

COVER ART NOT FINAL

"I wish more artists would produce books like this"  
- The Middle Age's Steve Conley, from his Introduction

# FIFTY YEARS OF ART



...AND THE FORTY OR SO YEARS WASTED IN BETWEEN

**Book 1: A CRASS Rebirth**

by J. ROBERT DEANS

FIFTY YEARS OF ART (...And the forty or so years wasted in between) Book  
One: A Crass Rebirth by J. Robert Deans

This book is a combined work of fiction and nonfiction.

Names, characters, places, and incidents depicted in comic strips and cartoons are either the product of the author's imagination, or are used fictitiously, or for the purpose of satire or parody. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or individuals living or dead is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. Except as authorized under U.S. copyright law, no part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher.

An original publication of DEANS FAMILY PRODUCTIONS

Deans Family Productions

P. O. Box 150663

Alexandria, VA 22315

*grandpunwick.com / deansfamilyproductions.com*

Special Edition Hardcover First Deans Family Productions printing, June 2022

Copyright © 2022 by Deans Family Productions and J. Robert Deans

Cover art and design copyright © 2022 by J. Robert Deans

Interior art copyright © 2022 by J. Robert Deans

Introduction copyright © 2022 by Steve Conley

## INTRODUCTION

It's often said nowadays that the most important thing an artist can be is authentic.

Authenticity is so important, that quite a few artists owe their success to how well they can fake it.

But my friend J. Robert Deans is the real deal. And FIFTY YEARS OF ART proves it.

FIFTY YEARS OF ART is part memoir, part treasury, and part time capsule. In these pages you'll find earnest self-reflection, heartbreaking loss, inspiring triumphs, and a whole lot of comics.

Now, about the comics... you need to know this up front... a laminated Nerd Card is absolutely required for admission.

If you like niche *Jeopardy* categories, have a passing familiarity with the denizens of Olympus, and you quote word-for-word from movies which rely on practical special effects, oh, you've found the right book! Thankfully, JRD includes enough *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* jokes so that even if your Nerd Card is slightly expired, you'll be fine.

There are puns, obscure references, and visual gags including the odd rebus. Some of the comics are like puzzles and the reward is a laugh or a groan-that-makes-you-laugh-in-spite-of-yourself.

JRD even included a few comics which haven't aged all that well - and this is where the book's running commentary helps tremendously. He could have simply excised those cartoons but instead he owns them and gives us context for the time in which the comic was created.

But the best parts of the book are the journey and the story behind the stories. I wish more artists would produce books like this and I hope FIFTY YEARS OF ART inspires more creators to follow suit.

As a reader, I'm thrilled that this book exists.

I suspect it will help encourage many more aspiring artists of all ages to pick up their pencils and make comics.

Even if they put their pencils down decades ago.

— Steve Conley

Steve Conley is the writer and artist of the acclaimed webcomic *The Middle Age*. His previous projects include *Bloop*, and *Astounding Space Thrills*. Find him online at [patreon.com/steveconley](https://patreon.com/steveconley) and [steveconley.com](https://steveconley.com)



## CHAPTER ONE

I've always been a doodler: the type of person who draws things in the margins while on the phone, or absent-mindedly doodles while the television is on. When I was quite young, I drew cartoon characters along with the occasional superhero. I was more influenced by newspaper strips than comic books, but I read both. In fact, I learned to read from a Wonder Woman collection my mother had that I believe was a joint publication of *Ms. Magazine* and DC Comics.

I also have memories – strong memories – of the debuts of *Star Wars* and *Superman* in theaters, and *Battlestar Galactica* on television. And the debates of “who is your Superman/Batman” was answered by the serials my local PBS station ran on Saturday afternoons.

I am a child of the early 70s, luckily evading disco thanks to John Williams records, a family history of jazz, and the emergence of what would eventually come to be the second British Invasion.

But before Wonder Woman and *Star Wars*, there was Snoopy, Bugs Bunny, and Tom & Jerry.

