A stylized illustration of a forest scene. The background is filled with tall, thin trees and dense foliage, rendered in shades of blue and black. In the foreground, a large, light-colored rock sits on a rocky path. A white bird is shown in flight, moving from the left towards the center. The overall style is graphic and high-contrast.

LEATHERY LITTLE SAINTS

By Fionn McCabe



LEATHERY LITTLE SAINTS
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THIS STORY WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN
IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE END OF
EVERYTHING (AND OTHER
ENCOUNTERS WITH NATURE) IN 2022.

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PRINTED ON GADIGAL LAND

COVER PRINTED BY
GOODNIGHT PRESS

@GOODNIGHT.PRESS



LEATHERY
LITTLE
SAINTS

By Fionn McCabe



LAST SUMMER I STARTED SEEING ALL THESE DEAD FRUIT BATS AROUNDTOWN.



THE FIRST ONE I NOTICED WAS HANGING RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET FROM MY HOUSE.



IT LOOKED LIKE A DEAD CAT TANGLED IN A BLACK PLASTIC BAG.



WHO WANTS TO GO SWIMMING?



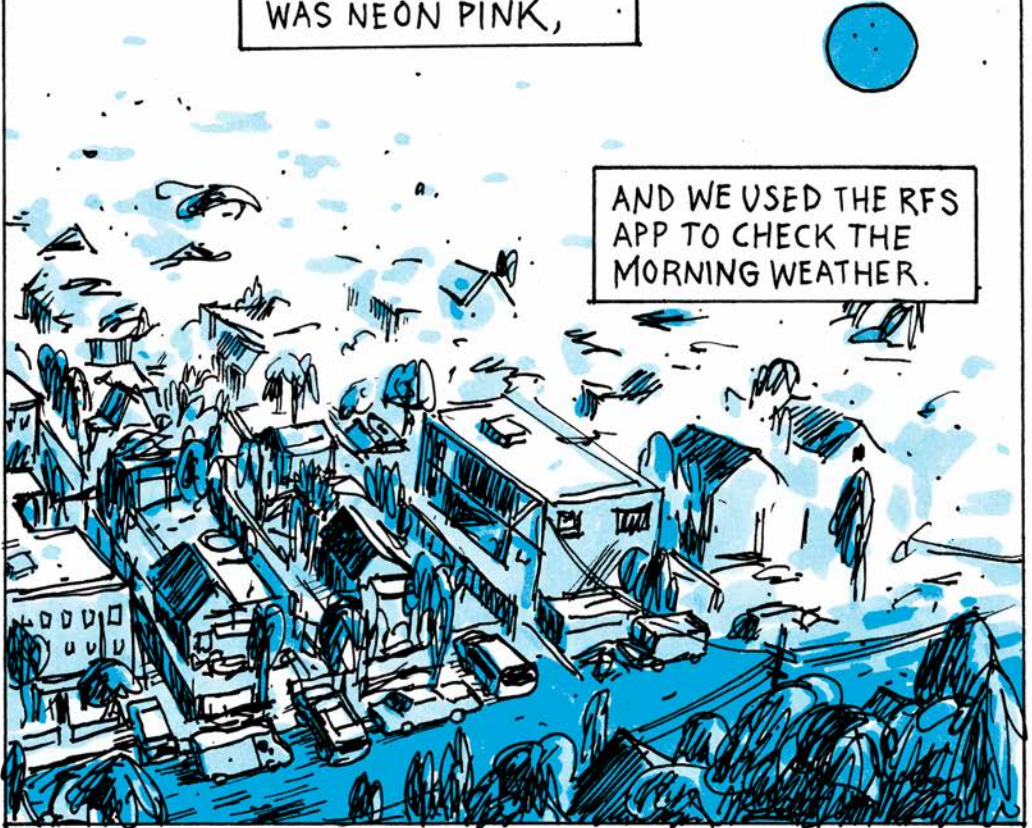
EEE!

ME!

THIS WAS AT THE HEIGHT
OF THE BUSHFIRES IN 2019.

