

# When Is Children's TV Going to Grow Up?

A new series  
by Edith Efron

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## The Drink Tank 389

Saturday Morning  
Cartoons

Local Programs April 7-13  
15¢



# The Drink Tank 389

CHRIS GARCIA, VANESSA APPEGATE, AND JAMES BACON ARE YOUR EDITORS

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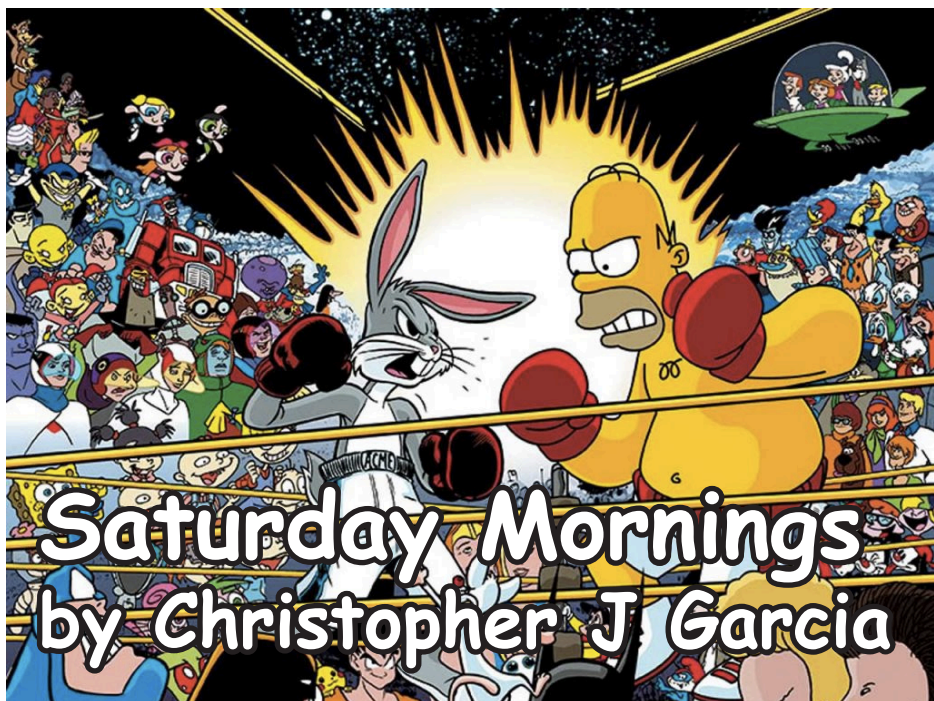
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Wake up. Grape Nuts in the bowl, milk, sugar, into the fridge to soften up for a while. I plop onto the couch and turn the TV on and it's 7am, on the button.

Cartoons.

I watched 'em every weekend, without fail. I was an ABC kid mostly. They had the best cartoons – *Superfriends*, *Scooby Doo*, *Plastic Man*, *Star Wars: Droids*, *Star Wars: Ewoks*, *Monchichis*. Yeah, CBS had *Muppet Babies*, and NBC had both *Gummy Bears* and *Alf Tales*, ABC was my go-to for cartoons on Saturday mornings.

And now, they're gone.

There are a lot of reasons. Educational groups viewing them as strictly marketing for toys and not at all what we should be presenting to children. They have a point about the toys, but there's way more to it. News also took up a bigger chunk, forcing the networks to compete with CNN and Fox News meant that they had to up the number of hours they could dedicate, and thus they ate into Saturday Mornings. Decisions by various courts to increase the amount of educational programming basically killed 'em. Ratings were also hurt as the Internet made older cartoons, and a wider variety, available to the world. That may be the real reason they're gone.

Sadly, the rise of educational programming has actually hurt the young generation in a way very few will understand.

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GUMMI BEARS!!  
BOUNCING HERE AND THERE AND EVERYWHERE.  
HIGH ADVENTURE THAT'S BEYOND COMPARE.  
THEY ARE THE GUMMI BEARS.

---

You see, we're animals that tell stories. Humans tell stories. That's a major part of what our brains were designed to do. We take in stimulus, we digest it like rice, we then put it into a context by telling ourselves a story. Later, we may re-tell that story to other people. That's how stories get passed on. What I learned in my time as a Museum Educator was this – the way we think kids learn is not the way kids learn. Kids learn by coming to stories. By reading stories. By hearing stories. By watching stories. They don't learn by being taught; kids learn by being entertained and opened up to the possibilities of the world that the storyteller is presenting. Why has there been an explosion in Genre Fiction over the last three decades? Easy; because kids grew up inundated with stories. Saturday Morning Cartoons were a part of that. Yeah, advertisers were taking advantage of that, but kids were being taught to tell stories, to understand that a world that is not their own can be a setting for a story that is their own. That there is a place for imaginative expression. That place for many kids started with Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Mickey Mouse, The Gummy Bears, Scooby Doo, Fred Flintstone, and on and on and on. Their cartoons told three generations of kids something so very important – The World In Your Head Can Be Yours If You Tell It to the World.

No, I'm not saying civilization will fall because we can't see animated fun and frolic; I'm saying that we're turning future generations away from stories in the name of education, and I'm afraid it just won't help.



