



THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN,
FACULTY OF FINE ART,
SCULPTURE DEPARTMENT.



COMICS , SEX & VIOLENCE .

by HERWARD KING.

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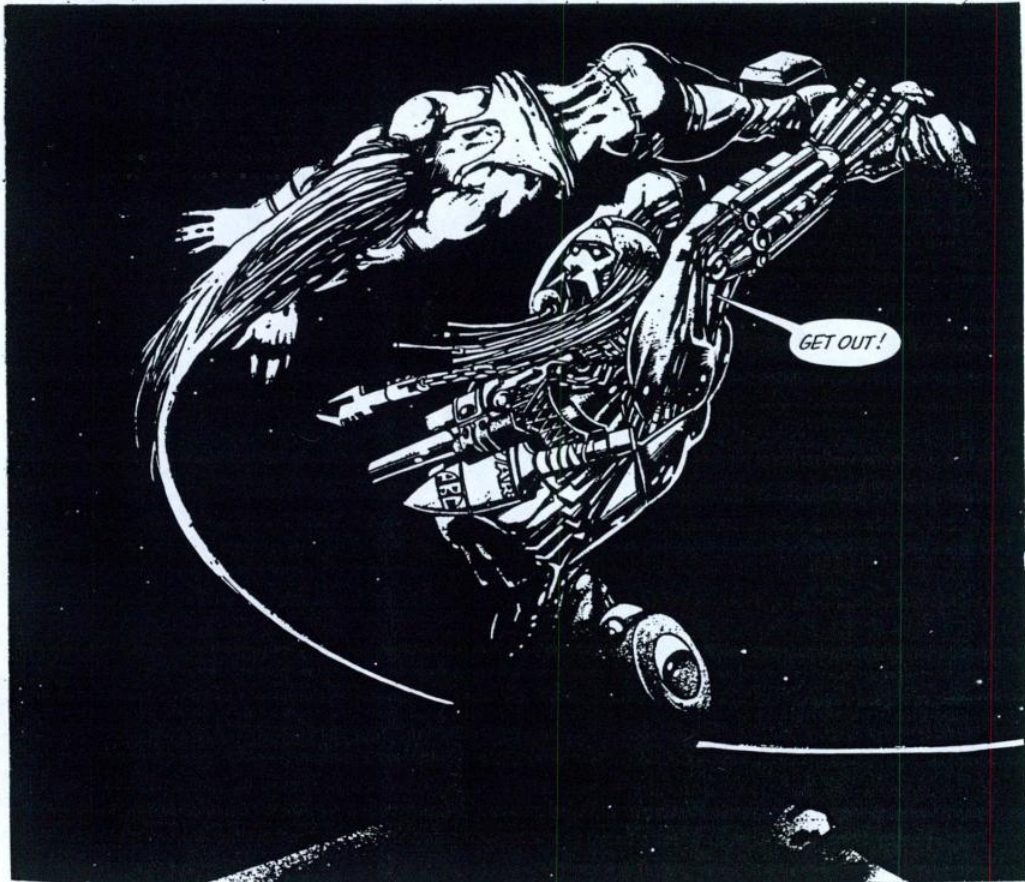
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SECTION 1

Sex and violence have long been an integral part of human society. They remain, perhaps, two of the most important aspects of behaviour to the human race: yet why in the twentieth century have these traits become either taboo or entertainment?

The comic book as we know it today, a glossy covered throw away book, has only been with us since the 1920's, (yet its roots are much older). It thrives on a staple diet of violence, and within its pages are, perhaps, some of the most bizarre depictions of sex. Its reflection of these elements of human behaviour often do nothing more than show a mediocrity of imagination and greed of exploitation, but many enlighten and make important truths.

But to what extent can the mainstream comic book be defined as art?

The complex orders imposed on the word "art" make it a difficult word to analyse. In the modern definition, the "Oxford Guide to the English Language" terms it thus:

"art n. Production of something beautiful; skill or ability; paintings or sculptures etc.; subjects other than sciences requiring sensitive understanding rather than use of measurement."

Sigmund Freud claimed that it was the highest product of the human consciousness. He linked it with Phantasy, stating that Phantasy plays a most decisive function within the whole mental structure and that it is Phantasy that links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of the consciousness, (art).

This analysis of what part Phantasy plays in art has led to aesthetics: the science of beauty. Aesthetic perception is accompanied by pleasure. Pleasure is achieved from the perception of the pure form of an object, regardless of what it is made of and its purpose. The form of the work invests the object with qualities of enjoyment: style, rhythm and meter introduce an aesthetic order which is pleasurable in itself.

The observer can elevate themselves by identifying with the art object, provided it is aesthetically formed in their eyes. They can enjoy it and forget it.

Journalism, television, comic books, and to some extent cinema, are part of the international communications network. They are "the media", not "art", to the purists.

All media can somewhere reach the definitions of art as laid down by society, yet there is an unnecessary gap between what purists term "high" art and "low" art - or historically between ancient, or traditional, and the modern.

The media in today's modern world exert huge influence. They provide us with information, aesthetics and entertainment. Everyone is affected by the media.

The arts, however, cater for the rich in society and, perhaps, the intellectuals of other classes.

They are treasured and kept precious.

The difficulty in allowing a new medium to expand and become an "acceptable artform" is at this wall: the elitist attitude of the plastic arts.

To me, the products and actions of human creation can be termed as "art".

The creation can be either "good" or "bad", depending on the observer's own beliefs.

The comic book, as a mass medium, is not constrained to the structures of high art, and its ready availability and quick, easy communication make it an important medium.

Its mass appeal to readers has attracted many different creators to try it out, and so the medium has expanded in thousands of different interpretations, some using it in an obvious manner: a simple story through pictures, others pushing the very limits of literature and drawing techniques.

The derision that has fallen upon the comic book is unnecessary and ignorant.

The cons may still outweigh the pros in this medium, but work is, and has been, produced that is worthy of the label of "art".

Society is based on the premise of man's creations. So the modern creator holds an important job within society as an innovator, and as the person who reflects the human animal at a precise moment in time.

When stripped of all pretension, art is culture, and history; it is as simple or complex as the people who made it.

Creation, or the art of creation, is perhaps the only thing people have to offer to an unknowing, uncaring universe. So, in this definition, art is easy to recognise as it is the fibre of society.

With the creation of an object many different interpretations may be taken from it, from the pure aesthetic to the sociological and contextual relevance of it. Because of its nature, art can be flawed, as it is a creation of human beings.

The interpretation of a piece is left to the individual's own personal likes and dislikes, and they decide the criticism of the work.

Art and craft are not the same. Much art has great craft behind it, and good craftsmanship of art can oft create a more accessible piece to the viewer. But the two are not interchangeable. I would term craft as the skill of rendering.

Art is unique. All creations made did not exist before. There is only one "Stolen Child", only one "Guernica", only one "Krazy Kat". There are similar things, but art influences art in order to create new beasts.

This essay, I hope, will show the merits and shortcomings of the mainstream comic book by looking at two important issues in human society and how the medium reflects, parodies or endorses these parts of human behaviour, and why.

Sex and violence in the modern comic book are the two behavioural issues on which, I believe, it may be criticised or praised for its various interpretations of the human being.

How close are the majority of comic books to achieving art? Are any? And what steps could be taken to push sections of the medium away from its niche of "trivial entertainment"?

THE MEDIUM AND ITS HISTORY.

Pictures are the universal communicator. We think in pictures; we dream in pictures. Children recognise the visual image long before learning to read. Prehistoric man drew before writing. With the picture there are no language barriers.

Graphic illustration is, without a doubt, one of the oldest art-forms: the communication through pictures. Some of the earliest images, created by Palaeolithic man on the walls of caves, show in their fluid drawings an awareness to communicate a religious or magical concept to the observer.

A dead Egyptian King was not properly equipped for his journey in the afterlife without an elaborate scroll depicting the perils of the journey, placed with his body inside the tomb.

As decoration, illustration has been an element of human life since earliest times. The Greek and Roman friezes show the great battles and stories of the time. The Assyrian and Cretan cultures adorned their worlds with tales in pictorial form. The Middle Ages did the same for the Battle of Hastings with such art as the Bayeaux Tapestry. This manner of storytelling, (tales in pictorial form), can be seen as the origin of the "comic".

Presumably, the time that might be called a watershed for the development of the modern comic book occurred in the Eighteenth century, the age of Hogarth and Thomas Rowlandson.

It can be said of Hogarth's paintings that he melded the novel and theatre together in his work. His satires, painted in sequence - "A Harlot's Progress", "Marriage A La Mode", "A Rake's Progress" and "Industry and Idleness", had found a strong narrative series in art. Engravings of these sold well to an eager public and much bootlegging went on by copiers cashing in on Hogarth's popularity.¹

In aesthetic terms, the comic strip's achievement is the development of a form of narrative art using its own unique conventions. Perhaps the earliest outstanding user of the possibilities of the strip, (pictures and words), was a Swiss schoolmaster called Rudolph Topffer,

who lived from 1799 to 1846. Topffer created a set of illustrated novels consisting of a series of drawings divided by frames with a continuous narrative at the foot of each panel.

The stories were bizarrely imaginative, embracing space travel, violent surrealist fantasy and dreams. Goethe encouraged him to publish his work, and the story of "Monsieur Cryptogramme" appeared in the Paris magazine "L'Illustration" in 1845.

He wrote, in his essay on Physiognomics in 1845², "The picture story, to which the criticism of art pays no attention and which rarely worries the learned, has always exercised a great appeal. More, indeed, than literature itself, for besides the fact that there are more people who look than can read, it appeals particularly to children and the masses, the sections of the public that are particularly easily perverted and which it would be particularly desirable to raise. With its dual advantage of greater conciseness and greater relative clarity, the picture story, all things being equal, should squeeze out the other because it would address itself with greater liveliness to a greater number of minds, and also because in any contest he who uses such a direct method will have the advantage over those who talk in chapters."

Professor E.H. Gombrich has pointed out that Topffer's great discovery was that the artist could evolve a pictorial language without reference to nature and that an abbreviated style can rely on the on-looker to fill the gaps with their imagination.

On this simple concept the comic book is based.

These discoveries led the way to newspaper illustration and the satirical cartoons of the Nineteenth century. It is probably from Victorian times that the seed of derision first fell upon the "Pictured Word", which continues with many to this very day. Such was the hang-over of the Victorian tradition of literacy, which decreed pictures as unrespectable. Pictures were easy, they did not demand the same intellectual effort as the written word to make their communication. Pictures encouraged mental laziness and moral collapse. The middle-class Victorians accepted only the news pictures in the "Illustrated London News" and the cartoons of "Punch" and "The Times", all others were "Penny Dreadfuls".

The first regular comic in the modern sense is probably "Aly Sloper's Half-Holiday". Appearing on the 3rd of May, 1884, it was published in London by the Dalziel Brothers, and was to continue with minor interruptions until 1923. Its claim to be the first comic rests on the fact that it contained a regular character - "Aly Sloper" - who was a gin swigging, working-class loafer who poured scorn on his fellows.

The paper was crude but hard-biting, aimed at a young adult readership. Its humour and contempt for pomposity were directed towards the new literate masses emerging as the first effects of the 1870 Education Act.

From here the comic book snowballed with titles such as "Comic Cuts" and "Chips" emerging in 1890, and in America "Little Bears and Tigers" which was composed of humorous animal drawings by James Swinerton. It was exposed to the public in the "San Francisco Examiner" in 1892.

In 1896 Richard Outcault drew the "Yellow Kid", a landmark in comic creativity, for the American newspaper, the "New York World". The "Yellow Kid's" guttersnipe impudence endeared him to thousands of readers; and, characteristically, anything could now be created on the comic book's pages.

MEDIUM MECHANICS.

In the world of comics there are few barriers to the imagination. Within their timespan, from origins to the present day, thousands of fictional characters and worlds continue on their merry way.

The comic book can explore most things, from your most bizarre dream to your most real moment; they are a multi-faceted and living world. For the purpose of simplicity of definition you can divide the "comic" into two sections - "the comic strip" and "the comic book".

"The comic strip" is a medium of huge influence. They exist in most newspapers. They can be as anarchic as Steve Bell's "If" in "The Guardian", or as understated as Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury". Some are straight humour, some political, and all are read avidly. The products of American Syndication are seen by more than 200 million people in sixty countries everyday.

The strip can take many forms, basically it consists of a sequence of narrative pictures featuring various characters. Most form an incident; the punchline at the end of about four separate pictures.

The "comic book" is a magazine with a page measuring about ten inches by seven. Within its pages is one story about certain characters, or, in the English tradition, various different stories about various different characters. A more recent departure from this format has

been the so-called "graphic novel", which is basically a high quality comic in a proper book format.

With few exceptions, there is no interchange between newspaper strips, comic books and children's comics.

Most strips attempt to fulfill no high social purpose. They are pure light relief, using fantasy, adventure and slapstick to create a dramatic or comic effect.

Sometimes a strip comments satirically on a serious problem, like Walt Kelly's "Pogo", but this is not generally condoned by large syndicates or their clients. But the attitudes of the syndicates are changing, as can be seen by the syndication of such strips as Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury".

It must be said that the comic strip has been looked down upon as a medium, often being accused of mindlessness and superficiality. Its role is ambiguous, as it is called upon to attract readers of different intellect and ages.

Comic strips are usually one-man creations - the creator usually both draws and writes the strip. In America, where many strips are syndicated, the strips' copyright belongs to the syndicate.

In the "comic book" there are many jobs in the creation of one story. Generally there is a writer and an artist, but this can be the same person.

In the European tradition, the artist pencils and inks his own creations, colour may be added by a colourist or by the artist.

Speech bubbles and lettering are handled by the letterer.

WALT KELLY - POGO POSSUM.

Walt Kelly was born in 1913. He developed a talent for art and eventually worked for Walt Disney Studios. After leaving Disney he came up with the idea for a comic strip involving a coloured boy and the various animals of a Southern American swamp, (the Okefenokee), this was in 1943.

The boy, (Bombazine), soon disappeared from the stories and the animals took over totally. The stories are written in a deep Southern drawl and Kelly's drawing style owes a lot to the Disney Studios. "Pogo Possum" is, however, more than just slapstick; within the swamp's settings Kelly satirises the modern world by means of allegory.



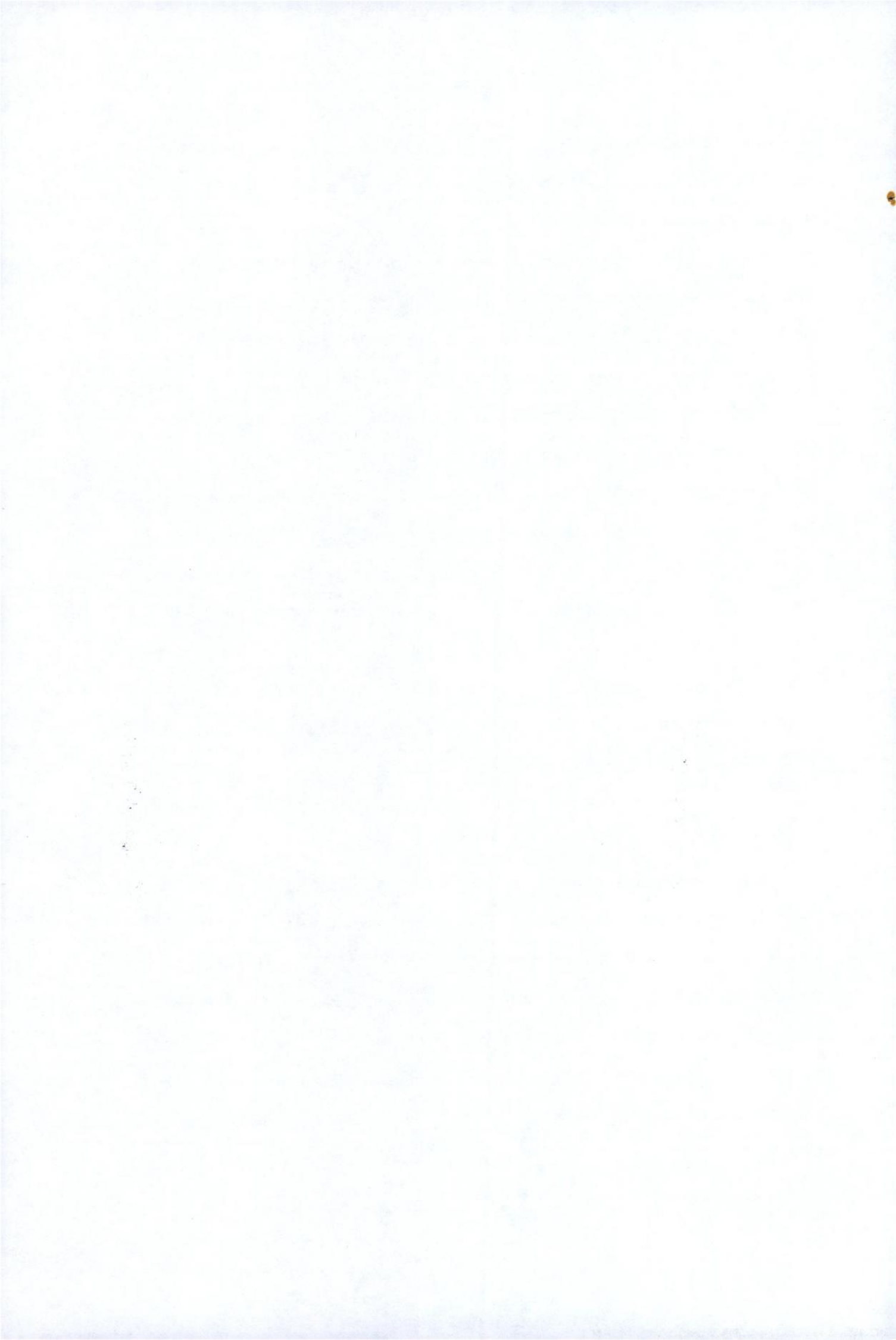
In America, especially in the large publishing houses, such as "D.C." and "Marvel", three people often do the artist's job: penciller, inker and colourist.

Today, most creators own the entire rights to their creations, this is due to a stormy past with large publishers, such as the two mentioned above and the "Fleetway Group" in England, where the creations often remained the property of the company.

Comics have their own unique shorthand which, today, is universally recognised. Dialogue is in the form of speech bubbles, thought is represented by diminishing bubbles linked to the thinking character. Bubbles are not new, Rowlandson and Gillray used them in their cartoons at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, and they they have been traced back to the Fourteenth century.³ Shouting is denoted by large lettering in the bubble, and movement by "speed lines" from the moving character. Onomatopoeic words such as WHAM, ZAP, and CRASH, all followed by obligatory exclamation marks, indicate impact. Sleep is denoted by Z-Z-Z-Z-Z, and swearing by */*?@?@*.

The drawings can vary from photographic reality to a highly stylised artform.

In composition, strips often use cinematic techniques, but the views in strip form are unique and can create huge impact if handled in the right manner by the creator. Cinematically, it is difficult to present the everyday lives of characters without disrupting the narrative flow. Comics can succeed more easily having still frames, allowing the reader to go back and study the picture sequence. The characterisation may continue along with the story in each issue, the strip having no time limit.



BERKE BREATHED'S - BLOOM COUNTY.

"Bloom County" is, in many ways, a modern successor to "Pogo Possum". It is just as humorous but probably more direct at satirising the modern world.

Here, Milo and Opus attempt to explain "comic shorthand".

BY POPULAR REQUEST:

The Official

HANDBOOK

for better

COMIX COMPREHENSION

A COMPANION GUIDE TO THE GRAPHIC IDIOSYNCRASIES OF THE MODERN COMIX PAGE AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE FOLLOWING COMIX SCENARIO PERFORMED BY MR. M. BLOOM AND MR. OPUS:



I GOT AN IDEA!



"SURPRISES"
-SUPPEN
-MENTAL
-EXCITEMENT
-POPULARIZED
-IN "MUTT"
-AND "JEFF"
-1727-1939

"SWIMLES"
-MOVEMENT,
-CHANGE IN
-DIRECTION,
-SEE "MOOVLES"

WHAT?!



"BULBLE"
-["TRIP,"
-SUDDEN
-INSPIRATION



LET'S BLOW YOU INTO ORBIT!

"MOOVLES"
-MOVEMENT,
-PHYSICAL
-ACTION



HOLY MACKEREL!!

"SWEATLES"
-ANXIETY,
-WORRY,
-ORIG. SEEN IN
"POPEYE", 1727,
-MODERN USAGE
-KING... STILL
-OCCAS. BEEN
-FLYING FROM
-HEADS OF
-CHARLIE BROWN,
-SLUGGO
-AND RONALD
-REAGAN



"ZIPPLES"
-ACCELERATION,
-BASICALLY
-A LINEAR
-"MOOVLE"

KABLAM!



"COMIX LICENSE"
-HUMOROUS EXAGGERATION, FOR INSTANCE, A PENGUIN COULD NOT ACTUALLY SURVIVE THE LACK OF OXYGEN AFTER BEING BLOWN INTO THE STRATOSPHERE BY A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION.

"POOFLES"
-SEVERE IMPACT,
-OFTEN IN ASSOC. WITH "STARS"

"STARS"
-SEVERE PAIN

SHOO!!

"SHOOLES"
-REVERSES
-"ZIPPLES"

WIHAM!



"BOOZLES"
-INTOXICATION,
-IN THIS CASE,
-"ROOT BOOZLES"

THAT WAS GREAT!!



"CRANIAL SMOKE"
-BURNING HUMILIATION,
-CARCINOGENIC IF
-INHALED

AS CAN BE SEEN, WITHOUT PROPER FAMILIARITY WITH THE GRAPHIC SYMBOLS, A COMIX SEQUENCE SUCH AS THIS WOULD MAKE NO SENSE WHATSOEVER. LORD KNOWS, WE DON'T WANT THAT.

Film directors, such as Nicholas Roeg and Jean-Luc Goddard, have of course managed hurdles such as these within their films. Yet few films can create the intimacy of the comic book. However, directors, such as these, have done much to improve the standards of film as an artform. The comic book has not yet overcome this hurdle owing, probably, to Siegel and Schuster's creation of "Superman" in 1932.

The influence of a character like "Superman" created a wave in the industry. It stamped the idea in the British and American public's mind that the comic book was a child's prerogative. In Japan and on the Continent, however, a more mature attitude reigned, with both cultures supplying all age-groups with different strips.

In the English-speaking world there have been several attempts to jolt this senile infant into a more artistic form: for instance, the radical underground comics of the 1960's and 70's were a subversive and humorous attack both on society and the comics industry, with fresh views on life, sex and art. More recently, through the work of such creators as Alan Moore, Frank Miller and the Hernandez Bros., comics have finally started to explore the medium's potential.

However, this modern outlook, that comics can be an acceptable and powerful artform, is very much a renaissance - as much was done by many early pioneers. Take, for instance Will Eisner's "Spirit".

Often called the father of modern comics, Eisner's work continues to appeal, even today. His layouts, powerful black and white drawings, amusing and often tragic stories have influenced many creators and will continue to do so.

WILL EISNER - THE SPIRIT, "RIVER OF CRIME".

Will Eisner was born in 1917. He became a part of the newly created comic book industry. He used production, line techniques to fill the huge demand for strips at the time, creating strips like "Blackhawk", "Sheena" and "Uncle Sam".

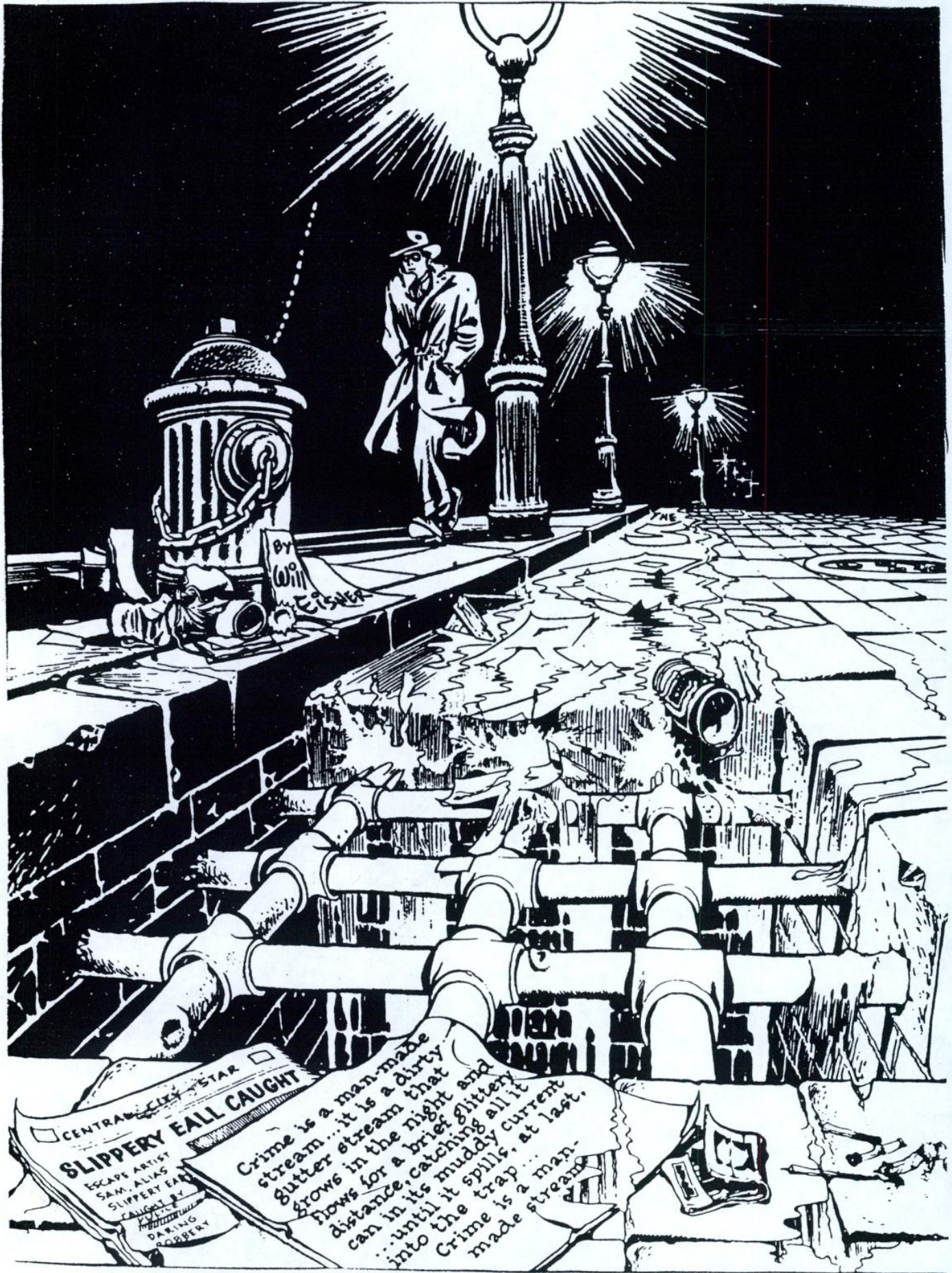
In 1939 he wrote and drew the "Spirit" for American Syndication. Highly acclaimed for its succinct use of space and revolutionary storytelling techniques, "The Spirit" pushed the medium closer to achieving an "art" status.

The strip is a good reflection of America of the time. Eisner seemed fascinated by the thousands of stories that could be present in one town.

"The Spirit" was an elusive character, the presumed dead criminologist Denny Colt who lived in Wildwood Cemetery. "The Spirit" aided the police in capturing criminals, only a face mask hid his identity and showed any allegiance to the newly created superheroes of the time.

