

NOW AN
HBO
SERIES



WATCHMEN



ALAN MOORE
DAVE GIBBONS





THE DELUXE EDITION

WATCHMEN

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With special thanks to
Neil Gaiman, Mike Lake,
Pat Mills, and Joe Orlando.

It began with Bob Dylan.

For me, a couplet from his 1966 masterpiece
Desolation Row was the spark that would one
day ignite WATCHMEN.

*At Midnight all the agents
and the superhuman crew*

*Come out and round up
everyone who knows more
than they do.*

It was a glimpse, a mere fragment of something;
something ominous, paranoid and threatening.
But something that showed that comics, like
poetry or rock and roll or Bob Dylan himself,
might feasibly become part of the greater cultural
continuum. The lines must have also lodged in
Alan's consciousness for, nearly twenty years
later, Dylan's words eventually provided the
title of the first issue of our comic book series
WATCHMEN.

Another twenty years on from then, in collected
form, WATCHMEN itself would become a widely
heralded cultural touchstone. Way, way back in
the sixties, however, comics still lay on the dim
margins of culture. Emasculated in the witch-
hunts of the previous decade, they were largely
saccharine and censored, harmless juvenile
reading fodder at best.

There were signs to be glimpsed though, hints
of what might lie ahead. A brief mention of a
superhero in a newspaper here, a slim volume
of comics history there or a fragment of a
comic book page appropriated as "pop art"
in a gallery. By the middle of the decade, the
anarchic glee of underground comics seemed
no more odd than the absurd Batman TV series.
The times they were a-changin', indeed.

We comics fans were partly pleased, partly
disappointed, that our medium, for so long
overlooked, had been spotted by the wider

world. Like so many offbeat obsessions, comics might
lose their exclusive, secretive allure if everyone noticed
and dragged them into the full light of day.

More than any other, the comic book medium is founded
on the evocative glimpse. Indeed, the very fabric, the
mechanism, of comics is essentially a series of static
snapshot panels magically given continuity by the
reader's attention.

The cover of a comic is typically a tight little promise of
pleasure, crafted to lure the eye, excite the curiosity and,
that done, hook the reader into buying. Once inside the
comic, the true fan needs but a few panels depicting
some prior continuity or an incarnation of a character
published decades earlier to open up vast suggested
histories of wonder.

Such is the power of the glimpse, the magpie lure of a
promising hint.

Often, in their actual content, comics would show these
promises to be lies. But sometimes, just sometimes, they
would prove to be truly memorable fictional realities.
Such a thing was possible for comics; such a thing could
be aspired to.

The particular qualities of the form aside, there is
nothing that fundamentally separates comics from other
storytelling media. The same considerations, essential
to a satisfying narrative, apply here as elsewhere in the
realms of fiction.

Whether tales are told by the light of a campfire or by
the glow of a screen, the prime decision for the teller
has always been what to reveal and what to withhold.
Whether in words alone or with images, the narrator
must be clear about what is to be shown and what is to
be hidden.

Relating the entirety of experience is too full, too
unmediated and sprawling to appeal, too much like the
mundane existence it approximates. It is for the storyteller
to offer the tantalizing glimpse and for the audience to
supply the closure which it suggests.

It was in this knowledge that we approached
WATCHMEN.

Although Alan knew the broad strokes of the story from
the beginning, the precise narrative decisions were made
only as we talked and pondered, sifting possibilities,
waiting for the flash of gold in the stream of conversation
and ideas. Waited for the glimpse of something valuable.

The story in this volume is the aggregation of what
we gathered, what we thought would best tell our tale.
The rest, discarded, washed downstream and vanished
from view.

In truth, for all its breadth and detail, actual and
implied, WATCHMEN is finite, as closed and complete
as a varnished oil painting or, perhaps, a delicate
clock mechanism.

We crafted it as carefully as we could and, concentrated
and intense though it was, enjoyed every moment of its
creation. There really is nothing left to add other than to
cordially invite the reader to enjoy bringing their own
closure to the work.

In the end, Bob Dylan probably put it best, in another of
his masterpieces, Gates of Eden:

*At dawn my lover comes to me
and tells me of her dreams,*

*With no attempts to shovel the
glimpse*

*Into the ditch of what each one
means.*

Dave Gibbons
March 2013

CHAPTER I



RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL.
OCTOBER 12 TH, 1985.:

DOG CARCASS IN ALLEY
THIS MORNING. TIE TREAD
ON BURST STOMACH. THIS
CITY IS AFRAID OF ME.
I HAVE SEEN ITS
TRUE FACE.

THE STREETS ARE EXTENDED
GUTTERS AND THE GUTTERS
ARE FULL OF BLOOD AND
WHEN THE DRAINS FINALLY
SCAB OVER, ALL THE
VERMIN WILL
DROWN.

THE ACCUMULATED FILTH
OF ALL THEIR SEX AND
MURDER WILL FOAM UP ABOUT
THEIR WAISTS AND ALL THE
WHORES AND POLITICIANS
WILL LOOK UP AND
SHOUT "SAVE US!!!"

THE
END
IS
NEAR

...and I'll
LOOK DOWN,
and WHISPER
"no."

THEY HAD A CHOICE,
ALL OF THEM. THEY COULD
HAVE FOLLOWED IN THE
FOOTSTEPS OF GOOD MEN
LIKE MY FATHER,
OR PRESIDENT
TRUMAN.

DECENT MEN,
WHO BELIEVED
IN A DAY'S
WORK FOR A
DAY'S PAY.

INSTEAD THEY FOLLOWED
THE DROPPINGS OF LECHERS
AND COMMUNISTS AND
DIDN'T REALIZE THAT
THE TRAIL LED OVER
A PRECIPICE UNTIL
IT WAS TOO
LATE.

DON'T TELL
ME THEY
DIDN'T HAVE
A CHOICE.

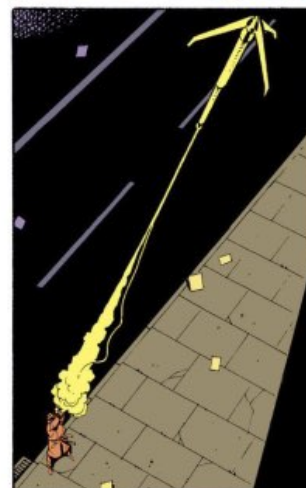
NOW THE WHOLE WORLD
STANDS ON THE BRINK,
STARING DOWN INTO
BLOODY HELL, ALL THOSE
LIBERALS AND
INTELLECTUALS
AND SMOOTH-
TALKERS...

...and all
of a sudden,
nobody can
THINK OF
ANYTHING
TO SAY.

HMM.

THAT'S
QUITE A
DROP.







AT MIDNIGHT, ALL THE AGENTS...





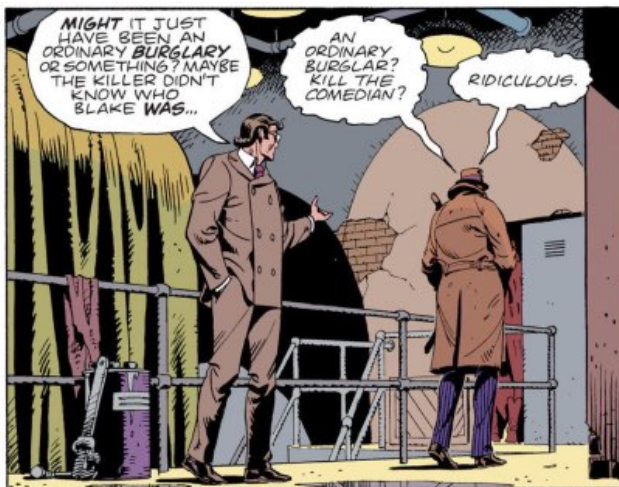




NEITHER HAVE YOU. LOT OF DUST.

YEAH, WELL, Y'KNOW, SOMETIMES I COME AND SIT DOWN HERE FOR A WHILE, BUT THERE DOESN'T SEEM MUCH POINT SINCE I RETIRED.

LISTEN ABOUT THE COMEDIAN...



MIGHT IT JUST HAVE BEEN AN ORDINARY BURGLARY OR SOMETHING? MAYBE THE KILLER DIDN'T KNOW WHO BLAKE WAS...

AN ORDINARY BURGLAR? KILL THE COMEDIAN?

RICIDULOUS.



HMM. I GUESS IT DOESN'T SEEM VERY LIKELY.

I HEARD HE'D BEEN WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT SINCE '77, KNOCKING OVER MARXIST REPUBLICS IN SOUTH AMERICA...

MAYBE THIS WAS A POLITICAL KILLING?



MAYBE.

OR MAYBE SOMEONE'S PICKING OFF COSTUMED HEROES.

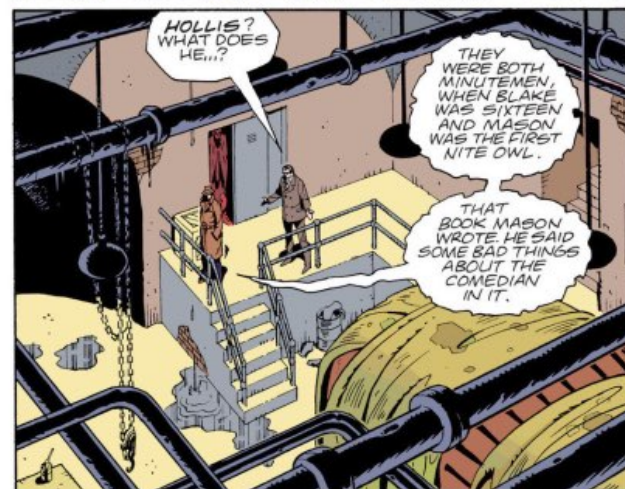
UM. DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S MAYBE A LITTLE PARANOID?



THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT MENOW? THAT I'M PARANOID?

THE COMEDIAN WAS ACTIVE FOR FORTY YEARS. MEN MAKE A LOT OF ENEMIES IN THAT TIME.

HOW'S YOUR FRIEND HOLLIS MASON THESE DAYS?



HOLLIS? WHAT DOES HE...?

THEY WERE BOTH MINUTEMEN, WHEN BLAKE WAS SIXTEEN AND MASON WAS THE FIRST NITE OWL.

THAT BOOK MASON WROTE HE SAID SOME BAD THINGS ABOUT THE COMEDIAN IN IT.



RORSCHACH, I DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU'RE IMPLYING HERE. HOLLIS IS AN OLD MAN. IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT GOING OVER THERE AND SCARING HIM...

IMPLYING NOTHING.

JUST AN OBSERVATION.



ANYWAY, THOUGHT I'D LET YOU KNOW. IN CASE SOME- BODY'S GUNNING FOR MASKS.

BETTER GO NOW. THINGS TO DO.



YEAH, WELL, THE TUNNEL BRINGS YOU OUT IN A WARE- HOUSE TWO BLOCKS NORTH...

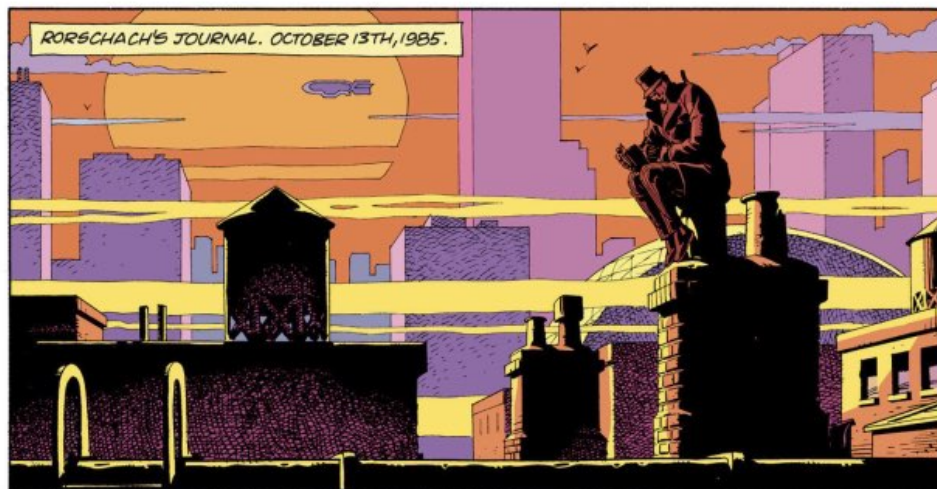
YES. I REMEMBER. USED TO COME HERE OFTEN. BACK WHEN WE WERE PARTNERS.

OH. UH, YEAH... THOSE WERE GREAT TIMES. RORSCHACH. GREAT TIMES. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THEM?



YOU QUIT.





RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL. OCTOBER 13TH, 1985.



SLEPT ALL DAY. AWOKEN AT 4:37. LANDLADY COMPLAINING ABOUT SMELL. SHE HAS FIVE CHILDREN BY FIVE DIFFERENT FATHERS. I AM SURE SHE CHEATS ON WELFARE.

SOON IT WILL BE DARK.



BENEATH ME, THIS AWFUL CITY, IT SCREAMS LIKE AN ABATOIR FULL OF RETARDED CHILDREN. NEW YORK.

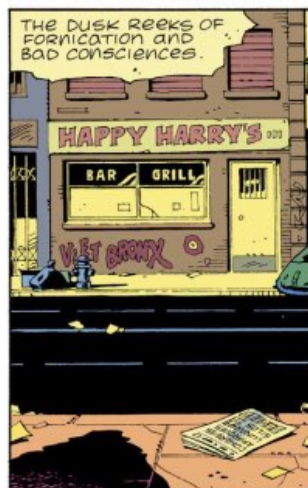
ON FRIDAY NIGHT, A COMEDIAN DIED IN NEW YORK.



SOMEBODY KNOWS WHY.

DOWN THERE...

SOMEBODY KNOWS.



THE DUSK REEKS OF FORNICATION AND BAD CONSCIENCES.



I BELIEVE I SHALL TAKE MY EXERCISE.



FINE! I'M FUH, I'M FINE!

AND I'M, AND I'M, AND I'M GLAD YOU'RE FINE, TOO!

AND UH, AND UH...



RUH.

ROR. ROR.

RORSCHACH! HAR HAR HOW YA DOIN', FELLA?



I'M FINE, HAPPY HARRY.

YOURSELF?



FINE! I'M FUH, I'M FINE!

AND I'M, AND I'M, AND I'M GLAD YOU'RE FINE, TOO!

AND UH, AND UH...



OH, GOD.

PLEASE DON'T KILL ANYBODY.



