

WALT DISNEY'S
MICKEY MOUSE
BY FLOYD GOTTFREDSON

VOLUME ONE

Gulliver Sullivans

"CALL OF THE WILD"



Series Editors: David Gerstein and Gary Groth

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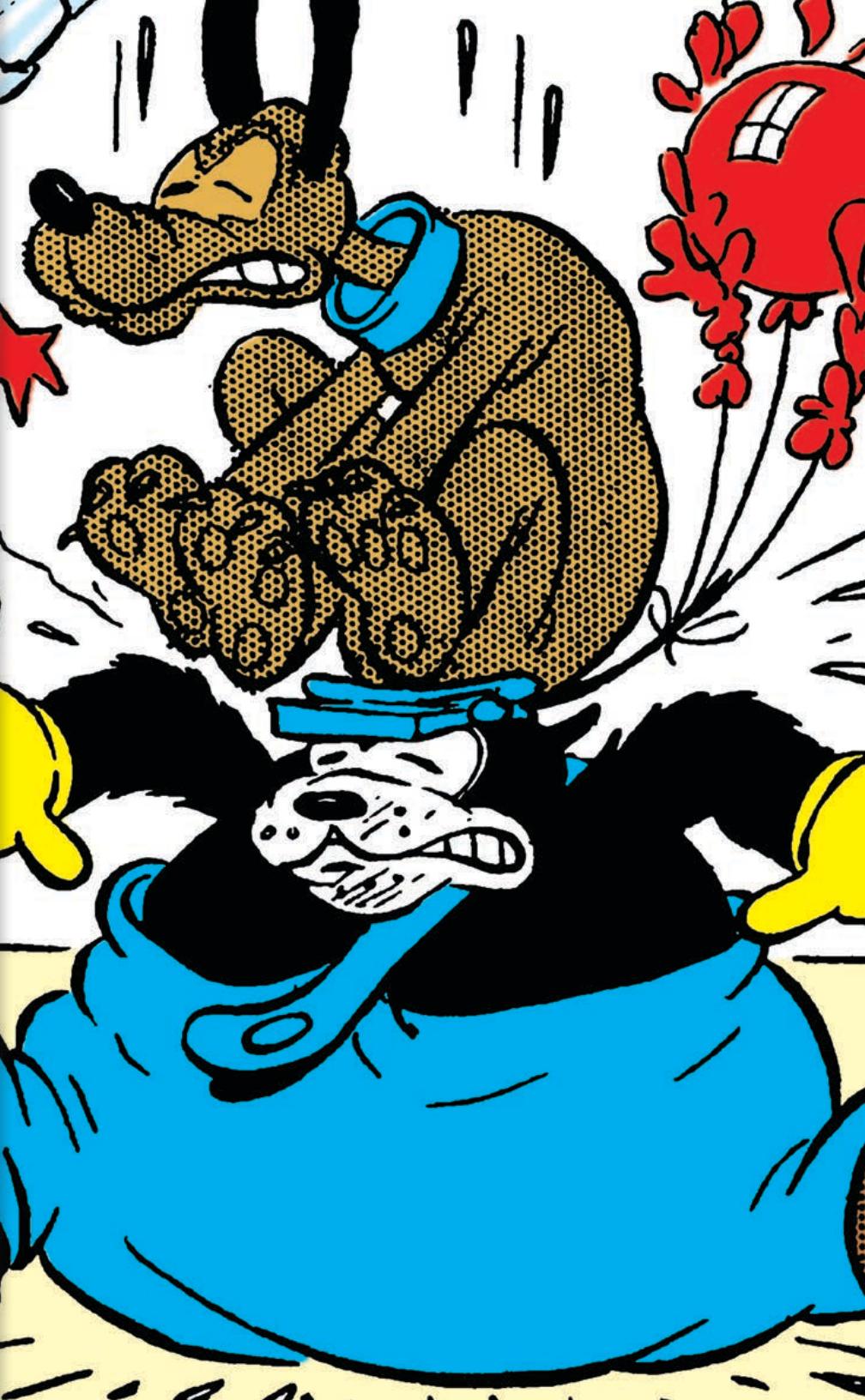
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**DAN THE DOGCATCHER
AND
MICKEY'S NEPHEWS
AND
GAG STRIPS**

JULY 31, 1932

-
JANUARY 22, 1933





THE PETER PRINCIPLE

Floyd Gottfredson was not one to rest on his laurels. After mastering several kinds of Sunday gag strip storytelling, how else could he improve his new feature? Perhaps by introducing continuity—though not yet the semi-serious, high adventure continuity that characterized the *Mickey* daily strip.

Gottfredson's first Sunday serials were firmly comedies, often loosely inspired by concurrent cartoons. But this didn't make them lightweight in Gottfredson's mind. He evidently took care to make sure that they integrated sensibly with the continuity of their daily counterparts.

What did this mean in practice? It meant that when *The Mad Dog* (1932), a new Mickey cartoon short, featured a comedy storyline that begged for Sunday adaptation, Gottfredson hopped right to it. Action-packed battles between Mickey and a misunderstanding dogcatcher—as shown in the cartoon—were obvious fodder for a long-form, multi-week scenario. But there was a problem: in the cartoon, this dogcatcher—the voice of law and order—was “played” by Pegleg Pete. And in Gottfredson’s ongoing daily strip serials, Pegleg Pete was consistently a crook: “the most perennial heavy of all time,” as Gottfredson described him.¹ Could *Mickey Mouse* comics fans make sense of seeing Pete as a lawbreaker during the week, and a law-and-order city official on Sunday? Perhaps not. So how to avoid confusion?

Gottfredson’s “out” seems to have been the fact that in *The Mad Dog* cartoon, Pete’s physique differed slightly from past incarnations. *Dog* gave Pete a fatter figure and more slovenly demeanor than in earlier *Mickey* shorts—and earlier Gottfredson strips. At the time, Gottfredson drew Pete as a top-heavy, barrel-chested strongman, not a fat slob; and Gottfredson decided to continue that way for the moment. The *Mad Dog* slob design could instead become a somewhat Petelike, but ultimately different peg-legged cat. Exit Pete; enter “Dan the Dogcatcher,” fat feline lawman, who starred in both the eponymous 1932 Sunday story and the short 1933 daily serial, “Pluto and the Dogcatcher” (see Volume 2 of our daily strip series).

Of course, time wounds all heels. Several cartoons later, it became clear that Disney’s Animation Department would be *keeping* the animated Pete in his new fatter form. What to do now? Gottfredson’s cast numbered a Pete who no longer looked like the cartoon Pete—and a Dan who did.

The answer was to blubber up the comics Pete, which Gottfredson did in 1934, and surreptitiously remove Dan from the cast for awhile. In much later 1940s strips, the catfaced dogcatcher eventually reappeared, fat figure and all. But in a nod to perfectionism, Dan now had gray fur or a shaven chin, just to make sure readers still knew he wasn’t Pete.

Continuity makes perfect. [DG]

¹ Floyd Gottfredson, *Walt Disney Best Comics—Mickey Mouse* (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1978), p. 12.

