

Unknown Armies Comic Introduction

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In 1996 I was running Pagan Publishing full time, having been laid off from my day job as the line editor for Robin Laws' Feng Shui roleplaying game at Daedalus Entertainment. In my spare time I was making notes on a project I called The New Inquisition. Initially this was just a repository of random weird modern-magick ideas I had, the kind of stuff that became known as "urban fantasy."

I took my scattered notes, wrote a short story or two based on them, and then turned them into a proposal for a four-issue comic book limited series. I pitched it to a brilliant artist I knew, Brian Snoddy, who agreed to take a stab at doing some work on it so we could try to sell it to a publisher. We spent a couple of months working on an adaptation of my short story, "The Course of Winter."

Initially I thought we could adapt that story into an eight-page short comic-book tale. That turned out to be madness and we adapted it as a 22-page story instead. I finished the script while Brian worked on character designs and then he got to work.

As it turned out, Brian and I both got busy on other projects and we put this one down. All that was left was my proposal and script, and a bunch of pages Brian did of character designs, pencils for many of the pages, and a few pages of finished or partial inked pages.

That was where it lay for about a year, during which time I wrote another short story or two and kept noodling on the ideas. Then in 1997 I approached my friend and fellow game designer Greg Stolze with the idea of collaborating on turning The New Inquisition into an RPG.

The process that led from my notes on TNI, to some TNI short stories, to a TNI comic book, to the Unknown Armies RPG ultimately took about three years. During that time the concepts changed quite a bit. As an example, I originally intended to weave the King in Yellow mythology into TNI and one of the main characters was Jaycy Linz, the protagonist of some of my King in Yellow fiction and the mystery man in the King in Yellow campaign I ran with Call of Cthulhu for my friends in college. Jaycy and the King in Yellow disappeared along the way before Unknown Armies happened but you'll find him hanging out in this document.

Included in this document is:

- My short story, "The Course of Winter," which was the first TNI tale

- My original comic-book proposal for TNI which I wrote specifically for Brian Snoddy
- My script adapting “The Course of Winter” into a 22-page comic-book story
- Brian Snoddy’s sketches, pencils, and some finished inks for “The Course of Winter”
- As a coda, the very first email I sent to Greg Stolze proposing that we collaborate on a TNI RPG. I have almost all of our correspondence from the creation of Unknown Armies, which is pretty fascinating to read now, but compiling that into some kind of document would require way more time than I can justify.

The Course of Winter
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3345 words

Alex Abel was crazy, or at least that's what I liked to think. I'd been part of his new inquisition for maybe six months, and while I'd seen things I would never had believed existed before I met him, that didn't mean the guy I was working for wasn't certified bonkers.

At present, I was out searching for the tape of the Naked Goddess. She was this porn star who ascended right in front of the camera, in between going down on a couple of jocks. One minute she's on them, the next she goes all insubstantial and there's this flash of light, then she's gone. No, I haven't seen the tape, but that's what people say is on it. There are a few copies floating around, none of which is the original. Alex wanted the original. It's the only time an ascension has been caught on tape, almost the only time one has been witnessed. This girl up and joined the Invisible Clergy just out of the blue—she sure as hell wasn't studying to get in—and Alex hoped that the original recording of her ascension might provide clues to what the Clergy were all about. He wanted to know crazy stuff: did they exist in measurable form, were they souls, or aliens, or what? He was going to have his white-coat geniuses crawl over every inch of tape on that recording and see if they could pull any hard data out of it.

Alex has a real hard-on for the Invisible Clergy. Don't ask me why. All I can guess is that they keep screwing up the plans of his glorious, privately-funded inquisition. Me, I could give a damn. But I do what the man tells me to do. I owe him.

He'd erased my life for me, you see. That's how you join his inquisition. You've done something stupid, fucked up your life, whatever. It's like the foreign legion, except it's run by this nutzo millionaire instead of France. He wipes out your whole history, your records, the works—does a clean wipe on everything you've ever done. Of course, he keeps copies of it all. You go to work for him, do what he tells you, and you get paid really well. There's maybe fifty of us, I guess, but he's never really given me the big picture. Most of us are independent operators. We've got specialized talents useful to his inquisition: we've been burglars, murderers, computer hackers, legbreakers, you name it. He doesn't just pull every Joe Blow off the street; he looks for a certain type of person, and when he finds them he makes them an offer. That's how I got into this racket, at any rate.

He called me in about a week ago. Did some funky divination shit right there in his office, bones and stuff, and then said the signs were still strong. There was this Clockworker I was supposed to go lean on; the guy had been making these freakish magical automatons for some weirdo colleague of Alex's who died recently. How'd he die? Don't ask. It wasn't me. Anyway, Alex was working an angle: he thought this dead guy had owned the Naked Goddess tape, and that he was just crazy enough for this clockwork magic crap that he might have left the tape to the Clockworker when he shuffled off this mortal coil. According to Alex's divinations, the tape was still with this loser. So that's where I came in.

This Clockworker was named Josef. Some crusty old eastern European freak. Probably been making his magic cog-and-gear critters since before I was born. He lived in a big old house in Saginaw, Michigan. I spent three days sitting in my rented car, freezing in the February cold, watching his house. Every now and then I'd crack my door open and walk up the street to a podunk stop n' shop for hot coffee and cigarettes. I changed cars each day, parked in different places, all the usual surveillance stuff. It didn't matter. The old freak only came out once a day, to take his mail from the mailbox

on the front porch. Excitement city.

So finally I figured I'd seen enough. I'd wanted to know if there were other people at the house, if he had visitors, that kinda thing. No dice. On the third evening, then, I got out of my car and broke in through the back door.

It wasn't tough. The guy was weird, but he must not have been very paranoid. The door came open easily. I pulled the talisman Alex gave me a while back out of my pocket and put the leather string around my neck, like a good boy. Alex told me to always put it on before I went into a serious situation. He said it was like a good luck charm. I was ready to enter the house and put some hurt on the Clockworker when I heard a voice behind me. It was a woman, singing softly. I turned around, looking into the dark back yard through the falling snow.

She wasn't real. I could see right through her. She was maybe in her thirties, in a dark gown, dancing around in the snow. She didn't leave tracks. I couldn't make out her words. I went cold, and not from the snow. I fingered the talisman and walked down the steps towards her.

She stopped dancing and her eyes got big as I approached. She had a grim smile on her face. I moved closer, then stopped and stared. She started singing again, softly:

*I was a planet when I was smaller
I circled rings around your daughter
She threw the keys to the strand
Into the pocket of a dead man*

I recognized the lines; they were from a song I'd heard on the radio in Memphis a few weeks back while I was there on a job. The woman wasn't the slightest bit familiar, but I knew what she was: one of the Snowfallen. Typical occult stuff, the kind of thing I'd gotten a crash course in during my work for Alex. They were the spirits of murdered young mothers of lost children. Tragic shit. They materialized in snow, following the course of winter across the world. They made prophecies, said cryptic things, crap like that. This one was operating true to form. She sang again:

*She cried every night by the door
Said prayers to him and asked for more
Went down and down to the hole
Where dancers gathered to grow old*

This part wasn't familiar. I had a sneaking suspicion that she'd pulled the first part out of my mind, from that recent memory. This second bit, though, was probably something important. Some prophecy shit. Too bad I wasn't taking notes.

She didn't sing anymore, but kept on humming the tune. I caught sight of glistening tears on her face. She swirled around, dancing faster, and then she was gone.

Okay. Whatever. I had a job to do, so I turned back to the steps.

Josef was standing there, staring at me. He was older than god, from the look of him. He had these cold blue eyes you could barely make out, because his eyelids were squeezed almost shut, squinting. He was wearing a big red terrycloth robe, dirty with bits of food and cigarette ash. The guy was tall and gaunt, and he didn't seem to like me very much.

The feeling was mutual. I bounded up the steps, pulling out my Browning with one already in the chamber and flicking off the safety, hoping he hadn't had time to unleash some lumbering clockwork nightmare inside the house to skin me alive and pluck out

my eyes. He didn't move. I got right up next to him, holding the gun close to my coat, pointing at his chest.

"I'm here for the videotape your patron left you. Just hand it over and we'll call it a night."

He looked at me for a long moment, with no expression on his face other than contempt.

"Okay," I said. "Like they say at Burger King: have it your way." I jerked the gun down and shot him in the knee. He sort of staggered and leaned against the door frame. His face didn't change.

I lost my temper. "Listen, you stupid old freak. I'm here for the tape, and I'll keep fucking you up until you pull the lever on the clue dispenser and give me one. What's the story?"

He just stared. One hand crept down and clutched his shattered knee. His face showed no signs of pain.

I glared and kicked him right in the knee where I'd shot him. He went down then, collapsing in the doorway. I leaned over and grabbed one of his hands, pulled it up, and blew off his little finger with another slug from the Browning. I leaned down close to him. "Give it up, asshole, before you've got no more fingers."

He didn't say a thing, didn't react, just turned his head to look up at me. I looked at his hand and cursed.

Where the finger had been, there were just bits of metal and wire.

I dropped his hand and stood up, disgusted with myself for being an idiot. I brought one big booted foot up, then down, and caved his head in. Sparks flew and little flywheels went everywhere.

He was a fucking clockwork. The real Josef was inside the house somewhere, getting something really nasty ready for me while I was out here playing with this replica. Christ. I'd blown it, but big time. *Thank you, Miss Snowfallen Dancing Bitch. You probably just cost me my life.*

I stepped over the spasming, clicking automaton and into the house. I was in the kitchen. It was neat as a pin. There were little clockwork things all over the place: small creatures of metal and fabric, sitting on the counters. None of them looked active; I figured these were the playthings he cobbled together to cook him food and keep things neat. Of course, one of them might launch off the formica and drive a spike through my face, too; who freaking knew? So I wasted no time and booked through the kitchen into a dining room.

Or what used to be a dining room. It was full of people—clockwork ones, clearly—dancing. There was no music. Many were naked, sexless, ready to be fixed up for whatever the job needed. Some were pure fancy: angels with big wings, hulking demons with horns and purple skin, you name it. Josef was a prolific old bastard. All of his creations in this room were doing a slow waltz in silence, the only noise coming from the low whirring inside each one and the shuffle of their soft feet on the carpeted floor.

I took a breath and dashed into the room, running along the walls so I could stay out of their way. It didn't matter. I hadn't gotten even a quarter of the way through the room before they closed in. The freak thing was—and there's always a freak thing it seems like—they kept on dancing. They were waltzing around, in great swirling circles, but they were moving right for me.

Twelve bullets still in the gun. Enough to part the crowd. Make way for progress.

Four dancers right in front of me. I was sloppy: 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, and all four went down, stumbling if not falling while I chanted the number of shots left under my

breath. I stepped over and through them. Three more between me and the doorway. 5, 4, 3, 2, and I was through them and past the doorway. In the foyer I spun around the end of a big staircase to the second floor and took a quick second to size up the situation.

There had been maybe twenty clockworks in the dining room; I'd knocked four down for the count, three more were getting back up slowly. All but two of the rest had returned to their dancing. Hell, maybe they were just built to pull new 'dancers' into the routine, and nothing more sinister than that.

But the remaining two were bad news.

They were a couple, a man and a woman, dressed in formal wear six decades out of date and covered in dust. The pair were striding through the crowd, pushing their fellow clockworks aside with grim determination. Short knife blades slid from their fingertips and locked into place. They were out for blood.

I hesitated, pulled the twenty-shot magazine out of my coat all psyched to take these two out, then changed my mind when I saw how fast they were coming and fled up the stairs. The staircase was big, with lush red carpet. I took the steps three at a time, knowing those two were coming fast. On the way up I dropped the almost-empty mag and slipped the twenty in; with that plus one still in the chamber I should have enough to get by, I figured. At the top of the stairs was a landing. I threw open the first door I found, ran in, and slammed it shut. There was a latch; I turned it to shut the two dancers out, then scoped out the dark room.

A light came on. Though the floor beneath my feet was bare, I was still standing in deep shit.

