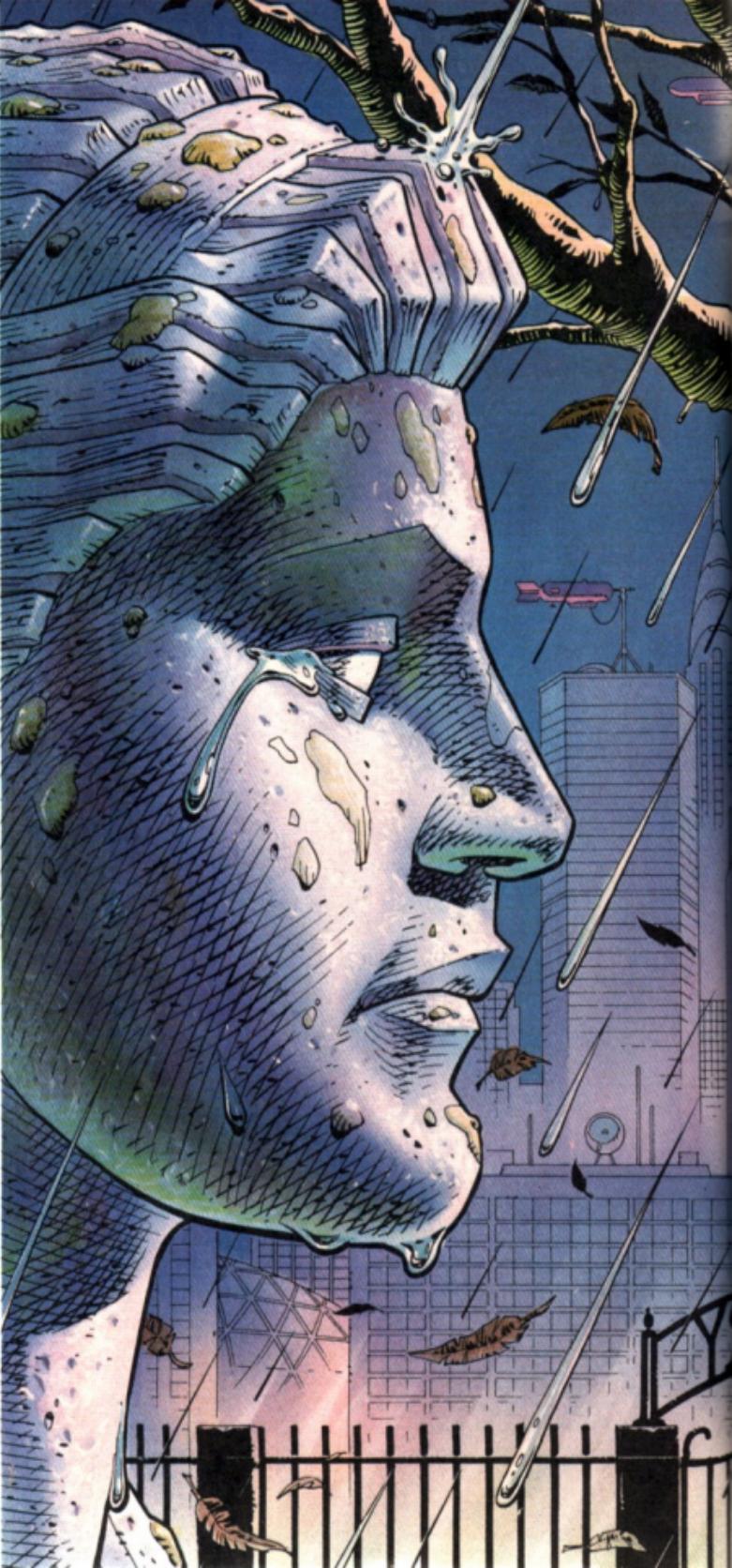
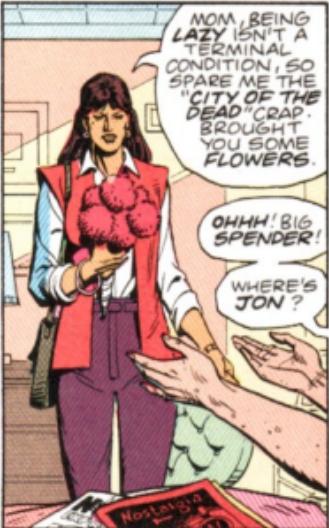


CHAPTER 3



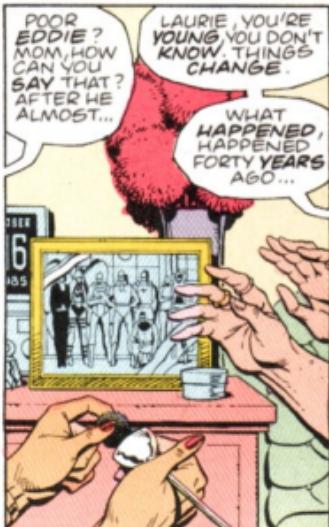
"AIN, WILLYA LOOK AT HER?
PRETTY AS A PICTURE AN'
STILL KEEPIN' HER FIGURE!"

