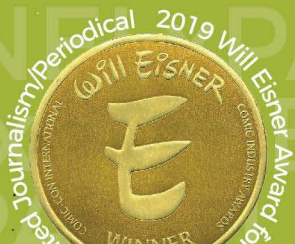


# PANELxPANEL

#42 x JANUARY x \$3 x THE SEEDS



# [ 3. Boxes, Bees Cells, & Beyond ]

Examining the various  
structures found within  
the pages of *The Seeds*.



Words by  
Lucius Illuminix

# Boxes.

If you ask Astra, there are 50 sides to every story; that's 50 different takeaways and 50 different sets of details. To offer up one presentation, she takes snapshots of the world as she sees it with her camera. Through composition and content, she decides what's important, and relays that information through her photographs. Just like the pictures on the wall near the gates to Zone-B, photos depict a version of reality the sharer wants us to see. It tells a story that takes an entire field of vision and worldly knowledge and confines it to a single image in a box, a constructed version of the reality existing beyond the lens.

Humans tend to organize the world in boxes.

These rectangular shapes rarely appear in nature, but humans cracked the code.

Boxes fit together neatly, you can place boxes within boxes, all of the angles are the same, and their edges make it simple to create 3D shapes and coordinate systems.

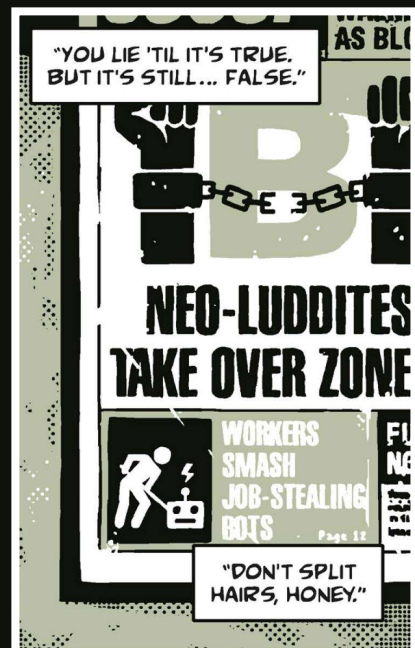
The use of pairs of parallel lines that intersect at perpendicular angles may be one of man's greatest ideas. We place so many things in boxes, we tend to forget they are there.

The rectangle has become second nature.

In *The Seeds*, Aja and Nocenti introduce the box at the same time they introduce people, and begin to give them both characters. When the reader first encounters Lola and Race, Lola tells Race about the “invisible killers” that live in bathrooms. She then walks into a bathroom and what is almost invisible is the boxes. The bathroom is a small box tiled with checkered wallpaper and there is no room in the box for Astra’s forearm crutches, yet alone her wheelchair. Meanwhile, her alien lover stands outside that box telling her that he is free to leave. The scene introduces us to Race and Lola but also the constricting nature of boxes.

The Scoops editor, Gabrielle, is fully aware of the power of the rectangular periodicals to bedeck our thoughts. She explains to Astra that The Scoop doesn’t just inform reality, there are panels containing news articles in rectangular frames. The boxed articles depict a progression of anti-tech sentiment that was initially manufactured but led to the creation of Zone-B. This is reinforced in the next chapter with the introduction of Nutwad, an alien from outside of our system who sees how an alien on TV behaves, and then adopts its character. Astra is on a journey to find truth, but her boss is telling her that the people who control the boxes are the creators of truth.

The truth Aja and Nocenti communicate through their boxes constantly calls attention to the boxes themselves. The light peeking through rectangular windows and doorways reminds readers that characters are confined within rectangular brick architecture. The characters don’t recognize this, because they are preoccupied with rectangular screens. The farmer, Jack, tries to “do what farmers do” and eat his beloved pig, and the same checkered boxes from the walls of the bathroom appear on the table cloth. The geometry of rectangles in *The Seeds* shows us what is within society and its limitations. *The Seeds* is able to make something fundamental and basic to the medium feel very constricting.



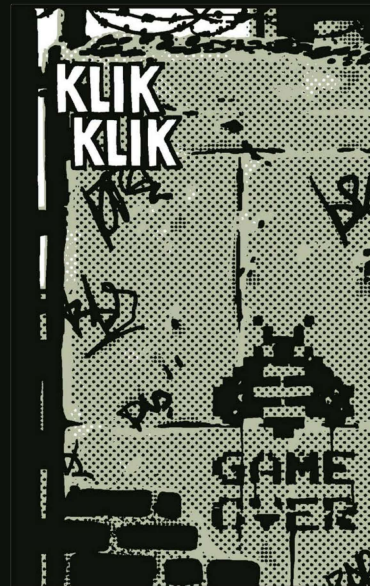


# Bee Cells.

That fundamental and basic form, the default for comics, is actually secondary in nature. The bees know nature's primary shape and incorporate it into their design. Many scientists believe that bees construct cylindrical cells, carefully space them at equal intervals and let the laws of physics take care of the rest. When the wax is heated and becomes more malleable, the walls of these carefully placed cells combine and naturally meet at 120 degree angles. As more and more bee cells merge, they begin to take the popular honeycomb pattern we are all familiar with. The bees recognize what the humans do not; that nature often flows toward the hexagon.

