

Lawrence "Rawdog" Hubbard / 50 Years of Devo / Outsider Paleontology / Remembering Joe Matt

# BROKEN PENCIL

ISSUE  
**100**

THE MAGAZINE  
OF ZINE CULTURE  
AND THE  
INDEPENDENT  
ARTS

## The Generations Issue

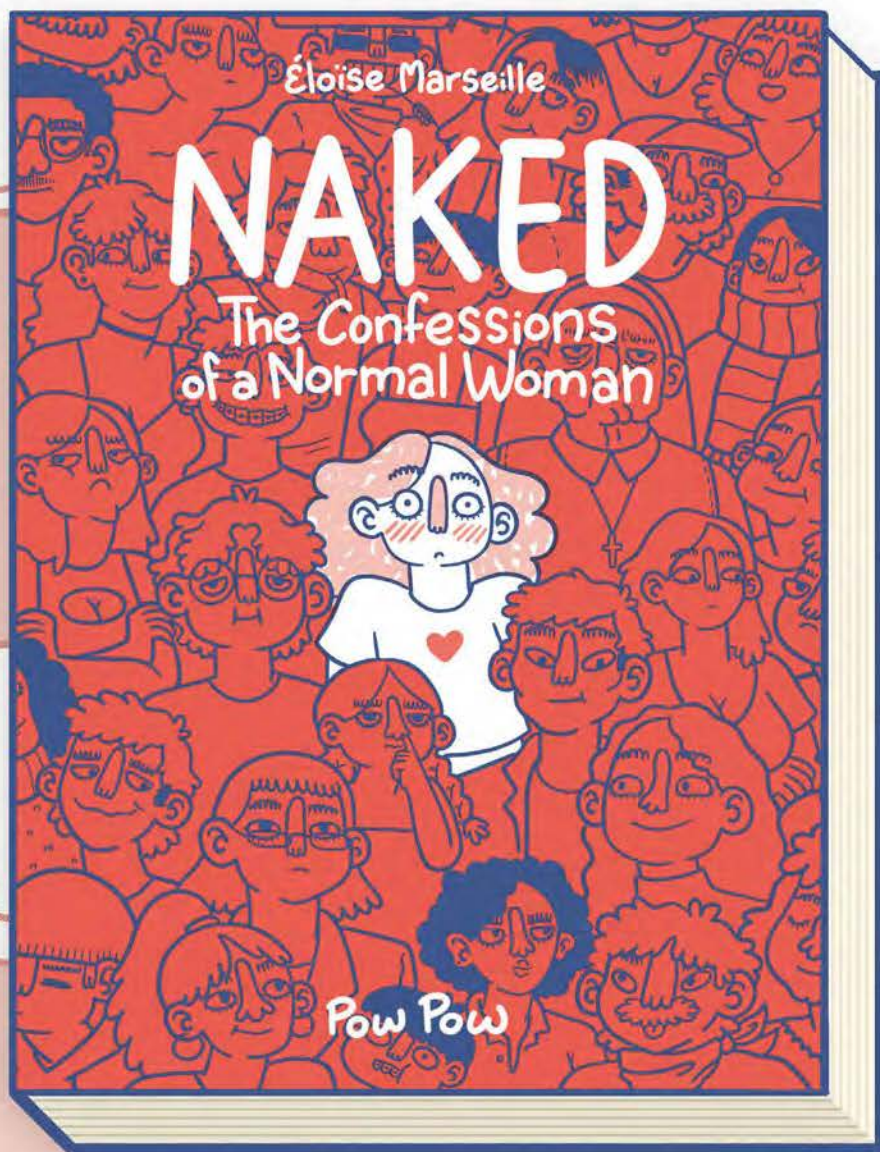


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# Broken Pencil

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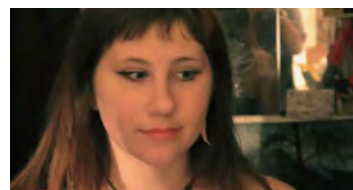
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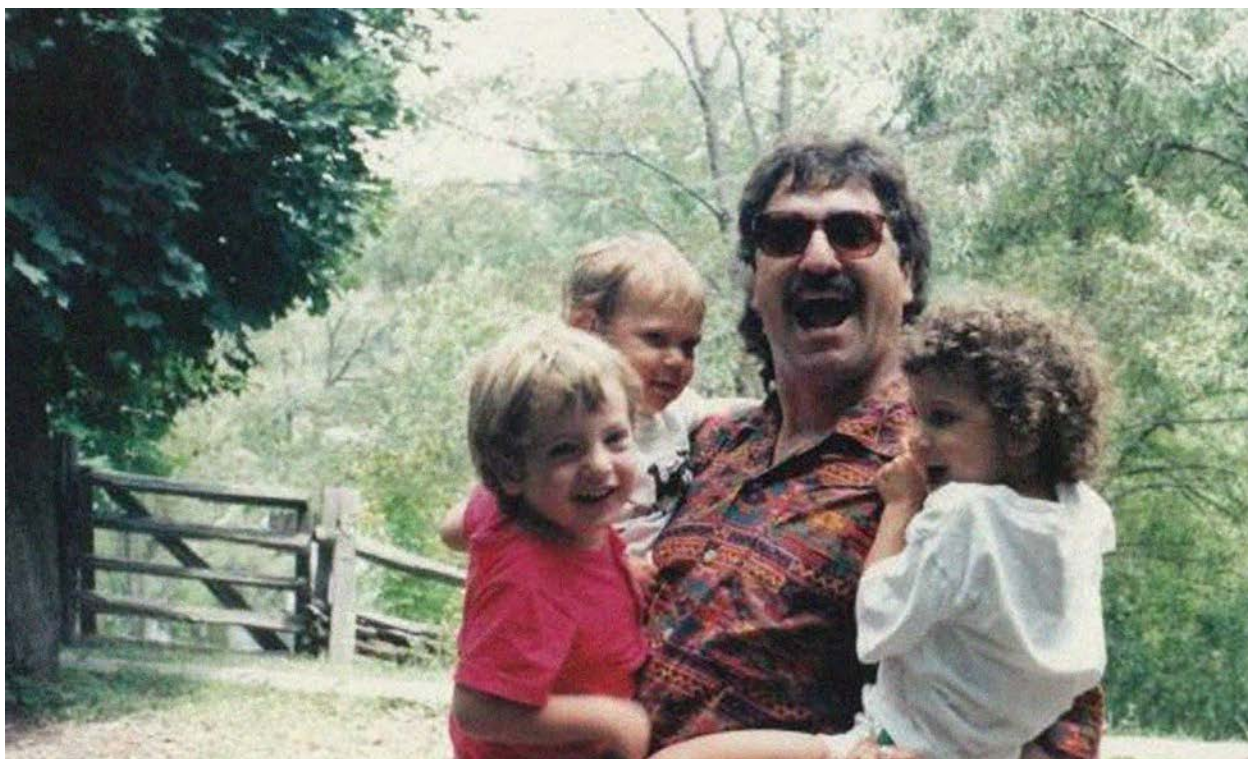
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**FAMILY. FRIENDS. MENTORS.** This may be a generational phenomenon shuffled to the dustbins of time, but it seemed like a lot of seniority figures in my life were eager to introduce me to *MAD Magazine* compared to, say, teaching me how to fish. My father used grocery store cash out copies to buffer out the eight days of Hanukkah gifts. My uncle brought an anthology along for a long drive, reprints from the original Kurtzman run from the 50s, before Alfred E. Neuman's introduction and still dripping in *Tales from the Crypt* sleaze (EC Comics' other infamous funnybook). A camp counsellor who shared in my Weird Al love cheered me up with a still-dated-but-less-dated collection that riffed on M\*A\*S\*H\* ('M\*U\*S\*H\*').

It is, I suppose, a prong of one of those core human experiences. The passing along of art, of knowledge, from an elder to those in their tutelage. Whether it be Socratic ponderings or the cartoon doodles of Sergio Aragones within the margins of an Austin Powers parody (itself a parody of James Bond). We do not want to merely foster a history of sciences and survivalism, because those alone do not reflect the world as we recommend it. We want to document and distribute a world we are driven to share.

This is the 100th issue of Broken Pencil Magazine, itself an ongoing chronology of zines, comix and self-published strangeness. It was a record of rare and uncanny art when it began in 1995, it continues to be a record of such things in an era where any artistic records become rarer and more valuable. I believe that the more hostile things become for the preservation of alternative voices, the more steadfast people will become to immortalize it. Digital platforms have interrupted the general tradition of passing along literature, but those platforms do not seem built to

outlast the printed page. Where things go after their collapse is hard to wager, but there's certainly preferred outcomes.

For this special issue of Broken Pencil we have decided to focus on this tradition. Zines as an exercise in passing culture along through generations, creating in these very pages a timeline of zine scenes, leaflet movements and underground cultures that stretch from the 2000s to prehistory.

We speak with paleoartists, outsider enthusiasts and illustrators who have shaped the popular conception of the early eras of our planet. We examine the largest Anarchy movement in history, and how zines had become its foundation. We profile Michael Novick, whose street action zines echoed for decades. From maritimes feminism to 90s hardcore scenes, from dadaist Devo-tees to the Speilbergs of the Boston suburbs, we look at underground art movements in crystal clarity. Our zine reviewers are reflecting on their all-time favourites.. And yes, we also hear from poet Daniel Scott Tysdal about *MAD Magazine*, and the deeper gospels of Al Jaffee's fold-ins.

Our cover feature is a visit with the Lim family, a Singapore household who have turned their own family tree into an ongoing zine. Manifesting memories, vacations and the gum wad of life into *Rubbish FAMzine*, a fascinating collection of art and writing. What does it mean to preserve your collective memories into an art piece, and how does the family feels about their project as the kids leave the nest?

Zines can be about important things. Zines can be irreverent. Zines can be so personally expressive that they are alienating to any other pair of eyeballs. They are all important. Even the trash. Especially the trash. They are all wholly encompassing records of our strange world, which is not strictly experienced on a need-to-know basis. Our brains have all accumulated an Alexandria's worth of useless information, but that is a cherished wealth to us all, and there should not be a shame to this now shared fact of life.

May you live 100 years to experience all the strange splendour of art, comix and counterculture. May you understand all the jokes in an issue of *MAD Magazine*. **bp**

# PALEONTOLOGY FOR EVERYBODY

*The Outsider Scientists Redrawing the Dinosaur*

BY EVAN WRIGHT

I'VE ALWAYS loved dinosaurs. I managed to impress my aunts by being able to say 'pterodactyl' before the age of two, and I distinctly remember my mother using dinosaur books to help me learn to read. Deinonychus and quetzalcoatlus required a lot of practice, but after those everything else was a breeze.

For those like me who still harbour a not-so-secret love of the prehistoric age when the oversized reptile ruled the roost, meet the grown-ups keeping the dream alive. Mike Fredericks, Rudolf Hima and their universe of fellow dino-enthusiasts, draw dinos and their environs for fun. They call it 'paleoart' and it is awesome.

The Paleoart community is a collection of mostly amateurs, though the occasional PhD type has been known to weigh in. They are basically people and collaborators who guesstimate and illustrate what these ancient reptiles might have looked like.

All this might sound distinctly unscientific, but paleo-artists are, in fact, operating in a long, proud tradition. In a lot of ways, the way we perceive dinosaurs is dependent on paleoartists. Since the first fossils were named in the late 1800s, there has been paleoart. You might even consider the quasi-scientific practice one of the longest ever underground art communities.

Though the genre may have languished somewhat when boring old, accredited science took over, indie paleoart is on the comeback trail. Witness the success of its current centerpiece, *Prehistoric Times*. Edited by the enthusiastic Mike Fredericks, *Prehistoric Times* celebrates everything dino, especially amateur finds and paleoartists.

"Paleontology has certainly grown with all the many new discoveries and theories that have come about in recent decades," says Frederick. "*Prehistoric Times* is never hurting for paleo news to report."

An exuberant mix of toy reviews, new discoveries, and interviews with scientists, the core of the zine is pages and pages of paleoart – full on saurian glory!

One of the regular contributors to the magazine is Rudolf Hima, a skilled artist with a great eye for detail. His pieces can be best described as photogenic, with vibrant colours and a strong feeling of scale. He also has a lot of knowledge about how paleoart changed in the last decade.

"There was a strong urge to avoid 'shrink-wrapping' and applying non-scale integument (skin and feathers) to a lot of dinosaurs," says Hima. "Artists like Joschua Knüppe and Hodari Nundu among others were exploring seldom seen behavior to depict other than just roaring and chasing or being chased."

Hima also mentioned being partly inspired by one of the early paleoartists, Charles R. Knight, essentially the Tolkien of paleoart. Starting out as a hobbyist in 2016, Hima describes his path towards paleoart as naturally extending from his lifelong interest in dinosaurs.

"While I have always liked dinosaurs since I was a kid, my paleoart endeavor actually started after I joined a Discord server for a game called 'Saurian,'" says Hima. "Just because we draw animals, it doesn't mean you have to consume wildlife documentaries all the time. I love looking at big ships to get that sense of scale to depict a sauropod. Watch action films and get inspired on how to frame my painting as dynamic as possible and to get that cinematic look. It can come from anywhere." **BP**

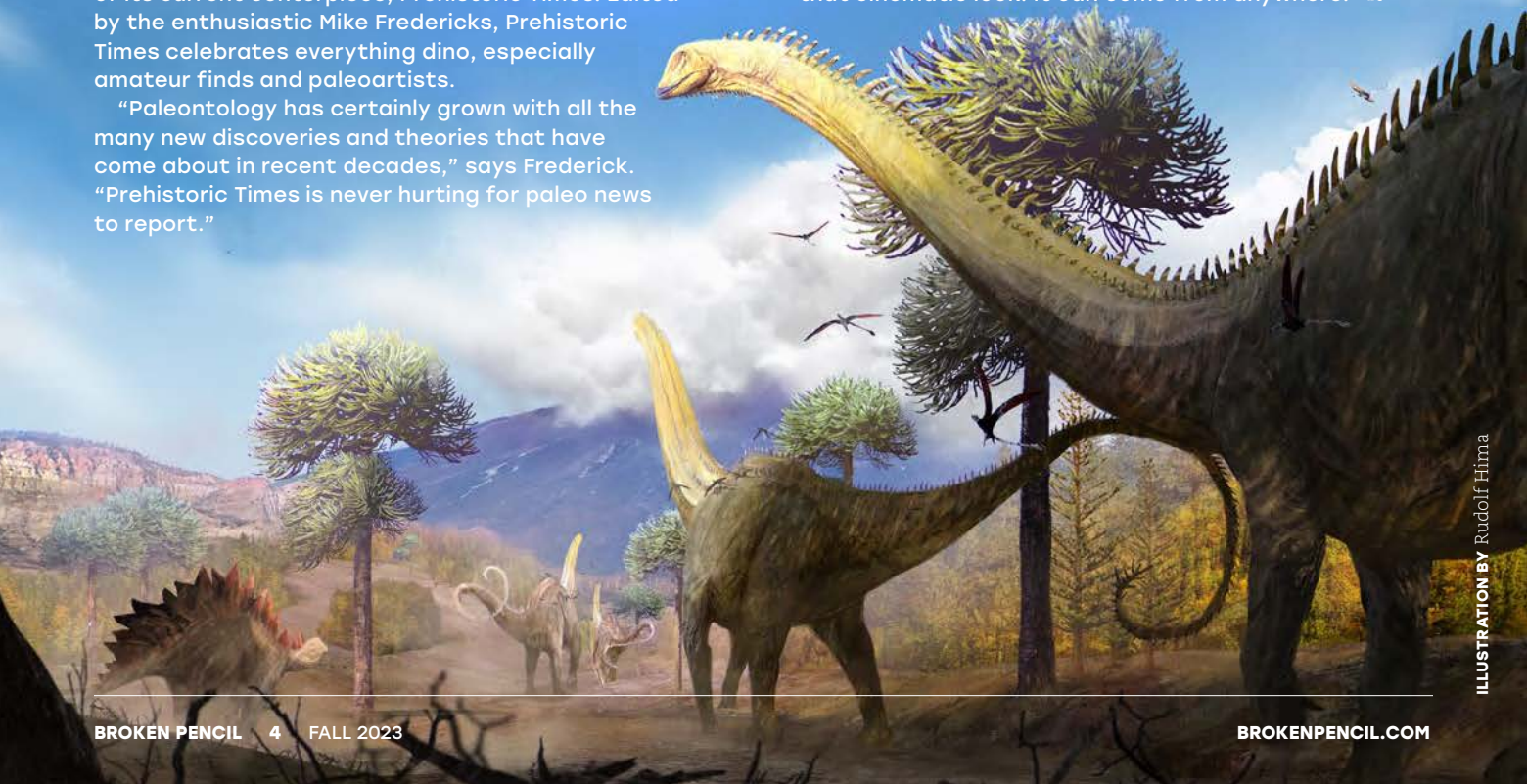


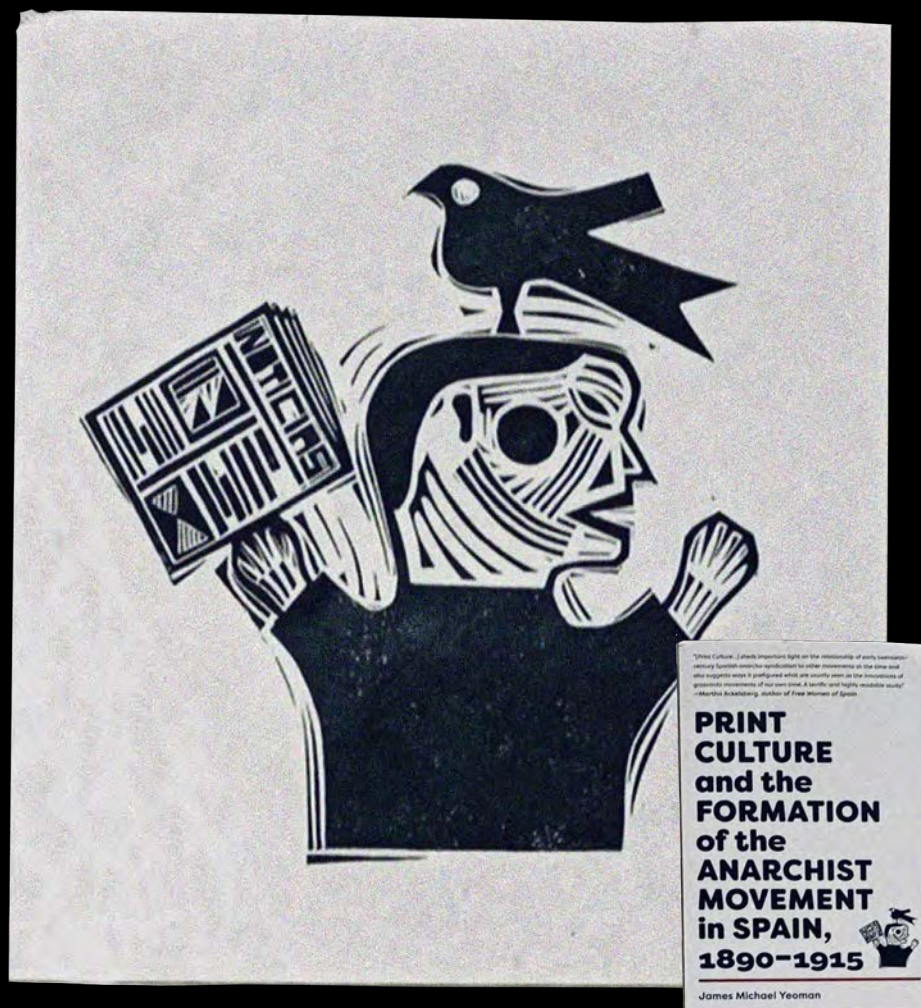
ILLUSTRATION BY Rudolf Hima



# FIRST THE PRESS THEN THE STREETS

## SPANISH ANARCHISTS RELIANCE ON GRASSROOTS PRINT

BY AVERY NOWICKI



In the early 1900s, Spain was at the forefront of the largest anarchist movement in history. According to James Yeoman, author of recently released *Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain, 1890-1915*, it would not have been possible without the underground press.

His book discusses this pivotal moment in anarchism and its long-lasting effect on independent print. Yeoman, who researched

the book while completing his PhD at the University of Sheffield in the UK, situates the tactics of the Spanish anarchist movement as part of ongoing experiments in underground media as early as the 17th century. "This desire to create a movement through engaging with print publication runs from at least the English Civil War and on into the 1960s."


Yeoman found his interest in the history of the print movement by accident, after a failed

first attempt at his research thesis. "Originally, I was meant to research educational missions in the Spanish countryside. However, after six months of researching, I learned there were no records of this ever occurring, so while I knew it had happened, I had no evidence to base my thesis around. But what I did find was loads and loads of newspapers detailing the Spanish anarchist movement."

Yeoman went to Jerez, a city in southern Spain that became an epicentre of the uprising, and dug through their archives. He spent an hour chatting with the archive's owner, hoping to make a case for his research. "Originally I worried he wouldn't help me at all," says Yeoman, "He actually turned out to be way too helpful and kept giving me different things that weren't relevant."

It was also during this time that he noticed how the high rate of illiteracy in Spain at the time caused printmakers to use creative methods to spread their message. Anarchist literature would be mass-read in the city squares, from Seville to Barcelona.

Reading these print archives nearly 100 years after the fact showed a fascinating style of newspaper. Yeoman assumed the works were made for aloud reading by the repetition, and enlarging font, which he predicts was made to invite a call and response format, necessary for enacting a powerful movement.

Yeoman's work takes its place among other works of emerging scholarship aimed at understanding how, as he writes in his concluding remarks in the book, "Bottom-up movements operate across boundaries within and between nations... creating and managing networks of exchange, which gave a practical significance to ideas such as solidarity, unity and organization." 

Yeoman's novel can be found through AK Press: [www.AKpress.org](http://www.AKpress.org).



# Beyond the Machine

## *The Analog Sea Bulletin*

### *Analog Sea and Maintaining an Offline Collective*

**BY MARISA KELLY**


In 2022, a dear friend of mine traveled to Edinburgh in search of something for herself. When she returned home she carried with her two things: an application for her U.K. citizenship and a zine from *Analog Sea*. I met it with curiosity, excitement and admittedly, after reading their editorial vision, some sadness. *Analog Sea* is a publication devoted to maintaining a small community of writers who wish to live offline in the digital age. They advocate for the human right to disconnect and have international stockists carry their bulletin for free-taking. It sparked in me the contemplation I had, and still have, about living an offline life, which feels somehow all too surreal.

*Analog Sea* is rife with stray thoughts, song lyrics, poetry and critical perspective. The last page is a single communication card to order the bulletin for yourself, your lover or your favorite book store (and what's the difference between the two, really?). They have a bare bones online presence, only a quiet landing page with information on how to contact them. It felt (and still feels) wrong to look them up on Instagram, as though I'm defying a dogma they so wish to uphold. So, instead, I wrote a letter to them.

With a PO boxes in both Germany and Texas, I sent several (English) letters about my excitement and my willingness to be involved. A year passed with no response, which to me felt like a response, until one hot sunny day this August a package arrived at my door. A notebook titled "*notes on solitude*," three *Analog Sea* bulletins, a small story titled *Life Beyond the Machine, Leisure as Dissent* by Jonathan Simons, laid there for me, and an apology letter for their lateness. They're a self-funded press, and move at their own speed.

The bulletin is so offline, but I have so many questions I want to ask the editors. *Must I be offline, to read you?* Or, *is there such a thing as a balance between offline and online?* and, *what the fuck do you do with your spare time?* But immediacy and urgency for zine inquiries might be another disposition to ease up on.

I'm not sure of much. But, what I am sure of is the general consensus around social media. When I discuss it with my friends, we sing in unison about how we wish we just weren't *on it* and how much it distresses us. This conversation, often followed with a sigh, as though we somehow don't have a choice. Which is partially true, considering how many job opportunities and social opportunities haunt the little feed in which we scroll. It's tough to be offline. However, the writers and editors over at *Analog Sea* do such bravery, everyday. Some anti-robot fodder dances within the pages. Mainly, however, the bulletin encourages you to slow down and make time everyday for contemplation. What a radical thought?

Learn more about Analog Sea on their site: [www.analogsea.com](http://www.analogsea.com) 





## The Most Honest Artist in Town: Remembering Joe Matt

BY TOM SCHARPLING

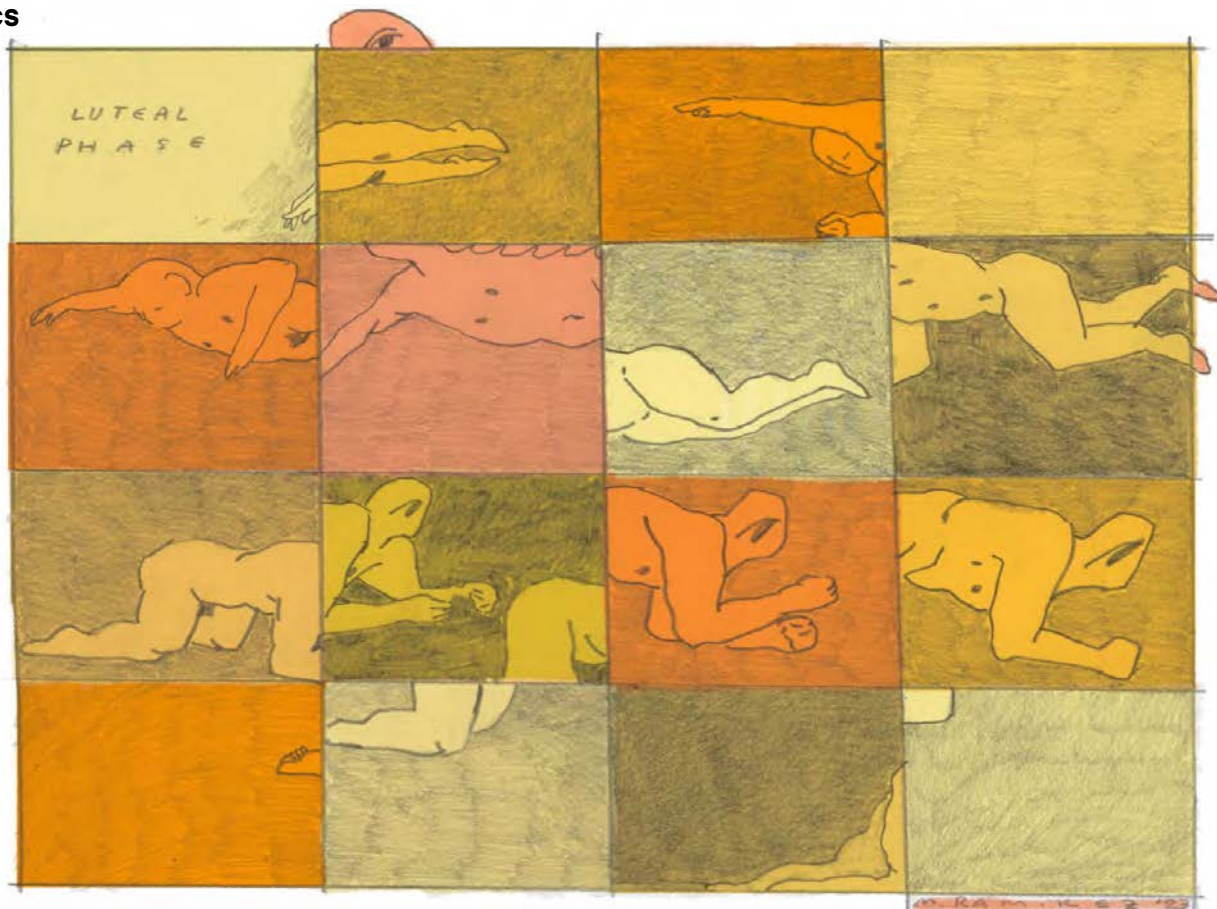
As grandiose as it may sound, everybody who loved the work of Joe Matt can remember when they first discovered his work. The experience of reading a Joe Matt comic was like getting brutalized by a tornado: every page of his signature title *Peepshow* was packed with so much unflinching honesty that you would feel dizzy from the impact.

