

# Disney Comics:

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by David Gerstein

# back to long ago!

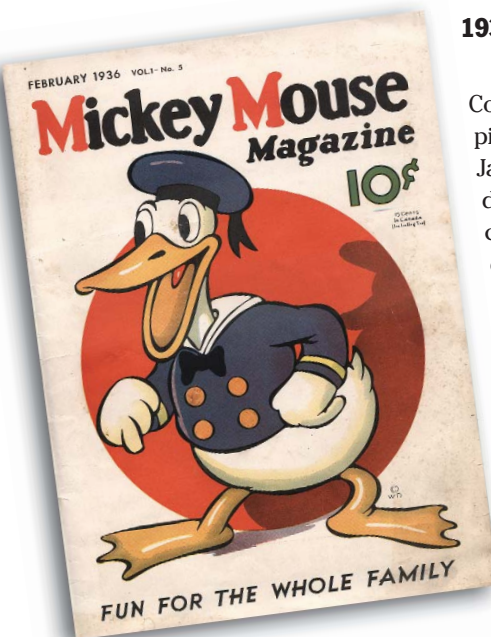
Walt Disney was fond of saying that his animation empire “all started with a Mouse.” But what exactly did this mean? The Disney animation studio existed before Mickey. It can also be argued that without the coincidental novelty of sound, the renowned rodent would never have been an empire-starter.

Now, to say that Disney’s *comics* empire started with a Mouse? That’s more like it. Beginning with Mickey and moving ahead—there were no Disney comics before the Mouse!—we can watch entire schools of creativity spring up on multiple continents, influence one another in fascinating ways, and play host to some of the comics medium’s most creative innovators.

The story of Disney comics is also classic melodrama in action, including as it does the birth and death of more American comic book titles than many could count.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s begin at square one...

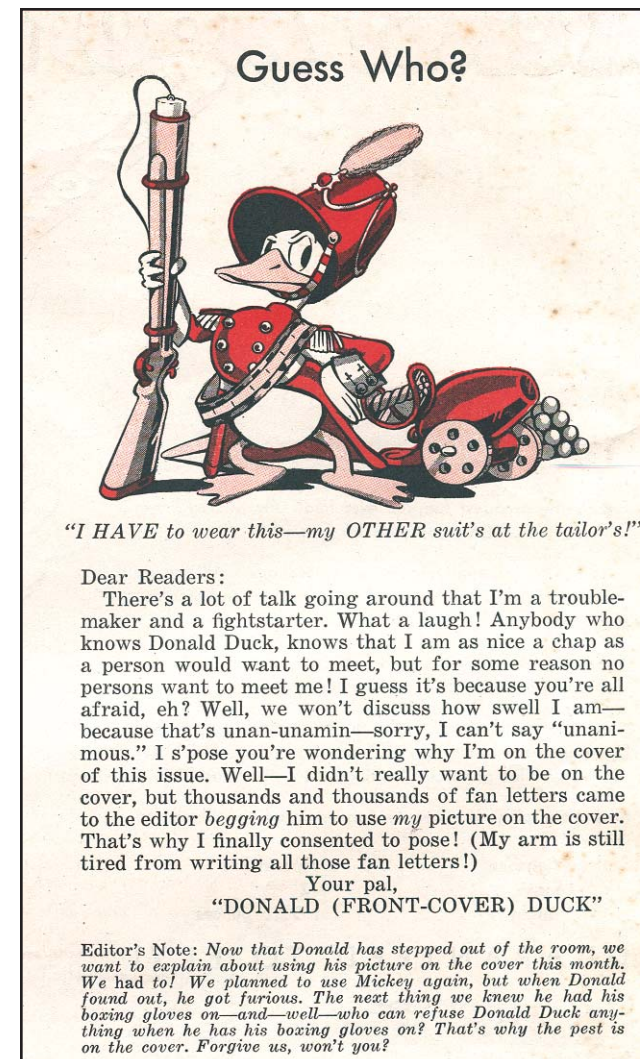
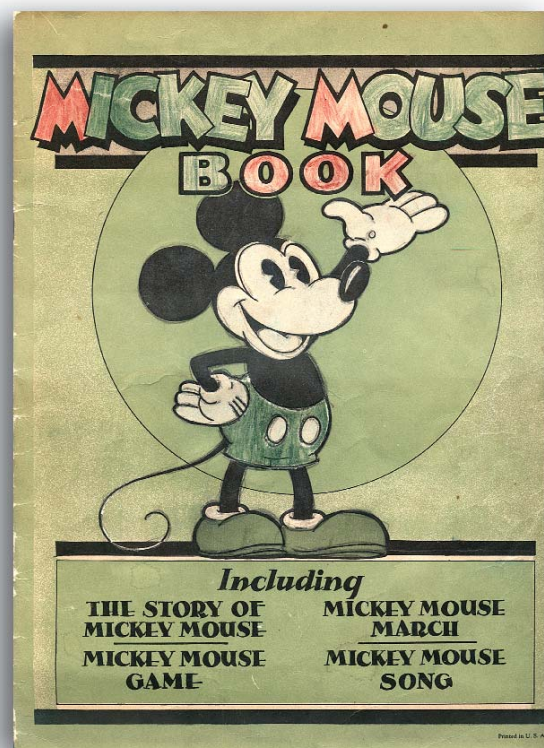
**Mickey Mouse Annual #1 (1930) by Dean and Son was the first in a long British series. Gruesome, isn’t he?**



## 1930s: All The World’s A Barnyard

“Gee!—but I’d like to fly, and be a great aviator like Col. Lindbergh!!” Big words from the mouth of a pipsqueak. But that’s where Disney comics started January 13, 1930: with scrappy farmhand Mickey dreaming of an unlikely future as adventure hero and celebrity. And the dream, at first, seemed but a dream. Mickey’s first funnies—daily strip pratfalls written by Walt Disney, pencilled by Ub Iwerks, and inked by Win Smith—were no big hit. But within the year, the starting strips’ slapstick was supplanted by adventure serials and the original creative troika by Floyd Gottfredson, a master Mouse plotter with a unique take on Mickey’s gang. The result was international success, the birth of a comic strip department within Disney (detailed in *CBM* #95), and a move to a new medium: Disney comic strips

**Bibo and Lang’s Mickey Mouse Book (1930) was the first American Disney publication.**



Dear Readers:

There’s a lot of talk going around that I’m a trouble-maker and a fightstarter. What a laugh! Anybody who knows Donald Duck, knows that I am as nice a chap as a person would want to meet, but for some reason no persons want to meet me! I guess it’s because you’re all afraid, eh? Well, we won’t discuss how swell I am—because that’s unan-unamin—sorry, I can’t say “unanimous.” I s’pose you’re wondering why I’m on the cover of this issue. Well—I didn’t really want to be on the cover, but thousands and thousands of fan letters came to the editor begging him to use my picture on the cover. That’s why I finally consented to pose! (My arm is still tired from writing all those fan letters!)

Your pal,  
“DONALD (FRONT-COVER) DUCK”

Editor’s Note: Now that Donald has stepped out of the room, we want to explain about using his picture on the cover this month. We had to! We planned to use Mickey again, but when Donald found out, he got furious. The next thing we knew he had his boxing gloves on—and—well—who can refuse Donald Duck anything when he has his boxing gloves on? That’s why the pest is on the cover. Forgive us, won’t you?

**Many of us recognize Donald’s cover turn on Hal Horne’s Mickey Mouse Magazine #5 (1936, opposite). But few of us know the story behind it—as revealed on the inside pages!**

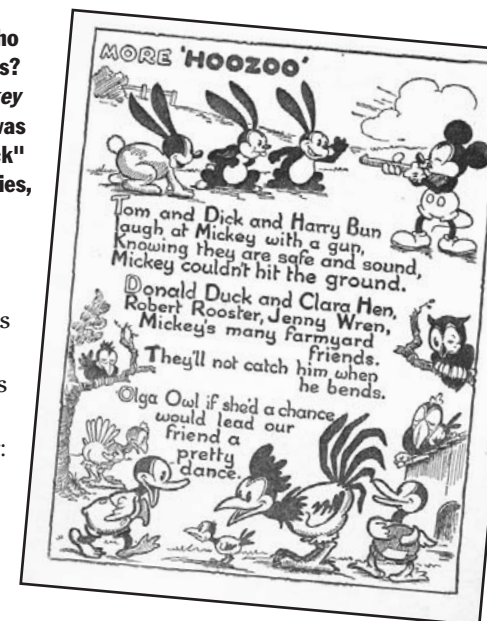
led to Disney comics publications.

The domestic paperback *Mickey Mouse Book* and Britain’s hardback *Mickey Mouse Annual* #1 both hit the stands in late 1930. The creative talent made no secret of where their influences lay. In Bibo and Lang’s *Book*, the “Story of Mickey Mouse” by Bobette Bibbo was a fantasy-based text fable, but

**Is that black-haired bird who Wilfred Haughton says he is? Prenatal Donald from Mickey Mouse Annual #3 (1932) was revived as “Dennis the Duck” for the 2001 Disney TV series, House of Mouse.**

artist Albert Barbelle borrowed Mickey models from some newspaper dailies. In Dean and Son’s *Annual*, the strip’s influence was far greater: comics were the main theme of this book. Famed English cartoonist Wilfred Haughton drew more than a hundred pages of original Mickey strips, using gags in part borrowed from the Iwerks/Smith series.

The next few years brought additional milestones. In 1931,



## Floyd Gottfredson

Mouse Man Floyd Gottfredson began work for Disney as an animation assistant. One day in 1930, the job was interrupted by a special duty: Walt needed a fill-in artist for the *Mickey* newspaper strip. Floyd took the ‘temporary’ post; but soon, it had become a permanent job both drawing and plotting Mickey’s adventure continuity.

Gottfredson created classic co-stars for Mickey’s world: ex-con Butch, Captain Churchmouse, Eli Squinch, Dr. Einmug, and the fiendish foe of “Mickey Mouse Outwits the Phantom Blot” (*Four Color* #16). The new recruits were abetted by Gottfredson’s brilliant characterizations of Minnie, Horace, Clarabelle, Pete, and especially Goofy.

Floyd’s greatest achievement arguably had less to do with Mickey’s supporting cast, though, than with Mickey himself. Instead of seeing his hero as an adult, role-model rodent, Floyd portrayed “a mouse against the world”: a stubbornly optimistic, imperfect but determined youth trying to prove himself in competitive and scary surroundings.

Gottfredson himself survived the scares, working with Mickey adventure continuities until 1955 and Mickey gag-a-day strips until 1975.



Italy's *Nel Regno Topolino* #40 collected Federico Pedrocchi's "Donald Duck and the Secret of Mars" (published here in *Donald Duck* #286, 1994). The historic serial thus became the first all-in-one duck adventure comic.

with *Mickey Mouse Series* #1, Philadelphia publisher David McKay began a line of black-and-white Gottfredson reprint albums; overseas, with *Les Aventures de Mickey*, French publisher Hachette

did the same. The first real Disney magazine arrived in 1932: Italy's *Topolino* weekly tabloid featured Gottfredson hand-me-downs, locally produced comics and non-Disney American newspaper strips. In the summer of 1934, France followed suit with a similar tabloid, *Le Journal de Mickey*.

