

MICHAEL FARR

TINTIN

The Complete Companion



TINTIN, the most recognisable figure in all fiction, has been a publishing phenomenon since he first appeared in 1929. For half a century Tintin books have sold four million copies annually in more than fifty languages, and every year new fans succumb to his appeal, which is just as strong for adults as for children.

This book explains the books' sources in real life. Hergé, Tintin's creator, drew on the news stories of his day. The fascist plots of the thirties, and later Stalinist machinations too, were transformed and inimitably satirised in the tension between Syldavia and Borduria. The race to the moon, fascination with the Abominable Snowman, the revolutionary Tupamaros in South America, plus much more, caught his imagination as well. Hergé was also preoccupied with accuracy. Equipment from aircraft to guns, street scenes, interiors, clothes, flora and fauna were all drawn from his enormous archive of press cuttings, postcards, catalogues and ephemera, and updated for new editions. People were updated likewise: Rudolf Valentino for example, who has a walk-on part in *Cigars of the Pharaoh*, later becomes Kirk Douglas.

Tintin himself was based on Hergé's younger brother, who (together with Erich von Stroheim) was the model as well for the dastardly Colonel Sponsz. Bianca Castafiore was derived from his Aunt Ninie – with a touch of Maria Callas – and Thomson and Thompson from his father and uncle, twins who really did wear matching bowler hats. Auguste Piccard is recognisably Professor Calculus and, though Captain Haddock has no traceable source, there was coincidentally an Admiral Haddock who might have captained the *Unicorn*.

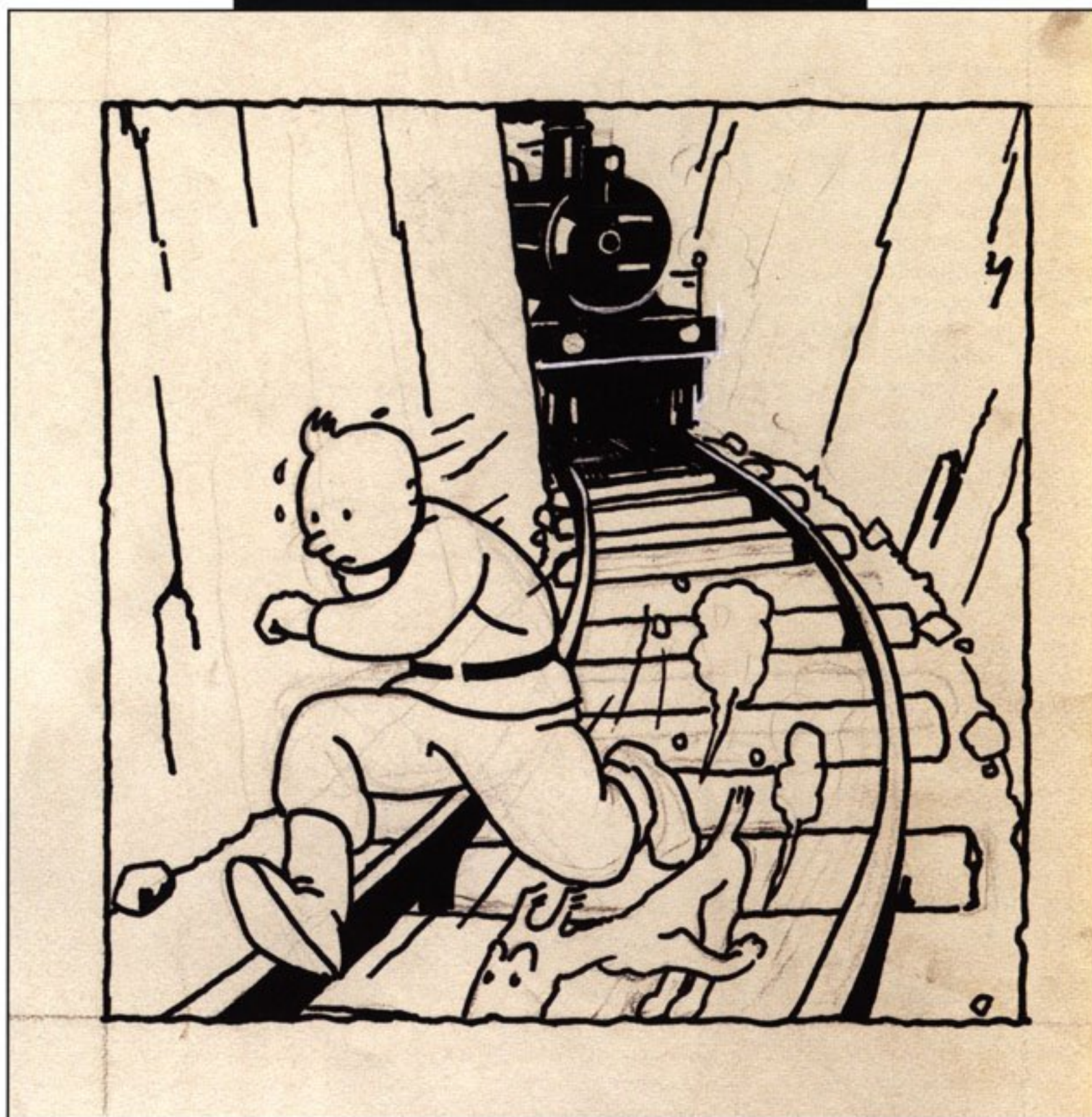
Tintin: The Complete Companion is full of fascinating information and intriguing connections, is comprehensive and unrivalled, and beautifully designed in colour throughout. For devotees of Tintin and the Tintinesque it is indispensable.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 8 |
| Tintin in the Land of the Soviets | 10 |
| Tintin in the Congo | 20 |
| Tintin in America | 28 |
| Cigars of the Pharaoh | 40 |
| The Blue Lotus | 50 |
| The Broken Ear | 60 |
| The Black Island | 70 |
| King Ottokar's Sceptre | 80 |
| The Crab with the Golden Claws | 90 |
| The Shooting Star | 98 |
| The Secret of the Unicorn and Red Rackham's Treasure | 104 |
| The Seven Crystal Balls and Prisoners of the Sun | 114 |
| Land of Black Gold | 126 |
| Destination Moon and Explorers on the Moon | 134 |
| The Calculus Affair | 144 |
| The Red Sea Sharks | 150 |
| Tintin in Tibet | 160 |
| The Castafiore Emerald | 170 |
| Flight 714 | 178 |
| Tintin and the Picaros | 188 |
| Tintin and Alph-Art | 198 |
| Index | 204 |

