

is the 1976 installment of a continuing Mardi Gras oneshot published by Don Markstein, 2533 Gen. Pershing St., New Orleans, La. 70115, and is Demented Turkish Dwarf Press publication #294, AM179, published on Fat Tuesday itself, March 2, 1976, to commemorate the 29th such celebration witnessed by its perpetrator. Printed in Occupied CSA, which is where 2533 Gen. Pershing St. happens to be located. Each installment of this continuing epic thus far has borne a different title, each named after the Carnival parade that happens to pass closest to where I live at the time, except for the first, which was called Rex #1. *Carrollton* #2, *Freret* #3, *Endymion* #4 and *Tucks* #5 followed, and it's kind of hard to believe this is the sixth year I've done the things already. I expected this to be the first year in which I re-used a title, since the only parades that passed close by were Freret and Rex, but a large number of the routes were changed this year, and quite a number of parades, it turns out, go along Napoleon Avenue, just one block from here. If the practice continues, I should have a wide variety of titles to choose from in coming years, assuming, as I hope, I stay at this address for a good, long time. This time, I chose the title of the first parade I actually witnessed one block from here, which you see above. A most appropriate title, I think, as venery is characteristic of Mardi Gras. In accordance with my custom, this zine will be distributed through every apa of which I am a member, those being (this year) SFPA, *Stobler*, FAPA and CAPA-Alpha.

I shall follow my usual custom and begin this zine by saying that I can't stand Mardi Gras, but the damn thing is unavoidable if you live in New Orleans.

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There. I've said it. It's not exactly true, but close enough. Actually, tho our Carnival appears to be a wondrous sight to those who have never seen it before, after having witnessed it 28 times in the past, I really believe it's lost its ability to surprise me. Which is not to say that there can't be distinctly pleasant aspects to it, but it's been quite awhile since it could evoke the frenzied enjoyment I see some of my compatriots getting out of it. This year, I've been hanging around with a lot of people who have never seen it before, and that does add to the enjoyment.

For the past couple of decades, at least (I wasn't paying much attention to such things before that), the Carnival season has been spreading out earlier and earlier in the year, like a stagnant puddle. Officially, the season begins right after Twelfthnight, Jan. 6, and doesn't end until Lent begins, which will be at midnight tonight. For practical purposes, tho, the first parades never did start until about 9 or 10 days before Mardi Gras itself (one never, if one is literate, says "Mardi Gras Day;" "Carnival Day" is accepted, but the term "Mardi Gras" includes "Day"), tho a few minor, private balls would be held earlier. 20 years ago, the Carrollton Parade kicked off the season the Sunday before the Sunday before Mardi Gras (nine days earlier, that is). About that time, tho, the Choctaw Parade in Algiers (a section of New Orleans located across the Mississippi River) was revived, pushing Parade Week back a day. Now, tho, the "week" is a full 14 days long, with no less than *fifty* krewes staging parades in all parts of the city and in suburbs as far as 25 miles away.

Enter John Guidry and Don Markstein, who have decided it's a good day to see *Nashville*, John for about the fourth or fifth time and me for the first, because it happens to be playing at a downtown theater where I know the manager and can get in free. Ah, but we reckoned not with Mardi Gras. Two weeks away, and the infernal nuisance was already mucking up traffic in that part of town as one parade after another strove to wrest the "honor" of being the first to roll from its predecessor in that position. We did manage to get close to Canal Street, tho, and paused on our way to see what kind of parade the Krewe of Mecca would stage. Got bored halfway through, tho, and left. And that was my entire Mardi Gras for one entire week. I was, however, mildly interested to note that Mecca began the endless array of red, white and blue that I *knew* would characterize this bicentennial Carnival.

Missed Freret this year--that's traditionally my neighborhood parade, and I usually try to get back for it. Ah well, it's not the first time I've missed it.

