Dissonant Times

December 2025 Vol 01.09

I believe in living.
I believe in birth.
I believe in the sweat of love
and in the fire of truth.

And i believe that a lost ship,
steered by tired, seasick sailors,
can still be guided home
to port.

Assata Shakur, Affirmations

by: mica

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Dear Readers,

Our final issue of 2025 is a a shift from previous months' content. In the darkest month of the year, coping with solastalgic dread in a remarkably unseasonably warm and dry winter takes a toll. Beyond this, many are experiencing burnout from the deluge of ICE abductions, ongoing genocides in Gaza and Sudan, healthcare and housing crises, and the attack on queer, and particularly trans, communities at federal and local levels. Sometimes, pessimism sets in and we wonder whether keeping up with local reporting and community building is any match against such existential threats-- but we do know the only way to win is to try.

In the midst of compounding bad news and despair, we're trying something different this month. As the year slows to an end and we await the return of our dear friend Sun, capacity quiets and makes way for a gentle and relentless creativity. So we hope that, for this month, you can enjoy an emphasis on artistic submissions with a few good-news stories to top it off. Our final issue of 2025 is mellow, but the first year launching and operating Dissonant Times was not. This time last year, we were having countless meetings to dream, refine values, build infrastructure, and, at long last. launch this grassroots publication in April 2025. Conversations with friends, comrades, artists, and others who shared this burning compulsion to build a container to hold the people's stories, told for and by US, culminated into this scrappy little trash rag. It was gratifying that after a year of planning for a grassroots news project we were finally able to actually begin to report the news and bring together a community of contributors and readers. Since April, we've published 118 submissions and news articles, introduced seven regular columns, and offered timely and relevant pieces shared monthly in our issues as well as intermittently on social media.

In 2026, we hope to host more open events and workshops to give access and tools for even more people in our community to share their stories, art, and perspectives. We'll go even deeper into old and breaking news that is creating the conditions for marginalized and everyday people to struggle, fight, lose, win, and live. We'll continue challenging one another in the beliefs and practices that move us closer to an equitable and decolonized world on this sacred, beautiful, stolen Kalap'uya land.

Thank you for being with us in the streets and on the pages. See you next year!!

With love,

Dime and Joy

Some Good News: It's A Wonderful Community Christmas

By: Joy Santiago

The halls of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Eugene (UUCE) were jolly on December 25th thanks to the hard work of community members and the hospitality of church membership. The Christmas Day event was the second iteration of what organizers have named Community Christmas, a mutual aid event dedicated to giving folks in need of community, resources, and love around the holidays a space to access it.

Throughout the day, some 150 guests filtered in and out to enjoy movie screenings, hot meals and drinks, a free store, live music, gift bags for both children and adults, crafts such as wreath and card making, and even complementary cigarettes.

Denise, an organizer for Community Christmas, reflected that, "the people volunteering needed this every bit as much as the people attending. The holidays are hard for so many of us and it felt wonderful to have a place to feel connection, community, and belonging. I have a personal stake in making sure this event continues to happen, because I also need a warm and safe place to be on Christmas."

For those who are spending the holidays away from family be it by choice or by chance, Community Christmas allowed people to create new memories and chart new traditions this holiday season. In case you missed out, don't worry: less than a month away is the next Solidarity Share Fair which will also be held at UUCE on Saturday, January 24th. Donations of survival gear such as hand warmers, coats and other warm clothes, sleeping bags, tarps, and tents are urgently needed. Any monetary donations can be donated at https://neighborhoodanarchists.org/sharefair/ and will go to purchasing these items.

Some Good News: Flocking Finally– Eugene and Springfield Police Departments Cancel Flock Contracts

By: James Croxton; Joy Santiago

On the evening of Dec. 5, both the Eugene Police Department and the Springfield Police Department announced terminations of their Flock contracts in what Dissonant Times dubbed "the Friday Night Deflocking." The terminations are a win by Eyes Off Eugene during their campaign to rid Lane County of the intrusive automatic license plate reader technology.

The contract terminations, beginning with the EPD, happened back-to-back.

At 7:20 p.m., the department's public information director, Melinda McLaughlin, sent news outlets the press release for EPD's termination of its Flock contract. It read:

> "Effective immediately, the Eugene Police Department has ended its contract with its current Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) vendor, Flock Safety.
>
> The department has identified vulnerabilities and limitations that raise concerns about the system's ability to meet EPD's operational needs, data security requirements, and community expectations. After further evaluation and internal discussion, the department has decided to discontinue the contract.
>
> Eugene Police's ALPR system experience has demonstrated the value of leveraging ALPR technology to aid investigations, apprehend felony suspects, and recover stolen vehicles more quickly. However, the department must ensure that any vendors meet the highest standards for safeguards surrounding privacy, data handling, data security, and system reliability."

Less than an hour later, the Springfield Police Department announced its own Flock termination on social media, citing the "vulnerabilities and limitations" noted by the EPD:

> "The Springfield Police Department (SPD) announced today that all Flock automatic license plate recognition (ALPR) cameras within the city will be covered in the coming days, pending their full removal.
>
> This decision follows information recently brought to the department's attention regarding Eugene Police Department's Flock ALPR cameras, as EPD identified vulnerabilities and limitations that raise concerns about the system's ability to meet operational needs, data security requirements, and community expectations.
>
> 'Our responsibility is to safeguard both the integrity of investigative tools and the trust our community places in us,' Deputy Chief George Crolly said in a statement. 'Given what we have learned, we do not have confidence that the current system provides the level of control and assurance we require.'
>
> This move does not represent a shift away from ALPR technology itself. SPD will continue to work closely with the community and our law enforcement partners, including the Eugene Police Department, to identify tools that Police can use to enhance public safety.
>
> 'ALPR remains a valuable tool for modern law enforcement. We will be seeking ALPR options that meet our standards for data security, system transparency, and operational control. As we move forward, we intend to continue our work with community members to ensure those expectations are clear and are met', said Police Chief Jami Resch."

This decision by both cities comes after countless community members and activists spoke up during the last few months' city council meetings due to concerns over the technology— with some public comment sessions filled up entirely. In October, Eugene turned off its cameras. In Springfield, they had never even been turned on.

