

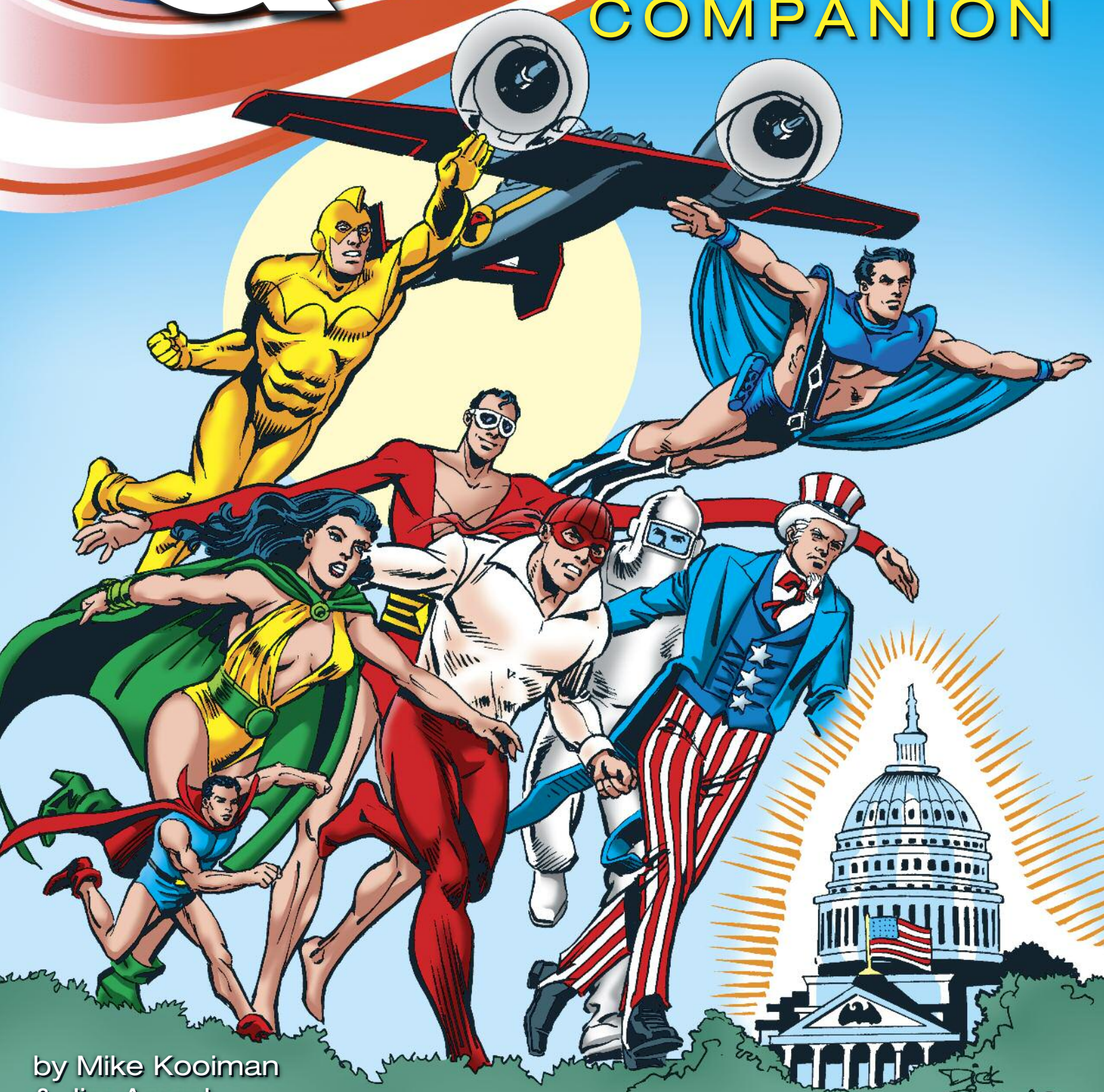
Alter Ego

presents:

A celebration of the forgotten publisher of Plastic Man, from the 1940s to today!

QUALITY

COMPANION



by Mike Kooiman
& Jim Amash

Dick
GIORDANO

Written and designed by Mike Kooiman with invaluable input and research from Jim Amash.
Edited and proofread by John Morrow and Jim Amash.

Front cover and front cover logo design by Michael Kronenberg. Front cover illustration by Dick Giordano, originally commissioned by Roy Thomas several years ago when the idea for this book was first discussed. We had hoped to have Mr. Giordano add Uncle Sam's hidden hand in front of the Capitol Building, but alas, his passing last year prevented that from happening. Color is by Tom Ziuko.

Headline fonts in this book were custom made by Mike Kooiman. They're called *Blimpy* and *King Cole*, and are modeled on the letter forms of Jack Cole.

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Dedications

From Mike Kooiman

To my partner Jeff, and to everyone who has ever tolerated my obsession with comic books. And to John Morrow and Jim Amash for their blind faith and patience.

From Jim Amash

To my wife Heidi, and to all the people who worked at Quality who graciously consented to be interviewed by me over the years.

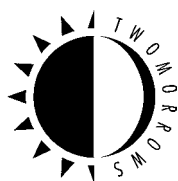
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RESEARCHING QUALITY COMICS

Imagine being an archaeologist and your dream was to reconstruct the skeleton of a rare dinosaur. Not only would you need to identify sites and carefully excavate the fossils, but you must make certain that those bones belonged to your *particular* dinosaur. After laboring for some time, you might discover that your skeleton was missing a small bone in the foot, so you fill that in with some molded plaster that approximates what you need. And at the end of the project, you're *still* left to wonder: "What color was this animal?" "What did it sound like?" "Will I ever know?"

You are reading that skeleton.

To document the Golden Age history of comics, one must become an archaeologist of sorts. Today, most of the men and women behind the creation of Golden Age comics have passed on. What remains is the publishing record itself, plus a variety of interviews conducted by comic pros and fans. For a company such as DC Comics, which has been publishing continuously the whole time, its history has been internally documented and occasionally published along the way. But even though the Quality Comics characters now reside under the DC umbrella, the *Quality Companion* is the first attempt to assemble a full and dedicated document of Quality Comics (absent, perhaps, a foot bone here and there).

The first studies of Quality Comics date back to the early 1970s. These were both part of all-encompassing Golden Age projects, and were conducted when many wartime comics professionals were still around and/or working in the field. Both projects were epic expeditions into the early days of comic books. In 1970–72, Jim Steranko (a comics legend himself) published two volumes of *The Steranko History of Comics*. Volume two included the only known interviews with Quality Comics artists Lou Fine and Reed Crandall, and is one of only two known interviews with Quality's publisher, Busy Arnold.

Another Arnold interview was part of Jerry Bails and Hames Ware's self-published project, *The Who's Who of American Comic Books*. Theirs was an attempt to index all of the works and interconnectedness among Golden Age comics professionals. Bails and Ware sent questionnaires and made visits to countless professionals and fans, and the result was astounding: four volumes of in-

dices published between 1973–1976. *Who's Who* became a model for subsequent comics indexing projects. Additional information relating to Quality Comics came from Henry Steele, who indexed his original comics. A caution to researchers: *Who's Who* was compiled to the best of the researchers abilities, and while it was comprehensive, some data has been corrected over time. Some of the original inaccuracies in the *Who's Who* have migrated into the Grand Comics Database (or "GCD," at comics.org), an otherwise excellent resource. In many instances, we rely on the data in these two databases.

Jerry Bails' 1972 correspondences with Busy Arnold reveal facts that mirror those presented by Steranko. In one of the letters, Arnold provided an astounding list of Quality employees, many of whom were technically employees of the Eisner and/or Iger studios, or freelancers who supplied a great deal of Quality's material. This staff list is amended and expanded by the authors, and appears on page 85.

Note: The name "Quality Comics" was never the company's official legal name. It first appeared on a small seal on the covers of comics dated September 1940.

This book builds on the framework of its forebears, giving credit in every instance where it is due. *The Quality Companion* is a collaborative effort that marries observation and insight. In-depth interviews conducted by Jim Amash for *Alter Ego* magazine included conversations with many major figures from Quality Comics (see the Bibliography for a full list). These interviews are thorough and corroborative, and they provide a near-complete picture of Quality's history. Most of the quotes that you read come from these interviews, unless otherwise cited (read the Endnotes for detailed source information). By cross-referencing Jim's discussions with these giants, a clearer narrative emerges about the character and environment of Quality Comics and Will Eisner's studios. The story is further enhanced by our reading of the Quality Comics archive. This comprehensive study allowed for certain observations about the *fiction* and how it related to *real-world* events.

The story of Quality Comics always returns to the influence of its two major forces: Everett "Busy" Arnold, the business man, and Will Eisner, the creator.

—Mike Kooiman



HAWK STORY

Quality's first masked hero, the Hawk, debuted in its second issue, *Feature Funnies* #2 (Nov. 1937); art by George Brenner.

THE EARLY DAYS OF COMICS

Quality Comics (officially “Comic Favorites, Inc.” and later “Comic Magazines, Inc.”) was one of the first publishers to begin packaging *original* comic book material for sale on newsstands. Comic strips and comic books were not new, but prior to this, comic books had largely reprinted the most popular newspaper strips of the day. As comics publishers started producing their own original material, writers and artists began inventing novel ways to incorporate the humor, adventure and intrigue of their predecessors. Comic books trace their lineage to newspapers, radio serials, classic fantasy and adventure novels, and pulp fiction. As far back as 1929, readers were delighted by popular newspaper strips like “Popeye,” “Dick Tracy,” and “Flash Gordon.” And during the Great Depression, colorful pulp characters like Doc Savage, the Shadow and the Lone Ranger crossed over between pulp magazines and radio programs.

Comic Favorites was not the first comic book publisher to publish new material. **Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson** of National Allied Publications (now DC) came out with *New Fun* in 1935, which featured 20 different strips. Most of these occupied only one page and the themes ranged from historical to adventure to humor. *New Fun* didn’t feature any “super-heroes,” but they weren’t far down the road. *New Fun Comics* #6 (Oct. 1935) contained the first appearance of **Dr. Occult**, who might be regarded as the first original *super-powered* hero created for a comic book. The first *masked hero* created for a comic book has ties to Quality Comics. Masked heroes were not the invention of the comic book medium either. Some of history’s most notable include Zorro (1919), the Lone Ranger (1933), and the Green Hornet (1936).

The Clock was a character who wore a draping black silk mask and (like Dr. Occult and their pulp predecessors) a suit. He first appeared in *Funny Pages* #6 (Nov. 1936), which was published by Comics Magazine Co., Inc., a company which (because of its suc-

cessive owners) is today generally grouped under the umbrella called “Centaur Comics.” Comics Magazine’s founders, William Cook and John Mahon, had direct ties to Quality’s publisher, Everett M. “Busy” Arnold, who facilitated the printing of their comics.

“BUSY” ARNOLD

Before becoming a publisher in his own right, Busy Arnold had considerable knowledge and experience of the printing industry. Everett M. Arnold was born on May 20, 1899, in Providence, Rhode Island, the only child to Earl and Ada Arnold. By most accounts, the Arnold family was reasonably well-off. Everett’s grandfather was a wealthy entrepreneur who owned a textile mill and real estate in Providence. His father, Earl, was the chairman of the math department at Brown University, and died of influenza in 1919 while Busy was in college there.

In no conversational account has Busy Arnold ever been called by the name “Everett.” The origins of his nickname, “Busy,” date back to his childhood school days, where he earned the moniker because of his fidgety predisposition. According to his own son, Dick, “He never sat still.” At Brown University, he majored in history and was very active in sports. As a long distance runner, Dick Arnold claimed that his father once bested a world champion runner. Busy was also a goalie in ice hockey.

This branch of the Arnold family is also directly related to the infamous Revolutionary War defector, Benedict Arnold. Dick Arnold told the tale of his ancestor, Benedict Arnold’s nephew, who at the end of the American Revolution tried to attend West Point, but he was treated “very shabbily.” This nephew returned to New England to attend Yale instead, but most of his descendants attended Brown University. After Busy Arnold graduated from Brown in 1921, he left Providence for New York. There he met his future wife, Claire (“a model of some sort”), and they were married in 1923.

So how did a well-educated man with a background in sports and history become a comic book publisher? It wasn’t because of any particular interest in art or in comic strips. His path to founding Quality Comics was an extension of Busy’s nascent career in printing and sales, and it was guided by Arnold’s own developing sense for good business. He began his first job in the summer of 1920 with R. Hoe & Co., who were printing press manufacturers. His talkative personality was probably an asset as a salesman. He did well in the industry and early in 1922 he moved on to the Goss Printing Press Company of Chicago. His title was Eastern Sales Representative and he was in charge of Goss’s New York office. When their son, Richard E. “Dick” Arnold, was still very young, the family moved to Old Greenwich, Connecticut, and Busy commuted to work in New York City.

In the 1930s, color printing (technically, offset lithography using a halftone process) became more common and Busy Arnold was there to sell the printing presses. He worked at Goss for eleven years, during which time most of his sales were black-only printing presses to large newspapers. He also sold a few color presses, including those to Eastern Color Printing (Waterbury, Conn.), the McClure Newspaper Syndicate (whose Baltimore plant printed color comics



From October 13, 1941: Eisner at his drawing board working on *The Spirit*. The comics feature editor of *The Philadelphia Record* looks over his shoulder. At the left, Quality Comics Publisher Everett “Busy” Arnold. © Estate of Will Eisner.

for newspapers) and the Greater Buffalo Press. His relationships with all of these clients were later instrumental to his own success.

Arnold not only sold the Greater Buffalo Press their machines, but also advised them about the business, and encouraged them to pursue color printing. (Steranko 92) Greater Buffalo's owner was Walter Koessler, who quickly cornered the market for color printing of the comics supplements inserted in Sunday newspapers. In 1933, Arnold left Goss to become Vice President of Greater Buffalo Press and stayed with them until 1937. His first experience with standalone "comic magazines" was in 1935, when the company began printing comics for John Mahon and Bill Cook, a.k.a. Comics Magazine Company, Inc. Cook and Mahon's first title was similarly named *The*

Comics Magazine (later *Funny Pages*), which featured new material that was a mix of humor and adventure, and also part color/part black-and-white. Cook and Mahon's foray into comics was very short-lived (only a year or so), but their titles survived under a succession of owners, the last of which was called Centaur Publications (which is why today Cook-Mahon comics are generally referred to as "Centaur").

When the Greater Buffalo Press was well off the ground, Busy Arnold seized his opportunity. He decided to start his own publishing venture, no doubt based on the models provided by Cook-Mahon and also by Eastern Color, who since 1934 had also reprinted popular strips in a comic book package called *Famous Funnies*.

COMIC FAVORITES, INC.

In 1937, Arnold formed an official partnership with three entities who could supply the raw material for his comics. These partners included the **McNaught Syndicate**, the **Frank Jay Markey Syndicate**, and the **Register and Tribune Syndicate** (Des Moines, Iowa). Together they formed **Comic Favorites, Inc.**

Some of the comic strips that were owned and syndicated by the McNaught Syndicate were previously reprinted in Eastern Color's *Famous Funnies* and now moved into Arnold's first title, *Feature Funnies*. McNaught's strips appeared for the last time in *Famous Funnies* #35 (June 1937). "Joe Palooka," "Dixie Dugan," "The Bungle Family," and "Mickey Finn" reappeared next in Quality's *Feature Funnies* #1, which was cover dated October 1937. Three more McNaught strips, "Flossie," "Jim Swift," and "Toddy" also graced the pages of that issue. Arnold's comic book was (and would always be) printed by the Greater Buffalo Press, as indicated in their indicia.

The Register & Tribune Syn-



Quality publisher Everett "Busy" Arnold and writer/editor Gwen Hansen, at a nightclub circa 1941.

© The respective owner.

dicade supplied five more features, "Jane Arden," "Lena Pry," "Ned Brant," "Off the Record," and "Slim and Tubby." They also later provided Rube Goldberg's popular "Side Show." This syndicate was run by **John and Gardner (Mike) Cowles Jr.**, who had taken the reigns of their father's publishing empire in the late 1920s. It was built on the success of the Des Moines *Register* and *Tribune* newspapers. Both men were Harvard graduates and first served as reporters but moved up quickly. John Cowles (the elder brother) organized the Register and Tribune Syndicate in 1922 and became vice president, general manager and associate publisher the following year. The syndicate offered news, features, and comics and cartoons for sale to other newspapers. The company also published the popular *Look* magazine. The Cowleses were the Midwest answer to William Randolph Hearst (and ironically, the Register & Tribune Syndicate was sold to Hearst's King Features Syndicate in 1986). (Drake)

The remainder of *Feature Funnies'* 64 pages (the standard comic book size for the time) was filled by two features from the Frank Jay Markey Syndicate—"Big Top" and "Lala Palooza"—both of which appeared in Quality Comics through 1950. Printed copyright on "Lala Palooza" suggests that Markey was only independent for a short time, and that his strips went to the Register & Tribune (which was odd if he was affiliated with McNaught; see Endnotes for more, page 207).

QUICKLY ONWARDS

Busy Arnold had arranged for his book to be filled, printed and distributed, but he still needed an editor to run the outfit and to maintain its... quality. Arnold had become good friends with the popular cartoonist **Rube Goldberg** and Busy credited the artist with helping him put together the first issues of *Feature Funnies*. Rube's assistant, **Johnny Devlin**, edited the first few issues, but Rube had just begun "Lala Palooza" and he couldn't spare Johnny for more than a few days each month. Then **Ham Fisher**, creator of "Joe Palooka," relinquished one *his* assistants (he had two more). That was **Ed Cronin**, who came to Comic Favorites as a full-time editor early



The Register & Tribune Syndicate's John (left) and Gardner (Mike) Cowles Jr. This photo appears to be from the 1940s, but no details are available. The photo is provided courtesy of the Drake University, Cowles Library, which possesses the print, but says no other information accompanies it.

© The respective owner.

in 1938. (Arnold, 1 June 1972) In August 1937, Arnold leased office space in Manhattan, at 369 Lexington Avenue. The next spring, the company also hired two agents to sell advertising in the books. ("News and Notes") His circulation manager, **Dan Goldstein**, came from Independent News (a division of National/DC). Goldstein stayed through Quality's end, then returned to Independent News.

Both of these early editors were also accomplished cartoonists. In fact, Devlin took over his boss's chores on "Lala Palooza" in 1939 when Goldberg moved on to bigger things. Rube Goldberg's work appeared through several syndicates. His early works were handled by McNaught but "Boob McNutt" was syndicated by King Features, whom Goldberg left in 1935 for Frank Markey. Under him, he produced "Doc Wright" and "Lala Palooza." Goldberg's "Side Show" was overseen by the Register & Tribune Syndicate and reprinted in *Feature Comics* from 1939–1945. "Side Show" is widely lauded for its regular inclusion of his fantastical "inventions" series. John Devlin's Quality contributions were not insignificant either. He drew features like "Philpot Veep," "Molly the Model," "Archie O'Toole" and "Dewey Drip" all the way through 1949. One of Devlin's editors at Quality, Gill Fox, described him as "a very professional cartoonist. A total pro. He had a big syndicate feature before comics and was an older man. Devlin was good friends with Arnold."

One of Ed Cronin's tasks as editor was also to draw many of Quality's early covers, and he worked on the flagship feature "Jim Swift," and a couple of installments of the "Marksman" in *Smash Comics*. Will Eisner remembered Cronin as "a very sweet, wonderful guy: real solid, good, God-fearing gentleman... I remember that he wore an apron when he was editing to keep his trousers from getting dirty on the job." Others described him as conscientious, which sometimes manifested itself as nervousness.

