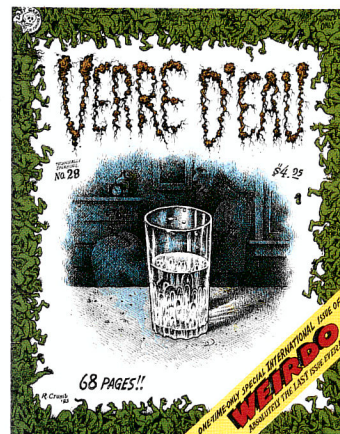
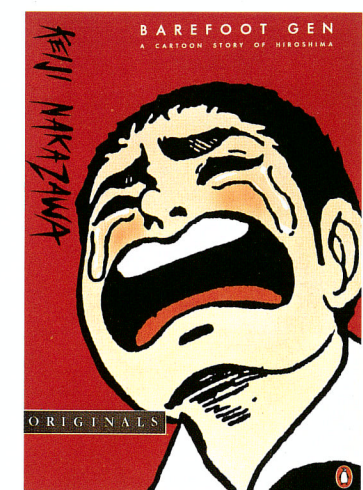
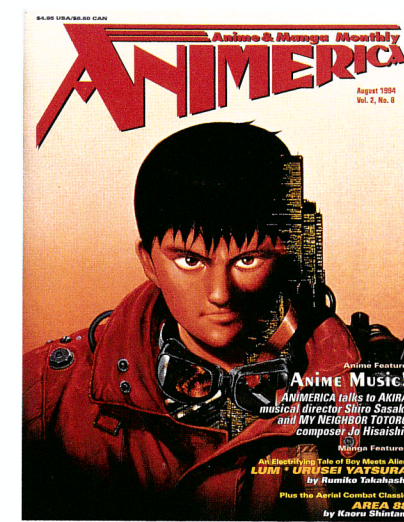
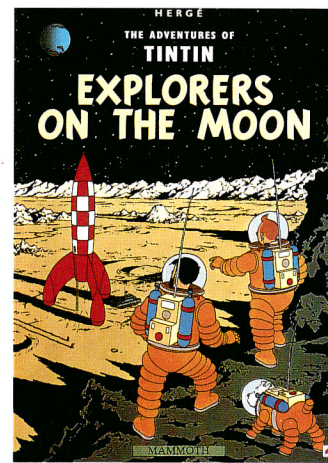




International influences

This page and opposite: Two of the most sophisticated comics industries in the world exist in Western Europe and Japan. Opposite: Detail from the cover of *Hell Baby* (Blast Books, 1995). Art: Hideshi Hino. A Japanese graphic novel about a demon baby with a taste for blood. Far right: cover to *Barefoot Gen* (Penguin, 1989). Art: Keiji Nakazawa. Another Japanese novel, about the horrors of the atomic bomb. Centre right: Cover, *Animerica* (Viz, 1994). Art: Katsuhiro Otomo. A fanzine devoted to Japanese comics and videos. Right: Cover, *Tintin: Explorers on the Moon* (Methuen, 1959). Art: Hergé. One of the most famous of the bestselling Belgian books. Below: Cover, *Verre D'eau* (Last Gasp, 1993). Art: Robert Crumb. In fact, a *Weirdo* 'International Special'.



Comics constitute a large part of the cultural diet of many countries in the world. They are in some ways a 'universal language', and because of this there has been a measure of international traffic: British and American comics have influenced different parts of the globe, and, more germanely to us here, vice versa. Although it would be impossible to trace in detail a pattern of influence, we can narrow things down by looking at the impact on the anglophone industry of comics from the two most important areas in this respect: Europe and Japan.

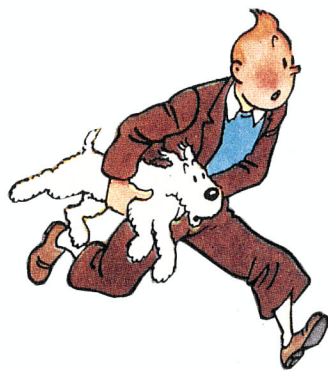
The particular cultural significance of comics in these regions is due to the fact that they have never been subjected to the same kind of prejudice as in Britain and America. In fact, today, they are accepted as an artform on a par with novels, movies and television, and this difference in status has led to a situation where children form only part of the comics market. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Europe and Japan have become increasingly influential on the ever-more age-conscious British and American industries. On one level, this has meant the raiding of ideas – art styles, formats and working practices – to be imitated in indigenous comics. On another, it has led to an influx of European and Japanese comics on to the shelves, usually, but not always, in translation, which have carved their own niche as a genre. However, as we shall see, sales have rarely been as impressive (relatively) as in their region of origin, and, with a few notable exceptions, the history of international influence in this respect has been one of critical praise and public indifference.

European comics were the first to make an impression. Of course, 'Europe' is a big place, and we are really talking about several traditions. In France, for example, comics were christened 'BDs' or 'bandes dessinées', a term for 'drawn strips'; Spanish comics, or 'tebeos' take their name from TBO, one of the founding picture papers; the Italians call them 'fumetti', literally 'little smokes', after their visualization of speech balloons. What is important about these various terminologies is that none of them are loaded in the same way that 'comics' is in Britain and America.

Historically speaking, the biggest and most important comics character was Belgian, and had his origins in the 1920s, though his success in the anglophone markets dates from the 1950s. We are talking, of course, about Tintin: a creation whose recognition factor worldwide today ranks with Disney's top characters, and whose adventures continue to far outsell those of any other European title.

Tintin was created in 1929 by Georges Rémi, who signed his work 'Hergé', and began life in a pull-out newspaper supplement designed for children. The character was essentially a boy scout, dressed in plus fours, who gets into scrapes in exotic locations – Africa, the Far East, South America and even the moon. There was certainly humour in the stories, mostly revolving around his friend Captain Haddock, the fearless seafarer, and Snowy, his trusty white dog. In essence, however, they were adventures, ostensibly 'innocent' but often with right-wing sub-texts; there was some controversy





This page: Tintin, whom President De Gaulle once referred to as his only international rival. Above: Detail from *Tintin: Prisoners of the Sun* (Methuen, 1962). Below: Page from *Tintin: Explorers on the Moon* (Methuen, 1959). Both art/script: Hergé. Note the precise 'clear-line' rendering, which became the standard art style throughout Europe.

during and just after the war over whether Hergé was a Nazi sympathiser.²

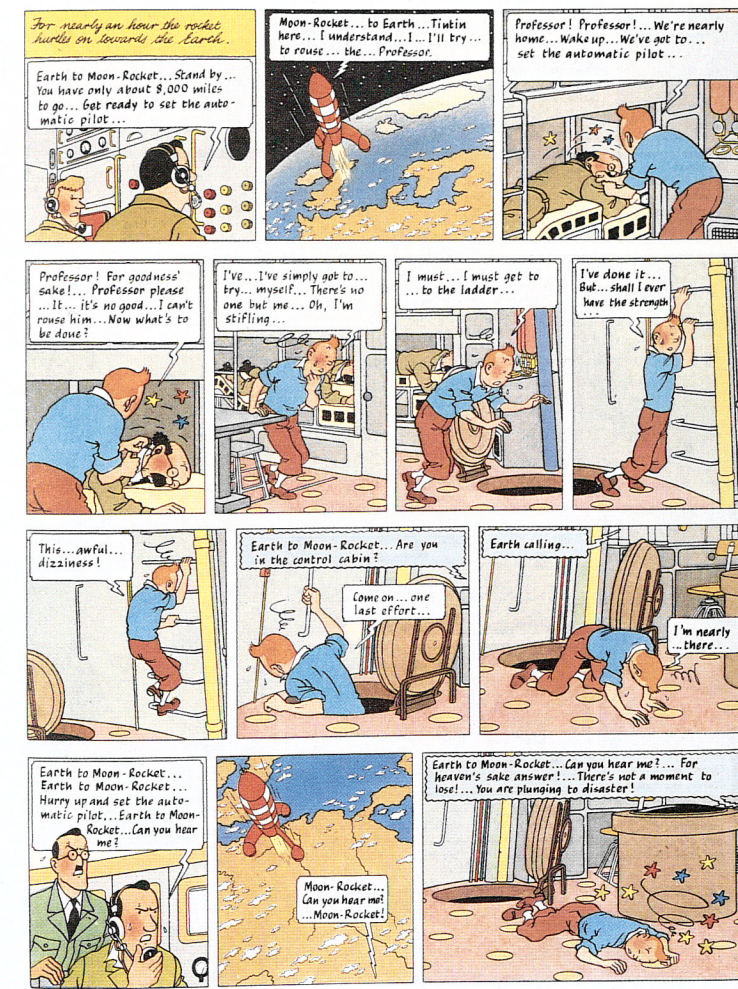
On a creative level, what was remarkable about the Tintin strips was their quality. The narratives were carefully researched, usually by a team of creators who would often travel to the location to make accurate sketches. The chosen style for the final artwork came to be known as 'clear line', owing to its precision and lack of shadow (the opposite in many ways of the sensationalist American approach). This attention to detail was accentuated when individual stories were collected into albums (in the form of what would become known as 'graphic novels' in Britain and America), and found their way on to bookshelves. These were typically around 48 pages long, in full colour, and in hardback. In this form, they were collectable, and had a value as 'objects', as well as being entertaining. Moreover, these books found a market among adults as well as children: they were advertised as suitable for anyone between seven and seventy.

These *Tintin* albums started to go on sale in Britain from 1958, reprinted by a mainstream book publisher, Methuen. As such, they were not sold from newsagents like ordinary comics, but automatically became shelved in bookshops and public libraries. It was in this form that they became best known, although there were

attempts to serialize strips in conventional comics (notably in *The Eagle*). Unlike in Europe, Tintin was always assumed to be for a juvenile audience, and was not marketed to adults (at least, not in this period).³ A similar pattern of sales was later established in America (the first album was published by The Golden Press in 1959), though relatively speaking Tintin never really took off here.

Tintin's commercial success grew exponentially with time. As licensing deals flourished all over the world, so too did cross-media exploitation, with the production of films, animated TV shows and all manner of merchandising. Today, albums still sell in the order of three million per year, and appear in thirty-six different languages. Hergé, who died in 1990, is now recognized as having had an impact on European comics analogous to that of Jack Kirby on the American industry, and as being one of the most important creators in the history of the medium. After him, European creators would either be categorized as followers of, or deviators from, the 'clear line' school.

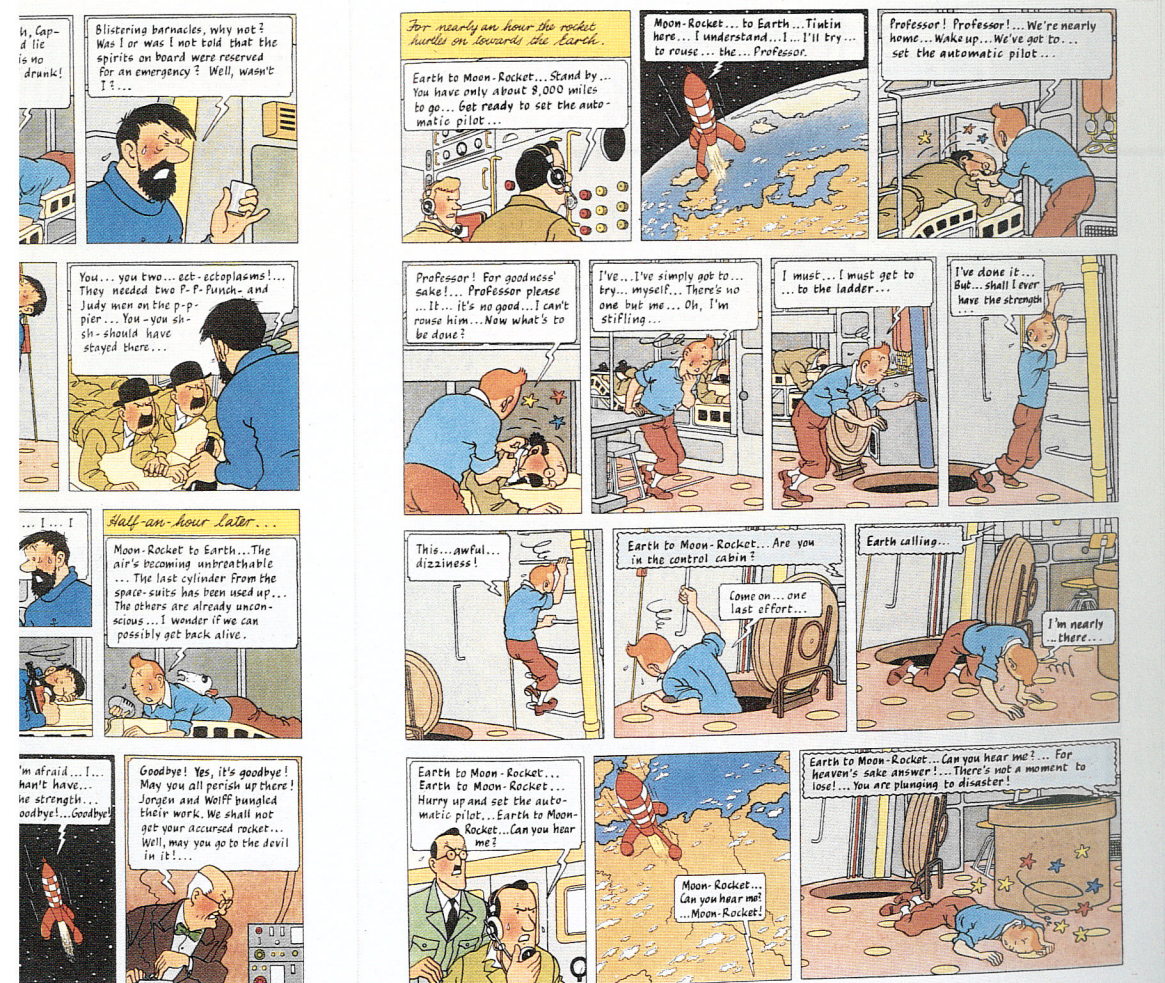
The economics of comics production in Europe were thus established in this early period. The enormous impact of Tintin established a template that other titles would follow: specifically, to 'pre-publish' in a regular, newsstand magazine, and then to republish individual



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Below and right: Detail and pages from *Asterix and the Roman Agent* (Hodder, 1972). Art: Albert Uderzo. Script: René Goscinny. The most famous Gaul in history, and the second most famous European comic. Stories mixed manic slapstick with more subtle allusions to world politics, and so appealed to all age groups: it was a trick that had been learned from *Mad*, but the result was quintessentially French. The character is today the star of stage, screen and theme park.



stories in album form later. This way, creators received two royalties. Thus, from the start, the assembly-line 'work for hire' method favoured by most British and American publishers was eschewed in favour of a system that, in theory at least, guaranteed a better quality product. This process was bolstered in some countries by the fact that comics were a 'protected' industry. In France, for example, a law was passed in 1949 that effectively banned American comics from entering the country. American newspaper strips like 'Flash Gordon' and 'The Phantom' had been syndicated in the 1930s, and superhero comics had arrived with the GIs in the 1940s, but French Communist Party protests about 'cultural imperialism' and the need for more patriotic French heroes forced the legal safeguard, and led to a situation where French comics were allowed to develop in their own idiosyncratic way.⁴ Indeed, the most successful comic, in terms of influence, after Tintin came from France, and again capitalized on the album system. 'Asterix the Gaul' was the creation of the artist Albert Uderzo and the writer René Goscinny; the latter of whom had worked in America with Harvey Kurtzman, and had been much influenced by *Mad*. Concerning the adventures of a diminutive ancient Gaul with an impressive moustache, and his friends Obelix the muscle man and Getafix the Druid, and in particular their run-ins with the Romans in 50 BC, the strip was much more humorous than Tintin, with an altogether more liberal political slant (despite being very sexist). The artwork was more 'cartoony' as well, though still within the clear-line tradition.

