

Watchmen Study Guide

Watchmen by Alan Moore

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Plot Summary

In 1939, several New York City costumed heroes become vigilante crime fighters. They form a loosely organized group known as the Minutemen. As the original costumed heroes age and retire, they are replaced by a younger generation of costumed heroes. In 1966, the new generation of costumed heroes gathers for an organizational meeting where one of them proposes the foundation of a new group of crime fighting heroes. Although the suggestion does not come to fruition, it does introduce many of the individual vigilantes to the others. Several alliances result.

In 1959, a strange accident happens at a government physics research laboratory, which results in the transformation of Jon Osterman into Dr. Manhattan, an actual super-hero with supernatural abilities. While other costumed heroes are simply highly trained and highly motivated athletes, Dr. Manhattan can control the very nature of reality, creating atoms from nothing, teleporting objects, and existing in a sort of extra-dimensional time. He is announced to the public and gradually becomes a vital component of the United States of America's strategic defense program.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the vigilante activities of the costumed heroes begin to become unpopular with the media, the police, and citizens. As anti-vigilante riots erupt, the costumed heroes respond with increasing brutality. Finally, in 1977, the government passes a law, which makes vigilante activity a criminal offense. With a few exceptions, costumed heroes hang up their costumes and pursue other lines of work - many announce their formerly secret personal identities and seek to capitalize on their recent fame. Others prefer to retire into obscurity, while a very few ignore the law and continue to seek justice on their own terms.

By 1985, nuclear war with Russia seems unavoidable. The world is deeply divided, the cold war is raising international tensions, and armies are being deployed. One retired costumed hero, now fabulously wealthy, decides he must intervene to deter nuclear annihilation and unite the world in a common cause. His amoral plan is to play an enormous practical joke on the world. He fakes an alien invasion by an extra-terrestrial being with hostile intent. The attack results in the deaths of millions of people, but does halt the seemingly unstoppable march to international nuclear war.



At Midnight All the Agents...

At Midnight All the Agents... Summary

In October 1985, a haggard-looking vagrant walks the streets of New York City carrying a sign proclaiming the imminent end of the world. He walks through a huge pool of blood on the sidewalk without pausing. Far overhead, on the high floors of an apartment building, Officers Steven Fine and Bourquin investigate the recent murder of Edward Morgan Blake. Blake was severely beaten inside of his apartment and then flung through the window to the sidewalk below. Detectives Fine and Bourquin quickly rule out burglary as a motive, and speculate that it would take more than one person to bodily throw Blake out of the window. As Detectives Fine and Bourquin leave the apartment building and walk down the street, they continue to speculate about the murder and wonder, aloud, if someone named Rorschach might have been involved. The haggard-looking vagrant overhears them but displays no particular interest.

Later that night Rorschach, the costumed hero, climbs the facade of the apartment building and investigates the murder scene. He carefully searches the apartment and locates a secret panel in the back of the closet. He opens the panel and discovers the costume and equipment of The Comedian, another costumed hero. Rorschach quickly deduces that the murdered Edward Blake was, in fact, The Comedian.

Meanwhile Dan Dreiberg visits Hollis Mason in his apartment above his business, and the two men reminisce about old times. When the visit is over, Dan walks home through a rough-looking neighborhood full of Nazi punks. When Dan arrives home, he discovers that Rorschach has broken in to his apartment. Dan and Rorschach talk about the Blake murder. Rorschach hypothesizes that, perhaps, a plot is afoot to murder costumed heroes. Dan disagrees and thinks that the Communists probably murdered Blake.

Rorschach then leaves and wanders through several seedy bars questioning likely suspects by physically torturing them, until he is satisfied they don't know anything. He then proceeds to visit Adrian Veidt. Veidt is a retired costumed hero who has publicly announced his secret identity. He was formerly known as Ozymandias. Veidt is now the head of a giant corporation. Rorschach tells Veidt about Blake's murder.

Rorschach then leaves and travels to the Rockefeller Military Research Center where he sneaks in and talks with Jonathan "Jon" Osterman. Jon is a bona fide super-hero - beyond simply a costumed hero. He is blue, naked, and has immense super powers. Jon's secret identity was made public years ago, and he is widely known as Dr. Manhattan. Jon lives with Laurel "Laurie" Jane Juspeczyk, another younger costumed hero. Laurie's hero identity, Laurie Jupiter, has always public.

Jon and Rorschach talk about the Blake murder. Rorschach again hypothesizes that, perhaps, a plot is afoot to murder costumed heroes. Jon disagrees and thinks that the Libyans probably murdered Blake. Laurie is uncomfortable around Rorschach and also



appears to be jubilant that Blake is dead. She explains that Blake had once attempted to rape her mother. Rorschach and Laurie begin to argue. The argument is cut short, as Jon teleports Rorschach back to the city. Laurie, still worked up, decides to call Dan, whom she has not seen for years, and to meet him for dinner. Jon seems both highly distracted by his work and pleased that Laurie will be meeting Dan.

At Midnight All the Agents... Analysis

This chapter takes place on October 12, 1985, and immediately sets the tone and texture of the graphic novel. The primary setting is a gritty downbeat New York City where gangs of drug-addled Nazi punks roam the seedy streets and murders are frequent and gruesome. Comic books are popular and tell the typical stories of heroes and super-heroes. Somewhat like the comics, however, there are also real-life costumed heroes that fight crime, and there are super-heroes with vast super powers. Newspapers are commonly read and some are inflammatory and extreme. In many ways, the fictional world is similar to the real world of 1985, but notable differences exist.

The haggard-looking vagrant carrying a sign reading "The end is nigh" is actually Rorschach's secret identity. This does not become known, however, for several chapters. The police conversation he overhears by chance sets off the chain of events that is detailed in the graphic novel - the conversation is the reason that Rorschach returns to Blake's apartment to look around and discover that Blake was the Comedian.

Dan Dreiberg, also known as Night Owl, is a retired costumed hero, who has never publicly revealed his secret identity. He is not the original Night Owl. Hollis Mason was the original Night Owl. Hollis is retired and has revealed his secret identity as the original Night Owl. After Hollis retired, he was contacted by Dan, an admirer, who asked if he could carry on the Night Owl tradition. When Hollis agreed, the second Night Owl was born.

The origins of Jon's strange appearance and super-powers are fully described in a later chapter of the graphic novel. Laurie's personal and family histories are also likewise detailed in later chapters.



Chapter 1 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason

Chapter 1 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason Summary

Chapter 1 concludes with excerpts from two chapters of Hollis Mason's autobiography entitled *Under the Hood*. Hollis was born in Montana in 1916, and moved with his family to New York City at the age of 12. At the age of 23, he became a police officer. In 1938, he read in the newspaper about the first-ever real-life costumed hero, Hooded Justice. Hooded Justice dressed in a costume and fought crime as a vigilante, just like a comic book hero. Hollis immediately decided to become the second real-life costumed hero.

Chapter 1 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason Analysis

Chapter 1 concludes with a few pages, which are presented as extracts from Hollis Mason's tell-all autobiography. Hollis describes his personal history, his decision to become a costumed hero, and other details about his life. Hollis remains, however, a minor character in the graphic novel and thus his autobiography is primarily interesting for the information it provides about other more dominant characters and developmental events in the novel's timeline. Additional chapters of Hollis' autobiography appear at the ends of Chapters 2 and 3.



Chapter 2 Absent Friends

Chapter 2 Absent Friends Summary

Chapter 2 begins with Laurie traveling to her mother's retirement community for a visit. Laurie tells Sally about the Comedian's funeral, and comments that the Comedian was a brutal thug. Sally tells Laurie that the attempted happened in the distant past - 45 years ago - and that she has put it all behind her and holds no grudge. Laurie is flabbergasted at her mother's attitude. Sally then remembers, in a flashback sequence, a photo session from 1940 where the Minutemen, the original group of costumed heroes, assembled. Sally, then known as the Silk Spectre, was changing clothes after the photograph was taken, when the Comedian assaulted her, attempting rape. When Sally resisted the Comedian severely beat her and only stopped when Hooded Justice intervened, in turn beating the Comedian.

