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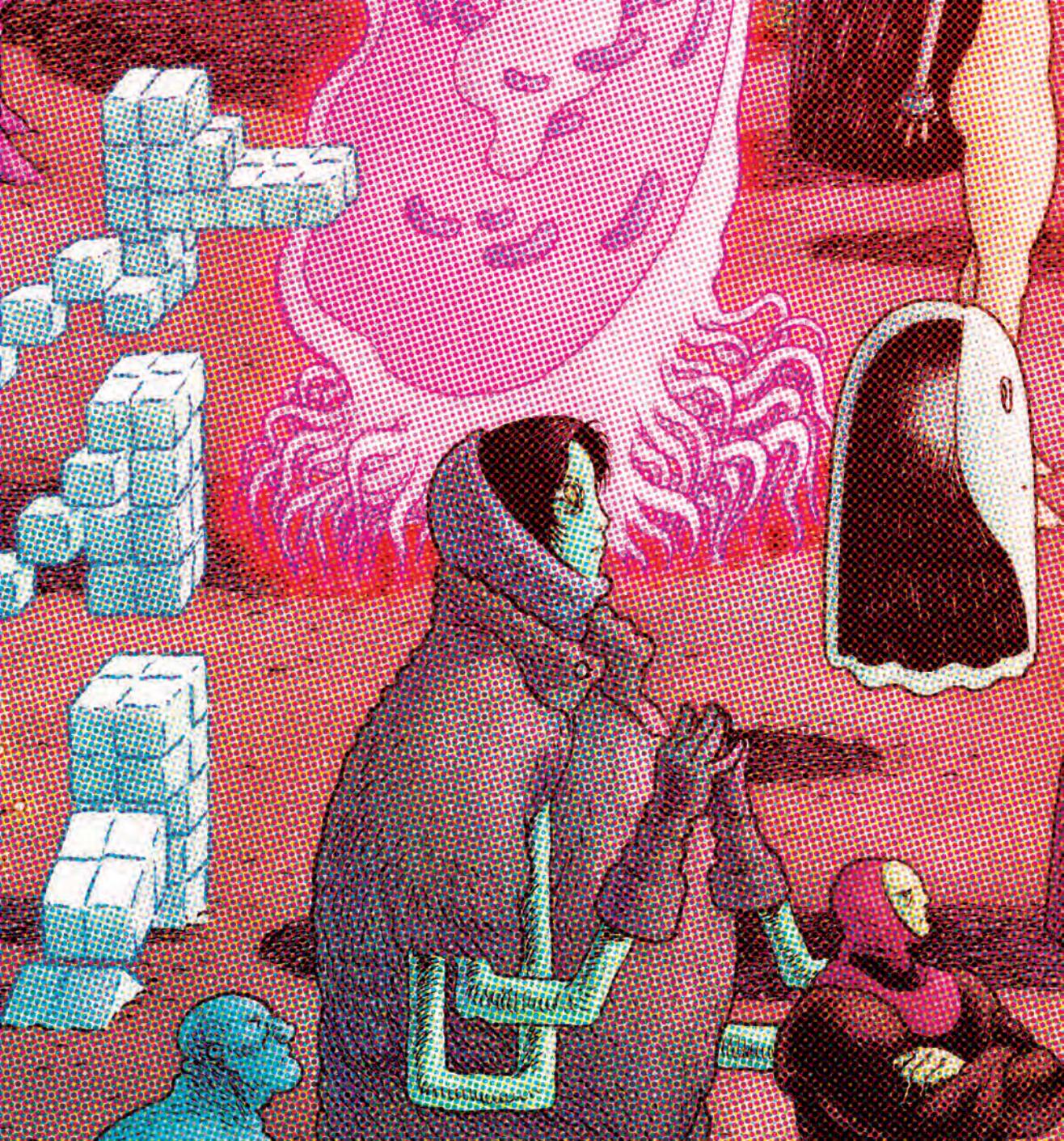
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WHY I LOVE OUTER SPACE

Brittany Matter

 @brittanymatter

WHY I LOVE VIDEO GAMES

Emi Lenox

 @emibot

WHY I LOVE HORROR MOVIES

Noelle Webster

 @noellewebster

WHY I LOVE TOYS

Brooklyn Allen

 @brooklyn_a_allen

WHY I LOVE

"SPOTTIEOTTIEDOPALISCIOUS"

David Brothers

 @brothersNothers

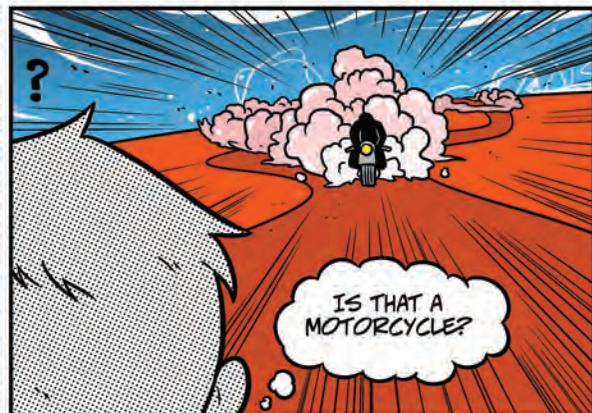
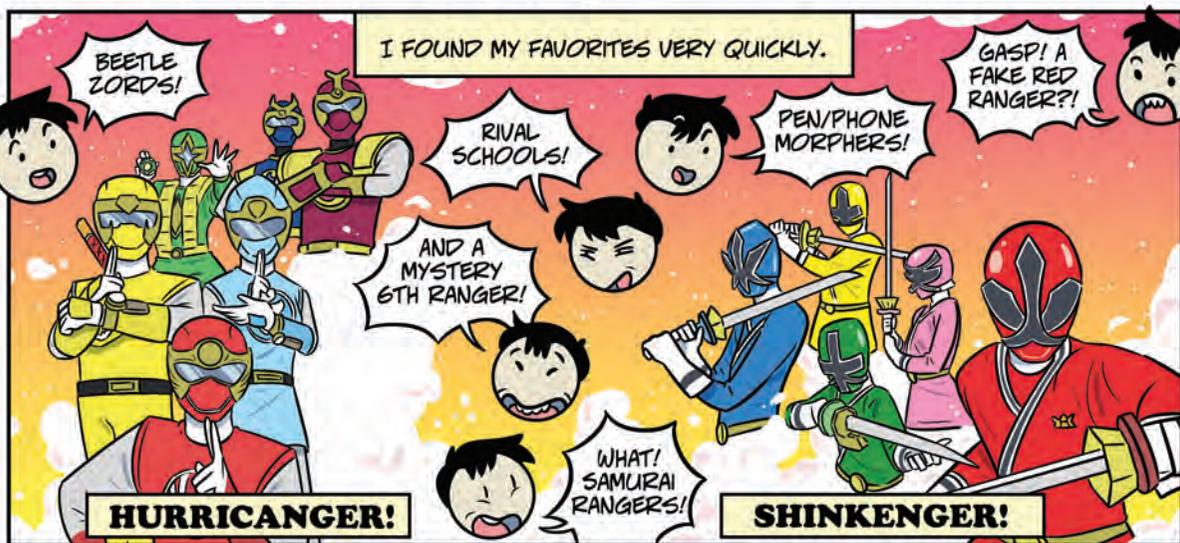
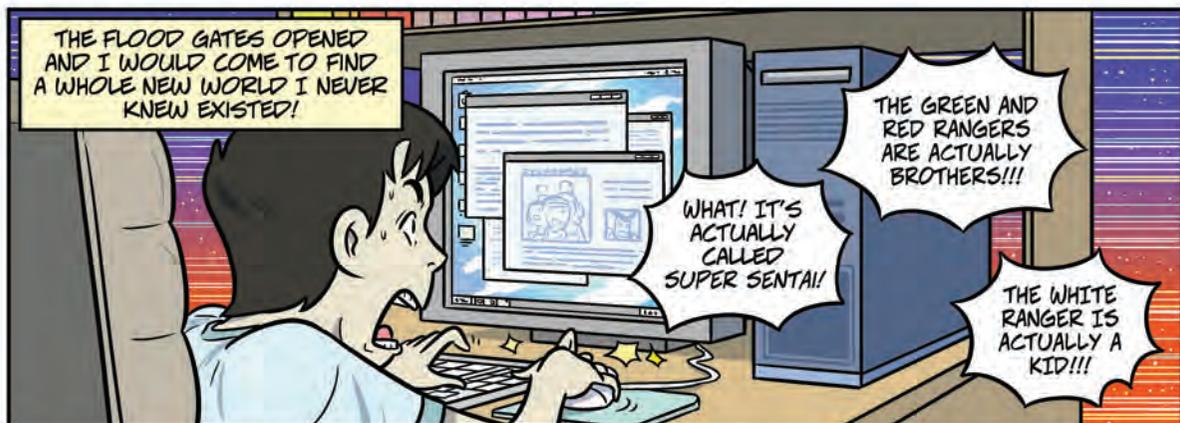
SHAMELESS PROMOTION

