



## Tintin: Herge and His Creation

*Harry Thompson*

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Author : Harry Thompson

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## From Reader Review Tintin: Herge and His Creation for online ebook

### Tom Ewing says

Harry Thompson's warm regard for Herge and his creation extended to imitation: if there's such a thing as "ligne claire" criticism, this book is it. Crisp, lively, tight prose; bouncy good humour; judgements that are briefly expressed but incisive, and hardly a sentence wasted. It's a fine example of a critical biography, and one which presents a fair bit of technical detail in a very plain-spoken style. Doubly impressive that it manages to be a very good work of comics criticism with zero access to examples - as an unauthorised biographer, Thompson was unable to actually show any of the art he talks about.

The only place it falls down are some of the judgements themselves, particularly Thompson's desire to defend Herge from all of the frequent political criticism of his work. Herge's work has an anti-authoritarian streak which took comic aim at communist, capitalist and fascist in turn (as well as at the petit-bourgeois mediocrities who stopped the latter-day Herge enjoying a quiet life). But Herge the man was not quite so bold, and while his post-war criticism by people keen to root out collaborators may have been distressing and inconvenient, it doesn't seem entirely unjust given what many of those who didn't knuckle under had been through. Thompson is also very defensive on the question of Herge and race - after a paragraph of excruciating detail on how *Tintin Au Congo* presents its African characters as stupid, lazy, feckless, and servile he concludes that the depiction is "patronising... but not deliberately racist". If *Tintin Au Congo* isn't deliberately racist, very little is. Artists make mistakes and think, write and draw awful things - to name *Tintin In The Congo* for what it is doesn't mean *The Calculus Affair* or *The Castafiore Emerald* have to be yanked from the shelves. (Any more than it means readers appalled by Congo, or a few others, should be expected to embrace less toxic *Tintin*, of course.)

Thompson is particularly good on those two books, and the rest of the string of late masterpieces that followed the double-length wartime and post-war epics. A comedy writer himself, he has a fine appreciation for Herge's comic timing and grasp of slapstick, and a keen structural sense of what each recurring character brought to the series. (His central contention is that the story of *Tintin* and Herge is the story of a man gradually transferring his ideal self from *Tintin* to *Haddock*). In particular, his reading of *Flight 714* is superb and brought me a new appreciation of that tricksy, enigmatic volume. When it focuses on exploring Herge's brilliance, not excusing his flaws, this is an excellent piece of criticism.

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### Stephen King says

Brilliant accessible biography of Herge- great to read along as I revisited *Tintin*'s adventures. Harry Thompson- also author of *Penguins Stopped Play* - is sadly missed.

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### Joshua says

A remarkable and thoroughly enjoyable read, *Tintin: Herge and His Creation* is really a masterpiece that superbly intertwines the biography of Herge with that of his life-work, *Tintin*. It does not excessively technical, and is not, as one would expect of a biography, be ponderous about Herge's personal life. Instead,

Thompson masterfully examines Hergé as storyteller-cum-artist-cum-social commentator, and draws such introspective parallels between Hergé's upbringing and beliefs and the action that Tintin engages in. He also delights the reader with fascinating and little-known details on the particular socio-historical events and realities that each Tintin book and setting attempts to satirize! Indeed an AMAZING find and one that is truly worth EVERY SINGLE CENT.

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### **Dirk Grobbelaar says**

Part biography, part reference guide, this is a magnificent companion book that deals with each Tintin book in its own clearly defined chapter.

What separates this one from the pack is the background that the author brings to each section, but without going into superfluous amounts of detail. The political and social events that impacted each book are examined, as well as influences on Hergé's life at the time. Hergé's artistic and professional development is followed as the series progresses, as well as his personal life and events that (probably) impacted his emotional state.

The effect that Tintin had on his creator's life is enormous, and it seems to have been a love/hate relationship right to the end.

This book does not appear to be endorsed by the Hergé foundation, but it might as well be. Thompson brings an enormous amount of respect and passion to the table, and the book is obviously well researched.

Something that I particularly enjoyed was the information relating to some of the other artists that assisted Hergé with his work, in particular Edgar P. Jacobs and Bob De Moor.

If, like me, you were raised on Tintin, this is an absolute **must** read.

I am (as a direct result of this book) re-reading all the Tintin books and comparing each to its relevant chapter. Fantastic stuff!