"SO, HONEY,
WHAT BRINGS
YOU TO THE
CITY OF
THE DEAD?"



"JON'S AT SOME FUNERAL I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE ATTENDING, SO HE TRANSPORTED ME HERE, TO CALIFORNIA."

"I JUST GOT THROUGH THROWING UP IN THE LADIES' ROOM."

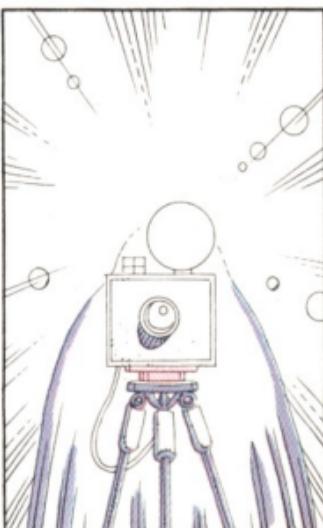


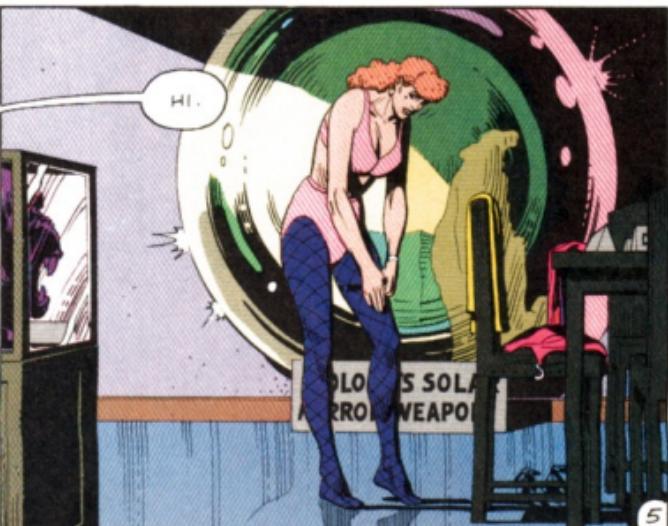




ABSENT FRIENDS













MAN THAT IS BORN
OF WOMAN HATH BUT
A SHORT TIME TO
LIVE, AND IS FULL
OF MISERIES.

HE COMETH UP, AND
IS CUT DOWN, LIKE A
FLOWER HE FLEETH AS
IT WERE A SHADOW,
AND NEVER
CONTINUETH IN
ONE STAY.

IN
THE
MIDST
OF LIFE,
WE ARE
IN
DEATH.

OF WHOM
MAY WE SEEK
SUCCOR BUT
OF THEE, O
LORD, WHO FOR
OUR SINS ART
JUSTLY
DISPLEASED.

WELL,
FIRSTLY, LET ME
SAY I'M PLEASED
TO SEE SO MANY
OF YOU HERE.

VERY
PLEASED.

SECONDLY, FOR
THOSE WHO ONLY
KNOW ME AS CAPTAIN
METROPOLIS, THE
NAME'S NELSON
GARDNER. CALL
ME NELSON.

THIRD, UH,
I GUESS I SHOULD
WELCOME EVERY BODY
TO THE FIRST EVER
MEETING OF THE
CRIMEBUSTERS;

BURRUP!







THOU KNOWEST,
LORD, THE SECRETS
OF OUR
HEARTS;

SHUT NOT
THY MERCIFUL
EARS TO OUR
PRAYERS, BUT SPARE
US, LORD MOST
HOLY, O GOD MOST
MIGHTY, O HOLY
AND MERCIFUL
SAVIOR ...



...THOU MOST
WORTHY JUDGE
ETERNAL, SUFFER
US NOT, AT OUR
LAST HOUR...

...FOR ANY
PAINS OF
DEATH, TO
FALL FROM
THEE.

GODDAMN
FIREWORKS!

YOU'D
THOUGHT
THIS COUNTRY'D
HAD ENOUGH
GODDAMN
FIREWORKS.



