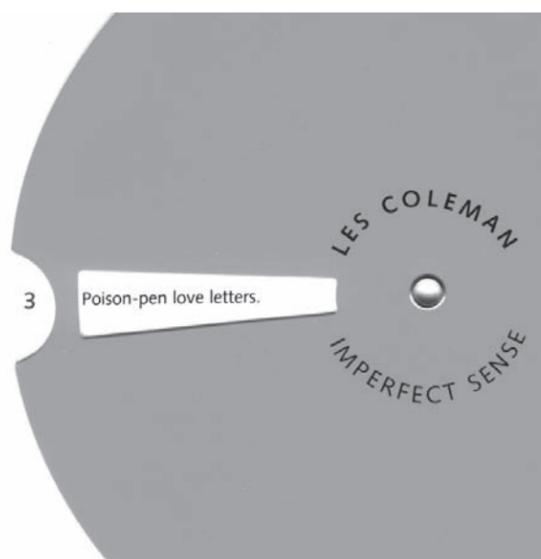


# Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson



KAREN magazine is an antidote to the current glut of mind-numbingly inane celebrity/gossip/showbiz/soap obsessed magazines cluttering up newsagents' shelves across the land. KAREN steps out of her front door and wanders around her village asking the people she meets, "What are you doing tonight?", "What are you having for tea?" and "Who lives on the Green?". Their answers to these mundane questions are recorded verbatim in the pages of KAREN magazine, accompanied with colour snapshots of the people and places. KAREN has a clean, restrained, minimalist approach to layout, using a single typeface throughout and devoting plenty of space to each article. Included are eight pages of beach hut photos accompanied by brief comments from the people who own or rent them, and the correspondence between a granny in residential care and her granddaughters, where she asks them to make a sign for her door saying "This door sticks. Please knock or push", together with a photo of it in situ. In other contributions, 'Neil' writes up his food/beer diary for a full eight pages before getting bored of it, and there's stuff on home improvements, a small ads section and a comments book. KAREN explores the fascinatingly familiar ground of ordinary, everyday life. My copy will find its place on the bookshelf next to The Caravan Gallery's recent WELCOME TO BRITAIN book and Daniel Meadow's NATTERING IN PARADISE (1988). I'm looking forwards to KAREN magazine issue 2 which will be out by the time you read this.



Les Coleman's IMPERFECT SENSE takes the form of one of those rotating card discs where text appears in a small window as you turn the circle around. These curious cardboard constructions—often used for presenting astrological information, handy hints or cocktail recipes—actually have a proper name; *Volvelles*. Examples of presenting information in this way date back over four hundred years. IMPERFECT SENSE is a beautifully produced dial-a-poem device, containing one-liners like "A slim volume of poverty" and "Her mascara ran away". This too-nice-to-send postcard is an ambitious new format for presenting succinct wordplays, one of Coleman's favourite subjects.



Typocrat press have dedicated themselves to producing English translations of outstanding European graphic novels. Their second publication is the oversized, modestly priced SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER. It's a neurotic jet-lagged drunken chaotic whirlwind journey through the depths of self-loathing which demands to be read in a single sitting. KILLOFFER arrives back home after a foreign trip and is repulsed by the fetid mass of dirty dishes in his overflowing kitchen sink which greets him. Escaping the confines of his apartment, he hits the street and finds himself accompanied by a steadily growing horde of *homunculi* KILLOFFERS who doggedly follow him from bar to bar causing trouble and getting into fights. Failing to shake them off, they follow him back home and take over his apartment for the sole purpose of satisfying their voracious appetites for alcohol and sexual gratification. Eventually KILLOFFER resorts to extreme measures to get rid of his other selves. SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER starts with words and images intertwined, but as the story gets more hectic and convoluted the words get pushed off the page completely as the action takes it up entirely. Cover quotes from Charles Burns and Ivan Brunetti attest that SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER should be an essential purchase for connoisseurs of self-hatred.

SALAMANDER DREAM by HOPE LARSON is a beautifully drawn tale of a young girl growing up. Eight-year-old Hailey lives just on the edge of town where she can run barefoot into the woods to play alone; chasing butterflies, following tracks of deer footprints and sometimes finding her (imaginary?) friend Salamander—a human-proportioned, mask-wearing salamander. They explore the woods, telling each other stories and sharing their dreams. Printed in black and a bright pastel green, many pages in SALAMANDER DREAM are given over

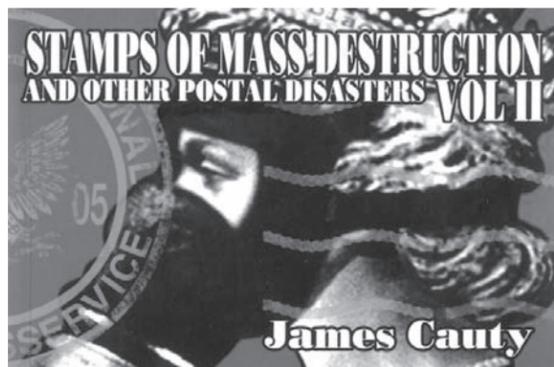


entirely to showing the natural activity of the flora and fauna of the woods and the movements and sounds of the insects and birds that inhabit them, often accompanied with species names. Exploring the woods in this way is just as important a part of the story as the relationship between Hailey and Salamander. Hailey gradually grows up, finds other friends to play with in the woods, encounters Salamander less often. Eventually, as she nears the end of her teenage years and is about to move away to college, she returns to the woods to see Salamander one last time, ensuring that she'll treasure her memories of childhood exploring the non-scary woods for ever.



