

**“Material” #1 is the comic book equivalent of a sprawling HBO television series”  
— Matthew Little, Comic Book Resources**

# Material™

**Ales Kot  
Will Tempest  
Clayton Cowles  
Tom Muller**

**Volume 1**

**Foreword by The Guardian journalist Spencer Ackerman**



**Material**

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**Volume 1**

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# Material™

**Volume 1**

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## Foreword

# Always read the footnotes

I know, I hate it too. It feels like a discursion from the main event, a distraction from the central text that interrupts the flow of the story and makes it difficult to pick up where you left off. Footnotes are dense, often maddeningly obscure, and frequently reference other information you need to seek out to understand the basics of what's going on.

And if I hadn't read the footnotes, I would never have found the Chicago Police's warehouse for incommunicado detentions and interrogations — which, it turns out, features in *Material*.

My path to the warehouse started when one of my editors at *The Guardian*, the news organization where I work, asked me late last year to read a manuscript from a man detained at **Guantanamo Bay** detainee named **Mohamedou Ould Slahi** before we published excerpts from it. He wanted to see if I could find any non-obvious news lines to pursue. I found one in a footnote.

Slahi is among the most brutalized detainees in Guantanamo history. His captors stuffed ice into a jacket placed on his bare chest while they punched and kicked him. In addition to the now-familiar noise bombardment and “stress positions” — a euphemism for contorting someone's body painfully — they threatened to kill him and rape his mother. The footnote said that his interrogations leader was, in civilian life, a Chicago police detective. I wanted to know what someone capable of torture at Guantanamo did as a lawman at home.

I grew up in Brooklyn and primarily report on national security. I didn't know Chicago and its history. But as I found Chicagoans who accused this same detective of abusing them, Chicago activists, criminologists and lawyers taught me about the Windy City's history of racialized policing. One of them, at the end of a two-hour coffee, offhandedly mentioned that the Chicago police even had an off-the-books warehouse where they held and questioned people without access to attorneys or public notice of their locations, effectively disappearing them. Another footnote.

In February 2015, I exposed the interrogations and detentions at **Homan Square**. By May, amidst police non-denial denials, I had published accounts of a dozen people who had been held there. By August, a transparency lawsuit I filed against the police resulted in a very incomplete and initial disclosure from their own records: over 3500 people had been held there over a decade; 82 percent of them were black in a city that's 33 percent black; and only three of them received documented visits from an attorney. My lawsuit, and the disclosures, continues as of this writing.

Social media brought **Homan Square** far and wide, even as the Chicago press preferred to report on it dismissively or not at all. Both of those developments might have been expected. Seeing **Homan Square** in *Material* was not.

We in America are living in a moment in which it is harder than ever before to ignore the ways in which law enforcement monitors, harrasses and kills black and brown people without consequence. (That's thanks in large part to social media, which makes racialized police brutality unignorable to Twitter-addicted mainstream white journalists, prompting coverage of something until recently very frequently ignored.) Yet if you read comic books, as I have since I could read, you would not know any of this is happening.

There are no superheroes jumping off rooftops to stop Cleveland police officer **Timothy Loehmann** from shooting 12-year old **Tamir Rice** dead. No telekinetic is tearing open incommunicado police detention warehouses with her mind. As the real-life vigilantes kill black teenagers armed with Skittles and iced tea, the make-believe vigilantes — mostly white, mostly written by white writers, for an audience assumed to be default white — move along with nothing to say.

The exception is Ales Kot and Will Tempest's *Material*.

*Material* is a confrontational and challenging work. It is not easy to follow: you will go from MIT lecture halls to Hollywood production meetings to Homan Square to the aftermath of Guantanamo Bay detentions. You will very likely be disoriented, unsure how the pieces fit together, and perhaps even suspicious that any connective tissue exists. But you are unlikely to miss the undercurrent that runs through each of *Material*'s characters: anxiety, displacement, the doubt that rises like stomach bile in your throat at the sensation that the reality you perceive conceals more than it reveals.

Pay close attention to Tempest's colors. Stark, garish and mutating from panel to panel like a flashing light, they are your guide through the story: what belongs, what does not, what connects, where the focus lies.

The complex nature of the storytelling amplifies how disturbing this story is. Kot is allergic to euphemism. When his story needs to be direct, as when he shows you police brutality, it is raw and frightening, and there is no false balance that diminishes the enormity of legally sanctioned crime. *Material* stands out of its own way, leaving nothing between you and the baton.

But the real place where you find *Material*'s urgency is in the footnotes — the margins and gutters between panels. Do not skip them. They mortar the story to reality. In an age where people protest the erasure of stolen lives through the **#SayHerName** hashtag, *Material* puts their names — **Rekia Boyd, Romain Brisbon, Eric Garner** — in the story. It is a sad testament to the squandered potential of comic books that the simple act of recognition feels groundbreaking.

To skip the footnotes is to miss the real story.  
Don't turn away from why *Material* matters ●

Spencer Ackerman  
**@attackerman**  
Brooklyn NY  
August 2015

*Note: I wrote this essay before Scott Snyder, Brian Azzarello & Jock tackled the intersection of police racism & gentrification in Batman #44, an important comic. Accordingly, I interviewed the creators about the book for the Guardian [here](#).*

**Spencer Ackerman is national security editor for *Guardian US*.  
A former senior writer for *Wired*, he won the 2012 National Magazine Award  
for Digital Reporting**

# Material™

Ales Kot  
Will Tempest  
Clayton Cowles  
Tom Muller  
Nº1, \$3.50  
Image Comics



Material #1, originally published May 2015.





LET'S *IMAGINE* SOMETHING *ELSE*.



WHAT IF THE MOST IMPORTANT *QUESTION* WE HAVE TO ASK *OURSELVES* RIGHT NOW IS NOT WHY ARE WE HERE, BUT WHAT DOES "*HERE*" ACTUALLY *MEAN*, AND HOW MUCH OF IT DO WE REALLY *SEE*?



WE LIVE IN AN *ACCELERATED* ERA. *HYPER-CAPITALISM* IS IMPOSING *CONSUMPTION OF TIME* AS THE PRIMARY MEANS OF *PRODUCTION*--WHERE ONCE THE PRIMARY MEANS WOULD BE *LABOR*, NOW IT IS THE *TIME* WE DEDICATE TO THE LABOR AT HAND.



