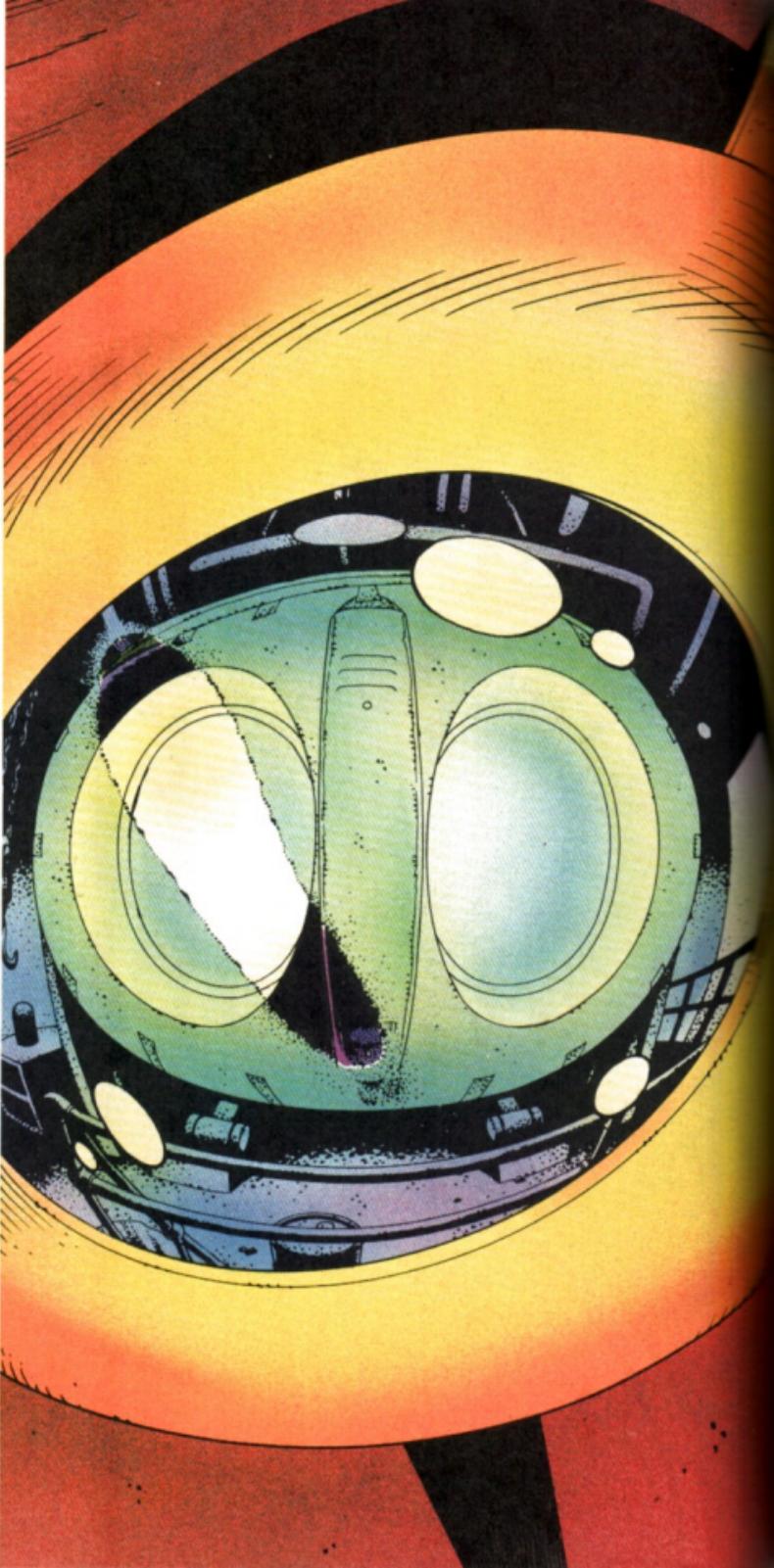
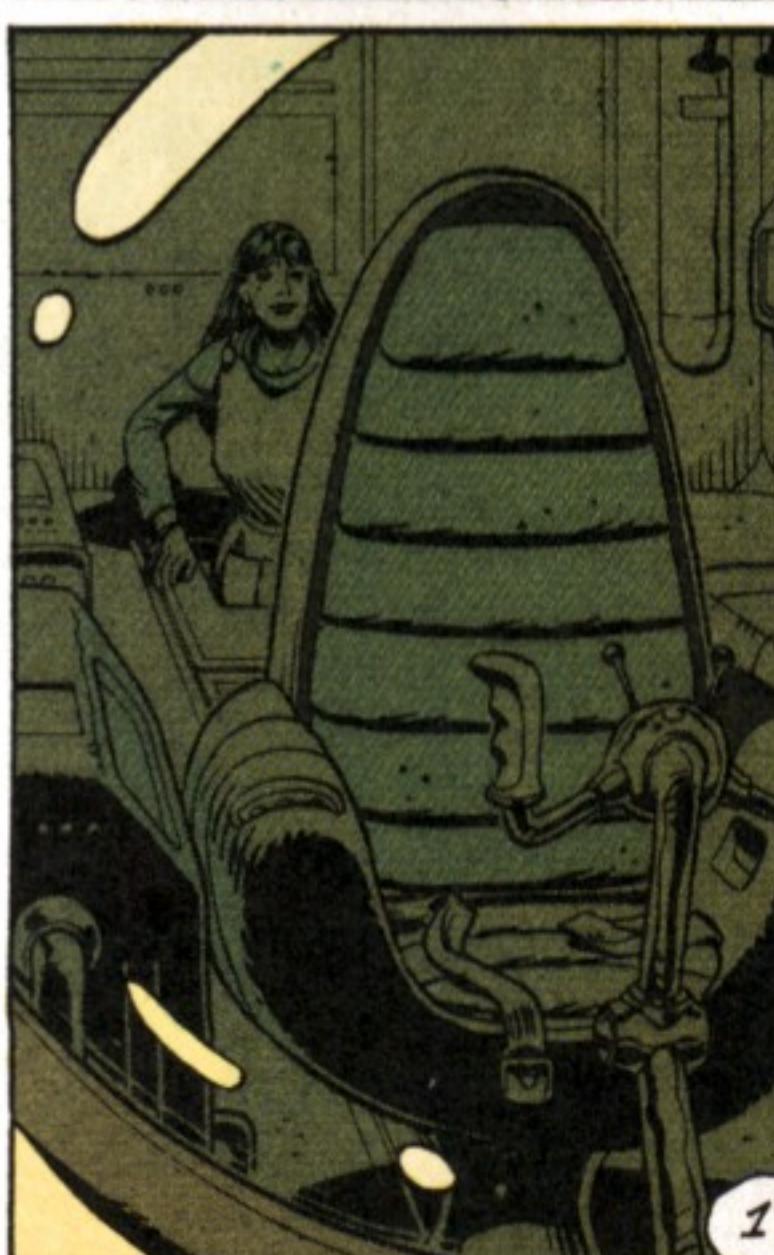
