



JERRY

AND THE

JOKER

ADVENTURES AND COMIC ART
BY JERRY ROBINSON



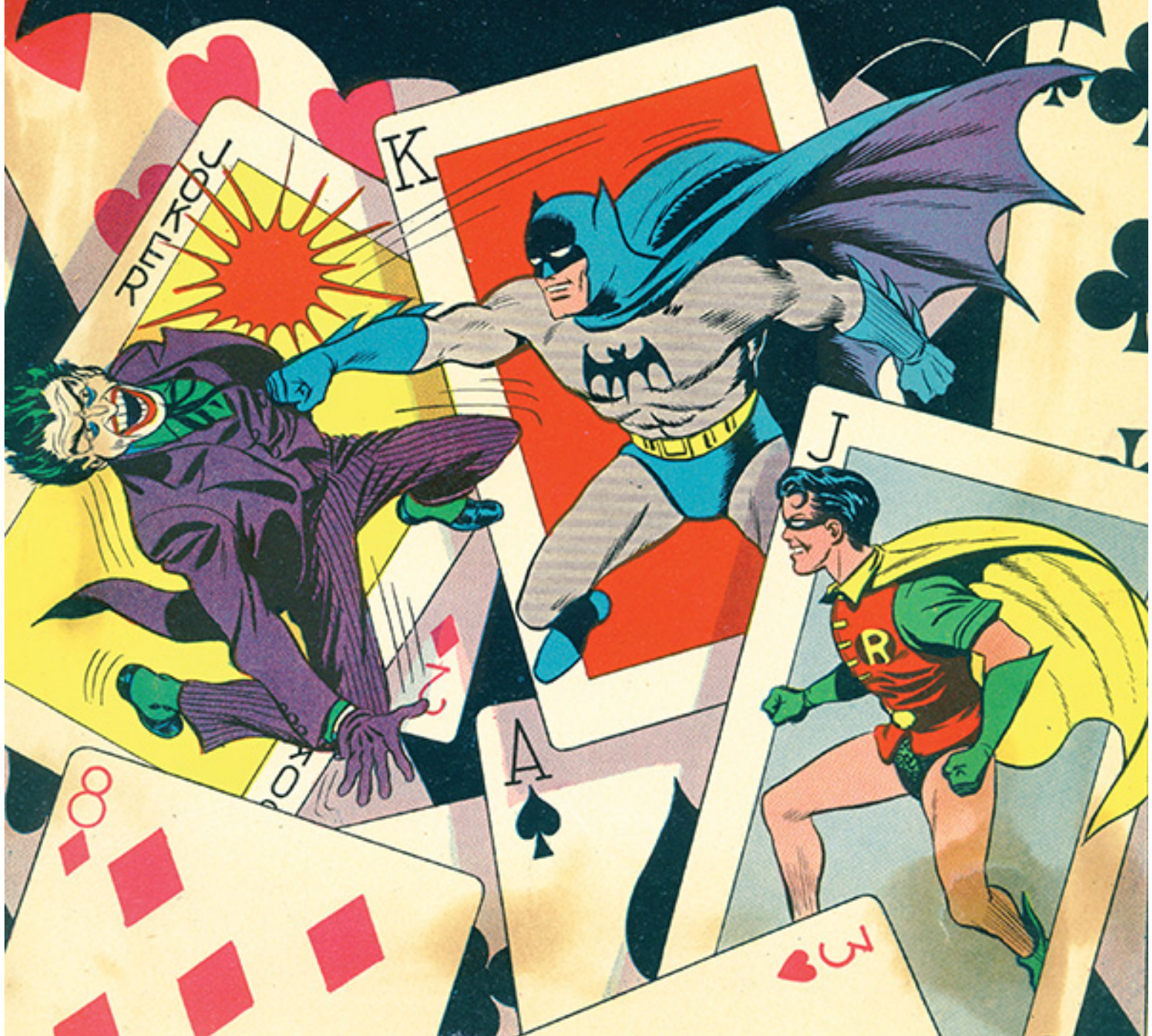
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WITH
ADDITIONAL NOTES BY
JENS ROBINSON



