

CONUNDRUM

AN ANNUAL CATAZINE OF THE COMIC ARTS

2023





photo: James Arthur MacLean

Small town theatre is a world all on its own. Where did you draw this material from? Which parts were important for you to capture?

I was inspired by my own life growing up as a child of a theatre director in Nova Scotia. It is an open secret that *Kettle Harbour* is inspired by the Parrsboro area, where my mother started the Ship's Company Theatre in the 1980s. The theatre in *Kettle Harbour* is an amalgam of the Ship and many other theatres across the province. I remember attending many rehearsals and show openings. I often drew on the back of old scripts. As a teen, favourite shows were the darker "shoulder season" productions you would sometimes see in September. Kit's play is drawn in part from those memories.

Tell us about your process.

I definitely take a hybrid approach to this medium. To me, there is no writing without the drawing and vice versa. I think of the page layout almost like a kind of sentence structure. Negative spaces between panels are a form of pause, a little bit like an ellipses or an em dash. This is why I can't start with a script, and then illustrate that script. The art does not illustrate what the words say so much as move the story forward. If you write about a sunset, you do not need to draw it. If you draw a sunset, you do not need to write about one, if that makes sense. The two work together. I am faster at drawing than writing too, so I'd rather do sketchy thumbnails of what I plan to write then write out descriptions of the images in a script.

Which character means the most to you and why?

I am fond of them all, but I think Michael means the most to me. I think that's because I gave him a very personal storyline: he is struggling with a parent who has memory loss. It is not stated explicitly, but I imagine Kit has early onset Alzheimer's disease. I went through this with my father, who passed away in 2018. Michael has a long road ahead of him and I feel that.

You spend a lot of time playing with memory and perception in this book. What attracts you most to this subject matter?

I think what I am interested in is the challenge of representing memory and perception in a visual way, and in the graphic novel form in particular—which is a unique blend of word and image. I tried to do this by developing page layout styles for each character that suggests something about their personality and their view of the past, in a similar way that a novel might have a unique prose style for each character in a multi-POV story.



*Kyle Vingoe-Cram is a cartoonist, writer and visual artist from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. They have been making comics since they were a child, and have always been fascinated by the potential of visual storytelling to create new avenues for literary exploration. They live in Ottawa with their husband and family. *Kettle Harbour* is their first novel.*



In this debut graphic novel from Nova Scotian cartoonist Kyle Vingoe-Cram, a young artist reunites with her beloved cousin and his husband in the small town where they spent formative summers, unearthing pieces of the past and upending their lives. Once tied at the hip, the two cousins, Andrea and Brendan, awkwardly reconnect over nostalgic hiking trips and retro video games. Meanwhile, Michael works on the premiere of a new play at the local theatre. As he struggles with the play, he must also care for his mother, the renowned playwright, who is suffering from early dementia.

Pushing the boundaries of visual storytelling, Vingoe-Cram plays with the reliability of memory and the cascading effects of trauma through bursting geological panels and pools of negative space. Bubbling intrusive thoughts are cleverly written in pencil, contrasting with the pen used for dialogue—and highlighting the difference between our inner and outer lives. Told from interwoven perspectives, each with their own distinct graphic style, *Kettle Harbour* deftly moves back and forth in time to reveal glimmers of an uncomfortable shared past.





The following is the complete introduction for the original 2012 edition of Heartless by American underground cartoonist Jay Lynch. Unfortunately, Lynch died in 2017, but we were enormously flattered he was willing to endorse Bunjevac's work and with appreciation we are pleased to reprint his words here:

I first encountered the work of Nina Bunjevac in the pages of the American magazine *MINESHAFT*, a small circulation publication which carries on the tradition of the little mags published in the post World War II years of the Beat generation. It was the incredibly detailed artwork that hooked me, and I was immediately drawn into the dark foreboding whirlpool of her unique vision. Interesting and just distressing enough to seize the reader's total attention; her Zorka Petrovic tales both fascinate and disturb.

Each Bunjevac tale in this volume captivates the reader by invoking a mood which for some might rekindle the flavor of a favorite Film Noir movie or a French New Wave film. For others, however, it may well invoke a buried memory of a real event from the giant screen of life itself.

Each tale is told in a precise manner and the highly detailed art, cross-hatched and stippled for maximum intensity, is flawless. The work speaks for itself with a graphic vocabulary seldom witnessed in the world of modern cartooning, or graphic storytelling, or whatever they call it these days.

Although Film Noir and the French New Wave cinema may have shaped her vision to some extent, one of Bunjevac's admitted major influences are the early films of the Serbian director Dusan Makavejev, the leading proponent of the Yugoslavian New Cinema, dubbed by wary critics of the 1960s "The Black Wave." The gritty reality of everyday life mixed with dark humor of this school of filmmaking is a principal ingredient in the recipe for each individually concocted Bunjevac graphic yarn included in this collection.

There is a movement; I guess you would call it, in the Balkans that has been going on for the past several decades. Pioneering cartoonists like Alexander Zograf in the former Yugoslavia began a wave of comics which chronicled the concerns of the era. Loosely influenced by the 1970s underground comix of the US, these self-published comics have evolved into a modern form of individual expression to be reckoned with. And right now, it is Nina Bunjevac whose works especially stand out as masterpieces in this genre.

So read on, folks. Follow Selma's entry into THE NEW WORLD and her reinvention of herself, for better or worse. Witness if you will the bizarre love triangle of Zorka, Chip Stein and Fay Slift, the old Frankie and Johnny legend taken to its extreme of outré weirdness! Check out the O'Henry-like twists and turns in THE REAL DEAL! This book is a wild thrill ride through hell on a Tilt-A-Whirl! It's a triple-dip banana split with a live cockroach at the bottom! I dig it the most, and so will you!

— Jay Lynch, 2012

"Her drawing chops are stunning, yet she's no mere illustrator, as she breathes life into her characters as they are the vessels of her bawdy but bone-dry and pitch-black sense of humor."

— Rob Clough, *The Comics Journal*

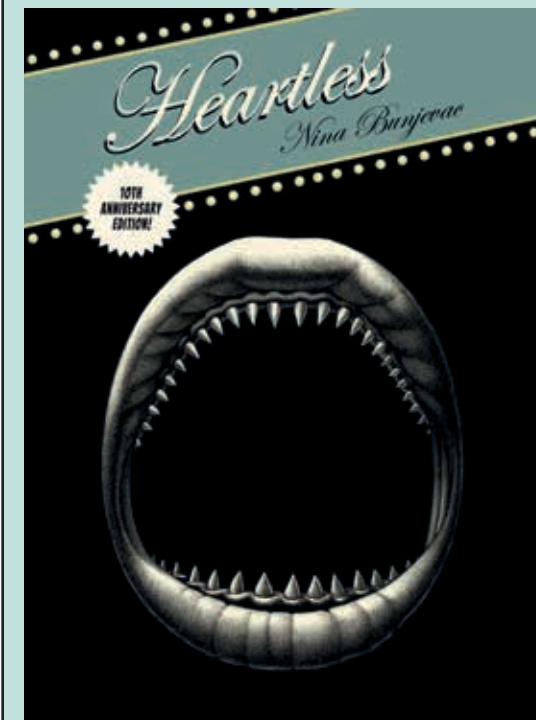
"The most vitally reinvigorating change in modern comics is the unstoppable rise of women, as creators, as readers, and as characters. In her impressive debut collection, Nina Bunjevac stuns as a distinctive, innovative voice, adept at hyper detailed cartooning and deliciously disturbing as she probes the darkest depths of desire and despair."

— Paul Gravett

"Heartless is just amazing! I laughed out loud a lot. It is chock full of great stuff and I'm hard to please! Nina Bunjevac's art is a pleasure to look at. The writing is seriously demented, but in a totally brilliant, highly entertaining way. It is its own thing, imitating no one."

— Kim Deitch

Nina Bunjevac is a Toronto-based artist and illustrator. Her other books are Fatherland (2015, Jonathan Cape), Bezimena (2019, Fantagraphics), The Alchemical Journey Through the Major Arcana of The Tarot (2021, Zarabatana Books, Brazil), and La Reparation (2022, Editions Martin De Halleux, France). Her books have received multiple Doug Wright Awards, the French Aremisia Prix, Italian Grand Jury Prize at Lucca Comics and Games, and a Joe Shuster Award. Her art has been exhibited both at home in Canada and internationally, most notably at Art Gallery of Ontario and Galerie Martel in Paris.



Nina Bunjevac's brilliant debut graphic novel returns in this expanded 10th Anniversary paperback edition.

Featuring 30 pages of new material and powered by an expressive black and white drawing style, reminiscent of Robert Crumb and the meticulous pointillist technique of Drew Friedman, the dark undertone of Bunjevac's humour brings into light the range of socio-political issues her comics deal with, such as gender, nationalism or urban alienation, always from an ironic feminist perspective.

In the decade since her ground-breaking first edition Bunjevac has come to be recognized as one of the world's most important comic artists, with her books *Fatherland* and *Bezimena* winning awards and garnering praise. With this new paperback edition, featuring new stories and drawings, she returns to her roots and shows why she is considered a master of the form.

