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## Drawing the Invisible: Comics as a Way of Depicting Psychological Responses to the Pandemic

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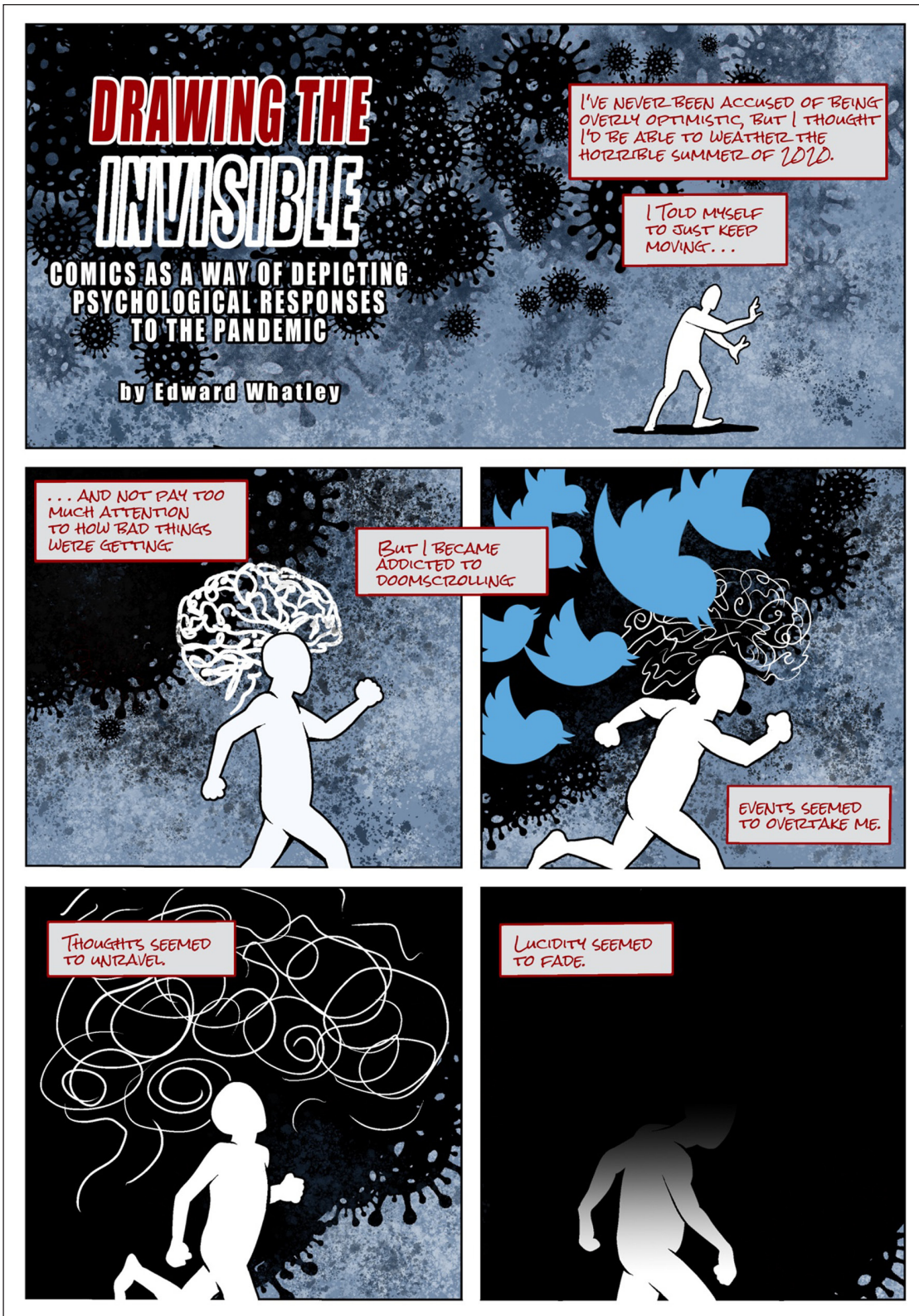
This graphic article explores the sensory world in the context of pandemic-related mental health issues. While comic artists work in abstract and impressionistic styles to varying degrees, most comic art has been representational. While many artists are adept at rendering facial expressions and body language, these are merely outward manifestations of a character's mood or emotions. The comic explores conveying states of mind less literally, using my own psychological reaction to the pandemic as its subject. I employ visual metaphors, icons, symbols, abstraction, and simplification rather than realistic or highly rendered images in the hopes of better relaying thoughts and emotions.

