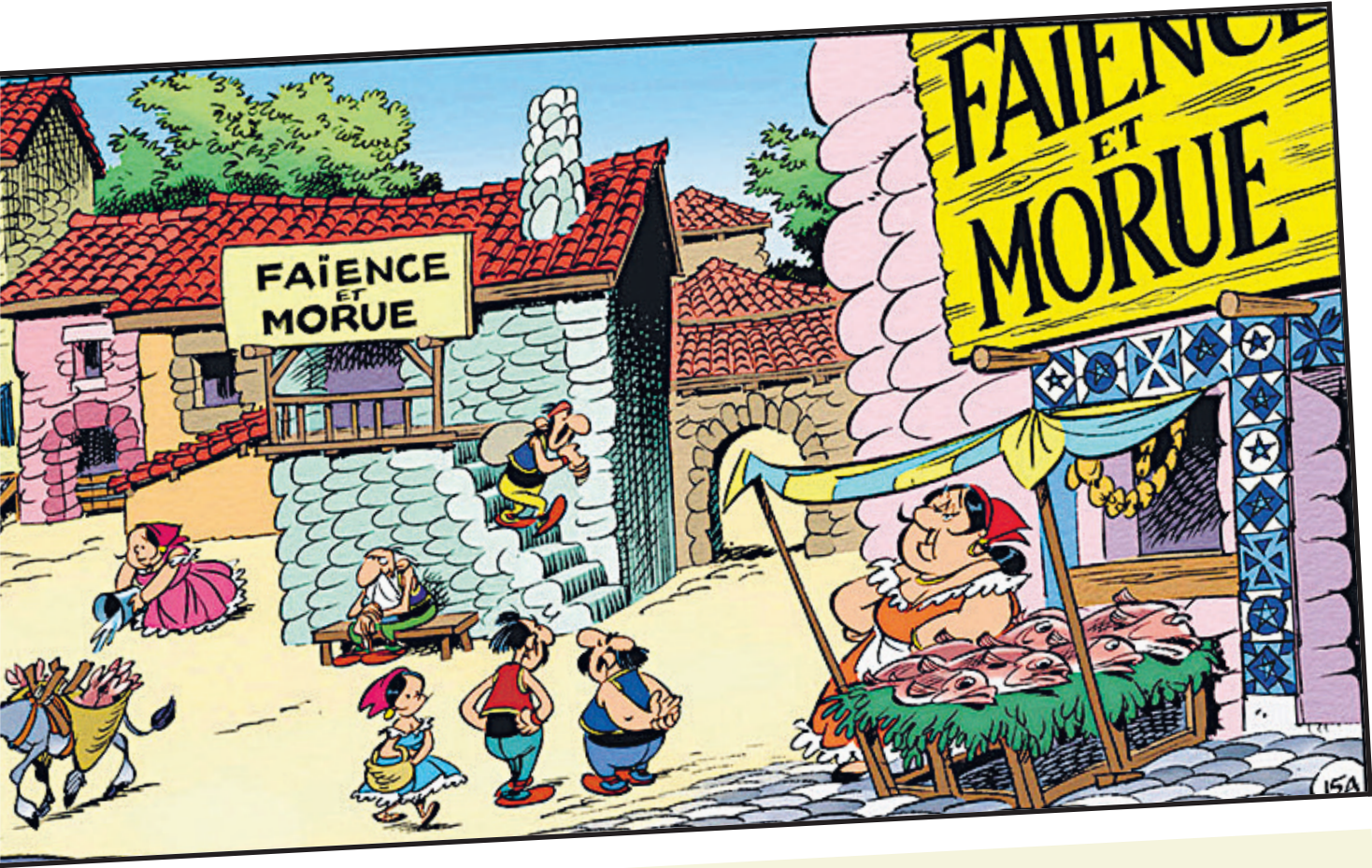




Old orders, however, are challenged by the new. By 1968, Pilote's younger artists wanted something more transgressive and taboo-breaking. For Goscinny, this was unthinkable. Pilote was conceived as a family-friendly magazine.

The younger artists invited the founders to a Paris restaurant to negotiate. It was a disaster.

This was the year of student riots. Normal life had been disrupted. New issues of Pilote had been delayed. Goscinny didn't know when production would resume. For the rebels, this was proof that it was time for a change.

The meeting ended with Goscinny almost in tears. He distanced himself from people whom he had considered friends and colleagues. In 1972, a number of these artists left to set up L'Écho des Savanes (Echo of the Savannahs), a more transgressive magazine.

