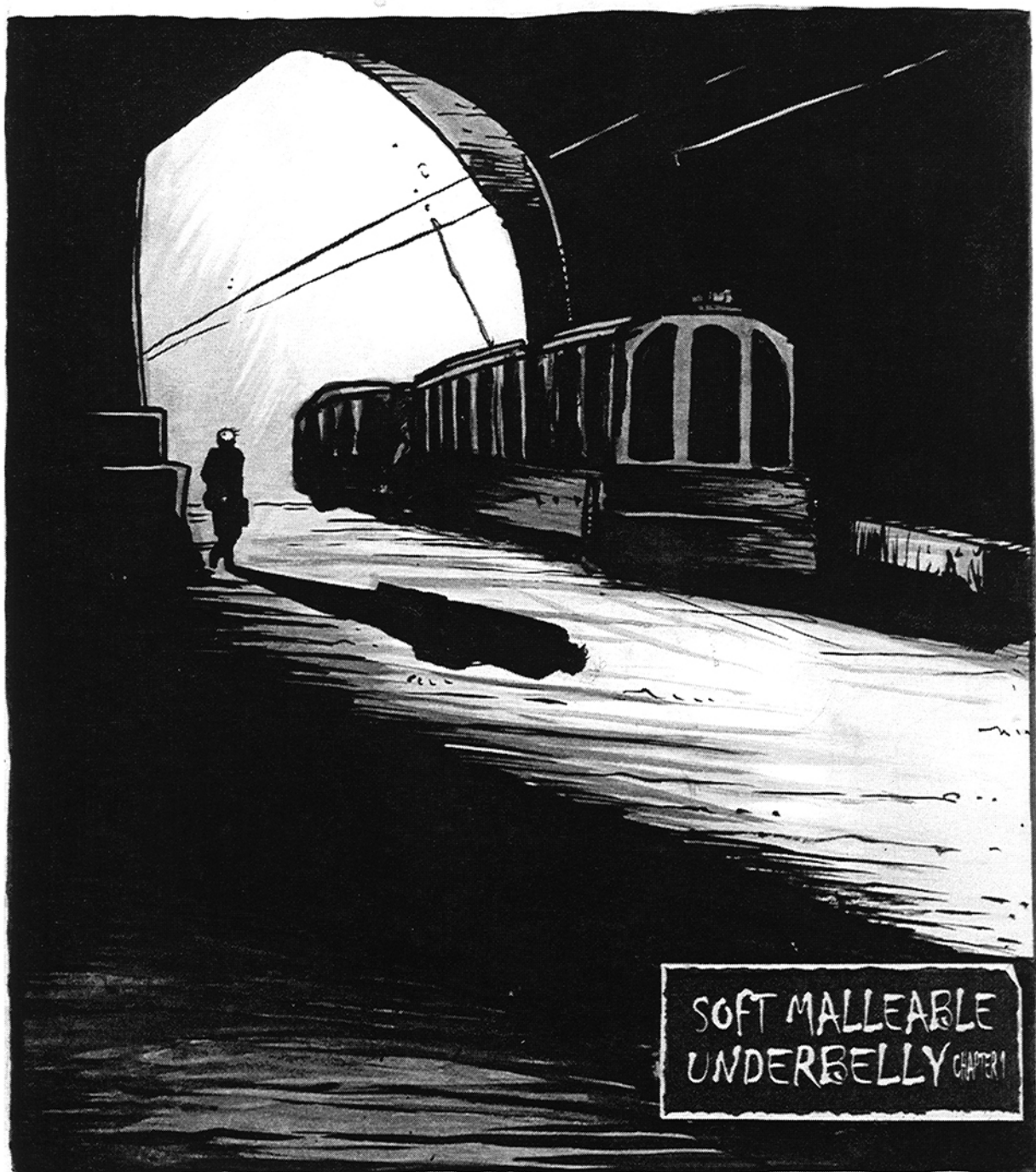
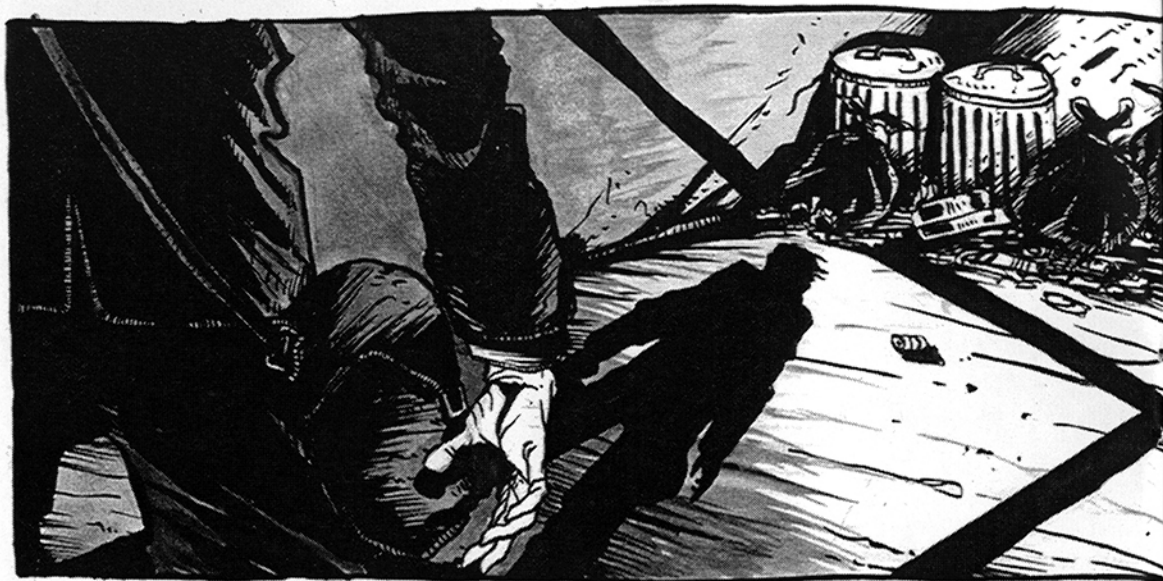