STARTS SEPTEMBER 10

# KIDS LOVE SATURDAYS

on  
abc



## THE BEST OF SCOOBY DOO

8:00 Eastern  
7:00AM Central & Pacific

## THE LITTLE RASCALS RICHIE RICH SHOW

8:30 Eastern  
7:30AM Central & Pacific

## MONCHHICHIS

9:00 Eastern  
8:00AM Central & Pacific

## PAC-MAN

9:30 Eastern  
8:30AM Central & Pacific

## RUBIK

## THE AMAZING CUBE

10:00 Eastern  
9:00AM Central & Pacific

## THE LITTLES

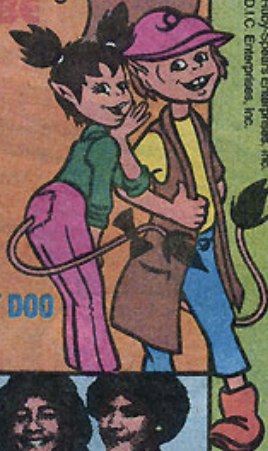
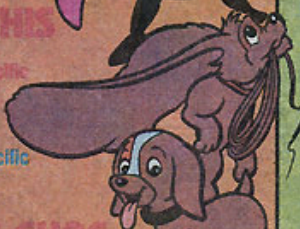
10:30 Eastern  
9:30AM Central & Pacific

## THE PUPPY'S FURTHER ADVENTURES

11:00 Eastern  
10:00AM Central & Pacific

## THE NEW SCOOBY & SCRAPPY DOO

11:30 Eastern  
10:30AM Central & Pacific



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©1983 DIC Enterprises, Inc.  
©1983 Ruby-Spears Enterprises, Inc.  
©1983 Ruby-Spears Enterprises, Inc. and CBS Toys

©1983 Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc.  
Pac-Man: Bally/Midway Mfg. Co.

©1983 Ruby-Spears Enterprises, Inc.  
©1983 DIC Enterprises, Inc.



## WATCH FOR MENUDO

ON ABC BEFORE  
"THE AMAZING CUBE"  
AND "THE LITTLES" EVERY WEEK





## Saturday Mornings Will Never Be The Same by JC Arkham

Saturday morning was that time of the week that defined me as a kid. It's the weekend...sleep in? Hell no! Cartoons are on. Got up at 7am, still in my pjs, poured me a bowl of Apple Jacks and for the next three and a half hours, rotted my brain away with Bugs Bunny, Foghorn Leghorn, Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd, the Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote...ah...Wile E. Coyote, "Supergenius". My absolute favorite of my Saturday morning ritual. No other cartoons compare even to this day. Of course it wasn't all brain rotting. After all, I did learn 436 ways how NOT to catch a roadrunner, Acme products suck, but I'll never figure out whether it rabbit season or duck season. Who cared!!? This was the funniest shit on the planet. But they did actually manage to squeeze in actual learning between side-splitting humor. I learned what a conjunctions function was, how a bill

becomes law and how the number 8 is the one number that goes on for infinity. There could be bulls running through the house and I would give a rats ass. My parents indulged me of my cartoons and never said, "Hey I wanna watch the game", or, "Can we watch normal TV now?" I think they liked watching it as much as me. And why not? Did I mention they're genius?

Now as a coinsure of cartoons, there were very specific Loony Toons I enjoyed the most. Any toon of theirs from the 40's & 50's, not the crap from the 60's & 70's produced by the same people of Hanna Barbarra.

Then, the dark ages of cartoons arrived. "Hey, what happened? They skipped the part where Elmer Fudd shot Daffy Duck in the face with his shotgun and his bill rotated to the backside of his head. Hey, there's another cut...and another...and ANOTHER!!? What the fuck is this!!?"

Two letters..."PC".

SON-OF-A-BITCH!!!!!!

This shit was completely unwatchable. The conservative fucks got to the FCC or whoever and deemed them too violent. Too violent!!? It's a fucking cartoon. You can't do that. Do the conservative ass-hats really think kids are going around shooting people in the face with a shotgun or running off a cliff, suspended in mid air, drop and survive a 500 foot fall to the base of a canyon? Give me a fucking break! It's like cutting of the private parts from the statue of David, or giving Venus DiMilo a bra. You don't fuck with art! And believe you and me, these cartoon ARE art. Finally after a short spell of utter crap and ZERO ratings, someone said "enough". My pals were back in their glorious mindless slapstick.

This is a ritual my kids missed out on. One I would have happily sat and watched with. Now and again, when they're on I stop whatever I'm doing and watch them and I feel like that kid in his pjs with his bowl of cereal.

They made me laugh...they ~~made~~...make me happy.



**KIDS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN!**

**DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™**

**CBS STORYBREAK**

**CHARLIE BROWN AND SNOOPY**

**THE BERENSTAIN BEARS™**  
© 1995 S & J BERENSTAIN

**Wuzzles™**  
© 1995 WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS

**ALL NEW**

**HULK HOGAN'S ROCK 'N' WRESTLING**

**The YOUNG™ Astronauts**  
© 1995 STEAL SPORTS, INC.  
#1 DC, ANNAPOLIS CITY

**Jim Henson's MUPPETS GABLE MONSTERS™**

**STARTS SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 ON CBS**





The early 80s was a hard time for me. My biological father had left my mom and I. He was an abusive turd, so it wasn't much of a loss. My stepfather, whom I now consider to be my father, had just come into the picture. Reagan and Gorbachev seemed to be tiptoeing towards nuclear armageddon. The Iron Sheik had yet to perform a camel clutch in the World Wrestling Federation. This was a confusing time for a 7-year-old boy. The biggest source of frustration, perched on a throne made up of hot garbage and broken toys was a show called, "*Buster and Me*."

