

THE GRAIL

VOLUME IV

OCTOBER 8, 2015

ISSUE III



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FARM TO FORK

Follow the fortunate freshman writers' fanciful foray to Flamingo Ridge farm as part of Reed's SEEDS program.

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1,000 DAYS

James Curry '16 is writing a book about blogging. One post at a time. One day at a time. For almost three years.

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COMMONS UNCOVERED

Familiar with the secret Bon Appétit menu? No? Then here's your comprehensive guide to the much beloved (maligned) Commons menu.

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www.reedthegrail.com

FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Thank you! This is an issue of *The Grail*! We couldn't have done it without support from readers like you. Since 2014 *The Grail* has not only been delivering the journalistic and creative content you want, but the content you crave. As a gift, this week we'll include great articles such as On Blogging, one man's figurative wrestling match with fame, immortality, and literature (1). Our adventure correspondents go on a SEEDs trip to unforgettable Flamingo Ridge farms (5). The Commons secret menu has been exposed! (it's more than just cheesy fries) (4).

The Cultural Calendar reviews the hottest-darkest-funniest cartoon of the past 100 years: Rick & Morty (9). We take a look at another drawn masterpiece, *Nimona*, by Noelle Stevenson (6). The Gender Blender Defender meets Miss Lonely Hearts (8). De Sastre is back with some style (in spanish, 7). The road towards perfection is long and narrow, but we travel it everyday. Here's to more issues (of the magazine)!

Join us on Mondays in PAB 105 at 9 P.M.

Love,

Brian, Jordan, Lauren, and Vikram

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Front cover photograph by Jordan Yu.

On Blogging

By SARAH RICHMOND

One thousand is an interesting number. It's the smallest big number, with the first inkling of unassailability peeking behind its comma, just look at it: 1,000.

At least that's what senior anthropology major James Curry IV has led me to think, and if there is one thing a conversation with Curry is, it's thought provoking. Last week, I had the opportunity to sit down with Curry and discuss one particularly intriguing project that is underway. He is currently in the process of writing a book titled *On Blogging*, which is to be comprised of 1,000 posts, uploaded daily to his blog. All of the posts will be focused on the subject of blogging. As of today, he is on post 328, and is set to finish by the time he is 23. While scrolling through what currently constitutes the work, the presence of that numerical comma, that *bigness*, can be found everywhere. From a reader's standpoint, it is not so much the experience of getting lost in the text, as the sensation that you were never re-

ally found in the first place. Each and every post is a jumping point, a catalyst for a collision of ideas, arguments, and intellectual evolutions. While reading *On Blogging*, it is impossible to keep the idea of the blogger out of mind for long. At times, it seems like the project belongs to 1,000 individual entities rather than one singular narrator.

However, there is one, and only one, James Curry IV, and if anyone is grappling to understand this overwhelming, multi-faceted impenetrability, it's him. "I had no idea where to start," he says, "So I wrote a sentence."

More specifically, the origin of Curry's inspiration can be traced back to a class here at Reed. "I guess like anything, it goes back a lot of different steps; there are a lot of different things that got me to start writing this. I'd say the original point is a class I took sophomore year, called Time and Space, which was taught by LaShandra Sullivan. It was very hard to understand; a lot of it was on dia-

lectics. I wanted to write my final paper in the class about blogging, I was really interested in the weird temporalities that play into it. You make a post, it's in the past, and then it gets recalled into the present. A blogger says a lot — they just type, and then post, and it's there forever. At first, I was interested in what it means to have something that accumulates so easily. I began to have so many different thoughts, that I couldn't even organize them for a final paper. I had all these ideas, and I didn't know where to put them."

It wasn't until the following year, while studying abroad in Argentina, that he began to compile the writing that would later become *On Blogging*. "I remembered that I had all these ideas about blogging that I wanted to express, but I had no idea where to start. I wrote a sentence, and then I had another idea and wrote the next one. When I started, it felt really good, and it kept on giving me new ideas. I thought I might end at 100, maybe



Jimmy Curry IV

Kevin Snyder

200. And through the process of actually writing it I realized I could set the limit at 1,000.”

But why blogging? Or perhaps more consequentially, why 1,000 separate pieces on blogging? There are well over 1,000 different paths one could venture down in the inquisition of the colossal and at times perturbing land that is the blogosphere. On tumblr alone, there are currently around 250 million blogs floating in a mass of creativity and conformity, ranging from revelatory think pieces to a collection of Ryan Gosling cereal memes. For the sake of this piece, and in the name of maintaining the integrity of our conversation, a more apt perspective may be *On the Various Subjects, Themes, and Questions that Arise While Attempting to Understand On Blogging*.

