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Joshua D. Goss

Eastern Illinois University

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Heroic Texts and Special Effects

(TITLE)

BY

Joshua D. Goss

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2016

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Heroic Texts and Special Effects

by

Joshua D. Goss

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

in the graduate school, Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois

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Critical Introduction

Mark Millar's comic book *Kick-Ass* begins with protagonist Dave saying, "I always wondered why nobody did it before me" (Millar 2). He's referring, of course, to taking on the role of a real-life superhero. He continues, "I mean, all those comic book movies and television shows, you'd think at least one eccentric loner would have stitched himself a costume... C'mon. Be honest with yourself. We all planned to be a superhero at some point in our lives" (2). This comic book enthusiast was inspired by his heroes to try to become one himself, but despite what he says, he wasn't the first.

In fact, the first modern novel, *Don Quixote*, does something similar. It tells the story of an older man who enjoys his own personal library full of chivalric tales so much that he eventually decides to spend his ample free time pursuing his own knightly quests. When he goes out looking for these adventures, he finds himself in heroic battle with giants, but onlookers see something different: a delusional old man fighting windmills.

Whether he was fighting windmills or giants, Don Quixote, like Dave, wanted to emulate the heroes in his favorite stories. While they both seem eager to act heroically, their ideas of what a hero looks like are clearly different; one dons a helmet with his suit of armor and the other a green-and-yellow mask and wetsuit combination.

Other than their costumes differing, our idea of a hero has changed over the four-hundred years between these two aspiring heroes. Such changes are inevitable since we are constantly changing and our "[h]eroes and heroic ideals... reflect the nature of the cultures from which they spring" (Ramaswamy 402). In fact, when looking at the history of the ever-changing hero, Archetypal critic Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy starts with heroes who came even before Don Quixote. She says that in the classical age, the hero was "a male warrior or soldier such as Achilles whose aim was the achievement of honour and greatness" (402). While some of the attributes—warrior-like strength and honor—might remain as heroic ideals, other aspects are continuously changing along with us.

For instance, when Miguel de Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote* in the early 17th Century, the idea of a hero was adapting to take on spiritual qualities (402). On the other hand, the heroes in Don Quixote's books were knights, heroes that were long gone by the time Cervantes was writing. Instead of

focusing on spiritual qualities, “protection of the weak was central to the age of chivalry” (402). Quixote’s beloved stories inspired him to go out on his own and try to be a hero the way that he saw fit: as a knight.

Perhaps it is the gap in heroic ideals that makes Don Quixote look even more delusional in his heroic aspirations, but even Dave—who is emulating the heroes of his own time—looks ridiculous at first. Then again, as time goes on, his actions earn him a superhero nickname, Kick-Ass, and internet notoriety. The differing results might be due, in part, to how we see heroes in the 21st Century. Ramaswamy’s explains that the “twentieth century saw the emergence of the common man as hero,” which might help explain why it was easier for people to accept and applaud Dave’s comic-book inspired actions (402).

If the common man being included in the current image of the hero can help readers connect to fictional heroes, such a hero might be able to inspire more people to do good. A study by Leif Nelson and Michael Norton suggests that these fictional heroes do inspire good deeds. Nelson and Norton studied heroes’ effect on altruistic behaviors, and the results confirmed their hypothesis that participants primed with superheroes would be more likely to commit to long-term help than the control group (428).

However, if today’s common-man hero is more relatable and thus more likely to be mimicked by readers, we have to consider what exactly it is that readers would be mimicking. Along with noting the emergence of the common man as the hero, Ramaswamy also credits—or blames—the twentieth century for the rise of the antihero (402). While works like *Kick-Ass* and *Don Quixote* show fictional heroes inspiring common people to do good, the rise of the antihero could lead to them emulating a variety of qualities as well. What are these other qualities that readers might emulate? What other effects could superhero stories have on readers? I offer this thesis in an effort to explore these questions and show a wider range of the possible effects.

Because I will be exploring the effect of fiction on reality *in* fiction, I will need to use a technique that Roy T. Cook calls “narrative metacomics” (175). Narrative metacomics is a unique form of metafiction that includes characters who interact with comic books somehow—by reading, selling, or writing them (Cook 175). This technique is essential to maintaining the degree of separation between my characters and the heroes they read about.

In a story without narrative metacomics, heroes live in the same world as the people they inspire, like how Batman inspires people in Gotham. However, I’m more interested in how fictional heroes affect

readers—or once put into a story like my thesis, how metafictional heroes affect fictional readers. Like Dave, my characters can often be found reading a comic book or going to the movies, and stories like this, ones that employ narrative metacomics, start with a clear divide between fiction and reality but progressively blur these lines. This “blurring of the distinctions between reader, writer, and character” connects my thesis to the postmodern tradition (*Metafictional Powers in the Postmodern Age* 139).

That postmodern element challenges readers to follow the characters’ lead and be more aware of the story, which is an added benefit of using metafiction in my thesis. When characters read, they act almost as a mirror to readers, thus becoming more relatable. Robert Alter supports this idea, saying that metafictional stories have “increasingly [become] our most precisely fashioned instrument[s] for joining imagined acts and figures with real things” (qtd. in Buehrer 168). While metafiction helps us connect to the stories we read, it can also help us apply what we read to real life. In fact, metafictional stories could provide “a more critical relationship with books, a more robust form of reading that does not reject reading or even the pleasures of reading, but that requires evidence, confirmation, and argument” (Sanders 357). The ability to relate to the characters and the situations invites readers to be more involved and invested. While my focus and purpose in this project is to explore the potential effects of fictional heroes on readers, the metafictional element adds value to this thesis by making readers more aware of this wide-range of effects that superhero narratives have on them.

Karsten & Sol is a good example of how each of my stories uses metafiction in the process of exploring the potential effects of fiction on reality. Karsten, who lives on a farm in post-state-of-emergency-evacuation Illinois, loves one comic-book hero in particular. Instead of reading comics in the traditional, typical ways, like hand-held paper or digital books, Karsten enjoys comics as they roll, panel-by-panel, down the railroad tracks. Since these comics are evasive, she copies them down in a notebook, which starts to distort the lines between reader and writer. Then, one day, Karsten notices that something is off about the latest installment, and fearing that something has happened to her favorite artist, she feels called to take up her own heroic role in the story unfolding before her. Her desire to be part of this story complicates another boundary as she, the reader, is now identifying with the character. While Karsten is breaking down the boundaries between reader, writer, and characters, she’s also complicating the distinction between fiction and reality. Even though she seems to know that the comic-book hero is

fictional, she ignores the distinction and sets out on her own heroic journey, which reminds us of the results from Nelson and Norton's study that show superheroes inspiring altruistic behavior.

On the other hand, Sol, the other title character, represents the other side of this inspiration equation. Another finding from Nelson and Norton's study complicates the idea of heroes inspiring good deeds. While those who were primed with superheroes in general were more likely to help than the control group, the control group was actually more likely to help than a third group primed with one hero in particular: Superman (428). Instead of inspiring people to do good, Superman—known for morality and being a do-gooder himself—was actually found to have discouraged good acts by making people feel inferior and less able to help. At the same time that Karsten is feeling like she should take heroic action, Sol—the artist of these train-car comics—is feeling less and less worthy of being a part of the story.

Both characters struggle with their roles as they begin going in different directions, rejecting traditional dichotomies—another convention of postmodernism (138). Each story utilizes this convention, as each main character as a distinct perspective. The different views on these ideas—like what it means to be different, good, bad, and involved—also challenge truths and investigate the psychologies and subjectivities of each of my characters.

Part of the beauty of writing comic-book scripts is getting to work on a team where—like my characters—each person brings a different perspective. The writer writes a story and gives the script to the artists, allowing the artists to tell their story too. But I didn't always work like this. Before starting this thesis, I'd been overly specific, and I force-fed every little detail to the illustrators by breaking down and describing each page, panel, and perspective change in my action sections because I wanted to make sure that my points were clear.

Sometimes, artists want to be told what to do with such specific scripts, but other times, they want to be respected as storytellers too. Scott Snyder, highly-acclaimed *Batman* writer, learned a similar lesson while working with Greg Capullo. In an interview with Kevin Smith, host of the *Fatman on Batman* podcast, Snyder admits that he had a similarly detailed style of writing scripts when he took on *Batman*, but Capullo, who was “really used to getting more outlines than scripts” convinced him otherwise (Smith). He explains that, when discussing these differences, he and Capullo were both afraid that they would get in the way of each other's stories (Smith).

After discussing this further and working together, they developed a better working relationship and Snyder admits his faults, saying, “I was way too controlling about scripts with [Capullo] and I’ve given him a lot more room” (Smith). He says that he still writes full scripts with the issue, the dialogue, and the paneling, but he encourages Capullo to think of and make improvements. This willingness to cooperate is evidenced in the *Batman Endgame: Director’s Cut* where he encourages Capullo to take liberties, saying, “[I]f there’s anything you see here, Greg, that could be condensed, made easier, etc., just SAY” (Snyder). Snyder knows the story he wants to tell, but he trusts that Capullo, as the artist, knows how to get that story across.

Hearing these two discuss their working relationship helped me realize that the most important job of the script is communication. Aside from being a control freak, I just wanted to make sure that nothing was missed in my communications with my illustrators. My new approach makes sure that my illustrator and I both understand what the goals of the story are, but I also don’t tell the illustrator how to do his or her job. Luckily, unlike most other forms of writing that I’ve done in the past, the script doesn’t have to be subtle in all areas. You don’t want to insult readers’ intelligence with text that will appear on the page or clutter the action with explanations of your thoughts, but you also don’t want the rest of your team to have to guess what it is that you’re trying to accomplish.

In an effort to make sure that my thoughts were as clear as possible, I decided to go with a more conversational approach in my scripts and utilize a tool I call “the note to the illustrator.” I use these when I’m especially concerned that a point might be overlooked by the artists, which would lead to some of my story being lost in translation. The first use of this in my thesis comes after the opening scene in *Vic*, when we flash forward to a scene with two hobos, one brandishing a knife, approaching an old man. I didn’t want to clutter the action and throw off the reading of the action, but I had an idea about these two hobos. Instead of demanding exactly how this looks and from which angle, I maintain my hands-off stance and simply note, “If the difference in size between these two characters is similar to that of ROBBY and JACCO in the opening scene, this could add some mystery to them because readers might think that this is what the three of them decide to do with the talent that was discovered in the first scene” (Goss 3). I found that this would prove to be a much clearer and less-distracting and less-overbearing approach to letting the illustrator know what I was aiming at.

However, we're only afforded these luxuries of directness when speaking to other members of the team. When it comes to narration or dialogue, clarity has to be achieved through more conventional story-writing methods.

While working on *Karsten & Sol*, I worked on using one of these more conventional methods of conveying meaning. In an earlier draft of *Karsten & Sol*, before I had decided on a name for Sol, I was still using her eventual superhero name as a placeholder. I knew this needed to change eventually, but after reading a conversation I'd written between her and her husband, I realized that, in order to truly believe their interactions, she desperately needed a name.

When I figured out her name and added it to the script, I read back through and felt the power of a name in dialogue. But that only piqued my curiosity, and I wanted to keep exploring the potential power of a name in dialogue. After thinking more about when names have been potent in a comic book, I remembered a moment in *Batman* #43 when Alfred and Bruce are engaging in a serious conversation. What stuck in mind was that instead of addressing Bruce as "Master Bruce," Alfred calls him "Bruce," and we get a better sense of the severity of the situation. When he leaves "Master" out of Bruce's name, we hear his tone shift from his normal, loyal-butler role to embrace father role.

I tried to take this idea of exploring the malleability of a name and apply it back to Sol and Julius' conversation to see if this would help it even more, and I was pleased with the results. Julius becomes suspicious of his wife sneaking around late at night when he notices that a locally infamous graffiti artist has changed targets from train cars to the trailers on his customers' semis. When he catches her in the act of strapping a can of spray paint into the last spot on an over-the-shoulder ammo-belt, Julius confronts her, and in the exchange that follows, Julius' choice in how to address his wife reflects his change in attitude toward her. He starts off with a playfully confrontational tone, and uses a term of endearment that doesn't sound of the ordinary, but as the seriousness of the situation escalates, he bypasses what he normally calls her—"Sol"—and goes straight to "Solina" (Goss 73). In this moment, she—and hopefully the readers—feels the weight of the situation similar to how we do when we hear our mothers call us by both our first and middle names.

Another area of concern, when it comes to clarity, arose when I started utilizing more flashbacks. While working on *Vic*, I had to include a lot of backstory to establish why he was running and what he was

running from. When doing so, I became more and more aware of not just how helpful flashbacks can be to establishing backstory but how much they can trip up the story.

If flashbacks work as hurdles, I'm in favor of finding a different way to establish a backstory. On the other hand, if the flashbacks can garner enough interest, they can establish themselves as another story completely, and *Arrow* gave me hope that these flashbacks could work. The hit comic-book-inspired TV show tells the story of Oliver Queen becoming the Green Arrow, but flashbacks reveal how he became a proficient archer and combatant. While I enjoyed the story of Oliver getting into the role of Green Arrow, I was consistently more excited to see *Arrow's* flashbacks.

I wanted my flashbacks to carry the same weight as *Arrow's* and act as more than just an infodump. I wanted to write flashbacks that work as a second story, developing at a similar pace to the story proper. While the main story is about hobo with the ability to turn himself invisible, a second story lies thematically and situationally interwoven in order to tell us how he finds out about the ability to turn invisible, how he deals with this as a child, and eventually what drives him to the hobo life of nomading his way around the country while his family—including a wealthy and generous movie-star brother—remains in California.

Just as flashbacks can work as hurdles, having too many stories with too many characters can also be distracting. Like many of the stories in this thesis would suggest, too much of something can always present itself as a problem and moderation is recommended. I saw the effects of this when I tried to take two stories and make them one. Originally, Karsten was supposed to have her own story, but when I started writing *Al & Ben* in the same world, I saw the possibility that their stories could intersect. With my enthusiasm about seeing what I could fit in twenty-seven pages of a comic book, I moved Karsten into a story with Al and Ben.

The process wasn't difficult. Since I'd already written stories for each of the characters and had a good grip on them in my mind, they easily fit together and all it took from me was a little trimming here and there.

