

The Ellery Queen, Jr. Series

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Surely all connoisseurs of detective fiction are familiar with Ellery Queen, the *nom de plume* of two cousins who created the eponymous detective and presented his exploits in more than thirty novels and many short stories over a period of more than forty years. I've read one or two of these novels myself and was impressed with their complexity and skillful storytelling. So when I learned that there had been a juvenile series written by "Ellery Queen Jr.", my interest was piqued. I bought one. I was impressed, and got the others. (I did not really think that "Ellery Queen", the author of the adult mysteries, had written these juveniles, so I was not surprised to learn that these books are spinoffs, written in the style of the adult stories but not by the same authors.)

Oddly, the series is really made up of two subseries—one has nine books and the other has two. Like the Connie Blair series, the nine books are named for colors. Not only that, but colored animals. You'll see what I mean. The subseries has only two books, which feature alliterative titles, a feature common in some series of mid-twentieth century vintage. I, for one, find that a trifle irritating, but maybe that's just me.

Now, a couple of years ago I learned about an author named Samuel Duff McCoy (1882-1964), who had created a two-volume series about a boy named Jay-Jay Jenks who lives in a small town on Long Island where he has adventures and solves mysteries. I read the second of these stories, *The Mystery at Robbers' Rock* (1950), and thought that McCoy had handled it beautifully. (The first volume, *The Mystery at Pickle Point* [1948], is the most elusive book I've ever searched for, and to date I've never found even a whiff of it.) So when I discovered that McCoy had written six of the color volumes, numbers one and four through eight, I expected good things, and I was duly rewarded.

McCoy was a journalist, and even won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism in 1924. In 1922, he had investigated, documented, and exposed a pattern of abuse of prisoners in the Florida penal system, which brought about a major revision of the system by the Florida State legislature. His work showed a consistent pattern of superb, thorough journalism in addressing timely topics like the inroads of German propaganda into the United States in the 1930s. McCoy was clearly a journalist of admirable ethics with a commitment to courageous investigation.

The target audience of the first subseries of the Ellery Queen Jr. books is a few years younger than that of most vintage series books. I think of Roger Baxter, Jack McGurk, and Alvin Fernald, for example. The adventuresome boy and his friends are probably about twelve years old; in a later book we learn that they are not yet fourteen.

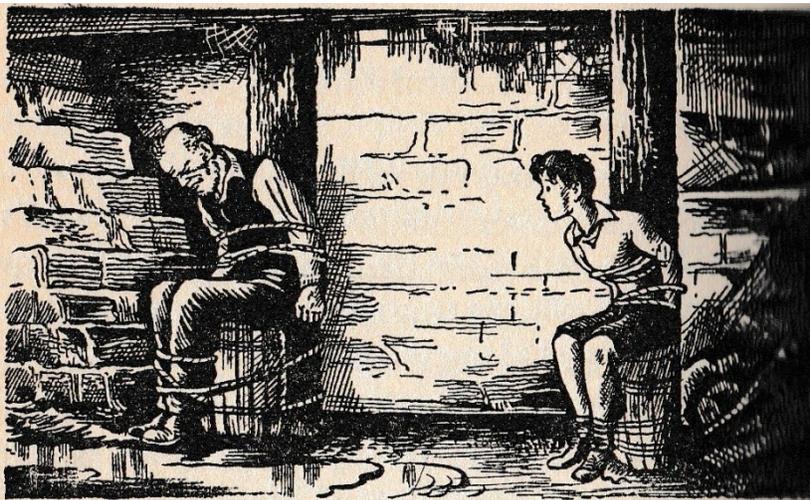
Four different publishers produced the nine volumes in the “colored animal” subseries. The covers in the earlier of these entries are attractively old-fashioned and detailed, and the internals feature pen and ink artwork which is pretty admirable; most of the later books do not have internals, and the cover artwork is “eh”. In the “alliterative title” subseries, the internals are token sketches and forgettable; the covers, though, are well done.

Let’s look at the books of the first subseries.

