

Cracked Ivory

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

“Cracked Ivory” is an anthology comic book script in which college is the central theme. In each anecdote and/or vignette an observation is made about the college life, revealing cracks in the refined ivory tower and in some instances, contemporary culture writ large. Mainstays of the college experience like apathy, isolation, pop-culture obsession, self-important professors, and ideologically motivated course content are all laid bare to be either lamented or laughed at in digestible bites.

Acknowledgments

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Process Analysis Statement

The process of writing a comic book script is a complicated one, but one where there are many ways to approach it. If you were to open any Marvel or DC trade paperback collection, there is a decent chance there will be a portion of the script for any one of the present issues. Unlike film or TV script-writing, there is no standard when it comes to comic books. The difference in approach by acclaimed authors like Stan Lee, Chris Claremont, Frank Miller, Alan Moore, and Grant Morrison are notable. For instance, Stan Lee would simply write a summary, which the artist (Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, John Romita Sr., etc.) on any given issue would draw up into a 20ish page comic book, afterwards Stan Lee would come back and fill the various panels with narration and dialogue. This was known as the “Marvel Method” and is the partially the reason why Stan Lee was so prolific. Alan Moore took a very different approach to his comic books. In books like *Watchmen* or *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?*, He would painstakingly write out each panel so that the artist (Dave Gibbons and Curt Swan respectively) knew what Moore wanted each panel to look like and what details for it to contain. Stan Lee’s approach saved time, and made the process more collaborative, whereas Moore’s approach made his works that of a singular vision. My comic, titled *Cracked Ivory*, follows the Moore formula since it is my own singular vision.

Cracked Ivory is an anthology of comics critical of aspects of the American university experience, which I believe to be fetishized to a certain extent in the United States. It consists of 6 scripts of varying length over 22 pages (a standard comic book issue length) and a cover page. The title itself is a reference to the term “Ivory Tower,” implying that the University system is damaged.

Brainstorming ideas was possibly the biggest, if not the most time consuming (more on that later), hurdle to jump through. Coming up with interesting and relevant vignettes or anecdotes to convey your ideas through is pretty tough. For instance, for my cover I wanted to convey that one of the roles of college is to continue the process of cultural and ideological hegemony. But how does one convey this. My inspiration for my cover page came from reading a Legion of Super-Heroes comic book, in which Darkseid was the villain. Darkseid's whole schtick is that he is seeking the anti-life equation, a mathematical proof that shows that life is meaningless and that you should submit your will to Darkseid. The equation described on the Cover Page is a variation on the complete Anti-Life Equation as found in DC Comics' *Final Crisis*. Other such inspirations include Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (which is directly quoted in "Eyes"), hilarious true stories told to me by friends (see "A True Literature Connoisseur" and "Mandatory Meeting"), my own Catholicism ("The Cathedral"), some personal experiences ("The Cathedral" again, and "My Friends") and even just theorizing on my part influenced by Frances FitzGerald and Murray Rothbard ("My Mind is Melting").

Taking the Alan Moore approach to comic book writing presented challenges also. I personally had to think up the composition of every panel and describe it in a way that is clear so that if an artist were to draw it, they would be able to understand and carry out my vision. Some instances like the Cover Page or pg. 2 of "The Cathedral" are detail intensive, and if I did not write clearly enough, the artist might find it impossible to decipher. Visualizing each panel and the describing it clearly easily took the most amount of time during this process.

Conveying theme or message is something fiction writers need to be aware of when working. The themes and messages I attempt to convey are as follow:

1. Cover Page: One of college's roles is to continue the process of cultural and ideological hegemony.
2. "My Friends": Isolation among college students is a serious matter, and some resort to replacing face-to-face social interaction with simulated social interaction via YouTube or social media.
3. "The Cathedral": Some professors use their classes to deliver homilies on their own political or social ideology and often use academic or outright moralistic language to disguise the fact that it is merely propaganda.
4. "A True Literature Connoisseur": Many a college students' only frame of reference is pop culture, which in certain settings, makes them sound dumb and childish.
5. "Mandatory Meeting": Students just do not take seriously what professors think they ought to, often for reasons professors aren't aware of. All the academic finger-wagging and moral grandstanding means little to most.
6. "Eyes": A Camusian pastiche of a sequence in the samurai film *Lone Wolf and Cub: Baby Cart in Peril* that conveys that it is often the struggle of life that motivates us and keeps us moving forward.
7. "My Mind is Melting": A graphic essay that circuitously conveys a theory of why certain subjects are given special attention in schools and colleges while also noting that I may be overthinking things.

