ROY THOMAS' TOTH & NAIL COMICS FANZINE

Alter Ego™

REMEMBERING COMICS LEGEND
ALEX TOTH

INDUSTRY TRIBUTES
NEVER-SEEN INTERVIEW
UNSEEN ART

TWOMORROWS

$6.95
In the USA

No. 63
December
2006

PLUS:
FCA
Fawcett Collectors of America

Alex Toth
8|1

Vol. 3, No. 63 / December 2006

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Alex Toth

ALEX TOTH
TRIBUTE TO A TITAN

Contents

Writer/Editorial: Who Cares? *Toth* Did! 2

Alex Toth: Edge of Genius 4
Greg Theakston examines the first few years of the master's career—plus *A/E*'s Toth Checklist.

"Let The Imagination Of The Audience Do the Rest" 15
A 1978 interview with Toth on media violence, conducted by Michael Vance.

"Alex Toth Had It *All!*" 20
Golden/Silver Age great Joe Kubert talks to Jim Amash about his fellow legend.

"This Guy Was A Driven Artist" 25
Phantom and DC artist Sy Barry on—what else?—Alex Toth.

"Alex Was Into *Everything*" 29
"Batman" artist Lew Sayre Schwartz has his own say about the terrific Mr. Toth.

"Photographic Memory Plus" 31
Artist and producer Jack Mendelsohn discusses Alex and TV animation.

"He Was A True Genius In His Field" 35
Cartoonist/animator Sparky Moore relates his own close encounters with Toth.

"It Was Worth The Journey" 41
Jim Amash remembers his boisterous friendship with Alex Toth.

***1941* And All That** 47
John Workman tells why Toth *didn't* draw the graphic novel of Stephen Spielberg's 1979 film.

"A.T.T.A. Boy Productions, Inc." 51
Inker Terry Austin on Toth at DC & Marvel in the 1980s.

***TOTH*timonials** 57
By Irwin Hasen, Manuel Auad, Will Murray, Michael Allred, Tony Tallarico, et al.

A Colorful Christmas 2006—In Glorious Black-&-White . . 67
Another year's worth of holiday hellos sent by comics pros & fans alike.

Comic Crypt: Russ Manning – The Lost Works! 73
Michael T. Gilbert showcases the *Tarzan/Magnus* artist's *John Carter of Mars* project.

***FCA* (*Fawcett Collectors of America*) #122** 79
P.C. Hamerlinck presents Marc Swayze, "Freddy Freeman's Christmas"—& a salute to Alex Toth.

About Our Cover: *No single drawing could possibly fully encompass the colorful career of* **Alex Toth**—*but Ye Editor was determined that, because* Alter Ego *is a magazine devoted primarily to super-hero comics and their creators, this issue's cover should spotlight the Golden Age Green Lantern, whom Toth drew incomparably in 1947-48. In the end, at the suggestion of publisher John Morrow, we opted for (most of) a 1981 illustration that depicts GL with other heroes of the fabled Justice Society of America, whose group adventures Alex likewise chronicled under DC/AA editor Sheldon Mayer. For what this stalwart septet are looking at, see p. 37.* [JSA heroes TM & ©2006 DC Comics.]

Above: *For the past several decades, the artist's handwritten letters to correspondents have been laced with art studies of people and things.* A/E *has printed a number of these multitudinous montages over the past few years… so what better way to introduce this special issue dedicated to the life and times of the terrifically talented* **Alex Toth***?*

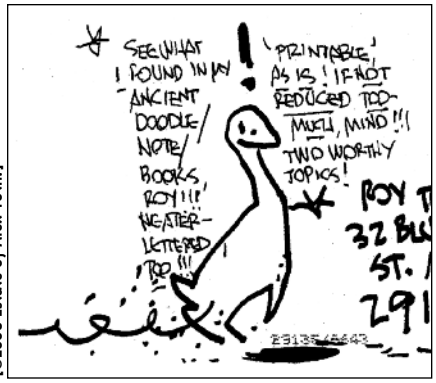
Alter Ego™ is published monthly by TwoMorrows, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614, USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344. Roy Thomas, Editor. John Morrow, Publisher. *Alter Ego* Editorial Offices: 32 Bluebird Trail, St. Matthews, SC 29135, USA. Fax: (803) 826-6501; e-mail: roydann@ntinet.com. ***Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial offices.*** Single issues: $9 ($11.00 outside the US). Twelve-issue subscriptions:$72 US, $132 Canada, $144 elsewhere. Printed in Canada. ISSN: 1932-6890
FIRST PRINTING.

Who Cares? *Toth* Did!

My relationship with Alex Toth was a backward thing, compared to most. It began stormily, but improved. And I'm very thankful for the memory of it.

Since 1947-48, Toth has been one of my favorite comics artists, based primarily on a handful of Golden Age "Green Lantern" and "Justice Society of America" stories—and to a lesser extent on his "Johnny Thunder" in *All-American Western*. Work he himself eventually disowned, and had moved beyond by the 1960s. His later art intrigued me, even if he'd journeyed from romantic lyricism into almost pure graphics. Opening a comic book containing a Toth story, I always knew at once I was in the presence of a true master of story-telling and design. But I don't mind confessing—my heart still belongs to his "Green Lantern."

I've related before the story of our sole in-person encounter: While I was casting about for backup stories for *The Avengers* during that brief time in 1971 when all Marvel comics leaped from 32 to 48 interior pages, Stan Lee informed me that Alex Toth, who lived in L.A., had written him concerning work, and Stan wondered if I had anything I could send him. He added that Toth had said he'd like to be a "creative part" of the process. I quickly typed up what I called "Notes toward a Plot" for a "Black Panther" story of 8 or so pages, a racially-charged episode set in "Rudyarda," a stand-in for *apartheid* South Africa. Therein, I explained the kind of tale I wanted to do, and various potential elements of the plot… and I invited Alex to run with it.



[©2006 Estate of Alex Toth.]

A week later, Stan and I received a handwritten diatribe from Toth that began: "IS THIS YOUR CORPORATE IDEA OF A PLOT?" He then proceeded to lambast the "story" because it rambled, lacked structure, etc.—ignoring the fact that I'd specifically stated that it *wasn't* a full plot. I wrote back that I'd been told he wished to be a "creative part" of the team, not just the artist… but that I'd gladly send him a complete synopsis—if he'd assure me he would follow it. I never heard back from him.

Then, in late 1976 or so, soon after I'd moved to L.A., I attended the first meeting of the Comic Art Professionals Society, assembled by Mark Evanier, Sergio Aragonés, and Don R. Christensen. Among the dozens of pros present, a bear of a man was pointed out to me as Alex Toth. Determined to forge a fresh start, I walked up and introduced myself by name as a longtime admirer of his work. He looked down at me, haughtily though not in an entirely unfriendly manner, and said, "Oh, yes. You and I had that little altercation a couple of years ago." I glossed over that as being in the irrelevant past… we exchanged a few noncommittal sentences… we each moved on… and that, alas, was the first and last time I ever met Alex Toth face to face.

Sometime after I revived *Alter Ego* in the late 1990s, *Comic Book Artist* editor Jon B. Cooke handed over to me some of Toth's illustrated missives, thinking I might utilize them in *A/E*. (Jon had put together the excellent *CBA* #11 devoted to Toth—we've duplicated few of its images in this issue, since it's still available from TwoMorrows.)

Oddly—perhaps because by then Alex and Jon were permanently on the outs—the artist and I exchanged a number of notes during the last few years of his life, with never a hint of tension… at least once he accepted the fact that I'd related in print my version of my one and only "Toth anecdote." I offered to print his own comments on the matter, but he declined, leading me to believe he had no quarrel with my basic account, at least in terms of the raw facts, if not interpretation.

Nor did he ever complain about the art (his own and others') that I printed with his letters and essays. I explained I was doing the best I could to illustrate his points. By and large, his personal remarks to me were scribbled in the margins of my own letters which he sent back to me… and on the envelopes which contained them. Not wishing to use the same "Before I Forget" heading for his column that *CBA* had, I utilized a pair of word balloons in one illustration he sent as a title instead: "Who Cares? *I* Do!" He seemed to enjoy the exposure in *A/E*; he wrote a note on one envelope to "keep those $50s coming in." I tried my best, using his essays and art in most issues.

A year or so ago, Jim Amash (once a friend and familiar of Alex's) and I toyed with the idea of interviewing him for *Alter Ego*. When I asked Toth about the possibility, he wrote back that it would depend on the questions asked. Jim and I were encouraged… but not long afterward I received a postcard from Alex giving a new address—which I instantly suspected of being a managed care facility. He scribbled on the card that this would be "probably my last address." Unfortunately, he was only too prescient. I wrote him back wishing him well, but never received a reply.

Well, in one sense I *did*: in February of this year, I received an envelope stuffed with two handwritten essays, totaling several sheets. Alex had run across them and felt I might be able to use them. The envelope was emblazoned with his trademark duck (Why a duck? you'd have to ask Chico Marx) and a note. I put them with other Toth materials I intended to use—and still do, in a future issue, unless Alex's heirs have other plans for them. (Incidentally, my thanks to the four Toth children—Eric Toth, Damon Toth, Carrie Morash, and Dana Palmer—for their gracious cooperation with this special issue. And check out the official Alex Toth website at: ***www.tothfans.com***.)

While one could argue with many points Alex makes in his missives—nor would he have generally minded that—one must always respect the sincerity and depth of his passion… his desire to see comics be the best they can be. Even if there can be valid disagreements about precisely what that means.

When I was informed Alex had passed away on May 27, the news was not unexpected, but still saddened me. Besides the loss to the comics world, I had enjoyed my latter-day association with him, even if it had been from a distance and with a light and not too personal touch.

Alex Toth will continue to influence comics and even other-media artists in the future, as he has for the past five or six decades… in ways that others will expand upon in the pages that follow.

He was one of the giants.

Bestest,

P.S.: Because of the outpouring of tributes to Alex Toth, we've had to delay both our letters section and Bill Schelly's report on the 1966 Kaler Con till next month.

P.P.S.: Oh, yeah—and Season's Greetings!

Alex Toth: Edge Of Genius

An Overview Of The First Few Years In The Career Of One Of Comics' Greatest Talents

BY GREG THEAKSTON

Greg Theakston is a comics collector, researcher, and historian, and through his company Pure Imagination has published numerous books on comics and comic artists, many of them featuring the work of Alex Toth.

The noble Julius Schwartz was being amused by his favorite pastime—bridge—in the production department, with anybody who knew how to play the card game. During working hours, Schwartz was one of a team of editors who had been producing material for the highly successful National Periodicals (now better known as DC Comics) for going on a decade. Part of comic book royalty, whose only equals—or betters, some would whisper—resided in the kingdom of Dell Publishing. All stern with their subjects—and in some cases, tyrannical.

The company's top-paid artist, Alex Toth, pushed through National's cold double-doors, bundled against the winter winds, portfolio/treasure-chest in tow, eyes scanning for Schwartz. Locking on his target, Toth beelined for the pick-up game, and said, "I'm here to pick up my check."

