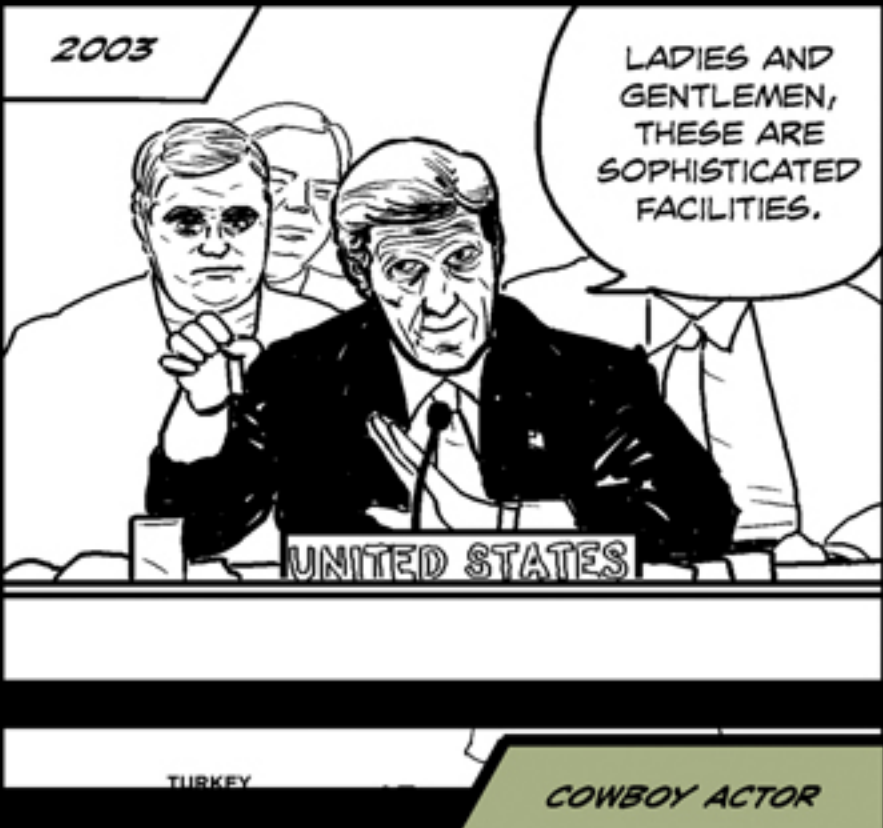




# MASSIVE FICTIONS

1







THE ABANDONMENT  
OF CRUELTY

*Spam* pt 1  
pg. 1



1OCT1993

*TAB2*, 1960  
pg. 10



COWBOY ACTOR #4

*Universal* pt. 1  
pg. 13



1OCT1993

*CU/FARLEY*  
pg. 17



ACTRON #242

*1986* pt. 1  
pg. 20

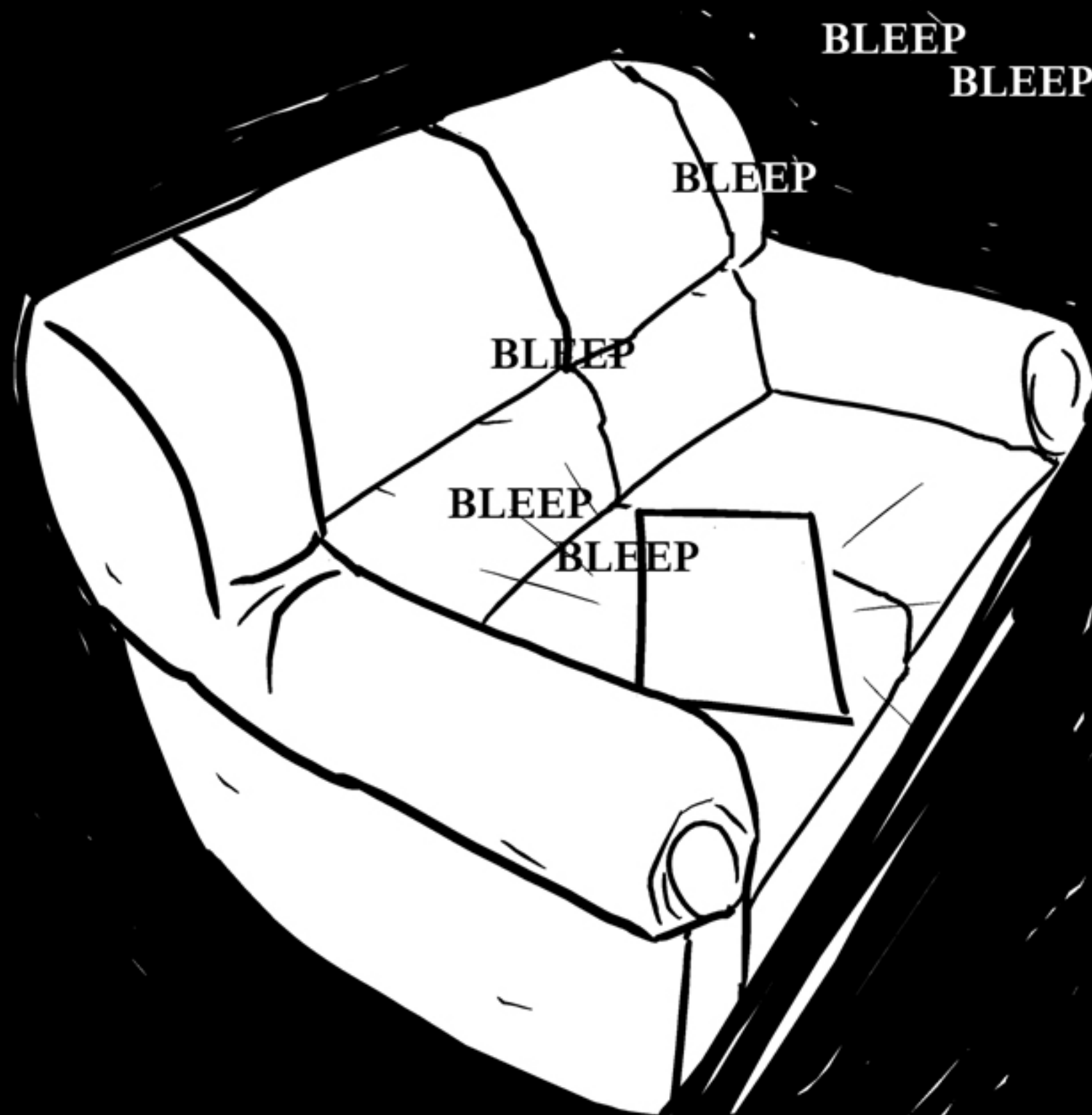


1OCT1993

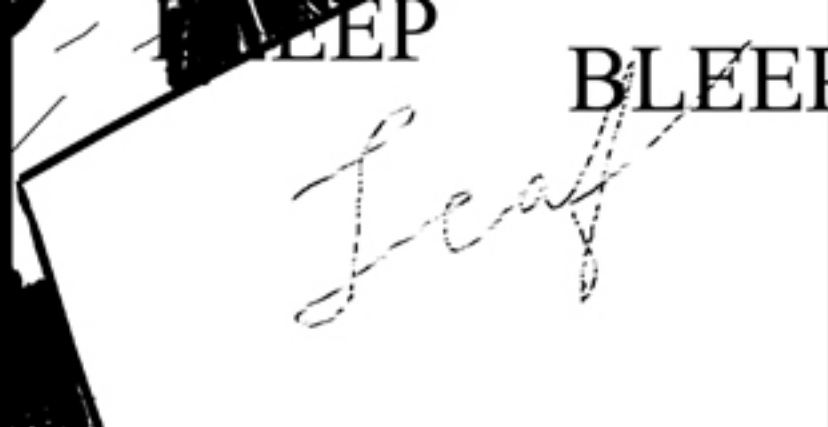
*INTERCOW*  
pg. 30

1983

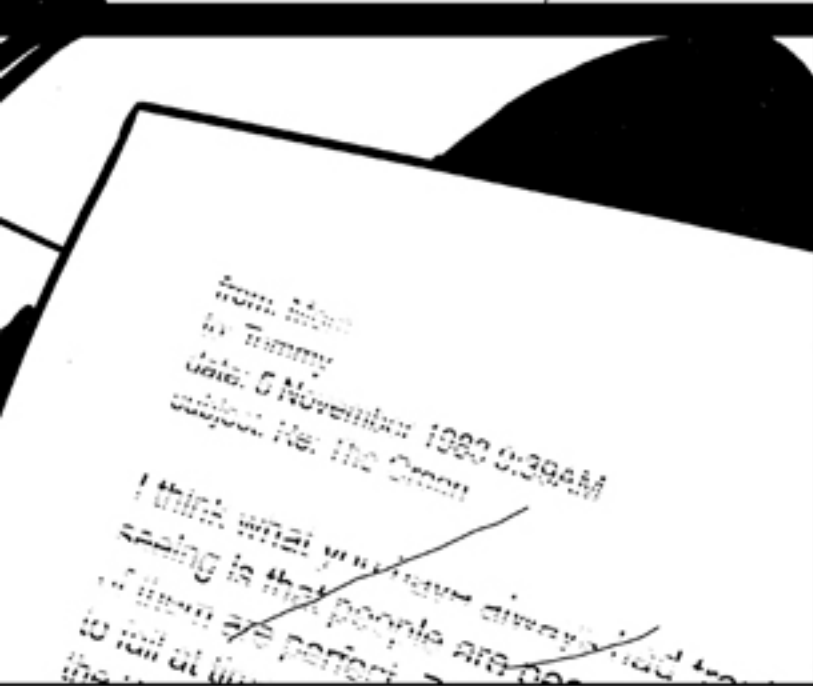
oh, spam





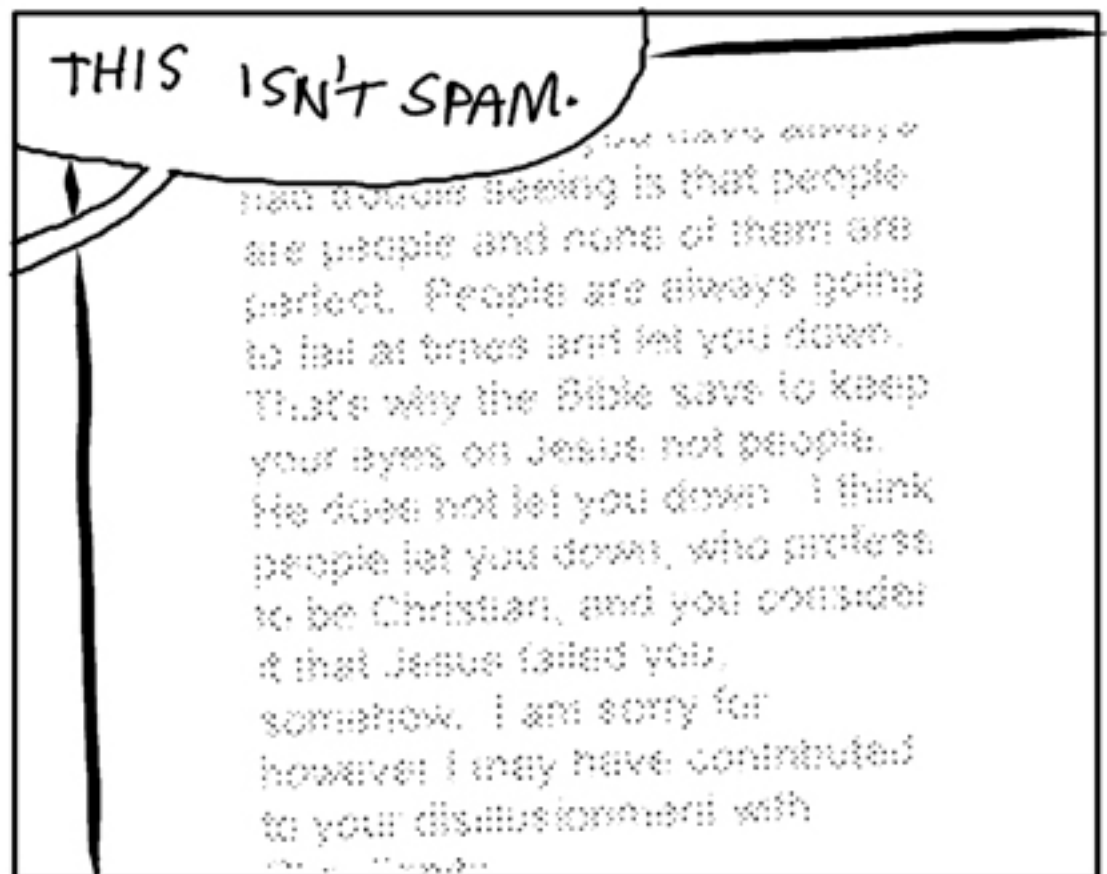


from: Mom  
to: Tommy  
date: 5 November 1983 9:39AM  
subject: Re: The Green



I think what you have always had trouble seeing is that people are people and none of them are perfect. People are always going to fail at times and let you down. That's why the Bible says to keep your eyes on Jesus and not people. He does not let you down. I think people let you down, who profess to be Christian, and you consider it that Jesus failed you, somehow. I am sorry for however I may have contributed to your disillusionment with The Green.

