

JOURNEY
PLANET



JOURNEY PLANET



#77: WATCHMEN



CLARK · AFTER GIBBONS

Journey Planet 77 - Watchmen

December 2023

COVERS BY IAIN CLARK AFTER DAVE GIBBONS

Page 3 - Introductory by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Page 4 - Editorial by Helena Nash /
A Brief Single Column Note from Chris

Page 5 - Letters of Comment on Journey Planet 74
- Vincent from Gary Lloyd, Carol Shetler,
Geri Sullivan

Page 7 - An Interview with Neil Gaiman

Page 8 - Watchdogs by Rob Hansen

Page 9 - Instant Fanzine Interviews - Part 1: Tony
Lee

Page 10 - Letter Todd Klein on Dave Gibbon's
Lettering

Page 13 - Instant Fanzine Interviews - Part 2:
Bryan Talbot

Page 14 - A Gallery of Watchmen-Inspired
Covers (And Parodies) Compiled by
Michael Carroll

Page 20 - Who Watches the Squadron Supreme
by Helena Nash

Page 22 - What Mad Universe(s) Earth N and
Earth W by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Page 24 - Symmetry and Pattern: Andy Warhol,
Rorschach, and Comics in the 1980s by
Jim O'Brien

Page 28 - Watchmen - A Tattered Love Letter by
Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Page 30 - Neighborhood Watch: The Street
Where It Happened by Helena Nash

Page 34 - *Saturday Morning Watchmen*: An
Interview with Harry Partridge by Helena
Nash

Page 37 - Interview with Paul Levitz

Page 39 - *Watchmen: The End is Nigh*, A Review
by Kumar Sivasubramanian

Page 41 - Instant Fanzine - Part 3: Antony
Johnston, Bruce Dickinson, Peter Hogan

Page 43 - I Watched The Watchmen by Tim
Pilcher

Page 46 - Interview with Michael Carroll on The
Crimson Corsair

Page 49 - The Annotated *Watchmen* Cover by
Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Page 52 - The Secret Origins of *Watchmen* by
Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Page 57 - The Embarrassment of The Watchmen
by John Higgins

Page 61 - What Were The Watchmen Watching?
by Julian West

Page 66 - Considering the Vietnam Equation in
Watchmen by James Bacon

Page 71 - Instant Fanzine Interviews - Part 4: John
Davies, Simon English, Stephen
Brotherstone

Page 74 - Chatting with John Higgins by Michael
Carroll

Page 79 - Dylan in *Watchmen* by David Ferguson

Page 80 - Enditorial by James Bacon

Special Supplement

Page 82 - You Are Rorschach: A Choose Your Own Adventure game
by HelenaNash

EDITORS

JAMES BACON, MICHAEL CARROLL, CHRIS GARCIA, HELENA NASH, PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

INTRODUCTORIAL

Pádraig Ó Méalóid

'We should do a *Journey Planet* about *Watchmen*,' I said to James Bacon. After all, I thought, how hard could it be? Sure didn't I know everything about *Watchmen*, and what I didn't know, I definitely knew someone else who did, I reckoned. Or that was the plan, anyway...

The thing with *Watchmen* is, it contains multitudes within it. It has elements of the classic crime novel – the corpse is dead before the first page – and of the classic comic team-up – When the Comedian first meets Ozymandias, he pretends he doesn't know they're both on the same side, so they do at least the first half of that thing where they fight each other first, before they both fight the baddies. But it is far beyond being as straightforward as either of those genres.

Alan Moore attempts to answer the question of what the world would be like if there really was a super powered being in our midst, but he also addresses what the non-superpowered 'hero' vigilantes might be like, and what their motivations might be. Serious mental illness seems to be his answer, most of the time. Rorschach deliberately burns a man to death. The Comedian shoots a woman who is pregnant with his child, whilst Doctor Manhattan simply stands by and lets him. Ozymandias kills three million people as part of a deliberately ridiculous scheme to save the world, completely putting the lie to his assertion that he wasn't a Republic serial villain. At least Nite Owl was only in it to play with his big boy's toys and, probably them most honest of the all, the first Silk Spectre was only in it for the money.

And there's so much more than that, still. As we dive beneath the skin, we learn not only about the characters, and what made them who they are, but see how incredibly intricate and intertwined their lives are. There's a highly complicated knot of interpersonal relationships – the first Silk Spectre acted as a beard

for Hooded Justice (who was in a same-sex relationship with Captain Metropolis), married her manager, and then had a child by a third man. Her daughter, Laurie, is in a relationship with Dr Manhattan, who was previously in a relationship with Janey Slater. Laurie then dumps the Doc for Dan Dreiberg. Dan, meanwhile, is troubled by erotic dreams about Twilight Lady.

And then there's the Dave Gibbons art, where all the clues about their world are shown to us. From the iconic and ever-repeated blood splash that we first see on the Comedian's badge on the front cover of issue #1, through the graffiti and fashions, we know we're in a slightly different world, which unfolds before us through repeated readings. I've got a tattoo of that badge, complete with blood splash. Ask me, and I'll show it to you.

And this is all without mentioning the meditations on both World War Two and the Vietnam War which are peppered throughout the story, and the references to the atomic bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Page 6 of chapter IV shows us how a little boy and a fat man irretrievably set in motion the sequence of events that led to Jon Osterman being turned into Doctor Manhattan, as an only-obvious-when-you-see-it parallel to how pervasive nuclear power was, not just to Cold War politics, but as a route towards the creation of superpowered gods and monsters in popular culture from then on.

There are many fantastic things in this issue of *Journey Planet*, written by many fantastic people, but I cannot help thinking that we've barely scratched the surface of *Watchmen*. Many books and articles, deconstructions and annotations, have been written, but I hope we've added a little something new here. If not, we might just have another go at it in another few years. After all, nothing ever ends...

EDITORIAL

HELENA NASH

I was just the right age at just the right stage, as Mitch Benn once sung. But still I very nearly managed to miss *Watchmen*. My only access to comics in the late 80s was my local newsagent, where I was engaged in a long-running guerilla war with an unidentified Rival Nerd to be the first to buy the only copy of each precious new Marvel and DC title as they were delivered every week.

(I later met and befriended said rival, thanks to a chance meeting involving my brother's verrucas, a Zenith t-shirt and the chiropodist's newly graduated son. But that's a story for another time.)

Suffice to say, I was not well informed about what was hot in comics at the time, and so my eyes fairly bounced off the cover of *Watchmen* #10 as I mooched around the Comic Mart at Westminster Central Hall in London, sometime in 1987. There were no superheroes on the front, no speech balloons, nothing. Just a close-up drawing of a radar screen or something. I sniffed dismissively and went back to hunting for back issues of *Marvel Two-in-One*.

At length though, the good news of Moore, Gibbons and Higgins' masterpiece got through to me, so I shelled out for the original Titan collection and read it in one mind-blowing session.

(Confession: to this day I have never made it through the text piece at the back of issue #7, 'Blood from the shoulder of Pallas'. Everyone has a blind spot.)

So I was delighted to be asked by Pádraig, James and Chris to guest co-edit (co-guest edit?) this issue of *Journey Planet*. I first started putting together material for this project in 2018, before life got away from us all, so it's particularly satisfying to be part of the team, along with Mike, to get this sprawling, octopoid monster out into the world some five years later.

My personal brand of comics geekery tends toward topics like continuity, gaming, and celebrating less well-known titles. With that in mind, this issue has been the perfect platform for me to inflict upon you such niche offerings as a *Watchmen* street map, a tribute to Mark Gruenwald's *Squadron Supreme*, and an unofficial Choose Your Own Adventure 'You Are Rorschach' which slots rather neatly into Alan Moore's timeline, if I do say so myself.

(Pro tip for writers. Keep word count down. Write like Rorschach.)

Lastly, a huge thank you to everyone who's contributed their time, thoughts and words to this issue. From friends and friends of friends who answered our instant fanzine questions to talented, generous creators like Harry Partridge, Antony Johnston and Tony Lee. Not forgetting Bruce flipping Dickinson talking about *Watchmen*! How cool is that?

'For my own part, regret nothing.'

H

A BRIEF SINGLE COLUMN NOTE FROM CHRIS

Happy Holidays, y'all!

I am laying this out over Christmas with my family. There's been Shepard's Pie, PlayStation 5s, a massive terror of toys all over the house, though mostly under foot, and a lot of Food Network.

I've never read *Watchmen* all the way through. I've got the issues, I've had several collections, and I've probably piece mail read them all, but not all in one go. It's my second favorite Moore work (I can not say how much I love *V for Vendetta*...or I will, coming soon) and the impact is impossible to deny. I have, however, seen the movie, several times. It's a masterpiece, it really is, in all its flawed glory. From the absolutely stunning cinematography, to the masterful editing, to some of the best montage work of the last twenty years.

It's not Moore, Gibbon, and Higgins' *Watchmen*, but I love it nonetheless.

Further suggested reading - James and I, back in the before times, took on *Watchmen* and *Before Watchmen* in *The Drink Tank* issues [209](#) and [309](#), plus the *Watchmen* entry in [52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy](#).

LETTERS OF COMMENT

ON JOURNEY PLANET 74 - VINCENT

An Appreciation...

Once a decade, if you're lucky, you'll make a new trusted friend, someone with whom you feel a kinship and loyalty, and similar passions, and similar tastes in life and the arts and All the Good Things. Once a decade, if you're very lucky, you'll meet someone who will drag you, your reservations, fears and apprehensions away, and put them in check without you even realising that that is what they've done, because you trust them deeply and maybe you hadn't even realised it, for that is, naturally, friendship. Once a decade, if you're very, very lucky, you'll meet someone who understands the ambitions you might have, however insanely far-reaching and impossible, and even when your brain is spinning out of control about just how implausible you might think these ambitions are, this person will make you feel it'll be easier for you than you think, and that It Can Be Done. Most of all, once a decade you'll make a friend, if you are very, very, very lucky, that shows you how seemingly effortlessly excellent that they are in everything they do, that you might believe this person could actually fly, and they make you feel like you won't fall flat on your face, and that you'll fall to the ground and miss, if you really try hard enough. This person is Vincent Docherty. Vincent is also very, very, very funny, loves life in all its glory and is yet always calm, like the Dalai Lama. Or Yoda. Or Clint Eastwood. With a dash of Pina Bausch (no that is not a cocktail!) Thanks Vincent. Keep being, keep going, keep never stopping.

Thanks JP for JP74, proving once more that the elastic properties of the fictional, factual, opined, documentarian non-format are alive and well.

Gary Lloyd, in Bern, Switzerland, 31st August 2023.

Much love to you all!
Gary Lloyd

Hi, I'm Carol Shetler, a freelance editor and proofreader from Canada, and one of Vincent Docherty's newest friends. We have chatted via LinkedIn sporadically since October of 2019, as we are in the Science Fiction Readers, Writers, Artists and Collectors group. We finally met face-to-face at Pemmicon in Winnipeg this past July, and have chatted more often since then. I had actually met Vincent in person at Magicon in 1992, but didn't recall having done so. He didn't remember me either.

Reading *Journey Planet 74* sometimes felt like I was cheating on a test. I learned more about Vincent in these 112 pages than I might (or not) have learned in the next two decades! The contributions from people I know—and those I haven't met yet—brought back fantastic memories of the Worldcons I attended in 1982, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, and 2003; along with a Novacon (1988); and two Eastercons (1989 and 1992).

I recognize Vincent as an intellectual powerhouse and organizational genius. These wonderful tributes from his friends and fellow conrunners confirm my views.

Theresa Renner (TR)'s anecdote about the participant bags at Registration for Conspiracy flashed up a memory of my waiting over half an hour to get one; they were in the process of being stuffed (for the second time) when I signed in. Brighton is one of my favourite UK cities, and I was surprised to learn that Conspiracy was not its first Worldcon.

As an editor, I must take issue with Vincent's own opinion, and that of many contributors here, that "Vincent is no writer" (James Bacon).

Vincent does the two essential tasks of a writer very well:

- 1) he draws clear "word pictures" that readers can easily understand, and
- 2) he evokes emotional responses from his readers.

There are too many examples of each in *Journey Planet 74* to list separately.

Let me put on my proofreader's hat here. The Photo and Art Credits did not provide dates for these photos:

Page 3 - the portrait of Vincent by Wes van de Plas

Page 23 - Vincent at con - OK, I found it! His convention badge says 2004, but the photo credits don't. Was this maybe Noreascon 4?

Pages 26 and 33 - Vincent in Oman. Since he was there for 5 years, photo dates would help. Both shots are great.

Page 46 - Colin Harris and Vincent: most likely 2005, but could be earlier

Page 50 - Two art images by Jim Burns and Frank Wu (among my favourites) - likely 2005?

Page 56 - neither of these photos is dated, but they were taken between 2002 and 2005 - bid process for Interaction. Glasgow (Kentucky) is the largest "Glasgow" outside Glasgow, Scotland.

Page 86 - Vincent with Sara Felix - my guess would be 2019 at Dublin or could be 2022 at Chicon 8.

Page 97 - artwork - my guess is 2022-23, as I picked up a small postcard copy at NASFiC in July

Page 98 - Hugo (spelling is "Huge" in the credits) base design - ? 2019, or earlier

Page 102 - Vincent with Connor - my guess would be 2008, as Connor looks about 3 years older than in the "all the parents" photo below.

My favourite photo of the whole issue.

Page 105 - Vincent with camera at FOKT by Cuddles (no idea! Nice camera, though.)

Thanks for including another copy of the photo of Vincent and James (2014) from Journey Planet 38.

I would be happy to do a quick final proofread of any future issues of Journey Planet to check both the text and that photo dates are provided for your readers to follow the chronology. I have developed a good reputation for "spotting the invisible".

It would also be a fun way to meet more of you who produce this amazing fanzine, before I arrive in Glasgow next August. I have volunteered for the Glasgow 2024 Souvenir Book Project, and prep of the daily newsletters at the con, so I am looking forward to meeting and working with my boss, Sara Felix, too.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Carol Shetler

Oshawa, Ontario Canada

caroliss88@gmail.com

Hello, it's me again. Cor! I fell into a trap with my attempt at dating the photo on page 86. Of course it was either at Discon (2021) or Chicon 8 (2022). Somehow I failed to notice that both Vincent and Sara were wearing masks.

Here are my excuses: 1. I was too busy looking at the bottom of the photo instead of the top; 2. I live in Canada where a great many people I see every week are still wearing masks, so I really don't notice them any more.

Hope you all had a good chuckle at my expense; I'm having one now.

I look forward to scoping out future editions of Journey Planet, and I'll keep my suggested corrections to myself for at least one more issue.

Humbly submitted,

Carol Shetler (who occasionally is an excellent proofreader)...

caroliss88@gmail.com

I am intrigued to see that the original Toad Hall was on the market last month. If I'd won the lottery, I'd have to give it serious thought. As is, I can flippantly ask if anyone has a spare £4 million lying around. Well, £4 million plus a healthy fund for the updating the Country Living article says it needs....

<https://www.countryliving.com/uk/homes-interiors/property/a44708372/wind-in-the-willows-house-kenneth-grahame-for-sale-berkshire/>

Many thanks to Ann Gry for stepping in and turning a lagging project into such a resounding success. And to the entire team who worked on this splendid issue, including Vincent himself!

Geri

Geri Sullivan

gfs@toad-hall.com

Some wonderful letters there. All the editors of the Vincent issue have seen them and enjoyed them and had the opportunity to respond here.

Chris says:

A meaningless to all but me update, Maui Sunset Vince is doing well according to my father-in-law who went and visited the other day! They've got a new hutch for their chickens that they seem to love!

It's Solstice, Chris. Our Chicken is in pesto!

Letters of comment are very welcomed. It was some lovely reading. Some delightful and fantastic words, welcomed with thanks. With a PDF, if Chris has the time, we can always update the electronic issue. We do this frequently, anyhow, but in this instance we'll let Vincent take the lead on any changes, and he will advise Chris. Perhaps others can be the vehicle for Vincent's next grand opus. Happy to suggest that a "How to run TrueFan Cons" could be a summit for others to ascend; it would be enchanting. Perfect can be the arch enemy of good, and it is such a chasm of doom that one can trip into. We avoid it, lest we gnaw off our typing fingers in misspelt despair, evade the analysis paralysis, and so we are imperfectly good. Meanwhile, it's a time of good spirits and I'm currently using the old Shield of Umour as a drinks tray. Please keep on sending in LOC's!

James

AN INTERVIEW WITH NEIL GAIMAN

Journey Planet: OK, first of all, I want to get to the bottom of how you ended up getting that 'special thanks' mention at the start of *Watchmen* - which first appears in the trade paperback collection, rather than the actual first issue, if I recall correctly. So, how did you know Alan Moore, and how did you end up assisting on *Watchmen*?

Neil Gaiman: Alan called me and said 'Neil, there's a quote "Shall not the judge of all the Earth do right?" Where does it come from?' So I went and found him the quote (it's from the Bible).

And then he called and told me the plot of Companion to Owls and Old Ghosts and asked if I could find him quotes, and I did.

I also found the owl passage he used in Companion to Owls, and the Rameses line in the last episode.

JP: When was the last time you read *Watchmen*?

NG: Not from beginning to end for a long time.

JP: Do you have any opinion on *Watchmen*'s place in comics' history?

NG: For me, it was a revelation. I had imagined comics that literate and smart but they didn't exist. I loved the process of reading one issue and then rereading it all. For me *Watchmen* exists in black and white. That's how I read them, in photocopy form.



WATCHDOGS BY ROB HANSEN

In 2007, in a comment thread on the Nielsen Haydens' MAKING LIGHT, Neil Gaiman wrote that:

I'm pretty sure my first published illustration was a Watchmen gag in an Avedon Carol fanzine, unless my memory has gone...

This caught my attention because:

Neil - That very illo has been pinned to my office notice board - about a foot from where I'm sitting - for years. You dated it, too - 29/9/86. I used to keep a diary back then, but a quick look at the appropriate page has no mention of you at all. Seems I spent the day visiting various museums with Stu Shiffman, over from the US. We used to see you pretty often back then so I suppose we could've all met up at a pub afterwards. Strange that my diary doesn't mention it if we did, though. The thing is, I was there when you drew that picture, and it was either in a pub or at a con. The nearest entry I can find that mentions you is a week earlier at UKCAC '86, the only comics con Avedon and I ever attended. Perhaps you drew it there and misdated it? Curious.

Rereading my diary from that period for the first time since I wrote the entries, that was quite a socially busy and interesting few weeks. Much more hectic than the more sedate social life I enjoy these days. Neil replied to my comment thus:

Rob - I remember meeting Stu with you, so my guess is that it was done in the pub that evening. I'm pretty sure I didn't do it at UKCAC. I interviewed Alan and Dave about Watchmen there, though. In a suit, as befitting the occasion.

This is probably what happened, and when the drawing was done. Anyway, one of those reading the thread asked to see the cartoon. Neil was happy for it to be posted, so here it is, two decades after it was drawn. And it occurs to me that if it gets linked to it will be seen by many more people than the maybe couple of hundred who saw it in its original fanzine appearance.



First appeared at <https://fiawol.org.uk//FanStuff/blog/index.htm#6apr07.NAM>

INSTANT FANZINE INTERVIEWS - PART 1

TONY LEE, # 1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER WRITER

Journey Planet: When did you first read *Watchmen*

TL: I had to be about 20 years old. I'd missed it when it came out, and I was in a dark time in my life. I found a copy in a thrift store and read the crap out of it. Unfortunately I then had a bad accident that left me with three months memory loss, and during that time it disappeared. Which was really REALLY annoying, as it was actually signed by Alan Moore by utter chance!

JP: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

TL: It made me want to write again. I'd been interested as a teenager but didn't do anything. But reading it for the first time reignited my passion to the point I actually pitched *2000 AD*. Who rejected me!

JP: Has *Watchmen* had any influence on your own work?

TL: It made me hate long script panel descriptions! I thought that was how all comics were written. It also taught me that you can compress a story far more than people often do, and it's the compression that pushes more story in, giving more value for money.

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

TL: I think *Watchmen* created a new army of comic writers, all looking to work from this base. However, the later issues that came out, when the characters were moulded and bastardised a little, left a sour taste in my mouth. I think it was for good, but it exposed, over the years, a lot of the bad sides of comics.

LETTERER TODD KLEIN ON DAVE GIBBON'S LETTERING

My knowledge of British comics artists and letterers is sparse, but there's one I know quite well, Dave Gibbons, as we worked together on American comics starting in the 1970s, and have kept in touch. Dave is unusual in that he almost always lettered his own comics work, something as rare in mainstream British comics as it is here in America. The page above is early work by him which already shows a fully professional and excellent art style, and equally excellent lettering. Dave's work has been consistently good ever since. In April, 2020 I interviewed Dave about his career and lettering, and all the quotes below are from that.

[...]

Dave had been talking to writer Alan Moore about a new project Alan was working on, *Watchmen*, and Dave knew he wanted to work on that when it was ready.

There was also another Alan Moore project before that, published in *Superman Annual* #11. Dave said, "The first convention DC ever paid me to go to was in Chicago, and they had a cocktail party. I went up to Dick Giordano and said, 'This new thing that Alan's writing, I'd like to draw it.' Dick replied, 'Okay, what does Alan feel about it?' 'Oh, he'd like me to draw it.' 'Okay, it's yours.' I reeled away from that, thrilled, but not actually realizing what it would mean, and I bumped more or less straight into Julie Schwartz who said, 'Hey, Dave! When Are you going to draw some Superman for me?' I said, 'Who's writing?' He said, 'Who do you want to write it?' I said, 'Alan Moore.' He said, 'Sure, fix it up.' It worked out well that we had that to do while we were developing *Watchmen*." I like the title on this story, and the fact that Dave gave himself a lettering credit.

Watchmen was a groundbreaking project in many ways, including Dave's suggested storytelling device of making most pages a nine panel grid. Dave also experimented with lettering styles, with Alan Moore's encouragement. Dave said, "Watchmen was so full, and it was so vital that the lettering read well



From *Watchmen* #2, Oct 1986, this and all *Watchmen* images © DC Comics

and didn't obscure anything important in the pictures, the lettering would be the first thing I would both pencil and ink. Then I would start doing the drawings and make any adjustments so it wouldn't cut off From people's heads. I really don't think *Watchmen* would have been feasible if I hadn't lettered my own work."



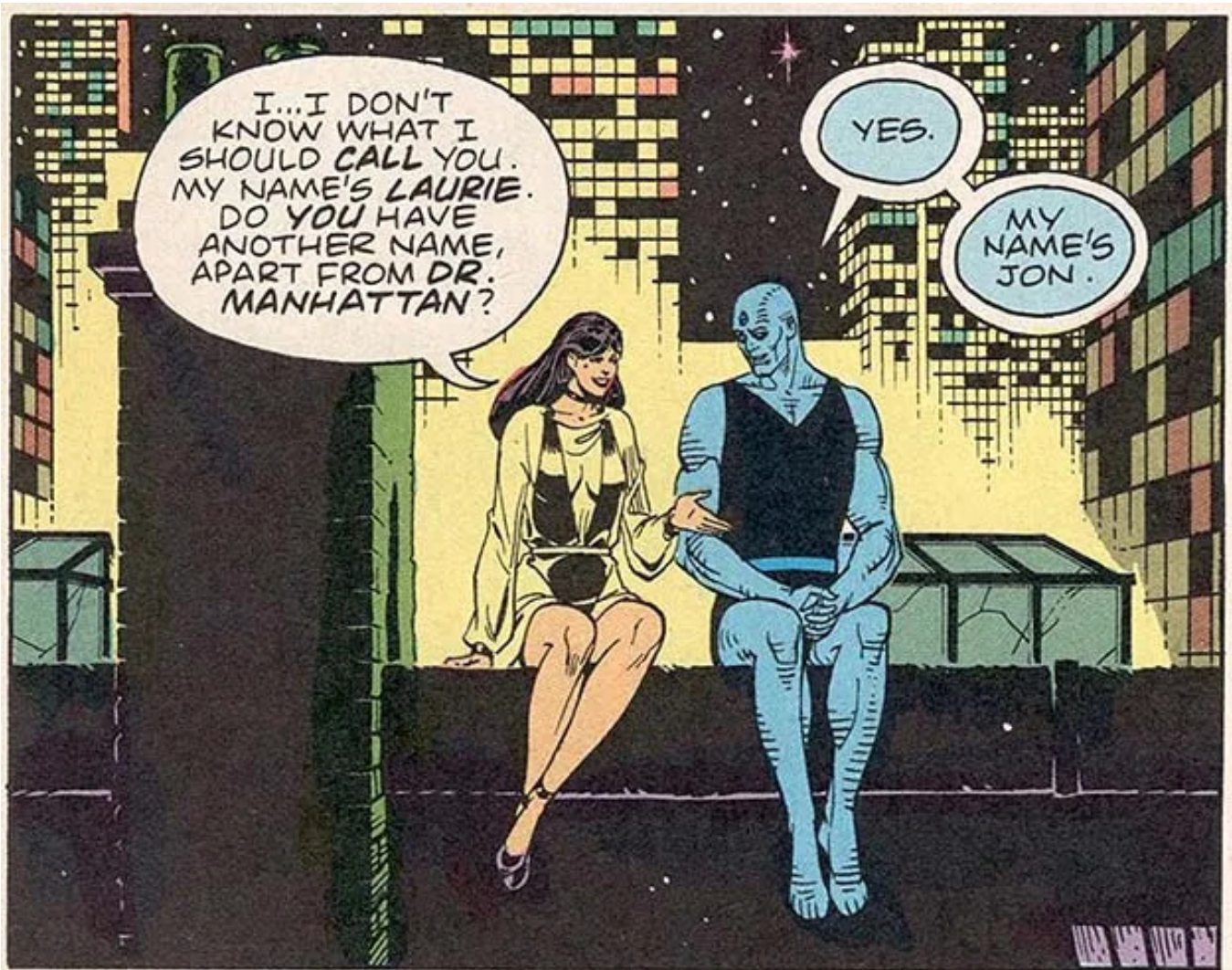
Perhaps Dave's most memorable lettering style was the unusual mix of upper and lower case letters in Rorschach's Journal, with their slightly ink-splattered captions.

Rorschach's speaking voice also had a special style and balloon shape that, to me, suggests a scratchy, guttural delivery.

Page 11 (Clockwise from upper-left)
 Watchmen issue 2, October 1986
 Watchmen issue 2, October 1986
 Watchmen issue 1, September 1986

Page 12 (Clockwise from top)
 Watchmen issue 4, December 1986
 Watchmen issue 3, November 1986

Dr. Manhattan's balloons had a double border to allow a pale blue color inside with a white

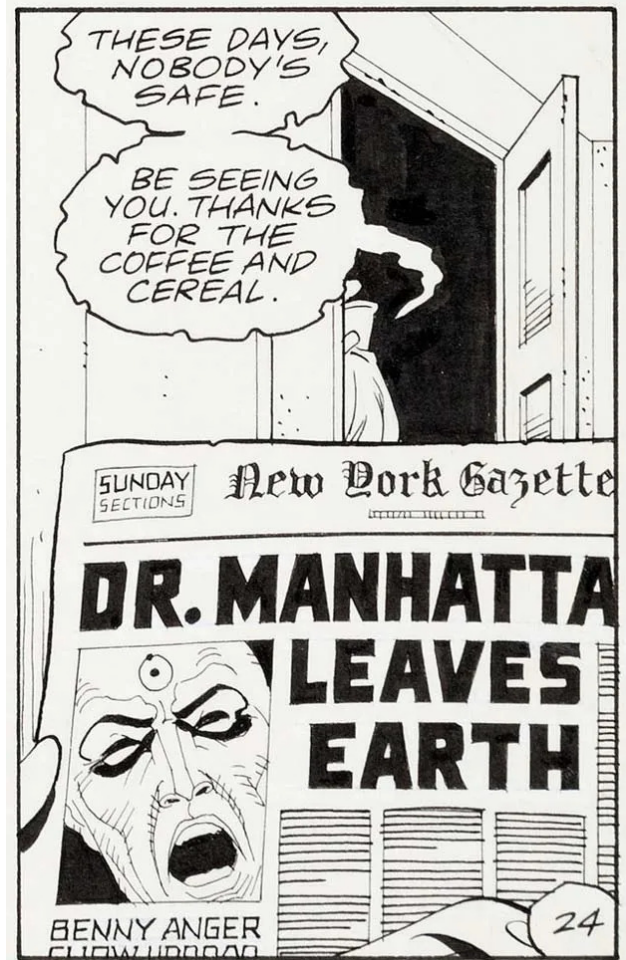


outline around it. Note that all the present-day balloon shapes are angular rather than rounded...

...though in scenes from the past, balloons were rounded.

Dave also did an excellent job with all the signs and newspaper headlines, as seen here. *Watchmen* changed comics, has remained on best seller lists, and has been a fan and critical favorite since it came out. Both the writer and artist's reputations were secured. As Dave said, "The rest is history." Each issue took about two months to produce, it was a solid two years of work, "The most profitable work I've ever done, and the most enjoyable."

Text © Todd Klein
 From kleinletters.com/Blog/dave-gibbons-letterer/
 Used with permission
 All *Watchmen* images © DC Comics



INSTANT FANZINE INTERVIEWS - PART 2

BRYAN TALBOT

JP: When did you first read *Watchmen*?

BT: I read at least the first four issues in photocopy form many months before DC published the first one. At the time, I used to see a lot of Alan and Dave, mainly at cons and marts and so forth. Alan had already let me read the first two scripts before Dave had drawn any.

JP: The photocopy issues, were these passed around, or were they items that were sent to you?

BT: I can't remember if anything was actually posted to me or not but, as I said, I saw a lot of Alan and Dave at this point at cons, marts and signings, and was shown them directly. I seem to remember reading the first couple of scripts on a train ride together after a con in Glasgow and at one point was even told about the mass murder scene in New York near the end of the story by Alan, who was particularly pleased with the idea. Dave always had photocopies of the episodes to show people. They were both very excited by the project and knew they were creating something new.

JP: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

BT: I thought it was fresh, a great read and groundbreaking in many ways. At a time when most superhero comics followed the same formula and were still mainly aimed at 12-year old adolescent boys, Alan was writing superhero stories for adult sensibilities. Everyone in the comic world was very excited about the possibilities of the medium at the time and *Watchmen* was one that everybody was waiting for.

JP: Has *Watchmen* had any influence on your own work?

BT: I'm sure that it must have done but the only direct influence I can think of was my choice to use a 9-panel grid for *The Tale of One Bad Rat*, though I introduced half-panels as demi-beats. In *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*, I'd already eschewed the use of sound effects, thinks balloons, whoosh marks and wobble lines, something that *Watchmen* introduced into superhero stories.

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

BT: Alan's work, and that of contemporary creators pushing boundaries, such as Frank Miller, Art Spiegelman, Howard Chaykin and Dave Sim, had a big impact on people's perceptions of comics. Afterwards, they were less likely to be thought of as a children's medium. In the superhero genre, they resulted in an onslaught of dark, "serious" stories that Alan later decried, as did Grant Morrison and others.

<http://www.bryan-talbot.com>

A GALLERY OF WATCHMEN-INSPIRED COVERS (AND PARODIES) COMPILED BY MICHAEL CARROLL

For a rough barometer of how well a property has inserted itself into/been accepted by popular culture, just count the parodies, references and tributes.

The average non-comics reader probably hasn't heard of *Watchmen* but just about anyone who *has* read comics in the past three decades knows what it is. And a heck of an awful lot of people in the entertainment business are (or have been) comics fans. They like throwing in little nods to the comics they love.

In 2007 **The Simpsons** episode "Husbands and Knives", Millhouse brandishes a copy of *Watchmen Babies in V for Vacation*...



And more recently the British pre-school children's animated show **Hey Duggee** featured this scene:



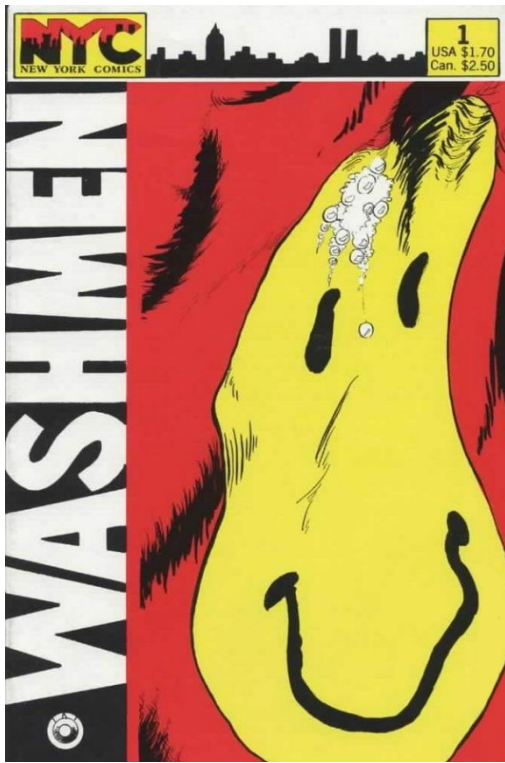
Yep, when a show for little kids features a nod to a comic that the kids' grandparents might have read that's a pretty solid sign that said comic is in there all right. Embedded in our culture. Part of the

zeitgeist, if you want to be all posh and educated about it (if you *don't* want that, then think of it like the way the name "Skegthorpool" might wobblingly run all the way through a stick of seaside rock).

Here we have a small collection of *Watchmen* tributes, nods and parodies that I've gathered over the past few decades... Credits added where known - apologies for any errors or omissions! I've tried to put them in roughly chronological order, but I didn't try very hard because life is too short to worry about that sort of thing.

"But, no, wait a second!" I imagine that I hear you ask. "What about the classic 'Rob Liefeld's *Watchmen 2*' mock-up that was rampaging around the internet many and a half years ago? Shirley that should have been included here! Oh, and I saw this great thing on DeviantArt where..."

Imma stop you there, imaginary voice! For the sake of space and sanity, I've selected only the *Watchmen* tributes and parodies that have been "officially" published. No fan-art here, folks - not even my own - because these things get passed around so much it's often hard to track down the identities of the creators in order to ask for permission (we're less worried about that for those "official" publications), plus there are so many fan-created *Watchmen* parodies there's no clear way to know when to stop including them. (Thus proving, once again, that "nothing ends.")



Watchmen #1, 1986 (New York Comics). Cover by Alex White.



Beat Dis by Bomb the Bass, 1987. Cover uncredited. Several variations exist. This adoption of Watchmen's blood-splattered smiley face motif is credited as sparking the use of the smiley as a symbol for Acid House music.



Watchcats #1, 1987 (Harrier Comics). Cover by John Jackson

Brief aside: I had the original Graphiti Watchmen t-shirt with the group shot and the big smiley in the background (below). Thanks to this, one of my siblings assumed I was an Acid House fan and gave me Acid House t-shirts and CDs for the next few birthdays and Christmases.





Mad Magazine, New York Comic-Con giveaway issue, 2008 (EC). Cover by Dave Gibbons & John Higgins.



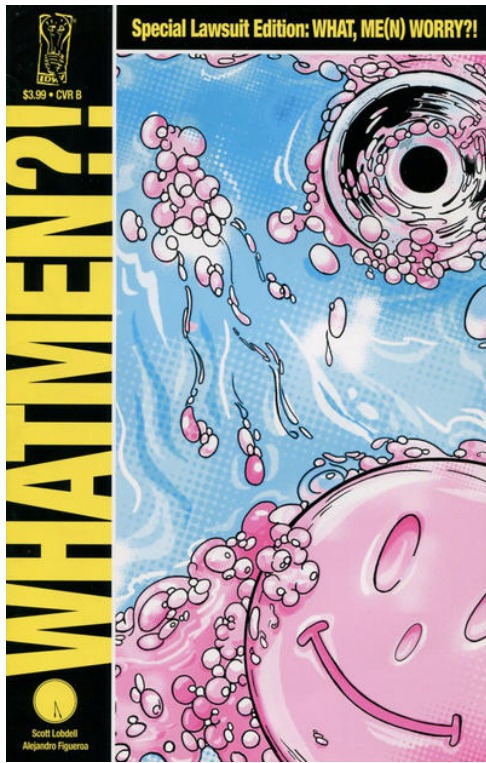
Mad Magazine, San Diego Comic-Con giveaway issue, July 2008 (EC). Features the parody strip "Botchmen." Cover uncredited.



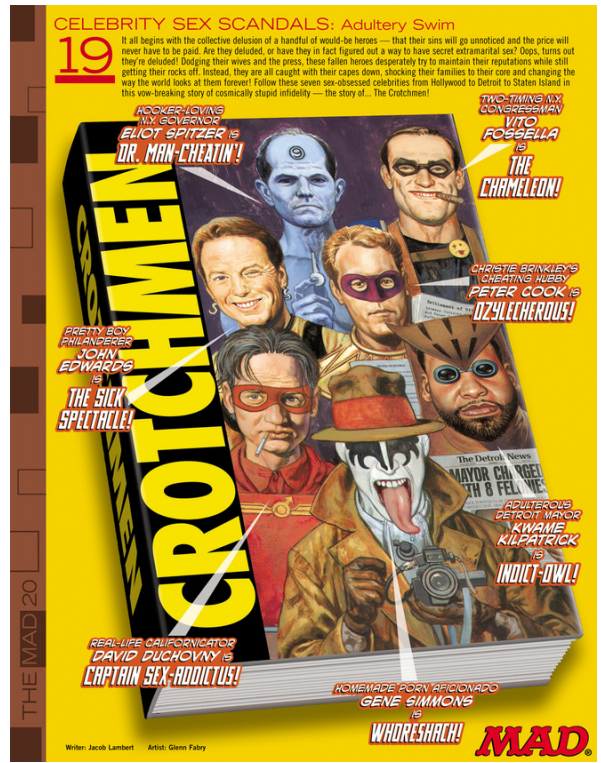
From **Mad Magazine**, San Diego Comic-Con giveaway issue, July 2008 (EC). First page of "Botchmen: Call it, Friendo," written by Desmond Devlin, art by Glenn Fabry, colours by Melvin Coznowski.



Whatmen, 2009 (IDW). Cover A. A one-shot by writer Scott Lobdell and artist Alejandro Figueroa. Cover by Elite Avni.



Whatmen, 2009 (IDW). Cover B. Cover artist unknown: possibly Elite Avni.



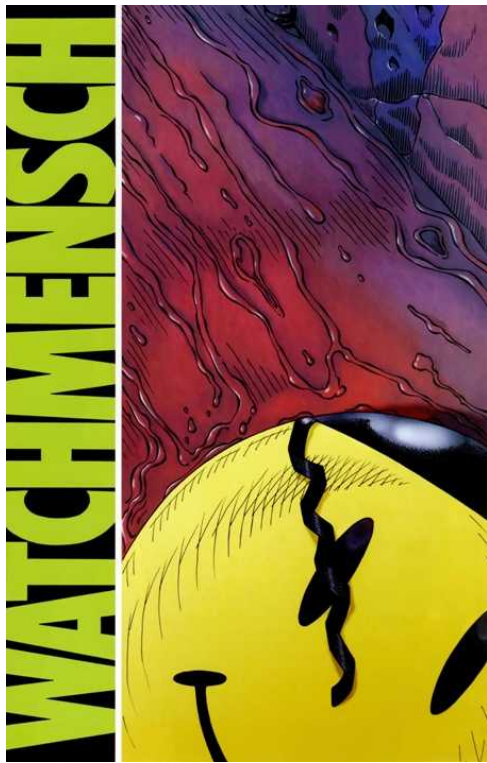
From **Mad Magazine** #497, January 2009 (EC). A look at 2008's celebrity sex scandals. Painting by Glenn Fabry.