GUY WENT SIDEWALK DIVING, FRIDAY NIGHT. I DON'T THINK HE WAS ALONE WHEN IT HAPPENED.

NAME WAS EDWARD BLAKE.

FRIEND OF MINE.



HEY, YOU HEAR THAT? HE'S GOT FRIENDS! MUSTA CHANGED HIS DEODORANT!

STEVE, FOR GOD'S SAKE, MAN, SHUT UP...



I--I GOTTA TAKE A LEAK...



H-HEY! HEY, I DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING...

I, UH, I HAVEN'T BEEN IN THE APPLE TOO LONG, AND I...



...I, UH...

HEY, WHAT...?



AAAAAA



I'VE JUST BROKEN THIS GENTLEMAN'S LITTLE FINGER.

WHO KILLED EDWARD BLAKE?

OH, OHHH...



WHO KILLED EDWARD BLAKE?

OH, OHHH...



...AND HIS INDEX FINGER.

WHO KILLED EDWARD BLAKE?



PLEASE...

PLEASE, WE DON'T KNOW...

AW, GOD, MAN, LEAVE HIM ALONE...



FIRST VISIT OF EVENING FRUITLESS. NOBODY KNEW ANYTHING. FEEL SLIGHTLY DEPRESSED.

HURM.

THIS CITY IS DYING OF RABIES. IS THE BEST I CAN DO TO WIPE RANDOM FLECKS OF FOAM FROM ITS LIPS?



never despair. never surrender.

I LEAVE THE HUMAN COCKROACHES TO DISCUSS THEIR HEROIN AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY. I HAVE BUSINESS ELSEWHERE, WITH A BETTER CLASS OF PERSON.



THE COMEDIAN DEAD?

BUT WHY?



I NEVER CLAIMED TO BE ANYBODY SPECIAL. RORSCHACH, I JUST HAVE SOME OVER-ENTHUSIASTIC R.R. MEN.

LISTEN... COULD IT HAVE BEEN A POLITICAL KILLING? MAYBE THE SOVIETS...



HE STOOD UP FOR HIS COUNTRY, VEIDT. HE NEVER LET ANYBODY RETIRE HIM.

NEVER CASHED IN ON HIS REPUTATION.



YOU WERE ALWAYS SUPPOSED TO BE WORLD'S SMARTEST MAN, VEIDT.

YOU TELL ME.



DREIBERG SAID SAME THING. DON'T BELIEVE IT.

AMERICA HAS DR. MANHATTAN. REDS HAVE BEEN RUNNING SCARED SINCE '65. THEY'D NEVER DARE ANTASOZINIZE US.

I THINK WE'VE GOT A MASK-KILLER.



NOT NECESSARILY.

THE COMEDIAN HAD PLENTY OF OTHER POLITICAL ENEMIES TO CHOOSE FROM, EVEN DIS-COUNTING THE RUSSIANS...

THE MAN WAS PRACTICALLY A NAZI.



NEVER SET UP A COMPANY SELLING POSTERS AND DIET BOOKS AND TOY SOLDIERS BASED ON HIMSELF.

NEVER BECAME A PROSTITUTE.

IF THAT MAKES HIM A NAZI, YOU MIGHT AS WELL CALL ME A NAZI, TOO.



HM.



RORSCHACH...
I KNOW WE WERE NEVER FRIENDS, BUT EVEN SO, YOU'RE BEING UNFAIR.

NBODY RETIRED ME. I CHOSE TO QUIT ADVENTURING AND GO PUBLIC TWO YEARS BEFORE THE POLICE STRIKE MADE THE KEENE ACT NECESSARY.



YES. GOOD TIMING.

I CAME HERE TO WARN YOU ABOUT THE MASK-KILLER. SO YOU DIDN'T END UP SMARTEST MAN IN THE MORGUE.

BUT I GUESS THERE'S WORSE THINGS TO END UP AS.

BE SEEING YOU.



SURE.

HAVE A NICE DAY.



RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL.
OCTOBER 13TH, 1985. 8:30 AM.

ROCKEFELLE
MILITARY
RESEARCH
CENTER

FOUNDED 1981



MEETING WITH VEIDT LEFT BAD TASTE IN MOUTH. HE IS POMPERED AND DECADENT, BETRAYING EVEN HIS OWN SHALLOW, LIBERAL AFFECTATIONS.

POSSIBLY HOMOSEXUAL? MUST REMEMBER TO INVESTIGATE FURTHER.



DREIBERG AS BAD. A FLABBY FAILURE WHO SITS WHIMPERING IN HIS BASEMENT.

WHY ARE SO FEW OF US LEFT ACTIVE, HEALTHY AND WITHOUT PERSONALITY DISORDERS?



THE FIRST NITE OWL RUNS AN AUTO-REPAIR SHOP.

THE FIRST SILK SPECTRE IS A BLOATED, AGING WHORE, DYING IN A CALIFORNIAN REST RESORT.

CAPTAIN METROPOLIS WAS DECAPITATED IN A CAR CRASH BACK IN '74.



MOTHMAN'S IN AN ASYLUM UP IN MAINE.

THE SILHOUETTE RETIRED IN DISGRACE, MURDERED SIX WEEKS LATER BY A MINOR ADVERSARY SEEKING REVENGE.

DOLLAR BILL GOT SHOT. HOODED JUSTICE WENT MISSING IN '55.



THE COMEDIAN IS DEAD.



ONLY TWO NAMES REMAINING ON MY LIST.

BOTH SHARE PRIVATE QUARTERS AT ROCKEFELLER MILITARY RESEARCH CENTER.

I SHALL GO TO THEM.



I SHALL GO AND TELL THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN THAT SOMEONE PLANS TO MURDER HIM.



GOOD EVENING, RORSCHACH.



GOOD EVENING, DR. MANHATTAN.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, RORSCHACH? THIS IS A GOVERNMENT BASE AND I HEAR YOU'RE WANTED BY THE POLICE.

EHH.
GOOD EVENING, MISS JUPITER.



THAT'S JUSPECZYK. "JUPITER" WAS JUST A NAME MY MOTHER ASSUMED BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW SHE WAS POLISH.

YOU HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION.



APOLOGIES.

CAME TO WARN YOU BOTH AND BRING BAD NEWS.

THE COMEDIAN IS DEAD.



YES, SINCE HE AND I ARE THE ONLY TWO EXTRANORMAL OPERATIVES CURRENTLY EMPLOYED BY THE GOVERNMENT, I WAS INFORMED ON SATURDAY MORNING.

I UNDERSTAND THE C.I.A. SUSPECTS THE LIBYANS WERE RESPONSIBLE.



ENNK.



WHAT MASON SAID IN "UNDER THE HOOD" IS WHAT HAPPENED. GOD KNOWS I'M NOT MY MOTHER'S BIGGEST ADMIRER, BUT SOME THINGS SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO ANYBODY.

WHY DO YOU THINK BLAKE NEVER SUED MASON?



HAVE MY OWN THEORIES ON THAT.

TAKE IT YOU'RE NOT TOO CONCERNED ABOUT BLAKE'S DEATH.



ANYWAY, IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED TO A NICER PERSON.

BLAKE WAS A BASTARD. HE WAS A MONSTER. Y'KNOW HE TRIED TO RAPE MY MOTHER BACK WHEN THEY WERE BOTH MINUTEMEN?



CRONCH. CRONCH.

MORAL LAPSES?

I'M NOT HERE TO SPECULATE ON THE MORAL LAPSES OF MEN WHO DIED IN THEIR COUNTRIES SERVICE. I CAME TO WARN...



A LIVE BODY AND A DEAD BODY CONTAIN THE SAME NUMBER OF PARTICLES.

STRUCTURALLY, THERE'S NO DISCERNIBLE DIFFERENCE.

LIFE AND DEATH ARE UNQUANTIFIABLE ABSTRACTS. WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED?



UHM.

SO YOU SUPPORT THE ALLEGATIONS MADE IN HOLLIS MASON'S BOOK CONCERNING BLAKE?



RAPE IS A MORAL LAPSE? YOU KNOW HE BROKE HER RIBS? YOU KNOW HE ALMOST CHOKED HER?

JON, GET THIS CREEP OUT OF HERE.



YOU SEEM TO BE UPSETTING LAURIE.

I THINK YOU OUGHT TO GO.



WITH RESPECT, DR. MANHATTAN, I WARNED VEIDT AND DREIBERG AND I INTEND TO WARN YOU AND YOUR LADY FRIEND.

I BELIEVE SOMEONE IS ELIMINATING MASKED ADVENTURERS, POSSIBLY SOME OLD Foe WITH A GRUDGE. I BELIEVE...



I SAID I THINK YOU OUGHT TO GO.



SPENT A LOT OF TIME GETTING IN TO SEE YOU.

NOT LEAVING BEFORE I'VE...



...HAD MY SAY.



HURM.



HE'S GONE.

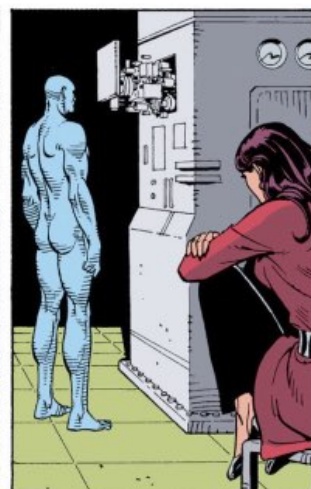
ARE YOU STILL UPSET?



YEAH. I JUST DON'T LIKE RORSCHACH. HE'S SICK. SICK INSIDE HIS MIND.

I DON'T LIKE THE WAY HE SMELLS OR THAT HORRIBLE MONO-TONE VOICE OR ANYTHING.

THE SOONER THE POLICE PUT HIM AWAY, THE BETTER.



JON?

YES, LAURIE?



I WAS JUST THINKING THAT I MUST BE REALLY EDGY TO LET A MAGGOT LIKE RORSCHACH GET TO ME LIKE THAT.

I JUST FEEL COOPED UP SOME-TIMES. MAYBE I COULD USE A NIGHT OUT.



YOU KNOW, RORSCHACH MENTIONED DAN DREIBERG. WE HAVEN'T SEEN DAN IN YEARS.

MAYBE I'LL CALL HIM UP. ASK HIM OUT TO DINNER.

IF YOU DON'T MIND, THAT IS.



OF COURSE NOT.

THAT'S FASCINATING.

I'LL CALL DAN.



HELLO, DAN? LAURIE. LAURIE JUSPECZYK. I'M FINE. HOW ARE YOU?

GREAT. LISTEN, I JUST REMEMBERED I HADN'T SEEN YOU IN AGES AND WONDERED IF WE COULD HAVE DINNER SOMETIME.

WELL, HOW ABOUT TONIGHT? RAFAEL'S AT 8:30?



THAT'S TERRIFIC.

JON? OH, YEAH. YEAH, JON'S IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE.

SEE YOU LATER, DAN.

'BYE.



ON FRIDAY NIGHT, A COMEDIAN DIED IN NEW YORK.



SOMEONE THREW HIM OUT OF A WINDOW AND WHEN HE HIT THE SIDEWALK HIS HEAD WAS DRIVEN UP INTO HIS STOMACH.



NOBODY CARES.

NOBODY CARES BUT ME.



ARE THEY RIGHT? IS IT FUTILE?

SOON THERE WILL BE WAR. MILLIONS WILL BURN. MILLIONS WILL PERISH IN SICKNESS AND MISERY.

WHY DOES ONE DEATH MATTER AGAINST SO MANY?



BECAUSE THERE IS GOOD AND THERE IS EVIL, AND EVIL MUST BE PUNISHED. EVEN IN THE FACE OF ARMAGEDDON I SHALL NOT COMPROMISE IN THIS.

BUT THERE ARE SO MANY DESERVING OF RETRIBUTION...



...AND THERE IS SO LITTLE TIME.

24



WELL, I GUESS IT'S GETTING PRETTY LATE.

IT'S BEEN A GREAT EVENING, LAURIE. YOU'RE SURE YOU WON'T LET ME PICK UP THE TAB?



NAH. IF I'M GONNA BE A KEPT WOMAN FOR THE MILITARY'S SECRET WEAPON, THEN THE MILITARY CAN STAND ME A BOWL OF SPAGHETTI AFRICAINE EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.

HEY, YOU SOUND BITTER.



NO. NOT REALLY. IT'S JUST THAT THE ONLY REASON I'M KEPT AROUND IS TO KEEP JON RELAXED AND HAPPY.

UH...IS EVERYTHING OKAY WITH YOU AND JON?



ME AND JON?

OH, YEAH, YEAH, EVERYTHING'S FINE.

COULDN'T BE BETTER.



IT'S JUST I KEEP THINKING "I'M THIRTY-FIVE. WHAT HAVE I DONE?"

I'VE SPENT EIGHT YEARS IN SEMI-RETIREMENT, PRECEDED BY TEN YEARS RUNNING ROUND IN A STUPID COSTUME BECAUSE MY STUPID MOTHER WANTED ME TO!



YOU REMEMBER THAT COSTUME?

WITH THAT STUPID LITTLE SHORT SKIRT AND THE NECKLINE GOING DOWN TO MY NAVEL? GOD, THAT WAS SO DREADFUL.

GOD, YES. DREADFUL.



Y'KNOW, WHEN I THINK BACK...WHY DID WE DO IT? WHY DID WE DRESS UP LIKE THAT?

THE KEENE ACT WAS THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO US.

YEAH, YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT.



25



At midnight, all the agents and superhuman crew, go out and round up everyone who knows more than they do.

—Bob Dylan



UNDER THE HOOD

We present here excerpts from Hollis Mason's autobiography, UNDER THE HOOD, leading up to the time when he became the masked adventurer, Nite Owl. Reprinted with permission of the author.

I

The lady who works in the grocery store at the corner of my block is called Denise, and she's one of America's great unpublished novelists. Over the years she's written *forty-two* romantic novels, none of which have ever reached the bookstores. I, however, have been fortunate enough to hear the plots of the last twenty-seven of these recounted in installments by the authoress herself every time I drop by the store for a jar of coffee or can of beans, and my respect for Denise's literary prowess knows no bounds. So, naturally enough, when I found myself faced with the daunting task of actually starting the book you now hold in your hands, it was Denise I turned to for advice.

"Listen," I said. "I don't know from writing a book. I have all this stuff in my head that I want to get down, but what do I write about first? Where do I begin?"

Without looking up from the boxes of detergent to which she was fixing price tags, Denise graciously delivered up a pearl of her accumulated wisdom in a voice of bored but benign condescension.