However, when I took a step back and read it from a reader's perspective, I realized that the development in my head wasn't on the page. Much of what I knew about the characters and how they

developed were lost while condensing, so it didn't take long for me to decide to help Karsten find her way back out of *Al & Ben* and into the pages of *Karsten & Sol*.

Despite the unsuccessful merger, part of the learning process is to not give up after the first failure. In fact, while most of the changes that I've noted up to this point have been smaller adjustments to my technique, the process of writing this thesis has actually changed the way I tell stories in general.

I love comics and the superheroes they give life to, giving us our modern form of Greek or Roman mythology, but at the risk of sounding conceited, I have to admit that they can be—and often are—handled poorly. Yes, comic book companies have to make money to survive, and in order to make money, comic book companies have to continuously sell comic books. Consequently, monthly comic books have fallen short of telling a complete story and leave readers wanting more. This, of course, would be desirable, as long as the readers' want for more results in sales and not disinterest.

This serialized comic book is what I was accustomed to, so when I first started writing my own, I started with a big story in mind and wanted to make that big picture stretch out over a longer arc. However, the more I got frustrated with serialized, partial stories, the more I became aware of the need for a full, satisfying story in each issue.

There are books and writers that consistently satisfy readers with a whole story in each issue, but to give credit to where credit is due, I have to thank Vince Gilligan and his pilot episode of *Breaking Bad* for helping shape my understanding of the potential to turn a big idea for a story into a pilot issue that can turn into something even bigger.

For example, half of my thesis, *Robby & Jacco* and *Vic*, started as a big idea for a story of three rather unique brothers with a rather unique situation. The older two brothers shared a biological father, but only one was blessed with his lumberjack physique. The youngest brother, whose father stayed around and raised all three boys, could turn invisible by holding his breath. I wanted to tell the story of these three brothers—inspired by stories of superheroes in comic books, on the radio, and in the movies—preparing, practicing, and planning to be a team of do-gooders like they saw in their stories.

I wanted to write a story about what happened to these plans and turn that into a whole series. I wanted to look at why buff, bulky Robby decided to be an actor instead of being a superhero, why Vic disappeared from his loving family's lives and opted to ride the rails instead of carrying out their childhood

dreams of becoming a superhero team, and what Jacco planned to do about keeping their dream alive. But the more I studied why Gilligan's pilot to *Breaking Bad* was great, the more I wanted to follow his lead.

I've studied his pilot episode for *Breaking Bad* extensively, using it as the model for creating a complex yet self-contained story from which different strands could be teased out and turned into their own stories. Gilligan's big idea was to tell the story of Walter White who teaches high school chemistry; is diagnosed with cancer; sees a former student, Jesse, escaping from a drug bust that was orchestrated by Walter's brother-in-law; contacts Jesse to learn how to cook and sell meth in order to provide for his family even as he is dying; acquires the knowledge and supplies to cook the meth; cooks and sells the meth; makes enough of a buzz that he gets the attention of prominent figures in the meth industry who pursue Walter in efforts to protect their territory; saves himself and Jesse by killing the two drug dealers; and goes home to his wife with a revitalized sex drive—all in the first episode. After watching the first episode, we see Walter in the position of having cash in hand and plenty of reasons to quit while he's ahead—remember, he just wanted to help provide for his family.

Before watching this series, I would have tried to work backwards and fill in the gaps. I would have tried to stretch Gilligan's story into a series—or at least a longer arc—due to a fear of spending such a good idea on one single episode. Instead of leaving him without a story to tell, he is able to pull out different strands from the wealth of complexities in the pilot and turn those into stories of their own.

For example, in the second episode, Walter and Jesse find out that, in fact, only one of the drug dealers is actually dead and the other is a new problem on their hands. At this point, Walter still has to deal with the remains of one body, but now, he also has to figure out what to do with the life of the survivor. Gilligan's complex pilot episode proved capable of doing the opposite of what I had feared.

I tried applying this approach to my storytelling, but as previously mentioned, these things have to be handled in moderation. I learned that trying to do everything I wanted with the three brothers in one issue was too much. While trying to deliver a complex story in one issue of a comic, I realized that I was tripping over the aforementioned hurdles again.

Instead of giving up on telling this story with the Gilligan approach, I took a different route and split the family in two and gave them two different books. *Robby & Jacco* tells most of the original idea of the brothers who didn't become a group of superheroes, establishes everyone's position, and shows the

initiation of Jacco's consolation plan. Since Vic has left his family, it makes sense that he leaves the others their own book and tells his own side of the complex story. Even if I couldn't write my stories exactly how Gilligan does, I was able to take parts of his approach and apply them to my own.

Overall, writing this thesis taught me something that my stories all try to say: the answer is somewhere between the extremes. Sure, reading *Batman* probably won't inspire people to build a Batcave and hop in the Batcopter, but that doesn't mean that readers aren't affected. Maybe a reader will be more willing to help a neighbor change a flat tire, carry in their groceries, or ... On the other hand, Batman's accomplishments might, instead, make readers feel inferior and unworthy of doing Batman-like deeds when afforded the opportunity. One way or another, fictional heroes do affect us, and a wider variety of potential effects deserve our attention.

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Vic

Issue 1

by

Joshua D. Goss

3/4/16

*

******PAGE 1******

Setting: Childhood home (Flashback)

Legend: 1946

Brown, drawn curtains leave a family room tinted in sepia that hints at an older setting. The sepia can hint at the past, but it also conjures up feelings of a dusty poverty, possibly reminding readers of a depression-era setting. But the contents of the house and the children don't suggest a particularly poor family—or a wealthy one, for that matter. The 1930-ish wood stove and the clothing of the eight-year-old ROBBY should also help put this in the 1940s.

ROBBY is standing in a corner near the stove, but he's not in trouble. He's playing hide and seek with his brothers, and he's it. He's just finished counting.

ROBBY

- Ready or not, I'll find you anyway!

Down the hall, two other boys duck into a room at the sound of ROBBY's warning. Even though one of these boys, JACCO, is only around a year younger than ROBBY, the stark contrast in stature makes the gap in age between JACCO and ROBBY seem much more drastic. JACCO pulls along their even younger toddler brother, VIC—who would be around two years old.

Click... A louvered closet door latches as the boys disappear, as quietly as possible, into a closet.

It's even darker inside the closet as the two boys hide, quietly giggling to each other. Their faces are illuminated by venetian-blind bars of faint sunlight peeking through the curtains in the room.

JACCO sits behind VIC, not quite using him as a shield, but not quite protecting him either. Both of their eyes widen as they hear ROBBY's footsteps reach the room.

JACCO

- [whispering to VIC] Shh! Hold your breath. If he can't hear us, he might not find us.

JACCO places his hands over VIC's mouth, non-menacingly, trying to help him hold his breath.

JACCO and VIC look at the door where they can hear their older brother's voice without being able to see him.

ROBBY

- [from the other side of the door] I'm going to hear you talking long before I hear VIC breathing, JACCO, but nice try!

We move to ROBBY's point of view, and he opens the door.

******PAGE 2******

We're surprised to see that we cannot, in fact, see the two boys who are hiding in the closet. This is because VIC has turned invisible, and since JACCO was touching him, VIC also turns JACCO invisible.

ROBBY

- What the—

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 3******

Setting: Small, wooded area near a train (Present)

Legend: July 22nd, 1963

An older hobo, PUDGE, hides in a small, wooded area near the train tracks. Along with the dark, night sky, the dirt on his face, hands, and clothes helps camouflage him as two railway police (BULLS) walk by. He's waiting for them to get far enough away that he can sneak into the car for a free ride.

However, as soon as the coast is clear, two younger hobos, BILLY and BO, who are apparently also good at hiding, seem to appear behind him out of nowhere.

***Note to the illustrator** – If these two characters' size differences are similar to that of JACCO and VIC in the opening scene, this could add some mystery to them because readers might think that this is what JACCO and VIC decide to do with the talent that was discovered in the first scene*

BILLY

- Well, lookie here...

BO

- Anything good?

BILLY threatens PUDGE with a knife while BO takes PUDGE's bag and starts looking through his belongings.

The hairs on DOG's back rise as he growls at the perceived threat, but PUDGE makes a gesture with his hand that calms his pet.

BILLY

- Calm the bone polisher, baldy...

PUDGE

- Sit, boy. That ol' bag isn't worth it.

Despite looking reluctant and wanting to protect his master, DOG sits obediently.

PUDGE

- Good DOG. Now, stay.

******PAGE 4******

Setting: Further down the same tracks

The BULLS have just walked by VIC at the moment he notices the scuffle. VIC sees BILLY and BO take PUDGE's bag and head for the train.

Within earshot of the BULLS at this point, VIC takes off running and sticks his arms out, **Sound effects** rustling the brush and calling attention to himself... Intentionally

BULLS turn their heads as they hear VIC making a commotion.

******PAGE 5******

VIC is running from the bottom-right-hand corner of the previous page to the top of this page where he picks up PUDGE, brushes him off, and helps PUDGE into the car with BILLY and BO, pointing to a corner of the train car.

VIC

- Hide in the corner and count to twenty—

PUDGE

- Slow down, boy. Count to—aloud?

VIC (cont.)

- Mhmm...

VIC takes a can out of his bag.

PUDGE

- [from the corner] two, three, four, five...

BILLY is still brandishing a knife when he approaches VIC in the middle of the car.

BILLY

- Some more gettins? Whatcha got there?

BO

- Some Sterno?

BILLY

- Mind if I take a swig?

VIC holds up a finger with the hand that holds the flask. He proceeds to take a cigarette, not looking the least bit worried about the knife held by BILLY, which should indicate that this is not an abnormal thing for VIC to experience as a hobo.

VIC

- Got a light?

BILLY nods to BO, and in the background, VIC takes a swig from the flask.

BO walks up to VIC with a lit match.

PUDGE

- [off-panel]... thirteen, fourteen, fifteen

VIC spits the alcohol out of his mouth, into the flame of the match being offered to him, burning BO's face.

Then, before BILLY can react, VIC throws the flask at BILLY's face, spilling the alcohol on him.

PUDGE

- Nineteen...

VIC dives over to PUDGE, puts his hand around PUDGE's mouth and gasps, clearly indicating that he's holding his breath. We should see him turning invisible, starting with his veins.

******PAGE 6******

BULL 1 opens the train car door, and BULL 2 makes his way into the train car, approaching the hobos inquisitively. While this is happening, BILLY and BO look irritated as they are still collecting themselves after the beating they just took.

BILLY

- Wh—what happened to... Where'd he...

BULL 1

- [mockingly] W-w-where'd who?

BULL 2

- He's just blabberin'... I only saw two of 'em get on here.

BO looks around confused, searching.

BO

- No there was another... He disappeared... Like a...

BULL 1

- A g-g-g-ghost? Oh, I'm sure there were *spirits* present... Whatcha been drinkin, son?

BULL 2

- You smell that too?

BULL 2 picks up the flask.

BULL 1

- Yep. Smells like the fuel for a good story. You two can tell us all about that on the way.

BULLS handcuff BILLY and BO and lead them to the door. BILLY is persistent in the story of the others, pointing, wide-eyed toward the corner where VIC and PUDGE were last seen.

BILLY

- No, I swear! They's here... Look over there

A BULL points his flashlight over to that side of the car, but there's nothing to be seen.

The rest of the page is a similar angle—VIC still cannot be seen—but zoomed out to include the door. We can see the BULLS leaving with the confused pair of hobos.

****PAGE 7****

VIC and PUDGE reappearing in the car. VIC is catching his breath.

PUDGE

- How did they not see us?

****END OF SCENE****

****PAGE 8 – 9****

Setting: Childhood home (Flashback)

Legend: 1946

VIC is giggling while he's sitting on his father's lap. His father is playing peek-a-boo with him. In the background, ROBBY and JACCO are scared and confused because they just saw their little brother turn invisible. They point at VIC as they talk to their mother.

VIC

- [narration textbox] Every kid is entertained by a game of peek-a-boo...

Six months later, VIC and DAD are playing peek-a-boo again, but VIC looks to be a little less entertained.

Legend: 1947

VIC

- [narration textbox] But I thought DAD **really** loved it...

DAD is still trying to get VIC to play, but VIC really doesn't look interested anymore.

DAD hugs VIC closely, seemingly giving up on making him turn invisible. In the background, MOM shrugs her shoulders and smiles.

VIC

- [narration textbox] Now, I understand what he was doing... But me being completely oblivious must have frustrated the hell out of them back then.

Tears and terror swell in VIC's eyes as he puts his hands over his mouth, trying to resist the spoon full of medicine MOM is trying to get him to take

Legend: 1948

***Note to the illustrator** – The fear in Vic's eyes should make readers think that this medicine has something to do with his invisibility and that his mom is trying to cure him of that, but she's actually just trying to give him some cough medicine, which will be explained later but should look intimidating now*

VIC

- [narration textbox] It was MOM who eventually got to the bottom of it with a spoon-full of medicine...

Since he is holding his hands over his mouth and holding his breath, trying to resist taking the medicine, VIC turns invisible, starting with his veins. In the background, ROBBY and JACCO peek around a corner and are excited to see this happen again.

The spoon MOM was holding hits the floor.

VIC

- [narration textbox] and a little help from ROBBY and JACCO to put the pieces together...

Cough VIC comes back into view because his cough makes him take a breath.

******PAGE 10******

Back at home, DAD sits VIC on his lap. This should remind readers of when he was trying to get VIC to turn invisible earlier on page 8. His hands are on VIC's shoulders, and they look like they are having a serious conversation.

VIC

- [narration textbox] ROBBY and JACCO talked to MOM...

DAD smiles as he tussles VIC's hair, trying to comfort his son.

VIC

- [narration textbox] MOM talked to DAD, and DAD talked to me...

DAD

- That doesn't make you weird, buddy! That's really cool!

Looking sad, worried, and scared, VIC stands up with a lunchbox. This should clearly be a first-day-of-school situation. DAD squats down to VIC's level and tussles VIC's hair.

Legend: 1949

VIC

- [narration textbox] I knew it was cool. That was the problem...

