

ROY THOMAS' SPIRITED  
COMICS FANZINE

# Alter Ego™



**\$8.95**  
In the USA

**No. 127**  
August  
2014



**WILL EISNER &  
"BUSY" ARNOLD**  
LETTERS OF QUALITY!



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**On Our Cover:** It's pretty "busy," isn't it—as befits a cover that spotlights some of the most colorful characters of the 1940s Quality Comics Group owned and operated by Everett "Busy" Arnold. But the man towering over the super-heroes and lowlifes is Will ("Bill") Eisner, as rendered by artists Jason Paulos and Daniel James Cox, the latter being the gent who provided the lush portrait of Joe Kubert for A/E #116 a couple of years ago. For more about this cover, see pp. 24. [Black Condor, The Ray, Midnight, Doll Man, The Sniper, Plastic Man, The Human Bomb, Firebrand, Blackhawk, Stormy Foster/The Great Defender, Phantom Lady, & Miss America TM & © DC Comics; other art elements © 2014 Jason Paulos & Daniel James Cox.]

**Above:** One of the other features in this issue is the chapter in Amy Kiste Nyberg's book on the history of the Comics Code that deals with that "scourge of the comics," Dr. Fredric Wertham. This effective little caricature, done by Rob Donnelly, can be found on his art website RobDraw.com. Check it out, why dontcha? [© Rob Donnelly.]



Alter Ego™ is published 8 times a year by TwoMorrows, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614, USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344. Roy Thomas, Editor. John Morrow, Publisher. Alter Ego Editorial Offices: 32 Bluebird Trail, St. Matthews, SC 29135, USA. Fax: (803) 826-6501; e-mail: roydann@ntinet.com. Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial offices. Eight-issue subscriptions: \$60 US, \$85 Canada, \$107 elsewhere. All characters are © their respective companies. All material © their creators unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter © Roy Thomas. Alter Ego is a TM of Roy & Dann Thomas. FCA is a TM of P.C. Hamerlinck. Printed in China. ISSN: 1932-6890

FIRST PRINTING.



# “Sincerely Yours, Busy”

## Letters From Quality Publisher “BUSY” ARNOLD, 1940-42, To WILL EISNER & JERRY IGER

by Ken Quattro

# A/E

**EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:** This fascinating look at first-hand documents—letters sent by Quality Comics publisher Everett M. “Busy”

Arnold to artist/writer/entrepreneur Will (aka Bill) Eisner and comics shop head S.M. Iger in the first years of their relationship was originally written by comics historian Ken Quattro for his blog **thecomicedetective**. The source for the correspondence contained in this piece is the Will Eisner Collection at Ohio State University, in Columbus, OH; Ken is particularly grateful to Susan Liberator for her help in obtaining these documents. The article is rich in information on events and judgments that went on behind the scenes in the early days of both Quality Comics and what would become The Spirit Comic Section; in the latter, done for newspapers rather than as newsstand comic books, Arnold and Eisner were essentially partners. Except for minor textual changes in the non-letter portions of the piece made in the interests of A/E’s “house style,” or occasional inserted information contained between brackets, we have preferred to limit any comments or additional information to our accompanying captions, and let Ken relate the story in his own way, italicized quotations and all....



### The Spirit Of Quality

A gag photo taken Oct. 13, 1941, showing (left to right) publisher Everett “Busy” Arnold, the comics feature editor of the *Philadelphia Record* newspaper (whose nickname was “Gap”), and artist/writer Will Eisner. This pic appeared in the 1983 Kitchen Sink volume *The Art of Will Eisner*. The official name of Arnold’s company was Comic Favorites, Inc.; but its cover colophon read “Quality Comic Group,” so that’s how it was known to readers. Eisner was interviewed for A/E #48, which came out shortly after his passing—while in A/E #34, an issue centered around Quality Comics, “Busy’s” son Dick Arnold, later a Quality editor, was likewise interviewed in depth by Jim Amash. [© the respective copyright holders.]

The photo is accompanied by the first “Uncle Sam” splash page, from *National Comics* #1 (July 1940), apparently written and laid out by Eisner and finished by future *Mad* magazine artist Dave Berg... and by the very first *Spirit* page done by Eisner for the Arnold/Eisner partnership’s *Weekly Comic Book* newspaper supplement, which was only technically renamed *The Spirit Section* at a much later date. Thanks to the ComicBookPlus website for the former; the latter is reproduced from the 2000 hardcover *Will Eisner’s Spirit Archives, Vol. 1*, published by DC Comics. [Uncle Sam art © the respective copyright holders; *Spirit* page © Will Eisner Studios, Inc.]



**B**efore e-mail, before texting, when only birds tweeted, people wrote letters. Letter-writing was a craft, an art form in deft hands, wherein thoughts could be expressed with nuance not limited to 140 character bursts. For some, though, letters were a cudgel to prod the recipient down a certain path. Business letters were often of this type, and when it came to writing them, "Busy" Arnold was all business:

Dear Bill,

As I told you over the telephone today, Lou [Fine] has been changing his costumes from month to month especially on *The Ray*. In the first installment of this feature, he had *The Ray* wearing a peaked headpiece but in the second installment he left off the peak on this, later it was restored. In some installments *The Ray* wore slippers and in others he did not have any. Also the stars around the neck of *The Ray* were omitted in some instances, although Ed Cronin usually added these.

I am enclosing a memorandum with some tear sheets and



**Ray Of Sunshine**

(Above:) The splash page of one of the exploits of "The Ray" in which artist Lou Fine drew him wearing his "slippers," which apparently he sometimes neglected to do. The "stars around [his] neck" (meaning the star-like design) are evident here, too. Clearly, "Busy" Arnold was a stickler for detail—understandably figuring that, if a hero's costume changed from issue to issue, it would undercut the realism of the stories. Thanks to the since-renamed Golden Age Comic Book Stories website for this image from *Smash Comics* #22 (May 1941). Lou Fine was covered in depth in *A/E* #17. Scripter unknown. (Incidentally, Ed Cronin, whom Arnold mentions as doing touchups on art, was one of his early editors at Quality, before he moved on to helm Hillman's comics line.) [Art © the respective copyright holders; *The Ray* is now a trademark of DC Comics.]

would appreciate having you tell Lou to make the costumes of both *The Ray* and *The Black Condor* the same each month.

Everett Munyan "Busy" Arnold was both Will Eisner's business partner (in *The Spirit* comic section) and client of his comic shop. It was in that role as owner of Comic Favorites, Inc., that Arnold wrote (more accurately, dictated) this October 1, 1940, missive. They would always come typed and on company letterhead. This was a business, after all, and Arnold's concern was for the product he was selling. The elegance of the artwork and the future status of Lou Fine as a Comic Book Legend wasn't even a consideration.

Try and build up the characters in both of these features so that they are more human and likeable. *The Ray* is in reality Happy Terrill, a reporter who works on *The Morning Telegraph*. His boss, the city editor, should have a definite name and other characters might be introduced from time to time. While Happy Terrill leads a normal life at most times, he has the power to change to *The Ray* when he goes in a beam of light and then can perform his wonderful deeds. As *The Ray* he can also bring people to him by means of the ray forces which he has in his hands. The same sort of build up should be given to *The Black Condor* and he should be a definite personality who operates as *The Black Condor* only in times of necessity. Originally you had *The Black Condor* brought up by birds when his parents (British) were killed by outlaws. I don't believe that he should be British and in any "build up," you should naturally assume that he is an American. I assume that you will finish the next *HIT* and *NATIONAL* covers within the next few days so that Lou can start working on *The Ray* for the February issue of *SMASH COMICS*.

Sincerely yours,  
Busy

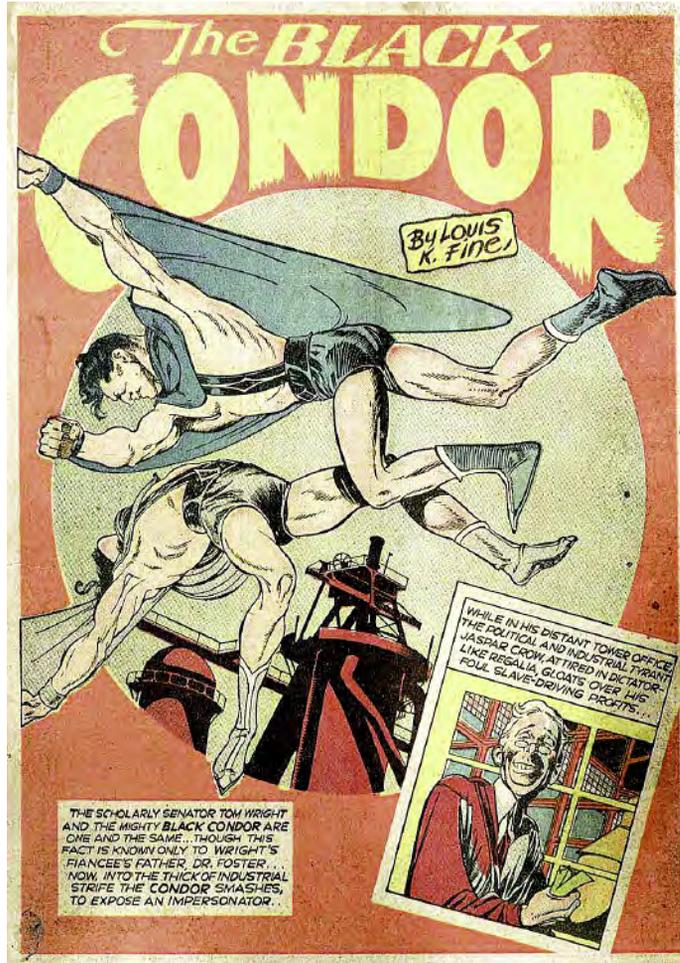
Eisner once told interviewer Jim Amash, "Busy Arnold and I had a very interesting relationship. I regarded him as a partner and he thought of me as an employee" [*Alter Ego* #48, May 2005]. When it came to the content of the comic books, it appears there was little doubt as to who was the calling the shots. By the next issue of *Smash*, Happy Terrill was in more panels than *The Ray*, and not long after, his boss finally was given the first name of "Steve."