It was the size of a horse, I guess. There's no point in trying to describe it, because it wasn't meant to look like anything in particular. It was a big—*big*—clockwork, all gears and legs and sharp pointy things. The light was from its heart: a big plastic Jesus christmas decoration, two feet high, illuminated from within. It lumbered towards me, leaving big gouges in the wood. The floor was riddled with them, and something else: bloodstains, and plenty of them. The walls and ceilings were covered in streaks of blood, of many vintages. This thing had ripped apart god knows how many people in here. It stank of oil and rot and old-world magic.

I still had my piece out, and without hesitating any further I leveled it at the innards of the clockwork and fired—once, then nothing. *Shit*. I hadn't slammed the 20-mag home. I did so, worked the action, brought the Browning up to bear, then ran like crazy because the sucker was right on me. It punched a big metal shaft through the door where I'd been standing; I had just barely ducked and started to run. I scurried to the far wall, spun around, and fired: 19, 18, 17, 16, and it was almost on me again. I moved as quick as I could, still firing: 15, 14, 13, 12, sidling along at a near-run.

It kept coming. Bits of cogs and fragmented metal littered the floor *but it would not stop*.

11, 10, 9, I shot Jesus right in the face, 8, 7, and I was at another door. I threw it open with my free hand and stepped through, pulling it behind me, and swung around to aim at whatever nightmare was waiting for me there.

Freaky old Josef, take two, sitting in a smoking jacket and slacks in an armchair by a lit oil lamp, a book in his lap. Behind me, that big steel shaft punched through the door making a hole to match the other one across the room.

I kept my gun on Josef, hearing clanking arms and gears on the other side of the door behind me. It couldn't fit through the door, no way, it was too big, but then my eyes hit the floor by my feet and there were gouges all over the place and I knew that thing could come through the door, easy, folding itself up and sliding through to take

me out.

It was doing just that. Chunks of wood were flying.

I walked forward, fast, the Browning leveled at Josef in the chair. He was smiling.

“Call it off! Call it the fuck off right now!”

He kept grinning. The door blew apart and the thing started to come through.

6. I tagged the wall above his head, plaster spitting out like the inside of a sucking wound. “Now, motherfucker! Shut that thing down *now!*”

He shrugged. Behind me, the clockwork stopped cold.

I took a deep breath and walked forward some more.

“Okay, pops. We’re gonna make this real quick and then I’m leaving your little freak show. I’m here for the video, the Naked Goddess, and I want satisfaction real quick as in right now.”

He stood slowly, setting the book aside on the table by the armchair.

“You’re a very noisy man,” the Clockworker said.

“I haven’t even raised my voice. Now come on, make me happy and we’ll both get a good night’s sleep.”

Josef sighed. “The tape. Of course. It’s yours. It’s in the cabinet.” He gestured to a big Chinese lacquer cabinet nearby.

“Open it,” I said.

He shrugged again. “As you wish.” He walked over to the cabinet.

I heard the cogs spin up a split second before it happened. The clockwork behind me launched a metal javelin from its innards straight at my back. I ducked and ate floor, rolled onto my back and 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, the clockwork wasn’t moving any more.

I jumped up and spun back to the Clockworker.

Josef was done for. The javelin meant for me had entered his chest and came out the other side, pinning him to the cabinet. His face worked furiously in confusion as blood dripped from the exposed shaft. He put his hands to the metal and tugged at it hopelessly. He looked up at me, his face blank with horror.

Not one to stand on ceremony, I strode over and yanked at the right-hand cabinet door next to where Josef was stuck and bleeding. It was locked. Keeping an eye on the old man and his last moments on earth, I stuck my hand in his pocket and found a set of keys. Josef gave me this weird look, like he didn’t know they were there. Moments later I had the lock open and the door followed.

There was all kinds of weird crap inside. Files, photographs, children’s toys, you name it. In there with the rest was the videotape: 3/4”, broadcast quality. I yanked it out and stepped away.

Josef was groaning, as his torn heart twitched in his chest. He looked at me one last time.

“You won’t leave this house alive,” he whispered, short of breath. “You’ll die here.”

“That may be,” I said as I pocketed the tape. “But you’ll die first.”

Zero. My last bullet put a hole right through his forehead. He gaped, dead.

Tick tock. The thing in the doorway started moving again. I thought I’d killed it, but I was wrong—Josef was just in too much pain to control it. Now it was running on its own, maybe driven by Josef’s dying fury or his freed soul. Who knows. What I did know was that it was blocking the only door out of the room, and I was out of bullets—not that they’d stopped the thing so far.

So I did the only sane thing I could. I ran across the room and dove through a window. I hit the roof over the front porch, tumbled and rolled, fell off and hit the ground—snow, six inches deep. My ankle hurt, but it wasn’t anything to cry over.

As I stumbled back to my car with the tape and an empty gun, I heard singing from

somewhere behind me:

*I was a planet when I was smaller
I circled rings around your daughter
She threw the keys to the strand
Into the pocket of a dead man*

I opened the door and climbed in behind the steering wheel. Through the windshield, I could see a figure in black dancing, twirling, footloose in the falling snow. Snowfallen.

I cursed a final time and drove towards Alex, and the dawn.

THE NEW INQUISITION

a limited series comic book proposal
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There's some serious shit going down these days, friend. Sure, the clockworkers are still around from the old world, building their tick-tock creations of blood and gears and sending them lumbering about dark alleys to retrieve forgotten tomes of mystical lore. But that's old school. I'm talking about the invisible clergy and the cult of the naked goddess and the flesh mages and freaking Alex Abel and his goddamn New Inquisition and all the rest.

The occult underground ain't what it used to be.

Used to be you'd hang out with creepy old ex-rabbis and talk about golems and that sort of thing, trading them smack in exchange for old scrolls you couldn't translate anyway. Used to be the worst you'd face might be some tricked-out incantrix who could make you forget that she'd cut off your dick and eaten it for dinner, but that only happened to rank amateurs. Used to be that when you wanted information, you'd have to go shake down some moldy old professor and threaten to pull out a ouija board right then and there and graft an astral parasite onto his ass.

But those days are over, man. The invisible clergy sent all that old school shit packing, by and large, and cranked the volume on what was left to 11. Big-money guys like Abel got into the scene and bought up those long-lost tomes of forbidden lore, only to find out they were just written by a bunch of crackpots and the info was way stale. Once the naked goddess ascended right in front of the video cameras and the bootlegs began getting around the underground, heavy hitters started coming out of the woodwork and making life tough for the rest of us.

I used to make a good living at this stuff, man. I'd track down old legends, stake vampires, drive off poltergeists, collect rare occult texts, that whole Kolchak trip. Now, there's young turks who've come outta nowhere. Who needs the secrets of the Kabbala when you've got chaos magick? These guys are hungry and lean, and they smell the power that's been waiting for someone to grab this whole time. Me, I knew better--play with fire and you get burnt. But jerks like Alex Abel are funding their own private armies of occultists and duking it out on the astral plane and in the streets of every city. Who needs it?

Sad to say, I do. A man's gotta pay the bills, you know what I'm saying? And if that means I'm shaking down wiccan priests and waxing Crowley-Grant-Lovecraft nuts and doing divinations with a Barbie doll, so-be-freaking-it. The times change and so does the occult underground, but one thing doesn't change: when people are this hungry for power, you better be the one with the fork.

INTRODUCTION

The New Inquisition is the proposed title for a limited-series comic book. It's loosely planned to be four issues long, but could be extended. Each issue contains three eight-page stories, which will interconnect as the series progresses until the final issue, which will be a single full-length tale. The driving forces of the setting are not all brought to a halt in this storyline, leaving open

the possibility for additional series in the future.

In brief, **The New Inquisition** is an occult action-thriller. It posits a very modern-day approach to classical occult ideas, and depicts an occult underground caught in the throes of the transition from old school mysticism to new wave sorcery. There's a war on of sorts, but no one is on the side of the angels—everyone is out for themselves, trying to make sense of what's happening and to grab as much power as they can. The main characters are all neck-deep in the intrigues of the occult underground, callously familiar with even the most shocking of horrors. There are a handful of major characters and groups at play in this setting, but there is a dizzying variety of minor characters, factions, and concepts that will be briefly encountered at lightning speed by the protagonists. The goal of this aspect of the project will be to give the reader scattershot glimpses of a much larger world, a world that is very strange to most of us but is the bread and butter of the main characters. There will be no novice character whose introduction to the world mirrors the reader; the reader will be plunged head-long into a rich and dangerous world and will be taken for a hell of a ride.

The New Inquisition is set firmly in the modern day. The main characters of the limited series all live in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, but the stories will occur in other places as well. Generous helpings of hideous violence, furious gunplay, and cynical manipulations set the tone. The insecurities of modern life and the dangers facing us all serve as the macrocosm in which the stories are set; the occult elements are the microcosm, taking our big fears and scaling them down to something you can shoot, fuck, or share a cigarette with.

Because **The New Inquisition** will be told in nine 8-page shorts and one 24-page conclusion, there is room for numerous characters, plots, and styles of stories. Most of the stories will give the impression of being slices of larger tales; they show more than they explain, and should leave the reader thoroughly engaged and wanting to know more about just what the hell is going on. The conclusion will wrap up the major storyline (elements of which will crop up in most of the short tales), but with plenty left unexplained for the reader to chew on.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Without further ado, let's meet our major cast members. This will serve as a loose introduction to the setting, as well.

Alex Abel

More spoken of than seen, Abel is still one of the pivotal characters in our story. He's the proverbial eccentric millionaire, a strutting turk in his late thirties, and he's got a hard-on for the occult. Abel has founded what he calls the New Inquisition: dozens of hit men, legbreakers, ex-detectives, computer hackers, you name it. He picks people that are in deep trouble—occupational hazard, for most of them—and makes them a Foreign Legion deal. Come to work for the Inquisition, and Abel will erase their entire life. No records, no warrants, no nothing. They get a new life, a fat paycheck, and a crash course in the occult. They do for him whatever he needs done, and they do it well. Mostly this consists of getting magical items Abel wants, or digging up information, or putting the hurt on Abel's enemies—and Alex Abel has a lot of enemies. Abel also has an agenda. He wants to ascend to the next level of existence and join the Invisible Clergy. Just who or what the Clergy are is anyone's guess, but their existence is undisputed. They act behind the scenes, they don't have bodies, and they're the baddest motherfuckers in known reality. From time to time, people ascend and join the clergy. Usually it happens to clueless schmos who didn't know a thing about the occult, everyday people who fall into the wake of synchronicity patterns. But some have done it deliberately. Abel wants to be one of the latter, and he'll do anything it takes to make it happen.

Eponymous

One of Abel's recent additions to the ranks of the Inquisition, "Eponymous" used to have a name and a life that he no longer has to worry about. He's good with a gun, doesn't mind gouging out someone's eyes to get them to talk, and is your basic cynical hardcase badass. Eponymous didn't know jack about the occult before Abel recruited him, but he's learned a lot in the six months he's been with the Inquisition. He thinks Abel is a stone cold freak, but doesn't care—he's doing what he likes to do, and he's getting paid well to do it. If that means he's duking it out with sorcerers and plugging bullets into magical clockwork automatons instead of running drugs and kacking stool pigeons, well, life goes on. Eponymous will be the major character in the limited series.

Daphnee Lee

Daphnee is the Heirophant of the Sect of the Naked Goddess, thank you very much, and don't you forget it. The Naked Goddess is the name given to one of the everyday normals who lucked into ascending to the ranks of the Invisible Clergy. She was a porn star, and her ascension happened right in the middle of a taping session. It was caught on videotape, a first, and the bootlegs of the tape kicked off a new wave of occult activity. One element of this is that a cult has grown up around her, obsessively digging up information on her life just like any fan club. Daphnee Lee was in the studio the day that the Goddess ascended, and saw it first-hand. It changed her life, and she's devoted herself to serving the Goddess. Of course, the Goddess has never contacted Daphnee—but that's the way these things go. Daphnee's followers are single-minded in their adoration of the Goddess, endlessly watching her skin flicks for symbols and clues about the nature of the Goddess and the form Her worship should take. Most people consider Daphnee's cult to be a bunch of rank amateurs, but the funny thing about synchronicity patterns is that even rank amateurs end up in the right place at the right time. No matter the circumstances, when heavy shit goes down it's a dead certainty that Daphnee and her crew will be involved for the most unlikely of reasons. Daphnee is turning into a sorceress of no mean skill, and her followers are adept at using sex magick to get what they want from people. Daphnee understands the importance of synchronicity well enough that she'll take even the most banal event as a sign to do something; usually she's right, and she's becoming a major player as a result.