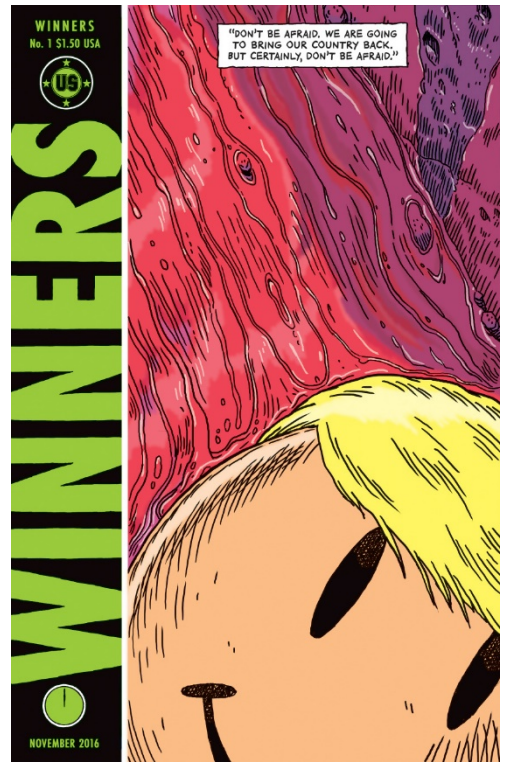
Glenn Fabry's unadorned original painting for Mad Magazine's **Crotchmen** piece.



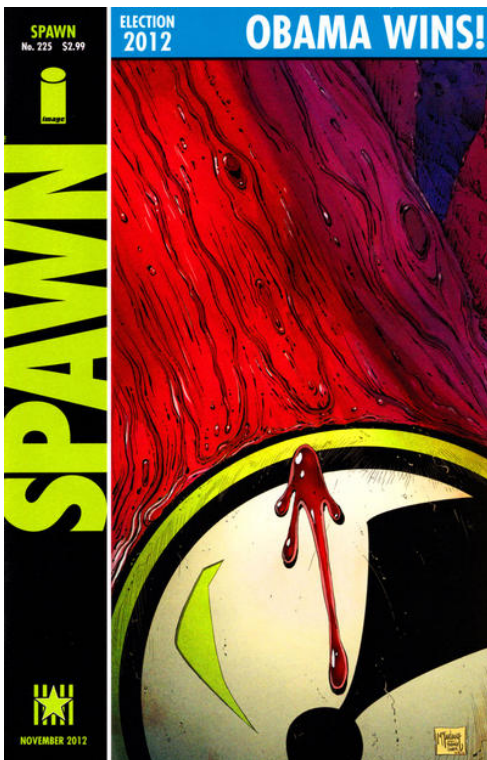
Mad Magazine #499, April 2009 (EC). Features the parody strip "Botchmen: Moore's Code Dept." written by Desmond Devlin, art by Tom Richmond. Cover by Mark Fredrickson.



Watchmensch #1, March 2009 (Brain Scan Studios). Cover art by Simon Rohrmüller, colours by Matthew Vega.



A page from Robert Sikoryak's **The Unquotable Trump**, October 2017 (Drawn & Quarterly).



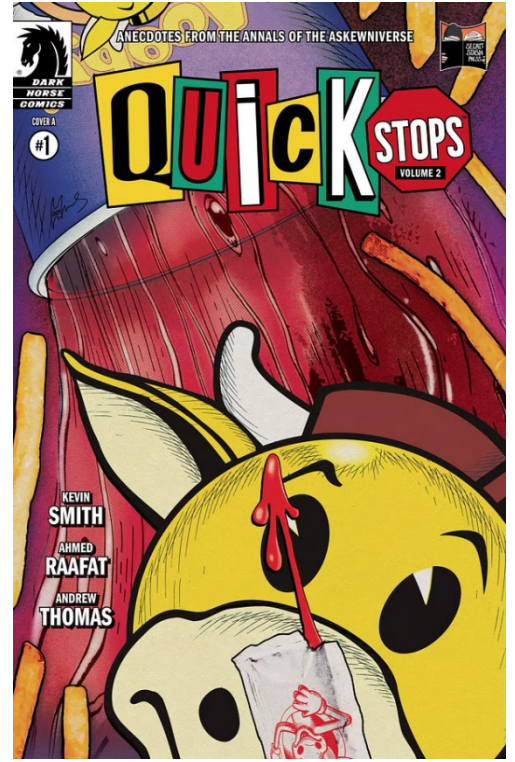
Spawn #225, November 2012 (Image). Cover by Todd McFarlane. Multiple variations of this cover were produced to reflect the different possible political outcomes..



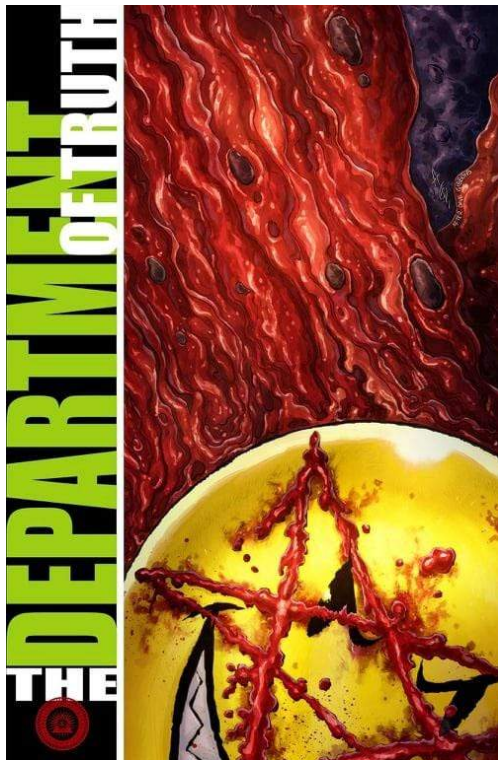
Watchvark #1, January 2018 (Aardvark-Vanaheim). Cover by Sandeep Atwal



Venom #11, April 2019 (Marvel). Cover by Dave Gibbons.



Quick Stops Volume 2 #1, December 2023 (Dark Horse Comics). Cover by Nate Gonzalez.



A variant cover for **The Department of Truth** #13, September 2021 (Image Comics). Cover by Alan Quah. There was also a black-and-white variant.



Cape & Cowl x Hieroglyphics x Peabe Watchmen 3rd Eye Mashup Enamel Pin (date unknown). From Cape & Cowl comics, whose website says, "We teamed up with Hop Hop Legends, Hieroglyphics for this Watchmen tribute just in time for the release of Doomsday Clock!"

WHO WATCHES THE SQUADRON SUPREME? MARVEL'S 1985 WATCHMEN FORE-RUNNER BY HELENA NASH

Squadron Supreme was a 12-issue Marvel limited series that came out in 1985-1986, predating *Watchmen* by about a year. Written by Mark Gruenwald and (toward the end of its run) drawn by Paul Ryan, it had none of Alan Moore's multi-layered storytelling nor Dave Gibbons' beautifully clean draughtsmanship. But coincidentally, it did ask a few of the same questions, like: Is it safe to hang around superhumans who are in effect walking nuclear reactors? When superhumans fight in most comics, how come nobody gets seriously injured or even dies? What if superheroes really affected the world and how society works? And what if some of them decided that leaving ordinary human governments to run the planet just wasn't working out?

The Squadron's origins begin back in *Avengers* #85 in 1971, as both an alternate-Earth version of the villainous Squadron Sinister and as a pastiche of DC's flagship Justice League of America, with alien powerhouse Hyperion modelled on Superman, caped crimefighter Nighthawk on Batman, Doctor Spectrum on Green Lantern and so on. As they sporadically guested in various Marvel titles, more Squadron members would be added to parallel the JLA's evolving line-up. Thus we had Arcanna for Zatanna, Nuke for Firestorm and so forth. Prior to the limited series, the Squadron's Earth (or at least the USA: like many American comics at the time they rarely made a distinction) had been devastated by an alien super-intelligence (*Defenders* #112-114), leaving society in a very sorry state.

In an ongoing

'Marvel Earth' comic (stories set on the world shared by Spider-Man, the Avengers, the X-Men etc), that sort of devastation would have been handwaved by the start of the next storyline; perhaps an opening page or two showing the heroes clearing up rubble and reporting that the President is back in charge, and then onto the next plot. But given that *Squadron Supreme* is set on an alternate Earth, writer Gruenwald had the opportunity to pretty much do what he wanted with the planet and its greatest heroes over the next twelve issues. And that's just what he does, examining the questions I posed earlier as the Squadron looks at the world with its war, crime, disease and death, and decides to use their great powers and resources to make actual, world-changing differences by instituting their so-called 'Utopia Program'.

Assuming control of the United States, they outlaw guns, get to work on a cure for cancer, establish behavioural modification on criminals and introduce cryogenic 'hibernaculum' chambers for people with incurable conditions. At first, the Utopia Program is a success, even if some of the Squadron's members don't seem to be fully on board with the 'benevolent dictatorship' approach that they have imposed on society. Things go bad when one of the team uses the behaviour modification device to 'fix' the attitude of his romantic partner after a disagreement, turning her into a clingy, lovelorn puppy. Another discovers that his nuclear powers have had life-changing effects on his close family (mirroring the later Dr Manhattan plot in *Watchmen*), while others



quit the team in disillusionment and disgust.

Things come to a head in the final issue when former teammate Nighthawk and his Redeemers (a scratch band of renegade heroes, untried newbies and desperate villains) confront the Squadron, demanding that they step down and dismantle the quasi-fascistic 'utopia'. A calm and civilised discussion does *not* ensue. Instead the most lethal super-team battle in the history of comics to date takes place in what is effectively a model for the famous 'airport fight' in the movie *Captain America: Civil War*. Hearts are stopped, heads are caved in, backs are broken and chests are impaled. By the end of the issue, seven major characters are dead and the dream of a utopian society has died with them. It's a brutal and brilliantly tragic finale to the series.

Squadron Supreme gets a follow-up shortly after in the shiny graphic novel *Squadron Supreme: Death of a Universe*, in which the survivors of both teams must work together to hastily combat a spatial anomaly which threatens to engulf the sun itself. The body count rises again, with some heroes failing to even survive the launch of their space rocket, while another fatally underestimates the simple physics of retarding the growth of a sun-sized entity (the subsequent purple smear effect is quite disturbing). Oh, and somebody's head explodes. The Squadron survives, after a fashion, and goes on to guest star in

mainstream 'Marvel Earth' comics, but they never reach the high and lows of the Gruenwald/Ryan era.

A curious epilogue to this tale is that when Mark Gruenwald died unexpectedly young from a heart attack (like one of the main characters in *Squadron Supreme*) in 1996, his will mandated that he be cremated and his ashes mixed in with the ink of the book he was most proud of. It was the trade paperback collection of *Squadron Supreme* #1-12. You could say that he loved comics so much that he wanted to be part of them forever.

Suggested Reading: Squadron Supreme Volume 1 #1-12 or trade paperback Squadron Supreme. The follow-up graphic novel Squadron Supreme: Death of a Universe.



WHAT MAD UNIVERSE(S)? EARTH N AND EARTH W

PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

It is obvious to anyone reading *Watchmen* that the Earth we see depicted in those pages is not the same as the Earth that would have been going on outside those pages, in the life of the person reading them when they first came out, even though the issues were appearing in such a way that the internal dates in them were very close to the actual dates in the world outside the pages, where we are. To try to make it easier to discuss these two parallel timelines, I'm going to use Earth N (for Normal) for our ordinary, quotidian, Earth – the one we live in now, the one we lived in then, and the one we will no doubt continue to live in for the (not quite) infinite future that lies ahead of us.

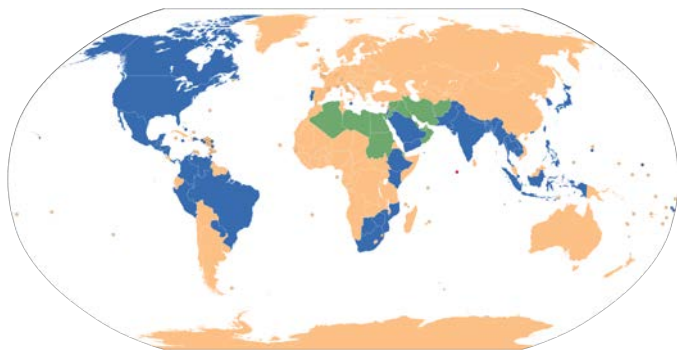
As opposed to Earth N, I'll also be referring to Earth W (for, of course, *Watchmen*). Earth W is where the differences are, which we observe in the story. It is obvious that some of the divergences are directly attributable to the leap forward in science that followed the advent of Jon Osterman's alter ego, Doctor Manhattan – things like electric cars and their ever-present charging ports on the streets of New York; the airships we see floating overhead; the American victory in Vietnam, which led to Richard Nixon breaking the two-term rule for US presidents; and those geodesic domes we see in the distance. There's even that four-legged chicken which we see being served in Raphael's restaurant.

There are other things that are definitely not standard Earth N issue: those caps with built-in speakers that the police officers, and even members of the public, can be seen wearing; the smoking devices with the spherical space for the tobacco to go into; even the Gunga Diner chain of fast food restaurants – it's not immediately obviously if these are the result of accelerated scientific discoveries post-Doctor Manhattan, although they could be, I suppose. In my head, they occupy an uneasy limbo between Earth N and Earth W. Earth N^w, perhaps. The same is true for Madison Square Garden, the venue for the Pale Horse/Krystalnacht gig that was unexpectedly cut short on that fateful night of 2 November 1985, which appears to be in a different location than it is on our Earth. Our current one is the fourth venue of that name, which my co-editor Helena Nash also mentions in her piece on the map of that intersection in New York, so there's no reason that it might not have been rebuilt a few more times on Earth W.

There's one other anomaly that bothers me: in issue #1, page 19, panel 1, on a board stating Rockefeller Military Research Centre, there is a

symbol a third of the way down on the left-hand side that very closely resembles the stylised S that makes up the symbol we see on Superman's chest. We know that that superhero comics had a brief showing early on, but crashed and burned once actual superhero comics came along. Perhaps it was that they felt that it was only right to take the symbol of the first real super powered hero from the comics to represent their own first real super powered talent. Perhaps they persuaded the owners of the comics, which was probably National Comics Publications, Inc, at the time, to give them a good deal. I imagine negotiating a deal with proto-DC would have been made easier if you were the American Government's dark ops people, particularly if you have the most powerful being in the universe in your back pocket...

There are other things, though, that really can't be because of Jon Osterman's post-accident antics, and therefore have to have been embedded in Earth W before that. Things as apparently trivial as American wall calendars running Monday to Sunday, which is how calendars on the eastern side of the Atlantic do it, instead of running Sunday to Saturday, which is how the calendars on the western side of the Atlantic do it. We see a calendar on the wall in Dan Dreiberger's kitchen a few times, and it runs Monday to Sunday. This is in Earth W. If it was Earth N, the order of the days would be Sunday to Saturday, because that's how they do it in America, and presumably have done for really quite some time now, and certainly did before August 1959, when Osterman had his accident. If nothing else, it's very difficult to posit a reason why it would be deemed necessary to change the standard American calendar, even in the wake of all the other changes.



A more curious difference is on that can of beans we see Rorschach eating – quite noisily – in Dan Dreiberger's apartment in issue #1. Although we



can only partly see the label, we can clearly make out that, instead of the usual '57 Varieties' slogan that we would expect to see on a tin of Heinz Beans, this one says '58 Varieties.' The thing is, Heinz have been using the '57 Varieties' slogan since Henry J Heinz introduced the marketing slogan '57 pickle Varieties' in 1896, over 60 years before Osterman's accident, and I cannot see a way that this would somehow change because of the sudden appearance of a bona fide super powered being.

What is particularly interesting about those two divergences, the calendar and the bean can, is that they appear in two adjacent panels, on page 10 of issue #1, as if to clearly signal to the reader that this story is taking place in an alternative universe to our one, in its own Earth W, as opposed to our Earth N.

And, if that is really the case, it might go some way towards explaining all that awful business with Ozymandias's computer password in issue #10. Not all divergences in alternate worlds are sensible ones, which make the world a better place!

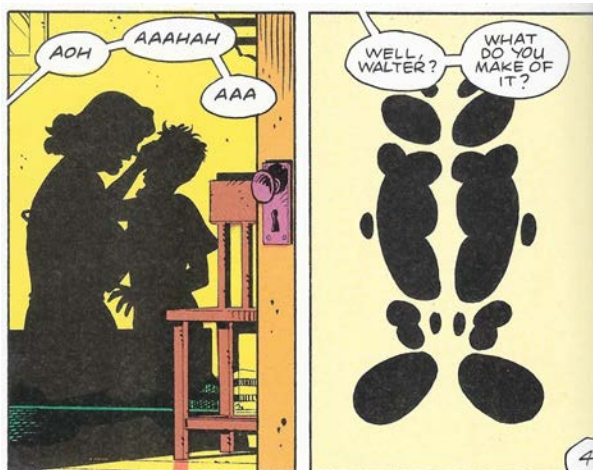
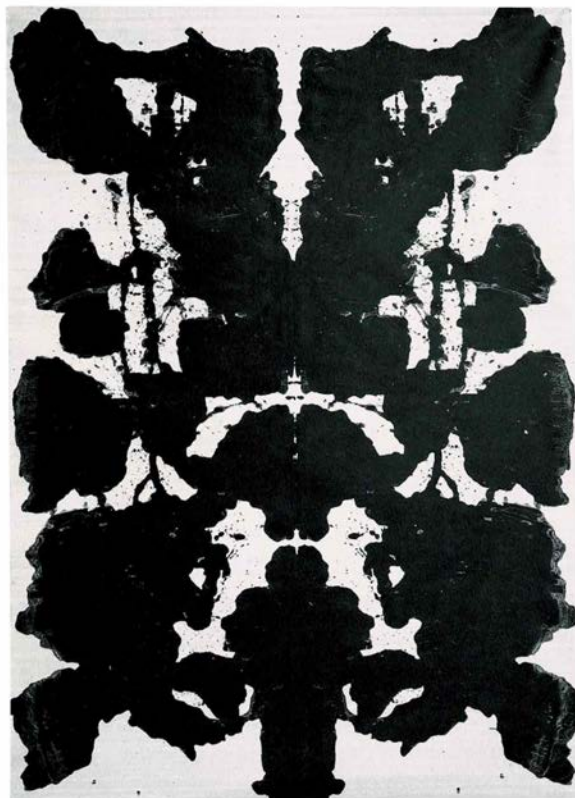
SYMMETRY AND PATTERN: ANDY WARHOL, RORSCHACH AND COMICS IN THE 1980S BY JIM O'BRIEN

History does not record whether Andy Warhol ever read any of *Watchmen* before his early death, aged just 58, in 1987, but it is tempting to imagine that, as an artist with a lifelong fascination with comics and with the role of superheroes in culture specifically, he would have found much to intrigue him in its pages.

Having himself very recently completed a significant series of paintings all entitled 'Rorschach', Warhol would no doubt have been delighted to find a character named after the eminent Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach and the picture-based psychoanalytical testing system he pioneered playing a pivotal role in proceedings.

Warhol's Rorschach canvases (of which there are more than thirty, ranging in size from vast pieces more than eight foot high to more intimate treatments of the theme just a few inches across) were completed in a rush of creative activity in 1984, after Warhol had been introduced to the possibility of producing symmetrical, mirror-image abstract paintings based on the Rorschach test ink blots by his studio assistant, Jay Shriver.

In fact, Warhol misunderstood the origins and purpose of Hermann Rorschach's testing process, assuming that patients were asked to produce ink blot art themselves that would subsequently be analysed by psychiatrists, and never appreciated that there was a standardised set of ten cards that – as with Dr Malcolm Long and Walter Kovacs in *Watchmen* – practitioners presented to their patients for comment and interpretation. If he had, Warhol would almost certainly have worked directly from these ink blots for



his own pieces, as was his normal working practice.

Indeed, Warhol never used ink for his Rorschach pieces at all, instead producing the pictures by applying paint in swirling patterns to one side only of a specially prepared canvas that could then be folded while the paint was still wet so that the imprint of the pattern was transferred identically but in reflection to the 'blank' side of the canvas on the other side of the fold. The result was a series of complex symmetrical images that (so Warhol wryly suggested at least) others could then 'psychoanalyse' for revelations as to the artist's personality.

Warhol evidently took a lot of pleasure in creating supposedly entirely abstract pictures in which viewers were absolutely meant to see 'real' objects and from which they were not supposed to step away until they had 'found' figures or silhouettes of things in the patterning, be they beautiful butterflies or flower buds – or, as in in Walter Kovacs' case of course, a dog with its head split in half. In this way Warhol seemed to have been having a humorous dig at the

more high-minded abstract expressionists of the previous decades who had scorned attempts to read their paintings as in any way representational and who had derided critics and viewers who claimed to locate landscapes or human figures within the canvases.

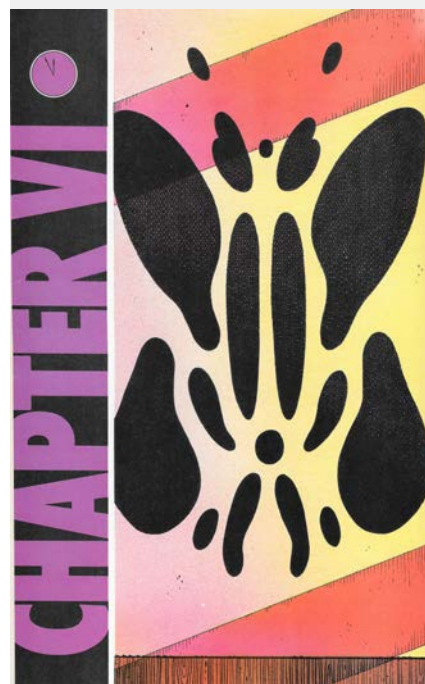
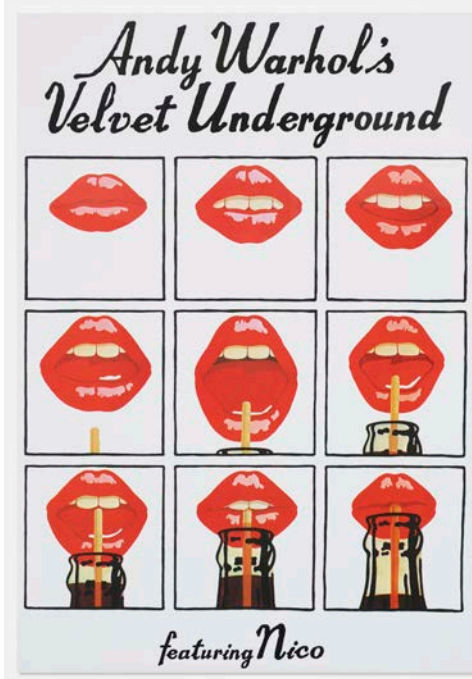
As in much of his work, Warhol's Rorschach pictures were very much a series, with a core idea or motif being reinterpreted or slightly differently presented across a gallery of images. Dave Gibbons' treatment of Rorschach's face mask, with its constantly

morphing arrangement of black marks against a white background, would no doubt have strongly appealed to Warhol in its repetition and its constantly changing nature.

Ditto Gibbons' rigorous nine-panel grid approach to page layout, which infuses *Watchmen* with the sort of patterning that Warhol evidently found beguiling, would also have appealed to the artist. Warhol would display his various series silkscreens (Elvises, Marylins, electric chairs, etc.) one next to the other to build a kind of incantatory effect, rather as the panels on a comic page build mood and narrative through being read in sequence. Although Warhol himself had only a supervisory role in its creation, with other artists producing the actual images for the design, the front cover to the 1971 compilation album *Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground* featuring Nico uses a nine-panel, comic-book style grid that is highly reminiscent of a *Watchmen* page to tell its 'story': in the album's case, that of a pair of lips sipping coke through a straw.

And as suggested above, *Watchmen's* meditation on superheroes and what they stand for in culture would undoubtedly have struck a chord with Warhol, who had made them and their comic book kin a central part of his art since the very early 1960s. Some of Warhol's earliest pop art paintings had (like those of his contemporary, Roy Lichtenstein) played with panels from comics, taking mass produced imagery and reimagining it as fine art, with paint and brushes used to recreate what had originally been produced with ink and mechanical printing processes.

Images of comic book heroes such as Popeye, Mickey Mouse, Superman and Chester Gould's Dick Tracy had all featured in Warhol's work, but it was the figure of Batman that evidently most fascinated the artist. In 1964 Warhol and his Studio collaborators shot a black and white art film entitled *Batman Dracula*, with fellow underground filmmaker Jack Smith playing both the lead parts. Just two years later, and Warhol posed as Robin alongside chanteuse Nico as Batman in a series of photographs used to illustrate an article in *Esquire* magazine called (playfully, for 1966) 'Remember the Sixties?' by David Newman and Robert Benton.



In their consciously camp approach to the subject (the pictures were shot contemporaneously with the Adam West/Burt Ward *Batman* TV series and feel very much cut from the same caped crusader cloth), Warhol's *Batman* photos seem a million miles from the imagery and tone of Frank Miller's later treatment of the characters. Nevertheless, it feels satisfyingly appropriate that Warhol should have not only a link to *Watchmen* via the ink blots of Hermann Rorschach but also to the comic's fellow traveller at DC Comics in the mid-1980s along the road to comics' super stardom, *The Dark Knight Returns*. Indeed, as Alan Moore was happy to acknowledge, Rorschach, with his masked vigilantism and his absolutist quest for moral purity along the mean streets of modern America, was the most *Batman*-like character in *Watchmen*.

And one of the creatures often 'seen' in Rorschach ink blots, at least in films and on TV?

Why, a bat of course!



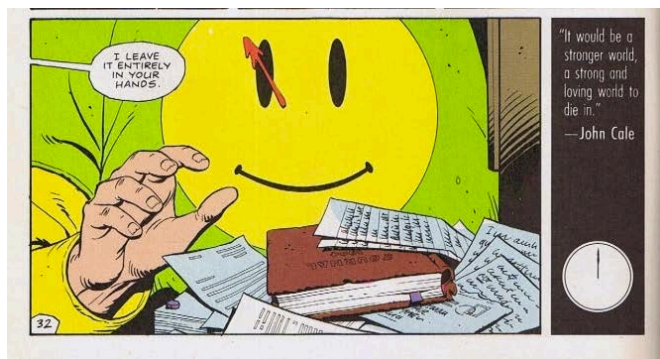
ALAN MOORE, WATCHMEN AND THE AMBIGUOUS APOCALYPSE

BY JULIAN WEST

Alan Moore is one of the most original writers, not only in comics, but in the last fifty years in any field. For all the dazzling range of his work, it's interesting to note that he has certain motifs to which he continually returns. One of these is what I have termed the ambiguous apocalypse.

Watchmen is undoubtedly his most famous work. One of the most disturbing parts is that when the disaster has taken place, and millions are dead, we're left thinking "Was it actually worth it?" We're never spared the real cost. The people who died aren't just faceless – they're people we've come to know. It's a terrible, disturbing event – but it also spared the world from a nuclear catastrophe. We are ambivalent about it. What if our heroes had managed to prevent it, and in doing so, triggered World War Three?

But then, in the very last panel, we see that perhaps it was all for nothing. If Rorschach's journal is found, then perhaps it will turn out to be all for nothing. Indeed, the fury at being fooled might well cause the war as a result. We don't know.



And this ambiguity is entirely typical of how Alan Moore wraps up a storyline. We know that there's been a big, cataclysmic event. We're just not sure what it all means. And he's been doing the same thing throughout his career.

V For Vendetta is both a precursor and successor to *Watchmen*. It's quite a different book. *V* is not a superhero, though he has preternatural abilities. He's a freedom fighter, or terrorist, depending on where you stand. He has an agenda of bringing down the government – and more, the entire concept of government. When he's done, there's nothing but chaos. And it's here that Moore leaves us. Is there going to be a new society, based on fairness and freedom? Or is there going to be another repressive regime – or does the chaos continue? The tone is vaguely hopeful, but uncertain. We don't know

if the big disaster is going to work out or not. The implication is that it is up to us.

Swamp Thing, as part of the DC stable, was expected to contribute to the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* storyline. The story that the creative team came up with is the revival of the Ultimate Evil. He's not specified very precisely – and since Lucifer is a DC character, we can think of him as Satan++. The efforts of the heroes are unavailing, and the huge black hand is reaching upwards – and then we get Deus Ex Machina. A great white hand is reaching down. They touch... and something happens. The world is changed, irrevocably, fundamentally – but we don't know how. The nature of good and evil are not as clear as once they were. What we thought was going to be the end of the world doesn't end the world – except that maybe, in a deep metaphysical sense, it did. God and the devil switched it off and on again.

Captain Britain had its own little apocalypse in a black and white, almost throwaway series. Mad Jim Jaspers is distorting reality. The universe is on the point of being switched off to protect the fabric of reality. Then Jim Jaspers is killed. The world resets back to normal. Is it the same as it was before? Probably, but you never know.

Marvelman/Miracleman has a city-wide destruction, much like *Watchmen*, but it's London, not New York. Kid Miracleman goes berserk. The panels showing the chaos and horror are some of Tottleben's most disturbing work. It's an unambiguous nightmare. But as with *Watchmen*, we're left wondering – was it worth it? *Miracleman* takes over the world. He's created an Utopia, a world without hunger or war. Everyone is free to do as they wish. Was destroying London an acceptable cost? In this case, Moore leaves the answer to Neil Gaiman to tell us. We've been waiting a very long time to find out.

After these seminal works, Moore takes a short break from the ambiguous apocalypse. *Killing Joke* has tragedies, but personal, not on a global scale. It's with *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* that he has another go. In Book Two, the heroes are fighting the Martians from H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. To defeat the aliens, germ warfare is employed at enormous human cost. Again, the heroes have to decide whether it was worth it or not. *Captain Nemo* plays the Rorschach role. It's not acceptable to his principles, and he quits. The *League* breaks up, and we're left, again, to decide for ourselves.

But *LOEG* seems to be well suited for cataclysmic disasters. We subsequently get the return of the Antichrist/Harry Potter/Aleister Crowley, whose

attempt to destroy the world is thwarted by Mary Poppins. In the final volume – perhaps Moore’s farewell to comics – we have a colossal apocalypse – perhaps Moore’s largest in scale, and yet most ambiguous. When James Bond tries to destroy the Blazing World with a nuclear device, he triggers the takeover of Earth, and perhaps the Universe, by magical beings. It’s a change in the very nature of reality. Is it a disaster? We don’t really know for sure.

Promethea is a story designed to illustrate Moore’s philosophical views. She’s a character of myth, from the human imagination, having a concrete existence in current reality. The purpose of the series was to explore deep philosophical issues about the human soul, and have one-line gorilla jokes. Naturally, when wrapping up the series, *Promethea* gets to destroy the world. She’s opposed by a team of heroes (of course). It’s a hilariously ill-matched set of characters from totally incompatible story settings. Naturally, they fail, and her plan comes to pass. The world is destroyed. Or is it? It seems to be the same, but... well, we’ve been here before. But why not? On the face of it, this is exactly the *Swamp Thing* story, but it feels very different. Put different characters in a different setting through the same story, and you get something new every time.

But latterly Moore seems to have become aware of what he was doing. *Promethea* gives us the most philosophical, deep, esoteric apocalypse. Now Moore decides to go a bit literal. *Providence* ends the world for real this time. The horrors of H. P. Lovecraft

manage to win, an unquestioned, total victory. The Rorschach notebook that might have changed things is thrown away. Yes, mankind is doomed to an eternity of unspeakable torment, a literal hell on Earth – but they all seem fairly OK with it. It’s probably pretty bad – but sort of interesting.

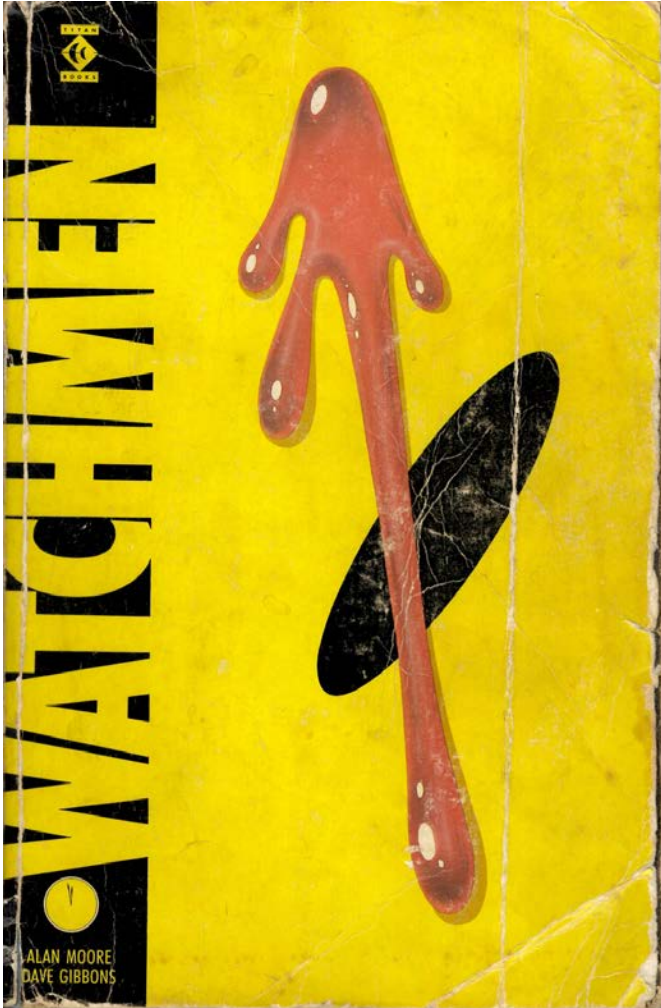
And finally, *Crossed* +100. This was Moore slumming it, playing in someone else’s universe. The original series by Garth Ennis imagines the world as bad as it could possibly be. An infection causes people to revert to the worst possible version of themselves. They become homicidal and insane. Moore’s approach is to see how to make this situation worse. He makes the infected intelligent, restrained, and capable of infiltrating the uninfected settlements. The good guys are overrun, with horrendous consequences. The heroine escapes, but hope seems absent. For once, for the last time, there’s nothing ambivalent about it. It’s all going wrong, and it will never be put right. Which mostly closed the door on Moore’s comics career.

Is this repeated trope a weakness? I think not. Writers have to follow their own path, and this is clearly something that Moore likes writing. It’s also something that people enjoy reading. The end of the world is a popular idea. What Moore has given us is a sequence of different, yet interesting ways to imagine it.



WATCHMEN—A TATTERED LOVE LETTER BY PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

This piece, in a shorter version, was originally a post on Facebook, about five years ago, where it attracted a number of useful and not so useful comments, of which I've reproduced a small number at the end. Subsequent to that, it appeared in *Heroes Unlimited* #8 in 2018, which entire issue was reproduced as part of *Journey Planet* #41, also in 2018. Which is not bad for a social media post, these days!



I bought a book today that I already own a copy of. Actually, I own several different copies of this one. It's Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*. After being released as twelve individual comics, starting in September 1986, it was pretty much immediately repackaged as a single-volume paperback edition—the fancier hardback editions, and all sorts of nonsensical stuff involving slipcases would all come later. This particular volume was published by Titan Books in 1987, and a quick squint at the indicia page leads me to believe it is, as far as is possible for a book like this to be, a first edition. It's even possible that the Titan version predates the American DC Comics edition, as this was often the case, back in those early times. As well as that, *Watchmen*, when it first appeared, was one of the very first of what we would now recognise as a graphic novel, a woolly and under-useful catch-all phrase that has none the less become ubiquitous since.

Besides being an early—possibly the earliest—edition of *Watchmen*, there's also the fact that there's a handwritten price on an inside front page, in the amount of £6. There was a time when I could recognise the handwriting of every second-hand bookseller in Dublin, and this was no exception. It was the handwriting of Stephen Lord, onetime owner of the second incarnation of Dandelion Books, which would inhabit three different premises on Aungier Street in Dublin's city centre between 1988 and 2004, before closing down, like virtually every other secondhand bookshop in the city did, those days. And it's where I worked as, eventually, the shop manager and sole fulltime member of staff for eight years, until 1997.

That edition of *Watchmen* came out in 1987, and Dandelion Books opened to the world in 1988. Within a few years I had taken over everything in the shop, including pricing the incoming secondhand stock, and, adding to that the fact that it was priced by the owner in Irish Pounds / Punts, in the time before I took over, means it was probably sold through there around the very beginnings of the 1990s, and probably handled by me, at that.

So I just couldn't resist buying it when I saw it on a trolley waiting to be shelved in Chapters Bookstore on Parnell Street this afternoon. There will be photos eventually, to show how worn this is, hopefully by constant rereading. I am, now, at the very least this book's third owner: there was the original purchaser, who presumably sold it in to Dandelion Books (I do remember one person selling up all his belongings to go try for a new life in Australia—a thing that happened often enough to be noticeable in the shop—who sold us a copy of *Watchmen*, which was quite a rare thing, then and now, and it is entirely possible that this might be that one), then there would have been the person who bought it from there for £6 in the late eighties or early nineties, who may well have kept it these past twenty-plus years or more, before selling it on to Chapters, from whom I have just bought it. There may even have been other owners, other transactions, in between.

It brought back a slew of memories, of the days when the graphic novel shelf in Forbidden Planet—itsself only open in Dublin since late 1987—only had *Watchmen*, *Dark Knight Returns*, *Maus*, and later things like *V for Vendetta* and *Stray Toasters*. Those were the days that Forbidden Planet had their loveliest premises in Dublin, before they moved out of Dawson Street. It came from a time before the terrible film adaptation, before DC Comics and their corporate masters, Warner Bros, decided that they would choose to interpret their contract with the comic's creators to allow the property to remain forever beyond their reach, before *Before Watchmen*, and

before Alan Moore finally disowned the work, to preserve his own sanity. It's a copy of the book which comes from a purer, a better, and a more hopeful time in comics. And, in a strange sort of a way, it is a relic of myself.

There were other memories, of time spent behind the counter in Dandelion Books, where friends would always drop in, and where my struggle with alcoholism finally came to a head, and I gave it up, for good, twenty-something years ago now. And there were fond memories of the gang I hung out with, talking about comics, and drinking beer, and generally living a better life than we knew.

Some of them are gone now, left us in that most permanent of ways there is, through death, but with a decent handful or two still left, some of whom I still get up to all sorts with, although the planning is more likely to be done sedately over pots of tea than foaming pints, these days.

And that's why I had to buy that copy of *Watchmen*.

