

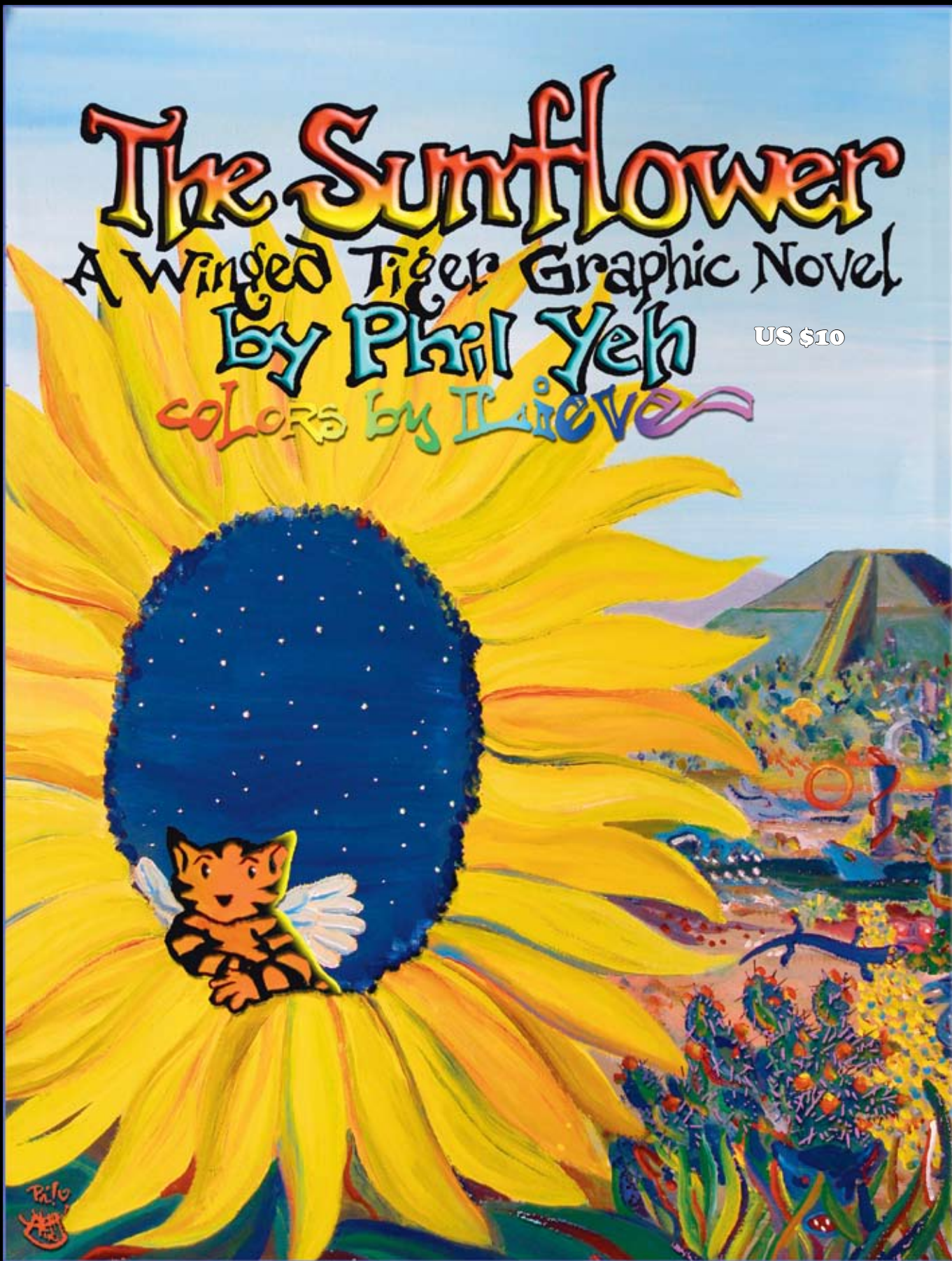
The Sunflower

A Winged Tiger Graphic Novel

by Phil Yeh

US \$10

colors by Iliev



Phil Yeh

Introduction to The Sunflower

"*The Winged Tiger* is a most imaginative concept and singular achievement. The employment of imagery as language is at the cusp of modern communication. It is the new literacy."

