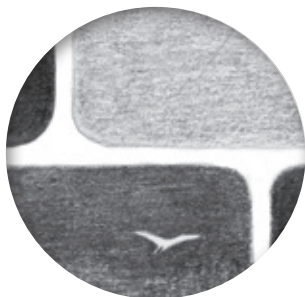
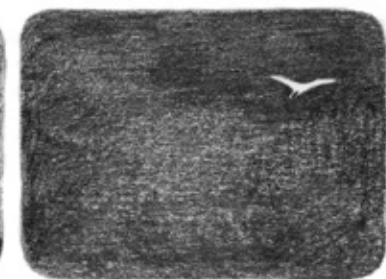
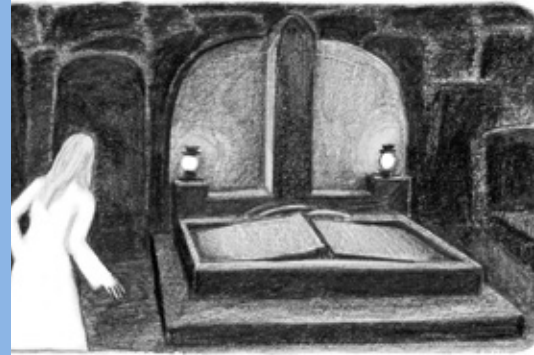


# Czech Comics since 2000







# Czech Comics since 2000

The portents look good for graphic narrative in the Czech lands; in a nation of about 11 million, which has come to embrace comics culture in the last decade and a half, the scene has a vibrancy and talent pool that would be the envy of a country three times the size; ever more publishers and readers are taking an interest. With the new millennium has come the renewal of a cherished national art form. The homeland of Ondřej Sekora, creator of *Příběhy Ferdy Mravence* (The Stories of Ferda the Ant), as well as Jaroslav Foglar and Jan Fischer, who produced the comics version of the enormously popular *Rychlé šípy* (Rapid Arrows) in the 20th century, today boasts the fresh talents of what publisher and comics scholar Tomáš Prokůpek dubbed Generace Nula (Generation Zero). Work by work, they are reviving a dynamic industry.

Comics scholarship has also exploded, as shown by mammoth histories such as Helena Diesing's *Kája Saudek* (2009) and *Signály z neznáma: Český komiks 1912–2012* (Signals from the Unknown: Czech Comics 1912–2012, 2013), both from Arbor Vitae press. The latter, edited by Pavel Kořínek and Prokůpek, was the result of a major state-funded project, *Komiks: dějiny – teorie* (2011–2012) (Comics: history – theory (2011–2012)), comprised of publications, exhibitions and “*Studia Komiksu, Možnosti a Perspektivy*” (Comics Studies, Possibilities and Perspectives), the first such conference, held in Olomouc in April, 2011.

Who are these new 21st-century Czech comics artists?

Prokůpek describes the 2nd wave of post-communist Czech comics, formed around the turn of the 21st century, as “the strongest group of authors” the domestic scene has ever produced. The members of Generace Nula, though in some cases not that much older from the previous Generation 89, are very much their own demographic – and much more worldly. He provides this sketch:

He was born in the 70s or 80s and studied art at university. He began absorbing comics at a tender age, when he would regularly encounter them in children's journals. Later he moved on to *Comet* and *Bubbles*, though today he feels no great need to limit himself to the works of the previous generation or even to domestic product. He speaks English, and so thanks to the internet, accessible foreign publications and translated series he keeps abreast of current developments in comics, especially in the Anglo-American sphere. He writes and draws his own scripts, in the course of which he often gives precedence to experimentation over narrative. At first, he was fascinated by the visual appeal of fantasy subject matter, but gradually abandoned it, seeking instead to integrate his surrounding reality into the work. He has yet to see the time when comics will be a lucrative profession, so he debuted his work in some small-circulation niche journal or e-zine; only occasionally does he succeed in selling his comics work for publication in a well-paying journal. He makes

his living as a storyboard artist for an ad agency or working for computer game-makers. He's published a short story or two in neighboring countries and is trying to find a way to break into the French or US scenes (“Generation Zero”: 8).

Many of these creators, such as Filip Novák and Jan Bažant with their *Pán času* (The Master of Time), appeared in the pages of the Brno-based *Aargh!* (2000), a vital anthology and comics culture journal edited by Prokůpek and Tomáš Kučerovský, as well as in *Zkrat* (Short Circuit, 2004). The Slovak Branko Jelinek's *Oskar Ed* (2003) also made its mark in this era, as did Džian Baban and Vojtěch Mašek, the prolific duo behind the *Monstrkabaret Freda Brunolda* trilogy (Fred Brunold's Monstercabaret, 2004–2008) and many other surreal, politically-charged works.

The annual Komiksfest in Prague (2006–2015) was organized by Jana Fantová and Joachim Dvořák, director of the important press Labyrint. Museum exhibits of such well-loved figures as Foglar (2007) and Bohumil Konečný (2008), as well as the reprinting of many classic communist-era works, consolidated the renaissance of the '00s.

In its drive to establish graphic narrative as a bona fide literary form and gain a larger share of the publishing market in the second post-communist decade, the Czech comics industry of the early 21st century turned to “serious” historical topics. No work of this period contributed more to the raising of Czech comics' profile for a skeptical public than the one which pioneered the approach: writer Jaroslav Rudiš and artist Jaromír 99's comics trilogy *Alois Nebel* (2003–2005). Its authors, who originally released it as three separate graphic novels – *Bílý Potok* (White Brook, 2003); *Hlavní nádraží* (Main Station, 2004) and *Zlaté Hory* (Golden Mountains, 2005)

and eventually packaged it together with a slightly different ending – sought to “legitimize” comics (a mass medium historically associated in this nation with “pulp” matter or children's fare) by explicitly linking them to recognizable Czech literary tropes, in particular those of the historical novel.

The eponymous hero, Nebel, holds a job as a railway worker in a train station in the former Sudetenland – a region of Czech-German contention before, during and after World War II. Affable, complacent and talkative, a modern exemplar of the Czech ‘malý clovek’ (little man), Nebel finds himself glimpsing, through a recurring dense fog, the various traumas of 20th-century Czech history; for example, at one point he sees a passing train carrying arrestees to a concentration camp. Nebel's visions eventually land him in a psychiatric institution – not unlike Jaroslav Hašek's hero in the classic novel *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk* (1923).

Though the tale is initially set in the late communist era, an atmosphere of what the Czech comics scholar Martin Foret calls a “strange timelessness” pervades the plot, as Nebel finds himself glimpsing, through a recurring dense fog, the various traumas of 20th-century Czech history; for example, at one point he sees a passing train carrying arrestees to a concentration camp.

Coupled with a canny media campaign by the publisher, Labyrint Press, which included a book and exhibit tour, concerts, an expansive social media presence, a play and in 2011 an animated film adaptation, *Alois Nebel* fulfilled the strategy to establish graphic narrative as a serious, worthwhile literary form, and catapulted to success. To this day it remains the best-selling and most widely-known graphic novel in the Czech Republic and has been translated into several languages.

History also takes center stage in another of the country's important comics

projects. In 2011, the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the social organization Post Bellum, which records oral histories, collaborated with Argo Press and several comics artists to create the anthology *Ještě jsme ve válce* (We're Still at War). Each of the collection's 13 stories is drawn from life, in many cases together with the person who lived it, in a bid to keep alive the memory of atrocities and resistance during the Nazi occupation and Communist domination of Czechoslovakia. The culmination of Czech comics' preoccupation with national history came in the *Češi* project (Czechs, 2013–2016), a nine-volume collaboration between writer Pavel Kosatik and several comics artists which tells the story of the country's tumultuous 20th century.

Two artists in particular represent the promise and, especially, the variety of the new creative talent in Czech comics – they aim their work at very different audiences.

Lucie Lomová (born 1964) began her comics career in 1990 with the series *Anča a Pepík* (Anča and Pepík) in the children's journal *Čtyřlístek* (Four-Leaf Clover).<sup>1</sup> Starting in 2006, she started producing more adult-oriented work, such as the graphic novel *Anna chce skočit* (Anna Wants to Jump) – the first Czech comics to receive its initial publication abroad (in France, through Thierry Groensteen's Editions de l'An 2). A Czech edition appeared in 2007. Through a mixed-media technique that uses ink for the present-day scenes and pencil for flashbacks, the novel follows its eponymous “everywoman” heroine through her boring life with

an insensitive boyfriend, haranguing mother and frequent daydreams. All this banality, however, is mere set-up for the startling revelation that Anna has an identical twin sister, Marie, who lives in America, and with whom – in a startling set of circumstances – she is confused by Marie's traveling companion, Alan, another Czech-American from San Francisco. As the two flee Russian gangsters, the dashing Alan explains Anna's tortured family history.