My observations are not original, but my goal was to present them in an original way that conveys my message. Accomplishing this took time and effort, and it paid off. My anecdotes should be relatable in some fashion to the plurality of current college students (I asked to be

sure), and my panel descriptions are clear and detailed enough that anyone with an ounce of imagination should be able to see my vision, whether or not they agree with it.

Cover Page

Title: Cracked Ivory

Credit: Written by Jack Sather

Cover Art Description: A large lecture hall. At the front is an academic looking man wearing glasses and a sportcoat. He is pushing his glasses up. On the projector screen is a slide that at the top says "Freshman Seminar". Below that it reads "Have a great semester!" Below that in smaller though readable font, it says "Isolation + Detachment + Terror + Anguish + Self-Esteem / Ridicule / Censure / Misinterpretation x Regret x Humiliation x Defeat x Penalty. N=Y, Where Y = Hope and N = Folly. Self = Unknown Quantity.

My Friends

Page 1

Panel 1/3: Wideshot of a dormroom. On the left side the raised bunk and desk is empty except for some scattered school supplies while the right bunk has a bored looking guy sitting underneath. He is sitting in his desk chair with his legs propped up on his desk. His arms behind his head.

Narration: On a Friday evening, college freshman Jimmy Johnstone sits alone in his room.

Panel 2/3: Same as before, except now JJ has let his arms down and his head is flung over the back of his chair.

JJ (thoughts): I've made no friends, my roommate went home because he's homesick. I've never been so bored.

Panel 3/3: Same as before, but now he is literally melting in his chair.

Narration: Whatever shall he do?

JJ: Hmmm

Page 2

Panel 1/3: We're now viewing JJ from the front. He snaps from being melted. His closed laptop should be visible from this angle.

Narration: Inspiration has struck!

Panel 2/3: He has pulled the laptop closer and is mid-flipping open.

Panel 3/3: The laptop is open and on. A light shines on JJ's face. Headphones are on his head. His eyes are wide.

Narration: 9:03PM. The night is young and the internet immense.

Page 3

Panel 1/3: The laptop screen with the wall as background. Part of lamp makes it into the frame as well. On the screen is a Joe Rogan Experience-type show. On a screen is two men on either side of a long table. Microphones are near, but do not obstruct the faces. In the lower right hand corner is a small box. The producer and his soundboard are shown. He too has a microphone.

Narration: Not much later, Jimmy has fallen down a rabbit hole difficult to climb out of: YouTube.

Guy on Left Side of Table: That's the funny thing about the human mind...

Guy on Right Side of Table: Indeed. Indeed.

Panel 2/3: This panel is the same except there is someone new on the left side of the table who looks like Vincent Vega from "Pulp Fiction".

Narration: The personalities can be so intense and become so familiar that they create the illusion of...

Guy on Left Side of Table: So here I am at a weed dealer's house, giving an adrenaline shot to my boss's wife. The ***** was ODing on coke!

Guy on Right Side of Table: Oh My God!

Producer: What the f***!

Narration 2: ...human connection.

Panel 3/3: The first panel setup but Jimmy is on his laptop instead of just sitting there bored.

Narration: When in fact there is none.

END

The Cathedral

Page 1

Panel 1/1

From a low angle, to accentuate the grandiosity of the building, we see a young woman in front of a Cathedral. To the left of her is a generic church sign that says “Cathedral” underneath the board says “Confess.”

Page 2

This is a weird page, so bear with me. It will be a standard nine panel grid format, 5 of the panels (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9) will form the torso of the young woman.

Panel 1/9: She touches her right shoulder with 5 fingers. A motion line goes from this panel, across panel 5, to panel 7.

YM’s thought bubble: bell hooks, forgive me.

