

= Fritz the Cat =

Fritz the Cat is a comic strip created by Robert Crumb . Set in a " supercity " of anthropomorphic animals , the strip focuses on Fritz , a feline con artist who frequently goes on wild adventures that sometimes involve sexual escapades . Crumb began drawing this character in homemade comic books when he was a child . Fritz became one of his most famous characters , thanks largely to the motion picture adaptation by Ralph Bakshi .

The strip appeared in Help ! and Cavalier magazines . It subsequently gained prominence in publications associated with the underground comix scene between 1965 and 1972 . Fritz the Cat comic compilations elevated the strip into one of the most iconic features of the underground scene .

The strip received further attention when it was adapted into a 1972 animated film with the same name . The directorial debut of animator Bakshi , it became a worldwide success . It was the first animated feature film to receive an X rating in the United States and the most successful independent animated feature to date .

Crumb ended the strip in 1972 due to disagreements with the filmmakers . He published a story in which Fritz was murdered by an ex @-@ girlfriend . A second animated film , The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat , was produced in 1974 without the involvement of either Bakshi or Crumb .

= = Overview = =

Fritz the Cat was created in 1959 by Robert Crumb in a homemade comic book story called " Cat Life " , based on the experiences of Fred , the family cat . The character 's next appearance was in a 1960 story entitled " Robin Hood " . By this point , the cat had become anthropomorphic and had been renamed Fritz , a name derived from a minor unrelated character who appeared briefly in " Cat Life " . Fritz appeared in the early 1960s Animal Town strips drawn by Charles and Robert Crumb . Sometimes Fritz was accompanied by Fuzzy the Bunny , who served as an alter ego for Charles , his creator .

Fritz the Cat is set in a " modern ' supercity ' of millions of animals . " Stories begin simply and become increasingly chaotic and complex as the narrative responds to uncontrollable forces . The look of Fritz the Cat comics was characterized by the use of the Rapidograph technical pen and a simple drawing style Robert Crumb used to facilitate his story telling . Crumb states that much of the comic books he enjoyed as a child were funny animal comics , particularly those of Carl Barks . Crumb was later influenced by Walt Kelly 's daily anthropomorphic funny animal comic strip Pogo ; Crumb did not copy Kelly 's comics directly , but states that he imitated his drawing style closely ; Crumb admired Kelly 's storytelling style , which " seemed [to be] plotless and casually done . The characters talked to each other and nothing much happened . Just a lot of foolishness takes place " . Robert Crumb stated of his anthropomorphic work :

I can express something [with animals] that is different from what I put into my work about humans ... I can put more nonsense , more satire and fantasy into the animals ... they 're also easier to do than people ... With people I try more for realism , which is probably why I 'm generally better with animals .

In 1964 , when he was not working at American Greetings , Crumb drew many Fritz the Cat strips for his own amusement . Some of these strips would later be published in Help ! and Cavalier magazines and in the underground comix . Fritz also appears briefly in Crumb 's graphic novel Big Yum Yum Book : The Story of Oggie and the Beanstalk , drawn in 1964 , but not published until 1975 . Several characters from the anthropomorphic universe of Fritz the Cat appeared in another Crumb comic strip , The Silly Pigeons , drawn in 1965 and intended for Help ! In 1970 , Crumb redrew an early Fuzzy the Bunny story written by Charles Crumb in 1952 ; it was published in Zap Comix # 5 .

= = Characters = =

Marty Pahls , Crumb 's childhood friend , describes Fritz as " a poseur " , whose posturing was taken seriously by everyone around him . Fritz is self @-@ centered and hedonistic , lacking both morals and ethics . Thomas Albright describes Fritz as " a kind of updated Felix with overtones of Charlie Chaplin , Candide , and Don Quixote . " Fritz had a " glib , smooth and self @-@ assured " personality , characteristics Crumb felt he was lacking in . According to Pahls , " To a great extent , Fritz was his wish @-@ fulfillment ... [the character allowed Robert to] do great deeds , have wild adventures , and undergo a variety of sex experiences , which he himself felt he couldn 't . Fritz was bold , poised , had a way with the ladies ? all attributes which Robert coveted , but felt he lacked . "