Amid continued resistance, Goscinny stepped down as editor of Pilote in 1973.

He died of a heart attack four years later, aged 51.

In that short life, he created characters and told stories that give pleasure to millions around the world. Movies based on Asterix are still being made. The most recent was the French live-action film Asterix & Obelix: The Middle Kingdom (2023).

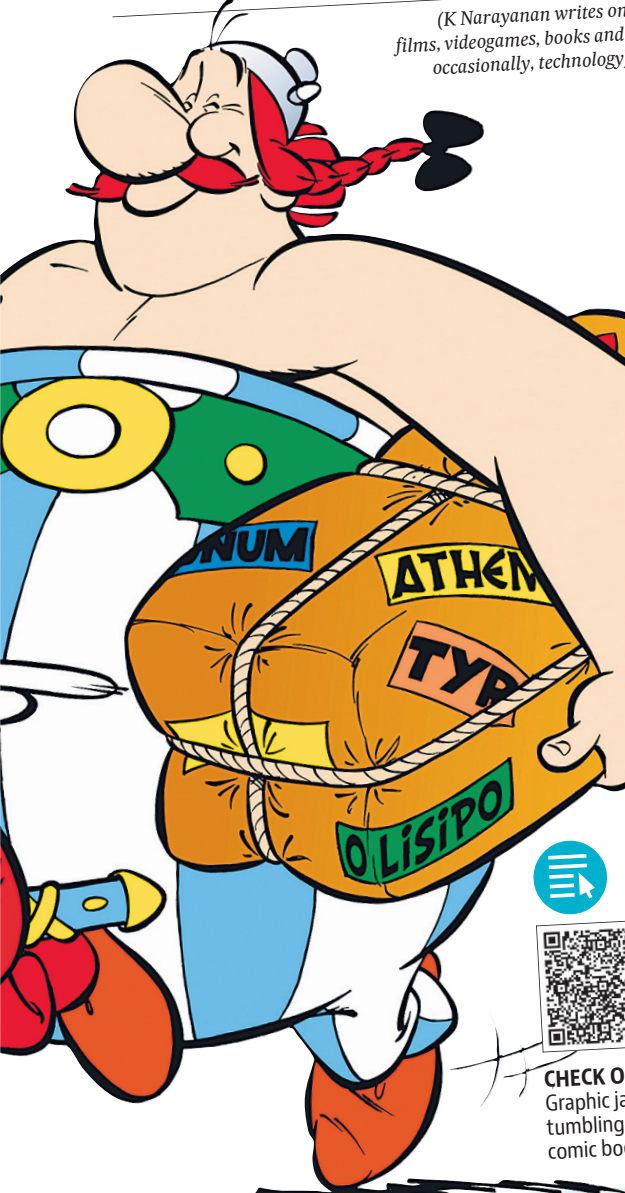
At France's amusement park dedicated to the little Gaul, one can take a log flume ride, cool off in rapids, or ride a rollercoaster through Egyptian ruins.

New albums are still being produced, and still sell in the millions. Asterix in Lusitania (2025) sold 1.65 million copies that year in France alone.

And why not? Why wouldn't you go to a world where there is always adventure and a banquet to follow, where the forests are filled with wild boar to hunt and Romans to bash, where there are new countries and cultures to visit, new friends to make, and always time to marvel at the eccentricities of human nature?

As Obelix would say, "These humans are crazy!". Goscinny made us love them all anyway.

(K Narayanan writes on films, videogames, books and, occasionally, technology)



{ PEELING BACK THE LAYERS } PUN AND GAMES

The gospel of Goscinny: How I fell in love with Asterix

K Narayanan



I read my first Asterix when I was in Class 3. On a visit to an aunt's house, I grew tired of fidgeting as the adults discussed the ailments and scandals of the extended family, and went scouting among my cousin's books.

The 10-year-old wasn't home, so it had been a dull afternoon. Until I found a copy of Asterix and the Big Fight (1966) he had borrowed from a local library. The first page had a map with the words "The year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely..."

The next page introduced the main characters: Asterix, Obelix, Getafix, Cacophonix and Vitalstatistix. You knew the place. You knew the time. You knew the people. And when the story began with two types of Gauls under Roman occupation (assimilated and indomitable), you understood the set-up.

I didn't know then that the map of Gaul overlapped with that of France. I didn't know why the speech of the villainous Roman centurion Nebulus Nimbus was always rendered in thick block letters (though I did get from that that he was meant to be loud).