BACK WHEN THE SUN
WAS NEON PINK,

AND WE USED THE RFS
APP TO CHECK THE
MORNING WEATHER.



HEY, LEON.



DID YOU KNOW
THAT BATS SPEND
THEIR WHOLE LIVES
UPSIDE DOWN?





HAVING THEIR FEET ON THE GROUND MUST FEEL LIKE WHEN YOU DO A HEADSTAND.



THE ONLY THING THEY DO "RIGHT SIDE UP" IS PEE AND POO!



THEY HAVE THESE HOOKED THUMBS THAT ALLOW THEM TO FLIP OVER WHEN THEY GO.

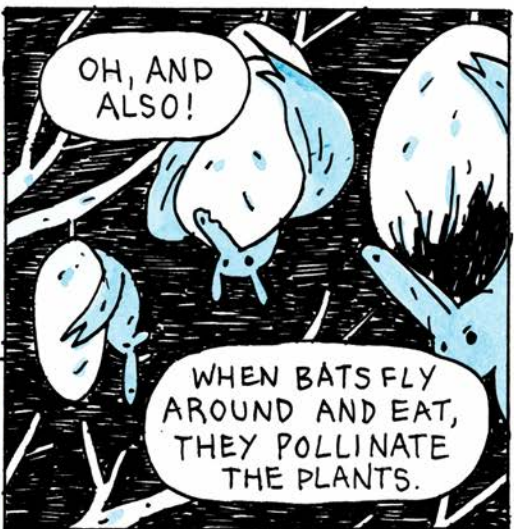


IMAGINE HAVING TO FLIP UPSIDE DOWN EVERY TIME YOU NEEDED TO USE THE TOILET?



NOT REALLY.

HA HAA!



OH, AND ALSO!

WHEN BATS FLY AROUND AND EAT, THEY POLLINATE THE PLANTS.



AND, AND! THEY SPREAD SEEDS!!

BATS ARE ACTUALLY INTEGRAL TO A HEALTHY ECO SYSTEM HERE IN AUSTRALIA.



AND SOME PEOPLE HATE THEM! THEY THINK THEY'RE PESTS!



PEOPLE ARE SUCH IDIOTS.



BATS ARE A KEYSTONE SPECIES FOR FUCKS SAKE!

DAD, YOU SAID FUCK.



THEY'RE LIKE THE BEES OF AUSTRALIA, LEON.

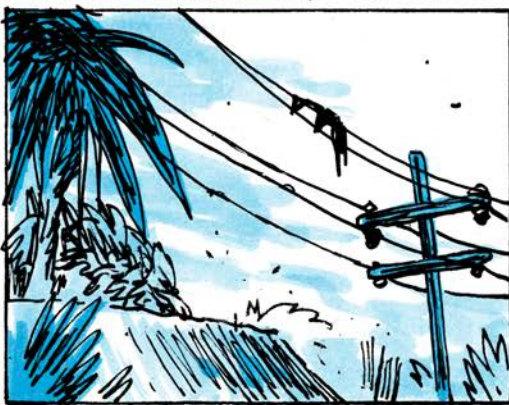


THEY'RE LEATHERY LITTLE SAINTS.



LITTLE NOCTURNAL CHRISTS, FLYING AROUND, HEALING THE PLANET WHILE WE SLEEP.

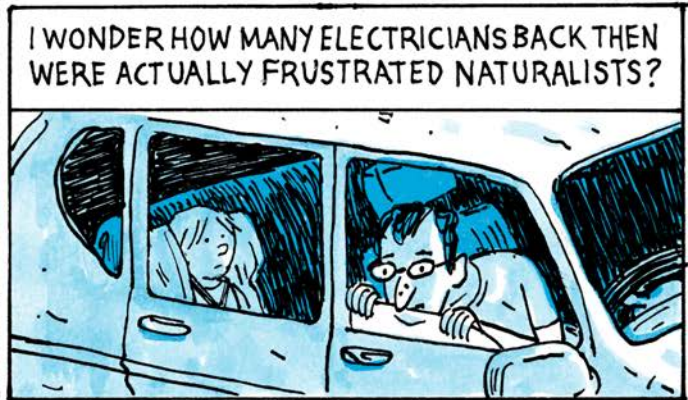




BACK IN THE FIFTIES, POWER LINES
OFTEN DIDN'T HAVE RUBBER CASINGS.



