

CHAPTER IV



THE PHOTOGRAPH IS IN MY HAND.

IT IS THE PHOTOGRAPH OF A MAN AND A WOMAN. THEY ARE AT AN AMUSEMENT PARK, IN 1959.



IN TWELVE SECONDS TIME, I DROP THE PHOTOGRAPH TO THE SAND AT MY FEET, WALKING AWAY. IT'S ALREADY LYING THERE, TWELVE SECONDS INTO THE FUTURE.

TEN SECONDS NOW.



THE PHOTOGRAPH IS IN MY HAND.

I FOUND IT IN A DERELICT BAR AT THE GILA FLATS TEST BASE, TWENTY-SEVEN HOURS AGO.



IT'S STILL THERE, TWENTY-SEVEN HOURS INTO THE PAST, IN ITS FRAME, IN THE DARKENED BAR.

I'M STILL THERE, LOOKING AT IT.



THE PHOTOGRAPH IS IN MY HAND. THE WOMAN TAKES A PIECE OF POPCORN BETWEEN THUMB AND FOREFINGER. THE FERRIS WHEEL PAUSES.

SEVEN SECONDS NOW.



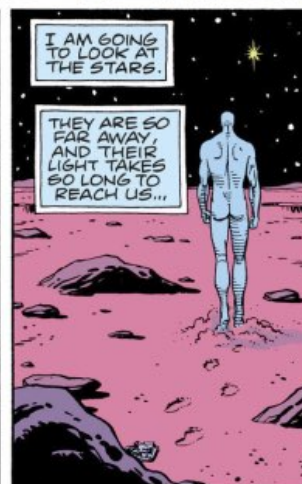
IT'S OCTOBER, 1985. I'M ON MARS. IT'S JULY, 1959. I'M IN NEW JERSEY, AT THE PALISADES AMUSEMENT PARK.

FOUR SECONDS. THREE.



I'M TIRED OF LOOKING AT THE PHOTOGRAPH NOW.

I OPEN MY FINGERS. IT FALLS TO THE SAND AT MY FEET.



I AM GOING TO LOOK AT THE STARS.

THEY ARE SO FAR AWAY, AND THEIR LIGHT TAKES SO LONG TO REACH US...



ALL WE EVER SEE OF STARS ARE THEIR OLD PHOTOGRAPHS.



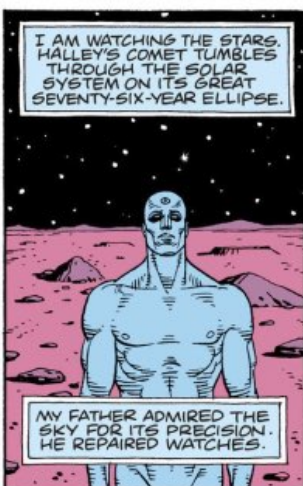
I AM TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVEN MILLION KILOMETERS FROM THE SUN.

ITS LIGHT IS ALREADY TEN MINUTES OLD. IT WILL NOT REACH PLUTO FOR ANOTHER TWO HOURS.



TWO HOURS INTO MY FUTURE, I OBSERVE METEORITES FROM A GLASS BALCONY, THINKING ABOUT MY FATHER.

TWELVE SECONDS INTO MY PAST, I OPEN MY FINGERS. THE PHOTOGRAPH IS FALLING.



I AM WATCHING THE STARS. HALLEY'S COMET TUMBLES THROUGH THE SOLAR SYSTEM ON ITS GREAT SEVENTY-SIX-YEAR ELLIPSE.

MY FATHER ADMIRED THE SKY FOR ITS PRECISION. HE REPAIRED WATCHES.



IT IS 1945. I SIT IN A BROOKLYN KITCHEN, FASCINATED BY AN ARRANGEMENT OF COGS ON BLACK VELVET. I AM SIXTEEN YEARS OLD.



IT IS 1985. I AM ON MARS. I AM FIFTY-SIX YEARS OLD.



THE PHOTOGRAPH LIES AT MY FEET, FALLS FROM MY FINGERS, IS IN MY HAND.

I AM WATCHING THE STARS, ADMIRING THEIR COMPLEX TRAJECTORIES, THROUGH SPACE, THROUGH TIME.



I AM TRYING TO GIVE A NAME TO THE FORCE THAT SET THEM IN MOTION.

2



IT IS AUGUST 7TH, 1945. THE BROOKLYN MORNING IS HUMID AND THE FIRE ESCAPE DOOR HAS BEEN LEFT OPEN.

JON? WHERE ARE YOU?



IN HERE, I'M PRACTICING ON YOUR OLD POCKETWATCH, BEFORE IT'S TIME FOR SCHOOL.

FORGET POCKET-WATCHES! HAVE YOU SEEN THE NEWS?



NEWS?

THEY DROPPED THE ATOMIC BOMB ON JAPAN! A WHOLE CITY, GONE!

ACH! THESE ARE NO TIMES FOR A REPAIRER OF WATCHES



THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING! THERE WILL BE MORE BOMBS. THEY ARE THE FUTURE.

SHALL MY SON FOLLOW ME INTO AN OBSOLETE TRADE?

FATHER? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



I'M DOING WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU. THIS ATOMIC SCIENCE... THIS IS WHAT THE WORLD WILL NEED! NOT POCKET-WATCHES!

HEY! GIVE ME THAT BACK!



PROFESSOR EINSTEIN SAYS THAT TIME DIFFERS FROM PLACE TO PLACE. CAN YOU IMAGINE?

IF TIME IS NOT TRUE, WHAT PURPOSE HAVE WATCHMAKERS, HEIN?

WAIT! DON'T...



MY PROFESSION IS A THING OF THE PAST. INSTEAD, MY SON MUST HAVE A FUTURE.

FATHER, NO!

FORTY YEARS AGO, COGS RAIN ON BROOKLYN...



ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN MINUTES INTO THE FUTURE, THE METEORITES HAIL DOWN THROUGH THE RAREFIED ATMOSPHERE OF MARS...



IT IS 1948, AND I AM ARRIVING AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY.

IT IS 1958, AND I AM GRADUATING WITH A PH.D. IN ATOMIC PHYSICS.

THE COGS ARE FALLING...

3

WATCHMAKER



IT'S JULY, 1959. I'M RETURNING TO NEW JERSEY ON VACATION, VISITING OLD UNIVERSITY FRIENDS.

JANEY SHARES THE TRIP FROM ARIZONA. HER MOTHER LIVES IN JERSEY.

SHE CALLS HOME FROM THE STATION, BUT NOBODY ANSWERS. WE VISIT THE AMUSEMENT PARK, KILLING TIME UNTIL HER MOTHER RETURNS.

HEY, YOUNG LOVERS! HOLD IT!

THERE! THAT'S JUST BEAUTIFUL. A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE PARTICULARLY OF THE LADY...

BUT WE'RE NOT...

YES! MATTER OF FACT, I DID! IT'S RIGHT...

OH.

JON? DID YOU FIX MY WATCH YET?

IT'S AUGUST, 1959. WE'VE BEEN BACK FROM JERSEY A MONTH. IN MY FUTURE, THE ACCIDENT IS WAITING FOR ME.

THE ACCIDENT IS ALMOST UPON ME NOW.

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

NOTHING. I LEFT IT IN MY LAB COAT WHEN WE WERE RESETTING THE I.F. CHAMBER THIS MORNING. YOU WAIT RIGHT THERE.

I CROSS THE SQUARE TO THE INTRINSIC FIELD CENTER. MY COAT'S INSIDE THE TEST CHAMBER. I CAN SEE IT THROUGH THE FOOT-THICK WINDOW...

HE GIVES US AN ADDRESS WHERE WE CAN PICK UP 75-CENT PRINTS, AND WE WALK OFF TOWARDS THE TILT-A-WHIRL, LAUGHING AT HIS MISTAKE.

BY THE SHOOTING GALLERY, JANEY'S WATCHBAND SNAPS. BEFORE I CAN PICK IT UP, A FAT MAN STEPS UPON IT. I TELL HER I CAN FIX IT.

HER MOTHER STILL ISN'T ANSWERING. WE DECIDE TO CALL AGAIN FROM MY HOTEL. WE BOTH KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN. WHAT'S MESH TOGETHER WITH SOFT PRECISION...

THE ACCIDENT IS ALMOST UPON ME NOW.

THE OTHERS RETURN FROM LUNCH AND I ASK THEM TO LET ME OUT, LAUGHING AT MY OWN STUPIDITY.

NORODY ELSE LAUGHS. DR. GLASS IS TURNING WHITE.

HE EXPLAINS THAT THE DOOR HAS LOCKED AUTOMATICALLY WHILE THE GENERATORS WARM UP FOR THIS AFTERNOON'S EXPERIMENT: REMOVING THE INTRINSIC FIELD FROM CONCRETE BLOCK FIFTEEN.

I ASK HIM WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER FOURTEEN...

WE REACH THE HOTEL. SHE CALLS AGAIN. HER MOTHER STILL ISN'T HOME.

SHE ASKS IF I CAN REALLY FIX HER WATCH. WE SIT TOGETHER ON THE EDGE OF THE BED, EXAMINING THE DAMAGE.

IT'S 1959. A PULSE FLUTTERS IN HER BELLY, BENEATH MY CHEEK.

IT'S 1966. THE SUITCASE WON'T SHUT AND SHE'S CRYING.

IT'S 1985. IN ONE HUNDRED MINUTES, THE METEORITE SHOWER BEGINS.

...AND HE TELLS ME.

NO! NO, NO, NO!

I-I'M SORRY, OSTERMAN. THE PROGRAM'S LOCKED IN AND WE CAN'T OVERRIDE THE TIME-LOCK. IT...

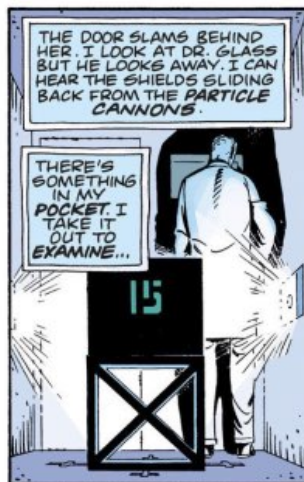
...IT'S A SAFETY FEATURE.

OH, GOD, LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT OF HERE...

JANEY? DON'T GO! I NEED...

NO! DON'T ASK ME! OH, GOD, I CAN'T STAY AND WATCH. PLEASE, I...

I JUST CAN'T, OKAY?



THE DOOR SLAMS BEHIND HER. I LOOK AT DR. GLASS BUT HE LOOKS AWAY. I CAN HEAR THE SHIELDS SLIDING BACK FROM THE PARTICLE CANNONS.

THERE'S SOMETHING IN MY POCKET. I TAKE IT OUT TO EXAMINE...



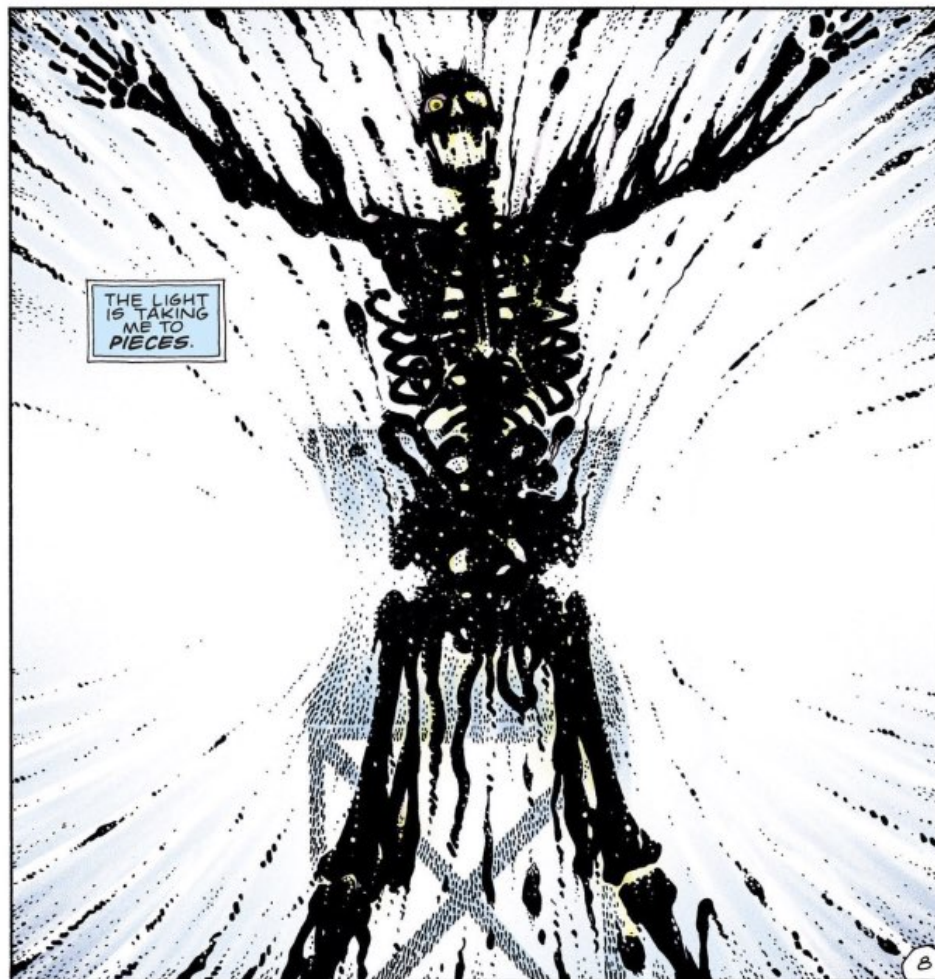
GOOD AS NEW.

THE AIR GROWS TOO WARM, TOO QUICKLY. I WANT VERY MUCH FOR A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN TO HAND ME A GLASS OF VERY COLD BEER...



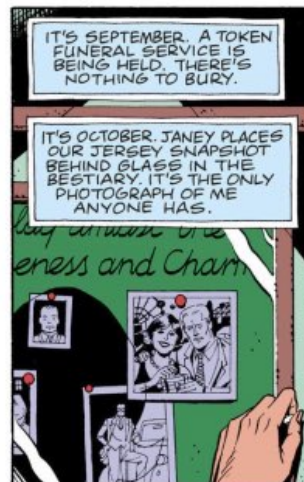
ALL THE ATOMS IN THE TEST CHAMBER ARE SCREAMING AT ONCE.

THE LIGHT...



THE LIGHT IS TAKING ME TO PIECES.

8



IT'S SEPTEMBER. A TOKEN FUNERAL SERVICE IS BEING HELD. THERE'S NOTHING TO BURY.

IT'S OCTOBER. JANEY PLACES OUR JERSEY SNAPSHOT BEHIND GLASS IN THE BESTIARY. IT'S THE ONLY PHOTOGRAPH OF ME ANYONE HAS.



IT'S NOVEMBER...

DID YOU READ ABOUT THIS COMMUNIST GUY WHO'S RUNNING CUBA? THIS CASTRO?

I SAW A PICTURE! JESUS H. CHRIST, WHAT'S WRONG WITH GUYS THESE DAYS? THAT BEARD!



I MEAN, I REMEMBER WHEN OUR CAROL-ANNE STARTED STICKIN' UP PICTURES OF THAT PIMP-EYED SINGER, THAT PUNK PRESLEY...

I THOUGHT I'D JUST ABOUT SEEN IT ALL.



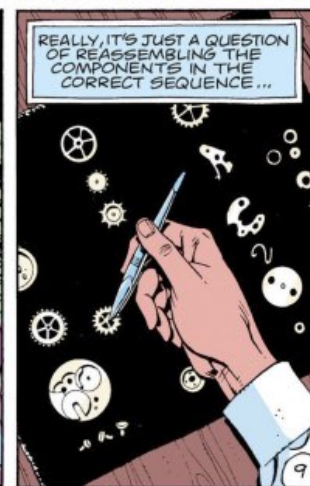
EEEEIIIGHH!



IT'S NOVEMBER 10TH NOW. THERE IS A CIRCULATORY SYSTEM WALKING THROUGH THE KITCHEN...