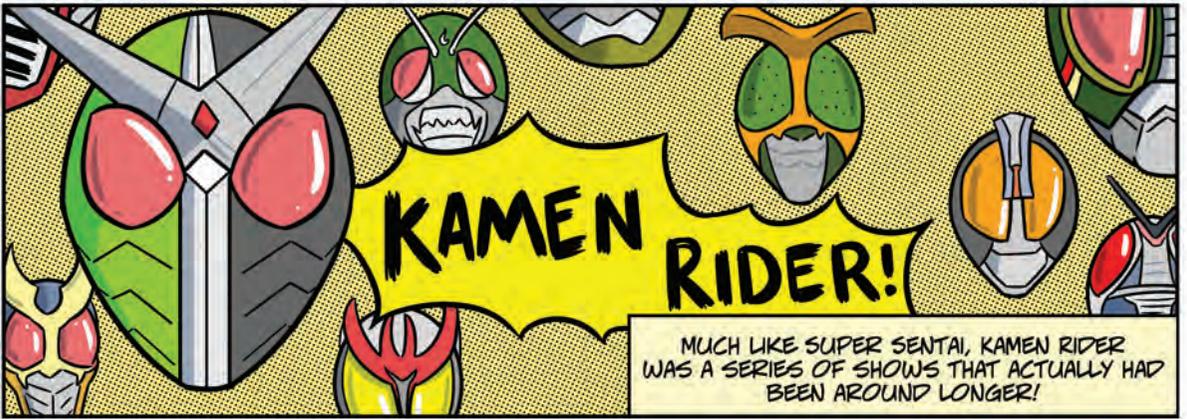
Caleb Goellner



IT WASN'T UNTIL I WENT AND SAW THE MMPR MOVIE WITH MY MOM THAT A REVELATION WAS MADE.







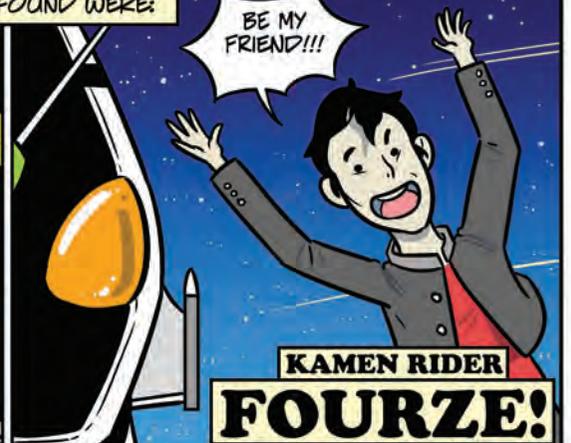
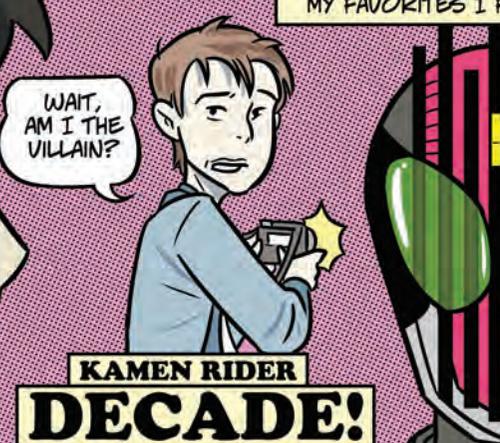
MUCH LIKE SUPER SENTAI, KAMEN RIDER WAS A SERIES OF SHOWS THAT ACTUALLY HAD BEEN AROUND LONGER!

I FOUND MYSELF BEING INTO THESE SHOWS EQUALLY IF NOT MORE SO THAN SUPER SENTAI, BECAUSE IT FOCUSED ON ONE TO TWO CHARACTERS AT A TIME.

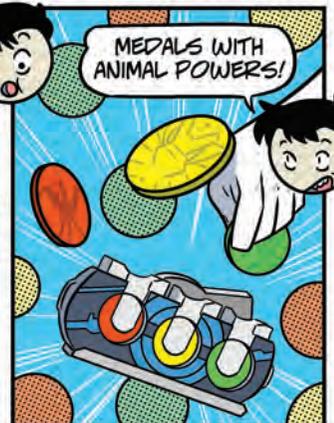
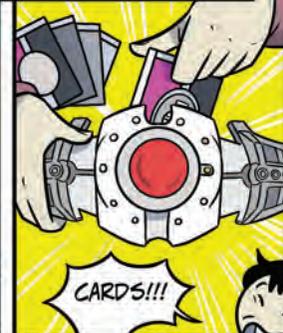
ALSO MUCH LIKE SUPER SENTAI, THERE WERE TRANSFORMATIONS!

