



Popeye, Vol. 1: I Yam What I Yam!

E.C. Segar

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Fantagraphics' *Popeye* series will collect the complete run of Segar's *Thimble Theatre* comic strip (dailies and color Sundays) featuring Popeye, re-establishing Segar as one of the first rank of cartoonists who have elevated the comic strip to art. He was the most popular cartoonist of his day, his sense of humor coming straight out of Mark Twain, who also balanced exaggerated tall tales and a perfect ear for everyday speech with dark themes that undercut his laugh-out-loud stories. The series will consist of six volumes released annual through 2011.

In this first volume, covering 1928-1930, Popeye's initial courtship of Olive Oyl takes center stage while Olive's brother Castor Oyl discovers the mysterious Whiffle Hen. Also, the entire cast meets the Sea Hag for the first time in their pursuit of the "Mystery House" (Popeye's first extended daily narrative), and Castor Oyl attempts to turn Popeye into a boxing champion in a series of hilarious Sunday strips. These strips are masterpieces of comic invention. Popeye's omnipotence pre-figures the rise of superheroes in the 1930s and 1940s, though Popeye is a much more sympathetic character, and his very name announces his vibrant personality. His mangled English pulsed with the vital spirit of immigrant America, its rhythm poetic in its own vulgar way: "I yam what I yam and tha's all I yam."

2007 Eisner Award nominee: Best Archival Collection/Project: Strips; and Best Publication Design (Jacob Covey); 2007 Harvey Award nominee: Best Domestic Reprint Project; Special Award for Excellence in Presentation; Winner: *HOW* Magazine Design Merit Awards: Covers

Popeye, Vol. 1: I Yam What I Yam! Details

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Author : E.C. Segar

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Fabio says

Believe it or not, Segar's Popeye strips from the 30's are the most fun, intelligent, irreverent, original and inventive rich comics ever made. The humour is still so fresh and effective as if they were sketched today, and despite the repetitions you get into - due to the daily strip format - you can go on reading and laughing for hours as they are so hard to put down. I was lucky to read them as a child, and recently made the happy finding of a full reprint from the original strips in my dad's comics collection.

Joe says

Because of life work married life family it took me a couple years to finish this, but this is the best comic strip I've ever read in my life and I've read a lot of comic books and strips. Pure comedy if this book doesn't make you laugh it's because you find nothing funny. This is Popeye from the beginning, everything you thought you knew about Popeye from the cartoons if you've never read this book if you've never read these early strips everything you thought you knew about popeye was wrong! These are the adventures of an uneducated unsophisticated gambling drinking fighting superstitious man! I would say more but I don't know how to do that without including spoilers let's just say there's a lot of comedy in this book some good drama in the beginnings of a budding romance that would last all the way to the 21st-century and I hope beyond.

Michael says

I've been picking through this volume for a while now. The large dimensions made it impossible to read while commuting, as I typically do, so I've been reading four pages here and five pages there for the last month. I have to admit that some of the daily serials read better that way - it breaks up some of the recapping.

Despite the occasional redundancy, this book collects probably the best comics I've read all year. Here's the quick backstory - for several years prior to the stories in this volume, cartoonist E.C. Segar worked on a strip called *Thimble Theatre*. From what I've read about the strip (and the few early strips I've been able to read myself), the early strips weren't so great, but Segar eventually got the hang of the comic strip form and started to steadily improve. 1932, the regular cast (Castor Oyl, his sister Olive, her beau Ham Gravy, and the Oil parents) were joined by a one-eyed, pipe-smoking, big-forearmed sailor.

Actually, due to the daily continuity, Popeye doesn't even appear until page 28 of this volume! That's when Castor gets the bright idea to take his lucky wiffle hen to a foreign casino, which requires the aid of a veteran seaman!

The daily continuities are tremendous fun, especially after Popeye joins the cast. The chemistry between Popeye and Castor is terrific, as they quickly become adventuring buddies (bickering buddies, but pals nonetheless - Popeye doesn't take a dozen bullets for just any joe off the street!) who often run afoul of various duplicitous foes. The serials are quickly paced, witty and full of great twists. Nothing ever gets too

serious. Just when the bad guys start to seem threatening, Popeye tells them, "You've got a chin I loves ta touch," while brandishing his fist!