Panel 2/9: The young woman is in the back of the Cathedral, many seats are filled.

Panel 3/9: She touches her left shoulder with 5 fingers. A motion line extends from panel 7, across panel 5, to this panel.

YM’s thought bubble: Angela Davis, forgive me.

Panel 4/9: The Young Woman walking up the aisle, looking for an open spot.

Panel 5/9: just below the young woman’s torso, the motion lines from panels 1 to 9 and from 7 to 3 form an X here.

Panel 6/9: She eyes an open seat between two people.

Panel 7/9: She touches her left rib with five fingers.

YM’s thought bubble: Roxane Gay, forgive me.

Panel 8/9: The young woman sitting, ready for the service to start.

Panel 9/9: She touches her right rib with five fingers.

YM’s thought bubble: Judith Butler, forgive me.

Page 3

Panel 1/4: A short white woman with glasses is approaching the podium at the front of the congregation. The congregation should be visible.

Panel 2/4: The woman is in front of the podium. Close up on her.

WW: All rise.

Panel 3/4: The young woman and the people around her rise their hands are clasped and their eyes are closed.

Woman at Podium (off-panel): Though we may not be perfect people, let us recognize that we are indeed GOOD people in our rejection of the Original Sin of Racism and other forms of hatred. All are equal to all.

Panel 4/4: Zoom out so we can see the whole congregation. They are snapping in agreement.

Woman at Podium: In recognizing that we are good people, it is upon us to save the world from climate change and other failures of baby-boomers and neoliberal capitalism. All are equal to all.

Page 4

Panel 1/1: The woman at the podium in the final moments of a powerful homily.

Woman at Podium: and that is why we should reject the entire legacy of Thomas Jefferson! Go in peace, making the world better by being better.

Page 5

Panel 1/3: The young woman from the first page is walking out of the cathedral. Others are walking out and mingling as well, in the background.

Panel 2/3: Her phone in her pocket is ringing, she is surprised.

Panel 3/3: She is talking on the phone while walking.

YM: Hey Mom.

YM: Yeah, I just got out of my English class.

YM: Oh, I love it!

END

A True Literature Connoisseur

Page 1

Panel 1/6: A female professor at the front of a class.

FP: Okay, today's icebreaker to get you thinking is this, "What is your favorite book."

Panel 2/6: Zoom back so the whole class, about 10 people, are visible, and raising their hands. One student is a short black girl (the friend who told me this anecdote), and one is a tall, overweight white guy with a *The Flash* hat on.

FP: Okay... uh, Gabby.

Panel 3/6: Gabby, the short black girl.

G: *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I thought it was pretty great.

FP (Off-Panel): Oh how neat! I love that book too. How about you, Christian?

Panel 4/6: *Flash* hat guy.

FHG: You know, I've read a lot of books in my day, but I've gotta say, my favorite book has gotta be *Bionicle Chronicles: Tale of the Toa*. It just hit different.

Panel 5/6: Panel 2, except everybody's face has the surprised Pikachu meme imposed over their face, or are generically shocked, if copyright is an issue.

Gabby's thoughts: ... Bionicle? ... Like the Lego Toy... from 2003?

Panel 6/6: The female professor has a confused smile on her face.

FP: Oh! Uh... Anna, what about you?

END

Mandatory Meeting

Page 1

Panel 1/6: An email that reads: “All Theater-Education Majors, a mandatory meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 15th, 2020 at 8 a.m. at AC404. Attendance will be recorded.”

Panel 2/6: A professor, the department chair standing at the front of a small lecture hall, looking stern. His fly is down. The POV is as if we are in the audience, so the view is tilted up slightly.

Narration Box: January 15th, 8:02 a.m. in AC404

DC: So I’m pretty upset. Apparently, we have a problem with bullying in the Theater-Ed option.

Panel 3/6: The students in the lecture staring awkwardly.

DC: You people want to be teachers, and some of you are threatening to throw your peers off of the Bell Tower?

Panel 4/6: Slightly zoomed in on the unzipped fly of the department chair.

DC: You should all be ashamed that this is your standard of behavior.

Panel 5/6: The unzipped fly is the focal point of the panel.

