



July-August 2014

ZOOM

in on america

By the U.S. Missions of Austria and Poland

Volume V. Issue 7.

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A comic illustration of Spider-Man in a publicity image released by Marvel Comics. (Photo AP Photo/Marvel Comics)

In this issue: Comic Books & Movies

Zoom in on America

Minimum Text, Maximum Picture

The first comic books were printed in the late 1920s as newspaper inserts or as promotional materials presented to shoppers. These early comics were, as the name suggests, books that were fun to read. Over time, many comic books appeared with different, more serious themes. The term comic book now refers to a whole genre of literature that combines pictures and words.

George T. Delacorte of Dell Publishing Company was one of the first people to discover comic books in the United States. In 1929 he published *The Funnies*, a newspaper insert that consisted of 16 pages of comic strips. Soon more comic books appeared on the market. Some were sold at newsstands while others were sent free as a promotional item to consumers who mailed in coupons clipped from various products. The 36-page *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics* is considered to be the first comic book in America. It was published by Maxwell Gaines and Harry Wildenberg.

Eventually many readers started buying newspapers for the comic inserts rather than for the newspaper itself. Once that happened, it became clear that comic books were here to stay.

In their early days, a comic book cost 10¢. Today, old comic books are collectors' items. The oldest issues are bought at auctions for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Comics seemed like children's books and were not taken

seriously by the literary community. The popularity of comic books later forced a change in perception. Roy Lichtenstein, one of the most famous American painters of the 20th century, recognized the artistic quality of comics. His use of comic-style work in his paintings raised the status of comic strips in the art community.

The most basic rule of comics is to maximize the use of pictures and minimize the use of words to tell a story. Pictures are based on exaggerations, associations and symbols. A fight can be represented by a single, full-page drawing of a clenched fist. The famous "WHAAM!" in Roy Lichtenstein's painting is not so much a word as it is a sound. Exclamations such as BINGO, YUMMY, and WOW, and onomatopoeic sounds like GRRR, BOOOOOM, SHHH, and BANG, have a similar effect. Another feature of comic books is to place the words within a speech balloon. The size and shape of pictures in a comic book vary, making each page look like a drawing. To reduce the need for narration, characters' thoughts and emotions are presented in an exaggerated way.



Nick Serota Director of the Tate, withdraws from its hanging rack Roy Lichtenstein's painting 'Wham' at the Tate's painting store in London on September 29, 2005. (AP Photo)

During the hard times of the Great Depression (in the late 1930s), American comics developed a new kind of character: the superhero. This was a character endowed with superhuman abilities who fought evil and saved innocent people (and often indeed the whole world).

Marvel Comics and DC Comics are the two biggest comic book publishers (the initials "DC" were taken from a popular series that the Company has published since 1937: Detective Comics). Marvel Comics publishes Spider-Man, X-Men, The Hulk, and The Avengers. DC Comics publishes titles starring such characters as Su-

