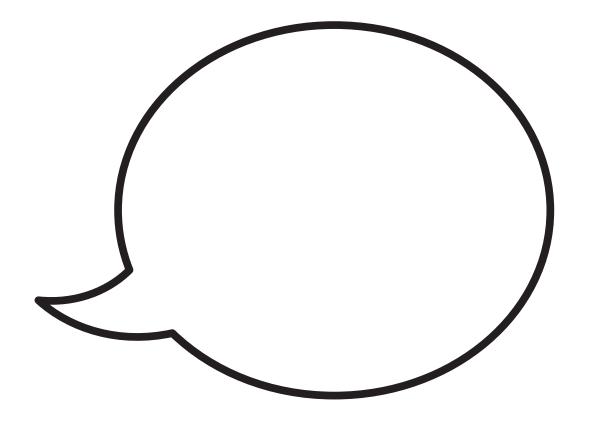


a webcomic art exhibition where the virtual world meets reality



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# TELLING STORIES

a webcomic art exhibition where the virtual world meets reality

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## FOREWORD

The digital era brings with it changes to art that appeal to some and terrify others. The need to master not only physical mediums but these new, electronic ones, is something that is daunting to many. However, it is also a way for those who lack the resources to discover art, to indulge in talents they didn't know they had, and to open up a world that is creative, free, and expressive.

Add to this our modern world of self-publishing, and it seems only natural that the webcomic should flourish.

A simple search of the internet for the term 'webcomic' yields guite literally millions of results, each offering suggestions of which to read, which are the most popular, which the most successful. Some have become large enough, with enough of a following, that they can fund charities or pet projects, that they are the sole breadwinner for their writers or artists. Others remain those pet projects themselves, labors of love that barely cover the costs of the domain associated with them, if that.

Almost universally, these comics started as an idea that someone had, a story someone wanted to tell. In another era, these stories might have languished in notebooks and personal journals or, at best, been handed out to friends and family. It is a miracle of our times that all it takes now is the ability to click several buttons and upload completed work for the whole world to see.

Very few of those comics released onto the web now will be seen; even fewer will gain the kind of popularity that fresh-faced artists hope for as they put their ideas out into the ether. Hopefully, however, this exhibit will put the emphasis on some artists who do exceptional work. Who put exceptional effort into their art. Who tell exceptional stories.



# INTRODUCTION

Don't try to reach Jeph Jacques before 3 p.m. He won't be awake. Readers of the Easthampton artist's webcomic, Questionable Content, about an indie rock lover who works in a coffee shop and owns a pet robot, are accustomed to his midnight updates.

Questionable Content is not just a hobby for Jacques, aged 31.

It's his job.

Webcomics were once seen as the new path to syndication. Comic artists would post their work online, hoping to attract a large enough fan base that syndicates would take notice, offer them contracts, sell their comics to newspapers, and give them a cut of the profits. But for Jacques and many other webcomic artists, syndication is out of the picture.

"There's no real money in that," he says.

Jacques, who says he earns six figures from his webcomic, is among a small but growing number of professional webcomic artists. There are, by some estimates, 36,000 webcomics in the world, but Wikipedia counts only 47 professional webcomic artists, meaning only a minuscule percentage are making money at it. Mostly they earn money from merchandise sales, supplemented by advertising and donations.

They arrived at this profession by various paths, but none originally set out to live this way.

Jeffrey Rowland, 37, of Northampton began drawing comics and submitting them to syndicates in 1999. All he received in return were stacks of impersonal rejection letters. Craving constructive criticism, he began to upload his drawings to a website.

He eventually hit his stride with a webcomic called Wigu, about a little boy named Wigu Tinkle and his adventures with intergalactic beings such as Topato, a flying potato. Successful Wigu T-shirt sales made him realize that he didn't need to be syndicated to make a living drawing comics.

"If a syndicate came to me and offered me a hundred newspapers, I would probably say no," Rowland says. "I'd have to answer to an editor, which I wouldn't be happy with. I'd probably make less money, with more work."

This is precisely the situation Richard Stevens, 34, also from Easthampton, found himself in four years ago, when his webcomic, Diesel Sweeties, was syndicated by United Media, which distributes Dilbert, Rose Is Rose, Get Fuzzy, and other strips. Diesel Sweeties portrays brightly colored, pixelated robots and humans, and their romantic entanglements. The site receives a few million page views every month.

Stevens now says syndication was a terrible decision.

"It's nice to have a syndicate handle things if you have 1,000 newspapers and your whole job is drawing seven days a week. But if you are committed contractually to draw seven days a week and you don't have clients, you're really working for free," says Stevens, who was syndicated in about 20 newspapers.

