



SHAZAM!

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8-18-1971 JOHN M. POUND

"They told me...

'Don't get into (comics)...

I'm glad I didn't listen to them."



CARMINE INFANTINO, 1972

This interview with Carmine Infantino, president of the National line of comics, resulted from two long conversations with Carmine.

After working many years for various companies as a multi-talented storyteller, in 1967 Carmine was assigned to the post of editorial director at National. He immediately effected many changes in the then-stagnant DC comics line. Last summer he became publisher and was recently appointed to the post of president of the company—the rest is history.



Carmine, how did you first become interested in art?

That's a good question. You never really know when you started to become interested.

Well, some artists say they became interested in art as soon as they could pick up a pencil. Was it like that with you?

No. I didn't particularly like art to begin with. I liked films. I was a big nut for watching the directors. I really studied them. I didn't realize what I was doing at the time, namely studying composition and continuity. I guess that led into comics, the closest thing to films.

How did you get interested in comics?

I'm a child of the depression. In those days, there wasn't much you could do. You couldn't afford very much. You went into a thing that you felt you were most meant for. Films interested me, as I said. I couldn't get into movies, so I decided to draw.

Do you think the studying of films helped you with continuity?

Oh, tremendously. Hitchcock was great. I could watch a film of his ten times. He did brilliant things. "The Thirty-Nine Steps" comes on television once in a while. Watch it. Every scene was composed beautifully. Then there was Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane." Go see that.

Did you read comics?

Yeah, I was quite a fan. I used to read Caniff, Louie Fine, Reed Crandall... Hal Foster was a big favorite of mine.

What about the pulps?

Yeah. I liked Ed Cartier, who did The Shadow. Beautiful things. Excellent.

Did you just read comic strips, or the books too?

No, I read the books. I was a tremendous fan of Lou Fine, who did the Ray, the Black Condor, and some others. Lou was a designer. He influenced me quite a bit.

Who else influenced your work?

The first influence was Hal Foster. I studied his layout when he did Tarzan. I used to make copy after copy of that.

What about his later stuff, like Prince Valiant? Did that have any effect on your work?

No, no. It was mostly Tarzan, because there was pure genius in those layouts. I used to copy them and study them and try to understand them. I thought the movement was great. Everything about the stuff was great. From Foster I went to Caniff, who I studied for quite a while.

And then somebody said, "Why don't you go to art school and

learn how to draw?" I did. I learned anatomy and so forth at a couple of schools; The School of Art and Design, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, and a few others. After I learned how to draw, I threw it all away and started designing. I'm basically a designer. If you look at my work, you'll see the anatomy is never correct. It was done purposely. I believed the movement was more important than having every muscle correct.

Like Jack Kirby. He never draws muscles correctly, but conveys the action.

Yes. I go in a different direction, but you'll find the same principle... action. Jack is raw. He'll move hard and fast. He's got a tremendous punch. Mine was kind of soft and gentle. I think that was the difference. That is the impression I have. I studied with Jack for quite a while, you know. We worked together. You're bound to be influenced watching a guy.

What do you think of Jack's new books?

I wouldn't run them if I didn't like them.

Do you think that by giving him such free reign he's being carried away?

No.

Some of his stuff is so wild.

That's good. We need wild things. I want him to go crazy. It doesn't hurt. As a matter of fact, it's good.

Back to influences, Mort Meskin was a big influence on my work. After that, I kinda popped off on my own, designing. My feeling is more for design than for anything else. I like design and things that run in a rhythm. That's why I figured, oh, the heck with drawing. I could design better, so I went to design.

Then you consider composition more important than the actual rendering.

Absolutely.

Is that why your backgrounds were often nothing more than geometrical designs?

That's right. Because in my mind, the shape told the same story. You never felt cheated seeing that background, but if you looked at it closely there was nothing there. The stuff was deceptively simple. Ask Murphy Anderson. The poor guy had to ink it. He had his problems there.

Who are your favorite artists, past or present?

Jeez, there are so many... I think the fellows we have here at National are the greatest. Nick Cardy is one of the very best to me. Irv Novick, who very few talk about, Kirby, DiZuniga is sensational, Joe Kubert is a fiend... Wait till you see Joe's Tarzan of the Apes. You won't believe it.

I've seen some stats of the first issue. It really looks nice.

The second one makes that look sick. Unbelievable. Mike Kaluta was looking at it. I called him in and said, "Mike, do you want to get sick? Take a look at this." His eyes bulged!

Could you compare it to Tor?

Ten times better. Ten times better than anything Joe's ever done. It's that simple.

I don't want to slight Jim Aparo. I think he's great. Mike Kaluta. He's going to be doing the Batman covers for us from now on. I think he's going to be a young genius. He was nervous when I said, "You're doing the Batman covers." Dick Giordano... As for artists, if they're working at National, I like them. Otherwise they wouldn't be working here.

Would you advocate going into comics as a profession?

Absolutely.

Many professionals advise against it because of the relatively small amount of money you get paid, difficulties in finding assignments, and so forth.

They told me the same thing thirty years ago. Six or eight guys who are no longer in the business (that's the crazy thing about

"I'm basically a designer"

"Thirty some odd years in the business. That's kind of a long history"

it) said, "Don't get into it. It doesn't pay enough. You'll never make any money. You'll never be happy." I'm glad I didn't listen to them. You've got to make your own decision.

Do you think it's better to enter the field through art school or as someone's assistant?

Both. Absolutely.

Which first?

Actually, I think you could do both at the same time. The school is tremendously important. There are things that you have to learn in school that you need. You just can't get them outside. And there are things you learn as somebody's assistant you might not learn in school.

Do you suggest studying the comics themselves?

Yeah, I'd study everyone. Everyone. I've got some particular favorites. I would particularly study a guy named Nick Cardy. He's a tremendous story teller. His *Bat Lash* . . .

Yeah, I'd study everyone. I'd watch everybody. But I'd still go to school to learn the basics; how to draw. That's number one.

If one wanted to go into comic art, what would you suggest as a course of study?

I would think, if available, courses on anatomy. Those would be the things to start with. Later on, composition and things like that. I studied them with a guy named William McNulty at the Art Students' League.