Asterix's success was modelled on the Tintin marketing formula: strips were prepublished in a magazine (*Pilote*, from 1959) before being collected into albums, which were then translated into different languages, and sold internationally from bookshops. In Britain, Hodder and Stoughton were responsible for publishing these from 1969 (though there had been a short-lived attempt to serialize a story in *Ranger* from 1965–6); again, America caught on to the albums slightly later, though they never made a particular impact.⁵

France was also the country at the centre of the next wave of international comics successes. The indigenous industry had gone from strength to strength in the 1960s, but now America became a major influence for the first time since the 1949 law. The underground, with its content of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and its hippie vision of psychedelic peace, started to become known, and to find echoes in Europe as anti-Vietnam War sentiment grew. Robert Crumb especially became a countercultural hero, and when France erupted in near revolution in 1968, the underground comics were as much a staple of the participants' reading matter as the radical press.⁶

This radical spark led to a boom in 'BDs pour adultes' in the 1970s. Initially, this took the form of anthology magazines – the main ones being *Métal Hurlant*, *Fluide Glacial*, *Circus*, (*A Suivre*) and *L'Echo des savanes* – all of which featured adult story lines, gags and images (especially in terms of depictions of sex). Though these were based in France, they tended to feature creators from all over Europe, especially from Italy. They were followed by the inevitable albums, which instead of acquiring the reputation of an 'underground' movement as had happened in America, instead went straight into mainstream bookshops. This assured their wide distribution, and at the height of the craze for adult comics, it was common for individual albums to sell in the region of 60,000.

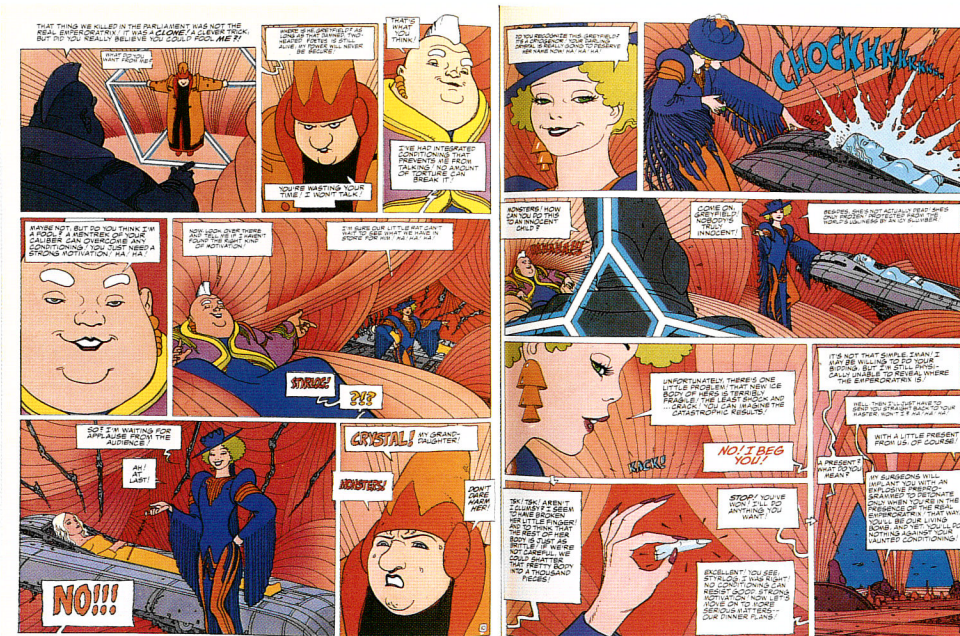
This boom was accompanied by a solidifying of

'comics culture'. Albums came to be sold on the basis of creators' reputations, and thus an 'auteur' system developed whereby creators became as esteemed as film directors or novelists. Criticism of comics became every bit as intellectualized as that of film, with critical magazines appearing in every European country (especially in France, where the 'Cahiers de la bande dessinée' were intended to do the same job as the famous 'Cahiers du cinéma' in raising standards). Finally, establishment institutions became involved, with universities setting up courses on comics, and governments funding huge comics museums and study centres, such as the 8 million-pounds 'CNBDI' in France. When President Mitterand declared himself to be an avid fan of comics in 1986, nobody was in the least taken aback.

It should be noted that though this adult comics explosion is often perceived by British and American commentators as representing a peak of creative invention, like almost every other sudden expansion we have explored in different parts of the world, a large proportion of the material was not worth the paper it was printed on. For instance, in terms of content many of the comics included a great deal of sexism: these were essentially titles by men for men. In this respect, they followed the history of the undergrounds quite closely.⁷

This boom in mature comics eventually made it across the English Channel and then across the Atlantic Ocean. Individual strips were serialized in British and American anthology comics, while albums were reprinted and sold from the emerging network of fan-shops. Naturally, only the best or most 'sellable' work was selected for translation, which is another reason for skewed perceptions among critics. The albums appeared spasmodically in the 1970s, and then in the 1980s went through a boom as they became intertwined with the whole graphic novel phenomenon. For British and American publishers they represented an easy way to feed the new demand for longer length stories in book form. Publishers which

Right: Pages from *The Inca* (Marvel Comics, 1988). Art: Jean 'Moebius' Giraud. Script: Moebius and Alexandro Jodorowsky. A colourful science fiction thriller with New Age pretensions, from the combined talents of the grand fromage of French adult comics and the Chilean film director (El Topo). After Hergé, Moebius was the creator who most influenced the history of European comics: here, his take on the clear-line tradition is shown to good effect.



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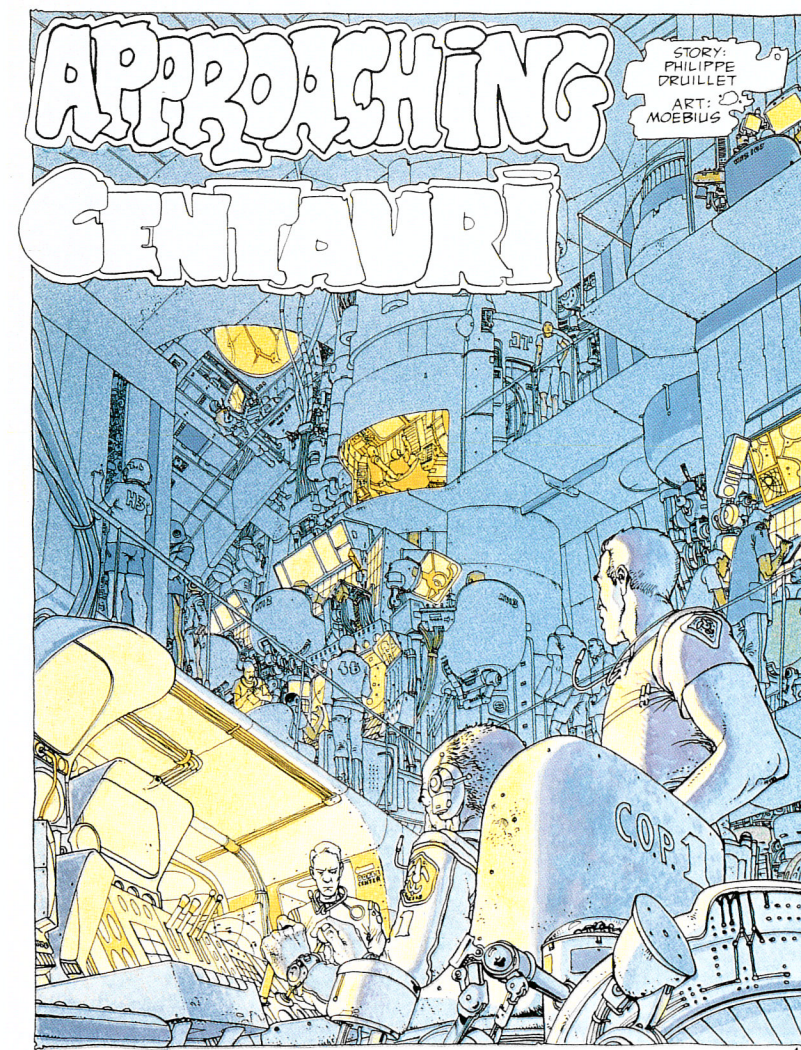
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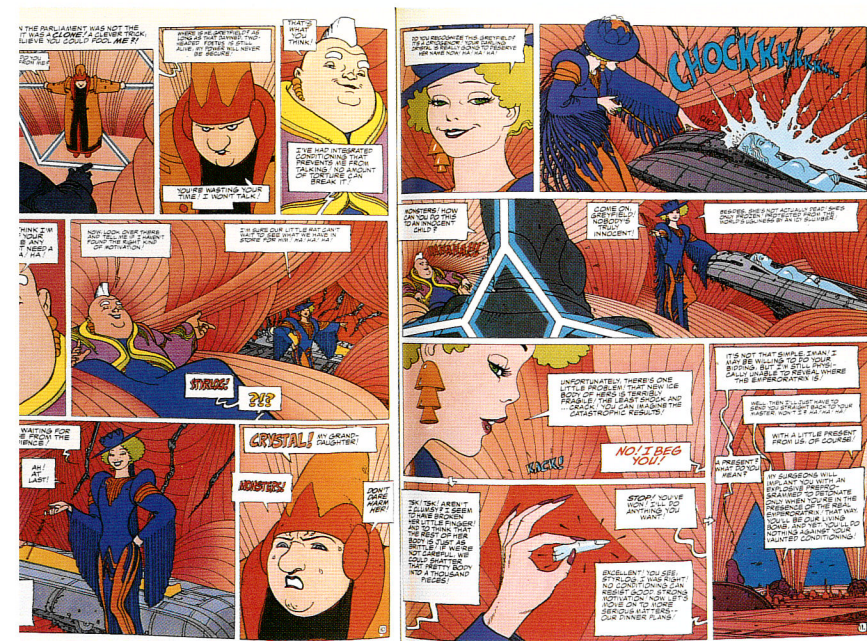


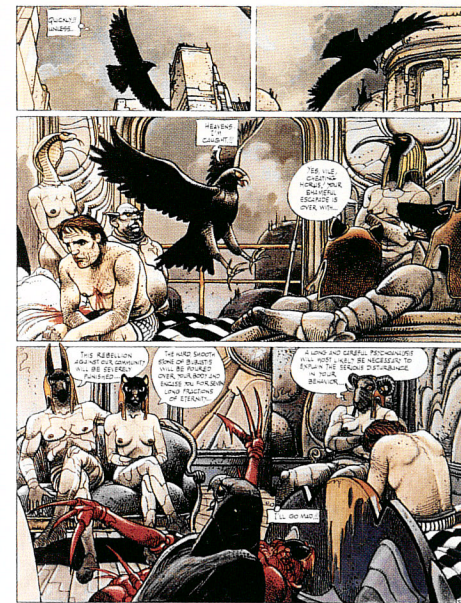
Above and right: Pages from 'Approaching Centauri', *Heavy Metal* (Heavy Metal Publishing, 1977). Art: Moebius. Script: Philippe Druillet. A terrifying SF yarn, with a level of violence and visual sophistication that was unusual to British and American eyes. The magazine *Heavy Metal* was instrumental in introducing readers to the 1970s French comics renaissance.

were particularly associated with European albums included Titan Books, Marvel/Epic, NBM, Catalan, and Heavy Metal Publishing.⁸

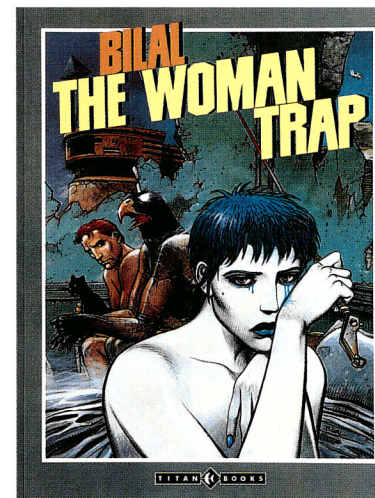
In terms of the overall influence on the British and American markets, science fiction was the genre that initially made the most headway, due to its affinity with the English language comics tradition. The groundbreaking science fiction anthology *Métal Hurlant* was extremely unusual among European titles in that it was imported in its original, untranslated form, and sold to comics fans who were typically content to enjoy the artwork by itself. The experimental nature of much of the art, plus its sexual content, was something that had not been seen in the context of science fiction comics before (bar one or two obscure undergrounds), and the quality of the paper stock, and of the production values generally, was also fresh. Consequently, as we have seen in Chapter 6, the comic was very influential, and not only spawned an American version of itself, *Heavy Metal*, but also became a huge influence on a wave of other adult science fiction anthologies. This was especially the case in Britain, where titles included *Pssst!*, *Graphixus* and *Brainstorm Fantasy Comix* (see p 139).

Science fiction albums as such were commonly collected and translated from the pages of *Métal Hurlant*, but could also have their origins in other European magazines. The science fiction 'auteur' 'par excellence' was the Frenchman Jean Giraud, who worked as 'Moebius', and who after Hergé, was the creator with the biggest influence on British and American comics. His albums were numerous and diverse, and ranged from the druggy and spontaneous *Arzach* and *The Airtight Garage*, to the zen-like *Incal* saga. His story





This page: A selection of science fiction work by Enki Bilal. Above: Pages from *Gods in Chaos* (Titan Books, 1988). Right and below: Cover, pages and panel from *The Woman Trap* (Titan Books, 1988). The two books were ostensibly part of the same story, a tech noir romance set in a future populated by Egyptian gods. The pale-skinned heroine (right and below) is both woman-in-peril and femme fatale, and her emotional disintegration is charted against a backdrop of explosive violence.