FILMS IN AMERICA 1929-1969. Working from a second-hand book of the same title, long time zinester LADY LUCY has drawn 41 images for 41 iconic films spanning 41 years. Her drawings are quickly executed, stripped down versions of film stills—maybe they're done in the dark?—which often just show the main characters together with the year and a single-sentence description of the plot. Occasionally they're accompanied by anecdotes describing associations or memories that the film has for the artist. The initial source material is filtered by LADY LUCY's choices of what to include in her drawings, resulting in a sort of through-the-decades classic film quiz book. But don't worry if you can't identify them all, the titles are given at the end.

Jimmy Cauty's 2003 antiwar postage stamp depicting the Queen in a gas mask resulted in legal action from the Royal Mail, and appeared on the front cover of *The Times*. As an ex-member of the KLF and K Foundation it's no surprise that Cauty thrives on press coverage and



controversy. He enjoyed the kerfuffle caused by his gas mask stamps so much that he's gone into creative overdrive and produced fifty more stamp sheets and accompanying first day covers with all the requisite rubberstamps, logos and cancellation marks. They're all included in *STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2*. The predominant topics explored on the stamps are environmental and antiwar themes, continuing a long tradition of subversive postage stamps by artists—including William Farley's 1971 anti-Vietnam War protest stamps which were keenly collected by the US Secret Service. The book is accompanied with a greatest hits sheet of perforated and gummed stamps where his best designs are featured: a gigantic crucifix being used as a mobile phone mast; Big Ben with a 9-11 style explosion ripping through the clock tower; and a clever follow-up to the gas mask stamp with the bust of a Queen-like figure wearing a haz-mat suit, gas mask and crown! Some themes are explored repeatedly to no great advantage, which Cauty seems to acknowledge with his 'Running Out of Ideas for Stamps Day' design.



*WE ARE THE TARGET PEOPLE* and *THEY QUICKLY RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER* are the most recent titles in illustrator Andy Smith's series of hand silkscreened books. They're a set format of twelve page, 14 x 14 cm booklets, silkscreened in two or three colours in editions of 300, which sell for a modest £3. Basically they're produced from a single A3 sheet of paper printed both sides then stapled and trimmed. It's a fun, winning formula which reminds me of those 1970's greetings cards with images on all four 'pages' rather than just the front of the card. *THEY QUICKLY RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER* is a one-line visual gag. An enormous finger stretches across the entire space of the first eight pages, only revealing itself to be a finger when you come to the fingernail and the very sensibly fleeing crowd of Lilliputian figures. Balancing illustration, handwritten and typeset text and printing methods perfectly, Andy Smith's books successfully combine the qualities of an artist's book, greetings card and mini-comic.

Can you get an ASBO for drawing? Can you get an ASBO for publishing a book? I don't know but it seems like Jody Barton is trying to find out with *EMBRYO BOY*. *EMBRYO BOY* is evicted prematurely from his original home and tries unsuccessfully to find a suitable one with/inside a surrogate mother. Homeless, the tiny, cigarette smoking *EMBRYO BOY* tries to make his way in the world and optimistically explores several career paths including strongman, cocktail waiter and grave digger. But being only a couple of inches

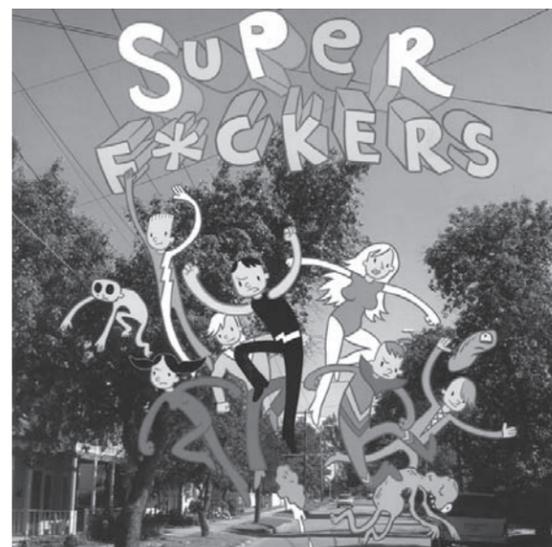


tall, life's not easy for this minuscule malcontent. As he says, "Popping out for cigarettes is not easy when you live in a womb." Guaranteed/intended to offend just about everyone who sees a copy, *EMBRYO BOY* is printed in duotones of black and a sludgy pinky-brown colour which looks like it's a mixture of all the leftover bits of ink the printers had lying around.



