

Meme Insider

KEITH STACK: THE ORIGINS OF 'LESLIE AND BRIANNE'

Keith Stack on His Webcomic, Drawing Sonic the Hedgehog Every Day, and Animating for TV

WIZARDS AND WORDS

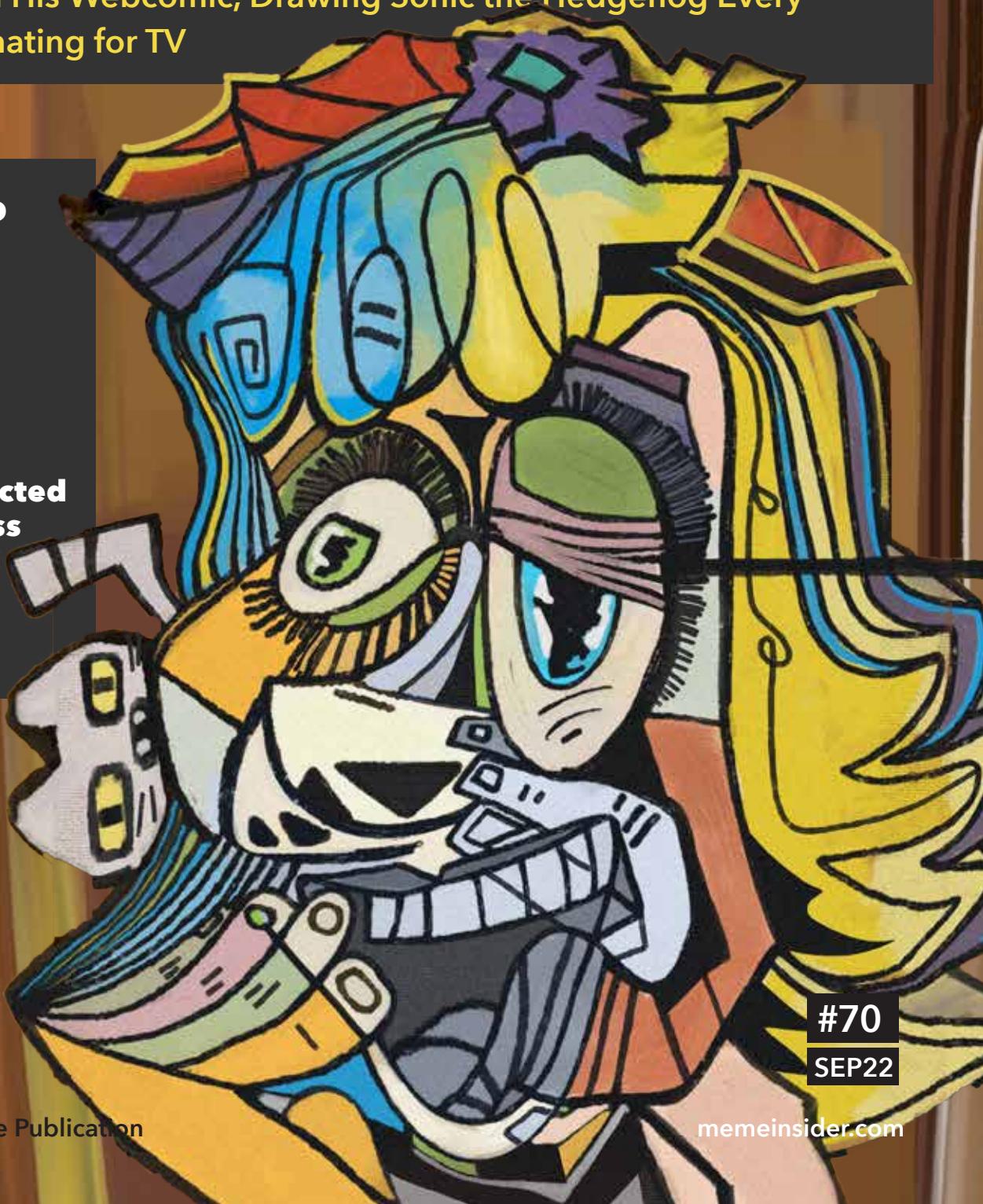
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A Know Your Meme Publication

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TO MEME INSIDER

Buff Dungeons and Dragons dungeon masters (BDMs) are avid gamers with experience running classic fantasy RPGs, cyberpunk RPGs, and other forms of tabletop gaming.

To make their role playing games as interesting as possible, BDMs like to build enormous worlds, move players from place to place, and workout while doing so.

BDMs also have great taste in magazines, preferring to wind down after a day of mastering dungeons and getting swole with the latest issue of Meme Insider.

The September 2022 issue contains an interview with Keith Stack and articles about growing up online, memes about Claire's stores, D&D, and getting buff!

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WIZARDS AND WORDS



PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO VIEW THEIR LIVES LIKE D&D GAMES, WITH MEMES TO MATCH

by Adam Bumas

Almost half a century ago, the very first version of Dungeons & Dragons was released to the public. Even before it came out, people were arguing about it and disagreeing over the rules. It's not just a proud tradition within the role-playing community, it's a fundamental part of the game itself.

Today, after all these years, arguing about D&D and all the roleplaying games it spawned is nearly as popular as actually playing. How challenging should a specific skill be for a player who's mastered it? How much should a player be allowed to customize their appearance and background, in a setting that they have no control over? Should players try to play to maximize the effectiveness and power of their characters, or create a carefully considered fictional persona and do their best to make all decisions in character?

D&D wouldn't have survived this long if it wasn't built specifically to accommodate all sides of this argument. The game's strength is its adaptability: It has the depth and complexity to support a staggeringly complicated style of gameplay, but at the same time offering support and guidelines to

play with as few hard rules as possible and enjoy the playacting. Every single one of the games inspired by D&D puts some limits on that choice while still allowing the player latitude, from other tabletop games like Fate and Vampire: The Masquerade to video games like Baldur's Gate and The Elder Scrolls.

It's that exact elasticity that makes it easy for people to think about real life in the terms of RPG mechanics. In recent years, it's become popular to describe the process of improving your life as "leveling up", calling especially unfortunate outcomes as "rolling a 1" or "critical failure" and so on. The language started in the role-playing community, exactly like you'd expect, but the growing popularity of these games in general have brought many of these terms from jargon to in-joke to meme to actual slang.

"Psychic damage" is an excellent example. The words we use to talk about mental health change quickly, since so little of it involves anything you can actually see or touch. You can feel it, though, just like how you can feel how hard it is to recover from scrolling past something shocking and unacceptable that you still have to accept as

part of the world. The Dungeons & Dragons term for physical harm sustained from being scared or demoralized fits perfectly, in a way more conventional terms don't.

The concept of skill checks seem to be headed this way as well. Nearly a decade after "Skyrim" was released, the game inspired the "Speech 100" meme format was used to justify absurd examples of talking your way out of problems. An Elder Scrolls character who's put the maximum possible points into speech should be able to justify doing anything to anyone - see the argument about this topic above.

Soon, other skills were being used to emphasize impressive feats - hiding in plain sight meant you had "Sneak 100", the sickest burns were reserved for those with "Destruction 100" and so on. Recently, the next incarnation of the concept has come from "Disco Elysium", an RPG with a system much more based around words than numbers. More specific skills like "Conceptualization (Godly)" or "Physical Instrument (Impossible)" have inspired correspondingly specific memes that work as well through text as through images, signaling the possibility of a shift from meme to slang term.

It's hard to define where a meme starts and ends, but along more than one axis, it's useful to think of it as something bigger than an in-joke but smaller than an actual element of the vernacular. The growing popularity of D&D and other role playing games means that terms like this may ascend past memes into something larger — or, if you like, level up.



