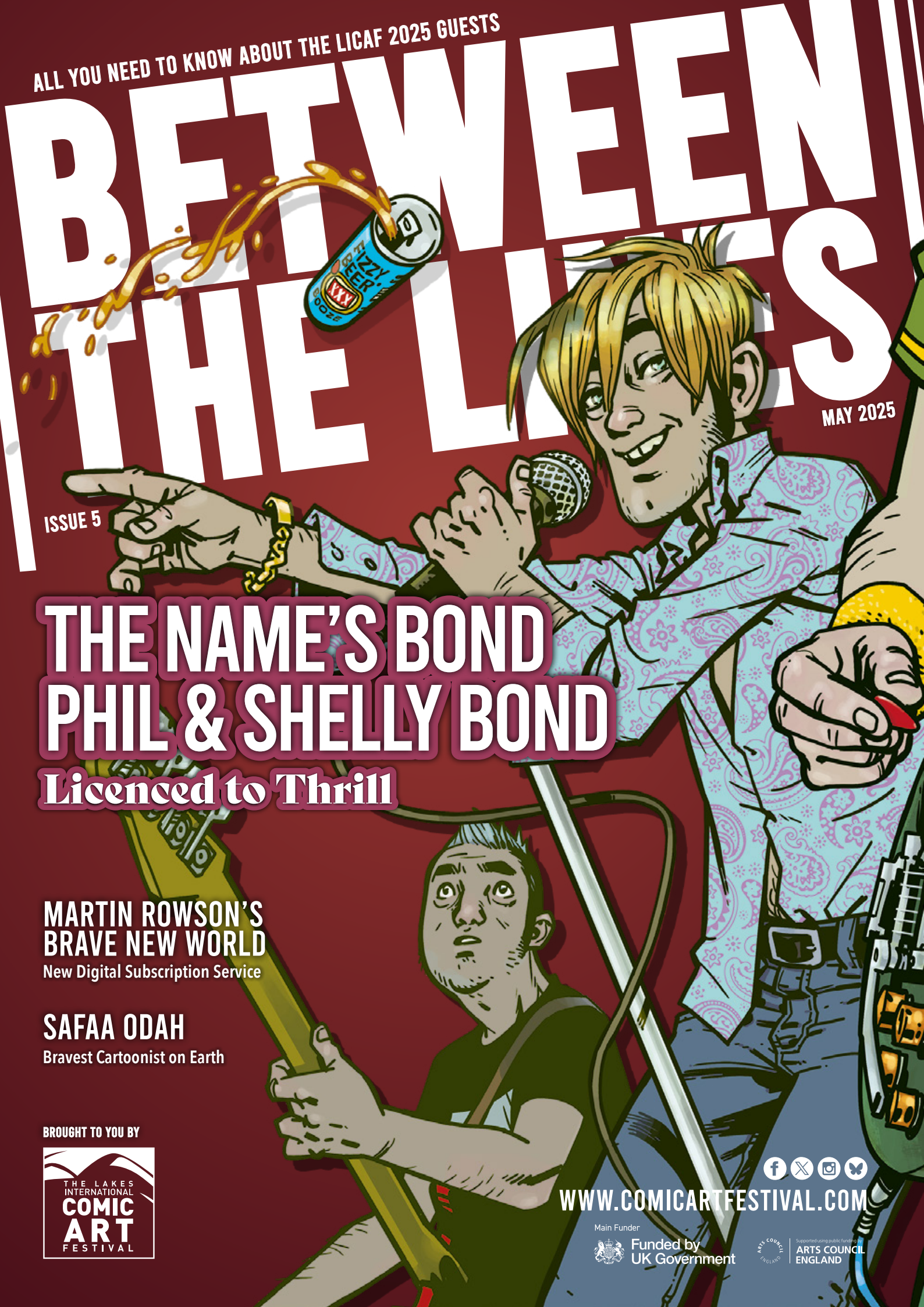


ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE LICAF 2025 GUESTS



ISSUE 5

MAY 2025

THE NAME'S BOND PHIL & SHELLY BOND

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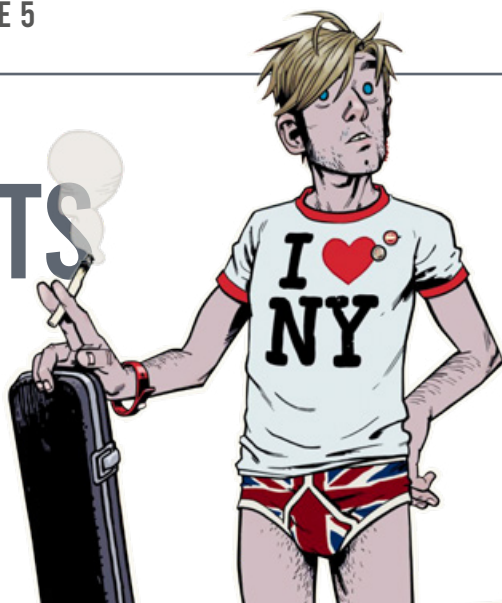
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ENGLAND

CONTENTS

THE WORLDS OF PHIL & SHELLY BOND

Pg 3-5

From Vertigo to Geezer



DITKO & AYN RAND

Pg 6-9

Randism and its influence on comics

SAFAA AND THE TENT

Pg 10-11

LICAF's most important publication yet



MARTIN ROWSON'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

Pg 12-13

The cartoonist goes (partly) digital



AVERY HILL PUBLISHING

Pg 14-15

The healthy state of UK graphic novels



DESERT ISLAND COMICS

Pg 16-17

Finally, we get rid of McShane and his eclectic mix of comics

HMP HAVERIGG

Pg 18-19

First fruits of a great LICAF initiative

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome back to yet another stunning issue of Between the Lines.

Those of you reluctant to read Ayn Rand's actual novels, may be delighted to learn that there is an excellent adaptation on several streaming channels of Atlas Shrugged. But don't go there before you read Finn Miles' brilliant introduction to her and her influence on Steve (Spider-Man) Ditko and other comics/film creators.

And we are more than delighted to have on board Shelly and Phil Bond. Deadline - one of the UK's most influential comics - Comico, Vertigo, work with Grant Morrison, and even more. Read here about Geezer, a terrific new series about a rock star who hasn't quite made it yet. This is comics' most creative couple.

If you do not already own Safaa and the Tent, put this down and order it. Like Joe Sacco's works, this is reportage from a war zone. In this case it is Gaza, where Safaa's home has been destroyed. She is not on the front line, but well inside it. Undeniably, the most important collection of cartoons this year. You will be unable not to be moved.

Everyone's favourite cartoonist, Martin Rowson (thanks for the £20, Martin) has a wonderful website and a subscription service to get exclusive cartoons. Dave Lloyd's Aces has proved that publishing online can be a success, so get in early on Martin's new venture and keep up with UK and international political events in a way which would make Gillray proud.

Meanwhile, book publishing is also alive and flourishing in the UK with Avery Hill Publishing (and others) showcasing some brilliant creators. 200 years on from the world's first comics publication, The Glasgow Looking Glass, UK creators are thriving.

Some guy called McShane has chosen a pretty weird mix of stuff to take with him to a desert island. That guy should get out more.

And last, but far from least, we feature early results of LICAF's project at HMP Haverigg. Mollie Ray has clearly had a wonderful influence on these aspiring cartoonists.

That's it for this issue. I'm away to reread Ditko's Spider-Man, especially since, as a little 'un, I obviously missed the Randian subtext. See y'all next issue.

John McShane

BETWEEN THE LINES MEETS THE BONDS

IN THE BACKGROUND I CAN HEAR, "I WANNA BE A ROCK STAR", SO LET'S START WITH GEEZER. THERE USED TO BE A DC COMIC CALLED SECRET ORIGINS. (NOT SO SECRET ONCE THEY HAD TOLD YOU THE ORIGIN, OF COURSE.) WHAT ARE THE "SECRET ORIGINS" OF GEEZER AND OF OFF REGISTER PRESS?

