

From the publisher of *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*

GERRY ALANGUILAN

ELMER



"One of my favourite comics.
It's just heartbreaking and funny
and so beautifully drawn."

—NEIL GAIMAN



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Published in Singapore by Epigram Books
www.epigrambooks.sg

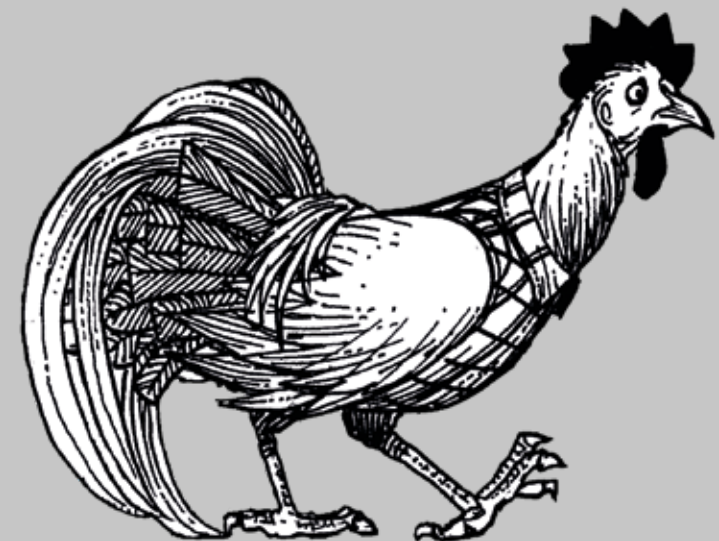
Originally published by Komikero Publishing, Philippines, 2009.

**National Library Board,
Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Name: Alanguilan, Gerry, author, illustrator.
Title: Elmer / Gerry Alanguilan.
Description: Singapore : Epigram, [2020]
Identifier(s): OCN 1121253214 | ISBN 978-981-48-4573-1 (paperback) |
ISBN 978-981-48-4574-8 (ebook)
Subject(s): LCSH: Chickens—Comic books, strips, etc. | Racism—Comic
books, strips, etc. | Speciesism—Comic books, strips, etc. |
Anthropomorphism—Comic books, strips, etc.
Classification: DDC 741.5—dc23

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents
either are the product of the author's imagination or are used ficti-
tiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or
locales is entirely coincidental.

First Epigram Books edition, January 2020.



EPIGRAM
SINGAPORE · LONDON



FOREWORD

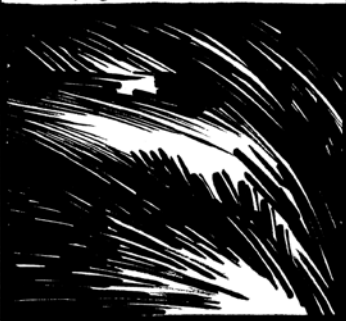
It has been 10 years since I finished *Elmer*, and in those years, the book has brought me to places I did not expect. In 2011, I found myself in the United States where *Elmer* had been nominated for an Eisner during that year's San Diego Comic-Con. In 2013, it brought me to Algeria as a guest of the Festival International de la Bande Dessinee d'Alger (FIBDA). Then it brought me to France where *Elmer* had been translated into French and had won a couple of awards. It was quite a whirlwind of experiences, which I will never forget.

It has quieted down a bit in the years since. My kidneys failed in 2011 right after I came home to the Philippines from the United States. I had been dealing with renal failure and all the complications from such a chronic illness since then. I still attend local comic book conventions in Manila, promoting and selling copies of *Elmer* published through my own Komikero Publishing. I still ink superheroes for Marvel Comics, where I'm currently working on X-Men. I refuse to accept slowing down as a consequence of my illness and I have made a personal vow to myself to continue creating comics until I am no longer able.

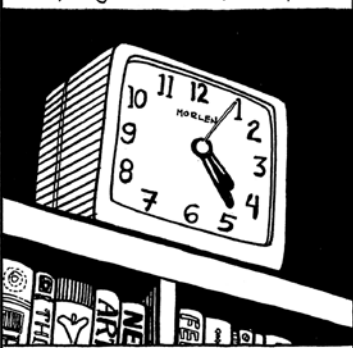
Elmer is now entering a new chapter in its life as part of Epigram's graphic novel publishing line. I am extremely honoured to have this well-respected publisher take care of my baby for me outside the Philippines and across the world. *Elmer* is 10 years old but it just refuses to fade into obscurity. I absolutely cannot wait for what the future holds for this book.

Gerry Alanguilan
November 18, 2019
San Pablo City, Philippines

OCTOBER 6, 2003.
I woke up at 4.25am. I had been dreaming. I remember being chased. People with knives. A forest and a sea full of hidden, dangerous creatures. It was terrifying.



I HATE waking up so early. It's so dark that it makes me feel like everybody's still asleep, except me.

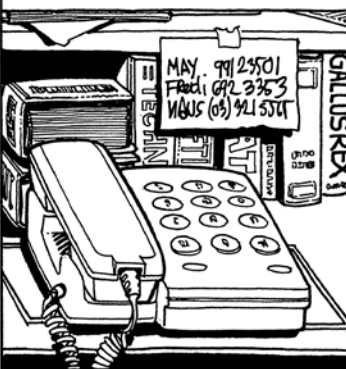


My interview wasn't until 9am, but I couldn't sleep anymore.

I sat down to write my dream, but I've forgotten most of it. I used to get a lot of my great ideas from dreams. Some of them, I'm sure, would make great movies.



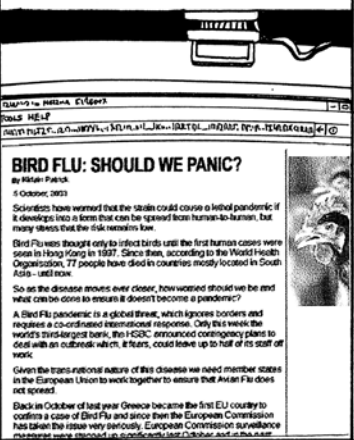
Speaking of movies, I really should call my brother. But it's hard to get in touch with him sometimes. It's hard to convince HIS IDIOT PEOPLE THAT I'M NOT SOME GODDAMN FAN.