When it comes to discussing Joe's work, "Honesty" is the first word that generally comes up. And that makes sense, because he leaned into it like no other before or since. Sure, other comic book writers have depicted the good and bad in their lives on the page. But Joe took this to a new level. He would truly eviscerate himself, reveling in each act of self-exposure like his life depended on you knowing what he was really like. Reading his work is like participating in a staring contest: can you keep reading without looking away? And you would inevitably blink. Joe won every single time.

The notion of referring to an artist as being "brave" or "courageous" is generally offensive. Artists aren't heroic. But it tracks when it comes to Joe Matt's work. Every issue was like eavesdropping on the world's most unsettling therapy session. You might be disgusted or even repulsed, but you cannot deny the transcendent rush that followed. This guy was going somewhere you simply didn't go if you wanted to be perceived as a "normal" person!

But what is "normal?" Joe erased the line between what should and should not be shared with an audience, which in turn made the reader realize that perhaps they didn't need to be so fearful of their own dark secrets.

Joe knew he was a mess; anyone that would call their own collection *The Poor Bastard* knew the score. But he also knew everyone was a mess underneath it all. The difference is that he embraced his absolute humanity of it all without blinking. Joe Matt won every time. **BP**



Many of the pagan traditions that remained in Poland were tied to safekeeping the land and the people living from it. My parents both grew up on farms and saw some of these rites practiced in their communities but I never did, having left our homeland as a child.



The 'drowning of the Marzenna' marks the end of winter. A straw effigy of the spirit of winter is destroyed by the melting waters of spring (or burned if there is not a sufficient body of water in the community).



A rather violent practice, though I admit at times I have violently anticipated the end of winter in Canada

In the midsummer festival, Wianki (wreath day), young women made wreaths to float down rivers.



The importance of water was joined with fire on that night. Both symbolized purification, which could be attained by bathing in water or jumping over a bonfire.





For a long time, there was a consensus within adoption research that adoptees were doing just fine and were just like "other children".

Many of those studies were conducted with young teenagers and children - with their adoptive parents present - and did not reflect the grim challenges many adoptees were faced with.

In 2002, when the high numbers of suicides and suicide attempts among adoptees were presented in a Swedish study, when asked to comment on it, Sweden's largest adoption agency Adoptionscentrum refused to see it as something negative.

They went on to write an article protesting the study and criticising the media for bringing attention to it.

The figures showing the suffering of adoptees are over 20 years old now, but are still relevant. Too many of us are gone now and can't speak up about our needs. Swedes have adopted children from abroad for more than 70 years, and still there is virtually nothing in place to support us. We are still met with the idea that our adoptions saved us.

In Sweden, adoptive parents get \$10 000 when they adopt.

Adoptees get nothing.

I find it very hard being an adoptee.

Not all adoptees feel like you, you know.





# Madness, **MAD** & Me, or, How (and Why) to Fold

BY DANIEL SCOTT TYSDAL

**I'VE ALWAYS** known that *MAD* magazine taught me how to fold. Only recently did I discover the full breadth of this lesson — the different processes of folding *MAD* shared and how much these have aided and shaped me.

*MAD* was an iconic American humour magazine published from 1952 to 2018. With its goofball mascot Alfred E. Neuman variously schmucking and shapeshifting on the cover, *MAD* led the vanguard of anti-establishment cartoon satire and humour for decades. The likes of Weird Al, Terry Gilliam, Roger Ebert and Patti Smith praised *MAD* as an influence, and the magazine inspired everything from a terrible *Animal House* knock-off to a decent *Saturday Night Live* knock-off.

I became a *MAD* obsessive at the age of six. Drawn to a cover featuring Alfred E. Neuman as a gap-toothed Gizmo from *Gremlins*, I slipped the issue onto the checkout at 7-11. My mom bought it for me, and my education began. Early in my fandom, my uncle gifted me the issues he'd saved from his youth, a collection running from the late 50s to early 70s.

If you're familiar with *MAD*, you're familiar with Al Jaffee's fold-in. In response to the fold-outs made popular by *Playboy* and *Life*, Jaffee introduced the fold-in. A page-sized visual with accompanying text provided the set up for the joke. Readers then folded the page, touching the tip of the "A" arrow to the tip of the "B" arrow. Beginning in 1964 and ending with his retirement at the age of 100 in 2020, Jaffee created fold-ins for the inside back cover of *MAD*, both during its original run and reprint-heavy reboot. Jaffee passed

earlier this year at a remarkable 102.

I was a fold-in fanatic. I loved the surprise and joy of the reveal, the interactive, tactile challenge of folding, and, as I grew familiar with the form, the game of trying to guess the punchline before folding.

Though I'd stopped reading *MAD* in my early teens, I still found myself returning to the fold-in as I committed to the path of the poet. I worked diligently off and on for a few years, failing again and again, until the necessary (and completely obvious) first step finally dawned on me: I needed to write the last line first. Otherwise, I had no way of knowing which words to seed at the beginnings and ends of lines to create the post-fold flourish. Titled "A><B" in honour of the fold guides in Jaffee's fold-ins, the poem appeared in *NøD Magazine* in and then in my first book (as the last poem, of course).

In early 2017, I was struggling through a severe mental health crisis, and, yet again, scribbling as a means of hanging on, when it hit me: the *MAD* fold-in was the perfect form for finding my footing in this fit of madness. I wrote a *MAD* fold-in poem from within and about my madness, then another, and then another, and I found this folding form gave me access to experiences and memories I had never been able to face or write about.

The fold-in's power derived from its restrictions and its pliability. On the one hand, I valued the form's grounding limits: the length fixed to one page, the discipline needed to select words that performed double duty (functioning within the body of the poem and as the post-fold last line), and the focus required

to align the words on the page, so the fold worked. On the other hand, I was lifted by the form's malleability, its openness to different processes and possibilities, to hybridity and play. In 2022, I published *The End Is in the Middle: Mad Fold-In Poems*.

*MAD* also taught me the process of bringing the reader into the fold. This impulse is at the root of *MAD*'s anti-authority, punching up humour, as the magazine implores us to not be marks for the powers that be (while, of course, mocking us for being marks for *MAD*). This impulse also manifests at the level of form as *MAD* is loaded with recurring features and elements that solicit reader participation: the many guides to follow, flow charts to complete, blanks to fill, parody songs to sing "to the tune of," and, of course, pages to fold.

In the spirit of *MAD*, then, and its lessons on folding, I will conclude by turning to you, reader, and extending a pair of invitations. First, I invite you to try your hand at the fold-in poem. If poetry is not your thing, I still encourage you. Okay, fine, if you really can't stand poetry, I say bring Jaffee's fold-in into concert with your art, whatever that might be, and create a fold-in story, fold-in song, fold-in sculpture, fold-in cross stitch, or, heck, even a fold-in powerbomb. Second, I invite you to undertake your own return to a practice or product that sustained and inspired you when you were young, one you have dismissed or simply moved on from. I promise you will discover fertile new creative possibilities when you two fold back together and old, perhaps unnoticed practices already folded in you, waiting to be undertaken and shared. **BP**



# HOW TO Write a Fold-In Poem

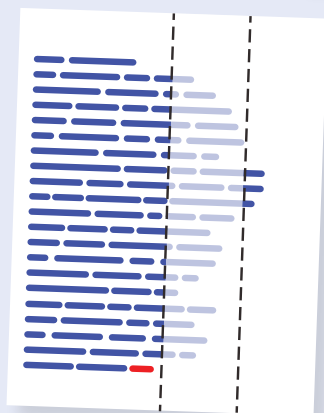
**1** As you begin your poem, write the last line as soon as possible.



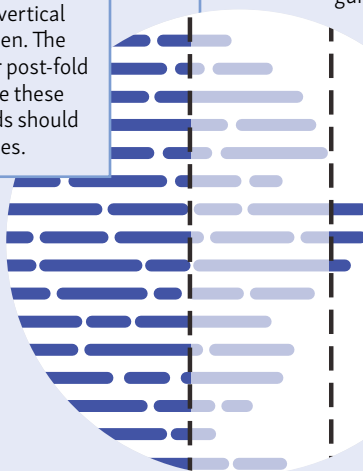
**2** For your last line to appear post-fold, the words that compose it must appear at the start of a line or the end of a line.

**3** Remember, to create your post-fold line, you can use full words or the parts of words. For example, “mad-ness” in your post-fold line can be created from “make” at start of a line and “sadness” at end of a later line, or “madrigal” at the start of a line and “wilderness” at the end of a later line.

**4** As you begin, you may find it helpful to draw two vertical lines on your page or screen. The words that compose your post-fold line should appear outside these lines, while all other words should appear between these lines.



**5** To format your fold-in poem, centre your poem and locate the longest line that does not have a word that appears post-fold. Use this line to set your “A>” and “<B” folding guides, with the “A>” guide to the left of this line and the “<B” guide to the right. Next, bring post-fold words at the start of lines to the left of the “A>” guide, and post-fold words at the end of lines to the right of the “<B” guide.



**7** Print your poem to test the fold, make any necessary adjustments, and then test again.



**6** I like to adjust the lines that remain between the guides to create a dynamic visual flow.

**9** Online Examples  
**“How to Fold a Fold-In Poem”**  
[youtu.be/xt57yCtbpj4](https://youtu.be/xt57yCtbpj4)

**“A MAD Fold-In Poem”**  
[poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/144841/a-mad-fold-in-poem](https://poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/144841/a-mad-fold-in-poem)

**“Snowflake (A Mad Fold-In Poem)”**  
[youtu.be/2Ed5Qhefe14](https://youtu.be/2Ed5Qhefe14)



**8**  
 Once you're done,  
 share your poem with  
 friends and drive  
 them . . . mad!

# THUNDEROUS FEMINISM

*The Legacy of  
the Northern  
Woman Journal*

BY SHIVAUN HOAD

**I ALWAYS THOUGHT** I'd gotten into zines through comic conventions and my own dorkery, but I'd missed a connection to self-publishing that was closer to home. My mother and many women I knew growing up in Thunder Bay were contributors to a long-running feminist periodical: *Northern Woman Journal*.

With over 100,000 people and 14,000 kilometres from Toronto, Thunder Bay is the biggest settlement in Northwestern Ontario and often serves as a regional hub. In April 1973, it was the site of the Northern Women's Conference, attended by 600 women who wanted to organize. The conference led to the formation of Thunder Bay's Northern Women's Centre, small interest groups for working women, day care, consciousness raising groups, birth control information and a monthly newsletter.

*Northern Woman Journal's* subscription cost a dollar "if you can" and was free for single parents and seniors. The first issue opened on an editorial letter on choosing the Women's Lib raised fist symbol as their logo: "it was time to review the purpose behind why women are coming together and where we might be going." They had book reviews, meeting announcements and a legal facts section: "Did you know that? the law does not require a woman to change her name when she marries."

By 1976, NWJ readership had expanded across the country, even as local subscriptions lagged behind. The collective had been approached by libraries and universities across Canada and America for subscriptions as a record of the ongoing women's movement.

NWJ received no government funding besides a single salary in 1977, an

arrangement they found disruptive to the collective energy.

Headquarters moved from contributors' homes to the Northern Women's Centre space at the Thunder Bay YMCA. NWJ and a number of women's groups then moved into 316 Bay Street, former home of Finnish cooperative restaurant The Hoito.

Collective consensus was crucial to NWJ. Each issue started with a group brainstorming session to choose a theme like sexual assault, the arts, prisons, women in the trades. Members would put together book reviews, artwork, poetry and news stories on the local, national and international levels. Contributors reminisced of "the hours spent debating the political correctness of accepting an ad from a hairdresser" and "doing one page about 10 times and nobody getting ANGRY."

On printing day, one woman would type up copy into columns on an electric typewriter. Volunteers would spread out the issue's pages, glue and lay out on the restaurant's original counters and stools — still smelling of the Hoito's fryer oil.

There were illustrations of how to insert a diaphragm and give a yourself a breast exam, a legal advice column and reprinted material from influential works like *Off Our Backs*, *Upstream* and Canadian Abortion Rights Action League. There were calls to action for contacting politicians ("feel free to call and fax Mike Harris your thoughts on his social cuts") and suggested 'guerilla tactics' like defacing sexist ads with stickers reading "This ad insults women."

In 1983, NWJ collective members Anna McColl and Margaret Phillips opened the Northern Woman's Bookstore. The

centre, the bookstore and the journal shared space over the next five years until NWJ moved out, citing a deteriorating relationship with the building.

There was a vast field of similar publications across the country at this time. NWJ sent an attendee to the Canadian Feminist Periodicals Conference in 1986 to learn from the women running *Broadside* (Toronto) and *Pandora* (Halifax), among others.

By 1990, NWJ's readership had switched over, with women in rural Northwestern Ontario communities as their most consistent supporters. Subscriptions were up to \$6 but finances were always precarious.

By the end of 1995, NWJ was one of the longest-running feminist periodicals in North America, reaching 22 years and 16 volumes; however, the collective members did not have the time and energy to continue production. There was a call for other women to carry on the project. But there were no takers.

I'd never read NWJ growing up but when we were putting together my mom's memorial service, I knew I wanted to have it represented in some way. It didn't take me too long to find old issues online — the back catalogue had been digitized in 2013 by the Northern Woman's Bookstore.

NWJ included my favourite feature of any small newspaper: shout-outs of rage-inducing and praiseworthy news. A thunderbolt to the all-male masthead of *Playgirl* "a Magazine of Entertainment for Women," a thunderclap to a local appointee to Status of Women Canada.

It was wild to see my old home phone



Stifled Dreamer  
They were divided,  
people say,  
like blind fish  
in a bottomless cave.

He had hopes,  
dreams,  
aspirations;  
which he expounded, volubly,  
with the force of a cresting wave.

She had hopes,  
dreams,  
aspirations too!

With no opportunity for expression.

They were concerned  
silly,  
childish,  
no account!

How could she be so lacking in discretion!

She lifted her hand,  
tentatively,  
as though to banish  
her expression.

She sighed,  
resumed her task;  
once more she would strive  
to ward off recurring depression.

Inna Johnson 1982

Catfight  
We live in a land, a pool  
net from which we draw  
The cat that fights  
The cat that stalks  
And the cat removed of claw

Joyce Michalchuk 1979



# Northern Woman Journal

Thunder Bay, Ont.

7-2



number printed with exhortations to call my mother, Miriam, to discuss Fat is a Feminist Issue, or to petition for nuclear disarmament. I also found my own chubby-cheeked face smiling in a baby photo round-up of "Future Feminists."

In the December, 1990 issue's section titled 'Our Favourite Anecdotes, Horror Stories, Adventures/Misadventures,' one contributor muses, "the radical irreverence with which we looked at life/our lives/men," and it comes through very clearly. There is so much care and humour evident in these pages. I can feel a MAD Magazine energy in calls for subscribers and contributors like, "Don't let a three year old die" and the 1979 cover that bears a giant tombstone reading "RIP?"

The centre, now named the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre, continues to serve women, trans and non-binary people in Thunder Bay and the region experiencing violence, poverty or issues with legal and administrative systems. They recently started up an online newsletter, *Feminist Dispatch*, in May 2022 for feminist analyses, program updates, event announcements and resources. It is also open to submissions of art and writing.

The wheels keep turning. As I read repeatedly in NWJ's pages: "we must work collectively — if we don't, our energies die." **BP**

## not an ordinary movie

by JOAN BARIL

In Winnipeg recently, I decided to go to a movie and that was how I saw, in the Winnipeg Free Press, on the movie advertisement page the ad for "Not a Love Story."

"Not a Love Story" is the documentary produced by Dorothy Renaud and directed by Bonnie Klein from Studio D, the women's unit of the National Film Board. It's a movie that takes an in-depth look at the five billion a year porno business, the de-humanization of everybody connected with the marketing of flesh and ultimately the de-humanization of us all.

"Not a Love Story" is also the first N.F.B. movie ever to be banned by the Ontario Board of Censors-banned it should be noted, not because of the scenes of women hung up on meat hooks or female breasts bound in barbed wire but because of the one scene of genital penetration.

It is not banned in Manitoba. There it is just an ordinary movie. The ad in the Winnipeg Free Press was rectangular, about 3x5 inches in size. Most of the space was taken up with a shot of Linda Lee Tracy, in a scanty Penthouse type costume, beside the picture, in big letters, the words "Held Over 5th Big Week" Under the photo is written "A Film about PORNOGRAPHY" and in much smaller letters "This is a frank documentary on the subject. Why does pornography exist? What is the extent of its influence?" To the casual reader in Winnipeg, it's just another ad for a dirty movie.

As interesting as the movie itself, has been its fate on distribution. Banned in Ontario, it has attracted full-throated "private" N.F.B. screenings across the province. It has received harsh and strangely irrelevant reviews from some articles (mostly male) and thoughtful sympathetic reviews from others (mostly female).

The word which above all characterizes the film is "thoughtful". The movie raises issues and asks questions. It is not about nor does it advocate censorship. Klein said, in a Globe and Mail interview, "We're not crazy about the freedom of pornographers to do what they're doing to women. But our basic position is that there is liberation in knowing what's going on. Ideally, we'd like to see pornography die from lack of interest". Nevertheless male reviewers assumed the movie was a treatise for censorship and only considered that point.

There were other curious instances of mirror thinking from the male critics. One critic thinking so that someone tries to figure out someone else's beliefs but can't get past his/her fears. A good example is the review by Alan Stewart in the Globe and Mail. He describes a scene in the movie showing a woman working as a peep show performer attempting to arouse the male viewer so that he will continue to feed coins into the machine. Then Stewart says, "I think I see it exactly as the filmmakers do... to them... the woman is for sure the prisoner. To them she is... being coerced, blatantly or otherwise, into participating."

This is exactly what the movie did not do. It did not say that all women participants were coerced into the porn business, and, although we know that in some instances coercion does exist and this was mentioned briefly in the film, the focus of the documentary was not on coercion, surely a strange "Not a Love Story" showed us two women who voluntarily worked in the business. One is the chief person in the business, Linda Lee Tracy, a professional stripper who does a Little Red Riding Hood nightclub act which was shown in the film. Tracy has also organized the "Fits for Tots", a 24 hour stripathon special which raises money for the Montreal Children's Hospital, as much as \$14,000 in one night.

At the beginning of "Not a Love Story," Tracy talks with Klein and Renaud about her experiences as a stripper and it is obvious she sees nothing wrong with it, she loves her body and gets a big kick out of the whole thing. Her attitude changes later as she probes into the dirty belly of the porn monster. Tracy was shattered by her experiences while making the film and no longer works as a stripper.



A scene from Not a Love Story: I'm t

Another willing female participant in the porn world is Suzie Randall, photographer for Hunter magazine. Tracy allows herself to be photographed by Randall and as we watch the photographer treat her subject like a hunk of meat and observe the addition of aesthetic symbolism when Tracy is required to hold a huge word point downward to her genitals and listen to Randall's sleazy line of erotic patter; the components of the scene compress themselves into the purifying heart of pornography.

The treatment of pornography in the movie is thoughtful and comprehensive, but it is as where pornography nor does it try for a "balanced" point of view. As scene follows scene we become weighed down with the horror of it all. We see a girlie magazine publisher say "We are producing a product which fulfills a need—a need created by the woman's movement. Men don't want to be equal—they want to dominate. The greatest

One of the most powerful scenes shows Robin Morgan, with tears rolling down her face, describing her feeling of rage scene moving; I critic, Jay Scright of Bobbi the low point Group disc which men dehumanized is never been by male cri for not ne dehumanize wonder if all, or Their sh as Judith assault against accepts The tends Unite; audie wome show Film the as the in

## Northern Woman Journal

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JULY CHICAGO'S DINNER

The famous feminist work of art "The Dinner Party", by Judy Chicago will be exhibited at the Museum d'Art. Montreal from March 11 to May 2. Several women from Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie are planning to make the pilgrimage to experience it. If you are interested contact the Northern Woman Journal, 316 Bay St., Thunder Bay or Women for Women, 221 Albert St. E., Sault Ste. Marie.

Want to see and learn more about WOMEN & ARTISTS? Join Donna Phoenix at Confederation College April to June.





*How Michael Novick evolved to put radical media in the hands of the people.*

**BY VIDY OVIYAN**

**76-YEAR-OLD ANTI-RACIST** activist Michael Novick is a lifelong political zinester, with their longest project being the 30-year-old publication *Turning the Tide*. Novick has seen many waves of revolution and with every wave comes censorship from the usual parties: private corporate interests and the authorities who enforce them. Zines have served as a passageway for ideas and information across decades of media infiltration and control. "Zine culture is that crack in the concrete where the flowers can come out," says Novick. "I have always wanted to nurture that and be a part of that sense of indie media."

*Turning the Tide* (or TTT for short) is an independent paper established in 1987. It was a space for reporting racist terrorism and a resource for anti-fascists, decolonial and anti-capitalist ideologues. TTT was born during the punk and anarchist subcultures of the '80s. For punk, itself grappling with the rise of hate groups, TTT offered access to critical information as a lifeline for self-defense movements resisting subcultures like the neo-nazi boneheads. 90s Warp Tour, Ozzfest and Rock Against Racism became venues

where Novick and *Turning the Tide* would station to remind fans of their scene's radical roots. Today the paper is the most widely read publication in prisons.

After a lifetime of dedication to independent publishing, Novick is looking for a group to take over *Turning the Tide*. But to do that, he must return to where it all began.

Novick grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 70s and had a childhood in the heart of the Civil Rights era. Motivated by a call from the Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Convention by the Black Panther Party, a network of men's consciousness-raising groups began *Brother: Men Against Sexism*, a zine on gender, sexuality, race and oppression. Novick started his journey as an independent publisher alongside his peers at his Jewish high school working on *Brother*. "I would sit in Talmud classes when I was supposed to be saying the Talmud," he says, "I would be counting up characters in stories so we could justify the columns."

Novick and his peers would publish these papers with wax printing. "You'd have this machine that melted lines of wax and you'd physically adhere the

words and images to a large poster board and then if you didn't like it you could pull it off and change it." The zine was distributed across the Bay Area throughout the decade. It was featured in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and later in *Time Magazine*.

"I have always been someone who's text-oriented," says Novick. As an author and editor, he's seen publishing evolve. When he first moved to L.A. in the 80s, he wrote pieces for the socialist *National Guardian*. "I would sit under the stairs on the Commodore 64 I bought at Toys 'R' Us, hooked up to my apartment's phone line, and send drafts to my editor," says Novick. He would then pick up bundles of the paper from a Greyhound bus downtown to distribute.

The late 80s saw a rising number of racial terrorist acts from skinheads and white power organizations that the Reagan-era media wasn't too concerned with. Novick started a LA chapter of what became the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) network and its official newsletter: *Turning the Tide*.

Novick would hand them TTT at local punk shows and protests. As *Turning the*



*Tide* grew, ARA chapters across the US and Canada requested to join the mailing list.

Michael was an English teacher for mature students, many of whom were immigrants. "I learned so much from my students about the world," he says. In the 90s, many Californians actively tried to cut Spanish language programs as conservative groups fear-mongered. Novick says there was a strong anti-immigrant sentiment, even among the teachers. "I was a union rep. I would take the papers to the union meetings and hand them out. Some people gave me flack about it, but they all knew what I was about."

During the summer of 1998, political prisoners Linda Evans and her partner Eva Goldberg wrote a piece about the economy of mass incarceration, which later became an extensively distributed pamphlet. The piece was shared on the whistleblower website *Project Censored*. It played a role in developing *Critical Resistance*, an organization dedicated to challenging and dismantling the prison industrial complex.

While Novick visited political prisoners to collaborate on pieces, many other prisoners would ask if they could get a copy of his zine, which became the catalyst for his free-to-prisoners policy. "We started sending it to political prisoners. Once word spread, hundreds of prisoners would write. Every time I went to the mailbox, I got letters asking to join the distribution list."

Michael spoke to folks radicalized by the paper who let him know it was the only paper many prisoners were willing to read.

Another critical chapter for *TTT* was the infamous 1992 Rodney King trial, which sparked the L.A. Riots. One of the movements that followed called for community control of policing and abolition — demands echoed by many Black Lives Matter activists after the tragic death of George Floyd in 2020.

The 92 movement, led by former Black Panther member Michael Zinzun, demanded radical change but they were pushed to the fringes during media coverage. Mainstream reporting favored government action like the formation of the Christopher Commission, a group of researchers jointly appointed by the mayor and police chief to investigate police violence in the Los Angeles Police Department. *Turning the Tide* would report on the work of Zinzun's group and later expose the role

that the Christopher Commission played in civil rights groups signing onto ineffective reforms, opposed to backing Zinzun's more radical movement.

Every time people rush to action and revolutionary movements rise, those in power turn to the commercial media for help. "It's infectious," says Novick. "The women's liberation movement became bourgeois feminism and white feminism. Gay liberation became gays in the military, gay marriage when that was never the point of the movement."

We forget the origins of movements because the media is quick to co-opt. "It's an effort to patch over the contradictions that exist in our society," but Novick pushes us further to look inward as these contradictions exist within each of us.