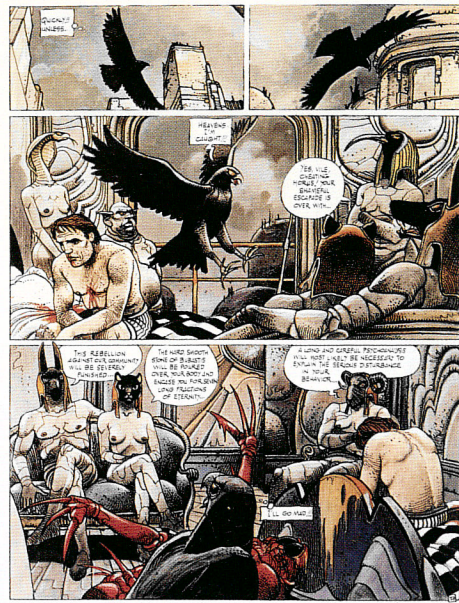


lines may not have been always coherent, but his artwork was never less than stunning, developing from a Crumb-inspired intensity in his early career to a more fluid clear-line approach later on. It was perhaps unsurprising that British and American publishers would try to poach him for themselves: he produced a variety of superhero comics for Marvel in the 1980s, including a run on the *Silver Surfer*.

Other creators who made their name in science fiction included: Enki Bilal, a Yugoslavian living in Paris, whose *Gods in Chaos* and *The Woman Trap* are set in a decadent future and populated by Egyptian gods (the latter vividly pictures a decaying London beset by tribal wars); Philippe Druillet, a Frenchman, whose *Lone Sloane* stories, about an adventurer's travels through time and space and across the fantastical world 'Delirius', had been a centrepiece of *Métal Hurlant*; Matthias Schultheiss, a German, whose *Bell's Theorem* was a dark technological thriller; and Don Lawrence, an Englishman (who had previously worked for children's comics such as *Look and Learn*), whose *Storm* volumes, about a muscular sword-wielding hero and his battles with sundry fantastic monsters, appeared first in Europe, and were then re-translated back into English.

If science fiction blazed a trail, other genres were soon to follow. Historical drama was a major draw in Europe, and had its share of English translations: the best comics demonstrated an historian's eye for detail in the artwork, combined with believable plotting; the worst tended to feature lashings of sex and violence in a phoney period setting. Every kind of historical era was covered, though different creators tended to specialize. For example, the Belgian Hermann was noted for his Medieval stories, *The Towers of Bois Maury*, which combined dark, photo-referenced art with mystery narrative themes, and included some stunning whole-page set-pieces. The Italian Hugo Pratt was more at home at the turn of the



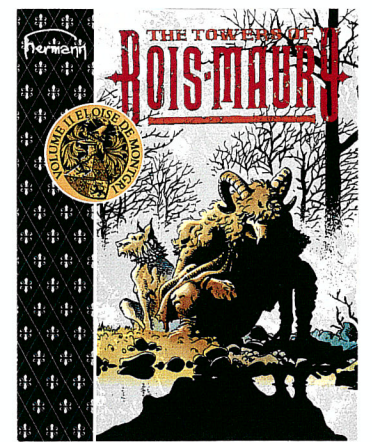
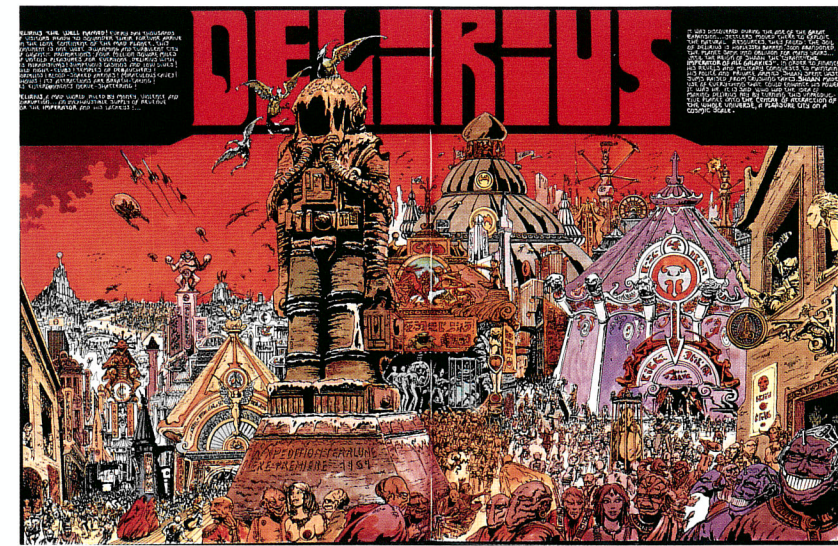


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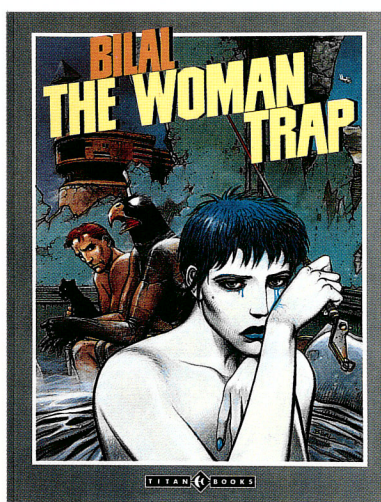
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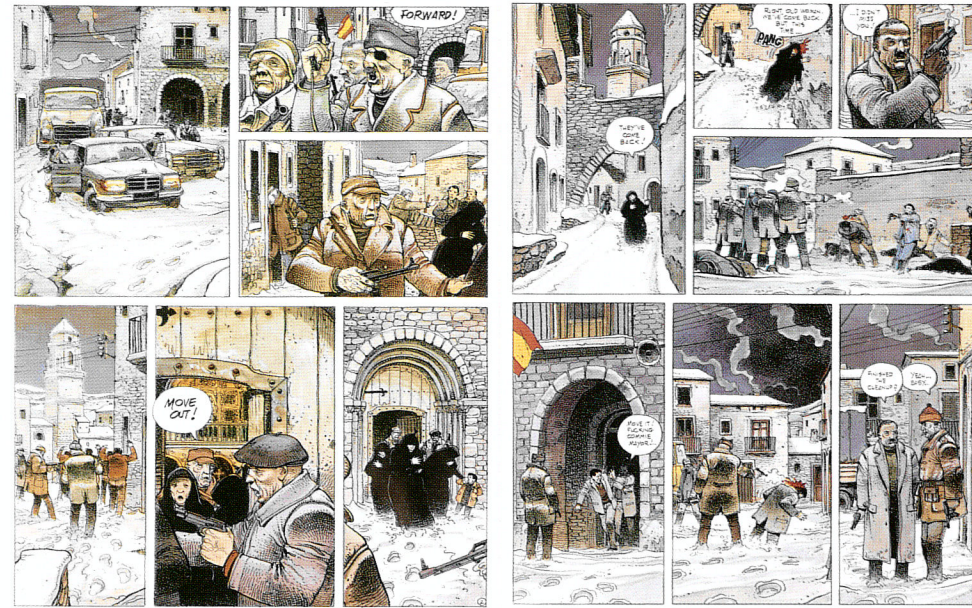
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Right, below left, and bottom left: Pages from *Lone Sloane: Delirius* (Heavy Metal, 1979). Art/script: Philippe Druillet. Psychedelic SF from one of the underrated auteurs of the French scene. Below right and bottom right: Page and cover from *The Towers of Bois Maury* (Titan Books, 1989). Art/script: Hermann. A group of raiders pillage their way across medieval Belgium: an authentic looking story rendered in elegant, subtle tones, and using techniques that are unique to comics. Historical fiction was the second most popular European genre in the 1980s and 1990s.

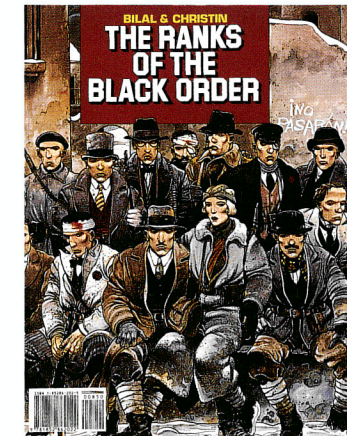


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Left and below: Pages and cover from *The Ranks of the Black Order* (Titan Books, 1989). Art: Enki Bilal. Script: Pierre Christin. A thriller about the legacy of the Spanish Civil War. Here, a reunited group of fascists do their worst.



Above: Panel from *Blueberry 1: Chihuahua Pearl* (Marvel, 1989). Art: Moebius. Script: Jean-Michel Charlier. A gritty western in the Sergio Leone mould, about a cavalry lieutenant (Blueberry) who has to stop a unit of Mexican soldiers before they can reach a fugitive who has a message for the United States President.

century, and his series of *Corto Maltese* albums featured a seafaring adventurer and his travels to, among other locations, Africa, Barbados and Ireland: again, the depth of research was impressive (in one story, Corto meets Jack London in Manchuria in 1904, where the American writer actually was a war correspondent). Finally, Frenchman Jacques Tardi contributed a remarkable account of the grim life of a recruit during the First World War in *The War of the Trenches*. More realistic than most film or novelistic portrayals, it was partly based on the diaries of his grandfather.

Another kind of historical drama, though much more within the confines of genre fiction, were westerns. One example in particular was very popular, the *Lieutenant Blueberry* albums, written by Michel Charlier and Jean Giraud, and illustrated by Giraud. Starring a stubble-chinned Yankee officer, these stories portrayed the West as a cynical, sinister place, where white men were ruled by greed, and American Indians were victimized and exploited as a matter of course. Critics have made much of the similarities between the series and the films of Sergio Leone, which featured a similarly 'European' vision of US history. The *Blueberry* tales were in fact more successful in Europe than Giraud's science fiction work, and though they were never as popular in Britain

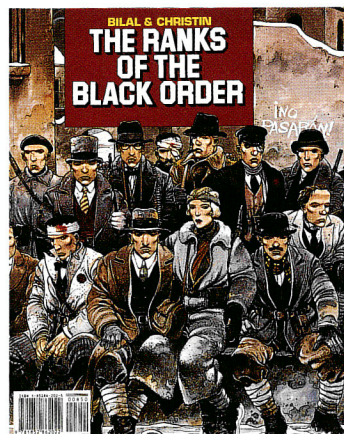
and America, they still picked up a healthy fan following.

The humour genre too had its album translations, though these were definitely hit and miss because jokes did not always travel. Examples included, from Belgium, Benoit Sokal's *Shaggy Dog Story*, starring Inspector Canardo, a down-at-heel duck detective, which dealt in a sometimes abstruse form of low sarcasm. From Spain came *Peter Pank*, by Max, a semi-pornographic reworking of the JM Barrie fairy tale, complete with a cast of punks. From Italy, there was *Squeak the Mouse*, by Mattioli, a brightly-coloured gore-toon where the x-rated antics of mouse and tom cat took the Tom and Jerry theme into 'video nasty' territory. But none of these really made much of an impact on their anglophone audience, and as a result the modern masters of European comedy (such as the great André Franquin) remain untranslated beyond one or two strips in obscure anthologies.

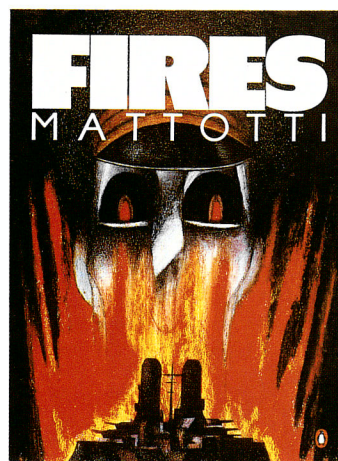
Thrillers in album form were slightly more successful. Two collaborations between Enki Bilal and writer Pierre Christin (a doctor of sociology), were particularly notable. In *The Hunting Party*, ten Politburo members gather for a bear hunt. But things go wrong when the sudden murder of a rising apparatchik highlights the doomed nature of the Warsaw Pact, and of Soviet communism. In *The Ranks of the Black Order*, old animosities from the



Left and below: Pages and cover from *The Ranks of the Black Order* (Titan Books, 1989). Art: Enki Bilal. Script: Pierre Christin. A thriller about the legacy of the Spanish Civil War. Here, a reunited group of fascists do their worst.



Above: Detail from *Peter Pank* (Knockabout, 1990). Art/script: Max. A bizarre punk reworking of the JM Barrie story, from Spain. Above right: Page from *An Author in Search of Six Characters* (Catalan, 1989). Art/script: Milo Manara. An erotic twist on Pirandello, set in Africa. Below: Cover and pages from *Fires* (Penguin, 1991). Art/script: Lorenzo Mattotti. A fully-painted expressionistic fantasy about a seaman's encounter with fire spirits. Mattotti's jagged shapes in vivid reds have become a trademark.



Spanish Civil war ignite again as two factions consisting of elderly radicals pursue each other across contemporary Europe. Jacques Tardi also contributed to the genre with two *Nestor Burma* adventures, adaptations of private eye novels by Leo Malet, and *Adele and the Beast*, an album spoofing early twentieth-century thriller fiction, and starring a plucky heroine. Mention should also be made of the remarkable series *Sinner*, by two South American exiles working in Europe, Jose Munoz and Carlos Sampayo. The story involves the grim biography of a down-on-his-luck sleuth, as he witnesses modern Manhattan go to hell around him.

Six albums were marketed as 'Eurotica', and found a small but devoted following. The most popular creators were both Italians: Milo Manara for his exquisitely rendered albums *Butterscotch*, about the adventures of an invisible sex maniac, and *Click!*, about a scientist who invents a machine that unchains women's libidos; and Guido Crepax for his more serious, and equally strikingly drawn, adaptations of *Emmanuelle* and *The Story of O*. Mention should also be made of the Frenchman Georges Pichard, whose 1977 album *Candide at Sea* featured a voluptuous heroine 'who just can't seem to keep her clothes on' (where have we heard that one before?), and who later became notorious for his *Illustrated Kama Sutra*.

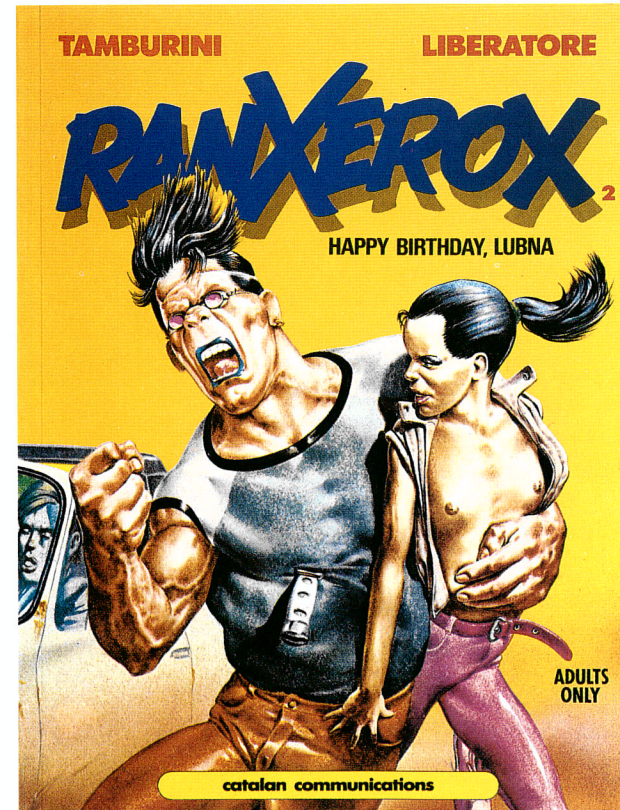
Last but not least, the European avant-garde also found a place in British and America comics shops. Two graphic novels by Italian Lorenzo Mattotti, both painted in an abstract style, exemplified the best of and worst of the genre. In the superb *Fires*, mysterious fire spirits take over an island, and disturb the minds of the sailors

and America, they still picked up a healthy fan following.