For his part, *The Black Condor* had soon forgotten his rarely mentioned British origins and apparently his name (Dick Grey), becoming instead an American named Tom Wright. A U.S. Senator, no less.



Lou Fine, in a photo taken circa 1942 in Stamford, Connecticut, by his friend and fellow artist Gill Fox; it first appeared in *A/E* #17, through the good offices of interviewer Jim Amash.

Within a few months, the business arrangement of Arnold and Eisner had evolved even further. On January 20, 1941, the pair agreed to a joint publishing venture. On that day they signed contracts specifying their co-ownership of two new properties: *Uncle Sam Quarterly* and *Army and Navy Comics*, soon to be retitled *Military Comics*. While Arnold agreed to pay the artists for their work, Eisner was to receive no money for his editing. Both shared any profits equally. Despite the parity suggested by this new arrangement, however, the hierarchy seemingly didn't change.



### It's Good To Be The King!

(Left:) By *Smash Comics* #30 (Jan. 1942), Fine was collaborating on "The Ray" with newer artist Bob Fujitani, who'd go on to be a top talent in his own right (and to be interviewed in *A/E* #23). This action page, also from the GACBS site, doesn't show the hero's alter ego, reporter "Happy" Terrill, or his editor—but surely, a year after Arnold's letter of complaint, the latter had been given his first name of "Steve." Writers of both comics pages above unknown.

(Right:) Fine's splash from *Crack Comics* #14 (July 1941)—with two Black Condors for the price of one. Writer unknown. The Condor had gotten the American roots that "Busy" wanted him to have in *Crack Comics* #11 (March '41), when he turned out to be the spitting image of U.S. Senator Thomas Wright and serendipitously took over the latter's identity after his assassination. Considering the comics' several-months' lead-time in those days and the fact that Arnold's "request" was made in October of '40, it looks as if, when "Busy" said "Jump!" Eisner & company didn't bother to ask "How high?" [Art © the respective copyright holders; Ray & Black Condor are now trademarks of DC Comics.]



Bob Fujitani, 1941.  
Courtesy of Tony DiPreta.

Dear Bill,

The issue of *MILITARY COMICS* which Julian delivered here yesterday was handled in a very sloppy manner. So for the fifteenth time will you please ask your gang to go over things more closely so that we don't have so much work on this end of the line.

The ears which your boys put on page one and page 33 are very sloppy and you should have new ears made for these pages. Also, you should have whoever puts them on do a better job than they have done in the past. Not only are the ears always dirty and partly torn, but whoever drew the originals looks like they had the palsy. They have to be retouched here by Tony and this work could be eliminated if your office didn't do such a careless job.

Sincerely yours,  
Busy

But he wasn't done yet. As he would many times, Arnold added a postscript in his own handwriting.

P.S.

Please don't supply any more art work for *Military* by the artists who did *Miss America* and *The Sniper*. They are awful so put Jerry Robinson on these two features—he [is] to do everything except the lettering. *Sniper* is a good idea but this artist is impossible—also [the] *Miss America* artist.

The "ears" referenced by Arnold that needed retouching by in-house artist Tony DiPreta were likely paste-over corrections to the artwork. Arnold got his wish as Robinson briefly filled in on "The Sniper." Eisner must have agreed with the assessment of Maurice Kashuba's artwork on "Miss America," as she disappeared from the pages of *Military* soon after Arnold's September 17, 1941, letter.

Arnold's comments weren't restricted to just the comic books.

[Continued from p. 16]

Arnold took special glee in writing this paragraph is evident in his handwritten notation at the top of the copy of this letter he forwarded to Eisner:

*Bill / Maybe you better send Jerry some smelling salts and flowers. Is paragraph #5 on page 3 okay or did Jerry really develop W. Eisner?*

But he didn't stop there. He made sure to get in a few more jabs as long as he had Iger on the ropes:

*As regards the \$10,000 you paid Bill for his share of the business, may I remind you that I had nothing to do with this and it was a matter entirely between Wm. E. Eisner and S.M. Iger. We paid you several thousand dollars as a split on the first ten issues of HIT COMICS and NATIONAL COMICS after Bill sold out to you and you got plenty more from Scottie about the same time. So I guess the deal you made with Bill was pretty fair to you both.*

And then back to business:

*Don't think there is anything personal in anything I had done, Jerry. It is strictly a matter of good business and you can readily see why I cannot afford to pay \$18 and \$20 per page for material any longer. And please don't get me together with Sid Klinghofer as I don't care to waste a lot of time talking about something that will have to stand as outlined above.*

*Incidentally, in addition to dropping the May and July issues of NATIONAL COMICS, I am also dropping the April and June issues of SMASH COMICS and POLICE COMICS. So during the weak selling spring months (March, April, May and June issues), FEATURE COMICS will be our only magazine published on a monthly basis. If business improves by next summer, I will put NATIONAL COMICS, SMASH COMICS and POLICE COMICS back on a monthly basis, otherwise I will leave them all bi-monthly magazines.*

Business must have improved, as all three titles were back on a monthly schedule by the following summer.

*I hate to take so much work away from Nordling and, if you wish me to do so, I will drop a five-page feature from CRACK COMICS and put Pen Miller in this magazine (five pages instead of four pages). But I can't afford to give you an agent's fee of more than \$2 per page for Nordling's features so the price for five pages of Pen Miller will be Sixty Dollars (\$60).*

*In closing may I ask you to deliver the balance of the material for issue No. 2 of THE DOLL MAN QUARTERLY just as soon as possible. You are nearly three months late in delivering this book with the result that we have to call issue No. 2 Spring instead of Winter. Follow up with 11 pages of Doll Man for April FEATURE COMICS (we need this just as soon as possible), then have Crandall do six pages of The Firebrand.*



### Help Police!

Even after only a few issues of *Police Comics*, keen-eyed "Busy" Arnold had already realized that Jack Cole's innovative feature "Plastic Man," not "Firebrand" or "Phantom Lady" or "Human Bomb," was destined to be the mag's star. Today, Cole's strip is considered perhaps the highlight of the entire Quality Comics run—but let's not forget that it was Arnold who changed the title to "Plastic Man" from Cole's original "Rubber Man"! The cover date of *Police* #3 was Oct. 1941. Thanks to ComicBookPlus. The photo of Cole first appeared in a 1999 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, accompanying an article on Cole written by Maus auteur Art Spiegelman. [© the respective copyright holders; Plastic Man is now a trademark of DC Comics.]

Sincerely yours,  
Busy

His business (and evisceration) of Iger completed, Arnold recommenced his correspondence with Eisner on January 5, 1942.

Dear Bill,

*Will you please send me the script for the next eight pages of Secret War News and one page of The Atlantic Patrol. Alden McWilliams is about ready to start working on these pages and I would like to turn over the script to him just as soon as possible.*

Sincerely yours,  
Busy

P.S.

*For very apparent reasons I would like to get Alden ahead on his comic magazine pages.*

# “My Comic Mom!!” – Part II

## Continuing A Daughter’s Memoir Of Her Artist Mother, VEE QUINTAL PEARSON

by Robyn Dean McHattie



**A/E**

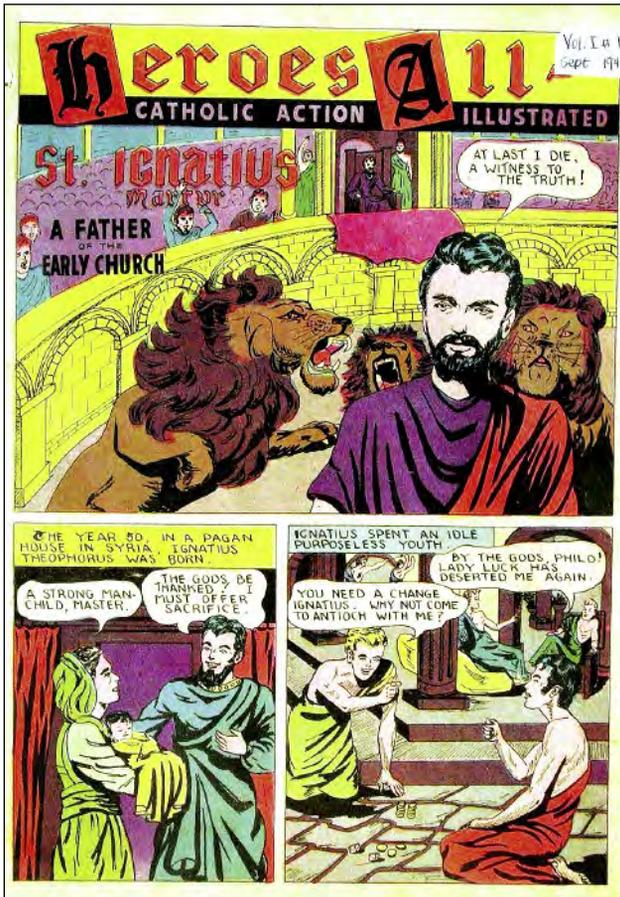
**EDITOR’S INTRO:** Last issue, we began

