



IN ORBIT WITH: JOY REEVES

A CARTOONIST EXPLORING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND FUTURISM



About Joy Reeves

Joy Reeves is the Director of Policy and Strategic Development at the Rachel Carson Council (RCC), a DC-based environmental justice nonprofit, and is an award-winning climate cartoonist and published author. Joy received her Master's degree in Environmental Management from Duke University, where she also earned her Bachelor's degree.

Her work in storytelling-advocacy has taken her to COP28 in Dubai and to the Galápagos with National Geographic's Lindblad Expeditions. Trained in science communication as a Huang Fellow, Joy founded the Environmental Comics Classroom, and authored the book *Growing Up in the Grassroots: Finding Unity in Climate Activism Across Generations*, published in 2020. She was named a Udall Scholar in 2021 and hopes to continue a career in public service. You can follow her work at [@theclimatecartoonist](https://www.instagram.com/theclimatecartoonist) on Instagram or contact her directly at theclimatecartoonist@gmail.com.

Spotlight Piece: *The Climate Anxiety Iceberg*

"I was commissioned to create this 3-page comic for the Youth Climate Collaborative's "[Climate Courage](#)" project, a guided interactive journal exploring mental health for advocates. You will see that the comic itself is interactive—using animal defense mechanisms to explore how we present ourselves on the surface vs. underneath. I encourage you to print it and fill it out as a reflective activity."

In Conversation with Joy Reeves

What first drew you to storytelling, and how did your journey begin?

“When I was eight years old, my local community college in Frederick opened up their campus for the summer to teach young kids random classes and skills. One of them was cartooning. After a single session, I was hooked. You could not keep me away from a sketchbook, and I spent hours drawing (inhaling too many Sharpie fumes) in the basement—my makeshift art studio—creating comics about space travel and underwater villages and Warrior cats for hours. I often think about that Frederick Community College program and how deeply it changed my life; it took me from reading and *consuming* fantasy stories to inventing them myself. The world would be a better place if every local college could open their doors to kids in the same way.”

How would you describe your work and the themes you keep returning to?

“I love creating comics that people see themselves in and relate to. My style is pretty far-ranging, since I’m a sucker for the classic [superhero-style pieces](#) I grew up on, but have also poured a lot of time into punchy [zines](#) and [one-panelers](#). There is a certain concision in most of my work—I believe in making one clear point, and making it well. I value the writing side of comics as heavily as the drawing side, so you’ll often see me poring over my Notes App to find the perfect compelling premise and script before busting out the pencils and iPad. Recurring themes in my work: climate heroism, imaginative sci-fantasy for kids, anthropomorphized characters, and stupid slice-of-life moments that remind us how sweet it is to exist on this planet.”

How does the environment or climate shape your work?

“The name **@theclimatcartoonist** probably gives my answer away. The environment is the driving force behind all of my comics. Every other issue we face, as a society, rests on whether or not we have a healthy planet for it to exist on.”

What does your creative process look like from idea to finished piece?

“Most days, it looks like a dumpster fire. But a really glowing and impressive one. Again, I house most of my ideas in a sloppy lifelong Notes App tab that’s about 200 pages long. I’ll grab an idea from there, flip over some scratch paper, and start bulleting out what that idea could look like in narrative form. Then, I’ll

thumbnail out a visual story for the idea. Finally, and somewhat reluctantly, I unsheath my iPad stylus and get to work digitizing the comic. (I switched to digital a few years ago to streamline my work and Keep Up With the Times.) The flexibility of the iPad, however, has been magical. I'll often pull aside my friends and show them draft layers before inking and adding color; it's a one-woman show most days. The feeling of a finished piece, to me, is simply exhilarating. I text it out to close friends minutes after it's done in pure excitement."

What are you working on right now?

"Right now, I'm looking to exhibit at my first comic convention. That's been a lifelong goal of mine, and so much of my work translates naturally into merch, buttons, greeting cards, etc. Stay tuned on Fast Orbit for the materials I come up with!"

Why do you think storytelling matters in shaping the future?

"I think we sometimes throw around the word "storytelling" as if it's some trite buzzword in climate circles. "Storytelling" is so much more than literally sitting down and listening to someone recite quaint little anecdote or fairytale. Storytelling persists quietly under the surface of everything we do: the brands we see everyday, the two-minute conversations we have with strangers, the reel algorithms stuffed down our throats, our job interviews and negotiations, the love letters we write to our favorite people and fandoms and places. Anyone who dismisses "storytelling" as something non-concrete fails to see it for the social fabric it is. I once had an English teacher in 10th grade sit the class down and dramatically explain that rhetoric is the greatest superpower on the planet. He's exactly right, and his words have stuck with me ever since."

What advice would you give to other emerging creatives?

"My number-one piece of advice is to call yourself what you are! If you draw comics, call yourself a cartoonist. It doesn't matter if you're not syndicated with a national magazine or published in the *New Yorker*. If you work in a lab, call yourself a scientist. If you make movies, call yourself a filmmaker. Your talents are boundless, and they don't deserve to be stifled under the ageist humility that comes with Impostor Syndrome! Call yourself what you are!"

If you could live in any fictional, sci-fi universe, where would you go and why?

"This one's a tough one. I'd want to steer clear of dystopian worlds generally, which eliminates about two-thirds of sci-fi. Thinking big, I'd have to say **Star Wars**. There is so much beauty in that universe, even under oppressive and

seemingly-unstoppable empires. Not to mention the sheer uniqueness of the planets themselves (I listen to the Star Wars soundscapes on YouTube and Disney+ all the time).

Thinking small, I'd pick **A Psalm for the Wild Built**. It's a slow-paced, calming utopia where people's basic needs are met (and there are robots). Imagine that?! Worth a read, and worth many thoughtful conversations."