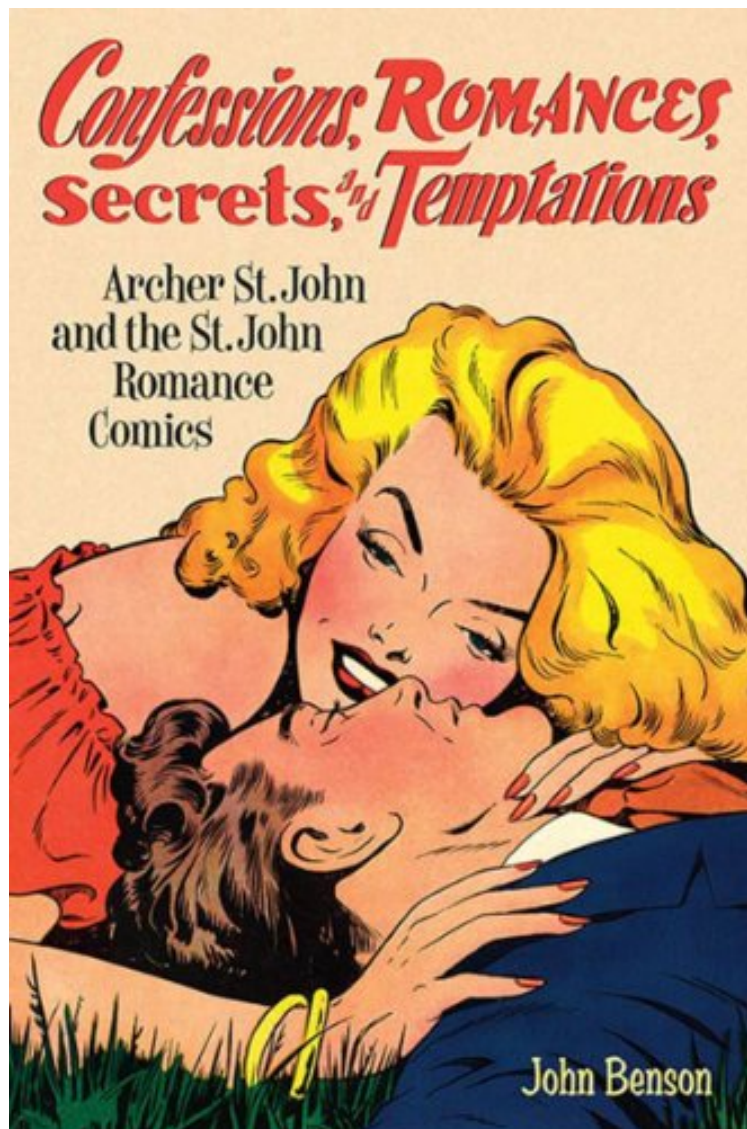


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Confessions, Romances, Secrets, and Temptations: Archer St. John and the St. John Romance Comics

John Benson

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John Benson : Confessions, Romances, Secrets, and Temptations: Archer St. John and the St. John Romance Comics before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confessions, Romances, Secrets, and Temptations: Archer St. John and the St. John Romance Comics:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Indispensable for fans of romance comicsBy Hal JordanRomance