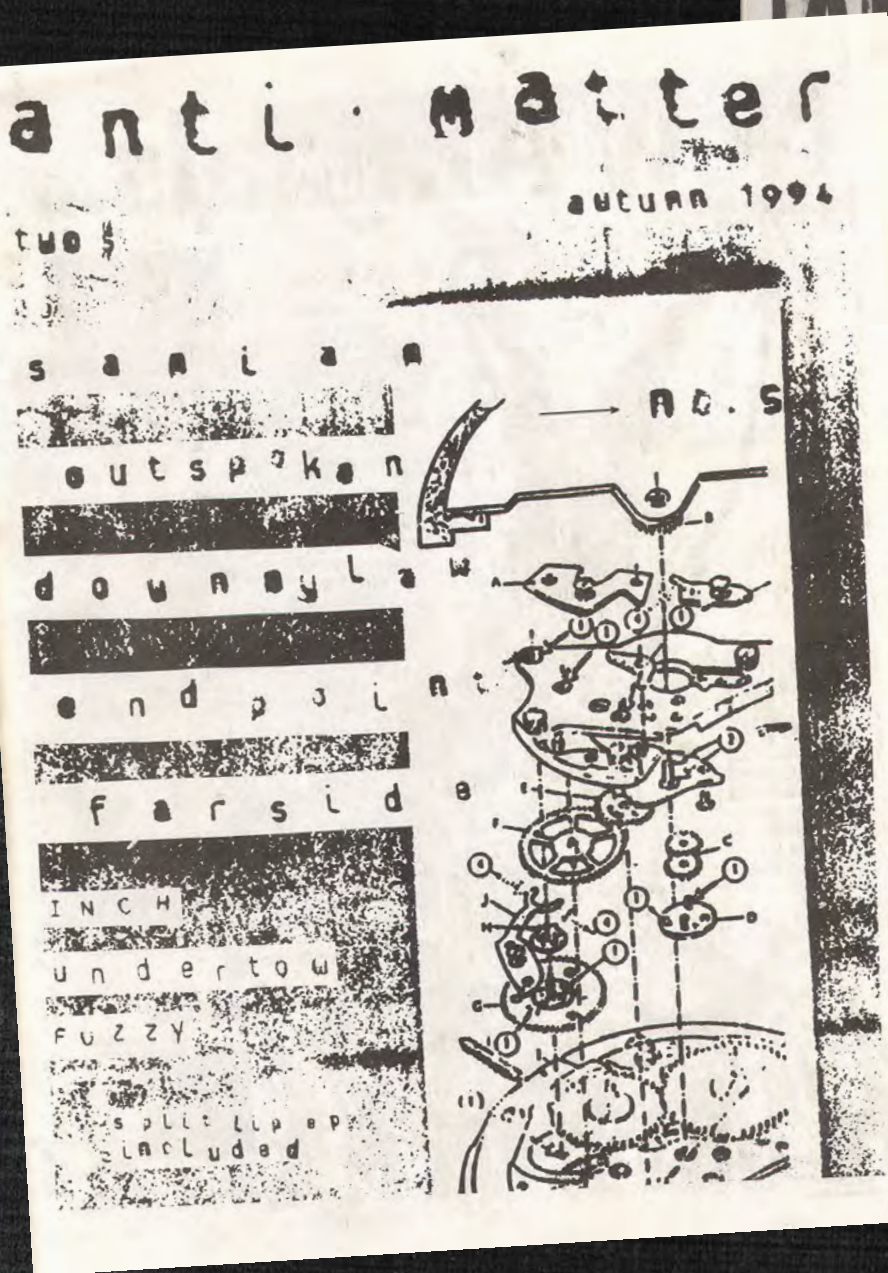
Novick shared their perspective on the 1996 US election. Democratic Bill Clinton had been a "draft dodger" during the Vietnam War and actively protested the war, while Republican candidate Bob Dole had fought the Nazis during World War II and was left disabled. "Each had a certain claim to anti-fascism and anti-imperialism in their youth but sold themselves out to be the leader of the empire."

We all need to stay grounded and consider those we stand in solidarity with. In recent years, Novick changed *TTT*'s tagline from Anti-Racism Newsletter to *Journal of Intercommunal Solidarity* as a reminder that continuing indie publishing creates more than movements, it builds community.

See the entire *Turning the Tide* archive at [Antiracist.org](http://Antiracist.org) **BP**







# HARDCORE IN THE VOID

*The Return of  
Anti-Matter*

BY YASMINE ALM





# "A GOOD OPENING QUESTION TO ASK SOMEBODY TO GET TO KNOW THEM IN THE HARDCORE SCENE, AT LEAST IN THE 80S WAS: 'SO, WHAT FUCKED YOU UP TO BE HERE?'"

says Norman Brannon. "And everyone had an answer, bar none."

This is the tissue that connects all generations of hardcore, a more aggressive subculture of punk, according to Brannon, the editor of renewed zine *Anti-Matter*. "It's the

reason why we scream at shows and why we jump on each other and like we're getting something out. Well-adjusted people don't need to do this."

Brannon knows hardcore. He has a three-decade tenure in the scene, as guitarist for multiple bands, including seminal emo band Texas is the Reason; as creator of the original *Anti-Matter* zine; as house DJ, label manager and real estate agent; and back to guitarist for Thursday, in 2021.


The original idea for *Anti-Matter* came in 1993 when the popular punk zine *Maximum Rockroll* began excluding bands for arbitrary reasons, worrying Brannon and his musician friends. *Anti-Matter* interviewed bands from all over, big and small. Rancid, Rage Against the Machine, Quicksand, Judge, Jawbox. The variety was intentional. "We were open to the idea of hardcore music sounding like anything we wanted it to sound like because that was punk to us," he says. "I was pushing forward this idea that was very important to me, and still is, that hardcore is more than music."

The first iteration of *Anti-Matter* ended in 1995 because he didn't want to be "both critic and artist," which he now regrets. With the resurgence of hardcore in the mainstream — Baltimore hardcore's Turnstile was nominated for three Grammys in 2023 — and the 2019 dissolution of *Maximum Rockroll*, Brannon realized there wasn't anyone that went in depth into hardcore. "It felt to me like there was a void that was shaped like *Anti-Matter*."

And he didn't want to make a podcast or video channel. He wanted to make a zine — classic punk. *Anti-Matter* today is an interview-essay digital zine that updates two to three times a week. Artists interviewed range from Incendiary to Friendly Fires to Geoff Rickly — all people whose personal tie to hardcore Brannon wanted to explore.

"I've been playing music for over 30 years, there's nothing you could tell me about music that's going to interest me," says Brannon. "So really, what's interesting to me is who are you and how are you dealing with being alive."

Intimate talks remain the zine's primary characteristic, as they'd always been. *Anti-Matter* allowed Brannon to be open, a privilege he didn't get during his upbringing. Intergenerational exchanges within the queer community and the hardcore community parallel for Brannon. "What I've learned about this particular conversation [on hardcore generations] is what I've learned from being a gay man. When I was young and trying to figure out who I was, and how I fit into this queer community, there were definitely times where I thought, 'Wow, I could really use a conversation with someone who's just seen it all.'"

You can read and subscribe to *Anti-Matter* at [antimatter.substack.com](http://antimatter.substack.com). 





# In the Beginning was the End: 50 Years of

# DEVO

BY NEAL ARMSTRONG

**IT IS THE 50TH** anniversary since the formation of Devo. I happen to be a de-evolution truther. Here are the uncomfortable truths you deserve to know:

One: Devo are NOT a one-hit wonder. When I was in high school, I thought I was the coolest nerd in town because I got a Devo energy dome shirt through their mail order fan club. Within minutes of stepping into the halls, I was slammed into a locker by a blockhead about twice my height. "Oh, you like Devo, huh?" he barely intoned between gritted teeth, "Name their first five albums!"

The words got stuck in my throat. My inability to answer was a panic response, not a lack of understanding Devo discography. I understand his rage though. The public perception of Devo as the one-hit wonder band of "Whip It," or the further devolved TV commercial version which commands the listener, "You must Swiffer," is an affront to a band whose body of work spans albums, videos, visual art and an aesthetic ideology that has perverted the entire realm of underground art.

Two: Devo are NOT a band. Devo, like most great art, was born out of trauma. Founders Gerald Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh were present at the Kent State Massacre, where the National Guard fired upon a crowd of student protesters, killing four. Casale was friends with two of the victims. "It completely changed me from some kind of free love pot-smoking hippie into a very politicized person that had a new agenda and a new well-founded anger," he said.

The tragedy gave them the ammo with which they

would target American culture with explosive satire. After finding a self-published religious zine titled *Jocko Homo Heavenbound* by chance, they found their weapon: The theory of De-Evolution. The doctrine that mankind is not progressing toward a brighter future, but is instead degrading, moving backwards.

Devo was not a band, but rather an art interventionists staging situations, pranks and performances in the vein of Dada and Futurist Agit-Prop. They had characters and plots dramatizing their fury at the mundanity of everyday life. The music was secondary to the subversive visuals, films, live shows and ideas. Their approach was DIY. They created all their own costumes, props, merch and pressed their records independently. They were called punks, but they rejected the label. Casale mused about punk bands of the era in a 1995 TV special, "there was nothing truly punky about them because they were looking back and taking all their ideas, about how they looked, the sound of the music, the progressions and the kind of anger, they were taking it from the 60s. We thought we were the true punks because we were hated by everybody. We were punk scientists."

Three: Devo ARE a band. Devo's first film predated MTV by five years. This film depicts Devo as janitors engaging in shady music-making activities in a dingy cellar. Bowie took a liking to the film and sent them to Brian Eno, who produced their first record. The rest, as they say, is Devo.

While it may seem strange for an avant-garde performance troupe to be accepted into the



mainstream — they were signed to Warner Brothers for ape's sake — this all happened before indie labels had much of a presence.

Four: Nothing Changed. Devo did not make the world more wiggly. The pop mafia turned their backs, as Devo was banned from MTV for supposedly obscene images, such as a french fry penetrating a donut in the video for "That's Good." Devo's albums took a downturn in quality after 1982's underrated *Oh No! It's Devo*. The satire was still there but the fangs were removed. Casale said, "something's always lost when any outside form of self expression becomes embraced and becomes established, but that's the arc and that's the journey that is so funny to Devo."

Five: Everything changed. Devo's influence can be found across indie music, electronic, industrial, experimental, any subversive DIY band or performance project. It's hard to imagine zine space-agers the Association of Automonous Astronauts, hyperpop parody Poppy or sci-fi freakout movies like *Liquid Sky*, without the influence of Devo. There's even a term for acts that hem close to Devo's look and sound: Egg Punk.


When I started my band Martian Crisis Unit, I wanted to perform music that used songs as vehicles for high-concept sci-fi dramatics, social satire and to turn the rock concert format into a psychomagical happening. Although I explored these ideas using my own signs and signifiers, Devo gave me the method and the blueprint to get my ideas across.

I surround myself with other Devo fanatics, like Paul Bellini of *Kids in the Hall* and queercore band Mouth Congress, which he formed with Scott Thompson in 1984. "[Devo] really provided a template for me in terms of how to create a mythos around a band," Bellini told me. "They proved that a band could be part of something greater, a whole world on its own and not just the third band on a bill. I never wanted to copy their style or sound, but it gets its hooks in you and you write something that sounds like a Devo riff or lyric."

Bellini reflected on how Devo is so good at galvanizing their fans. "They catered to their fans' desire for unusual stuff in a very direct way," he said, citing their unusual merch options and fan club membership as crucial for hooking devotees for life.

One such devotee is founder of the art movement Neoism, Istvan Kantor, whose alter ego Monty Cantsin is an "open concept pop star," an identity that anyone can take on, and make art under. Saying, "I am Monty Cantsin" is similar to saying, "We are all Devo." He told me, "Devo, especially between 1978 and 1982, were totally inspiring Neoist circles in the West Coast as well as in Montreal. Devo's version of 'Satisfaction' was among the songs I performed with my early band The Neoists, which included sci-fi writer John Shirley and Ju Suk Reet Meate from Smegma, another legendary band of the time. [We loved] Devo's completely different attitude in pop culture as part of their engagement in new wave music/noise, especially because of their refusal of the past."

Filmmaker and artist Sook-Yin Lee told me that, "the lineage of art rock mischief makers with hooks galore: Kraftwerk, The Residents, Nina Hagen, Devo and Negativland had a profound effect on my impressionable young mind. Like 20th Century Commedia dell'Arte by the way of Akron, Ohio, Devo, behind masked performances were serious satirists skewering societal stupidity and deconstructing rock and roll. It is no wonder Mark Mothersbaugh was a follower of J.R. 'Bob' Dobbs, founder of the parody religion Church of the SubGenius, with their battle cry to 'destroy the Conspiracy of the Normals.' But don't repeat that, ever."

Six: De-evolution is real! It's all around. The best of us are potatoes, while the worst are angry apes trying to make the apocalypse imminent. If you want to understand the present moment, you have 50 years of Devo history to draw on. They explain our predicament perfectly. If Devo's plan to replace themselves with robots pulls through, then we have many years of Devo ahead. If not, there is nothing to worry about, for we are all Devo! 





THE BIG HEIST



# A Day with Matt Farley, The World's Most Prolific Artist

BY WILL SLOAN

**FIFTEEN YEARS AGO**, a New England-based singer songwriter named Matt Farley was scrolling through the yearly stats for his iTunes discography and made a discovery. Of all the dozens of tracks he had uploaded, most earned zero dollars, but one — a novelty song called “My Goldfish Is Dead” — had grossed two dollars. For most creatives, these numbers would be discouraging, but Farley had an epiphany: if one novelty song could make two dollars, then perhaps 20,000 novelty songs could make \$40,000?

As of mid-2023, Farley has written and performed, by his count, 24,000 songs, from which he now earns a yearly income comfortably above that \$40,000 target. I don't believe he's cracked six digits yet, but a few weeks away from turning 45, he generates enough to afford a house and family in the Boston suburbs. He has built songs around the sorts of search terms that people shout to Siri when they're bored: names, cities, foods, animals, the names of celebrities, sports teams and any other topic you can think of. His most popular track is “The Poop Song,” which has reached over 5.7 million plays on Spotify, and is one of an enormous body of songs he has written about elimination.

Farley's unique business model has earned him short magazine profiles, a 2017 appearance on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, where he sang “Used to Be a Pizza Hut” (about repurposed former Pizza Hut locations that still retain the restaurant chain's distinctive shape).

Billie Eilish posted a TikTok of herself listening to “The Poop Song,” while Kris and Kylie Jenner posted themselves dancing to “Kris Jenner, You Are a Famous Wonderful Woman.” He still makes personal music when time allows, much of it quite good, but to polite society his reputation is that of a “Spotify spammer.”

I believe that Matt Farley is a great artist. I admire his work, and I also admire what he represents. I predict that he will one day be recognized as one of the emblematic creatives of his era. For this reason, I travelled to Peabody, Massachusetts on May 20, 2023 for the *Motern Extravaganza*, an annual concert and fan event Farley holds in his own honour (“Motern Media” is the name of his ad hoc production company). Farley screened two new feature films he has made and held a five-hour concert, with songs spanning his 20+ year discography. When the event was first held in 2017, it attracted 15 paying ticket-buyers, plus kind-hearted friends and family. This year, over 100 convened at the Peabody Marriott, about a half-hour drive from Boston's Logan Airport and a 10-minute drive from Farley's home in Danvers.

Farley will lose hundreds of dollars on this event, as he does every year, but every year he loses slightly less.

\*

When I arrive early at the Marriott's conference hall, Farley is rehearsing with his bandmates. There is Doug “Froggy”

Brennan (a childhood friend of Farley's) on drums, Chris “Pete” Peterson (brother-in-law) on bass, and Tom Scalzo (college friend and prolific collaborator) on guitar. For over 20 years, Farley and Scalzo have periodically recorded together as a two-man band called Moes Haven, whose summative achievement was recording a new 30-minute album every day for an entire college year. It was with this experiment that Farley established one of the guiding principles of his art, which is that the finished result, however good or bad, is less important than the act of ceaseless creation.

Farley is the ringleader, and one suspects they'll be meeting up in various configurations for creative projects for as long as he has air in his lungs. So great is Farley's creative fervor that Peterson has shown up even though he broke his shoulder two weeks ago, wearing a sling when he's not holding a bass. There is some suspense about whether he'll survive a five-hour concert.

I'm here with my friend Justin Decloux, with whom I co-wrote a book called *Motern on Motern* in 2020. The book focused on Farley's filmography, and involved us interviewing him and his filmmaking partner, Charlie Roxburgh, for many hours over Zoom. It was a way to pass the time during lockdown and also to distract from the day-job I hated. I always admired how they made 11 entire feature films before finding even a tiny audience. I thought it would be a



satisfying anti-capitalist gesture to write a book for the same-sized audience (as it happens, the book has sold reasonably well). A creative ecosystem has emerged around Farley, inspiring me and many other people to do little projects

I came to Farley through his movies, which I sincerely think are among the most interesting being made anywhere right now. *Don't Let the Riverbeast Get You!* (2012) is a smart, funny, horror spoof made with non-actor friends and family. A horror spoof that emphasizes loquacious dialogue and odd character detail, it revels in the stiltedness of its all-volunteer cast without feeling condescending. It has an irresistible sense of communal warmth, like the best summer barbecue you've ever been to, and if the movie industry is mostly a playground for the rich and well-connected, these movies suggest a path to democratization.

In 2021's *Heard She Got Married*, Farley starred as Mitch Owens, a once-promising singer songwriter who has returned home from "the big city" with the stench of failure. All the people he once played music with have settled into lives of quiet domesticity, but he has found a new collaborator in his mailman — an aspiring bassist who may be a sublimated manifestation, à la Tyler Durden. Not quite a comedy, drama or thriller, this is one of the best movies ever made about being an artist, because of its nuanced understanding of the vast grey area between success and failure. This is an underexplored topic in cinema because most movies that we see are by people who are successful.

At 2PM we gather for the first movie screening: *Heard She Got Murdered*, a sequel in which Farley's character goes on a killing spree. Afterwards, I slip out to grab a drink at the hotel bar, and find myself in line behind one of the regular Farleyplayers. "Oh, sorry you had to see that," he says. I'm reminded of something I read once about how hard it is to be a prophet in your homeland.

At 4PM, we gather again for the second movie, *Boston Johnny*. Here Farley stars as a sociopathic TV pitchman who speaks in a bizarre accent that can only be compared to *Austin Powers in Goldmember*. Inspired by such purposefully abrasive cult comedies as *Freddy Got Fingered* and *Clifford*, the

**“He is a slave to money ...Even when he wants to stop singing songs that are nothing more than the lowest common denominator of music, he is unable to.”**

movie is a hilarious patience-tester. Any double feature is a lot, but this one especially. Nevertheless, the concert begins promptly at 6PM. For five hours, Farley and his band alternate between novelty songs and more personal music (“no joke songs,” as he calls them).

While the band plays, Farley's fans — mostly millennials and younger — mill about, taking selfies with members of Farley's inner circle. There is Elizabeth Peterson, Farley's wife and on-screen leading lady, with their two young children. Farley's father, Jim, is dressed in full costume as Ito Hootkins, the monster hunter he played in *Riverbeast*. Another regular cast member, Bryan Fortin, has a merch table where I buy DVD-Rs of the camcorder horror movies he made in the 80s. For 30 years, Fortin has hosted a local public-access horror show called *Zones of Evil*, and was a god to Farley for

years before they met. Charlie puts on the surprisingly meticulous foam-rubber *Riverbeast* monster costume and we all line up to dance with the creature.

In February, Farley went semi-viral on Twitter when he posted a screenshot from a hit piece in a middle school newspaper. “He is a slave to money,” wrote one Spencer Garrison, Grade 8. “Even when he wants to stop singing songs that are nothing more than the lowest common denominator of music, he is unable to.” Farley got a kick out of this (“It's pretty well written! The kid has promise!” he wrote). Today, midway through an early song, he shouts out the young Garrison, who waves sheepishly from the back of the hall. The kid is greeted with applause, and I spot Elizabeth Peterson telling him how much they enjoyed the article. Farley is insecure enough to be constantly name-searching, but also





self-assured enough to relish the bad reviews.

\*

Around 7 PM, a tremor hit the room: Kevin McGee has arrived.

For 17 years, McGee was Farley's supervisor at a group home for underprivileged teenagers. Like everyone who enters Farley's orbit, he was recruited to act in his movies. Farley left in 2017 when his songwriting finally began to pay the bills, but McGee has remained a treasured member of the rep company. Impressively muscular for a man in his early sixties, he is the most physically imposing Motern player. With his terse, deadpan acting style, also the most natural and charismatic on camera. He is typically called upon to play villains and authority figures.

Most days of his life, McGee is a guy from New Hampshire, but in this room, he is a god. Attendees line up to get a selfie. One attendee shows off a McGee tattoo, which has him speechless. I introduce myself as being from Toronto, to which he says "I know Matt has a big

Canadian following. I think some guys from Toronto wrote a book about him?" I tell him that one of those guys was me, and he looks thoroughly nonplussed.

At 9:30 PM, Farley begins what he calls the "after-hours portion." We are three-and-a-half hours into the five-hour concert, and only Farley's energy is undiminished. The crowd of 130 dwindles to about 35, which, as Farley points out, is still more than double the peak attendance of the first Extravaganza. He asks Chris Peterson how he's doing, and Peterson replies, "I think my forearms' turning purple." Making it to 11PM is a matter of principle.

"We have 70 minutes to fill up... somebody say a name!" Farley asks the crowd. Names are volunteered. Farley sings with passion: "Katie Katie Katie Katie Katie Kaaatie POOP! Katie Katie Katie Katie Kaaatie POOP!"

\*

On the morning of May 21st, Farley is holding court on the shore of Hampton Beach, New Hampshire — a busy tourist spot full of pleasingly tacky souvenir

shops, pizza parlors and arcades. 15 people made it to Farley's annual morning-after beach blast.

Much is happening in Farley's world. One of his many music personae, "The Guy Who Sings Songs About Cities and Towns," has received a sudden spate of media attention. Farley estimates that the surge in streams will add as much as \$4,000 to his yearly income. The economics of streaming are not always this advantageous. When one of his songs is sampled in a TikTok video, he earns a flat rate of three cents, which stays fixed whether the video receives millions of views, as Kris Jenner and Billie Eilish's had.

At Hampton Beach, I met an aspiring filmmaker who recently quit his job as a publicist and made his first microbudget feature. We agreed that Farley reminded us of Hong Sang-soo, the prolific South Korean director whose individual films are less important than the threads between them. I also met Ed & Leah Mckelvey, who made an hour long movie called *Ernie and Ace's Wild Ventura* (2016), which imagines the son of Ernest P. Worrell befriending Ace Ventura. All of us feel some kinship with what Farley is doing. **BP**





The Trash and Treasures of

# HOLYCR

BY KHEE HOON CHAN





# AP

**THE MONIKER** of Singaporean art collective Holycrap says a lot about them: for one, they are brought together by their love of rubbish. Not the likes of black trash bags and rancid sewage, but the fragments of memories — and the most mundane of moments — that they forged together. The Holycrap collective is, after all, a family affair, parents Pann and Claire Lim alongside their children Renn and Aira.

Their award-winning biannual zine, “*Rubbish Famzine*,” centers the countless anecdotes the family shared with one another over the years. Their inaugural issue, published in 2011, was presented as mementos stuffed within a literal garbage bag, filled with crumpled papers and a zine, based on their family trip to Tokyo and Kyoto.

“*Rubbish* is nonsense lah. It’s not exactly trash, it’s like trash with meaning... trash with meaning is nonsense,” Aira quips over a Microsoft Teams call.

“It’s just a term we used to joke around with or just discuss things, even when referring to good work,” adds Renn.

“When we were thinking of that word, and because it’s said so commonly, so often [within the family]... we didn’t want it to be too serious. We’re just doing a fun thing together,” explained Claire. “And if people do look at it as rubbish — rubbish as in the true meaning [of the word] — it’s fine by us, you know? We were doing this thing for us, for the kids. And so a word as such that we use often... it just means it’s something fun and nonsensical to us.”

The *Rubbish Famzine* is more than just a bite-sized print magazine; it’s also a painstaking labour of love, with every single issue put together by hand as a family.

Take issue three, titled “*Forever and a Day*.” The zine was packaged within an old-school biscuit tin — the

quintessential icon of Singaporean childhood — alongside ephemera such as a paper plane, twigs, cassette tapes and brochures. The issue is conceptualized as a time capsule of the art collective’s dearest memories as a family. And with their tenth issue, “*No Time for Melancholy*,” in which Holycrap reminisced about a trip to Japan in the midst of the pandemic, was made to appear aged, with the corners of all 300 issues of the zine curled manually by hand. And as a finishing touch the entire zine was bound by an old Casio watch, paper clips, and rubber bands.

It was thus no surprise that uncanny Holycrap has won several local and international awards for the *Rubbish Famzine* over the years, including the Singapore Creative Circle Awards, The One Show from New York, the D&AD award from Britain, and the Cannes’ Design Lions.

Yet their process of creating the zine has barely changed over the decade. The first stage is a brainstorming session by the family, followed by Pann and Claire planning the production schedule. Pann typically takes charge of the zine’s design, while Claire does the bulk of the writing. Meanwhile, Renn and Aira create the zine’s illustrations, with the collective convening a few weeks later to discuss the publishing schedule and production. “[The process] has become kind of organic,” says Pann.

What has changed, however slightly, are the roles each member has adopted. When the *Rubbish Famzine* was conceived, Renn and Aira were eight and five years old respectively; remarkably young creatives, but still impressionable children who were largely happy to follow in the footsteps of their parents. This year, Renn and Aira will be turning 20 and 17, with Pann adding that their contributions to the zine are “smaller and more specific,”



**“These [issues] hold all the memories that they might have otherwise forgotten... They don’t really have that much interest to pick up and go and read their stuff because the meaning is not there yet. But I think the day where both of us don’t exist anymore, there’s the completion of that project,”**

as if they had become freelance writers for their parents, on top of conventional chores. They have more commitments outside of Holycrap and other hobbies as teenagers and soon-to-be adults.

“When Renn was around 14, we already roughly knew he would have less time with us for sure, so we started to treat both of them like freelancers,” Pann says. “So after we brainstorm, and we agree [on a] topic, for example, then me and Claire will plan out the schedule...”

“...which part [of the zine] they need to do...” adds Claire.

“...and we need to send the print, let’s say in November. Then by September-ish, we should see the first draft from them. Something like that. So we give them ample

time for their contributions,” says Pann.

As for Renn and Aira, devoting a not-insignificant amount of time as a child on this project means having to skip out on the occasional activities with friends. “I guess when you grow up like this for a while, you think it’s normal,” says Aira. “As you grow older, you’re like, ‘Wait, I don’t have time to do this,’ or ‘I can’t go to a friend’s birthday party,’ or something, because I have other things to do. But it was always quite normal and I never minded it much.”