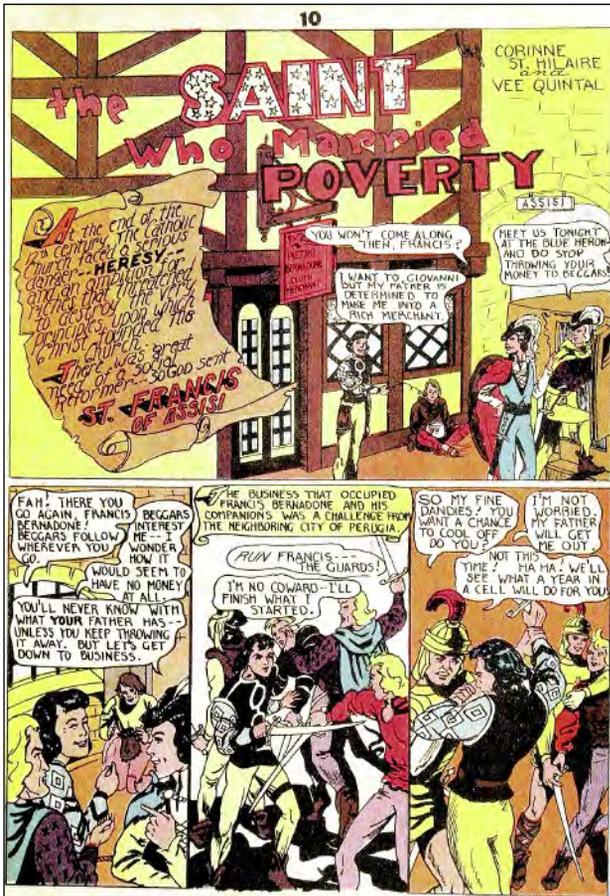
Robyn Dean McHattie’s look at the career of her mother, Vee Quintal Pearson (1918-1998), who, after some by-mail art instruction, found work in the early 1940s as a comic book artist at The Catholic Publications Company in North Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her first work was on comics material in the mostly-non-comics The Catholic Boy magazine, Mine Magazine, The Catholic Student, and The Catholic Miss of



*Heroes All!*  
(Clockwise from left:) Vee Quintal Pearson, 1944.  
A self-portrait of sorts, as she drew herself as a character in the modern-day story titled “The Band Needs Flavoring” in one of the Catholic magazines for which she worked.  
Two Vee Quintal splash pages for the first issue of Catholic Publications Company’s four-color comic book *Heroes All – Catholic Action Illustrated*: the stories of “St. Ignatius,” an early martyr in the Roman arena, and of Ferdinand de Lesseps, “the father of the Suez Canal.” Father Francis E. Benz, founder and head of CPC, had previously written a biography of de Lesseps. Robyn Dean McHattie says that Vee herself was “an avid horsewoman.” Photo courtesy of RDM. [Art © the respective copyright holders.]

America Magazine. The company was founded by Father Francis E. Benz, and its publications were distributed to Catholic grade schools in the U.S. In 1941 she briefly worked on a never-completed Paul Bunyan animated film short at the University of Minnesota. For a Sept. 1943 release date, Virginia “Vee Quintal,” who was not yet married, became the lead artist of a new four-color, monthly, all-comics magazine from CPC titled *Heroes All – Catholic Action Illustrated*...





## Heroes All – Catholic Action Illustrated First Issue: September 1943

**F**rom “Charlemagne” to “St. Olaf, King of Norway,” from “The Pony Express” to “The Al Smith Story,” Vee’s comic book settings spanned history on two entire continents. In her first comics for *The Catholic Boy*, *The Catholic Miss*, and *The Catholic Student*, the earliest characters all had a certain canned, squinty-eyed smile, but by the time she began the new title *Heroes All – Catholic Action Illustrated*—which was an all-comics format, not a magazine—her work had grown distinctive and versatile. Developing pencil layouts across four or more pages each issue, as well as inking and lettering multiple stories each month—that kind of workout would definitely lend mastery to anyone’s style. The increased weekly schedule for *Heroes All* beginning with Volume IV, Jan. 1946, also built a massive portfolio and promised a prolific career. In Vee’s collection of multi-pagers, there are 76 titles that represent more than 534 pages of work dated Sept. 1942 to April 1948.

Vee was uniquely suited to the comic book task. From the beginning, her drawings took swashbuckling to new heights, as if pulled on fly wires by stuntmen. Vee would have made a fine stuntman, herself; she was an avid horsewoman and first-class gymnast at North High. She had seen Tyrone Power in *The Mark of Zorro* (1940) about twenty times, not to mention everything starring Errol Flynn. You don’t even need to ask why she named one of her kids “Robyn.” My mother contended, if Padre Filipe or Friar Tuck—both played by Eugene Pallette—could be a fencing master, why couldn’t Francis of Assisi? That particular script-embellishment appears in *Heroes All*, Volume II, Number 3, for March 1944. Within her first few narrative comics in *Catholic Miss*, *Boy*, and *Student*, the beatific lives of Saints expanded with new energies, as Vee added cinematic swordplay to even the deadly dull “Song of Bernadette.” If you can add in swords and shields, or horses and spurs, my mom could turn any Christianity legend into something spectacular, worthy of the big screen and

### Good Fencing Makes Good Neighbors

(Above:) Vee may have had some influence on the writer of the story of St. Francis of Assisi in the March 1944 issue of *Heroes All*... turning him into a fencing master in his youth. [© the respective copyright holders.]



Technicolor. She directed the classic “cast of thousands” from the moment Hernando de Soto lined up in the panorama from here in town, down to the docks, in *Catholic Boy*, Sept 1943. Now in the pages of *Heroes All*, her layouts would challenge the limits of the page. Action

### Don't You Know There's A War On?

Vee also drew “war news” pages for both *Catholic Boy* (on left) and *Catholic Miss* (on right). [© the respective copyright holders.]



**Heroes All Goes To War!**

Heroes All also contained a number of stories oriented toward the action of the Second World War—and Vee was right there in those four-color front lines, as well. She drew the heroism of a member of the Women's Army Corps—and the story of an orphaned little Chinese girl caught up in the horror of war but adopted by U.S. troops. The former one-pager is from the March 1944 issue—A/E is less certain about "Precious Cargo: The Story of Patsy Li," which was spread over several issues but may have come out after the war ended. [© the respective copyright holders.]



would bleed from one panel to the next, as she broke free of the regimentation of orderly rectangles.

Vee wrote to Catherine Yronwode in 1982: "I enjoyed making my characters more exciting, like muscular super-heroes, though it wasn't kosher for me to draw St. Peter quite that way." Vee nonetheless stretched the precedents. Some weightlifter must have modeled for Vee's St. Ignatius, bare-chested and manacled to the wall, while the text to his left states: "His body weakened by torture and hunger..." Yeah, right! One advantage for Vee: unlike any other super-hero artists, Vee was never told by the art editor to redraw anyone's breasts larger.

Early Christians in Rome, thrown to the lions! That was Vee's Volume I, Number 1, Heroes All cover story assignment, "St. Ignatius." She added most details with enthusiasm, but particularly if gladiators were involved. Perhaps this is why: You probably don't care that Vee looked like Claudette Colbert. But I nearly flipped when I saw Cecil B. DeMille's Cleopatra (1934). There was my mom's look-alike on the throne of Egypt! And also so much grisly action in that other Colbert film set in Ancient Rome, The Sign of the Cross (1932). Crocodiles imported to chew up the extras; Louis B. Mayer's own lion puts a paw on everyone. My mom lived on movies like that—especially imagining that she was the star, I'm sure! As comic artist, she did



Dr. Amy K. Nyberg

# Seal Of Approval: The History Of The Comics Code

## Chapter 4 Of DR. AMY KISTE NYBERG'S 1998 Work On Comic Book Censorship

# A/E

**EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:** We continue our presentation of the full text (with added art and photos) of the book *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* by Dr. Amy Kiste Nyberg, Associate Professor of Communications in the Department of Communication and the Arts at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey.

Nyberg, Associate Professor of Communications in the Department of Communication and the Arts at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey.

As we've said before: *Seal of Approval* is extensively "footnoted," in the MLA style which lists book, article, or author name, plus page numbers, between parentheses in the actual text; e.g., "(Hart 154-156)" refers to pp. 154-156 of whichever work by an author or editor named Hart appears in the bibliography... which will be printed at the conclusion of our serialization, a few issues from now. When the parentheses contain only page numbers, it is because the other information is printed in the main text almost immediately preceding the note. (In addition, there are a bare handful of footnotes treated in the more traditional sense.)

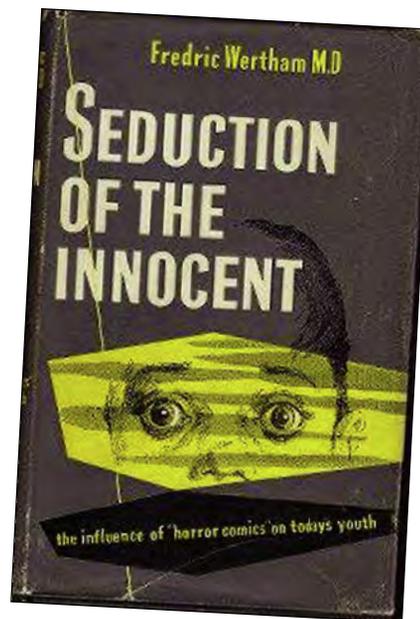
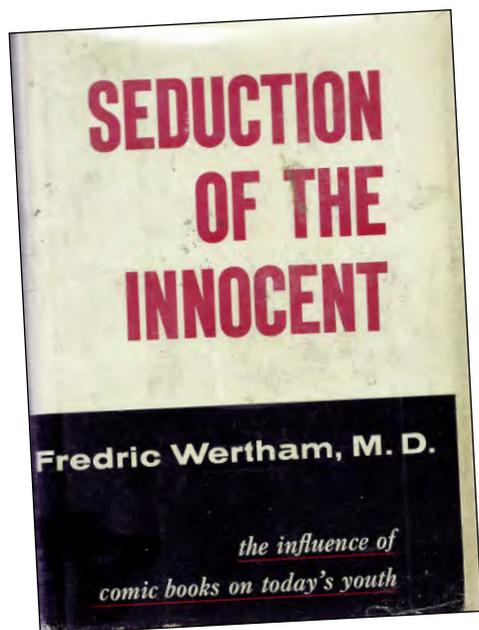
We have retained such usages and spellings from the book as "superhero," an uncapitalized "comics code," "E.C." and "DC," etc.; in the captions we have added, however, we have reverted to our own style. Those captions, naturally, do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Dr. Nyberg or the University Press of Mississippi, the original publisher of

the book—the original print edition of which can still be obtained from UPM at [www.upress.sate.ms.us](http://www.upress.sate.ms.us). Our thanks to Dr. M. Thomas Inge, under whose general editorship the volume was originally published as part of its *Studies in Popular Culture* series... to William Biggins and Vijah Shah, acquisitions editors past and present at the U. Press of Mississippi... and to Brian K. Morris for retyping the text on a Word document for Ye Editor to edit.