On Diaries

I repeat myself a lot within *On Blogging*, I read a book recently about diaries, and while I was reading that book, in the midst of writing *On Blogging*, it hit me that this is what I've been talking about. It's interesting, because diaries, and blogs too, always have this sort of dialectical relationship between the self that writes and the self that lives. They're kind of separate, but never entirely. They'll inform each other; they're caught in a feedback loop. That's one of the interesting things about blogging specifically, as distinct from diary keeping. It's a more public thing, and it's networked to other blogs. They link to each other, especially on something like tumblr. Older blogs, maybe, are more self-contained, but newer blogging platforms are all networked with each other.

On Research

It's something that makes me insecure about on blogging, but it's also a possible strength — a lot of it's very circular, most of the entries have the form of a circle. I'll start with an idea, and explore it, and then come back. And a lot of the times I haven't really gone anywhere. It's just recursive.

That's part of the whole idea of the project. I'm doing some light research here and there, but mostly I'm just doing it via practice, by doing and thinking about it. A lot of it is really just thinking about things unproductively. Just being really stupid about a thing for a very long time.”

On Narcissism

I feel like to be a blogger, you kind of have to be something of a narcissist. To be a writer, you kind of have to be a narcissist, but especially to be a blogger. I get these arguments some people have about millennials — that they're all narcissistic and self absorbed. I get where people are coming from, especially when they see that so many of us keep blogs. It's such a narcissistic gesture to keep a massive database of yourself in public. As if anyone would care about *you*, specifically. I wonder if it has to do with there just being different kinds of people, if it's just that some people want to be seen, and others prefer to be private. At the same time, it seems like a cultural shift as well, where fame becomes a bigger concern for more people than it was in the past. I see it in that spectrum of how much you want to be seen by other people.

On Fame

I'm obsessed with becoming famous. I wrote a zine in February about fame, and what it means to want to be famous. It's very important to me, but I also worry about that being an important thing. I try not to suppress it, but to sort of manage it. It gives me ambition and drive; I wouldn't be writing 1,000 things if I thought that no one would read it. I pretend I would, but I wouldn't. I struggle a lot to try and make it something good within itself. But then I fall apart when I say that because I don't know if there could be any piece of writing that just exists for itself. A piece of writing is made for someone to read it. Or for someone to write it, which is, perhaps what a lot of this has been.

On the Reader

When I imagine what it would be like for someone to read the whole thing, I get a little bit stressed out for them. I know how a lot of people read academic seeming texts thinking that each word is meaningful, and that it's deliberately moving towards a conclusion. I say this at the beginning of the work; I'm not really disciplined. I'm just messing around here and figuring things out for myself. I know on the one hand, a feeling I want people to feel when they read it is a sense of being overwhelmed. That's definitely a feeling I get when I work on it and when I think about it as a totality. I would also hope that people could encounter it and then start having their own ideas about it. Talk back to it, throw it away, and write new things about it. Every time I talk to someone new about it and they respond with an idea, I think that's a success.

On Floods

It's sort of a meta-theme about the miracle of being able to meditate on something, to have 1,000 random, stupid thoughts about something, and have them coagulate into something meaningful. Also, the metaphor of a flood has become very important. I began with the metaphor of a stream. It goes back to the idea of Heraclitus, and the idea of becoming. The weird thing about blogging, is that the streams are always accumulating, and when you get a lot of water in one place, it becomes a flood, and then you fucking *die*. You drown in it. That's become one theme, feeling what it means to get flooded by information, by ideas.

On Beginning

The weird thing about on blogging, it gives me this sensation, where every time I make a new entry, I'm like a completely different person. I feel like it's almost like I'm dreaming. Where you fall asleep, you have a dream, and you *are* yourself, so that there's a continuity between all your different selves, but you're also this dream self, that only exists in that moment, and

when you wake up, and it's gone forever. This has to do with the structure of *On Blogging*, and also how I imagine the structure of the self. There is continuity between all points, but it's sort of a miasmic, ethereal continuity. It's defined by essential discontinuity between the elements. This is a project where I've wanted to feel when I wake up every single day like it's a new thing. Like every single time I'm starting over. The only thing that determines when I move on to a new idea is exhaustion. I write an entry as long as I can, or until I feel satisfied, and then I finish.

On Presence

I think it's gotten better, but at first it only helped me be present to the project itself. It alienated me from a lot of people, because it became the only thing I could talk about. People do say that blogging alienates you from the world. And this is part of the project, I've been trying to create a vision of blogging that brings people more present within things. I used the metaphor of immersion in one of my posts. Where you're not so much in the presence of things as you're just living. You're in things by paying a lot of attention to it, and letting it surround you, and overwhelm you. That's sometimes how I get, especially during emotionally intense moments. It does help keep me engaged in my life.

