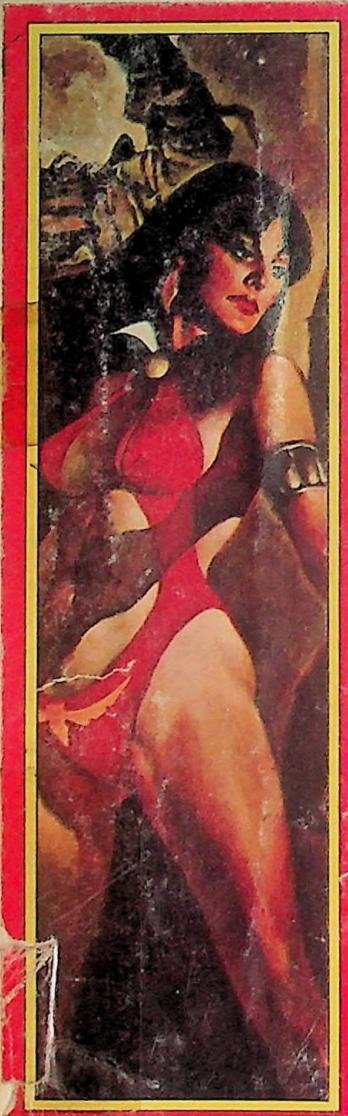


SKELETON (FA)

THE  
HISTORY  
AND  
ART  
OF  
THE  
COMIC STRIP

JOHN F SKELETON



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- ② CHAPTER I — ORIGINS
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## PART ②

- ① THE TOE MAN. an account of my personal experiences in the creating of a comic.

## INTRODUCTION

Desperate Dan, Dick Tracey, the Bush Street kids, Capt. America, Biffo and Corky, Fritz the cat, MR. Natural, Superman, Uncle Creepy, Spiderman, The ~~Avengers~~, Denis the Menace, Dirty Dick, Little Nemo, Batman, Billy Whizz, The Q-karts, Gnasher, the Green Lantern, Robin, the Penguin, Little Plum, Joe Rocket, Tom Thumb screw, Kid Kong, Capt. Hurricane, Lord Snooty, Brainy and his monster maker, Typhoon Tracy, Garth, Roger the Dodger, the furry freak brothers, Minnie the Minx, Sir Hector the Spectre, General Jumbo, Whiteman, the 3 Bears, Billy the Cat, Vampirella, to name but a few, are living today in some hidden corner of man's mind. Who are these beings? Where have they come from? What is their message?

They are the invaders from another universe; they come from the

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depths of man's sub-conscious, they are  
the twentieth century gods and goddesses'  
answer to a once great, ancient Egyptian  
or Greek civilisation. They are you and  
I, their world is a reflection of ours — they  
have been called the alternative answer to  
the heavy "media-burn" of the T. V. set:

" I'm gross and perverted  
I'm obsessed and deranged  
I have existed for years  
but very little has changed.  
I'm the tool of the Government  
And industry too,  
for I am destined to rule  
and regulate you.  
I may be vile and pernicious  
but you can't look away  
I make you think I'm delicious  
with the stuff that I say.  
I'm the best you can get  
Have you guessed me yet.....

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I'm the SLIME oozin' out  
from your T.V. set....."

That's Right folks — the comic  
is here : just another way of entertain-  
ment in the world of contemporary media.  
The Fine Arts are well established here;  
the expression, the passion, the message  
and the illusion have found another outlet  
in the art of the comic strip.

Both the Romantic and Classicist  
outlook outlook on life, in the arts, have  
found ground to harmonise in the strip,  
where the surface qualities and sensations  
of colour, movement and all action combine  
with a perfect framework (or underlying  
structure) to fulfill man's expression  
once again.

In the following pages, which  
will be highly illustrated, I will trace

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the antecedents and origins of the comic strip — in order to define the meaning of the art of the comic strip.

From there we can see the influence of the art "isms" in the comic strip, and it's eventual feedback to the artist in the 'Pop' fields.

Of course no expression is without some opposition — The Comics Code Controversy of the 40's and 50's saw to censorship, as things were getting out of hand — but it took many years to sever the chains of unjust censorship on behalf of the Government.

Finally the technique of the 'balloon' — the frame and the narrative picture — of the comic strip itself, will be intensely analysed. Some of my own revelations as to the mind behind a production of a comic strip will be discussed.

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1  
2  
3  
4  
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## ORIGINS

Comics are a twentieth century art. Photography, films and comics developed simultaneously, as did the population explosion; so billions of images were produced for the consumption by millions of people annually. The printing process was ideal for the twentieth century masses — and mass art was the obvious result.

Just as the caveman's art characterized the age of the caveman, so does the art of the comic reflect our age. The image-language within the frame can possess man's mind — just as one can lose oneself in a large painting by Rothko, the same transmutation happens within a smaller frame; the mind knows no boundaries as far as real or 'plastic' space and time exist, so one can just as easily flow into the land time / space of the comic.



BAYEUX  
TAPESTRY  
(short SECTION)

The dynamism of the present age, the wars, holocausts, speed and colour are represented in the strip. Just as the High Renaissance created the myths and gods in their art — so does the strip create its heroes today: all art's heroes, gods and tales change with the ages. The caveman's "bison" god is no less different from Michaelangelo's "Creation" as Marvel's "Captain America". Essentially they are all equal heroes fulfilling the dream and ambitions of power for the people of that age; ages change and so do the heroes, but the basic aspiration is in them all.

But let us not make the mistake of comparing the comic strip to the art of painting or sculpture now, the key to the origin of the comic strip with its earlier antecedents lies in the use of a rapid sequence of images. Could it be said that the Bayeux Tapestry of the 11<sup>th</sup> century with its alternating scenes of the general play right through to dramatic

particulars (death scene of Harold) could have influenced the early idea of the comic. OR the manuscript art of that period and earlier, depicting the lives of saints in consecutive images divided by white lines, with the use of narrative below or above the individual pictures.

Let's look at the contemporary comic and find a definition - from there we may see its antecedents in their true light. The comic strip is a story consisting of pictures drawn by one or more artists, the pictures being static, multiple and juxtaposed. The pictures are closely ~~knit~~ knit together by time and give great attention to a particular action. Illustration is not the art of the comic strip; to illustrate is to expound upon or to give light to a fact action or image which is already known to the spectator. The comic strip, however, is contained within itself as a total piece, expressing nothing else but itself.

So manuscript art would be more in-



ROY LICHTENSTEIN.  
(PAINTING 1964)

Clined towards illustration, as would  
Painted Greek vases and tapestries.

So the comic strip itself is a representation of a great evolution of vision and thought as it contains in itself the seeds of its own creation / destruction of an intelligible action; the stained glass and manuscript arts illustrate, whilst the comic strip is a real novelty — an original expression — it requires only itself to be itself, relying on its own limitations of a frame etc. So the comic eliminates most of the parallels it may have with the older arts of tapestry, manuscript, stained glass showing them only to be a series of disconnected illustrations.