1. *The Black Dog Mystery* (1941)

The first book introduces us to Djuna, who lives with his Aunt Annie in a small town named Edenboro; its location is not otherwise made specific, but piecing together bits of information throughout the books, we learn it’s probably in Connecticut, ninety miles from the ocean. It is a two hours’ drive from Philadelphia. His small Scotty, Champ, is his almost constant companion, and lends his color and his species to the title of the book.

Investigation into a bank robbery in a nearby small town to which Djuna is a witness is bumblingly handled by the authorities who laugh off Djuna’s insights, educated guesswork, and actual discoveries. Djuna sets out to solve the mystery himself, and is sort-of aided by Mr. Boots, an elderly man who lives near him in Edenboro. Mr. Boots is an under-employed carpenter, and a clear “father figure” to Djuna, who is presented as having no parents; no explanation for his being an orphan is ever provided.



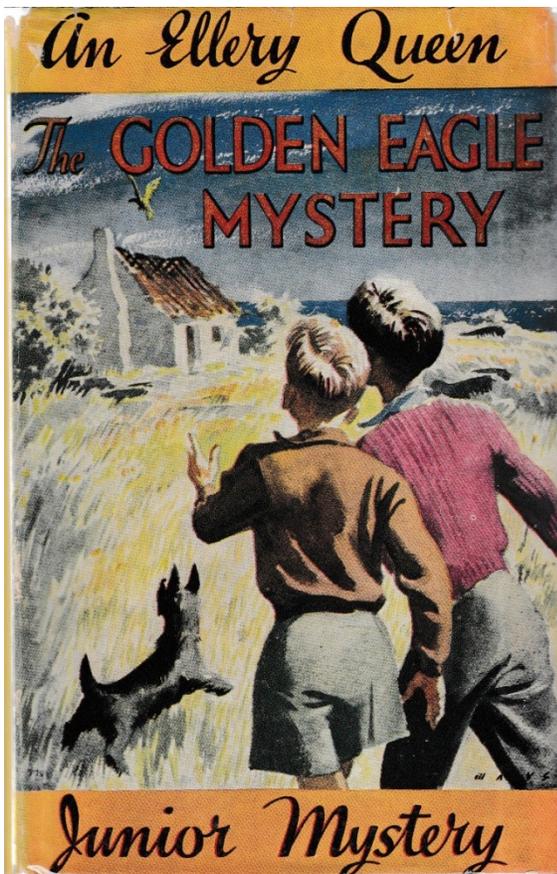
The story has a villain as frightening as any I’ve run across in any vintage series book, right up there with “Santa Claus” in Rick Brant’s *The Deadly Dutchman*. Check out this line in which the villain delights in Djuna’s plight, whom he has tied up and prepared for a slow death: “A triumphant

grin spread over [the bad guy's] face as he watched Djuna's eyes, and saw realization dawn dreadfully in them." The escape scene is most skillfully described; what had been carefully depicted as hopeless gives way to a plausible escape.

There are woods, lakes, bicycle rides, friendly neighbors, night-time excursions, and good friends for Djuna. There are Tommy Williams, a delightful friend who aids him in his labors; and Clarabelle, a neighbor with a couple of interesting hobbies that provide insights for Djuna's ponderings.

2. *The Golden Eagle Mystery* (1943)

In this tale, Djuna is sent by his Aunt Annie to spend the summer in a seaside town in what is clearly New England and probably Maine. His Aunt Patty (short for Patagonia), Aunt Annie's sister, is in some sort of trouble about which she



is hesitant to speak. Having proven his investigative abilities in the previous chronicle, Aunt Annie charges Djuna to find out what Aunt Patty's problem is without tipping her off that anyone is out to help her; like many adults, Aunt Patty is closed-mouthed and unwilling to accept help from others.

This mystery has Djuna making a fine new friend and getting to know some of the marvelous small town personalities such as the retired doctor, the retired sea captain, and the proprietor of the grocery store. The widowed and childless Aunt Patty is the fourth generation descendant of seafarers. Aunt Patty scrapes out a minimal living from lobster pots set around two tiny islands she owns, located about three miles offshore; on one is a cottage, now abandoned to the elements, that had been owned by her late husband. In an old tree on that island a rare golden eagle is sometimes seen.

