

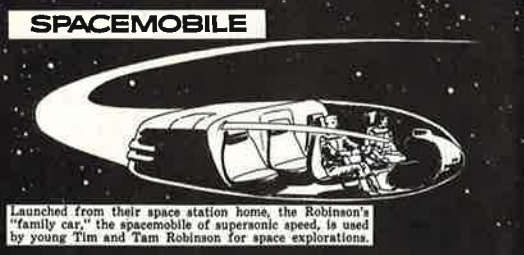
# GRAPHIC STORY WORLD

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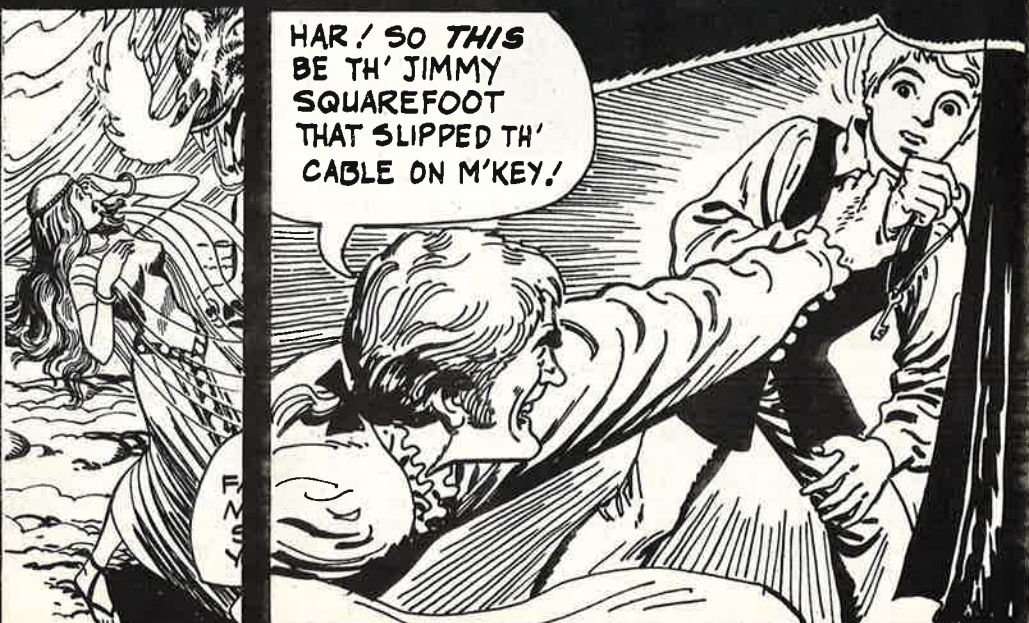
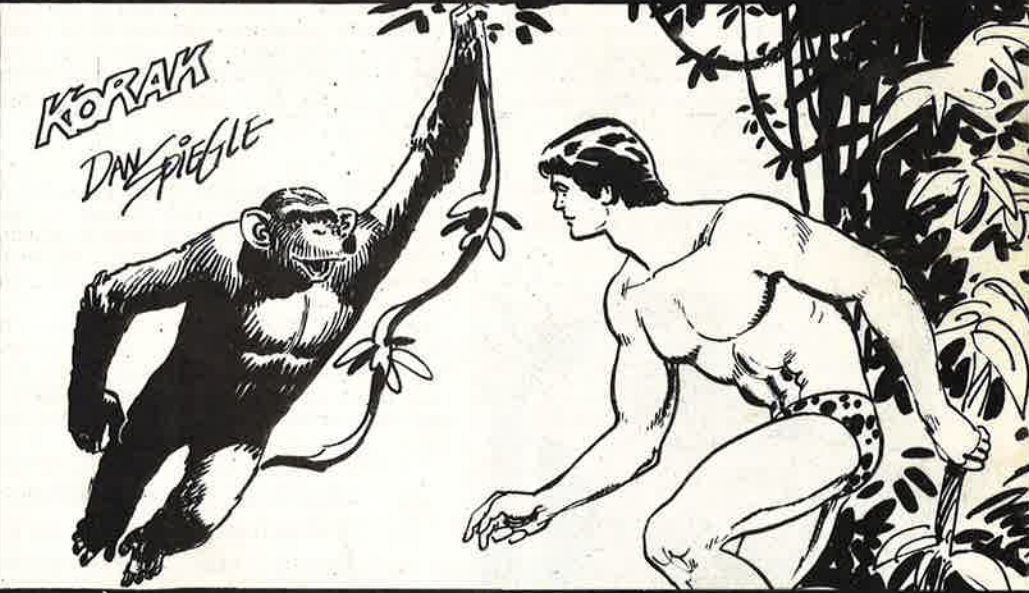
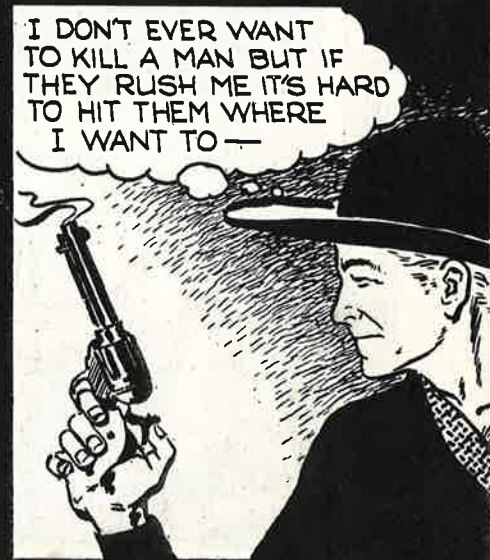
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*THE DANGEROUS JOURNEY BEGINS...*



