

WORKING HARD

The Comics of Tom Hart
by Tom Spurgeon

In a field historically dominated by art-work that can stand alone as illustration, Tom Hart gives us comics where the words can be isolated as poetry. His comic-book novella *New Hat* (Black Eye, 1995) opens with one of the funniest and most provocative uses of the English language in the medium's history. Tied to a wooden post by a band of crude, muttering strong-arms, the poet Pardon Parcel screeches a hymn of protest and moral outrage for the ages. Hart's exquisite word choices and assured pacing propel the reader through the eight pages like a gunshot, the rhythms of individual lines echoing in one's ears for the remainder of the volume. The speech is both touching and deeply ridiculous, acting as an introduction to the larger work's values and as a subtle character moment whereby the unbowed protagonist reclaims for himself the lunatic joys of verse. It is virtuoso stagecraft, and demands to be read out loud.

Strike me down!

With your clubs and truculence

"Club" — you call "club"

It extends like a stench from your filthy spirits!!!

Loud and furious mules!

Buck and whinny your indignation and subterfuge!!

Your "clubs" and your "clubs" —

Beating tirelessly against what might possibly repose you...

Bludgeon the still and resplendent

Bludgeon the shrill and decadent...

Bludgeon the curious, the composed

Bludgeon the recollectant, and received
Bludgeon it all!

Bludgeon everything into the lifeless masses of meretricious you value with such demanding contumacious
Sequestering off your degrees of bombastic approbation
Into plackets of desprite and repression
Finally securing your assiduous fealty to the regressive
repletion of your concerted condemnations
Writing, wallowing in the virulence of your caustic
vagarries and caprices
Locating, lastly, the steps of your stoic regard for the segregate and collusive

Spade or spade? Club or club?

Criminal! Criminal!

"Criminal!" you declare in your emphymematic wheeze...

And now you convoke your consternations

Regale in your vituperations

And ache to render your final wicked blows...
 You ask me —
 In the depths of your ignorance
 If I have a final request
 Yes! I have a final request!

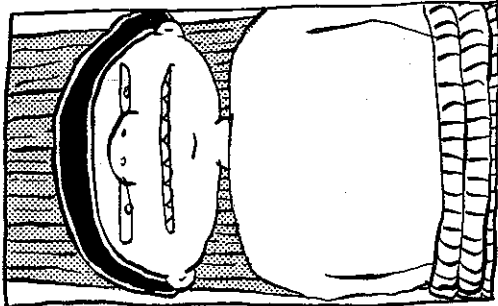
Do it fast and don't think about it all!

Such intensely fanciful writing is rare to the comics medium. On a first reading, Hart's skill with language recalls newspaper comic-strip masters like E.C. Segar (*Poppey*), Walt Kelly (*Pogo*) and George Herriman (*Krazy Kat*), each of whom gave idiosyncratic voice to their characters by grounding their speech in rough equivalents of regional dialect. But Hart is doing more than exploring specific aural peculiarities. Hart uses words to drive entire sequences, making some of his pages less about the juxtaposition of pictures than language broken across space. Hart upends the cinematic approach endorsed by the majority of cartoonists in favor of comics that draw equally from words and pictures, reviving ghosts of the medium's earliest decades, when fewer ideas about comics seemed certain and certain modes of storytelling had yet to be set in stone.