I'm sure I didn't know what a nimbus was, or the meaning of "nebulous". But the story was straightforward. The Romans enlisted the help of a friendly Gaulish chief named Cassius Ceramix to challenge Vitalstatistix. Getafix got hit on the head, lost his wits, and was unable to prepare the potion that gave our friends superhuman strength. And it was up to Asterix and Obelix to set things right.

It was only much later that I realised Cassius Ceramix, whom Vitalstatistix meets in what looks like a boxing ring, referred to Cassius Clay. Then the penny dropped. I understood why Ceramix kept wanting to be the "greatest"; and why there was a panel in which Vitalstatistix says "I'm the greatest", after knocking him out with one punch.

On an even later reread, I realised that centurion Nebulus Nimbus (which can either be read as a vague halo or dark storm cloud), looked like a cartoon version of a specific Italian: Benito Mussolini. And saw that the druid Psychoanalytix, who used a couch for his patients and talked them into feeling better, is a stand-in for Sigmund Freud.

By the time I left my aunt's house, I already knew one thing, though: I was going to read every Asterix comic I could lay my hands on.

I remember dragging my father to Kennedy Book House on Mount Road in Chennai, and learning, to my horror, that one Asterix album cost hundreds of rupees. I'm sure it was an even bigger shock to my father, whose experience in buying comics was limited to Amar

Chitra Kathas, which retailed for Rs 1.75 back then.

Buying an Asterix was out of the question. That's when my mother bought me my first lending library membership, to Easwari on Lloyds Road. I still remember my membership number: C-296.

In the late Terry Pratchett's Discworld universe, there is a theory called L-space or library space. Any large collection of books, it states, can warp space and time.

Easwari was like that. Here, Enid Blyton rubbed shoulders with Archie Digests, Bulldog Drummond with James Bond and Jason Bourne, Georgette Heyer with Stephen King.

There were shelves and shelves of Mills & Boons and James Hadley Chases. And there were two shelves of comic albums, low down, close to the ground. The albums were placed flat, not vertically with spines out, so the best way to browse was to pull out a stack and go through them one by one.

The cost of borrowing one for a week was about two rupees. Expensive, in those days, but well worth the price. Somehow, every time I went back, there was a whole set that had been returned, that I hadn't seen before.

Sometimes, I would strike deals with friends. We would each focus on titles neither had read, and swap within the week. Twice the books, so half the price.

It was on one of these expeditions that I saw my first Ompa-Pa (the English translations used Ompa-Pa, not Oumpah-Pah). On the cover, written very small, were the names Rene Goscinny and Albert Uderzo.

These stories — about a young aristocrat named Hubert Brussels Sprout and his Native American friend, in 17th-century America — were a delight. I still remember sitting on the porch of my best friend's house, the two of us giggling hopelessly over the fact that Ompa-Pa's father was Papa-Pa.

Later, my friend introduced me to Lucky Luke; he had borrowed Apache Canyon (1971) on the strength of Goscinny's name.

As I grew older, the books changed. They became labels.

Reading Robert Ludlum in senior school sent certain signals, as did reading Camus or Sartre or Douglas Hofstadter on the college lawns. But here's the thing: The comics were snob-proof. You could read Asterix publicly while others read Douglas Adams. You could read Lucky Luke as a 45-year-old on the metro on your way to work, and get a smile of recognition.

One of the first things I did after I started earning was to buy every Asterix album and every Lucky Luke I could find. The books were expensive, but what else was I earning for?

A few years ago, I gave them all away to a nephew.

Not because I was done with them. I would never be. But because I was spreading the gospel of Goscinny. The look of concentration and the smile on his face as he read Asterix and the Big Fight was my reward.

{ IT'S GAUL IN THE DETAILS } DID YOU KNOW?

Beyond the banquets

- In many ways, Asterix was meant to be a star. The word comes from the Ancient Greek "asteriskos", for "little star". Look closely and the little Gaul has a shape that is not dissimilar.
- The comics first appeared in the independent comics magazine Pilote, co-founded by Rene Goscinny (who wrote the Asterix stories) and Albert Uderzo (who created the art), among others, in Paris, in 1959. Goscinny died in 1977; Uderzo in 2020. The comics have since been carried forward by others.
- In these tales, set in 50 BCE, nearly all of Gaul has been conquered by Romans. One stubborn village holds out. They manage to ward off the Romans, time and again, with the help of a magic potion brewed by their druid, Getafix, that (temporarily) grants superhuman strength.
- The drink is made with mistletoe harvested using a golden sickle. To keep it palatable, Getafix uses added flavours, ranging from

lobsters to strawberries and "rock oil" (think, petrol).

