



# Stronger Than Spinach: The Secret Appeal of the Famous Studios Popeye Cartoons

*Steve R. Bierly*

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Until now, the Famous Studios Popeye cartoons have never really been given a fair treatment by animation writers and historians. Authors have concentrated on the earliest Popeye cartoons from Fleischer Studios because those films broke new ground in technique and humor, and on the made-for-TV cartoons of the 1960s because many of them are so awful. The Famous Studios cartoons are often just mentioned in passing.

But from 1942-1957, Famous Studios, a division of Paramount Pictures, produced Popeye cartoons that have a fan-following to this day. These cartoons were shown on TV during the Baby Boomers' formative years and continue to be shown on cable and satellite channels today. In fact, they are the longest running cartoons in television syndication.

Many of the kids through the years who grew up watching the Famous Studios films have found that the films grew up with them because these cartoons were originally made to entertain adult movie-going audiences, before they were sold to TV and broadcast as kiddie fare. So, they contain adult themes, humor that uses verbal and visual double entendres, and mature sensibilities. They also, of course, are full of slapstick and are just plain fun. So, unlike some childhood joys that are left behind, the pleasure of the Famous Studios Popeye cartoons gets even stronger the older one gets.

The Secret Appeal of the Famous Studios Popeye Cartoons explores the reasons for that. It sets Famous Studios in historical context and explains why the creators working there made the films they did. Then the changes the creators made to the three main characters - Popeye, Olive Oyl, and Bluto are examined, along with Famous Studios' emphasis on sex and romance, tension and suspense and violence, and moral confusion - it's often hard to know who to root for in the cartoons, Popeye or Bluto! Amid the puns and the slapstick, there was a lot more going on. And it's the "more" which makes the films endlessly fascinating.

Eleven cartoons are explained in depth, and then all the Famous Studios cartoons are scanned to uncover the magic elements they each contain. The The Secret Appeal of the Famous Studios Popeye Cartoons ends by exploring the ways the films could have influenced other cartoons, comic books, and even feature length movies.

The Secret Appeal of the Famous Studios Popeye Cartoons is a must read for anyone who has ever enjoyed Popeye cartoons and/or is interested in the character's history. And, perhaps even more importantly, it's a lot of fun, too!

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