



# COMICS INTROSPECTIVE VOLUME ONE

# PETER BAGGE

**WORDS AND PHOTOS BY:  
CHRISTOPHER IRVING**

**DESIGN BY:  
RICH FOWLKS**

**PROOFREADING BY:  
LAURA HEGYI & JOHN MORROW**



PETER BAGGE

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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE



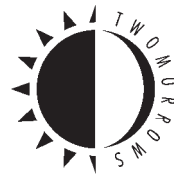
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## Dedication

To Shaun Irving, my brother and best friend...  
who seems to always know the right thing to say.

Peter Bagge interviews were conducted in Seattle, Washington on April 2, 2007  
by Christopher Irving

All interviews were transcribed by Steven Tice & Brian Morrison



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From Rich: Special thanks to my lovely and ever-patient wife, Angela.  
Yes, NOW I can come to bed on time.  
Thank you to Sara Johnson for photograph materials.

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### Author's Bio

Christopher Irving sprang from a coffee bean in 1977, and has continued to consume vast amounts of both coffee and comic books. His work as a comics journalist and historian has appeared in *The Blue Beetle Companion*, *Comic Book Artist Magazine*, *Comics Buyer's Guide*, *Back Issue*, and others. He currently lives in Raleigh, North Carolina with his black cat, Elise.

# COMICS INTROSPECTIVE VOLUME I Peter Bagge

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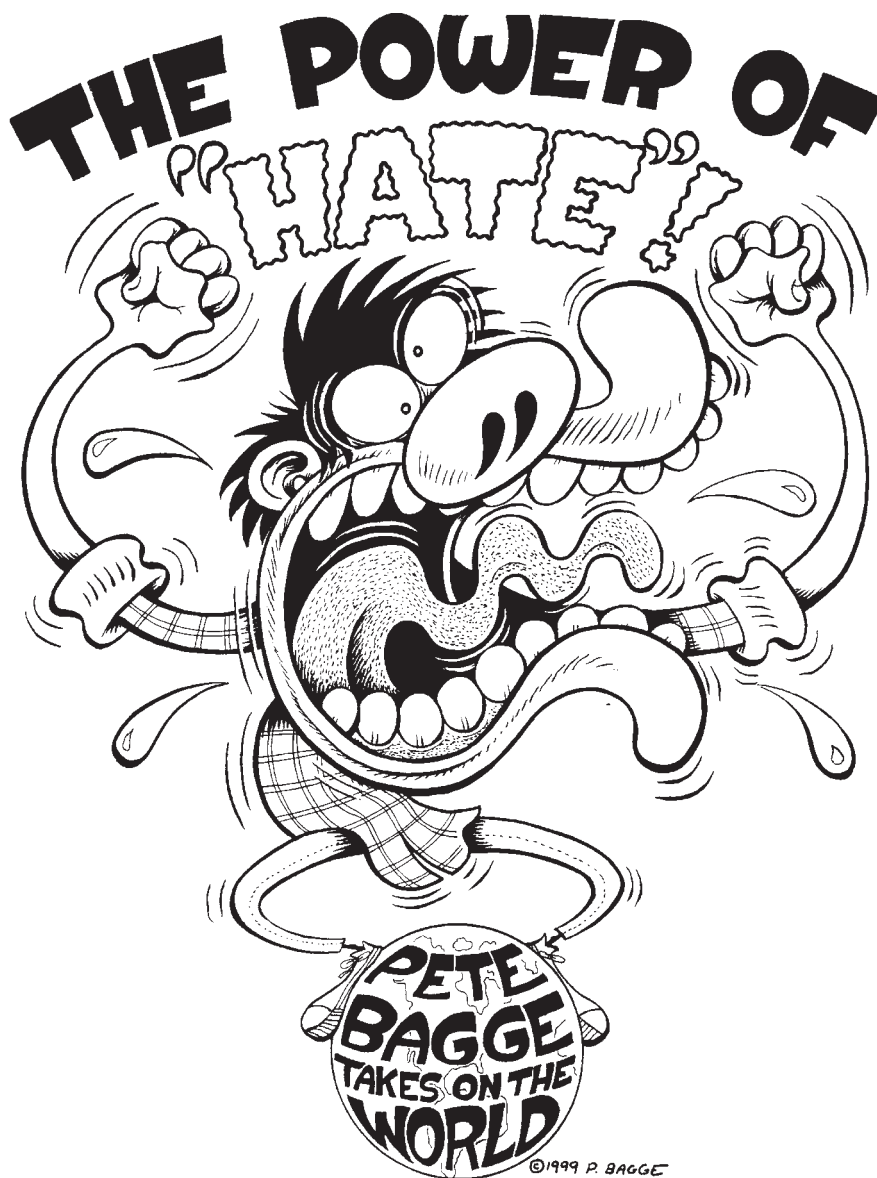
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# INTRODUCTION

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While John Lennon once claimed the Beatles were “bigger than Jesus”, *Hate* protagonist Buddy Bradley settles for being bigger than the world. This illo was the cover of *The Guide*, a UK entertainment magazine.

I first met Peter Bagge in Seattle in the mid-'80s when, you could say, I was a Peter Bagge wannabe. I had tagged along with the cartoonist J.R. Williams, a friend of Pete's, ostensibly to interview the creator of *Neat Stuff* and the editor of *Weirdo* for a comics/humor monthly I was co-editing in Portland, but really to get near to Cartoon Greatness and perhaps reveal to Him my own Kindred Genius.

In those days, among the handful of independent comics titles slowly making their presence felt, Pete's *Neat Stuff* was the one I responded to most viscerally. While bratty and punkish, his comic seemed aesthetically related to the great hippie-era undergrounds, which I was too young to have fully experienced and relentlessly pined for. And *Neat Stuff* was hilarious. To my eyes, no one working since the old EC *Mad* comics drew as funny as Pete. His characters were pop-eyed and rubber-boned, and they sometimes seemed to explode off the page. But for all his zaniness, there was something very real about the Buddys and the Juniors and the Stinkys that populated his tales and something very meat-and-potatoes about the way Pete told their stories. His plots had a beginning, a middle, and an end, and he never seemed conscious of the nouveau “art” of comics; he simply knew how to make comics work to serve his gut-busting and, often, poignant ends. His approach, his humor, and the sheer spontaneity that oozed off his pages were something I wanted to somehow emulate in my own writing and drawing.

Not that I had yet learned how to write and draw. Because that day in Seattle Peter Bagge gently let me know I wasn't ready for the Big Time. He looked



over a strip I red-facedly presented about a soldier sodomizing Hitler's charred corpse, and, bless him, he laughed heartily. Then he made a suggestion or two, which made me understand that the piece still lacked that something that would land it in the pages of *Weirdo*, or anywhere else, for that matter. But, still, Peter F\*cking Bagge had laughed at one of my strips! It was a triumph even if the upshot had been a rejection.

Pete stayed in touch — he diligently answered my every inquiry with a postcard — which made me feel he was somehow on my side as I struggled to find my own voice and gain professional traction. When I finally started my own comic book series, *Yahoo*, and it was dismissed in its first review, Pete immediately fired off a letter-to-the-editor to defend my effort as good enough to be worthy of encouragement. It was the sort of intervention that helped steady my fledgling nerves, for what was sniping from the critics' section next to Peter Bagge's blessing to go forward—.

My work has since moved in a more serious direction, and not without some misgivings on my part, because, damn it, I still want to make my mark as a funny cartoonist like Pete. Perhaps that will never come to pass, but I am not surprised that of all my peers, Pete is the one who most appreciates the humor in even the grimmest of my journalistic pieces. You cannot imagine my ego-bloated delight when he described to me how he had laughed his ass off at my comic book account of two young, war-weary Sarajevans planning to film a "porno tragedy." Again, I submit with pride that Peter Bagge laughed at this series of panels, but then Pete understands that laughter and tears are forever chasing each other's tail and that sometimes, even in the worst of circumstances, laughter gets the upper hand. For that reason a number of Pete's stories from *Neat Stuff*, *Hate*, and *Weirdo* have stuck with me ever since I first read them 10 or 20 years ago. They are that true, that sad, and, ultimately, that funny. I'll always envy Pete his abilities. I will always be thankful he encouraged me in my own.

Joe Sacco  
May 2007



A cast figurine of Buddy clutching a bottle of booze that currently resides on top of a bookcase in Bagge's studio, flanked by the *Hate* Zippo lighter and shot glass. Bagge himself is shown below in his studio.



Joe Sacco is noted for combining his cartooning skills with those of a journalist, particularly in his comic series *Palestine*, which recorded his two months spent in Israel and the Palestinian territories during the early 1990s (for which he won the American Book Award in 1996), and his 2000 graphic novel *Safe Area Gorazde: The War In Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995*. He is currently working on *Footnotes in Gaza*, a graphic novel about the southern Gaza strip.

COMICS INTROSPECTIVE PETER BAGGE



# JOHNNY RYAN

"I was living in Washington, D.C. around 1999 and trying to get my comic out there, sending it off to different artists that I liked. I don't think I'd read any of Peter Bagge's work at that point, and I was in the comic store and decided to give *Hate* a shot. It was one of the later issues, where Buddy goes on a date with a girl, which is a disaster, and winds up with him running home through the swamp. It was hilarious, and I noticed in the back pages that Pete would do reviews of little comics that people would send in to him. I sent him a comic and didn't realize that he'd just wrapped up *Hate*. I wrote him and went 'Hey, maybe if you like my stuff you could give it a mention in your book.'

"In a relatively short amount of time, I got an e-mail back from him where he said 'I got your stuff, and it was great.' He was very complimentary and excited about it, and said he wanted to pass it off to Eric Reynolds at Fantagraphics, but was very encouraging yet not too encouraging: 'I'll pass it off to Eric but, you know, they're into this whole Chris Ware thing and I don't know if they'll be as into you. They're more into arty stuff now.'

"In the meantime, there was a friend of his from New York who was moving to Seattle, a woman named Jenny Nixon. She was moving to Seattle to do art direction for *The Comics Journal*, and was going to stay with him for a week or so while looking for a place there. While she was staying with Peter, he gave her copies of my comics to read. She really liked them and e-mailed me, and we started an e-mail relationship. A couple of months later, I came to Seattle and we moved in together. I remember within a few days of my being in Seattle, Pete came by and we went to lunch. That's the first time I met him....He got me published and he got me a wife!"



TO PETE — FROM JOHNNY RYAN '03

Johnny Ryan's unique brand of sick humor can be found in *Angry Youth Comix*, published by Fantagraphics.

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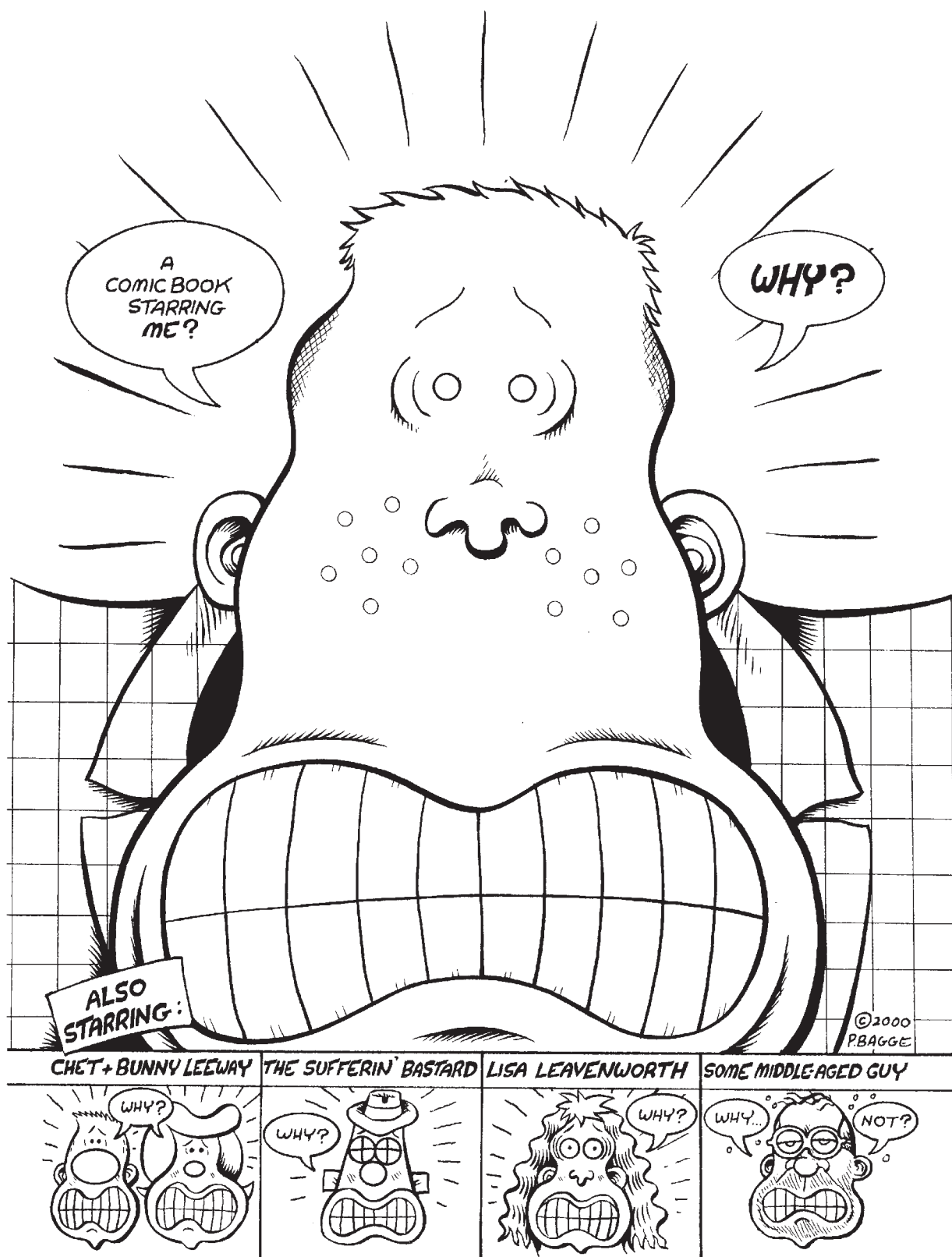
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Junior #2 Cover  
Pen and Ink

Junior, Bagge's virginal momma's boy, stares out at the reader in shock over his headliner status, in this *Neat Stuff* collection. The casts of other strips share Junior's horror at having him usurp their page count ... except for "some middle-aged guy", who serves as the punchline to this visual gag. This cover removes the "fourth wall" and forces the reader to participate, albeit in the form of a voyeur.

# MEET THE BAGGES

...where the author first encounters the artist and his surprisingly sane home.



“It became crystal clear that I wanted to be an underground cartoonist when I saw Crumb’s comics, especially the comics where he did all of them from cover to cover. I thought this is exactly what I want to do: a comic book where I have complete creative control.”

Every generation is defined by the pop culture left behind in the wake of their getting older and passing the baton on to the next group: the music, movies, and books that embodied their own bottled rage or optimism are their greatest testament.

As for Generation X (of which this author stems from the tail end), we saw the birth and death of college rock, its death throes culminating in the Seattle-born and soon-to-be commercialized “grunge” movement of the ’90s. Grunge brought a pissiness and skepticism to us slacking Gen X-ers — while early punk had denied authority, we denied having to work hard enough to gain authority. We had Nirvana; we had the Matt Dillon vehicle *Singles*, and...

We had the indie comic book *Hate*. Coming from the fertile mind of cartoonist Peter Bagge, it starred slacker/loser Buddy Bradley and his cast of fellow misfits on their misadventures laden with sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll (or a close approximation thereof, courtesy of Buddy’s crazy roommate Stinky and his short-lived band), and even more sex. Bagge, whose style is a hybrid between Harvey Kurtzman and Big Daddy Roth, became a storytelling hero

who spoke to us on our level. He had to dig the crappiness of growing up through the Republican Reagan and Bush administrations to then kick it with the easy-going Democratic Clinton of the ’90s, just like we did, right?

But *Hate* wasn’t really about Buddy’s being a Gen X-er: it was about his growing out of being a dysfunctional slacker and developing into a still dysfunctional adult as he finally takes charge of his own life.

The ironic thing about Peter Bagge is that, while he did completely understand the Gen X crowd, he’s a baby boomer with a penchant for khaki slacks, sweaters, and button-down shirts. On the cusp of turning fifty, Pete has that slight puffiness that comes with middle age, with a fire to the eyes set in his round-ish Irish features.

Pete picks me up in the Bagge-mobile, a Subaru hatchback; its dashboard and faux leather interior are covered with kiddie stickers broadcasting sugary-sweet messages. They were his daughter Hannah’s rewards for all the doctor visits she had as a kid...now an odd monument to every time she went in for a check-up or a bad cold. The



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# MEET THE BRADLEYS... JUST LIKE THE FOLKS NEXT DOOR!



In their first appearance in 1981, most of The Bradleys are visually unrecognizable compared to their later *Neat Stuff* incarnations. Ironically, Grandma's status as dying invalid was later adopted by Pops in later issues of *Hate*.

ironic thing, Pete points out, is that Hannah was always a tough kid to take to the doc, yet she'd always managed to walk away with these adhesive wonders.

After a quick nickel tour of the oldest section of Seattle, we settle on the Owl and Thistle pub in Founder's Square, an old area of Seattle that was going to be torn down in the '70s but, through the grace of enough vocal citizens, was saved and refurbished. It's Seattle's oldest part, and it would've been a crying shame to see the cobblestones and metal molding destroyed in the name of progress. The pub had a family get-together in the large front room before the bar and a stage in the back; the icing on the cake was the cute waitresses (oddly enough, two of the three bars we went to wound up having incredibly cute waitresses). Ordering two shots of whiskey with his

sandwich (our "Happy Hour" specials didn't wind up being so happy...they were okay at best), Pete chatted with me about this book and life in general.

Pete loves his music, and everything else, with contrast, or a "sweet and sour," like Lennon and McCartney of The Beatles: Paul's sweet, harmonic voice a great contrast for John's rather nasal delivery.

"The core of what I really like is the stuff I grew up on or anything that resembles it: The Beatles, The Beach Boys, The Who, and Motown...all that mid to late '60s pop rock," Pete said. "So like anything that is along those lines is going to this day I like...not so much right now, but there was kind of a golden era of bubble gum or teenybopper rock that started like with the Spice Girls and Hanson around '96 or '97. It lasted about five years where there was just tons of really good teenybopper rock. An awful lot was disco-y, but whenever it'd be kind of rock and roll-y, it would remind me a bit of the Beach Boys and also like the bubble gum records that came out back then. Sometimes, it even reminded me of the early Jackson 5 and even new wave. The last time before that, when there was a whole chunk of music that I really got excited about was the punk rock and new wave era, especially in the late '70s and the early '80s. And then a lot of my favorite bands either got sucky and pretentious or broke up."

"He likes a lot of crappy music," Angry Youth Comix cartoonist Johnny Ryan laughed about Pete's musical tastes. "I remember going to his house and we were just sitting around talking. He'd put on this Aaron Carter CD, which had to be the most annoying f\*cking thing I've ever heard. It was all poppy and stuff, and Pete was singing along to it. It was like a drill to the forehead. It's not that I hate all popular music, but that particular record was obnoxious."

Back in the Owl and Thistle, Smashing Pumpkins came on the loudspeaker (a tune from *Siamese Dream*, the breakthrough album that was, arguably, the Pumpkins' last good album before they became commercial whores). As it turns out, former Pumpkins' guitarist James Iha recorded on an album one of Bagge's friends produced for a band called Movie Madness. Apparently, Pumpkins' prima-donna lead singer Billy Corgan would go in and re-record the



other band members' tracks after hours on the old Pumpkins records and behind their backs.

It was, after all, Seattle.

Peter had been giving lectures on comics for a few years at the local library, until the kids started asking more about Manga than American comics. It was sad, but true: many American kids just don't seem to give a damn about American comics anymore; they're all gravitating towards the ridiculously large eyes and speed lines of Manga, attracted more to the flash than to the structure and form that may exist underneath. I probably shouldn't complain too much: after all, when I was that age, I was a huge fan of Todd McFarlane, one of the kings of all flash and no substance.

