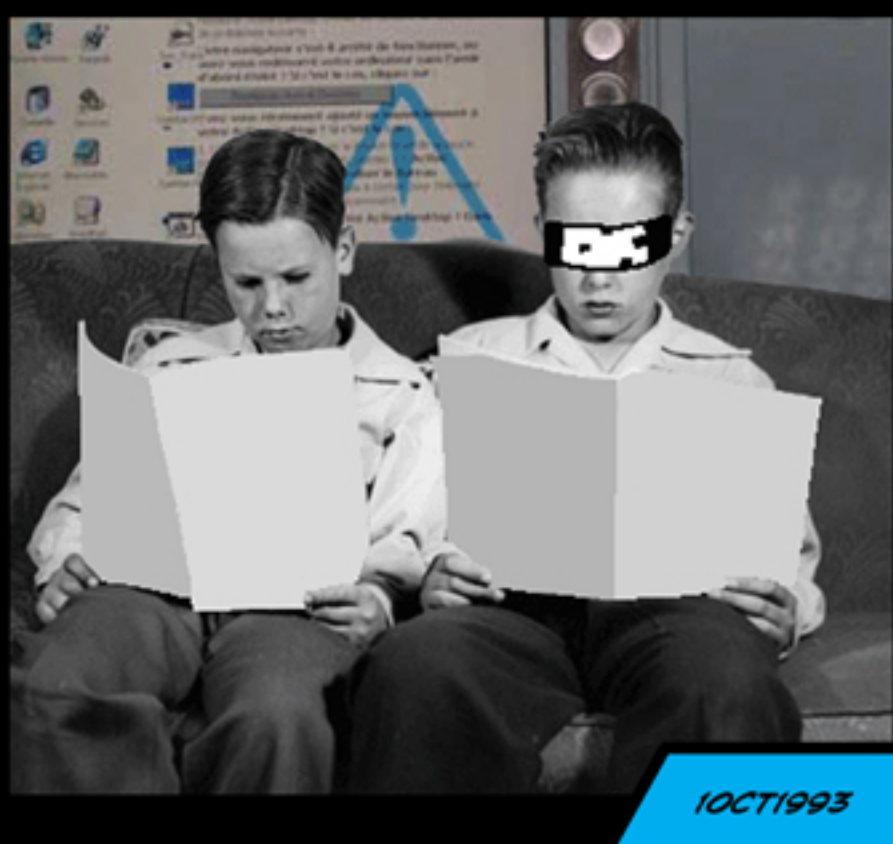
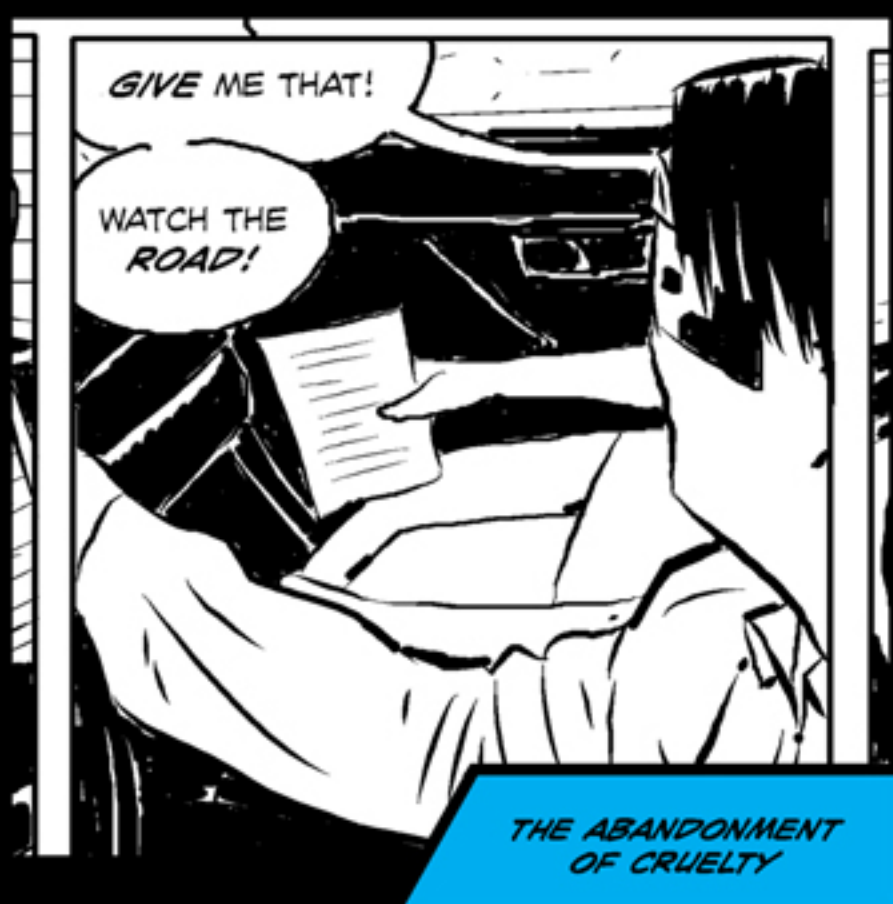




MASSIVE FICTIONS

2





THE ABANDONMENT
OF CRUELTY

Spam pt. 2
pg. 1



1OCT1993

Advance
pg. 12



COWBOY ACTOR #4

Universal pt. 2
pg. 15



1OCT1993

Men Of Vision
pg. 18



ACTRON #242

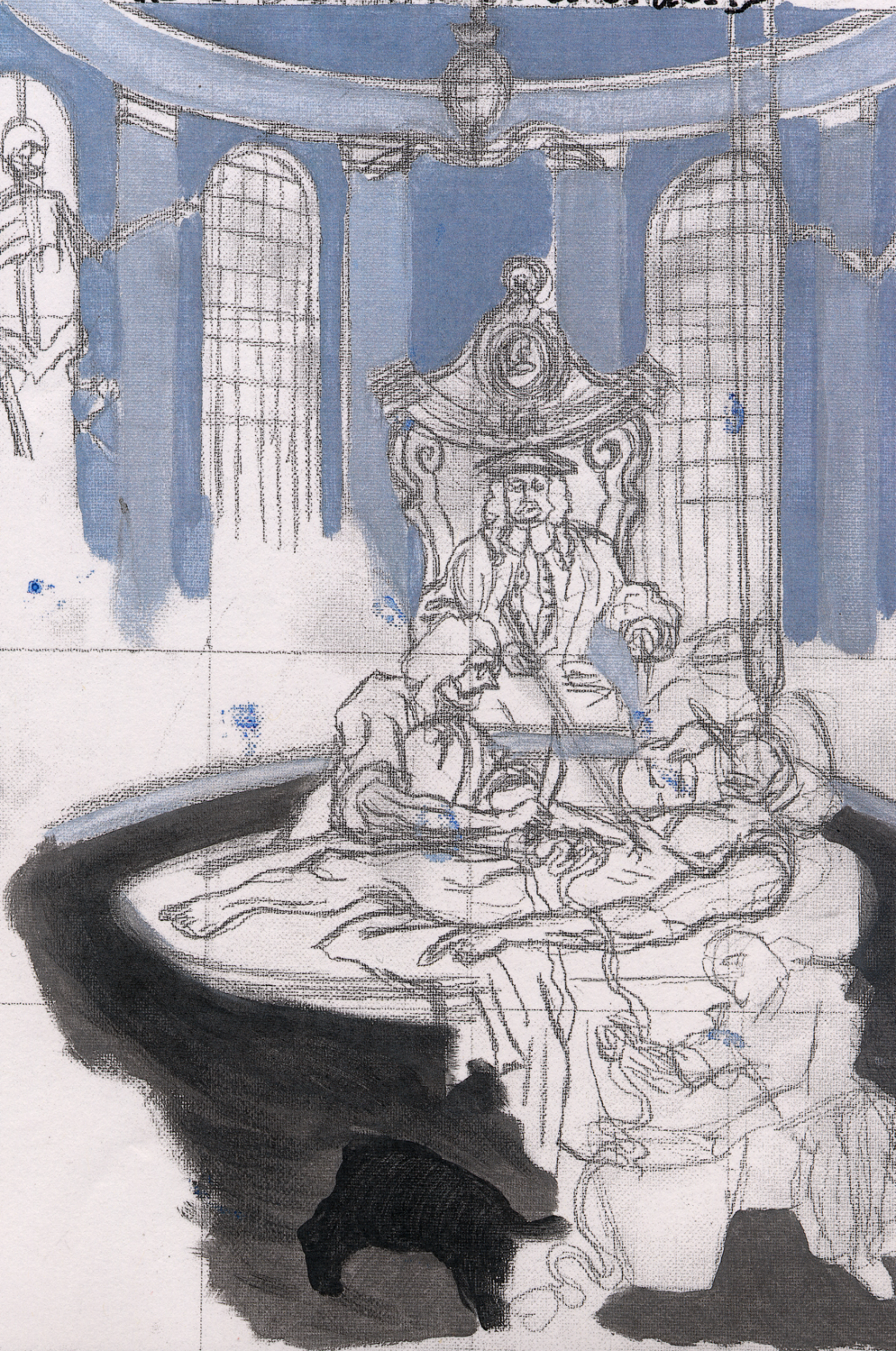
1986 pt. 2
pg. 27

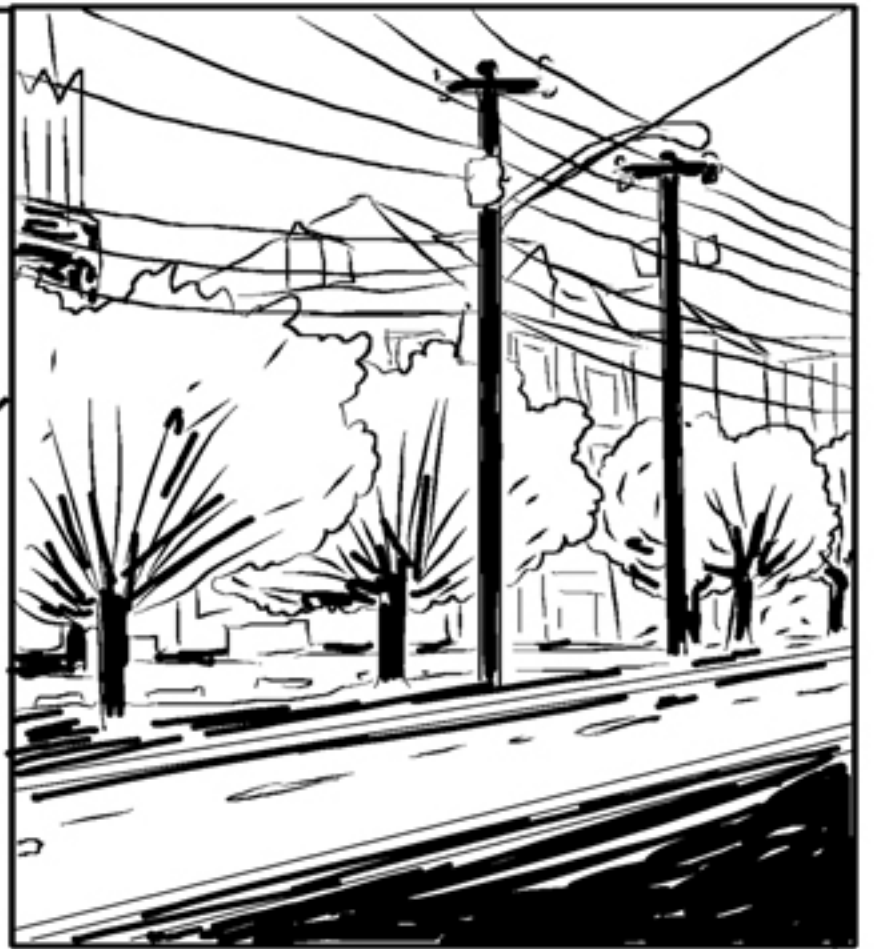


1OCT1993

Visor Technology
pg. 38

The Abandonment of cruelty





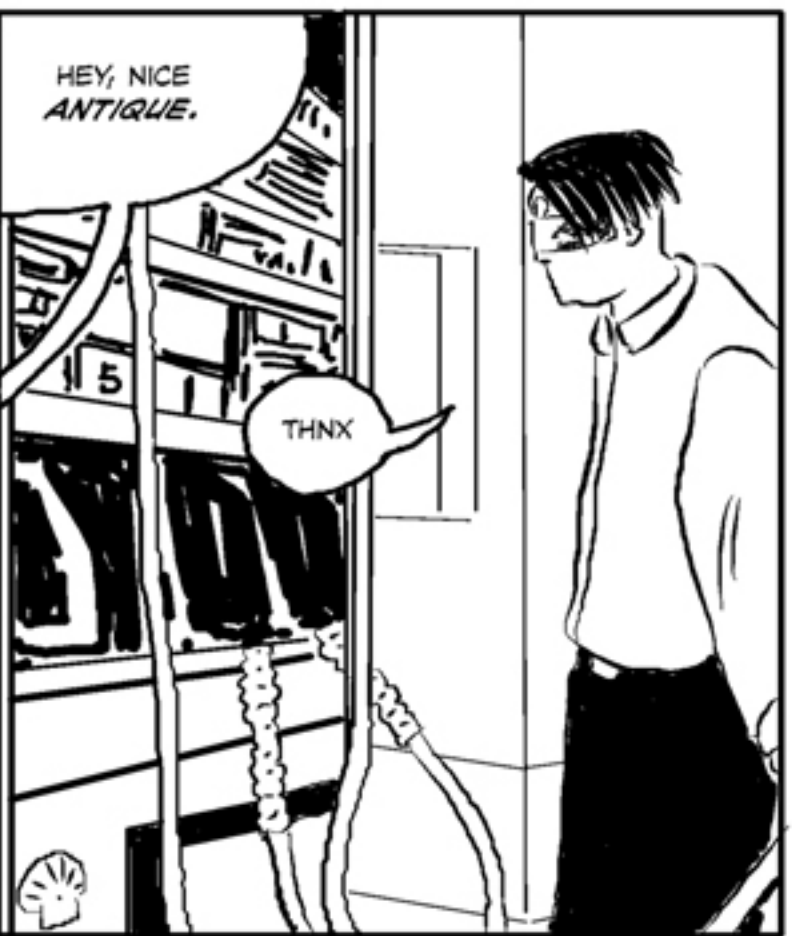
TO MY MOTHER, AN ATHEIST IS RUNNING FROM *THE TRUTH*.



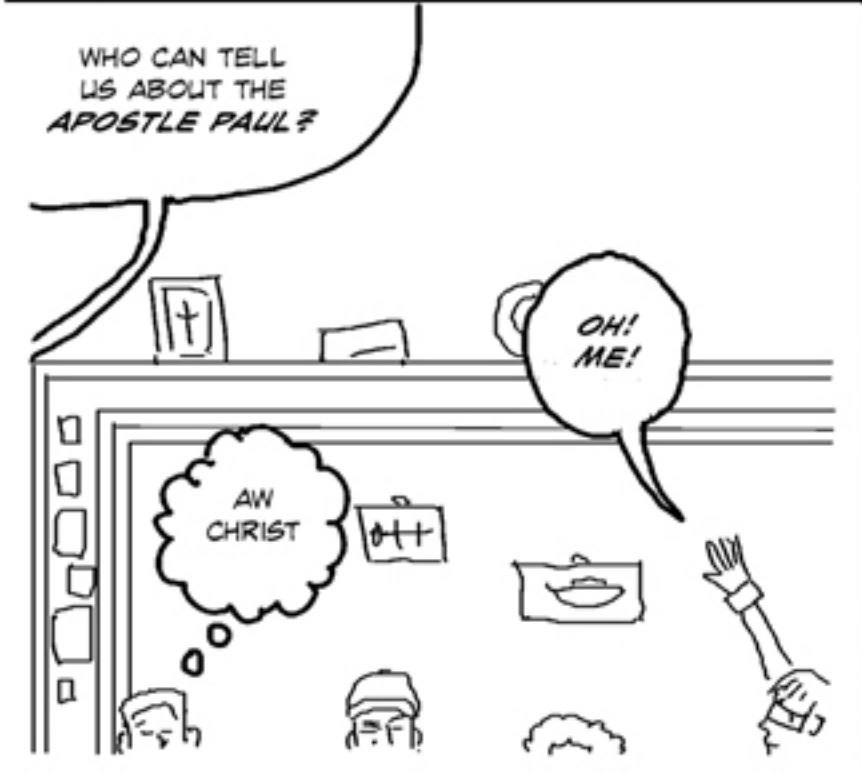
WHAT SHE DOESN'T *UNDERSTAND* IS THAT I NEVER WANTED TO STOP BELIEVING.



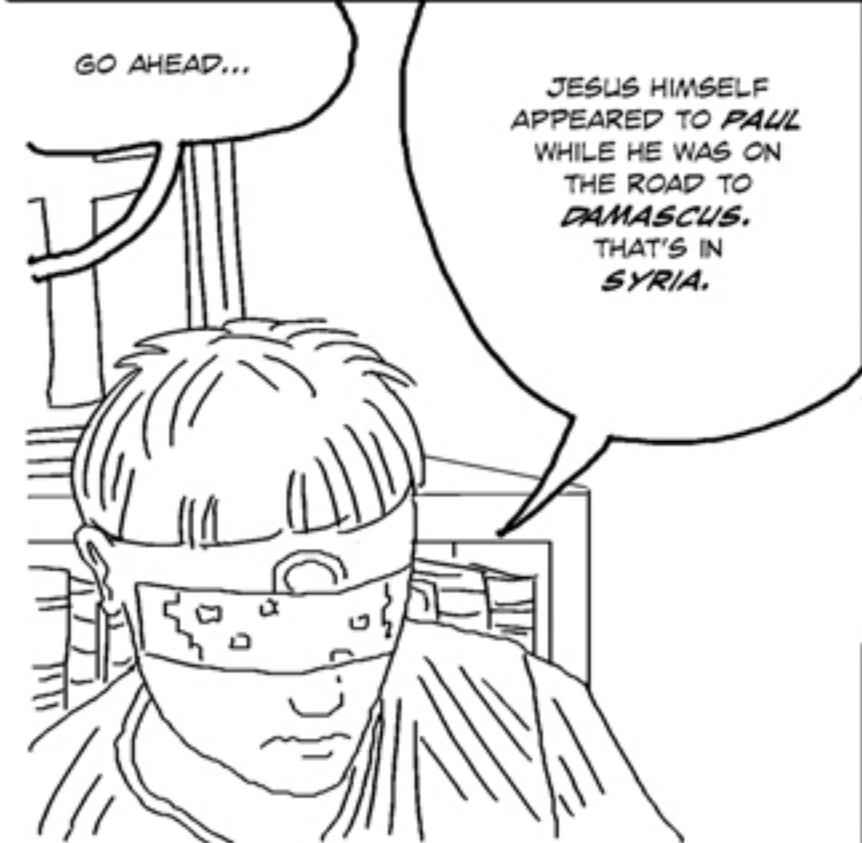
IT SIMPLY BECAME INEVITABLE.



