

A Comic Site

Welcome to Kanme Studios, the home of Janto Kanme, Boom Shaka and Luna Tide. Thank you all for dropping by and we hope you enjoy your time here and stay a while.



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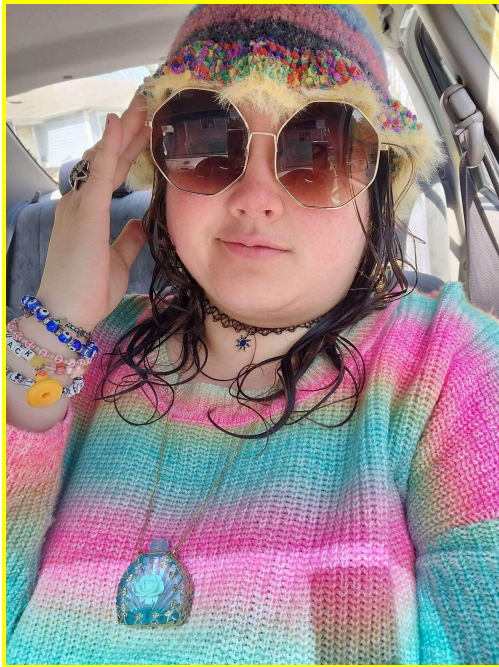
Latest Blog Posts!

“Welcome to your first day of your new life.” A Journey of Self-Publishing my Webcomic by Courtney Sawyer.

Intro:

This blog is dedicated to a wishful promise out of the brightest of stars, to Franco Ramos for urging me follow my dreams and reminding me to bet on myself (and referring me to the Mellon Research Program), to those who wish to create but don't quite know how, to all those who need to be told that there's nothing wrong with having your creations come to life, and to my former self.

Entry 1 – Author's Note



When I was little, I had this intense desire to either become an astronaut so I could float around in space or to make comics. Unfortunately, I am no mathematician so I decided to make comics instead.

I was a lonely child and took much comfort in the stories that others would create. It would inspire me, distract me from the woes of this planet, and give me hope for a better path forward. I knew without a doubt that I wanted to become an artist. It would take me 33 years to embrace that dream and recognize myself as an artist.

Entry 2 – Welcome to Mellon



This was perhaps one of the best opportunities I have ever done for myself. What truly kickstarted me into working on my project, was due to being accepted as one of the fellows in the Mellon Research Fellows program for VCU. It's a program in which the student shall spend a year researching on a topic of their choice in regards to the arts and humanities. We will be assigned to a mentor, have weekly meetings with our peers, attend monthly symposia, and be expected to take a deep dive and research to our hearts content in an academic setting. It is one of the few opportunities for a community college student to do a major project like one would do at a university.

By October 2023, I decided that I wanted my Mellon to focus on self-publishing graphic novels. Partly, I wanted to produce a resource or guide for others on the process. And while I wasn't sure what form this would take, I knew one thing, I needed to include my personal experience. This meant that I needed to have a product of my own to test to support the project. At this point, I recognized that step one in my research project was to go back to something I had been putting off for the last three years – creating my own graphic novel! What if my story isn't fully developed? What if my drawings were not of professional quality? What if I can't do this? Then I decided it

is all about intent and I was choosing to be a part of this learning process. By no means am I an expert at this field, but I could probably pretend I could be.

And thus, starts my journey in starting to face the music.

Entry 3 – Imposter!

In academia, I typically tried to just make my art follow through the guidelines and quietly take risks with expressing myself in my work. I feel as though I could have applied myself further at times, but, instead, I often settled with whatever came out. Looking back, I feel a bit of resentment over my pieces- especially as I go through them for my final portfolio. I often think about several students who have taken the time and effort to make remarkable things, incredible things- and be impressed by it. One student made an antique television about their vintage 1930s cartoon out of cardboard. When people apply themselves with their passions, you'd be impressed with what they will create. I've felt so impressed with my peers. I have been inspired by them and occasionally disappointed with myself for not working to that same level.

