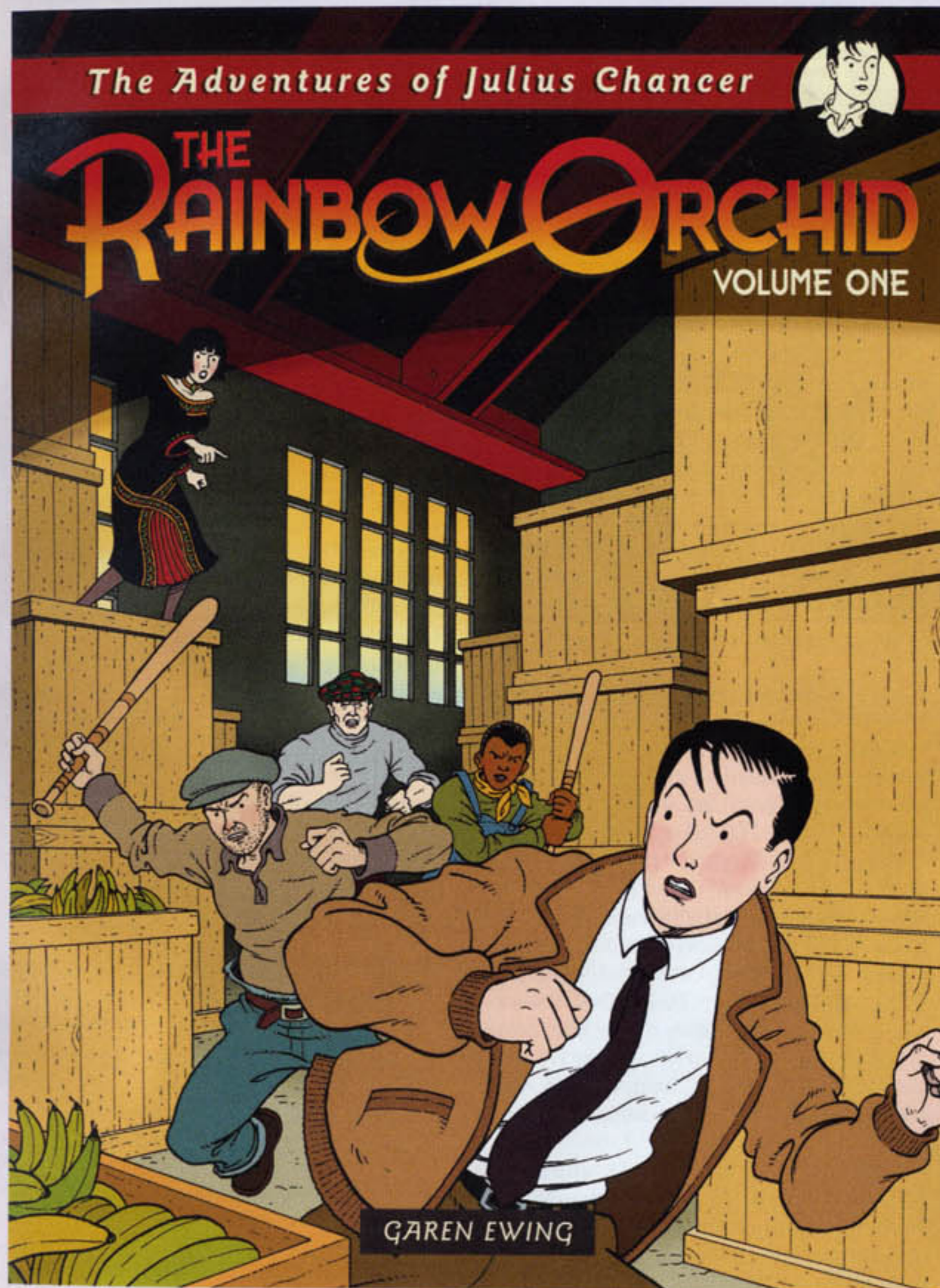
