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

This comic explores whether my responses to the pandemic can be told using nonrepresentational or highly abstracted art and still successfully convey the events. Its success is up to each reader. Finding visual metaphors and devices to carry the narrative was challenging but fulfilling. I intended to start with a full script, but the ideas just would not come. When I decided to “write” the article in pictures and then add narration the process became much smoother. In hindsight, I suppose that’s logical given the visual nature of the medium. This article was drawn digitally using Clip Studio Paint. The narrator is drawn extremely simply to allow the visual devices to create the narrative rather than the traditional renderings of facial expressions and figure poses. Panels 4 and 5 on page 6 include content that previously appeared in The Lame Halloween (Richardson and Whatley 2021).
I'VE NEVER BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING OVERLY OPTIMISTIC, BUT I THOUGHT I'D BE ABLE TO WEATHER THE ADVERSE SUMMER OF 2020.

I TOLD MYSELF TO JUST KEEP MOVING...

... AND NOT PAY TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO HOW BAD THINGS WE'RE GETTING.

BUT I BECAME ADDICTED TO DOOMSTROLLING.

EVENTS SEEMED TO OVERTAKE ME.

THOUGHTS SEEMED TO UNRAVEL.

LUCIDITY SEEMED TO FADE.
I was used to low moods, although not of such a severity and localization.

What came next, however, was a completely new ordeal.

The episodes were accompanied by a prickly sensation...

As if my sweat were actually sizzling on my skull.

The constant buffeting of the dark churning made organized thought all but impossible.

I felt as if I was actually comprehending pieces of the magma as reality became more distant.

Of course there are some real moments that I remember quite well...
... such as how my personal space became a territory to be defended even at the cost of discords.

... andHeader. Running Tragedies.

Eventually the comics muse was squashed out.

... and creativity evaporated.

Sometimes the muse did retreat...

As my Reeves grew ever darker... I was suddenly offered an opportunity centered around the one thing that's never failed to stir my creativity... that usually not in constructive ways.

Thank you for your recent application for the graphic novel project. Unfortunately, your application was not selected for the project. In conclusion, you suck. Try again when you've learned to draw.
Halloween!!!

The story was for a horror anthology, and though it was only three pages...

...I immersed myself completely.

I created more detailed and distinctive character designs than I had mastered before.

I also taught myself how to create simple 3D models...

...thus giving more detail and authenticity to my original designs.

The sad thoughts were still prevalent, but the call of refined creativity was strong enough...

To provide a feel of mental balance.
But even as I was using comics as a coring mechanism, I was also using them as a lens through which to view the world. Over the course of the summer, I watched in horror as our reality began to resemble one of my favorite dystopian comics.

In fact, a lifetime of reading shaped my view of the presidential election.

I came to see the campaign cycle as a blood-some conflict...

...between the forces of light and order...

...and darkness and chaos.

Getting vaccinated helped my mindset greatly.

In comic book terms, I felt a degree of invincibility.

Until the delta variant began to proliferate and the vaccination numbers stalled.
Now when I gaze ahead, the shapes of things to come seem chaotic and harsh.

And the present gives little reason to find hope in the future.

The pandemic is weaving its way through the fabric of the country... along the familiar pathways...

...and I tell myself to just keep moving, and seek the alternatives.

But as Covid weaves itself deeper into the fabric of the country, I find I've largely replaced anger with disappointment and a tired sense of resignation.

SAD
Author’s Note

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Editors’ Note

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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