Burne Hogarth is now teaching at the School of Visual Arts.

Burne is a great man. But McNulty was a genius at composition. He taught me a tremendous amount. You have to get it all from everyone. These guys here [pointing to the current DC comics tacked to the wall] . . . these guys think. We've got some great guys here. They really do great things.

How about a brief history of your career?

Thirty some odd years in the business. That's kind of a long history. I began with Quality Comics (*Blackhawk*, *The Ray*, etc.). They wouldn't let me draw. They'd only let me erase pages in those days. Then I did drawings for Fox. After Fox, I worked with Charlie Biro for a while. Then I worked for Jack Binder doing some backgrounds and things. From there (I was about seventeen or so) I came up to a company called National Periodicals, or something or other. I've been there ever since.

When you went to Fox, did you bring them some sample pages

and they said, "Oh, they're great! You're hired."?

No. I copied Reed Crandall. They liked what they saw so they gave me a script. It was terrible. I pencilled six pages, I remember, and I sweated over every panel. When it was rejected, it was rough.

What was the first comic you actually did?

I think it was a thing called *Jack Frost* for *Timely*. Frank Giacoia was the inker. It was a kind of crappy adventure character. A nothing character. We have a lot of nothing characters here too.

Didn't you do some work for Holyoke?

That's right, I forgot them. And Hillman. I wrote and pencilled the *Heap* for them. Leonard Starr, who's doing "On Stage," inked it.

Did you create the *Heap*?

No, but I wrote quite a few of his stories.

The story, "Swamp Thing," in *House of Secrets* 92, by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, was very similar to the original *Heap*.

Yeah. It got quite a lot of mail. I don't think it was intended to be similar, but you'd have to ask them. I don't want to answer for Len and Berni. I saw a similarity. It was emotional.

Have you seen Skywald's version of the *Heap*?

No, I haven't.

Your first strip for DC was *Ghost Patrol*. Can you give me some info on this and subsequent strips?

When Frank Giacoia and I came up here, we were a team. We met in high school, the School of Industrial Arts. We were both about fourteen and worked together quite a bit as a pencilling and inking team. We went up to National, and Shelly Mayer was editor up there at the time. He liked what he saw, and he gave us the *Ghost Patrol*. Then he gave us *Johnny Thunder*, the original *Flash*, and on from there.

Did you and Frank Giacoia work as a team before coming to DC or working on *Jack Frost*?

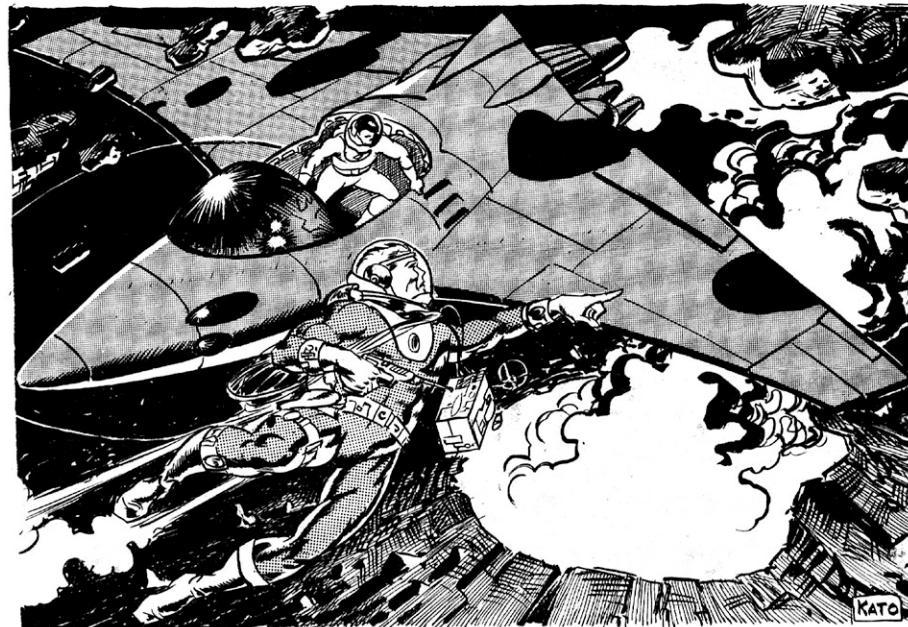
Yes, for Charlie Biro. I think we did westerns, but I don't remember.

Did you do the pencils and Frank the inks?

We began the other way. I was the inker, and he was the penciller.

When did you switch?

Bill Vigoda



Something happened. It flip-flopped. All of a sudden I began to pencil and he became inker. He's a great inker. I think he's sensational.

How would you rate your art of this period?

Lousy. It was crude. I mean, you always compare what you did to what you had done just before you stopped.

Were there any good parts?

Yes. The composition. I think sometimes you have more fun in the learning period than after you develop your art.

Was the composition similar to your more recent work?

No. It was a crude beginning, but it was in the direction I wanted it to go. It was a potpourri of things; square jaws, angular figures, crowded panels, and very bad drawing.

I understand at one time you drew *The Boy Commandoes*. Why?

Jack went into the service at that time. I think I did some of them, not all. Joe Kubert did some too, I think.

At one point, Joe and I did a thing called *Jesse James* for Avon. I did the pencilling and he did the inking. We did three or four books of that. We were really having fun, just kidding around. I pencilled a book in a day and Joe inked it in a day. The whole book! If you look at it, you'll notice there weren't even borders. Joe was going so fast he forgot to put them on.

Did you ever find the quality of a story affecting the quality of your art?

Yeah, it's got quite an effect. No question about it. How you relate to a story is how you draw it.

Did you write *Detective Chimp*?

No, but I wrote some other things for Julie [Schwartz]. I did a western strip I think we called *Kid Colby*. I wrote the *Heap* and *Airboy* for Hillman. I drew some of the *Airboy* strips, too. Not too many of them.

Who wrote *Detective Chimp*?

John Broome. They were good. I enjoyed them.

I have some Atlas comics from the late fifties signed "J. Infantino."

That was my kid brother Jim. He's in advertising now.