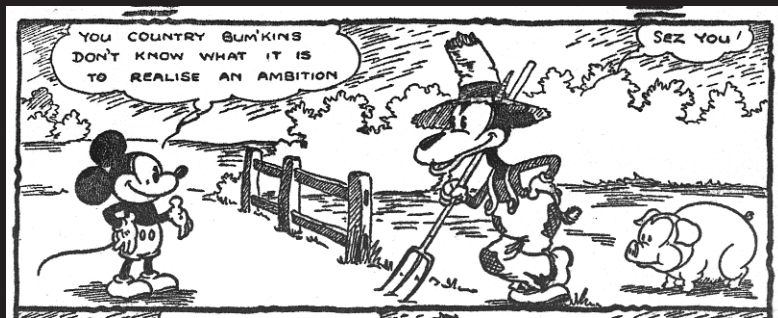
In the mid-1930s, what one might call the "powerhouse" Disney magazines emerged. The American *Mickey Mouse Magazine* dated back to January 1933, when Disney marketers Kay Kamen and Hal Horne introduced it as a theatre and dairy tie-in. But it was in 1935 that it became a full-fledged newsstand series with a large amount of original material. In the UK one year later, Odhams Press followed suit with a Wilfred Haughton-driven tabloid equivalent, *Mickey Mouse Weekly*. Aside from sharing content back and forth—beginning the Disney tradition of international partnership—Horne's and Odhams' large, attractive magazines inspired a rush of worldwide spin-offs. Sweden's *Musse Pigg Tidningen* and Switzerland's *Micky Maus Zeitung* are only two of the better known.

What was in a typical early Mickey periodical? Along with short, original comic strips, *Mickey Mouse Magazine* #5 features an editorial supposedly by Mickey ("Just Between Us"), then half- and full-page gag cartoons with Disney characters. There's a stage play for readers to put on ("Uncle Dumb's Cabin") and a couple of stories in prose—one Disney-specific, the other not. The material in the *Magazine*'s overseas cousins was of the same basic type.

All of these publications reflected the expanding Disneydom of both Gottfredson and the film cartoons. Enthusiastic Mickey sought adventure; sensible Minnie tried to keep him down to earth; Pluto the bloodhound sniffed out trouble; windy Horace Horsecollar bragged; gossipy Clarabelle Cow waxed romantic; and Gangster Pete and lawyer Sylvester Shyster brewed criminal intrigues.

Supporting characters came from Disney's *Silly Symphony* cartoons and Sunday strip. Some—like Cock Robin and Dirty Bill—didn't last, but sticking around would be insect wanderers Bucky Bug and Bo, Zeke the frustrated Big Bad Wolf, and three Oscar-winning little pigs named Fiddler, Fifer, and Practical.

Some new creations were even more successful, rising to join Mickey as studio stars. The lovable hayseed named first Dippy Dog, then Dippy Dawg, debuted on-screen in 1932 and in the Sunday comics January 8, 1933. Known inside Disney by another name—"the Goof"—Dippy found his public moniker morphing to fit. He became "Goofie" in Horne's February 1935 *Mickey Mouse Magazine* and Goofy not long after, though the name Dippy would remain in occasional use as late as 1941.



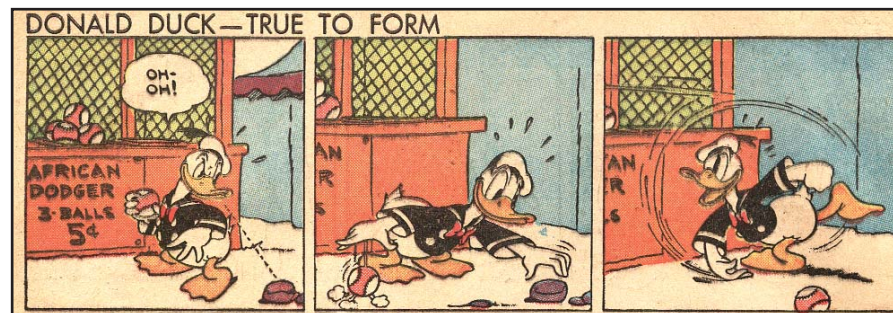
Mickey interrogates long-lost Disney bit player Gideon Goat in "Country Life" (*Mickey Mouse Annual* #3, 1932).

## Wilfred Haughton

When British publisher Dean and Son published *Mickey Mouse Annual* #1 in fall 1930, there had never been a Walt Disney comics periodical before, nor a regular artist to draw it. Taking the position and sticking with it for a decade, Wilfred Haughton produced the first-ever Disney stories designed in comic book format.

Haughton was heavily influenced by traditional English music hall humor. Indeed, his pre-Disney, self-created characters "Ebb and Flo" were black minstrels with blatant vaudeville roots. Haughton's Mickey and Minnie had vaudeville roots, too, mixing Gottfredson mannerisms with veddy British puns and proto-Python sadism. In "Mickey Comes Out" (*MMA* #3), the Mouse is smacked with a dog's decapitated head.

From 1936, Haughton also drew the glorious, photogravure color covers of Odhams Press' *Mickey Mouse Weekly*. Shedding his early anarchy for the job, Haughton now came closer to the authoritative versions of Mickey, Minnie, and particularly Goofy ("the loon," as Haughton called him). The *Weekly* covers were such a success that publishers adopted them across Europe, turning Haughton into a trend-setting artist.



Early *WDC&S* included more Donald Sunday strips than dailies, but the latter did appear too. Here from *WDC&S* #1 is the strip for March 3, 1938, written by Homer Brightman and drawn by Al Taliaferro

Disney's most important 1930s creation, however, was indisputably Donald Duck. The eternal underduck's debut was arguably earlier than is often pegged: his name is given to a generic quacker in a 1931 Mickey storybook, and Wilfred Haughton draws him as a blackfaced fowl in 1932's *Mickey Mouse Annual* #3. In any event, 1934 saw the now-familiar white, temperamental Don starring in both cartoon and comic strip versions of the *Silly Symphony* *Wise Little Hen*.

With his major dose of attitude—"Wanna fight?"—Donald was a force to be reckoned with, and Disney publications reflected his sensational rise. The 1936 *Mickey Mouse Magazine* text features slowly transform the Duck from Mickey's rival into a friendly, albeit glory-hogging pal. *MMM* also reprinted Don's first solo newspaper strips, Sunday gags by writer Ted Osborne and classic Duck artist Al Taliaferro. In Britain, 1937 *Mickey Mouse Weekly* offered William Ward's "Donald and Donna," an original series featuring the first Duck girlfriend, Donna Duck, and the first Duck adventure continuity. Italy took the next unprecedented step, reissuing their own 1937 Donald serial—Federico Pedrocchi's "The Secret of Mars" (*Paperino* #1-18/*Donald Duck* #286)—as the first-ever all-in-one, all-Donald adventure comic the following spring.

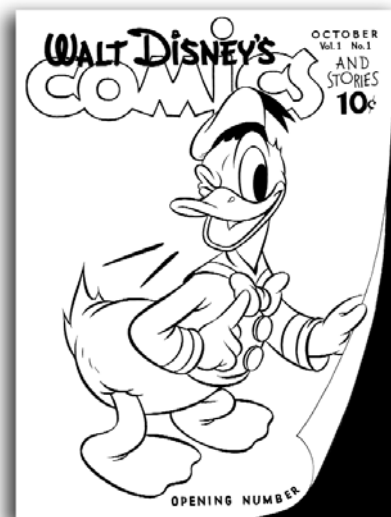
The rise of the Duck matched the rise of comics as Disney's magazine storytelling medium of choice. In 1937 Western Publishing, previously only a book licensee, took over Horne's *Mickey Mouse Magazine* operation. Along with a shift to newsprint pages and full color interiors, Western implemented an increase in the number of newspaper strip reprints per issue. The trend, likely an effort to compete with newsstand comic books like *Famous Funnies*, was a sign of things to come.

## 1940s: Duck! It's Disney

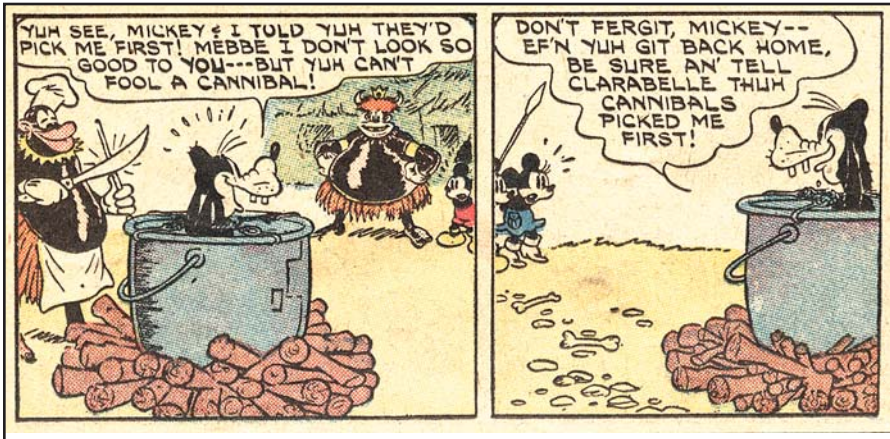
One might say the spirit of the 1940s was born in 1939. That's when Western Publishing launched Dell's *Four Color* series, one-shot comics containing a wide variety of newspa-

After sending Mickey off on a solitary desert mission, legion commander Pete is ordered to recover him or face a court-martial. This sequence from "Mickey Mouse in the Secret Service" (*WDC&S* #9, 1941) ranks among Gottfredson's greatest triumphs.

per strip material. Early the next year the first all-Disney number came out—#4, featuring Donald Duck—and its big-league success was the straw that broke the mouse's back. *Mickey Mouse Magazine* was already gaining comics pages rapidly; why not speed its transformation into a full-fledged funnybook? Western editor Eleanor Packer saw her chance and took it. Dumping many of *MMM*'s surviving editorial pages and adopting a new mast-head title, Packer brought out the first modern Disney comic in October 1940. *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* had arrived. Never had there been Disney magazines with so many comics pages. There was now room for any newspaper strip adventure continuity, no matter the length, and some greats were hustled onstage. "Island in the Sky," Floyd Gottfredson's 1936 masterpiece (*WDC&S* #1-2), mixes



The cover of *WDC&S* #1 (1940) is often seen in reinked form, for example on *WDC&S* #600. But no imitation quite matches the original, which appears here in black and white line art for what we believe to be the first time.



Gottfredson's "In Search of Jungle Treasure" (WDC&S #4, 1941) brilliantly sums up Goofy's character. He's no fool; he thinks longer and harder than most about being cooked by cannibals. Then he just sort of puts the wrong spin on it.

Mickey with atomic scientist Dr. Einmug, while "His Royal Highness" (WDC&S #6-9) shows the mouse as substitute prince in palace scandal and revolution. Floyd did well with Goofy, too: "In Search of Jungle Treasure" (WDC&S #4-5), the Goof considers it a great honor to be cooked first by the cannibals.