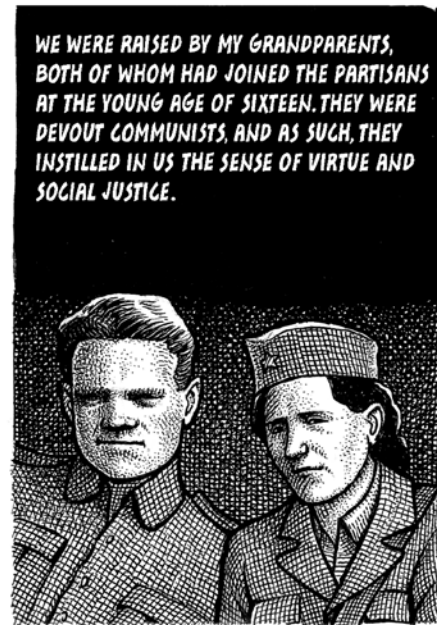


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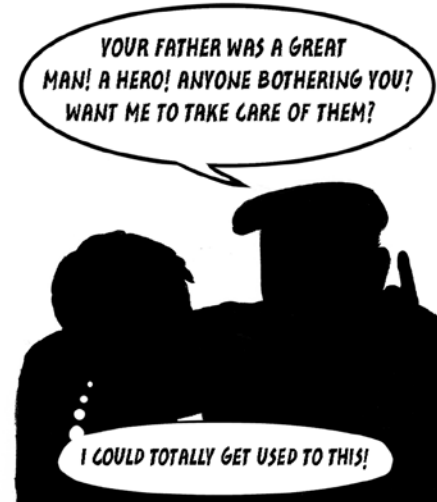
BY NINA BUNJEVARC

EXILED TO CANADA DUE TO HIS NATIONALIST TENDENCIES, MY FATHER JOINED 'FREEDOM FOR THE SERBIAN FATHERLAND', AN ANTICOMMUNIST AND ULTRANATIONALIST GROUP BASED OUT OF CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. HE DIED IN A MYSTERIOUS EXPLOSION WHILE PLANNING AN ATTACK ON THE YUGOSLAV CONSULATE IN TORONTO IN 1977.

NIKOLA KAVAJA, THE LEADER OF FREEDOM FOR THE SERBIAN FATHERLAND, WAS ARRESTED A YEAR LATER WHILE ATTEMPTING TO HIGHJACK AN AMERICAN AIRLINES 727 AND FLY IT INTO THE COMMUNIST CENTRAL COMMITTEE BUILDING IN BELGRADE. AFTER THE 9-11 ATTACKS KAVAJA MADE A STATEMENT...



I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT MY FATHER UNTIL I MOVED BACK TO CANADA AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN AND GOT TO MEET SOME OF HIS OLD ASSOCIATES.



MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE SERBIAN COMMUNITY DIED IN THE WAKE OF NATO BOMBING, SHORTLY AFTER I ATTENDED A FUNDRAISER AT THE SERBIAN CHURCH HALL IN TORONTO.



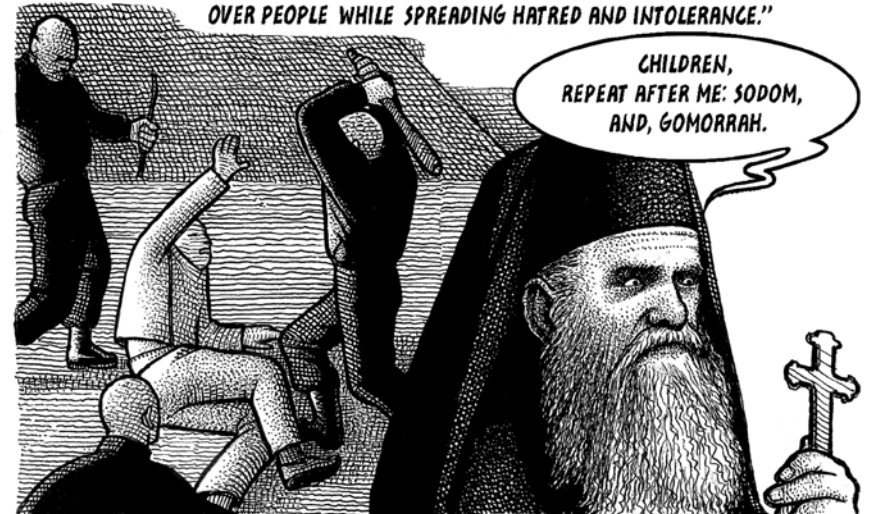
SEEING THAT MY HUSBAND WAS THE ONLY NON-SERB IN THE AUDIENCE, EVERYONE FELT COMPELLED TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.



IT WASN'T UNTIL 2007 WHEN I CONNECTED WITH THE SERBIAN UNDERGROUND COMICS SCENE AND BEGAN TRAVELLING ABROAD THAT I HAD A CHANCE TO TALK WITH PEOPLE WHO HAD LIVED THROUGH IT ALL: THE MILOSEVIC YEARS, ECONOMIC SANCTIONS, NATO BOMBING...



"WE ARE STILL RECOVERING FROM THE MILOSEVIC ERA, HAVING TO DEAL WITH THIS 'LOST GENERATION', THOSE WHO WERE BORN AND RAISED DURING THE NINETIES. HATE CRIMES ARE ON THE RISE, AGAINST ETHNIC MINORITIES, LGBT COMMUNITY, HUMANITARIAN ACTIVISTS, YOU NAME IT. THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HAS THIS HYPNOTIC INFLUENCE OVER PEOPLE WHILE SPREADING HATRED AND INTOLERANCE."



"AND NOW THERE ARE ALL THESE CHRISTIAN GROUPS THAT PROMOTE 'FAMILY VALUES', MAINLY THROUGH HARASSMENT. IF THEY HAD IT THEIR WAY, GAYS AND LESBIANS WOULD ALL BE STONED TO DEATH, AND I DON'T MEAN THE FUN KIND OF STONED."



MY GRANDMOTHER SURVIVED THREE YEARS OF SLEEPING IN DITCHES AND ON FOREST FLOORS, CERVICAL CANCER, AND FOURTEEN YEARS OF DOUBLE COLOSTOMY. IT WAS SEEING THE DEMISE OF THE COUNTRY SHE FOUGHT SO PASSIONATELY FOR THAT KILLED HER IN THE END. SHE DIED IN 1994, MY GRANDFATHER DIED TWELVE YEARS LATER.



I VISITED THEIR GRAVE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2011. THERE WAS NO RED STAR ON THEIR TOMBSTONE, JUST A CRUCIFIX, AND A LARGE WOODEN ONE STAKED INTO THE GROUND, THE KIND YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO REMOVE WITHIN A YEAR OF THE BURIAL. I TOOK THE DAMN THING OUT, IT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO.

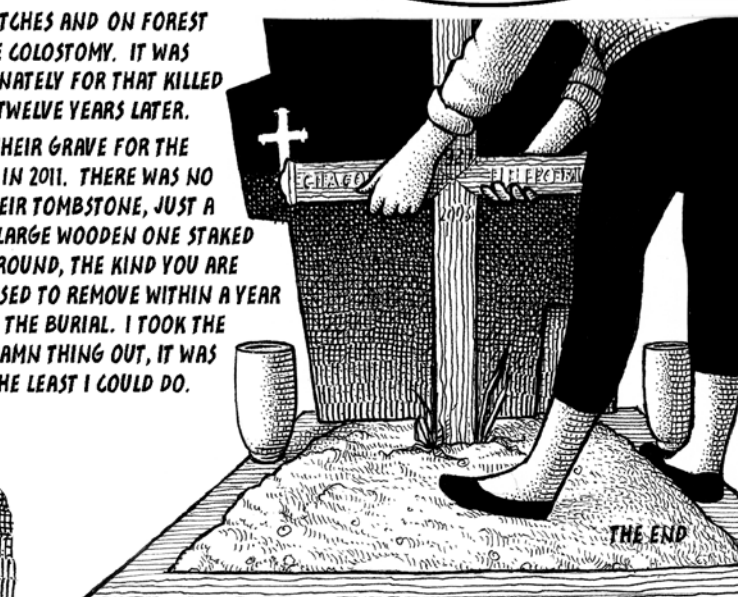




photo: Natasha Gowda

Moon Boots is a story of a musician on a road trip / tour. Your previous book *On Vinyl* was also about music and contained a road trip. Do you see these two books as complimentary? Is this part of a series of music books or is this just where your heart lies?

The two books do compliment each other, it's true! I never meant it that way. I tried to tie *On Vinyl* in with my own experience (record shop owner) as much as possible without the story being about myself. In *Moon Boots* I am going purely on an escapist trip, a secret life as a country singer, something that is never likely to come true for me. I like writing about road trips because there is so much room for adventures, I also love writing about what I know and music has always been a huge part of my life.

Moot Boots is fictional and hilarious. You have also done serious autobiographical work (as in *Dark Adaptation*). Do you prefer one over the other? Fiction or autobio? Serious or funny? Or is it all mixed together?