Peter took a job at Manga in the third issue of his short-lived DC Comic, *Sweatshop*, a comic about a comic strip studio. When artist Alfred self-publishes his comic book *The Peerless Penciller* in 2003's *Sweatshop* #3, he's advised at a convention to make his art more Manga-ish. "All the women in this comic have big round eyes..." another character, says. "Don't these Japanese artists know how to draw Japanese people?" Within the space of five panels, Bagge deconstructs and then abandons Manga as Alfred, in a rage, declares, "I hate Manga!"

On the upside, however, Manga has girls reading comics, a trend that may, within the next decade or two, yield an

injection of even more female artists into comics (quite possibly even into mainstream comics). Pete, however, noted the amount of female cartoonists currently in the field and how he feels their dynamic differs from that of their male counterparts.

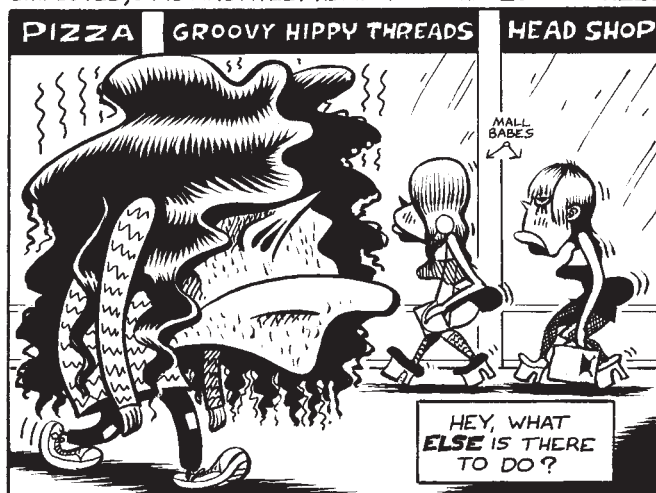
"There's been an increasing number of female cartoonists for as long as I've been in this business," Pete said later in his home studio. "Even when I started out in the '80s, there were quite a few. A lot of them stuck with it, but — and I suppose you could probably find this to be the case in almost any field — women are also more likely to drop out of it, or to just treat it as a hobby, or an on-the-side thing... The reasons for this seem to be that men feel much more driven to make a career out of it. It's the only way they can justify doing comics at all after a certain point. It's like, if you aren't making a decent living off of [it] at a certain point, you're almost better off walking away from comics altogether.

"The thing is, once you've chosen comics, you're really locked into it, whether you like it or not. I experience a moment, almost every single day, where I wish I wasn't a cartoonist, that I wish I was doing something else — *anything* else, depending on the mood I'm in! Any profession gets boring after a while, no matter how much you might love it. It's ironic how the more you strive towards something, the more locked into it you feel once you've achieved it. But that still seems to generally be a male thing... It's

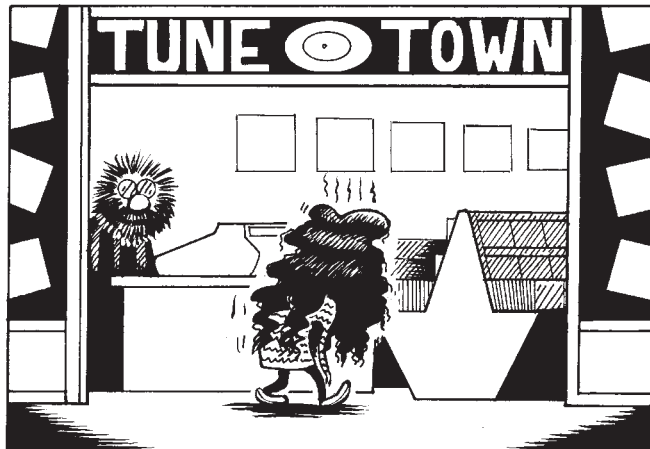
An excerpt from *Lameness*, an autobiographical strip.

# LAMENESS

ONE DAY IN THE SUMMER OF 1976: BORED, RESTLESS AND UNEMPLOYED, I INSTINCTIVELY HEAD FOR THE LOCAL MALL.



I ENTER THE RECORD SHOP TO PURCHASE MY WEEKLY LP, A LONGTIME TRADITION. THE PICKINGS HAVE BEEN GETTING MIGHTY SLIM LATELY, HOWEVER—"ROCK" HAD BEEN GOING STEADILY DOWNHILL EVER SINCE PETE HAM HUNG HIMSELF.





very old fashioned, the reasons for it, but women still use marriage as a way to free themselves from being obliged to turn their artistic endeavors into a career, assuming their husbands make a decent enough living, that is. So many women cartoonists I know will just dabble in comics off and on for years, while occasionally dropping it to take up writing or painting or pottery, or any other pastime that serves just as well as a form of art therapy.”

*“Once you become a parent, the toughest adjustment is how you have to wipe somebody else’s ass before you can wipe your own ass. That’s the best way to describe it because you have no choice in the matter. Their crap comes first.”*

Aside from his long-delayed mini-series *Apocalypse Nerd* from Dark Horse Comics, as well as occasional visits to Buddy Bradley and company in the *Hate Annuals* and his political strips in *Reason Magazine*...not counting the other projects on his slate, Bagge is far from picking pottery up anytime in the near future. He’s not only a cartoonist, but he also balances that with being a husband and father, two roles that are intertwined with his career choices.

“I think we’re falling into the very traditional roles that, even in this modern society, we have a hard time shaking,” Pete observed. “Like my wife is a great cook, likes to garden; she does all those things and is a great mom, so I’m like, ‘Hell, yeah, I’ll support you. You make my life so much easier. Of course I’m going to support you and

whatever hobbies and interests you have the time to pursue. Go dabble in whatever you want to dabble in.’ But if you let your career fall apart or destroy it, this is a real turn-off to women. ‘What do you mean you didn’t do any comics or paintings today? That’s what you’re all about. That’s why I married you.’

“That is why Joanne married me. She thought it was great that I wanted to be a cartoonist. That was always one of those things that she thought was really appealing and attractive. Even before she met me, this was exactly the kind of life she wanted to live, and I was just a pawn — her sugar daddy. There’s a really strong tendency to fall into this Ozzie and Harriet-type relationship as time goes by.

“My daughter and Joanne come first and the comics are to support them. But like I said, there are times where I get really burned out on comics and I’d like to do something else, especially if it involves writing. I would always draw, most likely, but drawing is a real struggle for me, whereas writing comes so much easier.”

The Bagges live in a three-story house (including basement) in the Ballard section of Seattle, down an unassuming side-street. Go through the comfortable living room (past the den on your right), and check out the framed comic art on the walls: a *Love and Rockets* page from the Hernandez brothers (the two are such perfectionists towards drawing beautiful women that, if you look closely enough at the woman in the splash panel, you can see where her face had been redrawn and almost seamlessly pasted over) and a





caricature of an angry Peter Bagge, drawn by his friend Dan Clowes. Then head down the carpeted steps to Peter's basement and through a door to his studio. With his art table and computer at the far end, in a corner lined with bookcases, there are bureaus flanking both the left and right walls (one, Peter says, contains his work from the last century, the other his work from this one). A Bagge-drawn poster for *Mr. Show* hangs on one wall, next to a *Hate* promotional poster showing Buddy and his Seattle cast on the beach. Mementos are propped up on one bureau (the 20th century one), including a pewter Buddy Bradley figurine, a *Hate* Zippo lighter, a drawing of Bagge by pal Johnny Ryan, and a Big Daddy Roth model reissue given him by his wife Joanne.

Pete apologizes that his studio isn't less cluttered or organized, but he points out that at least it isn't as dusty as it usually is. In all honesty, it just looks lived-in like most studios should.

The Bagge steps to creating a comic are shown to me right off the bat, with Peter using one of his *Founding Father* strips as an example: First, the script is typed out. Then the panels are hastily scribbled down on paper for the rough draft, which is then traced over and cleaned up with onion skin paper. Peter then takes the thin paper and redraws it on the backside, tracing over his previous drawing. This allows him to check the drawing for any awkwardness before it's placed down on the vellum, where it is drawn over once more, this time with Peter sliding the figures around for any changes in desired figure placement. The imprint from drawing over the tracing paper leaves a mark on the vellum, which Peter then uses as a guide to ink by; as a result, his pages are sickly clean, with little to no actual drawing done on the physical page. It's all part of the illusion that Bagge and cartoonists before him, like Toth and Kurtzman, are able to perpetrate: they simply make drawing look easy, when in reality it is all the result of a long and arduous process.

"When I was younger, I liked the idea of being a cartoonist," Pete revealed the next day. "But until I came across underground comics when I was older, I was getting very disillusioned with what was out there. *Mad* didn't seem as funny to me any



more; what was in the daily papers was getting worse and worse, and I couldn't see myself doing either of those. I was not inspired, but at the same time, I knew I had to do something for the rest of my life, other than just getting some dumb-ass job. So seeing the undergrounds, especially Crumb's comics (he is the king of the underground comic), a light bulb went off in my head, and I went, 'I could do this, too.' It didn't all come right away, of course. It's not like I immediately sat down and drew something that anybody in their right mind would want to publish. And I still had to wait another 10-12 years before I was making a livable wage at it."

**A sample of Bagge's arduous work habits: tissue paper tracing from an in-progress *Founding Fathers Funnies*, for *Apocalypse Nerd* #6's back cover.**



**Studs Kirby**, Bagge's Republican, whitebred radio show host, evokes a tantrum in this trade paperback cover. Note the parallel in shape between his large nose and looping tongue and his right foot (which is propped upon the soundboard for dramatic effect). Studs' oversized head serves as the focal point, angled as to draw the eye down the page.

The Bagges struggled early on in their marriage, even with Pete's working the obligatory Barnes & Noble gig to make ends meet. Fate took them from New York to Seattle, where they stayed with Joanne's sister and athlete husband outside of Seattle — in a "suburban wasteland," that would become the setting of Pete's "Chet and Bunny Leeway" stories. Ironically, it was hate that rewarded their love...that is, hate with a capital "H."

"My wife and her sister opened a deli in the Seattle suburbs, and they made decent money off of it. So I was living off of her, for the most part. She was making three, four times, as much as I was. That all changed with *Hate*. Prior to that, the plan was that I was going to primarily [be] a stay-at-home dad, because it still wasn't clear that I was going to have any kind of a career where

I could support everybody at the time our daughter was born. For the first two years after Hannah was born, Joanne still had the deli and went to work every day. I would draw all those early *Hates* at night and then wake up at six the next morning to take care of the kid.

"But Joanne was getting pretty burned out on the deli and wanted to be home with the kid. So once I started making money, we figured I'd make even more if she stayed home and I could concentrate more on my work and actually get some sleep," Pete laughed. "She sold her business, and we've been living in this set-up ever since."

*Hate* is a success story of independent and pop culture proportions that we'll touch on later. For now, let it be said that while working on *Hate*, Bagge evolved from being a throwback to old underground comics of the '60s into an iconic cartoonist of the '90s. Once the figures in Pete's work became more bendy and exaggerated, he hit on the unique style that he has today. Despite the variety of genres he covers (humor, drama, politics...even super-heroes, sort of), he maintains the same basic style each project. An interesting result is that the absurdity of his drawing can sometimes make horrible things that much more effective.

"I still alter and tweak with my style a bit, depending on what it is that I'm working on," Pete pointed out. "I'll make slight changes or add crosshatching, depending on whether there's going to be color added or not, things like that. But that signature curvy elbow thing is still there simply because, for me, it always works better that way. I could make more of an attempt to draw more realistically at times, but in the end it's not going to be worth the struggle. I used to attempt it somewhat in the early *Neat Stuffs*, and even before then, where I was always experimenting with my drawing style. There was still a generic, go-to style that I used for the most part, but there are times when I tried to be more stylized, or tried to be a bit more realistic than usual. But if I tried to alter my style too much, it wound up taking up so much of my concentration, and it still might not have worked. It's just so much more comfortable for me to draw the way I do, regardless of the subject matter, and then let the storyline carry things."



By the early '90s, Bagge's writing had developed a sensitivity that blossomed in *Hate* and was on display in his short-lived title *Sweatshop* for DC Comics.

"I think that Pete's probably, if not one of the best writers of comics ever (he might be), he's definitely up there," Johnny Ryan said. "He's a master at writing dialogue, and also of pacing a story in a way that seems almost like he's very aware of the reader. I've noticed, as I would read his stories, as you become a little weary of the scene you're reading, he'll start moving on to the next thing. He kind of knows exactly when to stop and move on to the next scene."

Part of what makes Pete such an effective writer is his ability to tap into personal experiences that are universal ...being jilted by a lover, getting angry at traffic, or trying to hide something from your parents. As some of the following essays reveal, much of it comes from Pete's personal experiences and his unintentional, almost "method acting" approach to cartooning and writing. While Chet Leeway may have been Pete's first avatar, Buddy Bradley, star of *Hate*, is the one that most successfully channeled the essence and experiences of Pete Bagge.

"Around 1980 or '81, I doodled this one page strip called 'Meet the Bradleys,' which presented The Bradleys

very much like a sitcom family, except that it started, 'Hey, here's Dad! He's drunk again and on a tirade again!' It was like, 'what a wacky lovable family!' only all these typically horrible, dysfunctional things were going on, not unlike my own family. They were the Bagges — but being presented and sold like the Brady Bunch. I found this set-up so amusing that I immediately started writing more stories about them. And whatever I had the teenage boy Buddy doing was something that I would have done as a teen. The very first time I drew him, he was 'me.' The Bradleys weren't exactly like my family, in that I had two brothers, two sisters, which I converted into one each just for simplicity's sake. Also, my mother's personality was pretty different than Mrs. Bradley's. Ma Bradley is more like many of my friend's moms than like my own. And I also didn't intend to make Buddy a stand-in for myself as much as he became later on, but as time went by, Buddy was clearly the one I related to the most. I kept coming up with story ideas for him. All the Bradley family stories that were in *Neat Stuff* started focusing more and more on him."

And the rest, as they say, is history...  
...or simply just talked about in the next essay.

An early Bagge strip. The pile of vomit by the toothless bum gives him the extra bit of repulsion to justify the shocked couple walking by. Note how they are walking from right to left, a sign of retreat.

PETER BAGGE

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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE





SHUT-INS  
2000  
Xerox with magic markers

Pete revisits Chet and Bunny Leeway (from his *Neat Stuff* days) in this color guide to a strip. Santiago is the prototypical moocher, much in the spirit of Popeye's Wimpy J. Wellington, while Chet is an example of a technophobic baby boomer anxious for the assistance of one of the younger, more tech-savvy generation.





PETER BAGGE

21

COMICS INTROSPECTIVE

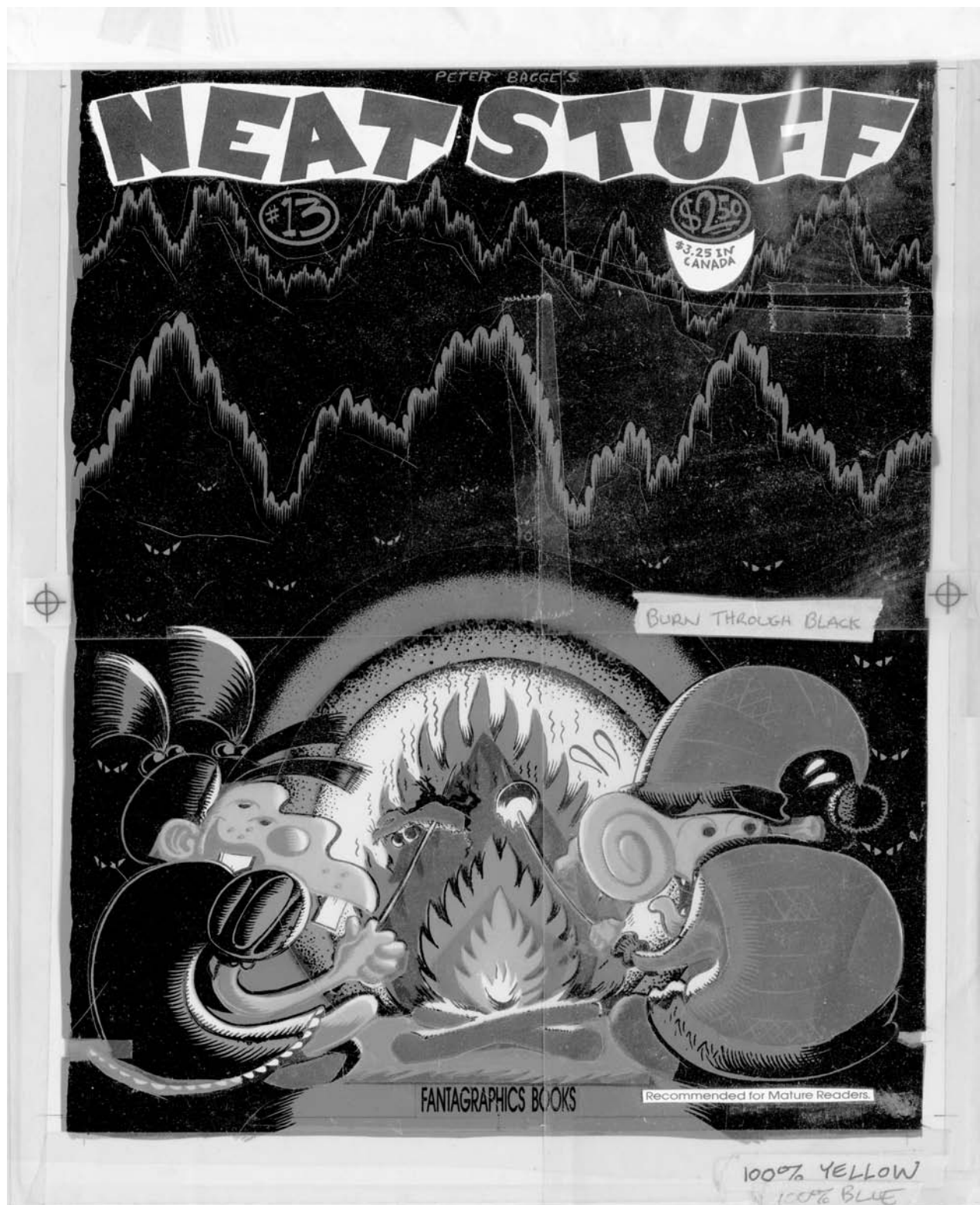
The Bradleys: You're Not the Boss of Me!  
1988  
Pen and Ink

Mom Bradley's obviously been pushed by the first panel: her eyes have furrowed down into an angular furrow, but it isn't until panel four that her teeth turn sharp and, by the next she's completely snapped. Babs' contorted, unjointed, increased size in the foreground of panel five not only exaggerates her fear of her mother, but also establishes a distance between the two (indicating the speed with which she is running).

PETER BAGGE

22

COMICS INTROSPECTIVE



NEAT STUFF #13 COVER  
1988  
Bristol, pen and ink, with  
color acetate overlays

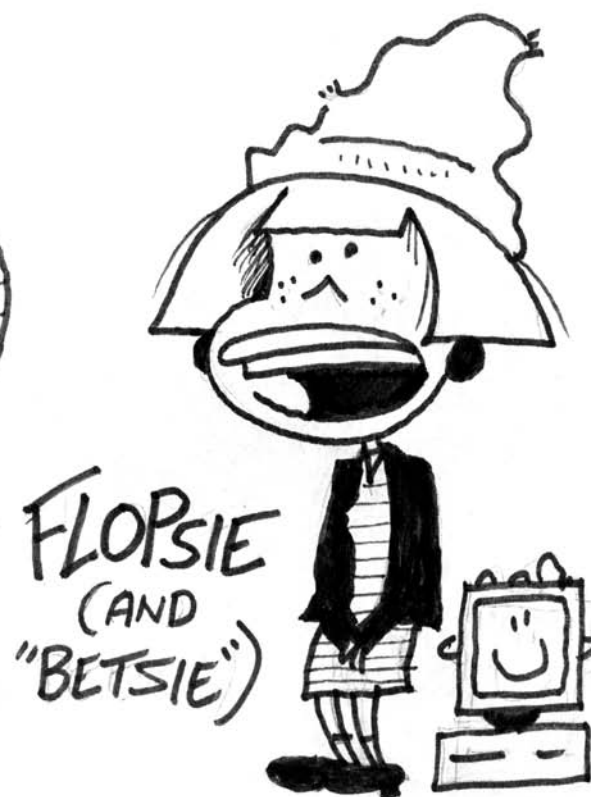
Girly-Girl and Chuckie Boy peer back at the “approaching” viewer, while respectively toasting a dead rat and a marshmallow, each item establishing Girly-Girl’s meanness and Chuckie Boy’s innocence. The frightened look on Chuckie’s face is either because the viewer is not in view yet . . . or because the viewer is horrific in appearance.