I don't open up about a lot of my past, but when I do talk about my childhood, the reaction I tend to get is that mine was either ‘not that atypical’ or people wonder how I didn't end up a serial killer. As much as it would pain Dr. Frederic Wertham to hear this, it was comics that kept me out of trouble.

My folks' marriage ended not long after I came along – or long before, depending on how you look at it – but they stayed together mostly out of convenience, until a job opportunity opened up for my mother. Because I was able to talk and converse before 2, able to read before 3, and able to drive my mother bonkers with my ADHD (despite it not yet a ‘thing’) at 4, I was labeled as “gifted,” but unfortunately not in the “X-Men” sense.

Before everything collapsed at home – or at least before I was made aware that things were collapsing – I would sit alone in my room and draw or read. My favorite book was a massive *Peanuts* collection, which I still have. Over the years, I would learn to appreciate Schulz's humor far more than I had as a child, but as a four- and five-year-old, it was the artwork that transfixed me. I was fascinated by how the characters looked different from one group of strips to the next. I was too young to understand the nuances of the way in which artists and their characters grow over time.

I would draw Snoopy and Charlie Brown over and over on sheets of looseleaf, and when I got bored drawing them, I took breaks by drawing Tom and Jerry, who were daily fixtures on the local television station. Occasionally I would pivot to a quick Heathcliff, Garfield, or something else.

Neighbors recommended other comics to me once they learned of my love for Schulz. The standouts were *The Wizard of ID* and *B.C.* by Johnny Hart, and Walt Kelly's *Pogo*. I quickly soaked up as much of their humor and wisdom as I could, and those characters soon found themselves in my artistic rotation.

All this time, my father was either at work, or in his office at home, or who knows where. My mother was deep into her work with Amnesty International, and if she wasn't home hosting meetings, she was off somewhere attending them. Left to my own devices, I stayed in my room and read or drew, listening to music – either storybook records featuring Spider-Man or Batman, or the *Star Wars* soundtrack by John Williams.

I was still mostly drawing comic strip characters, and the occasional comic book character, but I had also started drawing



the droids, Chewie, and Vader. I also must have tried to draw Han, Luke, and Leia as well, all while listening to that amazing score, and reading the *Star Wars Storybook*. I literally read that book to pieces in the days before home video allowed us a way to rewatch movies over and over at home.

The year before they formally split up, my folks moved me from a small Montessori school which I loved to some big private school miles out of town. One of the senators sent his kids there, and it was very prestigious. I never understood why I was moved. I went from a small school where I had tons of friends and playmates to a school where I was not only the 'new kid,' but an outsider both because of the 'gifted' branding and because I was at least a full year younger than anyone else in my class.

A couple of folks I would talk to later in my life suspect this is where the seeds of my depression were sewn. Not long after starting that year of school, my parents sat me down to tell me that my mother was leaving to work in another state, and I had a choice: stay with my father or move with her.

Much like Julian Glover in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, I chose poorly: I stayed. However, in retrospect, I doubt either choice was ideal.

I had basically stopped drawing well before my folks split up, perhaps feeling the elephant in the room before it had made itself known. That elephant was either the divorce and my trying to figure it out at 8 years old, or it was the depression that was taking hold of my young mind.

**CHAPTER CONTINUES IN  
"FIFTY YEARS OF ART BOOK ONE"**

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **(Excerpt)**

[...]

Between the rough period at work, the medical testing, and my best friend not being around, the writing and drawing stopped. I just coasted my way to a diploma, spending my free time reading comics.

The only difference being when I was much younger, I was enjoying the adventures of *The Invaders*, *Captain America*, the *Justice Society*, and *Star Wars* comics, along with *Peanuts*, *the Wizard of Id*, and *Dennis the Menace*. Now, I was engulfed in superheroic adventures of *Infinity, Inc* and the *Teen Titans*, and my newspaper comics reading had shifted to *Calvin & Hobbes*, *Bloom County*, and *Shoe*.

