‘A Flag is a Mirror’ by Stacy Gougoulis

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‘A Flag is a Mirror’ is a 16 page comic.

# Title page

## Visual description of title page

Reversed text, as in a mirror, reads A Flag is a Mirror. An abstract humanoid figure stands looking at a flag. The humanoid figure, in a style that appears throughout the comic, has a softly curved body with a round blank head like a marble.

The flag shows an ambiguous design of the figure’s own head and shoulders (either with the head bowed, or possibly beheaded).

# Page one

## Visual description of panel one

A plain flag waving in a series of mini panels.

### Text

I am in love with a flag flapping in a perfect breeze.

It stops me in my tracks and slows time with its hypnotic rippling.

## Visual description of panel two

A candle with a red flag in place of flame.

### Text

It is wind made visible.

Fire made fabric.

# Page two

## Visual description of panel one

A hand drawing a ship with a flag flying atop it.

### Text

One of the only things I know about flags is that when you design a flag you should draw it the size of a postage stamp.

That way you can ensure it’s unique and recognisable from a distance.

## Visual description of panel two

The drawing turns out to be of a ship flying the French flag. In this image, there are two ships flying the same flag, meeting at sea.

### Text

The other thing I know is that when French ships pass each other, they raise and lower their flags three times in greeting.

Three kisses on the cheek.

# Page three

## Visual description of panel one

An Australian flag. Beneath, a plain flag is shown wilting.

### Text

Sometimes the meaning saddled to a flag sours my pure pleasure. I just want to appreciate its form, but the symbolism is inseparable.

I cringe from the colonial canton. The Southern Cross is corrupted by ultra-nationalist agendas.

I think the flag feels that burden. When the breeze falls it droops, tired from the weight of meaning.

## Visual description of panel two

A figure, tied and semi-submerged, holds a flag. The flag shows a ship’s knot on a red backdrop.

### Text

A flapping flag gives the illusion of freedom. But part of what makes a flag is that it is…

Tethered.

Tethered to a flagpole. Tethered to meaning.

A flag is a mirror.

# Page four

## Visual description of panel one

An Aboriginal flag, held by many hands appears on a backdrop reminiscent of the Aboriginal flag.

### Text

In Australia, people are fighting for freedom for the Indigenous flag. Can a flag be both privately owned and publicly symbolic?

What to make of a symbol being sold back to the people it represents for the profit of non-blak business?

## Visual description of panel two

A hand setting the Australian flag loose. Beneath, a pair of flip flops bearing the Australian flag and a face covered with the same.

### Text

It’s tempting to think a completely free flag is the answer. But like fire freed from its stone circle, a free flag could wreak havoc.

When a flag is used as clothing or facepaint, it makes the public personal, it harbingers the hijacking of meaning.

Maybe that tethering is more important than we think.

# Page five

## Visual description of panel one

An Australian flag appears as a constellation, looked at by a seated silhouetted figure in a bare landscape.

### Text

We tend to see flags as fixed, representing some part of our essential nature.

But flags, like any symbols, like language, are mutable and changeable.

## 

## Visual description of panel two

The same landscape but this time with Greek domed buildings in white and blue. The Greek flag flies from the largest building.

### Text

Odysseus was not guided home by the Γαλανόλευκη.

The flag of Greece has only been in place as the national flag since 1978. The shade of blue has never been set.

# Page six

## Visual description of panel one

A two headed figure, reversed as in a playing card, covered in patterns. One head is feminine, the other masculine. An Aboriginal flag is set in the centre of the figure, between the two heads. The figure holds a pistol on one side and a flower on the other. Australian flag stars appear in each corner.

### Text

Imagine if a country chose to update its flag every seven years, to refresh its meaning and to affirm the country’s values and goals.

## Visual description of panel two

Same image as previous, flipped vertically.

### Text

Though playing a game like this would have its own dangers, at least it would create more jobs for vexilloligists.

# Page seven

## Visual description of panel one

A cityscape. Buildings topped with bare flagpoles.

### Text

Look up at the buildings on your city streets. Almost every one has a vacant flagpole.

Where did the flags go? Did they break themselves free or were they cut loose?

## Visual description of panel two

The same landscape with the foremost building flying the apple logo flag. It is taken down by a silhouetted figure and replaced with a pirate flag AKA the Jolly Roger.

### Text

Those denuded flagpoles represent an opportunity. Who will lay claim to them?

I see a space for a new form of street art, a space for protest, for piracy!

# Page eight

## Visual description of panel one

A figure, half submerged, holds a tiny flag. Abstract symbology appears above him, including a venn diagram and a triangle.

### Text

Perhaps we’ll see more localised flags fly as people gravitate to identity politics shaped by ever more niche internet communities.

I’ve been trying to think of the smallest reason to design a flag, because how could one flag represent the multitudes in me?