Yet much about Hart's work is modern. The closest popular cartooning equivalent to the opening suite of *New Hat* is Charles Schulz in full speechmaking mode, the word-intensive *Peanuts* Sundays featuring lengthy digressions by Linus, Schroeder or Charlie Brown. While Schulz's graceful line grounds his characters' aspirations in a way that makes their dialogue humane and slightly heart-breaking, Hart's cruder visual iconography gives his characters the energy and forcefulness that comes with impassioned conviction. Hart's comics force a reappraisal of the meaning of artistic craft in comics. While Schulz seems to have settled on his style deliberately and with a certain effect in mind, Hart appears to be drawing as well as he can with little choice in the styles available to him. But Hart's ability to render a world in ways that conform to high standards of illustration matters less than his drawing consistently and in a way that facilitates a range of emotional effect. His style may work for some as a rejection of the rigidities that come with an overemphasis on illustrator's craft, but seeing his art as primitive or playing the same role primitive work does in visual art misses the point. Hart recognizes — or his style has forced this recognition upon him — that drawing in comics plays more important roles than aesthetic. Hart's style has freed him to upset the hierarchy of standard narrative effects. The emphasis Hart gives language often casts the visual component of his comics as thematic or tonal support, a role for which his style is ideally suited. The only cartoonists of the last 25 years that came close to exploring this same fertile territory are the late fantasist Paul Ollivang (*Doogie*) and the collage artist and painter Ted Jouffas (*Stray*). "I think Tom Hart's one of the sharpest formalists in comics," says Highwater Books Publisher Tom Devlin, "so sharp that his formalism is rarely noticed." At age 33, Tom Hart walks in century-class artistic company. More than any cartoonist of his generation, Hart makes comics that celebrate and challenge his medium's rich foundation.

This Page: From *Hutch Owen: Emerging Markets*. © 2002 Tom Hart.

This Page: From *New Hat*. © 2002 Tom Hart.



HARD

Tom Hart

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comic store opened up in Kingston just as my senior year high school was starting, and only a few months after reading about *Dark Knight Returns* and running into *Cerebus* and *Fish Police*, I think at a rural flea market." Hart made several false assumptions about the state of the comic book market. "I walked past a row of Wonder Woman/Spider-Man, and I thought it was cute that they still were presenting these old-time superhero comics. I went right to the very small shelf of black-and-white and dove in. I didn't realize 'til I started working there that those dopey superhero comics were the engines of these stores." Hart would eventually work at the store, beginning his education in the specifics of the form. "Looking back, this and later working at [comics shop] Zanadu in Seattle, I see that this was my extended comics history lesson, for which I am very grateful."

Hart's formal arts education consisted of a year at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City, which at the time of his attendance counted amongst its faculty such master formalists as Harvey Kurtzman (the original *Mad*) and Will Eisner (*The Spirit*). Hart says he had been locked into attending SVA since the 10th grade, but found the atmosphere disappoint-



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Tom Hart was born in 1969 in the small town of Kingston, N.Y. Like every form of visual art except the 32-page superhero comic book that dominated spinner racks, "I grew up devouring comic strips, cartoon images, and funny illustrations," Hart says, citing greeting cards and the *Al Feldstein*-edited *Mad* magazine amongst a panoply of influences. His first, meaningful encounter with comic books came at the age of 16. "A

toonists such as Lewis, Ed Brubaker (Lowliffe), James Sturm (*The Golem's Mighty Swing*), Megan Keiso (*Artichoke Toes*), Jennifer Daydreamer (*Jennifer Daydreamer*), K. Thor Jensen (*A Short, Happy Life*), David Lasky (*Boom Boom*), and Jason Lutes (*Berlin*). Several members of this group lived together in various combinations, and many of them met to discuss comics, solve problems, and to criticize each other's work. "We were always conscious to make it about the work and about development," says Hart, "because we all had this desire to be better artists, period. It wasn't social at all. Eventually we realized we had created a network of friends, but it seemed to me that mostly we were just feeding each other ravenous hunger to make art and express our visions."

Hart impressed his fellow cartoonists with the broad nature of his comic influences, his attention to the writing in comics, and the value he placed on artistic process. Hart advocated on behalf of such exercises as doing comics based on flashcards, or limiting a four-panel work to a few pre-selected elements. "The plan was that each of us would come up with comics exercises, and each time we would do one," Megan Keiso recalls. Lutes remembers Hart as a skilled critic. "I developed a great respect for Tom's insightful analysis. We would sometimes get into heated discussions about a particular aspect of the medium, like the size of a panel or the consideration of a page break, and each time I would come away feeling like I had learned a little more of this evolving language, or even contributed to its evolution by talking about it."