As great as the dailies are, the Sundays might be better. I love the old, flat newspaper coloring. The adventure is toned down, and the humor is played up. Popeye's ability to punch out almost anything comes into play, as he kills a horse with his bare fist in one strip. He also gets into prize-fighting, but he's got no use for gloves or rules and has trouble not being disqualified!

Popeye and Olive's romance also blossoms in the Sundays, with Popeye frequently breaking his promise to never fight again. A highlight involves three men showing up at the Oyl house to court Olive, who says that she'll throw out anybody who fights. Once she departs into another room, Popeye knocks out both of the others with one swing, sticks a golf club and a vase into each of their respective hands, and lets Olive leap to her own conclusions!

It's absolutely hilarious, and full of terrific adventure, and endlessly entertaining. Highly, highly recommended.

Matthew says

I was going to limit my rating of this book to *** because of the primitive writing in spite of how much I was enjoying it, but dang it, this book does so much *in spite of* its limitations, that I just had to give it a ****. Simple as they are, the characters are all unique. Segar's 20's/30's take on the differences in the sexes is absolutely fascinating. The adventures are thrilling, the gags are hilarious. As simple as Segar's art is, he has mastered presenting story in the form of articulated violence via sequential art. The reader can follow Popeye's every punch, and the violence is uglier than in the animated shorts starring the "other" Popeye. The color strips feature a backup called *Sappo* starring John Sappo, whom I can only assume is Castor Oyl's long lost identical twin.

As with the *Donald Duck* books by Carl Barks I've been reading, Popeye of the comics is a completely different person than his animated counterpart, the big difference of course, being that in this case Popeye of the comics came first. As much as I love these, I'm a huge fan of the golden age *Popeye* shorts and I will never stop loving them. I've seen every Fleischer short, but not all of the Paramount ones. Sorry Segar Purists.

My one major complaint about this book is its presentation. Unlike with some of their other properties, I don't think Fantagraphics did a good job at all with this collection. The huge oversized hardcover is inconvenient to read in almost any position, and if you want to read it on the go, you can just forget it. I think if the strips had been turned sideways, with fewer per page, but more pages, it would have been a much better choice. Which would also have allowed the strips to be printed larger. As it is, the panels are tiny, not as easy to read, or to appreciate the detail of the art. The cover image on the other hand is plain ugly. A single color panel blown up to such a ridiculous size that it was never meant to be seen at, only exposing what would have otherwise been invisible flaws. Even the window on the front cover is pointless and unnecessary.

Gene says

Regarding racist imagery and so on: why give a whole trace of a... on political correctness? Try using a time machine and slap the damn guy for following the opinions of many people from those times, or simply burn all this goodness like the wise ole human being you are. In my opinion, Segar's representation of Popeye was the very best, without any doubt. Morals, "ettiket", you name it, it's all treated like it should be. Popeye was relentlessly naive, irrational, illiterate, shifting moods, and no character from this book is remotely close to an ideal character from a fairytale. In fact, Segar's examinations of human nature were so deep, that his Popeye should be hailed as a brilliant piece of literature - be it suspense, psychological, or maybe most adequately, farce. As one of Dickens' characters was saying, stick to the facts. Segar knew and stated that there's no world lacking discrimination, violence, hypocrisy, ignorance, or anything else. But you have a world where you can try to make it, and (a fact of highest importance) celebrate gems such as this great Fantagraphics edition.

Sara says

I was super excited to read this, having fond memories of poring over the Popeye section of a collected volume of newspaper comics as a child.

I guess, seeing as the comics are by a white guy from the 30's it shouldn't be surprising, but I was very upset to discover not too far into the volume racist caricatures of Africans. I was totally unprepared for this and haven't been able to get back into the book.

I have serious problems with the propagation of these images. I wish that Fantagraphics had at the very least felt that the racist content was worth mentioning in their introductory material.