Buster and Me aired at around 5:30 a.m. Saturday mornings. Just before the MonChiChis came on at 6. The MonChiChis were good monkeys that liked to sing and dance. If you had the stuffed animals, you could even make them suck their thumbs. *Buster and Me* were the bad monkeys. Puppets that looked sickly with voices that sounded high-pitched and hoarse at the same time. One of them even had a lazy eye. Why was that puppet's eye lazy? Why couldn't they just straighten that thing out? Saturday morning there was no *Sesame Street* or *Muppet Show*. Which was also the good puppets

(well marionette muppets but let's not get worked up about it.) Now that I'm older I can realize that the show *Buster and Me* wasn't a bad show. It was a half hour long kids show that taught good lessons with some decent one-liners. The problem was it was a half hour long puppet show that came before cartoons. All my 7-year-old rages were exploding at that show because it made me wait for *MonChiChis*. There were no other kids shows at the time. This was 1983. We had 13 channels, and three of them didn't count. The rest was all adult related things I couldn't care less about.

One day I wound up being sent home from school with a note from the teacher who was concerned over one of my drawings. Mom opened my backpack and fished out the project in question. She found a detailed, crayon-colored pictures of the cast of *Buster and Me* falling off a cliff.

---

"SATURDAY CARTOONS AREN'T DEAD; THEY'RE EVERY-HOUR-OF-EVERY-DAY CARTOONS NOW. I CAN WATCH THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS ANY TIME I WANT. I CAN EVEN POUR A BOWL OF SUGAR CEREAL TO GO WITH IT."

JOSH KEENE

---

I was, of course, sent to a counselor. He then questioned me about my life and my frustrations with my biological dad leaving and asked me what I knew about the world. When he asked me about the drawings, I lacked the capacity to explain this at 7.

"I just don't like *Buster and Me*," I said. The counselor wore wide framed glasses. His office was filled with bright colored kids toys and lime green lush carpet.

He looked at me with an upturned eyebrow and asked, "You don't like your dog?"

Oh yea! Buster was a good name for a dog!

I remember sighing before adding, "No. I don't have a dog." The counselor looked more confused and asked, "So is Buster imaginary?"

How dare this man? Has he lost his mind? I had far better imaginary friends than Buster. I hung out with Fozzie Bear for Christ's sake. Hanging out with the puppets from *Buster and Me*?

What am I, a fucking peasant? I'm sure none of these thoughts crossed my mind. I just calmly replied as kids do, "No, it's a show. There's nothing else on."

The counselor thought this was a big deal and that maybe there was something far more sinister going on. I don't think he convinced mom. After a few more conversations on the subject, her answer was not more counseling. Her answer came in the form of an alarm clock set to 6am on Saturdays.

That didn't solve the problem though because kids don't wake up on Saturdays because of alarm clocks. We wake up on Saturdays because of the excitement of sugary cereals, he-man commercials and the world of cartoons. So, like clockwork, next Saturday I was up at 5:20, angry as all hell about watching *Buster and Me* in ten minutes.

When the piano tune of the show began, I started mimicking its introduction with an off-key voice. Then I started making farting noises over the dialogue. Not realizing how loud I was, I looked up to find the form of my step-father standing in the dark apartment hallway. Dad didn't look too amused. He looked exhausted.

As a child being obnoxious you always assume the worst, so I began a flood of apologies as he stepped across the room towards me. I begged for him not to take my Monchichi stuffed animal. I pleaded for him not to take my Atari 2600 away. Each step landed with thunder on the worn carpet, and I swear I could hear him dragging an executioner's axe.

Dad shoved me aside, reached for the tv knob and twisted it to channel 10.

Mtv.

He then smiled and went back to bed.

Sharp guitar licks belted forth from the image of an astronaut straightening a multicolored flag on the moon. Dad had done the impossible. With only 13 channels to work with, Dad had slayed *Buster and Me*. It was this exact moment that I realized, "I have a pretty awesome dad now."



**8:00**  
EASTERN  
7:00 CENTRAL

**Sylvester and Tweety**

START YOUR MORNING WITH THE CAT AND THE BIRD AND ALL THEIR FRIENDS!

**The Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Hour**

A WHOLE SEASON OF BUGS - CARTOONS WITH BUGS, ROAD RUNNER, AND COYOTE, ELMER FLOOD, DUFFY DUCK, JOSEPHINE BAKER, FORKY PIS AND MORE!

**8:30**  
EASTERN  
7:30 CENTRAL

**9:30**  
EASTERN  
8:30 CENTRAL

**Tarzan**

HOOD OF THE JUNGLE

AGED BY HIS POWERFUL ANIMAL FRIENDS, TARZAN STRIVES TO COMBAT THE DANGERS THAT THREATEN HIS JUNGLE HOME.

**CBS SATURDAY**

**IN THE NEWS**

THIS IS NOW THE NEWS OUGHT TO BE SHORT AND SIMPLE - AND IT MAKES SENSE! TEN TIMES THROUGH THE MORNING.

**10:00**  
EASTERN  
9:00 CENTRAL

**LIVE**

**SHAZAM! ISIS HOUR**

THE SUPER-HEROINE RETURNS FROM A MULTITUDE OF NEW DANGERS AS SHE FIGHTS TO BRING LIGHT TO THE WORLD.

**10:30**  
EASTERN  
9:30 CENTRAL

**LIVE**

THE WORLD'S MOST TERRIFIC MORTAL IN MANY NEW ADVENTURES. SHAZAM! ACTION AND EXCITEMENT FOLLOW HIM WHEREVER HE GOES!

**11:00**  
EASTERN  
10:00 CENTRAL

**ARK II**

THE YEAR IS NEARLY 2500 A.D. AND LIFE ON EARTH IS ALMOST DESTROYED. THREE YOUNG SCIENTISTS IN A FUTURISTIC MOBILE AIR TRAVEL THE WORLD'S SURFACE TO HELP REBUILD WHAT IS LEFT.