Meanwhile Blake's funeral takes place. Outside the cemetery, a haggard-looking vagrant walks by carrying a sign proclaiming the imminent end of the world. At the graveside, Veidt stands in the rain and remembers, in a flashback sequence, a 1966 meeting called by Captain Metropolis. The meeting is attended by Captain Metropolis, Ozymandias, the Comedian, Rorschach, Night Owl, Dr. Manhattan, Janey Slater, and Laurie Juspecky. At the meeting Captain Metropolis suggest the formation of a group of costumed heroes and suggests the name Crimebusters. After a brief presentation by Captain Metropolis, the Comedian interrupts and vituperates the idea, burns some displays, laughs it up, and walks out of the meeting. Dr. Manhattan and Janey Slater then leave, followed by almost everyone else. However, Ozymandias looks at the burned display and considers Captain Metropolis' ideas.

At the graveside, Jon stands in the rain and remembers, in a flashback sequence, events at the end of the Viet Nam war in 1971. The United States' victory has been complete thanks to direct intervention by Dr. Manhattan and the Comedian. Dr. Manhattan and the Comedian stand in a shack having drinks and talking. A pregnant Vietnamese woman enters the shack and accosts the Comedian, evidently the father. The Comedian denigrates her, and she retaliates by slashing his face with a bottle. As Dr. Manhattan watches, the Comedian draws a Colt Model 1911A1 and murders the pregnant woman.

At the graveside, Dan stands in the rain and remembers, in a flashback sequence, events from 1977, before to the enactment of the Keene act. Dan, as Night Owl, and the Comedian are teamed up to suppress rioting. The riots are pro-police and anti costumed hero/vigilante demonstrations, which will eventually result in the Keene act. The Comedian is particularly aggressive while Night Owl urges calm. Night Owl also remembers the Comedian had commented that Rorschach had been mentally disturbed since being involved in solving a prior kidnapping.



The Blake graveside service concludes and a shadowy figure quickly slips away. Rorschach, from the shadows, watches the figure leave the services. Rorschach follows the figure and discovers him to be Edgar Williams Jacobi AKA Moloch, an old ex-convict costumed villain. Under Rorschach's forceful interrogation, Moloch reveals a series of events, which transpired the previous week. Moloch, the costumed villain, was an archenemy of the Comedian for nearly forty years. Eventually Moloch retired as Edgar Jacobi and lived a lower-class life in a seedy area of town, eventually being diagnosed with terminal cancer. One week ago, the Comedian had visited Jacobi, unannounced. The Comedian was uncharacteristically emotional and visibly distressed. He told Jacobi that he had recently accidentally discovered an island where writers, scientists, and artists were involved in terrible activities. He also told Jacobi about a list of names, including Jacobi's, which would be used to discredit Dr. Manhattan. He wondered aloud how Dr. Manhattan would react. The Comedian then left Jacobi's apartment.

Chapter 2 Absent Friends Analysis

Chapter 2 takes place on October 16, 1985, though many of the scenes presented are flashbacks to a prior time. When Hooded Justice ended the Comedian's rape attempt, he subsequently beat up the Comedian without much difficulty. Considering the Comedian's formidable fighting skills, Hooded Justice's victory is notable.

It is interesting to note that Rorschach, at the abortive Crimebusters organization meeting, talks in a normal voice. In 1985, Rorschach talks in a monotone voice, which is described as creepy. The transition in voice mirrors the transition in psyche that is detailed in a later chapter of the graphic novel.

The facial injury that the Comedian receives at the hands of his pregnant lover is a horrific wound. When it heals, the Comedian is permanently disfigured with the right-hand corner of his mouth fading into a huge curved scar that runs up the entire right-hand side of his face. The scar gives him a laughing, leering, horrible appearance. When Dr. Manhattan comments on the Comedian's murder, the Comedian replies that Dr. Manhattan could have easily prevented the crime, but chose not to intervene.

The timeline remembered by Dan during his flashback scene is not internally consistent with other events noted in the graphic novel. For example, the Keene act is passed August 3, 1977, in response to the riots that Night Owl is suppressing. Rorschach's traumatic kidnapping involvement was in 1975. The Comedian comments that Rorschach has been mentally disturbed "since that kidnapping he handled three years back" (p. 18), which would put the rioting events in 1978. Perhaps, the Comedian is exaggerating the elapsed time.

The Comedian's visit to Moloch is a central plot event, which has far-reaching repercussions throughout the next chapters of the graphic novel. Rorschach apparently recognizes Jacobi at the Blake funeral and his suspicions are aroused, because Moloch and the Comedian were always enemies. The Comedian's vague references, made to

Moloch and recounted to Rorschach, are vital pieces of information and are all accurate. However, they do not make much sense to Rorschach or Moloch.



Chapter 2 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason

Chapter 2 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason Summary

Chapter 2 concludes with a few more pages, which are presented as extracts from Hollis Mason's tell-all autobiography. Hollis describes how he became the original Night Owl in 1939. Several other costumed heroes quickly appeared on the scene including The Silhouette, The Comedian, Captain Metropolis, Silk Spectre, Dollar Bill, and Mothman. These costumed heroes then founded the Minutemen in 1939. Around 1946, Dollar Bill was shot and killed during a bank robbery. Also in 1946, The Silhouette was publicly revealed to be a lesbian, and she was then expelled from the Minutemen.

Hollis describes how Silk Spectre entered the costumed hero business primarily as a method of self-promotion. She had an agent named Laurence Shexnayder, who successfully promoted her career. Shexnayder subsequently promoted the Minutemen and backed the expulsion of The Silhouette. For a brief period Silk Spectre and Hooded Justice were a couple, but Silk Spectre subsequently married Shexnayder in 1947, conducted an affair with the Comedian about 1948, delivered her daughter Laurie Juspezyk in 1949, and was divorced in 1956.

Chapter 2 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason Analysis

Chapter 2 concludes with a few pages, which are presented as extracts from Hollis Mason's tell-all autobiography. Hollis describes his personal history and involvement with the Minutemen. Hollis remains, however, a minor character in the graphic novel and thus his autobiography is primarily interesting for the information it provides about other more dominant characters and developmental events in the novel's timeline. Additional chapters of Hollis' autobiography appear at the ends of Chapters 1 and 3.



Chapter 3 The Judge of All the Earth

Chapter 3 The Judge of All the Earth Summary

Bernhard the newsman talks aloud to anybody and nobody in particular. His curbside newspaper and magazine sales stand is in front of an imposing building, which houses the Institute for Interspatial Studies. He rambles on about how the world is going wrong and about how the United States of America should simply nuke the Russians. Richard Nixon is still, surprisingly, the president, serving in his sixteenth year in that office. A haggard-looking vagrant talks to Bernhard and purchases a copy of the *New Frontiersman*, an ultra-right-wing newspaper of yellow journalism.

Elsewhere, Laurie and Jon are having sex, when Laurie suddenly realizes that Jon is present twice. He is able to appear in multiple places, simultaneously. She gets upset and realizes that he is also still conducting scientific research in the laboratory. The two characters fight. Laurie then walks out on Jon and goes to Dan's house. Dan greets her with awkward enthusiasm - he obviously finds her very attractive. The Gordian Knot Company is replacing Dan's locks, damaged by Rorschach's last visit.

After a brief chat, Dan and Laurie go for a walk. They walk through a seedy part of town and are surrounded by a gang of muggers. A fight ensues and Dan and Laurie are easily triumphant. They both enjoy themselves and laugh about the fight. Laurie then goes to a hotel and Dan goes off for a visit with Hollis Mason.

Meanwhile Janey Slater, Jon's original girlfriend from 1959 through 1966, is giving an interview to *Nova Express*. *Nova Express*, an ultra-left-wing newspaper of yellow journalism, is preparing an exposy story about Dr. Manhattan. Janey is embittered and complains about Jon and his 'new' young girlfriend Laurie. Janey, a habitual smoker, also discloses that she has been diagnosed with cancer.