As they walk out the door to get on the bus, VIC walks behind ROBBY and JACCO, looking scared. ROBBY is reading a comic book while he's walking to the bus, and the cover of the comic book has a cliché picture of a typical damsel in distress looking scared of a monster... This should hint at why VIC is scared of being "cool" or "unique."

******END OF FLASHBACK******

******PAGE 11 – 13******

Setting: Back on the train (Present)

Legend: July 22nd, 1963

This should be a repeated panel of the scene on the train where VIC and PUDGE reappear.

PUDGE

- How did they not see us?

VIC

- I, uh... I dunno... It *is* dark in here...

PUDGE looks at VIC suspiciously, but his years of hobo-wisdom tell him that, sometimes, it's better not to ask too many questions.

PUDGE

- You're right, it is dark, Mr... I didn't catch your name.

VIC

- I'm VIC, and you are?

PUDGE cracks the door and whistles **whistle** for DOG.

PUDGE

- Nice to meecha, VIC. I'm PUDGE and here comes DOG.

The train begins to move **sound effects**, and DOG jumps back into the train car.

VIC

- Nice to meet you two, too. Any idea where this thing's headed?

PUDGE (cont.)

- Word is, factories in Britt are needin' some help... That's where we're headed... Eventually... But we have a few stops along the way.

VIC rummages through his backpack and pulls out his notebook, a pencil, and some jerky.

PUDGE

- Whatcha got there?

VIC looks at his jerky.

VIC

- Jerky... Hungry?

PUDGE points to the notebook instead.

PUDGE

- I was talkin' about the notebook.

VIC looks down at the notebook full of caricatures.

***Note to the illustrator** – Doing caricatures is VIC's way of feeling comfortable with the uniqueness of people. He can pull those out and highlight the

uniqueness to make him feel better about his own, so these “uniquenesses” should be particularly evident in the pictures that we see.*

VIC

- Oh, yeah, I do caricatures at stops... What about you?

PUDGE pats DOG who is sitting obediently at PUDGE’s side.

PUDGE

- He’s the talented one of this duo... We do tricks... But to answer your other question, I am a bit hungry...

VIC smiles and gladly hands PUDGE some jerky.

PUDGE

- Thanks

PUDGE tears off a piece of the jerky and hands it to DOG.

PUDGE

- Oh, and speakin’ of thanks, I ‘preciate you helpin’ me out back there.

VIC

- No problem. Just keepin’ up the code.

PUDGE (cont.)

- Code’s dyin’, son... Just like the trade... You youngens who grew up with this as the family business feel entitled to make your own rules.

Outside, as the train leaves, BULL 1 opens the driver-side door and is ready to get in. BULL 2 stuffs BO into the back of their white railroad police car.

PUDGE

- [off-panel textbox] **Chuckles** In fact, d'you consider how those two'll make the rest of us look?

BULL 2 closes the door to the back seat, but before BULL 1 gets in the car, BULL 2 smarts off about their jailbirds.

BULL 2

- Maybe these idiots could hold a job if they'd sober up a bit...

BULL 1

- Eh... It keeps us employed.

As the BULLS drive away, we can still see the train in the distance.

Once the car is out of the picture, VIC opens the door and hops out of the moving train.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 14-15******

Setting: Childhood home (Flashback)

Legend: 1948

The three boys stand around laughing at DAD's bulging eyes and red face as he puffs his cheeks, trying his hand at turning invisible by holding his breath.

VIC

- [narration textbox] DAD said it was cool

ROBBY and JACCO do the same thing, puffing their cheeks and unsuccessfully trying to turn invisible.

VIC

- [narration textbox] They all really did think it was cool...

*

Setting: Classroom (Still in flashback)

As ROBBY and JACCO walk by VIC in the hallway at school, they wink at him, indicating that they are respecting him and his desire to keep his invisibility secret.

VIC

- [narration textbox] But they respected me and let me keep this a secret...

VIC sits alone in class, but everyone else is talking to one another.

VIC

- [narration textbox] I'll admit, sometimes, I was tempted to be cool...

*

Setting: On a bench near a playground (Still in flashback)

VIC sits alone at a recess, doodling in a notebook, but there are two other kids reading comic books near him.

***Note to the illustrator** – The covers of these comics should look similar to the one that ROBBY was reading earlier. However, this time, the cover

should highlight a hero saving a damsel in distress
from the monster*

VIC

- [narration textbox] But I really didn't want to chance that... Sure, MOM, DAD, ROBBY, and JACCO thought it was cool, but who knows how others would react...

One of the other two kids walks over to VIC and looks at the notebook. He looks pleased with what he sees.

STAN

- JOHN, come look at this!

From JOHN's perspective, we see that VIC has drawn the cover of one of the comics that the kids were reading, showing VIC taking note of the monster/villain being different than the hero.

JOHN

- Awesome!

VIC

- [narration textbox] Luckily, I found something else. Drawing...
Vulnerability averted...

JOHN and STAN look at the notebook over VIC's shoulder and admire his work. For the first time at school, VIC smiles.

VIC

- [narration textbox] I was happy with the limited success.

The picture that JOHN and STAN admired helps transition to an image of the family refrigerator full of pictures drawn by VIC.

VIC

- [narration textbox] Nearly everyone was happy...

*

Setting: Back at childhood home (Still in flashback)

MOM scrubs something in a tub in the kitchen.

VIC

- [narration textbox]: MOM? She didn't mind keeping it a secret either.

A closer look at MOM shows that she's scrubbing VIC's shoes in order to keep them squeaky clean. This way, she could keep tabs on him, even when he was invisible.

VIC

- [narration textbox] She just wanted to make sure she could keep tabs on me.

VIC smiles as he walks away wearing his newly-squeaky-clean shoes, but he stops as he hears a **Squeak**

He looks back with a curious glare at MOM, who is giggling.

MOM

- At least I didn't sew bells to your clothes!

******END OF FLASHBACK******

******PAGE 16-17******

Setting: Outside of a doctor's office

Legend: July 22nd, 1963

VIC stops as he's walking by the doctor's office and thinks for a second.

As the front door opens, it rings the bell above the doorframe **ding ding**, but there's no one for the nurses to see. This is because VIC is walking through there invisibly.

The nurse at the front desk, NURSE AMY, is confused, but NURSE ANN goes over and pulls the door closed until... **Click**

NURSE ANN

- I didn't realize it was so windy out there...

VIC makes his way down a hall, away from the nurses, to a place where no one would be able to see him.

VIC slips in through another door to one doctor's office and takes a deep breath after closing the door.

Because of the deep breath, he comes back to visibility.

Once he's in the office, VIC rummages through the desk drawers and the doctor's files, finding material for a plan he's concocted.

After accumulating a small pile of goodies, VIC sits down at the doctor's desk and writes/draws for a moment.

He stops, contemplates for a moment, and goes back to the page.

Before he leaves, he takes a deep breath and turns invisible again.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 18-19******

Setting: Movie Theatre (Flashback)

Legend: 1949

A door to the theatre opens, but at first, we can't see anyone coming through.

***Note to the illustrator** – This should be from a similar angle to how the doctor's office door looked when he was sneaking in, which would hint to the readers that this is another scene with VIC sneaking in somewhere*

However, this time, VIC isn't sneaking in anywhere. In fact, he's holding the door open for his brothers, but the angle is too high to see the little guy.

ROBBY and JACCO walk in the door that VIC is holding open, ruffling his hair as they walk by.

Once they're all inside, the three boys approach the ticket-collecting employee of the theatre.

TICKET GUY

- What're you guys seeing today?

ROBBY

- I'm bringing these guys to see *Allen the Amusing Alien*. Have you seen it?

TICKET GUY looks down at VIC and smiles.

TICKET GUY

- Not yet, but I know my son wants to see it. I bet you'll love it, little guy!

TICKET GUY takes their tickets, rips the half and hands the tickets back to ROBBY.

TICKET GUY

- That'll be in the theatre to the left, fellas. Enjoy your movie!

VIC, JACCO, and ROBBY walk into the theatre to the left.

However, in the next panel, we see an empty hallway and as TICKET GUY is looking the other way, the door to the other theatre opens without us seeing anyone... This is VIC, JACCO, and ROBBY sneaking into sci-fi movie instead.

VIC

- [narration textbox]: Like I said, ROBBY and JACCO didn't care that they had to keep it a secret...

VIC looks scared in the sci-fi movie, but JACCO and ROBBY seem to really be enjoying it.

VIC

- [narration textbox]: That was but a small price to pay for the benefits...
Like sneaking into monster movies after buying tickets to go see something like *Allen the Amusing Alien*.

Show the big screen with a monster, arms raised in the air, attacking things.

VIC

- [narration textbox]: I was scared, sure, but I wanted to be around my brothers.

******PAGE 20******

Setting: Back in childhood home

We have a close-up shot of VIC as he peeks around a corner.

VIC

- [narration textbox]: They loved those movies... But I was more into fighting the monsters than watching someone else do it...

Zoom out and see VIC peeking around a corner with his hands in the shape of a gun, standing next to JACCO doing the same thing. On the other side of the doorway is ROBBY waiving to them in the lets-go motion.

DAD walks around with his arms up in the air, pretending to be a monster. JACCO and VIC attack DAD, each holding onto a leg **Animated-monster roooooaar**

Everyone is stuck in a stalemate—DAD is actually just letting the boys think they’re succeeding—and staying in the same position, but DAD now has a surprised look on his face.

ROBBY flies through the air to tackle DAD.

DAD

- **Uff** You’re almost getting too strong for DAD, ROBBY!

DAD sits ROBBY down next to him and ruffles his hair.

DAD

- I’m going to go see if MOM needs any help in the kitchen.

VIC and JACCO hop up on the couch next to ROBBY.

JACCO

- D’you hear that, ROBBY? DAD said you were almost too strong for him... Pretty soon, you’ll be able to fight real monsters!

ROBBY

- I bet I could do it... With a little training first, right?

****PAGE 21****

Setting: Outside the local high school at night (Flashback)

From the distance, there are three small outlines of figures sneaking around outside of a high school in the dark.

VIC

- [narration textbox] I thought they were kidding... To my surprise, they weren't.

An older JANITOR is sweeping the hallway, but in the background, ROBBY, VIC, and JACCO are tiptoeing to sneak past the unsuspecting JANITOR.

VIC

- [narration textbox] To our surprise, we didn't need to be invisible to sneak in.

JACCO and VIC help spot ROBBY who is lifting something heavy.

VIC

- [narration textbox] But I had to keep going with them, because it took both JACCO and me to spot ROBBY.

However, despite his willingness to help, VIC is too young to be a lot of help, and JACCO struggles to spot ROBBY.

VIC

- [narration textbox]: Even though they both came from the same dad, JACCO wasn't quite as lucky as ROBBY when it came to getting their dad's physique.

****PAGE 22-23****

With a closer view of VIC struggling to help spot ROBBY, we can see that his struggling is causing him to not breathe very well, so he starts to go invisible, starting with his veins.

VIC

- [narration textbox] Funny thing about their dad is, no one has seen him in years, but it was my dad—presumably—who came along afterward and had a son who could be invisible.

As the JANITOR walks by, sweeping a nearby hallway, he sees that the weight room's lights are on.

JANITOR reaches for the handle.

The boys look frightened because they didn't even notice the doorknob turning until it was too late and JANITOR has opened the door.

VIC

- [narration textbox] Speaking of which, invisibility would always be helpful, if we got caught.

******PAGE 24******

JANITOR opens the door wide, and VIC and JACCO stand there, spotting ROBBY, all three of them look terrified.

VIC

- [narration textbox] But you gotta know that you're in danger of being caught before you can hide...

JANITOR doesn't even look in the weight room, swatting at the light switch just inside the door and turning out the lights without even looking into the room.

The door closes as JANITOR leaves to continue his sweeping of the hallway, leaving us with a sliver of a light as the door closes on an otherwise blank, black panel.

ROBBY

- Hey, I...

Uurrgh

ROBBY (cont.)

- Guys!

Sound of weights crashing

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 25******

Setting: Jail/police station (Present)

Legend: July 22nd, 1963

JAIL JANITOR closes a jail-cell door, and walks away with some kind of cleaner in hand. **Sounds of jail-cell-door closing should sound kind of like the weights**

He walks down the hall to the front of the station where the other police are.

JAIL JANITOR

- [to an officer] The other holding cell is clean, if you wanted to move the two drunk bums over there.

BILLY and BO have been put into a holding cell that was already occupied by CELLMATE. The three of them are sharing the stories of why they are all there.

CELLMATE

- And he just disappeared?

BO

- Yeah, we have no idea how it happened... And course they think we're crazy for saying that we were attacked by a—

BILLY looks terrified as he points above CELLMATE'S head.

From his perspective we see that he's scared because, in that window, VIC is fading out of visibility.

BILLY

- There he was again!

CELLMATE looks behind him with a raised eyebrow, but he doesn't see anything.

BO looks out the window, searching for something to help back up BILLY, and he sees a figure coming back into visibility.

BO

- He's right, I just saw the ghost too!

Back up at the front of the station, the front door opens, and the officers look toward the door.

******PAGE 26******

VIC is dressed as a doctor holding files.

VIC

- OFFICER, have you seen these two men?

VIC is showing two files of men that looked similar to BILLY and BO, but he's drawn "updated pictures" to show a more recent depiction of them.

VIC

- I had a more accurate portrayal drawn up to put around town. I didn't realize that the pictures on file were severely out dated.

VIC shows them the "out-dated" pictures of two other people who clearly look very different from BILLY and BO.

VIC

- You know how it is... When you see them every day, you don't realize how much they've changed.

OFFICER looks back at the others in the office, showing them the "updated" renderings and scanning their faces for a reaction.

VIC

- I'm sorry if they caused any trouble, OFFICER. They don't mean any harm.

VIC shakes around a bottle of "pills."

VIC

- They're delusional patients of mine that escaped from the asylum, and they need their medicine.

At this, the OFFICER looks convinced enough and grabs keys.

OFFICER 2

- Patients, huh?

OFFICER

- I think I might know who you're looking for. Follow me.

******PAGE 27******

When the officer goes to unlock the door, he turns away from VIC who is standing behind him. A wide-eyed VIC holds a finger up to his mouth, shushing BILLY and BO.

