

Bumping the Lamp: An interview with graphic novelist Hannah Berry

Hannah Berry is a cartoonist, artist and writer who has created three graphic novels – *Britten and Brüllightly* (Berry: 2008), *Adamtine* (Berry: 2012) and *Livestock* (Berry: 2017) – all published by Jonathan Cape. She has also contributed short works to a number of anthologies, illustrating scripts by other writers or writing scripts for other artists. These include *Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics* (Duffy et al., 2014), *Hoax: Psychosis Blues* (Thornton et al., 2014) and *IDP: 2043* (Mina et al., 2014). Her work is generally genre-based, except for a weekly cartoon strip created for the British current affairs magazine *The New Statesman*.

The following interview is an extract from two conversations with Berry, recorded a year apart. These took place in front of audiences at *Graphic Gothic – The Seventh International Conference of Graphic Novels and Comics* at Manchester Metropolitan University (July 2016) and *Cartoon County* (July 2017), a monthly meeting for cartoonists to discuss their work in front of their peers at various venues in Brighton and Hove. The complete interview with Hannah Berry recorded at Graphic Gothic can be found at

<https://panelborders.wordpress.com/category/hannah-berry>

Figure 1: Alex Fitch and Hannah Berry (IGNCC 2016)
Alex Fitch (AF): *Adamtine is a graphic novel, a horror story set on a train, and is gothic in terms of there being a creepy atmosphere that affects the psychological make-up of the characters. Would that be a fair assessment?*

Hannah Berry (HB): Yeah, I think so. I'm not sure I exactly know the limitations of the gothic. I'd like to be able to say it's gothic in these specific terms: its characters who are at the mercy of a situation with some elements that are supernatural.

AF: *Certainly I think that when you have gothic environments, there's something present there regarding the uncanny – gargoyles on the corners of buildings– and if you have a train that's completely surrounded by darkness, and the darkness has some kind of sentience that is creeping in through the cracks [...] That seems particularly gothic.*

HB: That came from a photo and a train journey that I made in 2007. It was about twelve hours from Oruro to Pisa in Bolivia, through the desert, and it was overnight. There was just darkness outside the window. You could see the sun going down, you could see the distant horizon. For starters, I'd never seen the horizon that far away, and so much of it! When the sun went down, it was the most intense darkness outside. I found it really oppressive and all you could see was just the reflections of yourself in the carriage window, and then mile upon mile of nothing outside.

That was kind of the start of my ambition to do something that was a horror story. I was on the train and I thought this could be the start of something horrific.

AF: *Was that as you were gathering ideas about what might be your second graphic novel?*

HB: This was as I was travelling and celebrating the advance from my first graphic novel! So it wasn't intentionally my trying to do a second one.

AF: *An advance from Jonathan Cape will take you across Bolivia?*

HB: It's very cheap in Bolivia! I was young, I was wild. (laughs) That was the kernel of *Adamtine*, I think, and shortly after, I saw the 2004 film *Creep* (Smith, 2004) [...] It's a film that's set on the Underground, and you know how on the London Underground you're in this tiny enclosed space with all these other people, and outside this space that you know is mile upon mile of nothing, just darkness. You have no idea what's there, and what this film did was that they decided what was scary about the mile upon mile of nothing was a goblin!

I was so let down by the goblin that I thought I could do better than this. There was nothing else set on a train that had particularly caught my interest. When I decided I wanted to do a horror, I'm very into a very specific area of horror, which is that I'm much more into the suggested, the unknown. The horror which remains unknown at the end, anything which you can take away with you – so, not so much things which leap out at you – the suggested, and the supernatural comes quite heavily into that and plays into that quite well. I'm a big fan of the Japanese film *Ringu* (Nakata, 1998), which is fabulous.

So, I wanted to set up a story where there was, for starters, there were some very strict rules. You have to have rules when you're working in horror. You're creating a world which is not our world, and our world has rules we can understand, so you have to create a new set of rules. You have to sort of invite the reader into that, and show that these are the parameters, this is how this particular thing works.

