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2000 A.D. and British comics culture in the 1970s

This paper explores the origins and early history of one of the most influential of all British boys' comics: *2000 A.D.* This title, first published by IPC in February 1977, is a landmark in the history of British comics culture. The standard history is that *2000 A.D.* was devised to exploit the anticipated science fiction boom around *Star Wars*, released in Britain later the same year, and that its publishers thought it would be a short-lived title. I will argue, however, that the origins of *2000 A.D.* are also related to longer-term changes in the British comics industry. The 1970s was a period of transition for boys' comics as traditional adventure comics (*Lion, Tiger, Hotspur, Hornet, Victor*) were eclipsed by new titles with more generically specific content (war, crime, sport) and more violent content. *2000 A.D.* can be seen as a cleaned-up successor to the controversial *Action*, launched by IPC in 1976 but withdrawn following an adverse media reaction to its supposed extremes of violence. *2000 A.D.* continued the anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian politics of *Action*, but transferred them from realistic to fantasy narratives. An analysis of the story archetypes and conventions in the early years of *2000 A.D.* – including the cold war vigilante Bill Savage, the mutant bounty hunter Strontium Dog and the futuristic law enforcer Judge Dredd – reveals a vision of a dystopian future beset by social problems and urban decay. To this extent *2000 A.D.* was consistent with other British science fiction of the 1970s in literature, film and television. It also suggests a readership comprised not entirely of juveniles. The article will conclude by considering whether *2000 A.D.* (which is still published today) can be seen as anticipating Thatcherism through its concern with social exclusion and its satirical take on unregulated consumerism.