

# ATOMIC



# ALCHEMY

*A zine series on emotional transformation as  
fuel for liberation in life and death*

**JASMINE OWENS**


*Illustrations by Jackie Waight*



"Imagination is the central formative agency in human society... It's because we can imagine different futures that we can struggle against the present state of things."

— Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *"A Globalectical Imagination"*





# ***Prepare, For We Are In a Battle Over Building Dreams of A Better Tomorrow***

## **ZiNE #3**

“Do it scared.” That’s the mantra I added to my 2025 vision board, to repeat to myself when I found myself hesitating to act, to really live, out of fear. As someone who struggles with anxiety and panic disorder (and someone who [un]fortunately loves all things horror), fear and I are well-acquainted bedfellows. Monitoring how much fear dictates my own life has opened my eyes to just how much fear—our fear—is weaponized against us to lull us into complacency and acceptance of so many things that are actively harming us.

We’re told to fear the immigrants in search of a better life, the person who bucks gender and sexual norms to at last feel at home in their body, the communities with a different skin color, language, cuisine, culture—we’re told by our leaders that these people, our neighbors, are threats to our safety and security. This is all in service of distracting us from recognizing the real danger to each and every one of us: the bloodthirsty white supremacist, patriarchal, imperialist capitalist system of oppression we currently live under, that allows our leaders and those in positions of power to hoard wealth and access—defended by the arsenals, both nuclear and conventional, of the state—at the expense and death of people and planet.

One can observe an interesting, delicate balance of fear-mongering and gaslighting required of nuclear weapons proponents. During the Cold War, the government fed into the fear of the Soviets becoming the global nuclear hegemon and using the colossally deadly nature of nuclear weapons to wipe the United States off the face of the planet to justify turning the country into a bomb factory. At the same time, the government did everything it could to normalize the atomic bomb in American culture so it could further the country’s transition into the United States of the Military Industrial Complex, hiding or downplaying the impact of mining and testing and enriching on the environment and the communities living near these sites of death-making.

The narrative has changed little since the end of the Cold War. The “enemy” shape-shifts depending on who is getting in the way of U.S.imperialism that day, be it Iraq or North Korea or Iran or Russia or China. But the message stays the same: nuclear weapons are needed for our security, and yes, we do in fact need to spend tens of billions of dollars on top of the almost trillion dollars we spend on our military in order to maintain our national security.

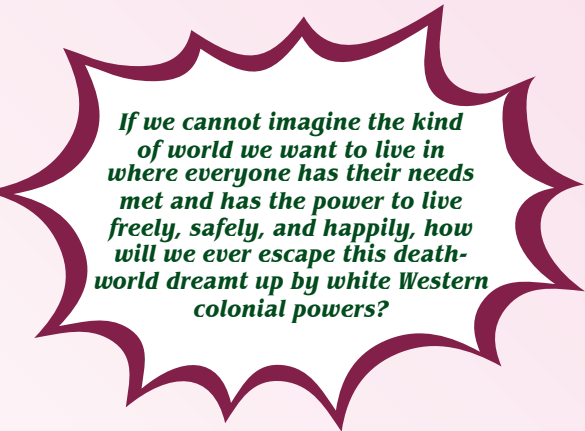
Don’t look at your fellow human beings forced to live on the streets before being carted off to a concentration camp or prison, don’t look at your city’s infrastructure falling apart or the line wrapping around the building of the food pantry or the Black and brown people being ripped off the street and thrown in unmarked vans by masked goons of the state too scared to show their faces. Don’t think about the ways the ills of society could be solved with the money and resources being wasted on manufacturing weapons of mass death and that are killing the very people we’re told they’re meant to protect. “The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and your ears,” or whatever George Orwell said.

Fear-mongering has been an extremely effective tool of the beneficiaries of the current intersectionally oppressive regime, because a scared populace is a populace easily controlled. People are willing to give up many rights for a semblance of safety (cough cough, Patriot Act). And people are willing to commit vile atrocities in the name of fear. Living a life dominated by fear is in part how we’ve arrived at the current state of the world and all the death and destruction we’re witnessing around us. We cannot live like this any longer.



I think often of the late great militant radical activist and musical talent Nina Simone's conception of freedom: "no fear." In attempting to give shape to the elusive feeling of freedom, Simone engages in the practice of imagining a life that isn't controlled by fear. Living as a Black woman in the U.S. at any point in time is to live a life of fear—Simone knew that feeling intimately. Really, living a life as a Black, Indigenous, brown, disabled, poor, female-presenting, or queer person in the U.S. is to live a life of fear on some level. But what Simone and so many other radicals have come to learn is that the first step to freedom is taking back power over your mind, to not let fear-mongering dictate how you, and all of us, live. "The revolution will not be televised," Gil Scott-Heron reminds us.