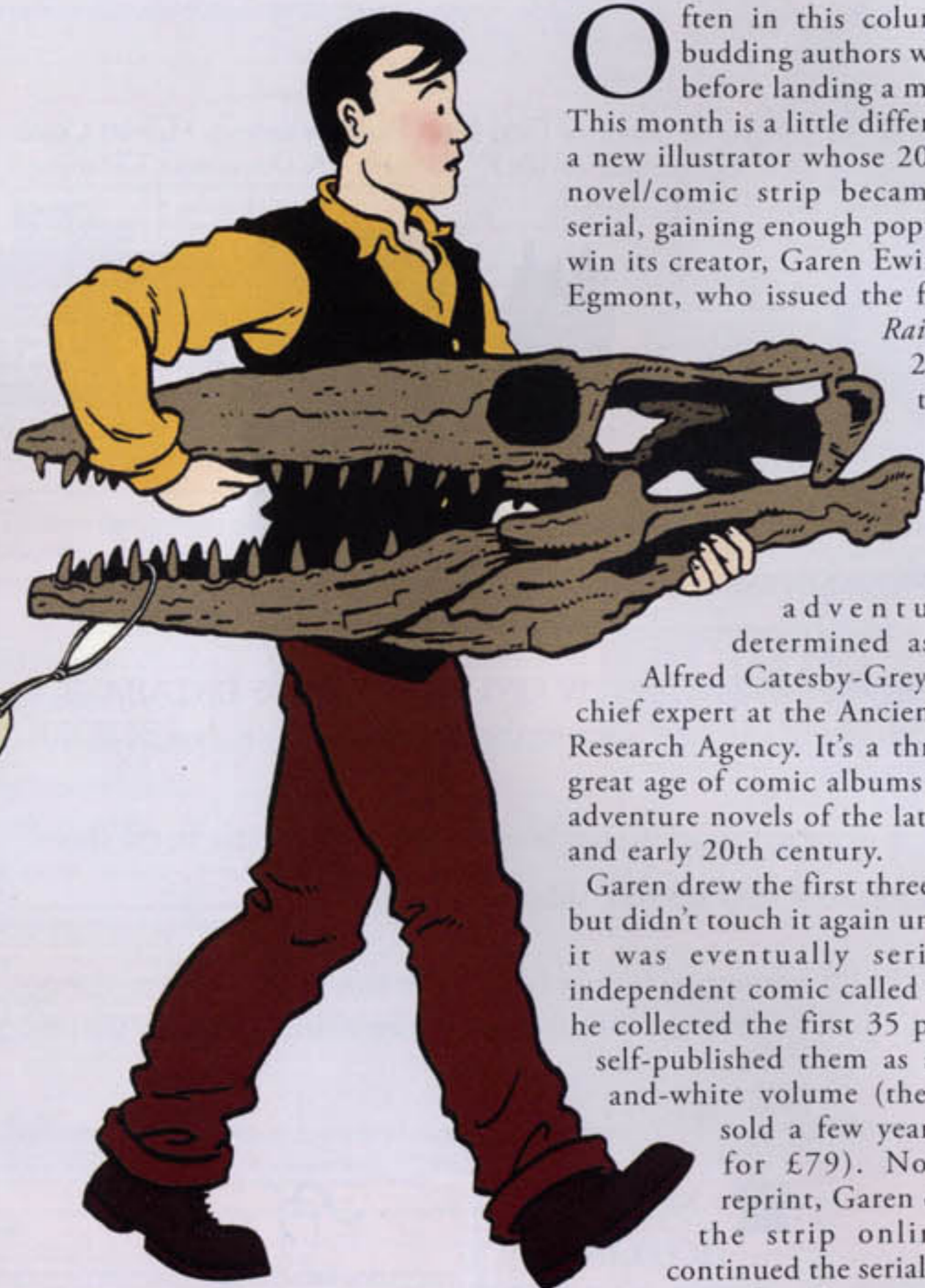