A S H T R A Y

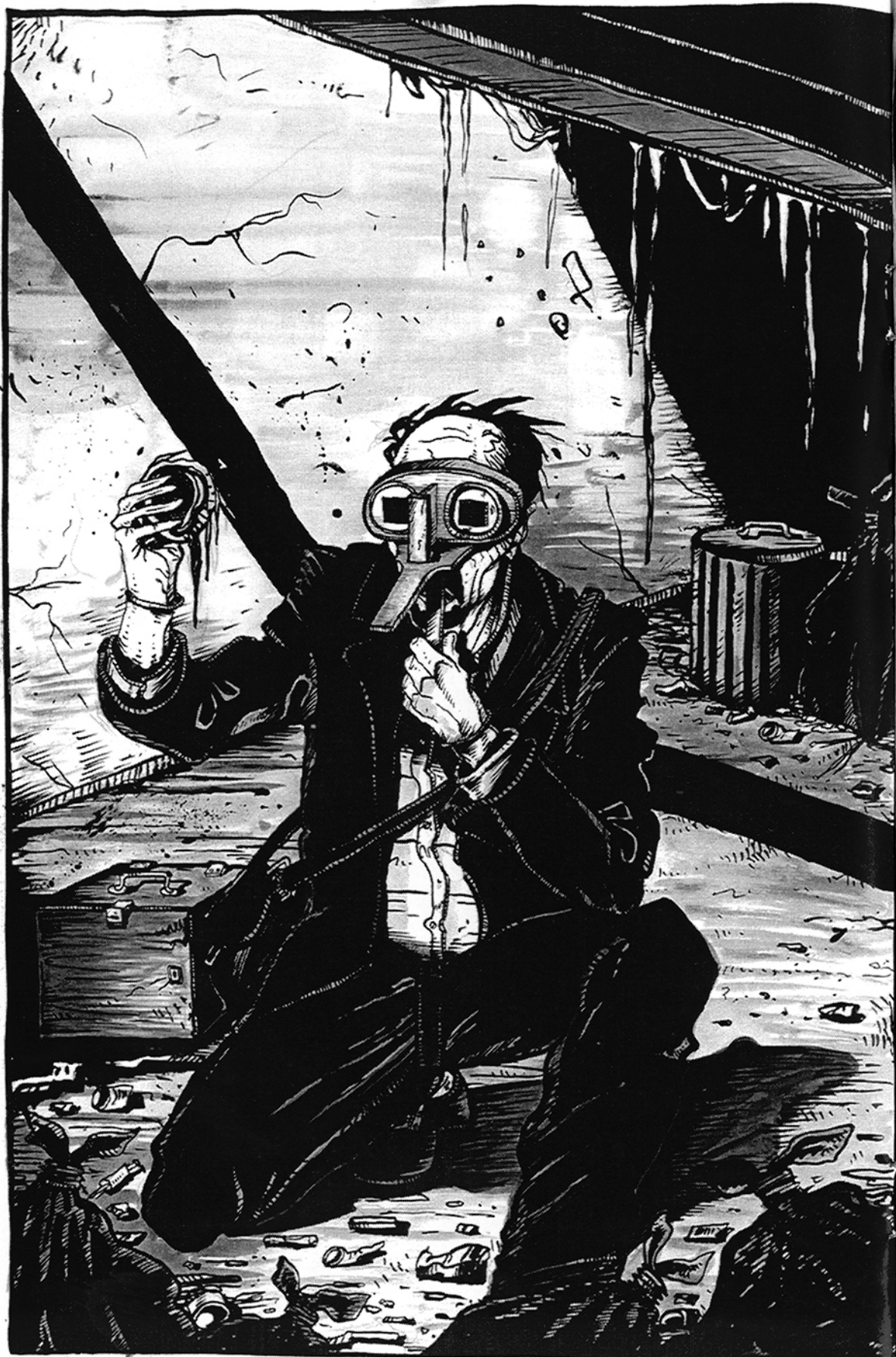
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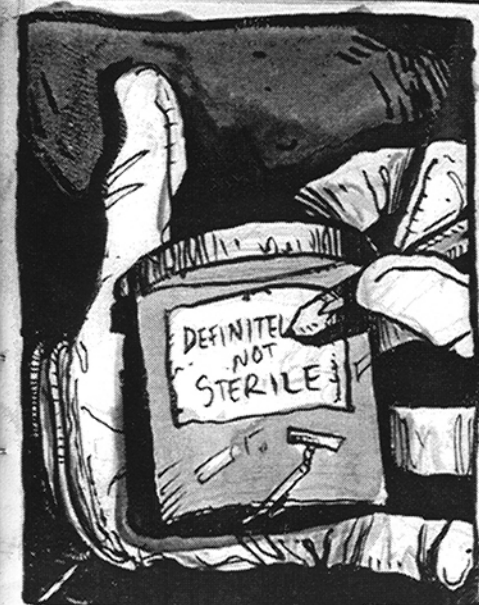








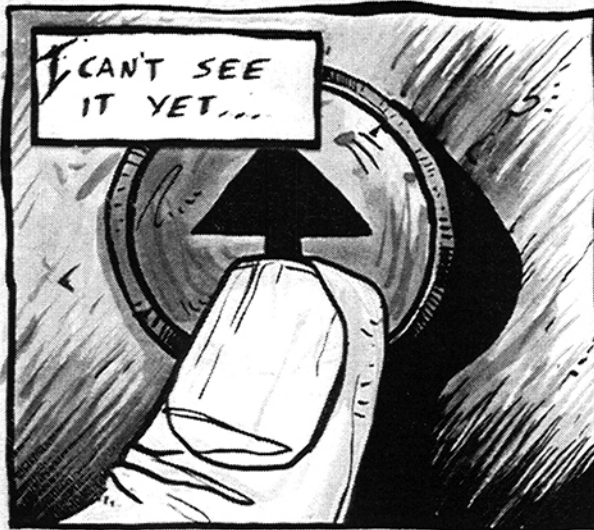






PERSONAL JOURNAL:
NORTON SINCLAIR:
DAY 263/ YEAR 3:

DARK THINGS ARE
HAPPENING
NOW...



