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COMICS FANZINE

Alter Ego™

TALES FROM
THE CODE!

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P.C. Hamerlinck, Marc Swayze, & Roy Ald—together again for the first time.

On Our Cover: See the whole story of artist **Josh Medors'** fabulous homage to an iconic **Steve Ditko** cover on p. 30. [Spider-Man TM & © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Above: German cartoonist **Andreas Gottschlich**, whose "maskot" drawings have appeared in a number of past A/E issues, drew this one for our "Code-disapproved" issue last Halloween, but it got crowded out there—so we were determined to fit it in this time—even if we don't have a letters section! We like to think that Doc Wertham and Judge Murphy wouldn't have condoned this one in a 1950s comic, either! [Alter Ego hero TM & © 2011 Roy & Dann Thomas; costume designed by Ron Harris; other art © 2011 Andreas Gottschlich.]



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FIRST PRINTING.

TALES FROM THE CODE

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE



How The Comics Code Authority Changed Comic Books— *Literally!*—From 1954 To 2011

by Richard J. Arndt



The Comics Code Authority— Protecting Young Minds Since 1954!

(Above:) The CCA seal of approval—and the title logo designed especially for this article by Al Dellinges, as touched up by A/E layout wizard Jon B. Cooke.

(Left:) Because Photostats or photocopies of artwork changed at the behest of the CCA were seldom preserved in their original form, we rarely have the opportunity to examine both the “before” and “after” versions of altered material, but only the page that was actually printed. Fortunately, however, a number of examples of “before” art do exist. Near left, Judge Charles F. Murphy, the CCA’s first administrator, poses in front of blow-ups of both renditions of the old woman (whom the Code folks insisted be prettified) in the Joe Sinnott-drawn story “Sarah,” from *Timely/Atlas’ Uncanny Tales* #29 (March 1955). Scripter unknown. This was surely one of the Code’s earliest forays in defense of American childhood. Far left is the tale’s splash page as printed, courtesy of Dr. Michael J. Vassallo; incidentally, Doc reminds us that Marvel reprinted the Code-approved version in *Dead of Night* #6 (Oct. 1974).
[Page © 2011 Marvel Characters, inc.]

The anti-comics crusade that forced the Comics Code on comic book publishers, writers, and artists in 1954 didn’t come from nowhere. It wasn’t even the *first* anti-comics crusade. It was actually the *third*.

The First Crusade

The first arrived on May 8, 1940, in the pages of the *Chicago Daily News*. A book review of “Superman” by children’s author Sterling North—

nowadays best known for his young adult novel *Rascal*—was prompted by his dismay at seeing how much time his sons were spending reading comics [see *The Ten-Cent Plague* by David Hajdu, pp. 39-45, and “The Effects of the Censorship of the 1950s on Comic Books,” Anne Seddelmeyer, p. 1; a full bibliography of this article follows it on p. 54]. North’s article

described a wasteland of crudely drawn, badly printed, and brightly colored garbage that he felt was destroying children's interest in reading books. Particularly, one suspects, *his* books.

He also seemed to be very angry about the amount of money that comics were bringing in. In 1940, most children's novels (or, as we call them today, "young adult novels") sold primarily to school or public libraries, not to the general public. That limited the sales for many books to around 5,000 copies, although North claimed sales of 30,000 for at least one of his books. The notion that comics were selling hundreds of thousands of copies a month, were generating income four times greater than the entire intake of traditional children's literature, and were being sold, for the most part, directly to children instead of to schools, libraries, and parents seemed to infuriate him.

The comic book field was only five years old when North wrote his newspaper piece, but the dislikes he touched on would become very familiar complaints in years to come. He felt parents were not watching their children's reading habits closely enough. He remarked on the extreme violence he found in comics and on the possibility that it could make children more violent. He disliked the political stance of comics, which he perceived to be left-leaning. His complaints got noticed, although not at this time by the government. This first run of anti-comics editorializing came not from parents or national, state, or local authorities, but from academia.

Teachers, librarians, and writers expressed their concerns about the new phenomenon of comic books, a form of communication that many simply did not understand. Some of this concern, particularly on the part of librarians, came from an educational belief popular in the 1920s and early 1930s that an excessive amount of fantasy, whether found in books, movies, or what-have-you, was not good for children, since it failed (according to the theory) to prepare the child for actual life. If you as a parent wanted your children to become responsible, productive adults, their indulging in fantasy stories or fairy tales past a very early age was a waste of valuable learning time. Comic books, both by their very nature and by their extreme popularity with children, were considered to be both childish and a major deterrent to reading "good" literature.

Adults were also confused by the fact that comic books, in and of themselves, were largely a new medium and were not the same thing as the widely popular newspaper comic strips, which tended to be more adult-oriented and usually better drawn. Comic books were brash, enthusiastic, and, most important for the child, they



Who Was That Masked Mammal?

Author (and comic book critic) Sterling North and friend. North's most famous work, *Rascal*, was about a boy and his pet raccoon. He didn't care so much for masked entities in comics, though.

were cool— long before the word "cool" was cool. Cool in the sense that there was something special happening in comic books that adults didn't get but kids did. The tinge of badness, the smell of forbidden fruit, wafted up from every dust particle created by turning the page. Nowadays, this phenomenon is not unusual. Video games, music, some books and book series, new applications for iPods and smart phones are media-based products aimed directly at a teenage market and are designed to have that cool factor. Adults are used to knowing, from their own experience when young, that there are things their kids are crazy about that they will never get (and, as far as the kids are concerned, *shouldn't* get). But in 1940, this was not the case. Most items, particularly in media, were not marketed for a child to purchase but for parents to buy for their children. This gave parents a chance to keep a close eye on and control

over what the child was getting, especially regarding reading material. But comic books largely bypassed that parental control, since they could be purchased by any kid with a grubby dime.

Studies were done examining whether reading comic books caused children to read fewer "real" books than before. The conclusion, which surprised many, was that comics seemed to have no adverse effect on readers at all. Kids who read a large number of books before comics came into existence still read a lot of books. They just read a lot of comics in addition to the books. Kids who weren't major readers of books still weren't major readers of books, but they, too, often read a great many comics. Comics didn't seem to affect the reading of traditional books at all, although they certainly seemed to promote reading of a sort.

That fact seemed to perplex even the researchers who conducted the studies. More than one appeared to doubt the results of their own studies. It seemed to be a case of "comic books don't hurt reading and, in fact, even seem to increase reading, but kids like them, so they must be wrong in some way, right?" Plus, they were in color. It seemed that every adult who wrote about comics had a problem with the fact that, unlike the daily strips, they were in color. That color was always described as garish, although to my eyes the color in comic books of that era and the color in the Sunday comic strips seem to be either much the same, or else was actually a little duller in the poorly printed comic books.

Regardless, the advent of World War II ended the first anti-comics campaign. With a horrific war taking place, parents, librarians, and teachers had a lot more to worry about than the effects of a comic book on children. It was after the war ended that the second



Make Mine Marvel Mystery

During World War II, as per this newsstand photo dated July 1, 1942, super-hero titles predominated. Thanks to Richard Pryor.



(Above:) In *A/E* #101's coverage of Fox Comics, writer Richard Kyle described the lurid cover of *Crimes by Women* #3 (Oct. 1948). This is as good a place as any to actually show it to you. Artist unknown. Thanks to the Grand Comics Database; see GCD info on p. 66. [© 2011 the respective copyright holders.]

anti-comics crusade began—and this one produced some characters who would have a dramatic impact on the third.

In 1947-1948 comic books, particularly crime comics, were linked by some religious leaders and by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham to juvenile delinquency. Juvenile delinquency had begun attracting attention during the war, when such films as Val Lewton's *Youth Runs Wild* had begun focusing on teenagers and their use and abuse of an increasing amount of free time. This free time came about for various reasons, including an exploding teen population (even before the postwar baby boom, one quarter of the U.S. population was between the ages of one and eighteen), a lack of parental oversight (fathers were in the military and mothers were working in the war factories), and the population move from rural areas, where chores and work for teens were commonplace, to urban centers where teens often had far less family work to do and far more money in hand. After the war, this concern with teen lawlessness only grew, as laws enacted to tighten social controls on teenagers caused crime statistics on them to soar [TCP, p. 84]. Parents, courts, and law enforcement searched for both explanations and easy fixes for this new problem. Comics were an easy target.

which Lev Gleason and Charles Biro had pioneered in 1942 with *Crime Does Not Pay*, rapidly increased in popularity. Partly this was because the stories themselves were quite exciting and, at times, very well done, and partly, I suspect, because their creators, many of them newly returned from the war, found that real life and the more grown-up stories available in the crime genre were more interesting for them to write and draw than the banal silliness in which many super-hero comics had been mired during the postwar years.

