

The following article, reprinted from the "Guardian" (21/2/77) may be of interest to readers, and hopefully stimulate response as to the content of children's comics. The purists, who can see no relevance in this for statisticians (radical or otherwise), may like to enumerate the printing errors and see if this article contains an above average number of mistakes for the Guardian.

# Cold war fare for the children

By JOHN EZARD

The themes of the British children's comic take a controversial, 20-year leap forward today with the launch of an adventure strip based on a Cold War instead of a Nazi scenario

The comic, 2000 AD, is published by the International Publishing Corporation, and aimed at an audience of about 1.5 million children aged 8-14, shows a BBC newscaster closely resembling Angela Rippon announcing the invasion of Britain by the Volgan Republic of Asia; a thermonuclear strike from underground Asian sikos on a Midlands town; and Marshal Vashkov, leader of the Volgans, ordering the execution of a Prime Minister looking very much like Mrs Margaret Thatcher on the steps of St Pauls.

A side attraction of 2000 AD is its revival of Dan Dare as an abrasive spaceman shorn, according to the publisher, Johnny Johnson, of the "rather prissy, head-prefect mannerisms" he displayed in Eagle comic 25 years ago.

But the new departure in the comic is its combination of what it calls "future shock" with a spicing of contemporary actuality in the strip invasion. A stricken King Charles III waits on an airstrip to be flown to exile in Canada — leaving the hero, a defiant lorry driver called Savage, to take on in future instalments the invaders who destroyed his home, his family, his country.

The strip opens under a facsimile of the Daily Mirror masthead: "The NATO ring of steel around the Volgan frontier is shattered on a thousand mile front." The Soviet Embassy in London, representing the only Eurasian country with a long NATO frontier and a tradition of Volga boatmen, did not want to make a formal comment on a copy of the comic, but Mr Valery Zemskov, its press counsellor, offered a personal comment: "It is not an embassy's business to analyse children's comics. But this

comic does not surprise me at all since it provides another example of what some people are doing constantly and continuously — to whip up war hysteria, to breed distrust in children's minds towards other countries which they hardly know.

"We do not see our country in this comic strip. Actually, it does not matter which country this comic reminds us of. It is a matter of principle that children should be educated in the appropriate atmosphere, free from hatred towards other people, to give them the sense

of confidence and stability which is so important for them to become rational and sensible people when they grow up. Any educationist would share this personal opinion of mine."

Mr Nicholas Tucker, lecturer in developmental psychology at Sussex University, has recently voiced worry about the tendency of comics to hark back to the second world war. He was pleased that at least IPEC had not drawn the Volgans with slit eyes. "One is glad that a comic is trying its hand at another story. The trouble is that, if you set these things in the future,

even a child can see what a depressing prospect it is. I don't think children want to read about thermo-nuclear war.

"If you go back to the past, you are stuck with the old Nazi theme if you are in a political union with a country like Germany, it's embarrassing to be pumping out propaganda against it in comics. "You are caught in a cleft stick—unless you abandon this particular form of violence. The only way out is for somebody to try a new form of adventure more in keeping with our own situation, as the Goons and Monty Python did with humour."

Mr Bob Edmonds, of Great Baddow, Essex, comic collector, said: "There is a very strong hint that the Volgans are associated with Russia. I am not sure that it is progress if British comics are swapping their World War II obsession for cold war paranoia." He found the new Dan Dare, drawn with a Dr Spock hairstyle, "a very rootless character, just another cipher." The strip was thick on the technical explanations of space technology which had made it popular in Eagle. It tended towards the modern cult of the amoral, ruthless comic hero which a lot of people found mildly disturbing.

While the resemblances to Mrs Thatcher and Miss Rippon have been noted with private glee by some IPC staff, the corporation says officially that the strip is not meant to echo existing people or a real overseas country. The name Volgans was considered for the invaders, but it was thought unsatisfactory.

IPC is confident that its Dan Dare is a valid hero for children unburdened by nostalgia for the original. Although 2000 AD is officially published today, it first hit the shops on Saturday and was a sell-out in some areas of the South-east—partly because each copy gave away a flying toy worth more than the cost of the comic. The real test of the cold war interests of British youth will come in future weeks.



2,000 AD. A page from the comic launched today for 8-14 year-olds