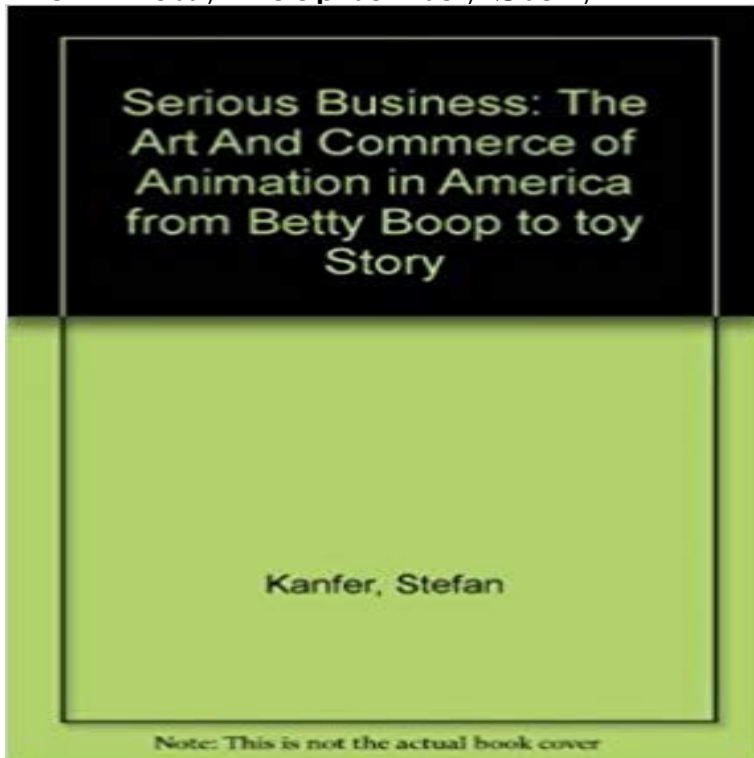


Serious Business: The Art And Commerce of Animation in America from Betty Boop to “toy Story”



Acclaimed critic and historian Stefan Kanfer follows the ascent of America's most beloved and successful original art form from vaudeville sideshow to global industry, in the process holding up a mirror to the passing parade of cartoons, a mirror in which their captured reflections leave an indelible record of the changing nature of American tastes, values, and dreams. Art and commerce combine and collide again and again in Stefan Kanfer's history, with results that range from predictably dismaying to hilarious. Take Daffy Duck's signature voice: If Warner Bros. producer Leon Schlesinger had not been such a tightfisted employer, Chuck Jones, Tex Avery, and the rest of his legendary animation team might never have created the thputtering duck to lampoon the boss's speech impairment. (Fearing Schlesinger's reaction, the animators wrote out their resignations before his initial screening, only to watch the oblivious Schlesinger leap to his feet and exclaim, Jeethus Christh, thats a funny voithe! Whered you get that voithe?). Small victories, uneasy stalemates, and defeats enough to make a cynic weep all have their hour in the story of an industry whose fortunes have swung between wild expansion and profound depression. To know the cartoons America has loved is to know America: the Jazz Age's infatuation with Betty Boop's shimmy; F.D.R.'s public embrace of Disney's *The Three Little Pigs* and its smash theme song *Whose Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf* during the Great Depression; the adoption during World War II of brash, indomitable Bugs Bunny as an unofficial symbol of the American GI; an unself-conscious consumer culture's infatuation with an endless string of household-appliance jokes on *The Flintstones*; and the counterculture's attraction to the gritty and sexually explicit exploits of Ralph Baksh's *Fritz the Cat*. In the end, though, the history of animation is

the story of its geniuses. Serious Business disperses the clouds created by decades of received wisdom.

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