Noble Schwartz refrained from looking up, contemplated his hand, and answered in an off-hand manner.

"I'll give it to you after lunch."

"Do you have my next 'Johnny Thunder' script?" Alex parried.

"No, your next assignment is a science-fiction story."

"I'm turning in my 'Rex' job, 'Johnny Thunder' is next."

"The science-fiction story is your next job."

Growing discontentment began to boil at the back of Toth's neck. It wasn't the first time he wanted to rebel. More and more, National seemed a claustrophobic kingdom, with unseen walls pressing in, and an evil foreshadowing of continued compromise. Unwilling to have his fate so randomly decided, Alex Toth, arguably the top dog at the company, quit on the spot.

Apocryphal versions of this story have Toth dragging Schwartz to the nearest window and dangling Julie out of it until he promised to immediately produce the check. And while Toth's anger is infamous, the story underlines Alex's frustration far more than it does an actual event.

It didn't matter either way.

Alex had an ace in the hole.

Julie played out the game, went back to his office, and quickly divided Toth's estates among his round-table of creators.

Gunfight At The DC Corral

Editor Julius Schwartz (left center) and artist Alex Toth (right center) slapped leather circa 1952—seconded by two horse- and space-opera heroes in an incident which, according to legend (which seems to be at least largely substantiated by *fact*), ended Toth's first stint at DC. (Left:) Johnny Thunder, in the lead splash from *All-American Western* #101 (Sept. 1948), the second tale of the new Robert Kanigher-written hero. (Right:) The splash penciled by Toth and inked by Dan Barry for *Strange Adventures* #12 (Sept. 1951); thanks to Bob Bailey for the scan. [Schwartz illo ©2006 the Estate of Gil Kane; Toth portrait ©2006 Estate of Alex Toth; other art in montage ©2006 DC Comics; art at top of page ©2006 Estate of Alex Toth.]

Four From The Firmament

"*Caniff's* Terry and the Pirates *and Roy Crane's* Wash Tubbs *(with Captain Easy), Frank Godwin's* Connie*, Noel Sickles'* Scorchy Smith..." These, says Greg Theakston (seen in photo), were the early icons of young Alexander Toth. So here are vintage panels from all four of those newspaper comic strips: *Terry* (1935); *Wash Tubbs* (1937); *Connie* (1929 or '30); *Scorchy* (1935). A Toth tribute to Terry can be found on p. 19. [*Terry* art ©2006 Chicago-Tribune-NY News Syndicate or successors in interest; *Wash Tubbs* art & ©2006 NEA; *Connie* and *Scorchy Smith* art ©2006 the respective copyright holders.]

It was time for a change, anyway.

Change had been the touchstone of Toth's career.

The fall and winter of 1952 found Alex in the middle of the change he'd been working for his entire professional career. Many jazz musicians of the era were working and thinking hard the same way, trying to push their art beyond what had come before. Passionate expression and unique approach in the face of faceless monotony. Toth, who was aware of all modern trends, felt a kinship.

The streamlining introduced at the 1939–40 World's Fair finally began to hit the minimalist wall. The arts were becoming, as industry had become: simplified. Louis Armstrong was old-hat; Charlie Parker ruled the day. Milton Caniff had set the standard in the more high-falutin' world of comic strips, but as yet no one had appeared in the comic book field as a pretender to the throne.

Alex Toth was well on his way to changing that scenario.

Humble Beginnings

The Depression pressed on during Alex's entire New York City childhood. Relentless brick, cement, and steel days and nights were brightened by the movies and the comic strips. A trip to the Loews was a big 10¢ event and didn't come often enough. The strips, on the other hand, lined every city street trashcan, four to an intersection. Discarded thrills and laughs within hand's reach if you weren't too proud. Every day, and in color on Sunday evenings.

Found Art. Literally.

Hot styles abounded, and the guy on the end of the brush was a star to the public. The Golden Age of the Newspaper Strip complemented the Golden Age of Hollywood perfectly. One satisfied the need for visual satisfaction with fleeting movements, the other with delightful static permanence. The young Alex Toth's eyes were quenched looking over the frozen images of Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* and Roy Crane's *Wash Tubbs* (with Captain Easy), Frank Godwin's *Connie*, Noel Sickles' *Scorchy Smith*, and a hundred others. But it was far more than just a pleasurable read; it was study time. Homework without deadlines or grades. Each panel and its contents were mentally scanned and re-scanned, and more and more of the young boy's brain-matter branded with the basics of composition, style, and storytelling.

Full cartoon creations with nuance and the subtlety of the best Hollywood production. Not just characters you knew and liked, but characters you got to know and liked better every day. Alex wondered if he could bring comic characters to life, too.

However, to suggest that comics and movies were Alex's only youthful passion would be misleading. Like every child of the '30s, the young Toth cut his literary chops on the other teething rings: radio; pulps; Big Little Books; the classics. All contributed to the boy's heroic spirit, sense of adventure, and wonder.

Like most kids his age, Alex was an Errol Flynn in the making, if he had anything to say about it.

All of this combined inevitably led to experimentation on works of his own with pencil and paper, and his artistic baby steps were taken during off-hours after school, and on rainy weekends. Failure after failure led to works that failed, but not by as much.

Certain that comics was what he wanted to do for a living, Toth eventually enrolled at the Art Students League and the School of Industrial Arts. While at the latter, he won a competition and was picked to illustrate a digest soft-cover edition of *David Copperfield*, published by the school. To his astonishment, teenaged Toth was in print.

Toth Becomes A *Heroic* Figure

Two of Alex Toth's earliest published works. (Left:) A text illo from *Heroic Comics* #32 (Sept. 1945). (Right:) A splash page from *Heroic* #33 (Nov. 1945). A splash from the first bylined published Toth story, also from *Heroic* #32, can be seen on p. 20 of this issue. Thanks to Tim Barnes. [©2006 the respective copyright holders.]

Fueled by his personal growth and encouragement from his teachers, Alex began to refine his craft to the point where he was almost ready for steady publication. Whether or not he was ready ceased to be an issue at the end of 1944 and in early 1945.

SERFDOM

The Second World War was a boon to comic books and the companies that published them. Millions of Americans looking for heroes found them in the pages of the color comics, and millions of troops looking for relief from the boredom of the quiet times of war also made comics a huge industry. Presses were running at full capacity without the help of the younger men pressed into the service of their country. In fact, the lack of younger men was a problem in all aspects of the business. So much so, that the comics publishers were forced to seek artwork from pre-draft-age teens, Alex Toth included.

Eastern Color, the originator of the comic book, might not have otherwise taken a chance on Alex, but they couldn't be choosy.

"How old are you, kid?"

"Sixteen," Alex replied nervously.

"You're hired."

Thus began his three-year on-the-job- training course in the medium in the pages of their flagship title *Heroic Comics*. While his friends were schlepping groceries or hawking papers, Alex was parked in front of the drawing table, making a fair rate, and getting his name in print.

"That'll impress the babes, and every guy in the neighborhood!"

He was only turning out about eight pages every two months, and this allowed him time to perfect each and every drawing without a pressing deadline: a luxury few professionals ever get to enjoy. Unlike almost any other artist, Alex got to assess his work without pressure, and to re-assess it, and I suppose the pattern was set early on.

The urge for perfection.

Of all the artists I've met, none have been so quick to crucify their own work, and with so much disdain. For that alone, I suppose this makes Toth unique in the history of the comics. So much passion that he would resort to the total destruction of what had come before, only interested in what was to come next. Such a high personal standard is rare, in the 21st century or in any other.

Eastern Color had hired him as a freelancer, though he probably wasn't sure if they liked his stuff. At least he was working steady in the comics industry.

However, sometimes there was no joy in Mudville, as in Alex's ill-fated attempt to get work from Jack Binder, the art director of Fawcett Publishing's comic book line. Best known for its Captain Marvel character, the Fawcett empire constantly nudged up against National for the #2 spot, just after the Valhalla that was Dell. Having dealt with much of the current talent, and knowing what he was talking about, Binder's critique was far from kind, but Alex knew it was honest. Heartbreaking, but honest: the best kind of critique you'll ever get.

In immaculate dissatisfaction, the young Alex tore the contents of his entire portfolio into shreds and started from scratch, incorporating lessons from the recent unpleasantness. Tenderfoot Toth was far happier with the new work.

Changes hot and fast.

By summer of 1947, the change had been remarkable: from crude Caniff wannabe to polished Caniff wannabe, and the All-American comics line (founded by M.C. Gaines, but now owned wholly by National) liked what they saw. A number of their artists were working in the Caniff mold, and Toth would be a welcome addition to their kingdom.

Editor Sheldon Mayer started him on a couple of "Dr. Mid-Nite" stories, then had him spell Irwin Hasen and others on some "Green Lantern" tales in *Green Lantern*, *All-American Comics*, and *Comic Cavalcade*. The total workload during 1947 zoomed to ten pages a month, and the work was still very strong.

The bonus provided by working for DC/AA was the cover assignments denied him at Eastern, and soon he got to do one for the multi-hero *All-Star Comics* (#38, Dec. 1947-Jan. 1948), and another that same month for *All-American* (#92, Dec. '47)! After a decade of viewing the castle from the streets, he was finally through the gates,

doing what he'd always wanted to do, indentured to a magnificent master who could offer many rewards.

Things had changed, and Alex Toth was thrilled.

During 1948, his rate of output doubled to twenty pages a month, and he moved from the minor leagues to the majors with amazing ease. It was another demand to change the way he had done things, and adapt to the new rules. The editors at National understood what working regularly in the professional world was doing to the sprout, and encouraged him with tough love.

He'd finally met the deadly deadline dragon, and, as with the best of all freelances, slain it.

A ROYAL COMMAND

Alex's fortunes changed as National's did, and the prevailing trend in the middle of 1948 was away from super-heroes and into any

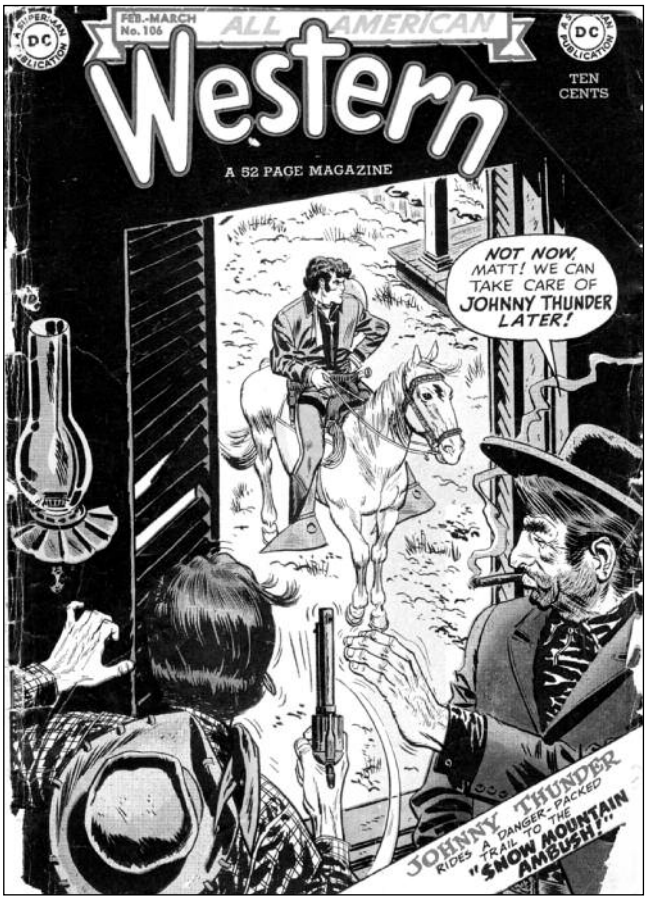
Nitey-Nite And Turn Out The Lantern

AA editor Shelly Mayer started young Alex out drawing "Dr. Mid-Nite" in *All-American Comics* #88 (Aug. 1947)—but soon moved him up to the mag's lead feature, "Green Lantern," as per the splash from *AAC* #92 (Dec. '47). The latter drawing, reversed ("flopped," as they used to say in the trade), became one of the artist's first covers for DC—though he probably didn't get paid extra for it. He was only 19 or 20 at this time. [©2006 DC Comics.]