However, crime comics had a hoop to jump through that other genres of comic book did not. Many states, particularly New York where almost the entire comics industry was based, had laws on the books prohibiting exploitive true-fact crime magazines, largely due to fears that such magazines encouraged rather than deterred crime. When reports of children either killing others or committing suicide were linked to comics, it wasn't a big leap for authorities to attempt to transfer and to enforce onto comics the pre-existing laws that dealt with real-life crime magazines. Crime comics could even be considered especially vulnerable to these laws, because they often claimed to be based on actual crimes (although this claim was usually wildly inaccurate).

By 1948 a grassroots campaign led by religious leaders, newspaper editors, teachers, and children themselves had led to a comic book burning campaign in which school children were urged to go from house to house in their communities, collect all the comics, crime or otherwise, that they could find, and incinerate them in public bonfires. Soon national attention was directed at the supposed crime comics/juvenile delinquency problem that comics supposedly fanned, and for a time, a strong anti-comics hysteria seemed to be building. But then studies began coming out that seemed to indicate that reading comics and breaking laws weren't that closely aligned. The public comic burnings began to get some bad press when people started to be reminded of the Nazi book-burnings of the 1930s, which had also started with children stationed front and center to do the



Sam Glanzman did a funny end run around the Code's aversion to bondage scenes in Charlton's *Hercules* #5 (July 1968). In the story the Queen of the Amazons is torturing one of her young subjects, who has dared to aid Hercules. Since the Code forbade showing women being tied up, let alone tortured, Glanzman drew the young girl standing on an iron ring that was suspended above a fire. There are chains holding the ring in place, but the girl is neither chained nor tied to the apparatus. All the elements are there for a bondage/torture scene, but the girl could jump to freedom at any time. It looked a little silly, but it got the point across without apparently violating the Code.

Don't Yield—Back S.H.I.E.L.D.!

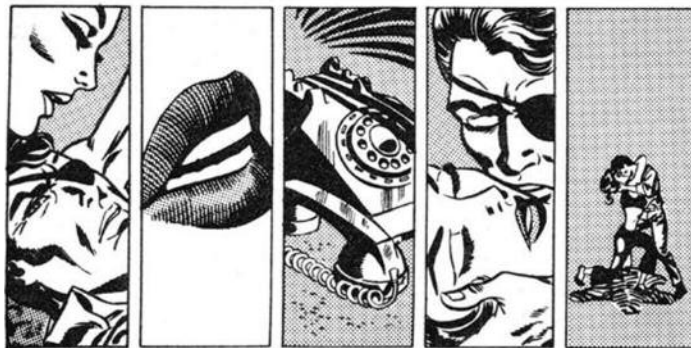
Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. #2 (July 1968) contained a nearly wordless page illustrated by writer-penciler Jim Steranko that showed Fury and his gal pal/fellow agent Valentina having a romantic evening. The Code office had three objections to the page, the first being Val's cleavage in the first panel, the second being a panel showing the phone off the hook, and the third being the final panel, which featured the two S.H.I.E.L.D. agents in an amorous clinch. The first two were art-corrected by John Romita to

Bringing Up The Rear

Richard mentions the Steranko-drawn Madame Hydra's whip being changed into a rope, while her skin-tight outfit was left untouched (at least by the Code). Earlier, though, in *Strange Tales* #168 (May '68), as seen at near right, agent Val's shapely derriere was blacked in to produce the less offensive panel at far right. As Roy T. recalls it, Jim was not happy with the change. Thanks again to Stephen Friedt, the CSBG Archive, and Brian Cronin. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

A Clash Of Symbols

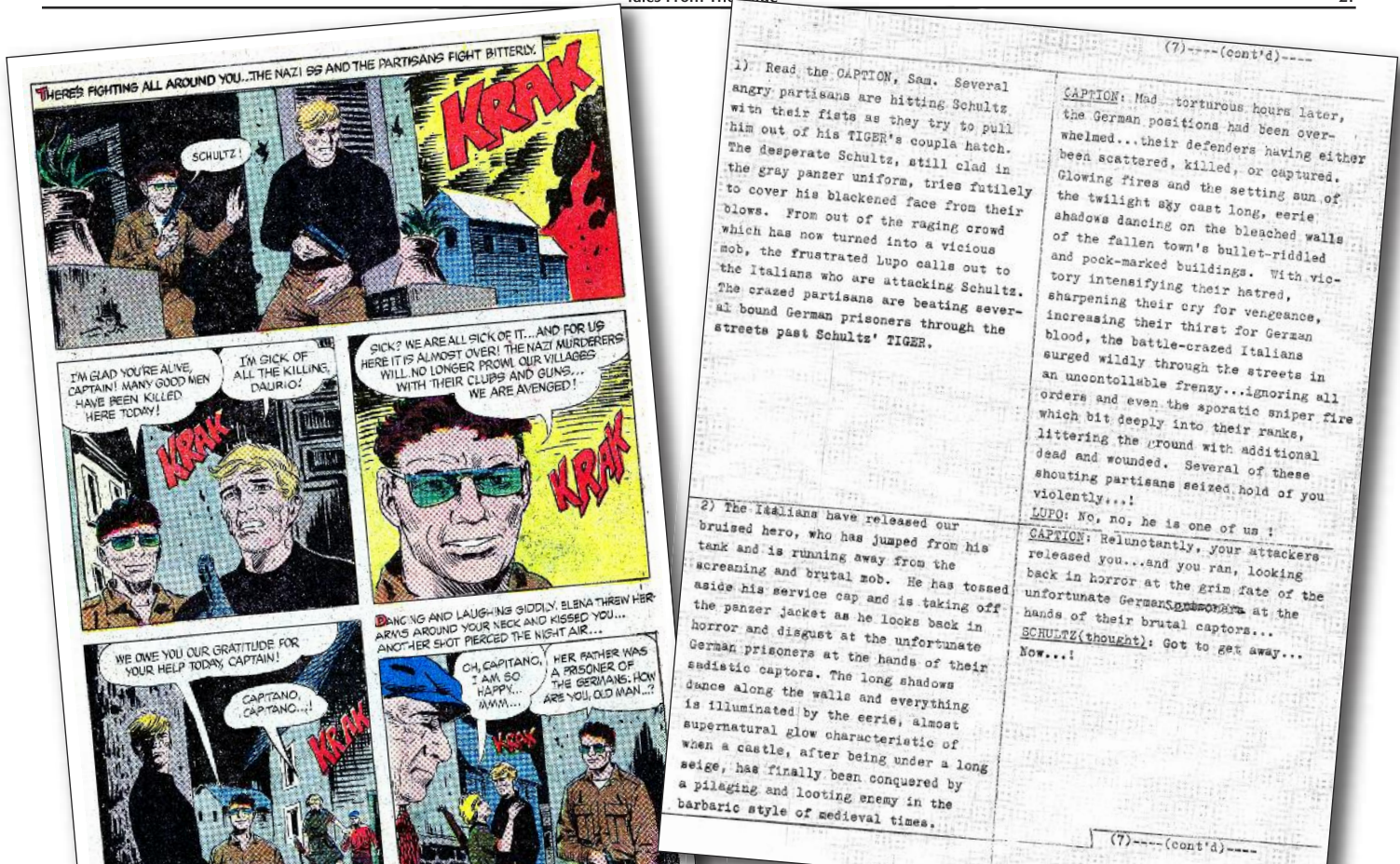
This most famous of Code-censored Marvel pages was written and drawn by Jim Steranko for *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* #2 (July 1968). Along with a bit of whited-out cleavage in panel 1, the altered panels in the printed version at left are 9 & 11: a phone ringing unanswered was apparently deemed less suggestive than a phone off the hook—and a gun in a holster (Photostatted from panel 1) was favored over a passionate clinch. The page's original bottom row is seen below. See accompanying text for a fuller appreciation of such symbolic subtleties. Thanks for the scans both to Stephen Friedt and to the website CSBG Archive — "Comic Book Legends #291," with Brian Cronin's analysis of the page. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



erase the cleavage and put the phone back on the hook (but still ringing unanswered—which amounted to basically the same thing)... but the final panel didn't need just art corrections but an entirely new image. But there wasn't time to send the page back to Jim Steranko (who lived in Pennsylvania) and have him redo it. The book was due at the printers.

It was associate editor Roy Thomas (as he confirmed in an e-mail to the present author) who, with the deadline looming, noticed the holstered gun in the first panel on the page and suggested Photostating that image and turning it into the final panel. It wasn't until Steranko called him up to congratulate him on his cleverness in getting around the Code's objection by replacing the clinch scene with a post-coital holstered gun that Thomas thought consciously about the sexual symbolism of a romantic interlude ending with a gun in a holster. According to Thomas, his panel replacement was just "an instinctual reaction to a desperate need. Still, I think in retrospect, as do many others, that the fix worked even better (both graphically and storywise) than the original panel."