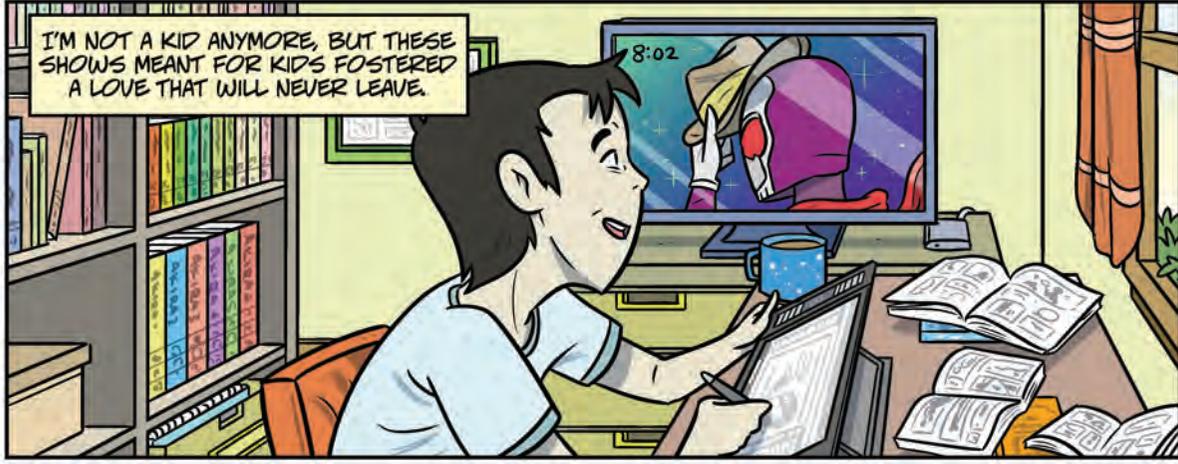
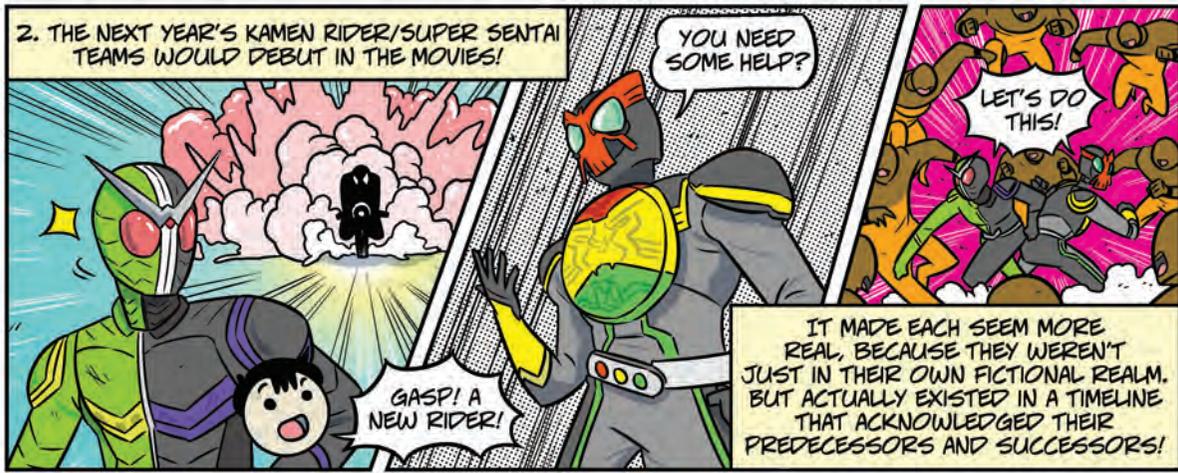
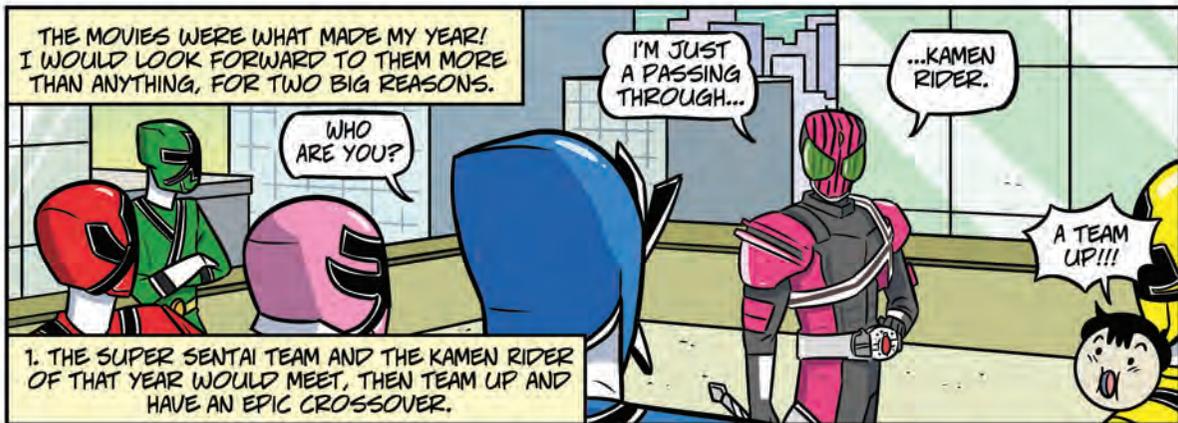


MY FAVORITES I FOUND WERE:



EACH YEAR THERE'S A NEW THEME/APPROACH, AND EACH HAD UNIQUE 'BUCKLERS'.







Why I Love Outer Space

By Brittany Matter (Art by OMOCAT)



“Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages—” er, ahem. Yes, that’s how I started my application essay for college, with the opening theme of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** to convey how much the show inspired me to study astrophysics and become an astronaut. Somehow, they let me in. Little did they know, I would not become that (yet, there’s still hope) but instead a comic book editor and budding sci-fi novelist, incorporating the vast sea of stars into most of my work. My mission now is to explore why I love outer space, and the short answer is that it’s eye-opening and wildly inspiring.

As it turns out, I have many reasons for why I love outer space, so I’ve tried to narrow them down into a modified acrostic poem:

Imagination: Sometimes I think outer space is where imagination lives, among and in between the stars as if Dark Matter clearly exists and influences everything around it. Just because it exists and considering its twinkling depths, it leads me to imagine a better world, a world of possibilities. Who knows, maybe outer space is my imagination’s muse?

Location: Across human history, the need to understand our universe and our place in it inspired many inventions. Telescopes and radio dishes record what we can and cannot see or hear with the naked eye and ear. The Ramsden Sextant and the Bygrave Position-Line Slide Rule aided in celestial navigation whether by sea or air respectively.

These inventions helped give people a better understanding of our collective or individual location on Earth. These scientific advancements, among others, laid the groundwork for the Hubble Space Telescope and interstellar travel such as the Apollo moon landings. Of course, I’m skipping over significant history with that kind of generalization so forgive me, but this is an essay, not a history lecture. ;)

Origins: Knowing definitive answers to the origin of Earth species is a possibility. Don’t get me wrong, I ascribe to evolution, that humans came from ooze like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Jokes aside, I believe in science, okay? But what if there’s something we’re missing and it’s out there in space?! The knowledge that awaits us out there presents endless possibilities and opportunities to discover what we don’t know yet.

Valuable data: What we have discovered so far by exploring in, and outside of, our little blue dot is valuable to scientists and citizens alike. Data collected on Earth and via outer space technologies led to a greater understanding of the periodic table, aka the building blocks of our world. I discussed why I love outer space with my chemical engineer husband and he said to me, “Every complex element originated from a star. No carbon or gold originated on Earth.” He’s certainly correct as most of the elements in the periodic table formed in stars or the Big Bang. Understanding the

table and its application in scientific research and experiments leads to advancements in medicine, power generation, and even the aluminum we know and use today at home, all to hopefully improve people's lives.

Eye-opening: When I was young – and even to this day – gazing into a pocket of our universe remains an eye-opening experience. My desire to understand astronomy and the cosmos led me to visit Pine Mountain Observatory in Bend, Oregon. The site is host to three large reflector telescopes where I observed a globular cluster and a binary star in the Big Dipper. As the site is located on a mountaintop and far from ambient light, I swear I could touch the stars while I was there, but most importantly, it was a humbling realization that I am merely a speck of stardust in the universe. It also made me think thoughtfully about what's important in life while I get to live in this world.

Science and mathematics: I love outer space because it stokes scientific progress and there is always something to learn. Understanding mathematics and engineering led Katherine Jonson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson to solve the heat shield problems facing NASA's space program during the Space Race in the 1960s. Their work, as portrayed in Margot Lee Shetterly's **Hidden Figures**, led to the successful launch and landing of Friendship 7, and Jonson went on to contribute her calculations to the Apollo 11 and Space Shuttle missions. Thanks to the **Dark Universe** planetarium show

at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, I now understand what Dark Matter is, how it holds our clustered galaxies together, and how scientists use supernovas to measure cosmic distances and speeds, including the expansion rate of the universe. The rate is accelerating and has been for the past 5 billion years, and the pressure causing it is Dark Energy. "Nobody yet understands Dark Energy, though it appears to be powerful enough to shape the course of cosmic destiny."