The revival of the Golden Age heroes started in 1956, with the *Flash*. Would the Code have had anything to do with it? It had limited some of the avenues that comics could take.

The business was in a slump at the time. Not a strong one. And every direction had been tried except bringing back old characters. So somebody suggested, "Let's bring back the *Flash* and see what happens."

Did you redesign the costume?

Yes, I did. Bob Kanigher wrote the thing. Joe Kubert inked the first story. Then it went on from there.

Did you prefer your work on *Adam Strange* (inked by others) to your work on *Space Museum*, another science fiction strip (inked by yourself)?

I liked Murphy Anderson's inking on *Adam Strange* very much. I guess you're always partial to what you do yourself, though. Julie hated my inking. Never liked it. I only did some inking. *Space Museum*, *Super-Chief*, *Pow-Wow Smith*, the *Elongated Man*, some others.

When you inked, it looks as though you used a pen almost exclusively. Is this correct?

Pretty much so. I like the feel of a pen.

But it looked so scratchy.

Yeah. I used it like a pencil. I pencilled that way also.

Why was the *Elongated Man* the only strip you inked in the later sixties?

"I think sometimes you have more fun in the learning period than after you develop your art"



KATO '71

No time to do others, really. Julie didn't like my inking anyway, as I said.

Well, why didn't he put you on one more pencilling job instead of the inking on that strip?

I wanted to ink and I liked the Elongated Man. I guess Julie figured I'd do less damage there than anyplace else. Dick Giordano is doing a beautiful job on the strip now. That man is just sensational. That's why I regretfully gave him up as an editor; to use him as an artist.

Who do you think is National's best inker?

I think Dick [is]. I personally feel that way.

Do you think you're a better penciller or inker?

I like both, because I think my inking fit my pencils.

A lot of people felt Murphy Anderson's slicker inks enhanced your pencils.

That's true. They certainly did. But you still favor your own inks. Murphy prefers to ink his own pencils to inking someone else's.

Do you have any inkers that you particularly enjoyed working with?

Murphy. I think he's great. He was my favorite, even over Giella, who I worked with for so long on Flash.

Was your artwork of the late fifties more similar to your current work?

It was evolving. I would experiment like crazy. I'd take a fountain pen and ink with it, chip off the end and put in flat blacks, just looking for directions.

Why didn't you use the continuity method of shadowed shapes from Strange Sports Stories and others again?

I don't know. When we started that book, Julie said to me he'd like to try something unique. So I went home and thought about it. I thought by using the silhouettes I could give the effect of motion. The guy swung at the ball, the bat followed through. So that's why,

it came about. I think I used it on a Phantom Stranger story years ago, illustrating the captions. But not to the same extent.

How about the captions themselves, which you always shaped into hand or profiles or something, like that?

Well, that was designing the captions. But I think that constantly using the shadows would bore the reader after a while, even though it showed up so much motion. For that particular thing it worked. It was a stamp for the book. It was a different type of thing.

How did the Sports DC Specials do?

The first one did well, the second one not so well, and the third not well at all. The mail was fantastic on all of them. Unbelievable.

Is the mail on any book an indication of its sales?

Not really. Strange Sports got enormous mail response. Sales weren't that good. Some books get no mail and do great. You just can't figure it out. Binky and Dabbi get loads of mail. The kids loved them. They even write in their problems to the love books.

Why were you chosen to do the "new look" Batman?

Well, I worked for Julie in those days. He was the editor, and he chose me. I was not a fan of Batman. I never did enjoy doing Batman. Neal [Adams] is the one who really does Batman.

Did you or Kane redesign Batman?

I did. In fact, I did the mock-ups for Filmation for the Batman television show.

What were the comments on your Batman, a new thing for you after you had been established for so many years as the Flash artist?

The reaction was mixed. Some liked it, some didn't. I didn't like it. I didn't like Adam Strange, either. I enjoyed doing Detective Chimp

'One day, Jack Liebowitz said to me, 'I didn't know you were afraid of a challenge.' That did it.'

and the Elongated Man. There were times I enjoyed the Flash and times I got bored with it. I enjoyed a few Pow-Wow Smiths that I inked.

You did the first Batgirl story (Detective Comics 359). Did you design her costume?

Yes. I designed it for television originally. Then it was decided to incorporate the character into the strip.

Did you redesign Kid Flash's costume?

Yes, I did. I drew a cover sketch with that as the scene, and Julie decided to use it as the basis for a story.

Who designs the covers now?

I design most of the covers. Now and again someone will come in with a sketch, I'll like it, and I'll say, "Let's use it." But I design most. They're sometimes done before a story, some after.

How do you feel about word balloons on covers?

Some I like, some I don't.

It usually ruins the effect of the art.

For the fan. But the fan comprises a very small part of the buying public.

The intro page for "The Hall of Golden Age Heroes," running in Justice League, was drawn by Murphy Anderson from a sketch by you. Is this done often?

Once in a while.

What type of comic did you enjoy doing the most (war, superhero, western, love, sci-fi, etc.)?

Detective Chimp, whatever that would be classified as. Humor, I suppose. Along the lines of the original Plastic Man. I think that's why I enjoyed the Elongated Man so much, too. I had fun with him. I enjoyed the pulling and stretching, like Plastic Man.

How long did it take you to pencil and ink a page?

There was some kind of story going around about how fast I was. I was fast in the early days. Toward the end, I wasn't fast at all. I had slowed down to about a page and a half of pencilling a day. And I was getting slower all the time. The more you learn, the longer it takes. I was very fast at inking. I could do two, three pages a day.

Do you paint?

I used to do watercolors years ago. Seascapes, landscapes, figures, you know.

