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Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy Volume 21



Synopsis

Dick Tracy leaps into the Space Age when Diet Smith's experimental Space Coupe brings back a visitor from outer space! Meet Moon Maid, the most outrageous character in the strip's entire history. Prior to venturing where no detective has gone before, Tracy deals with some very earthbound and gruesomely entertaining adventures, including the use of napalm (!) to flush out a gang of crooks from their hideout. In these strips from August 27, 1962 through April 12, 1964 Tracy mixes it up with the criminal 52 Gang—each named for a card in the poker deck—who have found a novel way to dispose of the corpses of their enemies, Junior is smitten by a girl who literally wants him dead, Sparkle Plenty falls into the hands of crazed modern artists and their ape accomplice, and (six months before it happened in the cereal world) a doctor has perfected heart transplant surgery—but in this case it's on unwilling victims!

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Customer Reviews

The latest TRACY volume opens with "Unholy Matrimony," unquestionably my least favorite Gould continuity (of those of which I'm aware, of course). Like the other continuities in this volume, I'd previously read the tale of Tess Trueheart's thwarted tie with batty ex-big-leaguer Edward Nuremoh in a softcover Pacific Comic Club collection. I panned it when I reviewed it the first time, and, trust me, it hasn't improved on reacquaintance. Before "Matrimony" (as Max Allan Collins points out in his introduction to Volume 6), Gould hadn't used Tess in a major story in quite some time, so it made sense to train the spotlight on her -- but NOT in a melodramatic mishmash that Jay Maeder accurately describes as "loony" and even Collins admits is "at times, ridiculously over the top."

What's more, once Nuremoh's suicide has literally driven the traumatized Tess crazy, the poor girl remains in that state for an additional agonizing month, stumbling into a brief partnership with a crook who deals in stolen dogs (and I thought NUREMOH was a cad!). The whole mess ends with Tracy clearing Tess of a murder rap and the babe herself sprawled in a self-abasing position at her no-longer-ex-boyfriend's feet. And just think, the two still wouldn't get married for another decade. Getting the Nuremoh nonsense out of his system appears to have caused Gould to do a major rethink. After restoring some manner of equilibrium with a brief and rather unmemorable continuity involving a crooked fur dealer, Gould brings back one of his strongest early villains, Stooze Viller, for a last bow. Yes, more melodrama ensues as Viller (who, predictably, refuses to reform, preferring to become a supplier to the underworld) desperately seeks to reconnect with his alienated daughter Binnie -- who inadvertently helps bring about Stooze's finish -- but tidying up this particular loose end appears to have cleared Gould's mind and reminded him where his strengths lay: in the depiction of strong criminal opponents for Tracy. Shortly after Viller's fall, midget crime boss Jerome Trohs and his obscenely fat and unnaturally strong "moll" Mamma appear on the scene, presaging the onrushing era of classic Tracy grotesques. Trohs himself isn't exactly a grotesque -- apart from his size and his Harold Gray-style blank eyeballs, he's basically a conventional mobster -- but his use appears to have struck a spark of newfound creativity. It's significant that two of Tracy's next three foes are Yogee Yamma, a tricked-up mystical fakir, and Deafy, a dealer in stolen bicycle parts whose supposed handicap -- like The Blank, whose blank face was only a cheesecloth covering, Deafy hears just fine despite the hearing aid in his ear -- gives him his name. In between those encounters, Black Pearl, a vaguely sinister arms dealer, hints at the coming war and its own contributions to the Tracy "universe," such as enemy agents Pruneface and The Brow. Regarding artwork, Collins correctly notes that 1940 sees the appearance of the "glossier, simpler, [and] stronger" art style that will carry TRACY through the war years and beyond. Actually, I'd date the first hints of this new, slicker style to the Jerome Trohs story, rather than the Yogee Yamma continuity. What happened here, I think, was the final disappearance of the Dick Moores influence that dated back to the mid-1930s. Moores' style of lettering stayed intact, but the elaborate, busy backgrounds that Moores designed for TRACY (and which can also be seen in JIM HARDY, his first syndicated strip) are somewhat simplified and scaled back, letting the characters in the foregrounds stand out more effectively. TRACY would never be the best-drawn adventure strip, but it was well on its way to becoming the most visually distinctive, save perhaps LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE. (Speaking of which, guess whose likeness in doll form can be seen in Binnie's bed in the strip of 12/28/39?)

