

Johan and Peewit, « *The Smurfs and the Magic Flute* » Peyo, 1958

Alongside Tintin, the Smurfs are the most important figures of Belgian comic strips. Their global celebrity is due to some 300 medium-length cartoon films directed by Hannah-Barbara in California between 1981 and 1990. Since then, the Smurfs were unrivalled. However, the invention of their universe and their unparalleled success for a person born in Europe, are indeed Belgian.

Originally, the Smurfs were secondary characters of another of Peyo's series, Johan and Peewit. Living in an enchanted Middle-Ages, the adventures of this duo were published in 1952 in the weekly Spirou and it was especially Peewit who quickly won the heart of readers with his whims and jokes.

In the ninth album entitled "The Magic Flute" and later renamed "The Smurfs and the Magic Flute", a flute, which seems to have magical powers, accidentally falls into Peewit's hands: when he plays it, those who listen begin to dance vigorously and faint from exhaustion. The flute is stolen by Torchisac, a crook who wants to use it to get rich. Attempting to recover the flute, Johan and Peewit try to find the creators of the instrument. Hypnotised by Homnibus the magician, they arrive in the Land of Smurfs.

It is these little beings who have made the flute and they promise to create a second instrument to make Torchisac harmless. This strip represents the Smurfs bringing the new flute to Johan and Peewit. The Smurfs are numerous and the Stork, their favourite means of transport, is also present.

Although we know very soon in the story that the magic flute is probably related to small creatures hiding in thickets throughout the album, the Smurfs only appear at the end. The story is 60 pages long, but there are only 15 where you can see one or more Smurfs. Nevertheless, young readers learn enough about the little blue beings who capture their hearts: the Smurf language in particular has much of success.

While Peyo simply wished to continue the adventures of Johan and Peewit, there was a hue and cry for new Smurf stories and he finally had to abandon the original series. Peyo took this decision reluctantly: Johan and Peewit remained his favourite series.

The genius of Peyo, exceptional storyteller and perfectionist designer, make his original strips count, alongside those of Hergé and Franquin, among the most popular on the market for comics. This particular strip demonstrates the birth of a phenomenon that would conquer the world.

