

Cartoons aren't just for kids anymore

of the Harlem Globetrotters and the Addams Family. Spooky.

All this, together with nerd Thelma, sorority babe Daphne and jock/hunk Freddy. Let's not forget this was the first show to do the baby 'toon thing — Scrappy Doo. And there was Scooby Dumb. And the list goes on and on.

Noon. This is when Dad comes in to make me go outside so he could watch Cowboy Theater. On rainy days I would watch too, but these guys fought about as well as professional rasslers and didn't talk junk about each other or pick up chairs and smash them over people's heads. Kinda boring.

I miss those days, but they went quickly once the Smurfs came on the scene. Let's face it folks, the Smurfs stunk even when they did teach us some valuable lessons (none as valuable as those taught by Schoolhouse Rock). Personally, I would've liked to have seen Gargamel chomp some Smurf head after the first season.

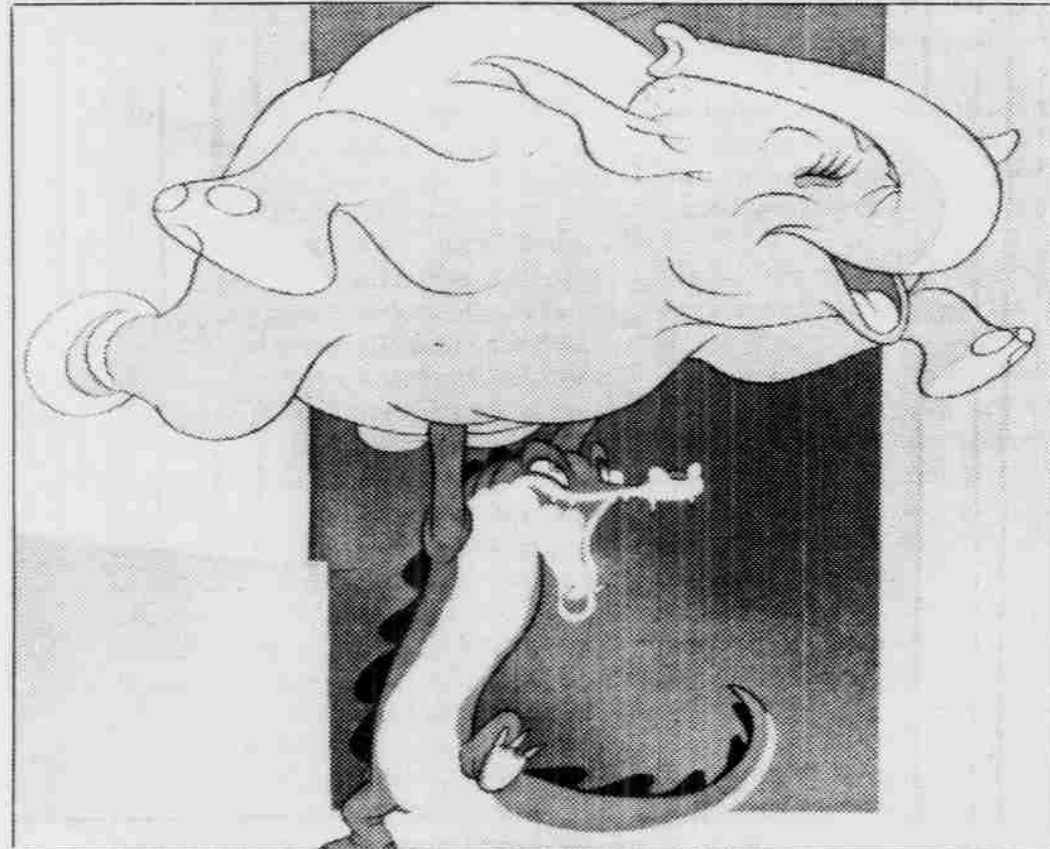
Now (returning to the present) everyone tells me that cartoons are on the comeback trail. Afternoons have heated up with *Tailspin*, *Duck Tales* and *Chip 'n' Dale's Rescue Rangers*. Disney is rolling over in money in his grave. They even have Nintendo games for *Duck Tales* and *Chip 'n' Dale*. Commercial sellout or not — you make the call.