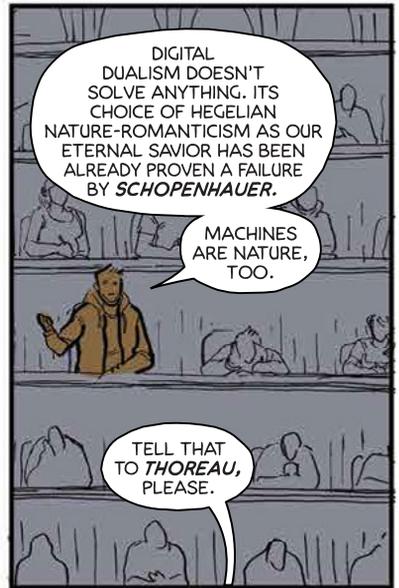
THIS ACCELERATION COMES AT A *PRICE*. WE SPEND OUR TIME WITH THE *MACHINES*, AND IN TURN WE ARE BECOMING MORE LIKE *THEM*. WE ARE BECOMING *COLD*--

THAT'S *BULLSHIT*. SIR.



OH.

"*BULLSHIT*"? AND WHY? NO, PLEASE, SPEAK.



DIGITAL DUALISM DOESN'T SOLVE ANYTHING. ITS CHOICE OF HEGELIAN NATURE-ROMANTICISM AS OUR ETERNAL SAVIOR HAS BEEN ALREADY PROVEN A FAILURE BY *SCHOPENHAUER*.

MACHINES ARE NATURE, TOO.

TELL THAT TO *THOREAU*, PLEASE.



I WILL--ONCE THE MACHINES *REVIVE* HIM. SHOULDN'T TAKE TOO LONG GIVEN OUR PROGRESS IN *QUANTUM COMPUTING* AND *A.I.*...

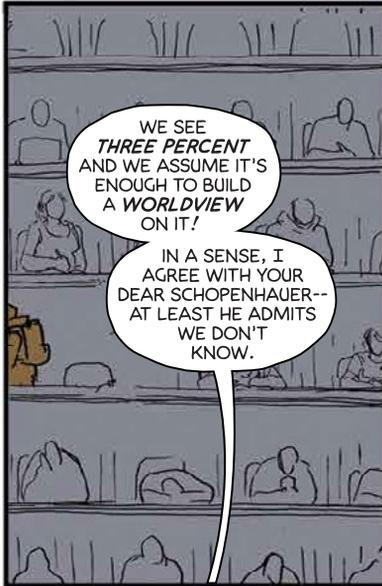


AS I WAS SAYING--

--THIS ACCELERATION COMES AT A *PRICE*.



CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS.  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.

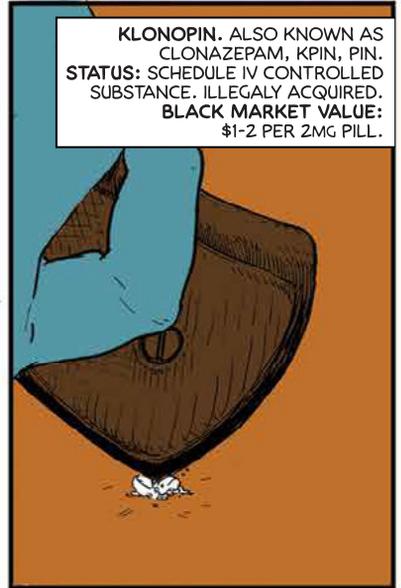


"ALL YOU NEED  
TO MAKE A MOVIE IS  
A GIRL AND A GUN."

-JEAN-LUC GODARD



**COLT DETECTIVE SPECIAL.**  
STATUS: GUN. LEGALLY ACQUIRED.  
MARKET VALUE: USUALLY STARTS  
AROUND \$900.



**KLONOPIN.** ALSO KNOWN AS  
CLONAZEPAM, KPIN, PIN.  
STATUS: SCHEDULE IV CONTROLLED  
SUBSTANCE. ILLEGALLY ACQUIRED.  
**BLACK MARKET VALUE:**  
\$1-2 PER 2MG PILL.



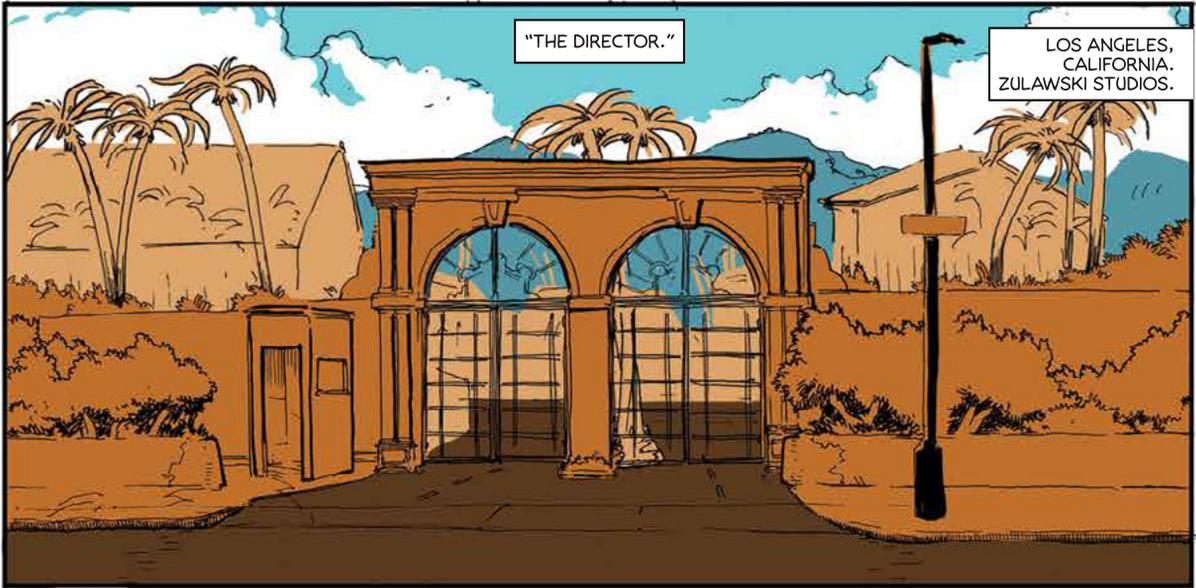
**NYLON DAHLIAS.**  
STATUS: HUMAN BEING. ACTRESS.  
MARKET VALUE: GOING DOWN.