It only gets more bizarre from there, but the novel's picaresque *Bridget-Jones-Meets-Pulp-Fiction* plot allows Lomová to explore issues of modern Czech and Czech-American identity in an age of globalization; the painful legacy of parents and the communist era; and the country's treatment of its Roma minority population. We can profitably compare *Anna Wants to Jump* to a number of recent Czech films that cover similar ground: *Tajnosti* (Secrets, d. Alice Nellis, 2007) and *Horem pádem* (Up and Down, d. Jan Hřebejk, 2004). But Lomová's novel departs sharply from those cinematic works in several respects, such as its whimsical tone; transatlantic scene changes; and streak of magical realism. It also has a surreal “cameo” by Václav Havel himself (“Hello, Mr. President!”) – he just happens to appear in the middle of a firefight with the Russians. Lomová remains the Czech comics artist best known abroad.

A very different – if no less Czech – sensibility is on view in the work of Jiří Grus (born 1968). A graduate of both Prague's Václav Hollar Art School and the Academy of Fine Arts, Grus' finely drafted work has appeared in *Aargh!* and elsewhere since 1999. He has a large following in the Czech comics community; many I have spoken with consider him the country's leading comics creator. He has won several awards, including for best story (*Epilogue*) at the 2002 Łódź International Comics Festival. His work,

which dabbles in science fiction, fantasy and humor, has appeared in France, the Netherlands and Italy.

Grus made his name with the self-published series *Voleman*, which debuted in 2007 (the protagonist appeared weekly in *Deník*) and resists description. Partly autobiographical, it lays out in a lush ink and wash technique phantasmagoric but hilarious tales of urban violence, with an oneiric twist. A gaunt “guy next door” type with close-cropped hair, often dressed in shorts, a muscle shirt and baseball cap, Voleman argues with his girlfriend Marie; interacts with his strange neighbors; and encounters random monsters and madmen on the streets, which terrorize his hapless policeman friend, Kamil. In a parody of the superhero Thor, Voleman always has a mallet strapped to his shorts, for just such occasions (though Voleman does not always manage to make use of the weapon; a shirtless, rabid maniac – perhaps a vampire or just a drunk – slobbers all over his face before Kamil chases him away by stabbing him in the buttocks).

Grus enhances the absurd mood through bombastic, elaborate captions with extra-large letters that read almost like sound effects, which give the impression of a very loud narrator (“VOLEMAN AND MARIE ARE JUST NOW MOVING IN TOGETHER...”). But for all their silliness, the stories (often set in actual locations around Prague, such as the Světozor movie theater) betray a mood of disquiet and post-industrial alienation. An episode in which Voleman slaughters an army of fanged bugs in his infested new apartment (“Yew! You fuckers!”), while horrific and funny, disorients the reader nearly to the point of nausea with its wild switches in scale, almost from panel to panel.

*Voleman*, in its street-level histrionics and mayhem, has something in common with coarse-but-sweet urban comedies like *Nuda v Brně* (Boredom in Brno,

d. Vladimír Morávek, 2003), though its everyman shlob hero's odd adventures are best understood as a shotgun marriage of American superhero conventions and the “little man” theme of Czech literature. Grus has gone on to successful collaborations with Džian Baban and Vojtěch Mašek, such as *Drak nikdy nespí* (The Dragon Never Sleeps, 2015).

Czech comics – of whatever generation – represent a rich trove of talent. All this activity, in one of Central Europe's smaller countries, demonstrates the vitality and bright future of its comics cultures.

José Alaniz

1 Launched in 1969, with writer Ljuba Štíplová and artist Jaroslav Němeček, *Four-Leaf Clover* was the only children's comics approved by the communists after 1968's rollback of liberal reforms. Its naïve art style and straightforward tales of four animal friends who always stand by each other inspired a thousand parodies.

#### WORKS CITED:

Grus, Jiří. *Voleman*. No. 1, 2007.

Prokúpek, Tomáš. “Generation Zero” (Exhibit Catalog). Trans. José Alaniz. Brno Cultural Center, 2007.

A selection of Czech comics  
published since 2000



# Jaroslav Rudiš & Jaromír 99

## ALOIS NEBEL 1–3

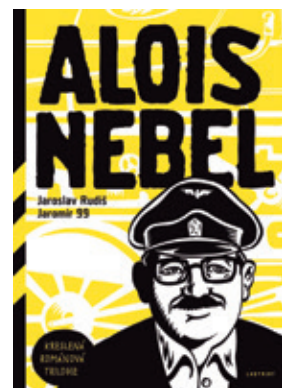
A small railway station as the centre of tragicomic and dark stories.  
A simple-minded train dispatcher as their narrator and protagonist.

This comic book by a promising writer, Jaroslav Rudiš (script), and a rock musician Jaromír Švejdlík (drawing; under the pseudonym Jaromír 99) was the first Czech graphic novel. Rudiš is a contemporary continuing the literary tradition of Hašek and Hrabal, while Jaromír 99 was inspired by Mike Mignola's drawing.

In the first volume, *Bílý potok* (White Brook), the simple-minded train dispatcher at a remote railway station in the Jeseníky mountains tells many stories (about soldiers from the local Soviet garrison, about local hippies, about the post-war resettlement of Germans, about village folk), together composing a three-dimensional world of one forgotten neck of the woods near the Czech-Polish border. The stories are mostly tragicomic or even frightening: their frightfulness results from Švejdlík's robust black-and-white drawing; however,

Rudiš's informal, concise tone brings them back to earth, or more precisely to the pub table, where they are quickly drunk to. In the next two volumes the pair of authors outlined two main stories: Nebel's relationship with Květa, a lavatory attendant from the Prague main railway station, and, in contrast with good-hearted, chatty Nebel, Polish deserter Němý (Silent), who hides a dark secret. This also opens a controversial chapter in Czech war and post-war history.

In 2011, a full-length animated film was based on this comic book, with both authors taking part (Rudiš as a co-screenwriter and Jaromír 99 as the art director). The film was presented at the Venice Film Festival and in 2012 was awarded the prize of the European Film Academy for the Best Animated Film of the Year.

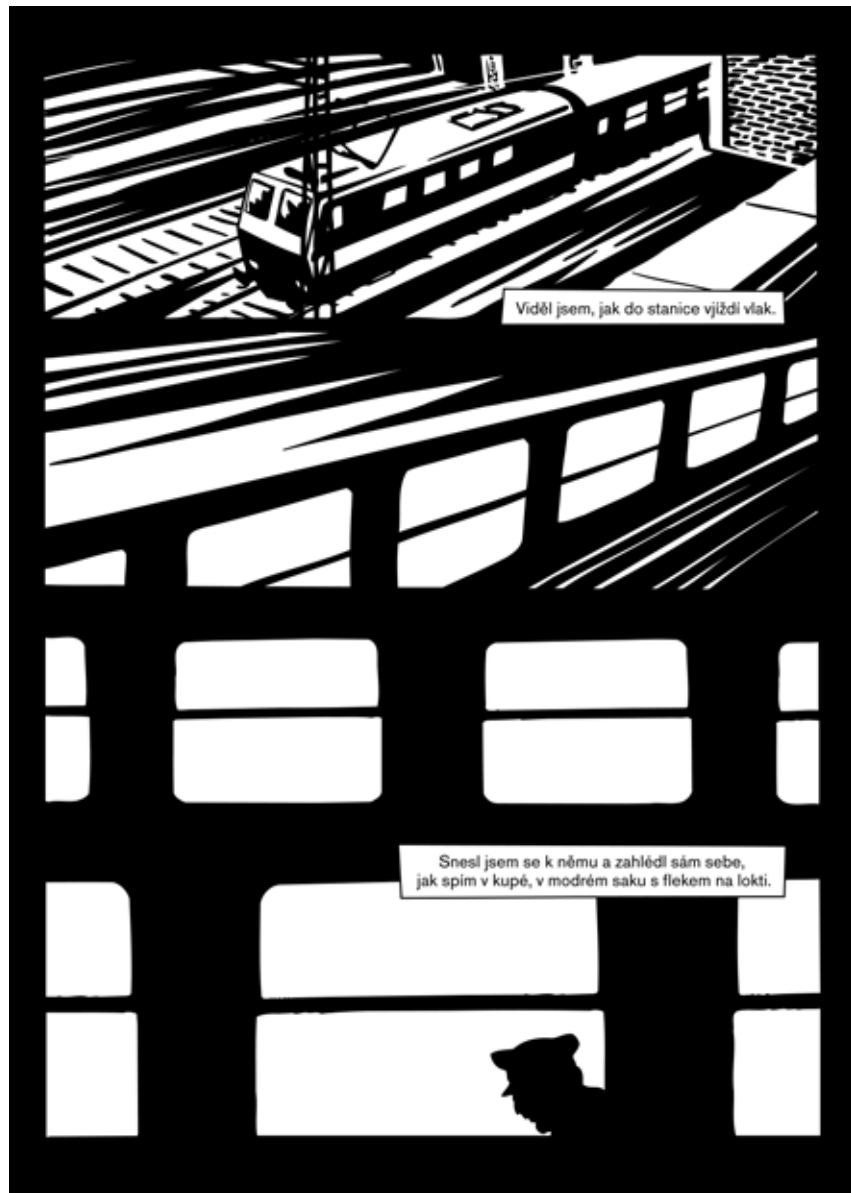


Alois Nebel 1–3  
Labyrint, 2004–2006, 360 pp

RIGHTS SOLD:  
France, Germany, Poland, Serbia

RIGHTS:  
Labyrint publishers  
Joachim Dvořák:  
joachim.dvorak@seznam.cz  
www.labyrint.net/stranka/21/english







# Jan Novák & Jaromír 99 ZÁTOPEK –...IF YOU CAN'T RUN ANYMORE, RUN FASTER!

This inventive biography presents the most successful Czech athlete of all time in the context of communist repression.