Philosophy: The pursuit of wisdom comes in many forms and one of them came in the form of an Italian polymath known as, Galileo Galilei. He was a pivotal figure in the transition from natural philosophy to modern science and his views on both were radical during his time as they contradicted Holy Scripture in the Roman Catholic Church. He also created the Galilean telescope and, turning it to the stars, he saw the phases of Venus, craters on Earth's moon, and discovered four moons of Jupiter. After learning about Galileo's contributions to philosophy and science, and how his work separated science from philosophy and religion, for me as it was for many others before me, it was a leap forward in human thought.

Art: I love outer space because of the art and film it inspires. Vincent van Gogh's **The Starry Night**, Gene Roddenberry's **Star Trek**, Luc Besson's **The Fifth Element**, Arthur C. Clarke's **2001: A Space Odyssey** and its ensuing film, and the cultural

phenomenon that is Star Wars, to name a few. Without these artistic imaginings of the cosmos, I may not see things as abstractly or have learned valuable leadership lessons from Captain Jean-Luc Picard. I may not have imagined the future or thought existentially about life and artificial intelligence; or be so inspired to pursue storytelling. I would certainly not be who I am today without them.

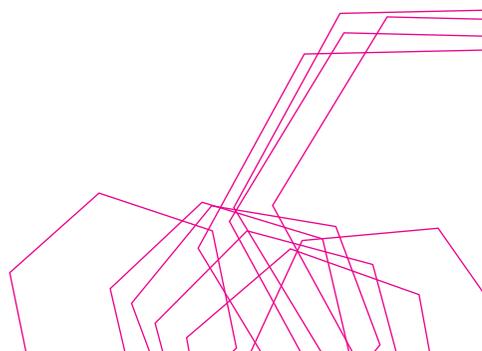
Creed: My friend Marie and I discuss religion often. She once reminded me that all societies, mythologies, and religions have a fascination with the heavens, which leads to expansive storytelling. She mentioned Sufi dance, the turn of the "whirling dervish" and how it's meant to align the human form with the spinning of celestial bodies. It was a lovely reminder of why I love space: it inspires people's fundamental belief systems to create spiritual rituals, meaning, and stories that connect people. It also reminded me that all religions share the commonality that there's more than just us in the universe. My love for space can get a bit sappy, and maybe that's because it's my creed. I believe in outer space and all it offers whether tangible or not.

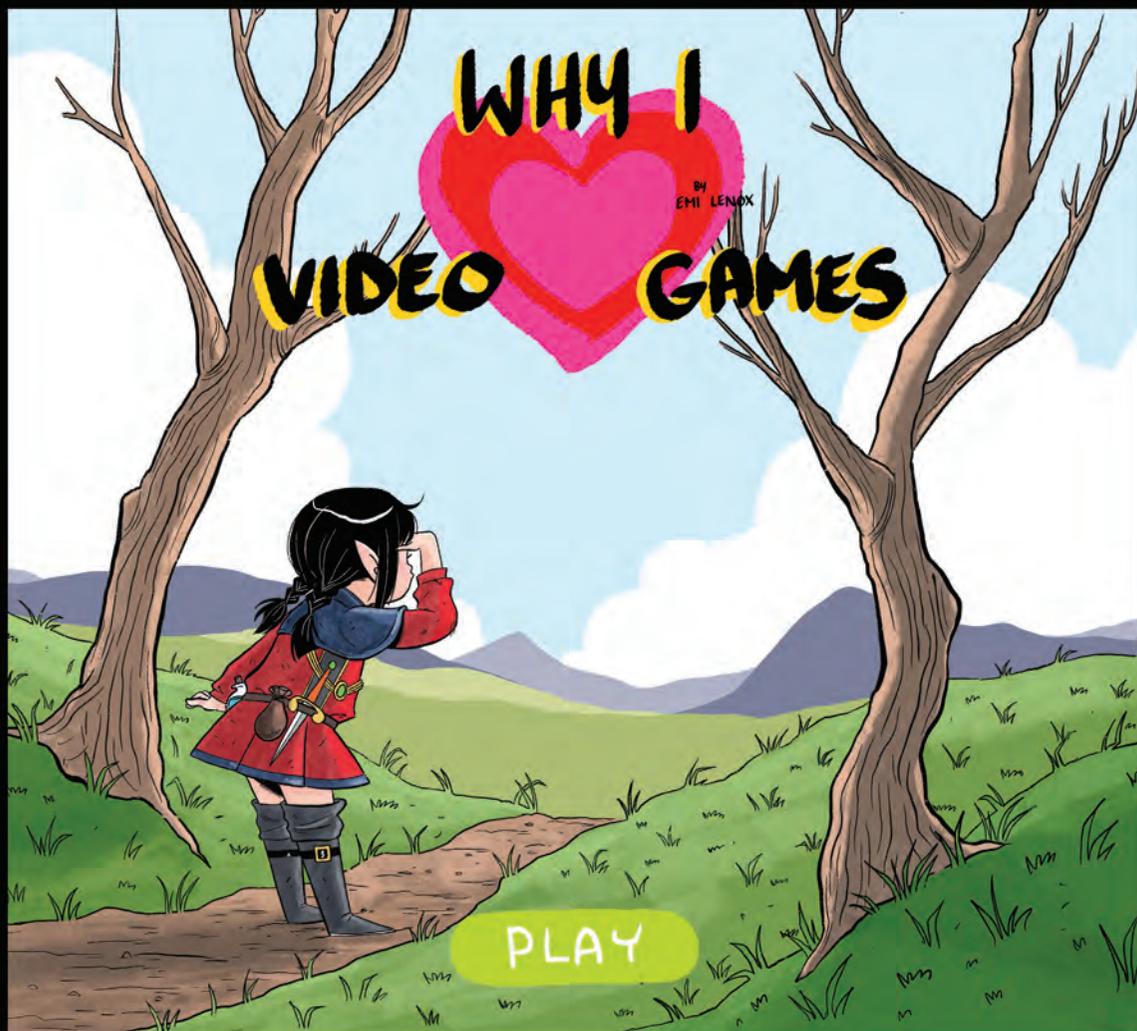
Extra-terrestrial life: Extra-terrestrial life must exist in our universe and I say this with conviction because of what astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson said so eloquently in his book *Death by Black Hole*, "To declare that Earth must be the only planet with life in the universe would be inexcusably bigheaded of us." Whether we come

upon alien life or they us remains to be seen, though recently, liquid water was detected on Mars and as water is one of the essential elements needed for life as we know it, the potential for finding extra-terrestrial life increases. I hope we encounter alien life and that they are different from us so that we can learn from one another. A wacky alien like Mork of Mork & Mindy would also suffice.

To me, space is a hope manifested – hope for a better future, hope to discover we're not alone in the universe. I know the latter is cliché, but seriously, I ask myself sometimes as an agnostic atheist, "Why do people seek God and spirituality? Does it stem from a kind of loneliness or a thirst for knowledge? What if, when we find alien life it uproots everything, rocking us to our core with the knowledge that we are not alone? What will happen?" Hopefully all good things. I don't like to be too doomy where it concerns first contact.

I love space because it makes me think outside of myself, it influences people to create and "explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before!" 





