

is the 1977 installment of a continuing Mardi Gras oneshot by Don Markstein, 2533 Gen. Pershing St., New Orleans, La. 70115, (504) TYphon 5-9020, and is intended, like all previous installments, for distribution in all apas of which the said Markstein is a member (this year it's SFPA, FAPA and DAPA-Em) with a small number of overruns going elsewhere. The title, as usual, is the name of a Mardi Gras parade. There's a rough correlation between the parades chosen for these titles and those that pass close to the home of the editor--this year, Iris passed within a block of here (and was also the first one I saw in 1977). Previous titles have been *Rex* #1, *Carrollton* #2, *Freret* #3, *Endymion* #4, *Tucks* #5 and *Venus* #6. (Have to preserve the image of this being a continuing effort rather than a set of individual zines by giving the titles each year--otherwise, I can hardly call it a oneshot even tho it *feels* like a oneshot.) Demented Turkish Dwarf Press publication #335. AM232. Printed in Occupied CSA. The "official" date of the zine is 2/22/77, but the first stencil is being cut the evening of the 21st.

Each year, I wonder if there's going to be another installment in this continuing (but slow-moving) epic. There always is, but for the month or two (or three or four or any other number up to eleven) before Carnival season, I think I'm just going to stay home and relax this time, and let the others make fools of themselves. Really, there's no need for me to go out and see what Mardi Gras looks like--after 30 of the things (counting tomorrow's), I should know. But it is kind of fun once you're in it, and if I can latch onto someone who hasn't seen it before, it can be really nice to enjoy it through him. Maybe it's the natural human desire to be the Experienced Guide showing these raw neophytes the ropes, or maybe it's because I'm trying to catch at least a reflection of seeing it new, since I can't even remember when I did. There may even be a trace of genuine altruism in my motives. But whatever, I do enjoy being with a newcomer.

This year, George Inzer was the one who dragged me out of the house. He phoned Thursday to say that the proposed-but-unlikely visit he'd mentioned a few weeks ago was indeed going to happen. Friday night he arrived with a friend named Fred whose last name I never did catch, giving me very little time to prepare (I'd have liked to make at least a *token* attempt to clean the place up, but barely had time to get the few remaining uncollated *Tandstikkerzeitung* pages off the floor and drop the last batch in the mailbox). At 1:30 in the morning we finally managed to find three vacant seats in the worst eatery we could find open right then (Carnival does tend to disrupt things), so we didn't starve to death, and after picking up Kevin Smith at the bus station and taking him all the way out to Harahan, we finally staggered into bed about 4 AM.

When Iris started, noon Saturday, five blocks from here and passed within a block, we'd been groggily stirring for a couple of hours. The sounds of marching groups roused us from our torpor and we walked over to Napoleon Avenue in time to see the Queen's float (Iris is a women's parade--see, it wasn't that at all). George and Fred entered into the spirit much quicker than I expected, yelling and waving their hands and beating up old ladies for doubloons almost before the first trinket-throwing float arrived. George, in particular, made a real haul of beads (of course, he has six inches of reach over everyone).

Hmm, this is the 7th installment of the thing already, and I don't think I've carried on about these silly beads they throw from the floats *yet*. Incredible. Well. Carnival parades, for those who don't know, are participatory. The spectators get to take part. The riders on the floats toss things, which the watchers compete for. (Brass knucks and switchblades are the traditional playing equipment in some neighborhoods, but in recent years there has been some escalation.) Most prominent are the "doubloons," little aluminum discs with the title and theme of the parade stamped on them, but that's been the case only in the past 15 years or so. Traditionally, the gewgaw that was thrown from the floats more than any other was the cheap string of beads, like you might buy Manhattan with.

I often wonder what the people who make these beads must think of their customers. There can't possibly be any market for them outside of New Orleans, yet when you see a tag on them (as is happening less lately) it turns out they're made in Hong Kong, Korea, or Czechoslovakia. (Even Japan doesn't stoop quite so low.) Do they understand that the

value in their creations lies not in anything intrinsic to them, but in the thrill of competition, or do they simply make circular motions at their temples and say, "These Americans...tsk"?

(Another area where the mental competence of Americans might be in question is the so-called "Moon Walk," a walkway overlooking the Mississippi River, built in 1969 [when else?]. Ships from all parts of the world pass by, with crews speaking some of the damndest languages, and there we are, droves of us, every day for two weeks before Mardi Gras, gazing at them as they pass. What must they think?) (But I digress...)

Once caught, of course, the beads are absolutely without value. Even kids outgrow any use for them at an unbelievably early age--they'd *have* to, in self defense; the damn things are *everywhere*. But people don't like to throw them away, for some reason (they *look* like they ought to be worth something), and being plastic (in recent years, at least), they're virtually indestructible. So they tend to accumulate. You'll find them hanging from the mirrors of Chevrolets, gathering in unused corners, filling up one dresser drawer after another like a creeping monster...all over the place. Somebody pointed out a couple of strings hanging from my toothbrush stand--I'd put them there after last year's Mardi Gras and simply stopped noticing them after that.