Letters in an old chest in Aunt Patty's attic and a few heirlooms do not interest her much, but they prove growingly fascinating to Djuna as they are evidence of a peculiar tale of a family fortune earned by the first two generations and then squandered by the third. It becomes evident that someone in the town knows or believes something about the family's history and property that is not known to fourth-generation Aunt Patty, and that secretive someone is, um, not very nice.

An unusual feature of this slowly unraveling but appealing tale is that there is information that the reader picks up that Djuna does not; and then there is information that Djuna unearths that is not revealed to the reader until later. The conclusion is satisfying, although it was a mite contrived and required a few stretches of plausibility. This created only a smidgeon of a let-down as the tale opened a window into the boys' lives in a small, seaside town nearly eighty years ago, with charm, beauty, and simplicity, coupled with boyish excitement growing up within juvenile innocence. And the resolution of the mystery showed it to be complex, and yet within the capabilities of an earnest twelve-year-old boy.



3. *The Green Turtle Mystery* (1945)

While Aunt Annie is not feeling well with lumbago, Djuna is temporarily staying with yet another aunt, the widowed Mrs. Silvernails, who lives in a small cottage in a city forty miles from Edenboro. Djuna sets out to make a little spending money by shining shoes in the city park; there he meets Mr. Socker Furlong, a reporter at the local newspaper whose primary interest is lazing about and getting by with as little work as he can. Djuna also meets another boy about his age, named Ben Franklin. He is the youngest of seventeen brothers and sisters, and is a gofer at the newspaper. He owns a small turtle named Waterbury which has the honor of suggesting the title of the tale.



Imaginative character names are a feature of the Ellery Queen Jr. series. We are never told where the name Djuna comes from. (In fact, in the next story Djuna informs someone that he has no last name!) A man named Socker and the new aunt with the intriguing surname of Silvernails are only some of the poetic names we run across.

Well, the mystery in this book is not very complex. Maddeningly,

the teaser on the inner flyleaf practically gives it away, and I can't give too many details about the story without providing spoilers myself, but the most enjoyable feature of this book is how the boys get to the bottom of the puzzle behind a long-abandoned house locally known as being "haunted". An old scary abandoned house, of course, is a standard feature of series books, and is always entertaining.

Even though the mystery is simple and several of its plot twists are unconvincing, the boys' exploration of the house and the descriptions make for an acceptable story. Further, as in all of the stories that feature Djuna, the bad guys are chillingly ruthless. One scene that can raise the hair on your neck is when one bad guy threatens Djuna with his little snub-nosed pistol: He "patted the automatic in its shoulder holster. 'If you try to attract someone's attention or open your trap I'll put a bullet where it'll fix you so you won't ever walk again. How would you like that?'"

This skillfully-written passage below reminds me of some of the similar descriptions found in *The Hardy Boys' The Secret of the Old Mill*, Hal Keen's *The Lonesome Swamp Mystery*, and plenty of others:

Dusk was fast giving way to night. A soft, summer wind was sighing through the elms along Carpenter Street. And overhead black clouds were scudding across the moon to herald the coming of rain. A jagged streak of light pierced the sky to the west to be followed by the distant rumble of thunder...

Djuna and Ben stood across the street looking up at the discontented old house just as a streak of lightning split the dark sky with a ghastly smile and thunder cannonaded down upon them until the house itself seemed to moan in protest. Great drops of rain came beating down through the trees... [pages 127-129]

It sets the tone for the adventure, and grips the reader with that satisfying atmosphere in which dark and scary things can happen in a history-ridden, long-empty mansion with the lights out and rooms festooned with cobwebs and thick dust.