I SUPPOSE VVN.
NIGHT MUST
MEAN SOMETHING
TO THEM.

NAH,
AVERAGE
VIETNAMESE DON'T
GIVE A DAMN WHO
WON. IT MEANS
SOMETHING TO THE
DINKS... AN' IT MEANS
PLenty TO
US...

I MEAN, IF
WE'D LOST THIS
WAR... I DUNNO.
I THINK IT MIGHT
HAVE DRIVEN US
A LITTLE CRAZY,
Y'KNOW? AS
A COUNTRY.

BUT
THANKS
TO YOU,
WE DIDN'T,
RIGHT?

DONNA
HATCH.

YOU SOUND
BITTER, YOU'RE
A STRANGE
MAN, BLAKE.
YOU HAVE
STRANGE
ATTITUDES
TO LIFE
AND
WAR.

STRANGE?

LISTEN...
ONCE YOU
FIGURE OUT
WHAT A JOKE
EVERYTHING
IS, BEING THE
COMEDIAN'S
THE ONLY
THING MAKES
SENSE

THE CHARRED
VILLAGES, THE
BOYS WITH
NECK LACES OF
HUMAN
EARS... THESE
ARE PART
OF THE
JOKE?

HEY... I
NEVER SAID
IT WAS A
GOOD JOKE!
I'M JUST
PLAYIN'
ALONG
WITH THE
GAS...

THERE HE IS.
FIRST PRESS HELICOPTER
INTO SAIGON
SINCE THE CEASEFIRE.
HE'S GOT THE NEXT
ELECTION IN THE
BAG FOR SURE.

ME, I'M
TAKIN' THE
FIRST CHOPPER
OUT!

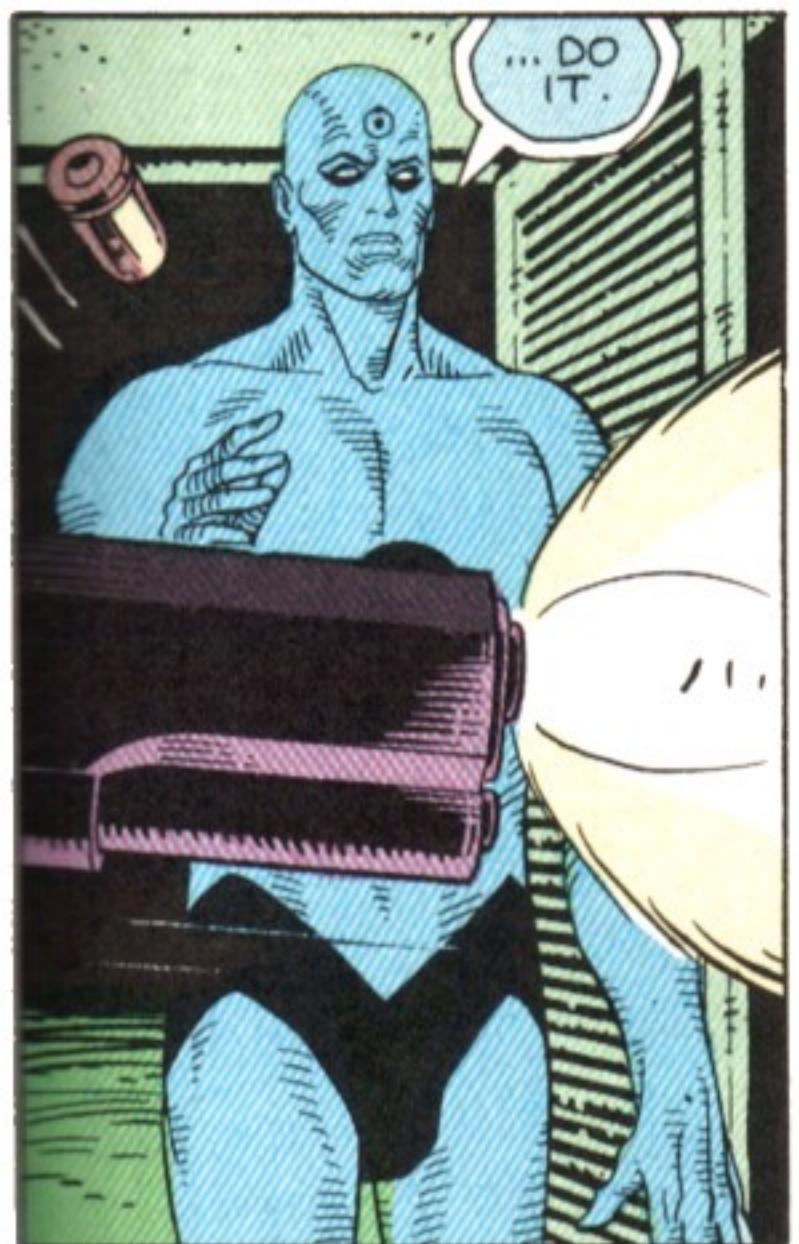
YOU'RE
ANXIOUS
TO
LEAVE?