Join the

MEATà VERSE



AN ENDLESS WORLD MADE OUT OF LOW POLYGON MEATS

Jim-cels

vs.

'Mirin-Chads



HOW ZYZZ, TIKTOK, AND THE PANDEMIC LED TO THE CREATION OF THE SARM GOBLIN

by soko

“Get the f*** up, like, get your a** UP and be the f***ing man or woman you wanna f***ing be, instead of sitting around and not doing sh** about your happiness and not living a full life—get the f*** up and GO JIIIIIM”

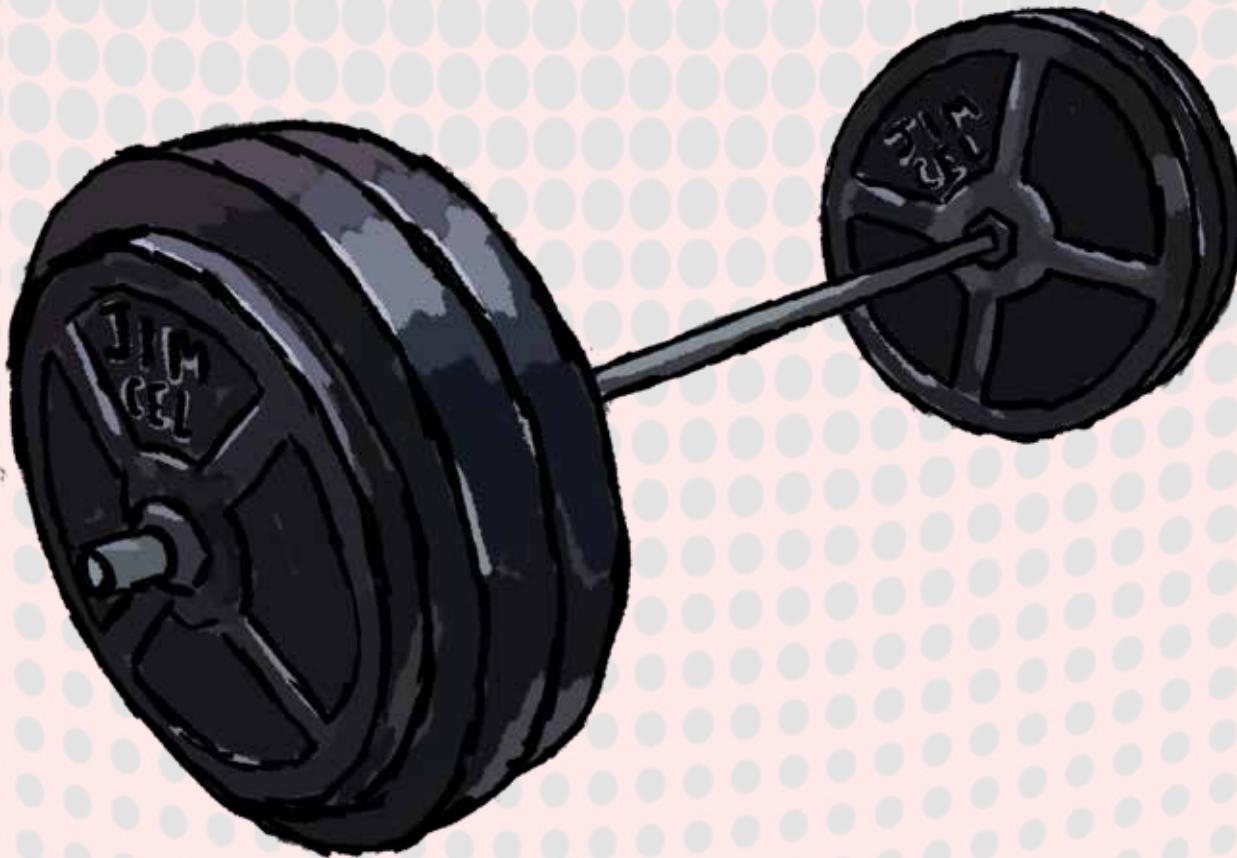
When popular LA-based fitness YouTuber Lexx Little began posting videos of him sitting in his car and screaming these motivational messages off a “Rush pill and 2 scoops of pre-workout,” he was tapping into a history of #aesthetic fitness culture that has a digital legacy spanning over a decade prior. Built like a Grand Cherokee Jeep at just 21 years old, Lexx is almost the same age as his most iconic digital predecessor— a man YouTube comments call “the patron saint of ectomorphs,” and the “manifestation of God’s energy.” The late Aziz Shavershian, better known as Zyzz.

A divisive personality that has no dearth of think pieces and fond eulogies published in his name, Zyzz, for the indoctrinated, was a cult hero for fitness freaks on the internet. Known for his uber-ripped build and cocky digital persona, Zyzz grew to fame between 2008 and 2011 on internet Bodybuilding forums, baiting users with pictures

of his jacked frame alongside a caption that read, “You ‘mirin brah?’”

His meteoric rise to fame was unheard of in the pre-influencer era of the internet. At his peak, he boasted of over 60,000 Facebook followers and over 16 million views on his YouTube channel. His KnowYourMeme entry has over a million hits as of 2022, a page rife with image after image of his flexing form, superimposed with impact font taunts asking if you are “jelly” of his body. But he was a multi-faceted man who did more than just coke on Chatroulette.

A perpetual instigator and role model for many, Zyzz cemented his role in internet history by chronicling his meteoric shift from a “sad c***” scrawny teen to a “sick c***” rippling demi-god on YouTube, all the while encouraging scores of disenfranchised teens in Australia and beyond to follow his example. “It’s just a f****ing act, there is no Zyzz,” he said in one infamous 2010 YouTube lecture, “Everyone has a little bit of Zyzz in them. You’re a f***ing sick c*** if you want to be brah! So stop being a f***ing sad c***, alright? Go out, get b****s and just be a f****ing sick c***.”



The resemblance to Lexx Little's 2022 car monologues is uncanny. Zyzz popularized the digital male motivational speaker format and injected it with a testosterone riddled fever that has seeped into every popular male fitness influencer's mannerisms. The idea that a solid gym routine and a buff body is the means to achieving peace and happiness lies at the core of many fitness influencer's ideologies today. "We're all gonna make it brah," Zyzz said in a particularly somber YouTube upload. In a shocking turn of events, Zyzz died of a heart attack in a Thailand sauna in 2011, at just age 22. His legacy lives on.

"Jim makes pain go away" is a mantra coined by a newer generation of fitness influencers and repeated by teens and young adults across the world. Stifled by a lack of routine and bored by the monotony of Zoom classes, scores of teenage boys in 2020 took to bodybuilding to find purpose and meaning. Given that a majority of

pandemic era social interactions took place on Instagram and TikTok, it didn't hurt to look extra buff doing a lat spread.

Meme pages like @dark_iron_gains that started posting "you 'mirin brah?" content in 2016 saw massive surges in popularity mid 2020, going from a few hundred likes per post to several thousand. A caption on a meme reads, "THE ROIDER FANDOM IS DYING (sadface)." Hardly true; the page boasts of over 150,000 devoted followers as of 2022.

The question of "roiders" does, however, raise the pressing issue at the heart of #aesthetic culture both now and a decade ago—Juicers. Gear heads. SARM Goblins. Different names for different generations of people that are all trying to pharmaceutically enhance their gainz in the gym. Zyzz insisted that he was a "natty" builder-gym speak for no steroids— but many suspect that his rapid physical growth was pharmaceutically

“STIFLED BY A LACK OF ROUTINE AND BORED BY THE MONOTONY OF ZOOM CLASSES, SCORES OF TEENAGE BOYS IN 2020 TOOK TO BODYBUILDING TO FIND PURPOSE AND MEANING.”

aided, a practice that may have led to his fatal heart problems and tragically premature death-by-sauna. Are the new generation of bodybuilders inspired by his message doomed to suffer the same fate?

