Little Nemo is a fictional character created by American cartoonist Winsor McCay. He originated in an early comic strip by McCay, Dream of the Rarebit Fiend, before receiving his own spin-off series, Little Nemo in Slumberland. The full-page weekly strip depicted Nemo having fantastic dreams that were interrupted by his awakening in the final panel. The strip is considered McCay’s masterpiece for its experiments with the form of the comics page, its use of color, its timing and pacing, the size and shape of its panels, perspective, architectural and other detail.

Little Nemo in Slumberland ran in the New York Herald from October 15, 1905, until July 23, 1911; the strip was renamed In the Land of Wonderful Dreams when McCay brought it to William Randolph Hearst’s New York American, where it ran from September 3, 1911 until July 26, 1914. When McCay returned to the Herald in 1924, he revived the strip, and it ran under its original title from Aug 3, 1924, until December 26, 1926, when McCay returned to Hearst.

Concept

A weekly fantasy adventure, Little Nemo in Slumberland featured the young Nemo (“No one” in Latin) who dreamed himself into wondrous predicaments from which he awoke in bed in the last panel. The first episode begins with a command from King Morpheus of Slumberland to a minion to collect Nemo. Nemo was to be the playmate of Slumberland’s Princess, but it took months of adventures before Nemo finally arrived. A green, cigar-chewing clown named Flip was determined to disturb Nemo’s sleep with a top hat emblazoned with the words “Wake Up.”

Little Nemo and Flip eventually become companions, and are joined by an African Imp whom Flip finds in the Candy Islands. The group travels far and wide, from shanty towns to Mars, to Jack Frost’s palace, to the bizarre architecture and distorted funhouse-mirror illusions of Befuddled Hall.

Music

The strip shows McCay’s understanding of dream psychology, particularly of dream fears—falling, drowning, impalement. This dream world has its own moral code, perhaps difficult to understand. Breaking it has terrible consequences, as when Nemo ignores instructions not to touch Queen Crystallette, who inhabits a cave of glass. Overcome with his infatuation, he causes her and her followers to shatter, and awakens with “the groans of the dying guardsmen still ringing in his ears”.

Although the strip began October 15, 1905 with Morpheus, ruler of Slumberland, making his first attempt to bring Little Nemo to his realm, Nemo did not get into Slumberland until March 4, 1906 and, due to Flip’s interfering, did not get to see the Princess until July 8. His dream quest is always interrupted by either him falling out of bed, or his parents forcibly waking him up.

On July 12, 1908, McCay made a major change of direction: Flip visits Nemo and tells him that he has had his uncle destroy Slumberland. (Slumberland had been dissolved before, into day, but this time due to Flip’s interfering, did not get to see the Princess until July 8. His dream quest is always interrupted by either him falling out of bed, or his parents forcibly waking him up.)

Story-arcs included Befuddle Hall, a voyage to Mars (with a well-realized Martian civilization), and a trip around the world (including a tour of New York City).

Style

McCay experimented with the form of the comics page, its timing and pacing, the size and shape of its panels, perspective, architectural and other detail. From the second installment, McCay had the panel sizes and layouts conform to the action in the strip; as a forest of mushrooms grew, so did the panels, and the panels shrank as the mushrooms collapsed on Nemo. In an early Thanksgiving episode, the focal action of a giant turkey gobbling Nemo’s house receives an enormous circular panel in the center of the page. McCay also accommodated a sense of proportion with panel size and shape, showing elephants and dragons at a scale the reader could feel in proportion to the regular characters. Narrative pacing McCay controlled through variation or repetition, as with equally-sized panels whose repeated layouts and minute differences in movement conveyed a feeling of buildup to some climactic action.

In his familiar Art Nouveau influenced style McCay outlined his characters in heavy blacks. Slumberland’s ornate architecture was reminiscent of the architecture designed by McKim, Mead & White for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, as well as Luna Park and Dreamland in Coney Island, and the Parisian Luxembourg Palace.
McCay used traditional ethnic stereotypes prominently in *Little Nemo*, as in the Irish-tempered Irishman Flip, and the nearly mute African Impie.

**Background**

In 1867-71, Richard B. Kipling published a collection of *Little Nemo* strips at a cartoon studio where McCay's son Bob had worked. In 1973, Gelman published a collection of *Little Nemo* strips in Italy. His collection of *Little Nemo* originals is preserved at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum at Ohio State University.