AF: *The idea of the monster that's hiding within a surface [...] In Ringu there's Sadako who's hiding and climbing out of the white noise of a television, while in Adamtine you have the creature literally existing within the darkness, and is a part of it.*

HB: This is it, and that's the kind of horror I love, the horror that exists beyond the form that it's in. In *Ringu*, because in 1998 you were presumably watching it on a video, the horror exists within a video; it sort of follows you, follows you out. I really like that 1992 programme *Ghostwatch* (1992), the old BBC drama, which I think was only shown once and then never again because I think a guy killed himself.¹ The premise of that was that the audience was taking part in a huge séance, and so when things in the study started to go awry, Michael Parkinson was supposedly possessed and things started to go wrong and horrific, you were somehow involved in this as well.

This is the kind of horror that I love. Something which will leave the page with you. Actually, it's not quite a horror influence per se, but I've got a friend from university called Emily Gravett who does children's books and once a week I go 'round to her place to work, and she did a book called *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* (Gravett, 2008) [...] It's adorable. For anyone who has kids, you probably know it. It's about this mouse who's listing all his fears, and he's going through this book – there are all these images of things he's afraid of and he's nibbling at the pages, tearing things up, scribbling over them, trying to make them less frightening. There's this really involved metafictional element, and I thought: 'I'd like that. I'd like some of that, please'!

AF: *If you consume your monsters, it takes away their power [...]*

HB: Yeah. I like the idea that it's not just the story itself that contains the horror, it's the actual object, the book itself which has an element of malice about it. By reading it, you are somehow connected to the horror; you are somehow potentially the victim of that horror. And so, in *Adamtine*, there is this layer between. The characters themselves inhabit the panels – flashbacks are in white backgrounds, current events happening on a black background – and the characters who are all stranded late at night on a train, they are contained within these panels.

One of the rules I set myself is that anything that happens within the panels is corporeal, anything that happens outside the panels is somehow supernatural in nature, because what happens is that after a while the blackened gutters and borders start to bleed in, start to interfere in ways with the panels themselves. Also, if you look through the book, there are moments where you can see faces in the darkness watching the characters, and also somehow watching you. Obviously you can't have something which jumps out in the flat surface of a graphic novel. I did ask about pop-up books, but I was told this is too expensive! So

unfortunately that didn't happen, so the next best thing you can have is be looking at an image and realize, after a moment of staring at it, that the image is looking back at you.

I think the realization of the thing that you're looking at, the familiar thing, is somehow a threat and the most powerful moment of fear you can have in a static image. I really wanted to play with that. Someone did describe it as a spooky *Where's Wally!* I can't argue with that, really.

Figure 2: The whistle-blower senses that perhaps he's not alone in an empty train carriage in

© Jonathan Cape (2012) *Admantine* (2012), Script/Art: Hannah Berry, p. 25.

AF: *But there's that idea that you're looking at the monster, and you don't realize. A bit like Bob in Twin Peaks (1990-1991), lurking in the back of a frame and you don't notice until he starts to move.*

HB: Yeah. That zombie in the original *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) – I do like a zombie – is my favourite of all zombies! You see it across the graveyard, kind of walking around, and it's only when it gets quite close, you realize he's not just an old man; he's an undead being. I love that, I really love that.

AF: *That's a really interesting idea, though, to use the gutters of the panels to inform the storytelling. A few people have done that in superhero comics, when superheroes break through the panels into some other kind of dimension. But obviously when something's set on a train, then the windows are creating panels that you can see through and beyond, and then beyond those in one sense is the darkness, but the fictional darkness is not only there but also in the gutter.*

HB: Absolutely. It's like a separate entity in the book itself. It does create a layer between the characters themselves, and you as the reader. It's something which sort of exists between the two. That was my plan. Also as it progresses, outside of the panels, the gutters get larger and larger, very slowly, incrementally larger, so the panels are almost being winked out into the darkness – things that no-one outside of a book group, or a room of academics would notice. But it's a thing that would subtly influence the way that people read them. I like details, little details that not everybody will notice but if you do notice it, you feel like you're special. I'm really aiming for those people.

