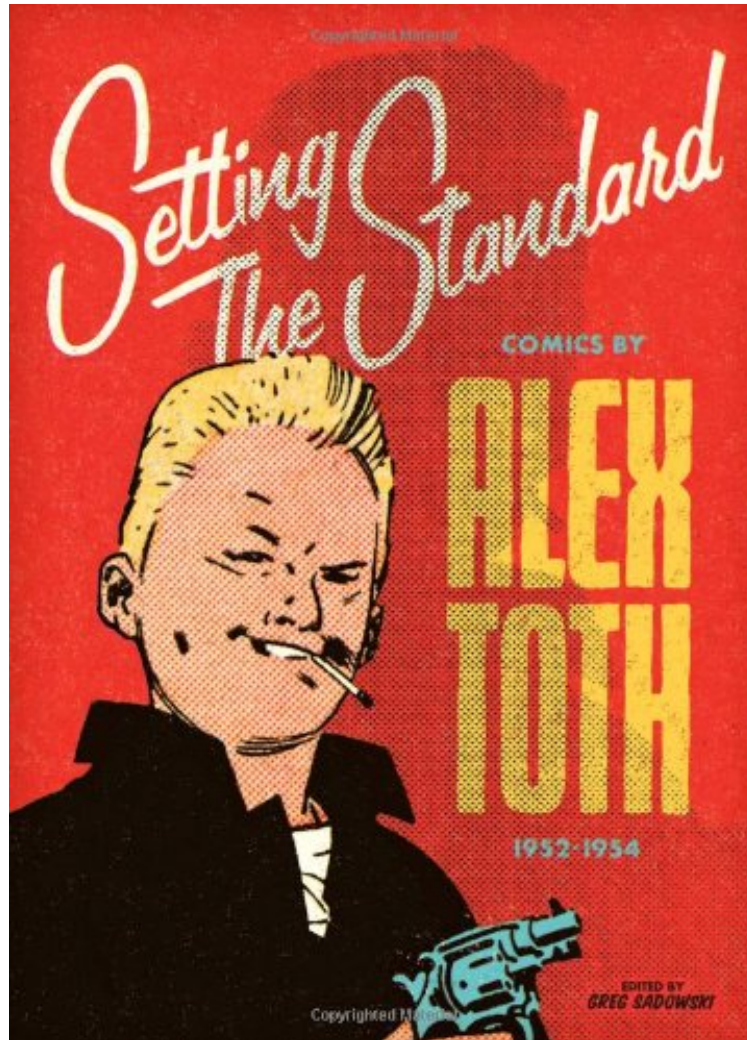


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## Setting the Standard: Comics by Alex Toth 1952-1954

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**From Fantagraphics : Setting the Standard: Comics by Alex Toth 1952-1954** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Setting the Standard: Comics by Alex Toth 1952-1954:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. What a great artist can do with mediocre materialBy Karl JanssenSetting the Standard is a collection of graphic short stories illustrated by Alex Toth, a master of comic art who chronologically and stylistically bridged the gap between the classic newspaper strips of the World War II era and the Silver Age of comic books. From 1952 to 1954 Toth worked for Standard Comics, where he drew stories for magazines like Intimate Love, Fantastic Worlds, New Romances, and Out of the Shadows. This book collects Toths complete body of work for Standard during that two-year period. The stories range in length from one to ten pages. Altogether theres about 400 pages of comics, all reproduced to faithfully represent the original full-color printings,