"Start off with the saddest thing you can think of and get the audience's sympathies on your side. After that, believe me, it's a walk."

Thank you, Denise. This book is dedicated to you, because I don't know how to choose between all the other people I should be dedicating it to.

The saddest thing I can think of is "The Ride of the Valkyries." Every time I hear it I get depressed and start wondering about the lot of humanity and the unfairness of life and all those other things that you think about at three in the morning when your digestion won't let you sleep. Now, I realize that nobody else on the planet has to brush away a tear when they hear that particular stirring refrain, but that's because they don't know about Moe Vernon.

When my father upped and left my Granddad's farm in Montana to bring his family to New York, Moe Vernon was the man he worked for. Vernon's Auto Repairs was just off Seventh Avenue, and although it was only 1928 when Dad started working there, there was just about enough trade for his wages to keep me and Mom and my sister Liantha in food and clothing. Dad was always really keen and enthusiastic about his work, and I used to think it was just because he had a thing about cars. Looking back, I can see it was more than that. It must have meant so much to him, just to have a job and be able to support his family. He'd had a lot of arguments with his father about coming east rather than taking over the farm, like the old man had planned for him, and most of the rows had ended with my grandfather predicting poverty and moral ruin for my dad and mom if they so much as set foot in New York. To be living the life that he himself had chosen and keeping his family above the poverty line in spite of his father's warnings must have meant more to my dad than anything in the world, but that's something I only understand now, with hindsight. Back then, I just thought he was crazy for crankschafts.

Anyway, I was twelve years old when we left Montana, so during those next few years in the big city I was just the age to appreciate the occasional trips to the auto shop with my dad, which is where I first set eyes on Moe Vernon, his employer.

Moe Vernon was a man around fifty-five or so, and he had one of those old New York faces that you don't see anymore. It's funny, but certain faces seem to go in and out of style. You look at old photographs and everybody has a certain look to them, almost as if they're related. Look at pictures from ten years later and you can see that there's a new kind of face starting to predominate, and that the old faces are fading away and vanishing, never to be seen again. Moe Vernon's face was like that: three chins, a wisecrack cynical curl to his lower lip, a certain hollowness around the eyes, hair retreating back across his head, attempting a rendezvous with the label on his shirt collar.



Vernon's Auto Repair c. 1928. (left to right) My father; myself, age 12; Moe Vernon; Fred Motz.

I'd go into the shop with my dad and Moe would be sitting there in his office, which had glass sides so he could watch the men working. Sometimes, if my father wanted to check something out with Moe before going ahead with his work, he'd send me over to the office to do it for him, which meant that I got to see the insides of Moe's inner sanctum. Or rather, I got to hear them.

You see, Moe was an opera buff. He had one of the new gramophones over in the corner of his office and all day he used to play scratchy old seventy-eight recordings of his favorites just as loud as he could manage. By today's standard, "as loud as he could manage" didn't amount to a whole lot of noise, but it sounded pretty cacophonous back in 1930, when things were generally quieter.

The other thing that was peculiar about Moe was his sense of humor, as represented by all the stuff he used to keep in the top right side drawer of his desk.

In that drawer, amongst a mess of rubber bands and paper clips and receipts and stuff, Moe had one of the largest collections of tasteless novelty items that I had seen up until that point or have seen at any time since. They were all risqué little toys and gadgets that Moe had picked up from gag shops or on visits to Coney Island, but it was the sheer range of them that was overwhelming: every cheap blue gimmick that you can remember your dad bringing home when he'd been out drinking with the boys and embarrassing your mom with; every ballpoint pen with a girl on the side whose swimsuit vanished when you turned it upside down; every salt and pepper crevet set shaped like a woman's breasts; every plastic dog mess. Moe had the works. Every time anybody went into his office he'd try to startle them by displaying his latest plaything. Actually, it used to shock my dad more than it did me. I don't think he liked the idea of his son being exposed to that kind of stuff, probably because of all the moral warnings my grandfather had impressed upon him. For my part, I wasn't offended and I even found it kind of funny. Not the things themselves . . . even by then I was too old to get much amusement out

of stuff like that. What I found funny was that for no apparent reason, a grown man should have a desk drawer full of such ludicrous devices.

Anyway, one day in 1933, a little after my seventeenth birthday, I was over at Vernon's Auto Repairs with Dad, helping him poke around in the oily innards of a busted-up Ford. Moe was in his office, and although we didn't find out till later, he was sitting wearing an artificial foam rubber set of realistically painted lady's bosoms, with which he hoped to get a few laughs from the guy who brought him the morning mail through from the front office when it arrived. While he waited, he was listening to Wagner.

The mail arrived in due course, and the guy handing it over managed to raise a dutiful chuckle at Moe's generous cleavage before leaving him to open and peruse the morning's missives. Amongst these (again, as we found out later) there was a letter from Moe's wife Beatrice, informing him that for the past two years she'd been sleeping with Fred Motz, the senior and most trusted mechanic employed at Vernon's Auto Repairs, who, unusually, hadn't shown up for work on that particular morning. This, according to the concluding paragraphs of the letter, was because Beatrice had taken all the money out of the joint account she shared with her husband and had departed with Fred for Tijuana.

The first anyone in the workshop knew about this was when the door of Moe's office slammed open and the startlingly loud and crackling rendition of "Ride of the Valkyries" blasted out from within. Framed in the doorway with tears in his eyes and the crumpled letter in his hand, Moe stood dramatically with all eyes turned towards him. He was still wearing the set of artificial breasts. Almost inaudible above the rising strains of Wagner swelling behind him, he spoke, with so much hurt and outrage and offended dignity fighting for possession of his voice that the end result was almost toneless.

"Fred Motz has had carnal knowledge of my wife Beatrice for the past two years."

He stood there in the wake of his announcement, the tears rolling down over his multiple chins to soak into the pink foam rubber of his bosom, making tiny sounds in his chest and throat that were trampled under the hooves of the Valkyries and lost forever.

And everybody started laughing.

I don't know what it was. We could see he was crying, but it was just something in the toneless way he'd said it, standing there wearing a pair of false breasts with all that crashing, triumphant music soaring all around him. None of us could help it, laughing at him like that. My dad and I were both doubled up and the other guys slaving over the nearby cars were wiping tears from their eyes and smearing their faces with oil in the process. Moe just looked at us all for a minute and then went back into his office and closed the door. A moment or two later the Wagner stopped with an ugly scraping noise as Moe snatched the needle from the groove of the gramophone record, and after that there was silence.

About half an hour passed before someone went in to apologize on behalf of everybody and to see if Moe was all right. Moe accepted the apology and said that he was fine. Apparently he was sitting there at his desk, breasts now discarded, getting on with normal routine paperwork as if nothing had happened.



I graduate from Police Academy (1938)

That night, he sent everybody home early. Then, running a tube from the exhaust of one of the shop's more operational vehicles in through the car's window, he started up the engine and drifted off into a final, bitter sleep amongst the carbon monoxide fumes. His brother took over the business and even eventually reemployed Fred Motz as chief mechanic.

And that's why "The Ride of the Valkyries" is the saddest thing I can think of, even though it's somebody else's tragedy rather than my own. I was there and I laughed along with all the rest and I guess that makes it part of my story too.

Now, if Denise's theory is correct, I should have your full sympathy and the rest will be a walk. So maybe it's safe to tell you about all the stuff you probably bought this book to read about. Maybe it's safe to tell you why I'm crazier than Moe Vernon ever was. I didn't have a drawer full of erotic novelties, but I guess I had my own individual quirks. And although I've never worn a set of false bosoms in my life, I've stood there dressed in something just as strange, with tears in my eyes while people died laughing.

II.

By 1939 I was twenty-three years old and had taken a job on the New York City police force. I've never really examined until now just why I should have chosen that particular career, but I guess it came as a result of a number of things. Foremost amongst these was probably my grandfather:

Even though I resented the old man for the amount of guilt and pressure and recrimination he'd subjected my dad to, I suppose that the simple fact of spending the first twelve years of my life living in my grandfather's proximity had indelibly stamped a certain set of moral values and conditions upon me. I was never so extreme in my beliefs concerning God, the family, and the flag as my father's father was, but if I look at myself today I can see basic notions of decency that were passed down direct from him to me. His name was Hollis Wordsworth Mason, and perhaps because my parents had flattered the old man by naming me after him, he always took a special concern over my upbringing and moral instruction. One of the things that he took great pains to impress upon me was that country folk were morally healthier than city folk and that cities were just cesspools into which all the world's dishonesty and greed and lust and godlessness drained and was left to fester unhindered. Obviously, as I got older and came to realize just how much drunkenness and domestic violence and child abuse was hidden behind the neighborly facade of some of these lonely Montana farmhouses, I understood that my grandfather's appraisal had been a little one-sided. Nevertheless, some of the things that I saw in the city during my first few years here filled me with a sort of ethical revulsion that I couldn't shake off. To some degree, I still can't.

The pimps, the pornographers, the protection artists. The landlords who set dogs on their elderly tenants when they wanted them out to make way for more lucrative custom. The old men who touched little children and the callous young rapists who were barely old enough to shave. I saw these people all around me and I'd feel sick in my gut at the world and what it was becoming. Worse, there were times when I'd upset my dad and mom by loudly wishing I was back in Montana. Despite everything, I wished no such thing, but sometimes I'd be mad at them and it seemed like the best way to hurt them, to reawaken all those old doubts and worries and sleeping dogs of guilt. I'm sorry I did it now, and I wish I could have told them that while they were alive. I wish I could have told them that they were right in bringing me to the city, that they did the right thing by me. I wish I could have let them know that. Their lives would have been so much easier.



Masked adventurers make the front page. (New York Gazette, October 14th, 1938) Note artist's impression of "The Hooded Vigilante."

When the gap between the world of the city and the world my grandfather had presented to me as right and good became too wide and depressing to tolerate, I'd turn to my other great love, which was pulp adventure fiction. Despite the fact that Hollis Mason Senior would have had nothing but scorn and loathing for all of those violent and garish magazines, there was a sort of prevailing morality in them that I'm sure he would have responded to. The world of Doc Savage and The Shadow was one of absolute values, where what was good was never in the slightest doubt and where what was evil inevitably suffered some fitting punishment. The notion of good and justice espoused by

Lamont Cranston with his slouch hat and blazing automatics seemed a long way from that of the fierce and taciturn old man I remembered sitting up alone into the Montana night with no company save his bible, but I can't help feeling that if the two had ever met they'd have found something to talk about. For my part, all those brilliant and resourceful sleuths and heroes offered a glimpse of a perfect world where morality worked the way it was *meant* to. Nobody in Doc Savage's world ever killed themselves except thwarted kamikaze assassins or enemy spies with cyanide capsules. Which world would you rather live in, if you had the choice?

Answering that question, I suppose, was what led me to become a cop. It was also what led me to later become something more than a cop. Bear that in mind and I think the rest of this narrative will be easier to swallow. I know people always have trouble understanding just what brings a person to behave the way that I and people like me behave, what makes us do the sort of things we do. I can't answer for anybody else, and I suspect that all our answers would be different anyway, but in my case it's fairly straightforward: I like the idea of adventure, and I feel bad unless I'm doing good. I've heard all the psychologists' theories, and I've heard all the jokes and the rumors and the innuendo, but what it comes down to for me is that I dressed up like an owl and fought crime because it was fun and because it needed doing and because I goddam felt like it.

Okay. There it is. I've said it. I dressed up. As an owl. And fought crime. Perhaps you begin to see why I half expect this summary of my career to raise more laughs than poor cuckolded Moe Vernon with his foam teats and his Wagner could ever hope to have done.

For me, it all started in 1938, the year when they invented the super-hero. I was too old for comic books when the first issue of ACTION COMICS came out, or at least too old to read them in public without souring my promotion chances, but I noticed a lot of the little kids on my beat reading it and couldn't resist asking one of them if I could glance through it. I figured if anybody saw me I could put it all down to keeping a good relationship with the youth of the community.

There was a lot of stuff in that first issue. There were detective yarns and stories about magicians whose names I can't remember, but from the moment I set eyes on it I only had eyes for the Superman story. Here was something that presented the basic morality of the pulps without all their darkness and ambiguity. The atmosphere of the horrific and faintly sinister

that hung around the Shadow was nowhere to be seen in the bright primary colors of Superman's world, and there was no hint of the repressed sex-urge which had sometimes been apparent in the pulps, to my discomfort and embarrassment. I'd never been entirely sure what Lamont Cranston was up to with Margo Lane, but I'd bet it was nowhere near as innocent and wholesome as Clark Kent's relationship with her namesake Lois. Of course, all of these old characters are gone and forgotten now, but I'm willing to bet that there are at least a few older readers out there who will remember enough to know what I'm talking about. Anyway, suffice it to say that I read that story through about eight times before giving it back to the complaining kid that I'd snatched it from.

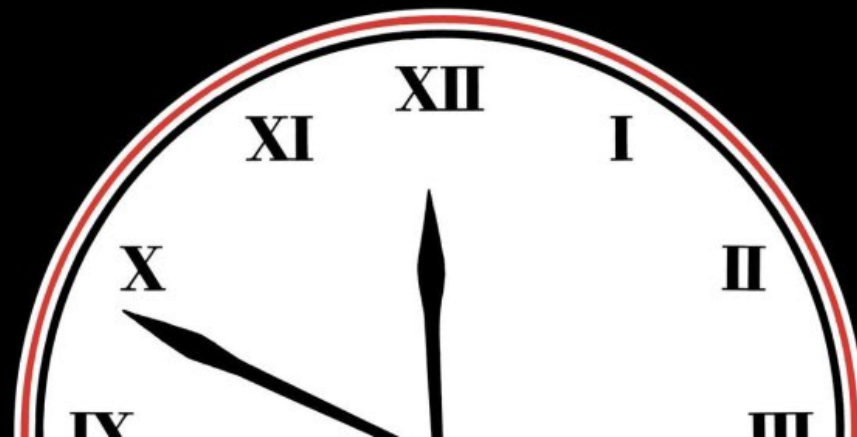
It set off a lot of things I'd forgotten about, deep inside me, and kicked all those old fantasies that I'd had when I was thirteen or fourteen back into gear: The prettiest girl in the class would be attacked by bullies, and I'd be there to beat them off, but when she offered to kiss me as a reward, I'd refuse. Gangsters would kidnap my math teacher, Miss Albertain, and I'd track them down and kill them one by one until she was free, and then she'd break off her engagement with my sarcastic English teacher, Mr. Richardson, because she'd fallen hopelessly in love with her grim-faced and silent fourteen-year-old savior. All of this stuff came flooding back as I stood there gawking at the hijacked comic book, and even though I laughed at myself for having entertained such transparent juvenile fantasies, I didn't laugh as hard as I might have done. Not half as hard as I'd laughed at Moe Vernon, for example.