Busy Arnold probably sensed the prudence in owning and producing his own features because it only took him two issues to call upon independent creators. The second and third issues of *Feature Funnies* saw the introduction of three characters by **George Brenner**: "The Clock" (carried over from Cook-Mahon), "Clip Chance," and "The Hawk." The Hawk was barely different from the Clock. The hero appeared only once but holds the title as Quality's first *original masked hero*, sneaking into *Feature Funnies* #2, one issue ahead of the Clock. **Vernon Henkel** was another early employee. He was hired by Arnold in 1937 and his first feature, "Gallant Knight," appeared in *Feature Funnies* #7 (April 1938). Henkel went on to create many features for Quality through 1946.

More significantly, *Feature* #3 also featured "Hawks of the Seas" which was the contribution of a talented and enterprising young storyteller, **Will Eisner**.

WILL EISNER

William Erwin Eisner was born March 6, 1917, in Brooklyn, New York. Like so many of comics' early creators, he was born the son of Jewish immigrants and was possessed by the desire to forge a better life. Eisner's first "published" artwork appeared in the DeWitt Clinton High School newspaper. From there, his investigation into the art of storytelling began to take unique form.

His ambitious path to comics stardom began with a partnership with **Samuel Maxwell "Jerry" Iger**—a cartoonist who was more successful as a salesman. Iger was under contract with John Henle of Henle Publications to produce a new magazine *WOW! What a Magazine*. Eisner was referred to Iger by Bob Kane (née Kahn), an



Iger employee who later co-created Batman. For Henle, Eisner created "Harry Karry" and "The Flame," but the company was unstable and

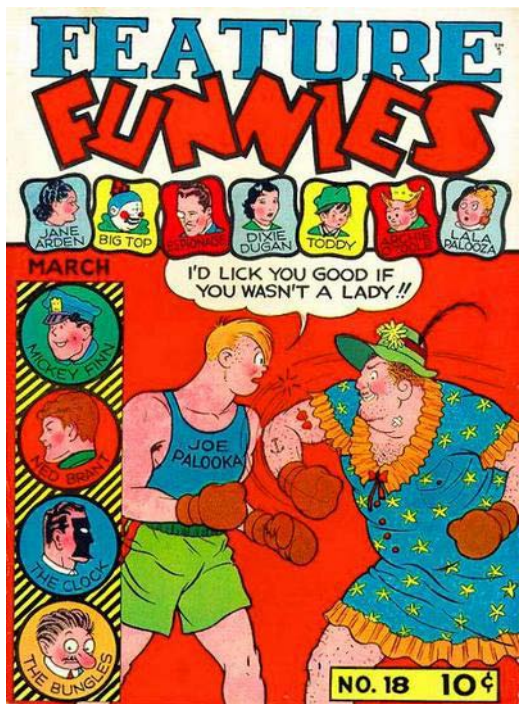
Will Eisner in 1941.

© Estate of Will Eisner.

WOW! folded after four issues. Meanwhile the comic book industry was starting to grow and Eisner saw an opportunity to supply for the increasing demand. At just age nineteen, Will ponied up \$15 to secure the rent for a new office and Eisner & Iger was born, housed at 299 Madison Avenue.

A list of the artists who worked for the Eisner & Iger shop reads like a comics pantheon. These fledgling artists included Bob Kane, Jack Kirby, Lou Fine, Alex Blum, George Tuska, Bob Powell, and Chuck Cuidera. Not only did Eisner create or co-create most of the shop's features, but he also acted as boss, editor and art director. Unlike most comic book creators of the time, Eisner and Iger apparently retained ownership of some of their characters—it depended on one's outlook on the medium. Creators who were familiar with the business knew that owning a "hit" could net significant revenues. But many early comic book artists considered their work a mere jumping stone to greater things, and never quibbled over copyrights (indeed, a good number of artists moved on to commercial art or syndicated work after the war). Eisner was a diamond in the rough—one of few men who from the start recognized the potential for this new medium. To him, it was important to retain ownership of his properties, and to take pride in his work. (See also "Jerry Iger's Studios," page 13.)

When *Comic Favorites* started, Eisner & Iger had already been supplying original features for publishers like Fox and Fiction House. The material was provided complete and ready for publication. Eisner described the shop as "one big classroom. I sat at the head of the classroom, and on the right-hand wall, facing me, were the lettering people. Jack Kirby sat on the right-hand side of the room and Bob Powell sat in the middle of the room. Lou Fine sat next to him. People would get up and walk around to see what the other guys were doing." Jerry Iger



Notice the change in the logo between *Feature Funnies* #18 and #19 (1938). Was it because of Eastern Color's lawsuit?



A SPIRIT RISES

When Arnold began his partnership with McNaught, the syndicate had pulled its features from Eastern Color's *Famous Funnies*. Did Eastern Color bear a grudge for this "swipe"? According to Steranko's *The Steranko History of Comics* vol. 2 (p. 92), Eastern Color sued Arnold's fledgling company, not about the features but for infringing upon the use of the term "funnies." The case was dropped without damages when Arnold proved that the word "funnies" was a colloquialism, not a trademark. Even though he'd won the case, astute readers might have noticed that late in 1938, a slight change was made to the logo on the cover of *Feature Funnies* #19 (April 1938). Now the word "Fea-

ture" was emphasized instead of the word "Funnies." Two months later, the second word of the title was changed as well, and the title became *Feature Comics*.

A turning point in Quality's partnership with McNaught probably began brewing in 1939. Busy's other partner, the Register & Tribune Syndicate, was represented by their Sales Manager, **Henry P. Martin**. Martin was the Register's primary liaison with Arnold and with Quality's increasing success, he took a more active role in guiding its future (see sidebar, opposite). The two devised an ambitious plan that included the buyout of McNaught's and Markey's shares and an expansion to the line. It made sense. In the beginning, Busy Arnold was concerned primarily with *filling* his books. Now with shops like Eisner & Iger churning out reliable material, there were more comics available. So why should the Register continue to share profits with McNaught, who were essentially their rivals (albeit friendly)?

By this time Arnold was still publishing only *Feature* and *Smash*, but he was poised to grow. Records printed in the *New York Times* indicate that he renewed his lease at 369 Lexington in April 1939 ("Quarters Leased"), but later that year Arnold moved the company to offices in the Gurley Building at 322 Main Street in downtown Stamford, Connecticut. (The move is also reflected in the comics' indicia for issues cover dated February 1940, which would have been sold in December 1939.) Quality's office in this multi-story building housed a modest staff including editors and a very small production department.

Henry Martin and his employers had noticed the increasing viability of comic books and saw a unique opportunity to capitalize on the new medium by using their existing syndication network. Newspaper publishers knew that a certain amount of their Sunday sales were attributable to the color funny pages. Now having a comic book partner, the Register & Tribune stood to capitalize on this. Martin's idea was imagined as a coverless 16-page comic book that would be inserted into Sunday newspapers along with the traditional comic strips. Busy pegged Will Eisner as the man to create it.

Arnold and Will Eisner characterized their partnership differently. Eisner summarized it best: "I regarded him as a partner and he thought of me as an employee." This is borne out when one reads

Fox had no assistant, but with the company expanding, he pulled in Tony DiPreta and Zoltan Szenics to letter. Szenics also helped check art and proofread scripts. His wife, Terry, became a letterer, too.

Fox also recalled a conversation that characterized the editor's relationship with Eisner & Iger, saying "I was athletic, and Iger was a little guy. There was something that I didn't like in one of [Iger's] packaged art jobs that came in, so I said to him on the telephone, 'Don't do this anymore.' And he said he'd punch me in the nose! This was long distance, and I thought this guy was crazy! He wouldn't have said that to me in person. Arnold and I got a big laugh out of that. Iger was not liked by too many people."

Eisner, Fox said, was liked well enough. He was "as a person... always very pleasant. And he was always a genius." Few disputed Eisner's worth but unlike Arnold and others in the Quality shop who socialized outside of work, Eisner maintained a professional distance from the staff. Gill and others sometimes spoke of Eisner as a penny-pincher. In his defense, Eisner was a middle man, and weighed by heavy responsibilities. His features—and they were many—were all delivered ready-to-print.

Busy Arnold hired his artists and writers, but handed off the physical part of the comics publishing. In day-to-day matters, artists worked with the editor. When a freelancer came to deliver his work, Arnold would verify it and then his secretary would cut a check. Publishers like Fox were notorious for their late payments, so Arnold's prompt payment was a boon to his contributors.

It's difficult not to overuse the word "quality" itself when describing Arnold's product, but it's obvious that he took pride in his business. Today we generally refer to Arnold's company as "Quality Comics," but as it was with DC for many years, this was only a cosmetic title. It stems from the "Quality Comic Group" seal, which was placed on all the company's covers beginning with most of their September 1940 issues.



Guardineer's "Mouthpiece" (August 1941), and Vernon Henkel's "The Whistler" (June 1945), all of which wore domino masks and suits. In early 1942, even George Brenner's "The Clock" traded his silk drape mask for one more like the Spirit's.

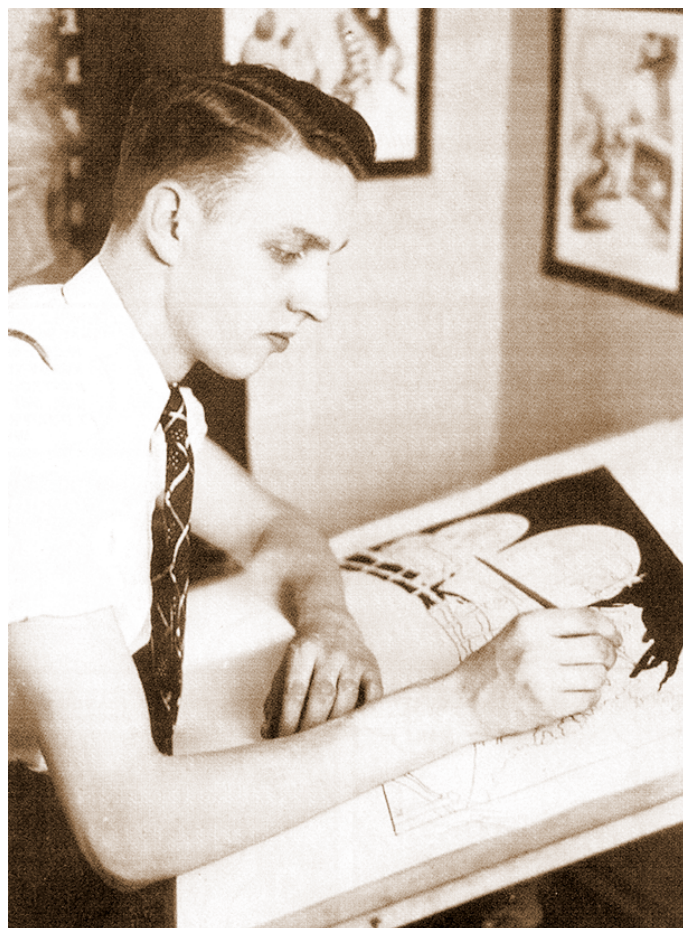
It was now mid-1940 and Arnold had gotten a better sense of what would sell a comic book. Lou Fine's work began appearing front and center. His graceful figures were distributed across the line: "The Ray" in *Smash Comics*; "The Red Bee" in *Hit Comics*; "Uncle Sam" in *National Comics*; and "Black Condor" in *Crack Comics*. He even drew some of the covers for these magazines, a duty previously left for Quality's editors. When things got too busy, Gill Fox began farming the covers out to other artists. Fine's covers were works of art unto themselves. In his hands, even a ridiculous character such as the Red Bee became majestic. Shortly after the reorganization, Busy Arnold coaxed Lou Fine away from Eisner's studio by offering him a higher pay rate. As Gill Fox told it, "Arnold told Eisner to give [Fine] a raise. Two weeks later, Arnold asked Lou if he had gotten a raise. Lou said, 'No.' Arnold said, 'Come see me in Stamford.' He gave him good money and that's when the change happened." After that Busy set Lou up with his own studio in Tudor City, upstairs from Eisner's. The exact time of Lou Fine's defection from the Eisner studio to Busy Arnold cannot be dated precisely. Many references to Fine at Tudor City (made in accounts from *Alter Ego*) describe Fine as having already moved into his own studio. The move did not affect the features on which Fine worked.

Will Eisner was already unhappy about Fine's defection, and he was more vocal when Arnold attempted to hire Bob Powell away, too. Eisner forced Arnold to back down and withdraw his offer to hire him. Powell was incensed, and accused Eisner of ruining his career. Bob soon also left Eisner's studio and began freelancing from his home. He still continued to work *for* Eisner, producing "Mr. Mystic" until his enlistment. For the same reasons as Lou Fine, there isn't sufficient evidence to precisely date Powell's move.

STRETCHING THEMSELVES FURTHER

Quality Comics outlived some of its early rivals but its success came only in carefully measured steps. Arnold admitted that before the war, the only titles that made money were *Feature* and *Smash Comics*. These made up for poor sales on the remainder of the line. (Steranko 92) Now with the partnership with Eisner in place, Busy Arnold continued to develop the company's image by adding to his stable of artists. His keen eye landed on the work of two artists whose contributions would propel Quality's most successful titles: **Jack Cole** and **Reed Crandall**.

Jack Cole's presence at Quality began with very humble cartoons. Who would have guessed, based on his previous work, that he was poised to become one of comics' early super-stars? Cole came from a modest blue-collar family in New Castle, Pennsylvania. As an artist, he was self-taught. Despite the lack of formal training, he possessed



an innate ability to distill current events, literature and pop culture into comic forms. After marrying,

Jack Cole at his drawing board in 1938. © Dick Cole.

Jack moved to New York to try to break into the cartooning business.

Like many hopefuls, his first comics work was done under the direction of the Harry "A" Chesler shop, where he joined other budding talents such as Mort Meskin, Charlie Biro, Bob Wood, and Gill Fox. One of his first original adventure features was 1937's "Mantoka," for Centaur. He gained a higher profile in 1939 for his bold covers on Lev Gleason's *Silver Streak Comics*, which sported the gnarly hand and fangs of the Claw and his foe, the original black-and-red Daredevil.

In 1939, Cole left the Chesler shop and began freelancing for several companies, such as MLJ. He really began to grow when he started working for Quality Comics in 1940, on humor features like "Wun Cloo" (created by editor Gill Fox, his former Chesler mate) and "Slap Happy Pappy." Cole was awarded more room for his talents to shine when he created his first *costumed* hero for Quality: Midnight.

As mentioned above, "Midnight" was blatantly designed to imitate Eisner's Spirit (this, on the orders of Busy Arnold, who wanted a similar feature in case Eisner died in the war). To his credit, Cole did approach Eisner personally to ask his opinion. Eisner told Jim Amash,

1923: "Charlie Chan" Earl Derr Biggers
1928: "The Saint," Leslie Charteris (on film in 1938)
1928-29: "Buck Rogers," Philip Francis Nowlan
1929: "Kull of Atlantis," Robert E. Howard
1929: "Popeye," E. C. Segar

1930: "The Shadow," Street and Smith
1931: "Dick Tracy," Chester Gould
1932: Johnny Weissmuller in Tarzan, the Ape Man
1932: "Conan the Barbarian," Robert E.

1933: "The Spider," Popular Publications
1933: The Bride of Fu Manchu, Sax Rohmer
1934: "Flash Gordon," Alex Raymond
1934: "Mandrake the Magician," Lee Falk
1936: "The Phantom," Lee Falk

1929-32: "Betty Boop" in cartoons by Fleischer Studios
1930: Gladiator, Philip Wylie

Howard
1933: "The Lone Ranger" on radio
1933: "Doc Savage," Street and Smith

1936: "The Green Hornet"
1937: Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

ity Comics; instead they were published by “**Vital Publications.**” Vital was a sort of “proxy” publisher run by William C. Popper, who had paper quotas to spare. Arnold struck a deal with Popper in order to put out these five issues. According to the Grand Comics Database, “This company ... published material on behalf of Quality Comics but was not directly associated with it.” Just to be safe, the Vital books bore the statement “This book has been manufactured under wartime conditions in full compliance with all orders and regulations of the War Production Board.” In *Plastic Man* #1 (1943), it adds, “from material prepared and supplied by Comic Magazines.”

In tone, comics during wartime exhibited a dichotomy. The literature of the day sought to represent the realities of war and some Quality features got bloodier, especially in *Military Comics* where the stories held no punches when depicting the cruelties of war. Readers routinely saw people being hanged, and women and children endangered. Most *new* features, however, got funnier (or tried). When super-heroes were on the rise, “straight” comic book features were regularly injected with masked men, monsters and random weirdos from the societal fringe. By 1943–44, the trend had reversed and even the super-hero features were lightening up. If Eisner’s “Espionage” and “Doll Man” were the templates for Quality’s formative years, then Cole’s “Plastic Man” was setting the tone by 1943.

In “Plastic Man,” Jack Cole had unwittingly created a sub-genre of sorts within super-heroes. Similar strips that were originally conceived with a humorous edge—the Jester, Quicksilver and Midnight—were also among Quality’s longest running. Some established features changed significantly in tone during the war. Heroes like Human Bomb, the Clock and the Death Patrol (of all things) became more kid- or sidekick-centered, or just more humorous overall. Features like these represented half of Quality’s longest running characters. Also in 1943, cartoonists like Al Stahl and **André LeBlanc** stepped in on new features like Blimpy, Inkie, and Intellectual Amos, which were solidly “cartoony,” yet retained some of the metaphysical elements of super-hero adventures.

There were other factors in the comics’ marketplace influencing this trend. By this time, an unassuming redhead from Riverdale was exploding in cultural popularity. **Archie Andrews** first appeared in MLJ’s *Pep Comics* #22 (Dec. 1941), and the company quickly expanded its *oeuvre* to include all his pals. And over at Fawcett, “Captain Marvel” was a warm, charming read that delivered a character who deftly embodied a kid’s perspective (Marvel was actually a grown up version of the boy, Billy Batson), plus the wondrous powers of a demigod. Fawcett’s line also grew to include Cap’s great supporting cast.

The super-hero was on the decline, and in late 1943, Quality dropped more than a dozen features, which included a fair number of super-heroes: Spider Widow, Spider, Black Condor, Inferior Man, the Clock, Kid Patrol, Kid Dixon, Cyclone Cupid, Phantom Lady, Cyclone, Zero, and Super Snooper. *Military Comics* was, perhaps logically, the first to move on. By 1944, the only super-heroes all that remained in that title were Blackhawk, Death Patrol and the Sniper, none of which were *classic* super-heroes.

It’s somewhat sad to read the final adventures of these heroes, knowing that most creators considered the characters as not just

expendable, but forgettable. For fans who favored super-heroes, it might have been disappointing. Nevertheless, comics continued to sell like hotcakes throughout the war—and even greater beyond it. If Quality Comics was the hydra, then there were plenty of heads left to replace those heroes axed by the changing marketplace.

POST-WAR

The Japanese surrendered to the Allies on August 15, 1945, and America’s soldiers began returning home. Some of Quality’s previous talent returned to the company, including Reed Crandall, Will Eisner, Gill Fox, Paul Gustavson, and Chuck Cuidera. Some left. The most notable departure was Lou Fine. He hadn’t fought in the war, but had served his time in the trenches at Quality, as the primary contributor to “The Spirit” throughout the war. Fine had finally begun to score high-paying commercial work, and left comic books for good (though he later drew two newspaper strips as well as some commercial comics, and a feature for *Boy’s Life*). Bob Powell returned to comics, but not to any of Quality’s features. Jack Cole continued to work on Plastic Man.