I can't speak to my newspaper strip interests, but in regards to my comic book choices, I always preferred the off-kilter books. If my fellow artists and writers are to be believed, I fell in love with the art of Jack Kirby, Frank Robbins, and Wally Wood far younger than I probably should have. But, I was also focusing on comics set in, or actually produced during, World War II. Perhaps a subconscious callback to the comics I read as a very young child when I was learning to read from my mother's Wonder Woman comics?



I read comics voraciously, and in the period between learning my folks were splitting up and the time I stepped off the train to live with my mother, I accumulated enough to fill two bankers boxes – both of which came with me along with my limited wardrobe.

This was also the period in which I dove head first into my film obsession. I watched and rewatched movies constantly, which frustrated my mother because the VCRs then were not cheap, and she had bought it for herself to rent films. I would borrow it for an entire weekend – and watch the same film over and over. She could never quite grasp why anyone would want to watch any movie – even a good one – more than once, maybe twice.

What I couldn't explain – and what I am sure I didn't fully realize myself – is that I was absorbing the greatest primer on visual storytelling there could ever be with every Hitchcock film, with every Universal Horror film, and eventually all of the fun B mysteries and serials I watched as a young child.

The period between high school graduation and college graduation seems a lot shorter in my mind than the near decade it took in reality.

After high school, I did two things. First, I toured the northeast of Europe. Second, I tested my father.

[ . . . ]

The summer after I got back was a fairly big milestone for me, in that it was then I first watched THE THIN MAN films, which have become major influences on both my storytelling and my life.

A few weeks after the firm shut down, and it became clear it was done for good, I got a job at a deli a couple of blocks from home. In that same time, all of which was spent in the same apartment with my mother with nothing to distract ourselves, we got very sick of each other very quickly, and she told me to either go to college or find my own place.

While I could have (and possibly should have) gotten a place with my best friend from high school, I enrolled in college. Or tried to. I started with the big University in town, and they rejected me, citing the years between my graduation and application, and my mediocre grades while in high school. I applied to the local community college and was immediately accepted, along with several grants.

The past was prologue, although this time I was not working for my mother, I was working for myself. Well, I was working for the deli, but you understand my meaning. Thanks to the work ethic I had developed at the firm, I was managing the place with the owners in a few weeks, and I was also a full-time student. I was basically away from home between 9am and 10pm six days a week, and at home Sundays doing my homework.

My mother had started working again, doing her usual law work, but across the country, on a case-by-case basis for anyone willing to bring her to their courts. There were long stretches when we wouldn't see each other for nearly a month.

The bizarre way in which I was both on my own and living with my mother gave me a weird sense of anonymity that helped me grow up a bit. Having long ago closed the book on the emotional aspect of my father's part of my life, not having to butt heads with my mom all the time was also helping. As long as I got the trash out and kept the kitchen clean, all was good.

All the while, when I wasn't working or at school, I just sat in my room and watched movies, and thought about making them.

It never occurred to me to even pick up a pencil.



# *CRASS FED COMICS*

## *The Archive*

### **PART ONE**

An archive of the comics posted to Crass Fed Comics from July 2012 through January 2013.

Almost all of these cartoons were ones I had doodled in the four or five years prior to my mother's death.

I launched the site when I did because it coincided with my Kidlet's birthday, so it seemed appropriate.

**CRASS FED COMIC 001: Fifty Shades of Bay** (Posted July 16, 2012)

A lot of the credit for today's comic goes to my wife, who knows a hell of a lot more about horses than I do.