Often "The Spirit" did not play the main role in the stories, the strip regularly explored the lives of many minor characters who lived in Central City.

Eisner's work continues today, and his fascination with the lives of the everyday man on the street has led to his more recent work such as "The Building" and "A Contract with God".



CENTRAL CITY STAR
SLIPPERY EAL CAUGHT

ESCAPE ARTIST
SAM, ALIAS
SLIPPERY EAL
CAUGHT BY
POLICE
DURING
ROBBERY

Crime is a man-made
stream... it is a dirty
glitter stream that
flows in the night and
distance, catching all it
can in its muddy current
...until it spills, at last,
Crime is a man-
made stream.



Like television and cinema, the comic medium is an easy communicator. The combination of story and artwork must bind together to achieve a wholeness as a fictional piece to the reader. The comic book is a strong medium and its influence lies within many of the structures and modern myths of society today. Characters such as "Superman" and "Rupert the Bear" are easily as well known as older myths such as that of "Robin Hood" or "Johnny Appleseed".

Often, strips have reflected a special morality: the G.I.'s in action on Omaha Beach carried comics of "Superman" destroying the Axis forces. Many newspaper strips preach conformism and the safety of marriage and the family. In the lives of "Blondie" and her husband "Dagwood", for all their family mishaps, life is fundamentally secure and decent.

Sex is usually taboo and violence rarely realistic - but this is changing. It must be said that realistic changes are emerging in comics, some are good and about time - some are ominous.

THE AUDIENCE.

The creators of strip cartoons within the comics industry have by far the largest cross section of readership.

Business men and women, housewives and children and people of various different standards of education all read different newspaper strips, such as Walt Kelly's "Pogo" and Johnny Parker's "B.C.". But the readership of the comic book is a different story.

John Berger in "Ways of Seeing" states that men are the ultimate observers;⁴ living, as we do, within a patriarchal system. This male orientated viewpoint can be clearly seen in the world of the comic book.

As a medium, the comic book is drawn, written and published by males for a largely male audience. Children and adolescents make up the bulk of the market. Although presumably a woman's market does exist for some titles: women, as an audience, continue to read comics in negligible numbers.

Perhaps better marketing techniques could be mastered to achieve results, but the mainly sexist, macho overtones and extreme violence within the majority of comics keep most women far from the medium and any worthwhile titles.

WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

The needs of women in comics was discussed recently at the 1990 U.K. comics convention, with a mixed audience of comics readers, writers, artists, teachers and retailers.⁵

The first answers showed that women wanted improved artwork and scripts, with good quality production to show effect and care by the creators.

All women wanted to see a maturity and sensitivity to relationships portrayed in comics and an equality of race and sex.

It was noted that the differences between male and female creators were mainly to do with the amount of violence within a strip. The excessive violence within the majority of mainstream comic books did not attract women at all; and, for women to buy and read comics, they needed to be stimulated by the material on offer.

Women have had a long association with comics, amongst them the creator of "Rupert the Bear", Posie Simmonds and Claire Bretecher, to name but three. It must be acknowledged that women have held only a small holding in this male dominated industry, but this is changing slowly and a feminine perspective is being gained by the medium, as more women creators gain interest in the medium.

Some of the best examples of women creators work can be seen in titles such as "Wimmen's Comix", Knockabout Press's "Seven Ages of Women", and gay comics such as "Tits 'n Clits".

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN.

The main reason that would keep women far from the comic shelf is their portrayal on the pages of your average comic book.

Throughout history women have been symbols of sexuality and fertility; because of rules dictated by a male orientated society, women must not only watch how they perceive themselves but also the importance of how others perceive them. As John Berger says, "Men act, women appear".⁶

Women's representations have been subject to sexism in all the arts since earliest times, and the comic book is no exception. The majority of women portrayed in comics can quite simply be seen as types. Often, men are too; but this is generally to create humour. Women, however, can more often be seen as secondary characters, whose only appearance is either to titillate the reader or back the more central male elements in the story.

DAVE STEVENS - BETTY PAGE.

"Betty Page" is an apt pastiche of the representation of women in comics. The character owes a lot to artists such as Wally Wood in the 1930's and creations such as Max Fleischer's "Betty Boop".

Stevens is better known for his creation "The Rocketeer", drawn with the same 1930's clarity of line as "Betty Page".

BETTY PAGE

· FIRST ISSUE ·

Betty Page COMICS



Featuring:
THE COMPLETE STORY...
"CAPTURED
JUNGLE GIRL"

© Dave Stevens
1981



WILL EISNER - THE SPIRIT. (PLASTER OF PARIS).

"Plaster of Paris" exudes the female characteristics defined by American Film Noir of the 1940's. She reflects many of the well known actresses of that time. She is mysterious and sensuous, characteristics that Eisner uses in his heroines time and time again. Intelligent, sexy women whose only flaw is to fall in love with the main character. Very much a product of its time.



JAMIE HEWLETT & ALAN MARTIN - TANK GIRL.

"Tank Girl" emerged on the pages of "Deadline", one of the new "adult" comic/fanzines. "Tank Girl" gave a boost to women's individuality.

Initially, it must be said, "Tank Girl" reflected the adolescent urges of its creators for "tits and guns", but the strip has matured.

"Tank Girl" and her boyfriend Booga, (a Kangaroo), terrorise Australia drinking lager and toting guns.

Loud and anti-idiot "Tank Girl" is a girl for the '90s.

"ONE VISION I SEE CLEAR AS
LIFE BEFORE ME, THAT THE
ANCIENT MOTHER HAS
AWAKENED ONCE MORE,
SITTING ON HER THRONE
REJUVENATED, MORE
GLORIOUS THAN EVER.
PROCLAIM HER TO ALL
THE WORLD WITH A
VOICE OF PEACE AND
BENEDICTION"*****

I'M 23. LOOK AT ME, I'M 23

I CAN SEE YOU ALL FROM
UP HERE..... ALL THE
BOYS AND GIRLS..... ALL
THE DICKS AND FANNYS.

AND WHAT OF THESE
SEXUAL REVOLUTIONS,
BOYS AND GIRLS?

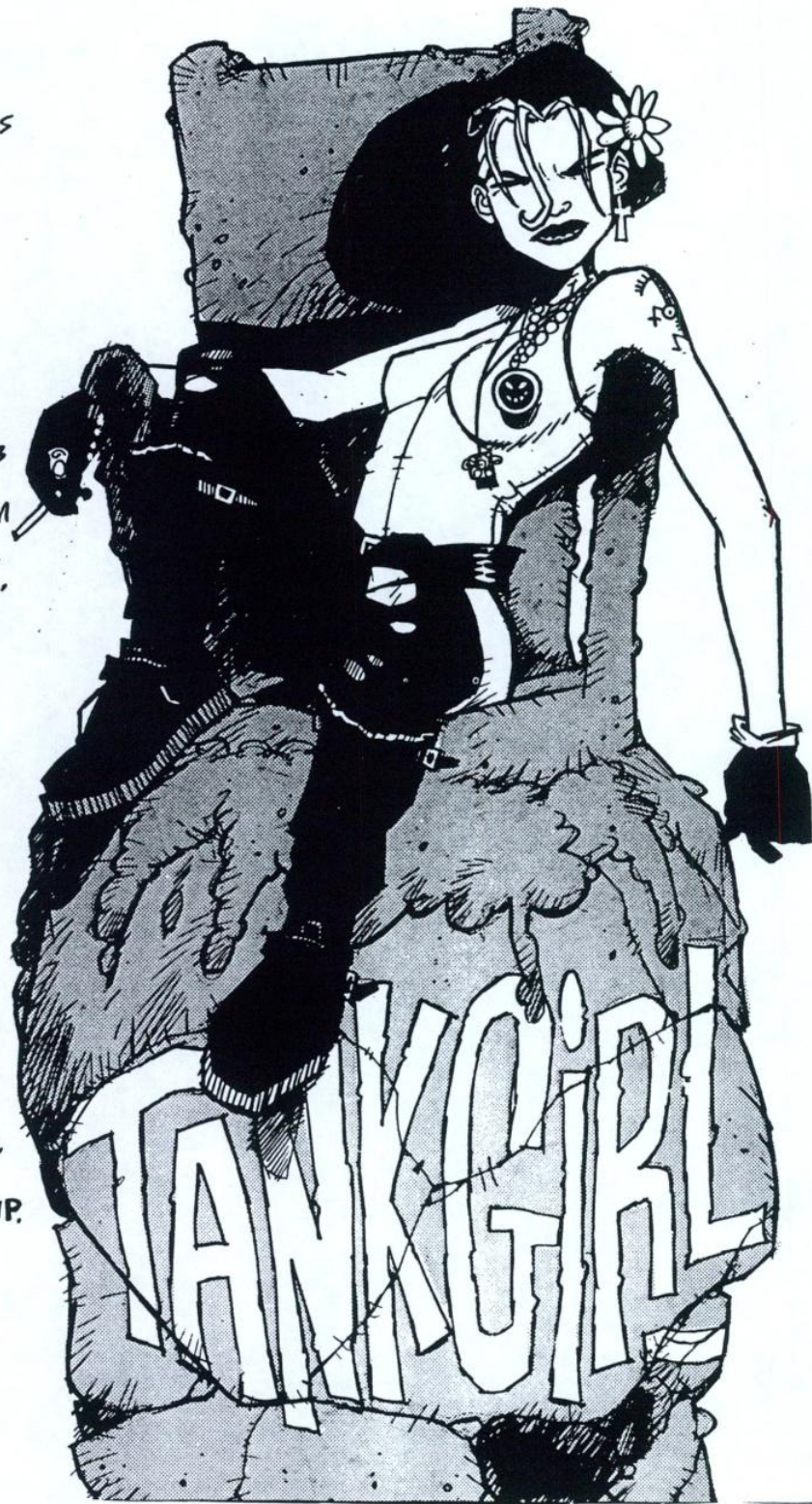
ARE YOU IN THE RIGHT
SEXUAL CATEGORY?
THIS IS THE QUESTION.

WHO GIVES A SHIT.....
TITS AND BALLS DICKS
AND FANNYS.

GIVE ME THE CELEBATE
VEGETARIANS FROM
MARS ANYTIME.

I'D LOVE TO F*CK YOU UP.

I'D LOVE TO F*CK YOU UP.



FEMFORCE.

An image such as this in mainstream comics would have been unthinkable fifteen years ago, now unfortunately it is far more common. Women are often used as excuses for very graphic violence.

The mock "damsel in distress" of "Betty Page" is still far removed from violent images such as this.

Women in comics are too often victims of their own sexuality and the victims of violence.



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, LADIES!

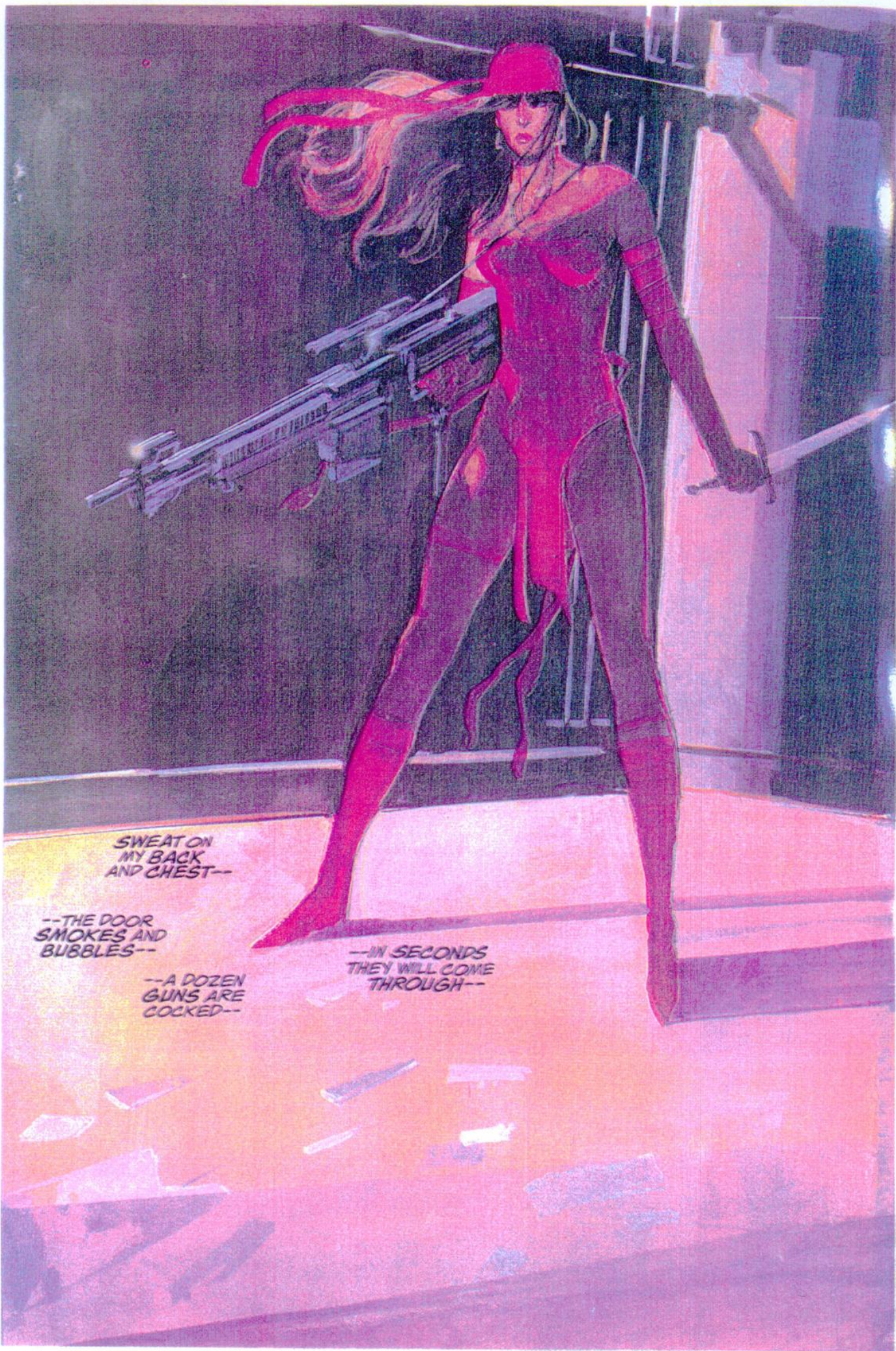


FRANK MILLER & BILL SIENKEIWICZ - ELEKTRA ASSASSIN.

"Elektra" was created initially by Frank Miller as a lover for Marvel's "Dare Devil". So intrigued was Miller by the character that this book was written.

Elektra is the ultimate woman, designed from male fantasy she is violent, intelligent and beautiful.

The images often border on the pornographic yet sex is not part of the complex story. It is a celebration of women yet also, obviously, a pictorial representation of male fantasy. Elektra is the logical finale to the motley collection of superladies over the years.



SWEAT ON
MY BACK
AND CHEST--

--THE DOOR
SMOKES AND
BUBBLES--

--A DOZEN
GUNS ARE
COCKED--

--IN SECONDS
THEY WILL COME
THROUGH--

Youthful women are nearly always aesthetically pleasing to the male observer of the day, unless some other characteristic is needed to create humour or drama in a story.

Aesthetic rules for beauty are laid down by each generation, these apply to both men and women; but more specifically to women, who are often looked up to as objects of desire within patriarchal society.

The creation of a beautiful female form also has capitalistic intentions. As an object of beauty, it becomes a product and therefore something to be bought and sold. This may demean the object: such as representations of women in pornography, or it may not.

This commercial slant to the comic book is very much in evidence; for, if the publisher can create a character, male or female, that captures the reader's imagination, the publisher is aware of expanding the audience of a title and thus making more money.

Often, as we will see later, women are used as excuses for violence, or, more often than not in many modern titles, as the victims of violence.

Just because comics have been portraying, in the majority of cases, these images of role models for the last fifty years does not mean it should continue. If a script demands sex and violence, let us at least see a maturity in the interpretation of these elements of society.

CHILDREN.

It must be acknowledged that the primary purchaser of the majority of comic books is still the child.

Children, from an early age, are encouraged to read comics as an aid to reading and education.

British comics such as "The Beano" and "The Dandy" are read avidly by four year olds to eighty-four year olds, and offer a simplicity of strip and style of humour based on "homely British values".

Young adolescents are pressed by the American publishers, notably "D.C." and "Marvel", and in England by "Fleetway" Stalwart's "2000 A.D.". This marketing is of a tradition that has been in evidence since the days of "The Eagle" and "The Lion". However, all of this material now available to children is not, perhaps, as wholesome as it was, and the "values" of a comic like "The Eagle" are long gone in the world of the big publishers.

Generally, in the world of comics, male children are well catered for in their choice of reading material. Girls, however, are not.

There is a sickly "wholesomeness" to girl's comics, evident in titles such as D.C. Thompson's "Bunty" and "Mandy" to the older girl's comics like "Just Seventeen" and "Jackie".

There is a lack of realness in their Enid Blyton scripts and worlds of hockey and ballet classes: role model propaganda, pure and simple.

Historically, these comics owe their existence to titles such as "Girl", the sister companion paper to Marcus Morris's "Eagle" in the 1950's.⁷ It must be noted that girl's comics have not moved with the times, still imposing gender divisions and social myths on their pre-adolescent and teenage readers.

THE HORIZONS OF COMICS: THE ADULT MARKET.

The adult market, to the world of comics, is not a new phenomenon. Yet, in the English-speaking world, this product - "the adult comic" - is the fastest growing sector of the comic book market since the early 1980's.

"Adult comics" have been around since the underground "comix" of the 1960's, where titles such as "Oz", "Cyclops" and "American Splendour" flourished.

Presumably, the adult comic has its roots in the newspaper strip, where many humorous stories have adult oriented viewpoints and humour, strips such as Walt Kelly's "Pogo" and Al Capp's "L'il Abner". Adult comics have always existed on the Continent, and can be seen in the work of creators such as Jean Giraud and Milo Manarra, and even in the adult oriented subtleties of Continental children's books such as "Asterix" and "Tin Tin".

In Japan, comics exist for everybody and there are titles available for all sections of society. Yet, in the English-speaking world, it is only now, according to the main body of opinion, that the comics market has at last come of age and the medium worthy of adult attention; and, although not yet recognised as serious literature, many people believe this will not be long in coming.

In England the idea of an "adult comic" first germinated with the arrival of the science fiction comic "2000 A.D." in the late 1970's. Fleetway had brought out Pat Mills' "Action" shortly before. "Action" was an extremely violent comic concentrating mainly on war stories and science fiction stories such as "Death Game 1999". Due, presumably, to sales losses "Action" merged with its war comic stable-mate "Battle" before disappearing altogether.

"2000 A.D." was aimed at twelve to eighteen year olds and was I.P.C. Magazine's (Fleetway's) attempt to knock rival company D.C. Thompson's "The Beano" from the bestsellers list, and it worked. "2000 A.D." was a mix of science fiction adventures and homely violence, just the sort of thing adolescent boys dream of. It introduced the authoritarian "Judge

Dredd" to the world, (a future lawman who was judge, jury and executioner in an American dystopia), and served as a breaking-in ground for some of the finest artists and writers in the comics medium today. The comic, however, thirteen years on, is growing tepid and has toned down its radical ways, though still selling in excess of 110,000 copies a week.⁸

"2000 A.D." in the late Eighties spawned Britain's new adult comics: "Crisis" was created by the conviction of editors Pat Mills and Steve MacManus that there was an older audience. They were asked to prove it by developing a title for the upper end of the "2000 A.D." readership. "Crisis" launched with sales of 100,000 a week but quickly settled to 40 to 50 thousand.

"Crisis" has run strips about race relations in Brixton, the Northern Ireland problem, and the story "Third World War" depicts Western exploitation of developing countries. Seventy per cent of the readership also read "2000 A.D." and is aged between 16 and 24. The gender ratio, however, is still 90 per cent male.

"Crisis" covers controversial issues which, until recently, would have rarely appeared in a mainstream comic; as Steve MacManus points out, "'2000 A.D.' has always had a social comment, but it had to be snuck in through the back door, disguised as 'Judge Dredd', 'Rogue Trooper', or 'Strontium Dog' stories. What 'Crisis' has done, is felt secure enough about the maturity of its readership, to be more overt about the social content".⁹

Following on the success of "Crisis", Fleetway launched, in May 1990, "Revolver".¹⁰ It was a fortnightly adult comic claiming to be different from "Crisis" by being "a melting-pot of social issues", as

The English Violent Legacy

2000 AD. - COVER BY MIKE MC MAHON.

The now legendary 2000 AD brought storytelling and violent images to the youth of the 1970's. "Judge Dredd" became the most popular character in Britain, created originally by John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerro, the future lawman was transformed to the right wing authoritarian figure he now is by both Wagner and Alan Grant - although Pat Mills' early stories had encouraged a more humanitarian character.

Mike McMahon's art on "Dredd" imposed the "Judge Dredd" image far more than any other artist.

2000 AD was a comic book milestone.

Prog 59 8 APR 78

South Africa 30c
New Zealand 30c
Malaysia \$1.00
Australia 30c
Mercury 17g
Venus 10g
Mars 15g
Asteroid Belt 20g
Saturn 84g
Neptune 87g
Pluto 93g

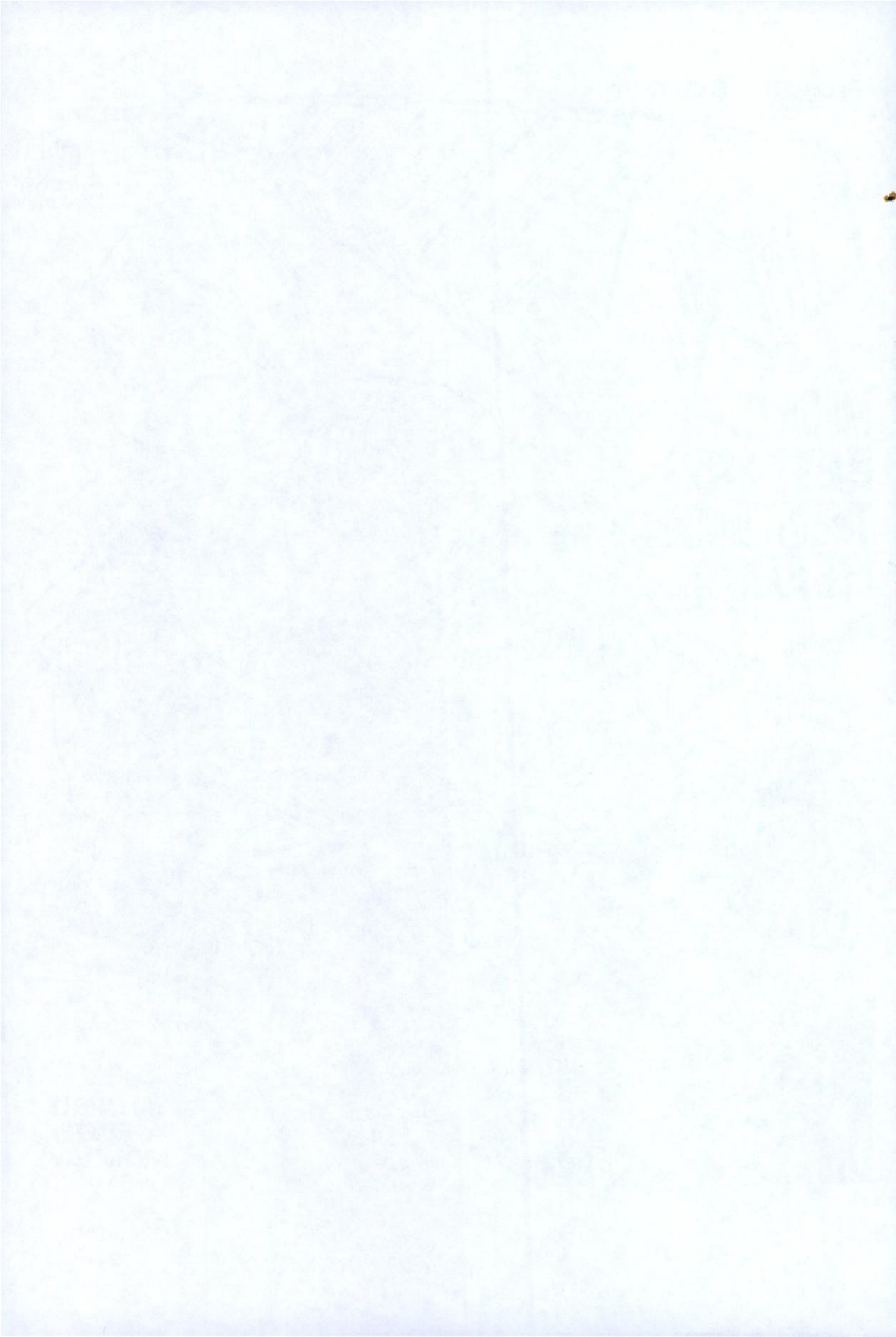
9p
EARTH MONEY

WORLD AD.

MEGA CITY BEWARE— THE JUDGE IS BACK!



**IN ORBIT
EVERY
MONDAY**



The English Violent Legacy

PAT MILLS & JOHN HICKLENTON - NEMESIS THE WARLOCK.

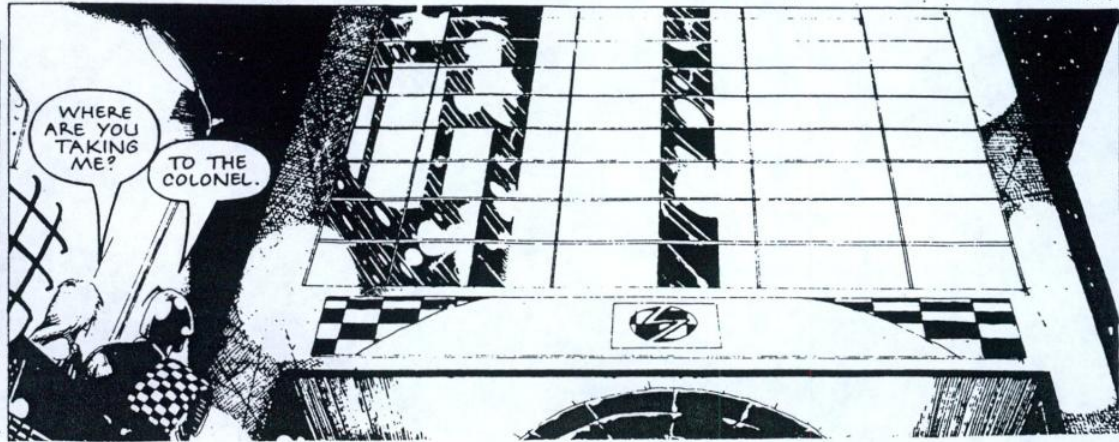
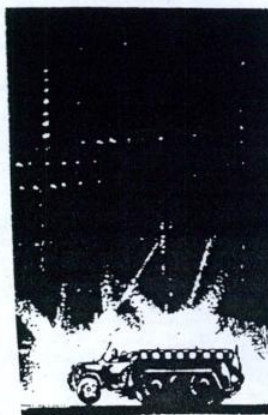
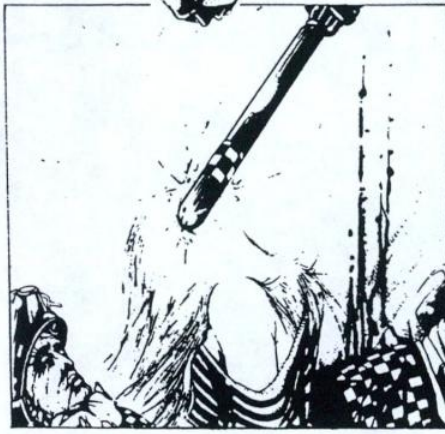
"Nemesis" appeared on the pages of 2000 AD. He was created by the ever present Pat Mills and originally drawn by Brian Talbot.