There can be little doubt that the comic book is a positive success as an art, at least in the most basic sense of attracting and holding an audience. Comics were not created — they evolved with the 20<sup>th</sup> century innovations like the cinema and broadcasting. ART Nouveau ~~is~~ is an ob-



Neo-Classist  
influence.



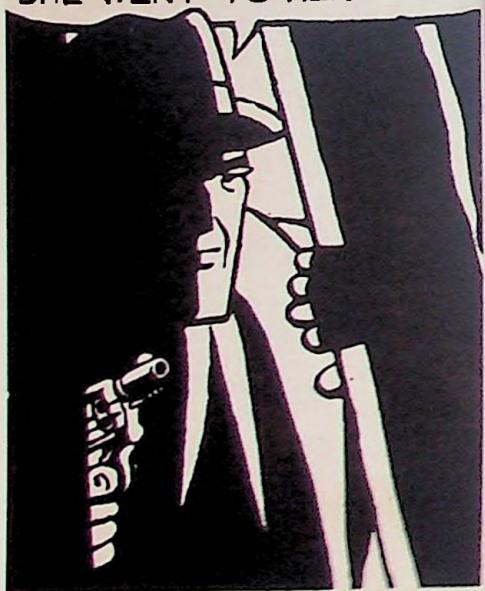
vious early link between the arts and the birth of the comic. The trends of art from 1880 to the present day coexist with the comic trends in style: as in it's "maker" Art Nouveau the sinuous line, the stylization of a character or personality, Beardsley lives on.

As Impressionism was the Resultant Reaction to the coming of Photography - painting and sculpture under went a 're-think' of it's meaning now that Realist images could be captured: abstraction in the fine arts flourished. So too the comic strip was influenced greatly by the many art experiments and movements - and having gone through many styles, eventually the comic feedback to the arts came to a peak in the sixties - Pop ART.



(ART Déco)

LOOSE BOARDS! AN EXIT!  
SHE WENT TO HER CAR?



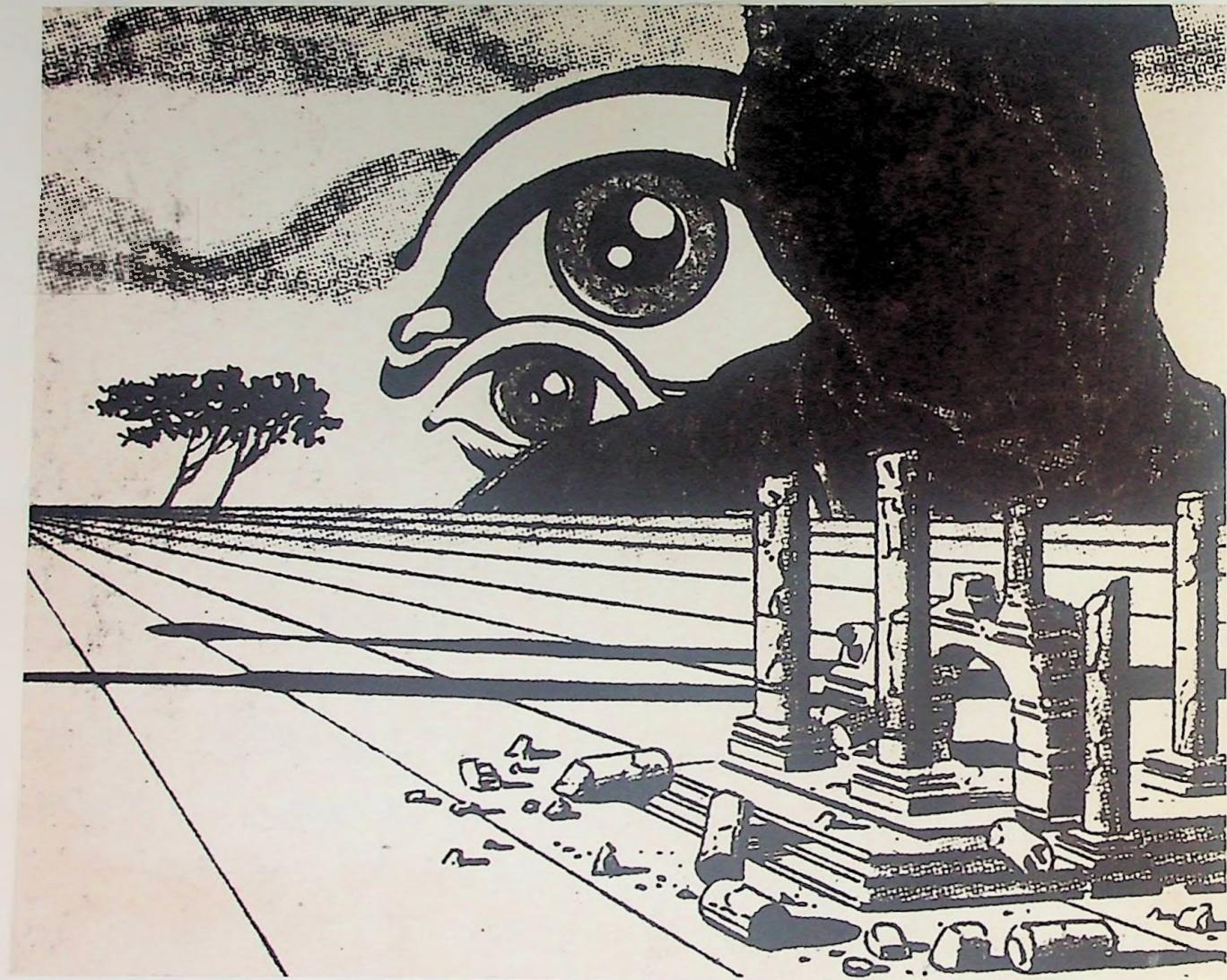
(Expressionist)

THE TRENDS.

Recognition of the graphic innovations of the comic strips from 1880's to the present day, quickly destroys the myth that comics owe everything to the cinema. The graphics changed only due to the movements in painting from Art Nouveau style through Art Deco, Expressionism, Neo-Classicism of the Thirties, Surrealism, Pop Art, Op Art Psychedelic art and of course the graphic innovations of new angles of observation, unusual perspectives, artificial lighting, and new relationships between successive pictures To understand the comic as an ART - we must apply the same critical methods as are usually applied to painting etc : we must ignore the total production, but rather consider the minority of important artists.