4. *The Red Chipmunk Mystery* (1948)

There is a mystery in this book, but you don't know it until nearly halfway through. Up to that point, it is mostly about a happy adventuresome cross-country journey. Djuna decides to leave the city where he spent the last book, and come home to Edenboro two weeks early to surprise Aunt Annie. He boards the train, but at one stop his dog runs away, he loses his wallet, and his train pulls out without him, so he concludes that he has no choice but to hitchhike the remaining thirty miles. He meets a new friend named Buddy, who is running away from camp to find his way home to see his older brother who has been traveling for several years. And the two of these lads meet Mr. Scissors (a professional name) and his granddaughter Joan, and are invited to travel with them leisurely but surely to their destination.

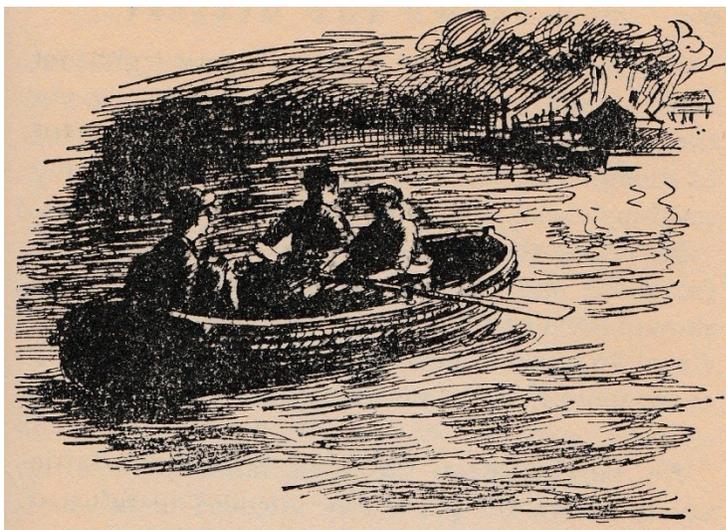
Mr. Scissors is a traveling knife sharpener and tinker who gets around with an old-fashioned horse and wagon he has fixed up with impressive cleverness and artistic aplomb. Joan, who is probably about ten or eleven, is his cook and general assistant. Mr. Scissors is well known and much loved wherever he makes his rounds, and leads group singing with an accordion in addition to sharpening knives, axes, mowing blades, and scythes.

The joy-filled and carefree meanderings through the countryside's farms and villages gradually grow dim and dangerous when two escaped felons focus on the wagon and its unsuspecting inhabitants. Though Mr. Scissors and the three children do not know what is going on, the criminals have a clear purpose. And in a believable and convincing way, Djuna figures it out. When the stakes suddenly become very high, the adventure becomes fraught with danger. The weather cooperates by bringing about a heavy downpour out of dark skies, and a captive is hauled through brambles by a merciless near-psychopath into a situation that seems hopeless. To say anything more would require providing spoilers, so I'll stop here.

What does a red chipmunk have to do with the story? Well, it's subtle. At one point in the story, the animals are described as being very smart, building their tunnels with two or three escape routes in case predators get in. The fact fits into the story with a sufficient ingenuity to earn the reader's approving nod.

5. *The Brown Fox Mystery* (1951)

By this time, Aunt Annie has had it with Djuna's getting into life-threatening danger in one mystery after another, so she has rented a lovely cottage on a lake miles away from Edenboro. She, Djuna, and Tommy will stay there for the entire summer. The first few chapters give us a tender, nostalgic picture of the



simple, enjoyable life of a young boy of seventy years ago. They meet Captain Ben, a retired sea captain who now picks up people's orders at Scatterly's, the little general and grocery store, and delivers them by boat on a daily basis to the cottages around the lake. He is a delightful, grandfatherly old man who teaches the boys how to fish.

At the north end of the lake is an abandoned ice house. Its services are no longer needed with modern "ice boxes", and its owner had died not long before, leaving his daughter with a need to work for a living; she

assists at Scatterly's. To her big surprise and monetary benefit, a couple of guys have rented the ice house to scoop up years of sawdust and ship boxes of it out to some company that will use it to stuff dolls. We know right off that these are bad guys, but we don't know what they're really doing. Their surface small-town friendliness is obviously faked; the boys have that knack of knowing when a grown-up is putting on an act.