Dirk Allen

Allen is an aging, dissipated writer with a small following and a lifetime of bad drugs, bad marriages, and bad choices. He's a Boozehound, someone who draws magickal power from getting plastered. Usually this form of magick offers little more than divination gifts, but Allen has been a boozier for most of his life and he can pull some serious shit if he's sufficiently drunk. He's obsessed with finding obscure and dangerous liquors—he always calls them "spirits," of course—which tend to have unusual properties in the hands (and liver) of a Boozehound. For guys like Allen, exotic stuff like absinthe is old hat. He's after peculiar bottles of the hard stuff brewed by monasteries of Satanic monks and so forth. No brew is too dubious for him to quaff, and if it's the good stuff he can work wonders. Allen's goals are muddled at best. A hardcore alcoholic, he's not sure if he pursues booze for the sake of power, or power for the sake of booze. Either way, he's a mean old bastard. At present he's on the trail of life-restoring magicks, as his health is so shot from a lifetime of hard drinking that he'll be in the grave inside a year without serious help. Going sober and getting medical treatment, of course, is out of the question.

Jennifer Zaraya

A well-meaning young chaos magician from Portland, Zaraya isn't too interested in the intrigues of the occult underground; she just wants to ditch the astral parasite some neophyte stuck on her in a flubbed ritual. Trouble is, astral parasites do more than sap your energy and occasionally possess your body. They're a magnet for weirdness of every sort, and as a result Zaraya is getting caught up in events she could care less about. Her friends are also a problem. Many of them are occult dabblers (like Artemis, who stuck her with the parasite) who know just enough to get themselves into trouble and not enough to get out. Occult hardcases like finding innocents like Zaraya's friends and using them for whatever purposes their personal agendas require. Zaraya is

motivated by getting her friends out of danger, and by her efforts to ditch the freaking parasite. Its given name is Inversus (its true name, of course, is a secret), and when it possesses Zaraya's body it uses her to further its own goals. This usually involves doing loathsome things and getting Zaraya in deep trouble.

Jaycy Linz

An enigmatic troublemaker, Linz straddles the old school and the new wave of the occult underground with ease. He's a self-admitted operative of the little-known King in Yellow (who some say is just a fiction created by Linz), and has at various times run an occult publishing company, been a graphic designer whose work allegedly drove people mad, and made short films in the Kenneth Alger vein. An inveterate scenester, he looks to be about 35 but may be much older. Linz has no allies, but no lasting enemies either; depending on who you ask he's either a punk who is beneath notice or an honest-to-gosh avatar of the King in Yellow himself and therefore no one you should screw with. Linz just smiles and pursues his own arcane, seemingly-random goals, popping up where he can be most annoying to the big boys. One of the few things anyone knows about him for sure is that his affable exterior masks a capacity for cruelty and bloodshed unequalled by anyone else in the occult underground—or is that just another one of Linz's fictions? Most agree it's better not to ask.

STORY

The main story for this limited series is the tale of how Alex Abel finally discovers the master recording of the Naked Goddess' ascension and what happens as a result. The main character for the tale is Eponymous, who does the dirty work and recovers the tape. Below are quick summaries of all nine projected 8-page shorts, not yet tied to any particular issue; some might be dropped or reworked, but this is what I have in mind right now.

Issue One

The Course of Winter

Main Character: Eponymous

This was a short story I wrote recently, dealing with Eponymous and his retrieval of the Naked Goddess tape. I've included the story with this proposal; I'd cut the material down to fit as an eight-page short. I think it'd be a good one to do as an initial demo to send to Dark Horse—it's got action, it's got violence, it's got freaky occult shit, and in short it should be a good way to kick off our pitch.

The Toast

Main Character: Dirk Allen

Dirk Allen, Boozehound, is approached by a young fan of his novels named Artemis. The guy has brought Allen a present: a rare bottle of fermented guavas from a Central American village. Allen receives Artemis and the booze gladly, and the two talk and drink. We learn some of Allen's background, and as he gets drunker he starts talking about the occult and about his search for a way to beat his failing liver. The whole time he's clearly up to something, and in the narrative captions (which are Allen thinking) we realize that he's going to do something really unpleasant. Eventually, he's had enough of the booze and proposes a final toast. Artemis, who is now pretty freaked out, agrees. As they toast to their health, Allen toasts Artemis: there's a blast of light and Allen steals Artemis' soul. Allen's left sitting at the table with the withered husk of Artemis, whose soul is now trapped in the bottle from Central America. He finishes his drink and regards the bottle, which now glows with the light of Artemis' soul. It won't save his life, but when he needs it it'll keep him alive just a little bit longer...

Demon Est Deus Inversus

Main Character: Jennifer Zaraya

Jennifer's trying to find her friend Artemis, who recently stuck her with an astral parasite by

accident. We know, of course, that Artemis has been consumed by Dirk Allen; Zaraya will get some clues in that direction, but won't meet Allen in this story. While she's looking for Artemis, she's also dealing with the astral parasite, Inversus. He keeps possessing her body when she's tired and doing things with it, real nasty things. (Jennifer comes to at one point to find an eyeball in her mouth and a corpse on the floor.) She starts taking speed to keep Inversus at bay, and gets more and more wacked out. Her search for Artemis isn't succeeding, and finally she goes into the astral plane and strikes a deal with Inversus: if he'll help her find Artemis, she'll willingly turn over her body for twenty-four hours. The deal is struck, with consequences to be addressed later.

Issue Two

In the Wake

Main Character: Daphnee Lee

Daphnee Lee is the star of this tale and it's told from her perspective. She's searching for the master videotape of the Naked Goddess ascension, and she's on the trail of Eponymous. Her search gives us some background on the Naked Goddess tape and Daphnee's role as leader of the sect, as well as the workings of synchronicity magick. Daphnee has no idea who Eponymous is or that he's working for Abel; she's just following the currents of synchronicity. She interprets seemingly-random events as symbols of her goal, and gets close to Eponymous through an oddball series of improbable events. She reaches the house of the clockworker Josef an hour after Eponymous left; Josef died when Eponymous came to collect the tape. She meets the Snowfallen spirit outside the house, and (unlike Eponymous) is able to communicate with it. Afterwards, she takes off after Eponymous (who is still in town) and the story ends as she reaches the motel he's at.

The Deal

Main Character: Dirk Allen

With the help of Inversus, Jennifer has tracked Artemis down to Dirk Allen's house in Seattle. She confronts Allen, who twigs to her parasite. They lay all their cards on the table. Zaraya needs Artemis' soul so that—hopefully—Artemis can release the parasite that's riding her. Allen needs the tape of the Naked Goddess, with which he hopes to extort magickal aid from either Alex Abel or Daphnee Lee to save his life. (He's been doing Boozehound divination magick to learn of what's going on.) Zaraya says the whole thing stinks and she wants Allen dead for what he did to Artemis, but she agrees that'll have to wait. They strike a deal, and Allen tells her that the tape will be arriving tomorrow with either Lee or Eponymous. Zaraya leaves, hoping she can pull off the grab and bring this sorry mess to a close—but her debt to Inversus still remains to be fulfilled.

Wet Work

Main Character: Jaycy Linz

This cryptic tale begins as sort of a slice-of-life for Jaycy. We see him meeting people in strange places, cutting deals, and saying lots of weird shit. In the end, he confronts a guy we haven't seen before. The two have a bloody fight that ends with Jaycy subduing him. Jaycy works a quick and disgusting ritual and a spirit possesses the man's body—it's one of the Invisible Clergy, it seems, and it's pissed off. Jaycy is looking for another member of the Invisible Clergy named Inversus; he says they have some unfinished business. The Clergy member directs Jaycy to Jennifer Zaraya, and says his brother Inversus is riding the girl in disguise as an ordinary astral parasite. Jaycy says thanks, the spirit leaves, and Jaycy cuts the man's throat.

Issue Three

Succubus

Main Character: Daphnee Lee

Daphnee Lee has caught up with Eponymous at his motel in Saginaw. She uses magick to seduce him, and as they're having sex he clues in that he's in big trouble: Daphnee intends to steal the

tape and drain the life out of him to cover her tracks. Eponymous doesn't know jack about magick, but he's good with his fists and a gun. A battle ensues, with Daphnee flinging spells and Eponymous popping off shots. The battle moves into the parking lot, with cars exploding and people in the motel spontaneously combusting (Daphnee's control isn't all that great). In the end, Daphnee escapes with the tape and leaves Eponymous cursing and bleeding but alive.

Idle Hands

Main Character: Alex Abel

This is the story of Alex Abel: who he is, how he got rich, and what drove him to found the New Inquisition. It puts some of the other stories in context, and explains the major plotline of this series.

The Grab

Main Character: Jennifer Zaraya

Jennifer heads for the Seattle airport at the appointed time that night, knowing that either Daphnee Lee or Eponymous will be there with the tape. She's got two chaos magicians with her, Sara and Andrew. The trio prepare, and when Daphnee gets off the plane with the tape, they strike. Jennifer is hoping to subdue Daphnee quietly with spells, but she doesn't realize how powerful the Hierophant is. The plan goes sour, and Daphnee toasts Sara and Andrew; on the brink of death, Jennifer hands over her body to the parasite for the agreed-on twenty-four hours. The possessed Jennifer makes short work of Daphnee, leaving her unconscious, and makes off with the tape. The parasite is pursuing his own agenda, it seems, but where that's heading is still a secret.

Issue Four

Ascension

This is the full-length tale that wraps up the limited series. The morning after the airport fight, Dirk Allen gets the tape from the possessed Jennifer Zaraya and sets up a meeting with Alex Abel and Daphnee Lee for that night. Eponymous returns and Abel chews him out, then tells him to come along to the meeting tonight. Jaycy Linz and Jennifer Zaraya (still possessed by Inversus) meet at a café and lay plans to interrupt the meeting, both pursuing some secret but apparently-mutual agenda.

At the meeting, Dirk sets out his demands: find a way to save his life, and he'll hand over the tape. He arrives drunk as a skunk and bristling with power—no one's going to fuck with him in this state, he thinks. He tells Abel and Lee that they have twenty-four hours to meet his demands, or he'll burn the tape.

Jaycy and the possessed Jennifer crash the party. Jaycy says *he's* here for the tape and he'll kill them all if he doesn't get it. All hell breaks loose. Abel tells Eponymous to waste Jaycy ("He's just a punk!"), so Eponymous attacks him and the two have a knock-down, drag-out fight. Daphnee goes for Dirk Allen and gets incinerated after a short scuffle. Alex Abel smiles and says he's still willing to fulfill the agreement, assuming this business with Jaycy and the girl is resolved. Allen is scared shitless by Jaycy ("Don't you know what he *is?*"). Jennifer tells Abel that he's a fool to want the tape, because the Invisible Clergy will never bring him into the fold; it becomes clear that Inversus is one of the Clergy. Abel is furious.

Jaycy kicks the shit out of Eponymous, but doesn't kill him. Inversus departs from Jennifer, the twenty-four-hour period having come to an end. She doesn't know what the hell is going on. Returning to the meeting, Jaycy says hello to Jennifer and walks over to a quaking Dirk Allen. He yanks the tape out of Allen's hands; Allen offers no resistance. Jaycy says this is all just about

over, as soon as—bang!

Eponymous has returned and shoots Jaycy in the back. The bullet blows out the other side and obliterates the Naked Goddess tape in Jaycy's hand. "As I was saying," Jaycy says, "this will all be over as soon as Eponymous destroys the tape."

Abel screams at Eponymous, who looks confused. Jaycy is bleeding badly, but doesn't seem to care. Abel starts to charge Jaycy, but Dirk Allen holds him back. Jaycy says "It's showtime," and right then and there Jennifer Zaraya ascends to the Invisible Clergy.

