Judgment Day

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Who: William Gaines, EC Comics, and Judge Charles Murphy

What: Judgement Day

When: 1950s

Where: United States of America

Why: The featuring of a black astronaut

Introduction

It is suddenly thousands of years into the future, a man in a bright red space suit climbs down from his gleaming spaceship and steps foot on to foreign ground. “Welcome! Welcome, Earthman” a crowd cheers, as he is greeted by a mass of orange and blue robots on this planet called Cybrinia (1). Years before, humans placed “a small handful” of robots on this planet to see how they would develop and survive (2). This earthman, named Tarlton, has now arrived to inspect and decide whether or not the society it has fostered is ready to be integrated into Earth’s human civilization.

One of the orange robots takes Tarlton on a lengthy tour through the city in an attempt to showcase the development and success of Cybrinia’s robot population. Speeding through the gleaming capitol
buildings, Tarlton becomes impressed. Not only have the robots mastered innovative engineering, but they have also developed a democratic government. It is not until the ardent orange robot invites the earthman to inspect the “assembly plant” (where the planet’s robot population is created) that he notices a peculiarity (2).

“I see only orange workers! What about the blue robots?” Tarlton inquires (2). The confused orange robot responds by explaining that only the orange robots are created here; the blue robots are assembled in their own plant on the other side of town. Hiding his concern, Tarlton dismisses the subject and the tour of the assembly plant continues.

As his guide concludes his explanation of the creation process and they exit the building, Tarlton asks his companion where the blue plant is located and to take him there immediately. It is in “blue town…on the south side of the city,” the robot replies, and he suggests that they take a bus (4).

They arrive at a bus stop, clearly separated into a blue section and an orange section, and Tarlton asks his companion whether the robots on Cybrinia “differentiate between blue and orange robots” (4).

“Of course!” the tour guide exclaims, “otherwise there’d be trouble! Have to keep them in their place you know” (4).

This statement begins to worry Tarlton, and he begins to notice just how separated the blue and orange robots really are. The bus, for instance, is separated into a clearly labeled “ORANGE” section in the front, and a “BLUE” section in the rear. Moreover, the charging station (the human equivalent of a restaurant) just outside the window has a large sign stating “ORANGE ONLY” (5).

Soon enough, the bus arrives in a much smaller and less shiny section of the city. Blue robots crowd the streets and the buildings appear run-down; a sharp contrast from the gleaming square they were just in.

Moving through building, both Tarlton and his orange guide see that every step of the blue robot creation process is identical to the orange robots’ production; the only difference being a blue shield is attached to the outside instead of orange.

“The sheathing are only outside coverings,” Tarlton explains to the orange machine, “the inside structures are no different than yours” (6). Baffled, the orange robot tries to retort that the outer shell does indeed make a difference. The blue robot goes on to explain how in Cybrinia’s society, their blue sheathing cause them to be limited to menial jobs, sent to the back of the bus, forced to go to different recharging stations, and live in a special section of the city.
In return, the orange robot explains that it is not his fault; the social barriers between the blue and orange robots existed far before he was created so there is very little that he can do about them. Hearing these words, Tarlton decides that Cybrinia is “not yet ready to join the great galactic republic” (7). He storms out of the assembly plant, with his orange companion running frantically behind, and starts back toward his ship. “Why, Tarlton? Why aren’t we ready?” the bot cries after him (7). Tarlton explains to him that he and the robots of Cybrinia must look inside themselves for the answer to that question. He assures his orange companion that there was also a time like this on Earth, where there seemed to be no hope, but once “mankind on Earth learned to live together, real progress first began” (7). Tarlton climbed back into his shining silver spaceship and waved good-bye to the land of Cybrinia. Within seconds, his aircraft was soaring into the infinite void of space and he takes off his space helmet, and shakes his head, and allows the “beads of perspiration on his dark skin to twinkle like distant stars…” (7).

This story was the plot of the 1953 graphic novel “Judgement Day” published by EC Comics and illustrated by Joe Orlando. Although an inspiring story to readers today, this comic was extremely controversial in the 1950s, a time when discrimination of African Americans was still quite prominent. The plot, which scrutinizes a segregated society and features a black astronaut, went against many of the popular beliefs at the time and gave the Comics Code Authority the perfect excuse to drive the publisher, Bill Gaines, out of business (Coville).