In 2022, a video of a burly man shoving past a gaggle of large teenage boys to get to the untouched bench press they were huddled around goes viral. The text overlay reads, “High school SARM goblins were hogging the bench so I stole it from them.” A debate rages in the comments—“Wow. You really showed those kids bro,” “This brand of bozos are at my gym too,” “Timbers=shivered big guy,” “no way that kid in blue is natty.”

A scroll away, another video, this time set in a dimly lit gym bathroom. A soft faced boy with impossibly wide shoulders twists his body and curls his fists to show off his back, only to be cut off by the entrance of a pudgy middle aged man

trying to wash his hands. The boy rolls his eyes and stops recording. All the comments seem to be tagging “Joey Swoll,” popular gym etiquette enforcer.

They are called “SARM Goblins”, a derisive phrase used to refer to insanely jacked young teens that could not have been lifting for longer than a few months but have amassed a build impossible to achieve the “natty” way. Pandemic born and bred, these teens have set off heated discussions in gyms and on bodybuilding forums across the internet.

From bad gym etiquette, to the constant preening, or other such symptoms of their home birth, long term bodybuilders seem to have no dearth of reasons to pan this new breed of lifters, many of whom engage in cycle after cycle of SARMs. SARMs, short for Selective Androgen Receptor Modulators, are performance enhancing drugs that are legal to sell online when classified

as “research chemicals.” Untested and poorly regulated, SARMs are shockingly easy to acquire on websites like Instagram and Depop.

Their blue and white pill form appears innocuous to teens who would “never, like, shoot up actual T like some roid-head.” Instead, they choose to dose SARMs, alongside a hearty helping of “Gorilla Mode” protein powder. Scores of young teenage boys across America are on a quest to get buff in an increasingly image-centric world and they don’t seem to care how they do it. They post video after video on TikTok of themselves flexing in gym bathrooms, in their garage and at school, painfully swole for 10th grade and wholeheartedly embracing the SARM Goblin title.

While the pre-TikTok era of bodybuilding had its digital counterpart in the various forums Zyzz and his followers frequented, it did not have the wide-spread online availability of performance enhancing drugs that teens can access today. Newbie lifters looking to get swole no longer have to tentatively approach the meanest mugging man at Gold’s Gym to ask about getting a sweet kick of testosterone. They can bypass gatekeepers

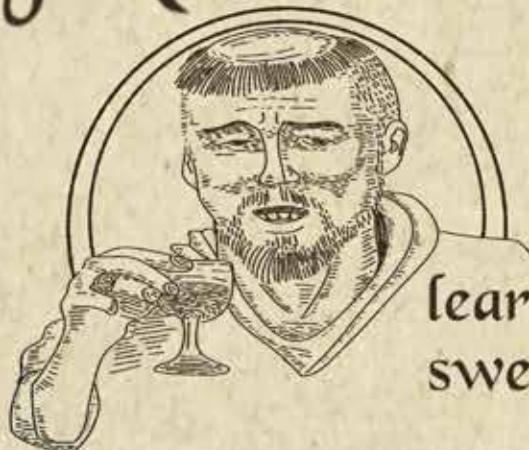
entirely, acquiring unlicensed drugs without the wisdom provided by experienced juicers, a crucial mode of communal advice that researchers call “pastoral care”.

The outcome? It’s hard to predict— in 2017, the Journal of the American Medical Association actually bought some SARMs off the internet and tested them. Only half the batches even contained SARMs. The rest were steroids or other performance enhancers. 10% contained no nutritional value at all.

There’s no doubt that the fitness cultures of both eras offer possible solutions for problems so many men face: whether it’s trouble with women, issues with mental health, difficulties with body image or an urge to find community and purpose in life. But for many impatient young teens looking to find immediate satisfaction after ogling at images of bodybuilders on algorithmically optimized social media feeds, Zyzz’s “you ‘Mirlin brah??” may come off less as a heartening challenge than a terrifying taunt, one that may push them down an irreversible path.



"Speaketh like a **swine**
eating golden finch, in
king Arthur's **court!**



learn all the **new**
swears!

For centuries, Alchemists
of the **tongue** have tirelessly
searched for the finest
ingredients to the **perfect**
insults. **Inner** and outer, farther
and widest, from the king's
court **all** the way to the nave
pig stables. Here **is our** finely
(monk hand crafted) tablets!
You will have their heads
rolling with **hardy laughter!**

Your mother is so poorly educated
when **dost** told her "Hark, it is cold
outside" she had hastily fashioned a fire!

"Your **mother** dost thou speaketh like a
cattle handler, on the **opposite end** of shilling
day!"

**...and many
more!**



I Got Lobotomized at Claire's: When Retail, Memes and Customers Collide

PRETEEN ACCESSORY STORES = THE PERFECT INSPIRATION FOR IRONIC MEMES

by Ally Dinning

When I was a child, there was no greater (legal) retail-based adventure than a Claire's Accessories Surprise Bag. A handpicked selection of the all the crap they couldn't sell got slung together in a flimsy opaque wrapper and, for \$10 or so, you got to find out what was inside. It was the epitome of a cheap thrill and one that, sadly, I believe might be no longer. However, the dopamine rush it delivered lives on in some ways thanks to memes. For many who influence the discourse of online culture today, you can tell that this grotto of overpriced sparkly junk and dubious piercings is a core memory of childhood shopping mall visits. People strut out of the green screen of

its iconic purple storefront on TikTok, use it as the backdrop for flippant Whisper images and casually namedrop it in jokes in the hopes of gaining Twitter virality. For some time now, Claire's has been a favorite touch point for unauthorized branded content and it's showing few signs of going away any time soon.

The memeification of the store is a particularly persistent example that pushes against the tide of official brand meme culture. We've all occasionally cringed as, one by one, brands have established some form of online sentience in the name of turning a profit. This has ranged from the hilariously out of touch, such as Chik-Fil-A unknowingly endorsing the "Homophobic Dog," to unabashedly horny — think the Duolingo Owl's intense thirst for Dua Lipa, described by Nathan Allebach as an "unrequited down-bad campaign". For many of those well versed in internet humor, this has culminated in the laser-eyed "Silence, Brand" attitude that disavows these attempts at courting an online audience in exchange for their patronage of these goods and services. Perhaps the inherent embarrassment of corporations selling their products via memes, no matter how

well done, is part of what encourages the public to take things into their own hands with the ones that have been slower on the uptake.

In many ways, Claire's has offered the perfect storm for meme popularity. It's got a heavy nostalgia factor, a kitschy aesthetic that one could argue has had a revival after the Y2K resurgence and a shaky business model in these heady days of mainstream piercing shops and SHEIN accessory hauls.