Crumb denied any personal attachment to the character , stating , " I just got into drawing him ... He was fun to draw . " As Crumb 's personal life changed , Fritz would too . According to Pahls , " For years , [Crumb] had few friends and no sex life ; he was forced to spend many hours at school or on the job , and when he came home he ' escaped ' by drawing home @-@ made comics . When he suddenly found a group of friends that would accept him for himself , as he did in Cleveland in 1964 , the ' compensation ' factor went out of his drawing , and this was pretty much the end of Fritz 's impetus . "

An early untitled 10 @-@ page story , drawn in 1964 and released in 1969 as part of R. Crumb 's Comics and Stories , depicts Fritz as a beatnik caricature who has an incestuous tryst with his sister . In " Fred , the Teen @-@ Age Girl Pigeon , " Fritz is portrayed as a pop music star . The strips " Fritz the Cat " and " Fritz Bugs Out " portray him as a hip poet and college dropout in the hippie scene . " Fritz Bugs Out " uses anthropomorphic characters to comment on race relations , with crows representing African Americans . Fritz is portrayed as a self @-@ conscious hypocrite , obsessed with his racism and associated guilt , while crows are portrayed as " hip innocents " . " Fritz the Cat , Secret Agent for the C.I.A. , " inspired by the popularity of the James Bond series , portrays Fritz as a member of the Central Intelligence Agency . " Fritz the No @-@ Good " depicts Fritz becoming involved with terrorist revolutionaries ; he also abuses and rapes one of the group member 's girlfriends .

Fritz has an on @-@ again / off @-@ again relationship with a female fox named Winston , they break up at the beginning of " Fritz Bugs Out " . Later in the story , she attempts to convince him not to " bug out " , but eventually agrees to go on a road trip with him . When her car runs out of gas in the desert , Fritz abandons her . Winston is also a character featured in the 1972 film , as is this storyline ? Fritz 's Volkswagen Beetle dodging big rig trucks on the highway in the middle of the night and later running out of gas in the middle of nowhere . She reappears in " Fritz the Cat Doubts His Masculinity " and in " Fritz the No @-@ Good " , where the two reunite after Fritz is thrown out of his wife 's apartment . Fuzzy the Bunny , who appeared in the early Animal Town strips , reappears as a college student in " Fritz Bugs Out " and as a revolutionary in " Fritz the No @-@ Good " .

= = Publication history = =

Help ! , a magazine published by former Mad editor Harvey Kurtzman , published two stories featuring Fritz , including the character 's first public appearance in January 1965 , " Fritz Comes on Strong " . In this debut story , Fritz brings a young female cat home and strips all her clothes off before getting on top of her to pick fleas off of her . Preceding the publication of the story , Kurtzman sent Crumb a letter which read , " Dear R. Crumb , we think the little pussycat drawings you sent us were just great . Question is , how do we print them without going to jail ? "

Although Kurtzman agreed to publish the story , he requested that Crumb alter the final two panels ; the published version depicted Fritz standing next to her . Crumb later recalled that the original ending " wasn 't that dirty ... only slightly risque by today 's standards " . In May 1965 , Help ! published a second Fritz story , " Fred , the Teen @-@ Age Girl Pigeon " . In this episode Fritz is a guitar @-@ playing pop idol and he brings Fred , a female pigeon groupie , to his hotel room and proceeds to eat her . John Canaday 's New York magazine review of Head Comix describes this punch line as " outrageous brilliance [that] is rivaled only by Evelyn Waugh 's last lines in The Loved One . "

" Fritz Bugs Out " was serialized in Cavalier from February to October 1968 . In the summer of 1968

, Fritz the Cat strips appeared in the Viking Press compilation titled Head Comix , which focused exclusively on Crumb 's material . In 1969 , Ballantine Books paid Crumb a \$ 5 @, @ 000 advance for the publication rights to a compilation of three stories featuring Fritz . Crumb used the money to purchase a three @-@ acre lot . Crumb abandoned the character that year , but previously unpublished stories appeared in Promethean No. 3 & 4 in 1971 and Artistic in 1973 . " Fritz the Cat ' Superstar ' " was the last new story released ; it was published in The People 's Comics in 1972 .