The (color) drawing at top right was done by Toth in 2003 for collector Joe Moores and his wife Gillian, featuring two JSA heroes the artist had drawn at various times over the years. [Dr. Mid-Nite & Black Canary TM & ©2006 DC Comics.]

They've Got Him Covered

Even when Toth didn't draw the "Johnny Thunder" story inside, new editor Julie Schwartz had him doing covers for *All-American Western*, as witness this one for #106 (Feb.-March 1949). Carmine Infantino penciled the "JT" tale within. [©2006 DC Comics.]



other genre. Companies diversified at an alarming rate, with more changed Third-Class Mailing Permits than you could shake a dime at.

The big trend was toward romance and crime comics: that's where the cash was. Lev Gleason's long-running *Crime Does Not Pay* was selling a hard-to-beat two million copies an issue. Simon and Kirby's instant success *Young Romance* was doing over a million per, and the publishing monarchs smelled cash and opportunity.

"Let's go invade the rich Romance and Crime kingdoms."

Most also took a stab at Western comics, and Toth suddenly found himself stripped of his "Green Lantern" feature in *All-American Comics* and receiving commands to produce "Johnny Thunder" in its replacement *All-American Western* in mid-1948. While it was just a case of musical titles to "the suits," it was a step closer to what Alex really wanted to do and would eventually excel at: human drama.

Though not much less cardboard than the super-hero work, the new projects dealt a bit more with the emotion of the scene rather than the action. People had to sit in a chair as convincingly as they formerly flew through the air. The Western motifs also allowed Alex to *decorate*, rather than simply *present* them. Lots of hats, horses, and architecture to master, and a lucky/logical next step in his career. National was so pleased with the result that Toth worked on the Western genre regularly during the rest of his first tenure there.

Every Dog Has His Day—And That's No Bull!

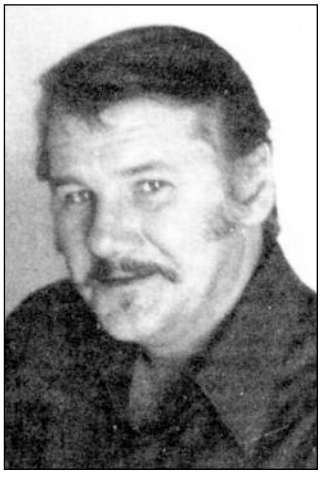
(Left:) The "Roving Ranger" splash from *All-Star Western* #58 (April-May 1951), actually the first issue of the mag that replaced *All-Star Comics*. Inks by Bernard Sachs. Thanks to Bob Cherry.

Since few artists come into comics specializing in drawing animals, it must've been a challenge for young Alex to draw Westerns, Green Lantern's dog Streak, and *The Adventures of Rex the Wonder Dog*. Thanks to Eric Schumacher for the above splash from *Rex* #2 (March-April 1952); inking attributed to Sy Barry, who talks about Toth on pp. 25-28. [©2006 DC Comics.]

"Let The Imagination Of The Audience Do The Rest"

An Interview With Legendary Artist ALEX TOTH on Media Violence

Interview Conducted by Michael Vance



Alex Toth was my first, and you are among the first to know it.

In the early 1940s, Alex Toth had begun spending afternoons away from the High School of Industrial Art in New York City showing his portfolios to comic book editors, art directors, and artists. With Sheldon Mayer's help, he landed page work at Funnies, Inc., and, at age 15, was hired to draw two- and three-page "filler" stories for Famous Funnies. *It was a modest beginning for one of the best-known and most admired comic artists in the history of the industry.*

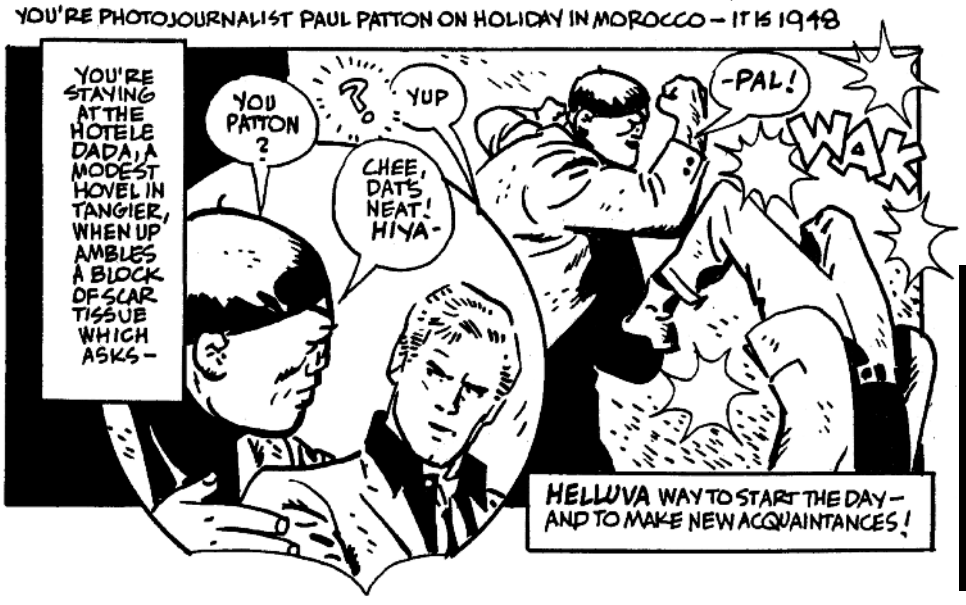
By 1977, when I interviewed him, Alex Toth had worked for almost every major comic publisher over a thirty-year career, branching into advertising art, animation, and motion picture storyboards as his interests and techniques grew. His art was so distinctive that a Toth page needed no signature. I came to interview him at an Oklahoma City comic book convention as much as a student and admirer of his work as I was a journalist on assignment. I worked for a small daily newspaper in Seminole, OK, and I came to argue against censorship, and for the graphic portrayal of anything an artist chose to portray. I went away with another viewpoint and a number of questions that changed my approach to violence in my own work and in storytelling in general.

Alex won the argument hands-down. He won not because his views were logical, and not because I agreed with him on even major points of censorship. He won because he demands high standards of content and quality of himself and of every artist. He won because his art proves that graphic is not always dynamic or dramatic. As is almost always the case when dealing with Toth, I came away the richer for the meeting.

I also came away poorer, and that's the reason you are among the first to know that Toth was the first person I ever interviewed.

I published the interview in a copyrighted fanzine I published called Cryptoc *(an anagram for "The Crypt of Comics") with a circulation of only a few hundred. Then I went about the business of selling the interview to a paying market, and the first well-known comics-related magazine I approached bought the article. But they never paid for* or *published it. After several years of waiting, I resubmitted the article to a second magazine,* Heavy Metal. *They rejected the article because they felt it criticized their editorial stance, even though they are never mentioned in the interview. Toth, who was working with them at the time, never did so again and blamed me for the loss of employment. In no uncertain terms, he refused to give me his blessing to submit the article again. Of course, I, not he, owned the copyright. But because of my respect for his talent, I have held the article back until now. I've submitted it at this time because I feel it deserves to be republished.*

I owe Alex Toth two debts of gratitude. In addition to my learning a different approach to storytelling, he taught me a second lesson that day. Extraordinarily talented people are always the easiest ones to deal with. **—Michael Vance.**



Toth Strikes A Blow For Art

Alex Toth in the 1970s (above)—and the type of "violence" he generally preferred to portray in his art (and to see in others')—the prelude to or aftermath of a blow, rather than the blow itself. From a 1983 "Fox" story drawn for Archie Comics' action imprint, as seen in *Toth Black & White* (1999), edited and published by Manuel Auad, which is sadly (like all Manuel's books done with Toth) out of print. The photo is from the DC-produced fanzine *Amazing World of DC Comics* #5 (1975). [Fox art ©2006 Archie Comics Publications, Inc.]

The Doctor Recommends Exercise

The artist defined action as "the good, clean fight of many years ago." Here's another example of Toth action, from his "Dr. Mid-Nite" story in *All-American Comics* #88 (Aug. 1947). [©2006 DC Comics.]

MICHAEL VANCE: *This is Alex Toth. We're discussing violence as portrayed in media. Mr. Toth is involved in television, in graphic arts, and a little bit with motion pictures. What is your personal definition of violence?*

ALEX TOTH: In the old days of motion pictures, if you had a fight scene, the hero knocked the villain down, and he stayed down, and if he didn't stomp him that was action. Today, you knock a man down, you stomp him, you cut him open, shoot him, whatever, you run him over with a car, and that's violence. And you zoom in tight (with the camera) for a shot of the blood streaming out of his wounds, whatever, or somebody's eye hanging out by a bloody thread. That's violence. But action is the good, clean fight of many years ago.

MV: *Is this clean, bloodless violence of television and older movies also harmful in a different way? This unrealistic portrayal of "painless" shootings, "bloodless" knifings, violence without hurt, may convince children that hitting brother over the head with a skillet has no real consequence.*

TOTH: I've heard that argument. I don't buy it, because I believe the audience's imagination can create more of a horror scene than anything shown up there on the tube. On the big screen or the small. I don't know if it was Hitchcock or some other director who said years ago that … oh, I believe it was Fritz Lang, talking about [his film] *M*, which was with Peter Lorre and had to do with a child molester/killer. It showed a scene where a little girl walked into an alley chasing her rolling ball, and that's where Peter Lorre, the killer, has been lurking. And the ball comes rolling out by itself, afterwards, and the girl does not reappear. Then you know that she's been grabbed by Lorre, the killer. The audience's imagination can do its worst in imagining what that man is doing to that child. It does not have to be shown.

