Opening extract from

Tintin & Co

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TINTIN

Without relatives and of indeterminate age,
an intrepid young man of high moral standing,
with whom everyone can identify.

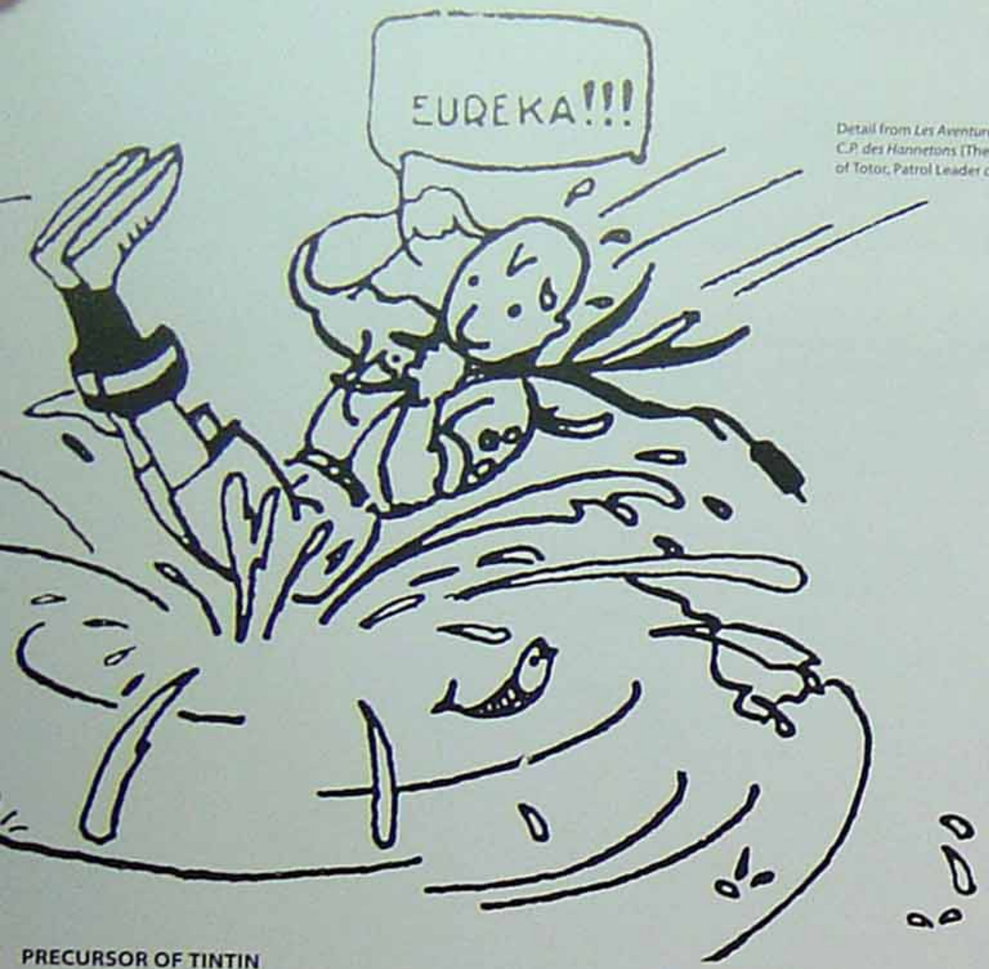
The first appearance of Tintin. Frame from Tintin in the Land of the Soviets.

Tintin, the unbeatable hero of the adventures that bear his name, is a celebrity who most unusually can combine worldwide fame with a discreet, little-known origin and private life. In that respect, as well as others, he is remarkably like his creator, Georges Remi, better known as Hergé.

Hergé created him hurriedly in January 1929 to help fill the pages of *Le Petit Vingtième*, a weekly children's newspaper supplement he was charged with editing, still aged only 21. Emulating a quality soon to become a strength of the character he was about to create, Hergé had to perform some quick thinking.

PRECOCIOUS AT DRAWING

Georges Prosper Remi – Hergé was derived from the reversal of his principal initials, as pronounced in French – was born in Brussels on May 22, 1907. From an early age, Georges took to drawing in his notebooks and in the margins of his school exercise books. One of his favourite subjects during those difficult years of the Great War (1914–18), when his home city of Brussels was under German occupation, was, according to his own accounts, a boy hero battling *les Boches* (slang for the Germans), carrying out acts of sabotage and spying. Unfortunately no such juvenilia survive.



Detail from *Les Aventures de Totor, C.P. des Hannetons* (The Adventures of Totor, Patrol Leader of the Maybugs).