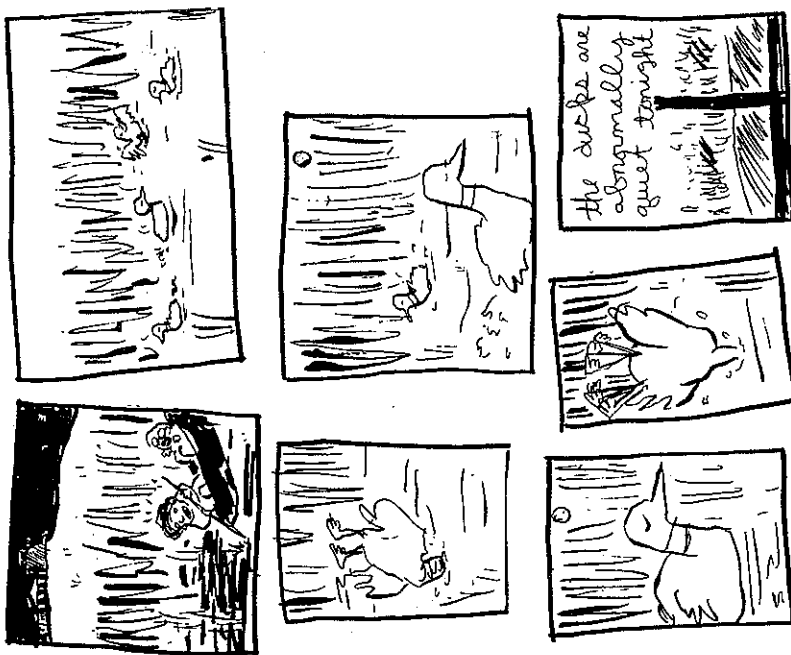
Hart continued making comics. Readers were able to mark Hart's development as a cartoonist through a series of mini-comics — self-published, Xeroxed booklets distributed in comic book shops and a smattering of book, magazine and music stores. Efforts like *Prince Frederick's Feet* (1991) and *Love Looks Left* (1994) are best remembered for Hart's raw visual style and the contrast the cartoonist explored between the endearing, romantic lyricism imbued in his characters and the underlying social criticism of the narratives through which they marched. Influences like Charles Schulz, small-press British cartoonist Glenn Dakin (*Albe*) and children's bookmaker Tore Jansson (*Moominrolls*) were obvious but not overly intrusive.

Not surprisingly given his passions, Hart's best mini-comics could be linked to formal experimentation. Two of the most interesting are *Maria* (1994) and *The Most Powerful Gate* (1995), both 24-hour comics, a storytelling exercise made popular by cartoonist, author, and devoted comics formalist Scott McCloud (*Understanding Comics*). The free-form nature of such comics, designed to be completed in a single 24-hour period, forced Hart to lether his fanciful stories to rock-solid narrative fundamentals or risk not being understood at all. Both *Maria* and *Gate* contained wistful narration and the specter of unrequited love familiar to readers of Hart's previous comics. But this time the stories were told through difficult panel to panel transitions, natural imagery that served as a thematic commentary on the narratives.

Best of all, Hart's visual style was beginning to coalesce in such a way that his comics started to feature a recognizable look their own: simple and spare, but also vital and pulsating with energy. Hart's characters had always taken full advantage of comics' reliance on cartoon effects: their faces twisted and contorted around the words they spoke for emphasis, every line in service of the emotions on display. But by the end of his mini-comics run, Hart had stepped over the fine line between making raw, unsophisticated drawings and claiming for his comics a raw, unsophisticated visual world. Tom Hart's drawings had become Tom Hart drawings. That artistic hurdle passed, Hart's simplicity became a virtue. He was now working with a visual syntax that was versatile but universally approachable. "I don't have a lifelong love for comics, but

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ing, his passion for the form far outstripping presiding student culture: "I used to bitch about SVA that what I wanted/expected out of college was *The Paper Chase*. Do you remember the TV show on CBS and then Showtime in the '80s with John Houseman as a truculent law professor? These kids stayed up all night discussing the issues and challenges raised in class the day before, time after time. And of course, it was art school, so it was pot and *The Cure*, and I was more bed-dled than angry about it, though I was probably mad by the time I didn't sign up for a second year."