**11:30**  
EASTERN  
10:30 CENTRAL

**CLUE CLUB**

**NEW SHOWS**

WATCH FOUR TERRIFIC TEEN-AGERS (AND TWO BLOOD-CANDS) TRACK DOWN CLUES IN A SERIES OF THRILLING MYSTERIES - THAT YOU CAN HELP SOLVE.

**FAT ALBERT AND THE COSBY KIDS**

**12:00**  
EASTERN  
11:00 CENTRAL

**LIVE**

EVERYBODY KNOWS HIM, EVERYBODY LOVES HIM, AND HERE THEY ARE, WITH LOTS OF NEW ADVENTURES.

**WAY OUT GAMES**

**12:30**  
EASTERN  
11:30 CENTRAL

**LIVE**

KIDS FROM ALL OVER AMERICA JOIN IN THE ZANNIEST COMPETITION EVER. AS THEY FIGHT STATE-OF-THE-ART ROBOTS AND TUBS OF FOAM ON BARNEY HILL'S SUPER-HIT AND SUPER-FUN TV'S SUPER-HIT AND SUPER-FUN.

**1:00**  
EASTERN  
12:00 CENTRAL

**CBS CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL**

**LIVE**

FILMS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS. HOSTED BY KIMBLE FRANK AND DOLLY AND IF YOUR PARENTS BEHAVE YOU CAN LET THEM WATCH TOO.

IT ALL STARTS SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 11/RIGHT HERE ON CBS

PlaidNation.com



You might not think of Alf when you think of political humor. Your mind might go to Bill Maher, or Mort Saul if you're of a certain age. Alf, the TV series on NBC, was very light and fluffy, while the Saturday morning cartoon, *Alf Tales*, was something different.

I'm not sure who was writing it, but *Alf Tales* told very funny stories in the form of fairy tales re-told using the Malmacian characters from Alf's home planet. They were funny stories, all of them, but what has to be the only single episode of any Saturday morning cartoon I can distinctly remember, *Alf Tales* blew me away.

You see, in a re-telling of Rapunzel, *Alf Tales* took the bent of Rapunzel's family needing money, and a Witch who controlled TV and Radio. The family goes on a game show and it's rigged, so Rapunzel ends up having to go with The Witch to appear in her shampoo commercials with her luxurious hair! She locks her in a tower and eventually a young Prince sees her on TV and decides to go and rescue her.

He also happens to be a rapper, and when he approaches, he hears her rapping, kickin' it Old Skool, yo!

So, when the Prince goes to get a Ladder, the Witch cuts off Rapunzel's hair, uses it to lure the Prince and tries to get him to marry her by breaking his glasses. Of course, it doesn't work, and

when The Prince ends up in Rapunzel's arms, her tears clear up his vision, as her family has had Vision Correcting tears for generations.

The end is what I loved the most. The pair then give a Hard Core, Chuck D-esque, politically-charged series of raps about how The Witch shouldn't be in charge of the Airwaves and there should be a Communications Commission in charge of everything.

Now, you have to remember several things about the 1980s. One, there was Tipper Gore, who had already started her thing. The Labeling of Explicit Lyrics had begun, and arguments about community decency standards were all the rage.

But this was specific - this was an anti-corporate media episode.

You see, the Witch owns all the media, and she doesn't like Rap music, and thus it will not be played. Alf's Dad, the King (Ronald Reagan!) is encouraged to allow Rap music on the air, by setting up a Federal Communications Commission to take over from The Witch.

Lets be clear - this is a message piece!

The whole Tipper Gore campaign to put stickers on potentially objectionable music was in full-swing, and it was messy. There was an FCC, and they often censored Rap music at the time (2 Live Crew, N.W.A., and Public Enemy all got held off the air at various times) and The Witch could easily be seen as representing both Tipper and the Corporate Communication Structure at the time. That would be a simple reading, and having Reagan as the potential saviour of Freedom of Expression is really a fascinating take.

And that's coming from one of the biggest Reagan fans there is!

This one stuck with me. All these years later, and thousands of other cartoons watched, and it's the one that has me in its grasp still. I've always been a political guy, and this certainly appealed to the young budding politico in me. It just came at the exact right moment!

Sadly, I haven't been able to find the episode online, but I'm betting it's out there, waiting to be completely misunderstood by the current generation!



Chris tells me that the topic for this issue is “Saturday Morning Cartoons”. I understand that they have pretty much gone by the way-side with the advent of things like Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and other cable channels. So much the loss for us.

To put things in perspective, I was born in 1958 and we didn’t own a TV until somewhere around 1971/1972. So any watching of these things had to be done at friends houses. Given that I didn’t have many friends in those pre-fandom days (that is before my discovery of fandom), this meant I had limited access.

I believe that I saw one of the early episodes of Scooby Doo at the YMCA in Berkeley where I was taking swimming lessons. There was often a delay between the time the class ended and when my parents could pick me up. This would have been sometime in the late 1960s I would guess. I was attracted because I was a fan of Charles Addams cartoons (New Yorker) and had several collection books. The victorian architecture of the haunted house in the credits caught my attention. I enjoyed the show when I could see it, but I was always disappointed by the standard “Scooby Doo Ending” (“...and I would got away with it if it weren’t for you meddling kids and



your dog!”)

I became a big fan of Warner Bros during this time. There was no other way to see these cartoons except on the TV on Saturday mornings. The only theatre around that still had cartoons was the Grand Lake in Oakland and they usually had ancient Woody Woodpecker cartoons. I’ve always found Woody Woodpecker to be annoying. The Disney fare (when it rarely turned up) was generally very well animated but bland. But Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and the Road Runner were genuinely funny. Marvin the Martian was one of my special favorites. His deadpan demeanor reminded me of Buster Keaton.