The ACLU of Oregon also sued the City of Eugene for not disclosing the locations of Flock cameras within the city.

These city-wide wins come days after Oregon Community Credit Union announced to its members that it was cancelling its own contract with Flock, and that cameras will be taken down at OCCU branches across the state of Oregon.

In a statement to Dissonant Times, Jacob Trewe from Eyes Off Eugene said:

> "We are thrilled by the news that FLOCK cameras are getting removed. This is due to the strength and breadth of the Eugene/Springfield community coming together to insist on true public safety.
>
> We call on Lane county to follow Eugene, Springfield, and OCCU in disassociating from this harmful technology from an untrustworthy company.
>
> Additionally, we need to enact policies to ensure that AI surveillance cameras cannot be returned to our communities. Basically, this is fantastic news but we need to make sure that this sort of thing doesn't happen again.
>
> Getting these cameras out of our community makes us safer. From immigrants, trans folks, and workers organizing to women seeking reproductive care and people just going about their daily lives, we are all better off."

Eyes Off Eugene's work is not done, though. The organization has plans to help overhaul legislation. Rob Sheldon, a founder of Eyes Off Eugene, stated:

> "We've got efforts already in progress to update policy at the local level, and legislation at the state level, to better address surveillance technology going forward. On Monday, there's a state legislative work group meeting to discuss specific legislative changes, and on Tuesday, there's a local work group meeting with officials from both cities to begin drafting a more comprehensive policy."

Organizers acknowledge that the fight is not over. Lane County recently signed a two-year $132,000 contract with Flock. The county has yet to install the cameras and it is unclear whether officials will follow the lead of Eugene and Springfield.

It is likely that without a successful public pressure campaign Eugene and Springfield would have continued using Flock cameras. Eyes Off Eugene's campaign had broad appeal that spoke to everyday people concerned about safety, privacy, and government accountability. While the threat persists in Lane County, including in neighboring Veneta, the popular momentum against government surveillance is certainly a win worthy of celebration.

It's not too late to keep

AMAZON OUT

Public comments open until January 2nd

Tell the Dept of State Lands we won't sacrifice our wetlands to corporate greed

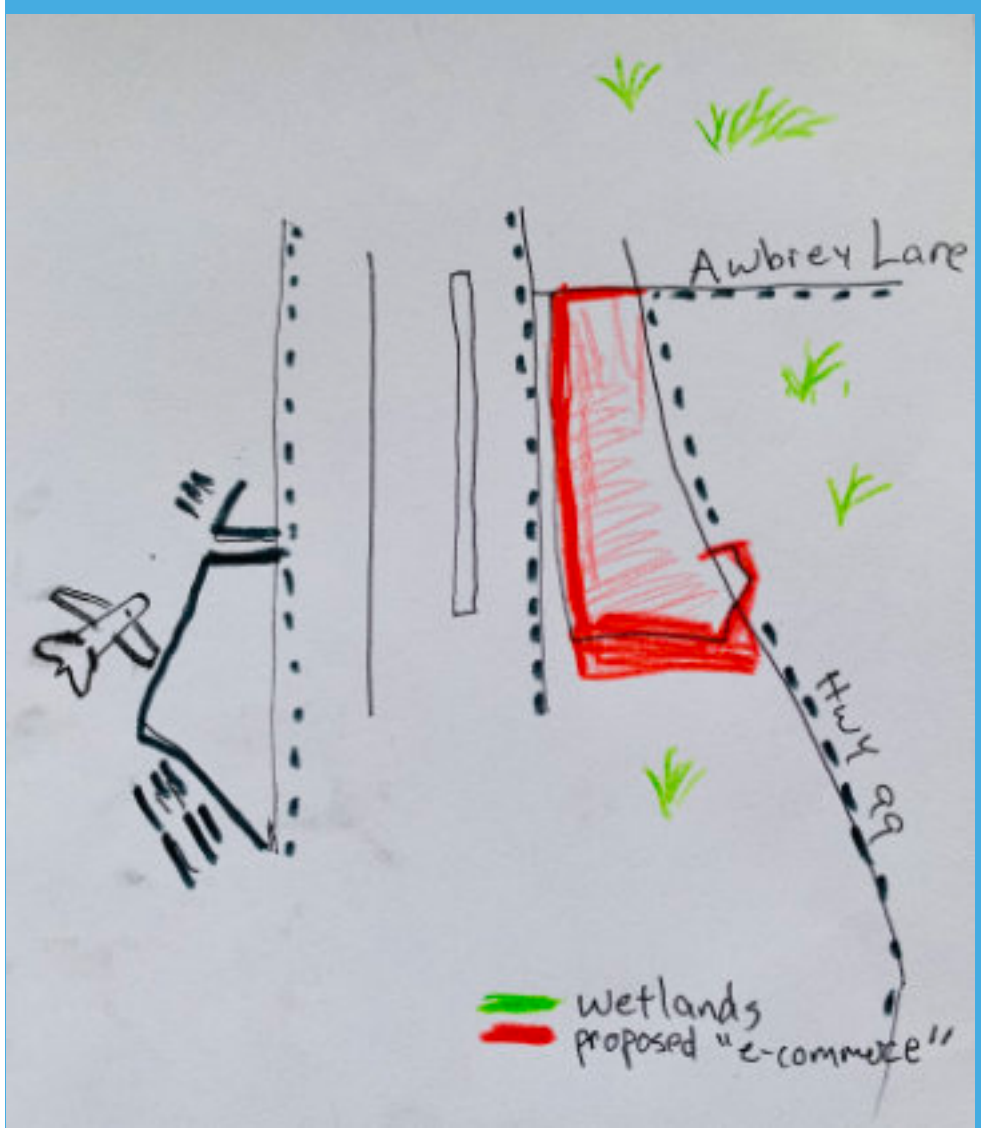
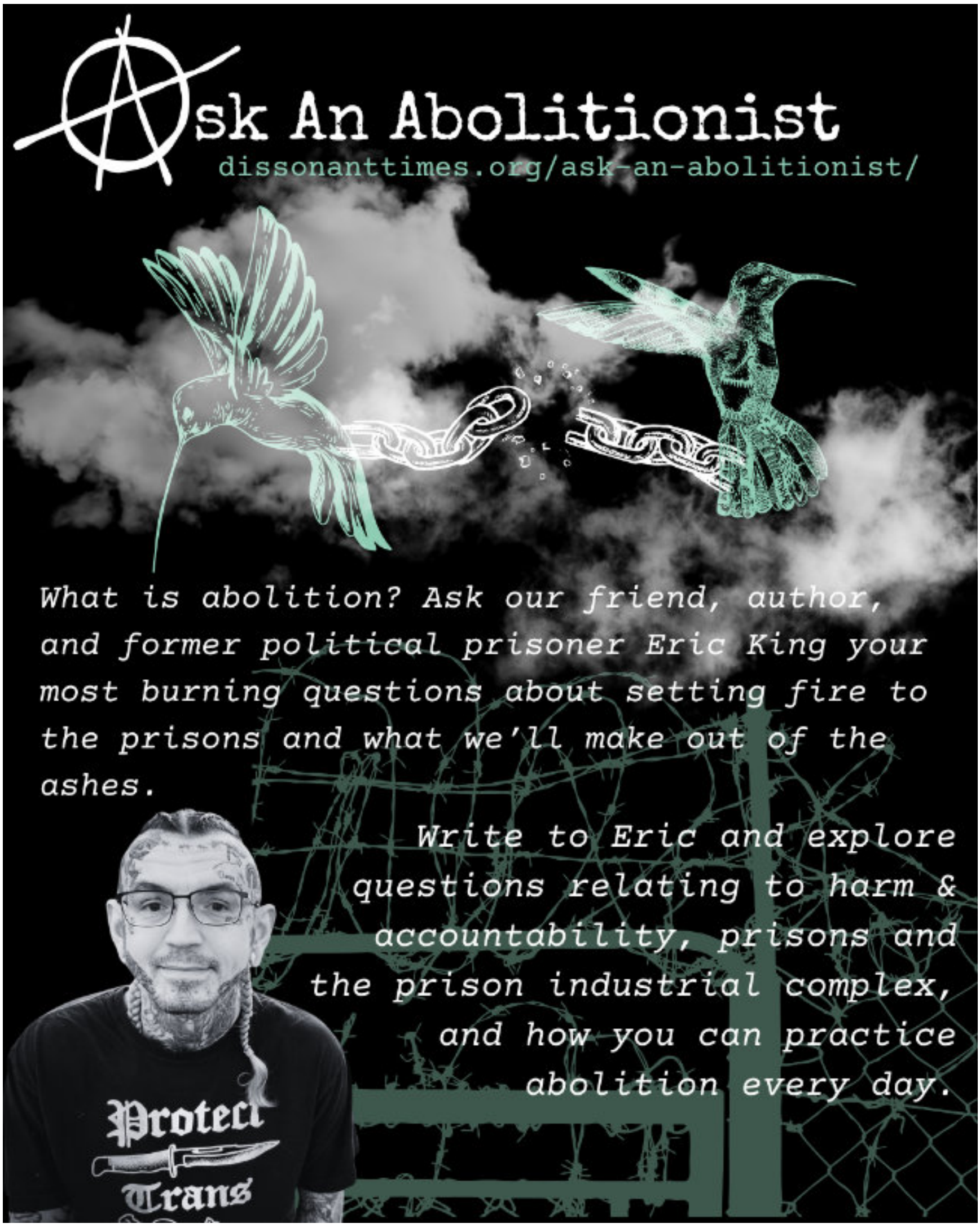