"Nemesis" was a bizarre looking alien with a hatred for humanity, especially the self-proclaimed Emperor of Termight, (Earth), Tomas De Torquemada.

"Nemesis" attacked Thatcherism, human greed and religious hypocrisy. To tackle issues like these it needed both humour and violence, this it achieved in equal measure.

Hicklenton was one of the "new" British wave of artists discovered in the 1980's by 2000 AD, amongst them Simon Bisley, Brian Talbot and Glen Fabry. They provided a much needed shot in the arm for the then ailing, (storywise not saleswise), 2000 AD.

This sequence is part of the story when "Nemesis" and "Torquemada" end up, through time, in Thatcher's Britain. The girl head-butting the constable is "Purity Brown", a human who sides with "Nemesis".



The English Violent Legacy

KEITH GIFFEN, ALAN GRANT & SIMON BISLEY - LOBO, (DC).

PAT MILLS & SIMON BISLEY - ABC WARRIORS,, (2000 AD).

Simon Bisley, like Hicklenton, is one of the artistic discoveries of 2000 AD. His biker imagery and love of Heavy Metal music provided him with a perfect start.

"ABC Warriors" was an offshoot of Mills' aforementioned "Nemesis" and Bisley provided the robot platoon with some breathtaking art. His collaboration with Mills has continued with the excellent interpretation of Celtic mythology in "Slaine".

Bisley's art thrives on violence and "Lobo" reflects it well.

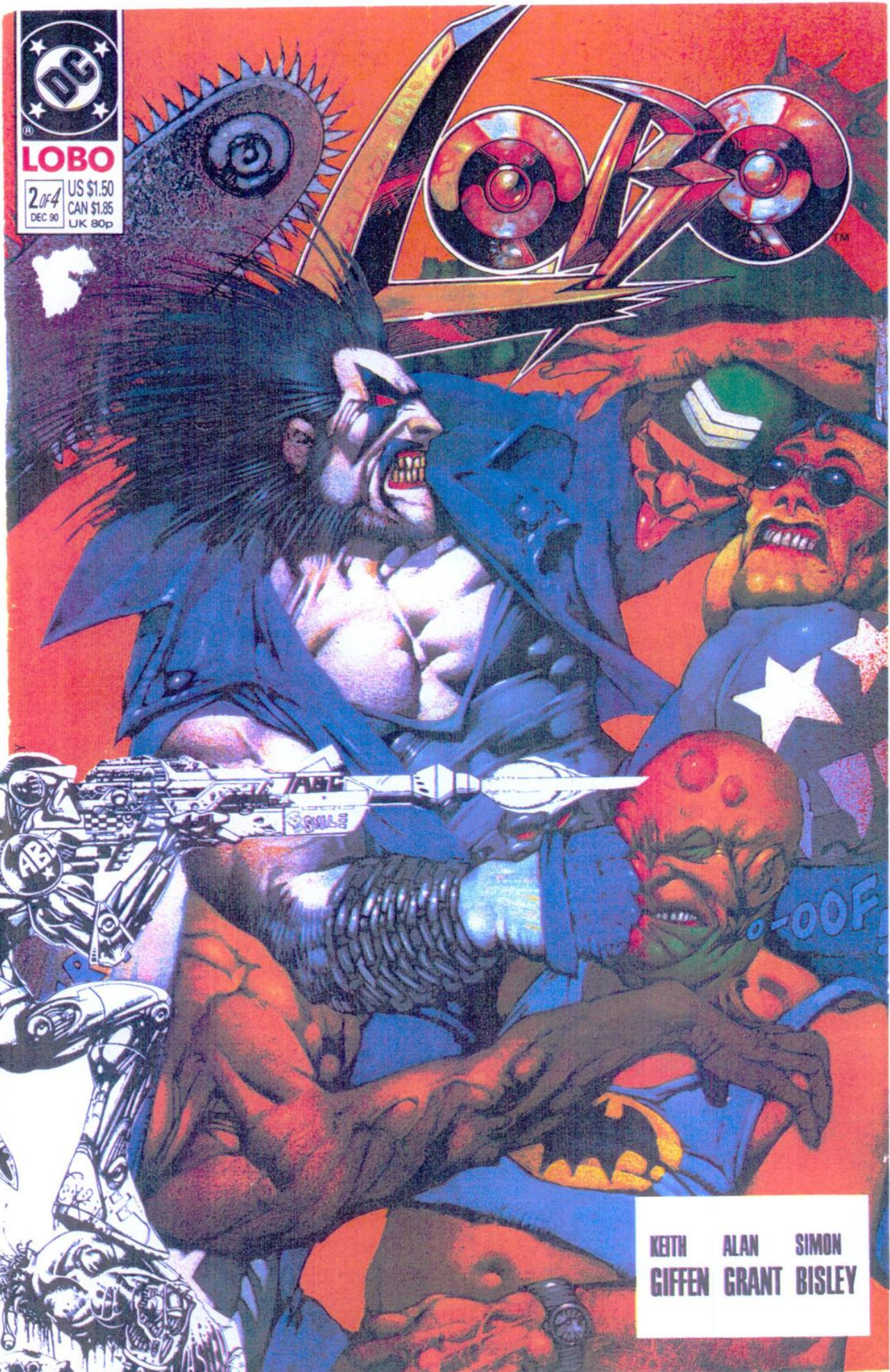
Alan Grant is responsible, with his partner John Wagner, for writing probably the majority of stories in 2000 AD. Violence is an integral part of his storytelling and he has no artistic pretensions on "the comic book".



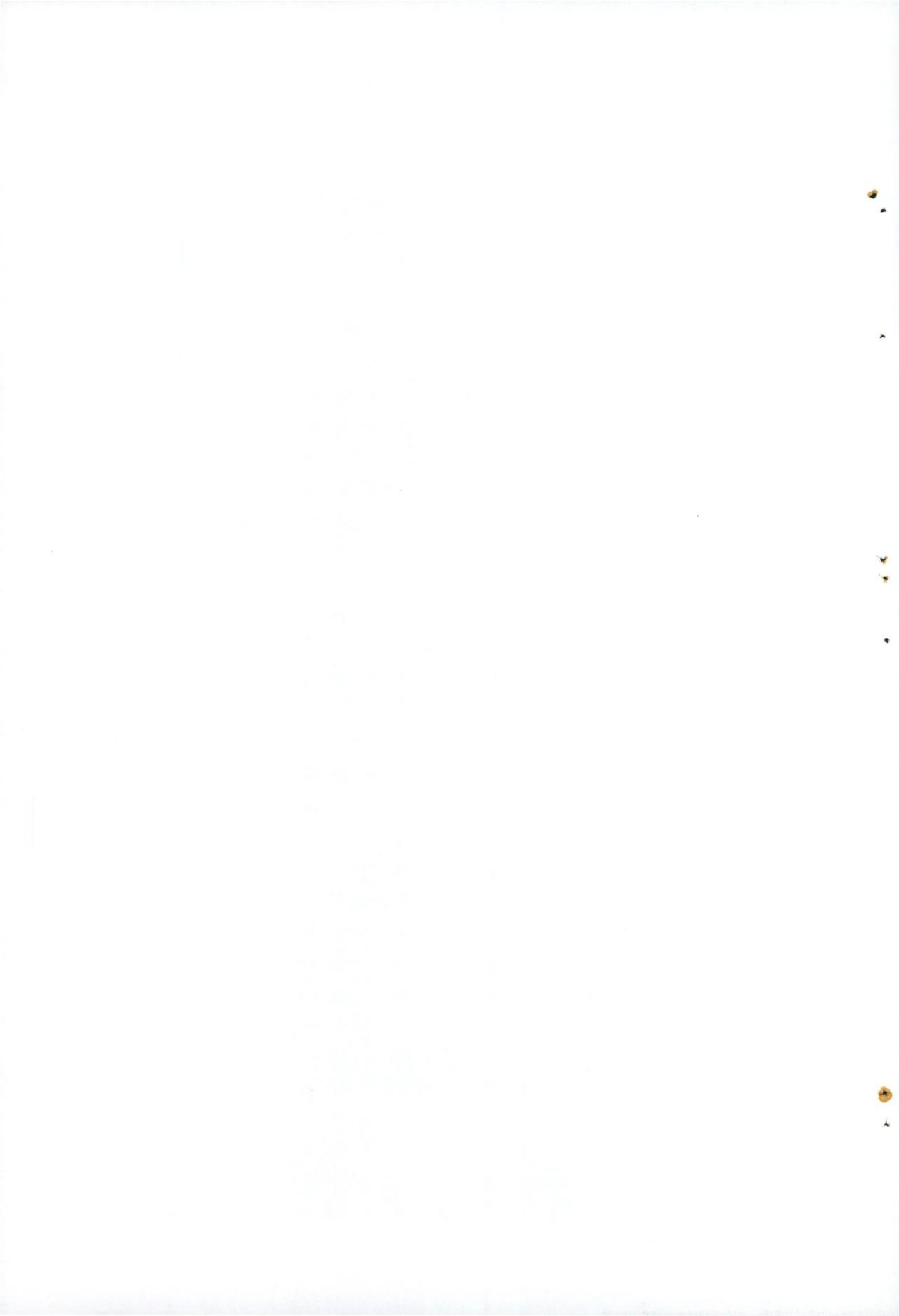
LOBO

2 of 4
DEC 90

US \$1.50
CAN \$1.85
UK 80p



KEITH ALAN SIMON
GIFFEN GRANT BISLEY



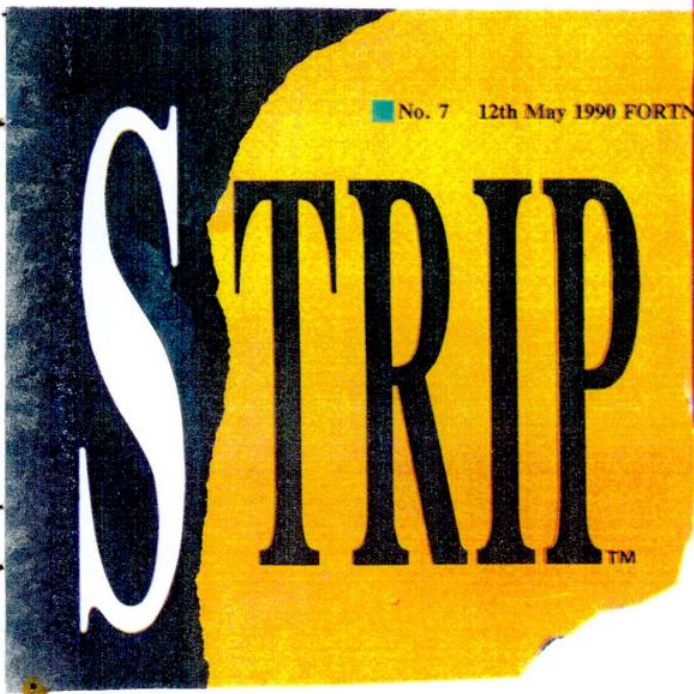
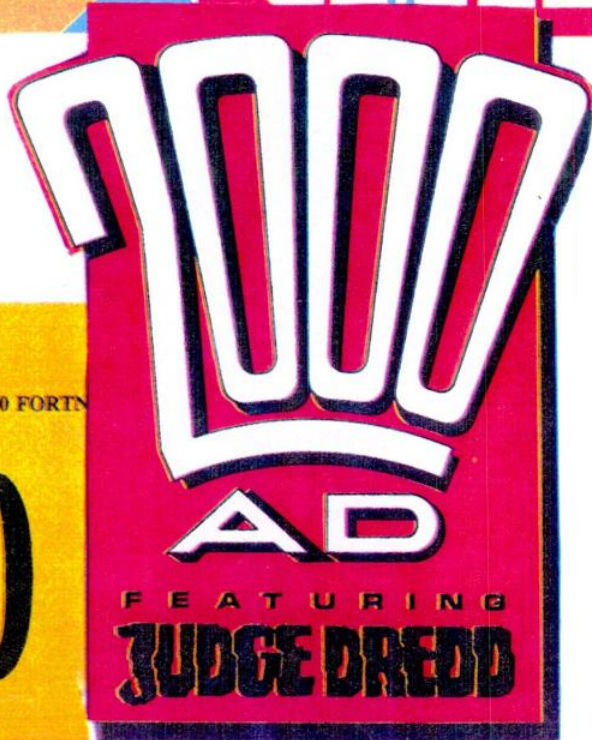
THE NEW WAVE OF "ADULT" COMICS.

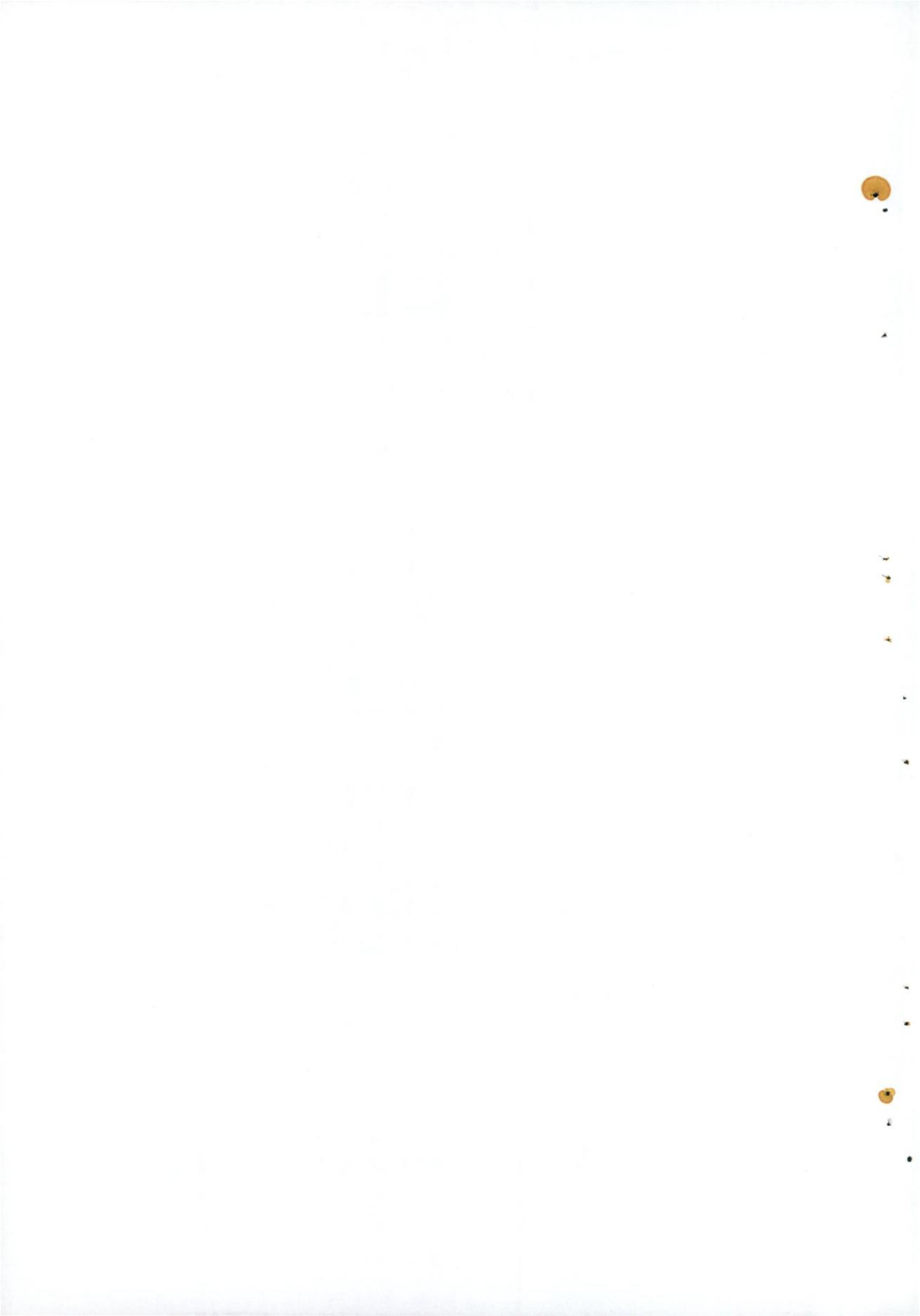
REVOLVER



CRISIS

**1ST
ISSUE!**





The English Violent Legacy

GARETH ENNIS & WARREN PLEECE - TRUE FAITH.

"True Faith" appeared on the pages of the new "adult" "Crisis". Ennis is best known for his earlier work for "Crisis" and for his interpretation of the Northern Ireland problems in "Troubled Souls".

"True Faith" is an attack on the sheep-like mentality of the majority towards religion. It follows the story of the meeting of a young man with a psychopath who believes that, by destroying churches, he can make God come down to earth and thereby kill him.

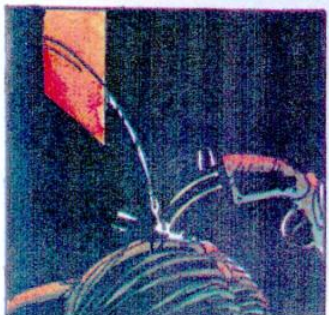
Combined with Pleece's art the story is realistic but eery with a healthy tongue in cheek attitude to the bizarre story it tells.



WELL, I KNOW WHAT TO DO. I'M GOING TO BE MY OWN GOD.

SO I MIGHT AS WELL BE YOURS, TOO, EH?

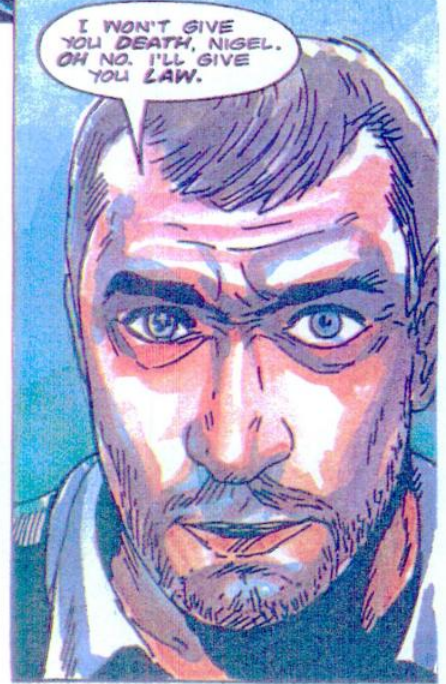
UH... YEAH...

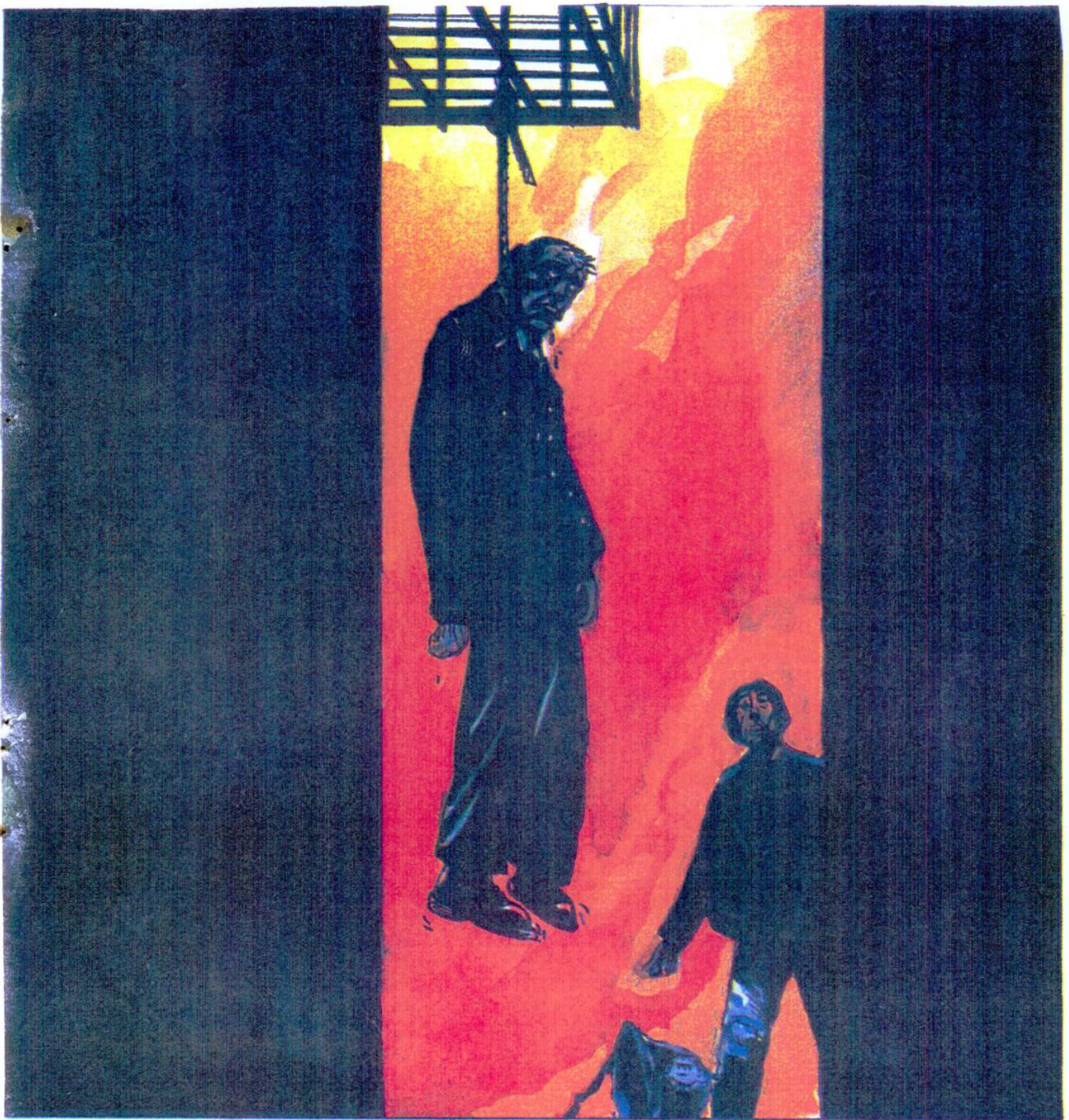


SANCTIFY YOURSELF, THEREFORE, AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT, FOR I AM THE LORD YOUR PERSON WITH A SAWN-OFF TWELVE BORE STANDING VERY NEAR YOU!



I WON'T GIVE YOU DEATH, NIGEL. OH NO. I'LL GIVE YOU LAW.





The English Violent Legacy

BRETT EWINS & STEVE DILLON - JOHNNY NEMO.

"Johnny Nemo" was originally created by the two Englishmen for American publishers, Eclipse Comics, in the early 1980's. Both are originally from 2000 AD, working on projects such as the future war scenario of "B.A.D. Company".

As a war story "B.A.D. Company" was, of its nature, violent, as is "Johnny Nemo".

"Nemo" is a futuristic London private investigator with no morals or scruples. Despite bouts of intense violence "Johnny Nemo" is an amusing character owing somewhat to strips such as Italians Libertore and Tamburini's "RanXerox".

Art is kept simple and direct with an American "house style", and violent images are not shyed away from. Violently satirical.





WE... HUH?

KERUNNCH!

THERE THEY ARE!



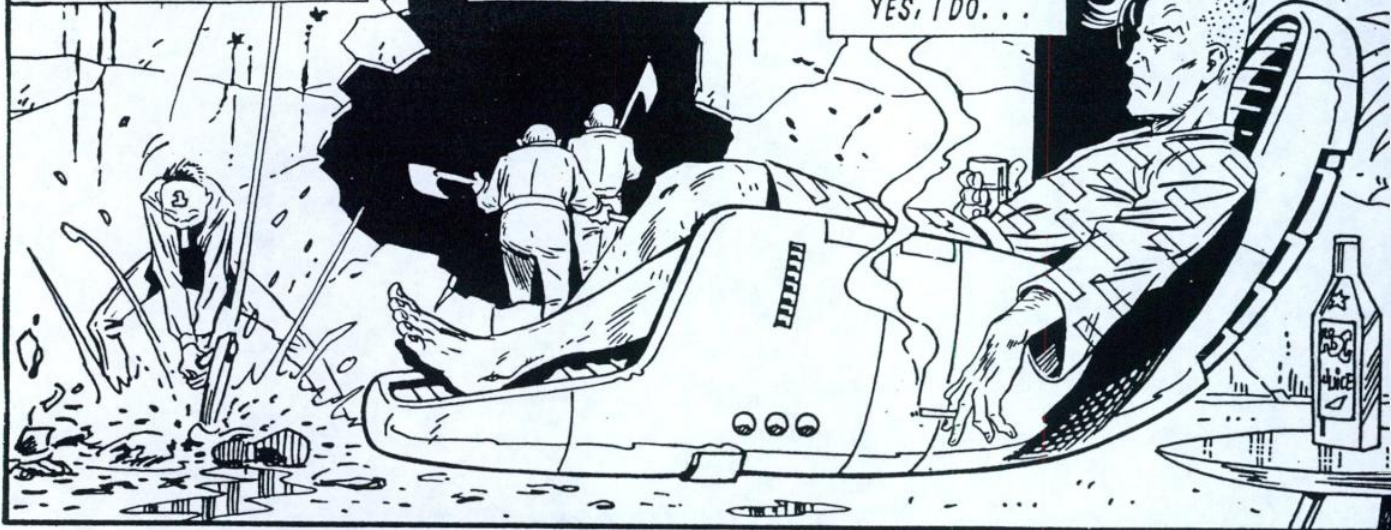
JOHNNY...
DON'T LET
THEM...
GUHRR!



NOOOOOO!

I COULD HELP BUT I DON'T.
I REALIZE SUDDENLY THAT
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO
WITH ME. I REALIZE
SUDDENLY THAT I DO
NOT CARE...

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO DIES OR WHO LIVES
SO LONG AS I LIVE. I REALIZE SUDDENLY THAT
I AM ALL THAT MATTERS. DO I REALIZE THIS?
YES, I DO...



I AM THE TRUTH.
THE ONLY TRUTH...

TSCH!
BLOODY
MESS...



BASTARD. WOULDN'T LIFT A
BLEEDING FINGER TO SAVE US,
WOULD YOU? YOUR OWN
PARENTS. YOUR OWN FLESH
AND BLOOD!

WHAT SORT OF
SON ARE YOU,
ANYWAY?



