

Killer jellyfish rock Rio

Eileen Laurie

Why I draw comics in general and comics on *Pelagia noctiluca* in particular

I draw comics, also known as graphic storytelling, also known as sequential art, also known as the ninth art,¹ also known as low culture. The English-speaking world came a fair bit later to the party than the Francophones, but today this genre is being taken seriously as never before.²

Killer jellyfish rock Rio is the second in my *Killer jellyfish* series,³ which humbly follows in the satirical tradition of Jonathan Swift and *Rake's progress* by Hogarth, viewed by some as 'the father of the modern cartoon – and the modern comic, too'.⁴

Before I drew comics, I made other kinds of art. In 2007, I made an installation of a two-metre-long whale and was reading a lot about the oceans. This article caught my eye:

¹ Seago, K. (2014) 'The ninth art: A review of comics in French. The European bande dessinée in context', *The Comics Grid*, 4(1): 1-2. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/cg.a>]

² Barnicoat, B. (2012) 'The graphic novel's spectacular rise: From kids' comics to the Costa prize', *The Guardian*, 23 November. [<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/nov/23/graphic-novel-spectacular-rise-costa-prize>]

³ www.eileenlaurie.se

⁴ Mount, H. (2014) 'Hogarth, the father of the modern cartoon', *The Telegraph*, 1 November. [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/11202643/Hogarth-the-father-of-the-modern-cartoon.html>]

A second pack comprising millions of juvenile mauve stinger jellyfish has been spotted off the coast of Scotland, less than a week after an overwhelming attack by *Pelagia noctiluca* killed 100,000 salmon at a Northern Ireland fish farm.⁵

The more I read, the more surreal it became: headlines like ‘Jellyfish take on US warship’⁶, ‘Spineless attacks on nuclear power plants could increase’⁷ or ‘Jellymageddon: Can we stop the rise of the jellyfish?’⁸ were classic ‘low art’ comic tales. This was truth being a whole lot weirder than fiction. So when I started drawing comics, the jellyfish were a perfect subject.

Rock Rio was created for this *ephemera* special issue. I couldn’t resist the temptation of drawing the jellyfish visiting (and trashing) an academic conference. Yet the state of the oceans is no laughing matter: it is a state of emergency.⁹ The jellyfish family members of the subphylum Medusozoa have been around a long time¹⁰ and may well outlive us all, flourishing as they do in places where vertebrates and shellfish cannot. Dr Lisa-Ann Gershwin, renowned jellyfish expert and author of *Stung! On jellyfish blooms and the future of the ocean*¹¹ does not mince her words:

Our impacts are creating tipping points, and once ecosystems have passed those tipping points, they become really stable in their new normal. Once jellyfish take over an ecosystem – or any pest for that matter – it’s hard to undo that. Pest controlled ecosystems are some of the most incredibly resilient ecosystems around: think of cockroaches in your kitchen or dandelions in your garden, pests are

⁵ Haines, L. (2007) ‘Second jellyfish pack moves on UK 27 November’, *The Register*, 26 November. [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/11/26/second_jellyfish_pack]

⁶ Flannery, T. (2013) ‘They’re taking over!’, *The New York Review of Books*, 26 September. [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/09/26/jellyfish-theyre-taking-over>]

⁷ Kopytko, N. (2015) ‘Spineless attacks on nuclear power plants could Increase’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 19 February. [<http://thebulletin.org/spineless-attacks-nuclear-power-plants-could-increase8001>]

⁸ Stelling, T. (2013) ‘Jellymageddon: Can we stop the rise of the jellyfish?’, *The New Scientist*, 13 July. [<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23130821-500-march-of-the-jellies>]

⁹ UN (2013) ‘United Nations world ocean assessment. Regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment including socioeconomic aspects’. [<http://www.worldoceanassessment.org>]

¹⁰ Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (2016) ‘Jellyfish and comb jellies’. [<http://ocean.si.edu/jellyfish-and-comb-jellies>]