Saturday mornings after a sleep-over at a friends house were wonderful. Very relaxing. Something sorely missed in these days. I tend to have a lot of meetings and services to do on Saturdays. In the seminary I usually had Saturday mornings free (this would have been between 1990 and 1996). My room was on the top floor and there was a wide gutter outside my window. Squirrels would use it as a highway and run back and forth. I could do a bit of a lie-in and then go over to a friends room to watch the animated The Tick. Happy days.

Some of my favorite shows:

The Bugs Bunny Roadrunner Hour

Scooby Doo

Fantastic Voyage (had very little to do with the movie of the same name but did have shrinking)

The Jetsons

The Tick (later)

The Herculoids

Marine Boy (yeah, I know it wan’t on Saturdays, but I liked it anyway).

*Anything that looked like it might be SF*

These days there are DVDs and streaming video, but it’s not the same as Saturday Mornings with a friend or two and nothing that needed doing later in the day.



**SATURDAY SEPT. 25<sup>TH</sup> IS**  
**PAC-MAN**  
**DAY ON ABC-TV!**



**3 NEW SHOW!**

**PAC-MAN**

**3 NEW SHOW!**

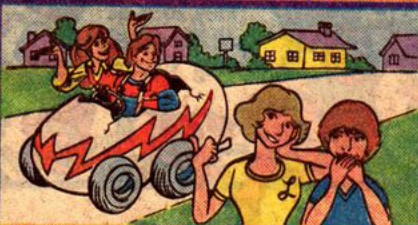
**THE LITTLE RASCALS**

**RICHIE RICH SHOW**

**8:30 / 7:30AM**

**EASTERN**

**CENTRAL & PACIFIC**



**3 NEW SHOW!**

**MORK & MINDY / LAVERNE & SHIRLEY**  
**WITH THE "PONZ"**

**10:00 / 9:00AM**

**EASTERN**

**CENTRAL & PACIFIC**



**SCOOBY & SCRAPPY**  
**PLUS THE PUPPY'S**  
**NEW ADVENTURES**

**11:00 / 10:00AM**

**EASTERN**

**CENTRAL & PACIFIC**



And the excitement continues on ABC's WEEKEND SPECIAL  
 and Dick Clark's AMERICAN BANDSTAND.

**SATURDAY'S MORE FUN ON ABC!**





# Dungeon & Dragons by Juan Sanmiguel

In the early 80s there was dearth of good animated action/adventure shows in the US. Anime was still a rarity on this side of the Pacific. The powers that be were trying to remove violence and the idea of jeopardy from animation. If a fighter jet was shot down on a show, one could clearly see the pilot safely parachuting to safety. ***Dungeons and Dragons*** TV series (1983-1985) was an exception. There was real sense of peril for the characters and on occasion dealt with the morality of their actions.

Six children (5 teenagers and one pre-teen) go to a fantasy world known as the Realm while on an amusement park ride. There the mysterious Dungeon Master gives the group magical weapons and title that reflected their role in the group. Dungeon Master sends our heroes on missions to help fight evil in the Realm and find a way back to their own world.

The characters were well developed and each had story that focused on them. Hank (Ranger), armed with an energy bow, led the others through their adventures. Diane (Acrobat) had a magical javelin that allowed her to use her gymnastic skills. Shelia (Thief), the emotional center of the group, had an invisibility cloak. Shelia's younger brother Bobby (Barbarian), armed with a thunder club that can cause small earthquakes, is always ready to go into battle. Presto (Magician) had a wizard's hat that did not always work as expected, but usually provided what was needed. Eric (Cavalier) had an indestructible shield and voiced concerns about the

group's predicament usually in a comical way. Upon arriving in the Realm, a unicorn philly named Uni joins them. The main antagonist was Venger, a powerful wizard, who sought out to take our heroes weapons to defeat the seventh headed dragon Tiamat and take over the Realm.

Looking back, I am surprised I liked this show. At the time, I was very hostile towards fantasy particularly fantasy derived from the Dungeons and Dragons game. It all seemed silly and impure unlike the rational and one foot based in reality science fiction. Still I watched the show eagerly. I think it was because it was different from other shows at the time. The characterization was good. The characters acted like real teens trying to cope in an unusual world with a hostile entity after them.

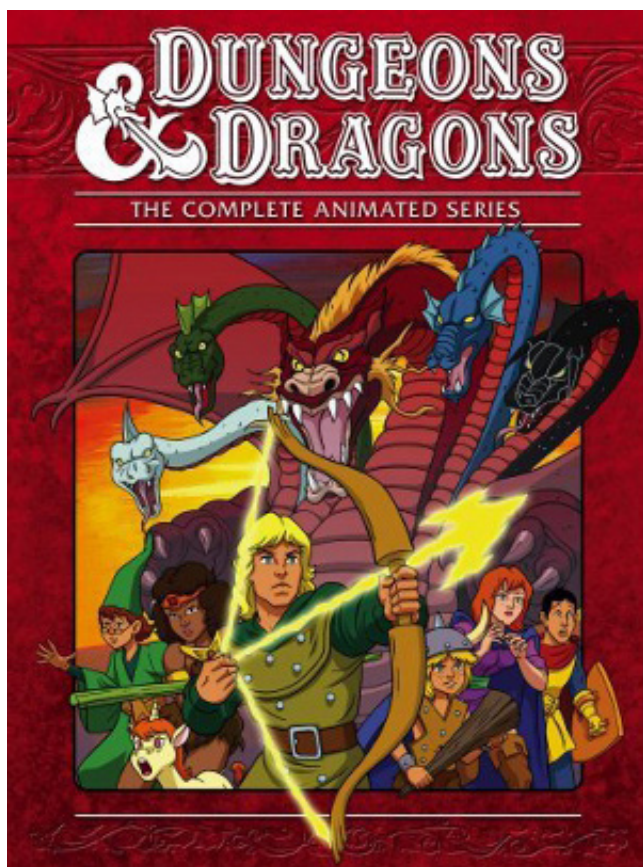
Writer and comic fan Mark Evanier devised the series format and wrote the pilot episode. Writers for the show included Paul Dini (who would later write and produce the DC Animated Universe), Steve Gerber (comic book writer and creator of Howard the Duck), and Michael Reaves (***Star Trek: The Next Generation, Gargoyles, Batman: The Animated Series***). The stories pushed the envelope of what can you do on an American series at the time. One episode, "The Dragons Graveyard" by Michael Reaves, had the kids being proactive by going out to kill Venger since he usually prevented them from returning home. The episode dealt with the moral consequences of taking such an action. At that time in American animation, the heroes usually reacted to what the villain's actions.