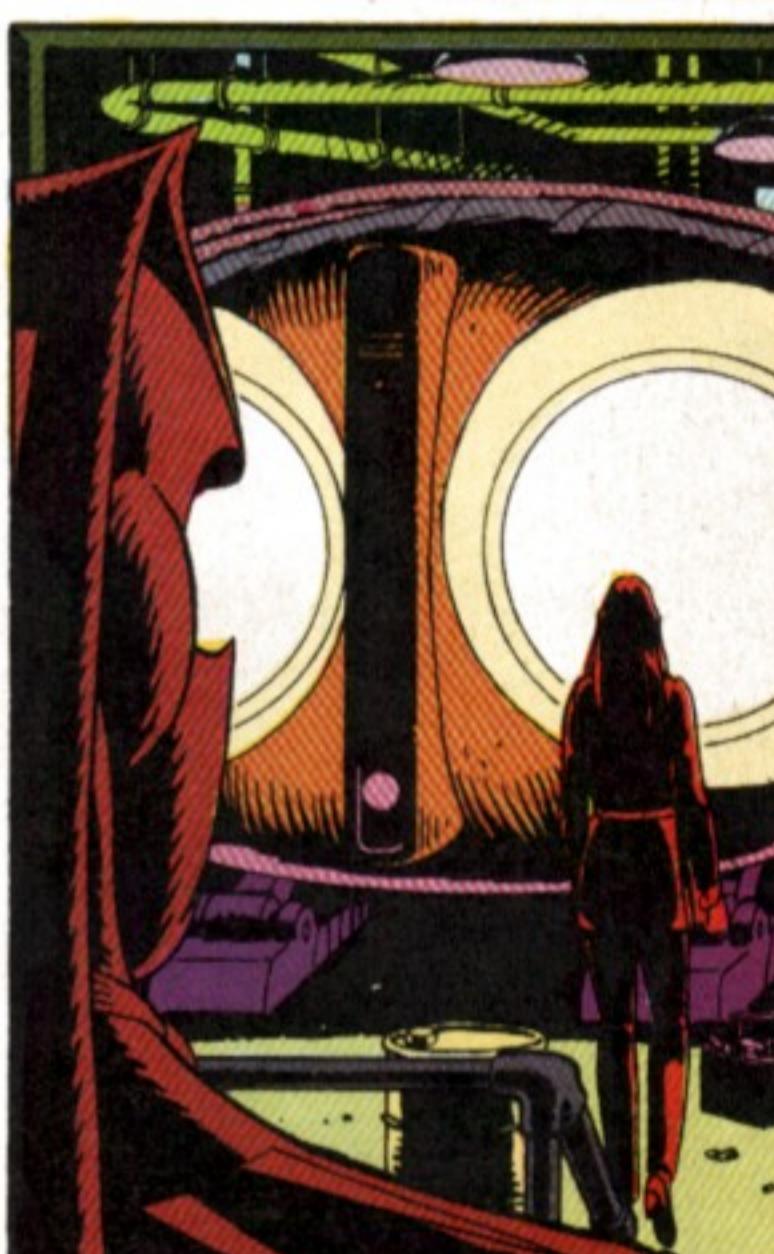