Later that day Dr. Manhattan does a television interview. During an open question-and-answer Doug Roth, of *Nova Express*, reads a list of Dr. Manhattan's previous acquaintances and notes they have all been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The list includes Edgar Jacobi, Janey Slater, and others. Roth blatantly insinuates that Dr. Manhattan himself has somehow caused the cancer. The crowd of reports erupts in questions, Dr. Manhattan is visibly disturbed, and the situation begins to escalate until Dr. Manhattan teleports all of the reporters away. He teleports to Arizona, where he retrieves an old photograph of himself and Janey Slater. He then teleports to Mars.

The next morning Laurie returns to the government facility where she has lived with Jon. She is told Jon has left earth, and she is basically forcibly evicted from the facility. She packs a few things and leaves. Across town, Rorschach pays another surprise visit to Dan and informs him of Dr. Manhattan's disappearance.



Meanwhile President Richard Nixon sits with his war advisors and runs nuclear attack simulations. He is contemplating the advisability of a surprise first strike against Russia. Without Dr. Manhattan's super-powers, the strategic simulation looks particularly grim for most of the United States of America. Nixon is informed that the Russian invasion of Afghanistan is proceeding.

Chapter 3 The Judge of All the Earth Analysis

Chapter 3 takes place on October 19 and 20, 1985, and introduces the comic-within-the-comic named *Tales of the Black Freighter*. The comic tells the story of a sailor, who is pursued by a cursed pirate ship. He is driven ashore on a deserted island where all of his shipmates perish. The ghastly pirates aboard the Black Freighter invite him to join their cause of plunder and mayhem. When he declines the offer, they set sail for his distant homeland to bring ruin upon his family. The Black Freighter story parallels the main story and intersects with it at points, and is an interesting literary element of the graphic novel.

Bernhard the newsman is an interesting character that appears repeatedly throughout the graphic novel, while remaining a fairly minor character. He is only tangentially involved in plot development but does serve to add texture to the graphic novel. He reads but fails to fully understand a great deal of news, which, he feels, makes him particularly prescient about current events. His role in the graphic novel is to supply the street-level conglomerate opinion of New York citizens. His newspaper sales stand is located directly in front of the Institute for Interspatial Studies. It's a humorous coincidence that will become significant in the final chapters of the graphic novel, unfortunately for Bernhard. Bernhard spends a great deal of time in the company of a young black man, who is also named Bernhard, or Bernie. Bernie 'looks through' several issues of *Tales of the Black Freighter* comic books without purchasing them because, as he says, the story does not have an ending. Bernie's reading of the comic book is presented intermingled with the main story line, set apart by being contained in a 'manuscript' type text balloon.



Chapter 3 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason

Chapter 3 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason Summary

Chapter 3 concludes with a few more pages, which are presented as extracts from Hollis Mason's tell-all autobiography. Hollis describes how nearly all costumed heroes were forced to testify before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee during the 1950s. The Comedian, alone, became ever more famous after the testimonies. Mothman had trouble because of some acquaintances and, after he was finally cleared, began to drink heavily and descended into alcoholism. Hooded Justice, alone, refused to testify and simply removed his costume and vanished for good.

After the 1950s, costumed villains dwindled in supply, most turned to more mundane but more profitable criminal activities. Without the costumed villains to fight, the costumed heroes gradually vanished from the front pages of newspapers. In 1958, however, Ozymandias performed his first vigilante arrests. In 1960, Dr. Manhattan was publicly announced to the world. Finally, in 1962, Hollis Mason, the original Night Owl, retired from crime fighting and revealed his secret identity. Shortly thereafter, he was contacted by another crime fighter who wanted to carry on the Night Owl tradition, a request, which Hollis quickly granted. Finally, Hollis writes his autobiography, which is here presented.

Chapter 3 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason Analysis

Chapter 3 concludes with a few pages that are presented as the final extracts from Hollis Mason's tell-all autobiography. Hollis describes his personal history and involvement with the Minutemen. Hollis remains, however, a minor character in the graphic novel and thus his autobiography is primarily interesting for the information it provides about other more dominant characters and developmental events in the novel's timeline. Additional chapters of Hollis' autobiography appear at the ends of Chapters 1 and 2.



Chapter 4 Watchmaker

Chapter 4 Watchmaker Summary

Chapter 4 takes place on the surface of the planet Mars and involves Jon as he reminisces about his life. The chapter's chronology is particularly complex as Jon's existence transcends time in the conventional notion - he lives simultaneously, more or less, in the past, future, and present. He therefore seems to inherently know what is going to happen, although his clarity of vision is sometimes distorted by certain types of sub-atomic events. In this, summary events are presented in a generally chronological order, even though Jon certainly does not remember them in the order given.

In 1945, Jon is learning how to be a watchmaker, like his father. He has taken his father's pocket watch apart and is reassembling it, when his father comes home and announces the startling news of the first atomic detonation at Hiroshima. His father concludes that watchmakers are now anachronistic artifacts of history, and he gathers the disassembled pieces of his own watch from the table and flings them out of the window. He tells Jon that he must focus his attention henceforth on a profession worthy of the future.

From 1948 to 1958, Jon attends Princeton University where he obtains a Ph.D. in atomic physics. In 1959, he obtains a job at Gila Flats, Arizona, where he performs advanced physics research for some type of governmental organization. He meets a few new friends and then meets Janey Slater, another Gila Flats employee, and they begin to date and then have sex and become a couple. In late 1959, Janey's watch is broken on a date with Jon, and he sets about repairing it. After he fixes the watch, he mistakenly leaves it in the physics laboratory and meets Janey for dinner. He then returns to the lab to obtain the watch and is involved in a freak accident which disintegrates his body by removing his so-called intrinsic field. A sham funeral is held for him, as there are no remains. Months later, however, strange apparitions begin to be seen around Gila Flats and eventually Jon reappears, now blue in color and bald. He explains that he has painstakingly reassembled himself from sub-atomic particles. Jon resumes his relationship with Janey although she is somewhat troubled by his strange transformation.

In 1961, Jon meets President John F. Kennedy. By this time, he has helped to invent electric cars and cost-effective lighter-than-air craft. He is also able to synthesize vast amounts of rare elements for use in industry, and he has become the lynchpin of the United States of America's nuclear strategic defense program due to his ability to vaporize incoming nuclear warheads before they detonate. He exists partially outside of conventional time, being able to see the past, future, and present simultaneously. In 1966, he and Janey Slater attend Captain Metropolis' meeting to discuss forming a new group of costumed heroes. Jon sees Laurie at the meeting and is attracted to the 17 year-old girl's good looks. Within a few months, he has dropped Janey Slater to pursue a relationship with Laurie.



In 1971, Jon, at the request of President Richard Nixon, intervenes in the Viet Nam war. He meets the Comedian in Viet Nam. Jon, using his super-powers, quickly wins unconditional victory in the Viet Nam war. Jon remembers how, in 1975, Ozymandias retired just a few years prior to widespread anti-costumed-hero rioting led to the passage of the 1977 Keene Act, making vigilantism illegal. Later the Comedian rescues the Iranian hostages and Jon, as Dr. Manhattan, and the Comedian are nearly the only active costumed heroes, still legal, because they are under the nominal control of the government. Only Rorschach continues to fight crime, though he does so illegally.

Jon's contemplation comes to an end, and he walks the surface of Mars stirring up red dust clouds. He then uses his super-powers to fashion a gigantic clock-mechanism-like construct out of the red Martian silica sands. Jon's huge clockwork is adorned by enormous gears and intricate spires.

Chapter 4 Watchmaker Analysis

Chapter 4 takes place on October 20, 1985. The chapter's chronological construction is particularly interesting as events separated sometimes by years are presented as happening simultaneously within a single illustrated panel. Thus, the graphic novel's complex and intricate timeline is presented in even more complicated and disparate fragments than usual.

The chapter presents a prolonged series of Jon's memories. Many of the detail panels are primarily reddish-pink in color, excepting Dr. Manhattan's light blue body, and the visual impact is notable. Jon's clockwork mechanism is reminiscent of his early boyhood days studying to be a watchmaker. In later chapters, the mechanism is used as a transportation device. At the time that Jon and Laurie's relationship begins, she is 17, and he is in his mid 30s. However, of course, he no longer ages. Laurie's costume is little more than lingerie while Jon, throughout the graphic novel, wears smaller and smaller costumes as the years go by until, by the 1980s, he is normally entirely nude.