The kids are happy after school, but they don't know what they're missing. Back in my pre-pubescent years, we had great shows on afterschool TV (when they didn't put on one of those stupid Afterschool specials that my mother always made me watch so I wouldn't turn into a drug fiend). We had *Star Blazers* and *Battle of the Planets*, two of my favorite shows. *Star Blazers* was a series of shows about a space battleship trying to save earth in only 365 days. It went down to the wire, but in the end the battleship's Wave Motion gun kicked hiney. And who could ever forget *G-Force of Planets* fame?

I will have to admit that kids of the late '80s had a good afternoon lineup. *G.I. Joe* and *The Transformers* were nothing short of excellent in their prime, but then they went into new generations and fell into the abyss. There is no justice.

Animation on the big-screen is still alive and Disney is still in sole possession of the top. Three reasons: *Fantasia*, *Snow White* and *Bambi*. More recently *The Little Mermaid*. 'Nuff said.

However, Spielberg has been jumping into the scene with *An American Tail* and *The Land Before Time*. Look out Disney, the E.T. man wants a shot at the little kids' hearts through animation, too. I mean, he is the one who got this Tiny Toons thing off the ground.



A prancing pachyderm and a graceful 'gator strut their stuff in 'Fantasia'

Cartoons are our life, our soul, our spirit as kids. May they never die.

So, until they run out of ink in their pens and the boulders stop drop-

ping on coyotes, you'll find me glued to the TV in the prime of my youth. Twenty-one and a cartoon fan for life.

psychic children



Japanese comic book anti-hero, Kaneda, with a really big gun

ager of the Rialto, said that a lot of animation and comic-book aficionados had requested *Akira*. "The phone's been really ringing," Munson said. "It's been out for a while now. In the cities where it has played it has done very well."

"We've got something a lot of people want to see."

Akira will open at the Rialto Theatre, 1620 Glenwood Avenue, in Raleigh on Nov. 19. Show times are at 9 p.m. from Monday, Nov. 19 to Thursday, Nov. 22, and at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. from Friday, Nov. 23 to Thursday, Nov. 29. Weekend matinees are at 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. For more information call (919) 856-8683.

Director fathers coyote and road runner: tells all

Chuck Amuck: The Life and Times of an Animated Cartoonist

by Chuck Jones

published by AvonBooks

\$12.95

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From 1933 to 1963, Chuck Jones either created or had a hand in creating some of the best-loved characters in America: the Warner Brothers stable of animated actors.

Actors indeed. As Jones admits in his vivid autobiography, *Chuck Amuck*, Bugs Bunny and friends had lives of their own. In his own words: "We (Bugs and I) had a happy life together, but, as the six-year-old boy protested when I was introduced to him as the man who draws Bugs Bunny, 'He does not! He draws pictures of Bugs Bunny.'"

He was absolutely right, and I can think of no happier career than as a man who drew pictures of such a fabulous character.

Gloriously, *Chuck Amuck* is just as lively as the Road Runner/Coyote shorts Jones began directing in 1949. He writes candidly and amusingly about their creation, as well as the early days of the Warner Bros. studios and his colleagues within them. Dry "I was born in ... facts are left to the

appendix; Jones just wants to tell some very funny stories.

Such as the origin of Daffy Duck's voice. Jones, veteran director Tex Avery and legendary voice artist Mel Blanc modeled Daffy after their similarly avaricious producer Leon Schlesinger. Then they realized Schlesinger would, of course, have to see and hear the short.

In order to save ourselves the embarrassment of being fired, all of us were careful to write out our resignations before that fateful day Then the lights went on and Leon leaped to his feet, glared around: "Jeethus Christh, that's a funny voithe! Where'd you get that voithe?"

Jones spends a fair portion of the book eloquently slamming his old animation producers, reserving special attention for Schlesinger and his replacement, Eddie Selzer who, "like the people in charge of network television today, hated and feared anything he had never seen before." According to Jones, their shortsightedness provided excellent creative motivation. Jones reserves special commentary for Selzer, who allegedly told Jones there was nothing amusing about a French-speaking skunk (Pepé Le Pew) in the Oscar-winning "For Scent-imental Reasons," (1949) or bullfighting gags ("Bully for Bugs," 1953).

Thankfully, there's more to *Chuck Amuck* than boss-bashing. Jones spends a lot more time emphasizing how critical his colleagues' work was to the success of the Warner shorts. Most people have never heard of Mike Maltese or Maurice Noble before, but

Jones wastes no words in detailing their contributions as writer and designer, respectively, of 1953's "Duck Dodgers in the 24 1/2 Century." Jones' eloquent commendation of these un-sung heroes is admirable.