NOVEMBER 14TH: A PARTIALLY MUSCLED SKELETON STANDS BY THE PERIMETER FENCE AND SCREAMS FOR THIRTY SECONDS BEFORE VANISHING...



REALLY, IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF REASSEMBLING THE COMPONENTS IN THE CORRECT SEQUENCE...

9



IT'S NOVEMBER 22ND...

Y'KNOW, I'M THINKING OF QUITTING THIS PLACE. SOMETHING'S HAUNTING US...

WALLY, PLEASE. I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT.



GEE, I'M SORRY, BUT...

NO, NO, I CAN HEAR IT. IT'S... HEY! MY ARM! ALL THE HAIRS ARE STANDING UP...

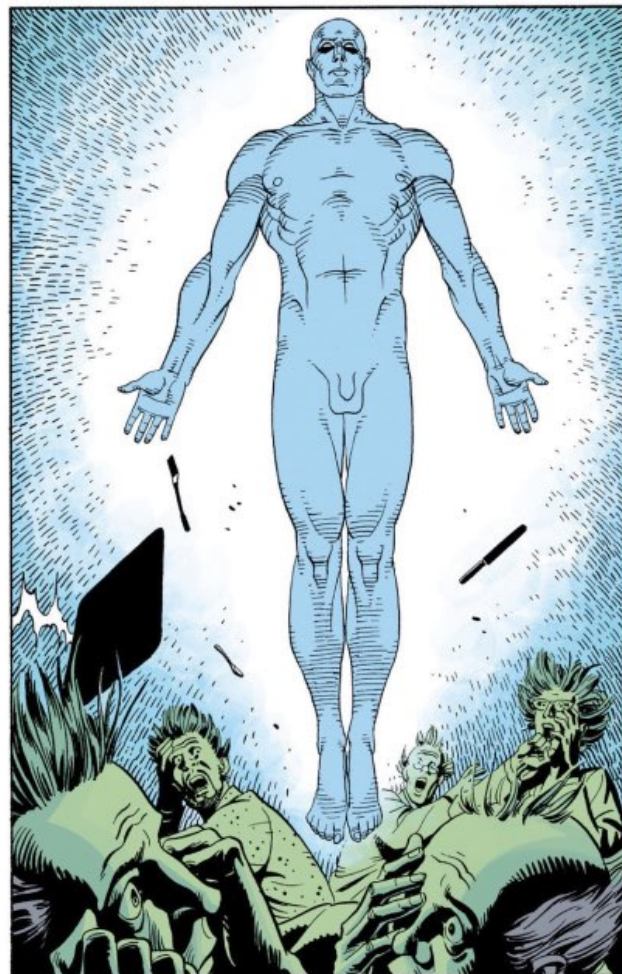
HEY, CAN YOU HEAR THAT? THAT WHISTLING? IS IT IN MY EARS, OR WHAT...?



DON'T PANIC! NOBODY PANIC!

AAAA! WHAT'S HAPPENING? THE CUTLERY, IT'S SPARKING...

OH, HOLY GOD, WILLYA LOOK AT THAT...



JON?

THEIR BLEACHED FACES STARE UP AT ME, PALE AND INSUBSTANTIAL IN THE SUDDEN FLARE OF ULTRAVIOLET.

SUNBURN IN NOVEMBER.

10



IT'S OCTOBER, 1985. I'M BASKING IN THE TWO-MILLION-YEAR-OLD LIGHT OF ANDROMEDA. I CAN SEE THE SUPERNOVA THAT ERNST HARTWIG DISCOVERED IN 1885, A CENTURY AGO.



IT SCINTILLATES, A WINK INTENDED FOR THE TRILOBITES, ALL LONG DEAD.

SUPERNOVAS ARE WHERE GOLD FORMS; THE ONLY PLACE. ALL GOLD COMES FROM SUPERNOVAS.



IT'S CHRISTMAS, 1959...

DO... DO YOU LIKE IT? I MEAN, IS THAT THE SORT OF THING THAT YOU LIKE, NOW THAT YOU'RE, UH...

YOU KNOW.



I LIKE IT VERY MUCH. ITS ATOMIC STRUCTURE IS A PERFECT GRID, LIKE A CHECKER-BOARD. IT'S...

JANEY? WHAT'S UP? ARE YOU COLD? I CAN RAISE THE TEMPERATURE...



NO... I'M NOT COLD.

I'M SCARED.



OF ME?

NO. YES. OH, GOD, LOOK, I...

I'M JUST SCARED BECAUSE EVERYTHING FEELS WEIRD. IT'S AS IF EVERYTHING'S CHANGED. NOT JUST YOU: EVERYTHING!



I MEAN, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE. NOBODY DOES. YOU WERE DISINTEGRATED. YOU PUT YOURSELF BACK TOGETHER...

THEY SAY YOU CAN GO ANYTHING, JON. THEY SAY YOU'RE LIKE GOD NOW.



I DON'T THINK THERE IS A GOD, JANEY. IF THERE IS, I'M NOT HIM.

I'M STILL THE SAME PERSON. NOTHING'S CHANGED. I STILL WANT YOU...



I'LL ALWAYS WANT YOU.

AS I LIE I HEAR HER SHOUTING AT ME IN 1963; SOBBING IN 1966. MY FINGERS OPEN. THE PHOTOGRAPH IS FALLING...

11







GONE TO MARS.

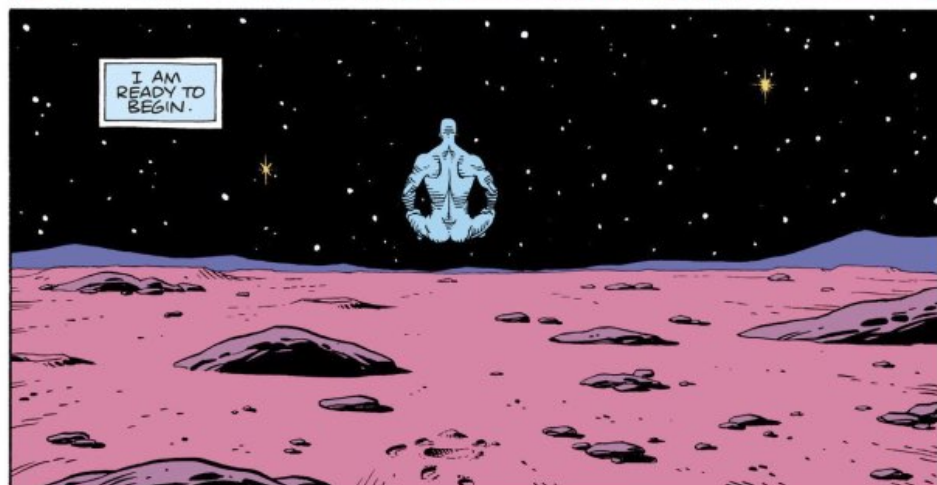


GONE TO A PLACE WITHOUT CLOCKS, WITHOUT SEASONS, WITHOUT HOURGLASSES TO TRAP THE SHIFTING PINK SAND.



BELOW ME, IN THE SAND, THE SECRET SHAPE OF MY CREATION IS CONCEALED, BURIED IN THE SAND'S FUTURE.

I RISE INTO THE THIN AIR.



I AM READY TO BEGIN.



26



A WORLD GROWS UP AROUND ME. AM I SHAPING IT, OR DO ITS PREDETERMINED CONTOURS GUIDE MY HAND?

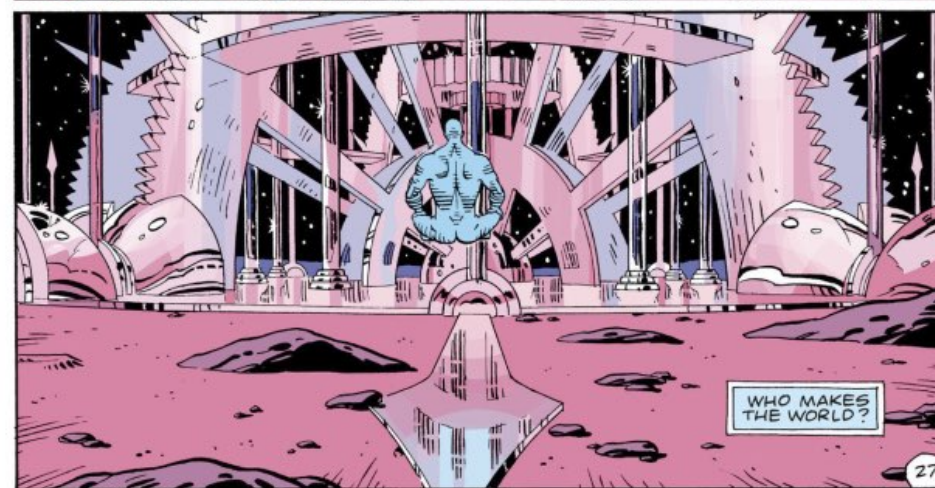
IN 1945, THE BOMBS ARE FALLING ON JAPAN, THE COGS ARE FALLING ON BROOKLYN, SEEDS OF THE FUTURE, SOWN CARELESSLY...



WITHOUT ME, THINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT. IF THE FAT MAN HADN'T CRUSHED THE WATCH, IF I HADN'T LEFT IT IN THE TEST CHAMBER...

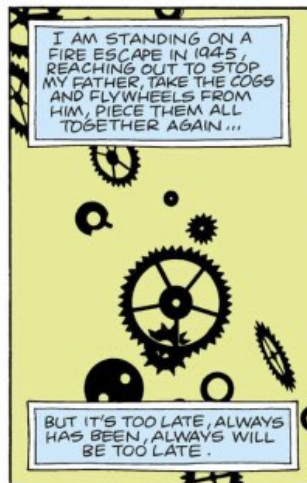
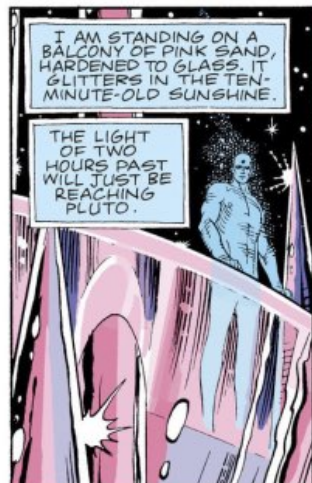
AM I TO BLAME, THEN? OR THE FAT MAN? OR MY FATHER, FOR CHOOSING MY CAREER?

WHICH OF US IS RESPONSIBLE?



WHO MAKES THE WORLD?

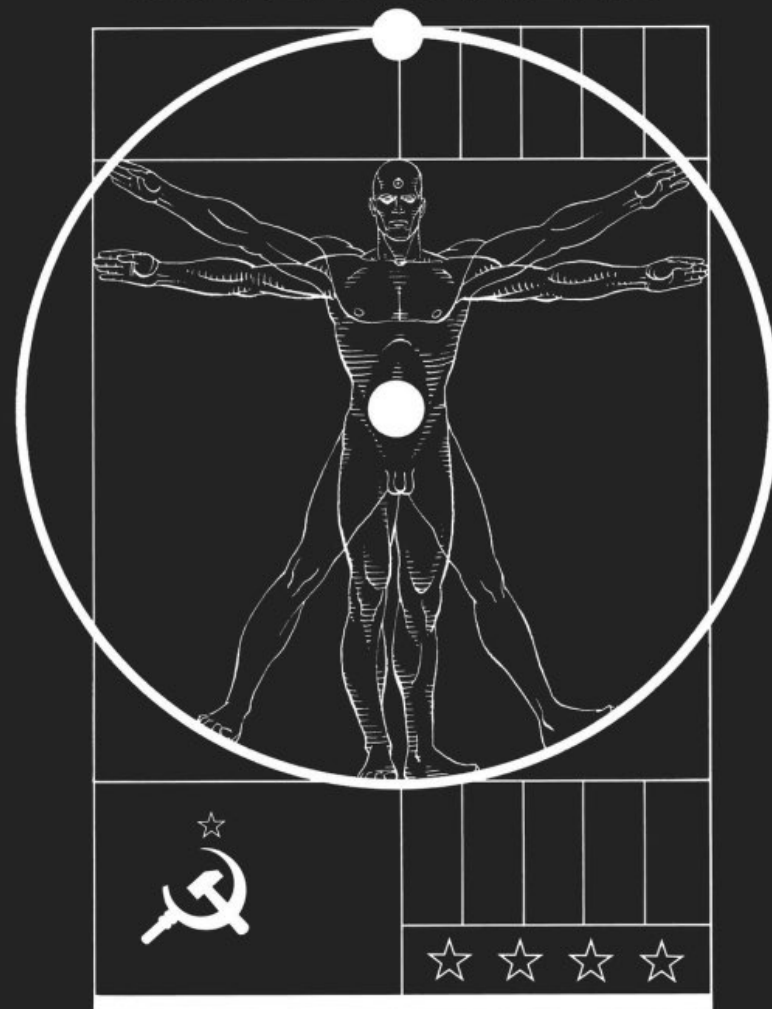
27



The release of atom power has changed everything except our way of thinking... The solution to this problem lies in the heart of mankind. If only I had known, I should have become a watchmaker.

—Albert Einstein

DR. MANHATTAN: SUPER-POWERS AND THE SUPERPOWERS



BY PROFESSOR MILTON GLASS

Introduction

For those of us who delight in such things, the twentieth century has, in its unfolding, presented mankind with an array of behavioral paradoxes and moral conundrums hitherto unimagined and perhaps unimaginable. Science, traditional enemy of mysticism and religion, has taken on a growing understanding that the model of the universe suggested by quantum physics differs very little from the universe that Taoists and other mystics have existed in for centuries. Large numbers of young people, raised in rigidly structured and industrially oriented cultures, violently reject industrialism and seek instead some modified version of the agricultural lifestyle that their forebears (debatably) enjoyed, including extended communal families and in some instances a barter economy in miniature. Children starve while boots costing many thousands of dollars leave their mark upon the surface of the moon. We have labored long to build a heaven, only to find it populated with horrors.

It is the oldest ironies that are still the most satisfying: man, when preparing for bloody war, will orate loudly and most eloquently in the name of peace. This dichotomy is not an invention of the twentieth century, yet it is in this century that the most striking examples of the phenomena have appeared. Never before has man pursued global harmony more vocally while amassing stockpiles of weapons so devastating in their effect. The second world war—we were told—was *The War To End Wars*. The development of the atomic bomb is the *Weapon To End Wars*.

And yet wars continue. Currently, no nation on this planet is not involved in some form of armed struggle, if not against its neighbors then against internal forces. Furthermore, as ever-escalating amounts of money are poured into the pursuit of the specific weapon or conflict that will bring lasting peace, the drain on our economies creates a run-down urban landscape where crime flourishes and people are concerned less with national security than with the simple personal security needed to stop at the store late at night for a quart of milk without being mugged. The places we struggled so viciously to keep safe are becoming increasingly dangerous. The wars to end wars, the weapons to end wars, these things have failed us.

Now we have a man to end wars.

Since my association with Dr. Jonathan Osterman and the being he eventually became are well documented elsewhere, I feel I need only recap them briefly here. In 1959, in an accident that was certainly unplanned and just as certainly unrepeatable, a young American man was completely disintegrated, at least in a physical sense. Despite the absence of a body, a form of electromagnetic pattern resembling consciousness survived, and was able, in time, to rebuild an approximation of the body it had lost.

Perhaps in the process of reconstructing its corporeal form, this new and wholly original entity achieved a complete mastery of all matter; able to shape reality by the manipulation of its basic building blocks. When news of this being's phenomenal genesis was first released to the world, a certain phrase was used that has—at varying times—been attributed both to me and to others. On the newswatches coming over our TVs on that fateful night, one sentence was repeated over and over again: 'The superman exists and he's American.'

I never said that, although I do recall saying something similar to a persistent reporter who would not leave without a quote. I presume the remark was edited or toned down so as not to offend public sensibilities; in any event, I never said 'The superman exists and he's American'. What I said was 'God exists and he's American'. If that statement starts to chill you after a couple of moments' consideration, then don't be alarmed. A feeling of intense and crushing religious terror at the concept indicates only that you are still sane.