complete with garish colors, muddy blacks, and blatant dot patterns. A few examples of Toth's original black and white layouts are also photographically reproduced. Editor Greg Sadowski has done a fine job compiling this volume. In addition to the graphic content, there's also an extensive interview with Toth from *Graphic Story Magazine*, a brief biography, and a section with notes about each story. In the interview Toth comes across as an extreme perfectionist totally devoted to his craft, and a bit of a prima donna. He acknowledges the influence of a few old masters like Noel Sickles, but he brutally critiques many more, including Milton Caniff and Alex Raymond. Toth's art often resembles the cinematography of a film noir thriller. His layouts are a symphony of blacks punctuated by judicious silhouettes. His style lends itself well to crime stories, but there's only a couple examples of that genre included here. There are several war stories, all set in the Korean War. Toth proves himself extremely adept at rendering airplanes, tanks, guns, and the like, but the writing offers little excitement. Mostly there are a lot of combat clichés and anti-Asian racial slurs. The few science fiction stories are also conceptually pedestrian, but Toth does a visionary job drawing the necessary lizard men and flying saucers. The best stuff in the book are the horror stories. Toth's art really shines in this genre, and the writing is generally pretty good. These stories aren't as gratuitously gory as the more famous EC Comics of the mid-1950s, but Toth doesn't shy away from the dark and spooky imagery. More than half of the book—perhaps as much as two-thirds—consists of romance comics. For the most part these are serious love stories aimed at an adult female audience. It's unbelievable how many variations the Standard writers could come up with on the familiar scenario of boy-meets-girl. Though some of the best writing in the book occurs in these tales of the heart, the sheer quantity that's contained in the book is mind-numbing. The effect is similar to a soap opera marathon. Nevertheless, Toth manages to enliven even these predictable love stories with innovative and inspired graphic solutions. Toth was a real genius at visual storytelling, and in this chronologically arranged body of work one can witness his talents developing and improving over the course of the book. The writing of the stories, on the other hand, is nothing to get excited about. In most cases, the author's name isn't even mentioned in the accompanying notes, though the inker's always is. Clearly Toth's art is the main attraction here, and today's comic art enthusiasts can surely find much to appreciate in his historic body of work. Beyond their importance in comic art history, however, can these stories really be enjoyed on their own merits? That all depends on how nostalgic you are for 50s romance.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.  
Great 1950's adventure comic book collection from a master! By Jonhayashi1  
My purchase of "Setting the Standard" comics by Alex Toth, really goes back to my buying and watching Hanna and Barberra's SPACE GHOST and DINO BOY dvd a few years ago! On that 2 disc dvd set there is the documentary, "Simplicity the Life and Art of Alex Toth." That hour and 16 min. video showed Alex Toth's sons and daughter talking about their talented dad and his ups and downs in the golden age of comic books! Also Bruce W. Timm (animation director, producer and visionary of BATMAN TAS) and various comic book artists talk about Toth and his work and how it influenced them! Wow! that just hooked me! After I bought BIRDMAN, and got HERCULOIDS, MIGHTY MIGHTOR, SHAZZAN, and YOUNG SAMSON from Warner Archive, I just had to get Mr. Toth's comics to study and enjoy his work! It was in 2011 in December that I spotted "Setting the Standard" at Barnes and Noble bookstore! But when I tried to buy it later the book had sold out! In 2012 I discovered on their computer the "Genius Isolated: the Art and Life of Alex Toth" I ordered it and it has great full size reproductions of his inked comic book pages! Great to see "the Phantom Ship" with a scarry, sexy looking witch Circe from the ODYSSEY changing two crooks to rats with her curse in Alex's dramatic simplicity style! Alex loved to use solid blacks with the inks in his compositions and it is dramatic to see it in "Genius Isolated"! But it is in "Setting the Standard" that you see the same comic in color! Same is true with "Terror in Wonderland" a sci fi take on Alice in Wonderland. His romance comic book work can rival any soap opera tv show with his close ups that have great subtlety of expression! A lengthy interview with Alex Toth reveals his thoughts about making adventure comics and how he felt that the comic strip industry had been going down hill in later years. Having read many of the stories he illustrated in this collection and seeing the variety of subject matter he worked on I can see why many artists and animators called him the artist's artist! I recommend both "Genius Isolated" and "Setting the Standard" for learning about Alex Toth! They compliment each other perfectly! One has history on Toth the other does not have and the other has full color stories that the other book leaves out! Anyway reading "Setting the Standard" helps me to wait for "Genius Illustrated: the Life and Art of Alex Toth" which is about his animation career at Hanna Barberra! The cartoons I have that I mentioned earlier are 1960s cartoons that Toth designed the characters for! So I wait AND WAIT AND WAIT!! SIGH! Hope this book becomes available soon because as an animator myself it's been a LONG WAIT! So glad to get "Setting the Standard" from .com on Feb 9, 2013! THANKS AMAZON.COM!