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In 1905 there began to appear a series of comic strip panels, a full page, in the New York Herald, up until 1911, and again in the 1920's: Little Nemo in Slumberland, by Winsor McCay. Technically innovated by a graceful line and colour, fantasies and adventures of a little boy named Nemo who each week, in the strip, went deeper and deeper into the land of dreams; and at the end of every adventure the last frame would show Little Nemo awaking temporarily from his dreams - only to return to his dreams to be continued the following week. The panels grew and shrank according to the dramatic instance of the theme: panoramic views from the clouds to close ups of a frightened face - even one single scene revolving around the characters. Little Nemo was never alone, he visited the richest king - doms Slumberland could offer - he always had a friend - but he also had enemies. His dreams are the sort of dreams we all had.



When we were kids, but somehow we had forgotten them; McCay remembered them, and he also modeled Little Nemo on his own son.

The work of Winsor McCay is regarded as the early "launching pad" for the modern classic comic strip artists today — the interest shown by the art critics today has produced a reprinting of his works; he used the Modern style — he took from the Draughtsmen of the Italian Baroque period for his treatment of architectural perspective — and his use of the pre-1920 Surrealist image is very strong. He was also the first to understand page layout and framing, the use of flat colour, often muted to extreme dominance of pure reds, yellows and blues to keep the action moving from frame to frame. Lichtenstein's work is more an analyses of the single frame as an expressionistic statement regarded as our contemporary Pop medium, he must have seen McCay's work — the underlying structure is comparable, Expressionist or Surrealist is only the surface for the comic strip.



Since the appearance of the camera imagination rather than information was the criterion for the artists of the day - and so in that atmosphere comics came to the foreground. Theoretically any kind of approach was evolved, with a greater range of content as wide or wider than any other existing means of expression. But each innovation which occurred had to go through the syndicates of individual newspapers and editors - if anything had to be seen by the public - so artistic control had to fall into the hands of those syndicates.

Mutt and Jeff, of the San Francisco Chronicle, has interesting points about the study of the society within which it had its genesis and final destruction : Mutt was first presented as a race-track character with doubtful morals, and this comedy grew out of the lifestyle of the shady gambler type (Early strips even went so far as to offer authentic tips on the races) But Mutt and his pal Jeff soon moved eastwards, through those shady syndicates, to New York papers etc - but by and by they became more respectable, and

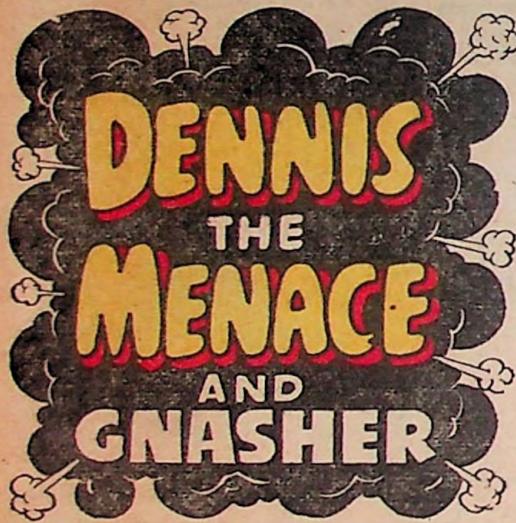
# THE BEANO

The Comic With "LORD SNOOTY"!

No. 1758 — MAR. 27th, 1976.

EVERY THURSDAY

4P



Soon lost their Raciness. Mutt himself got by some unknown osmosis, a wife, a home and some ill defined career. His individual character, of the early days, was lost, and he became a national institution. The price of fame was the Rape of Mutt + Jeff by the national syndicates of America.

So comics ~~became~~ became aware of their limitations of expression to an "ignorant" public with the shadow of the syndicates around. The answer was the Comic Book as we now know to be The Beano + Dandy of England and the "Superman" syndrome of the 30's in America; even Mutt + Jeff made ~~an~~ an effort in 1911 to have a book. The Comic book was the answer to the heavy "security" conscious hold of the syndicates — or was it; later the comic books were to be censored on certain points — and a Comic Code Authority came into being in America first of all, then England. To be discussed later, however; but now let us look at what is happening today (1976).

# DIAGRAM OF COMIC 'TYPE' APPRECIATION

## THE COMIC:

①	The Beano The Dandy	6 - ?	<u>APPRECIATIVE AGE GROUP</u>	
			6 - 11 years of age	
②	The Victor " Hurricane Valiant Judy		11 - 14	" " "
③	MAD ; SUPERMAN JACKIE;		14 - 18	" " "
④	CREEPY EERIE VAMPIRELLA MAD GENERAL UNDERGROUND	4 - 10	18 - ?	" " "

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Having touched the surface of the genesis of the comic strip, it would be a good idea to see what is happening in the art and social content of the strip comic book today.

Once again, as in any art, it is a matter of taste - of what you like - in order to decide for yourself what is best in the appreciation of a particular comic book : Some would say "The Beano" is the greatest ! (usually the 6 - 11 year olds) others would prefer the "Victor" any day. To make things easier, in the diagram on the opposite page I have listed a series of comic 'types' with their appropriate age groups. You will understand the significance of this diagram, having come from a childhood full of comic wealth.

This diagram just gives a general impression of the mass following to a certain comic type at certain stages

# CAPTAIN MARVEL

in  
THE BIG BANG!!

CALLING CAPTAIN MARVEL! THIS IS SPACE SHIP 49! WE HAVE INTERCEPTED A MESSAGE FROM NITRO HEADQUARTERS!

WHAT'S THAT CREEP UP TO NOW?

THE MESSAGE REVEALS A PLOT FOR A BIG BLOW UP -- THE BIGGEST YET!

MUST BE AN ATTACK ON FORT KNOX!

NOPE! THAT'S NOT IT...

EITHER WAY-- I'LL HAVE TO SET A TRAP!

MEANWHILE...

HAH! I'LL BLOW MYSELF A HOLE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN SO BIG, IT'LL FLOOD THE WORLD!

NITRO! LOOK! CAPTAIN MARVEL IS ESCORTING THAT SHIP!

MUST BE CARRYING VALUABLE CARGO! LET'S FOLLOW HIM FIRST!

LOOK! THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN IS OPENING UP!

AND MARVELS TURNING BACK-- THE SHIP WAS PROBABLY ON REMOTE CONTROL!

LET'S CAPTURE THAT SHIP AND GET THE TREASURE!

LATER INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN...

MM-- WE'VE GOT ENOUGH HOSTESS TWINKIES TO LAST A MONTH!

WOW! GOLDEN SPONGE CAKE WITH CREAMY FILLING INSIDE!

THAT WILL KEEP NITRO BUSY FOR A WHILE! I KNEW HE'D GET A BIG BANG OUT OF HOSTESS TWINKIES!

NOW-- TO BLAST HIS HEADQUARTERS!