PB: Geezer started, I think, as Shelly asking William Potter to pitch her something about the 80s or 90s music scene (I've known Will since the Deadline days and we worked together on "Rich And Strange" for Black Crown - another story about a band). When Shelly showed me what he came back with - "Geezer" - I was all "I must draw this. Don't let anyone else draw this."

SB: ::blows on knuckles x 2:: My evil plan to get Philip Bond, my favorite artist since 1993, to draw comics works again...

PB: It's taking me full-circle, back to the fun, DIY attitude I had when making "Wired World" in Deadline 35 years ago. I just want to make a book on my own terms again to see if it can be done.



Who is Spencer Bond?

PB: Off Register's finest intern.

SB: The last time I checked the masthead, he was cutting tiny paychecks at Off Register Press serving as President & Publisher. ::cracks knuckles:: But in truth, he's ORP's Resident Percussion section. Although we make comics 24/7, once in a while we throw an impromptu dance party.



Shelly, what got you into comics in the first place?

SB: Fall semester of my senior year at Ithaca College, 1987. I just returned from a semester abroad in London, and I was really angry about it. I had a screenwriting class at the ungodly hour of 8 am. My teacher used a black-and-white comic book to explain storyboarding to the class. I was surprised that comic books were still being made even though I thought they were all arch, superhero stories about good vs. evil, and objectified women. Even beyond the

obvious, I thought they were lame. Another student in the class was a serious fanboy. He suggested that I take a stroll in the local comic shop. It was the start of the indie comics revolution and I couldn't believe my eyes. Grendel and Love And Rockets were my first purchases and I've been addicted to comics ever since.

And how did you get the job at Vertigo? (I loved the comics there. Brilliant authors and artists.)

SB: I got a job as an Editorial Assistant for Comico The Comic Company, publisher of Grendel and Empire Lanes, in the fall of 1988 after I graduated from college and moved to Philadelphia. A year later, when the company declared Chapter 11, Comico's Art Director, Rick Taylor, and I were asked to stay on to help keep the company afloat. I learned a lot via "trial by fire" and I wouldn't change it for the world. After Comico declared Chapter 7 and officially went under, Rick got a job as the Production Manager at DC Comics. A few years later he tipped me off about the upcoming Vertigo imprint when he heard Karen Berger was interviewing for a new assistant editor. I faxed my resume, had a few interviews, and submitted some writing

samples. And luckily, I got the job. But there was a caveat: I had to start immediately. So my mom and I went to NYC, walked a six-block radius around DC Comics' midtown location, and I took the cheapest rent stabilized apartment in Hell's Kitchen. Twenty-two and a half years later, after throwing red ink at over 25,000 comic book pages of Eisner Award-winners, and TV shows with multiple seasons, I became another casualty of the ubiquitous Big Corp wrecking ball. Fortunately, comic book editors know how to pivot—and carry jet packs in case of emergency.



Phil, when did you meet Grant Morrison? Did you ever see his band? The Fauves?

PB: I'm sure I'd run into Grant at various late 80s UKCACs but we only really spoke on the phone when we made "Kill Your Boyfriend" in '94. Honestly, rarely even that once we'd got the look for the characters and everything. I really felt the script was written exactly to my strengths as an artist, to my tastes and style, so I just dove in without a lot of back-and-forth.

PB: I never saw the Fauves! I don't know if I even knew of their existence... I'll need to work them into a future Geezer issue.

Shelly, tell us the "Secret Origin" of Black Crown...

SB: On my last day at DC Comics in 2016, I received an email from Chris Ryall of IDW. I knew the name, but wouldn't have been able to pick him out of a police lineup. I was taken aback by his message, which basically said he was sorry that DC was laying me off because he loved the books I edited since the early '90s, and, if I

wanted to stay in the industry, he said to send him my resume. So I did. He asked me to pitch him a "Shelly Bond" imprint that became Black Crown once Philip designed the ultimate logo. But it only worked because Chris has amazing taste in story and art, and Philip and I got to work together. We cut our teeth on every aspect of making comics—from assembly to lettering and design. Best two years of making comics in my sordid history of making comics.

Phil. Fond memories of Deadline? How did you get involved with it? I loved that mag. Am I right that you worked once with Jon Beeston?

PB: Hugely fond memories, of course! I always liken it to being in a cool indie band but making the wonky comics that we wanted instead of music. We even did a tour in a dodgy white van, probably almost died crossing the Pennines. Steve and Brett, Alan, Jamie and Glyn were my comics family.

And yeah, Jon came along too, a little later on. First as a fan but then we started working together on this mad idea that he had called "Cheeky Wee Budgie Boy" which was basically a sci-fi acid dream about his budgie. We somehow wrote and drew monthly episodes together despite living 300 miles apart.



Your artwork on Geezer is highly detailed. How long does it take you per page?

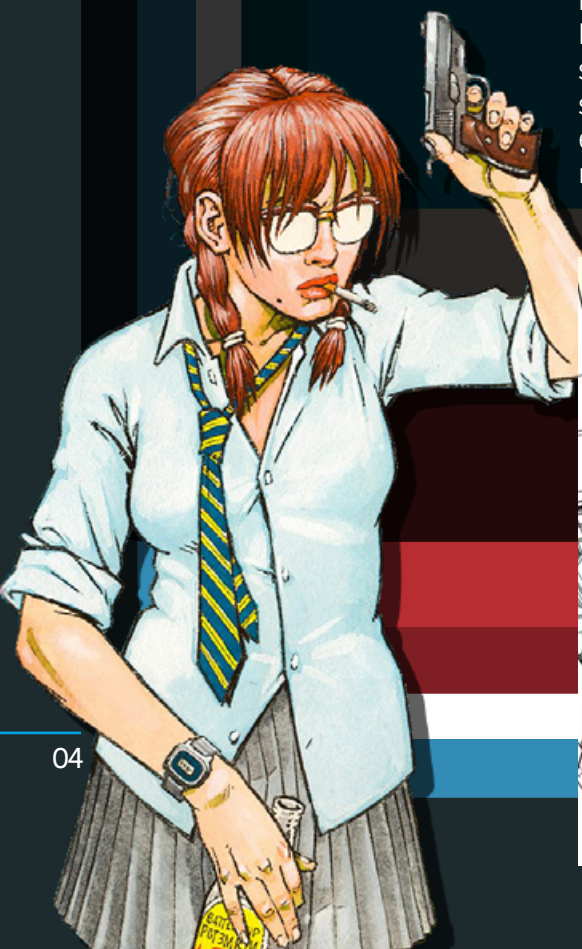
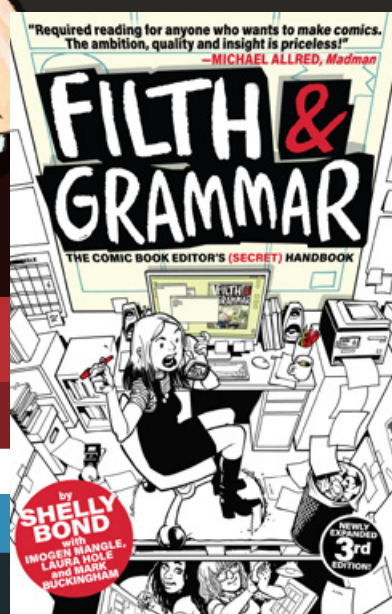
PB: Most of them are detailed, yes. I've kind of freed myself from a lot of constraints and made the pages I want, which often means me getting lost in backgrounds. I want readers to pore over the art finding all the extra stories going on in the background, it's like a "Where's Wally" book for the indie comics set.

PB: So yeah, if a page might involve designing a logo for a fake band to appear on a fake album poster in the background, I find myself wondering where a week went.