Then, Friday, I went shopping along Magazine Street (where the city has its largest concentration of junk stores--less than a week earlier, I'd picked up an IBM Executive [oh, go ahead and ask me his name] for \$25 there), and after a sumptuous repast at Spaghetti Eddie's, decided to walk home instead of taking the bus. And I walked smack into the middle of the Hermes parade. I stayed to watch, since Hermes has always been one of the better krewes (they were the first to have illuminated floats for night parades, and they still make the best use of the lights). Nice parade; nothing spectacular. Couldn't figure out the theme of it just from what I saw, but there was a lot of red, white and blue.

Sunday was about the eighth or tenth parade of the Krewe of Bacchus, a relatively new outfit that decided right from the beginning that they were going to be the best. Their floats are about 50% bigger and 100% more gaudily decorated, they always have great bands, and they've tried all sorts of innovative ideas like getting some out-of-town celebrity to be their king (this year it was Perry Como) instead of some crumbling New Orleans socialite that few people have ever heard of and fewer care about. The older krewes try to pretend that Bacchus doesn't exist.

Bacchus shortened its route this year, concentrating the already heavy crowd into a smaller area. Didn't bother me any, tho. My theater overlooks the routes of most of the major parades, so I watched it in comfort. But the reason for the shortened route this time is even more disgusting than its result. You see, when the Superdome was being designed, there was some idle talk about routing an occasional Mardi Gras parade through it. One door, in fact, was specifically designed to admit a Bacchus float, tho that's not the reason you'll find on the specs (the PR man they had at the time is a friend of mine--that's how I happened to know the real reason). Yeah, people were actually shelling out six bucks a head just to watch a damn Mardi Gras parade in the world's largest air-conditioned room. Give me a rickety couch by an open window on Canal Street.

Sunday afternoon, tho (Bacchus was Sunday night), had been a time of decision for me. That's the day no less than three parades follow one another on Canal Street, tho they start in different areas of the city. The first, Thoth, is Doug Wirth's neighborhood parade, and I debated whether or not to drop by Doug's house, as I've been doing for Thoth every two or three years since high school. What finally made me decide was coming back from breakfast and seeing people starting to gather for a parade right in my own neighborhood (the ones with paraphernalia like picnic baskets, campers, ladders, lawn chairs and the like sometimes arrive *hours* early to stake out areas). I checked the morning paper, and sure enough, Venus was going to pass right by (I wasn't even aware of the changed routes until then). It would fall in behind Thoth on St. Charles Avenue, about a dozen blocks from here, which would siphon off a lot of the crowd and make it more pleasant in this area. I busied myself with various pursuits until I heard the first bands, then made my lazy way down to Napoleon Avenue to watch it.

I missed the title float, but the rest seemed to indicate that the theme was probably "Famous Women," as it frequently is in the women's parades. The gaudy red, white and blue of the first float I saw signified Betsy Ross--thank God, I thought, at least one outfit has the good taste to limit the bicentennial stuff at least a little bit.

The whole thing was rather amateurishly put together, I thought. At least a third of the floats were missing their title placards, tho I imagine I'm one of the few people who noticed. Of the ones that did have them, quite a number had decorations that scarcely fit the titles. For example, the Mata Hari float had a huge icon of an Indian in the front, and nothing to suggest anything even vaguely associated with either Mata Hari or women in general. It was probably on loan from another parade--that often happens among the smaller krewes. Again, I imagine I was one of the very few who noticed, but it *might* have been a little more appropriate if they'd titled it "Pocahontas" or something.

The final float, tho, needed no title, at least for me (good thing, too, because it didn't have one). The decoration on the float was all spacey, with a big model of the Moon in front, a floating astronaut in back and little stars and saturns all over the sides. The maskers were dressed in Russian outfits, with the little fur hats and all. Apparently, they'd borrowed a space float from someone else and added the Russian stuff themselves to suggest Valentina Tereshkova, pilot of Vostok-6, only woman to orbit the Earth.