I find cartooning fun because it takes my mind into another realm where nothing needs to make sense or has to be explained. Doodles and drawings take over where

serious matters could gnaw and chew the life out of you. In a serious story like *Dark Adaptation*, it was based on my experience with my mother's terminal cancer and I thought the best way to process it was to write about it. Without any humour it would have been very dull and pointless, both the creative process and the story. I used to prefer autobio stuff because it is always ready and available. A story about walking down the street or riding a bus can be full of detail and random hilarity. Fiction is more challenging for me because I need to make stuff up sitting at a table and thinking. What I have learned through *Moon Boots* is that living through a character can be just as exciting!

Did you draw most of *Moon Boots* in rural New Brunswick, or in urban Toronto, or both? What was the process of making this book? Did the pandemic have anything to do with it?

I started writing ideas for this story around October, 2019 and did some sketchy pencils. The story really began to develop while most of the world was in lockdown in April, 2020. I was rather stuck and on my own in rural NB and had to wait like everyone else. Daily drawing and writing was the best way for me to ward off a terrible depression during that time. I returned to Toronto and finished the book within the year, I completed it very quickly, I drew in the mornings while playing records. Mainly scratchy dollar bin rock, country and RnB.

I remember moon boots being popular colourful snow boots in the 1980s. Is this what the title refers to? If not, can you explain the title?

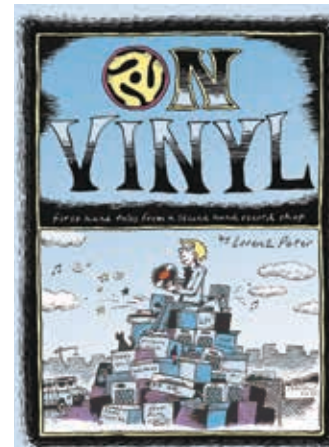
I had a pair of those, silver ones. I must have been 11 or so. They were great for sliding down hills in the winter time. I later inserted screws into the bottoms of them so they became super mega grip boots! But no, the story has nothing to do with that. Because I worked on this story so quickly, daily almost, I added a moon faze. The story takes place in real time, without a narration. There are 7 or 8 nights and the moon is present on each of those nights, gradually changing. Also there is a boot surprise but I can't give it away here.

What would be some songs on the soundtrack if *Moon Boots* were a road trip movie?

Recently I heard a country song about sleeping by Doug Bell, I really liked it and if *Moon Boots* were a movie I'd stick that in there. I would mainly love the story to have original instrumental guitar music, maybe a trumpet or harmonica. Also Lester sings so I'd have to come up with some original music for that! Send me your demos...

“Lorenz’s storytelling is direct and very readable and he’s developed a beautiful cartooning style.” — Chester Brown

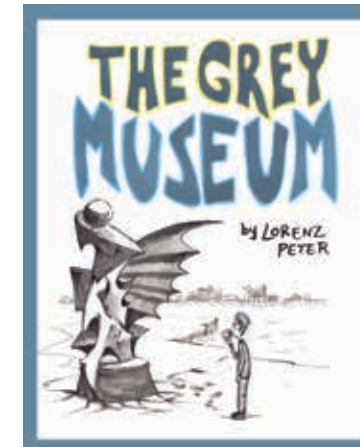
Also Available:



On Vinyl

ISBN 978-1-77262-029-0
80 pages / \$15

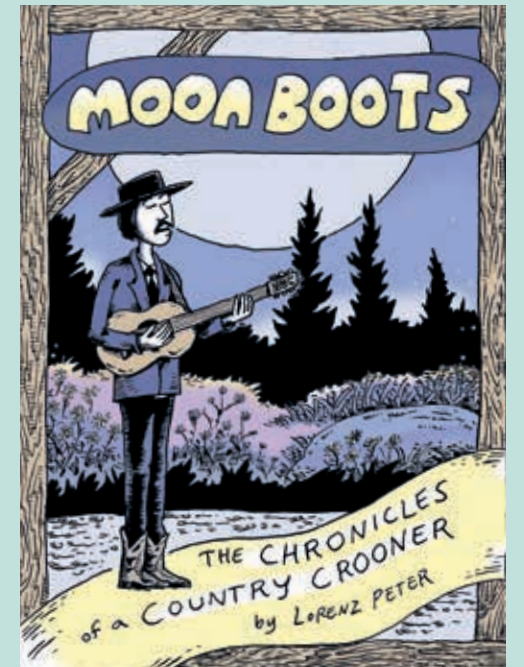
High Fidelity for the next generation. First hand tales from a second hand record shop. *On Vinyl* is a love letter to vinyl and an exploration of the role nostalgia plays in the decisions we make.



The Grey Museum

ISBN 978-1-89499-471-2
220 pages / \$20

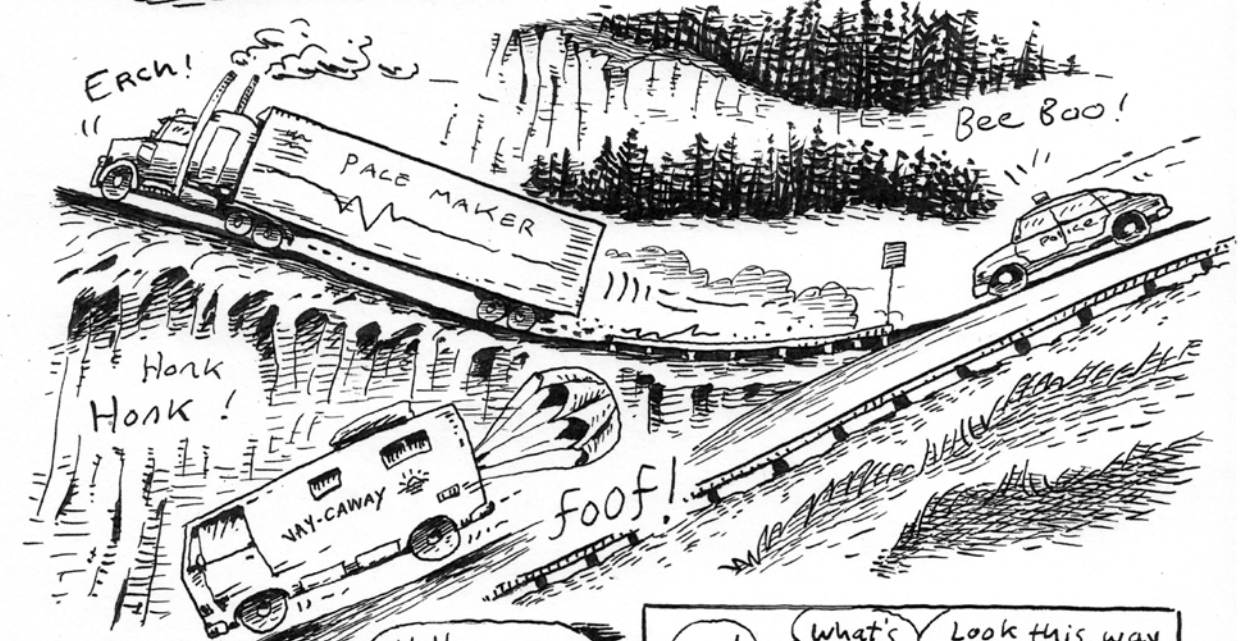
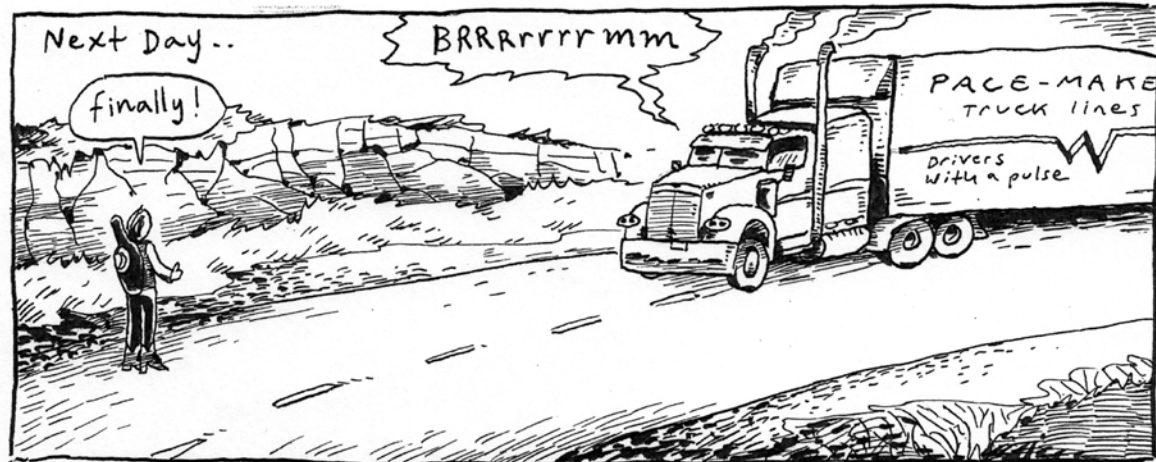
Set in the future, *The Grey Museum* is a galactic romp, following a small group of survivors as they fend with mystic beings, interstellar parasites and themselves.



Music and nostalgia take center stage in this gently humorous road trip story.

Following a major life upheaval, Lester LaFleur decides to leave the city for good. With his guitar on his back and cowboy boots on his feet, Lester heads west across Canada, playing his hurtin' songs in empty taverns and to anyone who cares to listen. As Lester travels across the country, he meets others who appreciate his music and share his experiences—and develops a deep kinship with his fellow drifters. As they ride together toward their unknown fortunes, adventures ensue.