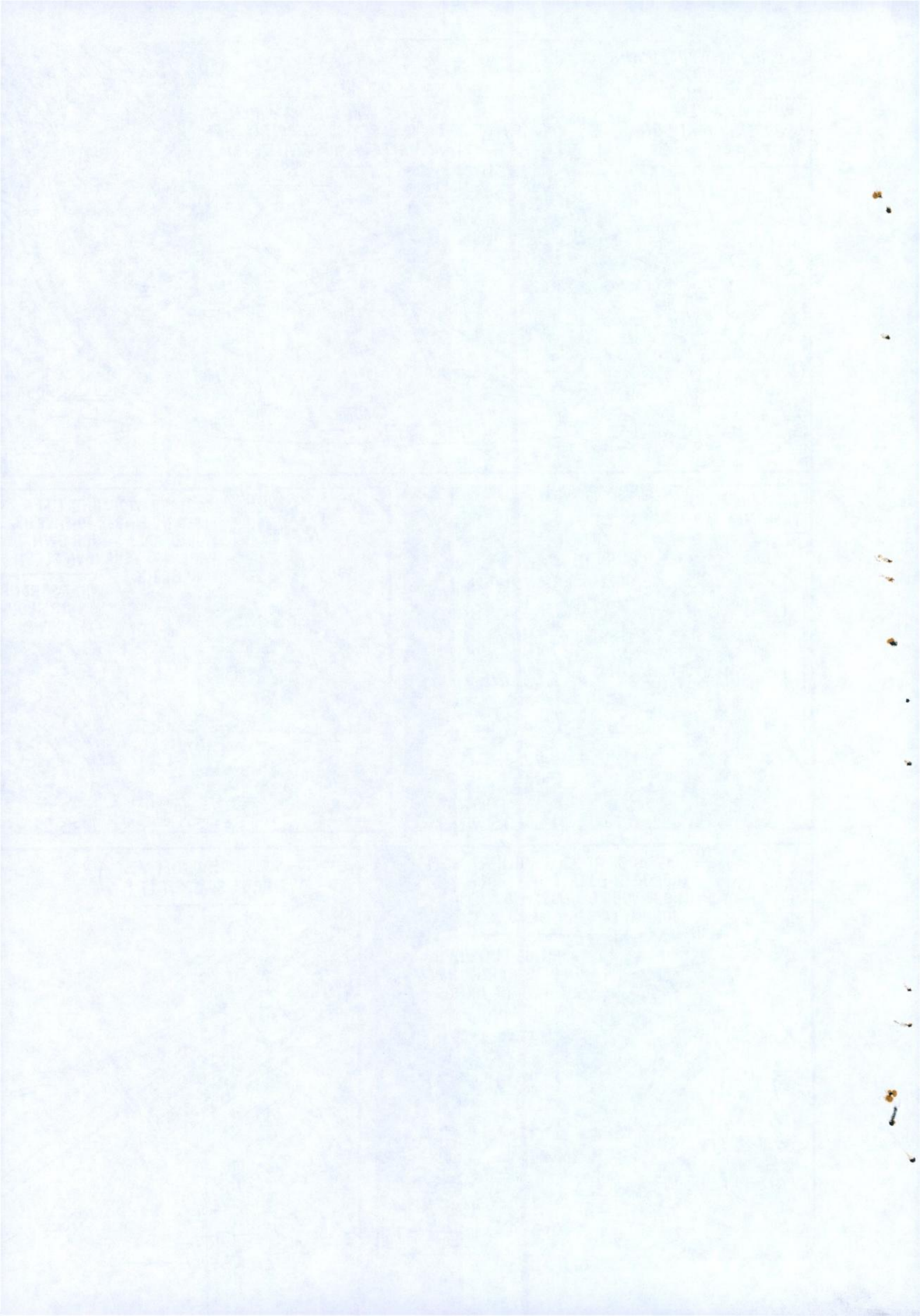
JUST LOOK AT YOUR MOTHER.
LOOK AT THE STATE OF HER. I
HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED,
JOHNNY LA-DE-DA NEMO...

DON'T BE TOO HARD
ON HIM, HARRY. HE'S
GOT A LOT OF THINGS
ON HIS MIND...



YOU'RE DEAD, GET ME?
DEAD! SO SHUT IT!





Pete Milligan said "It's going to carry a 'mature reader's' tag simply because we don't want to get complaints when real-life topics crop up as they do in 'Purple Daze', (comic biography of Jimi Hendrix), and some other stuff".

However, the overblown nature of the stories and confusing psychedelia baffled the public and led to its demise by November of that year.¹¹ Marvel, England's, adult comic "Strip" was also cancelled¹² and sales of "Crisis" are just above the 20,000 a week category, which just makes the title profitable.

In America, adult comics have been around since the 1960's. In the form of underground comix such as Harvey Kurtzman's "American Splendour" and Robert Crumb's "Fritz the Cat", but a stranglehold had been on the industry by the two largest producers of comics: D.C. Comics and Marvel Comics. Both specialised in "Superhero" comics since their genesis in the 1920's.

It was the restructuring of the "Superhero" genre that brought adult attention to the comic book.

Frank Miller's ground-breaking gothic treatment of "Batman" in "The Dark Knight Returns" and the Englishmen Dave Gibbons and Alan Moore's "Watchmen" set the stage.

"The Dark Knight Returns" set "Batman" in a troubled dystopia, retired and overweight, "Superman" was a government stooge, and "Robin" a girl. Miller had rewritten a modern myth with fascist undertones and adult attention was warranted.

Adult attention, it turns out, had always been warranted and many of the smaller publishers, such as Knockabout Press, had been producing adult material for years.

So the discerning public "discovered" titles like Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez' "Love and Rockets" and Dave Sim's self-published "Cerebus the Aardvark". Reprints of golden oldies like Will Eisner's "Spirit" and Milton Caniff's "Terry and the Pirates" were released by small presses like Kitchen Sink. Comics were alive, but for how long?

SECTION 2

REALITY CHECK.

With notable exceptions, comics are what they have always been, a commercial product deemed to have little to do with serious art or literature. But the face of this product has altered and publishers have rushed, entranced, to capture this new "adult" market forgetting, mostly, the traditional children's market in the scramble. Where there might be more adult interest than before, how long can this last? Having seen the decimation of "Revolver" and "Strip", does adult interest remain?

Both of the above titles were cashing in on the "adults only" tag and, unfortunately, both had little in the way of genuine interesting content. Adult, or mature readers, were not fooled by their unwarranted hype. However, adult attention is warranted to those titles that are exploring and pushing the medium. Comic sales have not significantly increased: to quote Buddy Saunders of Lone Star Comics,¹ "the ratio of comics readers to non-readers is undergoing no significant change and is illustrated by 'X-Men' and 'Batman'. 'X-Men' has long been a benchmark in terms of sales, if not quality, yet industry-wide 'X-Men' sales have not risen significantly in recent years. After a predictable leap in sales that can be attributed to interest in the movie and concurrent investor enthusiasm, 'Batman' sales are dropping back below 'X-Men' numbers. Neither title has penetrated much above the half million mark, despite a potential audience of 250 million in the domestic, (American), market alone. Equally telling, few comic titles have sales figures in excess

of 100,000 copies per issue, the majority experience sales in the 10. to 50 thousand range."

Both "X-Men" and "Batman" are comic book bestsellers, yet sales figures remain constant, showing little growth in the product.

Proof that adult attention is growing is the now innumerable small publishing companies set up in England and America to cater for minority tastes, these publish non-mainstream titles. (Companies such as Fantagraphics, Piranha Press and Dark Horse Publishing).

THE ADULT COMIC

It is sad to admit it but there are indeed few titles worthy of the attention of the adult mind, in mainstream comics. Few, that is, in relation to the bulk of the titles produced. The alternative labelling of the term "adult" on a book basically gives the publishers a chance to dish out more violence and more sex. More male macho one-sided power fantasies.

Today, many labels are appearing on comics: "adults only" or "mature readers only". But the manner of sales does not differentiate and retailers are often not informed of comics contents.²

"'Green Arrow 17' remains a prime example of the frequent abuses of the retailers right to be made aware of content at the time comics are solicited. D.C. Comics described 'Green Arrow 17' as follows: 'A mysterious man is on the trail of a female stripper. When the woman is found viciously murdered, Green Arrow enters the picture. Suggested for mature readers.' The actual comic featured adult only content, including a brutal fight, extensive female nudity and the crucifixion of a young woman, who is then slashed to death."

Mainstream Violence

GREEN ARROW, 17

Soft porn and violence against women increasingly becomes more and more apparent in mainstream comics.

This is for "mature readers only", but are story contents like this necessary for anybody?



"Green Arrow's" content is typical of many of the superhero titles available which explore power fantasies. It is "suggested for mature readers", many titles are not yet contain similar themes.

Comics have discovered "the video nasty syndrome" and now will have to enforce an prevent the selling of "adult" theme comics to children.

DR. WERTHAM AND THE COMICS CODE

American comics in the 1950's had no limit on what could be portrayed on their pages. In England "good British standards" were relied upon and comics such as "The Eagle", "Girl", "The Beano" and "The Dandy" enhanced the medium's reputation with the general public.

But in America the lack of such "standards" gave rise to a particularly graphic type of Horror comic.

The mainstream publishers continued to peddle their "Super-Products" to the public. The only real competition to their monopoly were the comics published by William Gaines: Entertaining Comics (EC).

EC's line of horror, fiction, war, humour and crime titles set new standards in the medium, and storytelling that in many ways has yet to be matched.³

Unfortunately, they set new standards in violence, but the product sold well and EC's success encouraged many small publishing companies to try their own horror lines.

In 1954 a book, entitled "Seduction of the Innocent"⁴, was published. It was written by a Dr. Fredric Wertham who was, until 1952, the senior psychiatrist for the New York City Department of Hospitals.⁵ He had spent seven years researching his book, which was an in-depth analysis on the

effects of comic books on children.

Dr. Wertham held that all comics, without exception, were bad for children and that the increase in juvenile delinquency could be accredited to the doubtful content of their reading matter. As he had asserted in an article in the Saturday Review of Literature in 1948,⁶ "We are getting to the roots of the contributing causes of juvenile delinquency when we study the influence of comic books. You cannot understand present day juvenile delinquency if you do not take into account the pallogenic and pathoplastic influence of comic books, that is, the way in which they cause trouble or determine the form that trouble takes."

Dr. Wertham made reference to several other problems that he associated with comic books. These publications, he said, had immunised "a whole generation against pity and against recognition of cruelty and violence." He suggested that comic books stimulated "unhealthy sexual attitudes", (although being unable to answer what he meant by this).

"Seduction of the Innocent" was illustrated with shocking examples of comic book art: eyes being gouged out, policemen shot down and the notorious baseball scene of EC, where the baseball lines were marked out with human intestines, lungs and liver. A leg was the bat and a man's head, the ball.

There were indeed many shady publishers who turned out sordid material and most examples in Dr. Wertham's book were, with the exception of EC, minor publishers. But within the text, Dr. Wertham was able to find much wrong with even the most popular comic characters.⁷ Batman and Robin were "like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together." He warned that the "Batman type of story may stimulate children to homosexual fantasies." Wonderwoman was "the lesbian counterpart of Batman".

Censorship in the 1950's

EC Comics notorious Baseball game. Stories such as this influenced the good Doctor's view on "the comic book".

SO NOW YOU KNOW, FIENDS. NOW YOU KNOW WHY THERE IS A BALL GAME BEING PLAYED IN THE MOONLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT IN THE DESERTED CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK. LOOK CLOSELY. SEE THIS STRANGE BASEBALL GAME! SEE THE LONG STRINGS OF PULPY INTESTINES THAT MARK THE BASE LINES. SEE THE TWO LUNGS AND THE LIVER THAT INDICATE THE BASES...THE HEART THAT IS HOME PLATE. SEE DOC WHITE BEND AND WHISK THE HEART WITH THE MANGY SCALP, YELLING ...

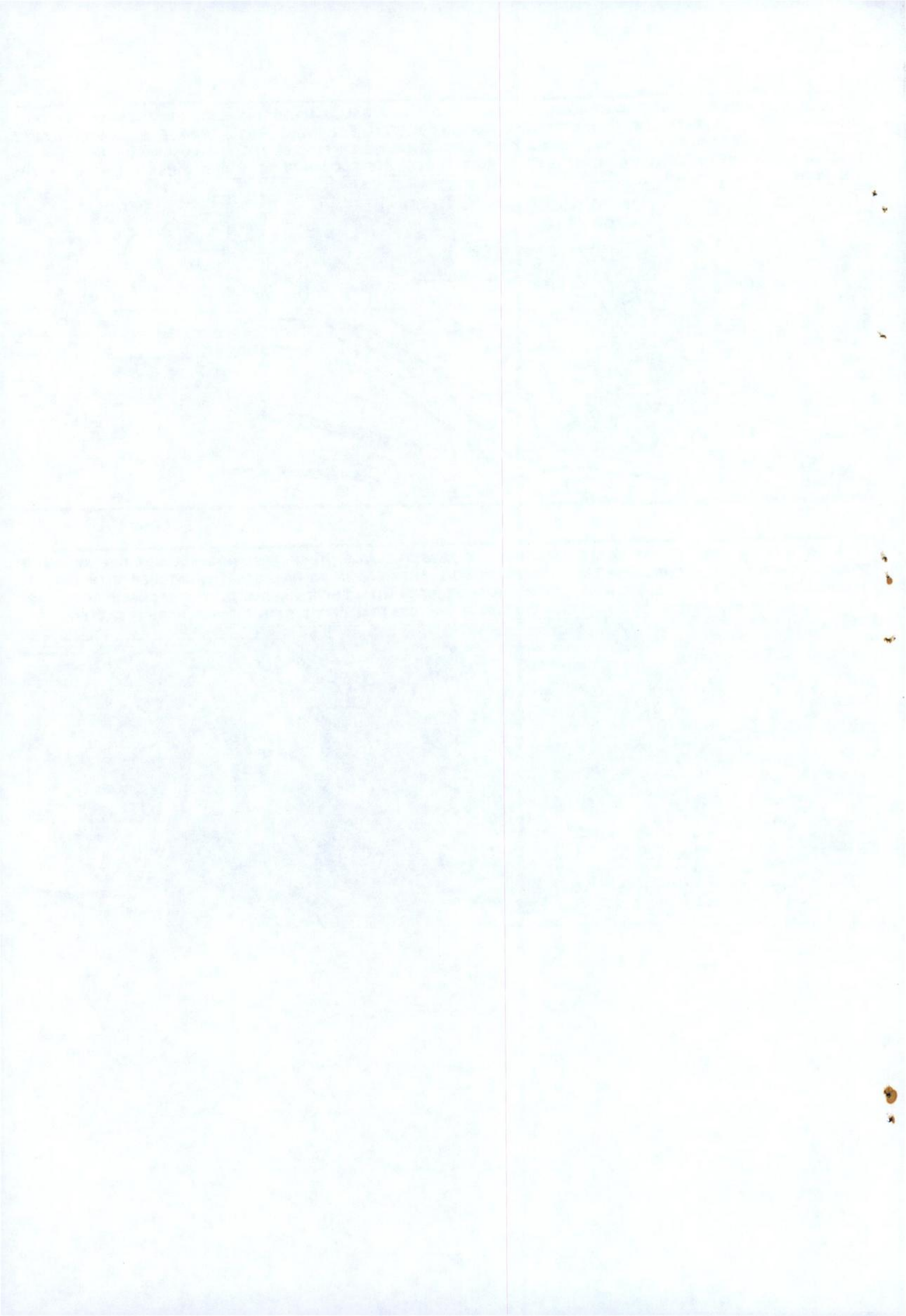
PLAY BALL...
BATTER UP!

LET'S GO PHILLY, BOY!
PITCH IT IN...



SEE THE BATTER COME TO THE PLATE SWINGING THE LEGS, THE ARMS, THEN THROWING ALL BUT ONE AWAY AND STANDING IN THE BOX WAITING FOR THE PITCHER TO HURL THE HEAD IN TO HIM. SEE THE CATCHER WITH THE TORSO STRAPPED ON AS A CHEST-PROTECTOR, THE INFELDERS WITH THEIR HAND-MITS, THE STOMACH-ROSin-BAG, AND ALL THE OTHER PIECES OF EQUIPMENT THAT ONCE WAS CENTRAL CITY'S STAR PITCHER, HERBIE SATTEN...





Dr. Wertham was an educated and concerned man, but he disliked and disapproved of most comic books. He wanted them all gone, even educational ones which, he claimed, dwelled on the wrong parts of the famous texts. What did he think of art and literature that contained objectional material? He found solace in that literature and art "reaches a relatively small number of people."

Comics were the only modern medium, in his opinion, that had no artistic value. But the ball was rolling....

There were rigorous calls for censorship. In England the so-called "Horror" comics imported from the U.S. were banned. In America, the industry fought hard to protect itself from independent censors, and tried to put its own house in order.

The Senate Judiciary Sub-Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, chaired by Senator Robert C. Hendrickson of New Jersey, met Wednesday April 21st 1954 in the U.S. Courthouse in New York.⁸

"Authorities agree," Hendrickson began, "that the majority of comic books are as harmless as soda pop. But hundreds and thousands of horror and crime books are peddled to our young people of impressionable age." Hendrickson claimed that "the freedom of the press is not at issue in this investigation.....we are not a Committee of blue-nosed censors." But, the Committee was concerned with the effects of crime and horror on young minds.

The situation at this point had been blown out of all proportion, but given the standards of the times and content of much material, it was easy to see why parents became alarmed. Eventually, Gaines called a meeting of comic book publishers to form a response to public pressure. The publishers turned on Gaines. They established the Comics Code Authority which banned nearly everything Gaines published, except for Harvey Kurtzman's "MAD".

The Comics Code Authority is an extremely restrictive set of standards. No comic book without this seal stood a chance of being sold or distributed. Dell Publishers were made the exception, as it was thought their material, (such as the Disney titles), were wholesome enough anyway.

The Code was despised by comics fans and publishers. The underground comix of the 1960's were, in part, a reaction to the restrictions of the Code.

One of the more ticklish problems connected to the 1950's furore was the dragging-in of the newspaper strips. Some of the critics often lumped "the funnies" together generically, and attacked everything. This attitude shocked the newspaper comic producers who had maintained reasonable standards for the simple commercial reason that if a strip was to be syndicated and distributed coast to coast, it could not afford to alienate its family readership.

The National Cartoonists Society was set up, led by Walt Kelly, Milton Caniff and Joe Musial.⁹ They made a statement opposing censorship and upholding the moral integrity of the creators and their readership, (minors included).

The climate for comics has improved since then and over the last ten years there has been a steady erosion of the Code's hold on the industry. Many of the Independent publishers never accepted it anyway and today many of Marvel and D.C.'s direct market only titles, avoid it aswell.

Nearly all newstand comics in America are Code approved, but the Code's provisions are not as rigorously enforced as they were. Marvel and D.C. will often simply drop the seal when a newstand comic is not approved. Neither publishers, retailers or purchasers pay much attention to the Code seal anymore.

VIOLENCE IN THE COMIC BOOK

The intensity and pervasiveness of violence within the comic's medium surpasses anything else to be found in literary form today. The majority of mainstream comics carry violence within their pages, and often the violence is sickeningly gratuitous.

The staple ingredient in many comics is the male power fantasy. In the past they have always been violent, but they had more in common with the slapstick comotion of a "Roadrunner" cartoon than with reality. But since the shift to power fantasies of a more "adult" nature the violence has become more graphic, knives and fists do what they do in the real world and heads roll, literally.

How can we define violence within a medium?

Within a narrative, violence can either be contextualised or gratuitous, but this is a difficult point because even the most blatant use of violence in any narrative can be argued that it has a place in the story and is thus contextualised. Gratuitous violence can often be used to shock the observer into revulsion, film makers such as David Lynch revel in their often unnecessary use of extreme violence.

Artistic pretensions aside, within a narrative depending on one's own view, violence portrayed can be deemed either necessary or unnecessary.

The point of controversy is this: can violence, portrayed in the media, influence people to carry out real violence?

There are two theories regarding the influence of violence as entertainment. The Incitement Theory and the Catharsis Theory.

The Incitement Theory holds that people are directly affected by watching violent themes and that the subtlety of modern media is so strong that the watcher can be incited to acts of real violence.

The Catharsis Theory suggests that the portrayal of violence in the media and arts, acts as a release for society's violent urges and, by watching, not doing, we are purged of the desire to do violence.

Studies on human behaviour related to media violence such as J. Eysenck's, "Sex, Violence and the Media",¹⁰ although dealing with television and film and its effects on children and the emotionally disturbed, remain largely inconclusive, inconclusive in a manner that poses the question - do depictions of sex and violence incite the watcher to physically attempt the actions portrayed?

Incitement happens, but normally on rare occasions such as the well documented "Hungerford Massacre" in England. It would seem that media incitement affects only a small proportion of people given the vast amount of violent images that we encounter through the media each day.

Exposure to violence portrayed undoubtedly wears down our moral judgements, and the more we see the more oblivious we get to it. There is no doubt, however, that the media creates social myths and perhaps violence or acceptance of violence is one of them?

The Catharsis Theory would seem to hold more water in its belief that the last few generations have been raised within this "global village" and the majority would seem to be no less "normal" than their parents.

LIBERATORE & TAMBURINI - RANXEROX.

"Ranxerox" is Italian, coming to the attention of the English-speaking world on the pages of "HEAVY METAL", the Continental comics magazine.

Colourfully rendered in felt-tip markers "Ranxerox" is a violent android, very much in love with his under-age junky girlfriend "lubna". Hard drugs are glamourised and violence is quite usually gratuitous in the strip.

"Ranxerox" has no morals and just desires to survive in his modern manic dystopia.



RANXEROX

IN NEW



DON'T PAW MY ASS, OKAY?

GOD, HE'S STRONG!

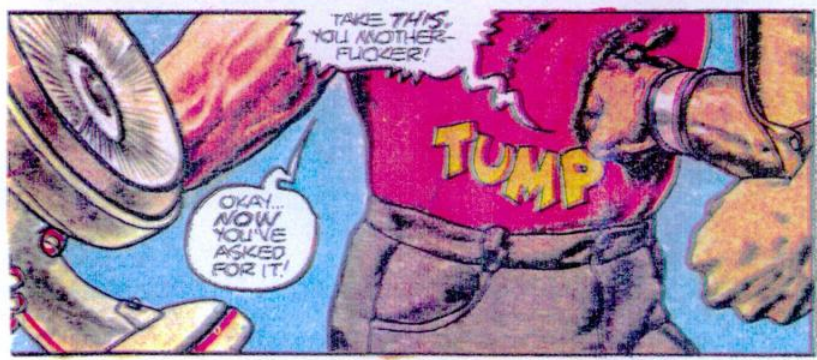
ROK

AGGH!



HEY, MAN... ONLY IN FOR A LITTLE FUN. COME ON, SWEET MEAT.

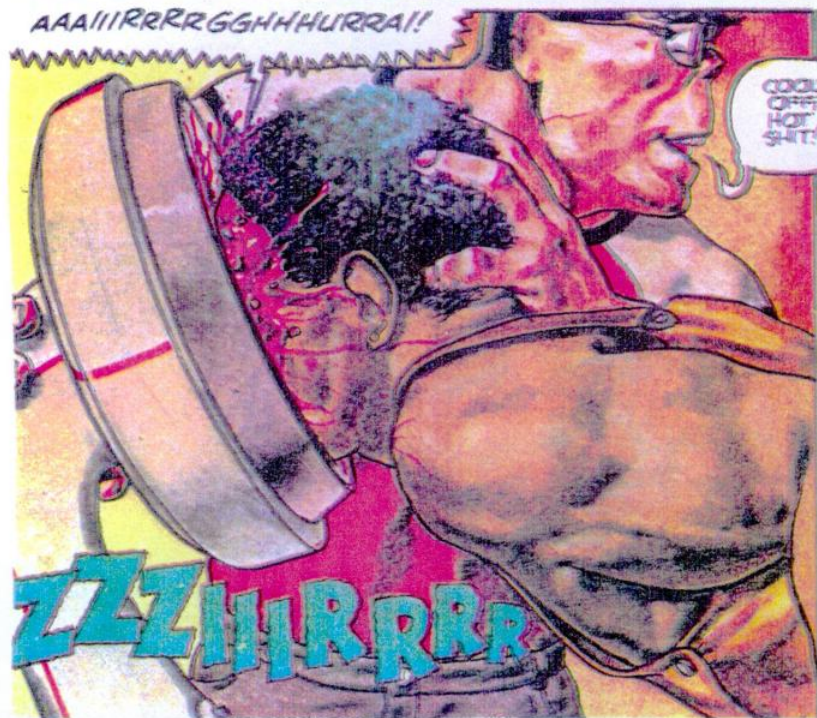
I'M WARNING YOU... GET OUT OF MY FACE!



TAKE THIS, YOU MOTHER-FUCKER!

TUMP

OKAY... NOW YOU'VE ASKED FOR IT!



AAAIIIRRRRGGHHHURRAI!

STOP!

ZZZZRRRR



GOOD WORK! THOSE SADO-MASOCHISTS ARE SO BORING AND REPETITIVE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME, ANYWAY?

MEZ RANXEROX.

OH, MOTHER MARY...



In Japan comics, or manga as they are called, are so popular that they are pushing out the written word.¹¹ They sell, on average, 94 million comic books a year. The books are thicker than telephone directories and cater for all tastes and all sections of society. The Japanese comic culture would subscribe to Catharsis ideals, Japan has a low crime rate yet the violence of many of the exploits available would make Dr. Wertham turn in his grave: MONSTER TOOTHY PENISES EATING THROUGH NUBILE GIRLS.. They feature various different characters, such as "Rapeman" who endorses such anti-social behaviour as rape and torture.

Whenever the Western comics industry chooses to acknowledge violence within its titles, it argues that violence is incapable of influencing or altering the minds of anyone who reads it, including children. But this argument is groundless, to argue that literature cannot have a negative effect on readers is also to assume that it cannot have a positive one. What effects do comics have on readers and who watches the publishers?

VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN / WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN?

There has been very little research studies specifically done on the effects of comic books, most deal with the most obvious whipping-boys within the media, such as film and television.

If Dr. Wertham had had his way there would be no comic books today, or certainly a very different medium. Within America there are several different self-appointed censor groups that watch the media as a whole, including comic books.



KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA - LONE WOLF AND CUB.

Recently there has been an influx of comic book material from Japan.

"Lone Wolf and Cub" is one of these titles. It is a Samurai comic based on heroes and values of ancient Japan.

Simply and succinctly rendered, Japanese art has influenced many Western comic book creators, Frank Miller's "Ronin" being perhaps the most successful rendering of a story of this nature.

Japanese titles are increasing in popularity in the West and the intense violence that is often portrayed, no doubt, is an attractive plus to the adolescent purchaser.



CRYING FREEMAN - ONE OF JAPAN'S VIOLENT COMICS.



"Focus on the Family" is a seven hundred member non-profit media watch group. They have targetted comics in an issue of their magazine "Citizen", edited by Tom Hess. In the June 1989 issue they featured a "Mean Comics" article by Joseph Farrar, the article bore the subtitle "Batman is now a sinister psychotic, Superman has sexual fantasies, and comic book publishers are out of control".

"Bothered about Dungeons and Dragons"(B.A.D.D.), specifically targets role-playing games and Heavy Metal music, but does focus on comics occasionally because of the traditional audience cross-over.

"The National Coalition on Television Violence", (N.C.T.V.), was founded in 1980 by psychiatrist Thomas Radecki. He started the organisation due to research in the 1970's showing serious harmful effects on society due to media violence. In 1989 the N.C.T.V. published a report on comic book violence.

These watch groups are not just an American phenomena and such groups exist in Europe too, despite their often unhealthy views on the need for censorship they provide a valuable service in pointing out unhealthy trends in the media.

In an interview with the "Comics Journal" Thomas Radecki aired his views, also included were excerpts from the N.C.T.V.'s report on comic violence.¹²

Thomas Radecki reckons that between 25 and 50 per cent of violence has been established by violent entertainment, he also cites social vices such as drink and drugs as causes. He believes firmly in the Incitement Theory and quotes several studies to back his point, "for instance, Dr. William Belson of the University of London looked at 226 possible causes of violence in the lives of 1600 randomly selected



London adolescents from the ages of twelve to seventeen and found that a diet of film and television violence was the leading cause of 227 possible cause that they looked at. Up to 49 per cent of the amount of violence could be explained by the diets of violence that were being consumed."

Despite Redecki's almost Bible-bashing condemnation of violence his observations often hit the mark. He points out that the large majority of comic books glamourise violence, non-violent solutions to problems, he claims, are never considered.