AND ON FAMILY TRIPS, MY MOM USED TO
SEE HUNDREDS OF ELECTROCUTED BIRDS.



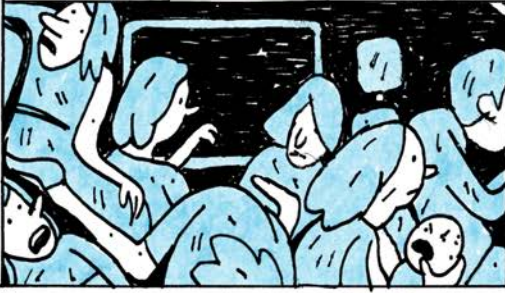




MY MOM, HER FIVE SISTERS, AND HER PARENTS WOULD ALL HAVE BEEN CRAMMED TOGETHER INTO ONE CAR.



AND TO DISTRACT HERSELF
FROM THE CACOPHONY,



MY MOM WOULD PRETEND
HER HAND WAS A PERSON.

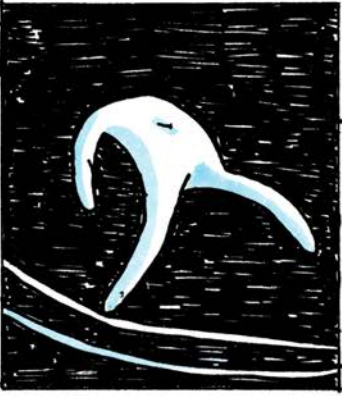


A LITTLE PERSON



RUNNING ALONG-
SIDE THE CAR







THE BUSHFIRE SEASON OF 2019-2020 IS NOW KNOWN AS THE BLACK SUMMER.

46 MILLION ACRES BURNED.



34 PEOPLE DIED.



ONE BILLION ANIMALS DIED.
ANOTHER TWO BILLION DISPLACED.

THE NEWS WAS FLOODED
WITH BLACKENED KOALAS,



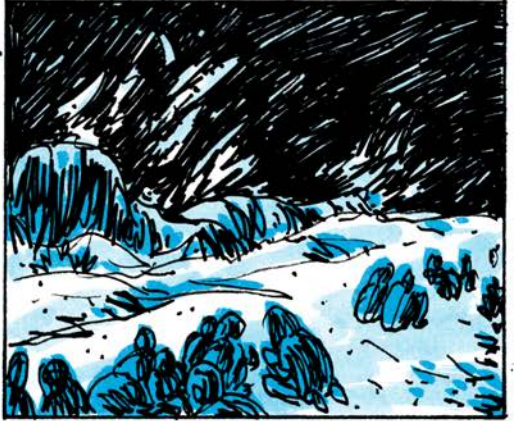
EXHAUSTED FIRE FIGHTERS,



ROADS CLOGGED WITH FAMILIES
ESCAPING SUDDEN CHANGES
IN WIND DIRECTION,



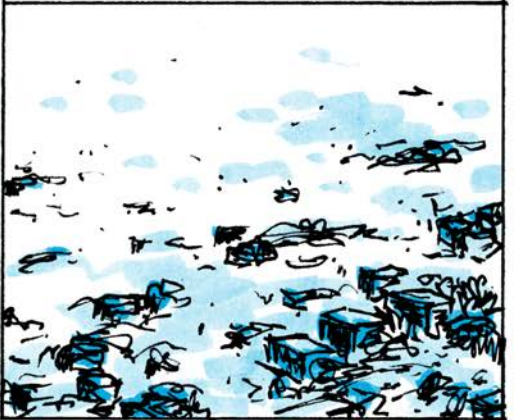
EVACUEES HUDDLED ON
BEACHES AWAITING RESCUE,



PLANES DUMPING CLOUDS OF
WATER AND FIRE RETARDANT,



AND WEIRD, FOGGY IMAGES
OF CITIES BATHED IN SMOKE.