A director named Val Lewton did the same thing with all the things that either he could not or would not show either because of budget or because of the movie code in the '40s with his little low-budget mysteries and horror films. *The Curse of the Cat People* did it. Did you see that? It was the unseen in the night that created the horror. If you remember, there is another terrible scene: I detested the film *Catch-22*. It was one of the worst things I've seen. And one of the things I objected to most was when, up there in the bombardier's nose, or rather, the nose-gunner's area up there, a fellow gunner or crewman is hit, and we have this scene where all of his insides are outside now. It was terrible. And who *needs* that? I mean, how many times do we have to keep hitting that thing on the head that war is horrible? We *know* war is horrible. Who wants bloody war?

MV: *One objection to media violence is that people can be influenced by seeing or reading violence to commit violence. What do you think of this?*

TOTH: Yeah. There are a lot of minds that can be affected by what they see—who like that kind of film. First of all, they seek out those films. They get turned on by it. Whether it's depicting rape, or whether it's depicting killing or a particular kind of torture or brutality. But they're not "running on the road," I think.

MV: *But can someone "normal" be influenced into taking his first step into this sort of violence through reading or seeing it?*

TOTH: It's very possible. But the thing is, these are very negative things to demonstrate to people, and I don't think that much film time or reading time… whether it's a comic strip or it's in a book… should be devoted to making too much of the violent scene, the scene of mayhem. I still think you can cut away from it with the camera at the proper point and let the imagination of the audience do the rest. But at least you have not depicted it clearly on the screen. Many years ago, someone could be shot, or walk into a dark room and you hear a scream after they enter the room. Lord knows what happened. But that excited your imagination. In a negative way, yes, because everyone had his own idea about what happened to that person in the room. Action is the clean fight scene, or the dirty fight… we always expected the dirty fight from the villain. You could expect anything from him and the audience would accept that as long as the hero won. He got up again despite what was done to him, and he won. But I think pandering to the lowest common denominator… and the thing is I don't think that sex and violence should always be mentioned together. They are a separate and distinct thing. Now with violent sex, like rape or whatever, and that area where it's just coupling—like two rutting animals—that's a different story. But sex is a beautiful thing, and it could be depicted, and has been, in film in a beautiful way, in an erotic way, granted, because the whole thing is an erotic sensation. But I don't like violent sex. I don't think these two elements should be constantly coupled together when they're talking about censorship, and they say "sex and violence," "sex and violence."

MV: *How would you answer those who say that media violence is healthy catharsis – emotional release from watching an action? Almost voyeurism. How can violence be cathartic without being graphic?*

TOTH: Well, it used to come from the hero winning in the end. He could be knocked down, given all kinds of trouble, by the villain, throughout the story, whether it was a he or she, hero or heroine, but after taking all their lumps, they finally got up off the floor and they

"Alex Toth Had It *All!*"

JOE KUBERT REMEMBERS HIS COLORFUL CONTEMPORARY

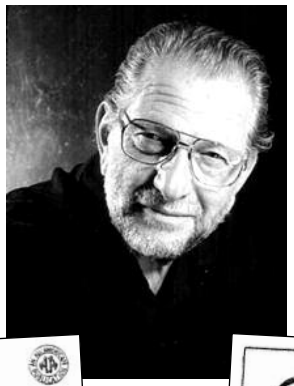
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY JIM AMASH

TRANSCRIBED BY BRIAN K. MORRIS

Although Joe Kubert entered the comic book field as a professional a few years before Alex Toth did, the art of the two young talents was often seen in the 1940s and '50s sharing the same issue in All-Star Comics, *Westerns, and science-fiction titles.*

JOE KUBERT: My relationship with Alex goes back to when he was maybe 16, 17 years old. I had a studio in New York where Carmine Infantino, Alex, and a whole bunch of guys got together to work. Alex was the young guy sitting in the corner. The rest of us were a year or two older, our eyes bugging out over the beautiful stuff he was drawing.

Eventually, I guess we, like most groups, kind-of physically grew apart, but we communicated and I got a bunch of beautifully handwritten cards with great drawings. Little by little, I heard less and less from him until, despite the fact that I tried a number of times to restore the communication, we lost touch. Within the last couple of months of his life, he *did* communicate with Irwin Hasen, who kept me informed on Alex's situation.



You know, I've always liked the guy and *admired* him incredibly because of the work he did. I felt sorry for him, because here was a guy everybody wanted to work with, but for whatever reason, he just kind-of tied himself up. I asked Irwin, "How's everything going?" He'd say, "Well, Alex hadn't been feeling well," and so on. So, as a last stab, so to speak, I wrote Alex a letter, asking how he was feeling and that it'd be nice to hear back. He didn't respond.

JIM AMASH: *You weren't the only one that happened to. Ah, who can explain it? Let's go back to when you guys were young. What were your initial impressions of the young Alex Toth?*

KUBERT: Alex was this tall, light-blond-haired, skinny, good-looking guy, maybe a year and a half younger than myself, but who was a wiz who drew like crazy. I don't remember the details of why he wound up working up at this little studio we had put together at Brad Smith's. We'd look over this guy's shoulder, he never said a word, [*mutual laughter*] never talked to anybody, but he'd just sit there and you'd see that brush and pen going, and watch a picture grow in front of your eyes. The guy was just terrific. I think I met him at All-American Comics when Shelly Mayer was the editor, and all of us—me and Carmine and a bunch of other guys—kind-of gravitated towards one another. The guy who drew us together,

Joe Kubert in the 1990s—flanked by art he and Alex Toth were doing when Toth was "16, 17 years old":

(Left:) The splash page from Joe's third "Hawkman" story, from *Flash Comics* #63 (March 1945). His first one saw print in the 1944 *Big All-American Comic Book*, now on view in the hardcover *DC Comics Rarities, Vol. 1*... his second in *Flash* #62, as seen in *A/E* #44. Joe, born in 1926, was around 18 at this time. Thanks to Al Dellinges for the photocopy. [©2006 DC Comics.]

(Right:) Alex Toth's first definite credit is for Eastern Color's "One Of Our Heroes Is... 'Missing!'" in *Heroic Comics* #32 (Sept. 1945), which is signed "A. Toth." Thanks to Tim Barnes. [©2006 the respective copyright holders.]

"Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made On"

The first and last (5th) pages of the "Danny Dreams" story from *Tor*, Vol. 1, #3 (May 1954)—actually the 4th issue—as drawn by Toth for St. John Publishing Corporation. Like editors/packagers Joe Kubert and Norman Maurer, Toth depicted himself narrating the yarn. In each previous issue, the 20th-century boy had dreamed he was in a prehistoric world...only this time, he didn't wake up at the end! [©2006 Joe Kubert.]

really, was Shelly. We were all working for him.

JA: *Alex considered Shelly one of his most important mentors.*

KUBERT: Our relationship with Shelly affected us because it hit us when we were so young. We were deeply into the process of trying to learn what this business was about. When I started working with Shelly, I was still a high school student. Alex came in a little later. Those influences at that young and tender age had a much more impressive effect on us than things, perhaps, that came later. Alex admired anybody and everybody who had the kind of talent that he felt that person should have.

Alex stayed at the studio for just a couple of months or so. The funny part of it is that the only socializing we did was when we all came together in the studio to do our own work.

JA: *I have two versions of how Alex was seen at this age. A couple of people said he was very nice, very friendly, very quiet; and then there's the other side, that he was grumpy and could be difficult.*

KUBERT: I never saw that side of him, and I don't think there *was* that side of him. Very frankly, I don't. He was... [*sighs*] and this is something that I'd learned later from other people who knew him a lot better than I: he had a problem, family-wise, and I'm really not sure of what the problem was. There was some kind of a problem with his mother, whom I may have met once or twice. I think his father was no longer available, but I'm really not sure.

JA: *How complete was Alex's pencil work?*

KUBERT: When he was doing "Johnny Thunder," his pencils were pretty tight. But what astounded me was they did not contain blacks. He did all his pencils linearly, and put the blacks in when he inked. That was astounding to us. [*laughs*]

JA: *So he worked from light to dark.*

KUBERT: Absolutely. I think that's the proper way to do it. It's a lot easier to make a lighter line dark than it is to make a darker line light. In his mind, he knew precisely where those blacks were going to go once he picked up his brush and inked. His pencils were very clean; they weren't smudged—he kept his paper real clean. And I say that because there were a lot of guys, you'd know what they had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, just by looking at the paper. [*mutual laughter*]

JA: *Did you ever see Alex use much reference?*

KUBERT: He must have, but I never saw him do it.

JA: *His work evolved over the years, as you know. But he worked for you. When you were at St. John, he did "Danny's Dreams" [in the* Tor *title].*

KUBERT: Yeah, that shocked me. The originals that I received from him were not full-size. They were closer to print-size, which really surprised me because I had not seen any artist work that small before. I've got to tell you that I was disappointed when I got the material. I'm sure Alex was probably working on other stuff and really didn't put in the time that *I* felt he should have done. I don't think it was his best work.

JA: *I believe he had quit working for DC then. Did you call him up and ask him to work for you?*

KUBERT: I would imagine that's the way it worked, but I really don't recall. I'm sure that I must have asked him to do the job, but I don't recall the exact situation.

JA: *Alex told me that Sol Harrison used to criticize his work a lot. He'd say things like, "It's very nice, Alex, but you don't know what to leave out."* [mutual laughter] *That made him strive for economy.*

KUBERT: I doubt that sort of suggestion would have pushed Alex to do anything, because Alex always struck me as the kind of a guy that, if you pushed him hard enough, he would go in exactly the opposite direction. [*Jim laughs*] Unless he agreed with it.

JA: *Let's flash forward to when he worked for you while you were an editor at DC Comics in the '70s. Again, did he come to you, looking for work, or did you call him?*

KUBERT: I don't remember, but I imagine it was because I called him.

JA: *Was there any problem about the fact that you were, at one point, Alex's peer, and now you're his boss?*

"This Guy Was A Driven Artist"

SY BARRY TALKS ABOUT—WHAT *ELSE* THIS ISSUE?—ALEX TOTH

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY JIM AMASH

TRANSCRIBED BY BRIAN K. MORRIS

Sy Barry, who was interviewed in depth in A/E *#37, drew for DC in the 1950s, and in the 1960s became the artist of the long-running newspaper strip* The Phantom.

JIM AMASH: *What was your initial impression upon seeing Alex's pencils?*

SY BARRY: I was extremely impressed. I marveled at the clarity and the marvelous placement of blacks that Alex had a skill for. He had an acute eye for design and composition, and I just was thrown for a loop every time I looked at his pencils. They were glorious pencils to ink. His pencil work was very clean and tight. I probably could have inked his roughs, because I had been in the business for a while, and some pencilers' work was just roughs; I had to reinterpret them and give them the completed blacks and the finished drawing. So, having learned how to do that with other artists, it would have been easy, and a joy, inking Toth's layouts, just his roughs.

JA: *Did he shade in his black areas or did he just put an "X"?*

BARRY: Oh, no. He shaded them in. As a matter of fact, what I would do is, I would take a kneaded eraser and knead down the page, erase down the page very lightly so I'd be picking up most of the graphite, and ink directly over his pencils. The ink wouldn't take too well over the graphite, so you had to lighten them in order to put the blacks in comfortably.

