

= Dream of the Rarebit Fiend =

Dream of the Rarebit Fiend is a newspaper comic strip by American cartoonist Winsor McCay , begun September 10 , 1904 . It was McCay 's second successful strip , after Little Sammy Sneeze secured him a position on the cartoon staff of the New York Herald . Rarebit Fiend appeared in the Evening Telegram , a newspaper published by the Herald . For contractual reasons , McCay signed the strip with the pen name " Silas " .

The strip had no continuity or recurring characters , but a recurring theme : a character has a nightmare or other bizarre dream , usually after eating a Welsh rarebit ? a cheese @-@ on @-@ toast dish . The character awakens in the closing panel and regrets having eaten the rarebit . The dreams often reveal unflattering sides of the dreamers ' psyches ? their phobias , hypocrisies , discomforts , and dark fantasies . This was in great contrast to the colorful fantasy dreams in McCay 's signature strip Little Nemo , which he began in 1905 . Whereas children were Nemo 's target audience , McCay aimed Rarebit Fiend at adults .

The popularity of Rarebit Fiend and Nemo led to McCay gaining a contract in 1911 with William Randolph Hearst 's chain of newspapers with a star 's salary . His editor there thought McCay 's highly skilled cartooning " serious , not funny " , and had McCay give up comic strips in favor of editorial cartooning . McCay revived the strip in 1923 ? 1925 as Rarebit Reveries , of which few examples have survived .

A number of film adaptations of Rarebit Fiend have appeared , including Edwin S. Porter 's live @-@ action Dream of a Rarebit Fiend in 1906 , and four pioneering animated films by McCay himself : How a Mosquito Operates in 1912 , and 1921 's Bug Vaudeville , The Pet , and The Flying House . The strip is said to have anticipated a number of recurring ideas in popular culture , such as marauding giant beasts damaging cities ? as later popularized by King Kong and Godzilla .

= = Overview = =

Winsor McCay first produced Dream of the Rarebit Fiend in 1904 , a year before the dream romps of his Little Nemo and a full generation before the artists of the Surrealist movement unleashed the subconscious on the public . The strip had no recurring characters , but followed a theme : after eating a Welsh rarebit , the day 's protagonist would be subject to the darker side of his or her psyche . Typically , the strip would begin with an absurd situation which became more and more absurd until the Fiend ? the dreamer ? awakened in the final panel . Some situations were merely silly : elephants falling from the ceiling , or two women 's mink coats having a fight . Other times , they could be more disturbing : characters finding themselves dismembered , buried alive from a first @-@ person perspective or a child 's mother being planted and becoming a tree . In some strips the Fiend was a spectator watching fantastic or horrible things happen to someone close to himself . The protagonists are typically urban bourgeoisie whom McCay subjects to fears of public humiliation or loss of social esteem or respectability .

Rarebit Fiend was the only one of McCay 's strips in which he approached social or political topics , or dealt with contemporary life . He addressed religious leaders , alcoholism , homelessness , political speeches , suicide , fashion , and other topics , whereas his other strips were fantasy or had seemingly vague , timeless backgrounds . The strip referenced contemporary events such as the 1904 election of Theodore Roosevelt ; the recently built Flatiron Building ( 1902 ) and St. Regis Hotel ( 1904 ) in New York City ; and the Russo @-@ Japanese War of 1904 ? 05 .

The rarebit is a dish typically made with rich cheese thinned with ale and served melted on toast with cayenne and mustard mixed in . McCay used it despite its innocuousness ? cultural theorist Scott Bukatman states rarebit was not the sort of dish a person would associate with having nightmares .

McCay 's most famous character , Little Nemo , first appeared in the first year of Dream of the Rarebit Fiend , on December 10 , 1904 . In 1905 , McCay had Nemo appear in his own strip in the New York Herald . In comparison to Little Nemo , the artwork of the Rarebit Fiend strips had minimal backgrounds , and were usually done from a static perspective with the main characters often in a

fixed position . The content of Rarebit Fiend played a much bigger role than it did in Little Nemo , whose focus was on beautiful visuals . The stories were self @-@ contained , whereas the Nemo story continued from week to week . The dreams in Nemo were aimed at children , but Rarebit Fiend had adult @-@ oriented subjects ? social embarrassment , fear of dying or going insane , and so on . Some of the dreams in both strips were wish @-@ fulfillment fantasies .