Diagram of proposed "e-commerce" fulfillment center (believed to be amazon) to see the size/ scope. Located at Awbrey Lane and highway 99, it is proposed to be 320,000 square feet and house upwards of 1400 vehicles. On their application, they acknowledge that six and a half acres of wetlands will be permanently damaged, which is vehemently opposed in the comments.

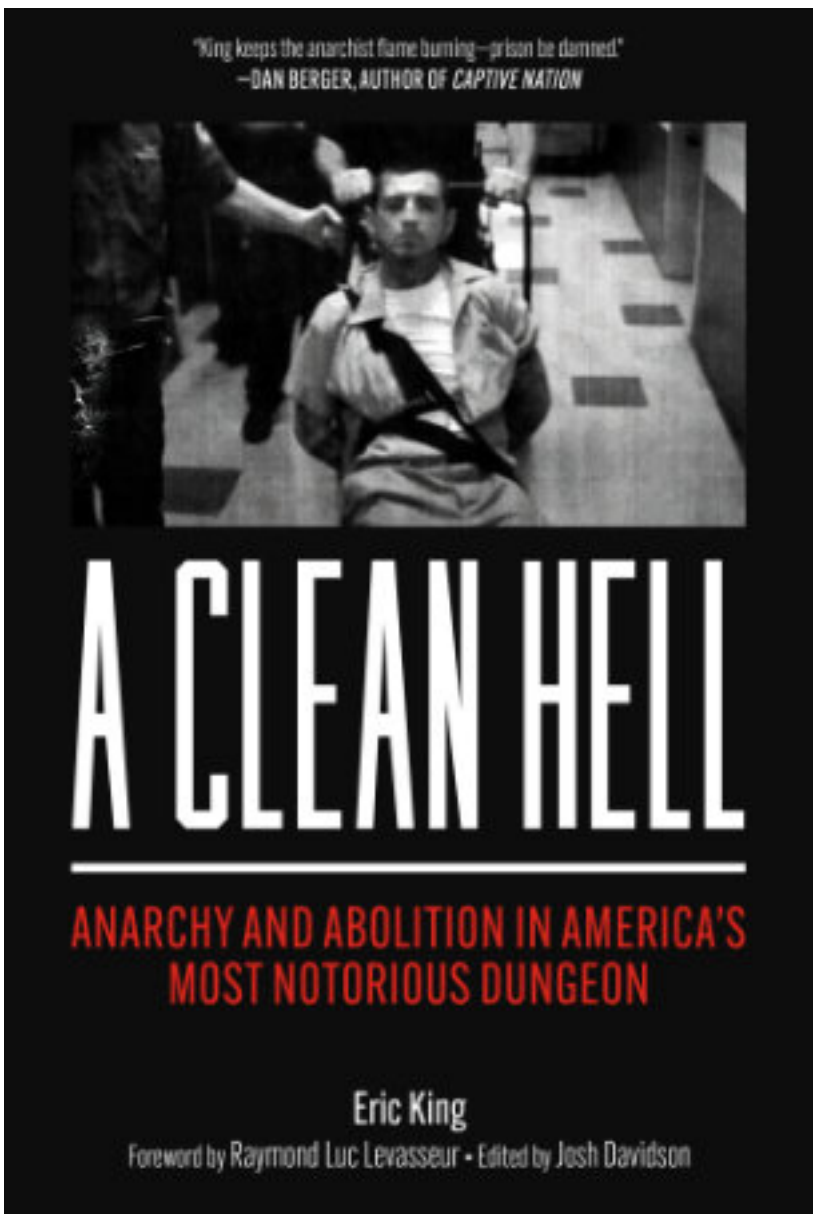
Jailbreak

Jailbreak is an abolitionist column broadly devoted to supporting political prisoners & all who resist the prison world. No revolutionary movement will ever succeed that doesn't fight state repression & support all who face it. We have so much to learn from our imprisoned comrades inside & so much support to give in our collective struggle for liberation that will be stopped by no prison wall. None are free until all are free! Write to a prisoner today!



Submit your questions to Eric at dissonanttimes.org/ask-an-abolitionist

A Review of Eric King's *A Clean Hell* by Indigenous political prisoner Oso Blanco



This book Eric King has published will tell you many truths of what US colonialism has come to in the form of US federal prisons, especially the abuses of humans in the SHU and at the ADX Supermax in Florence, Colorado. The haves who seek to destroy and imprison the have-nots have advanced in their evil quest to protect themselves from those not uber-rich using their prison system, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP).

The rich have hired the most ruthless thinkers to create the FBOP, so as to mentally, spiritually, and physically harm or murder prisoners. Eric King went to the ADX, the "Alcatraz of the Rockies," while I lived through 9 years at a Special Management Unit (SMU). These prisons and staff had and have a green light to commit any crime against prisoners, with the go-ahead from Central Office in Washington, DC. The SMU was shut down after staff murdered too many human beings, but the ADX Supermax continues endlessly, so far.

In A Clean Hell, Eric King goes into the deep inner thoughts of a person tormented by these hypocritical, criminal staff at the Bureau of Prisons. I've been in all these places except the ADX. I know these truths of racist hillbilly staff at USP Lee. I went through the same assaults as Eric at Lee and Hazelton USPs. Eric is telling the world 100 percent true facts of the abuses BOP staff commit every single day on the taxpayer's dime. The creator and the universe will not let these hateful BOP monsters go unpunished for the evils Eric is precisely describing first hand in A Clean Hell, exposing the real true hell of the BOP reality.

I pray from 4am to 6am in Cherokee and I strongly agree with Eric King about how we need to find something positive to keep our mind strong while in prison, constantly surrounded by negativity. As Eric writes, we have to do 5 positive things a day for other people, not just to help people in need, but to maintain our own sanity and strength.

No fake American politician or official will tell the real truth that Eric has now exposed. The people that really, really belong in these hell holes of darkness are the people running them. They belong in here for life for their crimes against humanity. That would be real justice for humanity. Eric and I work tirelessly toward the revolution of love for all life. The Bureau of Prisons, on the other hand, works toward the security of hate and the destruction of people and their families, all while claiming to do the exact opposite. Everything they say and do is backwards, and the federal prisons are not about justice or stopping crime.

Obviously, US society is at a low point in its history right now. Let's all stand against federal prisons and work to put an end to abuses by staff in these prisons. The Bureau of Prisons is a government corporation that facilitates the abuse and murder of the people who they actively profit off of in this industrial prison complex. A Clean Hell describes how the elite created this as a form of slavery for the have-nots who cannot defend themselves against the rich and their exploitations of all life.

In this new nonfiction gospel, Eric King pinpoints just what the BOP really does to humans and highlights the horrors people face behind these prison walls. It boils down to what America is really, really all about in its colonial quest. This book is a must-read.

Oso Blanco (Byron Shane Chubbuck) is an Indigenous rights activist and anarchist who is currently serving fifty-five years in federal prison for bank robbery (expropriations), aggravated assault on the FBI, escape, and firearms charges. Oso Blanco is a Wolf Clan Cherokee/ Choctaw raised in New Mexico whose Cherokee name is Yona Unega. He was known by the authorities as "Robin the Hood" after the FBI and local gang unit officers learned from a confidential informant that he was robbing banks in order to acquire funds to support the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, throughout 1998–1999. While in prison, Oso Blanco founded the Children's Art Project (CAP), which creates greeting cards with Indigenous prisoners' artwork with all proceeds benefiting the Zapatistas. Oso Blanco has served time in over a dozen federal penitentiaries and supermax facilities across the US. He has published two books, Love Me Rebel Love Me (Xlibris, 2011), and The Blue Agave Revolution: Poetry of the Blind Rebel with Michael Novick (BookBaby, 2022). **https://freeosoblanco.org/**

Purchase Eric's new book at https://pmpress.org/index.php?l=product_detail&p=1872

Some Good News: Malik Muhammed No Longer in Solitary Confinement

@Freemaliknow on Instagram

On Friday December 12th, Oregon-based political prisoner Malik Muhammed was transferred out of Snake River Correctional Institution, where they had spent over a year in solitary confinement. They are now in Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, a medium security prison located in Pendleton, Oregon, about three hours east of Portland.

In this transfer, Malik was given all of their backlogged mail, which the corrections officers at Snake River had illegally kept from them in retaliation for their political organizing behind walls. Malik's transfer both out of solitary and Snake Rover is a major victory in their fight, and is a direct result of outside pressure placed on the prison through a continuous phone zap campaign.

Malik's transfer out of solitary shows that when we fight, we win. Within that, this transfer exemplif`ies the role outside supporters play in improving prison conditions for incarcerated people. Phone zaps are one of many effective tools supporters can use in taking concrete action to demonstrate material solidarity with prisoners.