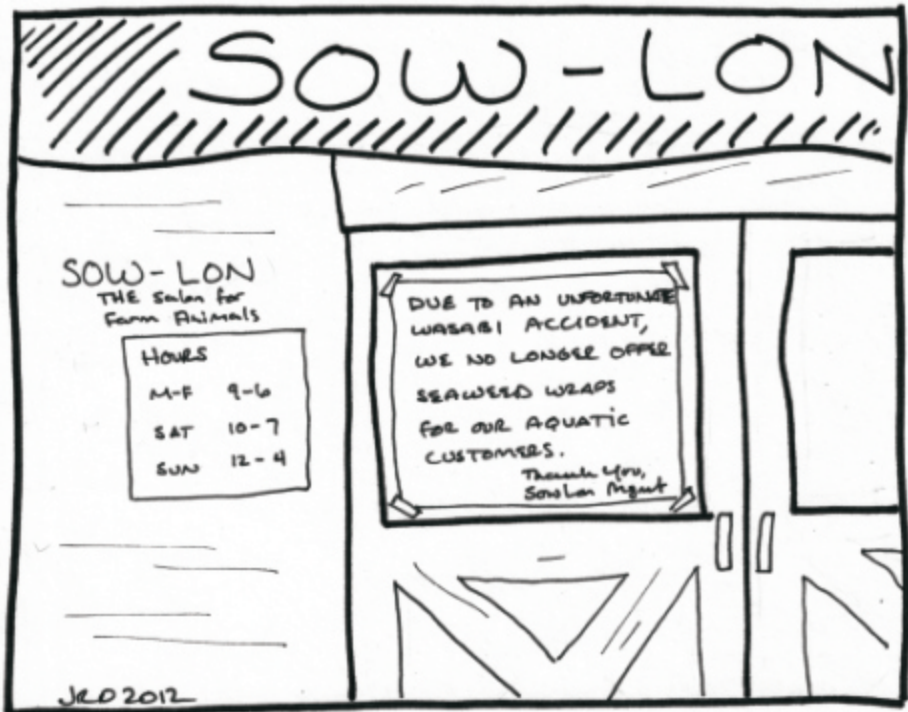


*The very first CRASS FED post was also one of the first gags drawn in my sketchbook. Ironically, the very first sketched cartoon never made it to the site.*

*- JRD, May 2022*

**CRASS FED COMIC 008: Unfortunate Wasabi Accident** (Posted August 13, 2012)

A weird thought I once had about where animals go to relax.