PRECURSOR OF TINTIN

A few years later, reflecting his considerable enthusiasm for scouting – the highlight of a childhood which he described to the Paris newspaper *Le Monde* in February 1973 as "very grey" and of which, "of course, I have memories, but these do not begin to brighten, to become coloured until the moment when I discovered scouting" – he created a Boy Scout character called Totor that he drew for the magazine *Le Boy-Scout belge* in the manner of a strip cartoon, a relatively new form of expression in Europe though well established in America. Using speech bubbles containing the odd word punctuated generously with exclamation and question marks, it was the beginning of the modern strip cartoon.

HERGÉ, JACK OF ALL PAGES

Hergé's natural ability at drawing was noticed at *Le Vingtième Siècle* where in his first proper job after leaving school he was initially employed in the subscriptions department. He soon found himself being asked to provide drawings and vignettes for different parts of the paper, whether women's fashions for *Votre "vingtième" Madame* or

Le Petit "XX^e", cover dated April 18, 1929.

illustrative scenes for the arts and book pages, at a time when newspapers used fewer photographs. His all-round usefulness as an illustrator led Father Norbert Wallez, the priest who was the Catholic newspaper's director, to put him in charge of a supplement for children that would be published every Thursday. When pondering what he should do for *Le Petit Vingtième*, he had Totor very much in mind and this indomitable Scout was in every respect the antecedent for Tintin: in appearance, in resourcefulness, as a do-gooder and even in the catchy alliteration of the name.

TINTIN, THE BEGINNINGS OF AN ADVENTURE

Tintin was to take all Totor's inherent qualities further from the moment of his first appearance on January 10, 1929, setting out by train from Brussels for a hazardous adventure in a country in turmoil, the Soviet Union. Tintin, Hergé later told Numa Sadoul, was to some extent "the little brother of Totor, a Totor turned journalist yet always keeping the spirit of a Boy Scout."

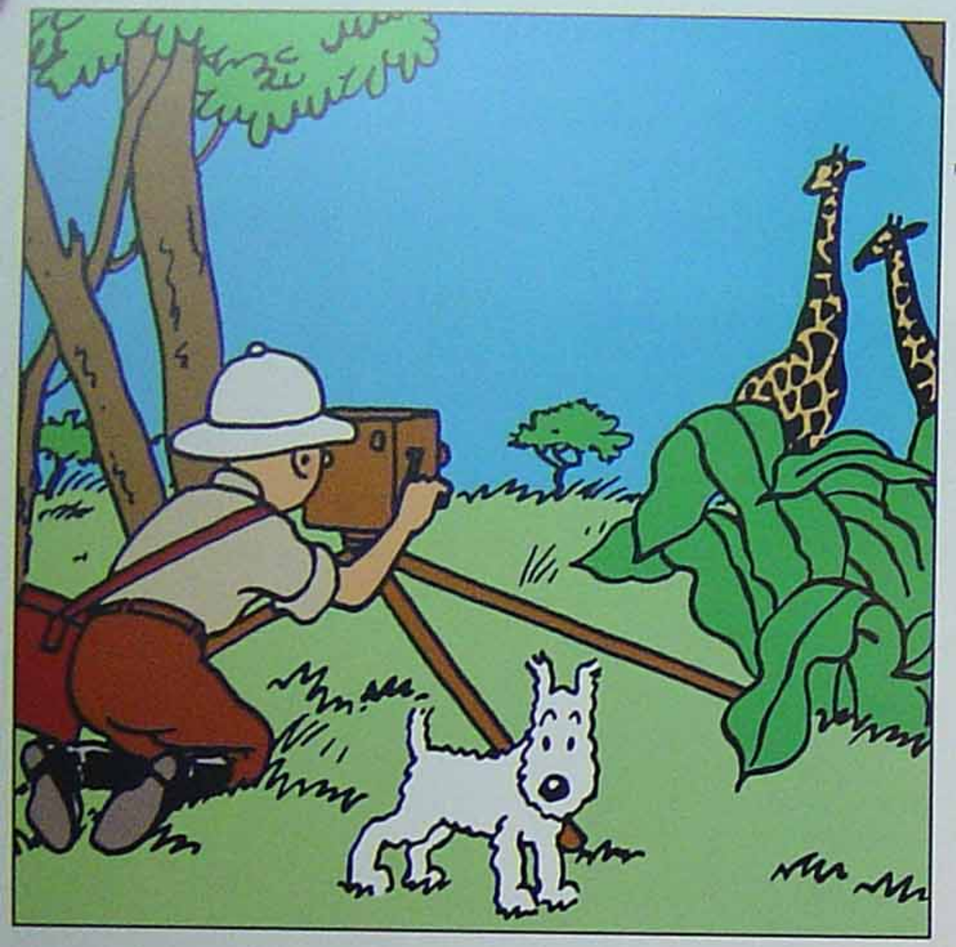
Hergé did not have much time to think about his new character. The improvisatory aspect of Tintin, notably the simplistic drawing: a round head, a button for a nose and two dots for eyes, the quiff to be – a few strokes of the pen – was to be the very key to his character's instant success. He was flexible, distinctive yet anonymous: any child, or even adult, could readily identify with him; age and culture were irrelevant.