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MIKE RICHARDSON

Editors

**JENS ROBINSON
DANIEL CHABON &
HANNAH MEANS-SHANNON**

Assistant Editor

CARDNER CLARK

Designer

DAVID NESTELLE

Digital Art Technician

ADAM PRUETT

Jerry and the Joker: Adventures and Comic Art

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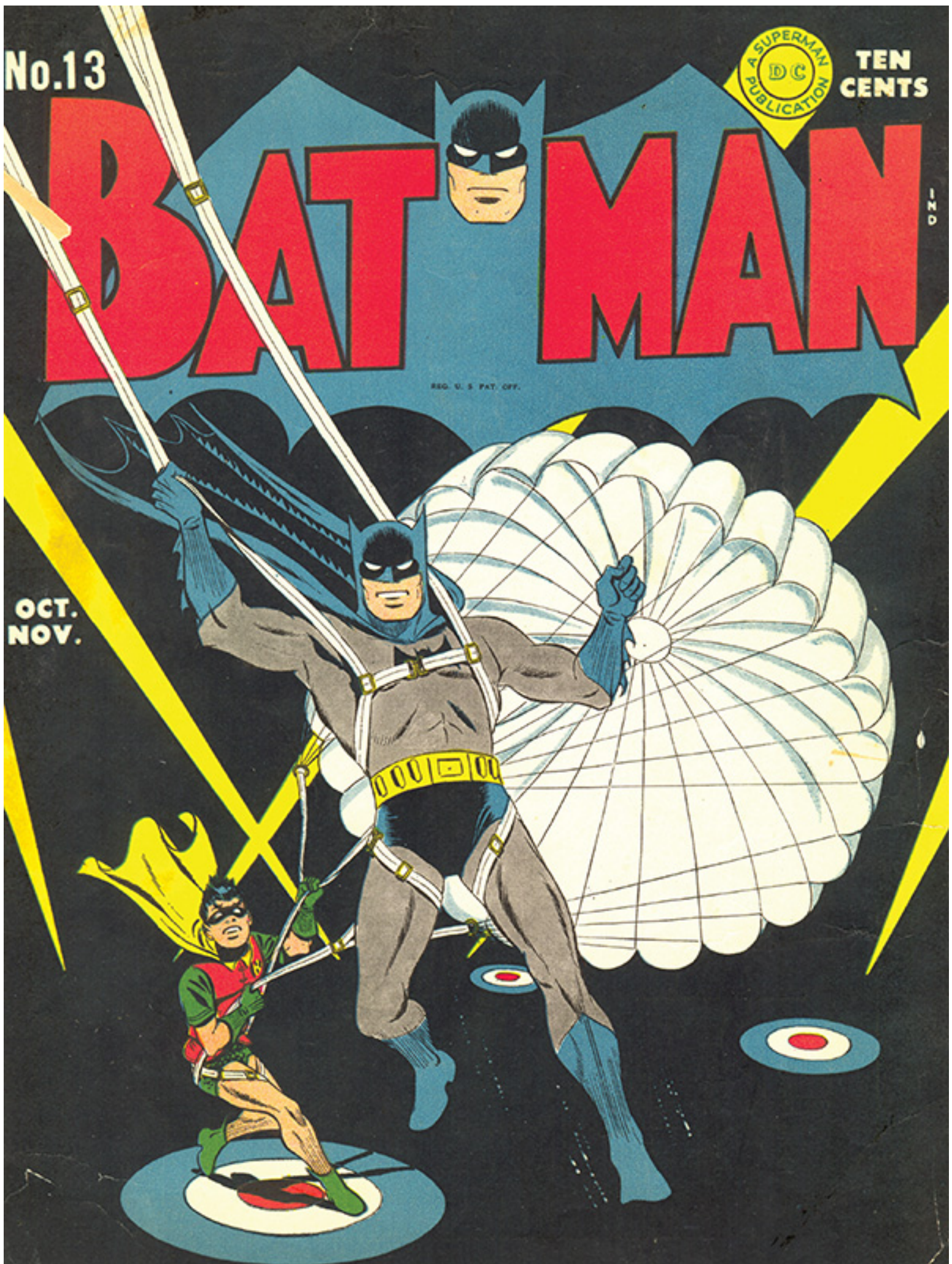


TEN CENTS

BATMAN

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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CHAPTER 1: HOW TO START OUT SELLING ICE CREAM AND END UP DRAWING BATMAN

The summer of 1939 was hot and humid. A proud recent graduate of Trenton Central High, I set out to conquer the world, but doing what? I knew not. So I got a job selling ice cream, pedaling a bicycle hauling a freezer cart to help pay for my first year of college. I couldn't possibly have imagined it then, but that summer job selling ice cream during that scorching summer, and a serendipitous meeting at a tennis court, would lead to drawing Batman and would set my entire life's course.