Fightin' Words

A page of "The Partisans" from Charlton's *Fightin' Army* #88 (Nov. 1969)—and an original script page of same by writer Willi Franz. Art by Sam Glanzman. Thanks to Richard Arndt & Willi Franz. © 2011 the respective copyright holders.

Another example of Code interference with Steranko's work occurred during his 1969 three-issue stint with scripiter/editor Stan Lee on *Captain America*. The Code office had some problems with the villainous Madame Hydra wearing a skin-tight green catsuit, but drew the line at showing her holding a whip. The whip was changed to a coil of rope, which made no sense [EMRP, Pearl, p. 164].

"Partisan" Bickering

Willi Franz was only a teenager when he created (with artist Sam Glanzman) not one, or two, but three separate series for the Charlton war comics. One, "The Devil's Brigade," was standard war stuff, but the other two—"The Iron Corporal" and "The Lonely War of Capt. Willy Schultz"—were significant contributions to both war comics and the comics field in general. I believe that in both story and art they rank right alongside Harvey Kurtzman's *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*, Archie Good-



Captains Outrageous

The Comics Code not only wouldn't allow the 1961 Human Torch to hurl fireballs in the early days of *Fantastic Four*—but a few years later, when Marvel began to reprint (poorly-retouched) 1940s yarns in *Fantasy Masterpieces*, they insisted on quite a few changes there, as well. Compare and contrast, for instance, the splash of this Red Skull encounter from *Captain America* #7 (Oct. 1941), repro'd at left from *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Captain America*, Vol. 2, with that tale's earlier "reprinting" in *FM* #6 (Feb. 1966). Perhaps the most Code-altered Golden Age reprint page was the splash from the "Fang" story in *Captain America* #6, as seen in that same issue of *FM*; to see both versions of that one, dig up a copy of *Alter Ego* #20! Thanks to Barry Pearl for the *FM* scan. © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

win's *Blazing Combat*, and Glanzman's solo work on his "U.S.S. Stevens" strip for DC. The Franz/Glanzman serials are underrated largely because they not only came from lowly Charlton, which rarely offered credits and even during its best days tended to produce mostly mediocre work, but also because they appeared during a period in comics (1968-1970) when editors and comic companies were skittish about the direction of war stories.

Previous American wars, such as World War II and the Korean War, had seen war comics presenting stories dealing with ongoing wars. However, that was not generally the case with Viet Nam War yarns. Warren, Dell, and DC all featured serials or comics dealing with Viet Nam between 1965 and 1967, but they all ceased publication, either due to active resistance from the military and possibly the distributors (Warren) or to dropping sales that may have been due to the reader resistance to gung-ho Viet Nam tales (Dell and DC) appearing during the course of an increasingly unpopular war.

SPECIAL ALTER EGO COLOR SECTION

Color-Coded!

16 Pages of "Before" & "After" Goodies Submitted To The Comics Code Authority Over The Decades

Notes by Roy Thomas (with a bit of help from his friends)

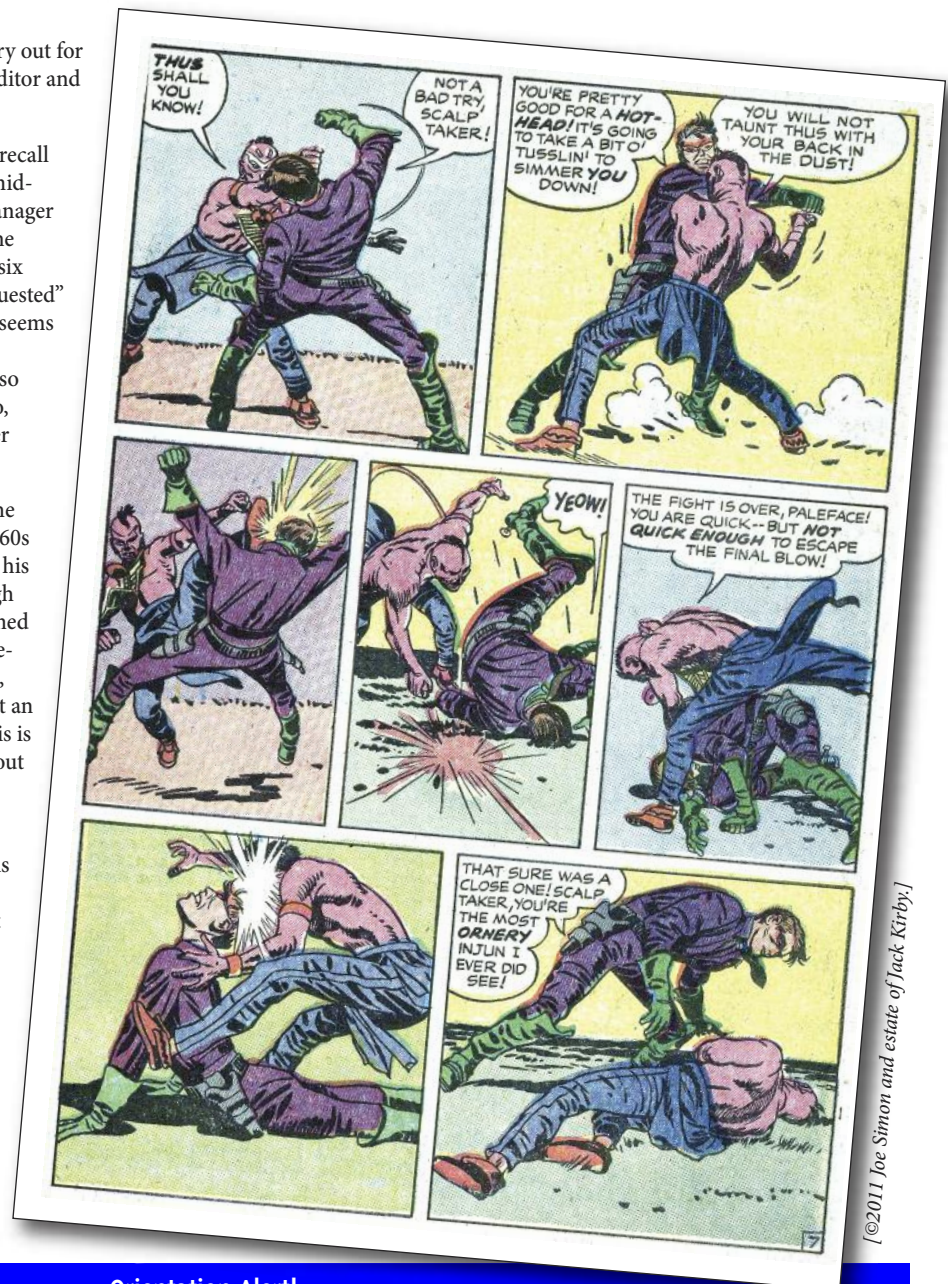
This issue's "before-and-after" theme seemed to cry out for a special color section, so here it is—annotated by Ye Editor and several other pros and students of the form.

One of the first Comics Code-related anecdotes I recall hearing at Marvel after I went to work for Stan Lee in mid-1965—either from Stan himself or from production manager Sol Brodsky, and quite possibly from both—was that one reason for the cancellation of *The Incredible Hulk* after six issues in 1962-63 was the sheer number of changes "requested" in the stories and art by the Comics Code Authority. It seems hard to imagine nowadays that the mere spectacle of a snarling green-skinned Frankenstein/Mr. Hyde hybrid so aroused the Code's wrath, but apparently it did. Even so, lagging sales were no doubt the main factor in publisher Martin Goodman's decision to discontinue the title.

And I recall a lunch in Manhattan—probably at the well-known Schrafft's restaurant—on one of the latter-'60s days when artist Jack Kirby ventured into the city from his Long Island home. I'm not sure if Stan was there, though Sol Brodsky and John Romita surely were. The talk turned at one point to Code censorship, and Jack remarked ruefully about his and partner Joe Simon's fabled *Bulls-Eye*, starring the bow-wielding Western hero on whose chest an enemy had long ago branded a target. Jack said (and this is virtually verbatim): "They kept taking the tomahawks out of the Indians' hands, and leaving me with a bunch of smiling Indians!"

The page at right, from *Bulls-Eye* #6 (June 1955), is undoubtedly one of the instances he was talking about. Prepared for Joe & Jack's doomed Mainline company, it wound up being published by Charlton. Personally, I wonder how the name "Scalp Taker" slipped by the Code! Thanks to Scott Rowland for the scan; thanks also to Jim Van Dore. [© 2011 Joe Simon and estate of Jack Kirby.]