I CAN'T SEE
IT YET...



BUT I CAN
FEEL IT...



HANDS
OFF!



SNORT



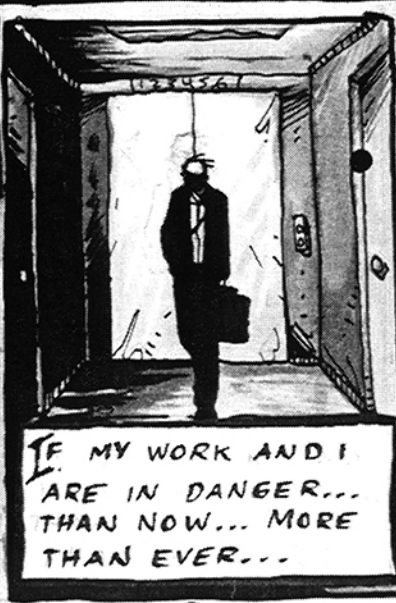
SOMETHING BAD IS COMING IN UNDER THE TELEPHONE WIRES, I FEEL A NEW SENSE OF URGENCY, A DANGER PRESSING IN.

I CAN'T LET MY INHERENT PARANOIA INTERFERE WITH MY WORK. I'VE COME TOO FAR FOR THAT. MY INSTINCTS SHOULD ONLY BE A GUIDE.

I MUST RELY ON MY METHODOLOGY. METHOD IS THE ANCHOR OF ANY SCIENCE. IT CAN NEVER BE TAKEN AWAY, IT CAN ALWAYS BE CONTROLLED.



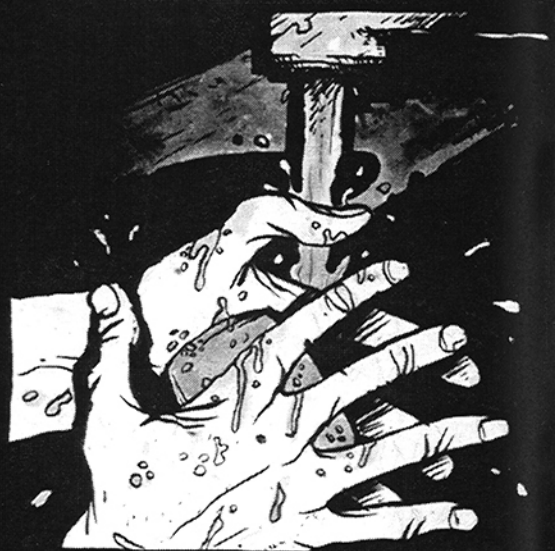
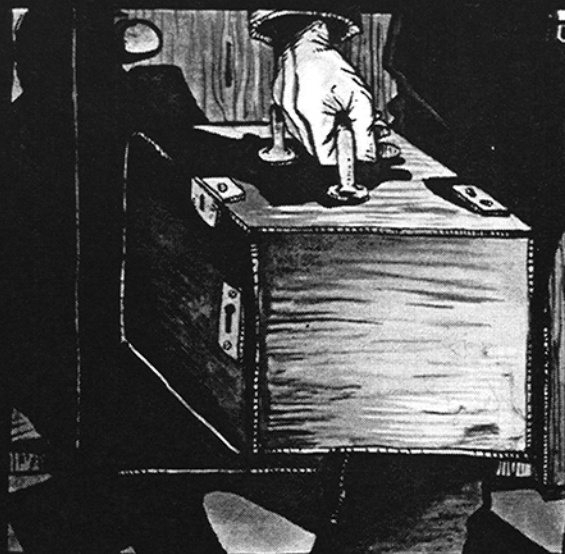
HUMAN EMOTION BREEDS HUMAN ERROR. THIS CAN NEVER BE ELIMINATED. BUT, WITH A PRACTICED AND CONSISTENT METHOD IT CAN BE REDUCED... FORESEEN... AVOIDED.



IF MY WORK AND I ARE IN DANGER... THAN NOW... MORE THAN EVER...

I MUST REMAIN IN TOTAL CONTROL.





PERSONAL JOURNAL:
NORTON SINCLAIR:
DAY 267 / YEAR 3 / ENTRY 2.

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN
THREE YEARS SINCE I CAME
TO THIS CITY...

...THREE YEARS ALONE
IN THIS MAKESHIFT
LABORATORY...

THREE YEARS SEARCHING
FILTHY GUTTERS AND
ALLEYS, CHASING
SECRETS.

NO... NOT SECRETS...
THE SECRET. SACRED
TRUTH. IT'S ALL
AROUND, WAITING
TO SHOW ME ITS
DIVINE LITTLE HEAD.

THE CLUES LIE IN
THE EXCLUDED DETAILS.
THE REFUSE AND
THE SCRAPS.

THERE'S A DESIGN TO
IT. AN INTERNAL
LOGIC. A TRASH
MICROCOSM, A GIANT
JUNK METAPHOR.


ALL OF IT FITTING
TOGETHER, DRAWING
A MAP INTO UNSEEN
PLACES...

TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS
WORKING TOGETHER
WITH UTTER
PRECISION.


