

Derek Riley is a cartoonist and musician from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The bold, pastel colors and round contours he brings to gig posters and album artwork stand out noticeably from the mostly monochromatic and aggressive tradition of punk rock visual arts, and his guitar work is second-to-none. You can find his drawings on his [website](#) and listen to his band [Leg Day](#) on Bandcamp.

Today, he's agreed to take some time and answer some questions for me!

Logan: Did you learn to draw or play music first? And do you find that either music or visual art comes to you more easily?

Derek: I started drawing long before I played music, I was drawing as a kid.

I'd had piano lessons for a while in elementary school but retained nothing and didn't have a strong interest in playing music myself until middle school years when I started playing bass and then guitar after being inspired by seeing a friend's band practice covers.

Music comes far easier now. Writing new things on guitar is seldom frustrating the way that drawing or trying to start drawing can be. If I'm not coming up with anything interesting for a new song I'll just practice old stuff or put the guitar away. If I can't justify beginning a drawing to myself it won't even happen.



Logan: Among your visual influences you list Rob Liefeld, probably one of the most controversial comics creators of the last couple decades. I'm not personally one to dump on other artists and I actually find the idiosyncrasies of his style visually interesting (and I absolutely subscribe to his design philosophy of throwing [lots of pouches](#) on every character). I'm curious what attracts you to his work, as at first glance I'd be hard-pressed to find any visual commonalities between the two of you.

Derek: There may not be an obvious Liefeld influence in the work that's in my online portfolio at the moment (largely fliers or single illustration projects) but I have started bringing some of his flavor to the comic ideas and sketches I make.

He cartoons. I think the anatomical inaccuracies come about because he is drawing from enthusiasm as much or more than he is drawing for representation's sake.

I love that he's not afraid to use pages just to show off characters - the worldly reader can see similar things in Shojō manga - a page that's 50-75% a glamour shot of a character posing, with a few storytelling panels to the side or in the background. It's indulgent. That can be good.

I do wish he had more work with a strong plot, more developed characters. For example the "The Infinite" miniseries that he began with Robert Kirkman was a blast to read - not my favorite (design-wise) of his casts of characters but I was getting caught up in the story.

However, if we're speaking of concerns artwise the only thing I could ask for more of from his work is backgrounds!

If someone has a visceral dislike of the things that are commonly "off" about his work, they won't ever be converted. However to the curious and willing I suggest "Re:Gex," "Youngblood" (1992 original series) issues #6-10, "Team Youngblood" Issue #9 and "Wolverine" issues #154 & 155 for some of my favorite Liefeld work.

My wife says I like Rob Liefeld because my body is so thin and I like to look at the opposite physique - enormous and muscular. So maybe everything above is window dressing for a deep psychological need.

Logan: You've been involved in the emo/screamo side of the music scene in Lancaster for about a decade now- first as a member of [French in Van](#), then of [Chalmers](#), and now as guitarist for Leg Day. How has the scene changed over the years and how have you changed? (Also, what's your favorite band to emerge in Lancaster over those years?)

Derek: I think 2011-2017 were the years I was really 'involved.' Nowadays I do album/ep, shirt, or flier artwork from time to time for friends and that's about the extent of my involvement. Leg Day doesn't play many shows due to my availability.

The biggest influences for me when I started playing guitar in what would become french in van were [1994!](#), [We Were Skeletons](#), and my all time favorite band from Lancaster - [swedes](#). Swedes released only four songs in 2007 but I have been privileged to meet two of the members in the years since and happen to know that much more material has been recorded... I've made some drafts of artwork to accompany these songs - an extraordinary honor. I hope people get to hear them someday soon!

Even five years separated from the time of most of my musical activity it's weird to think of it as 'then' and 'now'. I've realized that although I can't be in a band in quite the same way as I used to, I don't want to start looking backwards yet. I'd rather focus on being a good 'studio' band or whatever I *can* manage to do instead.