Chapter 3, last issue, covered the Spring 1954 hearings held in New York City by the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, which centered on comic books, mostly presided over by Sen. Estes Kefauver, and the testimony in particular of comics critic Dr. Fredric Wertham and EC Comics publisher William M. Gaines—the latter turning into a self-inflicted public-relations disaster for the industry. By the time the subcommittee issued its interim report in March 1955, a majority of the frightened comic book publishers had founded a new organization, the Comic Magazine Association of America, which would set up its own Comics Code Authority to promulgate and enforce stricter standards on comic books, which were deemed to be, *de facto*, aimed at children. This, they hoped, would keep Congress and state legislatures from enacting their own, even more severe, and possibly industry-destroying restrictions. But before we examine the first days of the new Code, it's time to take a closer look at the most influential voice against comics during the 1950s....

### Seductive Covers?

Dr. Fredric Wertham, holding up some scurrilous reading matter, bookended by the U.S. (on left) and British covers of his signature work, *Seduction of the Innocent*. It was published in America in 1954, and by Museum Press in the UK in '55. Wertham had originally wanted his book to have a less inflammatory title, but his U.S. publisher (Rinehart) insisted on *Seduction*. (Re the photo: the *Seduction of the Innocent* website informs us that the cover of Ed Brubaker's comic *Criminal*, published some time after Wertham's death in 1981, has been Photoshopped in. But otherwise it's an authentic vintage pic of the good Doctor. He probably wouldn't have liked *Criminal*, anyway.) [Covers © the respective copyright holders.]



## Chapter 4

# Frederic Wertham And The Comics Crusade

**F**rederic Wertham is given the credit—or the blame—for “cleaning up the comics” in the 1950s, but he was not pleased with the outcome of the Senate hearings. The establishment of a self-regulatory code administered by the comic book publishers fell far short of the legislation he had pushed for since the end of World War II. To understand his role in the comic book crusade and his dissatisfaction with the effect he had on the outcome, one must place Wertham’s attack on comics in the larger theoretical framework of his ideas about violence and society.

Wertham’s work, especially his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, is often cited as an early example of media effects research, and social scientists today criticize Wertham for his lack of scientific methodology and for his failure to offer quantitative evidence to support his findings. For example, Lowery and DeFleur describe his project as a qualitative content analysis supported by clinical case studies and psychological testing. They suggest that Wertham was claiming that comic books had relatively uniform effects, which was “clearly a version of the old magic bullet theory.” They add that the major weakness of Wertham’s position is that it was not supported by scientifically gathered research data and that Wertham presented no systematic inventory of comic book content. They write, “Without such an inventory, the conjectures are biased, unreliable, and useless.” They conclude that Wertham’s book proposed a simplistic model of “direct and immediate relation between cause and effect” (262, 264). Patrick Parsons suggests that Wertham’s criticism was a “crude social learning theory model which either implicitly or explicitly assumed unmediated modeling effects, often accompanied by an equally simple Freudian interpretation of comic content” (82). Other detractors echo some, if not all, of these criticisms. Moreover, even Wertham’s motives are sometimes questioned, with some implying that he acted more out a desire for personal recognition and gain than any genuine concern for children.

These critics, however, misinterpret Wertham’s work. Despite the fact that Wertham singled out comic books as a factor in juvenile delinquency, he was very careful to point out that there was no direct, linear relationship between reading comic books and delinquent behavior; comic books did not “cause” juvenile delinquency (although many of Wertham’s critics and his followers clearly believed he meant just that). His argument was much more complex. His project was to explore the relationship between culture and individuals, and his belief was that the social and cultural matrix in which individuals existed had been largely ignored by psychiatry in its efforts to understand individual behavior. Wertham’s goal was to establish a social psychiatry in which an understanding of the role of culture necessarily played a prominent part. When Wertham wrote of the “mass conditioning” of children by comic books, he never suggested that the medium had uniform effects. “A child is not a simple unit which exists outside of its living social ties,” he wrote (*Seduction* 118). Comic book reading was just one of a number of factors that needed to be considered when studying children’s behavior. His point was that comic books were part of the social world of children and should not be dismissed as harmless entertainment. He stressed that children did not learn only in school, but from play, from their entertainment, and from their social interaction with adults and with other children. He wrote: “A great deal of learning comes in

the form of entertainment, and a great deal of entertainment painlessly teaches important things” (*Seduction* 89).

Wertham was not interested in a social science approach, with its emphasis on individual effects, in his study of comics. Rather, his aim was to understand the ways in which mass media shaped society. He maintained that psychiatry’s goal should be to understand social influences affecting individual behavior. Historian James Gilbert has argued, quite rightly, that Wertham’s views were consistent with the theories of mass culture and mass society that preoccupied American intellectuals during the 1950s (111). Wertham shared many of the concerns of the scholars of the Frankfurt School who settled in the United States in the 1930s and whose critique of American mass culture was quite influential in the intellectual community. Wertham was no stranger to their ideas and philosophy; he knew Theodor Adorno well and was familiar with the work of other critics in the same tradition, such as Arno Mayer and Siegfried Kracauer, and Gilbert argues the assumptions Wertham put forth are better understood from this perspective (234). A close reading of *Seduction of the Innocent*, coupled with an understanding of where this book fits into Wertham’s larger body of work, supports this position.

Comic books presented Wertham with an ideal vehicle for his work on children, violence, and society, and his credentials as a leading psychiatrist enabled him to publicize his work in the popular media and thereby influence public opinion. He proved very effective in generating public outrage over the content of comic books and capitalizing on it to further his own agenda of social reform. A brief review of his career reveals why Wertham was quickly embraced by the media and the public as an expert in the controversy.

Frederic I. Wertheimer was born in Germany March 20, 1895. Wertheimer earned his medical degree in Germany and did postgraduate work in Paris and in London. In 1921 and 1922, he served as an assistant to Emile Kraepelin, a distinguished psychiatrist. Wertheimer emigrated to the United States in 1922 when he was invited by Dr. Adolf Meyer, director of the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, to take a



### Four-Armed Is Forewarned!

One of the comics cited by Richard Clendenen, executive director of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, in the hearings held in spring of 1954 had been *Black Magic* #29 (March-April 1954), though it wasn’t singled out in Nyberg’s text. Clendenen particularly noticed that one of the people on the cover had two faces and four arms. Well, wouldn’t you? Art, of course, by Joe Simon & Jack Kirby—with maybe a bit of help from their two-armed friends. You can read the story in the recent Titan Books hardcover *The Simon Kirby Library: Horror*, edited by Steve Saffel. [© Estates of Joe Simon & Jack Kirby.]

A.

Nr. 1302.

Nürnberg am 20 März 1895

Vor dem unterzeichneten Standesbeamten erschien heute, der Persönlichkeit nach \_\_\_\_\_ bei \_\_\_\_\_

Johanna Margaretha Beckmann geb. Hoffmann

wohnhaft zu Nürnberg innere Südfriedhofstr. 5

Religion, und zeigte an, daß von der Mathilde Wertheimer geb. Lust geb. 1861

Widweib Sigmund Wertheimer Kupferer

Religion, wohnhaft zu Nürnberg Oberhausenstr. 31

zu Nürnberg Oberhausenstr. 31

am \_\_\_\_\_ zehnjährig \_\_\_\_\_ ten \_\_\_\_\_ März des Jahres

tausend acht hundert neunzig und fünf \_\_\_\_\_ mittags

um \_\_\_\_\_ Uhr ein Kind namens \_\_\_\_\_

Geschlechts geboren worden sei, welches \_\_\_\_\_ Vornamen

Johann Franz

erhalten habe. Angezogen nach dem Lauff der Verbindung der

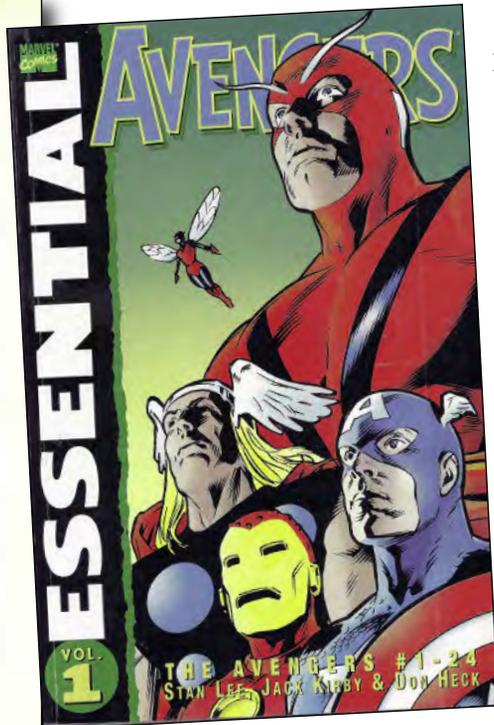
namen Mathilde Wertheimer geb. Lust geb. 1861

Vorgelesen, genehmigt und beurkundet zu haben

Margaretha Beckmann

Der Standesbeamte,

Joh. Beckmann



position at the clinic (Reibman 13; Rothe 634). He changed his name to Wertham after becoming a U.S. citizen in 1927, and in 1948, he changed the spelling of his first name to Fredric (Nisbet 29).