By this time Hart had made an important connection with a same-age peer, the comic book humorist Sam Henderson (*Magic Whistle*), one of many important professional relationships Hart would forge in the years to follow. Another friendship struck up around comics, this one with eventual collaborator Jon Lewis (*The Swamp*), led to Hart's relocation to Seattle and its burgeoning comics scene. As described by Hart and Lewis in 1997, the Seattle cartooning community of the early 1990s was split into three large groups: those associated with Fantagraphics Books, a group of "furry animal" artists centered around publisher Ed Vick, and a small faction of alternative cartoonists in the early stages of their artistic development, a group that included Hart.

In Seattle, Hart found the intellectual back-and-forth he had desired in art school. At various times, his immediate circle of peers included car-



ts such as Lewis, Ed Brubaker (*Lowlife*), James Sturm (*The Golem's Swing*), Megan Kelso (*Artichoke Tales*), Jennifer Daydreamer (*Jennifer*), K. Thor Jensen (*A Short, Happy Life*), David Laskey (*Bloom*), and Jason Lutes (*Berlin*). Several members of this group lived in various combinations, and many of them met to discuss, solve problems, and to criticize each other's work. "We were conscious to make it about the work and about development," says "because we all had this desire to be better artists, period. It wasn't at all. Eventually we realized we had created a network of friends

and when comics are highly detailed and complex, I tend not to want to look at them," says Megan Kelso. "I loved Tom's comics for that reason. They were appealing without making you look cross-eyed."

As pleasurable as they were to read, nothing about Hart's mini-comics prepared readers for his first graphic novella, *Hutch Owen's Working Hard* (1994). Published through a comics art grant established by *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* co-creator Peter Laird, *Hutch Owen* describes the title character's doomed struggle against a childhood rival turned corporation head honcho on a battlefield of slogans, competing memories, and a small boy's cobbled-together clubhouse. In some ways *Hutch Owen* functioned as a more fully realized version of Hart's mini-comics work. The character of Hutch Owen is a romantic loner who seems happier, smarter, and more fully alive than those around him, due in great part to living a life without economic or artistic compromise. And Hart's sense of humor is on full display, casting a welcome, slightly disreputable pall on the entire affair. At one point, Owen's straight-faced life lessons include exhorting his teen-age acolyte to masturbate constantly. "That semen fucks with your head — get it out of your system." The length of *Hutch Owen* allowed Hart to develop character-based humor with more significant payoffs. Owen and his corporate nemesis Wormer are extreme personalities, and many of the story's funniest moments come from their excessive enthusiasm. Wormer screams at and browbeats his corporate yes-men with a combination of Daffy Duck's logic and Roy Cohn's cruelty, while Owen stages proxies of arguments with handpuppets and drifts off into childhood reverie long enough for others to look on and stare. Any fan of Hart's earlier work would have been delighted by the richness of this material.

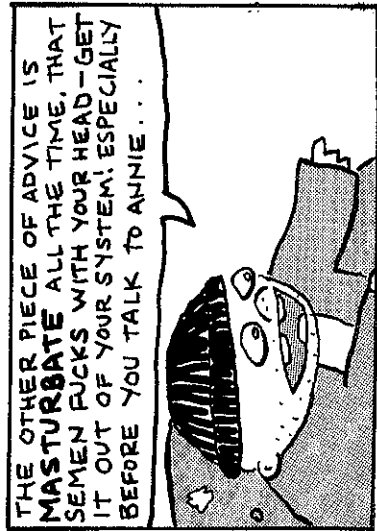
Top and Bottom: From *Hutch Owen's Working Hard*. © 2002 Tom Hart.



wrote and Hart drew, although both contributed to the visual breakdown of the page. The stories were divided between short fantasy comics (the lead character had a brother who was a fish) and longer, more realistic pieces. Despite keeping Lewis and Hart under close editorial control and paying for all of their work, Kodansha only used 28 pages and eventually killed the program. The inception of the project allowed Hart to quit a day job washing dishes. He even made plans to live off of Kodansha money in Morocco. But the reality is that neither the plans nor the comics came off as hoped. "This was always a source of immense frustration for us," says Hart, summarily, "I never believed this *Pitch* project worked."