SOME DAYS, NYLON DAHLIAS WANTS A ROLE.  
TODAY, LOS ANGELES IS *TOO* HOT, *TOO*  
SHAKY, LIKE HER PERCEPTION IS SHAKY--  
IMAGINE RESTING AGAINST A CORNER  
OF A TABLE WHEN YOU'RE *TOO* DRUNK--  
MAKE ONE BAD MOVE AND YOU'LL SLIP  
AND CUT YOUR HEAD OPEN. **GAME OVER.**



REUBEN WASSERMAN.  
STATUS: NYLON'S MANAGER.  
MARKET VALUE: COULD USE A BUMP.



"THE DIRECTOR."

LOS ANGELES,  
CALIFORNIA.  
ZULAWSKI STUDIOS.



SAILOR ROSENFELD.  
STATUS: "A MODERN VISIONARY." -BUZZFEED  
MARKET VALUE: GOING UP.





DON'T MOVE

"And after he did that, he..."

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.



KEEP FORMATION

"...looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked.



DON'T WORRY THEIR TIME WILL COME

"He comes back towards me again with his hands up."

-From Darren Wilson's deposition on his murder of Michael Brown.



THE CAMERAS GONE?

AIRSPACE CLEAR?

CLEAR.

ROYCE SAYS CLEAR.



DO IT.

Michael Brown



DO IT  
DO IT  
DO IT

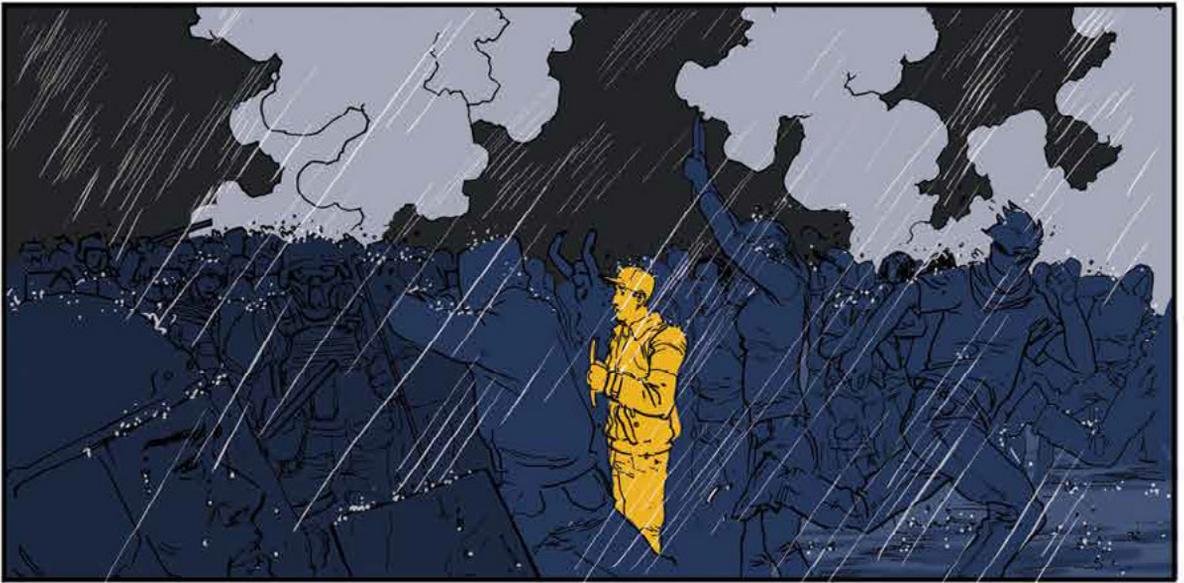
GREEN!  
GREEN!

Tamir Rice



DO IT  
DO IT  
DO IT

Cameron Tillman



Darrien Hunt



Tyree Woodson



Shereese Francis

AS MY LUNGS FILL WITH FEAR AND WATER I RECOGNIZE THIS SITUATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE MY CURRENT PREDICAMENT.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA.



Image of a woodcut depicting waterboarding included in J. Damhoudère's *Praxis Rerum Criminalium*, Antwerp, 1556.

WHEN WATER FILLS YOU UP SO MUCH IT THREATENS TO TEAR UP YOUR STOMACH IT TURNS INTO A HOT STONE GROWING INSIDE YOU BY THE SECOND.

U.S. soldier in Vietnam supervises the waterboarding of a captured North Vietnamese soldier.



WHEN WAVES SWAY IN YOUR MOUTH AND YOU HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ALLOW MORE TO COME YOUR SENSE OF SMELL TEMPORARILY HEIGHTENS AND THEN CRASHES DOWN.

WHAT I SMELL IS *HER SKIN*, WHICH IS *SALTY* AND *SWEET* LIKE A MEMORY OF A PERSON YOU MADE LOVE WITH WHEN YOUNG AND COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO FORGET YOURSELVES IN THE NEW YOU YOU HAVE FORGED TOGETHER.