THE FIRES EMITTED AN ESTIMATED
300 MILLION TONNES OF CO₂



THREE QUARTERS OF AUSTRALIA'S
USUAL ANNUAL OUTPUT.



NORMALLY THOSE EMISSIONS WOULD BE ABSORBED BY FOREST REGROWTH BUT THE
INTENSITY OF THESE FIRES MAY HAVE DAMAGED THE FOREST'S ABILITIES TO REGROW.



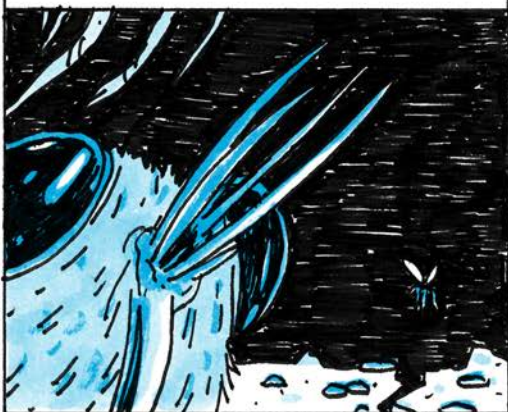
DEADLY HEATWAVES HAVE INCREASED
FIFTY-FOLD SINCE THE 80'S.



INCREASED TEMPERATURES AND MELTING
ICE CAPS HAVE A CASCADE EFFECT...



RISING SEA LEVELS, INCREASINGLY
EXTREME WEATHER, OVERCROWDING,



FLOODED CITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE
BREAKDOWNS, MASS MIGRATIONS,



SUPERBUGS, OCEAN ACIDIFICATION,
SCARCITY OF FRESH WATER,



REVOLUTION, RISE OF AUTHORITARIAN
LEADERSHIP, WORLD WAR.



OUR BEAUTIFUL, HECTIC,
PROBLEM-FILLED PLANET...



A LIFELESS DUST BOWL.









YOU ALREADY HAVE GOGGLES.



PLEASE, DAD. THE OTHER ONES DON'T EVEN FIT ME ANYMORE.



THEY DO STILL FIT YOU.

NO, THEY DON'T!

WE'RE NOT GETTING NEW GOGGLES.



PLEEEESE, DAD!

PLEASE!

PLEASE.



IT'S A WASTE, KIDDO, NO.