Since the mid-1960s, when the dazed and numbed mass consciousness first began to comprehend the significance of this new life form in humanity's midst, the political balance has changed drastically. Many people in this country feel that this is for the best. America's unquestioned military supremacy has also provided us with a certain economic leverage where we can dictate the economic policies of the western world and direct them to our advantage. There is little wonder, then, that the idea of a world run by an omnipotent God-King owing allegiance to the United States seems eminently desirable. By placing our superhuman benefactor in the position of a walking nuclear deterrent, it is assumed we have finally guaranteed lasting peace on earth. It is with this last contention that my most serious point of issue lies: I do not believe that we have a man to end wars.

I believe that we have made a man to end worlds.

The assumption that America's opponents are powerless before Dr. Manhattan, while comforting, begins to fail before closer examination. As I understand current Pentagon thinking, the conventional wisdom suggests that when faced with an insoluble problem, the Soviet Union will have no other option than acceptance of a loss of world influence culminating in its eventual defeat. It has been demonstrated, at least in well-supported theoretical terms, that Dr. Manhattan could at any time destroy large areas of Soviet territory instantly. It has been similarly theoretically demonstrated that, were a full scale nuclear assault to be launched upon America from Soviet bases in the U.S.S.R. and Europe, Dr. Manhattan would be able to deflect or disarm at least sixty percent of all incoming missiles before they had reached their targets. Against odds like that, it is argued, Russia would never risk instigating a full-scale global conflict. Since it is not in America's interests to promote such a conflict, does that mean that global peace is once and finally assured? No. It does not.

For one thing, it is an assumption based upon the belief that American psychology and its Soviet counterpart are interchangeable. To understand the Russian attitude to the possibility of a third world war one must first understand their attitude to the second. In WWII, none of the allied powers fought so bitterly or sustained such losses as did the Russians. It was Hitler's lack of success in his assault upon the

Soviet heartland that assured his eventual defeat, and though it was paid for mostly by Soviet lives, the entire world reaped the benefits. In time, the Russian contribution to the war effort has been downplayed and dismissed—most noticeably as our political differences became wider—as we glorified our own contribution while forgetting that of our estranged former allies. The Russians, however, have not forgotten. There are still those who remember the horror of a war fought on their soil, and almost certainly there are members of the Politburo in that category. From my reading of various pronouncements made by the Russian high command over the years, I am convinced that they will never again permit their nation to be threatened in a similar manner, *no matter what the cost*.

The presence of a deterrent such as Dr. Manhattan has doubtless curbed Soviet adventurism, as there have been numerous occasions when the U.S.S.R. has had to step down over some issue rather than risk escalation into a war it certainly could not win. Often, these reversals have been humiliating, and this has perhaps fostered the illusion that the Soviets will suffer such indignities endlessly. This is a misconception, for there is indeed another option available.

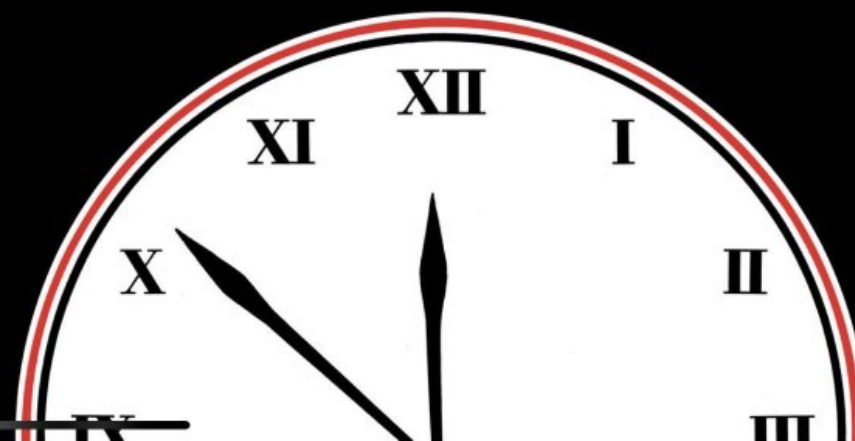
That option is Mutually Assured Destruction. Stated simply, Dr. Manhattan cannot stop all the Soviet warheads from reaching American soil, even a greatly reduced percentage would still be more than enough to effectively end the organic life in the northern hemisphere. The suggestion that the presence of a superhuman has inclined the world more towards peace is refuted by the sharp increase in both Russian and American nuclear stockpiles since the advent of Dr. Manhattan. Infinite destruction divided by two or ten or twenty is still infinite destruction. If threatened with eventual domination, would the Soviets pursue this unquestionably suicidal course? Yes. Given their history and their view of the world, I believe that they would.

Our current administration believes otherwise. They continually push their unearned advantage until American influence comes uncomfortably close to key areas of Soviet interest. It is as if—with a real live Deity on their side—our leaders have become intoxicated with a heady draught of Omnipotence-by-Association, without realizing just how his very existence has deformed the lives of every living creature on the face of this planet.

This is true in a domestic sense as well as a broader, international one. The technology that Dr. Manhattan has made possible has changed the way we think about our clothes, our food, our travel. We drive in electric cars and travel in leisure and comfort in clean, economical airships. Our entire culture has had to contort itself to accommodate the presence of something more than human, and we have all felt the results of this. The evidence surrounds us, in our everyday lives and on the front pages of the newspapers we read. One single being has been allowed to change the entire world, pushing it closer to its eventual destruction in the process. The Gods now walk amongst us, affecting the lives of every man, woman and child on the planet in a direct way rather than through mythology and the reassurances of faith. The safety of a whole world rests in the hands of a being far beyond what we understand to be human.

We are all of us living in the shadow of Manhattan.

DR. MANHATTAN:



CHAPTER V



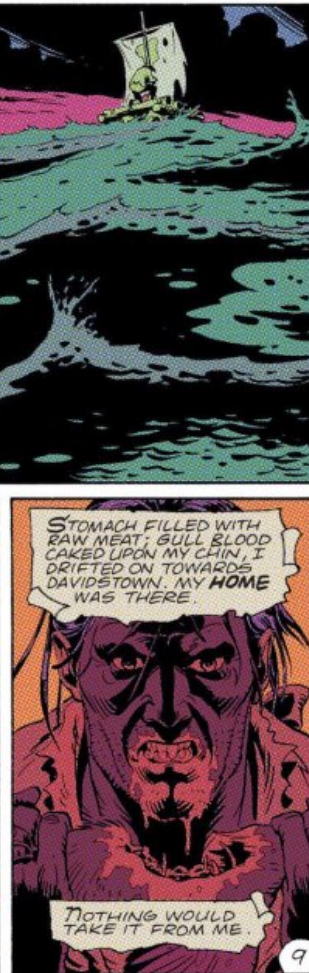
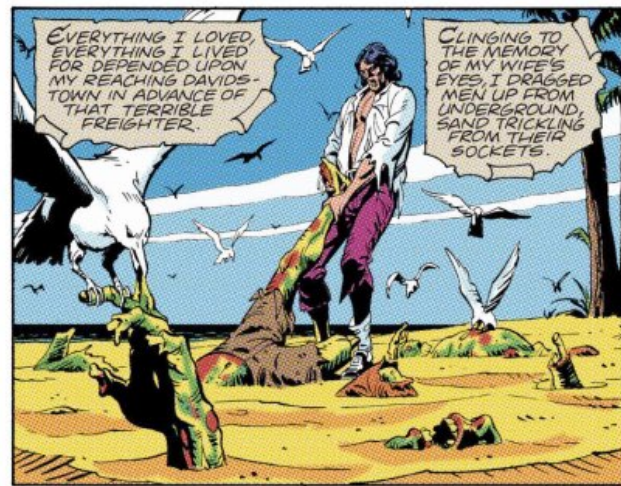




FEARFUL SYMMETRY









THEY SAID I CAN'T LIVE THERE ANYMORE, NOW THAT JON'S GONE.

PLUS, THEY SUSPENDED MY EXPENSE ACCOUNT, SO ALL I HAVE IS MY SAVINGS. IT WAS JUST "OKAY," WE'RE TAKING YOUR HOME AND MONEY, CHEW ON THAT."



SO, WHERE WILL YOU STAY? DID YOU CALL YOUR MOTHER?

OH, SHE'D LOVE THAT. I'D SOONER SLEEP ON A GRATING.

NAH, I'LL GET BY. IT JUST BURNS MY ASS TO BE SO DAMN DISPOSABLE.



ANYWAY, THANKS FOR BUYING ME LUNCH. I BETTER GO FIND A CHEAP ROOM SOMEWHERE.

SAY, ARE YOU OKAY? YOU LOOK KINDA UNCOMFORTABLE...

NO, NO, I'M FINE. I GUESS I'LL SEE YOU AROUND SOME TIME.

SURE, BYE, DAN.



LAURIE, WAIT.

YOU KNOW THERE'S, UH, THERE'S ALWAYS MY PLACE.



OH, IT'D BE NO IMPOSITION. I HAVE A LOT OF ROOM THERE.

OH, I COULDN'T IMPOSE...

I MEAN, WE'RE BOTH FRIENDS; WE'RE BOTH IN THE SAME LINE OF WORK; WE'RE BOTH, UHH... WE'RE BOTH...



WE'RE BOTH LEFTOVERS



RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL.
OCTOBER 21ST, 1985:

WOKEN AT ELEVEN BY SHOUTING OUTSIDE. DISTURBED TO FIND I HAD FALLEN ASLEEP WITHOUT REMOVING THE SKIN FROM MY HEAD. TIRDER THAN I. THE NIGHT SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL.



ACROSS STREET, BOYS WITH SPRAY CANS WERE DEFAECING ABANDONED BUILDING. MEMORIZED THEIR DESCRIPTIONS, THEN PREPARED FOR WORK.



FIRST, PEELED OFF FACE, FOLDED IT, HID INSIDE JACKET. WITHOUT MY FACE, NOBODY KNOWS.

NOBODY KNOWS WHO I AM.



ON WAY OUT OF ROOM, MET LANDLADY. USUAL COMPLAINTS RE HYGIENE AND RENT. THERE WERE PURPLE BITE MARKS ON HER FAT WHITE NECK. FRESH ONES.

SHE REMINDS ME OF MY MOTHER.



OUT IN STREET, INSPECTED DEFAECED BUILDING: SILHOUETTE PICTURE IN DOORWAY, MAN AND WOMAN, POSSIBLY INDULGING IN SEXUAL FOREPLAY.

DIDN'T LIKE IT. MAKES DOORWAY LOOK HAUNTED.



ON FORTIETH AND SEVENTH, SAW DREIBERG AND JUSPEZYK LEAVING DINER. THEY DIDN'T KNOW ME.

AN AFFAIR, PERHAPS? DID JUSPEZYK ENGINEER DR. MANHATTAN'S EXILE TO MAKE ROOM FOR DREIBERG? ALSO, SHE HATED COMEDIAN. MUST INVESTIGATE FURTHER.



ENTERING DINER, BOUGHT COFFEE, THEN SAT WATCHING MY MAILDROP, IMMEDIATELY ACROSS STREET.

POSSERS-BY MADE VARIOUS DEPOSITS: CANDY WRAPPERS, NEWSPAPERS, A PAIR OF KEDS STRANGLED BY OWN LACES, TONGUES LOLLING OUT HORRIBLY.



THIS CITY IS AN ANIMAL, FIERCE AND COMPLICATED. TO UNDERSTAND IT I READ ITS DROPPINGS, ITS SCENTS, THE MOVEMENT OF ITS PARASITES...



I SAT WATCHING THE TRASHCAN, AND NEW YORK OPENED ITS HEART TO ME.

TELLA THE TRUTH, THIS WHOLE BLOODY MESS, IT GIVES ME A FUNNY FEELIN' INSIDE Y'KNOW?

THERE WAS A GULL IN MY STOMACH.

AFGHANISTAN: IS PAKISTAN NEXT?

IT'S LIKE, I DUNNO HOW LONG WE CAN HOLD ON.

AS THE SUN CLAMBERED PRECARIOUSLY OVER THE WORLD'S SLIPPERY RIM, THE ENORMITY OF MY SAVAGE BREAK-FAST STRUCK ME AND I GREW FAINT.

I'D SWALLOWED TOO MUCH BIRDFLESH, I'D SWALLOWED TOO MUCH HORROR.

I MEAN, WORLD WAR THREE, IT'S A NIGHTMARE. THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO CAN EVEN THINK ABOUT IT ARE THE ARMS COMPANIES.

YOU WATCH YOU WATCH THE FINANCIAL PAGES, THOSE GUYS, THEY'RE GONNA MAKE A KILLING.

EVERYTHING TILTED. ABOVE, SCAVENGERS WHEELED HUNGRILY JUST SCREAMS DRESSED IN FEATHERS.

THEY'RE GREEDY. GREEDY FOR CASH THEY WON'T HAVE THE TIME TO SPEND.

I MEAN, DON'T PEOPLE SEE THE SIGNS? DON'T THEY KNOW WHERE THIS IS HEADED?

HEY, MAN, I'M READING.

AFGHAN PAKISTAN

SEE? APATHY! EVERYBODY ESCAPIN' INTO COMIC BOOKS AN' T.V. MAKES ME SICK.

THE GULLS' SLAUGHTERHOUSE CHORUS AFFORDED NO DISTRACTION FROM MY NAUSEA, AND I FELL, RETCHING, TO MY KNEES BETWEEN MY KID'S TIMBERS, BOSUN RIDLEY STARED UP AT ME.

THIS SUDDEN CONFRONTATION WITH MORTALITY INDUCED AN ODD CLARITY WITHIN ME.

I MEAN, ALL THIS, IT COULD ALL BE GONE: PEOPLE, CARS, T.V. SHOWS, MAGAZINES...

EVEN THE WORD 'GONE' WOULD BE GONE.

SEE NEWS-VENDORS UNDERSTAND THEY GET TO SEE THE PICTURE

LIGHT-HEADED, I GAZED INTO THE INVERTED WORLD BENEATH, WHERE DROWNED GULLS CIRCLED. A MADMAN WITH BLOOD-CAKED LIPS GAZED BACK AT ME.

HIS EYES, HIS NOSE, HIS CHEEKS SEEMED INDIVIDUALLY FAMILIAR, BUT MERCIFULLY I COULD NOT PIECE THEM TOGETHER, NOT INTO A FACE I KNEW.

IT'S OUR CURSE WE SEE EVERY DAMNED CONNECTION.

EVERY DAMNED LINK.

AFGHANISTAN: IS PAKISTAN NEXT?

TIME'S RUNNING OUT, MR. VEIDT.

YOU BETTER HURRY.

ADRIAN

YES, YES, I KNOW.

IT'S THE TOY PEOPLE I HAVE TO SEE THIS MORNING, ISN'T IT?

THAT'S RIGHT. THEY WANT SOME NEW CHARACTERS IN THEIR OZYMANDIAS LINE. MAYBE SOME OF YOUR MAJOR VILLAINS OR SOMETHING.

OH WOW, WHAT IS IT WITH EVERYBODY TODAY? EVERYBODY'S ON THIS TOTAL DEATH TRIP.

THE MAJOR VILLAINS ARE ALL DEAD.

LIKE ON THE NEWS THIS MORNING, SOME GUY WENT NUTS, KILLED HIS KIDS, YOU SEE THAT?

NO, NO, I DIDN'T.

APPARENTLY, HE WAS SCARED THERE WAS GONNA BE A WAR! ISN'T THAT DUMB?

NOBODY WOULD BE CRAZY ENOUGH TO START ONE, SO WHY'S EVERYBODY ON SUCH A DOWNER ABOUT IT?

PERHAPS THEY DON'T HAVE YOUR YOUTH AND OPTIMISM.

WELL, I DUNNO I THINK MAYBE IT'S THE DECOR ROUND HERE. ALL THIS EGYPTIAN STUFF, IT'S VERY MORBID. VERY OBSESSED WITH DEATH.

DEATH WASN'T MORBID TO THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS. THEY SAW IT AS LAUNCHING ON A VOYAGE OF SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY.