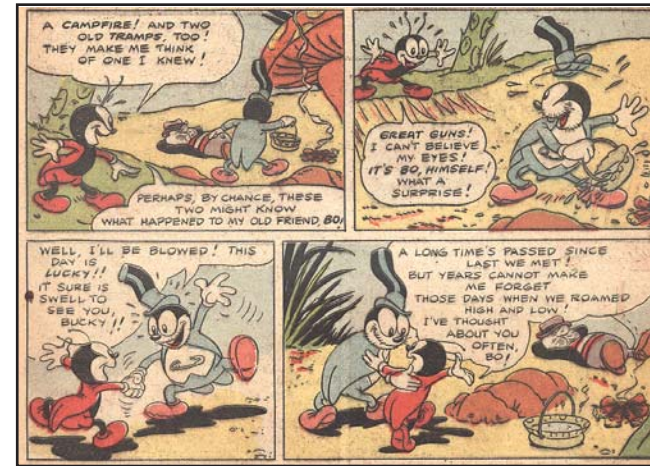
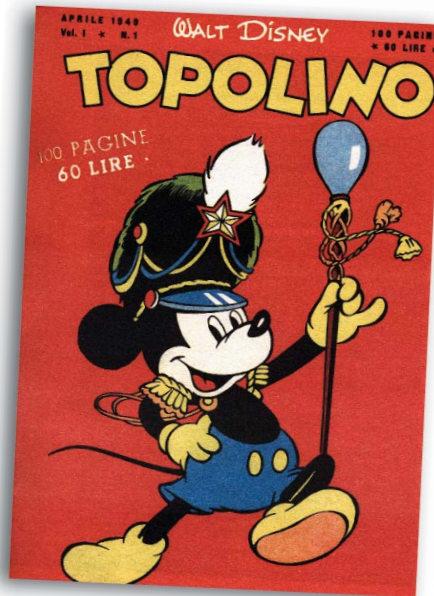
These Gottfredson classics were backed by equally classic shorter continuities and gags. Early Duck Sunday strips by Osborne and Taliaferro continue to appear in the first few WDC&S; in them, we see Donald's transformation from childish prankster to beleaguered uncle of the famous Huey, Dewey and Louie. The Silly Symphony Sunday strip's Three Pigs tales (WDC&S #5, 10, 16) show another transformation: pigs and wolf who'd been simplistic on-screen grow into multidimensional sharp thinkers.

Eleanor Packer was a sharp thinker, too. By 1942, she saw that a good thing—the supply of Disney stories she had for her comics—was beginning to come to an end. With both *Four Color* and WDC&S reprinting them, the supply was running low; and with World War II at its worst, most European production had temporarily disbanded. If Western wanted more comics and stories, they would have to produce them themselves.

"The Flying Gauchito," a story in WDC&S #24 probably pencilled by Walt Kelly, was the first Western-produced piece to appear in that series.

But the opening salvos of Western's Disney production came a little earlier, and for one-shots: "The Reluctant Dragon" and "Dumbo" (Four Color #13 and #17), "Pluto Saves the Ship" (Large

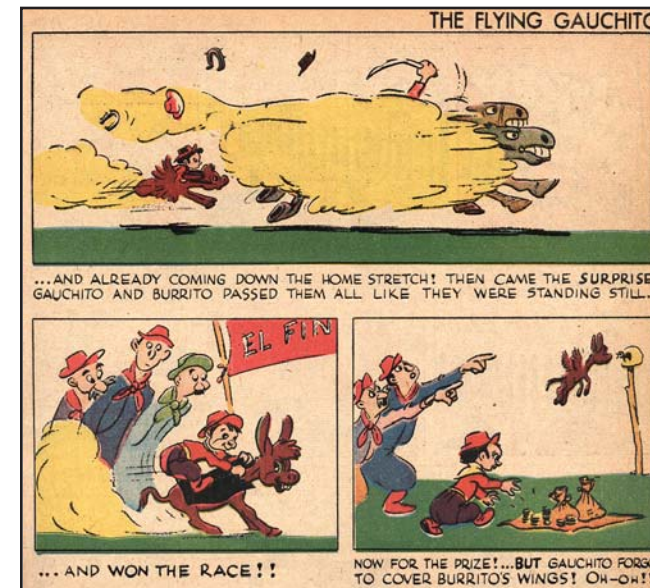
Italian Topolino digest #1 (1949). Haven't we seen this image before? Bandleader Mouse's previous gig was on the back cover of Western's WDC&S #9 (1941).



First encountering Old Man Bo in 1932 newspaper strips, Bucky Bug renews the friendship in this story by Carl Buettner (WDC&S #56, 1945).

Feature Comics #7), and FC #9, "Donald Duck Finds Pirate Gold." The last two stories marked the debut of now-famous 'Duck Man' Carl Barks.

Carl Barks was not the first man to create Donald Duck adventure stories. But he was almost certainly the first to have unconditional respect for his readers and his art form. In stories like "Ghost of the Grotto" (FC #159), "Sheriff of Bullet Valley" (FC #199), and the famous square egg quest "Lost in the Andes" (FC #223), Donald's family grew from cartoonish quacks into multifaceted, self-aware figures. And on the Ducks' wings, Western flew to regular production of stories with other Disney stars. By the end of World War II, Western's own stories filled half of WDC&S. By 1947 Mickey, Donald and



"The Flying Gauchito" (WDC&S #24, 1942) was the first original story produced for WDC&S. The blur of action and adult characters' stares suggest the pencil work of Walt Kelly.



Zeke Wolf makes a promise under duress. From "Zeke Midas Wolf" (WDC&S #106, 1949).

## Gil Turner

Gil Turner cut his teeth as a Schlesinger and MGM animator in the 1930s and 1940s, surely not guessing he'd make his mark with Disney characters. He did so from 1947 to 1957, though, when—starting with *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #85—Western Publishing assigned him to write and draw Li'l Bad Wolf stories.

The basic Wolf concept was very simple. Pig-friendly Li'l Wolf is an unnaturally good wolf; his father, Zeke the Big Bad Wolf, wants him to be bad. Turner's gift lay in instilling this basic contretemps with surprisingly real emotion. Under Turner, Zeke turned from simple grump into misunderstood crusader for nature's way. His Big Bad "wolfishness" became a life philosophy with provisions for sloth, littering, ignorance and disobedience—all of which were encouraged, of course.

"If I hadn't started fibbin' in the cradle, I'd have been a failure!" insists Big Bad in one story, never considering how sorry he'll be should Li'l Wolf really start to lie. Suggesting that we try to understand human commitment and dedication even when it is misguided, Gil Turner taught his readers a simple truth.

others had regularly scheduled slots within *Four Color*, which became the characters' own individually-numbered titles a few years later.

It was also in 1947 that Carl Barks helmed a great achievement. Scrooge McDuck was not the first lasting character to be created for a Disney comic book, but he was surely the most important. His creation, for all that, was fairly prosaic: "I just needed a rich uncle for the [Christmas] story I was going to do," Barks recounted. "I thought of this situation of Donald...getting involved with a bear up in the mountains. Somebody had to own this cabin he was going to..."<sup>1</sup> Scrooge—named with a one-off Yuletide adventure in mind—didn't come across as star material in "Christmas on Bear Mountain" (Four Color #178); but his money, spite and determination kept him in Barks' mind. As he reappeared over the years following, the "squillionaire" Duck enriched more



**Brer Rabbit, Brer Bear, and Brer Fox are up to tricks in an early work from Paul Murry (WDC&S #77, 1947).**

than Duck stories: his success showed that Disney comics characters could match their screen relatives in popularity.

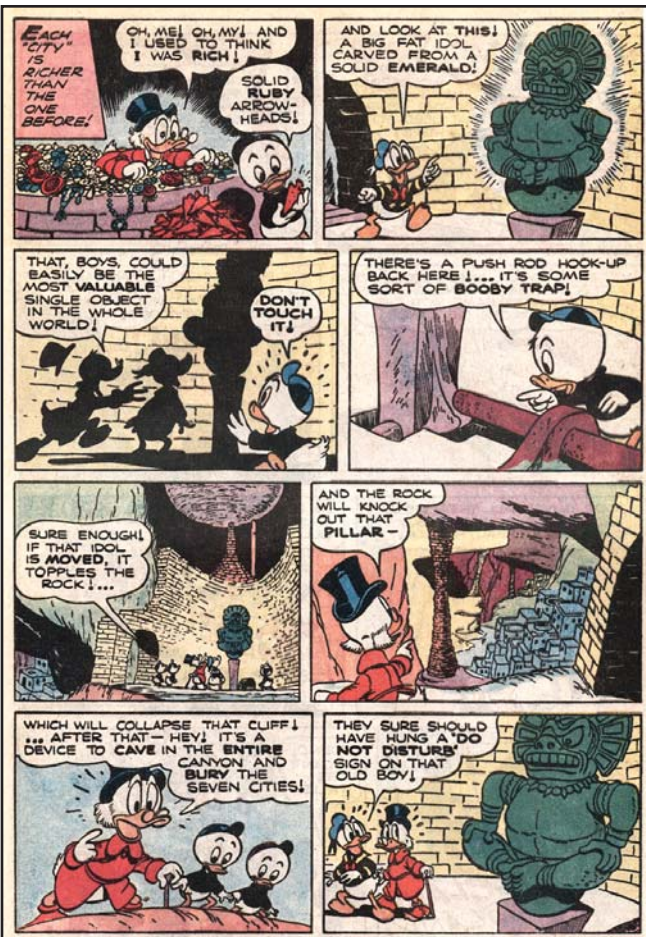
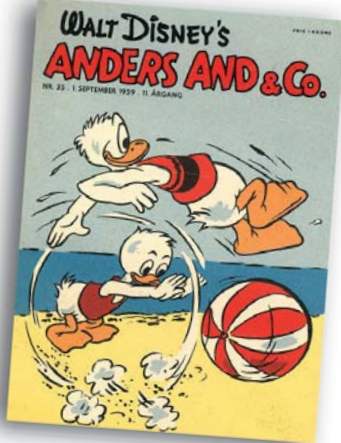
It must have been an emboldening realization for Western staffers, who by the end of the '40s were well into a golden age. Li'l Bad Wolf, Big Bad's goody-goody son, had been created by editor Chase Craig and artist Carl Buettner in 1945, meeting his definitive writer/artist in Gil Turner from 1947. Turner, Vivie Risto, Buettner and others drew new adventures of Bucky Bug, male ladybug hero of Junkville town, while Paul Murry offered up smart Brer Rabbit in memorable swamp-land sagas. *Pogo's* Walt Kelly, drawing early WDC&S gags during World War II, told of crafty Gremlin Gus and his saboteur Widget pals. Young warrior Little Hiawatha went hunting in stories by Roger Armstrong. And aside from Scrooge, Carl Barks offered other Duck supporting characters—annoyingly lucky Gladstone Gander and feuding Neighbor Jones, the latter of whom appeared in other creators' work before decade's end.

More Disney magazines were being published by decade's end, too. There was a giant *Christmas Parade* extra, *March of Comics* and Cheerios cereal giveaways, and *Four Color* issues for even minor Disney characters. The sheer volume of material attracted reviving overseas publishers. When Scandinavia's Gutenberg Publishing Service put out its first Disney comic books in Norway (*Donald Duck & Co.*, 1948), Sweden (*Kalle Anka & Co.*, 1948), and Denmark (*Anders And & Co.*, 1949), new Western stories filled them almost full. The same went for Italy, where *Topolino* was rebirthed as a digest. When a new Italian-produced story did appear—"Mickey's

Inferno" (*Topolino* #7-12), a classic Dante satire by Guido Martina and Angelo Bioletto—it reflected Western's production in its use of characters like Li'l Bad Wolf and Brer Rabbit. Poughkeepsie's editors were, for the time being, kings of the Disney press.

### 1950s: Of Mouse and Men

The 1950s were a Mickey Mouse decade in several senses. To begin with, the few years preceding had been a lean time for Disney films. Lacking the budgets that enabled pre-war artistic experimentation, Walt's crew had been cooking up simpler fare. And while no one would call *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), for instance, an example of poor draftsmanship, Disney movies nevertheless began to lose the cachet of high culture that they'd once entertained. As went the studio, so went its



**Wanderers of wonderlands: suspense and imagination highlight Barks' early Scrooge adventures. From "The Seven Cities of Cibola" (Uncle Scrooge #7, 1954).**



**In a change from the more usual Alex Toth, adventure artist Warren Tufts brings Zorro to life in "The Spaniard's Secret" (FC #1037, 1959).**

### Paul Murry

Born in 1911, Missouri farmer Paul Murry got bored of the sod, teaching himself to be an advertising artist in 1937 and a Disney cartoonist the next year. After assisting pivotal Mickey Mouse animator Freddy Moore, Murry moved on to create publicity art and draw Disney newspaper strips, including *José Carioca*, *Panchito* and *Uncle Remus*. Departing the Studio in 1946, Murry switched from comic strips to comic books. Beginning with *Four Color* #129—an Uncle Remus title—Murry began a thirty-eight-year Disney freelance career with Western Publishing.