## An Interview with Dan Spigle





# AN INTERVIEW WITH DAN SPIEGLE

## CONDUCTED BY DAN GHENO

"I was born in Cosmopolis, Washington in 1920. Then I moved over to Honolulu. When the stock market crash came, I left its warm climate for Northern California, where I went through my standard school years — and got the itch for drawing as a living..."

**Q:** You've been one of the leading artists in comics for more than twenty years—how did it all begin?

**Dan Spiegle:** In my last year at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles—this was 1949—I realized that my GI Bill was running out, and I thought it best if I looked for a job. A friend of mine seeing my plight handed me a clipping from the classified ads of the newspaper: Capitol Records needed an artist to draw a comic strip of theirs. At that time I'd been working on a western comic strip and I thought that I'd pay a visit to Capitol, show them my idea, and perhaps get the job.

Well, when I arrived they informed me that the comic strip was "Bozo the Clown," and of course I was let down because I couldn't do that kind of strip. But when they saw my western strip, the man I was talking to told me he was the brother-in-law of one of "Hopalong Cassidy's"—Bill Boyd's—managers, and that they were looking for an artist to draw the famous cowboy in syndicated strip form. He told me to walk a couple of blocks down the street to where "Hoppy's" main office was and see if I could get the job.

As the old saying goes, when you're lucky, you're lucky, because I was very fortunate to find Bill Boyd in an agreeable mood. He liked the way I drew horses and commented that it wouldn't matter how I drew him—I'd learn how through practice—as he considered horses the most important in a Western strip. He had another artist who could draw good horses in consideration and told me he'd contact me if I got the job. Sure enough, a week later I got the job.

**Q:** Were you always interested in comics? Some artists start out planning to be illustrators, or to go into advertising...

**Dan Spiegle:** I've always liked to draw. From the time I could hold a pencil, I'd scribble away. I used to go down to the dime store and buy these little 5¢ tablets and draw on them, creating a continued story throughout the tablets. It

was just a natural thing for me to do, to tell a story.

**Q:** Were you influenced by the comic strips appearing at that time?

**Dan Spiegle:** I don't really think I even looked at the comic pages when I was young.

The first comic strip to really make an impression on me was Alex Raymond's "Flash Gordon." Then there were "Tim Tyler" and "Terry and the Pirates" while Caniff was still doing it. I would say that Raymond influenced me the most and gave me the drive to become a comic artist.

While I was in my second year in high school, I drew up a comic strip, colored it, and sent it to King Features — whom I'd always wanted to work for. They sent it back and advised me that the next strip I sent in should not be in color because the colors would print black. I thought it was very nice of them to point out this fact that I was unaware of.

After my school years, along came World War II, and I found myself in the Navy. There, I did things for the base newspaper and insignias for planes. Upon release from the service in '46 I took advantage of the GI Bill and entered into Chouinard the same year.