SB: He says "week," I say month...

Who are your main artistic influences?

PB: My most formative, I think, come from reading my dad's early Mad paperbacks as a kid - Wally Wood, Bill Elder and Harvey Kurtzman. Then after that there's this line of black & white comics that runs through Brian Bolland and Jaime Hernandez that I seem drawn to.





You're both busy, but what comics/Graphic Novels are you reading at the moment?

SB: It's so hard to find time to read comics and graphic novels when you make them 24/7. But the comics I've enjoyed over the years include Maids by Katie Skelly, Solver by John Allison, Ducks by Kate Beaton, Maple Terrace by Noah Van Sciver, anything by Caroline Cash and of course Love And Rockets. There's also this incredible new wave of female and non-binary British cartoonist that has been blowing me away including Imogen Mangle, Clio Isadora, Philippa Rice, Anna Readman, and so many more. Anyone who says comics is dead needs to clean out their eyes and ears. The best time to make comics is now.

Now feel free to add anything or plug other projects...

PB: I'd just like to plug all Shelly's books. They're very good.

SB: You say that as if you actually read them...hm...

SB: Can't wait to wrap up my graphic memoir editing trilogy in the coming months with i-Doppelgänger: Portrait of the Comic Book Editor in the 21st Century. I teach Comics Editing at Portland State University each spring semester, and enjoy creating books and cheat sheets about making comics for people who want to self-edit or demystify the role of the comic book editor. Which is all-consuming and intense--not unlike Yorkie Milk Chocolate bars, which I hear are not for big girl's blouses.

P.S. Phil, you mentioned The Proclaimers on pg 36 of Geezer #1. I once had to translate their lyrics in San Diego for some folk. I liked your glossary. We had one in each issue of The Bobbie Man in case there were other Proclaimer fans out there.

PB: We do like a good glossary. We do a very slight variant for US and UK audiences, we feel our US readers sometimes need help.

SB: Not everyone is lucky enough to be an anglophile and live with the coolest Brit on earth. Now give me back my Pulp records...



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ON DITKO, AYN RAND, AND AMAZING FANTASIES

BY FINN MILES

Few figures' shadows reign over the world of comics and all things superhero quite like Marvel's own Stan Lee. Credited as the key mind behind the famed "house of ideas" and made even more famous by his many Hollywood and media cameos, the affectionately nicknamed "Stan The Man" has become a cultural creative icon up there with the likes of a Walt Disney or similarly admired figures of the "creative genius" sub genre of celebrity pop culture, being credited as the creator of everything from the X-Men to the Hulk, Spider-Man, Fantastic Four and Iron Man.

Of course, Marvel has never been a one man operation. Comprised of a cavalcade of creative talent both before and after its transition from its years as "Timely Comics", the much celebrated comic

powerhouse has always been composed of a litany of different orchestrators. But besides Lee, perhaps only two others qualify as foundational creators, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko.

Out of the two, it is perhaps Ditko who is more interesting off the page. Born in Johnstown, in 1927, Steve John Ditko would grow up in a working class environment under the auspices of his immigrant parents, both byzantine catholics from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His artistic talents were ignited via the influence of his similarly creatively inclined father, who held a deep love for the medium of the newspaper strip.

This, of course, is but a precursor for the tale that would turn the aspiring artist into the comic icon we know today. The tale would begin in the 1950s when a young Ditko, inspired by his love for the Batman artist Jerry Robinson, would enroll in New York's Cartoonist and



A young Ditko poses for a photo, a veritable Peter Parker lookalike



Ayn Rand pictured in 1943

Illustrators school. It would be here that he would meet Stan Lee, then an editor of Marvel precursor Atlas Comics, who would find admiration for his work.

The rest, as they say, is history, this meeting was the crucial catalyst for Lee and Ditko as a dynamic creative duo. It



Among Ditko's inspirations sits Batman maestro Jerry Robinson, who informed Ditko's love of expressive artwork

is this partnership that would lead to Ditko's most distinguishing and enduring creative achievement, the co-creation of what would become Marvel's flagship hero and one of the world's favourite superheroes, The Amazing Spider-Man, in 1961. Whereas Kirby's squared jawed and masculine superheroes fell in line with more traditional efforts dating back to the golden age, Ditko's more strange, twisted and, in more colloquial terms, "weedy" style lent itself more towards the creation of Marvel's now favourite hero, the scrawny teenage Peter Parker embodied by Ditko's in many ways sharper and more provocative style, backed by his focus on expressive characters drawn from his love of Robinson.

Spider-Man, of course, is not the only major enduring character with which Ditko is credited at Marvel, although Spider-Man in of himself is arguably worth the weight in terms of significance of most if not all of the creations of the Kirby-Lee partnership combined. He would later go on to co-create Doctor Strange and several other characters

outside Marvel, but none would reach the significance of the beloved wall crawler, whose influence would weave a wide Web on par with the likes of a Batman, Superman or Mickey Mouse.

Talk of Ditko, for many, could thus probably end here. But for those who inquire deeper into the life of "Shy" Steve Ditko, as he was sometimes nicknamed, there is another reality of Ditko beyond his role in Marvel's seminal creation, specifically that of his political affections, particularly for the famed political theorist (and to many political agitator) Alice O'Connor, better known simply as Ayn Rand.

To explain Rand in detail would be beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say the now infamous philosophical thinker, over 20 years Ditko's senior, was born in 1905 in St Petersburg, then capital of

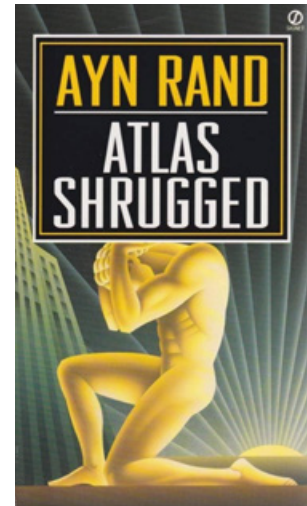
the Russian empire. Unlike Ditko and his humble origins, the originally named Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum was born into a bourgeois family, the daughter of a pharmacist and one of four siblings. She had no direct involvement in comics and died in 1985, just over two decades after *Amazing Fantasy* #15 first introduced readers to everyone's favourite friendly neighbourhood hero.

At first glance then, Ditko and Rand may seem odd bedfellows. Divided by age, class, and profession. But what United them would be Ditko's interest in Ayn Rand's central political philosophy, Objectivism.

Rooted in the social realist tradition and the works of the seminal Greek philosopher Aristotle, objectivism is founded on the rejection of religious faith in favour of man's capacity for critical reason and the belief in objective reality. Whilst such may sound rather unobjectionable to some, many others would argue Rand goes wrong (including this author). This comes down to a crucial element of her ideology, that is the fundamental crux of its abrasive and controversial reputation - the quandary of Ayn Rand's extreme rendition of political and social individualism.

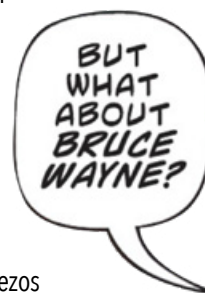
It is this core tenet of objectivism which puts Rand in a precarious and inflammatory political position, that of a laissez-faire capitalism driven by deep rooted egoism. The result is that Randian ideology essentially ends up either arguing for, or under the most charitable of interpretations, functionally leading to, the embracing of a form of radical self-interest many would see simply as an extreme form of ideologically affirmed selfishness. Thus whilst Randian ideologies anti-collectivist disposition has at times been praised for its rejection of certain forms of authoritarianism and rejection of racism and similar phenomena, it thus ultimately serves as a justification for severe wealth inequality and the notion that the rich are, by and large, a self made phenomenon under threat by elements of the proletariat, who to Rand serve as a sort of "parasite class", looking to leech off the spoils and hard work of the 1% who ascended fairly at the whims of the free market.