Oddly, reader Jim Ludwig tells us that *Bulls-Eye* #7 (Aug. 1955), the second S&K Charlton issue, "is pretty violent, with lots of tomahawks present."



[©2011 Joe Simon and estate of Jack Kirby.]

Orientation Alert!

Because so many of the "Color-Coded" examples require comparing one page or set of panels with another, we've deemed it best to print the remaining 15 pages of this segment sideways. You have been warned!

Talk About "Vanishing Americans"!

At roughly the same time that Code tweezers were removing tomahawks from Native American fists in Simon & Kirby's *Bulls-Eye* #6, the CCA folks were also turning an eagle eye and white-out liquid onto reprints of the team's *Boys' Ranch* #5 (June 1951) published by Harvey Comics (and apparently inked by Mort Meskin).
[© 2011 Joe Simon & estate of Jack Kirby.]



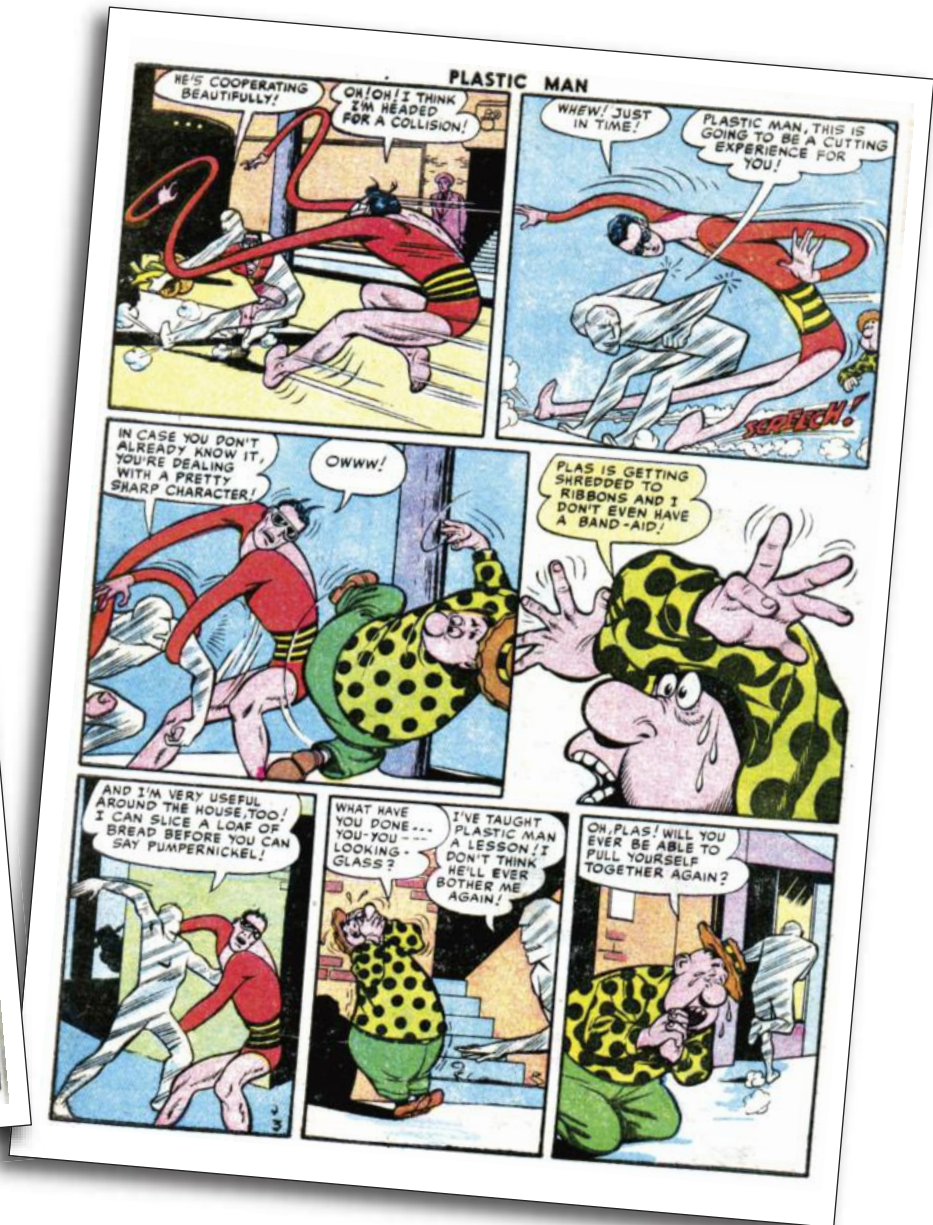
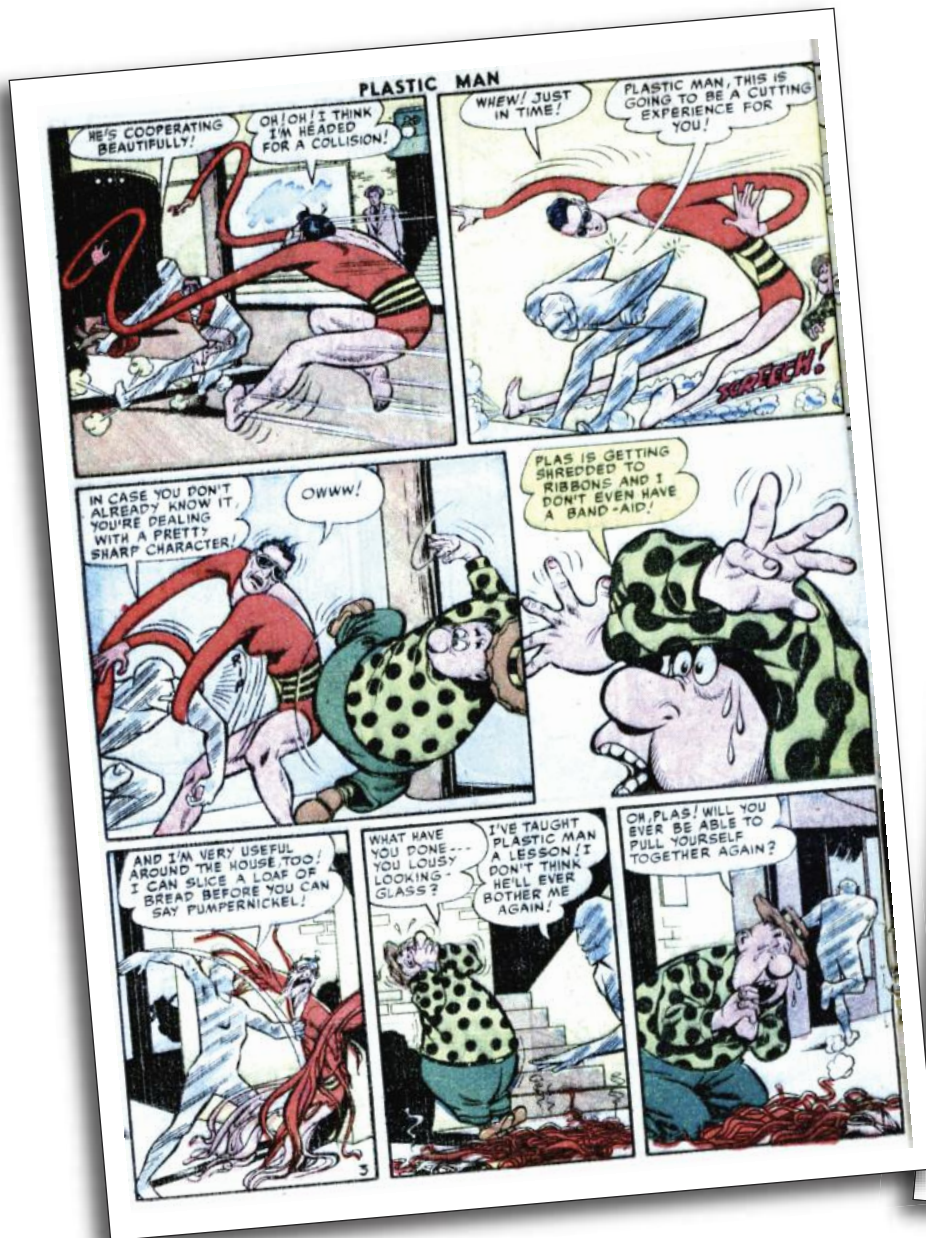
Page 6 of "Bandits, Bullets and Wild, Wild Women!" From a scan of the original comic, with thanks to Randy Graves.