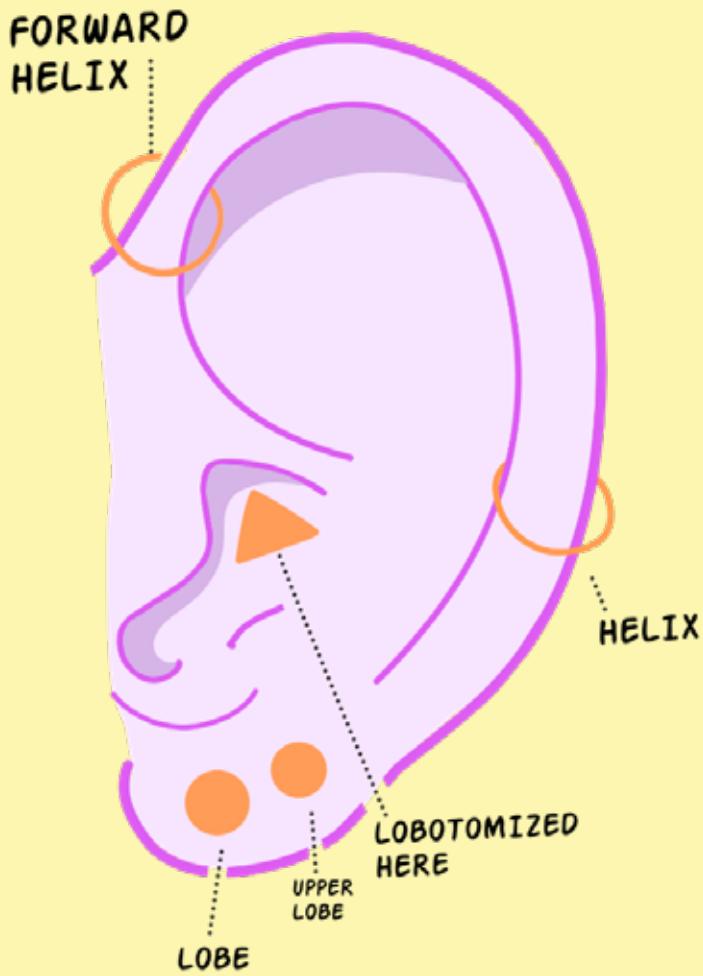
It also ties in with the longstanding, yet still developing phenomenon of e-girl/e-boy influence, which has unravelled across the internet from Tumblr to TikTok with all the grace and controversy of being conventionally attractive, online and sometimes politically engaged. It's not a stretch to think of many who identify as such copping jewellery from Claire's on the sly.

However, their identities are frequently “a costume to be experimented with in the privacy of one’s own space” in the words of Rebecca Jennings. Just as a moody 2003 twelve-year-old might kickstart a short-lived emo phase with a pair of their striped fingerless gloves, this group of meme creators flirt with the brand as a generation-specific way of validating their online clout with humor.

As a result, it's no coincidence that many of the memes that involve the store try to be subversive, repeatedly mentioning things such as getting genital piercings, gender-affirming surgery and a fan favorite among those who struggle with mental health, lobotomies. They're a more self-aware and irreverent means of the trend of “normalizing” all manner of things that social justice wannabes have been both celebrated and criticized for.

While these different iterations have meant Claire's has enjoyed an especially long time in the limelight as the retail meme of the moment, it is intertwined with a long history of certain stores

“THE MEMEIFICATION OF THE STORE IS A PARTICULARLY PERSISTENT EXAMPLE THAT PUSHES AGAINST THE TIDE OF OFFICIAL BRAND MEME CULTURE.”



being awarded the honor of meme status. Once upon a time, this was focused on the customer in the negative sense: People of Walmart spearheaded the trend by photographing strangers perceived as weird and worthy of ridicule.

This attitude has changed slightly with other types of stores. It's no surprise that Claire's finds its spiritual, alt-girl sister in the form of Hot Topic, whose emo employee attitude and often cringey product range have made it an easy target for POV's and starter packs for a long time. It's joined by the likes of Cex, frequently singled out for having employees with a nerdy disposition, an energy drink addiction and poor personal hygiene.

While more of a movement than meme, this countercultural attitude can also be seen in the great GameStop stock debacle of earlier this year. An active way of taking the perception of a nostalgia-tinged brand into the hands of the consumer, it may have been more about the stocks than the attitude. Nonetheless, it still offered an instance of branded sentimentality run amok.

That said, for the most part many of these examples simply run with the existing stereotypes of each brand. They don't really expand on the lore in the way that Claire's memes frequently do. A kindred spirit in this sense might be something like Bass Pro Shops, who have been given their own kind of makeover with a younger than average customer base embracing their merch and feeding their legend with ironic memes, including an almost cult-like reverence for their Memphis branch based in the 10th largest pyramid in the world.

If Bass Pro content involves embracing a potential future dadness, Claire's reclaims a childhood fantasy with a more grown-up perspective. Its tongue-in-cheek consumerist camp is made for reminiscing and establishing contemporary identity markers at the same time.

As a steady majority of us confine more of our shopping experience to our screens, it's easy to miss the visceral sensory experience that comes from the ambience of a store. Mixing gaudy aesthetics and childhood memories, Claire's is a worthy candidate to indulge in this nostalgia, while the punchlines it generates reaffirm its relevance. At a time when many are becoming increasingly aware of the stream of #branded content that we encounter daily, this disruption remains refreshing. The shop might pitch itself to preteen girls, but it accepts the chronically online as its brethren.



FROM THE COMPANY THAT BROUGHT
YOU... NO GAMES FOR THE PAST 4 YEARS!

GAME STREAMING SERVICE PASS++

YOU ALREADY DON'T OWN ANY OF YOUR GAMES!
SO WHY NOT RENT THEM EVERY YEAR?



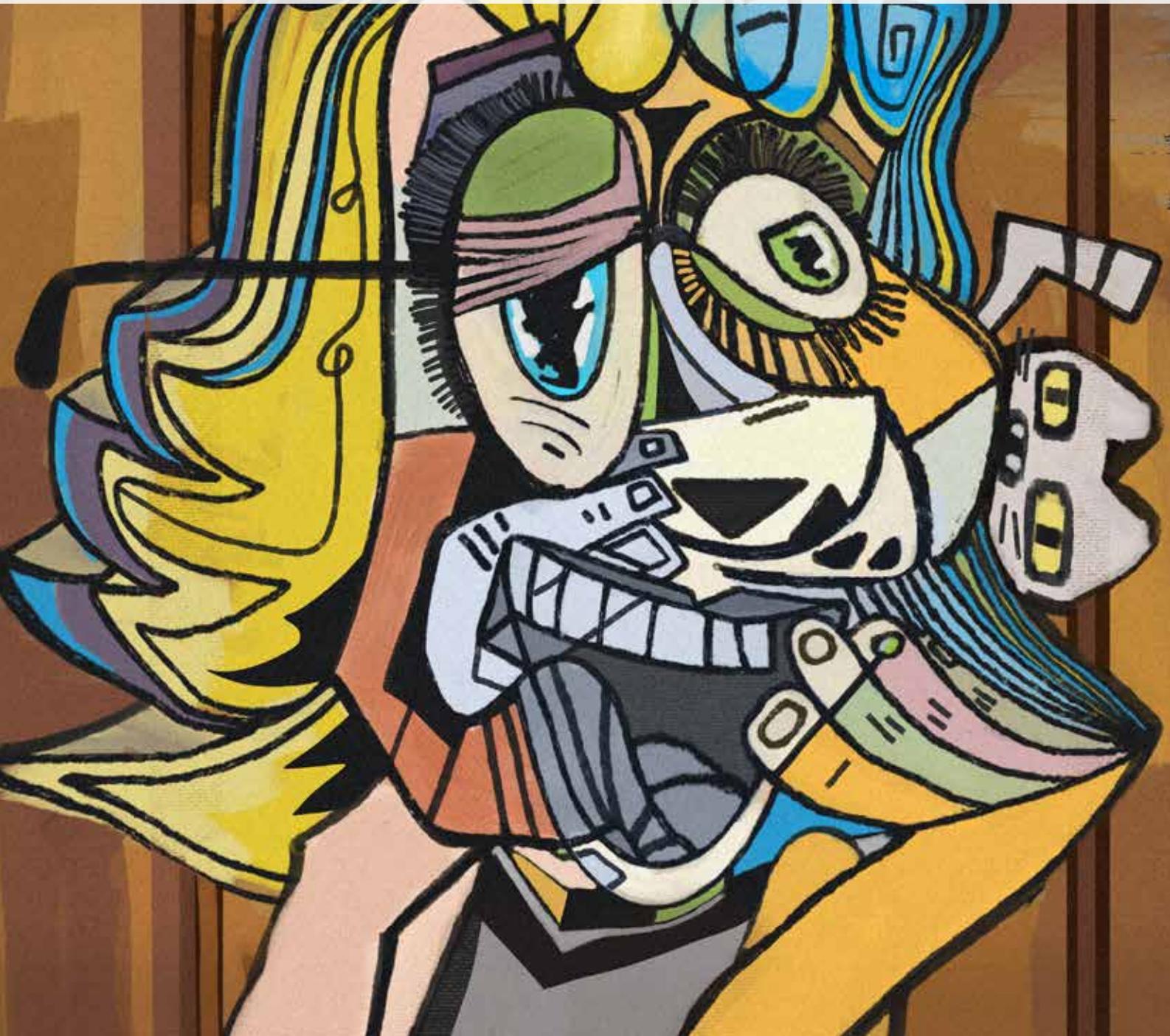
YOU KNOW THAT CONSOLE WE JUST SOLD YOU?
WELL, HERE'S A SERVICE THAT MAKES THAT HUNK OF
PLASTIC OBSOLETE!