OFFICER

- We had a few of the railroad's bulls bring these two in earlier, sayin' they'd found a couple hobos who were tryin' to bum a ride out of town...

VIC

- There you two are! Don't worry, boys, we'll get you out of here and back home soon.

BILLY

- [whispering to CELLMATE] That's him... The guy from the train...

OFFICER takes BILLY, BO, and VIC to the front room...

VIC

- Can I get a couple cups of water, OFFICER?

Another officer brings them each a cup of water. VIC looks at BILLY and BO with a playfully-stern glare.

VIC

- Take your medicine, boys.

OFFICER looks at BILLY and BO who are smiling back at him.

VIC

- Sorry about the confusion, OFFICER.

BO

- Yeah, sorry, OFF—

VIC smiles as he offers his hand to the officer, cutting BO off by moving on from apologies to gratitude.

VIC

- Thank you. Who knows where these boys could have ended up. They might not have survived the night.

BILLY

- Yeah, sorry, doc... Boy does someone have some explainin' to do...

******END OF ISSUE******

Robby & Jacco

Issue 1

by

Joshua D. Goss

3/4/16

*

******PAGE 1******

Setting: ROBBY's childhood room – Night

Legend: 1948

A ten-year-old ROBBY sits on his bed reading a superhero comic book by lamplight. ROBBY doesn't initially appear to be the stereotypical comic-book reader—a gangly or a chubby, pimply nerd. He's a well-built, handsome boy. Along with his clothes, the 10 cent price tag on the cover of this comic should hint at the 1930s setting. His two younger brothers—JACCO is nine and VIC is four—sneak a peek around the corner of the doorframe, looking into the bedroom. VIC, giggling, looks to be following JACCO, which seems like a bad idea given the mischievous grin on JACCO's face.

When ROBBY turns a page, the brothers disappear from the doorframe, but from the distance, VIC calls for him.

VIC

- ROBBY?

This gets ROBBY's attention, and he sets the book down on his lap and looks to the doorway.

ROBBY

- I'm reading... Watcha need?

He waits a second, but after not getting any response, he goes to find out what VIC needed.

ROBBY

- I'm coming...

ROBBY walks under a standing lamp that shines in an otherwise dark living room of a 1930s home.

In a series of slow-motion panels, ROBBY is startled by VIC suddenly reappearing out of invisibility.

***Note to the illustrator** – VIC can turn invisible by holding his breath. The invisibility is a reaction from his body to a lack of oxygen in his blood, so when we see him go in and out of invisibility, the transition should begin with the veins, providing some interesting visuals and connecting this ability to his blood. This becomes more important in VIC's comic. Comic-book heroes and other characters in the media have made him fear being different*

Out of shock, ROBBY's muscles flex as he tenses up in anticipation.

This is obviously a plan orchestrated by JACCO, who jumps out from a hiding place onto ROBBY's back.

Even though JACCO is only about a year younger than his older brother, ROBBY has clearly inherited a better physique.

******PAGE 2******

In a display of ROBBY's natural strength and physical superiority, he easily loosens JACCO's arms from around ROBBY's neck and flings his brother over his head onto a nearby couch.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 3******

Setting: Movie set

Legend: 1963

A close-up view of a masked man reveals that we're looking into the eyes of an older, more experienced ROBBY.

He scans the dark that engulfs the surroundings, and a sound provokes a similar reaction to when VIC startled him. This time, when he tenses up, we see every muscle in his comic-hero-inspired crime-fighting suit.

Out of the darkness come a handful of supernatural, alien, or monster-like adversaries—something that clearly comes from an early-sixties movie.

YOUNG ROBBY

- [off-panel textbox] I think you guys are going to have to come up with something better than that...

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 4-5******

Setting: Diner

Legend: Meanwhile

A newspaper obscures the view of TRUCKER sitting at the counter, but we can still see his trucker cap peeking out over the paper and his hands on each side in a fist of a grip. Maybe his veins should be popping

out of his hands a little, which would resemble ROBBY as we last saw him, tensed up. In the background, JACCO enters the diner **Ding**.

With a menu in hand and a smile on her face, WAITRESS meets JACCO at the counter where he sits, leaving plenty of space between him and the trucker when he sits at the counter. In the background, TRUCKER expresses frustration at waiting for his food.

TRUCKER

- [grumbling unpleasantly] What's takin' so long? Got product to deliver.

WAITRESS

- [to JACCO] What'll it be, hon?

JACCO

- Uh, I'll take a couple orders of your special and a couple sodas to go, please.

WAITRESS smiles, puts the finishing touches on the ticket, and responds to TRUCKER without stopping on her walk back to deliver JACCO's order to the kitchen. In the background, JACCO tries to avoid eye contact with TRUCKER who is still grumbling his frustrations.

TRUCKER

- Shelves ain't stocked till I get there 'n customers ain't happy if shelves ain't stocked.

WAITRESS

- [apologetically] I'm sorry, sir. I'll go check on it.

TRUCKER (cont.)

- If the customers aren't happy, the company sure ain't happy.

Another panel of JACCO trying to avoid eye contact with TRUCKER would heighten the awkwardness of this situation.

WAITRESS emerges from the kitchen, and her head is in the gutter between the next two panels of the two men.

- 1) TRUCKER peeks out over the top of the newspaper.

WAITRESS

- [happily, bubbly to TRUCKER] It'll be out in just a minute, sir. I'm sorry about your wait.

TRUCKER

- If the company ain't happy, I ain't got a job!

- 2) JACCO has his wallet out, ready to pay.

WAITRESS

- [more relaxed to JACCO] The total's \$10.10

JACCO takes all of the money out of his wallet, and hands it to her. WAITRESS winks at JACCO, indicating an appreciation for his concern but also a confidence in her ability to handle the situation for herself.

JACCO

- [quietly, to WAITRESS] Why do you take that from him?

WAITRESS

- [stern-but-not-angry faced] I live off of these tips. He'll eat, grumble, pay, and leave... And my day will go on... Don't worry...I'm a big girl. I can handle myself.

***Note to the illustrator** – If we establish the similarity between TRUCKER and ROBBY from the beginning with the fist gripped, JACCO's sentiments about TRUCKER could more effectively hint at the relationship between JACCO and ROBBY, making this scene even more potent*

WAITRESS grabs TRUCKER's food from the window to the kitchen, but JACCO's obsession with heroics makes this a bitter pill to swallow.

WAITRESS

- [apologetically and as sweetly as ever to TRUCKER] I'm so sorry about the wait, sir. Is there anything else I can get for you?

TRUCKER

- Not 'less you can get me all the time back that I wasted, waitin' on this shit.

Still sourfaced, TRUCKER takes a bite of the "shit," and WAITRESS, still smiling, brings JACCO his to-go order.

JACCO

- Thanks

A new angle should be similar to looking past the newspaper toward the front of the diner, but this time, we're looking past JACCO's change that he's left behind for WAITRESS as a tip. In the background, we see JACCO standing between the cab of his truck and the trailer, sliding one of the to-go orders into a hidden compartment in the front of the trailer.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 6 – 7******

Setting: On set

Legend: Meanwhile

As we return to ROBBY, we see the group of henchmen immobilized and scattered around him, but he maintains an unrelenting, cautious posture because there's a greater threat at large. He's in a standoff. About twenty yards away, LEADER OF THEIR KIND holds your typical damsel in distress, STELLA, captive.

***Note to the illustrator** – The OTHER KIND needs to be a clear villain, which will play into our understanding of VIC who fears the media's presentation of the non-normal.*

LEADER OF THEIR KIND

- I should have known I'd see you here, CAPTAIN...

ROBBY

- I'm here now, STELLA. Don't worry... I'm ending this...

LEADER OF THEIR KIND (cont.)

- What makes you think you can stop us?

ROBBY bends down to set down his gun.

ROBBY

- I know that I'm the one you really want... All of this is my fault... Let her go, and you can have me... Without a fight...

STELLA

- Oh, CAPTAIN, no!

ROBBY holds up his hand as if to tell her to stop and say “hush.”

LEADER OF THEIR KIND takes a step toward him, but ROBBY hasn’t taken his hand off of the gun yet.

Remaining on one knee, CAPTAIN holds his hand up as a warning to LEADER OF THEIR KIND.

ROBBY

- I’m here to end this all, to reconcile and restore the peace... Just let her go, let my kind be, and you can have me...

Accepting his fate and trusting that peace is the ultimate goal of both kinds, CAPTAIN takes his hand off of the gun.

In response to this, LEADER OF THEIR KIND lets STELLA go, and CAPTAIN kicks the gun to his adversary.

STELLA

- No, CAPTAIN!

LEADER OF THEIR KIND picks up the gun and shoots CAPTAIN, keeping his word to not hurt STELLA and disappearing after.

STELLA holds CAPTAIN in her arms as he lies dying, looking like Lois holding Superman as he dies.

STELLA

- Why did you—

ROBBY

- I am dying soon, and I hope you will forgive me for speaking bluntly. I’m another loss in a population that grows smaller every day, and the threat of

aggression by their kind can no longer be tolerated. There must be security for all, or no one is secure. I'm not saying that we should give up any freedom, except the freedom to act irresponsibly. I knew this when I established the treaty with their kind and agreed to enforce their terms. We—those of our kind and those of theirs—have long accepted and adhered to those principles. Because of the pact I created, we have an organization for the mutual protection for all kinds and for the complete elimination of aggression. The test of any such higher authority is, of course, those of us who support it. My function, administered to me by my position, is to govern our kind and preserve the peace.

STELLA looks down at CAPTAIN confusedly.

ROBBY

- This responsibility cannot be revoked. Months ago, at the first sign of violence, I should have acted automatically against the aggressor, since it was our kind who threatened theirs in the 4th sector. Now, I do not pretend to have achieved perfection, but we did have a system, and it worked. It still can... But if I don't act now, the violence threatens to extend, and our kind will be reduced to a burned-out cinder. My choice... No... My responsibility is simple: I must sacrifice myself for us all to live in peace... The responsibility lies with me...

With these final words, ROBBY drops his head backward, indicating that CAPTAIN has finally died.

DIRECTOR

- Cut! That'll do, ROBBY. We'll pick up here tomorrow, everyone, have a good night...

DIRECTOR walks onto the set and everyone scatters...

DIRECTOR

- Jiminy Christmas, Bob... We're making *The Humblest of All God's Creatures*, **not** *The Day the Earth Stood Still*...

DIRECTOR holds the script out and points to the single line of dialogue under the name CAPTAIN...

DIRECTOR

- CAP'N's dyin' here... He doesn't have time to recite the Gettysburg Address...

The rest of the page is panel-less, and ROBBY is walking off set with DIRECTOR. ROBBY takes this time to stop and sign a few autographs and wave at fans.

ROBBY

- I'm their hero, DIRECTOR... You know what I always, say... You gotta give the fans what they want!

******PAGE 8******

DIRECTOR rolls his eyes, and the two part ways. ROBBY walks toward his dressing-room trailer area.

Seemingly out of nowhere, a fan approaches ROBBY, grabbing him on the shoulder.

FAN

- Mr. HERRIOT!

ROBBY tenses up, and his muscles flex—as they did when he was being attacked as a child in the opening scene. But before he does anything, SECURITY 1 grabs the fan. SECURITY 2 is ready to handcuff the fan.

ROBBY walks away without doing anything.

But before he goes into his trailer, ROBBY looks back at the situation.

ROBBY

- I'm fine, he's fine, we're all fine... No big deal, guys. Just let him go.

******END OF SCENE******

***Note to the illustrator** – When Robby ends this scene by getting into his trailer here, it should line up on the right edge of the page. The left edge of the next page should have Jacco getting out of his truck, which should help smooth out the transition with some nice visuals.*

******PAGE 9******

Setting: JACCO's truck at a gas station

Legend: Meanwhile

JACCO gets out of the cab to get gas.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] You want to stretch your legs? You're safe to get out here.

PASSENGER

- [off-panel textbox] We still have a ways, don't we?

While filling up his truck at the gas station, JACCO walks to the place where he slid the food earlier and helps PASSENGER get out of the hidden compartment in the trailer.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] Yeah, but should get there by morning. Speaking of which, why doncha ride up here with me? We can help keep each other company.

PASSENGER

- [off-panel textbox] You're sure I don't need to stay hidden?

PASSENGER's stiff movements should indicate that he's not been able to get out and stretch in a while. But more importantly, his actions should show some kind of hesitation or fear.

JACCO

- Don't worry; I've done this before... We're far enough out of town by now, and like I said, we could both use the company...

Once PASSENGER gets in the cab with JACCO, they take off.

PASSENGER

- So, you said you do this all the time? How do you even get involved in something like this?

JACCO

- I wanted to help people, and sometimes, you have to work with what you have.

PASSENGER (cont.)

- So you—

******PAGE 10******

PASSENGER looks over to JACCO who pats the dash of the truck.

JACCO

- Can drive a truck, and the truck can... Well, it does its part to help too...

PASSENGER turns his eyes back to the road and **chuckles** after hearing about JACCO's desire to help.

PASSENGER

- Help...

Around JACCO's head is a montage of small-panel pictures of JACCO handing envelopes to several different people. Each of these different people has their luggage at their feet and their mugshots floating next to them.

PASSENGER

- So you think people like me deserve help... A second chance?

JACCO

- Help, yes, but don't just think of it as just a second chance...

From inside the cab, we see PASSENGER with his mugshot floating next to him.

JACCO

- Sure, the idea of this position **was** to help give people a second chance, but why stop there? Why not to give them **more** than that?

******PAGE 11******

Setting: A hospital

ROBBY is now off set, but he remains in costume, which draws a lot of attention and excitement from everyone in the building—patients, parents, nurses, doctors.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] I want to give people the chance to stop wasting their potential.

ROBBY hands an envelope full of money to DESK WORKER.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] A chance to stop wasting their resources.

ROBBY plays with the kids in the hospital, holding a bunch of them on his arms.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] A chance to do more with their lives.

ROBBY helps clean up after children eat their dinners.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] More than just wipe their hands clean and start over.

ROBBY reads a superhero comic book to a different child as a bedtime story. This should be a different issue but the same character that ROBBY was reading in the opening scene, indicating a higher level of interest in this character than just being a casual reader.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] Everyone can do their part... Anyone could be a hero.