I'd checked out many colleges, but found that none of them were to my liking—you had to take too many minor courses on top of the ones you really wanted to enroll in. I'd say this is true today, also. If you want to do anything and do it well, you must put your whole back into it, and you can't be bothered by what you could care less about—like in my own practicing years, I drew six hours a day, and I enjoyed it. I know many a friend who enrolled in a university and finally got so upset by all the minor, useless courses they had to take that they quit, coming over to Chouinard.

**Q:** What was it like doing a syndicated strip for the first time?

**Dan Spiegle:** It was rather difficult at first adjusting to the schedule for "Hoppy." It took me all seven days to do a week's

amount of strips—and they wanted them six weeks ahead for the dailies, and eight to ten weeks for the Sundays. But later I settled down to taking only about four days for the week's worth and it helped me get ahead.

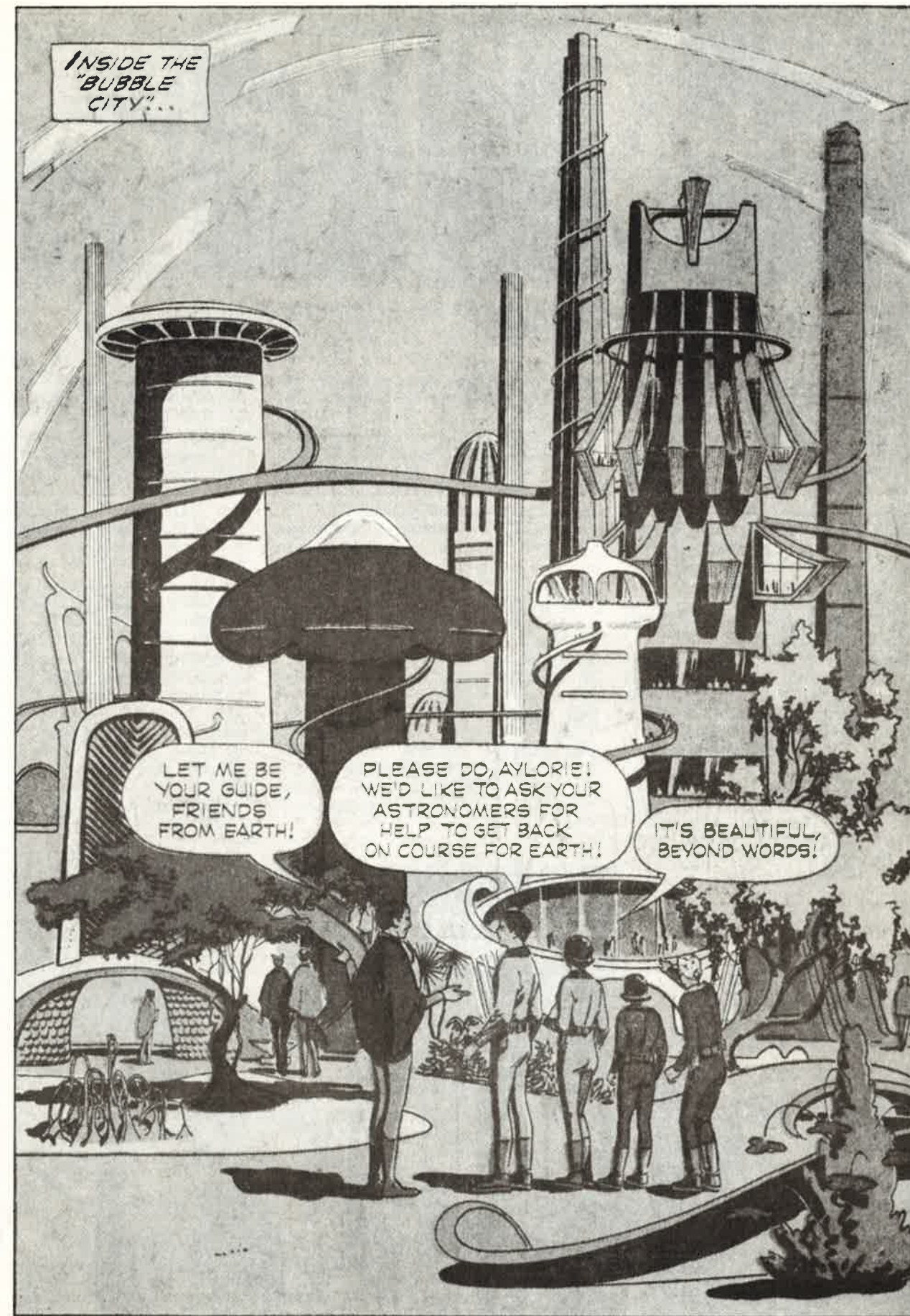
The first story was written by Dan Grayson, one of Bill Boyd's finance managers, and myself—but after awhile we realized we just couldn't come up with anything interesting, so we hired a writer named Royal King Cole.