When Eisner returned, those who had filled in for him were eager to move on, so he was faced with the challenge of rebuilding his staff. He rented a new studio at 37 Wall Street (Andelman 91), and hired a raft

of new talent to help ease him back into a regular schedule on *The Spirit Section*. **John Spranger** handled pencils while **Jerry Grandanetti** drew backgrounds. In the young **Jules Feiffer** (who won a Pulitzer in 1986), Eisner found a kindred soul who viewed comics in a richer way. Letterers **Ben Oda** and **Abe Kanegson** rounded out the recruits while **Klaus Nordling** and Andre LeBlanc continued to contribute regularly. (92)

At this time, George Brenner was still the editor, and Quality gained another returning vet. Before entering the service, **Al Grenet** had worked for Jerry Iger, but when he came back, Iger (illegally) refused to rehire him. Grenet went to Quality’s offices, and was lucky to find them in need. Grenet began by doing odd jobs like drawing panel borders, erasing and cleaning pages, or pasting up lettering. He went on to draw backgrounds and color and letter covers,

and his hard work got him promoted to assistant editor.

In 1949 **Harry Stein** succeeded George Brenner as editor-in-chief, but he remained in the post for only a year before he was fired. Grenet became Stein’s successor. The two of them had become friends, but this upheaval broke their bond. According to Grenet, Busy Arnold had come to the conclusion that Stein “wasn’t working out” at Quality (a decision which mystified Grenet). After his termination, Stein blamed *Grenet* and became bitter towards him, even writing to Arnold to suggest he should have hired a janitor before Al! Grenet responded with a half-cocked call to Harry from which came no resolution. Al’s tenure was considerably longer; he oversaw Quality’s output all the way through its final days in 1956.

Grenet was not unfamiliar with Quality’s titles. His history with Iger predated the split with Eisner. Back then he was primarily a



Quality’s last editor, Al Grenet with an artist for *Ebony* magazine, 1955. © Al Grenet.

COPYRIGHT

Copyrights and the issue of public domain are persistently hot topics among Golden Age comics fans. Recent revivals of such characters by Alan Moore in *Terra Obscura* and Alex Ross in *Project Super-powers* have piqued more of fandom's curiosity about the subject. There are many details about copyright and trademark laws that hinder the layperson's comprehension. This section attempts to outline the most basic laws. For most Quality enthusiasts, the question that comes quickly to mind is, "If DC Comics owns the Quality material, why are the original comics considered public domain?" Our answer addresses the difference between *copyrights* and *trademarks*.

The only "record" available to the public regarding arrangements between Busy Arnold and DC Comics comes from Arnold himself. He twice stated that he sold his *titles* to DC in 1956. In a letter to Jerry Bails, he said, "I sold all of our titles to National Periodical Publications with the exception of *Blackhawk* which they leased from me on a royalty basis." (Arnold, 15 May 1972) No dates accompanied that statement. Jim Steranko said, "He sold what was left to DC in 1956." (Steranko vol. 2, 109) Nobody knows the language of that deal, which could have included any number of stipulations. By 1956, DC was the undisputed industry leader. They continued to publish only five Quality titles, which were most likely selected for their market appeal and viability.

Edward Love is a researcher who has actually pored through the Library of Congress' card catalogs in search of documentation for original comic book copyright registrations. Love found proper original registration for most of Quality's and DC's titles, but no copyright *renewals* for any Quality material (more on that in a bit). He gained some additional insight from the people who worked there:

According to the people at the Library of Congress, when a publisher buys out another publisher, the common practice is to buy only the titles (trademarks) and not the copyrights. Research bears this out as there is no record of a transfer of copyrights from Quality to National (DC). (Love)

Indeed, the evidence suggests that DC owns the rights to all Quality trademarks, which includes title names like "Crack Comics" and character names like "Plastic Man."

To borrow an example from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, there are three ways to protect intellectual property: patents, trademarks, and copyrights. If you invent a new kind of vacuum cleaner, you would *patent* the invention itself; you could register

a *trademark* to protect the brand name of the vacuum; and you could register *copyrights* for any advertisements used to market the product.

For a publisher like DC, this means registering *trademarks* for names "DC Comics" or "Justice League," and *copyrights* for their actual comic books or animated films. It also extends to the rights for them to sell and license things such as action figures under those names.

HOW COPYRIGHTS WORK

Copyrights are administered by the Copyright Office, which is a division of the Library of Congress. Holding a copyright entitles the owner to republish their work and also to produce additional works derived from the original. (There are some well-known cases involving Superman and Superboy which deal with the idea of "derivation.") So how does copyright law apply to original Quality Comics materials?

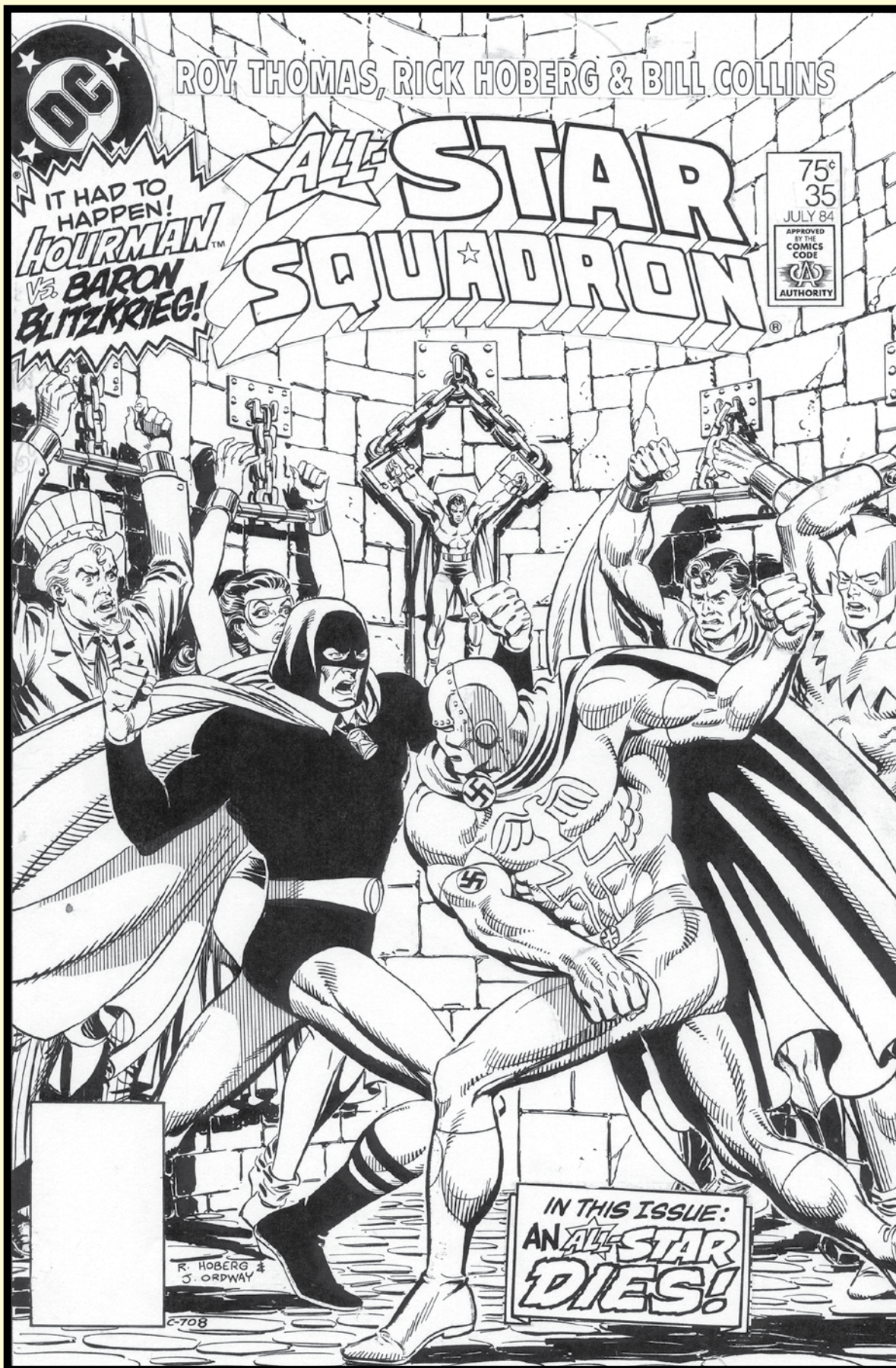
At the time of their publication, wartime comic books were governed by the Copyright Act of 1909. In the indicia of each Quality Comics issue, you'll find the copyright notice "Copyright 19XX by Comic Magazines, Inc." Then as today, the simple act of publishing this copyright notice automatically entitled the company to copyright protection—whether it was officially *filed* with the U.S. Copyright Office or not (Quality did also formally register its books, see below).

In the 1940s–50s, copyright protection was good for 28 years. Even though Quality Comics ceased publishing well before those 28 years expired, Busy Arnold would have owned the rights for most of his comics into the 1970s. After 28 years, he would have had to *officially* renew them with the

These pages, from the 1940 *Catalog of Copyright Entries*, show the entries for DC's *Action Comics* (left) and Quality's *Crack Comics* (right), diligently registered by the publishers with the Copyright Office in the year of their publication. Pages digitized by Google Books.

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DC
UNIVERSITY

The finished art from the story arc that told the Freedom Fighters' "Golden Age" origin—including the death of the Red Bee! From *All-Star Squadron* #35 (1984); art by Rick Hoberg and Jerry Ordway. Scan courtesy of Rick Shurgin. © DC Comics.

THE QUALITY LEGACY AT DC COMICS

This section provides a general overview of characters and titles published by DC. For in-depth discussions about each, see the corresponding profile in that section, which begins on page 86.

POST-1956

Although Quality Comics sold as well or better than its contemporaries, by the time the company folded in 1956, the age of super-heroes had long passed. For this reason—despite the fact that some titles were continued by DC—most of Quality’s heroes didn’t see the light of day again for decades. Sadder still, by that time, their former glory was always eclipsed by the popularity of DC’s own heroes.

Quality Comics’ presence in the DC Comics universe has unfolded slowly and quietly over time. After Quality ceased publishing in December 1956, DC continued to publish only four of Quality’s best-selling titles, picking up *Blackhawk* with #108, *G.I. Combat* with #44, *Heart Throbs* with #47, and *Robin Hood Tales* with #7. Some of these series continued to be successful for many years. In more recent times though, revivals of *Blackhawk* have failed to build a substantial following.

SILVER AGE AND BEYOND

It wasn’t until the mid-’60s (when the Silver Age revival of super-heroes exploded) that DC tried exploring the potential of more Quality properties. Most notably, in 1966 DC relaunched Quality’s second-best seller, *Plastic Man*. His first DC appearance was *House of Mystery* #160 (July 1966), but the solo series that followed lacked any of Jack Cole’s vibrancy and the series lasted for only ten issues. (The series was picked up again in the 1970s for ten more issues and Plastic Man also starred in a Saturday morning cartoon from 1979–81.)

In 1972, writer Len Wein began reintroducing Golden Age characters in the pages of *Justice League of America*. In issue #107 (Sept. 1973), he gathered **Uncle Sam**, **Phantom Lady**, **Doll Man**, **Human Bomb**, the **Ray** and **Black Condor** together for the first time as the **Freedom Fighters**. Issues #100–102 had featured DC’s own Golden Age heroes, the Seven Soldiers of Victory (and #135–137 reintroduced some Fawcett Comics heroes, too). DC’s solution for characters that came from other publishers was to sequester them on a “parallel Earth” in the DC multiverse. Fawcett Comics characters inhabited “Earth-S” (for Shazam), and Quality characters made their home on “**Earth-X**” (“X,” originally a swastika). The twist for Earth-X was that the Nazis had *won* the war! After the Justice League helped the Freedom Fighters take care of that problem, DC spun the Freedom Fighters into their own short-lived series in 1976. It was abruptly canceled in 1978 along with scores of other titles amid the “DC Implosion.”

There was little room for Quality heroes after the Implosion, when hard times forced the company to cancel half their titles. Writer **Roy Thomas**—who was also a Golden Age enthusiast—embraced DC’s acquisitions when he created the **All-Star Squadron** in 1981. Thomas used Phantom Lady and Plastic Man as anchor members, and reintroduced dozens more Quality characters over the course of the series. He also provided a Golden Age origin for the Freedom Fight-



ers in *All-Star Squadron* #31–35. In that story (plus issue #50), readers learned that the Quality heroes had migrated from Earth-Two (the home of DC’s own Golden Age characters) to Earth-X. *All-Star Squadron* brought many Quality characters back into the consciousness of DC fans and introduced them to a whole new generation of readers.

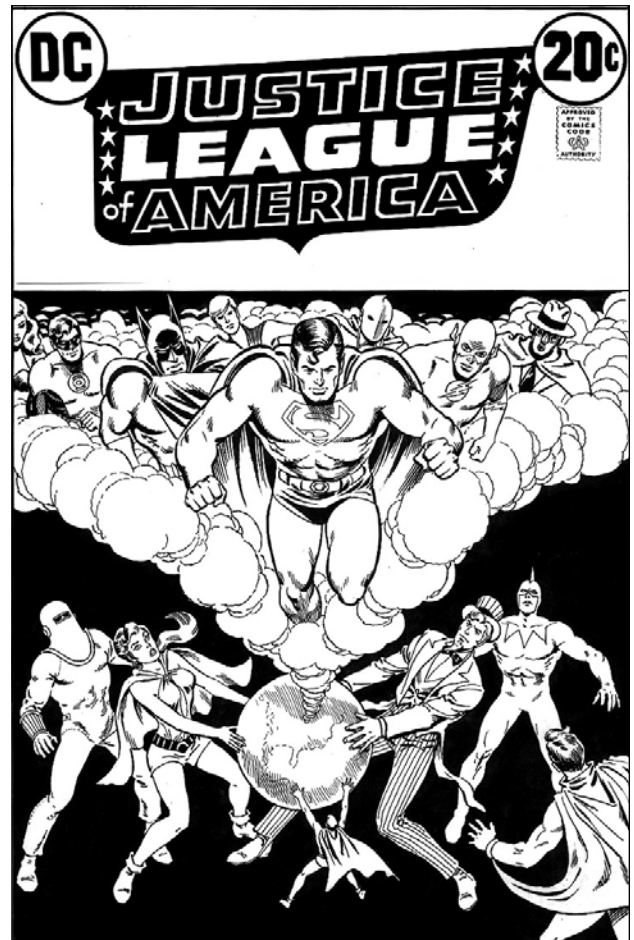
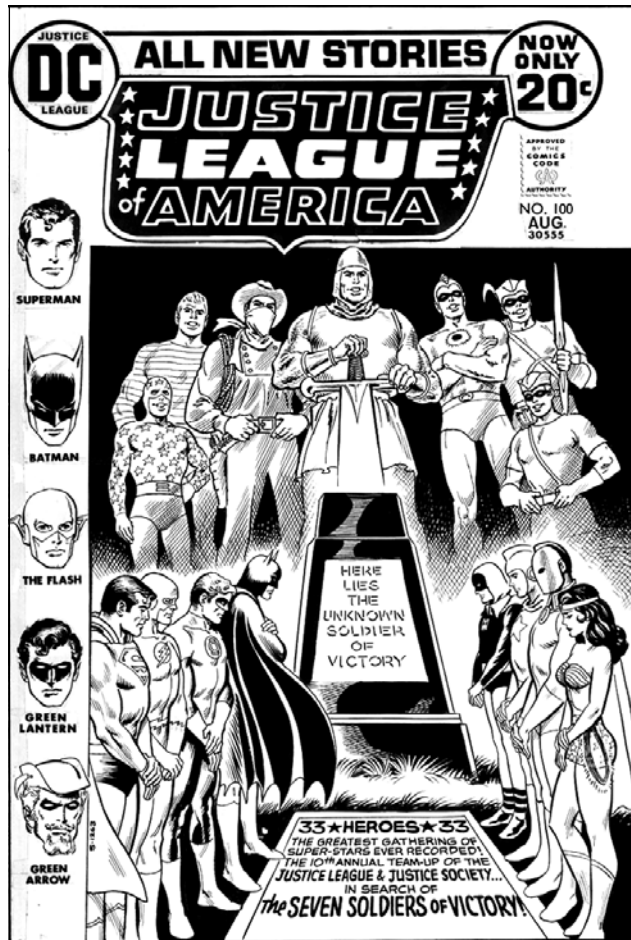
In a strange but logical move, another successful Quality property, **Kid Eternity**, was attached to Fawcett’s Captain Marvel mythos. (He’d also been featured in *Secret Origins* #4, 1973, which reprinted his origin.) This was inspired by the similar origin stories between Kid Eternity and Captain Marvel Junior, who had both lost their grandfathers to Nazis while on the water. Beginning with *World’s Finest* #282 (May 1981), E. Nelson Bridwell turned the previously nameless Kid Eternity into Christopher “Kit” Freeman, Cap Junior’s brother. Kit was a guest star throughout the Marvel Family’s appearances in *World’s Finest* and *Adventure Comics*. But Kid Eternity’s link to the Fawcett heroes was broken by the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which collapsed DC’s parallel Earths into a single universe. Then the character was spun by Grant Morrison into his own series, published under DC’s

Top: Robby Reed uses the H-Dial to become Plastic Man, from *House of Mystery* #160 (1966); art by Jim Mooney. **Bottom:** DC’s new Plastic Man, and his pal, Gordy Trueblood, from *Plastic Man* #3 (1967); art by Win Mortimer.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH LEN WEIN

Conducted August 11, 2011 by Mike Kooiman



© DC Comics.

Len Wein is an acclaimed writer in the comic book industry, the co-creator of the Swamp Thing, with Berni Wrightson. His resume includes writing and editing for loads of iconic super-hero comics, and TV writing. In the early 1970s, Len wrote for multiple publishers. He worked under editor Julius Schwartz at DC, in a time when the company began adding “parallel Earths” to its universe. Wein began writing *Justice League of America* with issue #100 (Aug. 1972), and reintroduced some of DC’s own Golden Age heroes, the Seven Soldiers of Victory, in a classic three-issue megacrossover between the JLA and the Justice Society. A year later, he took a look at DC’s stable of Quality characters and assembled seven colorful heroes into the **Freedom Fighters**. My conversation with him touched briefly on his role during this pivotal time.—Mike Kooiman

Mike Kooiman: *You were writing quite a lot of material in the early 1970s, between several publishers including Marvel and Gold Key. Was the workload different or was it somehow easier to write as much as you did back then?*

Len Wein: It’s always easier when you’re early in your career. You haven’t used up the words yet. It’s not a matter of how many com-

panies, it’s a matter of the enthusiasm and the “ignorance of youth.”

Len Wein made a splash in the early ‘70s by bringing back lots of Golden Age heroes from DC and Quality’s stables. Here is the finished art for the covers of those landmark issues. Left: *Justice League of America* #100 (Aug. 1972); art by Nick Cardy. Original artwork courtesy of Albert Moy. Right: *Justice League of America* #107 (Sept./Oct. 1973); art by Nick Cardy. Original artwork courtesy of Michael Finn.

panies, it’s a matter of the enthusiasm and the “ignorance of youth.”

MK: *I see a lot of crossovers in your early DC work, like the Elongated Man (who has parallels to Plastic Man). You used him in Justice League as well as the Phantom Stranger. Did you consciously try to populate Justice League with some of your favorite characters from other books?*

Wein: Oh sure! They’re more fun to write. I felt the Elongated Man was a power that was needed in the Justice League. We didn’t have anybody who could do that, so I put him in for that reason. As for the Phantom Stranger, it was fun for me to write him.

MK: *Did you consider the Stranger an official member, or just a good counter-balance and guest star? I think there might have been some writers after you who made that a bit ambiguous.*

MK: I'd like to skip ahead to your involvement when DC published *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Online sources credit you with the writing for some of the *Who's Who* series, and you wrote some *Secret Origins* tales following that. What was your involvement with the *Who's Who* project?

Wein: I was the editor as well as one of the head writers on it. I got to play around with some of their characters and sort of clean up the DC continuity.

MK: *The Grand Comics Database* credits you with the project through the letter 'L.'

Wein: I moved to California about halfway through the project. I stopped being the editor and at that point Bob Greenberger took over. But I continued to write occasional character bios.