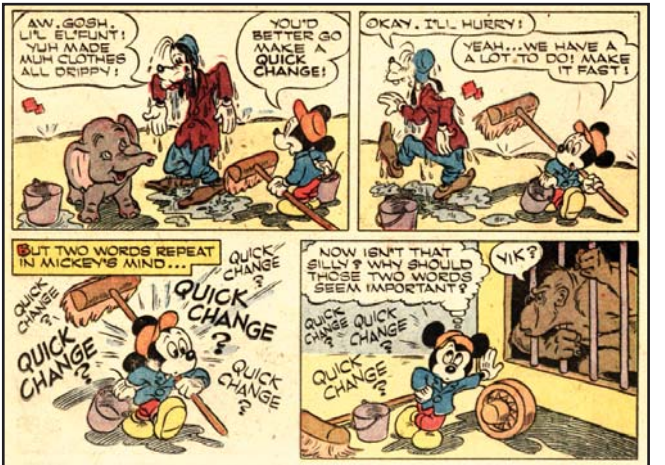
Murry drew almost every Disney character of the time, from Snow White to Humphrey Bear. But due, Murry said later, to his training with Moore, he gravitated especially to Mickey Mouse. Paul's first Mickey story, "The Monster Whale" (*Vacation Parade* #1), made few waves in 1950. But Murry was made in Mousedom three years later, launching a twenty-year run of WDC&S Mickey mystery serials. Together with the serials' usual writer, Carl Fallberg, Murry took Mickey and Goofy around the world in search of crooks and capers.



**Fallberg and Murry regularly set Mickey adventures on Mr. Clinker's train line. This example is from "The Vanishing Railroad" (WDC&S #185, 1956).**

driven characters. These characters had the power to attract all ages to young people's stories. Or as Carl Barks said on numerous occasions, "I always tried to write a story that I wouldn't mind buying myself."

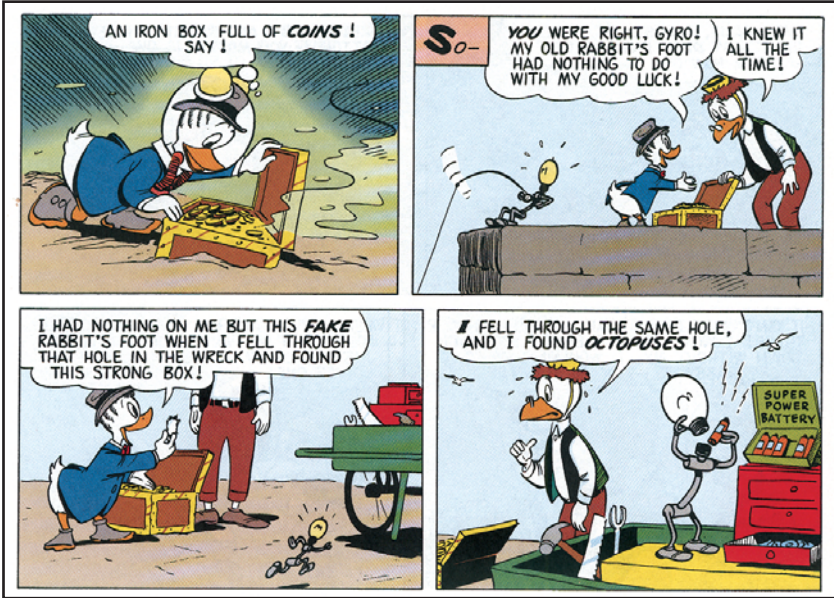
The 1950s found buyable Barks in numerous spots. WDC&S led off each month with a Donald Duck ten-pager from Carl's hand; there his brilliant new characters, like inventor Gyro Gearloose and the Junior Woodchuck scout troop, continued to debut. *Donald Duck*, now bimonthly, mixed



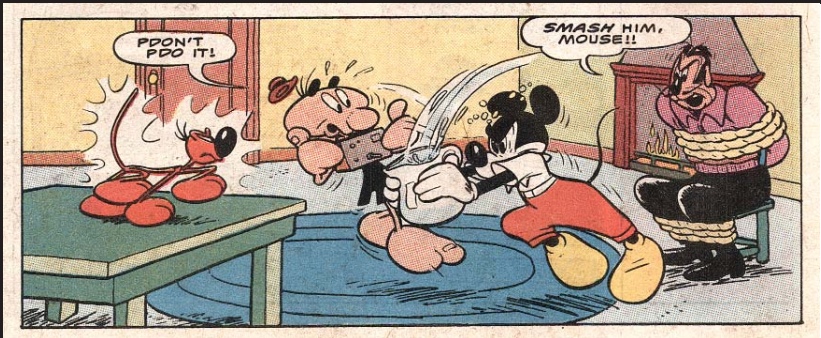
**"The Case of the Vanishing Bandit" (WDC&S 162, 1954) is an early example of Paul Murry at work. In the early fifties Murry's art was arguably at its apex.**

Barks with the more frequent offerings of Tony Strobl; so did *Christmas in Disneyland*, *Vacation Parade* and other seasonal specials. And then there was *Uncle Scrooge*. In testament to Barks' popularity, his own creation turned solo star in 1952. "Only a Poor Old Man" (*Four Color* #386) was the first of several one-shots before the regular series began. Like many later Scrooge sagas, "Old Man" detailed the miser's money bin and travails with the larcenous Beagle Boys. Not content beating bandits at home, though, Scrooge plumbed the world for riches in the issues after—and from Atlantis to Cibola, we were glad to go with him.

Other Disney characters offered other brands of escapism. The 1950s saw both *WDC&S* features and self-titled comics for Scamp, the pesky pup of writer Ward Greene and artist Al Hubbard; farmer gal Grandma Duck, retooled from Taliaferro origins by artists Riley Thompson and Frank McSavage; Chip 'n'



Three Carl Barks creations—inventive Gyro Gearloose, lucky Gladstone Gander and one-of-a-kind microbot Helper—have an adventure to themselves (*Gyro Gearloose Four Color* #1047, 1959).



Hypnotized Mickey obeys the costumeless Blot, almost killing Eega Beeva and Pflip in "The Blot's Double Mystery" (*Topolino* #116/*Mickey and Donald* #8). Story by Guido Martina, art by Romano Scarpa, American dialogue by Dwight Decker.

### Romano Scarpa

Romano Scarpa of Venice, Italy has been a cartooning fanatic—and a Disney aficionado—since his childhood days in the 1930s. Romano's interests led him first to an artists' academy, then to solo efforts at cartoon making. But the work that made him most famous would appear on the printed page. In the early 1950s, Romano got together with publisher Mondadori to create his own Disney comics.

Romano's Mouse stories, debuting in *Topolino* as Gottfredson's ran out, were often mistaken for those of his mentor—with their bouncy style, appearances by Eega Beeva, and emotional, exuberant Mickey, a character very close to Romano's heart. Scarpa's Duck stories, meanwhile, introduced characters of his own invention. Some, like lady tycoon Brigitta MacBridge, became permanent fixtures in European Duckburg.

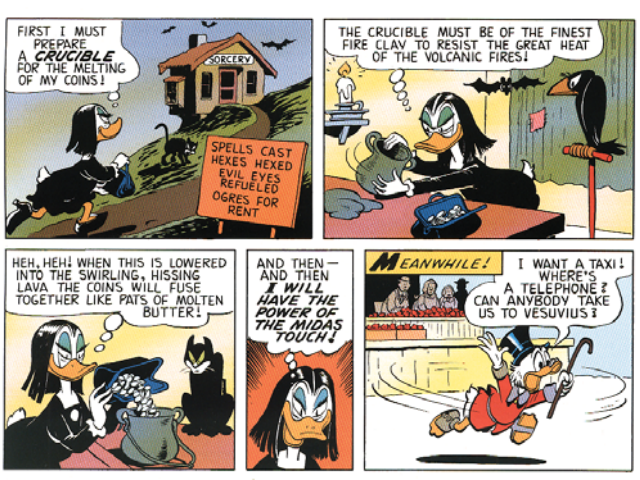
Scarpa has worked for more different Disney licensees than most other major creators. Outside of Italy, he has created British stories for Odhams Press, American work for Disney itself, French stories for France's Hachette, and most recently material for the Danes.

by generally moving away from the Mouse, a trend that would never be fully repaired.

The same didn't happen in Italy. Like *WDC&S*, *Topolino* had a mid-1950s gap where Gottfredson stories had gone; in their case, because they'd run out of stock. Like *WDC&S*, *Topolino* filled the gap with self-made Mouse material. But unlike Western's writers, creators Martina and Romano Scarpa preserved Mickey's distinct personality. "The Blot's Double Mystery" (*Topolino* #116-119/*Mickey and Donald* #6-8), including both Floyd's fiendish Blot and "man of tomorrow" Eega Beeva, was a triumph of characterization as well as thrills. The same went for "The Mystery of Tapiocus VI" (*Topolino* #142-143/*Mickey Mouse* #256), "Mickey Mouse in the Delta Dimension" (*Topolino* #206-207) and others. And just as Barks' popularity boosted Murry, Buettner, Bradbury and others in the USA, Scarpa carried the torch for a growing Italian school of Duck and Mouse men. While Luciano Gatto, Giovan Battista Carpi and others may be little known to



Romano Scarpa's emotional Mickey re-encounters Gottfredson-era pal Dr. Einmug in "The Delta Dimension" (*Topolino* #206, 1959). British printing.



Magica De Spell arguably represents the fullest use of whimsy and unreality in Carl Barks' work. From "The Midas Touch" (*Uncle Scrooge* #36, 1962).

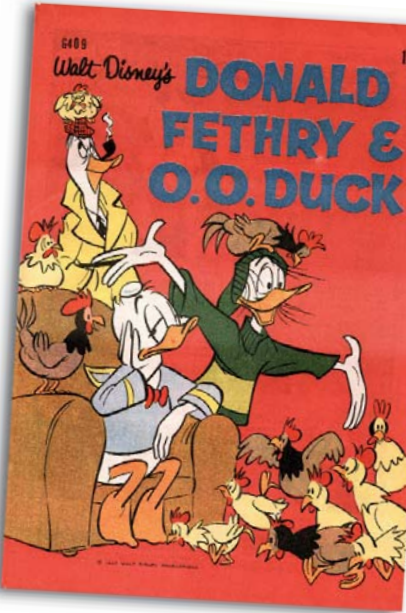
Americans, their work remains internationally famous today.

Other international voices also found themselves in the '50s. Dutch *Donald Duck* weekly, founded in 1952, included original Duck stories by Ed Lukacs several years later. New British *Mickey Mouse Weekly* artists—Ronald Neilson and Basil Reynolds among them—penned multiple animated feature follow-ups and a Mickey tale or three. Brazilian *Pato Donald* editor Victor Civita signed new artists to chronicle José Carioca, Disney's natty parrot-star. And Danish *Anders And & Co.*—now a weekly publication—featured an original cover on #35/1959 by one Nils Rydahl. Though a crude piece of work, it too marked the origin of a talent pool-to-be.