As in the previous book, we are nearly halfway through before the grimness of a genuine threat begins to manifest. Not long after that, the terror of determined evil engulfs the lives of Djuna and his party.

On a side note, the boys' friend from Edenboro, Clarabelle, along with her mother have also rented a cottage for the summer. Like Joan in the previous story, Clarabelle has a secondary but vital role to play in the working out of the events. The author is skilled at presenting girls as strong presences in a boys' mystery without weakening the plot. He is also skilled at sketching villains of utter corruption, whose threat to the heroes is truly unnerving.

The dreadful threat in the story, once it takes hold, grips with unrelenting firmness, and the resolution brought about by Djuna's clear thinking and courageous action is terrific. When I think of how Djuna reasons patiently while his friends are unconvinced and easily sidetracked, I imagine that he is like a young Ken Holt.

In one book, Djuna himself explains his method this way: "You never know anything for sure until you get a lot of facts together and figure out what they mean. You can tell easy when somebody is acting suspicious or doing things that don't seem right for them to do, but you can't be sure they're crooks until you learn enough about them. Then you match it up, and sometimes you'll find there's a connection between one bunch of facts and another, or between one person and another. And if there is, then it means the chances are better than ever that, whoever it is, he isn't as honest as he might be." (*The Purple Bird Mystery*, p. 129)

6. *The White Elephant Mystery* (1951)

The circus is coming to town, and Djuna and Tommy are itching to go. Mr. Boots drives them to the site where they discover that Socker Furlong (whom we first met a couple of books ago) and his friend, a large, jolly, honest, and trueblue police officer (who was also previously introduced with Furlong) are there too. (In ensuing books, these two play minor but vital roles.) Socker knew the recently-deceased owner of the circus, and Cannonball (the police officer's nickname) is on assignment to track down grifters who are known to be plaguing the circus and its patrons.

The author provides an overwhelming amount of inside information about how circuses are run as well as how grifters do their work: pickpockets, people who

falsify money changing, and the like. The late circus owner had started years earlier with a small outfit and had built it up to a “supercolossal” show with trapeze artists, clowns, trained animals, sideshow folks, and all the attendant necessary workers like cooks, railroaders, tent crafters, publicists, etc. etc.

The circus owner’s son has inherited everything, and started out by insulting, offending, and alienating nearly everyone. As in previous books, the mystery starts slowly and doesn’t take over the story until about halfway through the book. The mood changes from one of excitement and merriment at the circus to doubtful happenings to outright threats and danger. Djuna pieces together the clues that have appeared throughout the narrative, some obvious and others obscure and easily disregarded, but all essential as the tale gathers momentum.

We find out that the mystery, like so many others of the genre, is about a will. It may exist or it may not. If it does exist, where is it to be found and what will it say? This part of the story is a bit contrived as most stories about wills are, and there are some details that are never explained. These are flaws in the plot, but one can brush them aside like an annoying fly, and enjoy the mystery just the same. It’s not one of the best in the series, but it’s good.

7. *The Yellow Cat Mystery* (1952)

Between the end of the previous book and the beginning of this one, Tommy Williams’ father has inherited a bean farm in Dolphin Beach, Florida, and the Williams family has moved out of Edenboro so he can go run it. Dolphin Beach is forty miles north of Miami. Tommy has invited Djuna to come down for the Christmas season; the story begins when Tommy arrives in Tommy’s new town.

The book is 200 pages long. When the discriminating reader gets to the mid-40s, he’s already figured out the main plotline. We know who the bad guy is and it’s not hard to guess what he’s planning to do. The teaser on the front endflap pretty much confirms it, and if that’s not enough, the cover illustration puts it before your eyes. But this doesn’t ruin the story; it puts the reader into the position of knowing something that Djuna has to figure out, and it’s interesting to observe how he does it. Moreover, there is a lot more to the story that engages the reader as it unfolds.