When asked how Holycrap has nurtured her love for zine-making, Aira was quick to point out that she’s still discovering her interests, such as writing and illustration, since she was very

young when the *Rubbish Famzine* was first published. “I don’t know what I love,” says Aira. “I’m not sure how to express it properly. Some things in my earlier years, I can’t remember very well because I was quite young.

“Whatever I learned or experienced, it doesn’t stick with me as much as it would if I was doing them for the first time at this age.”

Renn admitted that he was “pretty invested in it” in the first few years, but became less so as he became older. “For me, it’s not really my hobby or passion anymore. Now my passions and hobbies are more like fitness and health. But I still enjoy doodling now and then... illustrations, mainly.”

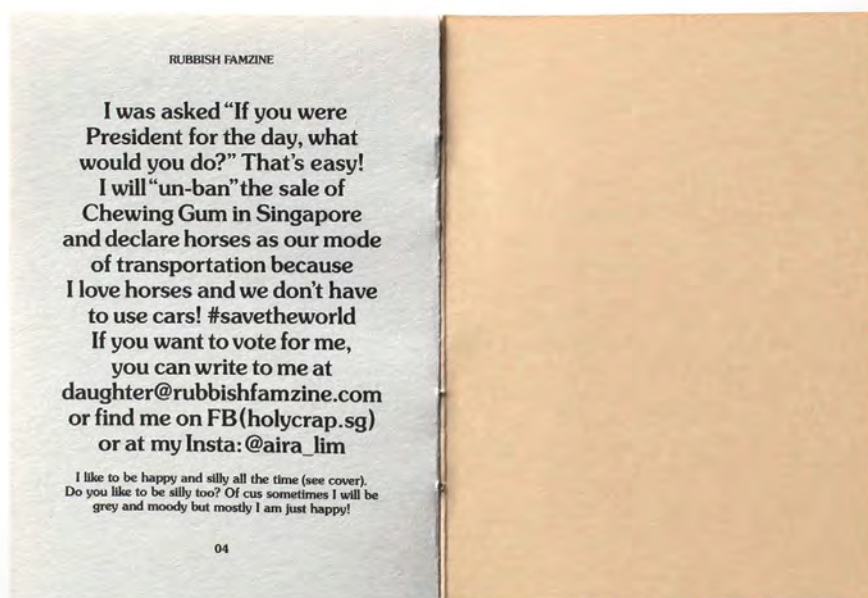
Despite the diminishing involvement of the Holycrap progeny, there still isn’t a sense that the *Rubbish Famzine* is nearing its end. Pann and Claire are eager to keep the zine going as long as possible. “If we have another idea for the next one we’ll just [keep doing it],” says Claire. “And we do say that we’ll try, we’ll just keep doing until one day our ideas run out or...”

Aira interjects at this point. “I think that will be till his death bed,” as she looks at Pann, much to the amusement of the rest of the family.

That’s because the *Rubbish Famzine* is more than just a print or artistic project for Holycrap. While it may have begun as a lighthearted family activity, it’s also the parents’ attempt to present *Rubbish Famzine* as something more enduring to their children: a keepsake — even an heirloom — that they might want to come back to when they are older. “When they are in their early teens, late teens and young adulthood, they’ll go out fly off the nest when the parents are still in the nest,” says Pann, “but then maybe in their late 20s and early 30s, they will try to come back more, and that’s where you know, hopefully it’s already maybe issue 28, 29, things like that.

“These [issues] hold all the memories that they might have otherwise forgotten, like things that the two kids are saying to each other. There will be a lot of stuff that they did when they were young that I’m very sure they don’t remember. And to be frank, our old issues, they are not very well versed with them as well. They don’t really have that much interest





to pick up and go and read their stuff because the meaning is not there yet. But I think the day where both of us don't exist anymore, there's the completion of that project, that I feel, [will make *Rubbish Famzine* a] full circle."

Take the children's shared enthusiasm for food, as the family discussed their more memorable *Rubbish Famzine* issues. One of them is the sixth issue,

"An *Emojious Odyssey of the Gluttonous Omnivores*," which explores the family's love of Singaporean cuisine. The issue, which is packed in a Chinese takeout box that's ubiquitous in the country, is based on their numerous trips to local food courts. Renn and Aira fondly remember their food trip across Singapore ("Because we can eat!" Renn recalls with a smile). Across Holycrap's extensive and esoteric

repertoire of zines, the fact that any particular issue stood out from the rest speaks to how tight-knit the family is.

"[When it comes to] things that stand out, it's this type of stuff, we're out basically doing a lot of stuff. Taking a lot of photographs," says Claire. "This is why we wanted to do a zine, a physical thing, so we can input our little DNA [into it] and do stuff together and have fun doing it." **BP**

## Creators Diagram Where They Work



**I'M LAWRENCE HUBBARD** aka "Rawdog". I am co-creator of *Real Deal Comix* and this is my Art Hole! My digs are quite spartan compared to others, but it works for me! My drawing table, my pens and pencils and always my 19 x 24 bristol board! My studio is also my bedroom, so if I'm working on a big project I can crash for a few hours and then keep on banging out pages.

I'm starting to get into digital art, but I still like to kick it old school, pencil and pen on paper! **BP**



# ZINES



## America's Dreaming Zine #11

*Perzine, Issue #11, Sophie Mol, 42 pgs*

When looking through my suitcase of old zines, this one immediately jumped out at me as a favourite. I fondly remembered the cover, and while flipping through the pages memories came rushing back. It's sort of like a celebrity gossip zine, and a number of more England-centric stars going over my head. I don't relate to much of what she wrote, so why did I love this zine so much? It's cute and peppy and like reading someone's diary. I think this was the first zine I had picked up that wasn't heavy and depressing. Most of my prior zines were about abuse, poverty and all the other turmoils of the world. In a way this was the first time I realized zines can be silly and fun, using a personally made platform for lightheartedness.

It's set up in an alphabetical structure, associating words and faces for each letter. A is for Australia. B is for boys, where Sophie gushes about every boy who she thinks is hott (spelled with two T's). There is a lot of talk about crushes and kissing. Deep love for Harry Potter, Biggie Smalls and Spongebob Squarepants (whose hotness level is not mentioned).

The zine includes top five lists, a look at what products Sophie uses in the bathroom and a recap of stories she read on livejournal of how girls actually play with their Barbies (boils down to nakedness and violence). Overall this is a fun little zine if you need to feel like a teenager again. (Devin Canary)



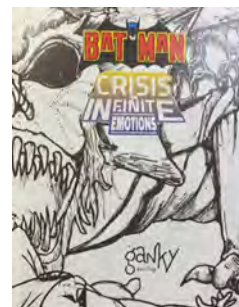
## Anxious

*Litzine, Issue #14, 18 pgs, Feels, [feelszine.com](http://feelszine.com), \$8*

*Anxious* is a wonderfully uplifting mini-zine from an assortment of writers and poets who come together under the mental health banner of that annoying, nibbling feeling of being anxious. I'm not talking about the kind of anxiety that one gets when worried about an upcoming test or that second job interview but rather the type of anxiety that can render a person completely incapacitated. It's more like drowning in a sea of quicksand and unable to scream for help. As Alexia Dalla Rosa writes in the opening pages, "Awake the entire night just to see proof of the sun. Isn't it exhausting? As if every thought has a solution." A fucking understatement.

Anxiety, while a sometimes terrifying experience, can also be a place of self-discovery as it forces some into periods of self-reflection, often in the form of intense therapy. And there's also something wonderful that lurks in that space between our ears, and something deeply connecting in reading about the experiences of others who are battling the same condition.

Throughout *Anxious* are insightful glimpses into the human condition and poignant moments in the day-to-day struggles of the writers, who choose to use words as a form of medication. The written works in *Anxious* are paired with beautiful blue and purple illustrations by Morgane Guedj. *Anxious* leaves the reader with these, somewhat comical, words from writer Frightened Rabbit's State Hospital, "Her heart beats like a breeze brick thrown down the stairs." (Raymond Helkio)



## Batman: Crisis on Infinite Emotions

*Comic, Charles Agopsowicz and Gord Cummings, 18 pgs, [gankycomix.com](http://gankycomix.com)*

It is difficult to get more ubiquitous than Batman. He, like the night, is everywhere and everything. Toys. Shirts. Popsicles. Those glass McDonalds mugs you encounter at house parties. Because of this, he's an easy target for parody and satire. A man who dresses up in spandex and beats up criminals while (at times) parading around with a rotating number of young sidekicks and instilling the same violence into them? The jokes write themselves. Adam West was living well off this. I've even reviewed Batman spoofs for this very magazine in recent history.

It is easy, then, to write off *Batman: Crisis on Infinite Emotions* as simply another Batman goof around with the same jokes we've seen before. While it does dip into the already deep well of Batman bits, Agopsowicz and Cummings' comic does distinguish itself.

With the assumption that you know who the Psycho Pirate is (and don't feel bad if you don't), the comic sees the reformed supervillain seeking purpose, stumbling into a clinic where psychedelics are being used for microdosing treatments. For Gotham's protector, this will not stand, and Psycho Pirate has the crud beaten out of him by the dark knight before being interrupted by heroes Power Girl and Huntress. A fight ensues, while heavily engaging in a debate about the use of ketamine and other substances in the treatment of mental health.

The conflict here is all the funnier with the "high school sketchbook" style artwork butting up against the characters performing armchair psychoanalysis on Batman. It's a joke that could have been very one note, but the

creators add enough dimensions to it that I never found myself thinking, “Ok I get it, that’s enough.”

By its trappings as a Batman parody, and all that concept invites, *Batman: Crisis on Infinite Emotions* manages to show that there is still fun to be found in the vast field that is making fun of superheroes. I look forward to seeing Agopsowicz and Cummings take on The Spectre and his crippling addiction to online gambling. (Graham Sigurdson)



## A Beginner's Guide to Treewatching

Artzine, Skye Henterly, 24 pgs, *Microcosm*, [microcosm.pub](http://microcosm.pub), \$4.95

The gorgeous and detailed illustrations are what drew me to this zine. What kept me reading

was Skye Henterly's deep reverence for the trees. I had not heard of 'treewatching' before, and it makes my heart sing that people in the world love trees as much as Henterly does.

The wild, which can range from outside the window, on your block, or anywhere a tree grows. Henterly makes it clear that any tree, anywhere can be watched and that's fantastic. Henterly encourages us to bring a small notebook and consider making gentle sketches of the trees when we fall in love. While reading I flashed back to a tree I loved once on Commonwealth Avenue in Allston, Massachusetts. I would smoke my cigarette on the tree lined street. I took an interest in an old, storied oak and if I quieted down just enough, I swear I could hear her whisper.

Alas! I was a young foolish college boy, always pretending I knew everything. If only I had come across this zine then, maybe I would have actually learned from the tree, instead of pretending to learn in a lecture hall. It's never too late to listen to trees, dammit! (joe from Longisland)



## bOING bOING

Litzine, Issue #1, Mark Frauenfelder and Carla Sinclair, *Happy Mutants*, 36 pgs

Similar to the classic joke cults of yesteryear, such as The Church Of The Subgenius and Discordianism (there's a Robert Anton Wilson interview), *bOING bOING* posits that sense of televangelist gnosis into a form of agitpop with a special cyberpunk focus, making for a zine mired in all forms of pseudo-philosophy and techno-theology, brimming with old-school eighties punk-flavoured anarchism and seventies post-punk-flavoured auto-didacticism.

The result is mostly reactionary polemic to the neoconservative capitalistic system of the 80s in its aesthetic trappings and content. Good when it's interesting but at times quite derivative in its barbs. Some aspects of the zine certainly haven't aged well (like the overly optimistic claim that with computer tech wiretapping would have been made completely obsolete by now through encryption), but for the most part it's an interesting dive into the underground with a peculiar science-minded flavour.

Design-wise it is pedestrian, the format doesn't lend visually (*Mondo 2000* is much better in this regard) especially for being made by cyberpunks which, if anything, is pure aesthetic. The articles and interviews, in contrast, are tops. They have a great eye for intriguing topics that have genuine intellectual depth, and aren't simply trying to crack as many jokes as they can.

For all of *bOING bOING*'s Dadaist tendencies, they are, at heart, serious about their subculture and all that functions within it; the interview with Libertarian candidate Jack Dean discussing the role of government control and the general facets of politics, the article on 'techno-thwarting the government,' and the bitterly satirical "News" section perhaps demonstrate these mores best. Behind their thick curtain of irony lies a deep

sincerity for their vision of society, and, of course, for poking fun for all the squares who will never get the joke in the first place, just like the aforementioned Subgenii and Discordians. Bless their digitized hearts. (Noah Rymer)



## but i digress

Photozine, Issue #2, Nestor Kok, 1 pg, [behance.net/nestorkok](http://behance.net/nestorkok)

Why does the colour blue feel like remembering? *but i digress* floats a mystery to you in a sea of blue fragments. The square pieces are of a photo of the author standing in front of Chicago's infamous Bean in Millennium Park. Kok tries to piece together a memory with these disembodied details. But it's complicated.

*but i digress* is a one-page zine and on its inside folio the colour photo is printed in full. As you work through *digress*, the full photograph calls you like a dare. You can peek in the folds, catch larger glimpses of the scene. You have to decide, will I follow Kok's storyline into reverie, or should I just look at it quickly now? Which version of the moment is more accurate? It's tempting to think that the full photograph will give you the whole picture.

I like the way the Bean itself bends and warps our perception of the world. The people reflected in it in Kok's photo are distorted, and that's part of the joy of looking into the Bean. It reminds me just how frail and mutable our memories are. Our perspective on a past event can change over time given someone else's account or our desires creeping in. But photographs? They are a more stable glimpse of the past seen through the static perspective of the camera. Though, *but i digress* illustrates that perspective is misleading. Kok remembers bird shit on the sculpture that the camera couldn't pick up and the bright, unrelenting summer heat that afternoon. The



camera can be as forgiving as we often think of it as objective, bald, even cruel. (Christine Cooper)



### Celtic Raven Women

Fanzine, Rin Vanderhaeghe, 24 pgs,  
Crow and Moon Press, [@crowandmoonpress](https://twitter.com/crowandmoonpress)

Rin Vanderhaeghe gives an informative and detailed look into the ways

that Celtic deities and goddesses were turned from powerful women into “evil, and malicious women.” Vanderhaeghe gives extensive information on the close association of ravens and crows close with Celtic women and how they were equally feared, loved and revered, seen as “bringers of death and war, as well as messengers from the Gods and bringers of prophecies.”

The zine is gorgeously illustrated throughout in black and white with raven feathers. Each picture of ravens ranges from regal to frightening, each bird speaking to the reader with a different message. There's also a two page spread of an unkindness of ravens swirling through the air as their feathers rain off of them.

The main takeaway from *Celtic Raven Women* is how despite the attempts to

demonize these women they remain powerful figures that are associated with life just as much as they are with death, not to mention the importance of using aspects of these women to come into our own power. (Sarah O'Connor)



### Cosmic Fern

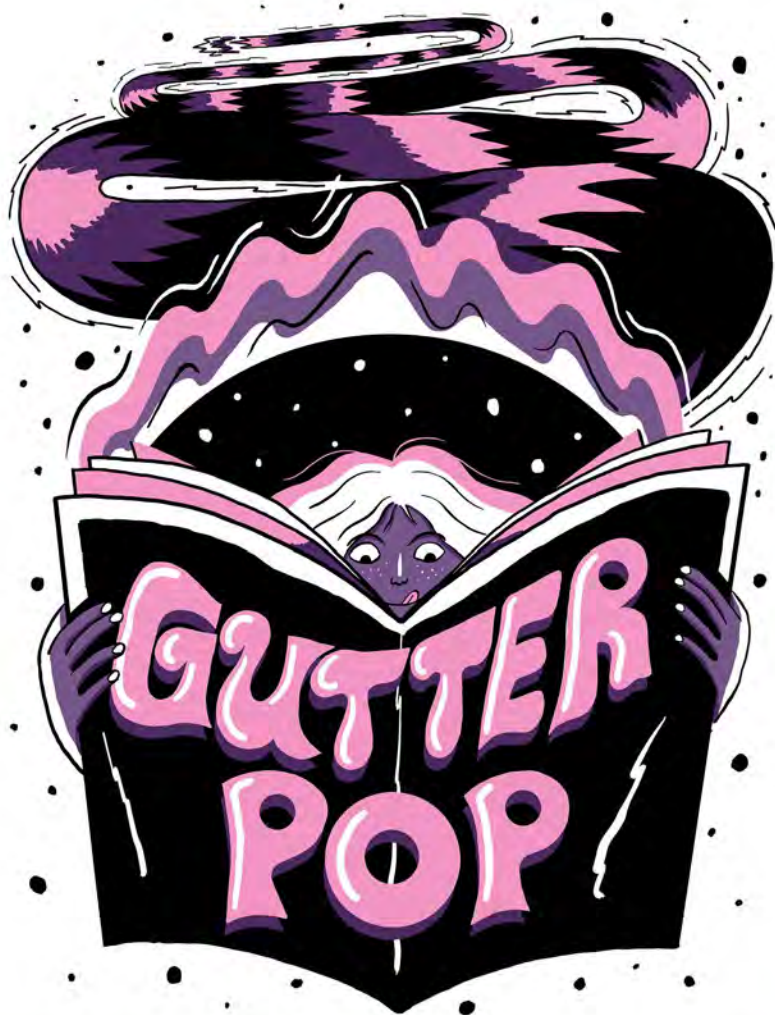
Comic, Issue #1, Sarah Maloney, 16 pgs,  
[maloneydoodles.bigcartel.com](https://maloneydoodles.bigcartel.com), \$12

Herbs and Flora are having a bit of a moment. Whether they be foraged or purchased, it is now easier than ever to be closer to nature. Grab a handful of that nature. Put it on your wall. Dry it out to hang it somewhere. Heck, smoke em if you got em. This is sort of a long-winded thematic preamble to describe *Cosmic Fern*, in which two spacefaring lovers descend upon a planet in search of pieces of nature with which to decorate their home... in space!

Not long after their arrival, Raye and Khora partake in some “psilocybin polypodiopsida,” their field guide close at hand as they seek out the “cosmic clippings” they desire. As you might guess, the pair soon partake of the plant’s spores, tripping and hallucinating as they experience the fusing of self and time, the image of a talking leaf explaining light cones and how they might behave in a black hole to them. Space psilocybin, it seems, is not all that different from its counterparts on Earth.

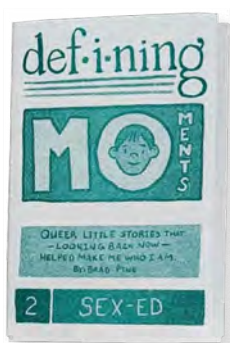
*Cosmic Fern* is certainly nice to look at. The pink and blue risograph ink being a suitable pallet for the otherworldly flora that the pair is seeking out. It’s the pages that mix both colours that are the stronger ones here, as the ones that lean heavily in one direction are almost too bright. Across a relatively short 16 pages, Maloney certainly manages to depict a variety of strange locales.

There’s a quaintness to things. Raye



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and Khora are clearly and believably in love, and this vignette of their no doubt much longer time together is even more enjoyable because of it. As a result, the sci-fi setting of the comic does wind up feeling a little inconsequential. There's not really anything here that requires a sci-fi setting, but at the same time, I feel as though *Cosmic Fern* would be lesser without it. Maloney renders a world that is convincingly lived in and just different enough from our own as to be enticing. (Graham Sigurdson)



## Defining Moments (Do I Have A Weird Penis?)

Perzine, Issue #2, Brad Pyne, 8 pgs,  
[bradpyne.ca](http://bradpyne.ca), \$5.95

*Defining Moments* is a zine series created by Brad Pyne, a graduate of York/Sheridan Graphic Design who lives with his partner and beloved dog, Harvey, in Toronto's West end. Described as "queer little stories that helped make me who I am," the zines are reflections on pivotal, sometimes embarrassing, moments in Brad's life. Issue #2 is a perfect example.

In this zine, Brad details his first sex education class in grade five where they learned about anatomy and the growing pains that accompany adolescence. In this zine entitled "*Sex-Ed*," during a sexual education class he learns about body hair, body odour and cracking voices, and encounters his first illustrated look at the penis (both circumcised and not). All this poses more questions than answers and, to Brad's horror, his penis did not match what he was studying. In an effort to solve this new and disturbing question, Brad asks his mother to compare his penis to that of the drawings.

While the zine is a humorous slice of life, it tackles a subject that many boys are not likely brave enough to raise with

their peers, let alone a parent. *Defining Moments* comes with a poster that illustrates all the different shapes and sizes of penises, something that will surely look great hanging on your bedroom wall! (Raymond Helkio)



## Dishwasher

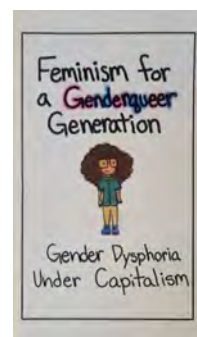
Artzine, Issue #9, Dishwashing Pete, 28 pgs

Continuing the lineage of creative slackerdom from George Orwell's caustic kitchen experiences when he was down-and-out in Paris and London to minimum-waged punks slopping grease at McDonald's, *Dishwasher* held the torch for all the disgruntled, low-wage loafers of the world through its various working-class vignettes. Stories of its writer and editor Dishwashing Pete trying to land a decent job wherever he happens to roam, occasionally interfacing with lists, interviews, or even works of art revolving around the low-rent world of dishwashing and dishwashers. While all this may sound pretty cut-and-dry in its subject matter and an idea that would grow dryer than a week old rag, there's a surprising variety to be had.

Amongst solid couch-surfing advice of how to be a good guest and beautiful demonstrations of workplace sabotage, this issue contains a ten-page epic of Homeric (in terms of the Simpsons character, not the Greek poet) proportions about landing a job, quitting, than finding another one and stealing food from the kitchen, which manages to be entertaining both in the personal narration as well as the colourful lineups of skinflint bosses and lunkhead chefs. It's not exactly Bukowski, sure, but hell, who is?

If someone is able to make the world's most common and despised profession entertaining, then that's poetry in its own right. The best verse comes in the form of a movie review:

"I was excited to see the movie *Malcolm X*, because I wanted to see how Spike Lee would relate Malcolm's days as a dishwasher to his rise as a prominent leader." (Noah Rymer)



## Feminism for a Genderqueer Generation: Gender Dysphoria Under Capitalism

Comic, Sabrina Melendez, 14 pgs, \$15

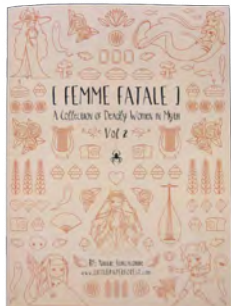
This short but potent zine engages with my often unanswered questions around where genderqueer and nonbinary people exist within feminist movements. How the body and mind relate (or don't). The big question around transness: would we want to change our bodies to "pass" if we didn't live in a world that subjugates women and female bodies?

Melendez identifies as agender. It can feel like there is no escape in our society from being gendered by our bodies and the way we adorn ourselves, so often the answer for many is to alter the body. The zine reminds us that the gender binary is a way to retain the status quo that "women biologically enjoy the work, so they don't need to get paid for reproductive labour." The tangle of technology, capitalism, and the patriarchy can disconnect our minds and bodies. Then add transness to the equation, it becomes more complicated. The author returns to the theory that the mind and body are the same, and can be reconciled, rather than succumbing and fitting the body into the binary box. The work to make peace with ourselves shouldn't just be internal and individual, we all must work together to dismantle that box.

The way Melendez mixes theory with personal anecdotes is a graceful way to deliver intellectual critique with relatable humour. This is a strong, accessible read that even someone who might be hearing



about “agender” for the first time can understand and empathize with. The handwritten text can get quite small, but if you have your readers on, you’ll enjoy this rich and nuanced take on transness within our society’s limiting structures. (Cassie Harner)



### Femme Fatale: A Collection of Deadly Women in Myth Vol 2

Fanzine, Nikkie Stinchcombe, 40 pgs,  
[littlepaperforest.com](http://littlepaperforest.com)

Nikkie Stinchcombe is back in her second volume of *Femme Fatale*, twice the length and fully coloured. Like the first volume, this zine looks at ten other dangerous mythological women but in more detailed, longer comics.

My favourite illustrations and comics were the Nagini, an Indian Sea Serpent who becomes vengeful of humans who pollute or disrespect the sea, punishing them with infectious skin diseases. The variety of blue used in the colour scheme felt just like submerging oneself with the Nagini. I also enjoyed the Japanese Jorogumo, a shapeshifter that would take on the appearance of a beautiful woman and prey on handsome men looking for love. She would invite these men into her home, distracting them with music, before binding them in silk threads and devouring them like a spider.

I love the amount of research Stinchcombe put into this zine. There’s an extensive bibliography at the end which any mythology fan will be eager to look into for more information on the women she’s examined.

Stinchcombe’s *Femme Fatale* entries are some of my favourite zines. I hope she continues to enlighten me with more dangerous mythological women! (Sarah O’Connor)



### Free to Choose, A Women's Guide to Reproductive Freedom

Political Zine, Esther Eberhardt. 24 pgs,  
*Microcosm*, [microcosm.pub](http://microcosm.pub), \$4.95

I’m a 38-year-old queer cisgendered white dude. I struggle to imagine the stories of women in a world that does not give them autonomy over their bodies. *Free to Choose* helped me glimpse into that world at a time when abortion was illegal. Although, through outrageous regression of legislation, abortion access is at risk in many parts of the United States. Once more, the violent unlearned lessons of history are back to cause more harm.

*Free to Choose* includes interviews with doctors and medical professionals sharing stories of patients forced into impossible decisions. Gut wrenching and impactful, the writing left me shaken. It also includes an in-depth description of Menstrual Extraction (ME), information all women should have printed access to.

It filled my heart with hope to hear stories about the Janes, women who banded together illegally and unapologetically to care for one another’s bodies when in need. This feels like necessary knowledge in the USA. This zine harkens back to a time when zines made movements visible. When zines made the invisible struggle tangible. I am grateful and more compassionate because it crossed my path. I am overjoyed it contains an invitation to reprint and distribute freely. The information contained within needs to be spread everywhere outside the all-seeing eye of the internet. (joe fromLongIsland)



### Grace

Perzine, Holly English, 24 pgs,  
[hollyenglish.com](http://hollyenglish.com)

*Grace* is an unflinching dive into the chronic pain of the author’s maternal grandmother and how it affected three generations of her family. Delicately rendered in black and white, it starts with the story of the ultimately harmful medical intervention of her grandfather’s depression. He was given a partial lobotomy, which sadly led to his suicide.