DON'T YOU FIND THAT A COMFORTING THOUGHT?

ARE YOU KIDDING?

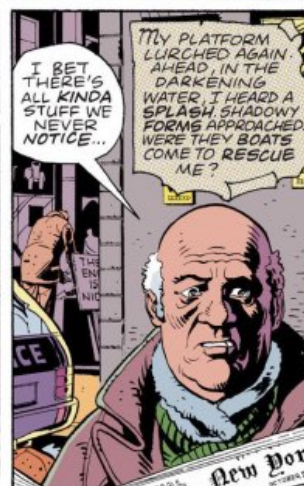
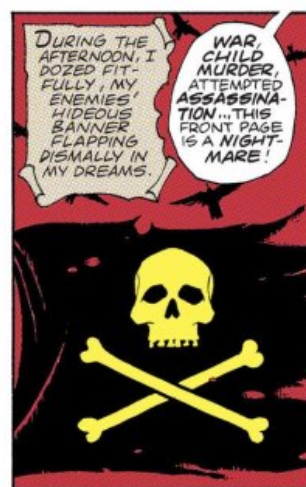
I MEAN, LOSING TEN POUNDS, THAT'S A COMFORTING THOUGHT. MY NEXT RAISE IS A COMFORTING THOUGHT.

GLORIA VANDERBILT, M.T.V., THESE ARE COMFORTING THOUGHTS...

SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY, ON THE OTHER HAND, I CAN TAKE IT OR...

OH, GOD. LOOK OUT, HE'S...









GOOD READERS, KNOW THIS: HADES IS WET. HADES IS LONELY.

TEETH THAT SEEMED TO MOVE INDEPENDENTLY OF THE LIPS TORE AT MY RAFT'S SUPPORTS. TINY PREHISTORIC EYES GLISTENED, SEEMING MAD WITH RAGE EVEN IN REPOSE.



WHATEVER WAS BENEATH MY BOAT COMMENCED A VIOLENT THRASHING, ALMOST SPILLING ME AMONGST THE GNAWING HORRORS.

I CLUNG TO MY MAST AS THE PLATFORM TILTED FURTHER. THE WATER BEGAN TO BOIL WHITE. SOMETHING WAS SURFACING.



HOW SHALL I DESCRIBE IT? IT WAS MASSIVE, LIKE NO SHARK I'D EVER HEARD TELL OF. WITH SKIN NEITHER BLACK NOR WHOLLY WHITE, BUT A PALE AND MOTTLED YELLOW.

FURTHER, IT WAS ENTANGLED IN MY ROPES.



TERRIFIED LEST IT SHOULD RE-SUBMERGE AND DRAG ME WITH IT, I FELT TO MY KNEES CLUTCHING A SPLINTER OF MAST THAT HAD SNAPPED OFF IN MY HAND.

THE SHARK'S STAINED MARBLE EYE LOOKED UP AT ME...



... AND, IN THAT INSTANT, WE KNEW EACH OTHER.



HALF BLIND; HALF DEAD; WHOLLY DERANGED BY AGONY; THE YELLOW LEVIATHAN ATTEMPTED TO SWIM AWAY, DRAGGING MY RAFT IN ITS BLOODY WAKE.

I HUNG ON DESPERATELY, CURSING IN THE BITTER, STINGING SPRAY.



THIS GODDAMN PAIN IN THE BUTT RAIN! DON'T IT EVER LET UP?

EVENTUALLY, THE SHARK DIED...



... AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER STOPPED SWIMMING.

WHO NEEDS IT? THIS WHOLE JOB'S LIKE PADDLING AGAINST THE TIDE!

WORKING THE STREETS THESE DAYS TAKES A REAL MENSCH.



MAN, CAR DRIVING'S BUSTING MY NUTS! GIMME A COPY HUSTLER.

HI, JOEY. HOW'S THE PROMETHEAN? STILL BRINGING LIGHT TO THE WORLD?

RELIEF WAS FLEETING, MY PROSPECTS STILL DARK.



WE SURE NEED LIGHT WITH THIS AFGHANISTAN CRAPOLA.

WHO'S THIS MONTH'S CENTER-FOLD?

THE OTHER SHARKS CIRCLED CLOSER THAN WAS COMFORTABLE.



IT'S PAKISTAN OUGHTTA WORRY. THEY'RE WIDE OPEN.

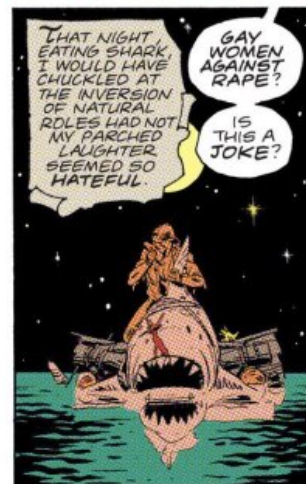
MMM. WELL, WE'RE ALL PRETTY VULNERABLE.

THEY WORRIED THE MORSELS FROM MY RAFT, WHICH I PRAYED WOULD SATISFY THEM.



THAT REMINDS ME. I GOTTA POSTER MAYBE YOU COULD DISPLAY, SO IT WON'T GET TORN UP.

AFTER EATING, THEY DEPARTED, REPEATE, FOR THE MOMENT, I WAS SAFE.



THAT NIGHT, EATING SHARK, I WOULD HAVE CHUCKLED AT THE INVERSION OF NATURAL ROLES HAD NOT MY PARCHED LAUGHTER SEEMED SO HATEFUL.

GAY WOMEN AGAINST RAPE? IS THIS A JOKE?



IT'S A BENEFIT GIG. NOW YOU GONNA NAIL IT UP OR AM I GONNA ALTER YOUR LOOKS?

MY RAFT GREW INCREASINGLY GROTESQUE, REFLECTING MY OWN GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION.

PINK TRIANGLE LIVE AT THE GAY WOMEN AGAINST RAPE



WITH SUCH THOUGHTS TO COMFORT ME, I DRIFTED ON, MASTLESS IN THE DAWN.

"BRINGING LIGHT TO THE WORLD." MY ASS.





GOT YOUR NOTE, BEEN WONDERING WHY YOU WANTED TO SEE ME.

SOMEBODY TRIED TO SHOOT THE WORLD'S SMARTEST MAN TODAY.

HEAR ABOUT THAT?



THE COMEDIAN, DR. MANHATTAN, OZYMANDIAS... SOMEBODY'S KILLING MASKS, JACOBI, SOMEBODY WANTS US DEAD.

MAYBE SOME OLD ENEMY. MAYBE SOMEONE YOU MET IN PRISON.



BEEN RUNNING THROUGH NAMES.

WAS IT UNDERBOSS? WAS IT JIMMY THE GIMMICK OR THE KING OF SKIN? LOT OF QUESTIONS. NO ANSWERS.

MAYBE YOU CAN ENLIGHTEN ME.



RORSCHACH?

24



THIS IS THE POLICE, RORSCHACH.

WE KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE.

IT'S ALL OVER.



NOW, IF THERE'S ANYBODY IN THERE WITH YOU, I WANT YOU TO SEND THEM OUT FIRST UNHARMED...

NO.

NO, NO, NO.



...THEN YOU FOLLOW THEM WITH BOTH HANDS CLEARLY VISIBLE. I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THIRTY SECONDS...

FRAMED. SET UP. WALKED RIGHT INTO IT.

STUPID STUPID STUPID.



... AFTER THAT I CAN'T MAKE ANY PROMISES FOR YOUR SAFETY.

C'MON, RORSCHACH. LET'S MAKE THIS A NICE CLEAN SURRENDER.

HEHN. NEVER. NEVER SURRENDER.



TIME'S TICKING AWAY, RORSCHACH. LISTEN, WE'VE GOT MEN OUT FRONT AND BACK, WE'VE GOT GUNS AND TEARGAS, WE GOT A WHOLE LOT OF HARDWARE HERE.

WEAPONS. YES...



TEN SECONDS. RORSCHACH, YOU'RE MAKING THIS TOUGH ON YOURSELF. FIVE. FOUR...

OKAY. THAT'S IT. TIME'S UP AND WE'RE COMING IN. I HOPE YOU'RE READY.



WHEN YOU ARE.

25



The following is reprinted from chapter five of the Treasure Island Treasury of Comics (Flint Editions, New York, 1984) with permission of the author and publishers.

science fiction and horror to the different atmospheric demands of pirate stories than many of his E.C. contemporaries, he was perhaps the best respected artist in a rapidly burgeoning field, and fans awaited the first issue of TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER with relish.

Nor were they disappointed. The first issue is classic Orlando. The script—by then-newcomer Max Shea—while sturdy enough, is clichéd and predictable in comparison with the work that Shea did later, and in that first issue was easily outshone by the darkly compelling majesty of Orlando's textures, shadows and faces.

The story served as an introduction to the vessel that lent the book its title, and which was itself apparently borrowed from a ship referred to in Brecht and Weill's 'THREEPENNY OPERA'. In that first story, three men with different paths through life have all been led to the same dockside tavern in search of work. The place is deserted save for a shadowy innkeeper who serves them ale in silence and the large, dark figure of a sea captain who sits at the next table and listens to them recount their stories to each other.

The stories are recounted as small, self-contained tales within the larger narrative that frames them, and are all effective if predictable twist-ending yarns that reveal the various tellers to be utterly unprincipled and worthless creatures capable of almost any act of treachery. Overhearing their stories, the sea captain says he is impressed and offers them passage upon his ship. By the time the men are aboard the ship and have noticed the dreadful, deathly smell that seems to exude from the ship's timbers, it is too late. The three hapless sailors learn that the ship is a vessel from Hell itself to take on board the souls of evil men so that they may walk its blood-stained decks for all eternity.

The identity of the captain is never made clear—is he meant to be Satan, or is he himself a victim of the ship? But this scarcely matters when confronted with Orlando's breathtaking rendition. From the marvelous scene in the first man's story where two ghouls fight to the death with shovels in the worm-infested tunnels beneath a churchyard, right through the haunting and evocative final shots of the horrible black ship drifting away into the white mist, the art is breathtaking, conveying a tangible sense of doom and evil even in those places where the writing fails to do so.

With the issues that followed, Orlando's art continued to shine while the scripts supplied by Shea

As discussed in our last chapter, the close of the 1950s saw E.C.'s line of Pirate titles dominating the marketplace from a near unassailable position. The brief surge of anti-comic book sentiment in the mid-fifties, while it could conceivably have damaged E.C. as a company, had instead come to nothing and left them stronger as a result. With the government of the day coming down squarely on the side of comic books in an effort to protect the image of certain comic book-inspired agents in their employ, it was as if the comic industry had suddenly been given the blessing of Uncle Sam himself—or at least J. Edgar Hoover. Unsurprisingly, as one of the few companies to anticipate the coming massive boom in pirate-related material, E.C. flourished and their hold upon the field remained unchallenged.

Until May, 1960. That date saw the first publication of an extraordinary new title from National Comics, now DC. The book was called 'Tales of the Black Freighter', and while its sales never

A MAN ON FIFTEEN DEAD MEN'S CHESTS

quite topped those of the E.C. giants such as PIRACY and BUCCANEERS, in terms of critical acclaim and influence upon later books of the same type, TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER made an impression upon the comic book landscape that remains to this day. Indeed, with DC comics currently reprinting the first classic thirty issues of the title and apparently meeting with considerable success, it would seem that its impact remains undiluted despite the quarter century that has elapsed since the original publication.

What exactly was it that made TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER so special? Despite the fact that nowadays most people are attracted by the controversy surrounding the later issues of the book, it should be remembered that this title was very popular from the outset. So: What was it that fascinated all those thousands of readers in the first place?

Well, to begin with, it was almost certainly the artwork of Joe Orlando, who drew the entire book from its first issue through issue nine, with the exception of GALAPAGOS JONES, a rather insipid back-up feature that lasted until issue six. Orlando, having been successfully tempted away from his well-received run of 'SARGASSO SEA STORIES' in E.C.'s PIRACY by National editor Julius Schwartz, was regarded as a star amongst pirate artists, and a prize catch. Having adapted more smoothly from



Tyger, Tyger
burning bright,
In the forests
of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
—William Blake

JOE ORLANDO, CIRCA 1953



EE
ELDSTEIN



also began to gradually improve in quality as the writer became used to the medium. With rapidly increasing confidence, Shea began attempting ideas for stories which at the time seemed wildly radical and innovative. The third issue's story, "Between Breaths", is told from the viewpoint of a man who is drowning, alternating between memories of his past life as they flash before his bulging eyes and horrific descriptions of what it is like to drown. Even read today, the story induces an almost tangible sense of suffocation, so that finishing the story and putting the book down is actually a relief. The closing images, with a multitude of dead and drowned men walking across the ocean bed towards the anchor rope of the Black

Freighter which they climb to take their rightful positions on board the ship, remain some of Orlando's most haunting work on the series.

By issue five, reader reaction was obviously in favor of the title, and the praise seemed to be divided equally between Orlando and Shea. According to insiders, receiving fan mail for the first time in his life had an adverse effect upon the writer, who began to see himself as the driving force of the book, becoming increasingly resentful of Orlando's clearly important role and harassing the artist with impossibly detailed panel descriptions and endless carping requests for revisions of artwork already drawn.

Despite growing friction within the creative team, both lasted on *TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER* until the ninth issue, when Orlando asked Schwartz to take him off the book, citing the ego of the writer as being the major factor in his decision. During those nine issues they crafted many memorable stories together, including the most famous of all, "The Shanty of Edward Teach", in issue seven. In this story, narrated in rhyme by the dead pirate Edward Teach (otherwise known as Blackbeard), we first begin to see the dark and pessimistic moral sensibilities showing that were later to form most of Shea's work on the series. These are more than adequately matched by Orlando's artwork, and there can be few readers of that period who will forget the heart-stopping close-up shot of Blackbeard, portrayed as violent and leering evil incarnate, in which he seems to look out at the reader and remind them that their own position is perhaps no more noble than Teach's own: "I tread a lurching timber world, a reeking salt-caked hell, and yet, perhaps, no worse a world than yours, where bishops stroll through charnel yards with pomanders to smell; where vile men thrive and love crawls on all fours."

After Orlando's departure, the art for the series was taken over by a relatively unknown but supremely capable artist named Walt Feinberg, previously best known for his work upon numerous western titles where he would often provide excellent fill-in issues that nevertheless seemed



to go unnoticed when slotted in between the work of great western comic artists such as Gil Kane and Alex Toth. Despite having Orlando's early work on the series to live up to, on *TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER*, Feinberg was finally given a chance to shine. For some reason, there are few incidents on record relating friction between Feinberg and Shea, and indeed the two of them continued to work together on the book until issue thirty-one, at which point Shea quit (perhaps the moody and temperamental writer was making a deliberate effort to control his behavior, having been taught an expensive lesson by Orlando's departure).

In any event the next twenty or so issues of the book became every bit as much instant classics as the Orlando issues had, a fact not hindered by Shea's gradually developing skill as a writer.

The stories that came from his pen in this period are uniformly dark and sinister, balancing metaphysical terrors against an unnerving sense of reality, particularly when applied to matters of mortality or sexuality. Readers who came to the series expecting a good rousing tale of swash-buckling were either repulsed or fascinated by what were often perverse and blackly lingering comments upon the human condition. Tales such as "The Figurehead", which deal unflinchingly with male homosexuality, and the harrowing "Marooned" spring most readily to mind.

In "Marooned", a two-part story occupying issues twenty-three and twenty-four of the book's run, we see Feinberg and Shea at their blood-freezing best. Unusual in that it is a one-character story narrated mostly in captions, "Marooned" tells the story of a young mariner whose vessel is wrecked by the Black Freighter before it can return to its hometown and warn it of the hellship's approach. Cast adrift on an uninhabited island with only his dead shipmates for company, we experience the frantic mariner's torment at the knowledge that while he is trapped on his island, the bestial crew of the Freighter are surely bearing down upon his town, his home, his wife and his children. Driven by his burning desire to avert this calamity, we see the mariner finally

escape from the island by what may be one of the most striking and horrific devices thus far in pirate comic books: digging up the recently buried and gas-bloated corpses of his shipmates, the mariner lashes them together and uses them as the floats on an improvised raft on which he hopes to reach the mainland (hence the title of this chapter.) On reaching the mainland safely



upon his horrific craft we see the increasingly distraught and dishevelled mariner trying desperately to reach his home, even resorting to murder to acquire a horse for himself. In the final scenes, thanks to the skillful interplay of text and pictures, we see that the mariner, though he has escaped from his island, is in the end marooned from the rest of humanity in a much more terrible fashion.