Anyway, although I'd occasionally manage to trick some unsuspecting tyke into lending me his most recent issue of the funnybook in question and then spend the rest of the day leaping tall buildings inside my head, my fantasies were to remain as fantasies until I opened a newspaper in the autumn of that same year and found that the super-heroes had escaped from their four-color world and invaded the plain, factual black and white of the headlines.

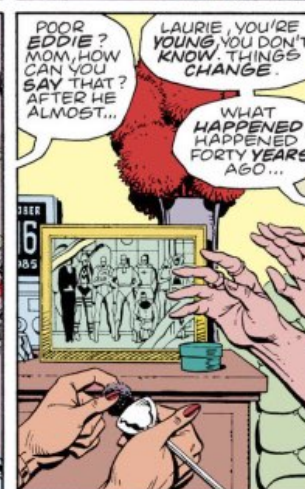
The first news story was simple and un presupposing enough, but it shared enough elements with those fictions that were closest to my heart to make me notice it and file it in my memory for future reference. It concerned an attempted assault and robbery that had taken place in Queens, New York. A man and his girlfriend, walking home after a night at the theater, had been set upon by a gang of three men armed with guns. After relieving the couple of their valuables, the gang has started to beat and physically abuse the young man while threatening to indecently assault his girlfriend. At this point, the crime had been interrupted by a figure "Who dropped into the alleyway from above with something over his face" and proceeded to disarm the three attackers before beating them with such severity that all three required hospital treatment and that one subsequently lost the use of both legs as a result of a spinal injury. The witnesses' recounting of the event was confused and contradictory, but there was still something in the story that gave me a tingle of recognition. And then, a week later, it happened again.

Reportage on this second instance was more detailed. A supermarket stick-up had been prevented thanks to the intervention of "A tall man, built like a wrestler, who wore a black hood and cape and also wore a noose around his neck." This extraordinary being had crashed in through the window of the supermarket while the robbery was in progress and attacked the man responsible with such intensity and savagery that those not disabled immediately were only too willing to drop their guns and surrender. Connecting this incidence of masked intervention with its predecessor, the papers ran the story under a headline that read simply "Hooded Justice." The first masked adventurer outside comic books had been given his name.

Reading and rereading that news item, I knew that I had to be the second. I'd found my vocation.



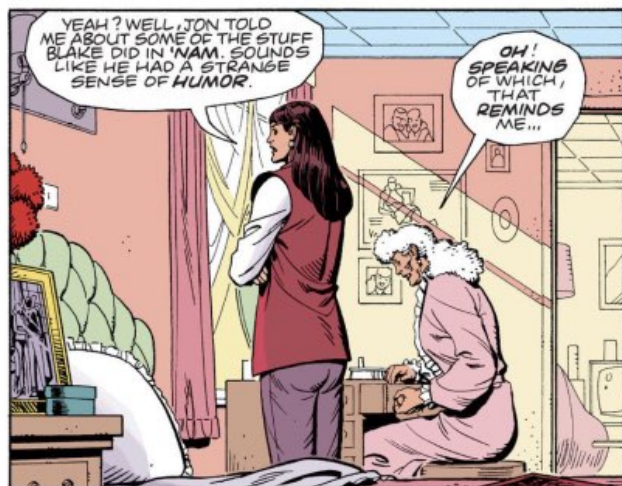
CHAPTER II





ABSENT FRIENDS





YEAH? WELL, JON TOLD ME ABOUT SOME OF THE STUFF BLAKE DID IN 'NAM. SOUNDS LIKE HE HAD A STRANGE SENSE OF HUMOR.

OH! SPEAKING OF WHICH, THAT REMINDS ME...



YOU REMEMBER THAT GUY WHO WRITES ME LETTERS? WELL, HE SENT ME AN ITEM OF MEMORABILIA...

THE ONE WHO ASKED FOR YOUR OLD COSTUME? HONESTLY, MOM, YOU ENCOURAGE THESE GUYS...

WHAT IS IT?



IT'S A TIJUANA BIBLE... A LITTLE EIGHT-PAGE PORN COMIC THEY DID IN THE '30S AND '40S...

THEY DID 'EM ABOUT NEWSPAPER FUNNIES. CHARACTERS LIKE BLONDIE, EVEN REAL PEOPLE LIKE MAE WEST.

THIS ONE'S ABOUT ME.



ABOUT...?

OH, GOD! MOTHER, THIS IS JUST GROSS! SOMEBODY SENT YOU THIS?

SURE. LISTEN, THOSE THINGS ARE VALUABLE, LIKE ANTIQUES. EIGHTY BUCKS AN' UP. I THINK IT'S KINDA FLATTERING.



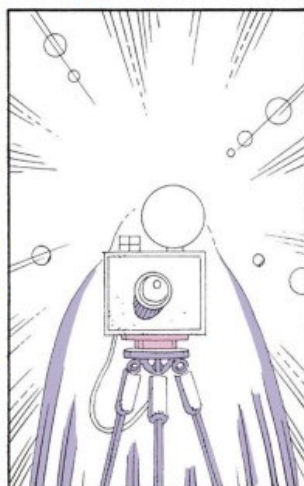
FLATTERING...?

BEING REMINDED THAT PEOPLE USED TO SLOBBER OVER ME? SURE. FLATTERING. WHY NOT?

LAURIE, I'M 65. EVERY DAY THE FUTURE LOOKS A LITTLE BIT DARKER. BUT THE PAST, EVEN THE GRIMY PARTS OF IT...



... WELL, IT JUST KEEPS ON GETTING BRIGHTER ALL THE TIME.



OKAY, THAT'S IT! NICE PICTURE, FOLKS!

WE CAN MOVE? I CAN FINALLY SCRATCH MY ARMPIT?

OOOH! I GOT SPOTS IN MY EYES...



REALLY? LEMME TAKE A LOOK AN' SEE IF I CAN FISH 'EM OUT FOR YA...

OH, EDDIE! GIVE ME A BREAK!

OKAY, MR. OWL, THAT'S EIGHT PRINTS. THEY'LL BE READY IN A WEEK.



BOY! REAL PHOTO SESSIONS! DO YOU THINK MY HAIR WILL COME OUT LOOKING OKAY, H.J.?

FRANKLY, SALLY, I DON'T GO IN FOR ALL THIS RAZZLE DAZZLE. I'D RATHER BE ON THE STREETS, DOING MY JOB.



STREETS NOTHING! WHY DON'T UNCLE SAMMY GET US INTO EUROPE, WHERE THE ACTION IS?

WELL, FIRSTLY, WE AREN'T AT WAR. SECONDLY, WE SHOULD AVOID POLITICAL SITUATIONS...

PERHAPS THE POLES THOUGHT SO TOO, EH? YOU AGREE, SALLY?



WELL, I'M SURE I WOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT THE POLISH PEOPLE THINK!

ME, I HOPE WE KEEP OUT OF IT. JUST THINKING ABOUT WAR, IT SCARES ME...

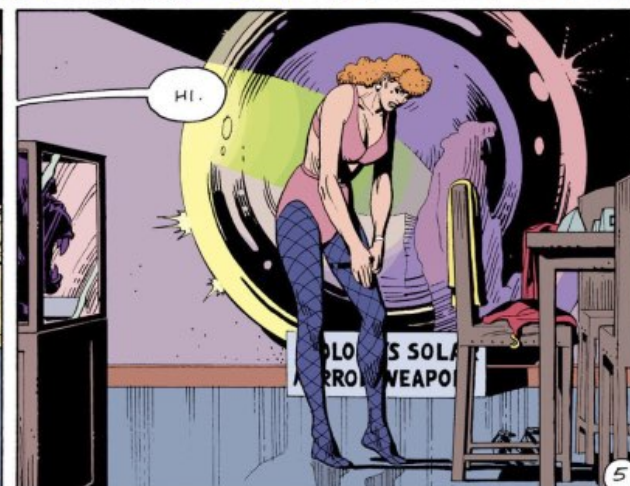
HEY! WATCH WITH THE WINGS!



C'MON... WHAT'S ALL THIS DISCORD I HEAR? MEETING'S OVER!

LISTEN, EVERYONE MEET IN THE LOBBY IN FIVE MINUTES. WE'LL GO BACK TO THE OWL'S NEST FOR A BEER.

FINE. YOU GUYS GO AHEAD. I GOTTA CHANGE.



HI.

OWLS SOLA
ARROW WEAPON





GET UP...

AND, FOR GOD'S SAKE, COVER YOURSELF.



MOTHER, THIS IS VILE!

OH, I TREAT ME ENOUGH, SUGAR.

OH SAY, BABY, THIS IS TOPS!



MOTHER?

I JUST, JEEZ, I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAN STAND BEING DEGRADED LIKE THIS. I MEAN, DON'T YOU CARE HOW PEOPLE SEE YOU?



HM?



I SAID, DOESN'T THIS SLEAZEBALL IMAGE BOTHER YOU? HONESTLY, MOTHER, YOU...

WHY DO YOU ONLY CALL ME "MOTHER" WHEN YOU'RE MAD?

ANYWAY, WHAT ABOUT YOUR IMAGE? AT LEAST I DON'T SLEEP WITH AN H-BOMB...



JON IS NOT AN H-BOMB!

HONEY, THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO GET THE H-BOMB LAID EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.



UH-HUH. RIGHT. I SEE.

YEAH? WELL, THINGS ARE TOUGH ALL OVER, CUPCAKE, AN' IT RAINS ON THE JUST AN' THE UNJUST ALIKE...

...EXCEPT IN CALIFORNIA.



8



MAN THAT IS BORN OF WOMAN HATH BUT A SHORT TIME TO LIVE, AND IS FULL OF MISERIES.



HE COMETH UP, AND IS CUT DOWN, LIKE A FLOWER. HE FLEETH AS IT WERE A SHADOW, AND NEVER CONTINUETH IN ONE STAY.



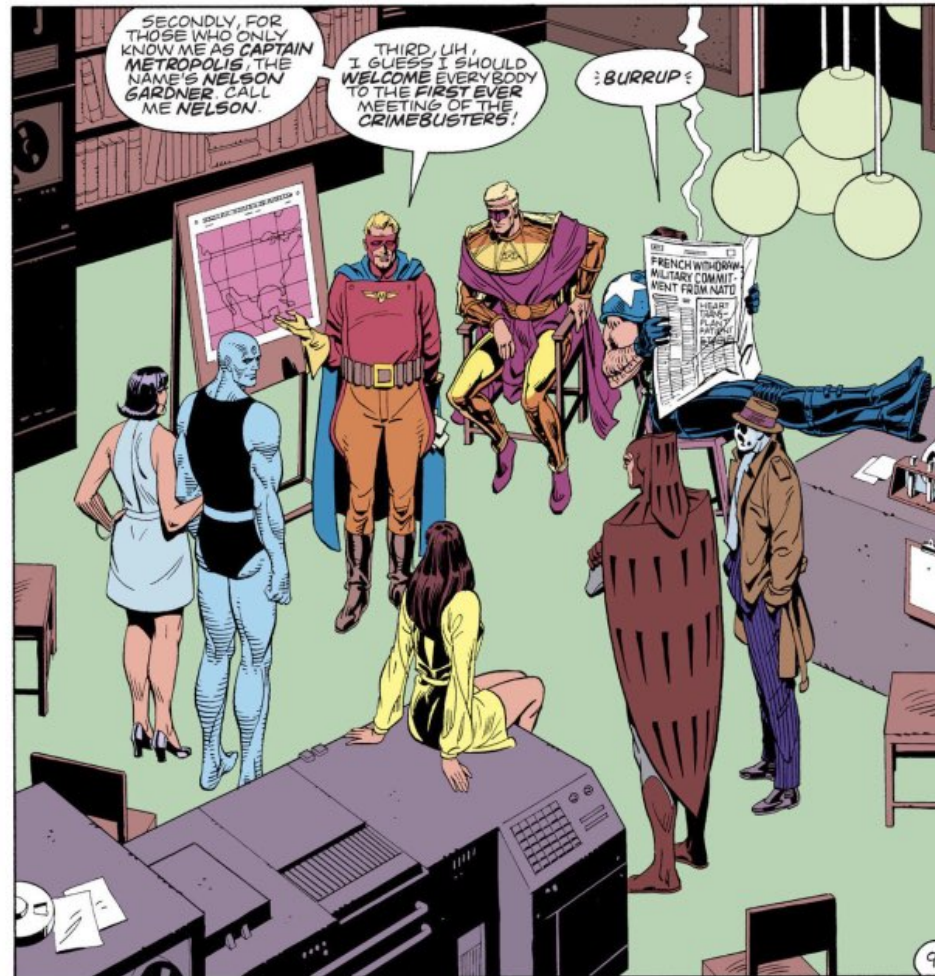
IN THE MIDST OF LIFE, WE ARE IN DEATH.

OF WHOM MAY WE SEEK SUCCOR BUT OF THEE, O LORD, WHO FOR OUR SINS ART JUSTLY DISPLEASED.



WELL, FIRSTLY, LET ME SAY I'M PLEASSED TO SEE SO MANY OF YOU HERE.

VERY PLEASSED.



SECONDLY, FOR THOSE WHO ONLY KNOW ME AS CAPTAIN METROPOLIS, THE NAME'S NELSON GARDNER. CALL ME NELSON.

THIRD, UH, I GUESS I SHOULD WELCOME EVERYBODY TO THE FIRST EVER MEETING OF THE CRIMEBUSTERS!

BURRUP

9



WHY "THE CRIME-BUSTERS"?

WELL, AS YOU KNOW, THIS COUNTRY HASN'T HAD AN ORGANIZATION OF MASKED ADVENTURERS SINCE THE MINUTEMEN DISBANDED IN '49.



SPECIALIZED LAW ENFORCEMENT IS STANDING STILL. CRIME ISN'T.

NEW SOCIAL EVILS EMERGE EVERY DAY: PROMISCUITY, DRUGS, CAMPUS SUBVERSION, YOU NAME IT! NOW, BY BANDING TOGETHER AS THE CRIME-BUSTERS, WE...



WHAT?

I SAID BULLSHIT. THIS WHOLE IDEA, THIS CRIMEBUSTERS SHIT, IT STINKS.

