

An Addition to the House that Crest Built

SEAN STONE
Dentistry Librarian
Dentistry Library
IUPUI

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When I started my position at the Dentistry Library four years ago it came with some start-up funds. Most people use these to pay for extra professional development, technology, etc. I spent mine on original comic art. Why did I do that? How am I still employed here? Allow me to explain with a dangerously nostalgic tale of chemistry, teeth, The Incredible Hulk, and cartoons.

Our story begins in the 1940s. At that time, the first two years of dental school at IU were taken on the Bloomington campus and Joseph Muhler, a dental student, began doing research on fluoride compounds and their effect on teeth.^{1,2} This was not a new idea. Since the late 19th century, scientists have linked fluoride compounds to enamel strength. Upon graduating, Dr. Muhler joined the chemistry faculty at Bloomington and teamed with two other scientists to work on developing a compound that was effective at strengthening teeth but would also stay in solution in toothpaste. The secret ingredient turned out to be tin. Stannous fluoride (SnF_2) became known as Fluoristan in what would become Crest Toothpaste. At the time, however, every toothpaste had a secret ingredient from “WD-9” in Ipana to “Gardol” in Colgate. What set stannous fluoride and Crest apart was a significant body of clinical field research^{3,4} that led to Crest being the first product to ever receive an endorsement from the American Dental Association (provisionally in 1960 and fully in 1964).⁵ This was a very big deal. Dentists and dentistry were known for being anti-advertising and were unlikely to support any product. In fact, around the time when Crest was released in 1956, the ADA was actively lobbying congress to investigate and censure toothpaste manufacturers for making a variety of claims about their products (ironically including the product that preceded Crest, Gleem which contained “GL-70”).⁶ In light of this, an ADA endorsement which seems like such a mundane thing by today’s standards, was something special. It helped lead to a significant share of the toothpaste and oral healthcare product market and the development of a brand that persists today. The profitable product from Proctor & Gamble paid royalties to IU that were used to build the Preventative Dentistry Research Institute in 1968 (now known as the Oral Health Research Institute) for \$476,000. Hence the moniker “The House That Crest Built” for the IU School of Dentistry.⁷

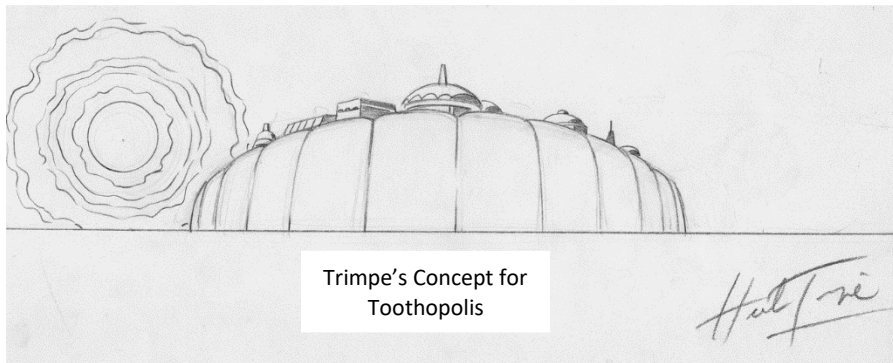


Joseph Muhler, 1947



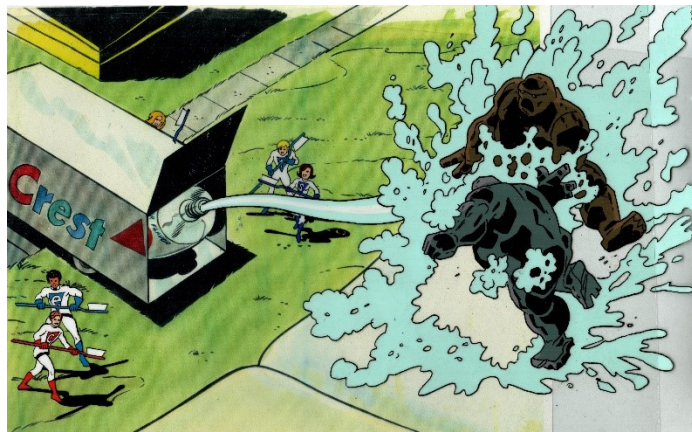
However, it wasn't all good science and clinical trials that solidified Crest's position as a fixture in bathrooms around the country. P&G knew how to market and their first major Crest campaign "Look, Mom! No cavities" was a huge success (which dentists also hated but that's a story for another time) and lasted for decades. By the 1970s, however, P&G began to look for new ways to market Crest. Enter Herb Trimpe. Herb Trimpe was a comic book artist who first came to prominence with the rise of Marvel Comics in the 1960s. He is best known for his work as an artist on *The Incredible Hulk* in the 1970s. It was in this capacity that he ended up doing art and storyboards for an animated commercial for Honeycomb Cereal in the mid-1970s featuring the Hulk. Later, P&G wanted to produce a

series of animated commercials for Crest, partially through the studio that produced the Honeycomb commercial, to be run primarily during Saturday morning cartoons. The commercials were to feature a super-hero like team and Trimpe did concept and background art as well as storyboards for the project. There were ten of these commercials produced throughout the late 1970s and into the 80s.⁸



Trimpe created "Toothopolis," a futuristic city surrounded by giant, gleaming tooth-walls. The antagonists were the brutish, Hulk-like "Cavity Creeps." Simple-minded monsters who

shambled about chanting "We make holes in teeth" which pretty much sums up their sole motivation. The dumb yet surprisingly well armed (with everything from catapults to fighter planes) Cavity Creeps did whatever they could to get at the teeth-walls of Toothopolis to try to damage them. They never seemed to have much of a plan beyond that. Even when their schemes got them inside the walls, they immediately began attacking them from the inside rather than doing anything else in the city. But I digress. The Cavity Creeps were opposed by the Crest Team, a dynamic group of young spandex clad quasi-super-heroes, and eventually a young lad "Crest Boy" who was owner of "Cresty" the dog. They responded to the Cavity Creeps' attacks with vehicles armed with weaponized Crest.



Combined animation cells and background from a Cavity Creeps commercial

There was a Crestmobile, submarine, hover craft . . . the list goes on. Needless to say, in each cartoon Cavity Creeps were hosed down with Crest, giant toothbrushes were used to clean the walls, and the city was safe until the next time.

Fast forward thirty-five years to me browsing the internet and coming across a small cache of Trimpe's original Crest commercial art, storyboards, and animation cells for sale. Ostensibly, it would form the nucleus of a great exhibition about the history and marketing of Crest, however, the real reason for its purchase is that it simply belongs here. The history of the School of Dentistry is inextricably linked to this product and everything it has become over the years. It may seem odd, but Dr. Muhler is certainly the grandfather or at least godfather of the Cavity Creeps because without him, they wouldn't exist. So, I spent my money on cartoons and this stuff lives here now and hopefully always will. You can see all of it in person at the Dentistry Library on the IUPUI campus. The exhibition "Crest Cavity Creeps: How IU Built Toothopolis" will be up throughout the summer and features all of Trimpe's art plus research and other Crest artifacts. If you can't make it, everything has been digitized and is available at our virtual exhibit (<https://iupui.libguides.com/CrestCC>). Not only can you see everything in the exhibition, you can watch the existing commercials thanks to the Duke Advertising Archive.

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