—Will Eisner, creator of *The Spirit*

"*The Winged Tiger* is a remarkable feat of human imagination. Phil Yeh's vision of a universal language is inspired and compelling. Highly recommended for readers of all nations."

—Scott McCloud, author of *Understanding Comics*

"Phil Yeh's *The Winged Tiger* is an exhilarating tour de force of wordless invention."

—Howard Cruse, author/artist of *Stuck Rubber Baby*

Praise for my 1993 wordless graphic novel *The Winged Tiger* came in from around the world (before *Facebook* existed!) and one would have thought I would immediately start a second wordless graphic novel. It took me months to create *The Winged Tiger* and having Mr. Eisner, The Father of the Graphic Novel; and Scott McCloud, who wrote and illustrated *Understanding Comics*; and many others say such kind things about the book immediately made me want to go into a different direction. *The Winged Tiger* featured wordless introductions by Jean Giraud aka Moebius and *Elfquest* creator Wendy Pini. It tried to tell a complex story including some serious issues, all without words. I wanted to see if we could do something that might reach the whole world since I was in the 8th year of my *Cartoonists Across America & the World* campaign promoting literacy. If I were to try and create another wordless graphic novel after *The Winged Tiger*, I knew that it had to be easier to understand and in full color.

In 1996, I picked up my brushes and created an oil painting for the cover of another wordless graphic novel. I drew five fast pages of the story and then put them aside. Another decade of my world tour and many more books passed before I picked up *The Sunflower* again. The 21st century brought about many changes for the traditional way that books were sold and produced (especially in the United States) and with all the access to information on the computer etc., I found that many people didn't really know the history of the American graphic novel or the important ways that all graphic novels could tell stories for a global audience.

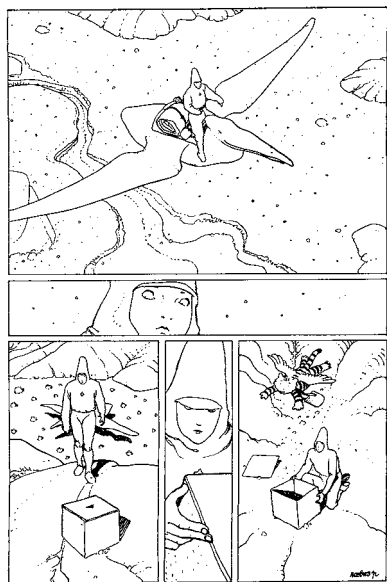
In 2005, I started a new tour of schools, libraries, and conferences to better explain what we had in mind when the modern American graphic novel was created in Long Beach, California in the mid-1970s. The term "Graphic Novel" itself was coined by my old friend Richard Kyle in the 1960s. Richard is a special guest at the San Diego Comic-Con in July 2011 and I am really glad that in his 80s, he is finally getting recognition for his idea and his publishing work. Richard also owned one of the best comic and science fiction bookstores in the country for many years in downtown Long Beach. I met him in 1972 when I started college at Cal State University Long Beach. Richard shared my passion for intelligent storytelling in comics and always had something to say about the world of comics, science fiction, and fantasy. In the fall of 1973, my partner Mark Eliot and I started our own free alternative newspaper called *Uncle Jam*. I continued to publish *Uncle Jam* in California until 1990 when my global travels made it impossible.

Uncle Jam covered Health, Books, The Arts and Travel and each year for our San Diego Comic-Con edition we focused on the people who wrote and drew comics and science fiction. Our aim was to expand the audience for these fields and help our friend Shel Dorf, founder of Comic-Con, and others who sold and created comics to find a bigger audience. It was our belief that comics could in fact reach a much wider audience. It's sometimes hard for younger fans to understand that when I attended the first Comic-Con in 1970 as a teenager, there were about 300 fans and only a few guests. It was meeting both Ray Bradbury and Jack Kirby at that first convention that gave me the courage to start my own publishing company that same year and make publishing and art my lifelong career. In 2009, we decided to bring *Uncle Jam* back as a quarterly magazine with Ray Bradbury as our first exclusive interview.

