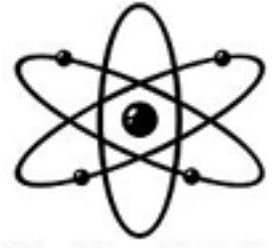


A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION FOR SFPA



THE TYPO KING #94



"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

---George Orwell (1903-1950)

A PUBLICATION OF INTENSELY PERSONAL COMMENT AND OPINION

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This is the January 2025 issue intended for distribution in SFPA Mailing #363





HEADING THINGS...

Following up on the com-

ments made last issue, I went in for my hearing tests, which were finally scheduled for the 3rd of December. Unfortunately the tests did not bring good news. My last hearing test was made over two years ago, and during that time I have experienced a noticeable loss of hearing.

The test revealed that my hearing had declined a bit, nothing serious, nothing that good hearing aids should not have been able to take care of.

Unfortunately in the comprehension tests things were dramatically worse. The main reason I wanted those hearing tests is because of the course of this year, beginning in late spring, I have had serious problems understanding words in sentences. There are gaps, blurring, dropouts almost, so I figured my hearing aids needed to be readjusted.

Unfortunately it turns out that there is serious damage/loss of reaction on the auditory nerves that connect sound with the brain. In the past test I had about a 40% loss of comprehension based on the test of spoken words read off by the audiologist. This time

the comprehension level lost was down by 60%.

This was not good news, especially since there is nothing that can be done to correct the problem. It means that I am likely to continue to lose word meaning in voices that I hear, both in person, and in the assorted media I watch/listen to.

It is not the end of the world, of course, and paying very close attention to words I am hearing can in some measure compensate for the problem. But the situation will continue to get worse, to the point where, sometime in the future, I will hear sounds, but I will not be able to understand words. While I might be able to appreciate music, I probably will not be able to understand the words a singer might be using in that song.

This is a bitter blow to bear. While I will miss movies and what little TV I watch, I will really miss listening to all the OTRadio shows I appreciate so much, or hearing the music I love. I am determined to keep going and try as hard and as strong as I can to compensate, and of course, things could always be worse. But this is just another unfortunate event in what has turned out to be pretty crummy year for me.

STILL TRYING, UNSUCCESSFULLY, TO THINK A LOT LESS ABOUT POLITICS THESE DAYS...

As I write this, Caligula Trump is mere weeks from being sworn in as the new dictator of the United States, and he has already laid out a brutal and vindictive agenda of what he wants to accomplish in the very first month he is in office. I expect horrifying destruction to the economic and moral fiber of this nation.

But, just as worrying is the response of those who oppose Trump and his minions. They keep saying the same things they have been saying for the past five years, that reason will prevail, that when the people see the results of the man's insane actions they will come to their senses and all will be well. Sanity will return, that in the midterm elections, or surely in 2028, the United States will return to a path of progress and kindness.

No, it won't. To restate the truism from 2016, made even more stark in 2025: **"If you could reason with Trump supporters, there would be no Trump supporters"**. It's that simple. And as to what will happen to his legions of worshippers when the Trump agenda goes full blast, please read the cartoon on the next page---



DIST. BY ANDREWS McMEEL SYNDICATION - ©2024 RUBEN BOLLING - 1713 - TO JOIN THE INNER HIVE: GO TO tomthedancingbug.com

It's not just you – bottles and cartons are now harder to open. We found out why

Story by Elizabeth Weise, USA TODAY

It's not your imagination – beverage containers for milk, soda and water have gotten harder to open in recent years because their plastic screw top caps have been shortened to save plastic.

It's a subtle shift in products opened by millions of Americans every day – a change the industry touts as saving not just plastic but also weight, both of which lead to less energy to transport them, a lower carbon footprint and a lower cost to produce the packaging.

"The shorter the height, the less grippable area," he said. "So we can't apply our maximum grip force and we struggle."

Wrap rage

Consumers have noticed.

"We keep a pair of pliers in the utility drawer in the kitchen to open them now," said Fred Wolden, a retired marine contracting officer with the U.S. Coast Guard who lives in Center City, Wisconsin.

It's not that they're impossible to open by hand but it's just a little more aggravating. "You used to have three or four threads to turn. Now you only have two, so it's harder," he said. "You can't really get your hand on it."

For Jack Whalen, a retired sociologist in Pioneertown, California, it's a nuisance. "I have indeed noticed how the screw caps have gotten shorter," he said. The newer, shorter caps "are a little more likely to slip out of my hand."

He's right. Yoxall has researched it and the difficulty boils down to this formula: $T = \mu * N * r$, where μ is the Greek symbol for the coefficient of friction, N is the grip force and r is the radius of the lid.

About [17% of U.S. milk was sold in paper cartons in 2023](#) compared with 82% sold in plastic jugs, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The shift to the new, shorter caps is mostly to reduce weight, which reduces shipping costs and therefore saves money, said Rafael Auras, who chairs Michigan State University's program in packaging sustainability.

"For several decades, there has been a strong incentive to reduce the weight of containers. From 2005 to 2010, Walmart mandated that all their suppliers reduce their packaging weight," he said.

The milk industry has followed suit. The change has also coincided with efforts over the last decade or so to reduce plastic packaging more broadly.

"This was largely driven by the processors and packaging companies as pressures increased to reduce waste, reduce cost, and be more sustainable," said Yee.

The same cap shortening has happened in soda pop and water.

The plastic lids for plastic soda pop and water bottles got smaller first.

A study by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality found that a typical water bottle weighed 13.3 grams but reducing the undefined, by shrinking both the cap and thinning the plastic bottle, [reduced the global warming impacts of the package by about 18%](#).

In some cases things went further than consumers were comfortable with. "People want to use less plastic and still get the job done," said Krieger. "We've all bought that water bottle that seems very flimsy and crinkly."

At a certain point consumers start complaining "I can't open it" or "It's too flimsy," he said.

That's when light weighting becomes "right weighting," he said. "We're insuring that we hit the happy middle ground of making sure it's as thin as possible but making sure you can still open it."

Tethered caps



A tethered plastic milk carton cap in Germany. This type of attached cap was first required in 2024 in the European Union, to reduce plastic waste and make recycling easier.

The text reads, "For the sake of the environment, I believe in it." Consumers have complained the caps can get in the way of pouring and drinking. © Sascha Karberg

The next likely disruption for your favorite beverage container will come in the form of what are known as "tethered caps."

As the name suggests, these are tied to the bottle with a small bit of plastic so the cap doesn't come off even when the bottle is open.

By keeping the cap attached to the plastic spout assembly, the cap can't get lost and contribute to plastic waste and especially ocean waste, said Degruson.

The new caps haven't made a U.S. appearance yet, but became required by European Union law in July, she said.

They've already gotten push back there.

"Those tethered caps get a lot of complaints because when you have the cap tethered, it gets in the way" of drinking and sometimes pouring, she said. "It might not be that the current design is the best."

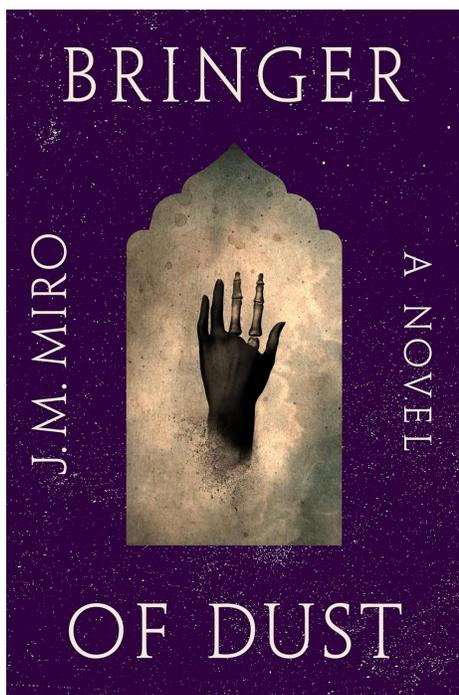
These caps will probably come to the United States eventually she said, but for now there's no regulation requiring them.