DC: If I hear any more of this kind of disrespect toward your peers, there will be consequences...

Panel 6/6: In the foreground of the panel are two people talking to each other. In the background is the bell tower, and someone falling off of it.

Person 1: Did you see that his fly was down?

Person 2: Oh my God, it’s all I could focus on.

END

Eyes

Page 1

Panel 1/6: A male student Lonnie Lydon, who is wearing baggy clothing and carrying a messenger bag, is facing a door in a cramped hallway.

Panel 2/6: He knocks on the door.

LL: Dr. Fitz?

Disembodied Voice Behind the Door: Come in.

Panel 3/6: Over the Shoulder POV from behind Dr. Fitz. We see Lonnie in the doorway and the hallway behind him. The shelves on the sides of the room are crammed with books. There is a chair in the corner to the left of Lonnie.

DF: Oh! Lonnie, good. Please sit.

Panel 4/6: Same angle. Lonnie is sitting and staring. The professors as if gesturing. The palm is open.

DF; I'm glad you came. This seemed like something to talk about in person rather than over email.

Panel 5/6: Same angle. Dr. Fitz' hand is closed now. Lonnie continues to stare.

LL: ...

DF: ...

Panel 6/6: You're going to fail this course, Lonnie. What's going on?

Page 2

Panel 1/4: Same angle.

LL: ...

DF: You did so well in my class last semester, but in 303 you're floundering. What's wrong?

Panel 2/4: Same angle. Lonnie is still staring.

LL: ...

DF: Lonnie, unless you get a move on, I'll have to fail you.

Lonnie: Nothing's wrong Professor. I'll get my grade up.

Panel 3/4: Now a close up of Dr. Fitz' face. He looks concerned.

DF: ...Good. I'm... glad to hear that, Lonnie.

DF (Thought): I hadn't noticed his eyes. There's something queer about them.

Panel 4/4: Same frame, Dr. Fitz look even more concerned. His eyes are squinting slightly and his index finger is in front of his lips.

DF: Are you positive nothing is wrong, Lonnie?

Page 3

Panel 1/1: A close up of Lonnie. He is straight faced and serious. His eyes are large and glassy. His right eye contains the word “APATHY” written in reverse, and his left eye contains the word “DESPAIR” also written in reverse. The eyes look glassy otherwise.

LL: Nothing’s wrong, Dr. Fitz.

Page 4

Panel 1/3: Lonnie is about to cross the street. He has headphones on. He is looking straight ahead. There is no crosswalk. Lonnie is about to jaywalk.

Narration by DF: I saw Lonnie later that week. I was walking to one of my classes; Lonnie to one of his.

Panel 2/3: Lonnie is crossing the street now.

Narration by DF: Weirdly enough, my course on Psychopathology was held in the Recreation Center that semester, but that’s beside the point.

Panel 3/3: Think about the Abbey Road cover, except instead of the whole band crossing the street it’s one one guy (Lonnie) and there is a bus, whose driver is panicking, hurtling towards him. Lonnie doesn’t notice and looks ahead.

Narration by DF: He must not have noticed the bus.

Page 5

Panel 1/4: Black with white text over it.

Narration by DF: I couldn’t watch.

Panel 2/4: Black except for a thick line in the middle as if a 10-year-old boy is peaking when his parents tell him to cover his eyes during the naughty part of a movie. In the visible section (the thick line) the bus has mostly passed and Lonnie’s mid-section is barely visible where the finger meets the palm.

Narration by DF: Fortunately, my squeamishness was unnecessary.

Panel 3/4: Vision is mostly clear. The bus is gone. Lonnie has made it to the other side and has turned left on the sidewalk.

Narration by DF: Somehow the bus missed him. Lonnie just kept moving forward.

Panel 4/4: Focus on Lonnie.

Narration: Lonnie ended catching up on his work. I shouldn't have, but I let him pass my course.

Page 6

Panel 1/1: A low angle portrait of Lonnie as he is walking down the sidewalk to class. "APATHY" and "DESPAIR" are in his eyes. Yet he is smiling.