Kenny Penman, co-owner of the Forbidden Planet International group, who own the Dublin shop mentioned, said 'Dawson Street was our loveliest shop by far. I found it, I fitted it, I stocked it, I hired the staff, I electrocuted myself stripping it bare, I bribed the telephone engineer up on the green £300 to get our phone fitted when we were told we would have to wait 5 months!! I lived in town for about 8 months and then for a couple of years later. I loved it all! So exciting back then. I was in our current one at the weekend—near broke my heart—I know it is going through a complicated re-fit but it looks so down at heel. Well, hopefully straight soon. In those days the runaway best sellers, from memory, were the *Calvin and Hobbes* collections which went gangbusters. Back then we sold 1800 copies of *Viz* a month (was it monthly, maybe 10 times a year) and 350ish *X-Men*, and just the occasional toy—changed days (rather sadly for a still died in the wool, comic and book fan like myself).'

Igor Goldkind, who worked for Titan Books in the 1980s, said 'I remember that edition and the 200 press copies I mailed out with the press release. It was the day the Earth left its orbit for a little wander.'

Larry Cloake, old friend, co-worker in Dandelion Books, and the first gay man I knew, said 'Is that the copy you used to bang the counter with when you were trying to emphasise the importance of my first purchase of said graphic novel and I, of course, completely ignored you and bought the Tom of Finland retrospective that still adorns my shelf, pride of place. But you did eventually browbeat me into buying a copy that is still lurking somewhere beside a Garth Ennis or two. And as for moving the shop one Sunday with shopping trolleys. Do I remember? Will I ever forget? And thanks to you I still love a graphic novel. Not that I see many of them down here in the wilds of Longford. Unless of course it's a beat up old copy of *Meatmen!*'

Julian West, another old friend, and the man who first brought *Watchmen* to my notice, said 'I'm glad you finally got a copy of *Watchmen*. You should read it, it's very good. I think I said so when it came out.'

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH: THE STREET WHERE IT HAPPENED

BY HELENA NASH, NOVEMBER 2023

One of the things that grabbed me about *Watchmen* was all those scenes at the intersection of two streets somewhere in New York: the man at the newsstand and the kid next to him leaning against an electric hydrant thing, reading *Tales of the Black Freighter*; the fabulously named Gunga Diner where Dan and Laurie meet and where Rorschach stakes out his mail drop; the Utopia cinema prophetically showing *The Day The Earth Stood Still*; the Promethean Cab Company where supporting characters like Joey work, the guy selling watches out of a briefcase just up the street; the nuclear fallout shelter sign on the wall; the freaky 'Hiroshima shadows' image of embracing lovers spray-painted onto a wall; and of course the bland-looking Institute for Extraspatial Studies building, which is fated to be the manifestation locus of Ozymandias' creature.

The last few pages of issue #11 show many of the series' supporting characters converging by chance at that intersection. Aline has come to see her girlfriend Joey and an argument swiftly turns into a violent assault. Gloria Long is quizzing Bernard the news seller about her estranged husband Dr Malcolm Long before spotting him down the street. Detectives Steven Fine and Joe Bourquin are driving by, possibly on their way home. Milo from the cab company and his locksmith brother Ralph are going for a drink after work. The Utopia is packed with moviegoers and just down the street hundreds of knot-topped music lovers are attending a Pale Horse/Krystalnacht concert.

Then there is a bright, white light from inside the Institute for Extraspatial Studies and everybody dies.

Those wide-screen panels at the bottom of the last few pages of issue #11 show the fantastic draughtsmanship of Dave Gibbons, doubtless directed by Alan Moore's characteristically detailed script. We see the lives of these secondary and tertiary characters colliding – literally in some cases – as their personal storylines lead to a climactic resolution. In another book, these people might emerge from this incident more or less in one piece. They would grow

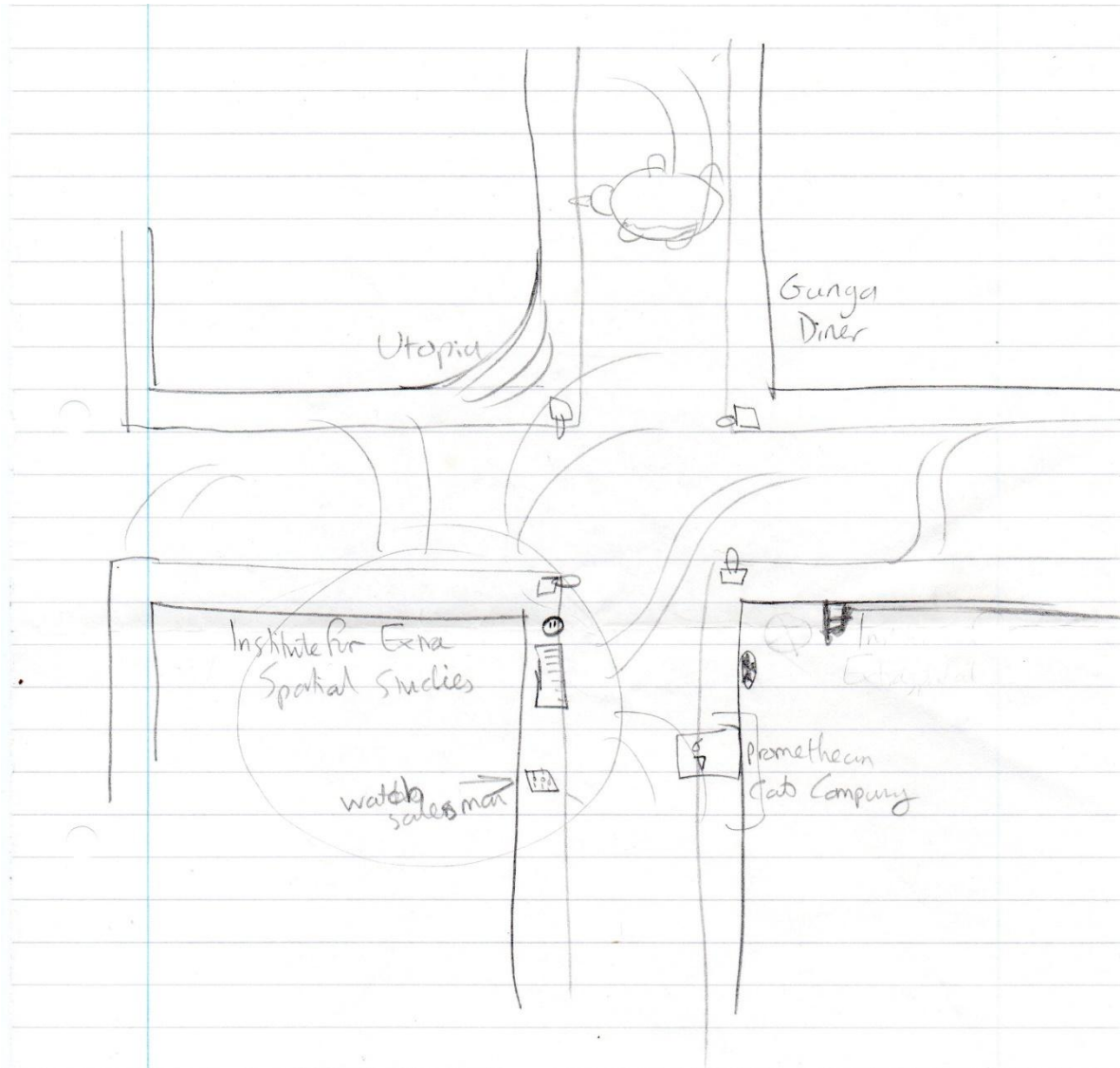
and learn from the encounter on that fateful street corner and perhaps end up as better, wiser human beings. But this is *Watchmen*, and Moore and Gibbons have just killed them all with a giant telepathic squid monster.

The first few pages of issue #12 describe the aftermath of the catastrophic event in graphic splash pages, dialogue-free until Jon and Laurie turn up in the middle of the carnage. We see the bodies, limp and bloody, strewn across the street, hurled against walls. We see vehicles embedded in restaurant windows and heaps of corpses spilling down the steps of the Utopia. We see the monster itself, a bulbous obscenity complete with titanic tentacles and what I can only describe as a bloodshot 'eye-gina' bursting out of the shell of the institute. It's a powerfully cinematic sequence of scenes.

Not only are those splash pages powerful, but taken as a whole they're incredibly precise and consistent; you see a leg in one page and it matches up perfectly with an outstretched body seen from another viewpoint on another page. Just like the entire *Watchmen* series, it all matches up beautifully like an intricately disassembled clock, waiting for the reader to piece it all together in their mind's eye. Carnage yes, but beautiful in its way.

Somewhere around my second or third rereading of *Watchmen* back in 1987, I started to get ever so slightly obsessed about those streets, those corners and buildings where it all happened. I wanted, needed, to be able to visualise it as a whole as Moore and Gibbons must have done, to see exactly which building faced which, to work out who worked at which corner, to figure out how close they all were to the monster when it appeared. So I studied the source material for a bit, deduced what went where and drew a little map on some lined paper (see below). I showed the map to my comic-reading wingman Ian and then folded it up inside the *Watchmen* trade paperback and subsequently forgot about it for 30 years.

MY HAND-DRAWN MAP FROM 1987



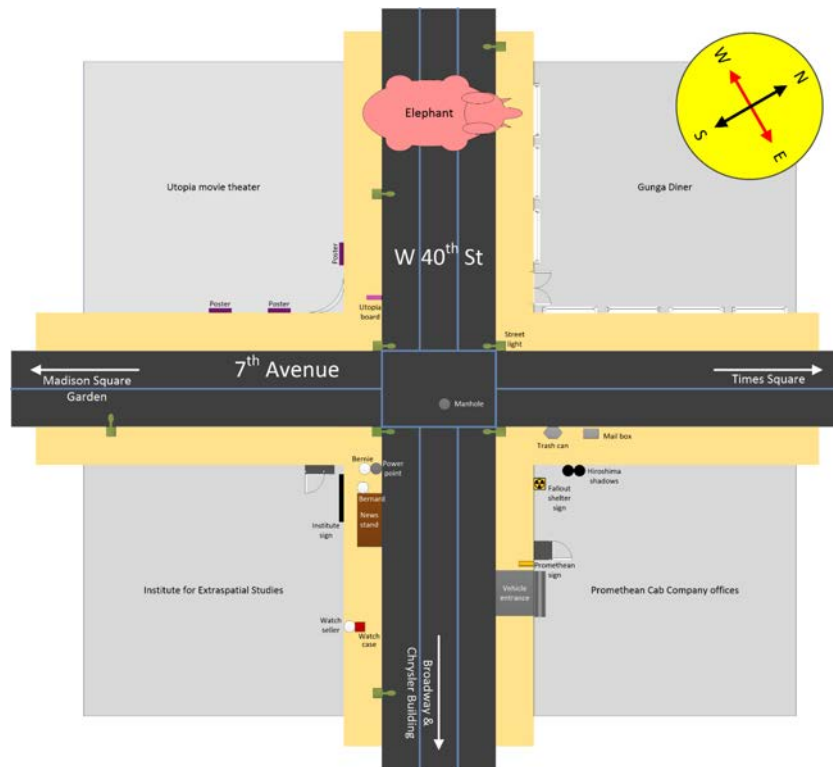
Then Pádraig invited me to join the editing team for this issue of *Journey Planet*, and I thought about digging out my old map and maybe redrawing it. Maybe a bit neater on the computer, and labelling things up. And once I'd done a nice map of the streets before the disaster, it shouldn't be too much trouble to use it as a template for a map of the scene after the event.

I may have got a bit carried away.

Have a look at the pictures below, then keep reading to see how I worked out what went where.

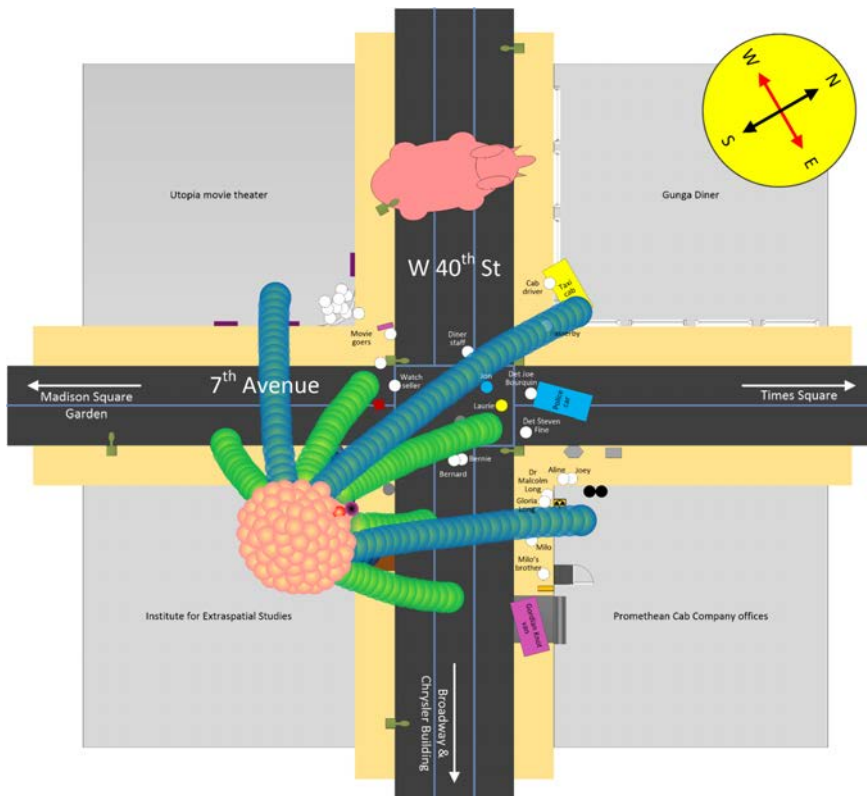
W 40TH AND 7TH: BEFORE

Here's how the intersection looks throughout *Watchmen*, up to the point that the creature appears.



W 40TH AND 7TH: AFTER

Here's the intersection as it looks in *Watchmen* #12. The creature's tentacles, crashed vehicles and bodies match up to the artwork as best I can manage. Jon and Laurie are indicated by the blue and yellow dots, where they first appear in that issue.



HOW DO WE KNOW WHERE THIS IS?

Fortunately, Rorschach's journal tells us that he shadows Dan Dreiberger and Laurie Juspecky to the Gunga Diner on 40th and 7th, which gives us the exact midtown location of the intersection, not far from Broadway and Times Square.

THE PROBLEM WITH MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

In *Watchmen*, Madison Square Garden is clearly visible from the intersection (seemingly a block south down 7th Avenue from the Utopia). But in our real world (or Earth N as my co-editor Pádraig calls it in his article) the current fourth Madison Square Garden is further downtown, south and west on 8th Avenue between 31st and 33rd Streets, and therefore could not possibly be visible as seen in (for example) issue #11, page #24.

So in the world of *Watchmen* (Earth W), the current (as of 1985) Madison Square Garden must have been built in a different location to its real-world counterpart. Perhaps the existence and actions of Dr Manhattan et al caused this curious divergence in municipal planning? Maybe a Moloch or Underboss-run construction racket in the 1960s resulted in a change in the city's zoning, or maybe the Comedian just shot the architect. We may never know, but there's probably a very niche fanfic in this.

THE COMEDIAN'S APARTMENT

In *Watchmen* #1 page 4, Detectives Fine and Bourquin are seen leaving Edward (the Comedian) Blake's apartment building and shortly thereafter walking past a Gunga Diner. Does this mean that the Comedian lived just down W 40 Street from the intersection with 7th Avenue? I don't think so. The diner on page 5 sits in a building with a substantial stone corner which is quite distinct from the Gunga Diner seen in (for example) issue #2 page 4. Gunga Diner is presumably a chain, and the detectives were simply passing a different diner.

MIDTOWN COMICS

In the real world, the south-west corner of the intersection is actually the location of the original Midtown Comics, a well-known comics store visited by several of the issue's contributors (other comic stores are available). Coincidence? Probably not.

Attending a signing by Dave Gibbons earlier this year (2023) at London's Gosh! comic shop, I had a chance to inflict my *Watchmen* streetmaps on him, which he graciously approved of and confirmed that he used his old building surveyor skills to meticulously plan out the layout of the intersection. As if there was any doubt.

REFERENCES

As well as Gibbons' faultless artwork, I drew upon actual streetmaps of Manhattan and the following resources:

http://watchmen.wikia.com/wiki/New_York_City

The work of **AYBGerrardo**, who I later discovered had undertaken a similar project to mine. Sadly, the links below no longer work, but I did manage to save a copy of their annotated streetmap.

<http://www.watchmencomicmovie.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=406>

<http://photobucket.com/gallery/user/AllyourbasicGerrardo/media/cGF0aDovd2F0Y2htZW5tYXAuanBn/?ref=>



SATURDAY MORNING WATCHMEN

AN INTERVIEW WITH HARRY PARTRIDGE BY HELENA NASH



Saturday Morning Watchmen (SMW) appeared on YouTube in 2009, described as a 'Classic cartoon intro ripped from an old VHS'. It depicts *Watchmen* as a wholesome children's animation from the 80s or early 90s, complete with a catchy theme tune and lyrics that describe each character's role in the team, for example:

*Nite Owl is their leader
And he loves to party down
Rorschach's friends to the animals...
"Yeah, when he's not clowning around"*

Of course, it's not a lost 80s cartoon at all. In fact, SMW is a brilliant parody of shows like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (TMNT) and *Thundercats* which hilariously reimagines the adult themes of *Watchmen* into supposedly suitable children's cartoon fodder: Rorschach is shown playing with a couple of friendly German Shepherd dogs, the Comedian has a crush on Silk Spectre (yeesh), Ozymandias saves Comedian from a nasty fall, and so on. It's 81 seconds of genius; a lovingly satirical homage to both 80s cartoons and the *Watchmen* graphic novel itself. It's almost a shame it only exists as the title sequence to a non-existent show, but then again it already perfectly encapsulates

everything it wants to say. Like a good joke, it's timed to perfection and doesn't out-stay its welcome.

The creator of SMW is Harry Partridge, who under the internet handle Happy Harry (@HappyHarryToons), has been writing, voice-acting and animating his own independent productions since he was 16. Since SMW became a viral hit in 2009 he has gone on to create original cartoons like *Dr. Bees* and *Starbarians*. I was keen to find out how SMW came about, what Harry's background in cartoons and comics is, and what he thinks of *Watchmen*, so I tracked him and fired off a few questions which he was kind enough to answer.

Journey Planet: How did you get into animation? And what cartoons did you watch as a kid?

Harry Partridge: I think I always wanted to bring characters to life, it goes right back to playing with toys. As a kid I would watch anything that was animated, lots of 80s Saturday morning stuff but also old cartoons from the 1930s (Fleischer *Popeye* and *Superman*), the first few anime movies that started showing up at HMV in the mid-90s and a lot of stop motion - especially Jan Svankmajer. I started fooling around with the stop motion animation setting on my

Game Boy camera when I was about 10 years old, and then making primitive games on the PC when I was 15. The games weren't any good but I got hooked on creating the animation for them.

JP: From the details in SMW that only a *Watchmen* reader would recognise, I guess you are or were into comics when you made the cartoon? Or was it simply a response to the Zack Snyder movie coming out in 2009?

HP: I got into comics in a big way when I was a teenager and gobbled up lots of Alan Moore stuff in a brief period. The cartoon was actually made for Playboy.com originally (yes, that Playboy!) because they wanted a viral hit, and I thought with the movie coming out that the video would do well - but I refused to hand it over in the end as I thought it was too good for their crappy website. Can you imagine the Playboy bunny icon in the bottom right corner? Would have totally thrown off the vibe. I think I still let them use it but shared my own version without their branding.

JP: I first read *Watchmen* as the Titan trade paperback in 1988. How about you? What sort of impression did it initially leave?

HP: I read it at age 16 as a trade paperback, around 2004. It left a big impression that never left me, it felt grand and dark and human. I probably wasn't ready for it at that age - maybe the rest of comics wasn't either. It seems to have helped close the door on a lot of the sincere optimism of the silver age.

JP: That's an interesting point. I think Alan Moore's gone on record to say that the comics industry took the wrong lessons from *Watchmen* and sent comics in a direction he never intended. What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

HP: I suppose it was the biggest rustiest nail in the "superhero comics are just for kids" coffin, and more have been hammered in since. I think we can have adult superhero stories but it's become the norm and not the exception for western comics these days.

JP: I only recently realised that your Happy Harry name is the same as the unfortunate bartender that Rorschach calls upon for information. What came first for you - the *Saturday Morning Watchmen* idea or the Happy Harry name?

HP: I think I was using the name before I read *Watchmen* so it's a happy(?) coincidence. I was looking for some sort of internet handle and jumped on the first bit of lazy alliteration I could think of. I'm not sure though, maybe I was subconsciously influenced.

JP: Listening to the cartoon's lyrics, your name-checking of each character reminded me of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* cartoon (1987) of course, but also *Defenders of the (pause) Earth* (1985). And the whispered 'Watch out!' at the end made me think of *Defenders of the Earth* and *Thundercats* (1985). What were your inspirations for the song?



HP: I think you've pretty much got it. I became more aware of 80s cartoons AFTER making the cartoon so the song is mostly a *TMNT* homage.

JP: So Silk Spectre's a *Jem and the Holograms*-style pop star, complete with keytar! Nite Owl is a party dude like Michaelangelo, and Bubastis is somewhere between Snarf and Cringer? What other Saturday morning homages did I miss?

HP: There's definitely a *Captain Planet/Toxic Crusaders* influence with the anti-pollution stuff. A slightly anachronistic bit of *Batman: The Animated Series* with the group shot of them stood on the roof. *Transformers* with Dr. Manhattan's car mode (I hadn't seen the insanity that was *Turbo Teen* yet). Maybe a sprinkling of *Alvin and the Chipmunks* DNA in there too.

(Interviewer's note: do check out the opening sequence to *Turbo Teen* online; it's sheer body-horror nightmare fuel.)

JP: What kind of reception did *SMW* get? Was there ever any 'official' attention or response from DC, or creators Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons?

HP: It was the first viral video that I had made and the thing that made me realise I could do this as a living (I was 21 at the time and decided I wouldn't even bother properly finishing university). I've read online that both Moore and Gibbons have seen it and "got the

joke" but it's not like I've ever spoken to them. Overall it was received very well.

JP: How did the online popularity of *SMW* affect what you went on to do? Have you considered turning your hand to other grim 'n' gritty 80s comics as a source of wholesome cartoon entertainment? *Swamp Thing*, *V For Vendetta*, *Miracleman*?

HP: It established me as a bit of a retro/throwback guy which I never minded. I considered doing more "Saturday Morning" parodies but other people can do that. I never wanted to be a parodies-only kind of guy. I was asked to do a similar treatment of the game *Mass Effect* for IGN but I hadn't played the game and the resulting video is pretty lame - I had no idea what I was doing.

JP: What are you working on now?

HP: More short animated films with my own characters the *Starbarians*, *Dr. Bees* and *Trilby Dogtooth*. Hopefully those films will become less short and more ambitious down the line. I'm also making my own comics now and you can support my graphic novel "Starbarian Tales" on indiegogo at igg.me/at/starbarians.

JP: Harry, thanks for taking the time to talk to me.



INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LEVITZ

JP: You bought the Charlton 'Action Heroes' characters for DC Comics in 1983, I believe. Why was that?

PL: It was a period of expansion in the comic shop market, and we felt adding more super heroes could be an opportunity. Marvel was publishing a much larger line of titles aimed at the type of readers frequenting the comic shops, and we were converting our line to confront that. We launched new series, tried revitalizing old heroes/names, did a little licensing in of others' IP. This was another angle.

JP: I have a vague memory that Jenette Kahn said something in one of her Publishorial columns about how they were looking for ideas for what to do with them. Is that right?

PL: I don't recall the piece, but after the deal we passed them on to Dick Giordano who headed editorial, and had supervised their birth.

JP: Maybe it was one of Dick's *Meanwhile...* columns... Was he looking for proposals from writers about how to use the characters as a group?

PL: I don't know what parameters Dick used in asking Alan for a pitch, I only recall he started specifically with him.

JP: All of this led to Alan Moore submitting his proposal for what became *Watchmen*. Was there any point at which DC considered actually giving him control of the Charlton characters, or was that out of the question from the beginning?

PL: I think Dick hoped Alan would have a good approach to the Action Heroes. At no point did anyone consider or suggest that it would involve giving him 'control' over them.

JP: There must have been a point where DC realised that *Watchmen* was going to be a very different property to what had come before. Do you remember that moment of realisation happening?

PL: As the pages came in from Dave, the magic became obvious.

JP: There had been a lot of talk in the various editorial columns that ran in the DC comics at the time about things like better paper quality, computer

colouring systems, stuff like that. Did all of that mean that *Watchmen*, which might not have been technically possible a few years previously, was the right product at the right time?

PL: Well, it certainly was the right time. Aspects might have been possible a few years before, but not long before.

JP: At that time, around the mid-eighties, there was a lot of talk about creators' rights in comics. I am of the opinion that, at the time, DC was sincere in their commitment to returning the rights for *Watchmen* to Alan and Dave Gibbons. Am I right?

PL: We were pleased to offer Alan and Dave one of the first contracts we made including a version of the very conventional book industry 'out of print' clause, which was embodied in the agreements they signed for the series and collected edition. Happily for comics, the conditions under which those rights would have reverted to Alan and Dave never occurred because of the work's success and the growth of the graphic novel market.

JP: The *Watchmen* graphic novel/collected edition virtually single-handedly changed how the general public saw comics, and ended up meaning that, not only has the collection been permanently in print from that day to this, but that every bookshop now has a dedicated graphic novel section. Did any of you foresee that happening at the time?

PL: I think single-handedly ignores important work like *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Maus* and *Sandman* to name a few equally significant titles. As to foreseeing it, we were working on that goal for a long time, and *Watchmen* was important in achieving it.

JP: I did at least try to mitigate that by putting in 'virtually'! I know that Dick Giordano mentioned receiving both the proposals for *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* in the same *Meanwhile...* column at the end of 1984. Did creators know at that time that you were looking for maturer, grittier work?

PL: We were certainly looking for material for the older audience going to comic shops as opposed to newsstands, so I think mature was probably part of the goal, but I don't think grittier was. That word was often applied afterwards talking about Frank and Alan's effect on the super hero genre, but I don't think it was an editorial goal.

JP: I absolutely did not realise that, rather than being a happy accident, *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* were part of a long-held plan. Can you tell me more about that?

PL: There's two levels to this.

On one, we were trying to adapt our publishing plans (content, formats, pricing and marketing) to the changes in our audience.

On another, it had been a personal goal of mine to create availability of the best material consistently (you could get Brahms or the Beatles, why not the best comics of prior eras?). My first two attempts failed to accomplish this, and the early emphasis on graphic novel volumes was a third—happily successful—try.

JP: What were those first two attempts?

PL: First I did a deal to license out the wonderful Goodwin/Simonson *Manhunter* to be published specifically for the direct market, nicely produced in a variation on the European album format. Whether the format doomed it or the publisher simply wasn't up to the task, it didn't work.

The second were offset reprints of things like *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* and *New Gods*, which I hoped stores would keep in stock or reorder. But 'looks like a periodical, treat it like a periodical' seemed to prevent them from fulfilling my hopes.

JP: Because I was buying them as they came out, it was possible to see DC's first faltering steps with the collected volumes – I remember that they published what would become volume two of *Sandman* in July 1990 before getting around to volume one over a year later in October 1991, for instance. But eventually it all became much more streamlined, with a collected volume appearing about six months after the issues in it had appeared. I can only assume this meant that the figures were good, and that you knew it was working. Can you say anything about that transition time?

PL: Takes time to learn new tricks.

JP: *Watchmen* has been in print, in numerous different editions, from that day to this, which is more than can be said for quite a lot of prose novels that came out in the meantime. Is this an achievement you look back on with any degree of astonishment, or were you sure from the outset this would happen?

PL: In '86 we only had dreams of the possibility. Lots of pride over how long we were able to keep great books available consistently.

JP: You were the person in DC who was primarily responsible for stopping the exploitation of *Watchmen* as a corporate property, I believe?

PL: I believed *Watchmen* was a singular creative accomplishment, best served to stand on its own...or in direct adaptation like the film. My successors have felt otherwise, and the result has included some commercial and critical successes. Opinions vary.

JP: Do you think comics in general should have continued to move closer to a standard book industry model?

PL: There were and are elements of the book world that are admirable and that I tried to bring to comics (the royalty plans I designed all used cover price based royalties for example, to my mind the most transparent basis). But not everything there is ideal, either.

JP: Do you have any opinion on the titles that subsequently appeared, the *Before Watchmen* ones, and the rest? Would the world – or, at least, our bit of it – be a better place if they'd never existed?

PL: No opinion. Their turn, their call.

JP: Thanks so much for doing this interview, Paul. It has been both informative and illuminating, and I don't think I realised how much you were responsible for helping to shape the comics world – and the contents of several of my bookcases – until now. We all owe you a debt of gratitude!

PL: Thanks for the kind words. Lots of us played a role in it...and you probably contributed to all our mortgages.

WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH VIDEO GAME

A REVIEW BY KUMAR SIVASUBRAMANIAN

Watchmen: The End Is Nigh is a merchandising video game tie-in to the 2008 Warner Brothers movie *Watchmen*, a film I have not seen. Being a media tie-in, I have to imagine it had a very brief development cycle. The game was released in two downloadable installments for Windows, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360 in March and July 2009. A physical version was also released in July 2009, which comes with two posters: one of the characters as they appear in the game, and a timeline of the movie version of the *Watchmen* universe. This second one is a long strip, which is kind of neat. In fact there was even a special PS3 version which included the director's cut of the movie on a second disc as well. I have owned the standard PS3 disc version for many years, but only finally got around to putting it on recently.

You can play as Rorschach or Nite Owl, or play two-player split screen. You can switch back and forth by going back to the loading screen, choosing again, and then reloading from your last checkpoint. Single player is a little bit easier than co-op, because if one of the characters is being controlled by the CPU, he won't get killed no matter what. But if a character controlled by a player gets killed, the pair together is forced to reload from the last checkpoint.

Jackie Earle Haley and Patrick Wilson, who played the roles in the movie, return to voice the characters again. Part 1 is 6 chapters long, takes place in 1972, and revolves around a prison break and a plot to kill Woodward and Bernstein by Underboss, and there are some surprise twists. Part 2 is 3 chapters long (too long), takes place in 1977, and involves a girl who was kidnapped by the madam-themed villain Twilight Lady, who ends up involved in stripping, pornography, and prostitution; meanwhile there's a police strike happening, and the streets are absolutely apocalyptic with gang violence.

Basically you run around and beat up endless waves of thugs. There are no civilians in the game. There's a boss at the end of each part, but they're not too difficult, and overall the game is very easy (there are no difficulty settings), and I finished it in about five or six hours.

Each chapter has a different variety of thugs. In one chapter it's cops, in another it's disco-era strip club patrons, in the final chapter it's beautiful women in bondage outfits, and obese gimps. (This chapter in particular is one of the craziest video game experiences I've ever had. I recommend watching at least this part on YouTube. I've never seen anything like it.) In part 2, this becomes especially tedious – there's not really any

variety or need to change 'strategy' with each encounter, just *another* wave of thugs around the next corner. But in part 2 especially, the strip club and brothel are absurdly gigantic mazes, like British Museum-sized, hence just more and more thugs.

As you work your way through chapters, you can pick up additional brawling moves (button combos), none of which I used (on purpose at least) because you can just keep mashing the attack buttons and beat the enemies anyway. It was only slightly a problem when I came up against Underboss at the end of part 1, and the game told me now was the time to use all the combos I'd learned and beat him. I hadn't learned the combos, so I just kept mashing the attack buttons and after a few tries I beat him anyway. Twilight Lady took even less effort.

My favorite thing is that the instant you finish beating up the current wave of thugs, Rorschach's hands immediately go into his pockets. Just punching and kicking a thug will result in sprays of blood, but Rorschach can pick up weapons dropped by enemies (sometimes riding crops and spanking paddles in part 2!) to do extra gory damage. Nite Owl cannot (I guess it's 'immoral' to hurt them *that* bad). Nite Owl has a 'Charge' meter, and Rorschach has a 'Rage'



meter which allow special moves. Other special moves are also triggered randomly (?) or by certain combos (?). These sometimes look like wrestling moves. Rorschach has one where he slides between a guy's legs and punches him in the crotch. In another one he pulls a thug over his knee and elbows him in the crotch. There's one punch to the face which causes a bunch of white bits to go flying which is either a fountain of spittle or every tooth in the victim's mouth. Both seem unlikely.

Another thing to note is there is no stamina limit. You just fight on and on and on and never have to slow down. You heal automatically just by waiting, so if you're getting low on health in a fight, you can just run away from it for a minute and you'll be fine again. In a sense, this is one of the most *unWatchmen*-like aspects of the whole thing. It's regular old superheroing rather than 'realistic' superheroing. Imagine if your weapons in the climactic battle had been a fork and a dinner plate! Yes, I'm asking you to imagine it, because the developers of this game certainly couldn't.

As I mentioned at the top, I haven't seen the movie, but I was at least surprised that they didn't try to make Rorschach a 'hero' here. That said, the moral axes are laughably black-and-white. Rorschach is relentlessly sanctimonious (and paranoid) to a right wing extreme, and Nite Owl is relentlessly law-abiding to a point of naiveté. In part 2, when it's discovered that the abducted girl is over 18 and enthusiastically consenting to all her activities (!), Nite Owl basically shrugs and says, 'That's that.' But at the end, once Twilight Lady has been incapacitated, Rorschach wants to kill her and Nite Owl refuses, so they have to fight each other! (It's the 'real' boss fight of part 2, I guess.) I played as Rorschach, and she died, but I imagine there is a different ending if you play as Nite

Owl or he wins. I can't imagine I'll be playing again to see how it plays out.

Between chapters you get cut scenes that look like comics done in Dave Gibbons's style (a bit like the *Watchmen* motion comic). In one of these cut scenes in part 1 chapter 1 there's a friendly pop around from Dr. Manhattan and Silk Spectre, and there's a surprise appearance from another *Watchmen* main character later on. These made part 1 at least tolerable. If you squinted hard enough, you could kind of see basic elements of that comic book you love. I mean, even Underboss was mentioned in the comic. Rorschach LOOKS LIKE Rorschach! Part 2, however, lacks even part 1's meager appeals (in that part 1 at least reminded you of a certain great comic book), even though Twilight Lady also had her 1 panel in the comic book source material. Having to run around for literal real-time hours through interminable corridors in a graffiti-covered mansion converted into a brothel the size of the Louvre beating up wave after wave of dominatrices. And almost every line of dialog from Twilight Lady is a stupid entendre delivered in a 'sexy' voice. ('If you two boys would just relax a little, maybe we could all spend some quality time together,' etcetera, ad nauseum.) It's juvenile and boring! Part 2 is as far from the source material as you could imagine. Probably far from the movie too, if I had to hazard a guess. And it's not just a bad 'use' of the source material: it's no fun. If anything, the whole exercise, especially part 2, is anti-*Watchmen*.

Watchmen: The End Is Nigh was developed by Deadline Games, and directed by Søren Lund. Len Wein, editor of the *Watchmen* comic book, has a co-writing credit on both Parts along with someone named Peter Aperlo, and Dave Gibbons has an 'Art Direction' credit on Part 1 at least. I didn't notice if he had a similar credit in Part 2 as I found it hard to

muster up the effort to focus on the credits a second time around for some reason. You can watch the whole game on YouTube where you'll find various full play throughs.



ANTONY JOHNSTON

Journey Planet: When did you first read Watchmen?

1989, if I recall correctly; my first year of sixth form. I completely missed the original series, but then heard people talking about how great it was in retrospect. I was already a big fan of both Alan and Dave thanks to their *2000 AD* work, and one Saturday afternoon spotted the Titan paperback collection in Nostalgia & Comics in Birmingham for a tenner. I devoured it the same weekend, and still have that well-thumbed copy.

Journey Planet: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

I became that insufferable fan who wouldn't shut up about how great *Watchmen* was and recommended it to anyone who would listen. I'd been reading comics since I was a child, but I'd genuinely never come across anything with such narrative complexity and density, both textual and visual. Likewise, I'd had ambitions to work in comics for many years already and *Watchmen* only further cemented them.

Journey Planet: Has Watchmen had any influence on your own work?

Yes, but perhaps not in obvious ways. I've little interest in writing cape comics (no surprise to anyone familiar with my Marvel work) and I'm not a deconstructionist. But *Watchmen's* scale, ambition, and narrative technique simply became part of how I think about comics. I imagine nobody but me can see its influence

on *Atomic Blonde*, for example, but it's there. It's always there.

There's also the packaging, of all things. After school I spent a decade working as a graphic designer, and the bold, stark design of that collection (not to mention the beautiful original covers) influenced my own work there, too.

Journey Planet: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

It's the perennial double-edged sword, or even triple-edged, if that's possible.

One: it raised the bar, and opened the eyes of a whole generation of creators – more than one, in fact – to what comics was capable of.

Two: unfortunately there's nothing comics likes more than a bandwagon, and too many creators only took heed of its surface elements, leading directly to the grim 'n' gritty trend of the 1990s – from which, forty years on, the comics industry *still* hasn't fully extricated itself.

Three: it helped usher in the modern trade paperback market, without which the industry would be unrecognisable, and those of us not writing monthly slugfests wouldn't have a career.

Four, for a bonus non-Euclidean edge: DC's wankery over the rights became a cautionary tale. Many of us who later entered the industry did so determined not to get screwed over like Alan and Dave, which is ultimately no bad thing.

BRUCE DICKINSON, IRON MAIDEN LEAD SINGER AND COMIC BOOK WRITER

Journey Planet: When did you first read *Watchmen*?

BD: First read it on recommendation from Julian Doyle, editor of *Brazil* and *Life of Brian*. We were working on a script for our movie *Chemical Wedding* and he gave me the script for *Watchmen* which Terry Gilliam was going to direct. Well, that never happened, but the book blew me away, like nothing I had ever seen. Julian and I discussed it a lot.

JP: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

BD: *Watchmen* for me is the gold standard of comics. It can stand repeated readings and still have secrets to reveal. It's something to aspire to in my opinion.

JP: Has *Watchmen* had any influence on your own work?

BD: Well yes actually. Realising multiple plot lines can work is a mind-bending experience, but for me it was the realisation that a philosophy underpinned the whole thing. Hopefully I can shoehorn all of that into *The Mandrake Project* (a graphic novel series Bruce is co-writing with Tony Lee).

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

BD: *Watchmen* brought comics out of being regarded as kids' stuff even though they weren't. Such is the prejudice of supposedly aware individuals. Alan Moore is the Odin of the comic world.

PETER HOGAN

JP: When did you first read *Watchmen*?

Peter Hogan: When it came out as single issues. When the first one hit the racks I was working in a comic shop, and we actually shut the place so that we could all read it undisturbed.

JP: What sort of impression did it leave on you?

PH: Well, it was stunning. It felt like you were in on this big secret that the world had yet to discover.