The humour genre too had its album translations, though these were definitely hit and miss because jokes did not always travel. Examples included, from Belgium, Benoît Sokal's *Shaggy Dog Story*, starring Inspector Canardo, a down-at-heel duck detective, which dealt in a sometimes abstruse form of low sarcasm. From Spain came *Peter Pank*, by Max, a semi-pornographic reworking of the JM Barrie fairy tale, complete with a cast of punks. From Italy, there was *Squeak the Mouse*, by Mattioli, a brightly-coloured gore-toon where the x-rated antics of mouse and tom cat took the Tom and Jerry theme into 'video nasty' territory. But none of these really made much of an impact on their anglophone audience, and as a result the modern masters of European comedy (such as the great André Franquin) remain untranslated beyond one or two strips in obscure anthologies.

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Right: Cover to *Ranxerox 2: Happy Birthday Lubna* (Catalan, 1987). Art: Gaetano Liberatore. The outrageous Italian tale of an ultra-violent robot and his affair with a pubescent delinquent, which would no doubt have caused quite a stir in Britain and America had it been more widely distributed. Below: Panel and pages from *Pixy* (Fantagraphics, 1993). Art/script: Max Andersson. The creator is stylistically a sort of Danish Chester Brown, though the random surreal carnage of *Pixy* is purely his own.



aboard a passing warship. In the infinitely more pretentious *Murmur*, scripted by Jerry Kramsky, a man with a burned face, lost in a strange land, finds salvation in nature. Humorous avant-garde titles included work that was analogous to the anglophone underground and alternative scenes. Early examples were the brace of albums starring the character Ranxerox (*Ranxerox in New York* and *Happy Birthday Lubna*), by Gaetano Libertore and Stefano Tamburini, about the incredibly violent (and amusingly amoral) adventures of a punk Frankenstein. A notable later addition was *Pixy*, by the Dane Max Andersson, which offered up a smorgasbord of bizarre images, where money eats people, buildings have personalities, and foetuses roam the streets armed with bazookas.

These were just some of the many European titles translated for a British and American readership over the last twenty years. The fact that in commercial terms none came anywhere close to rivalling the popularity of *Tintin* or *Asterix*, and that, indeed, most ended up in remainder bins, is not necessarily a comment on their quality. Like so many other graphic novels, they were not marketed properly, and fell foul of the mini-slump that followed the 'comics grow up' hype of the late 1980s. If indigenously-originated material of this kind had problems getting established, then it can be no surprise that the European output has fared even less well.

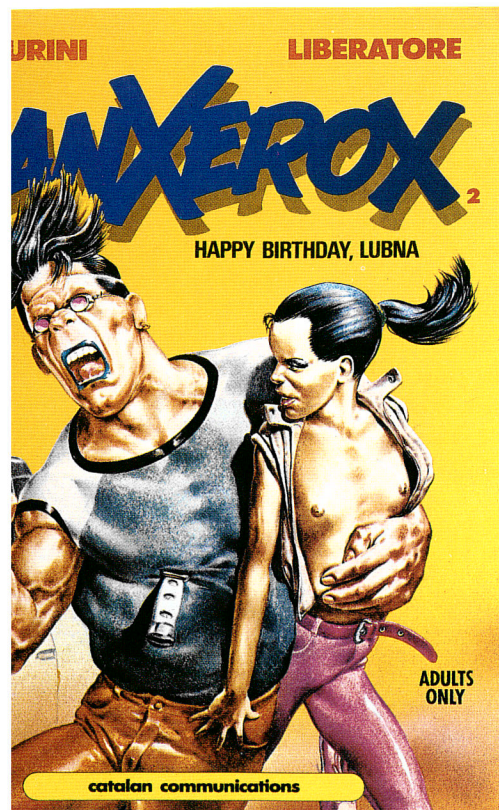
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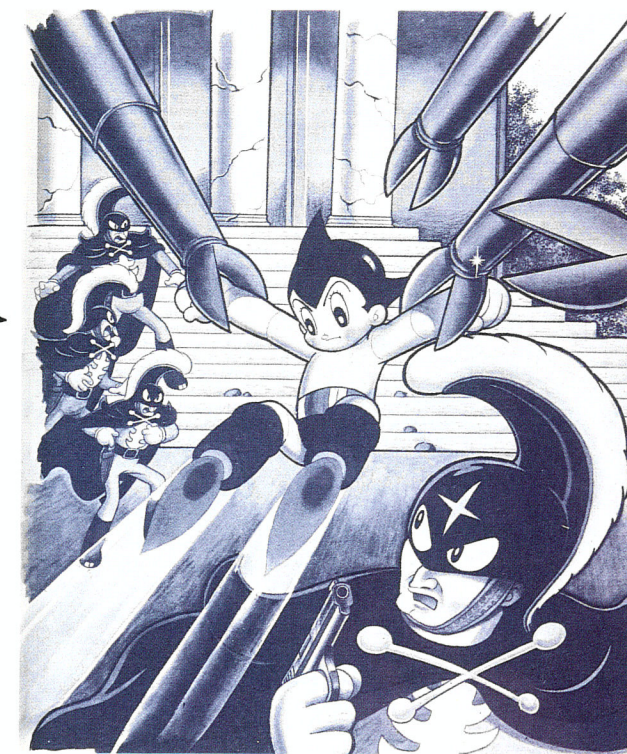
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Above: Detail from *Dragon Ball 2* (1995). Art: Akira Toriyama. A comedy adventure, and currently one of the best-selling comics in Japan. Above right: Page from *Tetsuwan Atom* (1951). Art/script: Osamu Tezuka. The best-loved Japanese SF comic starred a little robot with superpowers and human feelings. Unlike American superheroes, he fought not for freedom but for peace. (He is best known in the West as 'Astro Boy', after the 1960s TV cartoons inspired by the comic.) The artist, Tezuka, was responsible for virtually creating the comics industry in Japan after the Second World War.

novel was in part inspired by European albums. For the producers of fanzines, the European model showed that criticism need not be fawning and industry-led. The European system was an inspiration to British and American creators in a number of ways. It showed that working in comics need not be an anonymous and unglamorous occupation; it also proved that the idea of earning royalties was not so unthinkable. Above all, the maturity of European storytelling, and the flexibility of European art styles, influenced indigenous creators to expand the limits of their craft.

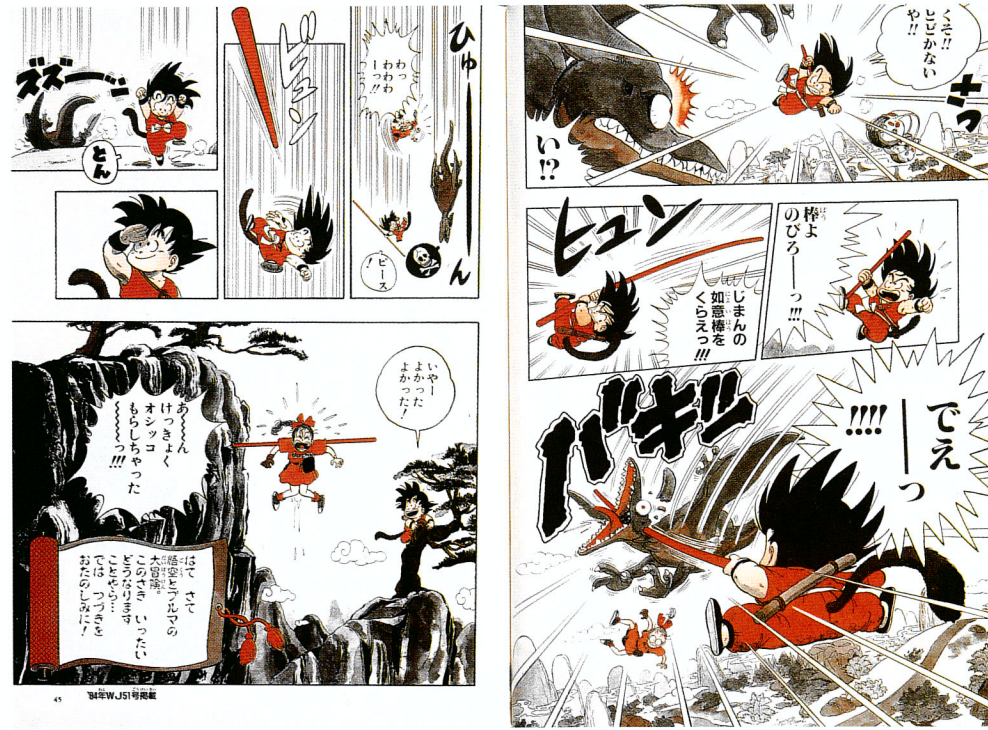
Japanese comics (or 'manga') were much slower to catch on in Britain and America. Whereas European comics were the product of a culture that was readily understandable, and of a comics tradition that was similarly not far removed, Japanese comics were much more alien in both respects. When they did finally start



to make an impact, in the 1980s, their influence was limited to a particular (cult) audience, and though the comics often achieved high sales by being sold through the network of fan shops, they remained a subculture within a subculture.¹⁰

In Japan, the manga industry started off by being orientated towards juveniles." In the 1950s, manga could be rented from pay-libraries for a few yen, and this made them a staple of post-war children's reading. Boys' comics ('shonen') included subject matter such as historical adventure, samurai stories, and sport, while girls' titles ('shojo') focused more on Mills and Boon style romance or puppy-love stories. One creator who managed to appeal to both sexes, and in the process became central to this initial boom, was Osamu Tezuka, whose Disney-influenced comics, such as the enormously popular *New Treasure Island*, set the stylistic template for the majority of manga over the next two decades.

As the 1950s progressed, one kids' genre became especially important, namely, science fiction, and more specifically manga involving robot stories. Again, Tezuka was pivotal. His strip 'Ambassador Atom', which ran in *Shonen Magazine* between 1959 to 1968, reworked the Pinocchio story, and was about a little twenty-first century robot who can never become fully human. An animated TV series based on the manga followed, entitled *Astro Boy*, in 1963 (also masterminded by Tezuka), and started the robot craze in earnest. Hundreds of copyists followed, often accompanied by TV series: a boom that has continued to the present. According to historian Helen McCarthy, it reflected, and continues to reflect, real-life concerns: 'The first nation to make extensive use of the industrial robot is still the world's largest user of robot technology, and Japanese popular entertainment mirrors the general enthusiasm for the concept of the 'tin man'... [manga] have helped to



Above: Pages from *Dragon Ball 2* (1995). Art/script: Akira Toriyama. This example, in its original form, demonstrates some of the problems involved with any translation. The text reads right to left, and therefore has to be 'flopped', while the onomatopoeia, so integral to the action in Japanese artwork, needs to be carefully replaced.

encourage and maintain Japan's positive attitude to technology, and by making it both popular and acceptable have thus contributed considerably to the nation's progress and prosperity.¹²

From the 1960s to the present day, the comics industry has built on these foundations, and quickly expanded to cover all sections of the population. This history has been well covered elsewhere (see note 10), but we can summarize by saying that those readers who had been introduced to manga as children continued to consume different kinds of manga as they grew up. Thus the kind of stigma attached to comics in many Western nations was circumvented. Science fiction continued to be very popular, but was joined by an incredible diversity of other adult genres: from splatter horror to mah-jong; surreal comedy to wok cookery; and martial arts to art appreciation. You could now learn to fix your car, study for accountancy exams, scrutinize political manifestos, and even improve your sex life from the pages of a manga.

Economically speaking, this growth had profound repercussions. By the start of the modern period, the Japanese economy was coming out of recession, and a manga-purchasing culture rapidly took over from the old pay-library system. Suddenly, big money was being made, and manga creators started to be taken seriously as celebrities. By the 1970s, they constituted many of the richest people in the country, with fan followings comparable to the hippest pop stars. Sales, it seemed, could not stop rising: by the mid-1990s it was estimated that between thirty and forty per cent of all Japanese publishing was devoted to manga, with sales in the region of a staggering two billion per year.

This explosion also necessitated new publishing methods. To maximize profits, publishers produced manga in a number of forms. Stories appeared first as serials in large digest magazines, with perhaps a few

dozen pages appearing per issue. These weekly and monthly publications were printed on low grade paper, were square bound, and often ran to over a thousand pages. With vast circulations, often with sales of individual titles in the millions, these manga could be priced very cheaply. If a particular story proved to be successful, it was reprinted in a higher quality version, possibly even in a hard cover, on better paper and without adverts. These volumes were usually around 200 pages long, and were designed to be kept on bookshelves rather than to be thrown away – the Japanese version of a graphic novel.

It was only a matter of time before such incredible sales figures for manga in Japan would lead foreign companies to buy sub-licenses and attempt to reproduce those successes in their own markets. By the 1980s, those markets were ready for such a move: American comics aimed at an older age range were becoming the new mainstream in the fan shops, and the development of 'direct sales' meant that minority-interest titles could prosper. Realistically, manga would be 'minority interest', at least to begin with: publishers might hope in the long run to imitate the mainstream success that they achieved in their home country, but at first, it was sensible to be cautious.

For one thing, there were factors to be considered beyond the obvious expense of translation. For instance, before manga could be sold into the home market, a number of technical problems had to be dealt with. In particular, the pages of artwork had to be reversed (or 'flopped' in publishing jargon), so that they read left-to-right, instead of right-to-left, as they would in Japan. Additionally, the original artwork needed to be touched-up, with Japanese sound effects replaced with more appropriate English onomatopoeia.