In the end, Wolden, the retired marine contracts officer, isn't convinced such changes are about saving the planet.

"I think it's baloney," he said. "There's no thought about the customer here. It's all about the dollar.

This article originally appeared on USA TODAY

Bringer of Dust: A Novel (Ordinary Talents 2) by J. M. Miro (hardback, ebook)



Like a great many fans of the first novel in this series, I have been anticipating this second book in the series for a long time, and this second volume does not disappoint. The book is long (596 pages), and complex, with new characters added, survivors of the first novel changed in ways they never expected, and new challenges awaiting them as they try to unravel the strange world of mysterious talents and the universe beyond the reality of the world in the 1880s. Rather than expound on the plot, and without giving away spoilers, let me quote the publisher spiel for the book--

In this highly anticipated second book in the Talents Trilogy, the world of the dead is closer than you think.

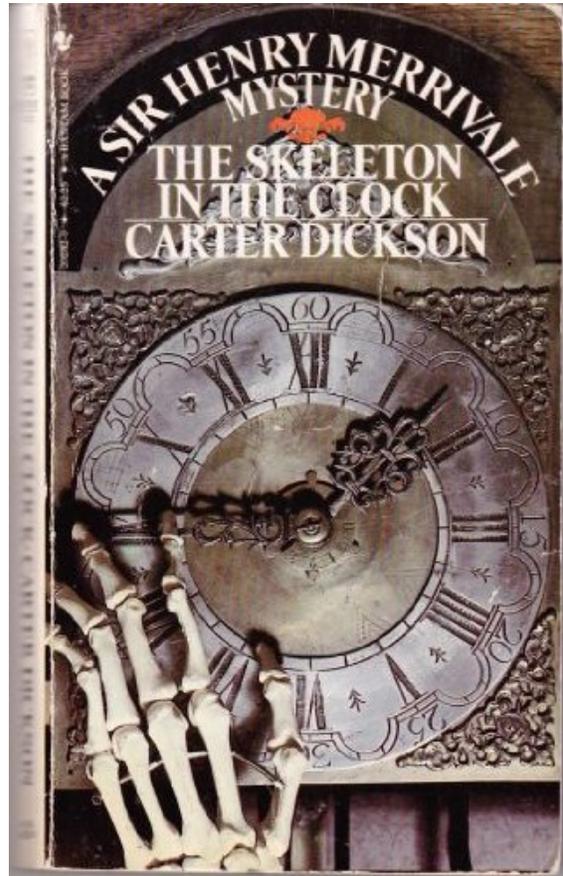
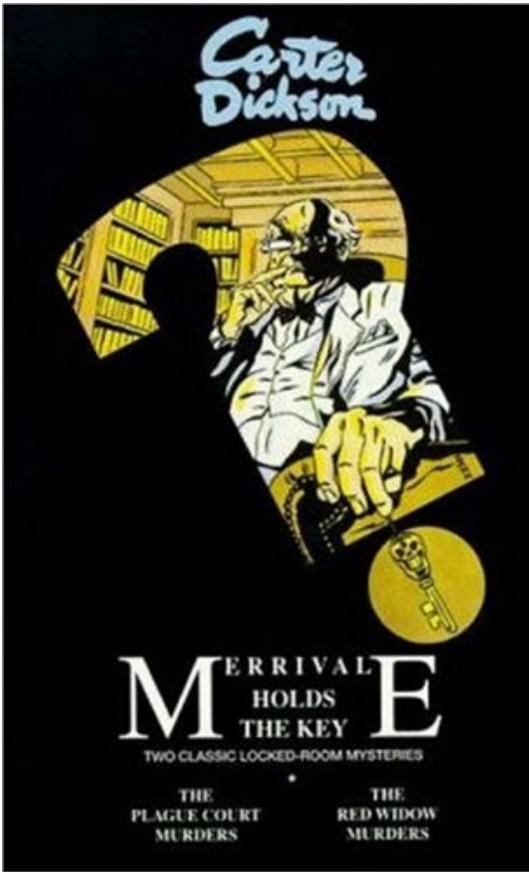
Agrirento, Sicily, 1883. With the orsine destroyed, Cairndale lies in ruins, and Marlowe has vanished. His only hope of rescue lies in a fabled second orsine—long-hidden, thought lost—which might not even exist.

But when a body is discovered in the shadow of Cairndale, a body wreathed in the corrupted dust of the drughr, Charlie and the Talents realize there is even more at stake than they'd feared. For a new drughr has arisen, ferocious, horned, seemingly able to move in their world at will—and it is not alone.

A malevolent figure, known only as the Abbess, desires the dust for her own ends. And deep in the world of the dead, a terrible evil stirs—an evil that the corrupted dust just might hold the secret to reviving or destroying forever.

So the dark journey begun in Ordinary Monsters surges forward, from the sinister underworld of the London exiles, to the mysteries of a sunlit villa in nineteenth-century Sicily, to the deep catacombs hidden under Paris. Against bone witches, mud glyphics, and a house of twilight that exists in a netherworld all its own, the Talents must work together—if they are to have any hope of staving off the world of the dead, and saving their long-lost friend.

Let me just say it again, “J.M. Miro” is one of the best new authors turning out fantastic fiction today, and this second book in the ordinary talents series is fully the equal to the first volume. It features dark horror, and bright hope, with an involved plot that will keep you engaged from page one, and reluctant to set the book down until you finish the last page. Put this book at the top of your list of book to be read for the new year. You will not be disappointed.



SIR HENRY MERRIVALE a British detective created by John Dickson Carr, writing under the pen name Carter Dickson, first appeared in 1934 in a short novel titled “The Plague Court Murders”. A complicated closed room mystery, the novel introduced both the character and the style of mystery story that was to become Carr’s trademark for the rest of his literary career—closed room murders that seemed absolutely impossible for anyone to commit. His detective Sir Henry Merrivale solves the mystery and traps the killer in every case.

I read three of his books starting with “The Skeleton In the Clock”, which seemed like an interesting concept with an intriguing setup. Unfortunately the mystery was not so mysterious after all, and the solving part takes place with other characters, altho Merrivale is there and claims he knows everything that has happened. It is obvious that he is trying to protect someone involved in the murder scheme.

The writing style was slow, with many characters introduced, lots of conversation, plus plenty of false clues. The plot is so elaborate and so complex that if anyone involved in the unfolding plot had done anything at all different the entire house of cards would have fallen apart immediately. To say I was not impressed is an understatement.

Still, many aficionados of detective and crime fiction hold that “Carter Dickson” and his fat protagonist is one of the great detectives of the genre, with his stories ranking among the best in the entire detective fiction field. Keeping this in mind, I checked out “Merrivale Holds the Key” that reprinted his two earliest novels under one cover from my town library.

“The Plague Court Murders” originally published in 1934 was the first Merrivale case, and it is a quite involved, with a pseudo mystic sharpster murdered inside the closed and locked out building of a crumbling old town mansion, with no apparent clues to a solution.

Unfortunately (at least in my opinion), in order for this impossible murder to actually happen, Carr provides a corrupted member of the police force willingly working with the would-be killer to insure the plot

can succeed. In this case the copper was corrupted by promises of romance with the killer, who, of course, is merely using him to commit pre-meditated murder and make off with lots of money in the process.

Meanwhile all of the people present at the scene act like they are guilty as hell with plenty of things to hide, even tho it turns out that all of them are innocent and the dark secrets they are trying to protect are mostly trivial and are already known, or are quickly revealed as the story moves on. The actual way the murder was committed is clever, but the actions of most of the characters are contrived and pretty much unbelievable.

“The Red Widow Murders” (1935), has more of the same. To quote directly from the publisher hype---
“An oddly assorted group of people draw cards to see who will spend the night locked into a room said to be haunted by the "Red Widow"—a legendary figure who was married to the executioner who guillotined French aristocrats. In the morning, the victim is found dead, locked inside a room whose door was continuously under observation. He has been poisoned by [curare](#), which must be absorbed into the body through a break in the skin, but no wounds of any kind are found on the body. Henry Merrivale must solve the mystery.”