It's a tremendous scene. Alex Abel witnesses it on his knees, weeping and begging for them to take him, too. Jaycy mocks him. Eponymous helps the incoherent Abel out of the house. Allen is still scared shitless by Jaycy, but asks him if maybe he can help save Allen's life. Jaycy asks Allen to pour them both a drink, and they have a toast: to synchronicity. "Maybe," Jaycy says, "we can do business together."

Outside, Eponymous hustles Abel into a car and they take off. Abel swears to destroy the Invisible Clergy, no matter what it takes. Eponymous lights a cigarette, and they drive off into the night.

THE NEW INQUISITION

Part One: The Course of Winter
©1996 John Tynes

Style Note: I'd like to avoid doing a traditional splash page kinda thing—no page with title, credits, etc. I'd like to put that stuff on the inside front cover, or along the bottom of the first page, or whatever. Just 22 pages of art and story, without that icky page with all the boxes and credits and stuff. Part of this is so that it'll read better as a collected edition at some point in the future, but part of it is also just to dispense with that old standby. If anything, we might leave space for the issue title within the design of an early page, like they did in WATCHMEN; but even that might be too much. I'd like to keep the 22 pages as purely focused on storytelling as possible.

Script Note: I've broken the material up into finished pages, but you're welcome to flow things one way or the other. The main thing I was trying to do was to put the two flashback sequences onto pages by themselves. Here's how I have it broken down:

Pages 1–6: Eponymous approaches the house, encounters the snowfallen, meets the false Josef in the doorway, the false Josef is revealed, into the house, sees the dancers in the ballroom.

Pages 7–8: Flashback to how Eponymous joined TNI and his thoughts on Alex Abel.

Pages 9–14: The dancers move, gunplay, pursued by two dancers, up the stairs, into the room to see the beast. Deal with the beast, into the next room, meet the real Josef, get Josef to call off the beast.

Pages 15–16: Flashback to this assignment and what the set-up is.

Pages 17–22: Deal with Josef, climax, end.

Each major sequence is six pages long, and each flashback is two pages long (total: 22). If you want to condense or expand sequences, try to do it by adding/removing entire pages to/from a sequence. So if the first bit is only five pages long, then the third bit or the fifth bit could be expanded to be seven pages long. That'll keep the two flashbacks onto their own two pages each.

I placed page breaks to take advantage of dramatic images or dialogue, but like I said, you can re-flow the material as you see fit. I trust your instincts; my page breaks are mostly to help express the pacing I've got in mind and which moments should be considered Big Moments or which can serve as a one-two punch to the reader—the first punch being at the end of one page, the second at the start of the next.

EPONYMS



← NOTE SCAR
ACROSS LIPS



EPONYMS

MM

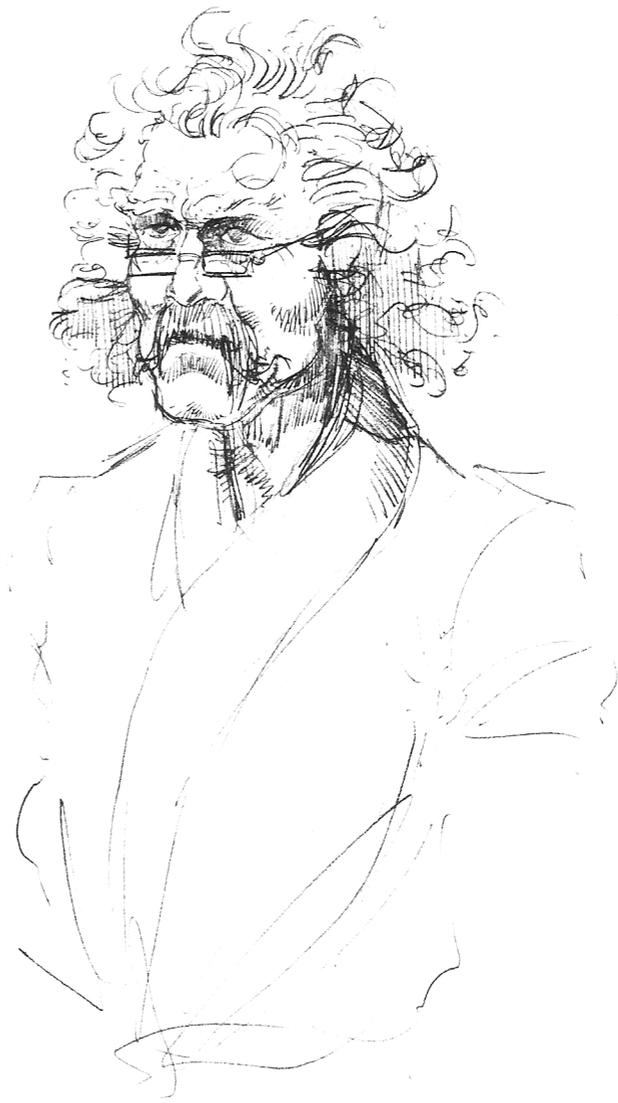
ABEL —

REF. P. 11 M
PA
EP



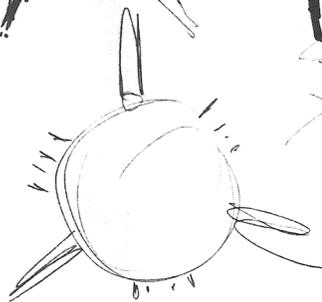
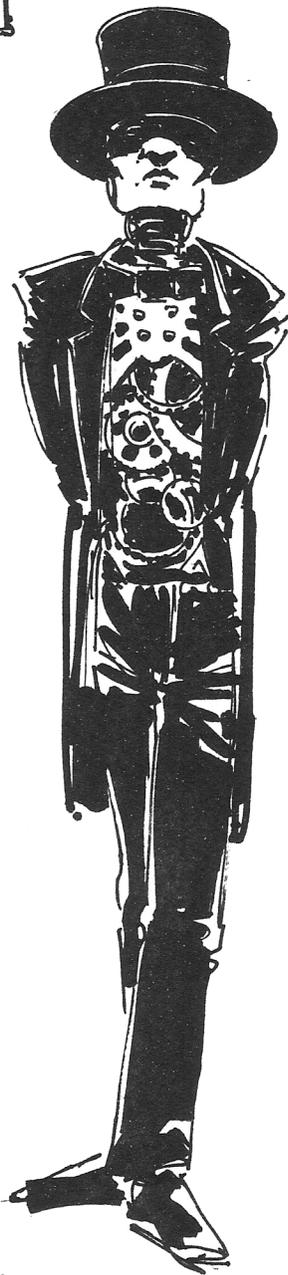
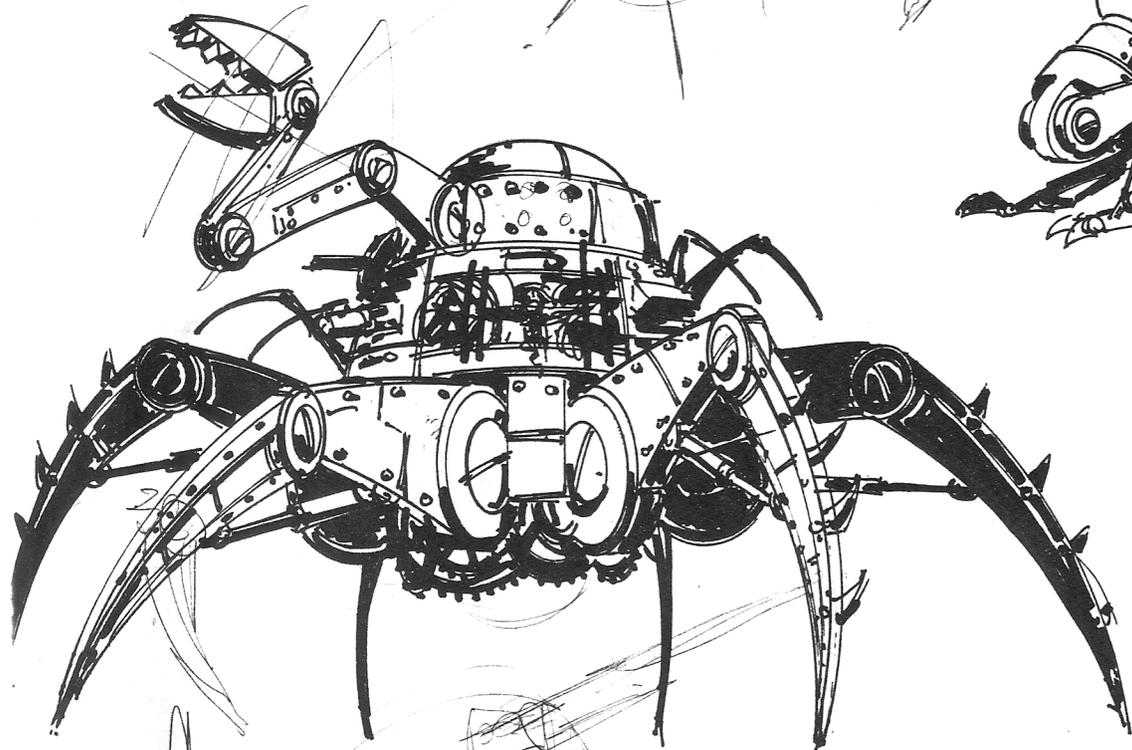
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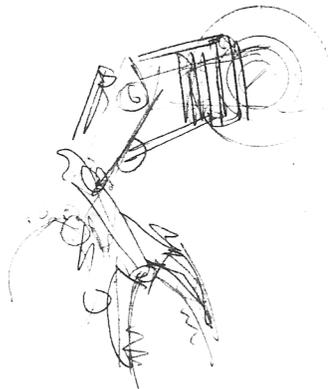
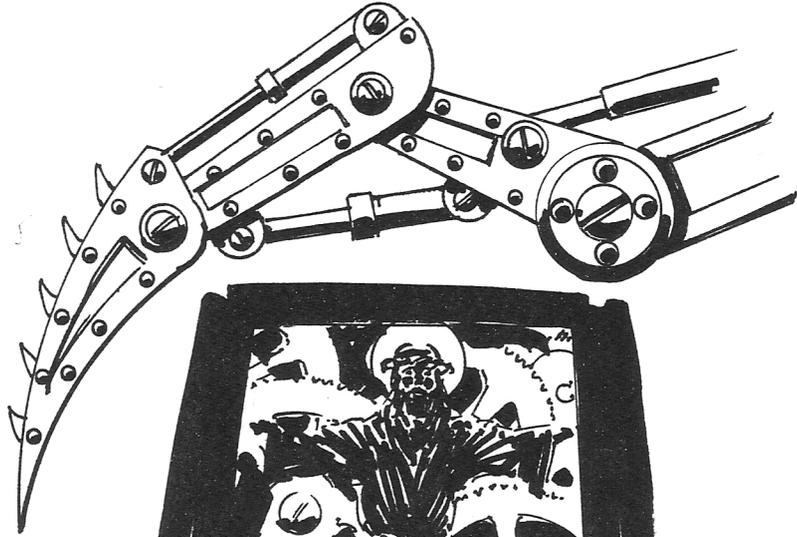
JOSEPH



CLOCKWORKS

3 PRAYING MANTIS
ARMS W/ SPIKES





PAGE ONE
caption

SAGINAW, MICHIGAN

It's late at night, and Eponymous is sitting in his car across from the clockworker's house, smoking a cigarette. Snow is everywhere, a thick blanket in the Michigan winter. The house is big, semi-Victorian, rather like Jesper's. All the windows have drawn, heavy drapes but there is light coming from some of them. There are other houses, but it's an old neighborhood so they all have big yards and lots of space between them. Not mansions or anything, but big old family homes. Few, if any, lights are on and there are no streetlights. Moonlight.

Eponymous narration

THREE DAYS ON SURVEILLANCE—JACK SHIT TO SHOW FOR IT. FAR AS I COULD TELL, THE OLD CLOCKWORKER JOSEF LIVED ALONE AND HAD NO VISITORS. NOTHING STOOD BETWEEN ME AND HIM BUT THE HOUSE HE'D LIVED IN SINCE BEFORE I WAS BORN.

Eponymous exits the car, ditches the smoke, heads across the yard. He's wearing his trademark black wool coat. He heads rapidly for the back of the house. There, he finds a narrow porch up to the back door.