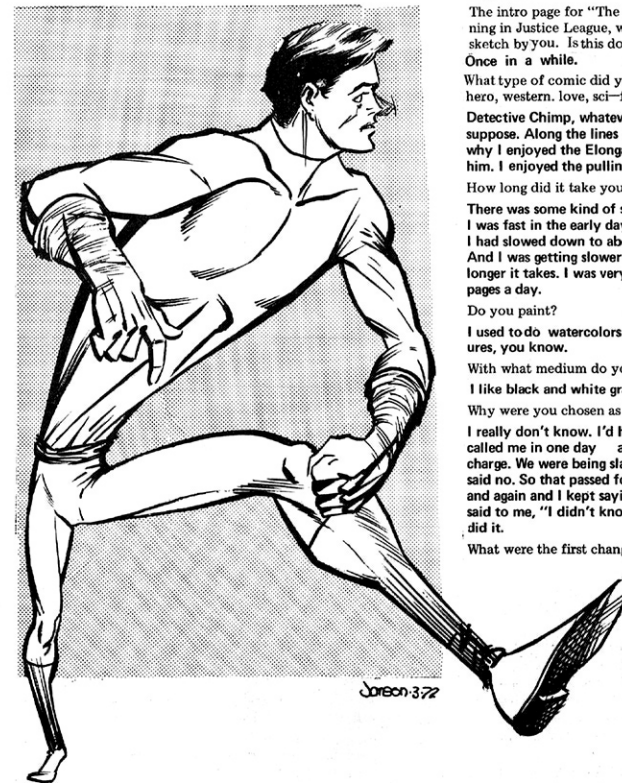
With what medium do you feel most comfortable?

I like black and white graphics. They're the toughest, I think.

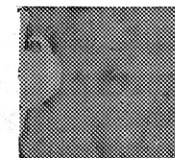
Why were you chosen as Editorial Director?

I really don't know. I'd had very little editorial experience. They called me in one day and asked me if I would like to take charge. We were being slaughtered by Marvel at that time. I said no. So that passed for a few days and they asked me again and again and I kept saying no. Then one day, Jack Liebowitz said to me, "I didn't know you were afraid of a challenge." That did it.

What were the first changes you made as Editorial Director?



Jareon 3:72





Your Flash was slimmer, lighter. All their characters are muscular and heavy. Irv Novick's Flash is much more like yours. Sensational. He's doing a great job. That's the right guy for the job. Murphy is doing a lot of very important work now, like inking Curt Swan's Superman.

Swan is so underrated. I've always liked his Superman, especially when inked by Anderson or the late George Klein. Why did you only do one Deadman, the first?

That's when I moved from being an artist to being Editorial Director. I think that was the last story I drew. Then Adams came along. You associate him with Deadman.

Well, he did all except that one.

Right, but I wrote them. I did the plotting, gave it to Jack Miller, who would write it down. Neal would draw it. I did the plotting, the dialogue, the whole thing. I did four or five of them, then I stopped.

I didn't know you were talented in the writing department.

I wrote *Batlash* too...

I thought Sergio...

I plotted it and gave the plot to him. He'd sit down and write it down. Denny would pick it up after it was drawn... And the first new *Wonder Woman* was by Denny and I.

Then you're actually behind some of these changes Denny has been making.

That's correct, pretty much so. That's a very talented young man, Mr. O'Neil.

Now that he's editing *Wonder Woman*, will he be writing less? I suppose so.

Who are your favorite writers?

I think Denny is the best. Len Wein is second. Kirby. Outside of comics, I'm a fan of Bradbury.

Do you think the best comic artists are also good writers?

Some of them are. Some of them think they are. Some are very bad. Some examples might be Steranko on Nick Fury and Neal on Deadman. I'll tell you something about both of these fellows. When Neal took it over, whether you liked it or not, Deadman didn't sell anymore. *Shield* didn't sell so well when Jimmy took it from Kirby. So while I'm sure the fans liked it, I don't think the general public appeal was that strong. Neal thinks he's a good writer. We disagree, that's all. He may be. I don't think so.

What do you think of Wally Wood's statement, "The editor who edits best edits least."?

It depends on the quality of the people an editor's got working for him.

What character, as an artist, did you enjoy doing the most?

Detective Chimp.

How about from an editor's point of view?

Batlash. The book died though. Really loved that thing.

I think it was played too humorous for the western fans and too western for the humor fans.

Could be. We'll see about the reaction to the reprints in *All-Star Western*.

Is it true that you changed that book to *Weird Western* because *Weird* is what sells?

Yeah. That's the genre that sells so well now.

Why do you think horror is now weird and gothic, as opposed to... well, all your horror books used to be science fiction.

Escape. People want to get away from things. That's why we developed the gothic romance books. The field sold tremendously well in paperbacks for years and years.

"Change is necessary in anything"

In a radio interview, you mentioned the fact that you didn't put out horror comics. What about *House of Mystery*, *Witching Hour*, etc.?

To me, horror comics are what Bill Gaines put out years ago, with the ax in the head; chopping up bodies; somebody eating somebody else.

What do you think of science fiction in comics?

It never sold. Including Bill Gaines's books. Our science fiction books of a couple years back never sold well. They just hung in there. Bill did some fantastic ones which didn't sell. I know this because Bill and I are rather close. Bill, to me, in every sense of the word, is a great publisher. He's a genius. And he doesn't have the ego of some people who don't have his talent.

Did you see the *National Lampoon* satire of *Mad*?

They thought they'd suck him in, but he didn't follow up. He's too smart for that. That magazine is twenty years old today and he's selling 1,750,000 copies a month, I think. I think it's the third best selling magazine. That's genius.

Why were several best selling books (*Superman*, *Batman*, etc.) changed in format?

Because change is necessary in anything.

But you don't tamper with success do you?

Why not? Don't automobile people do it?

Are superhero sales dropping extremely, as was predicted in the late sixties by people like Dick Giordano?

No. Some of those books recently went monthly, as a matter of fact.

Why was *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* discontinued?

It didn't sell, that's all.

I heard a rumor that Neal Adams was having problems meeting deadlines.

That's one of the big reasons. The last book was two and a half months late. The printer wouldn't put up with it. We can't put up with it. It could've had a chance to grow eventually.

Do you read your competitor's work?

I look at them.

What do you think of all the new artists working for Jim Warren?

I saw their work a year ago. They're very talented. What I'm concerned with is, can you read it? I don't think they tell stories too well. The artwork is sensational, but look at their storytelling. That is what your selling, isn't it?

Is that why you like panels to conform to definite shapes?

I think it's easier to read. Another, more important reason is that it makes the artist think harder. When you're confined to a square box, you have to design the box as best you can. I don't think it really inhibits the artist.