In this case the events are even more convoluted and unbelievable. One of the residents of the house has already secretly entered the sealed room, and discovered both the murder trap and the hidden treasure. Then, in one of the most ridiculous plot twists ever written, after gathering the lost jewels into a chamois pouch, instead of walking away with the goodies, he decides to hide them again inside an elaborately carved antique table top box with an ingenious hidden compartment. Then, after the murder has been discovered, he goes to suspicious lengths to make away with the little chest. Unbelievable is too kind a word for this behavior.

The writing is tighter here than in the other two Merrivale novels, but wandering conversations seem to be a trademark of “Carter Dickson”. Some of this is intended to move the story plot along, and to round out characterization of the principles involved in the mystery, but a lot of it seems superfluous. My impression is that the primary purpose of all the chit-chat is to pad the word count out to make sure these stories are actually book length manuscripts.

I was not impressed by Sir Henry Merrivale, or the plots of these novels. The long arm of coincidence is too contrived to be acceptable, while the deductions Merrivale make seem oblique in too many situations. And again, if any one of the characters in any these stories had done anything different, anything at all, the entire elaborately involved story plots would have collapsed.

I will not be reading any more “Carter Dickson” stories.



PEOPLE OF DUNE, YOU WILL NO LONGER HAVE TO THINK ABOUT WATER WHEN I AM ELECTED

BY HAYLEY IGARASHI THOMAS

“I will protect women at a level never seen before. They will finally be healthy, hopeful, safe and secure,” Trump said. “Their lives will be happy, beautiful, and their lives will be great again. So women, we love you. We’re going to take care of you.” The former president said women won’t have to think about abortion because decisions about regulating it are now left to the states.”

— [Los Angeles Times, 9/21/24](#)

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The people of Dune are thirstier, sandier, less safe in the dunes, and unhappier now than they were four years ago. I am also unhappier now than I was four years ago. That’s the last time I ruled this planet, or, as you may recall, the last time Dune (or “Arrakis” to be “politically correct”) was great, again.

Things have fallen apart since I was deposed. Everyone says so. All of the Great Houses of the Landsraad agree with me. Some of the Bene Gesserit too. I’m friends with many of them. Wonderful women. They actually wanted my daughter to join their order, but she’s allergic to Gom Jabbar and other foreign substances.

But I will fix everything fast, and at long last, this interstellar nightmare will be over.

To the people of Dune, here is my promise to you: You will be happy and hydrated once again, just like you were four years ago. You will no longer be thinking about water. And no offense, you people are a bit obsessed. I like water, but have you tried Diet Coke? If I had ten grams of spice for every time I had to hear one of you drone on about “reclaiming water” and “dying of dehydration,” I wouldn’t be running an intergalactic election, if you know what I mean. (I’d be buying it.)

But you won’t have to worry anymore, because the whole issue of water will be where it always had to be: with politicians who never had to worry about water in the first place. In some cases, these new decision makers won’t even be that familiar with water; I’ve been talking to some very smart, very talented android political leaders who are aware

of water as a concept, but have never needed it themselves, since they are made of metal and run on batteries.

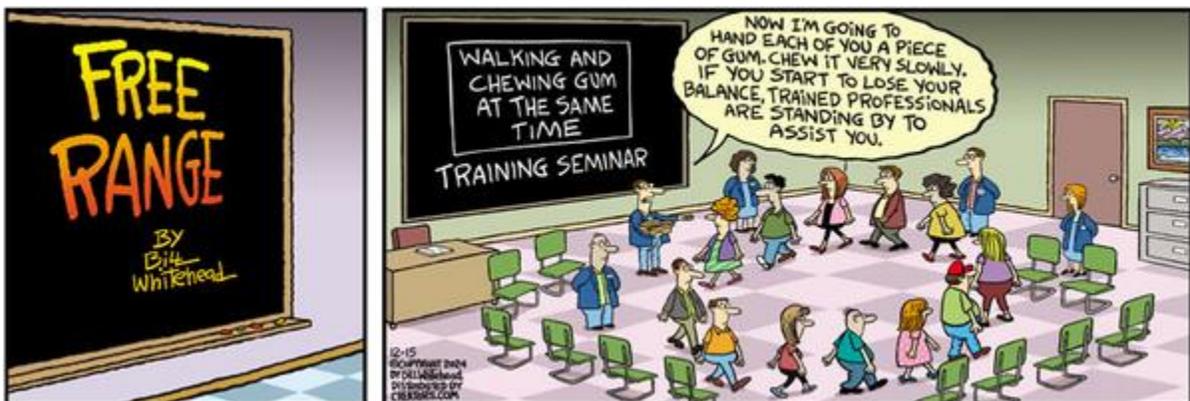
As an example of how carefree life will be under my rule, I can confirm that if you are really, really thirsty, you will be able to get access to water. Think of it as a powerful exception to “who gets water and who doesn’t get water,” as long as you are literally about to die of thirst. And maybe not even then. This is fair and just, and the details of these rare exceptions will be worked out by the aforementioned robots, who, again, are intellectually familiar with the elements that make up water but have never ingested, touched, or seen the liquid themselves. I believe this makes them more objective about the water issue. By being so removed from water as a matter of survival, they can make decisions driven by money not morality. That’s the Dune dream.

Also, I will not, under any circumstances, allow any of you, my dear, dear poverty people of Dune, to be drowned by water, no matter how thirsty you are. This is a real policy that my rivals, House Atreides, practiced or definitely want to practice. It was terrible. They drowned them. That’s what I’m hearing.

I know a lot of you like to say that “fear is the mind-killer.” I think that’s very smart, very wise. I’m never afraid. And I don’t want you to be either. Stop fearing that your rights to water will be taken away. Will they be taken away? That’s fear asking. Don’t answer! That fear will murder your mind before the lack of water will. So just be happy, like you were four years ago. Remember?

When I am your ruler, I will protect you at a level never seen before. Just trust me on this one. You will finally be hydrated, healthy, safe, and respected. Because you may be poor crusty sand people, but you’re my poor crusty sand people. I love you, and I’m going to make our lives great again—all of our lives, starting with mine and ending, if necessary, with yours.

Trump Cabinet Appointees getting training for their new jobs...



REREADING THE COLLECTION...

Recently I felt the urge to read some comics from my extensive collection of back issues. Specifically, I had the itch to read some Batman adventures. I decided to indulge the urge by checking out my run of *Detective Comics*, which of course headlines Batman. Based mostly which box was nearest the end of shelving unit six, I decided to start around 1968 and work my way up. It's been quite a long time since I read those issues. Obviously I read them back when I originally bought them, then I think I may have reread them around the turn of the new century, so altho many of the stories stuck in my mind, many others were only a dim memory.

I've been a Batman fan for most of my life. Sometime between the ages of seven and eight I discovered super hero comics, in addition to the funny animal and westerns I had been reading. There was Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman, Captain Marvel Jr., Wonder Woman, and more. But the two that became my long time favorites were Captain Marvel Jr. and Batman. Cap Jr., alas, died in 1953 when Fawcett got out of the comic book publishing business. It was a great blow to me, but there were other heroes, and there was especially Batman.

I followed Batman steadily thru the years, and never missed any issues. There were good times in the early and mid 1950s, and some not so great stories in the early 1960s, but I still stuck with the character because I really liked the set-up—a human being in a costume with a side-kick to bounce conversation and observations off of, fighting crime at every level. He was billed as the World's Greatest Detective, but by the early 1960s the brand had been hopelessly corrupted with goofy pseudo-science fiction aliens and ridiculous gimmicks that adapted very poorly to the then current DC Comics format of mostly eight to ten page stories.