In 2011, almost 150,000 fans now attend Comic-Con and most people have heard the term graphic novel. Sadly, most Americans still do not really understand what a graphic novel is and that the potential for this great medium is to tell stories covering all subjects for all ages and all cultures. I have always believed that graphic novels could deal with very serious subjects for a wider audience and we see that confirmed with the success of Bryan Talbot's *One Bad Rat*, Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor*, Craig Thompson's *Blankets*, Gene Yang's *American Born Chinese* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. I was invited to speak at Art's class at the School

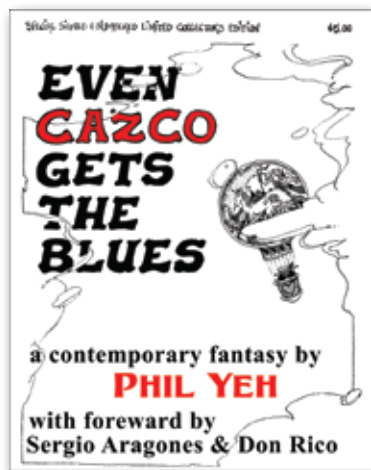


Moebius and Phil in Paris, 1995.



©2001 Moebius

of Visual Arts in the early 1980s and spoke about the graphic novel to his class and to Art afterwards about his comic book *Maus*. I have always believed that, if we want our art form to be taken seriously, we should package our stories as complete books. I don't believe that collecting random issues of *Batman* or *The X-Men* makes a graphic novel. Superhero comics in my mind can only be considered a graphic novel when they have that beginning, middle and end and can be picked up and read by a reader who has no previous knowledge of the title.



In late 1976, Richard Kyle co-published a collection of George Metzger's *Space, Time and Beyond* comic strips in a hardcover collection as a graphic novel. A few months later in the summer of 1977, I published *Even Cazco Gets the Blues* in Long Beach. I should mention that I started writing and drawing this book almost a year before and wanted to make something completely different from all standard American comic books up until that time. My old friend Sergio Aragonés agreed to draw an introduction for this *Cazco* book and asked his friend Don Rico to write an actual introduction. Don was way over the top in his praise for a book created by a young man in his twenties, but their kindness helped me get the book into stores.

I believed that a graphic novel had to be just like a novel in that you could read one book and understand and enjoy the complete story. I saw these books with better production values, higher price tags and the names of the creators in big type on the cover. I also dreamed about graphic novels being sold in mainstream bookstores and being included in libraries. All of these things seemed impossible in 1977. That same year Terry Nantier and NBM

introduced their own graphic novels translated into English from European material. Europe was many years ahead of us in creating better books in the comic book field. We also used *Uncle Jam* and our 50,000 readers to spread the word about the potential of the graphic novel that same year. Soon, there were many other graphic novels and a year later, Will Eisner saw his *A Contract with God* published as "the first" American graphic novel earning Will the title "Father of the Graphic Novel". Slowly the New York-based media began to create their own history of what happened in our field and all that we created in California faded from the actual facts, which is too often the case with history in this country.

I admired and liked Will Eisner and the term "Father of the Graphic Novel" never bothered me. What bothered me was how some people in the comic book industry told their own self-serving stories about the origins of the graphic novel as the truth, never giving credit to what Richard Kyle and I did in Long Beach. In 2005, as I traveled around the United States on the 20th year of my *Cartoonists Across America & the World* tour, the press started using the term "Godfather of the American Graphic Novel". When I spoke at the Newark Museum in the fall of 2006 for the Masters of American Comics exhibition, *The New York Times* printed this:

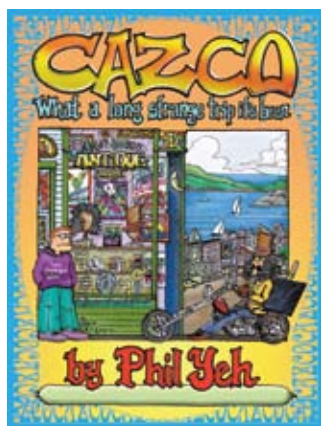
"Mr. Yeh, often called the godfather of the American graphic novel, will walk kids through the stages of creating a graphic novel," said Linda Nettleton, assistant director of education at the museum."

