

Being the fifth in a potentially infinite series of installments of the same Mardi Gras one-shot published by Don Markstein, P.O. Box 53112, New Orleans, La. 70153. This particular installment can be had through SFPA, which has seen all installments thus far; SAPS, ditto; FAPA, which has thus far seen only the fourth; and CAPA-Alpha, which is seeing its first right now. (I'm taking kind of a chance running it through K-a--the fuggheads there tend to censure anything that doesn't have to do with funnybooks, but I suppose I can put up with that particular lunacy since the copy requirement was just lowered and I won't have to send them as many copies, at least. We Shall See now they take to this zine. If they aren't too annoying about it, I might send next year's installment through as well.) Demented Turkish Dwarf Press publication #256. AM131. 2/13/75. Printed in Occupied CSA.

THE TITLE: Thus far, each installment of this oneshot has borne a different title. Except in the case of the first, *Rex #1*, the title has been that of the Mardi Gras krewe that parades closest to wherever I happen to be spending my nights at the time of publication. (*Rex* is merely the name of the most prominent of the krewes, and was chosen as a contrast to the title of John Guidry's Mardi Gras zine, *Alhambra*, named after one of the most obscure.) The second was *Carrollton #2*, when I lived on St. Charles Avenue. Then *Freret #3* when I was on Nashville and *Endymion #4* last year when I was staying with Norman Elfer temporarily. *Tucks* is named after a parade that starts at a loud, obnoxious college bar across the street, called Friar Tuck's. I've been fortunate thus far in missing the Tucks Parade, but this year I just barely cleared the neighborhood in time--it was forming up even as I closed the door behind me. With any luck, I'll have found a home at last by next year, and this zine will have a permanent title.

I traditionally begin this zine by complaining about how I can't stand Mardi Gras, but if you live in New Orleans, you can't very well avoid it. But I did a fairly good job of avoiding it this year. In fact, the only two times it impinged upon my consciousness were when I actually, deliberately went out of my way to see a pair of parades.

The Bacchus parade is more visually spectacular than most, so I generally make an effort to see it. I don't go all out, or anything, but the first year I pointedly missed it, people were talking for weeks about the incredibly fine 2½-story depiction of King Kong. So I usually take steps to ensure that if I miss Bacchus, it's through no fault of my own.

So last Sunday, I found myself with John Guidry at Guy Lillian's houseboat. First item on the agenda was to make sure we didn't collapse from hunger in the middle of the parade, so we dropped by a local hamburger emporium for sustenance. It was impossibly crowded, so we went around the corner to a kosher delicatessen, where Guy distinguished himself by ordering ham and cheese.

One of the ways Bacchus infuriates the Mardi Gras traditionalists (and its infuriating the traditionalists is one of the things that makes it so good) is by inviting a celebrity of some sort from out of town to be its king, instead of letting some crumbling old New Orleans socialite nobody ever heard of or would admit it if he had have the honor. In the past, Bob Hope, Phil Harris, Glen Campbell and several others have been King of Bacchus. This year, it was Jackie Gleason. And as usual, the king was throwing a special doubloon all his own, duplicated by none of the other riders.

A few words of explanation of doubloons are in order, incase I never got around to doing it before. In 1960, the Rex parade began minting commemorative coins and throwing them from the floats along with the traditional beads, trinkets and plastic gewgaws that even a half-naked savage would turn up his nose at. Incunabular doubloons as early as the 1880s have been unearthed, but these are like pre-Columbian discoveries of America. It was the 1960 Rex that touched off the boom.

Within two or three years, every parade--every single one--was tossing these things out with a prolificity that would embarrass Maxwell Grant and his 280 Shadow novels. In an equally short time, a particularly obnoxious sub-species of the Mardi Gras groupie had arisen--the doubloon collector. I don't know of anyone who actually regards himself as a doubloon completist--certainly, there can't be any *successful* doubloon completists in the

world, so diverse has the practice of minting them become. It's a long time since they were confined to the Mardi Gras organizations alone. Now, practically every group in the city with more than three members has put them out--even a couple of fan groups have been considering it. And they not only change every year...they also come in a bewildering array of hues of anodized aluminum. It amounts, basically, to a kind of mania. I hesitate to say dementia, because of the "some of my best friends" syndrome, but I think it.

Anywho, since it's next to impossible to catch these dollar-sized discs of aluminum in the air (tho not *quite* impossible), most of them are picked up from the ground. And baby, if you duck under the crowd to pick one up, you're taking your life in your hands. It was bad enough when it was just the collectors who had to be fought off, but it wasn't long before speculators entered the field. These are mostly kids between 6 and 10, whose invariable skin color I won't mention, who amass heaps of the things, and ~~in the winter/when the rich~~ ~~buyers/could~~ sell them to collectors and tourists at monstrous prices, sometimes as much as half a buck.

Now, these speculators are tough dudes. Don't let their age fool you. It is not unheard of for a hand reaching for a doubloon to be pinned to the ground with a knife. So the best thing to do is keep your hands in your pockets. I've noticed tho, this year for the first time, that a sort of social ethic has begun to arise concerning doubloons. That is, if someone manages to get his foot squarely on one, he's usually allowed to pick it up without too great a hassle. Even as late as last year, he could expect a fight to keep them from cutting off his foot.