This echoes a quote which Dr. Wertham in "Seduction of the Innocent" raised,¹³ "In investigating the mechanism of identification in individual children with individual comic books, it has become clear to me that comic books are conditioning children to identify themselves with the strong man, however evil he may be. The hero in crime comics is not the hero unless he acts like a criminal. And the criminal in comic books is not a criminal to the child because he acts like a hero. He lives like a hero until the very end, and even then he often dies like a hero, in a burst of gunfire and violence."

When Radecki explains how N.C.T.V. reached verdicts he claims to take context into account, but states: "Context is very much taken into account when we determine ratings, not when we determine the score - whether violence is slapstick or educational, glamourised or titillating - a murder is a murder is a murder."

Reading excerpts of the report it is hard to question their findings as many of the books were treated fairly, for instance "National Lampoon" an adult magazine, had 13 acts of violence counted by the report; it was rated as "X Unfit". "Boris the Bear", a child's comic, had 14 acts of violence but it was labelled "PGV" meaning that N.C.T.V felt that the violence was not harmful. "The 'Nam", an anti-war comic show-

ing the realism of the Vietnam War, had 10 acts of violence but was recommended with three stars.

But claiming to take violence into context does not ring true with N.C.T.V.'s report on "V For Vendetta".

"V For Vendetta" was written by Alan Moore and drawn by David Lloyd. It is modern comic's "1984" and follows the rise of a vigilante figure who escapes from a concentration camp. He dresses as Guy Fawkes to bring down a fascist dictatorship that rules the England of the future. The book is a grainy, detailed and gloomy picture of modern society and fascism. N.C.T.V. gave it an "X V" rating, claiming that it was unsuitable material as it promotes violence, "as a way to solve social problems and references to real-life political locations."

N.C.T.V.'s report may, while in some instances muddle its facts and spout right-wing Christian ideology to annoy the publishers and readers, it points out that there is a hell of a lot of violence in mainstream comics, this violence is evident throughout the range and that many contain inappropriate themes such as violence against women, sex and torture of children and other demeaning social traits.

What comes across is that there are insufficient guidelines on what should be sold in comics to children and what to adults.

With few exceptions, society believes that adults should be free to explore literature and enjoy its worth. Adults are held to be capable of discriminating and making value judgements. Children are not thought by society to be entirely capable of making the same informed judgements and for this reason society limits what the media can present to children.

THE 'NAM.

"The 'Nam" emerged approximately at the same time as the 1980's stream of movies on the Vietnam War. It was Marvel Comics attempt to educate their readers as to the realities of war.

Initially, the story was very wooden and simplistic - it was lengthily explained to the point of American moronicy - but as the readers got educated the stories improved and "The 'Nam" emerged as a fairly accurate representation of the War.

Unlike many of Marvel's titles "The 'Nam" has an injection of humour here and there amidst the brutality and carnage of war. Humour that is, perhaps, too M.A.S.H.-like occasionally.

Its anti-war message is unlikely to be as blatant as Englishmen Pat Mills and Joe Colquhoun's "Charley's War", which ran in IPC Magazine's "Battle", but obviously the message has been somewhat if an external censor body like NCTV can recommend it.

MARVEL
25TH
ANNIVERSARY

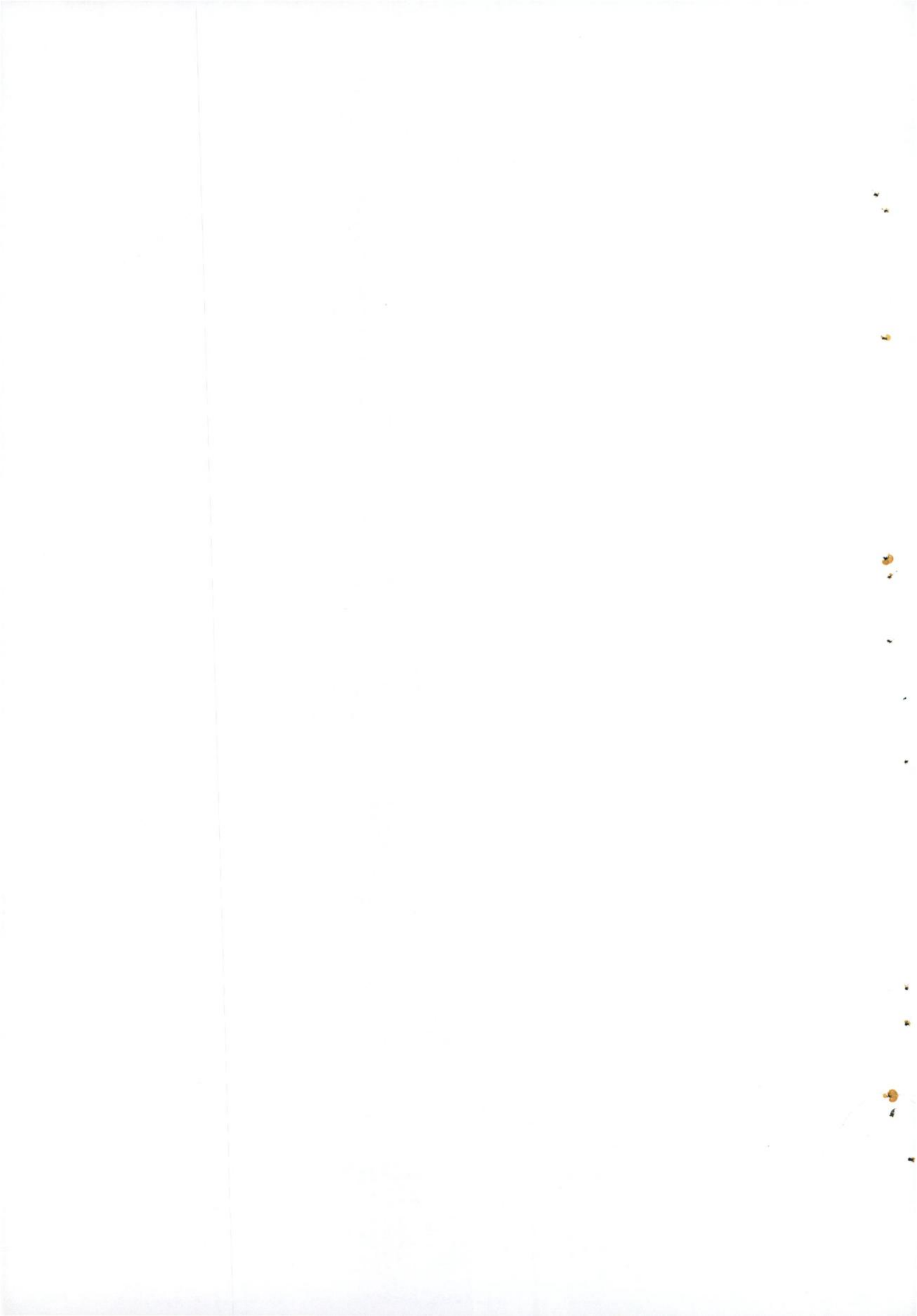
©1986 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

75c US
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02435

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

WAR IN NAM





This is because children take much of what they read at face value, especially when it is delivered by adults or through an adult medium. Small children believe almost anything, older children remain susceptible to far more subtle yet equally false interpretations of reality. Although these messages would be claimed to be unintentional on behalf of the publishers, who tend to see their product's story content as "entertainment".

So, until the publishers can get over their greed and enforce lines between adult and children's material, the controversy will continue.

THE RISE OF VIGILANTES.

Clearly, maniacs are popular. The more vicious and crazy they are, the more interesting they are to the general public.

In the cinema this has always been the case. In the 1960's and '70's few names could guarantee box office successes as certainly as Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson. This list has gone on to include the late Bruce Lee, Chuck Norris, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme. All are famous for the skill in which they simulate elaborate methods to kill, hurt and maim people. The new wave and logical extreme are the psychopaths, those clinically insane bad guys that you love: "Jason" of the unending "Friday the 13th" movie series, or Wes Craven's "Freddy Kreuger" of "Nightmare on Elmstreet" fame, or more recently "Hannibal the Cannibal", the genius psychotic of "Silence of the Lambs".

In comics, vigilantes are an integral part of the history and mythos of the medium ever since Bob Kane created "Batman". Beginning his career on a vengeance motive: the murder of his parents. "Batman" became an icon vigilante.

The views on violence of many comics from the 1920's to the late '70's are somewhat detached. With the exception of the aforementioned banned horror comics of the 1950's, violence on their pages did not reflect the real world. This lack of graphic reality also reflects the rigorous enforcing of the comics code, especially in America. Intense graphic violence in modern comics was probably showcased in England with the publication of IPC's "Action", "Battle" and "2000 AD".

These titles enraged parents and enthralled children. The stories within their pages were well written but intensely violent.

For instance, Pat Mills' anti-war story "Charley's War" which appeared in "Battle" followed the story of a young man going to fight in the First World War. It was brilliantly rendered by artist Joe Colquhoun, who achieved a frightening realisation of Mills' violent script.

"Judge Dredd" of 2000 AD is the fascist lawman in a post-apocalyptic future.

As a member of the "Judges" he was "the law" to the people of "Mega City One"

Again, Pat Mills had the job of fleshing out the character and many early stories almost make "Dredd" into a "real" person.

But quite quickly "Dredd" became the faceless machine of the law, the ultimate face of right-wing government.

American readers rediscovered violence when they rediscovered comic books; and much of the modern upsurge towards violence in the comics medium is derived from the financial success of Frank Miller's interpretation of "Batman".

ALAN MOORE & DAVE GIBBONS - THE WATCHMEN.

FRANK MILLER & LYNN VARLEY - THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS.

Since 2000 AD, Britain has proved that it possessed numerous talented writers and artists. The exportation to America was an obvious step. "Johnny Nemo" and "Lobo" are obviously British exports, but it was, perhaps, "The Watchmen" more than any other book that educated the American public to talent available in the British industry.

Alan Moore had proved himself to be one of the finest writers of the medium with work on "V for Vendetta" for Warrior and numerous stories, including "The Ballad of Halo Jones", for 2000 AD.

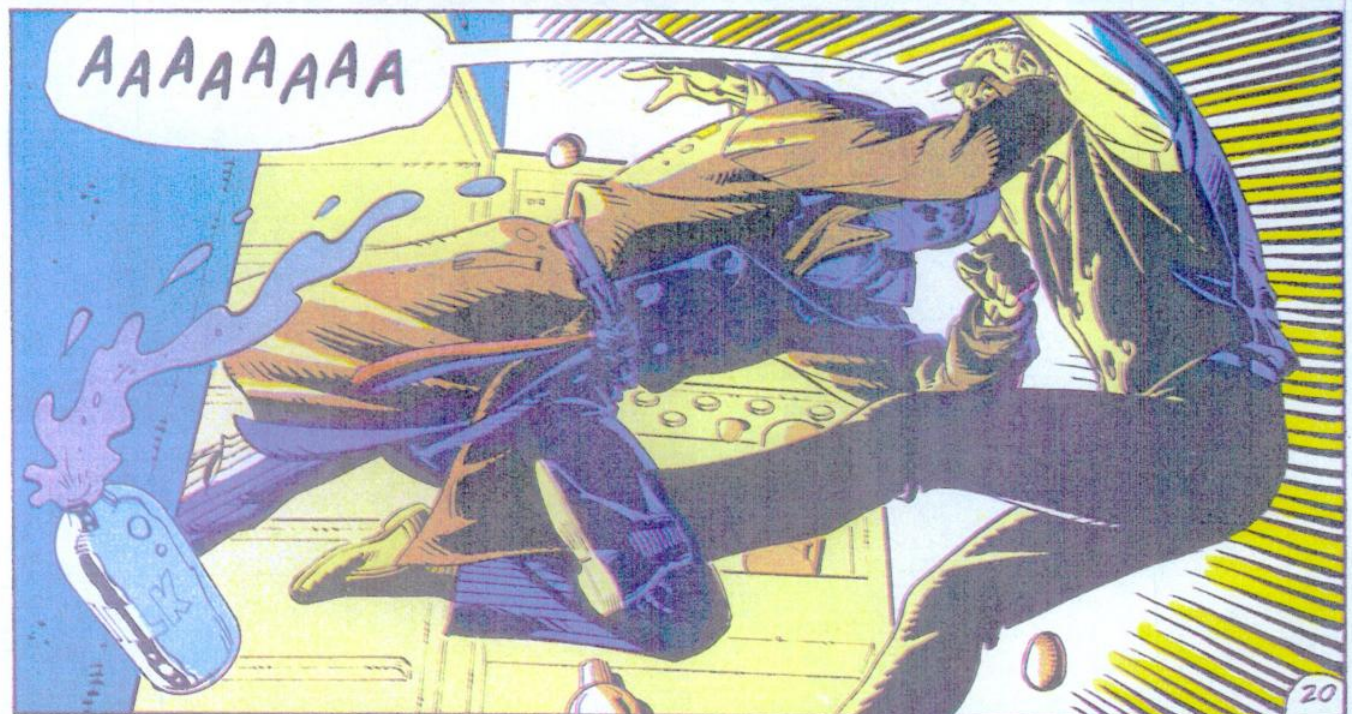
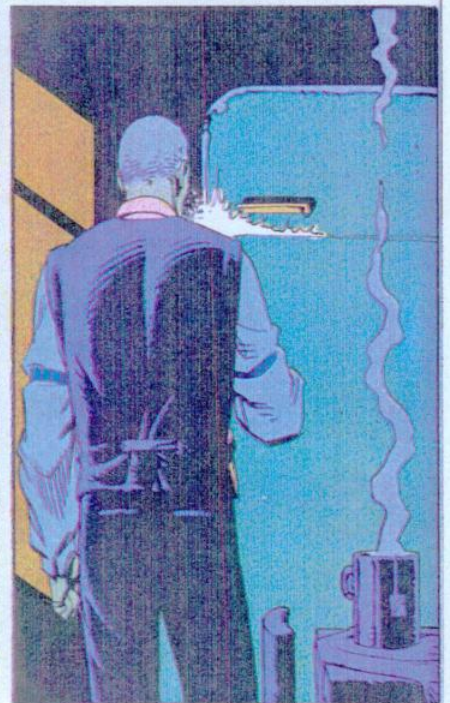
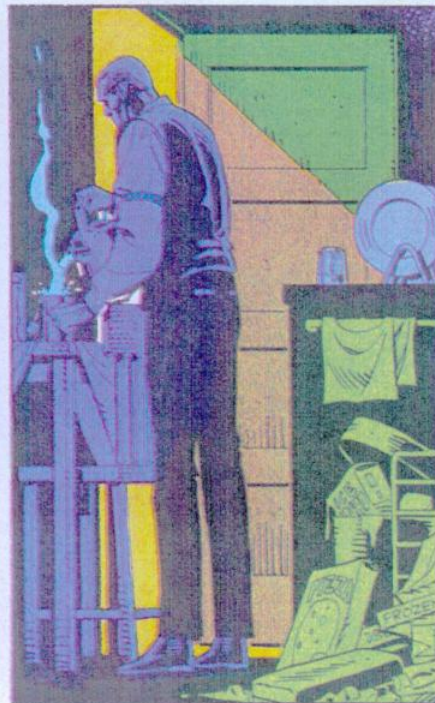
Dave Gibbons had worked for 2000 AD and had created characters such as "Rogue Trooper" for the comic.

DC Comics asked Alan Moore to write them a comic for their ever expanding "Super Universe". Moore did, choosing the long since deleted Charlton characters. Moore turned the characters on their heads, making real people and a real world and, with Dave Gibbons clear art, a multifaceted world and story became apparent.

"The Watchmen" is a direct contemporary of "The Dark Knight Returns" - Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's apocalyptic vision of Batman.

Miller's work had been brought to the American public's attention with his pseudo Japanese tale of a Samurai, "Ronin".

Whereas "Ronin" had explored ancient myths of Japan, setting them in a dystopic New York, "The Dark Knight Returns" explored a younger yet equally rich myth, that of "The Batman".



These books are the instigators of the "adult comic", at least to the financially minded Publisher. Both owe a lot to other works outside the comic book perspective.

Any violence within their pages is contextualised and treated, (if fairly graphically), in an adult manner. However, there is little doubt that their success has encouraged more explicit violence within mainstream comics, many of which are not as literarily well fleshed out as these two books.



...JUST AN OUNCE OR TWO MORE OF PRESSURE... AND... DO I HEAR SIRENS...?

YES... COMING CLOSE... YOU WON'T GET FAR...

...BUT THEN... IT DOESN'T MATTER... IF YOU DO...

...THEY'LL KILL YOU FOR THIS...

...AND THEY'LL NEVER KNOW...

...THAT YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE NERVE...

I'LL... SEE YOU... IN HELL...

WITH A DEVIL'S STRENGTH... HE TWISTS...

HEHH

KRAAK

...AND TWISTS...

...WHAT'S LEFT OF HIS SPINE... GOES...

HEHH

KRAAK

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

KRAAK

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

KRAAK

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

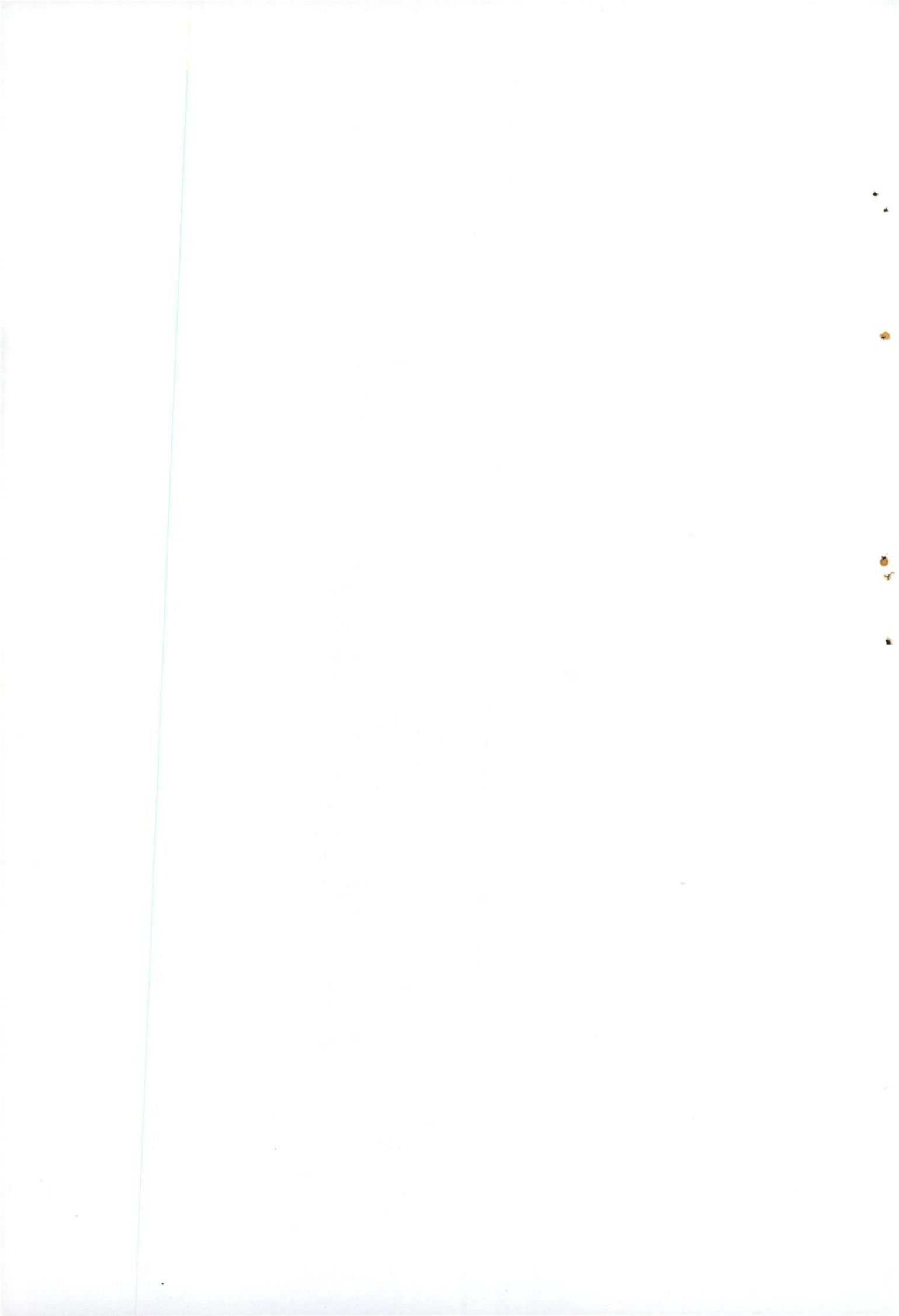
HEHH

KRAAK

...WHATEVER'S IN HIM RUSTLES AS IT LEAVES.

...THE SIRENS ECHO THROUGH THE TUNNEL... TIRES SCREECH... THE WORLD IS GROWING DARK...

...AND GOLD...



With the arrival of "adult" comics, all the comic book vigilantes have gotten meaner, much to the delight of the fans: out go their codes of honour and stupid sidekicks, and suddenly the shadows of the city are teeming with restless, shady psychotics who do terrible things to criminals, and between all these "Superheroes" its a wonder that there is crime in the cities at all.

The list of characters includes, of course, the older "heroes" who are hardened up, like "Batman", "The Spectre", "Spiderman", "Green Arrow" etcetera, to the new uninhibited modern character creations such as "Wolverine", "Manhunter", "The Punisher", and "Elektra".

Interestingly, comic book adaptations of X-rated movies, such as "Aliens", "Predator" and "Robocop" have all appeared for the children's market, and all contain the same amount of violence as their X-rated counterparts.

Many of these vigilante figures claim to be firm bastions of law and order, secret agents and the like; men such as "Captain America" and "Nick Fury" agent of "S.H.I.E.L.D.". Some are the law, like "Judge Dredd", but many are portrayed as living outside the law, like "Batman"

But where these characters fit into their fictional societies is probably irrelevant to the adolescent comics fan - most just desire their favourite psychotic deviant to "kick some ass".

As I have said before, the publishers' publicity material often confuses retailers, but sometimes it is more clear cut. Take for example the propaganda for "Fist of the Northstar" for Viz Comics: "Heads explode, blood and brains burst from skulls. Spears plunge into torsos, eyes dangle from their sockets." - this; is advertising for their product.

The "best" villains such as "The Joker" and "Lex Luthor" get even their own books and series. Their popularity only seems to wane when they soften up. More frightening are the recent exploits of these sociopathic "heroes" who do things that, in an earlier age, villains would not even attempt: for example, in issue 2 of "Melt-down", "Wolverine", (a psychotic, hairy member of the mutant "X-Men"), pops his claws through a Russian guard. "The Question", in issue 27, breaks a thug's arm and throws two off a roof. Even "Wonder Woman", in issue 31, rips "the cheetah's" tail, (real tail), from her body and beats her with it.

Publishers like Continuity Comics revel in mayhem, and the reader is spared no subtleties, as characters like "Armor" and "Crazyman" do very graphic things to terrorists and their ilk.

The vast majority of these characters would have no reason to exist if not for violence. Their worlds and simple plot-lines make their very existence gratuitous.

Fleshed-out psychopaths appearing in adult literature such as "Rorschach" in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' "Watchmen" have a carefully thought out reason why the character exists and why society is the way it is in its fictional sense.

In the real world, the majority of these characters would be a public menace, and few writers give their pulp creations much *raison d'etre* for their existence.

Alan Moore is one of the foremost writers in the comics industry and someone who believes in the medium; he also believes that a writer must have a good psychological insight to their creations.¹⁴ It is very

valuable if those characters have any relation to the world as people know and understand it, but that "the psychology of the masked vigilante who swings from rooftops and beats up evil-doers is not likely to make their lives any more pleasurable or interesting".

Alan Moore sees treatments of sex and violence within comics as adolescent concerns and in his current work, such as "Big Numbers", treats it flatly, if at all, and as realistically as possible.

Despite attempting to write more rounded superheroes in work such as "The Watchmen", "V for Vendetta", "Miracle Man" and "Swamp Thing", Alan Moore has washed his hands of them.

Other writers whose writing reflects a maturity of mind include the French artist and writer Jean Giraud, known over here for his science fiction stories under his pseudonym "Moebius" and his "Lieutenant Blueberry". Giraud says that by drawing violence it can act as a release for his own inner tension.¹⁵ "The violence always shows itself through the art work because your subconscious speaks through graphics."

Both Giraud and Moore, it must be said, are not run of the mill comics writers. Moore cut his teeth on "2000 A.D." and has consistently written more and more good, adult orientated stories; Giraud has been a major figure in Continental comics since the 1960's.

In America, writers such as Chris Claremont and John Byrne make, as a staple diet, use of the power fantasy and vigilante figures.

Mainstream Violence

GRANT MORRISON & DAVE MC KEAN - ARKHAM ASYLUM.

After Miller's interpretation of "The Batman", Batmania erupted. Never had there been so much interest in the character. DC Comics rereleased everything and encouraged new writers and artists to use the hardened character. "Arkham Asylum" is one of these titles.

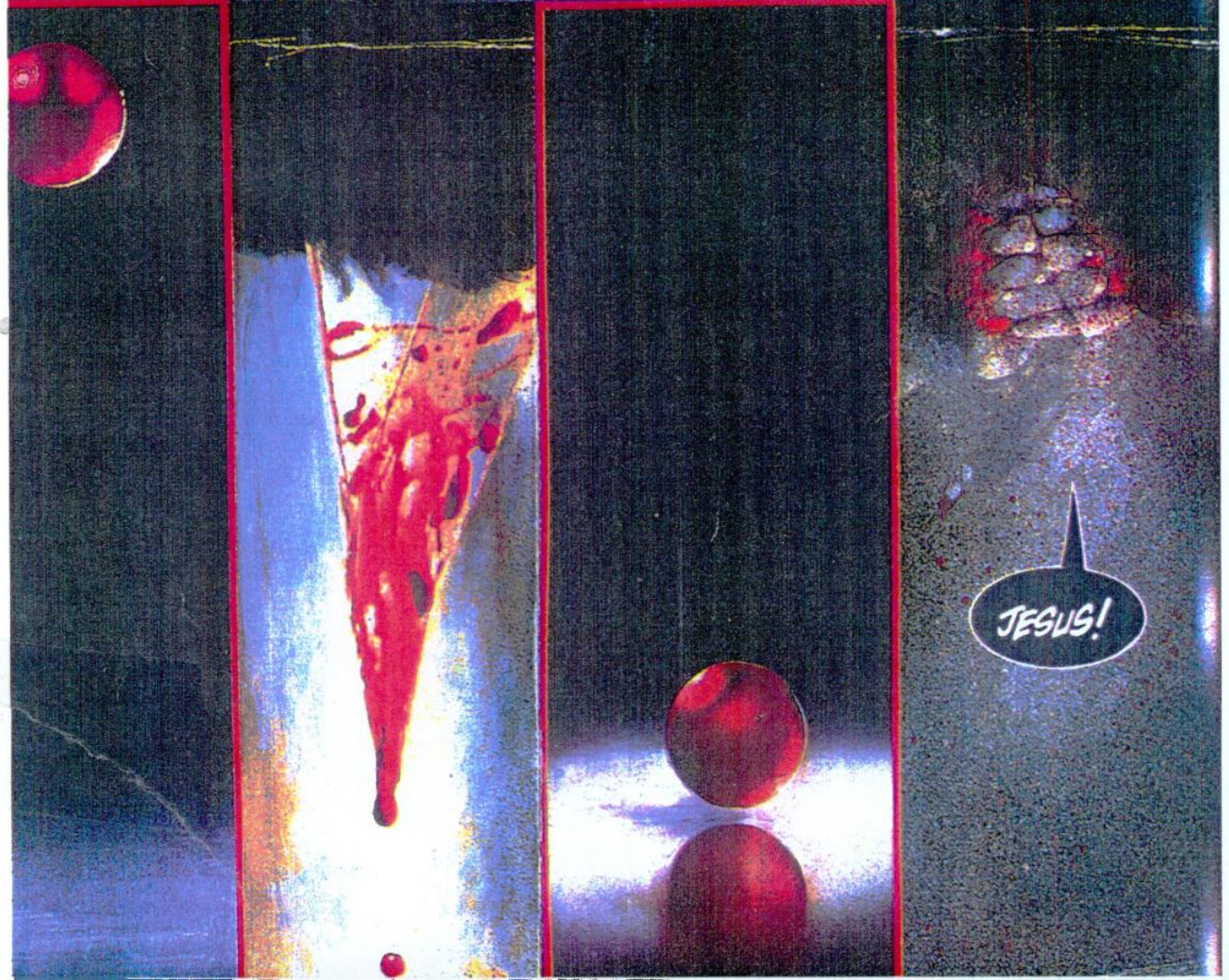
Created by two Englishmen, Morrison, who had worked for 2000 AD, and Mc Kean, working on "Violent Cases" and DC Comics "Black Orchid", the story was Gothically inspired and full of literary references.