WHAT IT IS, NELLY, IS THAT YOU'RE GETTIN' OLD AND YOU WANNA GO ON PLAYIN' COWBOYS AND INDIANS!



TH-THAT ISN'T TRUE...

UH, LISTEN, LET'S NOT THROW THE IDEA OUT RIGHT AWAY. ME AND RORSCHACH HAVE MADE HEADWAY INTO THE GANG PROBLEM BY POOLING OUR EFFORTS...



OBVIOUSLY, I AGREE--BUT A GROUP THIS SIZE SEEMS MORE LIKE A PUBLICITY EXERCISE SOMEHOW. IT'S TOO BIG AND UNWIELDY...

SURELY, THAT'S JUST AN ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEM? WITH THE RIGHT PERSON COORDINATING THE GROUP, I THINK...



OH, AN' I WONDER WHO THAT WOULD BE?

GOT ANY IDEAS, OZZY? I MEAN, YOU ARE THE SMARTEST GUY IN THE WORLD, RIGHT?

IT DOESN'T REQUIRE GENIUS TO SEE THAT AMERICA HAS PROBLEMS THAT NEED TACKLING...



DAMN STRAIGHT. AN' IT TAKES A MORON TO THINK THEY'RE SMALL ENOUGH FOR CLOWNS LIKE YOU GUYS TO HANDLE.

WHAT'S GOING DOWN IN THIS WORLD, YOU GOT NO IDEA.

BELIEVE ME.



I THINK I'M AS WELL-INFORMED AS ANYONE. GIVEN CORRECT HANDLING, NONE OF THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS ARE INSUR-MOUNTABLE.

ALL IT TAKES IS A LITTLE INTELLIGENCE.



YOU PEOPLE ARE A JOKE. YOU HEAR MOLOCH'S BACK IN TOWN, YOU THINK "OH, BOY! LET'S GANG UP AND BUST HIM!"

YOU THINK THAT MATTERS? YOU THINK THAT SOLVES ANYTHING?

WELL, OF COURSE IT MATTERS. IF...



IT DON'T MATTER SQUAT HERE --LEMMIE SHOW YA WHY IT DON'T MATTER...

HEY! WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



IT DON'T MATTER SQUAT BECAUSE INSIDE THIRTY YEARS THE NUKES ARE GONNA BE FLYIN' LIKE MAYBUGS...

MY DISPLAY ...



...AND THEN OZZY HERE IS GONNA BE THE SMARTEST MAN ON THE CINDER. NOW, PARDON ME, BUT I GOT AN APPOINTMENT.

SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS.



JON, I THINK I'D LIKE TO GO HOME NOW, PLEASE.

LISTEN, UH, NELSON, THIS ISN'T WORKING OUT. MAYBE...

PLEASE! DON'T ALL LEAVE ...



SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT, DON'T YOU SEE?

SOMEBODY HAS TO SAVE THE WORLD...



...O LORD MOST MIGHTY, O HOLY AND MOST MERCIFUL SAVIOR, DELIVER US NOT INTO THE BITTER PAINS OF ETERNAL DEATH.









FROM THEMSELVES. WHATSA-MATTER? DON'T YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE UNLESS YOU'RE UP AGAINST SOME SCHMUCK IN A HALLOWEEN SUIT?

SPEAKIN' O' WHICH, WHERE THE HELL ARE RORSCHACH AN' THE OTHERS?



JON AND LAURIE ARE HANDLING THE RIOTS IN WASHINGTON. RORSCHACH'S ACROSS TOWN, TRYING TO HOLD THE LOWER EAST SIDE.

HE, UH, HE WORKS MOSTLY ON HIS OWN THESE DAYS...



RORSCHACH'S NUTS. HE'S BEEN NUTS EVER SINCE THAT KIDNAPPING HE HANDLED THREE YEARS BACK.

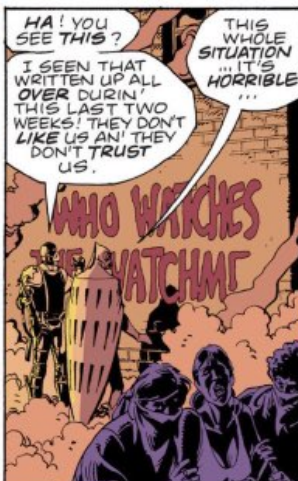
HIM, BYRON LEWIS, TON GODDAMN WALKING H-BOMB OSTERMAN NUTS.

BUT NOT YOU?



NO, NOT ME. I KEEP THINGS IN PROPORTION AN' TRY TA SEE THE FUNNY SIDE...

DROP THAT CAN, YOU LITTLE FREAK!



HA! YOU SEE THIS?

I SEEN THAT WRITTEN UP ALL OVER DURIN' THIS LAST TWO WEEKS. THEY DON'T LIKE US AN' THEY DON'T TRUST US.

THIS WHOLE SITUATION... IT'S HORRIBLE...



WELL, ME, I KINDA LIKE IT WHEN THINGS GET WEIRD, Y'KNOW? I LIKE IT WHEN ALL THE CARDS ARE ON THE TABLE.

BUT THE COUNTRY'S DISINTEGRATING. WHAT'S HAPPENED TO AMERICA? WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE AMERICAN DREAM?



IT CAME TRUE.

YOU'RE LOOKIN' AT IT.

NOW C'MON... LET'S REALLY PUT THESE JOKERS THROUGH SOME CHANGES.



"...WHO SHALL CHANGE OUR VILE BODY THAT IT MAY BE LIKE UNTO HIS GLORIOUS BODY, ACCORDING TO THE MIGHTY WORKING..."



"...WHEREBY HE IS ABLE TO SUBDUCE ALL THINGS UNTO HIMSELF.



"I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING UNTO ME, WRITE..."



"FROM HENCEFORTH, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD, EVEN SO SAITH THE SPIRIT, FOR THEY REST FROM THEIR LABORS."



"LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US."

"CHRIST HAVE MERCY UPON US."

"LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US."



"OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME..."



"THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES..."



"AS WE FORGIVE THOSE THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US..."



"AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION..."



"BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL."



"AMEN."





IT'S A JOKE.

S'ALL A JOKE.



I MEAN, LEMME TELLYA, WHEN I STARTED OUT, WHEN I WAS A KID, CLEANIN' UP THE WATER-FRONT, IT WAS LIKE, REAL EASY.

THE WORLD WAS TOUGH, YOU JUST HADDA BE TOUGHER, RIGHT?

NOT ANYMORE.



I MEAN, I THOUGHT I KNEW HOW IT WAS, HOW THE WORLD WAS, BUT THEN I FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS GAG, THIS JOKE...

YOU'RE PART OF IT, MOLOCH OL' PAL. Y'KNOW THAT?



IF I THOUGHT YOU DID KNOW ... I SAW YOUR NAME ON THE LIST, YOU AND JANEY SLATER, BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE IN ON THIS...

...I'D KILL YOU. YOU UNDER- STAND?

KILL YOU.



I MEAN, YOU FOUGHT THAT BIG BLUE GEEK! YOU KNOW WHAT HIS HEAD'S LIKE!

I TELLYA, WHO KNOWS WHICH WAY HE'LL JUMP IF ANYBODY MESSSES WITH HIM ...

HE MIGHT... HE MIGHT JUST...



NAH. I DON'T WANNA THINK. I DON'T WANNA THINK ABOUT IT.

DON'TCHA GOT ANY BOOZE IN THIS PLACE?



I MEAN, WHAT GETS ME, RIGHT? WHAT GETS ME, I NEED NEVER HAVE LOOKED OUTTA THE AIRSHIP WINDOW AT THAT MOMENT, NEVER SEEN THE GODDAMN ISLAND, NEVER GOT INVOLVED...

HAA! THERE Y'ARE, YA SUMBITCH ...



NK NK NK



PAHH

IT STINKS.

IT ALL STINKS.



I MEAN, THIS JOKE, I MEAN, I THOUGHT I WAS THE COMEDIAN, Y'KNOW?

OH, GOD, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. I CAN'T BELIEVE ANYBODY WOULD DO THAT...



I CAN'T ...

I CAN'T BELIEVE ...



AHUHH.

AHUH AHUHHHH.



OH, JESUS, LOOK AT ME. I'M CRYIN'. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING.

ON THAT ISLAND THEY GOT WRITERS, SCIENTISTS, ARTISTS, AND WHAT THEY'RE DOING...



I MEAN, I DONE SOME BAD THINGS. I DID BAD THINGS TO WOMEN.

I SHOT KIDS, IN 'NAM I SHOT KIDS ...

BUT I NEVER DID ANYTHING LIKE, LIKE...



OH, MOTHER, OH, FORGIVE ME.

FORGIVE ME, FORGIVE ME, FORGIVE ME...



I MEAN, WHAT'S FUNNY? WHAT'S SO GODDAMNED FUNNY?

I DON'T GET IT. SOMEBODY EXPLAIN...



SOMEBODY EXPLAIN IT TO ME.

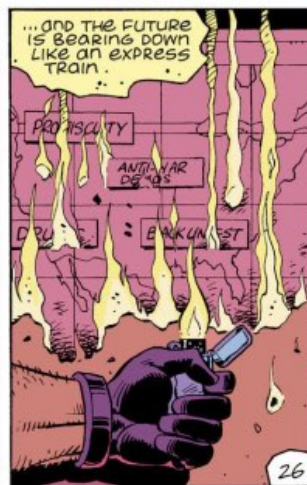


... AND THEN HE LEFT.

I DON'T KNOW.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL IT WAS ABOUT...







UNDER THE HOOD

III.

Presented here are the excerpts from UNDER THE HOOD. In these next chapters Hollis Mason discusses the formation of the Minutemen. Reprinted with permission of the author.

From the moment that I decided somewhere deep inside myself that I wanted to try my hand at being a costumed adventurer, to the moment I first stepped out into the night with a mask on my face and the wind on my bare legs, took about three months. Three months of self-doubt and self-ridicule. Three months of self-conscious training down at the Police Gymnasium. Three months figuring out how the hell I was going to make myself a costume.

The costume was difficult, because I couldn't start designing it until I'd thought of a name. This stumped me for a couple of weeks, because every name I came up with sounded stupid, and what I really wanted was something with the same sense of drama and excitement as "Hooded Justice."

Eventually, a suitable handle was provided inadvertently by one of the other cops that I worked with down at the station house. He'd invited me out for a beer after work two or three times only to be turned down because I wanted to spend as much of my evenings working out in the Police Gymnasiums as possible, after which I'd usually go to bed around nine o'clock and sleep through until five the next morning, when I'd get up and put in a couple of hours workout before donning my badge and uniform in readiness for my day job. After having his offer of beer and relaxation turned down yet again by reason of me wanting to be in bed early, he finally gave up asking and took to calling me "Nite Owl" out of sarcasm until he finally found somebody else to drink with.

"Nite Owl." I liked it. Now all I had to come up with was the costume.

A masked adventurer's costume is one of those things that nobody really thinks about. Should it have a cape, or no cape? Should it be thick and armored to protect you from harm, or flexible and lightweight to allow maneuverability? What sort of mask should it have? Do bright colors make you more of a target than dark ones? All of these were things that I had to consider.

Eventually, I opted for a design that left the arms and legs as free as possible, while protecting my body and head with a tough leather tunic, light chainmail briefs, and a layer of leather-over-chainmail protecting my head. I experimented with a cloak, remembering how the Shadow would use his cloak to misguide enemy bullets, leading them to shoot at parts of the swirling black mass where his body didn't happen to be. In practice, however, I found it too unwieldy. I was always tripping over it or getting it caught in things, and so I abandoned it for an outfit that was as streamlined as I could make it.

With the mail and leather headpiece hiding my hair, I found I only really needed a small domino mask to conceal my identity, but even this presented problems that weren't obvious at first glance. My first mask was attached to my face by the simple expediency of a string, but this nearly got me killed during my first ever outing in full costume, when a drunk with a knife hooked his fingers into the eyeholes of the domino and pulled it down so that I could only see out of one eye. If I'd been less fit and alert or he'd been less drunk my career might well have ended then. As it was I was able to tear off the mask completely and then disarm him, trusting that the alcohol would fog any clear recollection of my face. After that, I dispensed with the string and stuck the mask to my face using spirit gum, such as actors use to attach false beards or mustaches.

I first became Nite Owl during the early months of 1939, and although my first few exploits were largely unspectacular, they aroused a lot of media interest simply because by 1939, dressing up in costume and protecting your neighborhood had become something of a fad, with the whole of America at least briefly interested in its development. A month after I made my debut, a young woman who called herself The Silhouette broke into the headlines by exposing the activities of a crooked publisher trafficking in child pornography, delivering a punitive beating to the entrepreneur and his two chief cameramen in the process. A little after that, the first reports of a man dressed like a moth who could glide through the air started to come in from Connecticut, and a particularly vicious and brutal young man in a gaudy yellow

boiler suit started cleaning up the city's waterfronts under the name of The Comedian. Within twelve months of Hooded Justice's dramatic entrance into the public consciousness, there were at least seven other costumed vigilantes operating on or around America's West Coast.

There was Captain Metropolis, who brought a knowledge of military technique and strategy to his attempt at eradicating organized crime in the inner urban areas, and who is still active to this day.

There was The Silk Spectre, now retired and living with her daughter after an unsuccessful early marriage, who in retrospect was probably the first of us ever to realize that there could be commercial benefits in being a masked adventurer. The Silk Spectre used her reputation as a crimefighter primarily to make the front pages and receive exposure for her lucrative modeling career, but I think all of us who knew her loved her a little bit and we certainly didn't begrudge her a living. I think we were all too unsure of our own motives to cast aspersions upon anybody else.

There was Dollar Bill, originally a star college athlete from Kansas who was actually employed as an in-house super-hero by one of the major national banks, when they realized that the masked man had made being able to brag about having a hero of your own to protect your customer's money a very interesting publicity prospect. Dollar Bill was one of the nicest and most straightforward men I have ever met, and the fact that he died so tragically young is something that still upsets me whenever I think about it. While attempting to stop a raid upon one of his employer's banks, his cloak became entangled in the bank's revolving door and he was shot dead at point-blank range before he could free it. Designers employed by the bank had designed his costume for maximum publicity appeal. If he'd designed it himself he might have left out that damned stupid cloak and still be alive today.