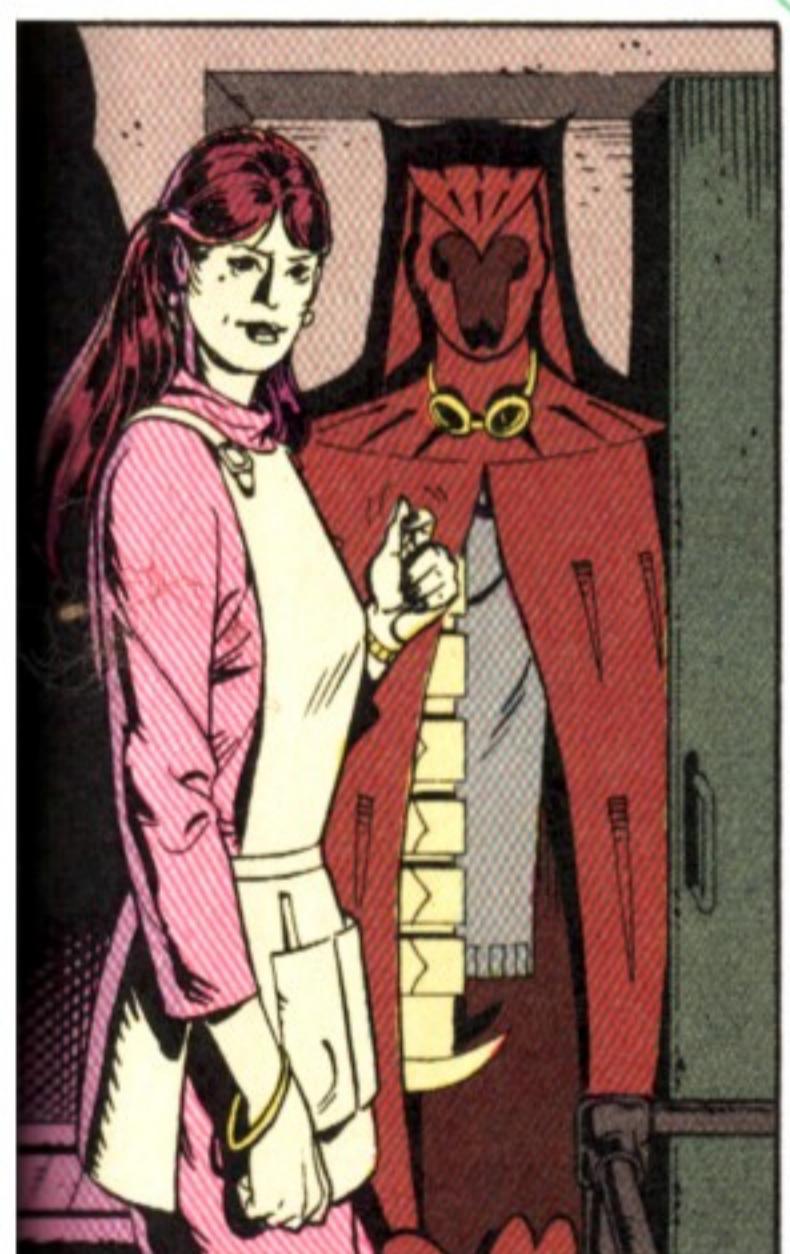
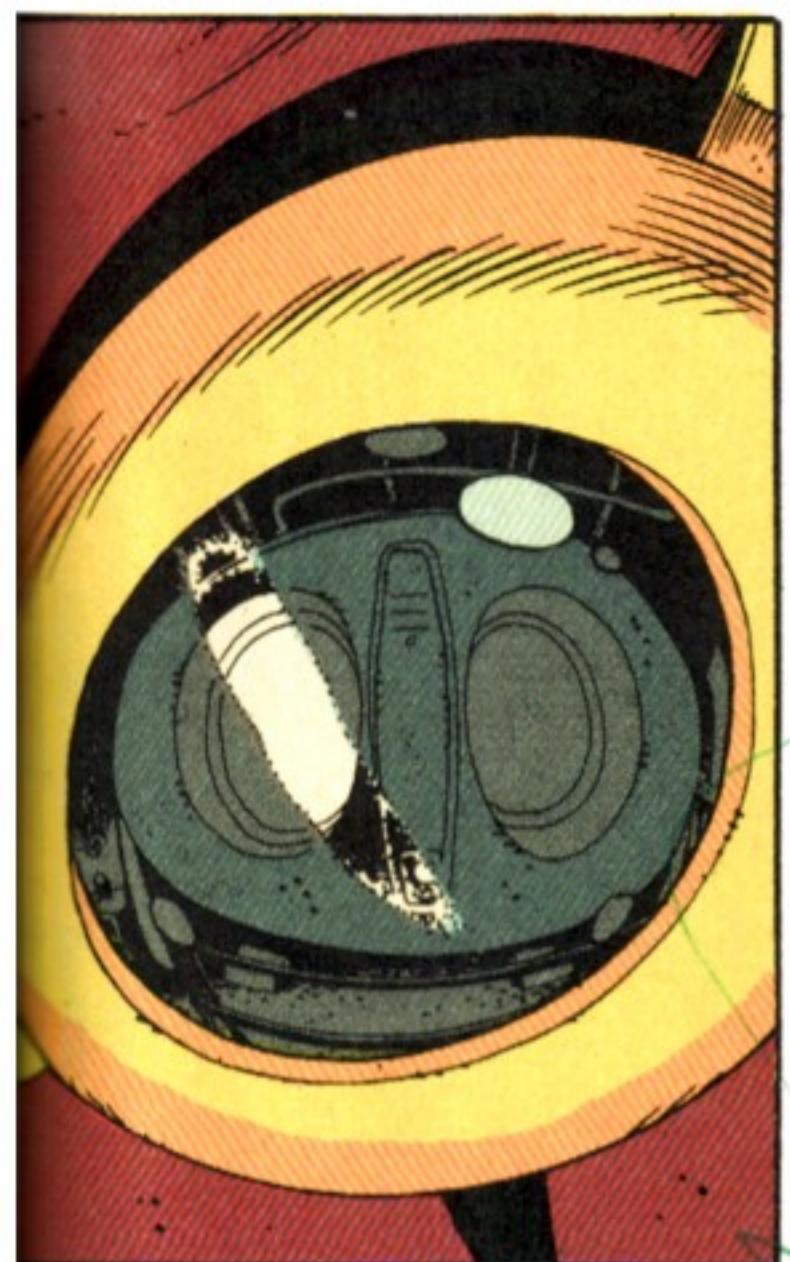