There were other Japanese storytelling conventions that were likely to be difficult for Western audiences, and which could not so easily be disguised. For example, comics symbolism could be very different. 'Sleep', for example, was not symbolized with a string of 'zeds', but with a bubble emanating from the character's nose. Similarly, facial characteristics were very different: for example, the heroes of many manga were drawn with over-large, Western-style eyes, in order to aid reader identification: the villains, by contrast, were usually rendered in more realistic fashion, in order to objectify them, to emphasize their 'otherness'.¹³

Finally, the pacing of Japanese stories could sometimes be very deliberate, and even slow. This was a huge contrast to the slam-bang tradition of American and British comics. The generation of mood was an essential aspect of lengthy manga, and there were many more 'silent' panels than in Western comics (in terms of format, there simply was not the same pressure on any one instalment to show a lot 'happening'): possibly, this attitude to pacing can be traced to the tradition of labyrinthine works of art in Japan. In the words of one historian, 'In Japan more than anywhere else, comics is an art of intervals.'¹⁴

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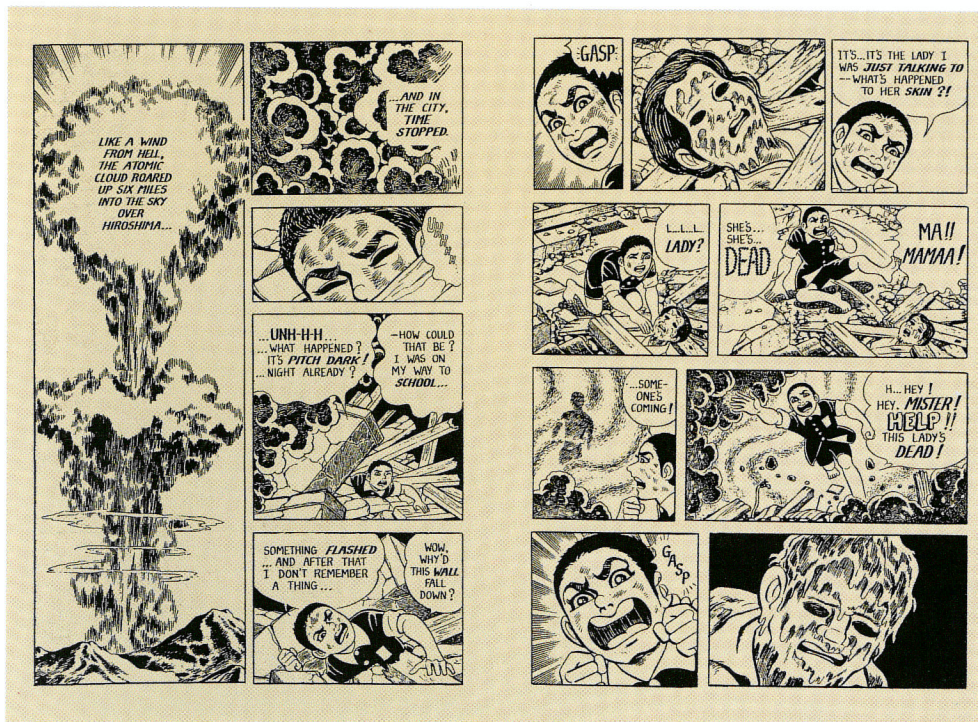
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Below: Pages from *Barefoot Gen* (Penguin, 1987) and *Barefoot Gen: the Day After* (Penguin, 1990). Art/script for both: Keiji Nakazawa. Subtitled ‘A Cartoon History of Hiroshima’, this harrowing semi-autobiographical story was originally translated in the West to aid the protest against nuclear power in the 1980s. In it, the young boy ‘Gen’ of the title sees his family and neighbours die of burns and radiation sickness. The fact that time is spent in the novel allowing the reader to get to know these people makes their fate all the more affecting.



very careful about the kinds of manga they tried to introduce into the domestic market. Partly for this reason, the first smattering of titles in the 1980s were chosen for their ‘cultural acceptability’: their artwork was not overly difficult, and the stories, though quintessentially Japanese, were not too alien. Three are worthy of particular note. *Gen of Hiroshima* by Keiji Nakazawa (Edu-comics, 1980), was probably the most famous because of its subject matter, and told the story of the author’s family’s experiences of everyday life during the Second World War, and of the ghastly consequences of the The Bomb; it was put out by an underground publisher in order to publicize the anti-nuclear movement. A thoughtful, vivid, and probing work, it was already considered a classic in Japan. *Lone Wolf and Cub* by Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima (First, 1987) was a samurai epic about a shamed warrior’s life as an assassin, baby son in tow: realistically drawn, and very exciting, it included near-silent sword fights that lasted many pages. Finally, *Goodbye* by Yoshihiro Tatsumi (Catalan, 1987) was a collection of slice-of-life stories set in postwar Japanese cities – downbeat, subtle, and extremely moving.

These early titles were relatively successful: they received great critical acclaim in the comics fanzines, and attained some commercial success. This was especially true of *Lone Wolf*. Their main importance, however, was that they opened the doors: hereafter, manga would no longer be virgin territory for publishers. As a result, certain companies started to take much more notice of product from Japan, and to specialize in translations: in the early days, the most prominent included First Comics (publishers of *Lone Wolf*), a sub-licensee in Chicago, and Viz Communications, an American-based subsidiary of a Japanese publisher.

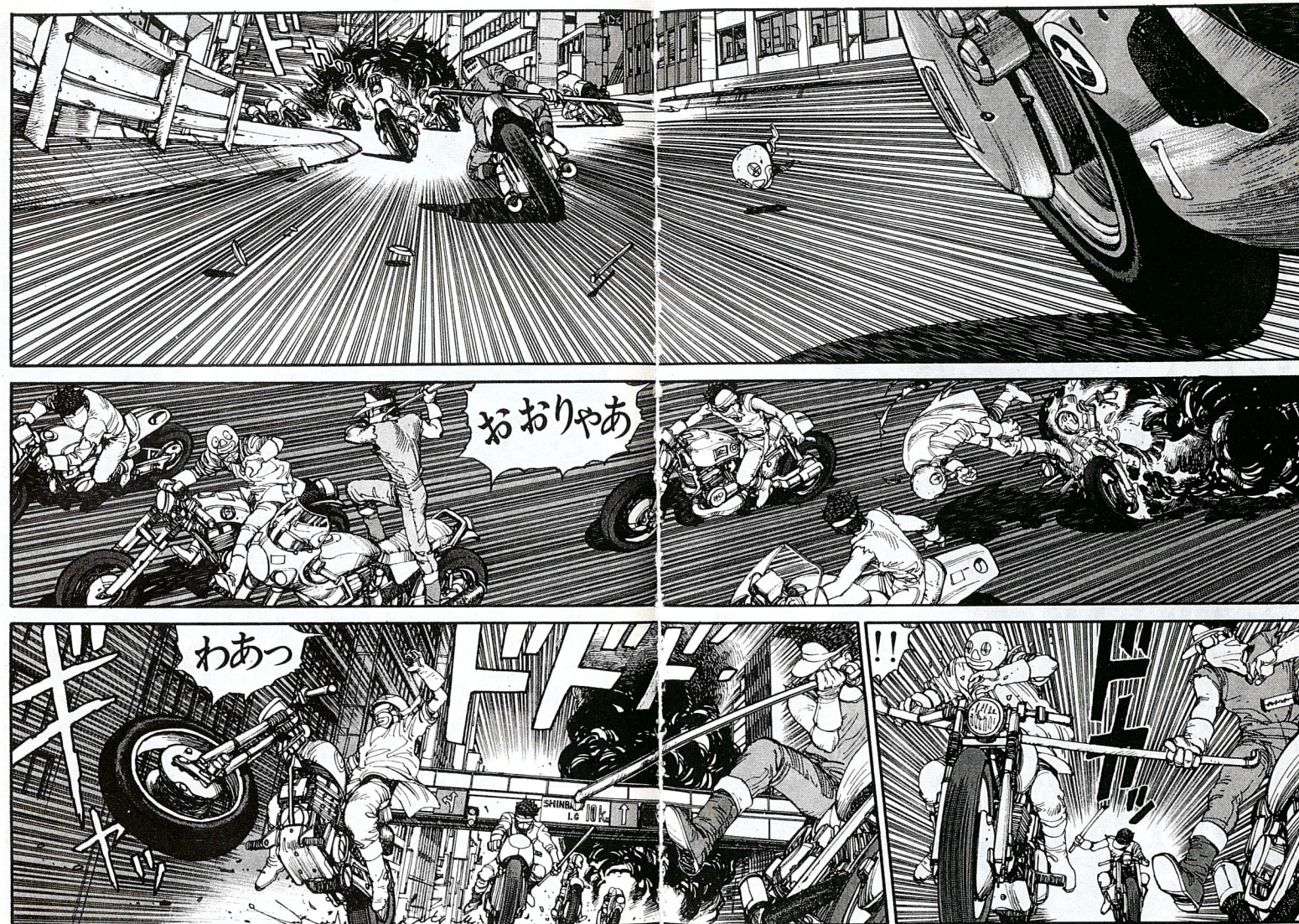
At this point, the story became rather more complicated. For it was clear that, despite these one-off hits, if manga

were really going to take off in any significant commercial fashion, they needed some extra impetus. The obvious answer was to link them somehow with the related business of Japanese animated films, or ‘anime’, as they were known, and to start integrated marketing campaigns. Thus, as anime became more popular among Western audiences in the 1980s and 1990s, so publishers producing manga worked ever more closely with the film and video companies, to such an extent that they became reliant upon each other, and their futures became largely intertwined. The specialist comics shops would soon take the extraordinary step of erecting shelves for manga and for videos next to each other.

To understand why anime became so influential, it is necessary to backtrack for a moment. In Japan, animation had first become popular in the form of television serials in the 1960s, and later had developed into a broader industry taking in full-length feature films. Although initially directed towards a juvenile audience, anime gradually became more sophisticated, to the point where they were a tiered product, for children, for teenagers and for adults. Thus, a night out at the cinema for the Japanese could mean going to see an anime. This was a situation that was barely conceivable in the West, where cinema-going meant live-action films, and where animation was considered ‘kids’ stuff’ in just the same way that comics were.¹⁵

The links between anime and manga were very strong from the start, and some of the most popular animators were also manga creators (Tezuka being the first, and best-known example). As anime were more expensive

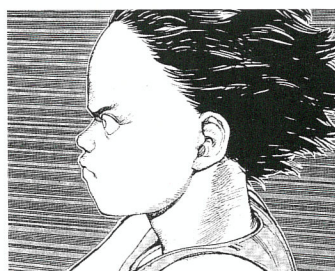




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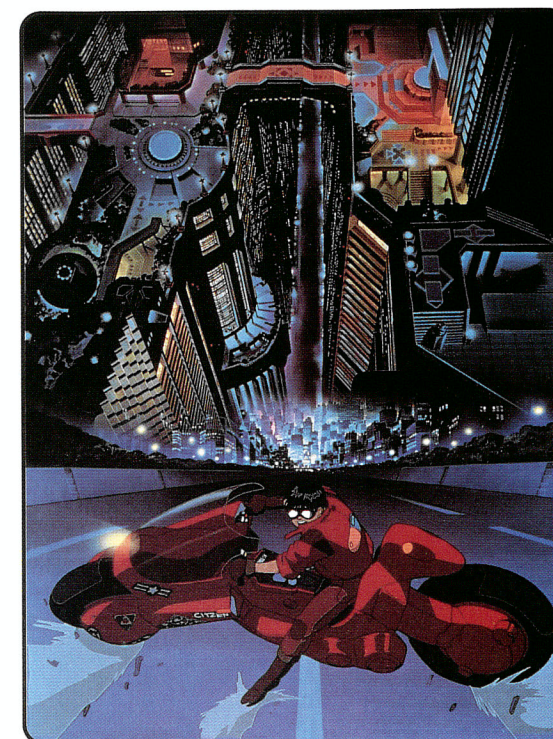
This page: The biggest Japanese comic in the West: *Akira*. A cyberpunk story about bike gangs in post-apocalyptic Tokyo. All examples art/script: Katsuhiro Otomo. Above and below: Page and panel from the original manga (1988), demonstrating Otomo's stunning use of speed-lines. Below right: Still from the movie (1990) adapted from the comic, also directed by Otomo, which broke art house records across Britain and the United States.

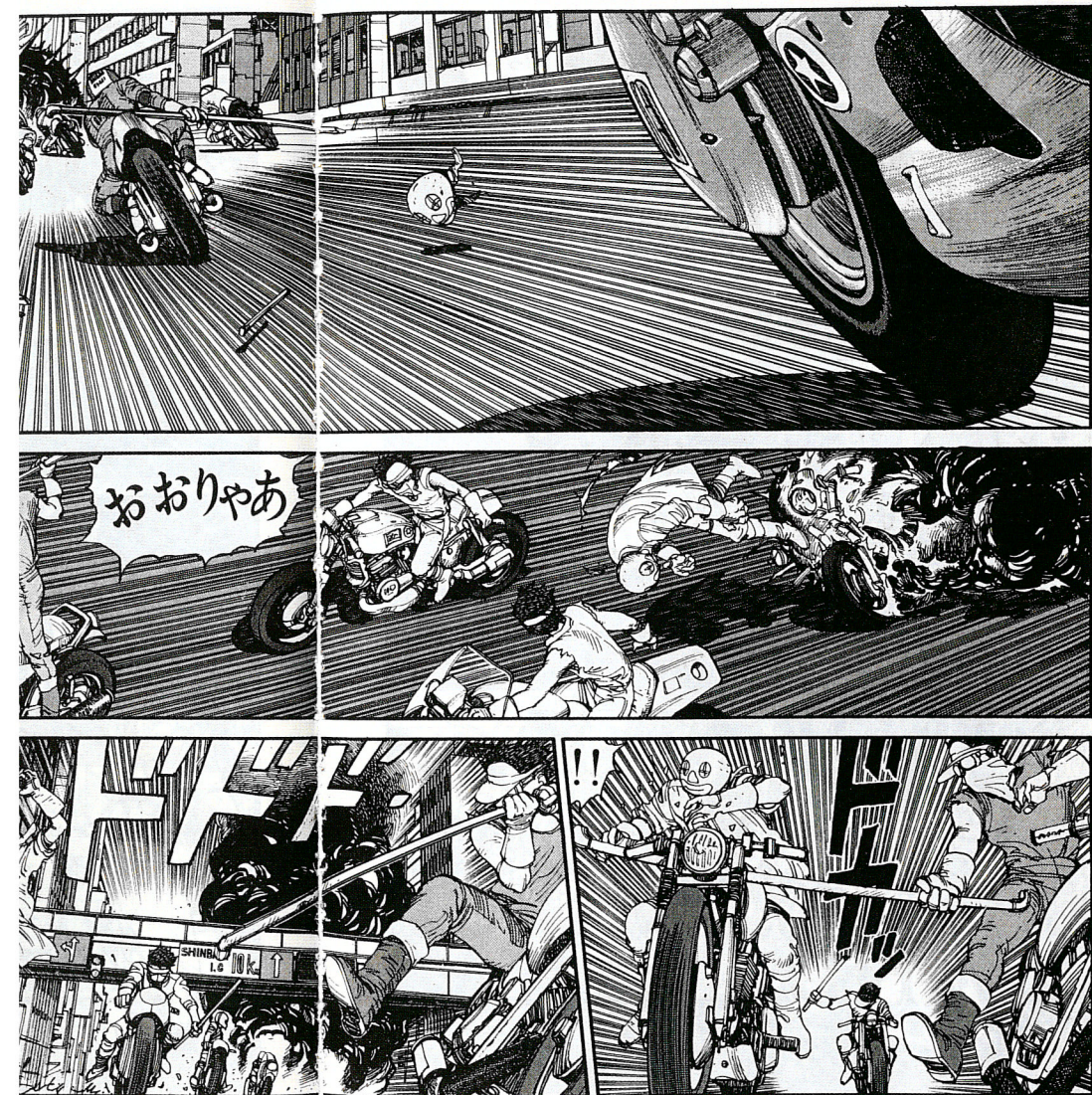


to produce, it was common for stories to originate in manga. The ladder was such that on the back of the popularity of a serialized manga story, it was possible to produce a graphic-novel collection and then a television series; full-length cinema feature films were also not uncommon. The quality of the animation itself could be exceptional: as for subject matter, this could be as broad as anything found in manga, including the same level of sex and violence. Once again, the popularity of the form in Japan was a spur for Western entrepreneurs to introduce it to their home markets.