DOC, ARE YOU
KIDDING? I
HATE THIS PLACE.
I HATE THE
TEMPERATURE.
I HATE THE
SMELL. I HATE
THIS ROTTEN
CHEAP
BOURBON.

FIRST
CHOPPER
OUT, MAN.
I'M GONE'

MR. EDDIE?





EARTH TO
EARTH...

ASHES
TO
ASHES...

...DUST
TO DUST.

PLEASE...
IF EVERYBODY
WILL JUST
CLEAR THE
STREETS...

LISSEN, YOU LITTLE
PUNKS, YOU BETTER
GET BACK IN YA RAT
HOLES! I GOT RIOT
GAS, I GOT RUBBER
BULLETS...





FROM THEM-S
SELVES. WHATSA-
MATTER? DON'T
YOU FEEL
COMFORTABLE
UNLESS YOU'RE
UP AGAINST
SOME SCHMUCK
IN A HALLOWEEN
SUIT?

SPEAKIN'
O' WHICH,
WHERE THE
HELL ARE
RORSCHACH
AN' THE
OTHERS?

JON AND LAURIE
ARE HANDLING
THE RIOTS IN
WASHINGTON.
RORSCHACH'S
ACROSS TOWN,
TRYING TO
HOLD THE
LOWER EAST
SIDE

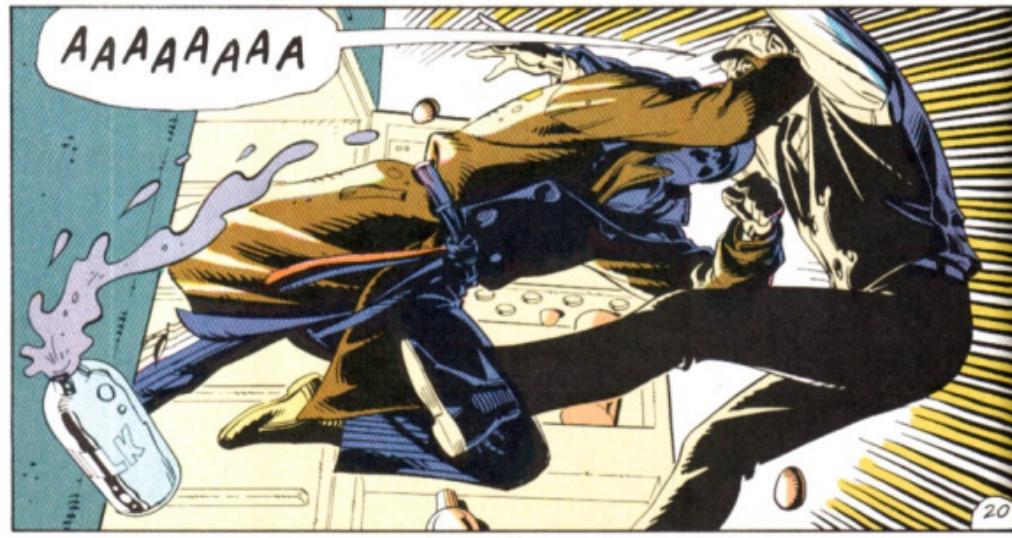
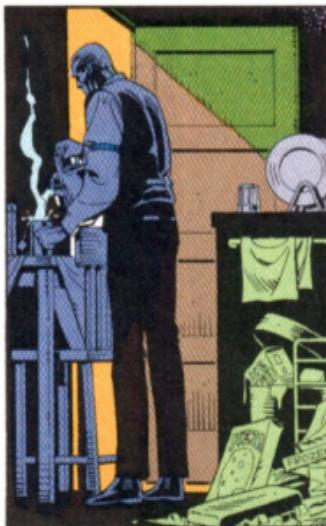
HE, UH,
HE WORKS
MOSTLY ON
HIS OWN
THESE DAYS...

RORSCHACH'S
NUTS. HE'S BEEN
NUTS EVER
SINCE THAT
KIDNAPPING
HE HANDLED
THREE YEARS
BACK.

HIM,
BYRON
LEWIS, JON
BODDAMN
WALKING
H-BOMB
OSTERMAN
... ALL
NUTS.