Such a philosophy, in spite of its many critics, has however been incredibly influential, her work selling over 37 million copies became a key player in the spread of neoliberalism, either directly or indirectly inspiring the world view of the mega rich, from Bezos to Elon Musk. It is thus that Randian ideology has inspired many a piece of artistic expression, both in affirmation and condemnation of her ideology. Of the latter, perhaps the most famous modern pop cultural example comes in the form of the 2007 video game *Bioshock* which parodies Randian ideology by imagining a dystopian reality where Randian individualism has led to a form of societal collapse and decay in the underwater city of Rapture, a Randian Atlantis. It is chiefly inspired by Rand's most famous novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, a work of fiction that imagines the very richest leaving to build their own utopian



society in the face of increasing regulations and the threat of forces that serve as an allegorical device for communism and collectivism writ large.

At first glance it may seem like such a philosophy would have little in the way to do with stories of a super teen webbing up bank robbers and a sizable rogues gallery



The Question is one of Ditko's greatest contributions during his time at DC Comics.

of colourful costumed super crooks. Such attempts to separate Spider-Man and other Ditko works entirely from the spectre of Randism however are doomed to go awry.

For starters, there is simply no way to deny that the earliest Spider-Man stories were explicitly influenced by Ditko's love of Rand, with the most famed example showing Peter Parker in his original, and to some thus most authentic form, decrying the collective gathering of student activism of the 1960s. In addition whilst Spider-Man is not a fundamentally Randian hero and to some there may be numerous aspects to the character that may even seem to fly in the face of Rand, he is neither the polar opposite - standing generally as a centrist political moderate, still largely acting in accordance with the established capitalist political and legal order, even if committed to stamping out corruption within it.

And whilst it has been argued that the character was somehow made radical by the intervention of Stan Lee and his supposed anti-Rand stance that is said to have led to his creative fallouts with Ditko, actual historical analysis seems to say otherwise. For instance, whilst perhaps not enough to declare Lee himself as an uncritical follower of the Randian faith to the degree of Ditko, Blake Bell's 2008 *Strange and*

Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko notes that it was indeed Stan himself who first introduced Ditko to the controversial author, to whom he was also an avid admirer and fan. Stan's status as a people pleasing moderate who contradicted himself depending on the social norms of the time further complicates any and all attempts to reinvent him in contrast to Ditko as a "political progressive", a notion now pushed through a variety of similar myths - such as the notion that the X-Men were initially created as an allegory for the civil rights movement.

It is, of course, such a political malleability that allowed Stan to work alongside both the New Deal Democrat Jack Kirby and the Randian Libertarian Ditko in creating Marvel, as well as, in later life, maintain close friendships with representatives of numerous political factions and parties, as demonstrated through his close

friendships with both Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. Conversely it is Ditko's relative lack of malleability, itself a feature of the uncompromising brutalism of Rand, that would go on to inform his desire to inject Randism into his work going forward, in ways stronger than ever before.

Whilst we have more than made clear that Ditko's own political persuasions did to a degree influence his tenure at the famed "House of Ideas", it would be Ditko's work after leaving Marvel in which he would begin to perfect the synergy between his politics and his creative output.

Perhaps one the best demonstration of such a development came by way of Ditko's 1967 creation of "The Question" for rival Charleton Comics.

An investigative vigilante of an explicitly cerebral disposition, it was in *The Question* that Ditko found his answer, a fundamentally objectivist hero who acted as a canvas for Randian ideology. *The Question* was envisioned as fundamentally Randian, his original form relatively mercilessly in his strict moral absolutist war on crime.



The Question offered a more explicitly randian hero.

In a similar vein, Ditko would also create the more aggressively Randian Mr. A, whose brutal black and white morality, uncompromising world view, and greater willingness for a passive approach to justice, letting a criminal fall to his death without any feelings of guilt, made the character perhaps the most blatant example of Ditko's growing political punditry.



Early Spider-Man stories reflected Ditko's growing objectivist leanings.

With The Question, however, Ditko managed to create a character that more closely mirrored Doctor Strange or Spider-Man in terms of serving as a demonstration of creative acumen, all whilst making him a spectre for Randian epistemology. As a result The Question in his original form was for most part appropriately mercilessly uncompromising in his view of objective black and white morality as well as wearing his philosophical nature on his proverbial sleeve without the sermon-like quality of Mr A. His general aesthetic sensibilities, both in name and design, are indicative of his reflective nature through which he would ponder the reality of the human condition. His greater subtlety and malleability also allowed The Question to establish himself as a symbol beyond his creation and still endure within a world such as the DC Universe, leading him to exist as a notable character to this day, alongside his air of mystery.

And it is not in such a dissimilar way that Ditko himself endures as his own Question or perhaps better stated as an Enigma. A stubborn and obsessive recluse enthralled with an equally uncompromising and absolutist ideology whose legacy is subject to an excess of rumours and speculation .

Yet in such a short time peeking out from the proverbial shell of his strange and troubled mind, that same riddle of a man left us with perhaps the quintessential modern superhero and lived a life that stands as its own Amazing Fantasy.

Snyder's take on DC icons like Superman involves a more passive and, at times, absolutist rendition of justice, in line with the Randian ethos.



Mr A offered a more brutal epitome of Randian ideology than the Question.

As the legacy of Rand within the superhero genre continues even beyond Ditko, with the likes of Zack Snyder's own recent DC film universe, often dubbed the "Snyderverse", channeling objectivist ideology. Combine this with Ditko's relatively recent passing in 2019, poetically a mere year after Lee's, and it is perhaps as appropriate a time as ever to look back at superherodom's original Randian orchestrator and reflect on the creativity of the strange and peculiar.



The legenda himself. RIP Steve



SAFAA AND THE TENT

“Until its capture by the British during the latter stages of the First World War, Palestine had proved itself of little interest to political cartoonists.”

Drawn to the Promised Land by Tim Benson

“I think ... it is being approached in the right way and the Jews are fully conscious of the necessity of working harmoniously with the Arabs.”

Alfred Balfour, returning from his first visit to Palestine, 100 years ago, April 1925

“Nobody who witnessed this miserable spectacle will ever forget it; nor will he wonder how some of the worst deeds in human history came to be committed in plain sight, and without shame.”

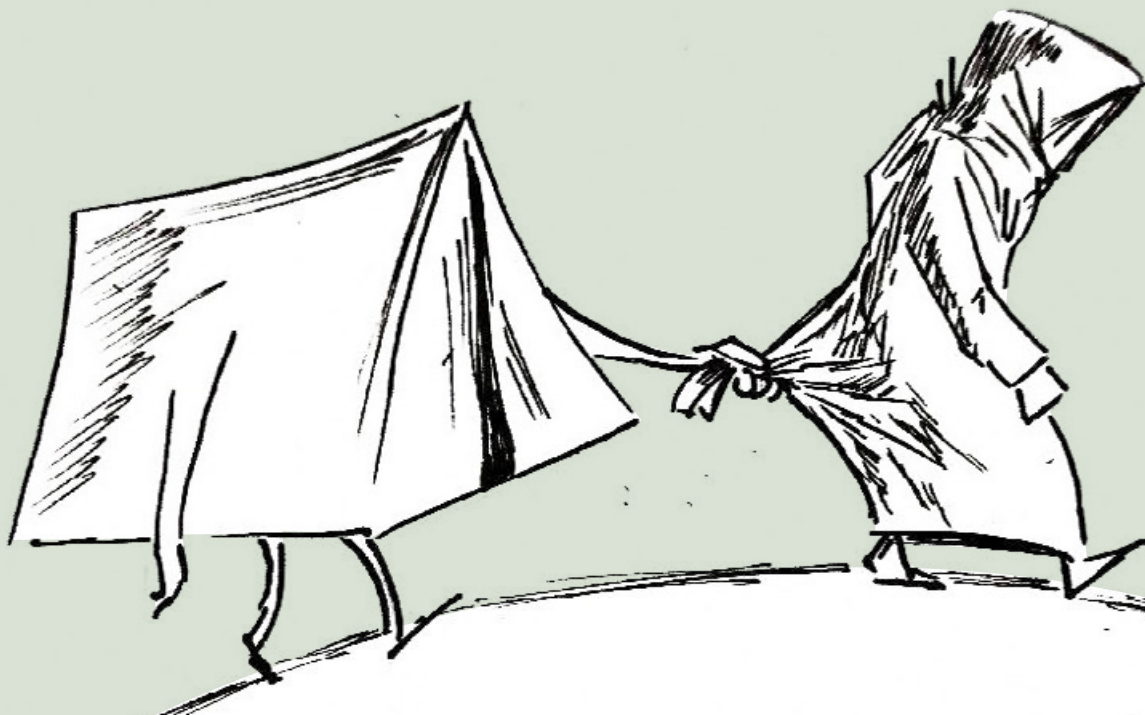
You could be forgiven for thinking that the above quotation is referring to the current atrocities in Gaza, but sadly Christopher Hitchens is talking here, in his introduction to Joe Sacco's ironically titled *Safe Area Goražde*, about another war - the one in Bosnia. Plus ça change...