In 1978 , Béliar Press published The Complete Fritz the Cat , which brought together all the published stories featuring Fritz , as well as previously unpublished drawings and unfinished comics . At the artist 's request , a 10 @-@ page story drawn in 1964 and previously published in R. Crumb 's Comics and Stories in 1969 was excluded from this collection . In April 1993 , Fantagraphics Books published The Life & Death of Fritz the Cat , compiling nine major strips , including the 1964 story previously excluded from The Complete Fritz the Cat . Fritz the Cat strips also appear in The Complete Crumb Comics series . An unpublished page featuring Fritz that had been intended for Help ! , as well as comics featuring other characters related to the anthropomorphic universe of Fritz the Cat , appeared in The R. Crumb Coffee Table Art Book in 1998 .

= = Cultural impact = =

Following the publication of the compilations Head Comix and R. Crumb 's Fritz the Cat , Crumb received increased attention and Fritz the Cat became one of the most familiar features on the underground comix scene and Crumb 's most famous creation . These stories served as the basis for a pair of film adaptations produced by Steve Krantz , Fritz the Cat 1972 , directed by Ralph Bakshi , and The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat 1974 , directed by Robert Taylor . According to Dez Skinn , author of Comix : The Underground Revolution , the strip served as an inspiration for Omaha the Cat Dancer . In Graphic Novels : A Bibliographic Guide to Book @-@ Length Comics , D. Aviva Rothschild criticized the stories printed in the collection The Life & Death of Fritz the Cat as being misogynist , racist , and violent . He felt that , " They also tend to ramble , as if Crumb were making them up as he went along . " Rothschild concluded that , " Even though Fritz the Cat is a classic , there are better , more coherent Crumb books around . " The 1972 film adaptation of Fritz the Cat was ranked 51st on the Online Film Critics Society 's list of the top 100 greatest animated films of all time and 56th on Channel 4 's list of the 100 Greatest Cartoons .

= = = Animated adaptations = = =

In 1969 , New York animator Ralph Bakshi came across a copy of R. Crumb 's Fritz the Cat and suggested to producer Steve Krantz that it would work as a film . After meeting with Bakshi , Crumb loaned him one of his sketchbooks as a reference , but was unsure of the film 's production and refused to sign the contract . Bakshi and Crumb were unable to reach an agreement after two weeks of negotiations but Krantz secured the film rights from Crumb 's wife , Dana , who had a power of attorney . Crumb received \$ 50 @, @ 000 , distributed over the course of production and ten percent of Krantz 's proceeds .

Fritz the Cat was the first animated feature film to receive an X rating from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) . The film 's distributor capitalized on the rating in the film 's advertising material , which touted the film as being " X rated and animated ! " Released on 12 April 1972 , it opened simultaneously in Hollywood and Washington , D.C. The film went on to become a worldwide hit , grossing over \$ 100 million (USD) and was the most successful independent animated feature ever . The film is credited with extending Crumb 's reputation beyond the underground comix scene . Crumb disliked how the film presented the sexual content and politics , denouncing Fritz 's dialogue in the final sequences of the film , which includes a quote from The Beatles song " The End " , as " red @-@ neck and fascistic " . Following the film 's release , The People 's Comics published the story " Fritz the Cat ' Superstar ' " , in which Crumb satirized Bakshi and Krantz . Crumb portrayed Fritz in a script conference for a fictional sequel Fritz Goes to India . The strip ends with a neurotic ex @-@ girlfriend killing Fritz . She stabs him in the back of the head

with an ice pick due to Fritz 's overt sexism .

After the film 's release , the American humor magazine The National Lampoon ran a story written by mordant humorist Michael O 'Donoghue and drawn in a parody of Crumb 's style called " Fritz the Star in ' Kitty Glitter ' " portraying the Fritz character as a jaded and complacent Hollywood star going through all the motions of celebrities of the day , going on talk shows and mouthing vaguely liberal platitudes before cynically guiding the conversation over to promotion of whatever his next movie would be . The strip ends with a nightmarish full @-@ page vista of " Crumbland " where all of Crumb 's countercultural icons have been turned into commercial commodities . In 1974 , Krantz produced the sequel The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat , without any participation from Bakshi or Crumb .