FELICE  
Early 1980s  
Pen and Ink

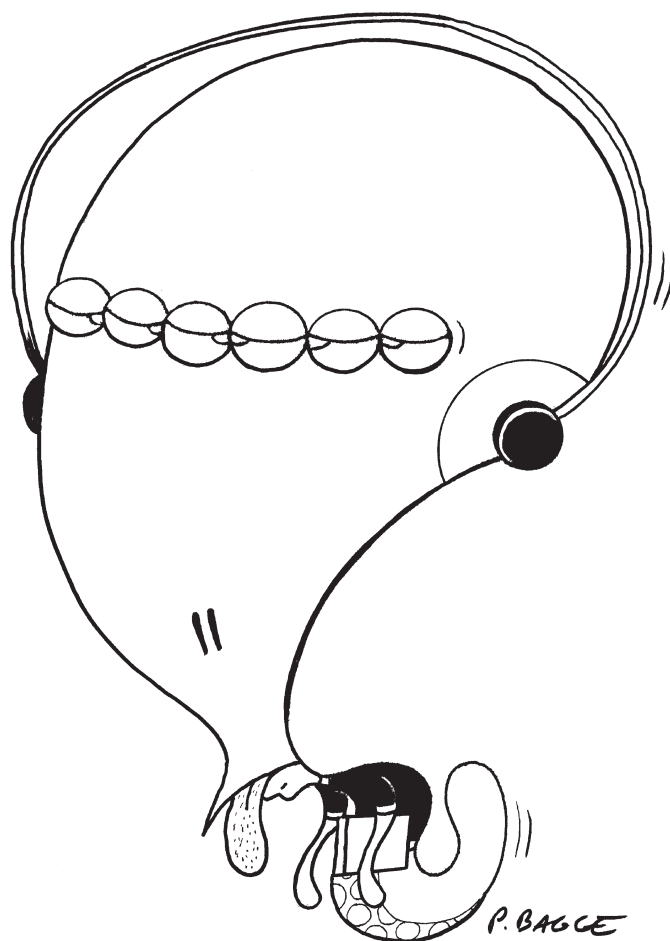
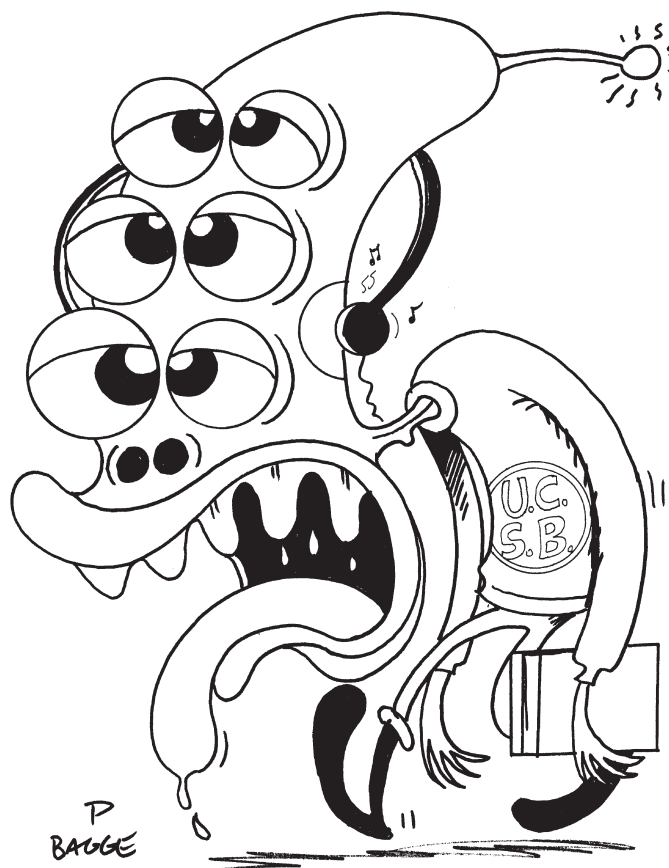
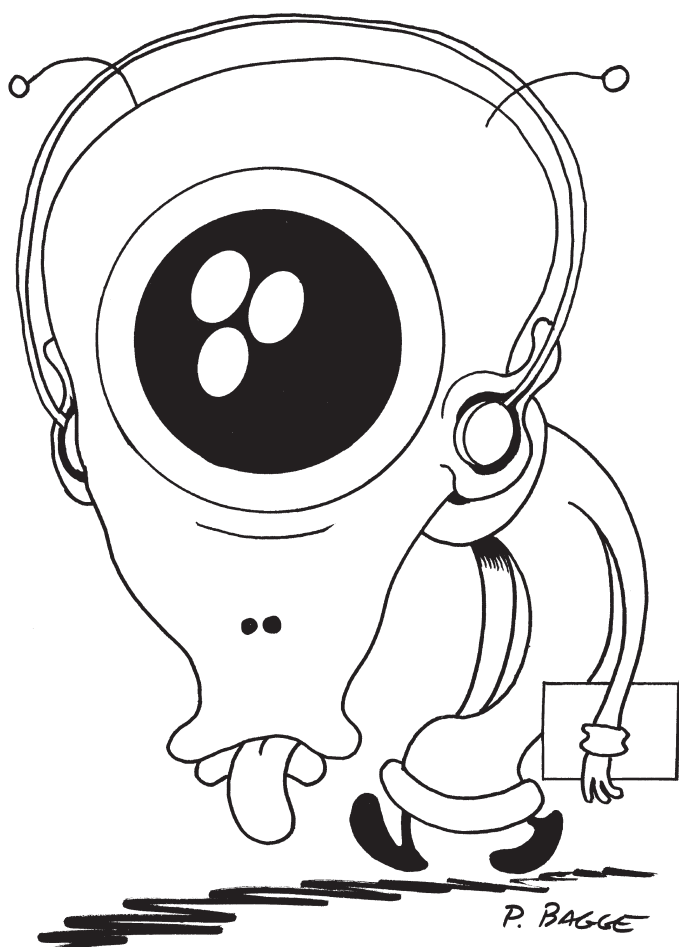
It's unclear whether Felice is merely a repulsive girl with horrible acne and a big forehead ... or something worse. This drawing was part of an "ugly art show" from 1982, done with cartoonists Ken Weiner and Kaz.

**IN PETE'S OWN WORDS:**

Ages ago *Girly Girl* was in development with some Hollywood production company, and someone there came up with an incredibly lame character for the never-to-be-produced show to be part of *Girly's* gang: a computer expert named "Hacker Joe." Years later, someone asked me to quickly come up with some characters for an online cartoon (that also never was produced, thankfully), and not having any other ideas at the time I perversely revived Hacker Joe!

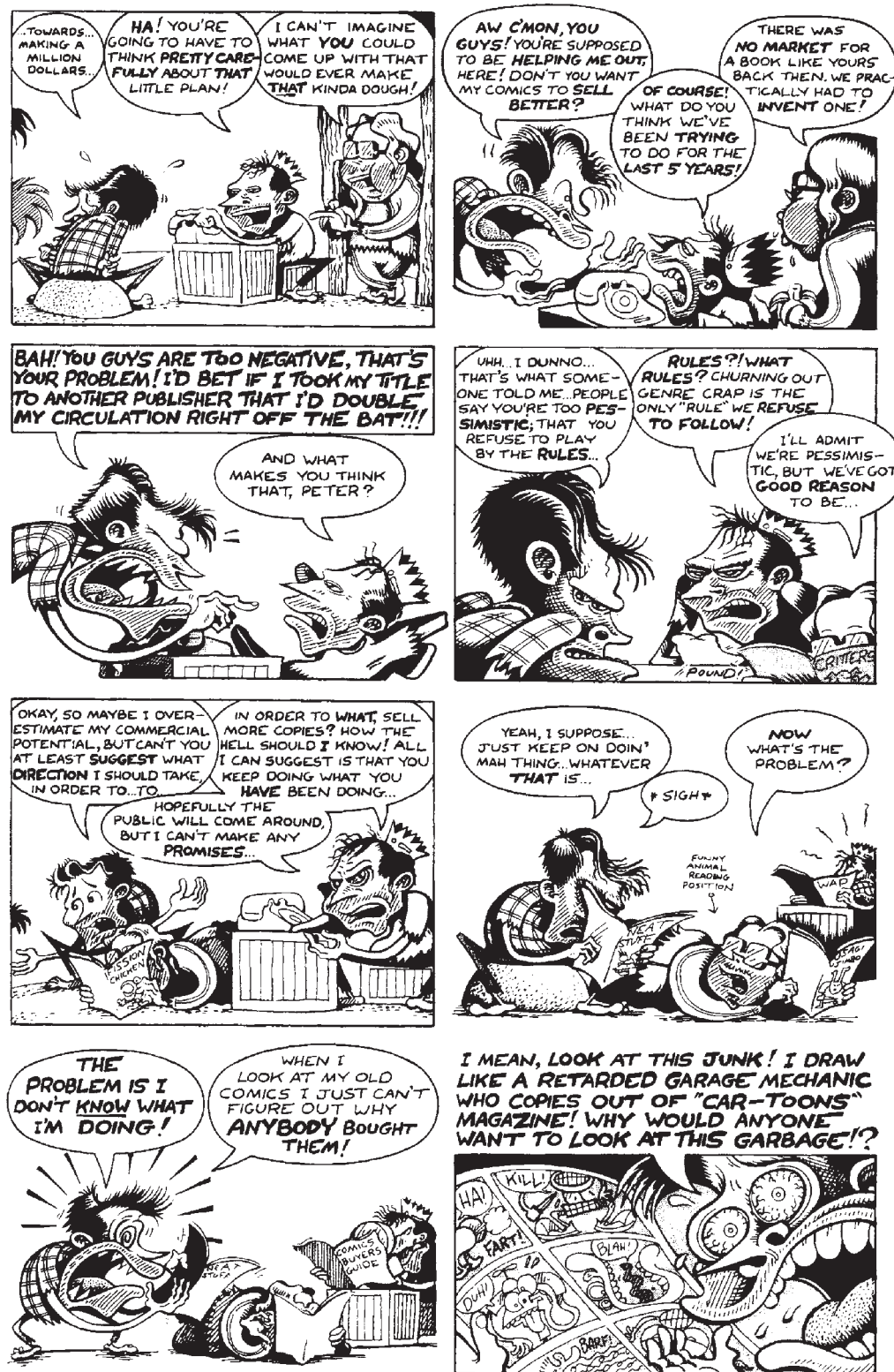
I later recycled "Flopsie" for the Carrie character in *Sweatshop*. I recycle characters a lot. And yes, Flopsie's name is derived from floppy discs, since this was done back in the mid-'90s.





# ALIEN DESIGNS Pen and Ink

The most alien aspect of these outer space high school students are in the eyes. Save for those, they are very human in nature, from their headphones to trademark Bagge slouches. As a result, they have just enough "human" to them to make them endearing. These "Discman" owning aliens were part of a Sony commission that Pete did for an ad campaign that never gelled.



HATE #1: PRISONERS OF HATE ISLAND STRIP  
1990  
Pen and Ink

This satirical strip strands Bagge on an island with Fantagraphics founders Gary Groth and Kim Thompson and serves as Bagge's self-deprecating commentary on his position as an alternative cartoonist. This strip would become oddly prophetic, as *Hate* would eventually become a cult classic. Groths' Jughead (from *Archie*) beany crown and crate desk (as well as their being stranded away from society) is representative of the isolation of the small press. Courtesy of Mike Benson.

# HATE COVER GALLERY

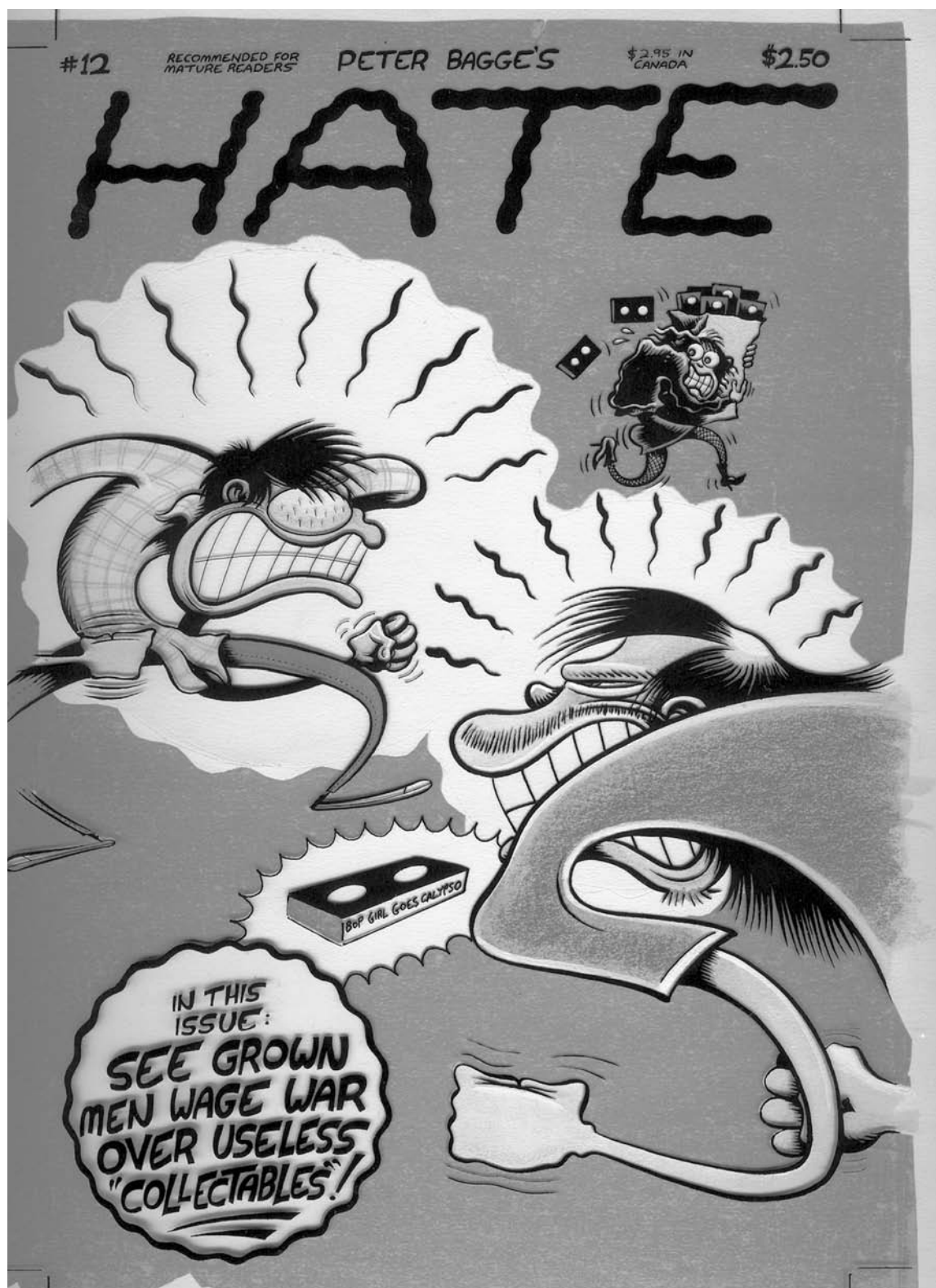
83%

HATE #2  
COVER

HATE #2 BACK COVER  
1990  
Pen, Ink, and Collage

Buddy and Valerie have found themselves as paper dolls, playing up to society's gender roles, most clear when experiencing the dating scene, most ironic when one considers Valerie's feminist nature, along with Buddy's non-chivalrous attitude. Note how Valerie's dresses overtake the cover, while Buddy is only expected (from his outfits) to be a professional or an athlete.





## HATE #12 COVER

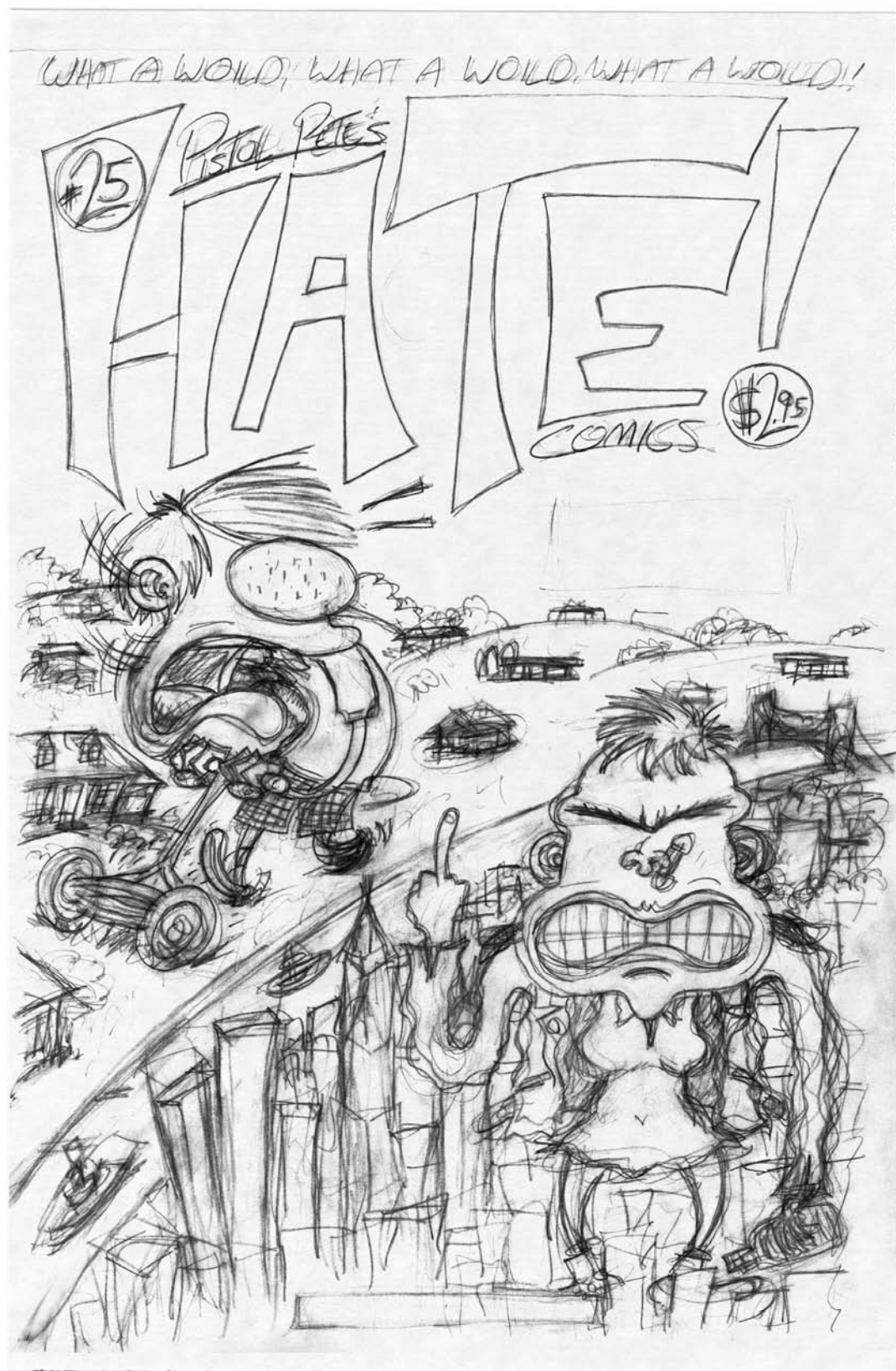
1992

Inks by Jim Blanchard

Colors by Joanne Bagge and Rhea Patton

Pen and Ink, Color Overlay

Buddy gets ready to confront rival junk collector Yahtzi Murphy over a videotape of *Bop Girl Goes Calypso*, a 1957 film about white people afraid of the encroaching Jamaican Calypso music craze . . . much like Buddy decides to not let the advancing (and, because of perspective) larger Murphy invade his turf. Lisa's defenselessness in retreating with the bag of VHS tapes gives the slant that Buddy has fallen into the primitive "hunter-protector" role, devolving over a piece of junk culture.



