

**miniMAG**

*issue133*  
sensitive young men





# I'm Trying to Say I Love You, But The Only Thing I Can Do Is Come Up With Awful Ideas for Reality Television Shows

Dolan Morgan

## *Kid Prison Surprise!*

In this children's show, intended to run in twenty-three minute segments with commercial breaks, a group of elementary school students is corralled into a remote field where they are provided a set of construction materials, tools, and protective gear. After a brief presentation on how to avoid OSHA violations, the fifteen children are left entirely alone and tasked with figuring out what to do with these steel bars, bags of concrete, and heavy machinery. The fun of the show is that the kids are totally naive and don't know anything at all (some can't even tie their shoes), which makes viewers feel good about themselves, or like the viewers are not alone in the world, because we also stumble around not knowing what to do with the random objects and artifacts that surround us in our work, families, and endless days. Every morning, we look at the junk piled up in our homes and offices and streets and don't know where to begin or how we ended up here, or why we are responsible for what happens next, and it's the same for these idiot kids and all this crap in front of them, so the whole thing is pretty relatable, and you just have to laugh. Of course, the real twist of the show happens as a result of the "challenges": a set of ridiculous daily tasks

that the children must undertake, seemingly for no reason at all, only loosely connected to any kind of thematic thread or meaning, but impossible to stop, they just keep coming and nobody knows why—the result of which is that, with each challenge completed, the fourth and fifth graders gather more info about what they should be building, and how. Gathering information feels like progress, but it actually isn't. The audience knows from the get go, of course, that the contestants are constructing a prison into which the kids themselves will one day be placed, and half the entertainment is watching as the children slowly piece this fun fact together. The other half of the entertainment is waiting to find out whether or not this season's crew of innocents will keep going like dummies or if they'll reject the whole plan, and if so, when. They almost always build it, wholesale, but every season has an episode where there's no turning back, and what I am trying to say is that I don't care if we build that thing or not, you and me, I just like being here with you, with your life intertwined into mine, even with all this stuff that I don't understand, and it doesn't matter if we are constructing, with our own stupid hands, the very box into which we will someday be locked, because I'm pretty sure we already have the keys. The show also features cameos by popular musical guests nobody cares about.

### *Water Polo Prom: Global Ocean Edition*

In this show delivering a novel combination of sportsmanship, fashion, and major life milestones, we follow a group of twenty-six high school seniors as they dream about, stress over, and ultimately get ready for one of the most important moments of their high school career: prom! The twist? In order to make it to the dance, they'll need to compete in a game of water polo—played across the entirety of the Atlantic Ocean's forty-one million square miles. Each of the twenty-six teenagers will be dropped into a random spot, anywhere from Nova Scotia to South Africa or any place in between. When they land alone in those dark waters, buoyed by small flotation devices and carrying light plastic mallets, they'll know that somewhere out in the vast expanse are three important things: 1) a tiny yellow ball, 2) a set of nets into which that ball must be placed, and 3) twenty five other players, bobbing somewhere in the waves, all of them equally lost and confused. The joy of the show, of course, is witnessing how each contestant's confidence in their own knowledge steadily diminishes with each passing hour. They come in thinking that other people exist, that true intimacy is achievable, and that winning has some kind of tangible meaning or value, but the infinite and empty horizon quickly batters this epistemology out of

each player, whether they cling to a delirious faith or not. How long will it take before a numbing fatalism overtakes them all? Random deliveries of dresses, tuxes, corsages, and tiaras into the waters add an element of chaos to the proceedings by providing totems of meaning and grand design, but really only serve to ensure that our official betting pools are robust and exciting. And, of course, the miracle of the show, the real money maker—the thing that keeps us all coming back for more—is that rare unicorn moment when any of these contestants actually stumbles upon another player, even from a great distance. We see them call to each other, and we hope that the waves are kind to them, we hope that their arms are not so weakened by their pasts that they cannot fight the currents ahead. And if we are lucky, this season we might see that gorgeous embrace, two weeping figures so grateful to have found each other, grabbing and clawing at one another like we each contain a secret door to some other, perfect place, which is in fact the truth, and the audience is reminded of that impossible fact, undeniably, when these players reach one another and we see those doors burst wide open right before our eyes, we see it in their faces. And what I'm trying to say is that I have walked through those doors, too, and into that perfect place, and I want to thank you for showing me how to find it, by just being here at all, because the map has always been a quiet, uneventful day with you by my side. The last episode is the prom, and it's usually kind of boring, because by this point, the contestants, if they are still alive, have already discovered a greater sense of joy or terror at the world around them than any prom can offer or convey, but there's also a dance-off that usually gets people pretty pumped.