PAY PREMIUM PRICES FOR TITLES YOU DIDN'T WANT
TO PLAY WHEN YOU HAD THE CHANCE. GOLDEN
MEMBERS GET ACCESS TO OUR "NONSTOP COMING OF AGE
INDIE GAMES THAT ALL LOOK THE SAME" SECTION!

IT CAN PLAY APPS!

Keith Stack: The Origins of 'Leslie and Brianne'



'LESLIE AND BRIANNE' CREATOR KEITH STACK TALKS THE ORIGINS OF HIS WEBCOMIC, DRAWING SONIC THE HEDGEHOG EVERY DAY, AND ANIMATING FOR TV

by Phillip Hamilton

We talked with Keith Stack, an animator and webcomic artist known best for his Twitter webcomic "Leslie and Brianne," about how he got into the webcomic game with his comic series about two wacky lesbians.

All the way back in 2005, an amateur animator named Keith Stack posted a Flash animation to Newgrounds titled Wacky Lesbian Hour. The absurd animation about a lesbian couple living in Yonkers made its way to Newgrounds' frontpage as people fell in love with the characters, who Stack kept exploring through a webcomic on Blogspot in 2010. Then, suddenly, the comic ended, leaving the internet without their favorite wacky lesbian couple. That is, until 2022, when Stack revived the characters for a brand new webcomic on Twitter that's gained a massive following in the past few months. We talked with Stack to get the full story behind Leslie and Brianne and learn more about his career in animation.

Meme Insider: When did you first get into art and drawing comics?

Keith Stack: For as long as I can remember, I've enjoyed drawing and doodling. I've always loved cartoons and comics and cartoony characters in general and still do to this day. I think I was just born with a built-in adoration for all things scriimblo and a desire to consume and create cartoons.

MI: Who or what are some of the biggest inspirations for your art?

KS: I certainly have way too many to list, but the most major influences that come to mind would have to be "Ren & Stimpy," Jhonen Vasquez and Shmorky. I've certainly been inspired by the countless cartoons I watched growing up, both on TV and on the internet, as well as all of the insanely talented artists I've had the honor of working alongside.

MI: You've worked on shows like "Ugly Americans," "Golan the Insatiable" and "The Jellies!"; how did you get involved in television animation?

KS: In 2011, I began working at Augenblick Studios, an independent animation studio in Brooklyn. I applied for an internship there while I was in community college, then worked there on and off for a number of years before becoming a full-time employee. Augenblick is the only animation studio I've ever worked at, so all of my involvement in television animation is thanks to working there.

MI: You're credited as the animator for Tyler, The Creator's show "The Jellies!"; how did you get hooked up with that gig and what was it like working on that project?

KS: I wasn't THE animator for The Jellies, but I was one of the animators! I was working at Augenblick Studios when that show was in production, which is how I got involved. I remember "The Jellies" being fun to work on. It was very cartoony and the unusual character designs made animating them a lot of fun. I got to sit in the same conference room as Tyler, the Creator on a few occasions, which was neat. I don't think I ever actually spoke to him though.

MI: What's your favorite professional TV or animation gig you've worked on and why?

KS: I animated the poop in a septic tank for a Rid-X commercial once. That's probably my favorite because it's a funny thing to brag about.

MI: Between 2020 and 2021 you drew daily Sonic the Hedgehog doodles; what made you want to do that? Did you learn anything useful from drawing so many Sonic doodles?

KS: When Covid hit, and everybody started working from home, I went from having a very long commute to no commute at all, which left me with a lot more free time. Previously, I had spent my lengthy subway commutes home playing games on my Switch while listening to



podcasts, which was a great way to decompress after work. I figured that doodling something fun and unrelated to my job every day after work might serve the same purpose.

Like many old internet boomers, I'm very nostalgic for the wild creativity that stemmed from the internet of the 2000s. Everyone was using a desktop computer, and had access to the same toolkits of primitive software, like MS-Paint and Flash. People who didn't consider themselves serious artists would just make weird stuff and throw it out there. I guess I was trying to channel that spirit a bit, by churning out some weird, crude MS-Paint doodles every day.

I think making a drawing every day, even on days you don't particularly feel like doing it, is



a really good artistic exercise. Setting a strict deadline for yourself really helps you overcome crippling perfectionism, and needing to think up something original to draw each day really works out the creative brain muscles. It's also just fun to see how long you can keep a streak of daily art posts going! I've yet to miss a day since starting my daily Twitter doodles on May 20th, 2020.

MI: You seem to really like Sonic; what is it about Sonic that you enjoy? What's your favorite Sonic game?

KS: I grew up playing and loving the "Sonic the Hedgehog" games on the Genesis and Dreamcast. Everyone pedestalizes the stuff they loved growing up and I'm no different. To me, those 16-bit Sonic games are the peak of video games.

Gameplay, visuals, music— all unparalleled.

"Sonic the Hedgehog" has also been a major staple of my long-running history with the internet. I've been talking to like-minded Sonic nerds over the World Wide Web since the 90s. I'm still in touch with people I first interacted with decades ago via Sonic-focused message boards. In that sense, Sonic has a lot more meaning to me outside of just the games and other official media, as corny as that may be. I got a tattoo of Sonic the Hedgehog on my left shoulder when I was 18, so Sonic is going to be a part of me for the rest of my life, whether I like it or not.

I love all the Sonic games. Even the bad ones! I'm going to keep buying and playing any new Sonic games that come out until the day I die. My favorite Sonic game, however, is Sonic CD. I've played all the 16-bit Sonic games to absolute death, but the intricate, exploration-focused level design of CD makes it feel fresh to me, even to this day. There are so many different ways to play through that game! And needless to say, CD's entire aesthetic is so incredibly beautiful. Colorful, abstract, simultaneously bright and bleak in tone, while never clashing. And not one, but TWO amazing soundtracks?

MI: For those who might not know, what is Leslie and Brianne? Who are the characters and what's the comic all about?

KS: Leslie and Brianne (also known as Wacky Lesbian Hour) is a series of web comics and Flash cartoons, focused on two goofy, terminally-online, millennial gamer ladies in a relationship with one another. Leslie is very temperamental and overthinks things. Brianne is a dumb-dumb and doesn't think very much at all. They're in love!

MI: When did the idea of Leslie and Brianne come to you? Where did the idea of Leslie and Brianne come from?