Unlike most comic strips from the time , Rarebit Fiend is not humorous or escapist . The strips highlight readers ' darker selves ? hypocrisies , deceitfulness , phobias , and discomfort . They offer often biting social commentary and show marital , money , and religious matters in a negative light . McCay had an interest in pushing formal boundaries , and playful self @-@ referentiality plays a role in many of the strips ; characters sometimes refer to McCay 's alter @-@ ego " Silas " or to the reader . Though frequent in Rarebit Fiend , this self @-@ referentiality does not appear in McCay 's other strips .

In contrast to the skilled artwork , the lettering in the dialogue balloons , as in McCay 's other work , was awkward and could approach illegibility , especially in reproductions , where the artwork has normally been greatly reduced in size . McCay seemed to show little regard for the dialogue balloons , their content , and their placement in the composition . They tend to contain repetitive monologues expressing the increasing distress of the speakers , and show that McCay 's gift was in the visual and not the verbal .

= = Background = =

McCay began cartooning in the 1890s and had a prolific output published in magazines and newspapers . He became known for his ability to draw quickly , a talent he often employed during chalk talks on the vaudeville stage ( alongside the likes of Harry Houdini and W. C. Fields ) . Before Dream of the Rarebit Fiend and Little Nemo , McCay had shown an interest the topic of dreams . Some of his earlier work , numbering at least 10 regular comic strips , had titles such as Daydreams and It Was Only a Dream . McCay 's were not the first dream @-@ themed comic strips to be published : McCay 's employer , the New York Herald , had printed at least three such strips , beginning with Charles Reese 's Drowsy Dick in 1902 . Psychoanalysis and dream interpretation had begun to enter the public consciousness with the 1900 publication of Freud 's Interpretation of Dreams .

McCay first proposed a strip in which a tobacco fiend finds himself at the North Pole , unable to secure a cigarette and a light . In the last panel he awakens to find it a dream . The Herald asked McCay to make a series of the strip , but with a Welsh rarebit theme instead of tobacco , and McCay complied . The strip appeared in a Herald subsidiary , the Evening Telegram , and the Herald 's editor required McCay to use a pseudonym for the strip work to keep it separate from his other work . McCay signed Rarebit Fiend strips as " Silas " , a name he borrowing from a neighborhood garbage cart driver . After switching to William Randolph Hearst 's New York American newspaper in 1911 , McCay dropped the " Silas " pseudonym and signed his work with his own name .

McCay married in 1891 , and the marriage was not a happy one . According to McCay biographer John Canemaker , McCay depicts marriage in Rarebit Fiend as " a minefield of hypocrisy , jealousy , and misunderstanding " . McCay was a short man , barely five feet ( 150 cm ) tall . He was dominated by his wife , who stood as tall as he was . Images of small , shy men dominated by their taller or fatter wives appear frequently in Rarebit Fiend . Gigantism , with characters overwhelmed by rapidly growing elements , was another recurring motif , perhaps as compensation on McCay 's part for a sense of smallness . McCay 's brother Arthur had been put in a mental asylum , which may have inspired the themes of insanity that are common in the strip .

Despite the strip 's bleak view , McCay 's work was so popular that William Randolph Hearst hired him in 1911 with a star 's salary . Hearst editor Arthur Brisbane deemed McCay 's work " serious , not funny " , and had the cartoonist give up his comic strips ( including Rarebit Fiend and Nemo ) to work full @-@ time illustrating editorials .

= = = Influences = = =

Scholars such as Claude Moliterni , Ulrich Merkl , Alfredo Castelli , and others have hunted down what they believe to have influenced McCay 's work on Dream of the Rarebit Fiend . Among the possible influences are Edward Lear 's popular The Book of Nonsense ( 1870 ) , Gelett Burgess ' The Burgess Nonsense Book ( 1901 ) , Lewis Carroll 's Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland ( 1865 ) ( particularly the pool of tears scene , which seems related to the flood of sweat in one early Rarebit Fiend strip ) , and a variety of dream cartoons and illustrations that appeared in various periodicals McCay was likely familiar with .