In *Moon Boots*, award-winning cartoonist Lorenz Peter (*On Vinyl*) uses gentle humour and expressive lines to explore the nostalgia of a hidden world beyond mobile phones and small plate restaurants — and discovers that sometimes, home is the open road and family is the people you meet along the way.





You live in Toronto but your previous work *Strays* and *Herman by Trade* take place in a city that is very much unnamed. In *Adherent*, you almost take the “unnamed city” to its extreme conclusion. Yet you say it is not post-apocalyptic. How do you view these landscapes where you put your characters? Does living in Toronto have anything to do with it? Or are they more interior worlds?

I consider them interior worlds but they wind up being refracted versions of Toronto in a way. I guess I can't escape the city, even in my fantasies. When I started drawing *Adherent* I wasn't thinking of post-apocalyptic fiction at all, which is a bit funny when I look at how the story turned out. My idea was that the main character is walking through different stages of development in human civilization. When she reaches the abandoned city she decides to turn back, but it is implied that there may be more to see beyond those ruins, i.e. further stages of civilization. So maybe I don't consider it post-apocalyptic because the city is only meant to be one stage among many.

I know the Toronto comics community is vibrant. Yet your previous books were published in the UK. Are you involved in the Toronto scene at all?

Not very much unfortunately! I know a few cartoonists here, but I'm mostly in my own little corner. When I finished my first comic, *Herman by Trade*, I sent it to a few publishers who had open submissions. UK-based SelfMadeHero was one of them and I like a lot of the books they've put out, so I was amazed when they agreed to publish my work. It did leave me in a bit of a limbo though, not really part of the Canadian nor the UK comics scene.

Your books almost read like fables or myths. Are there any specific fables that influence *Adherent*?

I didn't have a specific fable in mind but I definitely tend toward that kind of storytelling, almost despite myself. Before I began writing *Adherent* I had watched the movie *Vagabond* by Agnès Varda, which follows the journey of a wandering, aimless woman. That definitely influenced the visuals and mood of *Adherent*, and fit well with a bunch of story ideas I had been mulling over for a while.

Though not religious there is a biblical element to the story. Would this be accurate?

I think there's some truth to that. I was interested in the idea of ancient texts whose authorship is unknown or ambiguous, like the *Tao Te Ching* or the epic poems attributed to Homer. The Bible, like many religious texts, definitely fits in that category. I wanted to write a story about what might happen if it were possible to meet the author of one of these kinds of works and whether that experience would be worthwhile. The story changed direction as I wrote it, but a lot of this initial idea remained in the final book. So this image of ancient texts definitely influenced the world in *Adherent*, one that is kind of elemental and mythic.

Your drawing style is incredible. Did you go to art school? Are there other artists you admire?

I went to the Ontario College of Art and Design for illustration. It was a great experience, though it took many years after graduation to actually develop any sort of drawing style. I love the prints of Goya and Käthe Kollwitz. Their line quality and feeling for form are amazing. I'm very influenced by *bande dessinée* artists, having read *Tintin* as a kid. I love Jaques Tardi's comics... the list could go on and on.

“Chris Kim draws like a gifted, haunted anthropologist. This book is a creeping and enigmatic journey into the unknown.”

— Hartley Lin



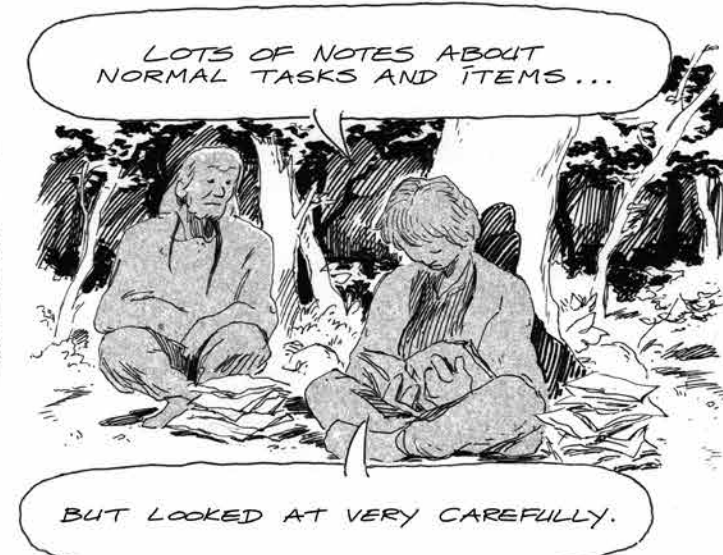
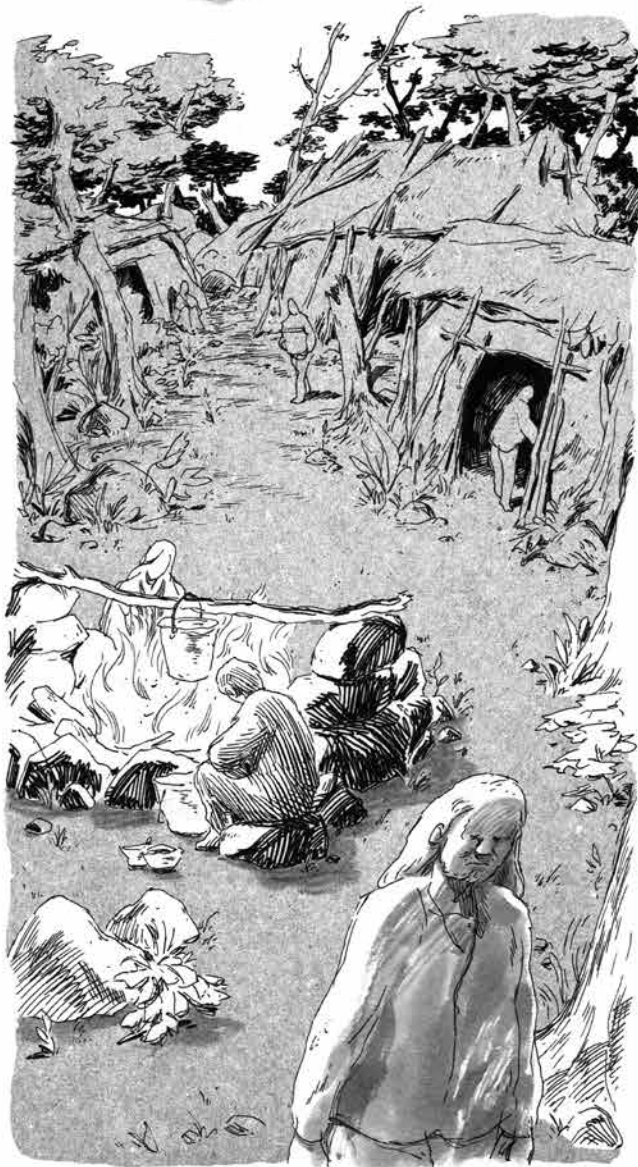
Chris W. Kim is a cartoonist and illustrator from Toronto, Ontario. Influenced by comics and animation, he pursued his interest in drawing at OCAD University where he studied fine art before switching to illustration. He has worked for clients such as *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Popular Mechanics* and *Maisonneuve Magazine*, among others. His first graphic novel, *Herman by Trade* (SelfMadeHero), was published in 2017, followed by *Strays* (SelfMadeHero) in 2021.



A poignant fable about a young woman who discovers an intriguing set of notebooks and leaves her isolated community to search for their author—a journey that ultimately makes her question what she wants and what she's willing to leave behind.

The residents of an isolated village in a dreamlike world scavenge for supplies in the surrounding forest, collecting scattered items left over from a time long past. No one strays far from this community, fearing what may lie beyond it. When they find a stack of notebooks by an unknown author, a young villager becomes obsessed with their contents. She sets out on a quest to find the writer. As she ventures into the unknown, she discovers a world both barren and increasingly complex. The closer she gets to her goal, the more she realizes that the encounter she's been seeking probably won't be what she wanted.

In *Adherent*, Chris W. Kim (*Herman by Trade*, *Strays*) brings us a fabular tale that examines the ways we connect—and the stories and memories we value—in our own increasingly disconnected world.





It focuses on a complicated love triangle. Can you explain the relationships of the characters?

We could even call it a quadrangle. Multiple elements influenced this story. During the Balkan wars and economic hardship, I observed how even educated and cultured people slid into the human cloaca. One of our friends suddenly married a gangster, probably to escape poverty. I don't know her motivation because we immediately severed all contact. That's how I got interested in women who date men for their money. But then, some women are really in love with thugs. I wanted to describe both scenarios, and I came up with the idea of two women in a relationship with the same brute. It's a quadrangle in which all characters are faulty, despite some of them being more likable than others.

When I first started working on the story, there weren't many storylines like this in comic arts. Even today, I find that relations in graphic novels are simplified and focus mostly on traditional two-way relationships and one-dimensional characters. That's not what I see in real life. The other challenge was to write a story about completely fictional characters. Unlike in some of my other comics, no characters in this novel are based on real people. I wanted to see if I could pull that off and create believable characters.

You were trained as an architect. Why the move to comics?