Narration: "the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." – Albert Camus

END

My Mind is Melting

Page 1

Panel 1/2: Two guys, Caleb and myself, are presenting to a classroom. Caleb is standing. I am leaning against the desk. POV isometric from above classroom, as if from a security camera in the corner of the room.

Narration: I was giving a presentation in one of my upper level English classes. To bookend the it, my partner asked—

Caleb: What do you think of the author comparing these two opposed pedagogies to Jim Crow and integrationism, respectively.

N: Easy enough question, I thought. But this one girl in class responds—

Girl: Yeah, I get how you could compare... uh, subtractive bi-ling-ual-ism to Jim Crow, but I don't know what integrationism is... so...

Page 2

Panel 1/2: My face in profile at the left end of the frame. My face is melting.

Me: Oh, its...

Narration: I addressed her confusion but I could feel my mind melting in real time. I took a brief glance around the room.

Panel 2/2: My POV of the entire classroom. Make sure to fit an older woman in there, who is the professor. Many of them (not the professor though) have question marks over their faces.

Narration: Too many of them were completely clueless.

Page 3

Panel 1/4: Me, in profile, with my hands gesticulating as I'm explaining something. My eyes are wide, and I'm lurched forward because I'm sitting.

Me: In her book, *America Revised*, Frances Fitzgerald explains that the primary purpose of history textbooks is not to teach history but to inculcate values.

Panel 2/4: Similar panel, but a different gesture, as if I'm shoving some invisible thing to the side with the back of my hand.

Me: I'd extend the thesis to state education more broadly, but that's besides the point.

Panel 3/4: My hands are clasped together and pointed away from me.

Me: Anyways.

Panel 4/4: Same posed, though slightly relaxed.

Me: To my mind, the primary value that these history textbooks attempt to inculcate is egalitarianism.

Page 4

Panel 1/1: The faces of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King Jr. each with halos over their heads.

Narration: This becomes apparent when you think of whom school textbooks hagiographize, often at the exclusion of their controversial or bad qualities.

Page 5

Panel 1/3: Me talking again. In profile, gesturing.

Me: This is where my “psychological fit” set in. Given that the Civil Rights Movement is one of the focal points of the education regime’s egalitarian propaganda, why didn’t they know what integrationism was?

Panel 2/3: My face, from the ridge of the nose up to the top of the head only. A lightbulb is above my head. My eyes are wide.

Me: Then it struck me! MLK, Lincoln, FDR-- they’re merely convenient mental placeholders for millennial/Gen Z narcissists to recall while mindlessly shouting “Equal Rights!” in support of whatever du jour cause they think is their own personal March on Washington.

Panel 3/3: A thought bubble containing “MLK’s face = Equality = Green Checkmark.”

Me: They, including self-described progressives, don’t know what integrationism is because they don’t need to know and aren’t expected to know. The primary message was already received.

Page 6

Panel 1/4: Me again, looking dejected.

Voice from outside the frame: And? So what?

Panel 2/4: Me still looking dejected. Looking up as if making eye contact with someone.

Me: Well, I typically keep a positive outlook. “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.” Pope Francis said that. But...

Other voice: But?

Panel 3/4: Still dejected, still making eye contact.

Me: This whole episode has me thinking that yet another generation is going to be subjected to the know-nothing ramblings of their teachers. Or there’s a possible worse outcome...

Panel 4/4: The black girl sitting across from me, Gabby, looking curious.

Gabby: What’s the worse outcome?

Page 7

Panel 1/1: A parody of the CunninLinguists debut album “Will Rap for Food” where the text is replaced with “Will Protest for Food” and one of them two characters is where a hoodie that says “BSU Class of 2020” and raising a Black Panther (the political organization, not the superhero) fist.

Narration: The proliferation of even more, even screechier professional activists.

Another distinct narration box: Jack?

Page 8

Panel 1/4: Me rambling.

Me: Y’know, just from the context clues they should have been able to figure out what integrationism was.

Gabby’s voice from off panel: Jack!?

Panel 2/3: Me, wide-eyed, in a minor state of shock.

Me: Yeah what?

Gabby’s voice from off-panel: Maybe you’re overthinking this?

Panel 3/3: Me, pondering.