PETER BAGGE 29 COMICS INTROSPECTIVE

HATE #25 COVER  
1996  
Layout Pencils

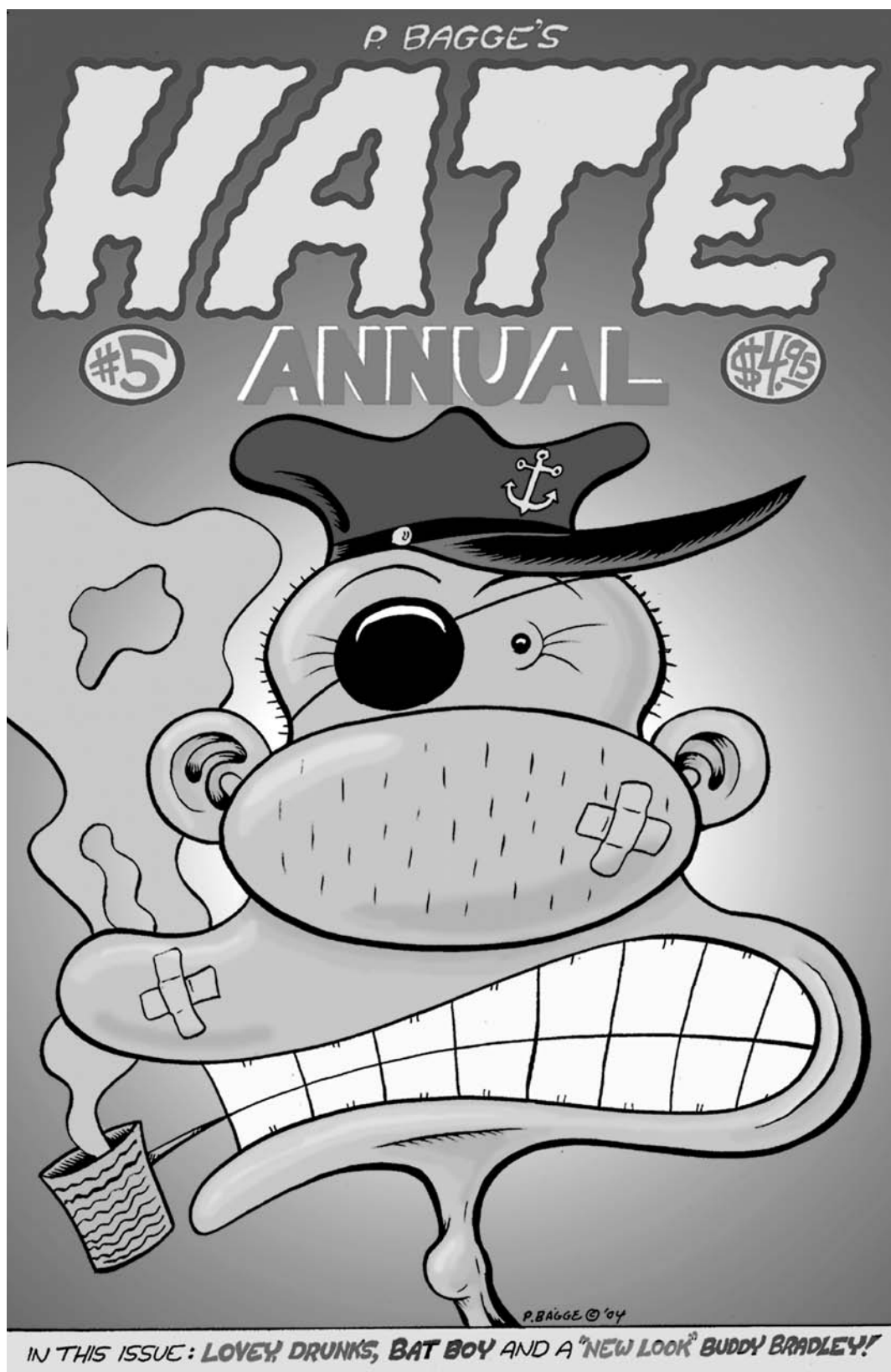
Buddy, mowing the grass at his parents' suburban home in Jersey, is wearing the uniform of a suburbanite, while Lisa has gone "punk" in the big city of New York, her pierced nose and middle finger a sign of her regressing into rebellion.



PETER BAGGE

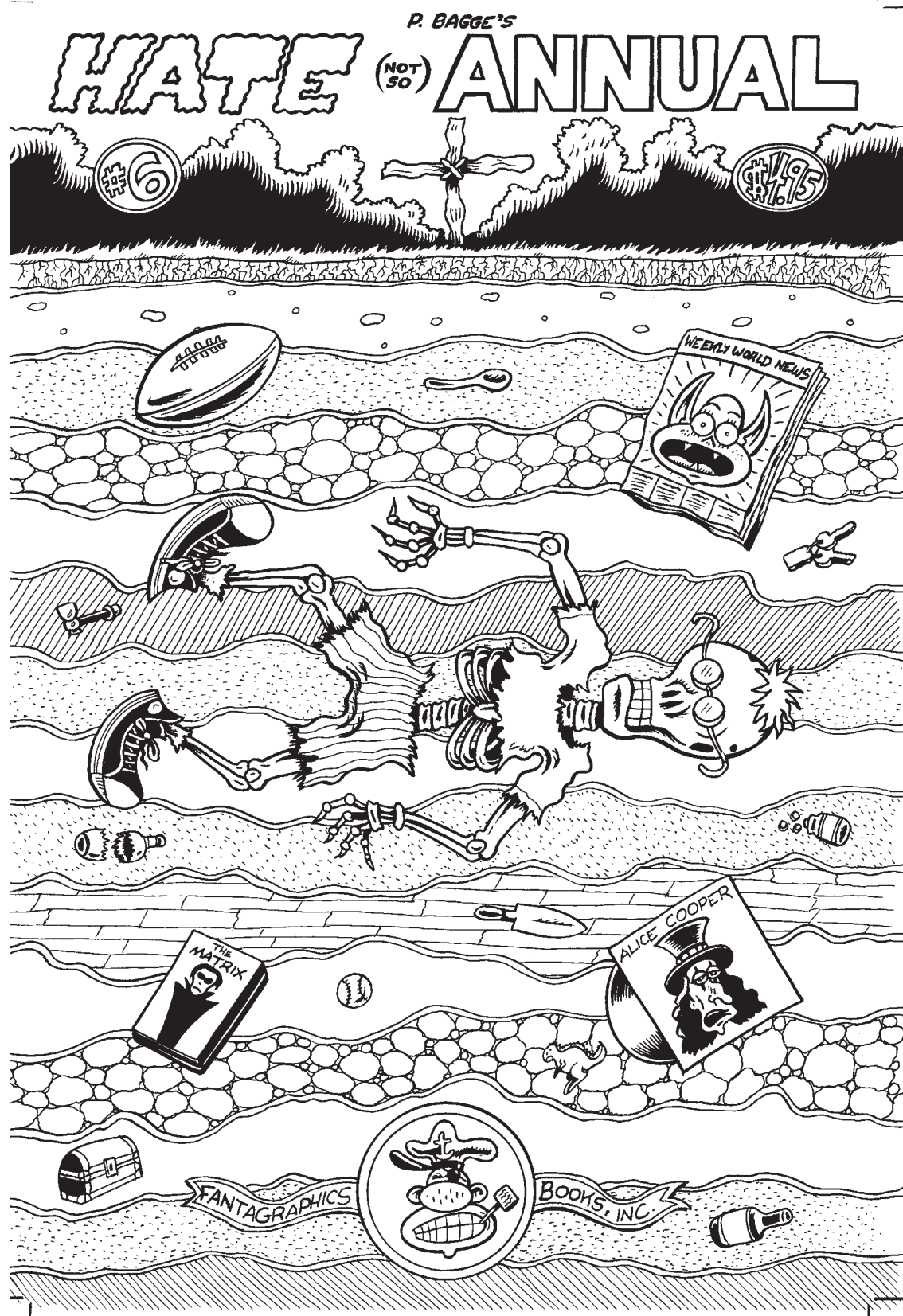
30

COMICS INTROSPECTIVE



HATE ANNUAL #5 COVER  
2004  
Pen and Ink, Computer Coloring

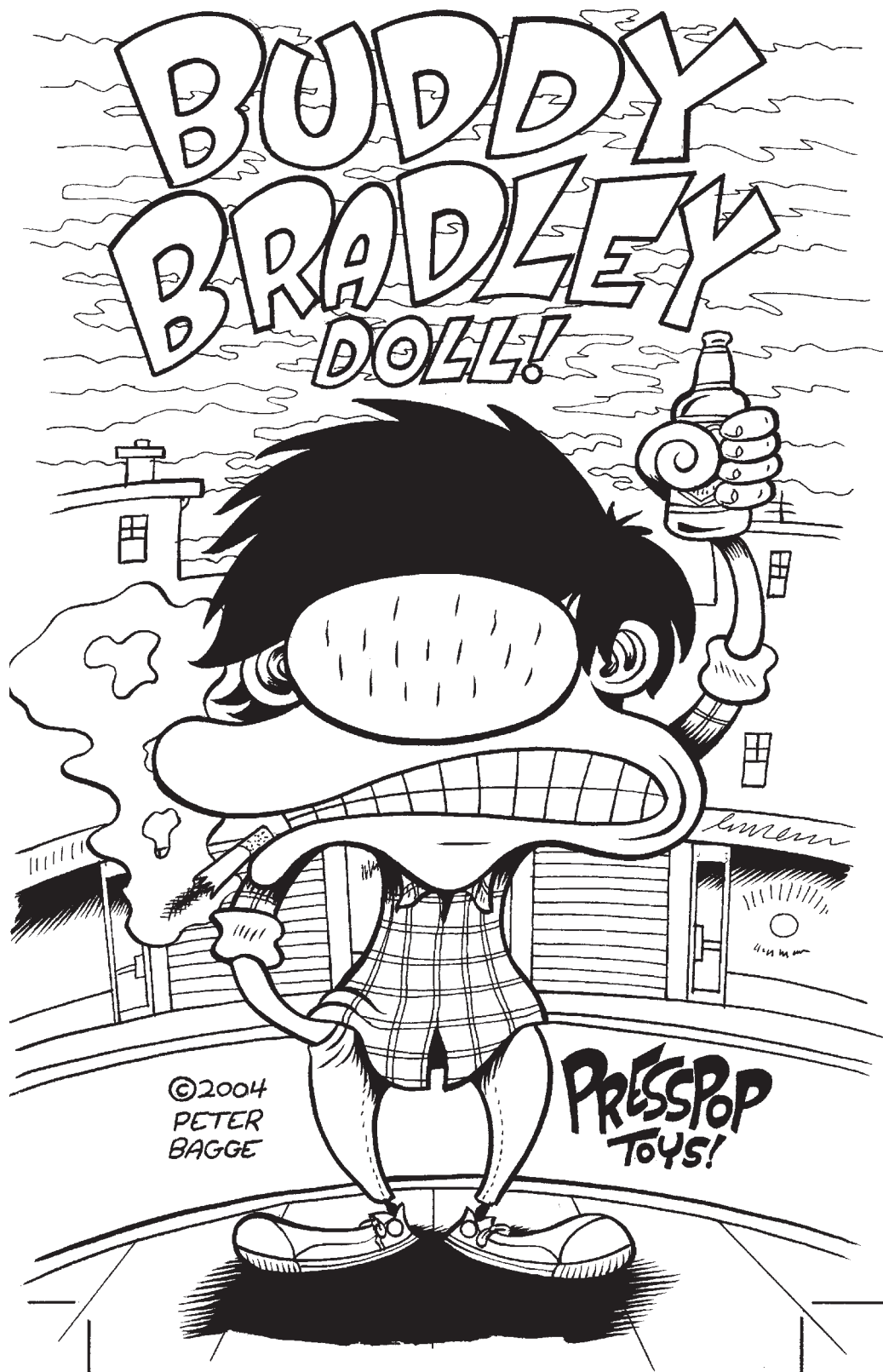
The premiere of the "New Look" Buddy Bradley (a play on the "New Look" Batman of 1964), who resembles an eccentric comic strip pirate over his classic long-haired appearance. His band-aids are crossed over in the classic "x" shape, and his shaved head and the wrinkles around his eyes show him as more a crusty old man than an irresponsible slacker.



PETER BAGGE  
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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE

HATE ANNUAL #6 COVER  
2006  
Pen and Ink

The current whereabouts of Leonard "Stinky" Brown, AKA Leonard the Love God, as revealed in this cutaway shot that also displays attributes of other stories present in this annual. Stinky's distinctive odd haircut, along with his glasses, cements his identity to long-time *Hate* readers.



BUDDY BRADLEY DOLL PACKAGING  
2004  
Pen and Ink

This box design by Bagge is for a limited edition vinyl action figure/ doll manufactured by a Japanese company. Bagge's design elicits memories of older, more innocent toys of the '60s... as well as an interesting (and most likely unintentional) reverse Statue of Liberty pose, his bottle of Ballard Bitter Beer akin to the torch.



# FEEL THE HATE!

...the trials, tribulations, and life of Bagge's semi-biographical cipher, Buddy Bradley.



*"When people would see my comic they would think it would just be all surface humor and fart jokes. When I started doing stuff, that's all I'd almost ever hear from mainstream publications like The Comic's Buyers Guide, whose reviews of Neat Stuff would read: 'If you think throw-up and farts are funny, you'll like this comic.' Obviously, the reviewer wasn't reading it. He'd just look at it and conclude that it was mindless crap..."*

*Hate* was a spin-off of Bagge's semi-autobiographical strip "The Bradleys," the title characters being the epitome of the dysfunctional family featured in *Neat Stuff*. At first, the situations seemed just a little over-the-top, and it all seemed a tad bland. By the third story, however, the trademark Roth-inspired aspect of Bagge's art took over and the characters' reactions matched the absurdity of their situations. When Pete decided to launch a new title, the teenage slacker Buddy Bradley was a natural subject...making *Hate* a spin-off more in a 'Mork and Mindy from Happy Days' way than in a 'Joanie Loves Chachi from Happy Days' way.

A camp counselor by the name of Stinky first appeared in a "Girly Girl" strip in *Neat Stuff* #13; with his John Lennon shades and squiggle of blond hair topping off his cone-shaped head, he reminds you of a socially inept version of Bert from *Sesame Street*. When the final issue of *Neat Stuff*, #15, hit in 1989, Buddy Bradley took over the entire issue in the classic "Buddy the Weasel" story. Starting with the bang of Buddy and Stinky playing with a gun on a polluted beach, it ends with a pathetic whimper as a now out-on-his-ass Buddy finds himself camping out on the same

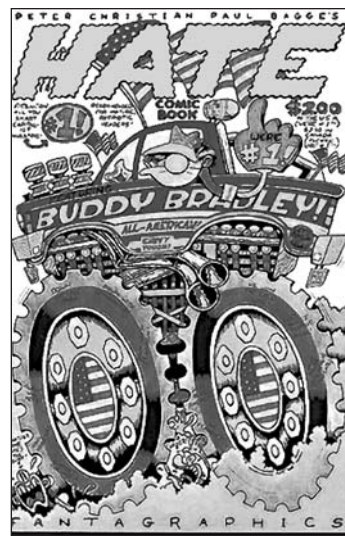
beach, oblivious to the vat of open toxic waste down the embankment from him.

"It was based on the success of that issue — and on the readers' seeming preference for full-issue stories," Pete said. "And I had countless story ideas for Buddy Bradley, so I thought I'd just age him a few years and do a comic book entirely about him."

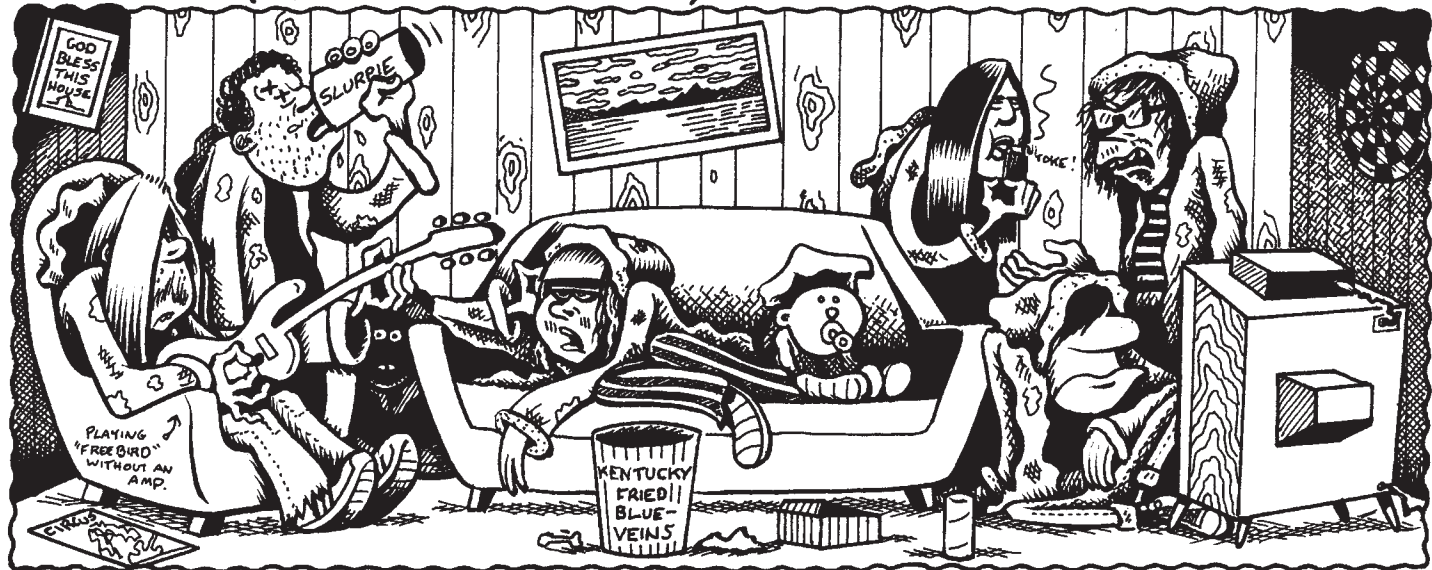
Since the adult Bagge now lived in Seattle (as opposed to the teenage Pete in New York City's suburban wastelands where "The Bradleys" had been set), Buddy became a Seattle resident by 1990's *Hate* #1, where we see him hanging out in the apartment he shares with the still-shady Stinky and the paranoid George Cecil Hamilton IIIrd.

"Well f\*ck your parents!" Buddy proclaims to the reader. "You gotta live it up while you're still young...Let the old folks do the worrying...That's all they're good for..."

Buddy's a slacker who drinks too much, smokes, and works part-time at a used book store (where he sneaks out more than an occasional free book). Through the Seattle years, Buddy dates Valerie, a feminist who happens to be the roomie of Buddy's crazy ex, Lisa, and finds himself constantly stuck in yet



AFTER MY BEACH BUM PERIOD I MOVED INTO THIS SPLIT-LEVEL DUMP FULL OF TRANSIENT TEENAGE HOODS + DOPE ADDICTS...IT WAS A LOT LIKE THAT MOVIE "SUBURBIA", ONLY THESE KIDS WEREN'T REALLY "PUNKS"...WE WEREN'T EXACTLY **ANYTHING**—JUST A BUNCH OF **REJECTS** AND **LOSERS** SITTING AROUND IN OUR **GREASE-STAINED PARKAS** BECAUSE WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY HEAT (THOUGH WE DID HAVE CABLE)...I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO OWNED THE PLACE...



Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, from "My Pad and Welcome to it" in *Hate* #1 (1989).

another of Stinky's get-rich-quick schemes; the most infamous of which was when Buddy managed Stinky's band, Leonard and the Lovegods. He was the classic Gen Xer modeled off of the life of a man then in his 30s, a way for Peter Bagge to look back with a more objective and detached eye.

"Around the time I started *Hate*, I had been married for a while. We had owned a house for a couple of years, and I was finally making a livable wage off of my comics. Also by then, my wife was pregnant, so I was about to become a dad. So here I am: a middle-class, home-owning, married father, and all of this came together like within the last couple of years. Being in that situation, I suddenly was able to look at my previous existence more objectively, from the moment I left my parents' house and the ten years or so following. That part of my life was all over. I was no longer living on fried rice, no longer renting, no longer putting up with roommates, no longer working crappy day jobs, no longer being coerced into going to crappy rock clubs...That was all behind me, and I wasn't in my twenties anymore. So things that used to not be so funny because I was still stuck in the middle of it were now hilarious, like always being broke and having to lug laundry to the Laundromat and stuff like that. Now that I was personally distanced from it, it suddenly all seemed hilarious,

so it was very easy for me to take all of it and turn it into stories. It all became grist for my mill."

*Hate*, visually speaking, was a grimy book: The art was heavily cross-hatched, one of Bagge's ways of creating depth of field and atmosphere. According to Bagge, though, it was also a wink and nod to the classic underground comics of the '60s that were so influential to him as a cartoonist.

"By then, nobody seemed to be doing comics that looked like an old underground comic, other than the few old undergrounders themselves who were still active," Bagge said. "And by that, I meant the really cheap newsprint — and all the cross-hatchy stuff that Crumb and Gilbert Shelton always did. I wanted it to have the look and feel of an old *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* comic."

A year later, Nirvana's landmark song *Smells Like Teen Spirit* hit the airwaves, bringing college alternative rock out to the forefront, letting loose a slew of other Seattle-based bands, and creating the '90s grunge movement.

Buddy Bradley and his life in Seattle just happened to come at the right time, commercially speaking.

"He settled Buddy in this Seattle milieu and trapped lightning in a bottle, as far as finding a resident contemporary milieu," Fantagraphics' Eric Reynolds observed later. "But one that he could impose his own memories on from his





PETER BAGGE

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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE

The (first) death of Stinky. Stinky's first appearance from *Neat Stuff* #13 (1989). Unlike Bagge's later work, this page features the end of one scene, and the start of another; he would later employ starting a scene on a new page. The Head Counselor's decision to "rehabilitate" Girly Girl and Chuckie-Boy in the final panel is given added weight via the use of silhouettes and a lack of panel borders.





Smells like a parody— Buddy is introduced to the band he hesitantly manages with Stinky in *Hate* #8 (1992); they're oddly reminiscent of Nirvana, whose "grunge" anthem "Smells Like Teen Spirit" debuted roughly a year prior.

time of growing up during the punk era in New York. I think it all translated from one period to the next. Then, you read the second long story arc of *Hate*, the New Jersey years. I reread those, and they're anything but a Generation X comic. Reading those now, I was struck by how good they were and how they aren't trapped in a time warp. In a way, maybe the first fifteen issues of *Hate* (as brilliant as they are) are sort of trapped in this time period in a way that the New Jersey issues aren't. I think they're all the better for it."

"One would think that the whole grunge thing must have contributed to *Hate*'s popularity," Bagge, who ironically isn't a fan of grunge, said of the timing with the movement, "but it also suffered

from the association to some degree. There were a lot of folks who wouldn't touch it or take *Hate* seriously because of it. Once all these terms came into being: 'Gen X' and 'grunge' and 'slacker'...a lot of people, especially those who fit those descriptions, became resentful of it, of being categorized. It was as if they became allergic to everything they thought they were supposed to like, or resemble, including my comics.

"While the term 'grunge' already existed, none of those bands were household names at the time I started *Hate*. And yet the first two years I was doing *Hate*, it was selling great, before all of these catch phrases caught on and *Time Magazine* was writing about flannel shirts. What changed everything was

when Nirvana's album *Nevermind* came out and became such a monster hit, its first release, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" became a mainstream radio anthem. A lot of these grunge bands became overnight sensations, and Seattle was suddenly flooded with journalists writing stories not just about the music but about our rain and beer and coffee. All our liquids! It also was a phenomenon in part because it came along during a slow news cycle, so even your mom knew about it. And then just as quickly it became a joke because it was so overblown.

"But the thing was, prior to all that, *Hate* was selling a certain amount. When the grunge phenomenon happened, the sales didn't really go up at all. It pretty much stayed the same. You'd have thought — and I certainly was hoping — that because of all this attention, that more people would make a point of searching out and buying my comic, but that really didn't happen. It goes to show you how there's only a finite amount of people who are willing to read a comic book at all. But like I said before, there seemed to be a set number of 20-somethings who made a loud point of *not* reading *Hate*! It's a shame, too, since those poor, painfully self-conscious darlings probably would have enjoyed it. Another thing that was a bit of a problem was folks' assuming I was jumping on some bandwagon and exploiting the whole grunge thing, which wasn't the case at all. It just was all very coincidental — and as it turns out, very much a double-edged sword."

"It transcends that stigma that this is the comic from the '90s for people who listen to Nirvana and pierce their nose," Bagge friend and fellow cartoonist Johnny Ryan said. "Even more than Robert Crumb whose comics were about the '60s hippies, I think Pete's writing is more accessible to anybody, more so than the stuff Crumb was writing about. I think that for any writer stuck in any particular time who does work that you can still read and enjoy...the *Hate* comics have that aspect to them. Even though it's about that time, it kind of transcends the datedness."

While *Hate* is satirical on the surface, Bagge's deceptively simplistic and over-the-top, expressive style masks a much more powerful undercurrent of raw human emotion that carries each issue.

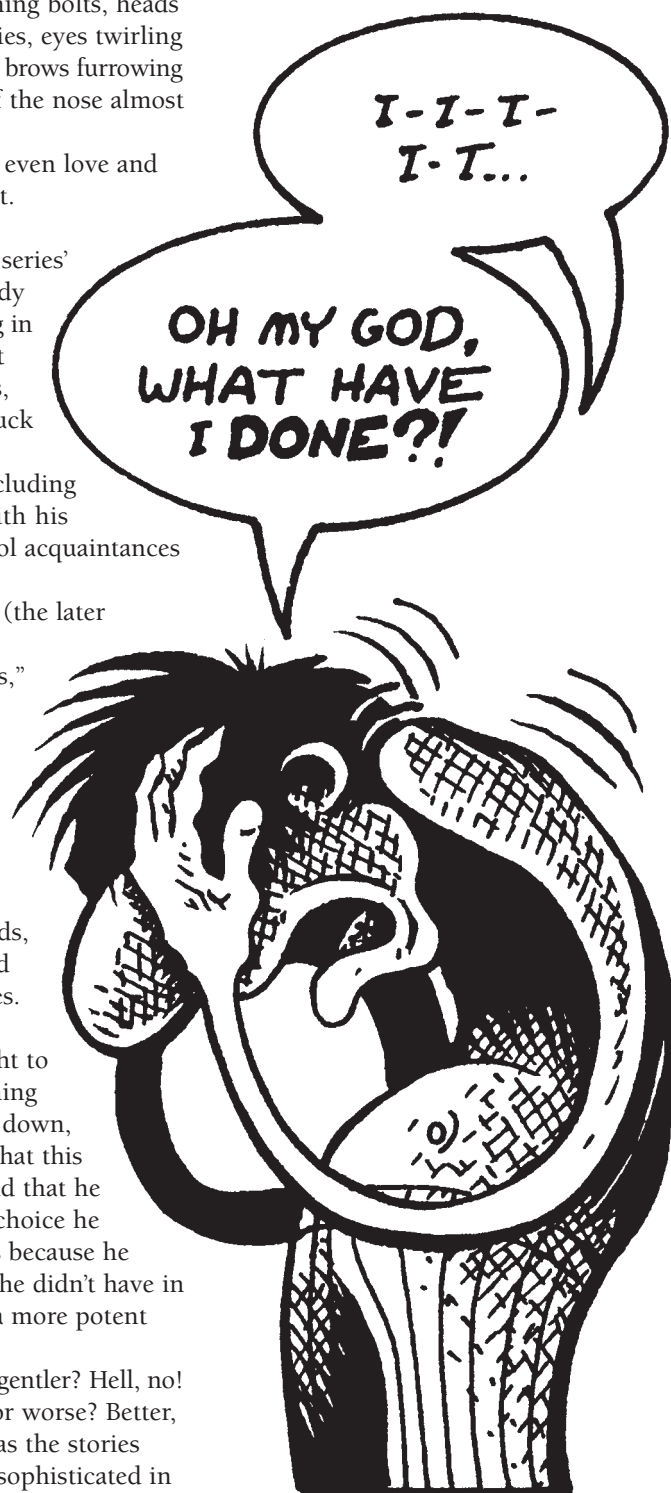
When characters have sex, it's never pretty or even ugly...it's just morbidly absurd, characters contorting into impossible positions as they're trapped in the throes of ecstasy. The characters seem to have no joints in their bodies as they strut from one panel to the next, their arms and legs moving like snaked tentacles and the men noticeably slouching. Reactions are always overstated, one panel's sedate characters being instantly transformed into Big Daddy Roth monsters for the next: tongues becoming lightning bolts, heads growing larger than bodies, eyes twirling in opposite directions, or brows furrowing so low that the bridge of the nose almost meets the upper lip —

In the world of *Hate*, even love and sex are angry and violent.

Halfway through the series' run, with *Hate* #16, Buddy and Lisa wound up living in Buddy's family's basement in Jersey. Like a lot of us, Buddy found himself stuck back in his hometown. Buddy's Seattle crew (including Stinky) was replaced with his re-introduced high school acquaintances from *Neat Stuff*.

"There's a gravitas to (the later *Hates*) that I don't think exists in the Seattle years," Reynolds reflected. "Partly because in those years, Buddy's just a young guy. Even though he's being put through hell and the wringer between crazy roommates and girlfriends, he's still a young guy and can roll with the punches. Whereas, in the Jersey years, there's a real weight to it, because he's approaching domesticity and settling down, really getting the sense that this is the only life he has and that he is not invincible. Every choice he makes has repercussions because he has responsibilities that he didn't have in Seattle. It all makes for a more potent novel [in the end]."

Was *Hate* kinder and gentler? Hell, no! Did that make it better or worse? Better, in this writer's opinion, as the stories became more adult and sophisticated in



PETER BAGGE

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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE





From *Hate* #1 (1990); through Stinky's scheme to employ Buddy in a porn flick, Bagge not only establishes Stinky's shuckster nature, but also Buddy's dysfunctional relationship with the yet-to-be introduced Lisa, and his ability to outsmart his old friend and roommate.

nature and Bagge tapped once again into his own life experiences.

"Perhaps if I were smarter," he confessed. "I would have kept it going the way it was and not age [Buddy] at all. I used to joke *Hate* was like a dirtier *Archie* comic, since it had a very similar dynamic set-up, with Buddy in the 'Archie' role and with two main male friends: the wise guy friend, Stinky, who's Reggie; and the weird nerdy friend, George, who's Jughead. And then there's the love triangle between Buddy and his 'Betty' (Lisa) and 'Veronica' (Valerie).

"Also, the most popular comic I've ever made was *Hate* #2. I was actually embarrassed with myself when I drew it: I liked the story, but it was so relationship-y, y'know? It was full of all the most typical romantic comedy clichés: boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-wins-girl-back; and with a love triangle thrown in for good measure, while his male friends give him bad advice. It even opens with Buddy having a 'Cathy' moment, sweating over his body image. Yet the very people I thought would call me out on all this actually *loved* it! All these hipsters, these editors of alternative-y indy magazines, they all raved about it like I just re-invented the wheel. It's funny how even the hippest of the hip can't resist a good boy-meets-girl story.

"That issue also helped to attract a lot of female readers, which was a rare feat in those days. So I probably could have milked that whole formula for a long time, if not forever, but it was all too silly and I was embarrassed by it right from the beginning. So I sabotaged the whole set-up by having Buddy settle with Lisa, much to everyone's chagrin.

"I also wanted to start doing deeper stories that were more personal and dealt with crises that were more profound than wondering who Buddy was going to date next, and the best source for that would be Buddy for the immediate family. That was another thing about the early *Hates* that I was starting to find limiting, is that they were solely about the trials and tribulations of a bunch of 23-year olds. I wanted to get older people and children back into the mix because that would make for story ideas that were deeper and more complex and even more painful...But the only way I could do those is to have Buddy move back to where his parents lived, since I



couldn't imagine how I would get his parents and siblings to all move out to Seattle. Plus his sister already had little kids, and I wanted to see Buddy dealing with kids, as well as his old messed up acquaintances."

But more than the setting of *Hate* had changed: the title was given a huge visual revamp. Bagge's heavy-handed cross-hatching changed into a cleaner, crisper style that would better hold color, inked by Bagge's new inker Jim Blanchard. The stories took a more dramatic tone that retained the cynicism and dark humor of the first half of the series. Rather than having three tiers of panels per page, the new *Hate* featured





four tiers; Bagge switched his original art size from 11" x 17" to 12" x 14" to accommodate the format change.

"I figured that since the stories would be more painful, it would make them more palpable if they were in color. Likewise, I thought that it would be interesting to tell these more painful, darker stories by simplifying the artwork more. I would make it look like an old-fashioned humor comic book where the color was very candy-colored, so there'd be that very weird, contrasting mix that I've always liked.

"I always liked to touch on some personal, uncomfortable subjects in my comics, but I also liked to draw them in this exaggerated, somewhat moronic-looking Big Daddy Roth style — so that what you see isn't necessarily what you get. It's like a clash between shallow and deep, smart and stupid, and I figured this contrast would be even more intense by combining stark stories with bright, garish 'comic book' colors.

"The possibility of going full-color in the first place came about thanks to computer technology with Photoshop. That, combined with *Hate's* sales figures, made going full-color economically possible. The economical reasons why underground and alternative comics were always black-and-white were pretty obvious: you simply couldn't afford it with all the labor involved to publish something in full-color. They also rarely had any ads in them, so color simply wasn't an option. Not that I have anything against black-and-white. I like both! I understand perfectly why an artist would prefer to work in black-and-white, or feel like their work is best represented that way, and I still do work in [black-and-white] myself, usually

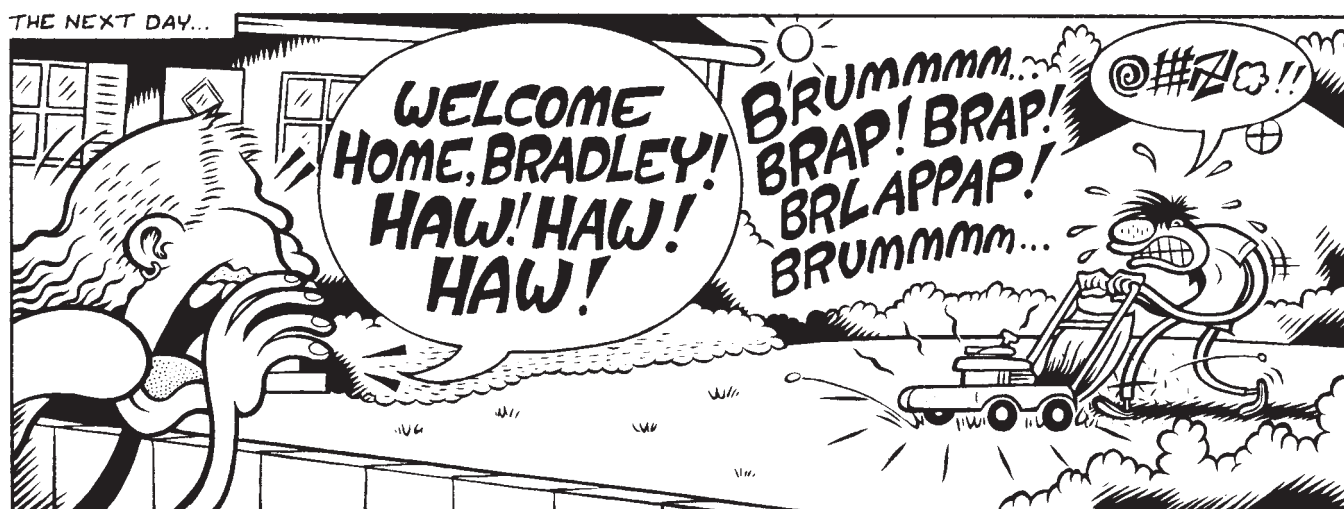
by choice. Even the color issues of *Hate* had black-and-white back-up stories! But I never thought that indy comics *had* to be in black-and-white. It was just the economics that made it so. But once color became an option I couldn't wait to take advantage of it. I thought color would greatly increase the visual possibilities of what an indy comic could be. And it has!"

The reaction to *Hate's* going color elicited some cries of "sell out" aimed towards Bagge.

"I'm still flabbergasted that there was such a backlash," Pete said, "how just the fact that it was in full-color translated into 'selling out.' To me, selling out has *everything* to do with content. And as it turned out, being in color didn't really help sales at all, much to my disappointment. So the only plus for me going full-color was that it appealed to my own personal aesthetics."

"I'm sure Peter handled the bulk of the criticism," Jim Blanchard added via e-mail. "I was a lowly inker and didn't hear much opinion, good or bad, regarding the new format — nor did I care to hear it. I think the majority of the feedback was positive, although there was a segment of the alt. comic crowd who preferred the early, black-and-white plus cross-hatched issues — we were staking out new ground, as I saw it. Those color issues have an odd quality to them, sort of a cross between undergrounds and mainstream comics — very hard to pin down. I seem to remember some rather harsh criticism from the *Drawn and Quarterly* dude regarding the color *Hates* — so, f\*ck that guy!"

"The only logical reason I can make out of that initial criticism was envy," Pete speculated. "At that time there were a bunch of younger cartoonists who were just starting out getting published

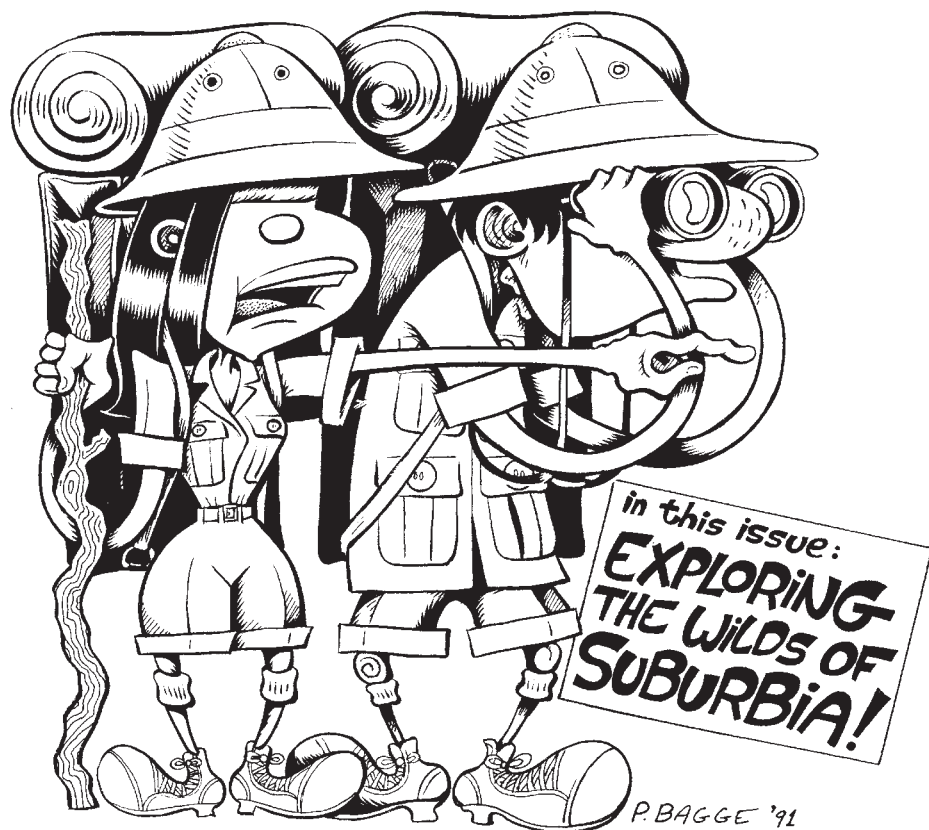




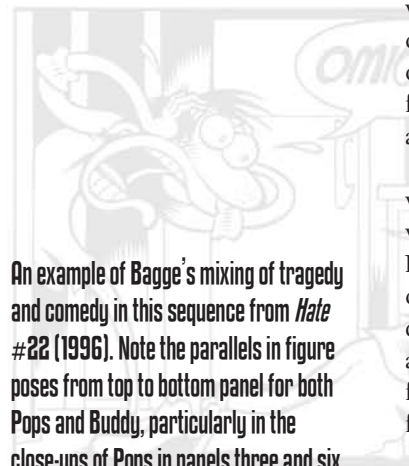
or trying to get published, doing the Xeroxed mini-comics and what have you. They were still trying to achieve what I had achieved so far, which is difficult enough in and of itself, yet with the color it looked like I raised the bar yet again. Nobody has ever said this to me, but I suspect that the introduction of color would raise the public's expectations of what an indy comic should be. That's what I think pissed them off: 'Will I ever have a full-color comic? And are people going to ignore my comic book because it's in black-and-white?' I could be wrong, but that's the only sense I could make out of the reaction the color received back then. Younger artists in particular acted threatened by it!

