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Blasphemy: A Romantic Comic about the Devil Himself

Jessica N. Brenner

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Blasphemy

A Romantic Comic about the Devil Himself

By

Jessica N. Brenner

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Professor Gregory Poulin,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

June 2020

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Abstract: The tendency for societies to organize themselves around contours of sameness and difference leads naturally to social constructions of "us versus them." Individuals are primed to identify with the groups to which they belong, and thus intellectually classify those unlike themselves as "the other." Our social inclination toward "othering" is intractable and ubiquitous across cultures. It breeds conditions of chronic inequality and marginality, reinforcing the ethos of xenophobia that perpetuates and undergirds human atrocities such as war, slavery, and genocide.

Through a creative project — a webcomic entitled *Blasphemy* — I address and illustrate how othering behavior can manifest in the world. Armed with the knowledge that powerful lessons can be gleaned from the arts, the goal is to raise awareness of othering and its deleterious impacts on individuals, and the wider society. *Blasphemy* co-mingles narrative and visual image in a long-form, serialized webcomic leveraging my study of art and psychology and engaging my own yearning to lessen the suffering of those who find themselves marginalized or targets of discrimination. As is common practice in webcomic production, each update will advance the story until the full story arc reaches its satisfying conclusion. Given the length and nature of *Blasphemy* as a complete narrative published in series, the full execution of the project logically spans beyond the time scope of this thesis.

Blasphemy

Plot Synopsis: *Blasphemy* revolves around a developing romance between Kid, a “demon” being of an extra-dimensional race of shapeshifting deities, and Liam, a human, and the tensions that flow from their inherent differences. Kid encounters Liam amid his customary routine of killing and corrupting humans, but his murderous plans are thwarted when he encounters Jesus, a rival demon whose family has it out for Kid’s life. Jesus amuses himself by toying with and tormenting Kid, ultimately testing him with the promise to return to make an appraisal of the human’s welfare. Interpreting this as a legitimate threat, Kid concludes he must assure no harm befalls Liam, at his own hand or otherwise.

Kid is then thrust into the unwelcome and unfamiliar role of faithful protector, and as Kid and Liam spend time in close quarters, they overcome their mutual distaste, fear, and resentment, ultimately becoming friends and romantic partners, no longer "the other." As their fondness for each other deepens, however, Liam discovers that throughout their relationship Kid has continued to inflict mayhem and destruction on his fellow humans, and he's forced to reckon with this reality. Anguished, Liam sends Kid away, but later when they meet to talk, Liam meets with a deadly fate unrelated to Kid's

atrocities. Ultimately, Kid neither kills, nor saves Liam, leaving the planet Earth wracked with grief.

Back Story: The Demon Feud: The demons provide the back-story which sets up the central conflict between Kid and Liam in the form of a long-lived feud in which a deep-seated grudge rages between two rival clans. Each family — one commanded by a demon recognized by humans as “God,” the other by the demon known as “Satan” — wants to render the other obsolete, but both sides are sheltered from outright annihilation as they are bound by ancient cultural rules of conflict... and complicated alliances with humans.

As the feud found its early footing, God discovered just how easily humans could be exploited, and thus they saw human's potential to be unwitting proxies in God's crusade against Satan. As *Blasphemy* unfolds, the winds of war have subtly shifted in God's favor. Satan and his son, Kid, who have historically found the human race to be an anemic foe — something more of an annoyance than an adversary — are newly concerned with the pace of human technological advancement that threatens to expose their otherness. As all demons understand, the alien and the inexplicable elicit the human's most primal fears, and from this frail place, humans are easily molded and vulnerable to the whims of a self-serving God who happens to be in the throes of dynastic rivalry with Satan.

The demon back story merges with the central plot of *Blasphemy* at the story's opening as Jesus, God's son, commands Satan's son, Kid, to serve as Liam's protector at threat of reprisal. The demon conflict will be revealed by Kid to Liam, and thus the audience, through expository scenes as trust begins to develop between the two, and their relationship deepens.

Genre and Setting: Devised in the genre of low-fantasy, *Blasphemy's* supernatural elements are superimposed upon the otherwise real-world backdrop of a fictive Southern California coastal city. Intended as a work of contemporary fiction, much of the action takes place in Liam's small, but homey, apartment filled with second hand furnishings, illustrative of a young man grappling with new-found independence working to get his feet beneath him.

Narrative and Techniques of Plot: The story utilizes a traditional, linear plot structure with customary inciting incident, rising action and climax, but is cut off during the lowest point for the characters, before a resolution is reached; in essence, the story ends tragically and sadly.

Liam functions as the audience surrogate, and expositional segments are included as characters reveal their own back story; Kid will clarify demon lore central to the plot. Tension will be broken through the occasional comedic element and the use of "fluff," such as the scene in which the couple

deepens their bond over a discussion of their "favorites"— foods, movies, colors, etc.

It is my hope for *Blasphemy* to serve as a tool for critical evaluation of themes, but rather than preach through an epiphanic moment whereby Kid serendipitously recognizes the harmful effects of othering, I will instead lead the reader to their own conclusions through the experience of the characters. The rising and easing tensions between Liam and Kid will expose othering for the unique harm it visits on each, and in turn for the wound-healing that results from its systematic breakdown as a relationship develops between the two. It is, then, not my objective to prescribe any specific feeling or sentiment to the work, but rather to heighten audience sensitivities to the themes and expose my own views for others' consideration.

Character Sketches:

On Demons as Unique Life Forms: Though powerful alien beings, the life forms designated as demons are not strictly gods, devils, angels, spirits, deities, nor demons, but rather extraterrestrial, inter-dimensional entities whose appellations are functional metaphoric clues as to the relationships between the characters, rather than faithful religious identifiers. Some readers might find a literal reading of the names bestowed on the demons expedient, and that will suffice, but they will learn that issues of morality do

not divide neatly down conventional lines of 'God-as-good' and 'Satan-as-evil,' as the demons are, in this specific way, much like humans who embody aspects of each. Religious allusions and subtext peppered throughout the story provide foundation, structure and form, but also blur widely accepted notions of 'good' and 'evil' while subtly acknowledging religion's contribution to the societal problem of othering.

Through exposition, the reader will learn that demons inhabit a dimensional space separate from humans which provides them with their supernatural abilities, including shape-shifting and the capacity to travel between dimensions. Since the two dimensions recognized in *Blasphemy* are not spatially linked, a demon can appear, via a teleportation-type phenomenon, in any physical space in the realm of Earth, and the action of the story occurs there.

Demons are, however, biological, corporeal beings. Though much "larger" than humans in intellect, physical size, life-span, and territory, they are bound still by natural law. They are not so much magical as in possession of natural capabilities so far removed from human comprehension and experience that, when witnessed by humans, their powers are attributed to tricks, misperception, psychosis, or mythology.

The mechanics of shape-shifting requires that a demon possess a sufficient quantity of biological matter within one's physical being such that emulation of any variation of a biologically sustainable form in the dimension of Earth is possible. Their earthly form becomes but a tiny part of their complete mass, so if they happen to die in said form, the wound sustained to them in the extra-dimension would be insignificant. Assuming a form for which a demon has little behavioral experience, however, poses a significant risk as there are no assurances that the form will be suited to the environment. Though exotic forms can be powerful tools when successful, the most peculiar are often short-lived, ending in death for the form, and in grand mysteries of folklore, such as rarified sightings of centaurs, dragons, and mothman, for humans.

Earth is but a neighborhood within the scale of demon "territory," and some, specifically Kid and Jesus, primarily reside there, unlike their antecedents, God and Satan, who reside exclusively in the extra-dimension throughout the course of *Blasphemy*.

Liam: In many ways, Liam reflects the demographic of my anticipated audience; a young person, and in fact a human, coming into their own independence and solidifying their own value system. Together, Liam and the reader are abruptly and unceremoniously thrust into a world shared by

humans and demons and as such, he functions as the story's audience surrogate by asking the questions that might arise in the minds of the uninitiated. Liam's character allows for the exposition which provides necessary story context.

Science has confirmed what most people know intuitively; conventionally attractive people are generally considered more likeable and trustworthy (Mitrokoostas). Liam, thus, is designed to be pleasantly average — symmetrical, rounded features, sandy blonde hair with a pleasing physical aesthetic and a fashion sense that skews toward soft and comfortable; pastel colors, oversized sweaters and skinny jeans — as I want my audience to like and identify with him. Eyes, as windows to the soul, feature prominently in my designs, and Liam's are round and somewhat large to express his gentle appeal, his innocence, and to convey a relative softness in his essence.

Liam is in his mid 20's, and is warm, approachable, unassuming and ultimately pragmatic by nature. While his tendency toward clumsiness is endearing, he is also known to put up defenses, or simply refuse to listen, when angry. His family's mid-western sensibilities have rendered his homosexuality a point of contention since he came out in high school, and was part of the impetus for his decision to attend college out-of-state.

Kid: A shape-shifting demon whose existence pre-dates human culture, Kid was molded by his father to systematically instigate disunity and engender violence among the human population in service of the feud. Regarded by his father as little more than a ready-made soldier, Kid was indoctrinated into the world of demons, raised to comply, execute orders, and attend to his duties without question or regard for consequence to the objects of his malice.

Initially, Kid is dually driven by self-preservation and lack of empathy. Charged by his father to cause the deaths of as many humans as is demonly possible, Kid complies out of fear of reprisal that will surely follow failure. In Kid's estimation, his father would scarcely hesitate to exterminate him and replace him with another. Kid was raised to kill, and he is able to do so without qualm or contrition, as the notion that humans are insignificant and unworthy of consideration has been instilled in him since his inception. Kid views humans similarly to how humans view insects, a form of lower life, simpler minds, that can be casually squashed under one's heel if they stand where one is walking.

Kid has created havoc and caused atrocities throughout time. Of course, humans are fully capable of committing atrocities of their own, but Kid has had a hand in many, and countless influential evil-doers and politicians have

been influenced by Kid's persuasions. He and his fellow demons are not only adept at murder, but they are masters of thievery, and blackmail. As one who can bribe, threaten, and kill so wantonly, Kid holds significant power, and he provides ample illicit rewards for those — both demon and human — who he manipulates into doing his bidding.

The relative ease with which Kid had previously spread destruction, however, became more knotty and problematic with the human invention of the internet. Its very existence, in fact, stands as evidence that Kid and his cohorts are losing the feud, as it reveals that humans have come to possess a certain proficiency with technology that threatens to out them to the human world by exposing their supernatural powers.

The new-found capability afforded to humans to record and widely disseminate otherwise unexplainable phenomenon and chaotic occurrences via the internet may well become a dangerous proposition for Kid's cohorts and their malevolent objectives. Any individual event that incites a human's suspicions — say, a teleportation captured on video and posted to the World Wide Web — will remain forever in the human's collective virtual memory. Even as generations die, the records of mysterious and baffling events remain available to quizzical human minds.

Kid understands that if humans come to recognize that their world is more than what they perceive, an overpowering fear of that which they cannot comprehend will, through mechanisms of blind faith, further align them with his principal nemesis, the entity known as God. A pivot toward faith, religion and belief would most assuredly prime them for ready submission to the demands of the "higher power" making them formidable recruits of God's army against Kid and his kind. Thus, the sphere of mayhem for which Kid is responsible is expanded as the story unfolds to include attenuating the power of human technological advancement. In the epoch of Liam's life, Kid faces a trifecta of adversaries: god, humans, and, by extension, the internet.

Physically, Kid is beautiful in a way that is meant to evoke the traditional look of an "anime boy," an intentional choice I make tongue-in-cheek because Kid, as a member of a species of demons with shape-shifting capability who can choose for himself any manner of look, deliberately selects a desirable shape, and supernatural flawlessness. He is tall and angular with a fantasy-like perfection that stands in contrast to Liam's round softness and down-home earthiness; the stuff of humans. Kid's spiky hair, always thoroughly impossible, defies gravity and provides another playful tribute to a staple of the look.