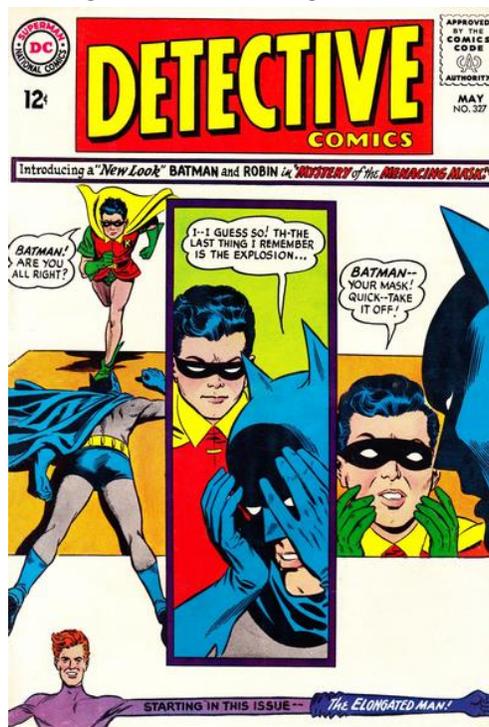
I was very active in comics fandom beginning in 1959, and by 1963 word around the hobby was that Batman was going to be cancelled. Sales were just pitiful. Bob Kane, the character's creator, had been officially notified, and it was just a matter of weeks before the plug was going to be pulled.

Except the powers that be decided to revamp the character, and that included switching editors. Jack Schiff the long time editor of *Batman*, *Detective Comics* and some other titles, was replaced by Julius Schwartz, who had successfully reintroduced the Flash in 1956, launching the Silver Age of Comics, and was editor of a series of successfully science fiction titles in addition to The Flash. The first official Schwartz issues started in late 1963. His first issue of *Detective* was #327, dated March 1964, but on the newsstands a few months earlier.

Major changes were made immediately, starting with the style of artwork, lengthening the stories, and getting rid of most of the dumb-ass science fiction aliens from other worlds themes along with most of the unbelievable gimmick plots as well. Fan fave artist Carmine Infantino took over the pencil art, with inks by Joe Giella, occasionally spelled by Murphey Anderson. Schwartz's regular cadre of writers, spearheaded by John Broome and Gardner Fox took over most of the writing, and things picked up immediately, particularly the sales figures. The format was one long Batman & Robin story, and one short 6 to 8 page backup, usually The Elongated Man, but often Batgirl.

Things did not go entirely smoothly. There were a few missteps. One of Schwartz's more unpopular changes was to introduce a yellow oval to the costume right in the center of Bats' chest with a small bat figure inside. As Richard Kyle and many other comics fans noted, a big yellow spot right over his heart made an ideal target for any criminal holding a gun, or any other kind of weapon.

The other misstep was a major one. Batman never used a gun, but in that same issue, #327, the story showed Batman picking up and holding a pistol on the bad guys after defeating them. The eruption of outrage from the readers was almost unanimous. Schwartz, had to admit that he had made a serious mistake, and promised it would never happen again.



The stories got a lot better. But then came an unexpected quirk. In 1964 Hugh Hefner, a dedicated film buff in addition to being the creator/editor of *Playboy*, screened the 1943 Batman movie serial at the Playboy Mansion. The event was extensively covered by the press, and it was very well received by his guests, who talked it up around Los Angeles and Hollywood, which led Columbia to rerelease the serial to theaters around the country both as a full length movie, and in the original format of a 15 chapter serial. It was a monster hit with college age audiences who thought the low budget special effects, ludicrous science fiction gimmicks and unbelievable cliffhangers were hilarious.

Clearly a work of its time, the serial featured outrageous situations and ridiculous cliffhangers. But the most annoying feature was the Columbia penchant of having a narrator speak over the closing minutes of each chapter daring viewers to guess what will happen and asking in breathless tones whether the hero(es) will survive. Well, since it was a fifteen chapter play, obviously they would survive to the end of the serial. It was deemed camp humor, a fad that rapidly caught on among hip young people college age and up.

There had been ongoing negotiations with CBS to develop a live action Batman TV program in the style of Superman and The Lone Ranger for a possible Saturday morning time slot. The unexpected popularity of the 1943 Batman serial changed all that. A new round of negotiations led DC to lease the rights to the character to ABC, who in turn contracted 20th Century Fox to produce a series, and they in turn engaged TV producer William Dozier to develop the concept of Batman as a humorous detective costumed hero program.

The series featured strong upbeat theme music by Nelson Riddle, but the stories were played strictly for laughs. All the scenes were offered tongue-in-cheek, with exaggerated silly plots and stilted conversations between the heroes. Batman and Robin faced even the most ludicrous situation with deadpan seriousness. The

whole purpose of the series was to make fun of the characters, play them up for laughs, and it always seemed to me, to sneer condescendingly at people who actually read and enjoyed comic books, people like me.

ABC bought the package, and decided to air it twice a week in prime time. Each first episode would end with a cliffhanger, just like in the serial, and the story would be resolved in the second half hour program.

The Batman television series immediately became one of the most popular shows on TV.

This led to an abrupt shift in the Batman comic book stories. Suddenly “camp” humor was the theme, as the comic tried to imitate the success of the TV series. And to the horror of many fans, it worked! Sell-thru ratios for the Batman comics jumped to eighty percent and higher.

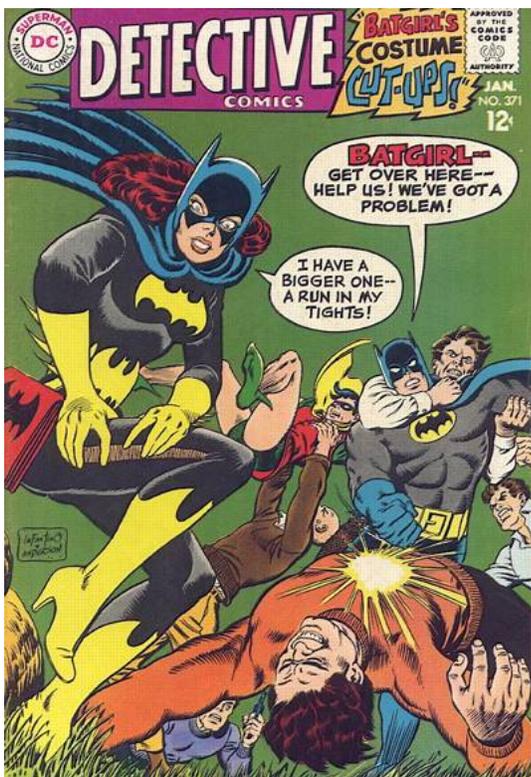
I wasn't happy. For the first time ever I was seriously considering giving up on the character, but the TV series only lasted three years, bowing out in March 1968.

Unfortunately the camp stories in the Batman comics did not go away. I decided to keep buying the series, but I was not thrilled with many of those stories. And the one that caused me to almost drop Batman forever was issue #371.

Dated November, 1967, the cover says it all. Batman and Robin are in serious trouble, but Batgirl can't help because

she has a fashion problem, a run in her tights. The story inside is more of the same. Batgirl has to deal with her feminine whims, her mud splattered costume, repair her makeup, or worry about getting her hair messed up, right in the middle of battle scenes with the bad guys, a bunch of lucky lunkhead nobodies know as the Sports Spoilers. Misogynic in the extreme, it trivialized any claim Batgirl had to being a legitimate costumed hero, and graphically demonstrated the nonsensical depths to which the “camp” style story plots had fallen.

The cancellation of the TV series led to a sudden drop in the sales figures for the Batman titles, which caused some fast editorial changes. It took a while to run thru the backlog and change focus, but by the late summer of 1968 the story emphasis had shifted away from camp humor.



With issue #378, dated August 1968, there was another major change. Gardner Fox and other older writers were dropped from DC because they had demanded that they be treated as regular employees and receive health insurance. DC responded by cutting all their assignments. Gardner Fox had been the major writer for the Batman titles since Schwartz took over as editor. But by a remarkable stroke of good fortune, a new writer appeared to take over those chores.