AF: *When you're casting a book, for want of a better word [...] When you're thinking of a group of people who are going to be murdered one by one, do you have a cast in your head that you're going to use for characters in books? 'I want this sort of person, so they're going to look like this [...]'*

HB: Sometimes. I've done that more with *Livestock*, but I didn't so much with *Adamantine*, because the characters themselves don't have names; the four main characters on this train don't have names. The book is about four people on a train who are connected through their previous deeds and actions to the death of a man, in their own way. Some small deed has led to the death of a person. So, they're kind of identified by the crimes they've committed in a way that lead to the death.

The characters' faces are slightly connected; the design of their faces are connected to the crimes they've committed. One guy is the whistle-blower, so his mouth has a ring of beard around it, to draw attention to it. There's a guy who's a bystander, who just stood and watched, so his eyes are underlined. There's a lady who was a delegator, so everything in her face is triangles because it passes down. There's another lady who's a prevaricator, who's got

white blond hair, but you realize she's got black roots in there. They weren't necessarily cast in any way.

AF: *They had attributes that confer their status.*

HB: Yeah. They're human beings, they have personalities, but they don't have identities. They don't have names as such.

AF: *It's quite complicatedly structured at times, with flashbacks, and even within the train itself there's a bit of a time loop in terms of interaction with the communicator panel on the wall. When you're structuring a book like that, did it involve lots of notes, post-it notes on the wall?*

HB: Oh god, so many! It was necessary and it did work at the end, but it does take some attention, it does require a bit of attention to read it. I sort of prefer that in a comic anyway, in a horror comic. Because I think you need to primarily unsettle the reader. I think the story told as a straight narrative would have been too straightforward. There's still a sense of inevitability about it, I think, because of the way that it's structured. There are all these flashbacks that explain what's happened before, what's gone on before, why these characters are here in the first place, interspersed with this continuing story. As you say, there's this kind of a time loop in it. This recurrent theme of things returning which shouldn't be returning, so there's a conversation which takes place through an intercom.

AF: *One of the themes of the gothic is a traumatic incident in the past that is constantly referred back to, and infects the present.*

HB: Yes. It's almost like narrative PTSD! I think that's probably the kernel of any good horror story. I think the best horror is psychological. I think the best horror comes from the idea that some emotion, some memory, is repressed and is bubbling to the surface in unpleasant ways, which this kind of is, really.

AF: *It's interesting that comics are a medium where you engage with it at your own speed, where you can stare at the panels as long as you want, and therefore this kind of impending doom, something that has a psychological content to it, works really well on the page. And it's weird then that a large number of previous horror comics all relied on the shock, the turn of the page and 'then she found his severed head!' [...] That works well when you're telling a ghost story around a camp fire, but it's weird that comics should rely on shock, when the shock is something that happens once, while when something is designed to be read over a period of time, and can build on itself [...]*

HB: This is it. Comics are inherently a very visual medium, and initially when I was trying to do this second book, I was trying to do something which can only be done in comics. Mostly, when I was trying to do my first book, I was working at Blockbuster Video. I said it's very cinematic because I like films. I was undermining a lot of the potential you have with comics. One of the great things about comics is that the reader can take it at their own pace, can digest at their own pace and can take in as little or as much as they want, really.

In the first couple of pages, the lady with white hair – the prevaricator – is telling this blatant lie, which sort of is hopefully setting up the premise, and the idea in the reader's mind, that what the dialogue, and what the narrative is saying, is not necessarily what's happening in the images. You need to take them separately and then work out what is really happening. Use context, is what I'm trying to say. I don't think you can do that with film in the same way.

This is something that is unique to comics, because you can flip backwards and forwards, you can read at your own pace, you can digest as much or as little as you like and obviously you can hide details in the background which people may or may not notice. It can potentially add a really rich layer for the observant, especially if there's a hidden watchful figure, for example. There's something in adding that in a way that not everybody will see, which means that for the reader who does spot it, it'll become quite a personal thing to them.

I suppose it does happen sometimes in film. There's a great Korean film called *Memories of Murder* (Joon-ho, 2003), which is about a detective following this serial killer. There's a scene with a young lady walking home; there're just these huge fields either side at night, and she feels something's wrong. So, she just stands there staring looking around. The camera's focussed on her, with a bit of the background. I was watching it with a few friends and you can just see, in the background of the field, a figure stand up and then it cuts away. I said to my friends: 'My god, did you see that? That was terrifying!' and they said: 'What are you talking about?' and that made it so much worse, because I had seen something and they hadn't seen it. It was like the figure was only there for me and it really brings it home, I think.