KS: I think I came up with the characters some time in 2004 or 2005, as a 14 or 15-year-old. I was a dumb teenage boy and I remember just thinking that lesbians were cool and that I basically wanted to make “Ren & Stimpy,” but they were hot ladies.

I didn't entirely come up with the names myself. I recall discussing my idea for the series on a message board back in the day, asking for name ideas. Someone (I can't remember who) suggested Les and Bian. I kept Les as a nickname for Leslie, and Bian reminded me of a friend I had in grade school named Brianne.

MI: The first Leslie and Brianne content online was an animation posted to Newgrounds in 2005; what do you remember about animating Wacky Lesbian Hour?

KS: I remember drawing it on one of those small, crappy little cheap tablets you would plug into your computer and using a pirated version of Flash. I was in high school at the time and I remember talking about it a lot with my friend Joe. Outside of that, I don't remember much. My memory is pretty terrible!

MI: Was there any previous L&B content that you made before the animation?

KS: Prior to “Wacky Lesbian Hour: Episode 1” on Newgrounds, I had drawn and posted a few WLH comics on the Sonic the Hedgehog message board I was a member of at the time. For the most part, those comics are embarrassingly bad and about as poorly-aged as you'd expect from something made by a teenage boy in the 2000s.

MI: What was the reception to Wacky Lesbian Hour (the animation) like and what led you to decide to continue WLH as a webcomic through 2010-2011?

KS: The first Wacky Lesbian Hour animation made it onto the front page of Newgrounds,

“THE FIRST WACKY LESBIAN HOUR ANIMATION MADE IT ONTO THE FRONT PAGE OF NEWGROUNDS, WHICH WAS THE HIGHEST HONOR A FLASH CARTOON COULD REALLY GET AT THE TIME.”

which was the highest honor a Flash cartoon could really get at the time. Critically, I don't think it scored particularly well on the site, but I guess someone in charge (maybe Tom Fulp?) must have enjoyed it. That really made me happy. I always wanted to make more stuff with the characters, but never got back around to it until those 2010-2011 comics. I think school/college, and general laziness took up a lot of my time.

MI: Why did you drop the characters / comic for a while?

KS: I started working professionally in animation in 2011, which just took up most of my time. Funnily enough, I remember showing off my WLH comics in the interview that landed me my internship! As noted on the Know Your Meme page, I did make little drawings and animated gifs of the gals from time to time. They've always been



in my heart and mind, even if I didn't have the time to do anything more with them.

MI: What inspired you to bring Leslie and Brianne back via Twitter in 2022 after such a long break from the characters?

KS: Well, I started drawing those daily Sonic doodles for Twitter at the beginning of the pandemic. At first, it was weird doodles of Sonic, then I turned it into a little countdown to Sonic's 29th, and then 30th birthday, followed by a countdown to the release of "Sonic Colors: Ultimate." These Sonic doodles garnered a lot of attention and I went from a few hundred followers to a few thousand. This even resulted in SEGA reaching out to me to make some promotional comics for their "Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania" social media campaign!

After the "Sonic Colors: Ultimate" countdown, I figured I'd try drawing every Pokémon, by doodling one Pokémon a day, in Pokédex order. It was fun, but it didn't receive nearly as much enthusiasm as my Sonic doodles. At a certain point I started reaching Pokémon I wasn't very familiar with (I grew up with gen 1 and gen 2 is where my Pokémon knowledge kind of falls off), and assuming my fifteen minutes of fame were over, I started just drawing whatever I felt like.

I was listening to a podcast called "Flash in the Pan," where they were discussing an old Flash cartoon, "Bonus Stage," which I was a huge fan of back in the day. This got me really nostalgic for the internet cartoons from that era, including my own and inspired me to make one of my daily doodles a Leslie and Brianne comic.

MI: People have really fallen in love with L&B on Twitter. Did you expect such a warm reception to L&B?

KS: When I posted that first Leslie and Brianne doodle on Twitter, I didn't expect much fanfare outside of longtime internet friends of mine who may get a kick out of seeing these old characters, but people seemed to really like it. It's not overt in that particular comic, but people in the replies were like, "They are dating!!" as folks tend to do when they see two fictional characters in the same image on Twitter and I was really chuffed to respond, "Yes! As a matter of fact, they are!"

Someone posted fan art in response to that comic and it really got me happy and excited! I just got really excited to make more drawings of them and was really happy that others liked the characters. The response to my Sonic doodles wasn't too surprising, because everyone likes Sonic the Hedgehog. But the positive response to my original characters really did surprise me. Every now and then I'll see a response to a comic that's like, "I usually hate these comics, but this one got me good," and those always feel uniquely satisfying.

“I’D LOVE TO SEE PEOPLE MAKE THEIR OWN ONGOING CARTOONS WITH THE CHARACTERS AND MAKE THEM THEIR OWN. I’M NOT SOME GIANT CORPORATION WITH AN IRON FIST OVER THESE CHARACTERS.”

MI: What do you think it is that people find so lovable and endearing about Leslie and Brianne?

KS: Some people find them cute, some find them funny, some people are horny for them and some people maybe feel a combination of all three.

I think a lot of people are, or know of, internet-obsessed individuals, interested in video games, with brains that have been completely broken by the last decade of political discourse and so they find the characters relatable.

Also, because it's a daily comic, I think, similar to "Garfield" or "Snoopy," some people just like returning to see what Leslie and Brianne are up to, even if it's not the most earth-shatteringly amazing comic that day. They're some people's comfort characters! They're certainly mine.

MI: Memes, pop culture trends and technology are often topics at the center of L&B, like the comic based on the NSFW bowling animations; why is it important

to show things like this through L&B's warped lens?

KS: I don't know if any aspect of it could be considered important. I think it's fun to have a cartoon that reacts to very time-sensitive internet trends. Like a "South Park," but with more focus on internet culture.

MI: What sets Leslie and Brianne apart from other webcomics in general?

KS: In its current form, it's a character-focused, gag-a-day comic, often pulling inspiration from current events and trends. I can't think of a ton of other modern webcomics that are doing that. Maybe "Jock and Nerd," or "Among Us Girl?"

A lot of webcomics nowadays seem to be lengthy, serialized, epic stories. Which is really cool and all, but I don't have the free time or attention span to get into any of those. I like that most L&B stuff works as a standalone little jokey comic.

MI: L&B has inspired a massive amount of



fan art; what's it like seeing so much fan art of your characters?

KS: It's overwhelming! The idea that someone likes my characters enough that they take the time to draw them themselves gets me emotional. I have to try and not think too much about it, or I'll get a bit paralyzed.

MI: Is there a type of fan art or content you'd like to see people delve more into? Like animations, fan comics, etc.

KS: It's always great to see other folks' interpretations of the gals. I'd love to see people make their own ongoing cartoons with the characters and make them their own. I'm not some giant corporation with an iron fist over these characters. There's no real canon or non-canon versions of these characters in my head. Have fun with them! Get weird! As long as it's not, like, hate-speech-y, or gets me in trouble somehow, I encourage everyone to go to absolute town with the characters!

MI: Do you have any future plans or dreams for L&B? Maybe a full comic series, animations? Any future projects for them?

KS: My dream is to make another proper L&B animated short. Maybe a Wacky Lesbian Hour: Episode 3 for Newgrounds. Maybe I'll make it onto the front page again!!

Outside of that, I don't have any grand future plans. I don't think I'd ever want to develop a TV show or physical comic book series with them. It may be a bit selfish, but I like keeping them as weird internet characters.

Maybe it'd be cool to make a video game with them. A lot of people want to play a Leslie and Brianne point-and-click adventure, but I think a more action-y game would suit the energy of the characters. Imagine a Doom-like boomer-shooter, but with, like, "Cuphead" quality animation! I don't know if I'd ever have the free time to work on such a project though.