AS A CHILD I NEVER QUESTIONED THE **BASIC THEISTIC ASSUMPTIONS.**



TO STUDY WAS ENOUGH.



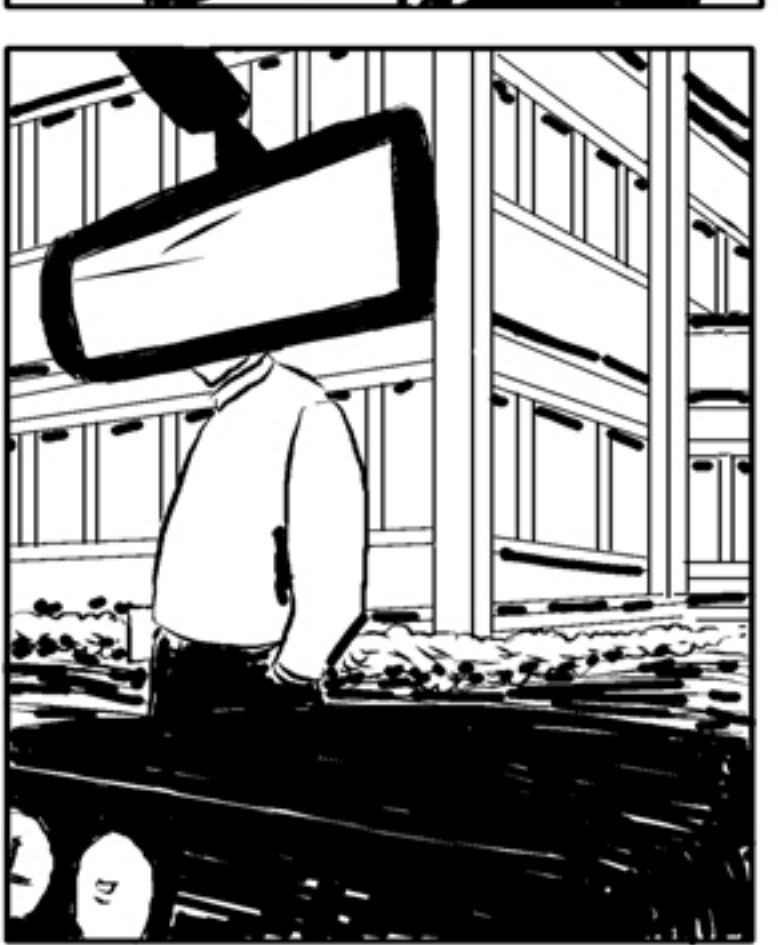
AND YET, IT WAS THE **STUDY** THAT LEAD TO **QUESTIONS.**

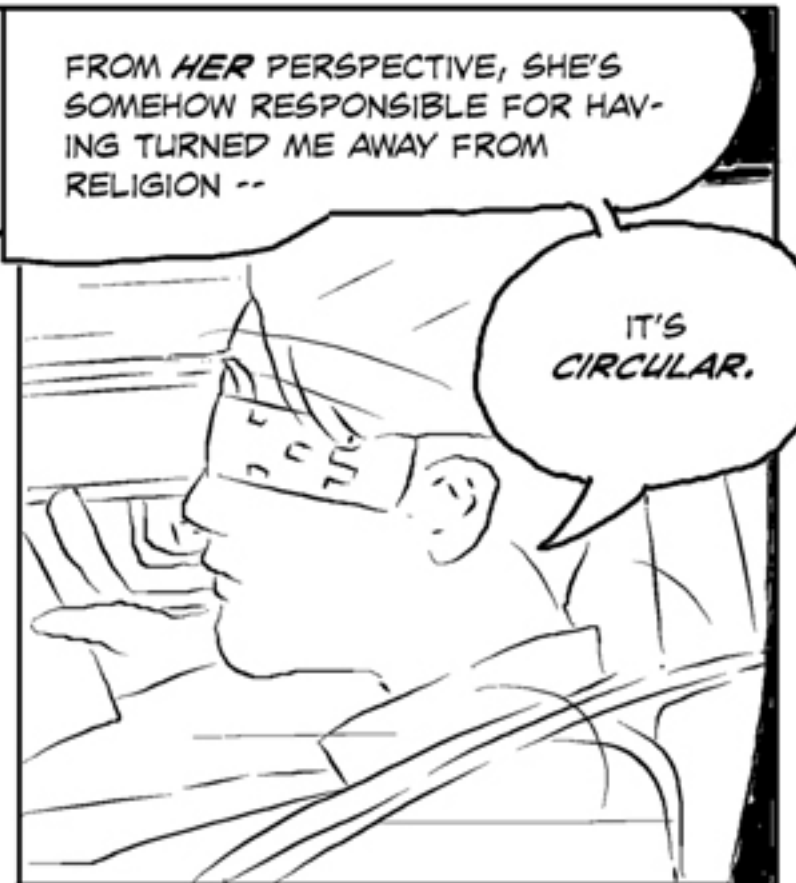
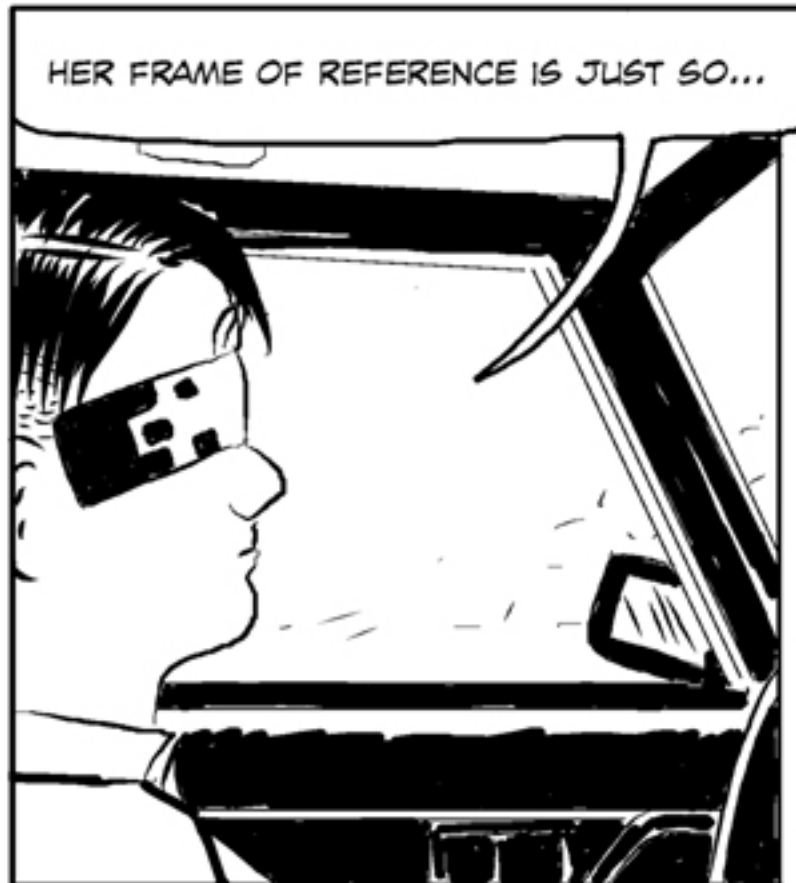
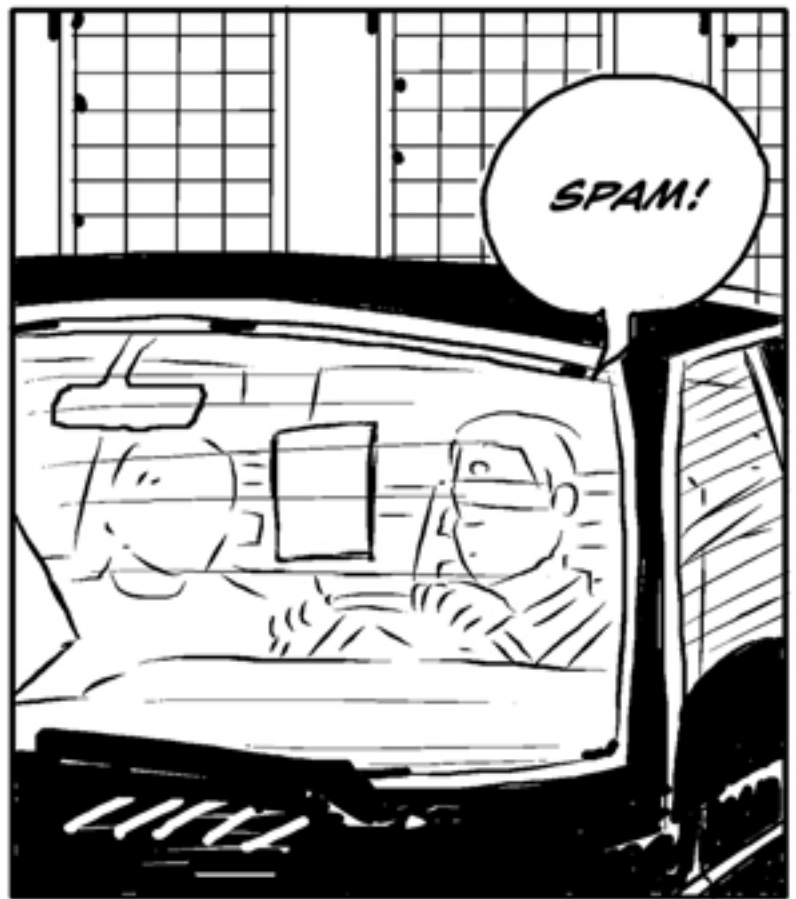
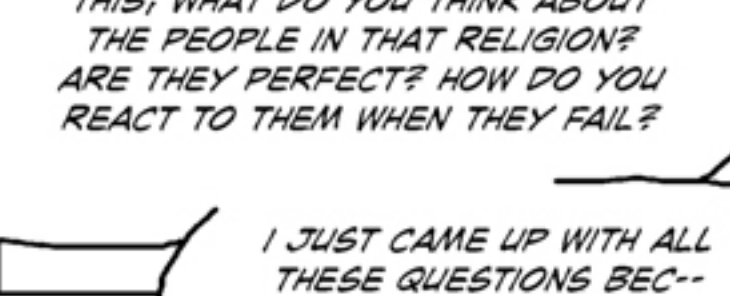
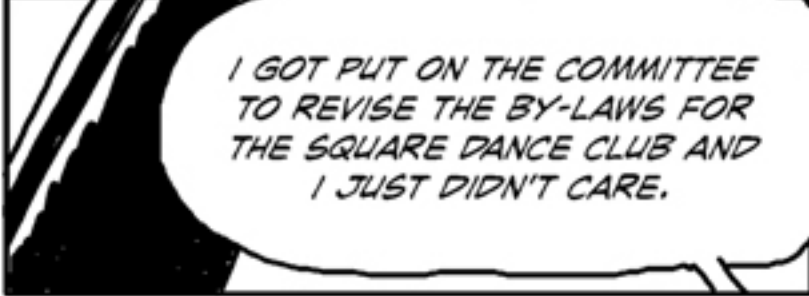
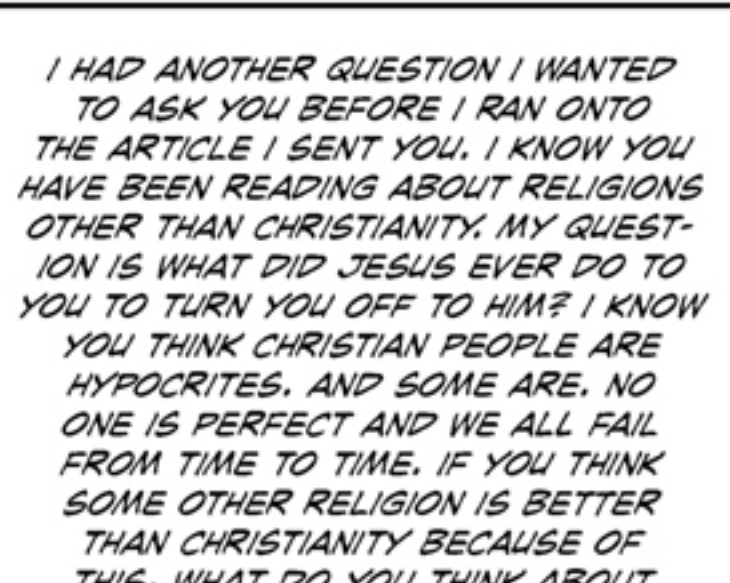
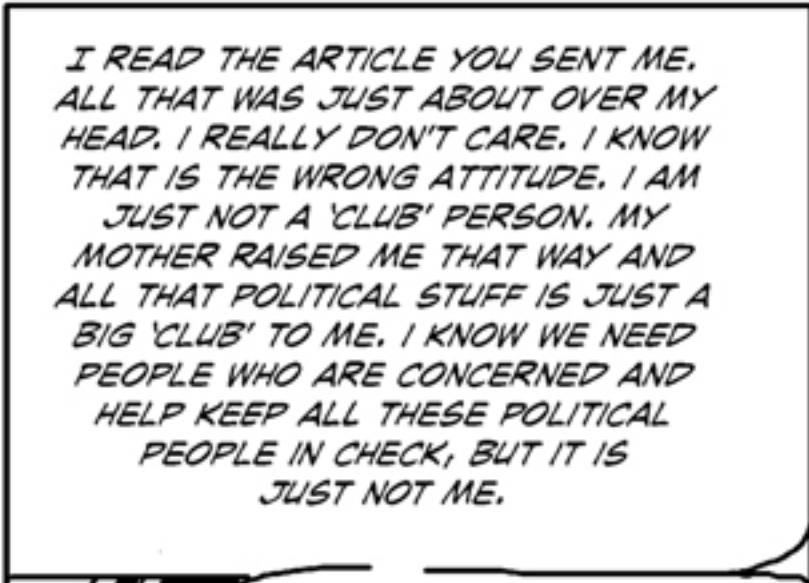


IMAGINE MY SURPRISE TO FIND THAT **QUESTIONS** WERE MOST EMPHATICALLY **NOT WELCOME.**



NAIVE, BUT WHAT HARM, TRUTH?





THAT *SUBTLE SUBTEXT* AGAIN. SHE'S TAKING IT ALL BACK TO THE TIME I FOUND OUT SHE HAD SEX WITH A GUY SHE WAS DATING.



NOW GRANTED, I *DID* FLY OFF THE HANDLE WHEN I FOUND OUT.



I ADMIT, I GAVE HER QUITE AN EARFUL. BUT WHAT DID SHE *EXPECT*? I'D BEEN TOLD THERE WERE *WORDS* THAT WERE UNFORGIVABLE...

LOGICALLY, THAT WOULD MEAN *ACTIONS* WERE EVEN *WORSE*.



SHE CASUALLY IGNORES THE DECADE OR SO OF CONCERTED (IF VAGUE) *THEISM* I MAINTAINED BETWEEN *HER GAFFE* AND *MY LOSS OF FAITH*.



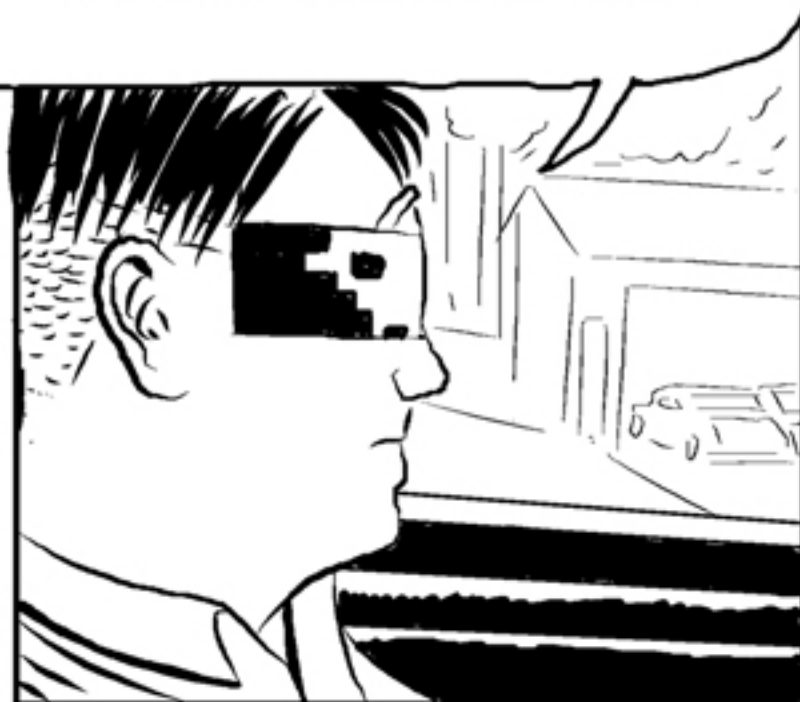
SHE CAN'T REALLY TAKE ALL OF THE BLAME, HERE.



IN MY EARLY TWENTIES, I DEVELOPED A SIMPLE AWARENESS OF *PRIOR ART*, FORERUNNERS OF OUR THEOLOGY THAT CALLED *EVERYTHING* INTO QUESTION.



PAST A CERTAIN POINT, IT BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE IN THE INERRANCY OF MATERIAL THAT SO OBVIOUSLY DERIVED FROM *EARLIER SOURCES*.



SHE SEEMS INTENT ON DENYING ME RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY OWN THOUGHTS.



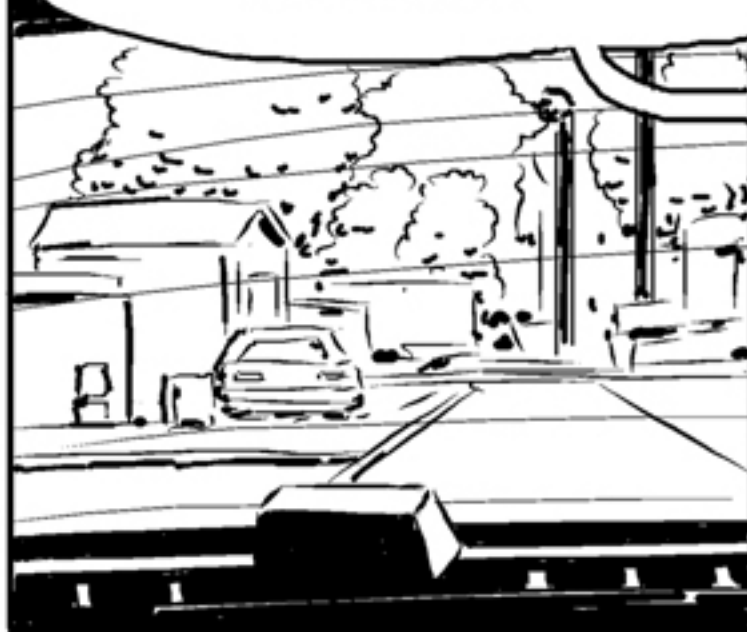
IT'S *INSULTING*.