**Adaptations**

**Theatre**

As early as 1905, several abortive attempts were made to put *Little Nemo* on stage. In summer 1907, Marcus Klaw and A. L. Etegan announced they would put on an extravagant *Little Nemo* show for an unprecedented $100,000, with a score by Victor Herbert and lyrics by Harry B. Smith. It starred dwarf Gabriel Wuelg as Nemo, Joseph Cawthorn as Dr. Pill, and Billy B. Van as Flip. Reviews were positive, and it played out-of-town in New York. It went on the road for two seasons. McCay brought his vaudeville act to each city where *Little Nemo* played. When a flat circuit refused to let McCay perform in Boston without a new act, McCay switched to the William Morris circuit, with a $100-a-week raise. In several cities, McCay brought his son, who sat on a small throne dressed as *Little Nemo* as a primary attraction.

As part of an improved story, Cawthorn introduced a mythical creature he called a "Whiffenpoof". The word stuck with the public, and became the name of a hit song and a singing group. One reviewer of the 1908 operetta gave a paragraph of praise to the comic painting tales presented in a scene in which three hunters are trying to outdo each other with hunting stories about the "montimanjack", the "pennissippi", and the "whiffenpoof". He calls it "one of the funniest yarns ever spun" and presents it favorably to Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*. One source indicates that the dialogue in fact began as an ad lib by actor Joseph Cawthorn, covering for some kind of backstage problem during a performance. The *Word* is also referred in one of the Little Nemo comic strips published in 1909 (April 27), after being held down by nine policemen during a hysteresis crisis, Nemo's father tells the doctor: "Just keep those whiffenpoofs away, Will you?" Despite the show's failure, it's worth making it back because of its enormous expenses, and came to an end in December 1910. In mid-2012 Toronto-based theatre company Frollick performed an adaptation of the strip into *Adventures in Slumberland*, a multimedia show featuring puppets large and small and a score that included a refrain "Wake Up Little Nemo", set to the tune of *The Empty Brothers* 1993 hit "Wake Up Little Sugar*. "Teasipper Children's Theatre in Cleveland OH produced a scaled-down, "colorful and high-energy 45-minute" adaptation in 2013, *Adventures in Slumberland* by David Hassen.

In March 2017, a short, one-act adaptation of the "Little Nemo" adventures was staged at Fordham University in New York City. The play, simply entitled *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, was written by Aladdin Lee Grant Rutledge Collar, and directed by student Peter McNally. The six person cast, as well as creative team, consisted of students and alums at the university.

**Film**

McCay played an important role in the early history of animation. In 1911 he completed his first film, *Winsor McCay, the Famous Cartoonist of the N.Y. Herald and His Moving Comics* (also known as *Little Nemo*), first in theatres and then as part of his vaudeville act. McCay made the 4,000 separate hand-drawn images for the animated portion of the film. The animated portion took up four minutes of the film's total length. Photography was done at the Vitagraph Studios under the supervision of animation pioneer James Stuart Blackton. During the live-action portion of the film, McCay bet his colleagues that he could make his drawings move. He won the bet by animating his Little Nemo characters, which shaped and transform.

In 1984, Arnaud Sélignac produced and directed a film called *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1984-06). The story tells of a quest by Nemo and friends to rescue King Morpheus from the Nightmare King. Instead of Flip or the Princess, Nemo meets Alice, Dr. Pill, and Billy B. Van as the various characters, who shapeshift and transform.

A joint American-Japanese feature-length film *Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland* was released in 1989, with contributions by Ray Bradbury, Chris Columbus and Moebius, and music by the Sherman Brothers. The story tells of a quest by Nemo and friends to rescue King Morpheus from the Nightmare King. The Princess is given a name, Camille, and Nemo has a pet squirrel named Tarus.

**Theatre**

The Sarasota Opera commissioned composer Forrest Hagen and librettist J. D. McClatchy to create an opera based on *Little Nemo*. Two casts of children alternated performances when it debuted in November 2012. The dreamlike, narratorial style told of Nemo, the Princess, and their comrades trying to prevent the Emperor of Sol and the Guardian of Dawn from bringing daylight to Slumberland. Special effects and shifting backgrounds were produced with projections onto a scaffold of boxes. The work was first performed on November 10, 2012, by members of the Sarasota Opera, Sarasota Youth Opera, Sarasota Prep Chorus, The Sailor Circus and students from Booker High School.