AF: *It's like what you were saying earlier, about the cemetery in Night of the Living Dead, and in that, it's made even worse because the brother is teasing his sister saying, 'Oooh, here comes one of them now', so she's apologizing to the figure before she realizes he's a cannibalistic ghoul.*

HB: So the moral of the story is always be watchful, always be paranoid! Setting a book on a train [...] If anybody's thinking of doing it, I don't recommend it. It's awful and repetitive.

AF: *But certain filmmakers set themselves that challenge, that when you set a movie in a small, claustrophobic space, how do you make that small space interesting for 90 minutes? So you have to come up with camera angles [...]*

HB: Yeah. I quite like that challenge. I like talking heads scenes, because I like to like to play around with the setting and the composition, and the different elements of the scene, and try and make it so it's not just a head talking at another head, panel after panel after panel. I really enjoy the challenge of that. It's something quite appealing, keeping it from being too static – unless you're trying to make the point that it's static – is one of the fun parts of

comics. I'm not saying I would be a good director, but if anyone has any directing jobs, I'd give it a try.

AF: *Although comic book artists are directors in their own right. They're casting a scene, they're choosing camera angles [...]*

HB: Yeah, directors that don't share!

AF: *Around the same time as making Adamtine, you also contributed to Ravi Thornton's Hoax: Psychosis Blues, which is also another kind of psychological horror. Did the two projects inform each other at all?*

HB: It was actually afterwards, and I don't think they did. One of the funny things with *Hoax* was that we weren't actually told what the other people were doing, or any of the other chapters. We were all kept very contained, and very separate. So, there was a lot of interpretation that went into it. I think that was what she wanted; she was really after everyone to put their different spin on things, but it was weird working in isolation in that way. Actually, it wasn't weird, because that's how I work anyway; it was delightful without other people! That was a really interesting project.

AF: *Livestock is your third, and possibly last graphic novel. In terms of choosing it as the third book you were going to write and draw, you'd made a comedic, surrealist detective novel as your first, a metaphysical horror graphic novel as your second, and your third book is a satirical take on celebrity culture mixing in sci-fi themes and cloning [...]* How did that come about?

HB: Well, I'm a lady of many facets! (laughs) The books that I write tend to be drawn from the mood that I'm in at the time. So when I did *Britten and Brülighly*, it's a bit of a gloomy

book. I was fresh out of university and was just very sad! *Adamantine* was a horror, and I was just feeling a little over-whelmed by adulthood and responsibilities, the pressures of society and afraid of other people, so it just made sense to do a horror. With *Livestock*, I was just really, really angry. I was so angry and it just spewed out into this funny, but aggressive book. It's all about the media playing with the public's understanding of narratives, and the skewing of the news in order to try to subvert people towards certain attitudes and certain viewpoints which are favourable to certain political parties or certain media moguls. All those fun things!

AF: *Was it any particular array of TV shows or any incidents that made you particularly angry about modern celebrity culture and the media?*

HB: I'm not really angry about celebrity culture, unless somebody gets me started on *Made in Chelsea* (2011-present) and then I'll rant all evening long – I hate those people! Celebrity culture doesn't really bug me that much.

AF: *But, people are obsessed with it, and they could do better things with their attention and their lives.*

HB: Yeah, I suppose that's always been a kind of slow creeping thing, but I don't know if I really blame people for being interested in celebrities, because we, as social animals, are drawn towards people that are more famous, more beautiful and more the leaders of our collective packs. I think we're just drawn to that. It's more that they are exploited to grab attention. It's more that they are given so much space and time when there are more important things to be talking about. So, I don't really blame the consumers so much as the providers, even though they're giving us what we want. Maybe they shouldn't do that, maybe they should be a little more responsible with their time.

I have this great article from the *Metro* newspaper which I kept pinned to my wall for a little while, then I got rid of it because it was a bit depressing. It was about Rihanna, and she'd gone on a night out. She'd sat on the back of a sofa, then she slid off, and ended up laying on the sofa. If you can imagine such a thing! There were two photos: a photo of before, and a photo of after, and there was a big, long article underneath. This took up half a page in the *Metro* and it made me just feel so sad and quite angry, also. A recurrent theme [...]

