

CONUNDRUM

AN ANNUAL CATAZINE OF THE COMIC ARTS

2024





1. *Degrees* takes place over a decade of your life. One chapter was published as a pocketbook in 2021 but I know you were working on some of this (houseboating chapter) back when you released *Ramshackle* in 2015. How long did it take to make this book?

The short answer is: Much longer than I had planned! I wrote and drew a first test chapter – the one about staying on the Distant Early Warning Line Site in the High Arctic – back in the spring of 2019. I was starting nice and slow, laying the ground work. I had pretty clear idea of how I wanted to develop the project and of what the timeline would be. But then, in 2020, there was a global pandemic. Then, in 2021, I had a third baby. Then, in 2023, just as I was finally almost done, Yellowknife had to evacuate due to an oncoming wildfire. It's been a drawn out process, with periods where I worked in a really hard and focused way, and other long periods where the project had to be set aside. And then, of course, many stints where it moved along at what seemed like a snail's pace, thrown into the mix of juggling self-employment and a young family. So really, I suppose the process spanned 4.5 years, which doesn't actually seem that crazy for a book of this size, but really felt interminable as it was happening. You change a fair amount over the course of a somewhat tumultuous half-decade – it's quite a challenge to have the same project in tow for that entire time!

2. As you mention, just as we were headed into the home stretch to get it to print the wildfires in the NWT meant you and the entire city of Yellowknife had to evacuate. Can you tell us what that was like?

It was a really smokey summer up here, marked by several community evacuations. Everyone was already on edge when it all came to a climax early August. Over the space of a few days, several different wildfires reached several different communities and the Northwest Territories descended into crisis. It all felt chaotic and apocalyptic. For a while, telecommunications were down in the most threatened areas and nobody quite knew what was going on. And, meanwhile, the one road out to Alberta kept closing due to the flames, which added to the general anxiety. By the end of that same week, over 70% of the population of the NWT was under evacuation order, most people relocated well over 1000 km south of their home communities. For our family, the 3 weeks we were gone from home went fine. Our old minivan held up, the three kids generally enjoyed the impromptu adventure and the two dogs – barring an impressive amount of stress-shedding in the first two days – took it in stride. Like with the COVID-19 lockdowns though, it was a situation where we were all in the same storm, but not all in the same boat. The sudden and extended mass evacuation was especially hard on those who were already vulnerable or who were already in precarious situations. We thought about that a lot. I still do.

3. The wildfires were partly a result of global warming. How impactful is global warming in the North?

The exact rate varies, but most scientists agree that the global north is warming up to four times faster than the rest of the planet. This isn't news – up here, people have been seeing impacts of the climate changing for years – but it had been increasing more and more, faster and faster. In the Canadian north, lots of communities are small and geographically remote. In many ways, they are really resilient places, but in others they are really vulnerable to changes to the environment. In the big obvious ways, like the more frequent and more intense wildfires or the spring flooding, but also in a whole slew of smaller, but also really impactful ways. Ways that increase the cost of living, that reduce food security, that hinder people's ability to get out on the land, that increase community isolation. For example, the annual barge delivery of fuel and goods being cancelled due to low water levels, community hunts made more dangerous by unpredictable ice and weather, winter road seasons made shorter by milder weather. Things like that. The threats and changes associated with climate change are much more noticeable and impactful when people's lives are closely connected, and reliant, on the land and the elements.

4. You travelled to many communities and countries north of the 60th parallel. Is the Northern experience universal? If not, how was it different?

In a way, there are quite a few commonalities and, definitely some shared issues, but I wouldn't go so far as to say there's

...continued on page 13

Graphic Novel / World rights, 978-1-77262-093-1
8x10 inches, 390 b/w pages, \$30
APRIL

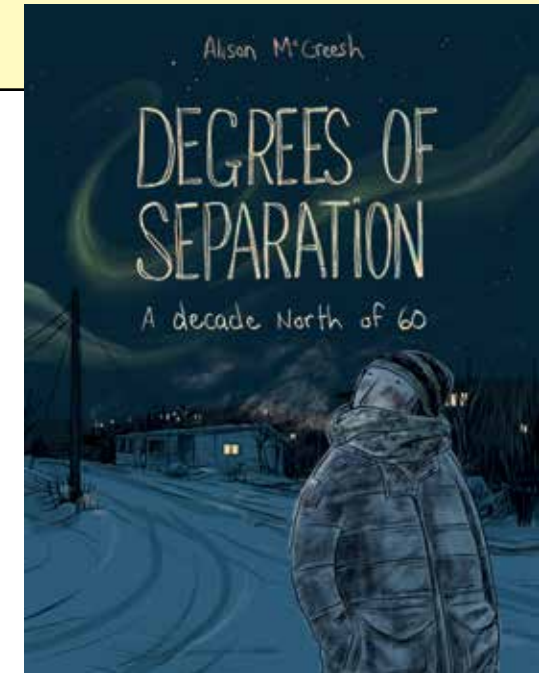
“The tension between free-spirited off-grid living and prosaic adult responsibility runs through Alison McCreesh's tender and loving ode to the people and landscapes of the Far North.”

—Joe Sacco, (*Paying the Land, Palestine*)

“Here's a graphic novel that's an education and an entertainment. Drawings and text zero in on the personal and quirky, then open wide for long, compelling views of a fraught yet alluring northern world. *Degrees of Separation* is fascinating and endearing, pointed and one of a kind, and it all rings beautifully true.”

— Elizabeth Hay (*Late Nights on Air*)

“Fans of Linda Barry's *Ernie Pook's Comeek*, Craig Thompson's *Blankets*, Kate Beaton's *Ducks* and Jeff Lemire's *Essex County* series are going to feel right at home with Alison McCreesh's *Degrees of Separation: A Decade North of 60*. What a treasure. Mahsi cho, Alison, for sharing all of this exquisiteness with us. You're always up to magic!” — Richard Van Camp (*The Lesser Blessed, Moccasin Square Gardens*)



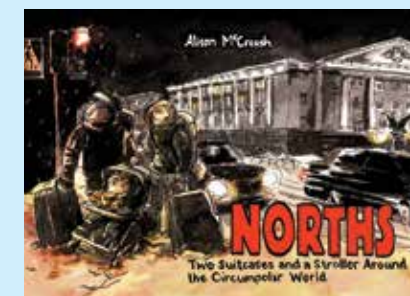
At age 21, Alison hitchhiked to the Yukon and spent the summer living in a tent. Ten years later, in the deep of winter and seven months pregnant, she returns. *Degrees of Separation* is about what happens in between.

Over the course of a decade, artist Alison McCreesh lived, worked, and travelled north of the 60th parallel. Through a combination of autobiographical stories, drawings and sketches, *Degrees of Separation* offers an intimate and understated glimpse of the North as Alison experienced it.

From frigid days spent killing time while stranded in the High Arctic, to the challenges of raising a baby in a small shack with no running water, it is one young woman's personal experience of both passing through and of setting down roots.

Tinged with McCreesh's characteristic blend of humour and humanity, *Degrees of Separation* is about the north and its vastness and its diversity. While the backdrop may seem foreign to many, this collection is also a universal exploration of those transformative years from young-adulthood to motherhood. It's a graphic novel navigating themes of connection and disconnect, between the north and the south, but also between different norths and between our different selves.

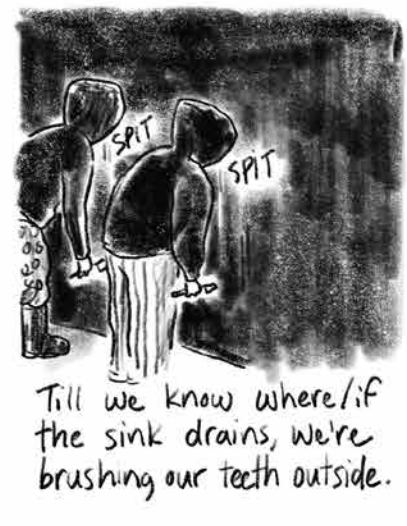
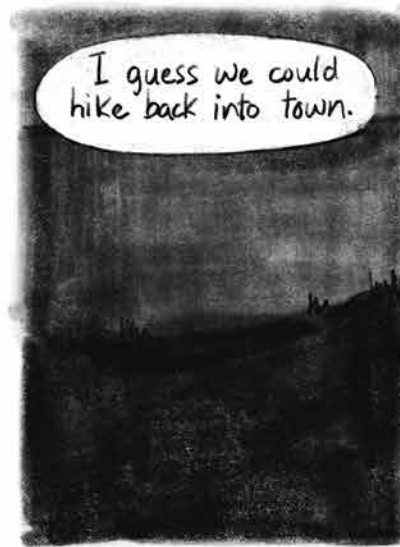
ALSO AVAILABLE:



**NORTHS:
TWO SUITCASES AND A
STROLLER AROUND THE
CIRCUMPOLAR WORLD**

Graphic Novel / World rights
978-1-77262-021-4
7x5 inches, 400 b/w pages, \$20

For six long winter months, Alison McCreesh, her partner Pat and their two year old son Riel, traveled north of the 60th parallel. Through a combination of prolonged stays at artist residencies and short side-trips, they experienced six circumpolar countries: Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. This book contains Alison's original postcards, which she created daily, exploring not only the "Idea of North", but also illustrating, both through sketches and words, how her family dealt with the uniquely northern issues that they encountered in their circumpolar adventure. Alison's astute and often hilarious insights give an intimate glance into the trials and tribulations of travelling, parenting, working and living in the North.



So, as one does in the absence of a logical solution, we opt for the stupidest course of action.



The journey feels like it takes hours, but eventually we make it to Yellowknife Bay.



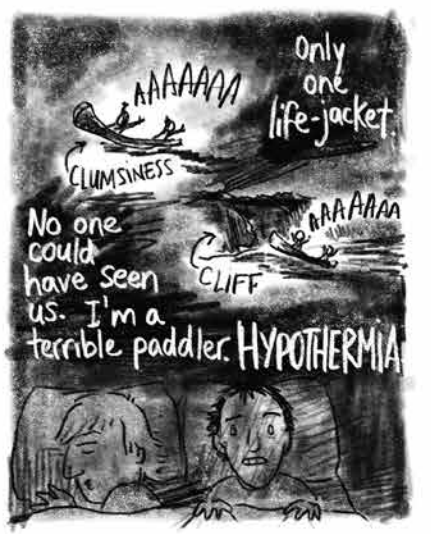
In reality, it may only have taken 40 minutes to get to Genevieve and Dani's houseboat.



Gen and Dani, half-asleep, get us settled into their guestroom.



I mentally re-enact all the ways we could have capsized, found ourselves in the water and subsequently died.



Now, in the beautiful light of this fall morning, I feel more at peace.

Both with the place we now live,



and with the stupid decision we made last night.



Even calm and with the luxury of hindsight, I can't come up with a smarter solution.



I settle in for what may be a long wait.

At some point, Dani and Pat are going to tow our canoe back with Dani's motorboat.



Until then, I'm stuck out here.



Fat lot of good the key does me with no boat to get home.



I'm exhausted. And I'm famished.



Good thing I have that orange Andy gave me.



Freeze-Up, As seen from the houseboat's window Nov, 2010

a universal northern experience. It's such an enormous area that there's inevitably a great diversity. There's a really big variety of scenery, of weather, of politics, of languages, of cultures, of histories, of ethnicities and demographics – especially if you're looking at the entire circumpolar north. You can go from a big industrial (big by my standards, anyway) town in Russia, to a cute Scandinavian village, to a windy Icelandic fishing town, to a fly-in only Inuit hamlet, to somewhat rough Yellowknife, then on to touristy mountainous Whitehorse, all on basically the same latitude. I tried to make sure *Degrees of Separation* highlighted some of that range. I think that's something that's often overlooked about the north: Just how vast and varied it is.

5. The first part of the book is Alison without kids and travelling free, and in the second part Alison is either pregnant or trying to get work done with a toddler. How has having children impacted your creative process?

I don't know that having kids has impacted my creative process, per se. I mean, my work has changed and evolved over the past decade, but I feel that might just be from time passing and me changing and trying new things more than about having children thrown into the mix. This being said, having kids is a ton of work, so it has definitely impacted how much time I actually have for creative projects – and how I organize the time I do have. I'd really like to do a middle-grade book next, so I think that's where the impacts of the kids on my creative process will really get a chance to shine!

6. And finally, did you ever fear for your life in one of those tiny airplanes flying through bad weather over the Arctic sea? Was the experience in the remote communities worth it?

In 2011, a regular passenger plane crashed upon landing in Resolute Bay, Nunavut. It was a horrific event for the small community, and it also shook everyone across the north. It was still front of mind for me when, in 2012, I was offered a job that would have me flying to all communities in Nunavut, including Resolute Bay. Up till that point, I had never really been afraid of flying, but the thought of small planes landing in bad weather on tricky landing strips really made me nervous. As a friend pointed out though, planes fly all the time in the North – lots of communities are fly-in only – and for the very few and far between tragic events, there are thousands of safe trips. Somewhat reluctantly, I took the job and, as soon as I set foot on Baffin Island, I realized the stress of flying was totally worth it. Of all the flights I took over the course of those few years, I never did have any reason to genuinely fear for my life and I never regretted a trip to a small community – although I have to say, the tiny shaky planes I had to take in Northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba were definitely terrifying to me. Bouncing a few times on those unpaved landing strips? Shudder.



photo: Dylan Gamble

1. *The Field* seems like it takes place in the 1970s, when children were more free to roam, and before the empty lots were developed. Yet it also seems timeless and could be any North American suburban environment. Did you intend for the time and place to be universal or is it more specific?