The fight to free Malik is not over and ongoing and increased support is needed. You can help bring Malik home by:

•**Sharing Malik's writing** and other creative works: Published at malikspeaks.noblogs.org/zines (or right here in Dissonant Times!)

•**Sending Malik books:** Books are a vital way to support prisoners, find their book list at bit.ly/MalikBookList

•**Donating to Malik:** Malik needs financial support for commissary, books, and visits from siblings and loved ones. Host a party, reading, event, or ask some friends to send some money Malik's way at bit.ly/freemaliknowfund

•**Joining the Free Malik Now Campaign:** Get in touch and get plugged into the work at bit.ly/FreeMalikCampaign

•**Supporting the UK Prisoners for Palestine:** Throughout their life Malik has been an active and vocal participant in the struggle for Palestinian liberation, including a hunger strike they participated in over the summer in solidarity with UK prisoners. Learn more at bit.ly/P4P-Toolkit

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Dear Darling,

Darling's outlook on life, relationships, conflict, and crime can best be described as whimsical. She values care for self and community, feeling good, looking good, and fucking s@! up. There are no questions too bold, topics too old, and anything you're thinking is conversation gold.*

Send your ponderings, your questions, and your deepest darkest fears and desires to our dear Darling ;)

For social relationships, organizing and tactical tips. Poly-drama? Poly-saturation? Ask darling.

Dear Darling,

I feel like like a lot of my friends hate me, which is something I've always struggled with, but in some cases I've been right. Lately its been really bad. I tried to tell a friend I was having a bad week and she just stared at me. Other people in the group have been ignoring my messages and attempts to make plans and I just feel this creeping dread. I don't feel it to be an unfounded fear either. Ive failed over the years I've known them, been a disappointment to say the least. As a result I always feel like I'm on thin ice, and I keep them at a distance as a result. Well, I keep everyone pretty distant, but the people in question are still some of my closest friends. Im torn between a rock and a hard place; confronting them and risking pushing them away fir good or ignoring it and hoping it's all in my head.

–Onyx

Hello my dear Onyx,

My heart goes out to you, it really sounds like you're in a predicament of volcanic proportions. What's more, I can deeply relate to the things you're feeling. Frequently, I find myself feeling like my friends are actually enemies, feeling like I'm all alone, and leaning into the relative safety of isolation. I try to keep a cool demeanor on the surface, but underneath the crust and mantle is a seething, roiling mess of emotions. But we're not here to talk about me, we're here to hopefully help you move back from the cliff's edge and safely explore some of those relational chasms you're facing. It also sounds like you're feeling some immense pressure to perform for your friends, to be seen as worthy of their friendship. Oh, dear Onyx, no wonder you feel like you're traveling on a rocky road right now, those are some big expectations to carry, it makes sense that they would weigh you down. Hopefully, together, we can take some of the stones out of our pockets and lighten your load.

I'm going to start with that second point, the one about feeling like a disappointment to those around you. I'm not sure there's an easy way to say this, so I'll opt for directness instead: You are worthy of care, love, and wellness, full stop. You may feel as though you have let your friends down (and in fact, you may have actually let them down, I don't know, I wasn't there), but that does not change the baseline: You are worthy of care, love, and wellness. Of course, hearing this and internalizing it, believing it, are two different things, and it may take some time to bridge the gap between them. I don't think

that you necessarily even need to believe it, but it's okay to just start by saying it whenever you need the reminder, whether or not the conviction is there. You can even write little reminder notes to yourself and leave them in places you'll find them, like on your mirror or in the pocket of your jacket. Hell, get a label-maker and really go to town! I honestly believe that, under the right circumstances, it is both acceptable and beneficial to gaslight oneself into believing good things, and I've found in my own journey that if you tell yourself something enough, you just might begin to actually believe it.

Of course, telling yourself you're worthy is just one facet of this predicament; we've also got to figure out how to reach across this faultline you're sensing between yourself and your friends. I recommend being honest and direct with your friends, but not so much that you come across as stony and uncaring (it's a fine line, have some grace for yourself if you don't quite get it exactly right). I won't lie, this can be extremely scary or challenging, especially if you don't feel very grounded. That's where your trusty label-maker comes in handy, just slap one of those "You are worthy of care, love, and wellness" labels on the palm of your hand so you can remind yourself while you're talking. I would wager that your friends don't actually know how hard things are feeling for you, especially if you're already keeping them at a distance. You might find that if you reach out and ask for the space to be vulnerable about what's going on for you and how you're feeling, your friends will receive you warmly and remind you that you are loved for who you are, regardless of your successes or failures. To be fair, you might also find that your friends are unreceptive, and while this may be painful, it is also valuable information. If your friends are unable to offer you the care, love, and wellness that you need at this moment, it might be worthwhile to try and invest your energy elsewhere. Remember that if this happens, it's not necessarily a reflection of your friends as people that they are unable to support you right now, don't erupt at them for it. Thank them for their friendship and their honesty, and then decide if or how you'd like to keep engaging with them. It may seem so scary but I promise you that carving new canyons of friendship will serve you better than continuing to rely on dams that are unable to adequately hold you.

Anyways, I really hope this was helpful, and I hope that you're able to find your way to a place where you don't feel so much like schist. One last reminder, change won't happen overnight, it takes eons for metamorphosis to happen, practice patience and grace, dear Onyx, and don't take your friends for granite!

Rock on,

Darling Tonia

Auntie Steph's Fab Vegan Recipes

Rice Pudding

Preheat oven to 350°F

- Cooking oil spray

- 2 cups cooked rice (1 cup uncooked rice = 2 cups cooked)

- ½ cup sugar

- 4 oz unsweetened applesauce (can also use a mashed banana)

- 2 cups non-dairy milk

- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

- ¼ cup raisins (you can also use dried cranberries, blueberries, chopped dried apricots, dates)

- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the rice with all the other ingredients. Blend well.

2. Pour the mixture in a greased 1 ½ - 2 quart baking dish

3. Bake the pudding in the preheated oven for about 30 to 35 minutes, or until set.

**** This can be eaten hot, but many folks prefer it cold, as do I.***

living creatively

An Excerpt from "Off Route"

By: Rick Levin

I am exaggerating my response to the pandemic, of course. Yes, it scared the hell out of me. But I never feared the virus killing me, really.