Wertham served for eight years as director of the Phipps Clinic, where he was chief resident in psychiatry and assistant in charge of outpatients of the Mental Hygiene Clinic. He also taught psychotherapy and brain anatomy at Johns Hopkins Medical School. During this time, he met and married Florence

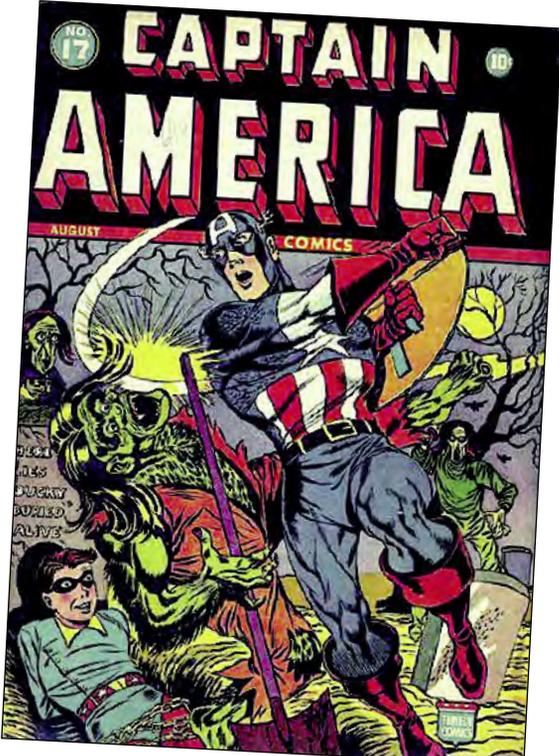
Hesketh, an artist doing biological research. Together they wrote a monograph, "The Significance of the Physical Constitution in Mental Disease," published in 1926 under the name Wertheimer. In 1929, he became the first psychiatrist in the United States to receive a fellowship from the National Research Council. He used his funding to begin research that he eventually used as the basis for his first book, *The Brain as an Organ*. It was published in 1934 and became a standard medical textbook (Reibman 12; Rothe 634). Also while at Johns Hopkins, Wertham developed the mosaic test, where patients assembled colored pieces of wood into a freely chosen design that could then be evaluated by psychiatrists. It became an important diagnostic tool in his later work in forensic psychiatry (Reibman 13). He was greatly influenced by Meyer, who developed the first standardized method of taking case histories of

**A German Export**

Reader Han Kiesl of Germany says he "somewhat lost interest in comic books [for some time, years ago] when he studied mathematics at university," but the first Marvel Essentials volumes brought him back; he became an A/E reader with #33, particularly enjoying Jim Amash's interviews with "Golden Age comic writers and artists whose names were often totally unknown to me and whose works have probably never seen print in Germany." In one edition of "re:" he read a letter "about Fredric Wertham being born in Nuremberg, my hometown. Checking with the Internet and a couple of books, I found two different birthplaces mentioned, Nuremberg and Munich." He went to the Nuremberg city archive "to check the birth registers of 1895" and found it there: "Friedrich Ignatz Wertheimer, born on March 20, 1895. So Wikipedia is wrong, Alter Ego was right."

Hans kindly sent a scan of the birth register entry; but he writes that it is "probably unreadable for most readers (even for most young people in Germany, since it is handwritten in an old German writing style which has not been taught in school for decades)." The section on Wertham's mother, as translated by Hans, reads: "Mathilde Wertheimer, née Lust, wife of merchant Sigmund Wertheimer, both of Jewish religion." Thanks, mein Freund! This adds even to the considerable information about Wertham given in Dr. Nyberg's book.

Also seen on this page are the cover of an early printing of *Essential Avengers*, Vol. 1 (2001), with cover art by Stewart Immonen & Wade von Grawbadger, which reprinted *The Avengers* #1-24, in black-&-white—and Al Avison's cover for *Captain America Comics* #17 (Aug. 1942), which almost certainly never made it to Germany during the Second World War. © Marvel Characters, Inc.]



adopted a code to be administered by a comic-book "czar" who would oversee an operation similar to the film industry's Hays Office. The publishers also launched a campaign to discredit Wertham. James Reibman notes: "To Wertham, a card-carrying member of the liberal intelligentsia, such animosity and misunderstanding were particularly painful. He did not believe in censorship but in protection of those whose extreme youth made them prey to manipulation and influence" (18).

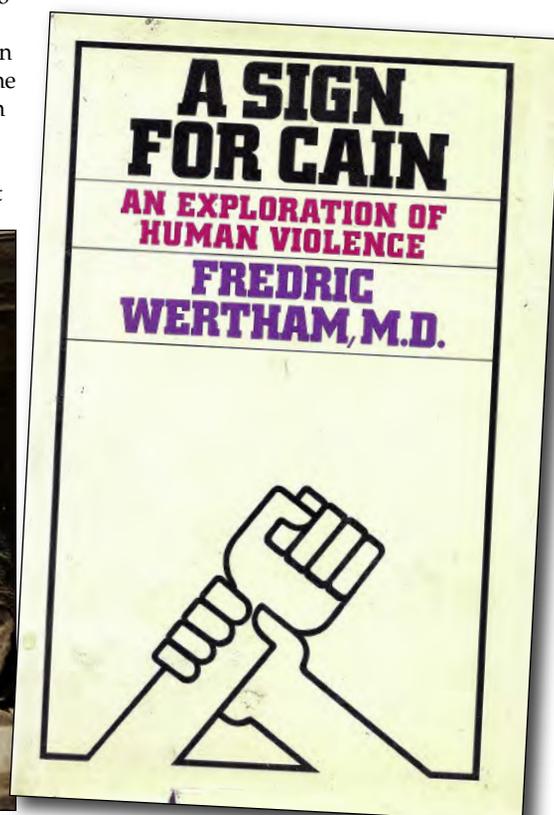
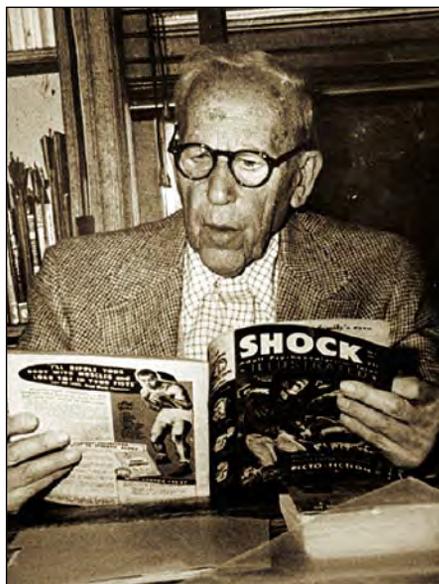
The adoption of self-regulation did not stop Wertham's criticism of the comic book industry. He denounced the code: "Whenever people begin to show signs of doing something themselves about controlling crime comics, the publishers come out with a 'code' or something to divert attention and avert action." He warned those concerned about children's mental health that "it is the duty of anyone concerned with children to avoid falling for this latest stunt of Superman" ("Curse" 403-4). He argued that comic book czar Charles Murphy was not a censor but an employee of the comic book industry and had no real power to enforce a censorship code (404). Wertham read the comics that carried the new code "Seal of Approval" and observed that they contained the same harmful ingredients, including murders, race prejudice, torture, crimes, and pornographic sadism. He concluded, "That is why a law to protect children is necessary" ("Reading" 613).

When *Saturday Review* asked Wertham to write a follow-up to his 1948 article, "The Comics... Very Funny," he wrote a scathing indictment of the comics code titled "It's Still Murder: What Parents Still Don't Know about Comic Books." In it, he condemned the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency for rejecting legislation against the comic book publishers. He claimed that the connection between crime comics and juvenile delinquency was now "well established," and added, "It is easy to build up a straw-man argument that comic books are the 'sole factor' and then demolish it. But nobody ever claimed that they are" (12). He continued, "Of course there are other evil influences to which we expose children. That does not mean we should take for granted, and do nothing about any one injurious factor. The comic-book pest, which we can isolate, is one of the worst and most far-reaching" (46). He provided several examples where material published in code-approved comics violated the provisions of the industry's code, and argued, "Surely this is not a counter-measure, but a cover-up continuation of the cruelty-for-fun education of children" (48). He concluded his article by once again urging legislative action: "The comic-book publishers, racketeers of the spirit, have corrupted children in the past, they are corrupting them right now, and they will continue to corrupt them unless we legally prevent it. Of course there are larger issues in the world today, and mightier matters to be debated. But maybe we will lose the bigger things if we fail to defend the nursery" (48). The CMAA reacted to that article by threatening to sue Wertham for libel (CMAA Files [minutes, 26 April 1955]).

Wertham continued to explore the connections between mass media and violence in society, publishing *A Circle of Guilt* in 1956 and *A Sign for Cain* in 1966.