I intentionally tried to make the book universal. The idea that my experiences are comparable to other people who grew up at that time, and enjoyed that kind of freedom, felt right to me.

2. This will be your fourth book with Conundrum. It is a much more ambitious book. How does it compare to your previous books? How long did it take to create?

Not to denigrate my other books, but this is my first real graphic novel. By that I mean I planned the whole thing from start to finish. My other books were collections of work that came out bit by bit. *The Field* is a fully formed work that is coming out as a whole. The book took me a very long time to do. I started it in the summer of 2006. At that time, I believed it was the only book I would do. Then Conundrum happened and very happily I did three books! But, because of

those obligations and my mom dying of cancer, I had to keep putting *The Field* aside. So instead of taking about 10 years as I had hoped, it took me much longer.

3. You live in Toronto, home to a thriving comics scene. Are you involved in the comics community in the city?

My direct involvement is teaching Cartooning to kids at the Art Gallery of Ontario every week. That is an incredibly inspiring and thriving environment and I am happy to say my 4 classes are usually full. I've also been doing Comic Jams for the last 20 years or so. At first at the Toronto Comic Jam where there can be up to 20 people and now with a smaller group.

4. Are there any specific influences for *The Field*?

Easily Chester Brown's *I Never Liked You*. A great book, but I would've loved 300 pages of CB's childhood stories.

5. Would you call *The Field* autobiography? You were surely a child of the 1970s since we are the same age. But also the character is called David Lapp. Hard not to make comparisons.

The Field is autobiography. I used to tell these stories to kids in my classes and I was always surprised how interesting they found them. At a certain point I thought "Let me see how many I can come up with when I list what I can remember." There were so, so many and after writing them all down I realized there were enough for a graphic novel. Leaving my name, and some family members names the same made it easier to maintain the energy to finish such a big book. When I had doubts about ever finishing *The Field*, I could always find inspiration in the source material. I would reflect upon how fortunate I was to have had all these experiences, and be able to write and draw them, let alone remember them.

6. The pace of the story is very deliberate but the reader is always on the edge of their seat. Will the gun go off? Will the woods burn down? So, a tension is created even though it is slow. This is masterful cartooning. How did you achieve this?

After writing and sketching out everything as thumbnails I had a 300-page book with 4 panels per page. My original plan was a simpler book that would be easier to do. Once I started the editing process, I realized the only way to tell the stories properly was to do them the long way. I abandoned the 4-panel grid and decided that the stories would be as long as they needed to be and to approach everything as though I had all the time in the world. Once I released myself from any real deadline or specific format, I was able to pace and compose everything based mostly on what felt right. This often meant revising pages into formats which were much harder to draw. An easy example is any page with 9 panels and multiple characters. Everything becomes so tiny, especially the hands, I found it quite difficult, but accepted my mental decision to do it that way. My back and wrist and shoulder did not agree.

Graphic Novel / World rights, 978-1-77262-094-8
6.25x9.25 inches, 560 b/w pages, \$30
MAY

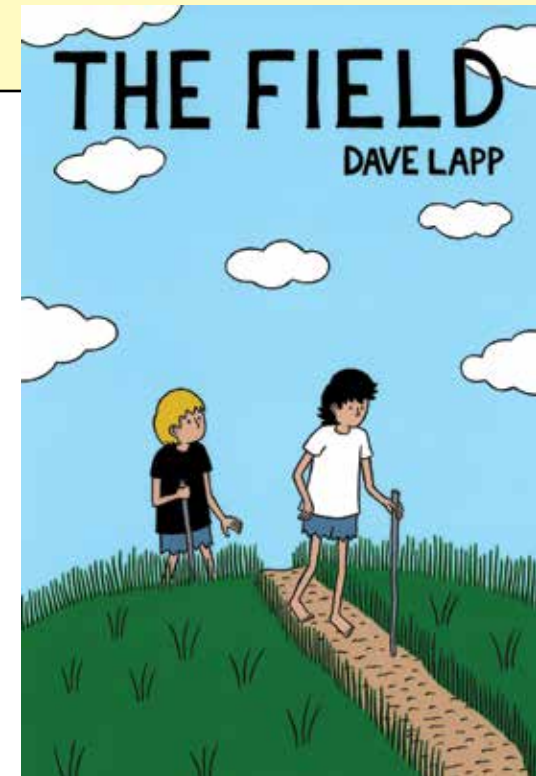
"It's just so real. No sentimentality, but so much emotion. It's the cruel / innocence of childhood. He gets it so perfectly. I seriously hope this book will find a giant audience. It's really good."

— Joe Ollmann

"This might be the best story about childhood that I've ever read (or heard). It's a masterpiece."

— Chester Brown

David Lapp is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design and the University of Western Ontario. He has been teaching cartooning at the Art Gallery of Ontario for over twenty years. Dave has created three graphic novels, *Drop In*, *Children of the Atom*, and *People Around Here*, which have been published by Conundrum Press. Dave's work was chosen for the Best American Comics series for 2010, 2011, and 2016. His work has also been nominated for an Ignatz and a Doug Wright award.



ALSO AVAILABLE:



DROP-IN

Graphic Novel / World rights
978-1-894994-33-0
6x9 inches, 120 b/w pages, \$17



PEOPLE AROUND HERE

Graphic Novel / World rights
978-1-894994-59-0
6x9 inches, 120 b/w pages, \$17

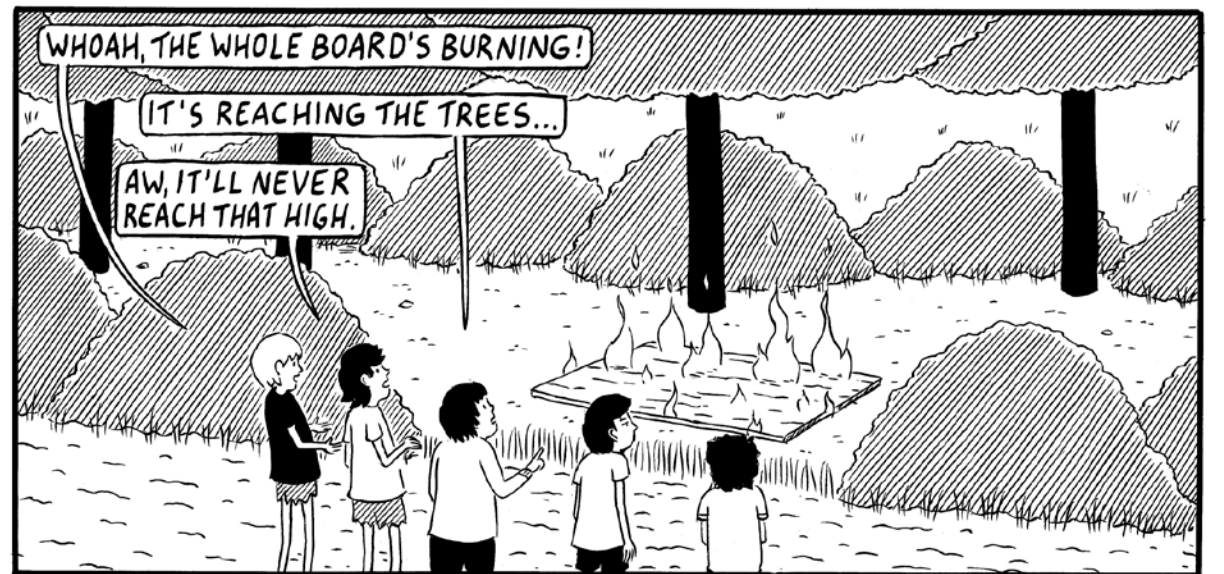
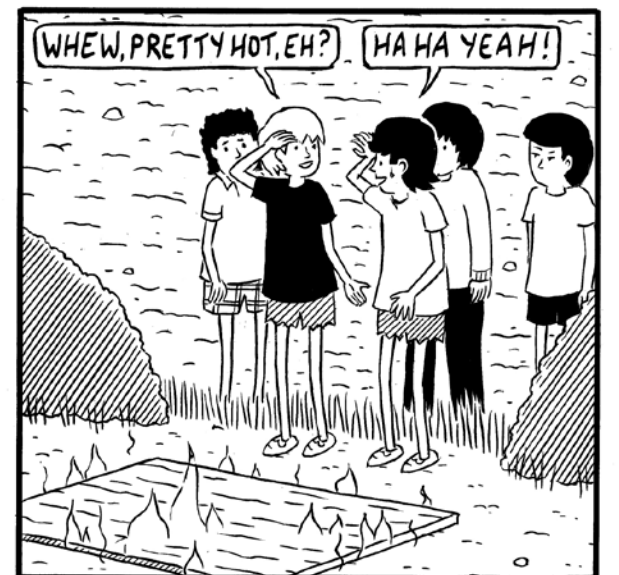
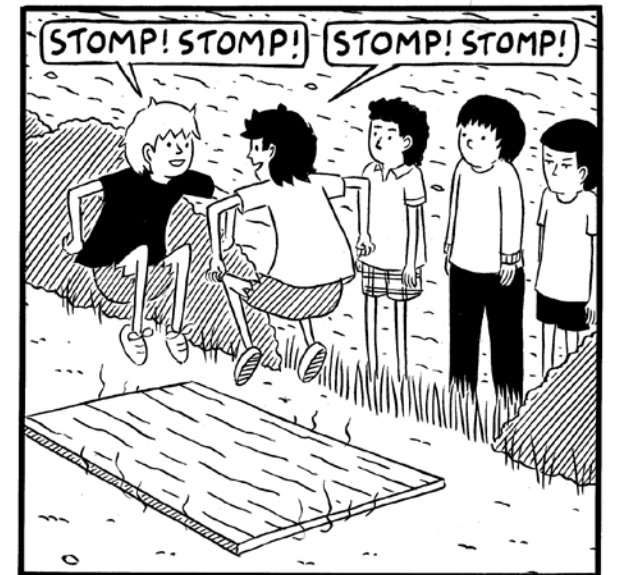
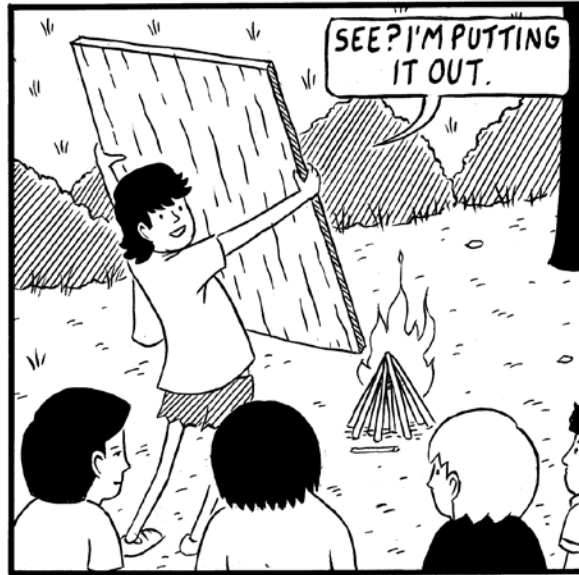


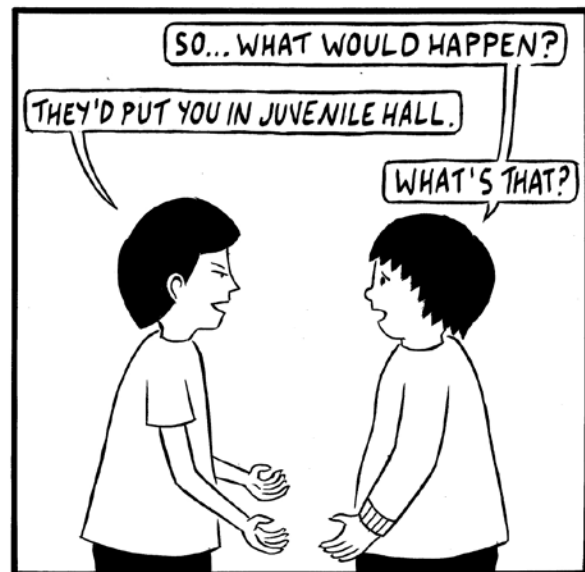
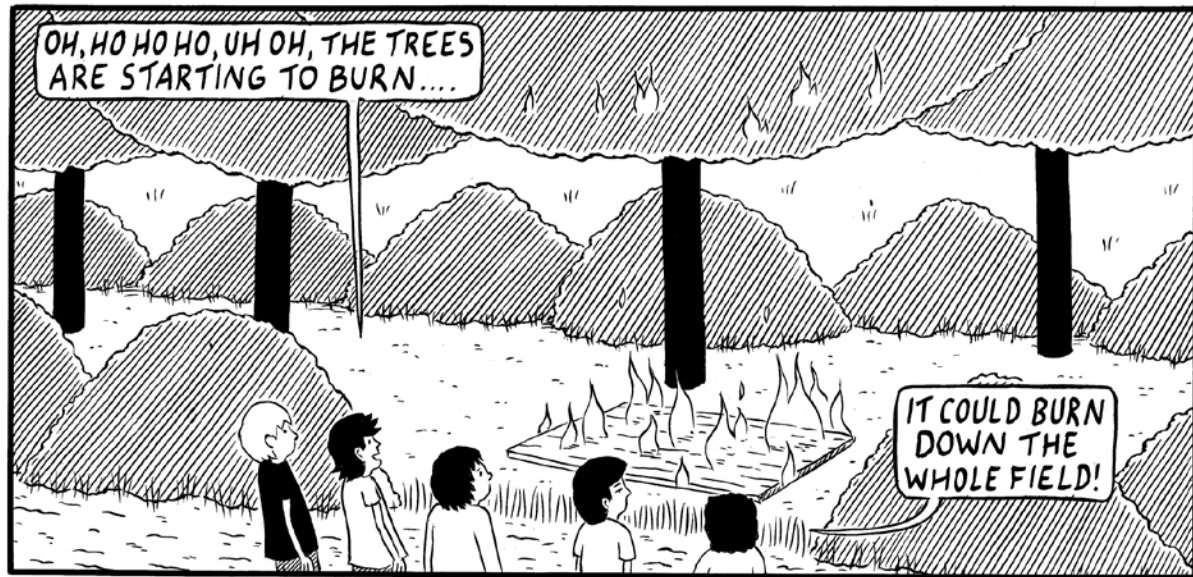
CHILDREN OF THE ATOM