In Harvey's *Witches Western Tales* #30 (April 1955), the short-lived successor to the pre-Code *Witches Tales*, the word "Die!" and the Indians' knives (but not the whites' pistols) have been whited out. But note the residual color in panel 6, even though the black line art depicting the Indian has been deleted. Thanks to Alan Hutchinson.

Mirror, Mirror...

The pre- and post-Code versions of the third page of the story of "Reflecto the Astonishing Mirror Man," reportedly penciled by Andre LeBlanc and inked by Alex Kotzky—first as originally seen in *Plastic Man* #46 (May 1954) from the Quality Comics Group, then as reprinted in toned-down form for its *PM* #63 (July 1956). Scripter unknown. See the aftermath of this battle—both pre-Code and Code versions—on pg. 18. [Plastic Man TM & © 2011 DC Comics.]



who was undergoing a journey through time and meeting many of the historical DC characters, becoming the wood for the cross of Jesus Christ. There is speculation that the conservative Christian response to the then-current film *The Last Temptation of Christ* was a factor. DC pulled the entire issue, even though by this time they'd already published equally graphic (if not more so) material dealing with violent murder and rape in *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*, the infamous beating/crucifixion scene of Black Canary in *Green Arrow: The Longbow Hunters*, the rest-stop mass murder scene in the first *Sandman* arc, and more.

As publishers took two giant steps forward and then one back in the quest for what was appropriate in the moral climate of the day, the Code came to be seen as more and more irrelevant, as each publisher searched for consistent ways to police its own titles, whether Code-approved or not. Still, the Comic Code Seal of Approval continued to appear on most newsstand comics throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The Code was revised for a third and last time in 1989. Oddly enough, the initial opportunity to make further revisions in the Code was prompted by the knowledge that the printed copies of the 1971 revision were running out. The publishers were requested to consider any changes to the Code that they might want to make before reprinting the Code regulations [Nyberg, SOA, p. 146]. By this time most of the independent publishers were bypassing Code approval. Both DC and Marvel published titles that were non-Code-approved. The 1989 version of the Code placed much less emphasis on crime and horror comics, which had been the main focus of the 1954 and 1971 versions. The concern in the late 1980s and early 1990s was extreme violence and sex, possibly brought on by the wave of "dark" mainstream comics that cropped up in the wake of Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. The initial Code revision was rejected, however, since some publishers considered it too liberal and others disliked the fact that it was still specifically banning certain topics. A second version was completed that offered guidelines but did not include lists of specific things that could or could not appear in comics. Apparently, a second section of the guidelines was intended for the eyes of the publishers only and was not included in the new booklet. In that section the publishers were reminded that comics displaying the Code seal were intended to be the equivalent of the motion picture industry's "G" rating and that publishers should take care on which titles they intended to have the Code Seal appear [Nyberg, SOA, pg. 150-151].

Marvel dropped the Code in 2001 over strong objections from the other remaining members of the Comics Magazine Association of America. Nothing earthshaking happened, either to Marvel or in public opinion. Although the seal continued to appear on covers, the practice of submitting pages to the Code office for approval appears to have stopped sometime in



An Art Style To Make You Turn Green

One of artist Kevin O'Neill's pages for *Green Lantern Corps Annual #2* (1986)—a comics story that had been rejected months earlier because of its allegedly "unsuitable" art style; see p. 32 text. Script by Alan Moore. Thanks to Richard Arndt. [© 2011 DC Comics.]

anything a real teenager might experience was allowed anymore. Even though the lovers in the stories looked like full-grown adults, most of these characters seemed to have no clue whatsoever on how to deal with an actual relationship. No comics that tried to show real problems and possible solutions to them were allowed under the Code, and although the genre stumbled along until the mid-1970s, it eventually withered and died.

As for real horror, the genuine article that EC, Atlas, Harvey, Fawcett, Charlton, Standard, and a dozen or so other publishers delivered before the Code, it vanished from comics for a decade. Oh, it popped up here and there. As mentioned earlier, John Stanley wrote two excellent 1962 horror comics—*Ghost Stories #1* and the 80-page *Tales from the Tomb #1*—through Dell, which didn't adhere to the Code. Most of the artwork is terrible, but Stanley's stories still stand up and at least one tale—"The Monster of Dread End"—is a genuine classic of the genre. However, when *Ghost Stories #2* came out, Stanley was gone and the stories considerably neutered. Atlas/Marvel published some fun monster stories by the likes of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck, but they weren't really scary, with the exception of some of the Lee/Ditko tales, and that more because of Ditko's eerie, moody drawings, rather than the actual story. "Mystery" tales appeared from both Code (DC, Charlton, ACG) and non-Code publishers (Dell and Gold Key), but they were usually tame to the point of boredom. It wasn't until 1964, when James Warren bypassed the Comics Code Authority by publishing the black-&-white magazine *Creepy*, that horror returned

2008 or 2009. DC and Archie, the last two publishers who were still subscribing to the Code and displaying its seal on their covers, dropped it in favor of their own internal self-policing systems in 2011. A few of DC's February 2011 and Archie's April 2011 titles were apparently the last to display the Code seal.

Some Lasting Effects

The Comics Code was probably necessary and likely saved the comics industry at a time of extreme political and social pressure in the mid-1950s. However, that act of salvation came at extreme cost. The most mature and adult leaning publisher, EC, soon stopped publishing four-color comics. Atlas/Marvel, although not immediately affected in terms of quantity, saw its more mature titles dropped, including the excellent *Menace*, which was a title that combined social commentary with horror and shock stories in the EC vein; the stories written by Stan Lee, in particular, were nearly as strong and hard-hitting as EC's celebrated tales. The crime genre vanished completely. So did most of the horror genre, although the Code still allowed the much tamer "mystery" stories to appear.

The Western genre became even more childish than it might have originally seemed, at exactly the same time as both film and TV Westerns started seriously reaching for more mature themes, spelling the genre's eventual doom. The romance genre was gutted. Nothing that resembled

“You Have To Earn Your Talent Through Discipline”

Artist CAL MASSEY Talks Candidly About His Comics Career

Conducted by Jim Amash Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

INTERVIEWER'S INTRO: *Cal Massey's comic book career, like many others of the 1950s, was cut short by the decline of the medium. He worked for Cross Publications, Lev Gleason, St. John, and Timely before moving on to the advertising world and book illustration. He was also the first medal designer for the Franklin Mint, and eventually settled into a career in fine arts. His paintings have been widely exhibited in many galleries. Still active as a painter, Cal Massey reaches out to his audience with thought and power during these difficult times, his message as potent as ever. —Jim.*

**“You Probably Have Heard Of Him
—Joe Maneely “**

JIM AMASH: Well, I'll start with the easy question, which is when and where were you born?

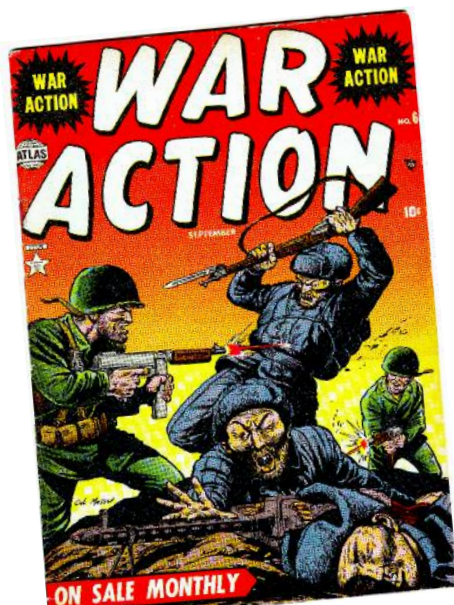
CAL MASSEY: I was born February 1926 in Morton, Pennsylvania, which

is a small town outside of Philadelphia. When I was four years old, I discovered the Sunday newspaper comics. My mother told me they were drawn, so I took the Sunday comics, put them up in the window, and let the sun come through pages so I could trace them. [chuckles] Of course, I got all the images from both sides of the paper, and it was a mess. So my mother said, “You stupid fool, you have to earn your talent through discipline.” And that's how I got interested in drawing.

The next step was just trying to learn to draw. While I was in high school, I met these two incredible twins who could draw with both hands. They were ambidextrous. I wanted to be as good as them. Then I found out that they were idiot savants. After graduating from high school in 1944, I went into the Air Force during World War II for two years; I was a pre-flight mechanic and radio mechanic. Then I came out of the service, and I met a guy named—well, you probably have heard of him—Joe Maneely, whom I met at the Hussion School of Art.