One thing I was looking for escaped me. Dany Frolich, who designs floats for a living, told me something more than a year ago about how one krewe, for the bicentennial, would have the theme "American presidents." I thought it was Bacchus, but apparently I remembered wrong. The Nixon float as he described it was particularly good--showed him with a silly grin on his face, with his head and hands moving back and forth, with the double-V sign we all know well. I suggested that they should do a Ford float with his hand holding an ice cream cone against his forehead, but they did him with just a simple football helmet. Sigh. I also suggested a Warren Harding float with a picture of a teapot and the Superdome, but apparently they decided Harding didn't deserve the honor, and skipped him.

Next year, I've made up my mind, I'm going to hold a party for Mardi Gras. I don't know at the moment whether it'll be Monday night or Tuesday morning, but the fact that so many of the parades pass so close now, with such a nice, neighborhood-like crowd near here, cannot go unrecognized. Most people reading this are invited (those who aren't probably know who they are, so there's no point in expanding on that), so come on down. I'll provide up to about a half dozen cases of beer; after that, anybody who wants refreshments is on his own. What suddenly made me decide to break with tradition to this extent (I almost never throw parties, and seldom attend them, except at cons, which is different, sort of) was seeing the Rex parade on Napoleon Avenue Mardi Gras morning.

I've seen Rex, at one time or another, at just about every point on its route. Up until now, I think, my favorite spot was on St. Charles Avenue, anywhere between Jackson and Howard Avenues (didn't know New Orleans had named a street after Marvel Comics' greatest creation, did you?). The crowd isn't as intense as it is Downtown, there are a lot of costumes in proportion to the number of people (tho the costumes are getting fewer and farther between these days, alas), and in addition to the main parades (and preceding them by sometimes as long as a couple of hours) are several marching groups, like the Jefferson City Buzzards, Pete Fountain's Half-Fast Marching Club (sometimes with Pete himself in the lead), and several others, large and small. A couple of fan groups have toyed with the idea of forming Mardi Gras marching groups, in fact. All told, that section of St. Charles more closely typifies Mardi Gras than any other place on the Rex route.

This year, tho, maybe it was just the novelty of being able to walk out of my house and see the parade practically in my own front yard, but I enjoyed Rex like I haven't in a good number of years. Instead of killing one another for doubloons (commemorative coins--I went into a dissertation on them in last year's installment), they were passing them around, making sure everyone got one. I caught one in the air (no mean feat--first time in years I've done so) and gave it to the nearest kid I saw (I collect the Rex ones, just because I have a complete set of them, but I'd already gotten mine for the year). It was altogether more like a gathering of friends than the usual mad scramble. I hope this new route sticks for a few years, because I like the hell out of it.

Afterward, I went downtown for a get-together we Porno Tsars were having in one of the theaters (the one where I work, coincidentally), and again saw a bunch of parades from second-story comfort. I missed Zulu (which, I found out later, had passed just six blocks from my house, on Louisiana Avenue--next year I'll have to make an effort to catch it there, if I can work up the courage), but was in plenty of time to catch Rex again. So I put on my costume (a plastic garbage bag marked "for prevention of disease only), opened a beer, propped my feet up on the window sill, and sat back to wait.

I really didn't mind seeing the same parade again, because this gave me a chance to see some really well done floats from another angle. I took the first opportunity that presented itself to congratulate Dany Frolich on a job really well done. I knew all along, of course, that Rex had too much Class to fall into the common rut of red, white, and blue, and sure enough, the theme was New Orleans Jazz, and each float depicted a particular well-known piece of music. Also, and this was unusual for any parade, let alone the tradition-bound Rex, instead of the usual multi-color riot, each float was tastefully done with one dominant color and minor pieces coordinated with it. I may be the only person in this entire city who pays attention to that stuff, but I liked it.