The show had an interesting look and great monsters. Venger's look was interesting since the designer choose to give him one horn coming out his head/helmet. No one had done a design like that for a character before. The animation was limited. Despite this limitation, there were some good action sequences.

In 2006, there was DVD released with the whole series and several extra features. There was a documentary on the making of the show. It was informative though it was irritating seeing the same shot of a dragon spouting flame as a transition scene. Two episodes had a commentary track (the pilot and "Dragon's Graveyard"). Every episode has some information about them in their

scene selection menu. There is a live action fan film short. There are copies of the scripts in PDF format accessible through a computer. The final episode “Requiem” by Michael Reaves, which was never produced, Members of the original cast performed “Requiem”, a proposed final episode written by Michael Reaves that was not produced, as a radio play. The DVD also contains a RPG module for the show. This version is out of print. In 2009, a second DVD released with the whole series, but there were no extras. At this time, the show is not on any streaming site.

**Dungeons and Dragons** is a good candidate for a reboot with modern story techniques. The show did not have story arcs. It would be interesting to see the show redone as a 13 to 26 episode series with a beginning, a middle, and an end.





# The Milton the Monster Show

## An Analysis by Chuck Surface

### Introduction

On top of Horror Hill, Professor Weirdo and his assistant, Count Kook, are making a monster. Into a large human-shaped vat go the ingredients: (1) six drops of essence of terror; (2) five drops of sinister sauce; and (3) just a touch of tincture of tenderness, in case the monster should want to destroy its creators. At the final moment, however, Count Kook bumps Professor Weirdo's arm, causing him to spill all the tincture of tenderness into the vat. The result? The most lovable cartoon monster you'll ever encounter, the hulking, volcano-headed Milton.

*The Milton the Monster Show* originally ran as part of the ABC Saturday morning lineup from 1965 to 1968, and then went into syndication during the 1970s. It was in this period of syndication that I first encountered Milton, learning from him that outward appearances often belied the true nature of individuals, that those society might deem ugly or frightening aren't necessarily so. Milton wasn't the only figure in popular culture conveying this message. Indeed, friendly monsters and weirdoes arose in several media in the 1960s. *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* appeared on television. In cartoons and in comics *Casper the Friendly Ghost* despaired when his companions, the Ghostly Trio, admonished him for wanting to befriend the living rather than to scare the pants off of them. Gold Key Comics published *The Little Monsters* starring 'Orrible Orvie



and Awful Annie, monster siblings more cute than frightening. Many of these would remain in circulation, but not Milton the Monster.

Then in 2007, Shout! Factory released on DVD the complete runs of two great classics from Hal Seeger Studios, *Bat Fink* and *The Milton the Monster Show*. I purchased the Milton collection and upon viewing it immediately was reminded that each half-hour episode contains three segments, one with Milton, of course, and two others centered on unrelated characters that rotate in and out of the show. The animation and artwork of Warner Brothers and Disney will overshadow that of Hal Seeger Studios for all time, as well they should. Seeger's cartoons, however, will shine because of their well-written, quirky situations and personalities that imbue media subgenres with new freshness, and that put forth stereotypes in manners that foster active thought over passive absorption.

## **Milton the Monster**

Unfortunately, Milton isn't as adored by his makers, the aforementioned Professor Weirdo and Count Kook, as he is by those who tune in to his program. Much like how the Ghostly Trio spurn Casper for his friendly ways, Weirdo and Kook undertake various schemes to evict Milton from their home because of his overly tender nature. Milton just doesn't fit the mold of the stereotypical monster. He can't terrorize like his "brothers," the skull-faced zombie, Heebie, and the cyclopean beast, Jeebie. For example, in one story Weirdo and Kook manage to sell Milton to a local hood, Hector the Protector, who turns Milton toward collecting protection money from local merchants. Milton successfully gathers the cash, but then donates it to an individual in need instead of turning it over to Hector. So it's back to Horror Hill for Milton, and back to the scorn of Weirdo and Kook.

When crafting this recurring plot, the writers at Hal Seeger Studios borrowed from television programs of the time. Viewers easily can detect similarities between Milton and Herman Munster. Both are docile, clumsy figures, humorous shadows of Universal's Frankenstein Monster. Also, Milton and Professor Weirdo's relationship mirrors that of Private Gomer Pyle and Sergeant Vince

Carter from *Gomer Pyle, USMC*. Pyle never lives up to Carter's expectations for Marines as Milton fails to meet Weirdo's criteria for effective monsters. Longtime voice talent Bob McFadden even portrays Milton as sounding exactly like Jim Nabors while Weirdo's tantrums and frustration match Sergeant Carter's step for step. Earlier, Hanna-Barbera Productions had modeled *The Flintstones* on *The Honeymooners* and later would inject many elements from *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* into *Scooby Doo, Where Are You?* Why shouldn't Seeger profit from this technique as well?

