

序文

During the beginning of spring of 2024, I found myself reading Maya Angelo's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* and Kyell Gold's *Out of Position* series. Which ignited something within my muse. I had wanted for a very long time to write some sort of novel that explored the culture of the world that I illustrated. There were times I thought such a thing was a tad ridiculous. Only because most of my illustrations were made with the intent to arouse my viewer. Therefore, I had worried that giving the world any further context than vague hints may topple the fantasy. Though, as I worked on *Bare Paws*, this said world began buckling out from the comfort of indistinction. Snapping and busting through the box I claimed was keeping it safe. I could no longer convince myself that keeping it caged was for the better.

This book, like all of my work, does not hide or snuff out any part of me. It is as weighty as it is kinky. There is no further intent than to please my muse and to share my imagination with the reader. It isn't saying anything serious about politics, only playing with it like barbie dolls. I did not write this book with any desires other than whatever it is that makes a flower bloom so confidently. It is a world to get lost in when the reader needs time away from this one.

Physical Graffiti takes place on a planet its people dub, Maya and is not our Earth with an alternate history. It is more or less of a poetic reflection of it. On Maya there are four advanced races: the Mustlian, Lycan, Gnoll and Ailuran. All of which have a range of nationalities that differentiate in appearance. Mustlians are a race that mimic a range of bipedal mustelids. There are some that appear raccoon-like, wolverine-like, skunk-like, ferret-like or a mixture depending on their family history. The same goes for Lycans. There are some that appear more like wolves, foxes, coyotes, tanuki or dingos. This continues on with Gnolls who range in appearance of spotted, stripped or brown hyenas. Finally, there are Ailurans. Who, depending on their region and family, may look like tigers, lions, panthers, and so on. For simplicity's sake I refer to each nationality of the races by the animal name they share similarities with. If referring to the people on the planet as a whole, regardless of race, I will say allkind or Therian(s) where it is necessary. Of course, wild animals still exist throughout Maya and therians do have close ancestors just as we humans do. Although, further information about that isn't necessary for this reading.

This book spans across several decades of Maya's history. All of which will be introduced in the text where the context is needed. I also wanted to avoid mass info-dumping so my reader can interpret the world as they see fit. The information here in this preface is only for the reader to be acquainted with necessary information in order for my writing to be less explanatory. Maya is a world complex, multi-cultural and multi-faceted as our own. Sonder wondrously and thank you for reading.

—

I clung to every sheet of paper I was gifted. Used every inch, drew with any colour I had and used all sides and corners of drawable space. No matter the size, shape, texture or thickness, each piece of paper was the anvil to my hammer. The mirror may have reflected my foxy complexion and dusty red fur. Shaking me to its vision, tethering me to its will. But the

PHYSICAL GRAFFITI - YEENSTANK 2024

mirror could never reflect my true form. That could only be seen through erratic scribbles etched on every inch of the unassuming parchment. Blossoming from the loving touch of the other side of the equation. Raptured in the bliss of the encompassing power of the interaction.

Drawing felt like the most natural way to express how I was feeling. I drew up day dreams and magical adventures. Sketched daisies, ferns, squirrels and critters. I thought if I drew things real enough they would pop out of the pages. I'm not even sure how I had even gotten such an idea. The worlds that I sketched were not just drawings to me. They were an ecstatic expression of who I was and what I loved. I would ramble about them to my parents. Since there were very few children in my rubble of a home town.

I had barely any time to even meet any children my age. My parents dragged me to noisy gatherings. Places that were crowded with people cheering and marching. Rallies with banners whose slogans all read about vague objectives. It was something my parents immensely enjoyed. Though, I always waddled out of the crowds to perch by a quiet spot in the grass, drawing and humming. I had not yet grasped the ongoings of the world around me. Did not desire to listen to the story unfolding in this new space. As I was homesick for the limitlessness and formlessness I had expressed onto my sketches.

However, as I grew I was expected to spend time away from paper and pencil. Told about great things that were coming to our city and how our lives would be changing for the better. We had gotten a brand new home from what my parents called the Union Effort. The logistics of which I couldn't exactly make sense of yet at my adolescent age. The effort had given us pots, pans, furniture, food and clothes. Assembled new streets and cultivated our lands. They were rebuilding what my parents told me was lost. Destroyed in an era before my time. An era in which they thought the world surely would have ended.