INCREASED RESOLUTION SACRIFICES THE BIG PICTURE. A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW SACRIFICES A DETAILED UNDERSTANDING. YOU CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE. LIFE IS INVISIBLE. CONSCIOUSNESS IS WHAT'S LEFT WHEN YOU STRIP AWAY EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE EXPLAINED.

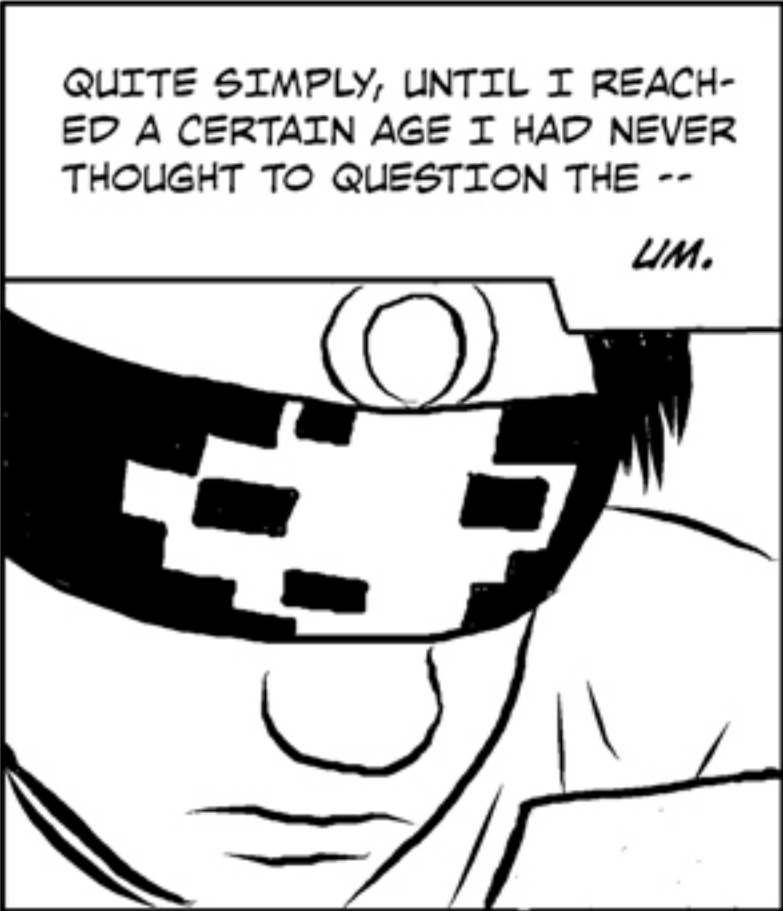




# *The Green*

SHE HARDLY PUT ME OFF *THE GREEN*. I'M USING IT RIGHT NOW, AREN'T I? PERHAPS SHE REFERS INSTEAD TO MY ADOPTION OF AN... *UNORTHODOX THEOLOGY*.

—noun  
a large computer network link  
[Origin: 1970–75]

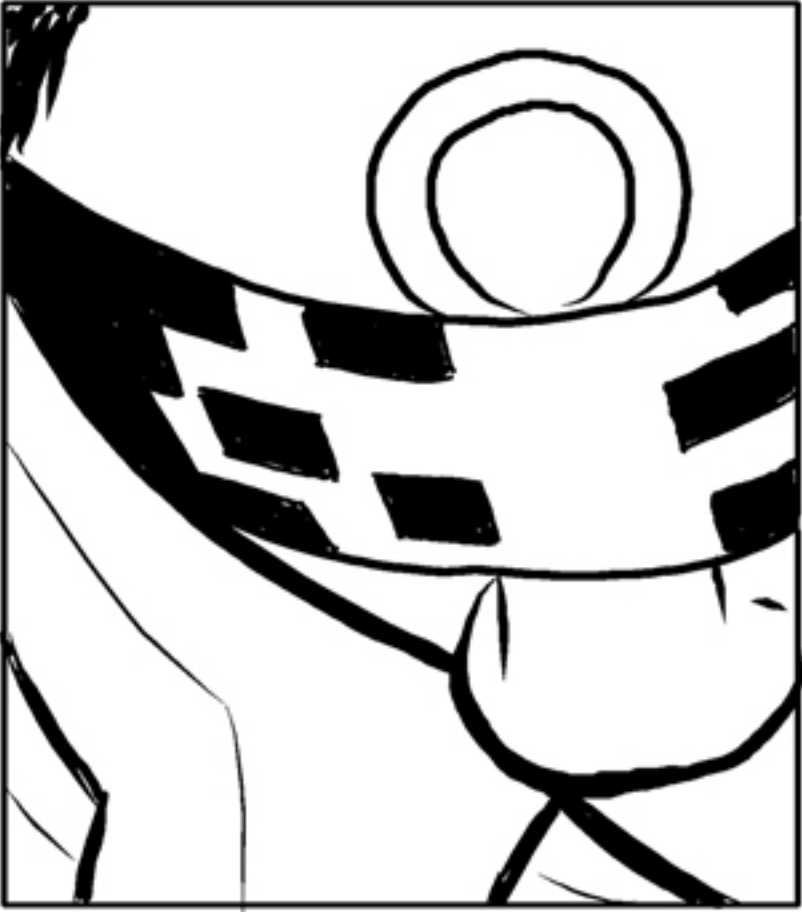


BUT EVENTUALLY, THE DISCREPANCIES WERE TOO NUMEROUS TO IGNORE. I WAS NOTICING PATTERNS NO ONE ELSE WOULD ADMIT TO SEEING. THERE WAS...

*SOMETHING THERE.*



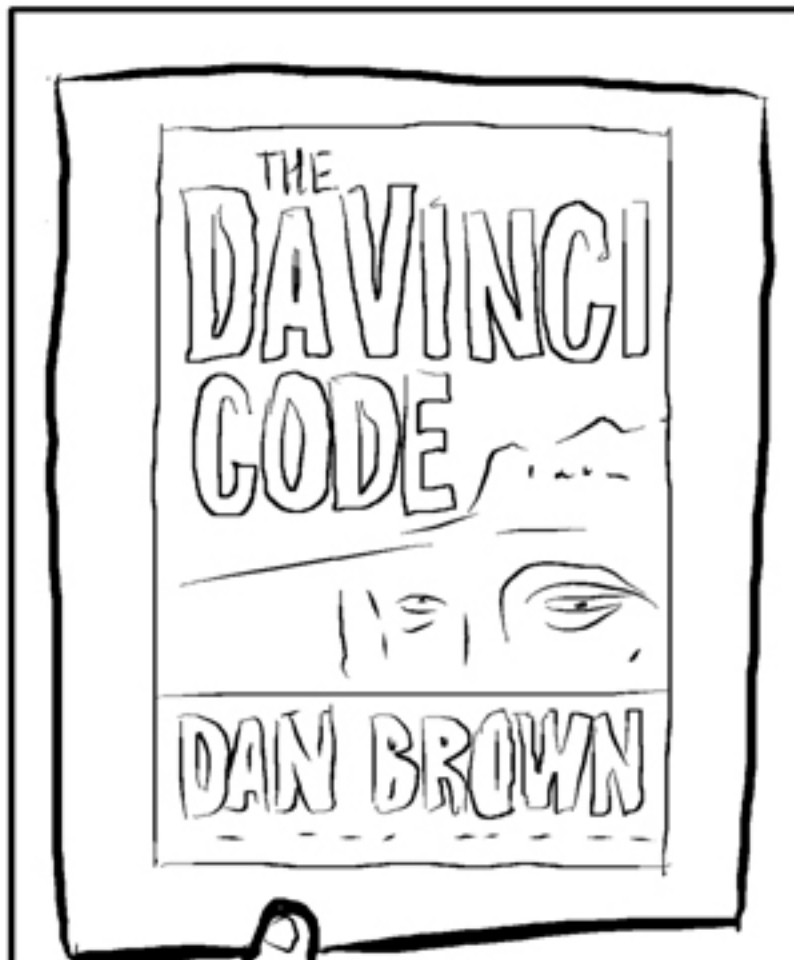
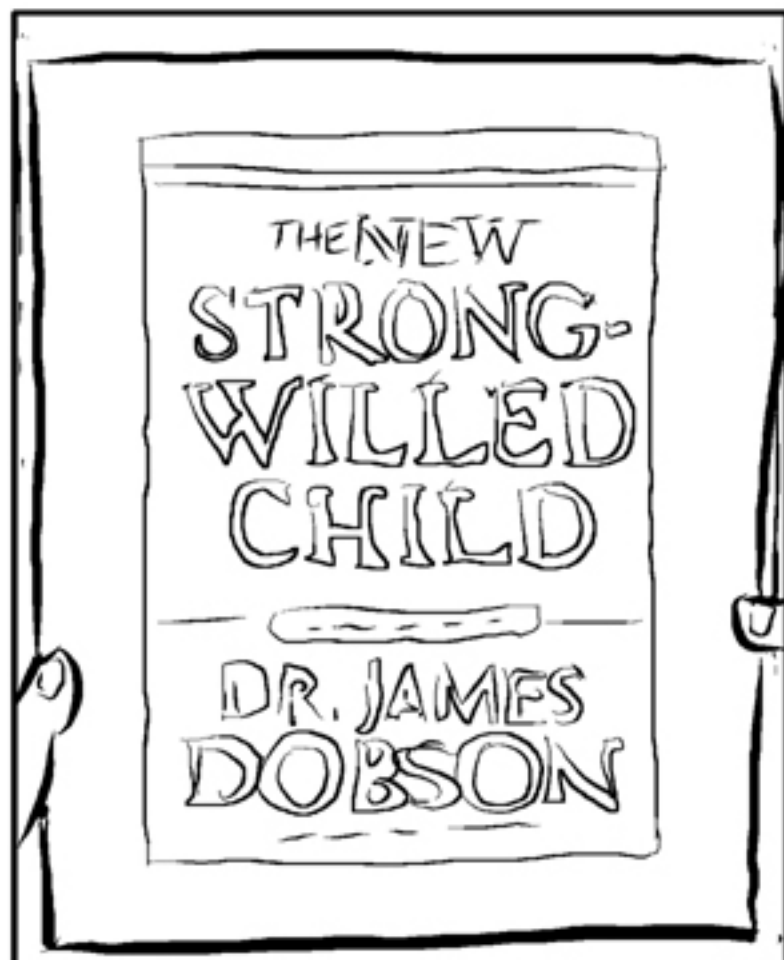
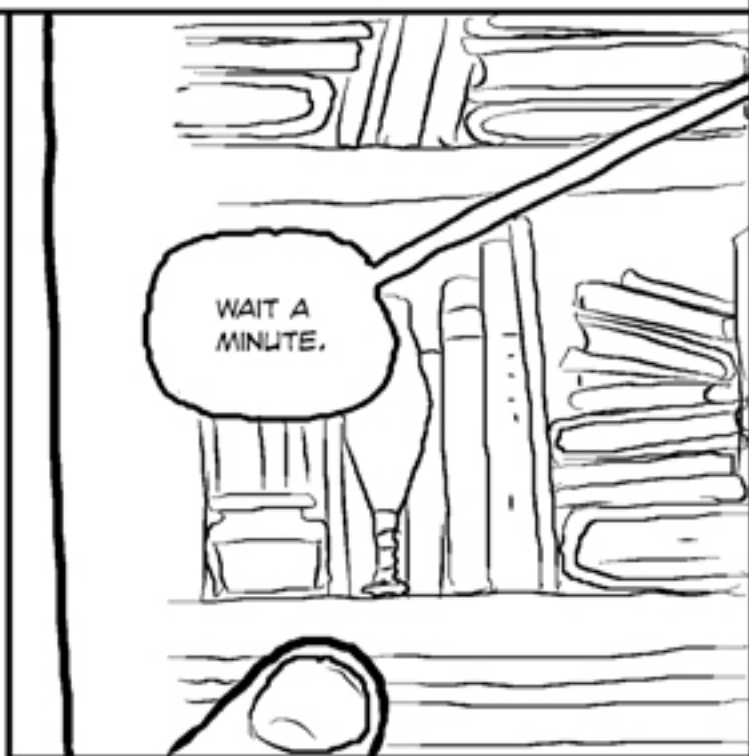
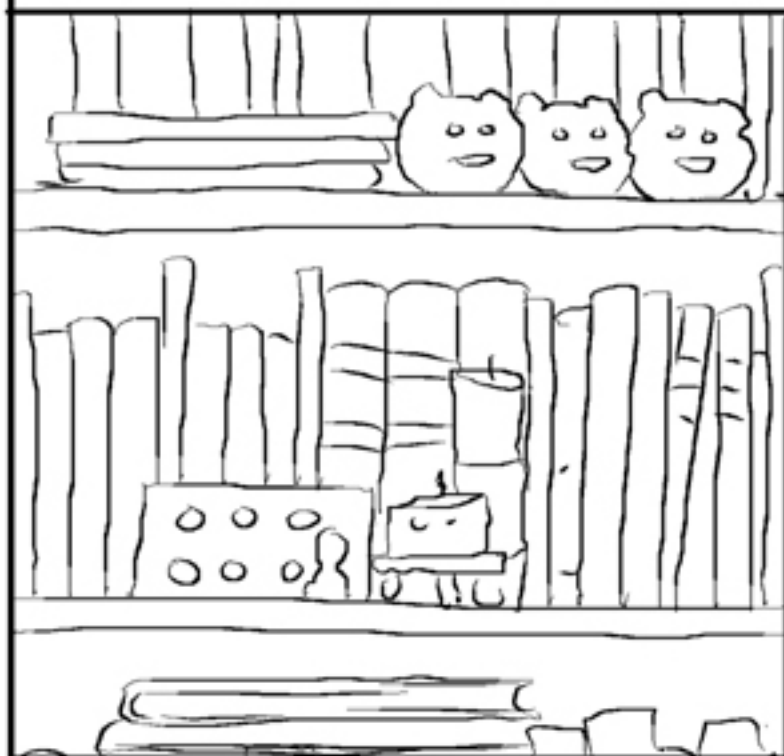
*COLGATE*  
=  
*JESUS?*