Kid shares an explicit physical trait — eye shape — with other demons that serves both as a visual shorthand to common identity, and a visual through-line that is sustained even when demon characters take a different form. Since this is intended to function as an identity cue to the reader, it is a purely stylistic choice since if presented in perfect realism, they would not exhibit this similarity.

Kid's eyes, and thus demon eyes, are narrow and heavily lidded, the upper half essentially a straight line suggestive of sleepiness, or perhaps the bored contemptuousness of one who is innately suspicious. The appearance of the eyes, in general, is an important aspect of my artistic style, as I believe they are evocative of character, emotion, and mood, thus the use of universal shape in this context underpins the commonalities among the demon's fundamental being not shared with the story's human characters.

The symbolism between Satan and goats — beasts with difficult and disobedient temperaments that stand in contrast to God's sheep who follow loyally — provides Kid with his nickname as a descendant and fledgling of Satan. The epithet was conferred upon Kid by a fellow demon, Jesus, as a tender dig at the boy, though demons don't generally conform to a conventional use of names but instead use whichever best serves their purposes.

As we learn through the arc of the story, Kid is a hopeless romantic. This endearing trait provides the reader with a tidbit of insight into Kid's vulnerability and intimates that he is not the absolute "bad-boy" he otherwise presents. He is, however, emotionally constipated, has a terrible memory, particularly for details, and is marginally slower, weaker and less cool than others of his species. Kid is, essentially, an assemblage of character weaknesses, and though he is significantly more formidable than Liam, these flaws serve to level the power imbalance between the two.

Jesus: Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jesus is the son of God. Though he fully comprehends his superiority over humans as a demon, in spite of himself, he once developed a paternalistic affection for the piteous lot. Thus, some two-thousand and twenty earth years ago, Jesus elected to live among them to edify and inspire in the hope that they might save themselves from themselves. He presented his form to a couple in the shape of a child, aged it accordingly, and endeavored throughout, with a fervent sincerity, to proliferate a political manifesto which emphasized social justice, non-violence, and kindness among neighbors. Jesus learned quickly, within the span of three decades in fact, just exactly how naïve he'd been. When they fashioned him to a fence post in the most ungrateful manner on an otherwise lovely spring day, he abandoned his human form and returned to the extra-

terrestrial. Jaded, disheartened and ultimately feeling betrayed, Jesus became aloof and surly, and never regained his beatific outlook of humans, despite needing them for his own survival.

Within the story arc of *Blasphemy*, Jesus has all but taken over "operations" for his father, and he is wholly committed to the mission of the demon feud. Though older, Jesus is Kid's generational contemporary and their relationship is often fraught and thorny, though they do share moments of collegiality. The two are not biological siblings, though they have been forced together through circumstance from their earliest years. Jesus regards Kid as something of a younger brother, frequently taunting, belittling, pranking, and, on occasion, conferring upon him a sound thumping.

Of the two, Jesus is the more superficial, and his adolescent behavior frequently leaves Kid frustrated because of his own tendency to keep his emotions tightly bound within himself. In general, Jesus is significantly more invested in their relationship than is Kid. Jesus, like Kid, is a second generation product of the demon feud and though their charter is, essentially, to kill each other, neither has an ultimate grasp of the rationale as to why, and thus occasionally relax their mutual posturing enough to acknowledge a morsel of brotherly-style fondness.

Where Kid has been socialized to bring about mayhem and the death in the human realm, for Jesus, their survival is paramount; he must exploit them for his ends, as with enough supernatural persuasion, they can be manipulated as pawns, under the guise of religion, to fight the fight against Satan and Kid. Despite his misgivings about humans, Jesus in fact encourages and supports their endeavors, particularly their foray into certain technological advancements that are so powerful they imperil the lives of Satan and Kid. This tension, of course, puts Jesus and Kid at cross purposes on Earth which becomes the impetus for the story's primary plotline when Jesus demands that Kid protect, rather than harm, the human Liam.

Jesus takes forms which are imposing and for the most part in keeping with those that will provide him with the most innate privilege, and thus the easiest means to his ends, that is to say, for example, when in Western nations, he commonly takes the form of a white male. As a cheeky modern take on the classic look of Jesus, I gave him a "man bun" fashioned from shoulder length hair. All of his forms are tall and muscle bound, to compensate, as Kid would gladly tell you, for his weak personality. Jesus is most often clad in the garb of a "gym bro" — tight muscle shirts and sweatpants — to emphasize his muscular design.

Fern: As her name implies, Fern is a plant. She is, in fact, a house plant belonging to Liam, and cherished by him in the way that some dote on a beloved pet. Her pot, in fact, is imprinted with a cute and cozy faux-knit pattern for which Liam has a matching sweater, a detail included to engender endearment for both.

Fern's genus is Sansevieria, more commonly known as the Snake Plant, selected to symbolize the temptations of Satan in the mythical Garden of Eden in which its inhabitants were exposed to the knowledge of good and evil. Despite his attachment to Fern, Liam is, relatably, a mediocre "plant dad." Though her genus is known for its hardiness, she sometimes suffers with sporadic attention to her care.

Her significance to the story is that of metaphor; she grows and thrives, with vibrancy to her green color, in synchrony with the relationship between Liam and Kid, but wilts and withers as the pair's connection is strained and Liam neglects her care. By the end of the story, Fern is dead.

Demon Dads: Sometime in the span of human history, a deity of great potency and faculty recognized the unsophisticated nature of humans. Exploiting their naiveté, he convinced them through an extravagant display of power that he was worthy of unquestionable faith and subservience. Humans complied. They chronicled his teachings, embellishing them with their own

simple agendas, and they worshiped, served, and did his bidding in accordance with his plan. In time, a religious mythos was fashioned around the entity they came to know as God, among other names.

Though God was not singular in his message, he was indeed dedicated to his own purpose. He indoctrinated them into his "ways," and encouraged the type of technological advancement that could be used in service of his mission. Quite cunningly, too, God forewarned the humans of the existence of another being, his equal in power, yet aligned against them. By positioning himself as *the* authoritative source, God cast this adversary into the role of malefactor, eliciting in humans a subconscious desire to destroy the deity they came to regard as Satan.

Thus, "the devil and incarnation of evil" is a character role accepted and played by Satan, and instilled in Kid from his inception, intended to intimidate humans as a means of self-protection. God's objective to promote the technological advancement of humans became Satan's wicked designs to use brute force to create strife, disunity, and to limit their population.

Neither God nor Satan appear directly through the story arc of *Blasphemy*, a choice intended to play on the notion that what the imagination conjures can be worse than reality, and to underscore the intangibility of "God" and "Satan" from the perspective of humans. God and Satan reside

solely in the extra-dimension, a setting which cannot exist for humans as its very possibility defies their perception. The two, of course, have a long history of enmity which originates from, and manifests in, the demon feud.

Liam's Family: Liam's parents take on a traditional appearance typical of a middle-aged couple with conservative political leanings, and his sister, Lucy, similar in appearance to Liam, also sports a look that might be described as conventionally average. Like Liam, their explicitly colloquial appearance contrasts starkly with the story's fantastical elements.

Elements and Usage of Color: Color is not solely an element of visual appeal in *Blasphemy*, it is used to support the narrative by establishing mood and time of day, identifying individuals and their distinctive traits, and providing a signal as to evolutions of character. A tetradic color scheme using four energetic colors, each with equal tension among them, will lend continuity to the overall piece. A simple palette of complementary red and green, and complementary blue and yellow/orange, conveys mood and meaning without overwhelming the eye or muddying the message.

One's intuitive response to color is generally the product of instinct and culture, yet psychology suggests that individual colors often evoke a common emotion among people. There is some science to back up this theory which I leverage in color choice as subtext to the narrative. Hence, blue, the most

common "favorite color," has been shown to encourage reflection, induce calm and lower blood pressure (Kurt) and is associated with loyalty and trust (Elliot). Yellow/orange, said to be the strongest color psychologically, represents happiness and joy, warmth and friendliness, confidence and optimism (Kurt). Red, the longest wavelength and the most basic of colors, is indicative of strength, passion, heat, love, and anger (Kurt), while green is found to be emotionally calming and symbolizes growth and kindness, safety and peace, equilibrium and harmony (Kurt).

Drawing on the trope of "red team/blue team," I use the primaries red and blue to set up character dichotomy, namely that of good and evil, between Liam and Kid and Jesus and Kid, then challenge the nature of the dichotomy through characterization. None of the three individuals are meant to be objectively good or evil, however, in the same way that the colors red and blue are not inherently connected to the concepts themselves. I offer no correct answer, but instead aspire to build characterizations with enough depth and nuance to prompt the reader to question their own prejudices surrounding 'good' and 'evil' in person or in deed.

Blasphemy's two most central figures, Liam and Kid, are designed each with their own dyadic of complimentary colors. The color schemes function as visual shorthand into character identity and involve two distinct layers,

one which identifies the *what* of the character, and another which identifies the *who* of the character. More precisely, the *what* identifies their wider ingroup/outgroup affiliations while the *who* signifies their individual essence and persona, that which provides the fuel behind their personal attraction to each other, and that which ultimately splits them apart in the push-pull of attraction and repulsion.

In Liam's character, yellow/orange represents *what* he is; it denotes his humanity and his connection to human nature, neither good nor bad, but also not self-selected. Yellow/orange is the color Liam is most apt to display outwardly, but it is a shallower characterization of his true self and representative of the aspect of him that Kid deems inferior. Yellow/orange appears on Liam's clothes, particularly on his outerwear, but features most prominently when the othering between Kid and Liam is most intense.

Use of the color blue represents *who* he is: calm, grounded, and trustworthy, that which draws in Kid. Blue appears on Liam's clothes, particularly his favorites, items worn under other clothes, and most prominently during more personally revealing scenes in which Kid and the audience are learning about and connecting with him. Blue is the color of his bedroom, and the color of his eyes.

In Kid, red provides the *what* of his character. It is the nature of demons, and specifically, everything his father taught him to be. Red appears on Kid's clothes, particularly when he is thematically connected with the feud, and associated with other demons. Red is the color of Kid's eyes.

Green represents the *who* of Kid, but the color is not introduced until midway through the story as Kid comes to recognize his own wants and interests as points on a path to self-discovery, and healing from a lifetime of abuse. Green symbolizes the personal growth which enables Kid's love for Liam, and the corresponding diminishment of othering between the two; it appears with increasing frequency as Kid comes into, and recognizes, his own personality and his emotional attachment to Liam.

Color usage in more minor characters demonstrates alignment with the larger themes of the story. In Jesus, for example, the use of blue stands in contrast to Kid's red, and represents his allegiance with God. Blue and red are used to reveal alignments among the demons with either God or Satan, and the yellow/orange of Liam's family represents their human connection to him.

As a plant, Fern is naturally and utterly green. She is an element of Liam's personal space, and thus not part of Liam's personal being, but instead a beloved extension of it. As such, Fern's green color symbolizes Liam's

attachment to Kid and as well the growth within Kid that is crucial and foundational to the relationship between the two young men. The "browning" of Fern at the story's climax, then, speaks metaphorically to the pair's darkening relationship.

Exposition

The Psychology of Othering: Tendencies toward prejudice, xenophobia, and othering put at risk our social harmony, leading to such destructive behavior as racial intolerance, social exclusion, violence, and war; prejudice, xenophobia and othering herald the active creation of division with the intent to vilify and marginalize, widening the aperture for acts of social discrimination.

Examples of othering are ubiquitous from our earliest history, and in fact the word "xenophobia" has its origins in ancient Greece. The phenomenon has endured, heightened and intensified by our current political climate as protectionism has resulted in the othering of our diverse neighbors domestically and our world neighbors globally, resulting in an attitude of indifference to their well-being. Examples are clearly observable in modern American society as we witness the rejection of refugees displaced by war, immigration bans for those from largely Muslim nations, and calls to construct a wall on our nation's southern border. Perhaps less obvious, the othering of non-human animals is used to ease their exploitation for the benefit of humans.

The alienating effects of othering in modern society are destructive, sometimes deadly, and undoubtedly dispiriting. No individual or society is exempt. It is thus valuable to understand the forces that contribute to such harmful attitudes in order that we might mitigate its excesses.