The first adventure. Tintin sets out with Snowy for Soviet Russia to report for his newspaper and battle the Bolsheviks.

Tintin in the Land of the Soviets



Along with a cluster of press photographers, we are on the platform of a Brussels station as a cloth-capped Tintin, flanked by a circumspect Snowy, boards the train that will take him on the first and least known of the two dozen adventures that were to make him the world's best known boy reporter.

It is January 1929, fifty-four years before the final adventure (Tintin and Alph-Art) petered out tantalisingly incomplete. Like the cinema of the time, Tintin is in black and white. At first acquaintance he is tubbier and shorter than the more mature and familiar Tintin. But, as later, his perpetual youth remains indeterminate. His pronounced brogues and, concealed only briefly by his overcoat, the bold check of his plus fours suit are without doubt dated. One can imagine Jeeves raising his eyebrows if Bertie Wooster had chosen such an outfit for golf.

REPORTING

His editor sees the ace reporter off, wishing him a: "Safe journey! Take care and be sure to keep in touch." Tintin, never altogether convincing as a reporter, replies: "I'll send you some postcards, and vodka, and caviar!" It is to Soviet Russia, we are informed, that Tintin's newspaper, *Le Petit Vingtième*, "always eager to satisfy our readers and keep them up to date on foreign affairs" is sending one of its "top reporters." It is in this debut adventure, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, that uniquely we see the young reporter labouring over an article for his newspaper. "We'll go back to the inn. I must write up my report for the paper," he tells Snowy. Sitting on a stool, hunched over a table, he begins and completes in longhand a story of inordinate length, a great pile of copy which he stuffs in an envelope while asking the crucial journalistic question: "But how can I get this back to the office?" He stretches and yawns: "Oh well, we'll think about that tomorrow. Now to bed." Apart from himself being the bearer of news on his triumphant return to Brussels at the end of the adventure, we never discover how, or even if, Tintin manages to get his story out. Neither telephone, nor telegraph, nor cleft stick as recommended to Boot in Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, features.