While Jaromír Švejdík (aka Jaromír 99) is already a renowned cartoonist, Zátopek's scriptwriter Jan Novák debuted in the cartoon medium at the age of sixty-three. However, he has had a prolific literary and film career: he was awarded the Magnesia Litera Award for the historical thriller *Zatím dobrý* (So Far So Good), has made two documentaries about Václav Havel and is a co-author of the script for Miloš Forman's film *Valmont*.

The comics book about the most famous Czech runner, the only to win all long-distance runs including the marathon at a single Olympics (in Helsinki in 1956), has the qualities as well as the prospects to appeal to the widest readership. Novák narrates the story systematically and linearly, developing not only the stories of Zátopek's victories, but

also the stories of his conflicts with the totalitarian regime: for example, at the time when Zátopek was about to leave for his second Olympics, at the peak of his career, he stubbornly refused to depart without his friend and training partner, Jungwirth, whom the management had banned from travelling abroad, because his father was a political prisoner. The book is not only a celebration of an athlete stubborn both on the track and in his life as well as his diligent training, which was admired by his contemporaries as well as by athletes today, but also a portrait of the difficult times.

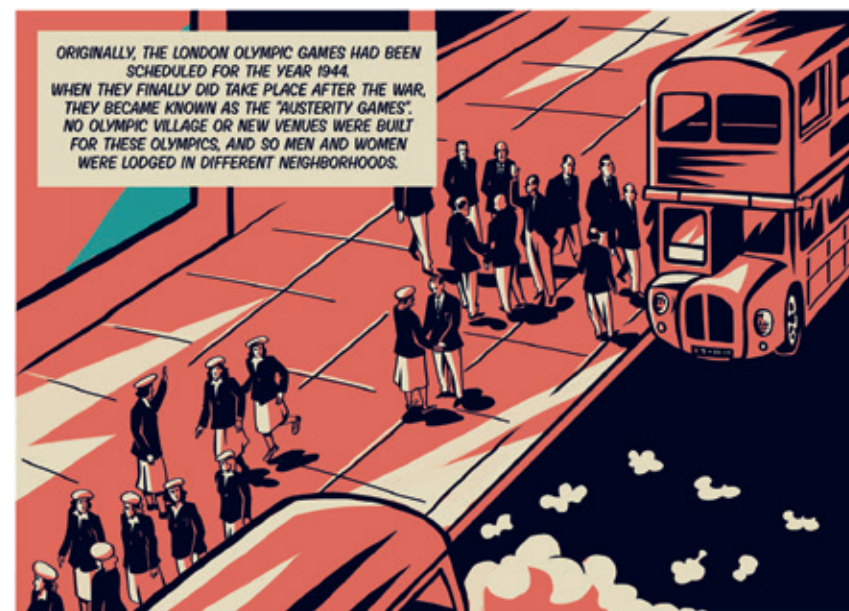
The atmosphere of this period breathes from the drawings and the three-colour concept refers to the printing technique used for posters or matches labels at that time. Švejdík skilfully changes the rhythm from six-frame compositions to full-page pictures, daring to use a formal riddle from time to time and working beautifully with shadows. This work shows how inventively and thoughtfully a biography of a famous sportsman can be made.

RIGHTS SOLD:  
Germany, Portugal, France

RIGHTS:  
Jan Novák  
janknovak@gmail.com



Zátopek –... když nemůžeš, tak přidej!  
Argo, Paseka and ČOV, 2016, 208 pp



# Pavel Čech

## ADVENTURES OF FAST SQUIRREL 1–4

How an Indian won a Formula One Race and how creating a comic book helped the dialogue between a father and his son.

The writer and illustrator Pavel Čech (b. 1968) has been among the perennial stars of Czech art for children for two decades now: during that time, he has authored twenty books (ten of which are comic books) and illustrated many others. As for his drawing style, he picks up the threads of Jiří Trnka in particular; his stories are often inspired by Jaroslav Foglar, the classic Czech author of gripping literature for boys. They usually take place in a sort of retro non-specific time, during the days when children did not spend their free time on mobile phones, but experienced little adventures in out-of-the-way corners of towns and in the countryside.

*Adventures of Fast Squirrel*, intended for younger readers (and their

parents) focuses on parental complaints that children are not interested in the heroes whom their parents used to love and admire when they themselves were young. The first volume of the series, *Velký závod* (The Big Race), starts with a father's vain attempt to slip his old toys, rubber Indians, to his son, who admires modern, fast cars and reproaches his father for not drawing such cars. The father rises to the challenge and the result is a dramatic story about car racing. However, the point of the comic book does not consist of the challenges of the journey to victory, but in the mingling of bedtime stories and reality; at the end, the illustrator's son gets a beautiful red Formula One car, which fits exactly one toy Indian from the father's collection.

In subsequent volumes, Čech also works mainly with the framework of the relationship between father-narrator and son-critical listener, offering more elaborate and resourceful central stories. He continues to sympathetically undermine the clichés of adventure comic books for young children through various disruptions of the narration, digressions and quotations.

RIGHTS:  
Petrkov publishers  
Petr Novotný:  
petr.novotny@petrkov.cz  
www.petrkov.cz



Dobrodružství Rychlé Veverky 1–4  
Petrkov publishers, 2013–6, 4 x 80 pp





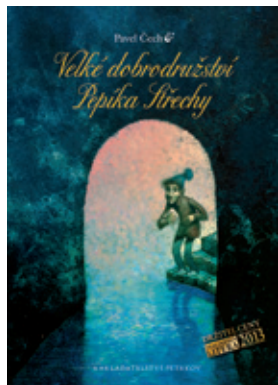
# Pavel Čech PEPÍK STŘECHA'S GREAT ADVENTURE

The fanciful adventures of a shy bookworm in the midst of pages of adventure books and the walls of an old, deserted mill.

For the time being, this comics *bildungsroman* is Pavel Čech's most significant work and has received every major Czech award. An epic and melancholic story the protagonist of which shows features of his author (during his boyhood) is most of all a metaphor expressing the power of imagination. The fourteen-year-old boy, timid, thin and stuttering, hovers on the edge between dream and reality, and when in reality a great part of his mind is immersed in the reading of suspense literature. The rest is filled with a dull routine at school, where he has no friends. Until one day, when he finds an old adventure book with illustrations and at the same time a new, slightly mysterious classmate, Elzevira, appears in his classroom. She is the only one who does not despise Pepík and tries to

understand his world. She does not avoid any boyish tomfoolery and yet she is an ethereal, evanescent being. Together they find an old, deserted mill and a dark sewer where Elzevíra disappears one day and Pepik sets out on a quest to find her in a fantastical other-world. At the end of his dreamy pilgrimage he is more mature, more experienced and more self-confident.

Here, like in most of his comic books, the author combines his own drawing (and aquarelle colouring) with facsimiles of old book pages with dramatic illustrations, blends printed text with handwritten comics bubbles, moving freely from the format of a comic book to that of an illustrated book, all that on a background full of spots, dust and yellowing areas.



Velké dobrodružství Pepíka Střechy  
Petrkov, 2012, 216 pp

**AWARDS:**  
2013 Magnesia Litera Award – For children and youth  
2013 Muriel Award – Best original comics  
2013 Muriel Award – Best script

RIGHTS:  
Petrkov publishers  
Petr Novotný:  
petr.novotny@petrkov.cz  
www.petrkov.cz





The silent story draws attention to symbols: hunched figures, the omnipresent letter A, huge statues of the general, police inspections, prohibiting signs, radio loudspeakers in streets and inside flats, propagandistic posters and celebratory marches. All this can tell school-age readers about the basis of totalitarian regimes more grippingly than any school textbook or well-meant lecture by a person who still remembers it.



# Lucie Lomová

## ANNA WANTS TO JUMP

Anna feels her life is worthless. However, awaiting her are an escape to protect herself against the Russian mafia and a meeting with President Václav Havel.

Lucie Lomová (b. 1964) is currently the most internationally recognised Czech comics author. This is due above all to her comic book *Anna Wants to Jump*, which she prepared directly for the French publishing house Éditions de L'An 2 in 2006; the Czech version of this comic book was published several months later in 2007. Until that time, she drew comics for children only: from 1990 till 2000 she published a series about two clever mice, Anča and Pepík, on the pages of Čtyřlístek, the most popular Czech comics magazine for children (this year, Czech Television has been showing an animated series of the same name for which Lomová had prepared both drawings and scripts). The success of the French edition resulted in her publishing her comics both in Czech and in French.