On Mark Zuckerberg

Mark Zuckerberg once said that having multiple personalities for yourself demonstrates a lack of integrity. It fascinated me because he has a very strong and weird ideology. He is fully in the extreme that you should share everything that you have, and everything should be public. He talks about it in this utopian sort of way, like if we all shared everything with each other, it wouldn't be a problem anymore. Like if everyone shared their crazy party photos, no one's boss would get angry at them, because this is just the way people are, which is just a fucking fantasy. It's one of the

most absurd things I've ever heard. Extending surveillance everywhere is not going to eradicate the interests of the state or the interests of power. And it's very easy for him to say something like that when he is a rich, white billionaire who lives in Silicon Valley.

On Intimacy

Around entry 300 something, the entries became a lot more personal, which I struggle with. I talk about breakups, about certain fights I've had in relationships. I talk about trying to find a house. It's been therapeutic to get my thoughts together, to try and figure out just what the fuck is going on in my life right now. But it's also been therapeutic in the sense that I have that same feeling that I have towards my life towards the phenomenon of blogging and towards just everything — towards the world as a whole, towards politics and metaphysics. I'm just confused and stressed out by all these things. It is sort of that egotistical grasp at a little bit of control of things, like articulating things so you feel like you have some agency within this flow of confusion. The more I've done it, the more I've gotten to the point where I write new entries with the sense that I have a foundation. It's a very comforting feeling to have gotten there, and to be able to keep going from there.

On Chasing, But Never Quite Catching Up

I've thought of this as an eternally futile struggle. But I think it's a lot more true to the medium and more joyful to think of it as chasing 1,000 things all the same time, and every moment you could be chasing another thing, and all those things come back and intersect. That's the joy, that's the fun of being a blogger. Unlike someone who's writing a real-deal book, you never have to stay on the same path. You can change your mind whenever you want. You can stay on one thing forever, or you can stop in the middle of a sentence. That's definitely one of the virtues of

it. I had wanted to develop a method for writing that I could maintain, conceivably forever. My biggest fear was writer's block, I was scared I only had a certain amount of ideas and that was it. I was scared of running out of things to say. And I think it has come about as something having to do with the meaning of blogging that when you engage with it in a certain way, it could conceivably generate infinite avenues for thought. Which is definitely a happy thing for me.

On Balance

To say that someone is imbalanced isn't to say that they're undisciplined. On blogging has made me very disciplined, I write a lot, and I'm working on it all the time. I think someone who is extremely disciplined is perhaps more unbalanced than someone who isn't. It's not necessarily a bad thing to be unbalanced. I think it's possible to imagine that being a good life.

On Garbage

In order to manifest a potential, you have to use up resources. In order to manifest our resources we have to generate a lot of garbage. It's the anxiety of contributing to a gigantic trash dump. I'm sometimes really into it, and sometimes deeply afraid of it. But the only way I know how to deal with it is to keep doing it.

...

Ultimately, according to Curry, there is one goal that has driven the totality of the work thus far — "I'm doing it because I want to be fucking rich and famous. I want to make a million dollars."

A million, I point out, is a much bigger number than 1,000.

However, it is only 1,000 one thousands, and as Curry is posed to prove, 1,000 may not be so unattainable of a number after all. ▼

You can access *On Blogging* at detrituscollective.tumblr.com/onblogging



Scouring the internet (or, more likely, casually browsing your Facebook newsfeed), one occasionally stumbles across some documents of critical importance. These top secret missives, protected and monitored by the U.S. government, no doubt, divulge information hidden in plain sight. . . information that changes the way our entire society functions. When one guides the mouse over the link to “Chipotle Secret Menu, Check Out #4, It’s CRAZY,” inhales a nervous, shuddering breath, and presses a finger into the warm metal of the mouse pad, there is no telling what will be found. Quessarillo-dillas, burritochangas, double meat for half the price, glory to the Lord! Unlocking secrets such as these does more than give you all of the powers awarded to the guy with the ring in *Lord of the Rings* (never seen it, oops), it is a password that lets you into the Chipotle club. And if I know anything about secret clubs, it is that they are amazing. So, without any further ado, allow *The Grail* to let you into the secret club of Commons, our very own, on-campus Chipotle equivalent.*

*Commons is not a Chipotle equivalent, please John Kroger bring Chipotle to campus, #buredobowls

Grilled Masterpieces

Many have tried their hand at nudging the patient gentleman behind the grill to whip them up something off-menu. One man took this divine creation to the next level, incorporating basically every ingredient at his disposal. “I did make something freshman year,” said Aaron Ramcharan ’17, “that was fries with diced chicken fingers on top, covered with cheese, bacon, jalapeños, and whatever other toppings there were.” Looking at this mouthwatering heaping plate of potato, vegetable, and meat is a day’s work in itself. Unfortunately, “they raised the price last year when [the dish] caught on with the new freshman,” said Ramcharan, who no longer indulges in that particular meal, and is unsure if it will still be prepared. He now has a newer, one might say even more exciting, go-to. “I’ve been getting something that. . . is more on the healthy side. You can order a grilled chicken breast and the five veggie toppings, jalapeños, tomatoes, spinach, mushroom, and onions, and then put that all in a bowl with the rice, beans, and broccoli,

and it makes a solid, healthy meal that’s available all the time because it’s made of standard items.” If I were a person who was comfortable saying “hack,” I would definitely call that a Commons hack.