What I feared was other people—that's always been my core fear, only here it was amplified and complicated, and I had to do a lot of so-called spiritual work around my issues of trust and faith and acceptance and, you know, everything. All of it. Just like a lot of us, I suppose.

So, yes, on the one hand, I had a pretty severe case of the apocalyptic humdrums—amorphous anxiety and heightened agitation mixed with mind-numbing boredom. The end of the world is, among other things, boring as hell—an assaultive sameness that declares itself in a perpetually compounding crisis of meaning squeezing itself to a pinpoint of dumb death. All whimper, no bang.

But the flip side of this was a perverse exhilaration at watching our massive house of cards finally start to collapse. The whole bing-bang-shebang felt inevitable. Beneath its flimsy veil,

Western Civilization strikes me as little more than a protracted nightmare, lit up by occasional flares of accidental beauty and aestheticized brutality—a disaster in slow motion, a neon-lit death cult, a logocentric dead-end. We killed all the good stuff long ago. Look around. Prove me wrong.

And America is its most putrid recrudescence—this stupid, noisy Las Vegas of the soul where human desire gets turned inside-out and infantilized in a gaudy cannibal dance of empty fetishes. American culture is the death rattle of the human spirit under attack. Fuck it. Let it come down.

Did I really want this lumbering beast patched up to hunt another day? Somewhere deep inside me resides this exquisite tension between rote survival and my so-called higher values. Fear and desire, desire and peace, peace and pain, pain and dreams of no pain.

That tension speaks, on the one hand, to the bourgeois comforts of the status quo and the appeals they hold out to my neurotic mind while, on the other hand, there is the realization that those very comforts are false and drenched in blood, purchased at the cost of existence itself. How many people have to die for my convenience? It's all so very stupid.

It's a question of ultimate values, I suppose, and the diminishing returns on what the Buddhists call samsara—those short-term fixes that bring us immediate relief but actually make everything way worse in the long run, further exacerbating our suffering. Like heroin. Like voting for the lesser of two evils.

There is nothing very special about me. I am a samsara junkie through and through. Uncomfortable as I was watching the social fabric get torn to shreds, that very discomfort presented a fantastic challenge to the truth of my politics, which behold history with fear and trembling. The revolution will never be the revolution I want. The fix will always be popsicle sticks.

Like everybody else, I was forced to question just about everything—reality, truth, my brain, my choices, my country, my life, life itself.

If I came up with an answer at all, it's that there is indeed a strange karma at work in the universe, a corrosive yet restorative cosmic justice that, in the end, balances all the scales. It's not nice, and it's not personal, and yet all of my joy and all of my suffering depends on my orientation toward that impersonality.

And the karma of the pandemic was a bitch. It pushed the envelope big time. It pulled me inside the belly of the whale. I was brought forth, kicking and screaming, to confront a very banal but very real personal reckoning.

I was compelled, by dire necessity, to reverse the polarity of things believed: It was not that the pandemic equaled the end of the world, but that the end of the world equaled the pandemic. Not that Trump equaled the end of the world, but that the end of the world equaled Trump.

For me, this was as liberating as it was horrifying. It erased all distance between me and reality. Excuses and blame fled from my mind, as did any reassurance that I would be saved. The kingdom of heaven is within, and it is small. Very small.

The universe will be fine without us. That awareness is the beginning of crawling out from under. You're dead already. Stop smiling at cops. Stop kowtowing to your boss. Salvation is now or never.

Off Route comes out early 2026

Get an early copy at Rick Levin's book talk:

Dark Pine Coffee (954 Pearl St)

Saturday, January 31st at 7:00 pm

A visceral account of felt truth- -charting survival and unexpected flashes of humanity amidst the relentless churn of the gears of capitalism itself, in its final stages.

From the driver's seat, the narrator navigates a world teetering on the edge, where personal crises intertwine with broader systemic failures. Grappling with a profound loss of self, he feels like a trapped work automaton in a job that has become his dominant identity. Amid bizarre encounters--a naked passenger, a gun-wielding rider- and the dehumanizing bureaucracy, he wrestles with crippling anxiety and the eerie monotony of days that feel like an infinite loop.

Off Route is a raw, darkly humorous odyssey through a collapsing American landscape, where corporate indifference and societal decay amplify personal despair. Yet in the midst of the breakdown, it's also a testament to the fragile, enduring human spirit-forever seeking meaning and connection, even when the world, and the bus, feel perpetually off route.

RICK LEVIN is an award-winning journalist and critic. His work has appeared in The Stranger, the Seattle Weekly, The Village Voice, and the Eugene Weekly. His short fiction and essays have been published in a handful of literary journals, including Oyster Boy Review, Timberline Review, and Blue Collar Review. In a spasm of romanticism and blue-collar solidarity, he abandoned his journalistic career in 2019 to become a city bus driver in Oregon's Willamette Valley, where he lives with his wife and various animals. Off Route is his first novel.