*Anna Wants to Jump* is a story from the Czech Republic of the 1990s, an era

full of changes in personal and professional lives. Twenty-seven-year-old Anna, who feels frustrated by her present life and even contemplates suicide (hence, the title of the book), coincidentally gets involved in a thriller adventure with a young man who witnessed a murder and is being chased by the Russian mafia. Later, Anna learns about the secret history of her family. The final firefight is also joined by bodyguards of President Havel, whom the runaway couple happens to meet when he is walking near his Hrůdeček cottage in the Krkonoše Mountains. In her first comic book for adults, Lomová decided to use black-and-white and two drawing techniques: while most of the comic book is drawn in pen and ink, passages of dreams and memories are drawn in pencil.



Anna chce skočit  
Meander, 2007, 80 pp

RIGHTS SOLD:  
France, Poland

AWARDS:  
2008 Golden Ribbon Award – Literary section:  
Special prize  
2007 Muriel Award – Best original book

RIGHTS:  
Lucie Lomová:  
lucie\_lomova@volny.cz

23





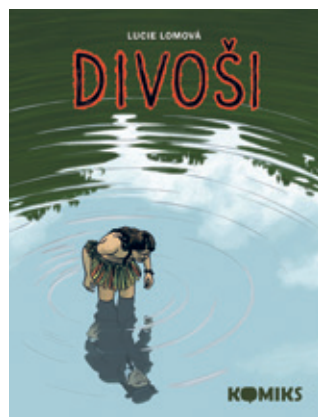
# Lucie Lomová THE SAVAGES

The small adventures of a native of Gran Chaca whom the Czech traveller Frič brought to Prague in 1908.

Lucie Lomová followed up the success of her first comic book for adults with, firstly, comics adaptations of four classical fairytales by Karel Jaromír Erben (*Zlaté české pohádky* – Golden Czech Fairytales, 2008), then in 2011 she returned to a comic book for adults in the form of an ambitiously conceived, colour graphic novel *The Savages*, adapting the real life story of Alberto Vojtěch Frič, a Czech traveller, botanist and writer and Čerwuiš, a Paraguayan native whom Frič brought to Prague from one of his journeys to find out the cause of an insidious disease affecting his tribe.

In addition to depicting Prague at the end of the 19th century with some of its important characters (including the author of *The Good Soldier Švejk*, Jaroslav Hašek), Lomová particularly

pays attention to two paradoxes: At first, Čerwuiš is afraid of civilisation (no matter how friendly and curiously the Czechs, as a nation without colonies, treat him) and longs for a fast return to his tribe; however, he gradually discovers the charm of its benefits (e.g. smoked meat products) or the winter climate with skating on the frozen Vltava river. On the other hand, Frič is more and more tired of scientific and social disputes and the never-ending defence of his work, longing to return to South America more and more. Later, Čerwuiš returns home with ambitions to show how great civilisation is but failed constantly. Lomová also found out that some of the native descendants of A. V. Frič are still living in Paraguay and their Czech 'cousins' are running a foundation to support them.



RIGHTS SOLD:  
France, Poland

RIGHTS:  
Actes Sud publishers  
Isabelle Alliel:  
i.alliel@actes-sud.fr  
www.actes-sud.fr

Divoši  
Labyrint, 2011, 152 pp

25



# Lucie Lomová KNOCK 'EM DEAD

The author's lightly ironic drawings depict a detective plot from the theatre world.

Comics, book and magazine illustrations and other work by Lucie Lomová show mainstream characteristics: The pictures are simple, understandable, easily identifiable even for those not educated in visual art; their inspiration stretches even to Hergé and his *ligne claire*. But at the same time, Lomová has already managed to build her own style, which is easily recognisable by everyone at least in the Czech Republic. Additionally, the characters and situations that she depicts are mundane; neither big dramas, nor dynamic scenes, instead, a subtle humour which only rarely turns into something biting or calculating.

The heroine of the detective story *Knock 'Em Dead* is a feared theatre

critic, a slightly corpulent fifty-year-old lady who coincidentally gets involved in the investigation into a murder which happened right on stage during a premiere. Lomová deals with the detective genre with a noticeable amount of irony; this impression is strengthened, besides the slightly improbable plot, by a scene almost from an action-movie finale, when the heroine kicks a pistol out of the baddy's hand.

Lomová studied theatre and worked as a theatre journalist for some time, so she knows the environment near actors' dressing rooms and caricatures it fondly. Thanks to that, the comic strip, originally intended to be a series for a theatre magazine, has its charm and esprit.



Na odstřel  
Labyrint, 2014, 90 pp

RIGHTS SOLD:  
France, Hungary

RIGHTS:  
Actes Sud publishers  
Isabelle Alliel:  
i.alliel@actes-sud.fr  
www.actes-sud.fr

27





# Máša Bořkovcová, Markéta Hajsá & Vojtěch Mašek O PŘIBJEHI 1–3

A comics documentary trilogy about the complicated life stories of Czech and Slovak Romani people of various generations.

Social anthropologists and experts in Romani studies, Máša Bořkovcová (b. 1977) and Markéta Hajsá (b. 1976) combined their efforts with comics and film scriptwriter, Vojtěch Mašek, to use the form of a comics documentary to popularise the stories of three Romani people of various generations whom they personally interviewed. The oldest, Ferko, is more than 60 years old and is one of the recognised leaders of the Romani community (the Vlach Roma subgroup) in industrial North Bohemia. Albina is one generation younger and has never left her underdeveloped native settlement in Eastern Slovakia, and Keva is twenty

years old and tries to live a modern life like her contemporaries in Prague.

Although the starting points of the individual stories were the same (the authors opted for different types of respondents from various socio-cultural background), the drive of each comics is different. While the Ferko volume offers a view of Romani history during the era of real socialism, Keva's stories are completely contemporary. The most striking story is that of Albina, which becomes unexpectedly dramatic because of her encounter with a Czech humanitarian worker, Karel, (arriving in the village to help in the aftermath of devastating floods) with whom the married mother of seven falls in love.

Vojtěch Mašek created all the stories using the method of redrawing (and deforming) photos the team of artists took during interviews with the protagonists of the stories. The resulting black-and-white drawing is authentic as well as markedly unrefined and earthy.

RIGHTS SOLD:  
France

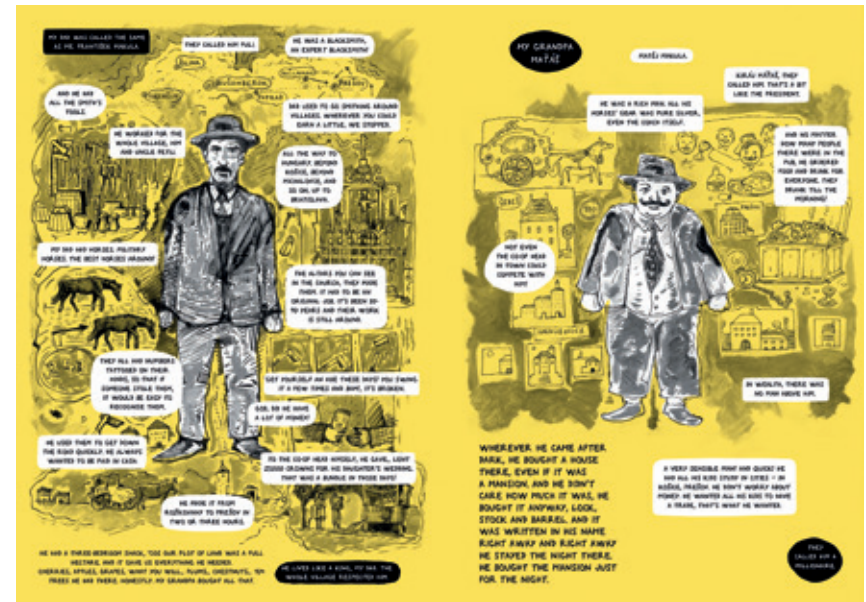
AWARDS:  
2010 Muriel Award – Best original script

RIGHTS:  
Markéta Hajsá:  
marketa.hajska@gmail.com



O přibjechi  
Lipnik, 2010, 112, 120 and 176 pp

29



# Máša Bořkovcová, Markéta Hajská, Vojtěch Mašek, Lela Geislerová, Františka Loubat & Marek Pokorný UNCERTAIN HOMES 1–3

Three different stories about bad parents, institutional and foster upbringing and about three children surviving it.