**Our minds, our imaginations, are the first sites of colonization.** When we give in to the fear-mongering and relinquish control to the state or the corporations or whoever is asking us to do so, we give up a piece of our agency, a piece of our selves. We shut and seal the door to our imaginations,



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accepting the assertion that there is no better way, that we must give up our power in exchange for violence thinly veiled as "safety" and "security."

But what if we dared to imagine something different? A new, more just, equitable, sustainable, and abundant way of living for all?

There is bravery in engaging in this practice of radical imagination. Bravery because it is a threat to the system when we allow ourselves

to stretch our minds beyond the stories we've been told, to reject the assertion that there is no other, better way of living and then doing the work together to imagine what that new way of living could look, taste, feel, smell, sound like.

As science fiction filmmaker Alex Rivera observes: "The battle over real power tomorrow begins with the struggle over who gets to dream today." Practicing radical imagination is not a trivial matter; there's a reason students and thought leaders throughout history through present day have been targeted for simply speaking or putting pen to paper. Their words build visions of collective liberation that have the power to shatter this death-world.

"Imagination is a field of struggle, not an ephemeral afterthought that we have the luxury to dismiss or romanticize," writes transdisciplinary scholar, writer, and educator Dr. Ruha Benjamin in Imagination: A Manifesto. It is our duty to engage in radical imagination, because as poet Lucille Clifton says, "We cannot create what we cannot imagine." If we cannot imagine the kind of world we want to live in where everyone has their needs met and has the power to live freely, safely, and happily, how will we ever escape this death-world dreamt up by white Western colonial powers?

After all, “imagination is not a wholesale good,” Dr. Ruha Benjamin warns. Imagination can be weaponized to inflict harm. Someone, many someones, had a vision of a world where a small subsection of humanity is able to thrive beyond our wildest imaginations while the rest of the world is left to perish. Through colonizing mind, body, and land, they birthed that vision into our current reality. And they continue to nurture that vision and world through the sustained weaponization of our fears and colonization of our imaginations—of what could be.

Black and Indigenous communities in the U.S. and around the world have long understood the power of imagination in the struggle for liberation. Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurisms recognize that when those in power are actively working to erase you from the future, there is real power and defiance in creating stories and visions where you are not only present but thriving in the future. A future defined not by colonizers or the corporations, but by us and our communities.



Anishinaabe author and public speaker Patty Krawec shares how tales of the white settlers leaving Turtle Island and returning the land to its original stewards spread across Indigenous tribes, serving as an oasis of hope for the future, a place to go to escape the horrors of settler colonialism and genocide in her book Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future. In Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination, historian and academic Robin D.G. Kelley discusses how movements throughout history to liberate Black people from the chains of slavery and restore their rights as full human beings in the U.S. were sites of radical imagination rooted in the horrific reality Black people were living daily. To dare to dream was a radical act of survival, because “the only way to



ensure survival for Black people was to envision a radically different future for all and fight to bring it into existence.” That fight to turn your dreams into reality is a necessary component of the liberation struggle. Dreaming is the first step; practicing the world we imagine building together is how we transform our freedom dreams into reality. For “it is in the fight that visions of the future are forged, clarified, revised, or discarded,” Kelley explains. It is in practicing an abolitionist future together that we learn what tools we need to build a liberated world that uplifts everyone, not just a select few.

I’ve been told many times over that I’m naive or idealistic for being a nuclear weapons abolitionist, for believing that we can actually create a safer world for ourselves without the existence of nuclear weapons. To these critics, I would argue that perhaps it’s self-defeating, naive and idealistic to believe that this system, unlike any other system in the history of mankind, is here to stay forever. That a system built on death-making is the only future we can imagine. How sad is that?

But most importantly, I’m a nuclear weapons abolitionist because like those before me, it is an act of survival. **It is a fierce commitment to the sanctity of all life and defiance to the nuclear necropolitical status quo to create and share visions of all that we could do as individuals, as communities, when we prioritize people and planet over profit and power.**

For as long as this white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist imperialist nuclear death-world exists, I will dream of and fight for a more just, equitable, sustainable, abundant world liberated from the clutches of the nuclear death machine. I will do it sad, I will do it angry, I will do it scared. I will do it with love in my heart and fire in my eyes and hope surrounding me in the form of each of you that dare to dream of and fight for a better tomorrow.