Chapter 4 Dr. Manhattan: Super-Powers and the Superpowers

Chapter 4 Dr. Manhattan: Super-Powers and the Superpowers Summary

Chapter 4 concludes with a brief essay by Professor Milton Glass. Professor Glass discusses the nature of Dr. Manhattan and concludes, "*God* exists, and he's American" (p. 11), referring to Dr. Manhattan as 'God' because of his god-like super-powers. Professor Glass then goes on to speculate on Dr. Manhattan's impact on the cold war between the United States of America and Russia. He concludes that Dr. Manhattan provides an enormous advantage to the United States of America, but that the advantage is not absolute. Professor Glass concludes that Russia, if threatened, would use nuclear weapons against the United States of America.

Chapter 4 Dr. Manhattan: Super-Powers and the Superpowers Analysis

Professor Milton Glass was, like Jon, employed at Gila Flats, Arizona, where he was a senior researcher. His basic premise is that Dr. Manhattan is essentially 'God' because of an unpredictable and unrepeatable laboratory accident. He also concludes that Russia will be kept in check by Dr. Manhattan only so long as Russia is able to maintain its own sovereignty. The essay serves within the graphic novel to further heighten the perceived threat of nuclear war that looms over the fictional world.



Chapter 5 Fearful Symmetry

Chapter 5 Fearful Symmetry Summary

Rorschach returns to Moloch's apartment and forcefully interrogates him again, but concludes that in actuality Moloch knows nothing. Rorschach tells Moloch that, should Moloch learn anything of note, he can be contacted by leaving a note in a particular city trashcan. Elsewhere detectives Fine and Bourquin investigate a brutal murder/suicide involving a man, who slaughtered his family because of anxiety about an impending war with Russia. In yet another location, Dan and Laurie meet for dinner.

Meanwhile, out on the street, Bernhard the newsman drones on endlessly, while Bernie reads *Tales of the Black Freighter*. The protagonist in the comic-within-the-comic is determined to reach him home before the Black Freighter so that he can protect his wife and children from their piratical designs. He is stranded on an island, however, and has very few options. In order to escape he fashions a gruesome raft by lashing together the deliquescent and bloated bodies of his dead friends and sets out to sea standing astride of his corpse-raft. As one would expect, he is then set upon by sharks, which begin to devour his raft. He is fortunately able to fatally wound one particularly large and hideous shark, which he then lashes to his raft, replenishing its size. He eats handfuls of raw shark meat.

Simultaneously, Adrian Veidt proceeds to a business meeting. As he walks through his building's capacious lobby, an assassin shoots Veidt's personal secretary, killing her, and then turns the pistol toward Veidt. Veidt reacts with lightning speed, knocking the gun away and delivering devastating blows to the assassin. The assassin falls to the floor and Veidt plunges his hand into the assassin's mouth apparently trying to prevent the assassin from crushing a poison capsule between his teeth. Veidt announces he has been unable to prevent the assassin's suicide and the assassin dies as the police appear on the scene.

The next day Rorschach receives a note apparently written by Moloch. The note says that Moloch has valuable information. Rorschach proceeds to Moloch's apartment but discovers that Moloch is dead - he has been shot between the eyes and the revolver lies on the floor. Rorschach then hears the police demanding his surrender, and realizes that he has been set up for arrest. Rorschach fights vigorously, wounding two SWAT police, but is eventually captured and placed under arrest. His eerie mask is stripped away to reveal his secret identity. Rorschach is the haggard-looking vagrant, who wanders the city carrying a sign declaring the end of the world to be at hand.

Chapter 5 Fearful Symmetry Analysis

The protagonist in the Black Freighter sub-story is linked to Rorschach by several graphic elements throughout the graphic novel, but particularly in Chapter 5. Both



characters contrast their real face to their perceived face, both characters frequently are illustrated holding a pole. The protagonist clings to his raft's mast, while Rorschach carries his 'end of the world' sign (for example, see Chapter 4, p. 17.) The sail on the raft is marked with a large bloodstain, and Rorschach spends much of the graphic novel wearing a similarly stained trench coat. Finally, the protagonist kills a shark and eats raw shark flesh, and Moloch is referred to as "raw shark" (Chapter 4 p. 22.) Rorschach is subsequently arrested for Moloch's death. Rorschach's frame-up and subsequent arrest is a critical plot twist. The chapter title, 'Fearful Symmetry,' refers to Rorschach's ever-changing 'ink-blot' facemask, which is always symmetrical and fear inspiring.

Veidt's encounter with the assassin requires close reading. It becomes evident in later chapters that the poison capsule was actually introduced by Veidt, who then claimed to have been trying to prevent the assassin's death. The expression on the assassin's face as Veidt sticks his hand down the assassin's throat is sufficient to alert a careful reader that not all is as it appears. Chapter 5 takes place on October 21, 1985.

Chapter 5 Treasure Island Treasury of Comics

Chapter 5 Treasure Island Treasury of Comics Summary

Chapter 5 concludes with a few pages of extracts from a book entitled *Treasure Island Treasury of Comics*. The article describes the strangely appeal of pirate comics in general and focuses on the unanticipated success of *Tales of the Black Freighter*. The title is notorious for its horrific scenes of piratical brutality and excesses. The comic was written by Max Shea and illustrated by two artists. Some full-size black-and-white artwork is also presented as putative samples from the original comic.

Chapter 5 Treasure Island Treasury of Comics Analysis

The extracts presented are interesting and humorous but are not particularly significant to the graphic novel's overall development, except the comment that Max Shea recently has disappeared amidst strange circumstances.



Chapter 6 The Abyss Gazes Also

Chapter 6 The Abyss Gazes Also Summary

Criminal Psychiatrist Malcolm Long interviews Rorschach at the prison facility. Dr. Long uses Rorschach inkblots to elicit responses from Rorschach. Rorschach sees violent images but responds with nice things. For example, he sees a dog with its head split apart but he replies that he sees pretty butterflies. Dr. Long tells Rorschach that he is trying to help, and needs cooperation. Rorschach replies that Dr. Long is just trying to get famous. Their discussion continues for a few minutes and as Dr. Long pops a handful of pills, Rorschach remembers his early life.

Rorschach was born, 1940, as Walter Joseph Kovacs to Sylvia Joanna Kovacs nee Glick, father unknown. Sylvia was a physically and emotionally abusive mother, who earned money-turning tricks, often in front of Walter. In 1951, age 11, Walter was involved in a street fight, when two much older and larger boys taunted him about his mother. He handily won the fight but partially blinded one of the older boys by stabbing a lit cigarette into his eye. The subsequent state investigation resulted in Walter being placed in child protective state services. Walter then excelled in school and enjoyed his time in protective services. After several years, he worked in a laundry where he obtained an unusual but discarded dress composed of a viscous fluid held between two layers of transparent latex. The fluid was sensitive to pressure and heat and when worn on the body constantly made various blotchy patterns. Rorschach took the dress home and made his Rorschach inkblot facemask from the material.

Dr. Long's interview concludes. Later that day Rorschach stands in line in the prison cafeteria. Another prison approaches from behind with a knife. Rorschach grabs a bin full of boiling fat and oil and throws it directly into the face of his assailant. Meanwhile, Dr. Long returns home, studies Rorschach's case file, and ignores his wife.

The next day Dr. Long again interviews Rorschach. This time Rorschach truthfully tells Dr. Long what he wants to hear. After becoming a costumed hero, Rorschach pursued a kidnapper in 1975. He tracked Blair Roche, a six-year-old girl, to a building surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by two vicious dogs. He discovered Blair had been murdered and, literally, butchered and fed to the dogs. He killed the dogs with a meat cleaver and waited for Gerald Grice, the kidnapper, to return. When Grice returned Rorschach beat him, chained him to the building, doused him in gasoline, and burned him to death. Dr. Long is visibly disturbed as Rorschach is led away back to his prison cell.

That evening Dr. Long and his wife host a dinner party with some friends. When one of the guests asks Dr. Long about work, Dr. Long responds by telling the story of Blair Roche's rape and murder, which predictably causes a scene. The guests soon depart and Dr. Long's wife is outraged at his behavior.