Architecture seemed like a good option for me, fusing art and technology. But, the university I attended was a bit traditionalist, so I didn't have much fun with my studies, although I made strong life-long friendships. I was ready to switch careers when I moved to Canada, and I am glad I worked in an educational media setting for a while. Comics are my secondary career, unfortunately. I still

have a very demanding university job.

The decision to start making comics was a purely rational one. I knew I could write and draw, so I put these two things together. Luckily, I had a lot of support from the start, with publishers, editors and artists back home in Yugoslavia being very kind and generous. Almost everything I ever made has been published. I think I have less than half a dozen pages, which were done as pitches, that were never published. I believe that a supportive environment was crucial to my early success.

How did you find making the transition to a longer work?

I never thought I had a temperament for a graphic novel because I hate dedicating years to a single project. It's one of the reasons I left architecture, as it could be years from an idea stage to realization. I have no clue how Seth could carry through with his *Clyde Fans* for 20 years. What worked for me was focusing on a single page at a time and not thinking too much about the enormity of the task.

Are your influences comic artists? Are the European artists doing something different?

Like many others in former Yugoslavia, I grew up with a smorgasbord of quality content. We were spoiled with the best of BBC, great Russian movies, Quebec TV series and, of course, the best world literature and comics from both sides of the ocean. I was always attracted to great literature rather than comics. My main inspiration is Chekhov. No matter what he wrote, he never lost sight of the comedic element in life and the humanity of his characters. I think we should listen when Chekhov says "Cherry Orchard" is a comedy. I remember crying when I read the last pages of Chekhov's writing I could find. That also happened with

the works of Hugo Pratt, Ingmar Bergman, Andrey Tarkovsky, Daniil Kharms, Tennessee Williams and Hillary Mantel, but very few others. Luckily, Rushdie is still alive. I like to constantly re-read a couple of my favourite books.

I am not an expert on the contemporary comic art scene. For me, the visual style of some European authors is more attractive, and I am drawn to it. A few of my favourites are Tardi, Fior, Yelin, Gipi, Igort, Zograf. I am leaning more towards the Italians. Growing up, I read their trashier comics, including Canadian/US-based serial "Captain Mark and the Ontario Wolves." No one here knows about that stuff. It's junk, but it was entertaining enough. Wasn't the reason for my move to this continent, though.

There are some fantastic achievements in Canadian comics, too: works by Jillian Tamaki/Mariko Tamaki, rightly recognized with two Governor General awards for youth literature, Nina Bunjevac New York Times best-seller *Fatherland*; and a nod for Joe Ollmann in the Governor General Awards literature category and Inkpot Award for Miriam Libicki in San Diego, both this year. I am excited to see what these artists do next.

Seems that your work is part of the Balkan Renaissance. Artists like Nina Bunjevac and Igor Hofbauer. Would you agree?

We always had a lot of great authors, and now some of them are known outside the Balkans. I don't see myself in the same league; I am more of an occasional meddler. There is certainly a lot of activity in that area of Europe. Whenever I open my social media accounts, I am like: "What!?! Yet another comic arts festival! Look at the art! Where is all this talent coming from?" So, yes, I guess you are right about the renaissance happening.

I discovered your work through Julian Lawrence in Vancouver. Would you consider yourself part of the Vancouver scene?

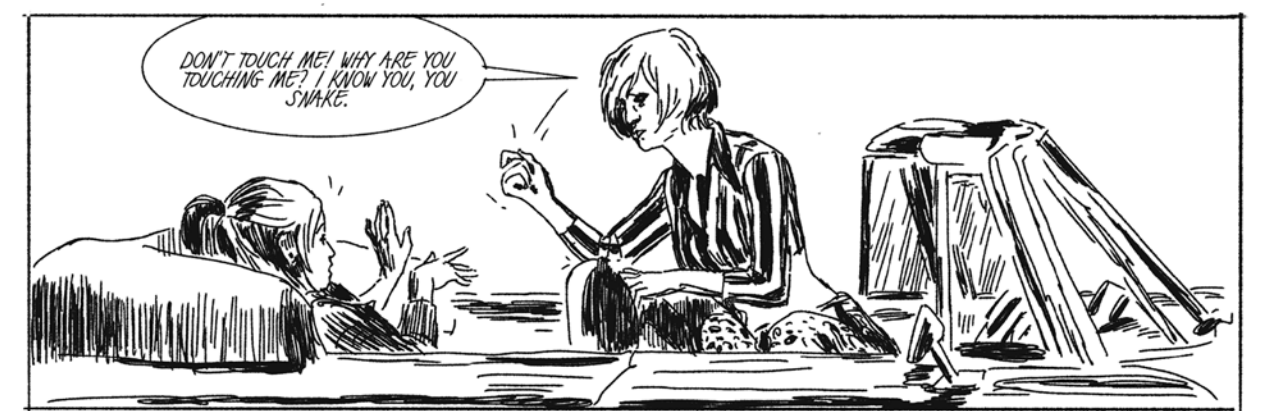
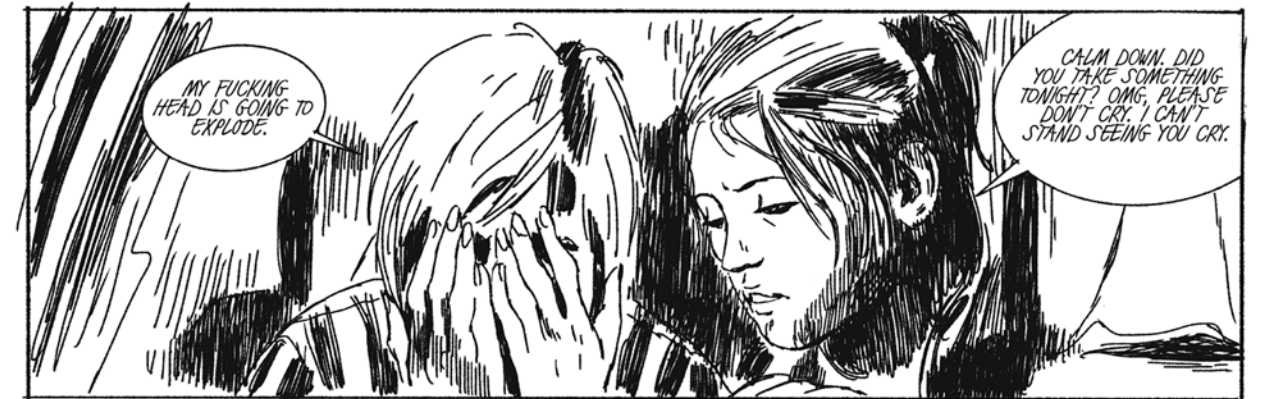
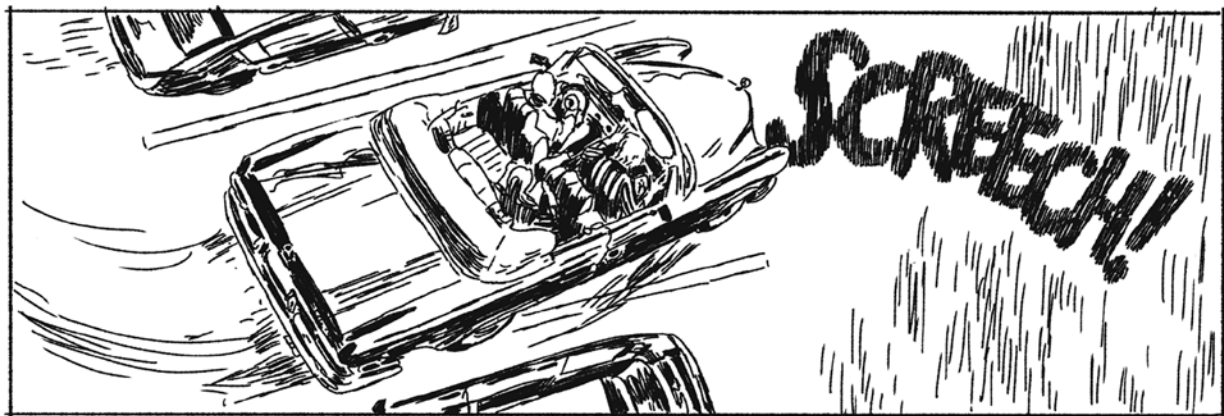
I still feel more connected to the Balkan art scene than anything here. Not for the lack of trying. I was lucky to run into some great creatives, like Julian Lawrence, Doug Savage, James Lloyd, Susan Ferguson, Miriam Libicki and David Lasky (from Seattle). Working hard to make a living in Vancouver certainly plays a part, leaving us with less time to help the growth and cohesiveness of the local comic art community. I am also very grateful to the VanCAF festival team, as they have given me opportunities to connect with the audience through workshops and the festival itself. They have put together a fantastic festival comeback in 2022, and I have high hopes for better times ahead and a much stronger Pacific Northwest scene.



A soapy crime drama unfolds between the stalls of North America's largest night market.

Eva and Mia couldn't be more different. Where Mia is insecure and image-obsessed, Eva is quiet and sensible. But the two women have one thing in common: their boyfriend, Max—a highly respected member of the city's criminal underground with a fearsome reputation. Over the course of a single dangerous evening at the night market, it quickly becomes clear that no one is in this relationship for love—instead, Mia, Eva, and Max are motivated by other complex social contracts: power, money, and fear.