JA: *Did he pencil with a heavy lead? Or dig into the paper?*

BARRY: I would say he used an HB. No, he didn't dig into the paper. That's another thing that impressed me; it's almost as though his mind's eye had seen that picture before he laid a single line down. I never saw him pencil, but I could just visualize the way he sat down at a page, ruled out the panels, and then saw these compositions in his mind's eye, and just put them down so cleanly and with such sureness. It was incredible to see the finished product.

JA: *Did you read the story first or did you just start inking?*

BARRY: I read it, yes. I loved to see how he interpreted a story, and I had the script in front of me, as well. Usually, the inker needs the script, just to get an idea what the writer was writing about, and what was in the captions, and what was behind the scenes in the script. I read the dialogue and the captions in the lettered artwork itself and put it all together.

JA: *Would Alex deviate from the script?*

BARRY: Yes, many times, with a great deal of anxiety on the editor's part. [*Jim laughs*] And many times, he had a good sense of story. Alex was a very bright guy, very well-informed and well-educated. He was a very pleasant guy to talk to, and we had a few somewhat intellectual conversations at lunch. On one occasion, Alex, Joe Giella, and I had lunch together. Alex was having another one of his little fits in the office, and we kind-of got him out of there and took him to lunch.

The Phantom Umpires

Two artists who kept close watch on *The Phantom*:

(Center & top right:) Sy Barry poses with his Phantom ring around the time of the 1996 film about the early costumed hero—with panels from his Sunday *Phantom* for March 24, 1968. [Phantom art ©2006 King Features Syndicate.]

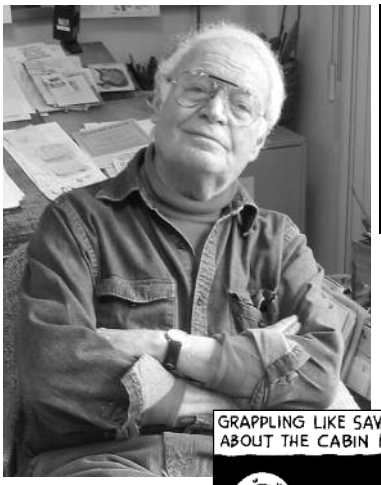
(Above:) Alex Toth's own interpretation of The Ghost Who Walks, done for a fan or friend in 1974. Thanks to Al Dellinges. [Phantom TM & ©2006 King Features Syndicate.]

"Alex Was Into *Everything*"

LEW SAYRE SCHWARTZ HAS *HIS* SAY ON TOTH

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY JIM AMASH TRANSCRIBED BY BRIAN K. MORRIS

Although he also worked in comic strips, commercial art, and other fields over his long career, Lew Sayre Schwartz, who was interviewed in A/E *#51, is particularly remembered by comic book fans as the principal ghost for Bob Kane on "Batman" from 1947-53.*

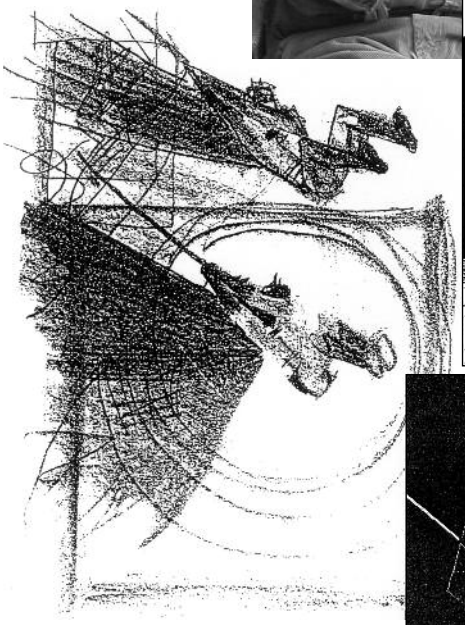


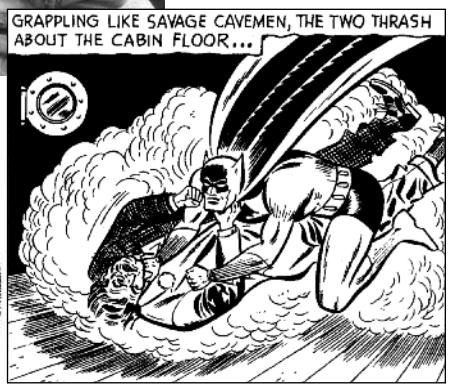
Dark And Stormy Knights

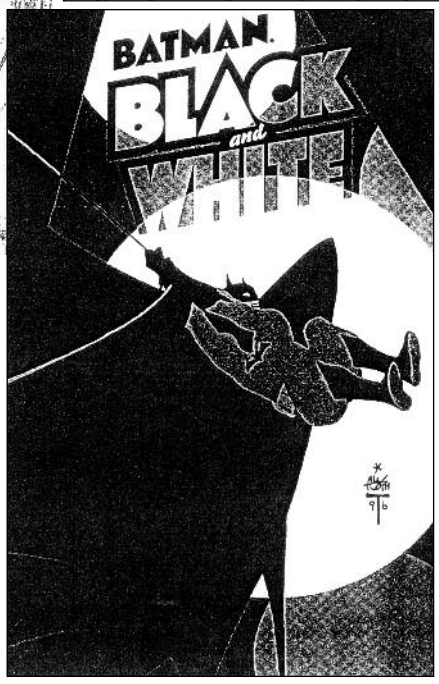
Lew Sayre Schwartz and a panel (right center) from "The New Crimes of Two-Face!" in *Batman* #68 (Dec. 1950-Jan. 1951); inks by Charles Paris—and it's said Bob Kane worked on the Batman and Robin figures. Also seen are Alex Toth's 1996 cover for the hardcover Batman Black & White, plus two initial pencil sketches therefrom... as printed in Auad Publishing's Toth Black & White. [©2006 DC Comics.]

JIM AMASH: *How did you first get in touch with Alex?*

LEW SAYRE SCHWARTZ: Alex, out of the blue, mailed me a copy of one of the *Batman* reprint books, which he beautifully inscribed to me—and I must say it was high-echelon flattery—as an "esteemed colleague" in terms of doing "Batman." It was a very sweet and very nice surprising gesture. I think Alex may have become aware of me because I was, at that point in my life, sending an occasional letter to a newsletter about Milton Caniff called *Caniffites*. I was well aware of Alex's work. I had been writing a series of letters to a couple of guys who wrongly assailed Noel Sickles as never having made any contribution to *Terry and the Pirates*. Of course, that was of great interest to Alex because Sickles was one of his heroes.







And so I garnered, unbeknownst to me, a certain level of favor with Alex. I got in touch with him and we started a telephone relationship which lasted about six years. In between, I had produced a bunch of sort-of art deco postcards, so I would get Alex's postcards covered with art and I would send one of mine back to him that way. We had a lot of fun with that.

Later on, I sent him a copy of the Caniff video that I had put together, and he was so delighted with it that he asked me to make some prints for his friends, of which you were one. And at that particular point, my equipment had broken down. I lived then on Cape Cod, which meant that this very complex recording setup that I had needed some attention from Boston, so it took me two or three months before I could get around to doing it. And Alex went ballistic because he didn't get them in sufficient time and thought I was—I don't know. Anyway, it strained our relationship, which saddened me a great deal because I valued him.

But it never interfered with my admiration for him. Toth carried the comic book business beyond its own innovation in many, many ways. He dipped into not just style, but visual happenings, so that every page he drew was a delight and innovative in design. He fiddled everywhere that he could reach. And there were very few guys like that, you know.

We had long conversations; we used to talk to each other all the time and I loved it. One of the things that always inspired me, because I'm not too sure I could do it: when I would talk with Caniff, we could talk for an hour or more on the phone and Milt would be working. [*laughs*] It never interrupted the flow of his work, and I had the feeling Alex was that way. I never asked him, but I'm sure he was working away while we talked.

JA: *Anything in your phone conversations that you think the readers might be interested in hearing about?*

SCHWARTZ: He had a continuing disappointment in the business, artistically. He was a very generous guy. Whenever he would talk about the comics, or acknowledge certain people, he was very good about naming names, [*chuckles*] and it was of prime interest to me that he was always willing to salute his colleagues.

"Photographic Memory Plus"

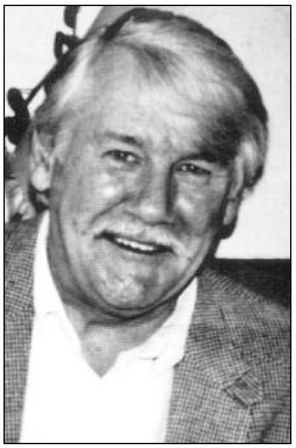
JACK MENDELSOHN Reminisces About ALEX TOTH

Interview Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

Jack Mendelsohn, longtime cartoonist for Dell, Quality, Ziff-Davis, Archie, and DC, was also the writer/artist of the Jackie's Diary *newspaper comic strip. He wrote such cartoons as* The Beatles *and the* Yellow Submarine *movie, and many TV shows, including* Carter Country *and animated series.*

JACK MENDELSOHN: The first time I met Alex was in New York around 1948, '49. Freelance cartoonists always tried to find some cheap office space and split it between them. Alex was briefly one of the transients in this group, which kept changing personnel. You know, you take over the guy's rent, and just move your drawing board in, and start working. At one time or another, Howard Post and Joe Kubert were there. I remember Frank Frazetta as being part of the crowd that would move in and out, always for brief periods of time. Maybe a guy would last a month or two months. It was where photographer Brad Smith had his studio. Brad would get these gorgeous women up there to pose nude for him. In those days, it was very shocking. This predated *Playboy* or anything else, and he would show us all these pictures, and we'd get all excited about seeing them. Yeah, Brad Smith was a character.



JIM AMASH: *What was the young Alex Toth like?*

MENDELSOHN: Alex was a grumpy old man, even when he was 19 years old. [Jim chuckles] I think he kind-of reveled in being one. I think he played to it. I'm not a psychiatrist, but I think he enjoyed being disgruntled and complaining, and being very, very negative about everything, the world in general and how the world was treating him.

JA: *Any examples come to mind?*

MENDELSOHN: Well, not in those days, because I kind-of gave him his space. It was like living with a grizzly bear; I didn't want to cross him because he was very snappish. I'll give you a more recent example from the early 1990s. When I commissioned him to do the artwork for *Little Orphan Annie*, I didn't want to go to his smoke-filled house in Hollywood. He smoked five packs a day. He had such an enormous collection of books, which were stacked floor-to-ceiling, and he wouldn't let any cleaning ladies in because he was afraid they'd move something, so everything had a half-inch layer of dust on it.