MK: So when you moved to California, how did your relationship change with DC?

Wein: It took a while. I was still writing two to three books a month like *Wonder Woman*, *Blue Beetle*, then *Gunfire*. Then I moved over to Disney where I was Editor-in-Chief of Disney Comics, overseeing the entire output of their comic book line.

MK: There was a lot of reinvention during the *Crisis* but the Quality heroes were left as is. Were you involved with the "ins and outs" of how the new universe would work?

Wein: No, I was in L.A. by then so I wasn't involved in that. 🐼

SELECTED DC COMICOGRAPHY:

- *House of Secrets* #92 (July 1971)
- *The Phantom Stranger* #14–26 (1971–73)
- *Swamp Thing* #1–13 (1972–74)
- *Justice League of America* #100–114 (1972–74)
- *Korak, Son of Tarzan* #46–51 (1972–73)
- *Batman* #307–327 (1979–80)
- *Green Lantern* #172–186 (1984–85)
- *Who's Who* #1–13 (1985–86)
- *Legends* #1–6 (1986–87)
- *Blue Beetle* #1–24 (1986–88)
- *Wonder Woman* #3–16 (1987–88)
- *Gunfire* #1–13 (1994–95)
- *Human Target* #1–6 (2010)
- *DCU: Legacies* #1–10 (2010–11)



Created by Len Wein and Dick Dillin

FIRST APPEARANCE: *Justice League of America* #107 (Sept./Oct. 1973)

FEATURED APPEARANCES:

- *All-Star Squadron* #31–35, 50
- *Black Lightning* vol. 1 #11
- *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1–2
- *DC Comics Presents* #62
- *JSA* #49
- *Justice League of America* #107–108
- *Justice League Unlimited* #17
- *Secret Origins* vol. 2 #19, 26
- *Young All-Stars* #27

SERIES:

- *Freedom Fighters*, 15 issues (1976)—no longer in continuity
- *Uncle Sam & the Freedom Fighters*, 8-issues (2006–07)
- *Uncle Sam & the Freedom Fighters* vol. 2, 8-issue limited series (2007–08)
- *Freedom Fighters* vol. 2, 9 issues (2010–11)

The Freedom Fighters is DC Comics team composed of characters originally published by Quality Comics. Decades after DC's acquisition, these heroes were given a home in the DC Universe on a parallel universe called "Earth-X." In their first appearance, they met the Justice League (*Justice League of America* #107). Later, Roy Thomas crafted a proper "Golden Age" backstory for them in *All-Star Squadron* #31–35 (1984). In Quality Comics, no such team existed.

Most of the Freedom Fighters' early adventures relied heavily

on events related to Earth-X, where the Nazis had won World War II. These stories were based on the legacy of their Nazi battle, and their travels between parallel Earths. When DC published *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, all parallel Earths were eliminated, and Earth-X was gone. This threw the Freedom Fighters' original appearance, their 1976 series, and some *All-Star Squadron* appearances completely out of continuity. Roy Thomas was able to rectify the situation while *All-Star Squadron* was still being published. In the new, streamlined DC Universe, he chose to simply meld the Quality heroes' histories with that of DC's own Golden Age heroes.

For a less confusing read, the profile that begins here represents Thomas's revisions, and the Freedom Fighters' story in terms of *current* DC continuity only. Invalidated events that concerned Earth-X have been sequestered in their own subsection, below.

HEROES OF QUALITY

The Freedom Fighters were first assembled at the dawn of World War II by the personified spirit of America, **Uncle Sam**. Uncle Sam was borne shortly after signing the Declaration of Independence. In 1776, a group of founding fathers conducted a ritual to create the **American Talisman** to capture the "spirit" of the new nation. The talisman in turn manifested a mystical avatar to embody that spirit. The avatar first rose during the Revolutionary War as the **Minuteman**, then faded away in 1781 after the Battle of Yorktown. (Spectre vol. 3 #38)

Sam first appeared in the 20th century just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. (National Comics #1) Sensing this looming horror, on

December 6, 1941, Uncle Sam recruited **Hourman** (the sole DC hero), the **Invisible Hood**, **Magno**, **Miss America**, **Neon the Unknown**, and the **Red Torpedo** to stop the Japanese attack. It was Hourman who suggested their name. They were enveloped in Uncle Sam's mystic energies and emerged in the Pacific Ocean, where the Japanese squadron was *en route* to Hawaii. They destroyed an entire squadron of zeroes, but a kamikaze surprised them and crashed into their platform (the Red Torpedo's sub). (All-Star Squadron #32)

The Japanese took Hourman (#33) but left the others for dead. Magno was the only hero to die that day. Uncle Sam and Miss America were found unconscious and retrieved by the U.S. Navy. Miss America was taken, comatose, to Project M. (Secret Origins #26) The Invisible Hood survived until 1974 when he was murdered by the Icicle and the Mist. (Starman vol. 2 #2). Hourman and the Red Torpedo went on to aid in creating the Starman of 1951. (Starman vol. 2 #77) Neon was transported by his powers to his place of origin—a mystical desert oasis—where he remained. The fates of the Freedom Fighters went unknown until February 23, 1942, during the first full meeting of the All-Star Squadron. At the Perisphere in New York City, Uncle Sam revealed his failed attempt. (All-Star Squadron #31-32)

But Uncle Sam was unaware that two other heroes had almost joined in that mission. Just before the Freedom Fighters departed, both **Midnight** and the **Doll Man** had tracked Uncle Sam to Bannermain Chemicals (where he'd met Hourman). Midnight and Doll Man arrived to find the Freedom Fighters teleporting away. The two men dove into the portal, but were instead transported to occupied France. They joined **Mademoiselle Marie** in the French resistance for several months and intercepted a message concerning a *second* Japanese attack on Santa Barbara, California. But before they could act, they ran afoul of the evil **Baron Blitzkrieg**. As fate would have it, Uncle Sam's portal reappeared just as the Baron blasted Doll Man. Midnight carried his partner through the portal back to New York City, where he sought the aid of the All-Star Squadron. (#32)

Right: Original art from *Freedom Fighters* #3 (July/Aug. 1976), written by Martin Pasko and pencils by Ramona Fradon. Original art courtesy of John Jackson. Below: By April 1944, Firebrand joined the team, from *JSA* #42 (2003); art by Leonard Kirk.

A second band of Freedom Fighters galvanized behind Midnight's warning that day, again under Uncle Sam: **Doll Man**, **Black Condor**, **the Human Bomb**, **Phantom Lady**, **the Ray**, and the **Red Bee**. Midnight himself was sidelined, due to injury. (#32)



© DC Comics



© DC Comics

Baron Blitzkrieg was the mastermind of the attack, and held Hourman as his hostage. (#33) Soon the Freedom Fighters were captured as well, with the exception of the Red Bee. (#34) The team rather pitied the Red Bee who, despite his vigor, simply didn't have the power to measure up in battle. Phantom Lady and the Ray managed to activate Hourman's super-strength, but it wasn't in time to save the Red Bee. Just as he returned to help his teammates, the Bee was mauled to death by Baron Blitzkrieg, who escaped. (#35)

Soon thereafter, the Freedom Fighters splintered off from the All-Star Squadron and were based in Washington D.C. (Who's Who '87 #5) Plastic Man (who was an FBI agent) acted as a liaison between the All-Stars and the Freedom Fighters, and **Midnight**, **Quicksilver**, **Manhunter**, **Firebrand**, and the **Jester** participated as well. (Young All-Stars #27, *JSA* #42, *Freedom Fighters* vol. 2 #4)

Following the war, many of these heroes went into retirement. In 1946, the American Talisman was shattered, and Uncle Sam wasn't seen again for decades. (Spectre vol. 3 #38)

The Freedom Fighters resurfaced again years later during the dawn of a new age of heroes. The *JSA*, *Blackhawks* and *Freedom Fighters* were all captured by the alien Appellax creatures and placed in concentration camps, and freed by the new **Justice League of America**. (JLA: Year One #12)

Many of the Freedom Fighters enjoy extended youthfulness, which

ROY THOMAS: ALL-STAR SQUADRON AND QUALITY'S HEROES

Conducted electronically by Mike Kooiman on August 3, 2011

Roy Thomas is a name synonymous with Golden Age fandom. More than any other writer, he has introduced readers to the Golden Age super-heroes in the DC Comics stable, including a fair number of Quality heroes. His 1980s series *All-Star Squadron* and *Young All-Stars* boldly wove together disjointed Golden Age “continuities” into a rich tapestry and told the story of World War II in the DC universe. He first did this at Marvel, where he teamed the original Golden Age Timely heroes as *The Invaders* in 1975.

I formulated this interview before the release of *Alter Ego*’s 100th issue, in which Thomas also discussed his use of Golden Age characters in great detail. Anyone interested in exhaustive behind-the-scenes details on *All-Star Squadron* should check out that issue, and also the *All-Star Companion* series of books.—Mike Kooiman

Mike Kooiman: Some accounts mention that some Quality books were not available in DC’s master library. Did DC keep any archives of Quality Comics when you began writing *All-Star Squadron*?

Roy Thomas: I don’t believe DC had any archives of the Quality comics—or if they did, I didn’t use them. I did ask for a number of DC stories to be Xeroxed for me, and somewhere I got hold of B&W photocopies of Quality “Miss America” stories by the time I brought her into *Secret Origins* and *Infinity, Inc.* I have a few other B&W photocopies—of “Manhunter,” a couple others, but I don’t know if they came from DC or not. “The Ray” and “Black Condor” I had from the Alan Light reprints [see page 212].

I don’t recall what DC had or didn’t have in its library, but I’m certain that some of the reference I got photocopied was from there. I still have Xeroxes from a couple of “Miss America” stories, for instance, as well as others. But I seem to recall their collection of Quality bound volumes was spotty.

MK: When choosing *All-Stars* for the book, why or how did you come to choose Firebrand, Phantom Lady and Plastic Man as main characters?

Thomas: I needed more women in the *All-Star Squadron*, hence Phantom Lady and a female version of Firebrand, since the male version wasn’t that much of a character, in my view. As for Plastic Man—he’s one of the great comic book characters, and besides, was an agent of the FBI, so it made sense to drag him in. But ultimately, I used only Firebrand on a regular basis.

MK: Firebrand bears some resemblance to Quality’s Wildfire. Is it true that you were told not to use Wildfire because of the Legion hero?

Thomas: I think it’s more that I decided not to use her because I’d have either had to change her name or risk confusion. Because she’d have been

an Earth-Two doppelganger, I think I could have used her if I wanted to. I apologize if someone proves (or even claims) that my memory is wrong on this. I did consider using her, though... probably would have if not for the repetition.

MK: Did you have some criteria for choosing the characters who would “die” at Pearl Harbor?

Thomas: I just felt that it might be useful to kill off some fairly useless characters, for the sake of a good story... since there are casualties, fatalities, in wartime. Not sure why Miss America was in that group, except to give it a female member. Nor do I recall if I had it in mind that I’d be bringing her back later.



Finished art from *All-Star Squadron* #32 (1984); art by Rick Hoberg & Mike Machlan. Original art courtesy of Michael Dunne.

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES ROBINSON

Conducted by Mike Kooiman on May 25, 2011

Anyone familiar with James Robinson's writing for DC has probably sensed his unabashed love for Golden Age heroes—including those from Quality. For some, his work in the *Golden Age* and *Starman* was their first exposure to Quality heroes. He managed to infuse new life and dimension into many of them, both iconic and forgotten. This conversation with Robinson reveals a wealth of behind-the-scenes insight regarding his use, regard, resurrection and reinvention of Golden Age greats.—Mike Kooiman

Mike Kooiman: Could you start by telling me a bit about yourself...

James Robinson: I was born in England, grew up in London. Not much more to add really except... When I was a little boy, the very last of DC's 52-page comics were coming out, which very often had Golden Age back-ups. This was also when they started doing the 100-pagers, which also had a lot of Golden Age stories in them. One of the things I enjoyed very much from that period were the Quality heroes; they immediately attracted me.

MK: Yes, you made mention of these comics in *Justice League: Cry for Justice*.

Robinson: I read the *Superman* #252 100-Page Giant that had the glorious Neal Adams wraparound cover featuring heroes who could fly—that was the theme of the issue. And on the cover and inside were stories featuring Black Condor and the Ray, and I had no idea who those characters were or their association with DC Comics. At the time I didn't really understand that Kid Eternity was a Quality character. I'd just encountered him in the *Secret Origins* [#4] comic book in the same issue as the Vigilante and was struck by how the story felt different to me. Grimmer and more adult. As a kid I found it oddly appealing for that.

The first time I really began to understand who they were was as I grew a little older and bought *Justice League* #107-108, which was the first time the Freedom Fighters appeared, with the idea that there was Earth-X and they were fighting the Nazis. Bear in mind this was before the Internet and growing up in England, where we especially didn't have this huge array of Golden Age comics that an American fan might have had just by going to a comic book convention. There was no opportunity to see old Quality Comics on sale and put "two-and-two" together. It seems crazy to say it now, but back then being a comic fan in England you had to be a bit of a detective to put it all together. (Obviously if I'd had the money to buy Steranko's *History of Comics* books they would have explained everything, but that opportunity wouldn't occur for years.)

I didn't understand that DC had acquired other publishers since the 1940s, so the first time it all began to make sense was that *Justice League* story line introducing Earth X. These Quality characters fascinated me because (like I'd already observed with the Kid Eternity story) they all had a completely different feel than DC characters, and also because, by and large, they had a lot of beautiful artwork. Obviously not all of it was wonderful but they had Reed Crandall, they had Lou Fine, and Eisner was doing work for them. I mean, the beauty of a Lou Fine page was something to behold. Where he'd do these nine-panel pages in "The Ray" and "Black Condor," but then he would break the grid so that there were characters flying out of panels and coming at you. He was literally inventing the rules and then breaking them. Even as a little boy I found that incredibly exciting and unique.



© DC Comics.

Another character that helped you understand which company used to own which characters, and where they first appeared, was Plastic Man—seeing Jack Cole's artwork, which was so unique and interesting and unlike anything else. So that was the first time I really encountered the Quality heroes and that always stayed with me. And as I've gotten to write, I've tried to find more of that original material on the Internet or by buying the actual comic books.

I first used Quality characters in the course of my first major DC

Hourman steps in to save Miss America from Robotman. Finished art from *The Golden Age* #4 (1994); art by Paul Smith. Original art courtesy of Aaron Bushey.

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THE QUALITY COMPANION

QUALITY
COMICS
GROUP

9

**SMASHING
STORIES!**

FEATURING:

THE RAY • FIREBRAND

BLACK CONDOR

MIDNIGHT • WILDFIRE



HUMAN BOMB



PHANTOM LADY



UNCLE SAM



MADAM FATAL

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Story by Robert Turner
Art by Jim Mooney

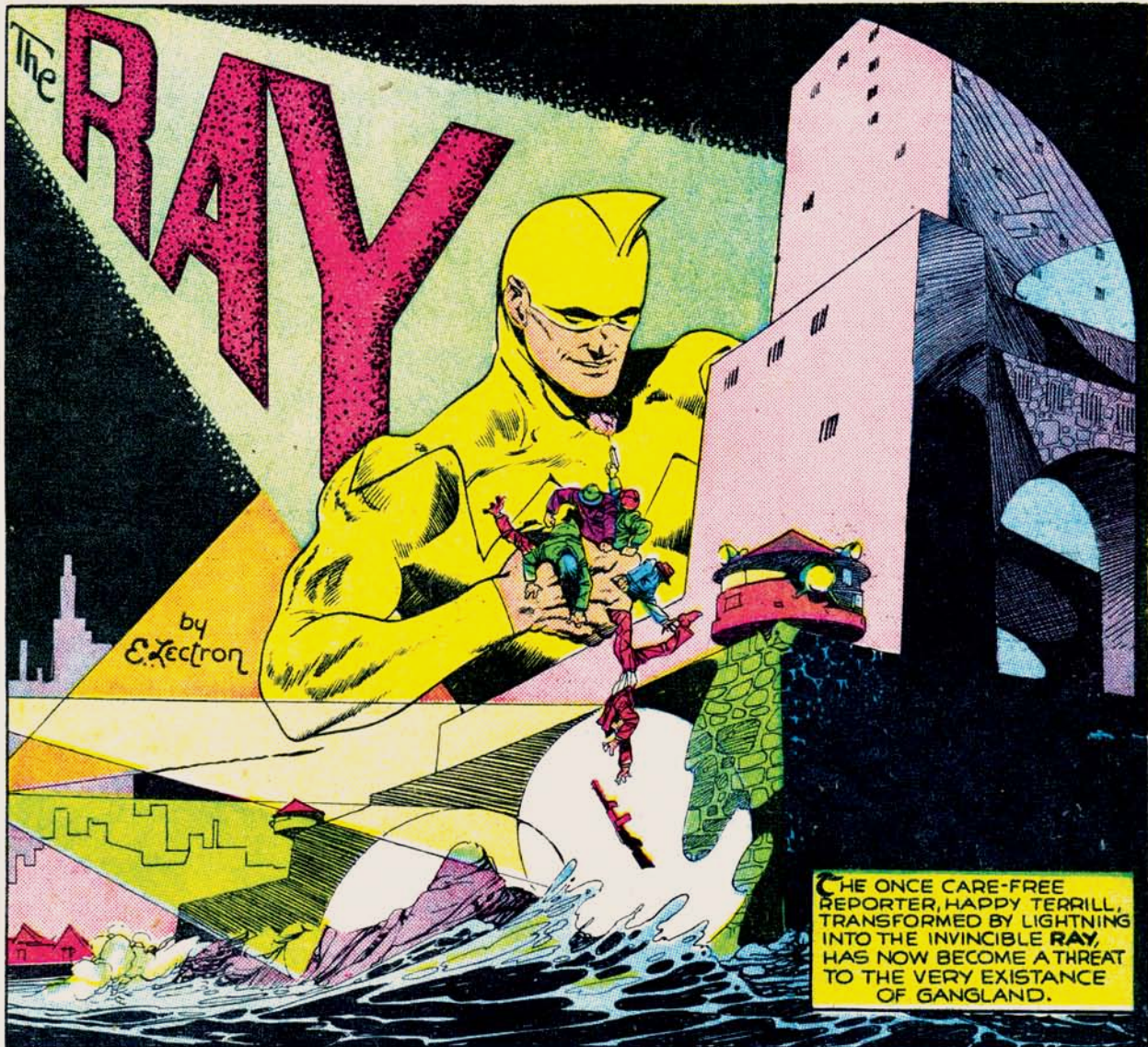
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"The Origin of Madam Fatal"

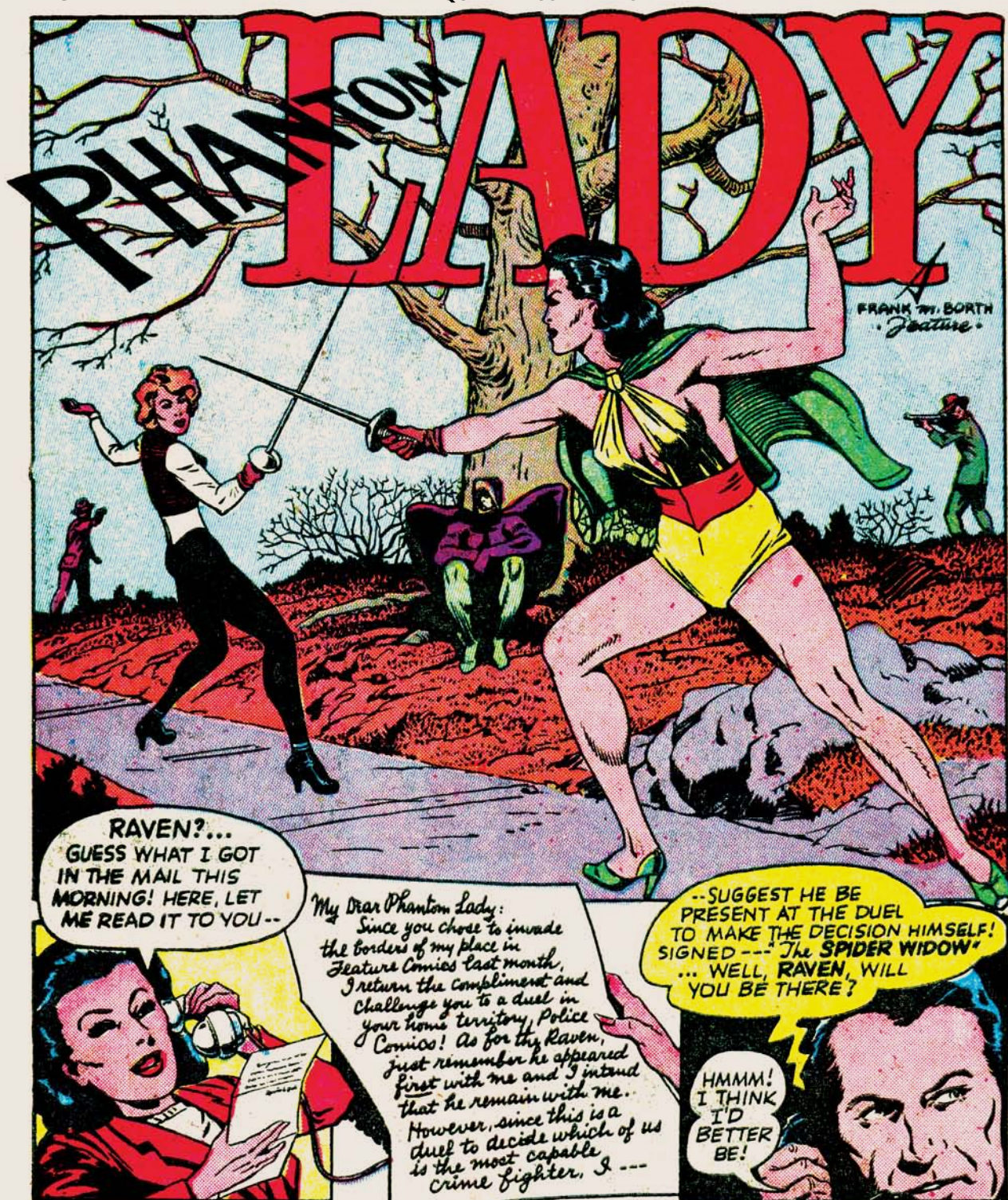
Originally presented in
Crack Comics #1 (May 1940)
Art by Art Pinajian

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ON CRIMINAL COURT, A VICIOUS GANG LEADER IS AT LAST BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.