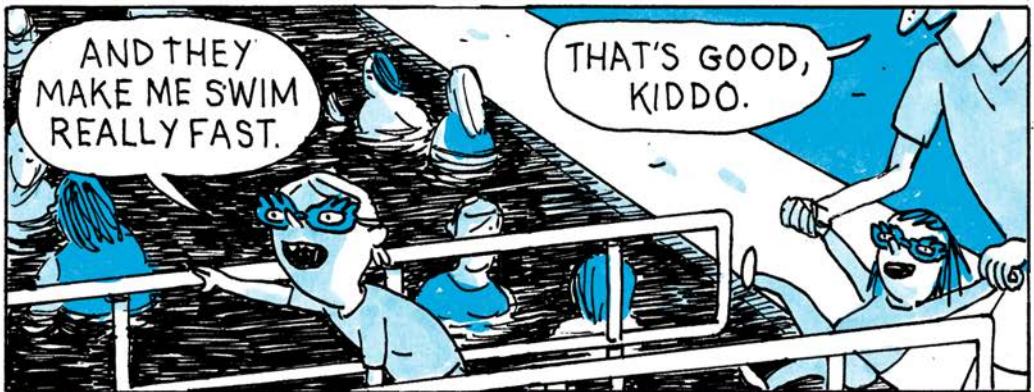
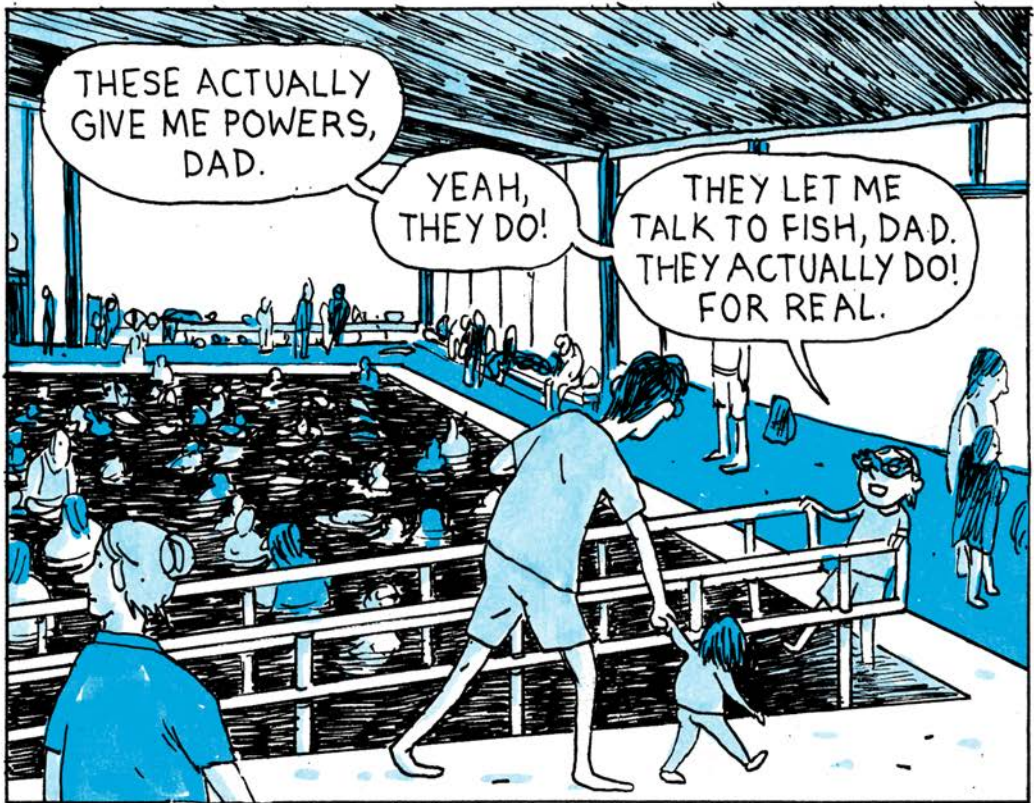
YOUR OTHER GOGGLES ARE FINE.

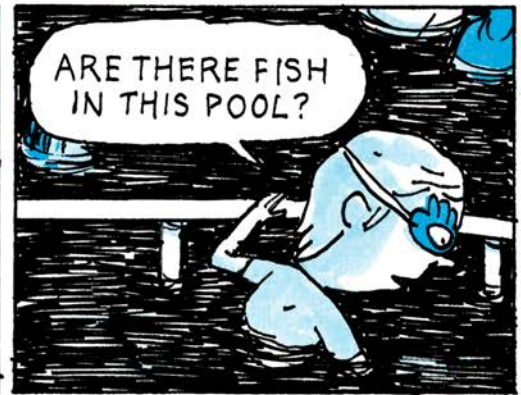
NO!

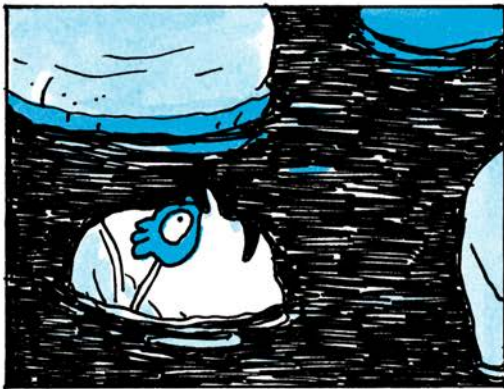


LEON! WE ARE NOT BUYING NEW GOGGLES.

END OF STORY.









THERE'S A COLONY OF BATS
OVER AT GIRRAHWEEN PARK.



HUNDREDS OF FLYING FOXES
HANG ABOVE A NARROW PATH.



THE SMELL IS INTENSE, LIKE
1,000 DIRTY GUINEA PIGS.