WITH PERSPECTIVE, THE PREVIOUSLY *UNQUESTIONED* ORIGINS OF CHURCH DOGMA WERE DRAWN INTO *BOLD RELIEF*.

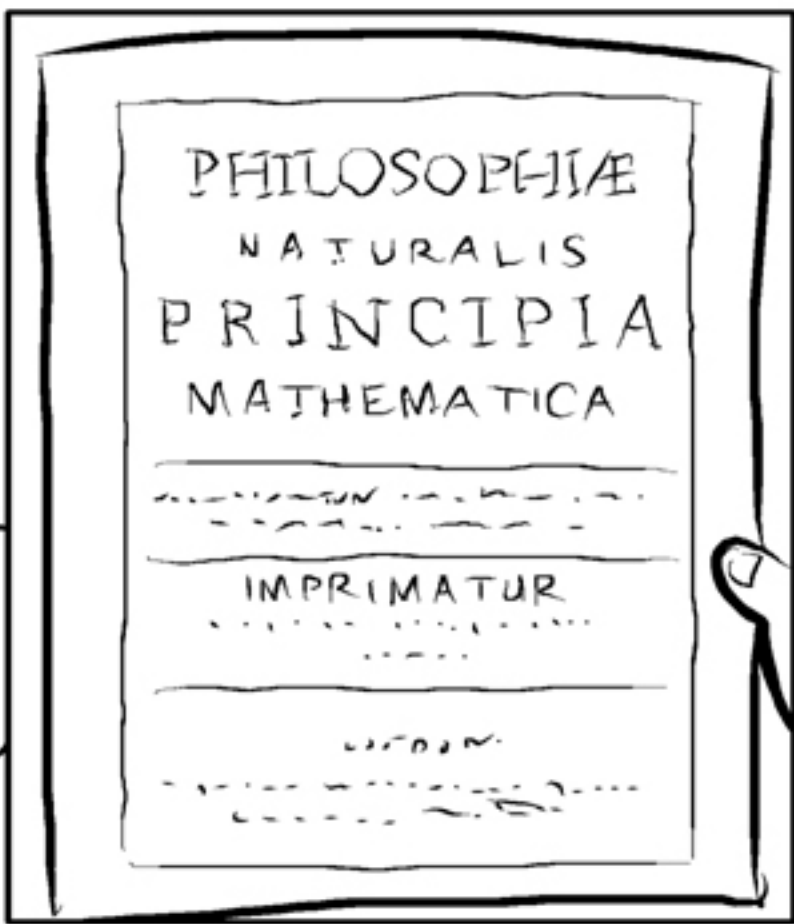


IT HAD FINALLY *DAWNED* ON ME THAT A RATIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL SHOULDN'T TAKE FOR GRANTED THE EXISTENCE OF A GOD(S).



THESE CLOWNS ALL PRESUME THE EXISTENCE OF AN *OBJECTIVE MORAL STANDARD*, WHICH ITSELF IMPLIES THEIR THEOLOGY BEFORE THEY ARE OBLIGED TO ASSERT "FACT ONE."

BUT WHAT, THEN, WOULD BE THE *SOURCE* OF THAT STANDARD?



EVEN WHERE I HADN'T AUTOMATICALLY ASSUMED THE SCRIPTURE INERRANT

SO WHAT *WERE* CHRIST'S LAST WORDS?



(AND IN SOME FOGGY WAY I HADN'T -- ESPECIALLY WHERE TRANSLATIONS DIFFERED)



WOULD THESE IDEALS STILL HOLD UP IF A GOD(S) DIDN'T EXIST?





The Scrolls can be divided into two categories—biblical and non-biblical. Fragments of every book of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) have been discovered except for the book of Esther.

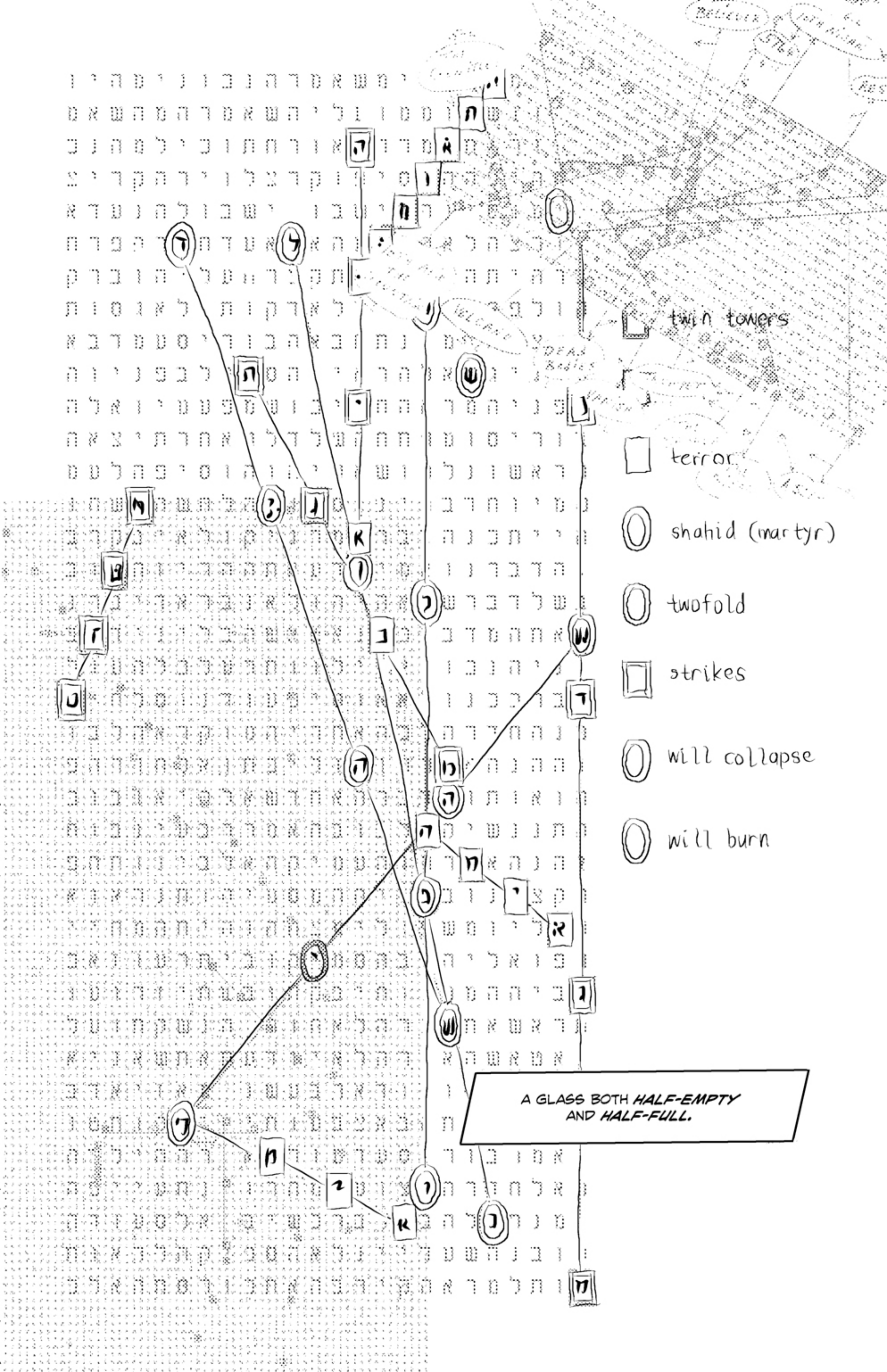
*\* In the Scrolls are found never before seen psalms attributed to King David and Joshua.*

13. The Dead Sea Scrolls were most likely written by the Essenes during the period from about 200 B.C. to 68 C.E./A.D. The Essenes are mentioned by Josephus and in a few other sources, but not in the New Testament. The Essenes were a strict Torah observant, Messianic, apocalyptic, baptist, wilderness, new covenant Jewish sect. They were led by a priest they called the "Teacher of Righteousness," who was opposed and possibly killed by the establishment priesthood in Jerusalem.

Equations of an infinite Number of Terms.

18. The scrolls contain previously unknown stories about biblical figures such as Enoch, Abraham, and Isaac. The story of Abraham includes an explanation why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son





twin towers

terror

shahid (martyr)

twofold

strikes

will collapse

will burn

A GLASS BOTH HALF-EMPTY  
AND HALF-FULL.

WHILE THE CHILDHOOD REVELATION THAT **"REALITY"** WAS NOT **REAL** HAD BEEN SHOCKING ENOUGH, IT PALED BESIDE THE KNOWLEDGE THAT MY PARENTS **DELIBERATELY LIED** TO ME.



...IF YOU DON'T HAVE THAT TRASH OUT THIS MORNING BEFORE THE **BUS** GET'S HERE, YOU'RE STAYING **HOME** THIS WEEKEND.



HEY -- WHAT **IS** THIS?

OH **SPAM**, A FUCKING **CONDOM**.



GRADUALLY, I **ACCEPTED** THAT PEOPLE LIED, EVEN WHEN THEY DIDN'T **MEAN** TO, SIMPLY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF **IMPERFECT LANGUAGE**.



IT'S -- IT'S JUST A LITTLE **BAGGY**.



WELL -- DO YOU WANT TO **SEE** THIS OR **NOT**?