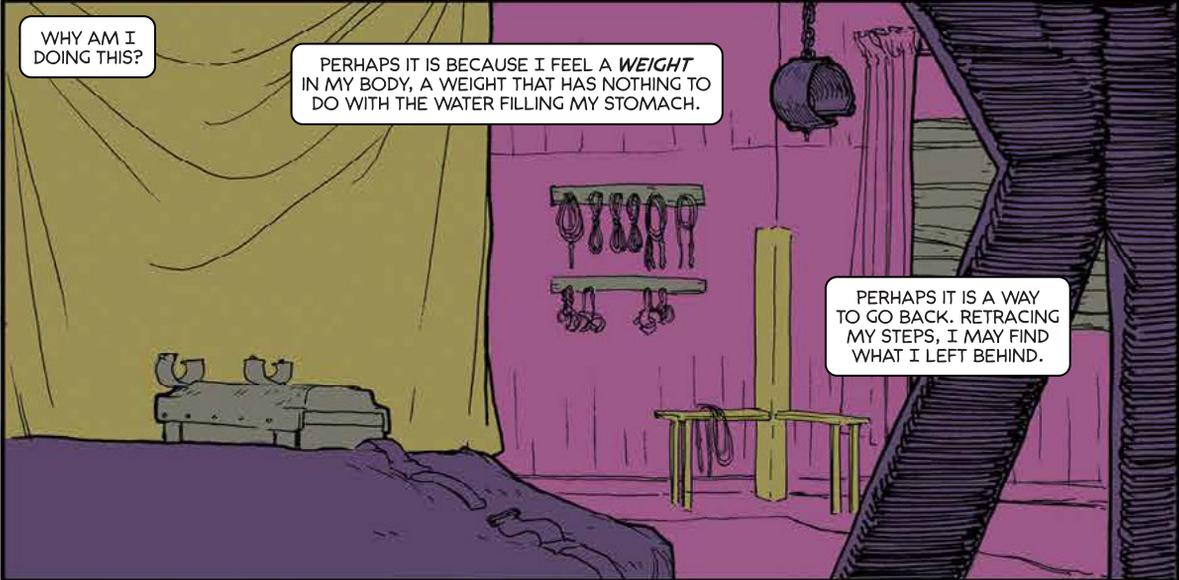
WHAT I SMELL IS THE *LEATHER*, WHICH IS REMINDING ME OF THE WAY OUR CAR SMELLED AFTER I BROUGHT IT HOME.

I BRIEFLY THINK OF *ATIFEH*. I ABANDON THE THOUGHTS.

WHAT I SMELL IS THE *INTERROGATION ROOM*, WHICH IS NOT THIS ROOM, BUT IF I CLOSE MY EYES FIRMLY ENOUGH, FOR A MOMENT, IT *IS*.



THEN THE SMELL DIES.



WHY AM I DOING THIS?

PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE I FEEL A *WEIGHT* IN MY BODY, A WEIGHT THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WATER FILLING MY STOMACH.

PERHAPS IT IS A WAY TO GO BACK. RETRACING MY STEPS, I MAY FIND WHAT I LEFT BEHIND.



PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE THE GREEN GRASS OF THE LAWNS AND THE *PERFECTLY ORDERED GEOMETRY* OF THE HOUSES DRIVE ME SICK NOW.

PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE I HAVE NOT MANAGED TO GET AN ERECTION SINCE I WAS RELEASED FROM THE GUANTANAMO PRISON CAMP SEVEN MONTHS AGO.

PERHAPS ALL OF THE ABOVE.



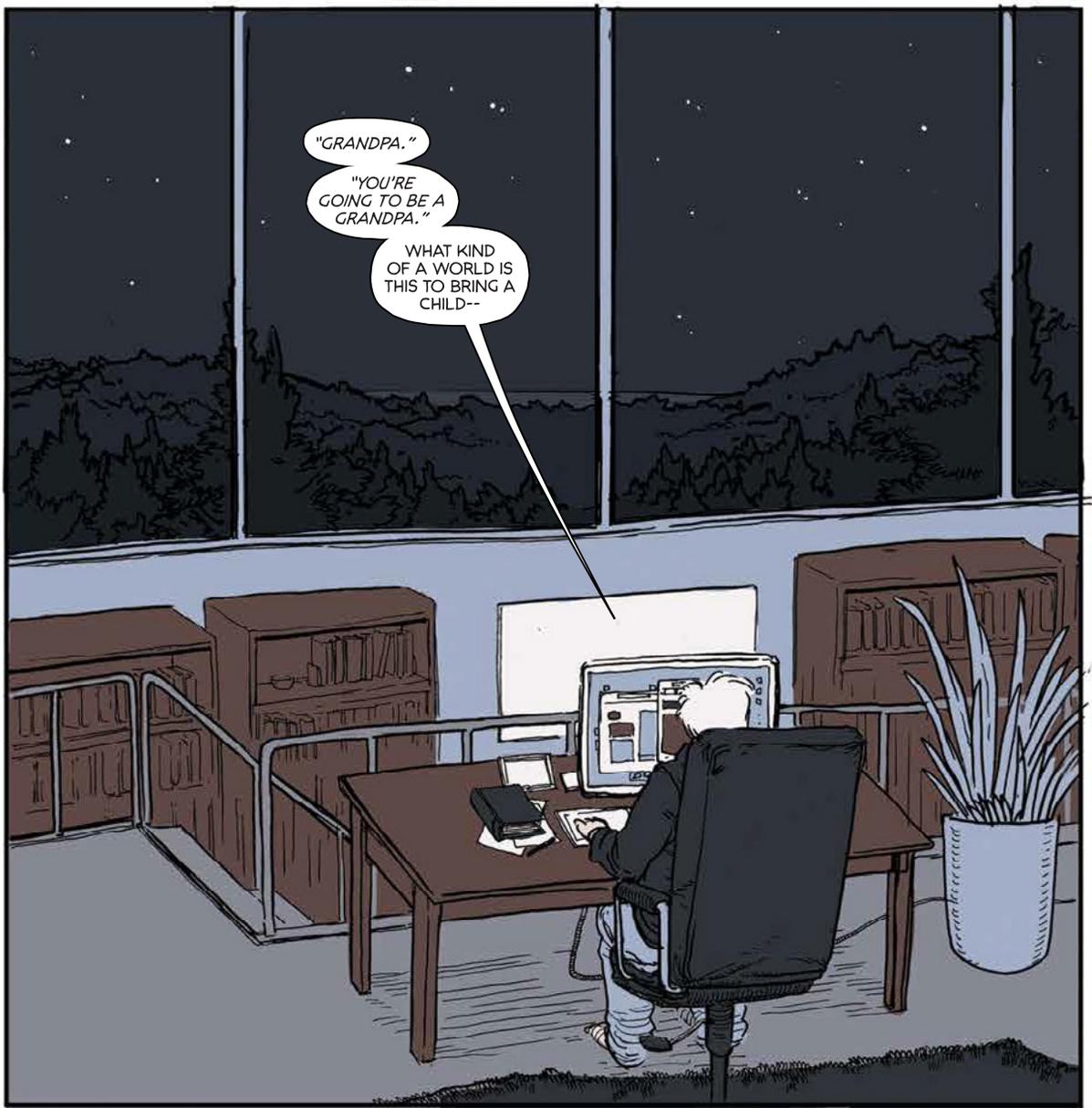
AS I FILL WITH WATER AND BLOOD I RECOGNIZE A WAY OUT AND AWAY...