The Palestinian cartoonist, Naji Al-Ali managed to annoy the powers that be in both Israel and Palestine with his cartoons. At one point he was working in Lebanon when Israel invaded in 1982. He was briefly detained there and moved after that to Kuwait to work for their newspaper *al-Qabas* on political cartoons. He may have thought he would be safer in London to which he moved in 1985 to work on the international edition of *al-Qabas*, but...

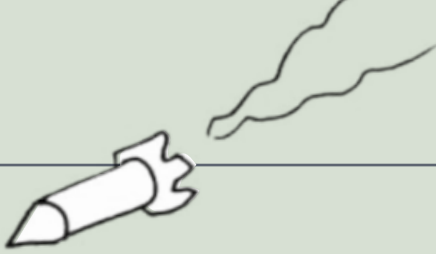
On 22nd July 1987, outside the London offices of *al-Qabas*, he was shot in the neck. He died five weeks later.

Who ordered this assassination? He always thought that one day Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, would finally kill him, but there is no proof of this. After all, he had managed to anger both sides. Since 2017, an investigation into the murder has been reopened, but no conclusions have yet been reached.

Safaa Odah is also a cartoonist, but her place of work is, still, inside Gaza. Her house has been destroyed so she lives and works in a tent. Indeed, when paper is in short supply, she actually draws directly on the fabric of the tent. As Mohammad Sabaaneh says, “When paper became as scarce as bread, safety, and solace, she did not stop - her tent walls became her new canvas, bearing witness to a resilience that could not be erased.”



**CARTOONISTS
RIGHTS**



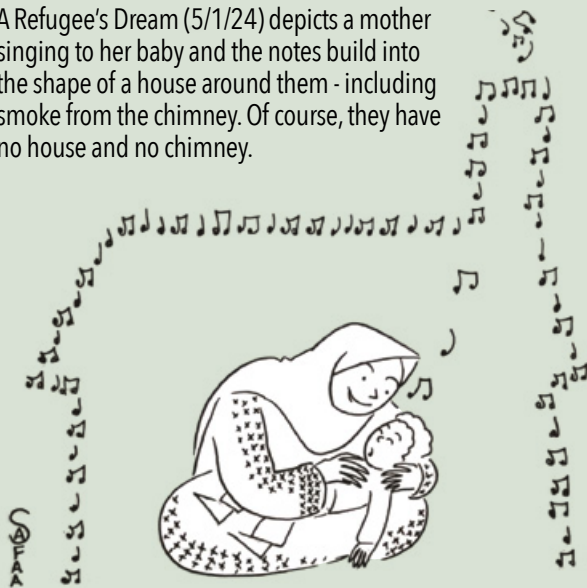
She used to use a tablet to draw, but with four hours or less of electricity per day, this is not practical. So, she draws with what is available, takes a picture with her phone, and uploads her work when there is a signal.

Safaa studied at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza. She was actually studying Household Economics and Education, but at the same time discovered her passion for art. She graduated when there was a blockade on Gaza which meant it was difficult to find a job. This left her with the time to hone her artistic skills.

Her deceptively simple looking cartoons repay close attention. The subtitle of the book Safaa and the Tent - published by LICAF in collaboration with Palestinian cartoonist Mohammad Sabaaneh - reveals what we have is a "Diary of a Cartoonist from Gaza Oct 2023 - Dec 2024". This, in effect, is reportage from the front line - live. Safaa never depicts politicians, nor does she reveal where the bombs are coming from. What does that matter really to the people who are just trying to survive?

Let us look at a few examples of her cartoons and the skilful visual way she depicts what is going on:

A Refugee's Dream (5/1/24) depicts a mother singing to her baby and the notes build into the shape of a house around them - including smoke from the chimney. Of course, they have no house and no chimney.



Silence overcame us (25/3/24): the once omnipresent speech balloons fall from their usual place above the two friends having a conversation and end up in their laps like discarded scraps of paper. Their heads are down in the second panel; there is no more to say.



And yet, on 2/8/24 a mother sews her word balloon back together after it has been torn by a bomb.

25/9/24: the baby's word balloon says "18+" which represents the curse words it has picked up in the camps.

24/11/24: the irony of hoping for rain and then being soaked. These people can't win in any situation.



Some of the drawings she was forced to make on the tent fabric are reproduced in the book. You are there, with her, in her tent.

So, how and when will this war in Gaza end? There are (mostly unreported) protests in Israel against Netanyahu; similarly there have been protests (mostly unreported) against Hamas in Gaza.

So, why does the conflict continue? Who has anything to gain? During the American Gold Rush, the money was made, not by the prospectors, but by those who supplied the tools, the picks, spades and sieves. Remember that it is not for nothing that Little Orphan Annie's guardian is called Daddy Warbucks.

MARTIN ROWSON'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

THE IDEA CAME TO ME THE FIRST TIME I WAS SERIOUSLY "CANCELLED", AS THE IDIOLECT OF OUR FOUL AND FOETID TIMES HAS IT.



You may remember, almost exactly 2 years ago, The Guardian published a cartoon by me featuring Richard Sharp, who'd just resigned as Chairman of the BBC because of the appearance of irregularities in his expediting of a loan to eternal panhandler Boris Johnson. I was accused by Dr Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust of using antisemitic tropes in my depiction of Sharp, though I was unaware of employing them as I was drawing the cartoon. My editors at The Guardian were equally in the dark.

However, once they were pointed out I couldn't see them any other way, so apologised, shut up for a couple of months, apologised again and moved on. If you're interested you can read what I wrote at the time here

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jul/26/britain-prejudices-cartoon-antisemitic-tropes.

One of the consequences of the whole sorry and sordid affair is that Dave Rich and I now regularly meet for lunch. We disagree on lots of things, but agree on others. And we like each other. I think this is called truth and reconciliation. I also gave him the original of the cartoon as I never want to see the fucking thing again for as long as I live, and if he can keep it locked away in a box of solid Kryptonite, so much the better.

Anyway, two years ago I found myself in the middle of a terrifying vortex combining online lynch mobs and my colleagues in the Tory Press, the same gang who go on and on about Free Expression and How You Can't Say Anything

These Days. En masse, heel-clicking hacks on The Telegraph and The Mail bayed for my professional destruction and personal disgrace, and continued rolling me in the shit for a full week. This is what comes with the job, and for the most part they were only doing to me what I'd previously done to them in spades.