EC Comics and The Comic Code Authority

In the late 1940s to the early 1950s, there was much controversy in the comic book industry, and the main perpetrator of this turmoil was Dr. Fredric Wertham (Figure 5). Wertham was a distinguished psychologist who became interested in the effects that comics had on children in 1946, and then, two years later, he appeared in an interview with Collier’s Magazine where he publicly denounced comic books, saying that they require “closer scrutiny” (Coville). This marked the start of a long series of events that proved disastrous to the comic industry, such as comic book issues being indicted as communist, unduly sexual, and racially discriminating. In addition, local laws were passed to confuse dealers, wholesalers, and publishers. Finally, by 1950, there were public demonstrations where comic books were burned in mass (Coville) (Figure 6).

By 1954, there was still a large amount of negativity directed toward comic book corporations, despite internal attempts to instigate stricter regulations, and Dr. Wertham led the crusade with his new book, Seduction of the Innocent. In the text, he draws a correlation between juvenile delinquency and comic books. He also concludes that graphic novels “gave kids wrong ideas about laws
“implemented and reinforced homosexual thoughts,” and “gave little girls the ‘wrong ideas’ about a woman’s place in society,” summarizes Jamie Coville, a noted professional in the comic book industry’s history. These accusations did not go unanswered, however, with many comic book proponents criticizing Dr. Wertham’s research by pointing out that his study only focused on juvenile delinquents and did not compare them to other kids who read comic books (to which Wertham replied that those children “may be worse off”) (Coville). It was at this point that the United States Senate fully joined the fray and held an investigation into the relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency, specifically the books that dealt with horror and crime (for full audio recordings of these hearings, click here). In these hearings, Dr. Wertham and other delinquency experts were called in to testify against comic books and representatives from major comic companies and the National Cartoonist Society testified in favor of the books (Coville) (see Figure 7).

This arrangement turned out to be a poor one for the comics industry as the experts had experience testifying in court and many of the representatives from the companies had little knowledge of the content that they produced. The main exception to this trend was William Maxwell “Bill” Gaines, who was the publisher of Entertaining Comics (EC) (Figure 8). This comic book company was the main producer of horror comics; the genre that most people were campaigning against. Gaines was clear in describing his position and was unfazed even when he was repeatedly questioned as to whether his comic books were in “good taste” or not (see full transcript of his testimony here). But this did not change the overall outcome of the trial which was an advisement from the Senate to comic companies to essentially perform a “competent job of self-policing.” Thus, Gaines met with representatives of other companies and formed the Comic Magazine Association of America (CMAA) and its Comics Code Authority (CCA) on October 26th, 1954. However, once this association was formed, Gaines refused to join because it was not what he had intended to create, and he believed that the CCA guidelines were too strict (see full guidelines here). Despite his refusal, the association was still approved by the Senate in its final report in 1954 where it stated that the CCA represented “steps in the right direction” (Coville). It should be noted that the Senate did not fully endorse Dr. Wertham’s studies because it only focused on juvenile delinquents. In addition, Dr. Wertham was not fully satisfied with the result of the trial and did not approve of the CCA because he believed the companies would be unable to perform an adequate job policing themselves.

Therefore, the Comics Code Authority was formed “in response to intense political and media pressure,” with “Gaines’ vision for it being more as a public relations gesture,” states Coville, but it instead turned into a “dictatorial censorship organization” that was headed by Judge Charles Murphy (interview). This placed strict guidelines on art and content that publishers had to follow in order to earn a stamp of approval (Figure 1), and comics that lacked this stamp were not picked by distributors. This led to many smaller companies falling into financial ruin because they appealed to a niche market in which the consumer liked aspects that were prohibited by the Code. However, larger companies were also effected in terms of sales because all of their stories were considered tame in comparison to pre-code comics. This led to hardships on the part of
A lot of artists just left the field of comics due to a lack of work, and artists that remained said they were regularly being told that they'd have to accept a lower pay rate in order to keep working in comics.

EC, in particular, faced extreme hardships by the CCA, which targeted it and censored most of its content to try to drive it out of business. This effort was spurred on, in part, because of resentment that Gaines refused to join the association and only began to curb his content after newsstands and dealers refused to carry non-stamped comics. The CCA maintained a general disdain toward Gaines as he came to represent “the face of ‘evil’ comic book publisher who was ‘corrupting’ kids and turning them into juvenile delinquents” after his testimony in the Senate hearings (Coville). The comics that EC produced would not circulate among the general censoring staff and would instead be scrutinized directly by the administrator, Judge Charles Murphy.