Adam McPhee says

It's strange because we all know who Popeye is, but you can't adapt him to the contemporary world. Of another time in a way that makes it feel alien and remote. I can't explain. Most fascinating in an historical sense, to see an attempt to create a humorous fictional universe in the late twenties. It's not just Popeye, it's all those comic strips from that era.

I remember my grandfather had a small archival volume of our local newspaper from throughout the war years, and one summer I spent reading every comics page in it when I was supposed to be minding his shop. I liked Dick Tracey and other detective stories the most. I suppose it's kind of a dead art form now, the newspaper comic strip. Or it's mutated into the webcomic. All those comics gave me that weird feeling. Half of them were recognizable to me as intellectual properties that are just barely alive in our era, propped up by large entertainment conglomerates hoping they can still make some money off them before they fall into the public domain. The other half vaguely familiar from some phrase that's survived, but otherwise even more distant and remote.

Years later a friend borrowed this book from the library and I borrowed it from him and I had that weird feeling again. Slightly nauseous but not in a physical sense.

Sorry if this doesn't make any sense. I don't think I've explained myself well.

C.M. Shifflett says

The animated cartoons are watered-down variations on Popeye vs. Bluto + spinach = Olive Oyl. Here is the brilliantly inventive original Popeye, the old salt who originally appeared in 1929. Like Spike in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," he was originally intended as a throw-away supporting character. Eventually Popeye took over the strip, starring with a mad cast of characters and creatures, from Olive and Wimpy to the evil Sea Hag and Eugene the Jeep. The comic is a treasury of wild situations and deliciously absurd language.

In his very first adventure, Popeye is shot 16 times by Snork, the evil gangster. How evil is Snork? So very evil that "the pure ocean breezes become foul with evilness after passing within 11 feet of his body." Popeye lies dying: "Nothing will help me now! I've lost too much red ink!" -- but was subsequently cured by Bernice the magical Whiffle Hen (her statue now stands outside the Memorial Hospital in Chester, Illinois, E. C. Segar's home town).

Re the Sea Witch: I'm not superstiskus, but I know that if them evil spiriks crawl down yer neck an' gets into yer heart, it'll be bad, matey!

Here too is the the explanation for Popeye's insistance that "I yam what I yam." It is an ongoing protest against Castor and Olive Oyl's attempts to make him into a gentleman by giving him riding lessons and hiring a tutor to teach him proper grammar. See how lucky we are that it didn't work.

Erik Niells says

If you only know Popeye from the formulaic "Bluto beats on Popeye until Popeye eats spinach and wins the day" cartoons, you are in for a surprise. These comics strips from the late 1920s/early 1930s are where it all started. Popeye started as a secondary character well into the run of Thimble Theater, and quickly became the focus of the strip, totally eliminating long-time hero Ham Gravy and relegating Castor Oyl (Olive's brother) to sidekick.

These strips are funny, beautifully drawn, imaginative and action-packed. The Fleischer cartoons didn't even hint at the depth of this series. The sequence in which Popeye continues to go back into a fight, getting filled with more and more bullets, is hilarious. And he does it without spinach. This shows how newspaper comic strips are a pale shadow of what they were, and this series still feels funny and fresh.

Ian says

Funny and charming, although "binge-"reading something that was meant to be read daily means there's a lot of redundant exposition, so the pacing never quite gets off the ground.

Mike Jensen says

This book contains the first couple of years of Popeye comic strips from THIMBLE THEATER. The only thing wrong with them is being a bit dated and repetitious, as most humor strips were c. 1928. The Sunday pages read better today than the dailies, whose story sequences seem too long. These strips are otherwise delightful. One brief Shakespeare reference on page 33.

Stven says

In a big oversized hardback we get the first Thimble Theatre dailies and the first appearance of Popeye the Sailor, later to become a superstar of the early animated cartoon era. We also get the Sundays, but not all the way back to the beginning of Thimble Theatre -- just when they started featuring Popeye, who pretty much stayed center stage once he was on scene.

The stories and characters are amusing and told with just the right timing for newspaper strips. They are classics and have not been outmoded by anything in the modern era.