Since that event, I decided I had better finish some of the graphic novels I have long thought about and set aside. *The Sunflower* is one of those projects. We published a first chapter of 29 pages in 2009 and now for the summer of 2011, we present the rest of the story in a new 43 page complete story without any words. This book could not exist without the fantastic coloring of my longtime artistic partner Lieve Jerger. Lieve and I are currently working on a new expanded edition of our 1998 book, *The Winged Tiger & the Lace Princess* for the summer of 2011.



Phil Yeh and Lieve Jerger at the Cobblestone Gallery in Long Beach, CA, circa 1977.

I am also working on a 300+ page *Cazco* graphic novel called *Cazco; What a Long Strange Trip It's Been* for the fall of 2012, marking the 40th anniversary of my character appearing in the Cal State University Long Beach newspaper. This *Cazco* story is a fictional account of my own journey for over 40 years. It takes place around the world and is not a book for young kids, which many people associate my work with, because of our *Cartoonists Across America & the World* literacy campaign. At the 40th anniversary of the San Diego Comic-Con I was a special guest and was honored to receive an Inkpot Award designed by my friend Rick Geary for my work in the comic art field. This summer, Richard Kyle is a special guest at the Comic-Con and I am thrilled that after all these years he is finally getting the recognition he richly deserves. If Will is the father of the graphic novel and I am the godfather, then we must give Richard a cool new title. If I were on twitter (not really sure what it is) and owned a cell phone, I am sure the fans could give me some great ideas. But then I live in the 17th century and draw my comics with a dip pen and a bottle of ink.



Coming in the fall of 2012.

—Phil Yeh, Running Springs, California, March 28, 2011.

OTHER BOOKS BY PHIL YEH

Cazco. 1976

Jam, with Don De Contreras, Roberta Gregory and friends. 1977

Even Cazco Gets The Blues. 1977

Ajaneh. 1978

Godiva. 1979

Cazco in China. 1980

The Adventures of a Modern Day Unicorn, starring Frank The Unicorn. 1981

Frank on the Farm, illustrated introduction by Sergio Aragonés. 1982

Mr. Frank Goes to Washington, D.C. 1984

Frank & Syd on the Brooklyn Bridge, with Dennis Niedbala. 1986

Frank in England. 1987

The Penguin is Mightier Than the Swordfish, with Leigh Rubin. 1987

Frank the Unicorn Comic Book Series. Since 1988

Theo The Dinosaur. 1991

Dinosaurs Across America Comic Book Series. Since 1991

The Winged Tiger Graphic Novel, illustrated introductions by Jean "Moebius" Giraud and Wendy Pini. 1993

Voyage to Veggje Isle. 1993

The Winged Tiger World Peace Party Puzzle Book. 1997

The Winged Tiger and The Lace Princess, with Lieve Jerger. 1998

The Winged Tiger Comic Book Series. Since 1998

The Winged Tiger & The Dragons of Hawaii with Jon J. Murakami. 2004

Dinosaurs Across America. Colored by Lieve Jerger. From NBM Publishers. 2007

& Revised edition in 2008 which won Children's Choice Award for 2008

Cazco; What a Long Strange Trip It's Been. Preview edition colored by Lieve Jerger. 2007

Full length graphic novel for the Fall 2012.

The Sunflower, a Winged Tiger wordless story. Preview edition. Colors by Lieve Jerger. 2009

The Winged Tiger in China. Colors by Lieve Jerger. 2010

Steve The Dog And The Winged Tiger by Geoff Bevington and Phil Yeh. Colors by Lieve Jerger. 2010

The Winged Tiger in Singapore by Phil Yeh, He Shuxin & Geoff Bevington. Colors by Lieve Jerger. 2010

The Winged Tiger & The Lace Princess new expanded edition with Lieve Jerger. 2011

ISBN 0-9755635-5-6

The Sunflower. Spring 2011. Published as a special limited edition by Eastwind Studios. Linda Adams co-publisher.

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