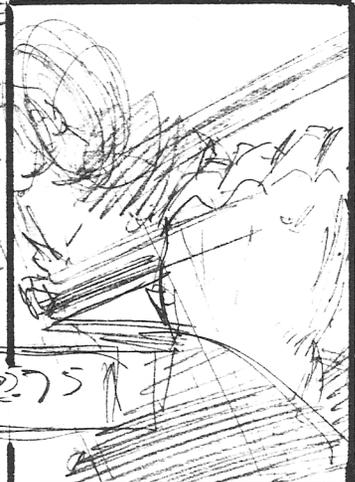
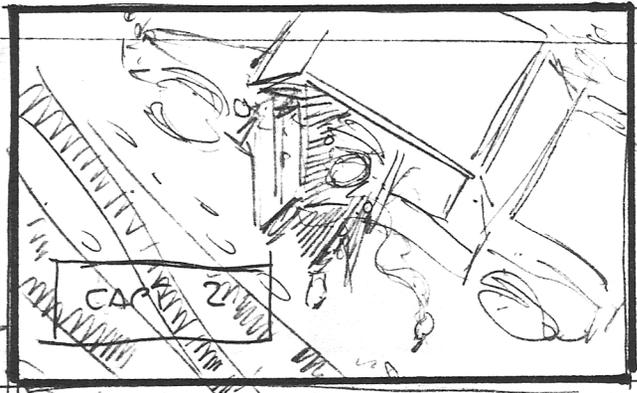
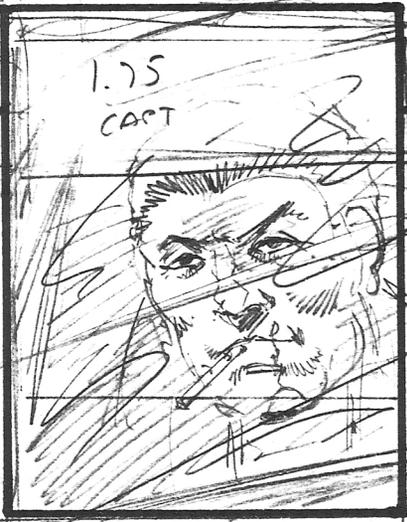
Eponymous narration

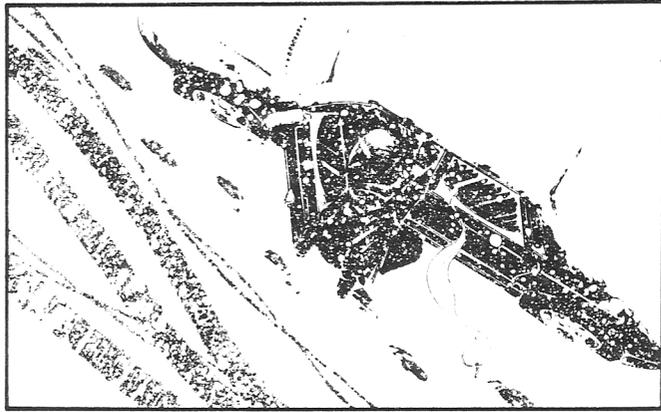
EVERYTHING'S GOT A WEAKNESS. PEOPLE HAVE KNEECAPS. CARS HAVE TIRES.

Eponymous pulls a short crowbar out of the lining of his coat and pops the lock.

Eponymous narration

HOUSES HAVE DOORS.





PAGE TWO

Behind him, a woman in a dark gown is dancing in the snow. We can see through her—she's a ghost, transparent.

Woman, singing

*I WAS A PLANET WHEN I WAS SMALLER
I CIRCLED RINGS AROUND YOUR DAUGHTER*

Eponymous regards her with surprise; she wasn't there a moment ago.

Eponymous narration

SHE WAS SINGING LINES FROM A SONG I'D HEARD IN MEMPHIS A FEW WEEKS BACK, ON ANOTHER JOB FOR ALEX. I CLICKED TO WHAT SHE WAS: ONE OF THE SNOWFALLEN.

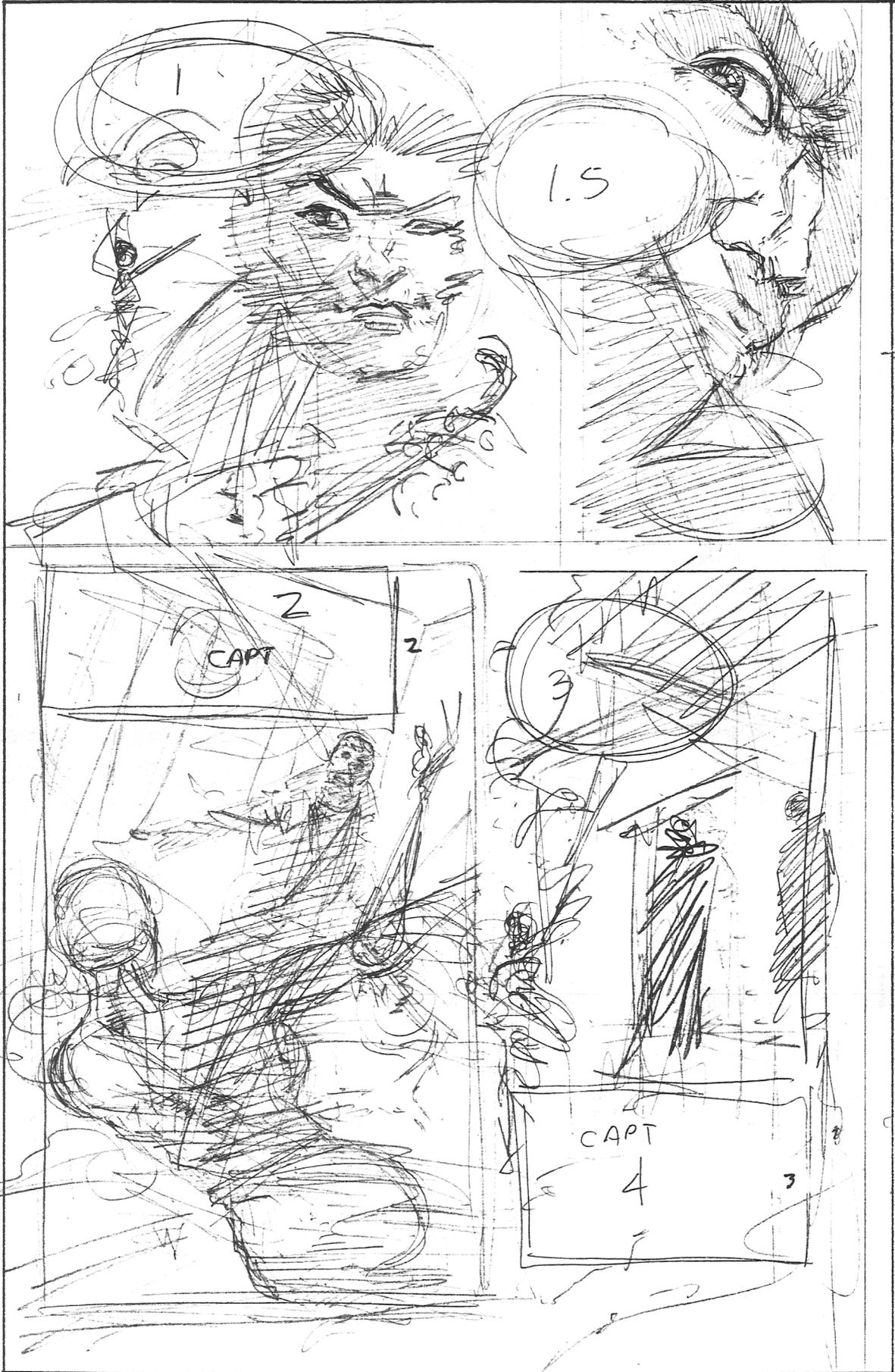
Woman, singing

*SHE THREW THE KEYS TO THE STRAND
INTO THE POCKET OF A DEAD MAN*

Eponymous goes down the steps and stands in the back yard before the dancing ghost. We can't see the back door from this point forward, until it's stated otherwise.

Eponymous narration

TYPICAL OCCULT STUFF, THE KIND OF THING I'D GOTTEN A CRASH COURSE IN DURING MY WORK FOR ALEX. THEY WERE THE SPIRITS OF MURDERED YOUNG MOTHERS OF MISSING CHILDREN. TRAGIC SHIT.





PAGE THREE

Woman, singing

*SHE CRIED EVERY NIGHT BY THE DOOR
SAID PRAYERS TO HIM AND ASKED FOR MORE*

Eponymous regards the woman coolly as she continues dancing and singing.

Eponymous narration

THEY MATERIALIZED IN SNOW, FOLLOWING THE COURSE OF WINTER
ACROSS THE WORLD. THEY MADE PROPHECIES, SAID CRYPTIC THINGS,
CRAP LIKE THAT. THIS ONE WAS OPERATING TRUE TO FORM.

Woman, singing

*WENT DOWN AND DOWN TO THE HOLE
WHERE DANCERS GATHERED TO GROW OLD*

Eponymous narration

THE LAST HALF OF HER LITTLE ROUTINE WASN'T THE SONG—IT WAS
SOMETHING NEW. SOME PROPHECY SHIT. TOO BAD I COULDN'T GIVE A
FUCK.

We see the woman has tears glistening on her face, humming the tune. She swirls
faster, and then vanishes.

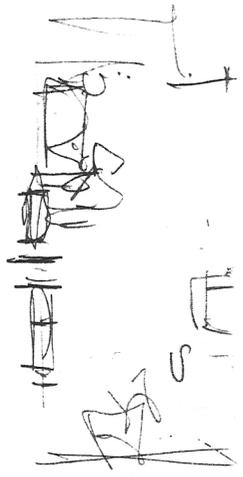
Eponymous narration

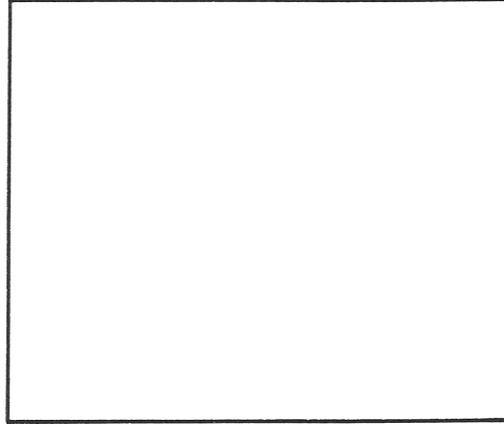
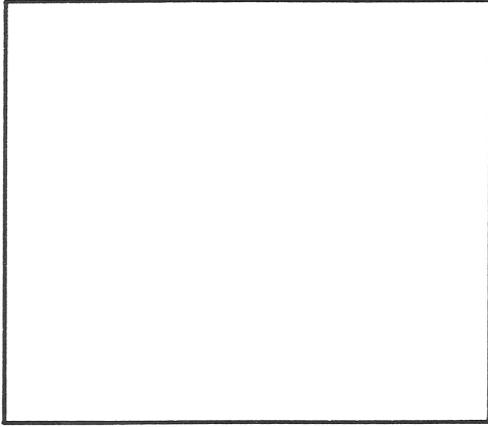
OKAY. WHATEVER. I HAD A JOB TO DO.

There's an old man standing in the doorway. Tall and gaunt, his eyes almost
completely closed, hair nothing more than wisps. He's wearing a bathrobe and
slippers, with cold malice on his face. Eponymous sees him. The man sees
Eponymous. They stare for a second.

Eponymous narration

FUCK.





PAGE FOUR

Eponymous bounds up the steps, yanking a 9mm Browning Hi-Power out of his coat. He's on the porch in no time, with his gun stuck in the old guy's chest.

Eponymous

I'M HERE FOR THE VIDEOTAPE YOUR PATRON LEFT YOU. JUST HAND IT OVER AND WE'LL CALL IT A NIGHT.

The old man just stares back into Eponymous' eyes, with no change of expression. Eponymous sneers.

Eponymous

OKAY. LIKE THEY SAY AT BURGER KING—HAVE IT YOUR WAY.

Eponymous shoots the guy in the knee. There's no blood, but we shouldn't notice this yet. The guy slumps against the door frame, but just keeps staring. No change of expression.