JP: Has *Watchmen* had any influence on your own work?

PH: Not *Watchmen* per se, but Alan's work in general had an enormous influence - not in copying his style particularly, but in learning the mechanics of how it all works.

JP: What's your favourite aspect of the comic, if you feel it's significant, why is it so?

PH: I think it's a great novel about the Cold War, and about coming out from under that shadow and into a more complex world.

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

PH: It set a benchmark to aspire to (good) and a lot of imitations (bad) who thought 'adult' meant nihilist/ultraviolent.

I WATCHED THE WATCHMEN

TIM PILCHER

I think I was a little late to the party. I'd only discovered the series after the first two or three issues were already out. Fortunately, I'd managed to pick them up as back issues, and from then on I was hooked.

At the time I was living in Eton, having previously discovered Alan Moore's tenure, already halfway through, on DC's *Swamp Thing*. Mixed amongst the brightly coloured spandex titles and flashy superheroic gaudiness, *Swamp Thing* stood out with its inverted palette of muted greens, browns and blues, and dark, heavily inked and brooding, fully painted covers. This was something different. Something special. And very possibly something dangerous. I was hooked. These tales of menstruating werewolves, sub-aquatic vampires, and terrors too terrible to tell, kept me awake at night. It never occurred to me that this writer was the same one who had wowed me just a few years earlier with D.R. & Quinch in *2000 AD* and V for Vendetta in *Warrior*.

In 1986 I started saving my money for monthly trips up to the London comic shops to get the precious gems I couldn't find locally—back issues of titles I'd missed and those titles that never made it out to the newsagents. My two regular haunts were Forbidden Planet (FP) on Denmark Street and the Virgin Megastore round the corner.

Issue five of *Watchmen* came out just before my very first comic convention, UKCAC 86, in September of that year. It was a banner year (as the Americans are fond of saying). Not only were Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz there—alongside Chris Claremont, Peter Milligan, Grant Morrison, Gary Groth, Alan Grant, Brian Bolland, Alan Davis, and Mike W. Barr—but also all three *Watchmen* creators were there, and The Original Writer was absolutely mobbed.

Comics were going through a renaissance. A brief, short-lived one, as it turned out, but one that caught enough of the public's imagination nonetheless. Suddenly in every magazine and newspaper there were articles about, and interviews with, Alan Moore and Frank Miller. A young journalist called Neil Gaiman wrote a piece on *Watchmen* for the *Today* newspaper.

By the time it was a hot Thursday in late May, 1987, I was in a near frenzied state. I raced up the steep and narrow staircase that led to the small comics concessionary in the Virgin Megastore on Oxford Street. As I scanned the new racks for the latest releases, picking up the familiar design, with the title on the left-hand side, but this issue had a startling absence of colour, bar a small butterfly in the middle

of a snow-white cover. Its minimalism leapt off the gaudy, muscle-bound shelves. I looked upon their work with awe. That long train journey back to Eton flew by as I voraciously devoured my new 'post-literate' booty of *Watchmen* #11, stunned, unable to wait for the unimaginable conclusion, but having to wait another two months as Dave and John raced to reach the finishing post.

UKCAC 87. It was also the last comic convention Alan Moore ever attended. I remember there was a vast queue for his signing which went out the doors and up one side of a tall staircase. Alan was at the pinnacle of his popularity. *Watchmen* had just finished and fans couldn't get enough of him.

Limited to signing one item per person, I recall approaching the 'Great Yeti of a man' nervously to get my copy of the collected *Swamp Thing Vol 1* signed. I was lucky to get anything signed as the queue was vast and his time was limited, but he was a real gent (and always has been in all subsequent meetings, bar one). However, later, so the apocryphal tale goes, whilst visiting the toilet he was accosted by a fan, or fans (accounts vary). Outraged at not even having the breathing space to be able to relieve himself, Moore swore he wouldn't attend another UK or US comic convention. A promise he kept for a quarter of a century, until he decided to play N.I.C.E. (the Northampton International Comic Expo) in 2012.

The following year I managed to get a job at Comic Showcase in Neal Street. Showcase was one of the few shops to sell original comic art, and thus it became a hub for all the top talent in the UK. We saw nearly all the key art in comics history pass through the shop. Owner Paul Hudson dealt with US art dealer Scott Dunbier (now special projects editor at IDW), who had access to practically every artist stateside. Numerous *Dark Knight Returns* pages by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson were sold at Showcase (prices now reach over \$400,000 per page). Plus, we had exclusive deals for Kevin O'Neill's *Marshall Law* artwork, all of David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* art and, most importantly of all, virtually all the pages from *Watchmen* by Dave Gibbons. It was a no-brainer, I bought a page of *Watchmen* art.

Many of the key pages were snatched up straight away by customers with keener eyes and bigger pockets than me. However, I was drawn to #7's page 19 with Dan Dreiberg naked in his basement apart from his goggles. It was affordable (just) and spoke to me in some way. The artwork was going for around £50-£80 (£117-£186 today, allowing for inflation) and so I bought it on 'credit.' I spent a lot of money on artwork, comics, and related

ephemera in the shop. A lot of money. Far too much money. In fact, so much money, that I was in hock to Paul for hundreds of pounds. Paul, in his clever, capitalistic way, decided to exploit my comic book addiction by opening the shop on Sundays and allowing me to work off my credit. I felt like a miner trapped in debt bondage.

Tragically, I was living a precarious existence in those days, spending more than I earned and a few years later I had to sell the art to make ends meet. It went for £200 (£382), which wasn't a bad profit at the time, and long before the 2009 film came out. That page is now probably worth well over £45,000. No, I'm fine. Really.

Funnily enough, years later, Dave and I were discussing the art, and it was one of his favourite scenes. We both felt an affinity with old Dan, the Everyman in *Watchmen*, not least because Dave came up with the Nite Owl character when he was in his teens, but also because the character shared the same name as his son.

A few years later, around 1993, and I'd secured my first job in publishing, working for my favourite comics publisher, DC, and my favourite imprint, Vertigo. Alan Moore was giving a reading in a small basement bar just off Tottenham Court Road (round the corner from our offices), so my old friend and co-writer Brad Brooks and I popped down to check it out. The reading was part of a promotion for Alan's forthcoming novel, *Voice of the Fire*. At the time, to my untrained philistine ear, it seemed



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

desperately convoluted and pretentious, but I've always loved his work so struggled on with it, listening attentively.

I hadn't seen Alan since UKCAC 87 and thought it would be good to say hello afterwards, as a representative of DC Comics. In my blissfully naive (and slightly inebriated) state I was completely unaware of the fractures that had already become chasms in Alan's relationship with DC over the *Watchmen* rights, and sauntered up to him jovially and started chatting. He was as pleasant and convivial as he'd been previously (and as he has been in every single encounter since) but as soon as I let slip that I was working for Vertigo UK

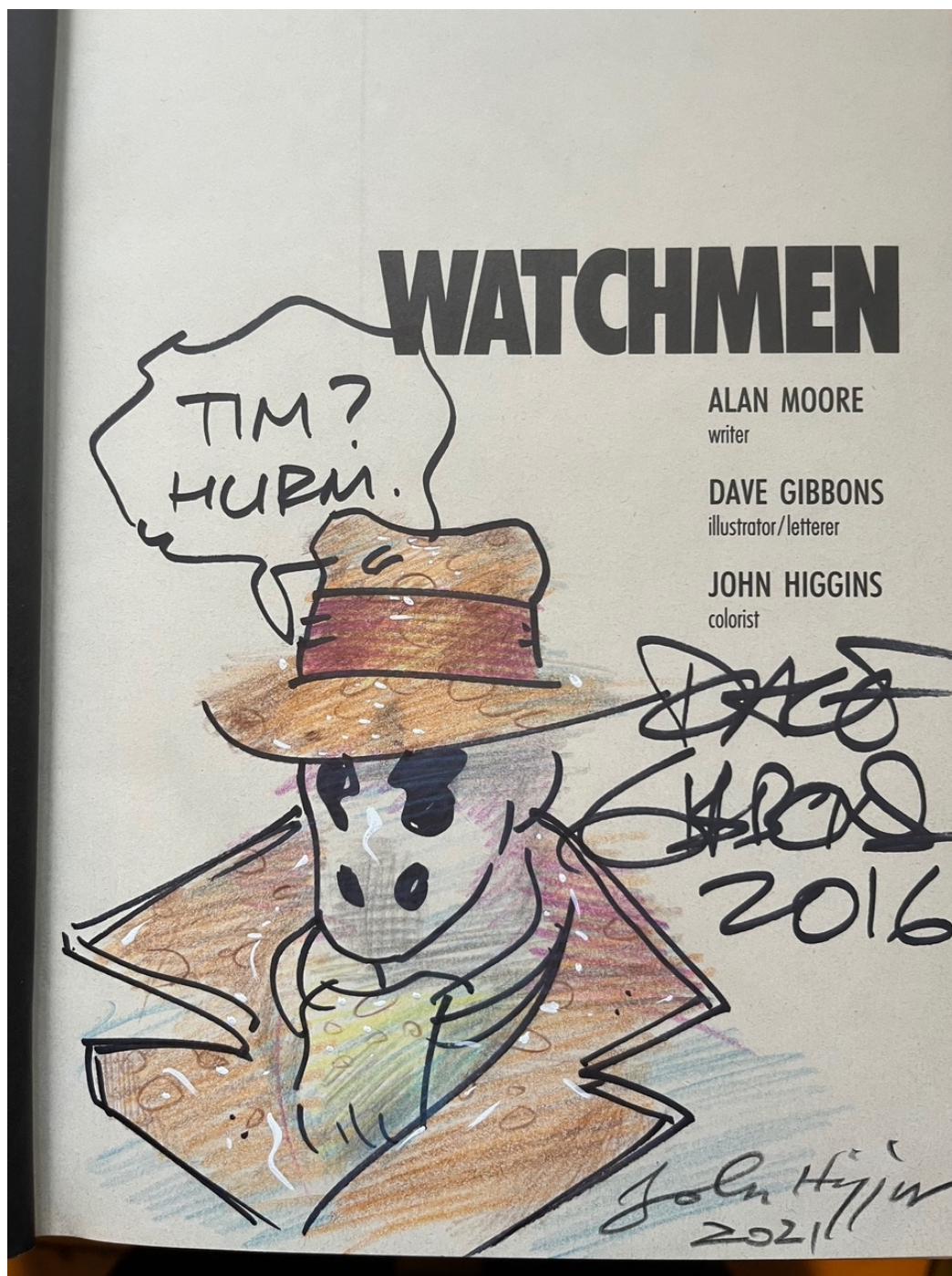
something changed. His face dropped and became a mix of rage and disgust, as if I'd just told him I'd taken a dump in his Guinness. He turned around and stormed off, leaving me embarrassed and completely baffled as to what I'd said wrong. With hindsight, I suspect he thought I'd been put up to this by DC to try and soft soap him. This genuinely wasn't the case, but the whole incident left me a tad shaken. I left in a daze, cheeks burning, and a little distraught that I'd apparently enraged one of my favourite writers.

In the meantime, Dave and I became quite pally, bumping into each other at cons or comic drink-ups. I approached him to do a foreword for Brad and my *The Essential Guide to World Comics*, which he did with aplomb.

I then asked him to do the foreword and be an artist's mentor for the *Brighton's Graphic War*

anthology (QueenSpark Books, 2016), which I edited. He did such a good job on that that he did the same thing for *Breakthrough: Our Time* (Soaring Penguin Press, 2021). We then worked on *How Comics Work* (Rotovision, 2017), Dave's approach to creating comics, and most recently *Confabulation* (Dark Horse, 2022), his 'Anecdotal Autobiography.'

Finally, years later in 2016, I managed to get Dave to sketch his standard Rorschach remark in my treasured leatherbound slipcased edition of *Watchmen*. Five years after that, John Higgins very kindly coloured it. It kind of made up for letting go of that original artwork after all those years. Kind of. Now, if I can just convince Alan to sign it. Hum.



INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL CARROLL ON THE CRIMSON CORSAIR

JP: I see that John Higgins mentions you in his acknowledgements for the *Before Watchmen*-related story, *Crimson Corsair*. Before we get to that proper, how do you know John?

MC: I met John at a convention in Dublin in the early 2000s. I was already a huge fan of his work on *2000 AD* and the first *Battlestar Galactica* annual, so naturally I dissolved into complete fanboy mode. Shortly after that we met again at a couple of social occasions, and quickly became friends. We share a very similar sense of humour and we generally appreciate the same comics and creators, and when we get together we can't help bouncing increasingly strange story ideas back and forth.

JP: When did John and yourself start collaborating on work?

MC: I think the first thing on which John and I collaborated was a two-part story in the *Judge Dredd Magazine*: 'Judge Dredd: Unchained' – which ran in issues 316 & 317 (November & December 2011). It's a nasty, dark, gruesome tale of revenge, absolutely drenched in gore and blood and more gore... I don't recall whether I wrote it specially for John, but that seems likely: I was running John's website at the time and I know the sort of thing he likes to draw! John's wife, the massively talented Sally Jane Hurst, was the colourist – I absolutely love her work!

JP: Have the two of you worked together much since then?

MC: In 2011 I wrote *Double-Crossing*, a tie-in novel to John's self-published *Razorjack* comic, and a couple of years later John asked me to 'rescript' the original *Razorjack* comic pages for the Titan graphic novel: *Razorjack* was one of the first things John had written and he felt that the dialogue and captions could be punched up a little. I also wrote a brand-new *Razorjack* eight-page strip to go with it, which John drew and Sally coloured.

Around 2016 John was working on his book *Beyond Watchmen & Judge Dredd: The Art of John Higgins*, and asked me to edit the book's text: my first proper credit as an editor!

I think the next thing on which we collaborated was *Judge Dredd: This Corrosion*, a *Dredd/Razorjack* crossover three-parter published in *Judge Dredd Magazine* in 2018. John, Sally and I had a *huge* amount of fun with that one! We started work on a sequel but couldn't nail down a story with which John and I were both happy. The door is still open there, I think, so hopefully we'll come back to that some day!

Around September 2018 I delivered the script for the first series of *Dreadnoughts*, a *Dredd* prequel series spun-off from the *Judges* series of prose novels, and when I mentioned it to John he grew very enthusiastic about it and *really* wanted to be the one to draw it, with Sally again behind the colours, so we checked with Tharg (*2000 AD*'s alien editor, AKA Matt Smith) and he agreed to assign the work to them – and we are so glad that he did! I reckon the art is some of John's career-best work. The second *Dreadnoughts* series – 'The March of Progress' – is currently running in the *Megazine* as I write this, and the third series has already been delivered.

JP: How did all this lead to your becoming involved with *Before Watchmen: Crimson Corsair*?

MC: As far as I recall, when *Before Watchmen* was in development John and Len Wein collaborated on the plot and then Len provided the scripts based on that plot. I think Len delivered the first ten scripts in one go, so that would have been twenty pages. John wasn't 100% happy with the scripts and asked for some changes (better characterisation, more horror elements, new scenes to clarify the story, more impactful cliff-hangers, that kind of thing), which the editor approved. But when the revised scripts came back, John still felt they weren't strong enough, so he decided to just draw the episodes as he felt they should have been written.

At some point Len officially stepped away from scripting duties and John took over. There was some talk that he would check with the powers that be in DC to have me officially credited, but that obviously didn't happen – can't remember why! John sent me his bare-bones script for episode 1 of the second *Crimson Corsair* story, 'The Evil That Men Do' which contained panel descriptions and basic guidelines for the dialogue. My job was to provide full dialogue and captions, following John's suggestions, such as 'I want evocative, dread filled anticipatory prose.' We went

back and forth a little getting the dialogue nailed down, but I'm pretty sure that the finished work is very close to my script.

We did the same for episode 2, and then he said that he reckoned he'd got the hang of the prose now and that he'd forge ahead on his own, but he'd definitely ask me again if he got stuck, which he did for a small portion of episode 6. That was pretty much it, I think! My entire creative input into *Watchmen* is very minor and tangential, but it's still nice to have been a part of it, however small!

JP: *Curse of the Crimson Corsair* is unusual in several ways: it's the only story in the *Before Watchmen* series that doesn't feature any of the characters in the original *Watchmen* series, it's the only story that was created by one of the three original creators who worked on *Watchmen*, and it's particularly unusual in that it didn't actually have its own title, instead being presented in two-page instalments – much like old British strips, like Dan Dare in *Eagle*, were published – in the back of issues of the other *Before Watchmen* titles, with the forward movement of the strip jumping around from title to title. If nothing else, it meant that, even though you worked on it, you are excused from the so-called 'hit-list' of the *Before Watchmen* creators that some over-enthusiastic fans put together, cursing mighty curses in their directions, and swearing never to read anything they were involved with ever again. Was this over-reaction on their part, or a measured response from loyal fans who felt that the original creators had been cheated out of the rights to their work, do you think?

MC: Were those fans over-reacting? Well, actually, yes, I think they were. But understandably, in many regards. *Watchmen* is a truly great comic. A wonderful, captivating, imaginative, moving story that to this day stands head and shoulders above just about any comic ever created. And it's a complete story, too. There was no need for *Before Watchmen*, or *Doomsday Clock*, or the sequel TV series, or the *Watchmen* RPGs, or any other 'supplementary' material. No need at all. We don't need to know 'what happens next' because there is no next: the original story had unanswered questions, sure, but their unanswered nature was part of the story... Mysteries are often more intriguing than solutions.

I genuinely can understand why some *Watchmen* fans were upset when *Before Watchmen* was announced, but I don't understand how the fans could have been surprised. DC Comics are a publisher and they were sitting on a property that they felt could be further exploited. From their point of view, they own *Watchmen*, so why shouldn't they do what they want with it? Why should they hold back for fear of

annoying one of the creators when they know that creator will never again work for them anyway?

And, sure, some fans were angry but... Well, I'd seen that before. On October 10, 1986 – right in the middle of *Watchmen*'s original run – *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was officially announced. A lot of very vocal Trekkies were hugely upset that their beloved show was getting a sequel that didn't even star any of the original cast. Blasphemy! They're ruining our childhood! Etc.

Good or bad, like them or not, the *Watchmen* prequels and sequels exist. And I think it's important to note that they have not changed the original *Watchmen* one little bit. The *Watchmen* graphic novel didn't disappear. It wasn't retconned into oblivion. It's still as good as it ever was. No matter how much the sequels and prequels might be despised by the die-hard fans, they have not poisoned the well from which they sprang.

JP: Did working with John on this lead to any further chances of work with DC Comics?

MC: For me? No... not yet! But then it's only been a decade – it's still early days!

To be honest, I don't actually really know how one is supposed to even go about getting hired by DC or Marvel. At a convention some years ago I met a chap who was the hiring guy for one of the Big Publishers and I pitched myself to him, explaining what I'd worked on and so forth. He told me that the way it was done was that they would find me. Paraphrasing, he said. 'When you make a big enough name for yourself, we'll hear about it and get in touch.' Still waiting...!

I did, however, get a chance to work with Dynamite Comics: I wrote a six-issue prequel to the *Jennifer Blood* series, and then I did a twelve-issue run on the main series when Al Ewing moved on (he's the one who recommended me for the gig). That was a huge amount of fun, but quite a challenge at first. Writing twenty-two-page monthly episodes is a very different discipline to writing weekly six-page episodes of *Judge Dredd* for 2000 AD.

JP: As you mention writing to different page counts, let me drag us back to what I said earlier, about the *Curse of the Crimson Corsair* stories being presented in two-page instalments, the same way that some old British strips, like Dan Dare in *Eagle*, for instance, were published. This meant that the story had to resolve any hanging plot thread from the previous episode, move the story along, and then set up another cliffhanger ending, all in the space of those two pages. Was that all John Higgins, or were you involved in that at all?

MC: I don't recall having any input into the actual story. That was all John's work, as far as I know.

JP: What did you think of those *Before Watchmen* stories featuring the original *Watchmen* characters? Did the world need them, and did they add anything to the story?

MC: I didn't read the individual issues as they were published but I have the collected editions... As I recall, on the whole they're pretty good. One or two struck me as excellent. Did the world need them? Well, no, but then the world didn't 'need' the original, either! As for whether the *Before Watchmen* tales added anything to the story... I guess the best barometer of that is that I've never felt the need to re-read them and don't actually recall what happens in any of them, apart from *The Crimson Corsair*! That said, now that we're talking about them, I do have a hankering to go back to them!

JP: If you were given the opportunity to write something in the *Watchmen* universe, would you take it?

MC: Almost certainly, yes! I expect that a lot of the die-hard *Watchmen* fans would probably despise me for it, but it'd be worth facing their ire: I can take it!

Plus, y'know, since this opportunity to play in the *Watchmen* sandbox is purely imaginary, I might as well go all-out and also imagine that the fans will absolutely love what I bring to the table, and Alan Moore himself will come around to my house to give me a big hug and thank me for improving on *Watchmen*, and DC will send me a great big pile of money. No, bigger than the one you've just pictured. Still not a big enough pile: try again. *That's it!* Now picture ten of those.

JP: Thanks very much for taking the time to do this interview, Michael.

MC: You're welcome! It's great that a near-four-decades-old comic still holds and garners so much love from so many of us. I think it's safe to say that a lot of comic-book creators can point to *Watchmen* as one of the key comics that sparked their desire to create. *I certainly can.* I want to be able to create something that makes others feel the same way that this has made *me* feel' is just about the strongest motivation possible. Most of us are aware that we're unlikely to achieve that goal, but we know we definitely won't achieve it if we don't try.



THE ANNOTATED WATCHMEN COVER

PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

Here is what we see on the cover of *Watchmen* #1: in the main image there is most of a smiley face badge, occupying nearly all of the bottom half of the image. The badge is bright yellow, with two long black oval eyes, and a smile with a smaller long oval shape at the end of it, signifying a crease at the corner of the mouth, also all in black. Across the right eye (on the left-hand side as we look at it) is a splash of blood. The badge is lying at an angle of about 45 degrees, so that the blood splash across the eye is very nearly vertical. Behind the badge, on the ground, we see a background of flowing diluted blood that is being washed from the sidewalk, a small portion of which we can see at the top right-hand corner of the image.

Down the left-hand side of the cover is the title, and assorted pieces of relevant information, including issue number, date of publication, company logo. These are: the word **WATCHMEN** written vertically in a large blocky unornamented font, starting about an inch above the bottom of the page, and ending about the same distance from the top. Appended to the end of this, which is to say right at

the bottom right-hand corner of the final **N**, there are the two letters **TM**, indicating trademark. Above the title we see, first, the word **WATCHMEN** in the same font, at a much smaller size, this time horizontally. Below that is the text **No. 1 of 12 \$1.50 \$2.10/CAN.** Below this again is the DC Comics Bullet Logo, beside which is a tiny R in a circle, the registered trademark symbol. Below the title, which is to say just under the letter **W** of **WATCHMEN**, there is a clock face with its hands pointing to 11 minutes to midnight. Just under that is September 1986, the cover date of this issue. All of these details are in a sort of a lime green colour, set against a black background, with a few exceptions, which I shall get to below.

Pretty much everything about this cover is, at the very least, unusual and ground-breaking. So I'm now going to go back over it all again, in much greater detail.

First, the cover illustration: there are four elements to this. There's the ground, the blood and water washing over that ground, the badge sitting atop that blood and water, and the very sharply delineated splash of blood on the front of the badge. The blood belongs to Edward Blake, as does the badge, and indeed the drop of blood thereon. The reason there's so much of it is that he hit the pavement with considerable speed, having been thrown out of an apartment window in the adjacent building. It could be argued that the ground represents the real world, that the watered down blood represents the result of violence as we see it in the real world, that the badge represents the simplified world of comics, and that the beautifully stylised splash of blood on it represents the violence this comic is about to wreak upon that world, dropping it from the rarefied world of our fantasies onto the mundane world below.

Many other explanations are possible. Spilt blood represents chaos, whereas the manufactured badge represents order. Blood itself is highly organised, and has many useful functions inside the body, but once you spill it on the ground, all you can do is wash it away, down the nearest gutter. But one drop of Blake's blood remains undiluted, and is a shape that we see repeated multiple times throughout this comic. And it could be argued that in another context, later on, that Blake's blood is saved. Or at least his bloodline.

The simplified three-part face on the badge—two eyes and a mouth—also appears through the entire work in various forms and disguises. More specifically the image of an injured, occluded, or otherwise partially covered eye, particularly the left-



hand eye of a pair as we look at them, is salted throughout. More specifically, we see Edward Blake bleed a number of times, often creating a splash of blood just like this one, usually falling onto the same part of his chest, whether there's a badge there for it to fall on or not.

Much has been written about the significance of the smiley face badge, and what it might symbolise. One Reddit user, Murmur322, says that

It's been stated very publicly by Moore that his use of the smiley face was based on some scientific study. The study basically stated that the yellow smiley face is the purest symbol of good that humanity has ever created, even infants have a positive reaction to the image. So Moore sought to corrupt the symbol, making it the emblem of one of the most despicable heroes the medium of comic books have ever seen.

And it is true to say that Alan Moore, talking to George Khoury in *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore* (TwoMorrows Publishing, USA, September 2003), does mention a study, but not quite as forcefully as Murmur322 does:

It wasn't until further on in the series that we actually started to understand the history of the smiley badge and why it made such an effective image with that little blood splash over it. Apparently, from what we heard, there were some tests that were done upon babies—if you lean over a baby's cot and smile, the baby will respond. If you hold a photograph of you smiling over the baby's cot, the baby will smile back. If you hold a drawing of you smiling over the baby's cot, the baby will smile back. It doesn't even have to be a very detailed drawing; they tried simplifying it as much as possible and they found out that a yellow circle with two black dots for eyes and a black smile drawn in was the simplest design that will elicit a response from a newborn baby.

So in some ways you could say that image is the ultimate scientifically tested image of innocence. I think it came about during the '60s... So by putting that splash of blood over the eye, yeah, it's sort of saying, the age of innocence is over. If you like, the good times are over. That is not the world we're living in now. Wake up and smell the brimstone!

Superheroes are also an image of innocence that young people respond to. There's a similarity there. Just as the smiley badge gets bloodied up, it's a symbol of innocence that has been bloodied up—then the

same is true of these innocent, simple nostalgic kinds of superheroes in *Watchmen*. That their image is bloodied up. That innocence is no longer possible.

And not only is it true that Moore mentioned a study, but it is also true that such a study did take place. In the 25 April 1974 issue of British science magazine *New Scientist* there was an article called *If a smile is so important...*, written by Dr Aidan Macfarlane, a research officer in the Department of Experimental Psychology in the University of Oxford. And it is even true that this article mentions babies and smiling. Unfortunately, it does not mention them in the context that both the above quotes suggest it does. If anything, it is about how adults respond to newborn babies smiling, whilst the babies seem to be specifically smiling in response to human eyes. Here's the relevant bit:

Wolff also found that smiling could be elicited in the first week of life by a variety of noises, including a high pitched voice. The first clear indication of a social smile appeared during the third week when a human voice became a better elicitor than mechanical noises, and in the fourth week when eye to eye contact became an effective elicitor by itself. This observation was further strengthened by the finding that a plain cut out cardboard face with ring and large dots for eyes would at this stage elicit smiling.

There is also some inference in the article to the effect that new-born babies can affect the behaviour of their mothers, a finding that readers of Alan Moore's *Miracleman* might find of significance.

Another Redditor, Deergoose, suggests that the distinctive blood stain on the badge is similar in shape to a mushroom cloud, that is to say the distinctive mushroom-shaped pyrocumulus cloud of debris, smoke, and condensed water vapour resulting from a large explosion, most usually used in referring to a nuclear explosion. I had not noticed this before, but I definitely recognise that it has some merit as a suggestion. Certainly the shadow of nuclear war hangs heavy over *Watchmen*, so there is undoubtedly contextual reasons that it could be the case. The blood stain can also be seen as an arrow, and as the minute hand of a clock, pointing to 11 minutes to midnight, the same as the clock face at the bottom of the left-hand side column.

On to the smiley face badge itself. In its simplest form, as two dots and a curved line, the smiley face has been around for at least four thousand years, and probably far longer. It is, after all, about the simplest readily identifiable image there is, bar none. But it is now generally accepted that the original

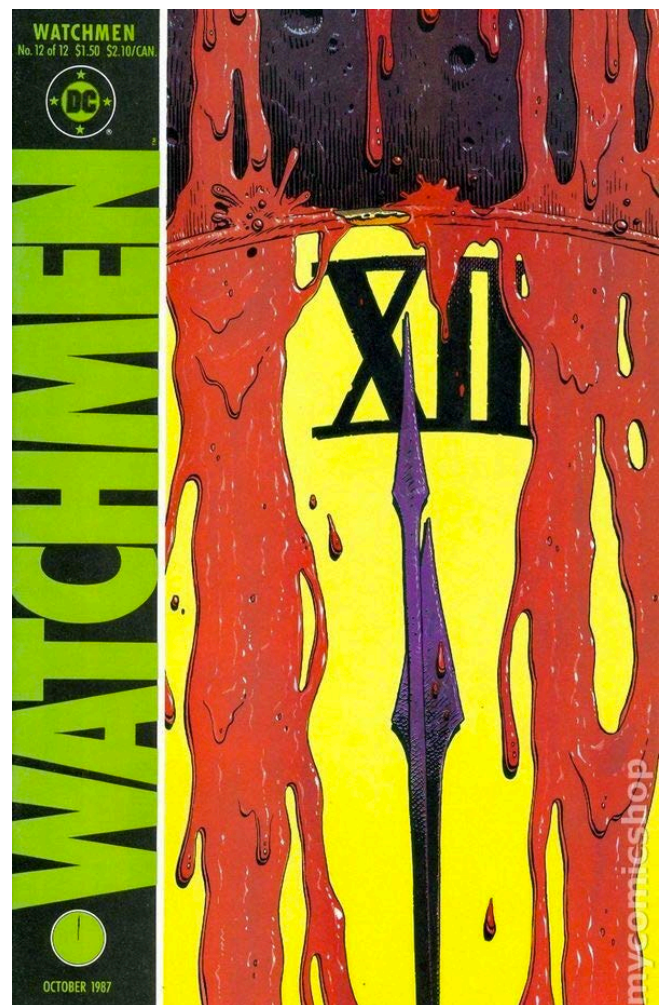
version of this one, with the two oval eyes and the smile with the creases at both ends, seen in black against a yellow background, was designed by a graphic artist named Harvey Ross Ball in 1963 for State Mutual Life Assurance Company of Worcester, Massachusetts, who asked him to create a happy face to raise the morale of the employees. Ball created the design in ten minutes and was paid \$45. However, neither Ball nor State Mutual Life Assurance Company copyrighted the design, which left it open to commercial exploitation by others, which is exactly what happened. In 1972, a Frenchman called Franklin Loufrani became the first person to legally trademark use of a smiley face, and launched The Smiley Company. Bizarre as it may seem, this copyright has legal status, and these days collected editions of *Watchmen* include the text **Smiley logo TM Smileyworld, Ltd** on the copyright page.

And, finally, back to the vertical title column, before the final wrap-up: comics traditionally have their titles horizontally across the top of the front cover. Not only that, but if a comic has a team name as the title, as seems to be the case here, we can usually reasonably expect that a team of that name will appear within the pages of that comic. But at no point in this issue, or indeed in any issue of *Watchmen*, do we either see a team of that name, or even have any group of characters collectively referred to as that. The Watchmen, who should be the superhero team of the title, are notable mostly for not existing. This is not to say that the word Watchmen doesn't appear in the pages of the book—quite the contrary. But I'll deal with that when I get to it. And the vertical-rather-than-horizontal title and the non-existent title team aren't the only unusual things about the contents of this column.

Firstly, there's that **No. 1 of 12**. Common and all as they are now, miniseries, and particularly maxiseries, as is the case here, were virtually unknown terms to the average comics fan. The whole idea that the entire story of a comic title could be told in a finite number of issues was a mind-blowing concept, back then. There was also that price, **\$1.50** because, at the time, most comics were around 75c.

And there's the **DC Comics Bullet Logo**. This was designed by Milton Glaser for DC Comics in 1976. It was usually presented at a tilt, pointing in the general direction of north-northwest, or thereabouts. But here it is presented straightened up, which puts it at odds with other cover elements that are tilted, perhaps to highlight the fact that it isn't one of the continually changing elements of the cover design. And on the subject of those continually changing elements, there's that small clockface at the bottom of the column, here pointing to 11 minutes to midnight. As the issues progress the minute hand moves forward a minute per issue, with issue #12, the last issue, having the clock reading 12 midnight.

The cover is composed largely of three colours—red, yellow, and green. Red blood, the yellow badge, and the green lettering. This colour scheme is repeated pretty much exactly on the cover of *Watchmen* #12, as well as on the last panel of *Watchmen*.



Is there anything else left to say about this cover? There's the fact that the cover image is a close-up of the first image on page one of this issue, which I'll be addressing more fully when I get to that. But this at the very least is a sign of the story inside the covers obtruding into the real world. There's also the fact that the image really doesn't tell us anything about what happens in the comic, nor does it show us any of the characters or the action we can expect to see within, which should have been commercial suicide, but wasn't.

And there is the fact that, like many a classic murder mystery, the first victim is dead before the first page. Even before the cover, actually...

THE SECRET ORIGINS OF WATCHMEN

PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

Charles Fort once said that 'In measuring a circle, one begins anywhere.' There are undoubtedly any number of places one could start writing about the origins of *Watchmen*. Here, I want to address the persistent idea that Alan Moore – ably assisted by Dave Gibbons – had somehow purloined the Action Heroes set of characters that DC Comics had bought from Charlton Comics in 1983, and corrupted them to his own ends. The thing is, bits of this are true, but mostly it's not.

Charlton Comics's Action Heroes were Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Judomaster, Nightshade, Peacemaker, the Question, and Peter Cannon, Thunderbolt, whose original creations had been overseen by Dick Giordano. These were acquired for \$5000 a character by DC's Paul Levitz, and DC set about finding a use for them. The unfolding tale of what happened to them, and specifically their

relationship to the characters who featured in *Watchmen*, could be seen chronicled in its early part in Giordano's *Meanwhile...* columns, which ran regularly in DC's titles from 1983 to 1987. *Meanwhile...* was similar to Marvel Comics' *Bullpen Bulletins* in that it gave information about the company and their titles and creators, but without the bombastic and over-hyped stylings of that other column.

The first mention of them comes in the *Meanwhile...* column in comics cover-dated August 1983 – which would have been on the shelves three months earlier, as the cover-date, amongst other things, indicated to retailers when they should remove the issues from display – Giordano wrote,

Talking of contracts, we just completed negotiations with Charlton Comics which gives us the rights to most of their 'Action Heroes'! At least that's what I called them when I created the line during my stint as Charlton's Executive Editor back in the sixties. I don't know how many of you go back that far but I was there when each of these characters was created. Heck, I was part of the creative process. I remember the energy and the fun of working with so many talented people to produce the likes of; Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, Judomaster, The Question, Sarge Steel, Peacemaker, Son of Vulcan. Anyway, these characters were the foundation of a very exciting, creative and formative time in my professional life and it's a big kick to have them back. Whatever we decide to do with these titles (our plans are tentative at this writing), I'm sure you'll enjoy them as much as I have.

Incidentally, if you have any ideas about DC's future use of these titles, I'm willing to listen. My only thought at this time is to use the original creative teams wherever possible. Nostalgia? Maybe. But Steve Ditko drawing Blue Beetle could be just as exciting as it was once upon a time ... Boy, that's a lot to look forward to.



At least one reader definitely had some idea about what DC could do with those characters...

Meanwhile, the next relevant Meanwhile... column was ten months later, in comics cover-dated October 1984, where he said,

When I was first given my current responsibilities at DC, one of my first acts was to announce a talent search. I knew we, the industry, could not get through the Eighties with only the talent pool available then, and the only way to draw new talent in was to go out and look for it. [...] We look for existing talent outside our country. Swamp Thing writer, Alan Moore, current GL [Green Lantern] artist, Dave Gibbons, and of course Camelot [3000]'s own Brian Bolland are or were regular contributors to British comics. [...]

We have a road map. We know where we're going. We have the will and the means and the right stuff to get us there and we hope you'll join us.

MEANWHILE...

DC

When I was first given my current responsibilities at DC, one of my first acts was to announce a talent search. I knew we, the industry, could not get through the Eighties with only the talent pool available then, and the only way to draw new talent in was to go out and look for it. [...] We look for existing talent outside our country. Swamp Thing writer, Alan Moore, current GL [Green Lantern] artist, Dave Gibbons, and of course Camelot [3000]'s own Brian Bolland are or were regular contributors to British comics. [...]

We have a road map. We know where we're going. We have the will and the means and the right stuff to get us there and we hope you'll join us.

Dick

MEANWHILE...

DC

A day in the life of a Cartoonist/Commuter/Executive Editor

(Continued from some months ago. When we last saw Dick, he was finished with his early morning stint at his drawing board, he was shaved, showered, and shiny as a newly minted penny—sort of—and he was dashing for the Stratford station to catch the 7:28 for N.Y.)

Help! I'm being held prisoner on Metro-North!

Well, not in a literal sense, perhaps, but it's a feeling you get after commuting awhile. Especially when your door-to-door commute takes two hours on the good days. You start becoming paranoid about the "bad" days being "planned" by the management and/or personnel of the railroad and what ensues is totally beyond your control. Actually, I don't really believe "they" plan or cause the seemingly never-ending delays that maddeningly lengthen my commute. I do get the feeling that they would be considerably more efficient if there was another railroad or viable alternative for getting into the city. The only other way is driving into town and that ain't viable by any definition of the word. Imagine what comics published by DC or Marvel would be like if only one of us were publishing!

Competition keeps you honest... and more efficient.

I'll say this for Metro-North... they are as creative as they can be in finding new ways to delay you or make your commute less comfortable. It's rarely the same way twice in one week, much less twice in a row! Two observations and I'll get off their case: 1) The trains only leave on time when I'm late arriving at the station. 2) In the past four years I've never used a lavatory in a Metro-North commuter car that provided all of the lavatory necessities: A) toilet tissue, B) soap, C) running water in the sink, and D) a toilet that flushes twice on the same day. Nice way to start the day.

Anyway, I make the 7:28... only, it arrives at Stratford at 7:35 and because of road-bed-work-related delays that have been ongoing for several weeks, it's certain that we'll be 15-20 minutes late into the Grand Central Station. No matter. Pat Bastienne (our Editorial Coordinator and another Connecticut resident) and I settle into the usual morning-on-train routine of sipping Dunkin' Donuts coffee from cardboard containers and distracting ourselves by various means so that the trip will be less painful and/or more productive. Pat takes her checkbook from her bag and starts writing some personal checks. I take some series proposal scripts from my bulging portfolio and settle back to read. I read two... and they're mind-bogglers! I rarely find two proposals a month that are interesting enough to consider publishing. To find two in the same morning that I like so much is a rare bonanza. Now there's almost nothing Metro-North can do to spoil my morning. The first in a proposal from Alan Moore, SWAMP THING scripter, for a maxi-series starring the super-heroes we recently obtained from Charlton. The idea is gutsy, grittily realistic, and explores aspects of the super-hero never really dealt with before. Unfortunately, I can't really consider it for the Charlton heroes. For one thing, certain aspects of the plotline do things with and to these characters that would make it difficult for us to use some, if not all, of them after the series was over.