## Visual description of panel two

A figure covered in tiny flags. Three are picked out—one red pennant set on the head with text attached reading ‘A flag for my ambition’, one green flag with purple dot set on the heart and one blue flag with a white stripe with text attached reading ‘A flag for my self doubt’.

### Text

All the changing moods. The different parts of me pulling in different directions. I need a flag for my desire to stay in bed today, a flag for my ambition, a flag for my self doubt.

What about a flag of my love for you? This is a private flag. I fly it only in my heart.

# Page nine

## Visual description of panel one

A venn diagram showing a grid made of tiny flags in the top circle and the same grid ripped into pieces in the second circle. Figures walk away from the circles holding flags.

### Text

This creates potential for an infinite amount of flags within oneself, more fractious than uniting.

If every stitch of your self-made flag is pulling in a different direction, it’s sure to come apart.

## Visual description of panel two

A castle with two flags flying from turrets. The flags show a crossed-out triangle. A figure below is walking a steed and looking up at the turrets. The steed bears a standard on its saddle, that of a triangle.

### Text

I’m avoiding the sight of a flying flag, that disagreeable banner of war.

A flag pretends to unite but really just seeks to discriminate.

# Page ten

## Visual description of panel one

A stretched out shadow of a figure on a city street with a shadow of a flag beside him.

### Text

One day I find peace in a detached shadow.

I get to watch it flicker, free from internal conflict.

Something is lost though, and soon I see the problem is one of dimension.

## Visual description of panel two

Blank, coloured-in flag flies (reminiscent of first page image of blank white flags).

A flag is a two-dimensional image made 3D in motion. It whips through space, hinged at the hoist. In shadow, a flag loses vital dimensionality.

### Text

As beings of the third dimension, we cannot conceive of an object that exists in four. But we can conceive of the shadow of that object.

# Page eleven

## Visual description of panel one

A cube within a cube on a swirling backdrop.

### Text

The Tesseract.

Here is a 2D image of a 3D shadow of a 4D hypercube.

In a four-dimensional object, concepts of inside and outside collapse.

A being of the fourth dimension could see inside us as easily as we can see there is text inside this two-dimensional box.

## Visual description of panel two

A Möbius strip with figures walking it like a path.

### Text

The German mathematician Möbius realised that a fourth dimension would allow for a 3D form to be rotated on its mirror image, just as a 2D being transiting a Möbius strip would become its mirror image.

A flag is a mirror.

# Page twelve

## Visual description of panel one

A tesseract (a cube within a cube) on a flag. The flag is surrounded by images of a mountain, a person, an egg, a leaf, a candle, the ocean.

### Text

If a single flag could unite the world, could we do better than the tesseract? It represents a unity beyond nationality, race, religion. Beyond humanity.

A connection that ties us to the plants and animals, rocks and waterfalls. It is the unity of mass and energy travelling at the speed of light.

## Visual description of panel two

A figure climbs a wavy ladder.

### Text

I see the tesseract as a symbol of striving and falling short. An acknowledgement of our limitations even as we fight to transcend ourselves.

It’s a shadow of something we can’t see. To us, the shadow seems free, but it must be tethered to something.

# Page thirteen

## Visual description of panel one

A knotted ball of world flags held in a hand. A tesseract flag emerges, planted in the ball.

### Text

This is a flag to end all flags.

And it’s a trick.

## Visual description of panel two

A hammer breaks shards with images of flags and figures on them.

### Text

Like a shadow it has no substance. To stand for everything is to stand for nothing.

And all I’m left with is the knowledge that I would rather smash the mirror than seek to change what I see there.

# Page fourteen

## Visual description of panel one

A shattered mirror in which we see a couple embracing.

### Text

What happens to me when the mirror is gone?

## Visual description of panel two

A flag shows a pigeon. A drooping flag. A flag showing a red face. A flag showing a watery surface with the text under it reading, ‘I always dream of water.’ Beneath these flag images, a figure climbs a staircase made of stone.

### 

### Text

I have a vision where I’m watching a flag flying on top of a tower. The flag changes with every billow.

I climb endless stairs to emerge on the tower roof…

# Page fifteen

## Visual description of panel one

A figure launches and glides from a flagpole into a citadel landscape that also appears to be a movie set.

### Text

The flagstaff beckons and I climb it with ease. When I look out the world is a movie set. The studio beyond is dark.

I am the flag now. I cut myself free and float away. I’m weightless! And then— too light! I’m filled with dread as I start to fade from existence.

## Visual description of panel two

A hand holds a tiny flag showing a mouth with a star lodged in a tooth (it looks like a broken tooth).

### Text

A flag is a mirror the size of a postage stamp and I’m trying to find the right angle, to see what I need to see.

# Page sixteen

## Visual description of panel one

A blank flag flies (white as in the first page).

### Text

I’m trying to love a flag flapping in a perfect breeze.