LIFE

UCONN STUDENT PUBLISHES FIFTH GRAPHIC NOVEL IN 'WHAT'S GOING ANDRE' SERIES



Illustration by Connor Szrejna, Staff Artist/The Daily Campus

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Note: Connor Szerjna is a Staff Artist for The Daily Campus

The graphic novel genre showcases many talented artists. One is Connor Szerjna, a fifth-semester industrial design student at the University of Connecticut, who published "What's Going Andre: On the Spot (Part 2)" on Saturday, Oct. 31, on GlobalComix.

"What's Going Andre: On the Spot (Part 2)" is the fifth book of the What's Going Andre graphic novel series that Szerjna has been working on since August 2025. It follows the story of Andre Bernard, who is pressured to sing at his school's Winter Formal by Christie, a former member of Andre's band, Jenny and the Animal Farm. Despite not wanting to perform, he decides he will to please Christie. When it's time to sing, Andre has a panic attack, preventing him from performing.

Szerjna wrote and illustrated the comic. He said the process was a double-edged sword with pros and cons.

"When you're one person dividing yourself amongst writing and illustrating, it can get a little bit difficult to fully present your ideas," Szerjna said.

Szerjna has been writing comics since childhood.

"When I was a little kid, I was deeply obsessed with newspaper comics and especially animation," Szerjna said. "And early on, I would do a lot of illustration. I'd make my own little books in, like, first grade, second grade, hand them out to my classmates."

Szerjna also said he enjoys creating his own stories, characters and worlds that he can expand on.

"It gave me a nice escape from how busy real life can be at times," Szerjna said.

Another challenge Szerjna faced while writing "What's Going Andre: On the Spot (Part 2)" was making everyone's stories comprehensive.

"I didn't want to just put characters in and have them just be a plot device," Szerjna said. "It's nice to give everyone a purpose and have their stories wrap up with a message at the very end that's clear."

Of the graphic novels in the "What's Going Andre" series, "What's Going Andre: On the Spot (Part 2)" is Szerjna's most ambitious work, he said. Szerjna explained that two of its biggest themes are letting go and appeasing others.

"When you are involved with someone who has taken away your peace or somebody that is driving you away from your passions and you feel almost nervous to make them happy, that's when it crosses into an unhealthy territory," Szerjna said.

Szerjna said his own encounters with similar behavior influenced the graphic novel.

"It's based on my own experiences on what it's like when you try to make everybody happy, but you end up making nobody happy and you're miserable," Szerjna said. "That's what ends up happening with me sometimes and I want people to feel heard about that."

Szerjna also mentioned that the graphic novel's characters are based on different aspects of his personality.

"Andre is naturally a very anxious, overthinking character," Szerjna said. "So that represents some of my worst traits when it comes to anxiety and perfectionism and trying to make everyone happy. Reggie, who's also one of Andre's friends in the band, represents the more chaotic, the loud, the sort of bold archetype that represents how I can act around people I'm very close with and my friends, where I can sort of let loose and really be myself. And Jenny is sort of the anchor of the group, the level-headed one and the sort of calm presence, which is another part of me that I like too."

He also said the characters are anthropomorphic animals, or animals that have human traits, with characteristics that bring out their psyches and depict symbolism.

"Andre being a hairless dog represents his vulnerability, and Jenny being a dog with droopy ears represents being laid back and relaxed," Szerjna said.

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> CONNOR SZERJNA

He also said making the characters personified animals "was a more freeing choice than to force them into physical human molds."

The band in the story, Jenny and the Animal Farm, was created based on band proposals thrown around between Szerjna and his friends over the years.

"In high school and middle school, my friends and I have always talked about what it'd be like if we had a band, what it'd be like if we started a musical group," Szerjna said. "So, one big part of the story is: What if my friends and I had a band? What would it look like? I sort of display that through the characters."

Szerjna plans to release future additions to the "What's Going Andre" series, with a total of 13 issues planned and eight remaining.

Szerjna said he plans to touch more on friend dynamics and anxiety as he continues writing the series. He also said he will keep developing the characters and implementing storylines that could be relatable to many.

"I hope to explore these characters deeper in these issues and help more people feel heard in various character dynamics and stories," Szerjna said.

Szerjna wants to write more graphic novel series after the What's Going Andre series is finished.

He hopes "What's Going Andre: On the Spot (Part 2)" will keep grabbing the attention of readers and resonate with them.

"If it reaches anyone in any specific way, and if they feel heard by it, then I'll feel like I've done my job," Szerjna said.