Twinkies

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in life. I know people who still buy  
the 'Beano' at the age of twenty-five onwards.  
But we can notice, if we take the purely  
graphic examples within each comic book,  
that the change from one comic book to an-  
other is an ~~change~~ example of the power  
and art a comic can render on the masses.  
It's a good thing too. If we ignored it we would  
be ignoring a large part of our culture  
rooted deeply into this present civilization.

Think about this : America once again,  
and the story of Marvel Comics begins early.  
November 1938 dated the first issue of Marvel  
Comics — the result was that two of the  
studio artists created masterpieces :

- ① Carl Burgos dreamed up a story of a  
character who was to have been invented  
by the pure - present, uncorrupt scientist.  
However, the scientist invented an android  
who would burst into flame and so came to

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life when exposed to oxygen. The android was kept in an air-tight case - and the doctor would slip him some oxygen to keep him alive: - whilst the newspaper reporters pleaded for the destruction of the doctor's creation before it got out of hand. Known as the "Human Torch" ever since the escape from the doctor's laboratory - he became the hero, due to some revenge on a top arsonist named Fagin, who, having conned the Torch earlier into crime earlier after the escape, was turned in to the law by the Torch - thus destroying the evil operation.

Overnight he became a national hero: soaring through the sky (as heat rises!) throwing fire balls at, melting concrete. His fame lasted ten years in the Marvel Comics era - but he was soon to be "accompanied" by a second character in that first issue.

② Bill Everett created "The Sub-Mariner" who was ruler of another civilization related to Atlantis, — but another paradise beneath the waters but in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. They lived beneath the frozen waters of Antarctica: One day the American naval ships came and proceeded to dynamite the ice berg region — their only protection. So Princess Fen, then the leader of the race, went to seduce Commander McKenzie of the navy. They fell in love. Princess Fen was betrayed, however, and pregnant she then gave birth and swore revenge, the baby grown to a man of blue/green skin who could live on land as well as under water was Prince Namor — known to us as "The Sub-Mariner".

Both the 'Human Torch' and the 'Sub Mariner' appear together in

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Marvel Mystery Comics - their personalities were quite different : the Torch was the outcast of society always wanting to become part of it , whilst Sub-Mariner ~~or~~ was a sworn enemy of the human race.

Soon we were to see the Torch and Sub-Mariner battling between each other - such battles are now revered as collector's items

Just about this time the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War is coming over Europe and of course another character appeared : Captain America :- as the name implies , we see the laboratory accident , when some serum affects the doctor , thus becoming superhuman . The war is on - and Capt. America in red , white and blue costume with his bullet-proof shield strikes terror into the hearts of spies , and newspaper reporters everywhere .

FIRST ★ THE LINE OF DC SUPER-STARS ★ GAVE YOU THE WORLDS GREATEST SUPER-HEROES



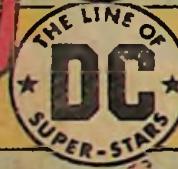
THEN ★



INTRODUCED TOP QUALITY MYSTERY TALES



NOW ★



PRESENTS FANTASY AT ITS BEST  
IN OUR ALL-NEW ADVENTURE LINE

JUSTICE INC.



TOR



WARLORD



KONG



CLAW



STALKER



BEOWULF



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But no matter how many super heroes were created they all fell below the omnipotent powers of the famous "Superman" who was invincible. Everyone knew that Superman was going to win by the end of each issue. He was too surreal, he couldn't have lasted in the minds of American people too long.

At this point it would be important to look at the Comics Code Authority. This was "an organization which set up an elaborate, if rather vaguely worded, list of restrictions with which all subscribing publications were expected to comply. In return the seal 'Approved by the Comics Code Authority' was stamped on those covers of the subscribed publications. Those without the seal could be boycotted, or refused distribution. The individual who was to pass judgement

# STANDARDS OF COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

## CODE FOR EDITORIAL MATTER

### GENERAL STANDARDS PART A (IN TWELVE SECTIONS)

- (1) CRIMES SHALL NEVER BE PRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO CREATE SYMPATHY FOR THE CRIMINAL, TO PROMOTE DISTRUST OF THE FORCES OF LAW AND JUSTICE, OR TO INSPIRE OTHERS WITH A DESIRE TO IMITATE CRIMINALS.
- (2) NO COMICS SHALL EXPLICITLY PRESENT THE UNIQUE DETAILS AND METHODS OF A CRIME.
- (4) IF A CRIME IS DEPICTED IT SHALL BE AS A SORDID AND UNPLEASANT ACTIVITY.
- (6) IN EVERY INSTANCE GOOD SHALL TRIUMPH OVER EVIL AND THE CRIMINAL PUNISHED FOR HIS MISDEEDS.

### GENERAL STANDARDS PART B (in five sections)

- (1) NO COMIC MAGAZINE SHALL USE THE WORD 'HORROR' OR 'TERROR' IN ITS TITLE.
- (2) ALL SCENES OF HORROR, EXCESSIVE BLOODSHED, GORY OR GRUESOME CRIMES, DEPRAVITY, LUST, SADISM, MASOCHISM SHALL NOT BE PERMITTED.
- (3) ALL LURID UNSAVORY, GRUESOME ILLUSTRATIONS SHALL BE ELIMINATED.

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on each comic book was former New York City Magistrate Charles F. Murphy. Now eighteen years old, the Comics Code Authority proudly proclaimed that they were "the most stringent code in existence for any communications media."

On the opposite pages is an example of the standards of the Comics Code Authority as originally adopted. What is REPRESENTED is only a small section of the CENSORSHIP RESTRICTIONS on the comic book. ONE could level the same RESTRICTIONS on the other communicative arts such as theatre, cinema, literature and even to painting and sculpture.

The Code began in 1958. By 1963 Marvel Comics, to concentrate on publicized magazine, under the pen of a Stan LEE, created THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN".

## COMICS CODE AUTHORITY CONTINUED.

RELIGION: RIDICULE OR ATTACK ON ANY RELIGIOUS OR RACIAL GROUP IS NEVER PERMISSABLE.

COSTUME: NUDITY IN ANY FORM IS PROHIBITED, AS IS INDECENT OR UNDUE EXPOSURE.

(2) SUGGESTIVE AND SALACIOUS ILLUSTRATION OR SUGGESTIVE POSTURE IS UNACCEPTABLE.

(3) FEMALES SHALL BE DRAWN REALISTICALLY WITHOUT EXAGGERATION OF ANY PHYSICAL QUALITIES.

NOTE: IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED THAT ALL PROHIBITIONS DEALING WITH COSTUMES, DIALOGUE OR ARTWORK APPLIES AS SPECIFICALLY TO THE COVER OF A COMIC MAGAZINE AS THEY DO TO THE CONTENTS.

### MARRIAGE AND SEX: (in SEVEN SECTIONS)

(2) ILLICIT SEX RELATIONS ARE NEITHER TO BE HINTED AT OR PORTRAYED. VIOLENT LOVE SCENES AS WELL AS SEXUAL ABNORMALITIES ARE UNACCEPTABLE.