Problems set in for the book around issue twenty-five, when Shea began his controversial

TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER



"I TREAD A LURCHING TIMBER WORLD; A REEKING, SALT-CAKED HELL; AND YET, PERHAPS, NO WORSE A WORLD THAN YOURS, WHERE BISHOPS STROLL THROUGH CHARNEL YARDS WITH POMANDERS TO SMELL; WHERE VILE MEN THRIVE AND LOVE CRAWLS ON ALL FOURS."



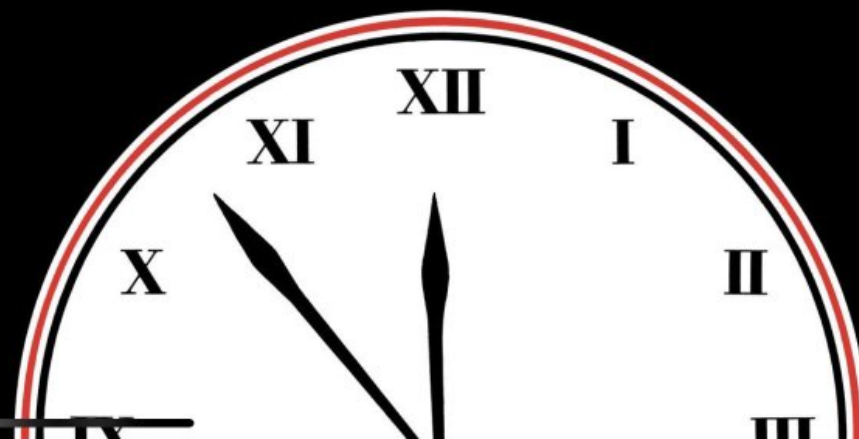


run of issues based around the contents of plundered books in the library of the Freighter's captain, including banned tomes supposedly originally headed for eternal suppression within the vaults of Vatican city when stolen en route by the pirates. Described as 'blatantly pornographic', four of the projected five stories were rejected by DC, which brought about the argument in which Shea quit the book and comics as well, going on to write such classic novels as the twice-filmed FOGDANCING.

At the time of this writing, Shea's whereabouts are unknown. In circumstances as strange



as those in any of his stories, the writer apparently vanished from his home one morning and has not been seen since, although police are continuing their inquiries. In his wake he leaves not only a string of excellent novels and screenplays, but also an exemplary run of pirate stories which today fetch mint prices of almost a thousand dollars according to the Overstreet Guide. Stories there to be rediscovered and reexamined, like so many of the fascinating sunken treasures lurking just beneath the surface of this fabulous and compelling genre.



CHAPTER V



FROM THE NOTES OF DR. MALCOLM LONG, OCTOBER 25TH, 1985.

OKAY, NOW I GUESS YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS...



FIRST INTERVIEW WITH KOVACS ...HE'S EVEN MORE DISTURBED THAN I'D HEARD, BUT I'M OPTIMISTIC. A SUCCESS HERE COULD MAKE MY REPUTATION.

I WANT YOU TO LOOK AT IT AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.



HE'S VERY WITHDRAWN, WITH NO EXPRESSION IN EITHER FACE OR VOICE. GETTING A RESPONSE IS OFTEN DIFFICULT.

WILL YOU LOOK AT IT, WALTER?

WILL YOU DO THAT FOR ME?



PHYSICALLY, HE'S FASCINATINGLY UGLY. I COULD STARE AT HIM FOR HOURS...EXCEPT THAT HE STARES BACK, WHICH I FIND UNCOMFORTABLE. HE NEVER SEEMS TO BLINK.



NEVERTHELESS, I'M CONVINCED I CAN HELP HIM. NO PROBLEM IS BEYOND THE GRASP OF A GOOD PSYCHOANALYST, AND THEY TELL ME I'M VERY GOOD. GOOD WITH PEOPLE.



WELL, WALTER? WHAT IS IT?



WHAT CAN YOU SEE?



A PRETTY BUTTERFLY.

HIS RESPONSES TO THE RORSCHACH BLOT TESTS WERE SURPRISINGLY BRIGHT AND POSITIVE AND HEALTHY. I REALLY THINK HE MIGHT BE GETTING BETTER.



I JUST WISH HE WASN'T SO INTENSE.



I JUST WISH HE WOULDN'T STARE AT ME LIKE THAT.

THE ABYSS GAZES ALSO



HIS FULL NAME IS **WALTER JOSEPH KOVACS**, BORN 1940. MOTHER'S NAME: SYLVIA JOANNA KOVACS, FORMERLY SYLVIA GLICK. HIS FATHER'S NAME IS UNKNOWN.

LET'S TRY ANOTHER SHALL WE?



HE'S 5'6" TALL AND WEIGHS 140 LBS. FOR HIS AGE, HE'S IN EXCELLENT PHYSICAL SHAPE DESPITE A LOT OF BRUISES AND LACERATIONS MOSTLY SUSTAINED DURING HIS ARREST.

HOW ABOUT THIS ONE?



THE POLICE HAVE BEATEN ON HIM PRETTY BADLY. DURING THE POLICE STRIKE OF '77 HE MADE SEVERAL INFLAMMATORY ANTI-COP STATEMENTS, AND THEY'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN.

C'MON, WALTER... DO IT FOR ME, HUH?



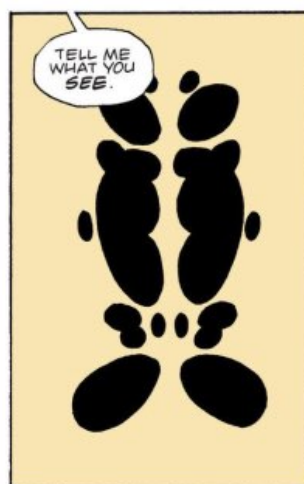
THE COPS DON'T LIKE HIM; THE UNDERWORLD DOESN'T LIKE HIM; NOBODY LIKES HIM. I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE QUITE SO ALIENATED. HOW ON EARTH DID HE GET LIKE THIS?

WALTER?



GOOD. THAT'S VERY GOOD.

OKAY, WALTER, NOW I WANT YOU TO TELL ME WHAT'S ON THE CARD...



TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.



NGH NGH NGH AAA!



AA! AOW! OH, GOD... OH, BABY...



NNNAH! OH, YES, OH, YOU'RE HURTING ME. OOH, YESSS...



OH, NOT SO FAST YOU'RE... OH... OOH... H.



OH, THAT'S RIGHT. THAT'S RIGHT... WHAT... HUHH... HUHH... HUHH...



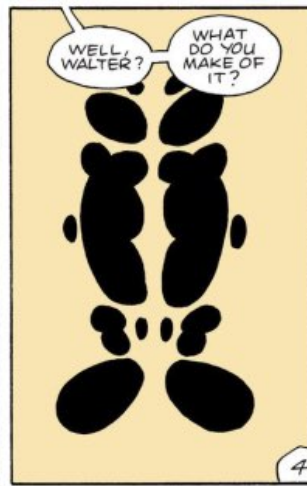
HEY! HEY, WHAT IS THIS? OH, GOD...



YOU DIDN'T TELL ME YOU HAD NO KIDS AROUND HERE! IT'S MY SON. LOOK, REALLY, IT DOESN'T MATTER. LET'S...

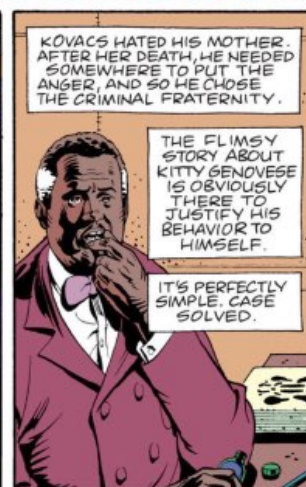
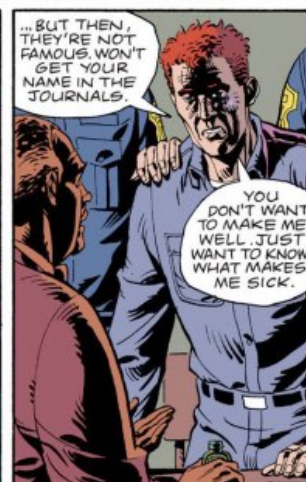


AHH, WHO NEEDS IT... KIDS CREEPING ROUND EVERYPLACE. I GET ENOUGH OF THIS CRAP AT HOME. OH, BABY, PLEASE, LISTEN. HE'S KINDA BACKWARDS. PLEASE DON'T GET MAD...

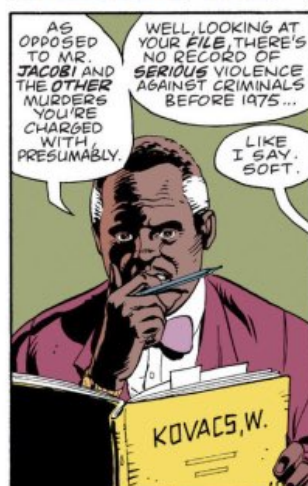
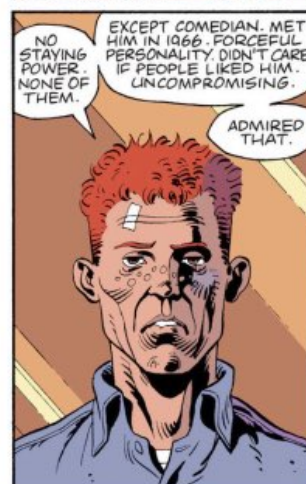




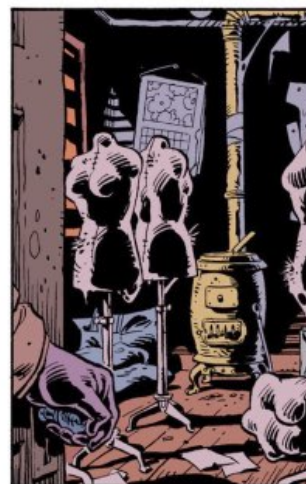


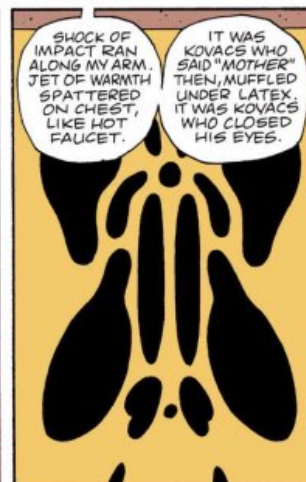










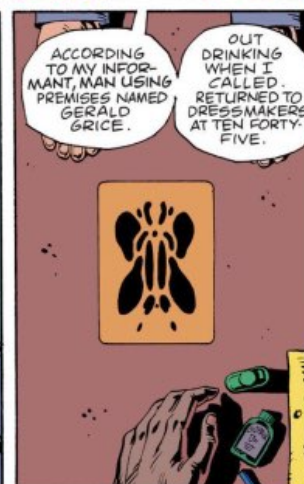


SHOCK OF
IMPACT RAN
ALONG MY ARM.
JET OF WARMTH
SPATTERED
ON CHEST,
LIKE HOT
FAUCET.

IT WAS
KOVACS WHO
SAID "MOTHER"
THEN, MUFFLED
UNDER LATEX.
IT WAS KOVACS
WHO CLOSED
HIS EYES.



IT WAS
RORSCHACH WHO
OPENED THEM
AGAIN.



ACCORDING
TO MY INFOR-
MANT, MAN USING
PREMISES NAMED
GERALD GRICE.

OUT
DRINKING
WHEN I
CALLED.
RETURNED TO
DRESSMAKERS
AT TEN FORTY-
FIVE.



DARK
BY THEN.

DARK AS
IT GETS.







"STOOD IN FIRELIGHT, SWELTERING BLOODSTAIN ON CHEST LIKE MAP OF VIOLENT NEW CONTINENT."

"FELT CLEANSÉD. FELT DARK PLANET TURN UNDER MY FEET AND KNEW WHAT CATS KNOW THAT MAKES THEM SCREAM LIKE BABIES IN NIGHT."



"LOOKED AT SKY THROUGH SMOKE HEAVY WITH HUMAN FAT AND GOD WAS NOT THERE. THE COLD, SUFFOCATING DARK GOES ON FOREVER, AND WE ARE ALONE"



"LIVE OUR LIVES, LACKING ANYTHING BETTER TO DO. DEVISE REASON LATER."

"BORN FROM OBLIVION; BEAR CHILDREN, HELL-BOUND AS OURSELVES; GO INTO OBLIVION."

"THERE IS NOTHING ELSE."



EXISTENCE IS RANDOM. HAS NO PATTERN SAVE WHAT WE IMAGINE AFTER STARING AT IT FOR TOO LONG.

NO MEANING SAVE WHAT WE CHOOSE TO IMPOSE.



"THIS RUDDERLESS WORLD IS NOT SHAPED BY VAGUE METAPHYSICAL FORCES. IT IS NOT GOD WHO KILLS THE CHILDREN. NOT FATE THAT BUTCHERS THEM OR DESTINY THAT FEEDS THEM TO THE DOGS."

IT'S US.

ONLY US.



"STREETS STANK OF FIRE. THE VOID BREATHED HARD ON MY HEART, TURNING ITS ILLUSIONS TO ICE, SHATTERING THEM."

"WAS REBORN THEN, FREE TO SCRAWL OWN DESIGN ON THIS MORALLY BLANK WORLD."

WAS RORSCHACH.



DOES THAT ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS, DOCTOR?



FROM THE NOTES OF DR. MALCOLM LONG, OCTOBER 28TH, 1985:

"WALKED HOME ALONG 40TH STREET. A BLACK MAN TRIED TO SELL ME A ROLEX WATCH. WHEN I KEPT WALKING HE STARTED SHOUTING 'NIGGER! HEY, NIGGER!'"



IGNORED HIM. BOUGHT PAPER. RUSSIANS CLAIM THAT FIGHTING SPILLING INTO PAKISTAN WAS ACCIDENTAL. NIXON SAYS U.S. WILL MEET CONTINUED SOVIET AGGRESSION WITH 'MAXIMUM FORCE.'

INSIDE ARTICLE ON NUCLEAR ALERT PROCEDURE.

New York Gazette
NIXON PROMISES MAXIMUM FORCE



IT SAYS THAT ANY DEAD FAMILY MEMBERS SHOULD BE WRAPPED IN PLASTIC GARBAGE SACKS AND PLACED OUTSIDE FOR COLLECTION.

ON 7TH AVENUE, THE HIROSHIMA LOVERS WERE STILL TRYING INADEQUATELY TO CONSOLE ONE ANOTHER.



HOME: GLORIA REMINDED ME THAT RANDY AND DIANA WERE COMING TONIGHT. LOOKED CROSS WHEN I CONFESSED I'D FORGOTTEN. WE DRESSED FOR DINNER IN SILENCE.



DINNER DIDN'T GO VERY WELL.

SO, MAL, HOW ARE THINGS GOING WITH THIS FAMOUS MASKED MANIAC OF YOURS?

OH, YES TELL US. HAS HE TOLD YOU ANYTHING WEIRD OR KINKY YET?



YES, YES, HE HAS.

TODAY HE TOLD ME ABOUT A GIRL WHO GOT KIDNAPPED.

LOOK, MAYBE THIS ISN'T SUCH A GOOD IDEA RIGHT NOW...



OH, BOY! WAS SHE TIED UP AND GAGGED AND HELP-LESS?

