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Bugs Bunny tops greatest cartoon characters list

(CNN) -- For now, there's no need for Bugs Bunny to ask, "What's up, doc?" According to TV Guide, he is.

The "wascally wabbit," who's faced down Elmer Fudd, Marvin the Martian and Yosemite Sam, has come out on top again: According to the latest issue of TV Guide, Bugs Bunny is the greatest cartoon character of all time.

Bugs is also the only character from the pre-television animated-short golden age to make the magazine's top 10.

He's followed by Homer Simpson, befuddled father on Fox's long-running "The Simpsons"; Rocky and Bullwinkle, the heroes of Jay Ward's parodistic cartoon series of the '50s and '60s; Beavis and Butt-head, Mike Judge's dopey MTV metalheads; and the Grinch, the Dr. Seuss character who just doesn't like Christmas until he's shown the error of his ways.

Also in the top 10: Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble of "The Flintstones," the first successful prime-time cartoon series; Angelica Pickles of "Rugrats"; Charlie Brown and Snoopy of "Peanuts"; SpongeBob SquarePants; and Cartman of "South Park."

A tough bunny to keep down

Bugs, a clever beast with long ears who always seems to make the wrong turn at Albuquerque, has been a hit since his first appearance in 1938's "Porky's Hare Hunt." His first starring role, in 1940's "A Wild Hare," saw the first utterance of his catchphrase, "What's up, doc?"

The hero of many a Warner Bros. cartoon, his success has carried over to television, advertising and other media. (Warner Bros. is a division of AOL Time Warner, as is CNN.com.)

His tough-talking image, inimitably voiced by Mel Blanc (who once said he created the voice out of the two toughest-sounding accents he knew, that of Brooklyn and the Bronx), was molded in classic WB shorts directed by such luminaries as Tex Avery, Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng.

Over the years, Bugs has been an opera singer, barber, lumberjack and medieval knight, and has worked with stars ranging from Michael Jordan to Taz, the Tasmanian devil. And despite the Daffy Duck's constant attempts to steal the spotlight, Bugs always holds on to the glow.

Daffy, incidentally, ended up at No. 14 in the TV Guide list, behind both Fat Albert and the Powerpuff Girls.

The TV Guide list includes characters from the movies, television, comic strips and comic books, and features both creations very old (Popeye and Felix the Cat, both of which date to the 1920s) and very new (the Powerpuffs and SpongeBob).

Several characters, including Superman and Wonder Woman, have saved the world, and at least one -- Alvin from the Chipmunks -- has sung on a No. 1 hit ("The Chipmunk Song").

Heavens to Murgatroid! Where's ...

Some surprises: Mickey Mouse ranks at No. 19, and though Josie and the Pussycats made it, the Archies are nowhere to be found.

Cartoon expert Jerry Beck -- who has written several books and television shows about the history of cartoons -- says the list is "a good thing on the whole," stirring up debate and renewing interest in classic cartoons.

"You could really debate this list," he says, noting the apparent lack of criteria used to create it. "I think they're rating it by beloved-ness. But even then you have questions!"

Internet discussion groups are already deep into arguments about this list's flaws. "Where's the Pink Panther?" one person asks. Others bemoan the lack of Smurfs.

Many of the complaints attack TV Guide's ranking current characters ahead of time-tested ones. Notably, the American Film Institute refuses to include relatively recent films in its "greatest" lists.

But Beck believes the diversity of time periods included is good for cartooning.

"An old-timer might look at this list," he observes, "and say, 'Who's Arthur?' or 'Who's SpongeBob SquarePants?' or 'What's Pikachu?' " And the publicity, he adds, may also get children or young people interested in more of the classics.

He thinks some current characters, such as Homer Simpson, are already among history's greats.

"You know someone like it, or you identify with (it)," he says. "That's really the key to a classic character."