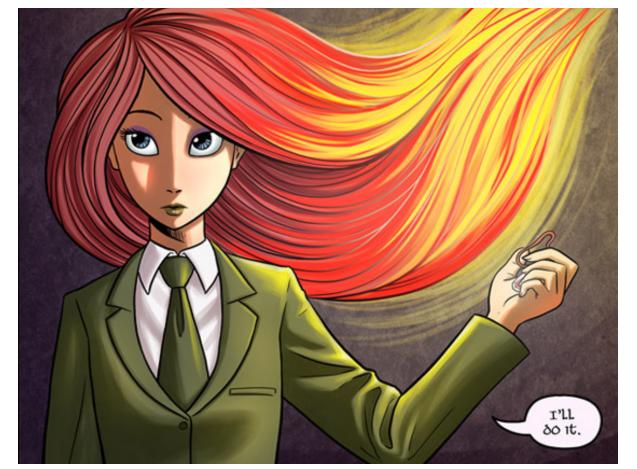
"Even when I was syndicated, I was making 80 percent of my money from my website." For some, the difficult decision not to syndicate is creative rather than financial. Something Positive, by Randal Milholland, 35, features characters with unwholesome backgrounds (one is a former sex worker), coarse language, and unsettling punch lines. In a recent comic, two characters fed cyanide to children as a "public service."

"Part of the joke of my comic is that none of my characters are nice people," Milholland says.

He seems to scoff at the idea of doing a syndicated comic, in which "not nice" would mean "taking five dollars from somebody."

One the other hand, Michael Terracciano, 32, of Boston, creator of Dominic Deegan, knew his fantasy webcomic about a grumpy seer who saves the world occupied a particular niche and wouldn't necessarily appeal to a broader audience. With its complete online archive, it also allows him to draw dynamic characters and extended story arcs that would be difficult for casual newspaper readers to follow. But, according to Terracciano, his cliff-hangers bring an average of 50,000 people back to his site each day to find out what happens next.

Jacques, 31, never intended to become a professional webcomic artist. Ten years ago, when he started drawing Questionable Content, he was answering phones for the Valley Advocate, an alternative newspaper in



GUNNERKRIGG COURT

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AVA'S DEMON



UNSOUNDED

Northampton. A year later, he was laid off and decided to sell Questionable Content T-shirts for a few weeks to make ends meet.

"That few weeks turned into a few months, and suddenly it was a year and I wasn't even looking for a new job," he says. "I never set out to make it my living. I kind of fell into it." Now, Jacques says, 400,000 people check his site every day.

Others launched their webcomic careers more dramatically. Seven years ago, Milholland was working in Medicaid billing for an ambulance company and drawing Something Positive. When readers complained about the infrequency of his updates, he challenged them to donate enough money for him to quit his job and draw the webcomic full time.

"It was very much a shut-your-mouth post. 'I make \$24,000 a year. If you can match that, I'll quit my job. I dare you.' I really honestly thought it would shut people up. Instead, in an hour I got \$4,000," Milholland says.

Now Milholland says he makes more than \$50,000 a year, the bulk of which comes from online sales of books, T-shirts, and other merchandise. Unlike others, whose take from advertising is negligible, Milholland makes up to 35 percent of his income from ads, and claims his website averages 215,000 page views a day.

Jacques takes the opposite approach, outsourcing the distribution of all his merchandise to Rowland's company, TopatoCo, a company for webcomic artists run by webcomic artists. Other clients of TopatoCo include Andrew Hussie, also from Easthampton, who draws MS Paint Adventures (the name says it all), and KC Green, whose non-sequitor flights of fancy appear in his webcomic Gunshow and who also happens to be TopatoCo's so-called "printer expert."

Others, such as Terracciano, take a more hands-on approach. He makes most of his income selling self-published compilations of his webcomic at anime and comic conventions.

His fans enjoy purchasing books directly from him - so much so that when he leaves his booth to use the restroom, "the books don't move."

Relying on a webcomic as one's sole source of income can be both terrifying and reassuring.

Terracciano describes having panic attacks every month, dreading a hypothetical moment when he realizes, "It's all over - the bottom has finally fallen out."

But, Stevens wisely reasons, "Hundreds of thousands of people would need to fire us all at once for us to lose our jobs."

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The artwork of each page easily draws the reader into the story, with every page displaying beautifully painted characters and scenery. The comic is played out in "scenes", with each page serving as a frame in the reel of events that unfold. Flash animations accompanied by music sometimes appear.