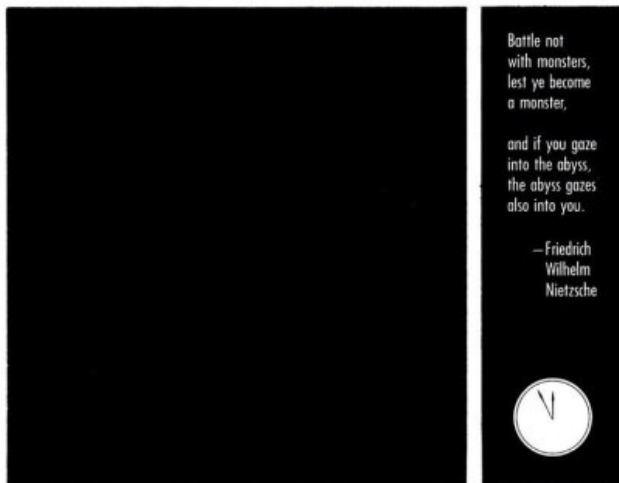
RAN-DEE!

NO, SHE WAS SIX. HER ABDUCTOR KILLED HER, BUTCHERED HER AND FED HER TO HIS GERMAN SHEPHERDS.



GLORIA?

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?



New York Police Department MANHATTAN



Form 2-18

WALTER J. KOVACS

FOR INTER-DEPARTMENTAL USE ONLY

(Please type or print clearly)

Name KOVACS, Walter Joseph

Address TRANSIENT

Born 3/21/40

Mothers name KOVACS, Sylvia Joanna (nee GLICK)

Fathers name Unknown

DETAILS OF ARREST

COPIES:

Walter Joseph Kovacs, A.K.A. RORSCHACH, was arrested on the night of Monday, October 21st when a squadron of police officers led by Detectives FINE and BOURQUIN surrounded the house of EDGAR WILLIAM JACOBI, A.K.A. EDGAR WILLIAM VAUGHN, A.K.A. WILLIAM EDGAR BRIGHT, A.K.A. MOLOCH, following an anonymous tip: Kovacs, who was on the premises at the time, injured two police officers while resisting arrest. Officer SHAW was admitted to hospital with minor burns, while Officer Greaves, who was shot at point blank range with a gas-powered grappling gun, has a shattered sternum and is still on the hospital's critical list as of this writing (10/22/85).

When the house was explored, the body of Edgar Jacobi was discovered in the kitchen, shot through the head. The murder weapon was found less than two feet away, and although there were no fingerprints on the gun it should be remembered that since Kovacs was wearing gloves when arrested, this lack of prints is hardly remarkable. Although Kovacs has denied the murder of Jacobi, given his previous history of violence against other criminals and his location in the murder house at the time, few other conclusions seem possible. Curiously, Kovacs has not denied the two other murders attributed to him, those of GERALD ANTHONY GRICE, unemployed, in the summer of 1975, and of wanted multiple rapist HARVEY CHARLES FURNISS two years later in the summer of 1977, immediately following the passage of the Keene Act into law.

At the time of his arrest, the contents of Kovacs' pockets were as follows: 1 battery powered flashlight; 5 individually wrapped cubes 'Sweet Chariot' chewing sugar; 1 map New York underground and subway system, dated 1968 with recent alterations drawn in with a red ballpoint pen; withered remains one red rose; one dollar fifty-nine cents in assorted loose change; one pencil; one notebook, pages filled with what is either an elaborate cypher or handwriting too cramped and eccentric to be legible; one broken bottle 'Nostalgia' cologne for men, possibly broken during leap from Jacobi's second story window during arrest; a residue of ground black pepper.

(If second sheet is needed refer to Form 6-2)



New York State Psychiatric Hospital West Branch

EARLY HISTORY: A SUMMARY:

Sylvia Kovacs came to New York from Ohio in the spring of 1935 with her husband, Peter Joseph Kovacs, whom she divorced in 1937 amidst mutual accusations of adultery and mental cruelty. After the divorce she had no further contact with her former husband, and for the next three years, she lived in a number of low-rent apartments, both alone and with a number of male acquaintances. Exactly when she drifted into prostitution as a means of meeting her mounting debts is uncertain, but it seems likely that her last semi-permanent relationship was with the true father of Walter Kovacs, who left her two months before the baby was born. Mrs. Kovacs was either unable or unwilling to provide any details concerning him other than that his name was 'Charlie'. Since shortly after the birth of her son we see Mrs. Kovacs' first arrest on charges of prostitution, we can perhaps assume that the additional cost of keeping an infant child may have been what necessitated this new occupation, and perhaps also speculate as to whether the above factors were the cause of the resentment and cruelty which Sylvia Kovacs showed to her son as he grew older.

In the July of 1951, the boy was admitted into care after viciously attacking two older boys in the street, partially blinding one of them. When questioned, Kovacs refused to talk about what had caused him to attack the boys, so it must be presumed that it was an unprovoked assault. Nevertheless, investigation of the circumstances the boy lived in revealed that he was regularly beaten and exposed to the worst excesses of a prostitutes lifestyle, and it was decided to place the child under care. He was admitted to the Lillian Charlton Home for Problem Children in New Jersey, where he remained until 1956, when it was decided that he was intelligent and stable enough to function in normal society. During his time at the home, removed from his mother's negative influence, Kovacs did very well at schoolwork, excelling particularly in the fields of literature and religious education as well as possessing an impressive skill in the areas of gymnastics and amateur boxing. While quiet and shy, especially with women, Kovacs was capable of long and well-reasoned conversations with his classmates and instructors, and struck most people as a serious but likeable child who was merely a bit withdrawn.

Aside from this, it is clear that his loathing of his mother remained undiminished. Shortly before Kovacs left the Charlton home in 1956, news was received that his mother, who had never made any attempt to contact her child and who had continued to become further involved in the world of small-time vice, had been murdered. Her body had been found in a back alleyway in the South Bronx, the cause of death being the forced ingestion of Drano cleaning fluid. A man named George Paterson, Mrs. Kovacs' pimp, was later charged



New York State Psychiatric Hospital West Branch

with her murder. When the news was broken to Walter Kovacs, then aged sixteen, his only comment was 'Good.' Shortly after this, Kovacs left the home to take up residence in the first of a series of small apartments and also take up full employment in a menial capacity within the garment industry, an occupation he apparently remained in up until the mid-seventies, maintaining a dual life between his daytime employment and his nocturnal activities in the guise of 'Rorschach'. Very little physical evidence exists that gives a clear insight into the psychology of this troubled man. Some police officers have tentatively identified him as a prophet-of-doom sandwich-board man seen locally over the last several years, but as Kovacs refuses to divulge his current address, if any, this is not provable at such an early stage in the investigation. Similarly, material relating to his early years is scarce, although I have been able to obtain photocopies of two pieces written by Kovacs during his stay at the Charlton Home, one being an essay written on the set topic of 'My Parents' when Kovacs was eleven, the other being a transcription of Kovacs' verbal recounting of a nightmare he suffered when he was thirteen.



Charlton Home

CONFIDENTIAL

by Walter Kovacs

My Parents

I have two parents, although actually, I don't have any. I never see my mom, but that's okay, although I would like to see my dad sometimes. I have never met my dad and I would sure like to. He had to leave our house when I wasn't even born, I guess because he couldn't get along with my mother. I would of done the same if I was him.

I used to ask my mom about my dad, but she doesn't talk much about him. His name was charlie, which is short for Charles although it has the same number of letters. She says she doesn't know his second name although how can you live with somebody if you don't know who they are? It is just stupid.

My mom told me she threw my dad out because he was always getting into political arguments with her because he liked President Truman and she didn't. I think perhaps my dad was some sort of aide to President Truman, because he liked him so much. Most probably he was out of the country during the war when I was growing up on some sort of mission. I think he was the kind of guy who would fight for his country and what was right. Maybe he got killed fighting the Nazis and he's with God now and that's how come he never managed to find me.

I like President Truman, the way Dad would of wanted me to. He dropped the atom bomb on Japan and saved millions of lives because if he hadn't of, then there would of been a lot more war than there was and more people would of been killed. I think it was a good thing to drop the atomic bomb on Japan.

That is all I have to say about my parents.



Charlton
Home

DREAM, 5/27/63

CONFIDENTIAL

"A man was in my old house, with my mom. They were eating some stuff like raw dough, and my mom choked on a piece. The guy with her tried to fish it out of her throat. He got his whole hand in her mouth and then it was like he had his whole arm down her throat. He told me to get a doctor, so I ran out of the room but the house was all different and there wasn't any doctor there anyway, so I went back to find mom. I was walking down this sort of hallway, and it was dark and I saw what looked like my mom and this guy dancing, old fashioned dancing at the other end of the room, and they didn't have any clothes on. They were sort of clopping around like a horse in a pantomine with two guys in a suit. When they got nearer, I saw they weren't dancing at all, they were squashed together like siamese twins, joined at the face and chest and stomach. They didn't have any face, you could only see their ears, two on either side of the head facing towards each other. Their hands were growing into each other as well, but they had all four legs free and they were sort of dancing sideways towards me down the dark hall like a crab, and there was something tripping 'em up, wrapped around their feet, and I looked down and I saw it was trousers and underwear and stuff. They were coming towards me, and then I woke up. I had feelings when I woke up. Dirty feelings, thoughts and stuff. The dream it sort of upset me, physically. I couldn't help it. I feel bad just talking about it."



MY
DREAM
BY
W.J. KOVACS
AGE 13

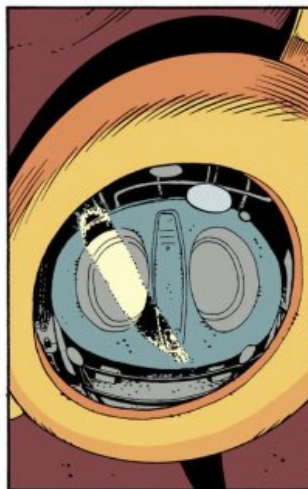
From the desk of: Dr. Malcolm

10/2

Walter Joseph Kovacs promises to be a complex case, especially in light of the extreme nature of his vigilante activities. It may be possible to identify a new syndrome that will help us to understand those other people who have in the past shared Kovacs masked vigilante activities. In any event, keep notes with an eye to possible future publication. First interview with Kovacs is Friday afternoon - looking forward to it.



CHAPTER VII





A BROTHER TO DRAGONS





OH, HEY, LISTEN, I'M NOT WORRIED. THAT FLAME THROWER BUTTON CONFUSES EVERYBODY. THE COMEDIAN ALMOST DID THE SAME THING, BACK IN '77.

MM.

DAN, I'M SAFELY ON BOARD. YOU CAN LET GO OF MY HAND NOW.



OH, I'M SORRY, I, UH...

LISTEN, I'D BETTER CHECK OUT THE SHIP'S OTHER SYSTEMS. YOU, UH, YOU JUST TAKE A LOOK AROUND.



I LIKE THE DESIGN. ALL CURVES AND NO CORNERS.

WELL, UH, ACTUALLY, ALONG WITH THE CONCEALED VENTS AND TURBINES, HAVING NO CORNERS HELPS MAKE THE SHIP RADAR INVISIBLE.

HMM. THIS CHAIR CONTROL IS STICKING A LITTLE...



RADAR INVISIBLE? BOY, YOU REALLY HAVE ALL THIS STUFF FIGURED OUT, DON'T YOU?

WHAT'S THIS CLOSET HERE?

SPECIAL AUXILIARY COSTUMES. AH... THAT'S BETTER.



HEY, THESE ARE TERRIFIC. IT'S LIKE, WHEN I WAS SMALL, MOM GOT ME THIS GI. JOE WITH ALL THESE NEAT LITTLE SPARE UNIFORMS.

WHAT'S THIS GREEN ONE?

UNDERWATER WORK. LET'S SEE... FLAMERS FUNCTIONING, WATER CANNON FUNCTIONING...



PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM AND SCREECHERS FUNCTIONING...

AIR-TO-AIR MISSILES FUNCTIONING...

FOG-SCREENS FUNCT...



AIR-TO-AIR MISSILES?

SURE. BUTTON RIGHT NEXT TO THE FLAME THROWER.



FOGSCREENS FUNCTIONING... RADIATION SHIELDS FUNCTIONING...

THAT'S IT! THAT DOES IT! NO MORE SMOKING. I'M ALL THROUGH. I QUIT!

I MEAN, TALK ABOUT DANGEROUS HABITS...



ELECTRO-MAGNETIC SYSTEMS FUNCTIONING... YUP, EVERYTHING'S OKAY.

I ALREADY STOPPED A COUPLE OF TIMES BEFORE, BUT IT GOT SO BORING AROUND THE ROCKEFELLER BASE, MY WILL POWER NEVER HELD OUT LONG.

PROBABLY WON'T THIS TIME, EITHER.



WELL, Y'KNOW, THAT'S A VERY NEGATIVE ATTITUDE... I MEAN, I HAD A DANGEROUS HABIT MYSELF ONCE.

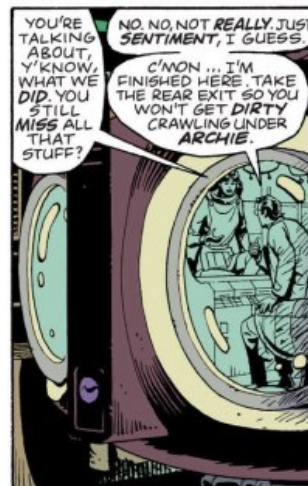
YOU DID? WHAT HAPPENED?



I QUIT. NO PROBLEM.

OH, I MEAN, SURE, AT FIRST I USED TO GET CRAVINGS BUT I HELD ON IN THERE.

THESE DAYS IT HARDLY BOTHERS ME AT ALL.



YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, Y'KNOW, WHAT WE DID. YOU STILL MISS ALL THAT STUFF?

NO, NO, NOT REALLY. JUST SENTIMENT, I GUESS.

C'NON... I'M FINISHED HERE. TAKE THE REAR EXIT SO YOU WON'T GET DIRTY CRAWLING UNDER ARCHIE.



ARCHIE?

OH, UH, WELL, IT'S SHORT FOR ARCHIMEDES, MERLIN'S PET OWL IN 'THE SWORD IN THE STONE'. I SAW THE DISNEY VERSION ONCE AND... WELL, YOU KNOW, IT'S JUST A STUPID NICKNAME.

HERE'S THE EXIT. WATCH YOUR STEP.



YOU WERE REALLY INTO ALL THAT KNIGHTS-IN-ARMOR FANTASY STUFF AS A KID?

YEAH. I GUESS IT FIGURES... Y'KNOW, BEING A CRIMEFIGHTER AND EVERYTHING. IT WAS JUST THIS ADOLESCENT, ROMANTIC THING.



NOTHING WRONG WITH ADOLESCENT ROMANCE, ALTHOUGH MOST PEOPLE DON'T SPEND SO MUCH MONEY GETTING IT.

I MEAN, THIS BASEMENT, IT'S ENORMOUS. WHY NOT SELL SOME OF THIS OLD EQUIPMENT AND TURN IT INTO, I DUNNO, A GYM OR SOMETHING?



ALREADY GOT ONE.

NO... I DON'T KNOW WHY I HANG ONTO THIS STUFF I MEAN, I KNOW THE ROMANCE IS OVER...

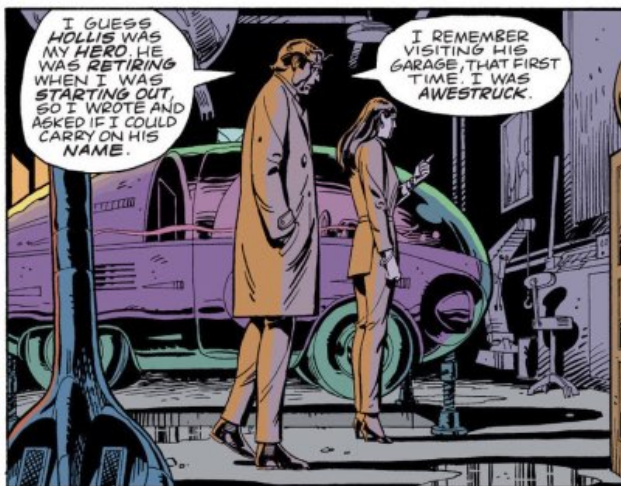
...I GUESS I JUST DON'T HAVE THE HEART TO THROW OUT ALL THE ENGAGEMENT PRESENTS.