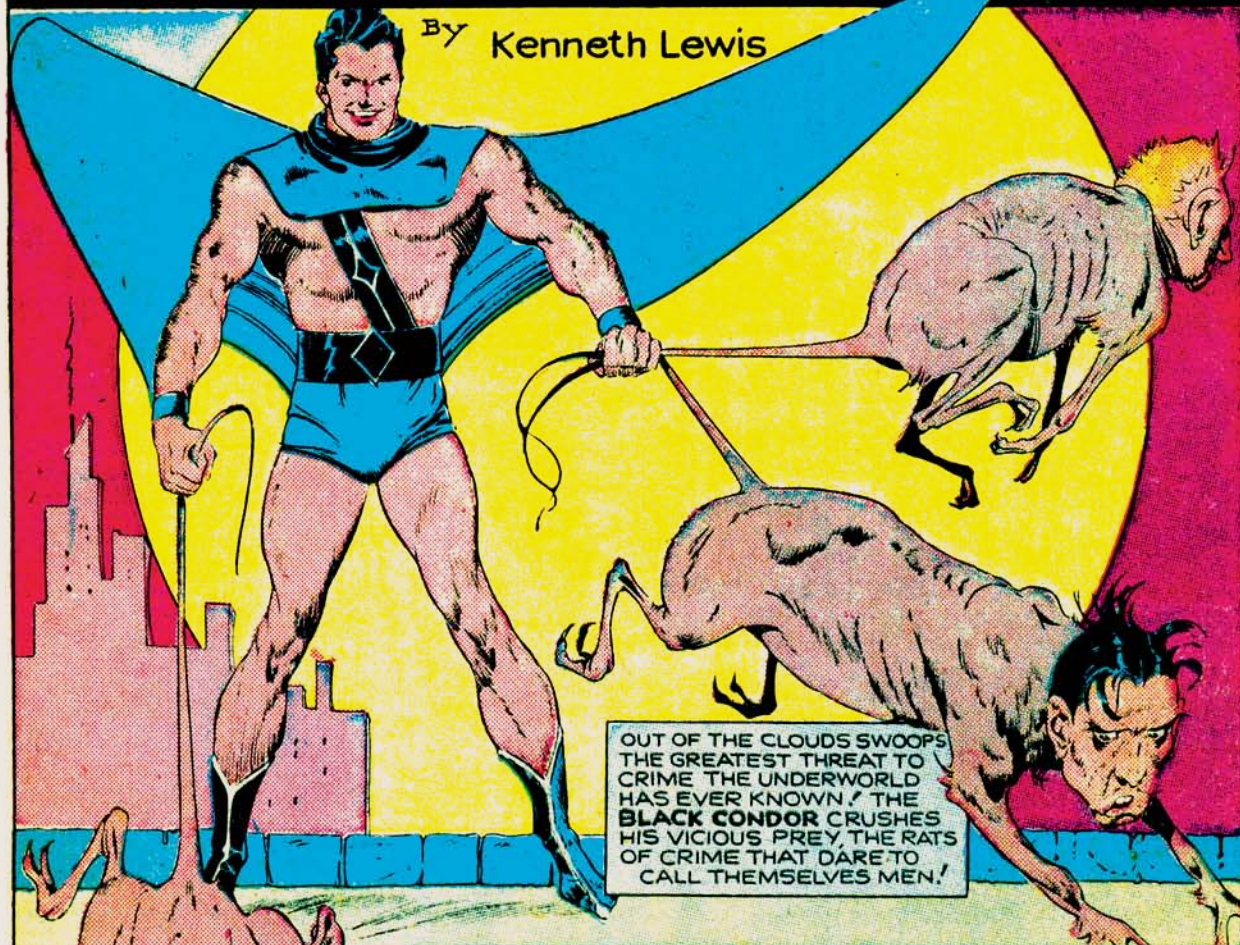




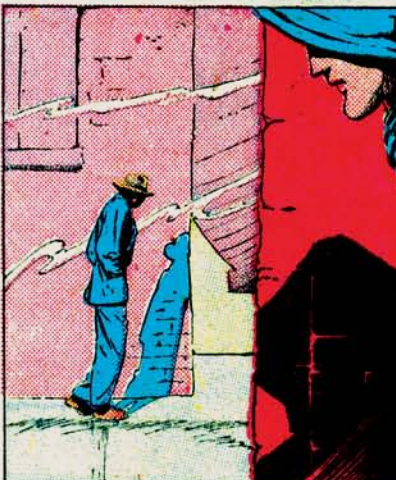
VS THE SPIDER WIDOW

THE BLACK CONDOR

By Kenneth Lewis

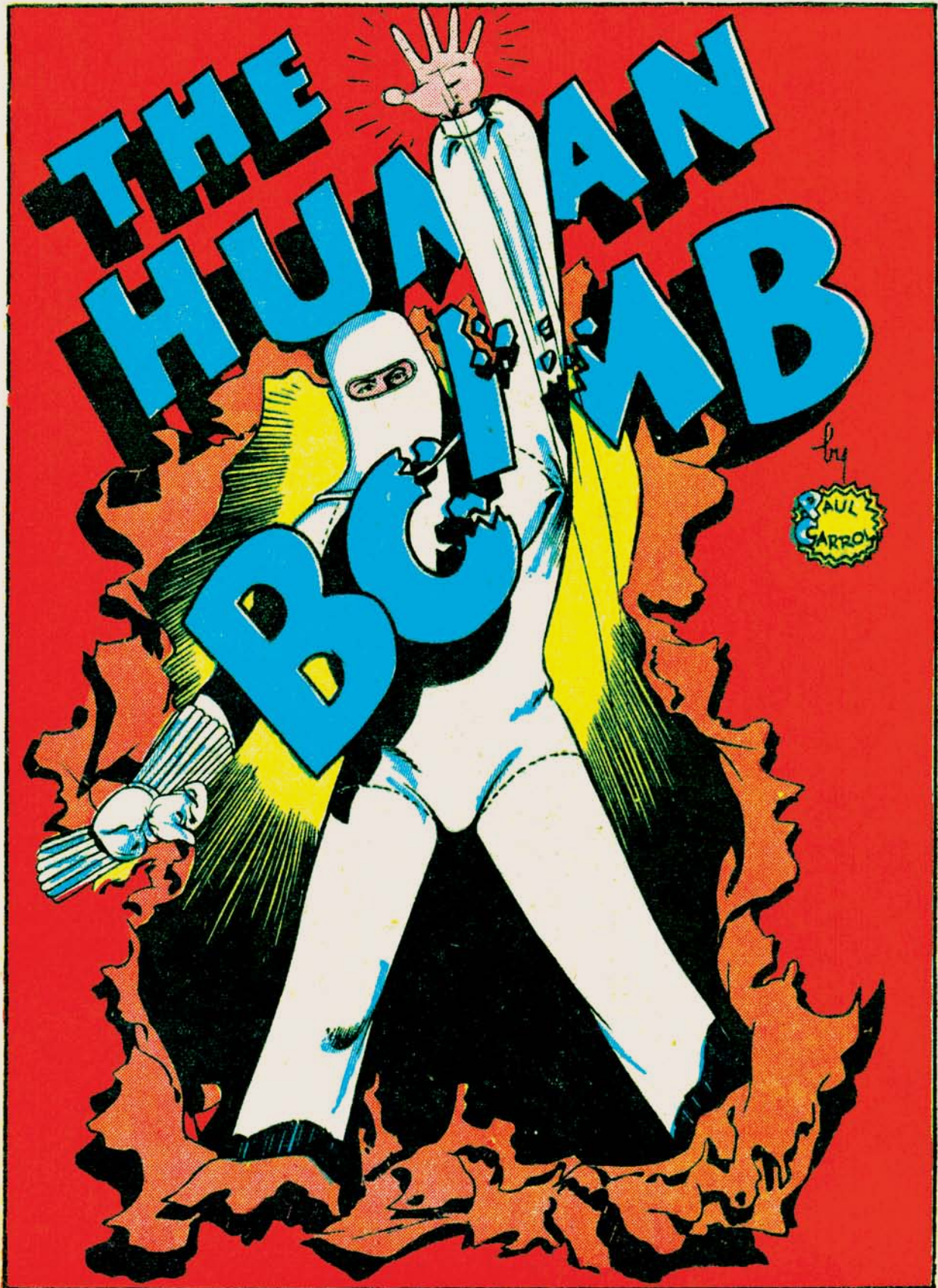


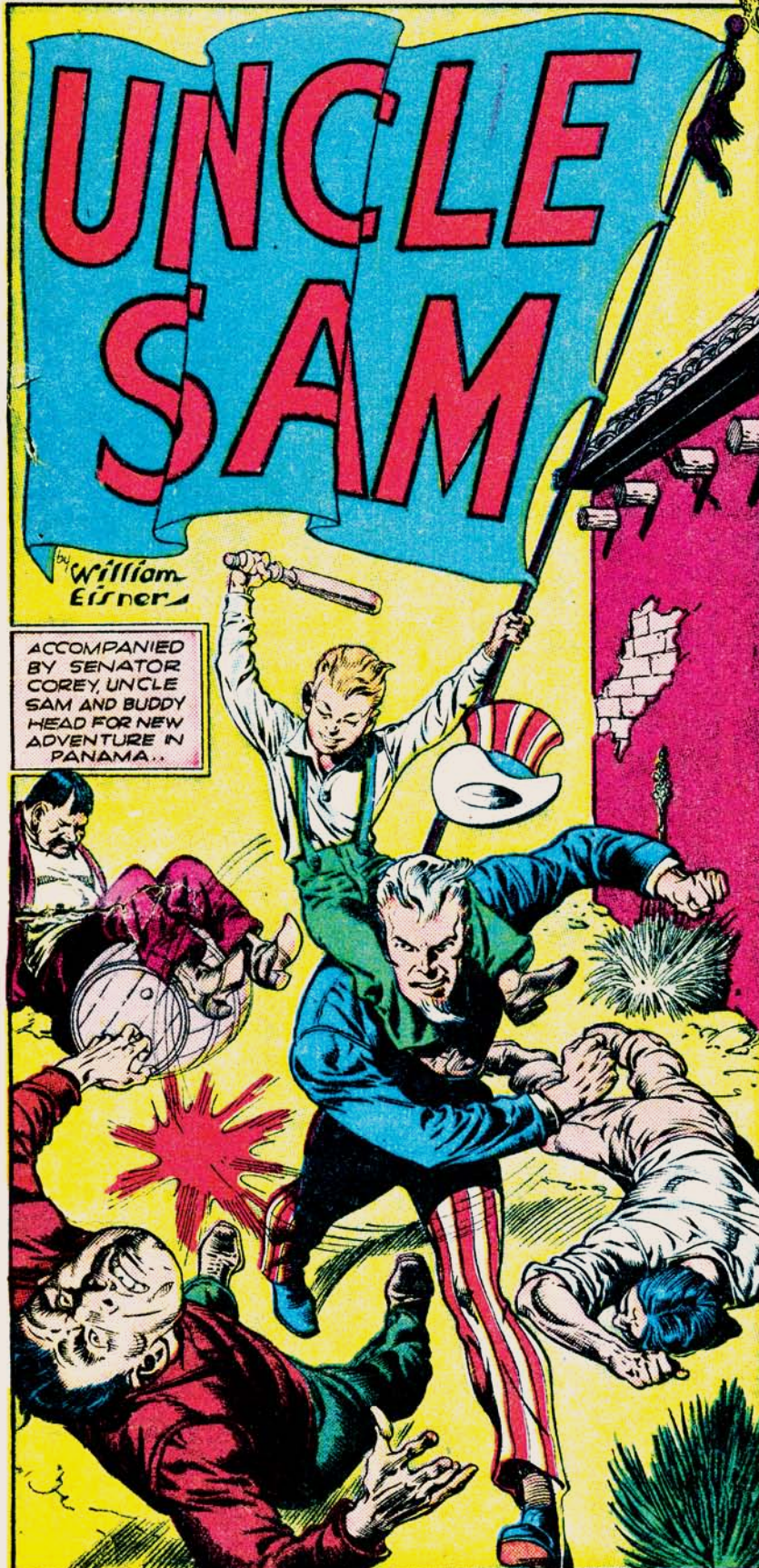
THROUGH THE HEAVY MIST OF THE WATERFRONT, THE BLACK CONDOR WATCHES A LONE, DEJECTED WANDERER...



OUT OF THE FOG SPRINGS ANOTHER FIGURE, POUNCING ON THE FIRST FROM BEHIND.







SPLITTING THE HEAVENS WITH ITS ROAR, A HUGE TRANSPORT KEEPS AN EVEN COURSE TOWARD SOUTH AMERICA...



WHY'RE WE GOING TO PANAMA ANYWAY, UNCLE SAM?

OH, NO SPECIAL REASON, BUDDY!



I JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT AT THE CANAL.. WHY? ARE YOU BORED?

YEAH.. THERE'S NOTHING TO DO HERE!





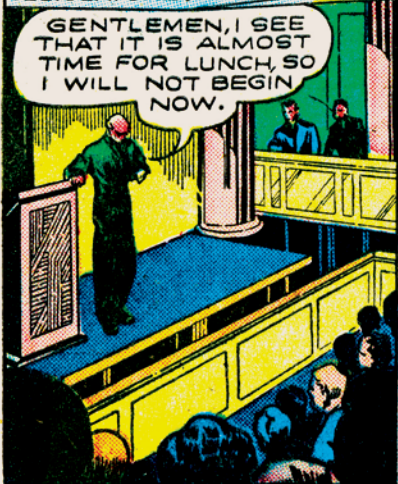


WHEREVER DEMOCRACY IS THREATENED, THE FIREBRAND STRIKES A SMASHING BLOW IN ITS DEFENSE. ONLY HIS SHIP-MATE, SLUGGER DUNN, KNOWS THAT THIS NEMESIS OF AMERICA'S ENEMIES IS REALLY ROD REILLY, NAVAL RESERVE OFFICER.

BUT, WHEN WE CONVENE AGAIN THIS AFTERNOON, I PROMISE TO EXPOSE THE MOST INSIDIOUS ANTI-AMERICAN ORGANIZATION IN THE COUNTRY! I REFER TO THE BAND OF MASKED HOODLUMS KNOWN AS THE WHITE GARDENIAS!

ROD AND SLUGGER ON LEAVE ARE IN THE GALLERY, AS SENATOR BARROW ADDRESSES THE MEMBERS OF THE STATE LEGISLATURE.

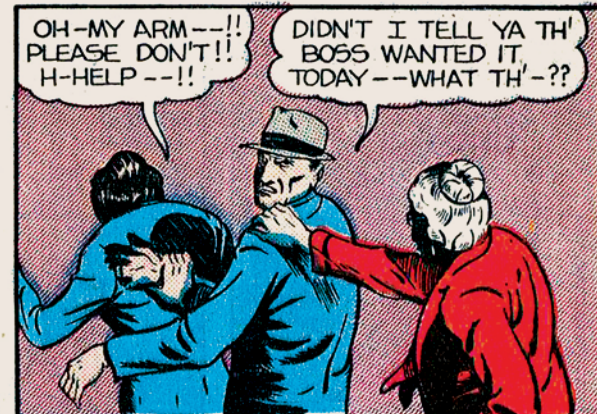
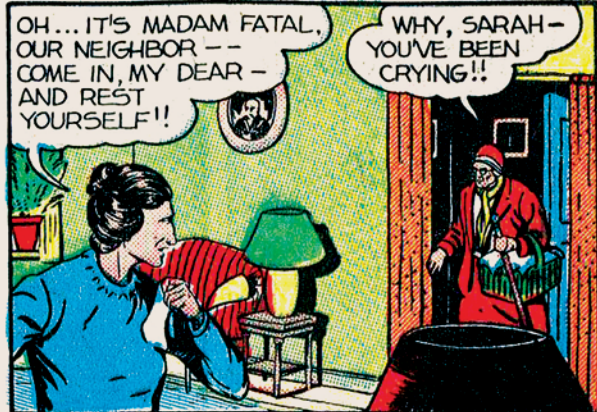
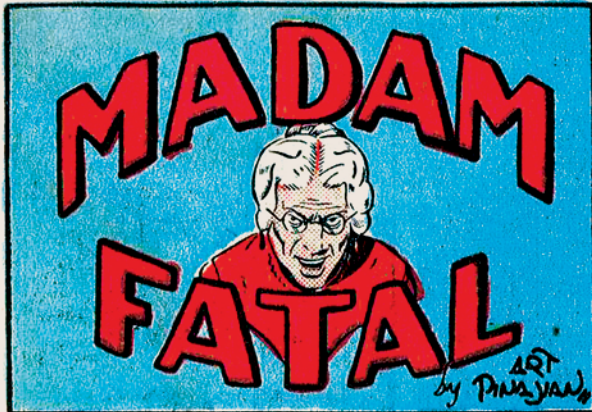
GENTLEMEN, I SEE THAT IT IS ALMOST TIME FOR LUNCH, SO I WILL NOT BEGIN NOW.



SLUGGER, I WOULDN'T MISS WHAT'S COMING FOR A MILLION..BUT FIRST I HAVE TO CALL JOAN!