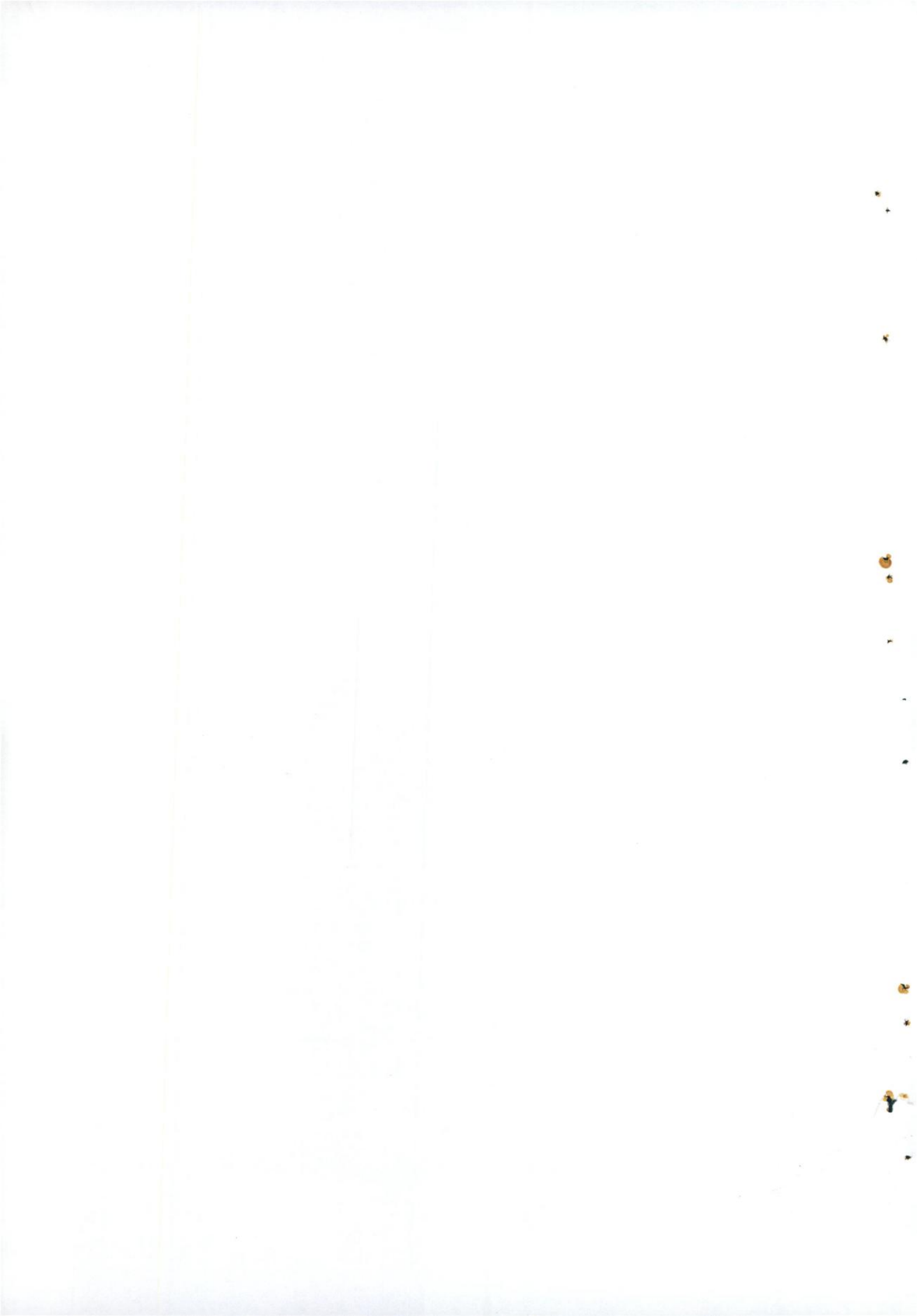
The story follows "The Batman" into the Institution of "Arkham Asylum" where the inmates, (Batman's numerous enemies), have taken over.

The painted artwork is very beautiful but the story is unclear and simplistic.

DC Comics allow "The Batman" to do things to himself that would not have happened in earlier uses of the character.

"Arkham Asylum" is a "mature readers only" book but is a good reflection of the problems that the adult market has opened: breathtaking artwork, violent imagery but with a poor storyline.





REAL VIGILANTES.

The popular love of the vigilante has been around for a long time. Legends like those of Robin Hood and Jesse James have stood much of the test of time. But far more sinister is the existence, in the modern world, of vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nations, Posse Comitatus and, in England, the likes of the Skrewdriver Skinheads.

Too often it can be seen that the modern vigilante has right-wing or fascist leanings and it can also be seen that the fascistic overtones of the superhero, as a symbol, are not too hard to follow. That these fictional characters may mirror real-life vigilantes is a sobering thought.

Frank Miller's "Dark Knight Returns" is a bleak, apocalyptic view of the modern world. Gotham City, a place which, during the forties and fifties, seemed to be an extended urban playground, becomes dark and unfriendly; populated by rabid and sociopathic street gangs. The Batman himself is a reflection of our own current thinking on modern vigilantes in the wake of real-life people such as Bernhard Goetz. "Batman" is seen as a near fascist and dangerous fanatic by the media within the book. Mean while, concerned psychiatrists plead for the homicidal "Joker's" release on strictly humanitarian grounds.

The basis for the story is bleak, but "Batman" is the new hero; the knight who saves the day. As Frank Miller said about his depiction of "Batman",¹⁶ "He changes the quality of life in Gotham City, the way everyone there thinks and lives. Now presenting the vigilante as such a powerful, positive force is bound to draw some flack, but it is the force I'm concerned with, more as a symbol of the reaction that I hope is waiting for us, the will to overcome our moral impotence and fight, if only in our own emotions, the deterioration of society".

Miller's work is adult literature and one of his themes is violence. His influence at this stage has rocked the comics world. Does the creation of a violent vigilante incite the reader to engage in vigilante thinking/doing, or can they give and take and enjoy this modern Gothic myth with, perhaps, a clearer view on the world?

"Batman", within the story, would not encourage the reader necessarily to his ways. "Batman", the character, is a man of myth and strength, (albeit with psychopathic tendencies).

The "real-life" vigilantes within the story are shown as a sorry bunch cashing in on the popularity of the hero. But they are only effective as a force for good when organised by "Batman" himself.

The human race has need for heroes and heroes would not be heroes if they had not got something that others desired. The fictional vigilante will always be a hero as long as he/she triumphs, the legality of his/her actions has little or no effect on the triumph of right.

It is important to realise that real-life vigilantes are well aware that their actions are illegal and feel obliged to legitimise their violence by contriving a philosophy of vigilanteism resting on these points: self-preservation, the right to revolution, and popular sovereignty.

The last point, perhaps, is the most vital pretext of being a vigilante; that a common consensus made the law. People who believe in democracy refer to popular sovereignty as "mob rule", as it undermines the authority and belief in democracy. Vigilantes have no accountability, they are guided only by their convictions, they are conservative, often nationalistic, their loyalties are provincial, they are small minded territorialists.

Mainstream Violence

WALTER & LOUISE SIMONSON, KENT WILLIAMS & JON J. MUTH - MELTDOWN 2

"Meltdown" is a story about two members of a superhero team: "Havok" and "Wolverine". Both are members of the "X-Men".

Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the founders of Marvel Comics, the "X-Men" were different, being born mutants not superhuman by some freak accident.

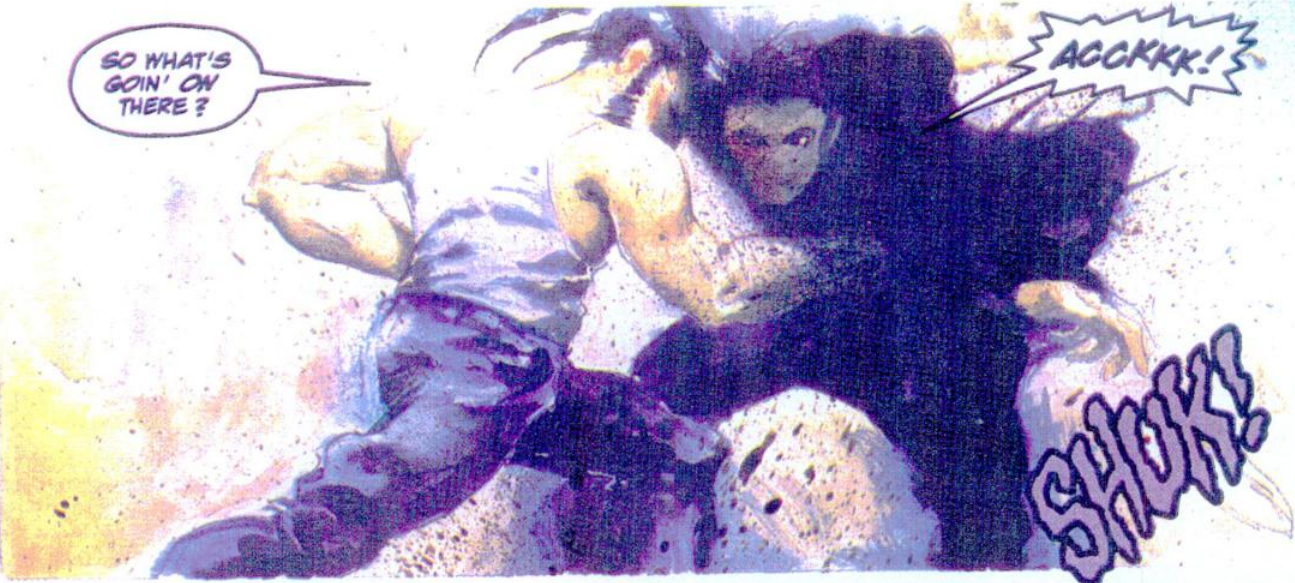
"The Uncanny X-Men", however, was not too popular and after 93 issues the title was cancelled.

In the early 1980's Chris Claremont revived the characters and introduced new ones such as "Nightcrawler" and "Wolverine". The "X-Men" soared in sales and popularity becoming a comic book bestseller, spawning other mutant titles such as "The New Mutants", "Excalibur", and "X-Force".

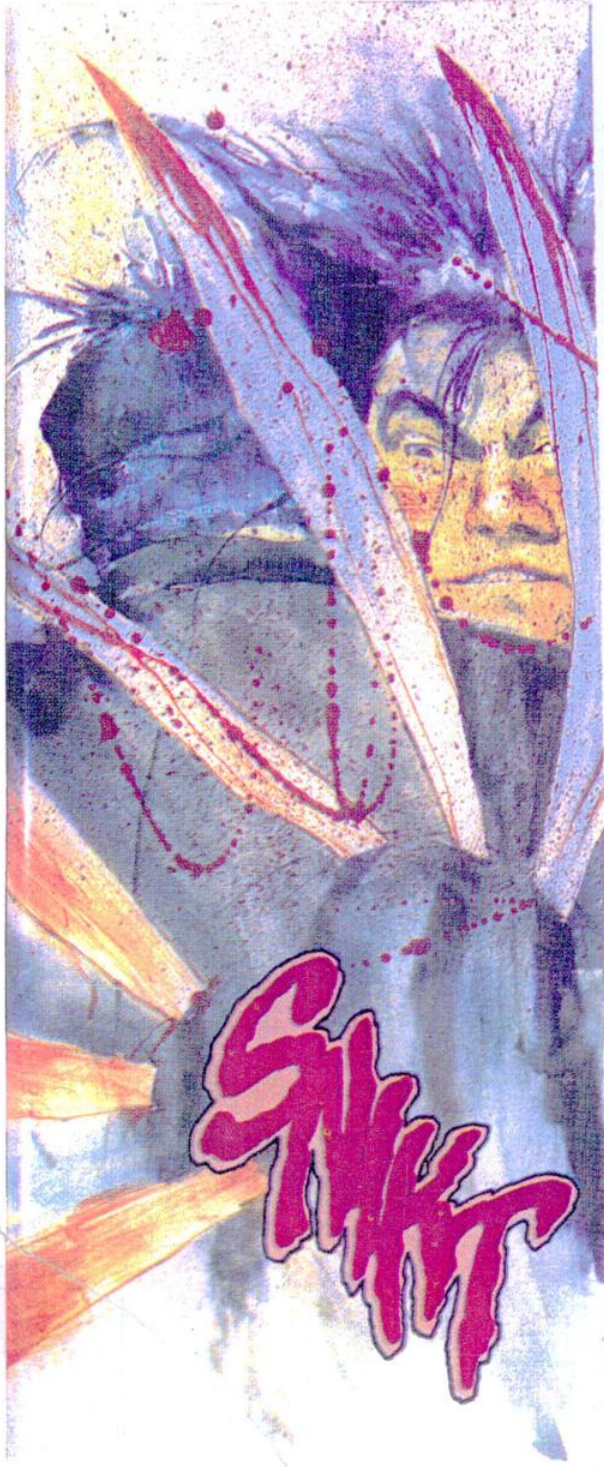
In earlier issues characters like "Wolverine" were kept firmly on a leash, his obvious talents, (half animal with a steel skeleton plus retractable claws), made him popular amongst comics fans. But "Wolverine" was only allowed macerate dangerous monsters, (like dinosaurs in the "Savage Land"). But more recently "Wolverine's" character has become more unpredictable as this illustration shows.

"Wolverine" is probably the most popular vigilante in America, and its not because he's an Elvis look-alike.

SO WHAT'S GOIN' ON THERE?



ACCKKK!
SHUK!



SHUK!



NO, DON'T TRY AN' TELL ME!

FRANK MILLER & GEOFF DARROW - HARD BOILED.

Hard Boiled is a very violent story centring around a cyborg detective.

Darrow's intricate use of detail makes for some vividly violent incidents.

Miller, again, places his character against the faceless city and streaming humanity.

HARD BOILED



Superheroes are often all of these things and perhaps worse. Superheroes are snobbish and elitest, treating normal people with a patronising condescension. The common people are pictured as a self-indulgent, fickle, easily corrupted mob that rarely does anything to help their gallant defenders.

Vigilantes, be they real or fictional, are only heroes because they stand apart from the mob. Accountable only to themselves, they are their own boss. Whatever anarchy they cause, it is this desire to be the innovator of Truth that makes the concept of their role desirable.

Creators of fictional "heroes" must at least understand the repercussions on the real world of their decisions.

Unskilled rendering of the "hero" and violence by the ignorant does nothing more than cheapen the medium and could be seen to morally reflect the creators of the fiction.

Skilled depictions of violence are not "entertainment" but can be important statements on this aspect of human behaviour.

"At midnight all the agents and the superhuman crew
go out and round up everyone who knows more than
they do." - Bob Dylan, "Desolation Row".

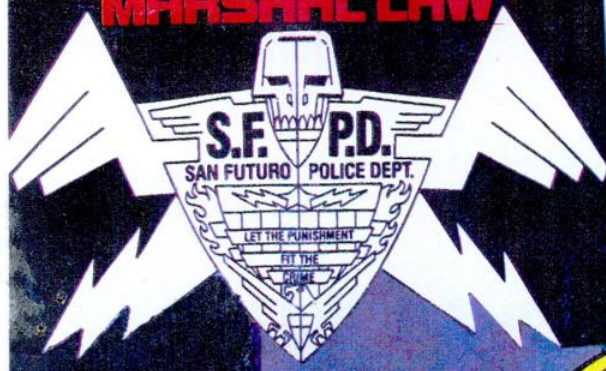
PAT MILLS & KEVIN O'NEILL - MARSHAL LAW.

In a world of violence and confusion, in a society that revolves totally around the costumed vigilante the "Marshal" brings justice to criminal superheroes.

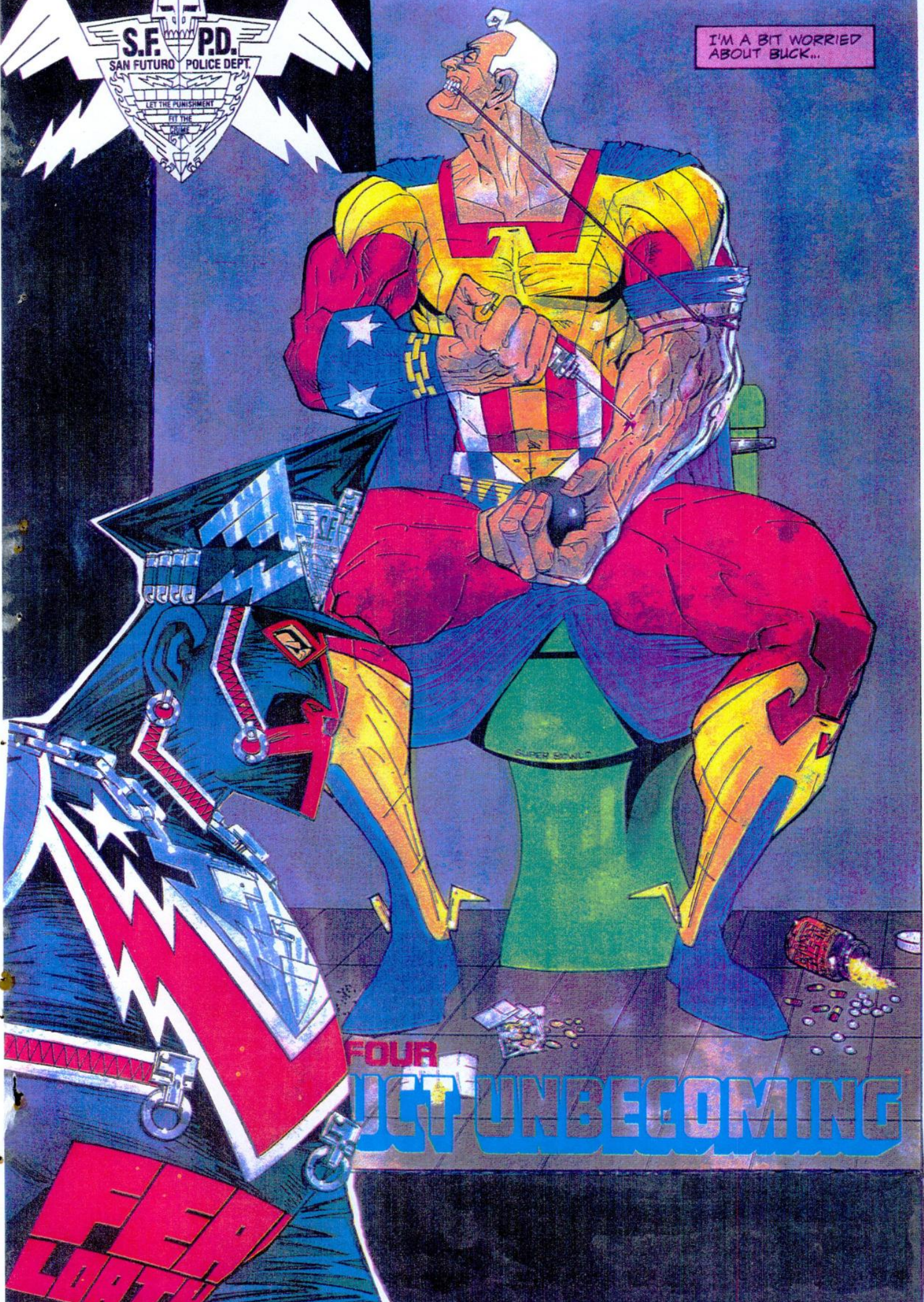
With manic glee Mills and O'Neill ridicule superheroes, vigilantes and their ilk with unrelenting humour.

Here "The Public Spirit" is seen shooting-up with steroids, the "Marshal" is in the foreground. For too long in comic books have superheroes been treated as serious characters, Mills and O'Neill uncover their basic stupidity as a concept and satirically whip media orientated society.

MARSHAL LAW



I'M A BIT WORRIED ABOUT BUCK...



FOUR
JUST UNBECOMING

FEAR
LOATH

SECTION 3

SEX IN COMICS.

Portrayals of sex in graphic form are not new, in ancient Japan print-making was very common so there was an availability of books. When a girl got married, she would have been kept very chaste so the parents would present the couple with a "pillow book", in which there were diagrams showing various sexual positions with greatly enlarged genitals.¹

In the 1890's Victorian Englishmen enjoyed spicy periodicals with mildly erotic strip scenes showing ladies undressing. It was not really until the 20th century that sex in comics revealed itself.

In the 1930's and 40's comics gave us vampish villainesses and beautiful heroines in strips such as "The Spirit" and "Steve Canyon". The portrayal of ladies such as "Sand Saref" and "Plaster of Paris" exude an obvious sexuality and mirror greatly the "film noir" actresses of the time.

The 1930's and 40's were also the era of tijuana bibles, pornographic versions of popular comic strips.² It often was the case that artists would produce these anonymously.

So, as can be seen, a sexual "underground" has always been evident in comics, but many are just outpourings of the male libido.

Artists such as Dave Stevens, (the creator of "Betty Page"), owe much to the art of Wally Wood who, after EC fell in the 1950's, drew "Sally Forth", a beautifully drawn but sexist rendition of women.³

Sexual liberation and exploration in comics happened in the '60's in the underground, in the midst of music, love and equality. Gifted artists like Robert Crumb masochistically exposed his own fetishes and fantasies about women in an hilarious manner to a mainly uncaring "hip" readership. Another gifted artist of the time is Richard Corben, and his work such as "Roda and the Wolf" and his "Bodessy" series have a strange eroticism. Much of Corben's work has appeared in "Heavy Metal", the English version of the French comics magazine "Metal Hurlant".

Today the richest erotic titles come probably from the European market. Sexual depictions on the Continent are treated maturely and often amusingly. Sex in comics, it must be understood, is not necessarily about depictions of intercourse, much emphasis is placed on the power of suggestion and the erotic image. Continental artists such as Milo Manarra excel in this. Early Manarra work is of a voyeuristic nature and detracts from his reputation. His more recent work, like "Click" in which a besotted doctor supposedly fits his friend's wife with a device that makes her instantly randy, is a sophisticated comedy of middle-class mores.

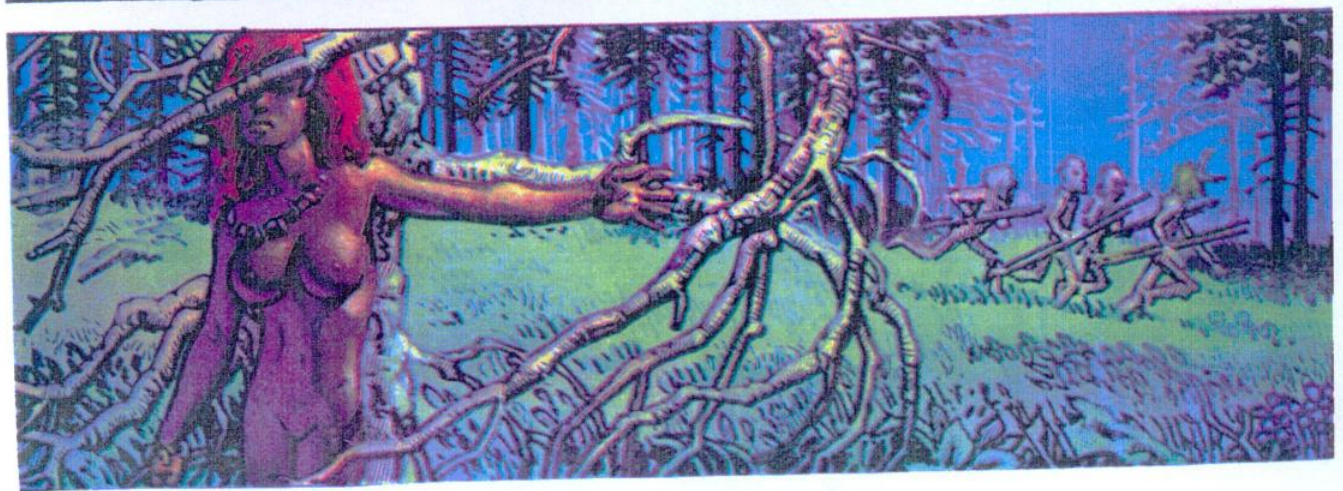
Jean Giraud has worked on many different themes, and his work is not just confined to the comics medium, he has worked on films such as "Alien" and "Tron". Depictions of sex in his work are often very honest and simple.