Like all writers, he had a tendency to overwrite things. He would always inject unneeded adjectives in the box captions and bog down dialog with long wordage. He's gone on and on, stealing my thunder since everything was already written out and I couldn't even begin to create as much impact as I would want to with my drawings. A reader can get frustrated with so many descriptions in words when he can see what's going on by glancing at the drawings. The drawing should always come first and the words second. I'm lucky now, since at Western I can clean-up the dialog balloon when it gets too cluttered. I never really cared for the stories that Royal wrote, anyway. They just weren't interesting.

I used an awful lot of Craftint in my "Hoppy" dailies—in fact, for a while, too much. I sort of got carried away, and seeing how good it looked on the drawing board full scale, I was very proud. Things look different when they're reproduced half-size, of course, and I was shocked when I saw the mess I'd made. It's very hard to experiment as I did with Craftint, for you must wait a whole six weeks to see whether you accomplished what you've set out for.

**Q:** Your characters are always pleasant looking...

**Dan Spiegle:** I always tried to make Hoppy with a pleasant face. I gave all his sidekicks a happy face because I don't like this grim-faced, constantly-frowning approach most artists have. I see no reason for it. I like to have a little humor in my characters, as much as pos-



The Space Family Robinson in "The Iron Dwarfs."



An episode from the first "Hopalong Cassidy" story for the Mirror Syndicate in 1949, reproduced from Dan Spiegle's syndicate proofs.

sible—but of course if it's necessary to the storyline I will make the character solemn appearing.

And then, too, Bill Boyd was always a very kind and concerned man. Even at the peak of his great popularity he was never too busy to give me the time of day. Often he would hold my oldest son on his knee. This congeniality and love of children always showed through in his personal appearances.

**Q: Did any readers of "Hoppy" ever dislike or disapprove of something you did in the strip?**

**Dan Spiegle:** There was this one particular character—I spent a lot of time creating him, and I thought he was pretty good myself. He was a Mexican and played the heavy. But I received a great many letters from enraged people who thought I was typecasting Mexicans. I'm sure if it had been any other minority I

would still have received flak, but I really thought I had a good character and it didn't seem to me that I was downgrading anyone. From then on we made it a point in our strip never to mention any nationality and to always make the villain as general-looking as possible.

Naturally, I never tried to convey any message or philosophy or opinion of my own. "Hopalong" really didn't belong to me. He was someone else's, and I couldn't go against the cast they set for him. So there was no subtleness in the strip of any kind.

**Q: When did King Features buy out "Hopalong Cassidy" from the original syndicate—the Mirror Syndicate?**

**Dan Spiegle:** In 1951. They bought us out, and then they sent for me to come to New York to get acquainted and talk things over. It

was here that I joined the National Cartoonists Society and got involved with the organization.

King decided to make "Hopalong" a promotional strip which means that they would put something like two unknown strips with "Hoppy," and sell them as a package. They'd say, if you want "Hopalong Cassidy" you have to take the other ones, as well.

"Hoppy" was extremely popular for a while, hitting a peak of 200 plus newspapers. Eventually, the Western trend wore out and "Hoppy" began slipping until King decided to drop us. We—Cole and myself—looked into other syndicates, trying to sell off "Hoppy." But they would only accept us if we took a cut in pay—so Royal and I jointly decided to abandon the venture.

**Q: You did a comic strip after "Hoppy" was cancelled, didn't you?**

© 1961 by Warner Bros., Inc.



Below: Dan Spiegle's portrayal of James Garner as Bret Maverick. Right: Jack Kelly as Bart.



**Dan Spiegle:** Yes, "Penn & Chris"—and while I thought I had it sold a couple of times, it was never picked up by a syndicate. They were having trouble with sailing strips, at this time, and since mine was based on pirates, that let me out.