### 1960s: A Descent Interval

"Nothing is stationary," said Disney publications director George Sherman in 1968. "There are a number of reasons that might explain the decline in circulation of comic books..." Mr. Sherman went on to gently blame television, censorious times and teenage magazines. The topic of discussion was *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*, and the tragedy—such as it

Overseas Program stories got special issues to themselves—overseas, of course. Donald, Fethry, and O. O. Duck (*Walt Disney Giant Comics* #G409, 1967) hit the stands in Australia.



was—had begun in 1960. Over the first few years of the new decade, circulation fell from 1,375,000 copies per issue to nine hundred, four hundred, finally three hundred thousand. Other Disney titles went through a similar slide.<sup>2</sup>

Sherman’s analysis of the problem pinpoints many causes; another, however, might have been quality slippage. No golden age lasts forever. While remaining of high class and by all means professional, Western’s Disney comics had begun a subtle slide in the late 1950s and kept it up, albeit slowly, thereafter.

The signals all pointed in the same direction. Stories once aimed at everyone were now—perhaps unbeknownst to the editors—acquiring the kids-only flavor of non-Disney humor comics. Back in 1948, Barks’ “Sheriff of Bullet Valley” (*Four Color* #199)



Witch Hazel wants to convince Goofy that her magic is real. But Goofy thinks she’s just a poor, confused ol’ lady. "Nocciola e il titolo accademico" (*Topolino* 453, 1964) by Carlo Chendi and Luciano Bottaro is one story in a famous series that continues to date.



Toonder Studio artist Piet Wijn brought a special touch to 1960s Dutch Big Bad Wolf adventures. Here is a rare example of his drawing a Disney Overseas story ("Keep Your Eye on the Clock", 1967).

made a horse opera believable by painting it as exceptional; the entire point was that the West isn’t usually wild anymore. By contrast, when a 1960s Disney character went to Texas, he could simply expect to find 1860s cowboys and Indians, no questions asked. Similarly, the fairytale reality of Disney “crossover” stories—with characters from different worlds casually joining up—began to affect Ducks and Mice in standard stories too. Mickey visiting Europe would surely meet Pinocchio.

Some creators made the best of this new world. The good side of childish storytelling, after all, is the creative whimsy you can mine by doing it right. Editor Chase Craig and writer Del Connell created Goofy’s secret identity of Super Goof: unbelievable for older Disney, but good satire still. *If* one accepted Mad Madam Mim the witch living in Duckburg, then her ego, libido and wild magic were funny. Barks’ Gyro stories had been unique parables of the human condition; *if* one was okay with their becoming a traditional good-versus-evil drama,

Walt Disney’s Comics Digest was a new title for Gold Key that would survive well into the 1970s.



Scrooge reenacts the deeds of his ancestors in "King Scrooge the First" (*Uncle Scrooge* #71, 1967), written by Carl Barks, pencilled by Tony Strobl, and inked by Steve Steere.

## Tony Strobl

Tony Strobl started his Disney career in ways both big and small. He began in animation, with early toil on *Dumbo*’s huge pachyderms. A decade later, he turned comics freelancer with tiny Bucky Bug (*Walt Disney’s Comics and Stories* #100). The two disparate creatures signify the sweep of his career: at various times, Strobl was asked to draw almost every Disney character. The Ducks, however, were his favorites. “I can handle them better,” he told Klaus Strzyz in 1980; “and as a freelancer, time is money.”

In his early days Strobl worked exclusively for Western, and only as an artist: “One for the Whammy” (*Donald Duck* #65) is a standout from that period, as is “King Scrooge the First” (*Uncle Scrooge* #71), a story scripted by Carl Barks. Later, Tony joined up with Disney itself to handle newspaper strips and Overseas Program stories—especially those featuring the crooked, hapless Desperate Doe Boys, Duck enemies whose final form Strobl designed. In the 1970s, toward the end of Tony’s career, he also began to write some of the stories he drew. At the very end in the mid-1980s, he was a writer only.

Vic Lockman’s hapless rival inventor Emil Eagle made a fine whimsical addition to the series. Finally, whimsy occasionally cloaked stories with some of the earlier integrity. The self-titled comics of super-genius *Ludwig Von Drake* (1961-62) and evil *Phantom Blot* (1964-66) were good examples of this.

Carl Barks, in some ways, partook of whimsy too. His great 1960s creation, *Magica De Spell*, is by her very nature less real than her predecessors: not just an exaggerated tightwad or bon vivant, but a self-declared sorceress with genuine magic wands. At least sometimes, however, Barks’ citified reality reasserts itself. *Magica*’s magic is sometimes fueled by mundane power sources like batteries, and her Donaldlike temper and cynicism keep her feet planted on the ground.

The ground flew out from under Dell Publishing, Western’s printing partner, in 1962. In a putative effort to up their profits (not all the details are known), Western broke free and started its own imprint, Gold Key Comics. On some level, the new

brand was as accepted as the old. Gold Key books like *The Beagle Boys* and *Huey, Dewey and Louie Junior Woodchucks* survived for years. The *Walt Disney Comics Digest*, including new feature-film-based stories, was also fairly successful. But the overall downward trend did not reverse, and money-saving reprints began to fill some titles.

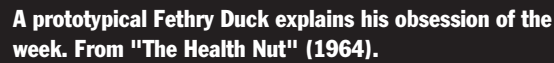
This is not to say that American Disney comics production had bottomed out. While Western began their slide, international Disney publishers were more successful than ever, and the Disney studio wanted to keep them well stocked with stories. The way to do this, starting in 1962, was the Overseas Comics Program, in which Disney itself produced comic tales for foreign use. Creators who’d worked with Western—most notably Tony Strobl—began moonlighting for Disney, joining forces with cartoon staffers to produce Duck and Mouse stories like no other.

George Sherman, series director, outlined the plan. “We [will] use new characters in our foreign comics, characters that we don’t have [in the USA].... to bring out facets of existing characters, [and to] give the stories more variety.”



Fethry Duck and Hard Haid Moe enjoy a uniquely funny relationship. "The Medicine Man" (1968) is written by Dick Kinney, pencilled by Tony Strobl, and inked by Ellis Eringer. Like many American classics of its time, it has never appeared in an American comic book.

And then there was Fethry Duck. Clad in a distinctive stocking cap, Donald's beatnik cousin hit readers like a bomb. Forever following fad lifestyles and hobbies, Fethry lovingly sets out to improve Donald's existence—only to drive Don berserk with his incompetence instead. Created by Dick Kinney and Al Hubbard for "The Health Nut" (1964), Fethry



Writer Dick Kinney started out as a Disney cartoon gagman for his more famous director brother, Jack. His employment took him in and out of other animation studios—UPA, Lantz—for several years. In each one, his zany sense of humor fixed on the same kind of cartoon character: a cheerful pest who threw himself at others.

Kinney and Hubbard created other characters, too, but the apple never fell far from the original tree. Hard Haid Moe started out as a nasty hermit, Hustler Duck as a marketing man, Belle Duck as an ex-girlfriend of Scrooge, and O. O. Duck as a super spy. In time, they all found pesky, pesky ways of throwing themselves at others.



Foreign Disney publishers had their own creative personalities to deal with. Even as overseas stories ran through the press, Europeans continued to make more and more Disney tales of their own. In Italy, this involved adding new stars to the Duck and Mouse cast—many of them Scarpa creations. Brigitta MacBridge, Scrooge's businesswoman wooer, was one; Jubal Pomp, a wannabe rival of Scrooge, and Dickie Duck, the nephews' teenage gal pal, were two more. Inventiveness, of course, did not end with Scarpa. Writer Rodolfo Cimino told imaginative tales of far-off treasure hunts. Writer/artist team Carlo Chendi and Luciano Bottaro paired Goofy and Witch Hazel for a series of wild comedies. And artist Giorgio Cavazzano, from a starting point as Scarpa's inker, worked toward an entirely new Disney graphic style.

Meanwhile in Holland, local editors felt there weren't enough Big Bad Wolf or Little Hiawatha stories available for their *Donald Duck* weekly. When master Dutch cartoonist Martin Toonder (*Tom Puss/Kitkat, Oliver Bumble*) produced some with his studio, the result was a classic series that lasted for several years.

There was a new Disney artist imitating Carl Barks. His name was Carl Barks.



who knew the man usually didn't know his past. And the situation was even bleaker in Europe. Comics scholarship grew up there as fast as here, but little was known of Barks save his style. When it came time to define the late-1940s, early-1950s high-water mark of their favorite artist, nostalgic Duck fans didn't yet know enough to refer to "the middle period of Carl Barks." They referred, instead, to *Donaldism*.

*Donaldism* (Donaldism) was also a book by Norwegian comics researcher Jon Gisle, published in 1973. The first-ever reference book on Disney comics, it was unprecedented at the time of its publication. Working with little background data, Gisle analyzed Duckburg history from the late 1940s forward, citing trends from the obvious (changes in Scrooge's

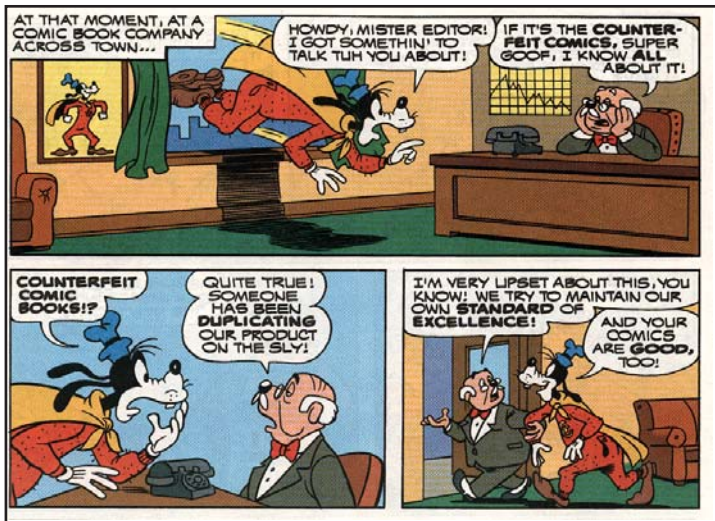


**Master Donald struts his stuff in Milton's and Jippes' "A Clean Case of Competence" (WDC&S #515).**

Since the 1980s the duo have pursued individual efforts. Milton has continued to draw Duck stories for Oberon and, occasionally, the Italians. Jippes, meanwhile, has taken 1970s Carl Barks scribble-scripts for Junior Woodchuck stories—stories originally drawn by lesser artists—and re-rendered them in faithful Barks style.

Ur-Donaldism was also the term fans gave to Duck stories, just then appearing in Norway, which they thought to be new imitations of the early Barks style.<sup>3</sup> Here was where research went understandably wrong: many of these allegedly first-run stories turned out to be vintage Barks reprints, new only to Norway. Oops. The drive to correct such mistakes led “Donaldists”—as they called themselves—to get together internationally, swap comics back-issues, publish journals like Norway’s *Donaldisten* (The Donaldist), and research, research, research.

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Writer Mark Evanier enjoys self-referential humor in "The Comic Book Crooks" (*Beagle Boys* #17, 1973). "Dell comics are good comics" was for many years Western's publishing slogan. Art by Kay Wright.

story they hadn't seen. In the process, the team discovered and exposed their readers to Gottfredson, Gil Turner and other great past creators. Jippes and his colleagues struck out to reclaim the future too, creating new Barks-style Duck stories and Turner-style wolf tales.

Fan excitement moved on to Scandinavia. *Donaldisten's* Danish cousin, Fred Milton's *Carl Barks & Co.* fanzine, was inspired by the Dutch developments. Then Gutenberghus comics editor Lars Bergström, a follower of the new fandom, got together with his colleagues to formally revamp their Duck production in a more classic vein. Some non-Barks 1960s

### Lars Bergström and Stefan Printz-Påhlson

When Swedes Lars Bergström and Stefan Printz-Påhlson talked, Danish comics production house Gutenberghus listened. Bergström, starting out as editor with the firm in 1977, made it his priority to create extra-Barkslike Duck stories—a new idea for Danish executives—and writer Printz-Påhlson agreed, himself becoming an editor a couple of years later. The early 1980s saw the flowering of the partnership, aided by artists like Vicar, Esteban and Daniel Branca.