Inspired by the work of literary masters Anton Chekhov, Ingmar Bergman, and Tennessee Williams, and created in a style that's reminiscent of black-and-white European artist Blutch, *What's Fear Got to Do With It* peels back the layers of human relationships and reveals that everything is not as it seems. A stunning debut from a talented artist who is part of the new Balkan Renaissance in comics.





I love how you've structured *Bad Medicine* — essentially, it's a series of graphic shorts linked by the shared experience of teens sitting around a campfire. What inspired you to use this format? Were there any unexpected challenges?

I have always liked horror anthologies. Comics like "Tales from the Crypt" and "Vault of Horror" were always interesting to me when I was young. Stephen King's books of short stories are also an influence on *Bad Medicine*. For me the challenge was to link the stories together by having the characters tell them in a way that seemed natural to me. The way Indigenous people spread their knowledge via stories is very influential on *Bad Medicine*.

What did you enjoy most about creating a graphic novel for teens? How did this audience shift the way you approached the subject matter?

I like introducing a teenage audience to horror that isn't too hard to digest, yet doesn't treat its audience like children. I tried to write the stories in a way that could be a bridge between adolescent subject matter and more mature stories. I think teens appreciate being able to read material that an adult would be able to read and enjoy.

Which was the hardest story to write? Why?

"Tracy's Ghost" (or "The Highway", not too sure what to title the story) was the hardest to write. It deals with issues that are very sensitive to me and many other Indigenous people. I had to make sure I treated the MMIW subject with great care and sensitivity. "The Monster Inside" was also difficult as its subject is one that modern Indigenous people deal with on a daily basis.

Who are your creative influences?

Junji Ito, Frank Miller, Katsuhiro Otomo, Grant Morrison, David Finch, Alan Moore, Ed Brubaker, Sean Philips, Fiona Staples, And Brian K. Vaughn. There are so many more that I would need to write a second book to name them all!



EMANATA

Conundrum Press is thrilled to announce the next title in its new young adult graphic novel imprint, curated by award-winning author Sal Sawler.



EMANATA graphic novels rely on a seamless blend of words and pictures to tell compelling, character-driven fiction and non-fiction stories. By focusing on work created by comic artists living in Canada and striving for social equity, EMANATA seeks to introduce fresh, strong, and under-represented voices to the international young adult and graphic novel markets.

Christopher Twin has been doing freelance illustration and comic work for close to a decade. He was self-taught from an early age and took correspondence courses. In 2018 he enrolled on the Fine Art program at Grant MacEwan University to advance his practice as well as to explore other mediums. His self-directed work is usually narrative driven and consists of stories about journeys of self-discovery and stories in the Horror and/or Science fiction genres. Christopher's work is inspired by social/cultural divides, alternative philosophies/religions, and life as a mixed-race person. He was born and raised on the Swan River First Nations reservation in northern Alberta and now lives and works in Edmonton, Alberta.



Also Available:

Call Me Bill
Lynette Richards

The first in the EMANATA Imprint
ISBN 978-1-77262-078-8 / 96 pages / 7x10 inches / \$18

"Visually inventive and eloquently written, Call Me Bill is a dazzling story of a short life lived daringly." —Emma Donoghue



A group of Cree teens gather around a fire to share stories of spirits and shapeshifters in this chilling debut graphic novel. After wandering out to the river near their homes, five teens decide to build a fire and exchange horror stories. Chad begins by telling the group about Carl, an unfortunate fisher who encountered a cluster of small, malevolent creatures while navigating the river in his canoe. Attempting to defend himself, Carl lashed out with an oar... and his world changed forever. One by one, the teens try to outdo each other, and the evening evolves into an impromptu storytelling competition.

On certain nights, if you walk along Loon River and peer under the bridge, you might spot a fire. You might hear a laugh. You might hear a scream. If you edge closer—and the conditions are just right—your view of the river will melt away, into the inky black beyond the firelight. Not to worry—the echoes of rushing water will help you find your way back. Or will they? Inspired by Cree folklore and modern Cree life, *Bad Medicine* will transport readers to terrifying new worlds that only exist at the edges of human imagination.





My understanding is that this new book focuses more on Yeva than the last one did. What interests you most about this character?

She was so much fun to write and draw in the first book, I knew I had to include her as one of the main characters in the sequel. Compared to Langosh, she offers a very different outlook on life. I decided to include her name in the title to reflect her importance to the story, and the series. I was excited to explore her first experience in America. For Yeva, who grew up in the USSR in the 90s, America represented everything that was cool and fresh! She thought that America represented qualities that she likes about herself; independence, creativity, and honesty. She begins to realize that perhaps America isn't what she thought it was, and maybe she isn't exactly who she thought she was, either. She also provides the perfect foil for Langosh, and her penetrating questions and straightforward takes on his choices give readers a fresh perspective.

Where do we get to travel this time? Which elements of these places were the most difficult to capture, either visually or in writing (or both)?

We get to travel across the USA, from the North East, to the midwest, all the way to California. I wanted to give readers

a taste of my own experiences traveling there, culturally and geographically. There is so much more that I wish I could have shown, but I get to cover quite a bit, even in the relatively small area of it that I was able to cover in this book! I think the most challenging places to capture are urban environments. Streets and buildings do not differ that much from Philadelphia to Sacramento. Even though they may look similar on a streetscape, when you are there in person they are so different! They smell different, they taste different, they sound and FEEL different. Very challenging to capture with words or imagery.

Last time, you drew and wrote at the same time, and this time, you chose to start with a script. How did this new process work out for you? What do you think you might change next time?

I managed to get through the script writing rather quickly. At first I tried to include too much, and had to edit out lots of stories I wanted to tell, but it's better to do that early on rather than later! The thumbnails were where I had to figure out how many panels, pages and chapters to dedicate to each event in the story. I know from experience that the layout of the pages and getting the expressions right on the characters takes a long time, so I poured much of my energy into that in the rough draft, because tracing those drawings and perfecting the shading will be much faster for me. Next time, I will be better at doing BASIC thumbnails before refining the drawings. Even though I could have done better, I managed to complete in 1.5 years what it took me 5 years to do last time, which I am very proud of!

Langosh and Peppi are an interesting balance of truth and fiction. Can you tell us about the line you've drawn between the two, and why you've decided to take this approach?

I decided to take this approach because I have lots of interesting stories to share! The process helps me clarify how I feel about the things that have happened, like a pictorial representation of me coming to terms with my own life. As I draw, I am able to explore different perspectives, and it helps me come to an understanding of how I really feel. The past few years have been difficult for everyone. There is so much wrong with the world and its systems. I worry that we have lost the ability to clear our minds and thoughts, to be open, to believe in the possibility of a better future. Working on these books gives me time to contemplate how complex life really is, and to have more compassion.

What themes do you dig into this time around?

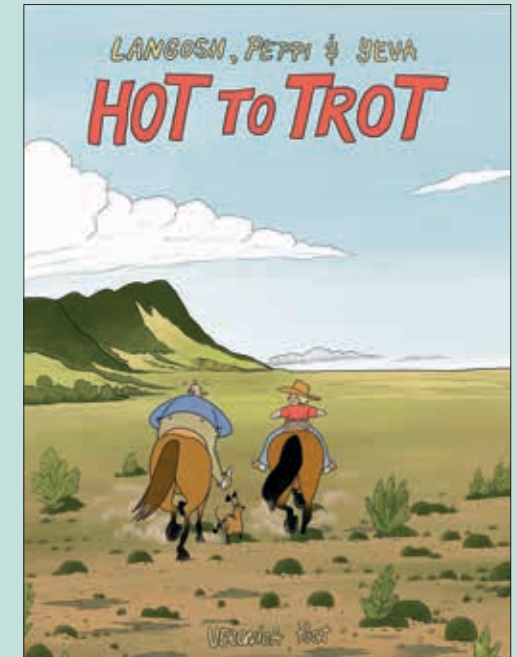
As in my first book, one theme is police brutality, which in the past two years has thankfully come to the forefront of public

consciousness thanks to the work of the Black Lives Matter movement. The media focus has rightly been on the police murders of unarmed people, which is sometimes misinterpreted as the acts of "a few bad apples". In reality, police violence has broad impacts that reach far beyond the actions of the few. For example, widespread racial discrimination, the criminalization of poverty, drug use and homelessness. For Langosh, his arrest for graffiti ended in him being beaten and sexually assaulted by the police. I think some readers will assume I exaggerated this scenario, but sadly this part wasn't fiction. I wish it was. I hope that this book will help readers explore how our current view of justice, punishment and morality deepens and reinforces divisions in society.

Another theme is the power of choice. Structural systems can harm us, but we also have our own unique agency in how we decide to respond to those systems. In every situation we have some choice. The choices we make help us define our identity. As we grow and change, we sometimes need to ask if the choices we made actually serve us well in a different context. It is very difficult to question values that were formed as a defense to trauma, and as Yeva and Langosh realize that they don't always see eye to eye, I explore if they can break free of the ideological barriers they have built for themselves, stay true to what feels right AND maintain the friendship that they have forged together.