Everything in a Tortilla

Have you ever (this is rhetorical because you absolutely have) strolled into Commons around 6 PM, perused the menu board, and done the nightly walk-around, only to discover that none of the items available appealed to your sensitive palate? You may have stood, paralyzed, unsure of what to do next. What if you starved? How would you finish your Hum paper? Well, no need for that any longer, with the advent of the Commonsrito. This process begins by approaching the grill, and asking politely for a warm tortilla. While that baby is heating up, you speed walk around the room, hitting the salad bar, the DIY, maybe even Yakimono if you’re feeling crazy. Fill up a bowl with some veggies, rice, beans, cheese, hot sauce, and whatever else strikes your fancy. Once you retrieve your tortilla and Commons George swipes your ID card, you sit

down to the most difficult part of your meal. Spoon your ingredients into your tortilla, making sure not to overfill, roll it up as delicately and evenly as you can, and enjoy!

Just Douse it in Cheese

There are a few hours of the day when these recipes may prove even more useful than others. Those quiet, contemplative moments between 1:30 and 5:00, when you can complete the food circuit as many times as you like, and perhaps still come up dry. This may pose a problem if you, like me, can never remember to eat lunch until 3:00 PM. It is in these desperate times that I say: cover whatever you have in cheese. While this method may be better suited to some food options than others (perhaps the brown rice with cheese would prove tastier than the frozen yogurt), it is certainly worth your consideration. I recommend grabbing a bowl of pasta salad with a good portion of cheddar on top, heading for the microwave, a letting it run until bubbly. What assemble doesn’t resemble a plate of fettuccine alfredo from a Michelin-starred restaurant, but it’s not bad. ▼



SEEDS of Change

By LYLA BOYAJIAN & CLAIRE STEVENS

Our SEEDS adventure consisted mainly of eating organic food. We also got on a school bus and drove an hour out of Portland to meet local farmer Charlie Harris. Charlie owns and operates Flamingo Ridge Farm, where he grows tomatoes and romaine lettuce. When Charlie says that Flamingo Ridge is a “family farm,” he means it. Every worker is on a first name basis. They sit around on hammocks and share sodas specially made by a close friend of Charlie’s. Everything on the farm is homemade and friendly.

When we arrived at the farm, we pulled down a large dirt road until we came to a field with rows of greenhouses. Charlie waved the bus into the driveway, jumping aboard to welcome us booming his hellos and bowing profusely. Charlie and his wife, Dina, are the quintessential old married couple. As we stepped off the bus and onto the farm, the couple were already fighting lovingly over where our tour should start; Dina grabbed Charlie’s bike as he tried to speed away.

Before reaching the bottom of the hill, home to a yurt and a hammock, we walked around a pond that can hold up to one million gallons of water. Dina’s labradoodle tailed us on our trip towards the yurt. Once there we feasted on homemade bread with marionberry sodas made by Hot Lips Pizza, a local pizza shop.

Standing in a circle, we took turns introducing ourselves and giving our reasons for coming to the farm, and why we care about food.

After the refreshments we began

our tour. Strolling up the dusty hill, we passed rows of greenhouses. Charlie explained how he maintained his monoculture crops (only one species of plant in a given area). He planted Romaine lettuce in the fall and winter, but switched to tomatoes in the spring and summer. Up until recently, his farm was labeled as “organic.” In the last few years, however, due to changes in the agricultural regulations, monocultures can no longer be certified as organic. Despite Charlie only using organic brands and techniques on his crops, Flamingo Ridge Organic Farm had to change its name to Flamingo Ridge Farm after 2008.

Towards the end of the tour, as we loitered in a clump by the back greenhouses, the Northwest Fellow for Bon Appétit, Autumn, spoke to our group a little bit about food justice and how Bon Appétit works to create a more sustainable company. Autumn’s job is to visit small farms that are direct suppliers to Bon Appétit and check their processes. She works directly with the farms and farmers to ensure sustainable operations.

