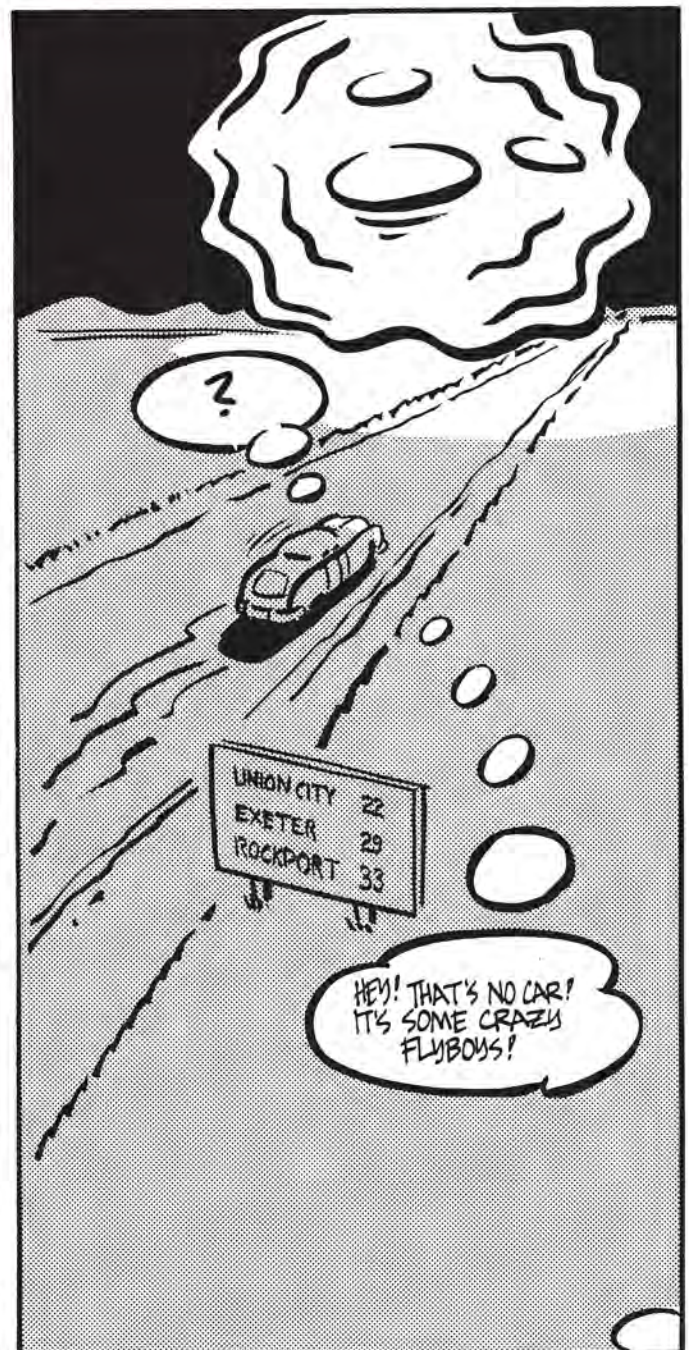
CHAPTER ONE

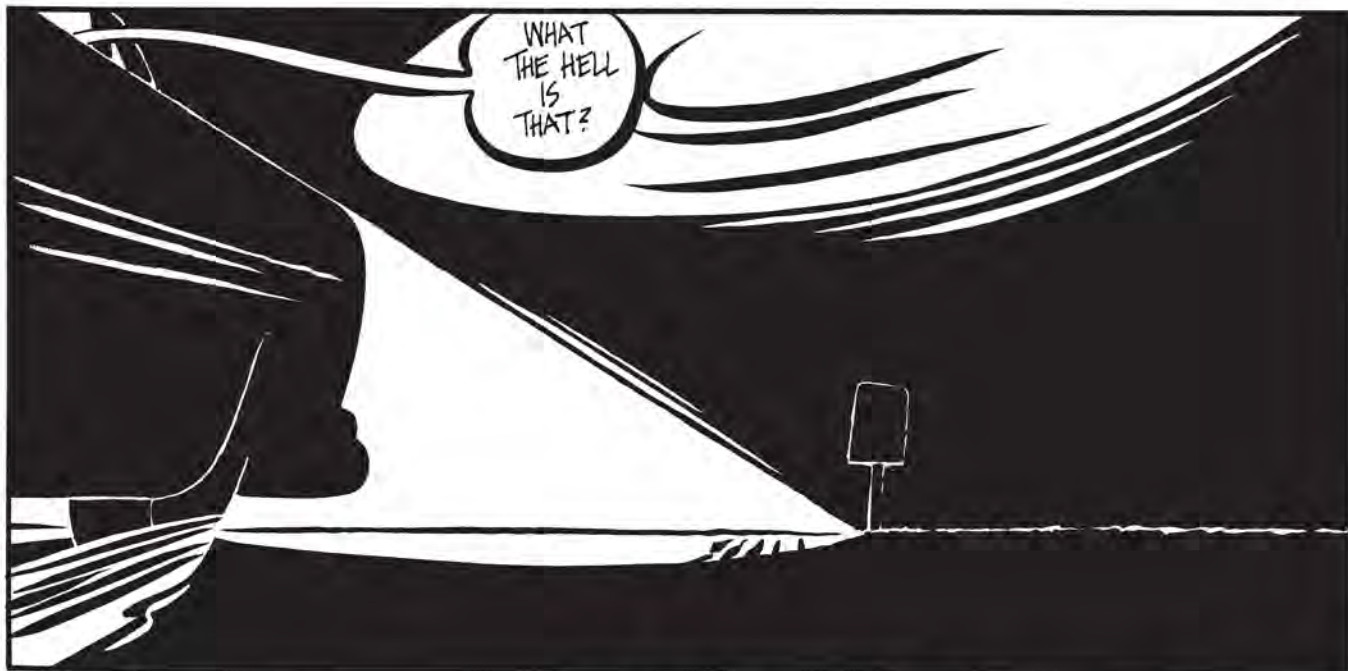
ATOMIC SPIES



APRIL 1952...







WHAT
THE HELL
IS
THAT?



THOSE AREN'T
JETS! THERE'S NO
ENGINE NOISE.

HOLY
MACKEREL!

SCREEEECH



THE NEXT MORNING...

WE FOUND SOME I.D.
THE CAR BELONGS TO A
DICK MALLEY - HE'S
A PRIVATE DETECTIVE...

...HE SEEMS TO HAVE VANISHED,
MR. HOUSLEY... JUST LIKE THAT
PHILBY INCIDENT A
MONTH AGO.

NOBODY COULD
HAVE WALKED
AWAY FROM
THIS...

...I WANT THIS
WHOLE AREA SEARCHED
FOR ANYTHING THE
LEAST BIT UNUSUAL.
THEN I WANT
THE NEARBY FARMS...



FOR THE LAST HALF YEAR FLYING SAUCERS HAD BEEN MY MAIN INTEREST—BECAUSE OF THE BOOK I WAS WRITING—AND FOR PERSONAL REASONS.

...LIGHTS WERE REPORTED IN THE SKIES BY RESIDENTS...

WHAT? WHY DIDN'T COSTELLO CALL ME?

I HOPE HE DIDN'T SEND SOMEONE ELSE OUT ON THIS.

HE WOULDN'T. HE KNOWS I'M CLOSE TO BREAKING THIS UFO THING WIDE OPEN...

HEY???

SOMETHING IS WRONG, MISS AMBER?

YES, MR. KALASHNIKOV, YOUR NEIGHBOUR IS A REAL HEEL!

WILL NOTHING GO RIGHT TODAY?

'MORNING, SCHNEIDER.

'MORNING, MATT. STRANGE THINGS HAPPENIN' OVER BY COPPER HILL, EH?

PROBABLY MARSH GAS.

THAT'S A GOOD ONE, EH? NEVER THOUGHT I'D HEAR THAT FROM YOU.

... AND AIR FORCE OFFICIALS SAY THAT NOTHING APPEARED ON THEIR SCREENS AT THE TIME OF THE ~ CLICK!

##!!##
AIR FORCE!
THEY NEVER SEE A THING!
THEY'RE AFRAID OF WHAT THEY MIGHT FIND.