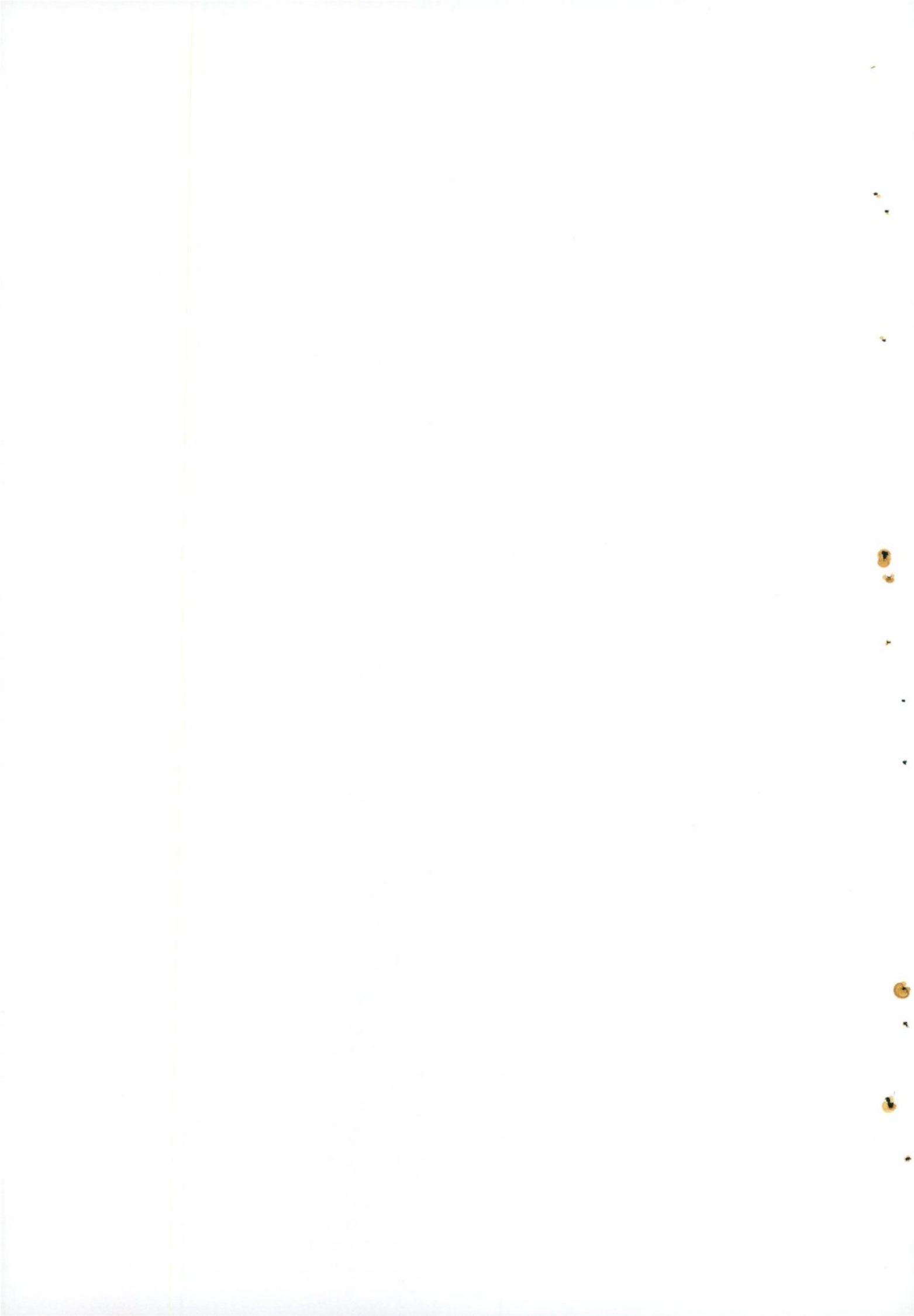
Guido Crepax's work has recently been translated into English.⁴ Work such as "Emmanuelle" and "Valentina" are treated in a unique manner by Crepax. He breaks all rules of storytelling, but it might be said that he manages to put the female sexual sub-conscious on paper.

RICHARD CORBEN - RODA AND THE WOLF.

Corben's semi erotic interpretation of a classic fairy-tale.

RODA AND THE WOLF







GANTO SU AYES
MO GRINDA.



WAZA KON
AYESDU RODA.



GANTO SU SODOCS
MO GRINDA.



WAZA KON
SODOW. RODA.



GANTO SU SMASE.
MO GRINDA.



WAZA KON
SMASEU. RODA.



GANTO SU DENTAC,
MO GRINDA.



WAZA KON
MAGADENT MO
RODA, MO RODA!

Continental Erotica

MILO MANARRA.

Manarra's clear continental style makes for some very sensuous portrayals, although much of his earlier work is quite exploitive.



SEXISM

The comic is a sexist medium and depictions of women leave a lot to be desired in the majority of titles. Sex in comics is mainly an adult perspective. There are more depictions of sex available in "adult" titles today than ever before.

"Super heroines", those scantily clad, perfectly formed ladies contrived by American publishers point out clear exploitation of the female form.

"Wonder Woman" was the first, created in 1942, (ten years after "Superman"), by psychologist William Marsdon. Marsdon hoped to counteract the blood curdling masculinity of other comic characters.⁵ As he himself says, "'Wonder Woman' saves her worst enemies and reforms their characters".

Since this creation there are now thousands of "super babes" performing incredible contortions in postage stamp outfits without losing a g-string. Sexploitation continues.

In the late 1980's Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz created the climax of the "super babe". They created a sexual multi-layered story focusing on one woman: "Elektra".

"Elektra Assassin", (Marvel Comics), is a complex cloak and dagger story about the American secret service, (S.H.I.E.L.D.), attempting to prevent the assassination of the President by the ninja "Elektra".

The work is intensely violent, and Sienkiewicz's art oozes a sexuality that is reminiscent of painters such as Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele.⁶ It is the drawings themselves that might be determined as erotic, the actual story has no rendition of sex but sado-masochistic undertones are strikingly obvious.

"Elektra" is a character that can be seen in two contexts by the reader: as the object of desire and as the victim of desire. She, as a woman, has been mentally and physically abused yet she takes on the patriarchal system and wins easily. Within the story, "Elektra" confronts the "ultimate" man, (a macho, boorish S.H.I.E.L.D. agent), and wipes the floor with him. He succumbs and becomes a sterile puppet.

The book is a multi-layered modern thriller with many inspiring views of women. The creation of a woman as a real person is not the issue in the story, but rather the power of the woman in society.

Howard Chaykin is an American artist who has opened the doors of mainstream comics to pornography. Chaykin has been a much respected creator in the comics field, most particularly with his work on "American Flagg", described by himself as "a high-tech version of Gunsmoke".⁷ He is a believer in the power of the cliché and his plots revel in its use.

"Black Kiss", published by Vortex Comics in 1986, caused a major stir. The story, about sex, blackmail and violence, was blatantly pornographic. His portrayal of women had always been sexist but "Black Kiss" revels in its seedy sex and violence. In his treatment of "the American dream" one could draw parallels with director David Lynch's "Wild at Heart". "BlackKiss" is an unhumorous piece of work, his blatant use of pornography and the furore that Chaykin has caused cannot but be admired in underlying the use of sex in adult comics.⁸

The success of "Black Kiss" has made many more artists "come out" and produce erotic comics. Artists such as Gilbert Hernandez and Matt Wagner are working on their own erotic comics.⁹ Indirectly, "Black Kiss" encouraged Aircel Publishers to release "Leather and Lace" and "Sapphire" for the "adults only" market. Both titles contain images of child pornography, and if photographs rather than drawings were used Aircel would be prosecuted.



HOWARD CHAYKIN - BLACK KISS.

Chaykin's notorious "Black Kiss" is a poor excuse for "adult literature" revelling in seedy cliched plots and graphic sex.



ARABIAN NIGHTS

HOWARD CHAY III

\$125
\$155
CANADA

NUMBER 3
ADULTS ONLY





OH, GOD.. THIS NEVER HAPPENS TO ME..

--THIN HOT BABES THROWING THEMSELVES AT ME--

YOU CASS...?

IT'S NOT YOU WE'RE JUMPING ON..



--LIKE I SAID-- I'M BEVERLY'S BIGGEST FAN..

AND DON'T FORGET.. YOU CAME TO US..

--FOR WHAT-- FOR HELP? FOR HOSTAGES..?



LISTEN-- I'M NO GUNMAN..

YUHH... I BEG YOUR PARDON..



I--SORRY IF I'M BORING YOU--

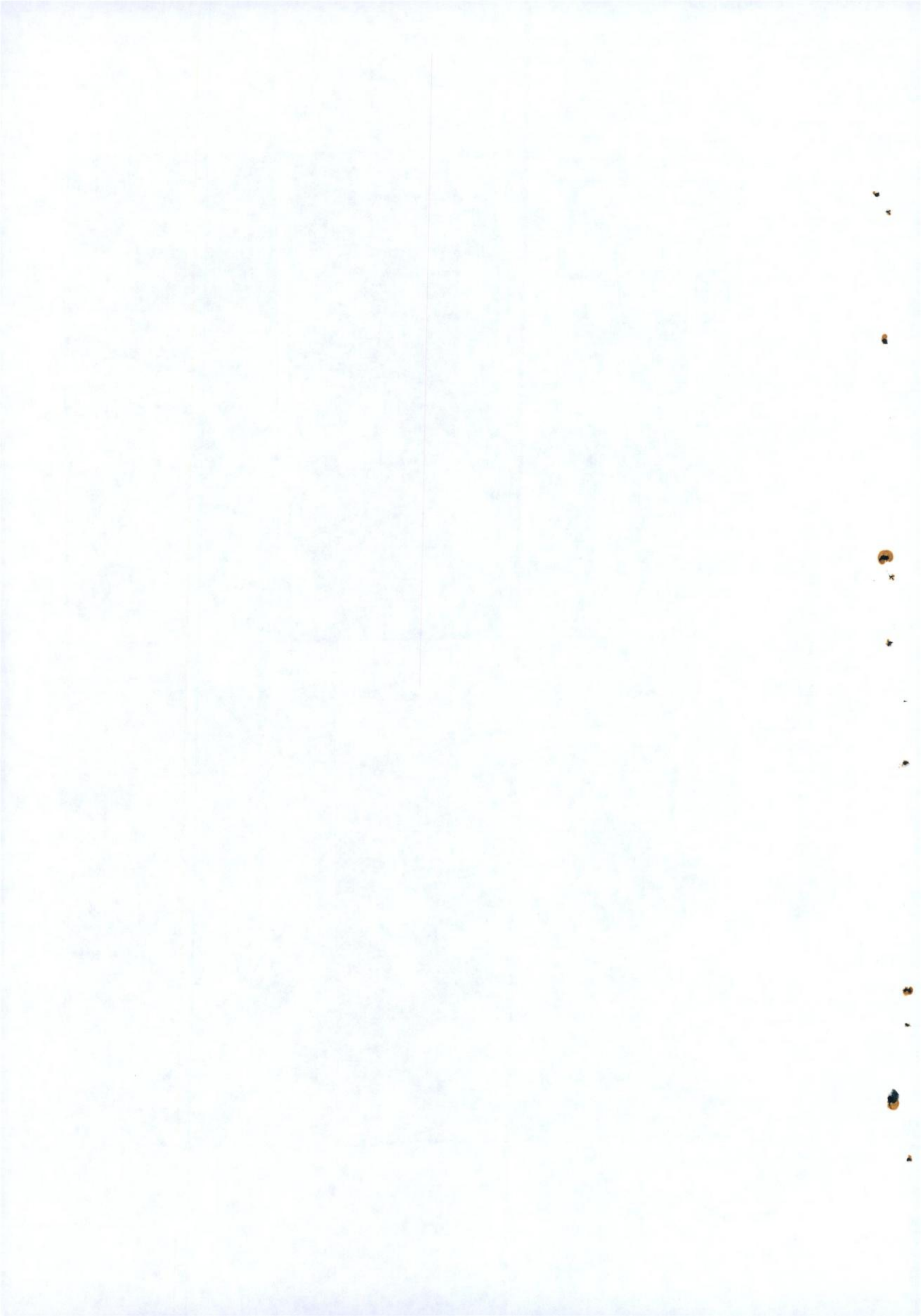
PLEASE, MR. POLLACK--

--FIND THAT MOVIE... PLEASE--

--I CAN BE INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL...



NOW BRING THAT STIFF DICK OVER HERE AND I'LL SHOW YOU HOW GRATEFUL WE BOTH CAN BE...



Aircel's own range of adolescent material is distinctly dangerous. Many of their titles place children, (or characters that look like children), in thinly disguised sexual fantasies. There is little outright nudity but many of the characters spend their time in suggestive costumes barely covering protruding nipples and bulging genitals.

Eros Comics was launched by Fantagraphics Books in 1990. Fantagraphics is a highly respected, independent publisher of notable work such as the Hernandez Bros. "Love and Rockets", and their highly critical comics magazine "The Comics Journal". Eros specialise in "erotic" material and release many different titles.¹¹

In Alan Moore's work, sexism has never played a part: his woman characters are always real people. "The Ballad of Halo Jones" caused a shock to the readership when launched on the pages of the macho "2000 AD".

"Halo Jones" was the story of a girl living in the future doing normal everyday things. She leaves an unemployed, depressing Earth to work in space. "Halo Jones" will be remembered especially for its terrifying future war in which many of the combatants were women. Even Moore's minor women characters are real people. Creations such as "Miracleman's" wife Elizabeth and the "Swamp Thing's" lover Abigail are complete characters. ("Miracleman", Eclipse Comics; "Swamp Thing", DC Comics.)

"Swamp Thing" was a historic comic book horror story, but through Moore the character became a tool to investigate many taboo human subjects.¹²

One of the subjects Moore tackled was menstruation in a story entitled "The Curse". It dealt with the taboo social meanings placed on menstruation and suggests that it is not menstruation but men's attitude towards it that is unclean.

GILBERT HERNANDEZ - BIRDLAND.

Strippers, love triangles and explicit drawings, "Birdland" is published by Eros Comics, a company specialising in so-called Erotica.

"Eros" was the idea of Gary Grath, the founder of Fantagraphics, an independent publishers who print "The Comics Journal" which is, perhaps, the most strident comics Fanzine in encouraging the criticism of comic book material.

"Fantagraphics" also print more notable works by the Hernandez Brothers, ("love and Rockets" and "Heartbreak Soup"), as well as underground works such as that of Daniel Clowes' "Eightball".

"Eros Comics" was released in June of 1990 with works by Gilbert Hernandez, Ho Che Anderson, Richard Forc and Robert Crumb. Reaction to "Eros" was stunned surprise and cutting words, especially from English Fanzine "Speakeasy"; Grant Morrison's column being the most vehement, (Bib. C, no. 114).

Much of the work was done by highly reputable creators, nevertheless the material was just "bad" pornography.

BIRDLAND





Eros

ANTON DREK - WENDY WHITEBREAD.

"Wendy Whitebread" is another title published by "Eros". It follows the exploits of an undercover vice cop, ("she wears a badge on her crotch").

A shallow story, "Wendy Whitebread" leaves nothing to the imagination, except perhaps the faces of the men, which are never shown.

Anton Drek is a pseudonym, and you can understand why.

Anton Drex

WENDY WHITEBREAD UNDERCOVER SLUT

Clean-Cut



No. 1



WART! THE AUNT NO LAR HEARD INDOOR -- IT'S THE UNDERCOVER SLUT...

THAT'S ABOUT, BOYS!

THE BADGE SAYS -- I'M THE LAW!

I THOUGHT SHE WAS TOO CLEAN-CUT!

AND HER UNTOUCHABLES!



Anton Drex



THE AFFLIES W/N, SHOWS IN HAND / HOURS INSTANT TICE PAID BY? OOK 60!

SLURP!



SPURT!



SPLAT!



SPLASH!



SQUIRT!



YOU'RE BUSTED, CREEP!

NOW HAND ME A TOWEL!

SHIT! IT'S THE UNDERCOVER SLUT!

SOON, WENDY GETS SOME HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WITH A FELLOW OFFICER-- A VOLUNTEER, OF COURSE -- PRETENDING TO BE A "JOHN"-- POLICE LINGO FOR A MAN WHO PAYS PROSTITUTES FOR SEX... WENDY FUMBLES THROUGH HER FIRST HAND-JOB...



REMEMBER, WENDY... PUMP AND SQUEEZE... PUMP AND SQUEEZE...

I GUESS I'M ALL THUMBS

Alan Moore's latest creation is with artist Melinda Gebbie, best known for her strips in "Tits 'n Clits" and "Wimmens Comix", which is an erotic fantasy entitled "The Lost Girls".¹³

One of the best insights into real women through the comics medium is Jaime Hernandez' "Love and Rockets", (see page), ironically written by a male it says a lot about young women living in a post-punk nuclear age.

"Love and Rockets" deals with the lives of two eighteen year old girls in a modern surreal Californian city. "Maggie" and "Hopey" are probably lesbians but sex and their sexuality has a very real place in their lives. When violence occurs, like real life, it is treated realistically and with respect. "The Death of Speedy Ortiz" is an honest look at the barrios gang-warfare in Los Angeles.¹⁴ Jaime's artistic style is simple, accurate black and white drawings, reminiscent of old "romance comics". It is hard to describe the vitality and strength of this work.

Jaime's brother, Gilbert Hernandez, tackles a different theme in his work: the family. His own stories are as complex and mature as his brother's, dealing with the Mexican town of "Palomar" and its inhabitants. Sex and violence are treated maturely and often strangely in "Heartbreak Soup".

Gilbert's work on "Birdland" could be termed erotic, but by his own admission it is about "fucking for fun".¹⁵ I found the work, however, had done nothing to stretch the medium unlike his aforementioned "Heartbreak Soup".

The characters in "Birdland": "Bang-Bang" and "Inez" live banal, over-sexed lives, trivialising sex, women, and men. Men and women, as portrayed in "Birdland", do little else but yearn for sex in multiple positions.

GILBERT & JAIME HERNANDEZ - "HEARTBREAK SOUP" & "LOVE AND ROCKETTS". .

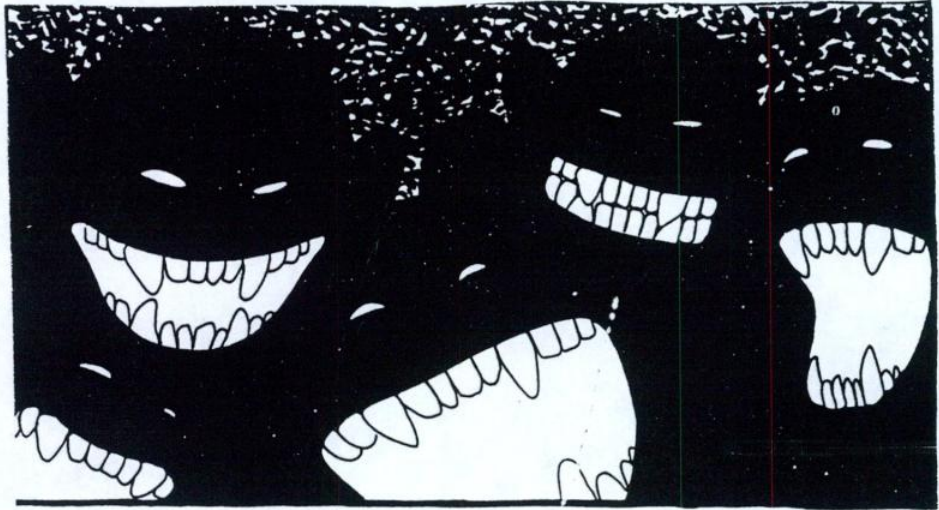
Sex and violence are treated maturely in the Brothers work. Gilbert's .
use of violence can be quite surreal as can be seen from the first page.

Jaime's attitude, (2nd page), can be seen in this ending of the
story "The Death of Speedy Ortiz".

The Brothers work, especially Gilbert's, owes much to film makers
such as Luis Bunel and Fredric Fellini. Their comics contain vibrant
characters and stories.

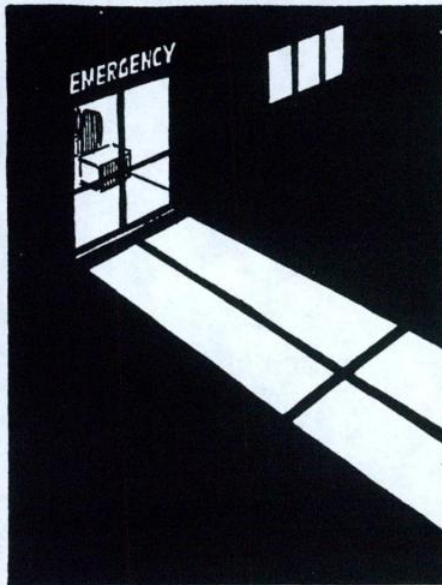
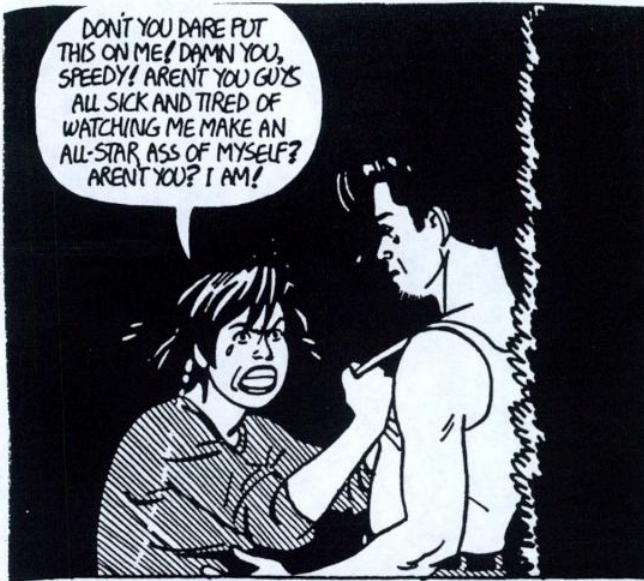
P. 1. HUMAN DIASTROPHISM - GILBERT HERNANDEZ.

P. 2 & 3. LOVE AND ROCKETTS - JAIME HERNANDEZ.









"Omaha the Cat Dancer", (Kitchen Sink), is a different kettle of fish. It is an intelligent, sensitive comic that revels in the pleasure of sex in a truly erotic way.

Wheatley and Hempel's "Breathmaker", (DC Comics), and Ted McKeever's "Plastic Forks", (Epic Comics), engage on complex sexual metaphors. Though neither is erotic, they look at the implications of sex, rather than just being full of it.

Chet Atkin's "Yummy Fur" and Daniel Clowes' "Eightball", (both published by Fantagraphics), are strange underground views of people and life. Their views of sex are surreally real.

FORNOGRAPHY VERSUS EROTICA.

Pornography can be quite simply put as human actions that demean the human being, generally depravity in sex and violence. Pornography can be seen in our society as demeaning mainly to women.

Beyond this definition it is hard for society to create restrictions on what is or what is not pornography, for people's opinions on what they find offensive differ wildly.

The word pornography comes from the Greek *porne* or prostitute, and *grapheim*, to depict. Thus, pornography can be literally interpreted as depictions of prostitutes. While we may assume "prostitutes" to be female, there is no gender implicit on the word: to prostitute is to offer for sale.

The word erotic comes from the Greek god Eros, son of the love goddess Aphrodite, (although a sexual god in his own right). Linguistically, one could say that pornography sells sex while eroticism is a celebration of it.¹⁶

REED WALLER & KATE WORLEY - OMAHA.

All the characters within "Omaha" are humanised cats. The stories are based around "Omaha" and her friends, their relationships and thier lives.

"Omaha" succeeds very well at being an honest sexual comic. Within the pages of "Omaha" sex is an intense, passionate act between two people, (or cats, if you prefer.).





No. 15 \$2.50 \$3.50 Canada

ADULTS ONLY

OMAHA™

THE CAT DANCER

by REED WALLER & KATE WORLEY



THERE NOW.



WHEATLEY & HEMPEL - BREATHAKER.

"Breathaker" is not about sex in an erotic sense, but about people and relationships.

The story follows on the life of a girl, (Chase Darrow), who unfortunately is a Succubus, i.e. a female demon who sucks the life from men. When men fall in love with her or touch her they begin to age. Chase is a real person who is very sad at what she does.

The Government order a "super" secret agent to capture her.

"Breathaker" is about love and sex, not about the portrayal or exploitation of it.

BREATHTAKER

BOOK 1 OF 4
\$4.95 U.S.
\$5.95 CAN.

SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS



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Scarpal '90

W H E A T L E Y



H E M P E L

Erotic art or literature is then acceptable "sexy" material for both sexes. The word pornography is used today as a term regarding the exploitation of sexuality, by either degradation or humiliation.

The pornographic image is an exploitive image, it leaves nothing to the imagination and quite often uses violent imagery. Images that use a "sex with violence" format can present a somewhat garbled message to the observer. Violent sexual images contain a dominant character and a submissive one, the observer can choose to identify with either but, as one character, (often a woman), is in pain, fear or being abused, this could be interpreted wrongly - as, for instance, that all women enjoy being in pain, fear or being abused.

Adults are, largely, entitled to do what they want by agreement with society. But they have no right to abuse or exploit others.

Erotic images, however, free the imagination and titillate the observer less blatantly. Erotic images, like good art, can challenge assumptions and also be subversive. Erotic images explore the sexuality of both men and women.

Pornography, like bad art, exhibits a mediocrity of imagination and serves the status quo. Sex becomes a commodity. Exploitive images of women and children misrepresent real situations, encouraging exploitation in the real world.

Truly erotic titles, such as "Omaha the Cat Dancer" and Milo Manarra's "Click", enhance sexuality or encourage questions regarding sexuality.

However, much of the material being sold as "erotic" is little more than distorted pornography. Many views in these so-called titles have nothing more than sexist, out-dated perspectives on women. Many

contain hackneyed images of fantasy women; the same predictable presentation of sexual images and no subtleties eroticise the sexual moment. The predictable images are blatantly portrayed - the cum shot, the blow job, the butt fuck. No sustained effort is made to flesh out the characters or present sex in a mature fashion. This is "bad" pornography: "Birdland", "Leather and Lace" and "Black Kiss".

Sex in comics is a sensitive and adult issue. For too long sexual images have been taboo within the media and arts. It is an important aspect of human life and images portraying it should be maturely treated and erotically cultivated. In many comics this has been the case; but in the majority, sex is a voyeuristic, exploitive act to be used at will by the male observer.

CENSORSHIP.

Comics have come a long way since Dr. Wertham's thesis, but the repercussions of "Seduction of the Innocent", especially on the American market, clearly stilted the medium and it has taken until now catch up.

Censorship is a frightening term to anybody connected with the arts, and the comics publishers are firmly against it.

But is censorship necessary?

Censorship is society's manner of protecting itself from dangerous images or beliefs that may damage the ethics or morals of the public. But censorship raises two important questions: Does the censor of any material infringe on the right of the individual to act as a mature adult and have the freedom of choice, or do depictions of violence and pornography degrade and humiliate sections of society, thereby infringing on their human rights?

Censorship does no medium any good. It creates taboo subjects and often encourages criminality on the part of people who do not accept the censorship.

I believe that the majority of adults can morally understand "dangerous" material and can choose personally whether they find the respective images and ideas within such material as right or wrong.

The censorship of material as regards children is another matter. Childrens' position on what should or should not be available to them is unique.

The law in England already defines what comic book material is banned from children: "The Young Persons and Harmful Publications Act", (1955), makes it an offence to "publish, sell or import magazines or other line of work which is of a kind likely to fall into the hands of children or young persons, (aged 17 or below), and which consists wholly or mainly of stories told in pictures with or without the addition of written matter, being stories portraying A: the commission of crimes; B: acts of violence or cruelty; C: incidents of a repulsive or horrible nature, in such a way that the work as a whole would tend to deprave or corrupt a child or young person into whose hands it might fall".¹⁷

This Act enforced makes no definition between adult and children's material. This is because, to the world at large, comics are a child's medium, the world of "Rupert the Bear", "Noddy" and "The Beano". It can be seen that many titles, especially those depicting uninhibited sex, can be banned because, as comics, they belong to children. So comics publishers have a right to be worried. Labelling material "for mature readers only" and "adults only" is irrelevant, the out-dated law is still effective.

RICK VEITCH & JACK WEINER - A TOUCH OF VINYL.

JIM WHEELOCK - ONE GOOD TRICK.

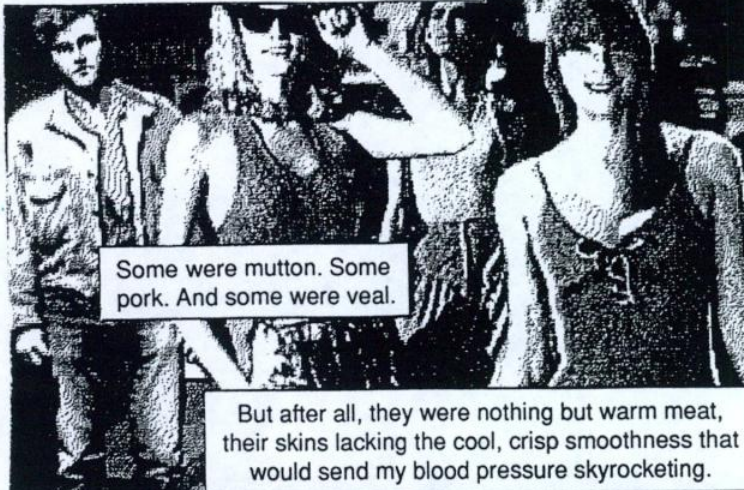
Both of these stories are from "Taboo", a horror anthology comic book which, as the title suggests, contains work of a controversial nature: "A Touch of Vinyl" investigates "love toys" and "One Good Trick: necrophilia.