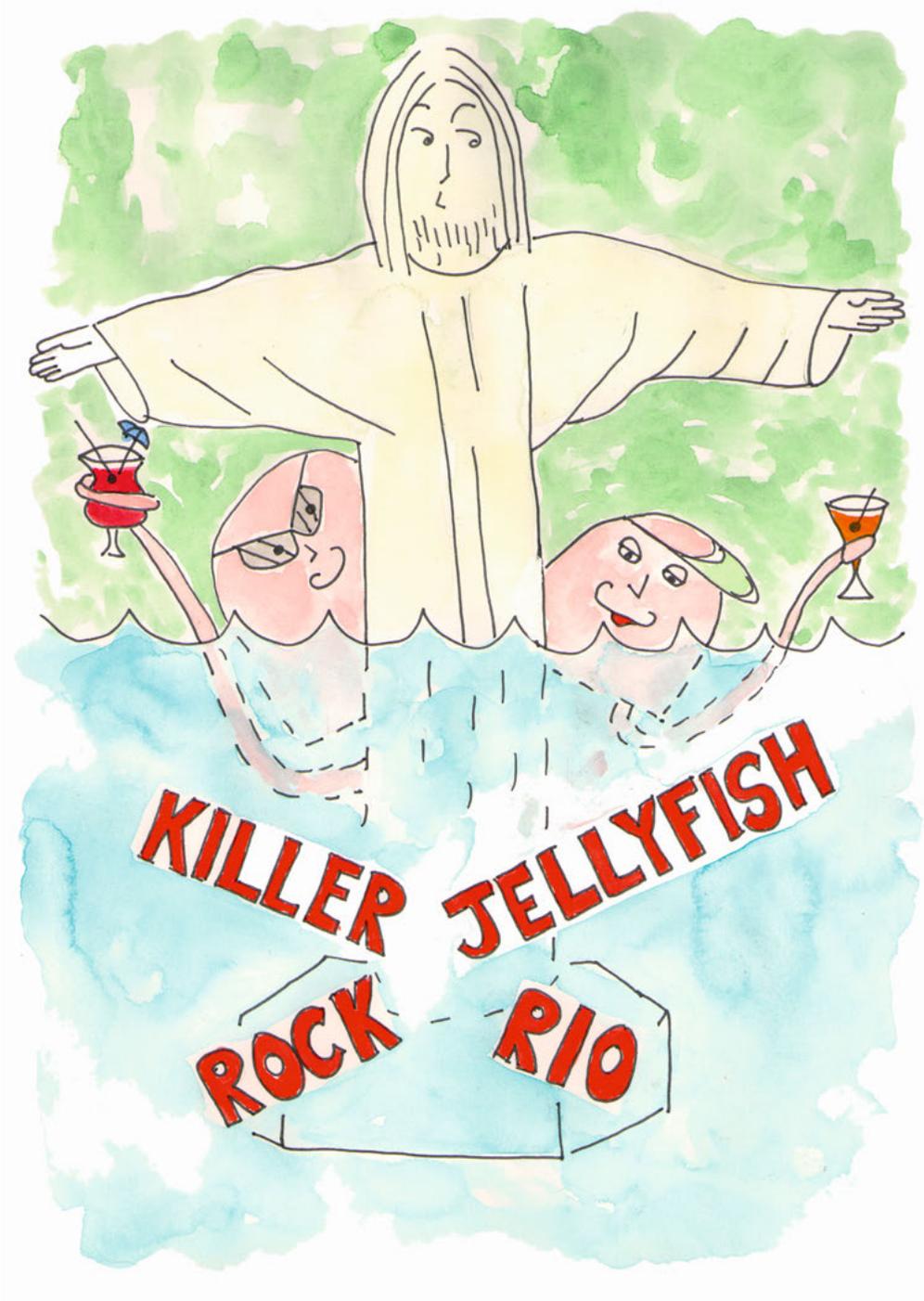
¹¹ Gershwin, L.-A. (2013) *Stung! On jellyfish blooms and the future of the ocean*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

tenacious by their very nature. The best way to fix this is to not let it happen in the first place.¹²

