

Re: Early 60s Hanna Barbera -- were they being set up?

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- *From:* "Howard Fein" <hfein@xxxxxxxxxxx>
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Joseph Nebus wrote:

Another little thought inspired by watching rather more of the funny-animal early 60s Hanna Barbera cartoons:

Alfy Gator, the perpetually hungry and ever-foiled alligator who hoped to eat Yakky Doodle; and Bigelow the Mouse, the strong and undeterred by common sense mouse who'll protect someone within an inch of their lives: they each got several cartoons, in rather prominent roles, Alfy even opening and closing some of his appearances, to the point the nominal title characters were put in supporting roles.

Were these meant to be tryouts to see if the characters could support their own spinoff cartoons, along the way that Snagglepuss got started as a Quick Draw McGraw villain, and Hardy Har-Har got started in guest appearances on ... uh ... Huckleberry Hound?

The Hardy prototype was in a Snooper & Blabber short "Laughing Guess". Not having seen it in many years, I recall that the character was designed similar to Hardy (including hang-dog look), but without porkpie hat and the gift of speech.

One would say that a Hokey Wolf prototype was in a couple of Yogi Bear shorts that were fairy tale parodies. The design was definitely different, but the personality was there (verbose, pushy) and Daws Butler had already established his 'Phil Silvers' voice that seamlessly segued into Hokey a year or so later.

It's true that Yakky and Snagglepuss prototypes made numerous appearances in the earlier series before Hanna and Barbera deemed them strong enough to strike out on their own. Alfy was in four YAKKY episodes- one pitted against Fibber; one against Chopper; two on his own. Bigelow guested in four different series: Yakky, Snagglepuss, Augie and Loopy DeLoop. For whatever the reason, Hanna and Barbera felt the duck and lion would make more viable starring characters than the

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alligator or mouse. More story opportunities, perhaps. After having viewed every Yakky episode on the COMPLETE YOGI BEAR DVD, I couldn't help notice the variety of storylines. It wasn't ALWAYS Chopper saving the little feller from Fibber Fox. Some episodes didn't feature Chopper, Fibber or Alfy.

You may recall a 'monster family' that was in three Snooper & Blabber and one Snagglepuss episode. The parents looked very similar to Charles Addams creations (Dad being voiced by Daws Butler in his standard Peter Lorre imitation), with a croaking toddler patterned basically as a mini-Frankenstein monster. After the Addams hit prime time in 1964, the Flintstones got next-door neighbors in the Gruesomes for a mere two episodes. Weirdly and Creepella bore a strong resemblance not only to Gomez and Morticia but the earlier H-B prototypes. Weird continued the tradition of speaking like Peter Lorre (in this case, by Howard Morris).

The FLINSTONES Season 5 DVD has a very interesting featurette hosted by Earl Kress that details the genesis of Hanna-Barbera's ongoing efforts throughout the first half of the sixties to make series stars out of these monstrous characters. Unknown to me was that between their last appearance with Snoop & Blab in 1961 and their heralded arrival on the FLINTSTONES, a prime-time series featuring these characters was pitched to ABC-- which aired the other H-B prime-timers 'STONES, TOP CAT and JETSONS. As with most series concepts it didn't make it to the air-- even as a pilot. Vestiges were the two FLINTSTONE episodes.

(It's funny how while the Rubbles lived next door for years, there was constant turnover in the house on the OTHER side. Alvy Brickrock, the Gruesomes and Loudrock moved in and quickly disappeared after their respective episodes. Must be something about Fred that only Barney and Betty can live next door to him--)

H-B's obsession with friendly comedic monsters didn't end there. The Gruesomes guested in one episode of the 1971 Saturday AM spinoff PEBBLES & BAMB--BAMB. Similarly designed characters were presented as members of the Really Rottens in 1977--78's LAFF--A--LYMPICS, albeit renamed the Creepleys. Dad's Peter Lorre voice remained, for some reason shared in various episodes by Casey Kasem, Don Messick and Frank Welker.

In 1980, NBC tried a prime-time revival of the FLINTSTONES, with an hourlong special concerning the Frankenstones, yet another set of next-door neighbors. Frank was drawn much like the Frankenstein monster and had a suitable Bela Lugosi voice courtesy of John Stephenson. The prime-time revival lasted only for a few more original half-hours, but NBC retained the Bedrock universe in all-new material on Saturday AM. The Frankenstones had their own component of the FLINTSTONES COMEDY SHOW, and often appeared on others. Curiously, Frank was now voiced by the legendarily prissy Charles Nelson Reilly to humorously incongruous effect. (Maybe Stephenson wore out his welcome after so many years at

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the studio?) An interesting sidenote is that son Freaky was voiced by Paul Reubens right about the time he was establishing his notorious Pee-Wee Herman persona. Aside from a lack of his trademark chortle, Reubens' voice is immediately recognizable.

Even the NAME of a character can endure from one-shot to series, even if the character is different. One Touche Turtle episode has them pursuing 'Ricochet Rabbit' (whose name sounds very bizarre uttered by Bill Thompson), who bears no resemblance to the later sheriff whatsoever: stark naked, no "Ping-Ping-PINNNG" (or any other speech)-- just the requisite speed. When the MAGILLA GORILLA SHOW and its supporting segments were being developed, it's easy to imagine Alex Lovy, Tony Benedict, Warren Foster or someone else saying "Didn't we have a 'Ricochet Rabbit' in some cartoon once? That would make a funny name for the sheriff."

In hindsight, one could speculate that 1968's WACKY RACES may have been viewed as a springboard for spinoffs. With ten race cars and two villains, it must've been hard for the writers to really 'flesh out' the many characters. If one views the episodes even while blocking out thoughts of the two spinoffs that did ensue, it's easy to notice that the Anthill Mob (usually having to disguise themselves to escape pursuing authorities or to thwart Dastardly) and Penel