comics are a neglected subfield of comic collecting. When modern comic collecting began in the 1960s, the focus was largely on super hero comics -- particularly Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, and the other Marvel comics. There were also a significant number of Disney collectors -- with interest centered on the Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge comics written and drawn by Carl Barks. Smaller numbers of collectors were interested in Westerns or 1950s horror and science fiction comics. Almost nobody, though, collected romance comics. The neglect of romance books in those days is unfortunate because if collectors had been interested, they could have preserved more copies of these books and they might have been able to interview some of the publishers, writers, and artists who have since passed away. John Benson has helped remedy the lack of information on one particularly important publisher: Archer St. John. St. John had the great good fortune to employ probably Dana Dutch, who was probably the best writer of romance stories, and Matt Baker, who was certainly the finest romance artist -- and, to my mind, the finest comic book artist who ever lived. Unfortunately, by the time Benson began working on this book in the 1980s, St. John and Baker had passed away and Dutch couldn't be located, if he was still alive at the time. Still, Benson was able to locate other people who worked for St. John and was able to gather important information about the company. This book is a quick read, at only 112 pages. It has many nicely reproduced black and white illustrations. The book's only drawback, to my mind, is that the structure seems backwards. After a brief two-page introduction, Benson reproduces interviews he conducted with 10 people connected with St. John. He finishes the book with three brief commentaries on aspects of St. John's romance books, a brief history of St. John's romance comics, and a checklist of all St. John's comics. I think he should have reversed the order, putting the overview material first and the interviews at the end. As it was, there were references made in the interviews that were unclear until after I had read the material at the end of the book. This is quibbling, though, because Benson has done fans a real service by bringing this material together and getting it into print. Anyone interested in this book, may also want to consider Michele Nolan, *Romance without Tears* and Jim Amish, et al., *Matt Baker: The Art of Glamour*. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. great service, not a good book By Paul Beauchemin book version, mostly interviews, not much in actual stories. great service, not a good book. sorry. 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. cannot vet its sellers better, since this book was sold as being in ... By Steve D. A detailed supplement to Benson 's large collection of St. John's romance comics, which suffers only from the cheap, pamphlet - styling of the book. Unfortunately, cannot vet its sellers better, since this book was sold as being in better condition than it turned out to be, a beat up library copy that unfortunately was only worth the heavily discounted price and not a penny more.

A tour through the best of the romance genre of comics in the 1950s. *Confessions, Romances, Secrets, and Temptations* is the companion volume to John Benson's popular anthology of romance comics, *Romance Without Tears*. Published in the 1950s by Archer St. John, the stories in that volume were decidedly different from the typical romance comics, just as St. John was decidedly different from the typical comics publisher. This new book explores the background of these comics and their publisher, including a short biography, interviews with the editors and artists who worked for the company, and critical commentary. In his research for *Romance Without Tears*, the author was left with a rich body of material about one of the few quality-driven 1950s comics publishers. St. John's reputation as a fair and honest publisher attracted many of the top artists of the day, including Matt Baker, Ric Estrada, Everett Raymond Kinstler, Joe Kubert, Bob Powell, Leonard Starr, and George Tuska. In addition to interviewing Estrada, Kubert, and Starr, Benson talks with several St. John staffers, including editor Irwin Stein, production man Warren Kremer, and editorial assistant Nadine King. Together they provide an engaging account of Archer St. John and the atmosphere he nourished to create these distinctive comics. *Confessions* contains a time chart of every title published by St. John (all genres), showing issue number and date, and a complete, detailed checklist of all the company's romance comics, giving story titles, artist credits, and cross-indexing the extensive reprints. The book is lavishly illustrated with examples of the comics, and includes rare photos and other visuals from the period.

From Booklist One of the most popular comic-book genres half a century ago, romance comics have been largely ignored by recent comics scholarship. Benson, who has written seriously about comics for decades, aims to change that situation with this book on the romance titles published by St. John from 1947 to 1958, which were consistently better than their competitors. Their quality was a function of talented writers, artists, and editors, many of whom Benson interviewed, unfortunately not including key writer Dana Dutch, whose character-oriented stories downplayed glamour and moralizing in favor of verisimilitude and happy endings and set the approach for St. John's other scripts. Insightful critiques and a brief biography of company founder Archer St. John round out the volume. The pages reproduced from St. John's titles whet the desire to read the complete stories, which, fortunately, are available in a companion anthology, *Romance without Tears* (2003). Although this work's usefulness would be greater had Benson provided more context showing St. John's standing in the comics industry, it still offers invaluable guidance on a significant cultural phenomenon. Flagg, Gordon About the Author John Benson is a comics historian living in New York City.