CUTTING DEEPER
AND DEEPER...

...FEELING BACK
THE SKIN.



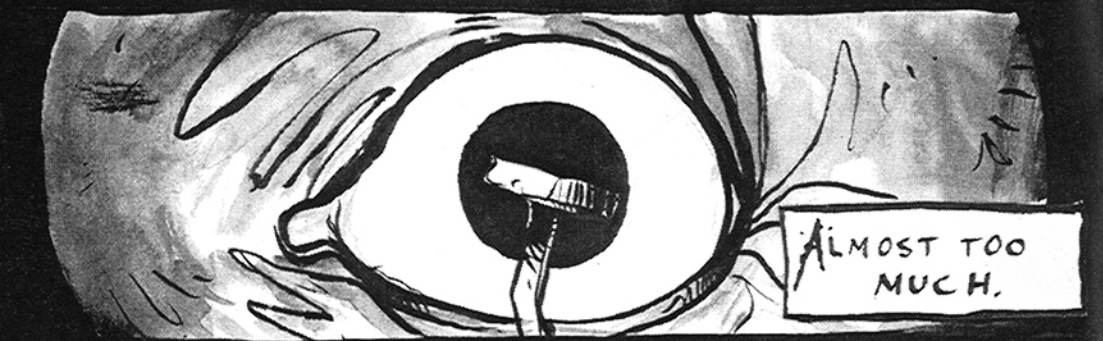
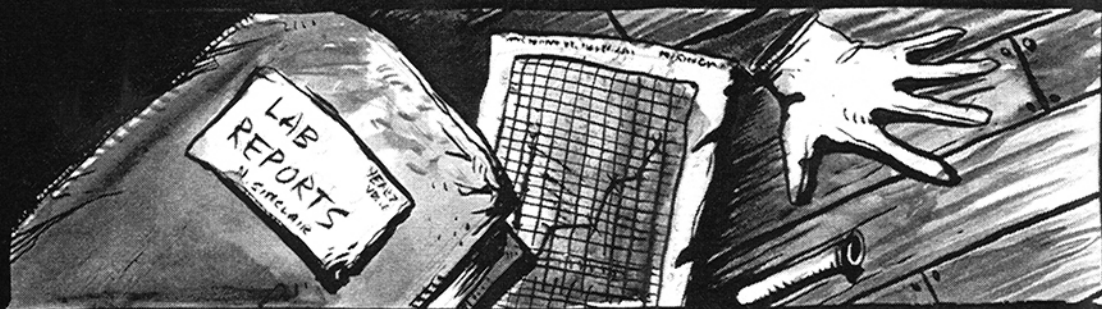


ONE HAS TO LOOK
AT THE SMALLEST
THINGS TO FIND THE
BIGGEST ANSWERS.

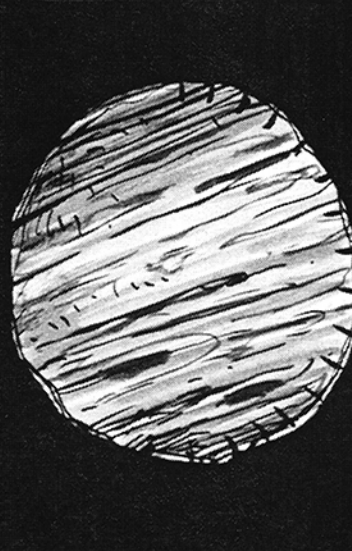


EVEN NOTHING IS
SOMETHING IF YOU
KNOW HOW TO LOOK.

IT ALL SAYS
SO MUCH.



ALMOST TOO
MUCH.



THIS PAPER FASTNER IS 3.3cm IN LENGTH. ITS "STEM" IS 0.3cm IN WIDTH. ITS "HEAD" IS 1.2 cm IN DIAMETER.

ITS BRASS FINISH HOLDS TWO TINY SCRATCHES. THE FIRST IS ABOUT 0.0006cm IN LENGTH, THE SECOND 0.003cm.

THAT IS THE EXTERIOR, INSIDE THERE IS MUCH MORE...



DAY 116/YR.1: I PICK UP A TORN HALF OF A PLAYING CARD, THE 8 OF HEARTS, OUTSIDE OF A CANNERY IN THE FACTORY DISTRICT. ITS COATING IS THE SAME WAX COMPOUND FOUND IN THE SCRATCHES ON THE FASTNER.



DAY 212/YR.1: I FIND A SARDINE CAN IN CHINATOWN. FURTHER INVESTIGATION CONFIRMS THAT IT WAS MADE AT THE SAME CANNERY WHERE I PICKED UP THE PLAYING CARD.

MOST COINCIDENCES ARE PASSED OVER AFTER A MOMENT OF INITIAL ASTONISHMENT.



BUT WHAT IF ONE DID NOT MERELY PASS THEM OVER? WHAT IF HE FOLLOWED THESE COINCIDENCES? ONE LEADING TO ANOTHER AND ANOTHER AND ANOTHER...

TODAY I CHOOSE THIS BRASS PAPER FASTNER. THE TWO SURFACE SCRATCHES HOLD TRACES OF A WAX COMPOUND AND A LIQUID, 1.65_{ug} COMMON RAIN WATER, LACED WITH 0.48_{ug} OF FORMALDEHYDE AND 0.098_{ug} OF HYDROGEN CYANIDE.



DAY 171/YR.2: I COLLECT A CRUSHED PLASTIC COLA BOTTLE BEHIND AN EAST END APARTMENT COMPLEX. INSIDE THERE IS A MOULDY PIECE OF CARDBOARD. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WORN INK AND TEAR MARKS CONFIRM IT AS THE MISSING PORTION OF THE 8 OF HEARTS.