IT'S A JOKE.

S'ALL A JOKE.

I MEAN, LEMME TELLYA, WHEN I STARTED OUT, WHEN I WAS A KID, CLEANIN' UP THE WATERFRONTS, IT WAS, LIKE, REAL EASY.

THE WORLD WAS TOUGH, YOU JUST HADDA BE TOUGHER, RIGHT?
NOT ANYMORE.

I MEAN I THOUGHT I KNEW HOW IT WAS, HOW THE WORLD WAS, BUT THEN I FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS GAG, THIS JOKE...

YOU'RE PART OF IT, MOLOCH OL' PAL. Y'KNOW THAT?

IF I THOUGHT YOU DID KNOW... I SAW YOUR NAME ON THE LIST, YOU AND JANET SLATER, BUT IF I THOUGHT YOU WERE IN ON THIS...

...I'D KILL YOU. YOU UNDERSTAND?

KILL YOU.

I MEAN, YOU FOUGHT THAT BIG BLUE GEEK! YOU KNOW WHAT HIS HEAD'S LIKE!

I TELLYA, WHO KNOWS WHICH WAY HE'LL JUMP IF ANYBODY MESSES WITH HIM...

HE MIGHT... HE MIGHT JUST...

NAH, I DON' WANNA THINK. I DON' WANNA THINK ABOUT IT.

DON'TCHA GOT ANY BOOZE IN THIS PLACE?

I MEAN, WHAT GETS ME RIGHT? WHAT GETS ME, I NEED NEVER HAVE LOOKED OUTTA THE AIRSHIP WINDOW AT THAT MOMENT, NEVER SEEN THE GODDAMN ISLAND, NEVER GOT INVOLVED...

HAH! THERE YARE, YA SUMBITCH ...

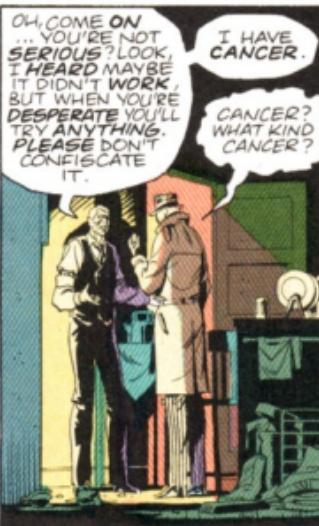
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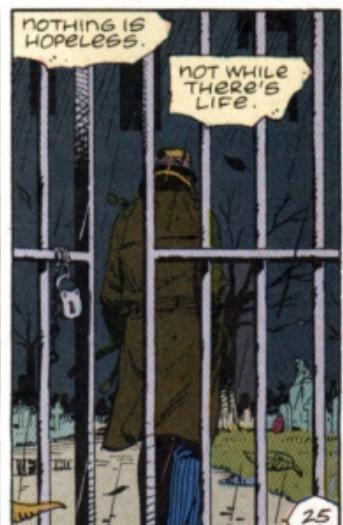
PAHH

IT STINKS.

IT ALL STINKS.

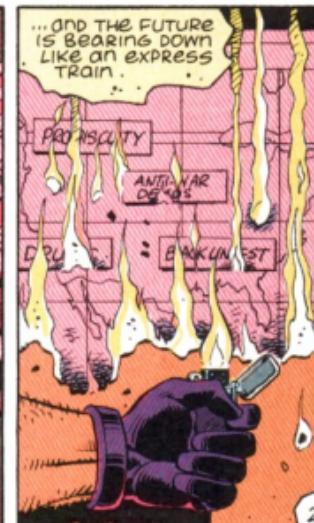






IN THE CEMETERY, ALL
THE WHITE CROSSES
STOOD IN ROWS, NEAT
CHALK MARKS
ON A GIANT
SCORECARD.

PAID LAST
RESPECTS
QUIETLY,
WITHOUT
FUSS.



BRAKE UNDERSTOOD.
HE TREATED IT LIKE A JOKE,
BUT HE UNDERSTOOD. HE SAW
THE CRACKS IN SOCIETY,
SAW THE LITTLE MEN IN
MASKS TRYING TO
HOLD IT TOGETHER...



HE SAW THE TRUE FACE
OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY AND CHOSE
TO BECOME A
REFLECTION, A
PARODY OF IT.



HEARD JOKE ONCE:

MAN GOES TO
DOCTOR. SAYS HE'S
DEPRESSED. SAYS
LIFE SEEMS
HARSH AND
CRUEL.