AF: *And giving it this sci-fi twist?*

HB: That was slightly unintentional. I was trying to set it in the not-too-distant future. So, in the story there's this scandal that's just been discovered, and the scandal is that human cloning has been accidentally legalized – within private institutions only; it's taking place in the dark and we don't know what is happening. There are suggestions that the characters [...] Actually, it's probably quite obvious! When you see it's about celebrity culture, and there's cloning going on, you kind of assume the characters in it will be clones. I don't confirm or deny this. It gave it that light dystopian lilt that gave everything this extra bit sad.

Figure 3: © 2017 Jonathan Cape. A journalist and government representative discusses the advent of cloning on TV before being interrupted by starlet Clementine in *Livestock* (2017), Script/Art: Hannah Berry, p. 52.

AF: *It does seem to be the ideal option for TV producers, that if they could replace the version of the celebrity in their show with someone who's always young, or always conforming [...]*

HB: Yeah, and if anything happens to them, she can be refreshed and replaced.

AF: *Your book is also weirdly prescient. I don't know if you read about this, but there was a story a few weeks ago: Madonna was blocking the sale of some of her old paraphernalia that had been acquired by one of her previous aides, including the sale of a hairbrush, in case it still has some of her hair in it, and then people could scan the DNA in the follicles² [...]*

HB: And make some tiny Madonnas! She's just future-proofing herself. She has to be careful what happens in the future with all of her progeny [...]

AF: *There's a 2012 science fiction film called Antiviral (Cronenberg, 2012) by Brandon Cronenberg, about a world where people can obtain celebrity viruses and clones of their STDs, and by the end of the film, burgers made from their cloned flesh [...]*

HB: That's a really good idea!

AF: *You've said recently this was going to be your final graphic novel, mainly because of the time it takes to write and draw a graphic novel and the amount of money you have to do it with, just is no longer viable.*

HB: The maths just doesn't add up. I've had a lot of support by coming out and saying that, but also a lot of criticism, but I think it does need to be said that – at least in the area of comics I work in – it's not really a feasible way to make a living. It was fine when I was just out of university, and younger, but as I'm getting older I've got to look to the future. I wasn't trying to depress people, but I've been doing this for twelve years now and I just feel broken and wasted! (laughs)

AF: *But also, I assume it's because you just don't want to have to make compromises. You could make graphic novels quicker, but only if you made your style looser. You have to do it in a style where you're happy with the finished result.*

HB: Yeah, and a lot of the criticism I received was along the lines of, ‘Why don’t you just do it faster?’ or ‘Do it less complicated, draw it a little simpler’ or ‘Maybe don’t paint it’, but you’re right, that isn’t how I work. I love to have detail in the artwork. To create something which readers will be able to spend a good deal of time with, because these books are expensive things. Cover to cover, you can probably read *Livestock* in less than an hour, but I want to have something you can get your money’s worth with. But also, if I’m producing something, I want to put everything into it. I want it to be a fabulous beast. I don’t want it to be cheap and naff. I think readers can spot when something has just been rattled off quickly. I know there’s a drive to make money, to churn out a lot of productions, but in everything – in books, in TV, in film – you can see the things that have been turned out to make a swift buck and then things that have been laboured over, which are enjoyed and appreciated more. I think so anyway. Maybe Michael Bay does love and appreciate his work! It’s not my place to say [...]

There’s a phrase I came across some time ago called ‘Bumping the lamp’; it’s regarding the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (Zemekis, 1988) and there’s a bit where Roger Rabbit gets handcuffed to Bob Hoskins and they’re trying to remove the handcuffs. In doing so, Hoskins bumps the ceiling lamp and the lamp is swinging backwards and forwards. The way they did it was that they filmed the live action beforehand and then drew the animation on afterwards. I think one of the animators suggested that one of the characters hit the lamp, so they’d not only have Roger Rabbit to draw, but they’d also have to draw the effects of light and the shadows on him created by this swinging lamp. They’d have to make it fit in with the scene, and they just went that extra mile to make it a thing that had that extra verisimilitude, that extra level of authenticity, that extra beauty to it. It looks great, it looks really good for it. So, always be bumping lamps!