Ratself by the Meat Pit

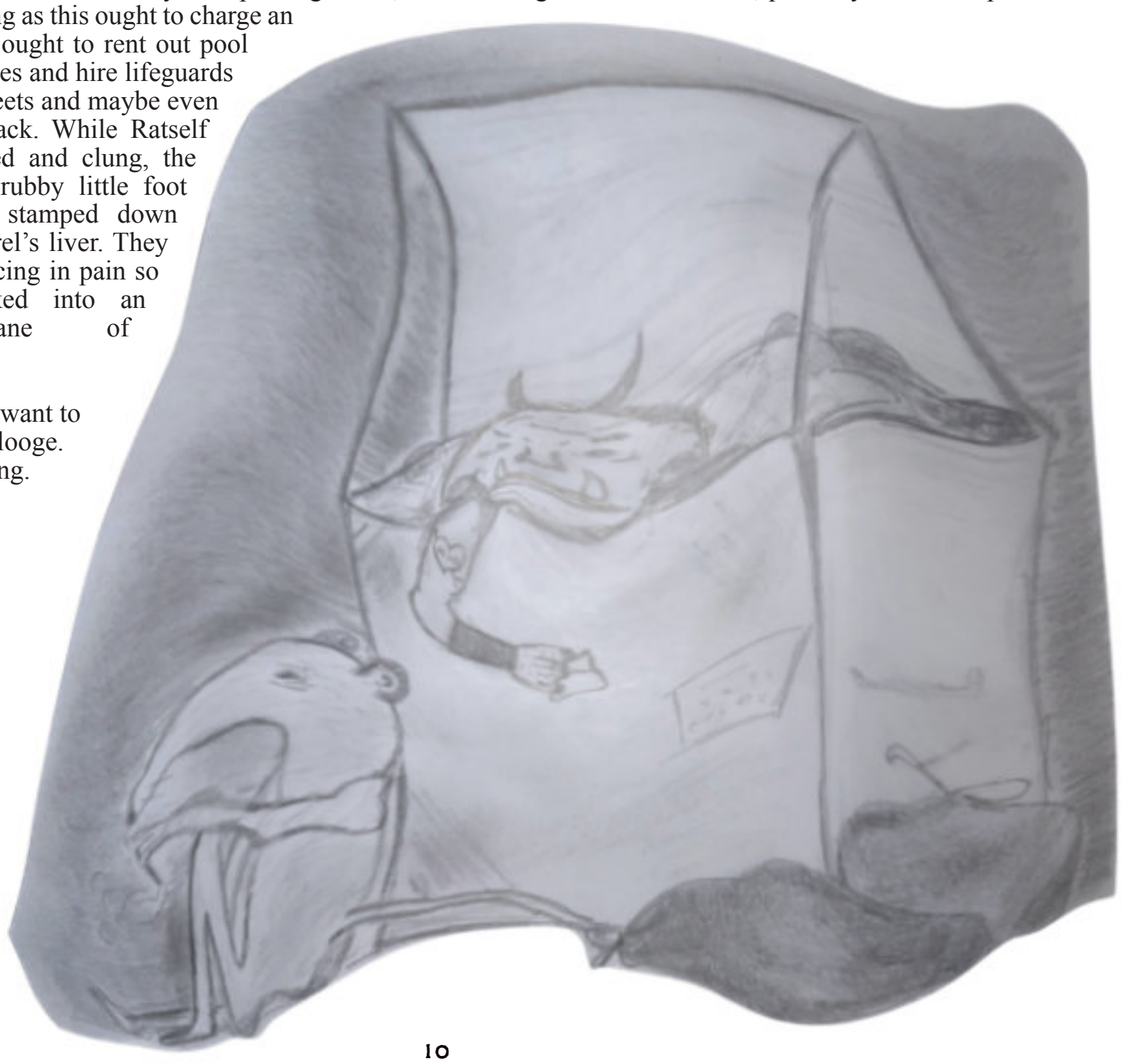
By: Proxy

Ratself stumbles over rotten garbage into the dank alley behind Boneyard, dizzy with oblivion and welcome of it. They trip, lurching faceward into goop and grime, betrayed by a loose, fraying shoelace rapidly congealing into the mess. Ratself is wasted. Nose leaking, blood pooling amid the filth, Ratself heaves their jangling flesh back upright, spuriously choosing to live in the moment, the moment of falling. They slump against Boneyard's famed dumpster, known affectionately as the meat pit. The fruits of said pit, borne of or born in, are myriad but indiscernible, discarded treasures, wasted meals, feral cats or any wretched combination therein. Some such monster bangs about inside as Ratself waxes in and out of lucidity. It's winter, muses Ratself, yet the night is sickly warm, a fever waiting to break. While it could very well be wintertime, Ratself doesn't know as much with any certainty. Of late, there's less and less they know as much at all. Knowledge of this waning knowing too, unfortunately, eludes Ratself, steeped in a manufactured contentment atop their puke stained throne of half truths and whole lies.

They shiver against the rusted metal of the meat pit just as the monster, some novel creature recklessly spawned from the pit's fertile, festering loins, shivers back on the other side. Shivering, it seems, could pose a revolutionary mode of wordless communication. It seems so, anyway, to that baby in the dumpster, which shivers and shakes harder and more violently in ecstasy of its newfound language. From raucous, thrashing gyration, to fervent, senseless vibration, the creature discovers a new frontier of sonic sensation, perhaps overzealously. A creature was immaculately born from the meat and just as suddenly reborn as a sound incarnate. A sound which thoroughly seeps into the pallid, crumpled up body of Ratself. The hum parasitizes Ratself. It reproduces in their vocal chords, lays eggs in their throat cavity which swells to accommodate them, then hatches, wriggling up and off their tongue. They ho and hum, raspy and off key, a senseless, drunken hum. Still, it is music, and energy, and a throbbing beating pulse of life.

This disturbance rouses the other denizens of the alley. First to pounce is the hob, a tricky and conniving goblin by birth, merchant by trade, and asshole by choice. Only last night, or the last last night, Ratself had been coaxed, with little if any understanding, to pawn off those last fleeting scraps of consciousness for an unreasonably generous, this according to the alley cat, dosing of splooge. The alley cat who was then keeping company with Ratself had vigorously balked at their exchange, beside himself that the hob would even consider cutting such a generous deal on what he assured Ratself was indeed premium splooge, fresh from the fae's knob, encouraging Ratself to transact while the going was this good. In most likelihood, Ratself was fated else bound to accept the hob's terms and didn't require the sly conning, yet the hob considered himself a maestro among splooge peddlers, an upstart and champion, and craft demands ceaseless innovation, theatrics or other such brain hacks. So last last night it was the charade with the alley cat which siphoned that meager remainder of Ratself's thoroughly fractured mental focus. Tonight, though, the hob was not feeling so crafty. A hobgoblin on the way and with it one more gobby mouth to fill, the hob scuttled restlessly from down the alley, stepping to Ratself after first stepping on Ratself to curry their attention, itself an increasingly exquisite commodity. The pooling blood, still trickling out Ratself's nose, pooled yet more. A pool as deep and sprawling as this ought to charge an admission fee. It ought to rent out pool noodles and floaties and hire lifeguards and host swim meets and maybe even erect a snack shack. While Ratself bled and hummed and clung, the hob raised his grubby little foot once more and stamped down hard on the wastrel's liver. They flinched, not wincing in pain so much as shocked into an alternate plane of unconsciousness.