Meanwhile, Hart's primary North American publisher, Black Eye, suspended publication on the serialization of Hart's graphic novel *The Sands* before its completion, promising a collection, but removing Hart's presence from the market until it was completed. A planned regular series called *Triple Dare* (Alternative Comics, 1998), to feature comics created under formal restraints by Hart, Lewis, and James Kochalka, took five years to produce the just-released second issue. The easiest place for many to find Hart after *New Hat* was through the tail end of his estimable run of self-published work, the mini-comics *The Ditch*, *The River...* (1996) and *Ramadan* (1997).

When *The Sands* was finally released in 1998 by Black Eye, shortly before that publisher closed its doors for good, Hart's artistic range had



Taken solely as a manic comedy, *Hutch Owen's Working Hard* would have been a memorable standard format debut. But several scenes of pitch-perfect sociopolitical satire raise it to the level of that decade's best works. In his introduction to *The Collected Hutch Owen* (Top Shelf, 1999), the New Zealand cartoonist Dylan Horrocks celebrates the rarity of an American cartoonist with political insight and correctly identifies where Hart scores the most points. "This is a story about the way corporate power co-opts rebellious counter-cultures and movements, rendering them harmless — all in pursuit of profit." True, but Hart's contribution to social dialogue at that post-grunge, pre-WTO protest moment in American history wasn't simply pointing out the noxious marketing of Malcolm X or the lunacy of linking punk rock to an automobile purchase; everyone who didn't explicitly know that this was a false bill of goods felt it in his gut. What distinguished *Hutch Owen* is Hart's courage to repeat these arguments loudly and with moral conviction, refusing to make peace with the cynicism that mumbles its protests of cultural co-optation because to speak up might make one seem less cool. When, at the end of the story, Hutch Owen is soundly defeated by both the physical equipment knocking down the fort and by Wormer marketing a protest videogame with Owen's likeness, it's both a savvy nod to the nature of the struggle (riot videogames are out there) and a knock at anyone whose belief in what Owen stood for was wrapped up in a fortuitous outcome.

Hart followed *Hutch Owen's Working Hard* with the shorter and more intensely lyrical *New Hat*. In addition to that work's extravagant use of language and controlled pacing, *New Hat* allows for a deeper rumination on the role of art and protest via overt manipulation of the narrative. The story progresses from Pardon Parcel's dramatic end to the seemingly meaningless war-related fatality of The President, a former leader turned earnest junior poet. Hart then jumps back in time to walk us through The

President's decision to leave his office in search of greater meaning, and an uncomfortable confrontation he has with a cynical Parcel. Knowing what will happen to these characters infuses this initial confrontation with a great air of sadness. Given his violent end, it's difficult not to wince at Parcel's insistence that the greatest need in life is to have one's ass kicked, no matter how hilariously the scene plays as a misbegotten meeting between an artist and his hero. But the lingering effect by putting the destination first and journey second is to feel encouraged by the characters' search for a moral life. Hart says he believes in formal play in part because he believes it can lead "to new emotional territory." In *New Hat* the twists in narrative allow him to celebrate life's process in a way that calls attention to its frailty. The President is conflicted at book's end over the proper course his life should take; both he and the reader sense his death.