On Bergström's and Printz-Påhlson's watches, *Magica De Spell* returned to chase Scrooge's first dime. Second-richest Duck Flintheart Glomgold was a regular character. Even Bolivar the St. Bernard and con artist Chisel McSue turned up again.

Bergström and Printz-Påhlson's other 1980s accomplishments included producing a famous series of Duck time travel adventures and training English comedy writers—Paul Halas, Gail Renard—to create Disney stories. Today the two editors are still very busy. Among Bergström's editorial charges is Italian Duck legend Marco Rota, while Printz-Påhlson has introduced Princess Oona, a prehistoric Duck character of his own creation.

characters were dropped from Gutenberghus' stories; Barks' own creations were nudged closer to the Duck Man's originals. And Gutenberghus' artists were pleased—not least up-and-coming favorite "Vicar," the Chilean Victor Arriagada Rios. Pioneering a new style, the team saw a great future ahead.

Disney comics scholarship travelled to Italy too in the 1970s, where big white books collecting Barks, Gottfredson and Taliaferro material began to appear. But Italy was, it seems, too satisfied with its own Disney style to consider further redirection. Truth be told, local creators did have many triumphs to celebrate. PK (Paperinik), a superheroic Donald also called the Duck Avenger, had been born at the end of 1969, and in the 1970s enjoyed a golden age. Created by editor Elisa Penna, written by Guido Martina, and first drawn by Giovan Battisti Carpi, PK struck a blow for anyone who'd ever pitied Donald. Acquiring a super suit really meant for Gladstone Gander, the Duck got to feel like a hero—but, ever unlucky, didn't dare announce his true identity for fear of Gladstone getting his own back. Aside from family feuds, early PK themes included Daisy Duck becoming an outspoken feminist. Aside from Carpi, early PK artists included Scarpa and the outstanding Giorgio Cavazzano.

Another outstanding 1970s development took place in Brazil. Donaldism hadn't struck there, but "parrotism" had:



An early accomplishment of Gutenberghus' Lars Bergström regime was *Magica De Spell's* return to her roots. "The Green Attack" (*Uncle Scrooge* #221, 1987), a classic 1970s story, was plotted by Werner Wejp-Olsen, scripted by Edele Kenner, and drawn by Daniel Branca. American dialogue by Geoffrey Blum.

### Giorgio Cavazzano

Lots of kids say they can't wait to grow up and start a career. A few special kids—like Giorgio Cavazzano—*don't* wait till they grow up. Venetian-born Cavazzano was only twelve when he began inking the Disney art of his cousin, Luciano Capitanio. A stint as Scarpa's inker came next; then in 1967, fully Cavazzano-drawn stories began to appear. With the onset of the 1970s, this Italian prodigy's golden age really started.

Cavazzano didn't usually write the stories he drew, but he certainly left his mark on any story he touched. He adopted a style of loose-limbed, abstract, emotional ducks combined with sharp, realistically-rendered machinery. The style was ideal for telling an edgy, emotional story—like 1972's "Donald's Underwater Adventure" (*Topolino* #873). Writer Rodolfo Cimino's intimate tale of Donald and mer-princess Reginella is often ranked with the greatest-ever Italian Disney works.

Cavazzano's success led his style to become the benchmark for modern Italian creators. Meanwhile, Cavazzano himself no longer works just for Italy: "Secret of the Incas" (*Uncle Scrooge Adventures* #53-54) was one of several Danish partnerships.

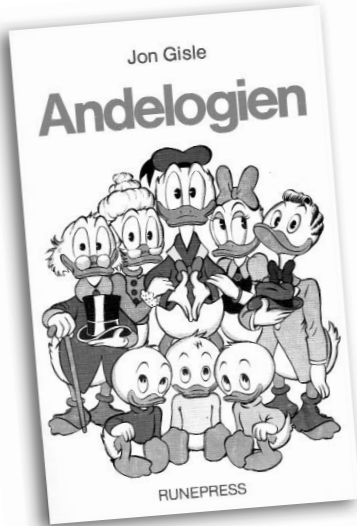
Giorgio Cavazzano draws Brigitta MacBridge in "Secret of the Incas" (*Uncle Scrooge Adventures* #53). Story by Byron Erickson.

José Carioca, in locally produced stories from publisher Abril, now ranked with Donald, Mickey and Scrooge as a top-of-the-line star. José, Brazilian-born according to Disney's earliest



Prolific Vic Lockman wrote all the stories in Gold Key's *Winnie the Pooh* series. Here in #11 (1979) is *Crusader Pooh*, a characteristic Lockman creation. Art by John Carey.

Jon Gisle's *Donaldismen* (1973) was the first scholarly study of Disney comics. Pictured is the Danish edition, titled *Andelogien* ("Duckology"). Cover art by Carl Barks.



newspaper strips (see *CBM* #95), now became extra-authentically so. Writer/artist Renato Canini contributed local Brazilian culture and even political humor to José's adventures; some have ranked Canini with Barks and Gottfredson as a master of Disney storytelling.

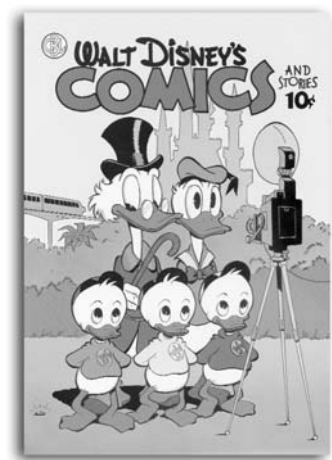
So where were we Yanks when the masters were called out? American Donaldism, though not named as such, was surely in action. Overstreet's *Comic Book Price Guide* in 1977 included a Barks cover story; that same year, Bill Blackbeard's *Smithsonian Book of Newspaper Comics* discussed Gottfredson and reprinted an epic Mickey story in full. A Disney comics fanzine, John Nichols' *Barks Collector*, began in 1976, and animation researcher Mike Barrier serialized a Barks bibliography in his journal *Funnyworld*. Carl Barks himself was also busy with fans. From 1971, Disney allowed the now-retired Duck Man to paint Donald, Scrooge and company in oils, and a one-man cottage industry was the result.

Little of this activity spilled over to Gold Key. The Italian big white books became Abbeville Press' *Walt Disney Best Comics* series (1978-1983), but the stories were often censored and Western itself only tangentially involved.<sup>4</sup> Gold Key had put out four reprint albums, *The Best of Walt Disney Comics*, in 1974—three Barks albums, one Gottfredson—but while the creators had received credits for the first time in America, the stories were again censored and the concept abandoned afterward.

Meanwhile, general Gold Key circulation slid ever further, and new titles like *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *Aristokittens* did not reverse the trend. Some *Super Goof* issues of the era featured clever scripts by Mark Evanier, but other new stories reflected the less-successful creations of the 1960s. Meanwhile, excepting Paul Murry, many classic Western artists had either retired or now worked for Disney only. Those remaining tended to draw in a coloring-book style; for readers, the general perception was one of lowered quality. Editors, apparently, disagreed: when Fred Milton submitted a strongly Barks-inspired Donald story to Western—"The Big Sneeze"—it was rejected for its old-fashioned look.

Who could guess that in just a few years, the philosophy behind these decisions would undergo a radical reversal?

1980s: A Gander at Gladstone



The Duck Man rendered new drawings of his stars for some *Carl Barks Library* slipcases. Here, Set VIII keeps every duck’s eye on the camera except...

USA. 1980 saw collectors Russ Cochran and Bruce Hamilton form the publishing house Another Rainbow. Personal friends of Barks, Cochran and Hamilton named the company for Barks’ Scrooge painting “Always Another Rainbow” (1974); and true to that moniker, their first publication was *The Fine Art of Walt Disney’s Donald Duck* (1980), a luxurious book collecting Barks’ Duck paintings to date. Another Rainbow followed up by commissioning new Duck oils from Barks for issue as lithographs. Then—masterminded also by production manager Byron Erickson, art director Gary Leach, and art assistant John Clark—came something even more exciting:



The 1980s in American Disneydom began with a whimper. Western Publishing’s comic books had reached a low point. Unsellable on the newsstands, from February 1980 the issues were made available only to toy stores, only sealed in bagged groups of three. Only, too, with a new “Whitman” imprint: the Gold Key symbol was now retired. By 1984, so would be Western’s entire comics line.

But Disney fans with printing presses were active elsewhere in the

USA. 1980 saw collectors Russ Cochran and Bruce Hamilton form the publishing house Another Rainbow. Personal friends of Barks, Cochran and Hamilton named the company for Barks’ Scrooge painting “Always Another Rainbow” (1974); and true to that moniker, their first publication was *The Fine Art of Walt Disney’s Donald Duck* (1980), a luxurious book collecting Barks’ Duck paintings to date. Another Rainbow followed up by commissioning new Duck oils from Barks for issue as lithographs. Then—masterminded also by production manager Byron Erickson, art director Gary Leach, and art assistant John Clark—came something even more exciting:

*The Carl Barks Library*, patterned after Russ Cochran’s *EC Library*.

Thirty volumes in ten slipcases released over seven years, the *Barks Library* reproduced the entirety of Barks’ Duck work from the best photostats Another Rainbow could acquire. True: a few stories, no longer available as stats, had to be reproduced from

**Daan Jippes also did a lot of original work just for Gladstone. This classic cover appeared on *WDC&S* #519 (1987).**

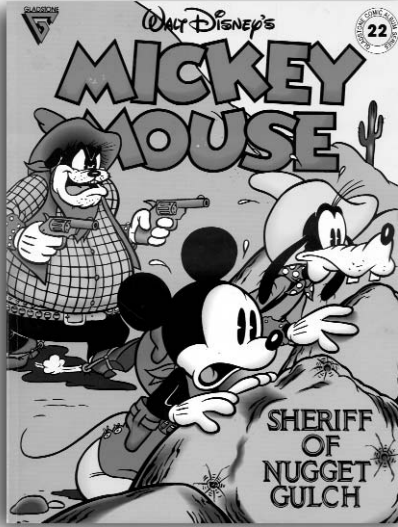


Fred Milton’s and Daan Jippes’ supremely cynical “The Do-Gooders’ League” opened out Gladstone’s first issue of *WDC&S* (#511, 1986).

traced or restored originals, and family-minded Disney asked for censorship to a couple more. But the vast majority of Barks stories were there as Carl created them.

It would seem hard to top the *Barks Library*, Disney comics’ most intricate tribute to its history. Another Rainbow topped it by taking over the American Disney comic book license from Western. With Erickson installed as editor-in-chief, the first of the standard “Gladstone” line—*Mickey Mouse* #219, *Donald Duck* #246, *Uncle Scrooge* #210 and *Walt Disney’s Comics and Stories* #511—appeared in 1986.<sup>5</sup> These comic books did something unprecedented: they made international Disney stories regularly available to American readers.

The difference



Gladstone’s *Mickey Mouse* title featured a windfall of classic Gottfredson material. So did the *Mickey* issues of Gladstone Comic Album: “Sheriff of Nugget Gulch” (*GCA* #22, 1989) is pictured here. Cover art by Murad Gumen.



Donald, Scrooge and the boys confront Italian bandit Fra Diavolo in Branca’s “The Twelfth Caesarius” (*Uncle Scrooge Adventures* #7, 1988). Story by Per Wiking and Tom Anderson, American dialogue by Geoffrey Blum.