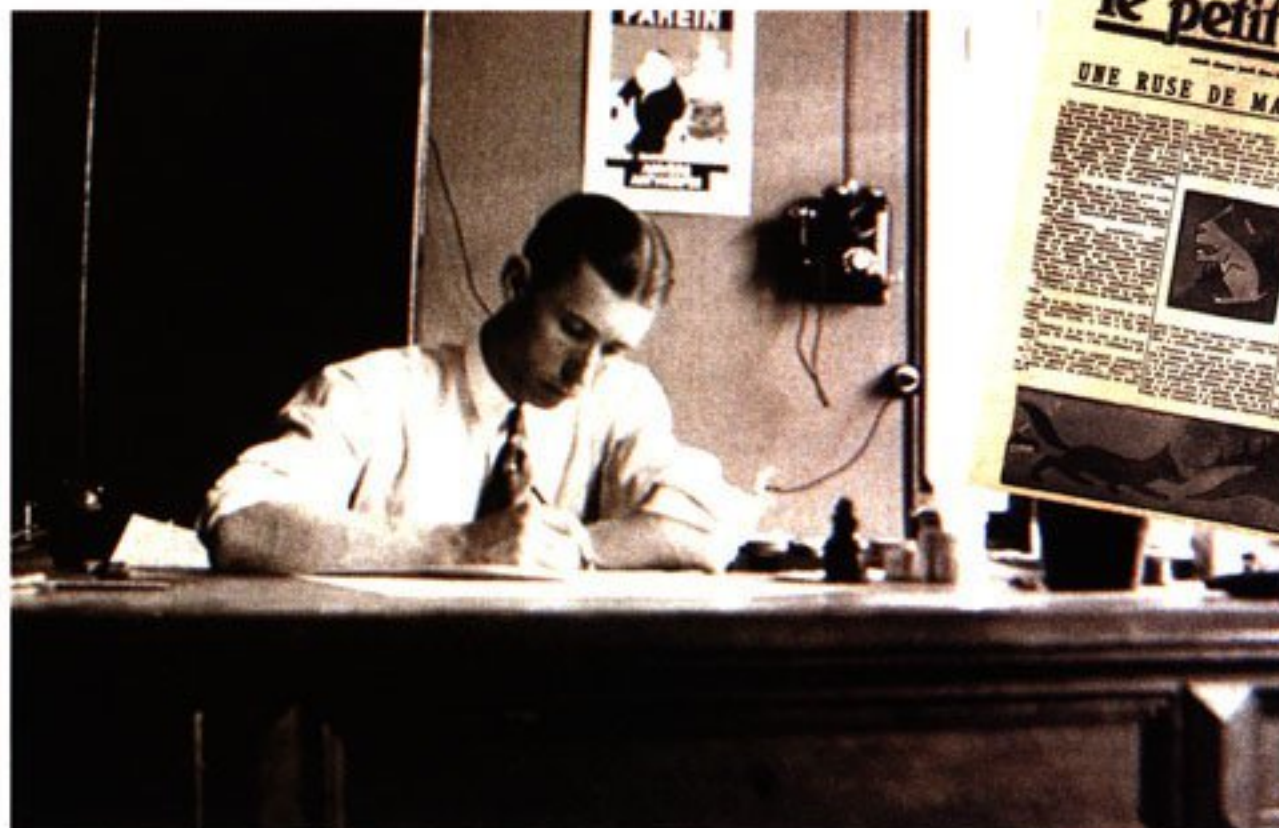
In December 1981 in the wake of the communist-imposed martial law clampdown in Poland, I remember intercepting at Berlin's Bahnhof Zoo railway terminus a despatch almost as long as Tintin's from a colleague



The first page of *Tintin in the Land of The Soviets*. From the start, Tintin and Snowy were embroiled in thrilling adventures (left, page 25).

trapped in Warsaw. Smuggled out by a traveller, it was my task to dictate by telephone the contents of the bulky envelope to *The Daily Telegraph* in London. Like Tintin's account, it reported a long litany of communist excesses. Two years earlier I was myself marooned in an isolated corner of war-torn Rhodesia, soon to become Zimbabwe, and took advantage of the lightning visit of an army helicopter bringing vital water supplies to hand the pilot a hurriedly compiled and unfinished despatch to be relayed to London. By such means we must suppose Tintin doubtless kept his public informed of his action-packed adventures.

Hergé, brilliant draughtsman and inspired story-teller, was himself a reporter manqué. From an early age and perhaps in response to an essentially dull childhood highlighted only by scout outings, he was an avid follower of current affairs. As a boy in Brussels, he had witnessed the Great War and the German occupation of his city. In the margins of his school exercise books he scribbled cartoons of the Hun invader. As an adolescent, he could observe how seeds of discord germinated from the less than satisfactory Treaty of Versailles. He lived in a front-line country in the thick of the turbulent times that forged the twentieth century.



Hergé at work in 1929. Responsible for *Le Petit Vingtième*, he divides his time between his picture stories—here *Flup*, *Nénesse*, *Poussette* et *Cochonnet*—and the illustration of articles in *Le XX^e Siècle* and its supplements—such as this drawing for an animal tale in the supplement for youngsters of 14 March 1929.

Initially employed in the subscriptions department, subsequently as an illustrator and then as editor of the weekly children's supplement, he worked for *Le XX^e Siècle*, a staunchly Catholic and conservative newspaper whose very title reflected the actuality of the new century. Among his heroes were the much-admired newspaper foreign correspondents of the time who managed to combine cunning and enterprise with literary and analytical skills. Like Tintin later, they often were the focus of news themselves. To a Belgian, the names to conjure with then were Albert Londres and Joseph Kessel. Soon a name could be added to the list that was to attain much wider and longer-lasting recognition: Tintin, the creation of an increasingly painstaking, sometimes prescient armchair traveller, someone who could himself have been a successful reporter if destiny had not led his natural talent in a more original and ultimately more compelling direction.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Hergé, having been charged with putting together *Le XX^e Siècle*'s Thursday supplement for children, *Le Petit Vingtième*, soon

realised that he had to create something original. However, Tintin did not surface with the first issue of *Le Petit Vingtième* printed on November 1, 1928. Initially Hergé provided the illustrations for *The Adventures of Flup, Nénesse, Poussette and Cochonnet*, a rather less inspired series with a text provided by a member of the newspaper's sports staff. As was usual in such early examples of the strip cartoon, the main text appeared under the illustrations that in this case depicted the antics of two mischievous boys aged close on twelve, the nine-year-old sister of one and her inflatable rubber pig. Hergé clearly realised its inadequacies and looked for something better.