There was Mothman and The Silhouette and The Comedian and there was me, all of us choosing to dress up in gaudy opera costumes and express the notion of good and evil in simple, childish terms, while over in Europe they were turning human beings into soap and lampshades. We were sometimes respected, sometimes analyzed, and most often laughed at, and in spite of all the musings above, I don't think that those of us still surviving today are any closer to understanding just why we *really* did it all. Some of us did it because we were hired to and some of us did it to gain publicity. Some of us did it out of a sense of childish excitement and some of us, I think, did it for a kind of excitement that was altogether more adult if perhaps less healthy. They've called us fascists and they've called us perverts and while there's an element of truth in both those accusations, neither of them are big enough to take in the whole picture.

Yes, some of us were politically extreme. Before Pearl Harbor, I heard Hooded Justice openly expressing approval for the activities of Hitler's Third Reich, and Captain Metropolis has gone on record as making statements about black and Hispanic Americans that have been viewed as both racially prejudiced and inflammatory, charges that it is difficult to argue or deny.

Yes, I daresay some of us did have our sexual hang-ups. Everybody knows what eventually became of the Silhouette and although it would be tasteless to rehash the events surrounding her death in this current volume, it provides proof for those who need it that for some people, dressing up in a costume did have its more libidinous elements.

Yes, some of us were unstable and neurotic. Only a week ago as of this writing, I received word that the man behind the mask and wings of Mothman, whose true identity I am not at liberty to divulge, has been committed to a mental institution after a long bout of alcoholism and a complete mental breakdown.

Yes, we were crazy, we were kinky, we were Nazis, all those things that people say. We were also doing something because we believed in it. We were attempting, through our personal efforts, to make our country a safer and better place to live in. Individually, working on our separate patches of turf, we did too much good in our respective communities to be written off as mere aberration, whether social or sexual or psychological.

It was only when we got together that the problems really started. I sometimes think

without the Minutemen we might all have given up and called it quits pretty soon. The costumed adventurer might have become quietly and simply extinct.

And the world might not be in the mess it's in today.

IV.

There's no mystery behind how the Minutemen first got together: Captain Metropolis had written to Sally Jupiter care of her agent, suggesting that they might meet with a view to forming a group of masked adventurers who could pool their resources and experience to combat crime. The Captain has always had a strategic approach to crimefighting, so I can see why the idea would appeal to him, although back then I was surprised that he'd made an effort to get in touch with Sally. He was so polite and reserved that Sally's drinking, swearing and mode of dress were guaranteed to shock him speechless. Later, I realized that Sally was simply the only costumed vigilante forethoughtful enough to have an agent whose address was in the phone book.

Sally's agent (and, much later, her husband) was an extremely shrewd individual named Laurence Schexnayder. He realized that without the occasional gimmick to revitalize flagging public interest, the fad for long underwear heroes would eventually fade, reducing his girl Sally's chances of media exposure as The Silk Spectre to zero. Thus it was Schexnayder, in mid-1939, who suggested placing a large ad in the Gazette asking other mystery men to come forward.

One by one we came, over the next few weeks. We were introduced to Sally, to Captain Metropolis, to each other and to Laurence Schexnayder. He was very organized and professional, and although only in his mid-thirties he seemed very mature and respectable to us back then. Maybe that was just because he'd be the only person in the room not wearing their boxer shorts over their pants. By the fall of '39 he'd arranged all the publicity and the Minutemen were finally born.

The *real* mystery is how the hell we managed to *stay* together.

Dressing up in a costume takes a very extreme personality, and the chances of eight such personalities getting along together were about seventy-eleven million to one against. This isn't to say that some of us didn't get along, of course. Sally attached herself pretty swiftly to Hooded Justice, who was one of the biggest men I've ever seen. I never found out his real name, but I'd be willing to bet that those early news reports weren't far off in comparing him to a wrestler. Strangely enough, even though Sally would always be hanging onto his arm, he never seemed very interested in *her*. I don't think I ever saw him kiss her, although maybe that was just because of his mask. Anyway, they started going out together, sort of, after the first Minutemen Christmas Party in 1939, which is the last time I can remember us all having a real good time together. After that, things went bad. We had worms in the apple, eating it from inside.



The first Minutemen Christmas party, 1939
(from left to right) The Silhouette, Silk Spectre,
Comedian, Hooded Justice, Captain Metropolis
(in mirror), Nite Owl, Mothman, Dollar Bill

The worst of these was the Comedian. I'm aware that he's still active today and even respected in some quarters, but I know what I know, and that man is a disgrace to our profession. In 1940 he attempted to sexually assault Sally Jupiter in the Minutemen trophy room after a meeting. He left the group shortly thereafter by mutual consent and with a minimum of publicity. Schexnayder had persuaded Sally not to press charges against the Comedian for the good of the group's image, and she complied. The Comedian went his way unscathed...even though he was badly wounded in an unconnected stabbing incident about a year later. This is what made him decide to change his flimsy yellow costume for the leather armor he wears at present. He went on to make a name for himself as a war hero in the Pacific, but all I can think of is the bruises along Sally Jupiter's ribcage and hope to God that America can find itself a better class of hero than *that*.

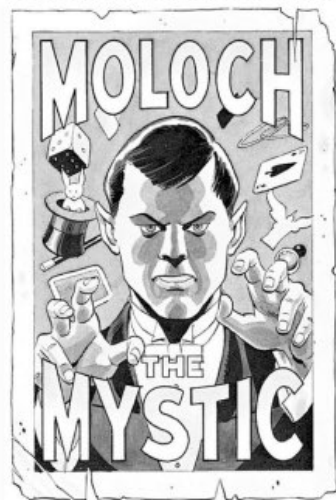
After that, things deteriorated. In 1946, the papers revealed that the Silhouette was living with another woman in a lesbian relationship. Schexnayder persuaded us to expel her from the group, and six weeks later she was murdered, along with her lover, by one of her former enemies. Dollar Bill was shot dead, and in 1947 the group was dealt its most serious blow when



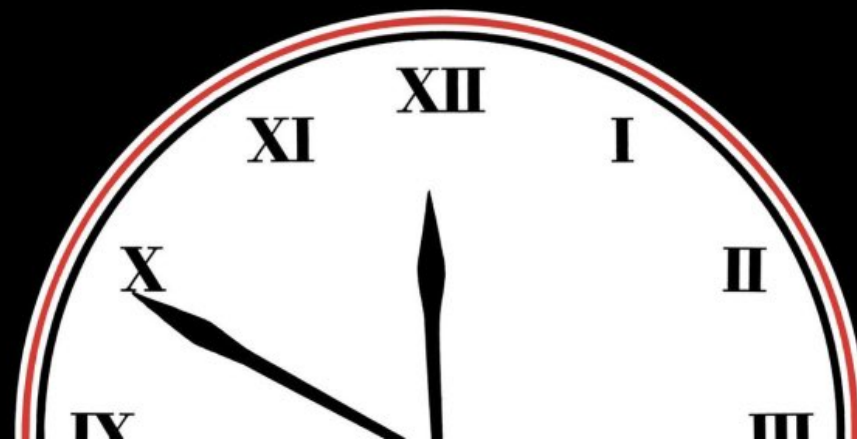
Newsreel footage of the Comedian in the South Pacific, 1942

Sally quit crimefighting to marry her agent. We always thought she might come back, but in 1949 she had a daughter, so that clinched that. Eventually, those of us who were left didn't even fight crime anymore. It wasn't interesting. The villains we'd fought with were either in prison or had moved on to less glamorous activities. Moloch, for example, who had started out aged seventeen as a stage magician, evolving into an ingenious and flamboyant criminal mastermind through underworld contacts made in his world of nightclubs, had moved into impersonal crime like drugs, financial fraud and vice clubs by the late '40s. Eventually, there was just me, Mothman, Hooded Justice and Captain Metropolis sitting around in a meeting hall that smelled like a locker room now that there weren't any women in the group. There was nobody interesting left to fight, nothing notable to talk about. In 1949, we called it a day. By then, however, we'd been around long enough to somehow inspire younger people, God help them, to follow in our footsteps.

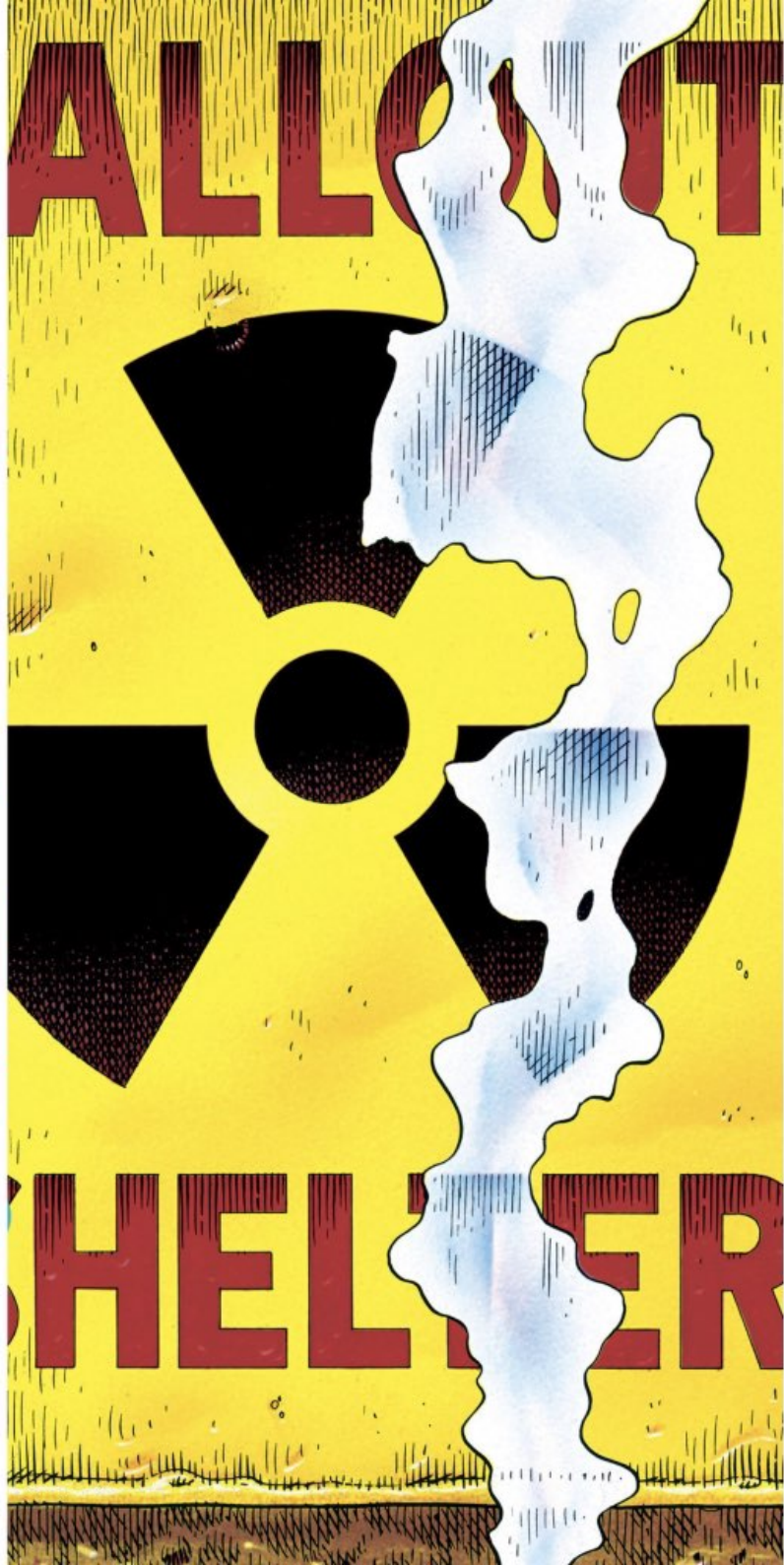
The Minutemen were finished, but it didn't matter. The damage had already been done.

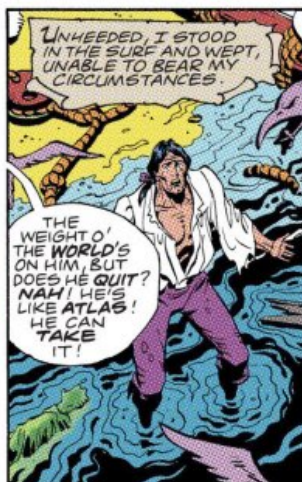


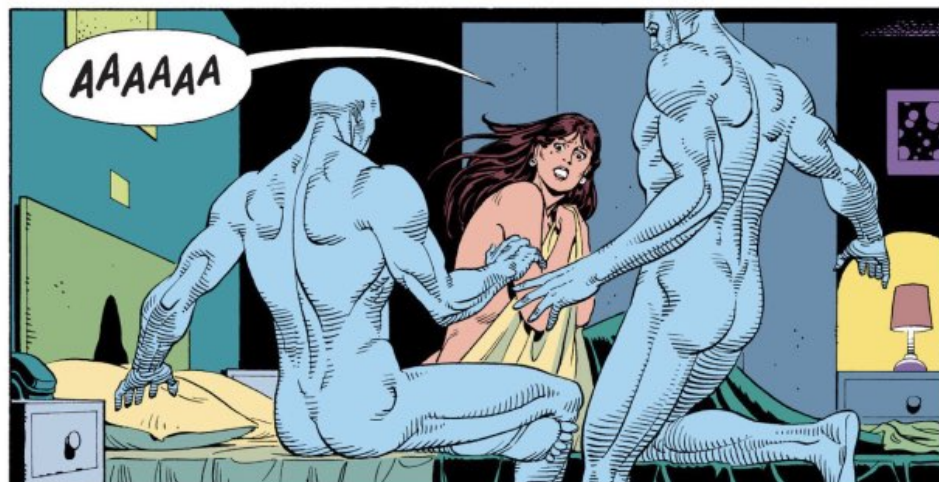
Early publicity poster of Moloch, 1937

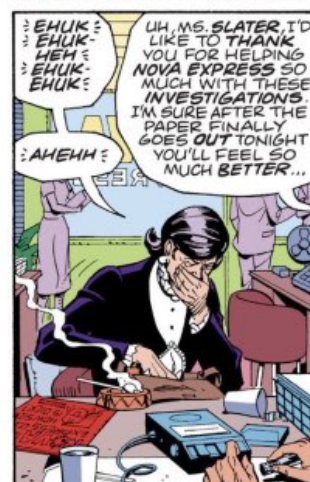
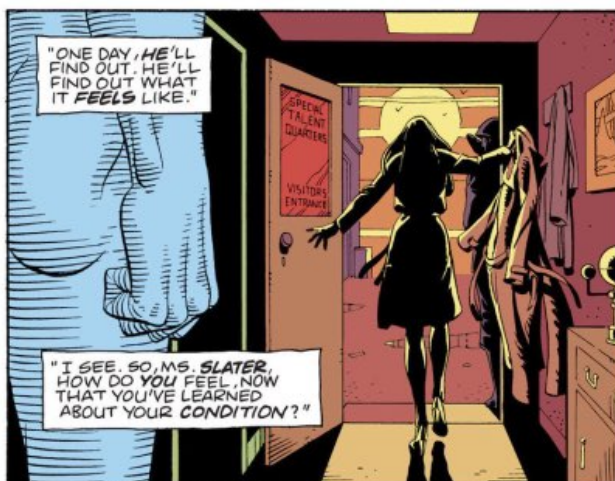


CHAPTER III















IF THE GENEVA TALKS COME UP, THE OFFICIAL POSITION IS THAT THEY CAN'T RESUME UNTIL THE SOVIETS AGREE TO EXCLUDE YOU FROM THE AGENDA.

