



Jaime (left) and Gilbert Hernandez and friends Hopey and Maggie

Comic Twist

THE HERNANDEZ BROTHERS RESURRECT THEIR MULTICULTURAL CARTOON STRIP *LOVE & ROCKETS*

IN 1987, OXNARD NATIVES JAIME AND GILBERT HERNANDEZ WERE HARD at work on the latest issue of *Love & Rockets*, an underground comic book about the residents of a Southern California barrio and a mythical South American village. Although *Rolling Stone* had given the series the somewhat dubious title of “American fiction’s best-kept secret,” it had already amassed a decent following, with legendary cartoonists like R. Crumb and France’s Moebius singing its praises. So the brothers were more than a little surprised when they discovered that former members of British Goth group Bauhaus, angling for a new band moniker, had swiped their name—without so much as a courtesy call to the book’s creators. “It wouldn’t have irked us so much if we thought their music was any good,” says Gilbert.

In the end, *Love & Rockets*—the comic—would get the last laugh, outlasting the band and gaining critical attention unheard of in the much maligned medium of funny books. By the time the strip ended its 15-year run in 1996, the series had received accolades in *The Washington Post* and *The Village Voice* and was being taught in major universities, while writers like British novelist Angela Carter were comparing it to the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez. Not bad for a couple of self-described lazy punk rockers from Oxnard.

Next month, the brothers will relaunch their award-winning comic after a five-year hiatus. The return may have been prompted by persistent begging from their fans and publisher, along with reports from comics retailers (Meltdown on Sunset, for example, and Golden Apple on Melrose) that fans were still coming in asking if they had the latest issue. And then there’s the money. Rumors that they were painting their publisher’s house to make ends meet were untrue, but it is true that few people get rich

LABUZZ
books

writing comic books, especially dramatic serials like *Love & Rockets* that largely eschew the standard men-in-tights superhero format. “It’s never really made us a great living,” says Gilbert. “We just do comics because we’d go nuts if we didn’t.”

For the first issue, Jaime will bring back Maggie Chascarrillo, a Chicana mechanic whose on-again, off-again love affair with a lesbian Colombian Scottish bass player named Hopey was one of the most popular story lines of the original series. Gilbert, who writes

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and illustrates his own section of the book, will start with all-new characters, abandoning the complex world (two continents, eight decades, and about 75 characters) he created in the first 50 installments of *Love & Rockets*.

What won’t change is the multicultural scope. The brothers grew up in the racial hodgepodge that is rural Oxnard, and their stories reflect that background, with Asian slackers and Latino movie idols coexisting alongside African American intergalactic crime fighters. Although this willy-nilly racial mixing goes against the grain of the comics medium—one would be hard-pressed to name a Latino superhero, let alone a Latino resident of, say, Gotham City or Metropolis—the brothers wouldn’t have it any other way. “If I lose fans because Maggie is Mexican,” says Jaime, “we’re in the wrong business.” —R.I.