

Donald Duck Faces A Morals Charge In Western Europe

German Defenders Say Hero,
Albeit Bottomless, Never
Laid a Hand on Daisy

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HAMBURG, West Germany—There's a bit of a row in Western Europe over whether Donald Duck, Walt Disney's famous cartoon character, is immoral.

In Finland, the Helsinki youth committee has found that Donald's 50-year engagement to Daisy Duck, plus the uncertain parentage of Donald's nephews Huey, Dewey and Louie, plus the sailor's suit Donald wears that leaves his feathery bottom uncovered, constitute a "racy life style" inappropriate for viewing by youth. At the committee's urging, the Helsinki city council has canceled library subscriptions to Donald Duck comic books at youth club libraries.

But here in this northern German city, Hans von Storch, a 28-year-old mathematician and founder of the 100-member Donald Duck Club, calls the morals charge "ridiculous." Pointing out that Donald doesn't drink, smoke, take drugs or have sex with Daisy, Mr. von Storch says, "Donald is one of the most moral ducks in history." He has written the Finnish ambassador to West Germany demanding that the Helsinki council reverse its decision.

A Scholarly Stand

Mr. von Storch stands ready to back up his judgment with dozens of documented examples gleaned from the thousands of Donald Duck comic books published over the years. It all is part of his club's serious (at least it's serious to them) study of Donald and all the other Disney characters who live in the imaginary town of Duckburg.

Mr. von Storch says that studying Donald Duck isn't as funny as it sounds. He argues that studying Duckburg is like studying mathematics or physics in that you have an "artificial system" in which an infinite number of questions can be asked. Every question can be answered, he says, by examining the evidence in the comic books themselves. In fact, some questions can be logically answered in more than one way, Mr. von Storch maintains, prompting heated debates among club members.

Mr. von Storch started his club after reading a magazine put out by a group of Donald Duck scholars in Norway. As far as anyone knows, these are the only two groups in the world dedicated to the study of Donald Duck. Indeed, a public relations man at Disney Productions in California hadn't even heard of these.

The German club is a kind of tribute to Disney Productions illustrator Carl Barks, who for many years drew Donald and his friends in the comic books. Mr. von Storch says that Mr. Barks made Duckburg a uniquely complex and often ambitious world not unlike real life. While the German scholars will accept theories based on Donald Duck comic books not done by Mr. Barks, a Barks-based conclusion is above challenge—unless, of course, it is challenged by another Barks-based conclusion, which often happens.

Who Is Miss Duck?

To be an expert, a club member needs a complete or almost-complete set of Donald Duck comics going back to the 1930s. Since that can cost thousands of dollars, Mr. von Storch says that he and his clubmates have been given permission by a Disney representative in Germany to make copies of their books and pass them around to other members. About once every two months, Mr. von Storch publishes a magazine where members set forth their latest theories on such questions as: Are Huey, Dewey and Louie illegitimate ducks? (Answer: yes, according to a 1937 comic book where a certain "Miss Duck" sends the little ducklings to Donald, asking him to raise them like his own. The mysterious Miss Duck doesn't appear in any other comic books, the scholars say.)

The club's magazine is a model of German efficiency. One article gives a minutely detailed organizational chart showing how news of Duckburg reaches club members through the pen of Mr. Barks, then through the offices of Disney Productions, then through a printer, and so on. In the back of the magazine is an extensive list of Donald Duck comic books, giving the year and the number of each comic, for members to use as reference. (Some members hold jobs in scientific fields; others simply are Disney devotees.)

If you think you know enough about Donald Duck to be a Donald Duck club member,

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try this simple question that appeared in last month's magazine: Where does Donald always run away to when he has done something bad?

If you correctly answered Timbuktu, then arrange a flight to Munich for the next club meeting in March. It will be helpful if you speak German. Among the red-hot questions you will be trying to answer is: Where is Duckburg?

One theory places Duckburg on the East Coast near Washington, D.C. The theory is based on a story in a 30-year-old comic book. In that story Donald goes to an auction in Ohio, sneezes at the wrong moment, and ends up buying a boat. He then sails 2,400 miles to Duckburg. The problem for scholars was first to figure out how far a "duck mile" is.

They knew from another comic that 1,000 duck steps equal a duck mile, but it took a mathematical computation based on Donald's height to determine the length of a duck step. To make a long story short, they determined that Duckburg must lie either near Washington or in Florida. But since it snows in Duckburg, that left only Washington.

Or did it? Other scholars cite a story where Donald sails his boat to the South Seas without passing through the Panama Canal. This, plus the fact that Disney Productions is in California, leads some duck scholars to place Duckburg along the California coast.

One question that has duck scholars stumped is what happened to the pig who was mayor of Duckburg. For years this sneaky and corrupt Mr. Pig presided over Duckburg. But about four years ago, he was mysteriously replaced by a duck. Duck scholars theorize there was a "Duckgate" affair in Duckburg, with Mr. Pig forced to resign. But so far they have no evidence to support that theory.

Another problem for duck scholars is whether Donald has teeth. When he is happy or singing, Donald is toothless. But just let Huey, Dewey and Louie get into mischief, and Donald breaks into a toothy rage. One theory says Donald wears false teeth on such occasions. But most duck scholars don't accept that, and the search continues for the story behind Donald's teeth.

Tempers may flare at the March meeting over whether the club should procure one of Donald's feathers. Feather advocates say the feather is needed as a symbol of the club's scholarly pursuit. But opponents charge that it would be against the basic rights of ducks to defeather Donald. No one has figured out how to get one of Donald's feathers.

The March meeting also will mark the first time that the club sings its theme song. A contest has been on for several months to write a melody for a song that Donald recorded in a 1954 comic. The complete words are: "I'm laying on my stretcher, thinking about my guitar." It was a big hit in Duckburg, and the winner of the contest will have the honor of leading his friends in the first-ever human rendition of the famous song.

The duck scholars say they are working on problems that may take years to solve. Some are studying crime in Duckburg. They want to know why Donald can be jailed for littering, but the Beagle Boys can walk the

streets still wearing their masks after robbing a bank. They also want to know why Uncle Scrooge, Donald's notoriously wealthy relative, pays so little in taxes and whether that means Scrooge controls the mayor and city council.

Still other scholars are examining the nephews' recent transformation from hell-raising brats to model children. Mr. von Storch has traced the change to an incident in 1974 when Donald and his nephews had a swimming race across a river. The nephews cheated by tying Donald up in a fishing net. But then the current caught them and it looked like they would drown. They promised that if they got out of this alive, they would reform. Donald managed to save them, and now, says Mr. von Storch, Huey, Dewey and Louie are generals in the Junior Woodchucks, Duckburg's Boy Scouts.