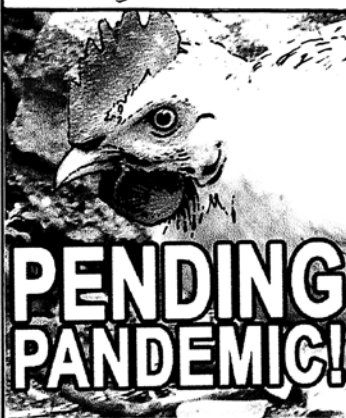
AND IT'S HARD TO CONVINCE HIM THAT IT'S NOT JUST GOD DAMNED MONEY I WANT. JEEZ! CAN'T A BROTHER JUST CALL?!



I checked my email and surfed a little bit. I read some news.



But I didn't read too much because it was too damned depressing.



Smut surfed instead. Much to my amazement, I discovered that little child star ANNA ROSIE has now grown up to be a bonafide BOLDIE!!



OH my GOD! She has REALLY grown. And I do mean GROWN. Lordy! God have mercy!



Oh man, I used to have such a CRUSH on her. She was so CUTE! And now she's... And you can see her...



ooh maan...

oh GOD...



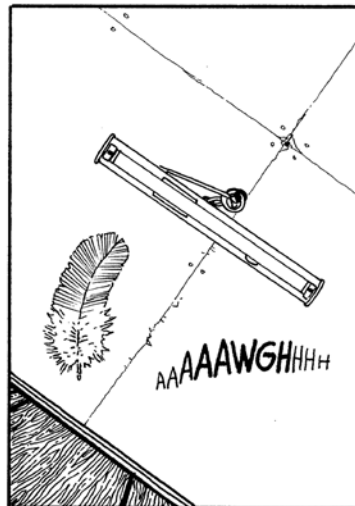
aungh

auungh

ghh

oh GHH

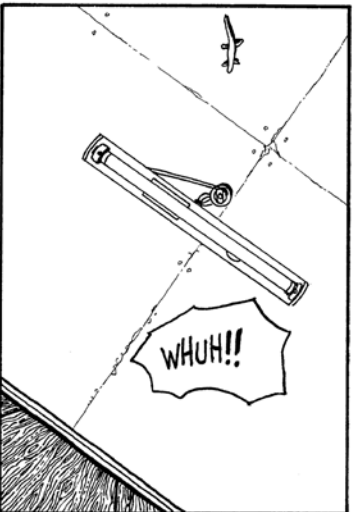
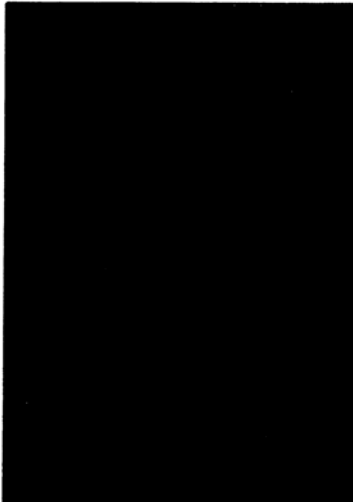
aaaaahhh



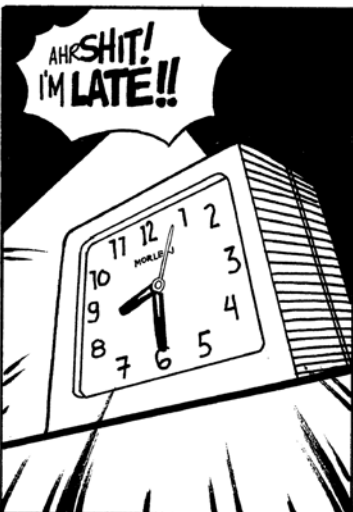
AAAAAWGHHH



uunnnhh



WHUH!!



AH SHIT! I'M LATE!!



The office was halfway across town. I didn't have time to eat or take a bath. I just rushed off, hoping to make my interview.

HEY! WATCH IT!

Which was FUN.



Mr ahh... Jake Gallo. Hmm...



I'm sorry, Mr Gallo, but I'm afraid our roster is full. We are no longer accepting new applicants at this time.



Not accepting? Well, what about that guy? He just came in and you hired him.



Well, Mr Gallo, we do make exceptions from time to time for people with... special skills.



I've got special skills. EXCEPTIONAL skills! I'm a GOOD writer. I can write up a fantastic portfolio for the company.



MR Gallo!

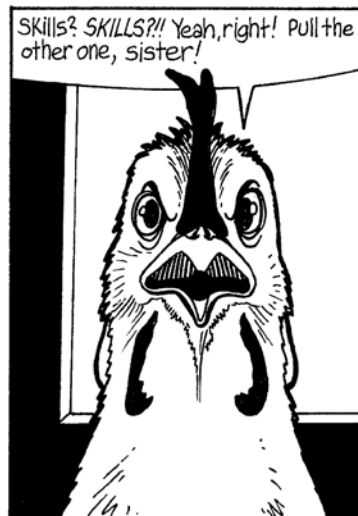
I know computers. I can design a kick-ass website. I was looking at the one you currently have and PHEW! It seriously needs a MAJOR overh-



I'm SORRY, but I don't think there's a place in this company for YOU.



I see.



HONESTLY, if it weren't for my sister MAY, I'd never even think of going to CITY HOSPITAL. Two years wiping the asses of the tall and lankies, I don't know how she stands it. Damned pasty-faced doctors, smelling of lilac and alcohol. I can't trust any of them. Naturally, May chewed me out.



Seriously, Jake. You have got to stop being so angry all the time. Stop being so self-destructive.

BLAH. BLAH. BLAH. I thought of ANNA ROSIE instead.



There is this doctor I know. He is a friend. You can talk to him, maybe figure out what is wrong. Maybe work things out.

Uh-huh. Yah. OK.

Damn that Anna Rosie. She HOT.



Do not worry. He is a chicken, if that is what you are wondering. We really should not make distinctions like that anymore.

Yahp. Got it.

Oh momma hurt me!



OW! what the FUCK?!

Do not swear. It will hurt if you keep flapping about. Settle down.