Secondly, I'd already made plans, now pretty far along, to publish the Charlton heroes in tandem with some current and past DC favorites in a weekly comic book format. I like the idea so much, though, that I'm going to suggest that Alan create new characters for this maxi-series (in place of the Charlton heroes) and tell his story... It's a wonderful concept! (Note: since this was written, Alan has enthusiastically agreed with my scheme and is hard at work. Dave Gibbons is slated to illustrate. With luck, it will be a 1985 release tentatively titled "Watchman.") Incidentally, reading anything written by Alan Moore is a pleasure. His scripts are liberally dotted with wisecracks.

Sgt. Rock 398: Banoakman Zack brings his personal war home! Batman and the Outsiders 19: Geo-Ford ventures to a planet full of explosive sun-eaters! Infinity Inc. 12: A press conference and all press conferences! Conqueror of the Barron Earth 2: Zengla is ready for conquest now that J'nal is his captive slave! What's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe 1: Now it begins, starting with A and featuring the best talent in the business!

Dick

DC ON SALE WEEK

CHECK

OF DECEMBER 20

LIST

- Sgt. Rock 398: Banoakman Zack brings his personal war home!
- Batman and the Outsiders 19: Geo-Ford ventures to a planet full of explosive sun-eaters!
- Blue Devil 10: Wayne's past catches up with him while Dan takes on the Furies!
- Saga of the Swamp Thing 34: A success-oriented madman is loose in the swamps!
- New Talent Showcase 15: More action-packed tales from tomorrow's top talents!
- Worldwide 91: Morgan's origin retold with new facts!

Five months later, in a column in comics cover-dated March 1985, in a column subtitled A Day in the Life of a Cartoonist/Commuter/Executive Editor [Part Two], Giordano wrote,

I take some series proposal scripts from my bulging portfolio and settle back to read. I read two ... and they're mind-bogglers! I rarely find two proposals a month that are interesting enough to consider publishing. To find two in the same morning that I like so much is a rare bonanza. Now there's almost nothing Metro-North can do to spoil my mood. It's up! The first is a proposal from Alan Moore, Swamp Thing scripter, for a maxi-series starring the super-heroes we recently obtained from Charlton. The idea is gutsy, grittily realistic, and explores aspects of the super-hero never really dealt with before. Unfortunately, I can't really consider it for the Charlton heroes. For one thing, certain aspects of the plotline do things with and to these characters that would make it difficult for us to use some, if not all, of them after the series was over. Secondly, I'd already made plans, now pretty far along, to publish the

Charlton heroes in tandem with some current and past DC favorites in a weekly comic book format. I like the idea so much, though, that I'm going to suggest that Alan create new characters for this maxi-series (in place of the Charlton heroes) and tell his story! ... It's a wonderful concept! (Note: since this was written, Alan has enthusiastically agreed with my scheme and is hard at work. Dave Gibbons is slated to illustrate. With luck, it will be a 1985 release tentatively titled 'Watchman.')

Incidentally, reading anything written by Alan Moore is a pleasure. His scripts are liberally dotted with asides, bits of humor, relevant background information, and clear insights into his feelings about pivotal sequences or events that make it easy for the artist(s) to share his vision. Alan Moore is one of the more creative writers in comics. The ideas fairly bubble forth from his fertile imagination, and I am delighted that at least some of his almost unbelievable production will be for DC Comics.

That other series proposal, by the way, was this:

The other series proposal is no less exciting. It's the outline for book #1 of a proposed 48-page, deluxe-format limited series. We've talked about this idea and the talks excited me, but nowhere near the excitement engendered by the script. It is written by Frank Miller. And I love it! And I can't say too much more until Mr. Miller puts his John Hancock on a contract. I can say that it is a very special story about one of the most popular super-heroes ever!

Just to clarify, *A Day in the Life of a Cartoonist/Commuter/Executive Editor [Part One]* had appeared in comics cover-dated December 1984 so, as both these columns are supposed to be describing the same day, we can probably say with some confidence that they were written around September 1984. If Dick Giordano was reviewing proposals for both *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* on the same day, his road map was definitely leading DC in the right direction!

The *Meanwhile...* column in DC comics cover-dated August 1985 was subtitled *The British are coming! The British are coming!*, and contained a mention of...

a very special maxi-series from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons—one I mentioned in a previous column and still hush-hush.

...which would have been more exciting if he hadn't already spilt the (baked) beans five months earlier...

As Giordano mentioned earlier, the *Watchmen* proposal was now completely unshackled from the Charlton Action Heroes, and Moore and Gibbons were free to build their own contained comics milieu, which they did, and which gave them freedoms that working with already established characters would never have done.

One of the earlier sources for the idea that became *Watchmen* was an entirely different set of comics characters, though. Talking to George Khoury in 2003's *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*, he said,

I think that Dick Giordano had just acquired the Charlton characters – either Dick himself suggested it, or Dave suggested it, or I suggested it – I can't remember whose idea it was, but the idea was, 'Let's come up with

MEANWHILE...

The British are coming!
That's good news! For DC and its readers. A few years ago, Joe Orlando and I crossed the "pond" to England to address a professional group of British cartoonists, acquaint them with DC's policies and sales structure, and tell them that we were anxious to establish an ongoing creative relationship with them. Our talk was well received and we came home feeling that our message had been heard and, at the very least, some long-lasting friendships had been established. By the time Mike W. Barr's and British artist Brian Bolland's bestselling, trend-setting maxi-series *CAMELOT 3000* was released, I was in charge of DC's editorial department and really glad that Brian had opted to throw in with us. Since then, the trickle of talent from across the pond has become a flood. We have watched in awe as Alan Moore reinvented *SWAMP THING*, cheered at the exciting new heights reached when Dave Gibbons drew *GREEN LANTERN*, braced some fresh air with the absolutely unique art of Kevin O'Neill (who has popped up here and there, most notably in a recent issue of *OMEGA MEN*), and had a real blast reading that wonderful two-part *VIGILANTE* story set in New York but written by Alan Moore in the English countryside and illustrated by Jim Balta, who resides in Scotland. (Jim, by the way, is currently drawing the origin of Brother Blood for a *TEEN TITANS SPECIAL*.) To show her appreciation for jobs well done, President-Publisher Jenette Kahn recently took some 30 writers and artists to dinner in London when she went to England on business. The dinner was held at the Savoy Hotel, a posh locale of which Dave Gibbons commented, "I didn't think I was good enough to even walk in front of the building!" The dinner, everyone tells me, was a smashing success. Everyone had a good time and Jenette let everyone know that DC is still looking for new talent and new ideas. All I had to do was sit back and wait. Sure enough, in less time than it takes to say "British

Airways, the proposals started washing up against my door. After digging my way through submissions, I was pleased to see a high level of quality... at least equal to the level we get from my colleagues here in America. And so in the coming year, you will be seeing (at the very least) a graphic novel by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill with the working title *ARMAGEDDON*, an issue of the DC *CHALLENGER* penciled by the last-drawing Dave Gibbons and inked by Mark Farmer; Vega takes in the back of *OMEGA MEN* by Steve Parkhouse, Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill; at least 12 issues of *BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDERS* by Alan Davis; and a very special maxi-series from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons—one I mentioned in a previous column... and still hush-hush.

When Editor Bob Greenberger was going to London for holiday in early January (see, I can speak like an Englishman), I asked him to meet with a number of the writers and artists to follow up on business we began doing by mail. When he returned, rested and bursting with good cheer, he made the following report:

"The British writers and artists are much like a fraternity. They gather regularly at a pub across the street from Forbidden Planet, the largest comics shop in the country. As is the local custom, they brought each other rounds of drinks and no one ever kept a tab. Despite a smoke-filled room, everyone gathered around a table and chatted away... usually swapping tales about people not in the room.

"On the last day, I had lunch with Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, spending the afternoon discussing

their maxi-series. Later we shared lunch (or lunch with Alan Davis, Mark Farmer, and Mike McMahon. All but Mike have been doing work for us, and try as I might, I couldn't wheedle a commitment out of Mike. He said when his current commitments are finished, he'll see what we have to offer. Meanwhile, Alan Davis explained that he has had to rethink his drawing because this is the first time he's working in full color from start to finish. Many of the British weekly comics use color sparingly and no story is ever completely in color. He's been coloring in photographs of his *BATO* pages just to get some idea of how his work will look.

"Mark's looking forward to his issue of *CHALLENGER* and is spending some of his free time illustrating children's books in England. Everyone is really very pleasant and relaxed about their jobs, without any of the seeming pressure felt by many of the creators back in the States.

"The next night I was treated to Indonesian music by Nick Landau of Eagle Comics. We were joined by Brian Bolland, Dave Moore, Steve Parkhouse, Kevin O'Neill, and the always generous Dave Gibbons. Everything seemed to go quite right until Nick handed me a plate and suggested I sample the squid. Yuck!

"Anyway, Steve Parkhouse explained that he had been completing assignments for the British comics publishers and was looking forward to doing a great deal of work for DC. In addition to a few *VIGILANTE* stories, Steve will probably contribute ideas for graphic novels and one-shot tales. Steve Moore, on the other hand, has already submitted one maxi-series and one graphic novel proposal. He's nervous about wanting to work with us, but either that or there wasn't enough time or they were unavailable. From what I can gather, though, the people over there are more than eager to do work for us.

No more sugar than I am to have them work for us, Bob. Thank you for the report, and I'm glad you had so much fun.

Hmm. Now that Bob and Jenette have been over there, I wonder when I get my turn to go to London and take these guys out?

Thank you and good afternoon.

Dick

ON SALE THE CHECK WEEK OF MAY 9 LIST

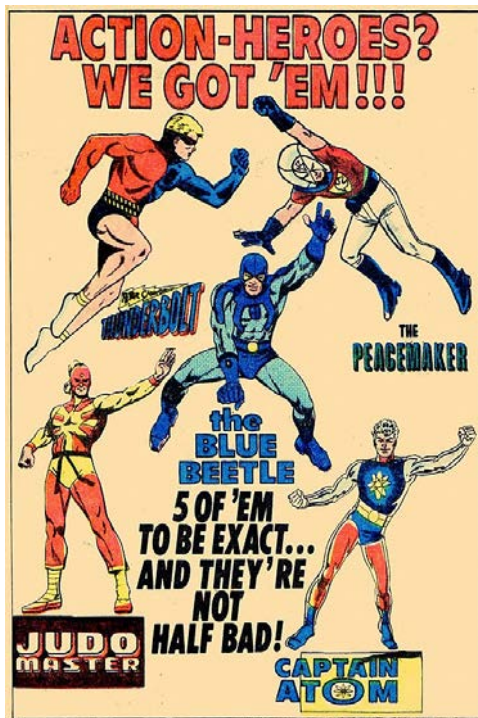
- **WARLORD ANNUAL 4:** Morgan and Hawk are marooned on a
- **TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS 56:** The return of Jericho, Adeline's secret, and a new villain!
- **JOHNNIE THUNDER 4:** Showdown in the Hollywood Bowl!
- **VIGILANTE 20:** Nightwing guest stars, Vigilante is on the prowl, and Adeline Chase is very confused!
- **DEADMAN 4:** The Hook's trial unexpectedly leads to Deadman's twin brother!

□ **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA 24:** A new costume for Vibe, Aquaman goes AWOL, and Amazo!

□ **CRISIS ON EARTH'S PART 9:** In the wake of the Monitor's death, two worlds merge!

□ **FLY OF HYESTROM 26:** Will Prof. Stein be the Weasel's next victim?

□ **ATARI FORCE™ 20:** The Force is on trial in the climactic final issue!



some a new treatment for the Charlton characters.

Now, at this point, I remembered a vague idea that I'd had floating through my mind for years. I knew that it would entail having a whole continuity's worth of super-heroes. Not a large continuity's worth, necessarily, but it would have to be several characters and I'd originally, I think, come up with the idea as related to the Mighty Comics characters. I really wanted second-string super-heroes, if you like. I didn't want these iconic characters like Superman, Batman, and Captain America, I wanted more average super-heroes, like the Mighty Crusaders line. I think I had some vague idea that it would be quite interesting to take a group of innocent, happy-go-lucky super-heroes like, say, the Archie Comics super-heroes, and suddenly drop them into a realistic and credible world.

I think my original idea had started off with the dead body of the Shield being pulled out of a river somewhere, and this sparking a murder mystery plot. So when the idea came up of doing the Charlton heroes, I remembered this and thought, 'Well, yeah, you've got a plausible but not too large cast of third-string heroes that you might conceivably be allowed to do some radical things with.' So we came up with the initial proposal which, as I remember it, named the Blue Beetle, and the Question, all of these characters and then we were told by DC that

having just acquired the Charlton characters they really didn't want - much as they thought the series looked interesting - they really didn't want to do it to the Charlton characters because a few of the characters would have ended up dead or dysfunctional. And so, they suggested that we come up with other characters, new characters.

Mighty Crusaders had originally been published by an imprint of Archie Comics called *Mighty Comics*, and consisted of Black Hood, The Comet, The Fly, Flygirl, and Shield. The title lasted for seven issues, from November 1965 to November 1966, although the characters all had other appearance, both before and after.

Speaking to Tony Roche about the ideas behind the actual characters in *Heroes Unlimited* #8 in 2018, Moore said that he wanted to...

...answer two fundamental questions, both arising from my desire to treat super-heroes as if they existed in the real world: firstly, what would they be like, psychologically and emotionally, if they existed in reality? And secondly, what would reality be like if they existed in it?

Answering the second question led to the skewed alternate history of *Watchmen*, while answering the first led me to its cast of - in some ways - dysfunctional adventurers. In *Marvelman*, I'd only had one or two massively powerful superhuman characters to deal with, whereas in *Watchmen* we had one authentically awesome superhuman and then a whole range of non-powered costumed characters, each of whom demanded their own personality and their own pathology.

With Doctor Manhattan I decided that rather than the Nietzschean ubermensch model I'd explored in *Marvelman*, an extreme version of almost Buddhist detachment might be more interesting.

With the Comedian, I took an off-the-peg American patriotic character and gave him what I thought to be a more likely political outlook for such a character than Captain America's vague liberalism, reasoning that figures like that would be less likely to be battling Batroc the Leaper than they would to be assassinating a democratically elected head of state or organising a military coup in some Marxist republic.

The Silk Spectre, along with her mother and predecessor, was an attempt to embody some of the observations I'd made in my earlier 'Invisible Girls and Phantom Ladies' essay for British Marvel and depict the sidelining and objectification of women characters: her mother has only taken up crimefighting, under advice from her male manager, as a publicity move to aid her career as a model and aspiring actress.

The younger Silk Spectre has almost no agency, and is made uncomfortably aware that she's only kept around because she's the most important character's girlfriend. Even her name expresses only fragility and a tenuous and wraith-like presence.

Ozymandias, a standard comic book 'perfected man' type, gave me a chance to investigate narcissism as a motive for wanting - or perhaps needing - to save the world, and allowed me to play against my own political tendencies by making the most liberal character into a credible mega-villain.

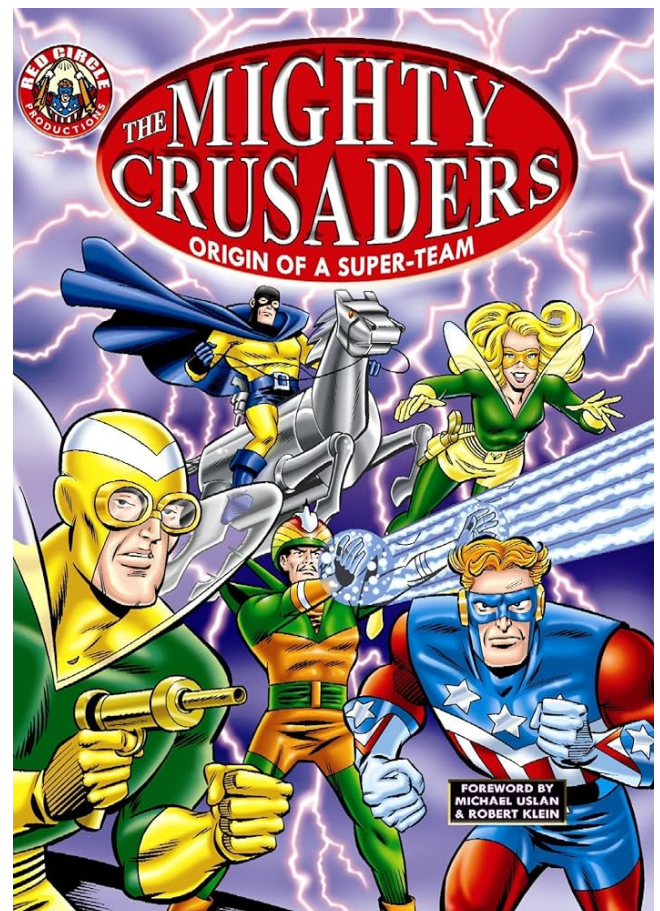
The remaining characters, Nite Owl and Rorschach, were effectively two different extrapolations of the Batman-type. Nite Owl is perhaps more like the 1950s Batman, or like someone who grew up reading adventures like that - he's essentially a big kid who's rich enough and inventive enough to afford all the cute toys of the superhero lifestyle, like the secret lair and the cool owl-themed vehicle. You have the feeling that he'd have loved a canine pet with a mask if 'Owldog' hadn't sounded like such a stupid name. The character is essentially motivated by nostalgia for his childhood, and is thus potentially the character whose psychology most closely resembles that of at least part of the readership.

Rorschach was an attempt to depict the most probable psychology for the more contemporary 'dark creature of the night' Batman, a justice-obsessed vigilante motivated by extreme childhood trauma. I noted that this seemed like a much more typical motivation for a serial murderer than for a caped crusader, and took my cues for Rorschach's Carl Panzram/ Son of Sam stylings from there. After all, while our world and its foreign wars have created a large population of children who've witnessed their parents murdered in front of them, to the best of my knowledge none of them thus far have become bat-

themed avengers, although a number of them have almost certainly gone on to become emotionally dead killers.

To answer my own self-imposed question at the start of all this, had Moore and Gibbons 'somehow purloined the Action Heroes set of characters that DC Comics had bought from Charlton Comics in 1983, and corrupted them to [their] own ends?', the answer is, a tiny bit yes, but mostly no. The Action Heroes were effectively a catalyst which, at most, provided a way for an already existing idea to crystalize around them, but which were then as easily switched out for original creations as it had been to replace the previous incumbents of that original spark, the Mighty Crusaders.

In the end, the characters didn't really matter, as blasphemous as that may now seem - it was the idea that mattered, and how it was treated. If you want proof of that, then try reading the *Before Watchmen* stories DC insisted on publishing, and see just how banal those same characters become when treated by someone who doesn't really understand what *Watchmen* was all about.



THE EMBARRASSMENT OF THE WATCHMEN

JOHN HIGGINS

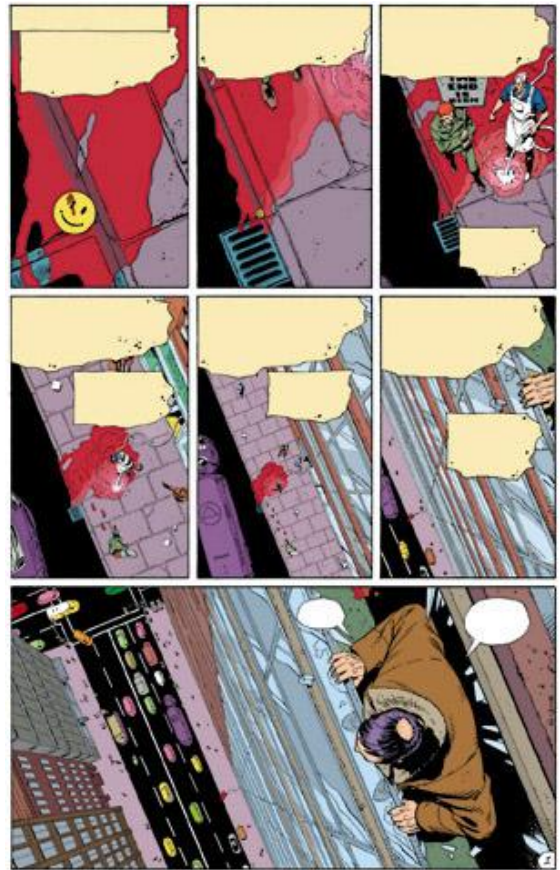
Among the many painful, sometimes unanswerable, questions creative people are constantly asked are, 'Where do you get your ideas from?' or 'How do I become a comic artist?' (the subtext being, 'how do I get your job?').

But the one I hated most, for approximately nineteen years and five months, was, 'What does it feel like to have been involved in one of the most celebrated comics of the twentieth century?' The one answer I could not give until now is, 'Total embarrassment!'

In nineteen eighty-six Dave Gibbons first approached me to be involved with a new maxi series he and Alan Moore were about to start for DC. I had importantly (as back then my career in comics was only in its infancy) just completed my first fully-painted comic strip for the *Judge Dredd Annual*. So as much as I have always admired Dave's work, to be a colourist for it was just another job in amongst a variety of different strands of work I was doing at that time... Such as drawing the B/W Judge Dredd for *2000 AD* weekly, working in advertising illustration, painting covers for computer games magazines and doing children's book illustration. So at the time it did not appear to be a particularly important job.

The first time Dave and Alan had a *Watchmen* story brainstorm they invited me along. Instantly I started to understand that it was something completely different to anything I had been involved in before. As far as Dave and Alan were concerned they had wanted a full creative team approach right from the beginning, and that made me feel as fully a part of the *Watchmen* creative process as it was possible to be, being the junior member. I remember this all happening during one of the very first UKCAC conventions in London. Alan by this time was well into his creative stride and getting the sort of media attention that made it near impossible to find a quiet corner at the convention. We found a pub in the West End of London, the Royal Oak if I remember rightly. It was packed to the rafters with drinkers, so we went outside to the empty beer garden.

Being March in the UK it was damned cold, Alan and Dave talked all about the world of *The Watchmen*, the design approach, the characters, storylines and we touched on colour but other than for me to sit and listen to two comic masters talk there was not a lot I could do. My job was the colour, which would come at near the end of the creative process, but even at this early stage some



colour guidelines were talked over. All along Alan and Dave wanted *The Watchmen* to be completely visually different to any other graphic magazine that was around at that time and of course that was achieved. One of the colour conversations I do remember concerned Doctor Manhattan, because he was made up of controlled energy in human form it was decided he should slightly affect his surroundings by casting a soft blue light a limited distance from his presence, I remember Alan and Dave trying to work out the optimum distance that it might affect objects. Yes it was that detailed! I had never up to that point been involved in a story that was so complex, usually working on copyrighted characters such as Superman and Batman, the character guidelines were strict and had a corporate approach, so to be onboard to see this creative deconstruction of superheroes was exhilarating.

My one major comment I do remember, and am proud to go down in the history of the *Watchmen* for, is as the teller of the first *Watchmen* joke. Interjecting into the conversation, after sitting in the freezing beer garden drinking cold beer, I told Alan and Dave, 'I feel a little like Doctor Manhattan.'

Dave and Alan's slightly confused response was 'Really, why?'

'Because my willy had just turned blue!'

OK, it might not be the best *Watchmen* joke but it was definitely the first.

I knew early on due to Alan and Dave's commitment to the detail and approach it was going to be different to anything else that had appeared in the Superhero genre. But I never knew, and I don't think anyone in the early days did know, how successful it was going to be. It was interesting to see how the company started to bend over backwards to accommodate the team once the early sales figures started to come in, and more than that, the critical acclaim. Most everything about it seemed to be right: the timing, we were getting the right sort of audience, the company were finally looking at creators as an important part of comics publishing and not just an exploitable commodity. Being that at this time there were a small number of like-minded writers and artists who, with Alan and Dave, were slowly changing the face of comic publishing. Not just in the content of the comics, but also more importantly, with rights and sharing remunerations which for the first time were starting to reflect the input of the creative team... except for the colourist!

This could be a time to explain my 'Total embarrassment!' statement. It wasn't actually due to my not sharing in the monetary success of *The Watchmen*, Alan and Dave had explained early on about the rights issue and had asked DC that I should share somehow in its success. But the company had nothing in place to accommodate this and even Dave and Alan's contract was a completely new deal. So I went into *The Watchmen* knowing my part was a work-for-hire job, and as I had said earlier, it was then 'just another job'. I do think, however, that DC's commitment to *The Watchmen* was total after a short time, and they did initially behave generously to me in relationship to *The Watchmen's* success. I got my flat-fee colouring page-rate, but they also surprised me by someone in DC's hierarchy arranging for me to receive a number of additional ex-gratia payments during the first year it was being produced, which did endear me to DC Comics for a long time.

So no, it was not seeing *The Watchmen* in constant print for twenty years, and fans coming up over the years and saying, 'Wow, you must be doing all right with all the reprint royalties.' And me through clenched teeth, saying. 'Nope not really!' It was something else.

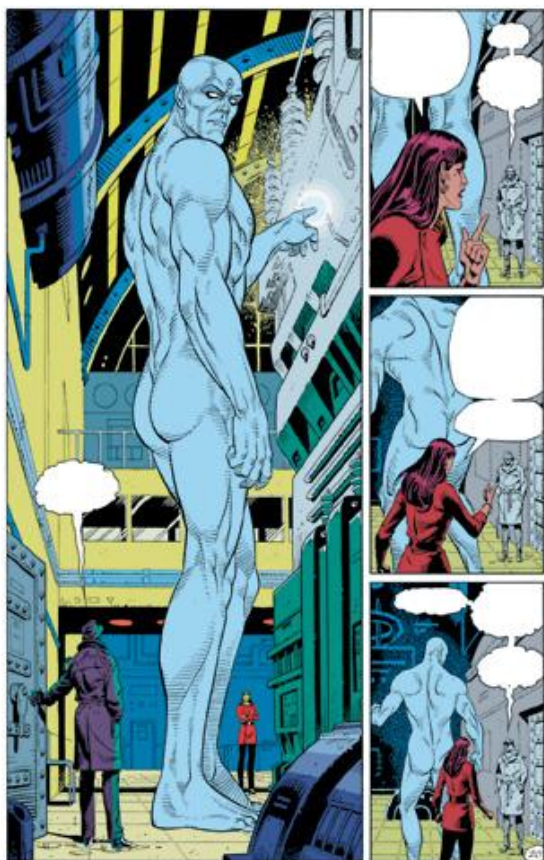


But on to more of the creative 'fun' part of comics publishing. Or the hell-on-Earth part if you are working on a regular scheduled book, as the deadline starts to get closer and closer. Dave had a six week turnaround for each issue, and even now, when I look at the amount of detail in *The Watchmen*, find it hard to believe that he did pencils, inks and lettering in that time! What a professional. Being the colourist and the last in the creative line did put deadline pressure on me, but my being so close to Dave's studio made it a lot easier than it might have been. My part started as soon as Dave gave me a phone call to come to his studios in St Albans, England. He handed me the reduced black and white photocopies of each page and, if I didn't already have it, the script. He would give me a coffee and a chocolate biscuit or two; I'd say hello to Kate, his wife and Dan, his son. After a while I used to bring my daughter Jenna around, she and Dan would play upstairs. They were about six or seven and I never really worried about this, until Dan went to University to study medicine to become a doctor! But then Jenna became an Arborist and not a nurse, so...! Dave would show me his new collection of *Lieutenant Blueberry* comic albums or

any of a multitude of new European comic imports or books about graphic arts he had just received. It was a most enjoyable and highly stimulating social evening. We would go over the art and to be only the third person to see the completed art and to read that new issue was a huge thrill for me.

Dave and Alan might have colour suggestions for something specific in a chapter such as, a red flashing neon sign, so I had to work out how to incorporate those colour ideas into what I had in each issue. This might sound simple and I might be a bit dense, but boy it did start to create colour conundrums very early on. But more so as the story unfolded in all is complex brilliance. For example in issue one, Rorschach takes the sugar cubes from Daniel's kitchen and in issue eleven he drops a sugar wrapper in the Antarctic snow! So do you do it the same colour as in Daniel's kitchen under hard strip lighting against hard edges and the primary colours of the units or allow the wan arctic light to affect its tone, is it falling into a white snow drift or a shadowed one? Yes, the madness of *The Watchmen* detail had bitten me well before I reached issue eleven. But initially I didn't make colour notes of every sugar cube wrapper, light switch or Gunga Diner takeaway box on the ground.

But I should have!



Seeing Dave and Alan's commitment to the project at work, I had to be completely honest to their vision of the world of *The Watchmen*. I used my choice of colour to complement and accentuate the art first and foremost, but also to enhance the mood and sense of drama of the story. One prime example would be the Rorschach episode, the opening scenes of Rorschach/Walter in prison talking to the psychiatrist. The issue started with sunny early morning light streaming into the prison room as the psychiatrist in a bright and breezy manner tried to get through to Rorschach, to cure him. As the story unfolds and the horror of Rorschach's life start to permeate the story, the colours start to darken and reflect the sense of corruption and despair that created Rorschach. I tried to use colour in this way throughout the series, and to go beyond what was usually done in American comics at that time. I had a number of conversations with Dave as to why I had coloured such-and-such a scene in that way and according to Dave - in a conversation only last year for the new digital repackaging of *Absolute Watchmen* - in 1986 when he initially saw some of the more 'Watchmenesque' colouring choices I made that may have surprised him, I always had a reason and an explanation of why I coloured it in that way, and he always accepted the explanation, it wasn't just because it was a nice colour combination.

Now onto my 'Total embarrassment!' statement. How dare I be or even acknowledge my embarrassment to be involved with *The Watchmen*, the most exciting and innovative comic of that period, for approximately nineteen years and five months? Well I dare! I dare!

Whenever one completes a creative endeavour, one always thinks of how it could be improved or can only see the mistakes one might have made. The same was true of *The Watchmen*, plus, timed, multiplied and squared. *The Watchmen* in a colouring sense was a major learning curve for me as a colour artist because of its size and its complexity and the sugar wrapper conundrums. Due to the complexity of the story other chromatic challenges arose. For instance I might have done a pleasing colour combination in a particular scene in any one chapter. Only later on when replacing part of it back into the story, as a flashback as just one part of a different scene, it could change its visual colour perception in a detrimental way. That and other similar colour moments are examples that I have kept on seeing for nineteen years and five

months. Okay, those I could tolerate. But what I found unbearable was the really limited, almost primitive, printing format we had to live with pre-computer colouring. It had probably not changed since the nineteen thirties when the first superhero four-colour comics appeared. To have an imperfect reproduction of my colour ideas was very galling.



A very brief colour history to all you who now can print in your own homes near perfect facsimiles of any colour art you can imagine: In nineteen eighty-six everything was done by hand. I coloured the black and white copies of Dave's pages with watercolour, and then marked the equivalent printing ink combination for each colour. So for Rorschach's brown overcoat it would be Y3M2C1. Then that page would be sent to hand separators who would do up to twelve separate acetate overlays for each page to create a four-colour effect. Also every colour and every percentage tone within that colour had hard edges, so no matter how subtle I tried to be with the colour, what I was trying to get from my mind to the printed page was getting confused before it had even been printed. Also we found early on when we had the new option of using tones of grey, we should not have used them on the first couple of issues, but this we unfortunately only found out once they had seen print!

So there you have it. I have had to live with all the mistakes, colour conundrums and printing limitations on one of the most seminal graphic stories of the Twentieth Century. For approximately nineteen

years and five months I couldn't admit it. Until twenty years later, now that we finally have the definitive digitally-coloured *Watchmen* in the 2005 DC/Wildstorm *Absolute Watchmen* edition.

What you will see in the 2005 edition is what I had always intended *The Watchmen* colour to be, but due to the printing limitations of the period you never saw it before. Believe me, to get the opportunity to work on the computer colour files, to finally get rid of the grey tone, to consolidate the colour conundrums, to tie all the colour threads into one united whole, was a joy. At last! Not many artists get this opportunity, ever, but at nineteen years and five months? Unheard of! I need to thank everyone at DC for sticking with this project to make it possible. The colourists at Wildstorm for giving me perfect facsimile colour files of the original flat colour for me to work on. The production department at DC, under Alison Gill in particular, who gave me full access to their computers and printer's-proofs to do final checks, to ensure there were no more 'colour conundrums'. Scott Dunbier of Wildstorm, without whom it might not ever have happened. Also, allowing for my bitching about the limitations of the printing process all those years ago, a big thank you to all those unsung original hand-separators who worked on *The Watchmen* and did try to make my near impossible demands appear on the printed pages.

And of course to Dave and Alan who all along had wanted to make *The Watchmen* a team effort and Dave in particular being the person I was in close creative contact with from day one to today. Without his support and input I would not be here to finally write about how proud I am to be involved with *The Watchmen*.

Note: This article originally appeared in an Italian charity book, *Watchmen: 20 anni dopo (Watchmen: 20 Years After)*, Lavieri Publishing, 2006.



WHAT WERE THE WATCHMEN WATCHING?

JULIAN WEST

Watchmen is a justly renowned comics series. It is praised for many things – its dazzling innovations, thoughtful characterisations, its formal structure and repeating patterns – but what it's chiefly summarised as doing is bringing a new realism to superheroes. By placing superheroes in the real world, Moore, Gibbons and Higgins (hereafter MGH) were able to reveal the nasty implications of the superhero power fantasy. At the time, Alan Moore was still partly in love with superhero comics, before the industry broke his heart. The characters still have a kind of innocence, still a vestige of glamour and excitement, even while being shown up for what they are. Because of course they aren't part of the real world at all. They are simply placed in a different fictional context, a place where they can reveal different truths. The characters of *Watchmen* aren't what would happen if people in the real world decided to become superheroes. It's rather a version of reality which has been altered enough to make superheroes, conventional superheroes, actually possible.

So if we recognise that the "real world" of *Watchmen* is not the real world, we can explore what kind of world it actually is. Firstly, the setting. It's mostly set in America, chiefly New York, with diversions to Antarctica and Mars. This is where we can see that it has to be a fictional universe. Alan Moore, when writing *Watchmen*, had lived in Northampton his entire life. Gibbons was from London, Higgins from Liverpool. The settings of *Watchmen* would not be familiar to them. So where did they get them?

The answer is given right away, on page one. There's a bloody mess on the pavement, and the commentary is from Rorschach's journal. To anyone familiar with the popular culture of the 1980's, the reference to *Taxi Driver* is obvious. The tone of Rorschach's journal mirrors that of Travis Bickle's opening monologue. "The accumulated filth of all their sex and murder will foam up about their waists and all the whores and politicians will look up and shout 'Save us!'... and I'll look down and whisper 'No.'" "All the animals come out at night, queens, fairies, dopers, junkies, sick, venal, some day a real rain will come and wash all the scum off the streets." And the visual doesn't reflect the Rorschach diary – it's the Bickle monologue, where the street is literally being washed.

And perhaps more of a stretch – the Bickle monologue is directly referenced in a totally different work of 1982. The song *Red Angel Dragnet* on the album *Combat Rock* by The Clash directly

quotes Bickle – the above text is copied from the album rather than the film. The song is about the Guardian Angels, a vigilante group in New York. A leading member of the Guardian Angels was murdered in 1982, inspiring the song, which sympathises with the impulse to do something about a collapsing society, but also links it to psychosis and violence. Was Alan Moore inspired by the song as well as the film? He would certainly have been familiar with the band and their work.

What the album and graphic novel have in common is a bunch of English lads taking in American culture. While *London Calling* absorbed the history of popular music, *Combat Rock* is The Clash taking in what was currently going on in New York and giving their English take on it. And that's what MGH were doing with their version of New York. Setting up a fictional background for their fictional superheroes to inhabit.

But any step by step analysis of *Watchmen* looking for influences will be tentative and uncertain. This is not a pastiche. MGH won't do anything as crass as having Rorschach in a taxi driven by Bickle, as happened in the unmentionable spinoffs. We're meant to feel familiar with the background, but not to the extent that we call out direct references.

So the two cops investigating the Comedian's murder might be from Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series, or from any number of procedural cop shows. They're deliberately generic.

Though while the story is linked with the 1970s atmosphere of *Taxi Driver*, the look is very 1980s. Blurry neon, bright primary colours, characters standing by chain-link fences. It's of its time.

RORSCHACH

When we get the superhero entry, the world is already established. Hence it's possible to get away with the most clichéd of superhero gimmicks – climbing up the side of a building on a rope, just like Adam West in the 1960's Batman series. It's obviously ridiculous. Why wouldn't he just sneak into the building? Why act in such an absurd way? Because the two fictional worlds are going to fit together somehow. This is not a story about how superheroes would be in the real world. That would not be very interesting. If superheroes could exist in the real world, they would be like the Guardian Angels of *Red Angel Dragnet*. These are full-on superheroes warped into a different kind of fictional

world. It will be a delicate balancing act to avoid making them ludicrous.

When Rorschach goes into a bar for information, this is straight from Frank Miller's *Daredevil* series. *Daredevil* is another source for Rorschach, though in an archetypal sense, he's just a blind Batman. But while Miller's *Daredevil* is an ambiguous character, when Rorschach goes through the same routine, it's from a different perspective. *Daredevil* roughs up villains for information. When Rorschach does it, it's just torture, pointless and degrading.

As the story reaches back into Rorschach's past - the only character whose 'origin story' is given any detail - we see him as a seriously damaged person. We already know that he smells bad, that he eats beans from the can, and that he's violent and deluded. Now we see why. This is a placeholder for the origins of the other characters. We have no idea what the Comedian sprang from, and we get very little detail about Ozymandias or Nite Owl. We can assume, though, that it will be more of the same. These characters don't become superheroes because they are normal or well-adjusted.

As Rorschach becomes a vigilante, we're given a particularly hateful villain for him. It's a bit that shows how daring Moore's writing can be. He's given us a child murderer, an entirely contemptible person. We'd normally cheer the hero for disposing of him. But in the context of Rorschach's background, it's just another futile bit of violence. We know the effect it has on Rorschach. He ends up torturing and murdering people. We don't glory in the killing of the murderer, though we accept he deserves it.

But there's another little hint. Rorschach handcuffs the killer and gives him a hacksaw. This is directly lifted from *Mad Max*. *Max* does exactly the same to a villain he captures. The film came out a few years before *Watchmen* and would have been familiar to many of the readership. Why copy a scene so precisely? It's a way to comment on vigilantism in general. This kind of thing is not O.K., Moore is telling us. It's not a good thing when Rorschach does it, and it's not O.K. when it's Mel Gibson either. None of these people are to be admired, in films or books or comics.

We've already had that link with *Taxi Driver*, but Travis is never presented as someone to admire. *Max* is a hero, though. His brutality is presented as necessary, or at least as a reaction to something worse. By linking Rorschach to *Max*, we have an implied critique of a whole landscape of self-appointed vigilantes. Much of the entire entertainment industry is based around the application of violence to solve problems. *Watchmen* tells us that they're all just Rorschach.