Here's the original sketch -

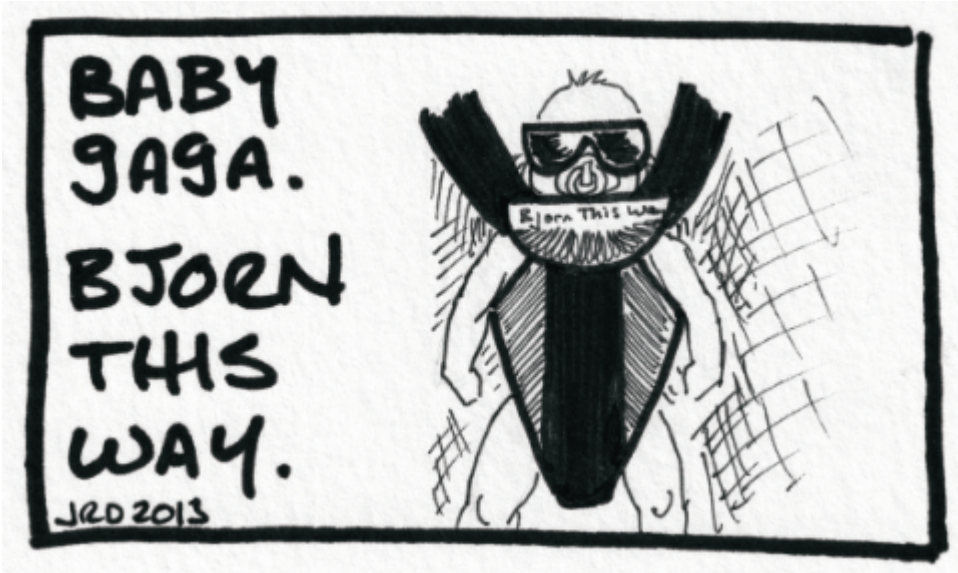
- JRD, May 2022





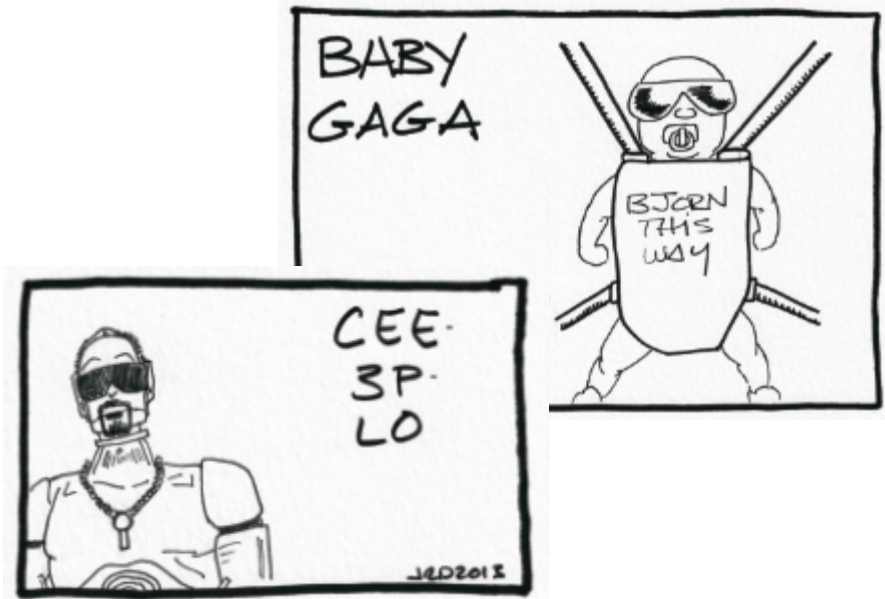
**CRASS FED COMIC 033: Grammy Time** (Posted February 11, 2013)

Last night's Grammy Awards were the inspiration for these cartoons. Both of the gags were some of the first sketches I made a couple of years ago when the idea for CF hit me. (By the way, the C3PLo is my second attempt...the first looked too much like Snoop Dogg Lion Whatever, and I just had to change the necklace to an Artoo unit.)



*Here are the original versions -*

*- JRD, May 2022*



*The cartoons on these pages - plus "Tauntaun Abbey" - were done all together on one sheet of bristol that was 6x6 inches. The first Baby Gaga attempt, above, was drawn in 2010 and is larger than all of the other cartoons here together.*

*If I had only worked on my handwriting as well...*

*- JRD, May 2022*



**CRASS FED COMIC 059: Felis Catus Ellipsis** (Posted August 5, 2013)

Another one of my sillier toons, inexplicably inspired by Corinna Bechko and other writer friends with cats. For no logical reason, this is the image I get in my head whenever anyone utters the phrase "dramatic pause." And, maybe, you do too, now. You're welcome. ;)



*This one is just so stupid that I  
giggle every time I see it.*

*- JRD, May 2022*

**CRASS FED COMIC 083: "Little" Known Feline Breed** (Posted January 13, 2014)

It's been a while since I drew this, so I honestly don't remember if my wife suggested this one outright. If you think it's particularly funny, then she did. If it stinks, it's all mine.



*Rule still applies. Are you  
giggling now? I'll let my wife  
know. Not so funny? That was  
me.*

*- JRD, May 2022*

**CRASS FED COMIC 107: Fishing For A Gag** (Posted June 30, 2014)

This one has double intent. First, it's a silly gag that occurred to me when I noticed my wife watching one of the CSI shows one day.