*A Circle of Guilt* was a case history of Frank Santana, a New York Puerto Rican teenager accused of murder in a gang-related shooting. *A Sign for Cain* was a more scholarly effort and was Wertham's attempt at a broader social history of violence. It relied less on anecdotal material and focused instead on the broader theoretical issues glossed over in earlier books. In *A Circle of Guilt* [sic], Wertham reproduced a conversation between himself and Santana where the youth talks about the "creeps," his name for horror comics. Santana read about five "creeps" a day and at one time had between two hundred and three hundred in his collection (86). Wertham believed that Santana's actions could be explained in part by the influence of these comic books. He wrote, "Reading creeps was part of Santana's Americanization.... One lesson we instilled in him by way of comics and movies is that violence is not a problem but a solution. It is a method to be used" (93). When Wertham visited Santana's home to talk to the boy's mother, he asked if he could have Santana's comic books. He was handed twenty-three comic books, nine in Spanish and fourteen in English. Of the latter, all but three had the seal of approval of the comic book industry. Wertham explained he took the comic books because "I intended to offer them all in evidence so the jury could judge for themselves what influence they had on the boy's mind" (102). He never got the chance, because Santana agreed to a plea bargain in the case and was given a lengthy prison sentence. Disturbed by the outcome, Wertham said he wrote *A Circle of Guilt* in order to take Santana's case before "a larger jury" (203).

In *A Sign for Cain*, Wertham devoted one chapter to the mass media and one to juvenile delinquency. He began the chapter on the mass media with this statement: "To discuss violence without

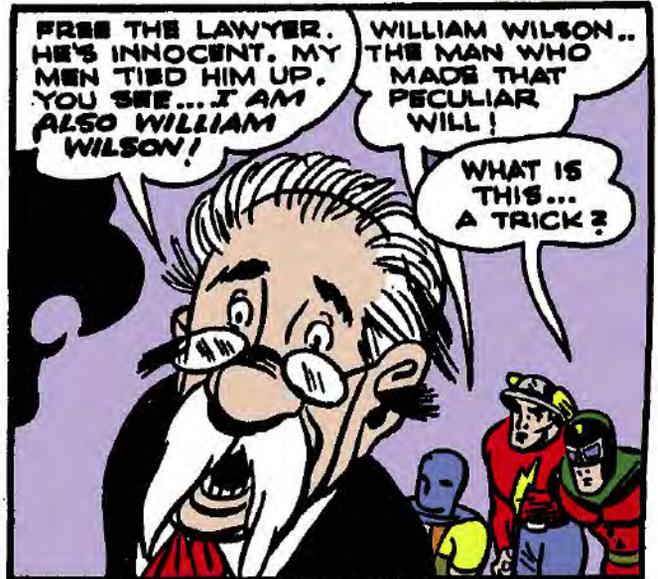


#### Sticker Shock

(Left:) In 1955 and after, Wertham had little use for the Comics Code or for many Code-approved comics—so we can't imagine he would've enjoyed the black-&-white magazine-size *Shock Illustrated* #1, which Bill Gaines and EC Comics put out that year to try to skirt the Code. It didn't work for Gaines, either.

(Right:) Comics were only a small part of Wertham's 1966 book *A Sign for Cain*, but naturally were covered in the chapter titled "School for Violence: Mayhem in the Mass Media." He had a way with phrases, did our Doc. The book's title came from the Biblical quotation "And Jehovah appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him," from Genesis 4:15. [Cover © the respective copyright holders.]

These two pages from a "written-off" and never-published "Justice Society of America" story of the mid-1940s also illustrate a brush with the laws of inheritance (and feature a tied-up attorney). See A/E #121 for more. [Continued on next page]





**HYUK!**  
 HOWDY FOLKS! IT'S ME, TYPICAL COMIC BOOK FAN HAPPY BUMPKIN! I READ GOOD. REAL GOOD!

ALL GOOD, COMICS! HYUK!

BUT IF YOU THINK I'M GOOFY ABOUT COMICS, Y' OUGHTA SEE MY PALS. THEY MAKE ME LOOK NORMAL! HYUK! WHEN YOU SEE 'EM, I'LL BET YOU SAY...

**NOW THAT'S A FAN!**

**(PART THREE!)**

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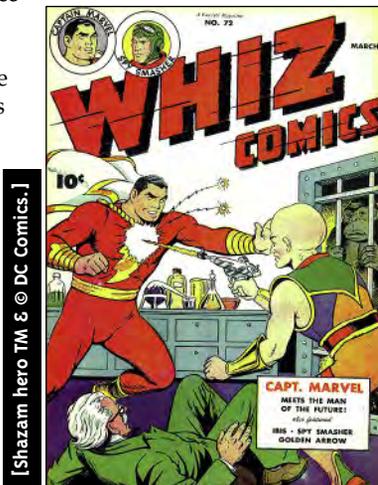
# Now That's A Fan! (Part 3)

by Michael T. Gilbert

**O**h, I've got your number, buddy! You haven't spoken to your mom since you were five and she threw away your comics. Yeah, I know you! You're listed as "Dependent" on your comic shop owner's 1040 tax forms. At home, your bookcase cracks under the weight of all those giant 500-pound IDW artist books. You swore you'd draw the line at the Myron Fass collection, but you didn't, did you? Break up a run? Never!!

Every square inch of wall space is filled with Mart Nodell Green Lantern and Shelly Moldoff Bat-Mite commissions, and your wife threatens divorce unless you toss out your precious Randy Bowen statues. But you don't care, do you? "Get rid of my Mr. Monster mini-bust?" you proudly sneer. "As if!"

In short, you think you're a pretty big comic fan. Well, let me tell you, you're NOT. Compared to these guys, you're a piker! Take a gander and see if you don't say... "Now THAT'S a fan!"



## Our Navy!

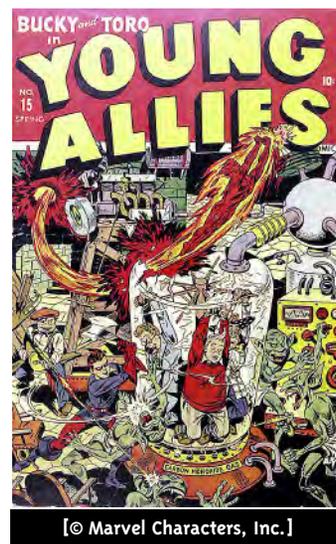
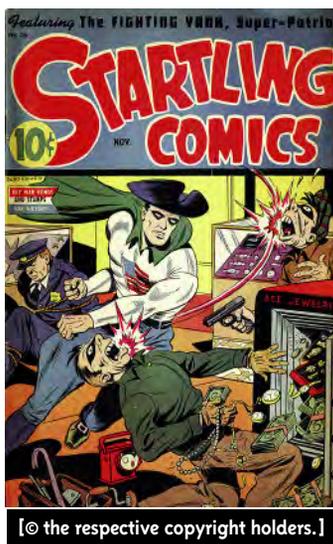
Ah! Check out the above *Our Navy* cover from April 1945 (reprinted from Craig Yoe's *Arf Forum* #3). Meet Biff, the intelligent comic book fan you typically find in old *Dragnet* episodes. That Street & Smith *Shadow Comics* issue he's drooling over (Vol. 4, #12, March 1945) is just an appetizer. Soon Biff'll be diving into the main course, consisting of Timely's *Young Allies* #15 (Sept. 1945), Nedor's *Startling Comics* #36 (Nov. 1945), Spotlight's *Three-Ring Comics* #1 (1945), Camera Publishing's *Camera Comics* #2 (1944), and DC's *Picture Stories from the Bible New Testament* #1 (1944).

A grown man reading comics in public? Smart move, Biff! "Now THAT'S A Fan!"



## Heavy Reading!

This 1946 ad features curvaceous actress Buff Cobb (ex-wife of journalist Mike Wallace!) studying *Whiz Comics* #77 (March 1946). She's also perusing Fawcett's *Captain Midnight*, Ace's *Hap Hazzard*, Street & Smith's *Shadow Comics*, and Fox's *All Your Comics*. What a studios gal!



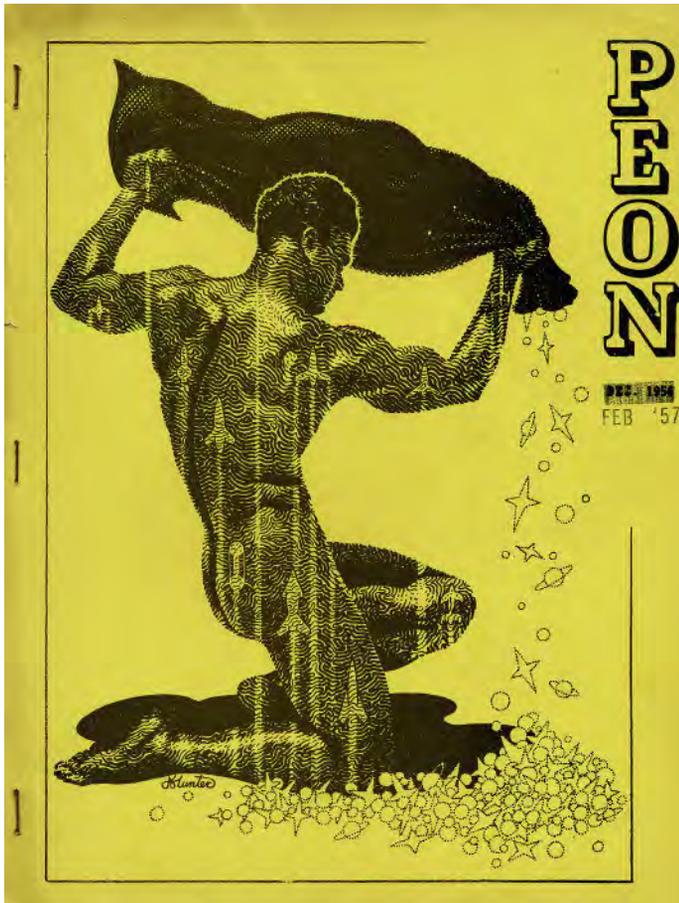
# He Remembered Comic Books

## Re-Presenting JIM HARMON's "Harmony" Article From *Peon* #38 (Feb. 1957) That Anticipated "And All In Color For A Dime"

### CFA Editor's Introduction

In 1957, it seemed as if no one was bothering to celebrate the comic books of comics' Golden Age. Yes, there had been EC fandom beginning in 1953, but it concerned itself entirely with comics published by one William M. Gaines.