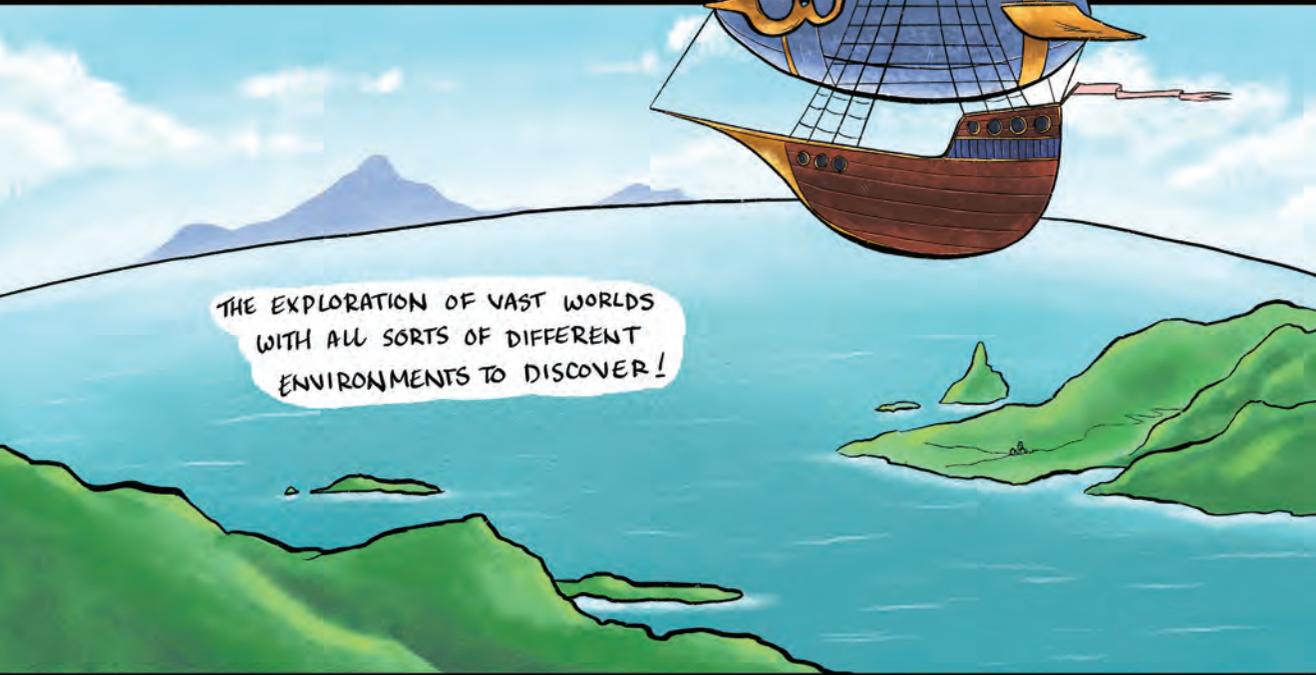


I LOVE HOW POWERFUL THEY MAKE ME FEEL.

I HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE THE WORLD AND ACTUALLY VANQUISH EVIL!



I LOVE HOW THERE'S A LONG CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO DO AND ACHIEVEMENTS TO UNLOCK.



THE EXPLORATION OF VAST WORLDS WITH ALL SORTS OF DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS TO DISCOVER!



AND IF YOU FAIL, YOU CAN ALWAYS TRY AGAIN AND AGAIN.

I STARTED PLAYING AN MMORPG* WITH A FRIEND BUT EVENTUALLY THEY STOPPED PLAYING.

* MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME



I KEPT PLAYING ALONE BECAUSE I WASN'T SURE HOW TO INTERACT AND MEET OTHER PLAYERS -

AND THEN A COUPLE OF PLAYERS STARTED INTERACTING WITH ME!

RHAE

HP 8139



/SAY OMG. THANK YOU! =o

/SAY HI! IT LOOKED LIKE YOU NEEDED SOME HELP! =)



WE ENDED UP ADVENTURING TOGETHER... A LOT!

SOMETIMES WE'D JUST SIT AND CHAT ABOUT OUR LIVES AS THOUGH WE WERE JUST HANGING OUT.

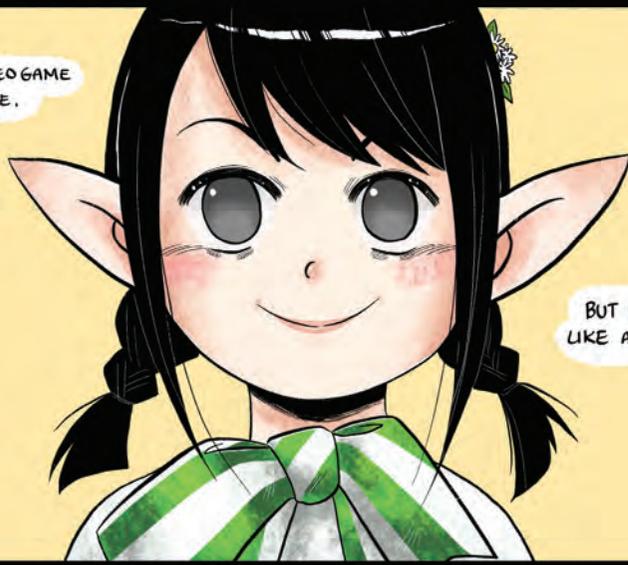


SO MANY LAUGHS WERE SHARED AND EVEN TEARS WHEN TOUGH TIMES IN REAL LIFE LOOMED.



POTION.

MAKING FRIENDS IN A VIDEOGAME WAS A NEW CONCEPT FOR ME.



BUT NOW IT FEELS LIKE A NATURAL THING!

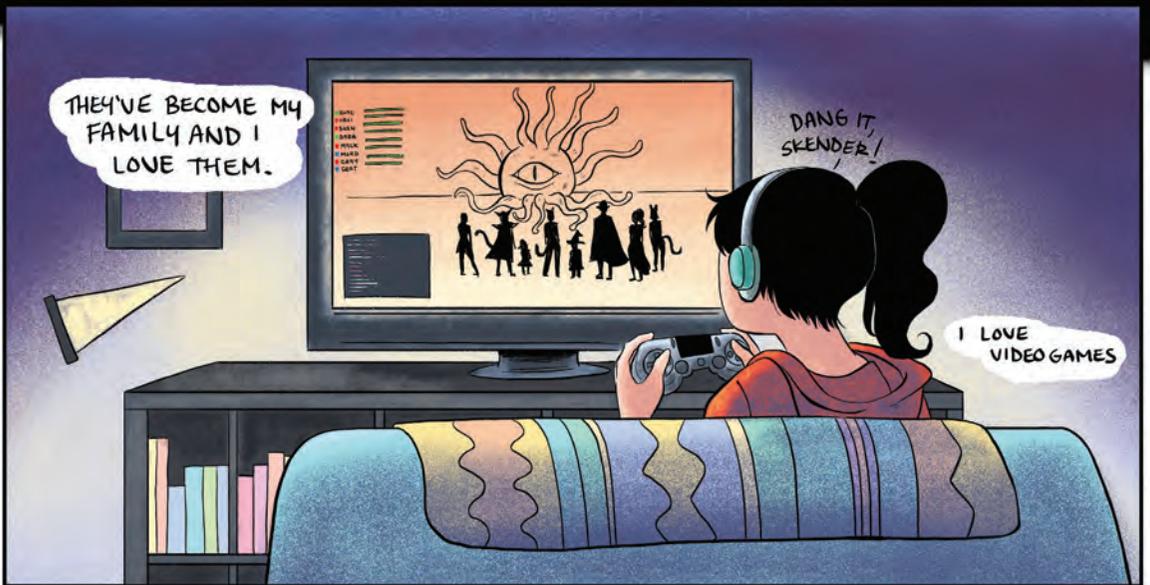
MY FRIENDS LIST GREW AND GREW AND TOGETHER WE FOUGHT AND DEFEATED MANY POWERFUL FOES.