QUESTION



Blackhawk and his occasional aide, the lady called Fear.
From *Blackhawk* #13 (Winter 1946); art by Bill Ward.

It's worth repeating: Quality Comics truly had the Golden Age's highest standards for art. Compare it for yourself if you can, to the works of almost any other Golden Age publisher. The Quality "house style" was pioneered by Will Eisner and finessed by Lou Fine. Their style and influence spread across Quality's entire line and set the bar very high. Fine's style tended towards the "realistic," but even the cartoonists were top notch. Jack Cole set the tone for the humor features, becoming an innovator in the synthesis of humor and hero.

This section provides an overview of some of the main creators who made their mark in the pages of Quality Comics. It is impossible to include all of them, but you can find a list of employees in "Quality Staff" on page 85. The biographies that follow paint a picture that shows the depth and breadth of the skill in play. To find references for the original *Alter Ego* interviews, see "Periodicals, Articles and Oddball Comics" on page 211.

Most of the information in these profiles is assembled from the interviews of Jim Amash, done for *Alter Ego* magazine. For a wealth of additional information, please read the original interviews in full. (See the Bibliography for full details.)

Nobody should be surprised that Busy Arnold is reputed to have turned down Siegel and Shuster. Shuster's art before 1940 was rough. Arnold had a keen eye for striking figures and kinetic, adventurous compositions. By 1940, his pages were exploding with the best action, anatomy, perspective and color (even Jack Cole's lettering and typography were ground-breaking).

Most of the artists whose work appeared in Quality Comics were hired as freelancers, or they worked for the Eisner and/or Iger shops, or for those men after they split. Even if Busy Arnold hired artists outright, they tended to work from their own studios. The Quality offices were mostly for editorial and supporting staff (including letterers and colorists), who arranged the publications for print.

Please note that the comicographies for each artist are not exhaustive, and dates may represent the total range of the issues listed. The comicographies are meant to point the reader toward the artist's significant contributions. For more information, we suggest searching the Grand Comics Database and *Who's Who*.

Many of Quality's most iconic characters were created or co-created by Will Eisner. By his own admission, he was oftentimes *not* the sole writer or artist on some of the earliest characters for Quality. Sometimes he held editorial conferences with his writers (i.e. Toni Blum, Ken Fitch, etc.), but there are no records to indicate whether any character was created *solely* by a staff member. Similarly, artists were given free rein to add their own touch when designing or redesigning a new character's costume. Again, there's no record of "who did what," only the published record.

This section owes a heap of gratitude to Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr., who provided fact checking and review.

Birth and death dates were confirmed, when possible, with "Social Security Death Index" at <http://ssdi.rootsweb.ancestry.com>.

GEORGE BRENNER

(?-1952)

There's not much on record about Mr. Brenner, and no interviews exist with the man himself. This is surprising, given the fact that today most historians recognize his creation, the Clock, as the first masked hero created for a comic book. (Of course, the pulps and radio had invented their own prior to this.) Being an editor for Quality for some time, many people had tales to tell about him. No reliable online public records could be found relating to Brenner. Many men shared the same name, and some inquiries to those families yielded "you got the wrong man" answers.

George Brenner had graduated from Villanova, where he'd been a football player. This shared love of sports led to his close friendship with Quality's publisher, Busy Arnold. Many accounts confirm this friendship, which may explain the relative longevity and "experimental latitude" granted to some of Brenner's features.

He first appears in history not at Quality Comics, but for Comics Magazine Co. (a company whose comics were eventually sold to Centaur). Busy Arnold advised that company's founders, and Brenner's "The Clock" debuted simultaneously in their *Funny Pages* #6 and *Funny Picture Stories* #1 (Nov. 1936).

Less than a year later, Comics Magazine began to fail and Arnold was establishing Quality. He took on Brenner and "The Clock" in the pages of *Feature Funnies* #3 (Dec. 1937). Oddly, the previous issue featured one other Brenner

Brenner's "The Clock," from *Crack Comics* #11 (March 1941).



creation, the Hawk, with the attribution “by Geo. E. Brenner, creator of the Clock.” The Hawk was never seen again, but the Clock lived from 1936–1944 in *Feature*, then in *Crack Comics*. Brenner might have also been one of the first comic creators to recognize the importance of copyrights. According to Quality editor Gill Fox, Brenner might have originally copyrighted the Clock because of the possibility of newspaper syndication.

Steranko’s *History of Comics* vol. 2 describes Brenner as Arnold’s “right-hand man.” Despite their friendship, Alex Kotzky said that Brenner “used to drive Busy Arnold mad because he’d always find ways to simplify the page as much as possible to do the least amount of work. ... But he got away with it.”

Artist Vernon Henkel described him as a “nervous” sort of guy, “when he was drawing, he’d almost have to pin his thumb down so his hand wouldn’t move. I thought, ‘This guy could draw like that!’” Gill Fox commented further on Brenner’s character: “a likable Irish guy with a good sense of humor. He and Arnold had a lot in common, and would go out and have drinks. Brenner had a beautiful personality. He could tell a story and had some popularity, but he was a better writer than artist.”

Indeed. Say what you will about the man’s artistic ability, but Brenner frequently showed flashes of brilliance by presenting novel characters and delivering the unexpected. Brenner wrote and drew all of his features throughout most of their runs, with the exception of “Destiny,” which went on for more than a year after his departure.

His creative contributions were largely over by 1943 when Brenner became a full editor at Quality, a position which he held through 1949. Gill Fox and Fran Matera said Brenner had been in editorial before that, and Matera added that there was quite the rivalry between Brenner and John Beardsley about it. His co-workers seemed to regard him well *personally*, though they frequently remarked upon Brenner’s drinking. As a *boss*, he was a hard case. It was Gill Fox who recommended Brenner for the job, “because he was tough and could handle it. He wouldn’t take any crap off anybody.” His successor, Al Grenet confirmed this, describing him as “a little, stocky guy... maybe five-foot-eight. He acted like he was really somebody big. He always talked down to people.”

Several different people reported that Brenner was ultimately fired by Busy Arnold. Arnold’s son, Dick, recalled, “He drank a lot. He lived near us in Greenwich... he was [an editor] for a number of years before my father fired him. I don’t know why he fired Brenner.” Chuck Cuidera dismissed Brenner as “another screw-up,” and also suggested that Brenner was fired.

Bails and Ware’s *Who’s Who* places Brenner at Western Publishing, which licensed Warner Bros. and Disney properties, from 1949–52. It is believed that he passed away at a relatively young age, in 1952.

George Brenner’s work sometimes appeared under the pen name “Wayne Reid.”

SELECTED COMICOGRAPHY:

Some of his later work was ghosted (confirmed by Fran Matera); it changed at times quite noticeably in style.

- *Feature Comics* #3–31 then *Crack Comics* #1–35 (the Clock, Dec. 1937–Winter 1944)
- *Feature Funnies* #7–16 then *Smash* #1–15 (Clip Chance, April 1938–Oct. 1940)
- *Smash* #1–41 (Hugh Hazzard and Bozo, Aug. 1939–March 1943)
- *Police* #1–19 (#711 & Destiny Aug. 1941–May 1943)
- *Hit Comics* #18–25 (Ghost of Flanders, Dec. 1941–Dec. 1942)

AL BRYANT

(June 20, 1917–Sept. 1993)

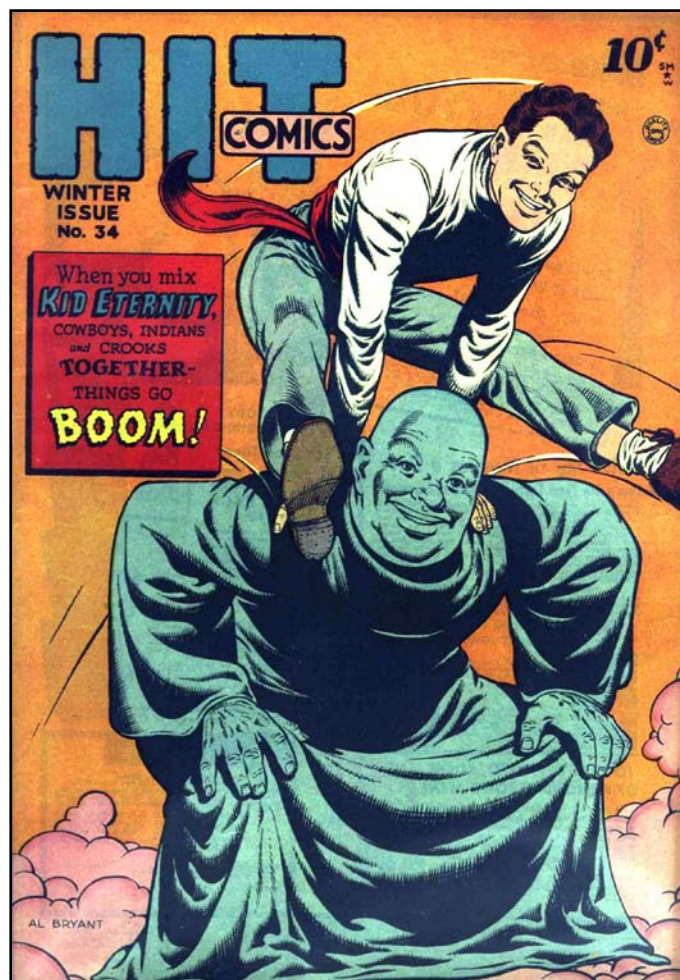
Perhaps no artist is as broadly visible across the Quality line as Al Bryant. His art adorns countless covers for all its magazines, and he drew a fair number of long-running features like “Blackhawk,” “Zero,” “Betty Bates,” “Sally O’Neil,” and “Kid Eternity.” Several people recalled Bryant’s mental health issues, although the details surrounding it conflicted. Many of his covers for Quality bore his signature, but a good amount of his work at Quality ran without a byline.

Bryant graduated from the Pratt Institute and is probably best known for his covers and features on *Doll Man*. He worked for a short time at Jerry Iger’s studio, then for Quality itself. Chuck Cuidera described him as a “nice-looking, good guy.” Editor Gill Fox echoed that: “a nice, quiet guy. He looked like Gregory Peck. He was good on deadlines.”

Alex Kotzky knew Al Bryant well. He, Al and Gill Fox would entertain at their homes together. By several accounts, Bryant took his job very seriously and wanted to be a top artist. The volume of his work is testament to his work ethic—and it was also the probable cause of his nervous breakdown.

Another editor, Al Grenet, added that Bryant had “a lot of problems with his wife and was a little eccentric. One day, he invited Aldo and me over to his house. We came over, and Bryant was hiding behind the curtains... we saw him. We knocked on the door, but he

Al Bryant’s figures were consistent with Quality’s “house style,” seen here in the cover for *Hit* #34 (Winter 1944), which bears his signature (uncommon for the time).



never answered, so I knew something was up.”

As the story goes, his personal problems led him to turn his car into a wall while driving home on the Grand Central Parkway. (Note: Gill Fox mistakenly thought that Bryant had died in this crash.) Afterwards, he was admitted to Pilgrim’s State Hospital on Long Island. Kotzky visited Bryant with John Spranger and his wife, but found there was little he could do for his friend. This was probably in the mid-to-late 1940s. Some of Bryant’s (rarely) signed work still appears on covers through 1946.

Grenet also recalled one day after he’d been committed when Al showed up at Quality: “He was all messed-up and dirty-looking. He must have hitchhiked over. Arnold gave him \$20. Bryant asked for a job, so Arnold gave him a corner to work on, but Bryant started drawing things that made no sense. I said to Arnold, ‘Maybe he escaped? Maybe he wasn’t released?’ Arnold called the police, and sure enough, that’s what had happened. The police were there in five minutes and took him away. We never saw him again.”

Grenet corroborated what the writers at Lambiek.net assert—that Bryant ultimately recovered after eight years in treatment, and moved south. He died in 1993 at the age of 76.

SELECTED COMICOGRAPHY:

The following is assembled with help from the GCD, but the authors find some of the data are inconclusive, as most stories were not signed.

- *Feature Comics* #43–61 (Zero, April 1941–Oct. 1942)
- *Hit Comics* #11–50 (Betty Bates, May 1941–Jan. 1948)
- *Police Comics* #1–73 (Steele Kerrigan & Manhunter, Aug. 1941–Dec. 1947)
- *National Comics* #26–63 (Sally O’Neil and covers, Nov. 1942–Dec. 1947)
- *Doll Man* #4–15 (Winter 1942–Winter 1947)
- *Feature Comics* #64–117 (Doll Man, Jan. 1943–Dec. 1947)
- *Military & Modern Comics* #31–55 (Blackhawk, Aug. 1944–Nov. 1946)
- *Crack Comics* #34–51 (Captain Triumph, Autumn 1944–Nov. 1947)
- *Blackhawk* #9–17 (Winter 1944–Winter 1947)
- *Kid Eternity* #1–7 (Spring 1946–Autumn 1947)

NICK CARDY

Nicholas Viscardi (Oct. 29, 1920–present)

Nick Cardy provided a lengthy interview to Jim Amash for *Alter Ego* #65 (Feb. 2007). It’s a great, lucid, firsthand account of the comics industry through several of its formative periods.

Nicholas Viscardi was born October 20, 1920 on the Lower East Side of New York City. As an adolescent, radio shows like *The Lone Ranger* and *The Shadow* captured his imagination and sowed the seeds for his artistic career. Like so many of his generation, his indoctrination to comics began with the Sunday newspaper and its color comics. His favorites were Alex Raymond’s *Flash Gordon* and Hal Foster’s *Tarzan*. His family couldn’t afford to send him to art school, so he learned what he could from the pages of library books. He also took classes at a local Boys Club where he was encouraged to emulate the Renaissance greats. After high school, he got a job with an advertising agency where he did clean-up work on the art.

From there he learned of Will Eisner’s studio and in 1940, he



Top: A page from Cardy’s “Quicksilver,” from *National* #11 (May 1941); art by Nick Cardy. Below: Nick Viscardi in uniform, in Germany, towards the end of World War II.

© Nick Cardy.

went to Tudor City, where he met Lou Fine, George Tuska and Charles Sultan. This was when Eisner & Iger were just separating, and Nick was placed with Jerry Iger. He continued to do low-level work but was eventually handed features for Quality like “Quicksilver,” then “Lee Preston,” “Samar,” and “Wonder Boy.” Bob Powell became his best friend in the business, offering the young Viscardi technical advice on making comics. As the studio personnel began to trickle off to war, artists shifted between the Iger and Eisner studios, and Viscardi was asked to take over for Chuck Mazoujian on the “Lady Luck” feature (at Eisner’s), which ran every Sunday in the *Spirit Section*. He drew both pencils and inks and even briefly tried the fine-tipped Japanese brushes that were

floating around the studio. This kept him busy through sometime in 1942, when he left Eisner to work on staff at Fiction House.

He was drafted in 1943, and after he was discharged in 1946 he continued to work for Fiction House. His early work was signed

QUALITY WRITERS

Less attention is generally paid to Golden Age writers, a sad repercussion of the Golden Age industry's lack of record-keeping. It is very difficult to accurately identify writers' works because for decades, most comic book features only named the *artist*, or it bore *no* creator credits, or creators made frequent use of cryptic pen names. Jerry Bails and Hames Ware's *Who's Who* was the first effort to document the works of these early contributors. Since then, researchers have uncovered more about writers from interviews with their peers.

In Quality Comics, especially before the war, many stories were written and drawn as a package by the same men. If there was a separate writer, only occasionally did any feature bear two bylines. When times were tight, editors and supporting staff were also called upon to pen scripts in a collaborative effort. What follows are some brief bios for those writers who are mentioned most frequently—primarily in Jim Amash's *Alter Ego* interviews—in connection with Quality Comics. Most were freelancers, and some worked for Will Eisner and/or Jerry Iger.

TONI BLUM



Above: Tony Blum probably circa 1940s. © Bill Bossert. Right: Toni's father, Alex Blum, likely drew this "The Purple Trio" feature, and "Neon" for Quality. This page is from *Smash Comics* #14 (Sept. 1940). Scan courtesy of Jerry Bails.

Audrey "Toni" Blum was a writer for Eisner & Iger who also worked for Eisner after the studio split. She was connected to several other notable people from this era of comics. She was the daughter of **Alex Blum**, a fine artist who also did comics. She briefly dated Eisner but later married another artist, **Bill Bossert**. Although Bill was Christian and Toni was Jewish, the difference didn't get in their way.

Eisner described Toni as a sort of "den mother" to his office, attractive and hard-working. Chuck Mazoujian, the artist on "Lady Luck" credited her with the early writing chores on that feature. Mazoujian liked her writing and rarely had cause to criticize it.

Bill Bossert was interviewed by Jim Amash for *Alter Ego* #99 (Jan. 2011).



BILL FINGER

Bill Finger is most famous for his indisputable but unaccredited role as the co-creator of Batman, a character he wrote frequently for DC. Dick Arnold described him as a very quiet guy, but many sources have mentioned that Finger was in constant debt. He delivered his scripts in person (so that he could grab his check, too). Editor Al Grenet complained that he was often late and added, "We had to stop giving him advances. He was a decent writer, though." Grenet remembered a time when Bill got in trouble with a loan company and someone came to



see Busy Arnold because Finger owed them money. Chuck Cuidera confirmed that Finger wrote some "Black-

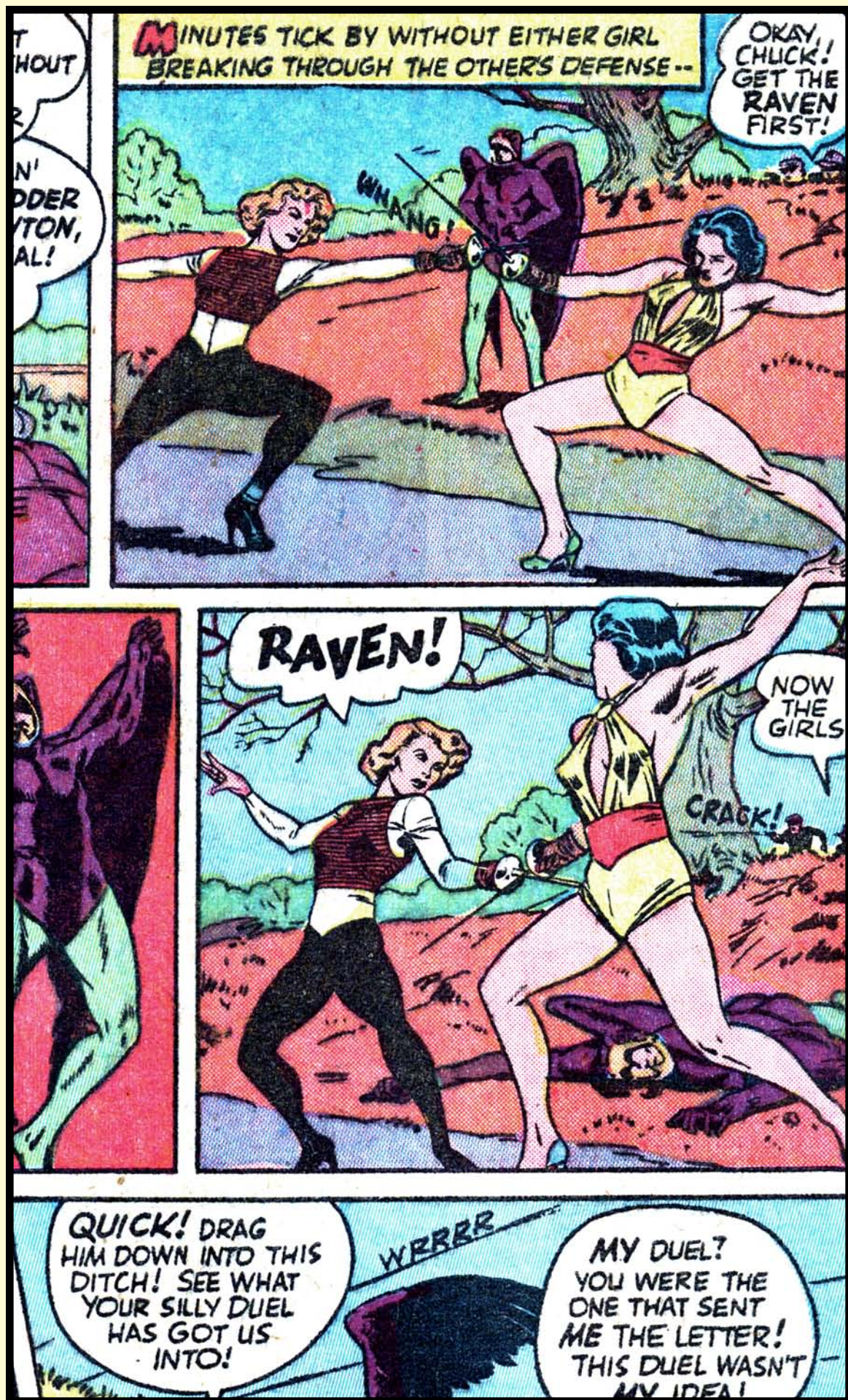
hawk" features, and that many comic book writers imitated him.