SHHH! WE'RE ON!
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I THINK WE'RE READY TO START...



"... AND BELIEVE ME, WE HAVE SOMETHING REALLY SPECIAL FOR YOU TONIGHT."



IN HIS FIRST EVER LIVE QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION, LET'S HAVE A BIG HAND PLEASE FOR DOC MANHATTAN HIMSELF, DR. JONATHAN OSTERMAN!

JON, I HOPE YOU'LL FORGIVE ME FOR ASKING YOU THIS...



"UP" IS A RELATIVE CONCEPT. IT HAS NO INTRINSIC VALUE.

UHH... RIGHT! OKAY! SO LET'S GET ONTO THE QUESTIONS. YOU... OVER THERE...

DOC, IF THE REDS ACT UP IN AFGHANISTAN...



"... WILL YOU BE PREPARED TO ENTER HOSTILITIES?"

KLAPKLAPKLAPKLAPKLAPKLAPKLAP



AS FAR AS I KNOW, THERE IS NO SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN CURRENTLY REQUIRING MY ATTENTIONS.

OKAY, FINE. NOW HOW ABOUT YOU OVER THERE. YES, YOU, SIR. AND PLEASE...



"LET'S TRY AND KEEP IT SNAPPY."



DR. OSTERMAN, I'M DOUG ROTH, I WRITE FOR NOVA EXPRESS.

I WONDER IF YOU REMEMBER WALLY WEAVER. BACK IN THE EARLY SIXTIES, THE NEWSPAPERS CALLED HIM "DR. MANHATTAN'S BUDDY."

HE DIED OF CANCER IN 1971.



"I BELIEVE IT WAS QUITE SUDDEN AND QUITE PAINFUL."



I REMEMBER WALLY AS A GOOD FRIEND. I ATTENDED HIS FUNERAL.

REALLY?

HOW ABOUT EDGAR W. JACOBI, ALSO KNOWN AS MOLOCH? YOU ENCOUNTERED HIM SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE SIXTIES IN BATTLES, CONFLICTS...



"... WHATEVER IT IS YOU SUPER-PEOPLE DO."



DID YOU KNOW THAT JACOBI ALSO HAS TERMINAL CANCER?

MOLOCH...? NO...NO, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT. I'D RATHER NOT...

WHAT'S THE MATTER, DOCTOR? DON'T YOU LIKE THE LINE OF QUESTIONING?



"AM I STARTING TO MAKE YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE?"



THEN HOW ABOUT THIS ONE DID YOU KNOW THAT MS. JANEY SLATER LINKED ROMANTICALLY WITH YOU IN THE SIXTIES, IS CURRENTLY SUFFERING FROM LUNG CANCER?

DOCTORS HAVE GIVEN HER SIX MONTHS TO LIVE.

NOTICE ANY CONNECTION?



"...BECAUSE FROM WHERE I'M STANDING, IT'S STARTING TO LOOK PRETTY CONCLUSIVE."



JANEY...? BUT...I WASN'T TOLD...

ARE...ARE YOU SUGGESTING...?

OKAY, THAT'S IT! NO MORE QUESTIONS! THE DOCTORS TIRED SORRY ABOUT THIS, FOLKS...



"...BUT THE SHOW'S OVER."



ALSO, WE HAVE REPORTS OF MORE THAN TWO DOZEN OTHER PAST ASSOCIATES, SIMILARLY AFFLICTED...

DR. OSTERMAN? TINA PRICE, FROM THE WASHINGTON POST, ARE THESE ALLEGATIONS TRUE?

C'MON, LET'S GET OUT! THE MOB'S GETTING AROUSED...



≡ AHUH ≡

≡ HHUH ≡

≡ HUH ≡

≡ HAH ≡

≡ HAH ≡

≡ AH ≡



DOC, I'M JIM WEISS FROM THE ENQUIRER? TELL ME, DO YOU THINK YOU GAVE MS. SLATER CANCER BY SLEEPING WITH HER?

NO, PLEASE... IF YOU'LL LET ME THROUGH...

LET HIM THROUGH. HE'S NOT HERE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ON INTIMATE MOMENTS!



≡ AHUH ≡

≡ HHUH ≡

≡ ≡



HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THAT YOU MAY HAVE DOOMED HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE?

PLEASE...IF EVERYBODY WOULD JUST GO AWAY AND LEAVE ME ALONE...

GENTLEMEN, I THINK IT SAFEST NOT TO PURSUE THIS LINE OF THINKING...





DR. MANHATTAN, HOW OFTEN DID...

I SAID LEAVE ME ALONE!



UH...WELL...

I GUESS I OUGHTTA GO FIND A HOTEL. I'M A BIT WIPED OUT. I MEAN, AFTER THAT... I MEAN, JESUS, US! GETTING MUGGED!

LOOK... I'M SHAKING. ONCE THE ADRENALINE WEARS OFF I ALWAYS FEEL SORTA WEIRD...



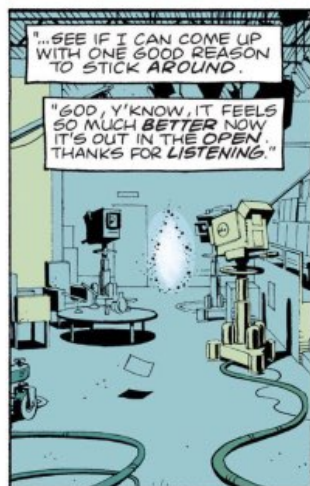
"SORTA EMPTY."



WELL, LOOK, ARE YOU SURE? WHY NOT VISIT HOLLIS AND GET YOUR BREATH BACK?

UH-UH. I'VE HAD ENOUGH SUPER-HERO STUFF FOR ONE DAY.

I'M GONNA FIND A HOTEL AND THINK MY RELATIONSHIP OVER...



"...SEE IF I CAN COME UP WITH ONE GOOD REASON TO STICK AROUND."

"GOD, Y'KNOW, IT FEELS SO MUCH BETTER NOW IT'S OUT IN THE OPEN. THANKS FOR LISTENING."



ANYWAY, YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, DAN. IT'S A TOUGH WORLD OUT THERE.

YEAH. YOU TOO, LAURIE.

'BYE.



SOME GUY STOOD UP AN' ACCUSED HIM OF GIVING A LOT OF PEOPLE CANCER INCLUDING JANEY SLATER.

DOC LOOKED REAL SHAKEN, STARTED SHOUTING TO BE LEFT ALONE. ONE MOMENT, THE CAMERAS WERE IN CLOSE ON HIM...



DANNY! HOW ARE YA?

YOU'RE LATE I THOUGHT YOU'D HAD AN ACCIDENT!

NO... NO, I JUST HAD A LITTLE SKIRMISH...



YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE. I JUST BEEN WATCHIN' DOC MANHATTAN ON T.V. THEY JUST ABOUT CRUCIFIED THE POOR GUY...

JON? UH...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?



"...THE NEXT, THE SCREEN WENT BLOODEY AND THEN WE WERE GETTIN' PICTURES OF A PARKING LOT."

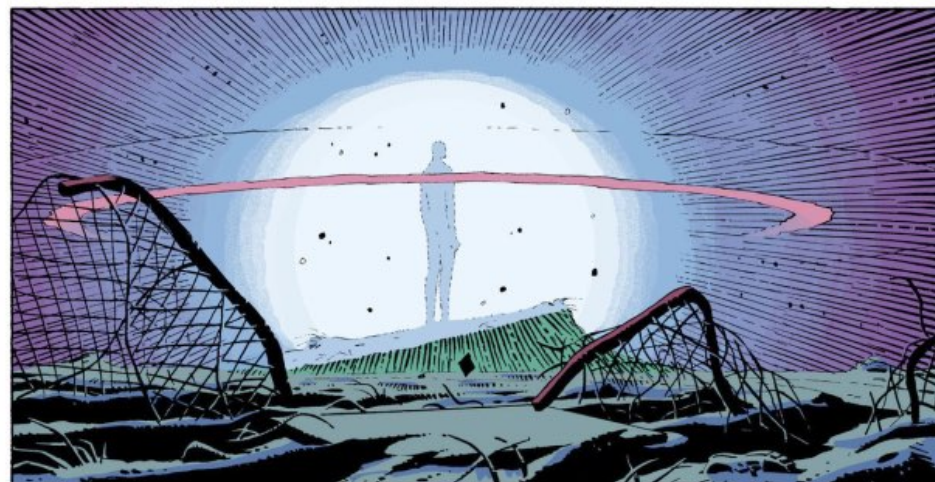
HE'D TELEPORTED EVERYBODY OUTTA THE TV BUILDING, CAMERAS AN' ALL.

BUT... BUT I WAS JUST WITH LAURIE. SHE DOESN'T KNOW...



EDITED REPLAY





THAT NIGHT, I SLEPT
BADLY BENEATH COLD,
DISTANT STARS,
PONDERING UPON THE
COLD, DISTANT GOD IN
WHOSE HANDS THE
FATE OF DAVIDSTOWN
RESTED.

WAS HE
REALLY
THERE?

HAD HE BEEN
THERE ONCE,
BUT NOW
DEPARTED?



THE MORNING SUN FOUND ME NO MORE WISE, NO LESS TROUBLED. FURTHER DOWN THE SHORE, SEVERAL OF THE BEACHED CORPSES HAD BECOME INFLATED BY GAS.

YOU SEEN THIS? HE'S GONE! NEW FRONTIERSMAN SAYS IT'S THE RUSSIANS!



I SET ABOUT BURYING THE SODDEN CARCASSES, MATCHING ODD LIMBS AS BEST I COULD. WITH THEM, I BURIED ALL HOPE FOR MY FAMILY'S SURVIVAL.

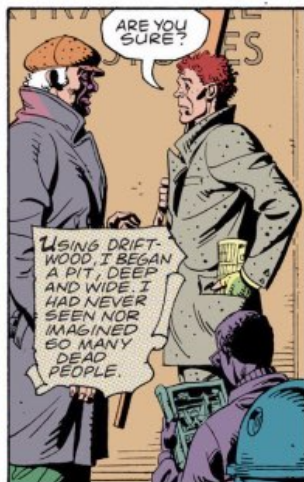
I MEAN, WHAT'S NEXT, Y'KNOW?

GIVE ME A GAZETTE, AS WELL.



SURE. THERE Y'ARE, Y'KNOW, I HAD IT TAGGED FOR A RED SMEAR FROM THE START. I'M A NEWS-VENDOR.

HOW ABOUT YOU? I SEE THE WORLD DIDN'T END YESTER-DAY.



ARE YOU SURE?

USING DRIFT-WOOD, I BEGAN A PIT, DEEP AND WIDE. I HAD NEVER SEEN NOR IMAGINED SO MANY DEAD PEOPLE.



DRAWING AND CURSING, I HOPED MY WIFE AND DAUGHTERS MIGHT BE TUCKED IN BY GENTLER HANDS WHEN THEIR TURN CAME.

I BEGAN TO WEEP AGAIN, DEAR GOD, WHO WOULD PROTECT THEM?



NOON CAME AND WENT. BY DUSK, THE CRATER WAS DEEP ENOUGH AND I COMMENCED HAULING THOSE COLD, MAIMED, WRETCHED THINGS INTO THE BED I HAD PREPARED.



HEY! ARE YOU BACK AGAIN? LISTEN, WHEN ARE YA THINKIN' O' PAYIN' FOR THAT FUNNY BOOK?

THE FREIGHTER WAS ALMOST UPON THEM. WHO WOULD CARE FOR THEM, NOW I WAS GONE?



GONE?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, HE'S GONE?



I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU SPENT LAST NIGHT, MS. JUSPECZYK, BUT HAVEN'T YOU READ THE PAPERS? DR. MANHATTAN LEFT EARTH.

NOW, PLEASE... WE HAVE TO GIVE YOU A CANCER SCAN AND ASK SOME QUESTIONS...



CANCER SCAN? WHAT IS THIS? WHO'RE ALL THESE PEOPLE?

LEAVE THAT ALONE! THAT'S MY MOTHER'S!

MS. JUSPECZYK, WE HAVE TO ASK... DID YOU PLACE DR. OSTERMAN UNDER ANY EMOTIONAL STRESS LAST NIGHT?



WHAT? ARE... ARE YOU BLAMING ME FOR SOME-THING?

JESUS CHRIST, I HAVE TAKEN ENOUGH OF THIS.

WH-WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? LISTEN, WHEN JON GETS BACK, YOU'RE IN BIG TROUBLE...



LISTEN, LADY, IF OUR PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE RIGHT, "JON" IS QUITE POSSIBLY NEVER COMING BACK! YOUR MEAL TICKET HAS FLOWN THE COOP!

THE LINCH-PIN OF AMERICA'S STRATEGIC SUPERIORITY HAS APPARENTLY GONE TO MARS!