But that's PAINFUL!!

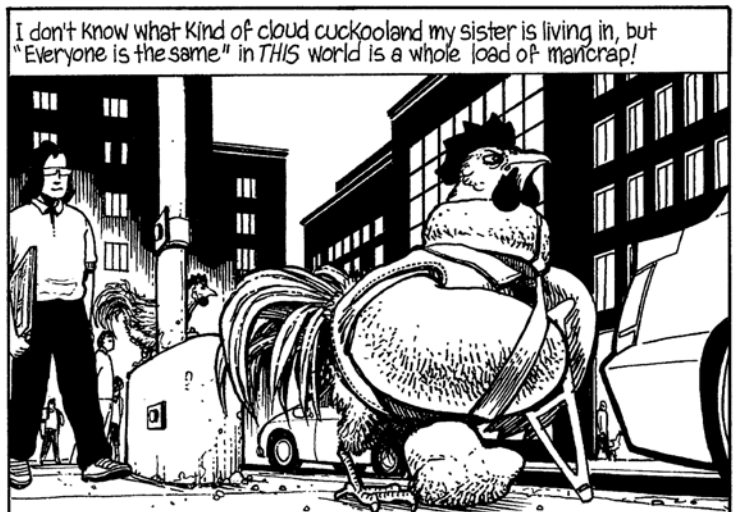


Will you stop being such a chick, Jake?! And pay attention!! Do not think I do not notice when you zone out. Listen, this is important!



It is not like how it was during Dad's days anymore. Things have changed. Everyone is the same now. You are the only one and a few other freaks out there who think we are not.

Yeah, well, whatever.



I don't know what kind of cloud cuckooland my sister is living in, but "Everyone is the same" in THIS world is a whole load of mancrap!

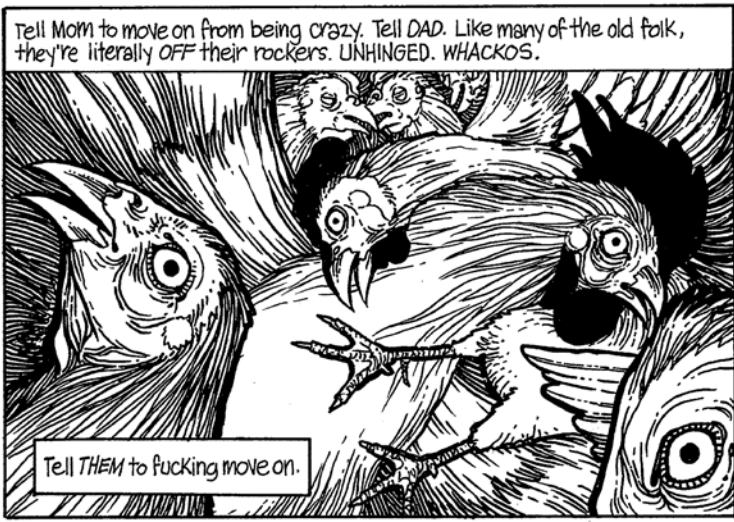


They'll NEVER treat us the same. Never BE equals. To them, we'll always be jumpy, paranoid little animals they used to eat.

Some of them still do. The bastards.



May told me to move on, that everybody has and that I should too. Move on? The PEOPLE who ganged up on me sure moved on rather fast behind my back to kick my ASS.



Tell MOM to move on from being crazy. Tell DAD. Like many of the old folk, they're literally OFF their rockers. UNHINGED. WHACKOS.

Tell THEM to fucking move on.

OCTOBER 15, 2003.
Today was a really bad day. I was woken up very early by the phone.



I really hate it when the phone rings late at night or very early in the morning because you know... you just know in your gut it's gonna be **BAD NEWS**.



It was May. She said Dad had a **STROKE**. I have to go home. To our **OLD** home.



He has been sick and weak for a while, but I never expected this could ever happen to him.



Freddie called from the set of his new film **CHICK-BOY** or whatever. They're closing production till he gets back. They haven't got any choice. He's the **STAR**.



We're **ALL** going **HOME**.



I can still remember being a kid... Mom chasing us around the house... telling us to watch out for when Dad comes home. They're growing old so fast. Faster than I realised.



They're **REALLY** old. Like **25 YEARS**. My **GOD**. That's really old for us. In the old days, we were lucky to live past **10**.



I packed my stuff, left my cactus **BILLY** with the neighbours and got a taxi to the bus station.



It takes four hours just to get back home from the city. I used to take this bus when I was younger, when I went out into the big city on my own.



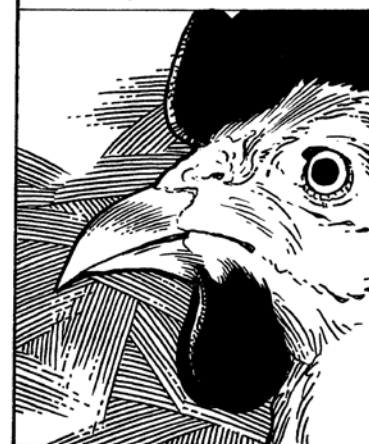
As a kid, I always thought that Mom and Dad would be around forever, you know?



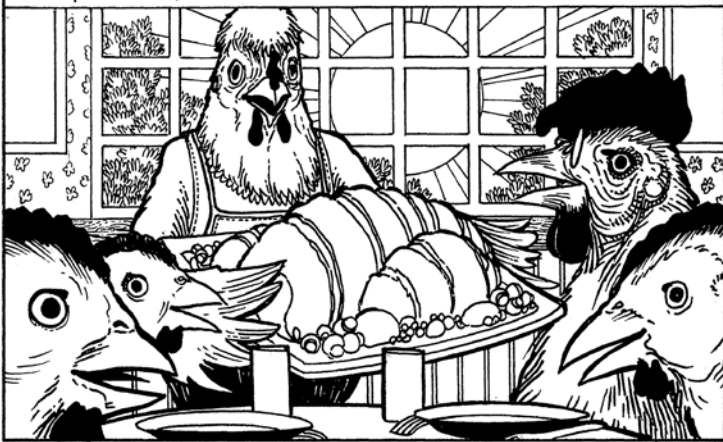
Now that I'm older, I admit I still kind of feel that way.