What do you think of Marvel's twenty-centers?

I would have put out twenty cent comics if I had thought they were right. I think it's up to you to object, because you have to buy them. I didn't want to go to twenty cents because I didn't want to charge more and give nothing more. I don't think it's right. But I can't disagree with their right to do it. You have to give people something for their money, though. You can't cheat them. That's what I believe.

What about Marvel's reprint books? Roy Thomas said they were selling well.

Peculiar thing about Marvel. Their artists, writers, and editors have become distributors too. They seem to know more about distribution than their own distribution people. Very interesting. As for Roy Thomas, I'm not impressed with him. Not even with his *Conan*. Many people are. I had made a great remark that I didn't think *Conan* would go. And if I'm not mistaken, Roy wrote an article for a fanzine saying that one of the competitors thought the book wouldn't go, and suddenly it's going like crazy. Look at the figures again. It's now bi-monthly. I won't answer that. It's kid stuff to play that game with him. And he's a little boy so I'm not going to play that. I'm not going to write a column for a fanzine. You don't buy a fanzine to hear about rivalry crap.

Stan Lee said, "For years the big things on campus had been McLuhan and Tolkien and Stan Lee and Marvel. And everyone

knew about McLuhan and Tolkien but nobody knew about Marvel. Now our competitor is coming out with 'relevant' comics and he has a big public relations department, so he's been easing in on our publicity."

The interesting part is that Mr. Lee has had a personal PR man for years. I so I don't understand. And if I'm not mistaken, Denny started the relevant thing with *Green Lantern*.

Well, Marvel's books had relevancy before that. Just not a whole series devoted exclusively to it.

In 1939, Superman was ripping down slum lords. I don't think they started relevancy or we started it. He's telling the world that he did. If it makes him feel better...

Our PR department doesn't handle only comics. It handles paperbacks, *Mad*, *Playboy*, the whole group. They don't go out and seek publicity for us. I think Stan was a little wiped out about the *New York Times* using our Sgt. Rock as their magazine cover when they had an article on comics. We didn't push that. They did it on their own. And I don't take credit for what Kirby's done, like some people.

What do you think of Marvel's proposed Doc Savage book?

I wish them luck. I had the opportunity to take the character, but I didn't want it. I wanted Tarzan. I could've made a big mistake. The art (Andru/Severin) is going to be interesting.

Why are you continuing the Gold Key numbering?

Postal regulations.

How would you compare the methods of writing at National to those at Marvel?



I was given the opportunity to pick whomever I wanted, the way I wanted it. That was when all the new stuff came out. I thought like an artist. This was a writer-oriented company to the point where the visual had practically disappeared.

Whereas it was just the opposite at Marvel.

Yes. So that's why I brought Joe Orlando, Joe Kubert and Dick Giordano in as editors. They were all artists.

Do you credit Dick with bringing many of the then-Charlton talents?

When I got hold of Dick I insisted on a package; Jim Aparo, a kid named Sergius O'Shaughnessy (now Denny O'Neil) and Steve Skeates. I wanted the package. I knew what Denny had. I could read his stuff. I got the package and was very happy. I guess if this was a ball team I made a helluva deal on that one.

Why did Andru and Esposito replace you on the Flash? Wouldn't Murphy Anderson have done a job more similar to your own, and better for that matter?

A good question. I chose Andru and Esposito. I thought they could do it. I really don't think they felt the character though.



We're very different. I prefer a tight script. Movie people do it the same way. Don't you get a feeling that there's a sameness in most of Marvel's books? I think that's one of the disadvantages in their format. But apparently it works for them. Ours works for us.

How do you feel about the code?

I feel it's necessary, because without it people would really go crazy. I think Marvel's going overboard with *Werewolf by Night*, *Fear*, and the like. I'm making objections to the Code about it. It's not creative.

Now that the Code has been liberalized, will you be coming out with anything like Marvel's *Werewolf by Night*?

Absolutely not. In no shape or form. That smacks of the old days with Wertham. This is crap. You don't have to do it. It's not creative one bit. I'll never do a book like that. If my my guys can't do better than that, then they don't belong in this business. Simple and frank. I really feel that sincerely. There are so many things you can do to be creative. This can only open up old wounds. It's senseless.

In another interview you said, "Comic books have more freedom than comic strips." What about the Code?

Comic strips have a stricter code. They have different editors across the country. They're really hard-nosed. You'd be surprised at the things they edit out. They're rough.

What do you think of the underground comix?

Well, they're growing, that's for sure. I guess if they ever reach the establishment level, they'll die because nobody will want them. Harvey Kurtzman said that things that rebel usually do well. Then when they become successful, they're not as rebellious.

Well, to become successful, you have to satisfy the majority. Have you seen any stuff by Richard Corben?

He's great. I tried to get him to work for us, but he said that at the moment he was busy.

Undergrounders open all sorts of doors. I'm not against them. There's a lot of good quality in them. A lot of talent too. It's just how it's directed.

Have you seen Steve Ditko's Mr. A?

It's interesting.

Would you ever consider running something, like that in a comic?

No. Anyway, Steve is into a completely different thing now. Has Kinney control made any changes at DC?

It opened up doors. They're quite good. They want to do lots of new stuff. They let you do what you want, but if it doesn't work, it's your neck. I think that's fair.

You've previously stated that comics will be used as educational tools in the future. What's happened with Edgraphics?

They're starting to take hold now. They're being tested.

In closing, what format do you think comics will be taking in the future?

They'll be changing, that's for sure.

In another interview, you said that you thought comics would be hard cover in the future. Would there be a market for that?

Yeah.

Who?

The new Superman book sold out its first printing and they're making a second printing of it. It sells at ten bucks.

But that's mainly reprints and so it appeals to the nostalgic oldsters who can say, "Gee, I remember this story from when I was kid."

Maybe. I don't think so. *Kirby, Unleashed* is selling like a bandit.

That's to fans. It only went on sale through the comics recently.