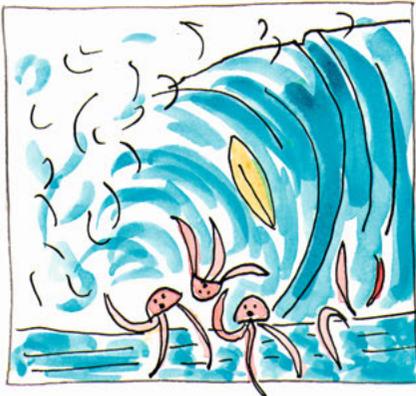
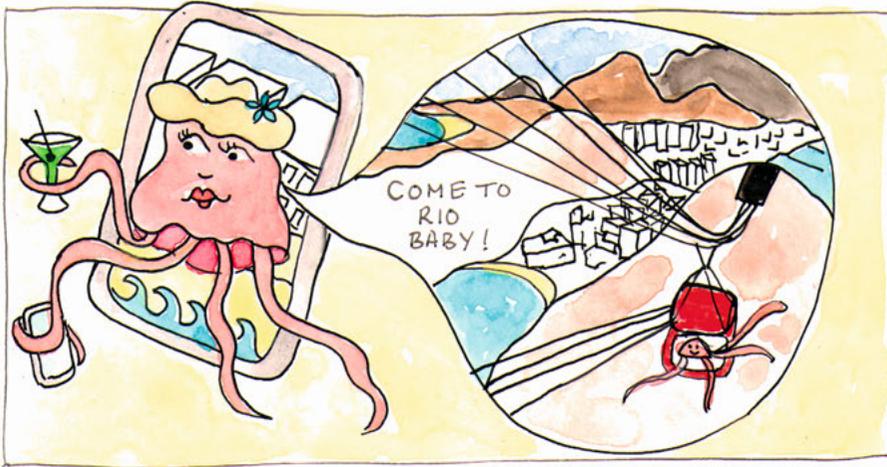
As jellyfish come ever more into prominence, can they help the hominid subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens*,¹³ understand anything other than our own hubris?

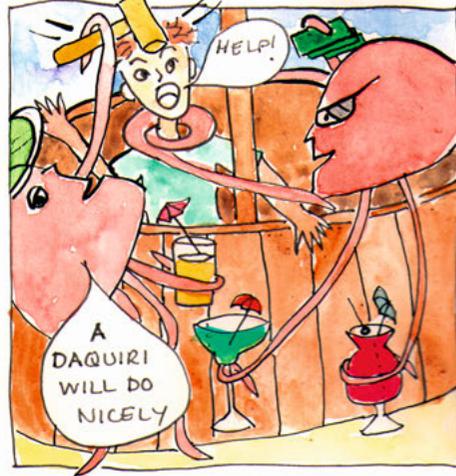
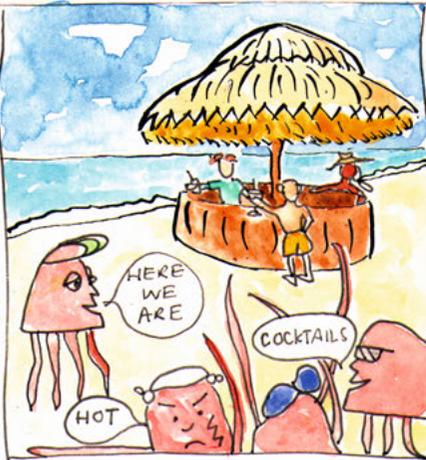
¹² Nexus Media (2016) 'Are jellyfish going to take over the ocean? An interview with jellyfish expert Lisa-Ann Gershwin', *Popsci.com*, 8 December. [<http://www.popsci.com/built-for-survival-jellyfish-are-quickly-becoming-pests>]

¹³ Encyclopædia Britannica (2017) 'Homo sapiens sapiens, hominid subspecies'. [<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Homo-sapiens-sapiens>]