**Other media**

In 1990, the video game *Little Nemo: The Dream Master* (known as *Pajama Hero Nemo* in Japan), a licensed game based on the 1989 film. The film would not see a US release until 1992, two years after the game's Japanese release, so the game is often thought to be a standalone adaptation of *Little Nemo*, not related to the film. An *arcade game* called simply *Nemo* was also released in 1990. Throughout the years, various Little Nemo merchandise have been produced. In 1941, Rand McNally & Co. published a *Little Nemo* children's storybook. *Little Nemo in Slumberland* in 3-D was released by Blackstone Publishing in 1987; this reprinted *Little Nemo* issues with 3-D glasses. A set of 30 Little Nemo postcards was available through Stewart Tobin & Chang in 1996. In 1999, as promotion for the 1999 animated film, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, a VHS game, illustrated storybook, and cassette soundtrack. In 2001, *Dark Horse Comics* released a *Little Nemo* statue and tin lunchbox.

**Cultural influences**

In 1911, the opera *The Hunting of the Snark* gave a paragraph of praise to the comic hunting tales presented in a scene in which three hunters are trying to outdo each other with hunting stories about the "montimanjack", the "pennissippi", and the "whiffenpoof". It's worth making it back because of its enormous expenses, and came to an end in December 1910. In mid-2012 Toronto-based theatre company Frollick performed an adaptation of the strip into *Adventures in Slumberland*, a multimedia show featuring puppets large and small and a score that included a refrain "Wake Up Little Nemo", set to the tune of *The Empty Brothers*. In March 2017, a short, one-act adaptation of the "Little Nemo" adventures was staged at Fordham University in New York City. The play, simply entitled *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, was written by Aladdin Lee Grant Rutledge Collar, and directed by student Peter McNally. The six person cast, as well as creative team, consisted of students and alums at the university.
Little Nemo itself is influenced by children stories in general, and some French comic pages in particular.

His wife was unsure how to handle the surviving pieces, so his son took on the responsibility and moved the collection into his own house.

Fellini biographer Peter Bondanella notes that they were left for future generations to rediscover and build upon.

In 2006, electronic artist Denzel used Little Nemo artwork for his album "Pennies the Day's Demise".

The strip combines characters from several of McCay's strips, including "Little Margie in Misty Magic Land", "Bobby Make-Believe", "Bobby Make-Believe in Happyland", "Bobby Make-Believe in Misty Magic Land", "Bobby Make-Believe in Happyland Again", and "Bobby Make-Believe in Happyland Yet Again".

In 2009, the Pittsburgh ToonSeum established its NEMO Award, given to notable individuals "for excellence in the cartoon arts". Recipients to date include veteran comic-book artist Jim Starlin and editorial cartoonist and artists' rights advocate John Rozum.

The strip features "Little Nemo in Slumberland" (where Nemo interacts with Neil Gaiman's characters "The Endless") and "The Sandman" (as well as "The Sandman's Book of Dreams" (pub. 1996), which features George A. Romero's short film "Seven Nights in Slumberland" (where Nemo interacts with John Carpenter's characters from "Halloween").

Little Nemo in Slumberland is also the inspiration for the video of the 1989 song "Runnin' Down a Dream" by Tom Petty.

In 2014, a new line of Little Nemo toys was launched by Kidrobot.

Little Nemo in Slumberland!

See also

References

Notes

Works cited

External links

Little Nemo and other public-domain McCay strips for download at The Comic Strip Library. Archived from the original on September 5, 2015.


Heer, Jeet (Spring 2006). "Little Nemo in Comicsland: Winsor McCay's influence on comics". Virginia Quarterly Review. archived from the original on September 6, 2015.
Little Nemo is the main fictional character in a series of weekly comic strips by Winsor McCay (1871-1934) that appeared in the New York Herald and William Randolph Hearst’s New York American newspapers from October 15, 1905 – April 23, 1911 and April 30, 1911 – July 26, 1914, respectively. The strip was first called Little Nemo in Slumberland and then In the Land of Wonderful Dreams when it changed papers. A brief revival of the original title occurred from 1924-27.

Music Scenes

Anaheim, California
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Anchorage, Alaska
Atlanta, Georgia
Arlington, Texas
Aurora, Colorado
Austin, Texas
Bakersfield, California
Baltimore, Maryland
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Billings, Montana

Popular Artists

Adele
Alicia Keys
Ariana Grande
Beyonce
Bruno Mars
Chris Brown
Coldplay
Drake
Ed Sheeran
Gorillaz
Jay-Z
Justin Bieber

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