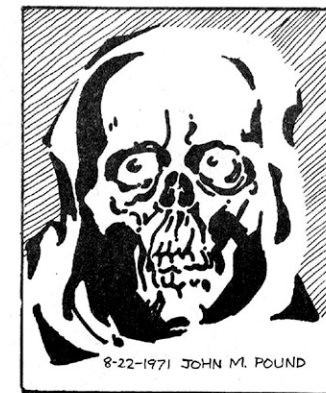
I think quality pays off.

If you ever went to a hardcover format, do you think you would have art like that used in "Little Annie Fanny"?

Somewhat. Harvey Kurtzman is a genius.

What about those adult characters you tried in '68, all of which were flops? Even *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* failed.

Maybe the package has to change. That could be part of it.



Although this interview is obviously outdated, we have decided to present it in its original form in order to show Carmine's original feelings before the recent upheavals in the comics industry.

A client has a product to sell. He comes to an agency. They are responsible for advertising the product. The agency will call me, the artist, up, with an idea of what they want to do. Usually they leave it up to the artist to tell it as he sees fit, in his own way, working with a script.

ADS &

ANIMATION

Mort Drucker

(as told to Neal Pozner)



For example, let's take the Vote toothpaste commercial. The art director had drawn three pictures of different stages which he gave me to work with. These comprehensives (rough sketches) had no personality; they were just rough stick figures. This was the direction in which the client wanted me to go, and I was to establish characters and a sequence of drawings. I had to break it down to six pencil drawings, one of which you see reproduced here. When I submitted these six drawings, I hadn't heard any voice tapes. They were undecided about one of the characters so they played the voice for me. As a result of the tape, one character was changed from the one you see here. It fit the voice, another important part. After those drawings were accepted, I did twenty more drawings in various stages. When they were accepted, two of them were done in a final, color version. All these drawings were given to Focus, an animation house, who gave them to a staff of illustrators. They don't create anything, but just fill in the steps in-between on cells. They don't necessarily all have to be full drawings. Some can be one part of the body moving. They're traced over a lightboard. For a one-minute commercial like this, about eight hundred or so drawings are required. It's the same basic principle as the flip books; each picture moves a little more.

A good commercial depends wholly on the animators. They can ruin it or make it successful. It's very important that a cartoon flows well. There are some animators who try to cut corners and ruin the flow. The finished version looks choppy and the animators do a poor job in copying an artists' style. As a result, the commercial becomes hacked up. Focus is a top animation house and I was pleased with the finished version in this case. The actual commercial was run on Joey Bishop's old show and a couple of other places. It did very well.

This sequence was for Utica Beer. Henny Youngman's voice was used and they wanted me to come up with a character that would portray him in simple form. My intricate style has to be simplified for TV animation. The more intricate it is, the harder it is to animate.





I met Youngman at a Mad party and that was the only association I ever had with him. I remember he made a big fuss over my wife.

The final was very successful. The client really liked it. It plays in upstate New York, where Utica Beer is very popular. Because of this, I've never seen the final version.

They have a way of testing commercials, using a rating system from one to fifteen. This commercial got the highest rating, fifteen. I did some ads for Party Tyme mix that ran in some magazines; a series of six different drawings. The first one got a fifteen rating. The same agency tried the same thing, this time by Al Jaffee, for another client, Passport Scotch. The Party Tyme Client got uptight about it, because they felt that theirs' was first and the agency shouldn't have handled the Scotch ad in the same way. They stop-



ped their account and left the agency. Three of the series saw print. Those ad agencies pull some big boners sometimes.

I did another commercial for ARM and HAMMER. We animated the hand on the package. A little germ ran across the screen and the hand stomped it. There were two thirty-second commercials like that done by the same animation house. That also did

pretty well, from what I understand.

I was working on a Saturday morning cartoon series that fell through for Steve Krantz Productions, under Ralph Bachi. They produced the Fritz the Cat film. It was supposed to be all about animals. They're a good and successful outfit, but the show was never bought. The picture that was originally presented to them is this issue's special poster.



Comic ART?

Howard Campbell

There is no such article as the "comic book art form." Merely because comics are not art. Instead, they are poorly drawn, written, edited, and packaged attempts at creative expression.

While a few of the "artists" in the comics present to us good composition, that is all they do. All the pencillers in the field lack any sort of understanding of anatomy. Their figures are abortions of the human body. Foremost of these offenders are Harvey Kurtzman, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. All of their figures are grossly incorrectly drawn to the point of disbelief. To compound this problem of poor rendering, the comics have decided to employ substandard inkers. Instead of improving on the penciller's work by making it more realistic, the inkers further misrepresent the human figure by using absurdly fat brush strokes. Going beyond this, most comic book artists lack any sort of craft. And without craft, there is no chance for art. Most artists have little formal training, and their work shows it. Besides their lack of understanding of an-

atomy, most artists know little of spatial relationships and other such knowledge of which all artists are required to be masters.

But this is not the only reason why comic book "art" is not art. Such deficiencies in craft could be overlooked if the artists in the comics experimented. Many forms of creative expression which have lacked any real craft have still been considered art; mainly because they have innovated. There is, however, very little experimenting present in the comics. Most artists are content to draw the same figures and backgrounds year after banal year. The few examples of experimentation in comics have been borrowed from the films, and thus, these experiments are neither new nor experimental in the true sense of the words. So then, if comic book "art" is not art, what is it? Comic book "art" is a form of unexperimental commercial art which lacks a good deal of craft. Then; it is merely a flimsy means of self-expression. And that is all.





While the art in comics displays at least a slight amount of craft, the writing in comics is wholly inadequate. Weak plotting, weak characterization, and weak dialogue; all are typical of comics. Although Stan Lee did indeed raise the writing standards of comic books, it is not anything really worth mentioning. He lifted the level of comic book writing from that of a children's daytime television show to that of a soap opera. Same difference. To say that comic book writing is anywhere near adult is stretching things a bit much.

Perhaps the largest problem in comic book writing is that of terribly weak characterization. The people portrayed in comics are no more "real" than my typewriter. None of the comic book characters show real emotions of any sort. Instead, they are all the same lifeless figures who are merely used as a vehicle to lead into a fight and nothing more. What little good characterization there is in comics is often vanquished by incompetent editors who switch around writers and artists like bowling pins.