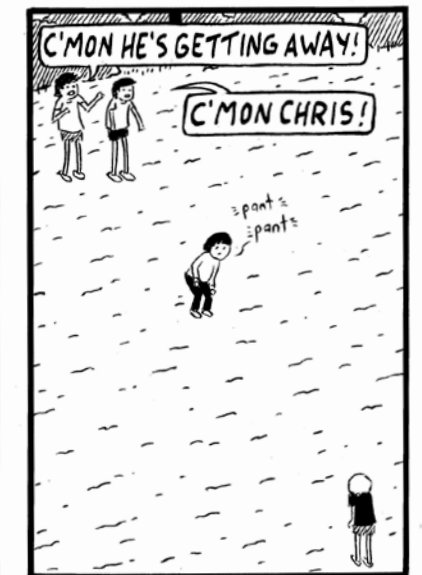
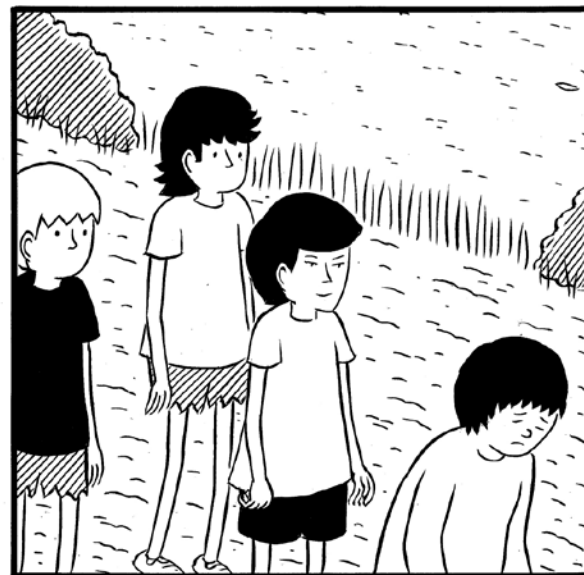
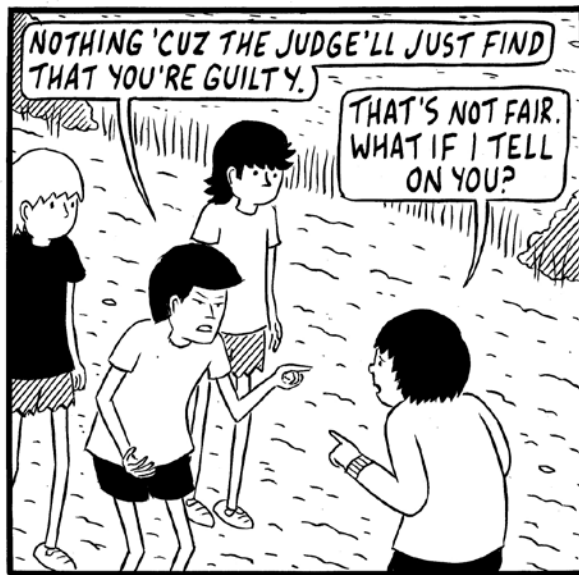
Graphic Novel / World rights
978-1-894994-47-7
11x3 inches, 240 b/w pages
\$17

Dave Lapp's new memoir unpacks a long, hazy 1970s summer and reveals that when we look beyond nostalgia, childhood is complicated—and rarely innocent. Dave's on the verge of summer vacation and change is on the horizon. Developers have begun digging up a field on the edges of Dave's universally familiar small town, presenting endless nooks and crannies for Dave and his fearless friend Edward to explore. Over the course of the summer, while the town's adults remain focused on their fractured marriages and neighbourly resentments, the children are allowed to run wild in the field, collecting caterpillars and tadpoles, catching field mice (which they smuggle home), and nursing a curious fascination with Dave's mother's matches and their potential for disaster. As the summer meanders on, Edward brings a new friend into the circle. But John's got a mean streak that's strong enough to flip Dave's world—and his place in it—upside down.

In *The Field*, Dave Lapp examines a time when kids stayed out until the streetlights came on—and exposes the dangers, foibles, and wildness of childhood in the 1970s.

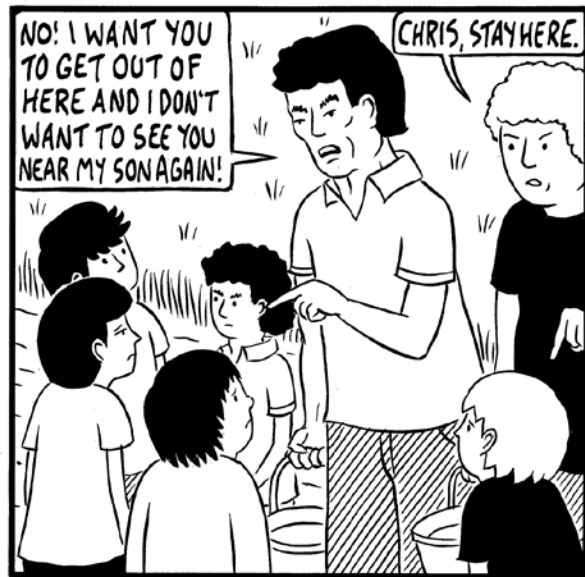








I WANT YOU KIDS OUT OF HERE!
WE CAN HELP PUT THE FIRE OUT.



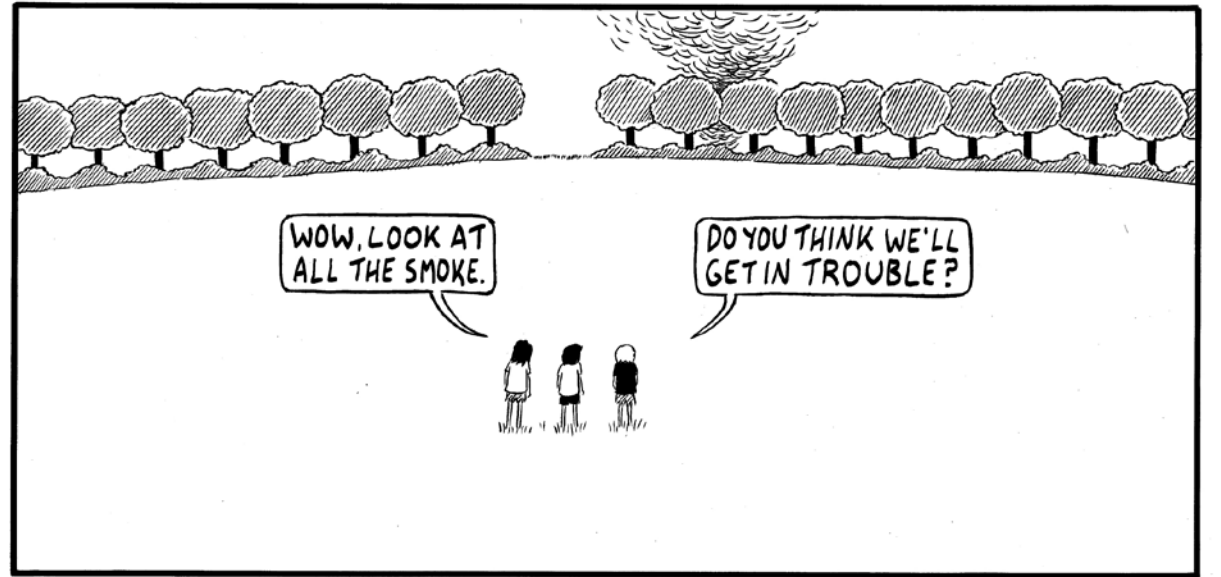
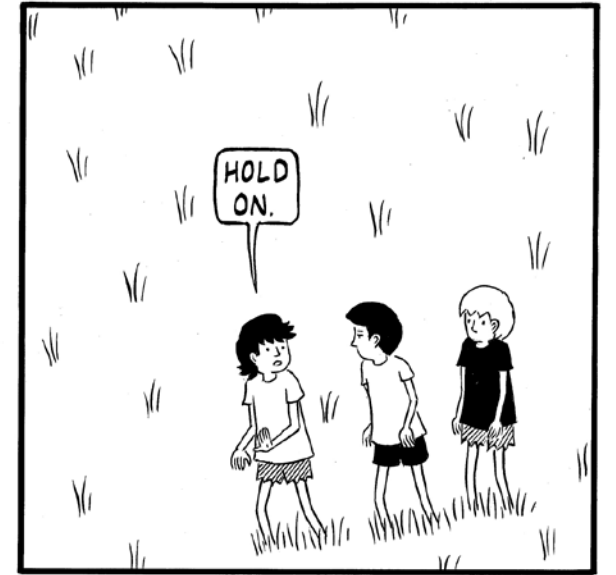
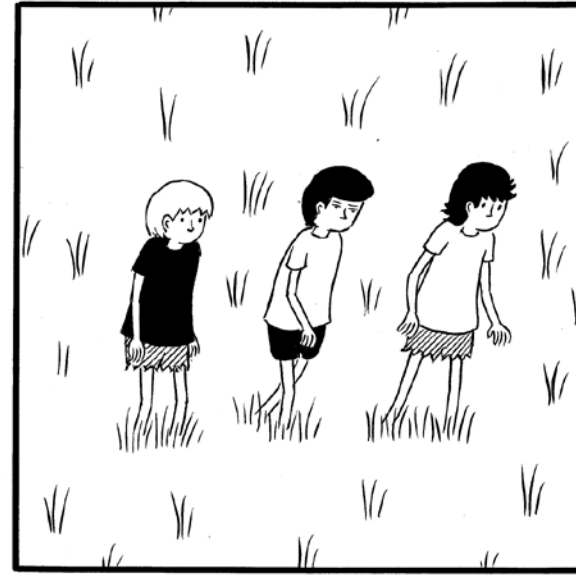
NO! I WANT YOU TO GET OUT OF HERE AND I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU NEAR MY SON AGAIN!
CHRIS, STAY HERE.



GO! GO HOME! IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO PUT THIS FIRE OUT, I'D BOX ALL YOUR EARS!



SNIFF, THEY SAID I WAS GOIN' TO JUVVY...
NOT NOW CHRIS.



WOW, LOOK AT ALL THE SMOKE.
DO YOU THINK WE'LL GET IN TROUBLE?



NAW, CHRIS STOLE THE MATCHES.
THINK THEY'LL BE ABLE TO PUT THE FIRE OUT?



DID'JA SEE JEFF'S DAD'S EYEBROWS?
HA HA YEAH, LOOKS LIKE AN IDIOT!

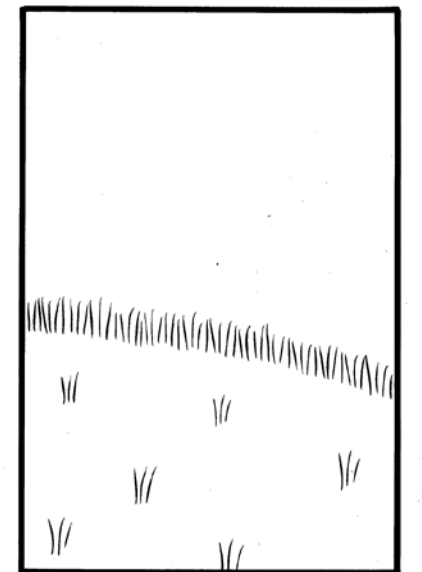




photo: Erik Friedman

1. *Food School* has had an interesting publishing history. It started out in a digital version. Can you explain the background?

Food School was originally released as part of the 2022 Short-Box Comics Fair. The SBCF is a digital marketplace that takes place annually every October, run entirely by one person(!). There are no physical books, only PDFs, and all participating artists debut one entirely new comic. All the comics are creator-owned and all rights reserved by the artists! It's a very cool fair, dare I say my favourite, to both be a part of and buy comics in. *Food School* debuted there as a digital PDF. I also self-ribose-printed a physical version with much help from my collective for TCAF 2023. Turns out, perfect bound printing books with a 20-year old printer, a guillotine and a tube of glue is many, many hours of work. Christine Wong really helped me out a lot with that.