******PAGE 12-13******

Setting: Back in JACCO's truck

JACCO looks down at the dash of his truck where there are a few pictures of his family.

JACCO

- I've just been around too much wasted potential in my life...

PASSENGER notices the picture that JACCO is looking at on the dash.

PASSENGER

- Wow, you know ROBBY P—

JACCO

- Everyone **can** do something. Thus, everyone's something **could** be used to help others...

JACCO and PASSENGER pass a sign covered up by tree branches.

JACCO

- They've just gotten themselves into trouble with it instead...

When the truck goes by the sign, it blows the branches around enough to read the speed limit sign at 35.

JACCO

- Yes, I know who you **were**, what you **did**, what you **can do** but I won't hold that against you...

A SHERIFF turning on his lights right after the sign interrupts their conversation by the red and blue lights flashing behind them.

JACCO

- I might, however, hold you to it.

PASSENGER

- Hold me to—

A close-up shot of JACCO in his side mirror shows him looking back at SHERRIF, but he's not shaken.

JACCO

- Well, shoot.

A close-up shot of PASSENGER in his side mirror shows him in a nervous panic.

PASSENGER

- Oh, shit! What do I do?

Passenger—still clearly panicked—looks at JACCO for some kind of direction.

JACCO

- Just go on 'n' sneak back there.

******PAGE 14******

From above, we see PASSENGER sneaking back into the trailer and the sheriff walking alongside the truck, approaching the cab.

SHERIFF

- [off-panel textbox] You know why I pulled you over, son?

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] No, sir.

SHERIFF (cont.)

- [off-panel textbox] You not see the speed on that sign back there?

JACCO (cont.)

- [off-panel textbox] No, sir, I'm sorry, I didn't.

We're looking from SHERIFF's view outside of JACCO's window.

SHERIFF

- Well, it said 35, and you flew on by...

JACCO

- I'm sorry, sir, I'll slow down... Thank you for doing what you can to keep these roads safe.

SHERIFF (cont.)

- I'll let it slide this time, son...

JACCO (cont.)

- Thank you, sir—

******PAGE 15******

PASSENGER pulls the string of the over-head, single light bulb while he is hiding in the hideout section of the trailer. He gathers the things in the room as if he is getting ready to try to escape.

***Note to the illustrator** – This section is as wide and tall as the trailer but is only about three feet deep, which would be a large enough space for Jacco to hide his human cargo in. However, the dimensions shouldn't be evident at this point, because that would lower the tension and risk of getting caught in this moment, which would lower the fun for the readers*

SHERIFF

- [through-the-wall text bubble] —But while I have you... Do you mind giving me a peek in the trailer?

JACCO

- [through-the-wall text bubble] Do you really think this is the best way to spend your time, sir?

For one small panel, we jump back to JACCO's point of view, where we see SHERIFF do some kind of suspicious glare at JACCO.

SHERIFF

- Let's have a looksey in the trailer there, son.

Footsteps sounds

SHERIFF stands at the back of the trailer, waiting for JACCO to open it up. PASSENGER obviously isn't the only one scared in this moment; SHERIFF is standing with his hand hovering over his gun as if he's really worried about what might be in the trailer.

JACCO

- That badge can do a lot of good, but you'd rather spend your time looking at a bunch of boxes?

SHERIFF

- Unlock the door and open it up.

Click

******PAGE 16-17******

A big reveal of JACCO opening the door, but the only thing that reveals is a bunch of boxes, pallets, and whatnot... Exactly what JACCO said would be there... No lighted room or PASSENGER.

SHERIFF walks around inside, shining his flashlight around, searching in and behind the boxes. In the background, JACCO stands near the doors of the trailer.

An overhead-view illustration of the truck—seeing through the roof—clarifies the hideaway section for the readers. From this picture, we can see JACCO at the back of the truck and SHERIFF—who has been searching the trailer, looking behind the boxes—has made his way to what he considers the very front of the trailer, standing approximately 2' away from PASSENGER. But PASSENGER is safely concealed in his 3' section of false-wall concealment.

Tiny, close-up shot of JACCO gripping the door.

Tiny, close-up shot of JACCO gripping the lock.

Click

JACCO and SHERIFF outside of the truck.

JACCO

- Well, thanks for the company, Sheriff, but—speaking of company—I’d better hurry. *These* companies aren’t happy if their **customers** aren’t happy, and their customers aren’t happy if shelves aren’t stocked.

SHERIFF

- Alright, son. Be on your way.

As JACCO passes by the hidden door, he knocks on it.

Another overhead view of PASSENGER climbing back into the cab through the rear window.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 18-19******

Setting: Hospital

ROBBY is still at the same hospital, but since it’s late, everything has seemingly slowed down there. Some of the lights are off, and there aren’t a lot of people walking around in the hallways.

ROBBY is getting ready to leave the hospital, but one hospital worker, HOSP. WORKER calls for his attention.

***Note to the illustrator** – To readers, this should look a lot like the fan from the set earlier. It is the same guy, but ROBBY doesn’t recognize him. FAN is now masquerading as a hospital worker to get a story*

ROBBY’s muscles flex as he tenses up, again. This time, it’s because HOSP. WORKER comes up behind him.

HOSP. WORKER

- Mr. PIPER!

ROBBY turns around and relaxes when he sees HOSP. WORKER.

HOSP. WORKER

- Thank you so much for coming today.

ROBBY

- I enjoyed it! No big—

HOSP. WORKER puts his hand on ROBBY's shoulder and dips his head in a dramatically saddened-looking way...

HOSP. WORKER

- It means a lot to the kids.

ROBBY

- Well, I'm glad to help with what I—

HOSP. WORKER looks up at ROBBY

HOSP. WORKER

- And help you did! The look on their faces...

ROBBY looks around smiling at the kids' rooms, now darkened for bedtime. HOSP. WORKER's face turns excited suddenly.

HOSP. WORKER

- The look on my wife's face! She'll be so jealous when I tell her about my day... *I* got to meet you, and she's your biggest fan!

ROBBY

- I appreciate that. Thank—

HOSP. WORKER slaps himself in the forehead.

HOSP. WORKER

- Ugh! She probably won't even believe me.

HOSP. WORKER hoists his keys in triumph.

HOSP. WORKER

- You know what? I have a camera in the car! Mind if I get a picture with you, so I have proof? She'd love it.

ROBBY

- I can hang around another few minutes. No problem, pal.

HOSP. WORKER and ROBBY have someone take a picture for them and that picture is the last panel.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 20 – 21******

Setting: Childhood home

Legend: 1948

We return to the flashback scene from the beginning. After being tossed off of ROBBY's back, JACCO is lying on the couch in an unnatural position, smiling; VIC is a giggling spectator; and ROBBY is relaxed in an almost-bored stance.

YOUNG ROBBY

- I think you guys are going to have to come up with something better than that.

YOUNG VIC

- We're going to need more help!

YOUNG ROBBY

- I bet you guys would have more of a shot if we trained JACCO, put some meat on his bones...

JACCO stops smiling and sits up, and MOM walks through the room in the background, looking over her boys, smiling.

YOUNG JACCO

- VIC's got the right idea... We need more help. We need to keep our focus on training you, not me. You're the brawn, I'm the brains, and VIC's... the baby!

MOM

- He's my baby!

VIC smiles discretely and rolls his eyes, and JACCO amuses himself more than he amuses the others, considering his playful jab at VIC a knee-slapper.

JACCO, who is still smiling, looks over to check VIC's reaction to the jab, but VIC is nowhere to be seen.

YOUNG JACCO

- Right again, VIC... More like... The stealthy... But that doesn't fit...

JACCO feels around the room for VIC, knowing that his younger brother has gone invisible... again.

JACCO and ROBBY are no longer surprised by this; it isn't anything new to them.

YOUNG JACCO

- Hmm... Brawn, brains, and... We need something else that starts with "B"

JACCO, still walking around with his arms extended, feeling around for VIC, heads back toward the hall.

YOUNG JACCO

- Brawn, brains, and... b-b-b—

When he gets near the hall, VIC comes out of hiding, hanging upside down in the doorway.

YOUNG VIC

- BOO!

JACCO loses his footing, falling backwards in shock, but ROBBY catches him with one hand, laughing.

JACCO stands back up, brushes himself off and smiles.

YOUNG JACCO

- Brains, brawn, boo! I like it...

MOM returns with a camera in hand and snaps a picture of her three happy, smiling boys.

******END OF SCENE******

***Note to the illustrator** – The picture that MOM just took should work as a transitional piece on page 21 that switches us out of the flashback and into the present... Also, this is one of the pictures that we saw

on Jacco's dash in his truck. As we switch back to the present, though, we'll see that this is a picture that Mom has hanging up in her living room.*

*

Setting: Mom's house

Legend: 1963

Zoom out from the picture which is hanging above MOM's head, and ROBBY walks in.

ROBBY

- I'm so sorry for being late, MOM. I was on a roll today, so we couldn't stop filming, which meant that I was late to help the children at the hospital, so I—

MOM

- Don't worry about it!

ROBBY (cont.)

- I wanted to make it up to them, so I stayed around to help clean everything up. Now, it's already—

MOM (cont.)

- —Calm down... There's no sense in running yourself ragged.

******PAGE 22******

ROBBY flops down on the couch, and picks up a throw pillow that he pretends is his gun and makes gun sounds with his mouth.

ROBBY

- I'm exhausted from the movie alone! I'm trying to protect civilization from this freakshow, and when it retaliates, my character has to—

MOM

- You and those science fiction movies... Why can't you do something... nice? Something happy?

ROBBY freezes in his action.

ROBBY

- I'm the hero... Something happy? MOM, I always win!

MOM

- Those movies feed off of the fear of the public. It's the same thing that scared VIC into hiding.

MOM walks out of the living room and into the kitchen. ROBBY, who stays on the couch, rests his elbows on the pillow that now sits on his lap, pouting a little.

ROBBY

- I didn't realize you wanted me to come over to make me feel like a bad guy, MOM...

MOM returns from the kitchen and hands ROBBY a pickle jar.

MOM

- No, I wanted to have dinner, and I couldn't open this jar without my hero!

ROBBY hands her the now-opened pickle jar, smiling as if he's accomplished something important.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 23******

Setting: JACCO's truck

JACCO and PASSENGER pass a welcome to SPRINGFIELD sign... sun is peaking out as the morning is nearing.

JACCO and PASSENGER pull up to a house... The sun is getting a little lighter.

JACCO gets out of the truck and helps PASSENGER with his luggage. Before JACCO gets back in the truck, he hands an envelope to PASSENGER.

JACCO pulls away.

JACCO drops off the truck to be unloaded. It's getting even lighter outside.

JACCO calls someone from their phone. It looks almost like morning.

JACCO

- Hey, it's JACCO... Yeah, I just dropped a trailer off in SPRINGFIELD, and I wondered if you were up for some breakfast? I have something to run by you...

JACCO looks at a diner down the road.

JACCO

- You heard of a place called Judy's?

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 24 & 25******

Setting: Judy's (another diner)

This scene could be laid out like a newspaper that JACCO is holding at the diner. If not, we at least need to see that JACCO is looking at the picture that ROBBY took with HOSP. WORKER who turns out to be a reporter. There's a "heartwarming" story underneath with the headline that reads: "Handsome Hollywood Hero Helps at Hospital"

***Note to the illustrator** – This is not the same diner from before, but Judy's should feel similar, which would tie it—even more—to the earlier scene with the unreasonable prick*

JACCO looks to be ignoring ROBBY who is sitting down across from him. Instead he's looking at the paper.

JACCO

- So, I see that all that time we trained over the years, all the work we put into making you the physical freakshow that you are...

To make sure that his point is clear, JACCO, in a swift motion, shows ROBBY the picture and the story in the paper, but he's doing this so quickly that it looks like he's going to slap ROBBY in the face with it.

JACCO

- ...has been put to good use. I hope these stunts help your movies sell.

ROBBY

- I'm glad to see you too, JACCO. You know—

ROBBY reaches for the paper, but JACCO pulls it away and focuses on his brother, squinting in disgusted disbelief.

JACCO

- [increasing in volume] Oh, save the bullshit, ROBBY. I'm tired of it. I'm tired of waiting for you. I may **not**—

ROBBY shushes JACCO

JACCO pauses for a moment and wipes his mouth with the newspaper, recomposing himself.

JACCO

- [whispering] I may not have inherited Dad's strength like you or VIC's...

JACCO's eyes shift, cautiously looking around to make sure no one is listening in.

JACCO

- [whispering] ...Skills at hiding... but I have enough of a brain to know that people need a hero... and enough of a heart to care

JACCO gets up from the table.

JACCO

- You two may have given up on our dream, but I haven't. I have something in the works, but I should have known you wouldn't be on board.

JACCO walks away.

ROBBY

- I just... Sometimes, we just have to grow up, JACCO.

WAITER walks up with the ticket and an eyebrow raised.

WAITER

- Do I give this to you?

ROBBY

- I'll cover for him... Some things never change.

ROBBY grabs JACCO's plate to eat, but before he takes a bite, he also reaches over and grabs the newspaper to read.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 26******

Setting: ROBBY's apartment

ROBBY is stunned as he walks into his apartment. The stripped, bare room doesn't look like one of a movie star. The only decoration seems to be the newspaper that he has just dropped on the ground out of shock.

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] Plenty of movie memorabilia...

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] Pricey-looking paintings off of the walls...

JACCO

- [off-panel textbox] Even the TV?

***Note to the illustrator** – These off-panel textboxes could be placed in the different spots that these things

might be missing from Robby's house, which would help readers see that these things are missing from these places—possibly making the empty space look even emptier*

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 27******

Setting: JACCO's truck in storage

JACCO and PASSENGER are in the truck's hidden storage that is now filled with ROBBY's stuff.

JACCO

- Good work, PASSENGER.

******END OF ISSUE******

Al & Ben

Issue 1

by

Joshua D. Goss

2/26/16

*

******PAGE 1******

Setting: On the open road at night

Legend: Last night

SEMIDRIVER's face glows blue in the night-time darkness, illuminated by the lights on the dash. His eyes are getting heavy and he tries to keep them open by downing the last drop of his energy drink.