Frank Robbins was the creator, artist, and writer of the long running Johnny Hazard comic strip. Heavily influenced by the work of Noel Sickles on the Scorchy Smith comic strip, Robbins had a strong, dynamic, minimalistic art style ideally suited for black and white daily comic strips. Unfortunately, near the end of the 1960s, adventure comic strips were dying off. Newspaper editors wanted humor strips, and Johnny Hazard was losing papers steadily when Robbins decided to do comic book work to supplement his income.

In 1968 Robbins approached DC Comics, which he regarded as the leader of the field (after all, they published Superman). The editors were not keen on using him as an artist. The DC comic book style emphasized sleek, realistic style artwork, with closed line central figures. That wasn't the kind of art Robbins specialized in. On the other hand, the stories in his Johnny Hazard comic strip had always been complex, character driven, with unusual, action filled plots. They decided to try him out as a scripter.

Robbins wrote first for Los Lane, then became the regular writer for Superboy. One month later he was writing for Batman. Robbins along with writer Dennis O'Neil had a different vision of the Batman character.

The kind of stories Robbins wanted to write involved the basic premise of Batman. He was a creature of the night, he was the world's greatest detective, and he therefore should be using his skills and intelligence to solve crimes instead of just slugging it out with gaudily costumed bad guys.

Editor Schwartz, faced with a rapidly declining sales base, was willing to try a new approach. Robbins was joined by artists also interested in seeing Batman return to his roots, particularly Neal Adams, Irv Novick, and Bob Smith. Neal Adams and Bob Smith were the relative new kid on the block so far as comic books went, but Novick had been around drawing comics since the late thirties and onward.

Working together they essentially reinvented the character. It was also decided that Batman, dark creature of the night, really didn't need a kid sidekick dressed in a bright red and green colored costume. Robin was allowed to age, and was hustled off to Hudson College, where he continued to function as Robin in backup features for *Detective Comics*, finding plenty of crime and action in two part adventures, also usually written by Robbins.

The first Frank Robbins Batman story in *Detective* was #378, dated August 1968. There were more changes coming.

Batgirl had been developed by DC at the direct request of the TV show producers, who wanted a strong female interest in the series. They were going to introduce Yvonne Craig as Batgirl, the costumed hero daughter of Commissioner James Gordon on the TV program. Schwartz and artist Carmine Infantino decided to emphasize strong character development with Batgirl, and with the new shift in story emphasis, Batgirl also became a regular backup feature in *Detective Comics*, alternating with Robin and Elongated Man, but increasingly becoming the more prominent backup character. During that process Barbara Gordon/Batgirl



managed to meet Viet-Nam vet Jason Bard. He had a bad knee and walked with a cane, the result of a war injury. He was trying to make a career as a private detective. Jason and Barbara became a dating couple, which naturally led to problems when Batgirl was needed to help out on some of the more complicated cases Bard got involved with.

The following five year run of *Detective Comics* produced some of the best Batman stories published since the late 1940s-early 1950s. Robbins offered very strong story plots with interesting characters, and he often played fair with the readers, offering them a chance to match wits with the Batman in solving the crimes as they unfolded. The art work was increasingly sophisticated, dark, brooding. Along the way the word “the” was added to the character’s name. He was known as *The Batman*, with taller bat ears for his cowl and a sweeping cape that emphasized the gothic weirdness of his appearance. One fan described the new Batman look as “Dracula with a halo and a cape”.

The stories were impressive, featuring often complex mysteries with weird overtones; sinister riddles that needed the sharp intelligence and hard fists of the Batman to solve. The covers during this period were especially striking, featuring artwork by Neal Adams and Irv Novick. They really stood out on the news stands, and on a couple of occasions the covers promised more than the inside stories delivered.

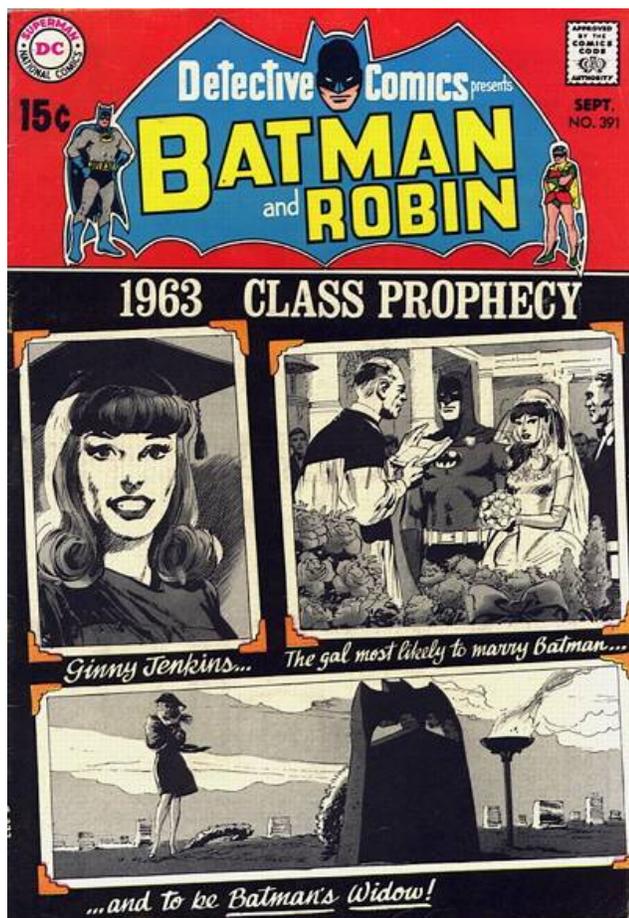
Take the cover for issue #391, September 1969, for example. The story inside was pretty good, but it sure didn’t match the impact of that cover drawn by Neal Adams.

