

Aurora native pens book with recipes and coping strategies for navigating depression

Life can throw a lot at you and, chances are, over the years you've developed strategies to make things a little more manageable. Yet, as the saying goes, what might be right for you may not be right for some.

But now, foodies can get a flavour of some of tips and strategies that work for others through *The Sad Bastard Cookbook: Food You Can Make So You Don't Die*.

The Sad Bastard Cookbook, edited by Zilla Novikov and Aurora-native Rachel A. Rosen, offers humorous advice on how to keep yourself fed while managing physical and mental disabilities through a vegetarian and vegan lens.

The idea for the co-authors came about through chats on their Discord server amongst themselves and their friends circle on coping strategies they use to cope with daily challenges. In Rosen's case, it is chronic health issues.

"It turned out we all had our various hacks that we use," says Rosen, noting that everyone's hacks were very different. "We came up with the idea of, what if we did a PDF of all the different recipes and cooking strategies we came up with so people could really benefit from them? We found there was enough to make an actual book. We crowd-sourced among friends and contacts and ended up writing a book between the two of us in 12 days!"

It's remarkable considering they started off with a base of just four recipes.

Once they had their material, however, they set out to create a reference that was helpful to as broad a group as possible.

"We didn't get specific because a lot of things that are helpful for physical health issues — lack of energy when you're dealing with chronic pain, the same hacks can work really well if you're dealing with depression or even if you just had a really long day at work," says Rosen. "A lot of our strategies are kind of beneficial for more than one thing. Even something simple like the fact you can get all the same nutrition and then some with frozen vegetables as opposed to fresh vegetables — it saves time in cutting if you've got low energy, it saves money if you are poor, and it saves the decision-making stress of cognitive overload if you're dealing with a mental health crisis.

"While there are a number of more specific illnesses and disabilities that maybe our stuff won't work for, it does cover a number of areas."

Other tips compiled from their circle include cracking a raw egg into a hot bowl of ramen to add protein, or using coconut water instead of plain ol' H₂O to make rice for a nutritious flavour kick.

"Just these little things that you can do to make food taste better and make the creation of food something that brings you a little bit of joy when you're going through bad times. One of the things we do is we searched out to see if there's anything left out there? Is there any book that deals with when you're depressed? We found these complicated recipes saying you should cook this obscure kind of fish and add in these herbs and vitamins and we couldn't imagine having to hunt for any of that. Everybody seemed to have at least one little thing they could do to make their food actually taste good and bring them a little bit of happiness. I found that a really beautiful aspect of working on it."

This isn't the first book for either Rosen or Novikov. Both are members of the Toronto-based Nightbeats Collective, while Rosen is a long-time member of the Aurora Public Library's Aurora Writers' Group.

The title of *The Sad Bastard Cookbook* was something Rosen came up with, but was inspired by a line in Novikov's debut novel — which Rosen describes as "Gen X-Millennial Humour."

Rosen herself is a fiction writer with a penchant for fantasy and sci-fi. Her first novel, *Cascade*, is an urban fantasy that incorporates her passion for political and social themes.

Cascade is set in an "alternative version of Canada" where magic reigns with and "a diverse group of activists, bureaucrats and journalists coming together and coming apart to prevent a climate-induced magical catastrophe."

The Aurora Writers Group, she says, "workshopped" the first few chapters and was integral to the publishing experience.

The Sad Bastard Cookbook is available as a free PDF on the creators' website to make the book as accessible as possible. Print editions can also be purchased from Amazon.ca.

"Everybody has bad days and everybody has days where they just don't feel like cooking, they don't feel like eating, but they still need to not fall over," says Rosen. "We really wish we could feed everyone but we can't do that. This is our way of extending a caring hand to the world."

For more information, please visit nightbeatseu.ca/the-sad-bastard-cookbook/.

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