



Tex, the Lonesome Rider

by Joe Kubert and Claudio Nizzi
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Interview with Ervin Rustemagić

(translated from Italian)

Q: Joe Kubert, among the most important and prestigious international comic authors, was the artist who drew “Tex, the Lonesome Rider.” You were his friend and his agent for many years. Could you tell us how did Kubert greet the idea of drawing a Tex adventure?

ER: To be very specific about this I have a story to tell. In mid-1990’s, when my company SAF became Bonelli’s world-wide agent, Sergio Bonelli told me about two wishes he wanted to bring to life in his professional career, but failed with both of them. The first one was to have some of his comics published in America. He said that for thirty years he consistently traveled around the United States, with a suitcase full of comics, offering them to all comic publishers there, but with no success. The second wish was the one of his father, creator of “Tex,” who always wanted to have Joe Kubert draw a story of “Tex.” Sergio said that over decades they were contacting Kubert a number of times, but he was not interested and kept rejecting them.

I told Sergio that I can fulfill his first wish that same day, but for the second one I will have to talk to Kubert the next time I see him. So, that same evening I called my friend Mike Richardson, the owner of Dark Horse Comics, and persuaded him to publish three mini-series with Bonelli’s titles in America. Mike agreed and sent me a signed contract to Milan without even seeing these comic books or their characters. And a few months later, when I visited Kubert at his home in New Jersey, he was reluctant about doing “Tex,” but he admitted he could not say “no” to me, and so he agreed that he will do “Tex,” but only as a favor to me.

Q: It took Joe Kubert seven years to complete “Tex, the Lonesome Rider,” with several interruptions and with a lot of struggling with deadlines. What were difficulties in the process, and what was the main satisfying side of that production for Kubert?

ER: Your interpretation of Joe’s work on “Tex, the Lonesome Rider” and your mentioning of interruptions and difficulties are all wrong. And, as I know that this version of Joe’s work on Tex is circulating in Italy, I have to say the truth here once forever, in order to defend Joe, who was the greatest professional that there is and who was never late with his work. When Joe promised me that he will draw Tex, he said that he can do it only under one condition: “I will do it because of you,” he said “but I do not want to have any deadlines or to feel any pressure while I am doing it. You know better than anyone else how much work I have and what are my obligations. So, I must have a total freedom of doing Tex pages only when I really can”. Sergio Bonelli was very happy when I told him that I convinced Kubert to do Tex, and he immediately agreed that Joe can do it in his own time and that there will be no pressure on him. But later on, when Joe’s work on Tex took longer time than anyone expected, I felt that there was certain unhappiness in Bonelli’s offices about it. In any case, “The Lonesome Rider” was the only Tex story that Kubert ever read, and he told me several times that he liked Nizzi’s script and that he really enjoyed doing it.

Q: At the beginning, there was the project of producing this book for the U.S. market. What was your role in the project?

ER: The project was entirely mine and was not made for the United States only – where this book has been published anyhow – but it was a project for the international market. SAF fully financed and produced coloring of all Kubert's pages of Tex, and Kubert did four extra covers for SAF, so that the color version could be published in four volumes. All in all, "The Lonesome Rider" has been published in the United States, France, Spain, Holland, Germany, Finland, Norway, Brazil, Turkey, Greece, India, Croatia and many other countries. A few publishers did it in black and white, some published it in four volumes in color, while in some countries it has been published in one big color volume.

Q: How does "Tex, the Lonesome Rider" place itself in the author's wide production?

ER: Joe Kubert produced many comics in his life, and this was not only the result of his very long professional career, but also because he was a very skillful and fast artist, as well as a hard worker. At the time when he was working on "Tarzan" he was drawing 6 pages a day in pencil and ink. When he was working on "Tex" he was somewhat older, so that he could only do 3-4 pages of "Tex" a day. I say "only", although I know that most of Tex artists would be jumping for joy if they could do 2 pages per day.

Just recently I was working with Jon B. Cooke, the editor of "Comic Book Creator," who has been preparing a special edition which will be a 160-page book of tribute to Joe Kubert. Jon had a serious problem in deciding what to include and what to skip from this book, because it was impossible to present Kubert's entire opus on 160 pages only, since the library of his work is so huge. Still, Jon himself (without my suggestion) decided that "Tex" is so important that it should take place in this book which will come out in the United States in July 2013. This, I believe, answers your question the best.

Q: Joe Kubert was one of the artists who received your faxes during the siege of Sarajevo. Thanks to the non-fiction book "Fax from Sarajevo," your personal story became the icon of that absurd war. When did he tell you that he wanted to turn your story into a graphic novel?

ER: Joe and his wife Muriel visited us in early spring 1994, only a few months after we came out from Sarajevo and settled in Slovenia. It was only then that Joe told me about his plan to do "Fax from Sarajevo". I was very much against it, because I didn't want to go again through everything that my family and myself

went through in the war in Sarajevo, but my long and friendly argument with Joe has been interrupted by my daughter Maja (she was 11 then), who told me: "Dad, this will be Joe's book, not yours!" Joe laughed, kissed Maja and very soon he started to work on the book.

Q: You have a long experience in your field, collaborating for many years with important comic publishers and authors. Would you tell us your thoughts on Tex? Namely, do you think that the character represents an obsolete type of hero, or do you think there is still space for that kind of adventures, considering the present age where it is difficult to believe in perfect heroes?

ER: Tex is a perfect hero for this new era when people, mostly living under stressful circumstances, try to find relaxing comic literature to read – opposite to unrealistic stories involving monsters, machines and all kinds of super heroes – the same way they're looking for a peaceful and isolate place to rest. When SAF was handling the international rights for Bonelli, we found many publishers for Tex – from Mythos in Brazil to Oglak in Turkey and Lion Comics in South India, who has been publishing Tex in Tamil language – and we had an ever growing list of clients for Tex. I have no knowledge of what was happening to Tex lately on the international level, but I would be surprised if the number of countries publishing Tex has not been doubled in the past three years since SAF is not representing Bonelli.



AUG, 2001
TO ERVIN
WITH GREAT
AFFECTION AND
RESPECT. YOU
ARE THE REASON
I GOT DONE
TEX

JOE