RADIOSTATION

- [off-panel textbox] This is UNCLE ART with a little Monday-morning traffic update...

Noticing a sinkhole that is blocked off by a couple traffic cones, he tosses the now-empty can out of the window and grabs the wheel with both hands **rrrrrtch**

RADIOSTATION

- [off-panel textbox] If you're headed inbound on I-70 this morning, you're going to want to allow a little extra time. It looks like some Monday morning madness lead to a several-vehicle collision, resulting in an overturned tanker blocking I-70 west. Police and rescue teams are working on it, but for the moment, they are directing traffic to an alternate route, and

since the border traffic is backed up, St. Louis commutes are being slowed by at least an hour... Yikes!

The semi screeches to a halt, knocking the traffic cones into the existing sinkhole **rumble**

RADIOSTATION

- [off-panel textbox] If you're across the border headed this way though...

SEMIDRIVER smacks himself on the forehead with one hand, laughing. With the other hand, he's cracking open another can. **rumble**

******PAGE 2******

The truck has fallen through a sinkhole, and part of the trailer hangs out of the hole.

AL

- [narration textbox] It's kinda like popping a tab on a can of sodie.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 3******

Setting: Rooftop in the morning

Legend: Present

A can of soda pops open **kssss crack**, and the angle of the tab that has punctured the top of the can mirrors that of the semi trailer that has fallen through a sinkhole on the top half of the page.

RADIOSTATION

- Callers have reported smooth sailing on I-70 West, so have a safe trip back over here to the states! We hope this one eases those freeway frustrations...

AL

- [narration textbox] The pressure on the surface becomes too much for what's supporting it underneath, and **some kind of boom snd-fx**

AL and BEN sit at a make-shift campsite on the roof of a nearby building, and BEN leans forward to turn off the radio as he points at a falcon flying by with something in its beak.

FALCON flies by and drops SEMIDRIVER's discarded can next to BEN, his owner.

Both AL and BEN look to be in their mid to late thirties, and we can see that they're also both wearing police badges. AL typically wears an oversized backpack, but it is sitting in front of him while he's camping out on the roof. He also usually walks with a cane, but since he's sitting at the moment, it's propped up next to him. BEN is your average mustached cop, and he wears full uniform, proudly displaying his badge. The only thing that makes him look different from a normal cop is the pair of binoculars he wears around his neck... oh yeah, and the falconry sleeve on his arm...

***Note to the illustrator** – The radio should have some really cool looking aluminum contraption attached to its antenna... We had our antennas wrapped in foil when we lived out in the boonies to get better reception, and since this IS AL(uminum), he'd have something cool and effective made for this*

****PAGE 4****

BEN holds the can in his hand, turning it over and examining it like he's doing some serious detective work.

BEN

- Looks to be traveling light, whoever it is, AL.

AL

- Could still be our guys. Pass me the 'noculars.

AL looks through the binoculars, and he sees the butt end of the semi trailer poking out of a sinkhole.

AL has given BEN his binoculars, and as BEN is looking through them, AL points down in the area where he saw the truck.

AL

- I didn't see this yesterday... Might've been a cartel shipment headed north...

BEN

- I dunno... He doesn't look armed... Maybe he needs our help?

AL grabs the binoculars back, and his facial expression says that he's intrigued.

For the first time, AL—and the readers—sees someone wearing a backpack and drinking an energy drink as he walks away from the wreckage, and AL is studying the loner, LARRY, and/or his body language.

BEN

- Let's go see—

BEN trades AL the can from FALCON for the binoculars.

AL

- I might buy that if there was a convoy of armed oil pirates chasing him...

AL takes the tab off of the can and tosses the can into his backpack.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] Or, you know, if he was running...

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 5******

Setting: Amid a traffic jam (Flashback)

Legend: A month ago

We are in traffic with cars trying to leave, but again, this shouldn't look like a Godzilla movie or World War Z. People have had time to leave, but this is the final rush of people leaving now that the homes that they've been desperately trying to hold onto have been designated as part of a state of emergency.

AL

- [narration textbox] Then again, wasn't much running around over here lately. Things've been quieter the last month. People'd been clearin' out over the past year or so...

From a car, we see a police officer, PO, in his police uniform, directing traffic out of the city. The traffic isn't particularly orderly, but PO's direction seems to be working.

***Note to the illustrator** – From the reader's distance, this should look similar to AL, which would

work with the idea that he was seen wearing a badge earlier, but it's not him.*

AL

- [narration textbox] But what was left was the procrastinators' rush to get outta the city, the state, the East...

Zooming out from PO and the traffic shows that he's helping direct traffic around a sinkhole with a house and a few cars in it.

AL

- [narration textbox] Which federal government had designated as a state of emergency

******PAGE 6******

As it is getting dark and traffic is stopped, momentarily, another police officer, BEN, takes over for PO who we have been watching.

AL

- [narration textbox] Police departments helped usher out civilians for the week, but after that, they were to be relocated out West.

BEN blows his whistle **tweeeeet** and yells at someone who isn't wearing a seatbelt.

BEN

- Buckle up, ma'am!

AL

- [narration textbox] Many police departments from the Eastern United States would supplement some of the smaller forces out west and help them with the transition of the booming population...

BEN blows his whistle again as someone is crossing the road out of a crosswalk...

AL

- [narration textbox] They wanted to keep people safe...

BEN

- Sir! What're you doing? You want a ticket?

JWALKER stops in the middle of the road, looking confused.

AL

- [narration textbox] And stop evil from tearin' apart what was left of the country...

JWALKER

- You serious? This is a state of emergency and you're worried about jaywalking?!

BEN

- There are rules for a reason. The only way to keep things running smoothly in moments of crisis...

BEN's eyes open widely in disbelief as he waves his hand on.

BEN

- Is to adhere to what we've put in place to keep everyone safe...

BEN's waving hand is misinterpreted, and both the cars and JWALKER start going at the same time, causing a minor accident.

BEN

- You see what I mean?

AL

- [narration textbox] The modern world can't survive unpoliced.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 7******

Setting: Following PO's car home, dusk

On PO's drive home, he sees a group of street youths looting a store.

AL

- [narration textbox] Because of that, while many of 'em were goin' over to help what was left of the country, me 'n' BEN was worried 'bout the country that was being left behind...

BEN

- [off-panel textbox, police radio] We have a jaywalker causing a collision on the corner of Harrison and Grant, over...

Hearing his radio, PO rolls his eyes and turns his radio off **click**

AL

- [narration textbox] There would still be people here... Some would inevitably refuse to leave home...

Instead of responding to BEN's call about the jaywalker, PO takes a light out from under the seat, slaps it on the roof of his car, and turns it on. It catches the four LOOTERS' attention, and they all take off running.

AL

- [narration textbox] Others would leave home out West to take advantage of the opportunity of a new beginning over here...

However, instead of following the looting kids, he turns his light back off and puts it back in his car, continuing his drive home.

AL

- [narration textbox] Hell, people were already leaving the reservations, awaiting repayment by the abandoned offering...

PO pulls into his driveway, but now it's revealed that we've been following him as if we were passengers in AL's car.

PO

- [off-panel textbox] Mr. AL, you really should consider leaving. The wife and kids are with my parents in North Dakota, and I'm headed there after I shower up and grab my duffle bag... We're in no situation to be brave...

AL keeps driving past PO's house, going around a sinkhole that takes up half of the road between his own house and PO's.

AL

- [narration textbox] Some of us weren't comfortable leaving everything behind, letting evil run rampant...

AL has parked in his driveway, only a couple houses down and across the street from PO's house. PO is still outside, and AL is getting ready to walk into his house but stops to respond to PO. They are the only two cars in the driveways on the street. The other houses are boarded up.

AL

- [narration textbox] So some of us didn't...

AL

- Thanks for the offer, Officer Peterson, but I still have some stuff to take care of 'round here...

******PAGE 8******

Back in the house is a bunch of technology-type stuff that AL has been working on. One thing in particular is a large backpack on the couch that looks like AL has been operating on it.

AL

- [narration textbox] Besides, I was in the middle of a project...

******END OF FLASHBACK******

******PAGE 9 – 11******

Setting: On the street with A&B

Legend: Present

AL and BEN are now on the ground, walking toward the person they saw in the binoculars, LARRY, who has turned the corner.

BEN holds out a hand to stop AL from walking in the line of sight as LARRY ducks inside a building where LOOTER 1 lets him in. BEN and AL are unaware, but readers might notice that LARRY is from the same group of LOOTERS that PO saw earlier.

BEN

- It's the LOOTERS, AL...

AL rolls his eyes and swats away BEN's hand.

***Note to the illustrator** – This should look like the scene where PO turns off his radio because of what BEN is reporting, which should draw more attention to BEN's over adherence to smaller, seemingly-now-insignificant laws*

AL

- I told you, BEN... They're just kids looking to survive like everyone else is out here...

BEN shoulderslaps AL who has grabbed the binoculars that are around BEN's neck and looks through them into the distance, toward the truck again, apparently still searching for the larger threat.

BEN

- Stealing is still stealing... It's still someone's property, and they wanted to keep it safe... Otherwise, they wouldn't have boarded it up...

AL doesn't even look away from the binoculars; he is still focused on the road, waiting for the threat.

AL

- We're not after LOOTERS, BEN...

BEN rolls his eyes, and looks back around the corner to scope out what he thinks is the newly discovered hideout of the LOOTERS.

BEN

- Maybe we should be... Stealing is still stealing, and it still affects other people...

BEN grabs the binoculars that AL is still holding onto and pulls them to look down at the situation at hand.

AL looks irritated as he lets go of the binoculars...

AL

- I heard you the first time. Did you hear yourself? We're not wastin' our time on some goons, **Boy Wonder**... We're after our **Clown Prince of Crime** here...

AL points toward the truck over his shoulder with his thumb, but BEN is looking at the hideout.

AL

- There've been oil pirates ripping off frackin' shipments, and the cartel has taken the abandoned East as a gift from God, but you want to stop a few kids from scavenging some sinkhole casualty?

AL turns to head toward the truck, but BEN stays hiding, waiting to scope out the LOOTERS' hideout with FALCON perched on his shoulder.

AL

- I'm going to check this thing out... I don't think it's cartel anymore, but it's worth a shot...

BEN looks at AL but only long enough to see that he's leaving... Then, he looks back to keep an eye on the situation with the LOOTERS.

BEN

- FALCON, go with him and check on the driver... If who we saw was a looter, we don't know if the driver is still there, alive, hurting...

BEN shakes his head with a disgusted look as AL's comments finally set in.

BEN

- [to himself] Sidekick my ass...

******PAGE 12 – 13******

Setting: BEN's car (Flashback)

BEN is driving along, but he sees a figure—a familiar looking figure wearing a ball cap—walking in the road.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] I was beginning to wonder if you'd gotten lost in a sinkhole or somethin'

BEN slows down and sees that it's PO and waves to his colleague to get in the car with him.

As they drive on, PO points to his car in the sinkhole, and BEN shakes his head in a that-sucks-but-I'm-relieved-you're-ok fashion.

BEN

- [off-panel textbox] Yeah, sorry. I had to stop and help a friend out.

BEN drops PO off with the rest of the police department, and they shake hands as PO gets out of the car.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] No problem. You got the stuff, right?

BEN drives back by PO's car on his way to AL's house.

He locks his eyes on it, and turns his head while he's driving...

BEN pulls up to AL's house, honks a couple friendly honks, and AL comes outside.

BEN

- Yeah, it's all back here.

BEN pops the trunk, and they both go back there to look through the trunk full of computer parts, wiring, switches, and other technological equipment...

AL hoists up two duffle bags full of this stuff, and BEN grabs the remaining one.

AL

- Perfect! Let's go finish this thing...

BEN stops on his way to the house, opens the passenger door, and looks in the glove compartment.

BEN

- Oh, hey, hold on a sec...

BEN, whose badge is shining in the sun, holds out PO's badge. This reveals that what readers didn't see is that BEN actually ended up stopping and getting the badge out of PO's car before he went to AL's house.

BADGE: Officer Peterson

BEN

- I found something on the road that I thought you might need, partner

******END OF FLASHBACK******

******PAGE 14******

BEN creeps closer to the building, going in for a better look. In the background, we see AL walking away with FALCON flying overhead.

BEN peeks into a gap of the boarded up windows and sees that this isn't really the LOOTERS' hideout... They're searching what turns out to be a hardware store, grabbing up supplies and taking money out of one of those charity collection cans that has a picture of someone and the cause that they're raising money for on it.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] Doesn't look like cartel to me...

Feeling justified in his desire to stop these thieves, BEN looks back at AL and FALCON and shakes his head in disappointment.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] But looks can be deceiving...

Wham LOOTER 1 smacks BEN over the head with an aluminum baseball bat.

The LOOTERS all run away, but they seem careful to not trample BEN who is now lying, face down, on the ground.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 15******

Setting: At the sinkhole and the semi

AL watches as FALCON checks on unfortunate SEMIDRIVER, who is dead with a similar expression on his face as we last saw on unconscious BEN. FALCON is nosing around and tapping the unresponsive man.

FALCON grabs the keys, turning off the ignition.

AL

- Let's go check out the trailer to be sure...

AL stands at the back while FALCON sorts through the mess of toppled and broken pallets, cases of soda, and puddles from broken cans.

Despite the lack of drugs or anything else that would indicate a larger evil that would seem to be worth AL's time, his eyes light up when he sees FALCON pull aside a pack of AL's favorite soda.

AL

- Oh, hey, grab that for me!

FALCON grabs the pack of soda in her claws and struggles but ends up being able to get it to AL.

AL

- Good girl. Now go 'n tell ol' Benny that all's well so he can stop worryin'.

As FALCON flies off, AL accidentally drops his cane down into the truck...

AL tries to climb in, but **rumble** he is alarmed by the sound of the ground rumbling under the truck.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 16 – 17******

Setting: Face down on the ground with BEN

FALCON shakes BEN awake...

BEN

- Ugh... Good girl.

BEN gets up and shakes himself awake.

BEN

- I told AL we needed to take care of these criminals, and now, I'm finished waiting around, letting them do their thing... Go see if you can find them...

FALCON flies off in search of the LOOTERS...