The most probable immediate influence on the strip was Welsh Rarebit Tales ( 1902 ) by Harle Oren Cummins . Cummins stated he drew inspiration for this collection of 15 science fiction stories from nightmares brought on by eating Welsh rarebit and lobster ? making further likely the influence , as several post @-@ Herald strips from 1911 and 1912 were titled Dream of a Lobster Fiend .

Other influences that have been established include H. G. Wells , L. Frank Baum 's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz ( 1900 ) , J. M. Barrie 's Peter Pan ( 1904 ) , Carlo Collodi 's Pinocchio ( 1883 ) , Arthur Conan Doyle 's Sherlock Holmes and the Engineer 's Thumb ( 1889 ) , Henryk Sienkiewicz 's Quo Vadis ( 1896 ) , Robert Louis Stevenson 's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde ( 1886 ) , and Mark Twain 's The 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 Pound Bank @-@ Note ( 1893 ) .

McCay never acknowledged the influence of Sigmund Freud , whose The Interpretation of Dreams had been published in 1900 . According to McCay scholar Ulrich Merkl , it is likely McCay was aware of the Viennese doctor 's theories , as they had been widely reported and talked about in the New York newspaper world McCay was a part of .

= = Publishing history = =

Dream of the Rarebit Fiend was McCay 's longest running comic strip . He made over 300 more Rarebit Fiend episodes than he made of the more famous Little Nemo . The first strip appeared on September 10 , 1904 , in the New York Herald , a few months after the first appearance of McCay 's Little Sammy Sneeze . It was McCay 's second successful newspaper strip , after Sammy Sneeze landed him a position on the cartooning staff of the Herald . Dream of the Rarebit Fiend ran in the Evening Telegram , which was published by the Herald at the time .

The strip appeared two to three times a week . It typically filled a quarter of a newspaper page on weekdays , and half a page on Saturdays . The strip normally appeared in black @-@ and @-@ white , but 29 of the strips appeared in color throughout 1913 , run weekly in the Herald . These were strips drawn between 1908 and 1911 which the Evening Telegram had neglected to print . McCay sometimes encouraged readers to submit dream ideas , to be sent care of the Herald to " Silas the Dreamer " . McCay acknowledged the submissions he accepted with a " thanks to ... " on the strip beside his own signature . Among those credited were science fiction pioneer Hugo Gernsback .

Dream of the Rarebit Fiend initial run continued until 1911 . It appeared again in various papers between 1911 and 1913 under other titles , such as Midsummer Day Dreams and It Was Only a Dream . From 1923 to 1925 McCay revived the strip under the title Rarebit Reveries . Though signed " Robert Winsor McCay Jr . " ( McCay 's son ) , the strips appear to be in McCay 's own hand , with the possible exception of the lettering . McCay had also signed some of his animation and editorial cartoons with his son 's name . As of 2007 only seven examples of Rarebit Reveries were known , though it is nearly certain others were printed .

= = Collections = =

The earliest collection , titled Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend , appeared in 1905 from Frederick A. Stokes and reprinted 61 of the strips . Dover Publications reprinted this collection in 1973 in a 10 % enlarged edition with new introductory material . The Dover edition dropped the final strip from the original collection as it contained ethnic humor that the publisher believed would not be to the taste of a 1970s audience .

Rarebit Fiend examples appear in Daydreams and Nightmares ( Fantagraphics , 1988 / 2006 ; editor Richard Marschall ) , a collection of miscellaneous work by McCay . Checker Books reprinted many of the Rarebit Fiend strips over eight volumes of the series Winsor McCay : Early Works and in 2006 reprinted 183 of the color Saturday strips in Dream of the Rarebit Fiend : The Saturdays . The Checker books reprinted all but about 300 of the known Rarebit Fiend strips .