I wouldn't be surprised if life obligations lead to another hiatus in Leslie and Brianne content from me at some point. Or maybe I'll just periodically run out of ideas for them. But I think I'd like to continually return to these characters forever. I hope I'm drawing these gals when I'm wrinkly and old!

MI: Besides L&B, do you have any other projects or characters you're working on or want to get working on?

KS: Not particularly! I'm just having a lot of fun with these L&B comics at the moment.

MI: Are there any webcomic creators or online artists you particularly admire right now?

KS: I really enjoy Haus of Decline and his funny Twitter penis comics. There are too many amazing artists to list! @sunawchi on Twitter definitely deserves more love! Do YouTubers count as artists? I really enjoy Cybershell's work. DKVine's The Kongversation is an incredible podcast, that I recommend to any video game enthusiast.

I'll take this opportunity to demand that everyone reading this go out and buy "The Strange Ones" by Jeremy Jusay, and "Justice Warriors" by Matt Bors.

MI: What's your big takeaway from the success of Leslie and Brianne in 2022? Any message you want to give to the fans?

KS: I guess my takeaway is that if you make stuff that amuses or entertains yourself, other people will likely get a kick out of it too. If something you want to exist doesn't exist, you should make it exist!

I would like to thank anyone who takes the time to check out my cartoons! Also, I ask that you please refrain from murdering me.

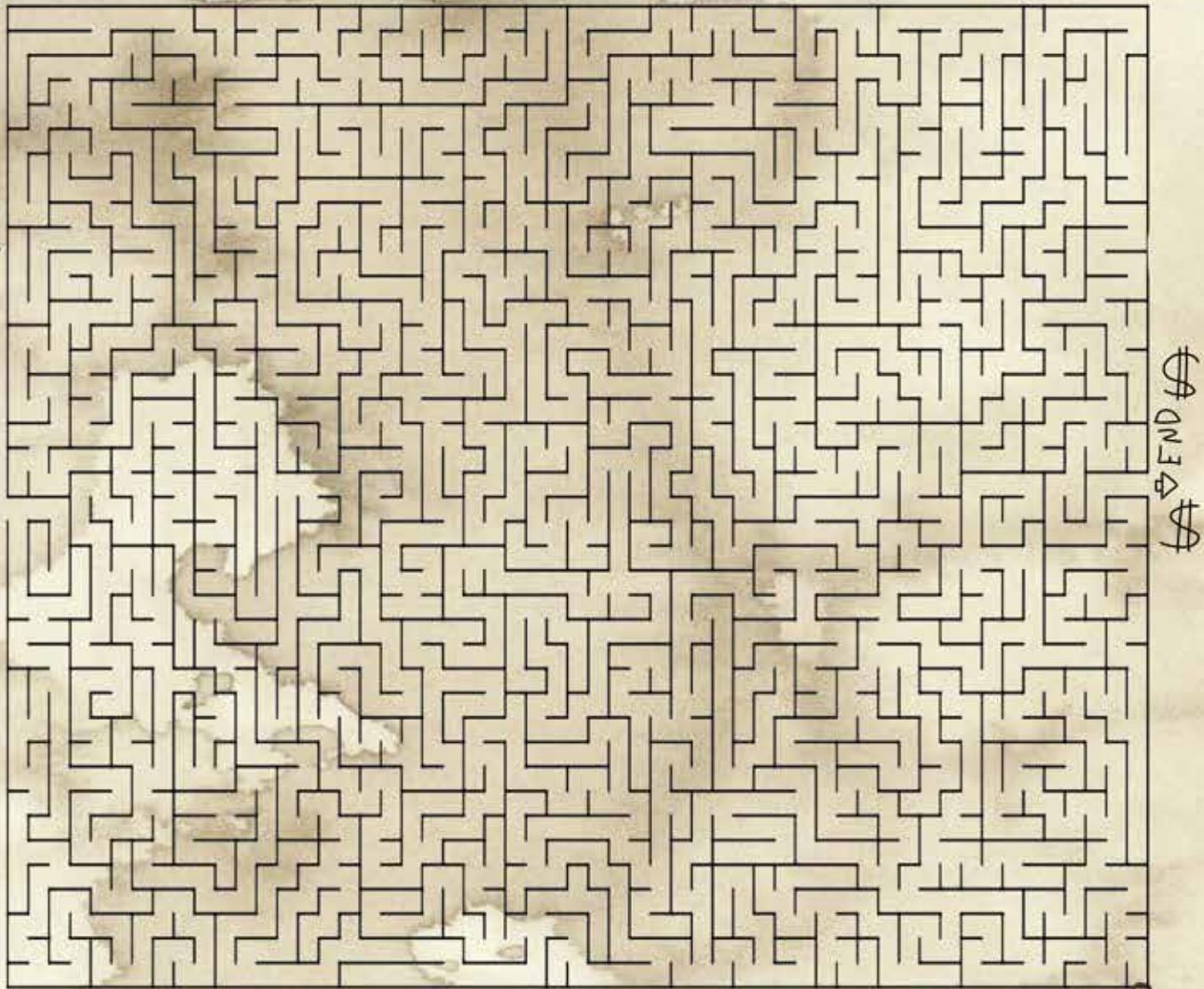
If you want to keep up with Leslie and Brianne and support Keith Stack, follow him on Twitter @keithjohnstack



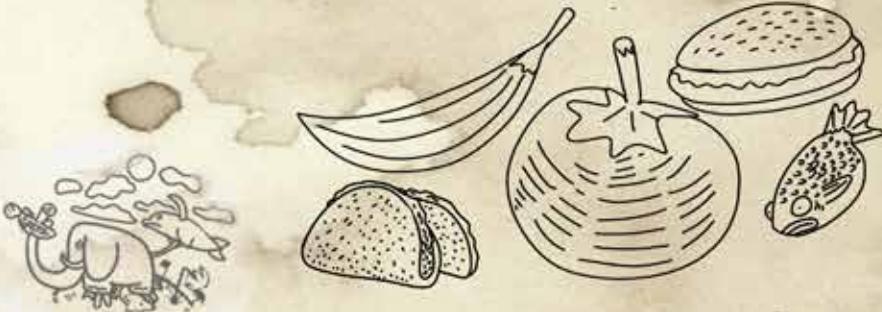
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Did you know?

that you can't eat
that whole thing!

elevators aren't actually
made out of the elevator
fish?

fall is the
best season?

What Unrestricted Internet Access as a Kid Does to a MF



THE CHRONICALLY ONLINE KIDS OF YESTERDAY ARE REGALING HOW UNRESTRICTED ACCESS TO THE INTERNET AS A KID DAMAGED THEM AND IT'S ... NOT GOOD

by Phillip Hamilton

Remember “Two Girls One Cup?” You’d probably rather not. But if you grew up with unrestricted access to the internet in the 2000s, reading that title likely gave you vivid flashbacks of two women doing unspeakable (yet loving?) things to each other. Maybe you watched the video with all your friends, seeing who could make it through while recording their reactions for YouTube. Maybe you watched it alone in your room at 3:00 am after hearing stories at school or finding the link on 4chan. You may have even stumbled across it by accident, falling prey to the classic internet bait-and-switch or making one too many risky clicks. However it happened, you and millions of others saw the video and never quite forgot about it, turning a niche fetish video into what’s become an internet right of passage. If you’re chronically online in 2022, you must at least understand what Two Girls One Cup is and if you don’t, it’s only a matter of time before some meme or video references it and sends you down that oft-tread, puke-covered

rabbit hole. Unfortunately, that rabbit hole has no age restrictions and today’s young adults are taking their time right now to remind everyone of exactly that.