I still feel that whenever I go home, they will always be there.



Mom would always have our favourite roast duck ready for dinner. Oh Man, I tell you. Nobody, as in NOBODY, can cook roast duck better than Mom.

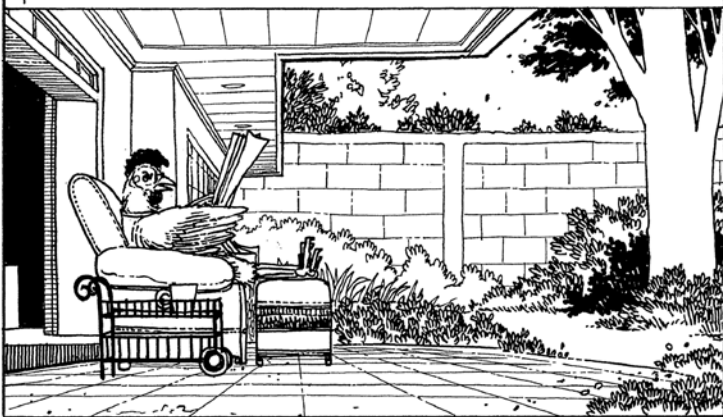


I miss that duck.



I miss Mom.

Dad would be sitting in his favourite chair with his stack of newspapers, having coffee and toast, laughing or ranting about what this or that politician has done now.

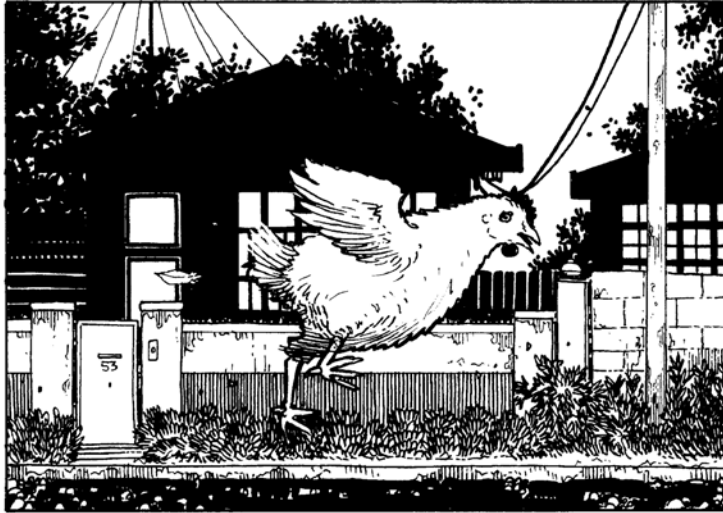


I really miss them.

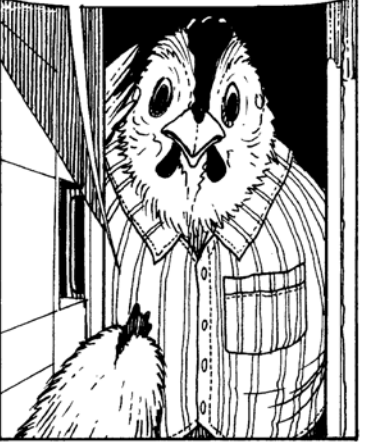


I miss Dad.

I don't want to overlook the "episodes", but I can't help but remember. Those are things that I just can't ever forget. The first time it happened with Mom, I was very young. I didn't understand what was going on.



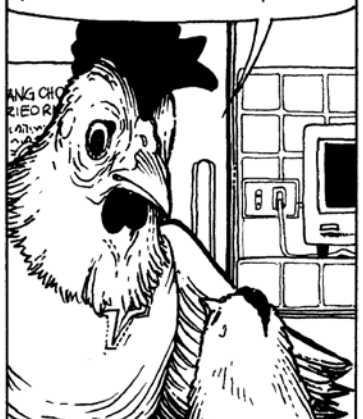
Come quickly, doctor! Something's wrong with my Mom!



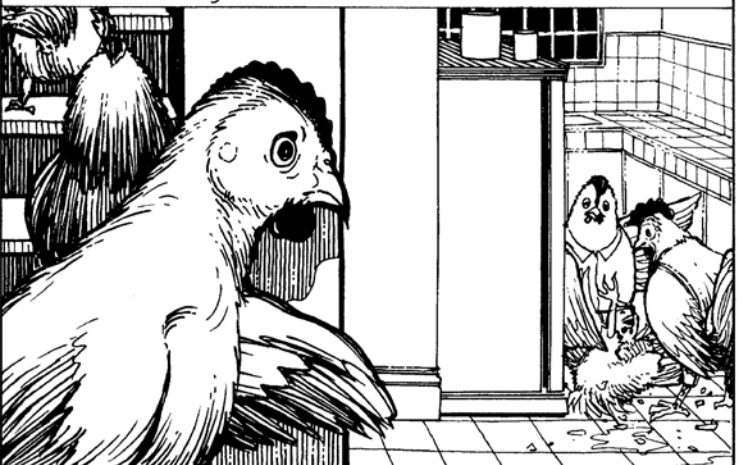
May and Freddie couldn't stop crying. I wanted to cry too, but I couldn't.



Thank you, son. Let me and the doctor take care of your Mom, now. You take your brother and sister upstairs.



"You have to be strong for them, Jake." That's what Dad said. And so I was.





What's wrong with Mom, Jake?

I don't know.



Is Mom dying?

Don't be stupid, May. Mom's not dying. she's just sick, that's all.



I thought you did not know what was wrong with Mom?

I don't, ok? If Mom was dying, Dad would've told us, wouldn't he?



Did you see her? The way she flepped around... she didn't even know who we were.

We ALL saw, Freddie.



But did you see? Her eyes looked like they were going to POP out!

Shut UP, Freddie! Just go to sleep, why don't you?

