

THE SENTINEL

THE PAPER FOR BRITISH COMIC COLLECTORS

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**THE SENTINEL SAYS:
ATTACKS ON BRITISH COMICS MUST STOP!**

Full story: See Page 2

Whatever happened to Graffix?

Readers of The Beano in the 90's may be able to recall interesting adverts that went "It's a book! It's a comic! It's a Graffix!". It's also pretty likely that they never actually saw these Graffix books being sold anywhere. Almost all of them that you can buy second hand these days appear to have belonged to libraries. The publishers, A&C Black, really missed a trick there! For the late 90's was also the time that manga (in the form of collected paperbacks, rather than weekly anthologies, sadly) started to take off in Britain. Imagine where our industry might be today if British-made paperback format comics had been sold alongside the likes of Love Hina and Vision of Escaflowne right from the start.

"Comics" is certainly the correct description for Graffix too, by the way. They have big text captions in a far-too-late attempt to make them look like "more" than comics to please parents (the parents of the 1950's!). Of course parents from the late 90's onwards would probably be only too glad to see their kids reading anything!

Of course as all readers of the Sentinel will know, British adventure comics are *supposed* to have big captions that explain the stories anyway. Just look at Commando – our nation's last surviving Boys' Own comic. We'll leave "cinematic storytelling" to America and Japan.

So what did happen to Graffix? Well after publishing about 32 books at the rate of 4 - 8 per year they vanished in the early 2000's. In 2006 they resurfaced as Colour Graffix and started running through the same stories again, only this time with murky-looking colourisation. It's not very impressive.

In addition the Colour Graffix series appears to be shorter (not all of the old black and white artwork was suitable for colouring, and in fact any artwork that was originally planned to be black and white is not suitable for colouring). As before, the books don't appear to be on sale anywhere and have gone directly to libraries. This, and the fact there is no new stories, is a huge wasted opportunity.

What the publishers desperately need to do is commission some new stories, in black and white, that are at least 4 times longer than the old Graffix books. And then they need to get them on sale in the manga section of bookshops! Not only will it introduce people who have previously only bought Japanese comics into the style and storytelling of British comics, it might also tempt fans of old British adventure comics such as Victor into trying out some Shonen Jump or Viz.

It's a potential win-win situation that can only help to further the penetration of the comics art form (of all nations) into mainstream British culture. A&C Black owe it to their country to try.

Where's Roy Race?

Take down your "Best of Roy of the Rovers - The 80's" book and flip to the inside back cover for a minute. See that advert for "The Archives: Volume 1"? Whatever happened to that? Well, despite being first advertised right back in 2008 that title has now vanished from Amazon and other sites, having never made it into print.

Never made it into print? It should never have gone out of print! Roy of the Rovers is one of the greatest sagas ever told in comics. Running for over 40 years, it covered all sorts of fantastic stories both on and off the pitch (not to mention forays into other sports!). Once Roy got his own comic in 1976 it was unbeatable, a kind of footballing soap opera with all sorts of ups and downs in the player's careers and lives. And let's not forget the real emotional rollercoaster of the "Roy Race Shot!" storyline from 1980. This comic wove an epic tale that must be kept alive at all costs. It's a body of work that any nation properly respectful of its culture would be shouting from the rooftops about.

There's even a simple way to encourage people to buy the whole run. Go and Google "The New Naturalists" (just don't buy any!). You'll be plunged into a whole new world of bizarre slang terms like "The golden thirteen" and "The silver three". All that fuss about a bunch of old fashioned field guides for ramblers... what makes generally-non-rambling 'bookish' people get so excited about amassing a complete collection? It's quite simple - numbers on the spines! The publishers of 'Tankobon' collected manga volumes understand this too. Just look at this:

(pic)

It looks 'right' doesn't it? Now look at this:

(pic).

Aagh! The simple fact of numbers on the spines seems to hook people, even if they aren't all that interested in the contents. So with that first picture in mind, why on earth aren't we seeing this?

(pic)

There's no ifs or buts about this, it simply *has* to be done. And done with proper credits, full-size reproduction and a reasonable price too. **Anything less is a national disgrace.**

The Phoenix Odyssey

A new British-made weekly adventure comic was released on the 7th of January... not that you would have noticed if you didn't read The Times or British comic websites. It's called The Pheonix and is kind of a revival of the the ill-fated subscription-only title The DFC.

It's funded by an "anonymous benefactor" (why anonymous though? Alfred Harmsworth was fiercely proud of all his publications back in the day, from the Halfpenny Marvel to the Daily Mirror. I say to this benefactor: Stand up and be counted! The sentinel at least will recognise your willingness to do what was right.) and apparently has enough funding to run for two years. On the seventh a free preview issue of the comic was given away in The Times, advising readers that the Phoenix was "on sale in Waitrose". However this was not quite true.

Posts from all around the Internet on the day reported nothing but universal disappointment, as people found no sign of the comic in Waitrose branches from central London to to remote Scotland. Those who asked customer services where it was were met with complete ignorance, most of the time those in charge of the store, let alone behind the counter, didn't have a clue what it was. This was especially frustrating for comic fans in the north, where Waitrose isn't as widespread. Some people made special long-distance trips to buy the comic and found nothing.

According to one poster on Comics-UK the store's "buyer" reported that The Phoenix was not on sale in any branch. Not surprisingly people began to wonder what was going on. This was not helped by the fact that the Phoenix website made absolutely no mention of the distribution problems. It was left to posters on comic forums to speculate... and in one case be angrily told that they ought to have emailed the Phoenix office rather than "make assumptions based on what you reckon". Surely it would have been far less work on either side to have just put an update on the website?

After a lot more speculation and wasted trips some positive news finally began to appear. The Phoenix Twitter (though still not the main website) mentioned on the 18th of January that it would be in Waitrose "this weekend". And lo and behold the first (that I can find) report of the comic being physically bought from a shop emerged on the Internet on the Saturday 21st. The buyer had a bit of a trek to find it though, travelling many miles around three branches and asking at customer service desks before finally discovering the first three issues (as it had been three weeks since the 'launch') "on sale" in boxes behind the customer service desk. Of course his asking if he could buy "one of those" was immediately met with "you mean the free book from the telegraph?". The comic finally seemed to appear in stores across the country around the 27th – 20 days later! But to their credit they did also sell the "missed" issues.

Other problems appeared in the subscription chain. The subscription offers are varied and very generous. A year's worth saves readers over £50 and they get a free binder to store the comics in (albeit only half a year's worth!). In addition a 5-issue taster subscription is available that works out at under £1 per issue. However some subscribers, including myself, ran into problems here too. After the "debut" of the first issue it was still possible to subscribe "from" issue 1 on the website. However many people who took out this subscription actually received issue 2 as their first issue and had to phone the office and buy issue 1 separately. I did this but my order somehow got lost, the money wasn't taken from my account and the comic didn't arrive.

All of these problems are a shame, because The Phoenix is easily the best thing that has happened to British comics in over 20 years. Many people who are not comic fans may have already given up on it after experiencing these problems. **But now that the problems are solved it's up to US to convince them to give it a second chance.**