After Rex came the truck parades, the Krewes of Orleanians and Crescent City. I hadn't seen the trucks Uptown, since they joined in after Rex somewhere on St. Charles Avenue. The truck parades, I think, deserve a moment of explanation.

Following Rex each year, see, are a whole big bunch of decorated trucks. There are no bands or other marching groups, none of the other accoutrements of Carnival parades, but there's a nearly endless stream of these trucks. Just when there's a lull and you think they're finally finished, another one rounds the corner. Although a city ordinance a few years ago limited the number of trucks in any given parade to something like 150 (I think), very few people stick around to see them all.

Now, the trucks are frequently criticized on grounds other than the sheer mind-boggling *number* of them. Their lack of any of the other parade atmosphere has already been mentioned. Most of them aren't very imaginative, nor very well decorated in any way. One character a few years ago made out a specious case that they cause juvenile delinquency.

To me, tho, the truck parades embody the true Mardi Gras spirit. There are no formal organizations putting them together, nor is there any sort of exclusion practiced--anyone who shows the interest can get one (John Guidry recently suggested holding a con on one--he bemoaned the fact that the trucks don't parade at night, so he could show movies). If some of them are shoddily put together, that's okay--the professional slickness might not be there, but their highs in imaginativeness are very high indeed. It's like an all-day party, with whole families, right down to the third cousins, riding the trucks; or college groups getting together on them, or any sort of bunch of people at all. The truck parades bring Mardi Gras back to the people. Even more democratic are the lone trucks that you sometimes see wending their drunken way through the streets--they don't even go to the formality of registering themselves with a recognized truck parade. I love the trucks.

This year, aside from the ordinary, expected red, white and blue, the trucks had quite a few real peaks. There were a bunch of space-oriented ones, a "tricentennial" one, one paying tribute to whatever flu bug is going around this year--Port Chalmers, I think... all sorts of them. My favorite, I think, was all blue, with everyone on it wearing a Sesame Street Cookie Monster costume. We yelled "Cookie! Cookie!" at them from our second-story window, and got a barrage of trinkets.

One thing I got a kick out of from my vantage point was the vengeance it's possible to wreak on obnoxious crowd people from them. There were several incidents of such visible from upstairs, but one that stands out in my mind involved a kid walking alongside the truck, beating on the side of it as loud as he could. Somebody on the truck beamed him with a doubloon, and he went off rubbing his head.

A late report just in clarifies a couple of matters having to do with the parade that had the theme of American Presidents. The wording of the theme was "Hail to the Chiefs," and the parade was Endymion, which was the title of this zine two years ago, when that parade passed right in front of the house I was living in at the time (I watched it from the living room window). One report says that people were throwing trinkets *back* at the Nixon float. Very, very illegal (and the law has been cracking down on such things ever since Al Hirt got a split lip from a brick thrown by a spectator about five or six years ago), but a wonderful example of good ol' American self-expression. (The same report also says that there was no Millard Filmore float, which isn't too hard to believe, since there were probably less than 25 of the things, even tho Filmore is no longer the Most Obscure Person Ever To Occupy The Office Of President Of The United States, having been edged out by Chester A. Arthur for that position when he gained such notoriety for holding it.)

Anywho, when the last truck wended its way down Canal Street, we continued to drink and carouse for awhile. The drinking and carousing continued when I left to go to bed about 8 PM, and may continue yet for all I know. And here I am, scribbling a few lines late at night about just another dull, ordinary Mardi Gras.

And don't forget, you're all (most of you, at least) invited to my party, assuming the new parade routes last long enough for it to be worth throwing. If Proteus, the Monday night parade, follows the Napoleon Avenue route, it'll be held Monday night. Otherwise, Tuesday morning, tho I'd like to avoid that if possible, as Rex passes at 10 AM and Zulu even earlier, and that would kind of break up the day. But that doesn't matter a whole lot, because if you're going to come to New Orleans at all you might as well stay overnight. I'll try to get a flyer out, but don't count on it. And have a happy Lent, y'all.