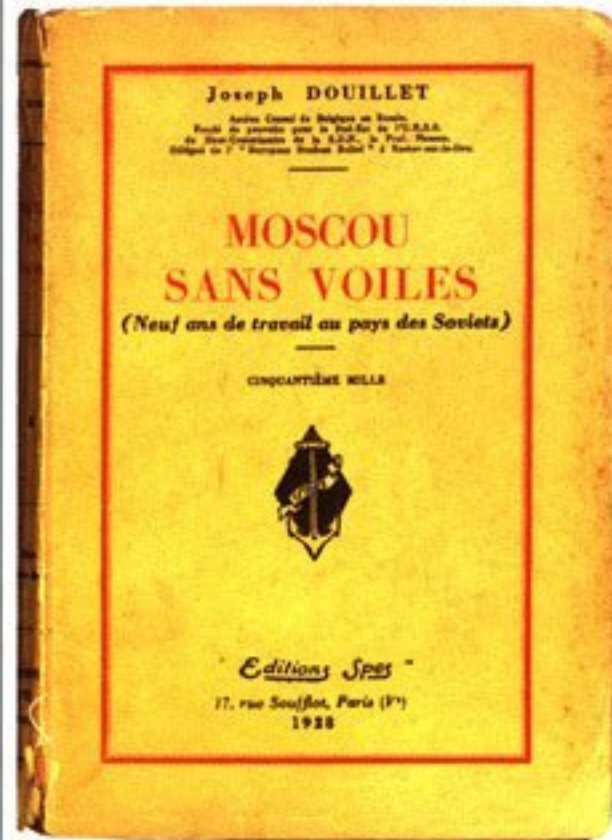
Since July 1926 he had been producing for *Le Boy-Scout Belge* a cartoon series centered on a scout patrol leader called Totor. This character provided a natural prototype for a new creation, an adventurer/reporter to be called Tintin. He would be given a faithful fox terrier as a companion—"I'll never leave you, Tintin," the dog vows as the hero faces an appalling end trapped in a Soviet sewer. In the preceding *Flup*

and *Nénesse* sequences one can spot a hound of similar appearance. Hergé impulsively decided to name Tintin's dog Milou after a full-bosomed girl he had pursued at school. When the Tintin books later came to be translated into English, Snowy was chosen as a suitable name.

And so, on January 10, 1929, this extraordinarily enduring, irrepresible hero and his dog first appeared in print, a trailer on January 4 having announced their forthcoming appearance. We would have to wait for later adventures to meet other members of the carefully characterised Tintin cast. Although it was America that held the greatest fascination for Hergé, Father Norbert Wallez, the right-wing cleric who ran *Le XX^e Siècle* with a great deal of energy and a rod of iron, had other ideas. As managing editors are liable to do, he suggested a destination for the reporter that must have been the last Hergé had in mind—Soviet Russia. Nearly a dozen years after the October Revolution that overturned centuries of Tsarist rule, Russia was in a state of more or less organised chaos as communism created new institutions and rejected established values. It was no wonder that *Le XX^e Siècle*, which described itself as a "Catholic and national newspaper of doctrine and information", saw this as a suitable target for critical exposure. And so, with a copy at hand of a newly published book, *Moscou sans voiles* (*Moscow Unveiled*) by Joseph Douillet, Hergé began his homework and prepared the setting for Tintin's first adventure. "One should remember that *Le XX^e Siècle* was a catholic newspaper, and whoever said 'catholic' at the time meant 'anti-communist'," Hergé later recalled. "One would literally devour Bolsheviks! I was thus inspired by the atmosphere on the paper, but also by a book entitled *Moscou sans voiles*, by Joseph Douillet, who had been Belgian consul in Rostov-on-Don and who denounced vehemently the vices and depravities of the regime." Douillet spent nine years in revolutionary Russia. His book published in Paris and Brussels in 1928 sold briskly, fuelling the prejudices that many in the west, including readers of *Le XX^e Siècle*, were only too eager to hear.

BIASED SPEECHES

Hergé freely, though selectively, lifted whole scenes from Douillet's account, notably the chilling election episode por-



2

- 1 Elections in the land of the Soviets inspired by Douillet's book: in three frames, the crowd is cowed into submission—marked by the gradual lowering of heads (page 33).
- 2 Moscou sans voiles (Moscow Unveiled) by Joseph Douillet, practically Hergé's only source of information and he made abundant use of it.
- 3 Totor, the Chief Scout of the Hornets troop, whose adventures appear in Le Boy-Scout Belge under a title influenced by the cinema, shows obvious physical resemblances to the first representations of Tintin.
- 4 Le Boy-Scout Belge of 10 March 1930. Hergé worked early on for this monthly magazine.