SAYS HE FEELS ALL ALONE
IN A THREATENING WORLD.
WHERE WHAT LIES
AHEAD IS VAGUE
AND UNCERTAIN.



DOCTOR SAYS "TREATMENT
IS SIMPLE. GREAT CLOWN
PAGLIACCI IS IN TOWN
TONIGHT. GO AND SEE
HIM. THAT SHOULD
PICK YOU UP."

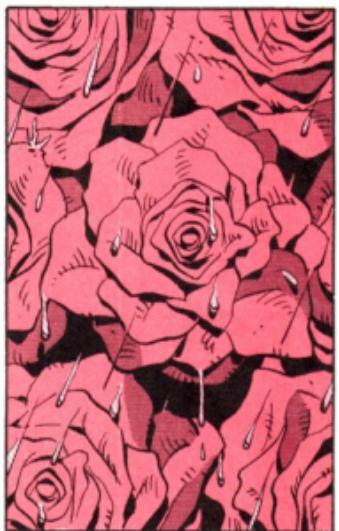


MAN BURSTS INTO TEARS.



"...I AM PAGLIACCI."





And I'm up while the dawn is breaking, even though my heart is aching.
I should be drinking a toast to absent friends instead of these comedians.

—Elvis Costello



Presented here are the excerpts from UNDER THE HOOD. In these next chapters Hollis Mason discusses the formation of the Minutemen. Reprinted with permission of the author.

III.

From the moment that I decided somewhere deep inside myself that I wanted to try my hand at being a costumed adventurer, to the moment I first stepped out into the night with a mask on my face and the wind on my bare legs, took about three months. Three months of self-doubt and self-ridicule. Three months of self-conscious training down at the Police Gymnasium. Three months figuring out how the hell I was going to make myself a costume.

The costume was difficult, because I couldn't start designing it until I'd thought of a name. This stumped me for a couple of weeks, because every name I came up with sounded stupid, and what I really wanted was something with the same sense of drama and excitement as "Hooded Justice."

Eventually, a suitable handle was provided inadvertently by one of the other cops that I worked with down at the station house. He'd invited me out for a beer after work two or three times only to be turned down because I wanted to spend as much of my evenings working out in the Police Gymnasiums as possible, after which I'd usually go to bed around nine o'clock and sleep through until five the next morning, when I'd get up and put in a couple of hours workout before donning my badge and uniform in readiness for my day job. After having his offer of beer and relaxation turned down yet again by reason of me wanting to be in bed early, he finally gave up asking and took to calling me "Nite Owl" out of sarcasm until he finally found somebody else to drink with.

"Nite Owl." I liked it. Now all I had to come up with was the costume.

A masked adventurer's costume is one of those things that nobody really thinks about. Should it have a cape, or no cape? Should it be thick and armored to protect you from harm, or flexible and lightweight to allow maneuverability? What sort of mask should it have? Do bright colors make you more of a target than dark ones? All of these were things that I had to consider.

Eventually, I opted for a design that left the arms and legs as free as possible, while protecting my body and head with a tough leather tunic, light chainmail briefs, and a layer of leather-over-chainmail protecting my head. I experimented with a cloak, remembering how the Shadow would use his cloak to misguide enemy bullets, leading them to shoot at parts of the swirling black mass where his body didn't happen to be. In practice, however, I found it too unwieldy. I was always tripping over it or getting it caught in things, and so I abandoned it for an outfit that was as streamlined as I could make it:

With the mail and leather headpiece hiding my hair, I found I only really needed a small domino mask to conceal my identity, but even this presented problems that weren't obvious at first glance. My first mask was attached to my face by the simple expediency of a string, but this nearly got me killed during my first ever outing in full costume, when a drunk with a knife hooked his fingers into the eyeholes of the domino and pulled it down so that I could only see out of one eye. If I'd been less fit and alert or he'd been less drunk my career might well have ended then. As it was I was able to tear off the mask completely and then disarm him, trusting that the alcohol would fog any clear recollection of my face. After that, I dispensed with the string and stuck the mask to my face using spirit gum, such as actors use to attach false beards or mustaches.

I first became Nite Owl during the early months of 1939, and although my first few exploits were largely unspectacular, they aroused a lot of media interest simply because by 1939, dressing up in a costume and protecting your neighborhood had become something of a fad, with the whole of America at least briefly interested in its development. A month after I made my debut, a young woman who called herself The Silhouette broke into the headlines by exposing the activities of a crooked publisher trafficking in child pornography, delivering a punitive beating to the entrepreneur and his two chief cameramen in the process. A little after that, the first reports of a man dressed like a moth who could glide through the air started to come in from Connecticut, and a particularly vicious and brutal young man in a gaudy yellow

boiler suit started cleaning up the city's waterfronts under the name of The Comedian. Within twelve months of Hooded Justice's dramatic entrance into the public consciousness, there were at least seven other costumed vigilantes operating on or around America's West Coast.