In the West, television anime were first screened on British and American networks in the 1960s. Tezuka's series *Astro Boy* was a particular success: with skilful dubbing, it was hard to tell that it was not American.¹⁶ It was followed by many others down to the present day, including most famously *Marine Boy* and *Transformers*. Actual animated features started to be shown in art cinemas in America and parts of Europe, particularly Italy and France, in the 1970s. But it was in the 1980s that things really started to get moving, with the rise of home video.

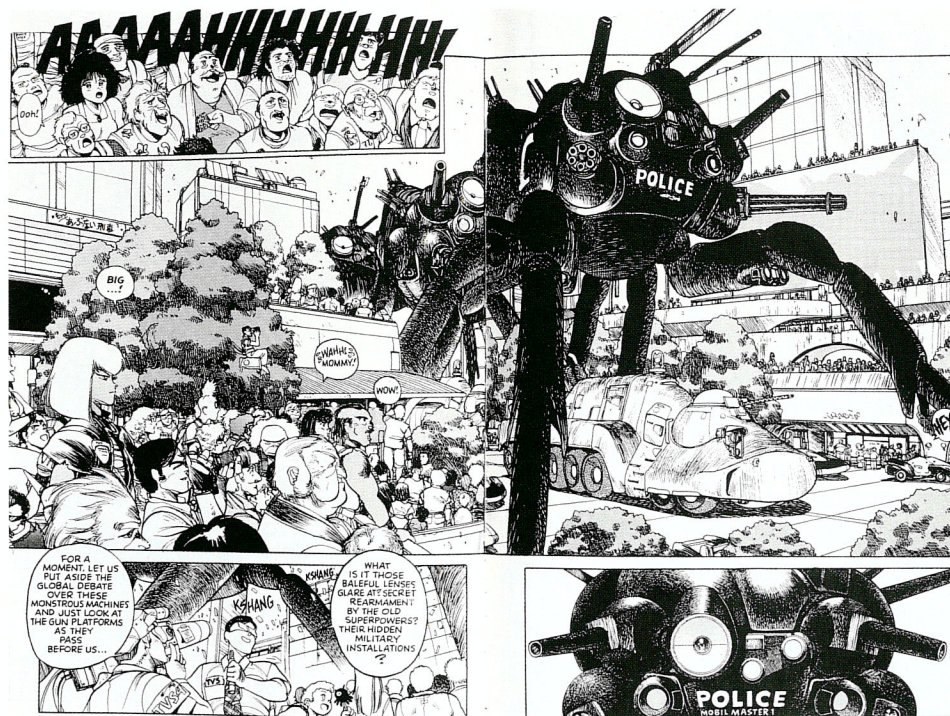
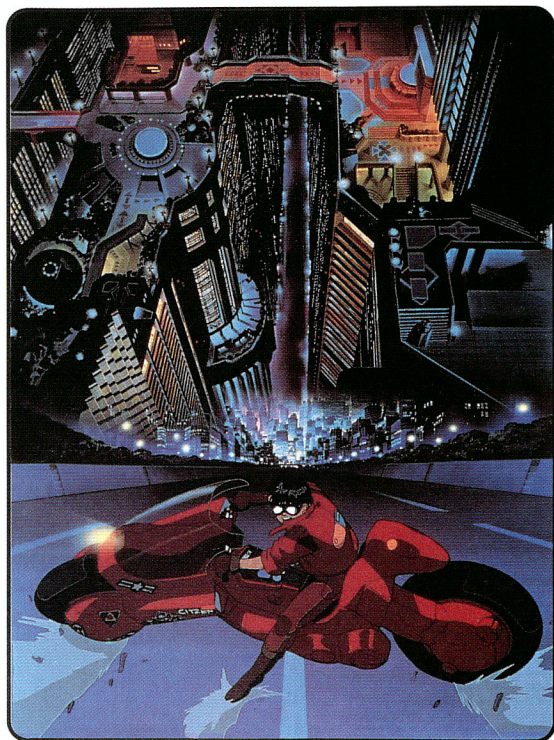
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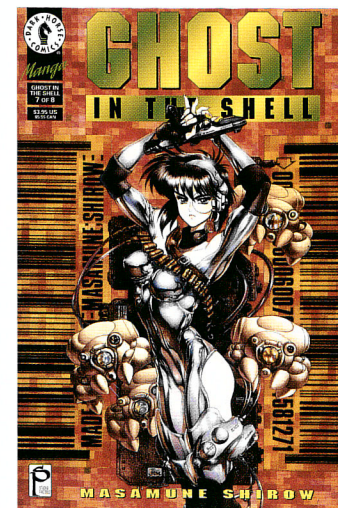
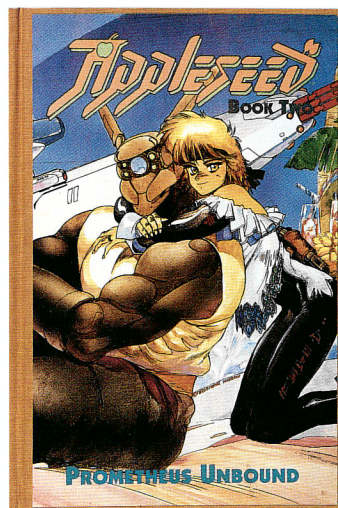


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This page: Examples by the prolific Masamune Shirow, the post-Akira SF king. Above: Pages from *Applesseed* (Eclipse, 1991), featuring some of the creator's many amazing technological inventions, in the form of spider-like police vehicles. Below: Covers to *Applesseed* (as above) and *Ghost in the Shell* (Dark Horse, 1995), a dystopian fantasy about a cyborg secret service. Shirow is clearly also a Japanese version of a 'Good Girl Artist'.

was *Akira* (1987). This epic science fiction tale, by Katsuhiro Otomo (arguably Japan's second biggest ever anime/manga star after Tezuka), first came to wide public attention when the full-length movie broke attendance records in art cinemas across Britain and America in 1990. The story, set in post-apocalypse Tokyo in the year 2019, concerned a motorbike gang and their, often bloody, involvement with a mysterious force ('more powerful than a thousand nuclear bombs'), the result of secret government experiments with psi-power, code-named 'Akira'. The links with old-fashioned Japanese science fiction were clear, but this was an altogether more complex and spontaneous piece. Otomo himself explained: '*Akira* is rooted in the old-style robot shows like *Tetsujin 28* that I watched when I was younger. When I actually drew it, I was able to supply my own characters, and spin my own story. You'd think an author would be able to control what he writes, but I don't have much choice about it!'¹⁷



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This essentially unfocused approach meant that the narrative itself left much to be desired (to call it shambolic would be kind). But as an example of state-of-the-art animation, it was stunning: Otomo used more than double the number of cells customary in conventional animation, and the resulting high definition, and sharpness in light and shadow, was impressive indeed. When *Akira* was released on video in 1991, it went straight to number one in the sales charts.

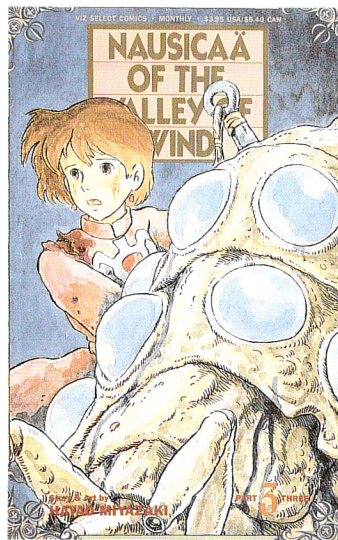
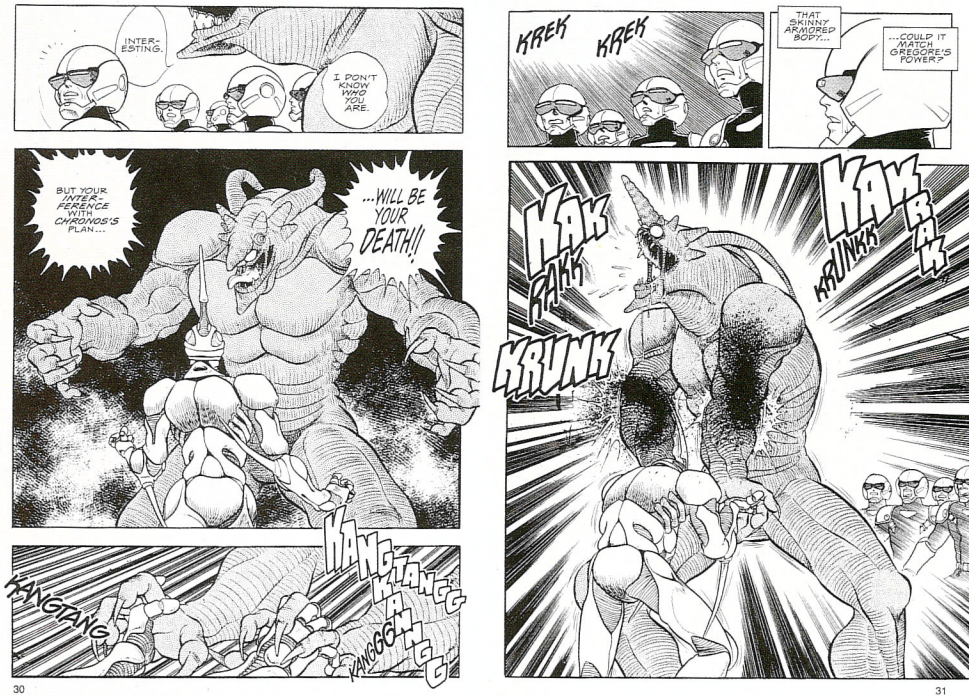
Why *Akira* should have taken off in the way it did certainly had much to do with its inherent quality. But it also tapped into the vogue for 'cyberpunk' among comics and science fiction fans, which had long made reference to an 'Asiatized future' and to Japan's status as a technological superpower.¹⁸ It was also a novelty in so far as the film included scenes of graphic violence (especially some Sam Peckinpah-style shoot-outs), which was unusual in animation, and led to a certain notoriety.

In fact, the comic version of *Akira* had been available for several years, published by Marvel since 1988 under a 'Mature Readers' label. But in the wake of the movie and video's success, sales rocketed, and the trade paperback collections were major sellers. The comics had a special appeal: again, they were very high quality, with the use of speedlines and detailed backgrounds being especially effective. But the story was also slightly different: Otomo's original manga did not follow the storyline in the movie, and, at the time of writing, still has several instalments to go before it reaches its conclusion. Above all, being a science fiction story with visceral elements, it fitted more easily into the average *X-Men* fan's expectations of what a comic should be than any previous release from Japan.

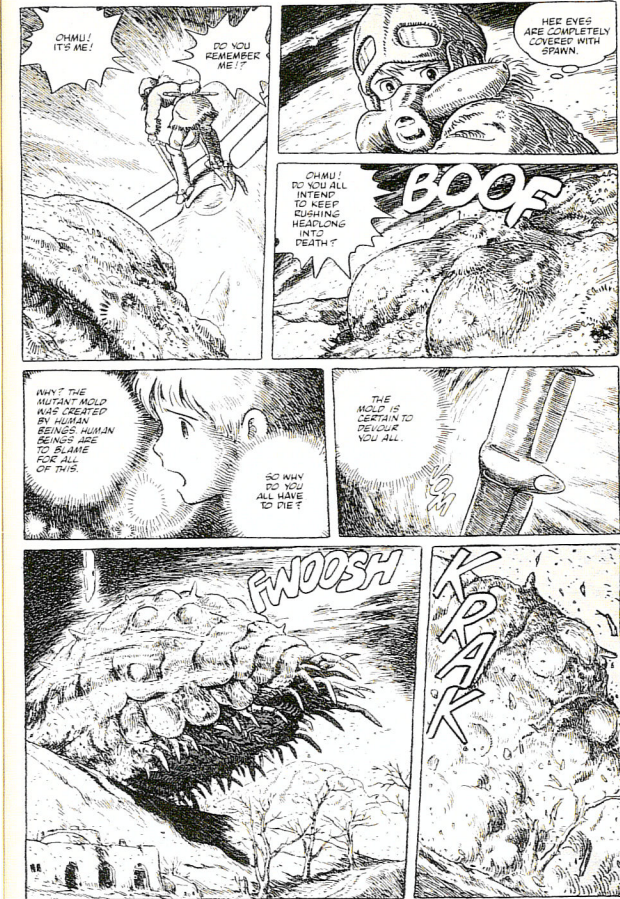
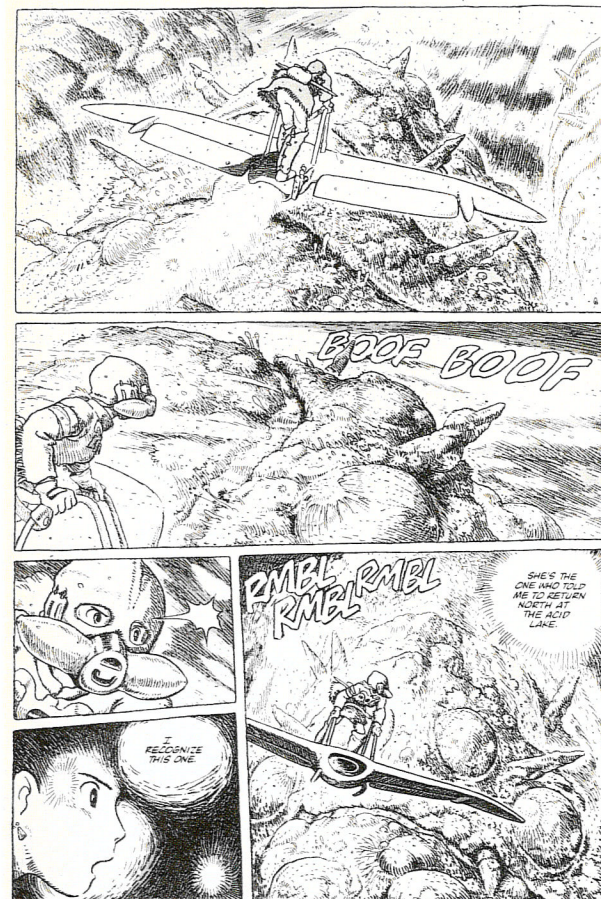
At a stroke, *Akira* made anime and manga 'hip'. The result was a boom that took just about everybody by surprise. Inevitably, the comics and videos that followed were overwhelmingly in the *Akira* mould: loud, sassy, aimed at a fifteen to twenty-five audience, and science fictional. In the late 1980s and 1990s, anime became a significant branch of the home-video business, with new labels starting up to specialize in the area; at the same time, the manga industry expanded exponentially, with more translations appearing than ever before. Now bigger publishers like Dark Horse became involved in earnest.