Social Psychology's Social Identity Theory posits, very simply, that "prejudice can result from the desire to maintain self-esteem" as ingroups are "validating and comforting," and that individuals perceive their ingroups to be superior to outgroups (Heinzen, 282, 297). The natural consequence of in-group favoritism becomes out-group estrangement, a phenomenon which underpins the bias involved in othering. This notion provides us with insight as to the proximate explanations for conditions of prejudice, xenophobia, and othering, but raises the larger question as to what makes these behaviors so pervasive, and so persistent, given we can clearly see how harmful they are to our modern social fabric.

Psychologists have long recognized that humans possess an intrinsic racial bias, and even those individuals deeply concerned with equality demonstrate some predisposition toward prejudice when tested using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Grewal). A view through the lens of Evolutionary Psychology, then, may provide insight into *why* humans are inclined toward notions of othering as the consequence of evolved behavioral

traits which were once functionally beneficial to humans in our ancient environment, though they have long outlived their usefulness to society.

Multiple evolutionary theories exist as to why xenophobia may have become an adaptive behavior whereby humans prioritized inclusive fitness of an in-group at the expense of the out-group. A central feature of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection explains how adaptations promote reproduction such that those traits which best fit the environment — those which are most functional — are passed on to future generations. The question then becomes, what function might have prejudice, xenophobia, and othering once served in reproductive success?

One such theory suggests that just as natural selection helped to shape the body's sophisticated immune defenses against invading pathogens, humans also evolved a "behavioral immune system" which selectively promoted behaviors which best avoided contact with pathogens in the environment (Schaller & Park). Since mounting a physiological immune response is necessarily costly to the human body, the behavioral immune system, then, "serves as a crude first line defense against pathogens" (Schaller & Park).

Psychological mechanisms at work in the behavioral immune system include the ability to detect cues to predict the presence of pathogens, and the

resultant cognitive or emotional responses that encourage pathogen avoidance (Schaller & Park). These responses, most specifically that of the emotion of disgust, results in an aversion which becomes generalized from disease to disease carrier. Since members of an out-group can indeed pose a disease threat by exposing one to pathogens or parasites for which an immunity hasn't been developed, it is evolutionarily adaptive to heuristically conflate the potential for disease with out-group members, thus cognitively linking "disease threat to outgroup stereotyping and prejudice" which can manifest in discriminatory behavior (Murray).

A connected idea broadens the notion of threat to include the myriad of complications related to living in proximity to others in the evolutionary environment, and posits that our "contemporary prejudices, stereotypes, and acts of behavioral discrimination" are consequences of the mechanisms that evolved as threat defenses (Neuberg). Having found reproductive advantage in working cooperatively to defend against predators and food scarcity, our early ancestors were disposed toward the formation of social groups. Yet, living in groups increased one's vulnerability to violence, theft, and economic exploitation, and those best equipped with mechanisms to identify and mitigate social threats — those who developed traits involving caution and suspicion toward others — were most likely to thrive, reproduce, and pass

those traits to their offspring. In essence, the perception of cues to social threats from ambiguous individuals evoked feelings of fear, anger, and disgust. These threat responses, of course, limited the costs of sociality and were thus selected for through evolution as fitness benefits, yet may well have endowed humans with our tendency toward social exclusion, stigmatization, and xenophobia.

Extending this idea once again, territoriality for our ancient ancestors was a matter of competition for scarce resources, thus it was biologically advantageous to reject or subjugate one's competition. Resource scarcity encourages social cooperation, but it also heightens intergroup distrust and conflict as a matter of environmental fitness (Kurzban). Thus, it appears that our modern psychology evolved to elicit an intensity of emotion toward those with whom we cooperated in the pursuit of resources, and an equal intensity of emotion toward outsiders perceived as resource competitors. From an evolutionary perspective, then, xenophobia and contemporary prejudices are inherited from our phylogenetic ancestors as a response to the threats and opportunities that had implications for reproductive fitness in human evolutionary history — a trait which is clearly maladaptive in our modern world.

Blasphemy as an Othering Disrupter: Too often literature, media and popular culture reinforce the unhealthy notion of othering. In literary theory this involves the stereotyping of individuals or groups as atypically distinct from that of the empathic protagonist, whereby the other is barbarized, coarsened, or de-intellectualized for use as an enemy or foil.

The devising of fantastical sentient humanoid races to serve as "the enemy other" has roots in the fantasy genre of literature and this well-established trope might be traced back to the works of JRR Tolkien, the standard bearer of the genre (Sturtevant). His conceptualization of Hobbits, Dwarves, Giants, Elves and Orcs stand as powerful metaphors soaked in the belief that race determines worth.

Tolkien's Middle-Earth is a racially hierarchical world whereby the highest ranking, the elves, are described physically as fair, yellow-haired and morally as "the noblest of the children of Eru" (Rearick). The rival Orcs, alternatively, are conceived as a discrete group of corrupted, twisted versions of elves and irredeemably evil. Though not expressly presented as a natural race, Orcs, a "grim, dark band," are described as in terms unmistakably racial, such as "squat, broad, flat-nosed ... with wide mouths and slant eyes," and they are slaughtered brutally and liberally (Chance).

The premise becomes problematic when these whole races, otherwise beautifully imagined by Tolkien, were granted positions of dominance or competitive advantage over lesser others as a dictate of plot promoting an ethos of "us vs. them" in the form of "race vs. race." Though structurally expedient as literary mythology, broad-brushing whole races with simplistic notions of "good" and "evil" presents a world in which race *can be* inherently so, and if mimicked in the real-world can incline us socially toward prejudice and xenophobia.

Tolkien's conceptualization of Hobbits, Dwarves, Giants, Elves, and Orcs has long endured, working their way forward into the fantasy and sci-fi literature, film, television, and video game mediums, and sealing it as a blueprint for an entire genre. Klingons, recognized for their hostility, aggression, and warmongering, is a widely known trope drawn from the television series Star Trek, and the tabletop game Dungeons and Dragons takes the model even further by attributing numerical values to the relative strengths and weaknesses of various races.

Othering in the literature and media allows an audience to commit violence, albeit mentally, without subsequent guilt or remorse, as othered groups are devised specifically for that purpose. It is reinforced through validation within an in-group, and distaste for an outgroup, and thus two

sides of the same coin. It should not be surprising to note, then, that ingroup/outgroup prejudices can be broken-down expediently through personal connections of sufficient quality (Antonacci).

Though othering may be an evolved human trait, as the discipline of Evolutionary Psychology proposes, we are not slaves to our genes. Our capacity for reasoning and inhibiting our internal impulses are well advanced, and as a species we are ably equipped to interact with one another in prosocial ways. Modern day group affiliations are fluid, providing a solid starting point for surmounting anti-social attitudes. In the words of author, playwright, and activist Sarah Schulman:

“Nothing disrupts dehumanization more quickly than inviting someone over, looking into their eyes, hearing their voice, and listening.”

These ideas are integral to the plotline of the *Blasphemy*. The story serves as a reactionary piece to common othering tropes, flipping on its head the traditional power dynamic by placing a supernatural being in the position of supremacy, and a human protagonist as other, thus taking the reader on a journey as the *object* of othering. Through Liam, the reader is conscripted into the role of other and asked to consider its negative consequences and mentally participate in the systematic break-down of bias, intolerance, and

fear as Liam and Kid look into each other's eyes, hear each other's voices, and listen.

Blasphemy deals with power structures and prejudices inherent to othering using an inter-species duplet as a symbolic stand-in for many kinds of othering prevalent in modern society. Though it explicitly centers on the relationship between a Kid, a demon-god, and Liam, a human, the story is intended to further convey its message about othering by extrapolation to other group-based identities including gender, religion, ethnicity, social class, or disability, and it will obliquely address sub-themes of sexism, same-sex relationships, and homophobia.

Objective and Audience: In her seminal work, *Inventing Human Rights*, historian Lynn Hunt argues that empathy for those across "broadly defined boundaries" is often conveyed through literature, as audiences identify with the characters portrayed (Hunt, p. 38). She contends that the story telling, (historically through the novel), has served as a powerful tool in influencing morality, as it engages the reader's imagination — rather than moralizing directly — while subtly providing insights into the complexities of another's moral struggles.

Researcher Keith Oatley extends the idea, suggesting that stories are simulations of real life that aid the reader not just in understanding an individual character, but in understanding human nature more generally:

"Recent research shows that far from being a means to escape the social world, reading stories can actually improve your social skills by helping you better understand other human beings. The process of entering imagined worlds of fiction builds empathy and improves your ability to take another person's point of view. It can even change your personality. The seemingly solitary act of holing up with a book, then, is actually an exercise in human interaction. It can hone your social brain, so that when you put your book down you may be better prepared for camaraderie, collaboration, even love" (Oatley).

Through MRI scans of brain activity, neuroscientist Tania Singer demonstrated that the brain of the reader responds as if they were feeling and behaving as the story's character (Oatley). This merely confirms what every lover of literature already knows — we experience our own emotions

in response to the desires, joys, and disappointments of the protagonist. Psychological tests measuring personality traits administered to those exposed to a piece of emotional literature and a control group showed that "those who read the story underwent small but measurable personality changes," leading Oatley to posit that engaging in works of fiction can alter one's sense of self (Oatley).

Though not explicitly a novel, *Blasphemy* is intended to engage similarly. The narrative touches gently on themes of tolerance, understanding, and humanity in a contemporary art form which appeals largely to teens and young adults. Because the medium of webcomics tends to meet the reader where they are, *Blasphemy* is an ideal vehicle for the message of acceptance, as young people's social constructs are still, perhaps, somewhat malleable. As narrative and image are both excellent conveyors of message and moral, through *Blasphemy*, I plan to exploit both in raising consciousness, and perhaps altering thought patterns about othering behavior and its potential destructive ends. As with many artists, however, it is my intent to inspire introspection of one's own moral judgments, moving my reader to their own conclusions about othering, rather than to prescribe a specific remedy.

Cultural Context and History of Webcomics: The foundations of today's modern webcomic industry has roots in the mirthful comic strips and vividly-colored comic books that have long captivated the imagination of Americans as a medium for social commentary, political critique and, of course, a respite from life's otherwise harsh realities. The earliest versions of humorous sequential art in America appeared as strips in the Sunday "Funnies" section of major newspapers near the turn of the century, giving birth to enduring characters such as Dick Tracy, Popeye, and Little Orphan Annie that have been beloved for more than a century (Chandler).

By the 1930's, strips evolved into an autonomous art medium, the comic book, sold through the many newsstands that once graced America's city streets (Allen). Though these first comics were cheaply printed offshoots of newspaper strips, by the middle of the decade *New Fun Comics* — the first publication from the organization that would later become the industry behemoth, DC Comics — gave rise to the modern comic book and the launch of multiple iconic titles including *Superman*, *Batman*, and later, *Wonder Woman*, and *Green Lantern* (Cape).

The success of the superhero genre begot a steady stream of breakthrough titles from DC Comics and its primary rival, Marvel Comics, setting off a pop-culture phenomenon. Through succeeding decades, the

comic industry endured through McCarthy era censorship, a robust underground resurgence in the 1960's, an assemblage of intrepid yet enigmatic anti-heroes inspired by the 1970's *Wolverine*, and the emergence of a highly talented pool of independent publishers in the 1980's (Ramsey). It was also around the 1980's that long-form comics took shape as graphic novels, thematically tackling more complicated subjects and introducing complex characters replete with fallibilities and real-world conflicts (Ramsey). By the mid 1990's, however, the confluence of a decline in print comic sales and the inception of the World Wide Web paved the way for the next generation of comic in an exciting new medium: The Webcomic (Allen).

Webcomics presented an aesthetic and structural revolution for cartoonists, and with new-found freedoms they began experimenting on the canvas of the World Wide Web. It was not long before Scott McCloud, artist and author, coined the term "infinite canvas" to express the potential for webcomics to move beyond the size limitations of their print counterparts (McCloud, *The Infinite Canvas*). Added flexibility in panel sizes, or the option to forego them all together, added a new dimension to storytelling, and freedom from the costs of printing meant artists could employ color, or not, with impunity (Fenty).

