

# Tintin's rocket and Mauritian moon memories

Bernard Appassamy | 12 December 2012  
11 Comments



I saw the toy shop out of the corner of my eye as I walked along a drab stretch of Sydney's Pitt Street.

I kept walking and glazed over rows of plastic toys behind the window display. Among the merchandise, I recognised figurines of comic characters, some matched with their extravagant modes of transport. They looked cheap, mass-produced and sad, seemingly anticipating a more vibrant future than gathering dust.

One item practically screamed at me and stopped me in my tracks. A red and white checked rocket standing upright on three legs – a rocket I had read about and drawn countless times during my childhood in Mauritius in the 1960s: Tintin's rocket from the *Explorers on the Moon* and *Destination Moon* books. At around 20 cm high, this resin replica was glistening and of high quality. The memories came hurtling back.

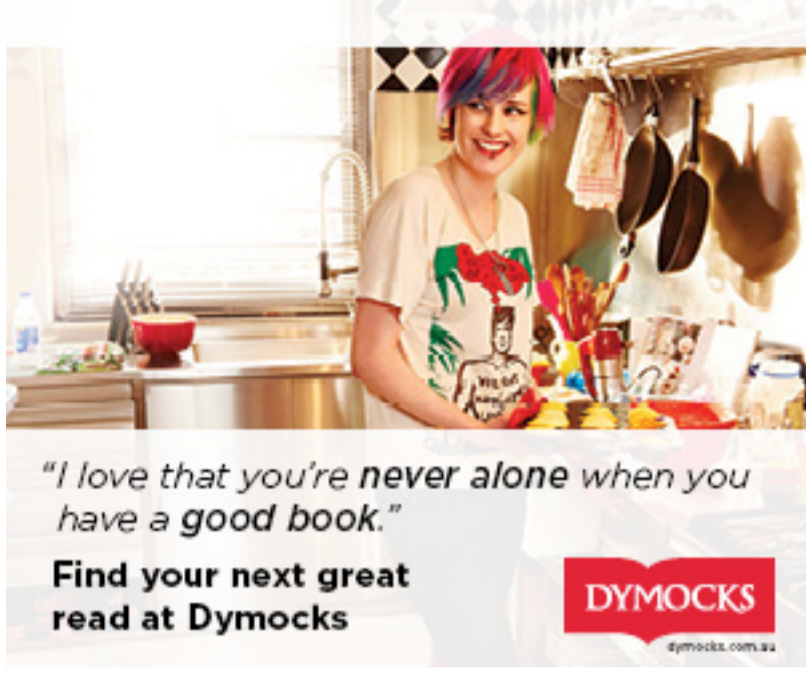
My mother instilled in me the pleasures of reading and drawing. From an early age, I learnt how to keep myself entertained since my two older sisters had grown-up occupations of their own.

While art supplies were readily affordable, books, most imported from France and the UK, were prohibitive and a luxury. I was given comic books for my birthday and Christmas, and given my speed at devouring them and my family's short-lived calm, my joining a library soon became an imperative.

Saturday morning. On the way to the bazaar for the weekly groceries, my parents dropped me off at our parish library, the Bibliothèque Saint Joseph, at the back of Notre Dame de Lourdes, our church in Rose-Hill.

I was entrusted to two elderly single sisters who ran the library on Saturdays as volunteers. Known deferentially as the Demoiselles Chauvin, they arrived in great style, chauffeur-driven, in a vintage black car with tomato-red leather seats. That car belonged to their friend, Countess Julie de Carné who later died at 102, a discrete figure in Mauritius if not for her imposing colonial residence.

I, of course, could not care less. What mattered was my selecting my weekly allocation of books before my parents picked me up again.



Tintin was the first of my super heroes and my favourite. From my isolated dot on the world map, he took me travelling to distant lands, and opened my eyes to foreign cultures, their history and rituals. He personified courage, a thirst for investigating and learning, and a dogged determination against injustice no matter the perils involved. He stood for freedom and making good.

I fancied myself as Tintin-*sous-les-tropiques* and my dalmatian Kim as Snowy as we sought and chased evil chameleons up the Casuarina trees that lined my family home.

None of Tintin's adventures thrilled me more than the double whammy to the moon, more so given the concurrent Apollo lunar missions at the time I was reading them. The construction of the Apollo rockets, the launches, the trips to and the landings on the moon, and the returns all fraught with dangers – Tintin had conquered those feats and more years before.


Fortuitously, my parents and I were staying with friends overseas when Apollo 11 landed on the moon. The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation didn't have the technology then to transmit such events live on TV. My father woke me up in the middle of the night and sat me in front of the black and white TV to watch Neil Armstrong's first lunar steps live. 'I am sorry but you need to see this. You will remember it for the rest of your life.'

I was so obsessed with rockets that I naturally progressed to secretly planning to launch one.

I engineered a prototype by folding two giant paper planes and gluing them back to back. Then, during the family's sacred siesta, I sneaked into the garden and stood my makeshift rocket on the sewerage manhole cover (my idea of a launch platform that could sustain extreme heat temperatures). Finally, I whispered the countdown, struck a match and lit the base, expecting the 'ignition' flames to blast my rocket into orbit.

Thankfully, no damage was done other than my own humiliation, and I was manic in disposing of any trace of my charred experiment.

Back on Pitt Street, I stepped into the toy shop ready to succumb to an impulse-buy, but the price tag of three digits shattered my fantasy. I still held my recollections for free. Besides, Father Christmas is coming.