# New Collectables

## Jonathan Scott talks to Garen Ewing

Often in this column we feature budding authors who self publish before landing a major book deal. This month is a little different as we meet a new illustrator whose 20s-style graphic novel/comic strip became an internet serial, gaining enough popular support to win its creator, Garen Ewing, a deal with Egmont, who issued the first instalment *Rainbow Orchid* in 2009. This is the first in a three-part adventure starring Julius Chancer, the adventurous and determined assistant to Sir Alfred Catesby-Grey, founder and chief expert at the Ancient & Historical Research Agency. It's a throwback to the great age of comic albums and boys' own adventure novels of the late Victorian era and early 20th century.

Garen drew the first three pages in 1997 but didn't touch it again until 2002, when it was eventually serialised in an independent comic called *BAM!* In 2003 he collected the first 35 pages or so and self-published them as a single black-and-white volume (the last of which sold a few years ago on eBay for £79). Not wanting to reprint, Garen decided to take the strip online, where he continued the serialisation over the next couple of years. It built up a healthy following and started to attract





interest from publishers, which led to an agent and eventually the Egmont deal. Just prior to the Egmont paperback edition, Garen also released a very limited edition (52 copies) in hardback as a fundraiser - they sold out within a week.

To find out more about the books' publishing history, visit Garen's site: [www.rainworchid.co.uk/readerscorner/readers\\_checklist.php](http://www.rainworchid.co.uk/readerscorner/readers_checklist.php)

#### What was the inspiration behind your book?

I think it boils down to two things: my love of Franco-Belgian comic albums - Asterix and Tintin - and my interest in plot-driven adventure stories, especially those of Rider Haggard, Jules Verne and Arthur Conan Doyle.

#### Who were your main influences?

Aside from the authors just mentioned - graphically speaking, the most obvious is Hergé, the author of Tintin, but there's a whole scene of 'ligne claire' (clear line) comic artists working in that style - Edgar P. Jacobs, Yves Chaland, Jean-Claude Floc'h, Eric Heuvel etc. that have been an influence.

#### Could you tell us a little about the technical details of how you work?

I plot and research the story and then start breaking it down, detailing how I'll tell that story in individual pages of comic strip. Once I know what has to happen on each

page, the story and dialogue is scripted and I make little thumbnail sketches for the panel layout. Next I might make slightly more detailed page roughs and then I start pencilling the final artwork on A3 bristol board. This is then inked with a dip pen, and then I scan the artwork into my Apple Mac, where I tidy up the inks a little and then colour the artwork in Photoshop. The final part of the process is to add the speech balloons and lettering (again in Photoshop) - dialogue will usually be updated and re-edited at this stage too. When the finished page goes off to the publisher I'll get comments from the editor (usually pertaining to dialogue, grammar or research points) and the designer letters the blank speech balloons in InDesign (I only put my own lettering in to size up the speech balloons correctly).

#### What other book illustrating/artwork work have you done?

My bread-and-butter work is illustration for a variety of publishers, for book covers, magazines, editorial, logos . . . almost anything! I also wrote and drew a comic strip called 'Charlie Jefferson and the Tomb of Nazaleod' for David Fickling's *The DFC* comic, which unfortunately folded before it saw print - a victim of Random House having to tighten the purse strings during the recession.

#### Did you collaborate with anyone over



#### the plot?

The story is all my own, though I do have the occasional plot discussion with my wife, quite often just so I can talk my ideas out loud - but it's a great help. I haven't had to make any changes after signing with Egmont - much to my relief! It's not as easy to change an illustrated sequence as it might be to change a few paragraphs of prose.

#### Your tale is set in the 1920s. Do you carry out much historical research?

At first I decided to be a bit fast and loose with the period in which the story is set (the 1920s), but as I went on I realised the importance of unifying many of the elements and getting things right, so became more fastidious. Quite often it's the little things that cause more trouble - such as when was elasticated fabric invented, or what colour were the trains that ran on the Northwest Frontier railway c.1928.