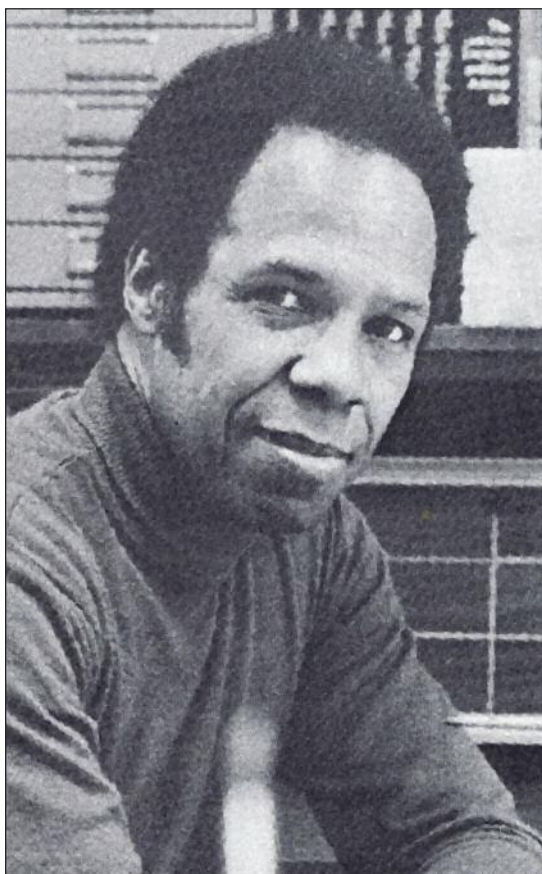
JA: When you went to art school, did you have a goal in mind of what kind of artist you wanted to be?

MASSEY: I knew I needed to go to art school; I had to learn how to draw. My goal was to be a comic book illustrator, and I met a wonderful teacher, Leonard Nelson. He separated me from the rest of the students and gave me split-hair criticism. It got to a point where I was kind of sick of it, you



Cal Massey In War And Peace

The artist—flanked by his cover for Timely/Atlas' *War Action* #6 (Sept. 1952) and one of his later paintings, this one depicting an angel. Scans of the photo and painting were provided by Cal; thanks to Dr. Michael J. Vassallo for the cover. [Cover © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.; photo & painting © 2011 the respective copyright holders.]





Go West, Young Maneely

Joe Maneely as a young Navy artist in the mid-1940s, a year or three before his first comic book work in 1948—and panels from a “Kid Colt” story provided by Dr. Michael J. Vassallo. Before his untimely death in 1958, Maneely produced a decade’s worth of skilled and oft-spectacular comic art. Thanks to daughter Nancy Maneely and Doc V. for the photo, and to Doc for the art scan. [Panels © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

know? I asked him why he stayed on me, and not anybody else. Mr. Nelson said, “You’ve got a rare gift. So rare, I don’t want to see you lose it.” And then I understood [why he was tough on me]. I knew he was what I was looking for. He would clip out the best comic strip features, like Alex Raymond’s *Rip Kirby* and Will Eisner’s *Spirit*, among others. He told me, “These guys can draw, but all your answers are in my class. You can’t draw a shoe unless you know what the foot looks like.” The average student would get one day of life drawing. I got three days of life drawing, one day of composition, and one day of illustration. Mr. Nelson and another teacher, Mr. Hussion (who owned the school), designed a course for me. Instead of getting all the other things like lettering and layout, they gave me the course structure I previously mentioned.

“Maneely... Suggested I Go Visit St. John”

JA: Tell me about Joe Maneely.

MASSEY: Oh, he was really suave. Joe Maneely also had a studio in the same building that the art school was in, and he was an incredible artist. Joe was working for Magazine Management, which owned Marvel [then known as Timely]. He was on the G.I. Bill, like most of the rest of us were. He’d come to work in a white shirt and a tie, while the rest of us wore t-shirts. He’d go into the life drawing classes with his sketch pad and do the

most beautiful drawings. He had total recall. He could draw a .45 without reference. My contact with him was limited. We talked off and on about the comic book business, and it was Joe who recommended that I talk to Stan Lee at Timely. Many of the students were very jealous of him, because he not only drew so well, but he was already making a living in the comic book business. He was the star! I remember talking to him when I was turning work in at Timely, and we’d talk shop, we’d talk about World War II and current events. I was shocked when I heard the news of his death.

Each year, one student won an award for best draftsmanship. I won it in 1948, ’49, and ’50. I graduated from the school in 1950, but in ’49, I started



A Cross To Bear

Massey’s first comics work seems to have appeared in Cross Publishing’s *The Perfect Crime*, for which he drew both generic cops-and-robbers yarns and the series “Steve Duncan.” Above are splashes from issues #3 (June 1950) and #27 (Aug. ’52).

Thanks to Dr. Michael J. Vassallo & Jim Ludwig, respectively. [© 2011 the respective copyright holders.]

working for Cross Publishing Company. I did that work through an agent. But it was Mr. Nelson who taught me how to become a better comic book artist.

JA: Who was the agent?

MASSEY: He was an accountant in Philadelphia, and saw my work when he was doing my taxes. He knew someone at Cross Publishing and agented my work for them. He convinced me that there were no black comic book artists in the business, and said he'd agent me so the company would not know I was black. And I fell for that. He was stealing money from me. He was getting \$35 a page for pencils and inks, and paying me \$12 per page. I went up to Cross after graduation, and that's how I found out he was cheating me. From then on, I worked directly for them. But I got the agent to do my taxes for free for one year before he left his job and disappeared.

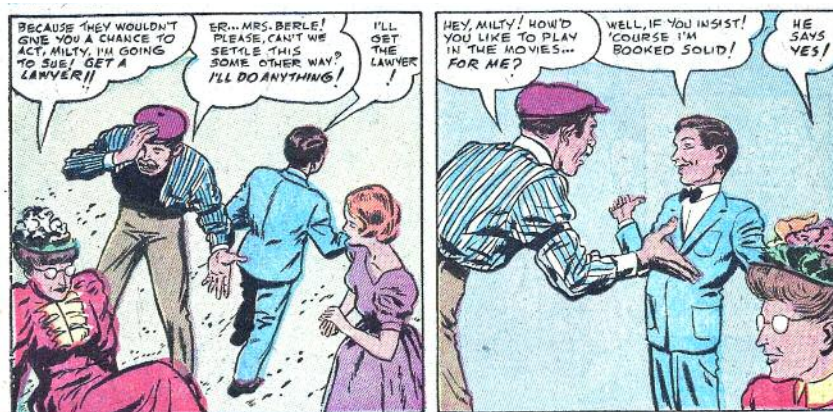
I don't recall who I met at Cross, but my contact was limited because I sent my work in by messenger. For Cross, I drew "Steve Duncan" and *Perfect Crime*. And after that, I went to work for St. John Publications. Joe Maneely, who moved to Flushing, NY, and was working on staff at Timely, suggested I go visit St. John [Publishing].

JA: Who lettered what you did for Cross?

MASSEY: A guy named Dick Marsden. He was fantastic. I'd hand him blank pages, and he'd return them with the panel borders ruled in and all the lettering done. Then I drew the story. Dick was not a full-time letterer; he worked in some kind of boiler factory outside of Philadelphia. He would take the train to deliver the work to me. He was dependable, and like a brother to me. He lettered for me at Cross, Lev Gleason, and Timely. I tried to get him to go to New York and get work, but he got married, and I think his wife didn't want him to do that. Stan Lee liked his work, and would have given him a full-time job if Dick had wanted it.

JA: Was your editor at St. John, Marion McDermott?

MASSEY: It could have been her; I'm not certain. Here is where I met Matt Baker. He was drawing for St. John and lived in Brooklyn with his brother John. This was in July of 1951. I was not yet working at St. John. I asked the editor if there were other black artists in the business, and she told me about Matt Baker. She called him at home and asked if he would see me. She was having a very good time talking to him on the phone; he was taking a nap when she called around ten that morning. By the tone of the conversation, I could tell they knew each other very well. Matt said he would,



"The Milton Berle Story"

In these Massey-drawn panels from a biographical episode in Cross' *Uncle Milty* #1 (Dec. 1950), the comedian who became TV's first real super-star gets a leg up on his rivals at a young age, thanks to the machinations of his mother—who, till the end of her life, remained his biggest fan. Thanks to Cal M. [© 2011 the respective copyright holders.]

person there—a Caucasian—who was pulling materials out of Matt's reference files. Matt was penciling a story, and I was amazed at his ability. He spent quite a bit of time with me that day, discussing brushes, pens, how to put together reference files, other companies I could get work from, and basically talking to me about the pros and cons of the business.