#### ABOUT THE CREATOR

Michelle Czajkowski is the lone writer, artist, animator, and updater of Ava's Demon. She graduated from the School of Visual Arts for Computer Art and Animation, interned at Pixar Animation, and worked at Dreamworks Animation, but so Ava's Demon is her first learning experience in the world of comic making.

## AVA'S DEMON

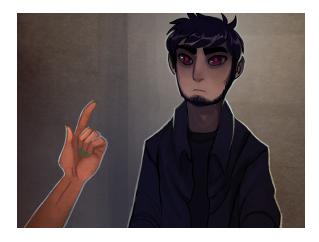
Ava's Demon is a webcomic set in a planet different from our own, that's allegedly 1000 years into the future, about a 15 year old girl named Ava Ire, who has the misfortune of being haunted by a Demon named Wrathia Bellarmina, who takes joy in manipulating Ava's actions to make her life as miserable as possible.

Only later does Ava learn about Wrathia's true motives, and little is she aware how tumultuous her life is about to become.

#### COMIC FORMAT

Instead of being a traditional comic that releases multipanel pages, as it has always been done via print, Ava's Demon takes advantage of the web medium to instead do its releases in batches of 10 singe-panel pages.

Each of these panels is, more or less, like a frame from a short animation, often flowing seamlessly from one to the next to give the impression that characters are talking, walking, gesturing, or otherwise in motion. Occasionally, there are short flash-animations that take





this effect to a new level, usually found at the start or the end of a chapter, like bookends to the material.

Above all else, though, the thing that sets this comic apart is the beautiful artwork, the creative use of color, and the incredibly distinctive, interesting characters that we learn about slowly as we work our way through the story.

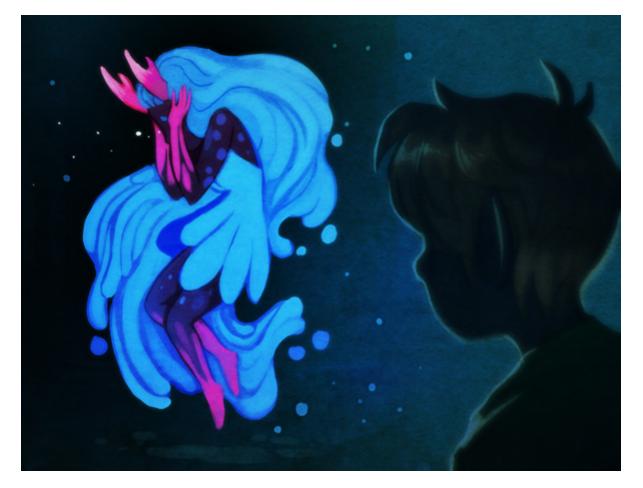
#### UPDATE SCHEDULE

Up until now, Ava's Demon has updated every Thursday. However, the comic is currently on hiatus until January 2nd, 2014, at which point it will update twice a week thanks to all the generous readers who participated in the first kickstarter. In addition, as part of this kickstarter, a print book will be available for purchase in the near future.

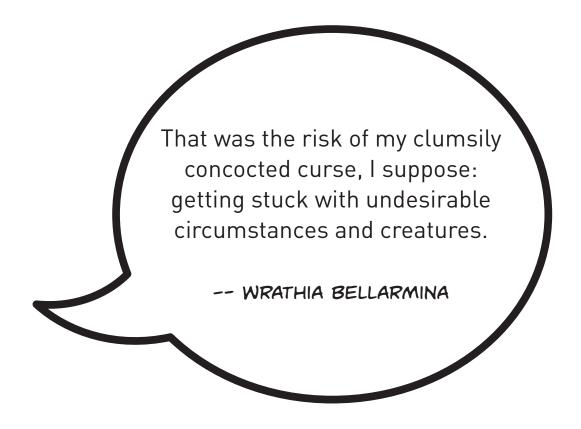
#### WEB ADDRESS

Ava's Demon can be found at:

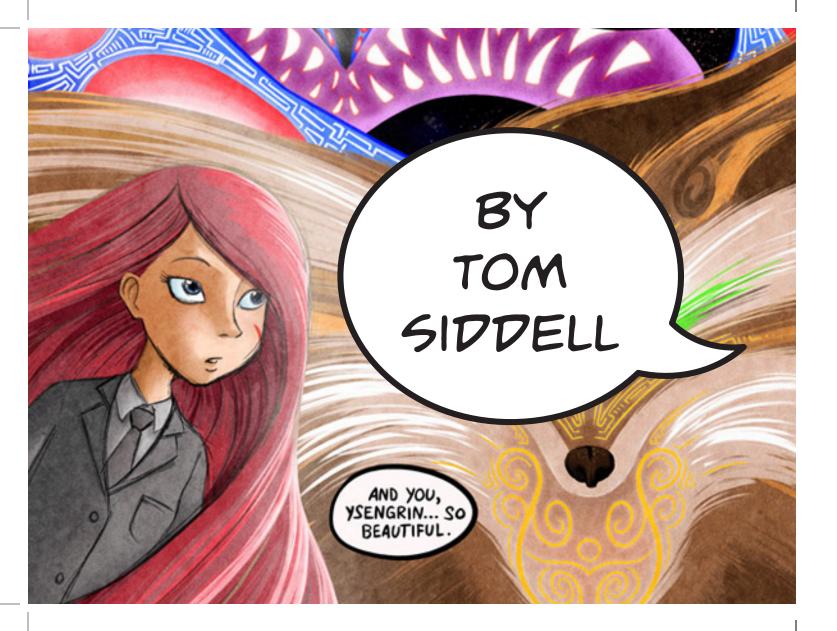
AVASDEMON.COM



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robot calls her "Mommy"; a Rogat Orjak smashes in the dormitory roof; odd birds, ticking like clockwork, stand guard in out-of-the-way places. Stranger still, in the middle of all this, Annie remains calm and polite to a fault.

Meanwhile, Annie befriends the technically-minded Katerina Donlan, whose parents both teach at the Court. The two serve as foils for each other: Kat's energetic, outgoing personality plays off Annie's initial reserve, which enables much of their character development.

Kat soon gets roped into Annie's investigations of the Court's mysteries, but every answer they receive raises more questions: about the school, about their fellow students, about the woods just across the river, and about their own parents. Soon, they start stumbling on creatures and intricate symbols from all possible mythologies — as well as plain old chemistry — topped off by the Oasisamerican trickster god Coyote, who has his own designs for Antimony and the school premises.

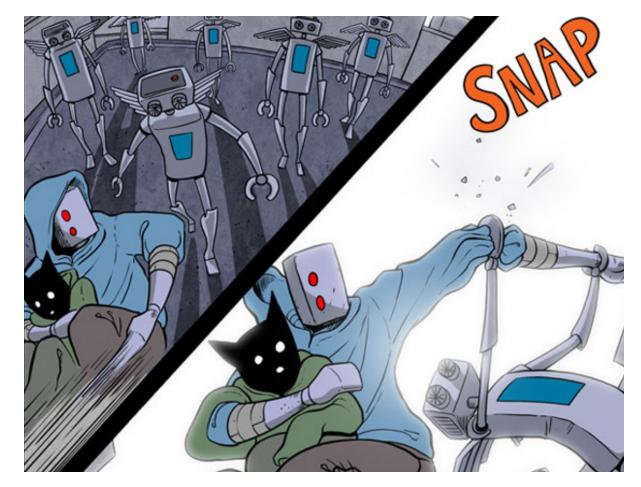
Throughout all this, Annie and Kat uncover the story of a truly frightening ghost woman, whose portrait is worshiped by Gunnerkrigg's crew of golem robots and who seems to be the key to some of the school's greatest mysteries.

Each chapter is a self-contained story. However, after several chapters, connections begin appearing between seemingly unrelated plot threads—but the exact nature

#### GUNNERKRIGG COURT

Gunnerkrigg Court is a Science Fantasy webcomic by Tom Siddell about a strange young girl attending an equally strange school. The intricate story is deeply rooted in world mythology, but has a strong focus on science (chemistry and robotics, most prominently) as well.

Antimony Carver begins classes at the eponymous U.K. Boarding School, and soon notices that strange events are happening: a shadow creature follows her around; a





of their link remains tantalizingly (or frustratingly) unclear for now. Although the story draws on some dark childhood fears, there is more than enough optimism (both innocent and realistic) to offset it.

#### ABOUT THE CREATOR

Tom Siddell is the author of Gunnerkrigg Court. Little is known about him, as he doesn't talk about himself much.

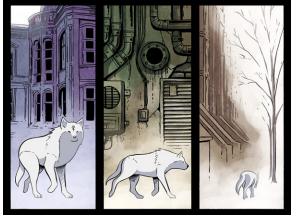
He is English, and he resides in Birmingham. He had a day job as an animator for a video game company before he started writing this comic, and he rode the bus to work every day. In 2012 he left his day job and he now works on the comic full time, both drawing pages and doing marketing and merchandise to support himself.