Chapter 6 The Abyss Gazes Also Analysis

Chapter 6 takes place on October 25 through 28, 1985, and is particularly interesting as it focuses on the life story of Rorschach, one of the principle characters in the graphic novel and, strangely, one of the most likable and sympathetic characters presented. The 1975 Blair Roche case was a major turning point in Rorschach's life. Before the case, he personally identified himself as Walter Kovacs, who assumed the costumed hero identity of Rorschach. After the case, he became Rorschach. The 1975 case was identified as the source of Rorschach's mental condition by the Comedian in Chapter 2, and the Night Owl appears to agree with that diagnosis. It is also interesting to note that in all flashback scenes prior to 1975 Rorschach speaks in a 'normal' voice, identified by a normal text bubble. After 1975, however, he speaks in a 'creepy monotone' voice, identified by a distinctive text bubble. Laurie, in 1985, comments that Rorschach's voice is monotone and creepy, and even his vocabulary and diction change after the 1975 kidnapping. The characterization and development of Rorschach is one of the most enjoyable and strongest fictional elements of the graphic novel.

Chapter 6 Arrest Report and Miscellany

Chapter 6 Arrest Report and Miscellany Summary

Chapter 6 concludes with Walter Kovacs' arrest report, a Kovacs psychiatric report from the New York Psychiatric Hospital, two early writings of Kovacs, an early drawing of Kovacs, and a memo from Dr. Long. Taken in context of the earlier graphic portion of Chapter 6, the miscellaneous documents complete the characterization of Rorschach.

The arrest report states Walter Joseph Kovacs was born March 1940, giving him a current age of 45. He is charged with the murders of Edgar Jacobi, Gerald Grice, and Harvey Furniss, and denies the murder of Jacobi. It also summarizes the arrest action and then lists a variety of minor objects in Kovacs' pockets, including a notebook with writing too cramped and eccentric to be legible.

The early writings of Kovacs are interesting but not particularly important to the graphic novel's development. The picture drawn by Kovacs as a child is a crude ink line drawing that shows a man and a woman having sex while their bodies merge into one. The memo from Dr. Long is an inter-office memo accepting the Kovacs case and expressing excitement and confidence.

Chapter 6 Arrest Report and Miscellany Analysis

The notebook taken from Rorschach, when he is arrested, is not his journal. Although the materials presented are interesting and help complete the characterization and motivation of Rorschach, they are not particularly significant in the graphic novel's overall development.



Chapter 7 A Brother to Dragons

Chapter 7 A Brother to Dragons Summary

Dan and Laurie spend some time at Dan's house. Laurie wanders around and looks at Dan's impressive array of equipment and inventions. She boards Dan's flight ship, named *Archie*, and inspects the interior. She then tries to light a cigarette and mistakes the flamethrower button for a cigarette lighter, starting a fire inside the hangar, which Dan quickly extinguishes. The two characters talk about Rorschach's mask-killer theory and then discuss their respective past lives. Laurie talks about Jon and discloses that recent medical scans have demonstrated she does not have cancer. On Dan's insistence, Laurie decides to stay at his house instead of staying in a hotel.

Later that evening Dan and Laurie watch the television news. The news shows a rapid series of events. Russia has invaded Afghanistan, and armed Russian forces are heading toward Pakistan. The search for missing author, Max Shea, has been called off. The Institute for Extraspatial Studies announces the discovery of extra-dimensional energy sources, and Ozymandias is performing a charity appearance. As the news program continues, Dan and Laurie snuggle, kiss, and then have lackluster sex.

Later that night Dan awakes from a nightmare. He wanders aimlessly through his extensive house and ends up in a secret area, looking at his old Night Owl costume. He dons the costume and is joined by Laurie, who also suits up. They climb into the owl ship *Archie*, and fly out into the city at night. They stumble upon a tenement fire that has trapped numerous poor people on an upper floor. Dan maneuvers the ship into position and extends a ramp while Laurie helps evacuate the people from the burning building. They then drop off the rescued people in a safe location and fly far over the city where they again have sex - this time it is fantastic for both of them.

Chapter 7 A Brother to Dragons Analysis

The date of the events described in Chapter 7 is not firmly established within the graphic novel's primary timeline, however they are bracketed by other events which place them between October 25 and 31, 1985. It is humorous to see the news show footage of the Institute for Extraspatial Studies. The news image shows a building exactly like that of the Institute for Interspatial Studies, except for the difference in the signage.

Chapter 7 focuses on the development of Dan and Laurie as characters. Dan, middle-aged and getting somewhat heavy, clearly misses his days of excitement as a costumed adventurer. Laurie is somewhat more ambivalent about her previous adventures, but senses that Dan's current life is one of tedium and boredom. After the two characters have a lackluster sexual encounter, Laurie encourages Dan to put on his costume and joins him, realizing it will be good for his spirit. Another funny aspect of Dan's character

is revealed during the rescue of the tenants. *Archie* is equipped with a coffee maker, and as he flies the tenants to safety he has Laurie serve them coffee as a courtesy.



Chapter 7 Blood from the Shoulder of Pallas

Chapter 7 Blood from the Shoulder of Pallas Summary

Chapter 7 concludes with a reprint from the Journal of the American Ornithological Society. The paper, by Dan Dreiberg, suggests that scientists, including Dan, often miss the mystery and beauty of life because of their rigorous approach to the scientific method. Dan suggests that instead of considering birds as simply organisms to be dissected, catalogued, and understood, they should be enjoyed as beautiful miracles. He also comments that the Owl's screech is not intended to disorient prey, but to paralyze it with fear and pin it to the ground.

Chapter 7 Blood from the Shoulder of Pallas Analysis

Dan's paper serves to further develop his character and serves as a metaphor for Rorschach's arrest report and miscellaneous writings found at the end of Chapter 6. The characterization and development of Dan is an enjoyable and strong fictional element within the graphic novel, although the paper reprinted does not otherwise influence the graphic novel's development.



Chapter 8 Old Ghosts

Chapter 8 Old Ghosts Summary

It is October 31, 1985, Halloween. Bernhard the newsman speculates on current events while Bernie continues to read *Tales of the Black Freighter*. In the comic-within-the-comic, the abandoned sailor continues his solitary voyage while he imagines the Black Freighter reaching his hometown, and imagines the rape and murder of his wife and family at the hands of the evil pirates. He finally resigns himself to suicide and steps off the decomposing raft. Instead of sinking into the sea, however, he appears to walk along its surface - he discovers he has finally reached his homeland. Meanwhile, inside prison, a composed Rorschach is being verbally threatened by several other inmates.

Elsewhere Dan and Laurie are happy and joking in Dan's apartment. While Laurie takes a shower, Dan answers the door to discover detective Fine. The policeman walks through Dan's house and notes that Dan was at Blake's funeral. Fine suggests that Dan is a costumed hero, but Dan shrugs off the suggestion and claims ignorance of any costumed hero activity. Fine remarks on the earlier rescue performed by Night Owl and Laurie, and then leaves with his suspicions about Dan seemingly confirmed. Dan becomes determined to rescue Rorschach - to spring him from prison. He enlists the support of Laurie and the two characters set about planning their rescue mission. Meanwhile on an isolated island far away Max Shea and Hira Manish talk about a recent project they are working on. Manish has drawn a huge alien-looking monster which is lying on the beach covered in tarpaulins. The two characters comment on each other's ability to create horrific tales and artwork.

Elsewhere riots have erupted within the prison holding Rorschach. A gang of criminals uses an electric welder to open the door to Rorschach's cell, intending to murder him. He easily turns the tables on the criminals and soon they either are dead or have run away. Dan and Laurie meanwhile use *Archie* to enter the prison compound and begin to search the chaotic prison block for Rorschach. They meet Rorschach outside of a hallway bathroom. Rorschach has followed a prisoner, who attempted his murder to the bathroom though Dan and Laurie are unaware the bathroom already has an occupant. Rorschach says he needs to use the bathroom before being rescued. While Dan and Laurie wait impatiently, Rorschach enters the bathroom and exacts his revenge. In the hallway, Laurie comments on the unpleasant noise Rorschach makes in the restroom. The three characters then board *Archie* and return to Dan's apartment. Dan realizes the police will soon be back and the characters begin to hastily pack, intending to permanently abandon Dan's home and identity. Suddenly Jon appears and speaks to Laurie. To Dan's dismay, Laurie agrees to go with Jon, and he teleports them both away.