STRANGELY, SHE ARGUES *AGAINST* THE *LOCALITY* THAT WAS SEEN AS *EVIDENCE* OF *EINSTEIN'S* BURGEONING (AND ULTIMATELY, LIMITING) *THEISM* --



SHE *INSISTS*, INSTEAD, THAT OUR PHILOSOPHIES MUST SOMEHOW BE *ENTANGLED*. IN SPITE OF THE *PHYSICAL DISTANCES* INVOLVED, OUR VIEWS MUST REMAIN *IDENTICAL*, *INDISTINGUISHABLE*.

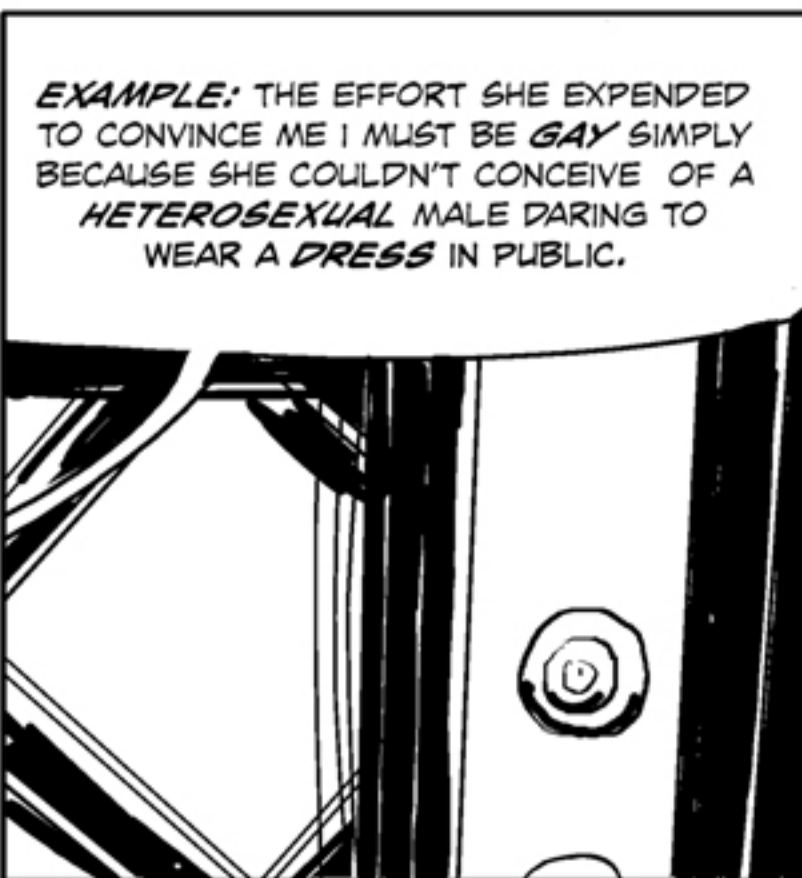
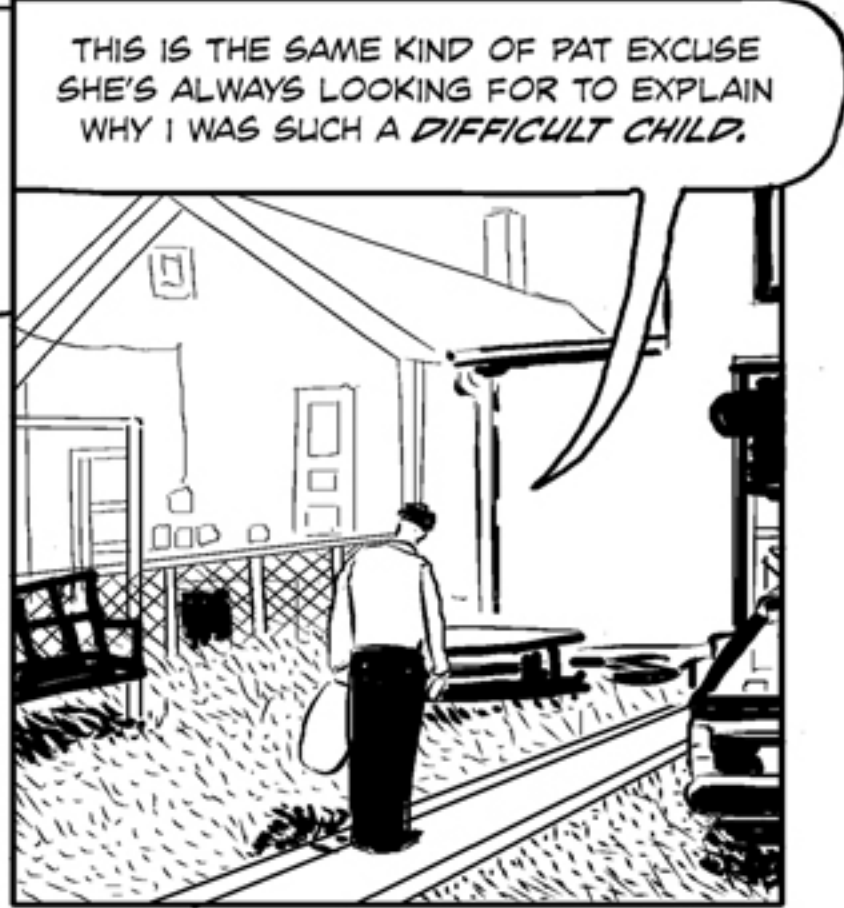


DOES THIS MEAN THAT SHE'S FACING HER OWN *CRISIS OF FAITH*?





IT WOULD BE FAR TOO SIMPLE AN ANSWER... ONE SHE WOULD ESTEEM *TOO LIGHTLY*... FOR ME TO CONCEDE THAT HER SINGLE ACT OF HYPOCRISY, OVER *FIFTEEN YEARS AGO*, TURNED ME AWAY FROM GOD AND THE CHURCH.



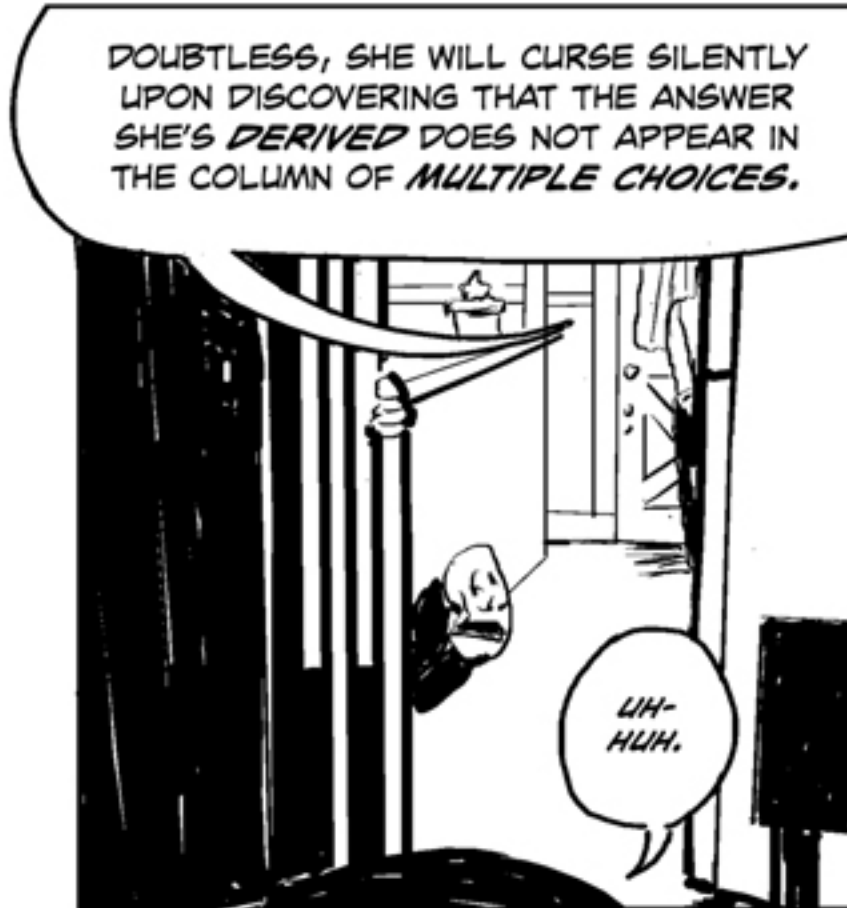
EXAMPLE: THE EFFORT SHE EXPENDED TO CONVINCE ME I MUST BE *GAY* SIMPLY BECAUSE SHE COULDN'T CONCEIVE OF A *HETEROSEXUAL* MALE DARING TO WEAR A *DRESS* IN PUBLIC.



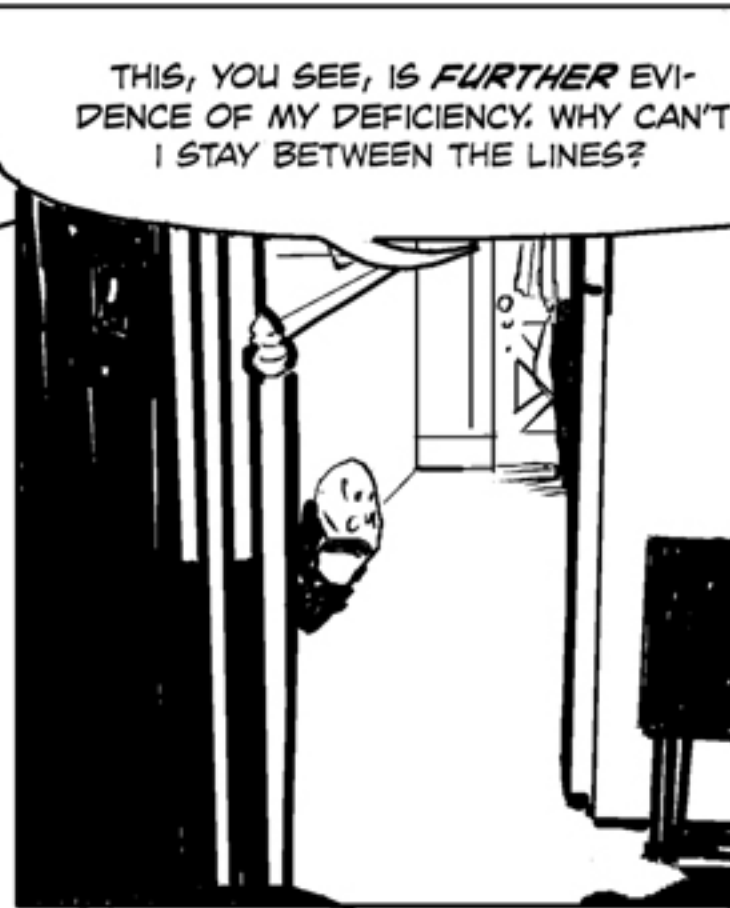
NO, SHE ABSOLUTELY *DID NOT* WANT ME TO BE *GAY*... BUT AN *UNHAPPY CONCLUSION* IS SOMETIMES *PREFERABLE* TO ACKNOWLEDGING *AMBIGUITIES* IN AN ALREADY-ACCEPTED PICTURE OF REALITY.



AN EQUATION WITH NO OBVIOUS RESOLUTION, I'LL ALWAYS FIND MYSELF SCRUTINIZED ON HER SCRATCHPAD.



DOUBTLESS, SHE WILL CURSE SILENTLY UPON DISCOVERING THAT THE ANSWER SHE'S *DERIVED* DOES NOT APPEAR IN THE COLUMN OF *MULTIPLE CHOICES*.



THIS, YOU SEE, IS *FURTHER* EVIDENCE OF MY DEFICIENCY. WHY CAN'T I STAY BETWEEN THE LINES?

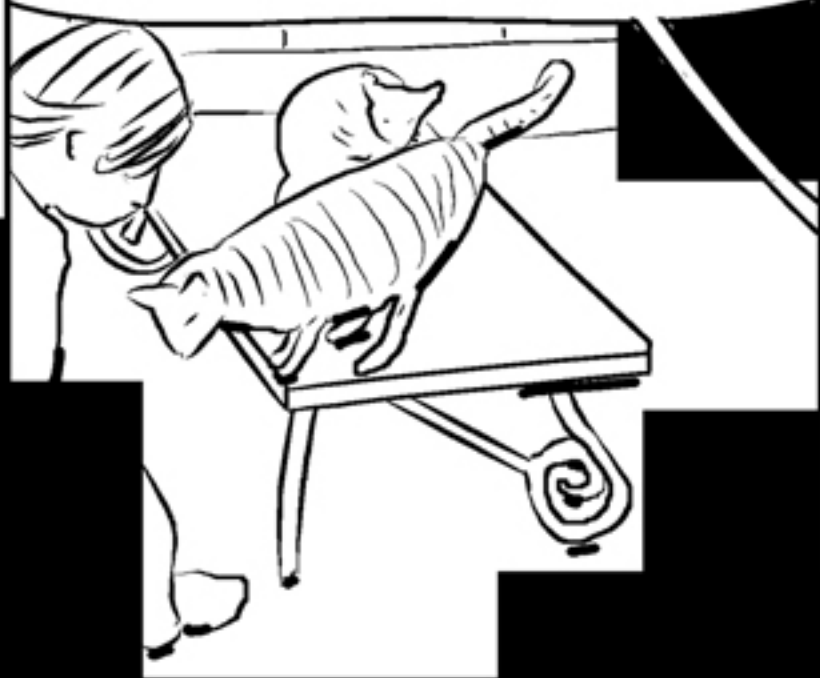


SPECIFICALLY THE ONES PAINTED ON THE ROAD.



IT WILL TAKE SOME WORK, BUT I'M ACTUALLY GOING TO RESPOND TO THIS ONE.

IT WILL TEST HER *ATTENTION SPAN*, BUT THEN THAT WILL TEACH HER BETTER THAN TO *ASK QUESTIONS* WHEN SHE DOESN'T REALLY WANT THE *ANSWERS*.



I SHALL SIMPLY ENDEAVOR TO *TELL THE TRUTH. AT LENGTH.* PROVIDE THOUGHT MODELS THAT COMMUNICATE THE *PROCESS* WHICH HAS LED TO MY CURRENT THINKING ON THESE SUBJECTS...



...AND THUS RELIEVE HER OF THE *PERCEIVED GUILT* SHE MAY HARBOR FOR HAVING *FAILED* TO SWING ME BACK INTO HER FOLD (TO TORTURE THE METAPHOR SOMEWHAT UNWHOLESOMELY).



THIS WILL SERVE CHIEFLY AS A *RHETORICAL EXERCISE* FOR ME. I DON'T EXPECT MUCH OF IT TO SINK IN.



MOST LIKELY, SHE'LL COME AWAY FROM THE INTERACTION RETAINING ONLY A SINGULAR CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCT: *HE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN GOD.*



WHICH OF COURSE WOULD BE SOMEWHAT *BESIDE THE POINT*.



THEN WHY EVEN *BOTHER?* WHY NOT JUST *AVOID* THE TOPIC ALTOGETHER? YOU'VE CERTAINLY EXERCISED THAT OPTION SO FAR. WHY STIR IT ALL UP *NOW?*



SHE'S LITERALLY *ASKING* FOR IT. SHE SAYS SHE WANTS TO UNDERSTAND ME.



I'VE BEEN MEANING TO WRITE SOME OF THIS DOWN ANYWAY. I'VE BEEN CARRYING IT AROUND FOR YEARS.



MAYBE THIS ONCE I'LL *CAPITULATE!* ACCEPT HER INFLUENCE AS AN EXCUSE.





Continued next issue

A MAN'S PASTIME

AFTER THE DAY'S WORK—
FIRST A SATISFYING DINNER...
A WELL-CRUSTED PIPE...AND
A TALE OF DARING IN SOME
DISTANT LAND.

MEN HAVE ALWAYS CRAVED
A TOUCH OF HARD-HITTING
ADVENTURE TO WILE AWAY
THE SLOW EVENING HOURS.

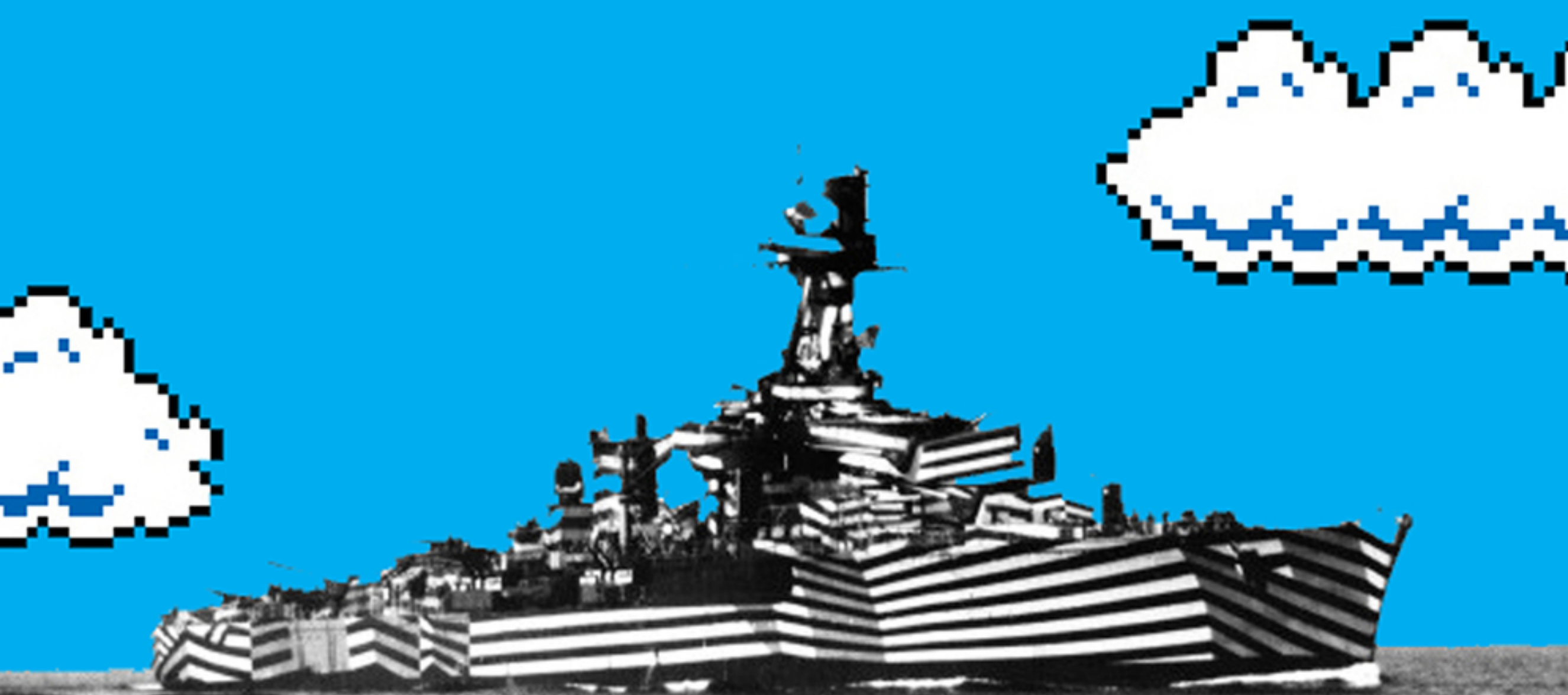
NOWHERE WILL YOU FIND
SUCH A TREASURY OF CLEAN-
CUT, EXCITING ACTION
STORIES AS IN THESE

Massive Fictions
Magazines.