UNITED ROVERS
PRÉSENTE
UN EXTRASUPERFILM:
LES AVENTURES
DE TOTOR
C.P. DES HANNETONS

1. Puis il s'en fut au pas scout, regardant de tous côtés et peu rassuré... Le texte du poteau indicateur, si terrible de lourdes menaces, lui fit redoubler de prudence...
2. Enfin — et son cœur sauta de joie dans sa poitrine, ce qui fit bondir la poitrine elle-même et tout ce qui s'y rattachait — au sortir d'un défilé rocheux ; le ranch, le cher vieux ranch, s'offrit à ses regards.
3. Mais, chose bizarre autant qu'étrange, plus il s'approchait, plus il paraissait abandonné ! De fait, les volets étaient clos et l'habitation avait un air mystérieux et sinistre qui fit tressaillir Totor.

3

10 MARS 1930

LE BOY
SCOUT
BELGE

REVUE MENSUELLE

4

INDEX

- A** Air India, 168 • Albert, king of the Belgians, 21 • Albert, prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 71 • Aldrin, Buzz, 135 • Alexander the Great, 36 • Alfa Romeo, 172 • Algiers Museum, 158 • American strip cartoons, 18 • Ananoff, prof. Alexandre, 135, 136, 137, 138 • Apollo XI mission, 135, 145 • Apollo XII mission, 135 • Arab League, 47 • Arab Legion, 152 • Arado reconnaissance aircraft, 100, 101 • Armstrong, Neil, 135 • Arnould, Marcel, 195, 197 • Astérix, 197 • Auschwitz, death camp, 180 • Austria, annexion of (Anschluss), 81
- B** Baden-Powell, Lord, 9 • Balla, Giacomo, 17 • Balzac, Honoré de, 133, 151 • Bank of England, 71 • Barrie, J.M., 9 • Barton, Otis, 112 • Baudouin, king of the Belgians, 91 • Bauhaus, 53 • Beckaert, Tryphon, 106 • Beethoven, Ludwig van, 91 • Belgian Foreign Ministry, 55 • Belgian Radio, 61 • Bell, Georg, 71 • Berain, Jean, 111 • Berbers, 94 • Bergier, Jacques, 183 • Berlin Conference, 27 • Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, 112 • Berlin Natural History Museum, 82, 83 • Berlin Philharmonic, 91 • Bertoina, Harry, 196 • Bhagwan, the, 202 • Bizet, Georges, 67 • Black Elk, 30 • Boccioni, Umberto, 17 • Bolivar, Simon, 62 • Bolshevism, 8 • Bonestell, Chesley, 136, 139 • Bonny, Anne, 109 • Bostelmann, Else, 124 • Boxer Uprising, 51 • Boy Scout Movement, 91 • Brahms, Johannes, 91 • Braque, Georges, 179 • Bristol "Chipmunk" aircraft, 75 • British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 22, 197 • British Controlled Oilfields, 62 • British European Airways (BEA), 75, 81 • British Expeditionary Force, (BEF), 89 • British Journal of Psychology, 81 • British Rail (BR), 75, 76, 77 • Bruckner, Anton, 91 • Brussels Observatory, 100 • Bucephalus, 36 • Buchan, John, 71 • Buddhism, 162 • Buenos Aires Conference, 62, 68 • Busch, Fritz, 91
- C** Caernarvon, Lord, 42 • Callas, Maria, 86, 172, 192 • Campbell, Sir Malcolm, 57 • Capone, Al, 22, 29, 36, 38, 138 • Carlsen, Publisher, 111 • Carné, Marcel, 197 • Carol II, king of Rumania, 81 • Carrefour Gallery, 200 • Carter, Howard, 42, 115 • Cartier, jewellers, 192 • Casimir III, king of Poland, 81 • Casterman, publisher, 8, 21, 27, 68, 69, 72, 78, 95, 99, 106, 112, 151 • Castro, Fidel, 189, 191 • César Baldaccini, 202, 203 • Cessna aircraft, 75 • Chamberlain, Neville, 81 • Chang Chong-chen, 51, 95, 162 • Chaplin, Charlie, 9 • Charles II, king of England, 111 • Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin, 82 • Charroux, Robert, 184 • Chiang Kai-shek, Madame, 189 • Christie, Agatha, 48, 171 • Citroën cars, 146, 155 • Coca-Cola, 35 • Cogniaux, Jacques, 175 • Cointrin airport, Geneva, 146 • Collier's magazine, 136 • Columbia Studios, 138 • Columbus, Christopher, 116 • Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur, 41, 203 • Condor Legion, 85 • Contras, guerrillas, 195 • Cornavin Hotel, Geneva, 146, 147 • Countess de Ségur, 18 • Coze, Paul, 30 • Crabb, commander Lionel "Buster", 157, 158 • Curtiss "Seahawk" aircraft, 157