CHAPTER

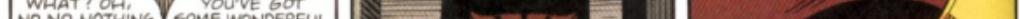






A BROTHER TO DRAGONS





YEAH, WELL,
AT LEAST YOU
WERE LIVING
OUT YOUR OWN
FANTASIES. I
WAS LIVING
OUT MY
MOTHER'S.

Y'KNOW, I'M
REALLY IMPRESSED
BY ALL THIS
EQUIPMENT. IT
MUST HAVE COST
YOU A FORTUNE.

WHAT'S
THIS CABINET
OVER HERE?

OH, THAT'S
JUST SOUVENIRS
AND JUNK LIKE
THAT.

I WAS
ALWAYS
KIND OF
SURPRISED
ABOUT
THAT.

AS FOR THE
MONEY, MY DAD
WAS IN BANKING.
HE LEFT ME A LOT
OF MONEY WHEN
HE DIED.

I MEAN, HE ALWAYS
SEEMED DISAPPOINTED
IN ME. HE WANTED ME
TO FOLLOW HIM INTO
BANKING, BUT I WAS
JUST INTERESTED
IN BIRDS AND
AIRPLANES AND
MYTHOLOGY. YOU
KNOW, KID'S
STUFF.

THAT? OH, THAT ISN'T
ANYBODY. IT'S JUST
THIS VICE QUEEN I PUT
AWAY BACK IN '68.
CALLED HERSELF
DUSK WOMAN
OR SOMETHING.

"THE
TWILIGHT
LADY"

SHE
SENT YOU
HER
PICTURE?

From one
Night Bird
to Another:
Love from
The Twilight
Lady

YEAH, WELL I GUESS SHE
HAD SORT OF A FIXATION.
SHE WAS A VERY
SICK WOMAN.

I KEEP
MEANING TO
THROW THAT
PICTURE
AWAY, BUT
YOU KNOW
HOW IT IS...

MMH.

I SEE YOU
HAVE A LOT OF
PICTURES OF
BIRDS AND
STUFF. THAT
WAS MY
FANTASY,
WHEN I WAS
A KID: TO
WORK WITH
ANIMALS...

I JUST
LIKED BIRDS
MOSTLY JUST
THE IDEA OF
FLYING...

AS A KID,
I READ ABOUT
PEGASUS, FLYING
CARPETS, THEN
LATER ABOUT
BIRDS AND
PLANES.

GUESS IT
HELPED ME
DESIGN THIS
JALOPY
HERE.

FINALLY, I
MASTERED IN
AERONAUTICS
AND ZOOLOGY
AT HARVARD.

HEH I PROBABLY
PICKED IT UP
FROM HOLLIS.

JALOPY?
THAT'S A WORD I
HAVEN'T
HEARD IN A LONG
TIME.

HOLLIS WAS
SOMETHING
ELSE THAT
INFLUENCED ME
AS A KID. I
IDOLIZED
HIM...

...BUT
THEN I GUESS
THAT'S PRETTY
OBVIOUS.

WELCOME
ABOARD.
YOU WANT
TO TAKE A
LOOK AROUND
WHILE I FINISH
CHECKING THE
SHIP OUT?

SURE.
AND DON'T
WORRY...
I WON'T
TOUCH
ANYTHING.



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

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

PROBABLY WON'T THIS TIME EITHER.

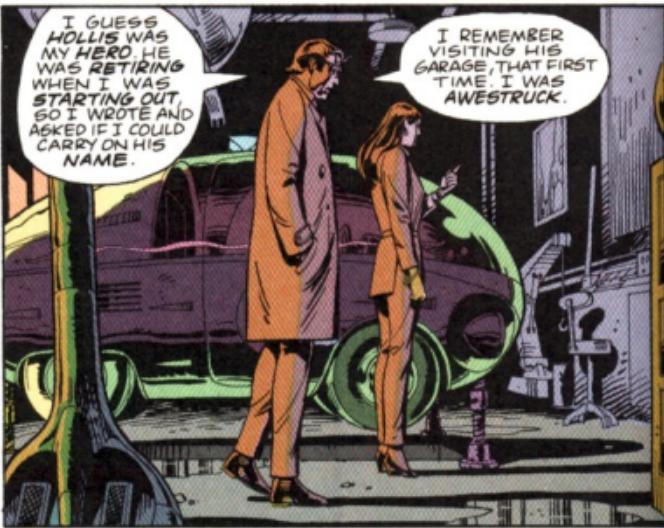
WELL, V'KNOW, THAT'S A VERY NEGATIVE ATTITUDE... I MEAN, I HAD A DANGEROUS HABIT MYSELF ONCE.

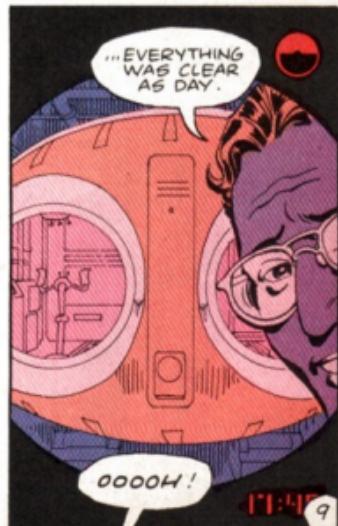
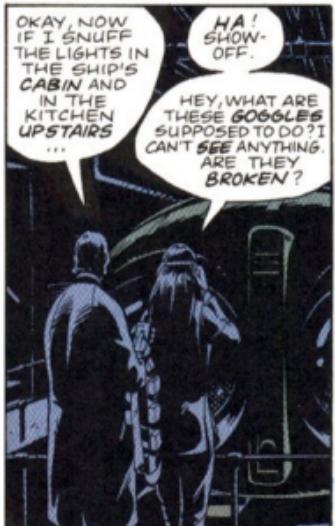
YOU DID WHAT HAPPENED?

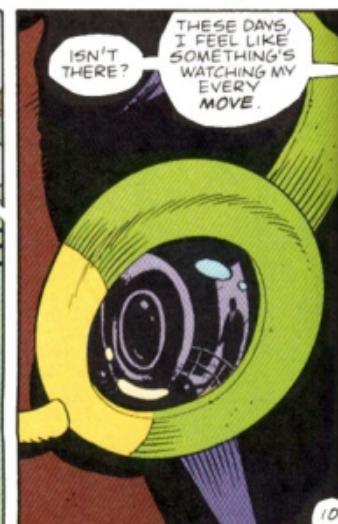
I QUIT. NO PROBLEM.

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









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

WHERE'S THE CONSPIRACY?