Speaking of "Duck Dodgers," there's a wonderful section describing its conception and the steps to its creation. Separate chapters are also granted to Bugs and Daffy, as Jones describes their metamorphoses, and, of course, the Road Runner/Coyote cartoons are discussed. Jones includes the rules he and writer Mike Maltese developed that made the Coyote such a hit, including:

Rule 2. No outside force can harm the Coyote — only his own ineptitude or the failure of the Acme products.

Rule 7. All materials, tools, weapons, or mechanical conveniences must be obtained from the Acme corporation.

Rule 8. Whenever possible, make gravity the Coyote's greatest enemy. Interestingly, that first Road Runner cartoon, "Fast and Furry-ous" (1949) was meant to be nothing but satire.

It was 1947 and the American short subject was preoccupied with the chase. Everyone seemed to be in the pursuit of one another ... So, as all writers and producers must have, Mike and I felt the call of *Profundity*. We would do a satire on chases, show up the shallowness of the whole concept ...

Audiences never got that particular joke, but thought the chase was hysterical anyway. Jones decided, if you can't lick them, join them. Eventually, his "Beep Prepared" (1961)

Bring back Schoolhouse Rock!

Editor's note: Board opinions are the product of the Omnibus Star Chamber: editor Alisa DeMao, assistant editors Charles Marshall and Billy Stockard, arts co-ordinator Randy Basinger, layout and production co-editors Lisa Reichle and Laura Ross, and copy editor Clare Weickert, plus Omni pledge Devon Hyde. Opinions are agreed upon by a majority vote and do not necessarily reflect anybody's opinion at all. We just needed to take up space. And we did.

Do you realize that an entire generation of children is growing up without a proper education?

We're not talking about the lousy SAT scores in this state or about the mystery of Jesse. We're talking about the lack of good Saturday morning programming.

We grew up with the classics — *Wile E. Coyote*, *Bugs Bunny* and, of course, *Schoolhouse Rock*.

Looney Tunes didn't manage to survive the censors. *Wile E. Coyote* never hits the ground because the powers-that-be think little Johnny may try to jump off the nearest 10-story building. *Granny* can no longer give *Sylvester* a well-deserved bash over the head with her umbrella, while every sit-com and cop show regales impressionable young minds with at least a sock in the jaw.

We are no longer shown that it is possible to confront and defeat things that are wrong. No matter how evil the villain is, it is now against the

Board Opinion

rules to hurt him, so how can you possibly destroy him for good?

In any case, who believes that when you see the umbrella swinging before, and *Sylvester* staggering after, that you don't know what happened during?

In the interest of "non-violence," the censors cut the heart out of the classic *Bugs* 'toon recounting the life story of the venerable wabbit. After *Bugs* is rescued from rock-bottom by *Elmer Fudd* to star in vaudeville, he gets tired of being the butt of the jokes and turns the tables on *Fudd*, stealing his lines and shooting him in the face with a seltzer bottle. After a classic chase through the theater, *Elmer* pulls out his rifle, prompting *Bugs* to say (for the first time ever), "What's up Doc?" A star is born. But the "improved" version cuts from *Bugs* deciding "things are going to change" to *Elmer* pointing a gun at him. "What's up Doc?" is entirely out of context and takes on a whole new meaning.