After the tour we returned to the yurt to find the table once again laden with food. Jenny Nguyen, the Executive Chef at Commons, had prepared a whole meal for us from local, organic food. Flamingo Ridge farm contributed their signature lettuce, which was grilled until to a delicate crispiness and formed the base of a salad. The corn was coated with unpasteurized butter, grilled, and sliced off the cob. Charlie and Dina’s private garden

provided a few of the last tomatoes and cucumbers of season. There were pears that one of their neighbors brought from their orchard, and a local goat cheese. Homemade bread was arranged in baskets beside olive oil, which Jenny used to make a vinaigrette. Roasted hazelnuts added the finishing touch to the salad. Dessert was baklava from Hot Lips Pizza.

After eating dinner, Autumn taught us some more about Bon Appétit’s work with local farms. She told us about the programs that Bon Appétit has in place to encourage sustainability. At all of their locations, at least 20% of the food must be locally sourced. However, each different location is free to expand on that policy. Based on requests from customers, such as comment cards in Commons, more local food is added. At Reed, at least one entree option every meal is completely locally sourced. Bon Appétit also has a food recovery program that collects all salvageable food that hasn’t be served and donates it to feed the hungry in Portland.

At the end of the trip, on the bus riding home, we realized what this trip really taught us. Bouncing in a school bus, watching the sun set, we realized that Charlie surrounded himself with the people he loves, doing a job he loves. While we learned about food justice and the importance of eating locally, we also got an in-depth look at a man who loves his job and his life. ▼

REVIEW: NIMONA, BY NOELLE STEVENSON

Bibliophile

By GUANANÍ GÓMEZ

~ don't forget to read for fun ~

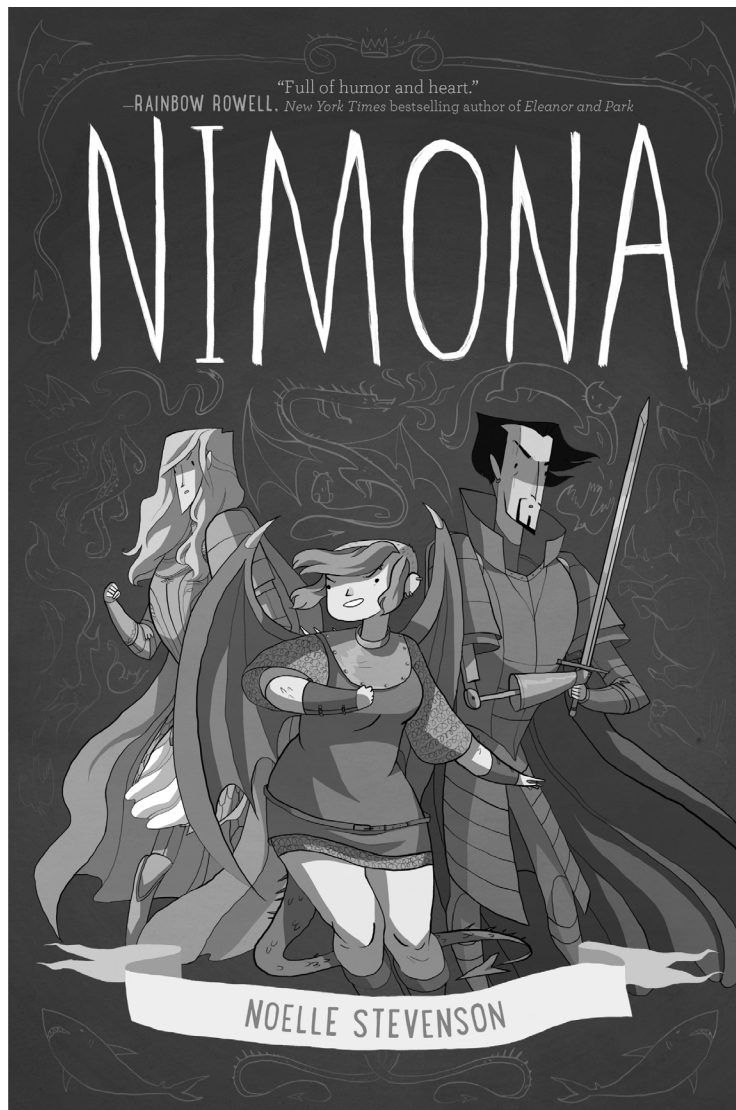
In a sentence: A shapeshifter named Nimona and a mad scientist named Ballister Blackheart team up to take down their kingdom's corrupt Institution for Law Enforcement and Heroics, a goofy premise that grows into something much darker and more awesome.

This delightful graphic novel begins as a medieval villain caper, complete with charming drawings, science, magic, conspiracy theories, puns (!), and complex characters. *Nimona* began as author/illustrator Noelle Stevenson's art school thesis, and quickly grew into a popular webcomic that has now been published in book form. After hearing a recommendation, I flipped through the first few pages at the store and quickly found myself completely engrossed, so moved by the story's momentum that I read the entire book while perched awkwardly in a corner of Powell's.