THEY'VE BECOME MY FAMILY AND I LOVE THEM.

DANG IT, SKENDER!

I LOVE VIDEO GAMES





Why I Love Horror Movies

By Noelle Webster (Art by Robbi Rodriguez)



Picture this: It's 6 AM, you (age 9) and your sister (age 12) are huddled in front of a TV under a blanket, and you're watching **I Know What You Did Last Summer** hoping your parents don't hear you. The idea of your parents walking in is even scarier than the movie—that feeling that you're seeing something you're not supposed to. That's how it was for me, anyway, when I first fell in love with horror. I loved the mystery, I loved that my sister and I were in on something together, and I felt **terrible** for Sarah Michelle Geller (who gets it way worse than anyone else in that movie, as blondes in horror often do).

My older sister once watched **Carrie** at a sleepover, and it freaked her out so much she had to be taken home. After that, "horror" was a Bad Word and not allowed in our household. So, naturally, it's always fascinated me. I was told I couldn't watch **X-Files**, so I never missed an episode of **X-Files**. You know how it is. But even if that's how I first came to horror, it's a genre I would have fallen in love with no matter what.

A great thing about horror is how what's "scary" can be so subjective from person to person. What scares people? What scares **me**? Turns out, it's ghosts. Ghosts scare me. They play by their own rules, they're already dead so you can't kill them, and they are extremely unreasonable. I've never personally tried to reason with a ghost, but horror movies tell me it's **exhausting**. They either want a 10-step appeasement process or, worse, they don't want anything.

They just want to scare you to death.

For me, the best ghost stories tend to be J-horror. I find them incredibly scary. Unlike horror movies where ghosts tend to pop in for a jump scare, the ghosts in J-horror movies tend to remain on screen to scare the poor victim as long as possible. Kayako from the **Ju-On** series (adapted as **The Grudge** here in the US) is a great example. At the end of 2002's **Ju-On** (spoilers follow!), social worker Rika is in the cursed house and her time is up. Sitting in the doorway of the house, she watches as vengeful ghost Kayako slowly crawls down the stairs towards her, all while Kayako croaks out her infamous death rattle. The slow, building dread is almost unbearable and remains one of the scariest things I've ever seen. Kayako is unearthly, and she can't be stopped.

Since I find Kayako so terrifying and unearthly, naturally, I had to watch every single one of her movies. It can be fun to be scared! If you've ever seen a scary movie in a theater, then you'll know that after making it through a particularly stressful or scary scene, there's a palpable sense of relief.

But "horror" doesn't have to mean "scary"! The eternal debate: Is [insert movie] a horror movie? Movie lovers and critics alike love to fight about this. My stance on the topic is if you're debating it... then it's probably a horror movie. Slashers, psychological thrillers, creature features, ghost stories, dramas, comedies – they're all horror! Typically, if someone is

declaring a horror movie “NOT a horror movie,” it’s because they think of “horror” as a dirty word or a trashy genre. But horror fans know it’s something to be proud of, which brings me to my next point!

One of the things I love most about horror is the horror community. The horror community will rally behind first-time directors, low-budget masterpieces, foreign movies, short films, and constantly seeks out hidden gems. The horror community will embrace a movie that might not be the **best** movie as long as it has a unique concept, a great set piece or, more often than not, a memorable kill. My favorite? The kitchen appliance kill! Blenders, coffee makers, garbage disposals, microwaves – anything will do!

I also love horror movies because I love **movies**. It’s fascinating to see how horror movies are made, and horror movies have some of the most interesting **b e h i n d - t h e - s c e n e s** features in Hollywood. Actors are put through the ringer – whether they’re being doused in buckets of blood, smashing through glass, wearing crazy contacts, or getting done up in maniacal make-up or monster parts.

Horror is a genre that keeps the craft of practical special effects relevant, because practical effects

are inherently real unto themselves. They simply sell horror scenarios as tangible, believable threats. A giant latex monster spewing buckets of blood-red corn syrup convinces the viewer that the fear on display in a given horror movie is justified – primal terror seems real and immediate. CGI is fantastic for creating unreal worlds populated with fantastic characters, but in horror the effect can pull viewers out of their suspense. Practical effects make unreal evil seem all too tactile.

Horror is the rare genre where in which franchises are built off of villains, adding a layer of unpredictability to horror that I love. With the notable exception of Ash from the **Evil Dead** franchise, the biggest horror franchises are built on everyone’s favorite baddies – whether it’s Leatherface, Pinhead, or Chucky. With the villain being the main selling point to

the audience, I never know if the good guys will win... or if Jigsaw is set to twist the knife with his own predetermined finale. Plus, every horror fan has their favorite icon that they’ll go to bat for. That’s

how we end up with mash-up movies such as **Freddy vs. Jason** and **Sadako vs. Kayako**, and horror fans love to debate who would win or who has the better franchise. I’m Team Freddy and Team Kayako respectively, something I’ll tell anyone who will listen. It’s fun to root for the bad guy

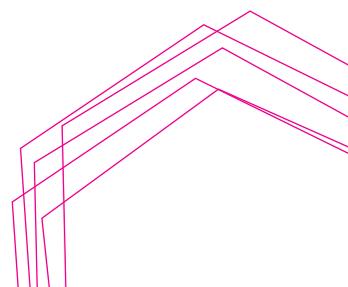
**My favorite?
The kitchen appliance
kill! Blenders, coffee
makers, garbage
disposals, microwaves
– anything will do!**

sometimes, something horror fans know all too well!

It's interesting to watch horror movies at different stages in your life as well. When you're younger, monster movies might scare you. But as you get older, psychological horror can be more likely to mess you up. Seeing a mom struggle to get by in **The Babadook**? Watching Nancy struggle to get anyone to believe her in **Nightmare on Elm Street** when the audience knows her threat is real? These types of scenarios scare me more now than when I watched horror as a teen. (I can barely watch scenes with property damage now, because it can't stop myself from thinking about insurance claims and repair expenses.) When I was younger I could boast "**The Blair Witch Project** didn't scare me, there was no witch!" Watching it now, I can't help but think "Oh my god what would you DO if you got lost in the woods?!"

Horror may mean something different to me now that I'm older, but I've never stopped watching horror movies with my sister. We currently live in different cities, so we like to line up viewings on the same night so we can discuss. If we're watching the movie at home, we press play at the same time and message our reactions during — usually along the lines of "oh no I can't look" or "pause it, I need to turn the lights back on!" Other nights we go see the same movie in theaters, so that we can gush about it afterward. While we don't have to hide watching scary

movies from our parents anymore, that doesn't mean we don't still hide under blankets while we watch. My exploration of the genre may be ever-evolving, but some things will always stay the same! 





Hi, Y'all! I'm:

BROOKLYN ALLEN

(AKA 'Broo')

He/Him/HIS

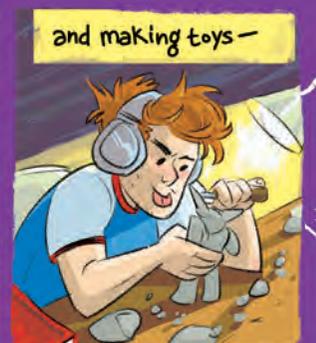
I LIKE DRAWING COMICS...

and skateboarding...



AH BEANS!

and making toys -



huh? You want to know

WHY I LOVE MAKING TOYS?



uhhh...



Hmmm



I've never thought about it before.