#### COMIC FORMAT

Gunnerkrigg Court is presented in the traditional multipanel comic format. All comics are in full color, a cel shaded style mixed with occasional and surprising painted elements. These pages are organized into 45 separate chapters of varying lengths, each of which tells its own self-contained story within the greater arc of the overall plot.

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It is interesting to note, as one works their way through the archives of this long-running comic, just how much Tom Siddell's work has improved over the years. He has gone from a somewhat childish, cartoony quality to something much more adult and impressive, and as the comic progresses, it seems logical that it will only continue to improve.

UPDATE SCHEDULE

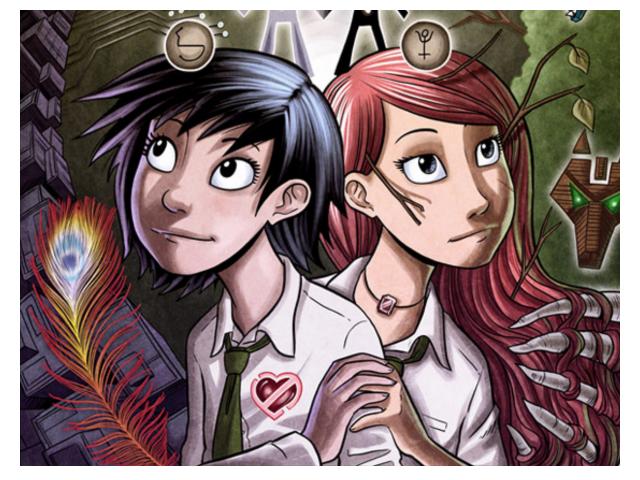
As Tom Sidell works full time on Gunnerkrigg court, multi-panel pages are now released on a regular schedule, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Gunnerkrigg updates so regularly and on time that it is almost a selling point for the comic on its own. Many webcomic artists are a bit looser about deadlines, but since Tom Sidell works full time in this project, he is almost never late.

#### WEB ADDRESS

Gunnerkrigg Court can be found at:

GUNNERKRIGG.COM



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to studying at the prestigious Uitspan University is to be employed there as a lowly lab technician. He works there unnoticed for two years until Tomias (a.k.a. Balzac), one of the cyclists (cyclist being their term for magic users) at the school, walks in on him performing a complex spell to clean up a wrecked lab.

This can only mean change for Luca, his life changing drastically due to Balzac's meddling.

The main character of Uitspan Age, as well as the character who started the comic, is Jahn van Heyden. His story will take place about four hundred years after Era. As a young boy, he and his two younger brothers, all powerful cyclists, are taken in and mentored by the semi-immortal wizard known only as Balzac.

The main character of Sfeer Theory as a whole is technically Tomias/ Balzac, but his story is told through the eyes of Luca and Jahn in Era and Age respectively.

At heart, Sfeer Theory is be shaping up into a politically-charged war story, only with magic. The comic is still in its early stages, but since Muun and Chira did a lot of their brainstorming in a LiveJournal community, some readers know a lot more about the characters and setting than can be found in the comic thus far.

Information on the storyline itself has remained much more guarded, to remain a mystery for its many readers.

### SFEER THEORY

Sfeer Theory is a fantasy/ steampunk webcomic written by Muun (Alex Singer) with art by Chira (Jayd Aït-Kaci) which updates once a week. The story is split into two storylines, Uitspan Era and Uitspan Age. Age was considered the original story with Era as a prequel, but fate conspired to have Era be created first.

Uitspan Era focuses on Luca Valentino, a Sevallese immigrant of modest birth living in the Warassa Empire. He aspires to study sfeer theory, but the closest he can get

#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jayd Aït-Kaci, AKA Chira, lives in Vancouver, BC, where she aspires to be a History Major. She is a staunch advocate that Taurus is under-represented as the coolest zodiac sign. She believes that she is secretly a Diana Wynne Jones character, shoujo is a legitimate life philosophy, Transformers Prime is one of the best political dramas on television, and Vassalord is the most perfect love story ever told.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Singer, AKA Muun, lives in New York, New York. She loves big, stupid dogs, silly hats, and has a love for the 1880s. She seems to be a very private person who shares little about herself with the public.

#### COMIC FORMAT

The story of Sfeer Theory is separated into two parts, though as of yet, only the story of Uitspan Era has been started. Pages are fully colored and shaded, presented in multi-panel pages reminiscent of print comics. However, the panels are often different sizes and shapes, taking advantage of the variety to create pacing in scenes.



