



**Quick—who is DC Comics' greatest detective?** A square-jawed, non-superpowered crimestopper who fights for justice in a cruel urban landscape teeming with grotesque bad guys with weird names and obsessions?

The answer, of course, is Batman. But for one lone month in DC's 75-plus-year history, the Darknight Detective had some real competition in the crimestopping department when, in September 1975, DC published *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-40 starring the one, the only, Dick Tracy!

*Limited Collectors' Edition* was the umbrella title for DC's entry into the world of treasury-sized comics. While across town Marvel Comics was a little more democratic in who it let headline their treasuries, DC mostly rotated the same half-dozen characters: Superman, Batman, Shazam!, Tarzan, and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (who, hoofs down, was DC's biggest treasury star). Dick Tracy, being a globally recognized icon, fit the informal criteria DC had established, so he got to skip ever having to be tested in a regular-sized comic, debuting for the company in this more deluxe format.

LCE #C-40 reprints a sequence of Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* newspaper strip that ran from Tuesday, December 21, 1943 through Wednesday, May 17, 1944. Those strips originally ran in black and white, but to appear here they were colored and edited (panels reorganized, subplots dropped) to fit DC's comic-book format and page count.

The story begins right before Christmas, with Tracy happy that, for once, it seems like he'll be able to enjoy the holiday season with his family and not have to be out on the streets stopping crime. But it doesn't take long (page two, in fact) before he runs across the dead-eyed Flattop, who at gunpoint takes Tracy hostage in the back of a cab. Over the course of 60 pages, Flattop's hasty decision draws in dozens of innocent (and not-so-innocent) people, including some black marketeers, a pickpocket, a street-corner salesman (who meets a bad end), plus the old ham and former big-time movie star Vitamin Flintheart. Hardly a master criminal, Flattop gets through life being more ruthless than anyone else, basically stumbling from one tense situation to the next, with Dick Tracy on his trail.

One of the hallmarks of the *Dick Tracy* comic strip, and one of things that made it really stand out to this five-year-old who bought the tabloid book off the stands, was its violence. Sure, Batman got into all sort of fisticuffs, but in just this Flattop sequence alone, multiple people are shot in the face, someone is burned alive, and a prison guard gets a shard of glass to the eye. Even more unusual when compared to Batman comics (SPOILER ALERT!), Flattop *dies* at the end! And this is no Joker-style "We can't find the body" open ending ... no, sir; this comic ends on a closeup shot of Flattop's bloated corpse. Dick Tracy knew how to take care of business.

Like all the treasury editions, *Dick Tracy* came packed with "extras"—a timeline of big moments in the strip's history, a Rogues' Gallery, a Crimestoppers Textbook, plus an article on Gould, who was still doing the strip at the time (officially, at least). It's an extraordinary fun package, and a great introduction to the world of Dick Tracy. So why was it the only one?

The editor of the book (and for most of DC's treasuries) was longtime writer/editor E. Nelson Bridwell (he's not credited on the