I read very little of this stuff - that way, should you ever find yourself in a similar position, madness lies. Though



I was told of two sallies in this attempt systematically to turn me into a non-person, both of which cheered me up a tiny bit during a very dark time. One was from Dominic Lawson, writing days after the cartoon was withdrawn, asserting that Sharp and I had been friends at Oxford, though in fact we were at the same school at the same time, but never spoke or interacted so far as I'm aware. I also didn't go to Oxford. Joyously cavalier disregard

for the actual truth is perhaps unsurprising in a former editor of The Sunday Telegraph and The Spectator, though as Lawson is also a former employee of the British Security Services, failure to do your basic fact checking hints that he may have been a truly fucking awful spy.

The other kicking was from Boris

Johnson, another former Spectator editor and Telegraph hack (who now writes a regular column for The Daily Mail), who said that what I'd done (accidentally, as it happens) was far worse than anything Richard Sharp had ever ever done and that everyone involved with publishing the cartoon should lose their jobs. Sadly, whatever else he said was drowned out by the deafening clanging of the Death Knell of Irony.





Happily, after a couple of months of R&R, two summers ago I returned to the opinion pages of The Guardian, where I'm still lucky enough (and delighted) to appear each Saturday.

Still, it was around this time I began to think seriously of how to earn a living without having to work in newspapers, many of which now reek of the death stench of, say, a slide rule factory around 1975 when pocket calculators first became widely available.

Recently, though, I got cancelled again. An exhibition of political cartoons in Kingston was cancelled by the owners of the venue, on the grounds that it might offend some of the people who work in their building. The cartoons had all been previously published everywhere from The Guardian (me and my friend and colleague Nicola Jennings) to The Times, The Telegraph, the Metro and The Daily Mail. You can read about it here:

www.downthetubes.net/cartoonists-furious-after-licence-to-offend-cancelled-for-potential-offence/, but also in the Mail and The Telegraph as an appalling attack on Free Expression, the very papers that made a concerted effort to cancel me over a cartoon two years ago. Well, c'est la guerre, and I've always thought consistency was the prerogative of the small-minded.

So the role of the right-wing meejah, as we're supposed to call the fascist press (or "Oligarch Media", though the poor Telegraph is now so mad it can't find an oligarch equally mad enough to buy it), in the hounding and organised effort to cancel Kneecap we've witnessed in the last few days comes as no surprise. It is, in fact, part of the eternal game of Taunt and Counter-Taunt which has typified human interaction probably for as long as humans have been sort of human, and the use of Offence, given or taken, as an offensive weapon is universal.

The screaming hypocrisy of clutched pearls among the Whining Snowflakes of the Right is as inevitable as dumb young men saying anything guaranteed to get a rise out of their elders.

Asset Strip Tease



Although it goes without saying that "cancelling", like the word "woke," is another instance of the kind of cheapening of language the fogeys used to deplore. A proper cancelling is what they used to do in The Soviet Union, and will probably start doing soon in the United States: you don't just not get invited to a pop festival; you lose your job, then your liberty, then likely as not your life, your family gets sent to prison camps and they then airbrush you out of the snaps of the big boys. O Tempora!

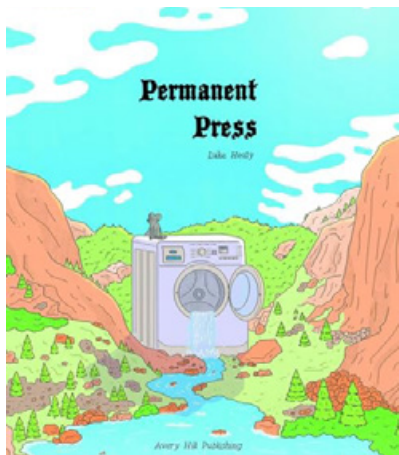
O Morons.



AVERY HILL PUBLISHING

**“THE SINGLE WORK OF WHICH I’M MOST PROUD IS
- PERMANENT PRESS, MY AVERY HILL BOOK.”**

Luke Healy, one of our guests at last year’s LICAF



In spite of quite a bit of turmoil in the world, UK graphic novels seem to be in rather a healthy place.

Tony Foster at Comic Scene is doing a great job at promoting - and getting distributed (in WHSmith, no less) - books such as Stevie White's and Fin Cramb's *Tara Togs* and Peter Pan and Pat Mills', Gary Welsh's, and Phil Vaughan's *Ragtime Soldier*.

Emma Hayley's team at Self Made Hero continue their excellent work with books on music stars such as Bowie (Low and Starman), artists like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, and Leonora Carrington (Armed with Madness), writers such as Orwell, and important books which you may have never read (or even heard of) like *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.

And we are lucky enough to also have Avery Hill.

They are yet another independent UK publishing company, based in London. They are dedicated to helping aspiring creators reach their potential and they provide a platform for talents that are, as yet, undiscovered by the mainstream. Their diverse catalogue includes works featuring psychogeographical mappings,

eco-anarchist wizards, boat-shaped coffins, and an all-female/non-binary construction crew in space (someone has to do it), and, of course, a bad canine named Greasy, and much more. Don't take my word for it, it says so quite clearly on their website.

Founded in 2012 by Ricky Miller and Dave White, Avery Hill evolved from a side project among comics enthusiasts into an award-winning, profitable business. The company has been instrumental in launching the careers of several notable creators, including especially Tillie Walden, whose debut graphic novel, *The End of Summer* was published in 2015. Tillie hails from San Diego, California and when she was a mere 16 took a course with (former LICAF guest) Scott McCloud - you've all read his *Understanding Comics*, *Reinventing Comics*, etc. Haven't you? Although UK based, not all of Avery Hill's creators come from the UK. There is a wide range of talent here.

Avery Hill's commitment to nurturing new talent is still evident in their recent projects. For instance, they have launched a Kickstarter campaign for *Second Shift*, the first full-length graphic novel by Kit Anderson, known for her work on *Safer Places*. This sci-fi story showcases the publisher's dedication to bringing unique and compelling narratives to a wider audience.

Space allows us to mention only a few more of their titles and creators.

They have a new book coming out in September, *Acid Box*, which sounds amazing. How's this for a list of creators: written by Sara Kenney, with art by James Devlin, Ria Grix, and Emma Viecele, colors by Sofie Dodgson, and letters by Hassan Otsman-Elhaou. Who better to review it than Kieron Gillen: "Dancefloor history

meets family history via psychic reality-skipping quest. Take your brain to another dimension. Pay close attention." Phew!

Adrift on a Painted Sea by Tim and Sue Bird has received very high praise. It is a beautiful book about the grief for the loss of a mother. There is an interview with Tim Bird on the website. Speaking of which, the website itself is a joy to visit, so put down *Between the Lines* (but come back soon) and type averyhillpublishing.com into your browser.

You will also find there an interview with J. Webster Sharp, the creator of *The Scrapbook of Life and Death* where she talks about newspaper clippings, the secret lives of humans, and art as exorcism. Of course.

And then there's Avery Hill Publishing's Ricky Miller who talks to Katriona Chapman (*Breakwater and Follow Me In*) about the cultural influences on her work in comics.

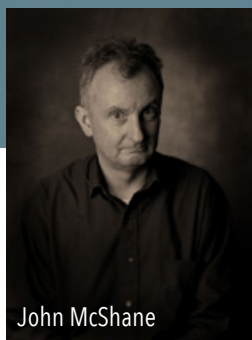
Until recently, Avery Hill was doubling in size each year which is quite an achievement. With costs going up for every aspect of publishing, they will probably slow down a bit - although, as you can tell, they already have an extensive catalogue. Since Brexit, selling into Europe has been a major hassle for all publishers. And as Ricky says, "There isn't really a good solution to it at the moment."

Avery Hill's influence extends within and beyond the UK with their titles receiving recognition from the likes of the *New York Times*, *The Herald Scotland* (if you are reviewed there, you have made it), and the *Comics Journal*. This acclaim underscores their role in shaping the landscape of independent graphic novels.