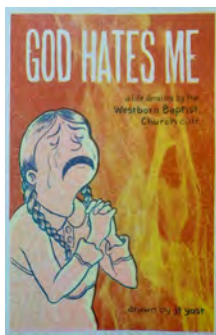
I expected the story to be about the family’s attempt to heal from that tragedy, a single mother with two children in the 1950s. Instead, it focuses on more of the medical system’s failures. *Grace* had a harmless, but bothersome twitch in her cheek. Her doctor attempted to surgically “redirect” the nerves in her face to correct it. The surgery traded a slight twitch for chronic pain that wore her grandmother down to a shadow of herself throughout her later life.

English’s drawings of her grandmother really struck me. A beautiful portrait of *Grace* in her youth lights up the cover, and as *Grace* struggles through her chronic pain, the representations of her deteriorate as she did. She becomes more of a crumpled abstraction than a person. “A leaking heart.”

When *Grace* finally leaves this plane, English’s linework becomes a peaceful realism again.

I remember my grandmother at the end of her life. She lived such a full and difficult life, and at some point she was just ready to go. “Time to die,” she would suddenly announce during visits. It was hard to hear, but I couldn’t blame her. I wonder why we try so hard to avoid ageing and dying. Why do we insist on prolonging someone’s life even if they are miserable? Their lives tend not to be pleasant at the end. Resources are a big reason for this, but society tends to treat our elders with

indignity and even becomes bitter and resentful of the responsibility. (Christine Cooper)



### God Hates Me: A Life Derailed by the Westboro Baptist Church Cult

Perzine, JT Yost, 24 pgs, Birdcage Bottom Books, [microcosmublishing.com](http://microcosmublishing.com), \$10

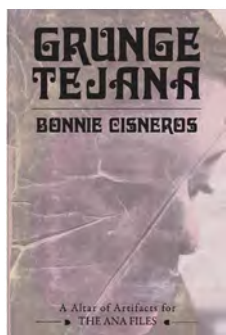
The first mini-zines I ever read were the ones I found at Ray's Tailoring Shoppe. I climbed onto the couch and instantly spotted the comic booklets with their brightly coloured covers. My eyes widened at the angry little comics full of hellfire and brimstone.

Mom, standing on the riser while Ray crouched down to pin her pants, frantically motioned for me. She didn't want her six-year-old to have nightmares. But she did it silently so as not to offend Ray because, crazed fundamentalist or not, he was one helluva tailor.

I'm reminded of Ray's scary, biblical tracts with *God Hates Me*, a brief graphic memoir of a girlhood in the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC). Comics are a fitting medium to convey the feeling of a kid whose family is sucked into the abyss of a vicious religious cult. Just as apt is the risograph printing: its grainy and uneven nature makes the reader feel unsettled. It's the same feeling as knowing that Yost's attempts to adjust to a life in the WBC will never be good enough. The loud pinks that weave throughout the zine symbolize her father's rage and abuse that remain just under the surface, waiting to be employed at a moment's notice to "wake up a sinner."

It's alarming how normal (and atheist!) Yost's father started out, and how quickly he was lured into the WBC web. I thought I had an inside track on the methods and psyche of WBC founder Fred Phelps, but *God Hates Me* provided facts that were news even to me.

What a moving and visually excellent account of growing up in a notorious cult. Young Yost is a deeply sympathetic character, and as a reader I'm constantly concerned whether Yost would end up okay. I'm going to take her appreciation of zines as a good sign. (Jen Bonardi)



### Grunge Tejana: A Altar of Artifacts for THE ANA FILES

Artzine, Bonnie Cisneros and Cloud Delfina Cardona, 31 pgs, Plancha Press, [bonniecisneros.com](http://bonniecisneros.com), \$15

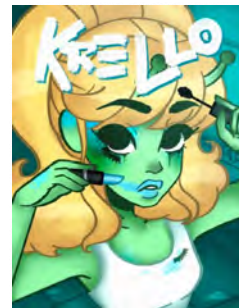
*Grunge Tejana* is an all-inclusive haunting. The artifacts and excerpts in these pages are a supplement to Bonnie Cisneros' essay "The Ana Files," previously published in *River Teeth Journal*. In these lovingly collaged pages, I grow to know Cisneros' friend Ana. I feel Ana's disappearance, Cisneros' loss of a sister, everything that haunted both girls, now women.

Though published in 2018, this is a quintessentially 90s zine complete with Nirvana lyrics, annotated liner notes, photobooth strips, mixtapes, jelly shoes, a 1994 notebook paper drawing of Courtney Love by Ana herself, photocopied concert tickets, y más.

On the topic of más, *Grunge Tejana* sheds light on the brown folks who made up a big part of the scene down here in Texas. Let me tell you, San Antonio, Texas was and is the place to be for Latinx art, writing, everything! This zine feels as much a love letter to the San Anto of the grunge era as it is to Ana. "Mexican, Tejana, American. All that," Cisneros writes. "Our ancestors came as they were." We had and still have just as much of a place in grunge, and this zine is a valuable addition to the conversation and preservation of this legacy.

"You can't spell Nirvana without A-na," Cisneros writes. Upon wrapping up

my reading of *Grunge Tejana* and maybe wiping away a tear or two, I am compelled to agree. (SG Huerta)



### Krello

Comic, Kanekiel, 14 pgs, [kanekiel.bigcartel.com](http://kanekiel.bigcartel.com), \$15

*Krello*, from what I can gather, is the first comic effort from Toronto illustrator Kanekiel. It sees a couple deal with an alien crash landing in their backyard. Without being too critical, *Krello* certainly feels like a debut effort, with its pages feeling more like an excerpt from a larger work than they do a piece of a serialized narrative. What little dialogue there is feels stilted, and things just sort of end without any resolution or hints towards what might come next. Kanekiel favours large panels that are mostly close ups of characters. This, coupled with dialogue balloons that tend towards only one or two words, makes the comic feel even shorter. It's as if there could be much more going.

Art-wise, I don't think *Krello* does a particularly good job showcasing Kanekiel's skills. The dark background colours often make things difficult to see, even against better lit, interior backdrops things aren't much better, with characters standing in front of a dark brown bookshelf or just as murky walls. *Krello* herself arrives in a bright blue uniform before throwing on a black band t-shirt. It's a little muddled, which isn't fair given how bright and vibrant Kanekiel's illustration work is otherwise.

A first published work shouldn't be the bar by which someone's efforts are measured, and though *Krello* left me wanting a bit more from it as a comic, there certainly seems to be a great deal of talent behind it and Kanekiel's talent as a whole. (Graham Sigurdson)





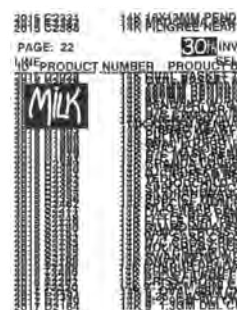
## **mend my dress: girl love, girl revolution, stories of friendship**

*Perzine, neely bat chestnut, 18 pages*

This zine is one of my oldest and most cherished. I have read it a million times or more. The edges are worn and discoloured and there is a little cat puke stain on the back cover. It's short but sweet and manages to pack a lot of heart into a small bundle. There's a beautiful tirade in the middle about how and why the riot grrrl movement is still valid in 2007 (the year this zine was written) that remains relevant to this day. The rest of it is mostly an

exploration of some of the author's closest friendships throughout her life, starting in kindergarten. neely writes in a wistful way that aches with nostalgia and longing for the past, but somehow manages to be at peace with the present.

As someone who was largely a loner in childhood, I found it fascinating to read about girls who were inseparable and had such intense love for each other. It was also shocking to me that such close friendships were often suddenly terminated and new ones grew in their place like a lost limb. I can't help but wonder what my childhood would have been like if I had found just one relationship like the ones described by neely. Her recollections of the girls and their adventures are so vivid that reading them is almost like being there with them. I think that is why I love this zine so much. Even though it describes a much different experience than my own, I feel a little less alone flipping through these pages. (Devin Canary)



## **MILK Magazine**

*Artzine, Issue #30, 16 pgs*

Providing psychogeographic voyages into microcosms of printed ephemera, MILK spills slews of found text, illustration and image into a format of free association, where anything is game to be repurposed or reinterpreted as according to the artist or to the reader. There is, from my perspective, absolutely no kind of harmony nor purposeful arrangement in any of these issues, almost making for an 'anti-magazine' wherein instead of an overarching topic providing the umbrella for what can or cannot be done in writing or image, MILK functions as something



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without a clear identity. Voiding the very idea of what a magazine is through the purposeful randomization of its enigmatic contents.

The 'Lost And Found' issue is essentially a grab-bag of whatever the editors could get their hands on, and through this simple subversion each piece of physical media is removed from its original context and gains a new subtext of being sort of a ready-made, yet without the clear detachment-through-manipulation displayed in a work of Man-Ray or Duchamp.

If anything, the lack of clever edits or snarky manipulation makes the image-as-itself haunting, confusing, and indefinitely eerie. Cheekily enough, for this issue a quarter of a chapter on Postmodernism was printed on the first page, right after its textgore cover.

Perhaps my favourite of the textual menagerie is a facsimile of a fax from New Line Cinema to theater projectionists on the topic of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, saying that David Lynch wishes to have the sound played two decibels above normal. MILK is a new kind of radio dial, a television that only plays commercials deprived of what they were once selling. If medium is the message, then the printed static is all but open to interpretation. (Noah Rymer)



## Nanonuts

Artzine, Bert Stabler and Mike Delinger,  
Belibiocorp Worldwide, 10 pgs

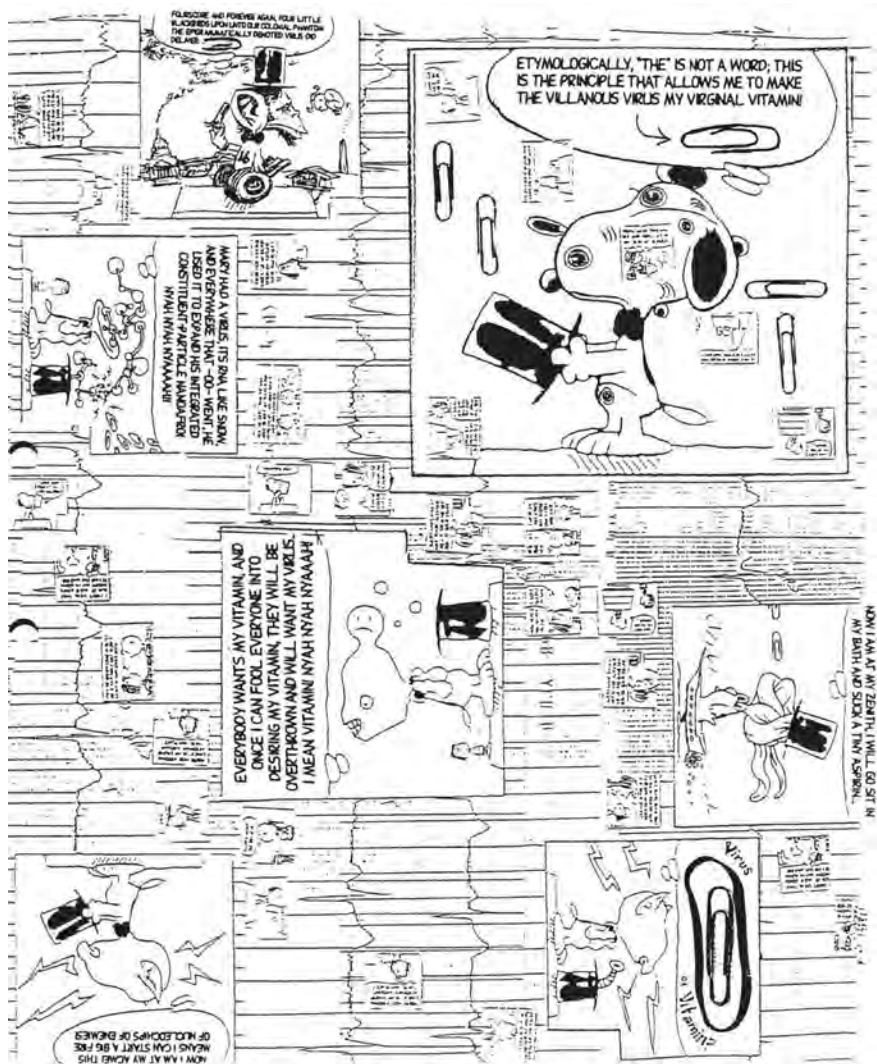
A blitzkrieg of consumer waste launched against the senses in comic-découpage, *Nanonuts* is a forced mutation and Frankenstein-esque corroboration of funny papers graverobbing, playing cut-up fast and hard with an endless supply of strips interlocked with a similarly endless supply of reference, weaving into each other ad infinitum ad absurdum; comics are grafted to and in front of each other, forming

something like an omnidirectional metaphysical nightmare like a negativistic version of the 'World Of Forms,' each panel teasing a microcosm of Lovecraftian abominations that would make Howard Peterson himself cower in fear. These surrealist readymade abominations spewing endless psychobabble that, from a certain distance, sounds like Da, Da, Da... There's something divinely brilliant in their creating absurdist arabesques from the carcasses of milquetoast culture that sort of hearkens to and portends to the more contemporary usage of memes from corporate commercials and ephemera.

Like analyzing a classical piece of artwork each page can be studied from

multidisciplinary and multitudinous angles, each sheet in itself is a confusing jumble of the lump sum of post-modernism that only gets more confusing the more you try to figure it out, an imagist labyrinth that coils further with every passing second. It's sort of like your first time reading a Zizek book where evening just seems to spiral in a million different directions and the footnotes themselves are a quarter of a page. If someone tried to track down all the references and in-jokes it would take several scholars to fully decrypt all of the metatextual elements. It's a post-apocalyptic rendering of Americana newspaper culture, Charlie Brown, and it's hurting my brain in the best way possible. (Noah Rymer)

### excerpt from *Nanonuts* by Bert Stabler and Mike Delinger







## Queer Your Mind - Lesbian Separatism Then & Now

Political Zine, Nicole Kelly and Phoebe Unter, 10 pgs, *bitchface*, [bitchfacepodcast.com](http://bitchfacepodcast.com)

This zine came to me many years ago at the height of my own lesbian awakening. It's an appetizer of theory that impacts the zeitgeist of lesbian culture today. You can follow the road map of references to bell hooks, Audre Lorde, the SCUM Manifesto, and more, to find other inspiring essential reading.

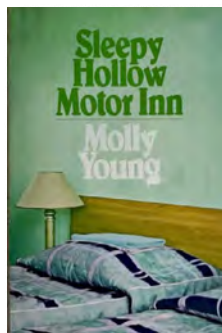
The zine opens with frustration, "Women...got TIIIIRED of waiting for men to get on board..." so the strategy was essentially, "We quit." It highlights that men are already separatists. So by that logic how long until men colonize our lesbian utopia? We aren't safe as separatists either, so the stretch goal would be to radicalize the men too. Go forth and give this zine to a man!

Yes, we shouldn't be seeking validation from men. Yes, we should be sharing our own power and wealth and establishing our own institutions that don't rely on or require men. Yes, we should critique male supremacy, social hierarchy, and compulsive heterosexuality. But if we are to break down the rigid gender roles as called to by this zine, then we have to break the binary altogether.

Reading this led me to some pivotal development as a queer person. The power of knowing where I exist in the history of my culture means I could build the next wave, and be a strong leader for the next generation of queer people.

The main message that this zine shouts from the megaphone is "all women are lesbians." It quotes Eileen Myles, "everybody's queer — everybody's wrongly shaped for a culture that requires conformity." Without the confines of the cisnormative patriarchal society, we would have infinite gender. The dismantling of the oppressive system means the erasure of the toxic masculinity preserving it, so men can be

included in the transcendent freedom of feminism and queer liberation. Maybe, one day, men will no longer exist. And, neither will women. I'm sure we'll come up with some other creative and corrupt way to establish hierarchy and maintain unrest. But until then, consider being a lesbian! (Cassie Harner)



## Sleepy Hollow Motor Inn

Litzine, Molly Young, 64 pgs, *Young Blanks*, [Youngblanks.com](http://Youngblanks.com), \$15 USD

Not to be too glib, but I have a private competition between myself and everyone else in the world where I try to figure out who had the most successful COVID quarantine experience. In a match between myself and book critic Molly Young, she takes the cake. While I was panic-adopting a large pitbull and getting beer hand-delivered to my apartment, Young escaped to her family's "conveniently empty" Cape Cod cottage nestled in amongst an idyllic scientific community where she spent her time going on long walks, reading, investigating old murders and researching Titanic submersibles (what a trendsetter!). If you, like myself, crinkle a brow at the terms true crime and ruin porn, have no fear. Young breathes life into her tale of homicide, hemophilia, Cape Cod motels and underwater exploration. She brings a love of language, rigorous research approaches and a jovial reportage style reminiscent of a *This American Life* episode.

I hesitate to use the word "fried" when describing my attention span, but if I were to, this zine would be the antidote to my problem. Amidst the murder and discussion of global pandemics, there were moments of delight that soothed my soul. For example, Young's father kept log books of his time spent in Cape Cod where he tracked weather, phone numbers, and weekend activities, all captured in neat, careful handwriting that reminded me of my own methodical grandfather. And

might remind you of yours!

Another delight, Young writes of a paper by scientist Stefan Helmreich that describes his exploration of the Titanic wreck in a small submersible named Alvin. To quote her, quoting him, she writes, "His description of the sub is the most beautiful I've ever read: To be nestled inside the submersible, he writes, it to be "a ball of culture submerged in the domain of nature.""

At one point Young collects the original police report from the murder and takes the time to commend the police officers on their clarity of thought, their innovative use of passive voice, and relatively few spelling errors. I too, tip my hat to the officers, and to *Sleepy Hollow Motor Inn* (this book not the place described therein), for also possessing the qualities mentioned above. (Kate Latimer)



## Terra Incognita

Artzine, edited by marc van elburg, 24 pgs

Strange hallucinogens of paper and ink deconstructing and reforming, Bacchanals of half-digested imagery violently erupting from the funeral fog of the subconscious ether. Tribal signifiers and ancient symbols seep into modernism like vengeful ghosts, somewhat akin to Basquiat's city-based cave paintings. There is a clear sense of violent catharsis, of exorcism present in every single page and every line laid on the paper that's terrifyingly deliberate and schizophrenic, undeniably filled with anxiety, paranoia and delusion. To read *Terra Incognita* is to reject any and all facets of normality; this isn't so much a zine as a cry in a world gone absolutely stale and completely milquetoast.

The text component itself is rendered not so much as meaningless but as simply part of the image-as-image, taking on a new aesthetic meaning as a sort of non-empty space, while the fringes and

margins act like the margins of a meta-physical television, hinting at what lies just beyond perception, and even if you, yourself, are, in fact, correctly perceiving. Contradiction becomes inherent and juxtaposition runs rampant but the ebb and flow of the internal acid tides of this zine have their own manic rhythms. Language transforms into a virus, corrupting what it infects, losing its own meaning and becoming dead and alive; somnambulist, alien.

Complete submersion into an artist's psyche with no sense of boundaries whatsoever is a terrible and beautiful and divine thing, and Monobrain demonstrates that as a singular yet incoherent strain of thought processed into one mind. Utterly incomprehensible, utterly brilliant. (Noah Rymer)



### That's My Jam! A Beginner's Guide to Flat Track Roller Derby

Infazine, Abriana Rosu, 16 pgs,  
[etsy.com/shop/AbrianaArt](https://etsy.com/shop/AbrianaArt), \$4

I really could have used this zine during the Obama administration.

This has nothing to do with Barack, only that his presidency happened to coincide with the years that I was a roller derby superfan. I don't know how many friends I dragged to the Shriners Auditorium to introduce them to the glorious game, but I was known as a derby evangelist.

A zine describing how the sport works didn't exist then. I resorted to creating my own soundbites to sum up the rules for friends. For my edification, I turned to the Women's Flat Track Derby Association's rule booklet which was thorough but overwhelmingly so. Too dry for most.

*That's My Jam!* fills this vacuum handily for not only burgeoning fans but also rookie skaters. It includes everything a good instruction book should: a clean,

legible font; a logical structure to the order of concepts, creating an intuitive flow from one idea to the next; and simple but well-drawn pictures that exemplify the action and complement the text.

Rosu makes excellent use of section titles and spare font colours to organize her derby doctrine. Aside from a couple of the more complicated strategy descriptions, it's comprehensible in one read. The first few pages would be enough for a first-time viewer.

Rosu is all facts. The zine isn't just meant to ease people into the sport, but draw them into competition. People typically only join communities where they see themselves represented, and derby is known as a game for the Everywoman. (Jen Bonardi)

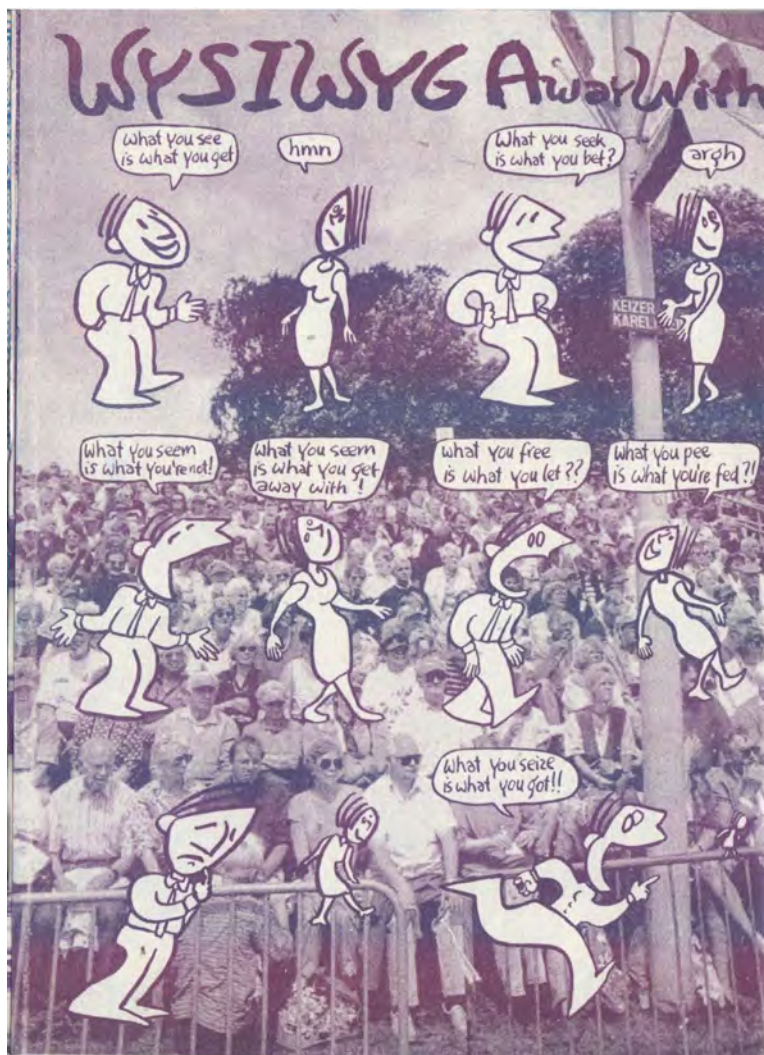


### there is an earth after innocence: christian hard rock albums deconstructed and erased

Poetry, andrea lianne grabowski, 20 pgs,  
[ko-fi.com/andrealgrabowski/shop](https://ko-fi.com/andrealgrabowski/shop), \$10

I teleported back to the musty old parish hall where youth groups were held the first time I read andrea lianne grabowski's poetry. Except now queerness was

excerpt from **Terra Incognita** by marc van elburg





The 6th Annual Broken Pencil

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no longer buried deep inside my teenage bones. My dykery was bursteth forth.

As a poet, grabowski shows immense talent and a biting voice. I would accept these as brilliant standalone, religiously reclaimed poems if I didn't know they were erasure pieces. There is queer beauty in the act of sifting through proselytizing words in order to create something more. In this case, that something more is unapologetic poetry.

While I loved the poems in this zine, grabowski's author's note at the end is what kept bouncing around in my head. She voices the growing pains of leaving behind harmful systems. Maybe it's okay to leave that which doesn't recognize our humanity. Maybe we can still be beautiful without being under the more-than-watchful eye of the Big C Churches that dominate North America.

Grabowski's work inspires a removal of empty, ethic-less punk aesthetic in favour of actual care for our fellow people. "welcome to / the part that hurts the most" reads the poem "plastic matches." In my experience, burning an already broken bridge is better than hurting yourself on one. (SG Huerta)

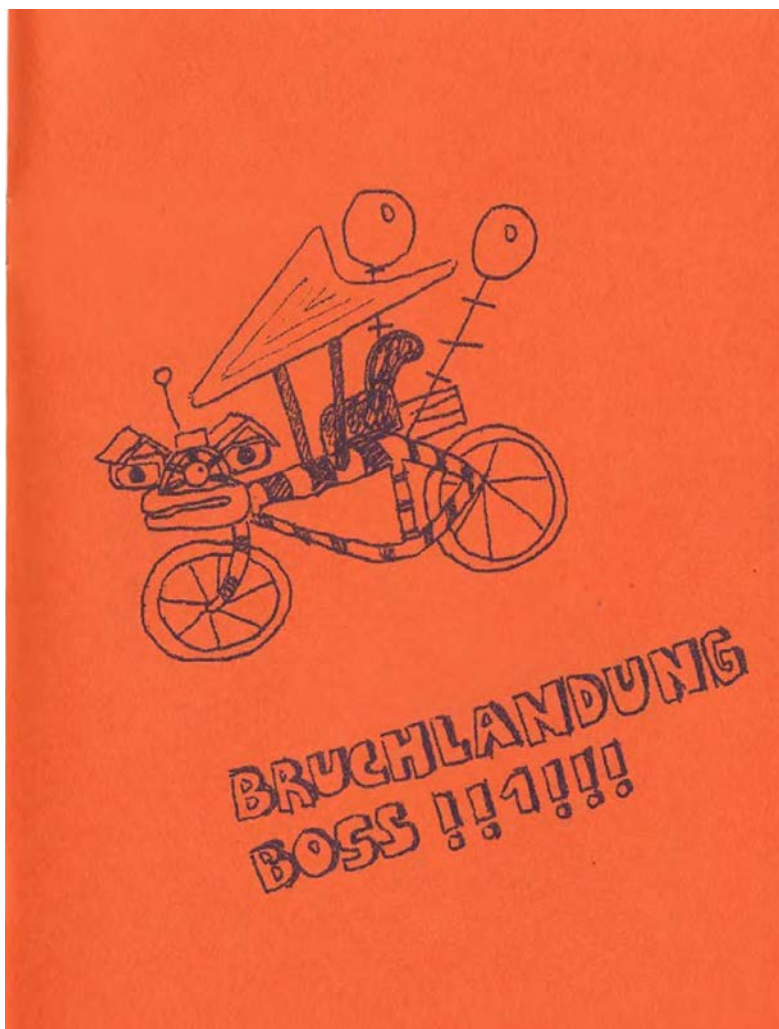


## Tom Turbo Fanzine

Fanzine, Elisabeth Danzer, 16 pgs,  
Vienna Printing Cooperative,  
[vieprintcoop.bigcartel.com](http://vieprintcoop.bigcartel.com), \$10

Fighting against villains, having 111 superpowers, and solving tough detective cases? That's right! This zine is about *Tom Turbo*, Austria's superhero bicycle of the 90s that looks like a clown with dinghy lips, tiger stripes and TV-squared eyes. Together with its founder daddy Thomas Brezina, Austria's most successful children's book author, they have solved criminal cases every Sunday morning on TV. Us '90s kids would wake up early to not miss the next clue for the infamous codeword. And if we followed the show just closely, we could use that codeword

excerpt from **Tom Turbo Fanzine** by **Elisabeth Danzer**



to participate in the show's raffle! But the chance for the big prize was never there because Mom wouldn't let you dial this oh-so-suspicious Viennese number from the Austrian Broadcasting Company.