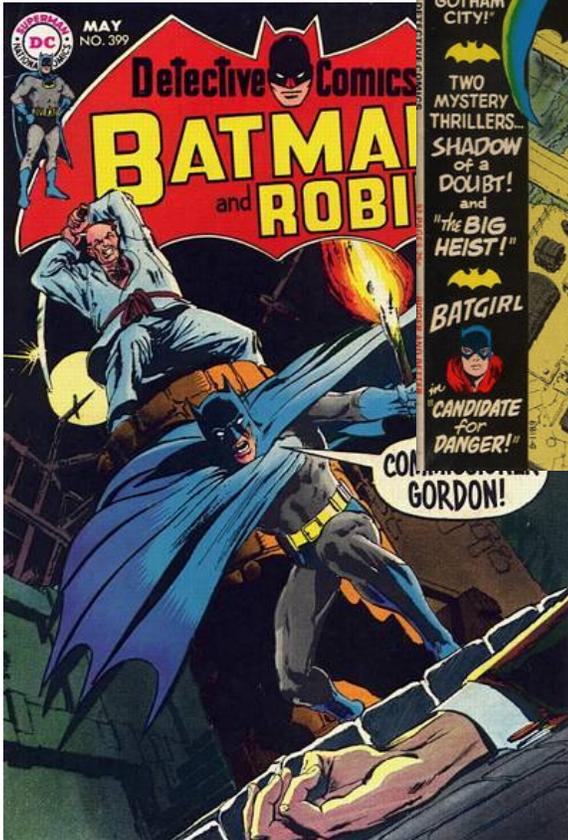
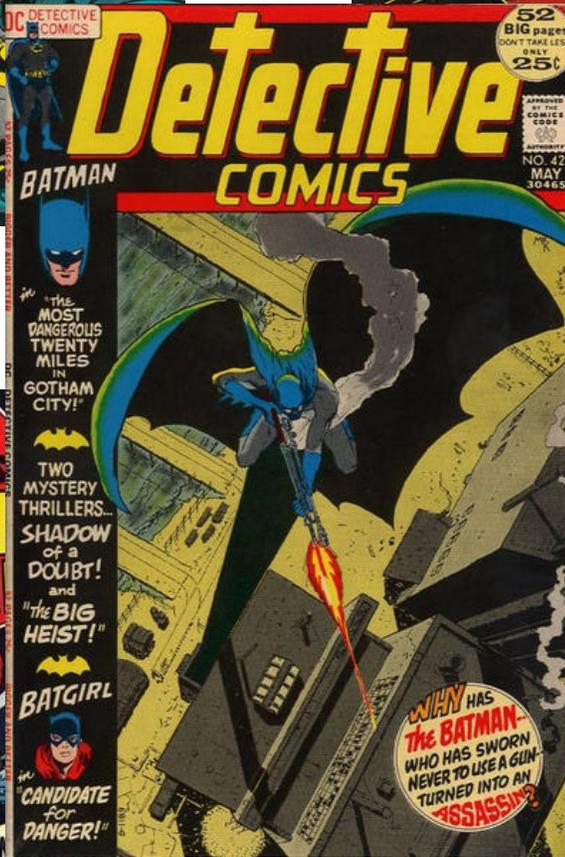
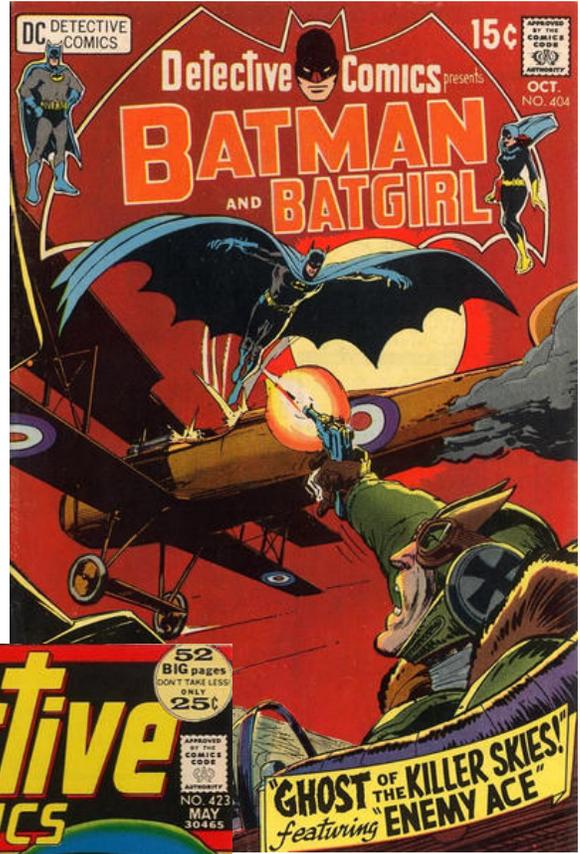
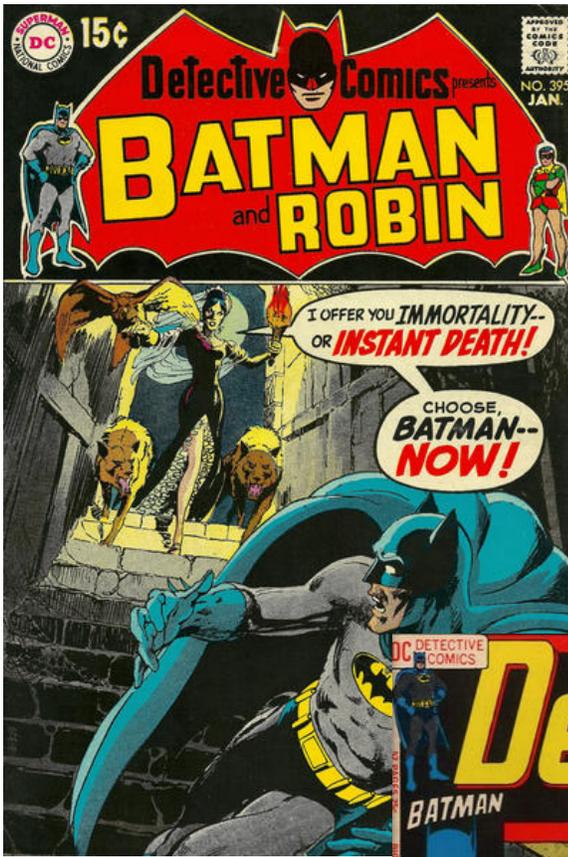
The sheer variety of story plots is impressive. While Marvel and many DC titles were featuring heroes hammering it out with costumed super villains, Batman was offering stories where Talia the daughter of Ras Al Ghul is involved in a brutal murder and offers Batman immortality if he will wed her or instant death if he refuses; or where a movie company is making a film about WWI German fighter pilot Baron Von Hammer (Enemy Ace from DC war comics), only to have a series of murders committed, apparently by the ghost of the dead pilot himself; or Bruce Wayne caught in a bizarre series of circumstances that finds him accused of murder and hunted down by somebody in a Batman costume; or the author of a book about a decade old murder winds up dead, and the answer to the old murder could well mean the death of the Batman; or Commissioner Gordon is kidnapped and tortured to reveal the secret identity of the Batman, only to have Bruce Wayne being forced to create an alternate Batman and rescue the Commission before murder and mayhem strike the city; or Batman actually using a rifle, for real, seeking to prove that an upcoming assassination attempt might not be able to be foiled no matter what Batman and the law can do to

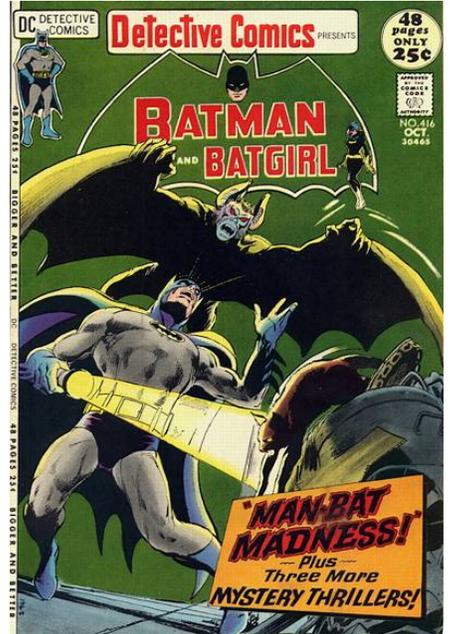
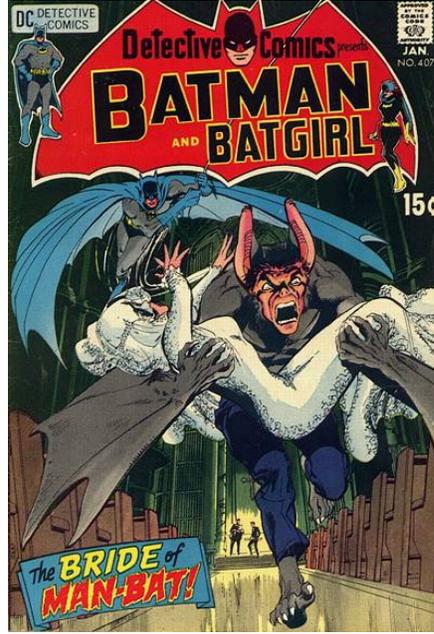
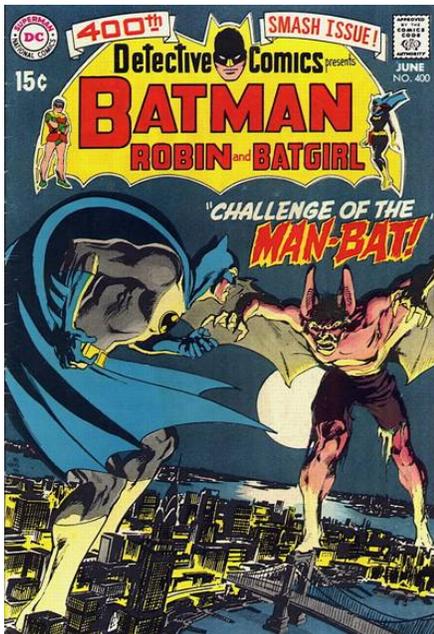
prevent it; or the Batman forced to engage in a fixed game of Russian Roulette to prove that a series of unusual suicides were actually clever murders.