### *Plastic Kitchen Improv*

In this competitive cooking show, ten aspiring chefs from across the nation, each in their early twenties, are violently stuffed into a van, taken to an abandoned warehouse, and forced to cook all day, every day. In order to win, they'll be placed on teams of two, with each pair needing to muster the best meals they've ever produced, bringing to bear every culinary skill and restaurant resource they have. But for one unlucky chef duo, all of the ingredients provided—every vegetable, meat, herb, and spice, every bottle, pan, and knife—is made of cheap, rubbery plastic. These unwitting cooks have no real food—only facsimiles, only children's toys. But they must keep going, there's nowhere else to run. So they cook, or at least *pretend* to cook. That's where the improv comes in. Together, they go through the motions. They follow the recipes. They toss, chop, blend and saute; they bake,





spritz, and even carefully plate. Like it's all really happening, which in some ways it is. There's a rhythm to it, this pretending, and the joy of the show is in watching the idiot pair give it their all with next to nothing and no hope whatsoever. Of course, the bigger joy is that it's not just one team stuck in this situation, it's all of them, each simultaneously thinking that they're the only ones who must secretly pretend to know what they are doing—as they all fumble like morons with insufficient materials and impossible constraints. Each new day is a gorgeous ballet of complete idiocy and earnest dedication. And, of course, there is a kind of truth that emerges between two people who commit wholeheartedly to that pantomime of a real life, a kind of



freedom accessible only to those mutually resigned to shared failure. What I'm trying to tell you is: I think it's okay that we were lost for all those years. We got it wrong, all of it, every day, and I'm grateful. There are few greater joys than being a dumb mistake hand in hand with another mistake just as earnest and ill conceived. The show is sponsored by a set of self-cleaning ovens that are impossible for actual humans to afford, but you can pretend to own one if your heart is big enough.

### *Trivia Loops*

In this show, which airs daily, a group of eight middle-aged professionals immerses themselves in the world of competitive bar trivia. Each season closely follows two teams, getting to know the quirky characters as they assemble, prepare, and compete in the classic game of obscure facts and figures. What sets this show apart from the rest, of course, is that the trivia questions don't change, are always the same, and repeat every night, right down to the phrasing, order, and format. The challenge for the players is not whether their team's particular blend of backgrounds, skills, and hobbies affords them a leg up in knowing more facts than the competition—remember, the answers never change and everyone knows them by heart—but instead whether they can withstand the monotony of repeating the same arbitrary details and engaging in the same rituals night after night. At first, there is a kind of joy and humor in the participants coming to terms with the questions and answers, beginning to understand that they are unchanging, and familiarizing themselves with the particular cadence of the game's unalterable proceedings. It's adorable until it isn't, which is quickly the case. Luckily, it's only after that initial sheen fades that the show truly takes off. Once the participants realize their contract has no exit strategy other than death, meaning they might have to go on answering these same questions basically forever, viewers watch as that initial amusement descends into despair, defiance, and absurdity. Some nights, the teams barely whisper the answers from where they have dropped themselves lifelessly on the floor. Other nights, they scream or weep, ripping up scrap paper and slamming doors. Some players leave and never come back, only to discover that it's just more trivia, the same questions, the same answers, no matter where they go or what team they join. The real joy of the show is when teams discover the space between each question, when they find the secret silence running through the patterns of each long evening. The architecture of the game becomes a kind of latticework upon which they can hang their pursuit of real intimacy, arriving at a kind of knowledge that stands outside of

facts and figures. What I'm trying to say is that there are questions about a person, the answers to which cannot be put into words, answers that can only be understood and expressed by how we move through the world, and that I feel safer in this life because of your presence within it, and how that presence answers a question I didn't know I was asking. The show also features nightly nacho recipes and cocktail ideas that nobody likes, but it's hard to stop at this point, because they just feel like part of the show, and honestly it's okay that some things are bad.