I'm up to answer more specific questions about that time in Lancaster 'emo' though if anyone really wants to know more. As a youth I had a burning desire to know what was going on with my predecessor bands, especially when I found out about [Spirit Assembly](#) from the 90s. Lastly, Max from [Fragile, Like Life After](#) and several other bands (simultaneously) has been booking emo, screamo, etc shows for several years now. He would be a good person to follow for news of recent Lancaster emo, etc.



Logan: Favorite comic?

Derek: Impossible, but here's two on my mind at the moment:

The FLCL adaptation by Hajime Ueda - the original english printing by tokyopop has been a beloved possession of mine since it was published here, but the more recent omnibus reprinting by Dark Horse has different versions of pages at some points. How did we get lucky enough to see Ueda draw some of these pages twice?

The original “The Books of Magic” miniseries by Neil Gaiman, John Bolton, Scott Hampton, Charles Vess, and Paul Johnson. I haven’t read this in over a decade but it left a huge impression on me when I found it at the Lancaster library as a teen. Some terrifying scenes. Not a horror comic at all, just grand in scale and strange.

Logan: Favorite album?

Derek: Impossible, but here’s two of my absolute favorites: “Kuchibue, Yofuke Ni Hibiku” by Eastern Youth and “The Inalienable Dreamless” by Discordance Axis.

The former is an oi band that grew wistful - this album is, in my opinion, the sweet spot between their original sound and what they are now. The latter is passionate grindcore.

The CD release of “The Inalienable Dreamless” was something that made me realize a CD could be more than cover art, band photos, typed lyrics and a thanks list.

Logan: What are your future goals both as a visual artist and as a musician?

Derek: As a visual artist - to get back into making fliers and illustrations and make more comics.



As a musician - to write an album. Everything so far has been a handful of songs that later get cobbled together. The leg day compilation is three songs from last year and the remainder is from 2017!

I made an album with Chalmers but my illustrative contribution to that release was more complete and satisfying than my guitar playing was. I think I was too in awe of playing in a band with Justin from We Were Skeletons (someone who inspired me early into my guitar-playing) and I was not confident enough to try and make my mark and possibly obscure his playing in the process. Speaking of Lancaster bands - he's sitting on a release of his newest endeavor [Stress Mess](#) that I have been needling him about for months...check that out soon.

Logan: Any tour dates coming up?

Derek: If we get out anytime soon it'd have to be a short affair due to my and our current circumstances. It's also not something I'd do before I had confidence that enough people in other towns wanted to hear us to make it worth their venues' time. Other bands may tour to *get* an audience. I'm a bit cynical about that. I would love to go on at least a short tour someday though.

PAPER CASTLE



Logan: Anything else you want to say? Anything you want to ask me?

Thanks for giving me a platform to share some thoughts and spread some Comics and Lancaster gospel!

As for you:

Derek: You said you don't play TTRPGs and got into illustrating for them or their players when someone contacted you. Yet, the first book of yours I have begun to read, 'Coelum', really seems like background/lore for a world - if it were to be expanded do you think it would be as a comic or a game?

Logan: Haha yeah my primary influences for *Coelum* were Wayne Barlowe's early books and stuff like *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* by Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi. I've always loved books that were less about narrative and more about building a world out of captivating artwork and weird ideas. Also I'm not a particularly competent writer and it's easier for me to lean on my art instead of developing plot, characters, and dialog.

If I were to ever expand *Coelum* it probably would be as short comics set in that universe. I think there are enough ideas there that I could come up with a few interesting stories. The issue for me is that (not unlike your experience with *Leg Day*, actually) *Coelum* was a fix-up of a bunch of disparate ideas and unrelated drawings that I tried to unify after the fact- it's never felt cohesive to me and while I'm proud of the work I did on it, I don't have a whole lot of interest in returning to it. Whatever books or comics I work on in the future, I'd like them to be more intentional and unified. I have a whole bunch of ideas and I am working on them slowly, but keeping up with illustration work takes up most of my time lately (not a bad problem to have, though haha).