As the World Wide Web became more accessible to the general public, avenues opened for amateur artists to share their work alongside established professionals. Comic syndicates moved online while minimal barriers to entry enticed independent publishers to explore the medium. As the writers at The UF Visual Rhetoric Research Group observe,

"While Marvel, DC, and *Garfield* strips are available on the web, webcomics like *Penny Arcade* and *8-Bit Theater* also populate the web with equal ease of access and availability, creating a new space for subversion, exploration, and change" (Fenty).

Notable early webcomic offerings included David Farley's *Dr. Fun*, a single panel cartoon that ran from 1993 to 2006, *ArgonZark!*, the first long-form comic created in 1995 for web distribution, and *Kevin and Kell*, the longest running daily webcomic ported from the newspaper by its creator, Bill Holbrook (Parker). The advent of the internet afforded budding artists with a means for modest success, and it is not unusual for today's most popular webcomics to have page-views into the millions per month. Some in the upper traffic tiers, such as *xkcd*, boast numbers as high as 1.1 billion with nearly 60 million unique visitors (Allen).

By 2000, webcomics had made their mark on readers, and as fan favorites emerged, so did recognition for their impact on the industry. The Web Cartoonist's Choice Awards was established in 2001 as a peer recognition award, and the Ignatz and Eisner comic awards both created categories for best digital comics (Atchison). Mass availability of the internet tapped an entirely new readership. Those who'd never before stepped into a comic shop eagerly anticipated the next issue of their favorite digital publication, attended comic conventions and purchased derivative merchandise (Atchison).

Perhaps the most significant development resulting from the shift from print comics to those designed for the web, however, was the liberating absence of content guidelines that are imposed on newspaper and magazine cartoonists (Strickland). Thematically, webcomic creators have enjoyed broader freedoms to probe more diverse topics and explore unique niches where print comics and strips have focused largely on superheroes, sci-fi, horror, and, of course, humor (Allen). About webcomic artists, MIT Comparative Media Professor Henry Jenkins observed:

"...right now, in what has been perhaps the greatest flourishing of young talent in comics since the underground comic movement of the 1960's, they

are enjoying the fringes. These comics are targeting everyone from ravers and skateboarders to sports fans, gamers and chess fanatics ... They offer everything from cute kids to barbed social commentary and gross bathroom humor" (Allen).

This new generation of webcomic artists are free to create works as philosophical, political, satirical, surreal, biting, taboo, or graphic as pleases them. The medium spans all genres, and content can be light and frivolous or as meaty and mature as a traditional novel; narrow or even offbeat interests which would typically fall outside of acceptable boundaries for mass-released comics is within the realm of the possible. As an example, Electric Sheep Comix, known for its dark, edgy, and unconventional humor, released *Apocamon*, a comic version of the book of Revelation from the bible in which the artist, Patrick Farley, irreverently conflates figures from the Apocalypse with characters from Pokémon (Apocamon). Successful webcomics exist concerning topics in history (*Hark, A Vagrant*), mathematics (*xkcd*), and gaming/video culture (*Ctrl+Alt+Del*) as do a host of non-fiction, educational, and biographical titles such as *Black History Leaders* and *Political Power Barack Obama* (Allen), (My Comics).

Comics reflect the culture and values of the wider society, and have held a celebrated place in American culture. Georgia Higley, manager of the comic book collection at the Library of Congress, remarks:

“They reflect us. It’s the ultimate popular culture of America. They really document what we’ve been interested in for most of the 20th century and beyond. It’s also a reflection of the good and the bad of our society” (Hartsell).

Providing an illustrated stroll through the American experience, comics have depicted cultural upheaval, social movements, and the caprice of popular culture. Through the early 1940's publishers pitted the roundly admired caped super heroes against the Axis powers, providing audiences with relief from the horrors of World War II (Thompson). Come the 1950's, our super heroes fought the perceived threats of communism, and later, political scandals, racial strife, and drug use inspired the more serious story-lines of the 1970's (Thompson). For example, in 1974's *Secret Empire*, Captain America uncovered a vast conspiracy by a high ranking government official known as "Number One," openly implied to be Richard Nixon (Shiach).

Comics have also chronicled evolving societal attitudes toward race and gender, reflecting a welcomed surge in diversity and representation. Luke

Cage, the first African American super hero, appeared in the 1970's and Marvel Comic's Black Panther broke ground as the subject of a 2018 Academy Award winning film (Thompson). The highly stereotyped character Ching Lung who first appeared on a DC Comics cover in 1937 as a "yellow peril" villain intended to fuel American's fears of the Chinese was given a modern reboot in 2016 as a foil to Chinese Superman Kong Kenan and the Justice League of China (DC). On the modern use of an outdated and ugly caricature, creator Gene Yang comments:

"The purpose is not necessarily to kick up old stereotypes as it is to comment on them. My hope is at the end of all of the storyline, the entire long arc that deals with Ching Lung, a reader will be able to see it as both a comment on the past and evidence of how far we've come" (DC).

Only the rarest of early comics produced a female hero, as women were primarily portrayed as decoration, supportive figures, or "career girls" in search of romance (Hartsell). Depictions of feminine stereotypes, however, began evolving with women's movements of the 1960's. *Wimmin's Comix* carved out a niche in an otherwise male dominated industry. Evolving from the underground comic movement of the 1960's and 1970's, *Wimmin's Comix*

was an all-female anthology which addressed feminist concerns such as politics, sex, abortion, and homosexuality. In fact, their debut issue, *Sandy Comes Out*, featured the first ever lesbian comic character (Hartsell). A 2010 issue of *Archie Comics* entitled *Isn't It Bromantic* introduced Kevin Keller, the comic's first gay character, an injured Iraqi war vet who later married his African American doctor (Lewis).

Modern comics are diligently working to mirror the people who read them, as publishers reinvent iconic characters to reflect modern sensibilities. Thor, the god of thunder, was reintroduced as a woman, Iron Man's successor, Ironheart, is an African American woman, and superhero Ms. Marvel is a teenaged Pakistani American from New Jersey (Hartsell). In webcomics, where there are fewer gatekeepers and restraints on voices, artists have wider latitude to explore varied representations of the American experience. Depictions of diversity in webcomics provides an opportunity for ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and gender minorities to see themselves reflected in art, and for non-minorities to see them too; strong gender diverse characters and compelling characters of color are aspirational.

Thus, webcomics can be a powerful medium for shaping a reader's perspective regarding social issues, and it's this notion that provides much of the inspiration for *Blasphemy*. In a world beset by challenges which derive

from group-based marginalization and othering, I feel compelled to use my voice to oppose toxic and dangerous tribalistic narratives. Stan Lee, comic pioneer and creative genius, once wrote;

"...although anyone has the right to dislike another individual, it's totally irrational, patently insane to condemn an entire race — to despise an entire nation — to vilify an entire religion. Sooner or later, we must learn to judge each other on our own merits. Sooner or later, if man is ever to be worthy of his destiny, we must fill out hearts with tolerance (Rodriguez).

Stan Lee goes on to say, "A story without a message ... is like a man without a soul," and thus I embark on *Blasphemy* as a touchstone for my message which takes aim at othering in service of empathy, acceptance and charity (Rodriguez).

The Creative Process

Evolution of an Idea: Some years back, while still in high school, a vague idea began to coalesce in my mind, an anecdote centered around the heir to the throne of Hell hiding a forbidden relationship from his overbearing father, and the conflict arising from balancing his obligatory familial duties and nurturing his secret relationship. Around this same time, I'd discarded another story idea save but one particularly cherished character who nicely fit the role of secret relationship partner to Satan's heir. This character ultimately became Liam.

Determining that a royal role wasn't right for my character, as it bestowed upon the character who would become Kid far too many formal ties and duties to make the plot viable, I still wanted the family to have stature and relevance in their community as weight for the back story. Thus, notions of the demon feud and the character of Jesus took shape as supporting story structure, and a set-up to the main action.

I'd considered setting the story in the 1980's as a matter of personal interest, since I have an affinity for its music and culture. However, as few of my readers will be intimately familiar with the time period, and it would only confuse the message, I rejected this idea as an unnecessary complication.

The mildly irreverent spin on religion bubbled up as a sister theme to othering and xenophobia, each reaffirming the other in a cycle that mirrors problems I see in modern society. Not wanting to adhere to strict characterizations of religious mythology, however, I took a twist on the deific figures by devising them as powerful aliens with powerful fallibilities, though they still appear as "gods" through the eyes of story's humans, a device I hope will cause my audience to question the probability, and plausibility, of conventional religious teachings.

Most recently, the focus of the central plot drifted from Kid's relationship with his fellow demons to the romantic relationship between Kid and Liam, and the narrative took its form. The most difficult personal decision point, however, became the story's climax whereby I struggled with supplying the audience with a traditionally happy ending, or a more personally satisfying one that concludes tragically.

Though a reconciliation and subsequent "happily ever-after" for Kid and Liam may have best fit my intended message — othering and xenophobia can be ameliorated through the development of personal relationships — I was wholly unsatisfied with this trite and overused conclusion.

Having always been drawn to tragedy in literature and media, the notion of including the death of one of the story's protagonists was too

personally compelling to ignore. Though I did not want to contribute to common tropes whereby LGBTQ+ characters are relegated to a life of misery, I felt that I must not compromise my customary dark style. In the end, I selected Liam's death and Kid's self-banishment to underscore the caustic and sinister sides of othering behavior. Though a cheerless ending, it's my hope that it will carry enough emotional punch to cause it to linger a while in the reader's mind, creating a mood which allows for making one's own textual inferences in the spirit of deeper insights and understanding. It is my ultimate goal that *Blasphemy* is not just entertaining or aesthetically satisfying, but that my audience will find a personal meaning in the story's theme that contributes positively to their understanding of the negative consequences of othering.

Creative Strategy: Though *Blasphemy* is ultimately devised as a visual, rather than performance medium, the overarching development process is intuitively like that of creating a theatrical performance piece. Like a play, the plot of *Blasphemy* unfolds through action and dialogue in a series of acts, scenes, and vignettes, but instead of a live performance delivered by actors with rehearsed lines in the playhouse, the story of *Blasphemy* is told through hand-drawn actors communicating through body language, facial expression and speech bubbles on the stage of the world wide web.

Outlining, sketching, and creating dialogue, then, can be thought of as the script writing phase, and the completed and polished comic becomes the execution of the script — the performance. With that metaphor to draw on, the outline is complete, the performers are cast, and *Blasphemy* is currently in rehearsal.

The outline for *Blasphemy* (see Appendix A) includes scene flow and plot progression, and serves as a living textual storyboard to guide the artistic process from beginning to end. Though many webcomic artists do not pre-script their work, I feel it's an imperative for telling a coherent story with clear beginning/middle/end development, free from significant plot holes. Further, pre-scripting allows for opportunities to include foreshadowing which keeps the reader in eager anticipation for future updates. The outline provides the structure from which all other artistic elements can be built, a well from which to draw on as I work progressively through the story in manageable, logistically sensible updates.

It should be noted, then, that each scene of the outline does not correlate 1:1 with a publishable update. I plan to execute and publish *Blasphemy* in accordance with an idea proposed by the former editor for DC Comics, Heidi MacDonald, who suggests that each webcomic update should be published in a "satisfying chunk," which supplies the reader with a small but

tangible and gratifying element, such as a plot hook, a cliff hanger or punch line (Arrant). Determining the scope of each satisfying chunk may well be one of the most challenging aspects of publishing *Blasphemy*, but I'm drawn to the concept both as an important element of keeping my reader engaged with the story, and as a method of delimiting my work load in space and time.

I had originally planned to storyboard the entirety of *Blasphemy* prior to finalizing any one specific page, but subsequently determined that working directly from the outline in a more serialized way — sketching roughs, storyboarding, dialoguing, and finalizing art as a distinct "satisfying chunk" in real time — will free me from creative constraints as I tell the story.