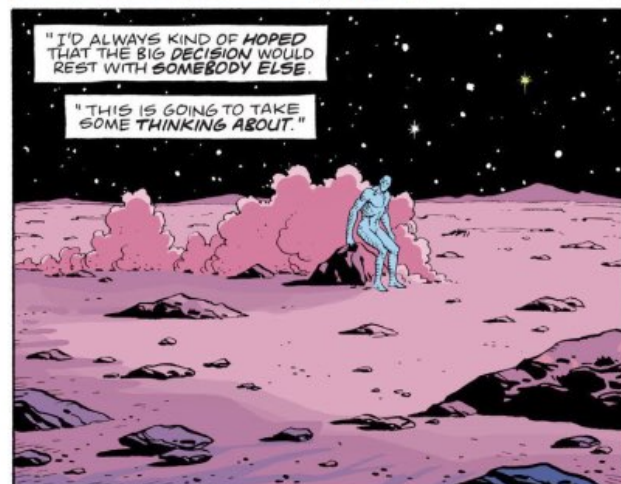
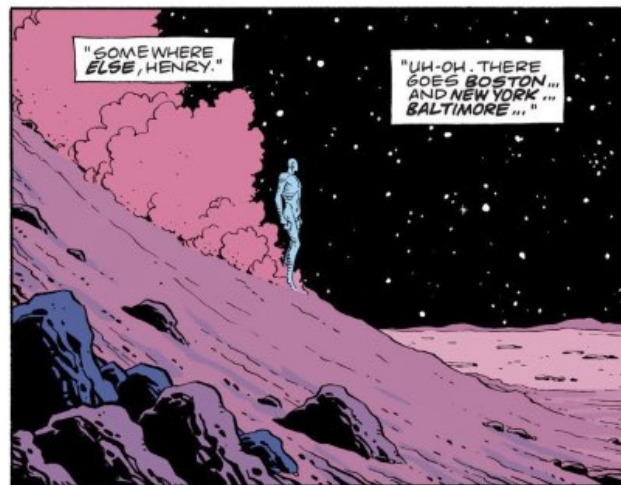
BUT YOU'RE RIGHT...

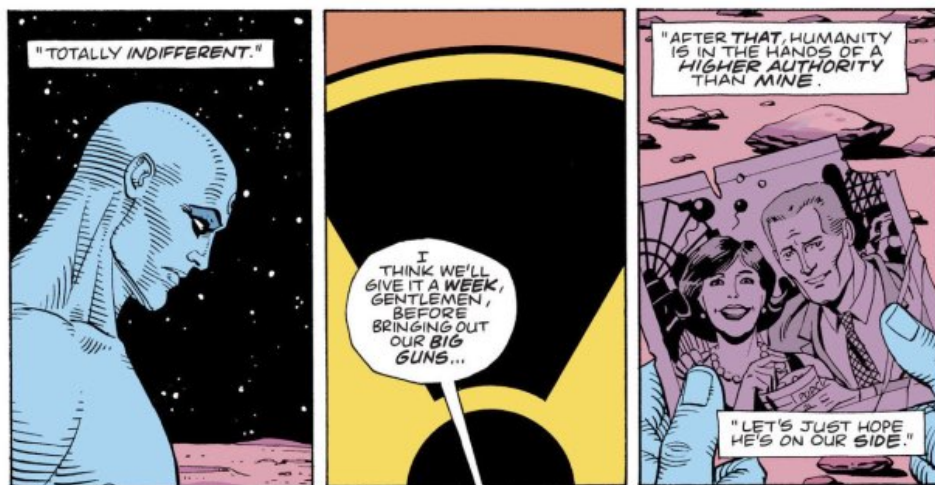


I AM IN BIG TROUBLE...

... AND YOU'RE IN BIG TROUBLE...







UNDER THE HOOD

Presented here are the excerpts from UNDER THE HOOD. In this next chapter Hollis Mason discusses the traumas of the 1950s and the emergence of the new super-heroes. Reprinted with permission of the author.

V.

The Minutemen didn't get to usher in the 1950s with a Christmas celebration the way we'd ushered in the '40s, and perhaps that's appropriate. The decade following the disbanding of the group was cold and bleak, both for me in particular and for masked adventurers in general. Plus, it seemed to go on forever.

I think the worst thing was the belated realization of just how much a fad we'd always been, something to fill the dead columns of the newspapers right alongside the Hula Hoop and the Jitterbug. Ever since Sally Jupiter married her manager, his tireless, shrewd efforts as a publicist had been noticeably absent. He'd recognized that the day of the costumed hero was over – even though we hadn't – and he'd gotten out while the getting was good. Consequently, we found our exploits being reported less and less frequently. When they were reported, the tone was often derisive. I can remember a lot of hooded vigilante jokes coming into circulation during the early fifties. The mildest was one that suggested we were called The Minutemen due to our performance in the bedroom. There were an awful lot of bright blue gags about Sally Jupiter. I know, because she told me most of them herself the last time I saw her.

Sally had a baby girl named Laurel Jane in 1949, and it seemed to be right about then that her marital problems started. These were widely discussed, so I don't think I need repeat them here. Suffice it to say that the marriage ended in 1956, and since then Sally has done a first rate job of bringing her daughter up into a bright, spunky youngster that any mother could be proud of.

The thing about that particular decade is that things first started getting *serious* then. I remember thinking at the time that it was funny how the more serious things got, the better the Comedian seemed to do. Out of the whole bunch of us, he was the only one who was still right up there on the front pages, still making the occasional headline. On the strength of his military work he had good government connections, and it often seemed as if he was being groomed into some sort of patriotic symbol. At the height of the McCarthy era, nobody had any doubts about where the Comedian's feet were planted politically.

That was more than could be said for the rest of us. We all had to testify before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, and were all forced to reveal our true identities to one of its representatives. Galling though this was, it didn't present any immediate problems for most of us. With Captain Metropolis having such an outstanding military record and with my own service in the police force, we both were more or less cleared of suspicion right away. Mothman met with more difficulty, mostly because of some left-wing friends he'd cultivated during his student days. He was eventually cleared, but the investigations were both lengthy and ruthless, and I think that the pressure he was under at that time prompted the beginnings of the drinking problem that has contributed so much to his later mental ill-health.

Only Hooded Justice refused to testify, on the grounds that he was not prepared to reveal



1947: Sally Jupiter marries Lawrence Schexnayder. Can you spot the famous faces in the crowd?

his true identity to anyone. When pressed, he simply vanished . . . or at least that's how it seemed. Vanishing is no big problem when you're a costumed hero – you just take your costume off. It seemed quite likely that Hooded Justice had simply chosen to retire rather than reveal his identity, which the authorities seemed perfectly happy with.

The only detail concerning the disappearance of America's first masked adventurer that still nags at me was trivial, and maybe not even connected at all; it was brought up in an article that appeared in *The New Frontiersman*, almost a year after Hooded Justice vanished. The author mentioned the disappearance of a well known circus strongman of the day named Rolf Müller, who had quit his job at the height of the Senate Subcommittee hearings. Three months later, a badly decomposed body that was tentatively identified as Müller's was pulled from the sea after being washed up on the coast of Boston. Müller, assuming the body actually was that of the renowned weightlifter, had been shot through the head. The inference of the article was that Müller, whose family was East German, had gone on the run for fear of being uncovered while the Communist witch hunts were at their most feverish. The piece also implied that Müller had probably been executed by his own Red superiors.

I always wondered about that. Müller disappeared at almost exactly the same time as Hooded Justice was last seen, and the two men had corresponding builds. Whether the body washed up on that Boston shoreline belonged to Müller or not, neither he nor Hooded Justice were ever seen or heard from again. Were they the same man? If they were, were they really dead? If they were dead, who killed them? Was Hooded Justice really working for the Reds? I don't know. Real life is messy, inconsistent, and it's seldom when anything ever really gets resolved. It's taken me a long time to realize that.

One of the big problems that faced costumed heroes at the time was the absence of costumed criminals of any real note. I don't think any of us realized how much we needed those goons until they started to thin out. You see, if you're the only one who'd bothered to turn up for a free-for-all in costume, you tended to look kind of stupid. If the bad guys joined in as well, it wasn't so bad, but without them it was always sort of embarrassing. There had never been as many costumed criminals as heroes, but with the end of the 1940s the trend grew much more pronounced.

Most of the crooks turned in their costumes along with their criminal careers, but some just opted for a less extroverted and more profitable approach. The new breed of villains, despite their often colorful names, were mostly ordinary men in business suits who ran drug and prostitution rackets. That's not to say they didn't cause as much trouble . . . far from it; I



(left) Hooded Justice (right) Rolf Müller.
Were they the same man?

just mean that they weren't as much fun to fight. All the cases I ended up investigating during the '50s seemed sordid and depressing and quite often blood-chillingly horrible. I don't know what it was . . . there just seemed to be a sort of bleak, uneasy feeling in the air. It was as if some essential element of our lives, of all our lives, was vanishing before we knew entirely what it was. I don't think I could really describe it completely except maybe to somebody who remembered the terrific elation we all felt after the war: we felt that we'd taken the worst that the 20th century could throw at us and stood our ground. We felt as if we'd really won a hard-earned age of peace and prosperity that would see us well into the year 2000. This optimism lasted all through the '40s and the early '50s, but by the middle of that latter decade it was starting to wear thin, and there was a sort of ominous feeling in the air.

Partly it was the beatniks, the jazz musicians and the poets openly condemning American values whenever they opened their mouths. Partly it was Elvis Presley and the whole Rock 'n' Roll boom. Had we fought a war for our country so that our daughters could scream and swoon over young men who looked like *this*, who sounded like *that*? With all these sudden social upheavals just when we thought we'd gotten everything straight, it was impossible to live through the 1950s without a sense of impending catastrophe bearing implacably down upon the whole country, the whole world. Some people thought it was war and others thought it was flying saucers, but those things weren't really what was bearing down upon us. What was bearing down upon us was the 1960s.

The '60s, along with the mini-skirt and the Beatles, brought one thing to the world that was significant above all others – its name was Dr. Manhattan. The arrival of Dr. Manhattan would make the terms "masked hero" and "costumed adventurer" as obsolete as the persons they described. A new phrase had entered the American language, just as a new and almost terrifying concept had entered its consciousness. It was the dawn of the Super-Hero.

Manhattan's existence was announced to the world in the March of 1960, and I don't think there can have been anybody on the planet who didn't feel that same strange jumble of emotions when they heard the news. Foremost amongst this assortment of sensations was disbelief. The idea of a being who could walk through walls, move from one place to another without covering the intervening distance and re-arrange things completely with a single thought was flat-out impossible. On the other hand, the people presenting this news to us were our own government. The notion that they might simply have made it up was equally improbable, and in the face of this contradiction, it became gradually easier to accept the dream-like unreality of those first newsreel images: a blue man melting a tank with a wave of his hand; the fragments of a disassembled rifle floating there eerily in the air with nobody touching them. Once accepted as reality, however, such things became no easier to digest. If you accept that floating rifle parts are real you also have to somehow accept that everything you've ever known to be a fact is probably untrue. That peculiar unease is something that most of us have learned to live with over the years, but it's still there.

The other emotions that accompanied the announcement were perhaps harder to identify and pin down. There was a certain elation . . . it felt as if Santa Claus had suddenly turned out to be real after all. Coupled with and complementary to this was a terrible and uneven sense of fear and uncertainty. While this was hard to define precisely, if I had to boil it down into three words, those words would be, "We've been replaced." I'm not just talking about the non-powered costumed hero fraternity here, you understand, although Dr. Manhattan's appearance was certainly one of the factors that led to my own increased feelings of obsolescence and my eventual decision to quit the hero business altogether. You see, while masked vigilantes had certainly been made obsolete, so in a sense had every other living organism upon the planet. I don't think that society has fully realized yet just exactly what Dr. Manhattan's arrival means; how much it's likely to change every detail of our lives.

Although Dr. Manhattan was the most prominent by far of the 'New Breed' of costumed heroes, he wasn't quite the first nor by any means the last. In the closing months of 1958, the papers mentioned that a major opium and heroin smuggling racket had been busted by a

young adventurer named Ozymandias, who seemed to have quickly gained a reputation amongst the criminal fraternity for his boundless and implacable intelligence, not to mention a large degree of athletic prowess.

I met both Dr. Manhattan and Ozymandias for the first time at a charity event in the June of 1960. Ozymandias seemed to be a nice young fellow, although I personally found Dr. Manhattan to be a little distant. Maybe that was more my fault than his, though, since I found it very difficult to feel easy around the guy, even once I'd got used to the shock of his physical presence. It's a strange feeling...the first time you meet him your brain wants to scream, blow a fuse and shut itself down immediately, refusing to accept that he exists. This lasts for a couple of minutes, at which time he's still there and hasn't gone away, and in the end you just accept him because he's standing there and talking to you and after a while it almost seems normal.

Almost.

Anyway, at that charity event...I think it was Red Cross relief for the ongoing famine in India...a lot of things became apparent to me. Looking around at the other adventurers there, I wasn't happy with what I saw: The Comedian was there, imposing his overbearing personality and his obnoxious cigar smoke upon anyone within reach. Mothman was there, a glass in one hand, slurring his words and letting his sentences trail off into incoherence. Captain Metropolis was there, his paunch starting to show despite a strict regimen of Canadian Air Force Exercises. Finally, leaving the two younger heroes aside for a moment, there was me: Forty-six years old and starting to feel it, still trying to cut it in the company of guys who could level a mountain by snapping their fingers. I think it was when that moment of self insight hit me that I first decided to finally hang up my mask and get myself a proper job. I'd been about due to retire from the police force for some time, and I started wondering about what I wanted to do now that the thrill of adventure had finally started to pale. Looking back over my life, I tried to work out what I'd been doing during my existence's happier stretches, in order to form a basis for my future contentment.

After much deliberation, I concluded that I'd never been happier than when helping my dad beat some sense into an obstinate engine down at Moe Vernon's yard. After a life of crime-fighting, no notion seemed sweeter to me than that of spending my autumn years contentedly making dead vehicles run again in the confines of my own auto repair shop.

In the May of this year, 1962, that's exactly what I opted to do.

I retired. To mend cars. Probably for the rest of my life. As I see it, part of the art of being a hero is knowing when you don't need to be one anymore, realizing that the game has changed and that the stakes are different and that there isn't necessarily a place for you in this strange new pantheon of extraordinary people. The world has moved on, and I'm content to watch it from my armchair with a beer by my side and the smell of fresh oil still on my fingers.

Part of my contentment comes from knowing that there have maybe been some overall consequence of my twenty-three years behind the mask. This knowledge came to me in the shape of a letter from a young man whose name I'm not at liberty to reveal. He told me of his great admiration for my efforts as Nite Owl and proposed that since I'd retired and would no longer be using the name, perhaps he could borrow it since he intended to follow my example and become a crime-fighter. I've visited his home since then and seen some of the fabulous technology he intends to bring to bear on the war against crime. I was certainly far too impressed to refuse him the use of what I'd always thought was dumb name to begin with, so by the time this sees print there may well be a new Nite Owl patrolling the streets of New York. Also, Sally Jupiter tells me that as soon as little Laurie's old enough she wants to be a super-heroine just like her mom, so who knows? It seems as if from being a novelty nine-day wonder, the super-hero has become a part of American life. It's here to stay.

For better, or for worse.