OH, DAN! YOU SOUND LIKE MY MAIDEN AUNT BELLA.

WHAT GOT YOU INTO THIS BUSINESS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

WELL, I WAS RICH, BORED, AND THERE WERE ENOUGH OTHER GUYS DOING IT SO I DIDN'T FEEL RIDICULOUS...



I GUESS HOLLI'S WAS MY HERO. HE WAS RETIRING WHEN I WAS STARTING OUT, SO I WROTE AND ASKED IF I COULD CARRY ON HIS NAME.

I REMEMBER VISITING HIS GARAGE, THAT FIRST TIME. I WAS AWESTRUCK.



I MEAN...THERE I WAS, HANGING OUT WITH A REAL HERO, BEING HIS FRIEND AND EVERYTHING.

BEING A CRIME-FIGHTER, Y'KNOW? LIKE PART OF A BROTHERHOOD OR SOMETHING...



THAT'S WHY I SORT OF REGRETTED THE CRIMEBUSTERS FALLING THROUGH BACK IN SIXTY- WHENEVER IT WAS.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE JOINING THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE; BEING PART OF A FELLOWSHIP OF LEGENDARY BEINGS...



...BUT EVENTUALLY I REALIZED THE COMEDIAN WAS RIGHT: IT'S ALL CRAP DRESSED UP WITH A LOT OF FLASH AND THUNDER.

I MEAN, WHO NEEDS ALL THIS HARDWARE TO CATCH HOOKERS AND PURSE-SNATCHERS? I MEAN REALLY?

HMM. WHAT'S THAT?



PROTOTYPE EXO-SKELETON. FIRST TIME I TRIED MOVING IN IT, IT BROKE MY ARM. NEVER AGAIN.

JESUS. THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE SORT OF COSTUME THAT COULD REALLY MESS YOU UP.



IS THERE ANY OTHER SORT?



I MEAN, LOOK AT RORSCHACH. THE CONDITION HE'S IN. HE WAS NORMAL ONCE.

SURE, HE WAS QUIET, HE WAS GRIM, BUT HE STILL HAD ALL THE BUTTONS ON HIS OVER-COAT.



SOON AFTER I STARTED OUT, WE BLITZED THE BIG FIGURE TOGETHER. TACTICALLY, RORSCHACH WAS BRILLIANT. HE WAS SO UNPREDICTABLE.

WHAT I'M SAYING IS, HE WAS RATIONAL THEN.

OVER THE YEARS, THAT MASK'S EATEN HIS BRAINS.



WASN'T ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT THOSE YEARS? I MEAN, ALL THESE GADGETS YOU DESIGNED... IF THAT WAS ME, I'D FEEL PROUD.

YOU'RE REALLY INTERESTED IN ALL THIS STUFF?

WELL, UH, DID I SHOW YOU MY GOGGLES?



I MEAN, IF YOU LIKE THIS SORT OF GARBAGE... I GUESS IT'S PRETTY KITSCH OR CAMP OR WHAT-EVER...

DAN, DON'T BE SO SELF-DEPRECATING. I WAS ADMIRING THE GOGGLES EARLIER.

THOSE LENSES ARE PRETTY DUSTY...



HMM. THEY WORK BEST IN DARKNESS, SO I'LL KILL THE LIGHTS. I'VE GOT THIS LITTLE CONSOLE IN MY BELT HERE...

WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU GOT IN THERE? CHOCOLATE RATIONS? BOY SCOUT KNIFE? ARMY ISSUE CONTRACEPTIVES?



HA HA HA HA. NO, IT'S MOSTLY PRETTY BORING... RESPIRATOR MASKS, SMOKE BOMBS, FINGERPRINT KIT, POCKET LASER, THIS LITTLE CONSOLE...

YOU KNOW.

THE USUAL STUFF.



OKAY, NOW IF I SNUFF THE LIGHTS IN THE SHIP'S CABIN AND IN THE KITCHEN UPSTAIRS...

HA! SHOW-OFF. HEY, WHAT ARE THESE GOGGLES SUPPOSED TO DO? I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING. ARE THEY BROKEN?



NO, YOU JUST PRESS HERE TO ROTATE THE LENSES A QUARTER TURN, LIKE THIS.

AS I REMEMBER, THEY WORK PRETTY GOOD. NO MATTER HOW BLACK IT GOT, WHEN I LOOKED THROUGH THESE GOGGLES...



...EVERYTHING WAS CLEAR AS DAY.

OOOOH!



DAN: THIS IS FABULOUS. THIS MUST BE WHAT IT'S LIKE HAVING POWERS...Y'KNOW, SPECIAL VISION AND LIKE THAT.

IT MUST BE SO STRANGE BEING JON. HE CAN SEE NEUTRINOS...

HM. WELL, IT'S GETTING LATE...



OH, OKAY. I'M ALL THROUGH PLAYING WITH THEM, ANYWAY.

...THOUGH MAYBE I'LL BORROW THEM FOR PALE HORSE'S MADISON SQUARE GARDEN CONCERTS IN EARLY NOVEMBER. THEY'RE KINDA DEVO.

DEVO? JUST A SECOND... LET'S PUT THE LIGHTS ON UP- STAIRS.



SURE. DEVO. "ARE WE NOT MEN?" BAND FROM OHIO. LATE SEVENTIES.

OH, WELL, I'M MOSTLY INTO BILLIE HOLIDAY, NELLIE LUTCHER, LOUIS JORDAN... STUFF LIKE THAT.

DO YOU MISS JON?



JON? NO... ALTHOUGH I KEEP THINKING I SHOULD.

BUT, YOU SEE, EVEN WHEN I WAS WITH HIM, HE WAS NEVER REALLY THERE. THERE WAS NO REAL HUMAN CONTACT; NO PHYSICAL CONTACT...

I WAS SO LONELY...



YES, I KNOW. LAURIE SOMETIMES I'VE FELT...

...AND, LIKE, IT WASN'T JUST THE ISOLATION. I USED TO WORK OUT IN A GYM A LOT AS A KID, ALL BY MYSELF, SO BEING ALONE'S NO BIG DEAL.



I MEAN, TAKE YOU, FOR EXAMPLE. YOU LIKE LIVING HERE ON YOUR OWN, SO...

DAN? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.



WELL, WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT AT ROCKEFELLER I GOT THE BAD SIDE OF ISOLATION WITHOUT THE COMPENSATIONS, LIKE PRIVACY.

THERE WAS NOBODY TO TALK TO, BUT I'D ALWAYS FEEL LIKE I WAS UNDER OBSERVATION.

HMM.



IT MUST BE GREAT FOR YOU, HAVING A SECRET IDENTITY, A SECRET IDENTITY, A SECRET IDENTITY, A SECRET IDENTITY...

YOU CAN JUST COME DOWN HERE TO HANG OUT AND THERE'S NOBODY CHECKING UP ON YOU...

NOBODY WATCHING YOU.



THESE DAYS, I FEEL LIKE SOMETHING'S WATCHING MY EVERY MOVE.

ISN'T THERE?



DAN, YOU SOUND LIKE RORSCHACH. THIS 'MASK KILLER' THING, IT DOESN'T HOLD UP.

I MEAN, JON LEFT EARTH OF HIS OWN FREE WILL, RORSCHACH WAS CAUGHT RED-HANDED COMMITTING MURDER, FOR GOD'S SAKE...

WHERE'S THE CONSPIRACY?

JUST MY CLOTHES, FORWARDED FROM ROCKEFELLER, MY OLD COSTUME, STUFF LIKE THAT.

OH, YEAH, AND A LETTER TELLING ME I DON'T HAVE CANCER. HOPE YOU DON'T MIND ME USING YOUR ADDRESS.

UH, NO. I DIDN'T.

OH, YEAH, AND A LETTER TELLING ME I DON'T HAVE CANCER. HOPE YOU DON'T MIND ME USING YOUR ADDRESS.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.

UHH, NOTHING. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THESE LICKS OF HAIR IN FRONT TIDY. PLEASE... CARRY ON.



I DON'T KNOW. THAT RORSCHACH MURDER THING SOUNDED FUNNY. HE WOULDN'T JUST SHOOT SOMEBODY. IT'S TOO ORDINARY.

I WASN'T REALLY THINKING ABOUT THE MASK KILLER, BUT...

ANYWAY, IT'S ALMOST SIX O'CLOCK NEWS TIME. WANT COFFEE?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?



SURE. BLACK AS THE DEVIL AND SWEET AS A STOLEN KISS.

WHAT?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

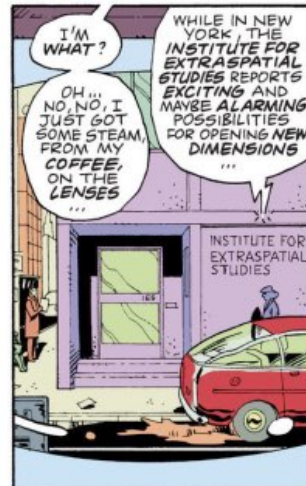
NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

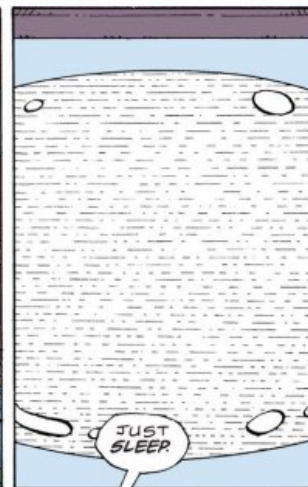
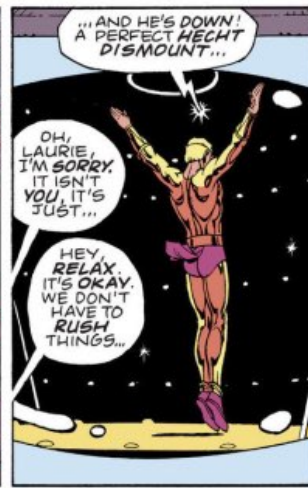
NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

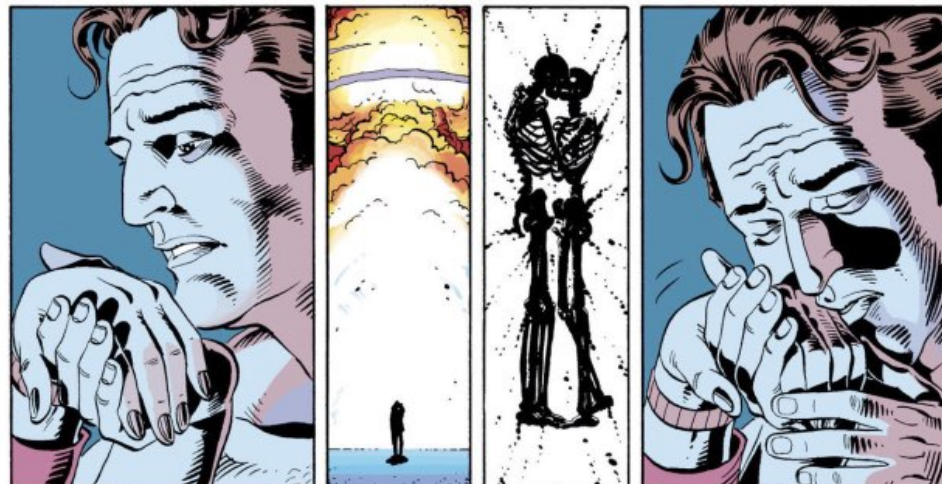
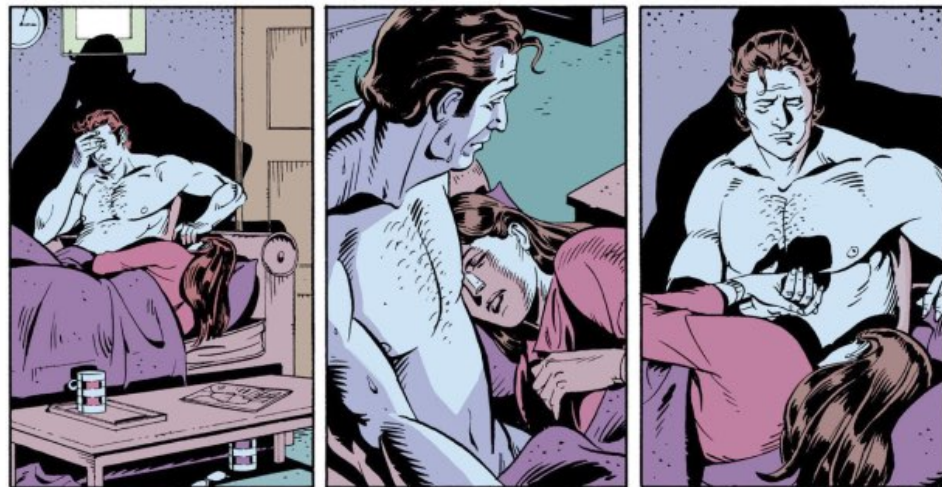
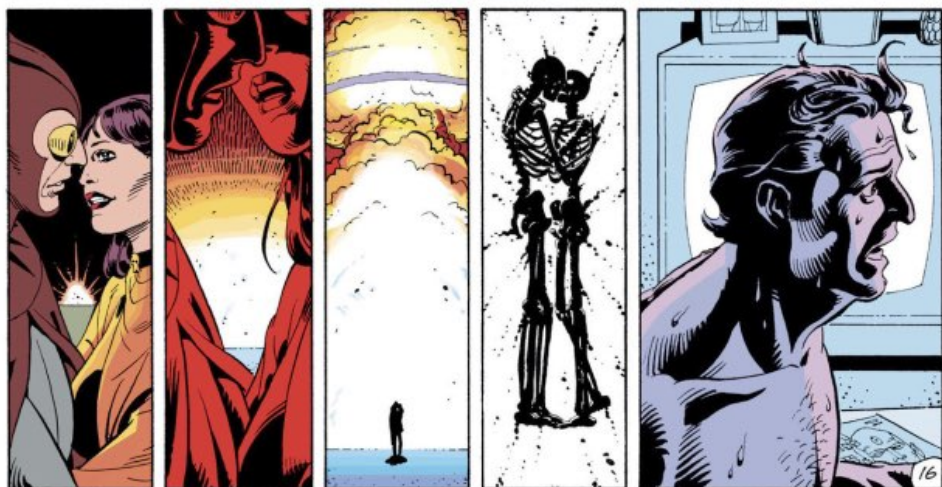
NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?

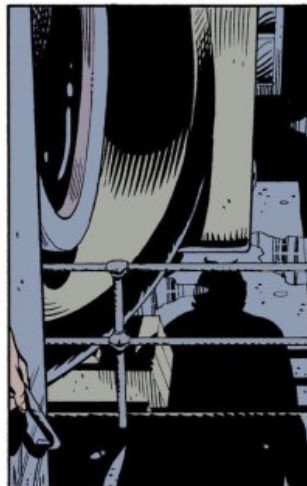
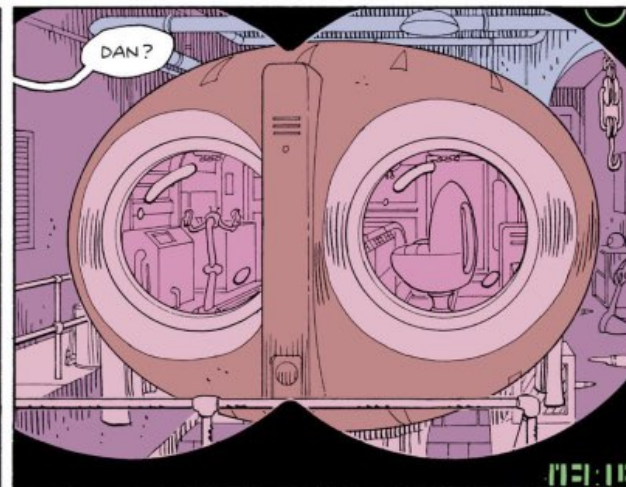
NO MILK: TWO SUGARS. POLISH FOLK SAYING, OH, INCIDENTALLY, DID YOU SEE THAT PACKAGE THAT ARRIVED FOR ME?