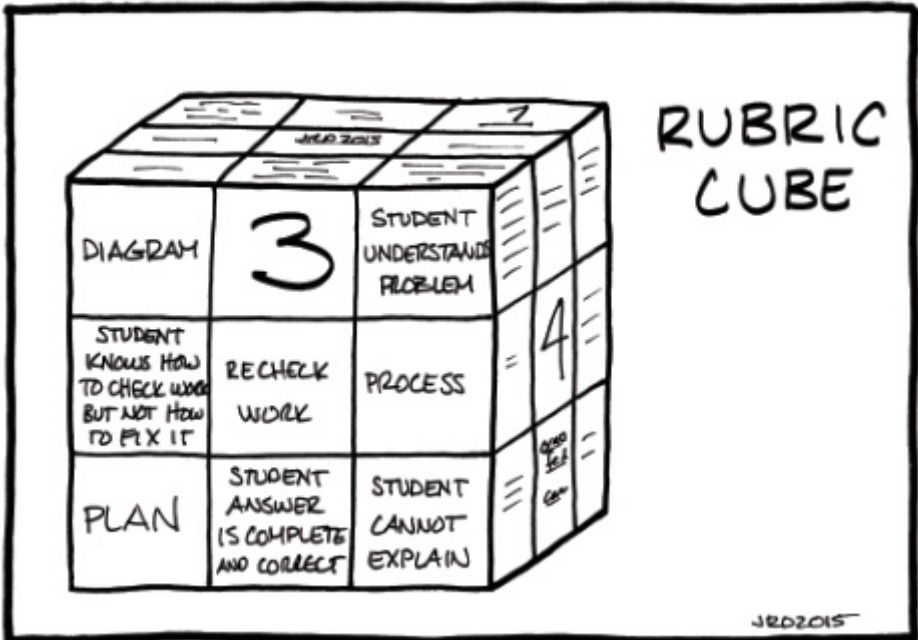


*In retrospect, it should have been  
"Sea SI: Miami"*

*- JRD, May 2022*

**CRASS FED COMIC 175: Easier To Solve Than A...** (Posted November 17, 2015)

With the first quarter done around the country, and the new grading period in full swing, this gag combining a common teaching tool and a frustrating 80s iconic toy seemed timely. (And, good luck to all of my teacher friends out there. With our country valuing problem solving and knowledge at a startlingly decreasing rate, anyone who willingly enters into the education profession is someone to be honored and exalted.)