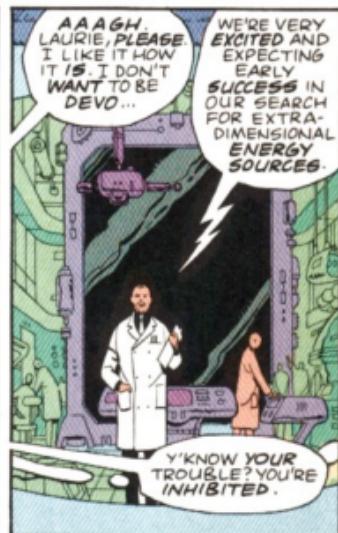
I MEAN, JON LEFT EARTH OF HIS OWN FREE WILL. RORSCHACH WAS CAUGHT RED-HANDED COMMITTING MURDER, FOR GOD'S SAKE...

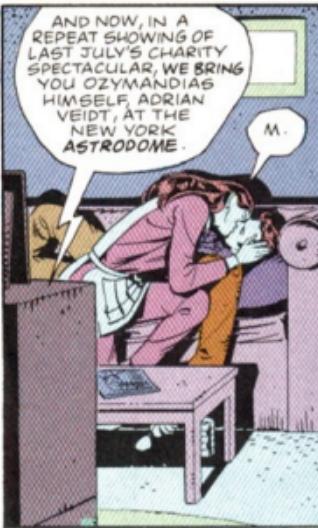


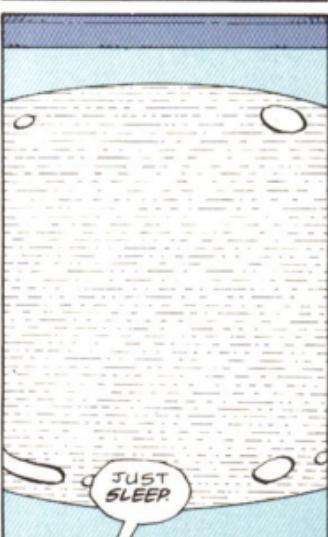
WE ASKED HECTOR GODFREY, THE FRONTIERSMAN'S EDITOR, IF HE HAD ANY COMMENT...

FRANKLY, ISN'T IT TIME WE REASSESSED RORSCHACH AS A PATRIOT AND AMERICAN?

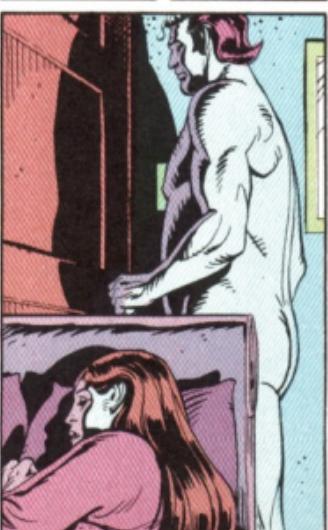








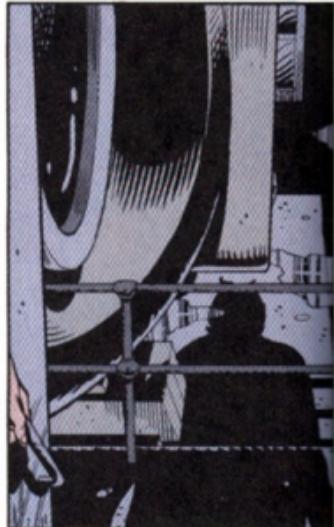
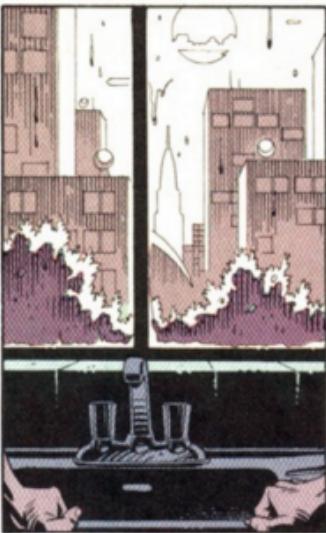


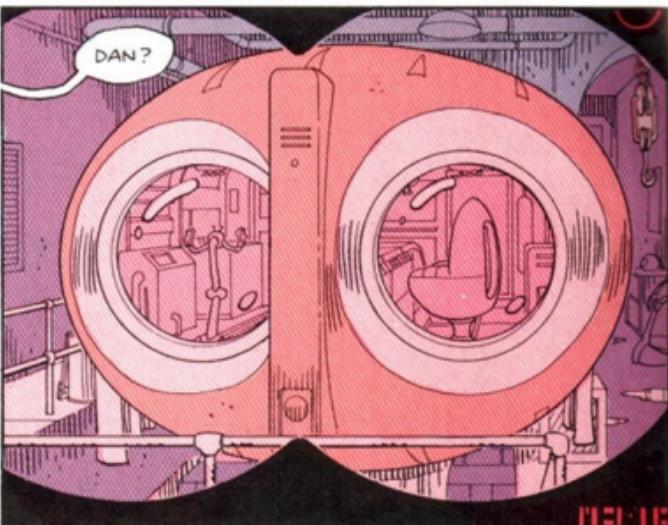


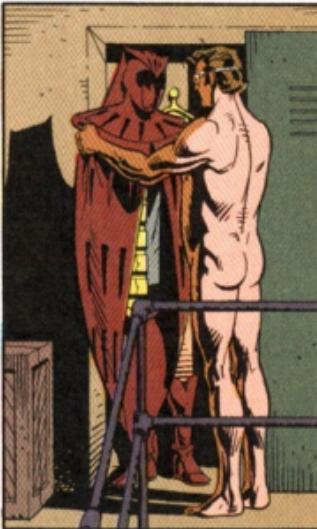
UHHMN..
JON..?