"Ironically, what I thought people would justifiably regard as a sellout about was when we started selling ads in *Hate* a few issues after the introduction of color, only no one said anything!" Pete pointed out. "We — meaning me and Fantagraphics — started selling ads so we could expand the page count and run color comics by other artists without raising the cover price. Rick Altergott was the first, with his soon-to-be-regular regular 'Doofus' strip. Rick knew how to use Photoshop, which was still a fairly rare skill back in 1995, and I was really impressed with the full-color comic strips he had done on it. He also was understandably eager to see his color work in print, but the only way we could afford to include him or anyone else in *Hate* was by selling ads.

"Well, it was that or raise the price, which I was loathe to do. I was determined to keep *Hate's* cover price as low as possible back then, since I associated that with accessibility. A lower price meant someone was more likely to buy it on an impulse, thus making *Hate* double as a recruiting tool or introductory title to indy comics in general. Which it was to some degree, though I've come to realize that it was pretty futile of me to try to make anything published by a company like Fantagraphics cheap and 'accessible.' Trying to create ephemera just doesn't fit into their business model, since it ignores the fact that alternative comics — and at this point, *all* comic books — are and always will be a specialty item that only appeals to a small subset of the general public. I deeply regret and resent that that's the case, but I've finally realized that there's no point in fighting it, either."



A sampling of the process Bagge undergoes for his artwork: shown above is the tissue paper images of Buddy and Valerie for *Hate* #6, which are then transferred to Bristol board for final inks. As a result, Bagge's final art rarely has any smudges or pencil smears.



An example of Bagge's mixing of tragedy and comedy in this sequence from *Hate* #22 (1996). Note the parallels in figure poses from top to bottom panel for both Pops and Buddy, particularly in the close-ups of Pops in panels three and six.

Pete has always said that he separated himself and Buddy Bradley by a decade: it was only natural, then, that Buddy slowly accrue the responsibilities of Peter Bagge a decade back. Part of that was in having Buddy mature, going beyond the 100% certified slacker of the Seattle years, and take on responsibilities like the ones he'd spent his first fifteen issues avoiding.

Buddy and his pal Jay the Junkie (last seen in "Buddy the Weasel") start a used junk business, and Bagge repeatedly leads us to expect Pops Bradley's death from his deteriorating health...only to depict Pops' getting hit and killed by a car while out walking. It seems like Pops' death was the one event in *Hate* that started the wheels of change turning for Buddy: the catalyst for the remaining threads of Buddy's days as a complete slacker to hit the fan.

"I was basing it on my own experience with death, and how it's not at all like the way it's always treated on movies and TV," Bagge said, noting an all-too-erie instance of life's imitating art. "When Pops Bradley died [in *Hate* #22], my father died right after it - and just as suddenly, too. It was a frightening foreshadowing of reality. My father was not a beloved man: he was a

moody, difficult guy, and nobody mourned his passing. There was not a wet eye in the house at his funeral. It's not like my dad was a total monster, but he was short-tempered, and he hid his own insecurities by coming off like an arrogant know-it-all...I got along with him sometimes and have some fond memories of him, which is more than most people could say, but he also drove me nuts as well. There were times when everyone in my family wanted to kill him."

At Pops' funeral, Buddy and Lisa wind up leaving the service early to take Buddy's bratty niece and nephew across the street to a Pizza Hut (in an understated Bagge one-two-punch that rubs in Pops' fate, Buddy's sister chides his nephew for not looking both ways while crossing the street).

"I did the story about Pops Bradley's funeral right before my father died, but it echoed my dad's funeral perfectly. Like, there were no touching eulogies, little being said or done regarding why we were all there. Even while you're viewing the open casket, you're thinking about how morbid and weird the whole thing is. Meanwhile, your stomach is grumbling,





and your new shoes don't fit, and my cousin's really getting on my nerves, etc. I remember standing next to my Uncle George, who was my father's only sibling, yet all he thought and talked about through the entire service was where we were all going to eat once it was over. 'You in the mood for Italian— If so, I know a good place — Honey, what's the name of that place?...' And kids are the most distracted and clueless. They don't know what's going on. So I just wrote about what happens at funerals — or at my own emotionally detached family's funerals, anyway. The kids get crazy and restless. And Buddy, of course, isn't gonna be a funeral guy. So he's like: 'The kids are hungry. What a great excuse for me to get out of here. But I'll act like I'm doing everyone a favor by volunteering to take the kids to the Pizza Hut.'"

Just as "Buddy the Weasel" forced Buddy to shake off the vestiges of his teenage life, preparing him for *Hate*, the last six issues of *Hate* had him discarding the elements of his life as a slacker, sometimes in a harsh way. The one tragic farewell to his past life, however, came in the death of the newly-returned Stinky in *Hate* #28. Playing with a handgun with Butch Bradley and on the same beach from "Buddy the Weasel," Stinky held the gun to his temple:

"Stinky stopped being a regular character once I'd brought Buddy back to Jersey," Bagge said. "I had gotten a lot of complaints about that, since he was a popular character, but the reason I stopped working with him as much was that I didn't really know where to go with him. He's based on the type of person who doesn't really grow or evolve much and is always going through the same motions, like a gerbil on a wheel."

It's typical in a story to introduce and establish a character in a setting and then, at the end, return that same but newly developed (through the events of the narrative) character to the initial settings to show just how much they have evolved. By having Stinky doing the exact same thing in his final appearance that he had in his first (in "Buddy the Weasel"), Bagge showed just how Stinky hadn't evolved in close to a decade.

"Stinky's the type of guy who doesn't see anything totally through," Pete said. "With him everything is 99% inspiration and 1% perspiration. That's why he'd always try to get someone like Buddy involved with his crazy schemes, half-hoping that Buddy will do all the heavy lifting. It's also why he burns all of his bridges, since after a while everyone's going to realize that 'yeah, he comes up with these great ideas, and he's a great salesman, but then I'm left holding the bag or just having to do all the boring stuff like licking the envelopes while he's got some other million-dollar idea brewing.'"

"I've known a lot of Stinky prototypes, and they're really amusing and magnetic because of their gift of gab and energy. But at the same time, if they don't settle down or wise up some as they get older, their whole shtick gets really old, really fast. It isn't always as charming when you run into someone like that 20, 30 years down the road who's still talking and acting that way.

"Whenever I travel somewhere on business, and there's a car and driver sent to pick me up, the limo drivers are almost always this type of guy, full of tall tales and million dollar schemes. Especially in L.A.... They're in L.A. for a reason: they were going to be a star, or a stunt double, or a big shot manager or







HATE #22  
1992  
Pen and Ink

Notice how this page (perhaps the most dramatic in *Hate*'s entire run), features cross-hatching like the earlier *Hate* issues. As a result, the sequence is not only made darker in tone, but also sets it apart from other Jersey issues. The use of close-ups is reserved for the most emotional moments (Stinky's death on panels seven and eight), while the long shot of Butch in the final panel not only draws the reader's eye, but also emphasizes his fear.

producer. 'I invented this new technology that was gonna revolutionize the industry, see, but then this schmuck stole my idea' and blah, blah, blah. Oh, and their driver status is always 'only temporary. This is just paying the rent until my *new* idea takes off. Wanna know what it is? Talking houseplants!' They're also half-hoping that you'll invest in their idea, figuring that if you're riding in their back seat that you must be some kind of mover and shaker. They're always amusing, fascinating guys, but they're also fifty-year-old limo drivers. I'm also struck by how quickly they'll walk away from their earlier million dollar ideas. Like 'let's show some stick-to-itiveness, pal!'"

When Stinky showed up in Jersey in *Hate* #27, it started with a crank call and Stinky's driving up to Buddy's shop in a "girly" convertible rental car that had an unloaded Uzi affectionately named "Suzi" in the back seat.

"At some point I decided to bring him back in, only he wasn't going to be the main thrust of the story as far as Buddy was concerned. He was going to be the 'B story,' where Buddy would be preoccupied with other woes, yet here comes Stinky to compound his problems. As in having Buddy shaking his head and going, 'What else can go wrong?' and in walks Stinky, shouting 'Hello!' TV writers call that a 'hello joke,' where whenever someone says something like: 'Who would *do* such a thing?' in would walk Urkel or Gilligan or whoever the show's biggest buffoon is and unknowingly shout 'Hello!' Whenever I've collaborated on a *Hate* pilot or movie script (yes, there's been several), I noticed that Stinky was always the 'Hello Joke' guy.

"Only in *Hate* # 26, I set it up as, 'Yes, Stinky's back, and he's still crazy and wacky — and that's a *bad* thing!' I thought I foreshadowed his death pretty well, because even though he's still a fast-talking operator, he was also clearly devolving. Like, look at what he's doing now: selling drugs to kids in a 'borrowed' US mail truck. Government property! And he's carrying a loaded UZI with him! Sure, I played it up for laughs, but at the same time... Yikes! That transcended his former 'wacky' behavior by quite a bit. And where is he going to go from there? It's either prison or death. He's going to have to find Jesus or something to derail him from this path he was on, because he obviously never stops and thinks.

"Stinky lacked self-awareness, which makes him lots of fun, but [if] I suddenly had him stop and go, 'Whoa, what am I doing? I better check myself!' then he wouldn't be Stinky anymore. It wouldn't be very interesting, either.

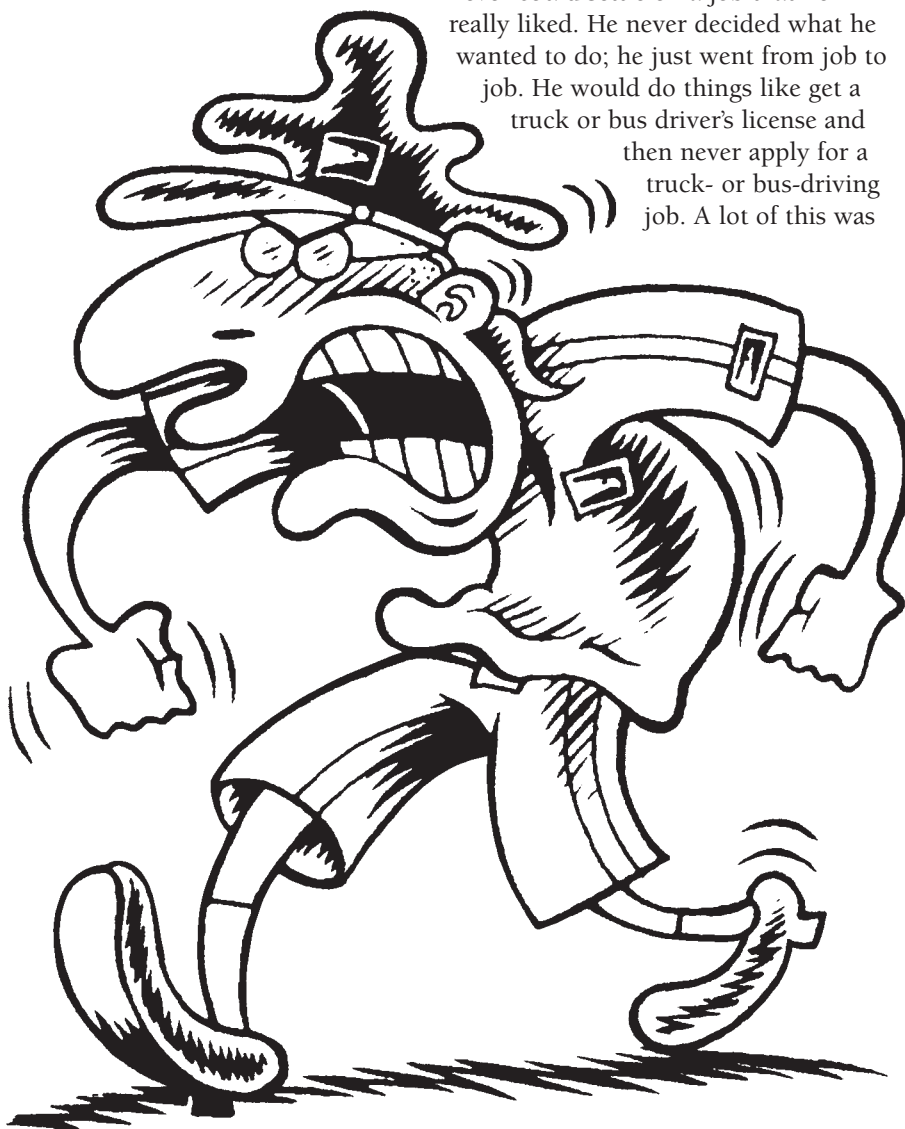
"A problem with *Hate*, if you can call it a 'problem,' is that it's not like *Peanuts* or *Beetle Bailey* or even *The Simpsons*, where Bart is 10 years old forever and everything is stuck in time. Instead I took the *Gasoline Alley* route and had everybody age and change and either evolve or devolve. Stinky was a disaster waiting to happen, so I figured it was about time to have a disaster happen. I'm surprised at how often people ask me to explain his death — not only because of all the foreshadowing I just described, but also because Buddy's brother Butch explains the whole thing accurately at the end of the same issue Stinky dies in! Buddy says, 'You were there. What happened?' And Butch says something like: 'I'm sure that he thought he'd emptied the whole gun, and that he just wanted to freak me out, and make me pee my pants, only he obviously miscounted the bullets we used.' But he also comments on how Stinky must not have valued his life much or he would've never pulled that trick in the first place. Like, I'm assuming you want to live a long, healthy life, so you wouldn't dream of pulling that trick on me. Even if you thought you counted the bullets correctly, I still can't imagine you saying, 'Wouldn't it be hilarious if I made Pete piss his pants by pointing a gun at my head and pulling the trigger?'"

"Only a guy who had a suicidal element to him would pull that trick. Just the mere fact that he was willing to pull that trick shows that he..."



Bagge invokes classic *Grit Magazine* subscription ads, in this retro ad for *Hate* subscriptions.





Pete paused and then revealed another odd aspect of Stinky's death. It wasn't Stinky's putting a bullet through his brain, only to be buried in an anonymous grave on a farm: the situation paralleled the cartoonist's life in a scary way.

"Again, it was a bit of foreshadowing to my own life: right after Stinky died, my older brother Doug passed away, from complications from diabetes. Technically he died from 'natural causes,' but for the last ten (but especially the last five) years of his life, he wasn't acting like someone who wanted to live. He had the 'bad' kind of diabetes, Type A, where he had to inject himself with insulin, and he came down with it when he was 12. You have to really watch your diet, too—which he did for most of his life. Well, he was really into drugs off and on, but he didn't drink at all for most of his life. But then he got in a bad marriage, and after they got divorced he started on this downward spiral. He never could settle on a job that he really liked. He never decided what he wanted to do; he just went from job to job. He would do things like get a truck or bus driver's license and then never apply for a truck- or bus-driving job. A lot of this was

due to insecurity, which he seemed to suffer from even before he came down with diabetes; he never was a very happy guy.

"But those last five years of his life were really wretched and he was a *really* unhappy guy. He also resented the hell out of me, because my life was going relatively fine and I was his kid brother. He was really nasty towards me, to the point that I couldn't stand being around him anymore. What was even worse was during the last year of his life, whenever he would call me, instead of him ragging on me, he'd get all sentimental and go 'I love you, man,' and he never talked like that before. Gave me the creeps! I figured it had to be because he knew he was dying, but he kept insisting he was fine. But he'd be calling me from a hospital bed, recovering from the umpteenth car accident he'd had that month. And the last time I saw him he was going through two packs of Marlboros a day and drinking hard liquor. His bedroom floor was covered with empty vodka bottles, and during the evenings he was constantly passing out, then reviving, then passing out again. My ex-brother-in-law and I were constantly dragging his sorry ass, tossing him onto the back of a pickup truck whenever we couldn't revive him as we went from one friend's house to another, in this endless search for more of the free pot and booze that the two of them were on. Doug told everyone the fainting spells were due to the diabetes, but he was blind drunk as well when I was with him. I tried to get him to lighten up on the sauce at one point, but he lit into me like you wouldn't believe, so I just dropped the subject.

"Did you ever see that *Crumb* film documentary? Well, my relationship with my brother Doug was exactly like Crumb's relationship with his older brother, Charles. Plus, Doug also lived upstairs in our mom's attic toward the end of his life. My mother wasn't allowed up there, and it turns out even his own platonic girlfriend never went up there. He also had five cats living up there with him. He was so paranoid of the cats getting run over that he wouldn't let them out. So the whole place reeked of kitty litter. The floor was just completely covered with empty cigarette cartons and empty bottles of vodka just all over the place.

"Then a couple years later he faints while making a sandwich in my ma's kitchen, cracks his head on the floor



and that was that. So, yeah, I think it was a form of suicide, or at least an utter indifference towards remaining alive. And it was odd that it happened right after I wrote that Stinky story and his accidentally-on-purpose suicide, and then with my brother it was the same thing: an accidentally-on-purpose suicide."

After thirty issues, Bagge retired *Hate*, continuing the series in not-quite annual annuals.

"I suppose I could have kept *Hate* going forever," Bagge said, leaning back reflectively. "But the sales started to dip, and I didn't like that trend. Plus, at that same time I was getting a lot of other opportunities. For the first time ever, people were calling me up, offering me fairly lucrative freelance jobs. That was when *Hate* was at its hottest, and I had several opportunities to develop it for TV — all of which failed, though I made good money off of development fees alone.

"All of a sudden I was making the best money I've ever made — before or since, sadly — so why would I want to keep slaving away on this single labor intensive comic book title? I was making much better money *not* doing *Hate*! But the idea behind *Hate Annual* was to just simply keep the Buddy character alive. It's kind of like he's dog paddling (or that I'm dog paddling) just to see if suddenly he can take off again, creatively or otherwise. It doesn't sell nearly what it used to, but it sells well enough that Fantagraphics is always ready and willing to put it out. I also pad the thing out with various freelance jobs that otherwise

would remain uncollected and forgotten, so it isn't nearly the time commitment that the regular *Hate* title used to be."

Buddy, while still ten years younger than Pete (which would put him at 39), has grown more in the eccentricity department: Now a parent, he still runs the junk store and has bought a house on a former Jersey dump, with a concrete backyard.

"I still kind of relate to him, and I certainly relate to his impulses," Pete admitted. "But the direction he's going in compared to me is far more idiosyncratic and eccentric. In appearance alone he's become a total kook."

Buddy Bradley's appearance pushed him further away from that of a younger Bagge, and more into that of a traditional oddball comic character. Gone are the flannel and long unkempt bangs: Buddy's now rocking out on a pipe, eye patch, and shaved head.

