Ever felt drawn to a particular shelf? Rummaging around in the Centre, I often get pulled to sections by a force beyond myself, and to be honest, now I just go with it. You never know what you might come across...

The other day I pulled out a massive tome, and what should I find lurking next to it but a comic book. Surprised? So was I.

Who’d put it there? Was it stuffed on the shelf in a rush when a librarian loomed on the horizon? I looked at the offending item more closely...

Lo and behold, what I’d found was the **Underhanded History of the USA**, a 1973 instalment of the left-wing student journal *Radical America*, produced by writer Jim O’Brien and cartoonist Nick Thorkelson. Talk about whacky! This was history with a difference.

Bald-headed bespectacled Professor Divine presides over the ‘orthodox’ version of events, whilst the parallel universe of reality is delivered straight from a horse’s mouth. That’s right, a horse’s mouth:
“Hi kids.

Lots of people ask me what’s so hip about the horse’s mouth? Well!

Supporting western civilization on your back for several centuries at a stretch gives you an interesting perspective on things…”

See what I mean by whacky? Why would anyone want to produce such a thing?

This was no ordinary comic. Forty years ago, O’Brien and Thorkelson were part of America’s radical student subculture, where groups popped up in cities around the country to prepare themselves and others for ‘the revolution’ that never came. Presenting their nation’s history via having Prof Divine’s ‘received wisdom’ debunked by the anarchic ‘horse’s mouth’ created an absorbing alternative narrative, highlighting the perspectives and contributions of Black people, working people, women and other marginalised groups.

Presenting this narrative as a comic strip could include everyone at some level – man, woman or child – regardless of their ability to read English. Especially keen to connect with new immigrants, O’Brien and Thorkelson had found the pictorial path to the transmission of knowledge...

Now, I’m not saying there are thousands of comics randomly stashed amongst the door-stopping volumes so lovingly preserved by the Centre, but I can guarantee there’s something to surprise everyone. How do I know? I get surprised myself every day!

_Underhanded History of the USA_ by Jim O’Brien and Nick Thorkelson was the May-June 1973 instalment of _Radical America_ (Vol 7 No. 3). The journal began as a product of Students for a Democratic Society and their Radical Education Project. Starting informally in the late 1960s as letters between members, it later became a magazine with themed issues produced by various groups of radically-minded thinkers, selling for a subscription of $5 per year.