DESERT ISLAND COMICS

WITH JOHN MCSHANE



John McShane



John McShane has really done very little with his life. He uses the excuse of living in Gourock as a child opposite the American base for nuclear submarines and the shops flooded with American comics as an excuse to sit at home reading these comics all day. Still, he does seem to have read a few interesting ones...

Beezer Book 1963

In the UK for a long time, hardback Christmas annuals of your favourite comics were a really big event. Unfortunately, many of the annuals were a disappointment. Whereas in TV Century 21, beautifully printed in photogravure, there was an attempt to tie in all the Gerry Anderson productions into one interconnected Marvelous universe, with Steve Zodiac of Fireball XL5 meeting the characters from Stingray and Lady Penelope from Thunderbirds, the poorly produced TV21 annuals featured Burke's Law and My Favourite Martian! The annuals, even to a young boy, looked as though they had been put together in a week or less.

Not so, the Beezer Book of 1963. The cover is beautifully designed, a combination of cartoons and paintings. Each story

within is very well crafted, both story and art. Every cartoon strip is genuinely funny, and especially Cap'n Hand and his Merry Mutineers which drops black outlines from the background of a large panel to give an effect similar to that of Disney's multiplane camera: Cap'n Hand has been tricked into grabbing a bundle of balloons which carry him far above the pirate ship and he stands out against the background to emphasise his plight.

The Story-Teller of Planet X is a properly realised sci-fi story with painted panels. There are several double page Magic Moments in History depicting events like the discovery of America by Columbus and James Watt from Greenock thinking up the steam engine while watching the lid of a boiling kettle bobbing up and down.

But the paintings accompanying the prose story Yellow Eye and the ones for the story of Samson have never been equaled in any Christmas annual.



The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics

Everyone who is interested in comics should have this wonderful book by Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams. Bill Blackbeard is owed so much for his almost single-handed preservation of American newspaper comic strips.

There is just so much incredible stuff in this collection. Polly and Her Pals by Cliff Sterrett deserves to be kept in print forever. It - and its supporting strip Dot/Dash (shades here of Krazy Kat) - are just beautifully drawn, approaching expressionism in style. It is truly unique.

Mutt and Jeff by Bud Fisher is said to be the favourite strip of no less than James Joyce. Read it with Finnegan's Wake by your side and you will see why.

Wash Tubbs is a precursor of the kind of adventure story that Terry and the Pirates is famous for. Roy Crane created something truly enduring here. Crane was an early user of duotone boards to create layered effects in his panels. Marvellous stuff!

There is an extended sequence of Little Orphan Annie by Harold Gray. How he managed to keep up the following discipline on a daily strip is beyond me. Every day moved the plot ahead by one day and the Sundays were designed to be read and followed even if your daily papers did not carry the daily strip! What!

I envy you if you have never encountered these masters of comic strip art. Everlasting joy awaits!



Judge Dredd America

Judge Dredd was never meant to be the hero. Alan Grant and John Wagner quickly "encountered the natural limitations of satire as a storytelling tool - there will be those who, either through innocence or ignorance, cannot see beyond the surface of the mirror that is being held up". Judge Cal anticipated Trumpton by decades, but did anyone listen?

Dredd did. "Then let this be a lesson to you, citizen. Democracy's not for the people."

The Judge Dredd Magazine launched in September 1990, just as the Thatcher regime was reaching its end. It featured America, "beautifully painted by Scottish artist Colin MacNeil," as Michael Molcher notes in *I Am The Law*. "America' is an intensely political noir in which Dredd is the villain in his own comic." America Jara is the child of Puerto Rican immigrants. Her compelling story still brings a tear to my eye. It is one of John Wagner's most powerful scripts. Democracy is under threat again - by Trump, Putin, Netanyahu, and so many others. Is anyone listening?

L'Homme du Somalie aka À l'Ouest de l'Eden

Between 1977 and 1980, the publisher Sergio Bonelli commissioned Hugo Pratt, at the top of his game and fame with both Corto Maltese and Scorpions of the Desert, to produce some self-contained short albums. This led to four of Pratt's most interesting works,

all of them called L'Homme de... (The Man From...). The four places were the Caribbean, Somalia, Brazil, and Canada (the last one is better known as Jesuit Joe). Bonelli was hoping for more albums, but his dictatorial style did not suit Pratt, so the series was cut short.

The most fascinating of these is L'Homme du Somalie aka To the West of Eden. This hallucinatory story sees British Lieutenant Abel Robinson separated from his companions. He is looking for a rebel called Kayin, the Avenger. On his journey, he encounters a talking skeleton, Ewa, Lilith, Samaël, and Seth, Adam's third son (see Genesis 4:25). Ethiopian legends tell of Adam's first wife Lilith and Ewa's other son "Kayin, the disinherited, he who killed his brother". Does all this happen in "our" world or is Robinson merely imagining things from being out in the sun too long?

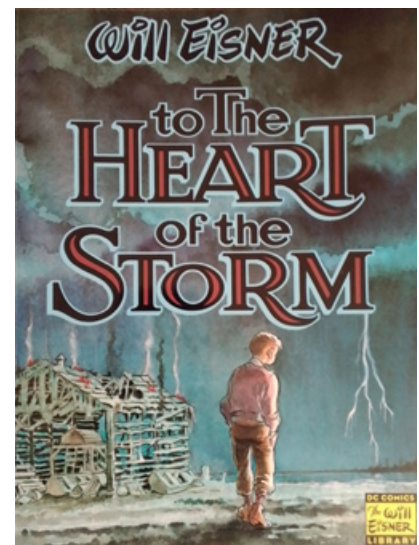
Once you have read this book, you will never forget it. I have been haunted by it since my first encounter.

A Contract with God/To the Heart of the Storm

It was when I was with Will and Ann Eisner at the Wicklow Comics Festival south of Dublin, that I learned about the death of their daughter Alice, at only 16 of leukemia. "Eisner was overwhelmed, not as much by grief as with rage. Although he was not a religious man, he felt as if some kind of agreement had been broken, as if he had lived a decent, moral life only to be punished all the same - or, worse yet, that Alice had been punished." (From Michael Schumacher's biography) In other words, God had broken the Contract. Back home I reread the lead story in *A Contract with God* and realised that Will was channeling here his own feelings about her loss.

In order to escape to the island with both these books, I stuck them together as the boat was sinking. They are as close as Will got to an autobiography. Contract did not invent the term "Graphic Novel". It was coined by Richard Kyle in 1964. But because Will insisted his book be published by a "real" publisher, Baronet Press, we finally got graphic literature displayed in "real" bookshops.

To the Heart of the Storm is a genuine masterpiece. One sequence that has always stayed with me concerns Will's father. He had left his shtetl in 1910 to seek employment in Vienna. He did indeed get employment - painting murals in Catholic chapels. [Eisner means "iceman" and the shtetl was on a river which iced up, so that the ice could be used to store food. It is difficult to determine exactly, but that shtetl seems to be one destroyed by the Nazis to build Auschwitz...] Shmuel socialises in a Viennese cafe which is always crowded with "painters, writers, and intellectuals". Until Archduke