From an historical standpoint, it can be said that "Harmony" (the actual title of his column, though this particular installment is often referred to by its first line, "I remember comic books") pre-figured the seminal "And All in Color for a Dime" series of groundbreaking articles that would begin in late summer of 1960 in the first issue of Dick and Pat Lupoff's science-fiction fanzine *Xero*. Indeed, by the end of that year, Jim Harmon had written "A Bunch of Swell Guys," tackling the history of the Justice Society of America, for that important series. (His title came from a line of dialogue spoken by Johnny Thunder in an early "JSA" adventure.)



### When The Peon Was Mightier Than The Sword

Fan-artist Al Hunter's photo-offset cover for the otherwise mimeographed *Peon* #38 (Feb. 1957), the issue in which "I Remember Comic Books" ran.  
[© the respective copyright holders.]



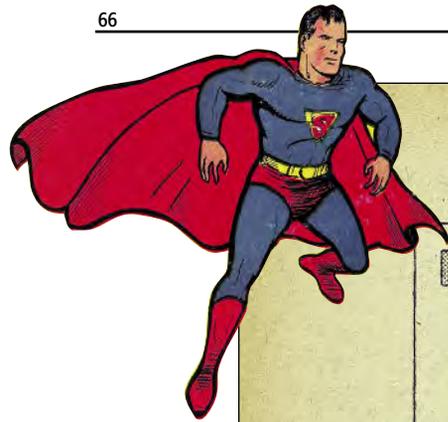
### In Perfect "Harmony"

Jim Harmon in his later years. He was a science-fiction writer for a time, and later the author and/or editor of various books on historical/nostalgic subjects, in particular the Golden Age of Radio in the 1930s-50s. In the early '70s he edited Marvel's black-&-white magazine *Monsters of the Movies*. His 1960 "Justice Society of America" article from *Xero* #3 was reprinted in *The All-Star Companion*, Vol. 4 (TwoMorrrows Publishing, 2009). Jim passed away in 2010. Thanks to Barbara Harmon for the photo.

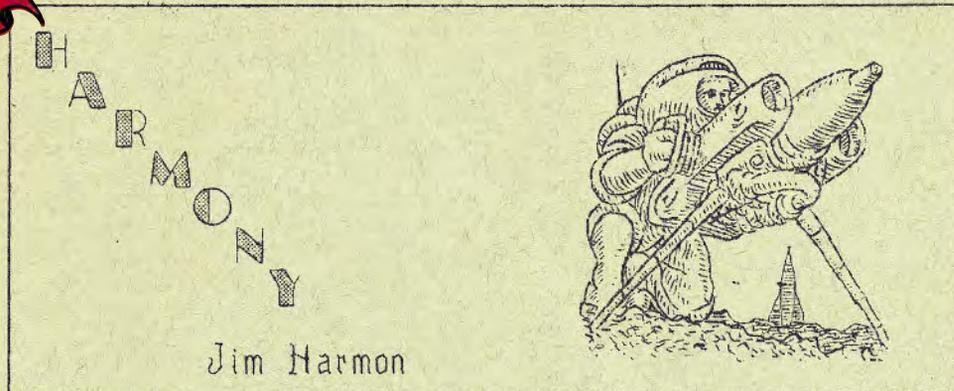
When writing his pioneering *Peon* column for another SF fanzine several years earlier, Jim inevitably made a few errors besides the unavoidable typo or three. He didn't know that it was Mort Weisinger, not Julius Schwartz, who had edited the "Superman" titles of 1957, nor did he seem aware of the appearance of the new Flash in Showcase #4 (though it's not impossible that he had turned in his column before Showcase #4 hit the stands in July of 1956). In any case, it's interesting that "Harmony" appeared just as comics' Silver Age was being born. For those of us who weren't "there," we have to imagine what it was like for Jim to be writing at a time when the wonders of the Golden Age seemed about to be forgotten forever.

We thank Jim's wife Barbara for her kind permission to reprint Jim's original article. On the following four pages, we've reproduced the actual pages of the "Harmony" piece just as they appeared in the mimeographed fanzine *Peon*, though we couldn't resist adding a bit of color art to remind us all what Jim was "remembering." [Article on following 4 pages © Barbara Harmon.]

—Bill Schelly.



Superman.  
Art by  
Joe Shuster.  
[Art ©  
DC Comics.]



I remember comic books.

I don't suppose they will ever completely disappear but the Comics Code censorship has maimed the entire industry, if not killed it. I've noticed a number of slick magazines gloating over the number of comic publishers going out of business. Of course, we can hardly expect sympathy for the writers, artists and editors put out of work but one might expect some sympathy for the unemployed printers and pressmen from the national publications.

There's been a lot said about comics censorship -- mostly by people, with their eagle eye on the First Amendment, but never on the colorful comics page. I've said part of it. The difficulty is the same one they are trying to impose on the television industry. Ding Dong School is a very good program -- I saw it once -- but they are holding this up as the standard for all children's TV programs. They used to do this with the late Nila Mack's fairy tale radio show "Let's Pretend." The social workers overlook the fact that these programs are of absolutely no interest to any child over seven. To a healthy, active twelve year old, they are as intolerably babyish as a game of patty-cake.

Anthromorphism has become the by-word of the present comic books. Gorillas are grateful to lions for saving them from the wicket hunters (evidently these writers have never read the original version of what happened to the thorn-pulling mouse). There is growing propaganda for racial inferiority complex -- the human race is not ready for Space, for the Secret Weapon, to know the Truth. The war comics have become dangerously jingoistic. I suspect letting children reading of wars that are exciting and where literally no one is killed or even injured is far more dangerous than having them read the War-is-Hell E.C. books. Damn it, I know it is!

But there was another day of lurid adventure, naked heroes and heroines, and lusty violence. This was a day before the era of the juvenile delinquent, the crazy mixed-up kid. This was the era of Jungle Comics, Planet Comics, Flash, Green Lantern, Captain Marvel, Tom Mix Comics, and of Superman--who alone, remains in faded fashion.



Captain Marvel. Art by  
C.C. Beck. [Shazam hero  
now TM & © DC Comics.]

P.C. HAMERLINCK'S

**FCA** 

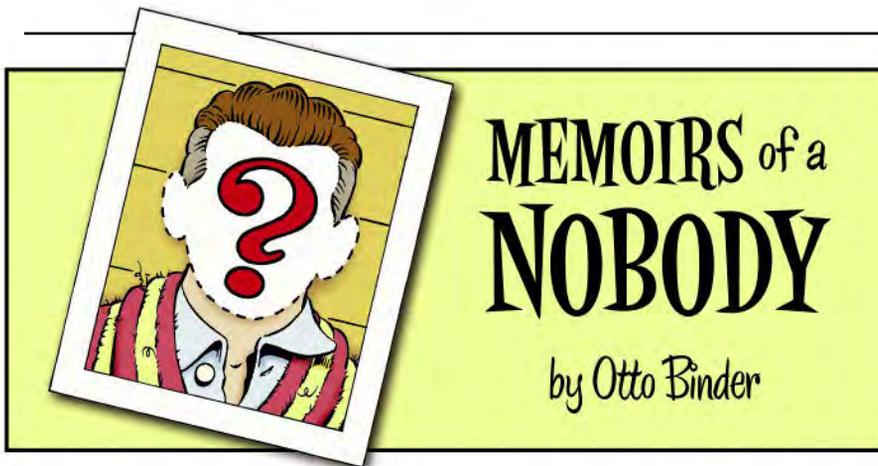
Fawcett Collectors of America

#187  
August 2014

**DRIVING  
CAP  
CRAZY!**



[ Shazam hero & Dr. Sivana TM & © DC Comics; other art © 2014 by Micropo.]



## Part VIII

Abridged & Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck

**O**tto 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 were written in freewheeling fashion and devoid of any charted course—other than allowing his mind to flow with no restricting parameters. The abridged and edited manuscript—serialized here within the pages of FCA—will nonetheless provide glimpses into the idiosyncratic and fanciful mind of Otto O. Binder.

In this 8th excerpt, Otto takes an honest look at himself as a writer as well as other types of authors in a chapter entitled “The Ego and I.”  
—P.C. Hamerlinck.

**T**his will be a short chapter, I think. It’s sort of an offshoot of the previous one. I’m going to give you a deeper glimpse into the alleged mind of a writer, to see what makes him tick.

In a way, being a writer gives you a devilish sense of power over your characters. You almost feel as if you’re playing god, moving human pawns about on the chessboard of fictional life. You put them through their paces like puppets on a string. You can get them into any frightful situation you dream up and sadistically let them squirm before you save the day.

Maybe writers are frustrated dictators underneath. Dictators take living humans and shove them around. Writers take human phantoms and shove them around. What’s the difference?

Now I scared myself. Am I another Hitler in disguise? If great power were thrust into my hands by fate, would I then shove flesh-and-blood people around as I do my prose pawns? Oh gosh, there is only the river for me.

I’ll tell you a secret, however. In real life, I’m just about two jellybeans above a milquetoast. Along about the tenth highball, I have been known to emerge and display some of the symptoms of a devil-may-care hero. But truly, any hint of authority thrust into my hands would scare me silly. I loathe telling anyone else what to do or where to get off. By the same token, I hate someone else taking a swing at my ego. Live and let live is my motto—he said virtuously.