FROM ALBERT LONDRES TO TINTIN

Working in a busy newspaper office was a stimulating experience for the young Hergé who was highly receptive to ideas, fascinated by current affairs and topics of the day, and had a keen eye for visual detail. Like any journalist, he benefited from the newspaper cuttings library before creating an archive of his own which he was to maintain to the end of his life and that provided the essential raw material for his work on the adventures. He was always abreast of the latest news, having access not only to Belgian but also to foreign newspapers. The American press provided him with up-to-date examples of strip cartoons as they had developed across the Atlantic. Amid such excitement, Hergé could dream of becoming a famous reporter himself, a celebrated foreign correspondent like Albert Londres, who not only reported but created news.

The reporter Albert Londres, one of the models for Tintin.

Hergé in 1949.



Frame from *Tintin in the Congo*.

Londres perished on the liner *Georges-Philippar*, which in 1932 sank in the Red Sea after a mysterious fire, as he returned to Europe with the promise of an undisclosed scoop. When it came to a hero for the new children's supplement, why not have a reporter–adventurer like Londres? So Tintin came into being, representing the reporter that Hergé would himself have liked to be.

In an interview with *Lire* magazine in December 1978, Hergé admitted that through Tintin he was able to experience the life of a reporter. He could – and pressure of work demanded that he did – remain in Brussels, an arm-chair traveller, as he sent Tintin to almost every corner of the world. Tintin initially sets out with camera and notebook to complete his reportages for *Le Petit Vingtième* but we rarely see him file his copy. There is a unique moment in *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* where we spot him writing a despatch much longer than any editor would want.

In the next adventure, *Tintin in the Congo*, the budding reporter – suitably for the subject – proves himself a proponent of photo-journalism, filming giraffe, buffalo and other African wildlife.

FROM REPORTER TO EXPLORER

As the adventures continued, it is newspaper articles about – though not by – Tintin that multiply. In the original version of *The Blue Lotus*, the very first plate is a newspaper report entitled "Des Nouvelles de Tintin" ("News about Tintin") giving an account of the state of affairs at the conclusion of the previous adventure (*Cigars of the Pharaoh*) signed with the initials G.R. – obviously Georges Remi. In the later English edition this is replaced by a simple, non-newspaper résumé. Finally, the Shanghai News has a front-page story about the rescue of Professor Fang Hsi-ying and the arrest of the drug ring under the headline "Tintin's Own Story," an interview signed by a reporter with the initials L.G.T.

We catch Tintin exercising his profession again in a scene at the Museum of Ethnography in *The Broken Ear* where, notebook in hand and in the company of another reporter as well as the Thom(p)sons, he questions the cleaner and the museum director about the theft of the fetish.

Elsewhere it is more usual for Tintin to be quizzed, such as at the end of *The Black Island*. "Welcome back, sir. Can we have a few details? Your own words ..." the radio reporter asks before the press pack flees at the sight of Ranko the gorilla. In *Land of Black Gold*, Tintin goes to interview the managing director of Speedol and poses the proper journalistic questions. Only the lack of note-taking is unjournalistic.

From being an investigative reporter Tintin develops into a detective. Snowy and others refer to him regularly as Sherlock Holmes and he has a good deal of the famous English detective about him – including a sharp eye for detail, considerable powers of deduction and an ability to solve conundrums. Like Holmes, Tintin is a master of disguise, and in Rastapopoulos he finds his own arch-enemy, pitted against him as relentlessly as Moriarty was to Conan Doyle's hero.

As the adventures progress, moreover, Tintin embraces wholeheartedly the role of the explorer, culminating in his most memorable achievement – the first steps he took on the Moon, some 16 years before the American astronaut Neil Armstrong.

Frame from *The Broken Ear*.

Frame from *Land of Black Gold*.

Frame from *The Broken Ear*.