(3) RESPECT FOR PARENTS, THE MORAL CODE, AND FOR HONORABLE BEHAVIOR SHALL BE FOSTERED. A SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS OF LOVE IS NOT A LICENSE FOR MORBID DISTORTION.

Peter Parker was the ordinary high school kid living with his disabled aunt and his uncle. He was bitten by a Radio-active spider. METAMORPHOSIS — the spider's powers, of great strength in agility plus the sixth sense of intuition possessed Peter. He thought of entering show business, and designed a spider costume with devices. Opening night he is away performing — but at home his uncle had just been killed. Revenge. After a swing around the city from his webs — he finds and apprehends his uncle's murderer.

Being a college kid was tough once one had latent powers of the spider: now that he had to support his destitute aunt and wanted to finish college — he went back to performing. A large audience came but the promoters' cheque was uncashable. Frustration.

So continuing to have an identity



Longer stories. Exciting art. Episodes from VAMPI's past. Her origin on Drakulon where rivers course with human blood. Then disaster dooms her to a planet where the blood she craves flows only in human veins! "Death's Dark Angel" stalks. The demon loosed by Chaos is determined to serve a soul blacker than his own. Huntress faces huntress. VAMPIRELLA stalks a beast/woman... her blood-lust awakened by the dark god Chaos. And presenting an all-new full-color sequel feature. VAMPIRELLA's newest, most chilling adventure!

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problem, Peter Parker the lone crime fighter college kid manages to get some bread selling action photographs to the 'Daily Bugle' which continues to attack the Spider Man. Of course his sex-life is ruined as he constantly breaks dates to fight crime in the city. And so Peter just misses personal disaster and is always left facing an uncertain future at the end of each story.

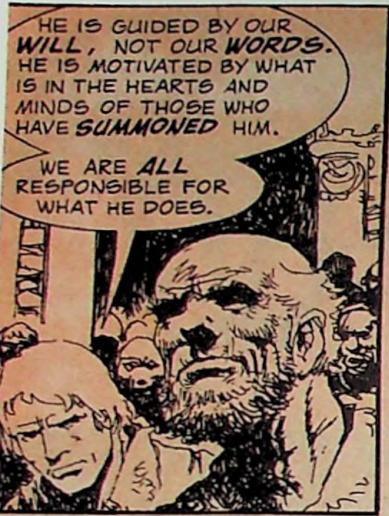
Esquire Magazine (Sept.'65) noted that Spider-Man was "as popular in the radical sector of American Universities as CHE GUEVARA." Spider-Man blew the Superman myth for good as the American activists saw Peter Parker's personal paranoia, his poverty, and mistrust of the press. The more power one had the more complications there arose rather than solutions, as Peter Parker and the contemporary college kids realized.



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Now the super-hero has become  
a farce as MAD MAGAZINE OFTEN ILLUSTRATES.  
The cartoons here illustrate the force of  
the comic-strip hero, and even the head-  
ing of the "story" is titled "Scotched Myths".  
Dept. present a MAD look at SUPER HEROES".

By now the drawing has ch-  
anged immensely. Although today the  
older comics ~~too~~ (The Beano etc) keep their  
original style - the style that is so  
innocent and ~~so~~ is generally read by  
kids. But the increased sexual aware-  
ness of some of the Marvel comics is aimed  
at the older reader. And with the coming  
of Warren's publications, that of 'EERIE',  
'CREEPY' and especially the sexy 'Vampirella',  
the Comics Code Authority was finally losing  
ground - as the public started reacting to  
the publications. Looking at the examples  
on the next few pages of these editions,  
then looking back on the older styles,



WHAT THEY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR AT THAT MOMENT WAS THE MAGICAL OPENING OF THE DRAWBRIDGE, ACCOMPLISHED BY A SIMPLE MOTION OF THE HAND.

NOT A GESTURE WAS WASTED AS THE RIDER SWIFTLY, SILENTLY PASSED WITHIN.

MEANWHILE, THE OBJECT OF HIS QUEST GLARED LECHEROUSLY AT THE BEAUTIFUL BOUNTY OFFERED HIM BY HIS SOLDIERS.

THIS WENCH REFUSED TO PAY HOMAGE TO HER BETTERS?

EXCELLENT! HER CHARMS APPEAR MUCH MORE PLEASING THAN HER GOLD.



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it is so obvious why Warren publications has become the most demanded today. Their early issues were fairly gory - and the covers, in brilliant realistic colour, depicted scenes of such great sadism that authorities world wide, demanded a certain restriction: ~~in~~ fact Ireland banned the issues in the early 70's.

By 1971, after a lot of negotiations with the Comics Code Authority - there came a relaxing in the laws of censorship: the stories dealing with the use of drugs were allowed, so long as they were depicted as a menace; some sympathy was permitted to criminals (a right previously denied) as some suspicion was given to public officials; dress costume was liberalized and suggestion of seduction is a possibility.

But so far we have dealt with comics that enjoy a wide publication. There is another school of comic that existed since the medium itself began: The Underground Comic - which embraces, without censorship, an uninhibited variety of social values, and warm bodies!

(1)



"HELP!"

(2)



FOOM!

(3)



HELP!

A "MAD" look  
at  
SUPER-HEROES

## UNDERGROUND COMICS

Since the offset-litho machine, in 1965, gave the possibility of offset-printing—anti-establishment publications were cheap and easy to run. So all those who would wish to publicise facts or fantasies, had the chance to do so in their own garage.

Of course it began in America; the first newspaper to allow such uninhibited comics was the New York's "East Village Other" (1965). The "BERKELEY BARB", the Los Angeles "FREE PRESS", Detroit's "FIFTH ESTATE", and the Michigan "PAPER" plus the "Village" united to form the Underground Press Syndicate for the total opposition to the Comics Code Authority and to provide free exchange amongst member publications which ~~had~~ held the same point of view. The point of view being (a) the opposition to the draft and the war in Vietnam,

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- (b) opposition to drug prohibition (c) support for oppressed minority groups (d) demands for sexual freedom, including women's liberation.
- (e) and a general mistrust of government and academic institutions. The "New Left" has its voice in the papers, which were soon to be joined by dozens of others after 1965.

Here is an example of the "level" of mind of an underground publication.—it is an introduction to R. Crumb's "HEAD COMIX"

# INTRODUCE YOURSELVES

"R. Crumb is too realistic to appear in regular periodicals like the Reader's Digest, and too surrealistic for the irregular 'Realist'; but into the resulting limbo 'Yarrow-Stalks', the 'East Village Other', and 'Cavalier' have jumped and proceeded to publish his stuff, a collection of which you are about to trip on... . . . . .