Me: Hmmm. Maybe. But I think I’m on to something. Do you want to grab a bite?

Gabby’s Voice: For sure.

END

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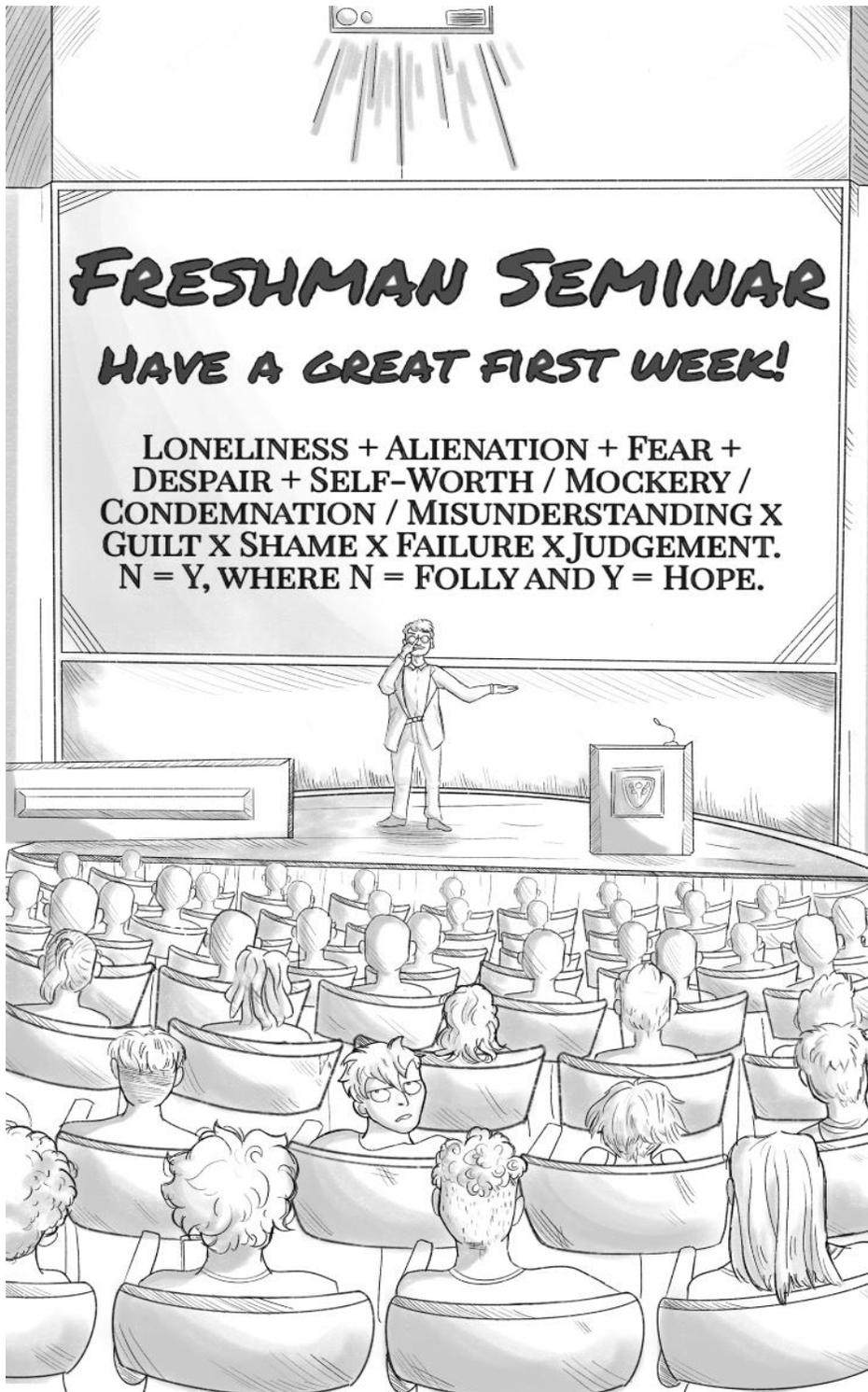
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Appendices

Sample Cover Page by Misty Fox



Sample Pages – “My Friends” by Misty Fox