What fascinates me about the *Tom Turbo Fanzine* is how Elisabeth Danzer accurately captures the childhood memories of a whole generation with so few, yet carefully selected illustrative elements. The zine's closeups seem to view the show through children's eyes that wander across the TV screen. The drawings look like the sketches in your notebook that you would do during a boring math class. Every piece of text immediately puts a jingle into your ear that you haven't heard in ages. Going through the zine, I suddenly found myself back on grandma's apartment floor in front of a tube TV. I could smell the scent of Marlboro's cigarettes that she would

smoke, and I even felt the buttons of the TV's remote control on my fingertips. To me, this zine is a great example of how to make an audience remember a feeling of belonging to a generation by reviving what mattered to it as children.

Reading the zine as a queer adult nearly 30 years after the show's peak, I can't help but admit that Thomas Brezina was probably my first daddy crush. By displaying his thick, sexy moustache in the zine, Elisabeth Danzer gave me clues for another case: Who was Thomas Brezina actually? Inspired by *Tom Turbo* I went on my own investigation (Google search) and discovered that it took Thomas Brezina until 2017 to finally come out as gay. By paying tribute to *Tom Turbo* after so many years in such a visually appealing way, this zine accidentally turned my early childhood stars into queer idols. (Tom Pfanner) **BP**



## Geordie Gordon

*Tambourine*

Victory Pool

[victorypoolmusic.bandcamp.com](http://victorypoolmusic.bandcamp.com)

It doesn't get much more DIY than recording an album in your grandma's attic. For this second record under his own name, Geordie Gordon (Barmitzvah Brothers, The Magic, Islands) returned to the streets of Guelph, Ontario to find the inspiration for a musical autobiography — a tale of letting go, becoming your queer self, connecting with similar souls and then preaching it all back to a younger you. Gordon's maturation as a writer and arranger is evident on this pastoral folk journey, though artificial beats occasionally interfere with the plaintive mood. Filter-free honesty is clearly his niche.



## Motion Sickness of Time Travel

*Not A Phase*

Independent

[motionsicknessoftimetravel.bandcamp.com](http://motionsicknessoftimetravel.bandcamp.com)

Georgia-based sci-fi drone maestro Rachel Evans is back with a whopping 20-track, two-hour-long collection that spans 15 years of recording and resurrects pivotal moments in relationships and self-discovery: falling in love; self-acceptance; missed opportunities; healing. Several of these songs are dedicated to particular people. That's not so dangerous an approach when your music is predominantly instrumental, but a couple of rare moments on this record see Evans trot out legitimate pop songs, vocals included. *Not A Phase* is as other-worldly as any MSoTT album, despite its earthbound focus. These memories haunted Evans and now they're here to haunt us.



## Spider Bite

*The Rainbow And The Dove*

You've Changed Records

[youvechangedrecords.com](http://youvechangedrecords.com)

Hearing Steven Lambke — already well-known to us as Baby Eagle — trying to sing along to rapid-fire punk is admittedly a little weird. His vocals are missing the vitriol that this lyrical content demands. Lambke and the Romano brothers (Ian and Daniel) rail against everything from colonialism to air conditioned houses on this second Spider Bite album, but also find time to wax philosophical on the meaning of it all: "What god or gravity keeps us spinning?" If you're already into these musicians there's plenty here to like. If you're looking for time-honored punk, you should probably steer clear. (All reviews by Scott Bryson)





## Girl Blunt

Directed by Clementine Narcisse

**GIRL BLUNT** opens with an advert for our two heroes' drug dealing business. It's bright and crunchy. This energy pushes through the rest of this vibrant film, living and breathing in contemporary aesthetics and culture of young alternative Black women. We're pulling on Aaliyah-core and the reclaimed hyperfemininity which sits at the core of contemporary Black fashion. It's all pink everywhere, with some phenomenal bedroom set design. There's a Trolls lighter, big "Doll" earrings and Y2K revival threads. Even the titular phrase is deeply tapped into this sphere, pulling on the Leikeli47 song of the same name.

Style pushes into the surreal at points. We get a hyper-saturated LSD high, where the world stops to give one of our leads inspiration. A balance is held

between ridiculous hyperreality and the grounded commonalities of Black girls living life. The groundedness specifically comes through with the centrality of gendered violence to the plot. These are women who have been wronged before and will likely be wronged again, so they're invested in supporting each other's entrepreneurial ambitions while getting their revenge.

A lot of *Girl Blunt* sits in a particular post-post-ironic space. Every word is cutting and everyone's tone is dry. This is bolstered by a snappy editing style which provides some ridiculous moments, like someone almost absent-mindedly calling her parents to tell them that someone is "literally dying" on their couch. At the same time, this tone can take out a lot of

the momentum, which is especially rough for a film this brief. It means that sometimes it's hard to pick out intentional humour from wooden, dissonant acting when we get too lost in the layers of insincerity.

Critiques aside, it's always fun to see Black girls do some mischief. Their moral complexity isn't an indictment and there's no demand that their Black Girl Magic is used in the pursuit of the just and the good. Instead the priority is pursuing pleasure and glory — "I wanna be the Beyonce of drug dealers, I'm not doing all this work to be a Michelle." *Girl Blunt* aims for being a small-scale story about young Black women trying to make it big and nails that — and it's something we need more of. (Oluwatayo Adewole) **BP**





## Isle of Pan

Developed by Dogū

**ISLE OF PAN** may be described as a kind of *Pokémon Snap* for cryptids. This third-person exploration game arms the player with a camera and a picture book. You are then set loose on the eponymous and mysterious Nordic isle to take pictures of all manner of creature, from fish and birds to banshees, faeries, gnomes, frogmen, harlequins, ancient gods. Various incomprehensible beings.

You start from your handsome little cabin up the path. You are equipped early on with a map and a personal sundial to manipulate the game's day/night cycle. Immediately, you see Puck right outside your lodging hailing you from atop a tree stump. Take a picture of him while he welcomes you. Take a picture of conceivably anything that moves in this game. When you do, you will create a Polaroid image that is then saved to an image folder, and a new entry in your magical picture-book with details about the creature.

Some creatures will only appear at certain times of day, and likewise some areas of the game only become

accessible when this condition is met. Perhaps some creatures or hidden areas only appear at night or dusk, or only become accessible when standing at the right position at the crack of dawn. Some areas may only open up to you once you have befriended the Raven King, or eaten a mushroom and followed the Funguy, or photographed every sheep on the island and learn their names.

The island itself is small. You will traverse its entire area many times, but it's surprisingly deep. Or really, it would be better to say it's hyper-dimensional. Scattered across the isle are portals to seemingly different points in spacetime, levels unto themselves. Each one makes a very gentle puzzle of the photography mechanic; the player is required to snap shots of specific creatures in each of these realms in order to obtain a token. Once you do, the 'Materialism Police' come to take you home. You are not required to photograph every strange sight to beat the game, though reaching the end does require obtaining every

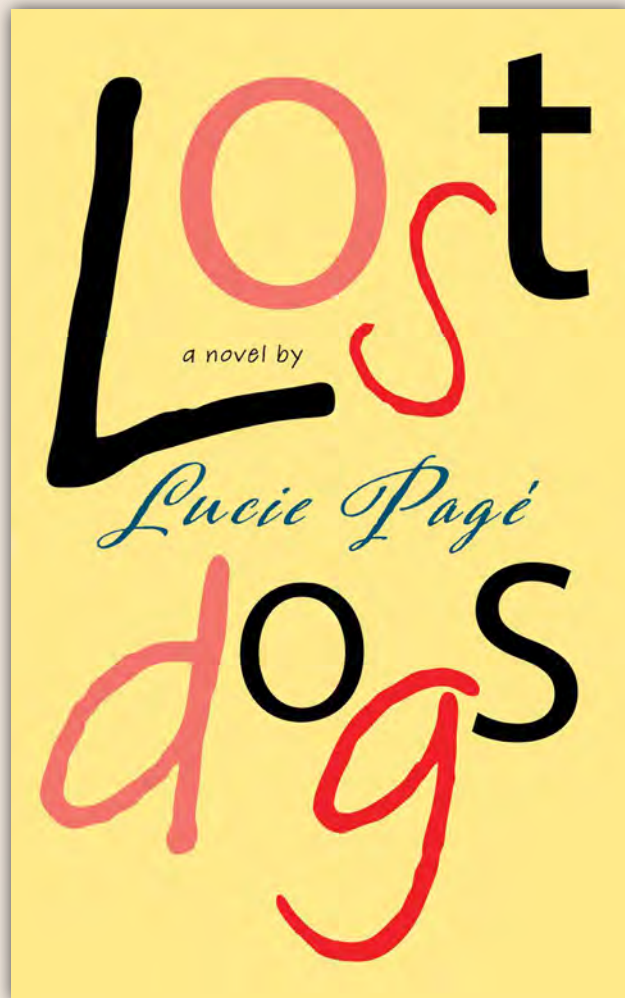
token. *Isle of Pan* is happy to let you take your time.

Each of these tokens, represented on the anterior wall of your cabin as a measure of your progress in the game, permit passage to return to their respective dimensions at any time. Likewise, on a shelf against a sidewall are all the skins you have unlocked in your journey. Once captured, you may become the Funguy, or Anubis, or a skeleton man, and so on.

The voice-acting, sound design and art direction in *Isle of Pan* are all well-executed and charming. Controls are, for the most part, intuitive and crisp (although I would like to be able to run a little bit faster and I found the pause menu clunky). As first outings for a developer go, Dogū has undeniably done a great job. *Pan* is an enigmatic, surreal and whimsical experience that hearkens back a little bit to the more psychedelic 3D games of the mid to late '90s. I mentioned *Pokémon Snap* at the start of this review, but more seriously my mind goes to the mystical works of Osamu Sato, or more truly bonkers CD-ROMs like *Drowned God: Conspiracy of Ages*.

That said, I do find myself philosophically at odds with some of the metaphysics of the game. Wizen floating heads with booming voices in pocket dimensions impart wisdom, but much of that wisdom redounds to a kind of contempt for the material world, positing the spiritual realm as some extra layer of reality that cannot be attained by material means. Unfortunately for those floating heads, psychedelic drugs and videogames *are* material things, and there are serious dangers to confusing a heightened experience brought about by such things for a higher plane of reality. There are dangers to losing the tether and living in a dream indefinitely, no matter how enticing. This is why the Materialism Police must bring the player home.

But we can still indulge in a little bit of fantasy. It can give new colour and insight to how we understand ourselves and the amazing real world around us. Pick a path in any direction and engage what you find, or what finds you, with fascination and humility. Take your time to study and wonder. Shoot a firework gun at a giant floating head just for the hell of it. It's fine, nothing can die here. Gods don't go down easy. (Lana Polansky) **BP**



**IN THIS DARKLY FUNNY  
DEBUT FROM LUCIE PAGÉ,  
CHARACTERS COLLIDE IN THE  
MOST UNEXPECTED WAYS AS  
THEY SEARCH FOR A DOG  
AND EVENTUALLY CREATE  
MEANING AND RELATIONSHIPS  
IN THEIR LIVES.**

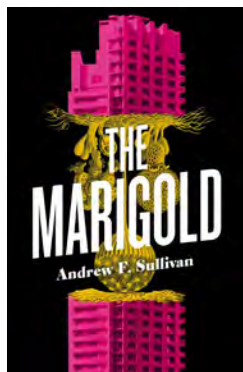
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# FICTION



## The Marigold

Andrew F. Sullivan, 352 pgs, ECW Press, [ecwpress.com](http://ecwpress.com), \$24.95

A cult of sacrifice-outsourcing real estate developers, public health investigators sporting bestial masks and a large cast of other Torontonians struggle to contain, monetize or simply survive a deadly fungal outbreak in this satiric horror novel. Set in an increasingly hollowed-out version of the city, with a sinkhole in place of Queen's Park, driverless streetcars drowning in sewage and an atrophied public sector at the mercy of a Sidewalk Labs stand-in, *The Marigold* is an engaging and unsettling saga of precarity and proliferating catastrophes.

Sullivan cites David Cronenberg and J.G. Ballard as major influences on the novel, and it shows in his eerie vision of the city. The titular condo tower features prominently, but the Toronto of *The Marigold* is most effectively unnerving when rendered from the vantage point of foundation pits, damp parking garages, fortress-like backyards and underground tunnels.

There's a skillful balancing of the novel's outlandish and grimly comic moments against its bleaker throughlines. Direct grotesqueness in *The Marigold* serves as an effective reprieve from its more grounded and familiar horrors. The novel often comes across as an expression of grief, and ineffectuality is ever-present: "Maybe he could see what was coming. It didn't mean he could change it." The fatalism and absence of easy platitudes allow for a more genuine engagement with social and ecological disaster.

Although characters in *The Marigold* can occasionally come across as stilted,

they're ultimately more than mere ciphers for conveying the corrosive effect of capitalism. Their complexity is most apparent in their grudging resilience and brief moments of slipshod resistance. (Isaac Sherry)



## LAUNCH SOMETHING!

Bae Myung-hoon, translated by Stella Kim, 368 pgs, Honford Star, [honfordstar.com](http://honfordstar.com), £11.99

One wishes there were more presses like Honford Star. By offering translations of East Asian literature, this publisher allows us to step outside of the slate of international hits on offer by the major presses and experience something different.

Bae Myung-hoon's *Launch Something!* is an example of that something different. In some ways it might be a little too different for the Western reader, as it satirizes aspects of the Korean military they may be too far removed from to really comprehend. Unfortunately, little is done in the way of explanatory notes to elucidate the unenlightened reader on the more obscure allusions, leading at times to near-total incomprehension. On the other hand, parts like the epic pick-up basketball scene are so clearly and inspiringly rendered that you might forgive you are reading a work in translation.

The novel's subject — the fictional Korean Space Force — proves to be a compelling setting for the story. The servicepeople are mostly conscripts barely old enough to live on their own, let alone operate a whole branch of the South Korean military, and yet they often surprise us by rising to the occasion.

There are tensions in the novel between Earth and Mars, between different departments, man and technology, management and underlings, ideal and reality and between youth and the weight of responsibility. Ultimately, the distance between the Space Force members' service to their country and

their personal lives is dissolved. There is something beautiful in the comradery they experience as they attempt to *Launch Something!* Little do these young people know what's at stake with their mission's success. (Jason Smith)



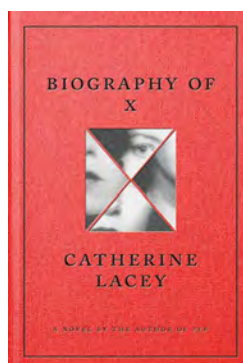
## This is the Afterlife

Jeff Chon, 166 pgs, Sagging Meniscus Press, [saggingmeniscus.com](http://saggingmeniscus.com), \$19.95 USD

Few characters actually die in Chon's versions of the "afterlife," but a handful of them probably wish that they had. Top contenders for alive-but-might-understandably-wish-otherwise are the guy who must never admit to his ex that her brother's necrophilia drove them apart, or the prototypical "mean girl" whose golden comeuppance earns her the moniker "piss princess."

No, it is not a work of absurdist comedy. Chon spins his sometimes improbable tales straight. The collection of tightly woven stories could as easily be titled "fallout" — one piece is a literal stand-off in a fallout shelter — but the poetry of "afterlife" is richer, and more apt. Chon's stories tend to begin after the crisis. He seems to like placing the reader alongside the characters deep in the muck, groping their way back rear-view style toward some kind of pivot.

Race, adoption, post-traumatic stress, coming of age and culture war are common strands Chon interlaces like a clutch of Jackdraw sticks, tugging and teasing at them until the often-bleak storylines fall into place. "I always tell myself the past only seems simpler because I've had time to process it," the narrator muses in the collection's opener. It's an insight that serves as a kind of roadmap for Chon's versions of the afterlife. There are no pearly gates in these carefully wrought tales. He pulls no punches, but the little hellfires he sketches spark and spit with understanding and life. (Rob Thomas)



## Biography of X: A Novel

Catherine Lacey, 416 pages,  
Farrar, Straus & Giroux,  
[us.macmillan.com/fsg](http://us.macmillan.com/fsg), \$28 USD

Art can be a curious thing. One person's masterpiece is another's mess — "my kid could draw that," as the old saying goes. But it can also be a painful thing. A tightrope walk of a novel, Catherine Lacey's *Biography of X* deftly weaves speculative fiction and fact into a story about love and abuse, a relationship turned sour and the lengths one will go to for their art.

Told as a fictional biography of a fictional artist, *Biography of X* blurs the lines between fact and fiction, creating a mirror world where everything is askew. After Emma Goldman is elected Vice-President, the US splits apart into three zones: a socialist Northern Territory, a libertarian Western Territory and the Southern Territory's fascist theocracy. Emerging from this mess is an artist who goes by many names, eventually settling on X. The book-within-the-book is a biography of her as written by her widow, CM Lucca. She travels around the world tracking down clues to the secretive X, eventually finding devastating truths not only about X, but about herself, too.

In X, Lacey has created a compelling, if dangerous, character. An artist, writer, and musician, X is composed of elements of Susan Sontag, Joni Mitchell, Renata Alder and more. In following her muse, X left a trail of broken people and shattered relationships, yet was a cultural trendsetter in multiple fields. She leaps off the page with a mix of arrogance, combativeness and vulnerability. She's a dangerous tiger of a person.

But where Lacey's book really shines is the worldbuilding of this funhouse-mirror United States. From the brutal

repression of the South to the failing utopia of the North, it's a world that examines the best and worst of the American dream. It's a world where the North elects Bernie Sanders while the South runs a literal thoughtpolice department. One is left wanting to know more about this world.

Still, *Biography of X* does exactly what one wants from speculative fiction: it weaves a compelling story with deft commentary while avoiding the trappings of more preachy fiction. Her book is a warning: not just about politics, but also about art and abuse. Recommended. (Roz Milner)



## Sing, Nightingale

Marie Helene Poitras, translated by  
Rhonda Mullins, 176 pages,  
Coach House Books, [chbooks.com](http://chbooks.com), \$22.95

Who knows what lies in the forest after dark? What mistruths have been told and believed year after year?

On a summer day in Marie Helene Poitras's new novel, *Sing, Nightingale*, Alienor comes to the crumbling country estate of Malmaison, bringing with her a reckoning and an awakening. She's a farmer of sorts, the kind of person one hires to whip an estate into shape. And Malmaison is in bad shape: only a few donkeys, a rundown house and a patriarch who is more interested in chasing skirts than he is in taking care of his property. Meanwhile, his son Jeanty is returning home after his marriage fell apart, tail between his legs. Soon, the season will change to winter, a time for rebirth and self-discovery.

In dense, almost lyrical prose, Poitras (and her translator Rhonda Mullins) bring readers into a world that's like a gothic fairy tale, weaving a story of death and decay, of secrets and illusions and of a place where blood flows into the

dirt. It's a charming story, and one that's told in an interesting way — it must have been a pain to translate Poitras's winding sentences while also keeping the pacing and inflections intact.

For example, the forest isn't just dense and dark, it's a place "streaming with the mucus of animals and the semen of males," where "flowers grow in abundance, without drying, indifferent to calendars or almanacs." More than anything, the flowing rhythms of Poitras's sentences suggest damp, warm and sensual feelings — not to mention secrets. This is not the forest of Thoreau's *Walden*.

Instead, one's left with a story that's almost baroque: details are layered and the story takes a weird, almost magical turn. At times it's reminiscent of Gothic fiction, at others of Louis Malle's movie *Black Moon*. The way Poitras shows an estate slowly coming to its reckoning is compelling and lyrical, although maybe a touch fantastical for some. This is not a realist novel, but more like a stage play (indeed, there are little stage directions at times, too).

While the fairytale-like direction of *Sing, Nightingale* might be a little much, readers who don't mind characters breaking out into song or speaking like they're in a Bergman movie will find this a charming and sensual read. (Roz Milner)



## Girlfriends

Emily Zhou, 168 pgs, LittlePuss Press,  
[littlepuss.net](http://littlepuss.net), \$19.95

It's fun to see a new writer emerge and follow their career almost from the beginning. Take Emily Zhou. A few years back, she started publishing fiction online and I looked forward to each new newsletter. Now her stories are in print and they're not just something passed around trans Twitter.



*Girlfriends* collects seven of Zhou's stories. At their best, they're tender and have a nice undercurrent of emotion. There's a resonance in her 20-something protagonists fumbling around, learning the beats and trying to make a go of it. They act like adults, but they're still just kids, really.

Indeed, the thing about Zhou and the stories in *Girlfriends* is the way she captures that feeling one has in early adulthood. The way everything is new and exciting, and it feels like it's the first time this has happened to anyone, or that life is just like the movies. The unrequited longing between Genevieve and the narrator in "Gap Year" or the way Cay fumbles into queer community in "Do-Over" capture this feeling well. To wit: "I kept wondering what I would say to you next, but at some point I looked up and you were gone." But age shows that these feelings only happen because one is young and you haven't experienced them before. By the third or fourth time you've fallen for someone who doesn't like you back, the charm has long since departed.

Elsewhere, Zhou's stories have a nice edge to them. "Ponytail" has her writing in full mean girl mode, with the protagonist playing dirty and cutting people down to size seemingly for the sheer thrill of it; "Performance" has her going against expectations and letting the smart young woman fall for the wrong guy while seeming to enjoy it.

Though Zhou writes about a certain kind of youthfulness well, that's also the main drawback to *Girlfriends*. Her characters all live in the same kind of universe and have the same kind of life. They're writers who live near the quad and have dreams about making it big someday. They namedrop the same kind of writers — Henrich Boll, Robert Walser — and have an affinity for music. Despite settings ranging from rural Michigan to downtown Brooklyn, one gets the feeling these characters could all be the same person, and by the book's end they begin to fade into each other.

Zhou's a talented writer with a lot of potential and wits to match. *Girlfriends* is a nice introduction to her work and hopefully it'll be the beginning of a fruitful career. While it doesn't quite add up completely yet, one's left with the feeling that someday, maybe it will. (Roz Milner)



## Standing Heavy

GauZ, translated by Frank Wynne, 152 pgs, Biblioasis, [biblioasis.com](http://biblioasis.com), \$22.95

Days and nights, they stand at the doors and among the racks. The security guard, a tall and silent presence that fades into the backdrop as we grow used to their presence. But who are they? What are they like? In *Standing Heavy*, French author GauZ delves into the world of the watchers and their inner monologues.

Told with a healthy sense of humour and with a dose of irony, GauZ's debut novel follows a few generations of Black immigrants from Cote d'Ivoire who make lives for themselves in Paris as security guards. It's at once a story of living as an undocumented immigrant and a wry commentary on late capitalism, not to mention the bonds between friends.

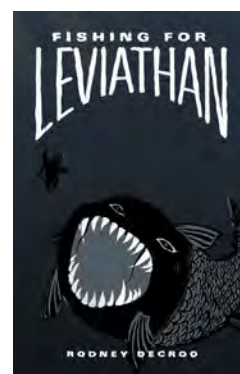
Ossiri and Kassoum work for a faceless security company in the French capital. They stand for hours at Sephora, guard an abandoned factory and watch the racks at expensive boutiques. They watch for thieves and squatters. And, over their years of working, they've seen it all. For example: an older woman comes to them asking if they can find her daughter: "Madame, a forty-year-old woman can't get lost in a shop." "You don't understand, Monsieur," the woman replies. "I'm the one who's lost!"

GauZ's narrative flows back and forth across time and into inner monologues. Between the anecdotes at retail shops, he traces a story that follows postcolonial patriots moving to Paris to make money in 9/11's aftermath. Ossiri plays a paternal role to the younger Kassoum, giving him advice and guidance. "Kass, leave the vulture's work to the vultures," he says to keep his protégé on the straight and narrow. Or the law of the handbag: "In a women's clothing

shop, all the women are permanently attached to their handbags, especially the thieves... in a clothing shop, the customer without a bag is the customer who will not steal."

With a deft, flowing translation via Frank Wynne, *Standing Heavy* is a funny, sharp-toothed satire that draws one into a world that's instantly familiar (especially for anyone who's slogged in the retail trenches), but also tense and claustrophobic. One hopes for more of GauZ's witty and intelligent work to find translation soon. (Roz Milner)

## POETRY



## Fishing for Leviathan

Rodney DeCroc, 112 pgs, Anvil Press, [anvilpress.com](http://anvilpress.com), \$18

I'll begin with an example rather than a description. The poem "Going into Winter" is fragmented memory of a violent father who confesses the intoxicating calm he finds in killing and unfettered aggression: "a state of emotional detachment / where anything was possible; / where he said a man found himself." DeCroc's poetry collection is a near-perfect counterpoint to this image. It is a portrait of that man's son coming out of winter, seeking attachment, wrestling through recovered memory of trauma and attempting to coax meaning from a history of violence, poverty and drug use. The title *Fishing for Leviathan* evokes wanton pursuit of a mythic beast twisting in the deep.

It is beautiful, but it is not pretty; it is hard to watch, but it is hard to look away. (Rob Thomas)



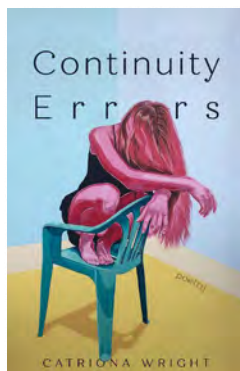
## oems

Matthew Tomkinson, 64 pgs,  
Guernica Editions,  
[guernicaeditions.com](http://guernicaeditions.com), \$20

The poems in Matthew Tomkinson's *oems* are flat. But not flat in a bad way. They are typographically flat — flat by design. The 36 poems in the collection are composed entirely using short-stature letters or letters that have no ascenders or descenders (parts that stick up or down). In other words, letters like b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, p, q, t, and y are verboten. This is why there is no “p” in the collection’s title.