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..... That doesn't necessarily mean you ought to get high first. Someone who starred in Andy Warhol's "The Chelsea Girls" once told me that I should get thoroughly zonked to truly dig the film, but if any art has to depend on drugs in order to be appreciated, then I don't exactly consider it the pinnacle of creativity.....

..... Crumb's work is a studied throwup to the paranoia communicated by mass media.....

No matter what one thinks of the underground views of life and society, it is obvious that their best moments are expressed through their arts, rather than rhetoric. If one analyses in a narrowly focused debate the potential or spiritual value of a movement, ~~all~~ all is lost; but in this case the comics medium with spiritual core is the open-mindedness of artistic and human experience.

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The Underground is only ~~the~~ under-ground because of the ignorance on behalf of society's officials of government and academic institutions, convincing us of their authority on life, to allow themselves to understand those basic fundamentals of human behaviour. So, of course, the underground's artistic expression in music literature, comic publications etc is satirical of the society, in order to be kind.

Therefore, the comic strip of the Underground is not really gross and perverted, in order to be gross and perverted, it is simply shock treatment to society that continually shuts up those who do not harmonise with it; shock treatment of the comic strip kind is harmless compared to societies which use the electric kind of treatment in mental homes to those unfit to survive in the ego centric, illusionary



"FRITZ THE CAT."

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chaotic home that has been built for them.

Robert Crumb, as described in that introduction to "HeadComix", is one of the pioneers of the Underground Comic. It was he who created the character "Fritz the Cat", that devious little animal who takes what he can, while he can, as everybody around him is paranoid or in some way in need of help.— and he's always around to "help" them.

The earliest manifestation of Fritz was in 1964 — but the first publication did not appear until 1969. In those years — the "hippy" life style was very much in vogue in America and so at first a glib but searching college student, Fritz soon drops out to become "Fritz the No-Good" — very disillusioned, who loses his wife and home and becomes a revolutionary political activist more out of boredom than conviction. He eventually drops out of that too and becomes the



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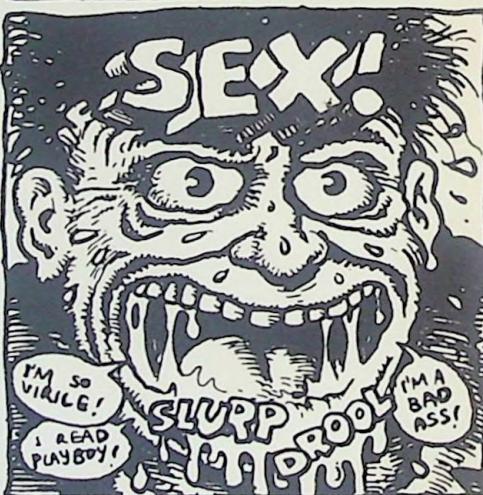
type of bewildered, downtrodden figure - who is everywhere in his creator's work (and in the streets across America!)

But "ZAP" is the true first comic book that literally fulfilled that promise.<sup>ZAP</sup> To read it is an experience that transcends the limits of "Superman" or even "Mad" magazine. It was first published in 1968. Only Crumb's work appeared in the first two issues, but he was soon to be joined by Rick Griffin, Vic Moscoso and S. Clay Wilson - the latter in particular, had contributed such articles ~~in the~~ that had so many repercussions, the God has been called the only cartoonist and writer that defied more taboos than any other in the history of Comics.

Not only should the individual's creative genius be considered but-

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we must also consider them (all) as representatives of a philosophy of which they are both a cause and an effect. The underground comic style of story is full of ambiguity and often contradiction - any "messages" which might be detected in one issue or even piece, can just reappear contradicting itself in the next - even if it had been done by the same hand. We must not make the mistake of presupposing that there is any logical explanation for an expression of fantasy and wild dreams. If there is propaganda the idea of a solution is Reluctance, on behalf of the artist - skepticism is strongest at the notion of any simplistic answer, to any particular problem. An example: R. Crumb created this character called "Mr. Natural" a sort of ZEN Master or yogi.

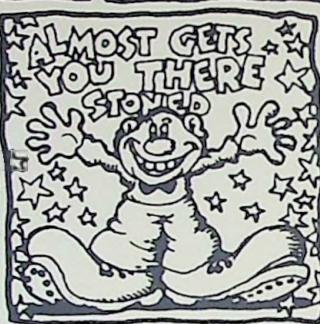
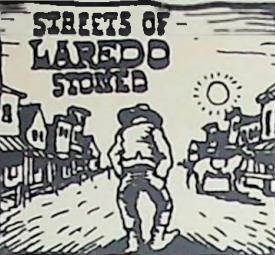


'WHITE MAN' R. CRUMB

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who has some followers - but never appears to help them. On one occasion a "disciple" asks him for the ANSWER — after a pause Mr. Natural asks him (the disciple) what the QUESTION is! The disciple stammers and tries to remember what the question is (at this stage in the strip, we realise that the question could be "what is the meaning to life?") but again he asks Mr. Natural "what's the answer?" Mr. Natural (very tired) turns round and says — "Go Fuck yourself". That was the example of avoiding the obvious - there is no solution to a question as straight as that in the underground philosophy.

The Sixties was a time of student revolt, anti-war movements and the intake of an enormous amount of now popular drugs such as, hashish, marijuana



and hallucinogenics of L.S.D. Peyote, mescaline  
and many more consciousness expanding  
activators. So underground publications  
outrightously broke the laws and adver-  
tised the reasons why one should take  
dope etc. Shoot back to the Comics Code  
Authority, and under the section of "drugs"  
you will see (1) Liquor and tobacco advert-  
ising is not acceptable. — but that's all  
there is on drugs. So ZAP and other such  
comics went many stages ahead of the law  
in a short space of time. But they never  
went ahead of the consciousness of the people  
(usually young) at the time — as any art, tho'  
can only reflect the feelings, emotions of  
hate, love, fear, lust etc of us all. Simply  
by defying the ban on true pornographic  
sex, forbidden despite the fact that we all

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know about it — it meaning the explicit sexual activity — except for the youngest child & and maybe conceptually familiar to some — the comic can capture an audience (most art forms must) and does mostly in its underground manifestations.

I'm very wary about giving an historical synopsis on the UNDERGROUND comic strip, as I did ~~in~~ in the previous chapters about other comic manifestations, for it would only contradict the philosophy of the general underground (let alone comic art). The philosophy, as I have already stated, is nihilistic on the surface but the underlying structures reveal the consciousness of it ALL — sorry, there are only closed doors to the uninitiated. But if you ~~are~~ not so aware — please be free to partake of it (go down to your local drugstore!!!)



PART 2  
COMING UP....