Nimona has quickly become my second favorite graphic novel (after Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*). In addition to humor and several touching moments, *Nimona* contains one of my favorite female leads in recent memory. She's

spunky, funny, and drives the action with her powers and unusual set of morals. Toward the end, as we find out more about the mysterious origins of Nimona's shapeshifting abilities, it becomes unclear who the audience should be rooting for. Even so, the story comes to a sweet and climactic conclusion, satisfying while still leaving questions about the characters' fates and choices.

I look forward to seeing more work from Stevenson, who has created a story about a complicated and powerful heroine that is also a kick-ass action book with real heart. Whether you have a free weekend to enjoy an amusing story with substance, or need a gift for that special bookworm in your life, *Nimona* is an excellent choice. ♣



De Sastre

Como la Flor

(Because She is a Flor)



“All the good cuss words are in Spanish anyways.”

This week we decided to turn the camera to our lovely latina Hazel Flores. Taking after the talented, stunning, and sexy reina Selena Quintanilla, Hazel wore a red halter crop top and white pencil-skirt. Complemented by the coordinating candy-red pumps, Hazel’s statement shirt reads “Judging you in Spanish”. A birthday gift from her best friend, the shirt is one of Hazel’s favorites. Matched with the skirt, heels, hoops, and her dazzlingly disheveled dark locks, Hazel Flores succeeds at being the baddest bitch around (latina edition).

¡Con tu adiós, ustedes llevan nuestro corazón! ❖

XOXO,
aa & muk

Miss Lonely Hearts

Dear Miss Lonely Hearts,

I've been dating a non-binary person for a while now and my parents have been asking me about them. My SO doesn't identify as either the male or female gender. I'm pretty close with my parents but I don't know to refer to my partner in front of my family. A little neighbor girl in my apartment complex approached me one day and

asked if I had a hamster. I said no. Then she asked if I had a girlfriend. For simplicity's sake I said yes but it felt wrong. I know my SO doesn't care what I call them or what my parents call them but I find it difficult when trying to explain the complexities of gender to people not as well versed as Reedies usually are. Any advice?

—Gender Blender Defender

Dear Blender,

I think you're asking two questions in the guise of one here. That's totally fine, but I'm going to separate them out and answer them one-by-one.

Question one is: my SO (*stands for "significant other," clueless readers!*) doesn't really care what words I use to refer to them or to our relationship, but I'd really like to know what words I can use, both to make them and myself more comfortable. Blender, it sounds as if by calling them your SO, you've already sort of made your decision. You've found a gender-neutral term that appeals to you. It makes your relationship with this special someone clear without incorrectly gendering them, which, is obviously a *huge* part of having a healthy and loving relationship with another person. Whether you're in a romantic relationship or you're just passing someone on the quad, misgendering someone when you know their preferred pronouns is like a big flashing sign that says: "I don't care enough about this other person to respect their gender, their decisions, or their life! I'm a big ol' butt!" Knowing this, it makes sense that you'd bristle at referring to non-binary partner as your "girlfriend," even if it seems like they wouldn't necessarily mind the gendered implications of the term.

If "significant other" seems too formal or clunky for everyday parlance, have you considered other gender neutral terms? "Partner" is common, as are "boo" and (my favorite) "sweetie." Apparently a couple on the show *Glee Project* has used the term "goyfriend," but then you'd risk people assuming that you're simply referring to your boyfriend, who happens to not be a Jew. Hey, that's how I took it.

Why don't you ask your partner what they prefer? I'm imagining this as a fun, romantic conversation — one that's about finding loving ways to think of one another rather than any kind of formal interrogation or interview. If you're squicked out by "lover" but they're into being your "honey," wouldn't it be nice to know? Then you can con-

fidently answer the question "do you have a girlfriend?" by saying "I'm dating someone, but I like to call them my sweetie. Isn't that cute?"

The second, more important question that you're asking is: what's my responsibility in explaining non-binary gender (both that of your partner and in general) to the non-Reed people in my life? Ultimately, Blender, this is up to you. If you're close with your parents and you want them to hang out with your partner in any capacity, I think you owe it to everyone involved to mention to your parents "hey, before we go to Slappy Cakes, just remember that my SO uses 'they' pronouns, not 'he' or 'she.'" That's pretty much as far as I went, conversation-wise, when my old partner began using they/them/theirs pronouns. Though my dad would sometimes have to clarify: "they're coming over for dinner still means I should only set one more place, right?" throwing a reminder into casual conversation was enough to make sure that no misgendering occurred.

That being said, not all conversations (or all family members) are that easy. I don't think that you ever have the *responsibility* to explain non-binary gender (or any other gender identity) to anyone. Don't feel like you need to constantly be carrying around a copy of Judith Butler, hollering "*gender is a social construct!*" at everyone you pass on the street. If you feel like the discussion would be fruitful and you *want* the person to understand what it means when someone goes by they/them/theirs, sure, strike up that conversation. But it's always your right — especially if you feel for any reason that the conversation wouldn't be safe — to say "I don't feel like talking about this right now. Hey, how about them [sports team]?"