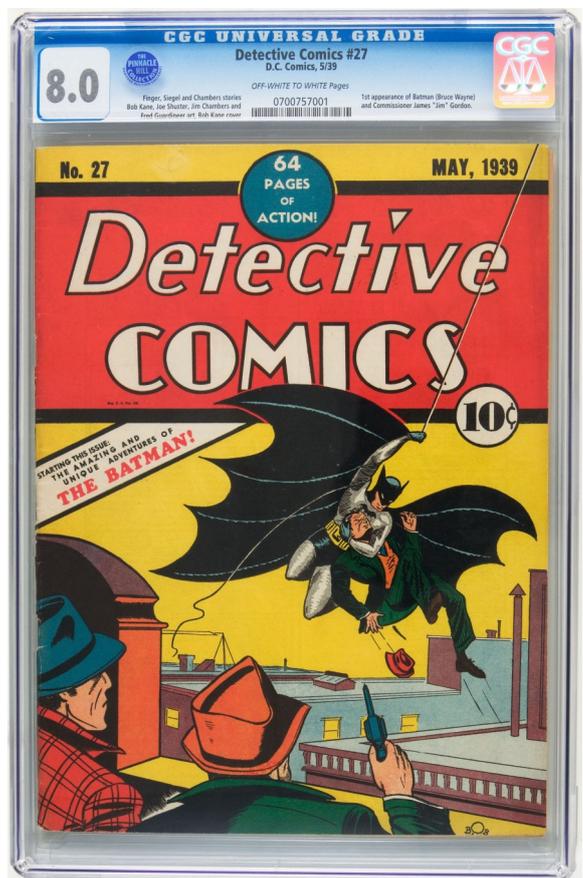
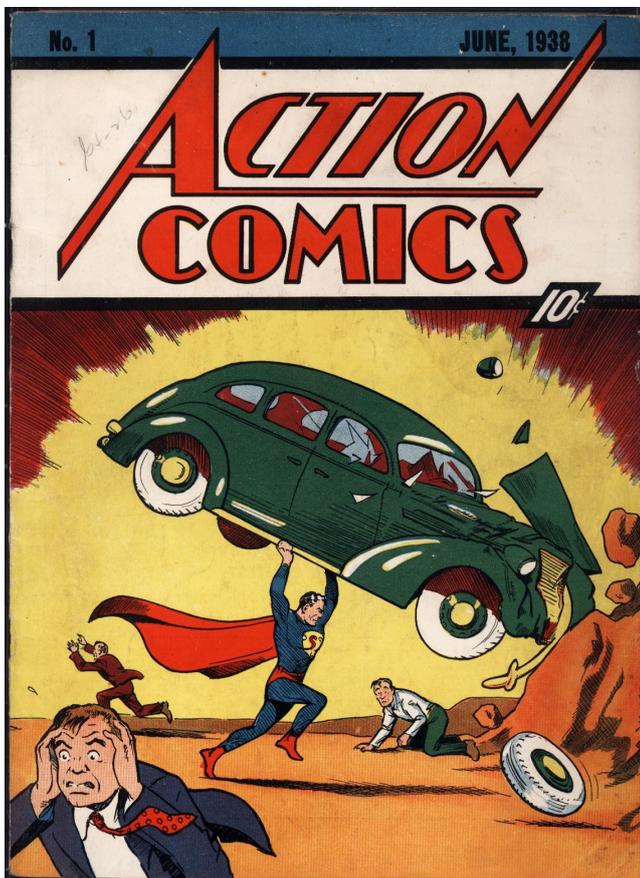
perman, Batman, Green Lantern, Aquaman and Wonder Woman. There are many other, smaller comic book publishers.

Comic book publishers have begun selling all of their monthly comic book titles through e-stores. Today, digital issues of comic books are widely available on devices like the iPad and Kindle. Comic book publishers have increasingly embraced digital platforms as a way to augment print sales in traditional comic book shops and stores by making it easier for first-time and casual buyers to get and read comics instantly.

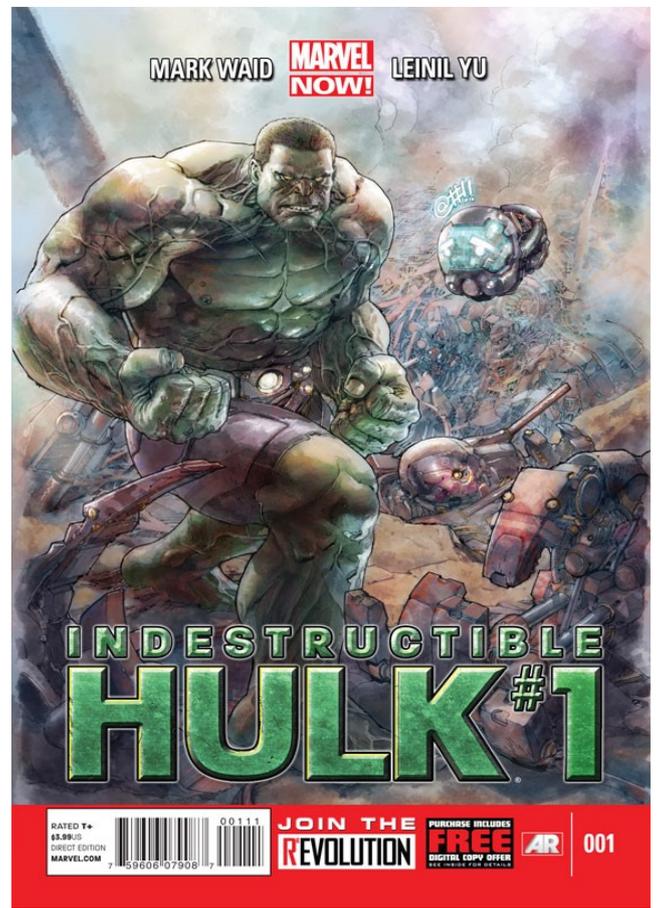
Big Names in the Superhero World

SUPERMAN opened the parade of comic book superheroes in 1938 and may still be the most popular comic book hero today. With his blue and red costume, complete with Kryptonite S-Shield, Superman has become an iconic character of pop art. Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel created the Superman character and created his life story, according to which Superman came to Earth from the dying planet of Krypton. He is raised by Jonathan and Martha Kent in Smallville, a town in Kansas. Given the name Clark Kent, he becomes a hero who does not hesitate to use his powers to better and save humanity. Created during the Great Depression, Superman also was a social activist, fighting against crooked businessmen and politicians.