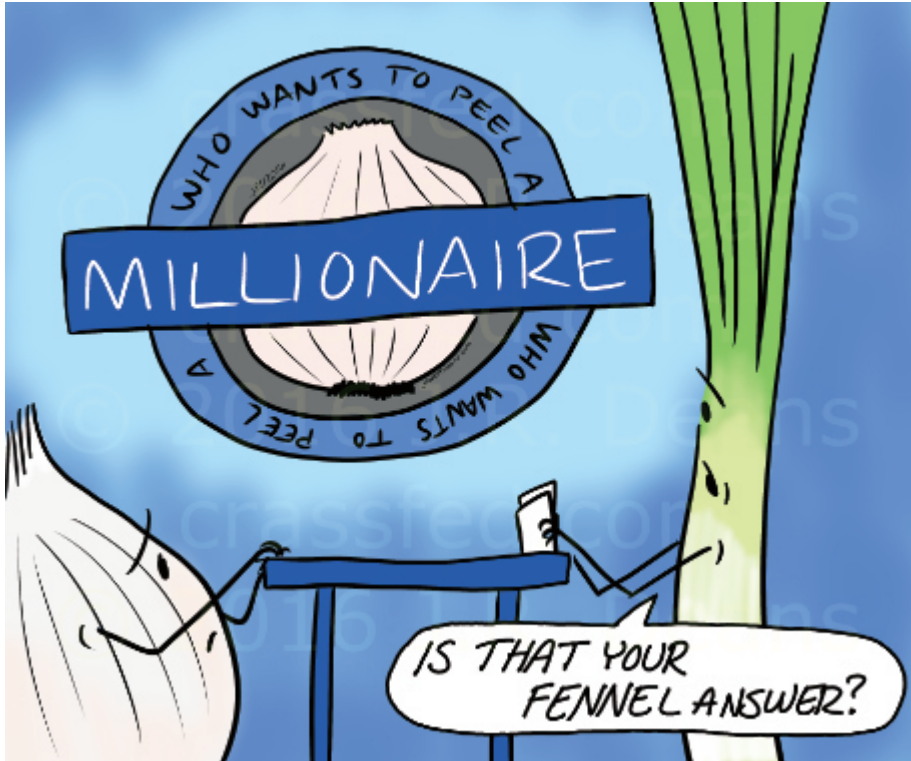


*I have to wonder if such a tool  
might actually be useful.*

*- JRD, May 2022*

**CRASS FED COMIC 197: These Contestants Make Viewers Cry** (Posted June 14, 2016)

I had hoped to draw this using the new Smith Micro program CLIP STUDIO PRO. However, The registration key they gave me doesn't work, and their customer service is...well...lax. So, back to Manga Studio it is!



*Six years on and I'm still not smart enough to use the line or ruler tools for straight lines.*

*- JRD, May 2022*



# *CRASS FED COMICS*

## *The Reveal...*

The last part of any hard- or soft-boiled detective story is "The Reveal," when the detective gets everyone together and explains the criminal's big plan, why they were doing what they did, and why the plan went south.

It's a conceit of the genre, and the most fun part of the story, because you get to see if you're as smart as the writer/detective.

So, what follows, are all of the unwritten puns and gags from all four years of CRASS FED COMICS!

Enjoy!

# PATREON



**BECOME A  
DFP  
PUN PAL!**

Becoming a DFP Pun Pal! Not only puts you in pretty amazing company with all of our other super fans, but you also support our creative endeavors directly via Patreon!

Patreon is an online membership platform that allows artists to interact directly with their fans who want to have a closer relationship with their favorite creators, as well as offer those creators more direct financial support.

When you become a PUN PAL, you not only help allow us to continue to produce the books, comics, and toys we love to make on our own terms, but you also get some really cool exclusives, such as:

- Weekly updates including exclusive artwork, or behind-the-scenes information
- Perks Packs which feature mini-prints, stickers, and more
- Patreon-exclusive stories released one chapter every week
- Original artwork
- Commissions
- And More!

Plus, EVERY Patron gets listed in the acknowledgments of every book we make - because without our Patrons, it would be almost impossible to put out all the books we create!

You can become a PUN PAL! at [patreon.com/jrobertdeans](https://patreon.com/jrobertdeans)





## **ABOUT J. ROBERT DEANS**

J. Robert Deans has doodled all of his life. During his nearly ten-year career selling comics, he relaxed by drawing them, and started his own web comic. CRASS FED featured a cow, a penguin, a peculiarly sketchy style, and Robert's rather eclectic sense of humor. Less than a day after being laid off, a silly idea struck: a cow lost in space. That idea became the first in the SHAKES THE COW series of picture books for young children, MOO THOUSAND AND PUN. Mid-grade spy adventures followed with the original version of the BEAR FROM AUNT series. With book publishing now a practical obsession, Deans and his wife formed Deans Family Productions (DFP) with the intent of creating books, comics, and more which would delight children of all ages. Deans has followed the initial two series with a new series of solo gamebook adventures – STEER YOUR OWN STORY, the first of which featuring a unique twist where you also get to pick your character for the adventure! Deans also writes a Patreon-exclusive series of soft-boiled noir serialized short stories inspired by 1940s mystery films. These stories are set in the very real and made-up land of Grand Punwick, where all of DFP's characters live (meaning, they're not just in Robert's head). Robert also regularly collaborates with his wife and Kidlet on various books, toys, and comics for their DFP imprint, Crass Fed Kids.

Find him online at:

- [twitter.com/jrobertdeans](https://twitter.com/jrobertdeans)
- [jrobertdeans.com](https://jrobertdeans.com)
- [grandpunwick.com](https://grandpunwick.com)