Blender, your relationship is about the love between you and your sweetie. That's the best part, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

[that emoji cat with hearts for eyes],
Miss Lonely Hearts

Cultural Column

By CHARLIE C. WILCOX

Hey everyone, Charlie here, I want to take a minute to talk to you about *Rick and Morty*. *Rick and Morty* is a fairly popular animated television program that just ended its second season this past Sunday. I say fairly popular based entirely on my Facebook feed, which consisted of nary a *R&M* post during its first season, growing healthily over the year-and-a-half absence, and seemed to have reached a healthy consistency over the course of this summer's delivery of episodes. This is all well and good, but there's a slight problem: this season hasn't been that great.

There's an anxiety at play here. I simultaneously want to share my excitement over a great TV show with some people I didn't think would ever be interested in it, decry the fact that this season isn't as great as it could have been and lob some criticisms into the fray, and mourn the fact that my excitement levels about the show don't sync up with others. I think that may be a familiar feeling to anyone that discovers an album or movie a couple months or years after their friends have all watched and enjoyed it, and when that person brings it up, their friends respond with something like, "yeah, that thing is pretty great. . ." and then they trail off. End of conversation. You may want to talk about it, but you get the feeling that for many other people it's something in the past, and the discussions have already been had. It's likely we've all been on both sides of this exchange. Luckily, with a TV show, the discussion self-perpetuates; as long as the show is still running you can catch up on the episodes between seasons and join the discussion. On the other side of things, the people that tend to be ahead of the curve pop-culture-wise can't really be that far ahead of you. It's not like TV shows leak as albums do.

So now that we are all together here (I suppose that I'm assuming that, if you like *Rick and Morty*, you have completed season two, but if you haven't, come back to this article anytime in the next year and a half (or more), and I'll be in the same place with you, waiting for the third season), let's talk about *R&M* season two.

Why do I feel like this season of *Rick and Morty* hasn't been that great? Simple answer: repetition. So many episodes this season dealt with a similar thematic structure without exploring this theme from different angles.

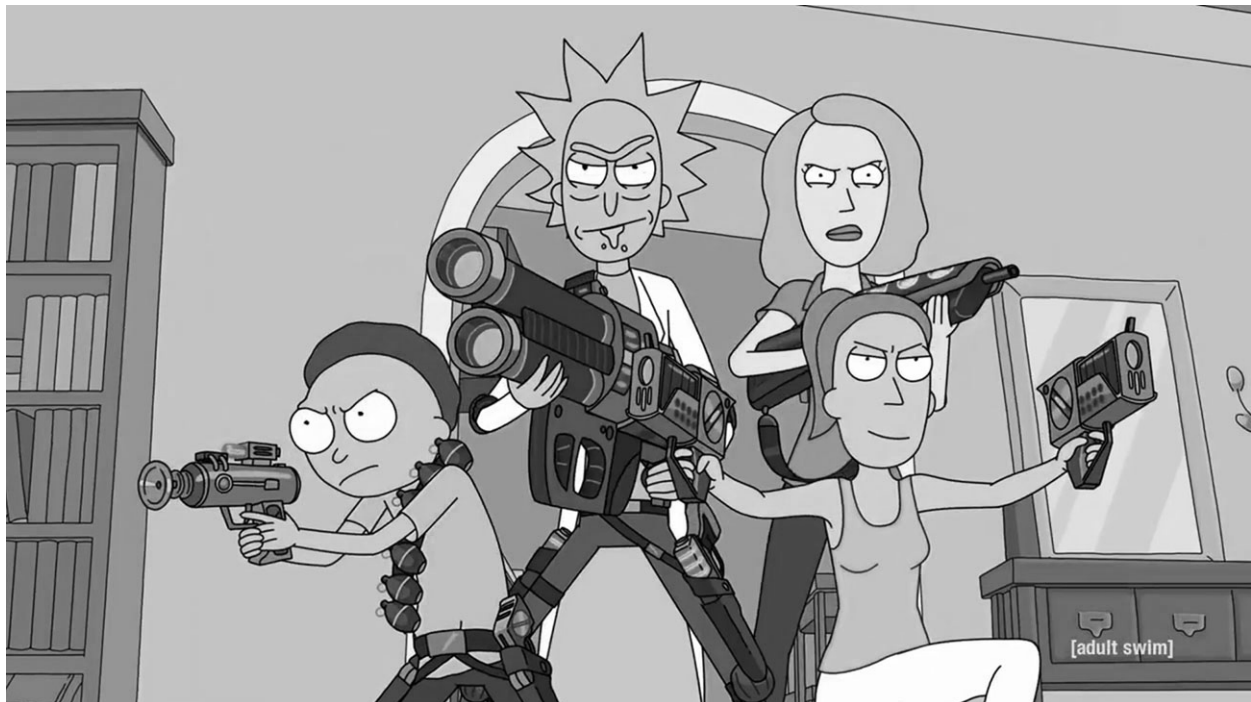
It really wanted to push the idea that Morty is a character with morals (albeit uncomplicated ones), and wants to do right in the world, but his attempts to right wrongs in an amoral universe usually result in even more apocalyptic destruction. Meanwhile Rick, by nearly all accounts a relatively cold son of a bitch, usually can see beyond a couple innocent deaths to the greater picture, which either means the avoidance of planet-wide genocide or the safety of his grandkids. It's almost as if the show proposes intelligence as its own morality, whereas uninformed morality and do-goodery can actually cause more harm than good. There's a wonderful anthropological nugget somewhere in there about cultural relativism; for instance, in the episode "Look Who's Purging Now" in which Rick and Morty visit one of those purge planets, where the key to a civil society is a night where there are no laws and people can go on murderous rampages and whatnot. To Morty, this idea is repellent, and he wants no part of it, vilifying the civilization for not being in line with his own sense of order. Rick, however, believes in doing as the natives do, so to speak, and is prepared to get his purge on. When Morty tries to intervene (for his own libidinous purposes), and alter the course of the purge planet is when things go awry, and Rick has to restore things to the way they were. Actually, by the end of the episode, Rick begrudgingly does help the planet overthrow its corrupt ruling class that forces the purge on the masses, but then we see that the masses don't actually have a better way for dealing with their society. It's a pretty pessimistic view on how the world works.