I'm not the only one who thinks that this mad lust after doubloons is one of the distinctly unpleasant aspects to Mardi Gras. A couple of years ago, there was some talk of legislation to keep them from being thrown from floats altogether, and distributing them through retail outlets so that the collectors wouldn't suffer too badly. Much as it galls me to think of legislation to keep people from doing things, I must say it would be nice if the things were to dry up and blow away.

Anyway, as I was saying, the King of Bacchus always has his own doubloon, that only he can throw, that comes in red to distinguish it even further from the gold and silver (colored) doubloons thrown by the other riders. Before the parade starts, you can hear people say "Boyoboy, I sure do hope I get one of the red ones." For weeks after, you can hear the lucky recipients brag about their acquisitions. It's rather nauseating.

I came within three inches of getting one of those red ones. Yup. One of them landed just three inches from my foot. I had a clear field to it, too. Want to know why I didn't get it? I didn't think it was worth the effort of moving my foot for it, that's why.

Anyway, Jackie Gleason seemed to be having a grand old time as Bacchus VII. The parade was pretty good, too--usually is. Not something I'd care to go out of my way for more than once a year, but the floats were quite well decorated (and the Frolich touch is still evident here and there--yes, he's still designing Mardi Gras floats in case anybody is wondering) and lavishly produced. As I say, Bacchus is one of the better ones.

I figured it was about a tossup whether or not that would be my only Mardi Gras experience this year. Ever since I can remember, Mardi Gras has been one of the colder days of the year, often getting down into the 30s. Why this should be so I don't know, when we have balmy days every month of the year in New Orleans, but it always has been. But this has been a particularly mild winter, and I figured there was more than an even chance of a nice, warm Shrove Tuesday for a change. And so I made up my mind that if it was warm enough to wear nothing but my old Judo outfit, I was going to sally forth. It's not every day that I get a chance to wear the most comfortable garment I've ever owned on the street.

And sure enough, after a brief cold snap over the weekend, Mardi Gras itself (the expression "Mardi Gras Day" is redundant and not used by educated people), the predicted temperature was in the 70s, and I suspect it got even warmer than that. So I met John and Guy again for a day of fun and frolic (no relation to the float designer). For all the time he's spent in this city, this was Guy's first Mardi Gras, and some amusement must accrue to watching the reaction of someone who's never seen it before. It was *my* 28th.

It's been a long time since I've worn the judogi in public. I realized that the first time I picked up a little banter about it, when I'd gone less than a block in it. Last time I wore it where anybody could see, people would make funny passes with their hands and say "Hai Karate." Now, they do the same thing with the hands, but say "Kung Fu" instead. It was like that the whole day--lots of friendly comments like that on it. Seems like I was returning the hand passes and smiling back every five minutes. As crowds go, Mardi Gras crowds aren't too bad. Only one character was obnoxious about it. I'll get to him in a few more paragraphs. One pair of kids stopped to chat for a few minutes about their Karate lessons and upcoming promotional exams. At one point in the day, someone asked me "Ta kwan do?" I replied "Kodokan." I *think* that was a conversation, but couldn't swear to it. It was, if, as I recall, Ta kwan do is a school of Karate. Kodokan *is* one of Judo.

Saw Zulu again this year. Used to be, you couldn't catch it without blind, dumb luck, unless you went right to the starting point of the parade. They'd publish a route each year, but where they actually paraded depended on who gave the Big Shot (title of the highest ranking officer of the krewe) the most incentive to make him pass by his house. They've been getting disgustingly dependable of late, tho. I suspect this might be because of allegations made by the NAACP several years ago that they were demeaning their race by acting undignified--tho whether it's undignified for black people to poke fun at undignified white people is a matter of debate.

Anyway, there was Zulu, coming down Canal Street from St. Charles Ave. just like they said they would, wearing grass skirts and throwing coconuts as usual. Zulu is one of my favorite Mardi Gras organizations. It's such a perfect parody on the white krewes with their absurd pageantry and ridiculously contrived titles and court etiquette. Guy complained that this was the first parade he saw where he didn't get any doubloons, but I pointed out the relatively plain decoration of the floats and told him that Zulu isn't one of the better heeled krewes. I don't know for sure how the situation is now, but a few years ago, the only way to get one of their doubloons was to buy it, the money to be applied to their parading expenses. Anyway, they do throw a few (*very* few) decorated coconuts.

Zulu isn't the only all-black way of celebrating Mardi Gras. Some of the others have roots in African customs, same as the white Mardi Gras has its roots in pagan Rome. I'll get to one or two of the others if I have the space. If not, maybe in a future installment of this oneshot.

Guy had trouble staying in one place, as usual. One of the consequences of having a lighted candle stuck up your ass. But he was back with John and me in time for Rex, which finally made it to Canal Street around 1 PM. It zipped through at a velocity that would rival that of Comus (the only parade that runs on Mardi Gras at night, which *has* to zip through fast enough to allow time for a ball between the end of the parade and midnight, when Lent begins)--apparently, they were running late, and the end of the parade was only a few blocks away, so they were kind of eager. I caught two doubloons--one to toss in a sack with the rest of my Rex doubloons (I have them all, not that I've made any particular effort to get them) and one to give away to the next deserving person I see that doesn't ~~have~~ have one (gonna be hard to find one). And after that, we wandered off to the French Quarter.