2. The book is obviously inspired by manga. You have called *Food School* josei but not manga. Can you explain / define?

Oh yeah, well, josei is my absolute favourite genre of comic. "Josei manga" literally means "womens comics," and refers to manga marketed to an audience of adult women. I'm deeply inspired by the work of mangaka like Okazaki Kyoko, Anno Moyoco, and Yazawa Ai. I dare say *PINK* by Okazaki Kyoko is my favourite comic of all time. I used the term "josei" for the promotion of the book for SBCF 2022, as a lot of the audience for SCBF are familiar with manga, and those who are familiar with the genre could tell how much I pull from it. So fans of the same thing could find something similar, I guess. I didn't want to call it a manga as that term is more used to describe comics coming out of Japan specifically.

As manga becomes more and more popular all over the world, josei has kind of become a genre on its own. For example, Black Josei Press based in the US is an amazing publisher that focuses on comics work by and for people of colour from marginalized genders and sexualities. I would like to see more western comic works that are "josei"!

3. You also create YA/middle grade graphic novels for big publishing houses. *Scout is Not a Band Kid* has been very successful. *Food School* is not YA. What is the difference between working for these two different markets? Is one more personal?

I'd say both books are equally personal, as they came from very vulnerable places for me. However, *Food School* was the first big comic I finished after drawing *Scout*, and I definitely did things a lot differently, haha. *Scout* is beautifully full colour, really tight drawings, marketable to a middle grade "general North American" audience and *Food School* is not that at all. Very rough drawings, black and white halftone, silly stuff like the main character talks only in lowercase and uses acronyms. And the content is quite specific, like, unapologetically Canadian, and I even referenced the anime Evangelion at one point, haha.

4. You are part of a cartooning collective called Hello Boyfriend. Can you describe how that works? Do you find HBF gives you a supportive community to try out your comics before releasing them to the world?

Hello Boyfriend is made up of my friends and fellow cartoonists, we all met in art school many moons ago. We read and edit each other's works, table together, co-work together, put out anthologies, share opportunities and whatnot. Lately, we got access to a riso and have been printing and assembling our own books together! We are also friends so we hang out together and do other non-comics stuff. I wouldn't be where I am without the support of HBF. For *Food School* specifically, Victor and Christine did the bulk of the editing for it, and a lot of emotional support when I was struggling writing/drawing it.

5. Who do you hope is the audience for *Food School*?

Back to the josei thing, the book was written for adults of marginalized genders, but of course I hope that anyone can enjoy it. I've had a few people tell me they've got the book for loved ones in their life who are struggling with eating disorders, and that makes me happy to hear. I hope it helps somewhat, especially as eating disorders are on the rise in Canada.

6. What is one of your favourite foods?

At the moment, I'm really into chocolates.

Graphic Novel / World rights, 978-1-77262-096-2
5x6.75 inches, 88 blue pages, \$15
APRIL

"The energetic and emotional drawings in *Food School* depict Olive's complex journey of healing from an eating disorder in a delightful but also devastating way. *Food School* is an excellent example of how comics can be used to both educate and entertain. It's a book I want to give to everyone to read." — Saicoink, author of *Open Spaces, Closed Places*

"Funny and informative, Jade effortlessly hits the sweet spot between silly and sincere to deliver a delightful treat despite its heavy topic. Grab a snack, a drink and definitely grab *Food School*!" — Hana Chatani, author of *Give Her Back To Me*

"Jade Armstrong is a slice-of-life master, finding the joy, beauty, and heartbreak in the way we tend to our one of our most intimate needs - nourishment, be it emotional or physical. Always funny, always real, I loved *Food School* so much." — Nadia Shammis, co-author of *Squire*

"*Food School* is funny, incisive and smart; a capsule of modern womanhood, and the sometimes complicated relationship we have with our bodies and food." — Lucie Bryon, author of *Thieves*

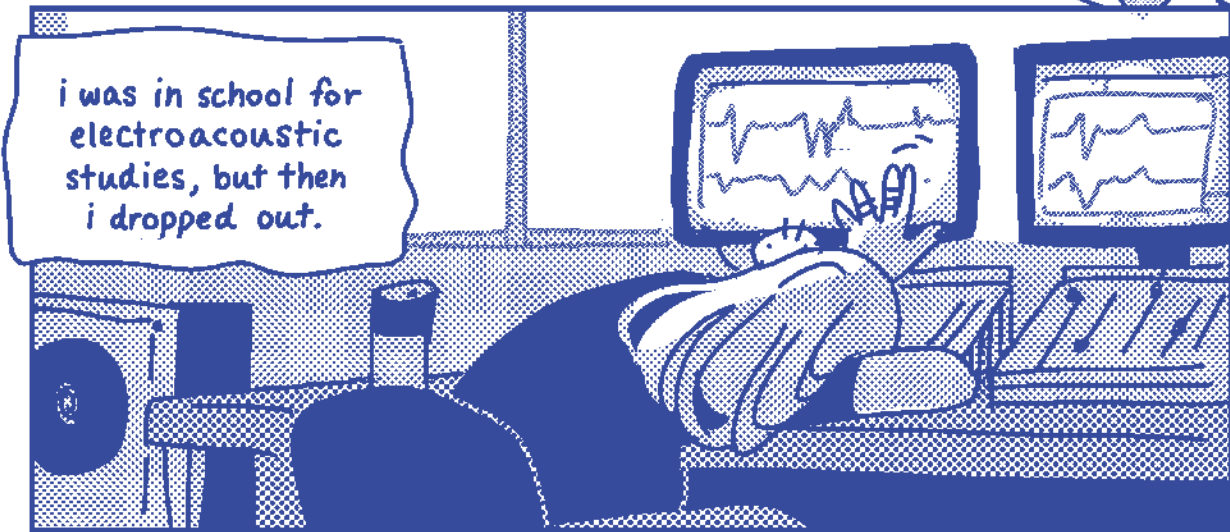
Jade Armstrong is a non-binary Canadian cartoonist who currently lives in Montreal. They are a member of the comics collective Hello Boyfriend. They like to write slice of life, humour, josei, and YA comics.



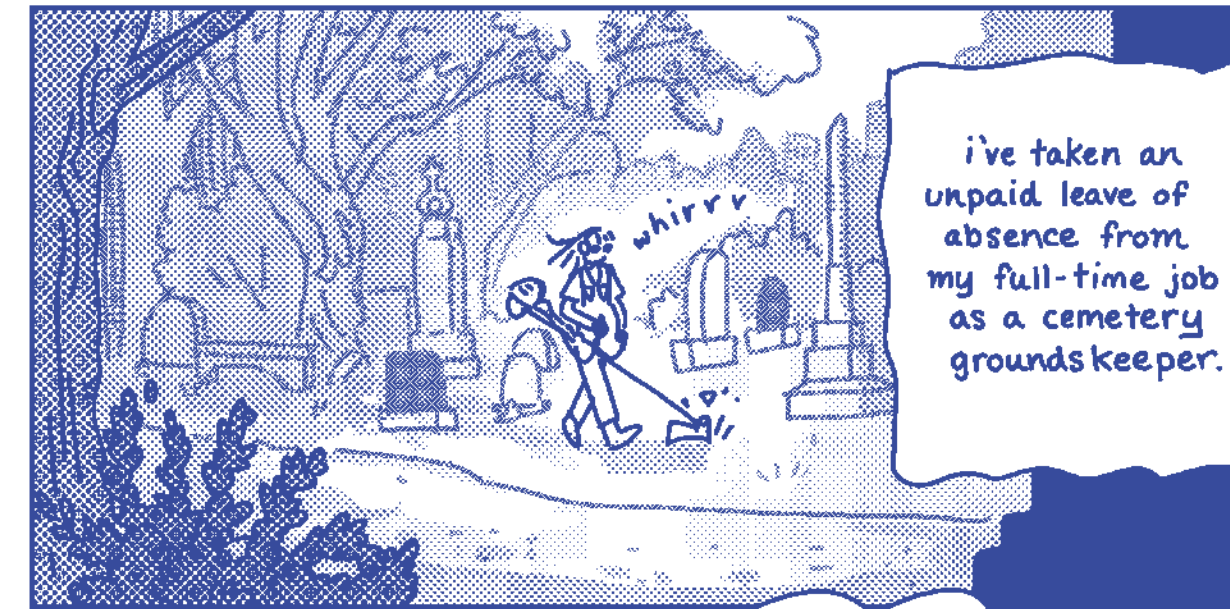
A twenty-something college dropout enrolls in a full-time outpatient program for eating disorder recovery. As they change their relationship with food, their relationships with people change, too.

Olive's post-secondary education isn't what they'd planned. Instead of college, they spend five days a week, eight hours a day at what Olive calls "Food School": a full-time outpatient program for eating disorder recovery where they learn, talk, and cry about eating disorders as part of a survivor support group. Intensely committed to recovery, Olive confronts the secretive, self-destructive, and sometimes tragically comedic nature of their illness, while struggling with the complexities of modern mental health care. With support and perspective from their roommate, a fellow patient, and their partner, Olive learns to open up about their abusive relationship with food and exercise—and finds ways to cope with the reality of living in a society that actively encourages disordered eating.

In this fictional slice of life comic, Jade Armstrong (*Scout Is Not a Band Kid*) explores the ways our relationships with food impact our connections with the people we love.



i was in school for electroacoustic studies, but then i dropped out.

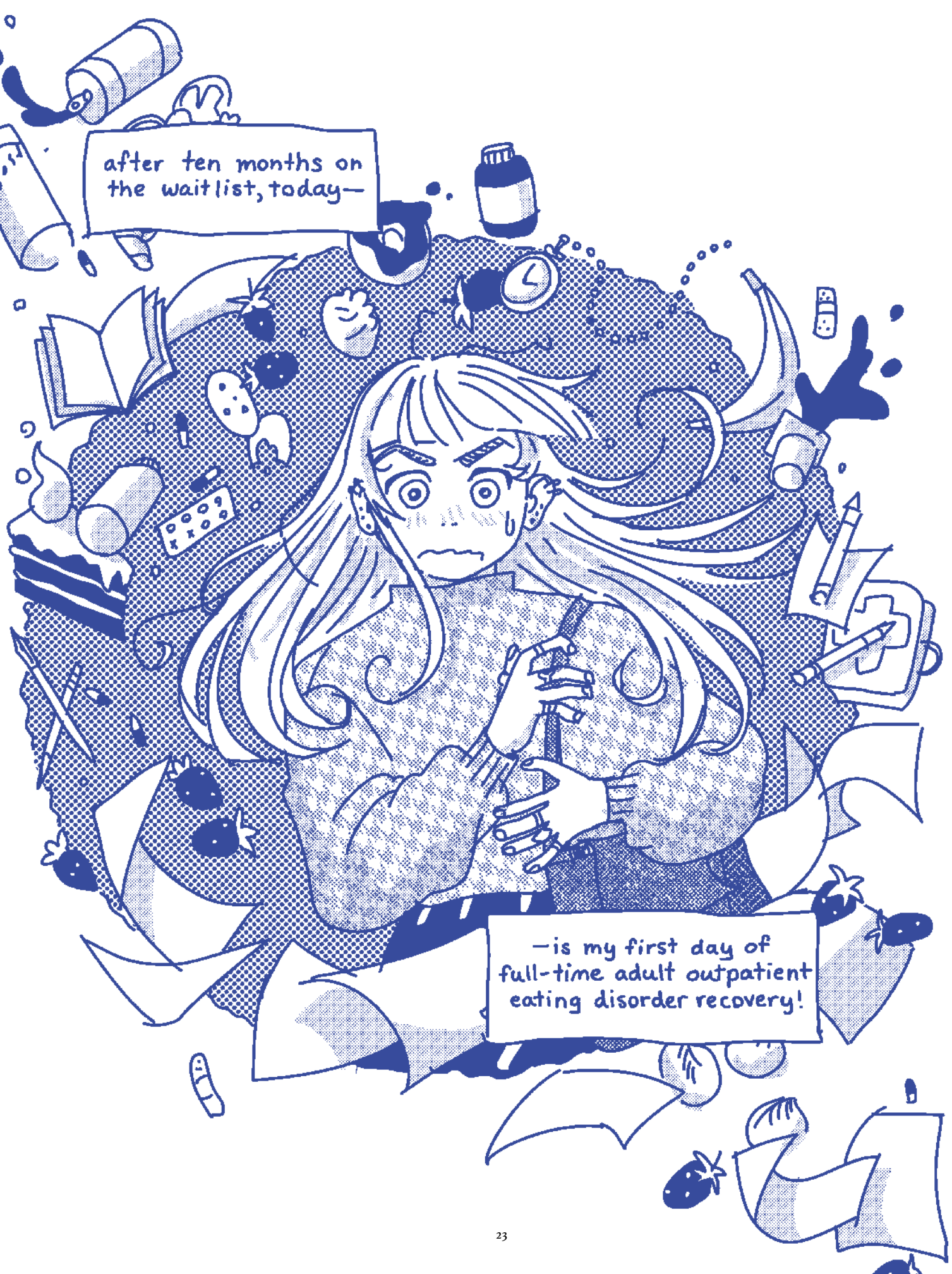


i've taken an unpaid leave of absence from my full-time job as a cemetery groundskeeper.