In another year or so, Gould will hit his full stride. In this volume he has nearly reached his peak as an illustrator, but it will take a while longer for his storytelling to catch up with his expressionist vision. In a few months though, the writing and the draftsmanship mesh to create a long run of classics that only Harold Gray and Hal Foster can claim to equal. This whole series is a dream come true for fans of the newspaper comic strip. Watching the development of a master through the daily creation of a viable world is unparalleled pleasure.

I wrote in my review of volume 5 that it had my favorite stories yet. Now I have to say the volume 6 features my least favorite. The late 1930s and early 1940s represent a transitional period for Chester Gould as the era of the classic gangster was waning in the United States and Gould responded by creating villains that were less realistic and more bizarre. Unfortunately too many of the villains came off as ridiculous. Yogee Yamma was some kind of Indian mystic with a gas that could control people. Deafy Sweetfellow ran a highly organized gang of bicycle thieves. And when I say bicycles I'm referring to children's bicycles. His gang murder commits murder and attempted murder all to steal and resell kids bikes. Ouch. However, the worst had to be the international arms dealer, Black Pearl. Not only did this story not make a bit of sense but it showed acutely that Chester Gould was making the stories up as he went because the plot was all over the place. In the first story there is an obvious mistake that again points to Gould not having planned out stories in advance. A crook who tries to marry Tess Trueheart to gain an inheritance is pegged as a murderer because he's a lefty. The problem is that the smooth talking crook is actually shown throwing a ball with his right hand at the beginning of the story. After revealing that the crime was committed by a lefty the criminal is shown using his left hand but it's clear that Gould had not planned on the story taking the turn it did. If someone read these stories in daily installments as intended these mistakes would not be obvious but reading entire storylines in one sitting makes the mistake clearly evident. In the Black Pearl story Dick Tracy stumbles upon the dangerous female when a bomb explodes that inexplicably contains unique and easily traceable shrapnel. Once Dick Tracy finds Black Pearl the bomb is completely forgotten about and no explanation is given as to its purpose. In one of Gould's worst stories Tess seems to completely lose her mind following her near disastrous marriage to a murderer and ends up dating a different man who openly and unapologetically tried to kill her. As if the bicycle thieves weren't low rent enough this guy steals dogs and ransoms them back. Tess finds out and starts returning the dogs rather than go to the police and ends up getting into a lethal fight with the

guy where she ends up accused of his murder. This story is poorly done on a ton of levels but mostly it makes Tess look like a complete moron and nutjob although she's never been particularly brilliant in the past. Modern readers will cringe seeing Tess prostrating herself before Dick Tracy begging for him to accept her back. Painful. I assume this volume is an aberration and better stories are coming and certainly better stories have been produced in the past. I definitely did not hate this volume but it just is not up to the storytelling standards of previous volumes. I get the feeling Gould was doing a lot of experimenting with stories during this period and a lot of his experiments were ending in failure. On the other hand the art continues to improve. This volume has not put me off the least in wanting to read all the Dick Tracy stories but if you're wanting to read some Dick Tracy and you're not collecting them in order this is one you might want to put lower on your must have list.

This item was received on time and in excellent condition from the vendor. Great period stories and vocabulary. I am enjoying the progression of Chester Gould's story telling and illustrating. Great series worth the price.

Action, action, action! Vivid blacks so well printed they glisten on the page. An unceasing string of characters with distinct facial characteristics (even the "extras"). And the uncanny ability to imagine what someone flying through a plate glass window, or someone on fire, or in a storm looks like well enough to draw it! Dick Tracy has it all!

This volume of The Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy reprints all the strips from July 5, 1939 to January 22, 1941. Dick Tracy was a great comic strip, but these strips are from right before Tracy's "golden" years with the great grotesque villains. They are very good in their own right, but the best was yet to come.

I have not read this volume yet. I know it will be as good as all of the previous volumes.

Very good, happy with everything.

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