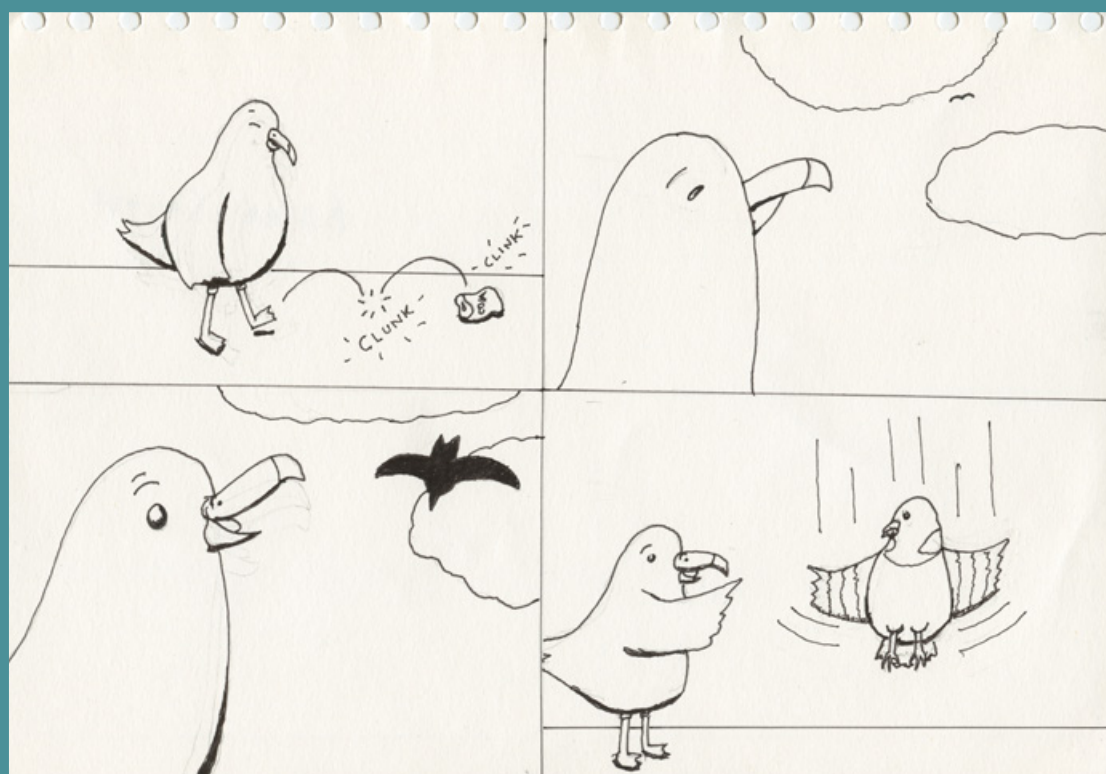


Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo. Suddenly Shmuel and the waiter are the only ones left. Fortunately, he wised up quickly enough to head for New York where he used his mural training to do backdrops for the Yiddish Theatre. A lucky escape.

There is, of course, a lot more to both these books than I have space for here. But I assume that, if you do not already have them, you have stopped reading to head to your nearest bookstore.

EXCLUSIVE TO BTL

LICAF piloted a short comics course at HMP Haverigg February-April 2025 under the guidance of Sim Leech and with input from Mollie Ray. The group created some amazing short comics all of which will appear as an anthology shortly. We have printed one here, anonymously of course, and plan to feature more in due course and at the festival too.







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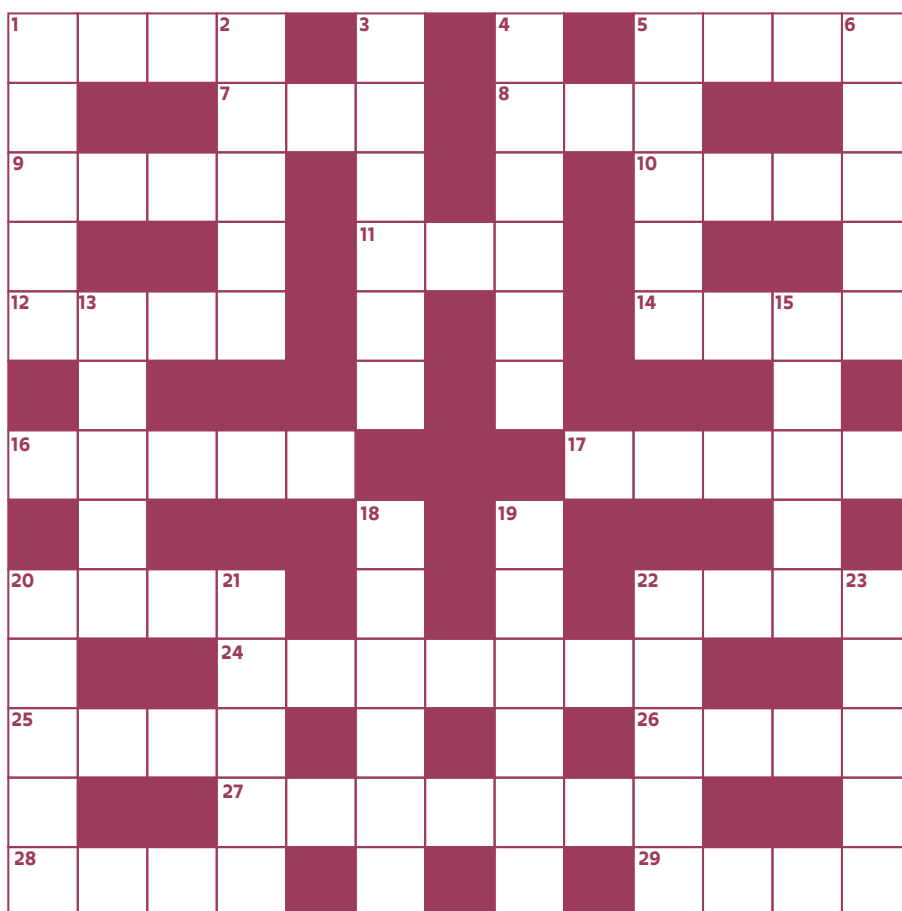
26-28 SEPTEMBER 2025

LICAF 2025 CROSSWORD

Test out your knowledge of LICAF festival, Cumbria and all things comics.

Send your completed crosswords to us with your chance to win free passes for this year's festival, signed artwork and much more.

You may also find some hints to this year's guests in your answers. Good luck



Across

1. Which famous James appeared in the LICAF -commissioned 2015 giclee print by Darwyn Cooke
5. Luxury relaxation treatments available at some Bowness hotels
7. Not harming the environment
8. Most common tree in Cumbria
9. A 'Place' 4 Comics hosted by Marc Jackson
10. Vieceli who hosted the 2024 festival opening event
11. US Richmond who attended the festival in 2024
12. Cumbria-based comic book artist and LICAF festival patron '..... Phillips'
14. William Wordsworth's profession?
16. Birthplace of Twins Cartoon, part of the '10 years to save the world' project
17. Scottish comic featuring Desperate Dan and Bananaman
20. Often seen flying over Lake Windermere
22. Jackson who hosted LITTLE LICAF last year
24. County where the Lake International Comic Art Festival is located
25. Birthplace of Gustavo Vargas
26. Character created by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson 'Black
27. New LICAF festival patron's canine call
28. Swedish artist who created Twelfth Night for SelfMadeHero's Manga Shakespeare series
29. Main funder of LICAF is '..... Council England'

Down

1. Owner of Springfield Nuclear Power Plant
2. What type of creature is Jack Kirby's Etrigan?
3. Creator of Peter Rabbit
4. Character created by Bob Kane
5. Animal seen on this years festival artwork
6. Creator of a long-suffering bunny and a mischievous monkey
13. British comic featuring Dan Dare
15. Soft down from ducks found on the lakeside
18. People who like to play video consoles
19. Book by Comics Laureate Bobby Joseph 'Scotland
20. Country associated with Manga
21. Underwater activity you can do in Lake Windermere
22. LICAF Touring Exhibition of Japanese comics 'Make Mine
23. Autobiographical comic by Charlot Kristensen

How to Enter

Once you have downloaded and completed this interactive crossword, email it to maheen@comicartfest.com for a chance of winning one of our great prizes.

If you prefer to go old-school, print out this page and send over a photo or scan of your completed crossword.

Entries must be in before 25 July 2025. Prize winners will be contacted by email and names shown in the next issue of Between The Line

To download the interactive pdf go to:

www.comicartfestival.com/festival-2025-crossword



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