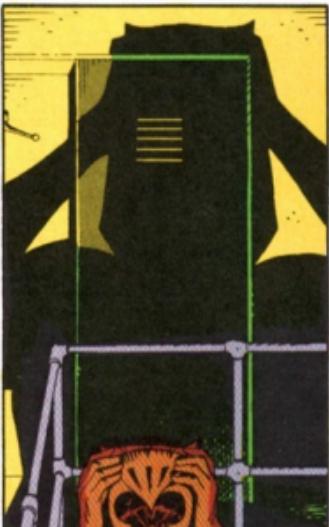
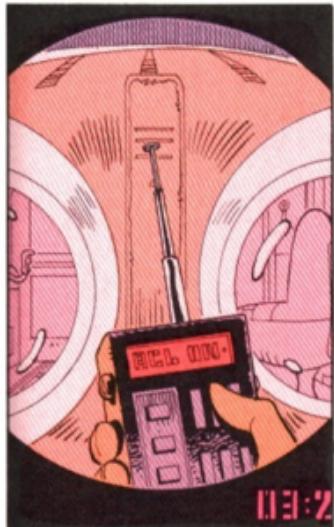
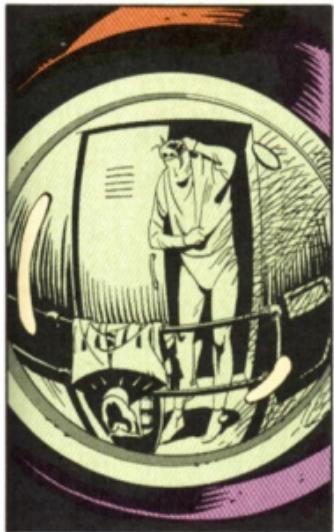
DID YOU
SHUB UBBULUH
NUHNUHDUM

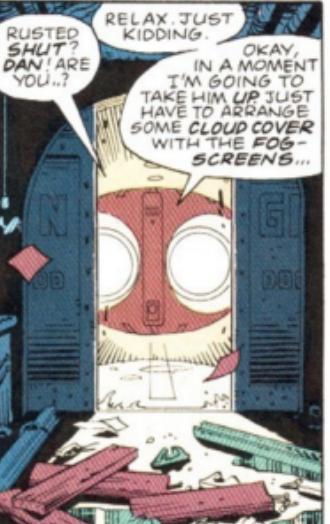
...
MM..











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

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

DAN?
WHAT'S THAT
DOWN ON OUR
RIGHT?

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

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

OH,
JESUS. I
SEE KIDS.
CAN YOU
DO ANY-
THING?

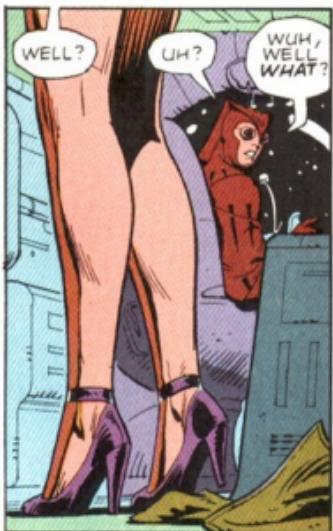
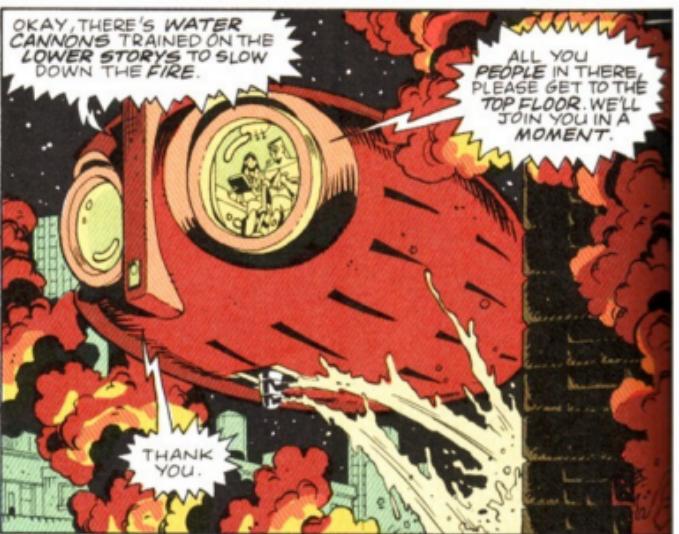
"LET'S HOPE SO. TAKING
HIM DOWN NOW..."