DICK FRENCH

Richard French (as he signed the Blackhawk theme song in *Military* #8) was the brother-in-law of artist Tex Blaisdell and wrote for Will Eisner. He's credited in DC's *Blackhawk Archives*, vol. 1, as the writer in *Military* #5-12 (1941-42). Will Eisner confirmed that French wrote many of the stories in his shop at the time, and French came along as Eisner & Iger were splitting. He also wrote "Death Patrol" for artist Dave Berg. Eisner described him as "a slight, quiet fellow, short, and he had a way of muttering to himself when you had a conversation with him. About halfway through, while you were making a statement, he would make a statement and continue muttering while you were talking. It's the only peculiarity I remember, but he was a very nice, sweet guy. And he was totally different than Tex, who was tall and outspoken."

Bill Finger. ©The respective owner.

P R O F I L E



The Raven is referee in a duel between the Spider Widow and Phantom Lady, from *Police Comics* #21 (Aug. 1943); art by Frank Borth.

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THE HEROES OF QUALITY COMICS

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

This section chronicles the fictional histories of Quality Comics' characters. For the most part, what you will find are the **costumed and/or super-powered** heroes. For an index of Quality's regular features, organized by title, see the section beginning on page 216.

Quality's super-heroes can be placed along a wide spectrum, from humor to everyday to omnipotent, and from ordinary to colorfully garbed. Many Quality heroes comfortably straddled the line between super-hero and humor, a template pioneered by Jack Cole's **Midnight** and **Plastic Man**.

In a case like the Blackhawk, because of their popularity (and their entrenchment within DC lore), they are covered in more depth than "also-ran" aviators. "Blackhawk" in particular (along with Death Patrol and Rusty Ryan) bore the hallmarks of the super-hero feature: adventure, occasional metaphysics, exotic foes, continuity, and a uniformed cast. Still, Blackhawk's history at DC Comics is beyond the scope of this book to cover comprehensively. (You might enjoy Michelle Nolan's "Better Read Than Dead" in *Alter Ego* #34, which covers Blackhawk's 1950s transition from Quality to DC.)

As the humor and funny animal features gained in popularity there developed another gray area. Characters like Inferior Man and Blimpie were never meant to be serious super-heroes. Both were played for laughs yet possessed great and fantastic abilities.

Characters such as the Spirit, Plastic Man, Doll Man, and Quicksilver had print runs that far outpaced the rest. In the profiles for those heroes, we try to balance space considerations with a thorough documentation of their histories. The most notable cases and adversaries are included; this might take the form of a "summarizing paragraph" that lists a series of villains.

On page 205, you'll find a short round-up of notable non-super-hero characters.

WILL EISNER PROPERTIES

The **Spirit**, **Lady Luck** and **Mr. Mystic** were originally published exclusively by Quality, but the copyright has always been protected and owned by Will Eisner. He made this very clear in interviews with Jim Amash for *Alter Ego* and his authorized biography, *A Spirited Life*. These three heroes starred weekly in the *Spirit* "comic book section," which was inserted into newspapers across the country. The Spirit and Lady Luck

were also reprinted in *Police* and *Smash Comics*.

The scarcer availability of *Spirit* newspaper supplements makes the review of these characters a *bit* less comprehensive. Still, our Lady Luck and Mr. Mystic profiles are well-fleshed out, and some holes were filled in by reading reprinted material from other publishers.

Like Blackhawk, it is also impossible to comprehensively cover the entire history of the Spirit here. Numerous other publications have documented the strip's characters and history very well. Check out *The Will Eisner Companion* by Couch and Weiner, WillEisner.com, and Wildwood Cemetery (wildwoodcemetery.com).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Some consideration is given in crediting artwork to a given creator or creators. However, in the latter part of World War II, and afterwards, Quality's policy was to exclude bylines from its comic features. Many early strips were also signed with cryptic pen names. Some credits are well known and others remain a mystery. These things make identifying some of the artists (and thus *creators*) very difficult. If our research concludes there is sufficient grounds to attribute unsigned work to a particular artist, we do so definitively. If no conclusion can be made without further investigation, we use the statement "artist uncertain"—instead of perpetuating a guess.

The artist information in the *Grand Comics Database* and *Who's Who* projects are not 100% reliable, especially for Golden Age comics. They are great starting points, but many errors exist in them. Information at Lambiek.net and in Jim Steranko's *History of the Comics* also provide some valuable clues. In some cases, our identifications are based on our own research. For example, we attribute the art in "Neon" to Alex Blum. This comes from a comparative study of Blum's signed features and other art attributed to him. As many as a dozen examples were brought together to draw our conclusion. Yet in cases like the Red Bee, the same amount of investigation leads only to the *guess* that he was first drawn by Charles Nicholas. With this uncertainty, that credit is withheld.

Writers are credited as creators only if a byline or independent source supports it. Will Eisner was probably involved in the creation of many characters, but he also held "plotting conferences" with his writers. These writers *would* be regarded as co-creators—if we knew definitively who they were.

HEROES IN CHRONOLOGY

The following list tracks the first appearances of Quality's costumed and super-powered heroes. **The Hawk**—Quality's first *costumed* hero—appeared only once, and **the Clock**—who is considered the first *masked* comic book hero ever—debuted under a different publisher, in *Funny Pages* vol. 1 #6 (Nov. 1936). **Doll Man** is sometimes misidentified as the first Quality super-hero, but he is indeed their first *super-powered* hero. Both **Bozo** and the **Invisible Hood** sneaked in a few months before him, but the Hood's powers were part of his cloak, and Bozo was a robot. The first costumed *woman* was **Lady Luck**, and the first *super-powered woman* was **USA**.

1936

- November, *Funny Pages* vol. 1 #6 (Comics Magazine Co.)
The Clock

1937

- November, *Feature* #2
The Hawk
- December, *Feature* #3 (1st Quality appearance)
The Clock

1939

- August, *Smash* #1
Bozo the Iron Man & Hugh Hazzard Invisible Hood
- December, *Feature* #27
Doll Man

1940

- May, *Feature* #32
The Voice
- Zero, **Ghost Detective**
- May, *Crack* #1
Black Condor
- Madam Fatal**
- Red Torpedo**
- The Spider**
- July, *Hit* #1
Hercules
- Neon the Unknown**
- Red Bee**
- July, *National* #1
Merlin
- Uncle Sam**
- Wonder Boy**
- June 2, *The Spirit Section*
The Spirit
- Lady Luck**
- Mr. Mystic**
- August, *Smash* #13
Magno
- September, *Smash* #14
The Ray
- November, *National* #5
Quicksilver
- November, *Feature* #38
Ace of Space

- December, *Feature* #39
Destroying Demon (Bruce Blackburn)

1941

- Jan., *Smash* #18
Midnight
- February, *Crack* #10
Tor
- March, *Feature* #42
USA
- May, *Smash* #22
The Jester
- August, *Military* #1
Blackhawk
- Blue Tracer**
- Miss America**
- Yankee Eagle**
- August, *Police* #1
Firebrand
- The Human Bomb**
- The Mouthpiece**
- Phantom Lady**
- Plastic Man**
- #711**
- The Sword (Chic Carter)**
- August, *Smash* #25
Wildfire
- Winter, *Doll Man* #1
Just 'N' Right
- December, *Hit* #18
"Stormy" Foster, the Great Defender
- Ghost of Flanders**
- December, *Military* #5
The Sniper

1942

- Jan., *Feature* #57
Spider Widow
- March, *Police* #8
Manhunter
- May, *Smash* #33
The Marksman
- June, *National* #23
The Unknown
- Summer, *Doll Man Quarterly* #3
The Dragon
- September, *Feature* #60
The Raven

- December, *National* #27
G-2
- December, *Hit* #25
Kid Eternity

1943

- Jan., *Crack* #27
Captain Triumph
- Jan., *Police* #15
Destiny

1945

- June, *National* #48
The Whistler

1950

- Jan., *Buccaneers* #19
Black Roger

1951

- December, *Doll Man* #37
Doll Girl

LADY CRIME FIGHTERS

(Non-humor, non-syndicated)

Some of Quality's heroines ran for a very long time, but most were short-lived. Listed chronologically:



CHARACTER, DATE, ISSUE (LONGEVITY)

1. Lee Preston of the Red Cross, May 1940, *Crack* #1 (9)
2. Sally O'Neil, policewoman, July 1940, *National* #1 (75)
3. Lady Luck, June 1940, *The Spirit Section* (300+)
4. Betty Bates, Lady at Law, Oct. 1940, *Hit* #4 (62)
5. USA, March 1941, *Feature* #42 (7)
6. Miss America, Aug. 1941, *Military* #1 (7)
7. Phantom Lady, Aug. 1941, *Police* #1 (23)
8. Wildfire, Aug. 1941, *Smash* #25 (13)
9. Spider Widow, Jan. 1942, *Feature* #57 (18)
10. X of the Underground, March 1942, *Military* #8 (6)
11. Her Highness and Silk, April 1943, *Hit* #2 (30)
12. Doll Girl, Dec. 1951, *Doll Man* #37 (11, but many more as a supporting character)

LONGEVITY OF QUALITY SUPER-HEROES

This list tallies the total number of regular Quality Comics issues in which each super-hero appeared.

NUMBER OF ISSUES/ APPEARANCES	CHARACTER/ FEATURE
645+	The Spirit
300+	Lady Luck
207	Mr. Mystic
166	Plastic Man
160	Doll Man
142	Blackhawk
95	Manhunter
68	Midnight
67	Quicksilver
64	The Jester
64	The Clock
58	The Human Bomb
54	Kid Eternity
53	Uncle Sam
49	Lady Luck
41	Zero
41	Bozo the Robot
36	Captain Triumph
32	Invisible Hood
31	Black Condor
30	Sniper
30	The Spider
27	The Ray
26	The Marksman
26	Merlin
26	Wonder Boy
24	Red Bee
23	Phantom Lady
22	Destiny
22	Madam Fatal
21	Hercules
20	G-2
20	Red Torpedo
19	The Unknown
18	Spider Widow
17	Neon the Unknown
17	"Stormy" Foster, the Great Defender
17	Tor
16	Blue Tracer
15	#711
15	Inferior Man
13	Raven

13	Wildfire
13	The Mouthpiece
13	Firebrand
11	Doll Girl
9	Black Roger
9	Magno
9	Scarlet Seal
8	Ghost of Flanders
8	Yankee Eagle
7	Miss America
7	USA
7	The Whistler
6	The Voice

5	The Dragon
4 (57)*	Chic Carter, a.k.a. the Sword
4	Ace of Space
2 (37)*	Wings Wendall
2 (25)*	Destroying Demon
1	The Hawk
1	Just 'N' Right
1	Margo the Magician
1	Monsieur X

*These heroes were only costumed briefly. The number in parentheses indicates the total run of their non-masked features.

HOW TO READ THE CHARACTER PROFILES

The following character profiles use a unique style of **ISSUE CITATION** in lieu of traditional footnotes, which would require the reader to jump back and forth in the text. Events from a particular comic book issue are followed by a small citation, e.g., (Crack Comics #1). To further reduce clutter, all successive citations from the *same comic book series* omit the title. For example, if the next event was from the next issue of *Crack Comics*, you'll see only: (#2)

These profiles are written in the style of DC's *Who's Who* entries, with suspension of disbelief. That is to say, **WE USE THE PAST TENSE** and refer to characters as if they are "real." This differs from the present-tense style preferred by Wikipedia for fictional characters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION and observations about characters is interspersed within the profile, at the appropriate chronological points in the story.

Some characters' **DC COMICS HISTORIES** are extensive. In most cases, this does not greatly affect the course of their Quality Comics adventures. Most DC origin stories have honored the original history while adding "behind the scenes" type information. In all cases, we are careful to delineate the information so that the reader knows what was presented in the original Quality tale, and what was by DC.

COVER DATES are included only for first appearances, Quality appearances, and significant featured runs in a character's history.

ACE OF SPACE

Created by H. Weston Taylor and Harry Francis Campbell

NAME + ALIASES: A.C. "Ace" Egan

FIRST APPEARANCE: *Feature Comics* #38 (Nov. 1940)

APPEARANCES: *Feature Comics* #38–41 (Nov. 1940–February 1941)



The Ace of Space, from *Feature* #39 (1940); art by Harry Francis Campbell.

Outer space themes were never Quality's specialty. The longest-running feature was Vernon Henkel's "Space Legion," which lasted just a year-and-a-half in *Crack Comics*. That strip featured a *Flash Gordon*-like lead character. The Ace of Space was the only super-powered space hero, lasting a mere four issues. Yet his origin story may sound strangely familiar.

One day as New York playboy "Ace" Egan was piloting his private plane, he encountered a red-and-yellow alien spaceship that had landed on Earth. A giant three-eyed, yellow-and-red alien emerged from within, looking ill. The creature was unable to survive in Earth's atmosphere and predicted his own impending death. He communicated telepathically to Egan, warning him of an impending attack by an alien

race called the **Slogons**. As he died, he bequeathed a power belt to Ace.

When Ace donned the belt, he grew instantly to a height of nine feet, and he could run at great speeds. Ace left the alien's body with a local hospital and returned to the spaceship, making it invisible. The belt imparted the knowledge of how to pilot and use the spaceship, and Egan made quick work of the invaders, sending their ships crashing to Earth. Back home, the newspapers dubbed him the **Ace of Space**. Ace kept these things secret from his butler, **Jennings**. (*Feature* #38)

Like the alien before him, Ace found that the belt gave him telepathy. This power alerted him to a plot by European dictators to impersonate United States lawmakers. (#39) When a friend of his was arrested for embezzlement, Egan uncovered the evil **Dr. Devlin**, who had developed a serum that gave men super-speed. (#40)

In his final adventure, Ace joined the Army Air Corps and became Lieutenant Egan. Naturally, he parked his spaceship near his post. His reputation as a playboy preceded him with his commanding officer, and when spies seized a new flying fortress, Ace won no points by dashing away to change. With a flying leap and a one-two punch, he'd reclaimed the Army's new plane and taken down the enemies. When he returned to base, the Major took him aside and noted that Egan had been injured in his left arm—just like of the Ace of Space. The jig was up, but the Major promised to keep Egan's secret. (#41)

NOTE

Ace's first adventure was signed by two creators, Harry Francis Campbell and H. Weston Taylor, but only Taylor after that. The two also collaborated on the Quality features "Bruce Blackburn," "The Scarlet Seal," and "Wizard Wells."

POWERS

When he donned his belt of power, the Ace of Space grew to a height of nine feet, could leap to great heights, and had telescopic vision and telepathy.

THE BARKER

Created by Joe Millard and Jack Cole

NAME + ALIASES: Clarence "Carnie" Calahan

GROUP AFFILIATIONS: Mammoth Circus

FIRST APPEARANCE: *National Comics* #42 (May 1944)

APPEARANCES:

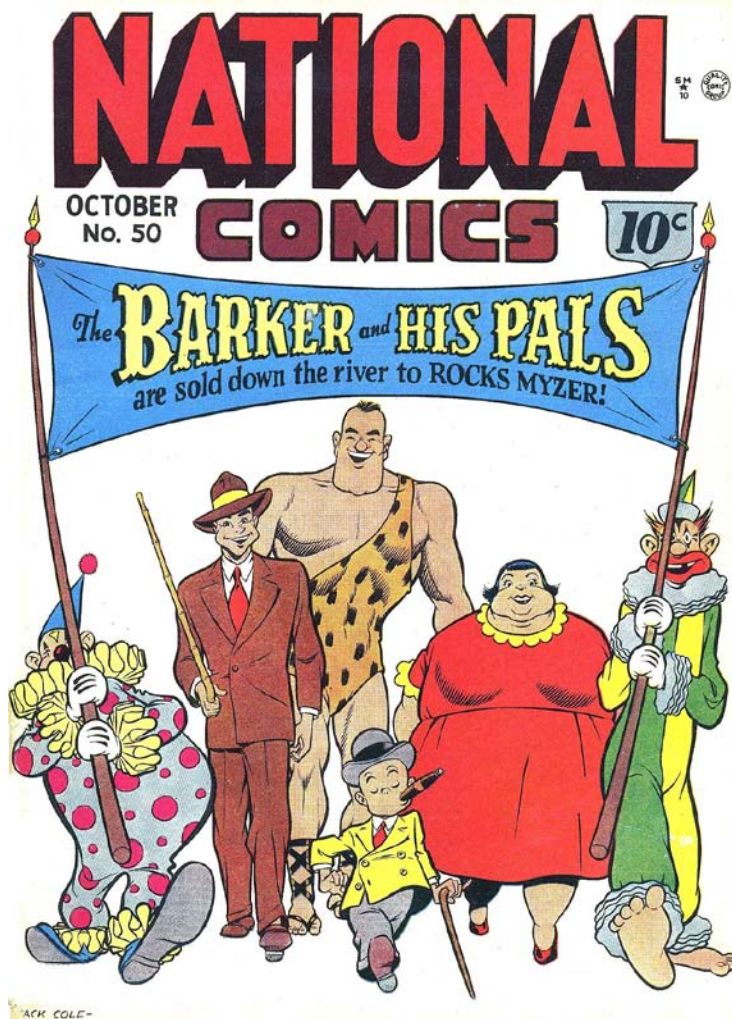
- *National Comics* #42–75 (May 1944–Dec. 1949)
- *The Barker*, 15 issues (Autumn 1945–Dec. 1949)

The Barker was the delightful creation of Joe Millard and Jack Cole (signed), a feature that followed a colorful group of circus performers across the country. Cole drew only the first two adventures, in *National Comics* #42–43, and then it was taken over by Klaus Nordling, who continued to build the momentum that led to a solo series in 1945. Cole's brief involvement is probably the reason why editor Gill Fox claimed that Klaus Nordling created "The Barker." Most of this band of freaks weren't truly "super-powered," but the series had the same sense of continuity, oddity and camaraderie as strips like "Death Patrol," "Blackhawk," and "Plastic Man."