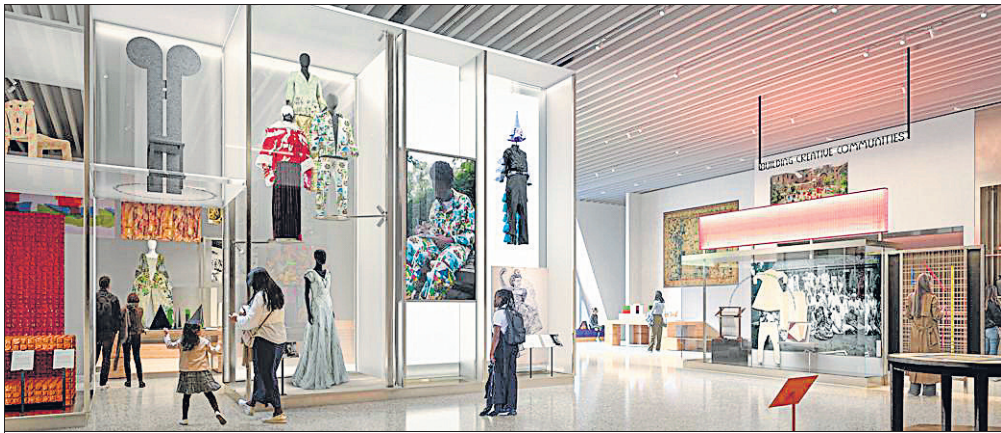
- The series was instantly popular, for its wordplay, gently irreverent plots and historical references, anachronisms (roundabouts, traffic jams, bureaucracy) and visual gags (references to classical art works; Egyptians arguing in hieroglyphic panels). It helped that each adventure ended, happily, in a banquet.
- The Asterix albums have since become some of the most-translated comics in the world, available in over 120 languages, including Icelandic, Norwegian and Urdu.
- In a tribute to this enduring element of French popular culture, that country's first independently launched satellite was named the Asterix, in 1965. It served more as proof of concept than valiant campaign, though. A damaged nose meant it couldn't transmit beyond two days, but the Asterix remains stubbornly in orbit.



culture

This just in...

A new London museum, V&A East, isn't looking for the oldest artefacts; it's looking for the newest, preserving tokens of rebellion from 2017, fashion from 2020 and art from last month



Open, edgy, accessible: The new V&A East in London puts young people at the centre of the conversation. (Below) Artefacts on display include Stormzy's stab-proof Union Jack vest, designed by Banksy and worn at Glastonbury in 2019; and the Daria dress by Molly Goddard (2019), worn by Beyoncé in Black is King (2020). PHOTOS: JA PROJECTS/V&A EAST MUSEUM, GETTY IMAGES

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The first thing all visitors see at the V&A East museum is a young person, smartphone in hand, staring into the horizon. The 18-ft bronze sculpture by Thomas J Price is "the personification of everything we aim to deliver with the museum," says Gus Casely Hayford, director of V&A East.

The museum believes its future depends on putting young people at the centre of the conversation, so it has taken the discourse to them, in more ways than one. Casely Hayford has cycled to more than 100 nearby schools, speaking at assemblies about what V&A East might have to offer.

"We consulted with over 30,000 local residents and artists as well," he says.

The resultant space, which opened in April, adds a new chapter to the 174-year legacy of the Victoria and Albert. It follows V&A East Storehouse, a sister venue a short walk away, that holds over 250,000 artefacts in a space that looks like a giant Ikea, serves as an actual storehouse of art and artefacts (with some now on display, by rotation), and opened to the public in May 2025.

The galleries at V&A East bring together 500 eclectic objects from the V&A collection that make unexpected connections across eras, cultures and creative disciplines.

Revolutionary anti-imperialist posters from the '60s and '70s sit alongside the iconic pink knitted hats of the 2017 Women's March. The fashion section holds the bright pink Daria dress by Molly Goddard (2019), made from 200 feet of nylon tulle and worn by Beyoncé in the visual album Black is King (2020).



{ THE SPORTING LIFE }

Rudraneil Sengupta



Squad goals

It's been an unusually busy summer of club transfers. See what the map looks like now

With the World Cup behind us, and the leagues ready to kick off a new season, here's a look at some of the most exciting transfers in a busy summer-transfer window.