THE COMEDIAN

Much has been made about the original source material for *Watchmen* - the Charlton comics characters, largely forgotten, that DC had acquired rights to. However, this approach was abandoned, which freed creators to go straight to the originals. We've already been shown that Rorschach is Batman. While examining the crime scene, he finds the Comedian's uniform. A single panel tells us all about the kind of superheroes we're going to see from here on in. A bondage mask, clearly associated with some kind of sexual kink. A knife and a gun. And a flag costume. This is Captain America, exposed. If America would be embodied into a single person, it wouldn't be Steve Rogers. We'll see a lot more of the Comedian in due course, but we already know who he is. We see him murder a pregnant Vietnamese woman - an explicit declaration of how an embodiment of the American Dream would behave.

Very little of what Alan Moore writes is accidental. The Comedian's name is Blake. This instantly reminds us of artist and visionary William Blake. How can this be? There seems very little in common between the nihilistic murderer and the author of *Jerusalem*, whose *Tyger, Tyger* is directly quoted at the end of Chapter V. But the Comedian is the one character in the story with an absolutely pure worldview. He believes in nothing, revelling in a lack of meaning - the opposite of a man who believed in everything. (It should also be noted that Edward Blake is a reversal of Blake Edwards, the director of the *Pink Panther* films, where an incompetent policeman leaves chaos in his wake).

Even Rorschach clings to his own warped principles. At first glance, we wonder why he's called the Comedian. He's not amusing, even in his younger, unscarred version. But the joke is fundamental to his worldview. He does what amuses him, and doesn't care about the consequences. It wasn't really necessary for Moore to write a Joker story. He'd shown everything that mattered about the character already.

At every stage of the story, we see Blake as an incarnation of brutality. He doesn't restrict himself even as much as Rorschach. He longs for war, for riots and destruction. We see him as barely human.

But then we realise – he is human after all. The lesson is that it is impossible to escape from humanity. It's always there. Blake wants to be a monster, but he fails even at that.

It's noteworthy that we never get more than a page or two of Blake. We can travel with the others, into their pasts and their motivations, but Blake can sum himself up in a few words. It's all a joke.



NITE OWL

We've seen the psychotic version of Batman – and then we see a different, feebler, pathetic version. Nite Owl is far more Bruce Wayne than Blue Beetle. Hollis Mason is perhaps the least damaged superhero in the story. He's managed to get out of the business. Daniel is still clinging on, unable to let go of the illicit thrill. He's always a little pathetic, even when he's beating up a gang of street thugs. In every encounter with the other heroes, he's on the back foot, unable to assert himself. Ozymandias tells him to grow up, but we know that this will never happen. He's literally and figuratively impotent, needing his costume to function. He cannot commit to the nihilism of Rorschach and the Comedian, or to the ruthless compassionate ideology of Ozymandias. He is rootless.

Nite Owl becomes our viewpoint character. We can't identify with the extremes of the Comedian, Doctor Manhattan or Ozymandias. Poor pathetic Nite Owl is who we end up as.



OZYMANDIAS

Ozymandias is the scientist genius. He's Reed Richards, Tony Stark, or another different incarnation of Bruce Wayne. Initially we're given a favourable impression of him, but the set of action figures shows how shallow and self-regarding he ultimately is, even before the shock reveal later on.

It's an example of brave writing, because Ozymandias is the villain of the story, if anyone is, but he's also the character closest in his views and aspirations to Moore. Unlike the nihilist Comedian, the fascist Rorschach or the wishy-washy Nite Owl, Ozymandias has deep principles, and a strongly liberal outlook. He is genuinely intelligent, something that's difficult to portray in fiction.

Importantly, he thinks that he's escaped the trap of being a superhero. In fact, he's the most deeply trapped. It's significant that while he wears a business suit when we first see him, in his Antarctic lair he's wearing a faintly ludicrous costume. He has become the supervillain.

His plan to save the world by killing a lot of people has its origin in an *Outer Limits* story – *The Architects Of Fear*. The story is referenced right at the end of *Watchmen*, playing on a TV station that nobody is watching. The scheme is simultaneously brilliant and hare-brained. It's again an example of how we are not in a 'realistic' world. It's only in pulp science fiction that a plan like Ozymandias' could work. It's no wonder that *Watchmen* has been adopted by 911 conspiracy theorists. It's every bit as impractical as their confused non-ideas. The fictional world in which his scheme could possibly work is not a realistic world.



DOCTOR MANHATTAN

Most fictional universes have many genuinely super-powerful characters. *Watchmen* can manage with only one. Jon is Superman. As with the original, he's effectively omnipotent. His purpose in the story is to show that ultimate power breeds an inability to relate to humanity. Does the character make sense? Probably not, if closely examined. Push these characters, examine them a bit more closely, and the contradictions tear them apart. It's the skill of MGH to press them enough to make the cracks appear, but not to shatter them entirely.

The concept of a character who experiences different times all simultaneously was notably explored by Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The idea has become central to much of Moore's work. The climatic scene of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the destruction of Dresden, something that is reflected in *Watchmen* in the destruction of New York. Vonnegut has been referenced by Moore as providing some inspiration.

In the course of the story, we see Jon trying to cling to his humanity, but he fails. There's a scene in Vietnam, referencing films such as *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*, where he allows the Comedian to murder a woman. He abandons his girlfriend for a younger girl, and later can't maintain any interest in her. There's a farcical scene in which he surprises Laurie by producing an extra body. He thinks it will be exciting for her, and she's of course horrified. She's doubly upset when she realises that he's carrying out scientific research with yet another version of himself.

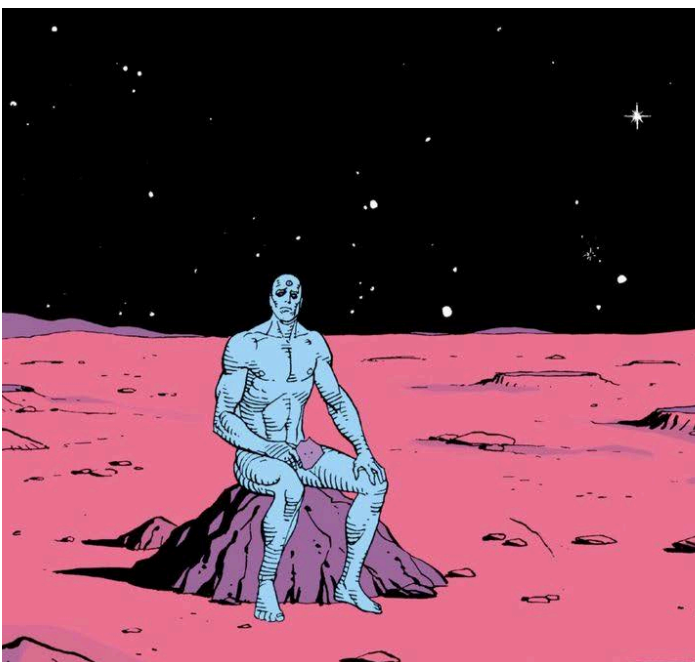
Just how Jon's consciousness actually works is left a little vague. It doesn't matter, in the context of the story. Jon is a *deus ex machina*, and also a *deus*. He comments on humanity from the point of view of someone who is no longer human.



SILK SPECTRES

Laurie and Sally stand for the 'default woman' superhero. Sally is perhaps the most likeable character in the story. She is a sweet-natured woman who's probably least damaged of all the superheroes, perhaps because her ambitions were very simple. She liked being admired, she liked fame and success. She's entirely matter of fact about life, in contrast to her daughter. She is like the Wonder Woman who gets to join the Justice League and ends up being the secretary. She doesn't even mind. She gives her new son-in-law, whom she's just met, a pornographic comic featuring herself. The *Tijuana Bibles* referred to were a real thing in the early part of the twentieth century, and it's plausible that they would have featured superheroes. It's a comment on how the actual comics industry treats female characters.

Laurie is more complicated, more nuanced. While Dan is the viewpoint character for the story, Laurie is the commentator. It's her opinions of the other characters which shape our view. We trust her judgement on Rorschach more than Dan's. She transcends her career as a superhero, which never amounted to much in the first place. We have a reference to her teaming up with Jon to handle riots - which sounds like the caricature of Angel Summoner and BMX Bandit, where the ridiculously overpowered Dr Manhattan would be doing all the heavy lifting. She has no illusions about being a superhero. And yet, by the end, she's been drawn back into the life, excitedly pondering a switch to a grittier version of herself.



OH, THE HUMANITY

The main characters in *Watchmen* are archetypal superheroes, their nature revealed by the new setting. What makes them come to life is the extent to which they fail to fit the superhero mould. Each of them gets to reveal their own vulnerability, their humanity, in small moments which bring them to life. The Comedian is the least sympathetic character, and everything we see of him is vile. Nevertheless, it's his humanity that brings him down. He's able to accept almost any monstrosity, but Ozymandias' plan is too much for him. He was, somehow, able to provide a friendly face for Sally, and he wistfully longs to know his daughter. (Though we've seen him murder his own unborn child and their mother). We don't like him, or forgive him, but we can see that there's a person there, who might have turned out all right.

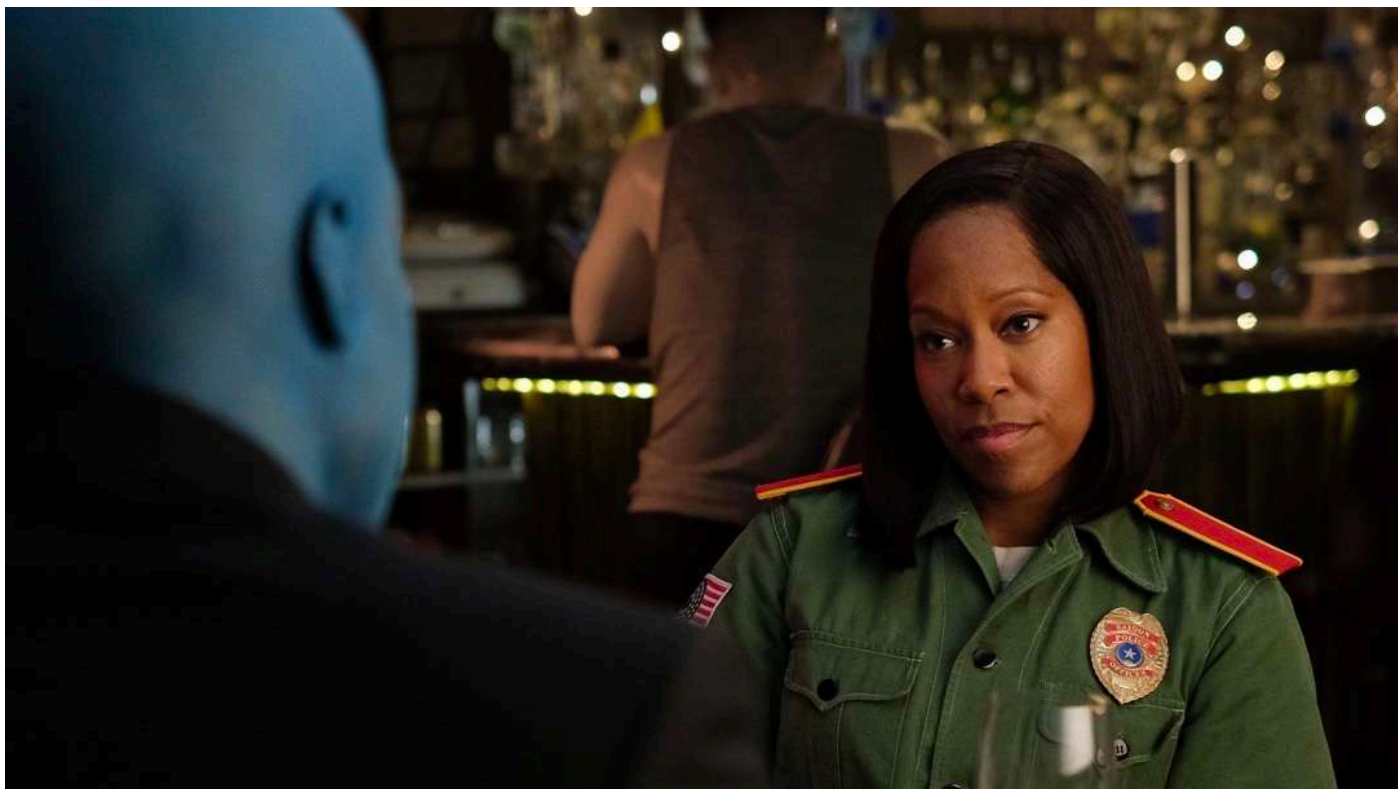
Rorschach is always pitiable, even before we see his past. He's allowed moments of grace as we approach the end. He acknowledges to Dan that he's a difficult person to have as a friend, a genuinely touching moment. His principles, even though totally misguided and confused, remain admirable in their steadfastness. He's not willing to accept Ozymandias' crimes, and he's willing to die

rather than let him away with it. Dan and Laurie are, in the end, a cute couple, and we want the best for them. Their new crimefighting career is silly, but we like them anyway.

But humanity is not available for Jon and Adrian. Jon has become removed from humanity in his experience, and now moves away physically. He can no longer meaningfully interact with people. Adrian has been damned by what he's done. The pirate comic that we've been reading in parallel to *Watchmen* tells us his fate. He's on the *Black Freighter*, now. It's a direct reference to the Brecht/Weill song from *The Threepenny Opera*, in which a young woman fantasizes about a pirate ship coming to her town and destroying all her oppressors.

The strongest expression of humanity comes just before the destruction of New York. All the background characters we've barely noticed all converge together, interacting with each other in expressions of rage, frustration and compassion, all having to deal with the messy lives of other human beings. It's a reminder that every person matters. In many stories, especially superhero stories, the background characters are treated as disposable. In *Watchmen*, everybody counts.





CONSIDERING THE VIETNAM EQUATION IN WATCHMEN

JAMES BACON

“If we’d lost this war ... I dunno. I think it might have driven us a little crazy, y’know? As a country.” – Edward Blake, The Comedian

Vietnam features strongly in the *Watchmen* TV series, and like so much of this sequel to the *Watchmen* comic, the source is indeed the comic.

The first indication we get that Vietnam is part of the wonderful alternative history of the *Watchmen* comic series is in issue #1 when the headline of the *New York Times*, 12th October 1985, is seen in the background on a newsstand, with a headline proclaiming that Vietnam is the 51st State. (Ch1. Pg4. Pn3.)

We are then welcomed to V.V.N., which one assumes is Victory in Vietnam, with Doctor Manhattan and the Comedian, Edward Blake, talking in a bar in June 1971. The Doc supposes it must mean something to ‘them,’ indicating the Vietnamese or maybe humans, but Blake cuts to the heart of the matter in his musings, saying, ‘If we’d **lost** this war ... I dunno. I think it might have driven us a little **crazy**, y’know? As a **country**.’ Which of course it did, but America essentially forgot that if you’re going to lose a game,

play a different game. The war was always lost. (Ch2. Pg13)

Instead of the image of the last helicopters evacuating civilians from a falling Saigon in 1975, we have Richard Nixon feted in a similar presented image in 1971, disembarking from a Huey to a rapturous welcome.

Blake is clear the war was won by Doctor Manhattan. In 1986, the portrayal of the American War in Vietnam being won is one of those alternative history moments that makes readers consider just how disastrous the war was. In contrast, *Watchmen*’s comic book offers readers a quick win, which is as much fantasy as superhumans are in fiction.

As Doctor Manhattan moves forward and backward along his own timeline, we see Richard Nixon asking him to go to Vietnam in January of 1971 where Manhattan meets Blake and describes him as ‘deliberately amoral.’ This appears to be a metaphor for the U.S. presence in Vietnam. (Ch4. Page 19)

We see an enlarged and towering Doctor Manhattan in May of 1971, razing the jungle with presumably Viet Cong running away, noting that he expects the war to end within the week. He comments that 'they ask to surrender to me personally, their terror of me balanced by an almost religious awe.'

There has been some excellent science fiction taking the American War in Vietnam as a historical influence and utilising it as a subject, be it *The Forever War* by Vietnam-veteran Joe Haldeman or *The Killing Ground* by JG Ballard, or Michael Moorcock's *A Cure for Cancer* (the third in the Jerry Cornelius saga). Meanwhile, Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen* only touches upon it, but it is an important part of the many twists in this piece of superhero literature. *Watchmen* details what would potentially happen if superheroes existed and if they willingly did their 'patriotic' duty. They enact massacres.



human life, so goes Doctor Manhattan. In fiction, it would take a god to win the American War in Vietnam, and yet in reality full credit is rarely given to the tenacity, hard fighting, organisational ingenuity of the forces in North Vietnam, who won the war.

The Comedian's actions in Vietnam, no matter what level of brutality applied, is a mirror for all the American atrocities: brutal but ultimately achieving worse than nothing. It only serves to cement the inhumane and dreadful perception of pointless violence, and the misguided belief that might equals right.

While the original 1986 comic moves away from Vietnam neatly and skillfully, encapsulating so much in so few pages, there is much to contemplate.

Including Vietnam as the 51st State of the United States of America serves to remind readers that the 50th state, Hawaii, was first annexed before the people voted to be a state. Puerto Rico, an unincorporated territory of the United States, is another, more modern, example of an annexed territory where statehood is yet to be decided, but desired by some residents.

The story in *Watchmen* ably creates a dark twist in American history and, subsequently, the country's consciousness. The *Before Watchmen* comic doesn't really add anything to the Comedian's story in Vietnam, despite six published issues. Suffice to say, he has a dreadful influence and impact on the war and instigates heinous acts. Regardless, not much is added to his backstory. Moore and Gibbons were able to portray the same message in just a few pages. The film saw Doctor Manhattan literally exploding Vietnamese to the tune of Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*, and it lost nuance and subtlety, the discrete elements hidden in plain sight.

Now, to the TV series.

To have the lead character of the *Watchmen* HBO series, Angela Abar (Regina King), be born in Vietnam before it became a U.S. state, was a lovely twist. Her parents, both American, we must assume, opted to stay in Vietnam for twenty years. Her father, a Captain in the U.S. Army, after fighting in the Vietnam War, defines a new setting in the *Watchmen*



Even in victory we see the absolute horrendous ugliness of the war. While the Comedian hates Vietnam and wants to leave, he is also aware that without Manhattan it could have been different. We see further manifestation of the amorality of the Comedian contrasted against Doctor Manhattan's detachment. The Comedian kills a Vietnamese woman who is pregnant with his child, in front of Doctor Manhattan. It's a murderous criminal act, sweeping aside an inconvenience. In this instance, someone who could stand up to a bully, the most powerful being in the world, is willing to watch on and do nothing. A point that Blake points out.

In three detailed pages, during a flashback, we are offered numerous examples of war bringing out the worst in people. (Ch2. Pg13-15)

The might of the great American war machine holds no comparison to that of a man-god who unleashes eviscerations with gestures and is dehumanised, utterly unmoved by the havoc that is being wrought upon the Vietnamese. Just as with the murder Blake commits, uninterested in mediocre

story. We've already had a focus on the Tulsa massacre. Now we have an African-American woman, the lead character, identifying as both Black and Vietnamese.

The Angela Abar we see in Tulsa is proud to be Vietnamese, identifying in the way one might from any country, wearing some Asian-style clothing with her jeans as she talks to her child's class, cooking the cuisine, and cursing in Vietnamese. Yet her own story in Vietnam is hard.

On the 16th anniversary of Victory in Vietnam Day, June 1986, she witnessed her parents being killed in a suicide bomb attack against the American occupation. The bomber screams, 'death to the invaders' before the explosion. Losing her parents, Marcus and Alisse, in such a violent way, must have left a huge impression. Afterward, we see Angela in an orphanage, making Doctor Manhattan Russian Dolls—an interesting allusion to a story within a story.

The hard life she lives is palpable. It is a life of being sufficiently different to be identified as foreign in her country of birth, which brilliantly juxtaposed how many viewers feel in the U.S. today. It also serves to remind us of the large number of Vietnamese children who were orphaned or became refugees.

The instigator of the bombing is captured and Angela identifies him for the Saigon Police. In their deep green uniforms, wide yellow and red epaulet boards, but with a U.S.-shaped, L.A. style badge, and the U.S. flag and state flag on their upper sleeves, they intend to execute him. Angela asks if she can listen, but is instead asked to go back inside. Before leaving, she is presented with the officer's badge, which she studies as we hear the executioner's gunshot.

This scene calls to mind the execution of Nguyễn Văn Lém—a member of the Viet Cong, who was shot in the head at point-blank range by Brigadier General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, the chief of the Republic of Vietnam National Police. However, this incident, which seems simply like a brutal murder of a civilian, is itself considerably different and complex. As if this is not sufficiently heartbreaking, we see that Angela's grandmother June Abar, the wife of Will Reeves, comes to take her to Tulsa. Of course, this inevitably ends in tragedy. After a Borscht Burger, talk of videos, and the belief that she is escaping, her grandmother dies on the street in Saigon.

With the concept of Vietnam as a 51st state, there is a lovely ambiguity about the visual depiction of Vietnam with the mix of American police vehicles and Vietnam colours. Showing the contrast in the visual evolution of Vietnam, we see Saigon in 1987 and then again in 2009, and there are obvious changes to the evolution of the visual landscape. As a result in the TV series, we see insurgency in the manifestation of a bombing, blowing apart that mixed visual of a Vietnam-American world.

One example of this is the mural of Doctor Manhattan in the background, its colors so bright and clean in 1987, despite the red graffiti labeling him as a 'murderer' and accented with blood daubs on his hands and horns on his head. Then, when we see the same image 22 years later, there have been multiple uneven over-paints. No doubt trying to fix it, but it is now well-faded and well-graffitied with a yellow penis line drawn over Doctor Manhattan's pants, in a juvenile way. It serves as a visual representation of society's underlying feelings, and how they may have changed as Doctor Manhattan goes to see Angela.

When a God Walks into a Bar is perhaps one of the finest pieces of science fiction television created. We see Doctor Manhattan in Saigon on VVN Day. Not only do we see the mural, but then, we see that the venue is Eddy's Bar, the bar where Eddie Blake murdered his girlfriend. A nod to a story within a story. Nicole Kassel, director of this episode, confirmed that Mr. Eddy's Bar is totally based on the bar in the comic.

While we see Doctor Manhattan take a new guise, and Angela's adventures move to Tulsa, there is no doubt that Vietnam at this point has featured strongly.

Lady Trieu, played by Hong Chau, could in many ways be an analog of the billionaires who can buy anything they want in today's capitalism-focused world—however, she is a scientist at heart and her precocious daughter, Bian, serving as a reflection of this, being a clone of Lady Trieu's mother, Bian My. The eccentricity and narcissism of Trieu's ambition is on display as she builds her legacy, driven by her mother's ambition by literally recreating her mother to witness her success.

Bian tells Trieu that she had a nightmare. 'I was in a village. Men came and burned it. They made us walk. I was walking for so long. Mom, my feet still hurt.' In the perfect twist, we learn that 'Bian My did have one unforgettable encounter with Mr. Blake. In 1971, Mr. Blake and his battalion of Blazin' Commandos passed through her village outside My Lai. Their uniquely warm demeanor made quite an impression on her. This encounter is sowed as a seed of query in an article from *Peteypedia*. Watering such seeds, the TV series provides each episode with extra documentation in a way that is reminiscent of the original comics, and we are left wondering if Blake is Lady Trieu's father.

In this way, we see that the seed of revenge sown was further watered by the flight of Lady Trieu's mother as she sought refuge, all the while knowing that Blake may have been a blunt instrument of brute grim violence, but it was Doctor Manhattan who won the war. As the parts come together, Bian My ends up being taken in as a cleaner in the Antarctic, recruited to work in Ozymandias's base, Karnak.

Bian My was herself very determined, and perhaps driven by this, she brilliantly purloins the legacy of Adrian Veidt (Ozymandias), inseminating



herself with one his semen samples and escaping from Karnak to go back to Vietnam in 1985, where Lady Trieu was born in 1986.

There is an implied disposability to the Vietnamese, which their refugee status highlights. In real life, the Vietnamese boat people who survived their escape from Vietnam numbered over 800,000. It is unknown how many perished during their journey.

There is a dreadful air of disposable insignificance regarding individual Vietnamese people in American history and in their stories. So, it is important to note that here, as an individual, Bian My is masterful and outsmarts the cleverest man on the planet.

There was much about Lady Trieu that I loved: how she planned things so well and also her confidence. Whether she is asking Veidt for \$42m or how she is certain that she can take Doctor Manhattan's power and rid humanity of nuclear weapons. Her look and styles intoned an empathy with Vietnamese fashion—I am, however, no expert—and I should go back and see if Lady Trieu ever wears an áo dài.

In the series, we also learn from *Peteypedia* that Ronnie Ngo Dinh, governor of Vietnam, made an accusation in 2017 that Ozymandias, Adrian Veidt, had been assassinated by the Vietnamese Liberation Front as an act of terror against the United States. This allows him to escalate action against the VLF, which results in hundreds of civilian deaths and international condemnation.

I had hoped there would be more about Lady Trieu and Vietnam along with greater intertwining of the characters and a chance to see more of Vietnam's history in this world. I also wanted to see something in the series about the origin of the name Lady Trieu,

which could have been developed and meant as much to the viewer as Tulsa. For many, it would be a surprise culturally delivered historical shock on par with Tulsa, and I wanted to see that with Vietnam. Lady Triệu or Bà Triệu is the name of a 3rd century warrior, who resisted the Eastern Wu occupation of Vietnam. Described as strong, brave, and smart, she wore yellow into battle and rode a war elephant. Where else did you see an elephant?

I was slightly disappointed when Trieu's character was portrayed simply as someone attempting to take over the world, and therefore ultimately evil, as by way of narcissism.

There feels like an unnerving level of synchronicity about the HBO TV series and current events, especially with regard to policing: the treatment of black citizens and the brutal racism and bias that underlies so much for so many. Starting the series with Tulsa was brilliantly done. Initially, the police stopped where it was as if current matters were turned on their head. Other elements include a black cop stopping a white driver, the lead characters Angela and ultimately Doctor Manhattan being Black (as well as their wider family connections), and the 7th Cavalry with their obvious cyclopean symbol of white supremacists.

Lynn Novick and Ken Burns's PBS series *The Vietnam War* was perfectly timed in many respects, and frighteningly, we now find the world around us somehow reflecting the worst elements of that time. Indeed, it would be fair to observe that currently we have a crop of narcissistic psychopaths in charge of countries, hell-bent on ensuring their own 'team' profiteer, and with little care for truth or human life.

In the series, the corruption of the Vietnam War has utterly impacted the American system, dividing the nation, and causing issues to spill onto the streets that ultimately result in violence, often at the instigation and hands of the authorities: this is happening again.

The current climate in *Watchmen* is indeed quite prophetic, especially if we consider the divisiveness that America's war in Vietnam caused amongst Americans and how upset the active people were in their anger about it. In comparison to current issues, it's rather like this year's Black Lives Matter protests. Martin Luther King spoke of the Black soldiers dying in Vietnam, and indeed, some 14% were combat casualties in 1965 when African-Americans only made up 12% of the population and 10% of the military. Discrimination also factored into the disproportionate numbers of African-American soldiers being punished through court martials, nonjudicial punishments, incarceration, and punitive discharges. This doesn't even consider the matter of segregated cemeteries, where judicial orders had to be made to allow Black soldiers to be buried with the same honor and regard as other servicemembers. An example would be Miami's Fort Pierce Cemetery when Mrs. Campbell had to bring a legal case so that her son, Specialist

Williams, 20, with the First Air Cavalry, who was killed on the 8th August 1970, could be buried.

Instead of high morals and funding going to a foreign land, we see inequality, racism, and segregation reign. In the U.S., we see the issue is inequality, under what is now a divisive and lying leader.

How does one measure prosperity and wellbeing? Vietnam has had an incredible record in the fight against COVID-19. Seeing a peak in early August, Vietnam is 186th in the world, compared to the U.S.'s 11th place, with over a quarter-million deaths today. Vietnam's death toll is 25 as of the 12th September 2023.

In an America where all forms of social responsibility appear to be seen as socialism that needs to be combatted, there is no pause for reflection on other less corrosive and murderous systems than the form of capitalism that the U.S. has adopted. It is not unrealistic to ask if there is a better way—a fair and socially-responsible way, where people do not flee nor fear incarceration from any type of government.

How corrupt was America during Vietnam? How bent out of shape was it from the expectations that people had and what fair expectations are in the

American system? Is it a similar sense of wrongness that has occurred this year, since the death of George Floyd? That something is not at all right with America when a Black man is murdered on camera? America is in a polarised and divisive time, lies and untruths abound, the President can say anything at all, and his loyal followers will believe him. Deceitfully describing those who died for their country as 'losers and suckers,' did Tricky Dicky step that low? All the while, he will kiss the flag and evoke patriotism, as much as possible.

Returning to the TV series...

While I am certain that those with more expertise, or from Vietnam (or both), will find more valid coincidences, influences, themes, and errors, I admit that I am always fascinated when AngloAmerican TV, film, or even comics features a different country (Ireland being my favourite), willing to mock such as with *Web of Spiderman #22*, or pleased with a decent depiction. I thought the *Watchmen* TV series was a strong departure, for a story that was already brilliantly challenging racial expectations. Involving a country that forces American viewers in particular to consider exactly what the American War in Vietnam was to themselves and to the world was a thoughtful creative choice.

INSTANT FANZINE INTERVIEWS - PART 4

JOHN DAVIES

JP: When did you first read *Watchmen*?

JD: I read the series as it was coming out in single issues. I would buy multiple copies of each issue so I could post them to a couple of friends at university in a town that didn't have a comic shop.

JP: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

JD: Mostly the memories of sitting up late with the aforementioned friends, drinking wine, and speculating on where the series was going. Who would live, who would die, what did it all mean? I'd been reading comic books since the early 70s but this was the first that had that effect on me. It felt like I was experiencing something special in the comic book genre as it was happening.

JP: What's your favourite aspect of the comic, and if you feel it's significant, why is it so?

JD: My earliest comic book memory is of a Steve Ditko *Blue Beetle* comic with the Question as a back-up. I have always had a fondness for the Charlton heroes so to see Alan Moore reinterpreting them was exciting for me. I don't think that aspect is particularly significant except that was what first drew me to read *Watchmen*.

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

JD: The series was a pioneer of 'Comics aren't for kids anymore'. It was a start of the end of 'Zap, Crash, Kapow!' reporting on comic books in the mass media as comics became more and more aimed at a mature readership.

There's an argument that this has gone too far and there are no young readers any more as the movies and TV series fill that niche for them. But there are too many factors involved in that argument to be able to single out *Watchmen* for being fully responsible. Even if the through line does start with the Comedian being thrown through a window.

SIMON ENGLISH

JP: When did you first read *Watchmen*?

SE: Probably 1990? I recall it coming out, and there was enormous hype about it – but it was in the era of single issues, and having missed the initial two, I ended up ignoring it at the time.

JP: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

SE: When I eventually did read it; my initial impression was 'this just isn't like anything else I've read' – it was my introduction to Alan Moore, so I then sought out a lot of his other work.

Subsequently, I have gained a deeper appreciation of Dave Gibbons' work on it – that 9-panel grid, and the tricks with symmetry and repetition still remain a pinnacle piece of work. The only other artist who comes close for me is J.H. Williams III. It's also worth mentioning the 'flat' colouring of John Higgins – another critical aspect to *Watchmen*'s distinctive look.

JP: What's your favourite aspect of the comic, and if you feel it's significant, why is it so?

SE: I think it's the grounding of the superheroes in a 'realistic', modern milieu – mixing 'real' history with those fantastical elements. It seems so obvious now, but it really felt like it was the first time that that had been seriously done.

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

SE: Well, for a while, that highly cynical tone and approach to superheroes pervaded comics – possibly for a good decade or so – as Alan Moore has observed, many other writers missed the point...

On the plus side – the movement of superheroes into mainstream media really gets an immense kick-start from *Watchmen*; there's so much that can be traced back to *Watchmen* surfacing above the enclosed world of comic books – you wouldn't have *Gen V* without *Watchmen* for example.

It's also a testament to the strength of that material that both the *Watchmen* TV show and Grant Morrison's *Multiversity 4: Pax Americana* are genuinely good follow-ons from the original (albeit in very different ways).

But it was also the first time comics were really taken seriously by the mainstream media – 1986 lays the groundwork for the utterly surprising dominance of geek culture that can be arbitrarily marked as starting in 2008 – so it took a while!

STEPHEN BROTHERSTONE

Ste Brotherstone is co-author of the popular Scarred For Life series of books, which take a look at the dark side of popular culture in the 70s and 80s.

JP: When did you first read *Watchmen*?

SB: September 1986, the very day that first issue was published! I'd have picked my copy up from Liverpool's legendary, and much-missed, comic shop Ogre Books on a Thursday. I'd been keeping track of it eagerly through DC's house ads and editorials, and especially the news pages of Martin Skidmore's equally legendary and missed fanzine *Fantasy Advertiser*.

It's genuinely impossible to understand the sheer excitement the entire comics world felt about *Watchmen*. Alan Moore was on top of his game, the closest thing to a genuine celebrity creator we had. Dave Gibbons was a bit of a legend thanks to his *2000 AD* work. And 1986 was a banner year for comics in general – I'd barely got over the excitement of *The Dark Knight Returns* that spring, now *Watchmen* promised to blow my mind.

JP: What sort of impression on you did it leave?

SB: I was blown away. It more than lived up to all the hype. It felt *important*. It was intricate, it was complex, it was layered, and most importantly to me and my mates, it felt adult. In a good way. Again, it's easy to forget that 1986 was the very beginning of the interminable 'Biff! Pow! Comics grow up!' articles that every newspaper and magazine would run from then until Tim Burton's *Batman* arrived in 1989.

Watchmen was, along with *Love and Rockets*, a comic I could show to Mr McCann, my inspirational English teacher, without him rolling his eyes. He was mighty impressed by it, too. The need to feel accepted by the mainstream was, I think, a curiously '80s thing for comics fans. And *Watchmen* was the key to it all for me.

JP: What's your favourite aspect of the comic, and if you feel it's significant, why is it so?

SB: The details. It's all about the details. If I'm being honest, I grew less and less impressed by *Watchmen* over the decades. The dialogue began to feel more and more stilted with every reread. The characters were hard to like. The plot is paper-thin, and I was never convinced by the giant squid.

But Moore and Gibbons' attention to detail never failed to impress. The world building is immaculate, one of the best examples of creative synthesis between writer and artist. The structure of the whole thing is incredible: the text pages at the back, the flashbacks, the constant subtle seeding of plot and character through dialogue. Moore was a master at 'show, don't tell'.

JP: What do you think the series' impact on comics has been, for good or ill?

SB: On the one hand, *Watchmen* did more to get comics accepted as a viable storytelling medium in Britain and America than just about any other comic I can think of. It did all the heavy lifting, ably assisted by *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Love and Rockets*, *Maus*, *Sandman*, etc. But *Watchmen* was the Geoff Capes at the centre of it all.

On the other hand, it completely and unwittingly knackered the superhero genre forever. I know Moore's intention was to try and kill it off altogether, but that was never going to happen. Instead, editors, writers, and artists looked at the dark bits, the violence, the sex, and the 'Grim 'n' Gritty' era of the '90s was born. And it's never really shrugged off that legacy. It certainly helped me realise that superhero comics are best served daft – I adore Grant Morrison's *Batman* and *Green Lantern* work for DC, as he seems to embrace the silliness. But whenever I see a grim, gritty modern thriller involving people in tights and undies, I can't help chuckling.

CHATTING WITH JOHN HIGGINS

BY MICHAEL CARROLL

John B. Higgins' career as a professional freelance artist began over forty years ago and has seen him work on such diverse characters as Judge Dredd, Batman, John Constantine and Jonah Hex. The recipient of countless awards and accolades, in his time he's also been a writer, editor and publisher.

John and his massively talented partner-in-art Sally Jane Hurst are two of my very favourite people on this or any other planet, and not just because some of my own comic scripts have been elevated by their amazing work. If you have the good fortune to meet them at a convention or signing, please lavish all possible praise upon them!

MC John, I know you've been asked about *Watchmen* a billion times, and it's well documented how you came to be involved in its creation (editors' note: see John's article *The Embarrassment of The Watchmen* elsewhere in this fine publication!), so I'm thinking that maybe we might skip ahead a little...

It's 1986, and the first issue of *Watchmen* has landed in the bookstores. There's a bit of buzz around it within the industry, but the average comic fan might not know of it. Many will recognise the names of the creators, but the characters are all new, the book has no connections to anything else in DC's back catalogue...

Can you recall your reactions and thoughts at this point? Clearly you knew that it was a top quality comic, but at what point did you become aware that the rest of the world was starting to sit up and go, "Oh, hey, hold on, *this* one is a bit special!"?

JBH I knew before anyone else how special it was, and that is not just hindsight! Well, maybe a little. Even though I had worked with both Alan and Dave before, I was still just predominately a comics fan. *Watchmen* was at the very start of my comics career: it was the same year I started to make a living as a professional comic artist. I was working regularly for *2000AD* and on *Judge Dredd*, alongside the *Watchmen* colouring, but up till then I was mainly a comics fan and a huge fan of Alan and Dave. I knew from hearing them talk about *Watchmen* at our first creative editorial meeting—in a pub garden before a London Comic Convention—how in-depth the *Watchmen* world would be, and I was sure that being involved with this series would be the start of something good for me. As it turned out it was even more than that: it was good for *all* creative talent in comics publishing. Contracts and conditions improved for everyone because of it.

But as a creative *tour de force*, I realised *Watchmen* was special way before it hit the shops. Since I was the very first comics "fan" to read the first episode as a completed comic story—words and pictures together—

and maybe only the second person in the world after the editor, I knew then solely by my reaction that this was a comics-world-shaking book.

Then it hit the stands and received all those positive reviews in the fan press. I had never seen such a groundswell of positivity before. But then it grew beyond the comics world, getting critically noticed by the mainstream press, particularly the broadsheets, even though *The Sunday Times* still led with a headline along the lines of, "Zap, Pow—Comics Come of Age!!" The "dinner dinner" Adam West *Batman* had been twenty years earlier but some people still had the idea comics were only for kids. *Watchmen*—along with a few other seminal comic books—changed that perception.

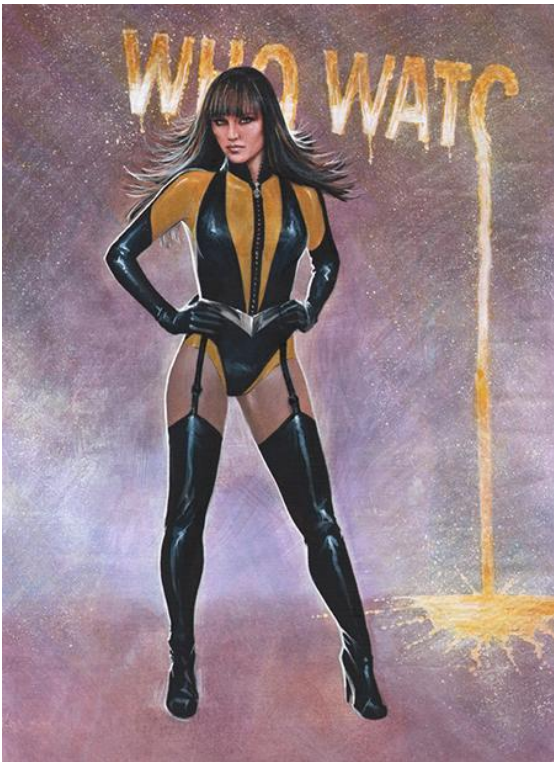
MC You've said before that *Watchmen* led to you being asked to colour *Batman: The Killing Joke*, but did it directly lead to other work? Running with that idea (bit cheeky this one!)... Did you get any jobs on the back of *Watchmen* that you don't think you'd have been offered if it hadn't made such a splash?