All of this brings up the other big theme in the book, which is friendship. Within friendships we have a lot of choices to make... when to be flexible and when to take a stand. When to listen to your friend, and when to listen to yourself. When to give advice, and when to keep your mouth shut! As Langosh and Yeva travel together, they aren't always tactful at making these choices. Seeking to keep their friendship alive while for the first time questioning their own values, I explore if Langosh and Yeva can find personal power in ways they never imagined before.

Veronica Post is an award-winning graphic novelist and multi-disciplinary artist based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She attended University for Philosophy and Fine Arts, before moving to Montreal where she completed her studies in cabinetmaking, and discovered the DIY culture of self-published zines. She joined a zine distro and began creating comics, while following a path towards becoming a furniture-maker. Her path took a turn when she left Montreal for the allure of travel. She spent 8 years exploring Canada, America and Eastern Europe, where she began working on what would become "Fugitive Days." Today, she is the wood studio technician at the Centre for Craft, where she taught furniture making for 7 years, and she continues to create comics based on her life with her characters Langosh and Peppi.



A deeply intimate and searingly emotional tale of friendship, Langosh and Yeva struggle for control of an epic cross-country journey while delving into old wounds from the past. The landscape of America creates a constantly evolving backdrop to their emotional voyage. As they explore big cities, small towns, prairies and mountains, Langosh opens up to Yeva about his experience of police brutality, and the stark difference between how they respond to the situation leads to deep reflection on how the past informs their current choices. The more they seek to influence each other, the more obscured their path becomes. As Yeva comes to understand the unjust act of violence that changed his life forever, she struggles with how Langosh decides to respond to what happened. Have the values that he formed in response to harm become barriers to his personal growth? Is Yeva callous to the realities that he faces? Can they stay true to themselves AND keep their friendship alive? Influenced by Jillian Tamaki, Kate Beaton and Guy Delisle, Veronica Post examines how we respond to structural harm, the power and limitations of personal agency and the divide between individual freedoms and collective responsibility.



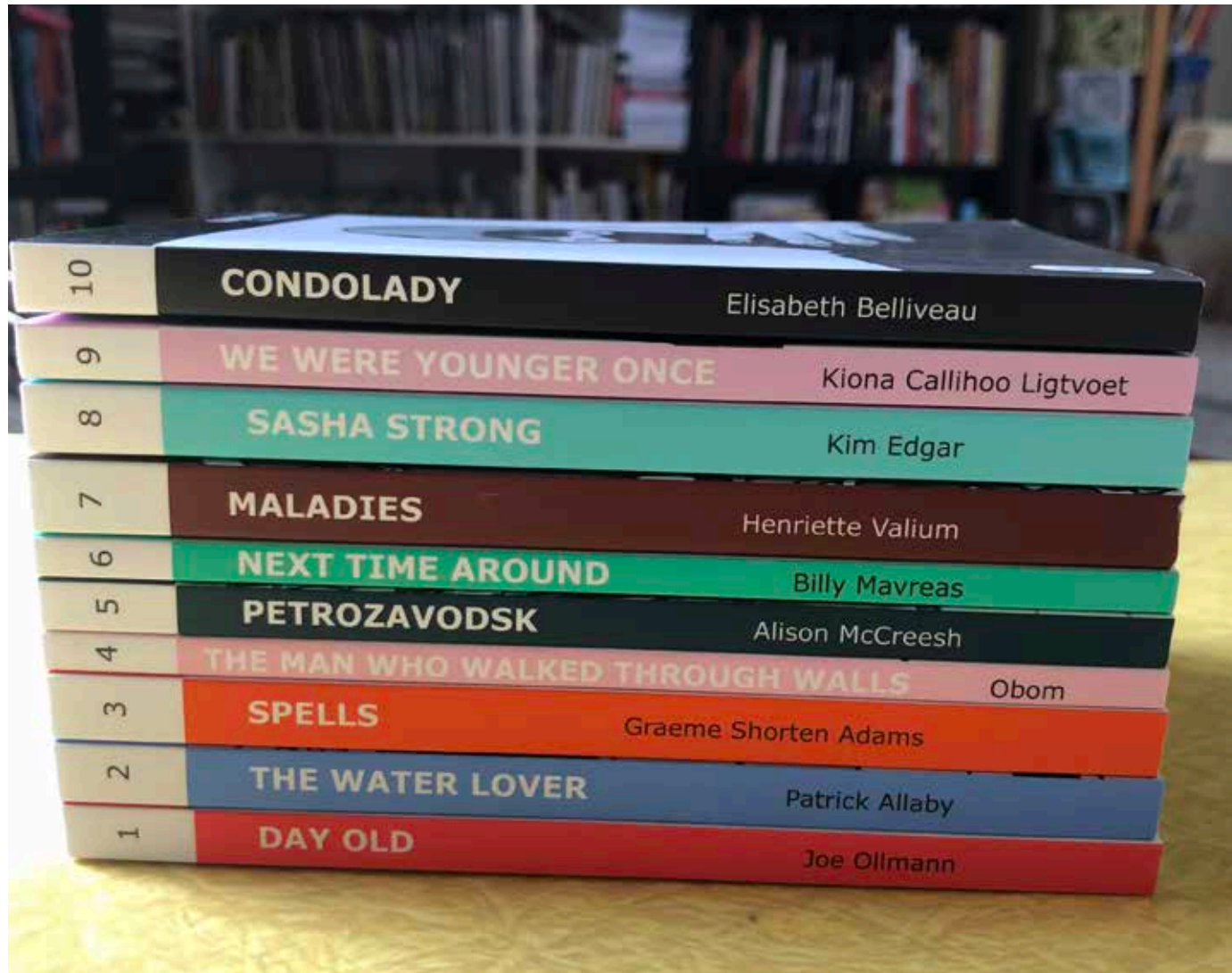
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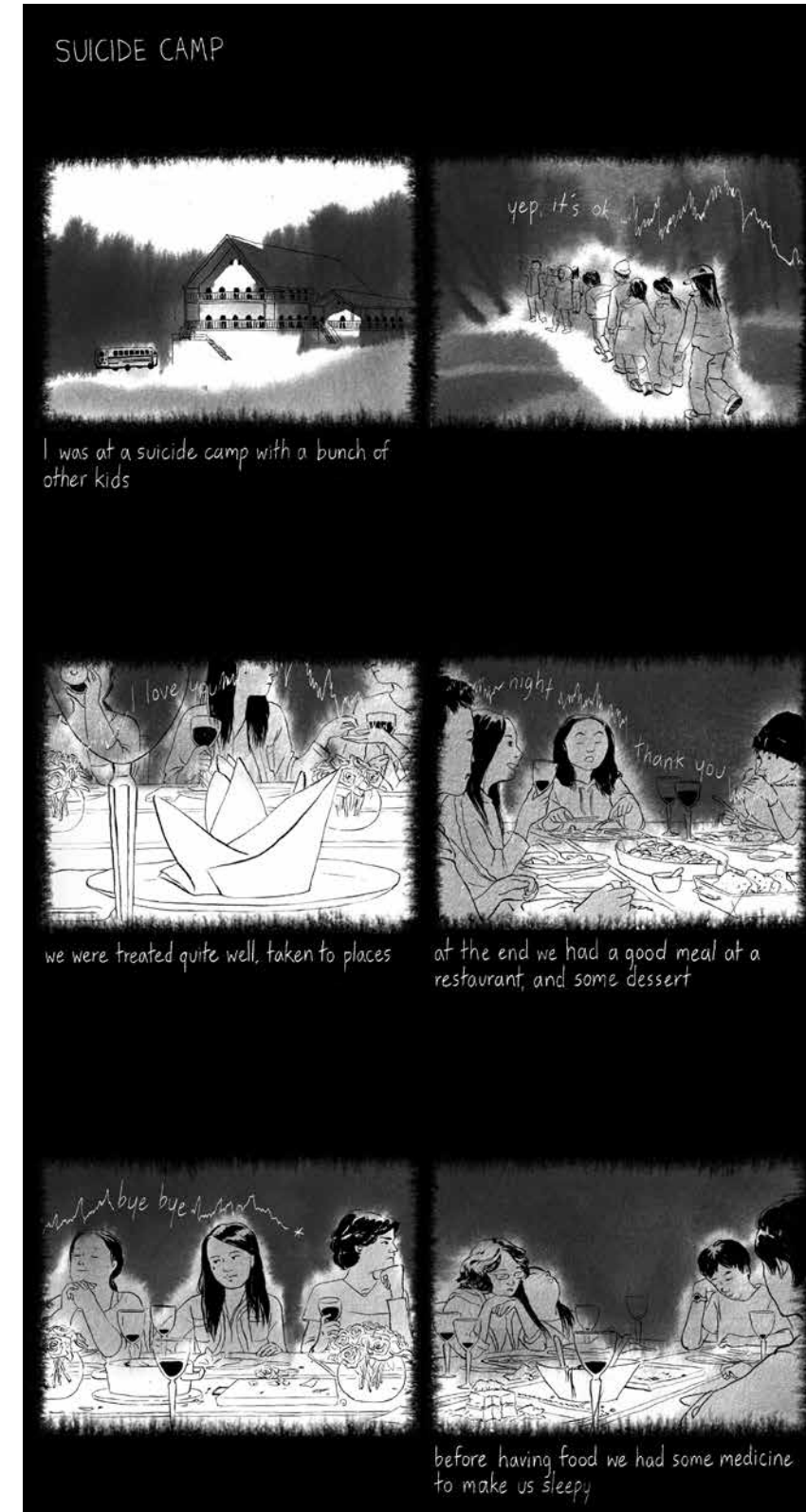
Vignettes of pregnancy and motherhood in a world where women are expected to do it all

Natalie has a few chronic illnesses during pregnancy and early motherhood, yes. But she also chronically wonders where the external factors that trigger her illnesses end and her genetic predisposition to them begins. She asks herself, am I crazy, or does motherhood in these conditions just plain suck?