Eponymous

LISTEN, YOU STUPID OLD FREAK. I'M HERE FOR THE TAPE, AND I'LL KEEP FUCKING YOU UP UNTIL YOU PULL THE LEVER ON THE CLUE DISPENSER AND GIVE ME ONE. WHAT'S THE STORY?

The old man says nothing, his face unchanging. Eponymous kicks him in the knee where he just shot him. The old man goes down, dropping to his knees there in the doorway. Eponymous grabs one of the man's hands, pulls it up, levels the gun, and blows the man's little finger off.

Eponymous

GIVE IT UP, ASSHOLE, BEFORE YOU'VE GOT NO MORE FINGERS.

The old man looks up at him, his face the same.



PAGE FIVE
Eponymous

SHIT.

We see the old man's hand, still grasped by Eponymous. Where his little finger was, there's just wire and metal and stuff hanging out. This guy isn't human.

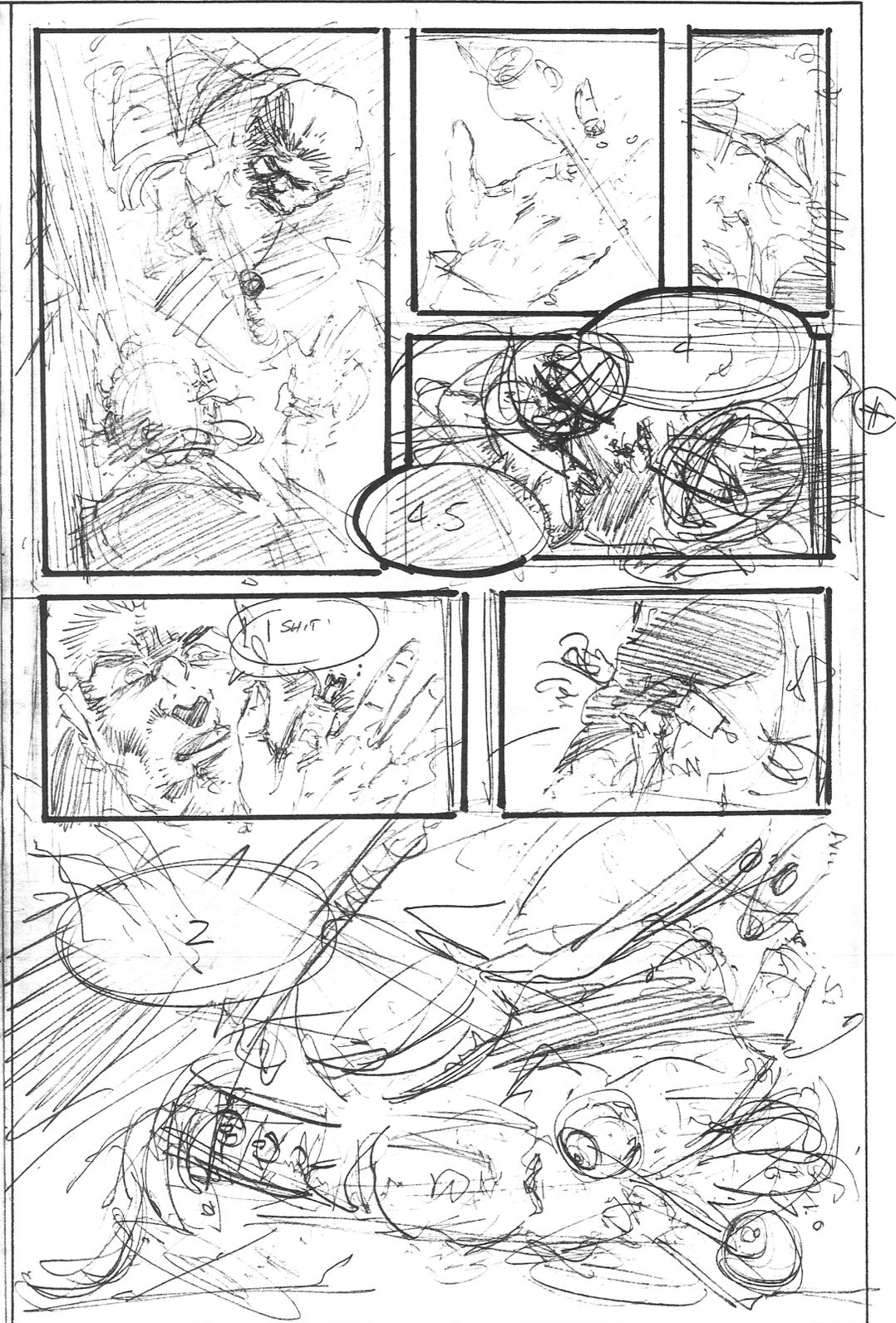
Eponymous
FUCKING CLOCKWORK MOTHERFUCKER!

He raises one big booted foot and brings it down on the automaton's head, crushing it. Cogs and wires and stuff go everywhere. Then he hurries inside, gun still out.

Eponymous narration
HE WAS A GODDAMN CLOCKWORK. THE REAL JOSEF WAS INSIDE THE HOUSE SOMEWHERE, GETTING SOMETHING REALLY NASTY READY FOR ME WHILE I WAS OUT HERE PLAYING WITH THIS REPLICA. CHRIST. I'D BLOWN IT, BUT BIG TIME.

Inside the kitchen, Eponymous gets a quick look. The counters and the shelves are covered with small clockworks: little toys, strange gizmos, cog-and-gear gnomes, all kinds of crazy stuff. Mixed in with these are piles of dirty dishes and other detritus.

Eponymous, whispering to himself
THANK YOU, MISS SNOWFALLEN DANCING BITCH. YOU PROBABLY JUST COST ME MY LIFE.



PAGE SIX

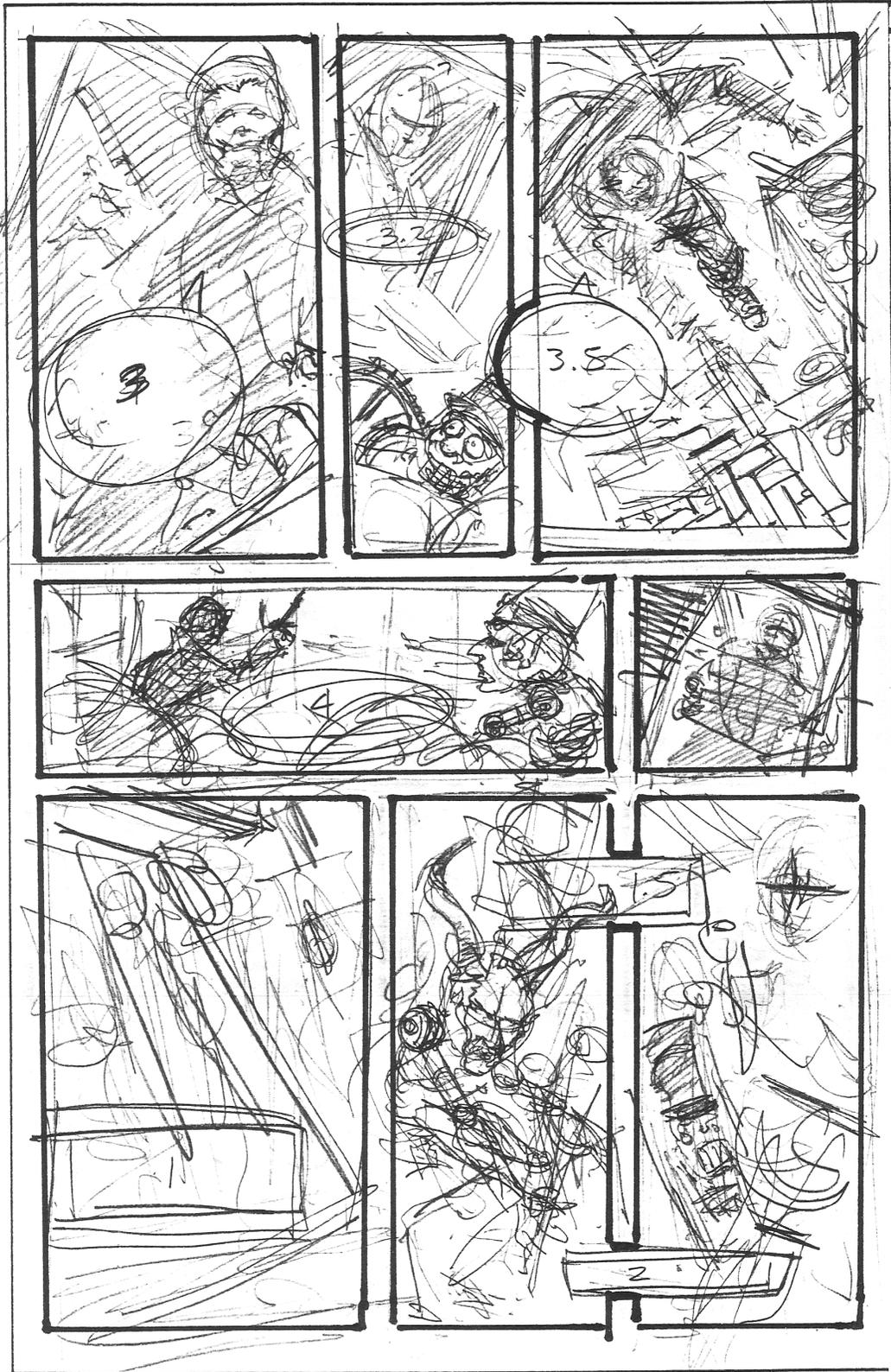
Eponymous hurries into the doorway of the next room. It's a large ballroom (but remember, this place isn't a palace), full of people—automatons, actually. Many of them look human, and are dressed in 1930s/1940s fashions. Others are skinless, and we can clearly see all their inner workings. Still others are done in outlandish styles: demons, angels, etc. All very classical, elegant-looking. They're dancing in big, formal motions. We get multiple shots of this on the page.

Eponymous narration

JOSEF WAS A PROLIFIC OLD BASTARD. ALL OF HIS CLOCKWORKS IN THIS ROOM WERE DOING A SLOW WALTZ IN SILENCE, THE ONLY NOISE COMING FROM THE LOW WHIRRING INSIDE EACH ONE AND THE SHUFFLE OF THEIR SOFT FEET ON THE WOODEN FLOOR.

Eponymous, whispering to himself

FUCKING CLOCKWORK MOTHERFUCKER.



PAGE SEVEN

Flashback time. Perhaps the borders are black or something—feel free to work up some visual framing element that sets this off from the rest of the pages.

CAPTION

SIX MONTHS AGO. ALEX ABEL'S OFFICE IN SEATTLE.

We're in a plush office in the upper floors of a high-rise office building downtown. Feel free to pick out a real one and use it for reference. A large picture window shows us downtown Seattle and Mt. Rainier in the background, but avoid the Space Needle if possible just so we don't overdo the landmarks. Eponymous and Alex Abel are here; Abel is a slim, well-dressed black man in his late 30s. The office exudes wealth and power, but it's not tasteless or ostentatious. What does that look like? Beats me. Eponymous is sitting in a guest chair; Abel is pacing around the room.

ABEL

IT'S A SIMPLE OFFER, REALLY, ALMOST A CLICHÉ. COME WORK FOR ME AND I ERASE YOU. NO BIRTH CERTIFICATE, NO POLICE RECORD, NO WARRANTS, NO JAIL HISTORY, NO NOTHING. THE MEN WHO WANT TO KILL YOU WILL CHANGE THEIR MINDS. DO THE JOBS I ASSIGN YOU, DO THEM WELL, AND YOU'LL LIVE WELL. BETRAY ME AT ANY TIME AND YOU'RE HISTORY.

EPONYMOUS

WHERE'S THE FLUFFY WHITE CAT?

ABEL

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

EPONYMOUS

DON'T YOU GUYS ALWAYS HAVE A FLUFFY WHITE CAT TO STROKE WHEN YOU'RE SAYING SHIT LIKE THAT?

ABEL

HAH. WELL. I DON'T HAVE A FLUFFY WHITE CAT, AND ALL KIDDING ASIDE, I'M QUITE SERIOUS.