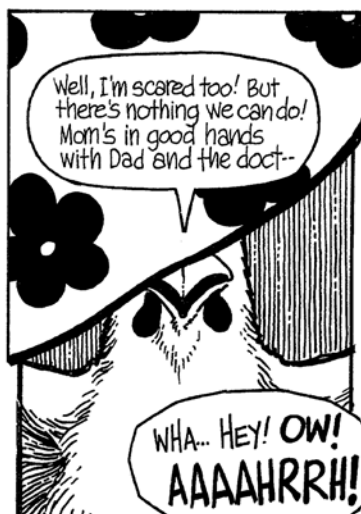


You go to sleep! Who are YOU to tell me what to do? You're not Dad! I'm going back downstairs!



HEY! It was DAD who asked ME to bring us all up here! So we're staying! That's IT!!

Jake! We are just SCARED! We are just worried about Mom!



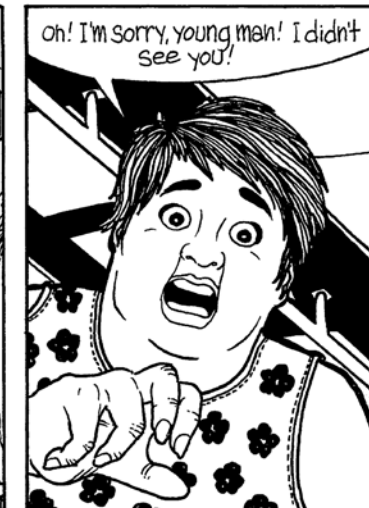
Well, I'm scared too! But there's nothing we can do! Mom's in good hands with Dad and the doctor--

WHA... HEY! OW! AAAAHHRR!!



OH!! Oh goodness!

WATCH WHERE YOU'RE SITTING YOUR FAT CARCASS LADY! FOR GOD'S SAKE!!



Oh! I'm sorry, young man! I didn't see you!

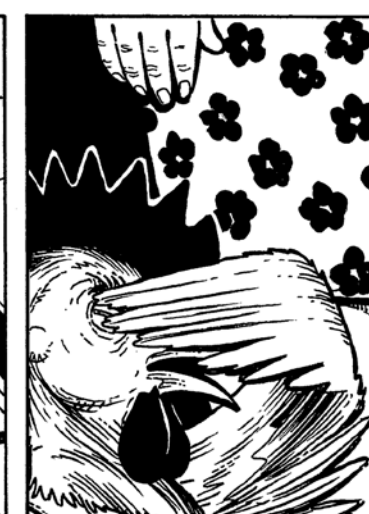


DIDN'T SEE ME? DIDN'T SEE ME?! I WAS SITTING HERE ALL THIS TIME! JESUS CHRIST, USE YOUR EYES!!



I beg your pardon. I said I was SORRY. You didn't have to take the Lord's name in vain.

OH FOR THE LOVE OF --!!



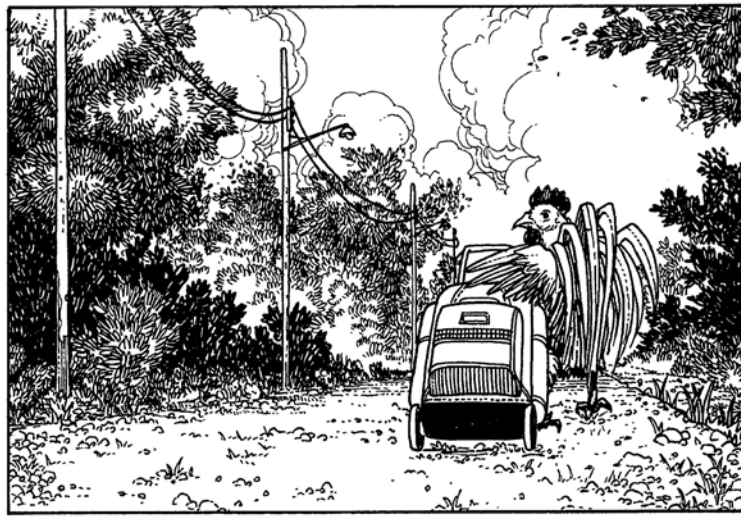
Fine. OK. Sit. PLEASE. Just... Just don't speak to me, OK?

