

Zine and Comix Review

Mark Pawson



Am I allowed to review Porno Mags in Variant? Well how about Playboys from the 1960s, when grown men could say straight faced that they bought it to read the articles? Unless you're lucky enough to have a complete run of valuable, vintage 1960s Playboys you're unlikely to have seen any of the classic **Little Annie Fanny** comic strips. Harvey Kurtzman who created MAD magazine in the mid 1950's, came up with this satirical strip named after a rather grown-up and generously-proportioned version of L'il Orphan Annie. Playboy owner Hugh Hefner wanted something special for his magazine, and took a personal interest in the strip, going to the extent of approving scripts and suggesting alterations. Hef gave Kurtzman and cartoonist Will Elder a generous budget without the constraints of fixed deadlines, in return Kurtzman and Elder created an innovative strip, lusciously painted in full-colour, which looked completely unlike anything else at the time and where every inch of background space was crammed with sight gags and topical references.

Annie Fanny's adventures take her tripping blissfully through every social event, fad, craze and phenomena of the Swinging Sixties; the Sexual Revolution, Beatlemania, discotheques, Pop Art, Black Power, Psychoanalysis, Civil Rights, the Space Race, Surfing, the Living Theatre, Hippies and Protest Singers are all explored for maximum satirical value. Annie emerges unscathed and inevitably unclothed at the end of each episode. The excellent **Little Annie Fanny** Volume 1 1962-1970 collects these innovative and controversial strips in 220 pages, an annotated guide to the episodes is helpful for those of us who were aged just 5 at the time, and don't quite get all the contemporary references or recognise the personalities of the time.



Usually the comic book comes first and the toys follow later but with **World of Pain** James Jarvis has done things the other way round. Following on from the limited edition action figures of his potato-headed characters for the SILAS clothing label, comes **World of Pain** which constructs the world in which the toy characters live. It's a cheery but authoritarian world, a policeman on the beat keeps a look out for crimes such as untied shoelaces and typeface pollution before confiscating a skateboard and showing the skate dudes a few kick-flip tricks of his own! There's an entire unfolding subplot about the lyrics and mythology of obscure psychedelic rock and heavy metal bands. **World of Pain** is guaranteed to be the only publication reviewed here that is bilingual, in English and Japanese!



Do you remember Senor Sandwich from your childhood, the roll-a-long Salami Sandwich with olive eyes and a gherkin nose? How about the Weiner Works Toy Set 'make your own tasty frankfurters from table scraps'? or Whip-It's, those racing cars powered by whipped cream? Possibly not, but they're all here in the **Gobler Toys 1964 Catalog**, alongside classics such as Darwin the Evolving Chimp, a top-hatted ape who gradually learns to walk upright until he's given a stiff drink and then regresses back to his primal state! and child-sized Play Dead Coffins which come 'with everything you need to fake your own death'. These nutty toys are only slightly more surreal than what is currently on sale in your local branch of Toys'R'Us and Woolworths.

The full colour illustrated **Gobler Toys 1964 Catalog** may just be a fictional spoof, complete with company history, newspaper clippings and biography of founder Ira Gobler, but I'd pay good

money for these crazy playthings. The Gobler product line is rounded out with cherry flavoured licorice underarm hair, US Mint Pops that print twenty dollar bills onto your tongue and Seniorios the first salami flavoured breakfast cereal. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that the Gobler Toys creators have been fending off phone calls and job offers from toy giants like Mattell, Bandai, Hasbro and Topps.



You must have seen those figures made from old car parts welded together sitting on top of garages or standing outside car mechanics premises, they're usually made from old exhaust pipes with the cylinders forming bodies and heads, pipes as arms and legs. In the US these humanoid auto-junk sculptures are called **Muffler Men**

(*Transatlantic translation dept #1: exhaust pipes = mufflers*), and guess what, now there's a book all about them. With plenty of wonderful photos and accompanying text this book approaches its subject from a Folk Art perspective looking at **Muffler Men** as workplace art created by self-taught artists rooted in occupational and ethnic traditions (many are by Latino mechanics). There's maybe a little bit too much analysis, I was longing for an interview with an innocent car mechanic saying; 'Well gee I kinda never really thought about it much, it's just one of those things that auto repairmen do, isn't it?'