Maybe it's because growing up toys meant a lot to me since I was an only child and kind of lonely...

Toys were excellent tools to explore world building, creating characters and acting out their motivations



* and lived at a dead end street surrounded by grave yards which I loved but made sleep overs a hard sell.



Brother! Help mee!!

HAHA IT IS I WHO PUSHED YOU - because you're half machine and can't be trusted! PREPARE TO DIE!



Brother Nooooo



HANG ON! I'LL SAVE YOU!

Blast! I'll get you one day, brother!

Thank you so much for helping me even though I was mean to you earlier because you're a machine and remind me of the parts of myself I was taught to hate.

It's cool, I realize now you have a complicated family life - but you're gonna have to get over this machine hating stuff.



They helped me work through things when I had no one else to talk to.

Wow... I've learned so much...



Any form of media I admired I would try to copy. Cartoons, comics...



and toys were no different:



Or maybe I just like the creative process...



Like a mad
Scientist:
Using
alchemy to
translate
your
imagination
into
reality

sculpt!



Build
a mold



pour
Silicone



DEMOLD!



**FINAL
CAST!**



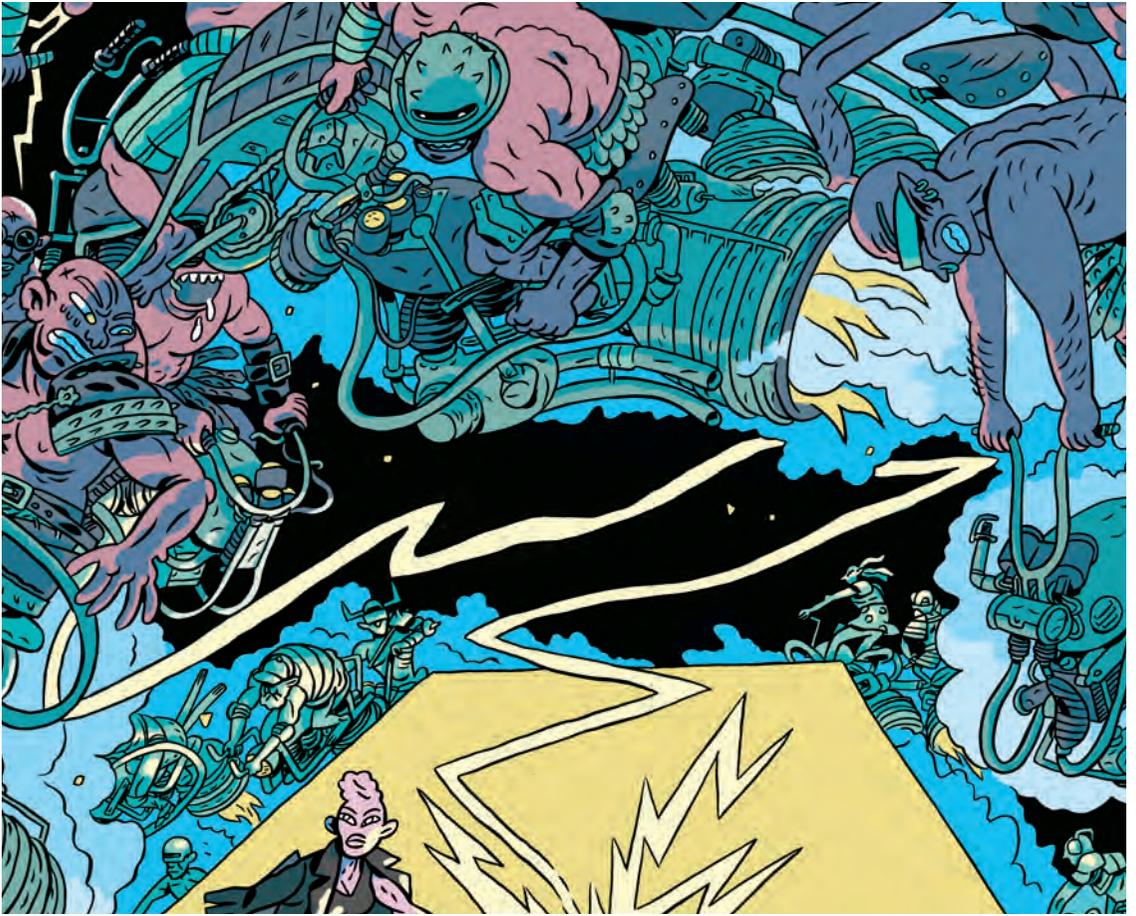
PAINT & FINISH

The result is a
3D ambassador to
Worlds locked in
your brain.



Or maybe I'm like some kind of Sci-Fi Toy Maker, making toys long into the night because I'm still that lonely kid.





Why I Love "SpottieOttieDopaliscious"

By David Brothers (Art by Ben Passmore)



I'm from a small town in the South. I have a big extended family, but growing up, it was my mom raising me and my little brother. I was good in school when I cared and mediocre when I didn't. I grew up black, with all that that entails for an '80s baby who came of age in the '90s. Public school worked hard to give me examples of people to admire, whether they were civil rights leaders, warlords, or authors. I eventually grew up and became a professional writer, but whenever someone asks me who my favorite writer is, I never say Mark Twain. I never say Robert Frost or Ernest Hemingway or William Shakespeare or Zora Neale Hurston or Octavia Butler. All of my favorite writers are rappers. Almost everything I love about the written word is related to my intense love for rap music, most particularly OutKast.

'Kast is easily my favorite group, the one that's had the biggest effect on my life and how I think. The duo grew up in Atlanta, and while I'm from a place that's about an hour and a half south and significantly more country than Atlanta, I still got it. They were talking about things that were real to me, even when they were talking about all the shiny things everyone loves to hoard once they get a bit of money. The chorus to their song "Elevators" — "Me and you/Your mama and your cousin, too/Rolling down the strip on Vogues/Coming up, slamming Cadillac doors" — sounds so familiar to me that I can't help but remember riding around with family as a kid.

"Spottieottiedopaliscious" is a six-minute song on OutKast's 1998 album **Aquemini**, written and produced by OutKast and Sleepy Brown. The word "Aquemini" is a combination of Big Boi and André 3000's astrological signs, a suggestion that the two are distinct individuals who come together in a natural way. Spottieottiedopaliscious-the first syllable begins like "spoke," the second like "oh," never "aw"-is a nonsense word whose meaning becomes crystal clear when Big Boi talks about the first time he "met his spottieottiedopaliscious angel," the woman who would eventually become the mother of his first child and partner as he matured into fatherhood. Spottieottiedopaliscious is more of a vibe than a concrete description. The only way Big Boi could get across how striking this woman is was to make up a word and trust you to catch what he's throwing. The word is flexible, liquid. It doesn't mean just one thing so much as it means everything.

The song is liquid, too. The opening drum roll gives way to an oozing, warbling melody as André intones "Damn, damn, damn James" in a way that brings to mind an invocation at church more than a pop song. That too transitions into lively brass, a woman moaning "damn" just below the music, and iconic crooner Sleepy Brown setting the stage in the smoothest way he knows how.

Rappers rhyme. That's what they do. But on this song — six minutes of music including one bridge, an intro, and

two verses—Big Boi and André don't rhyme at all, or rhyme incidentally at best. It doesn't feel like it, though. The song is so funky and their flow so compelling that you probably won't even notice the lack of rhymes. They're in full spoken word mode, and rather than talking at you, they sound like they're talking **with** you. The song invites you to live in its reality and contemplate what Big and Dré are talking about. This song isn't a brag or boast — it's about the shift in perspective that comes with the transition to fatherhood; the constant drama of being young and black and wanting to have a good time.