He was quite talkative. He talked about his earlier work, like "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle." He asked about my work, and I told him I had drawn "Steve Duncan" for Cross, and that I had just done my first job for St. John, which was a romance story. I told Matt I was having trouble drawing pretty women, and he gave me pointers on how to do that. He had a happy disposition, laughed some, and reminded me of my teachers at the art school. I was there for four hours, and left feeling very good about myself and the business. Matt treated me like a equal, a fellow comic book artist.

JA: How much did St. John pay you a page?

MASSEY: \$45 for pencils and inks.

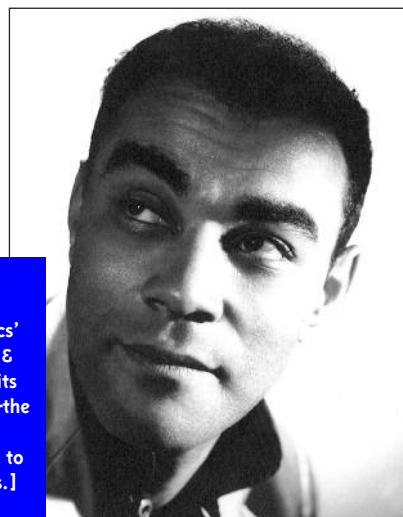
JA: What do you remember about their offices?

MASSEY: The offices were very small. The art was laid out in the room, where I could see it.



The Golden Age of Comic Phantom

Matt Baker with a noteworthy (notorious?) panel of his from Fox Comics' *Phantom Lady* #18 (June 1948). The splash was printed, with only red & black plates, on the issue's inside front cover (which you can view in its entirety on page 9 herein). Thanks to Fred Robinson and Matt D. Baker—the artist's half-brother and nephew, respectively—for the photo, which originally appeared with our extensive Baker coverage in *A/E* #47—and to Matthew Peets for the PL scan. [© 2011 the respective copyright holders.]





ABE KANEGSON'S REMARKABLE LETTERING ON WILL EISNER'S *SPIRIT* ELEVATED THE ART FORM TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL. ABE, A VICTIM OF *LEUKEMIA*, PASSED AWAY IN 1965 AT AGE 44, LEAVING BEHIND A WIFE, *ELIZABETH*, AND TWO SONS, *BEN* AND *ANDRAS*.

UNTIL RECENTLY, LITTLE WAS KNOWN ABOUT THIS *TALENTED* ARTIST. BUT WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT LOTS MORE! JOIN US AS WE TALK WITH ABE'S SON, *BEN*, AND *RITA PERLIN*, ABE'S SISTER!

**ABE
KANEGSON**
"THE MYSTERY OF
THE MISSING
LETTERER!"
(PT. 4)



PROFESSIONAL PHOTO OF ABE TAKEN WHILE HE WAS IN HIS 30S. © 2011 RITA PERLIN

The Mystery of the Missing Letterer—Part 4

by Michael T. Gilbert

Over the course of *Alter Ego* #101-103, we solved a 60-year-old mystery. Abe Kanegson, the man whom Will Eisner considered his greatest letterer, left comics around 1951 and seemingly vanished. Even Eisner couldn't track him down, despite his best efforts. But in 2010 a record surfaced on eBay, a memorial record album (remember them?) with Abe's name and photo. It was Abe's only record, issued in 1969, five years after his death.

The album's liner notes filled in a number of blanks on his pre- and post-comics career. After leaving the Will Eisner studios around 1951, Abe became an accomplished square dance caller and folk singer. Leukemia had ended his life prematurely in 1965, and he left behind a wife and two sons. I was unable to secure an interview with Abe's son, Andras. However, his brother Ben agreed to be interviewed—as did Abe's sister Rita Perlin. We'll start with **Ben Kanegson**:

Ben Kanegson Interview (10/14/10)

MICHAEL T. GILBERT: *I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions about your father, Ben.*

BEN KANEGSON: OK, I'll do my best. I don't have a lot of information for you, but I'll do my best.

MTG: *First of all, I wanted to ask if you were aware of his comic book career?*

KANEGSON: Uh, yes.

MTG: *Then you know he worked on The Spirit? You might be interested to know that there's a Jules Feiffer book that came out just this year, Backing into Forward, and he talks about Abe glowingly. He was one of his best friends back then.*

KANEGSON: I didn't know that.

MTG: *You might want to check that out. It's a very interesting book. What can you tell me about your father? You were quite young when he passed on, right?*

KANEGSON: Yes, it was just before my 7th birthday, so I was 6. But he had been sick for a long time. He traveled a lot. We didn't address each other in the normal way, because he knew he was going to die at the time of my conception. So he took more of the role of a friend, though he knew he was my father. He did act as my father, also, but a little more distant than with the other kids, and in the last month, I think, he was at home a lot and he was drawing, and I remember some of the things he was drawing at the time.

MTG: *What kind of things was he drawing? At that point, as far as I know, he wasn't...*

KANEGSON: I was about in second grade, so it was right towards the end... he was doing a record album cover. I tried to imitate him, and found that I couldn't really draw the way he could and kind of gave up on it for a long while because of that. I can tell you that particular album had a bunch of grapes on it and a flute.

MTG: *Interesting. I didn't realize he was still doing artwork at that point....*

KANEGSON: He did that consistently.

MTG: *Did he sign his work? Do you have any examples?*



Kanegson Sketches!

Abe Kanegson 16" x 24" drawing, late '40s. [© 2012 Rita Perlin.]

KANEGSON: I know that my Aunt has a bunch of signed work in her house. Some on the wall, some in boxes. Not all from that period. Some paintings, drawings, all that stuff.

MTG: *Wow! What was he like? I realize he was ill much of the time and you were young, but still...*

KANEGSON: I never knew him. In the normal sense. It was not visible to me other than he would be home at times when other people were out working and stuff. But that doesn't necessarily mean illness, either, because I do the same thing. I work in the motion picture business and have an odd schedule myself, which is why I couldn't talk to you yesterday. I was out scouting a job. He was a very pleasant guy, puzzles and curiosities; he would take me walking in the woods, which is why to this day I have a love of walking in the woods. He would show me rocks and, you know, explain things of the Earth and trees, and he was a very good-natured, gentle kind of person.

MTG: *He sounded like he was well liked at the Eisner studio. Has your mother ever talked about Will Eisner and the time back then?*

KANEGSON: Not in depth. Her personal story was that he had the Village Folk Dance studio on Bleecker Street. She was young and she started working there and that's how they met. He must have been in his late 30s then, and she was about 20 or 21. On one of his records they sing together.

MTG: *Well, I think it's on the memorial album. Among other things there was a song they sang together. That's how I discovered your name and number and such... because I saw there was an Abe Kanegson album on eBay, and I had to do a lot of tracking down to figure out if it was the same Abe Kanegson.*

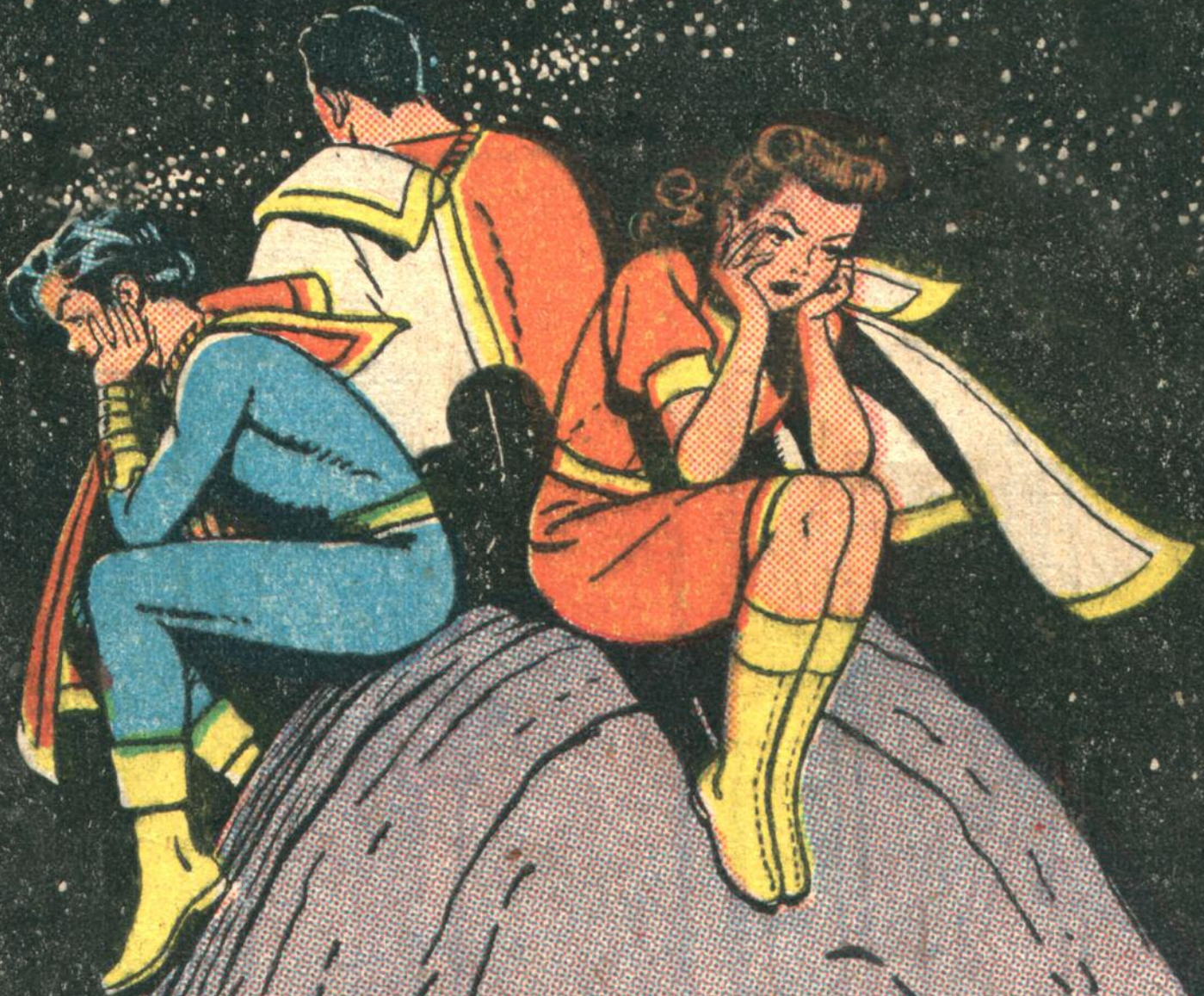
KANEGSON: [laughs] I had no idea such a thing would be on eBay.