With Judgment Day, the CCA told Gaines and Al Feldstein, the writer of the story, that they could not publish the comic book if the final panel had a black astronaut. For Murphy, the final panel was too controversial for 1950s America, a time when segregation and systemic racism were still accepted parts of society. This story was likely perceived as too critical of contemporary society. This outraged EC and Gaines threatened to sue the Authority. Murphy then chose to compromise and said that EC could publish the comic if it removed the astronauts beads of sweat. Gaines and Feldstein responded with “Fuck you!,” hanging up the phone (Von Bernewitz, Fred and Grant Geissman, 88).

Nonetheless, EC decided to publish the story without revisions, and it received several letters in response with only one criticizing the story. In fact, the comic drew the admiration of esteemed American writers, such as Ray Bradbury, the famed writer of Fahrenheit 451, who wrote in as well, praising the story for its message and saying that it should be required reading for everyone within the United States (see Figure 9).

However, despite Gaines winning the battle to publish Judgment Day, the overall war between Entertaining Comics and the Comics Code Authority was lost by EC when its distributor fell into financial ruin and it was forced to stop production of each of its comic books.

Impact

After resigning from the CMAA, Gaines moved on to distribute his magazine, MAD. Shawna Kidman, a graduate of the
University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, relays that Gaines believed EC’s “closure was the best thing that could’ve happened to [him]” (31). Gaines’ success can primarily be attributed to Independent News, the distributor for Marvel and other businesses, because strong distribution was the main way for publishers to survive.

The industry of comic books was already in decline before the creation of the CCA, so after new regulations were implemented, sales continuously dropped. One of the leading factors in the decline was the distribution. According to Kidman, overproduction and public resistance to comics reduced the profit being made by distributors, which results in less profit for publishers and artists (29). For these reasons, the CMAA targeted small distributors and small publishers in order to try and stabilize the market. However, the status of the industry significantly worsened. As a result of the codes, comic books turned into a “children only” medium (Coville). This thought discouraged adults from reading comic books. This diminished the adult fanbase.

It would not be until the new, “Silver Age” of comics before the comic book market would rise. This new age is normally marked by the release of DC’s Flash, a more mild, light-hearted style of comic. Coville claims:

“Most of their [Marvel and DC’s] crime and horror stories were fairly tame by industry standards... They also started looking for other genres of comics to publish since the usual genres of crime, horror, and romance were now being censored and watered down.”

Despite the strict guidelines of the CCA, Marvel and DC works with the seal of approval and were able to reveal iconic superheroes such as Spiderman, the X-Men, the Avengers, and the Fantastic Four. The success of the new age superhero comics, however, was not enough to completely bring back the adult fanbase, but it was enough to make a profit. Despite the strict guidelines of the CCA, Marvel and DC worked to earn seals of approval as they brought into creation iconic superheroes such as Spiderman, the X-Men, the Avengers, and the Fantastic Four. The success of these new age superhero comics, however, was not enough to completely bring back the adult fanbase, but it was enough to make a profit. In order to combat this issue, a method called direct market distribution was introduced. As Amy Nyberg states, direct market distribution allows for publishers to sell comics without the Seal of Approval by working with distributors and retailers that do not care about the codes. However, this method only lasted until 1989, when the Comics Code was revised to address and restrict direct market distribution. Over time, enforcement of the codes eroded. As of 2011, the Comics Code and the Comics Code Authority are abolished (Nyberg). Even so, censorship still exists in the domain of comic books, but organizations such as the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) exist to defend these works, so that situations such as Gaines’ fight to publish the original version of Judgment Day will not happen again.

Works Cited

Coville, Jamie. “Re: Interview Questions.” Received by Nastasia Porras, 2 October 2016.
Judgment Day

Judgment Day definition: 1. the time when some people believe the world will end and all the dead people will come back to.... Learn more. Meaning of Judgment Day in English.

Judgment Day. noun [ C usually singular ].

uk. Judgment Day was a professional wrestling pay-per-view event, produced every May by WWE, a professional wrestling promotion based in Connecticut. The event was created in 1998, with its inaugural event produced as an In Your House event in October of that year. The event was then brought back in 2000 and was rebranded as an annual PPV event for WWE. To coincide with the brand extension, the event was made exclusive to the SmackDown! brand in 2004. In 2007, following WrestleMania 23, brand-exclusive Judgement Day is the last produced episode of The New Batman Adventures. It features Two-Face as the main antagonist with a new personality known as “The Judge”.

“Judgement Day” is the 22nd episode aired and 24th produced episode of “TNBA”. An illegal transaction takes place at the Penguin’s hideout. The Penguin buys stolen items from Killer Croc and Two-Face, but after the two criminals have left the hideout, Penguin is attacked by a strange faceless man, dressed as a judge. The Judge is relentless...