I once wrote an article for the Sunday magazine of the local paper on what people do with the things after Carnival. I won't repeat myself here, but the best thing, I thought, was to melt them down into molds to make shiny plastic multicolored plaques. Maybe the reason I like that one so much is because it's the one that made them look least like strings of beads at the end, but psychoanalysing oneself is the height of something.

I'm surprised this sort of thing doesn't get bigger play as one of New Orleans' quirks than it does. You practically can't visit a home around here without seeing heaps of the things, which I think is at least as distinctive a characteristic of the city as, say, some of the speech patterns that get a lot of play (most of which are misunderstood by those who write about them anyway). It's at least worth a little fanzine space.

Anywho, after the parade, we noticed ourselves feeling sort of hungry (that happens when you go awhile without eating), and since George has been here before, he had his taste buds all set for a muffuletta sandwich as made by the Napoleon House. I waxed enthusiastic, telling Fred all about this wonderful, funky old building with some minor historical significance where they'd put a nice, quiet bar with absolutely unique atmosphere, meanwhile getting my own taste buds all set for a couple of nice, warm Guinness Stouts to go with the muffuletta.

Surprise! During Mardi Gras*, the Napoleon House only serves Miller. How crass, middle-class, bourgeois American! I felt the need to apologize to George and Fred for having carried on so about what a great place it is, when it was getting ready to do *that* to us. (They didn't even have the decency to make their only brand Dixie, which would at least be **crass, middle-class, bourgeois New Orleans.**) Actually, more than anything else, I felt kind of sad--maybe that's a sign that the tourists have discovered it at last.

(* - In Learned Journals devoted to the Carnival season [such as The Times-Picayune and this zine], it is usually pointed out that "Mardi Gras" refers only to the day itself, Fat Tuesday, right before Ash Wednesday, and that the period preceding it is "Carnival." Thus, "Mardi Gras Day" is redundant, and is never used by educated people. Recently, however, I have become convinced that while this may once have been the case, popular usage has made "Mardi Gras" the season and "Mardi Gras Day" the climax of it, thus making "Carnival" more-or-less redundant. Parenthetical paragraphs deprecating such "misuse", such as have been found in previous instalments of this zine, are, I am now convinced, the province of such pedants as might insist that prepositions are not things one should end sentences with.)

At least the muffulettas were good, but I still had a Guinness thirst when we left. We ambled over to Molly's Irish Pub, a fairly decent place that manages to maintain a bit of individuality even in the shadow of Bourbon Street, which I figured was probably our best bet for getting some. We were in luck--they hadn't run out yet (they had by Tues-

day). Since we're forbidden by law to carry drinks through the French Quarter in anything made of metal, glass or anything else that can be made into a weapon, each of us picked up the biggest paper cup we could find and instructed the bartender to get as much Guinness into each one as he could--it came to about three apiece.

As he did so, one of the patrons started carrying on about what True Men we must be, to drink so much of that stuff straight and warm. Obviously, this man drinks Miller unless he's in the mood for imported beer, in which case he drinks Coors. The whole time we were there, the spiel went on about what ruggedness and intestinal fortitude it takes to drink Guinness. Kind of silly, we thought, but egoboo is where you find it. He was still there when we came back for refills a little while later.

Our aimless wanderings eventually brought us to Jackson Square, one of the foci for tourists in the Quarter. Up until three or four years ago, the Square was taken over each Mardi Gras by a fairly freakish crowd pouring in from the lower stretches of Decatur Street, an area where the newsstands tend to turn into poster shops. Used to be, you could get a fairly decent buzz going just taking a few deep breaths around there. The city retaliated against this wanton debauchery, tho, and nowadays the Square has all its gates locked, and nobody gets to go inside but the pigeons. And the crowd in the fringes of it is becoming a little island of the Middle Class in the middle of a French Quarter that gets less so the farther you get from Canal Street.

We went up to the aforementioned Moon Walk at the top of the levee and watched the ships for awhile; then turned our attention to the crowd on the landward side. One guy was doing handstands on a post. A cop came along to run him off, and we hissed at him. A few feet behind us, another guy suddenly started playing a bagpipe. Some people threw coins to him. It was a good day for people watching.

Duty called, and I went to work Saturday night. Sunday, we tried to get a little get-together going before the Venus parade, which, again, passed a block away, but it started too early for everything to come off right. That parade, usually very kitschy (inane titles to floats, wandering from the theme, no title placards on some...), was notable mainly for a mild disagreement George had with a little girl over a doubloon. I didn't see the beginning of it, so by the time it attracted my attention, I had to admire her for holding onto it so long. I was rooting for George, of course, even tho he was five times her size, but had sort of lost interest by the time they disappeared behind a clump of spectators. Two or three floats passed by before George came out--alone, of course--with the coin in his hand. "She sure did have sharp teeth," he said, picking them out of his shoe. We all had a nice chuckle over that.