### **5 Stars**

#### **Read as part of the must-read agreement with my wife – 2014**

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### **Mike Jozic says**

Not a portrait of the artist so much as an analysis of Hergé's work. Granted, Hergé was not a person who spent a lot of time doing interviews or talking about his life, so the source material Thompson used to inform his book is sparse. Add to that the fact that the author did not have access to Hergé's estate and you have a book that is big on enthusiasm but lacking in any real meat-and-potatoes biography. The analysis of each album in the series does give Thompson an iron-clad structure and he manages to offer up some valuable information for the art/cartoon/comic historian/enthusiast. Still, for as much as it says about the artist and his work it still feels lacking. An enjoyable read, overall, and a good primer for the TINTIN neophyte, but I'll

probably keep looking for the Hergé bio that sates my appetite. Not a bad thing, necessarily.

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## **Morganna says**

I've always loved reading biographies and auto-biographies, but I don't think I've ever read something as detailed as this before (I joked to a friend that it's the first book I've ever read for enjoyment that has footnotes and an index). I felt so many emotions towards Hergé while reading this and count myself lucky that I found this book in a bargain bin several years ago. I almost wish I had got round to reading it sooner.

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## **Gary says**

This fascinating and revealing book combines a biography of the creator of Tintin, Herge (George Remi) with tracing the development of the Tintin albums.

We learn how Herge's personality, experiences and outlook shaped Tintin and his friends and foes, and some of the extraordinary happenings behind the scenes.

Tintin's pet dog Milou (in the original French) was named after a teenage sweetheart of Herge's.

We explore just how the character that is featureless, ageless, sexless and seemingly unburdened with a personality, has endeared millions and millions of fans across the world over several generations.

Children around the world still love Tintin today, as they did since the 1930s.

We learn of the political and historic events of some of the works, and the reflections of Herge's life and various experiences in others.

For example one powerful example of Herge's creativity are his celebrated dream sequences.

I disagree with the author of this book about Tintin in the Land of the Soviets (The Adventures of Tintin) and see no reason why Herge apologized. This was not propaganda as the author and so many others claim, but brilliant political satire with much truth in it about the Soviet tyranny.

The episode of the anti-semitic stereotype of the international banker Bohlwinkel in The Shooting Star (The Adventures of Tintin), Herge insisted was a genuine error with no malicious intent, while Hitlerism and Fascism are clearly attacked in King Ottokar's Sceptre (Tintin).

In Cigars of the Pharaoh (The Adventures of Tintin) "Rastapopoulos and Snowy, in Egyptian dress, carry Tintin off, while Sarcophagus rocks the baby Tintin in a crib and smokes one of the Pharaoh's cigars.

Tintinologists have long tried to find the hidden meaning in these dreams, but if anyone was dreaming then it wasn't Herge.

He merely used the illogic of dreams for comic effect. When Captain Haddock sat naked in an audience of parrots in The Castafiore Emerald (The Adventures of Tintin), for instance Herge was not interested in any subliminal meaning, only that he found the idea funny".

Then there is a whole geography that Herge invented, which is one of his greatest creative achievements.

" By the 1970s, it was possible for Tintin to board a plane in Sondonesia (not a million miles away from Indonesia) and fly to Khemed, a desert nation between Saudi Arabia and the Lebanon, which was curiously reminiscent of Jordan. Or he could visit the Bordurian capital Szohod, a merciless parody of a pre-glasnost East European city, right down to the many representations of the dictator Marshal Kurvi-Tasch, a figure with an uncanny resemblance to Stalin. Or perhaps Klow, the mineral water capital of the world, in a guardedly friendly but authoritarian Syldavia, whose mosques, hills and coastline look for all the world like Yugoslavia's". (I would say Albania).

An incredible insight into the mysteries behind Tintin and Hergé.  
One can return to read each of the Tintin adventures with renewed insight.

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### **Diptakirti Chaudhuri says**

A wonderful journey through the life and times of Hergé, broken down into the periods he was creating each Tintin album. His early life, trials and tribulations during the War, the continued success along with the torture of continuously producing the books are wonderfully described.  
Recommend reading this along with the Tintin books to note many of the inspirations, nuggets and small felicities that abound in them.

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### **Scurra says**

This is one of the most accessible books about Hergé out there; simply recounting the process of creation of the 24 masterpieces of comic art that make up the Tintin collection. He offers a friendly eye, with some understanding of the historical difficulties that Georges Remi faced (and overcame), but the focus is always on the immortal boy reporter. Along with Asterix, Tintin is one of the greatest European contributions to comic art; this book helps you look at the originals in a new way.

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### **Taffy says**

Harry Thompson pulled it off with this wonderful biography on one of the best fictional characters in history. Thompson describes the life of Hergé en Tintin while reviewing all the Tintin books. A tough task, but Thompson does it and keeps the material light and still doesn't forget the important details of the earlier part of Hergé's life which are omitted in the official biographies of Hergé. Maybe that's why the widow of Hergé didn't cooperate with Thompson. Luckily the former compatriots of Studio Hergé did and they paint the picture of who Hergé really was.