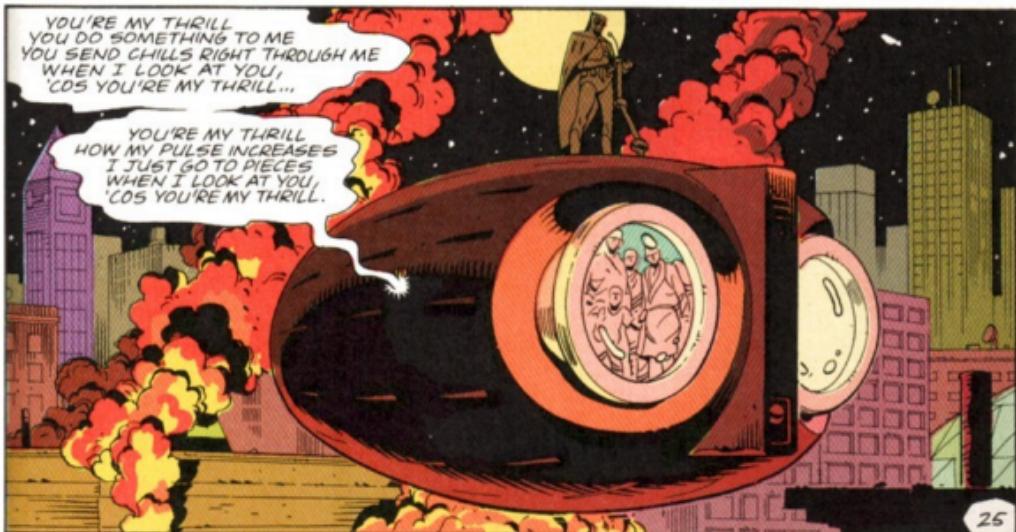
OUTTA
MY WAY
BITCH, I
CAN'T
BREATHE

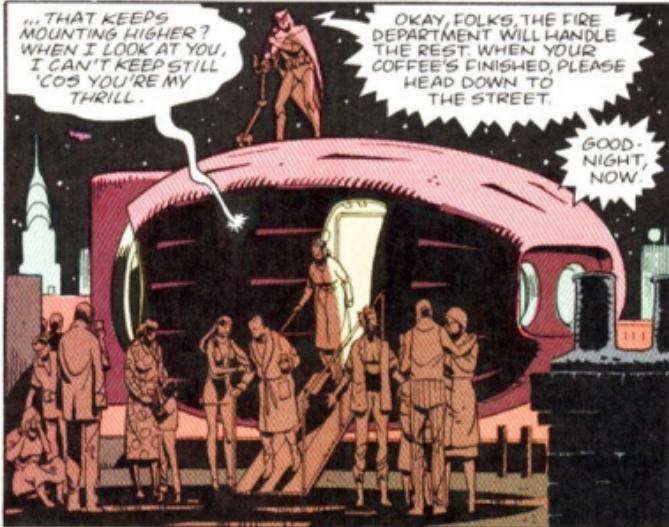
OH, GOD, PLEASE
SAVE US! WE AIN'T
DONE ANYTHING! MY
BABY, HE AIN'T DONE
NOTHIN'. OH JESUS,
LORD, I'M PRAYING
TO YOU...

MOMEEEEE!

