

focus

Freaky, decadent, bizarre...

Mardi Gras struts out

By GLENNA WHITLEY Battalion Staff

It's a spectacle, a decadent dream of a Ringling brother, a drunken Rose Bowl parade.

Masks cover those that taunt the shouting, hooting, begging crowd. Some masks are curtains of satin, some are clear plastic that make the flesh below look embalmed. Other masks are works of art—elaborate fantasies of silver, feathers, bright stones and spikes that make the crowd ooh and aah. The effect is ghoulish.

"Give me some beads. C'mon, throw me something," shouts a middle-aged woman whose black hair is piled in curls on her head. She runs into the street and pounds on a masked man straddling a horse.

He grins, holds out a string of yellow plastic beads. She grabs, squeals and runs back into the crowd.

It's Saturday night, and the Krewe of Endymion has started its parade.

Thousands of people line Canal Street. The crowd is four persons deep. Boys and boys-at-heart are

perched on every street-light and every tree in sight. Those lucky enough to own a business, or to know someone who owns one along the parade route, lean from balconies or hang out windows. They scream and wave as frantically as the people down in the street.

It's only a parade. There are marching bands, Shriners in little go-carts, horses and riders, floats with silly themes, and people dressed in costumes waving to the crowd.

But it's more. It's legitimate craziness. Official, anything goes. The city's attitude is—Do what you want, (short of putting someone in the hospital) and spend lots of money.

What makes the parades truly fun

is that the people who ride the floats throw things to the spectators: Strings of beads, little dolls, trinkets, and specially-minted coins called doubloons. Some of the doubloons are collector's items. Some will get you two free pieces of chicken at Popeye's Chicken Stand, however most are worthless.

But the doubloon-and-trinket-tossing is what makes the parades participatory. Without that, Mardi Gras would be nice costumes, floats and music.

Instead it's a cut-throat battle. The first thing I was told about the parades was not how beautiful they were, or how much the elaborate costumes cost, but how to catch doubloons.

"You don't dare grab with your hands," said a native I met at the airport. "First step on it and then reach under your foot to pick it up. Otherwise you'll get your hand stomped on."

It's true. Caught up in the excitement of the floats, music and something for nothing, some people are dead serious about catching as much junk as possible.

How ridiculous it seemed, minute later I noticed my first C... and my friend, in size 12, s... boots, stepping on a small tennis shoe to get a doubling...

Guess who kept the doubling... But if the beads hit the... forget it. The crowd is so dense... beads are crushed. You... catch those in the air.

Some people are so serious... catching vast quantities of... they rig up nets, cut off the... of Clorox bottles and mou... on poles to get above the... want to

But the parades are only... Mardi Gras. Different krewe... definitions) put on fancy... but these are by invitation... freaks, transients and othe... are not invited. Formal... to be the essence of Mar... for the cream of New Or... city. Needless to say, I... vited.

But I've heard they're... boring anyway.

Then there's the French... with Bourbon Street at its... probably safely designated... hub of debauchery for Mar...

I had heard all the stor... you-won't-believe-its from... So I was looking forward... some Romanesque.

People vamping, taking... ous articles of clothing, ... the streets to funky jazz, ... sniffing unusual drugs. You... I expected it.

Frankly, I was disappoint... Debauchery mainly am... drinking. Everyone carries... or a scotch and water, or a... in a huge styrofoam cup.

The crowd is diverse... aged couples on vacation... kids, bums, Jesus freaks, ... gays arm-in-arm, busine... women, housewives. Every... drunk.

Joints are passed around... corners. Policemen are ev... but few arrests are made... seem not to care what you... as no one gets hurt. In fact... the arrests made during the... Mardi Gras were for vag... sleeping in the bus termin... by he

People pass the strip... fashioned, carnival barkers... wares. "See the pretty bo... want to be girls," chants a... gray man in front of a bar... tures female impersonators.

Everyone strains for a g... flesh through the open do... ever, most keep going.

But the temperature... kept the debauchery do... minimum this year. After... it's 38 degrees, who has... naked?

Maybe I'll go back next...



First, some definitions

By GLENNA WHITLEY

Mardi Gras in New Orleans is many things. Natives can love it or hate it. They can build their social group around it, or leave town when that time comes around.

But no one in New Orleans ignores it.

First some definitions: Carnival is the two weeks before Mardi Gras, when more than 50 parades are held all over the city, its suburbs and neighborhoods. Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday" is the final day of that period—the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. This year Mardi Gras was Feb. 7. Since it occurs 40 Lenten days before Easter, Mardi Gras can happen anytime in a six-week period in February and March. It hasn't started any earlier than this

year's date in about 50 years. Though the adjective "fat" is odd to use for a day, the word "gras", or fat is used as in the French phrase foie gras—or sinfully rich.

It describes the insanity perfectly.

Mardi Gras is different from any other festival or parade in the country. Instead of being put on by city hall, or the fire department, or the American Legion, Mardi Gras is put on by private clubs called "krewes." The sole reason for the krewes' existence is to stage parades and balls during Carnival.

These krewes are closed organizations. Their selectivity often is a reflection of the social status of its members.

Some of the top krewes are very

exclusive. They have few Jews and no blacks. However, there are krewes that have only black members.

The names of the krewes are mystic and colorful: Rex, Bacchus, Zulu (a black krewe), Endymion, Proteus, Nefertari, and Thoth for example.

Krewes choose a King or Queen, (sometimes both,) or some other type of monarch, an Emperor or Pharaoh. In some of the exclusive old krewes, the King's name is a secret.

Other krewes, like Endymion and Bacchus, have celebrity kings and queens.

Cheryl Ladd, of television's "Charlie's Angels," singer Wayne Newton, and trumpet player Doc Severinsen, were featured in the Endymion parade this year.

Ed McMahon, Tonite Show co-host and beer spokesman, was the King of Bacchus.

Battalion Photos by Glenna Whitley

Corps joins the festivities

By MICHELLE SCUDDER

Mardi Gras was fun for some, but a lot of hard work for a few Texas A&M organizations who went to the celebration.

The Corps of Cadets came out in mass to enjoy the festivities, but mainly worked to win awards in drill competition.

The Ross Volunteers, Women's Drill Team, and Fish Drill Team all participated in Mardi Gras parades and activities.

"We had a good time at Mardi Gras," said John Stine, Fish Drill Team commander. "We had a yell practice at Pat O'Briens, and collected beads and coins thrown from the parade floats. It was pretty fun."

The Fish Drill Team placed first in the Tulane Invitational Drill Meet held this last weekend.

Drill team adviser Leonard Gulig



As the parade passes in review, cheering throngs of people grab for trinkets to take home as souvenirs. Each parade had its own distinguishable doubloon.



A clarinet player jazzes up Mardi Gras with "When the Saints Go Marching In" on one of the floats in the Venus parade.