I had been torn as to what I wanted to do. My older sister gave up a photography career when she married. My three big brothers (all significantly older)

were professionals—a dentist, a surgeon chiropodist, and a lawyer. I was impatient to get started with my life. My parents were just recovering from the depths of the Depression, during which they lost everything in the crash of 1929, including their business and our home. They had managed to put my brothers through college with the help of scholarships. In turn, each brother took a year off from college to work to help the next oldest brother. So I had a high bar to live up to.

Deciding what path to take was difficult. Having ruled out the traditional professions, I was left with my love of reading and writing. I had been an editor on the *Spectator*, my high school paper, for which I did reporting, humorous pieces, and occasional cartoons. I loved the short story form and avidly read everything from Twain, O. Henry, and Poe, to Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, and Maupassant. A career in art or cartooning never occurred to me. I never took an art course because they never gave enough college credits. So I decided to be a writer. My school advisor recommended applying to Penn, Columbia, and Syracuse since they were the best schools for journalism. Happily, I was accepted to all three. Never having visited any of the colleges or even set foot in New York City or Syracuse, I was torn regarding where to go. I settled on Syracuse probably because I envisioned it as more of a college town, like nearby Princeton.

However, I did have one unusual encounter with a cartoonist during that time. On a story for the *Spectator*, I drove to Princeton, which was only about fifteen miles away, to interview George Washington. For the anniversary of our first leader's inauguration, his trip by horse

Left:
COLOR COVER OF
BATMAN NO. 13
Oct-Nov 1942, pencils,
inks and colors by
Jerry Robinson.

and carriage from Mount Vernon to New York City was being reenacted, duplicating every stop he made on the way. Dressed in the attire of our forefather's day, from the buckle shoes to the powdered wig, the tall, imposing figure of George met me at the venerable Nassau Inn, the same Inn as our founding father had visited 150 years before. It was an exciting experience for me—the first time I dined with a President-to-be—and, as I was to learn, the first time I would dine with a cartoonist as well.

Not able to tell a lie, George admitted that his alter ego was Denys Wortman, the cartoonist creator of *Metropolitan Movies*, a syndicated panel then appearing daily in the

New York World Telegram. He looked just like our first president and might have even fooled Martha. During the many years that followed, however, I had the pleasure of following Wortman's feature. He was a superb artist who captured the gritty New York street life in his cartoons. Although I never met him again, I was pleased thirty years later to include his work in my book on the history of comic strips in America, *The Comics: An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art*.

I was offered a job after graduation, doing drawings using the same chalk plate process that I had used to create my cartoons for the school paper. I assumed it was the

cheapest way to make an engraving of a cartoon for reproduction. It was an exasperating procedure that included drawing the cartoon on the chalk surface and then using a sharp tool much like a dental probe to scrape the chalk down to the metal plate for every line that was to be reproduced. Often large pieces of chalk would break off when lines intersected. Liquid chalk would then be filled in and those sections would be redone when it dried. The plate would be mailed off to the company in Philadelphia to make the engraving. The only problem was that this job involved engraving chalk plates, plates that I never wanted to see again. It was very strange to me. I couldn't imagine anybody needing or wanting a chalk plate engraving. I don't think I ever replied to the offer and I never regretted missing out on a career in chalk plates.

As the ice-cream company's new hire, I was given the least desirable area to sell popsicles from a bicycle car—the western, residential suburb of Trenton, more sparsely populated and hilly. I had to pedal the whole day to sell my quota—at 1¼ cents commission per popsicle—and, for a big sale, an ice-cream brick, I would receive a whopping 5 cents commission. After about two months I was down to ninety-eight pounds. My mother thought I wouldn't survive the first semester at college. She persuaded me to take \$25 from my hard-earned savings to go to the mountains to fatten up. The Catskill resorts were famous for their fulsome meals—just the place for me to gain some weight!