So, I suppose it's why this situation feels so strange to me. I am finally allowing myself the time and taking the opportunity to draw something I feel passionate about. There was so much pent up guilt over choosing to focus on myself and my personal artwork. I felt like a sham...an imposter. Who am I to think that I could create a public work of art that others will like, be interested in, or even potentially respect?

Full of self-doubt and old feelings of inadequacy, I decided to dive into the creation of my webcomic (an online graphic novel). And well, it was even harder than expected. With trying to juggle classes, work, family, clubs, and life the prospect of

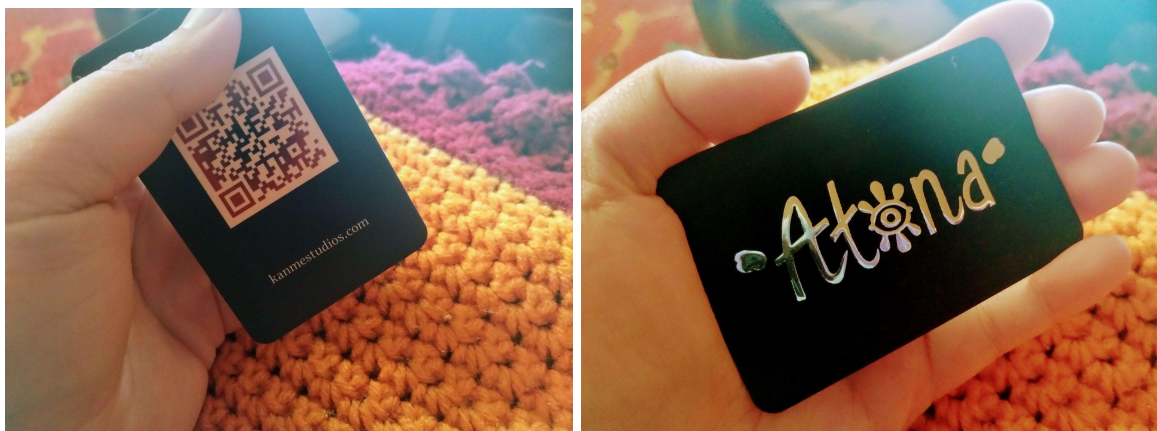
continuing to create time consuming digital pages made this portion of my Mellon project feel like a Herculean task. Instead, I made a radical choice to move away from digital media to graphite and paper. I knew that this was a risky choice for me but I was surprised it made the process feel more organic. As an added benefit, I now had tangible drawings to show my friends and peers. The way people reacted to seeing the physical pages was overwhelmingly positive, supportive, and reassuring. It was the most encouraging experience I ever had in years!



It felt like it was a dream; like I was a kid again making comics and sharing stories with people - I was really happy back then. To experience those moments, to share my work with so many strangers and new friends, it moved me to see the light brighten up in their eyes or the smiles on their faces. I was honestly surprised when people would say such kind things to me about my work in progress pages. I never had felt so seen in my life before that it started to become scary. I kept wondering if I had been lying to myself all along, questioning my own ideas and self-worth because so many people contradicted the cruel thoughts that would roam around my head.

Accepting the idea that my work has merit and that I have skill as an artist has been one of the most difficult parts in my journey. How do you reprogram your mind to have confidence? How can I have faith that this isn't temporary? And can I simply be present and enjoy the journey that this project has started?

Finally, I was able to achieve something I thought was impossible for some time. The first chapter of a comic. *My comic*. Then I had to take the next step, publishing it online. It's funny how I've worked on a webcomic before, but it was for a client I found once on a Craigslist ad. I then went and made over 120 pages of content for their story- which helped jumpstart Kanme Studios. I'm very grateful for Siam, Sali, Annie, Ash, Anna, and everyone at Kanme Studios for all of their support over this project- as they showed such genuine interest and care with sincerity that blows my mind. I never had thought there would be a time that I'd have this level of support!