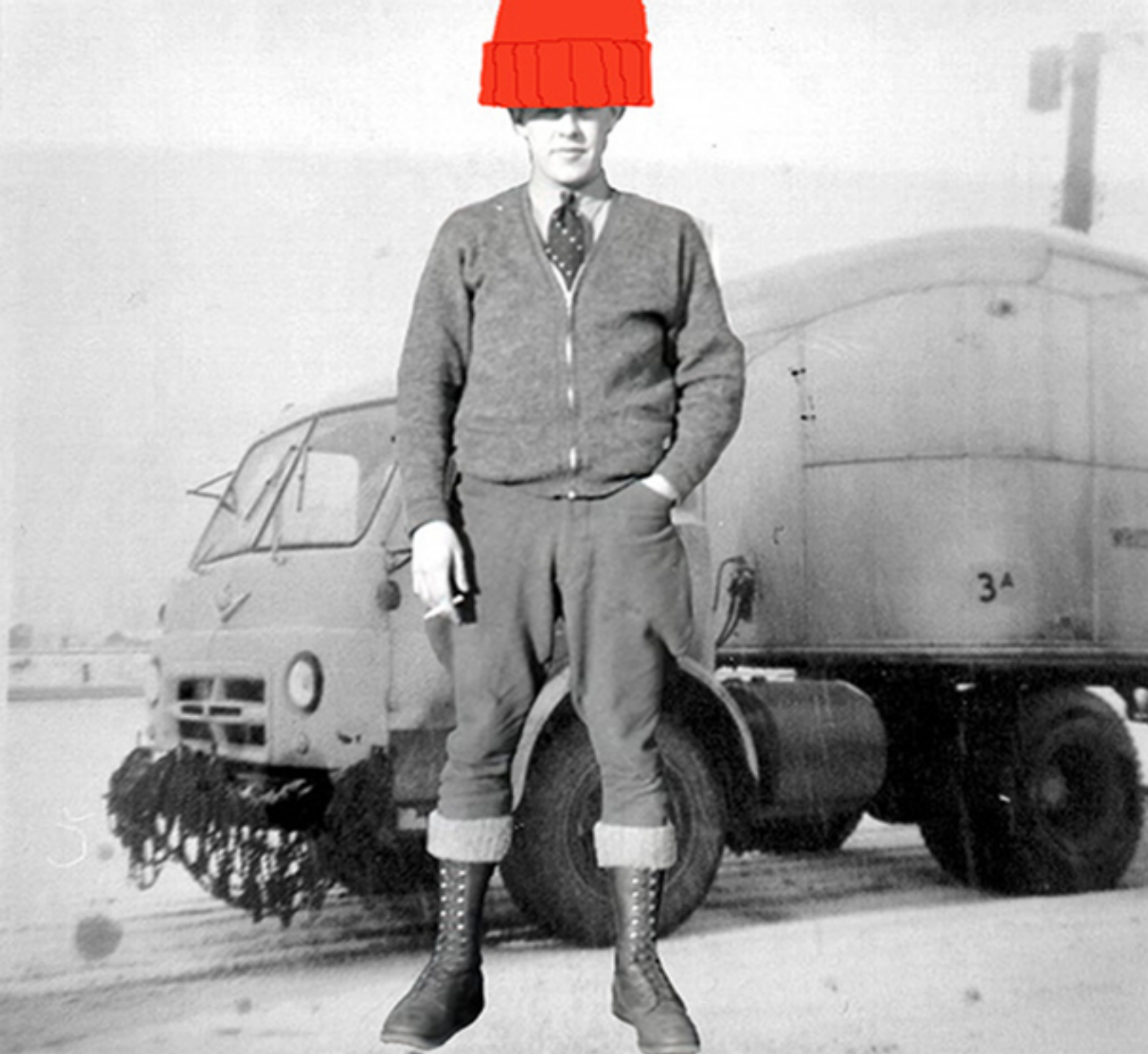
I BET IT **WAS**!











**Tags:**  
1960, tab1, tab2

## TAB2, 1960

The testing was rigorous but fair. I don't know if the equipment had any real effect, but he started talking just the same.

*bmp bmp bmp clickity clicky click bmp bmp bmp*

Little Tommy.

"Semen the color of old comic book pages, aged plastic, tape residue, dipping sauce for crayons that were flattened for a specific age group. You know, so they wouldn't roll away -- the crayons, not the age group. Dog piss on the carpet, striped wallpaper, a tray of stale flat bread, a portfolio of chalk drawings."

"What else do you remember?"

"The weather. Nothing."

"Let's start over from the beginning."

Aptitude tests. Memory. So far, things were progressing smoothly. I actually choked back a tear. I admit it: I was proud of him.

"Son, have you figured out what's going on yet?"

"A severed, pierced penis. In a can of Prince Albert pipe tobacco.  
Title: *Not Funny*."

I wrote *TAB2* on the inside of his hat and placed it on his head.

"Let's get the hell out of here."



Tommy hated the matching outfits. Orange toboggan hat, bomber jacket, military goulashes. I had told him to think of it as his uniform. He scratched at his buzzcut, dumbly.

I hoisted him into his car seat.

Winter had struck while the other boys were studying. Permafrost, monochrome landscape. I had Tommy out and about in the elements every day; we covered four miles on average pacing the farmer's market near headquarters. He was already beating up on the boys in the class ahead of him.

Or so I had forecast, when I set him on this routine.

Reality didn't quite track. Tommy wasn't meeting his PT requirements. I began scrubbing his face with an abrasive washcloth and doubled his hours.

"Father, who do I have to blow around here to get a time sheet?"

"You'll be done when I say you're done."

The kid's mother.

I cleared my cache and ducked into a flower shop, dragging Tommy behind me. He planted himself on the floor and booted up a comic book. I should never have bought him that thing.

"The usual?"

We came in here at least twice a week.

"Affirmative. Red."

I jammed the bundle of roses under my arm and yanked Tommy along to the truck. I thought he might have released a slight whimper, but I couldn't be sure so I ignored it.

The mesh was offline in the truck. I punched the dashboard and Tommy let out a laugh. Finally the HUD activated and we peeled out of the parking lot.

I was thirty-three years old.

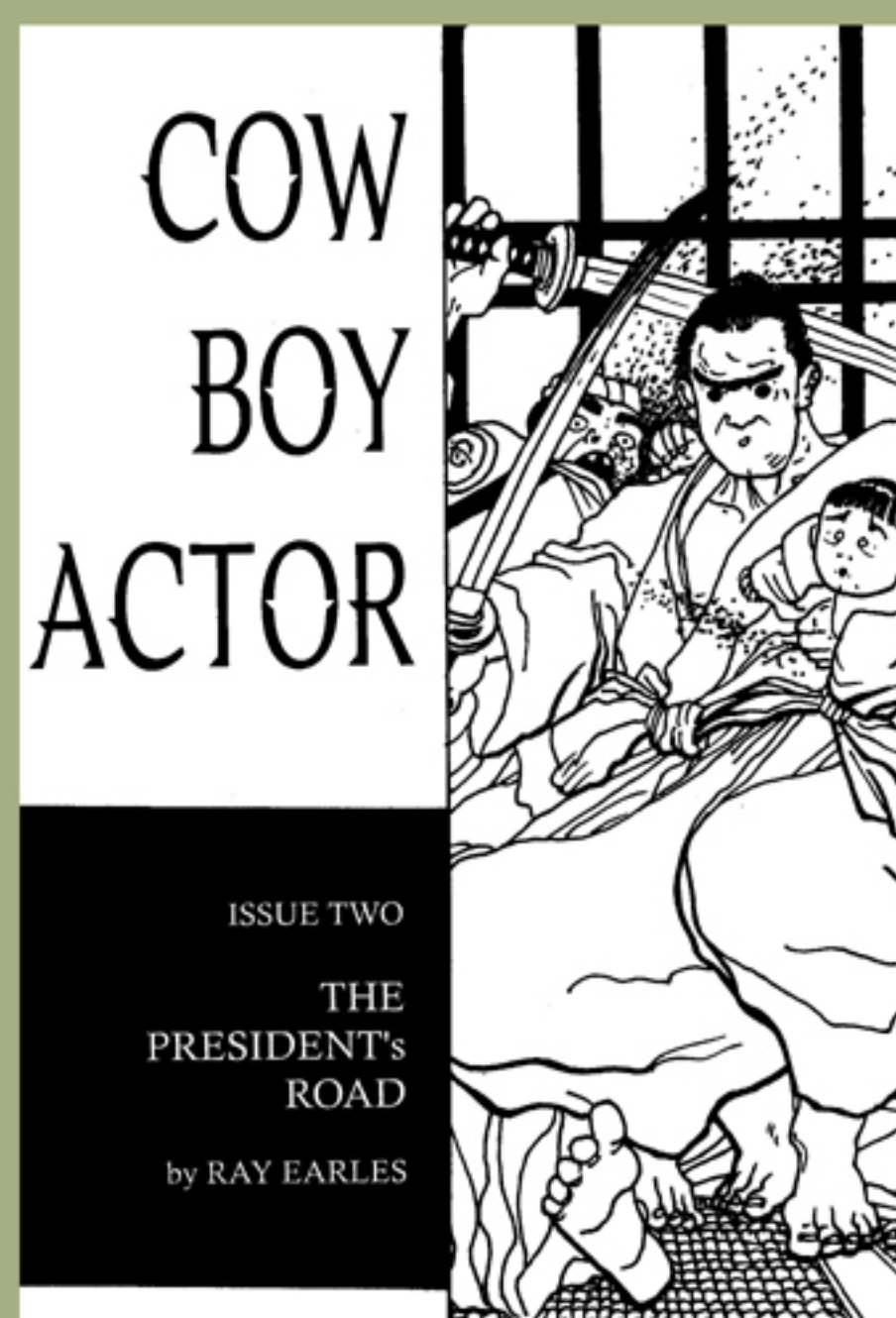
So far, 1960 was diminishing returns.