"He's literally become the Crazy Old Guy That Works at the Dump, right down to the eye patch, even though there's nothing wrong with his eye. I recently saw Gilbert Shelton, the *Freak Brothers* guy, at a Spanish comic convention, and he asked me if Buddy still needed the eye patch or if it was just an affectation. When I told Gilbert it was the latter I expected him to roll his eyes in dismay, but instead he laughed and said, 'That's great!'"

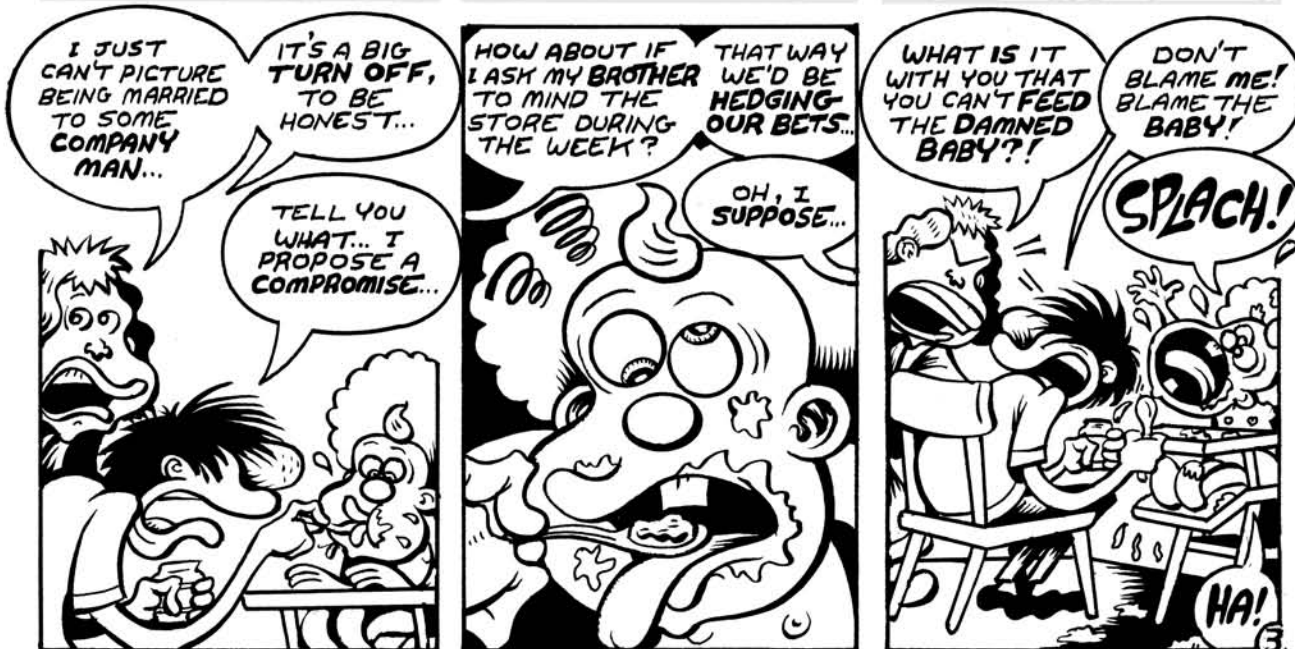
"Buddy's become a thoroughly domesticated creature of habit at this point," Pete added later. "But he's still trying to figure out exactly what 'settled'



PETER BAGGE

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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE





means and how he wants to live the rest of his life. The readers would much prefer I went back to, like, full-length stories, but with *Hate Annual* I much prefer doing these eight-, ten-, 12-page stories, these little snapshots documenting how Buddy is slowly turning into a total nut. Not a 'nut' in a bad way, but as someone that few people would relate to. How he still is paralleling my own life at this point is hard to say. Maybe he isn't anymore! Or else I'm in denial of my own idiosyncratic behavior."

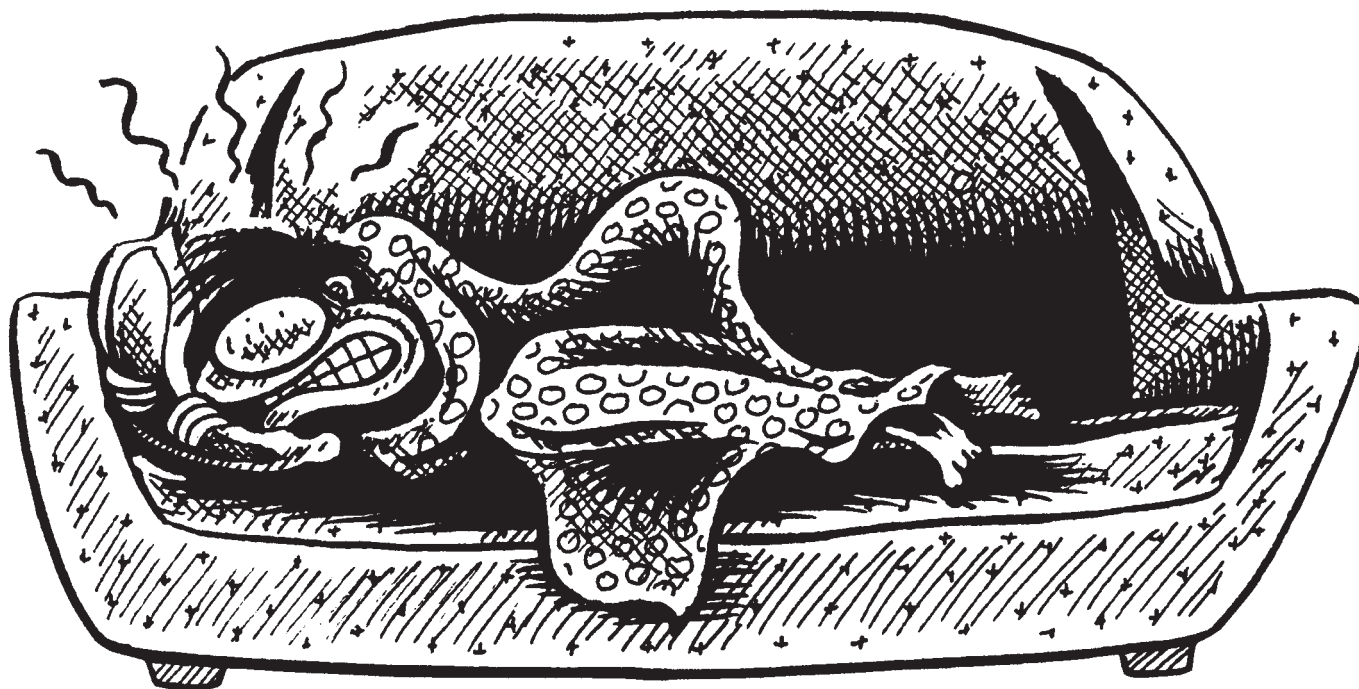
When *Hate* first hit in 1990, the alternative audience was most likely in their late teens to mid-20s; by the time the series' wrapped in 1998, most of the readers had grown to their late 20s to early 30s. They, in a fashion, grew up with Buddy Bradley and Lisa Leavenworth. While, from a literary perspective, it made *Hate* a book that paralleled its readers' lives as it came out, it doesn't necessarily help its commercial shelf-life.

"One major problem with alternative comics is demographics. We like to think that we're making comics for anyone and everyone to enjoy, but there still is a very core demographic who buy alternative comics, which is people in their twenties who live in downtown urban areas or college towns. What eventually happens to these indy comic fans are what happened to me: marriage, family, mortgages, career, etc...All of which take over your life to the point you don't have the time to invest in comic books, let alone go out and look for the ones that

might interest you. And once you buy a house, chances are it's nowhere near any of those rare comic shops that bother to carry alternative comics, so the whole comics hunting experience becomes that much more of a chore. The only way I can keep up at all with alternative comics is when Fantagraphics gives me free copies or if somebody else sends me one. Otherwise, new titles will come and go and I won't even know that they exist.

"Also, with Buddy now being a family man, this core demographic who read alternative comics simply doesn't relate. *Hate's* all about old people now. A big reason — the *main* reason — for the success of those early *Hates* was that the characters so accurately reflected the people who buy and read alternative comics. The whole title was like a mirror image of themselves and their lives, so of course they loved it. But once Buddy started a business and started to settle down, that's when I started to lose a lot of readers. They simply didn't relate to Buddy anymore."

But for those readers who can *still* relate to Buddy Bradley and his dysfunctional adventures, Pete continues his occasional annuals. As all things pop culture go, a new appreciation emerges roughly twenty years later, with a crowd too young to remember when those same movies, music, and comics originally came out. When college kids in 2017 latch on to the music and clothing of the '90s, Buddy and his pals may find themselves pop culture gods to a new group of readers.







PETER BAGGE

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COMICS INTROSPECTIVE

PRISONERS OF HATE ISLAND  
1990  
Pen and Ink

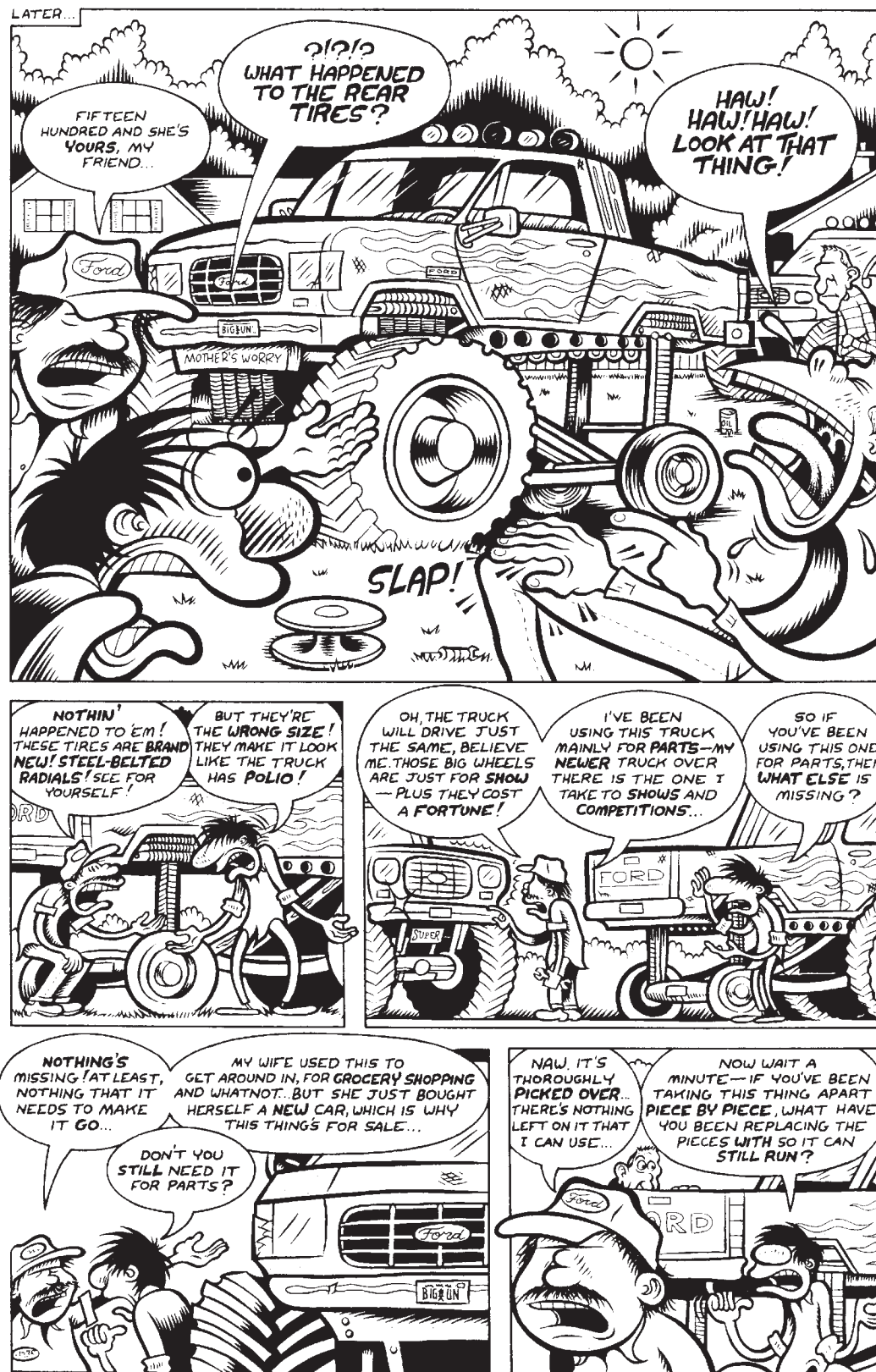
This cover, more reminiscent of Bagge's earlier work, features Fantagraphics publishers Gary Groth and Kim Thompson in the background, and an empowered and bloodshot Bagge advancing towards the reader. One can only suppose his publishers met the end of the rolled up issue of *Neat Stuffin* in his right hand. Bagge added that this cover was inspired by a Basil Wolverton sci-fi comic cover.





HATE #2, page 7  
1990  
Pen and Ink

Buddy, on his first date with the feminist Valerie, has his testosterone extinguished when confronting a Vietnam veteran. Note Bagge's alternating use of open, borderless, panels for those shots that involve impending violence and conflict.



HATE #18, page 12

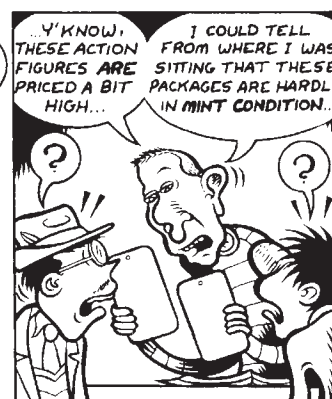
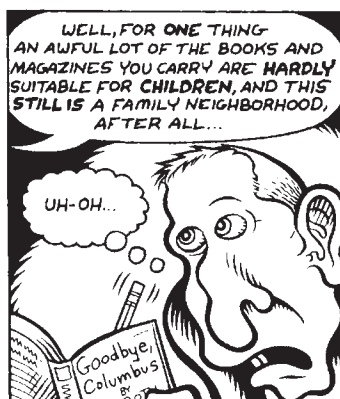
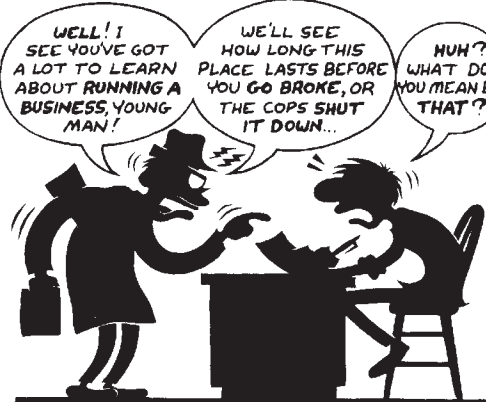
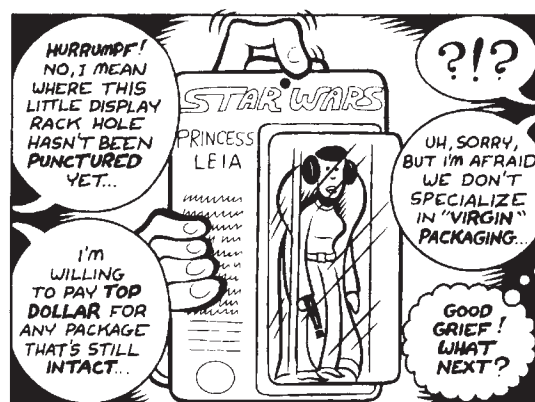
1995

Pen and Ink

Peter Bagge and Jim Blanchard

Buddy buys his new set of wheels, in this page, a Big Daddy Roth-inspired truck which looks like it has "polio". The opening panel's thick character outlines work to create depth, even without the printed color. Bagge also takes a humorous scene that is composed mostly of dialogue and, through varying camera angles from panel to panel, makes it visually arresting.