For the *Uncertain Homes* trilogy, documenting the life stories of children who were brought up without their biological parents, the three scriptwriters invited different cartoonists, each of which conceived their volume substantially differently. The plot of the comic books is based on the narration of the protagonists, complemented by reports by psychologists, expert committees or teachers from children's homes, court decisions and other documents that often had a decisive impact on the lives of the children concerned. The authors let the interviewed

respondents speak and let readers find themselves when mothers, fathers, educators or the protagonists make things up, improve their image or lie entirely on purpose. Two narrators are Romani (Honza, who went through the worst institutions in the Czech Republic due to his quick temper, and Michal, who, by contrast, broke free from his social group thanks to institutional education) while the third one is fourteen-year-old Lili, whose mother, a prostitute, refused to take care of her, but at the same time kept complicating her life with her foster family.

In the storyline of Lili and Two Mothers, illustrator Lela Geislerová directly involved author Máša Bořkovcová, who cautiously interviews Lili and her foster mother. The black-and-white drawing by Františka Loubat focuses on the dismal conditions in contrast with the education that Michal, the protagonist of the story, attained. Marek Pokorný's drawing is inspired by the narrative innovations of Chris Ware, working remarkably with rhythm and the format of comics frames as characters lacking outlines disappear in patches of snow or greenery in impressive sceneries.

AWARDS:  
2017 Muriel Award – Best original script

RIGHTS:  
Markéta Hajská  
marketa.hajska@gmail.com



Nejisté domovy  
Ašta šmé, 2016, 80, 120 and 96 pp

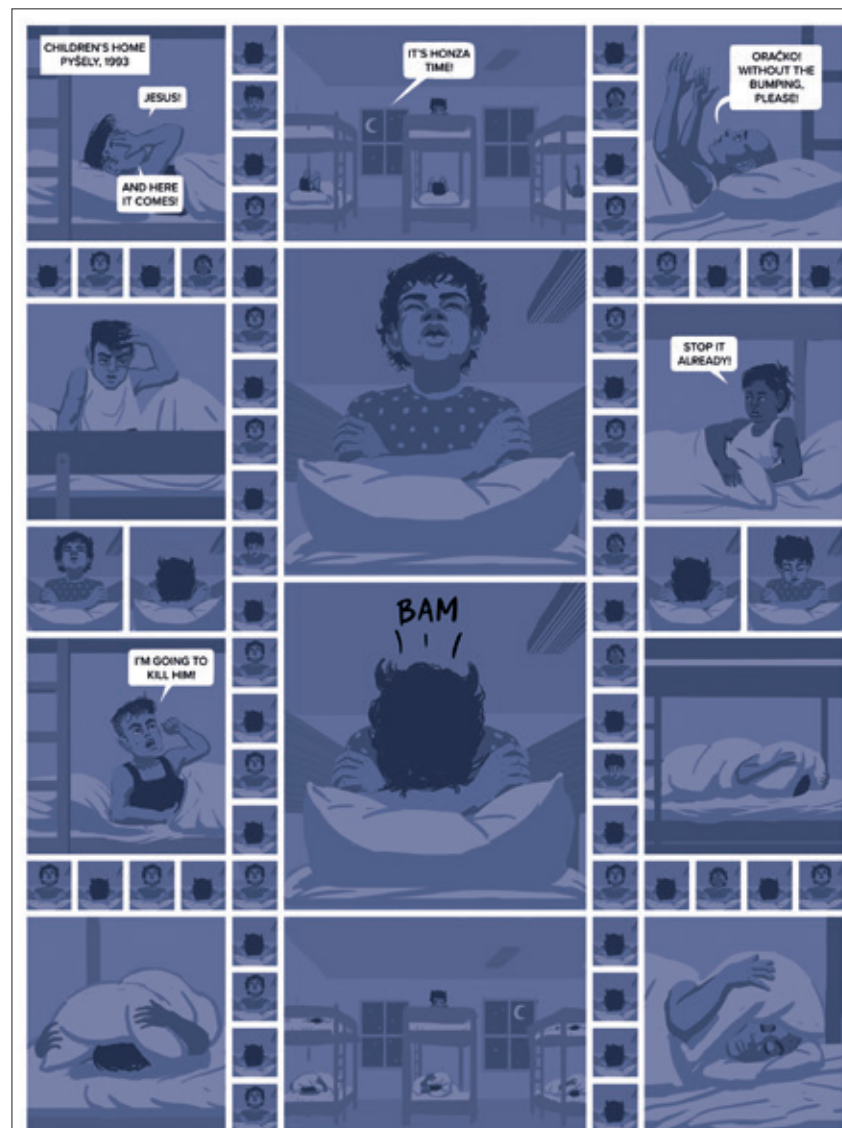




The first real memory I have is not when I lived with my parents, but from the first day I arrived at the foster home in Frýdlant. I was three years old. It was summer and in front of the house was a small slab of concrete where I would ride on a white tricycle, with purple wheels.



I quite like to look back on my childhood in the foster home.





# Jiří Grus

## VOLEMAN 1-4

A youth with a meat mallet and beings from an alternative cosmos in a prefab block of flats in Prague.

In 1999, a comics competition organised by the *Crew* magazine was won by Jiří Grus (b. 1978): based on a script of the action short story *Zemřít znamená nežít* (To Die Means not to Live), he has created a dynamic cartoon populated by bizarrely monstrous, as well as weird characters. Later, he created several harsh and darkly humorous stories (a wild, eight-page gun-fight, *Princip nepravděpodobnosti* (*Principle of Improbability*, 2002), was also published by the magazine *Heavy Metal*). His best work was the album *Nitro těžkne glycerinem* (The Soul Grows Heavier by Glycerine), a humorous sci-fi butchery created using masterful, sometimes hyper-realistic drawing, which is not lacking in irony (also published in Spain, Italy, Greece and Holland).

Then, however, Grus abandoned the mainstream and started working on the *Voleman* series. These episodic stories about the partnership between an outlandish young man, who jogs through town with a meat mallet under his belt, and his lover Maria, involve characters and phenomena that seem to arrive from a horror sci-fi. Grus combines communal stories with fanciful digressions, physiognomic and psychological portraits of disagreeable neighbours with fights to preserve the cosmic equilibrium in an alternative space-time. He continues to be playful, only the directions are more varied, which the black-and-white drawing serves splendidly.



AWARDS:  
2010 Slowcomics Award for Best European Fanzine (Italy)

RIGHTS:  
Jiří Grus  
grus9@seznam.cz

Voleman 1-4  
Adéla Tlachačová, 2007-2010, 48, 61, 52 and 56 pp

35



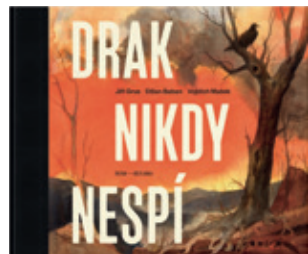
# Džian Baban, Vojtěch Mašek & Jiří Grus THE DRAGON NEVER SLEEPS

Jiří Grus, a native of Trutnov, adapted a local legend about the fight of a knight and craftsmen against a dragon grandiosely and with a sense of dark atmosphere.

As for size, this comic book stands out a mile: the authors opted for a non-standard landscape format (300 × 250 mm), hardback binding and full-colour printing. All of that on an impressive 160 pages, which is an above-standard length even for a graphic novel. Baban and Mašek supplemented the original legend about the founding of the town of Trutnov and the fight of a knight against a dragon not only with fantasy elements, but mainly by colourfully developing supporting characters and secondary plot lines. They compose a multi-layered story with multiple meanings about temptation and responsibility, about courage and cowardice, about succumbing to baseness and surprising displays of both physical and moral powers.

Like in the (literary and film) masterpiece *Marketa Lazarová*, micro-stories intertwine here about characters

wandering the wilderness and being confronted with the limits of their humanity: members of the knight's plebeian retinue (stonemasons, carpenters, bricklayers, cooks) excel at mutual squabbling and accusations rather than fighting, and are apt to panic, hostility and even lynching. All of that is depicted by Grus' expressive drawing, with aquarelle colouring in red and brown shades, which suggests a hostile autumn mountain landscape, but also danger for most characters, blood and dragon's fire. When creating dozens of characters, Grus' hand is certain and experienced in drawing and the characters are distinctive, with their nature somehow almost written all over their face. As soon as a ghost looking like a human being appears in the story, the reader feels intense danger, no matter whether the ghost looks like a devil, or like an angel.



Drak nikdy nespí  
Trutnov – město draka, 2015, 160 pp

AWARDS:  
2016 Muriel Award – Best original drawing

RIGHTS:  
Džian Baban  
dbaban@volny.cz





# Branko Jelinek

## OSKAR ED 1–3

A mysterious thriller with grotesque features follows the troubles of a young man who is able to endow objects and foodstuffs with life.

The Slovak artist Branko Jelinek (b. 1978) has settled in Prague, where he publishes his comic books. The three-volume series *Oskar Ed* is gradually being developed into other formats, while the colour story *Pout'* (Pilgrimage), created for *Aargh!* magazine, was even published by *Heavy Metal* magazine in 2015.

