

The Jay-Jay Jenks, Jr. Series

By Duff McCoy
A Sidebar to the Ellery Queen, Jr. Mysteries

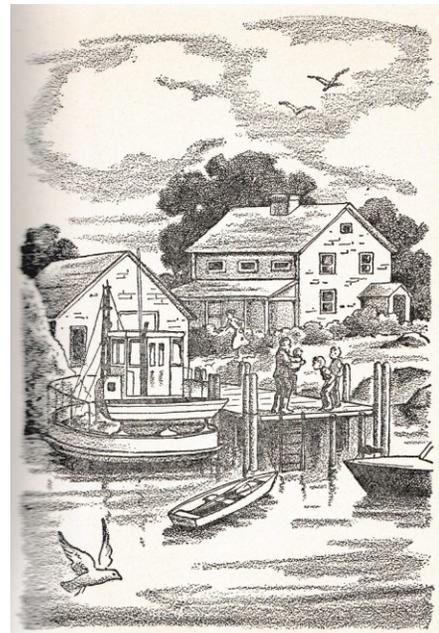
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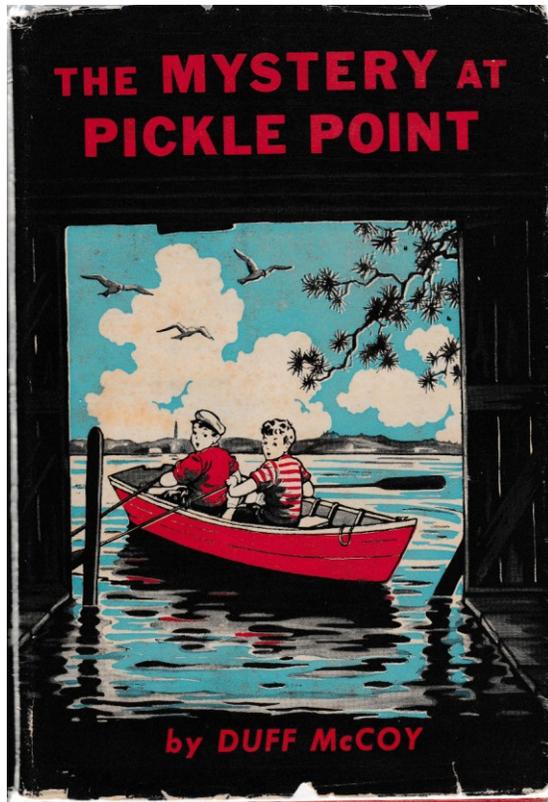
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In the article on the Ellery Queen, Jr. mysteries, I revealed that the author of six of the eleven books was Samuel Duff McCoy, and mentioned as an aside that McCoy had written the two-volume series about Jay-Jay Jenks, Jr. I figure it's worth a sidebar to take a glance at these two books. Joseph Jefferson Jenks, Jr., known as "Jay-Jay", in the volumes is sibilingsque to Djuna. He and Herbert Willis, his primary sidekick, use the same kind of vocabulary and even the same exclamations. Willis is an obese fellow whose nickname is Jumbo.

Both of the books are set on Long Island, in a very small village called Cliff Cove; nearby is the slightly larger town of Oysterville. This illustration of their village is taken from the second book. The boys are old enough to take a rowboat on their own out into the bay, but are definitely children. The cover illustration below confirms that impression. I'd put them at about eleven years old, just a year or two younger than Djuna. They take great delight in pretending to be pirates, explorers, or other adventurers. McCoy does good job of creating a boys' world of innocent pleasure and excitement in a setting with bright and clear sunlight, super thick fog, or day-long rain.



The illustrator for both books was Sally Tate. Her drawings are a good match for the author's atmosphere of both adventure and innocence.



The Mystery at Pickle Point was published in 1948. It is the most hard-to-find book I've ever set my sights on—or tried to. In fact, I can only write this entry because the volume was lent to me. To date, I have not found a trace of the book anywhere. I made myself a copy of the tome before returning it to my friend, and I suspect I may have to settle for that.

Pickle Point is an island (at least during high tide) which is part of the estate of Mrs. Tuckerman, a pleasant but elderly and frail widow who lives in a mansion on the outskirts of Cliff Cove. Pickle Point is small, but heavily wooded; on it there are a boathouse and a small house with only one room and a

large porch with kitchen facilities at one end. In one place there is a small cave which is accessible only at low tide. With Mrs. Tuckerman's kindly permission, Jay-Jay and Jumbo row to Pickle Point and play at being pirates.

The mystery takes off when Mrs. Tuckerman is found bound and gagged by persons she hadn't seen, and a valuable artifact she had in her room is stolen. Jay-Jay reasons from snatches of information he picks up here and there, and gradually puts together the picture of what happened. This was not easy since there are three pairs of people who look guilty. And, like Djuna (at least in the early books) the officials discount everything Jay-Jay offers; one police officer even snarls at him repeatedly and wonders whether Jay-Jay himself had stolen the artifact. Impressively, Jay-Jay maintains a high commitment to integrity, honesty, and promise-keeping, even when he is uncertain whether those to whom he had made



a promise are honest or not. And until he has the facts in order, he refuses to jump to conclusions no matter how circumstantial evidence points.

The conclusion of this mystery, like the stories that feature Djuna, comes together gradually but powerfully. Jay-Jay is in danger from some truly evil people. And when it's all over, he humbly but thoroughly explains what he had done to solve the mystery and why, and the officials are suitably impressed and complimentary.

The Mystery of Robbers' Rock was published in 1950. Unlike its predecessor, copies of this book are not difficult to find. In this tale, mysterious strangers appear in the village. Jay-Jay learns that they are hunting for gold that was supposed to have been hidden by a citizen of the village who had been a Forty-Niner a century earlier, and returned home after his time out West.

Jay-Jay and Jumbo use their skills at maneuvering their small boat, picking up stray information, and reasoning to draw a conclusion that there just may be something to the strangers' search. Moreover, if there really *is* some gold, it shouldn't belong to them but to a poor family who are the descendants of the old fellow of a century earlier. A cipher message adds to the appeal of the story, and the lads' ability to figure it out is entertaining.

Without a doubt, these books are first cousins to the "colored animal" books of the Ellery Queen Jr. series. They are top quality examples of the imaginative adventures enjoyed in the middle years of the twentieth century.