Afterward, we managed to get JoAnn Montalbano, Kevin Smith and Larry Epke, together with George, Fred and myself, all in one car to see the Mid-City parade, which is one of the really nice ones--they consistently have the best bands, and use tinfoil to decorate their floats instead of the usual canvas, making a very pretty parade on a sunny day, which this was. First time in a couple of years I'd seen it. No people watching after that one, tho, since George was due at the airport and I was due at work, so we just wound down for awhile back at my house before going our separate ways.

Mardi Gras Day--why does that phrase have the taste of Forbidden Fruit to me?--Larry came over bright and early, like before 8 AM, for our attempt at catching the Zulu parade on St. Charles Avenue. Zulu, for those who don't know, is the oldest of the black krewes (a krewe [pronounced "crew"] is a Carnival organization--see, keep reading these things three or four years and everything gets explained), and was originally conceived as a sort of parody of the white krewes. Now in its dotage, Zulu isn't quite as wild and disorganized as it appears to have been in its youth, but they're still pretty good at covering up for a low budget with a lot of imagination and disregard for their own dignified image. Yes, we did catch it, and enjoyed the hell out of it.

I was wearing the same costume I did last year--a garbage bag marked "For Prevention Of Disease Only," which is the silliest idea for one I've ever had. I may even use it next year, if I don't come up with another good one. I'm kind of an advocate of masking for Mardi Gras, and rather appreciate something like the one overleaf, which was drawn by



Bruce Townley in response to *Venus #6*. We did see some good ones, too. In addition to the Three C's (cats, convicts and clowns), there was a family dressed up as Alka-Seltzer bottles, with bubbles painted on their faces; one group of college kids dressed as M&Ms (the females marked "plain" and the males "with nuts"); and all sorts of nice things.

We wandered off into the Quarter after the parades all passed, partly for more people-watching and partly to see the Costume Contest at Bourbon & Dumaine. I think I've done a piece or two on that contest, but don't recall doing any in awhile. This thing, ladies and gentlemen, would put anything you can see at a World-Con to shame. The fact that all those beautiful women are really men in drag is immaterial--those are some fine costumes. The only thing wrong is that it's almost impossible to see anything there--word has gotten around, and it

gets very crowded around Bourbon & Dumaine right then. We were lucky, tho, and found a protuberance from a building close by that nobody had claimed, so we simply climbed on top. By craning our necks to see around the guy who had climbed on top of a lamppost, we actually managed to get quite a nice view of the proceedings.

Somehow, it didn't seem quite as pleasant to walk around Tuesday as it had Saturday. That may be because on Mardi Gras Day (that phrase again!), everyone was setting out to act silly instead of just being himself, or it may just be that I was tired. Whatever, I was plenty ready to go in by mid-afternoon. We made the trek back Uptown as the Sun was starting to get low in the sky, and were almost back to Gen. Pershing Street by the time it got completely dark. (No use looking for transportation on Mardi Gras.)

It was kind of a surprise to run right into Comus, the last parade of Mardi Gras--we figured it might be scared away from parading by a heavy shower that had hit while we were walking and threatened to recur; and besides, we thought it was too early. We paused for a few minutes--that's all it takes to see Comus--and continued on here to rest our feet and have a cup or two of coffee before turning in, tired and just a little bit muscle-sore. Larry left about 8 or so, and I went straight to bed.

(The reason it takes so little time to see Comus, by the way, is because the basic set-up of the krewes, with their parades and balls, is artificial. While other aspects of the celebration continue until dawn, the balls end on the stroke of midnight, when it becomes Ash Wednesday and Lent begins. Comus has to finish its parade in time to have a complete ball before everyone has to go home and fast and abstain.)

Every couple of years or so, some fan comes up with a brilliant idea for a marching group that we've got to get together next year. This time, the idea was Larry's--not surprising, since it was his first Carnival as well as George's. If we don't drop this one in mid-year like we do most of the others, it's going to be the Krewe of Id, with a Fink (instead of a King) being pulled along in a little red wagon. Beautiful maids will be flinging rose petals in his path, while a herald announces his advent with one of those long plastic trumpets. A chorus of knights, peasants and huns will entertain His Majesty with kazoos, and behind it all will be one grumbling, mustachioed little guy with a pushbroom. Oh yeah, and the Fink will have a doubloon on a string...

Well, it was a nice, pleasant, low-key Mardi Gras for me. Visits from George tend to be mellow and good that way, and besides, I'm in kind of a pleasant, low-key mood right now for some reason. No real frenetic activity, but the fatigue I felt afterward was the kind you feel when you've finished something that was just a lot of fun. Hoping you are the same...