The dialogue in comics is not much better. Most of it is pure emotionalism, wrapped in trite clichés or just plain foolishness. A common line such as, "I could recognize that grunt of his anywhere!" is enough of a testimonial, if ever there need be one, to the trite, illiterate dialogue in the comics.

Although in the past few years, with the emergence of Roy Thomas, comics have become increasingly poetic, it is clear that the comic book writers are not good enough to live up to what they are attempting. Such captions as, "Soft. The sounds of the night are soft, like the rattling of garbage cans." shows us most vulgarly that under the new wave of poetic wordiness, the writing in the comics is still as sophomoric and banal as ever. As Stan Lee so obnoxiously states, "Nuff said."

Another failing in the comic book industry is that of poor editors. In addition to their lacking a total command of the English language, which is normally required of any editor, most editors have little knowledge of for-

mal art techniques, thus resulting in the chronic misuse of many of the pencilers and inkers in the business. Instead of understanding their craft, it seems that most editors are more concerned with selling their product, no matter how poor it is, and with giving their publications good public relations. In short, most editors are businessmen instead of editors.

While most of the creators and the collectors of comics refuse to accept that comics are a banal, cheap, form of entertainment, the publishers know this fact all too well. They realize that the writing and the art work in comics is not good, and it is because of this that they pay such "minimal" rates to the people working in the field. But they aren't really minimal at all. The artists and writers are getting exactly what they deserve for their efforts: chicken feed. The publishers' realization that comics are indeed a cheap creative form is also expressed in their packaging of the books. Surely if comics were a bona-fide art form the publishers wouldn't subject them to the poor printing, coloring and paper stock that is being used. Instead, they would print them by the finest printing processes and on the highest grade paper. But, they realize that the comics are not an art form, and they present them accordingly.

In light of these conclusions, it remains a mystery to me as to why so many people profess admiration of the beauty of the comic book media. They're cheap, dismal, poorly executed attempts at art and nothing more. And yet, so many people are "fans." It seems that many fans are primarily interested in the art in comics; and this is their excuse for enjoying this juvenile product. My suggestion; if you are interested in Art go to museums and experience Michelangelo and Dali and Picasso, stop wasting your time studying Kirby and Steranko and Adams. Why waste your time with novices when you can view the masters? If you enjoy the writing in comics, read the classics instead, and see what good writing really is all about. And, if your prime interest in comics is in its composition and story telling, study the films; they do it better.

There is a wide spectrum of art forms in America, but the graphic story medium is, sadly enough, not one of them. And, the quicker all of you realize this, the more appreciative you will be of the true art forms in this country.

Howard Campbell is a Chicago University graduate who, in addition to writing many short stories and novels, is a serious student of all the creative forms in America.



KATO '71

Our visit to the offices of *Mad Magazine*, conducted on June 29, 1971, found us face-to-face with a minority of the talented individuals that contribute to the last (and most successful) child of EC Publications. In other words, while 4:30 P.M. in the middle of the week is not the best time to meet one's favorite *MAD* artists and writers, it does give one a very good indication of just when the rats desert the sinking ship.

So we found ourselves

NEAR TO THE MAD DING CROWD

by Martin Pasko and Alan Brennert
Copyright 1972 Martin Pasko and Alan Brennert.

One of those hardy individuals paid to remain there was associate editor Jerry DeFuccio, who greeted us at the door, somewhat taken back by the size of our entourage. Nevertheless, he braved himself for the ordeal to come, and attempted to explain the development of a typical *MAD* article, after ushering us into what we took to be an office.

"We use a lot of the same reliable writers, specifically because they are in the Metropolitan areas," explained DeFuccio. "We have to rely on a certain clique or group . . . from anywhere from ten to a dozen. We have about five writers who went out to the West Coast, now working on shows out there; we're fortunate enough to have them still contribute when they have the time." Then there are those that DeFuccio refers to as the "old-timers"—those people who "generally think in our idiom and . . . produce the type of material that we can use." Those in the metropolitan areas, such as a Frank Jacobs and Dick DeBartolo, "might come in once a month" for a story conference with editor Al Feldstein, associate editor Nick Meglin and DeFuccio.

"You see, up front, initially, we don't encourage a fully-developed script," continued DeFuccio. "We want a premise for every proposed article . . . a brief paragraph, and it states what the writer wants to say in his proposed article. We also will require two or three examples, just to show that it can build up a head of steam, that there's some momentum there and that the idea can be sustained." Should all parties agree as to the idea's potential, the writer is given the go-ahead to do a finished script. "When the script comes back," says DeFuccio, "we all read it. We talk about the various strengths of different segments of the script . . . the parts we think should be cut out . . . the parts that can be strengthened." Other considerations are bandied about—"Is the ending flat or is it good? Is it a good exit line?"—and when the editors come to an agreement, the script is handed over to editor Feldstein for the actual editing.



The first step for Feldstein is a "pagination layout" (a page break down) to decide upon the length of the article. "If it's real meaty," DeFuccio reveals, "it might go six or seven pages. If it's a filler, then you set in and out with two or three pages; you say your bit and then that's it." Feldstein types up the dialogue, which is then sent to the production department, which in turn sends it to the type house to be set. "Then we will pull finished proofs on it, and then all those balloons are enlarged double-size. We give those photo stats to the artist (the artist is the lastman on the job) and he just pastes it down in the various panels. We give him a mechanical to follow, so he knows where the placement is." The actual creative work on each story for any given issue finished. "The elements are combined in the production office" in such a way as to "represent each artist so we get a different overall look to the book." Although many have remarked of the scrupulously-maintained satiric balance of *Mad*, this is only a secondary consideration; the prime consideration in the selection of material for the 48 page magazine is the selection of as many varying art styles as possible, so as to make the book visually diverse.

In addition to those scripts written by *Mad*'s regular stable of writers, DeFuccio and company receive at least fifty scripts a day from sources outside the magazine. "We welcome all sorts of material . . ." he admits, "if they are capable of capturing the so-called *MAD* 'flavor.'" But while DeFuccio is fully capable of detecting that flavor, he is unable to define it. "Don't ask me what it is," he urges, "As you read through a script there's something that reaches out and grabs you, and that's . . . the *MAD* flavor; and if it doesn't have it, you just don't react."