AF: *You've been posting five panel gag strips on your twitter feed. Are they from The New Statesman magazine?*

HB: That's right. I think at some point *The New Statesman* will put them online. But I put them online in the meantime, just because I crave responses from the public. I want to know if I've done well! I put them on twitter, and it's really interesting to see which ones do well. Actually, the ones I think are the funniest are not always the ones which are the best received. The ones I think are just silly throw away things are ones which people like. Which is depressing, now I think about it! Perhaps I should spend a little less time on it, or maybe it's that I have a different sense of humour to everybody else.

AF: *Were you doing these at the same time as Livestock?*

HB: Actually, that was really good timing, because I was starting to get a little bit concerned on the financial front. I'd like to say *The New Statesman* came to me, but they didn't – they put out an advert saying, 'Would anybody like to pitch a strip to us?'; that was probably back in May 2016.

AF: *How far into the book were you?*

HB: I was near the end.

AF: *Reading them side by side, there seems to be some kind of dialogue between the gag strips – the angrier ones, about the stupidity of mankind – and the content of the book. Did you see some kind of relationship between the two?*

HB: Not intentionally. The idea of the strips is: it's called *Vox Pops* (Berry, 2016-2017), and each week it's a different person talking about something a bit weird, a bit funny, a little bit different. It was something intended to celebrate how weird and delightful people are. I like people, mostly. Mostly, they're pretty good, I think. So I tried to do the strips from a more

positive stance, but sometimes I get really, really pissed off about how stupid people are.

Those are the ones that get a little bit angrier. They do well on twitter, funnily enough. Who'd have thought something angry would do well on twitter?

Also, I've been asked to keep them a little bit light. There are times they've got a little bit dark. I received an e-mail saying, 'Could you just be a little bit jollier, maybe?', which I try to. One that you picked out – 'The Holistic Household Appliance Helpdesk' – that is one I based on something which angers me, and that may have come out more in the strip than I meant it to. (laughs)

AF: *Thinking of how the work you do has a relationship with the environment it's produced in, Livestock has a quote by journalist Paul Mason on the front of the book: 'A parable for the Trump era'. Obviously you started it years ago, but it's not the only book or film which has come out in recent months that's felt like it's apt for the time we live in, almost as if there was something in the Zeitgeist leading up to his election, predicting where culture was going.*

HB: I would never have guessed this was happening, but it did feel that this is where things were heading. I would never have predicted a reality TV star would have become a president! Who could have imagined such a horror? There are bits in there, just in the background of the story in *Livestock*. There are references to a new human rights act being drawn up. That was something which over the last couple of years kept on bubbling up, and then being removed. Not in the sense of people having any concern for human rights, but in the sense of removing human rights, certainly for poor people. That was something in the background, and then Theresa May, the Arch-Mage of attempts to destroy the Human Rights Act as Home Secretary, became Prime Minister, so now it's back on the cards again. I guess these things have been brewing for a little while.

Throughout *Livestock* there are trending news pages which give a breakdown of what's happening in the news, what's happening in the story, and socially where people are – the utter horror and decay of society over time. I did those in July 2016, at the very end of everything else, after the Brexit vote, and that definitely gave it a darker, more angry tone. One of the little news items is a picture of a bulldog and a lion, a Union Jack and the Red Arrows, with the caption 'British Pride! Find out what's happening in your neighbourhood'. That was at the time there was a huge uptake in racist attacks and awful xenophobia, just horrid. It was gloomy time, a lot of anger. As well as the news pages, I was working through the whole thing chronologically and there's a page I did during the election in 2015 featuring a Union Jack made of faeces in the background; so keep an eye out for that. Fun details like that!

AF: *There a page on your website featuring a story you've translated from a French portmanteau project, called The House on a Cliff / La Villa sur la Falaise (Sokal et al., 2012)*
[...]

HB: That's right. That was really fun. My first book, *Britten and Brülightly*, was translated into French by the publisher Casterman and they have an imprint called 'Écriture' which they use to publish their foreign authors. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of that, they had an author write the start to a story, and then ten different foreign authors continued the story. They didn't continue from each other – it wasn't an exquisite corpse – we all continued our individual stories from this one start. It was a really fun project to do. It would be nice to have a similar kind of project in the UK.