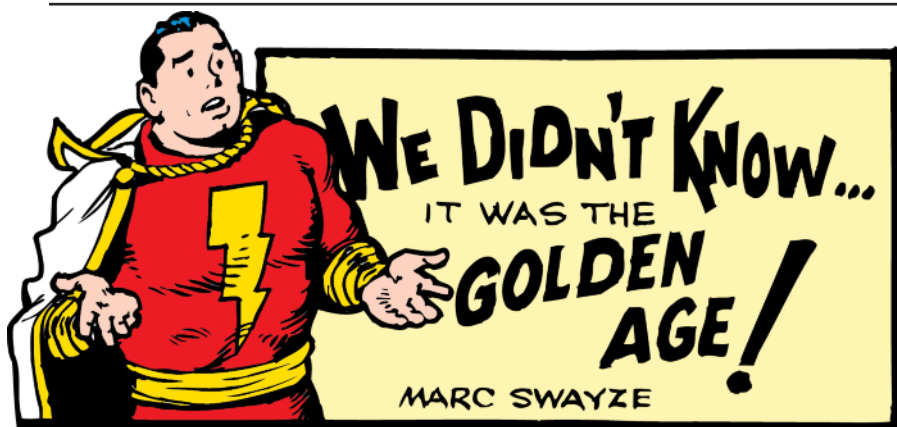
No. 164
October 2011

P.C. HAMERLINCK'S

FCA 

Fawcett Collectors of America





[Art & logo ©2011 Marc Swayze; Captain Marvel © & TM 2011 DC Comics]

[FCA EDITORS NOTE: From 1941-53, Marcus D. Swayze was a top artist for Fawcett Publications. The very first Mary Marvel character sketches came from Marc's drawing table, and he illustrated her earliest adventures, including the classic origin story, "Captain Marvel Introduces Mary Marvel" (Captain Marvel Adventures No. 18, Dec. '42); but he was primarily hired by Fawcett Publications to illustrate Captain Marvel stories and covers for Whiz Comics and Captain Marvel Adventures. He also wrote many Captain Marvel scripts, and continued to do so while in the military. After leaving the service in 1944, he made an arrangement with Fawcett to produce art and stories for them on a freelance basis out of his Louisiana home. There he created both art and stories for *The Phantom Eagle* in *Wow Comics*, in addition to drawing the *Flyin' Jenny* newspaper strip for Bell Syndicate (created by his friend and mentor Russell Keaton). After the cancellation of *Wow*, Swayze produced artwork for Fawcett's top-selling line of romance comics, including *Sweethearts* and *Life Story*. After the company ceased publishing comics, Marc moved over to Charlton Publications, where he ended his comics career in the mid-'50s. Marc's ongoing professional memoirs have been a vital part of FCA since his first column appeared in FCA #54 (1996). Last time we concluded the final installment of John G. Pierce's discussion with Marc from *Comics Interview* #122 (1993). This time around, I talked with Marc about my all-time, unparalleled favorite Swayze illustration.

—P.C. Hamerlinck.]

Introduction by P.C. Hamerlinck

Inside a torch-illuminated, stone-blocked underground dwelling, an elderly, Biblical-looking figure, holding an ancient scroll confidently gazed upon the three prodigious mortals positioned boldly before him. The majestic scene—the first ever interior panel to depict all three members of the Marvel Family together—was captured with profound solemnity, epic brilliance, and applied with cinematographic artistry... and, to this day, perseveres its emotive power as much as it did when I first fixed my eyes on it at eleven years of age.

Twenty years before I owned my well-read copy of *Captain Marvel Adventures* #18 (Dec. '42), I had first assimilated its lead story—"Captain Marvel Introduces Mary Marvel"—judiciously reprinted within the pages of *Shazam!* #8 (Dec. 1973). As an overwhelming majority of our readers are already familiar with that memorable origin tale, I won't go into specifics; I will say that—super-heroics notwithstanding—Billy Batson's pivotal reunion with his long-lost twin sister remains one of the more poignant and moving moments in the rich Shazam mythology. After further cogitating this compelling chronicle, there was another equally extraordinary aspect about it... its illustrations... and that mesmerizing aforesaid opening panel! Whose drawing board did it spring from?

I was a perceptive-enough kid in '73 to know that, with some similarities aside, it wasn't the work of C.C. Beck. I would soon immerse myself in initial interviews in *Steranko's History of Comics* (as well as in an early FCA) of a man who later referred to himself as "the most forgotten of the unknowns, or the most unknown of the forgotten." I had found my mystery artist!

Flash-forward to August, 1994. After tucking in my 10-month-old son, I dash a letter off to Mr. Marc Swayze. Would he join forces with me in my mad mission to resurrect FCA? A lot of correspondence (and "We Didn't Know..." memoirs) have taken place since, with the artist appreciative of my "patience" in continuing to write to "the worst correspondent ever to pick up a pen, as Rod Reed said, and Wendell Crowley concurred."



Making A Splash

Marc Swayze's momentous and venerable opening artwork for "Captain Marvel Introduces Mary Marvel" from *Captain Marvel Adventures* #18 (Dec. 1942). When the landmark Marvel Family drawing was first reprinted in 1973, it made a significant and permanent impression on the FCA editor. [Shazam heroes TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

“Is *This* What I Want To Do For The Rest Of My Life?”

The ROY ALD Interview, Part 2

by Shaun Clancy

Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck

Roy Ald was an editor and writer for Fawcett Publications' comic books from 1946 to 1953, applying his talents to such titles as Wow Comics (featuring Mary Marvel, The Phantom Eagle, Commando Yank, Mr. Scarlet, and his comical creation “Ozzie and Babs”), Captain Midnight, Don Winslow of the Navy, This Magazine Is Haunted, Captain Video, Life Story, and Strange Suspense Stories, as well as developing the groundbreaking Negro Romance comic and Fawcett's early graphic novel experiment Mansion of Evil before editing various Fawcett magazines after the publisher terminated its comics line. Ald later moved on to other noteworthy publishing ventures with various companies, and also authored dozens of books—predominately in the health and fitness fields. Remarkably, the now 90-year-old Ald has himself maintained a high level of physical prowess and aptitude over the years.

Last issue, Roy Ald brought us back to his time in the military, memories of first coming to Fawcett Publications and of editors Wendell



Crowley and Will Lieberman (including reminiscences of Will's fleeting Broadway play), artist George Evans, and the creation of the Fawcett Gold Medal book Mansion of Evil. We pick things up here with interviewer Shaun Clancy and Ald's illuminating background to his Fawcett comic innovation, Negro Romance, and one of that title's African-American artists, Alvin Hollingsworth.

—PCH.

SHAUN CLANCY: What can you tell me about Fawcett's Negro Romance comic book?

ROY ALD: I started the romance comics at

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ALTER EGO #105

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