Decoupling the work from a predetermined storyboard, thus working directly from the outline, will provide me the spontaneity to devise each new chunk around an upcoming story hook, cliff-hanger, or punch line, giving me ultimate flexibility in determining the scope of each update in real time. With this, I have the freedom to draw out, or speed up, scenes for emphasis and dramatic effect, ultimately allowing for the telling of a deeper, more intriguing tale.

When taking each chunk as the next planned update, the iterative process becomes conducting any necessary background research on the

setting for the prospective scenes, storyboarding/thumb-nailing, creating dialogue, then sketching and finalizing the art.

Much like a set designer for theatre or movies, I will need to have sense for the physical geography and architecture of the story's Southern California coastal setting to lend verisimilitude to the scene's background, particularly those that take place outside of Liam's apartment, such as those of Venice Beach and the city parks and streets of Inglewood. This information is easily accessed from the web on an as-needed basis.

Thumbnail sketches help me define what action will take place in each panel, and the general shape of any individual panel with respect to the physical placement of the characters in relation to one another, body position to provide broad strokes of mood, message and action. I also use the thumbnail to make determinations about where to place the dialogue bubbles so that they don't interfere with critical aspects of the images. These thumbnails then provide a rough draft for initial line drawings which are refined, then colorized using my beloved Wacom Cintiq 16 Drawing Tablet and Clip Studio Paint pro. Finally, dialogue bubbles and lettering complete the panel, and the process repeats with the subsequent satisfying chunk.

Technical and Commercial Considerations

Websites and Web Hosts: Undoubtedly the creation of *Blasphemy*, from concept to execution has been, and will continue to be, a labor of love involving equal parts doubt, tears, frustration, joy, pride, and a sense of accomplishment. The goal becomes sharing my art with an audience, a task that requires both courage and a physical place from which to share it.

Ultimately the public-facing end of *Blasphemy* will require a website and a web host to function as "business headquarters" — a base of operation. The website is where *Blasphemy*'s audience will come via unique address, or URL, to read the comic, and the ability to customize the website is dependent upon my selection of a web host. The host, then, is both the physical location on a server where the specific website resides and the mechanism that delivers the page to the user when contacted by their web browser (Guigar, *The Webcomics Handbook*). There are several types of hosts available from which to choose.

Free hosting is fully, or near-fully, managed by an outside organization and provides little opportunity for customization of the website. One advantage is obvious from its name, "free," but these types of sites also share a slice of their advertising revenue with site owners, and they have large

communities that promote site sharing which can increase readership (Guigar, The Webcomics Handbook). Though free hosting provides the site owner with little control over the aesthetics and revenue generating opportunities, it can be a great choice for those starting out, as they are popular, reliable, and have a shallow technical learning curve (Guigar, The Webcomics Handbook).

With shared hosting, the website holder buys their own hosting space on a server, and is allowed full control, and thus full responsibility, for their website. Cost is determined by the level of traffic generated, and it is a good option for websites getting fewer than 15,000 daily page views (Guigar, The Webcomics Handbook). For top-tier comics generating appreciable web traffic, virtual private servers (VPS) and dedicated hosts are available, but they require some knowledge of 'Control Panel,' the hosting software, and 'Web Host Manager,' the program that manages the administrative back-end of Control Panel (Guigar, The Webcomics Handbook).

As I initially want to focus my energy on the artistic aspects of *Blasphemy*, I plan to pursue an implementation strategy whereby I first leverage the benefits of free hosting, with the option to later migrate my website to a shared hosting service that provides me more control, and the

possibility of generating revenue. Of the free hosts, WordPress is among the most popular, and seems an excellent choice for *Blasphemy*.

WordPress comes equipped with thousands of pre-defined templates, called 'Themes,' that determine the "look" of the site, with options for product branding elements such as a header, logo and browser logo, as well as an option to include space for blogging, comments, or an "About" blurb (Guigar, *The Webcomics Handbook*). The site's landing page is of particular importance since this is where the reader is introduced to the central concept of *Blasphemy*, the artist's statement, and provided with navigational tools which will direct them to the various elements such as the first update in the series, or the latest update, etc.

'Plug-ins' extend the WordPress functionality with capabilities such as web traffic tracking, search engine optimization, spam filtering, and cyber security enhancements (Schäferhoff). One such plug-in, and the primary reason I'm drawn to WordPress, is 'Comic Easel' which provides a dashboard designed specifically to upload, organize, and manage webcomics (Guigar, *The Webcomics Handbook*).

In his book *The Webcomics Handbook*, Brad Guigar makes the analogy that using free hosting is much like starting one's independent life renting an apartment, suggesting that as one's comic matures, it will likely be

appropriate to move to a shared or dedicated host in order to build up one's "web equity," much like one does when buying a home. Whether or not I ultimately start with WordPress, starting small, with minimal cash investment and a shallow learning curve, then scaling up to build equity and reinvest in my business makes strategic sense.

In the event I find an audience for *Blasphemy*, and/or new comics I devise in the future, a personal webpage will provide me with the control and flexibility in publication and potentially a means to generate revenue through the sale of advertising, though this is clearly a long-term goal falling outside the scope of the thesis.

Publishing: As a first-time comic designer, my immediate strategy for *Blasphemy* is to focus on the story, art, and dialogue in keeping with universal advice from experienced creators regarding common mistakes made when starting a new webcomic,

"Webcomics demand realistic expectations ... don't worry about merchandise, fame, or tinkering too much with your website at the expense of making your comic better" (Davis).

With this counsel in mind, I intend to delay the initial publication of *Blasphemy* until I have a moderate stockpile of finished updates which I'm

reasonably comfortable presenting to the world. This strategy will provide me with sufficient wiggle-room for artistic, process, or technical adjustments, as well as time to prepare for a public introduction. In past financial literacy courses, I was taught that three to six months of expenses is a reasonable monetary buffer in the event of an unplanned expense or other emergency, and this seems as good advice as any to apply to an "emergency fund" of completed pages for my stockpile.

An additional guiding principle from webcomic experts is to follow a publishing schedule based on the "frequent/consistent/significant" rule (Guigar, Rethinking). In other words, to build a loyal audience, webcomic updates must be published as frequently as possible, consistent in quality and timing, and, of course, significant in content. Given the long-form, serialized nature of *Blasphemy*, this is the critical advice underpinning my publishing strategy of two updates per month on a pre-announced schedule, each a content-dependent "chunk" which may vary in substance from a single page to several pages. This approach takes significant pre-planning, but having a stockpile from which to pull will assure that I don't disappoint any readership I might accumulate by running late on any one update.

Positioning, Launch and Promotion: The web is awash with comics in the fantasy genre, and *Blasphemy* will appeal to this established audience

while distinguishing itself by tackling deep social themes through a distinctive art style. Reaching that audience, however, involves creating a launch plan and consistent outbound promotion through social media announcements, preview pages and press releases for comic news sites, and development and outreach to an email list. Building readership will take time and commitment — and a good deal of patience — and I plan to begin developing targets via social media in tandem with amassing content in preparation for an initial update. Each successive update, also, brings additional opportunities to draw in new readers, and once the complete story is published, it can be made available for digital download, or even readied for print as an alternative mode of distribution.

Blasphemy, as a consumer product, will be offered free to the reader, but should it accrue a loyal audience, there may be opportunity for it to generate revenue through the sale of site advertisements, digital downloads, crowdfunding, or even spin-off merchandise such as posters or t-shirts. In exploring the commercial aspects of comic generation, I'll be guided by Todd Allen's handbook, *The Economics of Digital Comics*, for insights into the fundamentals of webcomic financials. Allen does not mince words, however, about the difficulty of making a living in the business of webcomic creation, and I am thusly realistic about *Blasphemy's* financial prospects. Though I

would be pleased to find that *Blasphemy* could generate a profit, the preliminary goal is to have the project sustain itself financially.

With that, Allen advises that it is best to adapt a revenue model to an existing project, rather than devise the creative piece with the objective of generating revenue, as an "audience can smell insincerity." With this seemingly sound advice, I'll defer revenue generation plans until the mechanics of page creation and regular updates are well underway, as only then will it become clear whether *Blasphemy* will be merely a fulfilling outlet for my creativity, or a potential source of income. *Economics of Digital Comics* will serve as both a reality check and a road map for market testing my thesis as I assess whether webcomic creation might be a feasible career path.

Artistic Reflection

Personal Relevance: I've walked through the majority of my life with a drawing pencil and a pile of papers balanced in the crook of my arm, compelled from within to capture the swarm of ideas, feelings, and images from my imagination. I started on scrap paper, test prints, and printing mishaps that my parents provided me to outlet my creative energies, and as the drawings began to pile up, I transitioned to using paper that was entirely my own.

Stacks of blank canvases, sparking with energy, sat ready to be transformed into windows to memory and emotion, each a piece of myself that I found I had the power to bring visually into the world. Characters with motivations and back stories populated rich, imagined worlds that competed with their visual images for time in my head, and recurrent characters served as central subjects for my drawings, before ultimately falling out of favor as I conjured someone, or something, new.

By high school, I'd burn through a 500 sheet ream of paper in a matter of weeks, drawing in every spare minute, while in my head nebulous impressions of a forbidden romance rooted in the enmity between a deific power and an ordinary human surfaced. The story morphed and shifted, and

my interest in it waxed and waned through the ensuing years, until it connected solidly with another topic of personal intrigue: othering and xenophobia.

I recall being in sixth grade when I picked up my sister's AP Psychology textbook, (a book I still possess, and one in which some of my art from the time can still be found, stashed between the pages,) and reading about ingroup/outgroup biases. I'd recognized the problem and its resultant behaviors, and classified them in my mind as sources of such injustices as racism or sexism, knowing first-hand their hurtful and damaging effects.

I'd later been researching fantasy racism and xenophobia in the video game genre — and the deleterious ripples it can send through the wider society — as a theme for a college class presentation when I recognized just how intensely I still felt about the topic. It was then that an interest in mitigating the injustices of othering began to coalesce around my evolving story idea. The theme came into clear focus as the characters' behaviors responded to the negative attitudes they held. Having settled on a webcomic as the delivery mechanism, I could now envision *Blasphemy* as something more than a source of entertainment, but also as a medium for a message.

That I can commingle my art with a soft passion for social justice under expert advice in the context of my honors thesis feels beyond good fortune;

the ongoing creation of webcomics is a primary professional aspiration. As I plan to publish the work, this project will not simply serve its explicit purpose as a webcomic product, but it will provide for me an opportunity to market-test my viability as a professional webcomic artist.

Retrospective: Throughout the process of designing and creating my thesis, I have had to expand my perspective of the project again and again, in some ways I was expecting, and others I was not. The research conducted on the psychology of othering and group dynamics, beyond their considerable personal interest, strengthened and clarified my initial notions. On another note, however, I also got a hearty slap in the face concerning the scope of what I could accomplish — several, in fact. In certain ways, it feels as if this project has been defined by how I’ve had to scale it back, rather than by what I have accomplished.

At the outset, I had intended to start production of comic pages, and maintain a regular publishing schedule, thinking my proposed twice-monthly schedule was feasible even alongside the research, the written component of the thesis, a full-time-plus schedule of classes and personal obligations. However, as I diligently worked through the foundational aspects of the written thesis, an escalating anxiety over the artistic components of the project culminated in something of a block. The resulting long stretches

between work sessions on the comic pages themselves became increasingly burdensome, serving to reinforce my anxiety.

Though I continued to conduct my research and maintain a good pace with the written component of the project, I took a step back from the art, and consulted with my advisor. Ultimately, we decided that thirty pages was a generous goal for the time scale of the project that I had left. The momentary release from the pressure I'd self-imposed, however, was short-lived as the block remained, and my anxiety escalated. I consulted with professors, peers, friends, and family, fighting hard to keep a snippet of the final artistic product in the project plans, but ultimately retreating from my compromise proposal of 30 pages, to a few pages, to several scenes from the story, to pre-existing sketches that illustrated the concepts in the writing.