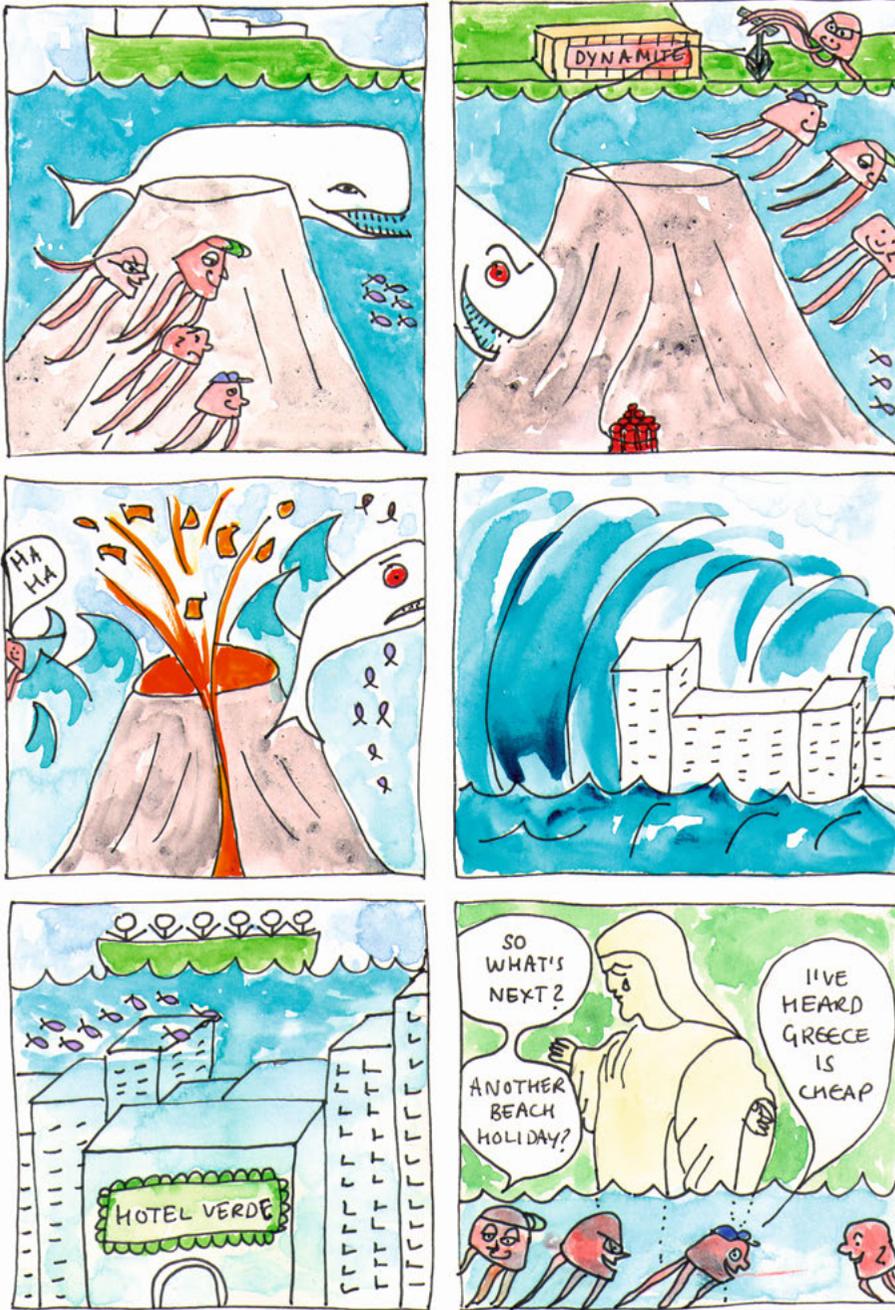














the author

Eileen Laurie was born in Scotland and studied fine art in Northern Ireland. She has lived in several countries and is now based in Malmö: the 'comicville' of Sweden. A voracious reader from a young age, she also read comics, from 2000 AD¹⁴ to various Scottish classics¹⁵. A French friend gave her *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi around 2004, a work of graphic storytelling that makes very clear that we can use comics to tell any kind of story, not just about guns and men in tights.

Email: eileen@eileenlaurie.se

¹⁴ <https://2000ad.com>

¹⁵ McCall, C. (2016) 'Five classic Scottish cartoon characters', *The Scotsman*, 23 March. [<http://www.scotsman.com/heritage/five-classic-scottish-cartoon-characters-1-4080587>]