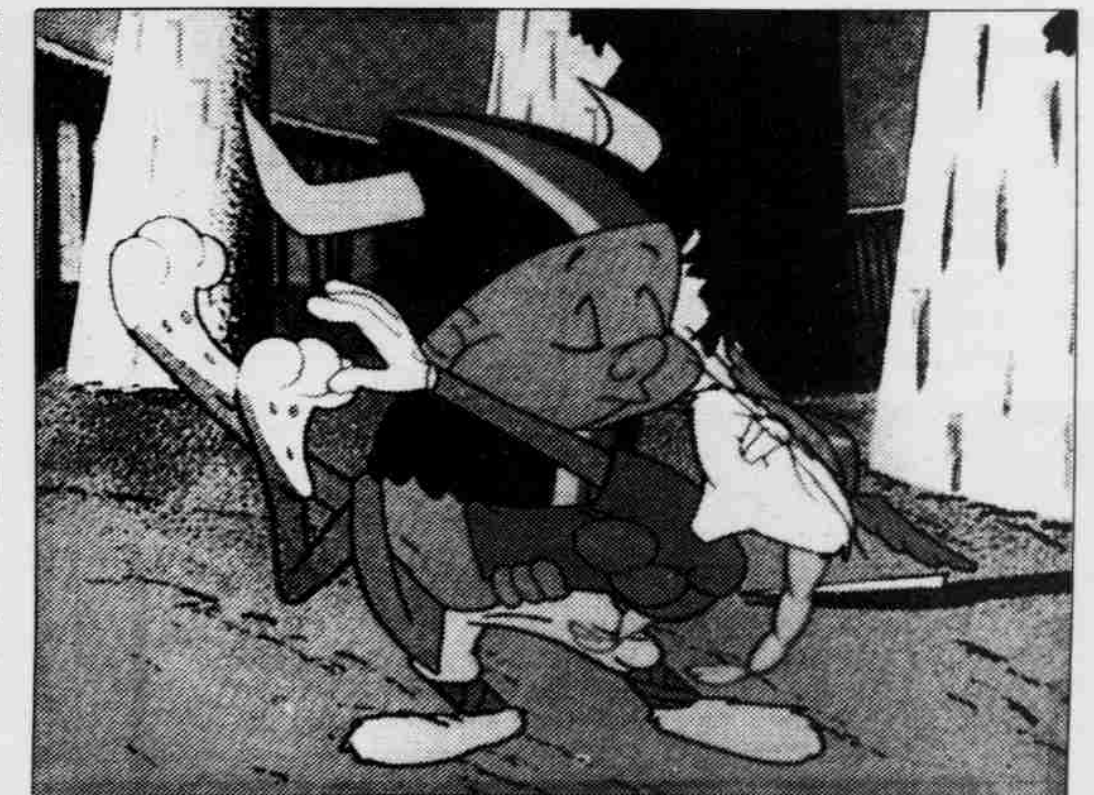
Instead, we were subjected to the *Smurfs* in their smurfy little world, where everything is just smurfy. Everyone does what wise *Papa Smurf* tells them. If they strike out on their own, they get into trouble, everything is not smurfy, and they have to be rescued by the whole gang. Do we see a pattern emerging here? One of conformity, unquestioning obedience to authority and the perils of being an

individual? The *Smurfs* are anathema to everything that supposedly made this country great.

We are convinced the primary reason SAT scores are so low is the absence of *Schoolhouse Rock*. In an informal survey of staffers, not one was found who could not sing at least three episodes of this infectious series of classic lessons in grammar, American history and other subjects designed to edify young minds. A friend of one writer remembers every word and every note of every installment, except the one about the multiplication table ("that one's too boring"). Who out there doesn't remember "Conjunction Junction" or "Interplanet Janet?"

Schoolhouse Rock was a way to trick us into getting excited about learning before we actually found out how frustrating and boring it would become. Just think of those bits of grammar we learned that still help us today: And who could have made it through *Poli 41* without the help of the bill sitting up on Capitol Hill? No schoolteacher or parent taught us anything so early that has stuck with us so well.

Unfortunately, instead of watching *Schoolhouse Rock* between cartoons, we now have to watch vapid, glossies of *Jordan Knight* running away from his fans. And they wonder what's happened to Saturday morning cartoons — they've replaced what teaches with what sells.



"I'll kiww the wabbit!"

earned an Academy Award nomination.

Chuck Jones' art litters the book, as it should; the excellent character animation is what drove the Warner shorts in the first place. There are hundreds of original production sketches, including a mournful coyote covered with mousetraps and *Bugs* hung over from mixing carrot juice with turnip juice.

Also included are plenty of character studies of the people Jones has worked with over the years, and a set of color plates featuring scenes from his favorite projects like "Duck Dodgers" and "What's Opera, Doc?," which

condensed Wagner's *Ring Cycle* to six minutes. (*Elmer Fudd*: "I'ww kiwl the wabbit!") These close-up views show what a master of expression Jones is; you can understand his cartoons clearly even with the sound turned down on your TV.

The book's subtitle, *The Life and Times of an Animated Cartoonist*, is inspired. *Chuck Amuck* is a thoroughly enjoyable read. Today's cartoon producers, or even cartoon lovers, would do well to study this book and learn more about how wonderfully creative quality animation is.

— Chip Sudderth