An epigraph for the collection, “Attend to your Configurations,” comes from Edwin Abbott’s 1884 quirky novella *Flatland*, which is narrated by a two-dimensional square who must grapple with both the third and first dimensions. The dimension Tomkinson seems keen to grapple with is, of course, symbol and representation. His flattening constraint makes the text itself almost impossible to ignore. The poems are also inspired by Tomkinson’s experience of obsessive-compulsive disorder. In addition to short-stature letter constraint, the collection is divided into six sections of six poems divided by what appear to be portions of a generative dictionary of flattened words. The poems themselves range from textual-fetishism — “crass / sex / emissions / cum / semen / urine” — to remarkably narrative pieces (given the constraints) — “one summer / we saw an ex-marine / in a nissan minivan / run over a / woman / in reverse.”

In general, Tomkinson allows the reflexive poems to more or less steer themselves. It’s a neat trick, and Tomkinson sustains it to the end. In terms of content, *oems* is anything but flat. (Rob Thomas)



## Continuity Errors

Catriona Wright, 88 pgs,  
Coach House Books,  
[chbooks.com](http://chbooks.com), \$23.95

Catriona Wright’s *Continuity Errors* is a poetry book for millennials who are climate anxious, financially insecure and saturated with the dark humour of the internet — that is to say, a lot of them. She manages this without being frivolous, which is an achievement given how commonplace such takes have become.

Instead, she takes a personal

approach, writing about pregnancy and birth in a starkly honest yet still oddly sentimental way: “My birth plan is no pain / And the glaciers stop melting.” Alongside these personal reflections, she observes the strange and dystopian in our world: “I take ballet lessons in a Brutalist building / I’m bad at everything except believing / I’m good.” She narrows in on the burden, prison and thrill of technology. She writes as though the internet is listening, not just as a form of technology but as a force field around us that changes how we think, feel and understand the world. All of this alongside dark fantasy and climate change: “I eavesdrop on the heat,” she muses at one point.

Wright’s is a poetry of compromise. A voice that wants to be better, that knows better, but that also delights in the failures and inevitable daily compromises of the Anthropocene. (Megan Clark)



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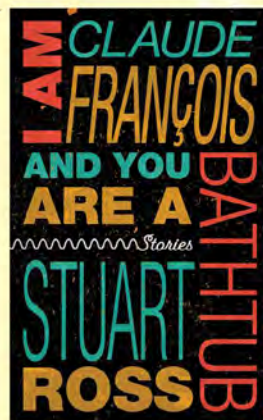
### FISHING FOR LEVIATHAN Rodney DeCroo

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“Distinctly urban, with a twist!”







## Love Is A Place But You Cannot Live There

Jade Wallace, 104 pgs, Guernica Editions, [guernicaeditions.com](http://guernicaeditions.com), \$20

How do we define where love lives? Is it a place you can travel to? Is it somewhere you could escape from? Jade Wallace doesn't give us the answers, so don't go looking for them.

Every poem in this collection has mastered the art of depicting love as something tethered to a place but not belonging to it. Each section details the journeys of mundane people and their unique but ultimately similar types of love, from ghost hunting to long-awaited trips to New York to finding love in old age. She chronicles seeking someone's approval and the desire to be touched and that aching feeling within us that never quite lets us turn our backs on our parents, especially when we love them.

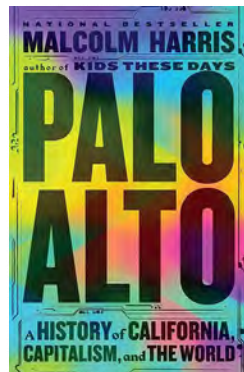
Wallace does an exceptional job of creating lush landscapes, but perhaps her best feat is her accurate depiction of the GTA: Vaughan with its ravines tucked behind sparse apartment buildings; the immigrants who "lived at the place where the subway ended." As a Torontonians, the instant recognition while reading was awesome.

The stories Wallace tells without restraint through flowing free verse are important but inconsistent. Her ability to make individual moments and small details coalesce into full narratives is spectacular, but some sections fall entirely short of completing the narrative the synopsis boasts.

*Love is A Place But You Cannot Live There* incites a lot of introspection into how we are connected to our environments in intimate ways, but not necessarily made loving by them. The idea of psychogeographic investigation itself sounds quite complicated, and the poetry agrees that yes, it is. The human brain and its capacity to love

have never been simple. Love comes in all different shapes and forms, different landscapes, different homes. Embrace its complexity. (Emma Santos)

## NON-FICTION



## Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World

Malcolm Harris, 708 pgs, Little, Brown, [littlebrown.com](http://littlebrown.com), \$36 USD

History: it's just one fucking thing after another. Reading Malcolm Harris's new history of Palo Alto and global capitalism, this throwaway pun I once savoured as a disaffected high school history student was all I could think of. Maybe because this book is huge — like 700-page doorstopper territory — or maybe because it's utterly exhausting.

Palo Alto is the heart of the Silicon Valley, a sleepy California suburb little known outside of tech orbits. Think flawless blue skies, creamy stucco crowned with red mission-style roofs and rolling green and gold foothills petering out gently into the San Francisco Bay. But between being home to every major tech company, the hallowed grounds of Leland Stanford Jr. University, and some of the wealthiest individuals on the planet, Palo Alto is a concentrated center of power and resources that has quietly shaped the entire world. Venture capitalism, Reaganomics, psychedelic revolution and the internet are just some of the many inventions birthed in this idyllic cradle and slated for global export. Harris, a native of Palo Alto, sets out to understand how his hometown came to be what it is today and how its entanglements in capital have radiated beyond California's borders.

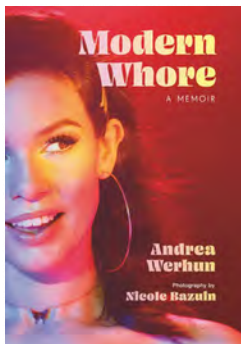
Harris argues that Palo Alto is

haunted, not in the literal sense, stalked by ghosts of dead high-school students under intense academic pressure who chose to end it all on the town's train tracks, or by legions of roaming indigenous Ohlone violently displaced from their land, but in the historical sense, by unfathomable crimes, lingering curses and unpayable debts. This is a compelling frame for thinking about the strange mood often tangible in Palo Alto's cafes and offices, where the most privileged people on earth somehow seem irrevocably jaded and miserable. Clearly something is rotten in the Silicon Valley.

Seeking to find the hidden corpse, Harris investigates the region from 1850-2020, an ambitious timespan by any historian's measure. He includes everything from agricultural history to bits of literary analysis to housing economics to explanations of aeronautical and psychological concepts. It's a lot to chew on, and at times it's hard for the reader to figure out why we're being given a 40-page exposition on suburbanization and segregation in a section on intercontinental ballistic missiles or suddenly finding ourselves knee-deep in a recap of the Cold War. *Palo Alto* creates an impression of simultaneous depth and cursiveness. Its digressions feel like being compassionately drowned in a grad school syllabus by a student who wants you to experience (and perhaps validate) the full scope of his pained learning.

For a book so concerned with sociological imagination, *Palo Alto* has surprisingly little of it. Its chapters, while bloated with factual detail, are full of oversimplifications and tenuous connections. "The Palo Alto System," Harris's term for the way historical forces — namely, capitalism — work through individuals like Leland Stanford, Herbert Hoover, or Peter Thiel, feels like both too much and not enough. The "forces, not men" Harris is interested in end up appearing even more abstract by the book's distant end (and yes, reader, I crawled there). But people are not just meat puppets for impersonal historical forces — they are living, breathing beings with hopes, fears and desires. How their grief or ambition become woven into the fabric of global capital is both far more mysterious and complex than Harris's account, which often settles for the obvious critique (Stanford was, *gasp*, an entitled, talentless capitalist!), allows. What does this add to our understanding of history, and where can we go from there?

What *Palo Alto* really lacks is the backbone of every great historical account: a narrative. Harris laments that this subject matter, with its ongoing nature and endless cycle of undying profit, doesn't lend itself to resolution: "How, then, to tell the story of Palo Alto, where the conflicts swell but never seem to crest?" Perhaps this is a case of form mimicking content — the book, like capital investment, "is exhausting; it uses up." (Maria Cichosz)



### Modern Whore: A Memoir

Andrea Werhun, 320 pgs, Penguin Random House, [penguinrandomhouse.com](http://penguinrandomhouse.com), \$45

Andrea Werhun tells all in an interwoven combination of personal essays, short fiction and some sexy, sexy softcore porn photography. In this flawed but necessary memoir, Werhun reflects on her antics, experiences and eventual activism as a sex worker in Toronto. *Modern Whore* is a 21<sup>st</sup>-century holistic confessional of all sides of the sex industry: it's not all glamorous, and it's not all horrifying. Most importantly, Werhun takes the opportunity to challenge prejudices and raise awareness about the reality of sex work in all its messy, empowering, glossy, oppressive glory. Prepare yourself for the best kind of exposure.

It isn't hard to tell that Werhun moves through the world with an obvious joie de vivre that charms you from the first page and permeates the entire book. Even in its darkest moments, the glow of confidence and communion with her fellow whores shines through. It's clear she sees sex workers of all stripes as inherently worthy while also acknowledging the baked-in hierarchy of the industry. Werhun readily recognizes her privilege in a world of women who are often forced or coerced into sex work and notes the differences between agencies and clubs and street workers. She chose to escort because she wanted

to, and thus challenged the notion that all sex workers are damaged goods who have been otherwise abused and therefore tragically fell into sex work. This subversion alone is enough for me to recommend this book, but it's certainly not all perfect.

For the most part, Werhun is engaging, clever and hilarious in her personal essays, but there are times when *Modern Whore* can feel somewhat emotionally detached. There's so much sarcasm in her prose, I sometimes felt like I had to bargain with Werhun for real vulnerability and not just shocking details. I understand that the need to make this a palatable introduction to sex work for the uninitiated reader is at stake. We can't go scaring people away with our most frightening tales. Werhun's focus is on resilience and humanity above all else, and I see her vision. However, as a fellow whore, I have to wonder: at what cost does Werhun sacrifice that depth of authenticity?

Werhun's short stories are sort of charming in isolation, but having read *Modern Whore* in one sitting, I found it often interrupted the rhythm of her storytelling. Her fiction feels a little confused, but so quick witted. The story "Holy Hooker" is a fascinating lens for reassessing prejudice. "Tyrant" offers an explanation for insecurity in disparaging men. A big departure is a story called "Agatha" about a girl lured into a premier's car who tricks him before she can be assaulted. They aren't terribly nuanced, but they are emboldening, and so much fun.

It's also worth noting the artistry and creativity put into the production of this book. Nicole Bauzin's poetic and provocative photography is the cherry on top. It's clear these two women are the best of artistic collaborators and friends. Even the formatting, from the Playboy-style centrefold of Andrea's stripper persona Sophia to the lists detailing her life goals in the back of the book, makes it easy to feel the care and effort put into the visual elements of *Modern Whore*.

Werhun's is undoubtedly a voice worth listening to, but still only one limited perspective in the vast world of sex work. As a white, middle-class, university-educated woman, there's a lot of intersectional nuance that Werhun misses. With a bit of art and a lot of entertainment, *Modern Whore* is the perfect light dip in the water for those curious about what it looks like to be a sex worker, and more importantly, how to protect and empower sex workers of all kinds. (Sophie Tate)



### Canada's Place Names & How to Change Them

Lauren Beck, 251 pgs, Concordia University Press, [concordia.ca/press](http://concordia.ca/press), \$34.95

The first name mentioned in Lauren Beck's study of Canadian place names happens to be that of my hometown of London, Ontario. There are many places in Canada whose names, like London, are borrowed from elsewhere. While this isn't necessarily a bad thing, I've often wondered how this might deprive a place of its self-presence, its own vital "here-ness."

As Beck's research shows, naming is a vital part of how we construct and interpret the world around us. Names can hold clues to the land and celebrate its people and stories; they can also be used to conceal what came before, to deny the land its past and thereby claim it. What Beck demonstrates so powerfully is that naming is both a creative and destructive act, a tool that can enrich but also erase local traditions and knowledge.

The book affirms many uncomfortable truths about Canada's identity by looking at the people and events that are commemorated or neglected by its place names and how communities have responded when a name is shown to be outdated and harmful. Beck applies this method to an impressive range of subjects in what remains a relatively short read, examining place naming in relation to gender, race, religion and disability. She also provides suggestions on how we can all be better custodians of local place names by unlocking their potential for inclusion and knowledge keeping.

The book definitely made me reflect on the place names that I'd grown up around, living in London, a city built at the fork of a river that the Anishinaabe call Deshkan Zibi (Antler River), the same river that French explorers once referred to as La Tranchée (The Trench), a river that I'd only ever known by yet another borrowed British name, the Thames. (Ben O'Neil)





### Tegan & Sara: Modern Heartthrobs

Melody Lau, 160 pgs, Invisible Publishing, [invisiblepublishing.com](http://invisiblepublishing.com), \$17.95

Lately there's been an interest in our nation's not-too-distant cultural history, especially the music acts of the aughts and teens that somehow managed to escape the borders of this afterthought nation to become global megastars. This phenomenon was partly chronicled by Michael Barclay in his 2022 book *Hearts on Fire*, which served as a gloss on many acts spread across several genres.

Melody Lau's contribution to the archive of Canadian music history, *Modern Heartthrobs*, zooms in on just

one act. Choosing Tegan and Sara (formerly Sara and Tegan) as her subject, Lau takes the reader from their early days all the way to the book's date of publication. In many ways, their story is as compelling as the other major acts of the period. After all, it wasn't an easy road for the twins from Calgary, who after coming out publicly early in their careers had to deal with a hostile press who proved to be more interested in speculating on whether them being lesbians meant they had experimented with one another than providing a sincere critique of their art.

Unlike many other acts who saw the quality of their music degenerate in inverse proportion to their pocketbooks, Tegan and Sara's art has only increased in its popularity and reach. Their victory is hard-won through their willingness to adapt and evolve and their refusal to succumb to the fear of deviating from others' expectations. Lau does an excellent job of highlighting these tensions through her interviews with Tegan and Sara and her use of journalism from the time to narrate this artistic expansion. She provides us with valuable insight into one of Canada most unique acts. (Jason Smith)



### We the Parasites

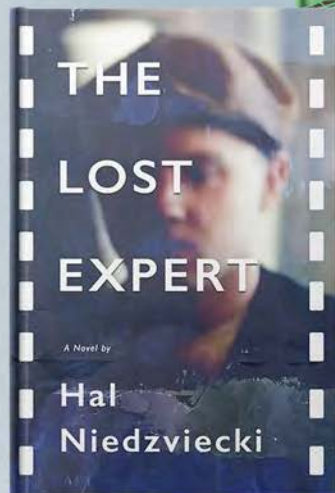
A. V. Marraccini, 148 pgs, Sublunary Editions, [sublunaryeditions.com](http://sublunaryeditions.com), \$18 USD

"But I'm not the fig, I'm the wasp. I burrow into sweet, dark places of fecundity, into novels and paintings and poems and architectures, and I make them my own. I write criticism, I lay it in little translucent eggs," writes critic, essayist and art historian A. V. Marraccini in her visceral debut.

Below its pink cover, Marraccini's *We the Parasites* delves into the relationships one can develop with the works of art they admire by way of correspondence. Working through the parasitism that characterizes the role of the critic, she reconsiders criticism as a mutually collaborative

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mode of creation. Marraccini's elegantly grotesque central metaphor is that of a wasp laying eggs in a fig. She moves via figs and wasps into masterpieces of classical antiquity and figures like Cy Twombly, John Updike, Rainer Maria Rilke and Jean Genet, among others.

Throughout, the author skillfully intertwines reflections on her own autobiographical experiences. Within her personal musing on the strange parasitism of criticism, Marraccini deploys the critical gaze as an intrinsically erotic and queer form that is "generative outside the two-gendered model."

One of the most enjoyable aspects of this criticism/essay/memoir hybrid is its unapologetically vast inventory of references. Surprisingly, the extensive list does not read as namedropping. Instead, the intensity of the author's genuine individual emotional attachment to these many figures, artworks, books, myths and histories sparks a legitimate curiosity in the reader to learn more. The exhaustive list of references functions like an intimate syllabus that is trustingly dealt out.

Marraccini writes that "criticism is a mutualism as parasites like me go, or at least a commensalism, pollinating novels to make more novels," and her ambitious art criticism is flourishingly repositioned as a mutual process of co-creation with the artworks it feeds on. (Alex McMillan)



### There Will Always Be Nights Like This (Cipher Shorts #1)

Edited by Ellis K. & Jenn Thompson, 60 pgs, Cipher Press, [cipherpress.co.uk](http://cipherpress.co.uk), £6.00

Queer individuals never have — and never will be — alone in their longing.

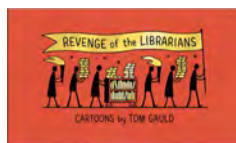
In this collection of stories, essays and poems published during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, thirteen LGBTQ2S+ writers provide an emotional antidote to the isolation imposed by lockdown. This antidote comes in the

form of understanding amid a time characterized by distance, wherein the writers pay tribute to the love, lust, community and resilience that comes with queerness.

*There Will Always Be Nights Like This* serves as a poignant, provocative reminder of the spaces and connections we hold dear, juxtaposed against the amplified sense of displacement within the queer community when distance separates us. One of the collection's greatest strengths lies in its ability to capture connection as queer individuals' historic means of survival. This notion is at its most powerful in the pieces set against the backdrop of COVID-19 restrictions, where "We, who are always on the move, now face restrictions on our movement."

While some pieces will resonate with readers more deeply than others, the diversity of the narrative voices in *There Will Always Be Nights Like This* ensures that there's something for everyone within this collection. (Bernice Santos)

## COMICS



### Revenge of the Librarians

Tom Gauld, 180 pgs, *Drawn & Quarterly*, [drawnandquarterly.com](http://drawnandquarterly.com), \$29.95

Tom Gauld knows his audience, and his audience is people like me: obsessive book readers, collectors, debaters. Gauld makes absurdist, sometimes intergalactic comics about petty slights and universal truths. *Revenge of the Librarians* targets book lovers and returns to many common themes and personas in his work. The lonely typesetter, the compulsive collector and the supernatural librarian appear here among many others.

I always enjoy Gauld's work because it routinely verges on the ridiculous while always maintaining a quiet truth about books and the people that love them. He pokes insistent fun at authors and self-important collectors while honouring the earnestness that surrounds many fans of literature.

The book can be read straight through beginning to end, although its dry humour at that concentration may be

overwhelming. It is best enjoyed over and over again through easy access on a bedside table, tucked in an office drawer, or on a coffee table to impress (and insult) your literary friends. Gauld is singing to the choir with *Revenge of the Librarians*, and the choir is responding in time. (Megan Clark)



### Parallel

Matthias Lehmann, translated by Ivanka Hahnenberger, 464 pgs, Oni Press, [onipress.com](http://onipress.com), \$29.99 USD

In 2023, when discourse about diversity is everywhere, it's easy to forget that being gay used to be pretty much impossible. A lingering look, a fleeting touch, a verbal slip — each of these alone could be enough to cost one's life or freedom. Coming out was impossible; a distant historical dream.

Matthias Lehmann's *Parallel* tells the life story of Karl Kling, a German man caught between two worlds: his heteronormative family life, and a dangerous clandestine existence as a gay man struggling to find community. In post-WWII Berlin, itself split into east and west, this balancing act is no small feat. Several times Karl is shamed, run out of town, beat up, jailed or ostracized. These events are detailed in a letter to Karl's estranged daughter, Hella, in an attempt to explain his poor parenting and frequent absences in her early life as he sought out a string of forbidden lovers. Now an old man with many friends but few who really know him and no family to speak of, Karl's narrative is a plea for connection and understanding.

*Parallel* is drawn in the nostalgia of soft sepia tones that linger on small details: smoke curling from a lit cigarette, a cut finger, a lone figure by a church. The book's expansive watercolour backgrounds blur into gorgeous impressions of East Berlin in the softly falling snow, charred scars and crumbling walls puncturing the blanketing white while stars peek through the inky black of night sky over silent apartment blocks.



It is fast-paced, atmospheric and sweet, lingering on understated moments of joy and clarity that anchor a life of uncertainty. (Maria Cichosz)



### Curb Angels 2 "Teaser Comic"

Lisa Mendis, Nyala Ali, & Lucas C. Pauls, 128 pgs, At Bay Press, [atbaypress.com](http://atbaypress.com), \$4.95

When I was in junior high, I had a relentless bully who would come after me every day. Actually, I had quite a few, but this isn't about what a loser I was, though I bet most people reading this can relate to feeling harassed, perhaps even physically endangered for

no reason other than being the unlucky target of some bigger person's misplaced aggression. You probably know that fiery feeling in the pit of your stomach when you want to break your bully's nose.

Now imagine that bullying is on an international industrial scale, and the most powerful institutions in our society offer either their tacit or direct support. *Curb Angels* is a cathartic punch in the balls to those bullies. Under the guidance of their leader Waffles (don't wear it out), these four young women take on the global network of sex trafficking all on their own, doing so with mettle that is unbreakable, but also with emotional vulnerability that allows them to grow as people while kicking the patriarchy's ass.

*Curb Angels 2* promises to take this confrontation to an even higher level. Armed with the notebook they acquired in the first book, which lists the personal information of sex traffickers around the world, the Angels have the capacity to shatter the kneecaps of this exploitative trade in a more explosive way than ever. But as we meet our heroes once more, they seem to have all gone their separate ways: Waffles on the trail of

her kidnapped sister, Kat playing guitar in front of raucous crowds, Julia studying medicine, Reiko being pummeled in the boxing ring.

But as Kat says in both books, "you can try to run away, but some things hang around just to remind you that you can't." This time around you can be sure they'll kick every bit as much ass as the first. (Alex Passey)



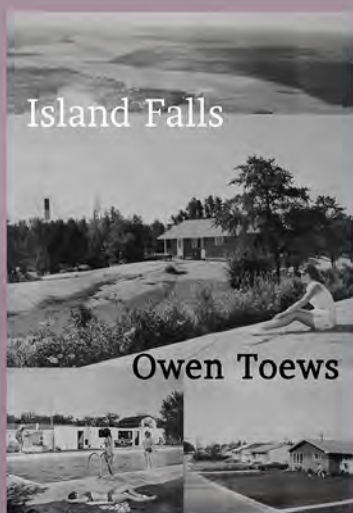
### Lamentation #1

Cullen Bunn, Arjuna Susini and Hilary Jenkins, 48 pgs, Oni Press, [onipress.com](http://onipress.com), \$6.99 USD

Amid so much other media, sometimes it's worth it to just pick up a good old-fashioned horror comic. What better way to excite the senses and switch it up than a story about a crew trapped in an abandoned theater, doomed to remain there forever unless they perform their play?

This first issue of *Lamentation* includes a mysterious cast of characters with their strange and eccentric director. Time moves differently within the Requiem Theatre, and it seems the play itself merges with the cast's lives as things lurking in the darkness backstage begin to emerge. *Lamentation* does everything right: being fully self-aware as a comic, it uses the full force of artistic creativity and convention to tell this story. Even in this first issue, the art style alters its backgrounds to incorporate things that aren't there (or are they?), throwing the cast into a reality constructed from their painted cardboard props.

Personally, I've always been a sucker for the manipulation of border space within a comic, but *Lamentation's* use of close-ups within the first encounter in the Requiem pushes readers directly into the protagonist Jennifer's headspace and keeps us there, whether she is acting or not. It left me completely hooked. Truly gripping, mysterious and horrifically beautiful, *Lamentation #1* sets the bar high for a series filled with bloody surprises, on stage and off. (Emma Santos) **BP**



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# The Corridor

JOHN DISHWASHER

**When I turned** to continue along the forest footpath toward some other place I had not planned to be the familiar stranger changed his pose. He had been leaning against the gray steel door which stood at the edge of the green wood. He had been leaning with his right knee bent and the sole of his cowboy boot up flat against the steel. Now he pushed off that steel, snapped the top snap of his thin plaid shirt, and shoved open the door. The sudden trust I felt in this man was so profound that I suffered no fear at all stepping from the dirt path, and leaving behind the leafy trees, and following him beyond the gray steel. I knew the man somehow. Or he knew me. Was he a long-forgotten uncle? A more distant relative? I did not recognize him.

The man smiled warmly and nodded at me with brilliant pride as I stepped onto the concrete floor. His expression suggested that by following him I had proved to him I was something he hoped I was, but which he could not believe I was until I had proved it. The familiar stranger inclined his head in a welcoming way, even affectionately, and turned to move down the corridor waiting behind the gray door. I did not doubt him. I did not hesitate. I stepped after the man. Something remarkable awaited me here, I sensed. Something important to me, and necessary.

I did not know what to do about the massive steel door. I left it as it was, standing open, with the bright forest daylight streaming through onto the gray concrete floor.

Even with the man's back turned now as he clomped off down the corridor I felt his confidence in me, and affection. He truly believed me ready for what he was about to reveal. Because of this I also knew I was ready. This knowledge filled me with curiosity and anticipation and willingness. He stepped and I stepped. I watched the man clomp his cowboy boots down the corridor and I followed.

The corridor is narrow, maybe three strides wide. The block walls, concrete floor and sheetrock ceiling are all colored a dull uniform gray. As you advance, beneath the hum of fluorescent lightbulbs, every few paces you pass another steel door. These doors line both the forest side of the corridor where I entered, and the side opposite. I did not think to mark the door through which I entered. Why would I? My mentor was leading me someplace definite and enchanting. Only where I headed mattered

now, not where I had come from.

So he stepped and I followed and he stepped and I followed and this went on until I felt sweat beading my brow. It seemed we had just started walking, but already when I looked behind us I could barely see daylight falling through the open steel door. The corridor was straight. Straight as a gun barrel. And the dull color of its paint never changed, nor the crowded lowness of its ceiling, nor the narrow spread of its concrete floor.

After a while I began to tire. I craved to call out for my distant relative to curb his pace, to ease up. But we did not speak the same language, I suddenly realized. Somehow I knew he would not understand me. I called anyhow:

"Slower, please. Where are we?"

I had lost ground to the man. He walked many strides in front of me now instead of just a few. But as my pace slowed further he did not pull farther away. He slowed also. The man glanced back over his shoulder a few times. He was grinning. He was making that welcoming, encouraging gesture with his head, egging me to hurry along. I understood from these signals that something worthwhile and happy awaited us not much farther on, that we were almost there.