Daniel Branca

Thanks to old-time Gutenberghus policy, Danish stories appeared creditless in 1980s Gladstone comics. Only later did fans learn that a series of especially admired, deftly brushed stories—stories like “The Twelfth Caesarius” (*Uncle Scrooge Adventures* #7) and “The Sunken Chest” (*Uncle Scrooge* #212)—were drawn by Daniel Branca.

Argentinian-born Daniel, though artistic as a boy, didn’t plan on a Disney-related adulthood. When he first drew comics as a teen, they were educational strips for a children’s magazine. His start with Disney comics in 1977 came only because an art agency he’d joined—Bardon Art—just happened to be making them for Gutenberghus.

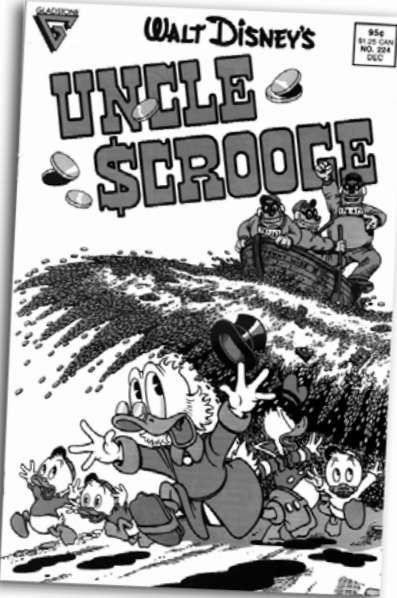
That said, Branca grew to like the work, and after a two-year 1980s hiatus to study painting, he actively sought Ducks to return to. Branca also has personal favorites to draw among the Disney cast. Did you guess they were *Magica* and the *Beagle Boys*?

Aside from being a cartoonist, Branca has painted cubist art for gallery exhibitions since his early 1980s studies. It’s only fitting that many of Branca’s best comics appeared in the USA with the extra-artistic, highly literate dialogue of Geoffrey Blum.

from Western was like night and day. Gladstone’s *WDC&S* began by offering Jippes’ and Milton’s 1970s Dutch classics, the highly ironic “Do-Gooders’ League” (*WDC&S* #511) and “Success Test” (*WDC&S* #512) coming first. *Donald Duck* and *Uncle Scrooge* mixed the current Dutch stories of writer Jan Kruse, artist Ben Verhagen and others with the dynamic works of Gutenberghus’ Bergström regime—identified only, by Danish policy of the time, as Gutenberghus. Finally, *Mickey Mouse* took an unprecedented tack: classic Gottfredson was the cover attraction, promoted with the kind of excitement that really built interest in Mickey as a character. A few years later, Scarpa’s 1950s stories were featured in the title as well.

High quality had the desired effect. Sales breezed back up to an acceptable level. *Gladstone Comic Albums*, letter-size paperback collections of classics, supplemented the regular newsstand titles. And Donaldistic foreign stories inspired modern American comics professionals: if Jippes and Milton could do this, why couldn’t we? With an editorial staff visibly more interested in classicism than was Western, the sky

An impressive—and early—cover by Don Rosa illustrates his “Cash Flow” (*US* #224, 1987).



seemed like the limit. “Big Feet!” (*DD* #249), a one-off effort by Marty Greim, was the first new story made for Gladstone. The second, “The Son of the Sun” by Don Rosa (*US* #219), was the one that grabbed headlines. With his penchant for emotional (and cynical) characters, historical authenticity and detailed artwork, Rosa set his favorite character—Scrooge—on the first of many lovingly intricate treasure quests. And where Rosa excelled at drama, other Gladstone creators turned masters of comic disaster. Canadian William Van Horn and part-time co-author John Lustig began working for the Ducks a year after Rosa, and dived into a number of slapstick

Don Rosa

When Gladstone comics appeared on newsstands in 1986, Keno Don Rosa saw his manifest destiny flashing before his eyes. As has often been recounted, he told editor Byron Erickson that he was born to write and draw *Uncle Scrooge*—and got a chance to prove it. Only a few months later, Rosa’s “The Son of the Sun” (*Uncle Scrooge* #219) was in print. The hit-making debut story also established Don’s tradition of reviving classic Barks situations and bit players, as a vicuna hunter from “Lost in the Andes” (*Four Color* #223) made a gag reappearance.

With time, Barksian references grew for Don into a more carefully fleshed-out Duck continuity, one which is touched on directly or indirectly in much of his work. In stories first created for Gladstone, then the Dutch, Danes, and sometimes French publishers, Keno has told us more and more about Scrooge’s family, his foes and his secrets. The Eisner-winning “Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck” series (*US* #285-296), built especially for the purposes of such fleshing-out, is often seen as his magnum opus. In between times, of course, Rosa has also provided some classic—and scientifically founded—Duck and McDuck gag stories.



Second-richest duck Flintheart Glomgold gets his due in “The Son of the Sun” (*Uncle Scrooge* #219, 1987).



The major new duck character created for DuckTales was fearless—and crash-prone—pilot Launchpad McQuack. In "Seeing the Blight" (DuckTales #5, 1989), William Van Horn gives Launchpad his marching orders.

scenarios. In his early days, Van Horn was surely the first Duck creator to costume Donald's nephews as ninjas ("Fly Now, Pay Later," *DD* #263).

One thing Gladstone didn't have going for it was page count. When an early attempt to publish digests fizzled, 48-page albums and 32-page comics became the rule—precluding the use of most Italian stories, long as they typically were. So what did we miss out on from 1980s Italy? Writer/artist Massimo De Vita enjoyed showing Mickey and Goofy in parallel worlds and other times; multiple *Star Wars* pastiches and the fantasy-based "Sword of Ice" (*Topolino* #1411-1413) were some of his works. Writer Giorgio Figus sent Donald and Fethry out as "P. I. A." operatives—secret agents for Scrooge in a Duckburg subseries. Writer Maria Uggetti and artist Bruno Sarda introduced another spin-off in Arizona Goof, Goofy's intrepid archaeologist cousin.

If Gladstone largely passed over Italy, it did take material from Disney's Overseas Program—now typically called the Studio Program. The Wuzzles, combination animals from Disney TV Animation's "Land of Wuz," appeared in stories from Tom Yakutis and the Jaime Diaz Studio. Disney was also producing a second series for TV, *DuckTales*; when Gladstone began a tie-in comic, relevant Studio stories appeared in it too.

*DuckTales* was itself a phenomenon. The daily animated half-hour marked a daring attempt to make something new out of Barks: Scrooge adventures with Huey, Dewey and

Louie, with newly-created airplane pilot Launchpad McQuack... and without Donald, whom it was feared would steal the spotlight. The series had been conceived before Gladstone's Barks revival, so perhaps producer Alan Zaslove felt fidelity to be less necessary. For all that, though, the cartoon was frequently creative, almost always enjoyable, and a boon to Gladstone along the way.

So popular was *DuckTales*, in fact, that together with the success of the 1988 feature film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, it greatly raised the Disney company's awareness of its classic characters and their value to the studio. In various ways, this new awareness would affect the future of Disney comics in the years that followed. It finally led to Disney deciding that what Gladstone was doing well, Disney would like to do better.

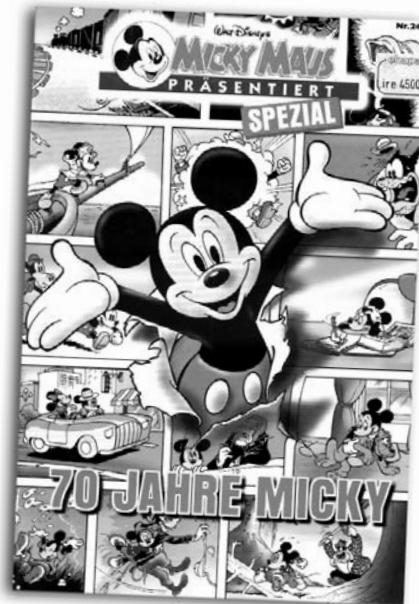
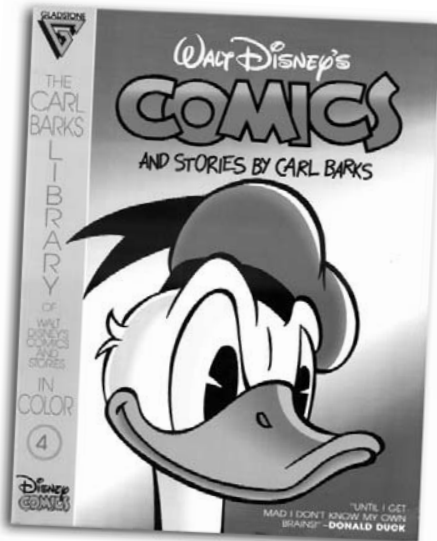
### 1990s: Rises and Falls of Donald Duck

"All the ducks come home to roost," read the ads. "This could be the start of something big!" Revoking Gladstone's comics license in early 1990, WD Publications assembled talent from Gladstone, DC, Marvel and the Studio Program to produce its own titles as Disney Comics, Inc. The justification was simple: a successful in-house comics line meant more profit for Disney than did an outside licensee. Some executives also felt that Disney comics, though successful under Gladstone, would be even bigger hits if they featured modern Disney TV characters. Now Disney could test this theory.

Under editor-in-chief Len Wein, the new line-up looked impressive at first glance. TV-driven *Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers* and *TaleSpin* offered the anthropomorphic action of rodents fighting animal crime and *Jungle Book* critters running a 1930s air cargo service, respectively. Though many stories were full of interesting characterization—Tom and Mary Bierbaum's "For the Love of Cheese" (*CDRR* #17) was a benchmark—the art, divided among multiple inkers, garnered mixed reviews.

*Roger Rabbit* was, from initial comic shop orders, perceived as Disney's most successful title. The lead-off stories' efforts to mix humans with 'toons came across a little inconsistently. Often more acclaimed were the wild backup pieces, usually set in ToonTown, written by Doug Rice and drawn by Bill Langley.

**The Carl Barks Library in Color (1992-1998) generally featured covers by Bruce Hamilton, pasted up from Carl Barks clip art.**



The spirit of Egmont's "New Mickey" stories is well captured in this cover by Cesar Ferioli—incorporating some classic Gottfredson and Murry designs (70 Jahre Micky, 1998).

*Goofy Adventures* was chock full of then-current international production. The book's concept—Goofy acting the role of historical and pop culture figures—lent itself to the "Disney's Goofy Classics" series, Studio Program stories on that theme produced in the 1980s. But also appearing in *GA* were

all-new stories by artist Rick Hoover and Danish, Italian and French material. Massimo De Vita, Gutenberghus' Cesar Ferioli and France's Claude Marin were showcased. Arizona Goof and the French James Goof (a Goofy impersonation of James Bond) also made their American debuts.

The plan for *Mickey Mouse Adventures* was to mix 1980s Gutenberghus stories—often Fallberg style-imitations—with self-produced Mouse stories. Disney's restrictions on corporate symbol Mickey apparently made that self-production difficult. But some stories ended up memorable anyway; two in particular, both drawn by Stephen DeStefano and Gary Martin, were Michael T. Gilbert's "Riddle of the Runaway Sphinx" (*MMA* #2) and Lee Nordling's "Phantom Blot Bedtime Story" (*MMA* #7-8).

Bedtime for Disney, alas, came shortly after. One year into publication, sales figures revealed that executives' predictions had been wrong. The new titles they had believed would sell so well—even *Roger Rabbit*—were now selling very badly. In what fans called the "Disney implosion," Len Wein left WD Publications; newly-launched series became miniseries, and the standard comics line was slashed down to three titles.