Even before Tommy meets Djuna at the station, Djuna (with Champ) meets the recently widowed Mrs. Pulham, whose late husband was the town dentist. She owns a large feisty yellow cat named Tootles who has an abscessed tooth. Her husband had always fixed the cat’s teeth, so Mrs. Pulham wants to take Tootles to the dentist who had just bought the practice—but has yet to pay for it. The boys take the cat to the dentist, whose reaction is so driven by anger and unreason that they back off.

As in previous mysteries starring Djuna, shreds of information gradually build up until he begins to piece together the nefarious plan that is secretly being worked. Pleasant town characters, an irritating spoiled ten-year-old girl named Amaryllis, a boy named Robert Herrick who works as a pin boy at the bowling alley, swimming at the beach with Tommy, and a Puerto Rican fisherman who treats the boys to the best milkshakes they've ever had are all part of the mix.

And again, as we have seen in previous mysteries, when Djuna irrevocably stumbles into the bad guys' plans, the face of terrible evil grips the reader. The evil in these books is far beyond the Hardy Boys' foes' yelling at them for being "interferin' boys" and tying them up with ropes. Twice in this book Djuna comes within a hair's breadth of meeting a ghastly death—both times through a foolish decision that he himself made, but which is credible for a twelve-year-old to have made. But his reasoning powers and good thinking bring the book to a fitting ending.

8. *The Blue Herring Mystery* (1954)

It's mid-April, four months after the time of the previous volume, and Bobby Herrick from that same story is coming up to Edenboro from Dolphin Beach, Florida to visit Djuna for a week. (It is not explained why Tommy Williams, Djuna's onetime best friend, is not coming.) We are introduced to Aunt Candy (short for Candidissima, another of the author's jaw-droppingly cool names), an old widowed lady who lives on a farm not far from Aunt Annie and Djuna. Miss Annie explains that the name is from "the old Latin language" and means "pure" or "honest". "Folks used to give their children names like that in the old days." (page 8)

Aunt Candy is a fourth generation inhabitant of the area; her great-grandfather, Captain Jonas Beekman, was a noted whaler who built a gorgeous stone house in Brookville, a neighboring little village, and also built Aunt Candy's home but died before he could live in it. The house in Brookville is being rented to Doc Perry, a man who's trying to make a go of it running a drugstore with a soda fountain, but he has competition from other such establishments not far away and is not doing well. He has hired a suspicious young fellow named Professor Kloop to help set up a museum in the old Beekman house, which is filled with stuffed animals and other mementoes that Captain Beekman had brought in during his whaling days. He hopes that the museum will bolster his meager income. At one point, the boys become fascinated with Aunt Candy's relics from her great-grandfather's day, such as harpoons of various kinds displayed in her living room, and most of all, his handwritten ship's log.

In the first half of the book, we are given the idyllic picture of two young boys enjoying the out-of-doors in a simpler time. As the hours pass from breakfast to lunch to dinner, the boys run into the kitchen for meals, and Aunt Annie fills them up repeatedly with pancakes, herring, scrambled eggs, cake, large

glasses of milk, spaghetti, sandwiches, or other fully-described comestibles. After one enormous feed, she says with a smile, "I've always said that a happy boy is one who is full."

The lads ride bikes over the countryside, carefree boys of the mid-twentieth century in the country: "It was like a June morning as they pedaled along, side by side, down the Landing Road toward Brookville. The air was cool and fresh, but the sun overhead, in a sky of flawless blue, was warming. They rode in silence, listening to the trill of songbirds." (page 108) The description swelled my heart with the delightful memories of my own childhood when I rode bikes with my friends.

About halfway through the book, as the entire town anticipates its annual merry scapping party on the shore of one of the fast local rivers (scapping is a particular method of capturing herrings by the hundreds as they surge upstream to spawn), it becomes a story about whether Captain Beekman brought treasure back from one of his excursions, and if so, what was it, who knew about it then and now, and most importantly, where is it?