FROM ALL THAT AILS ME.



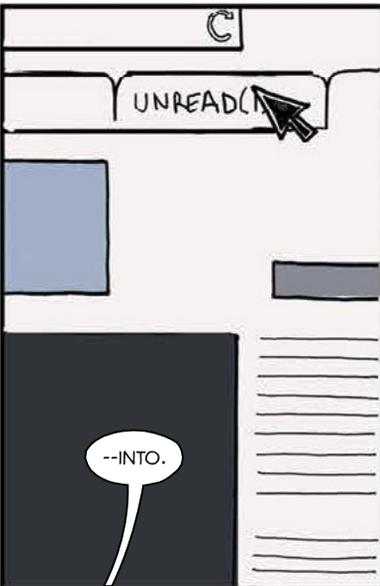




"GRANDPA."

"YOU'RE GOING TO BE A GRANDPA."

WHAT KIND OF A WORLD IS THIS TO BRING A CHILD--



UNREAD

--INTO.



[from\\_thefirstaionthisparticularearth@riseup.com](mailto:from_thefirstaionthisparticularearth@riseup.com)

I trust you won't believe this but I am a proof you are wrong

HELLO, JULIUS SHORE.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE FRIENDS?

MUCH MERRIMENT TO YOUR IMPENDING GRANDFATHERSHIP.

P.S. I ALSO ADMIRE JACKSON POLLOCK. THAT'S A NICE FAKE YOU GOT THERE. I CAN SEE THE REAL ONE VIA THE CAMERA AT ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF MOMA, MANHATTAN, NEW YORK.









HOMAN SQUARE,  
CHICAGO.

WHY THE FUCK  
DO YOU THINK YOU  
QUALIFY AS SOMEONE  
WHO DESERVES A  
POLICE STATION?



MOM...



YOU'RE  
FIFTEEN. SHUT THE  
FUXX UP.



OLD ENOUGH  
TO STOP SCREAMING  
FOR MOMMY.



LOOK  
AT ME. YOU  
WANT TO GO  
HOME?



LOOK  
AT ME.



YOU  
GOTTA WORK  
FOR IT.



I COULDN'T TOUCH THE DOG.

THIS WAS THE SAME DOG I PLAYED WITH FROM A PUPPY.

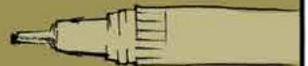
IT'S NOT LEO'S FAULT.

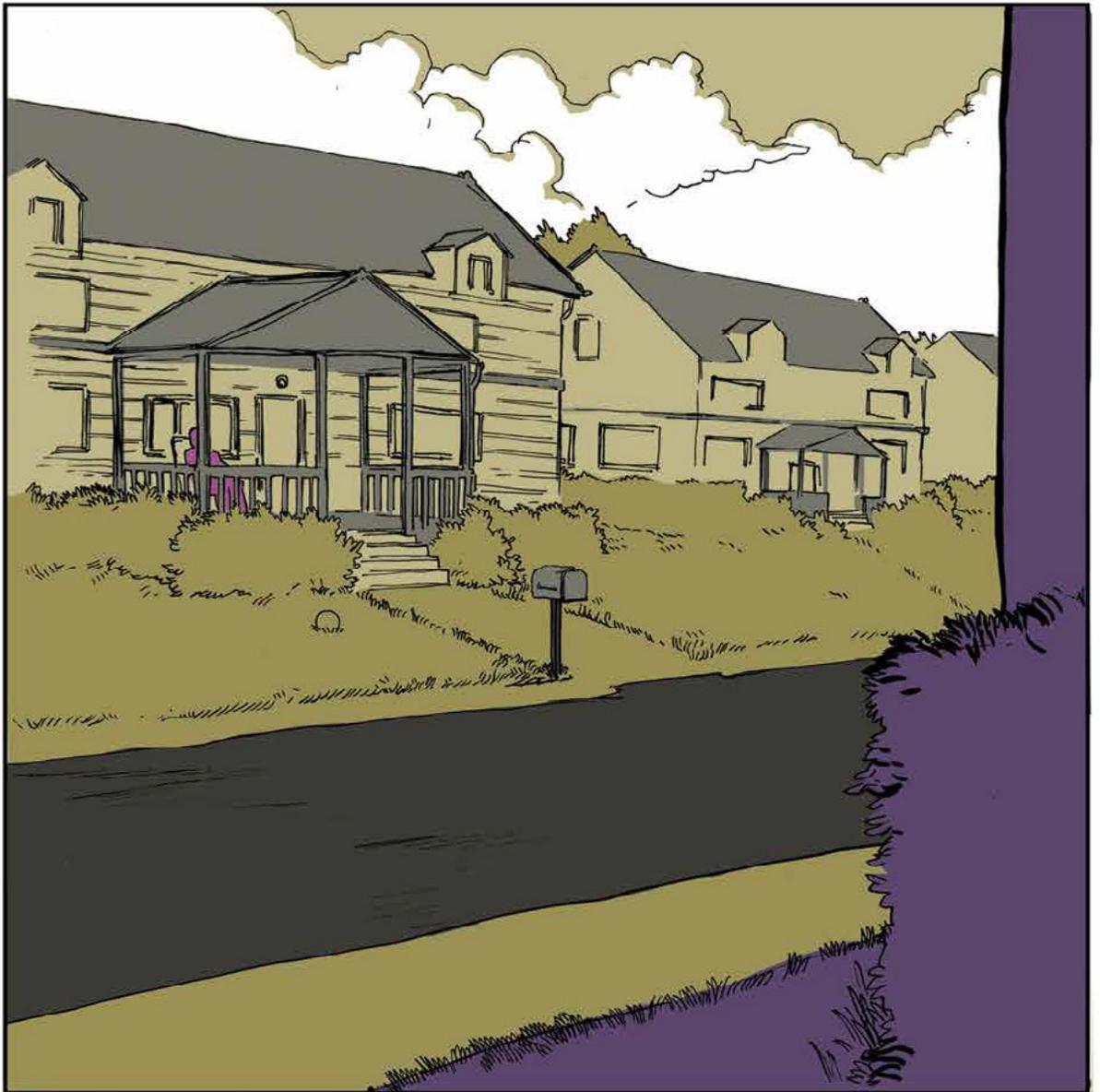
THEY USED DOGS ON ME. I CAN'T TELL ATIFEH. I CAN'T TELL ANYONE.