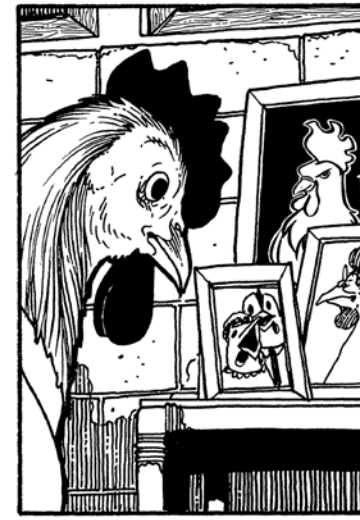
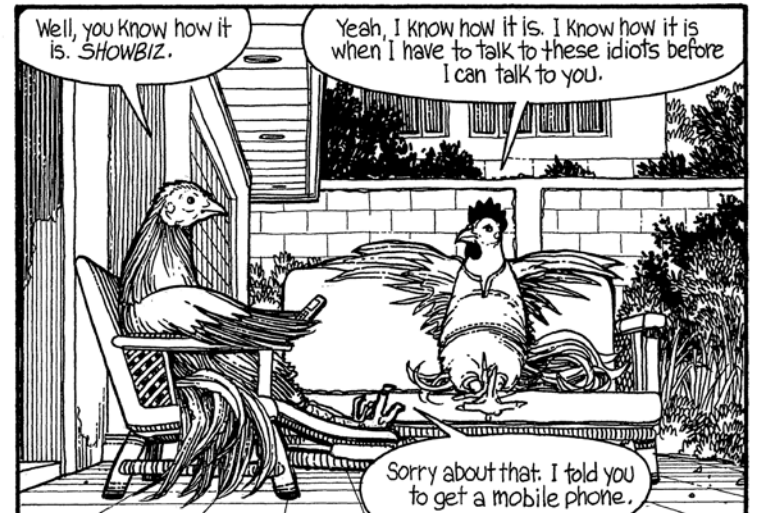
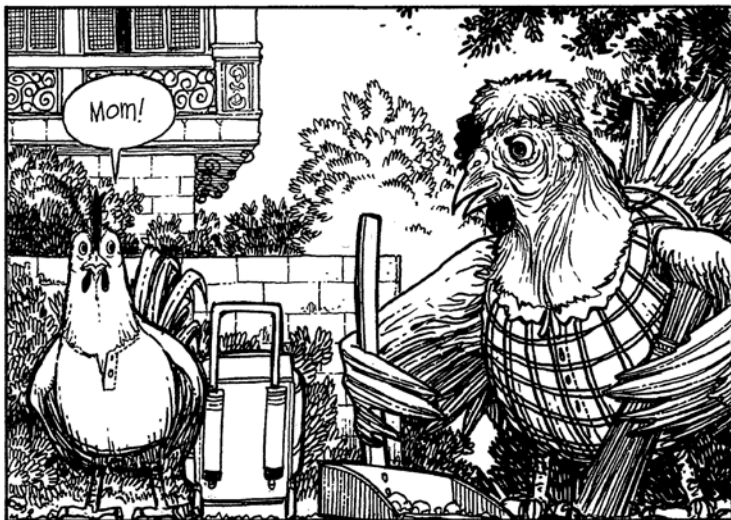
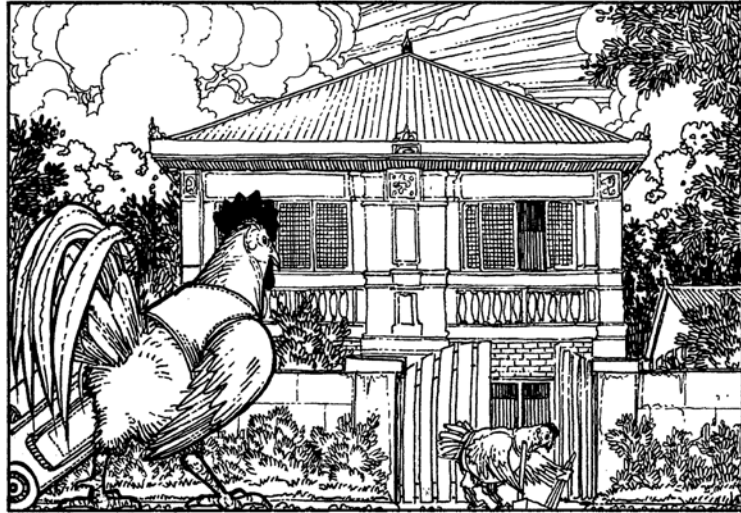


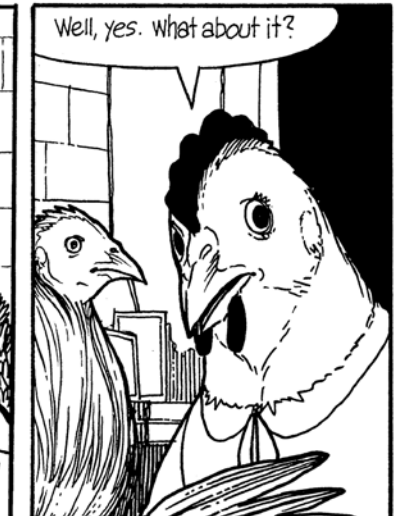
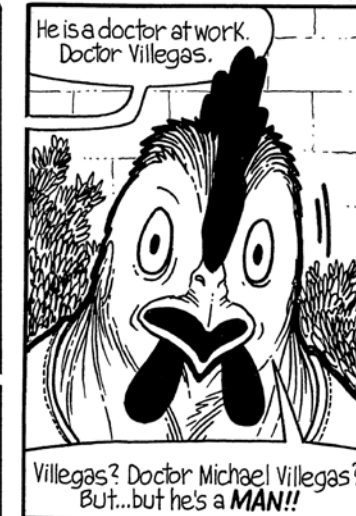
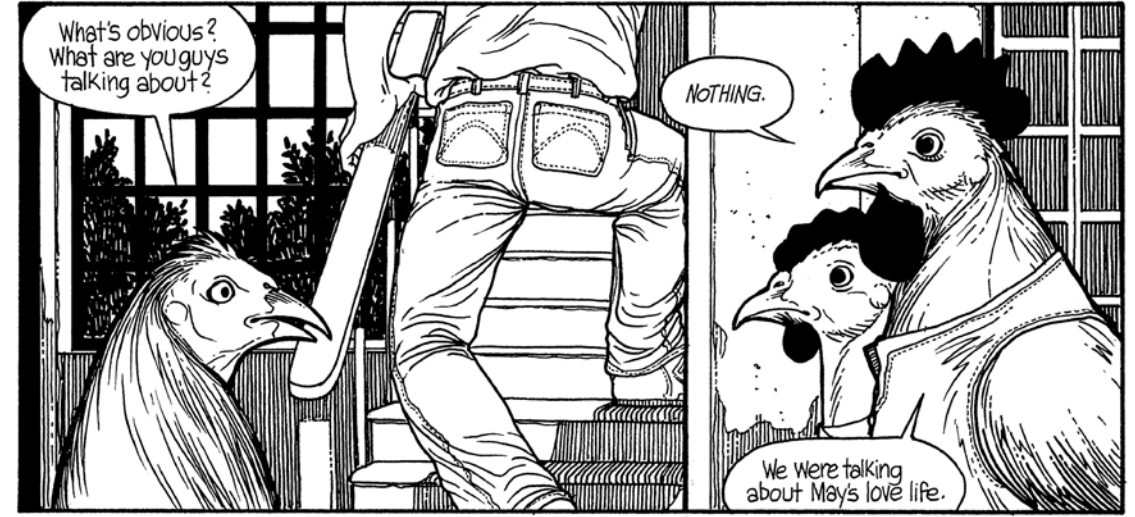
CHICKENS! Just a few years ago I would have ROASTED that bastard.



Tastes like chicken? Ha! Ha!