Chapter 8 Old Ghosts Analysis

Chapter 8 shows Rorschach at his best - in prison with hardened criminals where instead of being locked up with them, they are locked up with him. Although trapped in his cell and outnumbered, he quickly manages to not only escape the situation but deliver death to his assailants. He does it with nonchalant style and sarcastic humor.

Dan has also once again contacted his inner costumed hero and, as Night Owl, he determines to give up his existence as Dan Dreiberg and rescue Rorschach. Laurie agrees to accompany him. The rescue mission goes without a hitch and Rorschach's 'use' of the restroom provides a darkly humorous twist. Chapter 8 also begins the day of October 31, 1985, which contains most of the remaining events described in the graphic novel. All of Chapter 9 and much of Chapter 10 also happen on Halloween. The Halloween costumes of some children in the city nicely complement the costumed heroes.



Chapter 8 October 31st 1985 Issue of *New Frontiersman*

Chapter 8 October 31st 1985 Issue of New Frontiersman Summary

Chapter 8 concludes with a few pages taken from the October 31, 1985, issue of *New Frontiersman*. The leading article, by editor Hector Godfrey, is an ultra-right-wing, anticommunist rant promoting costumed heroes as true Americans and patriots. The secondary story notes the alarming number of persons of note, who have simply disappeared without a trace, such as Max Shea. The column calls on the authorities to immediately investigate the disappearances, and ends with the note that recently the noted psychic and clairvoyant Robert Deschaines' head has been stolen from his corpse immediately following his recent death.

Chapter 8 October 31st 1985 Issue of New Frontiersman Analysis

The leading article includes headshot photographs of Rorschach, the Comedian, and Night Owl, and the text is stereotypical of the ultra-conservative *ad hominem* attack tactics used by such extremist papers. The secondary story actually contains the important information. Max Shea has disappeared along with a substantial number of other authors, musicians, and artists. The column suggests some type of monstrous conspiracy is responsible and points to Deschaines' stolen head as particularly telling. These events are, in fact, relevant to the graphic novel's further development and suggest that Rorschach is perhaps right to regularly peruse *New Frontiersman* for useful, if bizarre and biased, information.



Chapter 9 The Darkness of Mere Being

Chapter 9 The Darkness of Mere Being Summary

Chapter 9 begins with a brief recounting of the final events portrayed in Chapter 8 - Jon appears in Dan's apartment and takes Laurie on a teleportation voyage to Mars. Laurie takes along a few small belongings, including a bottle of her mother's perfume. On Mars, Jon walks with Laurie toward the giant clockwork mechanism he constructed in Chapter 4. Jon tells Laurie that, for him, time is largely meaningless. He does not experience space and time like she does. Laurie seems unable to fully comprehend what Jon is trying to explain.

Laurie reminisces about her early childhood. She remembers Sally and Laurence having an angry fight about Sally's affair with the Comedian. Although Sally does not name the Comedian, she does yell that at least he knew how to be gentle with a woman. Laurie remembers sneaking past her fighting parents and playing with a snowstorm glass ball. The falling flakes, moving so slowly, made Laurie think that time was slowing down.

Laurie and Jon enter the clockwork mechanism and it flies into the air and travels around Mars. Jon tells Laurie the world is about to end, and he has decided not to intervene, because he no longer cares about the world or humanity. Jon shows Laurie many of the geographical wonders of Mars as she argues with conviction but without success that the world is worth saving. Their discussion is interspersed with Laurie's memory of earlier life.

She remembers her mother having a luncheon with the original Night Owl and Captain Metropolis, long after they are all retired. She remembers meeting the Comedian for the first time at the abortive 1966 Crimebusters organization meeting. The Comedian waited for her outside and engaged her with small talk, telling her how beautiful she was and commenting on her last name. Sally arrived and angrily intervened, immediately stopping the conversation and driving Laurie home. On the way home, she burst into tears and told Laurie about the Comedian's rape attempt. Laurie remembers attending a 1973 banquet and again meeting the Comedian. At the banquet, she publicly insulted him and threw her drink into his face.

Throughout Laurie's memories, she continues to urge Jon to intervene and save the earth from the destruction he has predicted, but he is not convinced. The clockwork mechanism lands as Laurie eventually gives up trying to persuade Jon, at which point Jon suggests that Laurie, visibly disturbed, is deliberately suppressing a realization. Laurie tries to deny it, but suddenly she realizes that she knows the Comedian is her biological father. Enraged, she flings a bottle of her mother's perfume and it smashes against the side of the clockwork mechanism which, itself, then fractures into countless pieces and shatters into a pile of pink shards.



Jon then announces that he has decided he will save earth - that Laurie's individual beautiful and complex existence justifies humanity and entices him to intervene to insure its continued survival. Laurie is worth saving.

Chapter 9 The Darkness of Mere Being Analysis

Chapter 9 takes place on October 31, 1985 - Halloween - and contains two events which are central to the graphic novel. First, Laurie realizes that she is the daughter of the Comedian, a man she has hated her entire life. Although this revelation is startling, it does not significantly influence the plot development of the remainder of the novel. The scenes presented are some of the strongest in the graphic novel - the shattering of Jon's monumental clockwork mechanism is particularly well executed.

The second event is understated but critical to the graphic novel's conclusion - Jon decides to intervene in humanity's affairs and save the earth. His decision seems, at this point, monumental, and the reader imagines a colossal manifestation of Dr. Manhattan entering combat, similar to the combat scenes from the Viet Nam war presented in Chapter 3. Jon, however, has progressed far beyond this brute force approach and his eventual intervention to save humanity is far more subtle and horrific.

The best interpretation of Jon's reversal of course is unintentionally provided by Dan Dreiberg in his paper *Blood from the Shoulder of Pallas*, reproduced at the end of Chapter 7. Jon the scientist sees nothing fundamentally interesting about the mechanics of humanity and has removed himself from the study of the earth. However, Jon the person sees in Laurie a complex and incredible individual, whose existence defies the cool and abstracted logic of science. Therefore, it demands preservation.

Chapter 9 Miscellaneous Documents

Chapter 9 Miscellaneous Documents Summary

Chapter 9 concludes with a few pages of miscellaneous documents which appear to be pages of Sally Jupiter's personal scrapbook. The documents include clipped newspaper columns, hand-written notes, a few letters about Sally, and a page from an interview with Sally. The interviewer asks Sally if the rape allegations contained in Hollis Mason's then-recently-published *Under the Hood* are factual. Sally corroborates Hollis' version of events. The interviewer then asks Sally how she responded to the rape attempt. Sally vacillates and even goes so far as to claim partial responsibility, concluding that she holds no grudges.

Chapter 9 Miscellaneous Documents Analysis

The pages from Sally's scrapbook wind up the graphic novel's development of an entire generation of costumed heroes known as the Minutemen. Further chapters deal nearly exclusively with the sequence of events which will lead, shortly, to the cataclysmic events predicted by Jon and there is no further development of the costumed heroes, who made up the Minutemen. Sally's ambivalent attitude toward the Comedian's 1940 rape attempt is an interesting sub-text within the graphic novel. The Comedian, deliberately amoral and generally deliberately brutal, somehow enthralled the world-wise and jaded Sally Jupiter. Despite his attempted rape in 1948, she conducted an extra-marital affair with the Comedian and later commented on his uncharacteristic gentleness as a lover. The affair resulted in her pregnancy with Laurie, however by 1966, Sally is apparently distrustful, once again, of the Comedian. It is interesting to contrast the Comedian's restrained treatment of Sally and Laurie with his later actions of brutally murdering a future pregnant lover in Chapter 2.



Chapter 10 Two Riders Were Approaching...