3
OF THE
WELL-KNOWN
Massive Fictions
MAGAZINES



Look for the **MASSIVE FICTIONS**



1OCT1993

by Stanley Lieber

book one

- 01. | TAB2, 1960
- 02. | CU/FARLEY
- 03. | TOWARDS MYTHOLOGIZING THE COMING
RESURGENCE OF COVERT WARFARE
- 04. | ADVANCE
- 05. | MEN OF VISION
- 06. | VISOR TECHNOLOGY
- 07. | PAPER WINTER
- 08. | D.I.V.O.R.C.E.
- 09. | VIOLET RETURNS FROM THE WOODS
- 10. | KUDEN
- 11. | CLASS 68
- 12. | DULL CARE
- 13. | THE BAD STUDENT
- 14. | UBICOMP
- 15. | ALL THAT IS
- 16. | DRIFT
- 17. | IN THE END, NOTHING WORKS

book two

- 01. | ??

book three

- 01. | ??



Tags:
1963,
tab1,
tab2,
violet

ADVANCE

All told, it was three years until I saw him again. Draped in something reflective, outfitted for gelpants.

He appraised me, amused.

"I don't suppose you objected too strenuously, when they told you what it was they planned to do to me."

Six years old. Circumcised. Ready to start public school.

"Son, I've been doing my best to provide you a future. You're getting the best education tax dollars can buy."

"Prove it, Dad. They cut off my *stick*."

By 1963, the war had started.

"They didn't cut it off. They've trimmed back the excess skin. Hygienic benefits. Read up on your New Jack Testament. It's part of the package."

I'll admit, the family tended to shunt Tommy aside. We had shelled into advanced operations and were channeling most of our attention to the tactical situation above ground. Probably some things slipped by unnoticed.

"Nobody ever asked what I wanted."

Maybe I should have sent him back to his mother. He seemed more attuned to her.

"Irrelevant. You're not old enough to have an opinion on this. Here, hop on up here. Help me parse these filter rules. We have incoming."

"You old fuss budget!"

My daughter.

"Why don't you give him a break. He's been studying all summer."

"This wasn't strictly my decision, Violet."

"Lies! You're the ranking officer now."

"He's going to learn a lot more by observing us here than he would diddling with you and your mother back at home. Praying. Whatever it is you do."

"You're wearing him out."

"It's part of the training. He'll endure."

"Well, gee. I would advise that you get yourself a good lawyer. Tommy's peer group is quite litigious. See you never."

Violet slammed a lot of doors, that year.

The dream was this:

My wife, my sister and Violet wandering through HQ. Someone I don't remember from high school walking up and smearing grease paint on my face, saying "Don't you remember me?"

My wife, my sister and Violet walking through someone's house as a shortcut. The women stop to pick through the occupants' belongings. I advise them not to continue but they've become unresponsive. The occupants of the hovel wake up and sound the alert for their extended family, who appear from out of nowhere and accost us.

Hometown Security arrives with shock troops and we are all separated and detained. I am interrogated by Jeff from *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

By 1963 I had quit smoking, but still I made routine trips to the balcony to clear my head and to stare at the snow. There's no telling what my handlers thought of this. Ten below zero and there I was, out there in my shirtsleeves.

Well, fuck 'em.

I was close. Ten more months and the agency would have recouped on my advance. Then I could start in on the mortgage. Savings. Things would start to look up.

Mostly.

Tommy was still a worry. Soon they'd want to draft him.

I wasn't sure he was ready.

To be continued...

**COWBOY
ACTOR**

archives vol. 1



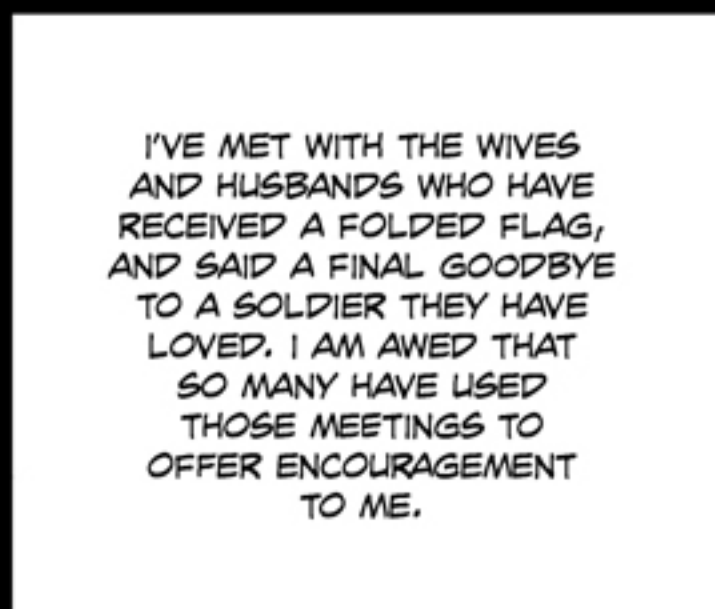
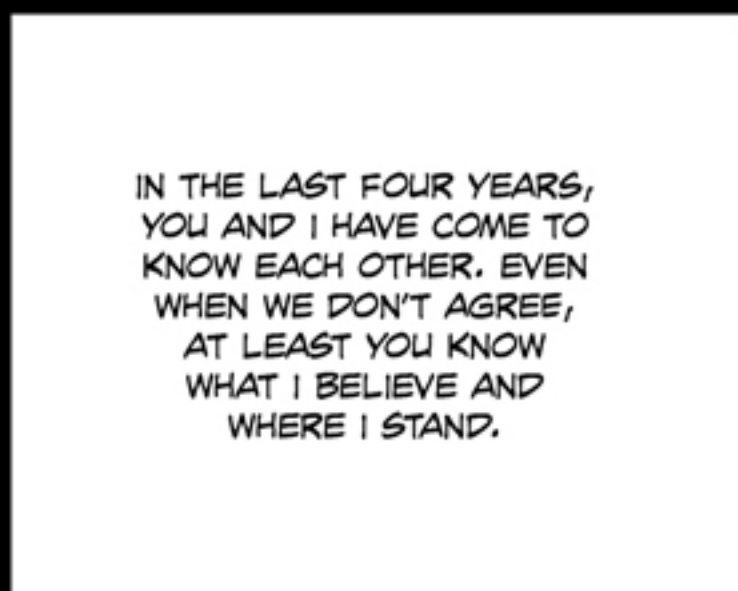
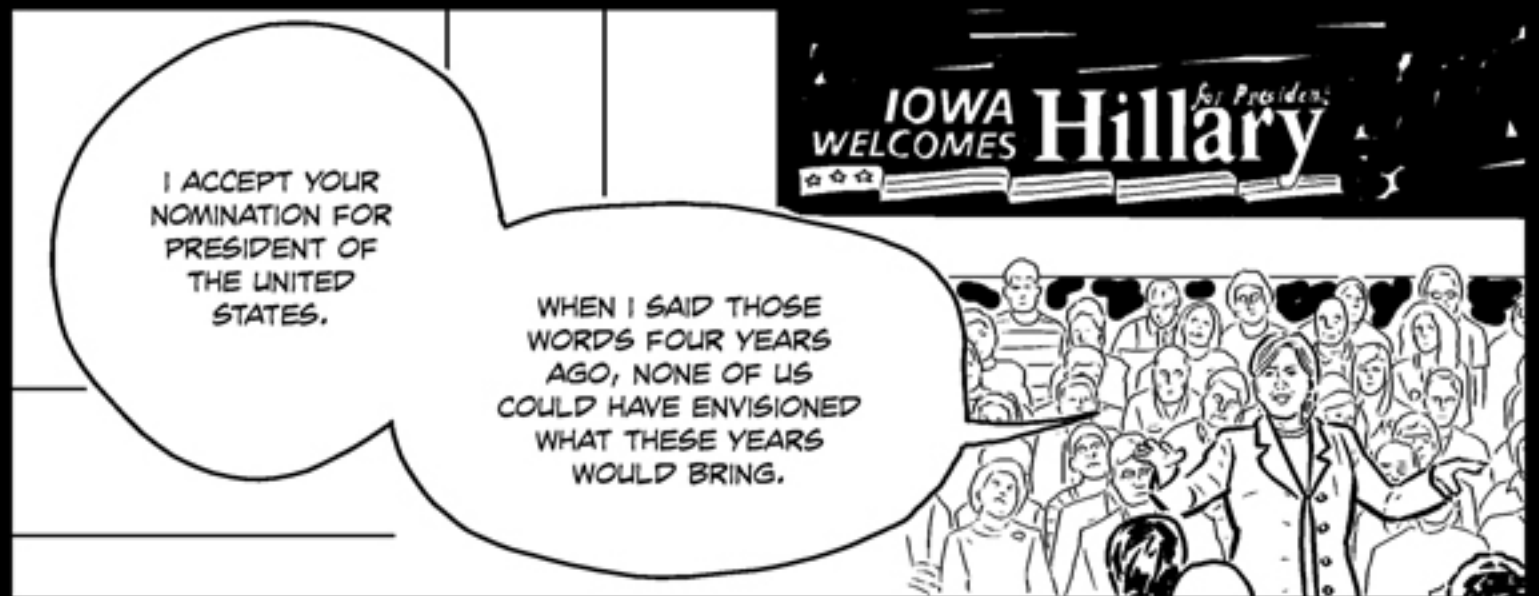
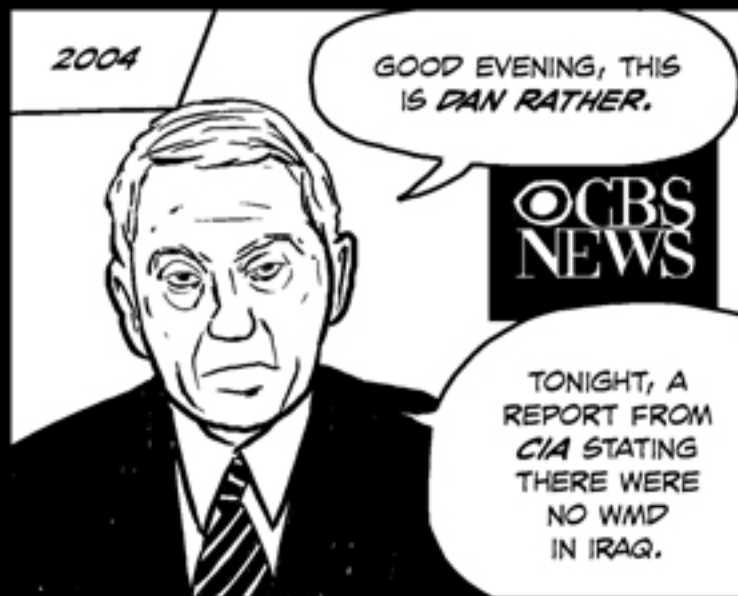
*Cowboy Actor
archives, vol. 1*

<http://tinyurl.com/ypntbq>

Cowboy Actor #4

continued from last issue...





2005



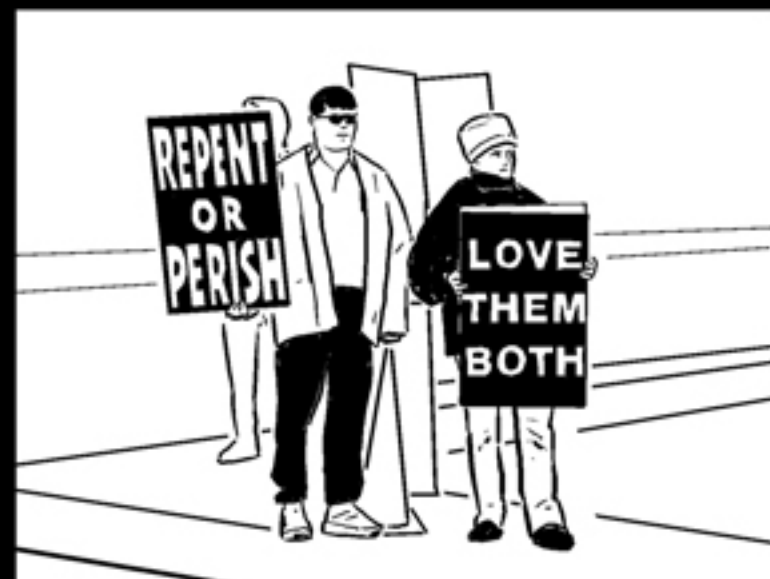
"...UNDISGUISED POLICY TO ISOLATE AND STIFLE THE DPRK."

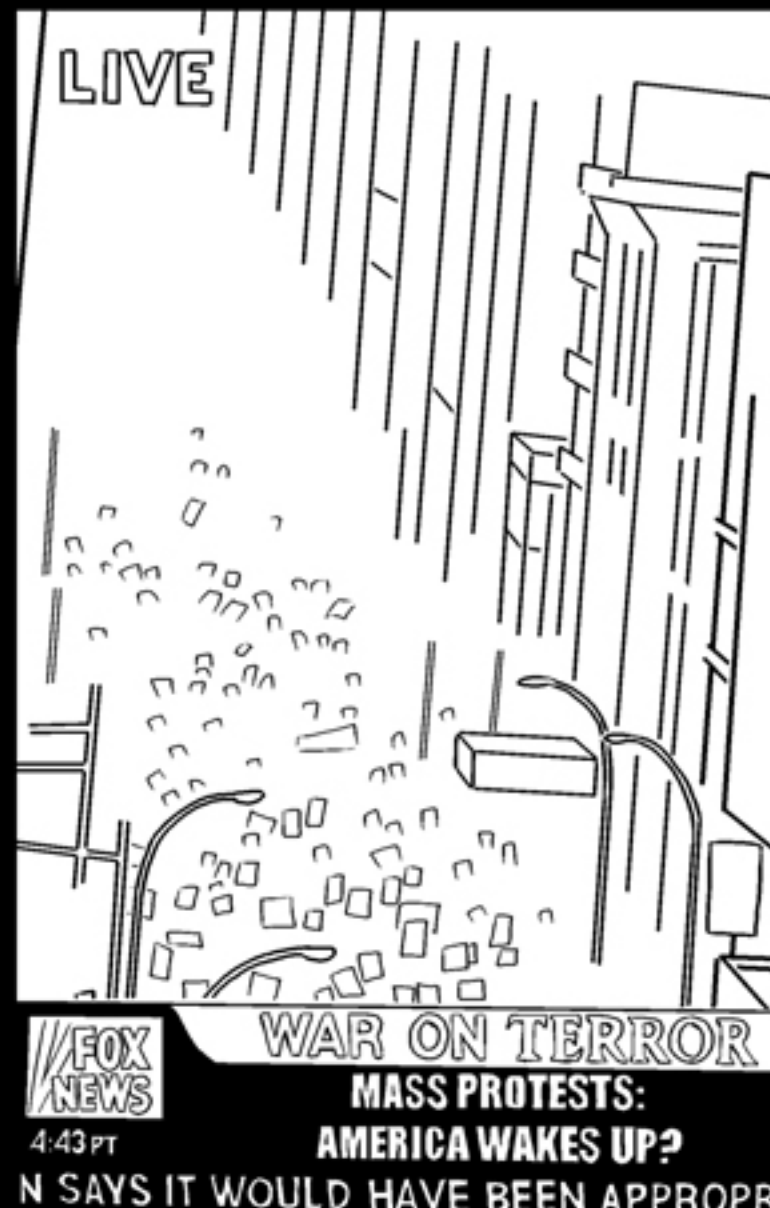
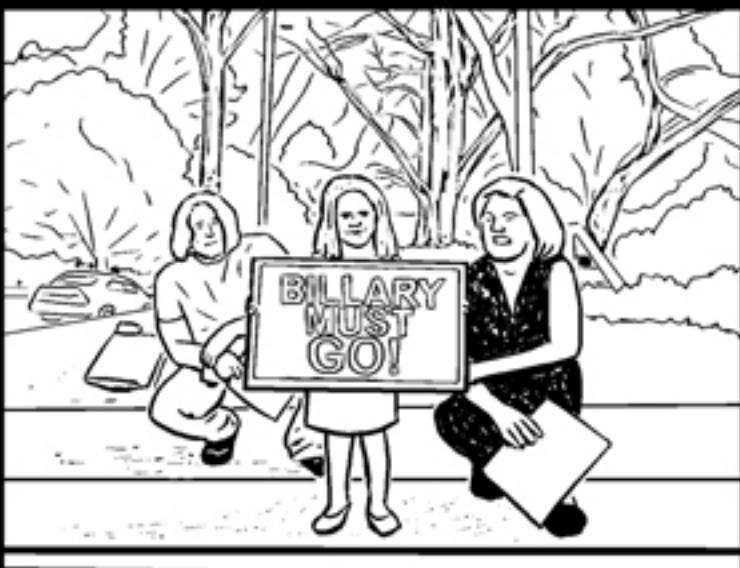
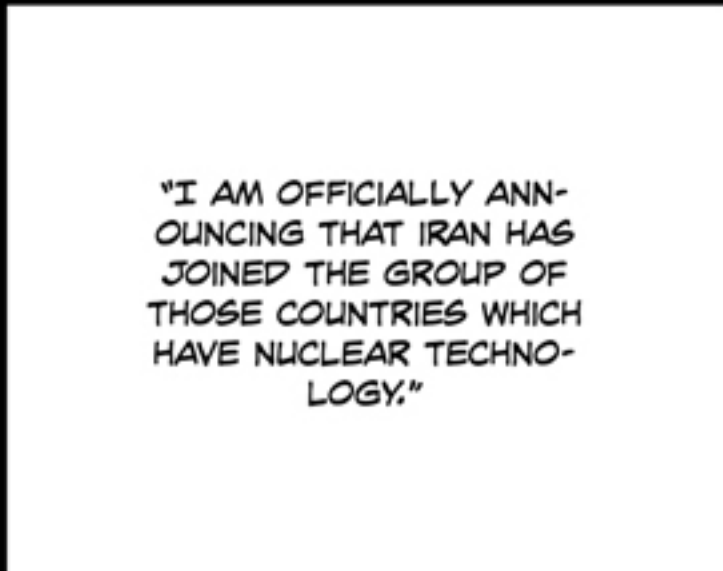
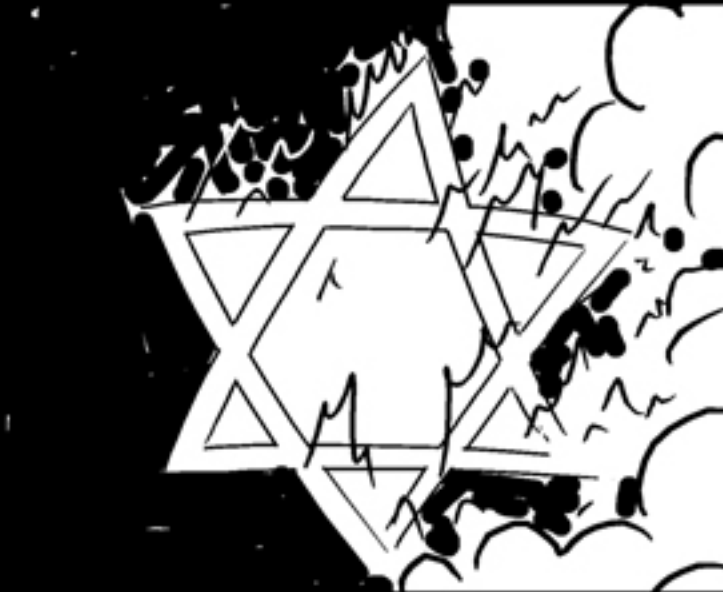
"IN RESPONSE TO THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S INCREASINGLY HOSTILE POLICY TOWARDS NORTH KOREA, WE HAVE MANUFACTURED NUCLEAR WEAPONS FOR SELF-DEFENSE."