- D** Dad's Army, television series, 48 • Daily Mail, The, 162 • Daily Telegraph, The, 11 • Dalai Lama, the, 162 • Dassault, Marcel, 180, 181 • David-Neel, Alexandra, 164, 165 • De Becker, Raymond, 92 • Debray, Régis, 189, 190 • de Chirico, Giorgio, 158 • Defoe, Daniel, 175 • Degrelle, Léon, 18, 91, 92, 118 • De Havilland aircraft, 47, 75, 157 • Dehaye, Marcel, 141 • de Mille, Cecil B., 121 • de Monfreid, Henry, 44, 45 • De Moor, Bob, 72, 75, 78, 130, 131, 136, 141, 143, 155, 183, 190, 197, 199, 200 • Dennis, fire-engine, 75 • Devos, Alice, 118 • Dewoitine aircraft, 62, 63 • Diario de Lisboa, 25 • Dimanche Illustré, 108 • Dior, Christian, 172, 175, 192 • Dirks, Rudolph, 18 • Disney, Walt, 18, 145 • Don Quixote, 57 • Douglas DC-3 aircraft, 162, 168 • Douglas DC-6 aircraft, 146, 169 • Douglas, Kirk, 45 • Douillet, Joseph, 12, 13, 14 • Duchamp, Marcel, 17 • Duhamel, Georges, 30, 33, 35
- E** Elisabeth, queen of the Belgians, 21 • Etna, Mount, 184, 187
- F** Faisal, king of Arabia, 47 • Faisal II, king of Iraq, 132, 133 • Farr, Walter, 162 • Flaubert, Gustave, 199 • Flying Scotsman, the, 76, 77 • Ford factories, 34, 35 • Four Powers Pact, 96 • Free French, 92 • Freud, Sigmund, 96 • Furtwängler, Wilhelm, 91
- G** Gall, Father, 30 • Gallimard, publisher, 183 • George V, king of England, 88, 89 • German Expressionism, 158 • Gestapo, 112 • Gibson Gallery, John, 199 • Gleiwitz radio transmitter, 81 • Glubb Pasha, 152 • Goldberg, Szymon, 91 • Gold Dragon cigarettes, 53 • Golden Press, 157 • Gontcharova, Natalia, 17 • Gosset, Father, 51, 55 • Gounod, Charles, 67, 86, 87, 133, 175 • Gran Chaco, 62, 68 • Grasset, publisher, 95 • Greene, Graham, 145 • Guinness, 77
- H** Haddock, Admiral Sir Richard, 111 • Haig whisky, 78, 158 • Harik Indians, 191 • Harvard University, 136 • Hawker Hart aircraft, 47 • Hawker Hunter aircraft, 75 • Hawker Tempest aircraft, 75 • Hayworth, Rita, 138 • Heinkel aircraft, 84, 85 • Hermès, saddler and luxury goods maker, 197 • Herriman, George, 18 • Herzog, Maurice, 165 • Heuvelmans, Bernard, 135, 138, 165 • Hitchcock, Alfred, 71, 85, 96, 99, 115, 145, 149 • Hitler, Adolf, 18, 71, 81, 82, 84, 91, 118, 145 • Hogarth, William, 116 • Hollywood, 38 • Holmes, Sherlock, 41 • Huntley & Palmer biscuits, 18 • Hutchinson, Peter, 199
- I** Incas, 116, 121, 123, 184 • Indian Airways, 162, 168 • Innovation department store, Brussels, 18 • Irgun, Jewish terrorist group, 129 • Ivestia, Soviet newspaper, 62 • Italian Futurists, 17, 158 • ITT, multinational, 195
- J** Jacobs, Edgar-Pierre, 21, 42, 43, 87, 89, 116, 118, 119, 120, 121, 141, 149, 155, 199 • Jaguar XJ6, 77 • Jeep, 130, 131 • Jeune Afrique, 152 • Jivaro Indians (Peru), 67 • Johnnie Walker whisky, 77, 158 • Jung, Carl Gustav, 42, 161 • Junkers aircraft, 62
- K** Keaton, Buster, 15 • Kemajoran airport (Djakarta), 184 • Keroul, Maurice, 109 • Kessel, Joseph, 12 • Keystone Cops, 15 • Kilauea, volcano, 184, 187 • King Kong, 71 • Klemperer, Otto, 91 • Ku-Klux-Klan, 190
- L** La Fontaine, fables of, 18 • La Libre Belgique, newspaper, 92, 135 • Lambic beer, 130 • Lang, Fritz, 17 • Lanvin, fashion house, 175 • La Patrie, newspaper, 118 • Lartigue, Jacques-Henri, 15, 17 • La Scala, Milan, 86 • Lawrence, T.E., 45, 133, 151 • League of Nations, 52, 55 • Lean, David, 45 • Leblanc, Raymond, 119, 141 • Le Boy-Scout Belge, newspaper, 12, 13 • Le Crapouillot, newspaper, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 45, 62, 71, 112, 130, 133 • Lee Enfield rifles, 47, 129 • Légion Wallonie, 18 • Legros, Fernand, 202, 203 • Leica cameras, 8 • Leloup, Roger, 75, 78, 157, 184 • Le Miroir, newspaper, 41, 46 • Leopold II, king of the Belgians, 27 • Leopold III, king of the Belgians, 91, 141 • Le Patriote Illustré, newspaper, 82, 136 • Le Petit Vingtième, newspaper supplement, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 21, 27, 35, 41, 46, 52, 61, 64, 68, 71, 72, 81, 89, 91, 92, 95, 108, 119, 121, 127, 141, 161, 203 • Leroux, Gaston, 121 •