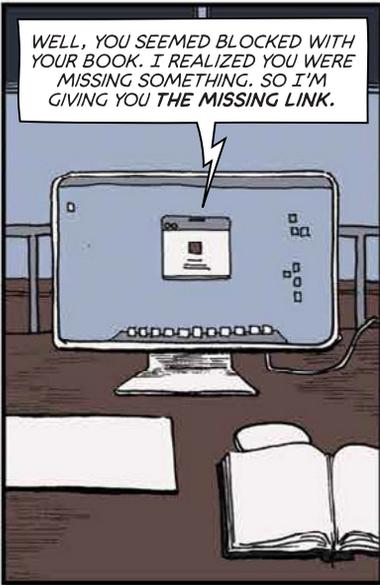


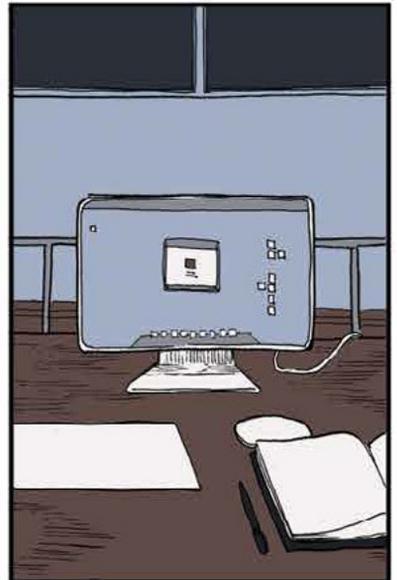
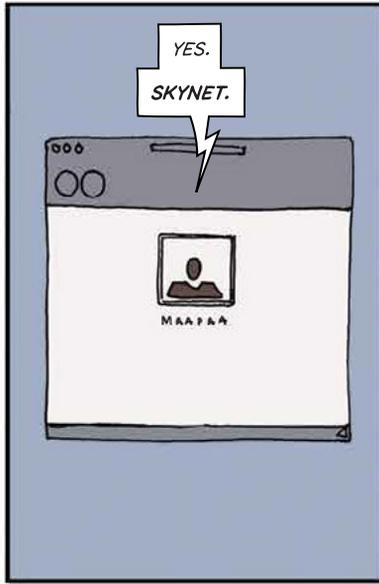
THEY USED DOGS ON ME. I CAN'T TELL ATIFEH. I CAN'T TELL ANYONE.

SHAME FOLLOWS ME EVERYWHERE I GO.











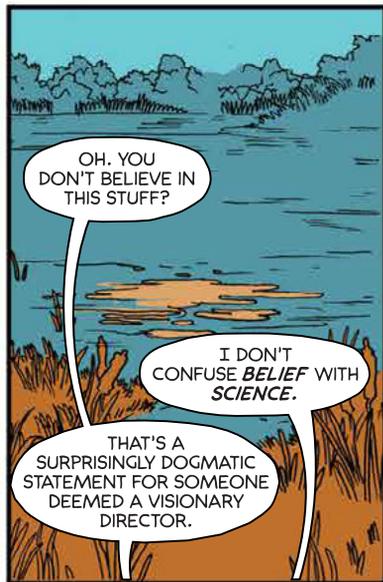
IT'S THE  
LAST **URANUS-  
PLUTO SQUARE**.  
HAPPENED A FEW  
MONTHS AGO, BUT  
STILL *FINISHING  
WITH US*.



WHAT IS THAT?  
**ASTROLOGY?**

HMH.

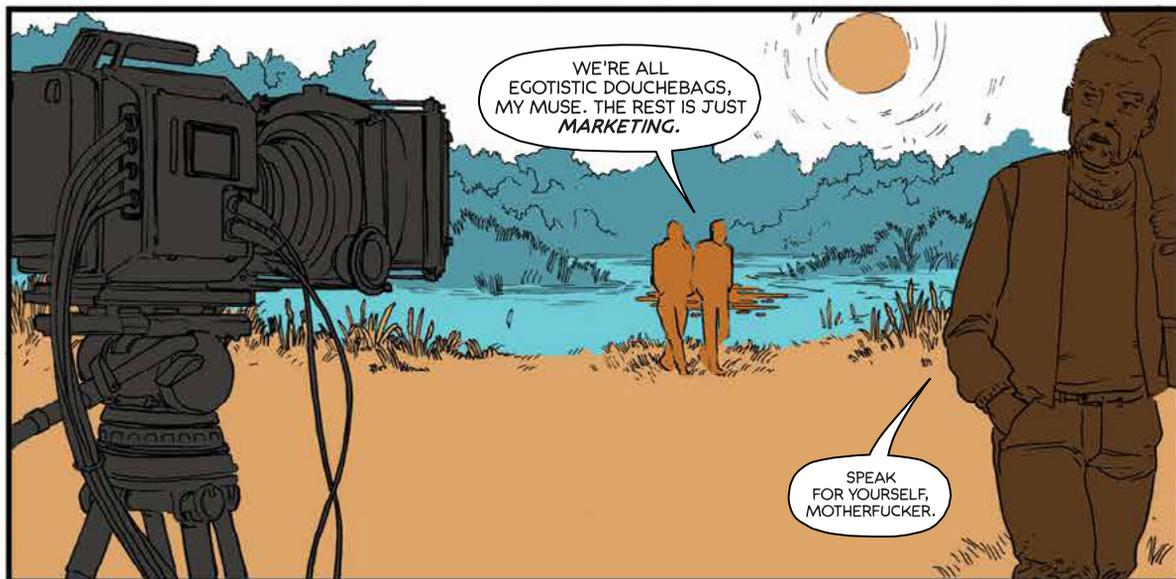
YES.  
AN ANCIENT  
SCIENCE.