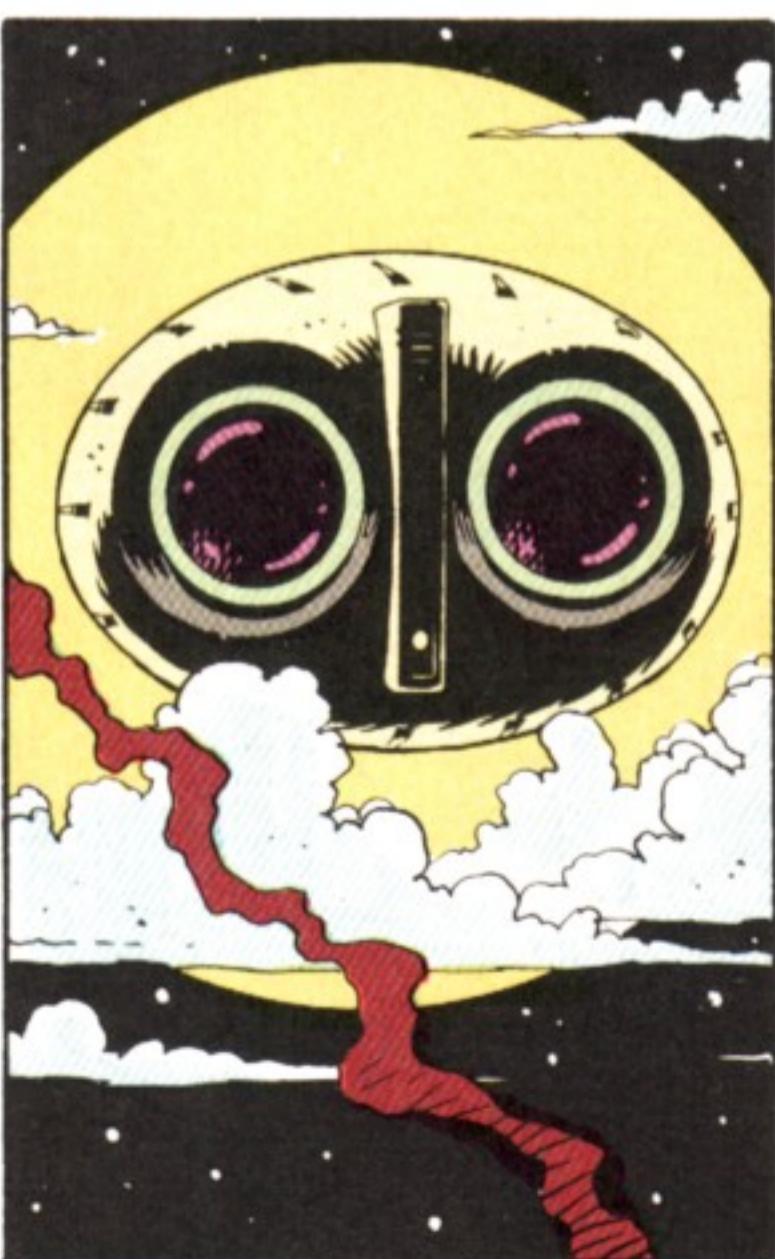
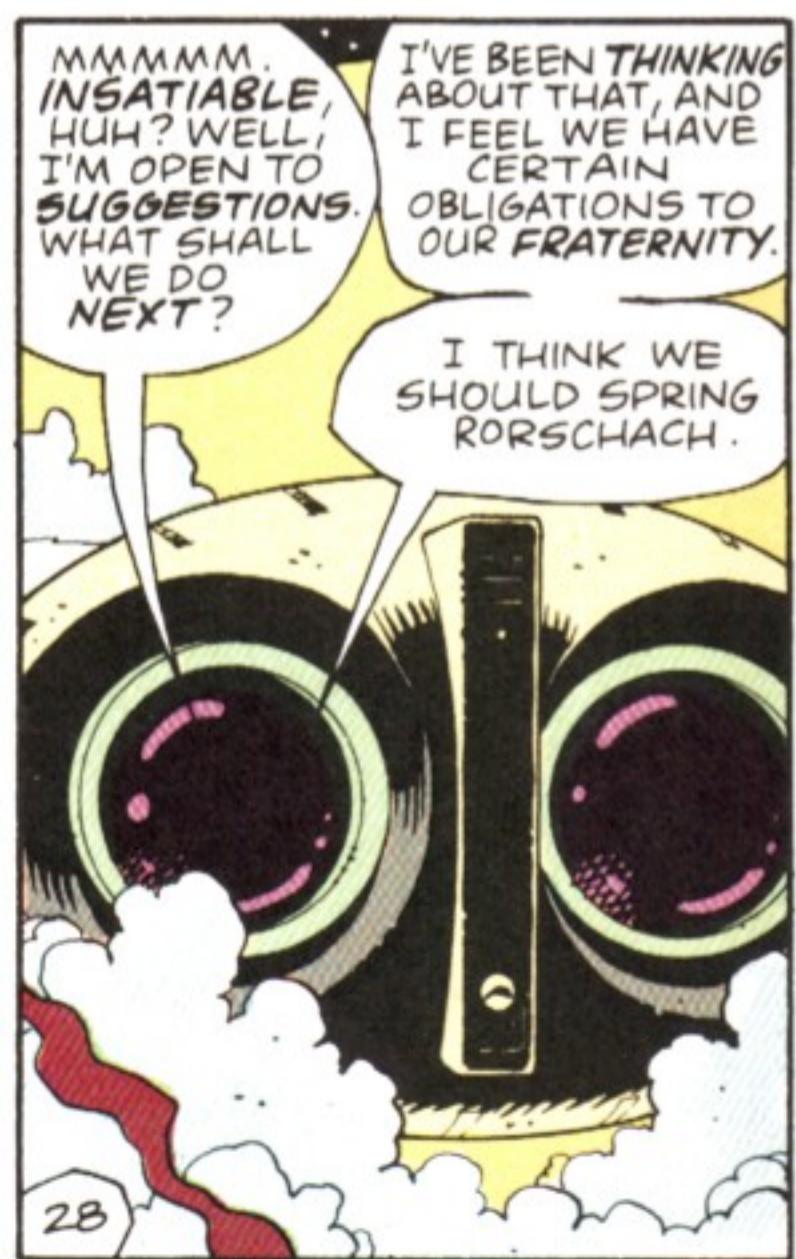
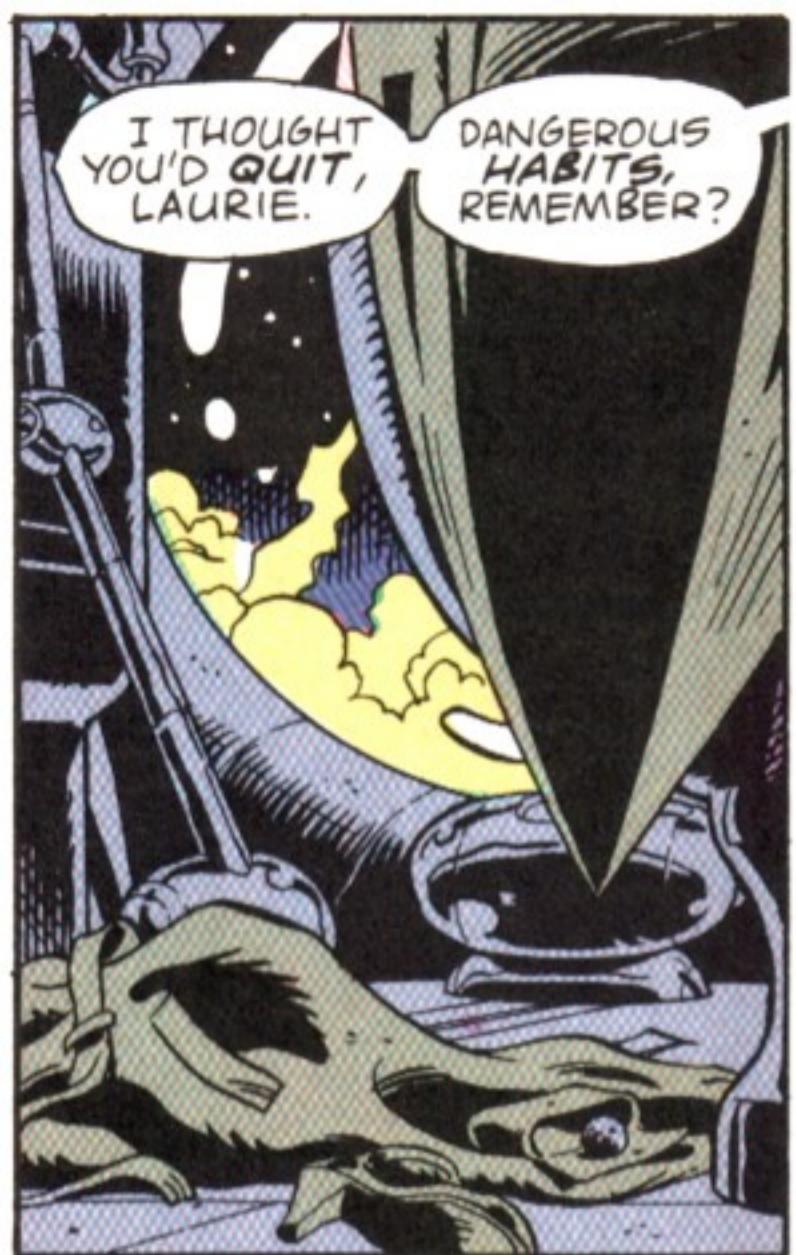
PLEASE STAY CALM.
YOUR PREDICAMENT
HAS BEEN NOTICED
AND THE SITUATION IS BEING
ATTENDED TO.











JOB chapter 30, verses 29-30

The following text is reprinted
from the Journal of The American
Ornithological Society, Fall 1983.



BLOOD FROM THE SHOULDER OF PALLAS

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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





XII

XI

X

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II

IV

III