### *The Wall Vacuum*

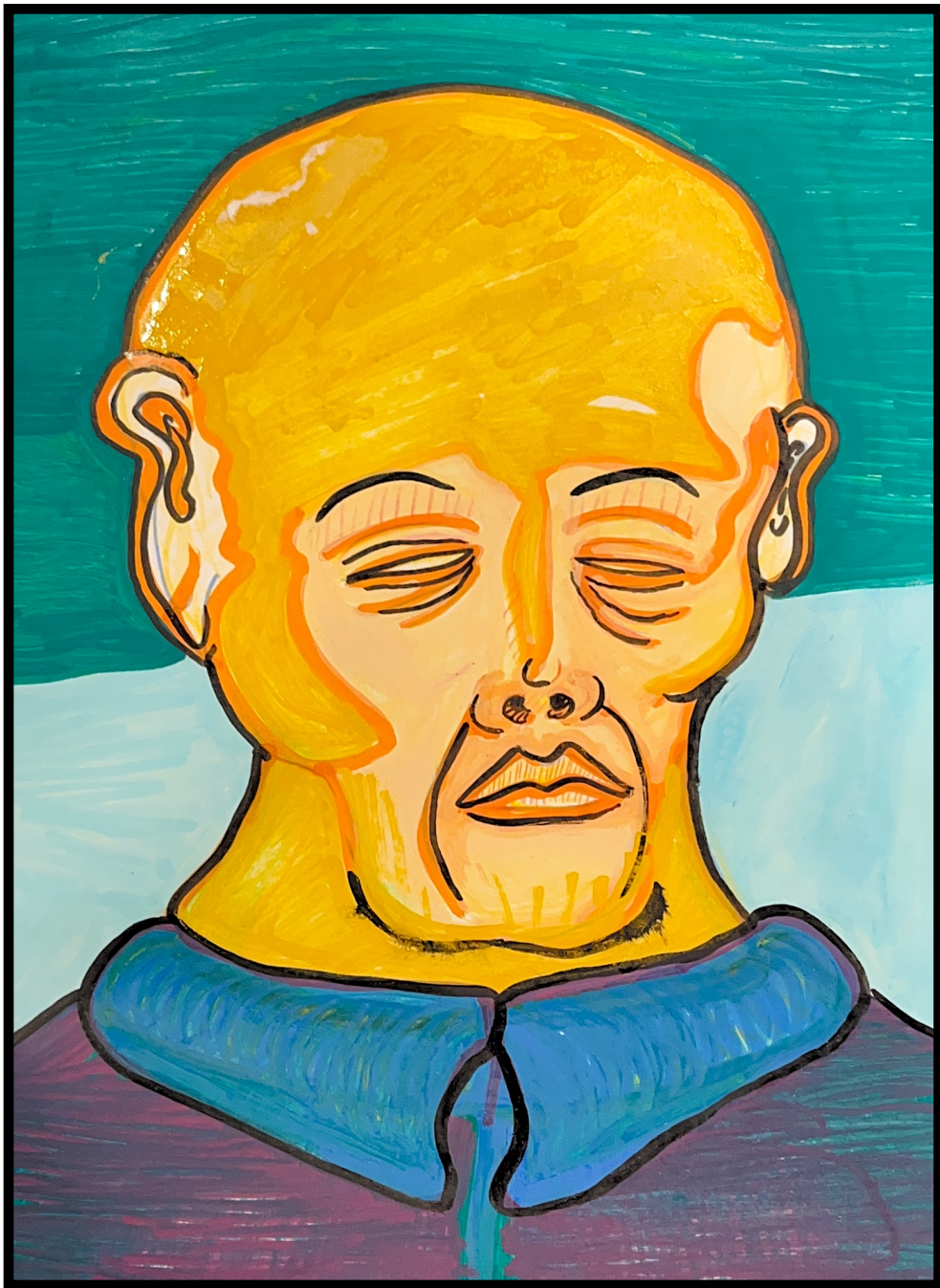
In this exciting addition to the canon of “housemate shows,” a la *The Real World* and *Big Brother*, audiences are introduced to two people forced to live with one another for as long as they can. We pick up not when the participants first enter this living arrangement, but many years into the process, when the contestants are already quite old. And in a fascinating twist, the two participants—despite occupying the same home for decades—are separated by a glass partition, with Participant A on the left and Participant B on the right. They can see each other and speak to one another, but they cannot reach each other. The entertainment value comes from the show's final element: on one side of the partition, the massive “wall vacuum” hums and stutters, a giant puckering mass of tissue drawing one continuous breath, its great engine always trying to drag Participant B further to the right and into its unseen depths. The fun starts when Participant B is no longer able to deftly avoid the pull of the wall vacuum and becomes ensnared in its gravity. Participant A can only watch helplessly from their side of the glass. The vacuum's suction is slow, much like quicksand, and the material of the wall is soft, so at first Participant B merely sticks to it, floundering like a fly caught in a glue trap. But it's also clear there's no escape, a fact both participants don't want to accept. Via the comms system, the two are able to talk, and through an arrangement of pulleys and gears, Participant A can provide B with small comforts like water, food, and medicine, and can ensure B's favorite blanket or stuffed animal is always within reach. But the pull of the vacuum continues, and Participant B sinks deeper each day, until only B's hands are reaching from the wall, their body lost to that unknown place. Participant A directs the pulleys and gears to find a makeshift way to hold B's hands as best they can until even these small pieces of B slip away into the wall, too. Only then does the glass partition rise—and the show ends with Participant A taking a hesitant and pitiful step across the divide. What I'm trying to say is that there is no way I can do this with you, it will kill me and I'm so afraid, and also: I will do this with