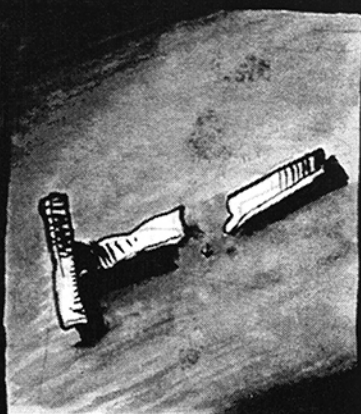


A WEEK LATER I FIND A BOTTLE CAP IN FRONT OF A SMALL DOWNTOWN LIBRARY BRANCH. ITS BROKEN SEAL MATCHES THE COLA BOTTLE PERFECTLY. INSIDE THE CAP IS A SMALL PORTION OF LIQUID... 1.65_{ug} COMMON RAIN WATER, LACED WITH 0.48_{ug} OF FORMALDEHYDE AND 0.098_{ug} OF HYDROGEN CYANIDE.



THIS IS WHERE
LOGIC ENDS,
METHOD DIES.

SUCH SYNCHRONICITY
CANNOT BE PUT IN
A JAR, CANNOT BE
LABELLED, DEFINED.
WHAT I CAN'T
DEFINE TERRIFIES
ME.



THEY ARE INCREASING IN
FREQUENCY. DOZENS OF
THESE "TRASH CIRCLES"
IN THE LAST SIX
WEEKS ALONE.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
WHERE ARE THEY
LEADING ME?



I CAN ONLY BELIEVE
THAT THE MAN OF THE
PAST IS ALIVE IN THE
MAN OF TODAY, AS
JUNG PROPOSED. THAT
I AM CONTINUING
THE QUEST OF THIS
COLLECTIVE MAN.

HIS CLUES ARE IN
ME, WAITING TO
BE FOUND, EXPOSED.



THIS IS WHERE THEY
ARE HIDING... IN THE
DISCARDED, THE
UNWANTED, WHAT'S
LEFT BEHIND.

OR AM I JUST CHASING
CRYPTIC, ARBITRARY
CIRCLES?

FOR AN INSTANT THE
THOUGHT OF QUITTING
CRIPPLES ME...

BUT I KNOW I CAN'T
STOP...





MY MIND MUST BE CLEAR,
MY EYES OPEN, MY
MOVEMENTS MEASURED.
THIS IS ALL JUST BEGINNING.

TO BE CONTINUED.

LEFT



LET IT GO
EUGENE...



IT'S OVER



YOU GOT NOTHING
TO BE ASHAMED OF.
HE'S JUST TOO YOUNG,
TOO FAST. TEN YEARS
AGO, YOU WOULD'VE
TORE THAT KID
A NEW HOLE.



LOOK JIMMY,
JUST LET ME
ALONE NOW.
OK.



IT AIN'T TEN YEARS
AGO.

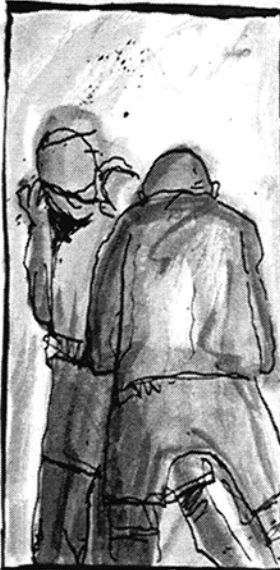


WHY'D YOU HAVE
TO GO OUT LIKE
THIS?

YOU LOOKED LIKE
A FOOL. SO
SLOW, SO
STIFF.



COULDN'T
CONNECT WITH
NOTHIN'
NO POWER.



SHOULD HAVE
SEEN THAT LEFT
COMING. YOU ALWAYS
SAW THE LEFT'S
COMIN'



USED TO BE
SO FAST,
SO GOOD...



SO YOUNG.



HOW DID YOU
END UP HERE?
JUST AN OLD,
FAT MAN.

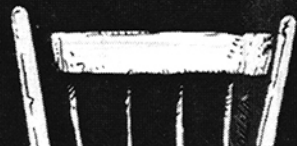


SHOULD'VE SAW
THAT
LEFT COMING.

END.

RIGHT

John Doe



WELL, I SUPPOSE I'M GLAD IT'S OVER. I MEAN, IF THAT EVER GOT BACK TO EUGENE HE'D BREAK MY BACK... BUT YEAH... I'M GLAD IT'S OVER.

IT WAS A GOOD RUN... I MEAN HE WAS THE CHAMP. AND HE'S STILL GOT HIS HEALTH... AND HE'S STILL GOT ALL HIS BRAINS IN THE RIGHT PLACE. THAT'S MORE THAN MOST CAN SAY!

AND, GODDAMN IT, EUGENE WAS THE BEST FIGHTER I EVER HANDLED! HE'S A... HE'S LIKE, WHATTA YA CALL IT... A PRODIGY.



YOU KNOW... IT WAS ALL NATURAL TO HIM. IT WAS ALL JUST THERE. ALL I HAD TO DO WAS HELP HIM FIND IT... AND MAN, DID HE FIND IT!

I TOLD HIM, I SAYS, "EUGENE, JUST LET IT GO." BUT HE HAD TO TRY A COMEBACK. THIS KID WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A SURE THING, ...

"JUST ONE MORE, AND I'LL GO OUT ON TOP". HE SAYS TO ME.



DONT MEAN NOTHIN' ANYHOW.
THAT KID WILL NEVER
BE THE FIGHTER GENE
WAS. HE AINT NO
PRODIGY... JUST A CEMENT-
HEAD WITH TEN YEARS
ON GENE, THAT'S
IT!



HOLD ON A SEC...



CAN YOU READ
THAT?



NO?
LET'S SEE HERE...