#### UPDATE SCHEDULE

The artist and author have expressed their intent to post a page a week, but as of this moment, updates are much less frequent, happening once a month on average.

#### WEB ADDRESS

Sfeer Theory can be found at:

SFEERTHEORY.LITTLEFOOLERY.COM









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The basics of Sfeer Theory are this: all things have a sfeer and in this sfeer all is subject to their will. -- PERCY CLAIRE, THE CYCLICAL MANIFESTO





# SPINDRIFT

Spindrift is an online comic featuring a modern fantasy story that is being published online and is free to read for everyone. This is a work of collaboration between Elsa Kroese and Charlotte English (author of Draykon).

Spindrift started back in 2006, when Elsa first started thinking about creating a fantasy comic someday. She spent a few years collecting ideas and notes before starting work on an outline and a story in early 2011.

It takes place in Aureate, the home of the Alar, which is built high upon a steep mountain range hidden deep within The Dim Peaks. In its earlier days Aureate was largely inaccessible to anyone without wings; but as the city prospered, its population and thus demand for supplies increased, making trade a necessity. This forced the Alar to improve some of the mountain passes, improving access to its lower levels. Only approved merchants are allowed to travel these passes, under the watchful eye of the Sky Wardens. Lifts, cranes and bridges are used to transport goods up through the many levels of the city.

The main character is a half breed named Morwenna Agenar. Known as 'Wenna' to her friends, she is the daughter of an Alar woman and an Ildrei man. She lives with her uncle Cimos and his son Hayden in Aureate, though her halfblood status prevents her from being viewed as a full citizen. Forbidden to gain her wings like the other Alar, Wenna must rely on her physical strength and agility to make her way around the heights of Aureate on foot. Eager to please and anxious to fit in, Wenna works hard at her uncle's forge as an apprentice blacksmith.

However, when her father discovers her existence, it means that change is on the horizon...





#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Elsa Kroese is the mad-artist behind Spindrift. She's an illustrator with a background in animation. She worked in the game industries for some years after graduating and now spends most of her time creating this comic. She's from The Netherlands but currently resides in Germany with her fiance and her cats. She's fueled by strong coffee, games, comics, snowboarding and petting the kittens.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlotte E. English was born and raised in one of the oldest cities in the UK, and grew up to be a decided history buff. Now a resident of the Netherlands, she enjoys cooking, crafts, gaming and, of course, reading.

She writes fantasy novels alongside her work writing alongside Elsa for Spindrift.

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#### COMIC FORMAT

The style of Spindrift is traditional, presented in standard multi-panel pages. It is somewhere between cel shaded and fully painted, with beautiful full-color pages with elaborate backgrounds. The covers and occasional double-page spreads interspersed throughout the comic are presented in beautifully painted detail.

It's obvious that a lot of work goes into the stylish, beautiful artwork, and this is only complemented by the complicated storyline that goes with it.

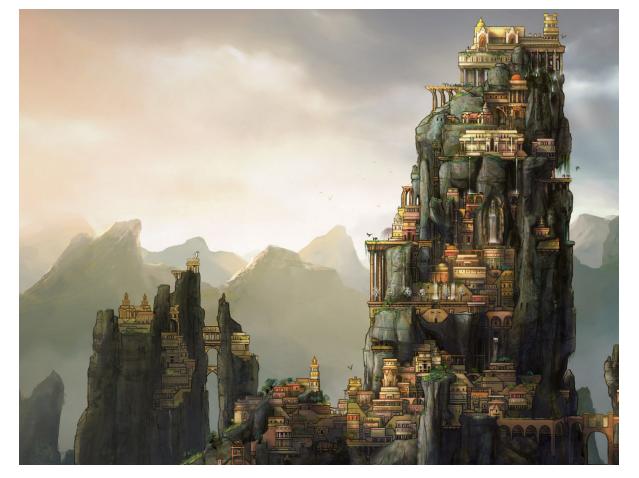
#### UPDATE SCHEDULE

As of now, the comic is on hiatus while the author and artist work on chapter two, so that they can regularly release pages on schedule. As it is a collaborative process, this can take some time, and their return date has not yet been released.

#### WEB ADDRESS

Spindrift can be found at:

SPINDRIFT-COMIC.COM



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is recovering from a major war which split the world between capitalist and communist super powers—with the scale tipped a little in the USSR's favor, America not doing all that well for itself.

This comic is character driven, and somewhat humorous in nature. While it starts out clumsy and somewhat rocky, unsure of itself, starting in chapter two Dirk Grundy hits his stride and the story develops into something more thoughtful and self-aware.