"THE PRESENT REALITY PROVES THAT ONLY POWERFUL STRENGTH CAN PROTECT JUSTICE AND TRUTH."

OUR ALLIANCE IS DETERMINED TO SHOW GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH. ALL OF US EXPRESSED OUR VIEWS ON THE KYOTO PROTOCOL.

AND NOW WE MUST WORK TOGETHER ON THE WAY FORWARD.







MEN OF VISION

Tags:
1964,
tab1,
tab2,
william

The bombs are still falling when they outfit me with this stupid, spamming *hat* and instruct me to cart around young cousin William, the other male child on the premises, so that he might bask in the unfiltered sunshine, take in the unfiltered air, be exposed, finally, to the city above ground. This isn't posed as an elective course of action; I'm given formal orders and nudged in the direction of the outer doors.

I tell them I don't see as how it's a good idea -- what with the declining birthrates, the continuously falling bombs, the constant danger of disfigurement and death. But I might as well be set on mute when it comes to registering above the din of the war room. My thoughts are not considered.

Children, creatures endowed with no special mastery over the evolved traditions of warfare, are expected to find their own way, to get in where they fit in, to drive unique footholds into this imposing, existential mountain dubbed survival. Honestly, I've never considered this state of affairs to be a cause for concern. I've never shied away from a difficult climb; have preferred, in fact, to traverse peaks of despair, regarding them as nothing more than clumps of grass gathered at my feet. The one permanent handicap I've endured is the responsibility to this cousin, William, who is so young, who cannot even fend for himself. Others of his age are expected to survive by dint of their own skills. William, for his part, is basically immobile. Self-sufficiency has been altogether ruled out.

The war effort consumes most of the adults' attention. Slowly, William and I have been pushed from one room to another, down long hallways and through half-open doorways, with barely any recognition paid to how we are being treated. No one includes us, or keeps much track of us, now that the fighting has percolated into the city. With new air strikes arriving daily, we are the least of the adults' concerns.

I work with what I am given.

It is in these streets that I've learned my trade, have begun to earn my keep. I've developed an affinity for commerce -- an aptitude, you might say -- and happily contribute a percentage back into the household. Apparently, I'm a natural born hustler. So says my uncle. It has come to the point where I'm afraid the adults will finally realize their neglect; it's conceivable they may even forbid us, William and myself, to leave the compound on our own. This would negatively impact revenues, which is unacceptable. It would also harm our family's standing in the community, which is equally unacceptable. My products are in high demand. It is with a constant awareness of this predicament that, over the past few months, I have striven to make the skills of the street my own. I have adapted myself to its rhythms, mastered its sundry particulars, balanced weight through the hood until these various criminal activities have become as second nature to me, a collection of reflexive actions, as simple as walking to the kitchen or emptying my bladder. This sympathy with the tidal nature of currency is hard won, but allows me to function freely, wholly invisible to the financial surveillance algorithms employed by HQ. I should say, invisible so long as I remember to hold back that reasonable percentage for the family's coffers. It is true I would quickly gain a reputation for scandal, if ever I became sloppy enough to arouse the interest of my Father's men. Let us observe then that my operations have never been brought to their attention.

Add to an already-formidable grip my legitimate pay from William's promenades, and I'm already better than halfway to my new shield jacket. I count it as a demonstration of utility that I'm able to provide my own armor. A new shield jacket would doubtless preserve me through countless future crises (that is to say, if I'm not found skewered by shrapnel before the thing is even delivered). Thus I have concluded that even lamentable character traits such as my unquestioning greed may be construed as facets of pious virtue. Until I am able to participate in weapons training, I will content myself to be lost in the paper chase. Keeping William and myself alive is merely the start of what I hope to accomplish.

I assume that Mom and Pop are cognizant of all this, to some degree. In my view, the whole bang-up, this war, is simply an excuse to seek out and extract ever larger sums of money. The whole conflagration only serves to increase trade out here on the street. (Fortunately for me, the family doesn't seem too keen on auditing my activities). The fact that my relatives' economic interests are currently seen to overlap with my own is a kind of happy accident, perhaps of the sort depicted in children's cinema, or in certain of the ancient, sequentially illustrated

pamphlets collected by my Father. In reality, my family's enlightened self-interest drives a free exchange of goods and services, a marketplace that in turn benefits the entire community. My own present activities, in spite of the myopic moral objections offered by my sister, merely contribute to this aggregate effect. Yes, I've done some reading on the topic. I admit. But the ideas I've argued with Father can stand on their own, without the backing of an intellectual's hem-hawing. I dare say that they are self-evident. If only I could get him to understand: even in wartime, altruism is *beside the point*.

The kid in the cart doesn't realize I'm only in it for the money. He digs his fingernails into the palm of my hand, obviously frightened of the noise. We round a corner and a rather large building comes apart right in front of us. He buries his face in my coat just as we're pelted by a boiling shockwave of dust. For some reason he looks to me for protection. Of course, this toddler's intellect is not able to assess the true complexity of our situation -- he's not yet up to the task of cynical apprehension -- but perhaps in the end he is right to place his faith in me. It is unquestionably within the realm of my interests to make sure he survives these trips to the surface. The profit motive is clear. It's right there in the contract.

I pause to reflect on this, and the brilliant symmetry of our arrangement dazzles me all over again. I cannot help but marvel as I recount the subtle articulation: William survives; I profit.

I try to gather my thoughts.

Still, the dizzying effect persists. I struggle to get a hold of myself, even as large sheets of smartglass are de-integrating everywhere around us. A rapture similar to my own seems to have overtaken William. I am enthralled as he adopts a distant, distracted gaze, his jaw falling slack. He seems serene now in his repose, more contented than either of us have a right to be, given the circumstances.

I believe that my hand, which he continues to grip quite tightly, is starting to bleed onto my trousers.

Torn from my reverie, I return a gentle squeeze, letting William know that we're going to be all right. I guide his chair across the street, away from this perambulating dust cloud that by now has puffed up its chest to encompass half the block. If the trailing wisps of this mess are not to gum up the works of William's chair, we'll need to find our way into a shop or an office or a foyer rather quickly.

Adults are hurling themselves to an fro, generally kicking up more commotion than is warranted by the simple demolition of a midtown office building. I reign in young master William and tether him to a banister, and then I set off to fetch an adult. In short order I'm breast-stroking

through a sea of white lab coats. It's clear to me now that we've ended up in some sort of medical clinic.

It takes only a moment to evaluate the new surroundings, and I remain lucid enough not to dust myself off before approaching one of the nurses. That would be tantamount to chucking my tools in the trashcan.

"There's just no end to it," I hear one of the doctors remark, circumnavigating the perimeter of a nearby cubicle. His voice is filled with work-a-day resignation. Rotating my body to face him, I size him up instantly.

Half a second passes, and I launch purposefully in his direction. I'm going to try and get some hand prints onto his coat before he has a chance to form a dispassionate impression of me. He'll be forced to take in my appearance, to consider my circumstance. The ploy is nearly guaranteed to work, given his type.

"This spamming war just goes on and on."

His remark is sympathetic in nature. I take his words as an obvious cue to redouble my approach velocity, and step fully into the field of his vision. I wipe my arms across his chest and submit my filthy clothing, runny nose for his inspection.

"Excuse me, sir, might I inquire as to what it is that has just taken place, out on the street?"

I let the question hang there, resonating in the stale clinic air. I'm play-acting now as if I'm stupid; asking after that which I am clearly not equipped to understand. He buys into this mailbox full of spam because I'm merely a child, seven years of age, and therefore, self-evidently, not sophisticated enough to mount a motivated deception. Oh, the folly of experience.

I tilt toward him perceptibly, making sure he gets a load of my garb. His eyes fall upon me in silence and then there is a gap of some seconds before I finally detect a twinkle in the center of his un-patched eye. At last, he's picked up on it. He's located the transceiver. He's got a make on my ID.

This, of course, changes everything. His demeanor, not thirty seconds ago the sort of bemused half-attention one pays to a poverty-stricken child, is now replaced with that of a Green hobo ready to snatch a billion dollar bill from the collection plate. I am well acquainted with this shift in disposition, immediately recognize his tell, and so may reflect that my gambit is almost certainly working.

"Well, hello there, young fellow!"

He dings my helmet.

"You see, recently, some *bad men* have taken it upon themselves to provide our city's skyline with a series of aesthetic enhancements. You may learn in school, in the coming year, about a social interaction often referred to -- referred to *in the literature*, that is -- as *politically motivated violence*. Or, for short, PMV."

"Splendid and fascinating!" I exclaim, masking a considerable amount of mental activity with a merely adequate portrayal of child-like wonder.

Let me explain. Throughout all of this my mind has been occupied, simultaneously, on three fronts: affecting to extract details of the bombing attack without also giving away my real aim; shuffling through numerous possible *non sequiturs* with which to counter his inane stammering, none of which must come across as excessively practiced lest I inadvertently alert him to the fact that I'm on the grift; and, to complicate matters, keeping an eye on what's going on around us in the office, paying particular attention to my physical location relative to all possible exits. It has only been in situations like this that I have, after so many years, felt well and truly engaged with the world. A fickle melancholy descends over me, and I resist the urge to withdraw, to run outside, to find myself peering over the railing and thoughtfully evacuating my stomach. Characteristically, I maintain my hold on the situation. I press on.

The doctor, for his part, sinks into a portrait of exquisite confusion.

"Say, what *are* you two doing in my clinic?"

William's chair is knocking back and forth gently, blissfully unaware of the limits set for it by my tether. I turn my eyes back to the man very slowly, straightening my posture and raising my voice.

"Sir, I was carting around my little brother here when the building at 25765 St. Aecstopher's Cross did fall down nearly on top of us. I'm afraid I have sustained some sort of injury, as my arm seems to have gone missing."

I do the trick with my shoulder, slipping my arm, and he gasps as it re-appears in my sleeve. Absentmindedly, I look down and say, "Oh, *there* it is."

He fails to laugh. Instead, he puts in a respectable effort to wrinkle his eyebrows, to grow more concerned with each passing moment. Privately, I want to be disappointed with this reaction, to ask him if somehow the humor hasn't translated, but I *will not* break character over a single flat joke.

Now, this fellow knows when he smells a five-star dinner. Oh yes, he's recognized which house we're from. Dad's pressure screen is probably glowing red even as we commence negotiations. I think I

can actually feel the chips twitching in my wrist and neck, as both regions are crying out to be scratched. Or maybe it's just my allergies.

Without warning, something seems to click into place in the doctor's head, and he lunges toward me.

Almost before I can unlatch William, the man's taken me up into his arms and is ferrying me into an examination room. He unloads me gently on the table and smooths me onto its stiff, white paper, presumably there to stem the spread of various bacteria. It will be interesting to hear which perilous -- though certainly, at this clinic, treatable -- ailment he has diagnosed me with, now that he realizes I've membership in a truly superlative health plan. That's when he notices my eyes.

"Son --" His own eyes get stuck gliding over William's gilded chair. "Son, are you... *blind*?"

"Of course I'm blind, you jack ass!"

Okay, I admit here that I've broken character. I wrench my face back into a pathetic sulk and twitch only once, trying to restore equilibrium. I remind myself to act my age. Let *him* guide the scene.

"How long have you been wandering the streets out there, without being able to see where you're going?"

An easy one.

"It's never really been an issue. I mean, I seem to know my way around the neighborhood pretty well. Everyone here knows *me*. And twenty-twenty vision isn't a panacea against belly-flopping architecture, as I think was proved out there today."

"Hm. I suppose it was. I admit, you do seem capable. But still, blindness is a serious complaint for one who spends so much time outdoors. I would imagine it's also quite demoralizing, when your obstructed vision is rated against that of your peers, wouldn't you agree?"

Like I said, I'm a billion dollar bill lying face-up on the sidewalk.

Presently, he claps me into another chair, this one missing the sanitary strip of paper, and begins attaching things to my face. I open my mouth to try another pitch but he simply reaches down and plugs it with a wad of medical gauze. I suppose we'll have to continue our discussion once he's finished tinkering with my eyes.

He's a few hours getting on with it, and so, by the time he's taken

down my numbers and confirmed them multiple times against his network queries, William and I are left to amble along home. Once again I have to point out: here we are, children, alone on the streets after dark, where war is still being waged. (Admittedly, the firing usually stops when the sun goes down.) Sure, plug me into a machine to fix my eyes, then send me right back out into the war zone. What was the point? I could get this treatment from the boys at HQ. In any case, I have now been outfitted with an outlandish plastic headband. It encircles the top half of my face and displays a pleasant array of colored shapes, monochrome to onlookers and passers-by. Aside from the cosmetic effects, my vision seems unchanged.

We exit the clinic without having gathered any useful intelligence. Ditto for the tally of unburdened credits we have to show for our trouble. No doubt this will have been a complete waste of an afternoon, distinguished only by the irritation of a needless medical procedure. I've wasted a lot of time that could have been devoted to shoring up my grip. William looks up at me, visibly disappointed.

At an intersection, I am surprised to note that I can now see things I've never been able to see before.

In some ways, it is confusing, this trying to peer between the fat cubes of light that gyrate before my eyes. At first I am not quite sure how to adjust, even as I attempt to keep walking. Slowly the input begins to make sense. To help, rather than hinder, my navigation.

On balance, I will say that there is much to recommend in these additional streams of information, all dancing betwixt each other and pouring unstoppably into my face. The interface is intuitive, hands-free. I can see where such a device could be considered useful. I'm even getting telemetry now from HQ. What has this motherspamming optometrist *done* to me?

I seem to have gotten quite a ways down the street on my own. I've inadvertently left William back at the intersection, his chair bobbing in sync with the traffic. When I return to his side, I see that he has pulled out his knapsack and begun to tear off little strips of paper, creasing them into slim, rectangular folds that bear a striking resemblance to illegal tobacco cigarettes. He offers one to me and I accept, gripping it between my second and third fingers, leaning back against the enormous smartglass windows of the FIRST MULTINATIONAL BANK. Eventually, I bring the sliver of paper up to my lips, deftly feigning inhalation. Smooth flavor...

William looks up at me with those preposterously large eyes and, for the first time today, puts forth the effort to straighten out his spine and stutter a few words. In spite of the pain it causes him, he wants to speak to me.

You have to admire his grit.

"T-T-Thomas, it's been a fun day, and it is r-r-rather late -- *ungt!* -- but, if it's all the same to you... I... I would prefer that we tarry here for a while, and p-p-pickle in the ebb and flow of the... c-c-cool night air."

I raise my cig to him and nod respectfully. We both jump as a building collapses, somewhere off in the distance. On this night, the city will not be afforded its usual dusk-to-dawn reprieve.

Gingerly, I work the length of gauze out of my mouth and begin to unroll its damp wad of fabric onto the sidewalk. William's glassy eyes reflect a light that seems to originate from no obvious source. He recognizes what it is I've managed to smuggle out of the doctor's office. There is more here than just the blood and spittle sopped up by the rags.

A selection of tiny hand tools glistens in the light of the street lamp. These are the final pieces we'll need to render our reverse-engineering shop, hidden for now in a vacant ammo closet on the sixth level, fully operational. Once I can get a hold of a few more classified schematics, we can begin undercutting the importers, kick our minuscule operation into full gear. We'll even be able to outfit William's chair with its own shield jacket and an independent comms package, all of our own design. No more relying on the adults or outsiders for our gear.

I briefly consider cutting Father in on this action. That notion gets dispersed along with the echoes of mortar fire still reverberating across the river. As I might, I know he just couldn't be made to understand. This world we've arrived at, crowning from the great, vaginal maw of nothingness bequeathed to us by our ancestors, brooks no quarter for the elderly, or for those sad individuals still nostalgic for the unambiguous adversaries of eras past. Pop would be happier lobbing rounds at the enemy, clawing defiantly as he sinks into his grave, still convinced he's making some sort of falsifiable, empirical contribution to his generation's most momentous struggle.

What a load of bollocks. Dad has wasted his entire life on this nonsense.

I decide it's best to keep my opinions to myself. William tends to be sentimental when it comes to family.

Speaking of which, the boy has gotten busy, grunting and drooling into his shirt. All evidence of his brief flash of lucidity is gone, vanished. Might as well never have happened. He's making a mess of his clothing.

I snatch up the little bundle of tools before he spoils them, too. Sometimes you wonder why you even bother. With William, the sentiment is amplified. I suppose I do feel for him.

We're both of us looking forward to the end of this war.

No, really. Hear me out.

I've grown weary of the grind. I want to be free of William, free of this duty.

I worry that the adults have already compromised our security. I can't imagine the Green insurgents will ever give up. Do you see what I'm saying? It's frustrating that the family pursues this stagnant vision of religious purity. We can't all be ideologues. Or not of the type my father admires, anyway. We have to be in this to win it. We have to get in where we fit in. And that might not include the Church.