you, will play either part, no questions asked. All of the hand towels on the show are available at a discount at our online store with code *LongGoodbyeStayDry*.

### *Single Item Scavenger Hunt*

This unprecedented show features a scavenger hunt where over a million participants each seek a personalized item that they've lost long ago. Every episode follows one new contestant (the show is over a million episodes long) as they rummage through closets, attics, and basements, and then travel from town to town asking anyone for even the smallest detail about the thing they have lost. What the audience knows—and what the participants do not—is that the things they are looking for are not only missing, but non-existent. Nobody is ever going to find anything because the missing things are not here, they are gone. The joy of each episode is in wondering whether or not the contestants will come to discover this fact, or even remember that they've already known it, in fact have always known it. When a contestant sits down at a roadside cafe after searching for so long, exhausted, having gone this impossible distance on their own, truly battered by the weight of what remains unfound, and when we see that they are somehow smiling now—at the breeze, at the sound of cars along the highway, at the reach of sunlight on the first warm day in many months—we want to know what they are thinking. Each episode ends without ever revealing the answer, of course, and that's what makes the show perfect, that sense of irresolution and incompleteness, amplifying how we want to believe the thought but cannot find it, and so what I'm trying to say, of course, is that I'm thinking that same exact thought right now—and will keep thinking it long after we are gone.





## I Have Two Bangles And One Edge

Kushal Poddar

One of these  
I wear when my wife reminds me  
she bought it for me before we met.  
The other my daughter  
sometimes lends me to ornate  
my wrist, too empty for her reign.  
The knife opens packages  
we order, mostly stationery.  
Papers cut my fingers sometimes.  
The knife glints sympathy

## Three Vasectomy Insights

Terry Trowbridge

Do not shower after your vasectomy.  
Getting shampoo in your eyes stings.  
Getting shampoo in your vasectomy  
can be measured with Scovilles.