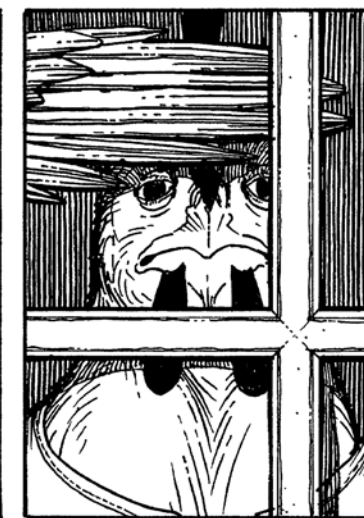
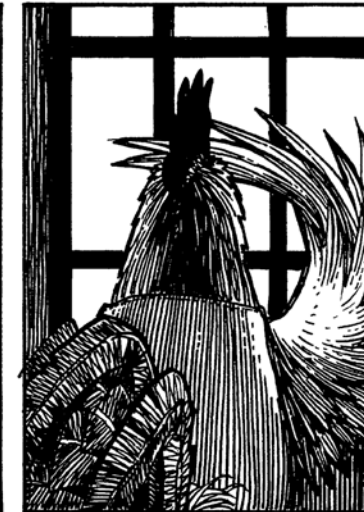
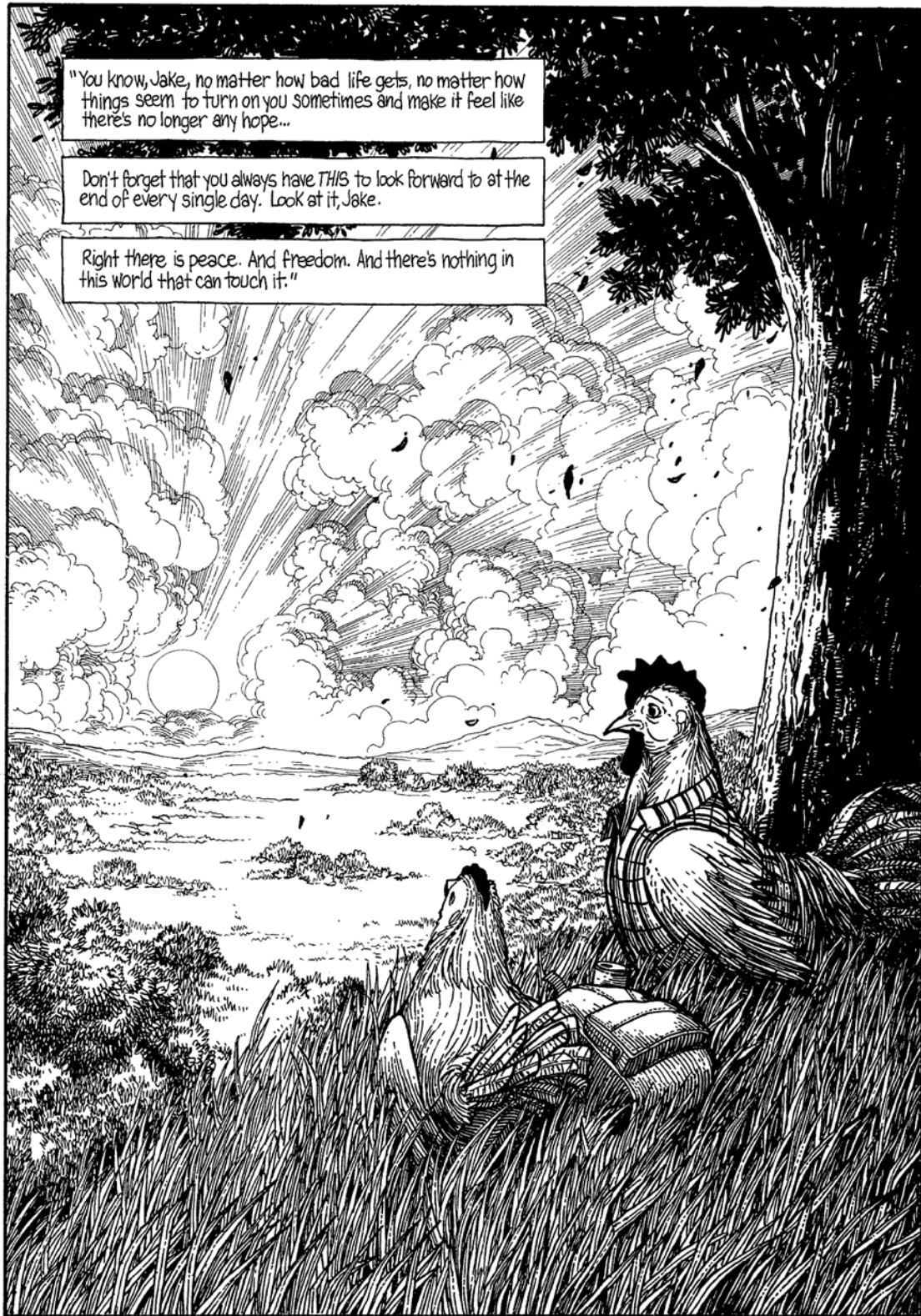