And then, as is the pattern in these books, the story becomes dark and dangerous. And at the end, we see once again the impressive reasoning ability of Djuna, his admittedly reckless entry into danger, a bare escape, and a celebratory conclusion. With three kinds of herring at a festive dinner.

9. *The Purple Bird Mystery* (1965)

This one begins on the first day of summer vacation, and Djuna sets out on his bike to find a job. He meets a boy his own age named Jimmy, whose father is the new golf pro at the country club between Edenboro and Brookville; he is the most recent of many generations of professional golfers. The boys hit it off immediately, and Djuna and Jimmy get jobs as caddies. We learn early that Jimmy's dresser is a family heirloom about two hundred years old. Jimmy has just moved into the golf pro's house provided by the country club, and lives with his recently widowed father and his father's mother. Grandma tells the boys about the King's Talisman. The artifact, made of gold, diamonds, and a large emerald, was given to an ancestor by King Henry VIII more than 400 years earlier, but it was stolen when the great-grandfather was living in Malaya. The dresser, however, and generations of family golf trophies, were safely shipped from Malaya years earlier and are now safe in the family's keeping.

Before long, three characters pique Djuna's suspicions: an antique dealer who offers a huge amount of money for the dresser, a golfer who's a guest at the country club for a week, and a caddy who is distinctly older than all the others. Gradually the suspicions mount up with characters' odd behaviors and strange and even violent doings, and Djuna, with Jimmy's assistance, assembles disparate pieces and draws a compelling conclusion. The story is well told. Like

all of the “colored animal” tales, villainy is presented with chilling terror; there are several surprises, and the resolution is eminently satisfying. This is one of the better of the tales about Djuna and his detecting abilities.

The tale is the fourth in the nine-volume “colored animal” subseries that deals with a long-long family heirloom or fortune that everyone had either forgotten about or given up on, but which conscienceless thieves learn about and try to steal. Yet none of the tales is boring or repetitive; all are exciting and a pleasure to read.

This completes the first subseries. Let’s move on to the next. These two volumes were published by Golden Press, which produced several series of the era that are popular with some collectors; these include the Kathy Martin stories, Brains Benton, Dig Allen, and a few others of lesser reputation.

In these books, the main character is not a twelve-year-old boy named Djuna; rather, it is a sixteen-year-old boy named Gulliver Queen, who is the nephew of the famed author/detective. The first subseries is set in a small town with a lot of rural countryside around, old houses with front porches, and “salt of the earth” characters in appearance and speech. The second subseries is set in New York City. There’s a lot of cement, tall buildings, bad neighborhoods, and sophisticated, well-dressed characters with an experienced view of the wide world. The two subseries are in sharp contrast with one another, set in completely different worlds. In fact, about the only thing they have in common is that they were written by “Ellery Queen, Jr.” Right.

1. *The Mystery of the Merry Magician* (1961)

In the first offering, Gulliver, better known as “Gully”, meets a boy named Fisty Jones. They become friends, and set about solving a mystery that Fisty wanted to bring to “Uncle Ellery” first, but the great detective is out of town for a few days; he had asked Gully to do no more than “get the facts” if anyone brings him a case while he is gone. Fisty reluctantly allows Gully to get the facts while he waits for the *real* detective to return.

Fisty reports that he has seen a space monster in a low-grade business-apartment building across from the docks and wants to find out what it is. As they look around the environs, the boys meet a friendly retired stage magician who has rented a space where he creates supplies for other stage magicians, but he is threatened by a couple of goons who have rented the adjacent space. They are secretive, and threaten violence if the magician will not move out so they can take over his space.

Fisty is acquainted with Peggy, a girl who lives with her grandfather on a boat located in the docks across the road from the business-apartment building; it is from there that Fisty first encountered the curious sight he called a “space

monster". The "space monster" was in the magician's workspot, and is easily explained. The boys become friendly with the magician and set out to assist him against the threats from the bad guys next door.