## **Fearless Fly**

Hiram Fly lives in a matchbox and hangs out in a restaurant with his girlfriend Flory and his best friend Horsey at the Sugar Bowl, a diner located in, appropriately enough, an old sugar bowl. When evil strikes, Hiram dons super-specs that cause megatons of energy to course through the sensitive muscles in his head, transforming him to Fearless Fly! Mighty Mouse, Underdog, Atom Ant, Bat Fink, and Fearless Fly: all examples of the superhero-animal subgenre within the cartoon medium. The segment *Fearless Fly* appears in 26 episodes of *The Milton the Monster Show*. Only Milton's own segment appears in all 34 episodes.

An evil Chinese genius, Goo Fee, and his henchman, Gung Ho, doggedly pursue our hero in almost every segment. These villains would never meet today's standards of political correctness, although they satirize more than celebrate "yellow horde" images like Fu Manchu. Contemporary audiences also might recoil from the conflation of Asian cultural stereotypes, as when Goo Fee threatens to commit hara-kiri to save face, or when he invokes the name of the Prophet. If *Fearless Fly* were a show on its own, this could simply read as racism. But these conflations emerge in other segments as well, bringing to notice that something else is happening here, something related to the quirky, disjointed writing that earlier I stated should earn this show notoriety, since the effect is jarring, not offensive, driving me at least toward considering the nature of stereotypes in a whole new light.

## Flukey Luke

Cowboy Flukey Luke works as a private detective in a large, unnamed city. Perhaps the worst detective in existence, Flukey only succeeds through dumb luck and the aid of his companion, Two Feathers, a Native American who speaks with an Irish accent, and his horse, Pronto. Mostly, this intrepid team “matches wits” with the mob boss, Spider Webb.

Yes, Two Feathers speaks with an Irish accent. His inflections, his vocal mannerisms, and the idioms he uses – all those of a stereotypical Irishman. As with Goo Fee this cultural conflation shocks, not enrages. Within this segment, we have a cowboy working in a city and a Native American expressing himself with a Gaelic lilt. Across segments we have a Chinese villain practicing Japanese and Muslim customs, and a monster practicing tenderness rather than terror. Further discussion will show how other segments perform startling experiments with subgenres and stereotypes, such as with *Muggy Doo*.

## Muggy Doo

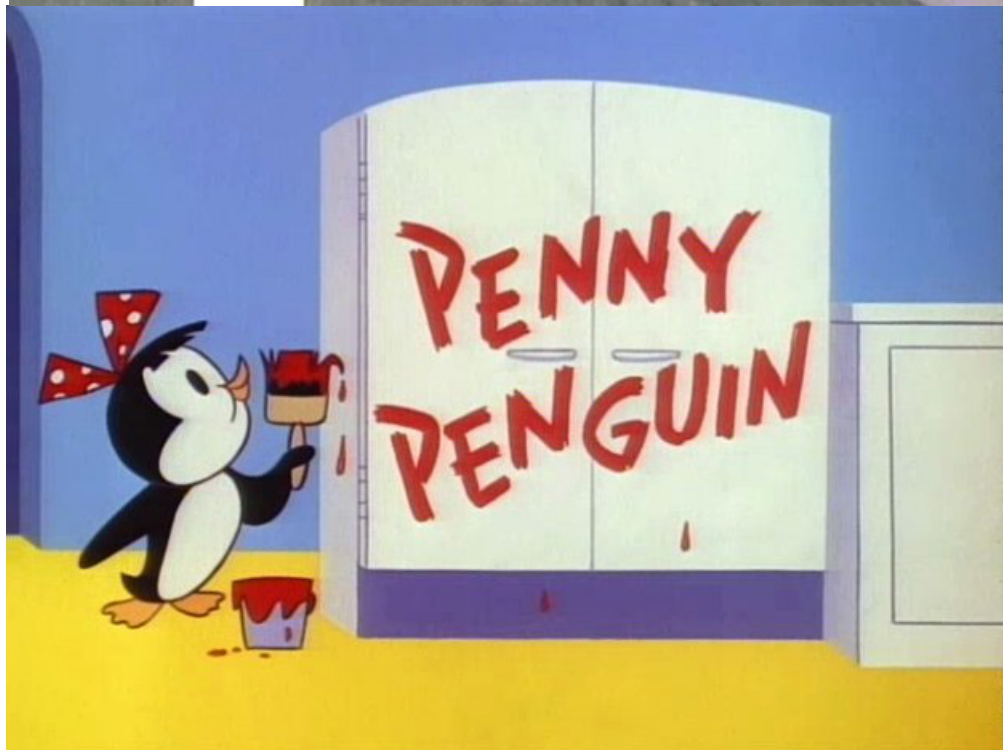
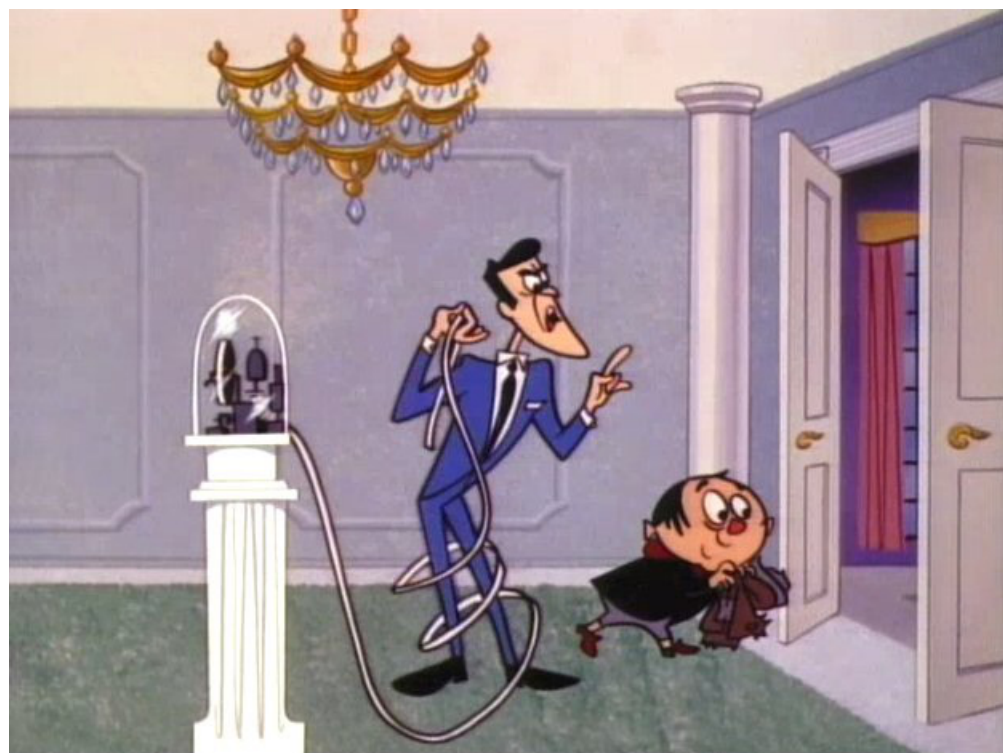
Muggy Doo spends his days trying to con others out of their money or belongings. His schemes, however, never pay off, and usually he finds himself facing justice. The theme song to this segment defines the mood fairly well:

Yum diddly dum dum diddly poo,  
Here comes your pal, Muggy Doo!

Now when there's trouble I don't mind it,  
'Cause you can bet I'm right behind it!

Yum diddly dum dum diddly dee,  
Muggy Doo, boy fox, that's me!

Animal characters with an angle constitute another subgenre within the animal world. Yogi Bear scams for picnic baskets,





Snagglepuss must “exit stage left” when his schemes go belly up, and Sylvester eternally plots against tasty Tweety. Usually we’re endeared to these moochers somehow, but not to Muggy Doo. In the end, one feels joy when he’s incarcerated or forced on the lam. So Muggy Doo might fit into the subgenre . . . maybe? If so, he does it on his own terms.

## **Penny Penguin**

Irresponsible and spoiled, her father’s special tormentor, Penny Penguin more resembles Veruca Salt than Little Lulu or Little Audrey. There’s no sweetness and light here, nor any sugar and spice. She’s got to have it her way, and she’s got to have it now. Muggy Doo’s activities turn the trope of the lovable rogue animal on its head, and in a similar fashion Penny Penguin would force the clique within the sweet and clever girl subgenre to skulk out of windows and back doors were she to pop up at a party. There’s Little Dot hanging from the upstairs balcony trying to swing out far enough to hit the pool when she lets go! Look at Little Lotta heading over the fence into the neighbor’s backyard! Anything to avoid that damned penguin!

## **Stuffy Durma**

Imagine a hobo that inherits \$10,000,000. The hobo then buys a town house, hires servants, and retains Bradley Brinkley to elevate his deportment. After a while, however, poor Stuffy begins to miss the hobo lifestyle, the freedom of life on the road. Brinkley’s always present, however, to keep him on the path to elegance, even when old friends Stu Mulligan and Ashcan Annie visit to remind him how wonderful and carefree life was before he came into money.

Like Milton the Monster, Stuffy catches flak for not fitting into an expected stereotype, but unlike Milton he can’t remain cheerful when faced with opposition. *Stuffy Durma* has none of the confluences found in other segments, but as with the others the idea of challenging stereotypes plays heavily into the mix. My ancestors were hobos. My grandmother’s people, the Britts, founded

an encampment in Iowa that since has become a town named Britt, of course. With this in my background, that love of adventure and liberty in my blood, I readily ask, “Why can’t Stuffie have money and jump into an empty transport container when the mood strikes him?” I wonder why he doesn’t fire Bradley Brinkley. If *The Milton the Monster Show* had run longer, maybe he would have let the overbearing snob go. But then again, why should he do anything I think he should do?

## Conclusion

As an animated anthology, *The Milton the Monster Show* features a cast of characters that vivisected classic subgenres within cartoons and other media. For this reason, I shudder to think that this show could disappear again, as it did from the mid-1970s until the release of the DVD collection in 2007. Fans honor Hal Seeger Studios not for the quality of their artwork or for their animation, but for their wonderfully oddball characters that defy convention and challenge stereotypes and for the way they upturned traditional categorizations.

The conflating of stereotypes in *Fearless Fly* and *Fluke Luke* forces viewers to perceive grotesque cultural generalizations consciously. Why does it seem so strange that a Chinese man might honor Japanese customs or follow the Quran? Or why shouldn’t a Native American speak with an Irish accent? Certainly these representations need polish, but they draw viewer attention in an active way, they shock our sensibilities instead of allowing us to passively absorb these unfair images of race and culture as we may have with the animated shorts included on any DVD of banned or censored cartoons. In 1965, the timing was ripe for writing that presented these themes with freshness of style and conceptualization – weird, quirky, and absolutely brilliant. Embrace your inner Milton, my friends. No matter what combination of traits you conflate within yourselves, no matter how you appear to the world, no matter how well your physical appearance jibes with your personality, be yourselves, tender or terrifying. Define your subgenres; don’t let them define you.