As for now, I'm content to focus on having a smoke and getting rich.

I'm convinced. It's the only way I'm going to survive.

To be continued...



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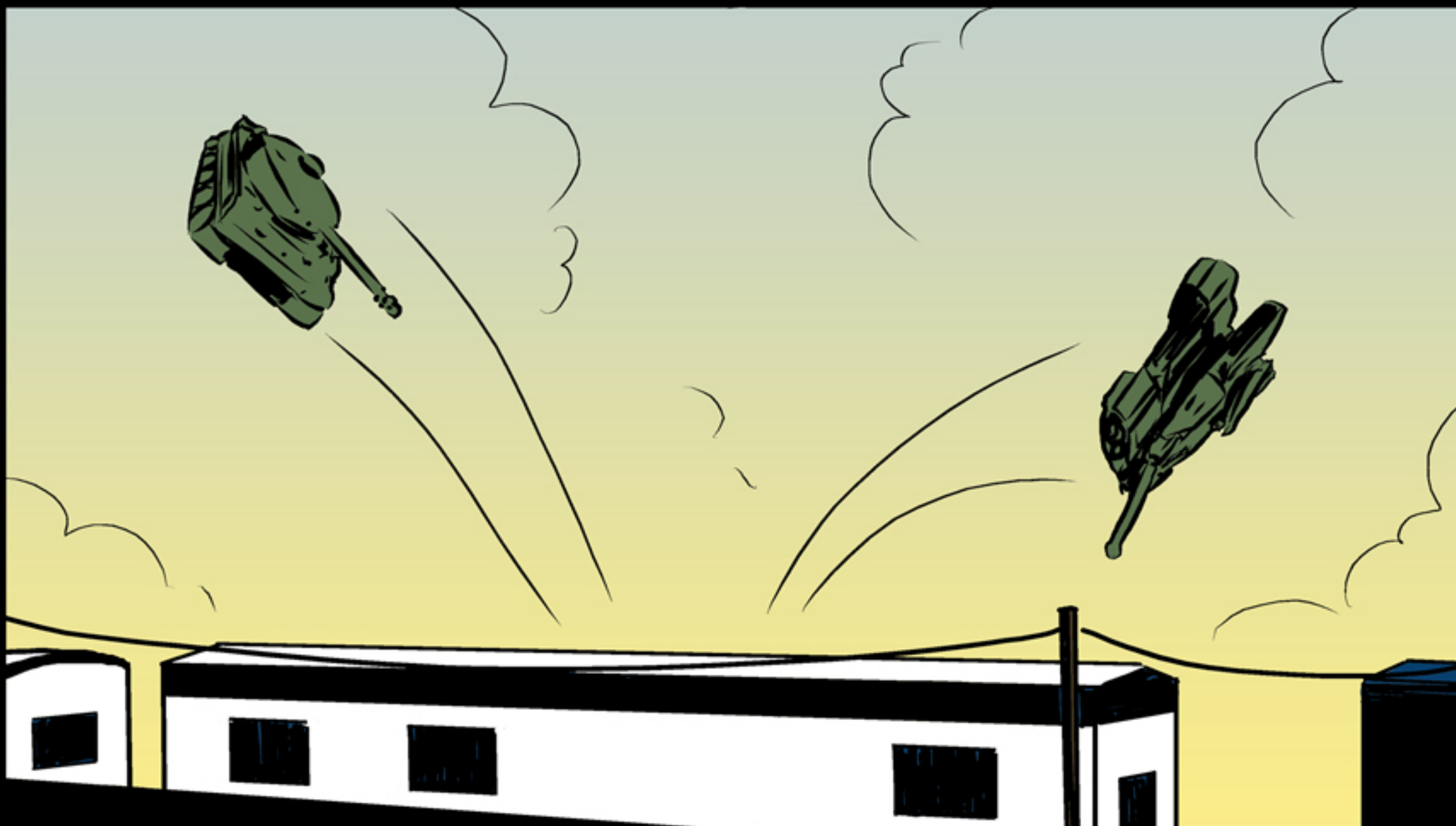
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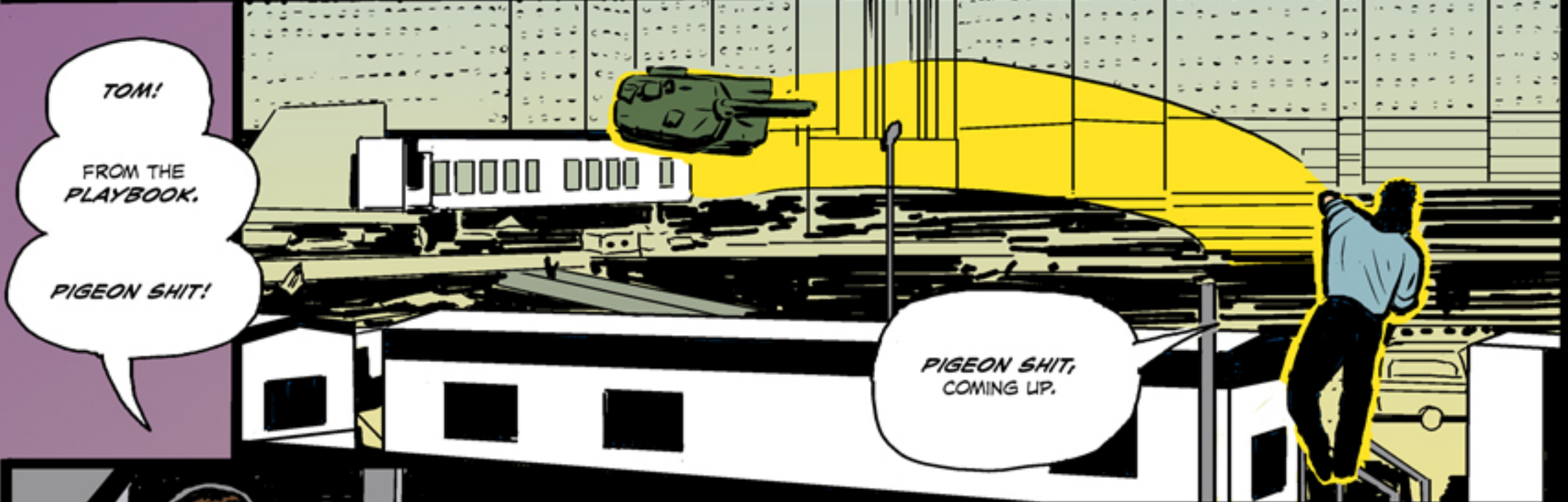
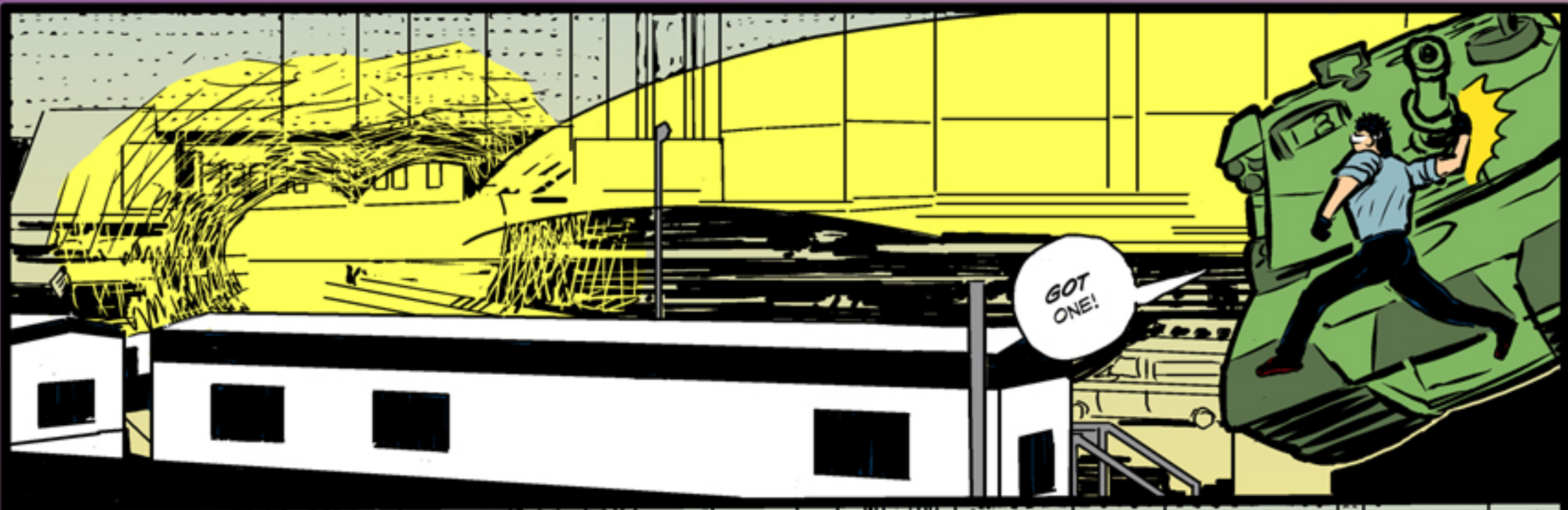
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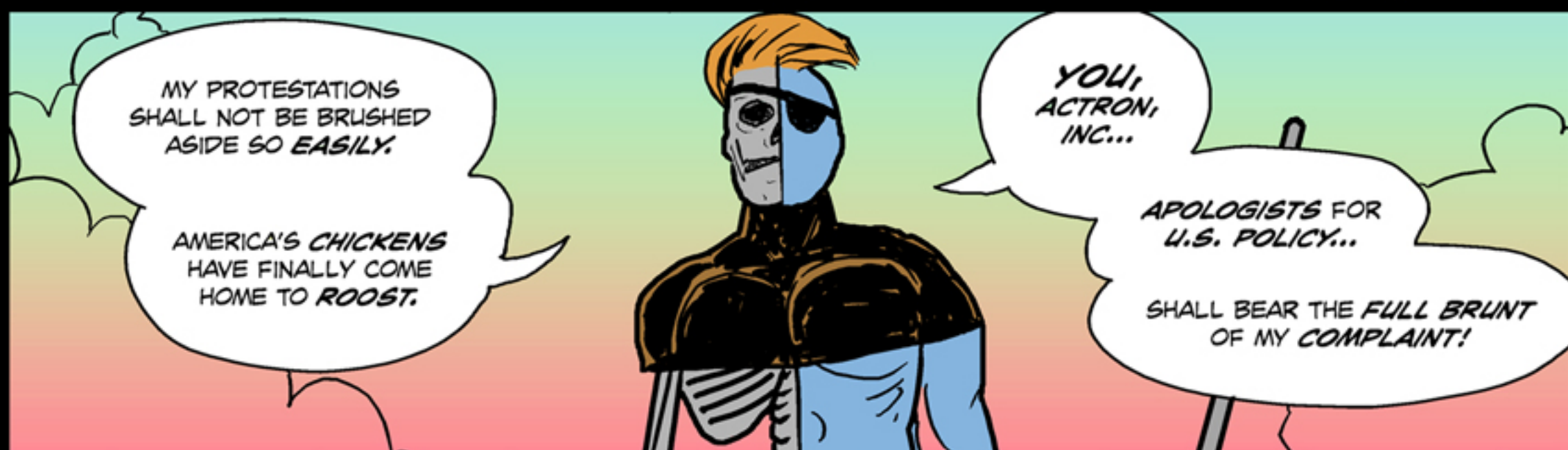








RIDICULOUS.



MY PROTESTATIONS
SHALL NOT BE BRUSHED
ASIDE SO *EASILY*.

AMERICA'S *CHICKENS*
HAVE FINALLY COME
HOME TO *ROOST*.

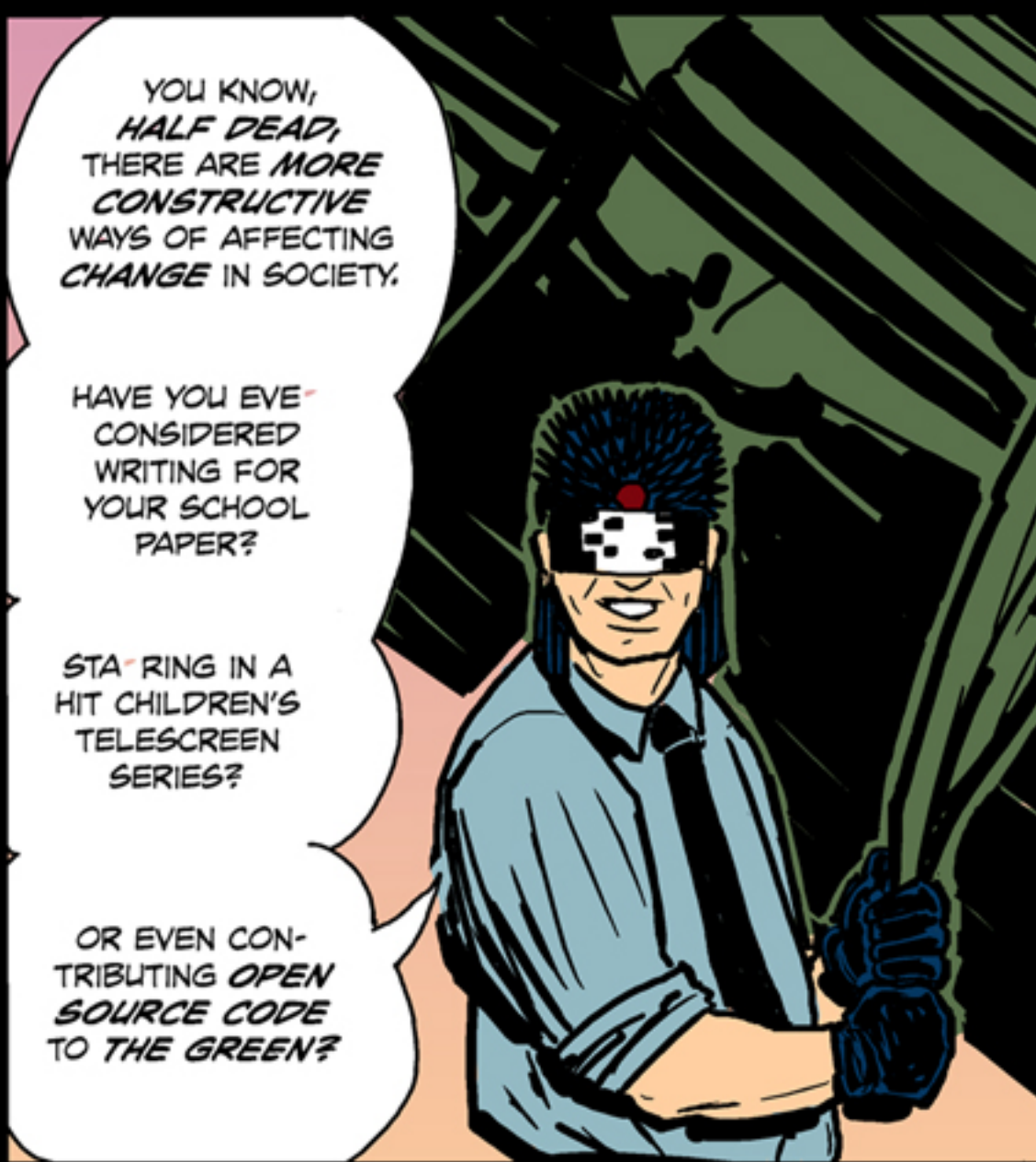
YOU,
ACTRON,
INC...

APOLOGISTS FOR
U.S. POLICY...

SHALL BEAR THE *FULL BRUNT*
OF MY *COMPLAINT!*



SOUNDS
FINE.



YOU KNOW,
HALF DEAD,
THERE ARE *MORE*
CONSTRUCTIVE
WAYS OF AFFECTING
CHANGE IN SOCIETY.

HAVE YOU EVE-
CONSIDERED
WRITING FOR
YOUR SCHOOL
PAPER?

STA-RING IN A
HIT CHILDREN'S
TELESCREEN
SERIES?