Anyhow, this theme structures a majority of the season two episodes, and it got pretty boring. After a while, it felt lazy, and I was stuck wishing the creators of the show spent more time exploring the mechanics of the worlds that Rick and Morty were visiting instead of using them as a backdrop for the moral dilemma. Do I think that Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland squeezed all the comedy gold they could have from the concept of purge planets? No, not really. Would Jermaine from *Flight of the Conchords* as a talking cloud named Fart have been funnier if he wasn't just a lesson with a funny song? Definitely. Not that there hasn't been some development over the course of the sea-

son. We gradually see Morty learning how to function in the universe. Sometimes when you are on a purge planet you just have to purge (but don't take it too far, buddy). I just wish there was a bit more continuity between the episodes. Not that *Rick and Morty* has to be completely serialized, but there are a lot of things that any individual episode seems to develop and then barely acknowledge again (hello Beth's alcoholic breakdown in "Total Rickall").

That being said, I thought the season finale was pretty phenomenal, and actually recast the season for me. The season finale finally presented a different take on the moral structure of the system, mainly by adding legitimate weight to what was happening to the characters. My partner (who is not as big of a fan of the show as I am) thinks the decisions that Rick makes in this episode are completely uncharacteristic of his usually self-centered modus operandi; while I agree that he is usually not so self-sacrificing, I'm not sure that this season doesn't set us up to believe in his empathetic turn towards his family. He would never let any legitimate harm come to Morty, Summer, or Beth (Jerry is another story). The reason that I really like this finale, though, is because it makes me legitimately excited for the next season, whereas I kinda expected this one to end and I would feel somewhat apathetic towards the long year and a half (or more) wait for new episodes. The reason it does this is because it makes me think that Harmon and Roiland have something big up their sleeves, bigger than the casual vibe of the show would let you think. After the finale, I found myself wondering what the

function of each season has been, and it seems like season one functioned as exposition. We are introduced to the characters and the universe(s) that they inhabit. We get a good feeling for some (but definitely not all) of the laws that govern those environments. All of these things are introduced at a luxurious pace; there are no huge storylines or arcs for the characters. Harmon and Roiland just want us to get comfortable in the world they inhabit. Then, in season two, they really start exploring some of the problems and dilemmas someone like Morty, a not-too-bright pubescent boy, would have by being foisted into the larger world. They take their time doing this too, so much so that it begins to feel repetitive, but they really want to hammer home that Rick and Morty are part of one singular organism that needs each other to thrive. Morty needs Rick's intelligence in order to navigate the outer and inner spaces around him, while Rick occasionally needs a dose of Morty's integrity (it's interesting that we also see both of these being corrupted by each other). It's only in this season finale in which we see a possible overarching conflict really developing, that could take several seasons to sort out. I have no idea if the next season will take this conflict head-on and turn *R&M* into some space epic, or if they will resolve it in the first episode of season three. Either way, I'm finally excited again to see what they will do. I hope you are too.



Rick and Morty ended its second season on Sunday.

Photo courtesy of Adult Swim.