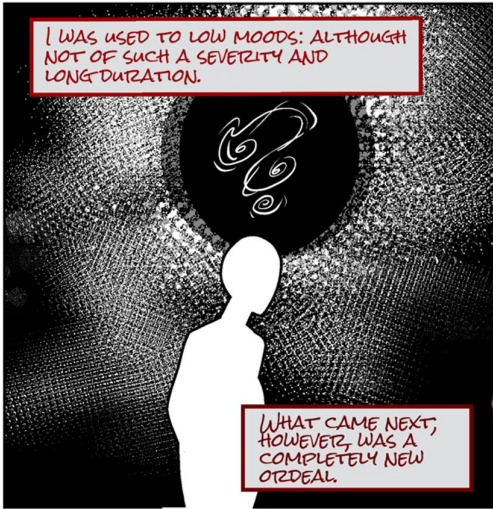
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## **Introduction**

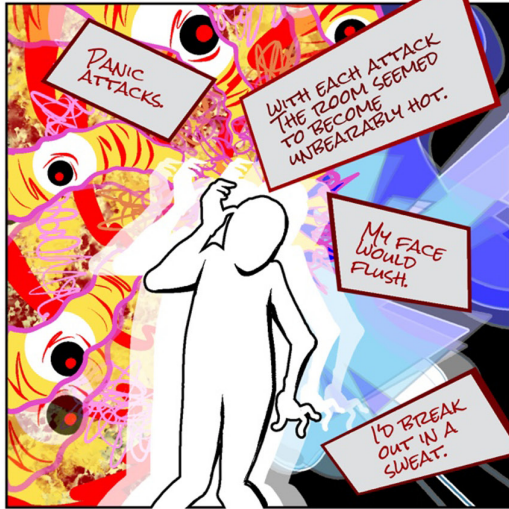
This comic explores whether my responses to the pandemic can be told using nonrepresentational or highly abstracted art and still successfully convey the events. Its success is up to each reader. Finding visual metaphors and devices to carry the narrative was challenging but fulfilling. I intended to start with a full script, but the ideas just would not come. When I decided to “write” the article in pictures and then add narration the process became much smoother. In hindsight, I suppose that’s logical given the visual nature of the medium. This article was drawn digitally using Clip Studio Paint. The narrator is drawn extremely simply to allow the visual devices to create the narrative rather than the traditional renderings of facial expressions and figure poses. Panels 4 and 5 on page 6 include content that previously appeared in *The Lame Halloween* (Richardson and Whatley 2021).





I WAS USED TO LOW MOODS; ALTHOUGH NOT OF SUCH A SEVERITY AND LONG DURATION.

WHAT CAME NEXT, HOWEVER, WAS A COMPLETELY NEW ORDEAL.



PANIC ATTACKS

WITH EACH ATTACK THE ROOM SEEMED TO BECOME UNBEATZABLY HOT.

MY FACE WOULD FLUSH.

I'D BREAK OUT IN A SWEAT.

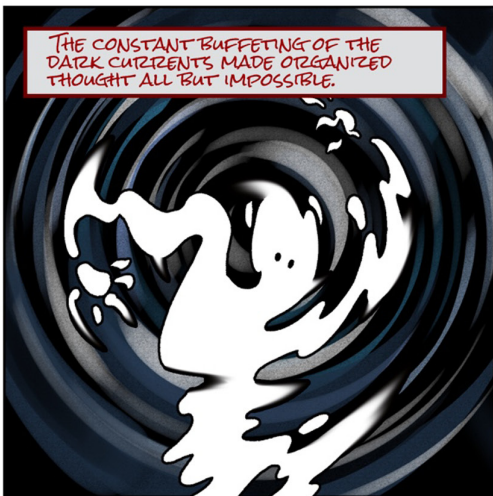


THE EPISODES WERE ACCOMPANIED BY A PRICKLY SENSATION . . .

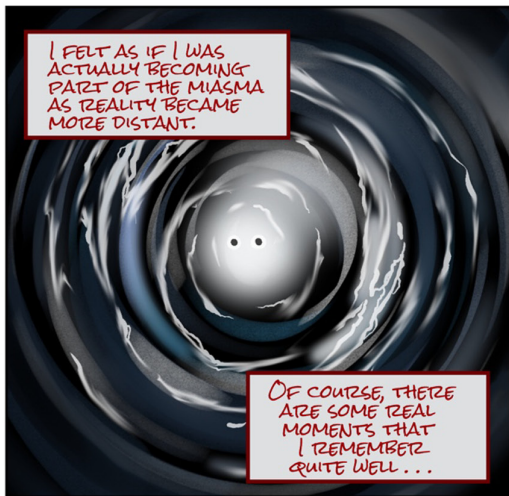
AS IF MY SWEAT WERE ACTUALLY SIZZLING ON MY SKIN.