# PART 2

THE  
TOE MAN

In this part I shall deal with my own experiences in the design, layout and art of a comic strip. I have been in the National College of Art for nearly 4 years now — and I have finally come to be at home (art) in the idea of capturing an audience at the same time as pleasing my personal artistic aspirations. Having worked side by side with other students in the painting and sculpture (fine art) for my period in the college I realized that we all needed to understand ourselves and what our potential (in the arts) could do — to know our limitations and reach our furthest horizons. The give and take of the society around us.

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Anyway, the genesis of the comic strip that I have created started when one evening my friends and myself were listening to a record - "Almost Every Thing" which contained prose and poetry by the now celebrated poet/writer Patrick Kavanagh. There was a short story, a kind of fairy tale for children, called "The Big Toes". It went like this, in Paddy Kavanagh's own voice recorded - a real treat: There once was a man whose name was Joe. He used to sleep with his bare feet sticking out of the end of his bed. But one morning he awoke to discover his two big toes talking to each other. He was surprised - and hid his head under the covers. But, the two big toes started pulling on

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his feet, and demanding that they be cut off and let free from his feet. They promised Joe no pain in the event. Because they were such a nuisance pleading with Joe, he decided to go ahead — and soon he had cut his two big toes off! After a while, the two toes started growing, hair, eyes, limbs and growing in size too. Soon they were as big as Joe, who by now was speechless with amazement; the two toe people were happy to be free — so they thanked Joe, shook hands with him and left. Down the stairs and out onto the road; Joe resumed consciousness and realized what had happened. He wanted them back — but could not run after them, for obvious reasons; so he sent his wife after them. She travelled fast on the bike to find them. Eventually she did find them — at a fork in the road. But

they were fighting and squabbling with each other — Why? Joe's Wife asked. They couldn't make up their minds as to who was right and who was left! They wanted to go their own way on the forked Roads (left/right) but could not as they were not sure of their identity! So Joe's wife convinced them it would be better to return to Joe and ask for to be put back on his feet again. So they Rushed back and on their knees they asked for forgiveness. And by some other metamorphosis, they were back home on Joe's feet again — never to bother him. The end. But from that day on Joe always slept in bed with his socks on!!!

From this, highly visual story came the beginnings of my idea for a comic strip adventure. For many weeks before I had been looking for the proper



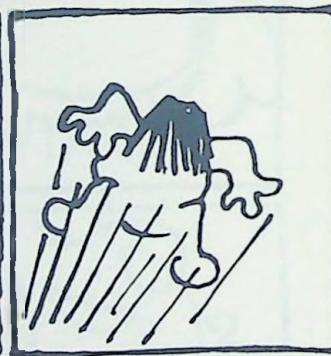
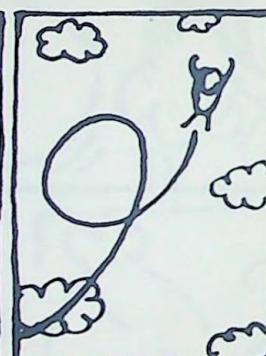
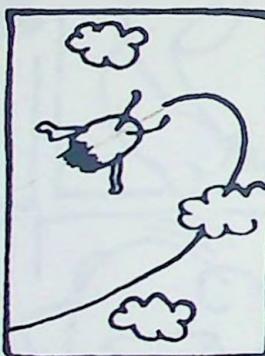
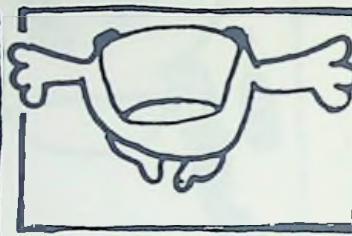
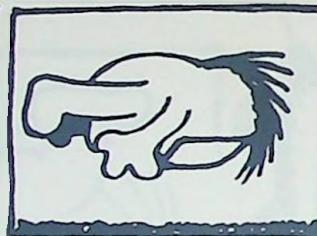
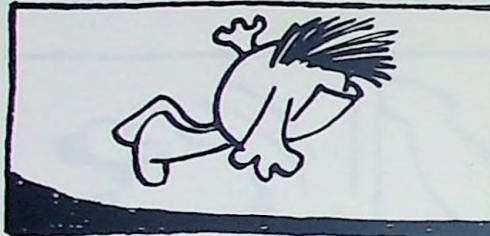
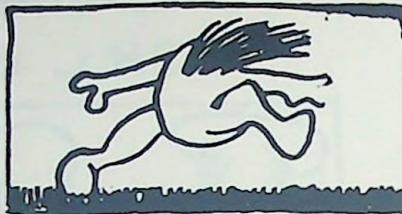
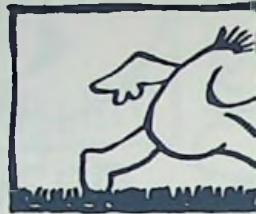
TOEMAN.

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information that would suit the art of story and drawing for a comic - all was fruitless. But with the "Big Toes" - I knew this was it.

After a lot of drawing and decision making I drew out the basic idea (in comic form) to be printed. But I was not satisfied : (a) I did not like the layout (b) I was following the basic story, without developing into variations - a creatively fruitless exercise. So I started a Rethink some weeks later, which happened during the drawing of a Toeman character; the metamorphosis from a toe to a man (but still retaining the visually attractive feeling of a toe). From this came the present<sup>10</sup> story wherein the "hero" element is the centre of attraction. Creatively: it worked wonders; I could expand and variate on P. Kavunaghi's story with greater ease. A short synopsis:

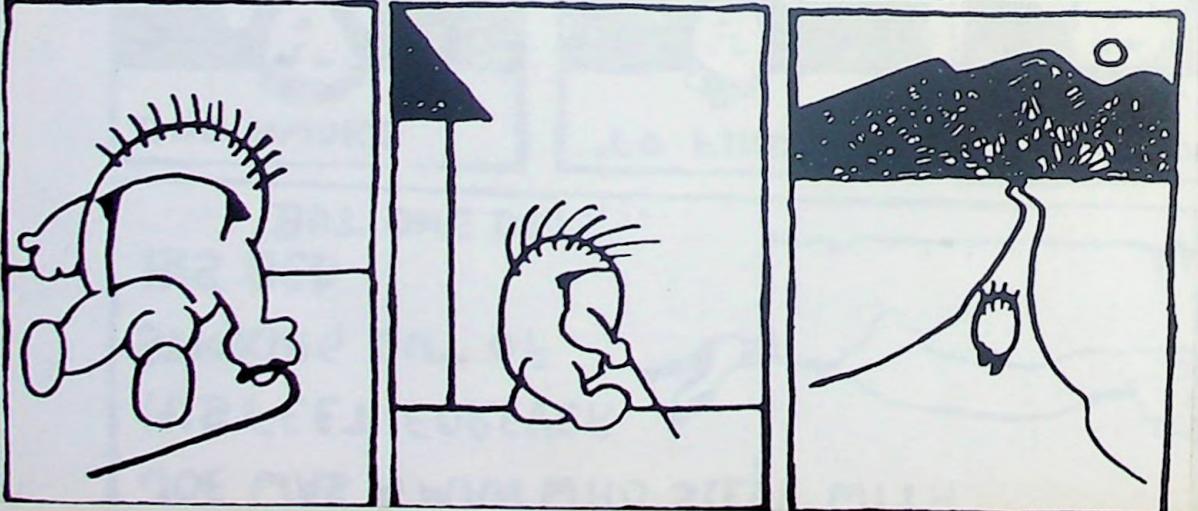
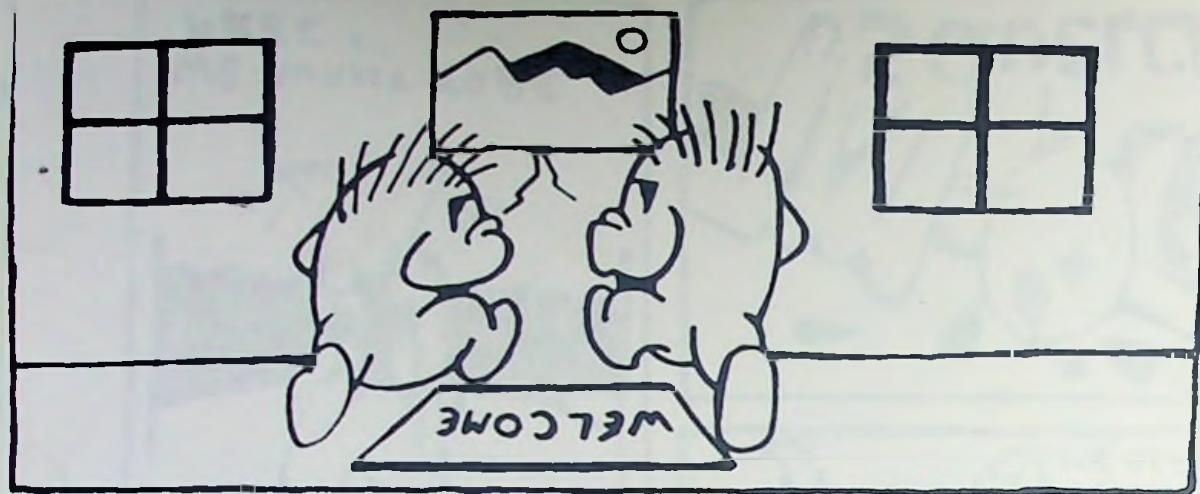
# TOEMAN LEARNS TO FLY...



TOEMAN  
MEETS  
HIS  
MAKER!

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I follow the story of Kavanagh up  
to the point where the two big toes are lead-  
ing Joe's place — cut — as they leave Joe's  
place Pow! the two become one. Thus the  
single TOEMAN has been born, and for the  
next fourteen pages we follow the adventures  
of the Toeman: he becomes a shoemaker,  
a juggler street performer, a fugitive on  
the Run, then towards the end he learns to  
fly by his own thought matter. Soaring  
through the sky, suddenly a huge foot hits  
him. Having collided with it he is knocked  
unconscious — and falls to the ground. As he  
lands he splits back up into the original  
two toes; and lying there at the fork in the  
Roads they see each other and shocked at  
~~at~~ seeing themselves, they <sup>are</sup> ~~have~~ to head off  
on their separate paths. This is <sup>? where</sup> Kav-  
anagh comes back in: the wife comes  
along — and you know the rest.



It is perfect. The whole thing is successful in that, as an art, it captures the audience no less than any of the other popular arts, because it has the same ingredients. (a) Movement (b) Simplicity (c) Emotion (d) the illusion of Reality (e) Change (f) Logic  
~~I~~ could include colour but I haven't used any! (another good ingredient, though)

It is also successful because it does not claim any definite Political, Social or Religious overtones — it is full of it but it is also quite obscure in following any school of thought. Although "Berman" is a fantasy character, he is subjected to our realities of unemployment, the law, money etc on the social side and the cosmic realities of heat, rain, earth and sky.

For most arts, the merging of Fantasy with Reality is a grand achievement.

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It is not hard to do this - but I have found that (besides film) the medium of painting or sculpture can only allow itself to be viewed in a limited space and time. Printing & caters for the mass of people who must, and do, demand mass art. Therefore the possibilities of the comic strip, regarding the art/creation suss, are ~~more~~ most possible within that media. Now let's be honest, the Fine Arts market is really for those who can afford it; the 5% of the community, the Rich minority control the whole art system. We all hear about Rembrandt, Goya Picasso, Oldenlaer only because they can fetch something on the market - but remember there is, and always was, a group of unknowns who were probably doing more creative stuff - but they're unknown only

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because of the dealers of today's market.  
For God's sake give the people a chance - why  
should we continually feed them with what  
they already know! All art is now clichéd,  
simply because it is Art — as we witness  
the present decline in the economy and  
social standards in the West we are also  
witnessing a decline in the arts. What  
happens to every big civilization, must inev-  
itable happen to ours — decline then  
fall.

So it would be adviseable to  
review all that we know — in order  
to prepare for some alternative order,  
with a completely new set of standards.  
What I am saying is that we as artists  
and all "expressionists" should relate

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what is actually happening now plus some kind of alternative before we carry-on regardless — and eventually fall.

The comic is a form which would cater for this — it is also very funny.

Ireland is the only country in the Western (rich) world which does not have a national, underground or overground, comic. Why? It is the same reason why it also doesn't have a secure National Film industry; it is also why the visual arts in Ireland have always been un-original (more inclined to copy) — it is because the Irish are afraid to take chances, in the fields of artistic and media expression. There is a basic lack of

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vigour in those fields. Maybe there is some hope now that the religious age old fanaticism is beginning to fall — and the present generation are travelling more these days bringing back something to this land — even if the ideas are not ours maybe they will spark off some energy. So, as Comics (for example) evolved and did not happen overnight don't you think it is about time some body published something! There have been attempts to create an industry so, but they never lasted more than a couple of months; due to the apathy on behalf of both artist/writers and the general lack of support from the public. After College I shall attempt to try to see what is possible in that industry — I'll drink to that !!

THEND

# INDEX OF Books and OTHER INFORMATION CITED

- ① GRAPHIS 159 "THE ART OF THE COMIC STRIP."
- ② "COMIX" THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN COMIC
- ③ Pop Art THAMES + HUDSON.
- ④ "HEAD COMIX" R. CRUMB
- ⑤ LENNY BRUCE "COMPLETE AND UNEXPURGATED"  
EDITORIAL BY R. COHEN.
- ⑥ THE BEANO; LITTLE NEMO; SUPERMAN; MUTT + JEFF;  
SPIDERMAN; CAPT. AMERICA; FRITZ THE CAT; MR. NAT.  
WHITEMAN; TOEMAN;