This space is where OutKast shines. It's reductive, but Big Boi is a little bit Funkadelic and André 3000 is a little bit Prince. Separately, they're fantastic. Together, they're unique. Nothing sounds like OutKast songs. No one raps like OutKast. They're part of a lineage that birthed artists as varied as Janelle Monae and Killer Mike.

In "Spottieottiedopaliscious," they speak on intensely relatable situations, drawing from real life experience, and in so doing elevate the mundane. They bring us with them, rather than trying to escape normalcy on their own. There was a lot of marketing and conversation around

OutKast that positioned Dré as the poet and Big Boi as the pimp, but that's too simple. The fact of the matter is they're both exceedingly regular dudes — rich musicians, yes, but early on, they found success because they reminded us of ourselves. André 3000 was a little weird, but no weirder than the average drama kid at your local high school. Big Boi was a little more of a player, but still prone to funk-inflected reveries.

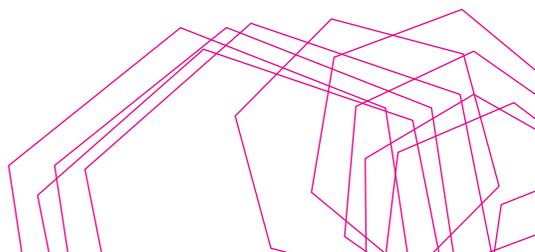
It was easy to relate to both of them, because we're all a little bit weird and a little bit rough. They were authentic, not in a cultural tourism sense, but more of a genuine sense: they felt earnest and honest to the outside listener, to us, which gave us a chance to see ourselves in them.

"Spottieottiedopaliscious" is an excellent example of how this works. The song is irresistible, the kind of song you wait in the car to finish if it isn't done by the time you get to your destination. The craft on display in the song is impressive, thanks to how all of the disparate, and even dissonant, parts come together to create something undeniable. The lyrics are about regular life, but still compelling, and delivered in a way that you still bob your head to the beat, whether you really vibe with what they're saying or just enjoy the bounce of the song.

That deadly combination of craft and subject matter showed me that the most important thing you can possibly do is to be true to yourself and your interests.

That deadly combination of craft and subject matter showed me that the most important thing you can possibly do is to be true to yourself and your interests. You can't be ashamed of who you are, and you can't pretend like you don't like something you love. You need to love it — and yourself! — with full-throated enthusiasm, so that when someone comes across that thing you love, they immediately understand why and how you love it. There's no place for shame when you aspire to excellence.

OutKast showed me what it was like to wear your influences on your sleeve, synthesize them into a new shape, and then execute your plans at an absurdly high level. OutKast taught me how to shine, whether it came to my work ethic or my personal life. There's an appreciation for the small things that runs throughout their music, and "Spottieottie-dopaliscious" is an ode to the changing nature of life, a song that says change is natural and anything can sound good if you do it right. 🍷





MAY 11TH, 1991.
SHORTLY AFTER DEFEATING DAN JOHNSON,
BIG BOSS MAN IS SUDDENLY ATTACKED BY
BRIAN KNOBBS & JERRY SAGS, KNOWN AS
THE NASTY BOYS.



THE MASTERMIND BEHIND THIS FIENDISH
& COWARDLY PLOT IS NONE OTHER THAN
BIG BOSS MAN'S NEMESIS...



THE MOUNTIE.



I WAS FOUR AT THE TIME THIS
EPISODE OF SUPERSTARS AIRED.
IT LEFT QUITE THE IMPRESSION.



OVER TWO DECADES LATER, I'D FINALLY ASK
MYSELF A QUESTION I NEVER BOTHERED ASKING:
WHY DO I LOVE PRO WRESTLING?





LIKE ALL FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT, PRO-WRESTLING HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY SINCE ITS EARLY BEGINNINGS IN SIDESHOWS & CARNIVALS TO THE NATIONALLY TELEVISED STAGE OF PRIMETIME T.V. & PAY-PER-VIEWS.

ONCE PRESENTED AS LEGITIMATE MATCHES BETWEEN OPPONENTS IN THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION, WRESTLING IS NOW UNDERSTOOD AS BEING SCRIPTED, HIGHLIGHTED WITH THEATRICS PLACED UNDER THE GUISE OF SPORT.



AND YET IT'S NEITHER SPORT NOR THEATER.

IT SITS ON A PARADOXICAL FULCRUM TEETERING BETWEEN FACT & FICTION. AT ITS CORE, IT'S THIS BALANCING ACT THAT MAKES WRESTLING CAPTIVATING.



WE, THE AUDIENCE, ARE AWARE IT'S NOT "REAL" IN THE ABSOLUTE SENSE, BUT WE'RE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN ITS SIMULATED REALITY AS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT.



ITS REHEARSED PREMEDITATION & HEIGHTENED SPONTANEITY COMBINED WITH THE CONSTANT THREAT OF PHYSICAL HARM ELICITS A KIND OF HYPERREALITY.



IN WITNESSING THE SIMULATION, WE ARE INVITED TO BE DRAWN CLOSER TO SOMETHING THAT'S PERHAPS TRUER THAN TRUTH ITSELF.



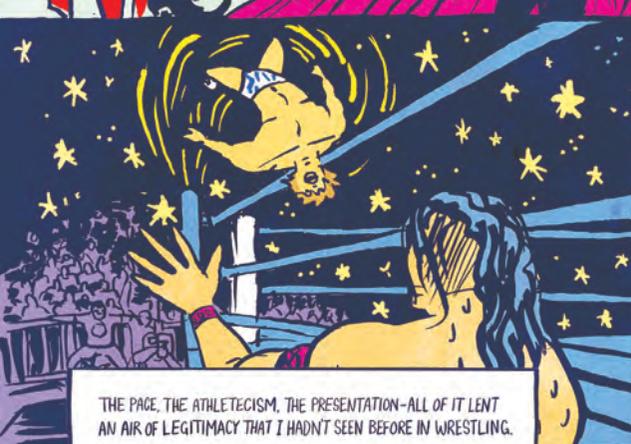
WERNER HERZOG REFERS TO THIS AS ECSTATIC TRUTH.



AT SOME POINT DURING MY FRESHMAN YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL, I STOPPED WATCHING WRESTLING ENTIRELY. SUDDENLY, MY OBSESSION HAD TURNED INTO AN AFTERTHOUGHT.

AND THEN WRESTLE KINGDOM 9 HAPPENED.

WHILE THE ENTIRE 3-HOUR EVENT HELD MY ATTENTION, IT WAS THE SEMI-MAIN EVENT OF SHINSUKE NAKAMURA DEFENDING HIS IWGP INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP AGAINST KOTA IBUSHI THAT LEFT ME SHOCKED.



THE PACE, THE ATHLETICISM, THE PRESENTATION—ALL OF IT LENT AN AIR OF LEGITIMACY THAT I HADN'T SEEN BEFORE IN WRESTLING.



THEATER PERFORMED AT AN ASTONISHING DEGREE, BOTH PHYSICALLY & EMOTIONALLY, BY TWO TRULY CHARISMATIC ATHLETES AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME.



FOR 25 MINUTES, I FIND MYSELF SHARING A MOMENT OF ECSTATIC TRUTH WITH 36,000 STRANGERS IN ATTENDANCE AT THE TOKYO DOME NEARLY 6,300 MILES AWAY.



I'M FOUR-YEARS-OLD AGAIN, AND I'M REMINDED THAT ONLY WRESTLING IS REAL.*

*THANKS ROBERT.

THE END