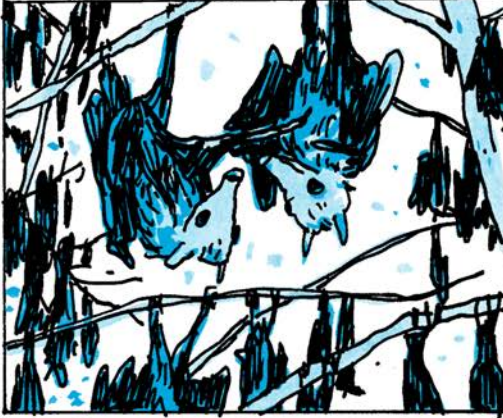
THEY'RE LOUD TOO! CHITTERING
AND CLICKING AND SCREECHING.



AND CONSTANTLY MOVING.



THEY'RE CLIMBING OVER EACH OTHER, FANNING THEIR WINGS



OCCASIONALLY SWOOPING LOW OVER THE PATH.



FOR NOCTURNAL ANIMALS, THEY SURE ARE ACTIVE DURING THE DAY.



IT WAS PRETTY SMOKEY WHEN I WAS THERE...



MAYBE THAT ADDED TO HOW AGITATED THEY WERE.



MEGA-BATS DON'T DEAL WELL WITH EXTREME HEAT.



IN 2002, 1,300 OF THEM DIED OF HEAT STRESS IN A SINGLE DAY.



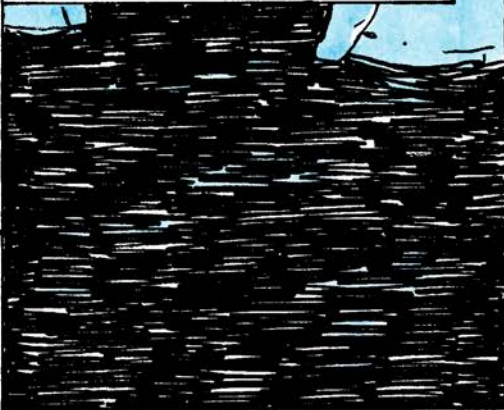
THE TEMPERATURE HIT 42°C AND THEY JUST...



RAINED DOWN OUT OF THE TREES.



BETWEEN 2018 AND 2019, 23,000 OF THEM DIED.



ONE THIRD OF AUSTRALIA'S ENTIRE MEGA-BAT POPULATION.



APPARENTLY, IT'S THEIR LARGE SIZE THAT DOES THEM IN.



SMALLER BATS ARE BETTER AT REGULATING THEIR TEMPERATURES.



SIZE IS WHAT GETS THEM IN TROUBLE WITH POWER LINES TOO.



THEIR BODIES ARE SO BIG...

THAT THEY CONNECT MORE THAN ONE CABLE WHEN THEY HANG.



ELECTROCUTION, GLOBAL WARMING...
WE ARE SUCH A THOUGHTLESS SPECIES.



OUR COMPLACENCY MAKES
ME SO SAD AND ANGRY.



HELP!



SOMEBODY,
PLEASE! HELP!









FIONN MCCABE IS AN ARTIST,
PRINTMAKER, AND EDUCATOR
CURRENTLY LIVING ON GADIGAL AND
WANGAL LAND WITH HIS PARTNER,
THEIR TWO CHILDREN, AND A
CEASELESSLY BARKING DOG.

HE IS ONE OF THE CO-FOUNDERS OF
READ TO ME, A LIVE STORYTELLING
EVENT DESIGNED TO SHOWCASE THE
WORK OF CARTOONISTS AND OTHER
VISUAL STORYTELLERS.

HE IS TALL AND FAIR, AND IS OFTEN
COMPARED TO BRAD PITT, THOUGH
NEVER FAVOURABLY.



THIS STORY IS ABOUT BATS DROPPING OUT
OF TREES, THE RAGING FIRES OF THE BLACK
SUMMER, AND A TRIP WITH THE KIDS TO THE
LOCAL POOL.

LIVING IN THE END TIMES IS DIFFICULT,
EMOTIONALLY COMPLICATED,
AND ODDLY MUNDANE.