I was inspired by a former professor of mine, Vince Zawada, to leave a lasting impression for future clients by making something striking to capture their attention. So I came up with the idea to promote the launch of my comic at the college with flashy business cards, containing a QR code to the first chapter of *Atona*. This was my guerilla marketing technique at advertising both my story and Kanme's website. When I would

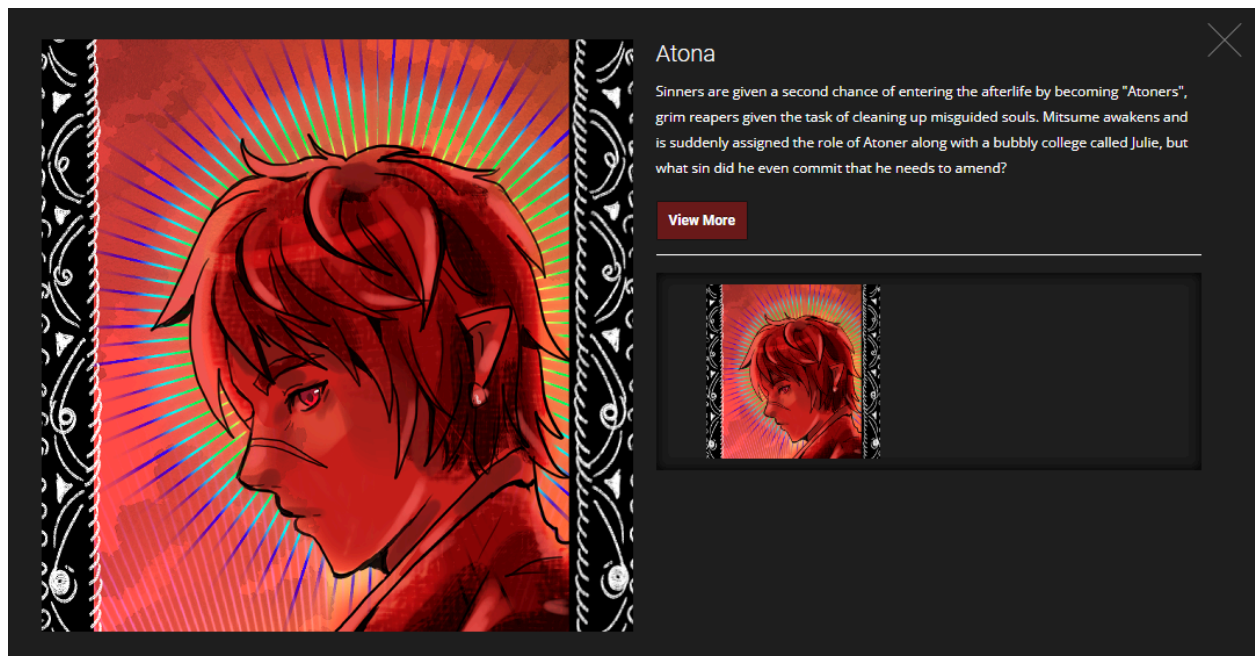
hand out the cards, I could introduce individuals to the project. I was genuinely surprised that most people were fine discussing my webcomic for five minutes. It was shocking how many strangers listened. Maybe this radical advertising campaign wasn't such a bad idea at all.

Now here I was, an artist with her first chapter of a webcomic published for the world to see. All of this felt like a dream. There were moments of great highs, feeling of accomplishment, pride, happiness and then those intrusive thoughts of self-doubt and hardship would return. Somedays the struggle was to put in the effort to work on chapter two. Some days, I struggled to make myself care enough about my work to talk-like get out of my comfort zone and talk with so many strangers, talk with so many professors, friends, family members about my work. Some days, I just struggled. I was starting to think I had been gaining a sense of my humanity back every time I had an impactful conversation, but I worried I might have been getting over my head and would begin spiraling downward...again.

On days where drawing pages seemed impossible, I turned towards the research aspect of the Mellon project. I would search for relevant resources for self-publishing, often finding none. I would talk to friends and colleagues in the convention circuit, only to hear of their burn out. I tried using the internet for inspiration and motivation to draw. Instead of finding things to rejuvenate myself, I started to feel so much dread over the project. Like, why am I sharing this silly story with everyone? How old am I? Would this even make a difference whether I share this to the world or not? Well and, truth be told - I had times where I needed to hide away and be a hermit for a little while. Socializing can be a bit exhausting, especially compounded with the basic hardships of life!

