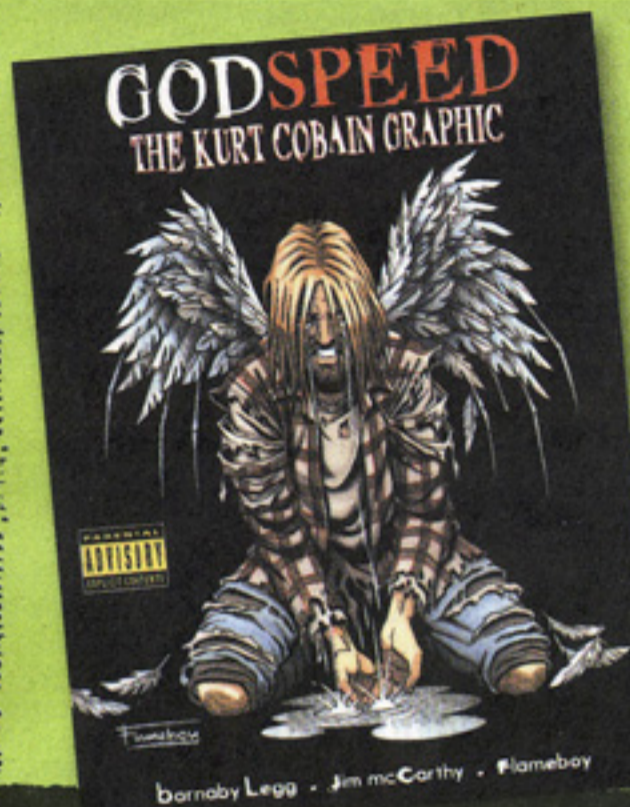


Smells like Teen Spirit

This week's glossy posters are extracts from 'Godspeed: The Kurt Cobain Graphic'. Here, the controversial novel's author explains why he wanted to tell the tragic tale of Kurt Cobain's life in comic book form



In a twist of fate that Kurt Cobain would surely have appreciated, the novel *Godspeed: The Kurt Cobain Graphic* was actually the accidental by-product of a pitch for a book on The Beatles. Omnibus Press Editor Chris Charlesworth was initially approached by an agent who represented various graphic novel illustrators with the proposal but turned it down because he thought that fans of the Fab Four would be too old to buy it. "I said that what they really needed was a dramatic story," recalls Charlesworth, "and I couldn't think of any story more dramatic

than Kurt Cobain's."

Charlesworth commissioned Barnaby Legg and Jim McCarthy to script the story, and set about asking artists to submit some work. Steve Beaumont, a relatively inexperienced illustrator who earned a living storyboarding films and video games, landed the gig.

"I didn't know if it was a good idea at first," admits Beaumont. "I was worried that Courtney Love might start suing everyone. But then I read the script and thought, 'This could work.'"

The resulting graphic novel has proved both controversial and commercially successful.

Words: Dan Silver

Beaumont received death threats from irate fans before *Godspeed* was even published, and Kurt Cobain's half-sister Kimberley complained that while she was happy to have his life documented in this form, "he was not this depressed Kurt Cobain who lived in a raw awesome rock god heroin chic torpor".

Nirvana fans remain divided as to whether it's a touching tribute or cynical exploitation, although Charlesworth insists it's the former. "Godspeed was always intended as a tribute, which is why I commissioned the introduction that explains the importance and significance of Nirvana and their music. It's very respectful, and I think he comes out of it very well."

Godspeed: The Kurt Cobain Graphic is published by Omnibus Press, priced £9.95.

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NIRVANA'S FIRST GIG



Steve Beaumont: "I was a fan of Nirvana but I never saw them play live, so I had to watch videos. But having been to lots of gigs, I drew on those experiences and what I could remember from

those nights out. I did struggle with some of the likenesses, and sometimes I don't think I've got them at all. But I think if you read the whole book you get more wrapped up in the idea of Kurt Cobain, and whether it looks like him or not is irrelevant."

KURT 'ENJOYS' EARLY SUCCESS



"I was trying to capture the energy I felt when I first heard 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'. To be honest, 'Bleach' never grabbed me in the way that 'Nevermind' did. People often ask me how I got so into this and put

such emotion down. To be honest, it wasn't something that I thought about doing. You know when rock stars say they just went with the flow? It's pretty much like that. Sometimes I look at these pages and think, 'Fuck - did I draw that?' I can't even remember drawing it."

'SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT'



"I actually lived like that for a while. Whenever I drew these squalid sort of places, I basically drew from places that I've lived in. I turned it into Kurt's place by sticking in lots of things that he

seemed to be into: candles and dolls and crucifixes. The one thing I could identify with Kurt all along was how important music was to him. His record collection was vital, all through his life. And in that scene you can see things like the Pixies, and I've even put in The Knack's 'My Sharona' - these are the things that shaped his songwriting."

READING 1991



"It's difficult to draw a scene like this when I've never actually been to a Nirvana gig. One of the first concerts I went to was the Ramones and Iggy Pop, and I could draw that in full detail. I have been

to Reading once - it's pretty much the same visually each year - so I just watched lots of live performances and tried to somehow capture it. I just had to hope people wouldn't get hung up on the detail, and take it on the chin if they said it wasn't like that. Nobody has... yet!"

KURT COLLAPSES ON TOUR



"That was purely from watching videos. I was really surprised the only one which seems to be available is *Nirvana Live! Tonight! Sold Out!!*. You can't get it on DVD, and I had to import it from America.

There is a scene on it where Kurt totally collapses while playing a gig. I don't think that the scene I've drawn here actually happened - I just tried to create an image of an almost burnt-out wreck of a person."

READING 1992



"When I look back at that page I don't remember thinking about where to place that spotlight behind him, but obviously it makes him look saintly, and it's a slightly Catholic image. Maybe there was

something going off in my head that I wasn't even aware of; it is a godlike reference, and obviously he was a god to many people. Also, the previous page showed him being pushed onstage in a wheelchair, and this is like him coming back to life. It's almost his salvation. There is a lot of quasi-religious resonance in the book, but that's just how it came out."

'UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK'



"This is a composite of a lot of different things. The main image is reminiscent of a lot of photographs, but I actually built it up from a thumbnail picture from the inside of the 'MTV

Unplugged In New York' CD. There aren't any images in the book that are straight copies of photographs - I tried to give the reader something they haven't seen before. If people are going to pay ten quid for this then they ought to be given something a little bit more."

THE FALLEN ANGEL



"This is the first image I drew of Kurt. Charles R Cross' *Heavier Than Heaven* was due to be published and NME had printed a preview of a section from Kurt's journals that became the text on this page. I've been

at low points in my life so I could understand where Kurt's coming from. I drew him as a fallen angel because I think Kurt was a good person but deeply troubled. I think he did search for God, or some sort of meaning and salvation, and that's what I was trying to get across. At that low point in his life, he will try anything. I wanted to communicate the sense of utter loss and complete despair."