And in addition to great stories, sometimes the new Batman team struck solid gold, as with issue #400, June 1970, when *Detective Comics* introduced a brand new villain, a grotesque mockery of what had once been a human being---the Man-Bat.

A story built out of pathos and desperation, zoologist Kirk Langstrom was working on developing a serum that would give humans beings, particularly those who were deaf, the extraordinary sonar senses that bats possess. But when he tried the solution on himself he was transformed into a grotesque anthropomorphic half human-half bat hybrid complete with wings. The longer he remained in that condition, the more his humanity began to fade, to be replaced by the feral instincts of a true bat. Viewed by everyone as a monster, the Batman







discovers his true identity, and it becomes a wild race to somehow capture Langstrom and find a way to reverse the process before the Man-Bat is killed by the police or before Langstrom changes into the Man-Bat permanently.

Man-Bat was too good a character to be a one hit wonder. Two issues later, in #402, Man-Bat was back, with a new set of problems. He was back again in issue #405, and #407, where his true love was determined to marry Langstrom whether he was a living man-bat or not. Along the way she also got an injection of the serum, and the Batman was in dire danger of suffering the same fate. As the saga unfolded, Man-Bat moved to Las Vegas where he and his wife were infected by mutant vampire bats, directed by a ruthless, greedy human bad-guy, with the risk of the antidote to the serum in danger of failing or the supply running out.

Man-Bat has since been recreated and changed and reinvented numerous times over the course of the years, becoming one of Batman's perennial villains/assistants in a long running series of appearances in the assorted Batman comics, and even getting his own mini-series several times.

In addition to reading the stories, I glanced over the letter columns. I wasn't particularly interested in reading fifty-five year old letters of comment, but I was interested in who the letter writers were. A lot of familiar names from the early days of comic fandom popped up, along with some future artists and a future editor or two, and among the mix were often letters from Guy Lillian, Steven Carlberg, and Donald D. Markstein; names that should be familiar to readers of this zine. For a long time Mike W. Barr had a letter in almost every issue, until he was invited to write a few scripts for the comic and almost overnight became a comics pro instead of an enthusiastic fan.

Despite showcasing some of the best stories and art that Batman had published in years, there were problems. Sales figures were slowly sinking. The average issue sales for 1970 were 209,630. The reported sales figures for 1971 were 199,112, and the reported sales for 1972 were down to 158,638.

The company was worried, and they had every right to be. With issue #414, August 1971, the cover price was raised from fifteen cents to twenty-five cents, with more pages added, increasing the page count to 52 pages. To fill out the extra pages DC reprinted classic stories from their past comics. There was a printed letter explaining to the readers that prices for everything involved in producing the magazine had increased, and the company was forced to raise the cover price to stay in business. Marvel Comics followed suit, but after a few months they dropped their cover prices down to twenty cents. DC held steady with the twenty-five cent 52 page format for almost a year, before dropping the price and the extra pages.

But the real problem was with the distribution, and the fact that the world was changing, with comic books caught in the middle of forces beyond their control. For most of their existence comic books had been

sold in drug stores, small corner grocery stores, newsstands, candy shops, and convenience stores. But by the late sixties leading into the seventies many of those outlets were vanishing.

The corner grocery stores were the first to go, forced out of business by super markets that sold more items for cheaper prices, offering complete one stop shopping. Super markets had originally sold comic books and had allotted big spaces for magazines. But that had mostly changed by the early 1960s.

Most newsstands bit the dust in the late sixties to the mid seventies when the owners of those stores aged out and retired, or their landlords decided to raise the rents. Small neighborhood convenience stores and candy stores, beloved by older hard core comic fans, faced the same situation. The real estate was worth more to the owners than the rent or the sales those stores generated.

Independent drug stores folded into larger and larger chains, and those big chain operations, like Walgreens or CVS, had no use for comic book racks, or even for many magazine racks either.

And the market was changing too. The readers tended to be older. A considerable percentage of the comic books sold in the 1960s were sold thru military posts. When Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968 he had pledged to end the war in Viet Nam, and a draw-down of troops began early in his term of office. By 1973 the US was out of 'Nam, and the size of the military was shrinking.

Increasingly comic books were being sold at chain convenience stores like 7-11 to older teens and adults. These were the kind of guys who went into the Gas & Go, and bought a six pack of beer and twenty or twenty-five comic books to make their Friday night after work routine complete.

Comic book fandom became increasingly important to the mainstream comic publishers at about the same time. Carmine Infantino had become publisher of the company in 1971 and introduced a number of new innovations, including a line of oversized treasury sized magazines with stiff cardboard covers. The treasury sized comics sold for a dollar or more, and featured reprints of rare classic DC comic issues. The reprint issue of

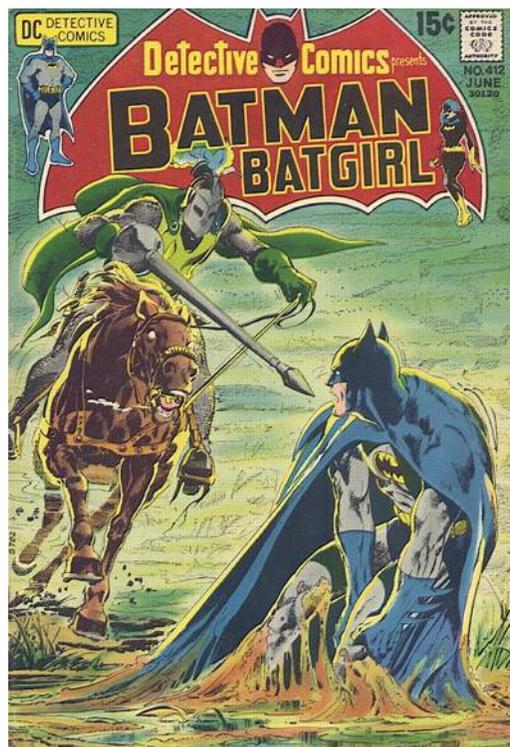
Action Comics #1 took the market by storm, and sold close to half a million copies. Those treasury sized comics were displayed on every magazine rack in the country, including those that had never even considered selling comic books.

Infantino introduced other gimmicks as well, including jacking the price of many of the comics up to fifty cents with a hundred page count. Within a few months the cover price was kicked up to sixty cents. The extra pages was made up of reprints from the DC archives, including golden age material, and to the delight of many comic fans, also including golden age stories the company had produced but for one reason or another had never seen print before.

He developed the ongoing push to get readers to subscribe to the DC comics by declaring that all subscription copies would be mailed out flat, in a mailing envelope to prevent damage by the post office. This was a huge selling point in a period where places to buy the comics were decreasing. For *Detective Comics*, the number of subscription copies sold had jumped from about 80 in the mid 1960s, to over 2000 by the early 1970s.

But, it wasn't enuf. In 1976 Infantino was replaced as publisher by Jeanne Kahn, a person who had no experience with comics, but had lots of experience producing magazines for children and tween age readers. The owners of the company still thought they were selling comics to young kids. They were wrong, and Ms Kahn quickly came to the same conclusion.

The overall DC sales situation would not stabilize until the middle 1970s. DC and Marvel had signed onto Phil Seuling's strange new idea of the direct market, where comic books were sold directly to dealers and specialty stores at distributor prices with no return privileges. By 1976 Seuling's Seagate Distributors was moving a substantial volume of comics into the hands of dealers and comic shops. This enabled the companies



to finally control their print runs and maximize their sell-thru ratio, which increased their profit margin significantly.

Changes were made immediately, including for *Detective Comics*. Julius Schwartz was out as the editor. Archie Goodwin had been hired in 1973 as editor and as a writer, first for the DC war comics, and then for *Detective Comics* with issue #437. He brought in new artists including Jim Aparo and Walt Simonson.

Frank Robbins was also out. He had done artwork for some of the Batman stories he had written, to mixed reactions from the readers. Editor Schwartz had quickly figured out that a lighter color touch was needed to showcase the Robbins art style, significantly different from the traditional deep color palate used for their other comics.