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Better than Genius Isolated  
By aglaess  
I'll leave myself open to all kinds of debate, but I think this is a better book than the first volume of IDW's "Genius Isolated". Why? It's the comics stupid! This has the entirety of Toth's Standard work, nicely restored and in color. I've seen some of these stories reprinted all over the place for the last 30 years or so, but almost never in color—as originally published. That's how comics should be. For all of its size, tons of space is devoted to copies of original artwork in the "Genius Isolated" book, but not much in complete, as published, color stories. As much as I love IDW's reprint books, I was disappointed in that. Overall, I find this to be better quality work than his early DC and later Dell work. The Dell stuff more than likely didn't pay well and I don't think that Toth devoted as much time to it, and early

on at DC his was still learning his craft. Gems in there at places for sure, but overall, story for story, his Standard Comics output was outstanding. You also get more total biographical information in *Setting the Standard* than in "Genius Isolated", with a long interview and then a biographical article in the back of the book. I went for both books, but if you want only one Toth book this year, I'd go for *Setting The Standard*.

A massive anthology collecting one of the mediums indispensable masters: Alex Toth. Toth's influence on the art of comic books is incalculable. As his generation was the first to grow up with the new 10-cent full-color pamphlets, he came to the medium with a fresh eye, and enough talent and discipline to graphically strip it down to its bare essentials. His efforts reached fruition at Standard Comics, creating an entire school of imitators and establishing Toth as the comic book artists' artist. *Setting the Standard* collects this highly influential body of work in one substantial volume. Toth began his professional career at fifteen in 1945 for Heroic Comics, but quickly advanced to superhero work for DC. Responding to the endless criticism of editor Sheldon Mayer and production chief Sol Harrison, the young artist strove toward a technique free of showoff surface tricks, clutter, and distracting picture elements. Simply put, he learned how to tell a story, to the exclusion of all else. After falling out with DC in 1952, Toth moved west. He freelanced almost exclusively for Standard over the next two years, contributing classic work for its crime, horror, science fiction, and war titles. But perhaps most revelatory to the reader will be the romance collaborations with writer Kim Ammodt, Toth's personal favorites. I came to prefer them for the quieter, more credible, natural human equations they dealt with emotions, subtleties of gesture, expression, attitude. To explain his take on comics, Toth would quote such proverbs as "To add to truth distracts from it," or "The beauty of the simple thing." He employed these axioms to make clear how universal this pursuit of truth, clarity, simplicity, economy, in all the arts and many other disciplines really is and has been for 6,000 years. These and other observations regarding the comic book form will be collected in an essay based on Toth's published and unpublished letters and interviews. Every page of *Setting the Standard* is restored to bring Toth's unsurpassed graphics and page designs into full clarity, making this an essential edition for anyone with an appreciation of the art of graphic storytelling. 304 pages of full-color comics

From Booklist: Five years after his death, comic-book artist Alex Toth is finally getting his due. Largely unknown to most comics readers, he's recognized by knowledgeable fans and his fellow artists as one of the most skilled and innovative talents ever to ply the medium. He was recently the subject of the first volume of a massive, three-part biographical project (*Genius Isolated: The Life and Art of Alex Toth*, 2011), and now comes this hefty collection of all 62 stories he illustrated for Standard Comics in the early 1950s. Working in the popular genres of the era—crime, horror, war, romance—Toth produced a string of stories more visually sophisticated than anything the field had seen. Particularly revelatory are the romance stories, in which the human-scaled, if formulaic and melodramatic, plotlines played to Toth's strengths: economic yet expressive illustration, artful design, and incisive characterization. And when he was matched to a worthy script, such as the noirish crime tale, *The Crushed Gardenia*, the results were something to behold. Toth would go on to produce even more impressive work in subsequent decades, but this is where he began to leave the rest of the profession in the dust. --Gordon Flagg

The presentation of the comics themselves proves crisp and strong. The manner in which the increasingly valuable Sadowski and his publisher chose to present the supporting material is even better. - Tom Spurgeon, *The Comics Reporter*

Greg Sadowski and Fantagraphics' *Setting the Standard* is perhaps the best book on Alex Toth that has been published thus far... The book's assemblage and design are very well done to make a package which is pulpy but tasteful, not cheap nor overly slick, not high/low cute or old-boy sentimental. It provides a complete and important body of work by a great cartoonist. - James Romberger, *The Hooded Utilitarian*

About the Author: Greg Sadowski is a writer, editor and designer (*B. Krigstein*, *Supermen!*, *Four Color Fear*, *Setting the Standard: Alex Toth*; *Action! Mystery! Thrills!*) living in Washington State.