BLAH BLAH... "HIS HOME TOWN
IS COMPARING HIS RISE TO
THAT OF JOE LOUIS..."
BLAH BLAH... "MITCHELL
IS HANDLED BY JIMMY
PATRICK, A WISE RING
HAND..." DA, DA, DA...



... "WITH THAT KIND
OF PATIENCE AND
KNOWLEDGE IN HIS
CORNER, EUGENE MITCHELL
MAY WELL FULLFILL HIS
BRIGHT PROMISE..."
HA!



I REMEMBER MY POP USED
TO HAVE THIS HUNG OVER HIS
CHAIR. NICE FRAME TOO!
MOM PICKED IT OUT OF COURSE
HE WOULDN'T LET HER
CLEAN IT THOUGH.

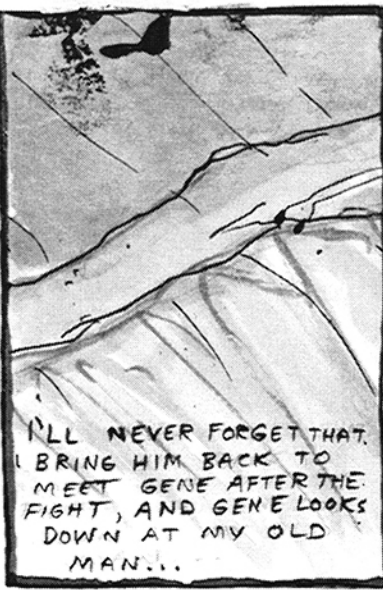


HE'D INSIST ON DOING
IT. HE'D GET UP
AND DUST IT OFF
EVERY TIME I WAS
OVER FOR DINER.



HELL, HE EVEN CAME
TO SEE GENIE FIGHT
MARTY GREEN AT
THE COLLESEUM...
GOT DRESSED UP FOR
IT!

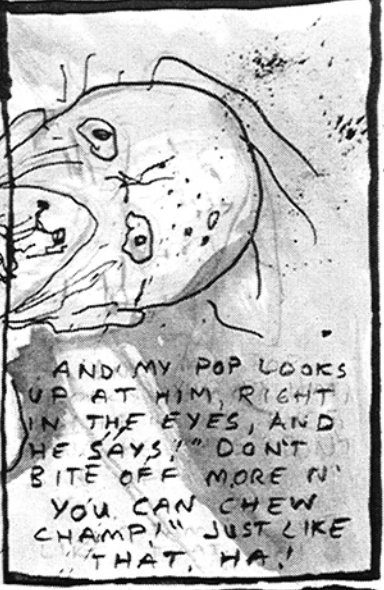




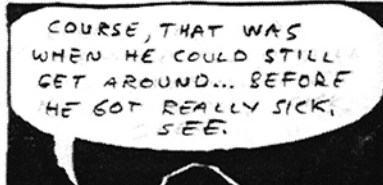
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT. I BRING HIM BACK TO MEET GENE AFTER THE FIGHT, AND GENE LOOKS DOWN AT MY OLD MAN...



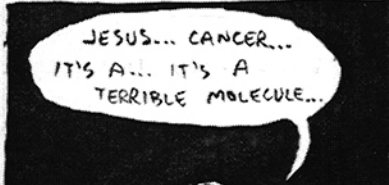
WHO WAS SMALL, YA KNOW, SMALLER THAN ME, AND GENE SAYS, "YOU WANNA TAKE A SHOT AT ME OLD MAN?" JUST JOKING AROUND, YA KNOW.



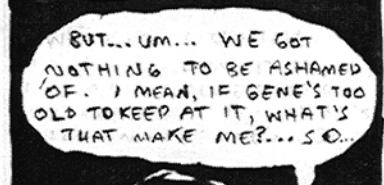
AND MY POP LOOKS UP AT HIM, RIGHT IN THE EYES, AND HE SAYS, "DON'T BITE OFF MORE N' YOU CAN CHEW CHAMP," JUST LIKE THAT. HA!



COURSE, THAT WAS WHEN HE COULD STILL GET AROUND... BEFORE HE GOT REALLY SICK, SEE.



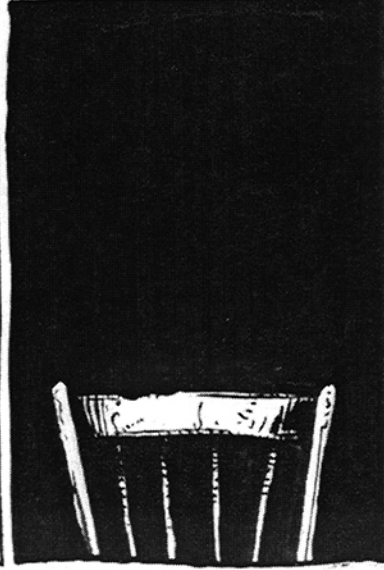
JESUS... CANCER... IT'S ALL... IT'S A TERRIBLE MOLECULE...