Maybe that’s the crux of the matter. Maybe my personal life is so quiet and routine and unadventurous that I’ve taken to writing as the “escape.” Just as others read for escape. Vicarious adventure, as it were.

On the third hand, a writer is supposedly a sort of sharp-eyed busy-body who sees all, hears all, and knows all. He sees all the little details of life that most people miss, and thus fills his brain with files of usable facts. Do you know that I can’t even remember my auto-license number at times?

Every author is in every story they write, whether they admit it or not. Try as they may, they can’t help projecting themselves and their particular way of thinking into everything their characters say and do. Most authors strive consciously, I suppose, to eliminate themselves entirely. They strive to be purely “neutral” observers. But I don’t think it can be done. Every writer is there in the spirit, in their stories, leering from behind their characters and prodding them into what they say.

There are arguments that go on in a writer’s mind as they unfold their story. The writer has to decide what’s best for the story, even though it’s often punishment for their characters. And of course the characters, if they had a say, would ask for a better break. I shudder at the thought, sometimes, if my characters formed a union and demanded better conditions.

Other writers will know what I mean when I say you’d be surprised how “strong” a character can suddenly become and then try to run away with the whole story. In fact, in cases like that, the character just about decides what the rest of the story will be, with the writer tagging along willy-nilly.

I am still trying to pin down what the “typical” writer is. A writer is supposed to be a student of human nature, picking people apart with uncanny precision, like a mental vivisectionist. Well, I have often picked people apart with my mental scalpel, and get them all apart like a clock. And then I can never put the pieces together again, into anything resembling a human being. So I just leave the mess there.



### Poet Pulverizer

In this issue’s slice from *Memoirs*, Otto Binder attempts to dissect the mindset of typical and atypical writers, himself included. Otto even sometimes used writers themselves as plot devices, as he did with his script for “The Mad Poet” from *Mary Marvel* #2 (June 1946); artwork by his older brother, Jack Binder. [Shazam heroine TM © DC Comics.]



C.C. Beck at 1982 Minneapolis Comics Convention; photo by Alan Light. Beck was proud of the fact that the new Smithsonian book had reprinted the lead story from *Captain Marvel Adventures* #100.

# The World's Mightiest Mortal Gets Psychoanalyzed

## "Captain Marvel Goes Crazy!" & John Huston's *Let There Be Light*

by Brian Cremins

Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck

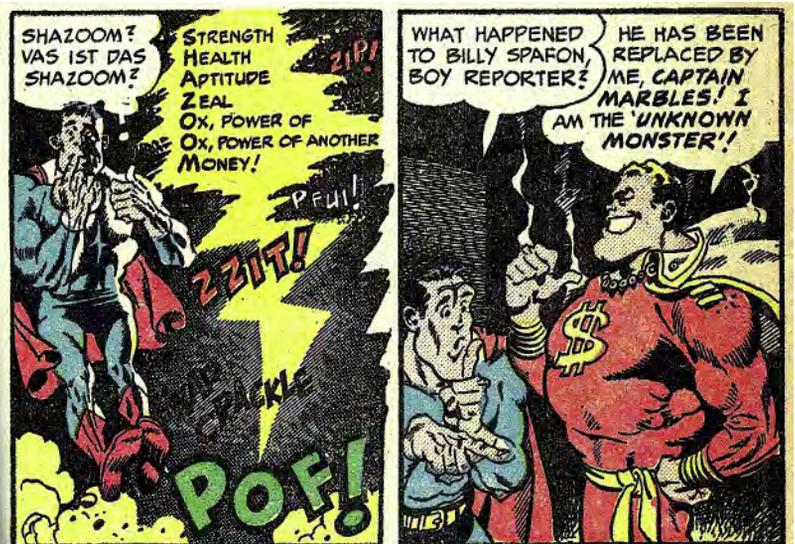
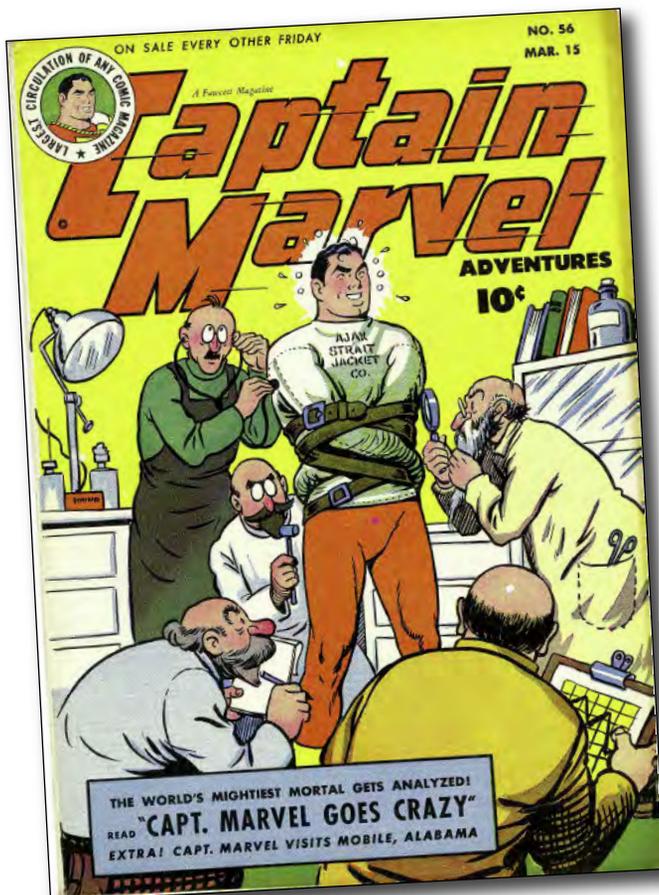
In "Real Facts about an Unreal Character," the fifth essay C.C. Beck mailed to his Critical Circle on July 14, 1988 [published in *A/E* #14/*FCA* #73, April 2002], Captain Marvel's chief artist and co-creator explains the "real secret" of the character's success. Like his colleague Otto Binder, Beck understood Billy Batson to be the true hero of Captain Marvel's adventures. In fact, Beck writes, the world's most celebrated boy news reporter

told about Captain Marvel's exploits over his radio and television programs. In the very first episode, written by Bill Parker, Billy never revealed anything about Captain Marvel to Sterling Morris and instead said, "Boy, oh boy! Here's where we go to town! Me and—"

"You and who else, son?" Mr. Morris asked.

"—er, nobody, sir. Just me and the microphone. That's all, sir—just me and 'Mike,'" Billy said. As far as anyone ever knew, Billy may have made up every story he ever told over the air.

Beck then pauses and reminds his Critical Circle colleagues that, of course, "Billy's stories were all made up by Otto Binder and some other very talented writers" who understood "that children, and for that matter most adults, are far more interested in fantasy and magic and outrageous fiction than in facts, which are dull and stupid things." But how does an "unreal character" behave when faced with an all-too-real set of circumstances? For example, how



### Analyze This!

Author Brian Cremins suggests that C.C. Beck's cover for *Captain Marvel Adventures* #56 (March 1946) presents a presage towards the Kurtzman/Elder/Wood super-hero parodies launched the following decade in *Mad*, as evidenced by panels from *Mad* #4's "Superduperman" by Harvey Kurtzman & Wally Wood. [Shazam hero TM & © DC Comics; *Mad* panel © EC Publications, Inc.]



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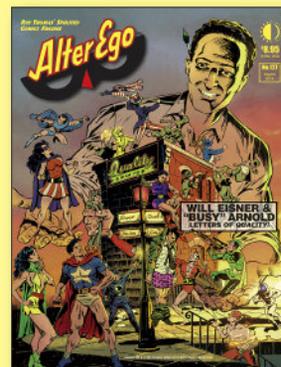
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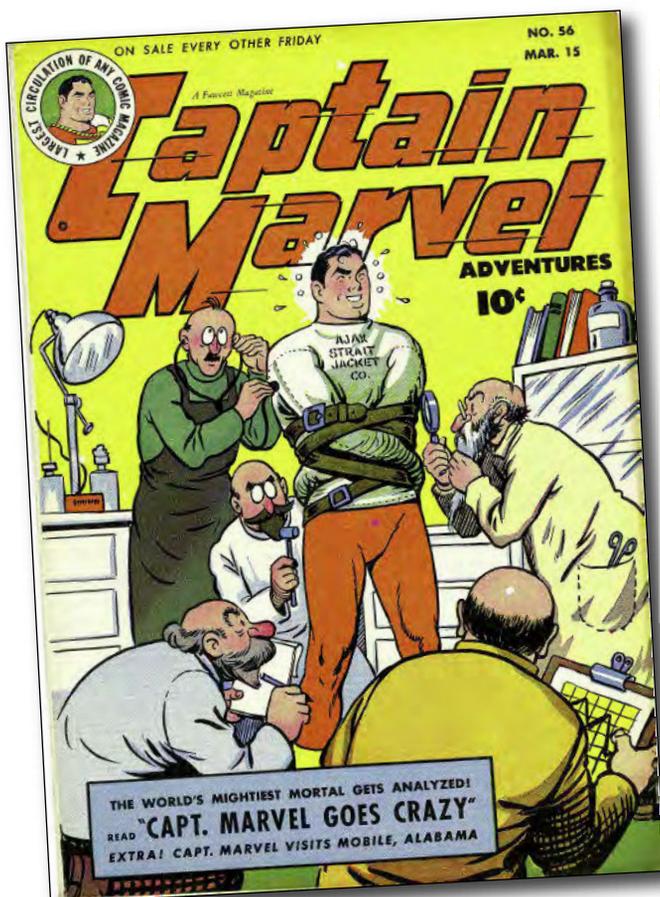


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