The central story revolves around the supernatural power of the hero, who unintentionally endows articles of daily use, foodstuffs and other objects with life, sometimes of a fairy-tale nature (tricycle), sometimes horror (cables in an office), but it is mostly grotesque (the backside of a dead body in an autopsy room). The objects speak and think independently (and call for others' attention), which results in an unspecified security agency sending their agents to

catch Oskar Ed. The plot, not dissimilar to the outlandish imagination of David Lynch's films or Charles Burns' comics, is like a psychological probe as well as an action thriller, turning into a grandiose and poetic metaphor of alienation between father and son in the last volume.

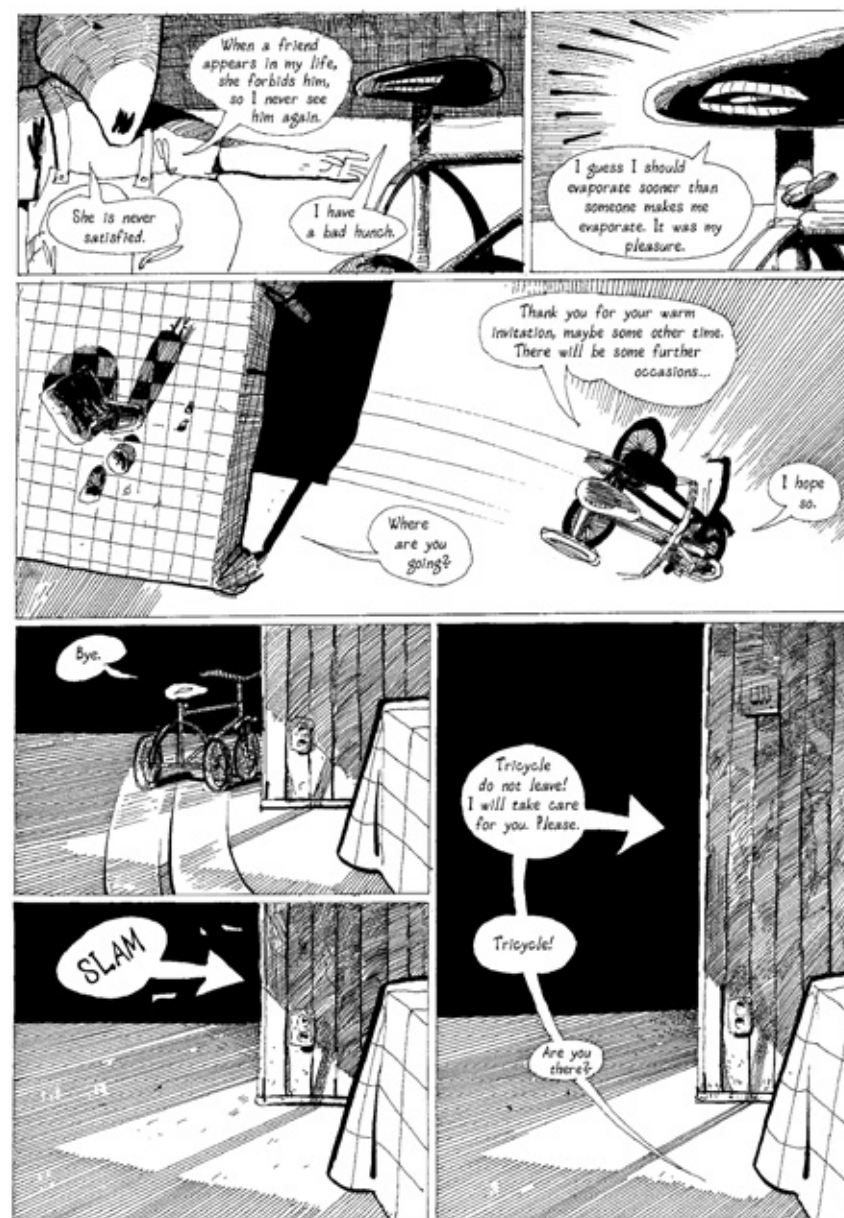
Jelinek's precise, realistic drawing is partly inspired by the dynamics of Japanese manga and partly by the elegant style of French cartoon thrillers of the 1970s and 1980s. He excels at work with shading and hatching; he uses the hero's sense of danger, both external and internal, powerfully. *Oskar Ed* is never sure whether he is dreaming or not, and Branko Jelinek is able to capture the feelings, fears and life of the runaway hero exceptionally vividly.



RIGHTS SOLD:  
Slovakia, Poland

RIGHTS:  
Branko Jelinek  
brankojelinek@gmail.com

Oskar Ed 1–3  
Mot, 2003–2006, 80, 104 and 100 pp



# Branko Jelinek

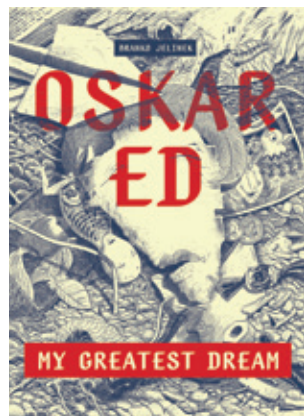
## OSKAR ED: MY GREATEST DREAM

One of the most ambitious Czech comics ever written, Oskar Ed fuses a poignant family drama with fantastical scenes playing out in the mind of its young protagonist.

Bored during a car journey with his dysfunctional parents, Oskar escapes into surreal dreams and fantasies reminiscent of the films of Lynch and Cronenberg. This imaginary universe created by Oskar parallels, warps and transforms the real world, unveiling the strained relationship with his parents and forgotten family secrets. Although it is built on the framework of a small, intimate story, this comics presents a monumental narrative played out on several time levels and in several spiritual worlds culminating in

a devastating finale. Branko Jelinek's art style, incorporating fine lines and elaborate backgrounds on both multi-panel pages and disturbing full-page visions, complements his multifaceted story.

Hailed by critics as one of the most important Czechoslovak comics of the past decade, *Oskar Ed: My Greatest Dream* vividly illustrates the manner in which a child perceives and processes family disagreements, and demonstrates how trauma and dreams may have a great deal in common.



Oskar Ed: Můj největší sen  
Lipník, 2016, 344 pp

AWARDS:  
2016 Muriel Award – Best original book  
2016 Muriel Award – Best original script

RIGHTS:  
Branko Jelinek:  
brankojelinek@gmail.com





# Toy Box MY BOOK WINNETOU

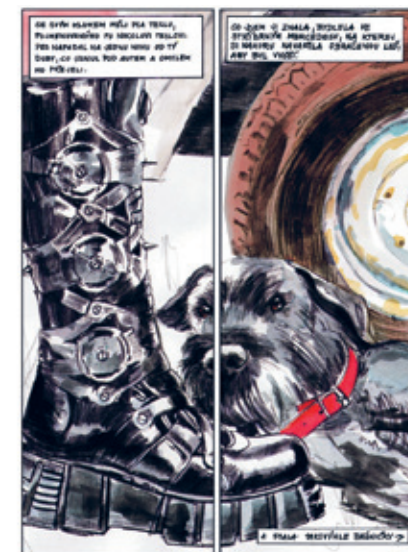
The squatter Madonna and a boy who rejected the death of his literary hero, in a excellent drawings soiled by street art.

The author recaps the life story of her deceased friend, anarchist and squatter Kate, who called herself Semtexdesign. The young woman in her late twenties spends her time travelling in her personally adapted caravan, stays in squats in Europe, most often in Amsterdam, where she met her son Storm's father. She is depicted as a remarkable human being – independent, entertaining and friendly, and adequately non-conformist and radical; a techno-Madonna. She would never abandon her life style: activism, wild concerts, drunken and drug parties and attempts at artistic creation. Semtexdesign writes poetry which Toy Box uses and illustrates in the cartoon. At the same time, she also watches what happens between these exciting moments: her heroine cooks, repairs her car and visits her old-fashioned granny.

The intense, personal story of Toy Box intertwines with a literary attempt

by Martin, a schoolboy, who was so desperate from the death of the principal character of the last volume of Karl May's westerns *Winnetou* that he decided to make him alive again and started to write additional adventures himself. They are naturally childish and work as a parallel to Semtexdesign's story. She is meant to be a kind of parallel to the noble Indian in the 21st century – she is pictured as an Indian mustang rider in the first chapter.

The drawing and its aquarelle colouring correspond marvellously with the story. Toy Box disrupts the realism with street-art elements, deforms and blurs outlines as colours bleed. She works significantly with symbols, both in one or two pictures as well as in fantastic and dreamy multi-page sequences.



Moje kniha Vinnnetou  
Labyrint, 2014, 210 pp

AWARDS:  
2016 Golden Ribbon Award – Comics for children and youth  
2015 Muriel Award – Best original book  
2015 Muriel Award – Best original drawing

RIGHTS:  
Labyrint publishers  
Joachim Dvořák:  
joachim.dvorak@seznam.cz  
[www.labyrint.net/stranka/21/english](http://www.labyrint.net/stranka/21/english)





# Filip Novák & Hza Bažant

## THE LORD OF TIME

A bizarre superhero and his dramatic, comic and psychedelic stories in a fantastical world.