*To be continued...*

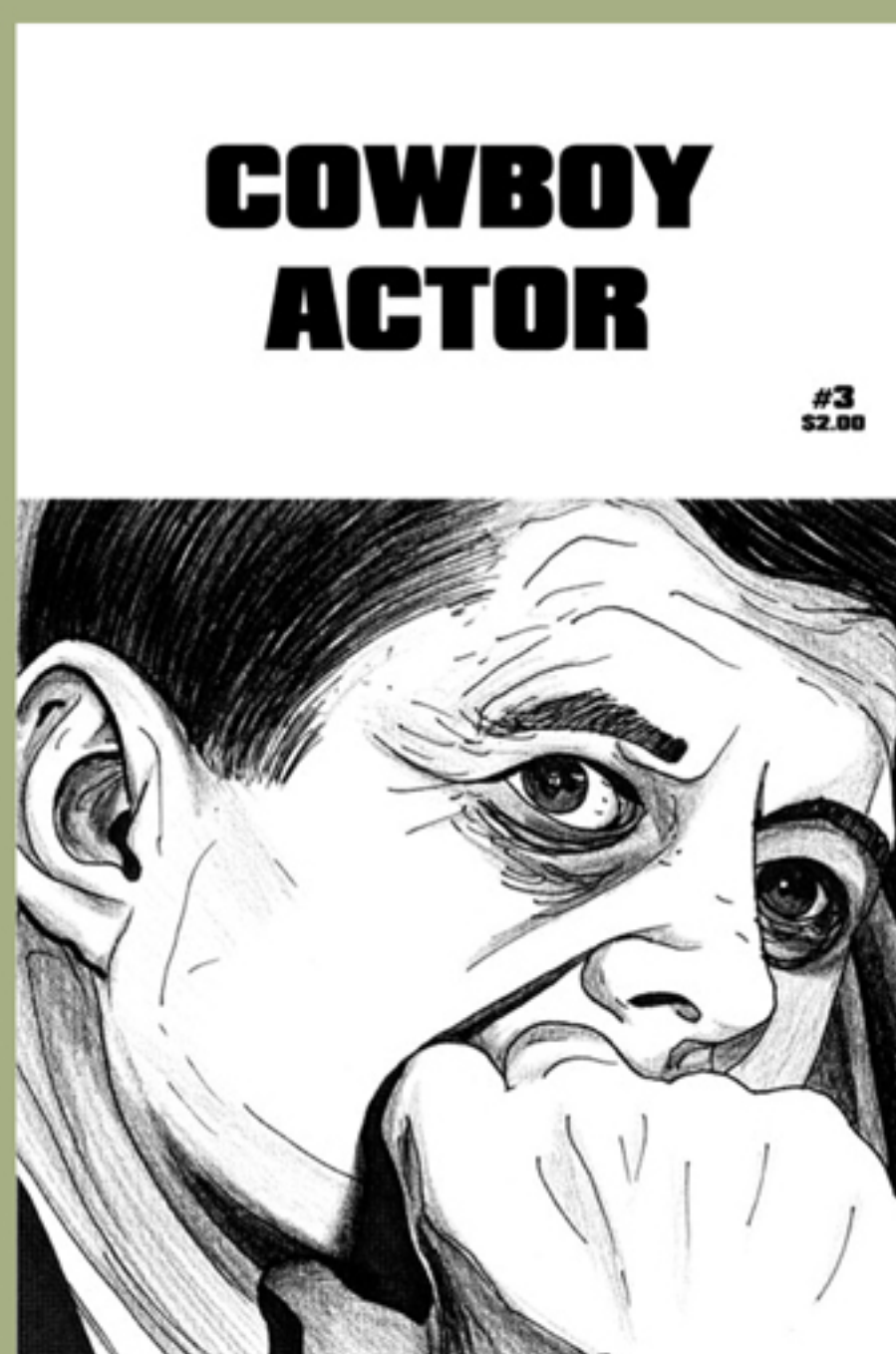




COWBOY ACTOR #1  
<http://tinyurl.com/2c59u4>



COWBOY ACTOR #2  
<http://tinyurl.com/2dlhpg>



COWBOY ACTOR #3  
<http://tinyurl.com/yt2khp>



# COWBOY ACTOR

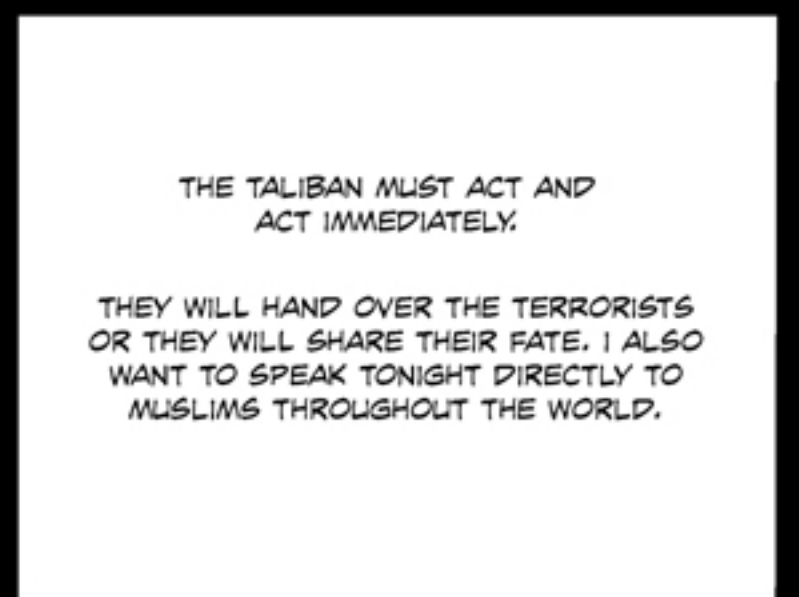
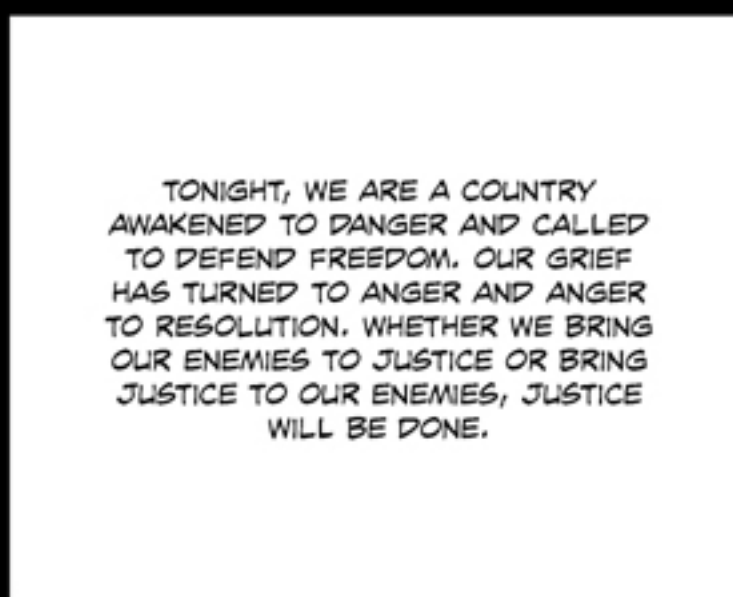
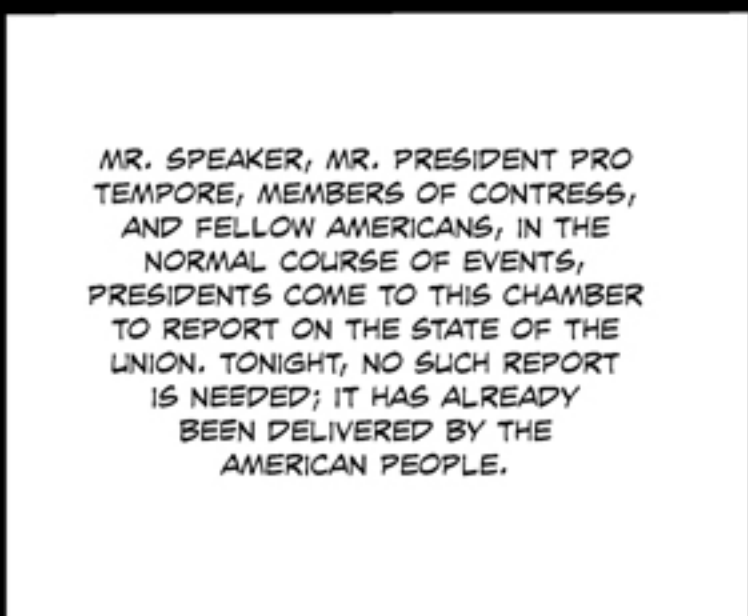
#4



I WANT YOU  
TO BRING ME  
HIS *HEAD* ON  
A *PLATE*!

Y-YES  
MA'AM...









THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

MR. SPEAKER, VICE PRESIDENT KERRY, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, FELLOW CITIZENS: AS WE GATHER TONIGHT, OUR NATION IS AT WAR, OUR ECONOMY IS IN RECESSION, AND THE CIVILIZED WORLD FACES UNPRECEDENTED DANGERS.

YET THE STATE OF OUR UNION HAS NEVER BEEN STRONGER.



THE LAST TIME WE MET IN THIS CHAMBER, THE MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS OF AFGHANISTAN WERE CAPTIVES IN THEIR OWN HOMES, FORBIDDEN FROM WORKING OR GOING TO SCHOOL. TODAY WOMEN ARE FREE, AND ARE PART OF AFGHANISTAN'S NEW GOVERNMENT.

OUR PROGRESS IS A TRIBUTE TO THE SPIRIT OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE, TO THE RESOLVE OF OUR COALITION, AND TO THE MIGHT OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY.

OUR CAUSE IS JUST, AND IT CONTINUES.



OUR SECOND GOAL IS TO PREVENT REGIMES THAT SPONSOR TERROR FROM THREATENING AMERICA OR OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES WITH WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. SOME OF THESE REGIMES HAVE BEEN PRETTY QUIET SINCE SEPTEMBER THE 11TH.

NORTH KOREA IS A REGIME ARMING WITH MISSILES AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, WHILE STARVING IT'S CITIZENS. IRAN AGGRESSIVELY PURSUES THESE WEAPONS AND EXPORTS TERROR. IRAQ CONTINUES TO FLAUNT ITS HOSTILITY TOWARDS AMERICA AND TO SUPPORT TERROR.



STATES LIKE THESE, AND THEIR TERRORIST ALLIES, CONSTITUTE AN AXIS OF EVIL, ARMING TO THREATEN THE PEACE OF THE WORLD.





Continued next issue





## CU/FARLEY

1 October 1960 I loaded Tommy into the truck and took him to work with me.

The boy perked up at the sight of the two-story displays. A damn sight better than the consumer grade equipment his mother used to review her nude home shows. We had a spare terminal so I logged him in with basic access and let him handle analysis on some non-essential traffic. No one would mind. With his orange cap he almost fit in.

Perturbations in the mesh. We were bringing a new series of embassy clouds online and things were not going smoothly. I was asked to supervise a side-switch.

At 07:30 Tommy spoke up, something about overlap.

"Pop, we've got incoming."

Three embassies were competing for the same channel. Ping errors were filling up the logs. I asked Tommy if he had a solution.

"Subnet them."

My men went into action and the crisis was averted.

Chief gave Tommy a lollipop.

Tommy liked the snow but touching his hand to it produced tears. I growled at him a bit.

I gassed up the truck and we cut across town back to the hovel. We had opened a new file on Tommy. CU/FARLEY would follow



him the rest of his life. He'd shown aptitude. All of that testing wasn't a waste after all. His mother would grumble but his interest was clear, honest. We assigned him TAB2 and that was that.

Inside the house I prepared a plate of sandwiches and pickles and we settled in to monitor the logs. Again Tommy showed initiative and reorganized his own desktop for efficiency. I dozed off for a while and when I came to he'd routed the embassy logs through his login. He picked out some trouble spots and saved the boys back at HQ a few hours of grief. I considered pulling him out of school for a few months until the embassies were all up and running. Heh, not likely, not with *his* mother.

Flipped on the telescreen. Presidential election. Iran.

Can't escape it. Switched off the telescreen and back to Tommy's progress, trawling the logs. I showed him how to clean up a few streams and in a few minutes he was giving me pointers on my own structures. I wondered how long this could hold his attention.

At 10:25 a page came over the wire, calling me back in to HQ. I strapped Tommy into his seat and we were on our way.

The truck spun through the slush and I got hung up in the parking lot. I left the vehicle and trudged towards the building with Tommy in tow; housekeeping would dig out the truck as time permitted.

We made it up the stairs and Chief stopped us before we got to our terminals. CU/FARLEY was already twenty pages thick. They had decided to call in their investment early. I slicked down Tommy's eyebrows with my thumb and handed him over.

My son and I locked eyes, with Tommy full of comprehension.

He reached up to his head and removed his orange toboggan. He glanced at the name I'd scrawled inside it, *TAB2*, and then passed it over to me, his three-year-old arms not quite bridging the gap between us.

I nodded. I understood.

*To be continued...*







THE CHRYSLER  
BUILDING

1986



ANOTHER  
DAMN  
DAY.

**WORDS + PICTURES:**  
**RAY EARLES**

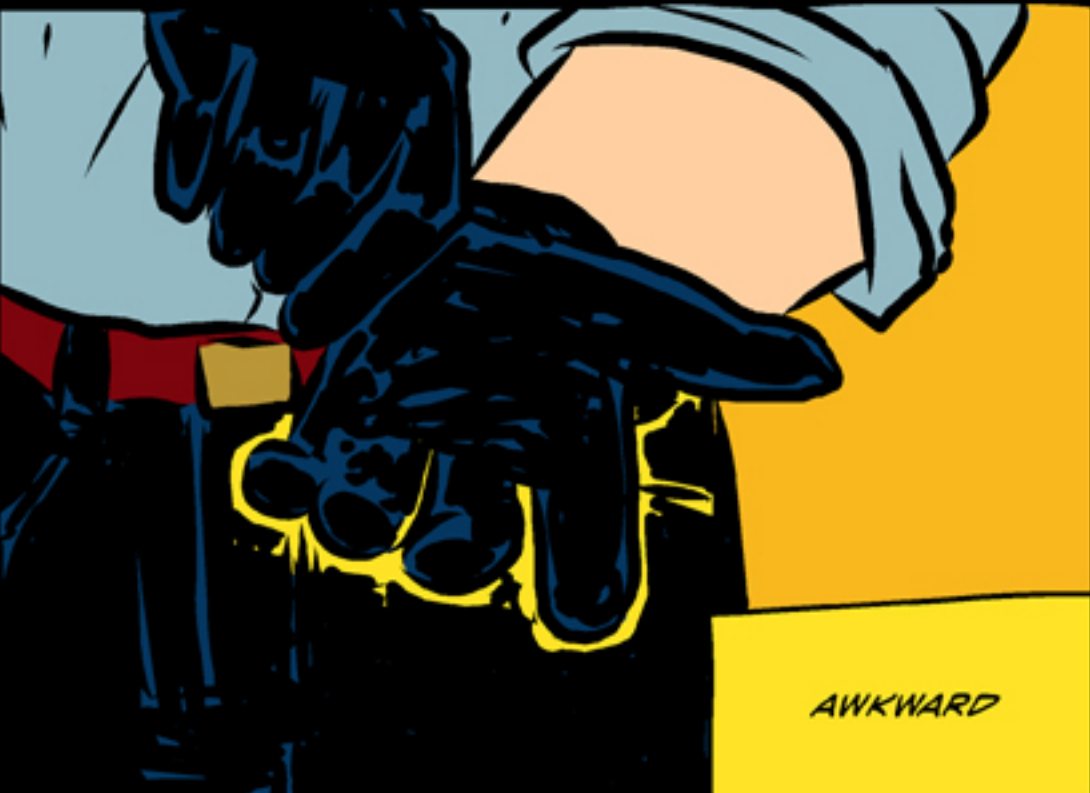
**COLORS:**  
**PETE TOMS**

VOL. 1 NO. 242  
PUBLISHED ONCE  
PER DECADE BY  
MASSIVE FIC-  
TIONS.COM.