In each tale **Clarence "Carnie" Calahan** (a circus barker, his first name revealed in *National* #48) and his friends traveled to a new city, where they performed their specialty acts. When first introduced, they were looking for work and staying at Liz Flannery's Boarding House for Show People, in Big City, Pennsylvania (a link to Cole, who was from that state). There the silver-tongued fortune teller **Professor Zell** intercepted a telegram to Carnie from **Colonel Lane** of the Mammoth Circus. Lane had invited Carnie to participate in his sideshow. As Zell attempted to sneak out, he was caught by Carnie and his pal, **Major Midge** (a little person). **Lena** the fat lady and **Tiny Tim** the strongman rounded out his crew. Carnie's troupe headed out after Zell to Waynetown, where they wrested the contract from Zell and set up shop in Lane's circus. The show there also included a "rubber man" performer called **Elasto**. (*National* #42)

Most of the Barker's adventures concerned freaks, shysters or both in one, who tried to scam the circus out of money. In the next town, the Colonel met his rival, **Cappy Kane**. Kane had learned about a new freak, the four-armed **Clarence Twiddle**, who was an accomplished pickpocket. The two of them set out to undermine Lane's circus, robbing patrons and implicating the Mammoth Circus. After Carnie exposed them, Lane offered Twiddle an alternative to jail: work for Carnie as "**Spudo the Spider Man**." (Spudo was the only supporting character to be awarded his own spin-off feature, beginning in *The Barker* #1.) This story also featured the first appearance of **Madam Shali**, the snake charmer. (#43)

Carnie's sideshow usually featured this core group of characters, but many other honest performers were introduced along the way, including **Peaches**, the bearded lady, and the **Thin Man** (#44); **Bombo** the human cannonball (#49); the fortune teller, **Madame Futura**, and a bona fide "Big Foot," the **Missing Link** (later called **Jo-Jo**), who was barely kept in check by Shali's snakes. (#51) The **Wills Brothers**, **Ken**, **Ben** and **Len**, were acrobats terrorized by the dreaded **Hawk**, an oddity who wore a beaked mask and clawed boots. The Hawk was actually the magician, **Rabello**, who sought to consolidate



Carnie, Tiny, Midge, and Lena, from *National Comics* #50 (1945); art by Jack Cole. Right: Leo the Lion Man, from *National* #68 (1948); art by Klaus Nordling.

performers under his own empire. (#55) In swamp country, Carnie met the Cajun **Coco Leboc, the Crocodile Man**, who made a convincing suit from animal skins but proved more profitable as a crocodile wrangler. (#62) **Bert the Whirlwind** was a motorcycle stunt man. (Barker #5) The poor **Witch of Whistler Hollow** found herself kidnapped and impersonated. After that, Col. Lane wanted nothing to do with witches. (#9)

Usually though, the freaks on show were less than honest. Most came and went in a parade of crooked astrologers, contortionists, cannibals, and men dressed in weird suits. **Benny the Beep** framed the Colonel for theft. (National #44) **Scramolo** the escape artist was only out to scam the circus's bankroll. (#53) A phony magician posed as the hillbilly **Sorcerer Si** of Yukville. (#57) A trio of talking animals (bear, seal and fox) were made to "speak" via miniature transmitters affixed by their trainer, **Duff**. He commanded the animals to attack and kill. (#58) **King Looney**, the exiled monarch of Numforia, swindled ladies into believing they were destined to be his queen. (#65) And *men* fought over **Salamo**, a belly dancer planted in the circus by her husband, the



sultan **Ali Ben Riff Raff**. (#67)

In *National* #46, **Samson Smith**, took Tiny Tim's place as the new strongman, even though Tiny continued to appear in plainclothes as more of a towering rodeo trickster. Lane pit Samson against Kane's own strongman, the **Mighty Moose**. (#47) In issue #55, Tiny was once again the sole strongman. He was also challenged by **Percy the Powerful**, a 90-pound weakling who took special pills every twelve hours for his tremendous strength. Percy's pills were stolen by a mad professor who fed them to the animals. In order to bring order to the circus, Carnie downed a mouthful of the pills, which enabled him to speed around the circus and clean up the mess! In the end, they decided to destroy the pills, lest the market become saturated with strongmen. (#69)

A year after the feature's debut, *The Barker* #1 was published. The solo book featured the same cast and ongoing coterie of menaces. That first issue focused on **Bobo** the evil clown, who killed one of the acrobats (named "Jack" in this story, but drawn the same as the Wills Brothers in *National* #55). Also, **Lydia** the elephant rider was caught stealing, and **Lily Ryan**, the bareback horseback rider, fell and was replaced by the equestrienne/temptress, **Nona de Garonne**. Nona attempted to fleece the circus with her hypnotic kisses. (The Barker #1) Lily wasn't so pure either. She later murdered **Tallulah** the tattooed lady. (#5)

Many of the guest stars in the "The Barker" appeared to possess truly superhuman powers. Aside from Spudo, whose four arms were "real," there was the **Copper Man**, whose body was half copper, divided down the middle. He found a way to restore himself to fully human. (Barker #2) The **Human Dynamo** was a former stunt man named Wylie who fashioned a trick costume to make it appear he could generate 50,000 volts of electricity. He was out for revenge against Mammoth's high diver, **Hi Cliff**. (#5) In the curious case of **Lulu Belle**, a dummy who seemingly spoke and walked independently, her ventriloquist, **Zargo**, was revealed as a swindler using near-invisible wires to control her. (#7) **Denoso the Birdman** was an exceptionally talented high wire artist who looked as if he could fly. (National #59) Louie, the **Human Fly** effortlessly scaled buildings until his sticky suction cups were revealed. (#64) **Leo the Lion Man** shared a bond with **Nero**, a lion with whom he'd grown up. (#68)

The personal dramas focused on Lena when she became the object of desire for both of the **Jealousy Brothers, Skinny and Fatso**. Lena's main concern was losing her gig to the fat man. Col. Lane thought the solution was to hire a skinny *woman*, **Miss Digby**, but she only diverted the brothers' affections. Also, **Andor** painted his performers **Carl** and **Nita** to look like bronze statues while they held challenging poses with their great strength. When a mishap resulted in Carl's death, Andor dove into poisonous paint, freeing Nita from his extortion. (Barker #6)

Both *The Barker* and *National Comics* ended around the same time, in late 1949. The cover of *The Barker* #15 (Dec. 1949) showed Carnie walking sadly in the rain, as if Nordling knew the book was canceled. Their final act brought them to Gay Bay, where they found their camp on the waterfront. They tried to devise new ways to wow folks with aquatic tricks. Instead they were terrorized by **Froggo, the Frog Man**, who could stay underwater for 20 minutes. Naturally, Col. Lane thought Froggo was the perfect attraction, but Froggo was bilking the operation for cash. He kidnapped Shali and took her to his secret lair, accessed by underwater entry, followed soon by Carnie and Spudo. In the end, his suit was revealed to contain an air reservoir that helped him breathe underwater. (Barker #15)

BILL THE MAGNIFICENT

Creator unknown

NAME + ALIASES: Bill Hanson

KNOWN RELATIVES: Dudley Doodle (uncle)

FIRST APPEARANCE: *Hit Comics* #25 (Jan. 1943)

APPEARANCES: *Hit Comics* #25–34 (Jan. 1943–Winter 1944)

Where once Quality had been an innovator in its features, Busy Arnold eventually threw himself into the “winds of change.” In 1943–44 most anthology titles began shifting away from super-heroes, towards a humorous tone. Elsewhere in the industry Captain Marvel was outselling Superman, and MLJ’s Archie Andrews had taken off like wildfire. “Bill the Magnificent” channeled both of those characters. Bill’s red hair recall’s Archie’s, and his powers were accessed by a magic phrase, “jeepers creepers!”, like Captain Marvel’s. Bill’s adventures lacked the heart or passion of those characters, and the feature lasted for only ten issues. Still Quality must have been betting on its success; the feature was awarded eleven pages, which was second only to the cover feature, “Kid Eternity.”

Bill’s creator is a bit of a mystery, though some of the middle adventures were clearly drawn by Paul Gustavson. The Grand Comics Database credits Tony DiPreta, but a visual comparison with DiPreta’s contemporary work yields no obvious parallels.

Bill Hanson was an average Joe from the town of Middleburg who inexplicably found himself living with incredible powers (and an amnesia that went with them). A newsreel reporter called Roscoe came to town one day hoping for a juicy story about this new hero. He instead found Bill, a humble copy boy. Everyone in town knew about Bill’s fantastic powers—except Bill himself. By chance, whenever Bill uttered the phrase “jeepers creepers!”, he became possessed with great speed and strength. Unfortunately for him, Bill retained no memory of anything he did while in this state, and with his powers came a personality change. He laughed at danger, and was more confident with girls.

Bill’s sweetheart, **Peggy**, noticed the difference too. When her father was kidnapped, she encouraged Bill to say the magic words, but he resisted, citing an “ill feeling” when doing so. Inevitably, Bill would say “jeepers creepers” in passing, and then the game was on. But easy come, easy go... whenever Bill was struck on the head, his powers subsided. (*Hit* #25)

The cowardly local Sheriff Poodle quickly got into the habit of asking Bill to do his dirty work, especially when it came to standing up to the likes of **Grego the Grisly**. (#27)

News of Bill’s abilities spread quickly, and in the name of science, he was kidnapped by the pint-sized **Professor Twerp**, who tried to discover the root of his powers. By this time Bill had also moved on to another girl named **Jean**. But when he was in the thrall of his powers, Bill forgot all about her and he took a plane to Hollywood to ask Hedy Lamarr for a date! Jean intervened and brought him back to reality. (#29) He also defended Jean’s honor against the diminutive **Dr. Batso Belfry**. (#30)

Bill’s last three adventures were drawn by Milton Stein in a more cartoony style. Still, the adventures concerned Bill’s desire to impress girls, even if it meant entering a boxing ring. (#33) The love interest in *Hit* #34 was named **Peggy**, but in his last adventure, Bill was back to wooing Jean. There he sought to compete with a suntanned life-guard by going under a tanning lamp himself. The result left him a



Bill demonstrates his power, from *Hit* #27 (1943); art by Paul Gustavson.

bit “overdone,” and he was mistaken for an Indian prince. (#34)

POWERS

When he said the magic phrase “jeepers creepers!”, Bill the Magnificent was mysteriously endowed with super-strength, invulnerability and speed. As a bonus, his personality was enhanced to give him more confidence (perhaps too much so).



BLACK CONDOR

Created by Will Eisner and Lou Fine

NAME + ALIASES: Richard Grey, Jr., a.k.a. Senator Thomas Wright

KNOWN RELATIVES: Major Richard Grey (father, deceased), Mrs. Grey (mother, deceased)

GROUP AFFILIATIONS: All-Star Squadron, Freedom Fighters

FIRST APPEARANCE: *Crack Comics* #1 (May 1940)

APPEARANCES:

- *All-Star Squadron* #31-35

- *Black Condor* #4, 10
- *Crack Comics* #1-31 (May 1940–Oct. 1943)
- *Freedom Fighters*, vol. 1 #1-15
- *The Ray* vol. 2 #10, 18, 20-21
- *Justice League of America* #107-108
- *Secret Origins* vol. 3 #21
- *Uncle Sam Quarterly* #2

The **Black Condor** is one of Quality's most enduring and popular creations. Like the Ray and Uncle Sam, he was created by Will Eisner and Lou Fine (here, under the pen name "Kenneth Lewis"). Fine's art on these features quickly set the bar for artwork at Quality. No doubt the "Black Condor" feature would have lasted longer had Fine remained on it. He drew the Condor's first 24 adventures, and signed his true name beginning with issue #13. The Black Condor nabbed alternating covers of *Crack Comics* through #26 (when Captain Triumph took over).

In his first adventure, the Black Condor's costume was colored red, then changed to black-and-blue after that. Various stories describe the Black Condor as the "only flying man in the world." Although the Ray had also debuted by then, it is a telling phrase. Despite the proliferation of super-powered heroes in comic books, few—including Superman—had yet to demonstrate the *true* power of flight.

The Black Condor was destined never to know his given name. He was born **Richard Grey, Jr.**, the son of archeologist **Major Richard Grey**. When he was yet an infant, his family went exploring in Mongolia, where they were besieged, and both his parents were murdered by raiders. Before her death, the baby's mother hid him away so he might survive. In this remote land, the only living things were the native condors, with whom the infant Grey seemed to make a connection.

Not long before, a meteor crashed near the mother condor's nest. The radiation from this meteor created a strange bond between her and the infant Grey, and she adopted him as one of her own. (The meteor was the only detail added to this origin by Roy Thomas in *Secret Origins* #21, 1987.)

As he grew, the boy studied the mechanics of flight, and eventually succeeded in emulating it. He had grown to adolescence before meeting another human, the monk named **Father Pierre**. It was Pierre who taught the boy how to speak English, but his mentor also fell prey to raiders led by **Gali-Kan**. Afterwards the boy committed himself to using his gift of flight to combat injustice. As the **Black Condor**, he made a name for himself across continents and got revenge on the men who murdered Pierre. (*Crack Comics* #1)

After some adventures, the Condor returned to India, where he defended a British brother and sister, the Kents, from **Ali Kan**. In doing so he brandished a new weapon he'd acquired somewhere along the line: a "paralyzing black ray gun." (#2)



Growing up in vulture-land, from *Crack Comics* #1 (May 1940); art by Lou Fine.

On his first trip to America, the Black Condor served as protector to a friend's daughter. Not surprisingly, he didn't care for the city. (#3) He remained for a time in the Far East, sometimes disguising himself as an old wanderer. Even there the Axis menace had spread. The Condor encountered **Sinh Fang** and his cohort **De Graf** in their "unconquerable" fortress called Mount Doom. This place went up in a blaze generated by the villains' own powerful death rays. (#4)

He fought a coterie of exotic foes like the strange **Karlo Klug**, who at the direction of his midget master launched an army of "human kites." (#6) The Chinese **Lung Woe** created the drilling "spinning death machine" for his Nazi cohort. This machine turned out to have a mind of its own and manufactured an army of itself! The black ray gun took care of it. (#8) And there was **Yaho**, a giant golem of the Waquo Indian tribe. (#7)

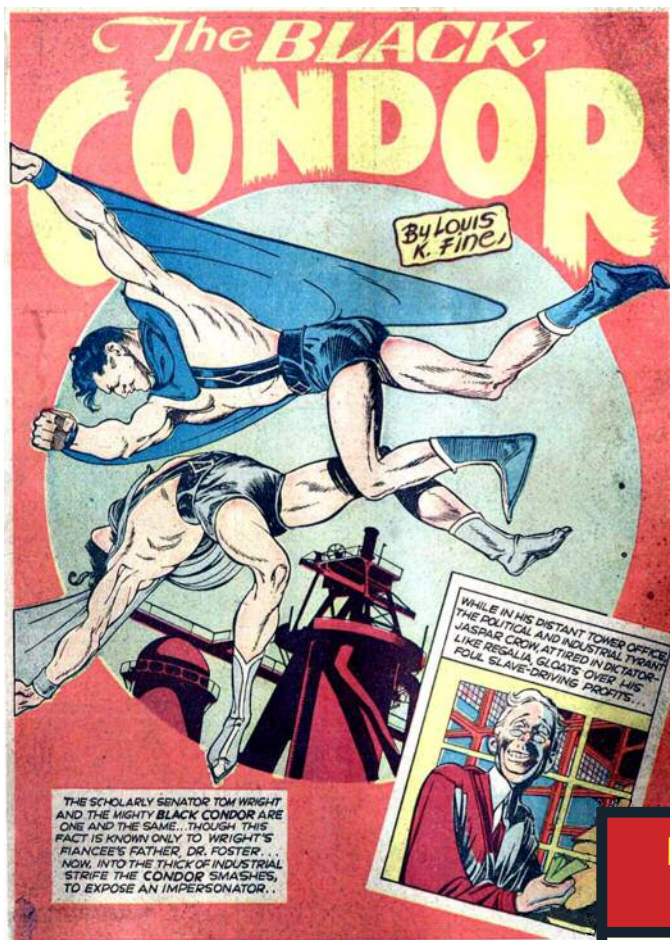
While the *Black Condor* was borne of Asia, it was America where Richard Grey Jr. found his mundane identity. When he returned to the land of his birth, he happened upon **Senator Tom Wright**. The Senator was beleaguered by fellow Senator, **Jaspar Crow**, who attempted to bully others into voting for an appropriations bill that would provide kickbacks. Wright refused, and Crow sent his thugs to rub him out. All this went down under the watchful eye of the Black Condor,

who swooped in after Wright had been shot. As Wright explained his situation, the Condor realized that the two of them were dead ringers for one another. The Condor decided to take Wright's place in Washington and vote *against* Crow's bill. But when he returned to check on Wright, the Senator had died. He then met the man in charge of his care, **Dr. Foster**, who was also the father of Wright's fiancé, **Wendy Foster**. The Condor vowed to take up the Senator's agenda and led a revolt that drove Crow from the country. It was less easy to step into the relationship with Wendy... (#11)

From this point forward, most of the Black Condor's battles were intertwined with his life as a Senator. He solved the murder of inventor **Carl Stark**, who created a remote control bomb that was used to destroy ten tall buildings! The culprit was a Nazi, **General Korn**. (#13)

Jaspar Crow was a constant thorn in both Wright's and the Condor's sides. After his first defeat, the Senator began a long descent into darker evil that was manifested in his private endeavors, too. His dictatorial complex even led him to create an impostor Black Condor to attack his own workers, who were poised to strike. The true Condor infiltrated this plant and frightened Crow into paying his workers properly and agreeing to humane working conditions. (#14)

When Senator Wright sided with the nation's Indians on a proposed tax bill, Crow objected because, naturally, he stood to gain



Against his doppelganger, from *Crack* #14 (1941); art by Lou Fine.

the Indians to his side, but he was ultimately forced to win entirely himself. Then he went back to the Senate to help a final bill. (#17)

Crow hired a psychic fraud called **Mysto** to steal the Hope Diamond (#20) but most of his treachery was centered on Wright himself. The Condor discovered that Crow bugged the Senate and Senator Wright was implicated in leaking secret information. Wendy stepped in to help on this case by using her wiles on Wright's rival, **Karl**, a Nazi spy. (#21) Jaspur Crow somehow uncovered the fact that he was the Condor's home land and chose that place for his revenge. Crow kidnapped Wendy, leaving clues for the Condor in Mongolia. Crow foolishly thought he could leave the Condor and Wendy at the mercy of predatory eagles, but he underestimated the Condor's special relationship with the birds. After defeat, the Black Condor left Crow to wander the unforgiving mountains, never returned. (#26)

With the entrance of America to the war, the Senator was kicked into high gear. Wendy also helped her father to develop a special "food concentrate" for Europe. (#22) **Jed Hawks** tried to warn Senator Wright of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—but he'd been on a commission and arrived *after* December 7. Hawks also came off a second attack, on the Panama Canal. This attack did not commence but Hawks took to the skies and made a suicide jump from a Japanese ship. The Black Condor disabled the Nazi's ship and the Germans there surrendered. (#23)

Senator Bird took Crow's place as Wright's nemesis in *Crack*.

He wanted to create a national park for the protection of bald eagles and Tom was key in shelving the bill. Bird responded by ordering his eagle, **Fury**, to pick off the committee members. (#30)

The Condor aided **Professor Tinker** and his weird, invisible and prescient **Do-Bos**. When crooks sought to acquire these entities, Tinker's place was set aflame, allegedly killing the Do-Bos. (#27) In his swan song, the Condor defended one fellow Senator (**Briggs**) from another (**Logan**). (#31)

FATE, DC

The next time the Black Condor appeared, it was at DC Comics. In 1973's *Justice League of America* #107, Tom was reintroduced to readers along with other former Quality heroes as the **Freedom Fighters**. This story and the successive *Freedom Fighters* series are no longer in DC continuity. For the details on this series and summary of events, see "The Freedom Fighters" on page 41.

The Black Condor's *current* DC continuity picks up from his Quality appearances more-or-less chronologically with his appearances in *All-Star Squadron*, set in the days of World War II. After the U.S. entered the war, the Black Condor decided to enlist his services with the All-Stars. At his first meeting, he met **Uncle Sam** and joined his splinter group called the **Freedom Fighters**. They moved to stop **Baron Blitzkrieg**'s invasion of Santa Barbara, California. (*All-Star Squadron* #31) For the remainder of the war, the Black Condor remained with this group, who eventually separated from the All-Star Squadron and were based in Washington D.C. (*Who's Who* '87 #5)

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