Recently, memes have been popping up online about what unrestricted internet access at a young age does to a person. Back in June, TikToker williesquared posted a video about visiting Best Gore, a website filled with graphic gore content, thanks to his unrestricted internet access. Similar videos have users, mostly young adults and teens, sharing how they were exposed to porn, roleplay and every shock video under the sun. Other posts on TikTok and Twitter share stories of falling into dangerous political groups and ideologies because of that same lack of restrictions, like Twitter user @starbarduous, who shared what a lack of web restrictions did to them over DMs.

“I was absorbed by and brought up [online]



around far right wing super racists, it made me more critical of basically everything and everyone. My sense of humor remained the same but was without limit because there was no taboo left. I think most people fall into groups that would correspond to their baseline personality/predilection. The communities amplify it, sometimes bringing a person into their own and other times being very unhealthy.”

As @starbarduous suggests, a more positive side of unrestricted internet access at a young age may exist. Kids might find a group they can relate with online, such as an anime forum or a niche subreddit, which may help their talents or social skills flourish, or help them discover who they are. A young artist stands to find some helpful creative feedback by starting a Deviant Art account. A young dancer might find encouragement posting their moves to TikTok.

On the other hand, a kid can easily end up on the wrong side of the web looking for places to discuss and share their interests. A young, politically minded person might end up in the annals of 4chan’s /pol/ board, leading down the QAnon rabbit hole. A few simple flips through TikTok’s FYP might land a young boy down the Andrew Tate rabbit hole (at least, before he was banned off every platform under the sun) as the FYP continually recommends clips of the misogynist ex-fighter. If internet history repeats itself, it’ll be no surprise if, 10 years from now, some of the same 13 year olds who spent hours ingesting Tate content without the proper mindset and worldly experience to even grasp what they’re listening to, end up making videos about how unrestricted access to the internet as a kid nearly turned them into raging woman haters. The ones who don’t, you may find on a Telegram group sharing hateful views about women and

“WHAT IT REALLY COMES DOWN TO IS PARENTS NOT ONLY KEEPING AN EYE ON WHAT THEIR KID OR TEEN DOES ONLINE BUT UNDERSTANDING IT AND CORRECTING ANY TROUBLING INFORMATION THEY COME ACROSS.”

everyone else that stands in the way of their rigid, potentially dangerous worldviews.

Children simply don't have the right skillset to process the things the internet might throw at them. The brain continues to develop into your 20s, leaving children not just ill-equipped regarding life experience, but from a biological perspective. Even apps made with children in mind, like YouTube Kids, are far from perfect. Inappropriate content is constantly slipping through the cracks of the app, leading kids to bizarre animations where Mickey Mouse injects “Frozen’s” Elsa with a mysterious liquid or Donald Duck gives an Among Us crewmate an enema. No parent in their right mind would admit to letting their kids watch these animations just as they'd never admit to letting them watch Andrew Tate if they were confronted about it by, say, a worried teacher who heard their student

parrot his hateful rhetoric to a girl. When that moment of confrontation comes, they're probably more likely to say they had no idea what their kid was watching, hopefully correcting that after the fact. What it really comes down to is parents not only keeping an eye on what their kid or teen does online but understanding it and correcting any troubling information they come across.

Like anything else, this is much easier said than done. Kids are on the internet these days from many angles, whether it's a computer, a phone, an iPad or their Xbox's web browser (if that's all they've got). As a parent, you can block or physically restrict as many devices as you want, but ultimately, the kids will find a way online and they will watch “Two Girls One Cup.”

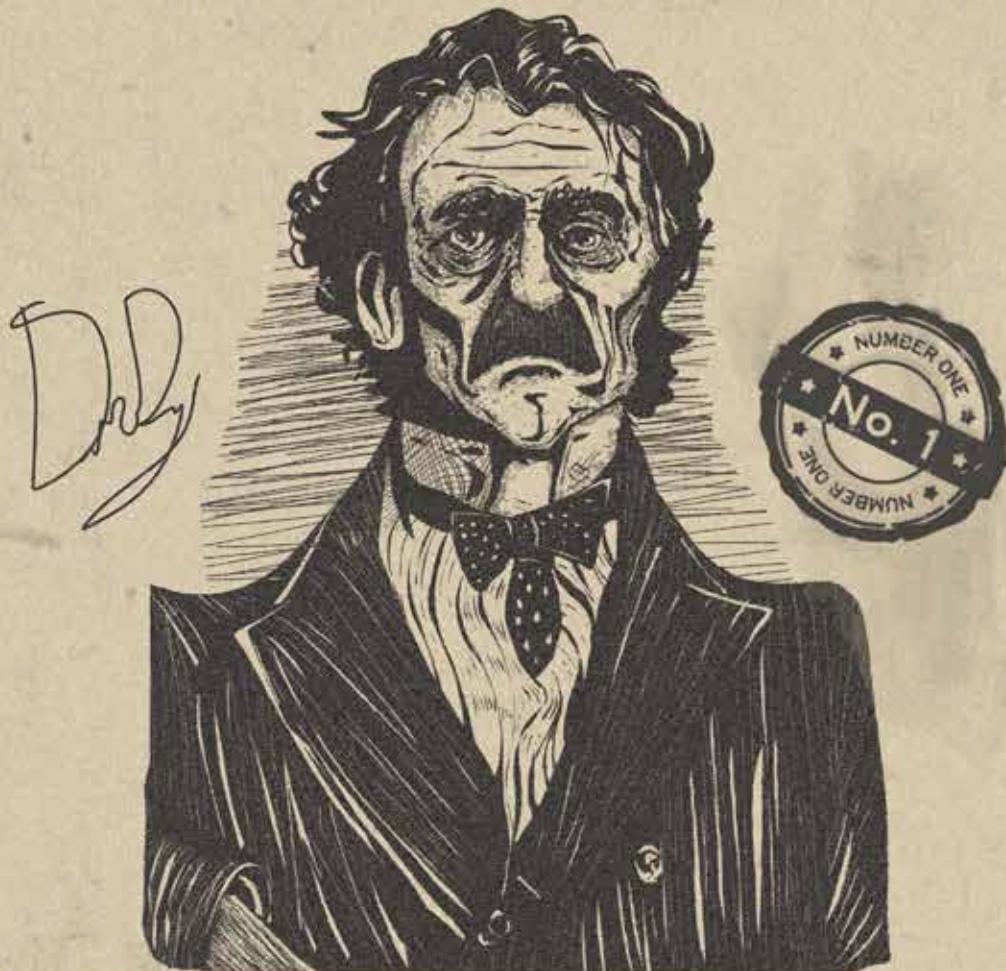
If the videos and posts by the young adults of today sharing what vile material they were

exposed to as kids right now give us anything, it might be a sense of hope that not everyone ends up a worse person for the trauma they received online thanks to a lack of restrictions or supervision. The truth is, we don't have the answers on how to best help kids stop falling down these dangerous rabbit holes. The problem is too new and there are too many considerations; there's too much room for fault and overstepping the line between moderation and turning your kid into a ludite. Rather than make some bold claim that all kids should stay offline after seeing these posts from affected young adults revealing their damage, we should see them as a reminder that kids are impressionable and they still need guidance from those more experienced than

them. There are millions of subcultures at any given kid's fingertips right now thanks to the internet and not all of them are safe. While the worst of these that come to the forefront might be taken down like Andrew Tate, there will always be another snake ready to slither from the grass and warp the minds of the youth. The internet can be a great place for you to find yourself, but it can also be a great place to lose yourself. Maybe the hindsight passed down from the young adults making these memes will make an impact on some kids and help teach them that there are consequences to what you do and see online, even if it isn't readily apparent. Probably not, but we can always hope.



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