Hey, I forgot to mention the costumes. I wasn't the only one who put on something out of the ordinary. Wild Men were quite common, that being a relatively simple costume to create, but one Wild Man deserves special mention. In addition to the fur drawers and like that, he'd covered himself with Spanish moss, the kind you find in Louisiana swamps a lot, and was dragging a cage on wheels behind him. And in the cage was an *eight-foot alligator*. Alive, too--every so often he'd flick his tail against the bars. Could hardly believe it.

And of course, there was the usual array of monsters, animated characters and undescribables. Few if any store-bought costumes--there usually aren't a whole lot, and the economic situation cut them down still further. John felt it incumbent upon himself to inform me of every duck that passed. One family of them was particularly well done.

The sights and sounds of the French Quarter were about par for Mardi Gras. So were the smells, which included frequent whiffs of marijuana. Right in front of cops, too--but I doubt any would seriously consider busting anyone for grass that particular day.

First stop was the costume contest at Bourbon and Dumaine, which Guidry has *got* to see every single year. Fortunately, we only stayed a few minutes. I don't think I could have stood the crowd, which was like a sardine can, much longer than that. One memorable thing did happen there tho. There was this guy with an elaborate costume with a wingspan of about 12 feet, absolutely inflexible. It was astonishing to see the crowd part for him so he could get to the stage. Like I said, as crowds go, Mardi Gras crowds are all right.

As we wandered along Royal Street, we chanced upon a bunch of guys on a balcony who had a sign saying "show your tits," which they flashed at every human female that passed by. I must say, they certainly didn't mince words.

Jackson Square is a mess. Aside from the fact that it's no longer open to the public on Mardi Gras--a hell of a note, when they lock the gates to a public park on a public holiday --they're replacing the asphalt on the streets around it with cobblestones, of all the asinine things, and the gaping holes in the street are supposed to last as long as two years. Sometimes I think the City Government is out to get us.

It was coming back toward Canal Street along Decatur that we ran into Anne "Crazy Anne the Martian Fanne" Hebert and her drunken companion. First thing the DC said to me was "What degree black belt are you?" "It's a brown belt." He squinted. "Oh." (He didn't quite believe it.) Then he asked how many challenges to fights I'd had during the day. "Yours is the first," I told him. "I haven't challenged you...yet," he said, "Then yours *will* be the first." "Well, how many people have pushed you like this?" "You're the first."

It's a mystery to me why drunken slobs try to pick fights they can't win--surely he couldn't have expected someone in a stupor the magnitude of his to stand up to a brown belt in Judo (it wasn't apparent just looking at me how long it's been since I've practiced) who was cold sober. He went on with a series of what ifs, and despite my assurance to each one that I'd merely step aside and let him fall on his face if he tried anything, I was reaching the point of *showing* him what even a retired Judoka like me can do with those who have no more muscular control than a beanbag, when Crazy decided to move on, and he turned abruptly and staggered after her. Crazy is okay, but I don't think very highly of her companion.

And it was just a few minutes later that we wandered right into the middle of a group that included our old friend, Dr. Virgil Feelgood. He informs us that he's planning yet another night of short subjects on the LSUNO film program, this one to be entitled "Dr. Feelgood Shows His Shorts." We stayed awhile with his group, resting under the Magnolia trees on the lawn of the La. Wildlife and Fisheries Building, then pushed on uptown.

And when John and Guy were ready to turn back downtown again, I split off from them and continued uptown, finally arriving at the very hovel where these immortal words are being set to stencil, there to collapse into bed and let Mardi Gras fade gently into dreamland. (I might not have collapsed *quite* so readily, but we're still in the middle of a transit strike here, and I had to walk the 62 blocks from the French Quarter.) I'm no great fan of Mardi Gras to begin with, and this one seemed particularly dull to me for some reason. I'm sure I was no sparkling font of wit myself. As I said, the main incentive for me to leave the house was the prospect of wearing such an exceedingly comfortable set of threads without feeling like any more of a fool than anybody else around.

Several days have gone by since the above events. I've busied myself in various pursuits, noting no particular difference between Lent and any other time of the year since I stopped being a Catholic. And in that time, news has broken relative to the aforementioned transit strike. When the thing first started, I figured it would last through Christmas and New Year, so the drivers could take those holidays off for the first time in the memory of living man (well, *this* living man, at least), and that would be the end of it. When it didn't end then, I figured they probably wanted Mardi Gras off as well. And sure enough, the word seems to be that they just *might* be back at work early next week, despite the fact that the transit company hasn't budged an inch since the strike began and still isn't moving.

Meanwhile, the 1975 Mardi Gras has joined the 27 previous ones, memories of varying degrees of pleasure and blaséness dancing about in my mind. And so, until such time as there may or may not be a 1976 installment of this oneshot, adieu.