**Q: And you moved to Western Publishing Company...**

**Dan Spiegle:** Western was lassoing any artist into their corral who had prior experience, so they happily set me to work doing — westerns. This was about the time of the great cowboy mania saturation peak in comic books, around '55 or '56.

**Q: What was your favorite comic book of that time?**

**Dan Spiegle:** Well, I rarely look back into my past. The story I'm drawing at the time is my main concern. Nonetheless, I would say my favorite was *Maverick*, which ran about three years—fairly successful, considering the run of other western strips published then.

I was assigned this strip even before they had stills available for the show, so I was sent down to Warner Bros. to see it in production—where I met James Garner, which is perhaps the reason I enjoyed it so much. Having met the star, I was extra careful to make the drawings I did look as parallel to the real person as possible. I put my all into that strip, having fun all the way.

**Q: How did you come to draw "Space Family Robinson"?**

**Dan Spiegle:** At that time, Del Connell, a Western editor, was writing the origin issue for the new magazine, and they asked me to draw up a cast of characters. Western liked them so much that they assigned me the strip. It was a success right

from the beginning, running about four years, for a while one of their most popular.

In fact, it was so popular that CBS stole our idea and refused to pay us any royalties! We were going to sue, but our lawyers cautioned against it, since we were doing so many comic books on their characters, and in the long run we would lose from the loss of business from them. So we adopted their title and added it to ours in hope of deriving some publicity off the tv show.

**Q: Did you have any set plans drawn for the space station?**

**Dan Spiegle:** No. Space Station #1 just progressively evolved out of my imagination. One thing led to another, and I had a fully equipped space ship with solar gardens, space pods, and the whole works. I fashioned the space pods, by the way, out of my electric razor. The only law that was set out before me concerning the design was that I was not to make the space station look like one of those round uninteresting satellites, the type that satellites are "supposed" to look like.

**Q: You took over Korak when Russ Manning left Western to do the "Tarzan" newspaper strip—did you have much trouble adapting to his version?**

**Dan Spiegle:** No one likes to copy someone else's style, and it was particularly difficult since Russ and I were using entirely different pens for the inking. It wasn't too hard, though, for me to adjust to the Korak characterization, since Russ had done only about ten issues of the magazine. All that was necessary to foster the continuity was to keep his hairdo and youngish appearance intact.

*Magnus, Robot Fighter* [another Manning-drawn comic book] was another thing altogether, since I was asked to do only an interim issue before another artist took over. The New York office [Western has two editorial offices, one in Hollywood for the West Coast, and a main office in New York] asked me to draw exactly the same as Manning. Quite impossible!

**Q: Did you enjoy working with editor Joe Kubert on his "Unknown Soldier" creation?**

**Dan Spiegle:** Yes, very much. I learned a great many new ways of going about telling a story from him. Unfortunately, the fact that I lived so far from New York [in Southern California] made working conditions almost impossible. Obviously, since Kubert has all his heart into the character, he wanted things done exactly the way he used to do it. Naturally, since I have my own style, we sometimes conflicted on certain ways to tell the story. If I lived closer to him, we would've been able to go over each and every panel to our satisfaction. Alas, the phone rates between New York and California are such that that couldn't be done, and I left the strip after two issues. It was best that he replace me with someone who could better understand what he wants out of his character.

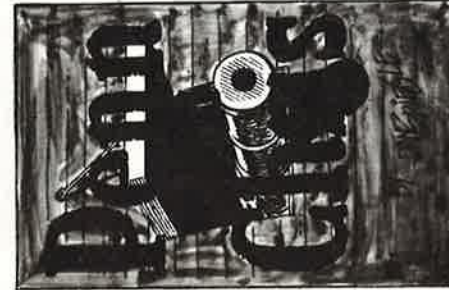
I did have an awful lot of fun, however — doing that war book gave me a chance to experiment on new storytelling ideas and concepts I normally wouldn't be allowed to do.

**Q: Have you ever been censored?**  
**Dan Spiegle:** Western has its own code, not too strict or lenient. They usually leave it up to one's good taste. Here's where good composition can be utilized. For in-



By 1954, Dan Spiegle's Craftint techniques had added a new dimension to the "Hopalong Cassidy" strip, and the contrast with the rough-and-ready black-&-whites of the first story (left) is striking. This sequence, which took Hoppy and his pals to San Francisco and Australia, is notable for its use of tone. (Reproduced from newspaper copy, courtesy of the Mike Royer Collection.)





is the second Sunday page, reproduced from the colored proofs. The two "Penn & Chris" storylines are completely different. The boys are the same.