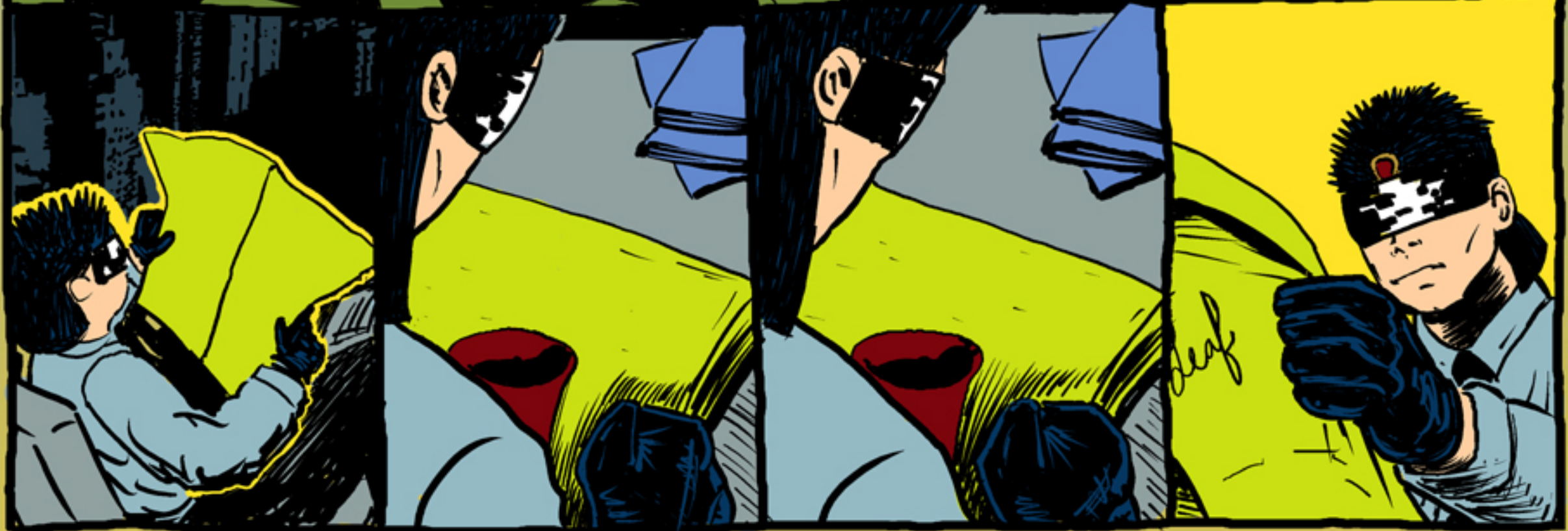
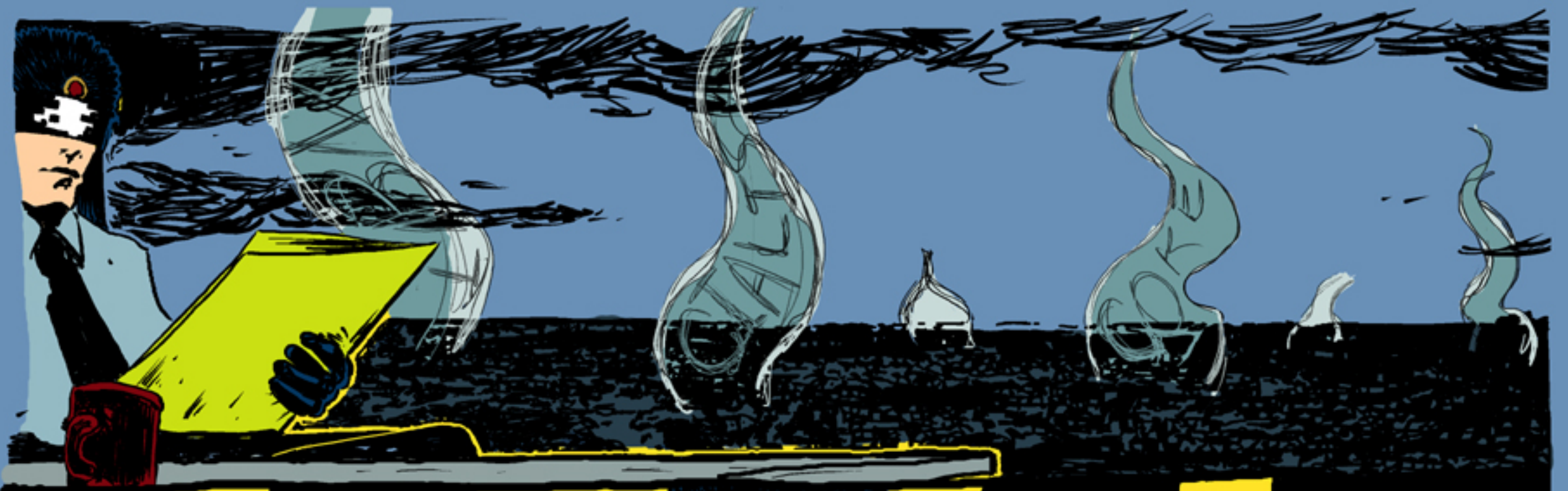
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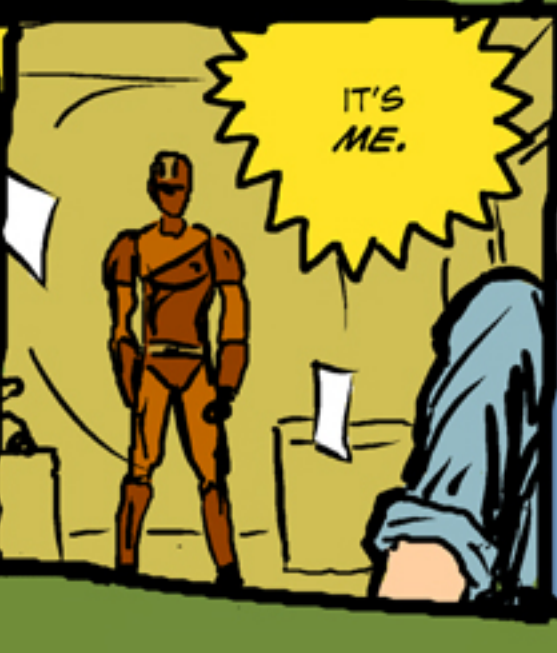




















HALF/DEAD IS THE  
SON OF A SPECIAL  
FORCES VETERAN...

... A SURVIVOR OF THE  
9/11 ATTACKS OF 1981

A CHILD, HALF-CRUSHED BY DEBRIS

THE TRAUMA OF THE EVENT  
TRIGGERED HIS LATENT TELE-  
KINETIC ABILITIES...



I THINK  
THERE'S STILL  
SOMEONE  
IN THERE!

NO. THIS  
AREA HAS  
ALREADY  
BEEN  
CLEARED.



THINGS  
ARE STILL  
BLOWING  
UP

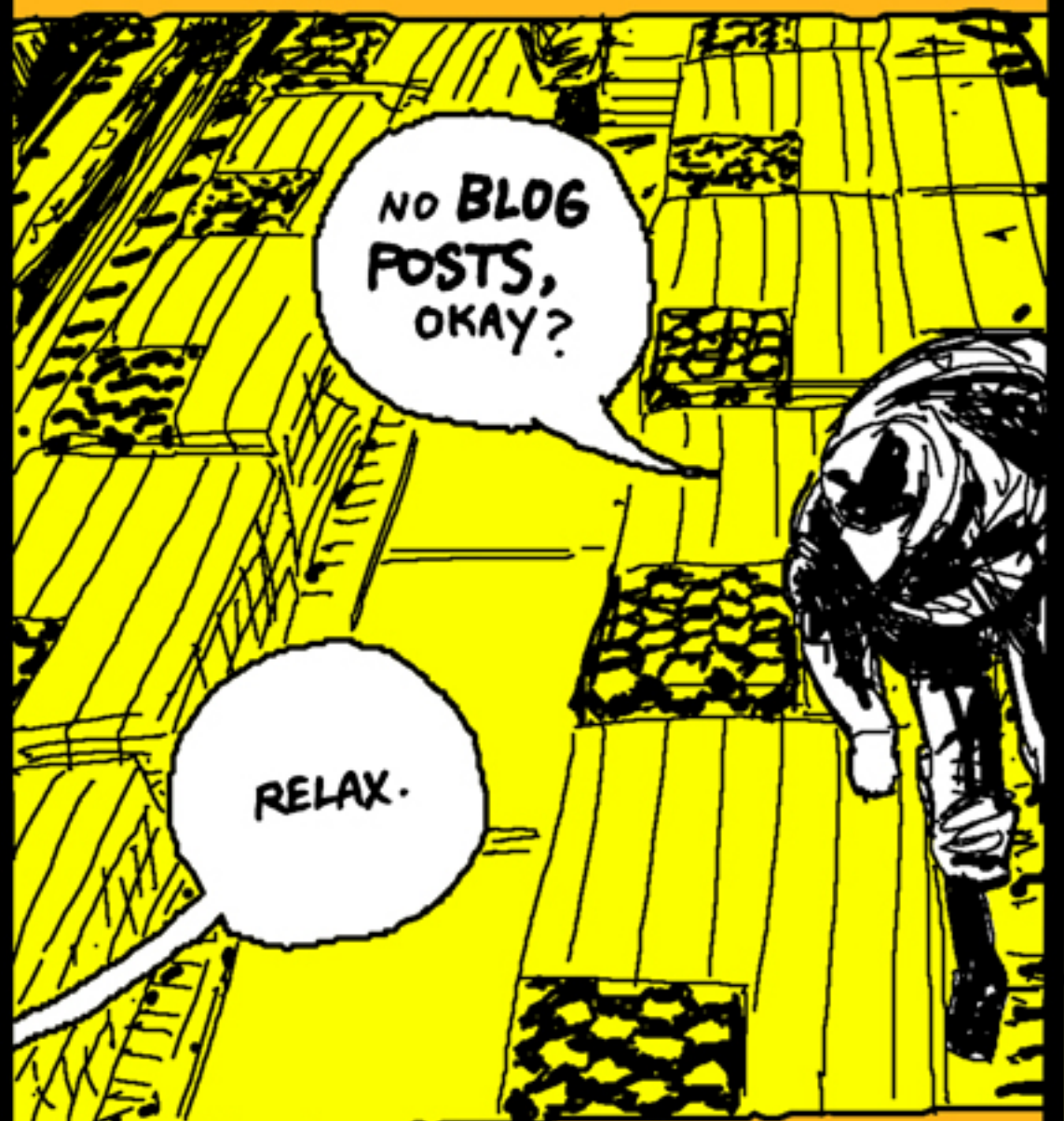
... WHICH HE NOW EXPLOITS TO HOLD THE RIGHT SIDE OF HIS BODY  
TOGETHER. A SORT OF PROTEST *PIECE DE RESISTANCE*.



HALF/DEAD'S FATHER DISTINGUISHED  
HIMSELF IN AFGHANISTAN...



BUT DID NOT SURVIVE HIS FIRST  
TOUR OF DUTY IN IRAQ.