"Stop, please," I called after a while longer. I halted. I leaned on a door with my hand, blowing a winded sigh. Then I leaned my shoulder against the door. "Stop," I called again.

The man moved farther from me. He clomped on down the uniformly lit corridor, growing still more distant from me as I stood watching. Soon he had walked far enough away that he appeared smaller, as if shrunk. But I could tell from the urgency in his body language that we were drawing very near our objective. We were almost there. The man stopped finally. He turned on his heel. The smile that shaped his mouth was beatific, even ecstatic. We must be very close indeed! We could not be far! He gave me an encouraging nod with his head again and leaned back into the wall. The man bent his knee and flattened the sole of his cowboy boot up against the gray blocks, assuming that pose which I had first seen on the edge of the green forest. I understood from his grin and folded arms that he would wait for me. I sensed such strong affection from the man that I knew he would wait for me as long as I needed to rest. I squared my back against the gray

blocks and slid my weight to the floor.

As I sat on the concrete I looked down the corridor away from the man, in the direction from which we had come. Except for his absence there, the view was the same. A long, long passage of gray, uniformly lit by dim fluorescence. Steel doors on either side, spaced apart by a few strides. A dull concrete floor unrolling on and on backward toward the door through which we had entered. That door stood so far behind us now that the corridor darkened into its own vanishing point before arriving there. I could not even observe sunlight falling through its breach.

I wondered finally what lay hidden behind all these doors. What did they lead to? I knew the corridor guided me somewhere significant, even fulfilling, but what might wait beyond one of its multitude of steel doors? The idea lingered in me for some breaths, but the greatness of what I was about to experience from the corridor smothered all my expectations, overwhelmed my wondering. I did not test the question.

Rejuvenated now, I breathed evenly. I rose and began to plod toward my distant relative, the familiar stranger, my mentor. The man smiled. His head nodded approval and encouragement. He pushed off the wall again and pushed on down the concrete passage, clomping in his boots.

While hastily I matched the man's hurrying pace, I wondered about the hour. If I was to return to my loved ones, who would be expecting me before nightfall, I should double back soon for the door I had left standing open. There are no indications of time in this place. Only uniform fluorescence, you see, and gray. But not much time could have elapsed, I reasoned, because I did not feel exactly hungry yet.

My mentor's quick strides were widening the distance between us again.

"Slow down, please," I called. "Where are we going? Is it far?" I actually hollered this to him twice. But he seemed only to pull still farther ahead of me. I could not match his pace.

"Sir," I called. "Sir."

He kept walking on until I gave up and stopped. I could not comprehend what was happening now. My belief that the man led me somewhere wonderful began to fade. And I could no longer see him closely enough to be persuaded by the subtleties of his body language. I peered forward.

Far along, well up the dim corridor, he finally halted. His shoulders turned about. Thank God, I thought. He will let me catch him now. But I stepped and he stepped also. I took three strides toward the man and he answered them with three strides away from me. I stopped and he stopped. I waved my arms at him. I don't know what I meant my arms waving to communicate, but I waved them. At last I slid again to the concrete floor, propping my back tiredly against the gray block wall. I saw him surrender into his customary pose. He planted the sole of his cowboy boot up flat against a steel door.

The fluorescent bulbs hummed above me here like they had before. The steel doors were massive here like the rest. And the gray concrete beneath me was as hard as ever. None of this had changed. Yet it all felt to me vaguely inauspicious now, almost ominous. I decided to turn back. The hour must be growing late. My loved ones would be worrying. I could not gauge what time had passed, but certainly much time had passed. I retained the energy, I felt, to retrace my course to the open door, but if I kept advancing I might not. I sat on the floor weighing these factors, strategizing my return.

I stood. "I'm going back."

His face turned to me.

"I'm going back," I hollered.

The man pushed off the steel door. I hoped briefly he might move toward me. Instead he raised an arm. The man gestured for me to follow. But I would go back now. I had decided.

I turned away and with some confusion started treading homeward. After a few strides I looked behind. The man had moved toward me. I examined him as best I could across the dim distance. He waved again that I follow. In a backwards shuffle I began to retreat, watching carefully to understand what he was doing. Yes, for every step I took away from the man he stepped a step toward me. He matched my pace, forever staying the same distance off, never edging closer, never drifting farther away, and continually waving that I follow him.

Finally I pivoted away from the man to decidedly return. I had to get home. I had responsibilities. Door after door after door I passed. Step after step I strode, peering far ahead of myself for that shaft of forest daylight that would mark my exit. But the uniform light of the corridor never freshened. The gray of its walls never warmed. I never sensed the slightest change in the fluorescent hum or the

concrete floor. Just sameness. A constant sameness. Step after step after step.

I began to fatigue again eventually and looked back over my shoulder. Maybe my mentor had neared, I hoped. Maybe he had hastened his stride to catch up to me to explain the meaning of all this, to describe our destination, to detail what I would miss by forsaking it. But I found the man the same distance behind me as before. Exactly.

I stopped to rest.

He cocked the sole of his cowboy boot up against the wall.

During this third break of mine, where I felt I must surely now sit much nearer my exit, I began to wonder again about the countless steel doors. Hundreds I had passed by now. Easily. Hundreds and hundreds. What lay hidden behind them? What was this corridor really about? Perhaps the massive doors told the secret. I had not tested a single knob. To take that liberty felt presumptuous to me. I was a guest here. I should mind my politeness while a guest. Besides, the ultimate purpose of a corridor is not in its doors, but in why it connects those doors. A corridor abstracts its meaning from its doors. The doors themselves tell more discrete stories.

So I sat and I reflected on these things and rested my wobbly legs. Far in the distance, exactly as far as before, the man stood gesturing to me welcomingly, coaxing with his raised arm that I join him. I did not acknowledge this. I stared instead at the gray block wall. My eyes traced instead the interminable stretch of dim humming bulbs that filed down the ceiling. And I wondered about the hour. And I wondered about my loved ones.

After I started walking again, I stopped spontaneously before a steel door and knocked four times. Then four more. Nothing. For a while I dithered there but finally gripped the doorknob and twisted it. Nothing still. The knob turned, but the door did not move. I spun and spun the doorknob but apparently the latch mechanism did not catch, or even exist.

I strode on, gazing anxiously down the endless wall for a brightness piercing an unusual breach. I began to think I should have reached my open door by now. I started to worry. Surely I should have arrived at the door already. I trod and trod, squinting and peering forward. Occasionally now I knocked on doors when I passed them. Random doorknobs I twisted, too. The knocks were never answered. And the doorknobs always turned but never opened. And every time I glanced back I saw my mentor still

clomping after me in the distance, his arm lifted high, beckoning.

After some time I started to fear the truth and I started to run. The light of the corridor remained uniform, and the steel doors clicked by as I flew past them, and the walls and low ceiling never changed, and I ran and I ran down the gray concrete floor searching for the open door, for its outlet to sunshine and air, seeking my exit from this place, looking, looking, but never arriving. I ran until I could run no more, until I stumbled in a pant to a crawl, completely spent.

I know I have passed where the door once stood open. I know it. And probably I have even turned its knob. I have turned so many knobs. I'm sure I've knocked on it, too, trying to signal to my loved ones beyond that I am here. I know I have done these things, but doing them has made no difference.

At last, with my distant relative still gesturing for me to head back in his direction, I lay down for an exhausted few hours of sleep. When I awoke, nothing had changed. The walls were the same, and the ceiling, and the doors, and the hum of the lights, and still the man waited. When I began to follow him again he finally stopped waving. We paced for what must have been days and never arrived anywhere.

He always stays exactly the same distance from me: Too far to give comfort, too near to be invisible. And the corridor never changes. And when I give up and turn again to seek desperately the door through which I entered the man starts waving again for me to follow him. It has been like this ever since. Nothing has changed since the beginning. It's just a corridor. A corridor. And I'm left to write it down as if it were some strange piece of fiction, one which presents the most potent symbol I could ever imagine of the ideas that have oriented me, and the aspirations that have motivated me, and the beliefs I follow. **bp**

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## The Game Called Enlightenment

REECE MCCART YOUNG

**Nadine had been** in the game longer than Bendi had ever seen before. All the others had already come out of play. He was sitting cross-legged on his squeaky green leather couch, honing his focus on Anu, his roommate, jumping between the different nervous compulsions she tended towards. She normally stuck to only one, but this time, it was like her body couldn't

decide which way it should self-destruct to release the anxious energy.

"How long has she been in there for," Anu asked, biting the fleshy bit surrounding her nails.

"Uh—I've got her at 12 real-time minutes, almost 13," Bendi said, "and would you stop that? It's gross, and it's stressing me out."

"The Khiladee was in there for 19 minutes 32 seconds when he won. So yeah, I'm stressed too."

"Don't be stupid. Nady hasn't even earned her first badge yet. She barely plays," Lee said, getting out his laptop. "I'll check her E-points."

"Fucking right you will. You know you aren't supposed to observe the code while someone is in game," Anu said.

Lee kept typing until he looked up at Anu, her eyes now filmed with the early

stages of tears.

"What?"

"Lee, it's dangerous."

"That was back in Beta. It's fine now. Besides, even if it wasn't, I programmed my own routes to isolate it. All we will see are her lifetimes and points."

Lee was a friend of Anu and Nadine, but he only seemed to be around when it was going to be a night of play. He always brought Fritos and a six-pack and tended to play a few more rounds than the others, until he could hardly keep his eyes open, and Anu would begrudgingly offer up the couch.

Lee started typing rapidly, his pupils dilating as he became increasingly intoxicated by his code. His fingers froze and his eyes widened.

"Shit—uh, I don't think this is right; I—"

Anu jumped over the coffee table and onto the couch beside Lee. "What, what is it? Lee, what? Is she stuck?"

"She isn't stuck. Relax. It's just, she's still in her second lifetime—I'm normally in my fourth after the first real minute."

"Can you see her E-points?" Bendi asked.

"Uhhh—they're high. Pushing nine-mil. But not moving."

"That's not possible, right?" Anu said, bringing her fingers back to her mouth.

"I don't know...something is happening. Her lifetime constraints are all scrambled. Her first lifetime looks like it was human: 89 years. After that, I can't read the code on her second lifetime."

Anu bit harder into her cuticles and ripped compulsively until she felt the metallic taste of blood on her tongue.

"Anu, don't worry. Lee's code is probably just misreading it," Bendi said.

"Right, Lee?"

Lee squeezed his eyebrows towards his nose and pursed his lips. "I don't know."

"So, what is it? Like—she died but didn't get reborn?" Anu asked, her teeth still clenched on her thumbnail.

"Not exactly."

"What is it then?"

"It's not like it can't move. It kind of reads like...I don't know, like, it's unlimited, infinite, as if her lifetime isn't constrained."

"What? That's not possible."

"She's at 18 minutes," Bendi said.

Anu moved her hands from her mouth and up to the crown of her head, grabbing a fistful of her black silky hair. A salty drop of her own mixed precipitation slid onto her lips. She collected it with her tongue, a

forecast of tears and sweat. "Jesus Christ. Okay, so what? No big deal. Let's just wake her up. We just wake her up."

Anu sprung into motion, entering the dark room where Nadine was lying seemingly lifeless on the sheets of Bendi's bed. Nadine's heart rate was still low, and she was breathing within her target levels.

"Wake up, Nady. Please, Nady, love, wake up!" Anu said, shaking and squeezing her. She pulled at the gold disc on her temple, but it was firmly attached.

"Jesus, Anu, stop. You can't pull her pinchip. You'll give her fucking brain damage," Bendi said, following her to the room, wrapping his arms around her. She pushed him and he grabbed back on. "Breathe, Anu, just breathe. It's okay. We'll figure this out."

"Yeah, shit, I...I don't know. She's at 19 minutes. I think Anu's right. I say we pull her," Lee said.

"How? You can't just pull some—"

"You can. Suppose we get her heart rate up to a high enough level that the game sees it as dangerous. In that case, it should put her back into body immediately—it's the fail-safe still around from the E4 version giving people heart attacks," Lee said.

"Okay. Yeah. That could work. Uh. Okay, shit. Check the top-left drawer of my desk," Bendi said.

Anu pulled herself loose from Bendi. She scrambled around in the drawer, leaving bits of blood on his loose sheets of paper. She pulled out a syringe in a bubble-wrap sleeve. Attached to it with an elastic band was a glass flask half filled with milky white liquid.

"Jesus, Ben," Lee said.

"Save your judgment. I don't play. We can't all get fucking points during our exits from the world." Bendi kept his eyes low. "Just give it here."

He shook the flask until the shade of white was even throughout and unwrapped the syringe.

"What the hell are we doing? We don't want to fucking kill her!" Anu said. "What about the emergency help center?"

"Anu, she's at twenty minutes now. Longer than the Khiladee. Her code isn't changing. She's either stuck or some kind of God-damn monk—we wait any longer, and we might not find out which one," Lee said.

"I'll just do a bit, I promise," Bendi said.

Anu collapsed into Lee, sobbing, punching his chest with her forehead, burying herself into him.

"Do it, Ben," Lee said, closing his eyes

and wrapping his arms around Anu.

Bendi slid the elastic band up Nadine's dead-weighted arm, holding it at the forearm and flicking at any hints of a vein. He injected the liquid into a big blue vein on the depression of the anterior surface of her elbow joint. He slowly pushed it into her, watching the whole time, trying not to shake. The blue paled for only a moment and was now visibly pulsating.

Jesus, I hope this works.

No one moved. Bendi looked deep into the tiny slit of white visible through her eyelids.

One second. Come on, Nadine, please. Two seconds. Please, Nady. Three, then four.

Bendi felt her awaken—like her self had extended into the world and into him. An invisible mass of energy radiated from her. It felt like it emanated into him, but he couldn't tell what was feeling and what was real. Maybe he felt inhuman for a second, like he was something else entirely, something unknown. In her—in him—he could see a depth that was incompatible with his natural and human identity. Timelessness entered him. Just as the others had only begun to experience it while playing, before now, he had only ever known this feeling in his dreams. It was like the world was no longer familiar, as if everything that was ineffable before, while still not available to him, was suddenly part of possibility.

Nadine's eyes opened. She began coughing, her chest raging violently. Bendi vomited, and then so did Nadine. She smiled, closed her eyes, and fell back into the bed. Anu carefully extracted the gold disk attached to Nadine's temple. She looked at Bendi, a stare of terror and anger.

"She's okay, she's okay. I just did a bit. She'll be up soon," Bendi said, shivering, sinking down onto the floor.

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When Bendi was nine, his family went on vacation to the east coast. It was a cool night, and they pitched some tents near a beach on the Atlantic. It was his first time seeing the ocean (he thought—it wasn't actually). The smell of sea salt potently climbed into his nostrils, making his eyes tear a little as he breathed in deeply. The beach was made of palm-sized grey-blue stones, smoothed by ancient tides. They were cold on his feet, but that sensation didn't bring him displeasure. He walked barefoot to where



the water rushed over his ankles, and then it retreated. With every retreat, the song of the rocks collapsing over each other slowly hypnotized him into a dreamy state. It was a collection of noises he had never heard before—thousands, maybe millions, of rocks dancing, colliding, moving, pushing, each creating their own unique story, each experiencing the world and providing some contribution to it through their individual movement. A distinctive set of motions, all creating a tremendously specific sound. Every wave living and dying in an instant, like the lifespan of a breath. Every stone persisting through time, accepting fate without will. He sat on the beach, his butt cold and wet, listening to the breath of the moon until his mother called him back up the hill for dinner.

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Nadine clasped a cup of tea. She was wrapped in a quilt and all the bits of body that Anu had to offer. Nadine hadn't spoken yet but sat in peace. They were all silent, Bendi numb and feeling unnaturally unaware of himself. He was not sure what had just happened to him. Did the others feel it too?

"I think I was the sun," Nadine said, breaking the silence. "Or, like, a sun."

"The sun?" Lee asked skeptically. "Not sure they made a badge for that."

"Well, I don't really know. Some center of energy. In my first lifetime, I lived a simple life, somewhere rural and poor. I thought my previous game must have been bad to end up in it. My parents sold me by age 13, and I had an unloving husband who was much older than me."

"A husband? Jeez, your last game must have been bad," Anu said.

Lee rolled his eyes, and Nadine giggled. "I mean, aside from him having a penis, he was nice enough. A farmer. He was sort of sedated to the world around him. Poverty and the cruelty of bad luck had really made him sort of uncurious and insensate."

Why do they put themselves through this...

"We had several kids, and when he died from disease and our children were married off, I worked fetching water from the local well until I died. I listened deeply to the people and the land that I worked. I lived a very uncomplicated life. Then I woke up into my second lifetime and...I don't know—"

"What do you mean you don't know—Nady, the game can't even calculate your

final points, you need to tell us what happened in there."

"Let her finish, Lee," Anu said.

"I'm just saying, she needs to know in case it glitched or something and it doesn't show a good score and she has to submit an experience review."

"It was...different," Nadine continued. "Like, ah, god, I don't know how to put it. I...it was like I didn't see the world through concepts anymore. Like how we see this book here, well, we all see it as a big binding of pages, and those pages have words on them, and they mean stuff and so on. But I just saw everything as a big grouping of particles—masses of different amounts of energy and history. It was like concepts weren't available to me. I saw everything, the whole universe, all at once. All beings and things across time. They all flowed into each other, like a river entering the ocean and the ocean turning into cloud. After you guys pulled me—while I was coming out, it felt like I had experienced enough to have been in there an eternity. Still, if I tried to remember anything, it was like remembering what had happened just a second ago. Or maybe a better way to put it is like if you tried to remember what is happening while it is happening. It was timeless...sort of. My brain in this world can't really make sense of it. Things just *were*. They didn't mean anything...like representationally."

Everyone was silent for a few seconds until Anu asked, "So if you weren't experiencing anything, did you think you were like...dead?"

"It wasn't like how dying in-game is, if that's what you mean. I was still experiencing the world. It still felt fulfilling. I was just—I...I don't know. I don't know if I can explain it with the words available to us."

Lee laughed but cut it short and pretended to clear his throat. "Er, sorry. It's just like, what do you mean by 'words available to us'? Did you learn another language? Are you planning on doing charades? Telepathic now, are you? You have some new way of communicating?"

Do you? I think I felt it.

Nadine didn't have a response. She sat there, content in not answering.

"So, do you think you almost won? Like, if we hadn't pulled you?" Anu asked.

Now Lee laughed unapologetically and said, "Oh—yeah right. Nadine, the next Khiladee. Everyone, quick! Buy your tickets to her talk shows now before they sell out!"

Nadine shrugged.

*Something's changed.*

\*\*\*

Bendi never tracked down when the world stopped being make-believe. The sadness of adulthood, the shame of humanity, his fate towards grey rooms and desks and work in tall buildings. When Anu was studying abroad in France last summer, no one was around anymore. Even if he was only ever used as the watch-over, his loneliness made him realize he liked when everyone came over to play. His days became blackout curtains and unknowable dreams and in the nights he found the steel doors of the city where, upon entering, he could lose himself in the newest drugs and the brightest lights. They drove into his mind like bullets, tearing him apart but providing the sensory key to new doors of perception. The world would blur into itself, and he would stop fighting it, stop dividing himself from it. The next day his brain would burn, a fiery mess of being in the world again. When the summer was over, and Anu came back with her new girlfriend, he never told her about this compartment of his life.

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Anu and Nadine were off on a walk and Lee wanted to play another round, so Bendi stuck around as the watch-over. He was in and out of play within four minutes.

"Jesus fucking fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck!" Lee said, taking off his disc.

"Good round?"

"I got born as a grasshopper. A fucking grasshopper, like some Jiminy type without the top hat—"

"I think Jiminy was a cricket, given the name and all."

Lee continued, ignoring Bendi. "Then in life-two, I got some good and stable office job. I was making six figures and had a sexy little wife. Solid jump, right? I was feeling good. Life-three? The same thing, except I had an even bigger salary. My parents were some CEO types. Then some mean robots got involved, and it got weird. Then boom! I am back in my body. No fourth life for the third damn game in a row. I swear this game hates me."

"Maybe you were closer to winning as the cricket."

Lee sneered. "How many badges do you have again? Right. You wouldn't know the first thing about how to win anyway."

Bendi looked out the window, feeling somewhat smug. He watched as two

shadows passed by the sheer green curtain, arriving at the door. The clicking of lock and key and shaky hands. Anu, still teary, and Nadine, smiling and nodding in greeting, walked in.

"Good walk?" Lee asked.

"Anu is still a little shaken up," Nadine replied.

They hadn't closed the door behind them when a flighted messenger descended, queuing its doorbell sound effect.

"Eh bot, the door's already open," Lee said, rolling his eyes. "Speak of the devil, and he shall appear."

It hovered for a few seconds, registering the response. It said: "I understand that a Nadine Stornsi may be found in this household. Is Nadine Stornsi currently present in this household?"

"Yep!" Nadine said.

"Scanning. Yes. Hello. Nadine Stornsi. Your message is as follows: 'Nadine, we see that you have achieved a new high score in *Enlightenment*.'" The voice was now not the familiar robotic messenger voice but the nasally voice of a narrow-mouthed man. They all recognized the voice; it was the founder of *Enlightenment*.

"In fact, you seem to have expanded what we had previously believed could take place within the game's possible worlds, but the game surprises us every day, as do the capabilities of the incredible players of the world, like yourself. I would like to invite you to join us in San Francisco tomorrow, and we can figure out what kind of award your score deserves. You have received an email to book your driver and pilot's departure time at your convenience."

Us?

The message went quiet for a second. Bendi scanned the room, gauging reactions. Nadine seemed without expression, just unspecified calmness. Then the message continued, in a new voice this time: "Yes, Nadine, I very much look forward to meeting you."

It was the Khiladee. *The great one*. He said Nadine's name.

The message ended, and the messenger said: "Message completed. When you are ready to record a response, please text 475# to—"

Bendi's ears rang the messenger's voice out of focus. White noise and shock. Anu was gnawing at her nails again. Lee looked like he had just seen someone get shot.

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The first time Bendi had sex, it hurt.

It felt like his penis was burning, as if someone was holding a tiny flame just a few inches away from its tip. He kept accidentally slipping out of her; their movements were very uncoordinated. Every time he re-entered her it took quite a laborious effort, pinching and pushing, sometimes reapplying lube—*Is this too much, shit*—and checking that the condom didn't break. The latex and lube felt yucky on his skin. *Fuck, ow. Maybe I should just offer my fingers again.*

"This feels so good," he said.

When it was over, he didn't have to fake cum like he thought he might. The sensation of sperm climbing through and outside him burned the most out of everything, but it still felt powerfully pleasurable. It was like the combination of the sensation of seeing a very good piece of art for the first time and when you stop coughing after swallowing something down the wrong pipe. She seemed very pleased, and he felt accomplished despite all the pain. He was acutely aware of his heavy breath falling through and rising out of him, sweat leaking from his lower back and into her bed sheets, and his penis quickly shrinking in size. The room had an unfamiliar scent; it was sweaty, sweet, saccharine; there was a hint of latex to it too; it was sort of tangy, but mostly it had the flavours of him, and her, and what they just did, and the connection that just happened.

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Nadine decided she had no interest in going to San Francisco. This choice received much protest from Lee, who wanted to go with her. Anu wasn't sure what to make of it. She didn't want to lose Nadine. Bendi was indifferent to it all. Besides never being interested in joining the whole E-path thing, he suddenly had great trust in Nadine and knew she would decide what was best.

"You're crazy. You're fucking crazy. For someone who might be fucking enlightened, you sure are stupid," Lee said. "We could—you could meet the Khiladee, a god-damned enlightened being. You'd be famous."

"Anu and I were planning on having a picnic tomorrow."

"Oh, oh! No! You can't sacrifice the picnic! Oh heavens, the bread will stale! The grapes will go soft! Nadine, you won't even need a degree after this. They're offering you a goddamn private jet."

"Give it a rest, Lee," Anu said.

It was a quiet night after the messenger

left, except for Lee occasionally circling back to the points he had already made a few times. Bendi and Anu were outside smoking cigarettes, sitting on the little piece of grass in front of their unit.

"This probably isn't over, is it?" Anu asked Bendi. She put out her cigarette and tossed it on the street, aiming for the drainage grate and missing. She got up, grabbed it, and put it in an empty beer can while she sat back down.

"I don't know, probably not."

There was a long silence, and Anu said: "Do you think it's true? Do you think Nady is really, like...enlightened now?"

"You're asking the wrong guy. I couldn't tell a Khiladee from a chipmunk."

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Bendi leaned against his bedroom's doorway and watched the slice of wall opposite Anu's room. Anu had a record on, Patsy Cline's greatest hits. Nadine and Anu's shadows danced in and out of a frame of light—created by the warm glow of a lamp—on the otherwise blank wall he was staring at. First, he saw Nadine's shaggy, poofy, mulletish hair bouncing slowly while her feet shifted; her shadow growing thinner as her hips turned. Then it all went dark, like a curtain coming down on the show, as a leg brushed over the projector of the scene. It became just a wall again. For the moment, it was just the colour of an eggshell wall in a room with the lights off at night. Then the vignette reappeared with a new leading actress. Anu's shadow danced in with the silhouette of her arms around Nadine's neck. Bendi's eyes fixated on the wonder of these things that were happening in the world, happening to him. In his life, he was having experiences that would be impossible to recreate, assign some specific value, or even bother trying to understand what they meant.

"—Hello? Dude, where'd you go?" Lee was all tangled up with a blanket on the couch.

"Huh—oh. I'm here." The world wrapped itself around him. *I'm here.* 

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**Reece McCart Young** grew up in rural Ontario, Canada, and now studies Philosophy and Economics at the University of Toronto. Reece loves to write nature-inspired poetic nonsense about his travels and about not-so-far-off dystopian worlds. Reece is an avid canoer, hiker and mountaineer. Above all, he values trees, waters and wilderness.





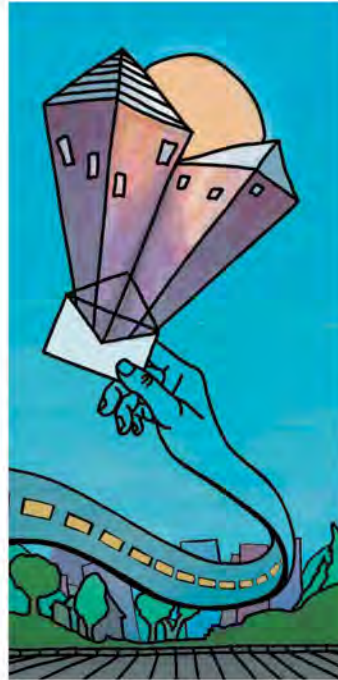
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