JBH Nope, no jobs directly from colouring *Watchmen* other than *The Killing Joke* and a painted poster pencilled by Pat Brodrick. None that count anyway. It sort of became a creative *cul de sac* for me for a short while. Soon after the twelfth issue came out I made a trip to Marvel and DC comics in NYC. From both editorial departments I received a round of applause—Americans can be very enthusiastic people! The Marvel applause from the staff I received in a NY bar: the other drinkers must have thought someone famous was in the house!

But my folder at that time didn't have much comic strip work in it, it was mainly SF book and magazine covers. A number of editors did say, "Sorry John, we have no colour work for you!" even though I had not *asked* for colour work. I got bracketed as a colour artist, which was only a small part of what I wanted to do.

MC Well, on the subject of your own art, here's an out-of-left-field question, one that I'm hoping you've not been asked before... Suppose, instead of Dave Gibbons, *you* had been the artist on *Watchmen*. Are there any major differences you might have made? Character designs, panel angles, composition, etc.

JBH An interesting question, unfortunately it is a small answer. At that time I could *not* have done it, I was not a fully-fledged comic artist and still had a long way to go to be anywhere near what Dave was doing. I really do think that no one could have done what the team of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons did. It would not have been on the *Time* magazine list of the top one hundred novels of the 20th century if it had not been that team. They were a perfect combination of talent, and each at the right time in their careers to perfectly complement the other's strengths.



A commissioned painting of Laurie Juspezyk from 2014

MC Hmm... You're too modest! Now, as I recall, after the twelve-issue series ended, your next official encounter with *Watchmen* was colouring the cover for *Heroes Roleplaying Module #227* (the *Watchmen* issue), and then we skip ahead eighteen years to 2005, when you worked on the *Watchmen Absolute Edition*. Can you tell us how this came about, and how much work was involved?

JBH Thanks for trawling my career memory for me, Michael – I didn't remember *Heroes Roleplaying Module*. It tends to be the big commissions that stay in mind and obviously *Watchmen* and *Killing Joke* were the biggest commissions in the early years of my

career, and to think I am still asked about them 40 odd years later is total bliss.

The *Absolute* edition was very satisfying as a project on so many levels. To be invited back to *Watchmen* on such a prestigious project, to be involved again with the most innovative and seminal graphic series of all time, to work closely with the two most talented creators in comics—Alan and Dave—was a gift. And they were both adamant that it had to be all the original creative team. Whether or not DC would have used another digital colourist on it if I had not been interested I don't know, but I was interested and I was available.

I had always planned to colour *Watchmen* pages in a certain way, but could not due to the limitations of the original hand-separated colouring process, but now with digital anything was possible. I worked as closely with Dave as we had originally. We had many conversations, the only difference this time was I was based in Bayonne NJ, just outside New York, and couldn't pop along to Dave's studio as I had in the early days, but the flip side of that was I could pop into the DC offices regularly to work closely with the production and design department led by Alison Gill.

I had worked with Alison since the very beginning of my career, when she was at the Marvel UK production department based in Kentish Town, London. I even got the opportunity—due to Alison and her production teams' total commitment to getting the best possible reproduction on any book that came out of their studios—of going in to the production department after seeing the first run proofs and working on any part of the colour we felt needed additional work before it went for the final printing. I can say absolutely the *Absolute* edition of *Watchmen* is as close as possible to what the original creators had in mind for the look of *Watchmen* all those years ago in 1986.

MC I know you corrected a few minor errors in the original colouring, and in a couple of cases you were able to create effects that just hadn't been possible with the pre-digital colouring, but was there any temptation to make any drastic changes?

JBH Dave was totally adamant we kept the colour palette and style we'd created in the original run of *Watchmen*, which was in complete sync with my mind-set. One of the biggest problems with any digital art, in my opinion, is that if it is not used appropriately, it will distract from the story. The use of colour can create an immediate emotional response, but it should not take the reader away from the story, it should only enrich the reading experience. So being spare with any digital enhancement should be the overriding concern in any colour artist's mind, the story always comes first, not

your technique, and that was how we approached it in 2005.



MC Related to the colouring of *Watchmen*... apparently in some foreign editions the colouring was tweaked in a panel in the restaurant scene to mask that it originally showed two men holding hands. Have you heard this? If so, what are your thoughts on that sort of censorship?

JBH I had heard that, and I would find censorship of any sort problematic. In the mid 1980s a number of highly considered writers and artists did make a stand against editorial interference on certain projects. And publishers became more liberal from that point onward. Vertigo at DC was probably at the forefront of telling stories of a mature nature reflecting what was going on in society as a whole, telling stories that just a few years earlier would not have appeared in the pages of a comic. Sadly, we know from what has happened the last couple of years, censorship seems to be on a creeping advance against all literature, not just comics, and you don't have to think hard to come up with examples, such as *Maus*—the award-winning graphic novel—being removed from public libraries in some states in America.

MC With the *Absolute Edition*, for the first time you're credited on the cover (well, on the spine of both the book and the slipcase) alongside Alan and Dave... Did that reflect a change in how your role in the comic's creation was perceived?

JBH Quite possibly, but I also think the position of a colour artist in the comics industry has changed, not only in the publisher's understanding of their creative role, but from my conversations with the discerning fans of *Watchmen*, the reading public appreciated that too. Of course it can still be just attractive colours used to please the eye, but when the creative team works together with an editor and intentionally uses colour to enhance the storytelling, then it is a valid part of the creative process. Plus Dave Gibbons has always emphasised my involvement and contribution to *Watchmen* in an open and generous way, which I believe helped people appreciate the use of colour in storytelling.

MC How did you come to be involved with the *Before Watchmen* project? And did you have any misgivings about the project before you began? (Specifically, I'm thinking about the potential for negative backlash from fans or other creators who might be upset that DC were tinkering with an "untouchable" property.)

JBH Dan DiDio worked hard trying to get all the original creators involved, and as we all know Alan and DC have been oil and water for a long time so nothing was going to get him back. Dave has always worked with DC to get the best possible result for any *Watchmen* project and even though he was not involved in art or story he was a very benign presence, as far as I remember, and signed off on what he saw being produced—at a distance, I am sure. So that left little old me, the last original creator, and with Dave's blessing—I would not have done it otherwise—I got involved.



MC Were you offered the chance to work on any of the other characters, or was *The Curse of the Crimson Corsair* your first choice? Of all the *Watchmen* spin-offs, sequels and prequels, it's very much the one most capable of standing on its own: it has no impact on the *Watchmen* universe, nor is it directly affected by it – was that a factor in your decision?

JBH They had a line up of brilliant writers/artists raring to go that went around the block, all just wanting to be involved with such a touchstone of comic literature, so I was way back in that line up. But thankfully being one of the originals I was going to be offered something and *The Curse of the Crimson Corsair* was it, I think Len Wein had talked about content before I had signed up, and had come up with "Curse" to give a nod to *Tales of the Black Freighter*. I would have loved to do *Tales of the Black Freighter*, but there was apparently a copyright issue with "Tales" (of which I have no other information).

MC In the years since *Before Watchmen*, we've also had the *Watchmen* movie, the sequel TV series and the DC comics "crossover" epic *Doomsday Clock*... As one of the original creators, what's your take on these?

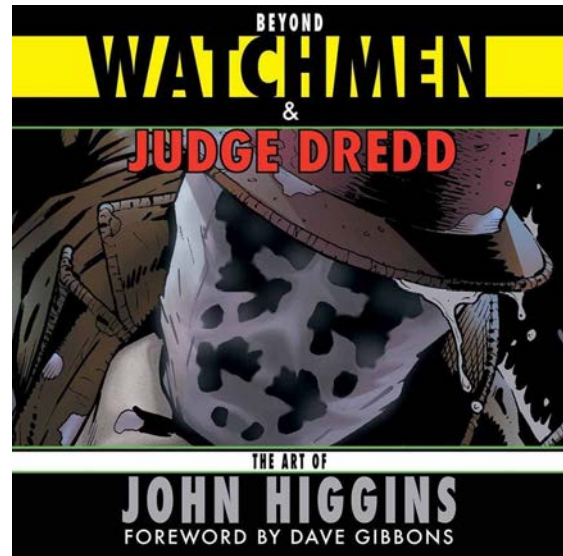
JBH Great, I love it. It is now like the Batman universe as far as I am concerned: many things can exist in it because of how strong the original was. The movie I loved, but I haven't watched the TV series. I'm not totally sure of the relevance of doing an original SF story in the *Watchmen* universe, but apparently it was well received. I didn't read much of *Doomsday Clock* but it looked good. I have no problem with any quality spin offs, since *Watchmen* started as something based on other original characters, as we know, so, "shrug of the shoulders."

MC In 2017 you published your artbook / autobiography *Beyond Watchmen and Judge Dredd: The Art of John Higgins*. How did it feel looking back over your career? Any nice (or nasty) surprises from the past? And... Will there be a second volume? (Please say yes!)

JBH You are so kind to mention my (twice reprinted and now sold out) *Beyond Watchmen and Judge Dredd: The Art of John Higgins*! It was so much fun to write and to have it sitting in Liverpool University book shops

alongside my year-long and extended retrospective art exhibition at the Victoria Gallery & Museum, very satisfying to be recognized in my home town.

No plans to do another but I might see about adding a few more chapters and get it reprinted.



MC And finally... Supposing the opportunity arose for an "After Watchmen" comic, or something similar (e.g., a "Watchmen Elseworlds" series where Jon Osterman never became Doctor Manhattan) would you be interested in being involved? What advice—if any—would you give to other creators regarding potential *Watchmen* properties?

JBH No more *Watchmen* for me: I have other characters and worlds to discover and explore. Such as *Dreadnoughts*, for one. But I would love to do more with my character *Razorjack*, and as a *2000AD* fan, I really still get a kick out of doing *Judge Dredd*.

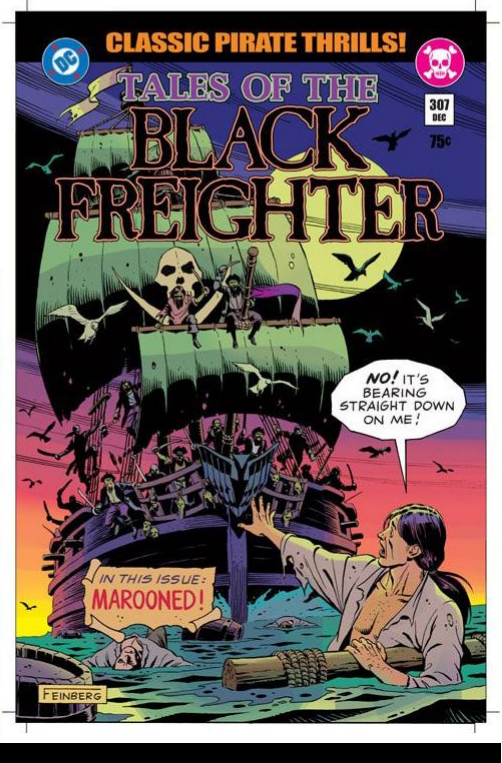
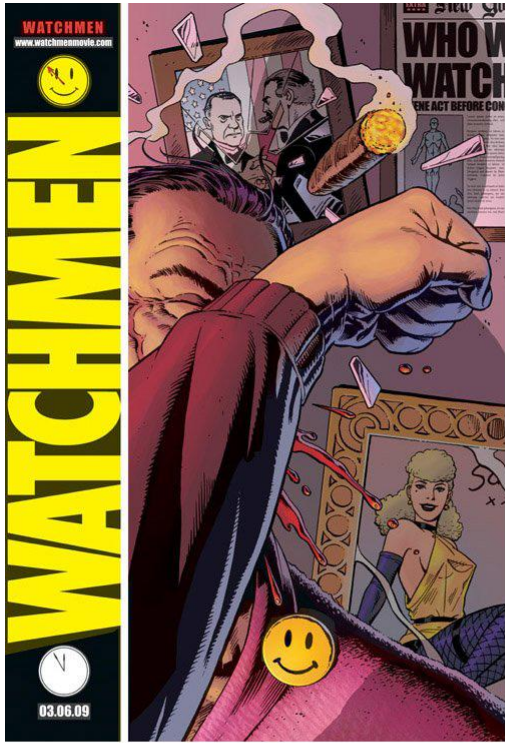
Good advice for any creator? Never sell your copyright outright, no matter how much you want to see it published. Always have a reversion clause in the contract. Never sign it in blood at a crossroads at midnight under the hanging tree.

Other than that, go and create!

MC John Higgins, thank you so much for both your time *and* your answers!

JBH Thanks, Mike. It has been a pleasure to talk about all things *Watchmen*, I love how it changed comics literature and it still seems relevant.

From our You Might Not Have Seen These Before Dept.: In advance of the 2009 Watchmen movie, Dave Gibbons and John Higgins were commissioned to produce a series of promotional illustrations...



DYLAN IN WATCHMEN

DAVID FERGUSON

Bob Dylan is an important presence in the Watchmen series. In the series, Alan Moore uses a part of a quote to title each Watchmen chapter and then reveals the full quote at the end that suggests the chapter's theme. He uses a variety of sources. He quotes musician Elvis Costello (Chapter 2: "Absent Friends"), the Book of Genesis (Chapter 3: "The Judge Of All The Earth"), scientist Albert Einstein (Chapter 4: "Watchmaker"), poet William Blake (Chapter 5: "Fearful Symmetry"), philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (Chapter 6: "The Abyss Gazes Also"), the Book of Job (Chapter 7: "A Brother to Dragons"), writer and poet Eleanor Farjeon (Chapter 8: "Old Ghosts"), psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (Chapter 9: "The Darkness Of Mere Being"), poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (Chapter 11: "Look On My Works, Ye Mighty...") and musician John Cale (Chapter 12: "A Stronger Loving World"). Dylan is the only person Moore cites twice.

He is first cited in the opening chapter, titled "At Midnight, All The Agents..." The full quote being:

"...at midnight all the agents
And the superhuman crew
Come out and round up everyone
That knows more than they do"

It is taken from Dylan's 1965 bleak epic *Desolation Row* and is a suitable summary of the theme of not only the first chapter but the series as a whole. Al Kooper, who played electric guitar on the first recordings of *Desolation Row*, suggested that it was located in Manhattan in "an area infested with whore houses, sleazy bars and porno supermarkets totally beyond renovation or redemption". A description that fits perfectly into the visuals of the New York of Watchmen created by Dave Gibbons. The suggestion of a totalitarian style government backed by "the superhuman crew" is appropriate too. The lyrics seem to me to be an apt description of The Comedian in particular. It sets the tone for the series.

Dylan is next cited in Chapter 10: "Two riders were approaching". The full quote:

"...outside in the cold distance
A wildcat did growl
Two riders were approaching
And the wind began to howl"

The quote comes from Dylan's 1967 epic *All Along The Watchtower*. The song was written during the height of the American War in Vietnam, where watchtowers were part of the iconic scenery. Vietnam of course is a story element in Watchmen. Writers like Keith Nagus have suggested that Dylan's lyrics were inspired by *The Book Of Revelations*. *The Annotated Watchmen* suggests the lyrics are partially based on Isaiah 21 and the prophecy of the fall of Babylon. Apocalyptic again. This seems to be enhanced in Jimi Hendrix's 1968 version as it has an apocalyptic sound to it. Dylan admitted of Hendrix "he could find things inside a song and vigorously develop them. He found things that other people wouldn't think of finding in there". Perhaps he enhanced the apocalyptic influence? It is noteworthy that from the first live performance of the song, Dylan has consistently performed a version closer to Hendrix's than to his original. Of course this apocalyptic theme fits perfectly with themes of the closing chapters of Watchmen, and the image of "Two riders approaching" (Rorschach and Nite Owl approaching Ozymandias' base to confront him) is a good summary of chapter 10.

Alan Moore has said of his using songs in comics "If you reference a song, the reader will be thinking about that song, playing subliminally in their head, giving a soundtrack to comics that can't have soundtracks." Dylan is definitely an important part of the soundtrack of Watchmen.

EDITORIAL

JAMES BACON

Ho Chi Minh City. 6th December 2023. War Remnants Museum.

I am sitting here, in Ho Chi Minh City. It is a very warm 28°C December day, but I am in the shade, outside and a fan is blowing strongly, and I have a cold drink. I will walk ten miles around the City today, starting early, taking in much, and returning to places, but for now, I am sitting, laptop out, plugged in and tapping away.

The Officers' Bar in Saigon was in the REX Hotel, which I have been to, it is a salubrious and modern-feeling hotel in a grandiose building, marble floored and sumptuous, a roof pool and an incredible tree-filled outdoor bar, with its own Rex Arcade of exclusive stores: Chanel, Burberry, Versace, and Rolex shops. There is nothing like it in Dublin. Is this where the Comedian taunted Jon and shot an innocent pregnant woman? I walked to the US Embassy location, was there an officers' bar in there? It has been replaced with a consulate, and the high wall which protects the new buildings was much more impenetrable than what had been there in the '70s, and security are very present, as are the pieces of art on the walls, celebrating commonalities between Vietnam and the USA, by local Hip Hop artists and director, Viet Max. I walk up to photograph the signage on the wall, but am stopped by a local employee of the consulate, his fine shirt covered in interesting badges, security of course for the Americans, and he is polite and I delete the photo, I do not want to give a local grief, nor question the bureaucratic nonsense he is employed to enforce. There are so few police about, I only see them in dedicated little sheds outside important buildings, not unlike other capital cities, but unlike London where police are everywhere, there is not the same presence.

I am drinking a cold beer, using the free wifi, and sitting in the outside cafe of the War Remnants Museum, that adeptly and skillfully points out the horror and criminalities of the Vietnam War, and other losses. There is much here about those who objected to the war.

I have found some collected comics in high end stores, *New Mutants*, *Marvel Star Wars*, *X-Men*, *Amazing Fantasy*, *Swamp Thing*, and *Sandman*, and art book shops had the *Taschen Avengers* and so on, but no copies of *Watchmen*, or *V for Vendetta*, and I am unsure if that is because maybe they are not as

well known, or not. Like they have *American Born Chinese*, and *Ms Marvel*, and everyone has the internet, and I fail to find any US raw copies, but some French translated British Picture Library comics, I do find. I am unsure how a Rolls Royce dealership exists, when the mode of transport of the regular people is obviously the moped.

You would never know that the US lost a war here, and that two million people were killed, there is a subtlety to the remembrance, the museum is very busy, as is the statue of Ho Chi Minh near the Continental Hotel. I watch, observe, and consider that both sightseeing venues seem to have different interested parties.

There are memorials, and many people's hearts touched, but the KFCs, Paul Bakeries, and Starbucks are all so popular with Vietnamese customers, Starbucks selling their 10th anniversary mugs... should we be surprised, I went to a McDonalds in 1990 in West Berlin.

The youth seem to love US things, as a guide said to us about a remote area in Thailand, they have the internet and like all humans want nice things. I read how some question the 'western' aspects or influence of some cultural elements, but I am not sure if that is a go to question, rather than an actual concern, as we see a NASA and USA marquee being set up as part of a concert set up in the city centre, where people can have a picture with their face in a wooden Astronaut Photo Prop.

America makes desirable things, not to everyone's taste, but to many, and crikey, everyone is making videos here, I assume TikTok, but who knows?

Watchmen is a phenomenal comic. I needed to read it a number of times, I was a teenager at first when I opened the gate to US comics, and I probably shouldn't have started it when I did, I enjoyed it, 1992, maybe 1993 I would say, 17 or 18, I was, but was unsure why everyone was so excited, but there came a point where I returned to it again and I'd read hundreds more comics of the US type and it made more sense, well aspects of it did, and like many things as we grow older, the nuance, the homage, the reflection of superheroes all became so enjoyable to read, so clever, and I learned how to appreciate it more.

Watchmen was one of the comics that had a lot of merchandise, well more than most beyond *Batman*, in 1989 there was *Batman* everything, but the Tim Burton *Batman*, so it was interesting to collect in the secondary market the badges, the badge, the roleplaying games and the portfolio. My battered portfolio was such a big deal, it was quite the thing, and I saw it as it was being sold in pieces, can you imagine. These were delightful things, and even this year, I was in a comic shop and saw the *DC Newsletter* promoting *Watchmen*, and picked that up, all thirty years later for me, from reading it.

The film was disappointing, but I have come to learn that with Zack Snyder, interesting, potential but never the 100% you want from a film. The TV series blew me away. I was astonished at just how good it was, and loved it, a bit of a problem, because we love Alan Moore, and he is genuinely such a nice man, but we all know the unhappiness between him and DC and well, you feel a bit like a Judas when you enjoy such a thing.

This is opposite to how I feel about *Before Watchmen*, which I was utterly contemptuous of, and at C2E2 I was a dissenting voice in a room full of excitement and hopeful fans, as Dan DiDio spoke about it, and he said that anyone not happy could speak to him after, and I did, and we did, and he basically explained, it was his product to make money from. Simple. He had a stone and he was going to get blood from it.

Sadly for me as a fan, it was not that it was just *Before Watchmen*, one can ignore these things, it was that the great Darwyn Cooke wrote 12 issues and drew 6 of *Before Watchmen*. A £1.25 comic on eBay, a regular in 50p and £1 bins, it's a dreadful waste of an amazing talent, and I would have adored something like *New Frontier*, or another couple of Parkers or anything, anything at all, that would have been another piece of amazing Darwyn Cooke, because then he was gone, passed away, too soon. One of the finest talents in comics.

Watchmen is part of a special selection of comics that reflect on superheroes. This includes *Marshal Law*, *The Boys*, *Top 10: The Forty-Niners*, *Hitman #34*, all of which I describe as postmodernist stories about the modernist literature that is comic book superheroes. These stories possess a really healthy cynicism, and a sceptical view that looks at superheroes and places them in a more realistic, what if really scenario. Taking the grandest concept of comics, that of superheroes, be it Superman or Batman, and then adding a realism and reality and satire that of course leaves one thinking.

I am grateful to all our contributors, thank you, and we are so lucky to have such engagement,

especially from the likes of Bryan Talbot and John Higgins, and Bruce Dickenson - who expected that? - and many thanks to our co-editors on this issue, Pádraig, Helena, and Mike have been superb in acquiring this amazing selection of interesting thoughts. Gosh wWow, look what we have for you next in this issue, by Helena, after some Letters of Comment. LoCs are very welcome, so please do let us know your thoughts. I am grateful that Dave Gibbons was happy to let us use the cover of the Portfolio, and hope he is OK with how that idea created some further thoughts, and thanks to Iain Clarke for the front and back cover, and Mike for the masthead, and Pádraig for the idea.

Right now, we are already working on future issues. If you enjoy this fanzine and would like to contribute on *V for Vendetta*, please do get in touch. David Lloyd gave Team Journey Planet an afternoon of chat, in an interview that was incredible, and we hope to have that issue out spring next year. We have instant fanzine questions available, and welcome input.

Next year we plan to have an Art issue, Blue Hills which will be a very different type of fanzine. Then an issue on the Holocaust, I am currently gathering research myself on this, I have travelled to the locations that Vladek Speigleman was in, in the incredible comic *Maus*, while also reading comics that portray the Holocaust from *Jinty* to *Screaming Eagles* and hope to include work on the complicity of the German railways in one of the greatest criminal tragedies of human history. If you have read a comic that mentions or features the Holocaust, do get in touch.

Workers Rights in Science Fiction, and then LGBT comics will be early and mid-summer issues, and if things go to plan, and this is a hard one, we really want to do an issue on Tim Powers, we may not have told him yet, so for feck's sake, don't say it!!! Tim was amazing as a guest of honour at the Eastercon I chaired, and we need to get our ducks in order. His fiction is fabulous. Hopefully towards November, all going to plan, we will do an issue on Dracula. Caveat Emptor ne Gratis Fanzines, this schedule is subject to change, variation, leaves on the line and notions of grandeur.

That is a lot, I think. We need to pace ourselves, Chris adores laying out, but we find issues where we capture the imagination, and excitement, and energy are easier but do need time and thought, and I think this is worth it.

Once more, our thanks to all contributors, and co-editors and to you, our readers. Do get in touch journeyplanet@gmail.com

- James

**YOU
ARE**

an unofficial choose your own Watchmen adventure

RORSCHACH

HELENA
NASH



You Are Rorschach

A Choose Your Own Adventure

Helena Nash - 2023

Introduction

In this game you are Rorschach, a masked hero, some say vigilante, operating on the streets of New York. An observant detective and student of the darker side of human nature, you investigate the cases that the police cannot or will not solve. Sometimes, frequently in fact, such cases require you to use intimidation and physical force to obtain answers from the city's criminal fraternity and in doing so bring the vilest wrongdoers to justice. In the past you have brought down gangsters, pornographers, rapists and killers, working alone and sometimes in concert with other masked adventurers like Nite Owl.

The year is 1983, some years since the US government passed the Keene Act which outlawed costumed crime fighters. You alone continue to pursue justice in defiance of the ban, even though this means that you yourself are on the police's Most Wanted list.

How To Play

To begin your adventure, go to section 1 and read the text. At the bottom of that section you will be given a choice of sections to go to next. Continue reading and choosing until you reach the end of the game, however short or long that game might be! You can always start again, or even turn back a few sections and make a different choice.

Clues

In the course of the game you may uncover information and physical evidence to help Rorschach solve the case. Clues are referred to by code words such as **MIRROR**, though the meaning of the code word is random and unrelated to the actual clue.

When you discover a clue, you will be prompted to write the code word down for future reference. You may be asked later in the game if you have recorded certain clues, which will enable you to take the investigation in certain directions. Some clues may be essential to move the case forward while others simply add background information.

Combat

In the game, Rorschach may find himself facing one or more opponents who are intent on hurting him. Many criminals will try to kill him, while the police will attempt to bring him in alive. Rorschach is an extremely capable unarmed fighter but is also good at improvising with whatever objects come to hand, in order to reduce his opponent's effectiveness and even the odds.

When combat is about to start, Rorschach will have a number of possible actions. Some will be more effective than others. Victory is not always assured, and some tactics will prove foolhardy or even fatal for Rorschach, so choose wisely.

Rorschach is only human and knows when he is outnumbered. In these situations, the challenge you face is not *How can Rorschach defeat all these foes?* but rather *How can Rorschach escape all these foes to continue his investigation?* Again, choose wisely how you respond in these situations.

Heat

You have only one score to keep track of in this game, **HEAT**. This is a measure of how close on Rorschach's heels the New York Police Department is. **HEAT** is generated by how much attention you attract during the case, and may increase if you publicly beat a suspect, become involved in an incident where shots are fired, are caught trespassing, take too long poking around a location or simply walk into a den of violent mobsters. In these situations, you will be asked to add 1 to your **HEAT** score.

You may be asked at certain points to check your current **HEAT** score. If it has reached a certain amount, the police may be closer than you think! Conversely, always playing it safe in your investigation might keep your **HEAT** low, but you may not get all the clues you need to move the case forward.

You begin the adventure with **HEAT** = 0.

1

Rorschach's Journal. August 5th 1983.

Friday. Woke at 2:19pm. Child screaming downstairs. Sun on window casts sliver of light across floor, like shard of broken glass. Afternoon heat sends smell of garbage from alley into the air, like week-old corpse.

Dressed. Left. At W 40th and 7th, collected today's newspapers. Newsvendor made joke about end of world. Not funny. Didn't laugh.

New Frontiersman headline is about Nixon running for re-election next year. Fifth term. Below that Soviets running military exercises in Eastern Europe. Inside short article about writer Max Shea, recently disappeared from Boston home.

New York Gazette leads with brutal murder of woman last night in her apartment on Upper West Side. Victim's name is Paula Davenport. 61 years old. Owner of dance club called The Glorioso. Police Detectives Fine and Bourquin gave official statement about *burglary gone wrong, probably by KT-28 addicts*. Below that, report of break-in at the Dorchester Building, the old headquarters of Minute Men from 1940s. Report says only one item of no value was taken, *no doubt by children on a dare*. Inside, Adrian Veidt hosting a telethon for charity.

Old woman murdered at home. Police clearly disinterested. Not right. People should feel safe at home without fear of criminals breaking in.

Wait until night, then put on face, hat, gloves. Now am ready to go to work. Am Rorschach.

Worth seeing what the police missed at crime scene. Go to **79**.

No mention of cause of death. Have to see body in city morgue. Go to **61**.

Newspaper report suggested burglary by 'KT-28 addicts'. Go to **72**.

2

Look around dance club for indications where killer might have gone.

If you have clue **GRICE**... Go to **64**.

If you do not have clue **GRICE**... Go to **13**.

3

Leap sideways. Snatch up green desk lamp as King Mob moves in. Barely avoid oversized fist. Reduces partition to splinters. Smash lamp against wall. Exposing jagged glass and live wiring. Duck low and jam it into King Mob's gut.

Like trying to push fork into frozen side of beef. King Mob grunts. Doesn't notice the pain. Stupid. Should have thought of that.

Oversized hand wraps around throat. Can't breathe. No way out. Fingers tighten...

THE CASE ENDS HERE

4

Back on street outside Davenport's building. Consider options.

If you have not yet visited the city morgue... Need to know cause of death. Have to see body. Go to **61**.

If you have not yet visited the local drug den. Newspaper report suggested burglary by 'KT-28 addicts'. Go to **72**.

Enough evidence gathered. Time to question local criminal fraternity. Go to **65**.

5

Remember animal hairs found on Davenport's body. Drag Gort around drug den while looking for hairs to match. No fur coats. No dogs. Nothing that matches. Doesn't look like Knot Tops were in Davenport's apartment. Still, was worth visiting them anyway. Useful lesson for the human rodents.

Time to question Gort. Go to **67**.

Nothing more to be found here. Go to **24**.

6

Remember condition of Davenport's body in morgue. Coarse dark animal hair under fingernails. Matches hair on mask in King Mob's hand. Probably wearing it when he killed her.

Go to **47**.

7

Group of older men in shabby suits sitting in booth. Haven't said anything yet. Keeping eyes neutral, hands above table. Spotted them leaning together and uttering when Davenport's name mentioned. Similar age to victim. Stand over them.

"Paula Davenport. 61. Owns nightclub. Murdered in home."

"Yeah," one man replies in level voice, not making eye contact, "We heard. Tough way to go out. She was something back in the day. Real fancy and a helluva looker."

Stare down at him. His hand trembles. Encourage him to continue.

"Well, uh, Paula, I heard she used to hang out with some mobster, way back. During the War, I mean, before he got put away. She went by some other monicker back then. What was it... Cherry, Sheena...? Sheela, that was it. Sheela. With two Es."

Man swears he cannot remember name of mobster. Believe him.

Record clue **FLOWERS**.

Leave Happy Harry's. Talk to fence. See what he knows about Davenport thefts. Go to **63**.

8

Take inventory of valuable items are still in the apartment. New television. Large music system. Original artwork on walls. If this was a robbery, thieves-turned-killers didn't steal much.

Voice outside apartment door. Nervous, shouting. Neighbor?
"Wh-whoever's in there, I'm c-calling the police!"
Must have heard me searching. Spent too long here. Time to go.
Add 1 **HEAT**.
Leave apartment. Go to **4**.

9
Dodge behind sturdy wooden desk to avoid King Mob's charge. He plows into vines. Turns to face me again. Keep desk between us.
King Mob brings up both fists over his head. Then slams them down onto desk top. Surface cracks like a shell. Splinters wood embedded in his forearms like quills. Doesn't notice the pain.
Bought myself a few seconds.
Go to **31**.

10
Gort slumped on floor of drug den. Conscious. But no more trouble from him. Derf and other thugs have crawled away. Get them some other time.
If you have recorded clue **JACOBI**... Go to **5**.
If you do not have clue **JACOBI**... Go to **67**.

11
Drop and roll, grabbing fistfuls of thick rug, and yank hard. Kirby tips backward and shotgun goes off. Blasts hole in ceiling. Impact sets light swaying madly. Kirby hits the floor but starts to get to feet.
Add 1 **HEAT**.
Grab briefcase off television and hurl it at him. Wristwatches spill out and scatter across the floor, but case catches Kirby in the face. Blood streams down from cut above eye. Move over and stamp on Kirby's wrist. He drops shotgun.
Disarmed and helpless. Kirby stops resisting.
Still need answers from Kirby. Go to **58**.

12
Trapdoor opens up into open space. Dusty. Quiet. Lit by dim electric bulb. Must be a hidden floor between dance club and roof.
Fingerprint on trapdoor. Large. Dirty. Recent.
Tattered old ropes of greenery draped everywhere. Stitched with dusty fabric leaves and flowers. Artificial ivy or vines. Like from a stage play. Fake foliage obscures line of sight. Like a forgotten jungle movie set up here.
Move through the jungle. Treading carefully. Old desks. Low tables. Leather armchairs. Secret clubhouse for original owners?
Go to **35**.

13
Stand in middle of dance floor and look around once more.
Search is taking too long. Risky.
If your **HEAT** is 4 or greater, go to **29**. If not, read on.
Go to **33**.

14
Search nearby alleys for vagrant matching fence's description. Side streets and alleys overflowing garbage. Dumpsters vomiting detritus. Rats everywhere. The stink of rotting food and improvised urinals.
An old gas automobile lies abandoned in the shadows. Wheels missing. Relic of America's failing auto industry. Rendered extinct by Adrian Veidt's electric cars. Like Detroit dinosaurs.
Movement from back seat. Slip around behind for closer look. A man inside. Unshaven. Clothing soiled. Bottle of liquor in one hand. Tattered comic books litter footwell. *Tales of the Black Freighter. Buccaneer Love. Strange Tides.*
Move round to side door. Glass broken. Squat down so face is level with vagrant's inside.
"Hello Gino."
Gino's eyes track round to look at me. Followed by rest of head. Arms fly up reflexively. Sputters something unintelligible. Scrambles out far side of car. Bottle still clutched in hand. Gino wades through ankle-deep trash. Staggered down alley. Half falling, half running. Like broken clockwork toy. Gibbering.
"You, you ain't got no face! No face!"
Better catch him and ask questions. Go to **41**.

15
Sweep stacked KT-28 bottles into air. Pills and plastic containers rain down and scatter across floor. Gort and others bring up arms instinctively. Move in to closest Knot Top and drive fist into face. Septum shatters. Man screams and drops knife. Pivot to kick next one in groin. Collapses onto floor, retching.
Chain wraps around arm. A lucky swing. Derf laughs. Pulled off-balance. Gort charges in like bull. Baseball bat in hand. Duck to avoid clumsy attack and deliver uppercut to Gort's jaw. High on drug, he barely registers the broken teeth. Chain pulls me back. I slip on vomit from retching thug. Go down hard. Gort raises bat high and brings it down. Feel and hear my forearm crack with the impact.
Others close in. Bats, chains and knives. Can't hold them all off for long.

THE CASE ENDS HERE

16
Front page reads:
APE KILLER DEAD!
A suspect in the murder of Paula Davenport was found dead by police last night. Sources identify the suspect as Jerry

Kaiser, 64. A notorious masked criminal in the 1940s known as King Mob, Kaiser was recently released from a decades-long sentence for armed robbery.

If your **HEAT** is 4 or greater, go to **77**. If not, read on.

Go to **82**.

17

King Mob breathing rapidly now. Powerful chest rising and falling visibly. Massive amount of KT-28 taking effect. Impressive he's even still standing given drug's side-effects.

"Now you're out. What's the plan? Scale Empire State Building?"

Gesture at bronze replica of building on desk. King Mob snorts.

"I'm getting back in the game, wise guy! Gonna show these young punks how to run this city. Remind everyone who the King of the Jungle is!"

He pulls on ape mask. Decaying grey rubber and black hair. Bloodshot eyes now hidden behind yellow lenses. With a bellow he charges. Fast for an old man. Like maddened bull. Bull gorilla.

King Mob not like other opponents. Need to fight smart. But first avoid his charge.

Throw Gunga Diner curry at face. Go to **53**.

Dodge behind desk. Go to **9**.

18

Walk back over to bar. Happy Harry has not moved. More sweat on face now, and speaking through shirt in dark wet patches. Not so confident now. Rest of patrons quiet now too.

"Called me freak, Harry. Not nice."

"Suh. Suh. Sorry. Ror. Roschach. Oh please. Sorry."

"Answer questions now. Woman murdered. Paula Davenport. In news. Someone knows who did it."

Look at Harry. Then turn to look at patrons. All stare blankly. Ask a few of them individually. Nobody knows. Believe them.

Take different approach.

Victim had nice apartment. Maybe killer took something valuable. Who around here receives stolen goods?"

Patron at one table twitches and tries to hide it. Go over and question him further. After a while, gives up name of local fence. Carl Kirby. Runs a sex shop called Herotica.

Question patrons further for more leads? Can't take too long. Risk of police responding. Go to **7**.

Leave Happy Harry's. Talk to fence. See what he knows about Davenport thefts. Go to **63**.

19

Hold bracelet in front of Kirby's face. His eyes cross as they focus on pearls.

"Who sold you the pearls, Kirby?"

"Nobody! I mean somebody! But just a bum! Gino. He came in with them last night! I swear! They were busted so I didn't give him much!"

"Not lying to me, are you Kirby? Where can I find this Gino?"

"The back alleys just down the street. He spends most of his time drinking there! I'm not lying, man!"

Step away from Kirby and head back toward front of store.

"I'll be back if you're lying."

Done here. Go to **32**.

20

Gino's Vietnamese whiskey bottle. Still half full. Grab old copy of *Tales of the Black Freighter* from ground. Leering pirate on cover beckoning to reader. Roll it up and jam into neck of bottle. Take aim at hot dog stand. Only one chance to hit it as first wave of police charge into alley. Yelling, guns drawn.

Bullseye. Impromptu Molotov cocktail hit hot plate. Glass shatters. Whiskey immediately ignites. Turns entire hot stand into fireball. Nearest police officers caught in explosion. Uniforms and hair on fire. Screaming, thrashing on ground. Other police turn to assist.

Disable nearest officers as they turn toward fire. Drop them to ground with blows to kidneys and back of head. Then slip past and run down street unseen.

Time to get back to the Davenport investigation.

Trail leads to Gloriole dance club. Go to **43**.

21

Back on street outside morgue. Consider options.

If you have not yet checked Davenport's apartment... Worth seeing what the police missed at crime scene. Go to **79**.

If you have not yet visited the local drug den. Newspaper report suggested burglary by 'KT-28 addicts'. Go to **72**.

Enough evidence gathered. Time to question local criminal fraternity. Go to **65**.