OR EVEN CON-
TRIBUTING *OPEN*
SOURCE CODE
TO THE *GREEN?*

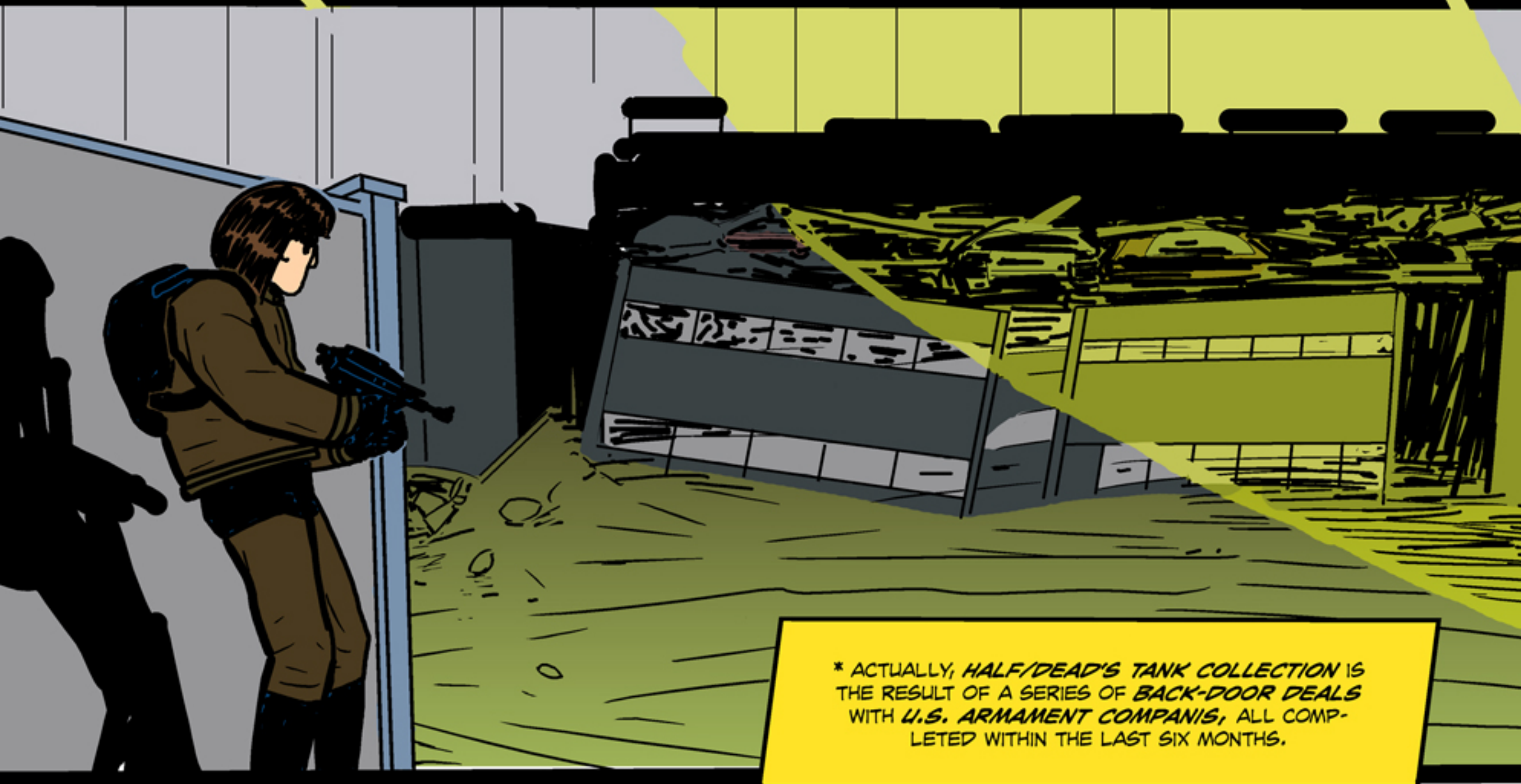


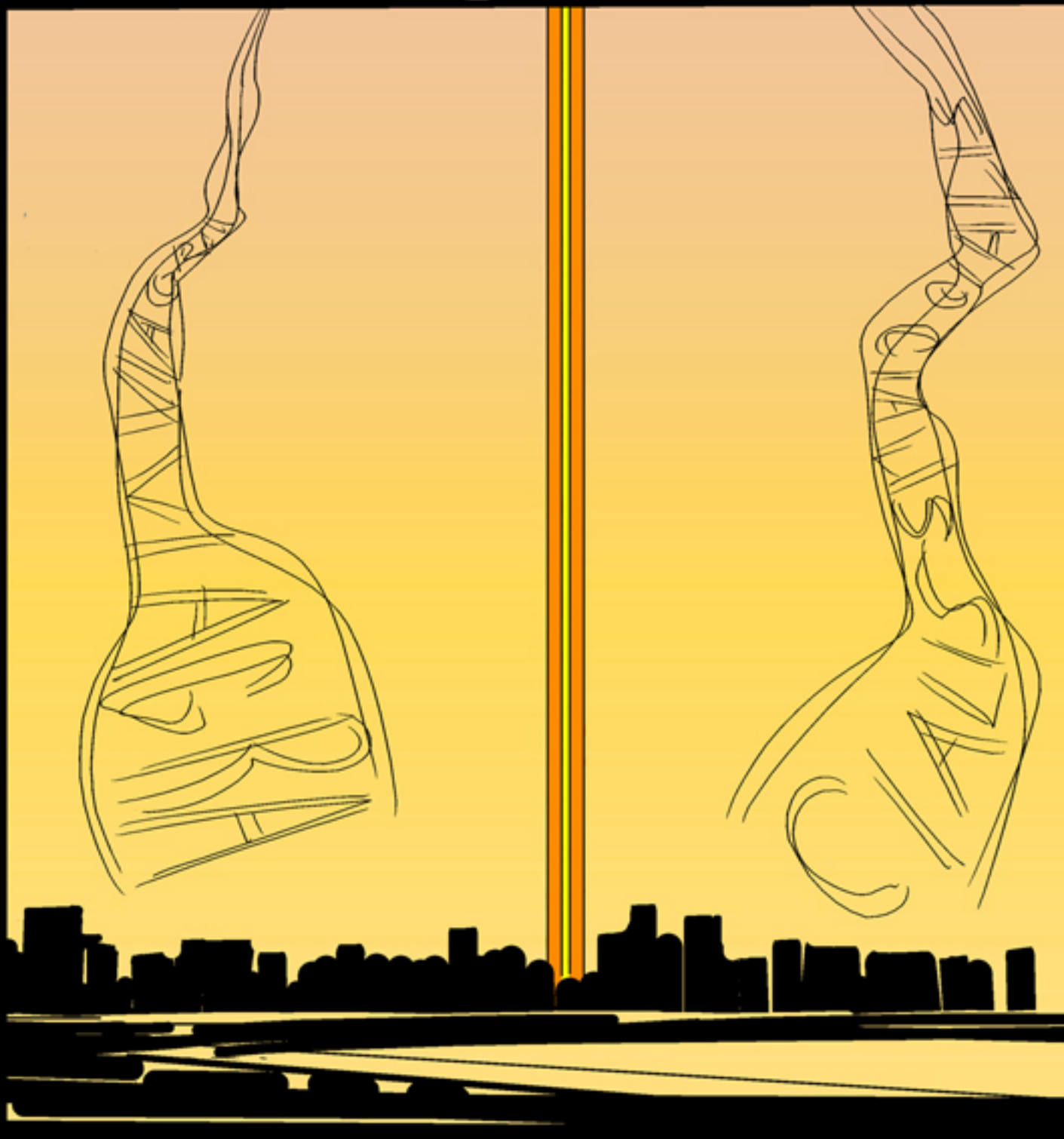
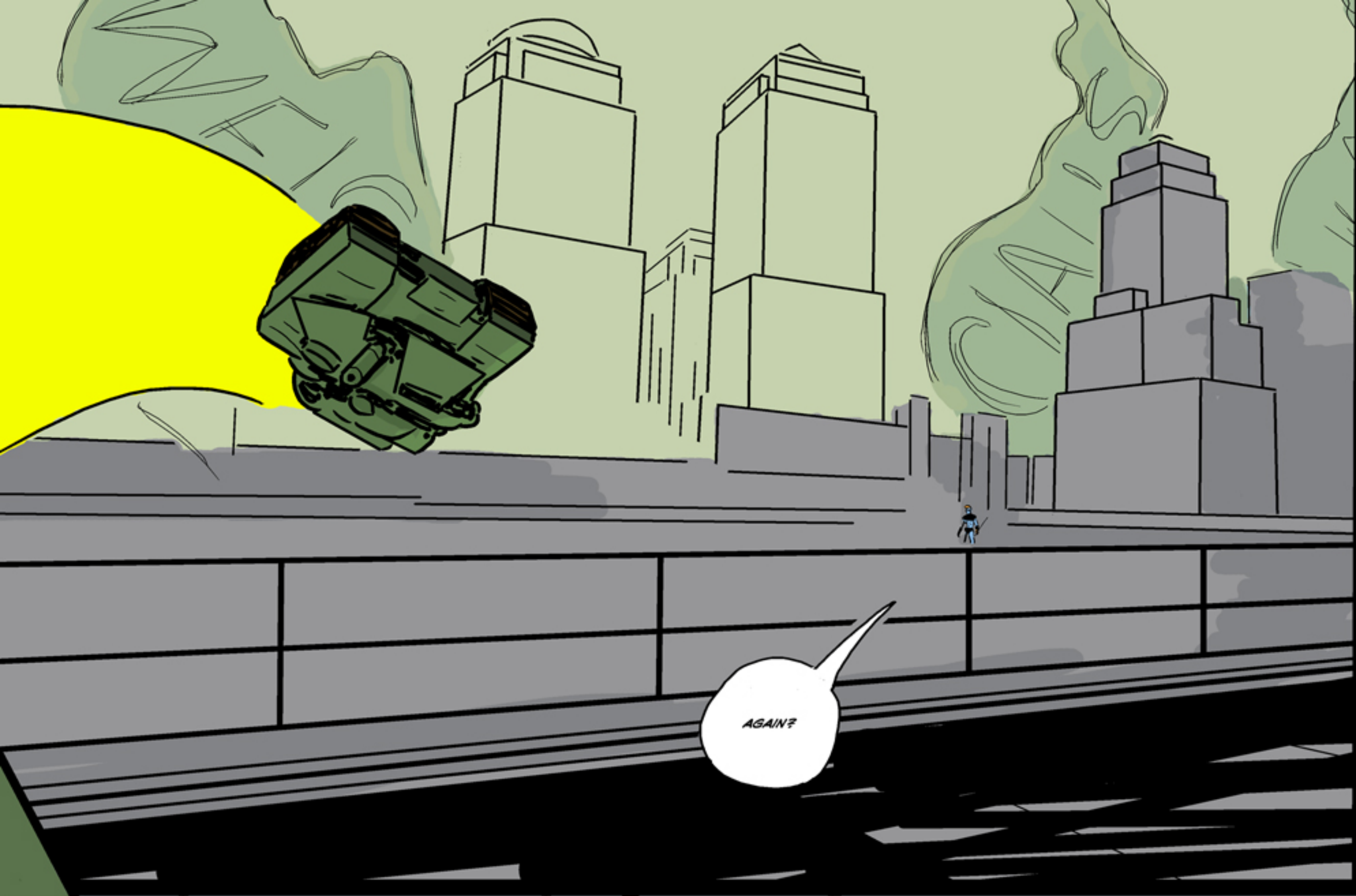
HAVE *YOU*
EVER CON-
SIDERED...

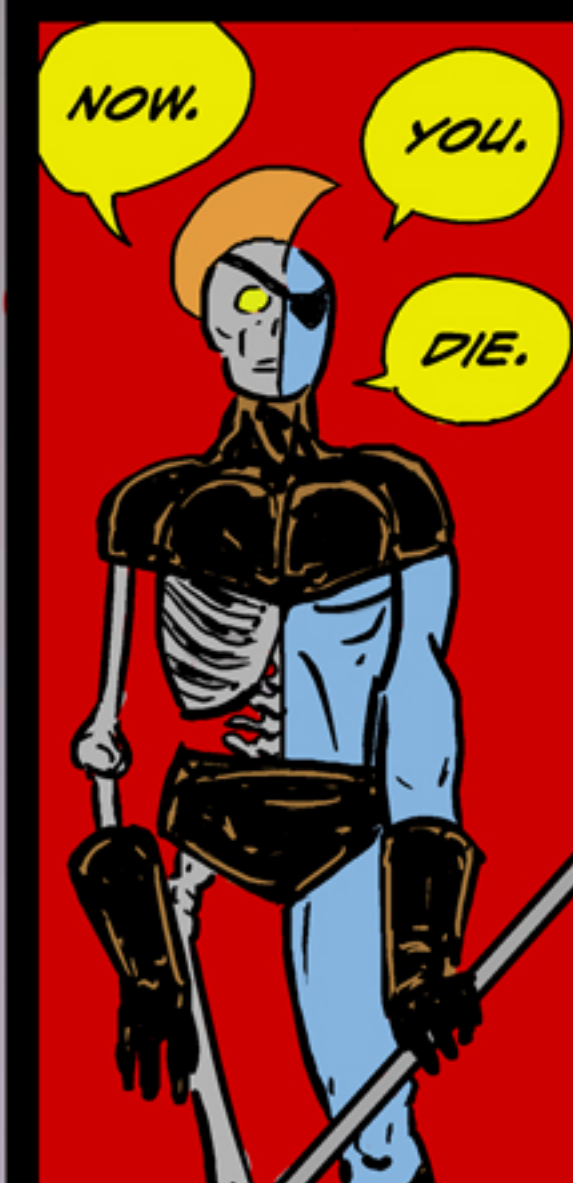
FALLING
UNDER A
TANK?



ACTUALLY
NO.





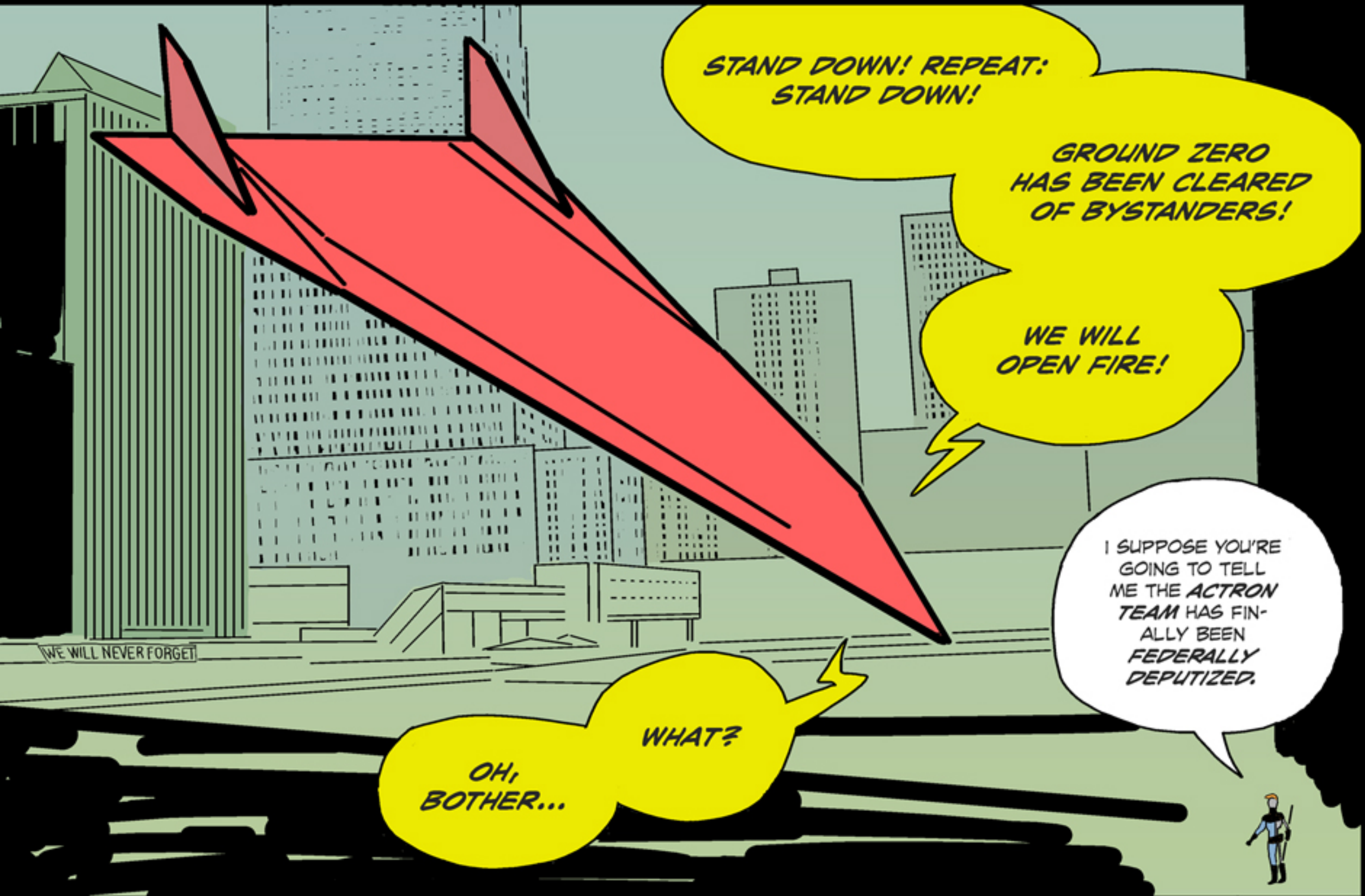




HALF/DEAD!

**DISABLE YOUR
TANKS AND
POWER DOWN
ALL WEAPONS!**

**WE WILL NOT
ASK TWICE!**



**STAND DOWN! REPEAT:
STAND DOWN!**

**GROUND ZERO
HAS BEEN CLEARED
OF BYSTANDERS!**

**WE WILL
OPEN FIRE!**

I SUPPOSE YOU'RE
GOING TO TELL
ME THE **ACTRON
TEAM** HAS FIN-
ALLY BEEN
**FEDERALLY
DEPUTIZED.**

WHAT?