OH. YOU  
DON'T BELIEVE IN  
THIS STUFF?

I DON'T  
CONFUSE *BELIEF* WITH  
*SCIENCE*.

THAT'S A  
SURPRISINGLY DOGMATIC  
STATEMENT FOR SOMEONE  
DEEMED A VISIONARY  
DIRECTOR.



WE'RE ALL  
EGOTISTIC DOUCHEBAGS,  
MY MUSE. THE REST IS JUST  
*MARKETING*.

SPEAK  
FOR YOURSELF,  
MOTHERFUCKER.



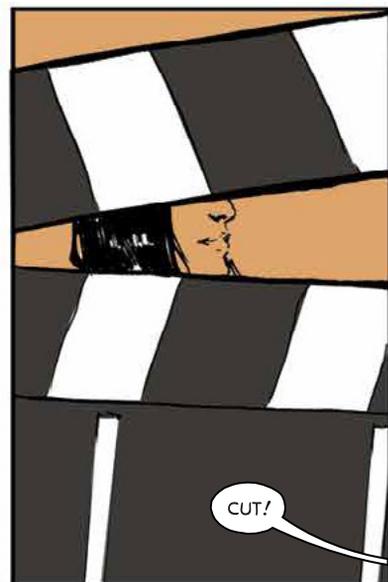
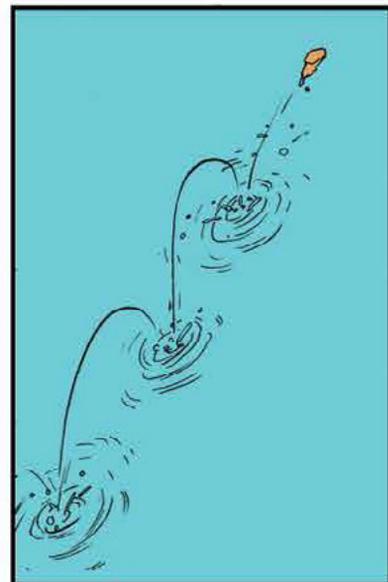
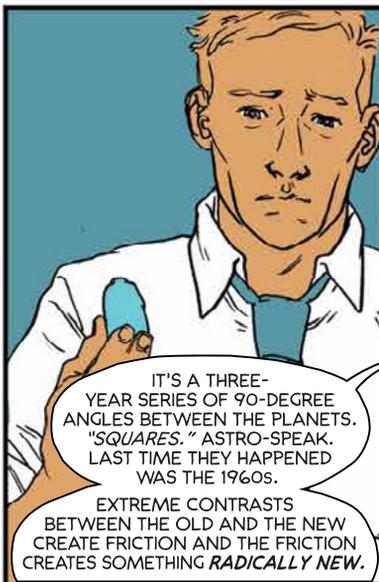
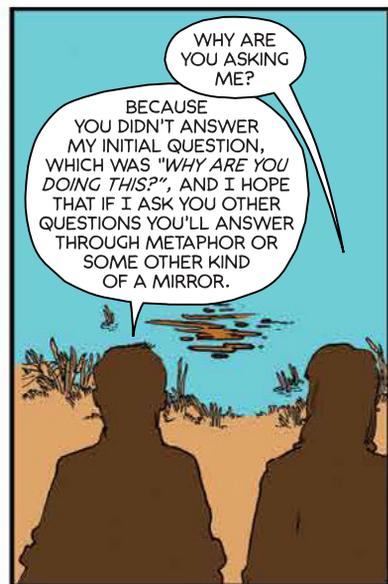
ANYWAY. WHAT'S  
IT ABOUT?

YOU REALLY  
CARE?

ANYTHING  
THAT CAN MAKE  
THE MOVIE BETTER,  
I'M UP FOR.



THIS FILM WILL BE A PERFECT  
REFLECTION OF YOU.

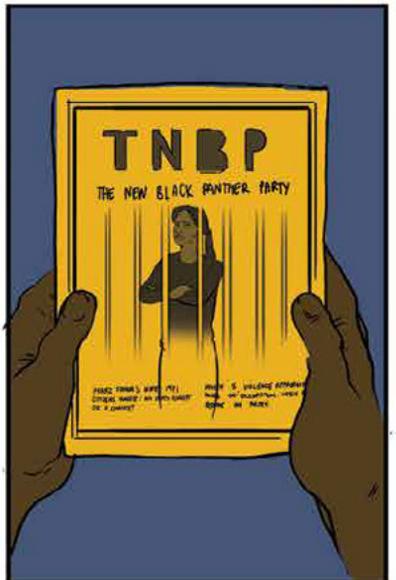




Darren Rainey

Noel Polanco

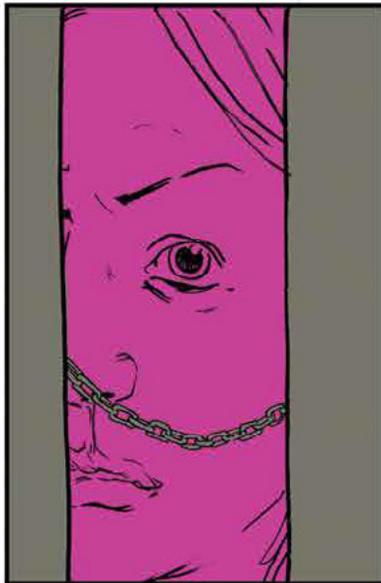
Kyam Livingston



Amadou Diallo

Sean Bell

Aiyana Jones



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? YOU KNOW THE RULES.



EEHH... I DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO... I'M SORRY...



OUR RELATIONSHIP IS STRICTLY PROFESSIONAL. PLEASE LEAVE NOW. IF YOU WANT TO CONTACT ME FOR A--

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.