Several of the main characters of String Theory are strongly criticized for being 'Mary Sues', or idealized dream characters by the creator, Dirk Grundy.

Others are so far out of this realm that they can only make up for it, becoming completely fleshed out and believable due to their many flaws.

## STRING THEORY

String theory is a webcomic about the life of Dr. Herville Schtein, an abnormal scientist who descends into a life of supervillainy. Think if a Start of Darkness was the first book in a series that you read, and it starred someone who was a Jerkass Woobie scientist, and you've got the right idea.

Set in an alternate timeline in the 2057-2060s where the Cuban missile crisis was never averted, where it went horribly wrong in fact, the world in String Theory

#### ABOUT THE CREATOR

Dirk Grundy is a native Texan of around 45 who loves cats and guns. A self-defined "carbon lump", very little is known about Dirk, including gender and qualifications.

Other than this, there is little information to be found about the creator of this comic, who (as many on the internet do) chooses to keep real life separated from interested fans in the digital world.





#### COMIC FORMAT

While it started in stark black and white, String Theory has evolved into a fully-painted, full-color multi-panel comic presented in standard print size pages. The characters all have a very strong, distinctive, very cartoony style, consisting of oversized noses and other kinds of exaggerated features.

These serve to make all the artwork very expressive and human, putting a focus more on the characters. Of course, the beautifully detailed backgrounds don't exactly hurt.

#### UPDATE SCHEDULE

String Theory updates approximately once a week, usually on Wednesdays, with a single page each week. The pacing is a bit slow, but it is worth the wait.

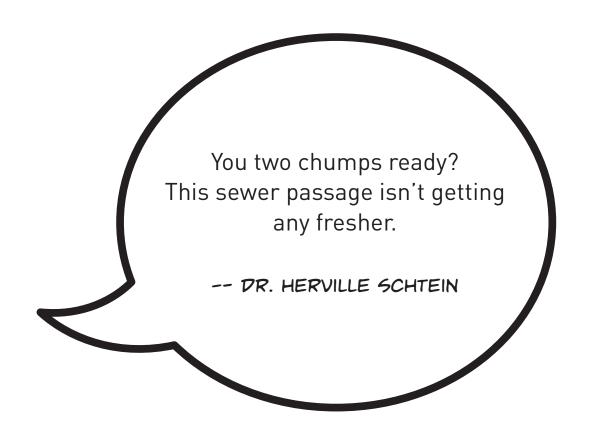
#### WEB ADDRESS

String Theory can be found at:

STRINGTHEORYCOMIC.COM

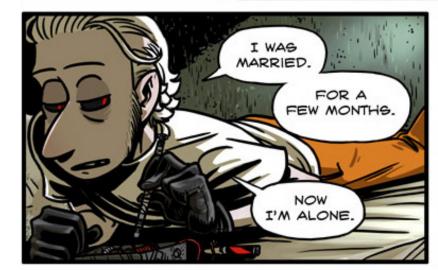


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# UNSOUNDED

Unsounded is a Fantasy Webcomic by Ashley Cope set in a world quite unlike our own, containing multi-faceted cultures with deep and dark histories, strangely different laws of physics, and magic so commonplace it's called by a different name.

The main story revolves around rude, loud-mouthed Sette Frummagem, daughter of the Lord of Thieves. Sette is on a mission from her Da', and she'll lie, cheat, and steal to make sure it's a success (she'll lie, cheat,

and steal anyway). Condemned to aid her in her rotten endeavours is a rotten corpse by the name of Duane Adelier, who seems oddly talented with the supernatural, and oddly not laying motionless in the dirt.

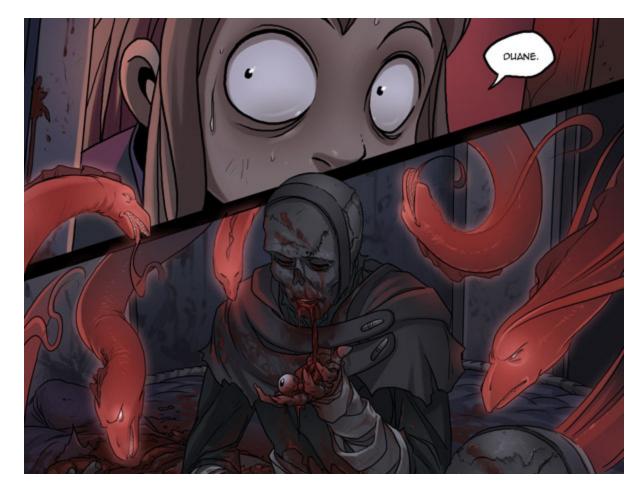
Events are guickly complicated by the appearance of the "Red Berry Boys", a gang of criminals who at first appear to be simple slavers, but are soon discovered to have a stranger and much more disturbing agenda.