As someone who has bought flowers about three times in the last fifteen years, who has never been to east London's famous Columbia Road Flower market, which is only a few minutes from where I live, and who feels contemptuous each time I cycle past a local 'Floristry school', I'm surprised to find myself writing about a book called *THE FLOWER SHOP*. The reason I bought a copy is that it's by Leonard Koren, whose 13 *BOOKS* I've previously reviewed. My collection of Koren's books has grown recently with the addition of *abe/ebay-ed* copies of *17 BEAUTIFUL MEN TAKING A SHOWER* (1975), *WET MAGAZINE* (1979-81), *NEW FASHION JAPAN* (1984) and *HOW TO TAKE A JAPANESE BATH* (1992). *THE FLOWER SHOP*, subtitled 'Charm, grace, beauty, tenderness in a commercial context', is an unobtrusive study of the avant-garde Blumenkraft—"Possibly the most beautiful flower shop in the world". Through 110 pages Koren follows the shop from Conception (when owner Christine decides to set up her own shop) to its Birth (choice of location, architect, the design of displays and lighting), Life (the roles and personalities of the staff, presentation and packaging of flowers, customer relations) and sort

of Death (the careful and caring preparation of flowers for funerals). The layout of the book—with each page taken up with a single, functional photograph taken by the author—reflects the aesthetics of the shop; where attention to detail and keeping things fresh and stimulating extends as far as having the whole shop completely rearranged twice a week. I wouldn't be surprised if *THE FLOWER SHOP* becomes a cult bestseller in business bookshops.



Indie comix stalwart James Kochalka's new series is a superhero title—has he finally sold out and gone all commercial and bigtime? Well, with a title like *SUPER F\*CKERS* (that's how it appears on the cover) and the exhortation, "Hey, Kids! Take your dicks out of the Playstation 3 for one god damn minute and read some fucking comics", I think we can safely assume not. The *SUPER F\*CKERS* are a mismatched bunch of foul-mouthed, electrotrash club kids and ineffectual science geeks stuck together in a Big Brother style club house. When they should really be figuring out how to rescue their team mates from, 'uh, like, some other dimension', these misfits are preoccupied with bickering, ripping the piss out of each others' lame superpowers, finessing their bad attitudes and getting stoned out of their tiny minds on improvised drugs. All the while a queue of hopeful wannabe superheroes line up outside, desperate to join the team. (Maybe there's a place for *EMBRYO BOY* with the *SUPER F\*CKERS*?) Kochalka's artwork is in ultra bright acid colours, with some photo backgrounds and even a strip shot with a plasticine model of one character. V. stupid, v. juvenile and v. reprehensible, *SUPER F\*CKERS* is v. enjoyable. Issue #2 is out already and #3 is on the way—at last an indie comix series that comes out with something approaching regularity, so you don't have to scratch your head trying to remember what happened in the previous issue that came out over a year ago.

<http://www.mpawson.demon.co.uk/>

#### Contacts

- KAREN* magazine. £5.00. ICA bookshop, the Mall, London. [www.karenmagazine.com](http://www.karenmagazine.com)
- IMPERFECT SENSE*. £5.00. Available from bookartbookshop, 17 Pitfield Street, London, N1 6HB.
- SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER*. £16.95. [www.typocrat.com](http://www.typocrat.com) Available from MAGMA, Manchester & London.
- SALAMANDER DREAM*. \$15.00. From good comic shops, if you can find one. [www.adhousebooks.com](http://www.adhousebooks.com) [www.hopelerson.com](http://www.hopelerson.com)
- FILMS IN AMERICA 1929-1969*. Available from Cube Cinema, 4 Princess Row, Bristol, BS2 8NQ. [www.perplexed.cubecinema.com](http://www.perplexed.cubecinema.com)
- STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2*. £8.99. Available from the Aquarium, 10 Woburn Walk, London, WC1H 0JL. [www.CNPOnline.com](http://www.CNPOnline.com)
- WE ARE THE TARGET PEOPLE* and *THEY QUICKLY RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER*, £3.00 each, from Playlounge, Gosh and Best (all in London) [www.asmithillustration.com](http://www.asmithillustration.com)
- EMBRYO BOY*. £4.00. [www.jodybarton.co.uk](http://www.jodybarton.co.uk)
- THE FLOWER SHOP*. \$19.95. [leonardkoren.com](http://leonardkoren.com). Blumenkraft, Schliefmühlgasse 4, 1040 Vienna.
- SUPER F\*CKERS*. \$7.00. [www.topshelfcomix.com](http://www.topshelfcomix.com)