It's not the same as Hans Moleman's opus  
*Man Getting Hit by Football*  
but boy did my left leg kick.

Market research is a fool's game.  
Before the procedure I informally polled 4 men who had it done.  
One said, "I had it done on a Friday and by Monday I was skiing again."  
One said, "My urologist's name was Dr. Love  
and he made me say his name and the procedure before he would let me  
sign off on it."

They all said,

"Pfft you'll be fine. Two days, tops."

"Pfft you'll be fine. Two days, tops."

"Pfft you'll be fine. Two days, tops."

"Pfft you'll be fine. Two days, tops."

I was that one guy who took a while.

Only one of the men saw me the day after.

"Did you do the kick?" he asked, laughing again,

"Everybody does the kick."



## Going in Circles Shaped Like Hearts

Richard LeDue

The poems have gone quiet,  
like a sad man afraid to say goodbye  
in a crowded hallway  
to someone he never told  
he loved,  
but then this one arrives,  
so sure it has more places to go  
than just this page  
and desperate not to think  
about all the love poems  
it left behind.



## Strawberry Candies

Sid Lilly

Every Sunday, he stole from the bowls of hard candy  
that rested on the table that held the church bulletins.  
He shared them from his pockets in the bathroom  
As we both hid from a god who didn't love us.

I called that love.

The taste of fake strawberries equals kisses goodbye. That  
never got to leave wooden church bathroom stalls. The  
church buried him in a suit with his hair combed back. He  
didn't own a suit,  
They had to pin the back of the jacket to fit,  
And I never once saw his hair behind his ears.  
They promised that god loved him,  
This pale, suited, and neat-haired boy,  
Because they preached that the real him was burning the week before.

It was love

Soldiers made of memories march in lines inside me.  
I puke them out  
And liberate them from my eyes.  
They snake across my body to remind me of  
Fake strawberry candies, wooden stalls, and  
Sermons of torture due to first loves.  
These little marching men carry  
Razor wire, box cutters, and pocket knives  
To build their trenches in my skin.

It was pristine love

Why would no one let me,  
Climb into his much too big suit jacket?  
So to be with him one last time  
Encased in wood.

## red

airport

all my lines have vocal fryyy  
and bash the libs  
and scorn the chuds.  
all my lines come from a pair  
of disembodied, self-  
desiccated, voices in lower  
upper brookhanttan  
(idk, i've never been to new york).

so i go for a walk around a neighborhood  
rich men in richmond  
with an inner monologue that sounds  
like a nasally jewish millennial being  
made fun of by his ex and her friend.  
all while humming "The Ballad of Yoko  
and John"  
atleast the skies are beautiful and orange  
and blue and white as the sun sets and the  
moon shows and my dog is old but still a cutie  
and it's a good joint and maybe i'll start a podcast  
and crucifixion, on a day like this,  
sounds almost pleasant  
almost

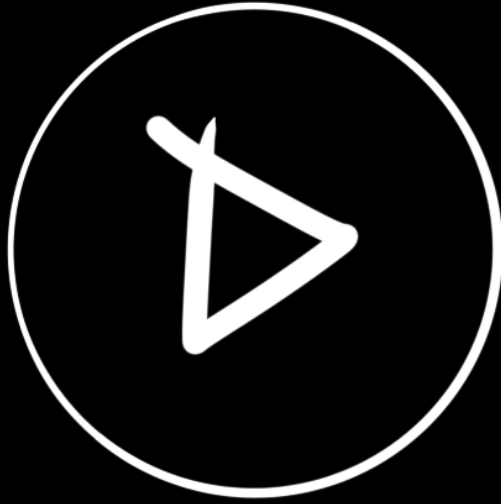


## Lies

NDS

Lies have lives like you and I  
Except their heart does not pump blood  
Truth diminished for a lie to persist  
They are made by men who are made of mud.