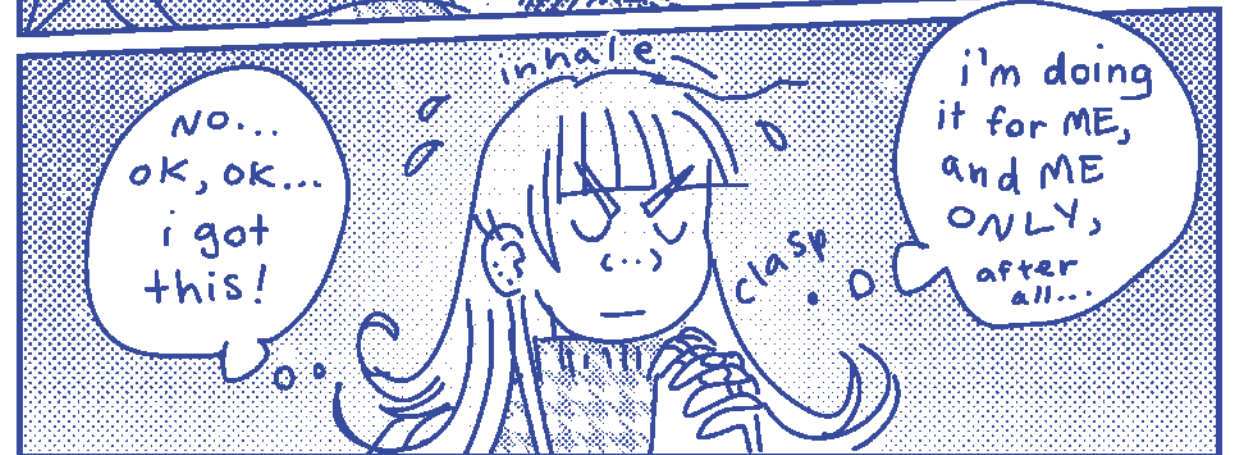
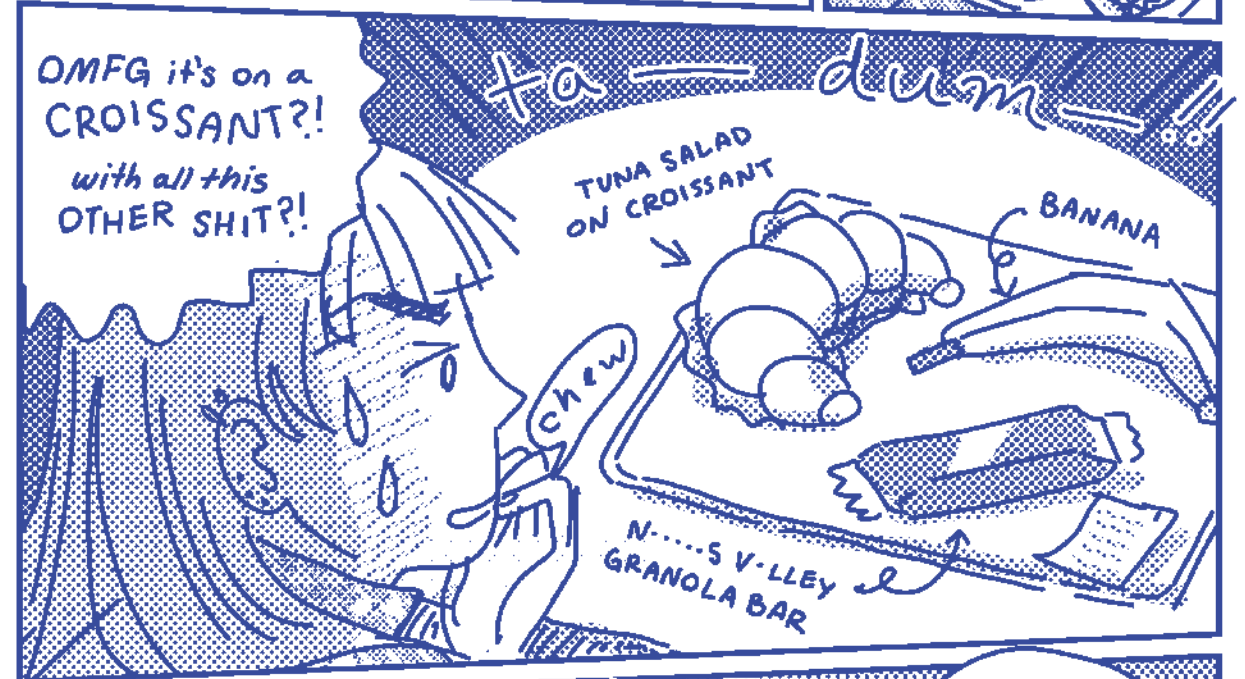
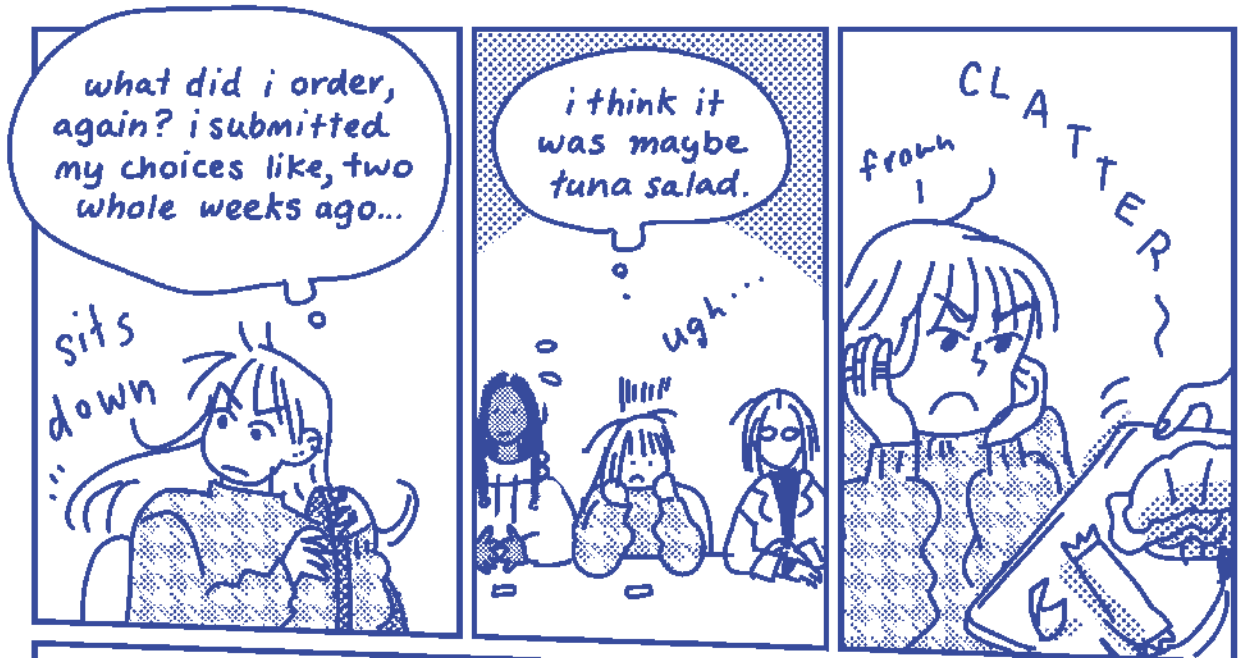
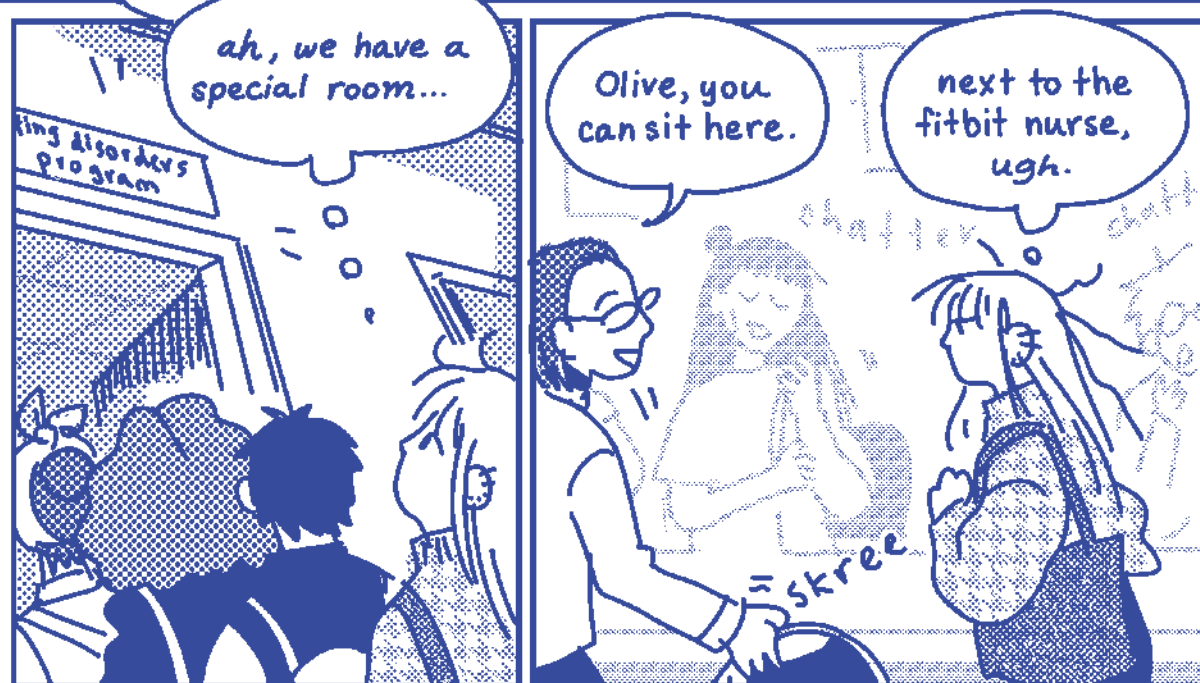
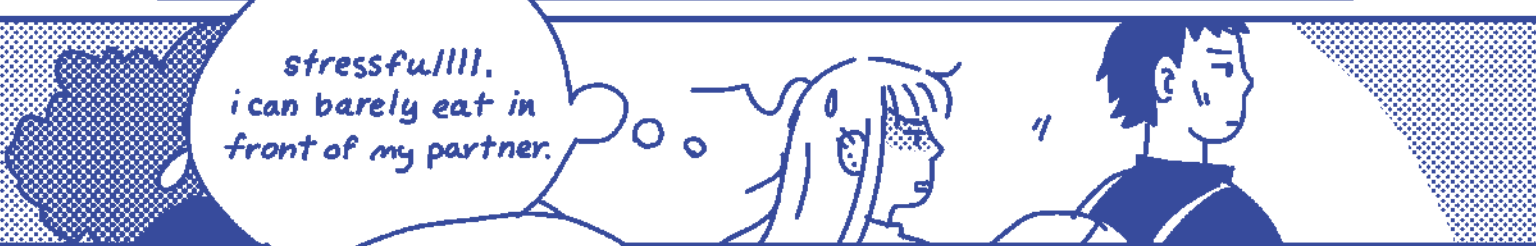
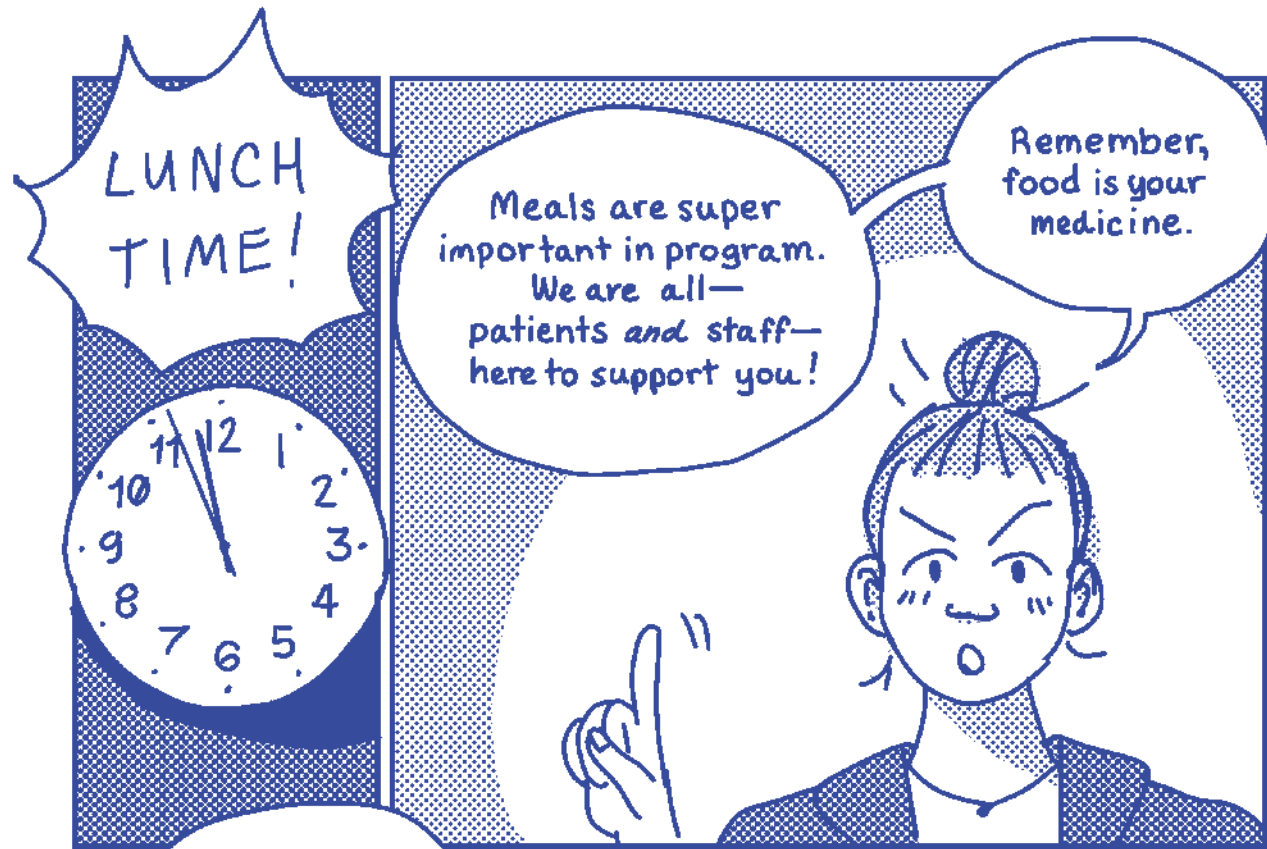
for the next three months, i'll be in the hospital for thirty-five hours a week.

welcome!



after ten months on the waitlist, today—

—is my first day of full-time adult outpatient eating disorder recovery!