- Lesne, Charles, 95 • Le Soir, newspaper, 91, 92, 95, 99, 100, 103, 105, 112, 116, 118, 121, 127, 172, 187 • Le Soir Jeunesse, newspaper supplement, 92, 95, 99 • Le XX^e (Vingtième) Siècle, newspaper, 8, 12, 18, 92, 118, 161, 172 • Lewinsohn, Richard, 62 • Ley, Willy, 136 • Librairie Hachette, 174 • Lichtenstein, Roy, 158 • Liore et Olivier, aircraft, 62, 63 • Livingstone, David, 27 • Loch Ness, 71 • Lockheed Constellation aircraft, 168 • Londres, Albert, 12 • Lonsdale-Cooper, Leslie, 108 • Louis XIV, king of France, 111 • Louvain, university of, 51, 55 • Louvre, 158 • Luftwaffe, 84 • Lytton report, 52
- M** Mackay, John, 71 • MacManus, George, 18 • Maginot Line, 89 • Magritte, René, 96 • Maisons Françaises, magazine, 197 • Malevich, Kasimir, 16, 17, 158 • Manchester Guardian, 14 • Mann, Thomas, 91 • Maraini, Fosco, 165 • Marx, Groucho, 197 • Maurois, André, 22 • Mauser rifles, 84 • Maya civilisation, 184, 191 • Mengele, Dr. Josef, 180 • Mercedes (Daimler-Benz), 15, 18 • Messerschmitt aircraft, 84, 85, 145 • Methuen, publisher, 59, 72, 77, 106, 129 • Michelangeli, Arturo Benedetti, 149 • Mickey Mouse, 18, 145, 197 • Mieszko I, king of Poland, 81 • Mieszko II, king of Poland, 81 • Mirbeau, Octave, 64 • Miró, Joan, 158 • Monet, Claude, 158 • Monty Python, 183 • Moriarty, prof., 41, 203 • Moukden incident, 52 • Mount Rainier, 166 • Mount Wilson Observatory, 100, 136 • Mouskouri, Nana, 203 • Movietone News, 57 • Muggeridge, Malcolm, 14 • Muller, Giovanni, 116 • Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren, 27, 67 • Museum of Geneva, 124 • Mussolini, Benito, 61, 81, 82
- N** National Geographic magazine, 8, 123, 125, 164, 166, 168, 179, 191 • National Geographic Society, 112, 124 • Nazis, 71, 81, 91, 92, 136 • Ninie, Hergé's aunt, 9 • Niven, David, 130 • Nuclear disarmament, 190
- O** Oglala Sioux, 30, 189, 195 • Onassis, Aristotle, 87, 158, 172, 179 • Opel Olympia, 116 • O'Toole, Peter, 45 • Ottokar Przemysl of Bohemia, 81 • Ottokar II, king of Bohemia, 81
- P** Palais-Royal, Brussels, 82 • Paramount Pictures, 38 • Paris-Match magazine, 8, 135, 172 • Parke-Bennet, saleroom, 179 • Pathé News, 57 • Pauwels, Louis, 183 • Pearl Harbor, 8, 54 • Peeters, Benoît, 158 • Peenemünde research centre, 136 • Percival P-40 aircraft, 75 • Peter Pan, 9 • Petra, Jordan, 152, 153 • Peyré, Joseph, 95 • Picasso, Pablo, 158, 179 • Piccard, prof. Auguste, 105, 107, 136, 175 • Piccard, Jacques, 105 • Piccard, Jean, 105 • Piccard, Jules, 105 • Pickford, Mary, 38 • Planète, magazine, 183 • Poliakov, Serge, 197 • Pop Art, 158 • Powell, Anthony, 151 •
- Q** Queen Mary, R.M.S., liner, 38 • Qutab Minar, Delhi, 168
- R** Rabier, Benjamin, 18 • Rackam, Jean, 109 • Rameses II, pharaoh, 43 • Raphael Sanzio, 143, 183 • Read, Marie, 108 • Red Cloud, 30 • Red Fort, Delhi, 168 • Reed, Carol, 145 • Reichenbach Falls, Switzerland, 41 • Remi, Alexis, Hergé's father, 9 • Remi, Elisabeth, Hergé's mother, 9 • Remi, Fanny, née Vlamincq—Hergé's second wife, see also Rodwell, 30, 200 • Remi, Georges (Hergé), 8, 9, 57, 89, 91, 106 • Remi, Germaine, née Kieckens—Hergé's first wife, 87, 92, 161 • Remi, Léon, Hergé's uncle, 9 • Remi, Paul, Hergé's brother, 9, 87, 148, 155, 195 • Renoir, Pierre-Auguste, 179 • Rexist political party, 18, 91, 118 • Ricklin, prof., 161 • Roche-Bobois catalogue, 197 • Rock and Roll, 159 • Rodwell, Fanny—see also Remi, 30, 200 • Rolls-Royce engines, 184 • Romano, Giulio, 143, 183 • Rossini, Gioacchino, 87 • Royal Air Force, 47, 75, 130 • Ryan, Cornelius, 136