I probably decided on the President Hotel because of its tennis courts—tennis was my lifelong passion—and perhaps because of one David Daniel Kaminsky. Kaminsky, a.k.a. Danny Kaye, the "King of the Catskills," was associated with the President and only a couple of years from launching his Broadway career. The Catskill Mountains summer resorts were

WHEN HE REPEATED THAT HE NEEDED SOMEONE TO ASSIST HIM ON BATMAN AND I COULD MAKE AS MUCH AS TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS A WEEK, THE COMIC BOOK LOOKED MUCH BETTER!

popular for the lavish food and top entertainment as well as their backdrop of shimmering mountain lakes. As soon as I arrived by bus and checked in, I couldn't wait to change clothes, grab my racquet and head for the courts. If it weren't for the tennis courts, I might actually have gained a pound or two.

I started playing tennis at about four years old when I was about as tall as a racquet. I had sorely missed playing that summer due to my ice-cream venture. Tennis was a family tradition—all my brothers played a top game. One was city champion and my three nephews were state champions. In fact I had once reached the semifinals of the city boys tournament only to be beaten badly by the winner Eddie Moylan. Eddie was a terrific player with a superb backhand who was to rise to become a top ten-rated player in the United States. I did have a few moments of tennis glory, however, as a two-time winner of the Lee Falk Annual Invitational Tournament on Cape Cod. Lee was a dear friend and, as all comics fans know, the creator of *Mandrake the Magician* and *The Phantom*.

That first day at the resort, I wore a painter's jacket festooned with my cartoons, that I used during warm-up. This was a fad we copied from college kids at nearby Princeton. It was white linen with a lot of pockets. I was watching a match when I felt a tap on my shoulder and someone asked, "Who did the drawings?"

Without turning around, I said meekly, "I did." I was worried I'd be arrested, because I couldn't remember what I had drawn on the back of the jacket. The voice said, "They're pretty good." He introduced himself as the creator of Batman, Bob Kane, and said that the first issue featuring the character (*Detective Comics #27*) had just been published. He didn't play tennis and, as fate would have it, was just passing by at the moment I arrived. He promptly showed me a copy. I had never seen a comic book before. I wasn't very impressed.

The Batman character reminded me of The Shadow, whom I had seen in the pulp magazines. The drawings looked pretty crude, even to my untrained eye. But I had grown up with the comics in the newspapers and loved them. I would get both the Sunday *Philadelphia Record* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* when I could. They had terrific comics sections—all the great strips of the time: glorious full pages in color of *Prince Valiant*, *Flash Gordon*, *Terry and the Pirates* . . . The art of *Batman* appeared crude by comparison. *The Record* also had a new comics insert of several features, the first being *The Spirit* by Will Eisner, which was impressive. I later met Will, one of the greatest creators the genre ever produced, in New York and we became lifelong friends. Interestingly, Eisner and Kane were classmates at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx.

Humor comics also enthralled me. I appreciated their styles—*Mutt and Jeff*, *Bringing Up Father*, *Skippy* and so many others. In fact, when I was sent to a boys' summer camp at age eight or ten, I begged my parents to bring me the latest collections of famous humor strips that were published at the time (now known by collectors as the Cupples & Leon series). I still have some of them—after over eighty years. One collection by Rube Goldberg was signed for me decades later by Rube himself.

Back to my first encounter with Bob. He was then about twenty-four, which appeared to be quite mature to me at seventeen, but we seemed to establish a rapport. He was about five foot ten, slim, with a dark complexion and sleek black hair—fairly good looking. He was

Right:
COLOR COVER OF
BATMAN NO. 10
April-May, 1942, pencils,
inks and colors by Fred
Ray and Jerry Robinson.

very personable, although a bit flamboyant. He talked about his success at DC Comics, as well as with women. He painted a glamorous picture of an artist's life in New York, meant to impress a naïve kid from the sticks, which it did.

When I told Kane I was going to Syracuse University in the fall, he said "Oh, it's too bad—if you came to New York, you could work on my comic book." I'd never read a comic book before, but when he repeated that he needed someone to assist him on *Batman* and I could make as much as twenty-five dollars a week, the comic book looked much better!

I made an instant decision. I ran to a phone booth and contacted Columbia to see if my application was still good. Luckily it was, so I told them I was enrolling, and called Syracuse and told them I wasn't coming. I called my parents and told them I had a job in New York, was switching to Columbia, and was going to the city straight from the mountains.

I didn't know how to get to New York City. The desk clerk explained that the only way was complicated, involving a change of buses. Suddenly he stopped and had a thought. "Mr. Peerce is driving to New York shortly. Why don't you ask him? He might give you a ride." It was Jan Peerce, the celebrated tenor, who had given a concert at the hotel that weekend.