In July 2007 , German art historian Ulrich Merkl self @-@ published a 17 in x 12 in ( 43 @. @ 5 cm x 31 cm ) , 464 @-@ page volume called Dream of the Rarebit Fiend , reproducing 369 of the strips in full size . Previous reprintings of the strip reduced the strips to about a third of their originally published size , resulting in loss of detail and making the lettering hard to read . The size of the book made automatic binding impossible , so it had to be bound by hand . The book was limited to 1000 copies , and a DVD was included with scans of the 821 known installments of the strip , the complete text of the book , a catalogue raisonné of the strips , and a video of an example of McCay 's animation . The sources of the strips were from Merkl 's personal collection , the Cartoon Research Library of the Ohio State University , and microfilms purchased from the New York Public Library containing the complete New York Evening Journal run of the strip . Merkl has said that , on average , six hours were required per strip for scanning and restoration . The book also featured two essays by Italian comics editor Alfredo Castelli and one by Jeremy Taylor , former president of the International Association for the Study of Dreams .

= = Other media = =

McCay 's work was very popular . It was adapted to film by McCay and others , and was optioned for Broadway . A " comic opera or musical extravaganza " called Dream of the Welsh Rarebit Fiend went unproduced , though McCay signed a contract to collaborate on it with music by Max Hirschfeld and lyrics by George Henry Payne and Robert Gilbert Welch .

= = = Film = = =

= = = = Dream of a Rarebit Fiend ( 1906 ) = = = =

Film pioneer Edwin S. Porter produced a seven @-@ minute live @-@ action film adaptation called The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend in 1906 for the Edison Company . The Fiend was played by John P. Brawn , who is tormented by imps in his bed , which flies through the air and leaves him hanging from a steeple ? a scene similar to that of an early strips that ran on January 28 , 1905 .

= = = = Animation by McCay = = = =

McCay produced four hand @-@ drawn animated films based upon his Rarebit Fiend series :

= = = = = How a Mosquito Operates ( 1912 ) = = = = =

Put together in December 1911 , and released in 1912 , McCay 's second film ( also known as The Story of a Mosquito ) is one of the earliest examples of line @-@ drawn animation . A giant top @-@ hatted mosquito flies in through a window to feed on a man in bed , who tries in vain to defend himself . The mosquito drinks itself so full that it explodes . Rather than expanding like a balloon , the mosquito fills up in a naturalistic fashion according to its body structure . The idea for the film came from a Rarebit Fiend strip published on June 5 , 1909 . McCay biographer John Canemaker commends McCay for his ability to imbue the mosquito with character and a personality .

= = = = = Bug Vaudeville ( 1921 ) = = = = =

In the fantasy Bug Vaudeville , a tramp comes out from a group of meticulously drawn trees and

falls asleep , muttering that cheese cakes give him strange dreams . A series of bugs put on performance after performance against highly detailed and realistic backgrounds . The performance ends with a spider who grabs a silhouetted member of the audience and eats him whole .

The film was released in 1921 , and draws from McCay 's experiences in the worlds of the circus and vaudeville . The film is presented as a vaudeville show , though without the stage interaction McCay used in *Gertie the Dinosaur* . Film critic Andrew Sarris praised *Bug Vaudeville* as his favorite of McCay 's films for " the linear expressiveness of the drawings and the intuitive rhythm of the acts " . Sarris wrote that a director like Federico Fellini " would be honored by such insight into the ritual of performance " .

===== *The Pet* ( 1921 ) =====

*The Pet* depicts a couple who adopt a mysterious animal with an insatiable appetite . It consumes its milk , the house cat , the house 's furnishings , rat poison , and passing vehicles , including airplanes and a blimp , while growing larger and larger . As it wanders among the skyscrapers of the city a swarm of airplanes and zeppelins gather to bomb the beast .

A *Rarebit Fiend* strip from March 8 , 1905 , inspired *The Pet* , which was released in 1921 . The dark film was the last over which McCay had " total creative control " , according to McCay biographer John Canemaker . Cartoonist Stephen R. Bissette called it " the first @-@ ever ' giant monster attacking a city ' motion picture ever made " .