This felt, and certainly still feels, like a defeat to have compromised my ideals — however over-ambitious they may have initially been — as I've been imaging *Blasphemy's* existence, in various forms, for the greater part of a decade. In my mind, I had conceptualized this project as my most formalized effort towards *Blasphemy's* creation, and by extension, my final try at producing comic material.

Though I'm quite proud of my rigorous research, and the bedrock foundation I have in the outline/story arc, character analysis and functional

details that might one day become the complete work of *Blasphemy*, the reality remains that my goal of creating comic material as a part of my thesis was not realized, and this is something that I must continue to grapple with as I evaluate what the future holds for *Blasphemy* and for myself as a webcomic artist.

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Economics of Digital Comics explores the commercial aspects of comic generation, and includes historical distribution models, economic trends, and business models for traditional print comics, comic strips, digital downloads, and webcomics. Todd Allen's target audience is comic creators and aspiring comic creators to whom he provides highly detailed, fully footnoted revenue and circulation numbers as well as financial models which can be used for sales projections. While there are several good books covering the technical how-tos of webcomic creation, this appears to be the only source offering insights from the industry into the fundamentals of webcomic financials.

Allen devotes one short chapter to the history of webcomics and another complete chapter to its economics. Specifically, he discusses the rudiments of publishing ad-supported webcomics — including the metrics used by advertisers in assessing what value to assign to comic creators — as well as the costs and benefits of crowd-funding, marketing, and promotion through social media. This fundamental background knowledge will be extremely useful to me as I consider whether, and how, to fund this project beyond my thesis, and what I

might expect from various levels of investment in marketing with respect to revenue generation. A framework of understanding surrounding the financial model will be of great use to me as I select which path on which to roll-out *Blasphemy*.

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This study examines the behavior of play in primates as a mechanism for aiding familiarity with outgroup individuals, concluding, logically, that play promotes social tolerance. The researchers measured levels of aggressive interactions before and after play, finding that play has a specific function in reducing xenophobia. Central to my story plot is the bonding of two individuals who regard the other as the “other.” I found this particular study provocative, instructive and inspirational on the type of activities — namely play — that best promoted familiarity. I plan to implicitly, if not explicitly, include these insights into the specific scenes relevant to the breakdown of “us v them” ideology between the two main characters.

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The piece discusses the modern understanding of tragedy as a literary genre, using *Hamlet* as an anchoring point of discussion. The author

examines the widely accepted definitional components of “tragedy,” identifying the conforming and dissident aspects of *Hamlet* as an archetype. As I intend my narrative to incorporate some elemental aspects of literary tragedy, this study will be beneficial to my understanding of its application in constructing a story with appropriate tensions and catharsis. This paper’s accessibility and applicability is enhanced because of my personal affinity for *Hamlet* as literature.

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How to Make Webcomics is a comprehensive advice-driven book written by those with experience in the business of creating webcomics, including the creation of compelling characters, formatting, building a website, branding, and monetizing the end product. My personal strengths and interests are in the messaging, narration, and artistic values of the webcomic, thus this book will be an invaluable resource for guiding the more business-oriented and technical — and personally less compelling — aspects of webcomic self-publishing.

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This piece concerns itself with the notion of "othering" as it relates specifically to genocide using a case study of the Armenian Holocaust which took place in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1917. It contrasts "othering" with the notion of "selfing," and extends these abstract ideas to their observable physical manifestations of violence, its progression and its various dimensions. The author details the genocidal process along a "continuum of destruction," and argues that "ideas, imagery, values and symbols," such as separating the other through labeling, destroying the others' cultural identity, dehumanization and calls for "purification" are precursors to tangible

acts of violence. The author posits that genocide is not solely the physical destruction of the other, but also involves the intentional destruction of a culture.

The Process of Othering from the 'Social Imaginaire' to Physical Acts: An Anthropological Approach will be insightful for the purposes of *Blasphemy*, as the webcomic considers themes of othering and resultant violence. Studying the author's ideas within the context of a true historical case may help me to develop *Blasphemy's* scenes, events and, more specifically, character motivations and actions with authenticity. For example, the author discusses subtleties such as the changing of Christian names to secular names as a way of separating Armenian's from Turks in the initial stages of othering, and how this progressed to the destruction of churches. These ideas may not, of course, have direct application to *Blasphemy* but will provide me with an appreciation for behavioral manifestations of othering that can spark ideas which can be incorporated into the story through the motivations and actions of the characters.

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From initial concept to webcomic publication, *The Complete Guide to Self-publishing Comics* is just that. Authors Comfort Love and Adam Withers provide a comprehensive guide for webcomic publishing, positing that advances in technology, the growth of social media and an increased public interest in Webcomics make DIY publishing a possibility for the independent or novice publisher. The sequential and

procedural nature of the book makes it unique both as a reference book and an instructional manual, replete with sidebar advice and insights from professionals in the field.

Having previously mapped out my design and development process, this book not only helped affirm that my overall method is sound, but it will address specific areas where I feel less confident in my skill as a fledgling webcomic artist. No doubt I'll find value in the sections on character design, color theory, and digital coloring techniques, but the content on writing dialogue and lettering are of specific interest to me as they fill in gaps in my experience.

Tips such as which elements are most critical to design, how far ahead to plan, and common publishing dimensions will ultimately strengthen my product. Several books exist that teach specific aspects of webcomic creation, but this appears to be the most comprehensive, making it an excellent resource as I work through the process from start to finish.

The authors, successful and seasoned publishers themselves, address the world of contemporary digital publishing, distribution, targeting, marketing, branding, and maintaining a successful web presence. While this will all be of use to me, I have significant open questions regarding whether to publish on an existing domain or buy my own, and I am

eager to understand the pros and cons of each from those with knowledge and experience; these specific sections on publishing will be invaluable to me. I bring some strength in design and artistry to the project, but I've sought out this book specifically to augment my understanding of the webcomic industry as a whole as it relates to digital publishing.

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John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian, Director and Assistant Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at University of California, Berkeley, have written a substantive yet accessible survey on the topic of "othering," and its negative implications in contemporary society, ultimately proposing that the "only viable

solution to the problem of othering is one involving inclusion and belongingness." Powell and Menendian discuss othering as the underpinning of social marginalization, group-based inequality, and prejudice that leads to regional and global conflicts such terrorism, white supremacy, Islamaphobia, and sectarian violence. They highlight the role of politics – both historical and modern – in stoking xenophobia, and discuss how social classifications, unconscious bias, and institutionalized discrimination negatively affect our behaviors both individually and collectively.

I'm drawn to this piece for its balance of logic and heart as the author's lay out a comprehensive case against othering. More personally compelling, however, is their concluding section on how to minimize its devastating effects through spreading messages of belonging and inclusion through our institutions and our legislature. This piece, for me, is not so much practical in the context of creating *Blasphemy*, but it is inspirational, speaking directly to the heart of why I've selected this theme. I've chosen to include this piece among my bibliographical selections because it reminds me of what is at stake, gives me hope that some are seeking ways to make the world a better place, and, quite simply, reaffirms my commitment to *Blasphemy*. It is my hope that

when I find myself overwhelmed by the scope of the project I've selected, I can review the piece and hope that *Blasphemy* might one day contribute in any small way to spreading a positive message of acceptance and inclusion for those who have ever felt "othered."

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Appendix A: Outline

- *Opening Scenes; Introduction*
 - Liam is walking through the park.
 - Kid materializes, grumpy having just spoken with rival, Jesus.
 - As Liam passes, Kid notices him and decides to take out his anger on him. Despite Liam being a small-fry, Kid intends to kill him.
 - Jesus appears in order to antagonize Kid, commenting about how Kid ran off in the middle of their conversation. He notices Kid's frustration, and chooses to remove Kid's outlet by demanding that he not kill Liam. Jesus reminds Kid that he has leverage over him having knowledge that he's been "slacking" on his "job," and he threatens to inform Satan. After promising to be back to check on the condition of the human, and then disappears.
 - Liam tries to run, but Kid stops him, revealing teleportation powers.
 - Kid takes Jesus' threats seriously. He decides to assure this human's safety, since even if Kid doesn't kill him he has no faith in humans' abilities to keep themselves alive. After all, they rarely live even to be 100 years old. Kid makes Liam take him back to his apartment so he can keep watch over him.

■ *Scene 2; Kitchen Stare Down*

- Liam and Kid 'set up shop' at Liam's kitchen table so Kid can literally watch Liam at all hours, because Kid doesn't think things through.
- Kid threatens that if Liam displeases him or tells anybody about his presence, he is ready to take advantage of the fact that the restriction on killing was limited to Liam, and not his family.
- Liam eventually runs out of food in his kitchen and asks Kid if he can leave to go to the store. Kid agrees, but only if he's there to supervise.

■ *Scene Three; Store Trip*

- They take a supremely mundane trip to the grocery store, and Kid is out of his element for the first time in the story. Liam sees Kid in a situation in which he is out of his element, and in which he has no power, and it shows Liam that Kid is also a person.

■ *Scene Four; Kitchen Stare Down Part 2*

- They return to the apartment, the tension somewhat broken. Eventually, Kid gets bored and decides that he doesn't need to watch Liam moment to moment. He's got things to do, like working

on that job that Jesus was planning to blackmail him over. Kid leaves and...

- Liam is finally able to go back to his own job and life, and he takes the opportunity to breathe and reflect.

■ *Scene Five; Exposition For Liam and Audience*

- Kid returns to check on Liam, but with an added degree of trust since Liam managed to keep himself alive while Kid was gone. (Kid is not very hard to please.) Kid determines that it would be advantageous for Liam to have relevant background. Kid provides an exposition about the demons, and his own life circumstances.
- Liam and Kid begin to understand each other, and the relationship thaws. Kid continues to return to Liam as not only a ward, but as someone he can talk to, and because hanging out with Liam is a respite from his own life.

Fluff *

- Mutual disclosure of personal information and propinquity lead to an increasing closeness. They feel their mutual attraction and begin to fall in love. Their intrinsic differences become inconsequential.

■ *Scene Six; Liam Talks to his Friends*

- Approximately one month into their friendship/relationship, having spent the majority of their time in close quarters, Liam finds himself needing a short breather from Kid, and the routines and patterns of their life together.
- Liam meets up with friends to discuss his new friendship, feeling more than a little uneasy about it, hoping for their ear and some advice.
- Humorous conversations ensue, involving Liam carefully avoiding certain info about his new friend.

■ *Scene Seven; Kid Talks to His Friends*

- Smash cut to more humorous conversation amongst friends, emphasized by Kid's rather more panicked demeanor compared to Liam regarding their relationship.
- Kid's friends are not all that... supportive.

■ *Scene Eight; Coffee Shop Date*

- Liam and Kid go to a coffee shop. They are relaxed and comfortable with each other, chatting and enjoying each other's company.

- Kid suddenly feels the pressure to take Liam's hand, and he spends more than a moment feeling stressed and uncertainty, when Liam, seemingly cool as a cucumber, simply takes Kid's hand.
- Their feelings for each other are actualized.
- *Scene Nine; Deepening Feelings*
 - As time passes, they become more comfortable with each other.

Fluff *
- *Scene Ten; Liam Breaks Something*
 - In the normal course of the day, Liam accidentally drops a dish, and this shakes him up significantly.
 - Kid puts effort into trying to help Liam and make him feel better, illustrative of an attempt to be supportive and emotionally available to Liam. Ultimately, Kid is not adept at displays of emotion, and he thus generally avoids them, but in his attempt here, he has lowered himself to the level of humans purely for the benefit of Liam. Kid is showing growth.
- *Scene Eleven; Hanging Out at Venice beach*
 - Approximately four months pass, and Kid and Liam further bond over shared experiences.
 - Fluff *

■ *Scene Twelve; "You're Not Like the Others"*

- Kid now has genuine love for Liam, but he is still awkward in how he displays his feelings. Kid makes a clumsy, racist remark to Liam, and the implication of the inherent inferiority of the human race makes Liam justifiably angry, foreshadowing future events.

■ *Scene Thirteen; Christmas Visit to Liam's Family*

- Liam visits his family in the Midwest for Christmas. Tensions with his family are illustrated. Kid is subsequently left behind because Liam isn't ready to explain Kid to his parents.
- Kid, home alone with time to think, reflects on how boring life is without Liam, and he recognizes the degree to which he's a changed person.