I shyly approached the great man. "I'm trying to get to New York . . . I'm starting classes at Columbia," I sputtered.

"Sure, kid," he said as his enormous, chauffeured limousine pulled up the driveway, "Hop in!" I quickly hopped along with my battered suitcase and tennis racquet before he changed his mind. In retrospect, it seems like a script for a Frank Capra movie. The fact, as I learned on the way, that he was a Columbia graduate didn't hurt. He plied me with stories of his experiences on the concert tour, none of which I recall. My mind was on the future. New York! Columbia! And Batman! It was too overwhelming to think about at once. I don't think I uttered more than a few words during the several-hour trip!

That's how I made my grand entrance to New York—until I asked to be let out of the limo somewhere in the Bronx to fend for myself in the big city. Actually, my survival skills were not needed right away, as I was dropped off at my Aunt Mae and Uncle Arthur's comfortable apartment!

No. 10

APRIL
MAY

IND
A SUPERMAN
DC
PUBLICATION

BATMAN

10¢





No. 61

3/42



The BATMAN

Detective

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

MARCH

10¢

COMICS

**BATMAN
AND
ROBIN
VERSUS
"THE THREE
RACKETEERS"**

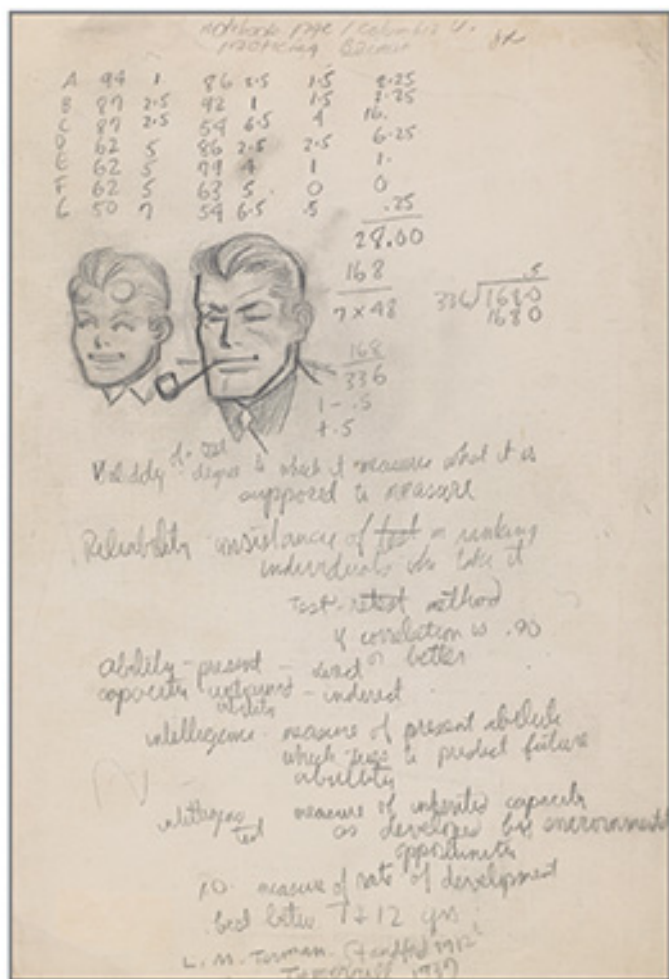


BOY
KANE



Left
ORIGINAL ART TO DETECTIVE
COMICS NO. 61
March 1942, pencils by Bob Kane and
Jerry Robinson, inks by Jerry Robinson.

Above
COLOR COVER OF DETECTIVE
COMICS NO. 61
March 1942, pencils by Bob Kane and
Jerry Robinson.



Left:
**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
 CLASSROOM NOTES
 WITH SKETCHES OF
 DICK GRAYSON AND
 BRUCE WAYNE**
 1940, by Jerry Robinson.

Top right:
**COLOR SKETCH OF
 BATMAN AND ROBIN
 SWINGING ON ROPES**
 by Jerry Robinson.

Bottom right:
**SKETCH OF BATMAN
 SWINGING ABOVE BELO
 HORIZONTE**
 Brazil, 1997, by Jerry Robinson.