These titles were *Uncle Scrooge*, *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* and *Donald Duck Adventures* (Disney had no *Donald Duck*). Edited by Donald newspaper strip writer Bob Foster, the books had done well since the 1990 launch without slowing down. Now Foster had more freedom to fill them with what he liked: Barks and Gottfredson rarities in *WDC&S*, Italian Duck artist Marco Rota in *Scrooge* ("The Money Ocean," *US* #266-267), and a number of well-picked Gutenberghus stories—Americanized in the Gladstone tradition—for all the titles. There was only one drawback. Prior to the "implosion," Foster had commissioned new stories from William Van Horn. Now Disney management, burned by the greater comics line's failure, cut the budget for purchase of new material. Where would Van Horn, at the

height of his powers, go now?

The answer, as it happened, was where many American Disney comics creators were going: Gutenberghus in Denmark, now renamed Egmont Comic Creation. Egmont had added Gladstone's Byron Erickson to its editorial staff in 1991. Now Erickson, with Lars Bergström and Stefan Printz-Påhlson, worked to bring a Yankee school of freelance talent to the company. These creators had begun with Don Rosa before Erickson's own arrival. As the '90s went on, they included Michael T. and Janet Gilbert, John Blair Moore, John Lustig, Dave Rawson, Pat McGreal and your present author, David Gerstein, many of whom had first worked for Bob Foster. And Foster came to Egmont, too, leaving Disney in 1992 to begin several years as an in-house Copenhagen editor.

The writing was on the wall for the crew remaining in Burbank. Though Foster replacement Cris Palomino kept the comics' standards high, management felt they would never become as successful as was once hoped. In 1993, Disney stopped self-publishing. The license for feature film and TV characters was given to Marvel. The Ducks and Mice moved back to Gladstone.

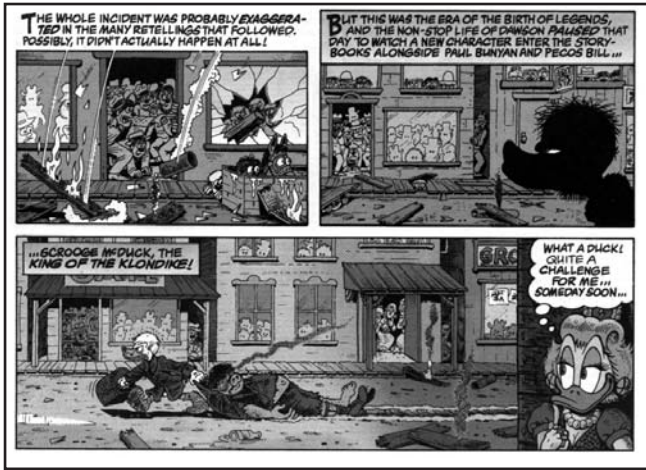
Marvel's "modern Disney" titles—*Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* among them—were not a financial success. Neither were the comics of Acclaim, who got the "modern" license next and tried micro-marketing separate digests for girls (*Disney's Enchanting Stories*) and boys (*Disney's Action Club*).

### William Van Horn

Toiling decades ago in an animation studio on kids' films that needed rewrites, William Van Horn had to retool the dialogue himself, learning as he went along. The job left him with a talent he could put to work in children's books (*Harry Hoyle's Giant Jumping Bean*, 1978), other freelance writing...and comics. Van Horn's first funny-page effort, *Nervous Rex* the dinosaur, made way for ducks as Bill signed on with Gladstone's Byron Erickson in 1988, then with Disney Comics' Bob Foster in 1990. Bill's initial Gladstone stories included a large number of one-page strips and *DuckTales* Launchpad McQuack sagas. Under Bob Foster, this changed to a monthly gig of Barks-style Donald lead-off stories—a pattern that continues today, despite a sea-change to Egmont in 1992. Mixing Barksian personality with out-of-control silliness, Van Horn creates a Duckburg full of mocking irony and looney frustrations for Donald and Scrooge. Van Horn also creates duck characters of his own. Scrooge's lazy half-brother Rumpus McFowl, cat-faced con man Woimly Filcher and Baron Itzy Bitzy, the legendary whistling flea, are all Van Horn inventions.



William Van Horn combines the swagger of the classic Donald Duck with a Seussian screwball touch. "From Wince We Came" appeared in *WDC&S* #604 (1996).



"King of the Klondike" (*US* #292, 1995) shows the legendary tone with which Don Rosa pictured Scrooge's most immortal deeds—and invoked classic Barks supporting characters for his *Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck* series.

Gladstone, however, had nothing if not staying power. Editor of the new books was John Clark, with Gary Leach as art director and Sue Daigle-Leach as production manager. "Gladstone II" started out with a familiar feel. A new paperback series, *The Carl Barks Library in Color*, combined the content of the hardback *CBL* with the style of the 1980s *Gladstone Comic Albums*. As for the standard comics, publisher Bruce Hamilton sprinkled *Donald and Mickey* with his own favorite stories; "Disney's Goofy Classics," for example, appeared with his articles of endorsement. *Donald Duck*, now an



It's all in the family for the Phantom Blot in Lee Nordling's "Phantom Blot Bedtime Story" (*Mickey Mouse Adventures* #8, 1991). Art by Gary Martin.

all-reprint book, began a chronological study of Al Taliaferro's newspaper strip. *Uncle Scrooge*, *Donald Duck Adventures* and *Uncle Scrooge Adventures* looked ahead, with Clark and Leach picking first-run Scarpa and Egmont material. Oberon, too, had highlights in the 1990s; some—like the modern works of Jippes, writer Frank Jonker and artist brothers Mau and Bas Heymans—were represented in the Gladstone line. Then came Don Rosa and William Van Horn. Van Horn, having produced classic-style Donald Duck short stories for Bob Foster, continued them for Egmont as ten-pagers. Now one a month rubbed elbows with Gottfredson reprints in *WDC&S*. Van Horn also collaborated with Carl Barks on the latter's newly-scripted story, "Horsing Around with History"

BYRON ERICKSON

Initially Another Rainbow's *Carl Barks Library* production manager, Byron Erickson turned editor-in-chief for Gladstone's 1980s newsstand comics. When Don Rosa and William Van Horn wanted to write and draw Ducks, Erickson coached them and refined their storytelling. When European Disney tales found their American voices in Geoffrey Blum's literature-inspired dialogue, Erickson reached for the dictionary. Perhaps most critically, Erickson's devotion to Gottfredson's Mickey Mouse was the deciding factor behind Gladstone's successful use of those stories.

In the 1990s Erickson became an editor and creative director at Denmark's Egmont Comic Creation, where he remains today. Aside from continuing to work with Rosa and Van Horn, Erickson rebuilt Mickey—once just a secondary figure at Egmont—back into the adventure hero of 1930s yore. Erickson's "Fantasy Island" (*Walt Disney Giant* #5), combining his own writing with Cesar Ferioli's art, was the first of many successful "new Mickey" classics by modern Egmont creators. Erickson has also written "World of the Dragonlords," a recent Duck fantasy miniseries, for artist Giorgio Cavazzano.

(*USA* #33). Rosa, meanwhile, constructed his magnum opus: "The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck," a twelve-part Egmont miniseries founded on Barks' Scrooge factoids. The saga spun through *US* #285-296, going on to win an Eisner Award for its creator. Subsequently celebrated at many a European comics convention, Don let his fandom fuel some "Life of Scrooge" Danish follow-ups as well. A few new creators reported directly to Gladstone. Patrick Block, comic art aficionado, began drawing his own Duck tales directly for editor Clark with "The Mystery of Widow's Gap" (*DDA* #27). Ron Fernandez scripted the first few stories, bringing back Witch Hazel in "Too Late for Christmas" (*DDA* #30); Block's wife Shelly took over as writer afterwards. A short time later, however, the Blocks—like many before them—moved on from the American market to work for Egmont. In 1996, it seemed like everyone was doing it. Egmont in the mid-1990s had a larger audience than ever before—a growing number of subsidiaries around Europe and

Asia—and produced more stories than before, too. Many of these stories took Disney characters in new directions. Byron Erickson wrote the first "new Mickey" stories for artist Cesar Ferioli in 1993; these tales, re-costuming Mickey in his Gottfredson two-button shorts, also brought the Mouse's grit, humor and optimism back from daily strip limbo. Now Erickson taught some North American freelancers to do the same: John Lustig, Stefan Petrucha ("The X-Files") and William Van Horn's artist/writer son Noel. By the late 1990s, other Egmont writers, artists and editors also crafted "new Mickey" stories, the most popular Mouse works Egmont had ever printed. And the Ducks were moving ahead, too. Editors Stefan and Unn Printz-Påhlson created cave-duck Princess Oona; writer Andreas Pihl expounded "The Rise and Fall of Donald Duck" in a fan-favorite *Anders And* miniseries. Finnish writer/artist Kari Korhonen brought Gyro Gearloose to inventive new heights. Dane Lars Jensen and American Stefan Petrucha created Kinneylike Fethry adventures, while with Lars Bergström, Italian Marco Rota told tales of a doughty Donald ancestor—the Briton Andold Wild Duck—and his fight against the Vikings. Some, but hardly all, of these stories made it Stateside. In 1996, Gladstone's *WDC&S* became a 64-page prestige-format title, the seemingly ideal spot for international variety. "New Mickey" and other modern European stories duly did appear there. But the prestige *WDC&S* was the Prescott, Arizona comics firm's last hurrah. Gladstone II sales, while at times better than Disney's, were below the '80s level. Sales flinched further when new distribution rules, levelled by both Disney and magazine distribution firms, effectively cut Gladstone off: from its international market in 1997, from newsstands in 1998. At the end of that year, with only *WDC&S* and a prestige *Uncle Scrooge* left to sell, Gladstone II let its Disney contract lapse. Less than two years later, the great Carl Barks passed away.

**Into the Future** In the tradition of Mickey Mouse's optimism, however, it's exciting to end Disney comics' story in our country on a positive note. After several years of hoping and wondering, Steve Geppi and Gemstone Publishing—*CBM*'s own parent company—have a license to publish new Disney comics, and the first of their new line should be available as you read this. The Gladstone II nucleus of John Clark, Gary Leach and Sue Daigle-Leach has relocated to Timonium, Maryland, where new titles are now in the works. Prestige *WDC&S* and *Uncle Scrooge* will pick up where the old line left off, with newsstand and digest titles returning to boot. At this point, it's difficult to know what kind of success they will have; but with positive opening signs from retailers and from Disney itself, a fighting chance seems likely.



Patrick Block's duck art included "Somewhere in Nowhere" (*Tesori* #3, 2000), one of the final stories to be plotted by Carl Barks.

With the right kind of promotion, drive and personal interest, Gemstone has the opportunity to treat us to a wide, rich variety of international stories both vintage and fresh. Coffers around Europe and the world hold not just classics we'd like to enjoy again, but great numbers of exciting Duck, Mouse and other Disney adventures we've never read—and that we perhaps will get to know, if the audience is there. The next few years could be an exciting time. © Disney Enterprises Inc.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Barks, "The Duck Man." Interview by Malcolm Willits, Don Thompson and Maggie Thompson. *Comic Art* #7, 1968.  
<sup>2</sup> George Sherman. Interview by Malcolm Willits. *Vanguard* #2, 1968  
<sup>3</sup> Pål Jensen, "Hva skjedde I første halvdel av 1973?" *Donaldisten* #1/1973.  
<sup>4</sup> The Abbeville Press edition of *Qui, Quo, Qua* (*Donald Duck And His Nephews*, 1983) uses a contemporary Western cover design. No other evidence of Western's contributions to the volumes are known to this author.  
<sup>5</sup> The first Gladstone comics per se, *Uncle Scrooge Goes to Disneyland* and *Disneyland Birthday Party*—each issued both as a standard-size comic and as a digest—appeared the previous year.