The next few years were marked by frustration. Hart began collaborating with close friend Jon Lewis on a comic series called *Pitch Unger* for the Japanese publisher Kodansha through their American Artists program, producing 160 pages of comics between 1996 and 1998. Lewis and Hart drew, although both contributed to the visual breakdown of the page. The stories were divided between short fantasy comics (the lead character had a brother who was a fish) and longer, more realistic pieces. Despite keeping Lewis and Hart under close editorial control and paying for all of their work, Kodansha only used 28 pages and eventually killed the program. The inception of the project allowed Hart to quit a day job washing dishes. He even made plans to live off of Kodansha money in Morocco. But the reality is that neither the plans nor the comics came off as hoped. "This was always a source of immense frustration for us," says Hart, summarily, "I never believed this *Pitch* project worked."

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expanded exponentially. *The Sands* featured long meditations on the nature of love and devotion, and a bouncy, humorous secondary narrative about the teacher-student relationship between the protagonist Hawk Troy and a profane boy king. *The Sands* works most powerfully as a narrative about isolation and lack of direction. Troy not only lacks the moral compass of earlier Hart creations, he lacks for things to do to fill his time. Even his exact vocation remains indeterminate. Although Troy loves Margie enough to follow her to a foreign country in support of insect research, he seems to find little day-to-day solace in their relationship. Tenuous connections with locals contain undercurrents of contempt or disinterest. The achingly spare countryside Hart draws also seems to work against Troy making a meaningful connection. When Troy does manage to triumph over his ennui, through organizing a child's tea party or simply fantasizing about something exciting, it becomes difficult to resist seeing these small events as minor epiphanies in contrast to the emotional bruising that precedes and follows. A slightly fragmented narrative only increases the reader's sympathy for Troy's feelings of disorientation and loneliness. *The Sands* is an unsparring, emotionally honest work.

With *Banks/Erubanks* (Top Shelf, 1999), Hart began a cycle of stories that stand in contrast to, or act as commentaries upon, his earlier works. The life of protagonist Barney Banks revolves around his dog, a demeaning job, watching movies alone, and leering at women. In many ways, Banks recalls a "real world" Hutch Owen, and the opening scenes that depict the character's life in pathetic detail are as brutal and judiciously unsparring as any comics narrative in memory. The work's second half, where Banks undergoes a directionless adventure in a storm-threatened coastal town, proved a minor letdown. Unlike past works where expectations, Banks stumbles through exactly the sort of non-event for which he seemed destined from page one.

Hart continued in self-reflexive mode that year by returning to his best-known character with the first of three stories that eventually saw print alongside *Hutch Owen's Working Hard* as the major trade paperback release *The Collected Hutch Owen* (Top Shelf, 2000). *Hutch Owen: Emerging Markets* is a mostly lifeless sequel to the original story, re-stating the original novella's critique of American culture by showing how its corporations export to and exploit their foreign markets. The visual iconography Hart assembled for the character and his world seemed as lively and energetic as the work done five years earlier. But despite some hints at a more deeply layered back story for Owen (Hutch's mother has made him uncomfortable around Christians) and a stage piece set at an exotic holiday celebration whose details feel observed rather than constructed from scratch, Hutch Owen's return found him saying little he hadn't enunciated

ed earlier, more clearly and with greater force.

Hutch Owen: Stocks are Surging and *Hutch Owen: The Road to Self* were different beasts entirely, and marked another leap forward in Hart's artistic development. In these stories, Hart examines past assumptions through stories of greater narrative and thematic complexity, all without sacrificing the clarity of his vision. In the opening scenes of *Stocks are Surging*, Hart depicts a homeless Owen as cold, wet, and defeated. The sight disturbs, but by temporarily disabling Owen's rock-solid sense of himself, Hart is better able to make an unflinching case why our mostly fallen world needs out-of-step iconoclasts like Hutch Owen. Owen's situation is so desperate and his resigned nature, when he takes a temporary job, so discouraging, that the cascade of brutal positions Hart takes at modern moneymaking enervate like celebratory reaffirmations of the lead character's rightful place in the world. Owen is surrounded by so much stupidity — inane bus rides, casual displays of package-grabbing sexuality — the reader gains confidence that Owen can at least use the dimwitted bodies of his co-workers to climb out of his hole.