- S** Sabena, Belgian Airlines, 81, 146 • Sadoul, Numa, 15, 22, 51, 81, 146, 152, 155, 161, 179, 180, 199 • Saint-Ogan, Alain, 17, 18 • Salicon, shipwright, 111 • Sandwich, Earl of, 111 • "Sapper", 67 • Saturn rocket, 136 • Saud, king, 132, 133 • Savoia-Marchetti, aircraft, 75, 81 • Schiaparelli, 192 • Schuschnigg, Austrian Chancellor, 81 • Shell petrol, 18 • Siemens, 52, 53 • Simca, 146 • Simon, Leslie E., 145, 146 • Sisley, Alfred, 108, 158 • Snoopy, 197 • Sole Bay, Battle of, 111 • Spanish civil war, 85 • Speer, Albert, 145 • Sputnik, 135 • Stal, Marcel, 200 • Stalin, Joseph, 146 • Standard Oil, 62, 133 • Stanley, Henry Morton, 27 • Stasi, East German secret police, 82 • Stevenson, Robert Louis, 175 • Stobbaerts, Marcel, 87 • Studios Hergé, 8, 9, 121, 136, 141, 151, 159, 168, 183, 199 • Sunday Times, The, 179 • Supermarine Spitfire aircraft, 130, 131 • Suprematism, 17 • Swahili, 27
- T** Thévenin, René, 30 • Tintin magazine, 119, 121, 127, 135, 136, 138, 171, 175, 184 • Treaty of Versailles, 11 • Trenet, Charles, 127 • Trident, airliner, 75, 81 • Triumph Herald, 75 • Tupamaros guerrillas, 189, 190, 195 • Turner, Michael, 108 • Tutankhamen, 42, 45, 115
- U** Ulbricht, Walter, 195 • United Nations, 162
- Valentino, Rudolph, 45 • Van Melkebeke, Jacques, 87, 97, 121, 138 • Verville Air Coach, 95 • Vichy government, 92 • Vichy water, 18 • Vickers Armstrong, 62, 190 • Vickers Vanguard, 75 • Victoria, queen of England, 71 • Vogue magazine, 192 • Volkswagen, 146 • von Braun, Wernher, 135, 136 • von Stroheim, Erich, 82, 148, 195 • V-2 rocket, 135, 136, 145
- W** Wagner, Richard, 35 • Wallez, Father Norbert, 8, 12, 21, 22, 27, 33, 35, 161 • Warhol, Andy, 33, 158 • Warsaw Pact, 82 • Waugh, Evelyn, 11 • Wedgwood Benn, Tony, 14 • Wehrmacht, 83, 84, 91 • Whipple, Fred, 136 • Wiener, Charles, 120, 121 • Wiley, John, 145 • Wooster, Bertie, 11 • Wrigley chewing gum, 35
- Y** Yeti, 160, 161, 162, 165
- Z** Zaharoff, Sir Basil, 62, 63, 133, 190 • Zeiss, Carl, 82 • Zischka, Antoine, 71, 130, 133 • Zog I, king of Albania, 81 • Zorro, 197



Like Tintin, Michael Farr was for years a reporter, in his case for Reuters and then for the *Daily Telegraph*. He covered many of the same countries, or at least their real-life counterparts. He came to know Hergé himself, and for this book was given access to his immense archive. Now the leading British expert on all aspects of Tintin, he is the author of *Tintin: Sixty Years of Adventure*, and the translator of *Hergé and Tintin, Reporters* and *Tintin and the World of Hergé*. His books on other subjects include *Vanishing Borders* (which was shortlisted for the Thomas Cook Award) and *Berlin! Berlin!*



Mit 12 „Jahren“ durchs Wasser, kann der Tintin-Unterschied und die Klänge geschmacklos werden. Mit 12 Jahren vom Tintin und gleich, von einem Krokodil ange-

griffen, mit 12 Stundenklimmen durchs Wasser. Mit 12 Jahren hat Tintin, kann das Meer auch mit Fischen und Krokodilen. Spezies und Fische sind diese keine Angst vor Haien mehr zu haben.



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