1. The book takes a crack at the New Age wellness industrial complex. Can you tell us what that means to you?

That's a super nebulous question, because it touches on everything from spirituality to hand soap. If I had to boil it down I would describe it as the rejection of the self in favour of an imagined, idealized self that can be achieved through a kind of morally aligned consumption. That sounds a bit academic, what I mean is that if you make these correct movements, breathe in this manner, eat and drink this particular food, and think in this certain way, then you too can become a good enough person to stop self sabotaging your own happiness and actually achieve your dreams. I was staring at a goat yoga book thinking "that's literally the stupidest thing I have ever seen in my life," yet longing to know the secret to inner peace those goats must possess, when I started feeling angry about the entire wellness industry thing. By the time I reached that breaking point I was a fucking mess, card carrying member of a violent gang of Napoleon Hill fanatics, biohacking my morning coffee, holding space for three different emotionally deranged narcissists, pestering angels regarding my rent, reducing my unproductive sleep hours, and utilizing mindfulness to increase my art making productivity. Looking back it was utter insanity, it sounds more like I was addicted to meth than just trying to find a way to be a full time artist. What actually brought me down was finding a new day job and like, going to therapy.

2. Cheryl deals with a lot of internalized homophobia and the book is a journey towards coming out and accepting queerness. Would that be an accurate assessment?

I think things are a bit more complex than that, but

for the sake of selling lots and lots of comics, yes absolutely. *Cheryl* is 100% positive queer representation in which our heroine leans in and girl bosses her way to self love. Like *Love Simon*, but for aging queer millennials who never got a chance to date in high school or college or their twenties. No, I think *Cheryl* represents coming to a moment of acceptance, and the recognition that that acceptance is in of itself temporary. That's kind of the stickler with trauma, you don't just heal, you come around and around and around again to the same old problems and you don't fix it, you just get better at patching up the holes and resetting your course. What passes for healing in the same kind of practice that passes for talent, it's all just repetition and time. When I get to spend time with queer teens at workshops or other arts events, I get a little jealous. They're just out like it's nothing, that's nuts to me. I had to write the entirety of *Lake Jehovah* before I figured out I'm pan and trans, and the entire time I was freaking out about getting the labels right and saying the right thing. I guess I'm really much more interested in the messiness of it all. I'm interested about when coming out to your folks goes sideways or the space when one is never really "queer" enough. I'm interested in indefinite conclusions where things aren't wrapped up tidy, because in truth I don't know what that's like. I hope that other people experience it, but I certainly don't.

3. You are based in Calgary. What is the comics community like there? What about the queer community?

I like Calgary but I complain about it constantly, I've basically lived here my entire life though so I think I have the right. I don't really leave my house other than for work or provisions. I can feel pretty isolated, but I'm not sure if that's a universal experience or me being a grimy little hermit man. I hear there's a queer night club in town, but I'd never go. I don't really know if there's a place where queer people congregate in Calgary. The comics community is really cozy, there's an organization called Panel One that brings together independent creators for events that's really cool. Since the pandemic there have been a lot more zine fairs and art markets that have made connecting with artists easier. The biggest thing that I know of that brought together the comics community was Renegade Arts Entertainments anthology *Alberta Comics: Home* which came out in 2022. I mostly hang out with Ryan Danny Owen and a few other queer creators and artists.

4. Your first book *Lake Jehovah* is a wild trip, with talking animals and cross-species sex. Cheryl has some colour pages which delve into a more fantastical world with talking animals, though tame in comparison. What are the influences for these strange storylines? Do you read these types of books?

Hey now! There's a bunch of cross-species sex in *Cheryl* too! Golly, now that you mention it I guess that is a recurring theme. I made a zine back in the day called *Cool Apple* about anthropomorphic fruits fucking letters of the alphabet. Recently a coworker at my straight job discovered this and was shocked, it was very much a "Who ARE you??" moment. I don't know where it comes from exactly, I am a child of the internet and cross-species sex is like, pretty fucking tame compared to shit that's already out there. I think interspecies sex is probably a way for me to describe the way in which I do not understand regular human-to-human sex, or the social in-

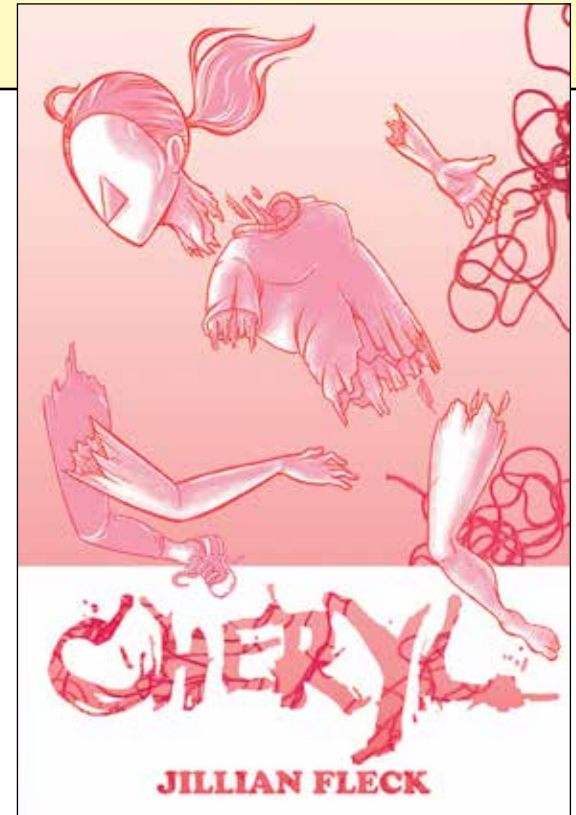
Graphic Novel / World rights, 978-1-77262-095-5
6x8.5 inches, 152 b/w pages, 8 pages colour, \$20
MAY

teractions and cues that lead up to it at least. The desire is there, but the script isn't. So cross-species sex makes as much sense as regular bonking, and at least with cross-species sex one can disperse with the pleasantries and assumption that partners are understandable to one another. Plus, I dunno, if you had the chance to fuck an alien, wouldn't you?

Do I read these types of books? I can think of a few. *The Bridegroom was a Dog* by Yoko Tawada comes to mind. *Hot Pterodactyl Boyfriend* by Alan Cumyn is another. Alissa Nutting wrote a short story about fucking animate lawn ornaments if I recall. *Gaylord Phoenix* by Edie Fake is of course the gold standard for amazing weird sex in my mind, and basically the entire reason I get out of bed in the morning. Megg and Mogg in Simon Hanselman's comics are awful and great too. This is all without getting into actual erotica.

5. How many glasses of water do you drink a day? Need to stay hydrated!

Did my doctor pay you to ask me that? I hate drinking water so much. If I didn't have to I wouldn't. For a while when I was working on *Cheryl* I was averaging about a litre of coffee a day, which looking back was the best I've ever felt except for the heart palpitations and insomnia.

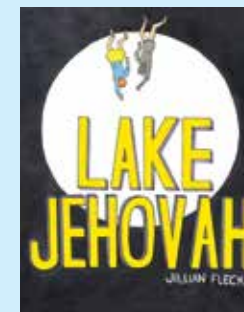


A story about a newly realized lesbian woman, hell-bent on reaching spiritual enlightenment. Even if it kills her.

Cheryl just came out and she's been doing just fine, thanks for asking! She just broke up with her dog, quit gluten, cut contact with her father, and is just really trying to focus on getting enough water daily! It's all going great!! Except it isn't and everything is terrible, because no matter what Cheryl does she really can't shake that there's something wrong deep down in the core of her being.

What would really fix things would be to address her lingering internalized homophobia and childhood trauma. Or reach total spiritual enlightenment, reaching total enlightenment sounds easier, let's go with that one. As Cheryl falls further down the New Age wellness industrial complex however, the world turns out to be a lot weirder and sicker than she could have ever imagined. Now Cheryl is forced to confront that not only is it not all about her, but that she might have some part to play in making it better. *Cheryl* is a vision board of a coming out gone sideways.

ALSO AVAILABLE:



LAKE JEHOVAH

Graphic Novel / World rights
978-1-77262-007-8
5.5x6.5 inches, 216 pages, colour
\$25 CDN / \$20 US

Lake Jehovah is a small northern town known for its allegedly bottomless lake. It is there that Jay, a genderqueer individual, experiences a crisis of meaning regarding love in the face of a series of apocalypses.

Jillian Fleck is a comic creator from Calgary, Alberta. They received a Bachelors of Fine Art from the Alberta University of the Arts and later a Masters of Letters in Comic Studies from the University of Dundee. Their work has been published in a variety of zines, anthologies, academic journals, and stand alone publications. Aside from making comics, Jillian has also taught classes and workshops, and given public lectures regarding the comics medium and zine making. Through comics they have been given the opportunity to share their work internationally and connect with people worldwide and within their own community. In their spare time they are known to grow orchids, chat about pro wrestling, and make ink.





1. *When the Lake Burns* is your first graphic novel in French and now translated into English. It won awards and did very well. Or as we say in English, “You hit it out of the park on the first pitch.” How did you manage to create such a successful project the first time out? Or do you have a background in art and illustration?

I studied graphic design, illustration and traditional animation. I don't have a professional background in comics/graphic novels, but I think my cinematic studies made it easier to make a graphic novel. I also created *When the Lake Burns* in residency at my French publisher, Front Froid. For a whole year, I was supervised by a professional editor and comic artist that helped me with the scenario and storyboard. This helped me tremendously in making my first graphic novel.

2. *When the Lake Burns* is heavily invested in magic realism. Do you read these sorts of books, comics or fiction? What were your influences?

I do! Books with magic realism are my favourite kind, so I wanted to write a story in that genre. I read novels, graphic novels and manga, mainly YA and Fantasy.

3. This is the first time our two Imprints have collaborated, BDANG for translated Quebec work and Emanata for YA. I realize there is no YA category in the French publishing world. How do you see your book? What audience?

It's true that there is no YA category per say, but there's still some stories in that genre that can be found in the Young Reader section. While I wrote this story for teens, I had many readers outside that audience read the book, younger and older. I'm happy that the story managed to reach such a range of people.

4. The book takes place in a small town with all the social dynamics of such a place. You live in Montreal but did you grow up in a small town? Did that influence the book?

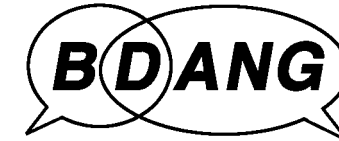
Absolutely! I come from a small town in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, near the Ontario border. I moved out of it to study in Montreal, but I'm very fond of it and go back often. It's a place surrounded by the Boreal forest, which you can find in my book.

The vibe is also different from big cities. I went to school with the same person starting from Kindergarten until the end of High School and that creates an interesting dynamic with friends, which I wanted to write about. The proximity of those relations makes it easier to befriend someone, but harder to avoid someone.

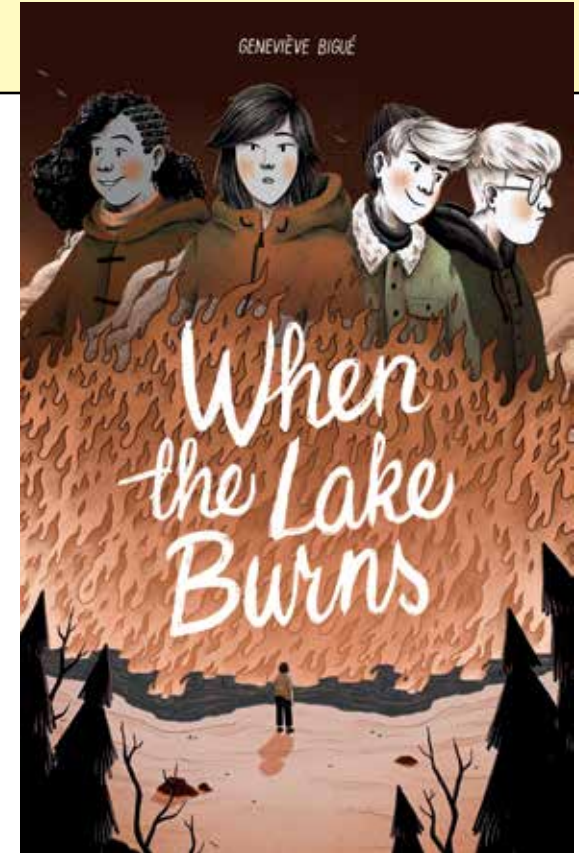
5. Do you have plans for more graphic novels?