Get up, fool. You want to buy some splooge. They kept shivering.



ON GHOSTS

By: Clarabel

"My heart has joined the thousands, for my friend stopped running today"- Watership Down

A new ghost

darts past the door,

a silvery wisp, with sparkling eyes.

Every other ghost in the house is woken,

From sleep, From respite, from being locked in the closet,

and slowly floats out into the grand hall.

The hats on the hat rack sway,

the cold air and cavernous echoes

are the loneliness that prowls the floors, that lowers the blinds,

that electrifies the haunting of this old house.

Middle age sets in like moss on the roof, leaves in the gutter.

I am not alone, I have my ghosts.

The ghosts I choose, the ones that chose me

and the ones I sent away but they refuse to leave.

The ones I will always beg to stay.

Boxes of memories and love letters,

funeral programs,

large framed photos,

tether me across starry time and through lands of big mountains,

sun on fertile valleys and broken hearts.

But deep in the house my candle burns and my knees weaken.

Ghost song and rosemary sprig.

Velvet curtain and dust.

A sunrise and sunset I no longer see,

Rise and fall.

rest
love
surrender
love
grow
burn
breathe

Disabled Love

What happens when we tell the whole truth about the parts of us we've been taught to pretend don't exist?

Being real about emotions and inner life is everything to me. I'm a radical mental health person. Relatedly, addicts are my people. I think a lot about self-harm, substance use, addiction, and harm reduction.

What am I doing that's fucking up my life, and how can I do less of that? It's joyful to have an attitude that's not all or nothing. Yay for harm reduction as opposed to brutal, unrealistic "abstinence only."

I need to do everything at my own pace, in my own way. Artificially being forced to do or not do anything– that isn't going to work. If I have a big problem, it's there for a reason, and it's going to be a substantial process to get me out of it.

Thank you to everyone who does harm reduction– thank you for helping. There's narcan, safer sex supplies, distributing materials like clean paraphernalia… But mostly I appreciate the attitude that all people are sacred beings worthy of respect. That's the part that makes me cry. Thank you for seeing me as human.

Having been treated as a non-person for my differences, which could be called psychiatric and developmental differences, and the years I didn't talk, and when I was under-housed panicking at a library in Ventura… I love it when all people get to be people.

harm reduction

Recently I was fortunate my spouse Ming invited me to help make first aid kits with a local street medic collective. Local street medics hand out first aid kits to mostly houseless / underhoused people. We were at a co-op with first aid materials covering a big wooden table.

Then something wonderful happened. Our chosen family member, also a street medic, suggested I make harm reduction kits, a seated side project. Thank you for helping care for my health, sweetheart.

I got to learn about harm reduction kits as I assembled some. Depending on the drug, the harm reduction kits vary. That day I was making kits for injection drug users. I got to learn about the materials like sterile water packets, long stretchy rubber strips that were blue, gauze, alcohol wipie prep pads, some little cotton pellets that I never knew what they were for…

My ignorance is bliss. So glad I never needed these kinds of drugs. So grateful that my homelessness was with Ming. I had a buddy– I was rather safe. Over the years, I've walked down paths of risk, but I've enjoyed many ok paths also.

gratitude

There was a point at the first aid kit / harm reduction kit assembly party that I needed to announce how tearfully happy I was for what I was doing.

"I just need to tell everyone. This is my destiny. I can't believe I'm finally doing this kind of harm reduction. Thank you for helping me do this sacred work," I told the street medics.

Yes, I will be the crazy person who cries about putting clean drug use materials into a bag. We are anarchists— we can do this. Far removed from the encampment, I can help in this small way, right? If we do a little something, good can come of it.

Thank you for being real about power. Just because someone has less power in society, doesn't mean they are worth less. We all belong.

questions for discussion

When you have been homeless, how safe were you?

What kinds of harm reduction do you participate in?

Have you done street medic work?

Have you ever benefited from street medicine?

In what situations have you been treated as a non-person?

Where do you feel justice in your body?

Who treated you as a person, when others did not?

What types of love are your favorite?

thank you

Harm reduction is love. Personally I like all different kinds of love. My favorite is probably cuddling in a quiet place with someone who respects me.

Also I like cooking for people who have particular dietary needs– knowing I was conscientious about the ingredients, and the person will not get sick from what I made. I never had kids or grandkids, but part of me is an abuelita, wearing a colorful apron and holding an old wooden spoon. I want to feed you so at least your tummy is ok.

Also I like praying with people who are freaking out and want their hands held in prayer. When they can cry, I feel the grief-energy shift in their body, less stuck. This is holy work, to be there with someone who's suffering.

Also I like enriching soil with compost and considering the needs of the land. I'm clumsy and unpracticed, but it feels good to try. The earth is my home, and some care for the earth is the least I could do.

Also I like giving people zines although often I don't get to know about the reaction which happens later in private. Someone reads a poem before bed, and maybe a phrase sifts into their dream. A phrase they needed. Words matter– we are wordy animals.

prayer

Dear Mother God, Parent Earth, water, electricity, Jaguar, gravity, ancestors, transcestors, art ancestors, Snake Mother, mushroom people, tree people, and all forces of Love,

Thank you for our blessings and resources. Thank you for these bodies which feel and need so vulnerably. Please hold us as we change, which may involve suffering. Please protect us as we endure harm from unjust forces and violence.

Thank you for our good hearts which seek the truth and want to be respectful. Please help us treat ourselves and others with compassion, and understanding that we do not understand. Please help us remember that we're all filled with Mystery and have rich pasts, with forces that can't be seen still influencing us– traumas, blessings, and lessons we're still learning and processing even years after the fact.

Thank you for time. Please help us stay grounded in love and stay steadfast, being the people who we want to be, even when we're stressed. Please help us choose rest and find rest when we need it, in order to nourish our hearts and show up kind. Thank you for all the pleasures you give to us, like flowers, laughter, a moment of sunlight even in winter, a warm beverage, a beautiful dream.

Please bless the people who use substances, the people who do harm reduction, the people who are on the streets and exposed to the elements, and all who struggle and want. May we be comforted, fed, helped, and loved on our own terms, as the people we actually are, not the people others might wish us to be.

Thank you– we love you.

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