AL

- [off-panel textbox] I sent FALCON to find you... Did she never make it?

BEN goes into the building to look at the damage that the LOOTERS did.

BEN

- [off-panel textbox] She made it, and I sent her after the looters...

BEN pokes around the hardware shop, and in the background, AL starts crawling through the window that is now open from BEN going in.

BEN

- Where's your cane?

AL

- [off-panel textbox] Oh, come on, man... Those kids aren't affecting anyone else... FALCON's supposed to be our police dog, doing border patrol to help us keep the evil out of this city...

BEN points emphatically to the small cut inside of a red bruise on the side of his face, and AL squints, mocking his friend by leaning in and looking closely for the battle wound that he's talking about.

BEN

- She is... She's finding the criminals that did this to me...

AL

- Did what? Gave you a paper cut?

AL picks up a piece of paper that was on the counter by the collection can.

AL

- Here, I found your culprit...

BEN snatches the paper out of AL's hands and turns it around so AL can read it... It reveals the information that was on the charity collection can.

BEN

- No, someone beat me over the head with a baseball bat... You know, after the innocent LOOTERS loaded up a backpack from the truck and stole supplies from here... Supplies and charity money...

AL

- Oh, it was just a love tap...

AL grabs a handful of nails, letting them trickle out of his hand back into the pail.

AL

- For one, who couldn't use hardware these days? And we all need to drink...

AL tosses BEN a can of soda that he'd gotten from the truck.

AL

- Yes, that's what was on that truck—

BEN

- It's not theirs... You don't know who that was going to... It could have been headed to a needy area—

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 18******

Setting: LOOTERS' real hideout

LOOTERS are stacking the money and sorting their bounty.

***Note to the illustrator** – We want to make this ambiguous here. We're not trying to tell the readers what they should think about these kids taking the stuff; we want to leave it up to them*

AL

- Those rascals... Even if it was, it wasn't going anywhere quickly... And whosever shop this is didn't even take the charity can out West with them... It's not like money does a lot for you out here in the barter boonies... For all you know, those kids could be using the cash for kindling to keep them warm—

BEN

- [off-panel textbox] Yeah, in this chilly Atlanta summer...

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 19******

Setting: Back on rooftop

On his way out the window from the hardware store, AL grabs the cases of soda that he left on the sidewalk and limps off.

BEN

- [off-panel textbox] We stayed here to stop crimes...

Back at the rooftop campsite, AL watches for evildoers...

As the shadows move slightly, indicating a lapse in time, AL watches for evildoers...

BEN

- [off-panel textbox] Keep the inevitable evil stifled...

When the sky turns colors because the sun is setting, AL sees FALCON, flying around above, and notices that FALCON is carrying something in her beak. Because of this detail, he watches for where the bird is going, knowing that she's retrieving something for BEN

AL

- [to himself] What is that idiot doing?

AL

- [off-panel textbox] Ok, well, while you stop those school-aged scoundrels, I'll go back up and watch out for real threats...

AL starts packing up the campsite, removing another pop tab and tossing another can in his backpack.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] Someone has to while you have our K9-unit German Sheppard chasing mice...

AL notices that FALCON is flying over again, but this time, she stops and flies in place. He knows that this means that FALCON is marking a spot for BEN to go find, so AL also heads that way.

AL quickens his pace a bit, searching for the bird and his partner because FALCON is landing, indicating that BEN has arrived at his destination and FALCON no longer needs to act as his guide.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 20******

Setting: Back at LOOTERS' hideout (flashback)

Legend: An hour ago

Similar scene as seen on PAGE 18, but now, it's darker and we see FALCON in the background, landing on the windowsill.

Through the window, still, we see FALCON leaning over, fiddling with something on the side of the house.

Still through the window, we can see FALCON flying away from the house with something in her beak.

******PAGE 21******

Setting: Street-level wandering with Ben

Legend: 50 minutes ago

BEN is wandering the streets as he sees FALCON flying over a building and coming down to meet him.

FALCON drops something and BEN catches it.

BEN

- Good girl.

BEN holds a number 4 in his hand.

BEN

- Lead the way...

FALCON flies away, and BEN follows her lead.

*

Setting: Outside of LOOTERS' hideout

Legend: 30 minutes ago

As he approaches an old house, he can see that the address on the front of the house reads 124, but the four is an outlined dusty void in BEN's puzzle.

BEN replaces it before he does anything else.

Then, he peeks into the house and spots the four LOOTER kids sitting around in the living room—BEN either doesn't notice or doesn't care that there are no parents.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 22 – 23******

Setting: Streets at night

Legend: 10 minutes ago

The night has gotten dark, but AL is still out searching for BEN.

Eventually, he sees the light from a flashlight followed by a string of the four LOOTERS handcuffed together and BEN guiding them with a flashlight as the caboose of this sad-looking train.

AL shakes his head out of disbelief and/or disappointment as he walks up next to BEN.

AL

- [off-panel textbox] What've we got here?

AL pats BEN on the back in a brotherly-mocking way.

*

Setting: Jail

Legend: Present

In the front room of a florescent-lighted police station, AL grabs up an aluminum baseball bat from behind the counter.

AL

- Is this Colonel Custards' lead pipe?

BEN

- Well, it's no candlestick...

AL laughs as he points the bat at BEN who is also showing a bit of a smile.

AL

- You **DO** still have a sense of humor! It's like the stick up your...

Jokingly alarmed, AL drops the bat **clang-clang** and wipes his hands on his pants.

AL

- I don't wanna talk 'bout this anymore...

******PAGE 24 - 25******

BEN smirks as he picks the bat back up and sets it up against the counter.

AL

- Anyway... Whaddya say, pal?

BEN walks back to the cell that is holding all three of them.

BEN

- If we see Bowser, I'm more than willing to help you jump on his head, but until then...

Holding a clipboard, BEN fills out the booking paperwork as if this was routine. In the background, AL flips some food up for FALCON to catch.

AL puts on his backpack and looks like he's getting ready to leave.

AL

- If you have this under control, I'm gonna head home for the night, partner.

AL picks up the baseball bat before he heads for the door.

AL

- I found me a new walking stick, FALCON!

BEN doesn't look up from the paperwork as he waives goodbye.

***Note to the illustrator** – BEN needs to look completely oblivious to the fact that AL is taking the bat, so you might even need to play up the fact that AL is *sneaking* this away. This is a glimpse of BEN missing out on “crimes” because he's focused on other things... Like paperwork for LOOTERS*

BEN

- I think I got it. I'll see you tomorrow.

******END OF SCENE******

****PAGE 26 – 27****

Setting: AL's house

AL walks into his house, shakes his head, and sets his bag down on his kitchen table.

He sits down at the table and opens one of the many compartments on his backpack, revealing some kind of computer system that he has installed. It's what he and BEN worked on earlier in a flashback... They were building the world's fastest 3D printer.

AL

- Well, if he's going to fill that one....

AL begins to type...

We see the screen that he's working on. He's selecting options to form a "Print Queue"

AL

- I'd better make more room for the more deserving candidates...

possibly as five different panels that look like five different screenshots from this 3D printer in his backpack?

1) Cylinder rod, and the screen reads

- DIAMETER: 7/8"
- LENGTH: 6'
- VOL: Full
- QTY: 72

2) Strips with circular slots

- LENGTH: 10'
- WIDTH: 4"
- VOL: Full
- DSTNC BTWN SLOTS: 5"
- QTY: 6

3) Lock 1...

4) Key to fit Lock 1

He takes a drink from his can of soda, and then takes a bag full of crunched cans and dumps them into his backpack.

AL

- That's IF I can get him to focus on the priorities again...

He sits back and watches as the backpack starts printing out one of these cylinders, and after he finishes his soda, he takes the tab off and tosses the empty can into the backpack too.

******END OF ISSUE******

Sol & Karsten

Issue 1

by

Joshua D. Goss

3/4/16

*

******PAGE 1******

Setting: KARSTEN's home

Legend: Somewhere in Illinois, Spring 2040

KARSTEN wakes up to a beautiful sunrise, and she's getting ready to go out in the field.

MOTHER and FATHER walk inside after talking to LEROY—the regular semi driver who comes to pick up their produce to deliver out East—who has just delivered their weekly mail. MOTHER goes to the bottom of the stairs to call for her daughter.

MOTHER

- KARSTEN, your comic book is here!

KARSTEN, whose lethargy was making getting ready a struggle, suddenly snaps out of her trance, drops her belt only half looped, and runs to her desk.

There are a few comic books there, but she's not interested in these. Instead, she opens a drawer, rummages through, and pulls out a notebook.

KARSTEN

- Like *here*, here?

******PAGE 2 & 3******

From her desk, she scurries out of the window and sits down on the slightly-sloping roof with the notebook propped up on her knees.

With a childlike smile full of curiosity and wonder, she watches a train coming in the distance. It's planting time, so the field between her and the train should be empty, giving us a nice clean view of the train, even in the distance.

MOTHER

- [off-panel textbox] It's pretty close...

Before she opens her notebook, we see a symbol that she's sketched on the front: a seed with a sproutling coming out of the top. This might, initially, look inconspicuous since she lives on a farm, but it should still look iconic—after all, this is the symbol that will be emblazoned on her favorite superhero's chest.

She flips through a couple pages of drawings, and the symbol begins to establish its place in the minds of the readers since the drawings on each page display the same character wearing the same logo. In most of the pictures, the superhero is controlling the land/vegetation/environment around him. This collection of pictures is an indication that, for years, KARSTEN has been anticipating these images of a familiar hero that would come by on the trains. She has enjoyed them like a traveling version of one of her favorite comic books and learned to draw them for herself in order to preserve their presence—like an even more hands-on way of recording a TV show than we used to endure if we had to record programs on VHS tapes.

The smile on KARSTEN's face is joined by a squinting pair of eyes that are anticipating something on the train.

***Note to the illustrator** – Her excitement about the superhero shouldn't be some kind of dreamy daze. She's not crushing on the superhero. Actually, she

should be looking at the hero like the stereotypical little boy would look at the hero: as someone relatable and/or a role model. Think of him as some sort of a fantasy KARTSEN has of herself—farmer turned hero, controlling the land and vegetation.*

KARSTEN's look of excitement quickly fades away when the train car finally comes by. With a skeptical expression on her face, she looks down at her notebook, flips back a couple pages, and notices that she's already seen—and drawn—this image.

This realization causes the skepticism to fade again to disappointment.

MOTHER

- [in a shrill voice like Howard's mom on *Big-Bang*] Did you see it?!

Now that she gets another look at the treasured, fleeting artwork, KARSTEN makes a few minor adjustments to its existing presence on her page.

Eventually, she closes her notebook up and puts it back on top of all of the comics in her drawer.

KARSTEN

- It's a rerun, Ma...

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 4 & 5******

Setting: Country Road

Legend: Somewhere in Illinois, Fall 2040

FRED and GEORGE, two men in black ski masks, walk in the ditch between a country road and a bean field. They're headed toward KARSTEN's family's cornfield, and their path is lit only by moonlight.

MOTHER

- [off-panel textbox] Well, maybe tomorrow there'll be a new one, but come on down here and help plant some corn today while there's still sunlight!

When FRED and GEORGE get to the cornfield, they take turns gathering corn and putting ears in each other's backpacks.

Once they've filled their backpacks, GEORGE zips up FRED's backpack. However, FRED struggles getting GEORGE's backpack to zip up.

Getting frustrated, FRED yanks GEORGE's backpack off of him...

FRED

- Give it here...

GEORGE

- Wait!

GEORGE tries to stop FRED, but FRED successfully removes GEORGE's backpack and drops GEORGE's backpack, which bulges full of corn, at his feet.

Their eyes widen as they hear the **rumble** from this thoughtless blunder disturbing the ground's stability and the family dog barks.

The worry on FRED's face burns through the ski mask face as he carefully bends down to pick up the corn-packed backpack at his feet.

******PAGE 6******

Since the initial impact shook the ground, it has become less stable and all of the weight now concentrated on FRED's two feet proves to be too much pressure for the more-fragile-than-before surface, this page turn reveals that the ground has given way.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] Was that a...

From up in KARSTEN's room, we see the last image from PAGE 5 repeated from over her shoulder, but this time, FRED has fallen through a sinkhole, and GEORGE runs off at the sight of FATHER who has just walked out the front door, into the panel.

FATHER

- [off-panel textbox] Cover collapse...

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 7******

Setting: Outside of their house

Legend: Next Morning

As the family is walking inside, FATHER waves goodbye with a newspaper in his hand. LEROY brings newspapers, as a personal favor, along with their mail from the West each week.

The look on FATHER's face indicates a warmth and familiarity with LEROY, who sticks his arm out of the window to wave back as he pulls away, heading east toward the rising sun. He has his regular truckload of produce to deliver out East.

FATHER

- [off-panel textbox] Correct... It's similar to the subsidence sinkholes we see around here...

KARSTEN sits next to her MOTHER at the breakfast table, and they read the newspaper to FATHER who is cooking breakfast in the background, wearing an apron that has an ear of corn on it and reads, "Corny apron joke."

MOTHER

- But instead of a slow, gradual process that leaves us with dips in the land...

With FATHER now in the foreground, we see him go to break open an egg. Now in the background, MOTHER separates the funny pages from the newspaper and hands them to KARSTEN.

FATHER

- They sneak up on you... On the surface, everything looks dandy, but underneath, things trickle, slip, erode, and whatnot, leaving a big gap below a thin surface until—

Crack his thumb goes through the shell, resembling the process of cover collapse.

MOTHER

- It collapses under the weight.

KARSTEN

- No wonder they declared a state of emergency... All this time, I thought they were just easily scared...

******PAGE 8 & 9******

Setting: Back in the cornfield during the day

KARSTEN walks out to the field to pick corn. Her hair is still done in the same particular way, but now, she has what looks like two sticks keeping it up. These sticks are actually folding fans.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] But that was freaky...

KARSTEN

- [narration textbox] It only took one of those on our property for FATHER to declare his own state of emergency...

As we zoom out, we see that KARSTEN is wearing something that FRED and GEORGE could have used: a much larger version of the fans that are in her hair. However, this one, when folded up, is a stick that she has draped over her shoulders. This is a dual-purpose stick that can be used like the farmers in Spain use to avoid falling through sinkholes, but since it can unfold into a fan, it can also be used for weight displacement.