EPONYMOUS

UH HUH. SO IS THIS A LIFETIME CONTRACT OR WHAT?

ABEL

YOU CAN LEAVE MY SERVICE AT ANY REASONABLE TIME. IF YOU DO SO UNDER—UNFAVORABLE—CIRCUMSTANCES, YOU CAN EXPECT YOUR FORMER LIFE TO RE-APPEAR, IN FULL DETAIL, WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. THE MEN WHO WANT TO KILL YOU WILL SUDDENLY REMEMBER THAT THEY WANTED TO DO SO. THEY MAY HAVE HELP. YOU CAN ALSO EXPECT THE LAW TO RECEIVE INFORMATION THAT WILL HELP IN YOUR APPREHENSION AND CONVICTION. AT THE LEAST.

EPONYMOUS

AND WHAT IF I SAY I WANT TO LEAVE AND YOU AGREE I'VE DONE A GOOD JOB AND THERE'S NO PROBLEM WITH MY BEING PUT OUT TO STUD?

ABEL

THEN YOU GET A NEW IDENTITY, A PERMANENT ONE, AND A GENEROUS SEVERANCE PACKAGE. BUT NO ONE HAS YET CHOSEN TO LEAVE MY EMPLOY UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES—WORKING FOR ME IS VERY REWARDING, AND IF I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D LIKE IT YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE.

EPONYMOUS

GOT ME ALL FIGURED OUT, DON'T YOU?

ABEL

INSOFAR AS THE FINEST RESEARCHERS CAN ASSEMBLE A COMPLETE PROFILE OF YOU FROM THE FACTS AT HAND, YES.

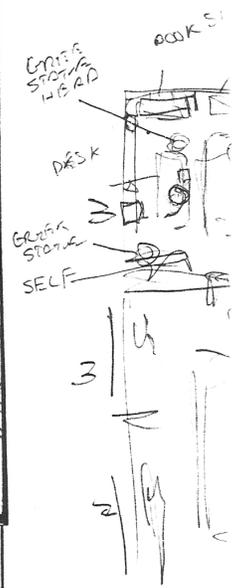
EPONYMOUS

(whispering)

HMM.

ABEL

REALLY, I TREAT THE MEMBERS OF MY INQUISITION VERY WELL. YOU'LL HAVE NO COMPLAINTS. THE WORK CAN BE HAZARDOUS, BUT YOU'RE USED TO THAT.



PAGE EIGHT

EPONYMOUS

SO WHAT THE FUCK IS YOUR INQUISITION, ANYWAY?

ABEL

IT'S JUST A NAME. ONE I'M FOND OF. IT HAS CERTAIN CONNOTATIONS THAT PLEASE ME. MY INQUISITION SEEKS THINGS I NEED, WORKS TO ACCOMPLISH MY GOALS, AND THWARTS THOSE WHO WOULD OPPOSE ME.

EPONYMOUS

YOU AREN'T RUNNING SOME SORT OF SYNDICATE, ARE YOU? THIS IS SOME PERSONAL SHIT.

ABEL

I'M A MAN OF PASSION, SIR, AS ARE YOU. WHILE I REALIZE THAT YOU MAY NOT SYMPATHIZE WITH MY GOALS OR EVEN UNDERSTAND THEM, I WILL EXPECT YOU TO DO ALL YOU CAN TO MAKE THEM COME TO PASS.

EPONYMOUS

ALL RIGHT. YOU'RE ON. LET'S DO IT.

ABEL

EXCELLENT. I HAD FULL FAITH IN YOUR ABILITY TO ARRIVE AT THIS DECISION. I PROMISE THAT WHILE YOU MAY AT TIMES FIND YOURSELF IN UNPLEASANT SITUATIONS YOU COULD HAVE AVOIDED BY DECLINING MY OFFER, YOU WILL NEVER REGRET JOINING MY TEAM.

EPONYMOUS

I GOT ONE QUESTION LEFT.

ABEL

NAME IT.

EPONYMOUS

(sarcastic)

DO I GET SOME SORT OF CODE NAME? I'VE ALWAYS WANTED A CODE NAME.

ABEL

YOU'VE SEEN ENTIRELY TOO MANY MOVIES, SIR. MY OPERATIVES DO TAKE A NEW NAME TO BE USED WITHIN MY ORGANIZATION. USUALLY THEY ARE ORDINARY NAMES. IF IT PLEASES YOU, YOU MAY CHOOSE SOMETHING MORE COLORFUL.

EPONYMOUS

(whispering, sarcastic)

OUT FUCKING STANDING.

ABEL

WHAT'LL IT BE, THEN? "MR. BLONDE"? "STEEL DEEP"? "THE ENFORCER"?

EPONYMOUS

EPONYMOUS.

ABEL

HEH. VERY WELL, EPONYMOUS. WELCOME TO THE NEW INQUISITION.



PAGE NINE

Eponymous runs into the room, gun out.

Eponymous Narration

NOTHING TO DO BUT RUN FOR IT.

The dancers close before him, still swaying in couples and so forth.

Eponymous, whispering to himself

KILL THIS NOISE

The gun fires. As the following narration comes out, have quick shots of four intervening dancers getting shot in various locations. He fires a total of six shots at them, so distribute the hits as you like.

Eponymous narration

11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6 AND THEY WENT DOWN.

Eponymous hustles through the room, boots crunching the downed dancers. Three more dancers are in his way. He fires four more shots and drops them, too.

Eponymous narration

5, 4, 3, 2 AND THE WAY WAS CLEAR.

He's entered the next room, a foyer with front door and a big staircase leading up to the second floor. He looks back.

Eponymous, whispering to himself

FUCK ME

PAGE TEN

Two dancers are pushing their way through the still-dancing crowd. We see them pop knife blades from their fingertips; both have a grim look on their faces. They're clearly coming for him. The rest of the dancers aren't doing anything different, just dancing.

Eponymous pulls a 20-shot magazine out of his coat. The two killers are too close to load the mag and take them down. Eponymous turns and runs up the stairs, holding the gun in his right hand and the fresh mag in his left.

Eponymous, whispering to himself

FUCK FUCK FUCK

On the way up the stairs, he releases the mag in his Browning and it drops out. He pops the fresh mag in the gun. The two are following close behind.

At the top of the stairs there's a landing, a hallway, and a convenient door. Eponymous opens the door, runs in, slams it shut, and throws the latch.

Eponymous narration

I FIGURED I HAD A BREATHER WHILE THE TWO CLOCKWORKS TORE THE DOOR TO SHREDS. LONG ENOUGH TO LOOK FOR ANOTHER EXIT, LONG ENOUGH TO GET READY TO TAKE THEM DOWN.

PAGE ELEVEN

Eponymous looks back at the room he's just entered and sees the beast. It's a big clockwork, the size of a horse or so, and it doesn't look like anything real. It's all legs and cogs and blades and so on, sort of spider-like. In the heart of the beast is a two-foot plastic statue of Jesus, lit from within. That might be the first thing we see; perhaps we cut from Eponymous looking to the face of Jesus, then zoom back to see the whole thing.

Eponymous narration

LONG ENOUGH TO REALIZE THAT EVEN THOUGH THE FLOOR WAS BARE, I WAS STILL STANDING IN DEEP SHIT.

The room he's in was a bedroom or sitting room. Now it's just a bare wood floor with no furniture or decorations. There are big gouges all over the place, left by the beast scrambling around. Bloodstains, old ones, are everywhere.

Eponymous raises the gun and fires the round in the chamber at the beast. Then another trigger pull—and nothing.

Eponymous narration

I HADN'T JACKED THE FREAKING MAG HOME. DUMB, DUMB, DUMB.

He slams the palm of his left hand against the base of the magazine, brings the gun up, and then the beast is right on him, blade-arms pistoning around his head. Eponymous ducks and bolts to one side, running to the far wall.

PAGE TWELVE

Eponymous

BASTARD!

He fires four shots into the beast. Bits of metal and sparks zip off as the thing closes on him.

Eponymous narration

19, 18, 17, 16 AND IT WAS ALMOST ON ME AGAIN.

Eponymous dodges and quick-steps backwards, firing as he goes.

Eponymous narration

15, 14, 13, 12 AND IT WOULD NOT STOP. IF THE OTHER DOOR WAS LOCKED, I WAS A DEAD MAN.

The shots land home, but the thing has little mass—it's all rods and gears without much to shoot at effectively. Eponymous is still moving steadily towards another door, his attention on the beast.

PAGE THIRTEEN

Eponymous narration

11, 10, 9, I SHOT JESUS RIGHT IN THE FUCKING FACE, 8, 7 AND I WAS AT THE DOOR.

The third shot of this batch does, indeed, blow the head of the plastic Jesus right off. It doesn't help. Eponymous' left hand fumbles at the door and gets it open.

Eponymous, whispering to himself

LUCKY LUCKY LUCKY

Eponymous steps through the door into the next room and slams the door shut behind him. The room is a study, filled with bookshelves, a couple of armchairs, some curio shelves, a desk with cabinets, and so on. Josef (the real one this time) is sitting in a chair opposite Eponymous, a book in his lap and a calm look on his face.

Eponymous stares for a second, then ducks as one of the beast's metal blade-arms punches a hole through the door.

PAGE FOURTEEN

Eponymous

CALL IT OFF! CALL IT THE FUCK OFF RIGHT NOW!

Josef grins and stares. More holes get punched in the door.

Eponymous narration

6.

Eponymous squeezes off a shot, the bullet striking the wall above Josef's head.

Eponymous

NOW MOTHERFUCKER! SHUT THAT THING DOWN NOW!

Josef

VERY WELL.

One of the beast's blade-arms punches through just behind Eponymous' lowered head and stops inches short of impaling him. Eponymous glances back, grimaces, and then strides towards Josef, gun leveled.

Eponymous

OKAY, POPS. WE'RE GONNA MAKE THIS REAL QUICK AND THEN I'M LEAVING YOUR LITTLE FREAK SHOW. I'M HERE FOR THE VIDEO, THE NAKED GODDESS TAPE, AND I WANT SATISFACTION REAL QUICK AS IN RIGHT NOW.

PAGE FIFTEEN

Flashback time again. Use the same distinctive border or whatever to identify this as a flashback.

We're back in Alex Abel's office in Seattle. It's night, as we can tell from the sky outside the big picture window. Make sure Abel is wearing a different suit in this scene, since it's months after the previous flashback. Eponymous is in his trademark black wool coat. He's standing. Abel is sitting at his desk, staring into the smoke issuing from a small fire in a large bronze brazier resting atop the papers on his desk. The substance burning in the brazier is a mixture of powdered incense and blackened human bones. Make sure there's a skull in there (or pieces of one) for easy identification.

CAPTION

ONE WEEK AGO. ALEX ABEL'S OFFICE IN SEATTLE.

Alex Abel

I'M SENDING YOU TO RETRIEVE THE NAKED GODDESS TAPE.

Eponymous

I DIDN'T THINK BLOCKBUSTER RENTED PORN.

Alex Abel

ODDLY ENOUGH, YOU'RE IN THE BALLPARK. IT IS A PORN TAPE, OR RATHER THE RAW FOOTAGE FROM A PORNOGRAPHY SHOOT.

Eponymous

NOW THAT'S A FETISH.

Alex Abel

HARDLY. DURING THE SHOOTING, THE LEAD ACTRESS ASCENDED TO JOIN THE INVISIBLE CLERGY. IT WAS ALL CAUGHT ON TAPE, THE FIRST TIME THAT'S EVER HAPPENED WITH AN ASCENSION.

Eponymous

YOU'VE LOST ME.

Alex Abel

THE CLERGY ARE PURE THOUGHT, OR SO I SUSPECT. NO ONE KNOWS WHO THEY ARE OR WHAT THEY DO. ONLY THEIR EXISTENCE IS CERTAIN—THEIR EXISTENCE AND THEIR POWER.