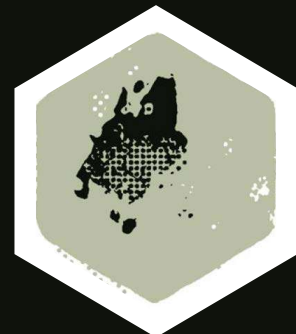
Those who choose to move closer to nature will find them passing through a hexagonal patterned gate. On the other side of this gate is Zone-B, a land where people have attempted to get closer to nature. The neo-luddites took over, and attempted to create a tech-free zone. While they successfully eliminated the technology of the internet age, they still live in box shaped buildings and trailers constructed by man, believing the answer is to go back just enough to appease nature. However, the damage to the Earth done by the boxes cannot easily be undone.

Nature's flow toward the hexagon is often overlooked. When a billionaire crash landed on Saturn's moon, the space agency's focus on the machinations of blinded them to the hexagon in front of them. They shared photos of the corpse, somehow blind to the giant hexagonal cloud on the north pole of Saturn visible to the billionaire. The first page of each issue shows us the ways that nature flows toward hexagons. The insect's hexagonal eyes that allow it to see more of the light spectrum, and cracks in cooling volcanic rock that form hexagons to release energy more efficiently seem to have nothing to do with the story's plot. Yet the shape speaks for nature in ways the animals cannot.



That is exactly why some think the answer is to go direct the other way. Green Biotech, in their boxed-shaped complex enclosed in a hexagonal fence, tries to repair problems caused by tech with more tech. The bees are dying and cannot spread the seed, therefore Green Biotech should create some form of artificial pollination. Alice believes so strongly that pollination drones and artificial bees can do a better job than the original that they were willing to bet on it. Green BioTech's logo contains hexagons, as if they could contain nature. If more time was spent listening to nature than trying to out-invent it, they may have recognized that nature was already moving.

Before *The Seeds* spells this out explicitly in issue 4, the shapes begin to tell the story. Hexagons begin to appear in more abstract places, like tree branches and reflections. The machinations of humans failing is highlighted by errors on computer screens. The imagery builds up to a climax at the end of chapter 5 of issue 4, when all 9 panels have been overrun by honeycombs. Humans bickered over what they needed to do to heal the earth, but all they needed to do was listen to nature. If more people heeded the hexagons, society may have been ready for what was coming.



# Beyond.

David Aja's use of the shapes in *The Seeds* goes beyond those used in the story. The form of the comic itself also feeds into the geometric iconography in ways that can easily go unnoticed. Open *The Seeds* to any page and you may recognize the iconic 9-panel grid, which Aja uses as a cornerstone of the book. Each page is a rectangular box with four-walled panels containing snapshots of the world. Like Astra's photos, the panels depict the reality the creative team want us to see. Instead of fighting against the inherent man-made structure of the medium, and trying to make the human choices invisible, Aja decides to draw attention to it. The grid can be seen as 9 uniform boxes spaced at regular intervals. The boxes may be combined to slightly adjust the layouts, but the rigid 9 box foundation of the story draws direct attention to the human influence.

Once the reader recognizes the geometry of the series, it begins to take on a life beyond the page. Within the panels, depictions of the world conform to the boxes. All of the imagery in the city feels constricted, as walls, doors and windows add smaller spaces within the already confined edges of the panels. The birds watch from above, as a limitless sky in the background can not be contained by the panels, and even their dialogue is borderless. In Zone-B, tree branches burst through the borders and grow into other panels. The language of the comic draws attention to the human hand behind it by making what is in the four walls of the panel just as important as what is not.



# "The hexagon creeps into the story in... inconspicuous ways."

This focus on boxes also creates a sleight of hand that draws attention away from the geometry that is truly in control of the story. Before the reader opens the comic to find a 9 panel grid, they will see a hexagon on the cover. Just as they are overlooked in nature, it can be easy to overlook the way the hexagons impose themselves in the narrative. Even though there are four issues, each issue contains six chapters. Many of those chapters begin with a page consisting of four panels. Yet, in terms of the 9 panel grid, every chapter contains a large panel made up of six grid spaces. This is able to open up the claustrophobic feeling of the smaller boxed panels throughout the story and give the reader a more open look at the world. The box can be continually referenced by the number four, the fours are easy to find throughout. The hexagon is indicated by the number six, and creeps into the story in more inconspicuous ways just as they do within the narrative.

The use of geometry as a tool to further the themes of the narrative is one that works especially well in *The Seeds*, because it is a story very much about the intersection of humanity and nature. Because we may be more attuned to things like acting, colors, or the presentation of characters, the hexagons and rectangles that Aja and Nocenti use throughout become almost invisible by design. Just as the buildings and roadways that make up our day to day environment go almost unnoticed until we take the time to look, we may only notice all the hexagons and structures on a second or third (or fourth) read of the series. When we are more attentive to the ways we shape the world, we become aware of the ways the world shapes our behaviors. *The Seeds* quite literally uses shapes to draw attention to the ways structures shape us.

We just have to be willing to take a moment to stop and look. ●





"We just have to be willing to take a moment to stop and look."