The more primitive, goofy **Muffler Men** that reflect the character of independent garages are more interesting than the consciously crafted/designed ones, franchises & corporate-owned auto repair shops either discourage or have bans on muffler men! There's no tips on how or where to get hold of a muffler man of your very own, but its clear that outsider/folk art collectors have already identified and started to move in on these garage mascots.



It was a real surprise to see a copy of **Punk** magazine in the racks of Tower Records, a mere twenty years after the last issue! It says on the cover that it's a 25th Anniversary issue, but there's no further explanation for it's reappearance. Is Punk

back again? which revival are we on now? the third or fourth? I've lost count. Maybe it's just that after a lengthy stint at High Times magazine, editor John Holstrom has seen his way out of the dope smoke haze? **Punk** was the original document of the mid to late 1970's New York Punk Scene and this issue faithfully recreates the miscellany of interviews, comics, spoof pieces, rants, reviews and **Punk**'s legendary Top 99 chart, plus there's colour pin-ups of all yer fave punks; The Damned, Blondie, Richard Hell and Johnny Thunders. Pleased as though I was to see this issue I wouldn't have felt the need to buy future issues, but with the recent loss of Joey Ramone, who was a contributor, the next issue is certain to be a Ramones tribute issue, **Punk** is definitely the right magazine to do them justice.



Panik is required reading for Transgressive Culture Vultures everywhere, a magazine for all the misanthropes and miscreants who've been in mourning since Answer Me! fell silent. Inside the Trevor Brown cover we find Jim Goad making good

use of his time behind bars by compiling a dictionary of prison slang, there's articles on film-maker Larry Wessel, Japanese Literary Suicides, What's Wrong with Assault Weapons? A Manifesto for Misanthropologists, unpleasant websites, Peter Sotos/Whitehouse, Boyd Rice, the Nietzschean Spirit of Planet of the Apes, Plastination, Videos you won't find at Blockbuster and Adam Parfrey on his Apocalypse Culture 2 book. Basically there's something here to shock, amaze and offend everyone plus plenty of reviews. Tabloid sized **Panik** is easy to conceal in the folds of your floor-length black leather trenchcoat.



Each issue of **Monozone** is a collection of factual stories of sickness, disease, affliction and infection of every possible kind. Straightforwardly written (often hand-written) and plainly presented, without comment or

analysis it makes great voyeuristic, gut churning reading. No matter what you've been through one of the **Monozone** contributors has had it worse and of course being American the writers have the biggest and best ailments and most disgusting stories. Other people's suffering is a comedy staple and such subject matter has a universal appeal, would reading a copy of **Monozone** be a cure for hypochondriacs? Each time I read the latest **Monozone** it leaves me feeling healthy and bursting with energy. (*Transatlantic translation dept #2: mono = mononucleosis = glandular fever*) Did I ever tell you about the time I had Kidney Stones?



Below Critical Radar, Fanzines and Alternative Comics from 1976 to Now. Edited by Roger Sabin and Teal Triggs. There have been several American books covering the publishing world of alternative/underground/subculture comics and zines, but until

now nothing from the UK. There's definitely a need for a guide to help people find their way into the bewildering world of these strange little publications (after you've read this column of course.) I'd been looking forwards to **Below Critical Radar**, its title indicates the whole area of publishing that exists for its own reasons remaining free of commercial considerations, and the subtitle shows a broad, inclusive approach.

The format which mixes reviews of comics and fanzines representative of specific genres with short essays works well, but only David Kendall's essay on the genre of Horror fanzines and comics stands out, emphasising the overlap between publisher and readers, many of whom are actively, enthusiastically involved in contributing to and shaping these publications. By covering fanzines and alternative comics side by side, the editors fail to make the important distinction that fanzines are entirely self-published and distributed with minimal news-stand distribution, in contrast alternative comics are published by 3-4 alternative publishers, with established distribution networks, and are relatively easily available from specialist comics shops nation-wide.