Increasingly, anime and manga were sold next to each other in comics stores, and a new wave of fanzines emerged catering to the new market. Titles like *Animerica* carried dual-market adverts and garnered cult readerships. There were even comics made up of animation stills ('animekomikkusu' as they were known in Japan) – perhaps the ultimate expression of the incestuous nature of the subculture.

The post-*Akira* science fiction comics threw up new creative stars. To name just a few: Masumune Shirow, perhaps the most prolific, whose hits included *Dominion*, *Applesseed* and *Black Magic* (all Eclipse), and whose most accomplished work, *The Ghost in the Shell*, was a dynamic cyberpunk tale about a group of elite cyborgs; Yoshiaki Takaya, whose popular *The Guyver* was a spectacularly



Top: Pages from *The Guyver: Bio-Booster Armor* (Viz, 1995). Art/script: Yoshiaki Takaya. A gleefully mindless slug-fest featuring an armour-plated superhero versus devilish 'Zoanoid' monsters. Above and right: Cover and pages from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (Viz, 1993). Art/script: Hayao Miyazaki. A much more subtle SF tale, with an ecological theme.



violent story involving alien-designed 'Guyver units' versus demonic-looking 'Zoanoids'; Go Nagai, a master storyteller, whose *Mazinger Z* (First, 1990) graphic novel was a 'giant robot' odyssey; and Hayao Miyazaki, whose *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (Viz, 1993) was a sophisticated ecological fable (with artwork very reminiscent of the 1970s work of Moebius), about a princess whose people are caught between two warring factions, one of which is planning to use a 'fire demon' to destroy 'the Toxic Forest'.

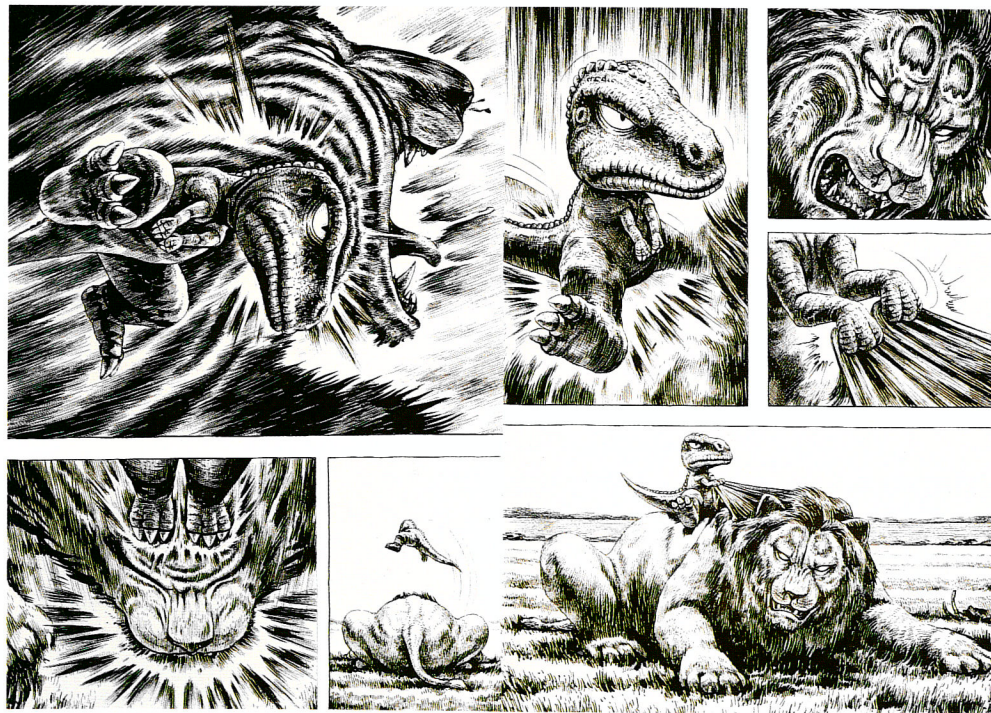
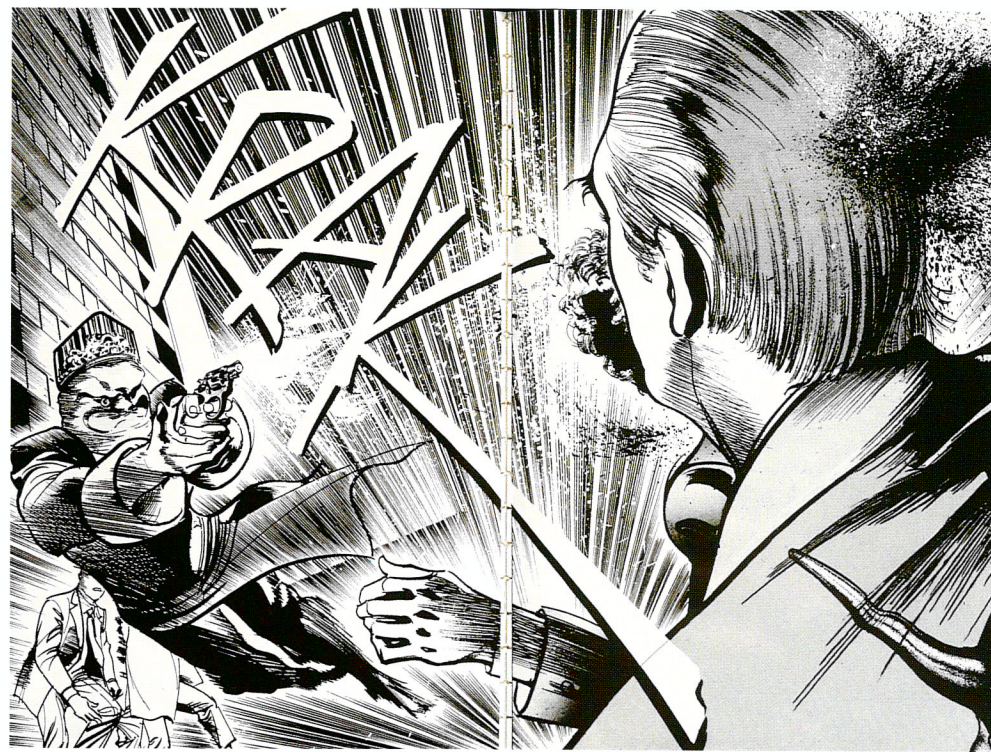
Other genres prospered as well. Thrillers included *Golgo 13* (Viz, 1993) by Takao Saito, about a contemporary assassin who travels the world in search of his prey, and *Crying Freeman* (Manga, 1995) by Kazuo Koike and Ryoichi Ikegami, another story about an assassin, this time one who weeps with shame after every 'hit', but who nevertheless rises to become the head of the Chinese mafia. Katsuhiro Otomo added to the genre with *Domu*, an offbeat, almost Hitchcockian, suspenser about a series of suspicious deaths in an apartment block, which turn out to be caused by a covetous old man who uses his psychic powers to force his victims to commit suicide.

Humour, too, made an impact. This is surprising, bearing in mind the notorious difficulties in making comedy 'travel' between nations. Especially important here was a female creator, Rumiko Takahashi, referred to by fans as 'the manga princess', and one of the richest women in Japan. Her bizarre titles included *Lum: Urusei Yatsura* (Viz, 1994) about a young boy who falls in love

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Top: Pages from *Crying Freeman: Portrait of a Killer* (Manga Books, 1995). Art: Ryoichi Ikegami. Script: Kazuo Koike. A violent thriller about a hitman who is so sensitive about his trade that he sheds tears after each assassination. Top right: Pages from *Lum: Urusei Yatsura* (Viz, 1994). Art/script: Rumiko Takahashi. A surreal teen comedy with a cast including friendly aliens. Above: Pages from *Gon* (Mandarin, 1990). Art/script: Masashi Tanaka. The story of a midget dinosaur who never became extinct, and his domination by brute strength of the contemporary animal kingdom. Right: Panel from *Ranma 1/2 Volume 1* (Boxtree, 1994). Art/script: Rumiko Takahashi.

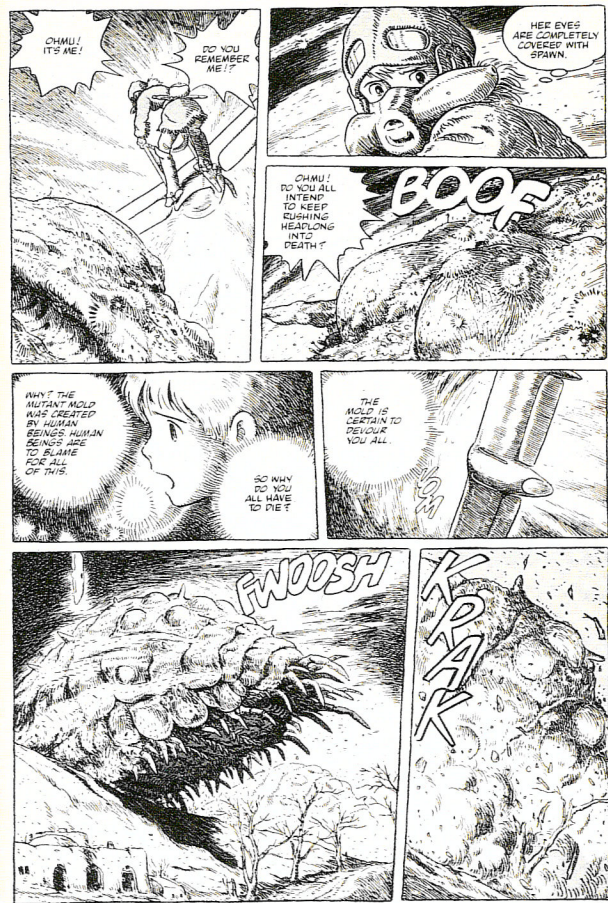


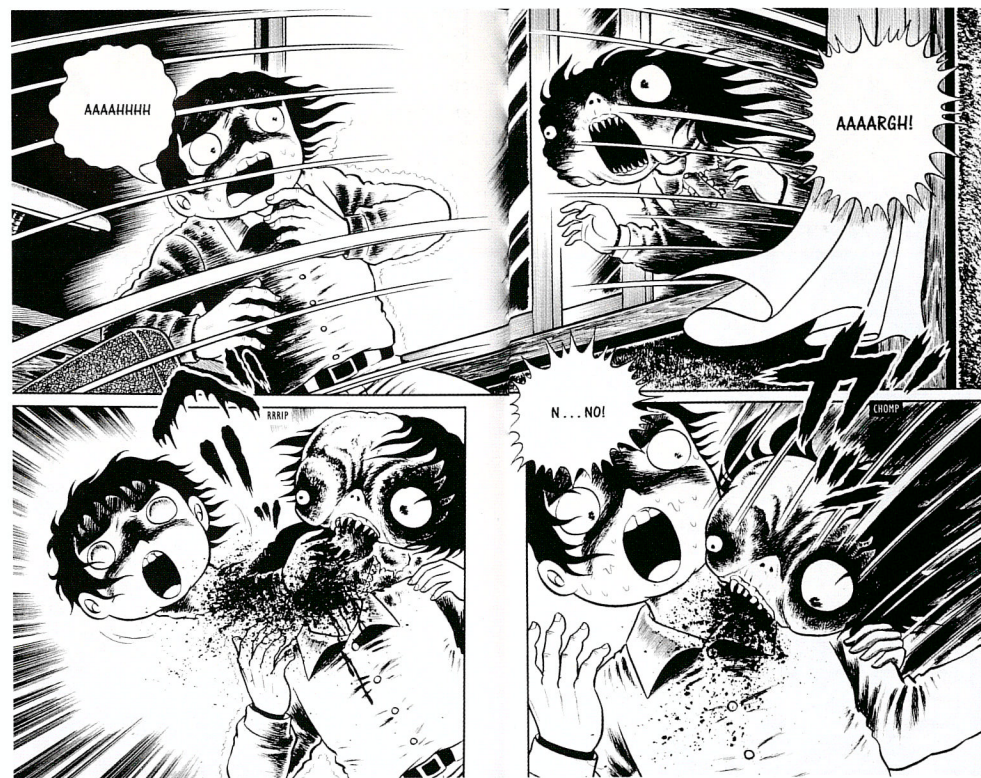
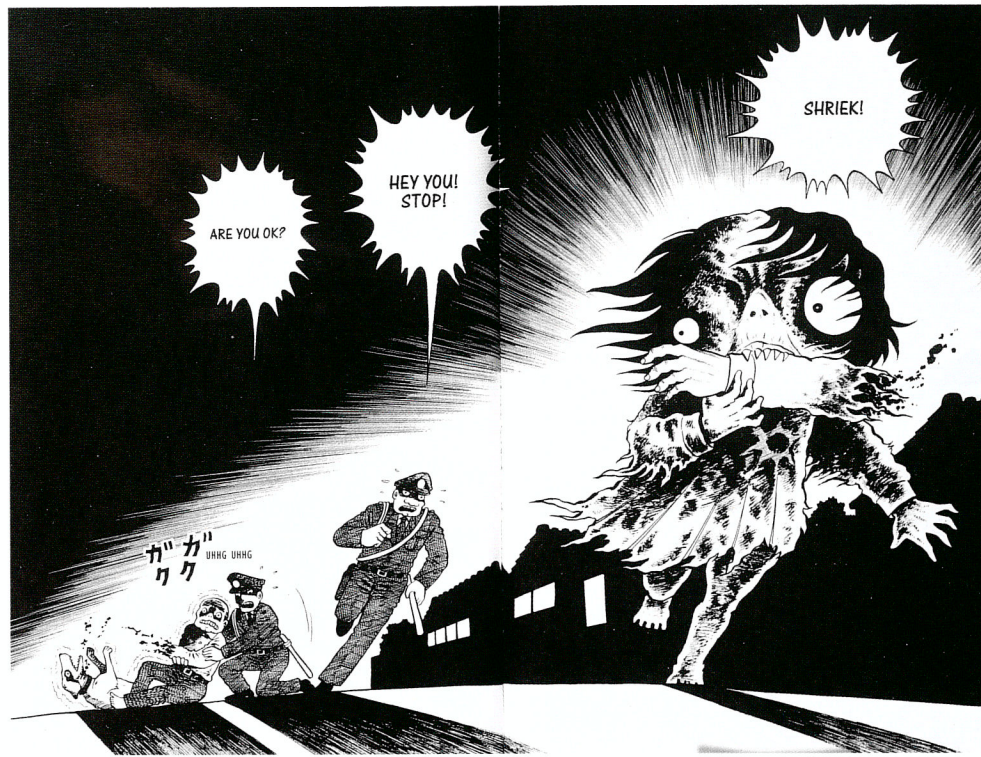
with the, very cute, leader of an alien invasion; and *Ranma* (Viz, 1993) about a boy who changes sex every time he gets wet (described on the jacket-blurb as 'a fast and furious tale of martial arts, schoolgirl crushes and gender-bending'). One other title is worthy of note: the remarkable *Gon* (Mandarin, 1990) a superbly drawn series of short stories about a foot-high dinosaur who has survived until the present, but who cannot quite come to terms with the contemporary animal kingdom. Though it was a slapstick premise, there were unusually violent overtones.