My parents spoke of it like the dream worlds I boasted about in my drawings. Gave it a name like a mythic beast. Yowling over the misery it blanketed onto allkind. They would tell me of 'hard-times' they had as children. How they survived only off beetles and berries. How towns were destroyed and families were torn apart. The Taisen-era eradicated a world they knew and loved. I thought back to all the worlds I had drawn. The peace they offered me and my intense desire for them to merge into my own. I understood why my parents felt so strongly about the Union Effort. I began to think I had a purpose, one where I'd find a way to physically make the worlds I envisioned. A purpose that the Union Effort could help me achieve.

So, as our involvement with the effort grew past casual to true allegiance, it subsumed all facets of our lives. Everything we did was for the Union Effort. It was our priority and duty as a family. The sacrifices were for the greater good of allkind. We were going to help bring the world back together. I had begun using my talent to paint slogans onto crimson red banners. Whose once vague objectives now read to me as compelling and influential. We dedicated ourselves to the cause without question and gave no doubt to the on goings of the Effort's programs.

The Union Effort had changed the culture of our once familiar world. Buildings that I remembered being slowly swallowed by nature now stood proud and tall. Farmlands draped over and all around. Boats filled the harbor and trains scaled the landscape. There were billboards of art that showed therians working hard for a prosperous future. Illustrations that displayed honest laborers, elegant lands bounteous with beautiful flowers and meadows. All of their faces showed enlightened smiles. I wanted to make work that was just as powerful. Art that

PHYSICAL GRAFFITI - YEENSTANK 2024

reflected the wondrous achievements my fellow comrades had realized. I wanted to illustrate scenes that resonated so intimately with my peers that they felt it within themselves. Have them collide with the very source that had been burning within me. It needed to be real. What I wanted was physical graffiti.



My school hosted many programs for the Union Effort's local causes. Which mainly consisted of the elegantly named: Therian Laborers Encouragement Expedition, we kids just called it 'T-lee.' After our lessons each day we would paint slogans on banners that would be displayed throughout the city. Assemble then deliver flower arrangements to people's homes. Sing anthems of how grateful we are over local radio. As well as write thank you letters to the people working so hard to shape our city. Mine specifically were filled with doodles and flourishes.

In each of my letters I thought of every laborer as being righteous as my parents. Dedicated patriots who out of the goodness of their hearts were making our lives here better than ever. I never knew exactly whom they were going to, so I always drew a wide variety of people. Wolf Construction workers, tiger traffic coordinators, skunk farmers, hyena teachers, any I could think of until there needed to be space left to write my message. The drawings were my special touch, as the messages contained within the letters got repetitive after some time. I had even asked my teacher if there was a way I could know whom my letter was going to. That way my message can feel more personal.

"Comrade Clay Hoary." She looked down at me and gave a long smile, the kind only coyotes can do and placed a paw onto my shoulder, "Anyone no matter their duty will be beyond happy to get a message from a fox like you." She booped my nose at the tail end of the sentence. I was a bit of a teacher's pet, and I was certainly teased for it. Madam Mikasi was hard *not* to please, though. Any courteous action, no matter if it was mandatory or voluntary, left her with eyes shining so bright they could put the sun out of business.

Her classroom was filled to the brim with local plant life. All ornately potted with handwritten labels. Every morning before class we watered each one. During our survival lessons we were taught the medicinal use of each plant. Where to find them and how to properly sow. She taught us how to make tinctures and teas. Madam Mikasi was nothing short of a horticultural patriot.

I looked up to her both literally and figuratively. She carried herself like a crane would land on water. Used big words and happily taught their meanings. I loved her cinnamon, fulvous fur. So much in fact that when I ever drew a coyote, I tried to mimic how her fur laid.

One day I had forgotten my sketchbook in Mikasi's classroom. As I was drawing many of her plants during lunch-time. After my T-Lee assignments I had jollied my way up four flights of stairs to that bright corner classroom. A voice rivaling the birds ringed through the fourth floor. The gentle plucking of guitar pecking across the walls. It was all coming from Mikaski's classroom. I had caught her singing as she neared the end of the familiar folk song.

*But man has come to plough the tide,
The oak lies on the ground.*

PHYSICAL GRAFFITI - YEENSTANK 2024

*I hear their tires in the fields,
They drive the stallion down.
The roses bleed both light and dark,
The winds do seldom call.
The running sands recall the time
When love was lord of all.*