I CAME TO FEEL AS IF MY CONSCIOUS MIND WAS BEING SUCKED DOWN A WHIRLPOOL.

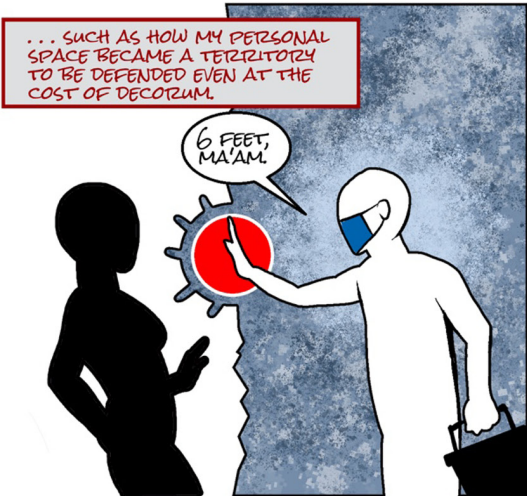


THE CONSTANT BUFFETING OF THE DARK CURRENTS MADE ORGANIZED THOUGHT ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE.

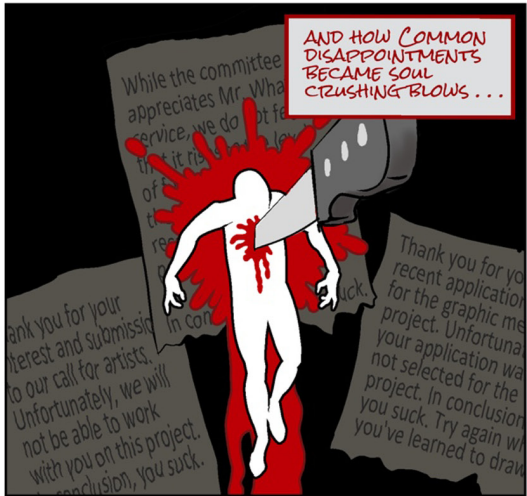


I FELT AS IF I WAS ACTUALLY BECOMING PART OF THE MIASMA AS REALITY BECAME MORE DISTANT.

OF COURSE, THERE ARE SOME REAL MOMENTS THAT I REMEMBER QUITE WELL . . .



... SUCH AS HOW MY PERSONAL SPACE BECAME A TERRITORY TO BE DEFENDED EVEN AT THE COST OF DECORUM.



AND HOW COMMON DISAPPOINTMENTS BECAME SOUL CRUSHING BLOWS ...

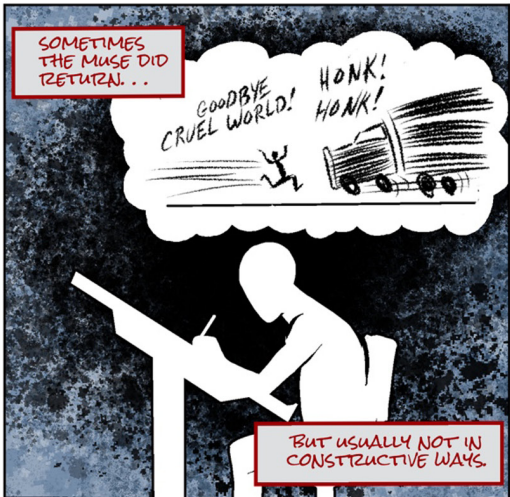


... AND HEART-RENDING TRAGEDIES.



EVENTUALLY THE COMICS MUSE WAS SNUFFED OUT.

AND CREATIVITY EVAPORATED.