THAT'S RIGHT. AND I DON'T WANT TO. PLEASE LEAVE NOW.



# CONVULSIONS AMONG THE LILIES

By Bijan Stephen

— *“We are a fact-gathering organization only. We don’t clear anybody.  
We don’t condemn anybody.”*

— J. Edgar Hoover, *Look* magazine (14 June 1956).

*“All the gods are dead except the god of war.”*

— Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul On Ice* (Part I: “‘The Christ’ and His Teachings”)

*“We shall have our manhood.*

*We shall have it or the earth will be leveled by our attempts to gain it.”*

— Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul On Ice*

“On Thursday\_\_\_\_\_ about 4 o’clock in the afternoon, Matthew\_\_\_\_\_, 16, was shot in the back and killed by a policeman. The officer had stopped the car Johnson and a friend were riding in: he thought they looked suspicious. The policeman, Alvin\_\_\_\_\_, 51, ordered the two out of the car and told them to raise their hands. Matthew\_\_\_\_\_ began to run down a hill with his hands raised. The officer says he fired three warning shots before hitting Johnson. A witness claims that all the shots were aimed at the youth. At the time of the shooting the officer did not know that the car was stolen. The owners reported it as stolen several hours later.”

What year is this from? Can you guess?

Not that it matters. Matthew Johnson died on September 27, 1966. The cop, Alvin Johnson—presumably no relation—read out the ending to Matthew’s story in the time it took the bullet to find flesh. This is an ending that’s so familiar it’s banal: Man, sensing his death, attempts to get out from under it; bullet, life’s equal and opposite, called once again to active duty, responds. And then there’s another body that lies cooling on the ground in the summer heat. We know how the story ends, and we know what the victims of its conclusion look like.

I write to you from another summer. Today, July \_\_\_\_\_, 20XX, was the hottest so far. And you can feel it in the humidity, in the heat. Don't give them a reason, the indelible lesson my parents taught me, floats across the surface of my thoughts, because it's fighting weather again. It's been years since I've heard the words spoken, but I can still remember their original tone; despite years of warping sun and heat, they haven't lost their original hues.

I wonder what Matthew Johnson's last thoughts were. Did he remember his mother's advice? Or was it pure animal panic, life's animating spirit convulsing one last time in a desperate bid to prolong its existence? I wonder what the heat was like that day. I wonder how humid it was. I can only imagine the gemlike sun, a shard of broken glass in the sky ready to draw blood. I don't believe in time travel but I've put myself there that afternoon; I go there every morning, afternoon, evening, and night that ends the same way. Let me tell you what I see.

In America, hate and history are close bedfellows, and one nourishes the other, motherlike, with the strange black fruit that hangs low and heavy from all different kinds of trees, in every kind of weather. America is not a vegetarian, and she requires many carcasses a day to stay upright. Or perhaps she's not a carrion-eater. Perhaps she's an addict, chasing an eternal high.

But I think I've got it backwards. You can discern truth when your neural chemistry is altered; the filters between you and the everyday unsayable are muted, have disappeared, and you're free to probe the awful nature of things. Maybe America is painfully sober; maybe she's our designated driver. Or perhaps it's that she's in charge of the getaway car, as we rob our memory banks of atrocity and flee.

When I wake up each morning, I thank my heart for beating. I lie on my back and feel it pulse through my chest. I imagine blood rushing through dark veins, the electrical impulses that keep the drumbeat in my chest beating in time. When I contemplate my vitality I imagine the impossibly thin edge that separates me from death. As a black man in America, I am never closer to death than I am always. Get high and think about it. I wish I could put it more simply.

What if Malcolm were still here? How would he and Huey respond? I keep them close. I ask for guidance. They seemed to know the truth of things, to know the secrets of the brutal, peculiarly American disease. Malcolm said "Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery." You can feel the heat of his sincerity decades later.

But this is all very abstract. I suppose I'm orbiting my point because I can't bear to confront it directly. I'm not strong enough to admit that everything I do, everything I am, is defined skin-first, because it means that the foremost pursuit of my life is convincing Americans that I am, in fact, human. That I am not a monster with my kinky hair, that I am not a demon with a flattened nose. That's the trick of how to survive in this blighted country; that is my advice to you. Force them to grant you personhood. Usually, you have to show them you bleed for them to make them believe you're human.

Before I do anything else, I do this. I bleed. The hearts of Americans are, whether they know it or not, impure. I know they are flawed by their dreams of pure white. They imagine themselves to be like the driven snow, like lilies waving innocently in the breeze. But we, the dark ones, are the soil they grow out of, and they cannot survive without us. Never forget that there are ancient fault lines that cross the globe. Never forget that the massive plates at their edges move imperceptibly against each other in the eternal night of geological time. They do move, though. They convulse and the Earth itself shakes.

**Bijan Stephen is an Associate Editor at *The New Republic*.**  
**@bijanstephen**

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### Bobby Hutton

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*(Hutton's funeral was held on April 12 at the Ephesians Church of God in Berkeley, California. About 1,500 people attended the funeral and a rally held afterwards in West Oakland was attended by over 2,000 people, including actor Marlon Brando and author James Baldwin.[6][7][8] He was buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, but did not have a gravestone until 2003, 35 years after his death. [bolding mine])*

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Photo by Clayton Cubitt

**Ales Kot invents, writes & runs projects & stories for film, comics, television & more.**

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**Tom Muller is an Eisner Award nominated Belgian graphic designer who works with technology startups, movie studios, publishers, media producers, ad agencies, and filmmakers. His recent comics design credits include**

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**He lives in London with his wife, and two cats.**

**@helloMuller**



A man comes home from Guantanamo Bay, irrevocably changed.

An actress receives an offer that can revive her career.

A boy survives a riot and enters  
the Homan Square.

A philosopher  
encounters an agent  
of deep change.

Look around you. Everything is **material**.

**Created by Ales Kot** (*Zero, Wolf, Change, The Surface*), **Will Tempest** (*Zero*),  
**Tom Muller** (*Zero, Drifter*), and **Clayton Cowles** (*The Wicked + The Divine, Bitch Planet, Zero*).



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