Chapter 10 Two Riders Were Approaching... Summary

Chapter 10 opens with President Richard Nixon traveling to NORAD, which is at alert level DEFCON 2. After his arrival, the staff runs nuclear simulations and readies a nuclear first-strike action against Russia. Nixon whines that he doesn't want to make the big decisions as the staff tells him that a huge section of the United States of America will probably be destroyed even if he launches a surprise first strike.

Meanwhile, Veidt leaves New York City and travels to his Antarctic retreat while on the streets two Jehovah's Witnesses try to talk Bernhard the newsman into buying copies of *The Watchtower*. Bernie reads more of *Tales of the Black Freighter*. The marooned man has finally returned home and sits listlessly on the beach, knowing he has arrived too late to save his wife and children from the pirates' attack. While he sits a fop from the town and a woman of ill repute ride horses to the beach and dismount to cavort. He realizes the fop must be a traitor, who has sold out the town to the pirates. In a rage, he attacks the traitor, murdering him, and strangling the whore. He then determines to extract his revenge on the pirates that he feels must still be in the town. He dresses as the fop and straps the woman's dead body onto her skittish horse, deciding that the ruse will allow him to ride past any pirate sentries that may be watching. He then sets out for home next to his dead companion.

Meanwhile Rorschach and Night Owl, in Archie, hide out until night and then return to Rorschach's apartment. Rorschach retrieves his costume and his journal, in which he has recorded his mask-killer theory and all related facts. Rorschach and Night Owl then return to hiding where they briefly argue before Rorschach, uncharacteristically, offers Night Owl his hand and an apology. Sometime later, they again emerge from hiding and begin an aggressive questioning of various shady underworld characters. Within a few minutes, Rorschach has located a petty criminal who provides the vital information that the attempted assassination on Veidt was organized and paid for by a company known as Pyramid Industries. While Rorschach is interrogating the criminal, Night Owl learns that his friend and mentor, Hollis Mason, was murdered only hours earlier. A gang of drug-addled Nazi punks, inflamed by anti-costumed-hero rhetoric in the media, kicked in his door and beat him to death. Night Owl is stunned and disoriented by the horrible news.

Elsewhere Dan Shea, Hira Manish, Linette Paley, and other writers, artists, and musicians are boarding a ship docked at an isolated island. Their work on some vaguely referenced Hollywood project has been completed and they are finally going home. Shea is happy that the atmosphere of absolute secrecy is about to vanish, and he anticipates a huge paycheck in his immediate future. Shea and Manish sneak into the



ship's hold where they begin to kiss, as suddenly the entire ship explodes in a fireball, killing everyone aboard.

Meanwhile Rorschach and Night Owl have proceeded to Veidt industries to inform Veidt that they have discovered information about the earlier attempt on his life. They arrive to find Veidt has already gone. Night Owl deduces that Veidt must be at his Antarctic retreat and then, as Rorschach prowls around the office, Night Owl logs on to Veidt's computer system using the password Ramses ii. Night Owl reads the computer display and, within moments, realizes that Veidt controls Pyramid Industries. Rorschach and Night Owl now suspect that Veidt has masterminded the series of events leading to the present paradigm, including Blake's murder, Jon's estrangement, Rorschach's frame-up, and even Veidt's own apparent assassination attempt. Rorschach quickly updates his journal with the startling news and then drops it into a mailbox, addressed to the only place he feels he can trust.

Rorschach and Night Owl then board *Archie* and travel to the Antarctica, where they plan to try to ambush Veidt and learn what he is really involved with. Rorschach muses that Veidt is probably too smart, fast, and powerful to be defeated. In fact, as Rorschach and Night Owl try to sneak up on Veidt's Antarctic fortress, Veidt sits inside and watches their approach being televised from hidden cameras. Elsewhere, Rorschach's journal is delivered to the offices of *New Frontiersman* where it is immediately discarded into the so-called 'crank file' which is slated for disposal.

Chapter 10 Two Riders Were Approaching... Analysis

Chapter 10 begins on October 31, 1985, and ends on November 1. The chapter is a major transitional chapter in the graphic novel's plot development. The primary characters have uncovered a major plot hatched by one of their own, although they are not yet aware of the exact nature of the plot. They have left behind their previous lives and have traveled to the land of their newly realized enemy to try to prevent him from completing his evil designs. Nearly all of the graphic novel's numerous sub-plots have been concluded by Chapter 10, and the remaining chapters deal nearly exclusively with Veidt's plot. Night Owl figures out Veidt's password by realizing that Ramses ii was the Egyptian name for Ozymandias.

The artwork in Chapter 10, especially that of the vast Antarctic waste, is extremely well executed. The white expanse of Antarctica is oddly reminiscent of the pink expanse of Mars, while the vacant vista of Antarctica contrasts well with the cluttered frames illustrating New York City.



Chapter 10 Veidt Company Documents

Chapter 10 Veidt Company Documents Summary

Chapter 10 concludes with several pages of Veidt company documents, including notes on product line development plans, advertisements, and a memo from Adrian Veidt which discontinues his line of Nostalgia perfume and replaces it with a new line of Millennium perfume. The chapter concludes with a one page summary of the so-called 'Veidt Method,' an exercise and mental-discipline program which is hawked on the back cover of *Tales of the Black Freighter*, among other places. The Veidt Method, presumably, embodies the lifestyle Adrian Veidt used to become the costumed hero Ozymandias.

Chapter 10 Veidt Company Documents Analysis

The documents show Veidt to be a shrewd and crafty businessman, who is looking forward to a new world paradigm. Incidentally, Nostalgia is Sally's favorite and is also the perfume carried by Rorschach. Rorschach's bottle is smashed during his arrest, and he subsequently stinks of his own particular odor mingled with Nostalgia perfume. Laurie also has a bottle of Nostalgia that was once her mother's, and she throws this bottle in a fury, when she realizes the Comedian is her father. The flung bottle shatters against the side of Jon's clockwork mechanism which is, in turn, shattered by the bottle. In fact, the Nostalgia perfume brand permeates the entire graphic novel and its constant and frequent repetition, in some ways reminiscent of modern product placement ads, is another binding thread in the visual tapestry of the graphic novel. Its planned replacement with Millennium is, therefore, telling.



Chapter 11 Look on My Works, Ye Mighty...

Chapter 11 Look on My Works, Ye Mighty... Summary

Adrian Veidt walks through his Antarctic retreat. He walks through a giant tropical-zone dome surrounded by the freezing wastes of snow, and walks through a vast hall that features an enormous painting of Alexander the Great severing the Gordian knot. At precisely 11:25 PM, Eastern Standard Time, on November 1, 1985, he depresses a large ominous-looking red button set into a computer bank. His face is expressionless. He recalls his life history in a flashback sequence.

Veidt was born into a wealthy family in 1939 and was quickly realized to be a child prodigy. His incredible intelligence gained him early attention, which he disliked. In later years, he deliberately hid his abilities to avoid attention and suspicions. He was orphaned in 1956. During his early life, he idolized Alexander the Great and decided he, too, would try to unify the world. In order to avoid charges of a privileged start he gave away the family fortune and started traveling the world to receive a global perspective. He followed the path that Alexander the Great had traveled. Eventually, he came to believe that Alexander the Great had, in fact, failed to unify the world. Veidt pondered on Alexander's perceived failure and determined that the pharaohs were the greatest people to have ever lived. From then on, he styled himself a pharaoh, even taking the name of Ozymandias for his costumed-hero identity.

Meanwhile in New York City, Bernie reads the final pages of *Tales of the Black Freighter*. The hapless sailor enters his home and discovers it is inhabited by what he believes to be the evil pirates of the Black Freighter. He lunges upon one, flinging the form to the floor, and beats it to death. When he looks up he stares into the horrified eyes of his children, and realizes he has just murdered his own beloved wife - he has arrived in town before the Black Freighter. In horror, he stumbles out of town and flees to the beach. In the surf, the Black Freighter waits for him, and he staggers into the water, swims to the boat, and joins its fate as the newest damned pirate crewmember.