AF: *Unlike Adamtine, it's not horror – although maybe it has a sense of the horror of bureaucracy – but it has a lot of the qualities of the gothic to it. A crumbling house, circling vultures, a grey oppressive atmosphere [...]*

HB: The story is about this woman whose childhood home is on an island, which she's since left. There's a big storm and it knocks half the cliff, which the house is on the edge of, into the sea. So, the house is slowly tumbling into the sea. She's trying to get inside to reclaim the objects, but the island council is not letting her inside because of safety regulations. It was a while ago, so I don't remember the details.

AF: *She wants to get inside the house to retrieve her belongings, but they won't let her, but they're going to sue her if they fall on people below!*

HB: Yes, she can't win either way [...] I was in the middle of moving house when I made it, so that kind of Kafkaesque paperwork is what I was involved with at the time.

AF: *And next you're contributing a short story to the *Scream!* & *Misty Halloween special* (Berry and Willsher, 2017) [...]*

HB: Yeah, this was quite exciting! I got an e-mail from Rebellion saying they're bringing back *Scream!* and *Misty*, in a one off special – would I be interested in writing a reboot of 'The Sentinels' story, which was big in *Misty*. I hadn't read it as I'm too young, but 'The Sentinels' was about these two tower blocks, one of which was occupied, and one of which was empty. If you go into the empty one, you come out into an alternate universe, which is in a world where Nazis won the war. If they thought I wasn't going to turn this into a metaphor for the rise of fascism in current society, they were wildly mistaken, because that's exactly what I did! It was really fun to do. I think I've only written a story once for somebody else to draw – that was for Rebellion as well, for a Free Comic Book Day *2000AD* (Berry and Dani, 2016) comic.

AF: *That was 'Fiends of the Eastern Front'?*

HB: Yeah, set in the Vietnam War. That wasn't a reboot, but a continuation with the same characters. Again, a very short story. With this one, the idea is that if it does well, then they'll continue it.

AF: *They're hedging their bets: One half of the anthology is for boys and the other for girls [...]*

HB: [...] and my story's entirely pink! (laughs) I was wondering, was I asked to do this thing because it's *Misty* and I'm a girl? They said it's because I wrote *Adamtine*, which is horror.

AF: *If it's successful, would you write a weekly strip?*

HB: I wouldn't turn it down! It was a lot of fun to write. I've got ideas for if it does continue. I've left some threads to follow. I've got some ideas that I'm quite excited about if it does continue.

AF: *Livestock is your last graphic novel that you've written and drawn, but if there were a dozen instalments of 'The Sentinels' in Misty, collected as a book [...] At least, you might write another one.*

HB: Yeah, exactly. That's a graphic novel, right there! I'm not ruling out the idea of another graphic novel; it's just that I have to be able to live on it, that's all. I would definitely never stop doing comics, and that was one of the weird responses to the article I wrote for *Ink Magazine*, that I was giving up comics altogether, or dying! People were acting like I wasn't going to be around anymore. I don't think I'm dying, any more than any of us is! I'll still be doing comics, I'll still be doing *The New Statesman*, I plan to do self-published comics on the side. I just can't do them as a main source of income as I am at the moment. I'm freelance and doing comics. My rates are very reasonable!

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Notes

¹ The parents of a boy with a developmental disorder blamed the programme as a contributing factor to his suicide – <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/parents-blame-tv-programme-for-sons-death-1565122.html>.

² Madonna is quoted as saying 'I understand that my DNA could be extracted from a piece of my hair. It is outrageous and grossly offensive that my DNA could be auctioned for sale to the general public' (<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/madonna-auction-tupac-shakur-2pac-love-letter-underwear-panties-celebrity-memorabilia-sale-a7848161.html>). More recently Martin Shkreli was found in breach of his bail conditions for asking followers on social media to obtain a sample of Hilary Clinton's hair, offering a bounty of \$5,000 for a strand with follicle still attached

(<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/13/martin-shkreli-jail-securities-fraud-hillary-clinton>).