If you're a comics fan of any stripe, you should enjoy this volume.

Lizzie says

Pat and I went to a big show of comic art a few years ago that included original stuff by E.C. Segar. I liked them so much that I asked him to get me this collection, and over the years he got me all six volumes. In 1919 the strip, Thimble Theatre, featured Ham Gravy and Olive Oyl, then Olive's brother Castor was added and most of the 1920s stories were about his get rich quick schemes. When he needed to take his luck-bestowing African Whiffle Hen to an island casino in order to win millions, he hired Popeye to sail the boat, and the latter was such a colorful character that he took over the strip.

I finally started reading and it's hilarious. The humor is surreal and dry, absurd and charming. I'm loving it, and haven't forgotten that Popeye on TV cartoons was one of my first childhood crushes.

Bob Garrett says

I've always loved E.C. Segar's Popeye, but I've never read the full run. Now, thanks to a six-volume set published by Fantagraphics, I will be doing just that. This first volume reprints daily strips from 1928-1930 and Sunday strips from 1930-1931.

Not everyone knows that Popeye debuted in a strip named THIMBLE THEATER, and that THIMBLE THEATER had been running for almost ten years before the sailor even showed up. Volume One reprints the entirety of the storyline that introduced him. He doesn't appear until the bottom of Page 27, and even then, he's not quite the Popeye that modern readers would recognize (more on that in a bit.). The book requires a little patience, then, and more casual readers might prefer to start with Volume Two. Conversely, Popeye fans and scholars of early newspaper strips will likely find the evolution of THIMBLE THEATER and its

soon-to-be-main character quite fascinating.

As the volume begins, the lead is not Popeye, but rather Castor Oyl, brother of Olive (Yes, folks – Olive Oyl has actually been around longer than Popeye!). Castor is, frankly, a fairly typical old-style mild scoundrel-type character who constantly schemes to become wealthy but isn't all that good at it. He hires a sailor to take him to an island with a gambling casino, and this is where Popeye comes in.

The early Popeye proves extremely loyal to his employer, Castor, and he loves to shoot craps. In an early scene, Castor, Olive and Olive's then-boyfriend Ham Gravy gang up on Popeye, and he flees up the mast. Two days later, he socks Ham Gravy, and suddenly, he's a natural born fighter. His strength and fighting ability soon become a main characteristic. For a while, however, I actually found the character obnoxious, as he constantly goes off about his strength and how he can "lick anyone." Rather than immediately taking over the strip, Popeye soon becomes a co-star with Castor, and the two develop a bit of a "bromance." Castor's character, too, changes during the course of the volume, as he goes from a dim bulb who buys a brass mine (arguably one of this volume's best gags) to being the brain to Popeye's brawn.

I'd argue that the Sunday installments are where the Popeye we know really takes shape. The Sunday strips are a separate continuity, in the sense that the storylines are separate from those in the dailies, and Segar makes no effort to fit them into the daily stories' timeline. Regardless, it's the Sunday strips where we see Popeye courting Olive, becoming a prize fighter and becoming more noble and more of a hero (I agree with those who call him a forerunner of the modern super hero, but that's a whole 'nother discussion). The Sunday strips are placed together toward the end of the volume, separate from the daily strips, and my one quibble here is that I'd prefer to have seen them merged with the dailies and have all strips presented chronologically. That might arguably have made it more cumbersome to follow the separate storylines, but would also have made it easier for readers to understand how Popeye truly evolved.

Historical matters aside, Segar's strip is still quite charming, with a nice mix of fantasy, adventure and (sometimes cynical) humor. Despite some inconsistencies in characterization and such (much less noticeable, I'm sure, when the strips are read daily, as intended), I found Segar's work as enthralling today as audiences likely found it in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Frankly, I can't wait to start Volume Two.

Andy says

Popeye's a lot like The Three Stooges, girls don't like him much but guys go crazy over his antics. I don't know if it's the boxing or the sailor business, but whatever, there are a lot of ladies in the series: Olive Oyl, Bernice The African Whiffle Hen, The Sea Hag, and many more. Girls, don't fear the reaper!