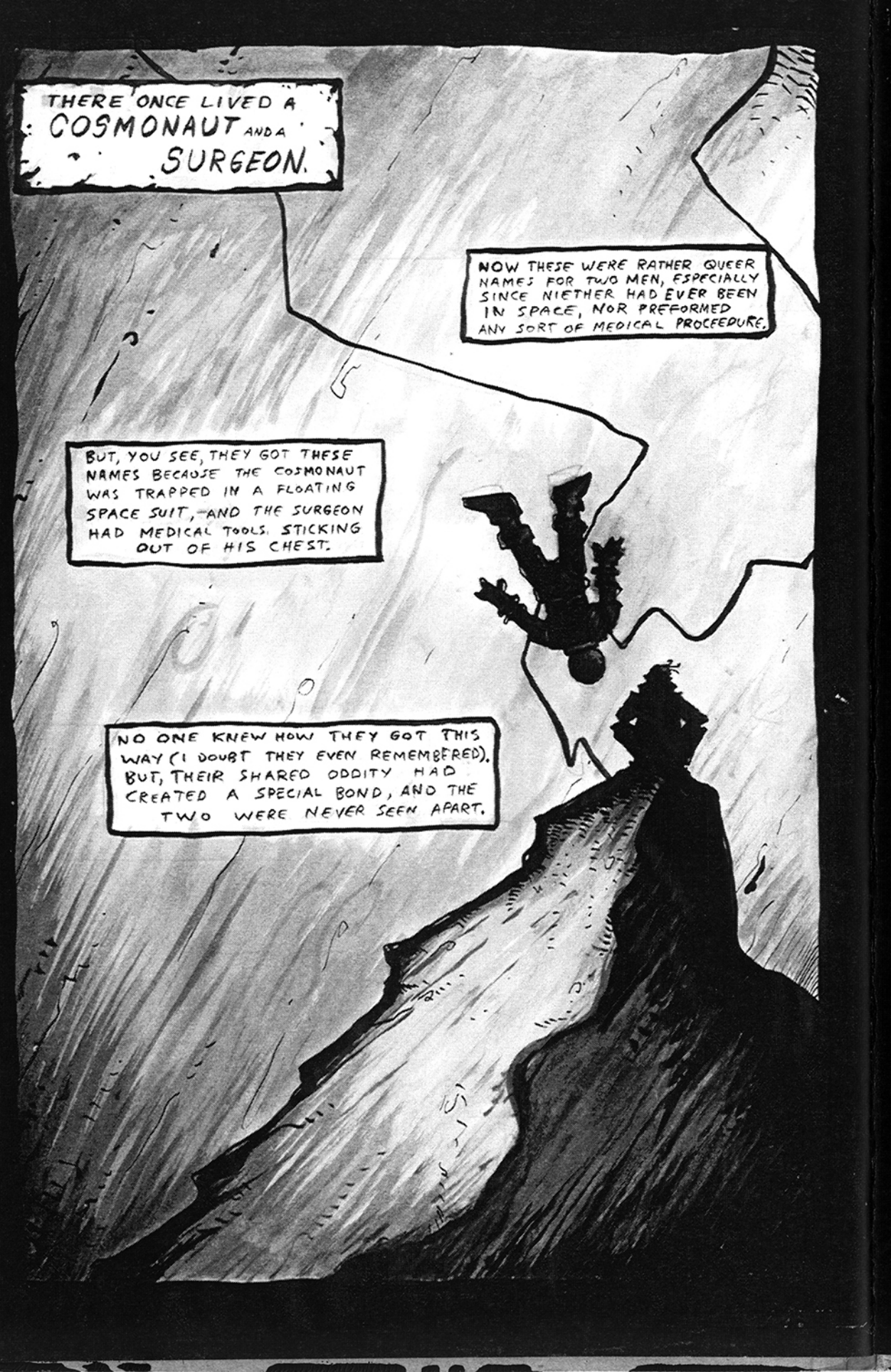


BUT... UM... WE GOT NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF. I MEAN, IF GENE'S TOO OLD TO KEEP AT IT, WHAT'S THAT MAKE ME?... SO.



YEAH... YEAH, I'M GLAD IT'S OVER...





THERE ONCE LIVED A
COSMONAUT AND A
SURGEON.

NOW THESE WERE RATHER QUEER
NAMES FOR TWO MEN, ESPECIALLY
SINCE NEITHER HAD EVER BEEN
IN SPACE, NOR PERFORMED
ANY SORT OF MEDICAL PROCEDURE.

BUT, YOU SEE, THEY GOT THESE
NAMES BECAUSE THE COSMONAUT
WAS TRAPPED IN A FLOATING
SPACE SUIT, AND THE SURGEON
HAD MEDICAL TOOLS, STICKING
OUT OF HIS CHEST.

NO ONE KNEW HOW THEY GOT THIS
WAY (I DOUBT THEY EVEN REMEMBERED).
BUT, THEIR SHARED ODDITY HAD
CREATED A SPECIAL BOND, AND THE
TWO WERE NEVER SEEN APART.



THE COSMONAUT WAS A QUIET MAN, ONE OF THOSE "STILL WATERS RUN DEEP" TYPES. HE HAD A GENTLE NATURE, CALM AND SERENE...

... AND WHEN HE DID TALK, IT CAME OUT ALL MUFFLED BECAUSE OF THE PLASTIC SPACEMAN BUBBLE OVER HIS HEAD. IN FACT, ONLY THE SURGEON COULD UNDERSTAND HIM MOST OF THE TIME...



MUMBLE..
MUFFLE..
MUMBLE..

BWA-HA-HA!
GOOD ONE
OLD BUDDY!



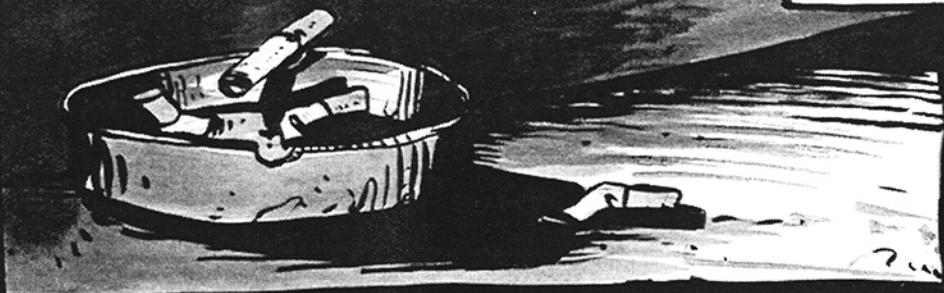
BUT THAT WAS OK, BECAUSE THE SURGEON DID ENOUGH TALKING FOR BOTH OF THEM. FOR AS CALM AND SERENE AS THE COSMONAUT WAS, THE SURGEON WAS BRASH AND LOUD, OFTEN PRONE TO VULGAR DISPLAYS OF MANHOOD...