22

Look around dance club for indications where killer might have gone.

Remember black and white picture from Davenport's apartment. 1940s. Young Davenport in nightclub or restaurant. Layout is familiar. Furnishings and décor have changed over years. But this is the same place. The Pongo Rooms. Been in Davenport's possession all these years.

Pongo Rooms photograph showed large artificial tree covered in vines. Would have stood... Right about there. Look up to ceiling. Dark but can see faint outline of a trapdoor.

Plenty of speakers, spotlights and cables on walls and ceiling. A fit individual could climb up to the trap door if they wanted.

Use grapple gun. Climb up to trap door. Go to **12**.

23

King Mob slowing down. But still strong enough to kill me with bare hands. Need to finish this.

Jungle hideout now a battleground. Splintered wood and tattered fabric everywhere. Behind me the rear wall. Covered by old movie posters. Breath of hot city air stirs the brittle yellowing paper. Over there the trapdoor above the Gloriole dance floor.

Back up to fluttering poster on wall. Go to **62**.

Move in close. Get King Mob in headlock. Go to **68**.

24

Back on street outside Knot Top den. Consider options.

If you have not yet checked Davenport's apartment... Worth seeing what the police missed at crime scene. Go to **79**.

If you have not yet visited the city morgue... Need to know cause of death. Have to see body. Go to **61**.

Enough evidence gathered. Time to question local criminal fraternity. Go to **65**.

25

Leap over beer table to reach jukebox. Patrons scatter, leaving incontinent puddles of spilled beer. Thugs spread out to approach from different sides, broken bottles outstretched.

Nothing useful to use as weapon here. Keep back to jukebox. First thug lunges. Sidestep easily and turn to add force to his charge. Drive head into jukebox. Casing shatters in explosion of glass shards. Thug gurgles wetly and flails, unable to remove head without doing further damage. Second thug closes in. Parry his attack and drive jab into gut. But third thug already here and slashes at me with broken bottle. Coat tears. Sharp sensation across ribs. Hiss in pain and hold hand against side to staunch bleeding. Second thug recovers and renews attack from other side. Can't fight one-handed. Take another hit. Legs wobble and floor comes up to meet head.

Emboldened, other patrons get up to join in beating. Losing consciousness. Stupid.

THE CASE ENDS HERE

26

Back room of sex shop. Poorly lit by single bulb in ceiling. Pornographic material outnumbered by open crates of Nostalgia perfume, air conditioning units, car radios, fur coats. All stolen. Open briefcase of wristwatches sits on top of cheap color television set. On screen, Adrian Veidt urges people to give what they can for cancer research.

Thick, stained rug covers center of room, where the fence Carl Kirby stands. About ten feet away. He is thin, one eye squinting. Pencil-thin mustache crawls over upper lip. Left leg jiggles spastically. Nervously holds a shotgun in bony hands.

"Huh. The actual real-live Rorschach! You, you get the hell out of here, right now man!"

Kirby aims shotgun at me. Not bulletproof. Can't afford to get hit.

Pick up television and use as shield. Go to **46**.

Pull rug from under Kirby's feet. Go to **11**.

27

Old photograph on table similar to one in victim's apartment. Davenport and unidentified powerfully built male in Pongo Rooms. Here. Davenport in revealing clothing. Man in well-tailored suit. Wears an ape mask, like those on movie posters. Davenport is smiling. Ape mask has fixed rubber grin. Both Davenport and man are holding guns. Photograph is inscribed *The King and Queen of the Jungle*. Man must be King Mob.

Proof that victim Davenport was involved with violent ape-masked gangster in 1940s.

If you have the clue **FLOWERS**... Go to **81**.

If you do not have clue **FLOWERS**... Go to **76**.

28

Grab magazine rack and smash display cabinet glass. Shower floor of store with shards. Move back, deeper into store and take cover by bondage equipment as first wave of police charge into store. Yelling, guns drawn. Crunch of glass under their feet. No screams.

Heavy boots. Standard issue for police assault team. Too thick for glass to penetrate. Stupid. Should have thought of that.

Swing out from cover and fling empty rubber gimp suit at first officer. Slip past and kick other one in the knee. Next two police have had time to react and close in, clubbing me with butts of guns. Shrug off first few blows. Take out one officer with jab to throat and roll to one side. But more have joined them. Surrounded now. On knees. Fists and metal rain down on my back.

Hands claw at my face. Pulling, tearing. Exposing Kovacs to the world. Composure lost.

"My face! Give me back my face!"

Handcuffed. Dragged out into street. Thrown into patrol car.

THE CASE ENDS HERE

29

Sound of elevator in foyer. Heavy boots outside club doors. Flicker of flashlights through keyholes. Look out window to street below. Patrol cars pulling up on the street. Uniformed police in body armor and heavy boots spilling out to cover building, weapons drawn.

Took too long searching nightclub. Must have triggered a hidden alarm.

A voice from the foyer. Probably senior officer leading special tactical squad.

"Rorschach, we know you're in there. You have ten seconds to come out with your hands up before we come in."

Too many of them. Need to even the odds. But can't just escape this time. Need to keep searching dance club for killer. Quickly glance around club for something useful.

Cleaner's bucket of water. Dry ice machine. Glitterball. Strobe lights. Sound system. Cleaner's mop. Bar stool. Window. Fire hose.

Must choose best means of evading police so can finish search.

Do something with strobes, sound system and mop. Go to **48**.

Do something with stool, window and hose. Go to **74**.

30

Grab nearest trash cans and load them into abandoned shopping cart. Police won't expect frontal assault. Cart now top heavy. Overflowing with trash. Get behind cart. Keep low and push, building up speed as first wave of police charge into alley. Yelling, guns drawn.

First two officers too slow to avoid impact. Go down in shower of trash. Cart collides with patrol car. Leap up onto roof of vehicle. Flashing lights illuminating me. Police everywhere. Surrounded now. Stupid.

Kick first officer in face as he grabs for me. Turn and leap down on second one. Let him take brunt of impact with street. Roll to one side and kick another in groin. But more have joined them. Surrounded now. On knees. Fists and metal rain down on my back.

Hands claw at my face. Pulling, tearing. Exposing Kovacs to the world. Composure lost.

"My face! Give me back my face!"

Handcuffed. Dragged out into street. Thrown into patrol car.

THE CASE ENDS HERE

31

King Mob already moving to attack again. But need to go on the attack. Or good as dead.

Smash desk lamp. Jagged glass and wires. Go to **3**.

Use bronze Empire State Building replica as blunt weapon. Go to **60**.

32

If your **HEAT** is 4 or greater, go to **40**. If not, read on.

Kirby said Gino had Davenport's pearls. May be killer. Need to find him. Go to **14**.

33

Eventually look up to ceiling. Dark but can see faint outline of a trapdoor.

Plenty of speakers, spotlights and cables on walls and ceiling. A fit individual could climb up to the trap door if they wanted.

Use grapple gun. Climb up to trap door. Go to **12**.

34

Drop down onto living room carpet and look across floor for anything standing out.

Small round object under couch, size of a pea. Reach under and hold it up to light from street. Single loose pink pearl.

Perhaps from a necklace or bracelet. Must have been missed by police. Sloppy. Evidence of robbery gone bad?

Record clue **GENOVESE**.

Continue to search apartment. Go to **8**.

Leave apartment. Go to **4**.

35

Partition walls decked with peeling movie posters. *Congo Joe Returns*. *Queen of the Gorillas*. *Bombaa!* In every poster lurid artwork depicts menacing apes. Stuntmen in cheap gorilla suits no doubt.

Framed newspapers. All dated 1940s. Every one describes crimes committed by gangster called King Mob. Mostly armed robbery. Banks. Business payrolls. Sometimes other gangs. Frequently violent. Bloody.

Remember the name King Mob. Masked criminal from glory days of the Minute Men. Had a gimmick. Dressed as big game hunter? No, not that. Recall recent newspaper report. Break-in at Dorchester Building. Minute Men's old headquarters. Connected to Davenport murder?

So. Not a secret clubhouse. Hideout. Criminal hideout. This was where King Mob's gang operated from.

Notice a large framed photograph on table by armchair. Black and white. 1940s.

If you have clue **BUTTERFLY...** Go to **27**.

If you do not have clue **BUTTERFLY...** Go to **38**.

36

Squat down to examine victim's body more closely. Lingering scent of perfume on skin, mixed with disinfectant. The bouquet of the dead.

Play flashlight over hands. Something about the fingernails. Painted red, well-manicured, but... Under the nails, hairs. Short, dark, coarse. Not human. Animal?

Record clue **JACOBI**.

Door opens behind me. Light from corridor spears the darkness.

"...play a song for – Hey! What're you – Oh shit!"

Attendant. Stupid. Took too long with body. Push man aside and rush down corridor. Out loading bay entrance toward street. Think he saw face. Unfortunate.

Add 1 **HEAT**.

Leave morgue. Go to **21**.

37

Sidestep and reach for spray cans. One in each hand. Unleash blinding jet of paint at Derf and other thugs. They scream and splutter, blinded. Move in quickly to disarm them. Break fingers and arms as weapons clatter to floor.

Gort remains on feet. One protective arm shielding face. Arm now dripping red and yellow. He bellows and swings a baseball bat. Easy to duck beneath. Then step in and drive up, headbutting him in face. He steps back, high on drug, barely registering the damage. I pick up discarded chain.

Whip it around Gort's ankles. Yank hard. Gort falls hard, driving air and fight out of him.

Ask Gort questions about Davenport murder. Go to **10**.

38

Old photograph on table shows two people in nightclub or restaurant. Young woman in revealing clothing. Could be Paula Davenport in youth. Standing by her side is a large man. Powerfully built. Well-tailored suit. Wears an ape mask, like those on movie posters. Woman is smiling. Ape mask has fixed rubber grin. Both Davenport and man are holding guns. Photograph is inscribed *The King and Queen of the Jungle*. Man must be King Mob.

If this was Davenport, suggests she was involved with violent ape-masked gangster in 1940s.

If you have the clue **FLOWERS**... Go to **81**.

If you do not have clue **FLOWERS**... Go to **76**.

39

Weave past other patrons to reach pool table. Players stand to one side, cigarettes dangling flaccidly from lips. Thugs spread out to approach from different sides.

Grab ball from table. Six ounces of smooth, hard resin. Throw at one thug. Hits in face. Nose shatters. Blood everywhere. Thug staggers back screaming and holding ruin of face. Other two thugs move in from either side, broken bottles outstretched. Roll over table and snatch pool cue from player. Drive it straight into second thug's solar plexus. Thug doubles over and starts retching over himself.

Third thug hesitates. Give him look. Thugs back off like whipped dog.

Someone runs out the front door, yelling about the police.

Add 1 **HEAT**.

Still want answers from Happy Harry. Go to **18**.

40

Screech of sirens. Spasmodic flash of lights outside. Patrol cars pulling up on the street. Uniformed police in body armor and heavy boots spilling out to cover the store front, weapons drawn.

Took too long with Kirby. Someone must have raised alarm.

A detective takes cover behind patrol car. Brings loudhailer up to speak.

"Rorschach, we know you're in there. You have ten seconds to come out with your hands up before we come in."

Too many of them. Need to even the odds and get away somehow. Quickly glance around store for something useful. Racks of pornographic magazine and films. Display cabinets of sex toys behind glass. Life-size inflated Rawshark sex doll. Fire extinguisher by counter.

Must choose best means of escape.

Smash glass cabinets. Cover floor in shards. Slow police down. Go to **28**.

Position Rawshark doll at counter. Distract police with dummy. Go to **80**.

41

Catch him easily enough. One hand on collar of filthy coat. Spin him around. Pluck bottle from hand. Cheap Vietnamese whiskey. Recent price sticker. Probably bought it with money from fence. Gino puts hands up over face. Blubbers.

"Please, Mister Faceless, don't hurt me! I ain't done nothin'!"

"You handled stolen good goods Gino. Pearl bracelet from murder of old woman. That's a criminal offence. Don't think you'd like it in jail."

Gino splutters, eyes wide. Stink of cheap whiskey assails nostrils.

"Oh please, don't send me to jail! I didn't hurt no old lady, mister! I just found them, is all."

"Where?"

"Just a couple of alleys away. I was resting my eyes in a corner when someone ran past. Threw the pearls behind them like they weren't interested. I just went over and picked them. That's all!"

"Person who threw pearls away. Where did they go?"

"Uh, across the street, to a tall building. The one with the dance club. Y'know, s'got a funny name. Gloria's? Gloriette?"

Gloriole. Dance club owned by Paula Davenport. Interesting. Killer passed this way, discarded pearls and went to victim's place of business. Pearls not important to them. Smokescreen to disguise deliberate murder as robbery gone wrong?

Question Gino further? Get description of killer. Go to **71**.

Nothing more to be found here. Go to **78**.

42

Discarded takeout cartons litter floor. Stamped with Gunga Diner logo. Pick carton up and examine. Still hot. Half full. Others no more than a few days old. Wipe finger around inside and taste. Not bad. Finish off contents of several cartons.

Examine desk. Old-fashioned green desk lamp. Dusty eighteen-inch bronze replica of Empire State Building. Twisted scraps of tinfoil and white pills. KT-28. Also known as 'Katie'. Illegal. Dangerous. Ingestion of drug increases aggression and is extremely addictive.

Framed newspaper on floor. Glass smashed. Pick paper out of shards and examine. Another old edition from 1940s. Details apprehension of notorious King Mob by Minute Men. Photograph of Hooded Justice and Dollar Bill marching captive up steps of police station. King Mob dressed in well-tailored suit. Unmasked. Grimacing. To one side, Captain Metropolis holds ape mask up as trophy. Article names criminal as Jerome 'Jerry' Kaiser. No mention of Davenport.

Killer has been hiding up here. Venturing out for food and drugs. Also paid Paula Davenport a visit.

Vines on far side part. Something lurches from shadows.

Go to **73**.

43

Dance club occupies top floor of building not far from Davenport's apartment. Unlit neon sign outside says GLORIOLE in cursive script. Can't be coincidence that killer fled to this building.

Simple enough to slip inside. Take elevator to top floor. Sign in foyer says club is closed due to recent tragedy. But door locks easily opened.

Inside all is quiet now. Dark. Obvious that club occupies entire floor of the building. Dance floor with sound system, glitterball on ceiling. Bar. Storage. Cleaning materials. Restrooms. Small office. All empty and undisturbed. Floor to ceiling windows look out over the city.

Décor glitters with images of oiled men and women. Golden haloes. Gyrating bodies frozen in mid-thrust. Lingering aroma of sweating bodies and aftershave in still air. Probably a haunt for casual homosexual encounters. Where the city's inverted come to grind and paw each other to the beat of insistent throbbing music.

If Davenport's killer came here, where could they have gone?

If you have clue **BUTTERFLY**... Go to **22**.

If you do not have clue **BUTTERFLY**... Go to **2**.

44

Slowly step to one side. Put sturdy desk between us.

King Mob start ranting. Must keep him talking while considering options.

"This is my place! Not yours! Not hers!"

"Who? Davenport?"

"Sheela... Paula... whatever she called herself! I thought it was her and me forever. But she ratted me out! Left me to rot in jail for forty years! Took my club! Turned it into this fairy paradise!"

King Mob vaguely gestures to his feet. Indicates Gloriole club downstairs.

"When I got out, she wouldn't give it back! Wouldn't give me what's mine!"

Frothing at mouth now. His eyes are bloodshot. Has actually bitten through lip. But hasn't noticed. KT-28 is dulling his pain receptors. Need to remember that.

"Got what back? Club?"

"That... and this! My old face!"

Holds something up triumphantly. Something made of decaying grey rubber. Shedding short dark hair. An ape mask.

If you have clue **JACOBI**... Go to **6**.

If you do not have clue **JACOBI**... Go to **47**.

45

Screech of sirens. Spasmodic flash of lights outside. Patrol cars pulling up on the street. Uniformed police in body armor and heavy boots spilling out to cover mouth of alley, weapons drawn.

Took too long with Gino. Hot dog vendor must have raised alarm.

A detective takes cover behind patrol car. Brings loudhailer up to speak.

"Rorschach, we know you're in there. You have ten seconds to come out with your hands up before we come in."

Too many of them. Need to even the odds and get away somehow. Quickly glance around alley for something useful. Streetlight. Discarded brick. Dumpster. Fire escape overhead. Shopping cart. Trash cans. Old comic book. Whiskey bottle. Hot dog stand.

Must choose best means of escape.

Load shopping cart with trash. Then propel it toward police. Go to **30**.

Do something with comic book, whiskey bottle and hot dog stand. Go to **20**.

46

Twist and pick up color television to use as shield from shotgun. Big, heavy. Enough?

Deafening roar as Kirby pulls trigger. Blast tears through screen cabinet, turning it into shrapnel. Stagger back as chest and face takes brunt of the impact. Face shredded. Blood. Can't see. Ignore pain.

Duck down and sweep out with leg. But Kirby not where I thought. Where?

"Stupid, masked man! Stupid!"

Voice from behind me now. Kirby pulls trigger again.

THE CASE ENDS HERE**47**

Break-in at Dorchester Building make sense now. Minute Men kept trophies from their cases. Items seized from costumed criminals. Weapons. Devices. Masks. King Mob, recently out of jail. Obsessed with his old mask.

"So you broke in to Minute Men's headquarters. Desecrated headquarters of American heroes."

"Heroes? Those creeps weren't no better than me! Fruits, freaks and frails, all of 'em. Hooded Justice was the only real man among them!"

Continue to slowly edge around. King Mob's head tracks my movement.

Keep circling round. King Mob swipes big hand across desk. Sweeps up handful of KT-28. Dry swallows. Probably picked up the habit in jail.

If you have clue **TRUMAN**... Go to **50**.

If you do not have clue **TRUMAN**... Go to **17**.

48

Move to disc jockey's booth. Switch on turntables. Turn volume all the way up. Pounding, high energy dance music. Activate strobe lights. Then run over to unattended cleaning materials. Grab mop as first wave of police charge into club. Yelling, guns drawn.

First two officers stop at edge of dance floor. Hands held up to shield eyes against strobes. Move in among them. Use

mop as blunt weapon. Strike then move. Strike then move. Strobe makes it hard to track me. Music too loud for officers to co-ordinate. Men down. But more moving in.

Police going to stay here until they catch me. Search impossible now.

Trip one officer over with mop. Then strike two more in head. Slip past. Reach fire exit. Into stairwell. Jam door shut behind me with mop. Leap down stairs four at a time. Police break through above me and pursue. Will be difficult to shake them.

Eventually evade police pursuit. But dance club now swarming with police. Must lie low until heat dies down. Cannot continue Davenport investigation.

THE CASE ENDS HERE

49

Remember loose pearl from Davenport's apartment. Look around back room while Kirby pleads.

Small box by car radios. String of something pink and shining hanging out. Pearls. Bracelet probably. Broken as if ripped off Davenport's wrist.

Turn back to Kirby, holding pearls. Go to **19**.

50

Remember what Gort said about KT-28 customers.

"Just some big old guy. Comes round here every few days, buys a bunch of pills."

King Mob is Knot Tops' customer. Getting drugs from them to feed his habit.

Go to **17**.

51

Across the counter, fat man with bowtie stares at me while smearing grease around a beer glass. Sweat runs down his fleshy cheek. Or maybe oil from receding hair.

"What the hell you want, freak?" he sneers at me, "Gay bar's down the street."

"Must be Harry. Want information about a murder."

Fat man snorts like a pig emerging from mudhole.

"Does this look like the public library, freak?" Harry calls over to patrons, "Hey, you guys wanna show this masked creep what we think of his kind?"

Turn around to face the room. Chairs scrape. Glass shatters. Three large men wearing stained undershirts stand up. Each holds a broken beer bottle by the neck. Other patrons look on, undecided whether to flee or join in.

"Get 'im!"

Three thugs close in. Need to finish this quickly. Remember to use surroundings to best advantage in fight.

Move to pool table by front of bar and make stand there. Go to **39**.

Move to jukebox opposite and make stand there. Go to **25**.

52

One last question for Gore. Instruct him to spit out the pills. Rolls to his side on couch. White tablets clatter onto the floor like teeth.

"Lot of KT-28 here. More than enough for you and rest of gang. Must be dealing the surplus. Who to?"

Gort spits and pants. Saliva running down cheek and pooling on filthy couch. Slow to answer. Might be getting ideas about not co-operating. Up-end couch loudly and tip Gort onto floor. Bring Gort's arm up painfully behind him. Gort screams.

Add **1 HEAT**.

"Okay! Okay! Whatever you want. Just don't, don't, not any more!"

"Other KT-28 users in the neighborhood. Names."

"There's nobody else, I swear! It's just us, and that other guy a few times!"

"Other guy. Name. Description."

"I dunno his name! Just some big old guy. Comes round here every few days, buys a bunch of pills, and goes again."

Gort unable to offer much more in way of description. Big old man buying KT-28 from Knot Tops. Another dealer? Or addict? Possible suspect?

Record clue **TRUMAN**.

Leave Gort whimpering in room. Move to stairwell leading down to tattoo parlor.

Done here. Go to **24**.

53

Sidestep King Mob's charge. He plows into vines. Turns to face me again. Grab half eaten carton of curry. Fling contents of curry at his head. Hot spicy contents splash against mask. Brown fecal gobbets slide down rubber features.

Hoped to blind King Mob. But mask's built-in lenses protect his eyes. Like Dreiberg's Nite Owl mask. Stupid. Should have thought of that.

Maddened ape man wraps arms around me. Feels like industrial press. No way out. Feel spine beginning to grind...

THE CASE ENDS HERE

54

Go back to sideboard and look at photographs.

Black and white picture from 1940s shows a young Davenport in revealing clothing in nightclub or restaurant. Victim has arms around a powerfully built young man in a sharp suit. Boyfriend, husband? Perhaps Davenport was high-end prostitute and man was a client. In background there is a large tree covered in vines, all obviously artificial, like on old film set. Sign on wall says *Pongo Rooms*. Nightclub then?

Record clue **BUTTERFLY**.

Continue to search apartment. Go to **34**.

Leave apartment. Go to **4**.

55

Cold storage. Dark, cool. Scent of disinfectant masking decay. Footsteps echo slightly off tiled surfaces. Use flashlight to search ceiling-to-floor wall of steel lockers opposite door. Find Davenport's name and pull drawer out.

Body of woman in her sixties. Average height. Slender and well-toned for her age. Hair dyed auburn but grey roots showing. Traces of makeup still smeared on lips and eyelids. Vain, denying age.

Head lolls to one side, more than is natural. Lift corpse's head and test for movement. Loose. Grinding sound as disjointed vertebrae move under my gloves. Neck broken. Bruise marks on either temple suggest head was held tightly, then twisted violently to one side. Death probably instant.

Not accident. Deliberate. Murder. Condition of body suggests killer possesses great strength.

Record clue **ROCHE**.

Examine body further? Can't take too long. Risk of attendant returning. Go to **36**.

Leave morgue. Go to **21**.

56

Say nothing. King Mob pleads some more. Fingers begin to slip from sign.

Grapple gun embeds nicely in his hand. Pins him to sign. Should hold him there long enough for police to arrest him. If not, long way down.

Done here. Davenport case closed. Go to **69**.

57

Large room at end of corridor. Music loudest here. Sounds of people chattering, braying with animal abandon. Step into room. Room is littered with the detritus of squalid lives. Aerosol spray cans. Discarded KT-28 pill bottles. Overlarge stereo system. Bottles of beer.

Four Knot Tops inside. One man, tall and pockmarked, lies on filthy couch. A smaller man applies a tattoo needle to Pockmark's bicep. A half-formed swastika. Two others in room. One is decanting pill bottles of KT-28 into tinfoil wraps. The other is over by large stereo system, head banging up and down to the clashing guitars and pounding drums.

Pockmark sees me first. Turns to address headbanger.

"Hey Derf, what the hell is this guy supposed to be? Some kind of early Halloween fruit?"

"Gort, don't you recognize him?" replies headbanger – Derf, "That's Rorschach, Gort! That's freaking Rorschach!"

Pockmark – Gort – brushes tattooist away and rolls to feet. Face breaking into wide, brown-toothed grin. Pupils dilated. Breathing fast. Clearly high on KT-28.

"Oh, yeah, the superfag. You got some nerve coming here, superfag," Gort turn to Derf and others, who produce bats, knives and chains. "Let's beat the shit out of him."

Four opponents. All armed. Some or all on Katie. Will be overwhelmed if not careful. Need to act swift but smart.

Get artistic with spray can. Go to **37**.

Scatter pill bottles. Go to **15**.

58

Drag Kirby across floor until he is cowering against an air conditioning unit. White strands of saliva lazily swing from his bottom lip.

"You receive stolen goods from criminals. Get anything from the Davenport murder last night?"

"Murder? Hey listen man, I don't know anything about no murder!"

If you have clue **GENOVESE**... Go to **49**.

If you do not have clue **GENOVESE**... Go to **75**.

59

Front page reads:

APE KILLER CAPTURED!

A suspect in the murder of Paula Davenport was brought in by police last night. Sources identify the suspect as Jerry Kaiser, 64. A notorious masked criminal in the 1940s known as King Mob, Kaiser was recently released from a decades-long sentence for armed robbery.

If your **HEAT** is 4 or greater, go to **77**. If not, read on.

Go to **82**.

60

Leap sideways. Snatch up bronze replica as King Mob moves in. Barely avoid oversized fist. Reduces partition to splinters. Wrap both hands around replica. Bring it down onto King Mob's head with every ounce of strength.

Sensation like striking baseball bat against oak tree. Arms vibrate with impact. Drop replica from numb fingers. But King Mob staggers. Goes down to one knee. Bloody gash in mask. Hair and rubber glisten redly.

King Mob panting heavily now. He is wounded.

Go to **23**.

61

Upper Manhattan Morgue. Early 20th century brick building. Has seen better days. Sign above main entrance illuminated by dull yellow light, flecked by pigeon droppings. Scuffed vehicle ramp to one side leads down into darkness. Duck back into shadows as headlights appear from ramp. Ambulance emerges, unladen, and drives down the street. It's late, but the morgue never closes. Death the only constant.

Move down ramp to underground loading bay. Deserted. Double doors to morgue wide enough for gurneys and coffins. Easily opened. Inside, white walls and ceiling are tobacco-stained yellow. Floor blackened and gouged from decades of the dead being rolled in for one last indignity.

Ignore stairs leading up to offices. Need to find body. Sign ahead indicates cold storage for cadavers.

A sound. Footsteps, a voice. Male, singing tunelessly.

"I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to..."

Quickly slip into maintenance closet as sound approaches, then passes by. Open door a crack. An attendant disappears down the corridor and out of sight. Place is not deserted. Have to be careful.

Go to **55**.

62

Acting on hunch. Back up to poster on wall. This close can feel breeze on neck.

Need to dodge at last split second.

King Mob charges. Covering ground between us in three big strides.

Drop down onto floor. Kick out and up with feet. Let King Mob's momentum carry him over. Hits poster like runaway train. Splintering wood. King Mob disappears through boarded up window concealed by poster.

Get back on feet. Large hole in wall now. City's breath caresses my face. Peer out and down.

King Mob hanging from neon Gloriole sign by one hand. Mask half torn off. Blood and spittle whipped away by the wind. The city street far below.

"Hunh. Quite a drop."

King Mob looks up. Fresh air has sobered him up.

"SAVE ME!"

Show mercy. Go to **56**.

Choose justice. Go to **66**.

63

West 42nd Street. Near Times Square. Herotica sex shop squats between a strip club and a \$5 hotel. Yellowing posters for pornographic films cover the wire-reinforced display windows. Cartoon version of original Silk Spectre winks neon promises, her face and rear both impossibly facing toward prospective customers on the filthy sidewalk.

Push open door and enter.

Racks packed with curling pornographic magazines and films starring actors billed as Dr Manhardon and the Cumedian. Sex toys squat in glass-fronted display cabinets. Bondage equipment hanging from hooks like cast-off skins, stinking of rubber and lubricant. To one side, life-size Silk Spanker and Rawshark inflatable sex dolls loll against the wall like obscene, orgiastic drunks.

Past the merchandise of filth, a bespectacled hippie leans against the counter. Dull eyes behind thick lenses, slack mouth as he paws an issue of *Hooded Justits*. On cover, large-breasted woman, naked apart from dark sack on head. Hippie does not look up.

"Hey, take your time man, we're open all night."

"Looking for Carl Kirby. You?"

Hippie looks up. Lets out strangled noise like small animal. Drops magazine and flees out front door.

Voice from back room, behind counter.

"What's that you said, Marvin? I told you not to bother me while I'm stock-taking."

Must be Kirby back there. Have lost element of surprise. Can't be helped.

Go to **26**.

64

Remember what Gino said about 'monkey man'. Obviously delusions of alcoholic mind. But still... ape creatures...

Look up to ceiling. Dark but can see faint outline of a trapdoor.

Plenty of speakers, spotlights and cables on walls and ceiling. A fit individual could climb up to the trap door if they wanted. So could an ape creature.

Use grapple gun. Climb up to trap door. Go to **12**.

65

Happy Harry's Bar & Grill. A gathering place for the city's lowest order of criminal vermin. Open door and enter. Air reeks of cigarettes, spilled beer and unwashed bodies. Place is busy tonight. Pimps, prostitutes and street thugs cluster around tables like human rats gnawing at the city underbelly. Others play pool or throw darts at board. They all glare up at me with their animal eyes.

Music blares from jukebox opposite the bar. The insistent wailings of a drug addict who choked to death on his own vomit.

Well, uh, outside in the cold distance

A wildcat did growl...

Start with bartender. Go to **51**.

66

"No."

King Mob pleads some more. Fingers begin to slip from sign. One finger. Two. Three.

Body hits street. Watch for a while.

Done here. Davenport case closed. Go to **69**.

67

Time to question Gort. Haul him back up onto filthy couch. Dust and worse plume out of couch like a leprous cough. Grab handfuls of KT-28 pills from floor. Put knee on Gort's chest. Proceed to fill his mouth with pills. He struggles a little. I remind him not to.

"Not sure how many pills in there," indicating Gort's overflowing mouth, "Twenty? Thirty? Enough for an overdose. They say the heart tears itself in half. Messy, painful. Wonder how long you can last before swallow reflex kicks in."

Gort's eyes roll. Small gagging noises from throat.

"Davenport murder. In the papers. Old woman. Was it you?"

No response. Push a few pills into his mouth. Gort's esophagus spasms.

"Asking again. Was it you? Or other members of your gang?"
Urgent grunting noises of denial. Head shakes slowly, carefully, from side to side. Believe him. Knot Tops not responsible for murder.

Question Gort further? Go to **52**.

Nothing more to be found here. Go to **24**.

68

King Mob tired now. Wounded. No need to get fancy. Do last thing he expects. Step inside his reach. Then leap up. Wrap legs round chest. Arms round head. Twist.

Ape Mask tears in half. King Mob sprays my face with blood and spittle. Teeth gnashing. Too strong. Draws his head back. Then butts me in face. Like wrecking ball. Pain. Lights. Impact.

On the floor now. Look up. King Mob above me. One foot raised. Brings it down...

THE CASE ENDS HERE

69

Rorschach's Journal. August 6th 1983.

Saturday. Woke at 4:51pm. Couple arguing upstairs. Fly buzzes lazily in heat. Alley outside stinks less. Garbage men must have been.

Dressed. Left. At W 40th and 7th, collected today's newspapers. Newsvendor made joke about me needing an alarm clock. Still not funny. Not everyone a comedian.

Scan New York Gazette front page.

If you brought in King Mob alive... Go to **59**.

If King Mob died during your struggle... Go to **16**.

70

Remember condition of Davenport's body in morgue. Neck broken. Bruise marks on either temple suggest head was held tightly, then twisted violently to one side. Killer possesses great strength.

King Mob old, but big. And on KT-28. Need to be careful. Can't let him land a punch. Or get into a wrestling match. Or good as dead.

Go to **44**.

71

"Describe person who dropped pearls, Gino."

Gino looks reluctant.

"Uh, you, you wouldn't believe me, mister."

Hold up whiskey bottle and start dribbling it down drain clogged with fat and prophylactics. Gino lets out involuntarily wail.

Add 1 **HEAT**.

"Oh god, alright! Alright! But you won't believe me! It was a monkey man! Swear to God! A big hairy monkey man!"

Gino continues to swear he is telling truth. Believe him. Or at least, believe he thinks he saw some sort of ape. Whatever that means to his liquor-rotted brain.

Record clue **GRICE**.

Nothing more to be found here. Go to **78**.

72

Standing outside Inkubus tattoo parlor in run-down neighborhood. Once decent, hard-working families lived here. Children playing in street. Front doors left open. Different now. Half the stores are boarded up, or long since broken into and looted. Remaining stores have shutters and bars across windows, graffiti daubed across like a drunken whore's make-up.

Tattoo parlor is notorious den of vice for those who consume and deal in drugs. Most popular narcotic is KT-28, also known as 'Katie'. Ingestion of drug increases aggression and is extremely addictive. Feral street youths known as Knot Tops cluster in packs to take drug and commit acts of random mindless violence, rendering entire neighborhoods no-go areas.

Enter parlor quietly and take stairs up to second floor. Inside, walls are smeared in years of overlapping graffiti. Lurid, childlike, garish ejaculations. Air is thick with the sweet, pungent, urinal smell of drugs. Simian howling masquerading as music blaring from somewhere. Not real music. Not Benny Goodman, Glen Miller. Decent music from decent men. All gone now.

At top of stairs, stained mattress spread across the floor. Next to it a large refrigerator, door carelessly hanging open. Beers and soda pops inside. Open carton of Sweet Chariot sugar cubes sitting on top of fridge. Help myself to a handful to keep energy up. Move carefully from room to room, looking for human rodents.

Go to **57**.

73

Lurching figure is dressed in old but well-tailored suit. Same one as in photograph. Now soiled and stained with fluids. An old man, but big, well over six feet tall. Wide shoulders. Big hands. Grey thinning hair. Lined face. Older version of Jerry Kaiser from newspaper. King Mob. Out of jail after all these years.

Pupils dilated. Breathing fast. Clearly high on KT-28.

"The hell you doing in my place?"

If you have clue **ROCHE**... Go to **70**.

If you do not have clue **ROCHE**... Go to **44**.

74

Can't win fight against this many officers. But can't run either. Need to finish searching club for killer. Think.

Grab heavy bar stool and rush over to floor to ceiling window. Hurl it at glass. Window shatters loudly. Hot breath of the city in sighs in. Unravel fire hose from wall. Throw end

of hose out window. Then take cover behind bar as first wave of police charge into club. Yelling, guns drawn.

Officers spread out into club. But broken window and dangling hose obvious. Draws their attention. Police cluster round window, guns drawn.

Plainclothes detective joins them. Peers out into the abyss and gazes down.

"Crazy bastard must've rappelled down the side to a lower floor. Shit. He's probably halfway to the street by now. Come on, let's move!"

Detective and other officers turn and rush out the club to the elevator. Jostling and pushing to rejoin the chase. Wait until last officer has left club. Then emerge from place of concealment.

Time to get back to the Davenport investigation.

Go to **33**.

75

Grab Kirby's finger and pull up. Kirby howls.

Add 1 **HEAT**.

"Asking once more. Paula Davenport. Old woman, well off. What did you get?"

"Come on man! Please! Please..."

Under pressure, Kirby's eyes stray to one side. Small box by car radios. String of something pink and shining hanging out. Pearls. Bracelet probably. Broken as if ripped off Davenport's wrist.

Turn back to Kirby, holding pearls. Go to **19**.

76

Move carefully past fake vines and old furniture into heart of jungle clubhouse. Consider case so far.

Concealed criminal hideout above dance club. Used by violent gangster King Mob and associates in 1940s. Club owned by Davenport. Davenport murdered in own home. Davenport opened door to killer. Maybe knew them. Killer using hideout.

Hideout has remained hidden all these years. Police must never have found it. Davenport knew about it though. Sealed it off from Gloriole downstairs. Kept it safe. Mementoes untouched. Emotional attachment?

A strong smell from behind thick wall of vines. Spicy. Pungent.

Draw back vines. Small dark area shielded from rest of hideout. Sturdy wooden desk. Large mound of old drapes and fake foliage. A makeshift bed. Or very large nest.

Go to **42**.

77

Front page continues:

RORSCHACH INVOLVED! VIGILANTE REMAINS AT LARGE!

Must lie low until heat dies down. Unfortunate. My work will have to wait.

THE CASE ENDS HERE

JOURNEY PLANET 77

78

Leave Gino and move to mouth of alley. Hot dog stand under streetlight nearby. Unattended meat charring on the hot plate. Should grab some hot dogs to keep strength up.

If your **HEAT** is 4 or greater, go to **45**. If not, read on.

Trail leads to Gloriole dance club. Go to **43**.

79

Paula Davenport's apartment, Upper West Side. Quiet neighborhood. Decent. Not sort of place for random break-ins. Dark, no passersby. Climb up to apartment window on third floor using grapple gun. Slip in through window and look around inside.

Apartment is big. Well furnished. Davenport not short of money. Dance club business must pay well.

Traces of police tape in middle of living room floor shows where body was found. No blood on carpet.

Search from room to room. Not a lot of damage. If burglars, they knew what they were looking for. Apartment door undamaged, not forced. Victim must have let her attacker in. Were they known to her?

Photographs on sideboard. Mostly of Davenport over the years. Striking woman when younger. Recent color picture shows victim as older woman standing outside club Gloriole.

Search apartment for clues? Can't take too long. Risk neighbors hearing something and alerting police.

Continue to search apartment. Go to **54**.

Leave apartment. Go to **4**.

80

Grab Rawshark sex doll and position it behind magazine rack at rear of store. At a distance, obscured by rack, it makes an obvious and tempting target. Crouch to one side, behind slowly deflating Silk Spanker doll, a look of permanent outrage and surprise on its face, as first wave of police charge into store. Yelling, guns drawn. They see the Rawshark doll.

"On the ground!" "Hands up!"

Doll does not respond. More police close in. Become more agitated. Demand doll surrenders.

Magazine rack shifts, and doll slumps to one side. Police open fire. Deafening firecracker volley. Rawshark leaps and contorts, punctured a dozen times in seconds. Thrashing in its plastic death throes.

While officers move in to secure body of Rawshark, slip past and out front door. Run down street unseen. Good chance police will dismiss entire incident as prank. Someone with sick sense of humor using sex toy to waste police time.

Time to get back to the Davenport investigation.

Kirby said Gino had Davenport's pearls. May be killer. Need to find him. Go to **14**.

JOURNEY
PLANET



JOURNEY PLANET



#77: WATCHMEN



CLARK · AFTER GIBBONS

81

Remember what old man in Happy Harry's said about Paula Davenport.

"She used to hang out with some mobster... before he got put away... she went by some other monicker... Sheela. With two Es."

Confirmation that victim was formerly known as Sheela. Associate of criminal King Mob. Murder no accident. Past catching up to her?

Go to 76.

82

Front page continues:

NYPD APEMAN OPERATION: NO COMMENT

No mention of my involvement. Good. Work can continue uninterrupted.

THE CASE ENDS HERE



Art by Michael Carroll