***All-American Comics* Goes To the Dogs—And To The Horses**

Jack Mendelsohn (above) met Alex Toth (top) "around 1948, '49," perhaps about the time the latter drew these two covers for *All-American Comics* #99 & #100 (July & August 1948)—the final Green Lantern cover for what had been the All-American group's flagship title, and the debut of cowboy Johnny Thunder. With #103, the comic would be rechristened *All-American Western*. The splash of the #99 story can be seen on p. 28. [©2006 DC Comics.] Photo of Toth, taken at the 1985 AcmeCon, was snapped by Teresa R. Davidson, and is courtesy of her and Jim Amash; photo of Jack M. courtesy of the artist and his wife Carole.

"He Was A True Genius In His Field"

Artist SPARKY MOORE Relates His Own Close Encounters With TOTH

Interview Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

*Sparky Moore drew tons of comics pages for Dell, Gold Key, and Disney. He also drew model sheets and layouts for many Hanna-Barbera (*Jonny Quest, Space Ghost, *etc.) and Grantray-Lawrence (*Captain America, Spider-Man*) cartoons.*

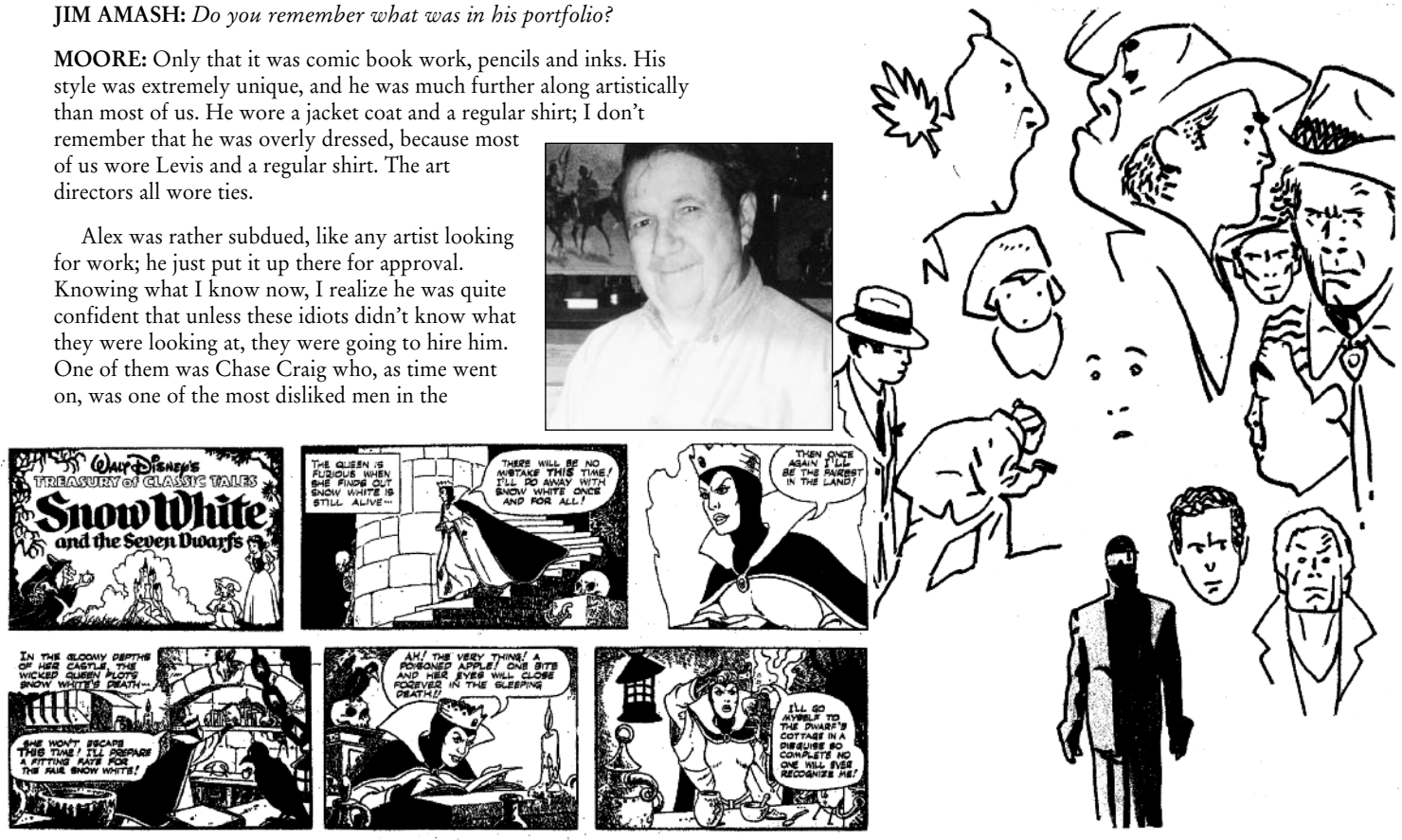
SPARKY MOORE: I first met Alex the first time he showed his work at Western Publishing (also known as Whitman) in Beverly Hills, around 1954. I was there the day Alex walked in with his samples. Don MacLaughlin was there, Chase Craig, myself, and maybe one or two other people. Everybody was totally impressed. He was taken on immediately, and went on to bigger and better things.

JIM AMASH: *Do you remember what was in his portfolio?*

MOORE: Only that it was comic book work, pencils and inks. His style was extremely unique, and he was much further along artistically than most of us. He wore a jacket coat and a regular shirt; I don't remember that he was overly dressed, because most of us wore Levis and a regular shirt. The art directors all wore ties.

Alex was rather subdued, like any artist looking for work; he just put it up there for approval. Knowing what I know now, I realize he was quite confident that unless these idiots didn't know what they were looking at, they were going to hire him. One of them was Chase Craig who, as time went on, was one of the most disliked men in the business. He was the reason Toth left Western Publishing. Chase got his position by simply outliving everybody else. He didn't get it by talent. Everybody that'd had the job either quit or left. Chuck McKimson was an art director for a while along with Chase. Chase would come in and oversee everything simply because nobody told him not to. Tallender (I can't remember his first name) was the head of the company. He was involved in the last blowup with Alex, who usually dealt with Chase.

Alex and I also worked for Don MacLaughlin, an art director who put together a bunch of little sports booklets with illustrations; he didn't do any comics. Alex couldn't do them all, so I did some. That



Snow White & The "10 Pages of Doodles"

Sparky Moore, flanked by his own art from the 1983 Sunday newspaper strip *Walt Disney's Treasury of Classic Tales*—and by one of "10 pages of these 'doodles' [Alex Toth enclosed] in one of his letters. They were torn off a scratch pad." Thanks to Sparky Moore. [Disney art ©2006 Disney Enterprises, Inc.; Toth art ©2006 Estate of Alex Toth.]

1941 And All That

Why The Graphic Novel Version Of Stephen Spielberg's 1979 Film Was *Not* Drawn By ALEX TOTH

BY JOHN WORKMAN

In the 1970s John Workman served for two years in DC Comics' production department before beginning a seven-year stint as the art director of Heavy Metal *magazine. Since then, he has become known as an individualistic letterer for dozens of different comic book titles, and has also worked as editor, writer, designer, penciler, inker, and colorist for various comics features.*

One of the greatest things that can happen to any human being is for that person to discover that he's been wrong. It's a liberating experience to find that a belief that one has held for minutes or for years has been incorrect. Acknowledging the error and setting aside the never-true information is a big part of our ability to learn. In the late 1960s, I learned that I had been incredibly wrong about the work of Alex Toth.

When Jim Warren began publication of the godawful-titled magazines *Creepy* and *Eerie* in 1965, I was delighted. It was as if the glorious EC Comics of the previous decade (of which I possessed but a few) had returned in a format that allowed the beautifully-rendered art of Frank Frazetta, Al Williamson, Roy Krenkel, Reed Crandall, George Evans, Wally Wood, Angelo Torres, Joe Orlando, and Gray Morrow to be seen in a way that typical letterpress color comics printed on pulp paper could not match. I was, however, perturbed by the one lesser-quality artist that Warren seemed determined to use … Alex Toth. He didn't seem to belong among the greats who were the backbone of the *Creepy/Eerie* art staff. And so I reluctantly read the Toth-illustrated stories and found that, although I liked those short tales, I'd have been happier if they'd been drawn by Wally Wood.

Those Wonderful Years 1941 & 1942

John Workman surrounded by two artistic images: (left) the printed cover of the *1941* graphic novel, as done by Stephen Bissette & Rick Veitch—and (right) a 1987 illo by Alex Toth of a World War II aerial dogfight, done as an homage to Milton Caniff's work in the comic strip *Terry and the Pirates*, as printed in the Manuel Auad publication *Toth Black & White*.[1941 cover ©2006 Universal Studios & Columbia Pictures or their successors in interest; Toth art ©2006 Estate of Alex Toth.]

"A.T.T.A. Boy Productions, Inc."

ALEX TOTH At DC & Marvel In The 1980s

BY TERRY AUSTIN

Terry Austin is a noted comic book inker, best remembered for his inking of Marshall Rogers' "Batman" and John Byrne's "X-Men." And he's still at it!

"Simply Put, I *Hated* [Toth's Art]!!!"

I knew Alex Toth for almost exactly ten years, the ten years that comprised the decade of the 1980s. In that time, we became close friends, colleagues, collaborators, and maybe even crusaders. It was a benign relationship, unsullied by the dramatic bursts of temper that characterized his association with some others of his friends. And, in the end, I believe that we stopped communicating not as a result of any animus or ire, but simply because we ran out of things to say to one another....

My first real memory of encountering Alex through his work was his decidedly different take on The Atom and The Flash in the pages of *The Brave and the Bold* # 53. To a kid raised on the squeaky clean graphics of DC super-heroics, this gloomy burlesque arrived like an unforeseen blow from a sledgehammer! These accustomed icons of my youth now inhabited a bizarre world of dramatic light and shadow—the newly strange angularity of their once-familiar forms was actually affected by the light sources within the panels, sometimes reducing them to stark silhouettes! The Flash didn't just run, he took mighty, straining strides; the Atom didn't just gesture, he swept his arms wide in a half-bow like Errol Flynn in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. In short, these four-color symbols of niceness had become more real than I had ever seen them before.

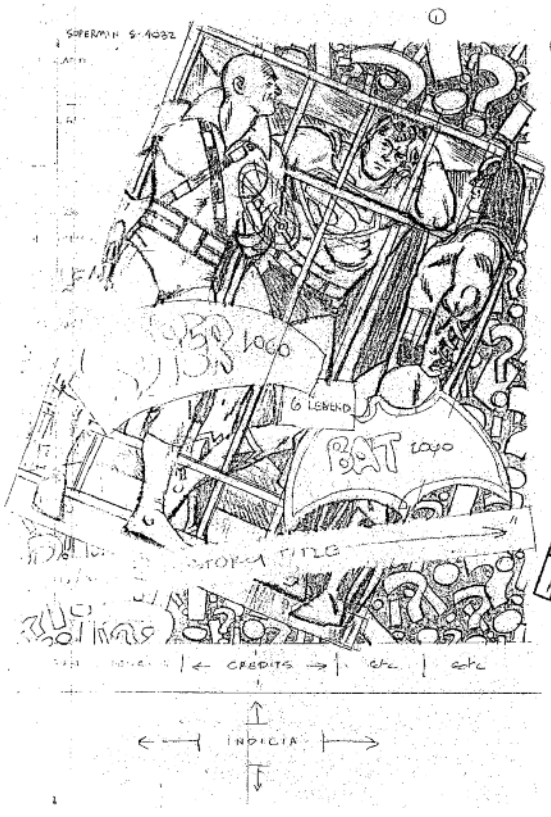
Simply put, I *hated* it!!!