Begun as a Julie Doucet tribute comic, *Partum Me* soon took off in its own direction. In it, award-winning writer Natalie Pendergast reveals with candour some of her most memorable moments as a mom(-to-be)—and that having dignity is not always about presenting as pristine, clean and pure. It is sometimes messy, gritty and pure.



Only a Slender Internal Connection



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Three times a week, the patient blocks the sun coming in through the window, turns on a string of holiday lights, and lies on her bed in a dark, red room. She begins each session by recounting the dreams of the preceding days. The patient, in concert with her analyst on the other end of the line, follows where her speech takes her.

Each story in *Only a Slender Internal Connection* interprets a fifty minute psychoanalytic session via its dreams, with words faithfully reconstructed from notes and recordings by the author.

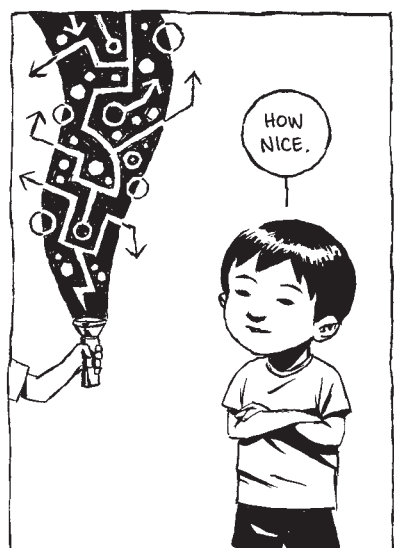
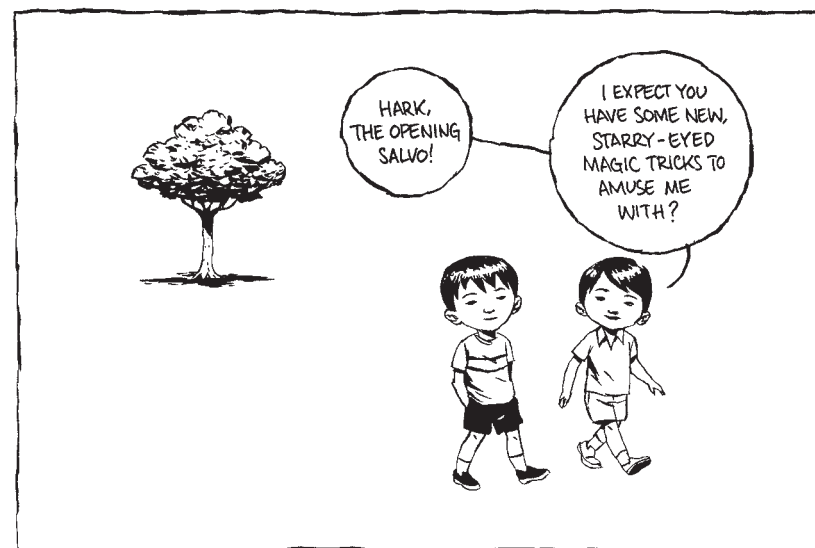
Xiaoxiao Li is an award-winning cartoonist and zine-maker based in North Scarborough, Canada. At present, she's begun academic study with the intention to realize her middle school dream of being a therapist, and eventually a psychoanalyst.

Between Gentlemen

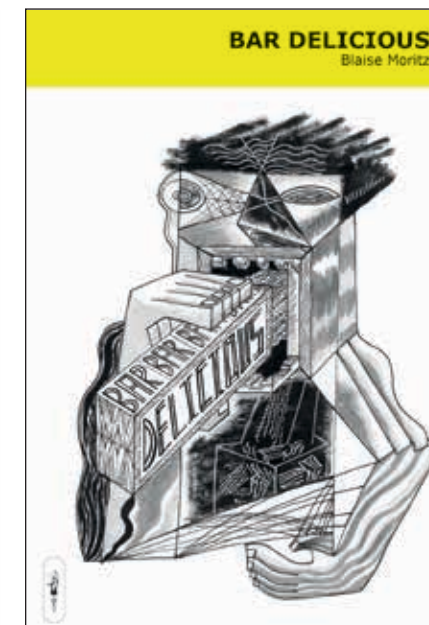


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Featuring the four short stories “Between Gentlemen”, “Babellion”, “Box Populi”, and “SKLH” for the first time together in one pocketbook format. These short stories, reprinted from various anthologies, play with the medium and language of comics, and explore the unique properties of telling a story in comics form. Bottenberg has been a driving force in the Montreal comics community for decades and this book proves why.



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Bar Delicious is what everyone craves. Why else would it be so omnipresent, constantly available to fulfill the incessant desire to consume Bar Delicious? Surely, they must live in a land of plenty, those who are given to live in a land with plenty of Bar Delicious. And yet we are at odds, the moment in which we expressed that desire evasive, our relationship to the massive processes that massively produce Bar Delicious unclear.

Bar Delicious is a meditation on consumption and desire in the context of the contemporary late capitalist and technological system. In a hybrid Futurist-Primitivist visual style, these panels advocate for the oppositional and liberating power of desire.



Blaise Moritz is an artist living in East Toronto. Since June 2019, he has produced *The Test*, a monthly visual poetry comic that has ranged from a long engagement with Jack Kirby's late career editorials to illustrations of Eugenio Montale's prose poems. Issue 17, the final issue of the sequence “An Affliction of the Eyes”, was shortlisted for Best Comics Zine in the 2021 Broken Pencil Zine Awards. His graphic work has appeared as part of the *Colossive Cartographies* series from Colossive Press (London, England) and in *The Plague Review Digest* from Rotland Press (Detroit). He is the author of two previous books of poetry without pictures, *Zeppelin* (Nightwood Editions, 2013) and *Crown and Ribs* (Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2007).

JAZZ GRODEN-GILCHRIST



The recipient of the second annual Conundrum Press Mini-Comic Bursary for Black and Indigenous Creators

We think it's helpful to be able to show potential applicants the kinds of things the bursary can be used for. Can you tell us about what you've been working on? How has the bursary helped?

The bursary really helps make time for projects that might not pay as much as you need. I'm working on a comic I really believe in and I'm using the bursary to extend the amount of pages my client

budgeted for, so I can tell the story I really want!

Who or what inspired you to start drawing/writing? How do you motivate yourself to maintain a regular practice?

A friend's comic in 5th grade made me realize I could do the same. I'm driven by stories affecting me deeply and understanding comics can have a genuine positive effect on society. Plus, they reach a different level of real when they're out of my head and shared with others.

Out of all the work you've created so far, which project means the most to you? Why?

You Will Live Forever is a black fantasy comic series that we've been pitching. It hasn't found a home yet, but every time I revise it, I'm really proud of every aspect. I'm pretty self-critical, so this kind of love and confidence in my work is really nice.

What's your artistic vision for the next five years? What do you hope to learn, and what themes do you hope to address?

In five years, I'm hoping my first big graphic novel will be out and I'll be well on my way into making the *You Will Live Forever* series. A theme that I'd like to explore is people forgiving themselves and realizing they can belong and are worth being loved.



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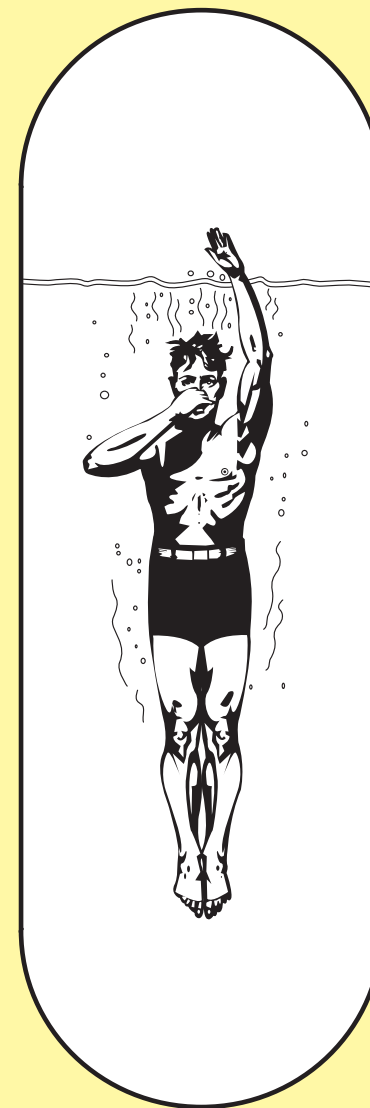
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