This book is a must read for every comic book fan and I recommend to read the Tintin books simultaneously if you can. It adds to the fun!

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### **Tom says**

Can't say I know all that much more about Hergé having read this book. Okay, so that's not quite fair: Thompson's biography is broken up by Tintin book, with a chapter focussing on each, so I certainly know a lot about his work process and collaborators. Which itself is an interesting look behind the curtain, especially given the apparent scandals about Hergé's use of assistants and how much he actually drew himself.

However details seem to be rather thin on the ground about the man himself. Frequently mention is made of the artist disappearing for weeks at a time without explanation - the pressure of the work, mental health issues, or what? Thompson doesn't say. Admittedly, the lack of information about Hergé away from the drawing board might be because no such recorded information exists - Thompson is working mainly from

second-hand sources here, since Hergé and many of his assistants are long dead, and the former only gave one major (and majorly edited) interview in his life - but it feels like the author also didn't want to pry.

Repeatedly throughout *Tintin: Hergé and His Creation*, Thompson defends the artist from all criticisms, real and imagined (his constant insistence that anyone who found pre-or-inter-war Tintin at all iffy is **TOTALLY WRONG** left a particularly bad taste), and generally it seems like he wasn't actually up for any sort of deep dive into the man, and more of his creation. Some nice behind-the-scenes info, but rather shallow, and could maybe have done with an edit - lots of repeated information and phrasing throughout.

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### **Christopher Lockery says**

#### **Enjoyable read, very interesting.**

As a long standing fan of Tintin I very much enjoyed reading this book.

As it stands I own a full set of the books, yes that includes the facsimiles of the older versions, and even I found plenty of new info about both the production of the stories (i.e. the fact that even in the days of *Tintin Magazine* the stories would overrun, thus even whole pages would have to be omitted for the book versions, thank heaven for the 'Hergé the complete soap opera' series) and also a few nuggets about the story content e.g. did you know the it is in fact Prof Calculus, not Cap Haddock, who is in fact supposed to be the legal owner of Marlinspike Hall? Don't believe me, well just read *Red Rackham's Treasure* again to find out..

The book also details various aspects of Hergé's life outside of his work, however as the title implies this is skimmed over, plus there is also a chapter which details some of the various adaptations of the stories, of which I have always felt were of poor quality, and it is clear that Hergé felt the same way about them...

One thing to note though, some of the info in this book is somewhat out dated as it was first written back in the early 1990s, thus there is no mention of more recent developments in the history of the Tintin brand, such as the 90s cartoon series (of which I quite enjoyed) or the 2011 film.

However given that most of the info concerns Tintin over the lifespan of his creator and likewise Hergé's life in regard to how his work impacted on his own life, this book is still worth a read.

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### **Matthew Hodge says**

I read this book as a teenage Tintin fan, and all of a sudden, it opened my eyes to exactly how much of a genius Hergé was. It went out of print for many years, but they brought it back into print on Kindle to coincide with the Spielberg Tintin movie, which was nice.

Thompson walks you through the life of Hergé, but does so by devoting a chapter to each Tintin book. Whether Hergé's life did actually divide up that neatly is another matter, but it's a solid device and brings each book to life as well as the man behind the stories.

The limitations of the book are that because Thompson didn't have access to Hergé, who was dead by the time this was published, he can only put the story together using other people's interviews and whatever

information existed out of there. Still, this probably means he can be more objective.

What's fascinating about the story of the Tintin books is that you can simultaneously chart the improvement in Hergé's craft, but also his growing love/hate relationship with Tintin, all of which are pointed out expertly along the way by Thompson.

But the best thing is simply the level of detail that you will pick up in the Tintin books from reading this. After reading this book, I never again read Tintin the same way. If you too are a fan of the little Belgian detective, you should definitely check out this book.

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### **Jeroen Van de Crommenacker says**

It's a decent biography on Hergé and Tintin, but you really have to be a fan to appreciate this and it doesn't add much to be honest.

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### **Kevin de Ataíde says**

Two stars for shoddy writing, sophomoric use of political terms such as 'right-wing' and 'conservative' to classify Hergé's work and for a barely veiled antagonism towards the Catholic Church that supposedly drove Hergé to seek escape in these comic books. But this book is not a very good biography of Hergé, rather it's an analysis of each of the Tintin books in turn and the illustrator's circumstances at the time. Hergé's bouts of depression and his disagreeable nature are softened by the author's hagiographical narrative. The reason I picked the book up was for its commentary on the books and I've learnt more than I wanted to. I've missed some of these titles and have finally managed to read all the books as well as to see the different emotions of George Remi expressed within.

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