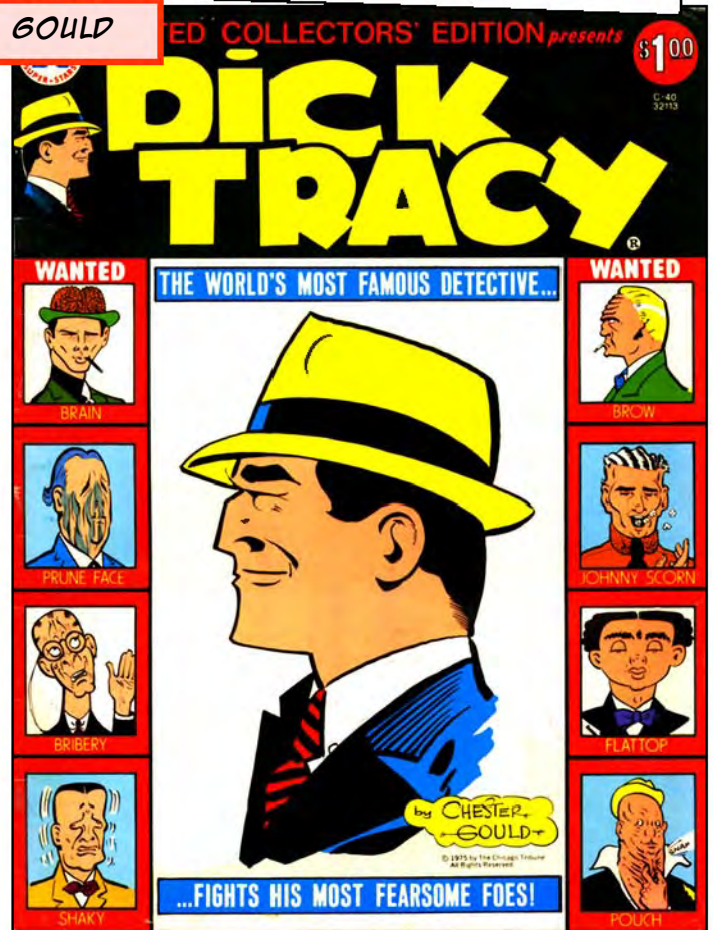
# The World's SECOND Greatest Detective

## DICK TRACY®

by Rob "Mumbles" Kelly



CHESTER GOULD

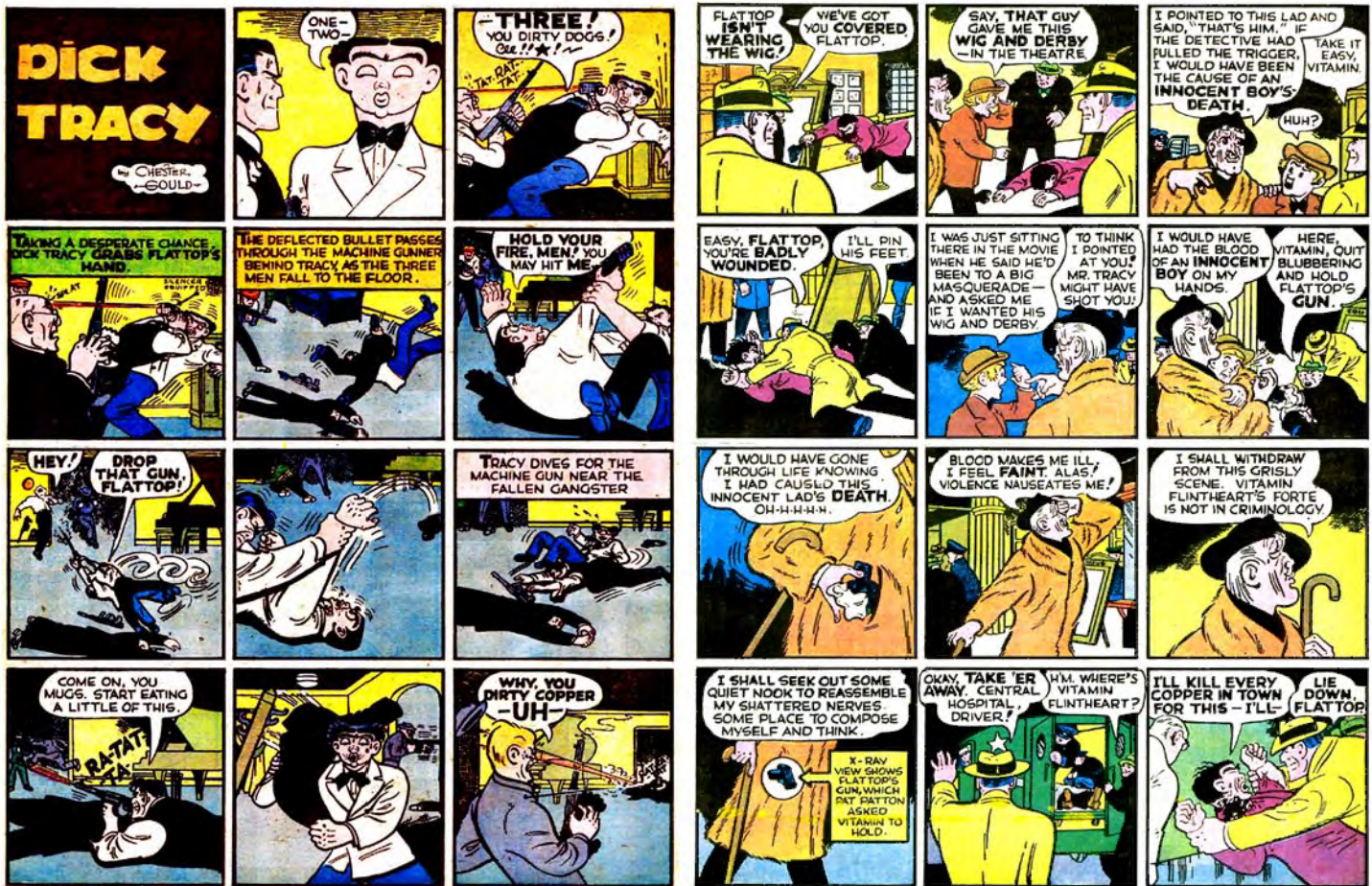


### Detective Comics

Dick Tracy's DC Comics one-shot, in the super-sized *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-40.

Dick Tracy TM & © TMS News & Features, LLC.





Could bio, but since he frequently wrote these sorts of text pieces, odds are it's his work). I was curious to the hows and whys of this book's creation, but since ENB is no longer with us, I turned to Bob Rozakis, a name familiar to most *BACK ISSUE* readers. He was on staff at DC at the time, and told me he guesses that then-VP Sol Harrison "probably came across some old expiring rights agreement or something" and saw this as an opportunity to get a book's worth of material on the cheap. Sadly, *Dick Tracy* didn't sell very well, so DC never brought him back. Tracy had his one shot, and this was it. (There's something oddly poetic that Dick Tracy joins James Bond as hugely famous fictional characters that were part of the DC Comics stable for all of 30 days.) [Editor's note: DC's *Showcase* #43 (Mar.-Apr. 1963) featured an adaptation of *Doctor No*.]

Which is too bad—DC could have done a lot if they had acquired the rights to Tracy for longer than just the one month. Just imagine what a Batman/Dick Tracy vs. the Joker/Flattop team-up might have been like. [Editor's note: Sorry to intrude again, but *BI* #77 features a "Greatest Stories Never Told" article about a scrapped Batman/Dick