FUCK-FACE!

OOPI!

AS THE YEARS PASSED
THE COSMONAUT AND
THE SURGEON WENT
ON MANY ADVENTURES.



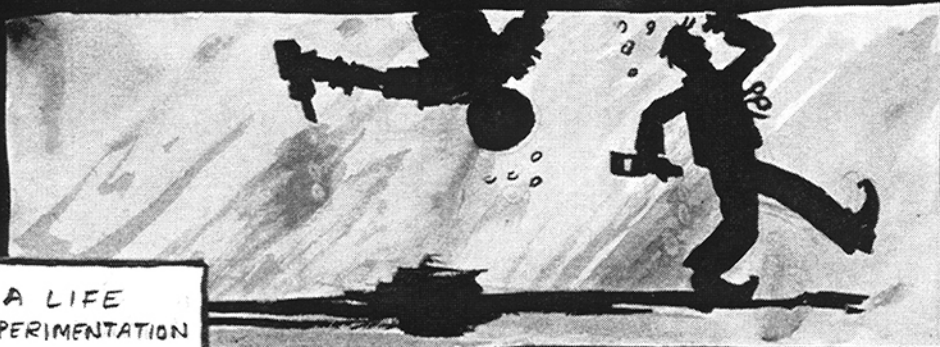
ROAMING THE BACKWOODS
AND THE BACK ALLEYS,
THEIR LEGEND
GREW...



... WHORING,
DRINKING AND
FIGHTING...



THEIRS WAS A LIFE
OF WILD EXPERIMENTATION
AND EPIC DEBAUCHERY.





THEN, ONE DAY, THE
COSMONAUT GREW
WEARY OF THEIR
LIFESTYLE. HE WANTED
SOMETHING MORE...

SO, HE BOUGHT A LENGTH
OF THIN BLACK WIRE.
HE WOULD CONSTANTLY
TWIST AND SHAPE IT
INTO THESE ODD
LITTLE BIRD-CAGE THINGIES.



THE SURGEON WAS
DISMAYED BY THIS.
HE JUST WANTED TO
KEEP GOING... DRINK!
EAT! FIGHT!

QUIT PISSIN' AROUND
WITH THAT WIRE, AND
KICK THIS GUY IN
THE STOMACH! COME ON!

HE FEARED HIS FRIEND'S
MIND WAS ELSEWHERE...
THAT HIS HEART JUST
WAS'NT IN IT ANYMORE.

HEY!
THIS SUCKS!
YOU'RE NOT
EVEN TRYING
MAN!

AND SO IT WENT, THE
SURGEON CONTINUED TO
"LIVE IT UP", AND THE
COSMONAUT FLOATED BEHIND
HIM, MAKING THE THINGS HE
MADE.

AND, LIKE ALL OTHERS,
THEY EVENTUALLY GREW
OLD, AND HAD TO REST.



AS THE DAYS GREW
LONGER, THE COSMO-
NAUT FELT THAT
SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

HE FELT SO TIRED,
SO WEAK.

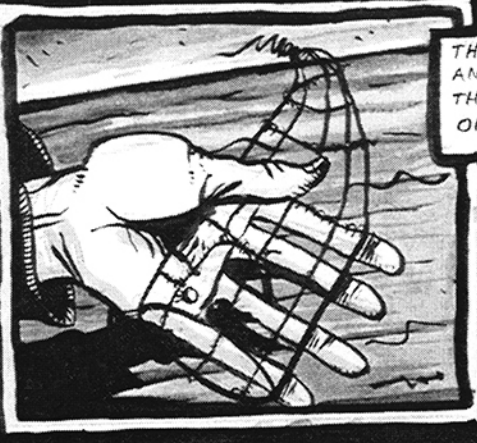
SOON, HE WAS
TERRIBLY ILL
WITH CANCER.

BITTER AND COLD, THE
SURGEON SAT WITH HIM.
HE SAW NO POINT TO
LIFE, AND PERHAPS
NEVER HAD.







AND WITH THAT, !!!
HE PASSED AWAY.



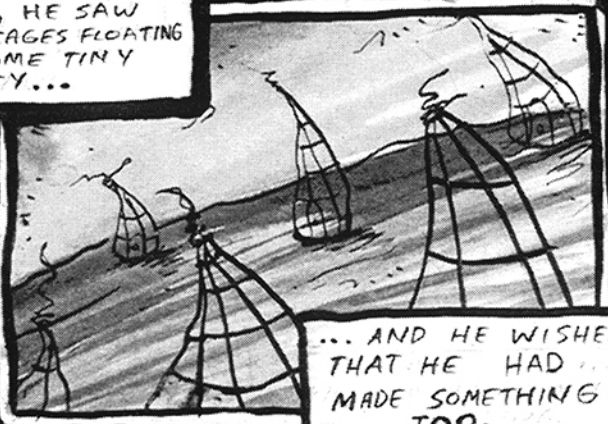
THE SURGEON WAS CONFUSED
AND ALONE. HE WALKED TO
THE RIVER AND LET ALL
OF THE BIRDCAGES GO.



THEN, AS THESE THINGS SO
OFTEN GO, HE FELT AS
THOUGH HE COULD NO
LONGER GO ON WITHOUT
HIS MATE. SO HE LAY
DOWN WITH HIM.



AS HE LOOKED OUT,
READY TO DIE, HE SAW
ALL THE BIRDCAGES FLOATING
AWAY LIKE SOME TINY
WIRE CITY...



... AND HE WISHED
THAT HE HAD
MADE SOMETHING
TOO.