Some teams, such as Real Madrid, may have a distinctly new look, having swept many of the world's biggest talents into their stable. Others, such as Newcastle United, are on the other end of the spectrum, hollowed out after losing all their star players (though that has brought the club unprecedented earnings with which to rebuild in the future).

Any talk of transfers must start with Rodri, 30, the incomparable defensive midfielder who was the rock behind Manchester City's most trophy-filled seasons under Pep Guardiola, and the World Cup player of the tournament. He takes charge of Barcelona's star-studded midfield and attack.

England winger Anthony Gordon, 25, and German winger Karim Adeyemi, 24, are the



A 17th-century silk gown likely last owned by a maid. And a 1990 Cut, Slash & Pull denim ensemble by Vivienne Westwood.

Meanwhile, an inaugural exhibition titled Music is Black: A British Story uses 200 objects — from instruments to cinematic footage — to tell the story of how Caribbean immigration birthed homegrown music genres such as Brit funk, trip hop and grime.

On display here is a piano that belonged to Winifred Atwell, the first Black artist to score a UK #1 hit, in 1953; influential grime MC Jme's Super Nintendo and Mario Paint games, which he used in early experiments with music-making in the 1990s; and Stormzy's iconic stab-proof Union Jack vest, designed by Banksy and worn when the artist headlined Glastonbury in 2019.

Young at art

Young people weren't just consulted, they also serve as consultants at the museum.

The V&A East Youth Collective Programme offers paid 10-month gigs to East Londoners aged 16 to 25. These advisors have shaped programming and design briefs, opening hours and ticket prices.

Temporary exhibitions will champion local artists and lesser-known stories.

On display at the moment, for instance, is Heads! Look to the Workers, a series of moving sculptures by artist Laura Wilson that honours the workers of East London's theatres, factories and other labour-driven establishments. Also on display is Dispersal, which sees photographers Marion Davies and Debra Rapp document small-scale units in the region, such as belt-making, salmon smoking and stained-glass workshops.

Circa right now

Could spaces such as V&A East help rethink what a museum can be? Such shifts are a heartening response to new cultural contexts, adds museologist Vinod Daniel, chair of AusHeritage, Australia's international network for cultural heritage management, and former board member of the International Council of Museums.

As heavily carpeted, strictly curated rooms give way to open-plan structures and interactive displays, even restoration, once hidden from public view, is becoming part of the draw, Daniel adds. "Conservators build a glass facade around it, inviting people to stop, look and ask questions about something centuries old." And suddenly, something rooted in the past isn't rooted in the past any more.

other new signings for Barcelona, who have sold World Cup-winning forward Ferran Torres to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG).

That may be a great move for Torres, 26, who didn't really fit into Barcelona's line-up. PSG doesn't have an out-and-out forward. He can slip into that role with ease. With the team's incredible attacking players, which include Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha, and Mika Godts, the Belgian winger and consummate dribbler PSG picked up from Ajax, this may be the most entertaining team to watch this season.

Real Madrid, meanwhile, have done more to bolster their defence than any other major club, buying Dutchman Denzel Dumfries, 30, from Inter Milan; Spain's Marc Cucurella, 28, from Chelsea; and France's Ibrahim Konate, 27, from Liverpool. That's three of the best defenders in the world right now. Cucurella, flying about the pitch with his mass of curly hair, was one of the great sights of the World Cup. He keeps that hair wild to make it easier for his son, who has autism, to recognise him on the pitch. More power to him.

The attacking combination that may dominate Europe, though, is Bayern Munich's line-up of Harry Kane, Michael Olise and Luis Diaz, now joined by Morocco's star forward, Ismael Saibari, 25. In England, it's been all about central midfielders and obscene prices. After years of patiently building a squad, Arsenal are finally in "win-now" mode, after their Premier League triumph.

A strong attempt at luring Vini Jr away from Real failed at the last minute, but the London club secured Brazil's Bruno Guimaraes from Newcastle, one of the best centre midfielders in the game, for \$101 million. In monetary terms, this was immediately overshadowed by Manchester City paying \$153 million for Nottingham Forest's midfielder Elliot Anderson. A few weeks later, Chelsea broke that record by signing forward Morgan Rogers for over \$156 million.

The summer transfer window runs until September 1, so expect more major moves. For example, who will Arsenal target now that Vini Jr has turned them down?

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