Bruce Wayne, a.k.a. BATMAN, a brave billionaire who devotes his life to fighting evil, is the creation of artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger. Batman first appeared in DC Comics publications in 1939. Batman is not endowed with superpowers. Bruce Wayne lived through an unforgettable horror as a child. He witnessed his parents being shot in front of him. He made up his mind there and then that he must rid the fictional city of Gotham of crime and corruption. To do this he trained himself physically and intellectually and donned a bat-themed costume. Batman gets support from his sidekick Robin and his butler Alfred Pennyworth.



(left): The June, 1938 cover of Action Comics. The issue features the first appearance of Superman (AP Photo/Metropolis Collectibles). (right) A rare copy of the first Batman comic book. (PRNewsFoto/Heritage Auctions)



(top left): The issue 11 cover of "Batman" (AP Photo/DC Comics).

(top right): The cover of "Indestructible Hulk" (AP Photo/Marvel Entertainment).

(bottom): Stan Lee, famous comic book character creator for Marvel Comics, breaks up a fight between Spider-Man, left, and Batman at a Los Angeles bookstore on November 8, 1995. (AP Photo)

SPIDER-MAN, also called Spidey, made his first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy*, a comic published by Marvel Comics in 1962. Stan Lee and Steve Ditko created the character. On a daily basis he is just Peter Parker, an ordinary person coping with everyday problems. A bite by a radioactive spider transformed Peter into a spider-man endowed with amazing powers. He has the ability to cling to walls and shoot spider-webs. In a way Spider-Man is a tragic hero. Some of his friends and family die as a result of his mistakes. His feelings of guilt inspire Spider-Man to try to make up for his mistakes. He has many foes, including Doctor Octopus, the Sandman and the Lizard. Spider-Man also has a humorous side and doesn't take himself too seriously.

WONDER WOMAN is yet another superhero character published by DC Comics. She is also one of the most important female comic book heroes. Created by William Moulton Marston, *Wonder Woman* has been in continuous publication ever since its debut in 1941. The plot of this comic is built around the Amazons, a tribe of women from Greek mythology, who have a mission to realize the ideals of love, peace and sexual equality in a world dominated and ill-governed by men. Wonder Woman was born as Princess Diana, the daughter of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, but in the man's world she is known as Diana Prince. While Wonder Woman is a strong warrior and possesses magic weapons such as the Lasso of Truth, which forces people bound by it to speak the truth, her triumphs are the result of love, not destruction.

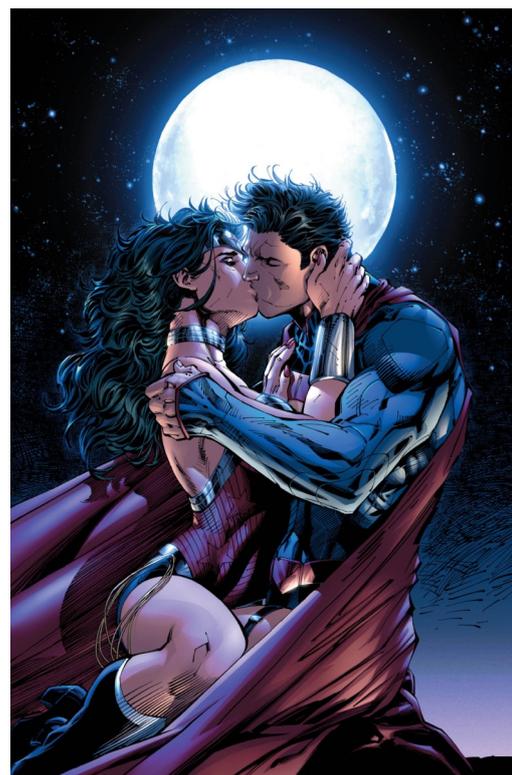
CAPTAIN AMERICA is the incarnation of all that is

good and pure. He has the right to assemble the Avengers, a club of superheroes, and is respected and listened to by all of them. As a patriot he wears a star on his chest and carries around a star-spangled shield, which is a weapon that he throws at his enemies. Captain America is a product of Marvel Comics, or rather, its predecessor in the 1940s, Timely Comics. Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created the character. Captain America is the alter ego of Steve Rogers, a sickly young man who was given an experimental serum to make him perfect in every way. Having received the serum, he becomes an indispensable character in World War II fighting the Axis military forces. After WWII, when the superhero was extremely popular, his popularity decreased. It was revived, however, when he appeared in the team of Avengers in 1964. Since then he has appeared in both Avengers and in his own series. Steve Rogers was killed in *Captain America* vol. 5 in 2007, but the series continues with Rogers' former sidekick, Bucky, who took up the mantle.