There was Captain Metropolis, who brought a knowledge of military technique and strategy to his attempt at eradicating organized crime in the inner urban areas, and who is still active to this day.

There was The Silk Spectre, now retired and living with her daughter after an unsuccessful early marriage, who in retrospect was probably the first of us ever to realize that there could be commercial benefits in being a masked adventurer. The Silk Spectre used her reputation as a crimefighter primarily to make the front pages and receive exposure for her lucrative modeling career, but I think all of us who knew her loved her a little bit and we certainly didn't begrudge her a living. I think we were all too unsure of our own motives to cast aspersions upon anybody else.

There was Dollar Bill, originally a star college athlete from Kansas who was actually employed as an in-house super-hero by one of the major national banks, when they realized that the masked man fad made being able to brag about having a hero of your own to protect your customer's money a very interesting publicity prospect. Dollar Bill was one of the nicest and most straightforward men I have ever met, and the fact that he died so tragically young is something that still upsets me whenever I think about it. While attempting to stop a raid upon one of his employer's banks, his cloak became entangled in the bank's revolving door and he was shot dead at point-blank range before he could free it. Designers employed by the bank had designed his costume for maximum publicity appeal. If he'd designed it himself he might have left out that damned stupid cloak and still be alive today.

There was Mothman and The Silhouette and The Comedian and there was me, all of us choosing to dress up in gaudy opera costumes and express the notion of good and evil in simple, childish terms, while over in Europe they were turning human beings into soap and lampshades. We were sometimes respected, sometimes analyzed, and most often laughed at, and in spite of all the musings above, I don't think that those of us still surviving today are any closer to understanding just why we *really* did it all. Some of us did it because we were hired to and some of us did it to gain publicity. Some of us did it out of a sense of childish excitement and some of us, I think, did it for a kind of excitement that was altogether more adult if perhaps less healthy. They've called us fascists and they've called us perverts and while there's an element of truth in both those accusations, neither of them are big enough to take in the whole picture.

Yes, some of us were politically extreme. Before Pearl Harbor, I heard Hooded Justice openly expressing approval for the activities of Hitler's Third Reich, and Captain Metropolis has gone on record as making statements about black and Hispanic Americans that have been viewed as both racially prejudiced and inflammatory charges that it is difficult to argue or deny.

Yes, I daresay some of us did have our sexual hang-ups. Everybody knows what eventually became of the Silhouette and although it would be tasteless to rehash the events surrounding her death in this current volume, it provides proof for those who need it that for some people, dressing up in a costume did have its more libidinous elements.

Yes, some of us were unstable and neurotic. Only a week ago as of this writing, I received word that the man behind the mask and wings of Mothman, whose true identity I am not at liberty to divulge, has been committed to a mental institution after a long bout of alcoholism and a complete mental breakdown.

Yes, we were crazy, we were kinky, we were Nazis, all those things that people say. We were also doing something because we believed in it. We were attempting, through our personal efforts, to make our country a safer and better place to live in. Individually, working on our separate patches of turf, we did too much good in our respective communities to be written off as a mere aberration, whether social or sexual or psychological.

It was only when we got together that the problems really started. I sometimes think

without the Minutemen we might all have given up and called it quits pretty soon. The costumed adventurer might have become quietly and simply extinct.

And the world might not be in the mess that it's in today.

IV.

There's no mystery behind how the Minutemen first got together. Captain Metropolis had written to Sally Jupiter care of her agent, suggesting that they might meet with a view to forming a group of masked adventurers who could pool their resources and experience to combat crime. The Captain has always had a strategic approach to crimefighting, so I can see why the idea would appeal to him, although back then I was surprised that he'd made an effort to get in touch with Sally. He was so polite and reserved that Sally's drinking, swearing and mode of dress were guaranteed to shock him speechless. Later, I realized that Sally was simply the only costumed vigilante forethoughtful enough to have an agent whose address was in the phone book.

Sally's agent (and, much later, her husband) was an extremely shrewd individual named Laurence Schexnayder. He realized that without the occasional gimmick to revitalize flagging public interest, the fad for long underwear heroes would eventually fade, reducing his girl Sally's chances of media exposure as The Silk Spectre to zero. Thus it was Schexnayder, in mid-1939, who suggested placing a large ad in the Gazette asking other mystery men to come forward.