Dan Spiegle says, "I gave the syndicates two choices of story direction—one on the Sundays, and the other on the dailies—for "Penn & Chris." This

stance, you could position a gunman and his pistol in a close-up, firing, and then show the other cowboy dead in the next panel—obsured by a shadow of some sort. There's always a way to imply something like a dead body without having to show it outright.

The reason Western didn't join the Comics Code association was that we were already abiding by our own code—and had for a long time—and we didn't need another one to go by. We felt, however, that if the Comics Code could induce other companies to exercise good judgment once in a while regarding content, then more power to it. But we



A key episode in the second week of the daily "Penn & Chris."

didn't feel we needed someone else to tell us whether our work was in good taste.

I've never been censored by Western myself—except once when I put too low a cut on the leading lady's blouse. However, many times I've been asked to change a panel or two when I send in my rough layouts for lettering. [Staff letterers do most of the lettering for the Western comics, following a standard practice in the industry.] They write around the borders of the paper, asking me to change a panel when it's needed to make the story more readable and to flow better. Often I find myself disagreeing with them, as many artists do I'm sure. But in the long run, the editor is usually right, since it's his job, and I'm sure he knows best how the reader will react to a certain panel—different from my viewpoint. But this happens only once in a while, asking me to change a panel or two.

Q: What's your main concern in drawing a story?

Dan Spiegle: I aim at creating as much depth in a crowd scene or a group of buildings as possible. The most important thing I attempt is to keep a continuity going in the strips, with the flow of the

characters going from right to left. It always hurts a story when you have someone running left to right, since it breaks up the reader's eye movement and he has to refocus.

Q: What's your working speed?

Dan Spiegle: I pencil about ten pages a day on the average. When I ink them it drops to three pages a day.

Q: Do you work at home?

Dan Spiegle: Yes. And working at home I find I can get off my easel for a few moments to an hour, to pull weeds or whatever, if I begin to get tired—until my inspiration returns. Often, when I'm really

rolling, I work non-stop late into the night, from the early morning hours. Usually I find the first day on a story goes slow, but after two days I'm more involved with it, and I find myself working at a faster pace.

Q: The reactions of people when they learn you're a comic book artist—are they ever critical?

Dan Spiegle: Certainly many people have sneered about the fact I'm a comic book artist. But no one as yet has tried to give me a lecture on the "evils" of comic books. Most people are basically polite, and won't tell you what they think of you to your face—but I can see through to what they think. They envision comic books as the lowest form of literature. But I believe comic books have their own place.

I know for a fact that my children learned how to read better through comics, while also increasing their vocabulary with picture-word association.

Q: What changes would you make in comic books, if you could?

Dan Spiegle: I'd like to have comic books a little larger in size, on a better stock of paper that would reproduce better—so that the art we spend hours on could be better appreciated and the color would be

brighter. The coloring, too. At Western the artist has no choice as to how his art will be colored. That'd be my main concern. The colorer just slaps on any old gaudy color that's catchy—without any regard to whether it's night or day, the mood, or whatever. That's why I try to put so much black in my art, so that the fella who happens to color it has less to mess up on. I used to indicate what color I wanted, but they made me discontinue that practice for they felt it was too much trouble for the colorer to follow my directions. The only time I was allowed to color an entire issue, page for

page, was a Sea Hunt book I did. Doing the coloring myself, I think I added more depth to the art.

Western's digest-size comic books are an innovation whose future looks very bright. The only drawback with this type of book is that it makes all of the problems we have with the standard comic book more acute. Our art is even more cramped, and the coloring becomes that much worse on the miniature pages. Colors that were appealing in the original stories look horrid when reprinted at a reduced size. Better paper just might solve this.

Although the digest-sized books appear to be a success, they're only one answer. As a whole, the industry should be expanding in both size and page-count.

Q: What do we have to look forward to from you, now that you're no longer drawing a regular series?

Dan Spiegle: I'm getting very many scripts from the New York office for some of their mystery books, and I'll be doing quite a bit of art for Mystery Comics Digest. I'll also continue drawing the comic book versions of Walt Disney movies. The latest one I'm working on is "Napoleon and Samatha."

=Dan Gheno