A.T.T.A. Boy!

(Above:) One of two photos the camera-shy Terry Austin took of Alex Toth at the 1980 Houston comicon where they met. Alex is signing for Terry the original art to the "Super Margret" cover for a 1960s issue of *Clothes* magazine, which was printed in the Toth special in *Comic Book Artist* #11 (Jan. 2001), still available from TwoMorrows.

(Below left:) Toth's pencils for the splash page from *Superman Annual* #9 (1983). Thanks to David "Hambone" Hamilton.

(Below right:) The splash lettered and inked. Repro'd from a photocopy of the original art, courtesy of Terry Austin. [Splash art ©2006 DC Comics.]



Still, it was the kind of repulsion that held an undercurrent of fascination. I kept returning to that issue long after *Brave and Bold* had reverted to its customary artistic safe haven for the eyes of a 12-year-old. And, in a few years, when Alex produced dazzling works, out of his own unique insight and imagination, at Warren Publications and in DC's mystery and war titles, I was more than ready to accompany him on those artistic thrill rides, and inspired to seek out his earlier work at Dell, Standard, and elsewhere.

Raising Kane

I met Alex in the summer of 1980 at a three-day comic book

TOTHtimonials

Peers And Friends And Admirers Talk About— Even *To*—The Late Great Artist

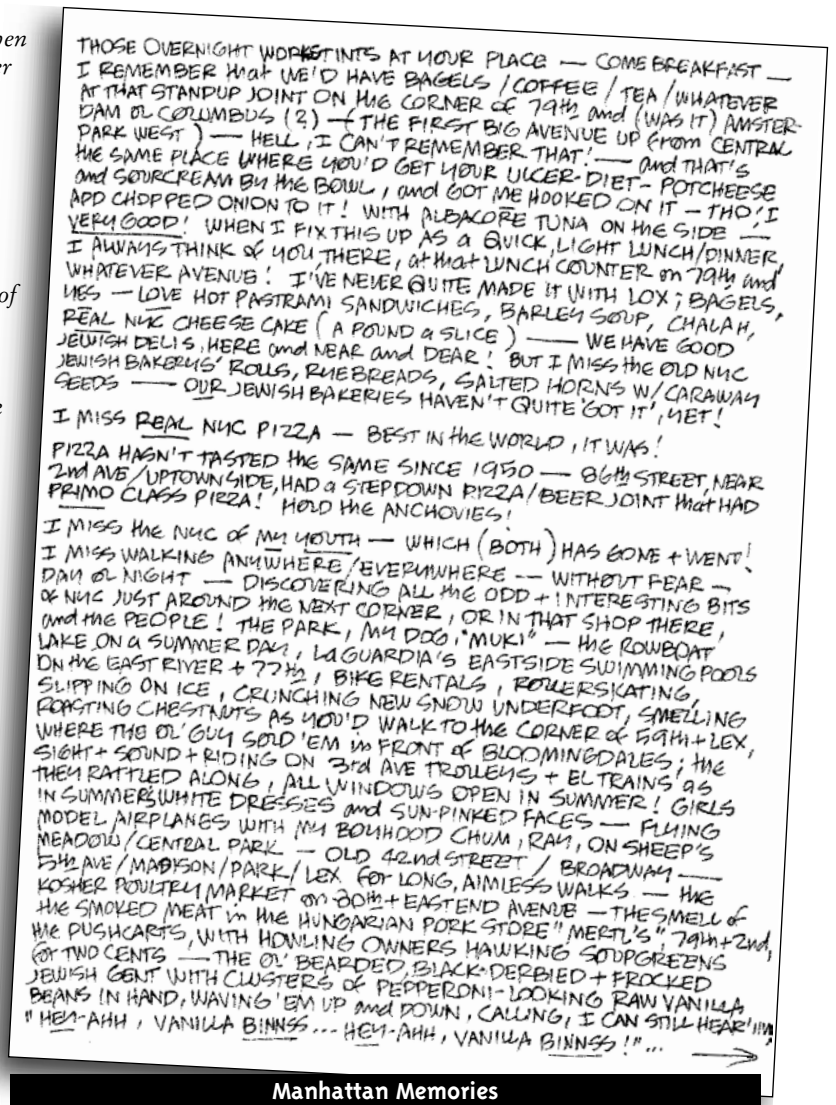
Alex Toth was respected by his fans, his peers, his friends—even, for the most part, by those he might have considered his enemies (although, in the course of preparing this issue, I never ran across anyone who would have placed himself on that list, whatever disputes they might have had with the artist personally or professionally). A number of pros and collectors have expressed their feelings about Toth to me over the past few months. This section is devoted to those letters and e-mails, though it is far from complete. It begins with a longer reminiscence from one who was a contemporary and longtime friend of Toth's—a man whose work Alex consistently said he admired and was influenced by when he came into the business in the mid-1940s—and ends with a letter to Alex Toth that, in a sense, speaks for us all. **—Roy.**

Irwin Hasen

[*Irwin Hasen became a professional comic book artist in the early 1940s, drawing "Green Lantern," and a major "Justice Society" artist as well by 1947. In 1953 he became the first and only artist of the long-running* Dondi *newspaper comic strip—and he and Toth were always friends, albeit in later years only from a distance, because Irwin prefers to use the phone, while Toth was a letter-writer. Recently, with Dan Makara, Irwin published a small book of notes he received over the years from Alex Toth. Below is his introduction to the book; it is ©2006 Irwin Hasen.*]

Alex Toth and I met at DC Comics in 1946. We were kids, all of us. Even Sheldon Mayer, our editor, was a kid. Shelly would, without provocation, leap atop his desk, brandishing his T-Square, and shout "*En Garde!*"

The youngest of us was Alex Toth. A like-minded fan of Roy Crane and Noel Sickles, I'm proud to say that Shelly Mayer claimed to have hired him, based on Alex's claim of being a fan of my own simple style of cartooning! Go figure….


THOSE OVERNIGHT WORKETINTS AT YOUR PLACE — COME BREAKFAST — I REMEMBER WHAT WE'D HAVE BAGELS / COFFEE / TEA / WHATEVER AT THAT STANDUP JOINT ON THE CORNER OF 79th and (WAS IT) AMSTERDAM OR COLUMBUS (?) — THE FIRST BIG AVENUE UP FROM CENTRAL PARK WEST) — HELL, I CAN'T REMEMBER THAT! — AND THAT'S THE SAME PLACE WHERE YOU'D GET YOUR ULCER-DIET - POTCHEESE AND SOURCREAM BY THE BOWL, AND GOT ME HOOKED ON IT — THO, I ADD CHOPPED ONION TO IT! WITH ALBACORE TUNA ON THE SIDE — VERY GOOD! WHEN I FIX THIS UP AS A QUICK, LIGHT LUNCH/DINNER, I ALWAYS THINK OF YOU THERE, at that LUNCH COUNTER on 79th and WHATEVER AVENUE! I'VE NEVER QUITE MADE IT WITH LOX; BAGELS, ETC — LOVE HOT PASTRAMI SANDWICHES, BARLEY SOUP, CHALAH, REAL NYC CHEESE CAKE (A POUND a SLICE) — WE HAVE GOOD JEWISH DELIS, HERE and NEAR and DEAR! BUT I MISS THE OLD NYC JEWISH BAKERIES' ROLLS, RYEBREADS, SALTED HORNS W/ CARAWAY SEEDS — OUR JEWISH BAKERIES HAVEN'T QUITE 'GOT IT', YET!

I MISS REAL NYC PIZZA — BEST IN THE WORLD, IT WAS! PIZZA HASN'T TASTED THE SAME SINCE 1950 — 86th STREET, NEAR 2nd AVE / UPTOWN SIDE, HAD a STEPDOWN PIZZA / BEER JOINT that HAD PRIMO CLASS PIZZA! HOLD THE ANCHOVIES!

I MISS THE NYC OF MY YOUTH — WHICH (BOTH) HAS GONE + WENT! I MISS WALKING ANYWHERE / EVERYWHERE -- WITHOUT FEAR — DAY OR NIGHT — DISCOVERING ALL THE ODD + INTERESTING BITS OF NYC JUST AROUND THE NEXT CORNER, OR IN THAT SHOP THERE, and the PEOPLE! THE PARK, MY DOG, "MUKI" — THE ROWBOAT LAKE ON a SUMMER DAY, LAGUARDIA'S EASTSIDE SWIMMING POOLS ON THE EAST RIVER + 77th, BIKE RENTALS, ROLLERSKATING, SLIPPING ON ICE, CRUNCHING NEW SNOW UNDERFOOT, SMELLING ROASTING CHESTNUTS AS YOU'D WALK TO THE CORNER of 59th + LEX, WHERE THE OL' GUY SOLD 'EM in FRONT of BLOOMINGDALES; THE SIGHT + SOUND + RIDING ON 3rd AVE TROLLEYS + EL TRAINS as THEY RATTLED ALONG, ALL WINDOWS OPEN IN SUMMER! GIRLS IN SUMMER'S WHITE DRESSES and SUN-PINKED FACES — FLYING MODEL AIRPLANES WITH MY BOYHOOD CHUM, RAM, ON SHEEP'S MEADOW / CENTRAL PARK — OLD 42nd STREET / BROADWAY — 5th AVE / MADISON / PARK / LEX FOR LONG, AIMLESS WALKS — THE KOSHER POULTRY MARKET on 20th + EASTEND AVENUE — THE SMELL of THE SMOKED MEAT in THE HUNGARIAN PORK STORE "MERTL'S" 79th + 2nd, THE PUSHCARTS, WITH HOWLING OWNERS HAWKING SOUPGREENS FOR TWO CENTS — THE OL' BEARDED, BLACK-DERBIED + FROCKED JEWISH GENT WITH CLUSTERS of PEPPERONI-LOOKING RAW VANILLA BEANS IN HAND, WAVING 'EM UP and DOWN, CALLING, I CAN STILL HEAR IT!! "HEY-AHH, VANILLA BINNS... HEY-AHH, VANILLA BINNS!"...

Manhattan Memories

The first page of Toth's nostalgic notes to Irwin Hasen about the good ol' days in New York—juxtaposed with Green Lantern going into action in an opera house in the distinctly similar Gotham City in *Comic Cavalcade* #27 (June-July 1948). The notes were forwarded by Irwin's good buddy Dan Makara, who also informed us of a humorous incident from a while back. It seems Irwin lost his wallet while attending a Heroes Con in Charlotte, NC, and "had trouble at the airport without his ID. Someone let him borrow Jerry Bails' book that had a picture & bio of Irwin. They let him on, no problem! He got a kick out of that!" [Toth material ©2006 Estate of Alex Toth; GL art ©2006 DC Comics.]