That agenda appears to have an uncanny number of connections to Sette's mission, and as such Sette inadvertently finds herself wrapped up in their schemes. It's not long before she and Duane are in over their heads and under fire from all sides. Priorities change from just carrying out her appointed task to living to see the next sunrise.

The road is long and no one is what they seem. Never trust a thief, and never trust anyone who won't let you look into their eyes.

#### ABOUT THE CREATOR

Ashley Cope describes herself in her personal bio as "no one special." She likes to write and draw, and used to like to roleplay a lot until comic-making devoured her free time. She graduated from art college a number of years ago and now makes a living doing freelance work.



#### COMIC FORMAT

Unsounded, at times, is more art than it is comic. Its pages are all beautifully full-color painted, and usually are contained to the standard page split into panels.

It really shines, however, when Ashley Cope decides to burst through the boundaries of these boxes, when the comic explodes out of the expected frames to take over the entire web space.

In addition to drawing the comic, Ashley Cope also changes the design of the page behind the comic to affect mood, and often bits and pieces such as spines, entrails, hands, ghosts, or maniacal laughter will spread around the edges of the pages to extend the experience outward. This is a one of a kind experience that no other comic seems to do as well, taking advantage of the web medum.

#### UPDATE SCHEDULE

Unsounded updates every Monday, Wednesday and Friday with at least once page, sometimes offering more than that.

Rarely is a day missed, making this a regular, reliable, and enjoyable read.



#### WEB ADDRESS

Unsounded can be found at:

CASUALVILLAIN.COM/UNSOUNDED

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Flashback. Dream sequence.
Hallucinatory revelation. Who put the little girl in the lead? Where's the plothole you came in through, darlin'?

-- MURKOPHY





## RESOURCES

If you enjoyed the artwork contained in this book, there are likely hundreds of other comics on the web that would also catch your interest. A simple Google search will turn up more results than anyone could possibly sort through.

So following please find a list of other comics, curated by MacKay Wilford for the purpose of this art exhibition catalogue. While these artists weren't featured, their work is certainly worth a look.



FAMILY MAN



DRESDEN CODAK

DEAD WINTER:

A zombie-apocalypse story. Found at **PEADWINTER.CC** 

DISTILLUM

Modern fantasy. Found at **DISTILLUM.COM** 

DRESDEN CODAK

Mad science. Found PRESPENCOPAK.COM

FAMILY MAN

Victorian feminism. Found at LUTHERLEVY.COM

FEY WINDS

High fantasy. Found at FEYWINDS.COM

GIRL GENIUS:

Steampunk madness. Found at GIRLGENIUSONLINE.COM

GIRLS WITH SLINGSHOTS

Girl gag comic. Found at GIRLSWITHSLINGSHOTS.COM

JOHNNY WANDER

Personal journal. Found at JOHNNYWANDER.COM

KINDLING

Post-apocalyptic fantasy. Found at KINDLINGCOMIC.COM

MONSTER PULSE

Coming of age. Found at MONSTER-PULSE.COM



JOHNNY WANDER

NAMESAKE

Literary fantasy. Found at NAMESAKECOMIC.COM

OCTOPUS PIE

Real life drama. Found at OCTOPUSPIE.COM

PENNY ARCADE

Video game satire. Found at PENNY-ARCAPE.COM

PLUME

Western fantasy revenge. Found at PLUMECOMIC.COM

QUESTIONABLE CONTENT

Indie music geeks. Found at QUESTIONABLECONTENT.NET

PLUME

SATURDAY MORNING BREAKFAST CEREAL

Geek gag humor. Found at SBMC-COMICS.COM

SHADOWEYES

Post-apocalyptic future. Found at SHADOWEYES.NET

THE LESS THAN EPIC ADVENTURES

OF TJ AND AMAL

Dramatic romance. Found at TJANDAMAL.COM

XKCD

Geeky humor stick figures. Found at XKCT.COM

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## COLOPHON

The main typeface used in this book is FF DIN, created by Dutch type designer Albert-Jan Pool between 1995 and 2009, based on DIN-Mittelschrift and DIN-Engschrift, as defined in the German standard DIN 1451.

The accent typeface is Unmased BB, created by Nate Piekos of Blambot, and can be downloaded free from blambot.com.

This book is one of a kind, printed and assembled by hand by MacKay Wilford.

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