■ *Scene Fourteen; Big J Chat*

- Jesus, remembering the prank he pulled on Kid nearly a year earlier, sets out to pay Liam a visit.
- Jesus is beginning to confront Liam when Kid walks in and insists that Jesus leave Liam alone.
- Jesus recognizes that Kid genuinely cares for a human — a welcome turn of events in Jesus's estimation — and leaves the pair alone... for the moment.

■ *Scene Fifteen; Conflict with Kid and J Over Threats*

- Jesus returns when Kid is out, and has a deep conversation with Liam, ala “I’m talking to a dog because they’re great listeners, but they don’t understand and will never tell your secrets” mentality on the part of Jesus. Liam, however, learns some disturbing information about Jesus and his world views.
- Jesus, in an attempt to save Kid, suddenly tries to kill Liam, but Kid arrives in time to save Liam. He is furious with Jesus.
- Jesus reveals personal information about himself to Kid, then leaves, angry.
- The encounter leaves both Liam and Kid tense and worrying about Jesus's potential return.

■ *Scene Sixteen; More Awkward Comments by Kid*

- Tension remains high between the pair, and they begin lashing out.
- They have an argument similar in style and content to a previous fight, but this time, bad feelings linger.
- Fern begins to wilt.

- *Scene Seventeen; Mirror Incident-Breaking Something. Again.*
 - Another dish is broken. Kid and Liam sit silently for a full minute.
Liam is already angry, and thus quietly seethes. Kid is angry and the noise of the breaking glass startled him into silence.
 - Unlike the previous incident of shattered glass, Kid makes no attempts at gentleness or support toward Liam.
- *Scene Eighteen; Moment of Clarity (climax)*
 - Tension lingers between the two. Kid's emotions are heightened and he drastically over-reacts to a stranger trying to mug Liam. Kid murders the mugger.
 - Liam discovers that Kid has killed someone. Liam is justifiably incensed, confused, panicked, and scared. He kicks Kid out.
 - Kid is confused by his own feelings, both for Liam and for the murder he committed, but he's also indignant since he feels Liam should have known all along that this was happening.
- *Scene Nineteen; Liam and Kid Spend Time Apart*
 - Liam and Kid are estranged, and Fern sits nearly dead.
 - While Liam lingers, depressed and anxious, in his apartment, Kid makes attempts to apologize.

- Liam reluctantly agrees to talk with Kid. They acknowledge their inherent differences, but agree they are surmountable. They agree to talk further at a later date.
- *Scene Twenty; Encounter on the Roof*
 - Liam and Kid meet, trespassing on an apartment rooftop in town.
 - As they talk, Kid seems to begin to understand Liam's position about his killing, and he expresses a willingness to at least try to change... for Liam.
 - Having made some progress, they resolve to talk again, with still much to consider, and much between them. Kid, for his part, feels heartened and hopeful.
 - As they get up to leave, Liam missteps and falls onto the pavement below.
 - Startled and shocked, Kid does not react in time. He teleports to the ground, and assesses Liam, who is unconscious. He uses Liam's phone to call an ambulance.
- *Scene Twenty-One; At The Hospital*
 - Kid waits anxiously in the hospital waiting room.
 - A doctor comes out and gives Kid bad news. Kid threatens and pleads with the doctor, punches a wall, and then sits on the ground.

- Kid completely closes himself off.

■ *Scene Twenty-Two; At The Apartment*

- Kid returns to the apartment and takes it all in.
- He picks up Fern and sits with her for a while.
- He leaves.

■ *Scene Twenty-Three; At The Funeral*

- Liam's family has his funeral. Kid, in the shape of a goat, watches from a distance. Kid leaves Earth.

* Fluff: In literature, "fluff" refers to story elements that provide context, but do not otherwise serve in the development of the plot. In *Blasphemy*, I have stockpiled a series of fluff scenarios/events that I may insert, thoughtfully yet sparingly, into the story line through the course of development. The fluff scenarios provide the audience with instances demonstrating the deepening relationship between Kid and Liam which can serve as a break from the tension of the story. Elements of fluff to draw upon include:

- ❖ A chat between Liam and Kid about their "favorites" (colors, foods, songs, etc.) Kid finds himself unable to come up with any "favorites," but upon reflection he determines his favorite color is green, symbolic of his growth as a person.
- ❖ Liam teaches Kid to do something exceedingly mundane, but ultimately novel, and therefore thrilling, to Kid, endearing them both to the audience.
- ❖ Kid and Liam discuss their families with an air of sincerity, honesty, and openness as they get to know each other, and the audience gets to know them more genuinely.

❖ Kid and Liam cuddle/watch a movie/get an ice cream/go swimming/visit the aquarium. These events are supremely ordinary in the context of a budding romantic relationship, but are somehow extraordinary and remarkable given the barriers between the two.

Appendix B: Selected Pieces

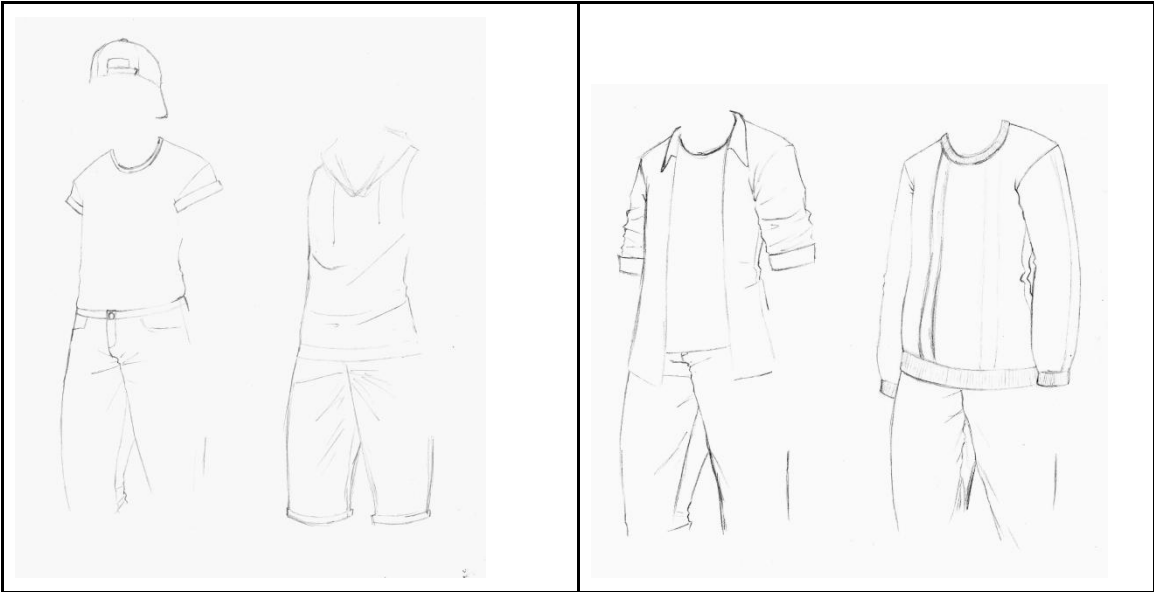


Blasphemy Logo

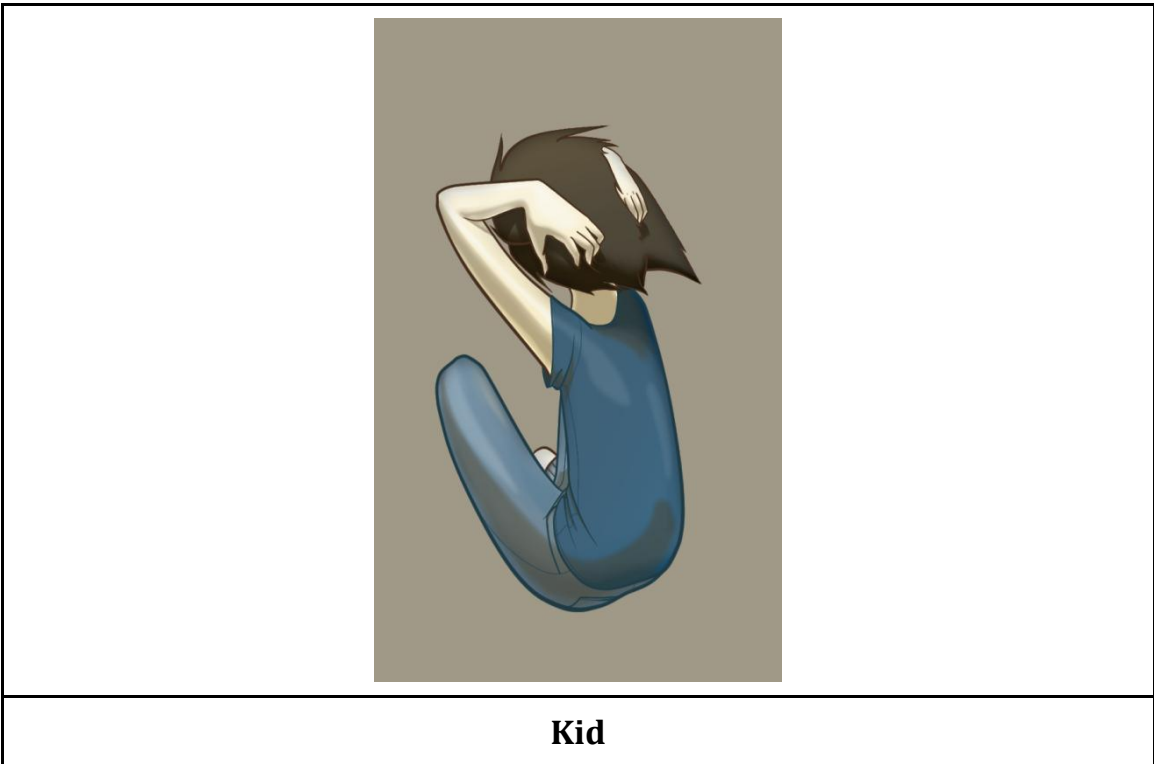
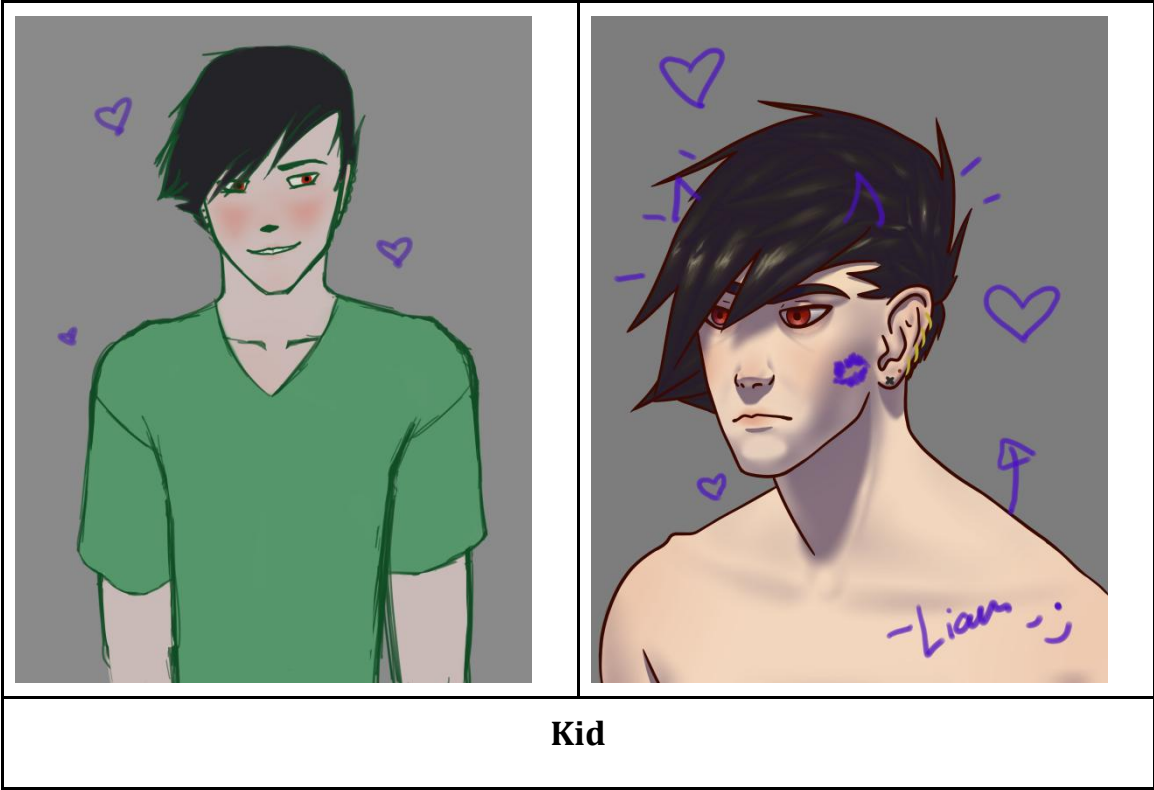
A hand-drawn sketch of a park area. It shows a green field with a blue pond, a small building, and some trees. The drawing is done in a simple, illustrative style.	A hand-drawn map of a neighborhood. It shows a grid of streets, a park area, and a library. The drawing is done in a simple, illustrative style.	A hand-drawn floor plan of an apartment. It shows a living area with a television, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom. The drawing is done in a simple, illustrative style.
<p>Neighborhood Park</p>	<p>Neighborhood Map</p>	<p>Liam's Apartment</p>

