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**NEW BOOK QUESTIONS FUTURE OF THE FUNNIES IN A WORLD  
WITHOUT PRINTED NEWSPAPERS**

STONEY CREEK, Ontario – September 9, 2008 – After a worldwide energy and economic crisis, newspapers have ceased production and nearly every form of art and entertainment is a digital simulation. Setting his tale in this seemingly impossible (but plausible) future, Canadian cartoonist & multimedia designer Mike Cope tickles the heart and imagination with *The Last of the Funnies* (80 pp., CreateSpace Publishing and Lulu.com, \$7.50).

“It’s widely reported that print newspaper markets are shrinking,” states one of the Four Funny Facts on which *The Last of the Funnies* builds its sharp-witted foundation. “It’s nothing to laugh at,” explains Cope. “In today’s news, words like ‘higher fuel costs’ and ‘job losses’ seem uncomfortably common. From the automotive industry to farming, things are getting tough. Sadly, it’s no different for newspapers and their cartoonists.”

Having grown up dreaming of becoming a syndicated cartoonist like his childhood heroes: Charles M. Schulz, Bill Watterson, and Lynn Johnston; Cope hopes that newspapers will evolve and endure. But for the purpose of his sci-fi novelette, he considers some of the potential impacts if our environmentally-conscious society was to go virtually paperless, citing digital copyrights as the primary concern. “Would the funnies survive?” asks Cope. “Or would the secrets of this magical medium be lost forever?”

To help answer these questions, Cope presents a futuristic world filled with scientifically plausible technologies, and develops a fragile father-son relationship that any generation can relate to. In the process, he pays homage to the American comic strip’s rich history with nods to legendary figures, including: William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, The Yellow Kid, Rube Goldberg, and the National Cartoonists Society (NCS). The Canadian Cope also connects the over 100-year-old art form’s future to current U.S. copyright legislation bills known as *The Orphan Works Act of 2008*, whose present wording is being actively petitioned by American artists and their professional organizations, including the NCS.

According to Cope, in the year 2076, virtually all information (including the funnies) is exchanged via a giant Solar System Wide Web and humans communicate with one another using a form of digital telepathy via cerebral implants called *iTtiam* (“I Think, Therefore I Am”) devices. Cope takes a thoughtful look at the purpose and role of the funnies in this paperless society through the eyes of Giles, a young Virtual Arts professor who struggles to understand the societal value of his father’s traditionally hand-drawn cartoons. Giles’ father, a crusty old cartoonist named Frost, is the creator of *Li'l Nibs*—the most celebrated comic strip about four little aliens who

crash-landed on Earth during a worldwide energy and economic crisis and aptly announced, “Weez Comez in Peez!” Although Giles has grown to resent his father’s crudely hand-drawn creations, he soon discovers that things aren’t always as they appear.

While the heart of the story is a father and son making amends, Cope adds splashes of color and dimension by caricaturing our human relationship to technology, and our responsibilities as both individuals and as a society in an increasingly digital world. By paralleling the current fragility of the newspaper industry to that of our own planet, Cope reinforces a message that all things in life (big or small) are related and connected. Each one can influence and affect the other.

“If you look close enough,” Cope explains, pointing to the book’s cover art which features the round-headed Yellow Kid wearing a Charlie Brown-esque zigzag, “you’ll find that many cartoon themes and symbols echo throughout history. Like an Olympic torch, each generation passes a flicker of inspiration to the next . . . This particular pattern not only appears in Watterson’s *Calvin & Hobbes*, but also old *Krazy Kat* cartoons by George Herriman—a hero of Schulz’s.” While Cope’s commercial use of the Yellow Kid (now in Public Domain) is legal, his science fiction presents legitimate issues and concerns regarding copyrights in a digital-only world.

*The Last of the Funnies* concludes with an 8-paged illustrated appendix, featuring selected reference images from sources, including: Ohio State University’s Cartoon Research Library; King Features Syndicate; Creators Syndicate; Rube Goldberg Inc.; The National Cartoonists Society; and others. Designed like a newspaper article entitled “Hully Gee: We Ain’t Alone!” Cope honors his heroes from the past, as well as positively demonstrates how modern cartoonists can find similarities in their differences. “Whether it’s a stone tablet, piece of paper, digital workstation, or cerebral implant, no matter the medium they use, a cartoonist is still a cartoonist.”

Although comic strips are often considered an inferior art form, Cope offers the possibility that the funnies still have an important role to play in society. “Emerging technologies and global events may change our lives (for the better or worse), but people will always need to laugh. In its form and function, *The Last of the Funnies* is a cartoon about all of us.”

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Visit the book’s official website: <http://lastofthefunnies.com>

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MIKE COPE is a full-time cartoonist and multimedia designer in Stoney Creek, Ontario (Canada), where he lives with his wife, Lynn, and their baby daughter. His cartoons have been published in a variety of books, magazines, newspapers, and websites, including: *Reader’s Digest* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Since 2003, he’s been a contributing gag writer for the daily technology-themed comic strip *PC and Pixel* by Tak Bui (featured on United Media’s Comics.com).

Cope has a Combined Honors BA in Multimedia & Anthropology from McMaster University, as well as a Bachelor of Education from Brock University in Communications Technology. In 2002, he was awarded a merit-based scholarship to study classical animation at the world-renowned Sheridan College (Oakville, Ontario). For over ten years, he’s enjoyed teaching cartooning to children of all ages at local community recreation centers, libraries, parks, and schools.

For more about Mike Cope and his work, visit his website: <http://copetoons.com>

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