Yes! I'm currently working on a few. One of those is already published monthly in the teen magazine *Curium*, two pages at a time.

Translation by Luke Langille
Graphic Novel / English rights, 978-1-77262-097-9
6.5x10 inches, 192 pages, colour, \$25, JUNE



When the Lake Burns is the first collaboration between our two imprints: **BDANG** Imprint for translated work and **EMANATA** for YA books



When a local lake catches fire, a group of teens set out to see the spectacle for themselves—but not everything goes as planned.

A very rare natural phenomenon is causing quite a stir in the Village of Corbeau River: Lake Kijikone has caught fire and grown into a veritable inferno. When the disaster occurs, an old local legend re-emerges, and a group of local teens decide to find out if the stories are true.

Deep in the woods, one of the teens shares a secret so shocking that the group splits up—and the real nightmare begins.

Geneviève Bigué is an illustrator and comic artist based in Montreal. With a formation in Traditional Animation (Cégep du Vieux Montréal) and Graphic Design (UQÀM), she now works in many fields, such as books, advertisement and the cultural scene. In 2022, she published her first graphic novel as an author, Parfois les lacs brûlent (When the Lake Burns). Her book has won many awards:

- Prix des libraires du Québec 2023 (Adult Graphic Novel)*
- Prix Bédéis Causa 2023 (Réal-Fillion Award)*
- Prix du Salon du livre de Trois-Rivières 2023 (Youth Graphic Novel)*
- Prix des Éléphants d'Or de Chambéry BD 2023 (Quebec's Youth Graphic Novel)*

Her book has been nominated (finalist) for the following:

- Governor General's Literary Awards in Young People's Literature (Illustrated Books, French) 2023*
- Bedelys Awards (Quebec' Youth Graphic Novel) 2023*









the best version of themselves, the hero is rewarded with a special ability, or awareness, a new stage in the evolution of consciousness.

3. *Survival of the Goodest* throws a lot at Sable in terms of the circumstances she encounters. What would you say is the biggest personal hurdle she needs to overcome, and how does that hurdle relate to your own experiences as a young adult?

Sable ultimately has to learn not to fall into the trap of polarizing the world. Everyone is worth saving. That's how she saves herself. This definitely resonates with my experience as a young adult. Sable simply has to do her best, to help lessen animal suffering, protecting and preserving her forest, always moving forward... becoming.

4. There are two magical helpers in *Survival of the Goodest* that remind me a lot of Hayao Miyazaki characters. Who are your biggest creative influences?

Sable believed she needed both, and manifested them as real. One character is the people-pleaser who finds the song in everyone else's heart, this helps to avoid talking about yourself, and exposing perceived flaws. You'll find he also has an extreme case of pareidolia. The other character represents the night watchman who patrols the perimeter of your psyche. Vigilant in his work, this one makes sure the electric fence is fully charged so no one can get to you. They both try to stop Sable from getting hurt. To keep her safe.

I had to use a little paper magic, similar to the one in the book, to create them visually. Alan Moore (*Watchman* with Dave Gibbons) once said in an interview with *Believer Magazine*, that what the world needs is more magic, and so I'm very happy to have found these two special characters. That's also what I love about Hayao Miyazaki — the strength of his characters and the magic. His work is definitely a creative influence.

5. What do you hope young adult readers take away from this book?

What I hope this book says to young adult readers is to keep looking for sources of beauty and celebrate them! Beautiful rescue plans, laws, wild places, art and animals. I want the book to say, "Yes, keep going, don't give up hope." The Internet is filled with funny and moving videos of animals acting as if they think and feel, and it's because they DO think and feel. It's funny because it's true.

Marianne Boucher is a comics creator and painter from Kirkland Lake, Ontario. After graduating from the Ontario College of Art and Design, she worked as a court-illustrator, covering crime stories for a Toronto television station for 30 years. Her graphic novel, Talking To Strangers an adult memoir, was published by Penguin Random House in 2020, and was listed as one of the best Canadian comics in 2020 by CBC. She will be starting a new graphic novel while attending the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, writers residency in Avonport, fall 2023. A recent move back to northern Ontario has rekindled her desire to return to painting. She is represented by Britton Gallery in Muskoka.

1. *Survival of the Goodest* is a departure from your last book, *Talking to Strangers*, which was a graphic memoir for adults. What inspired you to write this fable-like young adult graphic novel? Do you see any common threads?

Talking To Strangers ends with the idea that beauty helped save me, and I am continuing that conversation about beauty in this new book. *Survival of the Goodest* asks the question: Can beauty save the world? Beauty gives us a sense of conviction, because no one has to tell you what you think is beautiful. It carries the power of truth, it can transport and transform. This was my personal experience.

Perhaps I am seeking beauty as a transformative power, because I desperately need a redemptive idea in the face of our environmental challenges.

2. You refer to this story as an eco-romance. Without spoilers, what does this label mean in the context of this graphic novel?

I refer to this story as an eco-romance because it's about a hero who develops a new and enhanced relationship with the natural world. After hardship, and the struggle to be

YA Graphic Novel / World rights, 978-1-77262-104-4
6x8.5 inches, 152 b/w pages, \$20
OCTOBER



The Nameless City meets *Princess Mononoke* in this eco-adventure about a young messenger who taps into an ancient magic to defend her island's animal inhabitants.

Sable has spent her whole life in a tightknit community on a remote island. With support from her parents, she's trained for years to take up her position as the next Kerpathic, a messenger who travels through the dangerous forest to share news, medicine, and culture. When her father, the current Kerpathic, has an accident, Sable must step into her pre-destined role. As her first mission goes awry, she wonders if she's ready for this important but dangerous work. Until a young naturalist arrives on the island and sets off to capture a mysterious animal that's never been seen on the mainland. Sable realizes that she can use her skills as a Kerpathic to defend the island's animals and their way of life. But she quickly learns that she can't do it alone.

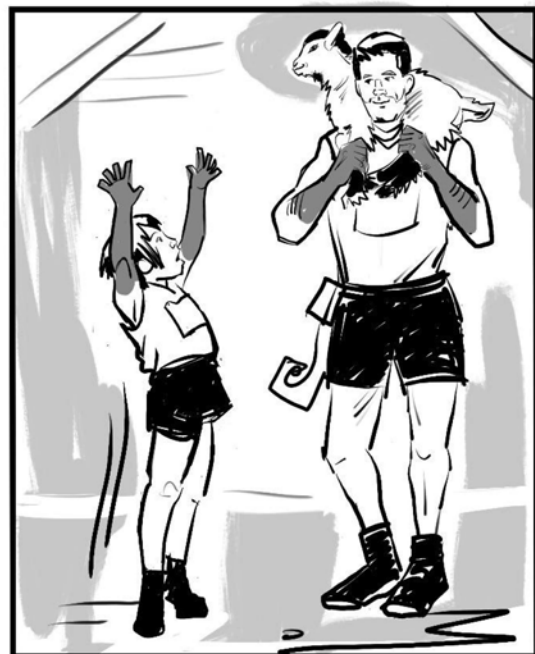
In *Survival of the Goodest*, Marianne Boucher (*Talking to Strangers*) explores ideas of animal sentience, interspecies communication, and environmental preservation.

EMANATA

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

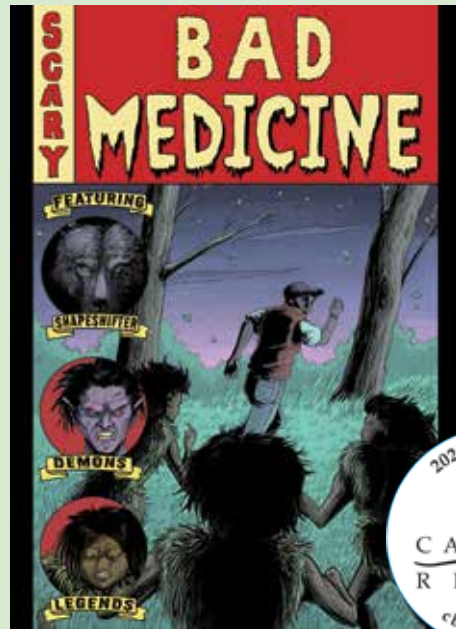


EMANATA graphic novels rely on a seamless blend of words and pictures to tell compelling, character-driven fiction and non-fiction stories. By focusing on work created by comic artists living in Canada and striving for social equity, EMANATA seeks to introduce fresh, strong, and under-represented voices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





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“The illustrations are delightfully creepy, delivering powerful images that will stay with readers long after the fires are out and the lights are back on. Twin delivers a set of stories perfect for graphic novel collections and horror readers.”
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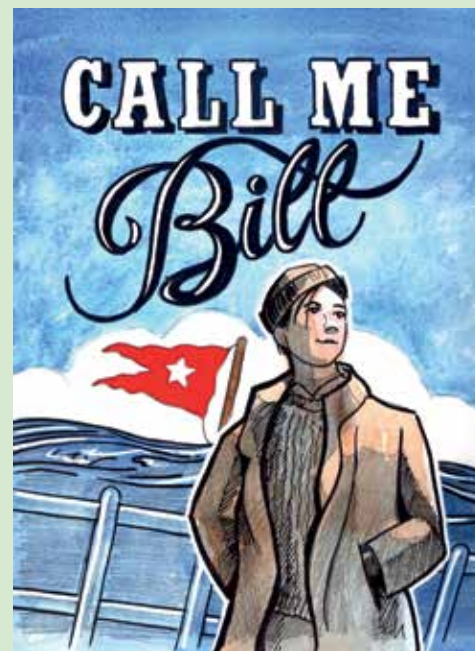
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“Expertly illustrated in black and white, Lynette Richards’s debut graphic novel tells a fictionalized version of the life of Maggie/Bill Armstrong, an adventurer who defied gender expectations in a quest to do what they loved.” —Quill & Quire (starred review)

“Loosely inked gray-washed watercolors give the narrative a timeless feel. Richards’s thorough research—drawn from local records, community history, and historical and modern publications, which feature as excerpts throughout—help explore what Billy’s life might have been like in the late 19th century; while the excerpts focus primarily on Billy’s gender identity, Richards portrays Billy as a person with a complex and rich life who just wanted to be accepted as he was.” — Publisher’s Weekly

“*Call Me Bill* also serves as a wonderful source of Nova Scotian history. The *SS Atlantic* shipwreck is not a story commonly told and this graphic novel provides insight into a major nautical event.”
—Dalhousie Gazette



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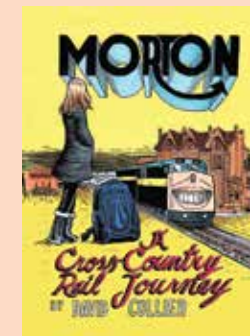


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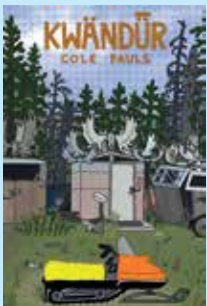


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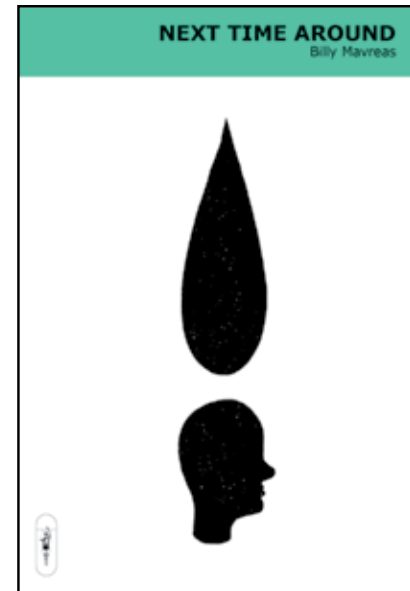
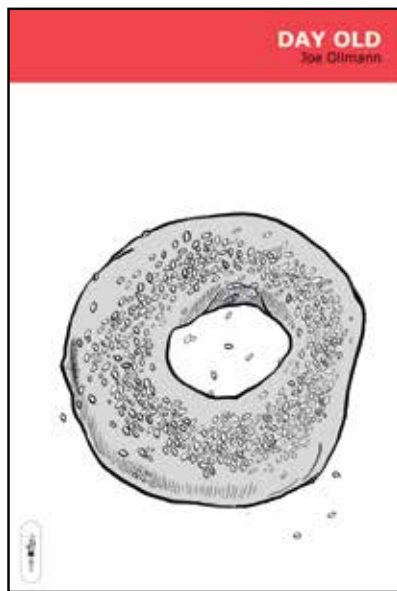
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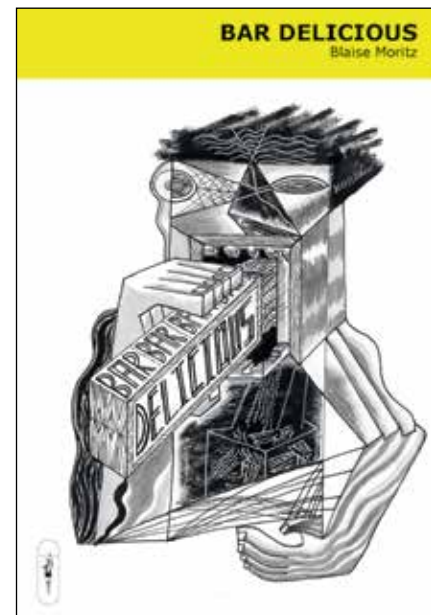