Less easily classifiable material, often in an 'underground' style, was also translated, and found a readership among comics fans interested in the 'alternative' titles (see chapter 8). Hideshi Hino's punky and incredibly gory horror tales *Panorama of Hell* and *Hell Baby* (both Blast Books, 1994 and 1995) were particularly impressive, as were the 'realist fiction' strips published within the pages of *Raw* (for example, 'Red Flowers' and 'Oba's Electroplate factory', by Yoshiharu Tsuge).

Finally, even one or two educational comics made it into translation. Foremost among them was *Japan Inc* (University of California Press, 1989) by Ishinomori Shotaro, which attempted to teach economics (in this case the trade war between Japan and America) by personalizing the issues. Company men debate interest rates and the collapse of Chrysler, while office secretaries sigh and fall in love with them. Preposterous stuff, but amazingly, the comic achieves its didactic aim.

This flurry of activity was accompanied by the attempts of mainstream book publishers to cash in on the manga craze, and to penetrate the high-street bookshop market in the wake of the boom in graphic novels. Penguin were quick to jump on the bandwagon, and marketed the two-volume *Barefoot Gen* (1989), an expanded version of *Gen*





Above: Pages from *Hell Baby* (Blast Books, 1995). Art/script: Hideshi Hino. Horror Japanese style, about a mutant, vampiric toddler. Interpreted by some critics as a metaphor for the country's experience of post-Atomic birth defects.

of *Hiroshima*, as a follow-up to *Maus*. They received widespread attention in the review pages of newspapers, but sales were mediocre. Other companies, such as Boxtree, Mandarin and Bloomsbury went for more commercial material, and were marginally more successful.

Perhaps the main indication that manga had arrived was that Japanese rendering and storytelling styles began to influence Western creators, sometimes significantly. Frank Miller had long been interested in manga, and had provided covers for *Lone Wolf and Cub*, as well as producing a series for DC Comics about a samurai (*Ronin*, 1993). Now his art technique became more directly influenced, and by the time of his black-and-white epic *Sin City* in 1993, the Japanese-style speedlines and dynamic page layouts were clearly in evidence. Other creators were equally affected, but were not so willing to admit it: many of the Image superhero titles from the 1990s, for example, bear the stamp of manga.¹⁹

However, there was a more negative response to the boom. The sexual and violent content of some manga and anime might have been expected to cause a small stir, but nobody was prepared for the vitriolic nature of the media backlash when it came. The anti-manga piece 'Japanese Cruelty Comics Move In' in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the anti-anime rant 'Cartoon Cult With an Increasing Appetite for Sex and Violence' in *The Independent* were fairly typical.²⁰ They sensationalized odd scenes from various stories, and cheerfully played on old stereotypes of Japanese people as sadists (so familiar from children's war comics). What they did not report was that in Japan, crime figures were actually very low, and that here was a strong case for seeing the manga and anime as a 'safety valve'.

Nor did they make the obvious point that the more extreme sex and violence titles were only a fraction of those available, and by extension an infinitesimally small fraction of those available in Japan. This kind of subject matter was only evident at all because it was what the dominant fifteen to twenty-five year-old market in Britain and America wanted: more 'difficult' genres, such as sport, hardly got translated at all (not surprisingly, there is very little call for 600-page manga on mah-jong).

How the British and American manga industries will respond to this continuing negative press is hard to say. A broadening of subject matter would no doubt be a start, but this seems unlikely. The bulk of publishing is still tied to science fiction, and to 'youth culture' in general – a situation that is not helped by the symbiotic relationship with anime. For a time, the link between manga and anime was a bonus: they supported each other and secured valuable media awareness. But, now they appear to be entwined too closely, and cannot move on. It remains a hermetic environment, feeding off itself rather than reaching out to the outside world. Perhaps the fact that there has not been a success comparable to that of *Akira* in the years since is a sign that the fashion is dying out.



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1. Histories of comics in individual countries do exist, but unfortunately they are almost all in European languages and have not been translated (for a bibliography, see Roger Sabin, *Adult Comics*, London, Routledge, 1993). Probably the best source in English, though by now very dated, is Maurice Horn, *The World Encyclopaedia of Comics* (New York, Chelsea House, 1976). Otherwise, articles in fanzines can be very informative.
2. The best sources on Hergé are Benoit Peeters, *Tintin and the World of Hergé* (Boston, Little Brown and Co, 1992) and Harry Thompson, *Hergé and his Creation* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).
3. In the 1980s, Tintin became somewhat trendy, and memorabilia shops opened in Britain and America catering to adult fans.
4. An indication of how important this American influence was to the French tradition can be gleaned from the amount of space given over to American strips in French published histories of their industry. See, for example, Pierre Couperie et al, *A History of the Comic Strip*, 1968 (re-published in New York by Crown), which started life as the catalogue to an exhibition at the Louvre in 1967.
5. It is worth noting that creators' rights in France were further improved by the actions of a group of artists on *Pilote*, who went on strike in 1966 for better pay and conditions.
6. There was an indigenous French satirical tradition based around the magazine *Hara Kiri* (founded 1964), which contained considerable comics content. It too played a role in the disturbances of 1968.
7. This was one major exception to the rule. *Al Nana* (1976), a feminist quarterly produced predominantly by women.
8. The best, and most comprehensive, listing of European comics in translation can be found in a British fanzine called *Panel House* (1995).
9. The Euro-porn albums were pre-figured to some extent by *Barbarella* by Jean-Claude Forest, which appeared in France in 1962, and was subsequently serialized in the US in

Evergreen Review. The strip, however, remained little known, and the character only entered public consciousness with the release of the movie in 1968, directed by Roger Vadim and starring Jane Fonda.

10. For an excellent history of manga up until 1983, see Frederick Schodt, *Manga! Manga!* (New York, Kodansha International, 1983). On the publishing and marketing side of the story, as it related to Britain, there is a very useful university thesis: *Japan Inside: The Anime and Manga Publishing Industry* by Jonathan Clements (University of Stirling, M Phil, 1995)
11. The origins of manga are debatable. Some historians trace them to Medieval religious scrolls; others to the early nineteenth-century woodblocks by the artist Hokusai, responsible for coining the term 'manga'; others still to the late nineteenth-century boom in satirical cartooning. The 'industry' per se only developed in the 1920s, and was primarily orientated towards children.
12. Helen McCarthy, *Anime!* (London, Titan Books, 1993), p 14.
13. The depiction of 'big eyes' in Japanese comics is controversial for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is some dispute as to the origins of the device: most historians argue that it was adopted in imitation of Western cartooning styles at the turn of the century, when comic strips from Britain and America were becoming widely known (Western physiognomy was considered to be very attractive at the time, and the eyes were intended to reflect 'an ideal of beauty'). Some, however, insist that it was borrowed from Disney animated films, and thus should really be dated as a trend from the 1930s: certainly, Tezuka was a big Disney fan, and was fond of using 'Mickey Mouse eyes' in his work.

Secondly, there is controversy over whether reader identification is actually aided by the device. Scott McCloud makes a case for this in his *Understanding Comics*, but provides little evidence: the question of 'identification' is a notoriously difficult one, but it is certainly true that readers identify with characters 'as people', which is to say with recognizable personality traits, more than with any particular

Right: Pages from Mr Arashi's Amazing Freak Show (Blast Books, 1992). Art/script: Suehiro Maruo. A classically Japanese tale of a little lost orphan ensnared in a travelling freak show. By turns repulsive and surreal, it compels us to become voyeurs.



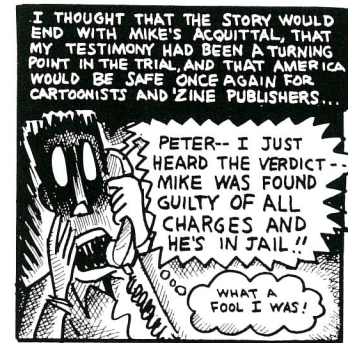
form of stylized rendering.

Thirdly, the effect of 'big eyes' on certain characters is to make them seem younger than they are meant to be, and this can be problematic when it comes to the depiction of women. For example, it can make them look like girls, which can be very disorientating for Western readers when it comes to scenes involving sex. Much feminist criticism of manga and anime has centred on this fundamental problem.

14. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (London, Tundra, 1993) p 81-2.
15. For a short, but useful, history of anime, see McCarthy, *Anime!*
16. *Astro Boy* also appeared as a number of comic books, the most notable of which was published by Gold Key in 1965.
17. Katsuhiro Otomo, interviewed by Jonathan Clements, 'Mangaka', *Comic World*, issue 36 (Feb 1995), p 28.
18. *Akira*'s relationship to cyberpunk is contentious. 'Cyberpunk' refers to a high-tech, Asiatized, urban future dominated by technology and, in particular, by computers. All definitions cite William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer* as the defining source, but many refer to the 1982 movie *Bladerunner* as a major influence. Although *Akira* does not focus on computers, it does share many of the preoccupations of cyberpunk, and many of Otomo's citiscapes resemble those of *Bladerunner*: it is disputed, however, that he was directly influenced by that film, and *Akira* certainly pre-dates *Neuromancer*.
19. Certain publishers also began to produce what became known among fans as 'pseudomanga' – comics based on original manga, but drawn by Western artists. The most famous example was *Dirty Pair* (Eclipse, 1989) by Toren Smith and Adam Warren. The idea behind this was that the more 'alien' elements of Japanese storytelling (for example, pacing) could be ironed out.
20. Sally Malcolm-Smith, 'Japan's Cruelty Comics Move In' (*Sunday Telegraph*, April 11, 1993); David Lister, 'Cartoon Cult with an Increasing Appetite for Sex and Violence' (*The Independent*, October 15, 1993).



Conclusion



Above: Panel from 'Sunshine State', *World War 3 Illustrated*, (self-published, 1995). A witness in the trial of cartoonist Mike Diana, discovers that the defendant has been found guilty and jailed. A scandal that refutes the postmodernist notion of the 'breaking down of cultural barriers'.

We live in changing times. But just how 'changing' remains open to question. It is fashionable, in the mid-1990s, to see modern culture as being in the process of transformation by huge, almost apocalyptic, forces which will leave it unrecognizable in a very short space of time. We can see this in two interlinked areas in particular: the hopes and fears surrounding the 'digital revolution', and the current fondness for postmodernist theory.

Both themes are extremely relevant to comics. The digital revolution, for example, is said to herald the end of print. The argument runs roughly as follows: books, newspapers and comics will all disappear as computers take over, and people get their information and entertainment from the Internet. With the Net growing at an exponential rate (10 million new users in last year alone), and more and more companies using it to publish their wares, this progression is seemingly inevitable. In the forthcoming digital age, to coin a pun, the days of the comic are numbered.

Postmodernist visions of the future are more optimistic. For example, in our introduction, it was suggested that comics have never been accepted into the realm of 'real art', and that this was due to a number of interwoven prejudices against popular culture. But recently, a number of postmodernist philosophers and writers have suggested that this division between art and popular culture has been breaking down. We live in an era, it is said, where the media dominates cultural products, and where, therefore, surfaces and style have become more important than content. Under these circumstances, there are no longer any agreed and inviolable criteria which can serve to differentiate art from popular culture. Comics, therefore, are not dying out, but entering a new era of acceptance.

But before we get carried away, events need to be seen in perspective. Taking the digital revolution first, it's necessary to question who the revolution is for. Certainly, it won't benefit the majority of the world's population, who cannot afford telephones, let alone expensive computers. Taking this as a starting point, it is easy to challenge the idea that the Net and comics share the same properties. They do not. One is cheap and one isn't; one is mobile, one isn't. (Although it's possible, we don't think in terms of taking a computer on the bus.) Of course, computers have the advantage for certain kinds of storytelling: they can be interactive, for instance. But at the present state of

technology, the experience of reading from a computer screen compared to that of reading from a comics page is no contest. They are, in other words, two completely different media, and therefore the rise of one does not by any means automatically presage the decline of the other.

As for postmodernism, it is a seductive argument, and it would be very tempting to apply it to the history of comics. After all, we have seen how in the 1980s and 1990s, comics have become more 'respectable'. *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize, and graphic novels were reviewed in the literary pages of the quality newspapers. Even the existence of an art book such as this, devoted to such 'trash', could be taken as a sign of a change in the cultural climate.

But let's be clear. On the rare occasions that comics have popped their heads over the wall of media indifference, there have usually been reasons other than an acceptance of the medium as a whole. *Maus*, for example, was a one-off, while the mainstream reviews of graphic novels were largely inspired by their novelty value. Certainly, in some countries, such as Japan, comics are accepted as art. But, as we have seen, this has been due to a distinct set of historical circumstances. So far as Britain and America are concerned, a few decent reviews in the press do not a revolution make.

So where does that leave us? Marginalized for sure, but such a marginal position is an attractive one for many creators and consumers. The comic's exclusion from the art establishment enables it to eschew the dampening appraisal of art criticism. Moreover, its association with street culture gives it a certain edge, which many contemporary artists have vainly attempted to transfer to the gallery. Whereas fine art can only send shocks through the art world, comics – available to a far broader audience – are still regarded as dangerous enough to be clamped down on intermittently.

Comics seem to be going through a golden age right now. When I see recent books like Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and Chester Brown's *I Never Liked You*, I am filled with admiration for the medium. Sacco and Brown's generation of creators were inspired by the underground generation before them, and I'd be willing to bet that sometime soon they'll inspire a future band of comics stars with their own take on what 'a comic' can mean. As ever, the medium remains worthy of any message.