Tracy crossover by Max Allan Collins and Joe Staton.] Or maybe he would have been given his own monthly comic, something DC was doing at the time with other licensed pulp characters, like *The Shadow* and *the Avenger* (in *Justice, Inc.*). A *Dick Tracy* series written and drawn by people like Denny O'Neil, Michael Kaluta, Howard Chaykin, or Frank Robbins could really have been something to see.

While the book wasn't a big seller, obviously I wasn't the only one it made a strong impression on—in the 1982 video for the Clash's "Rock the Casbah," lead singer Joe Strummer can be seen reading *Dick Tracy* as



he lounges by a pool [see above]. What the what?!

Dick Tracy, of course, would go on to get his own big-budget movie (following in the wake of, yes, *Batman* a year earlier), and after over a decade or so of being relegated to the pop-culture margins, returned to daily creative prominence in the 21st Century under the talented hands of Mike Curtis and the legendary Joe Staton. As Flattop learned the hard way, you just can't keep a good crimstopper down!

**ROB KELLY** is a writer, illustrator, and comics historian. He is the creator and EIC of *The Aquaman Shrine* blog, and the co-creator/writer of the award-winning webcomic *ACE KILROY*, which in part draws its inspiration from this *Dick Tracy* comic.



## Dirty Dealings

Two pages scanned by Rob Kelly from DC's *Dick Tracy Limited Collectors' Edition*, by the inimitable Chester Gould. The strip's violent tone is clearly evident here.

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