The puppeteer, graphic artist and scenographer Jan “Hza” Bažant (b. 1979), a leading personality of Echt Street Puppets, an international ensemble of giant marionettes, started publishing his series *The Lord of Time* in *Aaargh!* revue in 2005 and one year later he published a short volume. The stories of the unusual hero got a big-format and colour design only in 2012, thanks to the scriptwriter Filip Novák, and meanwhile even a stage version appeared aboard the theatre ship *Tajemství* (The Secret) in Prague (2008). At present, Bažant is working on the comics *Mao Case*, based on a book by Qiu Xiaolong for the French publishing company Hachette livre.

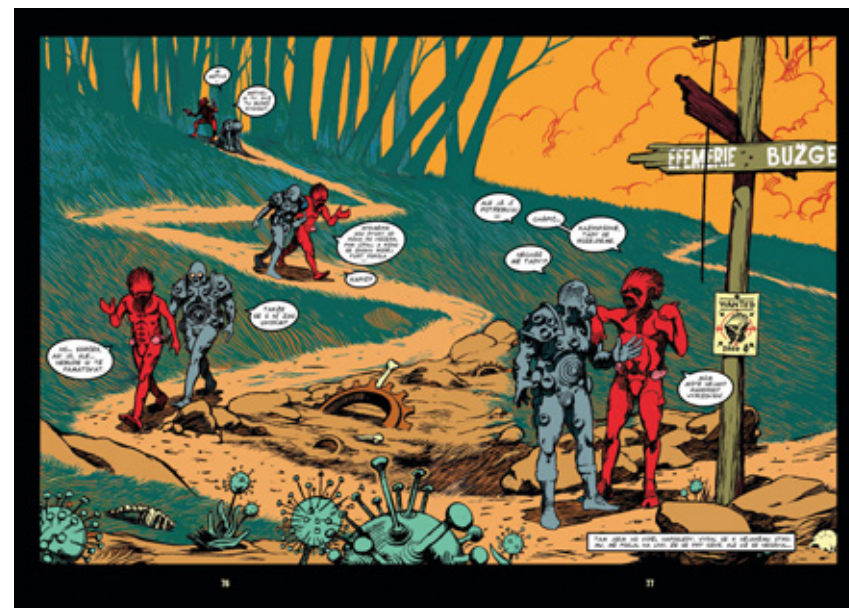
Both the drawing and the environment where the peculiar stories of the *Lord of Time* take place are inspired by the fanciful universe of short stories by

the French author Moebius. Nevertheless, Bažant creates a more eclectic and hectic plot full of absurdly humorous or tragicomic situations, sometimes at the level of harsh sci-fi anecdotes. Episodic chapters find the protagonist in isolated situations, connected by characters rather than by a continual plot. Erlioz Ment invented a spacesuit which can stop time; however, the experiment did not turn out according to his wishes and he stayed confined in the spacesuit, in a kind of dream world in which he wanders aimlessly. In the latter chapters the initially black-and-white comics turns strikingly colourful; first the colour red is added and then the full spectrum. In addition to the drawing itself, which is excellent in its dynamics and hatching, Bažant uses various techniques, including silk-screen printing.



Pán času  
Hura kolektiv, 2012, 96 pp

RIGHTS:  
Hza Bažant  
hza@hura.cz



# Pavel Kosatík (and various illustrators) CZECHS 1918–1992

Nine key events of Czech(oslovak) history in a caustic, ironic, dismal, as well as playful, hyperbole.

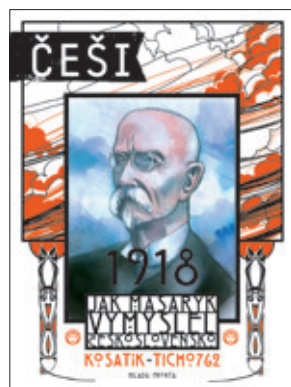
This monumental comics series by experienced historian and journalist, Pavel Kosatík (b. 1962), looks back at key moments of Czech history – from the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 to its separation into the States of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1992. The first medium for Kosatík's scripts was Czech Television; concurrently with the broadcasting of the series, the Mladá fronta publisher started publishing comic books, which, based on (more or less) modified Kosatík scripts, were always drawn by different cartoonists, usually one generation younger. This is the reason for the different mood of each comic book: the volume *Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského* (How Gottwald Murdered Slánský, 2014) is extreme, suggestive, greatly conceived by Vojtěch Mašek's non-standard drawings; by contrast, the

playful collages in Jiří Husák's work *Jak z rock'n'rollu vznikla Charta 77* (How Charter 77 Arose out of Rock'n'roll, 2016) creatively use contemporaneous photos of Václav Havel and other dissidents, as well as pictures of men in police uniforms. A distinctive approach was presented by Karel Jerie; in his work *Jak Dubček kapituloval v Moskvě* (How Dubček Capitulated in Moscow, 2016), he added dinosaur heads to the bodies of Czech and Soviet communists, accurately depicting the physiognomies of the historical figures even in this form.

Kosatík and the cartoonists he cooperated with have created more than just trivially educative works: their comics are inspirational, provocative and original, while depicting the historical events honestly and suggestively.

AWARDS:  
2014 Muriel Award – Best original book  
2014 Muriel Award – Best original script  
2015 Muriel Award – Best original script  
2017 Muriel Award – Best original drawing

RIGHTS:  
Mladá fronta publishers  
David Pazdera:  
pazdera@mf.cz  
www.mf.cz



Češi 1918 – 1992  
Mladá fronta, 2013–16, 9 volumes, 80–128 pp

o 15 minut později





# Marta Morice SECRET AGENT

49

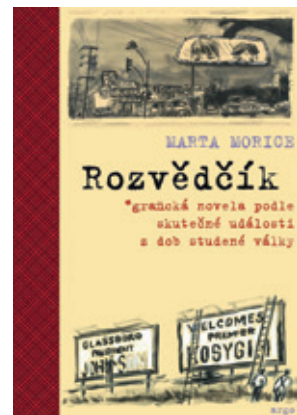
A graphic biography of a Czech secret agent and diplomat looks at the big and small history of the Cold War.

This informal comic book written and illustrated by Marta Morice (b. 1971), an artist who has been living in France for a long time now, is based on real events of the Cold War, namely on the hidden backstage, which the public did not witness and has since been forgotten. Although after November 1989 the protagonist, socialist spy Miroslav Polreich, the author's uncle, joined the new, non-communist Czech(oslovak) diplomatic services, he also operated there in the background. Earlier, in the 1960s, he worked in the foreign department of the Czech secret service – and is one of only a few who has no reason to be ashamed of it.

A key event took place in June 1967, when an important Russian-USA summit

was held in Glassboro, USA, dealing with disarmament for the very first time. It was Polreich, an inconspicuous man at the Czech embassy in the USA, with good contacts to the CIA and Russian diplomats as well, who had an important role during its preparation.

Morice follows her uncle from his childhood, through his joining the Czechoslovak communist party in 1947 till his change of allegiance after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. She uses typewritten script and a yellowish background, evoking the days of the plot perfectly. Like *Alan's War* by Emmanuel Guibert, *Secret Agent* also shows how important a small, personal history can be in understanding big history.



Rozvědčík  
Argo, 2017, 120 pp

RIGHTS:  
Argo publishers  
Veronika Chaloupková:  
veronika.chaloupkova@argo.cz  
www.argo.cz



# Nikkarin

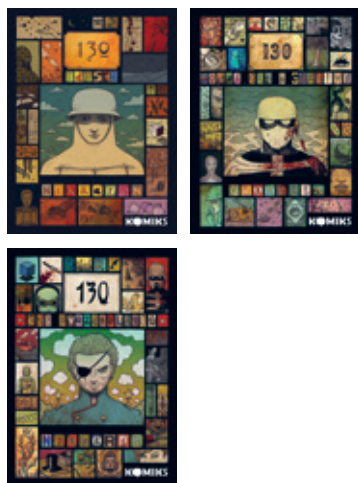
## 130 1–3

A melancholic sci-fi combining Exupéry's *Little Prince*, the computer game *Fallout* and De Chirico's pictures.