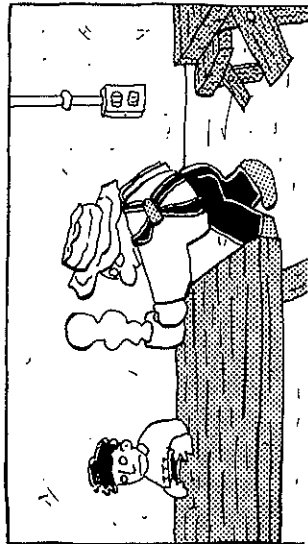
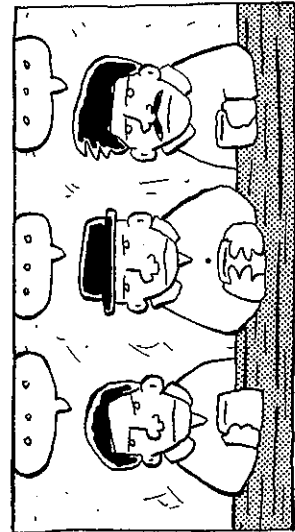
Hart surrounds Owen with supporting characters of unexpected nuance in *Stocks are Surging*, something he continues to even richer effect in *The Road to Self*. In that story, a lonely Owen comes to terms with an old girlfriend's big-money publishing gig in a subtle passive-aggressive fashion. Hart's satirical ear allows him to brutally dissect the culture of this new milieu. He sums up everything you need to know about corporate creativity in one background exchange between cubicles:

"Will you send me that pooppy e-mail?"
 "Sure — do you have any Mylania?"

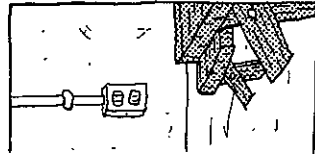
But what nudges *Road to Self* into greatness is the protagonist's savagely conflicted reaction to the road not taken and the humor that springs forth from his attempts to have it both ways. Owen tries to write his own version of his ex-girlfriend's magazine, hopelessly attempts to cadge a freelance assignment, and in the end touchingly... admits? lies? confesses? that the story his ex wrote in a recent issue is really good. Hart says that his return to Hutch Owen is both an exploration of the connection such a character can create between audience and artist, and the fact that the stories seem better to him when Owen is present. *The Road to Self* serves as a positive affirmation of both theories. It is every bit as affecting and funny as the original novella.

Since 2000, the majority of Hart's new work has appeared in on-line venues, a move about which the cartoonist says, "It is a lot about distribution, and a lot about killing trees and wasting people's money and cluttering their houses with shit. I don't think it has changed anything I do artistically." Depending on how you look at it, *Hutch Owen: Anistatle* (topshelf.comix.com, 2001) is either a solid addition to the Hutch Owen canon or

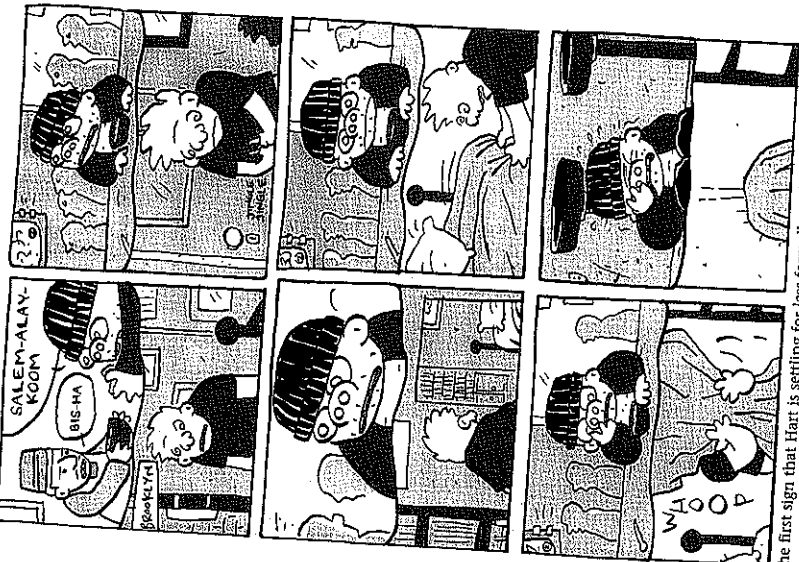
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This Page: From *The Sands*. © 2002 Tom Hart.