 Bernard Appassamy is a Sydney artist, writer and bilingual medical care coordinator who grew up in Mauritius.

## RECENT ARTICLES BY BERNARD APPASSAMY.

- 1 First trip to red earth
- 2 The meaning of cake
- 3 Barbers of Mauritius and inner Sydney
- 4 Broken porcelain illuminates destructive Dutch colonial legacy
- 5 The masala stone

Topic tags: [Bernard Appassamy](#), [Tintin](#), [Christmas](#)

## SUPPORT RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS IN A TIME OF DIVISION

If there's one thing that the recent election campaign and its outcome demonstrated, it's the depth of the divisions that exist in our Australian community.

Our politics is focused on point-scoring, personalities, and name-calling across party lines. The media, for the most part, don't help, driven by the 24-hour news cycle and the pursuit of advertising dollars into a frenzy of click-bait and shallow sensationalism.

What does it mean to be an Australian in times like these? What are the values that unite us?

Eureka Street offers an alternative. It's less a magazine than a wide ranging conversation about the issues that matter in our country and our world; a conversation marked by respect for the dignity of ALL human beings.

Importantly, it's a conversation that takes place in the open, unhindered by paywalls or excessive advertising. And it's through the support of people like you that it is able to do so.

[DONATE NOW](#)

## SUBMIT A COMMENT

Word Count: 0

Name

(Feedback is moderated. Please limit comments to 200 words. Comments must be on topic and respectful.)

Email

[SEND COMMENT](#)

## EXISTING COMMENTS

Bernard, I really enjoyed this. And if I ever own a Dalmatian, I shall call it Snowy, just to confuse people.

**Penelope | 12 December 2012**

Shake hands with a similarly infected human. I wa quite a bit older when Armstrong made his small step for man and giant step for mankind but apart from that we had similar feelings. Cheerio in any case stranger.

Theo

**Theo verbeek | 12 December 2012**

Please, Bernard, not another four-and-half-years before your next offering! Have you published anywhere else? I'm eager to read more, and maybe longer stories/reminiscences.

**jaymz | 12 December 2012**

Bernard and Eureka Street. Thank you thank you thank you. What a delightfully lovely story. I too travelled while reading, exotic overseas countries, sea breezes, dogs, the old days of parish, making things, a trip to the town, dreaming, dreaming and more. Then I read that Bernard invented the first prototype Space Shuttle and that some back yard above the septic coexisted with Cape Canaveral. Endorsing Jaymz sentiments too. Thank you for the sentiment Jaymz. More of Bernard please. Thank you for making 12/12/12 even more significant - you almost took me to 01/01/3001. Happy Father Christmas day and Jesus' Birthday and Joyeux Noël Ben of Redfern

**Ben from Redfern | 12 December 2012**

I have fond memories of Tintin from childhood, particularly that rocket and I too have drawn it a thousand times and imagined my own journeys into space. It's been a joy to pass this on to my son who is now old enough to read these adventures, giving me an excuse to revisit them myself. Tintin has a mark of classic quality to it that modern franchises often lack. It was not cynically researched and targeted to extract the most amount of money possible. While I'm not so naive as to believe that he didn't have a sense for business and marketing, Herge was an artist and a story teller first.

**Matt | 13 December 2012**

Quel joli bond en arrière ! B, c'est un vrai régal de te lire...

**Jacqueline | 13 December 2012**

Lovely!

**Wendy Small | 13 December 2012**

Thank you Bernard for giving us a glimpse of the joys of reading Tintin at Bibliotheque St Joseph. you also reminded me that our dreams are free

**Irlande Alfred | 14 December 2012**

Another very well written article that captures that nostalgia of childhood just right. And I agree with Jaymz - don't wait four and a half years until your next one!

**Winston | 14 December 2012**

Ah, Tintin. Oui, Bernard, GRAND MERCI! Revivre UN moment, et toi seul Bernard sais y apporter toute la joie, le naturel et l'euphorie, d'une jeunesse jamais complètement oubliée..... J'AI ADORE j'ai ri aux éclats (surtout de ton expérience) et me voila prete pour une autre histoire, une autre aventure.....MERCI JOYEUX NOËL . a

**annie | 20 December 2012**

I'm sitting in the small village of my childhood looking out the window as the day dawns to a snow covered vista at 20 degrees below 0 here in western Canada. Deer tracks stretch across the fresh snow in the back yard of my sisters house, leading into the melancholy white valley where sky and horizon meet. Your story connected me with the wonders of childhood as it was here that I first saw those amazing events you described on black and white television. Thank you for your sensitively crafted reflection.

**Jac | 23 December 2012**

## SECTIONS

INTERNATIONAL  
MEDIA  
AUSTRALIA  
RELIGION  
ENVIRONMENT  
EDUCATION  
CARTOON  
FAITH DOING JUSTICE  
ARTS AND CULTURE  
ECONOMICS

## CONTRIBUTORS

Featured contributors  
Submit an article  
Margaret Dooley Young Writers Fellowship  
Work experience

## ARCHIVES

Web  
PDFs

## ABOUT US

Home  
Contact Us  
Donate  
Mission statement  
Advertise  
Privacy Policy

## SUBSCRIBE

Get updates when new articles are published on Eureka Street.

[DAILY EMAIL SIGN UP](#)

[WEEKLY EMAIL SIGN UP](#)