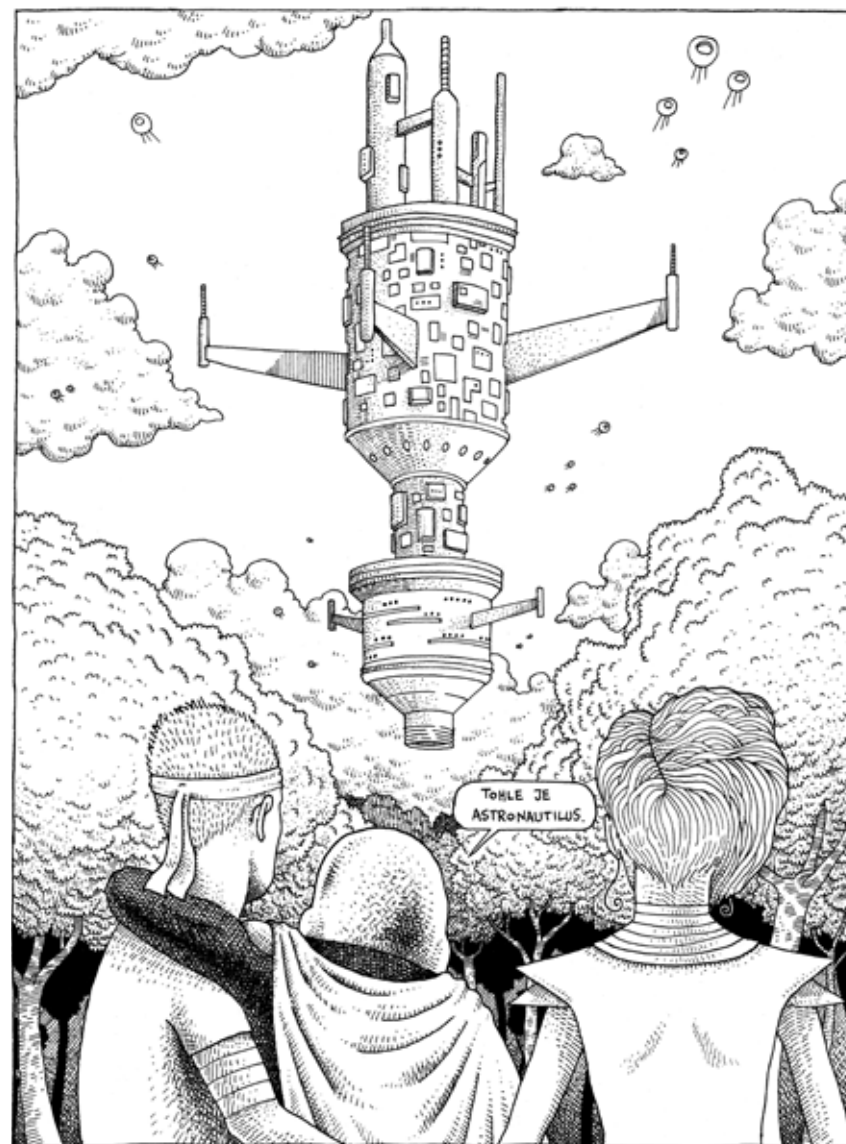
The comics series authored by Michal Menšík aka Nikkarin (b. 1987) entitled *130* was originally meant to be a trilogy; however, the third volume from 2015 has not wrapped up the plot yet. The cartoonist develops a melancholic world of a remote future in which a wanderer called Bo, a little silent creature Kňh and Prince Antoine, an adult Little Prince with Jedi swordsmanship travel around, the aims of their wandering being rather unclear at the beginning. In the first volume of the series, peaceful, undramatic, slightly humorous, saddened and philosophizing episodic stories, or rather hints at stories, are usually based on meeting a peculiar phenomenon or beings in the middle of an empty, sci-fi wasteland.

In the latter volumes, the picaresque plot starts getting concrete contours and the shape of a traditional conflict of

between good guys and bad guys: the group of wanderers is joined by a star hunter, Valendiel, and those with superpowers start distinguishing themselves within the group of baddies. In the third volume, the poetics of Magritte's sceneries shift towards the poetics of superhero comics or computer games. However, fights and action scenes are of a strange nature thanks to the static and subtle, even timid drawing. Nikkarin does not abandon the post-modern tone of the story, with references to works of art and pop-culture, from surrealists to the post-apocalyptic game *Fallout*. At the same time, he is a mature, original artist of black-and-white drawing in which he combines the fragility of Saint-Exupéry's illustrations with the world and style of Moebius' short comics.



RIGHTS:  
Labyrinth publishers  
Joachim Dvořák:  
joachim.dvorak@seznam.cz  
[www.labyrinth.net/stranka/21/english](http://www.labyrinth.net/stranka/21/english)





# Džian Baban & Vojtěch Mašek FRED BRUNOLD'S MONSTERCABARET 1–3

Soviet paranormal research, a cabaret freak show and the Bavarian secret police in the style of the craziest films of David Lynch.

Graduate film scriptwriters Džian Baban and Vojtěch Mašek in the trilogy Fred Brunold's Monstercabaret have created a remarkable work which reminds us that Czech authors are often masters of parody and mystification. The world portrayed in detail is uniquely comprehensive and full of grotesque monsters, crazy scientists and primitives in uniforms. The thriller with grotesque aspects is based on the history and present day of a small Central-European locality (from West Germany to the former Soviet Union) which gets wildly fantastic dimensions in their narrative. Lowly motifs intertwine with noble ones in a surreal disarray. The owner of a freak circus meets jovial frontier guards and communist secret agents, the protagonist has a proboscis

the purpose of which will be revealed only in the finale to the series; former Soviet scientists from the paranormal research programme intrigue to dominate the world and all this is commented by a smug and rude Bavarian writer who finds nothing but his own work good.

The Monstercabaret is being developed in different formats and genres: it has a regular comic strip version, *Hovory z rezidence Schlechtfreund* (Talks from the Schlechtfreund Residence); it has been transformed into the theatre performance *JožkaLipnikIsaGreatManandCannotLie* (JožkaLipnikIsaGreatManandCannotLie), and if there was enough money for expensive special effects and a period stage set, a film would also certainly be made.



Monstercabaret Freda Brunolda  
Lipnik, 2009, 132, 152 and 216 pp

RIGHTS:  
Džian Baban:  
dbaban@volny.cz





# František Skála

## WHEN CECIL MET LÍDA

This photo comic book brings handmade puppets alive and lets them experience little adventures among leaves and roots in the forest.

A versatile Czech artist, František Skála (b. 1956) is one of the most famous and respected Czech artists, his exhibitions are the pride of leading Czech galleries, and his works of art are represented in the Czech National Gallery collection. He is also the author of one of the greatest Czech comic books for children: his cartoon adventure *Velké putování Vlase a Brady* (The Travels of Vlas and Brada) was published as early as in 1987. It is typical of Skála's art that he uses various found objects and materials, most often products of nature (pieces of wood, stones and grass) from which he makes fantastic, organic and technical objects.

His photo series *When Cecil met Lída* was also created in a similar spirit. It is about a tiny go-ahead fellow, Cecil, who

is easy-going, wandering through a forest until he comes across the recluse Lída. Together with other peculiar beings, they experience small poetic and humorous adventures. While the first story about the couple combined macro-photos of home-made puppets and little buildings with a written text, the character of the subsequent, more voluminous story *Skutečný příběh Cílka a Lidy* (Cecil's Quest, 2007) is already a pure photo comic book, following on from the work of Czech artists and photographers Ladislav Sitenský or Radek Pilař. The latter book was included, as the only Czech comics, in Paul Gravett's book *1001 Comics You Must Read Before You Die* and has been translated into English.



Jak Cílek Lídu našel  
Meander, 2006, 72 pp

RIGHTS:  
Meander publishers  
Iva Pecháčková:  
iva@meander.cz  
www.meander.cz/en



Posedával tu tam, tu onde, až se navečer schoulil do suché hlíny mezi kořeny, kam nikdy nepříš, a usnul.



Vyrobil si dřevěnou motyku a kopal.

The presentation of Czech book culture at book fairs abroad has a long tradition. The Moravian Library, one of the leading Czech heritage institutions, has been in charge of coordinating the Ministry of Culture's national expositions since 2014. In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, authorities of Czech literary culture and Czech Centres abroad, the Moravian Library focuses not only on presenting major publishing houses but also on small publishers and printers. Significant Czech literary awards and their winners, along with a selection of current fiction and non-fiction are presented within the frame-work of a thematic national exposition. The accompanying cultural programme aims at bringing Czech authors together in the form of discussions and readings, especially at the Leipzig Book Fair (focused primarily on translations) or at the most important venue, the Frankfurt Book Fair. Czech book culture is presented in a similar scope also at the book fair in Bologna, which focuses on books for children, and at the London Book Fair. The Moravian Library is also the parent organisation of the Czech Literary Centre, which supports and promotes Czech literature abroad and in the Czech Republic.

## GRANTS FOR PUBLISHING CZECH LITERATURE ABROAD

Every year, the Czech Ministry of Culture awards grants to support the publication of Czech prose, poetry, drama, essays, comics and children's literature abroad.

Publishers can apply for funding for:

- translation costs
- graphic design, typesetting and printing costs
- copyright costs
- promotion costs

Deadlines

- 15th April for books and excerpts to be published in the same year as the application is submitted
- 15th November for books and excerpts to be published in the following year after the application is submitted

Publishers, agents and translators can apply for funding for:

- the translation of an excerpt of between 10–25 standard pages (1,800 characters with spaces)

Magazines can apply for funding for:

- translation costs of an issue where at least 50% of the total content is dedicated to original Czech literature











MINISTRY OF CULTURE  
CZECH REPUBLIC



MORAVIAN  
LIBRARY