One by one we came, over the next few weeks. We were introduced to Sally, to Captain Metropolis, to each other and to Laurence Schexnayder. He was very organized and professional, and although only in his mid-thirties he seemed very mature and respectable to us back then. Maybe that was just because he'd be the only person in the room not wearing their boxer shorts over their pants. By the fall of '39 he'd arranged all the publicity and the Minutemen were finally born.

The *real* mystery is how the hell we managed to *stay* together.

Dressing up in a costume takes a very extreme personality, and the chances of eight such personalities getting along together were about seventy-one million to one against. This isn't to say that some of us didn't get along, of course. Sally attached herself pretty swiftly to Hooded Justice, who was one of the biggest men I've ever seen. I never found out his real name, but I'd be willing to bet that those early news reports weren't far off in comparing him to a wrestler. Strangely enough, even though Sally would always be hanging onto his arm, he never seemed very interested in *her*. I don't think I ever saw him kiss her, although maybe that was just because of his mask. Anyway, they started going out together, sort of, after the first Minutemen Christmas Party in 1939, which is the last time I can remember us all having a real good time together. After that, things went bad. We had worms in the apple, eating it from inside.



*The first Minutemen Christmas party, 1939
(from left to right; The Silhouette, Silk Spectre,
Comedian, Hooded Justice, Captain Metropolis
(in mirror), Nite Owl, Mothman, Dollar Bill)*

The worst of these was the Comedian. I'm aware that he's still active today and even respected in some quarters, but I know what I know, and that man is a disgrace to our profession. In 1940 he attempted to sexually assault Sally Jupiter in the Minutemen trophy room after a meeting. He left the group shortly thereafter by mutual consent and with a minimum of publicity. Schexnayder had persuaded Sally not to press charges against the Comedian for the good of the group's image, and she complied. The Comedian went his way unscathed...even though he was badly wounded in an unconnected stabbing incident about a year later. This is what made him decide to change his flimsy yellow costume for the leather armor he wears at present. He went on to make a name for himself as a war hero in the Pacific, but all I can think of is the bruises along Sally Jupiter's ribcage and hope to God that America can find itself a better class of hero than *that*.

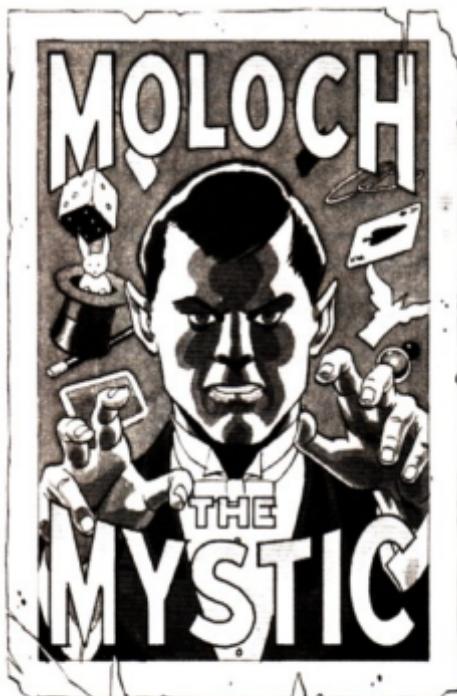
After that, things deteriorated. In 1946, the papers revealed that the Silhouette was living with another woman in a lesbian relationship. Schexnayder persuaded us to expel her from the group, and six weeks later she was murdered, along with her lover, by one of her former enemies. Dollar Bill was shot dead, and in 1947 the group was dealt its most serious blow when

Sally quit crimefighting to marry her agent. We always thought she might come back, but in 1949 she had a daughter, so that clinched that. Eventually, those of us who were left didn't even fight crime anymore. It wasn't interesting. The villains we'd fought with were either in prison or had moved on to less glamorous activities. Moloch, for example, who had started out aged seventeen as a stage magician, evolving into an ingenious and flamboyant criminal mastermind through underworld contacts made in his world of nightclubs, had moved into impersonal crime like drugs, financial fraud and vice clubs by the late '40's. Eventually, there was just me, Mothman, Hooded Justice and Captain Metropolis sitting around in a meeting hall that smelled like a locker room now that there weren't any women in the group. There was nobody interesting left to fight, nothing notable to talk about. In 1949, we called it a day. By then, however, we'd been around long enough to somehow inspire younger people, God help them, to follow in our footsteps.

The Minutemen were finished, but it didn't matter. The damage had already been done.



Newsreel footage of the Comedian in the South Pacific, 1942



Early publicity poster of Moloch, 1937