===== *The Flying House* ( 1921 ) =====

Against the backdrop of the rapidly urbanizing United States of the 1910s and 1920s , one house from the artificial grid of modern , planned America takes flight in the dream of a woman who has feasted on Welsh rarebit . *The Flying House* is rendered in meticulous realistic detail . The house is conventional in every respect ? until the viewer reaches the attic , where the woman 's husband is seen tending an enormous engine . He attaches a propeller to a shaft out front of the house , and tells his wife that his actions are in reaction to their landlord 's intention to evict them over nonpayment . He says he plans to " steal the house " , and the couple fly away to find a place where their landlord will never find them ? a swamp , the ocean , even the moon , where they are chased off by the Man in the Moon with a flyswatter . The film self @-@ consciously directs the viewers to notice the quality and accuracy of the animation when the house takes off into space , calling attention to the " remarkable piece of animation which follows " , accurately showing the revolutions of the Earth and Moon and the " beautiful constellation of Orion " . The woman becomes anxious that they will become " lost in the sky " . In the end , the house is struck by a military rocket , bringing the nightmare to an end as the woman awakens in her bed .

The film was released in 1921 , and was credited to McCay 's son Robert , though Canemaker states it is unlikely the elder McCay was not involved . A 1921 *New York Times* review found the film " interesting because of its excellent workmanship and fantastic character " though it was " not as brightly humorous " as it could be . Film critic Richard Eder contrasted the film 's realistic nightmarishness with the more innocent qualities that came to be associated with American cartoons . In 2011 , animator Bill Plympton restored the film , using Kickstarter to fund the project . He had the film colorized , and actors Matthew Modine and Patricia Clarkson provided voices .

===== *Music* =====

The Edison Military Band performed a piece called " *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend* " on an Edison cylinder ( Edison 9585 ) in 1907 , written by Thomas W. Thurban . The music was likely inspired by Porter 's 1906 film , and may have been intended to accompany it . The piece was written for an 18 ? 20 @-@ piece band , and has been recorded numerous times .

===== *Legacy* =====

Rarebit Fiend set up a formula which McCay was to use in the better @-@ known Little Nemo . A large number of the Nemo strips used ideas recycled from Rarebit Fiend , such as the October 31 , 1907 , " walking bed " episode , which was used in the July 26 , 1908 , episode of Little Nemo .

Comics scholar Jeet Heer called Rarebit Fiend " perhaps the most bizarre newspaper feature in American history " . Merkl notes examples of the strip presaging ideas and scenes in later media : the strip includes scenes in which a man kicks a dog , slaps a woman , beats a blind man , and throws another woman out a window , as in Luis Buñuel 's film L 'Age d 'Or ( 1930 ) ; and giant characters let loose in the big city , climbing and damaging buildings and subway trains , as in King Kong ( 1933 ) . Merkl compares the strip for March 9 , 1907 , in which a child 's bedroom becomes a lion @-@ infested jungle , to the 1950 Ray Bradbury story " The Veldt " , and the strip from September 26 , 1908 , depicting a stretchable face , to Salvador Dalí 's surrealist painting Soft self @-@ portrait with fried bacon ( 1941 ) and the cosmetic surgeries in Terry Gilliam 's Brazil . Stephen R. Bissette compares a strip featuring elevators flying from buildings and other scenes to the 2005 Tim Burton take on Charlie and the Chocolate Factory .

The strip was most likely an influence on episodes of Frank King 's early comic strip Bobby Make @-@ Believe . Many scholars believe that Carl Barks , a professed fan of Little Nemo , was likely exposed to Rarebit Fiend , which appeared in The San Francisco Examiner , which Barks read growing up . Several episodes of Barks 's Donald Duck strips appear to have taken their subjects from Rarebit Fiend . Many scenes from animated films by Tex Avery from between 1943 and 1954 are said to show clearly a Rarebit Fiend influence . Science fiction illustrator Frank R. Paul painted a number of pulp magazine covers influenced by Rarebit Fiend .

Art Spiegelman paid parodic homage to Rarebit Fiend in his 1974 strip " Real Dream " . In 1991 , Rick Veitch began producing short comics based on his dreams . Beginning in 1994 , he put out twenty @-@ one issues of Roarin ' Rick 's Rare Bit Fiends from his own King Hell Press .

===== Books =====

===== Newspapers =====

===== Web =====

===== Strips =====

Complete scans from the Ulrich Merkl DVD at The Internet Archive  
Archives of Dream of the Rarebit Fiend at Comic Strip Library

===== Other =====

The Burgess Nonsense Book ( 1901 ) by Gelett Burgess at the Internet Archive  
Welsh Rarebit Tales ( 1902 ) by Harle Oren Cummins at the Internet Archive