UHHHNN.
JON...?
DID YOU
SHUB UBBUH
NUHNUHUUH
...
MMMM.



DID YOU GO TO THE BATHROOM, OR...
DOWN HERE.



I MEAN, IT'S ONLY A QUARTER AFTER THREE...



A DREAM. I...I JUST HAD A DREAM IS ALL.



IT'S THIS WAR, THE FEELING THAT IT'S UN-AVOIDABLE. IT MAKES ME FEEL SO POWER-LESS.







UH, WILL THIS THING STILL FLY OKAY AND EVERY-THING?

SURE, I RAN A SCAN ON ARCHIE EARLIER: NOT A FEATHER OUT OF PLACE. LET ME JUST PLUG THE STEERING COLUMN IN OVER HERE...

HMM. GOT SOOT IN HIS EYES...



OH! WE'RE MOVING.

YES, I'M SORRY... HE ALWAYS GIVES THAT LITTLE LURCH WHEN HE STARTS UP. CAN'T SEEM TO IRON IT OUT.

BETTER WASH THESE WINDOWS DOWN BEFORE WE HIT THE EXIT TUNNEL...



WOW. IT'S LIKE BEING ON A GHOST TRAIN: THE DOORS BUMP OPEN, YOU ENTER THE TUNNEL...

HEH. ACTUALLY IT'S A FORGOTTEN SECTION OF SUBWAY I CONVERTED AFTER BUYING THE BUILDING ABOVE.

LET'S PICK UP A LITTLE SPEED HERE.



IS IT OKAY TO GO THIS FAST? WHERE DOES THE TUNNEL COME OUT?

A DERELICT WAREHOUSE TWO BLOCKS NORTH, I OWN THAT, TOO.

LET'S JUST HOPE THE STEEL FLOOD DOORS OVER THE END OF THE TUNNEL HAVEN'T RUSTED SHUT.



RUSTED SHUT? DAN! ARE YOU...?

RELAX. JUST KIDDING.

OKAY, IN A MOMENT I'M GOING TO TAKE HIM UP JUST HAVE TO ARRANGE SOME CLOUD COVER WITH THE FOG-SCREENS...



FOG-SCREENS?

DRY ICE, ARCHIE BREATHES SMOKE AS WELL AS FIRE.

OKAY NOW, HOLD TIGHT. I'M ROLLING BACK THE WAREHOUSE ROOF.

HERE WE GO...



THIS IS GREAT. REMEMBERING WHICH SWITCHES, WHICH SEQUENCES. IT'S LIKE THE OLD INSTINCTS ARE IMPRINTED ON MY FINGER-TIPS...

THERE'S THE ASTRODOME, LIKE A BUMPER ON A GIANT PINBALL MACHINE...

DAN? WHAT'S THAT DOWN ON OUR RIGHT?



WAIT A MINUTE, LET'S GET SOME CAMERAS ON THAT SO WE CAN...

HMM. TENEMENT BUILDING ON FIRE. LOOKS LIKE PEOPLE TRAPPED THERE ON THE UPPER STORIES.

OH, JESUS, I SEE KIDS. CAN YOU DO ANYTHING?



"LET'S HOPE SO. TAKING HIM DOWN NOW..."

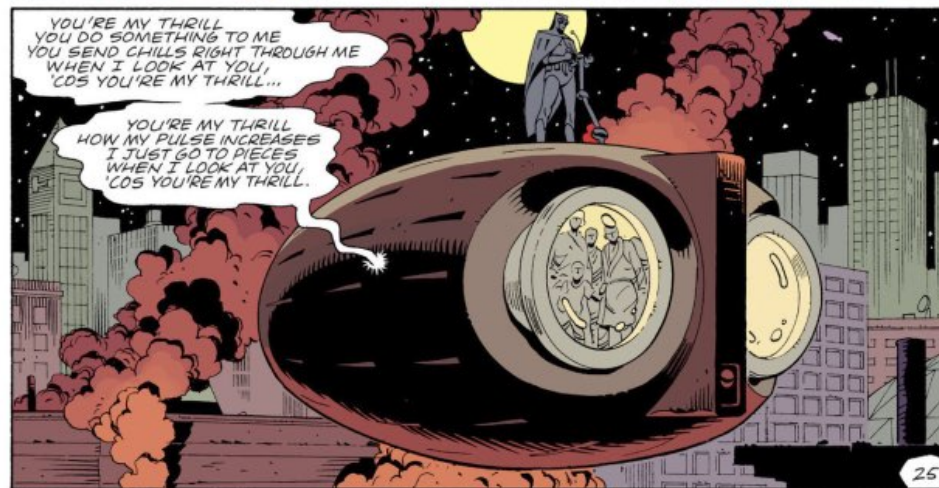
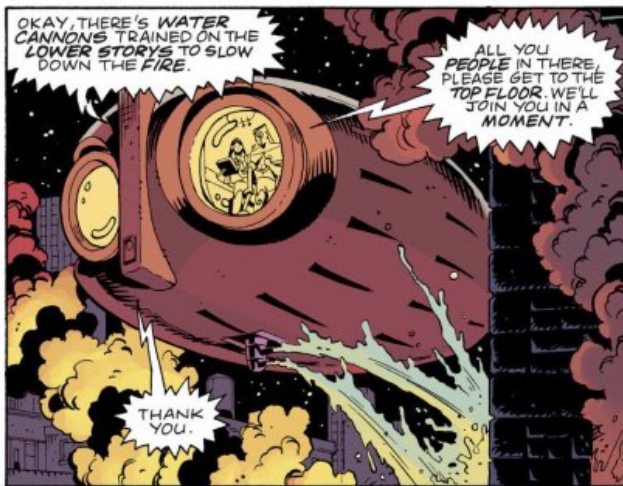
OUTTA MY WAY, BITCH, I CAN'T BREATHE...

OH, GOD, PLEASE SAVE US! WE AIN'T DONE ANYTHING! MY BABY, HE AIN'T DONE NOthin'. OH JESUS, LORD, I'M PRAYING TO YOU...

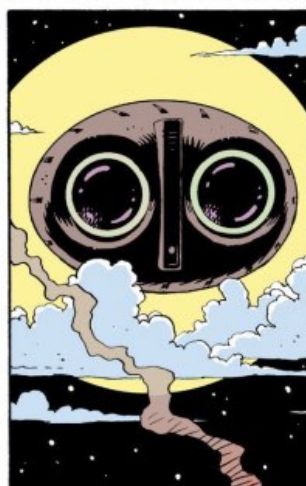
NOMEEEE!



PLEASE STAY CALM. YOUR PREDICAMENT HAS BEEN NOTICED AND THE SITUATION IS BEING ATTENDED TO.



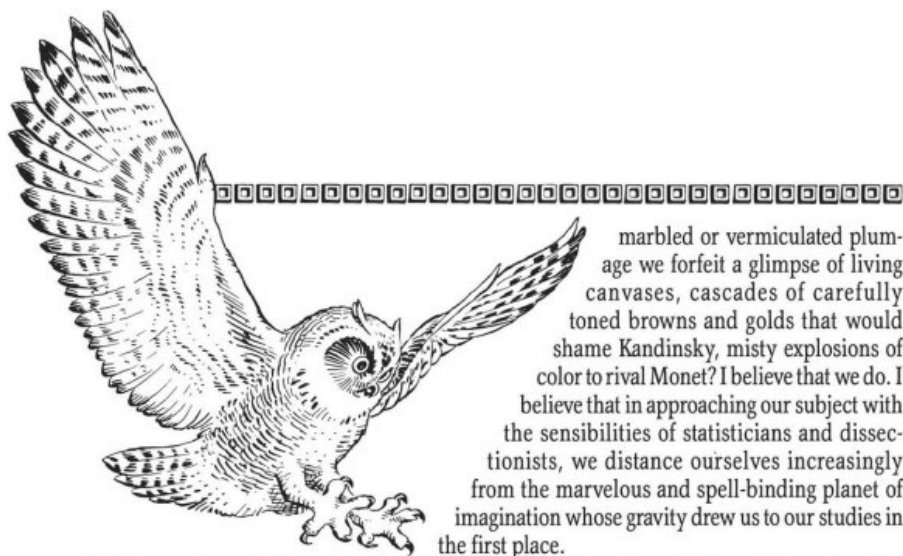




BLOOD FROM THE SHOULDER OF PALLAS

■■■■■■■■■■ BY DANIEL DREIBERG ■■■■■■■■■■

Is it possible, I wonder, to study a bird so closely, to observe and catalogue its peculiarities in such minute detail, that it becomes invisible? Is it possible that while fastidiously calibrating the span of its wings or the length of its tarsus, we somehow lose sight of its poetry? That in our pedestrian descriptions of a



marbled or vermiculated plumage we forfeit a glimpse of living canvases, cascades of carefully toned browns and golds that would shame Kandinsky, misty explosions of color to rival Monet? I believe that we do. I believe that in approaching our subject with the sensibilities of statisticians and dissectionists, we distance ourselves increasingly from the marvelous and spell-binding planet of imagination whose gravity drew us to our studies in the first place.

This is not to say that we should cease to establish facts and to verify our information, but merely to suggest that unless those facts can be imbued with the flash of poetic insight then they remain dull gems; semi-precious stones scarcely worth the collecting.

When we stare into the catatonic black bead of a Parakeet's eye we must teach ourselves to glimpse the cold, alien madness that Max Ernst perceived when he chose to robe his naked brides in confections of scarlet feather and the transplanted monstrous heads of exotic birds. When some ocean-going Kite or Tern is captured in the sharp blue gaze of our Zeiss lenses, we must be able to see the stop motion flight of sepia gulls through the early kinetic photographs of Muybridge, beating white wings tracing a slow oscilloscope line through space and time.

Looking at a hawk, we see the minute differences in width of the shaft lines on the underfeathers where the Egyptians once saw Horus and the burning eye of holy vengeance incarnate. Until we transform our mere sightings into genuine visions; until our ear is mature enough to order a symphony from the shrill pandemonium of the aviary; until then we may have a hobby, but we shall not have a passion.

When I was a boy, my passion was for owls. During the long summers of the early fifties, while the rest of the country was apparently watching the skies for incoming flying saucers or Soviet missiles, I would hare across the New England fields in the heart of the night, sneakers munching through the dried grass and bracken towards my watch, where I would sit peering upwards in hope of a different sort of spectacle, ears straining for the weird scream that meant an old bird was out combing the dark for sustenance, a mad hermit screech, glaringly distinct from the snoring hiss of a younger owl.

Somewhere over the years; sometime during the yawning expanse between those snug years in the afterglow of a war well won and these current times, huddled in the looming shadow of a war unwinnable; someplace along the line my passion got lost, unwittingly refined from the original gleaming ore down to a banal and lusterless filing system. This gradual tarnishing had gone unnoticed, unchecked, finally calcifying into unthinking habit. It was not until comparatively recently that I managed to catch a dazzling glimpse of the motherlode through the accumulated dust of methodical study and academia: visiting a sick acquaintance at a hospital in Maine on behalf of a mutual friend, walking back across the shadowy parking lot with my mind reduced to blankness by the various concerns of the day, I suddenly and unexpectedly heard the cry of a hunting owl.



It was a bird advanced in years, its shriek that of a deranged old man, wheeling madly through the dark and freezing sky against the ragged night clouds, and the sound halted me in my footsteps. It is a fallacy to suppose that owls screech to startle their prey from hiding, as some have suggested; the cry of the hunting owl is a voice from Hell, and it turns the scrabbling voles to statues, roots the weasel to the soil. In my instant of paralysis there on the glistening macadam, between the sleeping automobiles, I understood the purpose behind the cry with a biting clarity, the way I'd understood it as a boy, belly flat against the warm summer earth. In that extended and timeless moment, I felt the kinship of simple animal fear along with all those other creatures much smaller and more vulnerable than I who had heard the scream as I had heard it, were struck motionless as I was. The owl was not attempting to frighten his food into revealing itself. Perched with disconcerting stillness upon its branch for hours, drinking in the darkness through dilated and thirsty pupils, the owl had already spotted its dinner. The screech served merely to transfix the chosen morsel, pinning it to the ground with a shrill nail of blind, helpless terror. Not knowing which of us had been selected, I stood frozen along with the rodents of the field, my heart hammering as it waited for the sudden clutch of sharpened steel fingers that would provide my first and only indication that I was the predetermined victim. The feathers of owls are soft and downy; they make no sound at all as they drop through the dark stratas of the sky. The silence before an owl swoops is a V-Bomb silence, and you never hear the one that hits you.

Somewhere away in the crepuscular gloom beyond the yellow-lit hospital grounds I thought I heard something small emit its ultimate squeal. The moment had passed. I could move again, along with all the relieved, invisible denizens of the tall grass. We were safe. It wasn't screaming for us, not this time. We could continue with our nocturnal business, with our lives, searching for a meal or a mate. We were not twitching nervelessly in stifling, stinking darkness, head first down the gullet of the swooping horror, our tails dangling pathetically from that vicious scimitar beak for hours before finally our hind legs and pelvic girdle are disgorged, our empty, matted skin curiously inverted by the process.

Although I had recovered my motor abilities in the aftermath of the owl's shriek, I found that my equilibrium was not so easily regained. Some facet of the experience had struck a chord in me, forged a connection between my dulled and jaded adult self and the child who sprawled in faint starlight while the great night hunters staged dramas full of hunger and death in the opaque jet air above me. An urge to experience rather than merely record had been rekindled within me, prompting the thought processes, the self-evaluation that has led to this current article.

As I remarked earlier, this is not to suggest that I immediately foreswore all academic endeavor and research pertaining to the field in order to run away and eke out some naked and primordial existence in the woods. Quite the contrary: I hurled myself into the study of my subject with renewed fervor, able to see the dry facts and arid descriptions in the same transforming magical light that had





favored them when I was younger. A scientific understanding of the beautifully synchronized and articulated motion of an owl's individual feathers during flight does not impede a poetic appreciation of the same phenomenon. Rather, the two enhance each other, a more lyrical eye lending the cold data a romance from which it has long been divorced.

Immersing myself avidly in dusty and long untouched reference books I came across forgotten passages that would make me almost breathless, dreary-looking tomes that would reveal themselves to be treasure houses of iridescent wonder. I rediscovered many long-lost gems amongst the cobwebs, antique and functional stretches of descriptive prose which nonetheless conveyed the violent and terrible essence of their subject matter effortlessly.

I stumbled once more across T.A. Coward's engrossing account on an encounter with an Eagle Owl: "In Norway I saw a bird that had been taken when in down from the nest, but it not only assumed the typical terrifying attitude, but made frequent dashes at the wire, striking with its feet. It puffed its feathers out, framed its head in its wings, and fired off a volley of loud cracks from its snapping beak, but what struck me most was the scintillating flash of its great orange eyes."

Then of course there is Hudson's account of the Magellanic Eagle-Owl which he wounded in Patagonia: "The irides were of a bright orange color, but every time I attempted to approach the bird they kindled into great globes of quivering yellow flame, the black pupils being surrounded by a scintillating crimson light which threw out minute yellow sparks into the air." In long-buried words such as the foregoing I caught some of the searing, apocalyptic intensity that I had felt in that wet hospital parking lot in Maine.

Nowadays, when I observe some specimen of *Carine noctua*, I try to look past the fine grey down on the toes, to see beyond the white spots arranged in neat lines, like a firework display across its brow. Instead, I try to see the bird whose image the Greeks carved into their coins, sitting patiently at the ear of the Goddess Pallas Athene, silently sharing her immortal wisdom.

Perhaps, instead of measuring the feathered tufts surmounting its ears, we should speculate on what those ears may have heard. Perhaps when considering the manner in which it grips its branch, with two toes in front and the reversible outer toe clutching from behind, we should allow ourselves to pause for a moment, and acknowledge that these same claws must once have drawn blood from the shoulder of Pallas.