**OH,
BOTHER...**



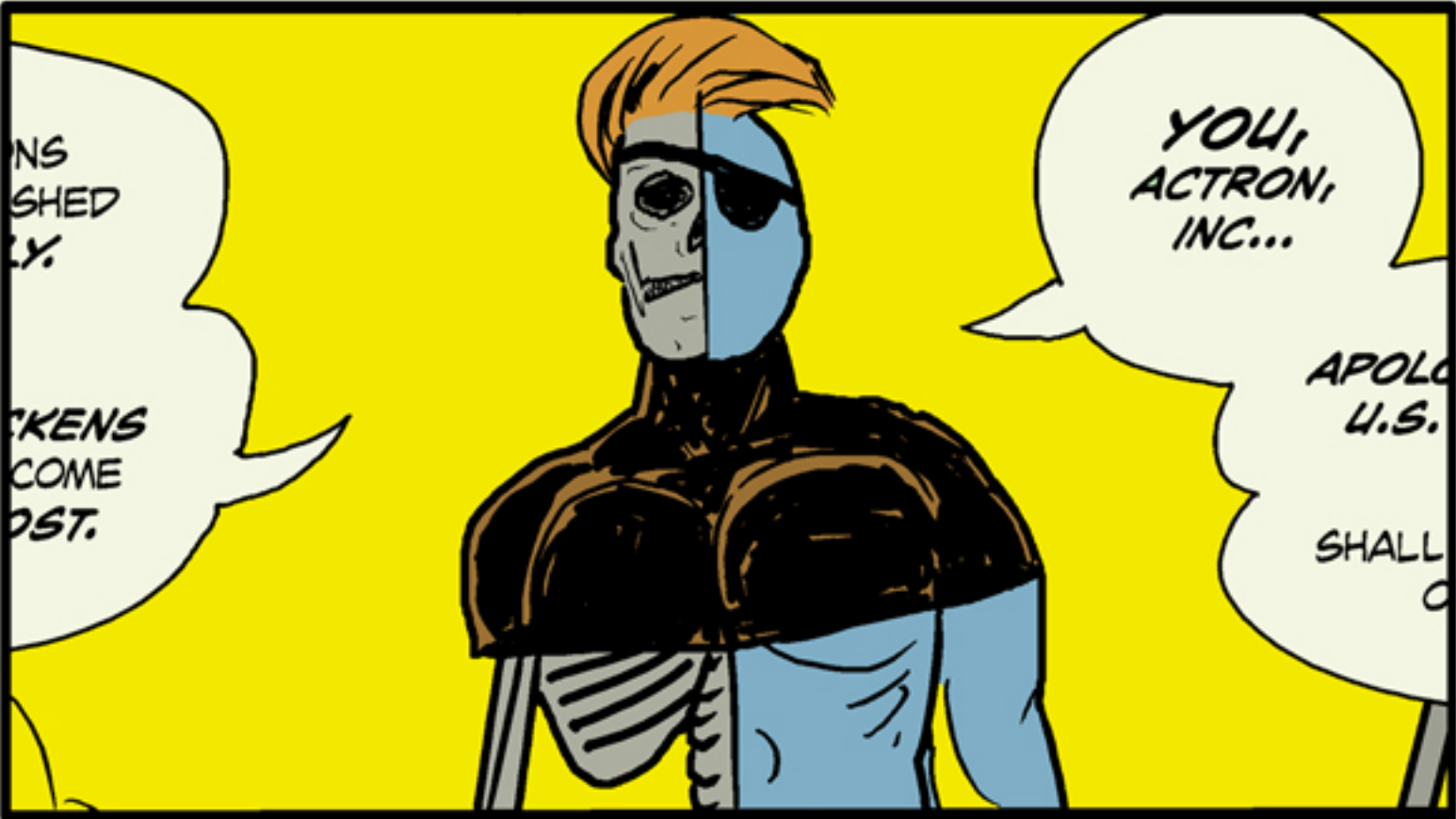
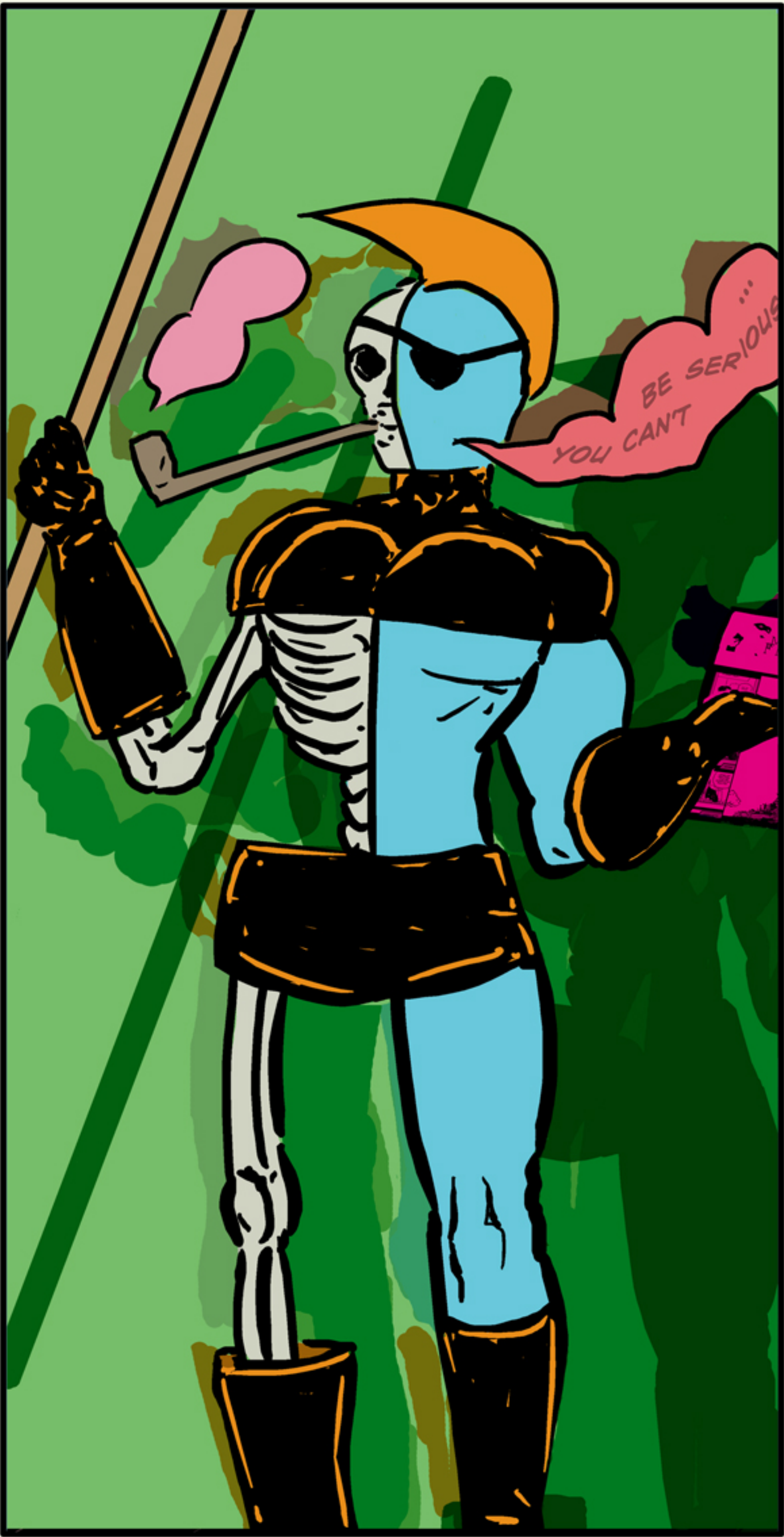
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE
MADE US GET OUT
OF THE PLANE.



Continued next issue

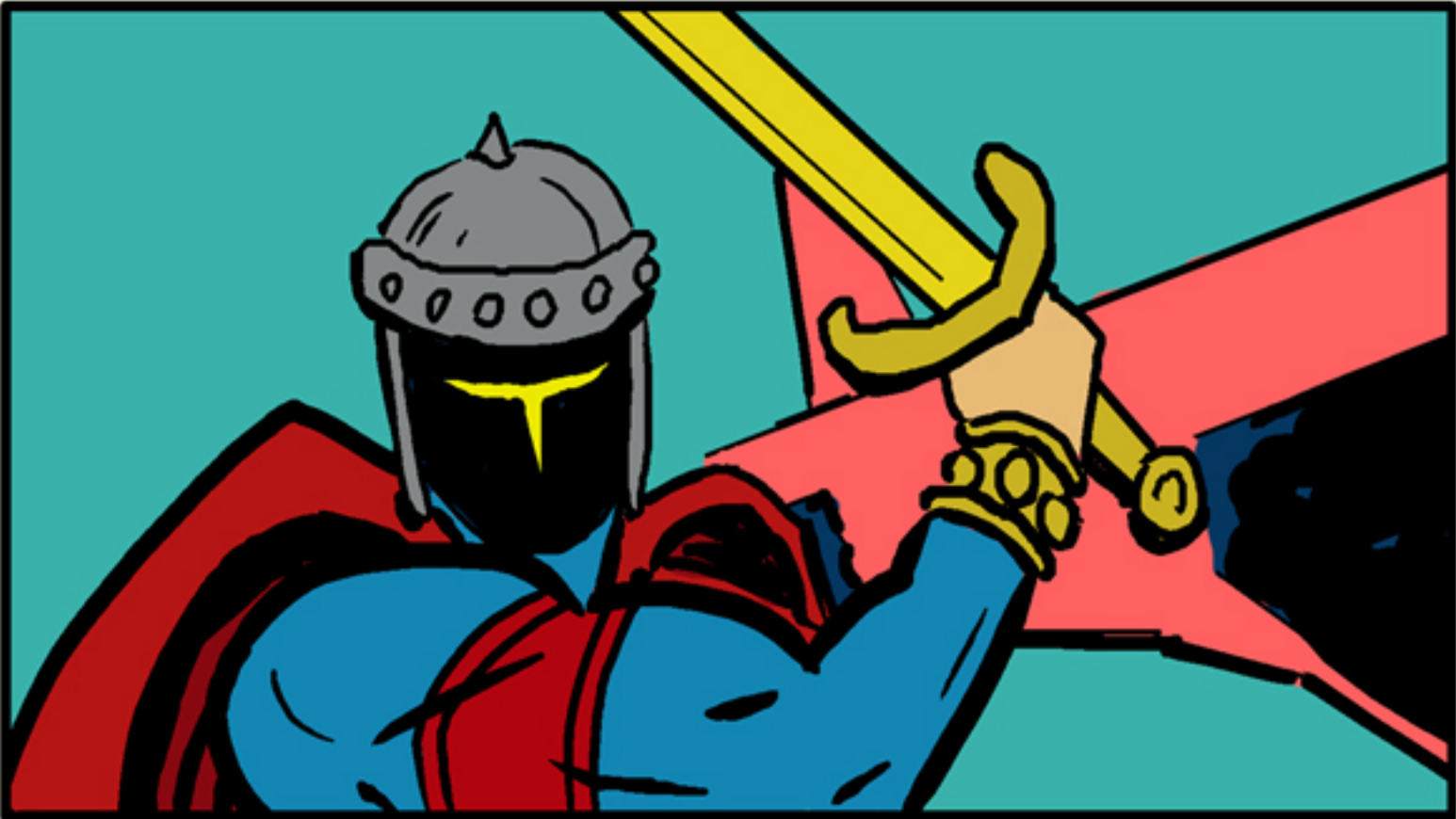
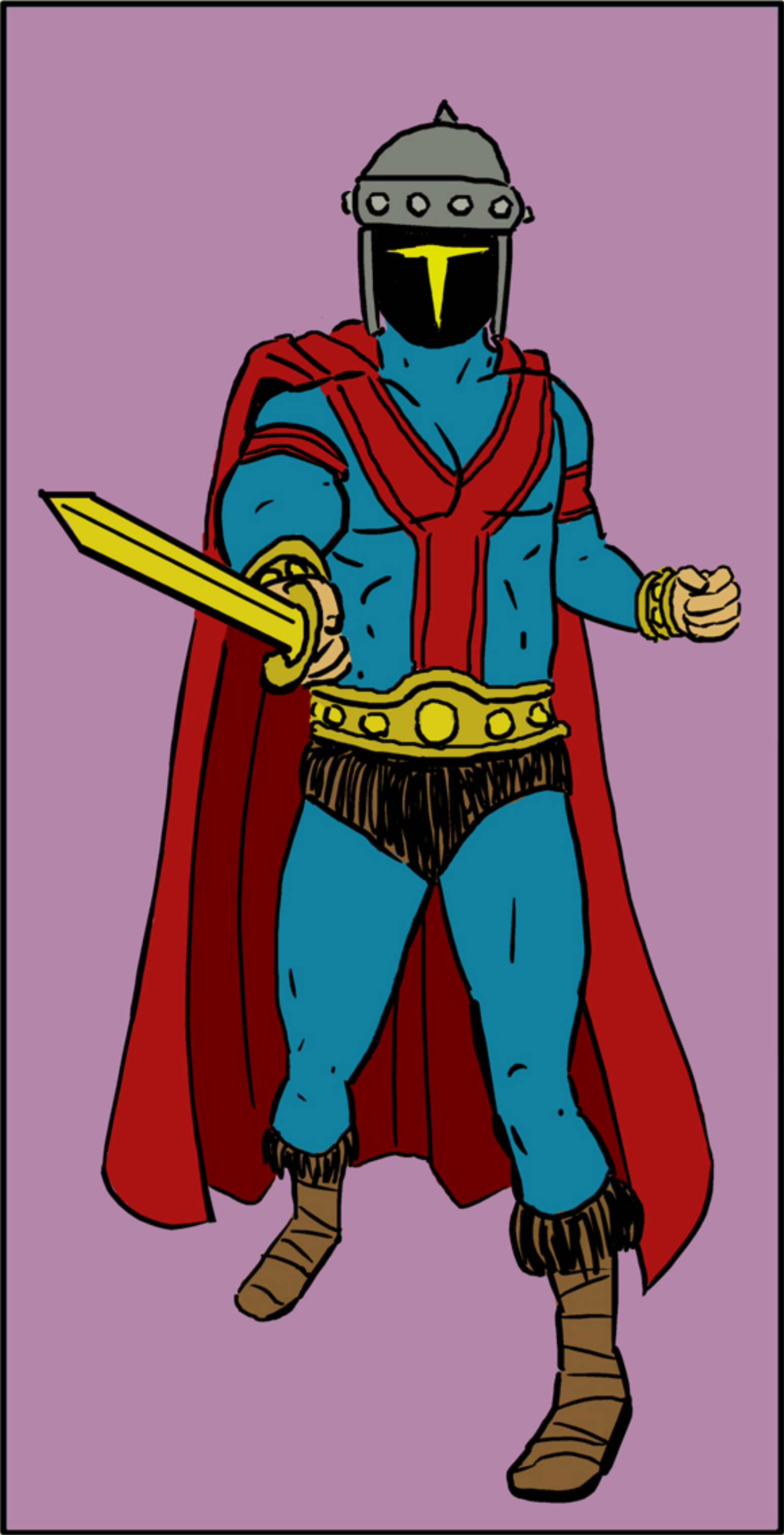
HALF/DEAD

Real Name: Dr. Fred Drift
Occupation: Terrorist, robotics engineer
Identity/Class: Human
Legal status: citizen of the United States with a criminal record
Aliases: None known
Marital status: Single
Known relatives: Father (U.S. military, killed in action)
Group affiliation: ACLU, Skeptic Society, DeMolay International
Base of operations: New York City, Baghdad, Riker's Island
First appearance: ACTRON vol. 3, #5 (1990)
Other appearances: ACTRON vol. 3, #6 (1990)
History: DR. FRED DRIFT is the son of a Special Forces veteran, and a survivor of the 9/11 attacks of 1981. Abandoned by overburdened rescue workers, the trauma of the event triggered his latent telekinetic abilities, which he leveraged to dig himself out of the rubble. DRIFT's father went on to distinguish himself in Afghanistan, but did not survive his first tour of duty in Iraq. DRIFT has what one could describe as a chip on his shoulder about American interventionism in the Middle East. Today, a brilliant child in a supremely powerful cyborg body, he routinely causes extensive property damage to the city he calls home.
Comments: HALF/DEAD's intelligence is quite literally off the scale. Within two years of his father's death, DRIFT had completed his PhD in advanced robotics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In a short period of time he accepted a position as MIT's youngest ever tenured professor. It is unknown if campus politics played a role in his eventual adoption of the HALF/DEAD alter-ego.
Height: 5' 11"
Weight: 250 lbs
Eyes: None
Hair: None
Known superhuman powers: Telekinesis
Weapons: HALF/DEAD wields an energy staff that serves as a targeting focus for his telekenetic force blasts.
Accessories: As a part of his regular costume, HALF/DEAD wears a clip-on "mo-hawk" hair weave. ■



SUPER-SONIC

Real Name: John W. Ratcliff
Occupation: Poet, enforcer
Identity/Class: Human
Legal status: citizen of the United States with no criminal record
Aliases: John Alcmena (pseudonym)
Marital status: Single
Known relatives: Hercules (ancestor)
Group affiliation: ACTRON, INC., Greek Pantheon
Base of operations: The Chrysler Building, New York City
First appearance: ACTRON vol. 1, #1 (1986)
Other appearances: ACTRON vol. 1, #2-3 (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: Little is known about SUPER-SONIC's background, apart from his apparent status as a descendant of the Greek Pantheon. He was recruited into the ACTRON TEAM by PIRO while living as a resident poet in Venice, Italy.
Comments: JOHN ALCMENA's poetry in the Italian language has garnered numerous awards in the European literary press. His presence on the ACTRON TEAM has been credited with the group's immense popularity with the Italian media.
Height: 6' 4"
Weight: 360 lbs
Eyes: Green
Hair: Brown
Known superhuman powers: Invulnerability, Class 100 strength
Weapons: SUPER-SONIC wields a mystical sword of solid gold, which is sheathed in an unknown substance that renders it one of the most durable objects known to man. On occasion he has used the sword to slice through industrial steel with little evident difficulty.
Accessories: SUPER-SONIC's solid gold belt and gauntlets are thought to be somehow connected to his invulnerability and strength. His left gauntlet contains a digital watch beneath one of its jewel facings.





Tags:
1964,
actron,
molds,
tab1,
tab2

VISOR TECHNOLOGY

The new gear seemed to suit Tommy fine.

Indeed, over the past month he'd hardly complained. The visor allowed him to dominate. Sometimes even with the older boys. Now, he came home with money in his pocket.

He still hadn't been drafted.

When I'd sent him to the Mold Clinic, I was only vaguely aware of what they might install in his head. The modern equipment was beyond my expertise. Above my paygrade, as we used to say. Now, it looked as if some improvements had been pushed to Tommy's firmware, even in the last fifteen minutes. All I could do was shake my head.

The tactical advantage was clear. I was just glad HQ had agreed to pay for it all.

Reagan was starting to concern us. Would he poison the public on Bush? John Kerry Rowling might run for President in 1968. Naturally, something had to be done.

I decided to involve Tommy. I was allowed complete discretion when it came to personnel. I thought that with the enhancements he'd prove useful. At least as useful as before.

And he had been pretty useful, before.

I got him out of bed and brought him in to work.

The Chief was having a bit of problem with a can of bi-partisan

gravy.

"I can't get this spamming thing opened."

Tommy quickly found a weak spot in the can's lid, using his visor. "No problem," he said, and opened the can.

"Next time, I'll just go with the low-fat DeliSchticks."

"None of that stuff is very good for you," Tommy chided.

The Chief could only roll his eyes.

"Well, shit on my Christmas! The boy's found another one."

Campaign contributions. We'd put Tommy on the trail of JKR's backers. The financial streams were now running through the boy's system. He was even better at this than the machines.

"It's old man Gerrymander."

"The Molds," I said, making eye contact with Tommy.

We'd had a hell of a time keeping this guy out of the race. Strictly speaking, he wasn't even legal; an immigrant from some border state that had been excluded from the New American union. But he'd leveraged his wealth to rig local rules in one of the communities he controlled. We'd missed it before it was too late. It had caused some friction here at HQ. Who was to blame? We all had a bit of a problem with Mold's politics.

"So I guess if he can't run, he'll put up a guy who can. Sounds like a good strategy to me."

"No, not analysis," I ordered. "You concentrate on the streams."

"Yes Father," Tommy replied.

After a while he seemed to tucker out. I brought up some comic books on my leaf and sent him over to a corner. The Chief had allowed his own son to tag along that day, and so the two of them spent a few hours together, chewing on DeliSchticks and catching up on back issues of *Actron*. Harmless entertainment, in my opinion.

But Tommy had hit on something important. If Gerrymander Mold really was angling again to get his claws into the election, we could expect a lot of activity down south in the next few weeks. It was likely

the attacks on the city would only intensify.

The boy's visor had amortized in only a month.

To be continued...

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²As for the suppositions of the logician, I shall never tire of underlining a concise little fact which these suppositions people are loath to admit—namely, that a thought comes when “if” wants, not when “I” wants; so that it is a falsification of the facts to say: the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think”. It thinks; but that this **process** “if” is precisely that famous old “I” in, to put it **how** to mildly, only an assumption, an assertion, above all not an “immediate certainty”. For even with this “it **interview** thinks” one has already gone too far: this “if” already contains an interpretation of the event and does not belong to the event itself. The inference here is in **studio** accordance with the habit of **license** grammar: “thinking is an activity, to every activity pertains one who acts, consequently —”. It was more or less in accordance with the same scheme that the older atomism **oplocronodization** sought, in addition to the “force” which acts, that little **archive** lump of matter in which it resides, out of which it acts; the atom; more dignous **studio improvisation** minds at last learned to get along without this “medium of earth”, and perhaps we and the **confusion** logicians as well will one day accustom ourselves to getting along without that little “if” (which is what the honest old “I” has expounded into). — Friedrich Nietzsche, from Beyond Good and Evil

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