The HULK is a superhero created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. He made his first appearance in *The Incredible Hulk* in 1962. The series is published by Marvel Comics. Dr. Bruce Banner is a socially withdrawn person who lived through abuse as a child. When he gets stressed out, he turns into a large green humanoid endowed with nearly limitless strength. The transformations, which are reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, happen to Banner involuntarily and lead to various complications in his life, even though he occasionally has control over the Hulk.



"Avengers Vs X-men #1." (AP Photo/Marvel Entertainment)



Comic book image shows Wonder Woman and Superman kissing from the "Justice League 12" issue. (AP Photo/DC Entertainment)

Movies Based on Comic Books

IMDb, an online database of information related to films, television programs, and video games lists well over a hundred movies based on comic books and graphic novels.

The comic book superhero who has made the most frequent appearances on the big screen is Batman. Batman movies include such titles as: *Batman* (1989), *Batman: The Movie* (1966), *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman and Robin* (1997), *Batman Forever* (1995), *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). In Batman movies, humanity faces various dangers, be it a secret invention that dehydrates people, a homicidal Joker, a corrupt businessman who plots to take control of Gotham City and many others. Batman is there to fight evil characters and wage his war to free the crime-ridden Gotham City from corruption.

Another character who has made several comebacks on the big screen is Superman. The series lists *Superman* (1978), *Superman II* (1980), *Superman III* (1983), *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987) and the 2006 production *Superman Returns*. From the first episode, which tells the story of how he was sent to Earth from his dying planet, we see him marry Lois Lane; become split in two: good Clark Kent and bad Man of Steel; and finally how the Man of Steel returns to Earth to become the people's savior once

again and reclaim the love of Lois.

X-Men made their cinematic debut in 2000 and then consecutive appearances in 2003 (*X2*), 2006 (*X-Men: The Last Stand*), 2009 (*X-Men Origins: Wolverine*) and 2011 (*X-Men: First Class*). X-Men are mutants with superhuman abilities who must fight assassins, terrorists and a dictator who wants to start World War III.

Spider-Man and his fights with evil - sometimes disguised as a brilliant scientist, sometimes as a doctor - as well as with numerous villains and temptations, populate the Spider-Man series: *Spider-Man* (2002), *Spider-Man 2* (2004), *Spider-Man 3* (2007) and *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012).

Actor Robert Downey Jr. (in the photo below), starred as Tony Stark in three movies in the *Iron Man* series (2008, 2010 and 2013) Tony Stark, a wealthy industrialist, builds an armored suit in which he can fight and defeat even the most cunning, evil and strongest opponents. His is a nod to technological innovation.

A crowd of superheroes from Marvel Super Heroes visited the film *The Avengers* (2012) to stand against Loki and his cohorts when they threatened the world. Who but Iron Man, The Incredible Hulk, Thor, Captain America, Hawkeye and Black Widow is able to save the world from disaster? This seems a rhetorical question. Especially when they are a team!



Robert Downey Jr., as Tony Stark/Iron Man, in a scene from "Marvel's Iron Man 3." (AP Photo/Marvel)

Activity Page

Exercise 1 COMIC BOOKS QUIZ

1. The adjectives 'comic' and 'comical' have a similar meaning, but there is a difference in their usage. 'Comic' should be used for something that is intended to be amusing while 'comical' is used about a situation/person that actually was funny or absurd. Which adjective will you use in the sentences below?

- a. We are going to see a ... opera tonight.
- b. And then she sang us a song.
- c. ... books are my favorite.
- d. There is something ... about him.

2. What color was the Hulk when he appeared in the first issue of the series The Incredible Hulk in 1962?

- a. green
- b. black
- c. grey
- d. orange

3. Stan Lee (Stanley Martin Lieber) was the creator (or co-creator) of which of the following comic book superheroes?

- a. Spider-Man
- b. Iron Man
- c. The Hulk
- d. all of the above

4. What decades are considered the Golden Age of the comic book (there may be more than one answer)?

- a. 1960's
- b. 1930's
- c. 1940's
- d. 1980's

5. Steve Rogers' alter ego is:

- a. Spider-Man
- b. Captain America
- c. Superman
- d. Iron Man

6. Roy Lichtenstein's 'Whaam!' is based on an image from:

- a. All American Men of War
- b. Aquaman
- c. Captain Action
- d. Uncanny X-Men

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This comic image released by Marvel Entertainment shows the cover of the "Uncanny Avengers," part of Marvel Comics' initiative aimed at recharging the publisher's heroes and villains. (AP Photo/Marvel Entertainment)