KARSTEN

- [narration textbox] 'Course, I still have to pick corn...

Frustration mounts on KARSTEN's face as she tries to walk between rows of corn and the stick that stretches out at least three feet beyond both shoulders repeatedly gets caught on the stalks, keeping her from doing things the way she's used to.

KARSTEN

- [narration textbox] But I can't go **anywhere** without this stick.

In an irritated tantrum, she swings her shoulders—and consequently, the stick—around, and the stick damages one of the stalks of corn, snapping it in half. The upper half, still connected, dangles by threads.

At first, she looks scared, like she was a child who has just knocked over a vase because she was playing ball in the house.

But her look of terror quickly fades to a devilish grin as she takes the stick off of her shoulders and gets into a fighting stance.

Whipping the stick around, up and down, from side to side, KARSTEN takes out some of her aggression by fighting a nearby scarecrow. Her moves demonstrate some kind of understanding of how to fight, but since her knowledge is based on what she's learned from comic book, she's far from being an expert.

She eventually puts the stick back over her shoulders with her backpack, smiles, and walks sideways down the rows, picking the corn, and as she leaves, the scarecrow's head rolls off the side of the torso.

******PAGE 10 & 11******

After gathering a full load of corn in—the best mode of transportation for her, in terms of weight displacement—her sleigh, KARSTEN takes her gatherings to a storage shed for unloading.

***Note to the illustrator** – This shed should somehow, by illustrator magic, progressively turn into the back of LEROY's semi on the page... The rest of this spread should seem like a continuation of the movement of the corn through the shed as it opens with LEROY unloading corn from his trailer.*

******BLEND OF SCENES******

Setting: Semi truck outside of a hotel

Legend: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

LEROY delivers the sweet corn and other produce to the married couple, SOL and JULIUS, who own a pit-stop hotel in Philadelphia.

Along with the payment for the produce, JULIUS—seemingly instinctively—gives LEROY a set of keys for a place to stay for the night, and SOL takes this corn back to the kitchen.

*

Legend: Later that night

Later, there in the kitchen, SOL and JULIUS prepare dinner for their guests, using some of this fresh shipment of corn as a side dish to go along with the meal they provide for their guests.

As they pass out plates of dinner, SOL sees LEROY talking to some of the PIRATES, and we can see the concern on her face.

After LEROY and PIRATES have nearly all cleaned their plates, they leave their empty plates and head outside to... talk business...

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] I don't like it, JULIUS...

SOL watches them suspiciously as they leave the dining room. She knows who these PIRATES are, and she's bothered by the fact that one of the hotel regulars, LEROY, is getting involved in their piratey shenanigans.

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] What don't you like, sweetheart?

She looks irritated as she's washing the dishes, and she shakes her head when, through the window from the kitchen area, she sees LEROY and the PIRATES coming back in from outside.

SOL

- The kind of business that those guys are into...

JULIUS comes up behind SOL and playfully puts his soapy hands over her eyes to block her view of the PIRATES.

JULIUS

- SOL, they're customers, and they'd be doing whatever they're doing no matter where they were... So why not put a roof over their heads, food in their bellies, and a loving touch on their hearts...

SOL plays back and pushes JULIUS's hands away and smiles at him.

SOL

- Where do you think I should put this foot?

JULIUS

- Now, now... **Remember**, these guys pay up front, so we **really** don't want to lose them... They're **valued** customers!

******PAGE 12 & 13******

From roughly the same area and angle, we get a peek at the dishes that she was cleaning. They're all clean and drying.

As we leave the kitchen, floating in third person, we catch glimpses of the sleepy-looking, dark hallways of the once-busy hotel. It looks like the whole place is sleeping at this point, but when we get to JULIUS and SOL's room, we see that SOL is fidgeting in the middle of the night.

As SOL tosses and turns, it becomes clear that she's bothered by something, and despite honest attempts, she can't sleep.

Eventually, she hops out of bed and grabs a dark, hooded jacket from the closet.

After checking to make sure that JULIUS is asleep, she sneaks out of their room, tiptoeing down the hall...

Down the stairs...

And eventually to a janitor's closet. Here, she gets her real supplies... She reminds us of FRED and GEORGE because she's dressed as a dark, hooded figure.

However, SOL turns around, revealing that she's actually quite unlike them. From the janitor's closet, she continues getting prepared by strapping in the last spray-paint can to the last slot of her over-the-shoulder-ammo-belt-looking thing.

When she leaves the ammo/janitor's closet, she heads for a remote area of the parking lot where LEROY was able to park his semi.

Once there, she climbs up and works on painting an illusion on the roof of the semi.

Eventually, her art looks like a 3D rendering of a sink hole that actually looks like a burning man is falling through.

When she's finished with her project, SOL sneaks back up to her room and goes to sleep, seemingly more relaxed as if she's gotten her fix.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 14******

Setting: Their room, but in the a.m.

Legend: The next morning

In the not-quite bright, early morning, JULIUS drinks his coffee and watches from the window of their room in the hotel.

LEROY's semi pulls away from the parking lot to head back out to deliver to the West and into JULIUS's line of sight.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] Where did LEROY just come back from?

The truck goes right under JULIUS's window, and JULIUS can clearly see the roof of the trailer, forcing him to stop drinking his coffee mid-sip.

He sets it down on the window sill, and squints at the latest artwork.

FATHER

- [off-panel textbox] Not sure where all he went...

JULIUS looks suspiciously at his sleeping, seemingly innocent-looking wife.

******BLEND OF SCENES******

LEROY's truck bleeds over the pages, present in both locations at once.

******PAGE 15******

Setting: Back on the farm

Legend: A couple days later, back somewhere in Illinois

Like JULIUS, KARSTEN is looking out of her window as she's getting ready for the day.

FATHER

- [off-panel textbox] He usually makes stops in Indy, Cinci, Philly, and sometimes up through Kalamazoo. **chuckles** Why?

She is snapped out of her daily routine, but this time, it's not because she's watching the train come by. Instead, it's because she notices LEROY's truck pulling up.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] Well, when he pulled up this morning...

KARSTEN goes closer to the window and peers out at the familiar vehicle. But LEROY's truck isn't the only familiar presence this morning. More importantly, at least to KARSTEN, she's seeing a familiar style of art—the art on the roof of the truck looks similar to SOL's work from the trains for obvious reasons.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] I noticed that he has an awesome new paintjob on his trailer...

Before she goes down to talk to LEROY or anyone else, she pulls out her notebook and draws this picture too, making sure she's careful with the details, especially since this temporary picture isn't moving as quickly as the trains do.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] And I think my favorite artist is done with the hiatus...

On her way outside, she grabs her stick, her backpack, and any other gear she'd need...

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] I was beginning to wonder if something happened...

When she gets outside, she does some slick little move with her stick where she spins it around like she's going to attack someone, but she actually just does that to get it into place where she can slide it through the straps of her backpack.

KARSTEN

- [off-panel textbox] If, maybe, I needed to go take care of some business.

KARTSEN goes outside and helps LEROY and her family load the produce into LEROY's truck to send west to the U.S. In the background, next to the storage shed, there should be a greenhouse full of interesting-looking plants. They grow quite the selection of plants on the farm.

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 16 & 17******

Setting: Back at the hotel

Legend: A couple days later

Next to sleeping JULIUS, SOL tosses and turns in the middle of the night, struggling to get some sleep.

She has the itching to go make some art again, so she gets out of bed, grabs her jacket from the closet, and leaves the room.

As the door closes, the chain **clinks** on the metal doorframe and wakes JULIUS up. He's just waking up, but since he's been waiting for this opportunity, he doesn't look surprised; he knows what to do, and he hurries up out of bed too...

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] Whatcha up do, dear?

He barely catches a glimpse of her walking around the corner to go down the stairs, so he hurries that way too.

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] Got the midnight munchies?

JULIUS sees SOL bypass the door to the kitchen and walk, instead, into a janitor's closet.

Next to the barrel of oil that was delivered by LEROY, SOL stands, frozen, in the janitor's closet, holding a can of spray paint that she was in the middle of strapping into her spray-paint-can ammo belt.

JULIUS

- [saying all of this playfully] 'Cause, if so, you took the wrong the door!

SOL

- JULIUS, I can explain...

******PAGE 18 & 19******

KARSTEN sits on the rooftop, tapping her notebook with her pencil and looking at the picture she drew of the truck's art.

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] That was you that did LEROY's truck, wasn't it?

She looks off into the distance, waiting for the train to come.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] Yes, but you don't understand...

This time, noticing a new picture coming down the tracks, KARSTEN puts pencil to page and doodles what she sees into her notebook.

***Note to the illustrator** – The only view readers should have of the train is from far enough away that they cannot see the art on the cars. Readers' first glimpse of this image should actually be through KARTSEN's rendering and not SOL's.*

A look of concern sprouts on KARSTEN's face.

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] Look, SOLINA, it's one thing to paint the trains—I'm assuming that was you too...

The train comes closer, revealing that despite the hero's attempts to conjure up something from the earth to fight against an oil-rig situation, he has seemingly conjured up an inverted silhouette of a screaming man outlined by spray-paint splatter...

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] But we're running a business here, dear... You can't do that to our customers...

KARSTEN focuses on the oil-rig situation, noticing that the hero is trying to fix an oil rig that is erupting into the skull and crossbones shape.

JULIUS

- [off-panel textbox] Please, sweetheart, have at the trains, but we don't want to piss these people off, right?

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 20 & 21******

Setting: Near a train stop (FLASHBACK)

Legend: A few nights ago

Somewhere off of the grounds of the hotel, SOL walks around several different sinkholes on her way toward a train stop in the distance. She seems to know her path and the threats pretty well, so she's not overly concerned with the sinkhole-riddled terrain. Evidently, this is the same path that she usually takes to get to the trains she uses as her canvas.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] I can't really go back to the trains...

As she gets close to the train, SOL hops down into an existing sinkhole. Her confidence and willingness to do this indicates that she knows that this particular sinkhole is stable enough that it isn't dangerous.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] They either got tired of being looted or seeing someone's artwork...

She peeks out from her hiding spot and watches the security that is guarding the train and, presumably, the goods aboard the train.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] Whichever it was, they really amped up security...

When the coast is clear and she thinks she's safe to proceed, SOL hops out of her hiding spot.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] I tried to keep going, doing what I could to get my messages to the East **and** the West... The tracks were my easel and the cars my canvas...

She begins a stenciled mural of the oil pirates on the train.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] So I kept trying... I even made some stencils to help me work faster....

******PAGES 22 & 23******

To her—and hopefully readers’—surprise, an unaccounted-for-straggler GUARD walks, seemingly aimlessly, from between the train cars around the corner, trying to light a cigarette...

GUARD’s lighter finally works, and he lights his cigarette, relishing his long-awaited drag, but this is interrupted when he looks up and sees SOL at work.

In an almost-instinctive, self-defense reaction, SOL—who is still in the middle of her work—decides to use what she has at her disposal and sprays her spray-paint canister as a stand-in pepper sprayer in GUARD’s eyes.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] But I can’t do it...

GUARD, doubled over in pain, screams **aaaargh** and tries to rub the pain(t) away. Behind him is the inverted silhouette on the train car.

Knowing that this will get her caught, SOL runs. The sounds of her footsteps catch GUARD’s ear, and he takes off after her, still somewhat blinded.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] The trains are too well guarded now

But in the panicked state, he can't see where he's running and falls down into one of the already-present sinkholes, but not one of the safe ones that SOL would have chosen to hide in.

SOL looks into the hole, but she sees nothing and the screams have subsided.

SOL leaves the scene in a state of shock, and sneaks back home.

There, she crawls into bed and waits, trying to sleep it off.

After a bit of this, she gets back up, and as she heads to LEROY's truck, readers see that this has been the backstory to why she couldn't sleep on the night that she eventually snuck back out to do the art on LEROY's truck.

SOL

- [off-panel textbox] That's why I wanted to try the trucks...

******END OF FLASHBACK******

******PAGE 24 & 25******

Setting: KARSTEN's kitchen

Legend: Present

For the first time, KARSTEN has her notebook down on the kitchen table. With an inquisitive, concerned stare, she studies the spread in her notebook that shows both of her renderings of the pictures that were on the truck and the newest one on the train...

KARSTEN

- I was meant to see this, Ma... Pa...

KARSTEN flips to the inside cover of her notebook, revealing an early depiction that she'd done of the hero.

She erases parts of the superhero—the hairline, the jaw, the eyes—and replaces them with a self-portrait.

***Note to the illustrator** – The original depiction of the hero should clearly be in SOL's style, the style that has inspired KARSTEN so far. However, the alterations she makes to the picture of the hero should be in a noticeably different style, hinting at her taking the inspiration and influence but going in her own direction.*

Underneath the superhero, she writes her name.

KARSTEN

- Something had to have happened, and I need to go check it out...

******END OF SCENE******

******PAGE 26 & 27******

Setting: Kitchen area of the hotel

Legend: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

SOL sits at an empty table in the dining area, trying to enjoy a lull in the dinner crowd.

While sneakily watching the last few dining customers, a couple of the PIRATES, she doodles something on a napkin that closely resembles her style from previous work on the trains and truck.

JULIUS walks by, bends over, and talks to the PIRATES.

When he heads back toward the kitchen, he leans over to give SOL a quick kiss on the head.

He looks at her doodled-on napkin and smiles.

JULIUS

- I like it, SOL...

SOL smiles back to him, but that smile quickly fades to disappointment after he walks back to the kitchen.

JULIUS

- [from the kitchen] I'm excited to hear your plans for that one!

She stuffs the crumpled-up doodle into the pocket of her apron.

From another angle, we get a clearer picture of what is in front of her, and we see that SOL was also reading a comic book and has been using a real comic-book character for inspiration for her drawings.

Unlike the villains she's drawing, the real comic-book hero is fighting some huge, cosmic villain...

She takes the crumpled up doodle back out of her pocket and starts embellishing the once-human-ish-looking villain of her own doodle, making it look much less conquerable than before... Then, she edits the facial expression of her hero to be something that looks scared instead of heroic...

******END OF ISSUE******