Fanzines are a lot harder to get hold of than alternative comics, their readers have to make an effort to find out about them in the first place and then send off cheques and S.A.E.'s and wait patiently by the letterbox. On principle zine writers list contact details for publications they review, the editors of this book give us instead a 5 page bibliography, ensuring that the very publications that enabled them to compile their book in

the first place remain **Below Critical Radar**. In his essay David Kendall sums it up;

“Whatever the definitions, it is enthusiasm that is the binding factor. Academic commentators rarely understand this. From what I’ve seen of academics’ (parasitic) relationship to the fanzine culture, what they want to find in zinesters is something like themselves but purer, untainted by nasty commercialism or arts grants/book subsidies/the requirements of tenured posts. The noble savage syndrome.”

Below Critical Radar is a good general introduction, but sadly just that and no more, I can’t imagine that anyone is going to read this book and get inspired enough to rush out and start their own zine/comic.

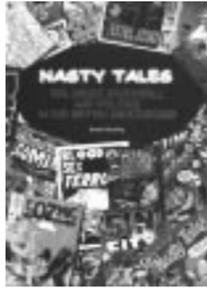


Schwing!, most excellent title dude, but I’m not so sure about the magazine. **Schwing! Golf Mag** (that’s with a circled anarchist A) aims to be a magazine for golfers with attitude from the publishers of Thrasher and Juxtapoz. Both these titles have

been formative reading for me at different times, Skatemag Thrasher was considered so controversial in the early 1980s that a rival publication emerged with the declared intention of being a more wholesome skateboard magazine! and despite some patchy recent issues Juxtapoz still manages to find art you’ll never see covered anywhere else.

With features like ‘America’s Worst Golf Courses’ **Schwing!** just about retains some of the

humour & character of its parent publications, but the celebrity interviews with J. Mascis/ Dinosaur Jr and ‘Chart Toppers Incubus’ leave much to be desired and the cheesecake ‘n’ golfclubs photos are just plain tacky. Is this a magazine aimed at the influx of young golfers that Tiger Woods has attracted to the sport in the US, or maybe just the result of a calculated decision by surf/skate/snowboard clothing companies to create new clothing lines for golfers. Hopefully it will remain a state-side phenomena, but I’m not a golfer, so what do I know, maybe at this very moment clubhouse committees up and down the country are hotly debating whether to let people with baggy camouflage-patterned trousers and blue hair play on their courses.



Nasty Tales: Sex, Drugs, Rock’n’Roll and Violence in the British Underground David Huxley. Having a small but treasured collection of British Underground Comix I’d been looking forward to this book, but sadly it fails to live up to the promise of the title. As I ploughed through the pages I realised

that actually there weren’t very many British underground comix and most of them weren’t very good! This is a shapeless rambling pub-conversation of a book in desperate need of a good editor, re-presenting the same old tired arguments about sex, drugs, violence and good ol’ bad ol’ Robert

Crumb is pointless. This left me disappointed and yearning for something more substantial, maybe a close textual analysis of Pete Loveday’s Big Trip Comics?

Little Annie Fanny Volume 1 1962-1970, \$24.95 Dark Horse Comics. www.darkhorse.com

World of Pain £3.00. Magma Bookshop, Earlham Street, Covent Garden, London.

Gobler Toys 1964 Catalog £7.95 inc p+p. available from Disinfotainment, P.O. Box 664, London, E3 4QR. www.goblertoys.com

Muffler Men Timothy Corrigan Correll and Patrick Arthur Polk. \$18.00. University Press of Mississippi, 2000. www.upress.state.ms.us

Punk \$5.00+p/p. PMB #675, 200 E.10th St, New York, NY 10003. www.punkmagazine.com

Panik \$3.00+p/p. 1891 Obispo Ave. Long Beach, CA 90804. bountyhunterinc.com

Monozine \$3.00+p/p. P. O. Box 598, Reistertown, MD 21136, U.S.A.. www.monozine.com

Below Critical Radar £10.00+£2.00p+p Slab-o-Concrete, POBox 148, Hove BN3 3DQ. www.slabo-concrete.com

Schwing! \$3.99. P.O.Box 8845570, San Francisco, CA 94188-4570, U.S.A..

Nasty Tales £13.95 Headpress, 40 Rossall Avenue, Radcliffe, Manchester, M26 1JD www.headpress.com