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Art and “Lies” by NDS

Page 1: Colorful\_Faces

Page 5: Thoughtful\_Man

Page 9: Face2

Page 11: Yellow\_and\_Green\_Man

Page 14: Face1

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“I’m Trying to Say I Love You, But The Only Thing I Can Do Is Come Up With Awful Ideas for Reality Television Shows” by Dolan Morgan

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“Three Vasectomy Insights” by Terry Trowbridge

Website: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Terry-Trowbridge>

“Going in Circles Shaped Like Hearts” by Richard LeDue

Website: <https://mailchi.mp/256525ddc2fd/stuff-poetry>

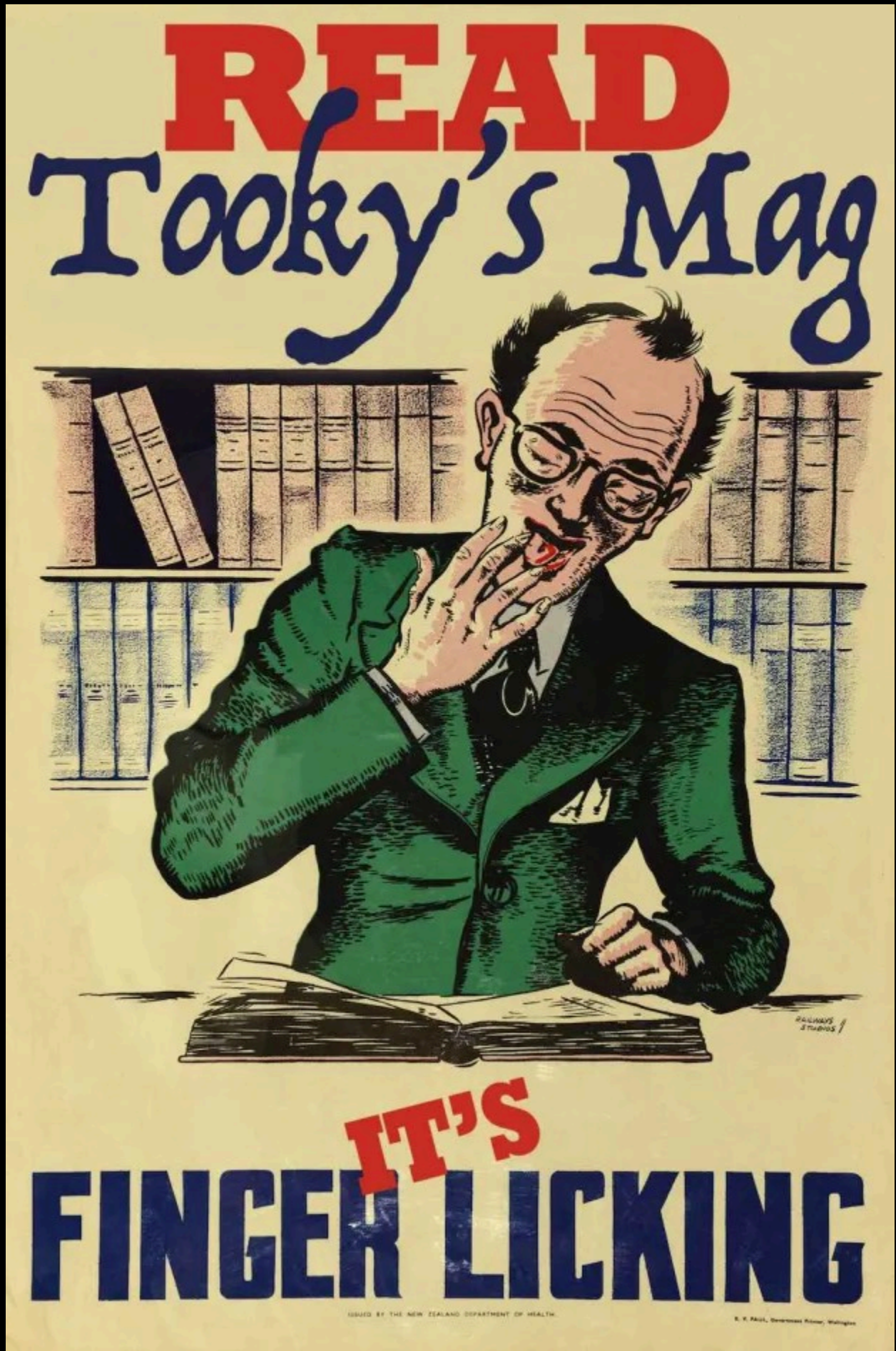
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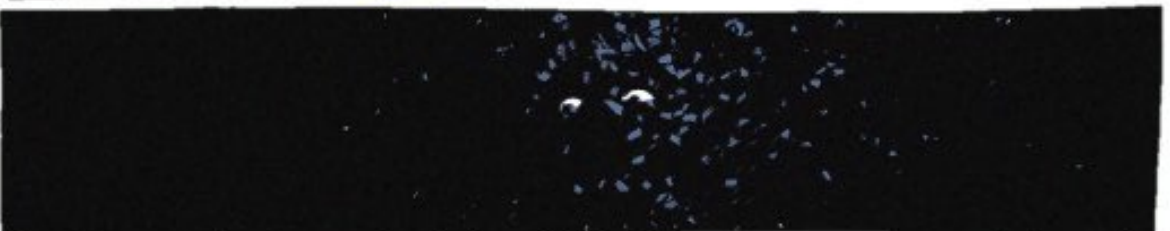
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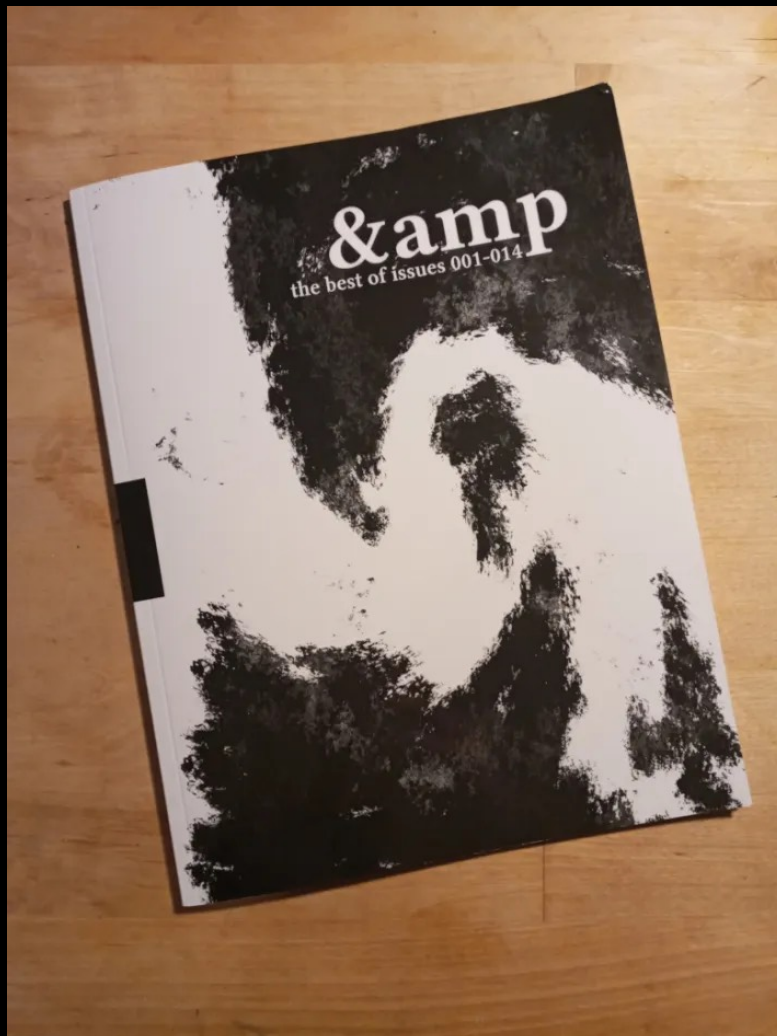
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