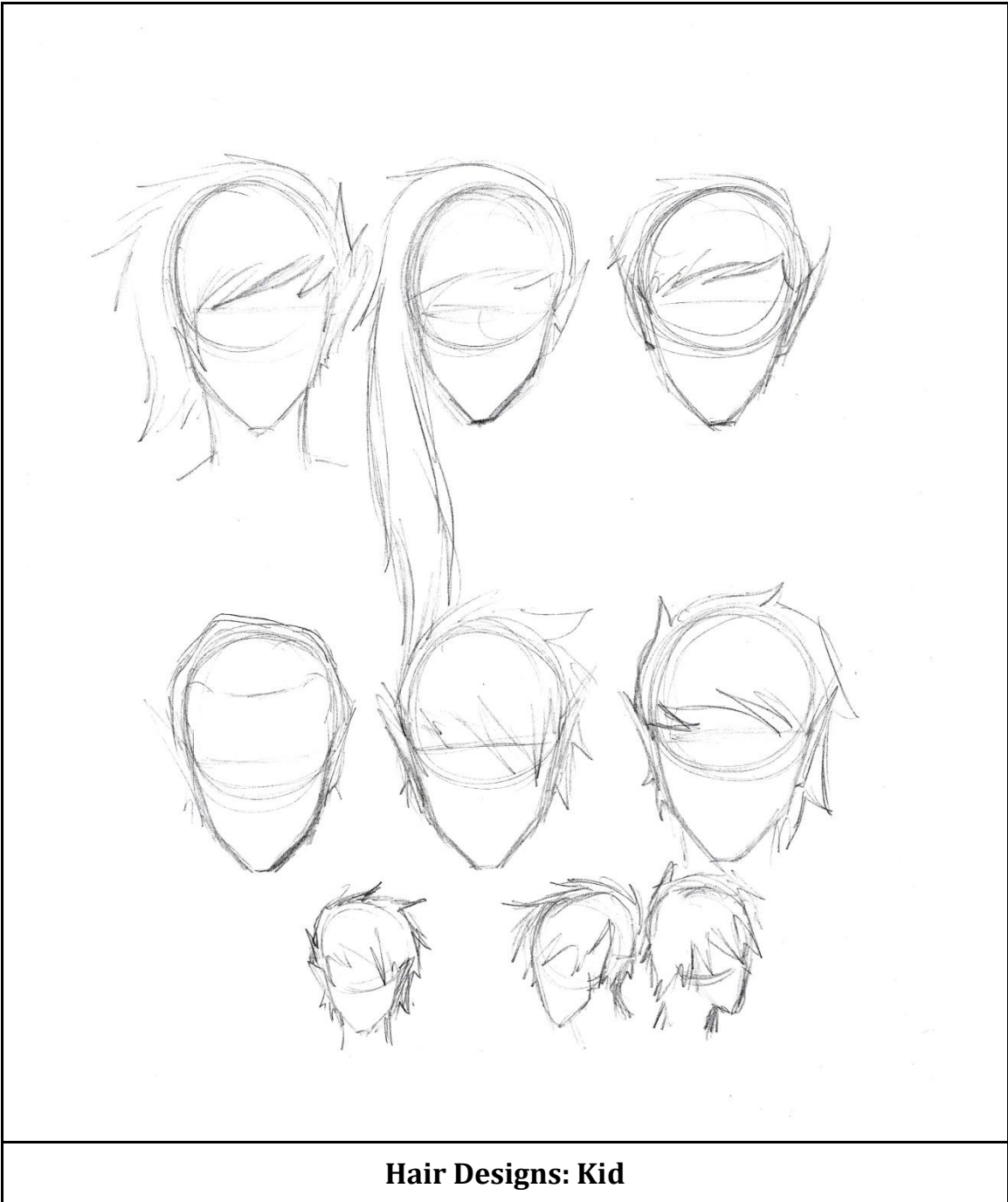


Liam

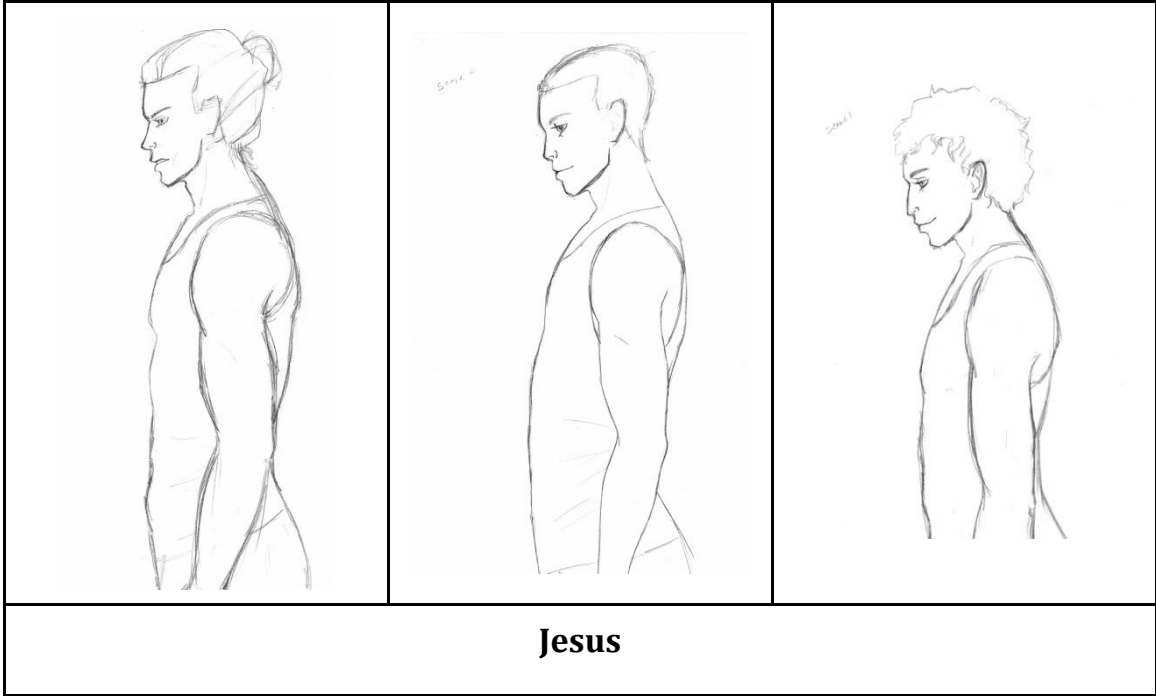


Liam's Wardrobe





Hair Designs: Kid



Jesus



Fern with Kid



Liam and Kid



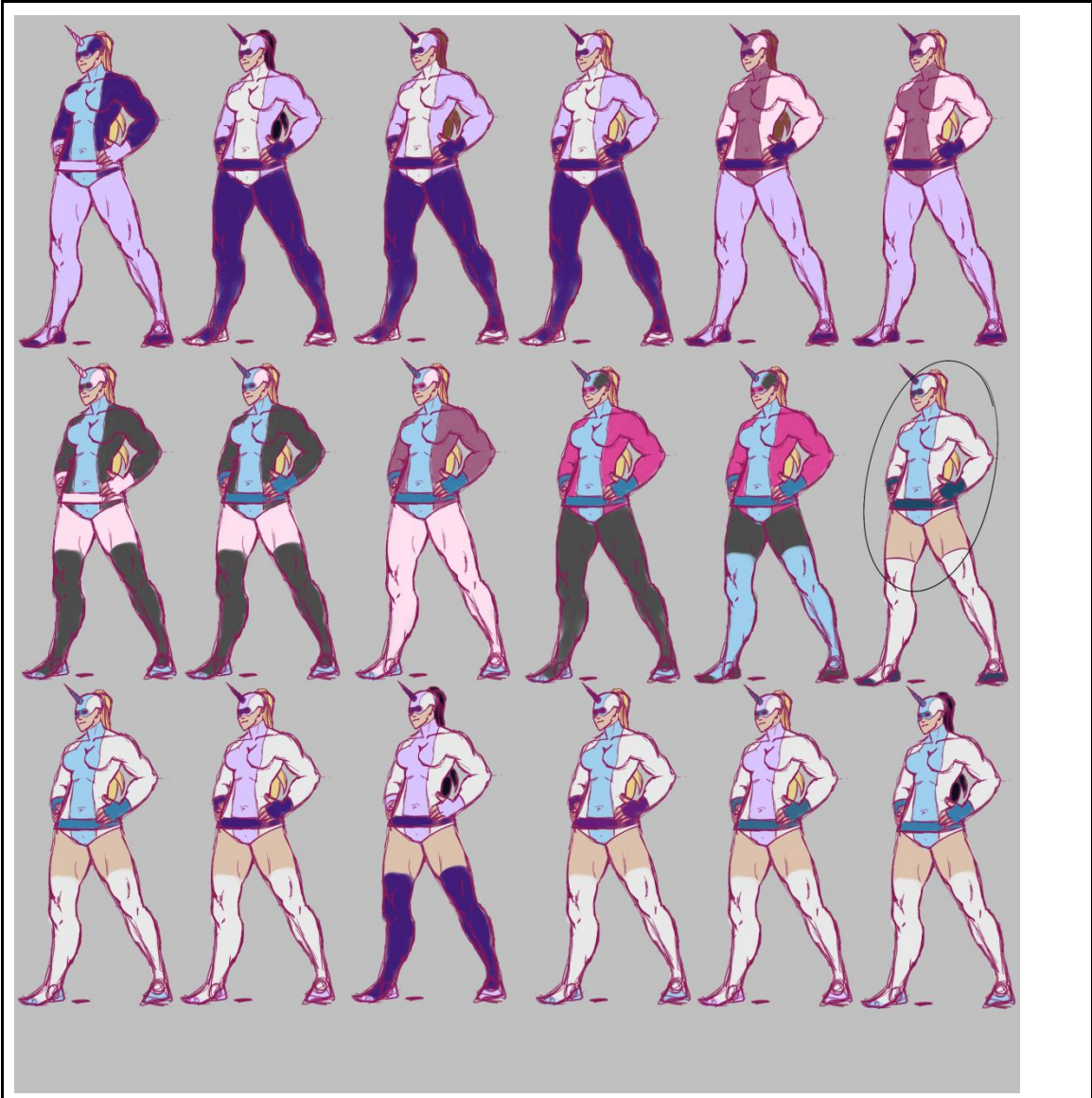
Liam and Kid: The Fall



Liam and Kid



Character from Alternative Universe; Pre and Post Colorization



Color designs: In-fiction Superhero