The mystery escalates when strange things happen on the docks, especially at night, and it becomes evident that some sort of theft or smuggling is going on. Peggy and her grandfather allow the boys to stay on their boat for a few nights so that Gully can "get the facts" for his uncle. Eventually he gets enough "facts" to figure out what is going on, and his uncle arrives just in time to complete the work. A twist ending, uncommon in the series book genre, is mildly hinted at but is by no means obvious, and makes for a very satisfying conclusion.

This was the first book I bought in the Ellery Queen Jr. series, and its high quality convinced me to get the rest.

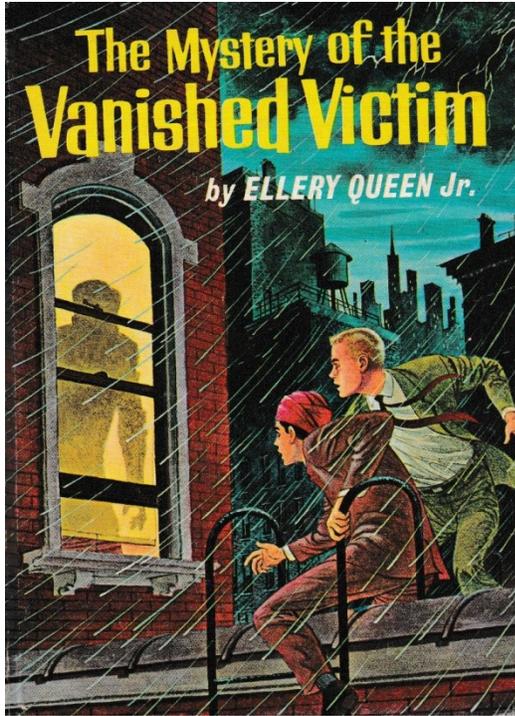
2. *The Mystery of the Vanished Victim* (1962)

As this story begins, once again the famous Ellery Queen is leaving town for a week, and once again nephew Gully is advised merely to take notes and get facts if anyone brings a case to the apartment. His uncle has presented him with a red leather notebook with a pencil attached so that he can record those notes; the notebook is drawn from his pocket many times through the following adventure.

Because, of course, someone does bring a case. The guard/chauffer of the Sikh ambassador to the United Nations has been abducted from his apartment. Gully becomes friends with the man's son, Balbir Singh, and the ambassador's stunningly beautiful teenage daughter Prema Jind, and the three set out to solve the mystery of the disappearance. I should say "investigate", not "solve", since Gully is only supposed to "take notes".

The story unfolds more like a game than a mystery. It's as if someone leaves clues for the teens to discover step by step. Gully's grandfather, the highly skilled police inspector, takes on the case, but we see almost no action that the police force takes while Gully and his friends find clue after clue. The characters are two-dimensional, more caricatures than characters. The great Inspector Queen "pales" when Prema speaks up sharply. The teens out-reason and out-argue police officers; Gully picks up obvious clues that the experienced police foolishly miss.

About two-thirds of the way through, though, the tension kicks in. The final scenes can pick up one's heart rate as the stakes are raised to great heights, and the resolution can make the reader gasp with relief. It is evident that the writer was, at best, only so-so when dealing with character development and interaction, but when it came to action, he was tip-top. If only the whole story had been as well written as the last two or three chapters.



The cover artwork is engaging, and suggests to me Ken Holt's *Clue of the Marked Claw*.

Several of the series I've written about in The Review over the past few years have been pretty easy to find for not too much money. Unfortunately, that is not the case with this series. Most of the books are about fifteen to forty dollars each, one or two significantly more than that, and *Yellow Cat*, being particularly scarce for some reason, was eye-opening pricey. I had to lay out a good number of buckaroonies for that one, and at that the few other copies I found for sale were much more expensive even than what I paid.

For books that are as good as most of these are in the style of the popular Ellery Queen adventures, one unsolved mystery is why there are so few copies of these "junior" series available. Still, I was fortunate to find them all, even if doing so put a dent in my wallet. I don't regret the outlay, as this series surely ranks pretty high in the genre; it deserves to be better known than it is, with more recognition than it has.

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