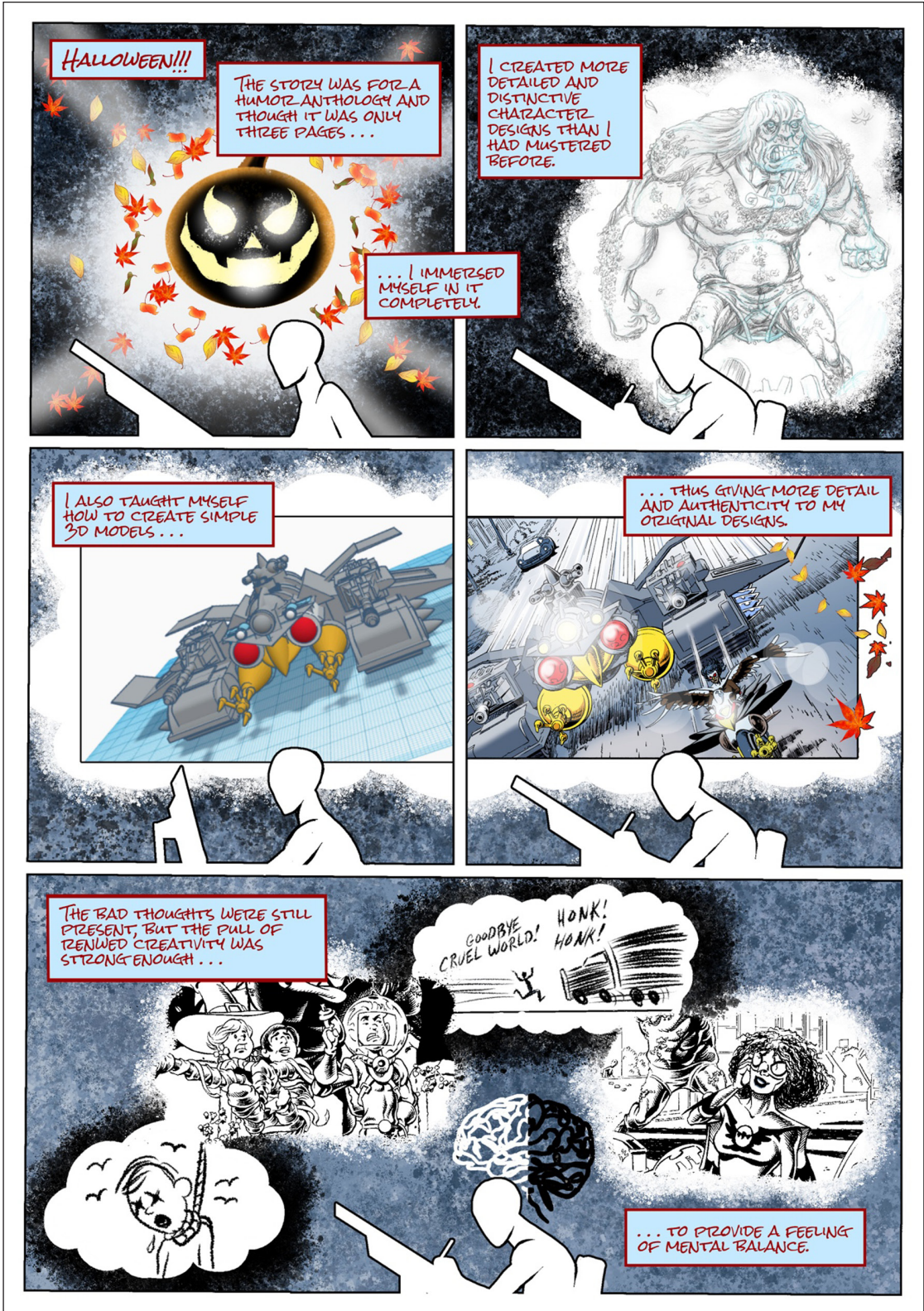
SOMETIMES THE MUSE DID RETURN...

BUT USUALLY NOT IN CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS.



AS MY REVERIES GREW EVER-DARKER...

I WAS SUDDENLY OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY CENTERED AROUND THE ONE THING THAT'S NEVER FAILED TO STIR MY CREATIVITY...



HALLOWEEN!!!

THE STORY WAS FOR A HUMOR ANTHOLOGY AND THOUGH IT WAS ONLY THREE PAGES...

... I IMMERSSED MYSELF IN IT COMPLETELY.

I CREATED MORE DETAILED AND DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER DESIGNS THAN I HAD MUSTERED BEFORE.

I ALSO TAUGHT MYSELF HOW TO CREATE SIMPLE 3D MODELS...


... THUS GIVING MORE DETAIL AND AUTHENTICITY TO MY ORIGINAL DESIGNS.

THE BAD THOUGHTS WERE STILL PRESENT, BUT THE PULL OF RENewed CREATIVITY WAS STRONG ENOUGH...

GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD! HONK! HONK!


... TO PROVIDE A FEELING OF MENTAL BALANCE.

BUT EVEN AS I WAS USING COMICS AS A COPING MECHANISM, I WAS ALSO USING THEM AS A LENS THROUGH WHICH TO VIEW THE WORLD. OVER THE COURSE OF THE SUMMER, I WATCHED IN HORROR AS OUR REALITY BEGAN TO RESEMBLE ONE OF MY FAVORITE DYSTOPIAN COMICS.



BRENNER 2010

IN FACT, A LIFETIME OF COMICS READING SHAPED MY VIEW OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.



MILLER AND GIBBONS 1990

I CAME TO SEE THE CAMPAIGN CYCLE AS A KITZBYESQUE CONFLICT...

... BETWEEN THE FORCES OF LIGHT AND ORDER...



... AND DARKNESS AND CHAOS.



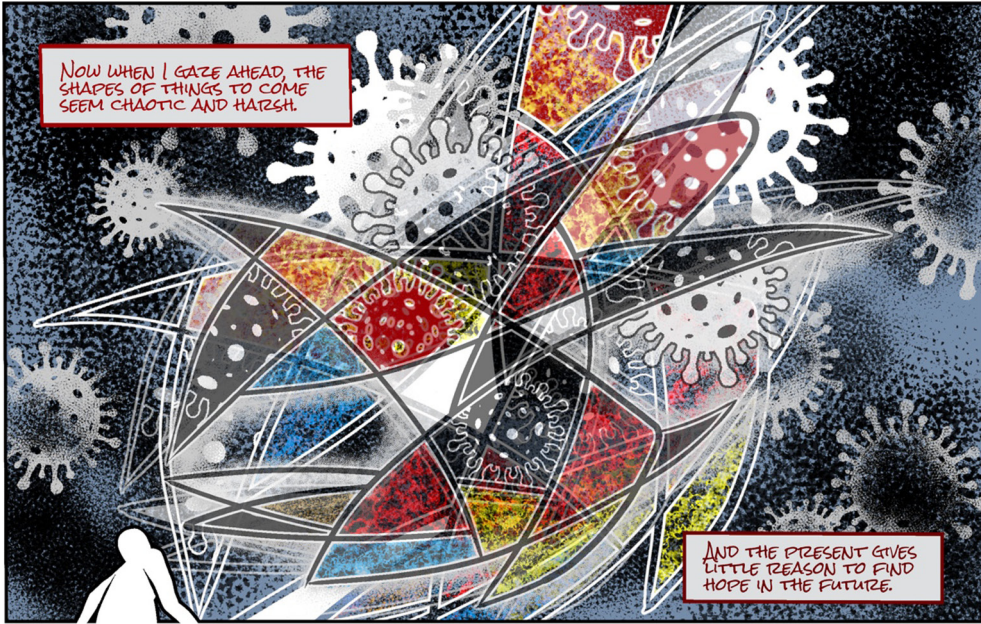
GETTING VACCINATED HELPED MY MINDSET GREATLY.



IN COMIC BOOK TERMS, I FELT A DEGREE OF INVULNERABILITY.

UNTIL THE DELTA VARIANT BEGAN TO PROLIFERATE AND THE VACCINATION NUMBERS STALLED.





NOW WHEN I GAZE AHEAD, THE SHAPES OF THINGS TO COME SEEM CHAOTIC AND HARSH.

AND THE PRESENT GIVES LITTLE REASON TO FIND HOPE IN THE FUTURE.



THE PANDEMIC IS FURTHER FRACTURING THE COUNTRY...

... ALONG THE FAMILIAR FAULTLINES.



BUT AS COVID WEAVES ITSELF DEEPER INTO THE FABRIC OF THE COUNTRY, I FIND I'VE LARGELY REPLACED ANXIETY WITH DISAPPOINTMENT AND A TIRED SENSE OF RESIGNATION.

I TELL MYSELF TO JUST KEEP MOVING...

... AND REJECT THE ALTERNATIVES.

END



### Author's Note

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### Editors' Note

This article is part of the Rapid Responses: Comics in and of The Moment Special Collection, edited by Jeanette D'Arcy and Kay Sohini, with Ernesto Priego and Peter Wilkins.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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### References

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**Richardson, K (w) Whatley, E (p,i)** 2021 The Lame Halloween. *Monster Fun Halloween Spooktacular*. Rebellion Publishing.