Eponymous

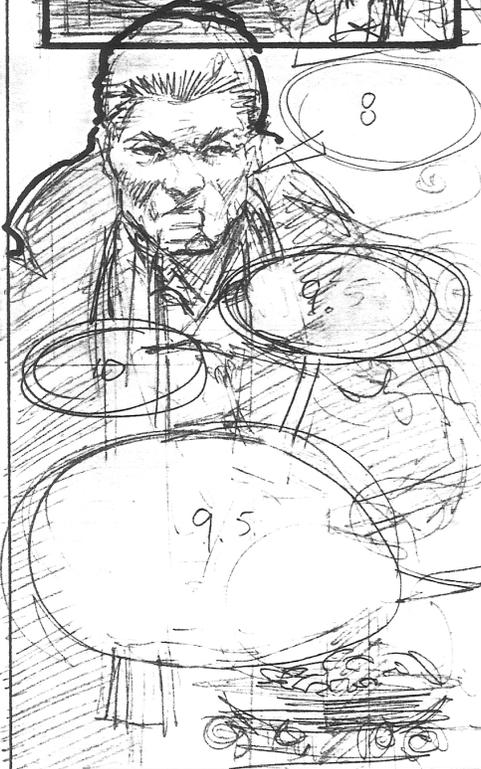
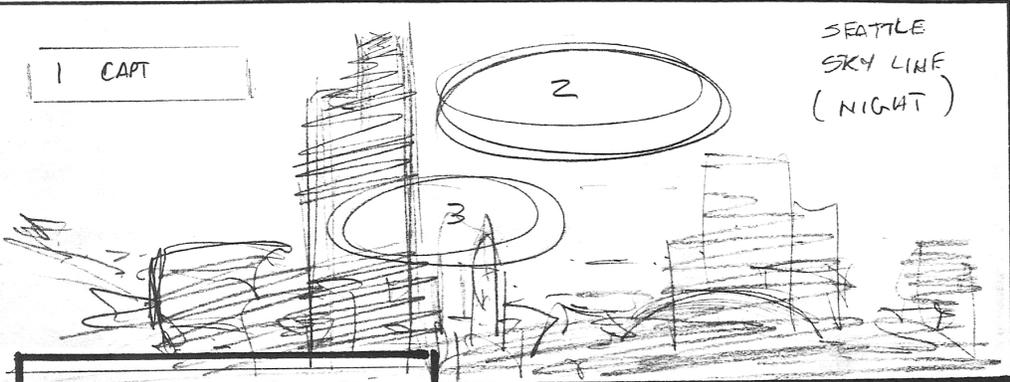
UH-HUH.

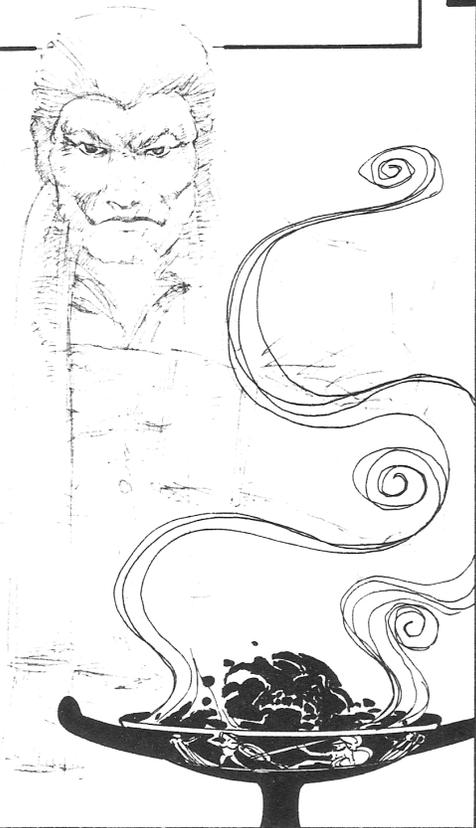
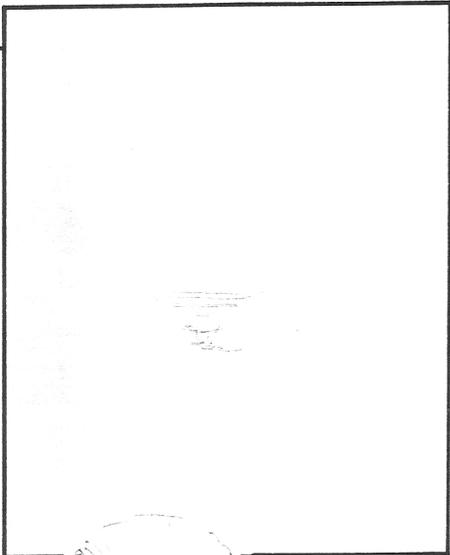
Alex Abel

I WANT THAT VIDEOTAPE. I'M GOING TO HAVE IT ANALYZED FOR ANY DATA THAT CAN BE RETRIEVED. IT MIGHT GIVE ME A CLUE AS TO THE NATURE OF THE CLERGY.

1 CAPT

SEATTLE
SKY LINE
(NIGHT)





PAGE SIXTEEN

Eponymous

THAT'S ALREADY MORE THAN I NEED TO KNOW. WHERE IS THE TAPE?

Alex Abel

IT WAS IN THE HANDS OF A...WELL, A COLLEAGUE OF MINE. HE PASSED AWAY RECENTLY, AND MY DIVINATIONS SUGGEST HE LEFT IT TO HIS FAVORITE CLOCKWORKER.

Eponymous

A CLOCKWORKER. OUT FUCKING STANDING. JUST WHAT I WANTED TO HEAR.

Alex Abel

SARCASM ASIDE, THIS CLOCKWORKER IS NAMED JOSEF. HE'S IN MICHIGAN. YOU'RE GOING TO GO THERE AND GET THE TAPE FROM HIM. HIS OPINIONS ON THE MATTER ARE IRRELEVANT, AS IS HIS LIFE.

Eponymous

WILL HE HAVE FRIENDS?

Alex Abel

ONLY THOSE HE'S BUILT. HE'S AN OLD MAN, AND HIS LATE BENEFACTOR WAS HIS ONLY ALLY. I DON'T THINK YOU'LL HAVE MUCH TROUBLE.

Eponymous

THAT'LL BE THE DAY. YOU KNOW, I HAVE HEARD A FEW THINGS ABOUT THE INVISIBLE CLERGY.

Alex Abel

OH?

Eponymous

WORKING FOR YOU IS VERY EDUCATIONAL. LET ME TAKE A GUESS: YOU WANT TO MAKE THE ASCENSION YOURSELF. YOU WANT TO JOIN THEM.

Abel just glares at him for a moment.

Alex Abel

CHERISE HAS YOUR PACKET. YOU LEAVE TOMORROW.



PAGE SEVENTEEN

Back in Josef's study. Eponymous is standing directly before the seated Josef. Eponymous has his gun leveled at the clockworker's head.

Josef

YOU'RE A VERY NOISY MAN.

Eponymous

I HAVEN'T EVEN RAISED MY VOICE. NOW COME ON, MAKE ME HAPPY AND WE'LL BOTH GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

Josef

THE TAPE. OF COURSE. IT'S YOURS. IT'S IN THE CABINET.

He gestures towards a red lacquer oriental cabinet nearby.

Eponymous

OPEN IT.

Josef
(casual)

AS YOU WISH.

Josef gets up and walks over to the cabinet.

PAGE EIGHTEEN

We cut back to the broken door that the clockwork beast stands behind. Cogs whirl, armatures move, and a metal javelin launches from the beast. Eponymous hears the noise, hits the floor, rolls back and comes up firing at the door.

Eponymous narration

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 AND THE BEAST STOPPED MOVING AGAIN.

Eponymous, whispering to himself

GODDAMNIT

He gets up and looks around. Josef has been impaled with the javelin meant for Eponymous; it's passed part-way through him and stuck into the wall by the cabinet. Josef's face is white, and his hands are on the javelin that pierces his chest, trying to free himself as blood pours onto his clothes.

Eponymous

DON'T BLEED ON THE FLOOR, COCKSUCKER. IT'S A BITCH TO CLEAN UP.

PAGE NINETEEN

Eponymous walks over to the cabinet and tries the latch. it's locked. he shoves his left hand into Josef's pocket, and pulls out a ring of keys. Josef looks surprised to see them there.

Eponymous

THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND THESE HERE.

He unlocks the cabinet and flings it open. Inside is a mass of stuff: books, papers, old toys, all kinds of crap. The tape is here, too. It's a 3/4" broadcast video tape inside a plastic case (I have one of these for reference, Brian; it's bigger and bulkier than a normal VHS tape). Eponymous takes it out and shoves it in his coat. Josef looks bad.

Josef

YOU WON'T LEAVE THIS HOUSE ALIVE. YOU'LL DIE HERE.

Eponymous

THAT MAY BE. BUT YOU'LL DIE FIRST.

Eponymous narration

ZERO.

Eponymous fires his last bullet directly into Josef's forehead. Blood, brains, and bits of skull splash against the wall. Make this a nice, big, gory couple of panels. Serious gross-out. Eponymous is a stone cold killer and the reader should take a second here to go "Shit, I was rooting for this guy and he just blew this old dude's brains out." We need to remind the reader that Eponymous isn't a straight arrow kinda guy, and he's not on the side of the angels—he's just a gun for hire. So rub their faces in the blood.

PAGE TWENTY

Back at the door, the clockwork beast begins moving. It tears down the rest of the door and starts pulling itself through, smashing the door frame as it goes (it's big, after all).

Eponymous narration

I THOUGHT I'D KILLED IT, BUT I WAS WRONG—JOSEF WAS JUST IN TOO MUCH PAIN TO CONTROL IT. NOW IT WAS RUNNING ON ITS OWN, MAYBE DRIVEN BY JOSEF'S DYING FURY OR HIS FREED SOUL. WHO KNOWS.

The beast enters the room, whirring and clicking, its arms spinning about and pointing all sorts of sharp things at Eponymous. Give this another nice big panel or two with lots of details in the construction of the beast, or maybe a bunch of small slice panels showing glimpses of the thing moving, turning, whirring, etc.

Eponymous narration

WHAT I DID KNOW WAS THAT IT WAS BLOCKING THE ONLY DOOR OUT OF THE ROOM, AND I WAS OUT OF BULLETS—NOT THAT THEY'D STOPPED THE THING SO FAR. SO I DID THE ONLY SANE THING I COULD.

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

Eponymous darts across the room and leaps through a window. Glass flies everywhere. As he dives out, several metal javelins pierce the air above him. Make this good and splashy.

He hits the roof over the front porch. It's got a lot of snow on it. He tumbles down the slanted roof and falls off the edge, then lands in the front yard in more snow. We see him lying down below.

Eponymous rises slowly, painfully. Snow falls all around him. He shoves the gun in his pocket and runs across the yard towards the car.

Woman, singing off-stage (caption form)

I WAS A PLANET WHEN I WAS SMALLER

I CIRCLED RINGS AROUND YOUR DAUGHTER

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

In the car, Eponymous looks out the window. The snowfallen spirit is dancing in the front yard, singing again.

Woman, singing

*SHE THREW THE KEYS TO THE STRAND
INTO THE POCKET OF A DEAD MAN*

Eponymous

FUCK ME.

He drives off, leaving the dead house and the dead woman behind.

Eponymous narration

I DROVE TOWARDS ALEX, AND THE DAWN.

End of issue one.

Subject: So, hey--
Sent: 5/29/97 11:21 AM
To: Greg Stolze
From: John Tynes

Greg,

Wanna make some big bucks? If so, don't bother reading this message.

I've been tinkering with an intellectual property for a while now called THE NEW INQUISITION. It was originally to be an RPG, but I decided it wasn't a game I wanted to pursue at Pagan. So I used the setting for a series of short stories, and am presently pursuing a comic book version with an artist here in town.

But...

John Nephew of the ever-lovin', ever-livin' Atlas Games is sniffing around for a new RPG to publish. He's intrigued with the TNI material, and is up for looking at a proposal.

I'm interested in making it happen. But I can't do it alone.

So: I'm looking for a co-author for the game. You interested? I remember that modern-occult RPG you came up with a couple years back, and thought that you might even be able to use chunks of it for TNI.

Fire up your web browser (are you web-capable?) and surf on over to the TNI page at my web site:

http://www.tccorp.com/rev/rl_newinq.html

You'll find the core documents there. I've also got two short stories and a third in progress that I can email you if you like what you see.

Absit invidia!