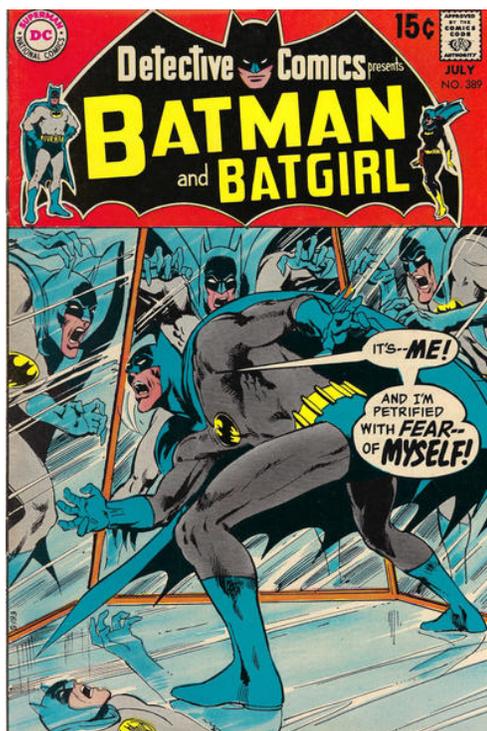
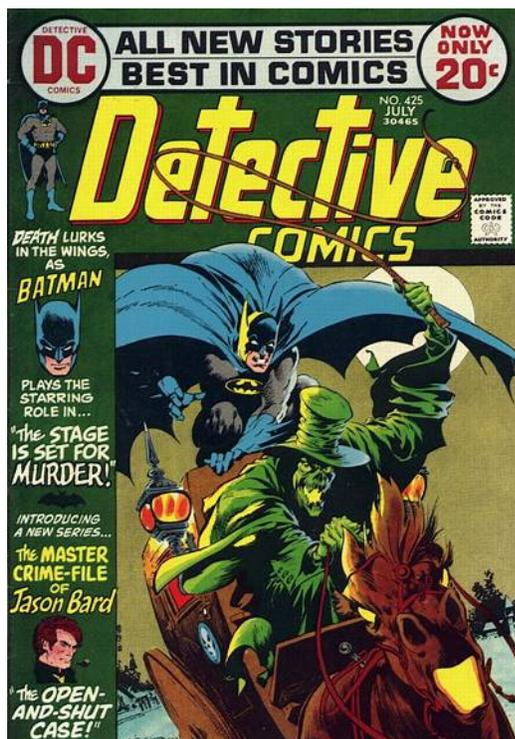
Robbins had done the artwork for the last issues of the DC *Shadow* comic before moving over to Marvel full time. At Marvel he has already worked with Roy Thomas on the *The Invaders* comic beginning with #1 in 1975. He also did art for *Captain America*, *Ghost Rider*, *Man From Atlantis* and *Human Fly*. He was involved in the Marvel style of comic story creation, but to the best of my knowledge he was not credited with writing any scripts for Marvel.

A few years later, in 1977 he decided to retire. He ended his Johnny Hazard comic strip and moved to Mexico where his living expenses were about half of what they had been in the US. He spent his final years painting. His paintings sold reasonably well, with some of his pictures being displayed in museums.

Archie Goodwin's first editorials in *Detective* (and his other magazines) directly spoke to readers, mentioned comic conventions he would be attending, and discussed the realities of the comic business as one adult to another adult. The stories were mostly good, with a shift in emphasis toward more action and more exotic background situations.

Archie Goodwin's tenure ended about a year later. For reasons unknown he left DC and went to work for other companies. I decided to stop my rereading there, at the end of the Goodwin issues, at least for now.

It was an interesting experience. Reading comics in a collection enables you to get a better insight into the process and internal development of the characters. This run of *Detective Comics* issues was pivotal to the survival and development of the Batman, a shift in emphasis and style that helped shape the character far into the future and also helped determine the style, indeed the survival, of DC Comics itself. And it made very enjoyable reading.





READER REACTION

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Ray Palm raypalmx@gmail.com

I also have a hearing problem, sometimes asking people to repeat themselves or speak up a little. As you observed it adds to the difficulty of speaking with customer service on the phone especially when the person is overseas with an accent.

One number off can really screw things up. That's happened to me a few times, going back and correcting the entry. It's easy to do with a computer when ordering something and not paying enough attention.

I'm a fan of Pearls Before Swine and enjoy the puns that pop up. "Clothes minded" indeed.

George Phillies phillies@4liberty.net

"China has a trillion dollars of US Bonds". They are not callable. China can hold them to maturity or sell them on the open market. They, the Chinese, can ask the US government to buy them, but a sale is unlikely.

China can ask major banks with bond markets to take the bonds off China's hands, but the price the banks propose will be way below a trillion dollars.

China can also sell its bonds more gradually. China then this as a problem: How are they going to be paid? A large group of banks might buy them, slowly. China would then accumulate dollars stored in accounts in American banks, the deposits being held in large part as US bonds held by the Federal Reserve System.

They could try converting them to Euros, except the supply of Euros in the US is not unlimited, and as the Chinese buy more and more Euros, the price of the Euros is subject to the law of supply and demand.

Then there are the poor Chinese manufacturers. They want to buy foreign raw materials, the Chinese Treasury has largely sold off its supply US Bonds, and therefore China is more or less out of foreign currency with which to pay foreigners.

If you are interested in why Harris lost, other than -- lousy candidate, finished fifth to Joe Biden in the 2020 primaries -- I suggest reading The Liberal Patriot and/or Nate Silver.

///The economics of future bond trading are fairly complex and murky, but nations that decide to sell off American governmental promissory notes to other buyers usually make a profit on their investment if they

have held onto them for a year or more. Obviously the profit would not be the same as if they held them to full maturity, but the advantage, as you mention, is that they acquire ready cash, usually foreign currency, that they can bank and use in international trade.

In China's case, they can use foreign currency, particularly US dollars and Euros, to buy machinery, integrated circuits, computer technology, semiconductors, refined industrial chemicals, and fuel. Raw and refined petroleum are the main thing China buys, and the fuel market is mostly conducted in US dollars, so having a ready reserve of dollars in their banks would be a tremendous advantage, particularly if Trump follows thru on his threat to slap enormous tariffs on Chinese exports to the US.

I doubt that China will try to unload the entire trillion+ bucks worth of US bonds they are holding. For one thing I don't know who would be able to absorb that much in promissory notes. I suspect the fact that they are willing to sell off 51 billion dollars worth of those bonds in one fast week-long move is obviously a thinly disguised hint that if they wanted to they could flood the market and scare off the potential buyers of upcoming American bond sales.

The disagreeable reality is that American debt is so deep and so out of control that the only way the US treasury can keep ahead of the looming disaster is to keep issuing new bond offerings constantly. If there are no buyers for those listings then the US treasury, our entire economy, would be in serious and immediate trouble, so that is a very real threat.

Except for fuels, particularly raw and refined petroleum, and certain refined chemicals, China imports almost no raw materials. For some reason they import gold, mainly from Africa, but that may be to help solidify their relations with the governments in Africa with whom they have forged economic alliances.

For the past eight years China's leader Xi Jinping has been pushing a crash course to sharply curtail China's dependence on foreign oil, and he has made major progress in boosting sustainable energy, including the big push on electric vehicles. The import figures on foreign purchased petroleum have dropped noticeably, but China still has a long way to go before it can give up the oil habit.

None of this is reassuring to me. I fear we are facing some difficult times in the near future.///

ARTWORK THIS ISSUE IS FROM THE FOLLOWING COMICS STRIPS, WITH SPECIAL THANKS---pg 1 Brian Gordon from Fowl Language; pgs 2, 10 Bill Whitehead from Free Range; pg 3 Rubin Bolling from Tom the Dancing Bug; pg 8 by Wayno & Piraro from Bizarro; pg 20 Phil Dunlap from Ink Pen.