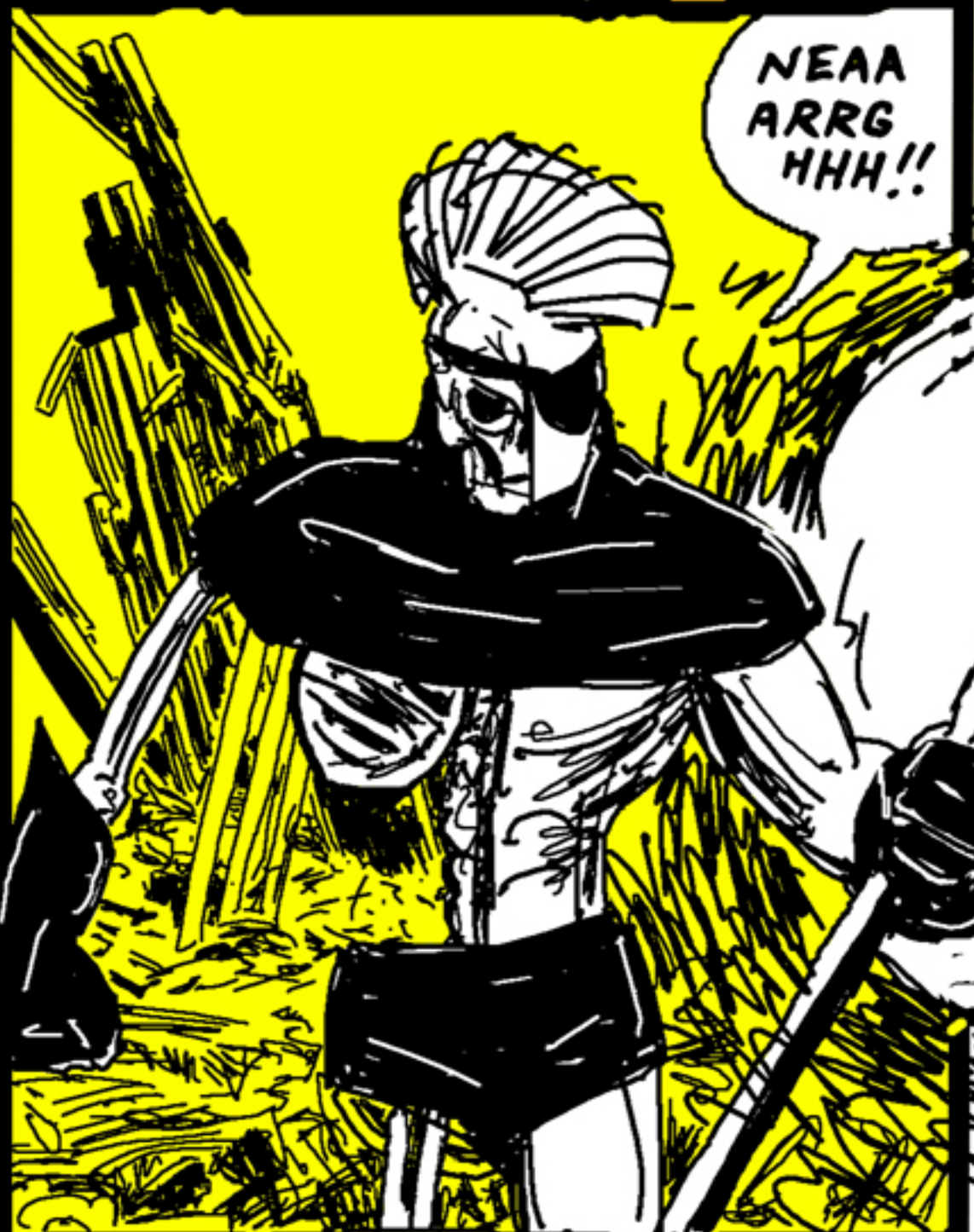


THE BOY HAS WHAT SOME MIGHT  
DESCRIBE AS A CHIP ON HIS SH-  
OULDER ABOUT AMERICA'S  
MIDDLE EAST POLICY...

NOW, A CHILD REBUILT IN A SUP-  
REMELY POWERFUL CYBORG BODY

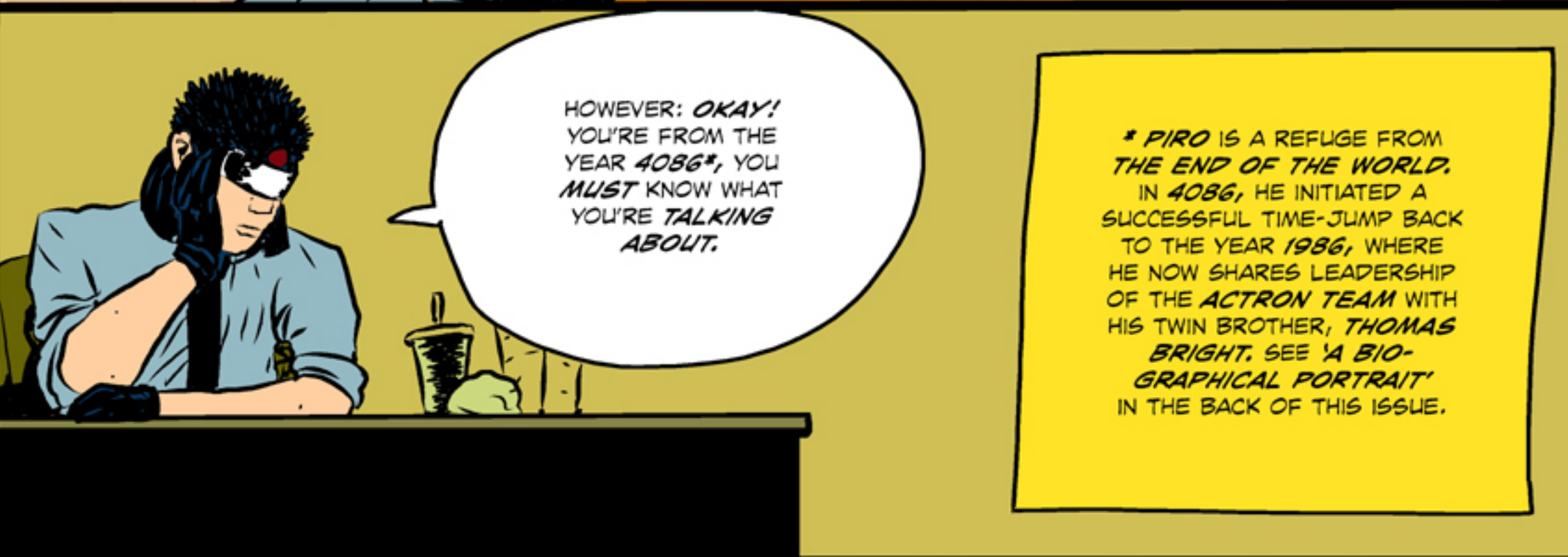
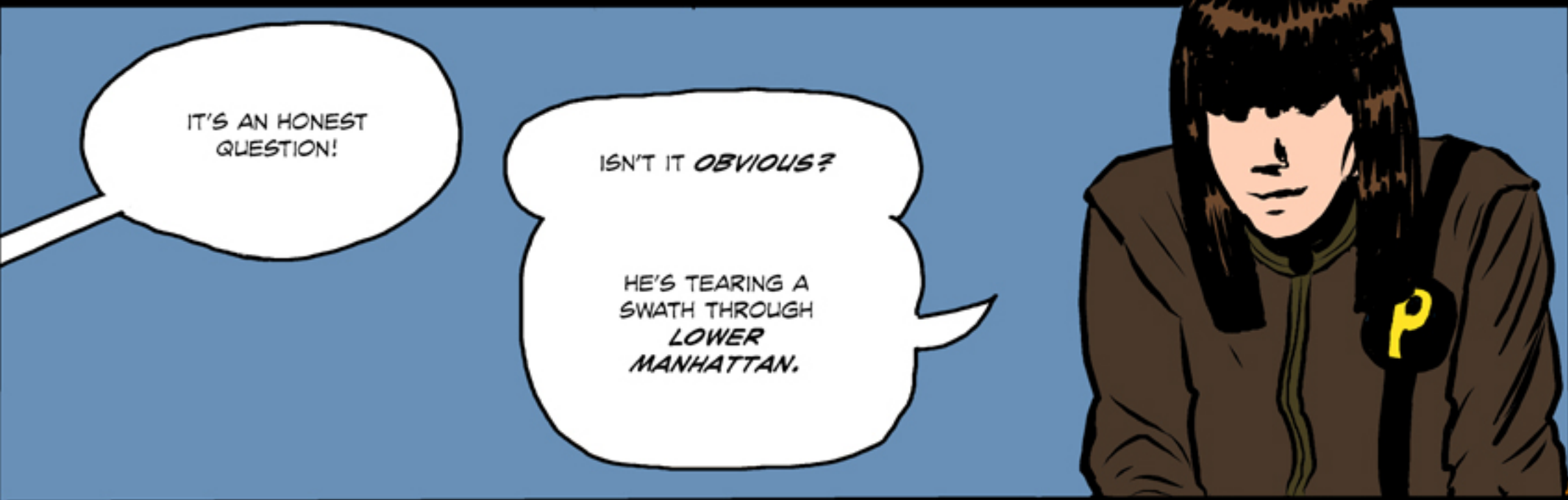


ER...  
OKAY...



HE ROUTINELY CAUSES EXTENSIVE  
PROPERTY DAMAGE TO THE  
CITY HE CALLS HOME.







# ACTRON

**Real Name:** Thomas A. Bright, Jr.  
**Occupation:** Adventurer (comics)  
**Identity/Class:** Human  
**Legal status:** citizen of the United States with no criminal record  
**Aliases:** Tom, Tommy, TAB2  
**Marital status:** Married  
**Known relatives:** Eva Bright (wife), Piro (brother), Violet Bright (sister), Thomas Bright, Sr. (father), Margaret Bright (mother)  
**Group affiliation:** Actron Team  
**Base of operations:** Chrysler Building, New York City  
**First appearance:** ACTRON vol. 1, #1 (1986)  
**Other appearances:** ACTRON vol. 1, #1-3 (1986-1987); ACTRON vol. 2, #4-10 (1988-1989); ACTRON GRAPHIC NOVEL (1988); ACTRON vol. 3, #1-6 (1990), HOUSE OF HERESY #1 (1994); ACTRON CITY vol. 1 (1998)  
**History:** THOMAS BRIGHT's parents both operated as agents of the United States Government throughout the 1950s and 1960s. MARGARET BRIGHT's work in a covert radiology lab is thought to have contributed to the development of superhuman abilities in all three of the BRIGHT children. THOMAS was inducted into the youth C.I.A. training program in August, 1968, and graduated the following September; shattering all previous records for academic progress. In spite of his remarkable progress, he never became an active field agent, preferring instead to enter the private sector. Since the early 1980s, THOMAS has served as leader of the ACTRON TEAM, operating out of the Chrysler Building, New York City.  
**Height:** 6' 1"  
**Weight:** 190 lbs  
**Eyes:** Blue  
**Hair:** Black  
**Known superhuman powers:** Flight, invulnerability, class 100 strength  
**Weapons:** The ACTRON armor consists of a carbon nanofiber outer shell, an array of advanced partical beam weaponry and a unique biomechanical control interface that links with THOMAS' visor.  
**Accessories:** THOMAS wears a custom visor attachment which serves as a real-time personal interface to THE GREEN.





# PIRO

**Real Name:** Piotr  
**Occupation:** Freelance agent, pirate  
**Identity/Class:** Human  
**Legal status:** Citizen of the United States with no criminal record  
**Marital status:** Single  
**Known relatives:** Actron (brother), Eva Bright, (sister-in-law)  
**Group affiliation:** Actron Team, C.I.A.  
**Base of operations:** The Chrysler Building, New York City; The Ship  
**First appearance:** ACTRON vol. 1, #3  
**Other appearances:** ACTRON vol. 2, #4-10 (1988-1989); ACTRON GRAPHIC NOVEL (1988); ACTRON vol. 3, #1-6 (1990), HOUSE OF HERESY #1 (1994); ACTRON CITY vol. 1 (1998)  
**History:** PIRO is a refugee from the end of the world. In 4086, he initiated a successful time-jump back to the year 1986, where he now shares leadership of the ACTRON team with his twin brother, THOMAS BRIGHT. Prior to his time-jump, PIRO served as chief security officer for PLINTH MOLD INDUSTRIES. As early as 1968, PIRO is known to have been a C.I.A. asset in charge of training new recruits in hand-to-hand combat. By the late 1970s he was assigned to monitor the emerging super-powered population of New York City. His current operational status in C.I.A. is not known at this time.  
**Height:** 6' 1"  
**Weight:** 190 lbs  
**Eyes:** Brown  
**Hair:** Brown  
**Known superhuman powers:** Photographic reflexes  
**Weapons:** PIRO has received extensive training in all NATO and WARSAW Pact small arms. He also retains unexplained access to state-of-the art particle beam weaponry, presumably procured through the United States government. ■







**Tags:**  
1961, tab1, tab2

# TOWARDS MYTHOLOGIZING THE COMING RESURGENCE OF COVERT WARFARE

DIPLOMATIC POUCH MAIL  
(SB:WR-U; 10-17-1961)  
(Office of Origin: BT/FUCK)

Son, you said you wanted to know what I do all day at my job. That is, since we've been separated and you've been off at school. To that end, I've written up this account based on notes I took sometime last week. I traveled from New York to New San Francisco to take part in one of the operations assigned to my group.

Here is my description of what took place.