A Colorful Christmas 2006—In Glorious Black-&-White

Another Year's Worth of Holiday Hellos Sent By Comics Pros & Fans

INTRO-HO-HO-HO yet again! For a fourth year in a row, we proudly present some season's greetings we've received (in one way or another), courtesy of various A/E *readers and the creators themselves. Of course, the card is often from the spouse as much as from the artist…!*

Creig Flessel

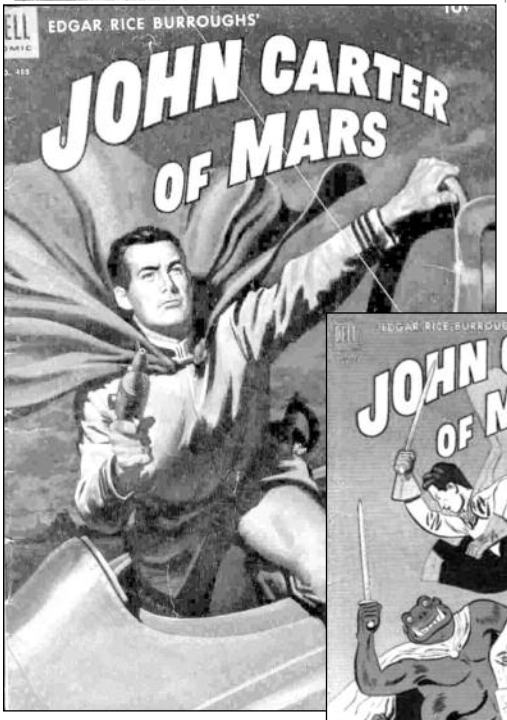
Creig Flessel, late-1930s DC cover artist, the second illustrator of the "Sandman" feature in *Adventure Comics*, and the co-creator of "The Shining Knight," sent this pic of himself and the missus to collector Craig Delich in 1997. Do yourself a favor and glom onto the great Sandman illos by CF in *The All-Star Companion, Vol. 2*, just out! [©2006 Creig Flessel.]

Mart Nodell

The original artist creator of the Golden Age Green Lantern and his wife Carrie sent this drawing of his co-creation (done with scripter Bill Finger) to Craig Delich a few years back. The fabulous Carrie passed away a couple of years ago, but her memory lives on in the minds of all who met her. [Green Lantern TM & ©2006 DC Comics.]

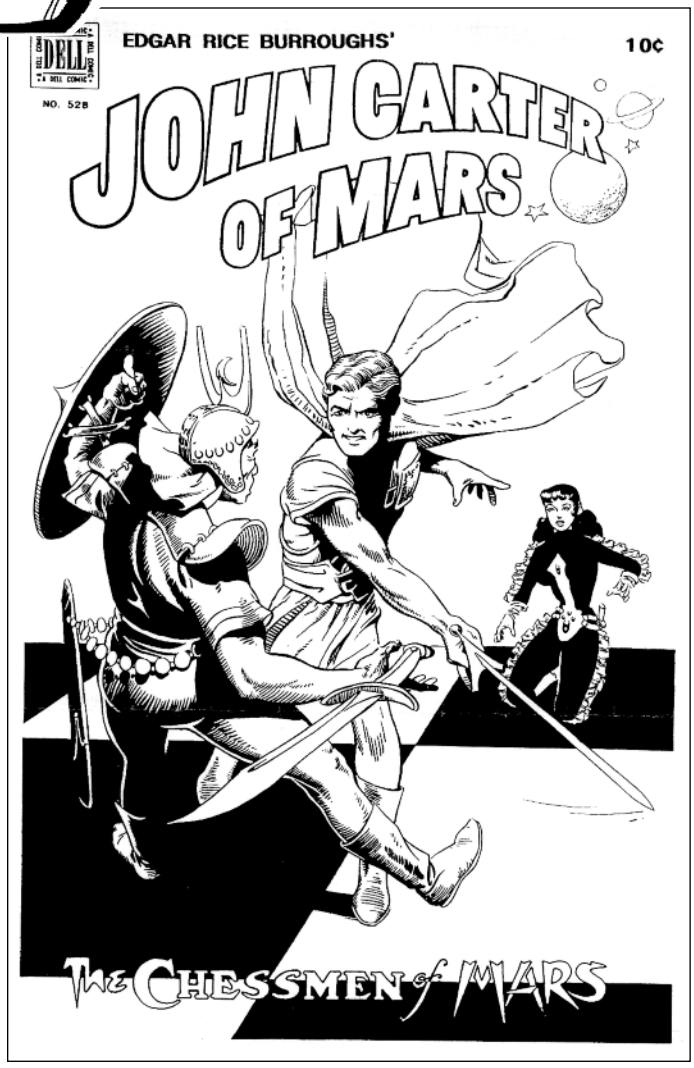
Dave & Jill Bennett

Dave, a West Coast animator, is a former colleague of artist Jim Davis, who figured prominently in *A/E* #61's coverage of the American Comics Group. Clearly, the Bennetts are owned by a trio of cats. [©2006 Dave Bennett.]



SOMETIMES *TIMING* IS EVERYTHING.

IN 1950, ***RUSS MANNING*** LEARNED THAT DELL PLANNED TO PUBLISH A NEW COMIC BOOK STARRING ***JOHN CARTER OF MARS.*** MANNING, A PROMISING YOUNG CARTOONIST AND A LONG-TIME ***EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS*** FAN, MUST HAVE BEEN ***THRILLED!*** THIS WAS HIS BIG CHANCE TO BREAK INTO THE FIELD, WHILE ILLUSTRATING ONE OF BURROUGHS' MOST ***FAMOUS*** FANTASY HEROES! WHAT COULD BE ***BETTER?***



MANNING SET TO WORK AND SOON PRODUCED SOME IMPRESSIVE ***SAMPLES,*** MANY OF WHICH ARE PRINTED HERE FOR THE FIRST TIME. HE HOPED THE ***JOHN CARTER*** PROJECT WOULD BE HIS FIRST ***PROFESSIONAL*** COMIC BOOK SALE AND THE START OF A NEW CAREER, BUT ***FATE*** HAD ***OTHER*** IDEAS.

MANNING NEVER ***DID*** SUBMIT HIS SAMPLES. WHEN THE ***JOHN CARTER*** COMIC EVENTUALLY CAME OUT, HIS FRIEND ***JESSE MARSH*** ILLUSTRATED IT. IN FACT, IT WOULD TAKE RUSS ANOTHER ***TWO YEARS*** TO BREAK INTO COMICS.

SO WHY DIDN'T MANNING SUBMIT HIS ***SAMPLES?*** AS I SAID EARLIER, SOMETIMES *TIMING* IS ***EVERYTHING.***

RUSS MANNING FOUND THAT OUT THE ***HARD*** WAY....

(Above left & center:) Dell's first two *John Carter of Mars* comics from 1952. The second featured a line-drawing cover by Jesse Marsh. (Above right:) Two years earlier, Manning drew this proposed cover, inspired by Burroughs' fifth novel, *The Chessmen of Mars*. [Dell covers ©2006 Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc.; John Carter & related characters TM & ©2006 Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc.; above-right art ©2006 Estate of Russ Manning.]

More Toth Testimonials

FCA's Own Tribute To ALEX TOTH

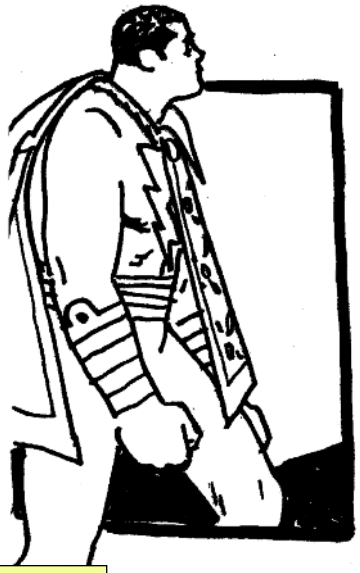
The following short memorials to the late great artist have been assembled by P.C. Hamerlinck—beginning with his own. Each contributor's name precedes his comments:

P.C. Hamerlinck

Editor of FCA

"Jack Binder was an S.O.B. to me!"

Alex Toth dug deep into his memory in one of our postcard exchanges wherein I quizzed him about the early 1940s ... when an inexperienced 15-year-old with a new but thin portfolio in hand was making the rounds after school around New York City to various comic book publishers. While dropping by the offices of Fawcett Publications—and after a split-second "hello" to C.C. Beck and Pete Costanza—Toth nervously sat with Jack Binder, who reviewed the kid's crude samples. "After his slashing critique, I went home, ripped up my drawings in anger, re-did everything ... *better*. So, in perverse logic, Binder helped start my career."



Toth always felt warm respect for Beck, and once declared to Beck that "ol' Captain Marvel was, and still is, somewhere in comic strip heaven, the best damned comic hero ever—editorially and graphically!" Both artists understood economy of concept and execution. Both artists outwardly and vehemently denounced any vulgarization of their beloved art form.

"By their works, ye shall know them."

"CC" - CRUSTY CURMUDGEON?

Crusty curmudgeon, cranky critic, consummate cartoonist? CC is all these things and more. He's a man who talks, draws, and thinks straight. He is an uncommon person.

CC has given me joy for over forty years, bless 'im . . . ever since that first Captain Marvel story. He has my affection and respect for his perfect blend of cartoon humor and superhero story. Old "Cap," built like a handsome locomotive, always came through with a twinkle in his eye, a grin, and maybe a wisecrack. The stories were light and mirthful, but were mixed with one-two-punch action.

CC's "Big Red Cheese" figurework was almost pure outline . . . bold, economical. It created a feeling of solidity and weight never attained by today's purveyors of punch and power heroics. His way was to infer, to imply, never to overstate. Few comic book artists have equalled his economy of line.

The toughest job in drawing is to know what to omit. It's easy to over-embellish, to embroider, and in the proverbial "kitchen sink" way to produce a tour de force. Why? Because one has fewer troublesome choices to make. Tossing in every bit of stuff one can think of to fill up every corner of the space allowed and "faking" details is the easy way . . . but not the right way. It was not CC's way.

Economy of style is what every thinking actor, writer, designer, composer, and musician seeks. CC helped me to form an appreciation of true simplicity in art and for that I thank him here and now. Long may he reign!

Alex Toth

Michael Uslan

Film Producer; Former Comics Writer

"It was thirty years ago today…" that I had the honor of writing a comic book story illustrated by Alex Toth. The man turned it into a lesson for me on visual storytelling and graphic design. I never learned so much from a collaboration with an artist.

Thanks to the efforts of Bob Layton, Alex and I had the sweet task of being the first to continue the adventures of "The Question" following Steve Ditko and his original Charlton run.

Preacher's Son's Admirer

(Left:) Toth's introduction to *Preacher's Son*, C.C. Beck's privately circulated autobiography. [©2006 Estate of Alex Toth.]