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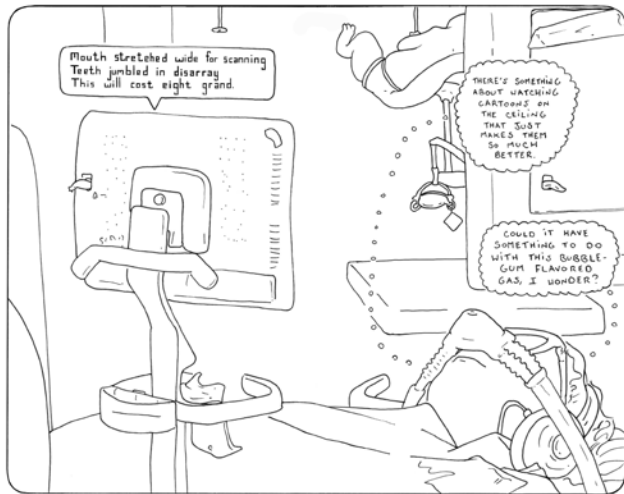
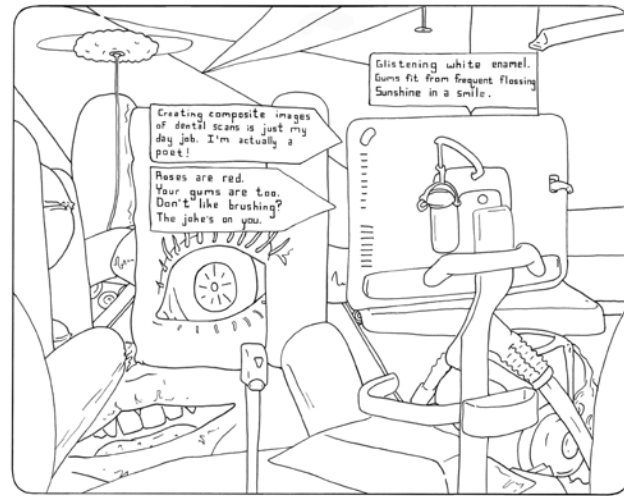
Just Happy To See You



ISBN 978-1-77262-098-6
140 Pages / \$10
May / Canada Only

Just Happy To See You is a mix of bizarre comedy and a captivating autobiographical sequential art in which a breadcrumb trail of punchlines connects the dots between singing bougainvillea, poorly thought-out pandemic guidelines, and murderous clones.

Psychedelic visual-narratives coupled with side-splitting punchlines will eventually leave you wondering: why did Shea Proulx's youngest spent so much time huffing laughing gas in 2021? The answer is simple: It was just that kind of year.



Cousin Bear Comes to Visit



ISBN 978-1-77262-099-3
120 Pages / \$10
Sept / Canada Only

In *Cousin Bear Comes to Visit* Halie introduces us to Francis the bear as she prepares for her and her cousin to reunite. The pair haven't seen one another in quite awhile, time to catch up, laugh, and to uncover Cousin's big secret.



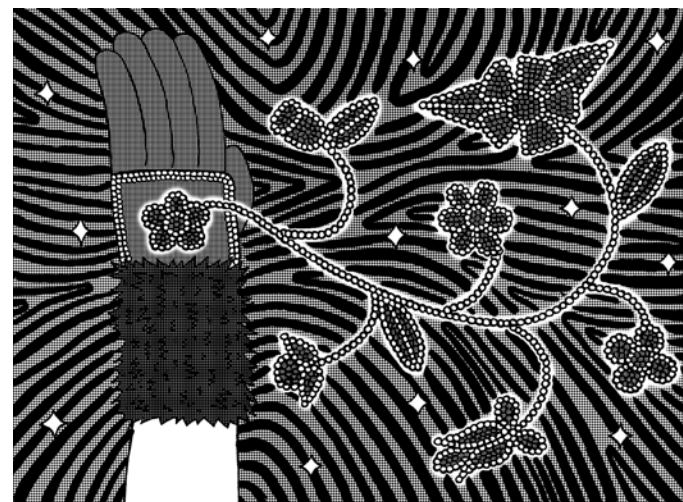
COLE PAULS

We see stars only at night



ISBN 978-1-77262-100-6
80 Pages / \$10
Oct / Canada Only

L̓t̓eḡe zedle son neṣit̓'in (Tahltan for We See Stars Only at Night) is a surrealistic landscape of Tahltan shapes, culture and motifs. Originally created for the Nanaimo Art Gallery's group show "Gutters are Elastic" between July 15 to September 23, 2023, Pauls decided to expand the work into a full length book. Playing with the connection between land, regalia, performance and heritage, Pauls follows the footsteps of Tiger Tateishi, Hironori Kikuchi and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas with his dreamlike narrative.



BRANDON HICKS

On The Border



ISBN 978-1-77262-101-3
140 Pages / \$10
Sept / Canada Only

After moving to St. Stephen, New Brunswick, during the height of the pandemic, cartoonist Brandon Hicks began illustrating a diary to record all of the strange occurrences and social mores of this sleepy border town. *On The Border* collects the best of these stories, introducing you to a large cast of idiosyncratic neighbours, wild animals and strange antagonists. Learn all there is to know about the local traditions, bizarre habits and the changing economy of a small East Coast community.

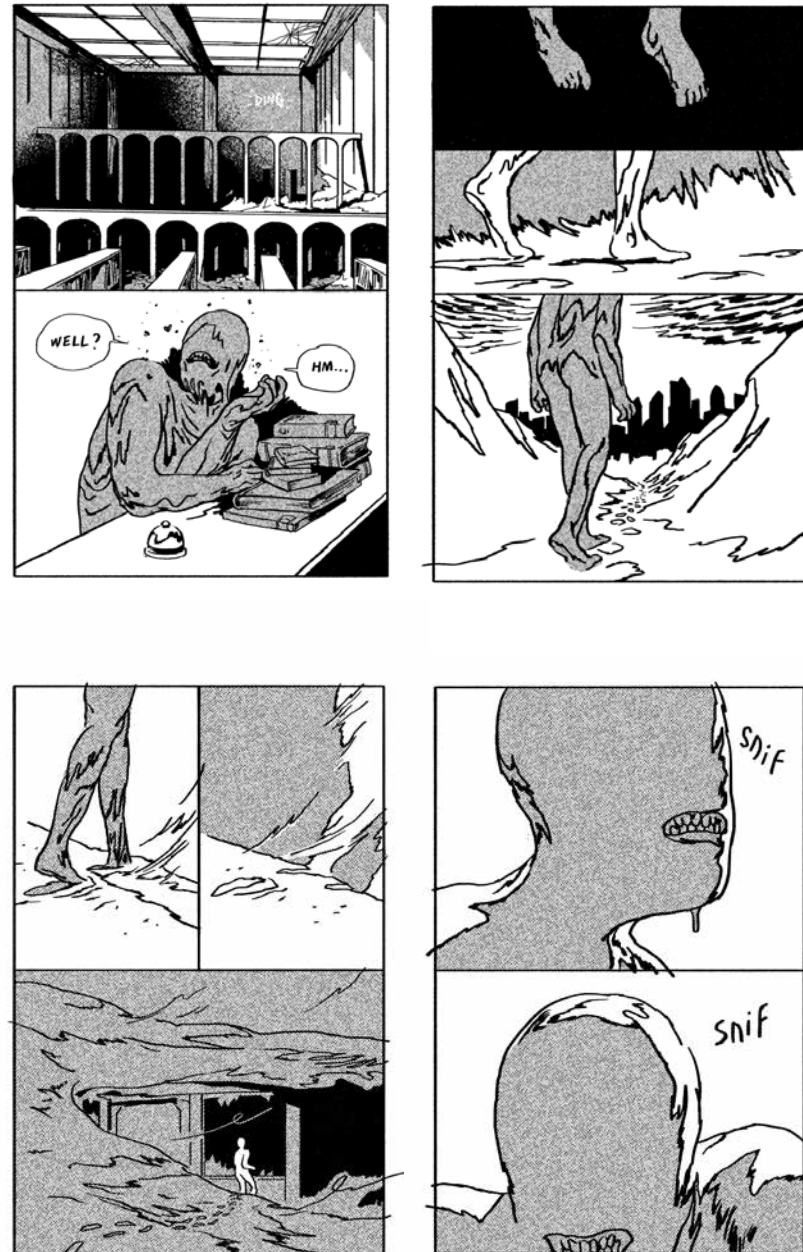
TYLER LANDRY

Wanderer of the Wastes



ISBN 978-1-77262-102-0
96 Pages / \$10
Oct / Canada Only

Slogging interminably through a largely barren post-human landscape, a creature of waste encounters the last vestiges of life and seeks to understand them.



COLE DEGENSTEIN

It Really Is



ISBN 978-1-77262-103-7
124 Pages / \$10
Oct / Canada Only

Winter begins with good intentions—baking, flower arranging classes, and trips to the farmers market to keep fresh produce in the house. Despite these considerable efforts, something inside of Cole seems to go rotten every winter and stays that way until spring begins to peek up through the snow. *It Really Is* is an auto-fiction comic based on the phenomenon of the winter slump, documenting the slow descent into a full-on winter induced depression with humour, sensitivity, and talking geese.

CONUNDRUM 25 BIOS



Shea Proulx has a BFA from Emily Carr University and an MFA from the University of British Columbia. Through tracing and repetition, Shea constructs autobiographical visual narratives that transcend the boundaries of individual lived experience. Her books *ABC Monstrosity* and *Alice at Naptime* were both nominated for the Best Illustrated category by the Alberta Book Publisher's Association, and Alberta Comics: *Home*, which she co-edited and did the cover art for, won the award in 2023. Shea has been the recipient of grants from Canada Council (2022), The Alberta Foundation For the Arts (2019) and Calgary Arts Development (2023). Among the Fine Arts galleries that Shea's paintings and installations have been exhibited are The Morris and Helen Belkin, The Alberta Art Gallery, TRUCK, and Contemporary Calgary. As Vice-President on the board of directors for Panel One, a Calgary / Mohkinstsis based comics festival, Shea helps put the spotlight on local, original sequential artwork. Her two daughters and husband, artist Ryan Proulx, routinely make her laugh so hard she spits.



Halie Finney was raised in a little tiny hamlet in northern Alberta, it's the same place her mom, and her grandparents, and probably her great grandparents were raised. They share the same gravel roads, creek, lake, neighbors, and many other things. Year after year those things they share stay the same. Halie has affectionately hodgepodged together characteristics of the people and places she grew up with to create an odd bunch of characters in a familiar landscape. Together they navigate their little world, taking care of themselves and each other, doing the same tasks and activities Halie and her family do, and dealing with the feeling of loss and connection that come from staying in the same place since before you can remember.



Cole Pauls is a Tahltan comic artist, illustrator and printmaker hailing from Haines Junction (Yukon Territory) with a BFA in Illustration from Emily Carr University. Residing in Vancouver, Pauls focuses on his two comic series, the first being *Pizza Punks*: a self contained comic strip about punks eating pizza, the other being *Dakwākāda Warriors*. In 2017, Pauls won Broken Pencil Magazine's Best Comic and Best Zine of the Year Award for *Dakwākāda Warriors II*. In 2020, the collected *Dakwākāda Warriors* won Best Work in an Indigenous Language from the Indigenous Voices Awards and was nominated for two Doug Wright Awards. His book *Kwāndūr* won the 2023 Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Award at the BC / Yukon Book Awards and the 2023 Expozine Award.



Brandon Hicks is a writer and cartoonist based in New Brunswick. He is the author/illustrator of several books, including the novel *The Fish That Ruined Everything*, and the "Beezle, Buzzle and Barb" series from Humorist Hooks. His award-winning short films and theatre plays have run in festivals across the world, and his work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Fangoria*, *National Lampoon*, *American Bystander*, *CBC* and the *Maritime [EDIT]*, where he serves as Comics Editor.



Tyler Landry lives and draws in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, on the east coast of Canada. Over the last 20 years he has occupied professional roles as Game Artist, Art Director, Illustrator, Graphic Designer, as well as Cartoonist, Club Organizer, and Comics/Drawing Instructor. Published comics include: *By the Lingering Light of a Slowly Dying Sun* (Strangers Publishing), *Old Caves* (Uncivilized Books), *Dungeonoids* (Self-Published), *Opal* (Dagger Dagger anthology), *Trabajar para Sobrevivir* (AIA Editorial/Buen Gusto), and *Shit and Piss* (Retrofit/Big Planet).



Hailing from the prairies and based in Montreal, Cole Degenstein is an interdisciplinary artist whose work takes form in illustration, comics, and poetry. Tenderness is at the core of his work, which centres itself in storytelling about intimacy, rural life, gay history, and domesticity. For the past ten years he has been involved in the Canadian self-publishing and zine community, having published numerous projects of his own work as well as organizing group exhibitions and anthologies; his debut graphic novella *10-10 to the Wind* was published in the spring of 2023. Cole seeks to tell stories that communicate in delicate whispers, inviting the reader to see the poetry in daily life, mundanity, and quietness.

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