Faint smoke wafted out of nearby chimneys. Awkward-looking clouds clung to the sky, a gross of cotton balls scattered at random, then glued down carelessly onto an enormous blue shirt. I observed the aerial tableaux through a crack in the curtains. My hotel room was cold.

Shifting focus, I came to notice the ground directly below my window. It offered up only the faintest suggestion of tangibility. Its contours were blunted by yet another layer of new fallen snow. Bemused, I traced the deceptive topology at high resolution, scanning the area for markers before proceeding to vacate for the last time.

I made my way out onto the balcony. Even as my room's heavy wooden door clicked shut behind me, I instinctively checked my pocket for the plastic key card.

It was present.



Coat tucked and breath stale, I tunneled through the mounting drifts, trudging towards the front office. I swiped my key card and slipped inside. The night clerk had dozed off, abandoning the assortment of *Rap Chowder* clips he had pulled up on his terminal. He was probably inebriated. Stealthily, I snuck past him.

Moving down the hall, I edged past a throng of blinking, chattering vending machines. My trench coat trailed along behind me, probably, I thought, getting dirty. I hustled once more into the laundry room, tossed my knapsack down on a table and placed my hat on the dryer.

Laundry was done.

After stowing my garments, I dropped my room card on the front desk and called for a taxi. Yawning, I leaned up against a support column and strained to catch the closing salvos of the *Rap Chowder* season finale. It seemed I had not alerted the night clerk to my presence. That suited the situation fine, as my taxi would not show up for some time and I was in no mood for small talk.

An hour later I detected the heat signature of a car engine and then the slush of tires racing through black snow. It was my ride.

The taxi driver wasted no time and engaged his car horn, initiating a blast of sharp, targeted audio. *Modus operandi* endemic to the New American service industry: never in a hundred consecutive life sentences would he have thought to come into the hotel and fetch me. Remind me sometime to tell you about Hanoi, and the drive who actually did.

I tossed my knapsack over my shoulder and hopped into the cab. The driver was a tough looking Arab, equipped with the usual rough shaven beard and a giant, furry parka. He had a three-dollar cigar clenched tightly between his brown teeth. As he spun the orange cab out of a snow bank, I leaned back into my seat with a sense detached curiosity. The Motel 7's automation was apparently inoperable; I checked my balance and discovered that I hadn't even tipped the desk clerk on my way out.

The driver propelled us across the bridge and on to JFK, where eventually he halted the cab and told me to get out. I tossed him a single hundred and he affected only the slightest nod towards the meter. I didn't budge, so he gave me the finger, then sped off into the freezing smog. I had to laugh.

Soon, I was aboard my plane.



Floating safely above New America, I rang for my stewardess. She brought out some coffee and loaded it up with a fair amount of synth-cream. Somewhere over St. Louis, I was enjoying a fifty-dollar cup of Folger's Crystals. Unlike most passengers I didn't let them sway me with their dubious offers of a more rarefied blend -- I know from bitter experience that no matter what you order, on a government airplane you end up drinking the same cup of coffee. It still befuddles me that no one ever seems to notice this. Menus are little more than a racket they try to put over on unsuspecting customers. What you actually get is whatever they have too much of.

Finally, we approached New San Francisco. Tires screeched across the runway. Air pressure in the cabin shifted to sea level. Presently, a voice came over the intercom, announcing our impending arrival. I gazed at the surface of my leaf, pretending to read a newspaper article. Shrewdly, I had opted not to activate the pay-device.

"At the tone, all passengers will unbuckle their seat-belts and disembark in an orderly fashion."

There was an almost deafening racket of clacks and clatters.

"Once again, thank you for flying Federal Airlines."

"Like we had a choice," came a muffled retort from several rows back.

A number of heads from various sections of the plane snapped around to face the speaker, all of them in perfect synchronization. Immediately, I ascertained which of my fellow passengers were Air Marshals.

I returned my leaf to the seat-back in front of me, then reached up into the compartment above my head to withdraw my bags. Nothing seemed to be missing.

Exiting the plane, I was forced to elbow a few tourists out of my way. Nothing too unusual; a young Pioneer Scout had nearly caused me to trip and fall. Children were everywhere in coach, clogging up the aisles with their sluggish movements. This would not have been a problem if I'd taken a seat in first class, where children are generally forbidden, but such an expenditure would have raised flags with the wrong people, and on this flight I was concerned with keeping things -- as far as those wrong people were concerned, anyway -- quiet. Friendly shoving has become commonplace during an average disembark, and so my excess physicality went unnoticed.

On the way into the terminal I passed through a metal detector. My sidearm triggered a shrill cacophony, followed by an array of hastily drawn weapons. I flashed my TSA card discreetly, at waist level, and got through the checkpoint without much hassle. As you know,



I can activate its logging processes mid-flight, or even pull it out and wave it around if I so desire. In this way it would have been trivial to clear a path through the crowd by sending everyone diving to the floor. I don't need to tell you that I restrained myself. Even with non-networked weaponry such as my own, flashing a gun would have attracted attention from the mesh.

I wandered into a nearby pay-zone and called for another cab. My long-range implant was by now producing only blips and bleeps. For some reason, disabled.

My experience with that last cab driver in New York had put me on edge. I recalled now that when I climbed into his vehicle he had shifted his eyes instantly to my left earlobe, where they paused for a bit longer than I would have liked. He was careful, also, to look me up and down several times, tracing all of the obvious marker points. He had really been quite subtle about it. To my mind, this was uncommon and suspicious behavior for a New York cab driver. I found myself considering the implications. Something might be going on with the cabbie unions here in the States. Wary of surprises, I loaded my Colt and stuffed it into the cargo pocket of my trousers.

When my taxi finally arrived I slid into the back seat and gave the driver a once-over of my own. Ditto. The same type as the last one. Excepting that this fellow, rather than expose his bushy eyebrows and lice-infested hair to the world, sported a grey taxi cap with a dark, translucent visor. He was chomping a duty-free cigar (unlit) and taking sips from a can of Stro's Light. A Paki.

Before putting the car in gear, he pivoted around in his torn seat. With no small effort, he stuck out his free hand, then moved his eyes back to me. Sensing the inherent purpose of the gesture, I pushed a fifty towards him -- extended it just far enough to catch in the tips of his fat fingers, really -- and settled the rest of the way back into my seat, which served to punctuate the exchange. The driver remained silent. His seat creaked under the weight of his body.

"Take me to the Embassy," I growled as harshly as I could muster, "And put some stank on it. I have an appointment to keep."

With a squeal of tires and a strangled burst of exhaust smoke, we were off.

After a short drive we careened to a stop in front of the Embassy. I evacuated the back seat and leaned into the taxi's front window, glaring at the driver, adopting an aggressive posture. In response, the Paki clenched my collar into his fist and pulled me in even closer. It seemed he wanted to share a few words.



About time.

"Meter say *five hundred* am fifty, stupid fart."

He spit out his cigar, which came to rest lightly on the floor.

My cue.

I rammed the barrel of my Colt into his throat. He recoiled against the seat with a muffled thud, spilling beer all over his lap. I then gripped him by the hair and smashed his head into the dashboard, smirking amusedly because his forehead had just taken out the meter, and because his pants were now soaking wet as if he'd burst his bladder. He raised back up, groggily, and steered his car the hell out of there. I wouldn't have believed it, but the cabbie trade had actually gotten more belligerent in my absence. As a corollary, I'd just saved five hundred bucks. You have to stay sharp on the basics.

I stomped up the stairs of the Embassy and kicked open the door, which hadn't been latched to begin with. Gradually, I got myself into character.

The place was fossilized as ever. All of the antiques, artifacts and arch-politicos were still glued into place, practically inert. The room was artificially quiet, which also conformed to my mental inventor from previous visits. All right then, noise-cancelers were still being employed. What was new, here, was that the place had apparently been outfitted as a nano-blank zone. I wondered why.

Good thing I had thought to pack my Colt and not bothered with the network weaponry.

Without warning, a butler sidled up to me, whispering that he wanted to take my coat. I kicked him out of the way. He tumbled into a chair, looking dumb. I decided to ham it up in my new role and barked at him that I hated being touched by the help. He muttered something and I made a show of ignoring it as I pushed on into the long central corridor.

Quickly locating the correct cube cluster, I burst into the Coordinator's office and dropped down onto his horsehair sofa. His eyes moved to meet with mine and then just as casually returned to his pressure - screen. I remained silent. After a few minutes passed, he realized that it would be up to him to initiate conversation.

"I'm sure you are aware," he finally said, agitated but monotone in his murmur, "that this sudden reappearance of yours will make certain impending maneuvers more... *awkward*... for my department. I



will have to make up another acceptable room for you here in the embassy, and re-issue your cash and supply requisitions." He wiped his forehead, the pitch of his voice lowering steadily as he continued to speak, resembling nothing so much as air being let out of a bicycle tire. "I'll also have to find some way to pay for all of this, since you are still officially off of my books."

Well, that didn't seem like much of an obstacle to me. I was a diplomat and this was his embassy. I was sure he could come up with something involving the embassy lawyers, numerous layers of complex accounting, and a few billion dollars out of his discretionary fund. Throw in a gaggle of highly trained Russian prostitutes and no one would ever be the wiser. This was, after all, his area of expertise.

"Why not just write it up as a series of business lunches," I thought to myself.

But I chose not to say any of that out loud. Instead, I sat motionless, staring, thinking about Iran and 1959, wondering why I'd bothered to haul his perforated ass back home with me. He must have guessed what I was flashing on, because he quickly dropped any pretense of busting my balls and cut straight to the conclusion of his prepared speech. He hates going through the motions as much as I do.

"Okay. I give in," he mouthed, the vitriol now suspiciously absent from his voice. He had put up his token resistance, which for the purposes of budgetary documentation would have to suffice. He tossed me my pass and all of the needed cards, already made out and validated, packed into a large manila envelope. He held it out with one hand, not looking away from whatever it was he was scribbling, somewhat erratically, into his leaf. I had never known he was ambidextrous.

"Tom," he said to me as I left the room, "Let's not botch this up, not like the last time I had to rely on you. You know what I'm talking about."

The wisecrack was wholly unnecessary.

I halted, wanting to launch into him, but quickly reversed myself and resolved to just let him have his insults.

Son, at this point the man is little more than a torso. His titanium legs are encased in medical plastic, but that hardly represents a cosmetic improvement. Below the elbows, his arms are tracked with skin grafts, and must be covered up by shirtsleeves even in summer. True, the substrate now conceals more firepower than I could ever hope to lift with my merely human-gauge limbs, but technically he was correct. During the war, I'd botched the rescue attempt that made all of his "improvements" possible. After all, he'd still possessed both of his legs when we were dispatched to Tehran. For this, I do carry some measure of responsibility.



Turning again, I looked down at the manila envelope and said nothing. I closed his office door gently on my way out.

As I hoofed it down the south corridor, I fished through my envelope of cards, digging out the one that would open my room. It stated: Room 1097, Tenth Floor, Second Hall. I pocketed the room key and made my way toward the central security elevator, arriving just in time to glimpse the doors snapping shut.

I located the stairwell.

With little effort I advanced to the tenth floor. Swiping my key card, I tossed the security door open and proceeded into the hallway.

As I reached the door of my actual room, I fished out the card again and shoved it into its slot. The whole door frame quivered as I ambled inside. This place was antique, but I didn't mind the clumsy old mechanisms, in spite of what my diplomatic status might have entitled me to. I wouldn't end up using all of that new equipment anyway.

I suppose the room itself was quite impressive, by conventional standards. A hot tub was situated, or sunk into, really, the middle of the floor, equipped with its own bar. The carpet was some sort of deep white pile. I don't know, but it looked expensive. Cathedral windows with variable display angles. Universal remote. The furniture was a posh mixture of vintage and the very latest in network enabled. I waved my hand in front of the couch and seats around the room reconfigured themselves to my pre-stored, custom contour. A few more gestures and my temperature/humidity preferences were transferred to the local mesh.

I have not devoted much of my attention over the years to the ins and outs of fully-integrated interior design, but I can tell you that this wasn't the work of amateurs. I wasn't able to locate a single bug. Good for them. There's no telling what kind of footage this room has been able to capture, during the periods between wars when it is used to house foreign dignitaries. And the like.

I'm afraid my reputation preceded me here and I did not expect many frivolous trifles, but, still, a few of the line items from my standard rider were missing, and remain absent, which continues to annoy.

Well, that's about all I have time for right now. I have quite a bit of work to do before I can turn in for the night. You know I'm not much of a writer, but I hope this has given you some idea of what an average day of mine is like here at the embassy.

Hope to see you soon.

*To be continued...*