Neither story glamorizes the sex involved, such is the way in which they are rendered. The perversities, however, are successfully unnerving.

Veitch is best known for his work on "Swamp Thing", especially the censored no. 88.

Wheelock was the freelance writer who probably introduced America to "Judge Dredd" via his articles for the "Comics Scene" fanzine.

I tried dating, of course — sampling the various menus of the opposite sex.



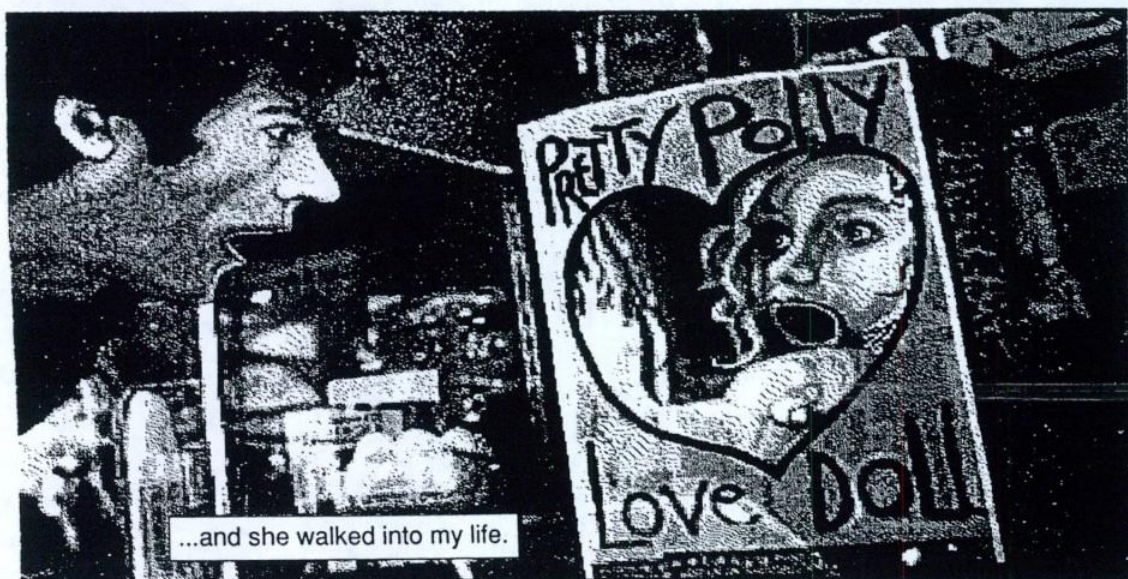
Some were mutton. Some pork. And some were veal.

But after all, they were nothing but warm meat, their skins lacking the cool, crisp smoothness that would send my blood pressure skyrocketing.

So I had quite satisfactorily resigned myself to the lonely existence of the onanist...

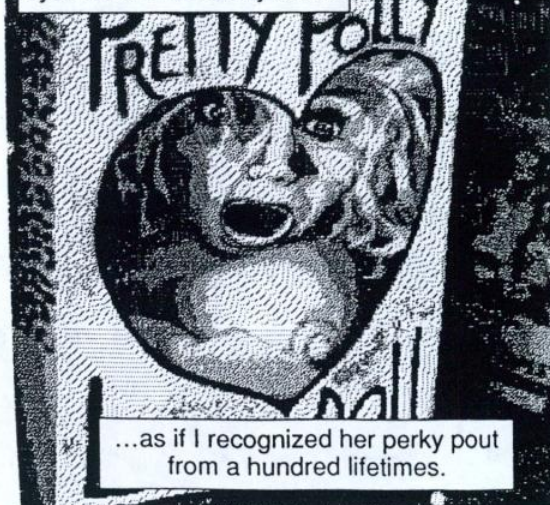


...until that fateful, blessed day, when a store window display caught my eye on a busy street...



...and she walked into my life.

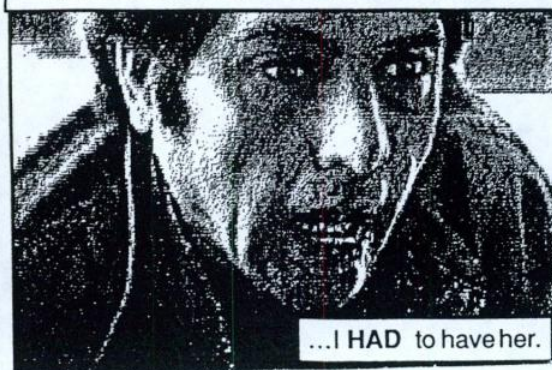
It was as if I'd known those eyes for a thousand years...



...as if I recognized her perky pout from a hundred lifetimes.



The quivering pulse that surged up and through my head told me, in no uncertain terms...



...I HAD to have her.

Afterward, we lay in love's rosy glow, trying to understand the immensity of what had happened to us.



I don't remember any discussion about whether Polly would be moving in with me or not....

There was never any question — she and I were meant to share everything...



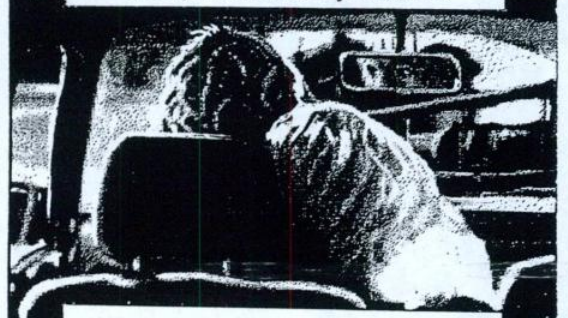
...not only the simple pleasures life offers...

...but the more exotic ones as well.

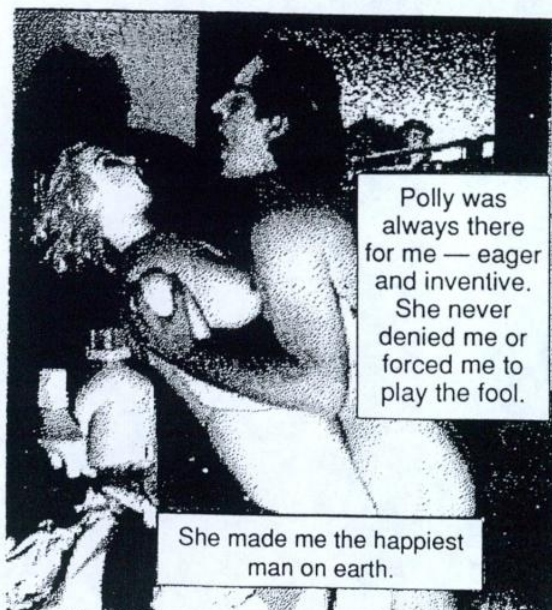


Any hour of any given day might find us back to back, belly to belly, pushing the envelope of mutual, glorious, gratification.

I still enjoyed commuting to the plant in the vinyl cocoon of my automobile, but doubly so when she joined me.



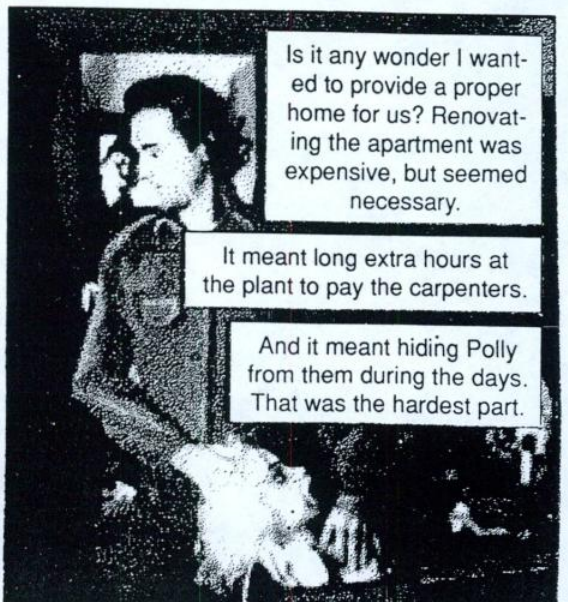
With her hands on my thigh, or even her head in my lap, we experienced mind-blowing excursions along scenic interstates of pleasure.



Polly was always there for me — eager and inventive. She never denied me or forced me to play the fool.

She made me the happiest man on earth.

Is it any wonder I wanted to provide a proper home for us? Renovating the apartment was expensive, but seemed necessary.



It meant long extra hours at the plant to pay the carpenters.

And it meant hiding Polly from them during the days. That was the hardest part.

... HE MUST BE INSIDE ME... BUT I CAN'T FEEL SHIT...

...Two strangers meeting...

It is close, Maria... I sense the perfection...

Faster, now...

HELL THIS ISN'T BAD...

...The convergence of two roads...



Slower, again...

...For an infinite moment...

I DON'T EVEN HAFTA ...

Soon...

Going in two final directions.

...PRETEND TO...

...COME!

PERFECT!





Perfect...

HOW WAS IT?
WAS I DEAD
ENOUGH?



NOT EVEN A
GOODNIGHT KISS?



NOW, I CAN
OPEN MY
EYES.

If the definition of the "comic book" can change within the law, and the law can see that there is both adult and children's material available then problems such as the sale of "adult" material to minors can be solved. Labelling and better sales techniques will solve this problem.

Whereas Censorship quite often deals with the censoring of "dangerous" material, it quite often occurs because opposition to the material is often motivated by either incomplete understanding or just by repute. Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses" are a case in point. But, closer to home, the censorship of Dr. Alex Comfort's "The Joy of Sex" is now again uncensored, (maybe somebody read the book).

At its most basic, irresponsible blanket censorship runs the risk of operating solely, in a sense, of denouncing easy scapegoats that are perceived as initiating controversies. It is too easy to condemn material that is giving expression to themes of common concern, but the shock of the new in art, theatre, cinema or comics will, of course, generate opposition with the traditionalists.

1992.

In 1992, we are told, European Censorial Laws will be beholden to all. This could mean the availability of some unsavoury material but could give breathing room for adult comics.

Caroll Bennett of Knockabout Comics hopes to see a loosening of laws in England. Knockabout's titles are mainly underground, dealing with creators like Robert Crumb and Hunt Emerson.¹⁸ "We consider we are selling art, because we've tended to concentrate on publishing material by artists who have achieved some status in their field, consequently, we feel that the material must be judged on its own merits".

In England the Customs and Crown Prosecution Service tend to act in regard to comic books on the basis of individual complaints as opposed to questions of aesthetics.

Neptune and Titan Books have indeed suffered at the hands of Customs.¹⁹ In May of 1990 English Customs impounded several American comics titles after the discovery of a copy of Aircel's "Leather and Lace" in a spotcheck. They also impounded "Sapphire" and Kitchen Sink's "Omaha the Cat Dancer". On the 1st of May of that year, Titan issued a letter to all their customers advising them that they might no longer be "able to supply certain titles.....it would not be sensible to jeopardise the majority, by attempting to continue selling suspect material." This seems to be Neptune and Titan's policy today.²⁰ Titan's Mike Lake is unhappy with the situation but concedes that it was in their best interests.

Underground comix have been badly hit over the years and Knockabout fought a lawsuit in the early '80's.

The sheer volume of titles imported in recent years has made the Customs job a lot more difficult. Customs decisions could be challenged but the range of material is so great it would not be worthwhile attempting to defend it all.²¹ The artistic merits of titles like "Yummy Fur" or "Omaha" might be contested but few people could honestly defend comics such as "Leather and Lace" and "BlackViss" as good art.

Both in England and America, the police have been carrying out many raids on comic shops. Confiscation of offending material under various laws has taken place. Shop retailers in both countries have appeared in court.²² Ironically, seizures have not, to my knowledge, happened in Ireland but only perhaps because one retailer imports anything that may be deemed undesirable.

INTERNAL CENSORS

Not only are comics subject to increasingly more stringent external censorship procedures, but within each publishing house certain measures are taken into account to verify that said material is up to the publishers standards.²³

Obviously different publishers have different standards, that rest on the very type of material that they publish, be it mainstream, underground, erotic, adolescent or adult. There have been several internal censorings that have caused fuss recently in the comics world.

In April 1989 Rick Veitch resigned as writer on D.C. Comics "Swamp Thing".²⁴ Veitch had taken over the character after Alan Moore had left. Veitch was writer and penciller, originally as a stop-gap but his stint on the title was over 20 issues.²⁵ Veitch had moved away from Alan Moore's redrawn character to explore the community surrounding the swamp and other issues.

Number 88 was the issue in question, the story entitled "Morning of the Magician". The story was concerned with the arrival of the Plant Elemental at the crucifixion.

The story had been passed by long-standing D.C. editor Karen Berger, she felt the material was touchy: The "Swamp Thing" appears as an angel who offers the cup to Christ in the Garden and Veitch's cover showed the "Swamp Thing" in the form of a cross. Karen Berger showed the synopsis to executive editor Dick Giordano who gave it conditional approval. However, Jeanette Khan who read the material after Giordano decided that D.C. could not print the material, she said, "the subject was handled with integrity and respect but the story concept itself would have been offensive to many of our readers."

Veitch did not accept the censor and resigned, although not believing it was necessary, stating, "if anything, I believe my story to be an affirmation of the rather elegant symbolism of Christ's personal sacrifice and crucifixion".²⁶

Grant Morrison was the star of controversy when his strip "The New Adventures of Hitler" was published by The Cut Magazine in England.²⁷ Bill Sinclair, who ran only three issues till The Cut folded, decided to publish despite the resignation of editor Alan Jackson and lead columnist Pat Kane, as well as resignations among production staff.

The story is based around the claim made by Hitler's sister-in-law Bridget, that Hitler spent a year staying with her and her husband in Liverpool during 1912 to '13. The strip is, in fact, a satirical attack on Thatcherism. For Morrison, "the whole idea of setting a vast contemporary icon of humanity like Hitler, into the mundane landscape of 1912 is where the potency of the piece lies. Hitler is demythologised, exposed to ridicule and allowed to condemn himself with his own words."



Censored

THE SWAMP THING - DRAWING BY JOHN TOTTLEBAN.

Environmentally friendly, with a feminist perspective. Censored on religious grounds.

Originally created as a horror story by Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson, under the guidance of Alan Moore "The Swamp Thing" investigated many different issues including topics like menstruation in "The Curse", topics perhaps far more volatile than Veitch's interpretation of the Crucifixion.

SWAMP THING



Pat Kane told Bill Sinclair that he would resign if he ran the strip, at this time Kane had not even seen it. As he resigned, the editor wrote, "I believe that some icons carry with them too much history to be used in a commercial context, and that the passage of time makes them no less offensive than recent monsters."

The reaction to the strip was overblown, the story innocuous, and had no connection with pro-fascist ideals. The strip was finally published in its entirety within the adult comic "Crisis".²⁸

Censorship struck within "Crisis" itself when the printers of the Fleetway title, Hoistmuir, complained about depictions and content of a strip entitled "Skin".²⁹

"Skin" was created by writer Peter Milligan and artists Brendan McCarthy and Carol Swain. Milligan and McCarthy are known for their work on "Strangedays" and for their collaboration with creators Steve Dillon and Brett Ewins creating work such as "B.A.D. Company" for 2000 A.D., "Johnny Nemö" for Eclipse Comics and Deadline, and "Skreemer" for D.C. Comics.

"Skin" was scheduled for release in "Crisis" number 30, (release date - 28th of October '89), and was to run for four issues. The story concerns a teenage boy, "Martin 'Atchit' Atchitson", who joins a gang of skinheads. "Atchit's" story is told by another gang member, and it roused upset because 'Atchit' was depicted as a thalidomide victim.

Thalidomide was an effective, non-barbituate hypnotic drug, a tranquiliser prescribed to pregnant women in the late 1960's. Although the drug had passed stringent testing, after its release to general use it was found to be teratogenic, that is, a catalyst for a number of foetal defects. Many babies were born with deformed hands and missing limbs.

The revelation caused a scandal and most Western governments banned the drug and formed committees to investigate new drugs for any side-effects so that this could not happen again. The manufacturers of the drug: Distillers, initially refused responsibility and only after a campaign within the newspapers agreed to give compensation to the drug's victims.³⁰

"Skin" deals with "Atchit's" disability in the light of skinhead culture. The strip is violent and explores the central character's sexual awakenings. Both Milligan and McCarthy were skinheads in their youth so the strip is an accurate portrayal of their culture.

Hoistimuir called the editor of "Crisis", Steve McManus, and said that they refused to print the material due to a dope smoking scene and an "attempted rape" in which "Atchit", after jibes from his friends, attempts to penetrate his girlfriend with his finger, the scene ends with the girl pushing "Atchit" away, whereupon "Atchit" becomes embarrassed and regretful.

Steve McManus described "Skin" as one of the best strips he had seen in his work in comics and he tried hard for Fleetway to continue to print the story. Despite the fact that "Crisis" had adult labelling and that 90 per cent of the readership was over sixteen, Hoistimuir would not alter their position. Fleetway lawyers investigated "Skin" and deemed, if it was printed, that the company would be liable to prosecution. Fleetway took the advice and regretted they could not publish it under any format.

"Deadline", another adult comic, then agreed to run the strip. It was to appear in issue 20 or 21. Deadline also agreed to publish the story as a graphic novel in September of 1990.³¹

Censored

MILLIGAN, MC CARTHY & SWAIN - SKIN.

Censored on moral grounds. Interestingly, as recent internal censors show, comics are not often censored over sex or violence but over other moral issues altogether.

A FOUR PART
SERIES
COMMENCING IN

CRISIS

30

ON SALE 28-10-89

CREATED BY MILLIGAN AND

MCCARTHY

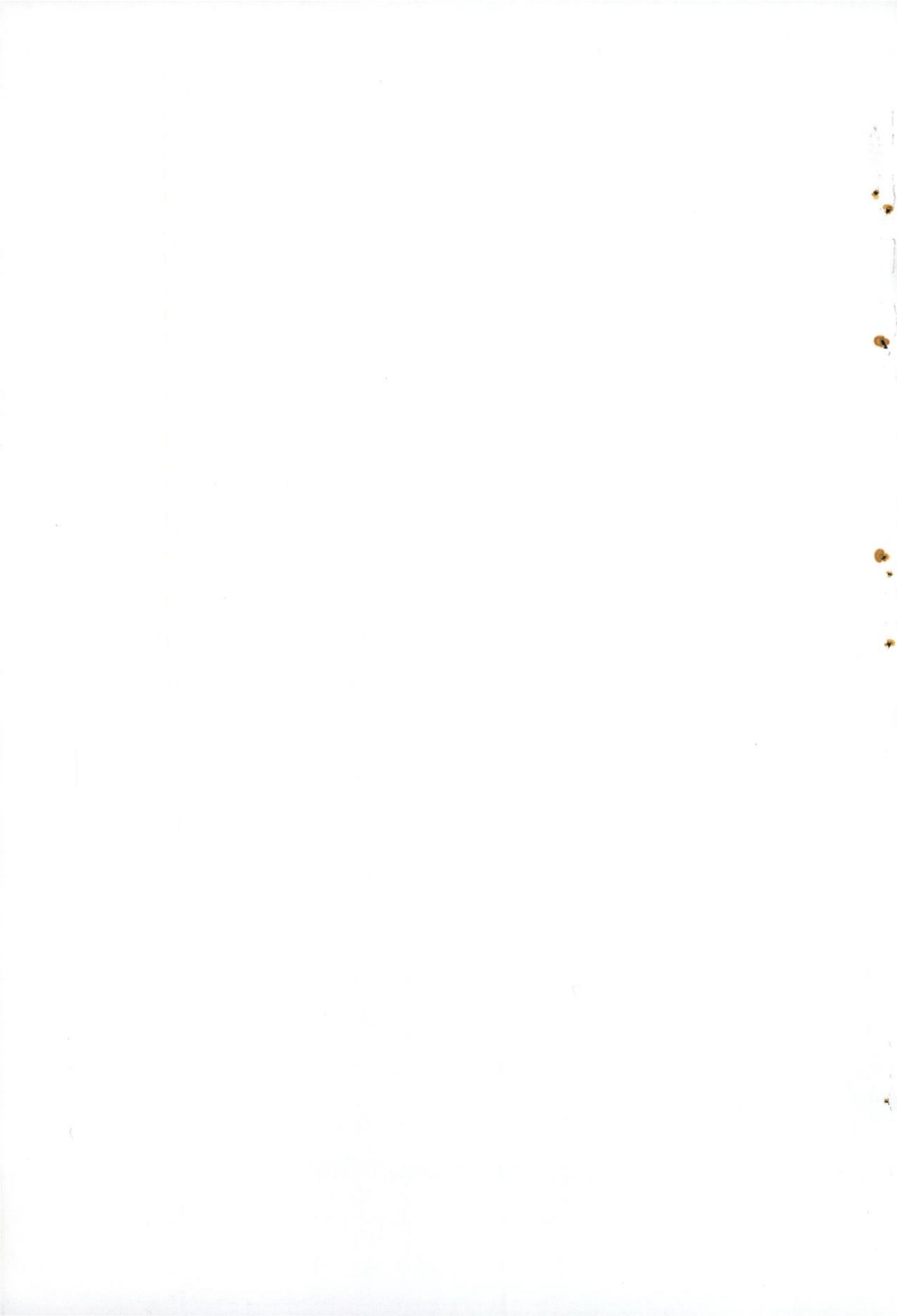
SCRIPT MILLIGAN

ART MCCARTHY/SWAIN

FROM AN ORIGINAL

CONCEPT BY MCCARTHY





"Skin" was shown to disabled groups and to the "Deadline" printers, none of whom had any strong reactions. "Skin" was to run, starting in a special issue concerned with disabled people's problems. The disabled comics artist Al Davidson was to contribute also. But the saga was not over yet. The Deadline publisher showed the book to British Customs in order to get clearance for it to come into Britain after printing in Spain. Objections were made and Deadline was told that they were unlikely to be able to import the book into England.

Legal advice has also forced the creators to change names, specifically that of thalidomide in order to avoid possible legal action. Peter Milligan went to the San Diego Comics Convention to find an American publisher to, "do what a British publisher couldn't."³²

As yet "Skin" has not been published. The reaction to an accurate representation of human interest does not warrant this furore, at least not when the strip is of an adult nature, for adults. As Peter Milligan said, "People who think this is obscene don't see the real obscenity of thalidomide and its effects."³³

In-House censorship is probably necessary. Publishers should stick by their titles values, if they are of an adult nature and their material is of good quality and artistic merit, censorship is not an issue. Self-censorship by publishers today seems to mean you make concessions until your material is entirely innocuous.³⁴ As Titan's Mike Lake says, "Personally I'd rather leave censorship to market forces, whatever is blatantly inept tends not to sell."³⁵

CONCLUSION

The comic book's portrayal of sex and violence reflects a very real element of society. Works on this element of behaviour and its effects on society such as the work of J. Eysenck³⁶ and Messrs. Yaffe and Nelson³⁷ prove that various different interpretations can be made in respect to findings on both Catharsis and Incitement Theories.

Depictions of violence is usually used as a surrogate for sex in the media and especially in comics where it covers the lack of sex within adolescent titles. The unnecessary stigma attached to sexual depictions might be explained because sex is a personal pleasure while violence is impersonal and not encountered too regularly by the majority.

Art and the media have an important job to explore these themes.

If comics are to be recognised as an important artform several inhibiting factors must be recognised and overcome, they include: a lack of mature and good writers and editors, comic book art has made big leaps in recent years but the standard of the majority of writers is weak.

The focus on the male power fantasy is too one-sided and more themes should be, (and are beginning to be), explored. Sexism, attitudes to women, children and sex should change and mature. The reliance of violent themes and indifference to ethical and moral standards only trivialises much work. Subversion is fine and healthy if you understand the situation, ignorance is not.

There is an unhealthy dependence on the fan market and adolescent males, comics by exploring different themes, can be an important, influential art form for everybody.

The inappropriate marketing strategies such as selling adult material to children are wrong and should be stopped. If the attitude of the publishers was to mature and comics were treated as important, cultural and artistic material, rather than "entertainment products" and items of capitalistic gain, many problems would be solved.

Finally, the perception of the public at large that comics are just for children needs to be changed and highlighted; this perception that they are not adult literature, for the majority of titles remains correct. If the above points are not noted an influential and important medium will be lost through greed and ignorance.

FOOTNOTES SECTION 1

1. BIB. B/13. p.
2. BIB. B/11. p.17
3. BIB. B/11. p.14
4. BIB. B/ 5. p.46
5. BIB. C/ 4/115. p.30
6. BIB. B/ 5. p.47
7. BIB. C/ 4/115 p.27 also BIB. B/20. and BIB.B/15 and 16
8. BIB. C/ 5/ Oct. p.11
9. BIB. C/ 5/ Oct. p.11
10. BIB. C/ 4/ 109 p.31
11. BIB. C/ 4/ 116 p.7
12. BIB. C/ 4/ 102 p.35

FOOTNOTES SECTION 2

1. BIB. C/ 1/ 138 p.110
2. BIB. C/ 1/ 138 p.113
3. BIB. B/ 21 p.25
4. BIB. B/ 14
5. BIB. B/ 11 p.168 also BIB. C/ 1/ 133 p.87,85,81.
6. BIB. B/ 15 chapter 5
7. BIB B / 11 p. 168
8. BIB. C/ 1/ 133 p.85
9. BIB. B/ 11 p.170
10. BIB. B/ 8

FOOTNOTES SECTION 2 CONT/D

11. BIB. D/ 1 part 2 also BIB. B/ 23
12. BIB. C/ 1/ 133 p.66
13. BIB. B/ 14
14. BIB. C/ 2/ 4 p.14
15. BIB. C/ 3/ 29 p.35
16. BIB. B/ 21 p.66
17. BIB. C/ 4/ 116 p.39

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1. BIB. C/ 3/ 31 p.39
2. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p.44
3. BIB. C/ 3/ 31 p.18
4. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p.45
5. BIB. B/ 11 p.167
6. BIB. C/ 2/ 10 p.44
7. BIB. B/ 21 p.89
8. BIB. C/ 4/ 103 p.7
9. BIB. C/ 3/ 31 p.36
10. BIB. C/ 1/ 138 p.120
11. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p.32
12. BIB. C/ 5/ Sept. p.20
13. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p.37
14. BIB. C/ 4/ 116 p.47
15. BIB. C/ 4/ 116 p.47
16. BIB. C/ 6/ Tues. Nov. 1990

FOOTNOTES

SECTION 3 CONT/D

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18. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p.48
19. BIB. C/ 4/ 110 p. 11
20. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p. 48
21. BIB. C/ 4/ 113 p. 10
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also BIB. C/ 4/ 114 p. 11
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26. BIB. C/ 4/ 98 p. 5
27. BIB. C/ 4/ 100 p. 5
28. BIB. C/ 4/ 107 p. 19
29. BIB. C/ 1/ 133 p. 25
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31. BIB. C/ 4/ 109 p. 11
32. BIB. C/ 4/ 112 p. 10 & 11
33. BIB. C/ 1/ 133 p. 25
34. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p. 49
35. BIB. C/ 4/ 115 p. 48
36. BIB. B/ 8
37. BIB. B/ 26

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IN FOUR PARTS :

- A. - Contains Comic book & Graphic novel material.
Titles listed under Publishers.

- B. - Contains a book & Comic anthology list.

- C. - Contains a list of magazines & newspaper articles.
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- D. - Contains Video reference.

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