

A dog, a kat, a mouse, a brick: The eternal triangle



by Ira Nayman

Krazy and Ignatz
by George Herriman
Turtle Island/Eclipse Books

Religions generally tell you that the perfect romantic relationship consists of precisely two people. Artists, on the other hand, have been more interested in relationships involving three people: triangles. Although there are numerous examples, one of the most interesting involves a dog, a kat and a mouse, and revolves around a brick.

The kat is Krazy, a moony romantic of indeterminate gender with a unique patois. The mouse, Ignatz, is a lout (whose tortured speech is, nonetheless, highly poetic) whose only purpose in life is to cause trouble. Offisa Pupp, the dog, is determined to see that he does not succeed.

As for the brick . . . well, Ignatz' greatest pleasure is tossing it at the kat in the hopes that she will subsequently leave him alone.

Krazy, on the other hand, is infatuated with the mouse, and sees each brick as a love offering, to be awaited with breathless anticipation. Pupp, who stoically harbours a love for Krazy, is entrusted with the job of keeping brick and Kat apart (it is also his pleasure.)

Such is the story that George Herriman spun in the pages of William Randolph Hearst newspapers from 1915 to 1942. It is a magical story, currently being retold in a series of books from Eclipse/Turtle Island.

Each book covers a year of the strip, which only appeared in Sunday cartoon supplements.

Eight volumes are currently available; all 27 (all but seven of which are in black and white), which will contain the entire run of Krazy Kat, should be in print by 1994.

This is in keeping with the recent trend to reprint classic comic strips in large volumes (including *Lil Abner*, *Dick Tracy* and *The Spirit*).

It is a shrewd move. As comic readers get older, their tastes are becoming more sophisticated; there are a lot of people ready to discover the innovators in the graphic storytelling medium.

As explained in the introduction to the first volume, *Krazy Kat* was not popular with the public, was never a financial success and would have ended soon after it began if Hearst hadn't adored it and ordered publishers in his chain to run it (a chore they frequently found reasons to avoid). It seems ironic that a man who showed such poor judgement in other areas is responsible for the continued health of one of the most imaginative strips of this century.

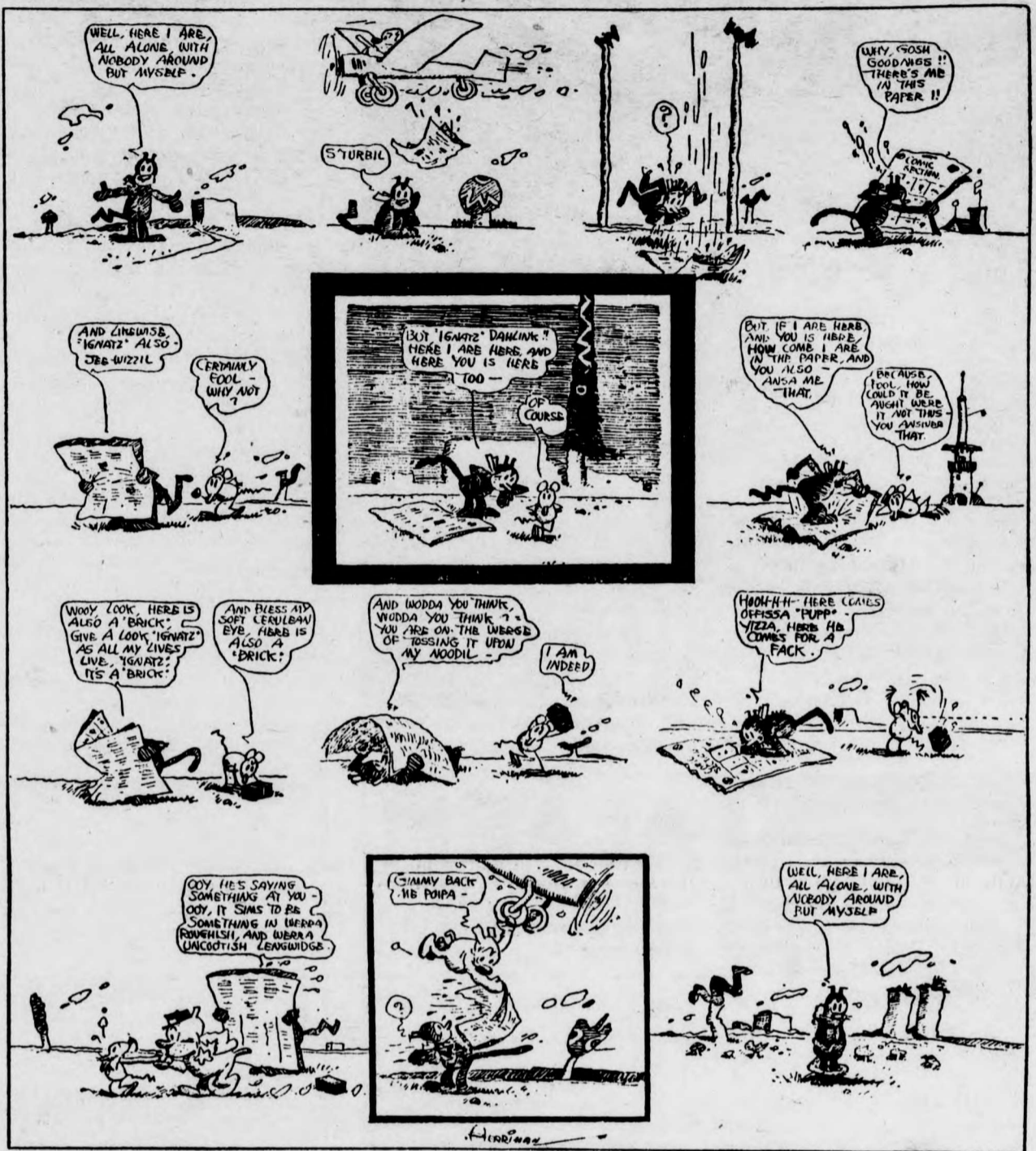
The lovers' triangle seems a thin premise on which to base almost 30 years of cartoons. Yet, Herriman always managed to find ways to keep things fresh, including infusing his strip with new scientific and metaphysical concepts and creating enough additional characters to populate a small county (Coconino, actually).

Although some references are dated (each volume contains a page devoted to explaining some of the more obscure ones), *Krazy Kat* has a timeless quality. Indeed, some of the cartoons have a post-modern playfulness to them.

Artistically, Herriman was a little rough, and he had a tendency to shift backgrounds at will.

Moreover, his animals sometimes walked on their hind legs, sometimes ran on all fours, a curious mix of anthropomorphism and realism. Touches like this make *Krazy Kat* quite quirky.

The most original, striking visions usually are.



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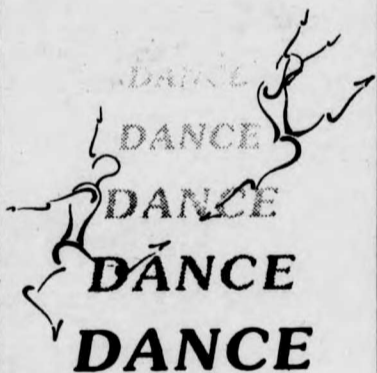
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