Right Page:
**PERSONAL CHRISTMAS CARD
 1941, by Jerry Robinson.**







No. 68

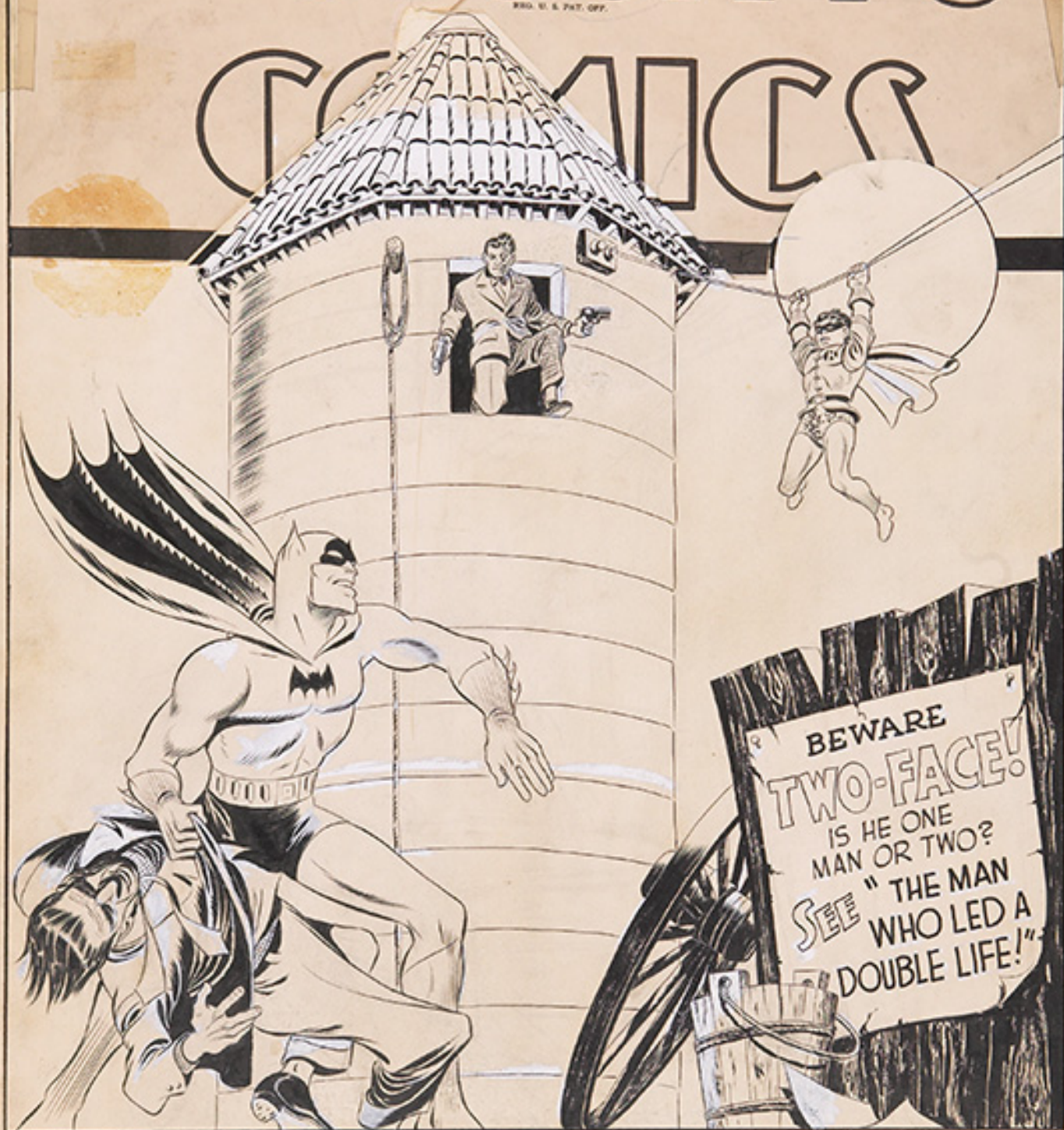
IND

The BATMAN

Detective

COMICS

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.



from the collection of Jerry Robinson



Left
ORIGINAL ART TO COVER OF
DETECTIVE COMICS NO. 68
October 1942, by Jerry Robinson.

Above
COLOR COVER OF DETECTIVE
COMICS NO. 68
October 1942, pencils, inks and colors by
Jerry Robinson.