This Page: From Hart's contribution to *Alternative Comics*' 9-11 *Emergency Relief* benefit book. © 2002 Tom Hart.

the first sign that Hart is setting for less formally ambitious work in order to maintain a comics franchise. The coffee shop and corporate branding camp settings in *Aristotle* fail to measure up to the more archetypal settings of earlier Owen stories, at least in terms of offering interesting commentary on Owen's developing character. But Hart is still able to write a few exquisite truths from the details: the wariness with which Owen's students treat him, the ease with which a computer-savvy geek takes over his discussion group, and the contrast between Owen's willfully innocent flirtation with capitalism and a loutish barista's cynical desire to make money so he can sue his record label. Hart's style seems perfectly suited to the computer screen. Driven by their verbal component, with simple shapes that communicate effectively and Hart's clear sense of design and pacing, on-line comics have in Hart a fine spokesman to help the tactile readership through the difficult transition from holding comics in one's lap to negotiating around them via the computer screen.

Tom Hart's current projects are the serials *Hatch Owen: Public Relations* (modernfables.com, 2002) and *Trunktown* (serializer.net, 2002), the latter a collaboration with the writer Shaenon Garity on a site Hart edits. Both are important experiments in subscription model comics services, as well as opportunities to recognize the wide variety of work available on-line. Unlike most alternative cartoonists, whose creative control over each project often extends to the minute details of its package design, Hart is happy to share the creative burden of *Trunktown* with Garity. He does so in part by necessity: "I love and need there to be a work that is all mine, where all the variables are provided, or at

least enabled, by me, but to take on a second project and again handle all that needs to be handled in a comic — plotting, writing, laying out, penciling, etc. — I just can't do it. I'm not good enough, quick enough, fast enough on my feet." Hart also says a project like *Trunktown* allows him to work on the specific component skills. The Hutch Owen story is as solid as the one previous to it. But the art on *Trunktown*, a picaresque comedy in a mythical kingdom that unites past Hart characters with newer creations, is looser than anything Hart has done before, bursting with energy reminiscent of early cartoonists like Ham Fisher (*Mutt and Jeff*) and Roy Crane (*Wash Tubbs*). It reads like an odd love letter on yellow newsprint, a heavy dinner in an older relative's home where very little English is spoken, a 19th century blog.

At an age when many cartoonists are just beginning to assemble the skills necessary to create a recognizable idiom, Tom Hart can boast of hundreds of pages of quality work and at least two great novellas, both featuring the Hutch Owen character: *Working Hard and Road to Self*. Hart has also become an arts comics community fixture, following years of living in towns with lively comics scenes by settling down in New York with his wife Leela Cozman, teaching at SYA and editing the art-comics friendly serializer.net. Teaching has taught Hart, as he puts it, to "put up or shut up" when it comes to his drawing, and his line has never looked more expressive or versatile than on pieces like *Public Relations* or the two-page short "Zombies Loves Comics" that appeared in the anthology *Bogus Dead* (Jerome Gaynor, 2001). Blessed with an understanding of formal properties that is neither showy nor wasted on his page, Hart only has to live up to the expectations fostered by past work to continue being a cartoonist that entertains and occasionally demands us to ruminate on the nature of the medium. When you're rightfully claimed as both the paragon of comics simplicity and as an exemplar of the formally daring, one's artistic future is a wide-open page. Tom Hart will no doubt find beautiful language with which to fill it.

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