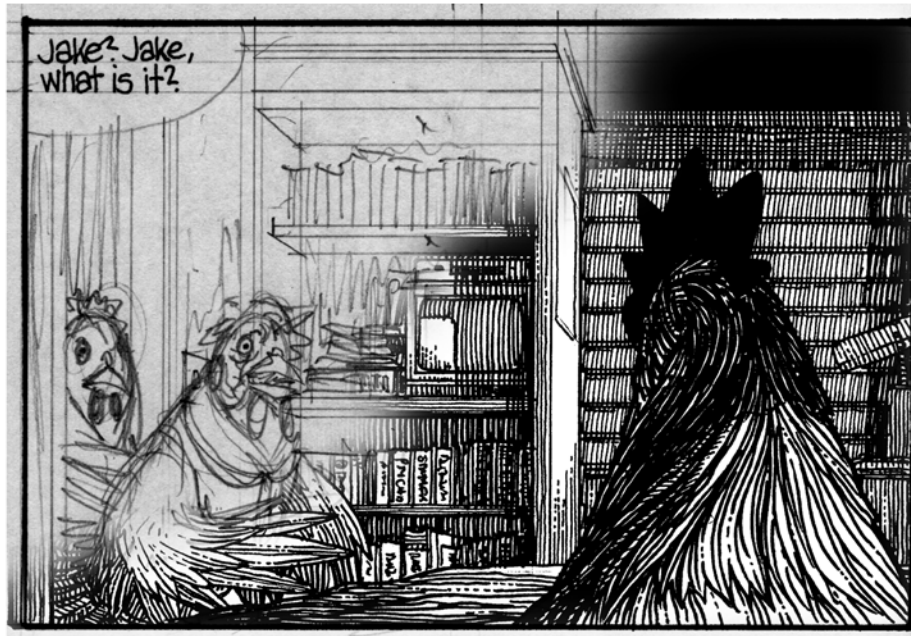








PROCESS NOTES



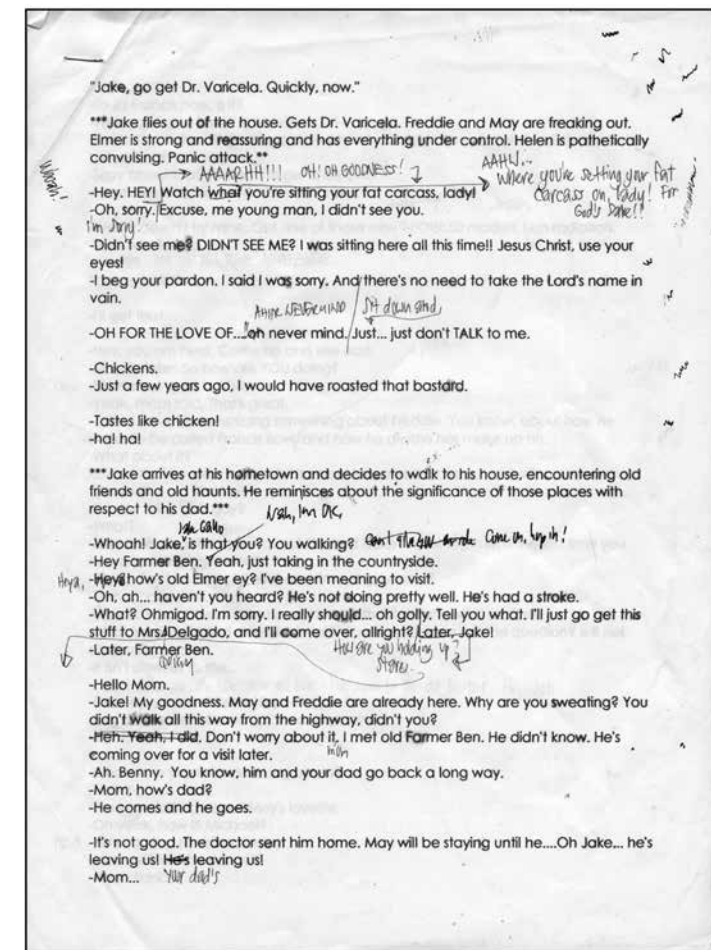
Elmer is the first work that I did in which I imposed some strict rules in terms of comic book storytelling. In many ways, *Elmer* is the culmination of years of continued study of the comic book form. I have learned that the most important aspect of comics is, and will always be, "telling the story". It seems like such a simple idea, and yet, it is quite difficult to pull off effectively. The challenge for me was to tell the story of Elmer and his family as clearly and as concisely as possible.

The first step towards clarity of story was to impose a strict nine-panel guide to which all the panels in the comic book would adhere to. At its most basic, a nine-panel grid requires nine equally sized panels on one page. One can combine two panels or three panels, but the panel must always be a combination of any number of one-in-nine panels.

Next, the lettering needed to be fully integrated into the art and so, all the letters were hand-lettered. The positioning of the text is almost always at the top of the panel to achieve a consistency of look and rhythm.

One of the most important aspects of storytelling are the expressions. Not only of the faces but of the bodies. I tried very hard to give honest and true expressions to the characters, acting out their thoughts and feelings as I drew them. The angry and emotional moments took a lot out of me, but in the end, I felt it was worth it in order to get the expressions that I wanted.

Here's an example of a page from the *Elmer* script. Because I was drawing the book, I went without panel descriptions and just wrote down all the words that would appear in the comic itself. This allowed me to "read" the comic book in my mind as I imagined the drawings. This, in turn, helped me pace the flow of the story better. I wrote the script quickly, giving free rein to whatever ideas that came out. I then printed it, and began to edit heavily. I took whole bits out and added other bits in. You can see some of that process below.



I was constantly editing, right up to the moment I brought the files to the printers. But there comes a time when you just have to let go and let the work stand, warts and all. Still, I'm extraordinarily proud of the book, and I'm happy to have done it.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Originally trained as an architect in the Philippines, Gerry Alanguilan became a comic book artist in 1992. He started his comic career as an inker for Marvel, DC and Image, working on series such as *Wolverine*, *X-Men*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Avengers*, *Hulk* and *Superior*. In his own work, Alanguilan's comics are tinged with social commentary. His titles include *Wasted*, *Bakokak*, *Humanis Rex!*, *Timawa*, *Where Bold Stars Go to Die* and *Rodski Patotski: Ang Dalagang Baby*.



"The gorgeous art, full of lush pen work and strong expressions, takes what should be a self-evidently ludicrous proposition and somehow imbues it with plausibility... A peculiar but engaging work that deserves attention."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Gorgeously drawn, black-and-white artwork combines with outstanding storytelling in this modern-day fable of ethnic strife, identity, friendship and family."

—Francisca Goldsmith, author and critic

"*Elmer* is a beautifully drawn and tightly scripted family drama set in a world where the advantaged and disadvantaged live in a state of mutual distrust."

—Forbidden Planet, UK

"This is Alanguilan's greatest achievement, constructing a thoroughly plausible setting where fowl and man live side-by-side, if not always in harmony."

—Ruel S. De Vera, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*



Chickens have gained sapience and the United Nations has recognised them as the newest members of the human race. This is the world of Jake Gallo, a chicken who still holds a grudge against mankind. When he gets a call early one morning, Jake rushes to the bedside of his ailing father, Elmer. Upon his death, Jake reads Elmer's diary documenting that tumultuous transition period. By discovering the trauma and triumphs of his parents, Jake finds a way to make peace with his identity and with those around him.

Graphic Novel
FOR MATURE READERS

ISBN-13: 978-981-48-4573-1



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