"A NEW HUMOR IN THE LAND"

"Flavor" notwithstanding, there is no doubt that *Mad*'s approach to humor has changed over the years, perhaps even, DeFuccio concedes, out of necessity. "We've decided that there's a new humor in the land today. Say ten or a dozen years ago, or even back to the fifties, forties, and thirties, American humor has been a laugh not at what's happening to you but what's happening to the other guy. . . . But today, humor has changed. It's humor that you can relate to. It's truth humor. When it happened to you, you possibly couldn't laugh at it; it might have been even tragic. But in retrospect, you can say, 'Oh, that's so true, because that happened to me,'" and I think that's why a lot of articles that really hit home or hit a nerve are the most successful. . . . our whole concept of humor in this country has changed."

With such a change in the American sense of humor has come a reduction in the number of things once considered sacrosanct. DeFuccio maintains, however, that "We do deal within the realm of good taste, because we're essentially a family magazine to a great degree. We have some ideas that are great ideas," he explains, but, being of a questionable nature, they are discarded; "we'd rather not use them, then, than be offensive."

With the discovery of the new brand of humor came the development of a social conscience for *Mad Magazine*, one which leads readers to suspect that *Mad*, on occasion, will forego an obvious gag to defer to an opportunity for serious social commentary. DeFuccio admits that "we've made statements because we realize that in today's climate you can't be just ha-ha anymore." He points out that "before, *MAD* was ahead of the world. . . we used to project. And all of a sudden the world got so insane it caught up with *MAD*. We prophesized that if you didn't buckle your seat belt before turning your ignition key, you could get a mild shock; last year, *Popular Mechanics* showed it came to be an actuality."¹ All of which means, DeFuccio jokes (or does he?), that "we've got to get out in front of the world again."

"HUMOR IN A JUGULAR VEIN"

"The first 'comic' comic book," as the ads went, had its beginnings as an economy move. According to *MAD* creator Harvey Kurtzman, *MAD* was "something that I could do without research. We were doing *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Front Line Combat* with incredible research. We'd go down on submarines, and up in planes, and it just got to be too much. So I decided I'd come up with an idea for a comic book that I didn't have to do research on. And that's really how *MAD* was born, because I didn't have to leave the room to do humor."

DeFuccio, in the Fifties working with Kurtzman on his war books, recalls the research not quite so fondly. "I went out, down, submerged out on Long Island Sound on the U.S.S. *Guardfish*," he recalls, "and this was unheard of to write a comic book story." Kurtzman, DeFuccio claims, was given "tremendous latitude" by EC publisher Bill Gaines, "even though Al Feldstein was, is, superior. Harvey never worked as hard as Al did. Al produced one story a day, and Harvey had this tremendous luxury of going to libraries and air bases." DeFuccio claims that Kurtzman had a "superior attitude" about his war stories, likening them to "little gems that kept being polished and polished" whereas he allegedly felt that Feldstein was "sort of batting them out one a day," and that "that horror stuff was just out-and-out fiction."

MAD would not be here today if Harvey had stuck with *MAD*," DeFuccio states. "It was only that Al really got it on schedule. You never knew when *Mad* was coming out when it went from the comic book into the slick magazine; you never knew when it was going to appear, because Harvey could not adhere to a schedule. He would get an idea and he would work up an article and set it down in type, and overnight he would have a change of heart, and the next day he would pull the story and rewrite it, and send it down for type again, and he might do it a third time. We were getting like three type bills for one story, and that's no way to put out a magazine."

Kurtzman split with *MAD* in 1956 in order to work with Hugh Hefner on the latter's short-lived fifty-cent humor magazine *Trump*, taking with him Will Elder and Jack Davis, "sotto voce" as DeFuccio puts it. The first few issues of the Feldstein-edited *MAD* saw DeFuccio in a "continuity" capacity, present Art Director John Putnam as Production Manager, and "Nick Megliola" (now Nick Meglin) listed as head of a rather ambiguously titled department, "Ideas." Norman Mingo did several of the early *MAD* slick covers, and was replaced for a period of several years by Frank Kelly Freas (now a standby at *Analog*) as chief cover artist. Since 1963, the white-haired Mingo has returned to prominence as *MAD* cover artist, occasionally giving way to the likes of Jack Davis or Al Jaffee.

Why was the comic book *MAD* chosen, out of the many sophisticated war/horror/crime/SF EC titles, to advance to slick magazine format? "Well, I guess I think *MAD* was relatively innocuous," DeFuccio muses. "It wasn't considered an offender. The horror books and the crime books were really considered as 'offenders'—I say that in quotes because I don't think they were. I think they were very well done, and it was just the rest of the very parasitic so-called imitators that jumped on the bandwagon.—One company was putting out twenty 'horror for horror's sake' to our six or eight, and they called attention to us. We were going along very nicely with our own little sort of specialized clique. Our readership was a little more intelligent than the usual comic book reader."

And just as the EC titles had a fringe readership of adults and others above the average comic book-reading age of the time, so MAD has pulled in a phenomenal audience not restricted, as critics have charged, to twelve-year-olds. Presently the book is the fifth largest magazine in the nation, surpassed in circulation only by Family Circle, Women's Wear Daily, TV Guide, and Playboy, and it is distributed in such countries as England, Holland, France, and Sweden. Whether the responsibility for its success should go to Al Feldstein or Harvey Kurtzman is a moot point—but there is little doubt the someone must be doing something right.

MISGUIDED TOUR DEPARTMENT

Over the years, unscrupulous rumor-mongers have spread many vicious stories to the effect that the offices of MAD magazine are not offices of the respectable, dignified, efficient and businesslike type one would expect to find on Madison Avenue, but in fact strongly resemble the day room at Bellevue. We feel it is our duty to inform the public that all of those dirty, nasty, unconfirmed rumors are all absolutely, positively, and categorically TRUE!! As proof, we offer the following representation of the treatment we received there:



(With all due respects to the Marx Brothers)



WELL, FANCY MEETING
YOU HERE !!!



*To Neal
with Best Regards
Syd Shores
(with apologies to National)*