#### What has been the response to the

#### Rainbow Orchid?

Very positive if the reviews are anything to go by, but also based on the enthusiasm I've encountered at a number of book and comics festivals so far this year. There are barriers to break down - the 'graphic novel' industry is fairly new in this country and many people still have old prejudices against the medium. Also people in the UK generally only really know Tintin in the ligne claire style, so that has been both a blessing and a curse - though mainly a blessing, and I'm happy about that.

#### What are your future plans for the series? What's the nature of your deal with Egmont?

The Rainbow Orchid is one story told over three volumes, so volumes two and three are yet to appear (July 2010 and early 2011 respectively). Sometime in the future there will be a collected edition of all three and if the books do well, then there will hopefully be more Julius Chancer



adventures to look forward to.

**When did you first conceive your hero? And where did he first appear?**

I came up with Julius Chancer in late 1996. A preview of the strip appeared in a fanzine called *Imagineers* in 1999, but it wasn't until *BAM!* in 2002 that the story saw its first proper airing.

**What's the state of health of the graphic novel market?**

Just before the recession took hold it looked as though comics were set to enjoy a major resurgence in this country, largely thanks to a number of high profile films being adapted from the medium (and not just in the genre of super heroes), and also because of the popularity of manga introducing a new generation to the form. The economic difficulties did slow this down a lot, and many publishers who seemed to be toying with the idea of publishing brand new material put their plans on the back-burner, if not shelving them for good.

A comics boom had happened before in

the late 1980/early 1990s, springing from the success of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*, but it was centred too much on the so-called 'mature readers' label (which basically meant dark, gritty and violent) and there wasn't a lot of high-quality material to put out, so a fair number of sub-standard and hastily put together collections were thrown onto the shelves leading to a bit of a depression. Indeed I started *The Rainbow Orchid* partly as a reaction against all this 'dark and gritty' and 'adult' material.

Comics are enjoying a higher profile now, despite the slow down, and the important thing is there is a lot of good quality material available this time, across a wider variety of genres. The UK self-published and independent market is especially strong, and major book publishers, such as Egmont, Walker Books and Jonathan Cape are putting out more new original material. Another great development is the fact that Cinebook are reprinting and translating some outstanding books from the Franco-Belgian scene, and having great success with them – so things

are looking quite bright for the future of comics in this country, and for all ages and genders too. It's still a challenge to get people to look at a comic sometimes, though!

**You say the market is dominated by US artists/writers. Why is that?**

We're not dominated by the US as much as we used to be in the UK (though many specialist comic shops still are), especially now Cinebook are adding some lovely European titles to the pool and of course Japanese manga is huge. But there certainly aren't a large number of new British original works - though the situation is improving. When I looked at Amazon's top 100 for children's graphic novels recently, there were just four that I'd class as British originals - the rest being imports, reprints, collections, manga, or just plain not comics, TV-tie in annuals and picture books, for instance.



**Do you think your Britishness gives your story a unique quality?**

Although *The Rainbow Orchid* is graphically closer to styles found in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the story and setting is very British, and it has been called a 'British Tintin' on more than one occasion. And despite being largely marketed as a children's book, it's also been called 'like Tintin for adults' – by Bryan Talbot no less. I certainly didn't write *The Rainbow Orchid* specifically for kids, though I did want it to be okay for them to read.

The story has a classic feel, I'm not rushing to the big action sequences, just like the lovely pace of some of the best films from the 1930s, 40s and 50s, and also from those Victorian and early 20th century 'adventure romances'. Adding to that is the art style which was born out of the 1930s when Hergé drew *Le Lotus Bleu* and became more widespread in the 1950s and 60s with the stable of artists at Tintin magazine, doing such stories as Jacobs' 'Blake & Mortimer', Vandersteen's 'Suske en Wiske', and Martin's 'Lefranc' (for instance).

**Has there been any interest in the story from film makers?**

There has been a little bit of interest, but nothing definite. I'm aware of a few foreign publishers showing a lot of interest too, but they are waiting for all three volumes to be completed before any deals are finalised.