Imposter syndrome, self-doubt, lack of confidence – call it what you will, the feelings are real. Frequently, maybe more than I care to admit, I had to remind myself of the positive responses I was receiving from people of all ages and demographics. Instead, sometimes when I was discussing my webcomic, I would feel silly just saying "oh it's for my school's research program," which it totally is but I felt guilty thinking if I was cheating the system. How could a program such as Mellon allow me the opportunity to make a "silly little comic?" It felt like I was cheating the system. Then it hits me. My life is paralleling the stories in my head. *Atona* is about cheating the system by choosing to make the most of each and every day of your life. Bam. Boom. Maybe I should give myself a bit more grace. And maybe I should have taken my art more seriously sooner.

Entry 4 – *Atona*



<https://kanmestudios.com/story/atona/>

I won't speak too much about the plot of *Atona* and what it's all about, for I'm a believer in letting the piece speak for itself. However, for the sake of clarity here's what I'll say about it. The story's premise is about grim reapers on community service, and that the main character is a vampire, who is the first grim reaper of his kind. You follow along with that vampire learning about the lore of that universe and what's life like in another afterlife while struggling to accept the fact that their new life about reaching repentance will change the trajectory of their fate. In other words, it's much like the hell that most humans currently face as we race through the hoops and loops of life's chaotic merry go coaster.

I've already envisioned the end of the plot and have charted out the guide map for the first ten or so chapters. Working on this comic is a whole lot of trouble than it's worth at times- but it is what my heart set me out to do. Hopefully, I'll be handing out the first issue at the VMFA, but a first proper volume will take quite a while to see through. Till then, here's the magic of publishing online! It does take a lot of mental bandwidth to do though. Ever heard of Webtoons? The process of uploading a page requires the creator to format every page of your work to accommodate their layout. Not everybody makes comics to be quickly scrolled down your phone. Then another gripe of publishing online is the little problems that could easily add up: internet connections, site crashes—you name it. You have to learn how to control what you do in your own time. Which isn't as easy as one would hope. I would like to apologize in advance for not keeping up a consistent uploading schedule throughout this portion, but I have the resolve and a game plan to see this passion project through.

The most important thing I would tell to a beginner or a novice is, you gotta make the time for yourself. You have to learn how to say no, and believe that your work is worth investing the effort in. Sometimes you will find people who will not understand what is the big deal in making a comic for however long you plan to work on it, but do not let them discourage you. You are making magic, and I hope to see it come alive in this world. It's never a bad thing to ask for help, or receive input by your trusted peers. You'd be surprised by how much people want to hear what you have to say.

During the early stages of the comic, I recruited a friend of mine who had over a decade's worth of experience in making webcomics to help me with polishing the pages and adding the text bubbles. I ended up commissioning her to work with me and she's done a fantastic job! Thank you Anna! It's an amazing feeling to work as a team! As I worked on this story, not really recognizing it for what it was to begin with- I started to finally experience an emotion I haven't felt with my work in forever: a sense of pride.

Entry 5 – Now what?

I have come to realize that this is only just the beginning of this journey with both the webcomic and the notion of creating a self-publishing guide. I want to share more about my experiences to those who need it. I know I would have benefited from such a resource since there's not much on the web to explain the process, how to find a publishing platform, advertising, etc. In regards to writing a self-publishing resource, I don't quite have enough experience...yet. Instead, the research continues through first-hand experience. I've started hosting "How to Make Webcomic Panels" at various

conventions. Within the industry, I am working on side projects with multiple clients trying to bring their webcomics into fruition through online publishing. For now, Kanme Studios is planning on publishing a 150-page book featuring their artists webcomics. My work will be included as part of the collaboration. I find that aspect to be inspiring and amazing, a bit mind blowing really.



But some things will have to wait till after my graduation. I'm still a student after all, but I am not giving up yet! This blog, located on Kanme's website (*forthcoming*) will continue to document my journey of self-publishing. So, I shall continue to pick up the pen and continue to walk with you on this journey and relay my experiences back to the world as I am finally learning how to live like it's the first day of my life.

If you're curious on seeing it published online- it is also on Webtoons and on Global Comix