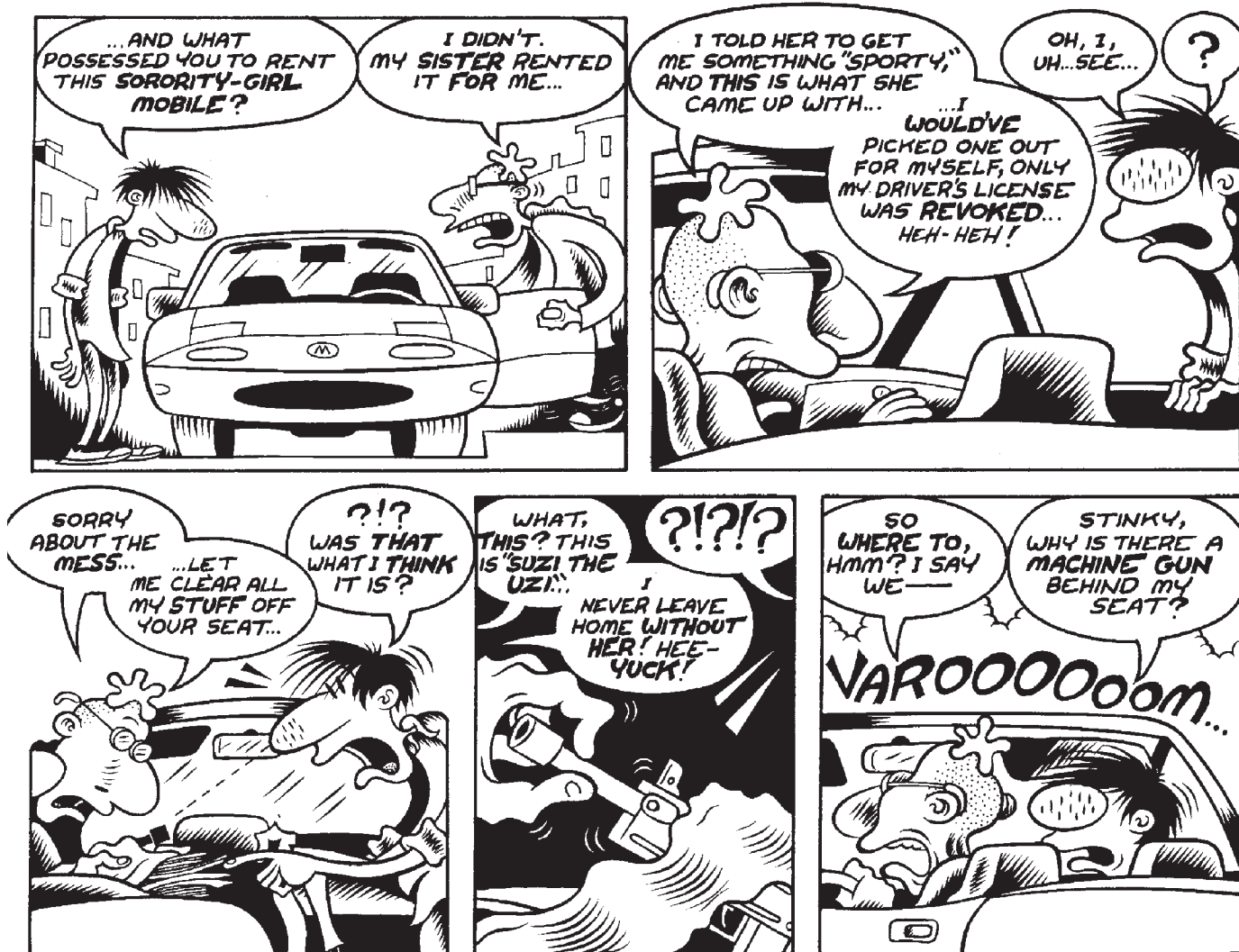




HATE # 19, page 4  
1995  
Pen and Ink  
Peter Bagge and Jim Blanchard

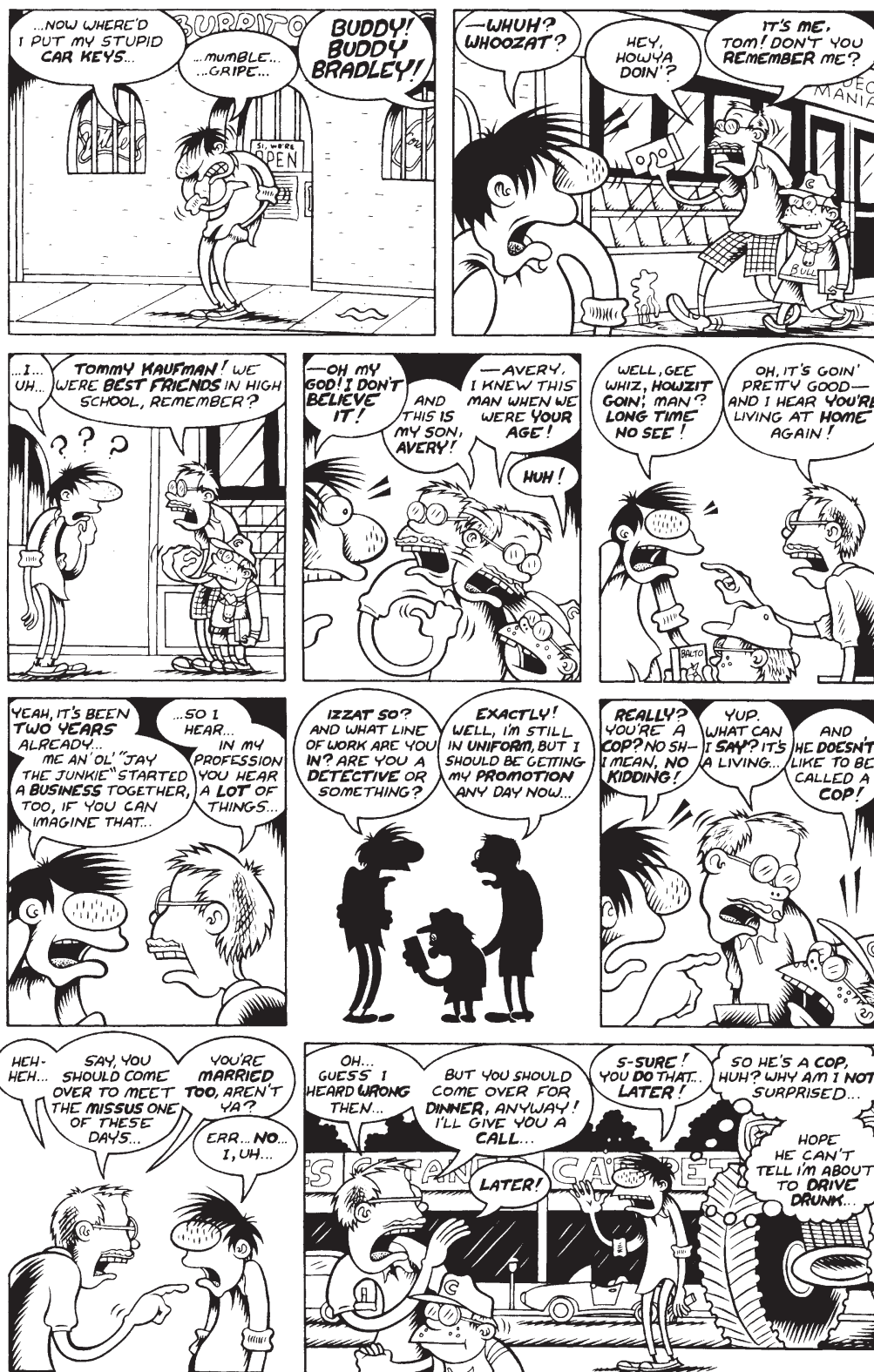
This scene opens with a wide, establishing panel that details the scenery and the relation between the players. Having set the stage, Bagge then utilizes close-ups and medium shots, bringing the focus more on the characters and their conflict.





Kate #26, page 8  
1997  
Pen and Ink

Within eleven panels, Bagge establishes the long-absent Stinky's current situation, and foreshadows alleged zaniness (but, in the end, tragedy) that is to come. Buddy's probing questions and further doubts about Stinky reinforce his own more adult development since the early Seattle issues.



Hotel #24, page 8  
1996  
Pen and Ink

Bagge normally begins scene changes at the start of a page. This scene, where Buddy reunites with his *Neat Stuff* pal Tommy is entirely self-contained. Coming out of the bar, drunk, Buddy is perhaps given his first example of an old friend whose accepted the responsibilities of an adult life. It seems that Tommy's becoming a policeman is the focal point of this scene, as Bagge has left the panel open, with the characters in silhouette.



PETER BAGGE

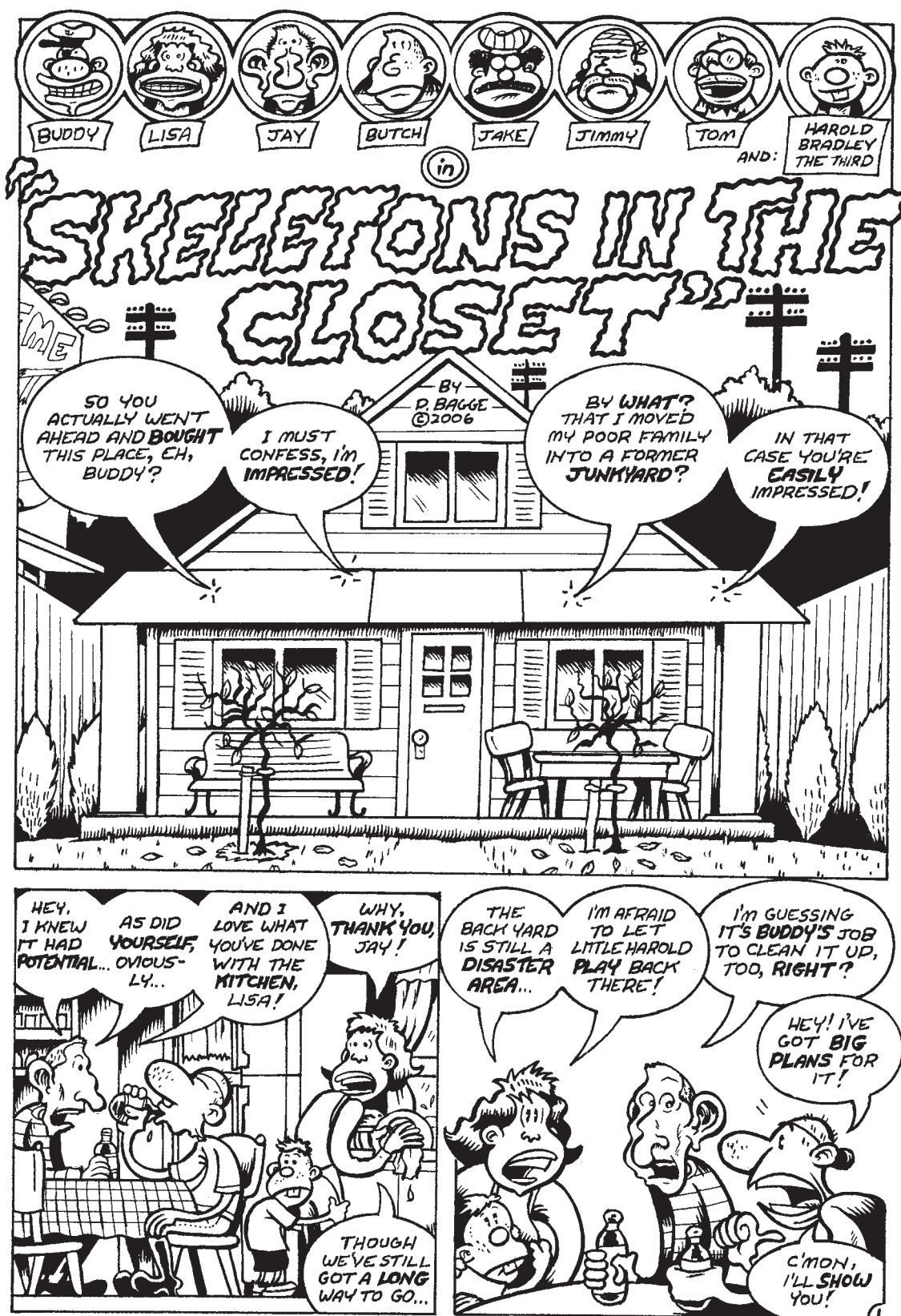
55

COMICS INTROSPECTIVE

Hand #24, page 15  
1996  
Pen and Ink

This page is the second of a two-page scene, where Buddy encounters the depressed Lisa. Lisa's feelings of alienation are well illustrated through Bagge's reducing the amount of speech balloons in key moments: her breakdown in panel three, and her self-pity in the final panel.





Hate Annual #6, page 1  
2006  
Pen and Ink

It would seem that Buddy Bradley really has settled down into the suburban, domestic life... But Bagge slaps in the face of any sense of normalcy by presenting a willingly bald and eye-patched Buddy who has moved his family into a junkyard.

# BUDDY GETS ANIMATED

...or does he? Where Pete learns the ins and outs of making a cartoon.

We were watching Peter Bagge-designed characters, computer generated and possessing weight and dimension, on a television...creator Eric Kaplan did *The Mooch* as a five-minute presentation cartoon in the hope of having a cable channel pick it up as a regular show. The main character, a deadbeat computer programmer who quit his job because he wouldn't work on a video game where the hero is a rapist, is out on the street without any money or a place to live, and he imposes on both his best friend and his friend's wife. Living on their sofa, The Mooch quickly comes close to ruining his pal's marriage and finds himself once more kicked out on the street — and knocking on his wanna-be girlfriend's door.

The characters were Peter's in form and movement, their bodies moving without any visible joints and the Bagge slouch ever-present as their heads bobbed forward; they even freaked out like Buddy Bradley (with a shade less Big Daddy Roth). There was something almost creepy about them, though, but not exactly in a soulless *Polar Express* way. The figures had warm, human faces but contorted, Bagge-ified bodies.

Bagge had been flirting with animation for a bit more than a decade. Judging by the recent wave of creator-owned and directed films (everything from Dan Clowes' *Ghost World* to Frank Miller's *300*), Hollywood is sinking its vampiric teeth into the jugular of comics for some fresh blood. One would think that Pete would soon be a successful donor.

"As we speak, I'm in the exact same place with MTV that I was ten years ago," Bagge admitted. "Back then I had a development deal with MTV to turn *Hate* into an animated TV show. Now



I'm doing the same exact thing with them, only it's with *The Bradleys*, so it's Buddy as a teenager, and I've only just got started on it."

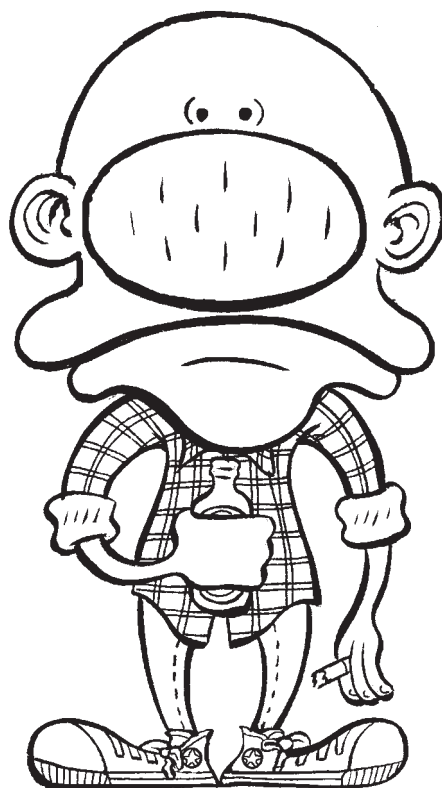
Around 1993, Bagge was courted a few different times about producing *Hate* as a show or film, particularly by MTV (this was, after all, when *Beavis and Butthead* and *The Simpsons* were staking their claim in television's landscape) and, later, by HBO. Despite a positive testing of an animatic (or quasi-animated test short), the one-two punch of a new MTV President and another show's receiving the greenlight instead killed it.

"For every single television show that you actually get to see make it to TV, there's probably a hundred different properties that get optioned," Bagge speculated. "Out of those, only one out of ten reach to where I am. It's like a rapidly narrowing funnel that I'm still entering, and I still have a long way to go before I come out the other end.

A character from *The Mooch*.

© 2007 Mirari Films.

A model sheet of a bald Buddy Bradley, complete with bottle of Ballard Bitter. This was used for the PressPop Buddy doll.



“So there’s not only a lot of competition, but animation projects also are relatively more expensive to make than a live action show, and especially a reality show. This is especially true with cable networks, where the budget for an animated show can be prohibitively expensive.”

With CGI’s giving film-makers the ability to convert pages from comics and graphic novels into convincing silver-screen life (particularly in Miller’s past two films), could an iconic indy comic be turned into an indy movie? Bagge’s not a fan of that idea:

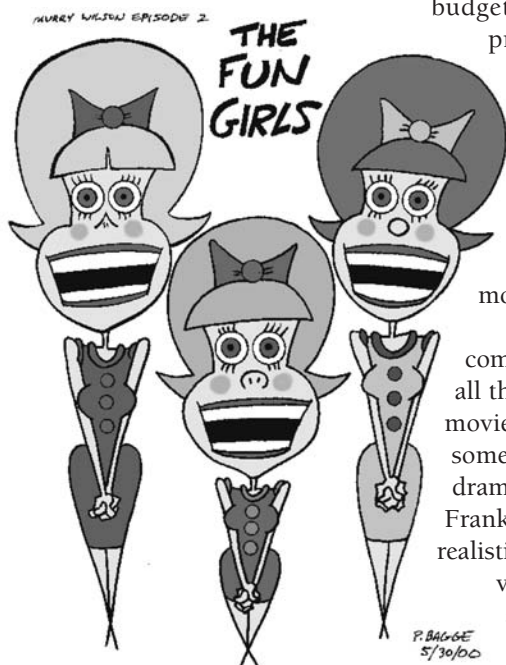
“Well, first of all, the nature of my comics are so radically different from all these recent successful superhero movies — and even more so from something like *Sin City*, which is so dramatically stylized. As stylized as Frank Miller’s work is, he still draws realistically proportioned people, so it’s very easy to take live action actors and create the Frank Miller comic book world around them. Whereas with my comic, that would be completely impossible: it would be like trying re-create *Peanuts* with real actors.

“Whenever someone contacts me to option *Hate*, nine times out of ten they want to make a live-action ‘indy’ flick out of it. They want to give it the *Ghost World* treatment. That seems to be the easiest,

most obvious thing to do with *Hate*, apparently. And it always turns out to be someone who’s basically going around pitching several ideas, just throwing sh\*t at the wall to see what sticks, and they want the right to fling *Hate* around as well.

“I’m not opposed to the idea of *Hate* as a live-action movie, at least during times when that’s the *only* thing anyone is interested in doing with it, but I’m not really a movie guy. My stories aren’t exactly novel-length: they’re more bite-sized. So I don’t think of what I do as movie material at all. To me, converting them into a TV series, preferably animated, is a natural and *obvious* way to go — especially something like *Hate*, where each installment already reads like a half-hour sitcom.

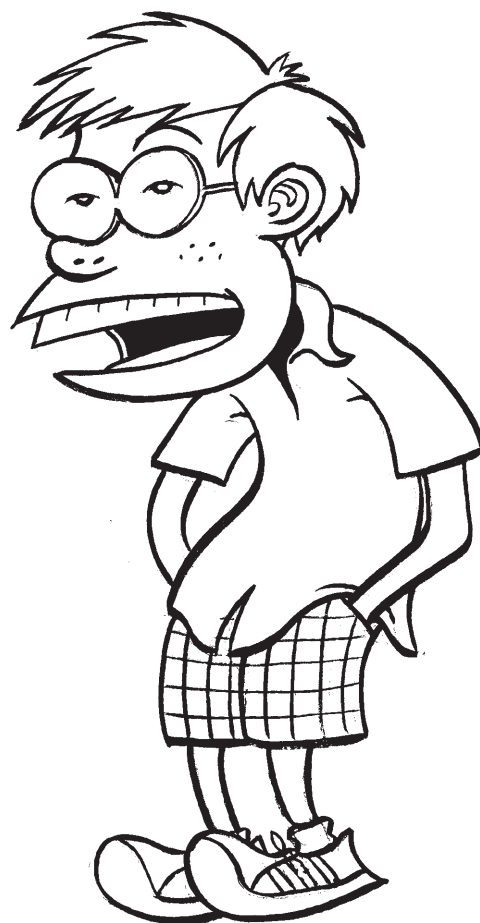
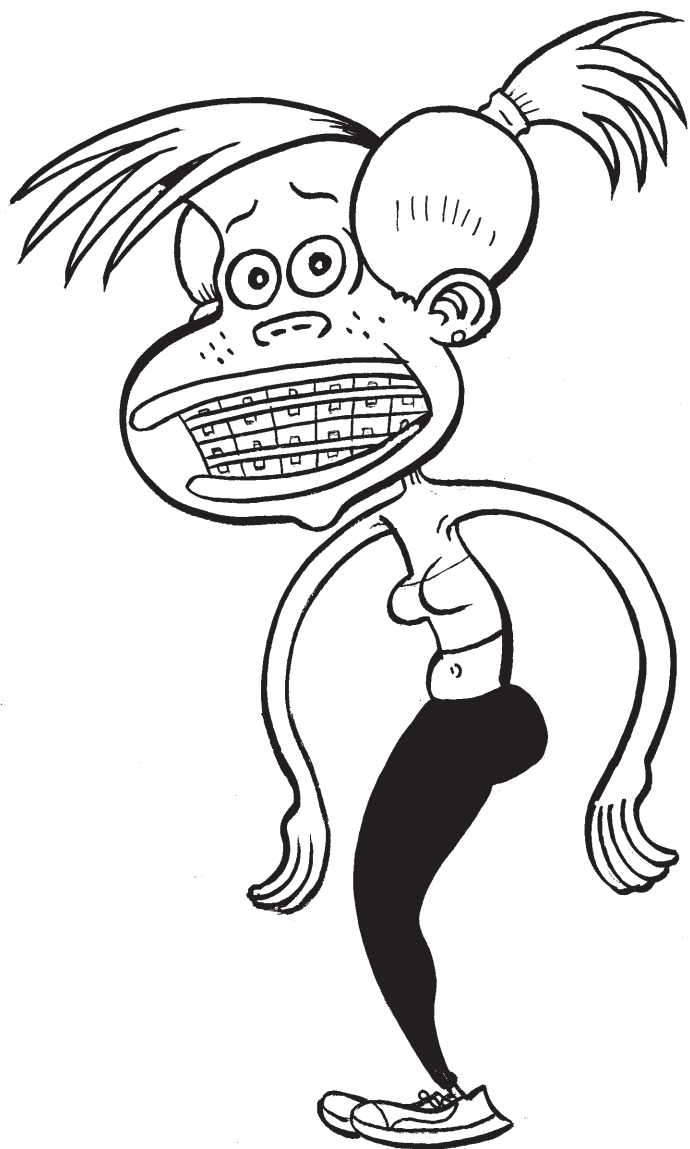
“I think movies are inherently too long, anyway. Whenever I’m watching a movie, I think, ‘This movie could easily be over now.’ But you always get the requisite plot twist two-thirds of the way through in order to justify the movie being two hours long and worth the nine bucks you had to pay to see it. ‘Oh, so *he’s* the bad guy.’ Yawn,” Pete laughed. “I prefer stories that are a bit more concise. You know, like a TV show! So the only possibilities that come up that I ever get remotely excited about are when something of mine has been optioned for the express purpose of making it into an animated TV show.”



Models of The Fun Girls, who appeared in an episode of Bagge’s flash-animated *Murray Wilson* shorts, based off the manager and father of The Beach Boys’ Brian Wilson.

rock ‘n’ roll Dad is © 2007 icebox.com.





Model sheets of Babs Bradley, Tommy, and Butch Bradley, for the proposed MTV animated series of *The Bradleys*.





## TERRY AND THE TYKES



MURRAY WILSON, EPISODE 2

P. BAGGE 5/30/00

Clockwise, from upper left: Murray Wilson, a "fun Girl", Terry and the Tykes, and The Fun Boys, from various episodes of Bagge's *Murray Wilson* online animated shorts.