As Bernie reads, Bernhard the newsman postulates favorably on the morality of a first-strike nuclear attack against the Russians. Dr. Long's wife wanders the street looking for her husband. She meets him quite by accident near Bernhard's newsstand. Dr. Long is dressed in a funny helmet-style hat and overcoat. His wife accosts him and they begin to argue. Meanwhile a fight between a lesbian taxi driver and her estranged lover develops on the next corner and Dr. Long states he will intervene to stop the hostilities. His wife tells him he must not leave her, but he runs toward the fight. At the same time, detectives Fine and Bourquin are driving by and they, too, get out of their car and try to stop the fight. Coincidentally, the Nazi punks, who murdered Hollis Mason, are walking down the street. At this moment, nearly all of the graphic novel's minor characters happen, by chance, to be within just a few feet of the Institute for Interspatial Studies - it



is the moment, when Ozymandias pushes the red button. First the Institute, and then the entire area lights up with the brilliant white light of an enormous explosion.

A few minutes later Rorschach and Night Owl sneak into Veidt's compound. They locate Veidt and try to subdue him but he easily knocks them both down. He then delivers the perfunctory villain speech, telling them that the Comedian had schooled him to the true ways of the world during the abortive 1966 Crimebusters organizational meeting. Seeing that the Comedian was right - that the world revolved around conflict and power - Veidt decided to unite the world against the likes of the Comedian. His plan is, essentially, to fake an alien invasion of earth. Faced with an imminent threat of destruction from space the world will, Veidt believes, put aside its petty differences and unite against the common enemy.

Veidt hired a large crew of scientists, artists, writers, and musicians to create the alien being. The alien created was actually alive, genetically engineered, and Veidt had a human brain - that of the psychic Deschaines - wired into the monster. Deschaines' brain was then programmed with horrific images, terrible stories, and eerie sounds created by the crew of artists, who had believed they were working on a blockbuster monster-movie prop. To insure complete secrecy, the monster had been built on a remote island and all involved were subsequently killed.

Unfortunately, the Comedian had stumbled upon the island by accident and had uncovered Veidt's plans - thus, Veidt murdered the Comedian. Veidt had also caused many of Jon's old acquaintances to contract cancer, and then planted a media story that Jon had unintentionally caused the cancer - all a plan to drive the psychologically distant Jon from planet earth. Finally, Veidt had framed Rorschach and implicated Night Owl in an attempt to have them imprisoned.

Night Owl then expresses doubt that such a far-fetched plan would succeed. Veidt explains that the monster would be teleported into the heart of New York City and the simultaneous merging of teleported matter would cause a violent and vast explosion. The monster's death would also unleash the latent telepathic power of Deschaines' brain, telepathically projecting horrific images throughout the area. Thus, those not killed outright by the explosion would be driven insane by images and thoughts of terrible interstellar attackers. Veidt again states he is convinced that the resulting catastrophe will unite the world to a common cause.

Rorschach tries unsuccessfully to maneuver into ambush position as Night Owl tries to casually ask, when Veidt was planning to carry out this action. Veidt explains he would never tell them what he was planning to do if there was any way they could alter the outcome. He tells them he already did it, thirty-five minutes ago.

Chapter 11 Look on My Works, Ye Mighty... Analysis

Chapter 11 concludes a series of chapters composed largely of character background development and simultaneously delivers the climax of the graphic novel. Nearly all of



the novel's minor characters die in the explosion caused by Veidt's teleporting monster, and with the characters many minor plots are also, at least within the narrative structure, resolved. Indeed, the simultaneous convergence of so many of the novel's minor characters near the actual epicenter of the explosion is a particularly compelling element of the Chapter. Moments after Bernie concludes his reading of *Tales of the Black Freighter*, Bernhard the newsman, Bernie, the two policemen, the Nazi punks, Dr. Long and his wife, and a few other minor characters come together seemingly by coincidence. From this point onward, the graphic novel focuses entirely on the main plot with only one plot twist remaining.

Rorschach and Night Owl have failed in their quest to prevent Veidt from carrying out his nefarious plans. Strangely, Jon has apparently also failed to save the world - although this will be shown to be a matter of perspective. Chapter 11 takes place on November 1, 1985. Veidt pushes the button at precisely 11:25 PM Eastern Standard Time, November 1 (refer to illustrated pane 5, Chapter 11, p. 5). Thus, his announcement to Rorschach and Night Owl that New York City already has been largely destroyed is made at approximately midnight, and is the first time they become aware that their plan to intervene has failed. The ease with which Veidt physically defeats Rorschach and Night Owl is comical.



Chapter 11 After the Masquerade

Chapter 11 After the Masquerade Summary

Chapter 11 concludes with an interview of Adrian Veidt conducted by Doug Roth, a reporter for *Nova Express*. In the interview, Veidt recounts his life story, nearly all of the details of which have been presented earlier in the graphic novel. It is evident that Mr. Roth is a very sympathetic, even somewhat sycophantic, interviewer.

Chapter 11 After the Masquerade Analysis

This short interview does not add much to the plot development of the graphic novel, but it does tie up several smaller plot elements. Note that the interviewer is Doug Roth of *Nova Express*. He's the same person who presented information about various cancers allegedly being caused by association with Dr. Manhattan, part of Veidt's plot. Mr. Roth is clearly a pawn of Veidt, willing to do whatever he is ordered. It is also interesting to note Veidt's responses to questions about his personal goals and aims. His replies seem bland enough on the surface, but when re-read with knowledge of Veidt's planned terror attack, they take on a deeper, even sinister, meaning. The interview's title is also noteworthy. Clearly, Veidt feels that his new world order will be more truthful than the current global situation, although perhaps only Veidt will realize it.



Chapter 12 A Stronger Loving World

Chapter 12 A Stronger Loving World Summary

Jon and Laurie arrive in New York City near 'ground zero' and wander through scenes of destruction and carnage. Jon proves a dispassionate observer but Laurie is overwhelmed and begs him to teleport her away from the destruction. Jon tells Laurie that the clarity of the future is reduced for him due to a large amount of tachyons, and then he teleports himself and Laurie to the Antarctic fortress of Veidt.

Meanwhile at Veidt's fortress Night Owl challenges Veidt's disclosure. Night Owl says that Veidt would not attempt his own assassination, as that would be too dangerous. Veidt says that in the gravest extreme he would have simply caught the bullet. Night Owl seems skeptical but Veidt appears completely confident. Veidt then explains that his biological monster's brain, harvested from a psychic human, was programmed with gruesome artwork, horrible stories, and creepy sounds. Upon the death of the monster, the telepathic brain sent out an enormous wave of negative thought. Thus, the destruction caused by the explosion will be followed up by months of insanity and disturbed dreams which emanate from the explosion's center. Veidt is sure that this additional telepathic event will convince the world that the artificial monster was indeed a hostile alien being.

Jon and Laurie eventually enter Veidt's fortress. Jon is evidently out of synchronization with the standard time flow. For example, he responds to questions before they are asked. The chronologically disoriented Jon pursues Veidt on foot, and Veidt leads him down a hallway into a large device, which proves to be a trap. Veidt flips a switch and Jon is vaporized. Veidt has gone to great lengths to emit tachyon particles to cause Jon's ability to discern the future to be unreliable. Laurie is outraged and produces a snub-barreled revolver, probably a .38, and shoots a surprised Veidt. However, as he previously claimed to be able to do, he catches the bullet and is only slightly wounded. Veidt then declares he is the winner.

Jon, however, reappears in giant form and sneers at Veidt, explaining that reconstructing himself after atomization was the first thing he learned how to do as Dr. Manhattan. Before Jon is able to grab Veidt, Veidt turns on a panel of televisions which show hundreds of channels simultaneously. The media reports coming across the television report on an attempted alien invasion of earth and note that Russia has called off its invasion plans, the United States has called off its defiant nuclear stance, and the world appears to have set aside its differences to unite for the common good and defense against a perceived extra-terrestrial threat. An exultant Veidt exclaims, "I did it. I did it!" (p. 19.) Jon then suggests to all that, the damage having already been done, the best course of future action is to simply keep mum about Veidt's involvement in recent events, allowing the world to continue united against a perceived but non-existent threat. All agree that exposing Veidt's plot would simply lead to further warfare and hysteria. That is, all agree except Rorschach, who assumes Jon is joking.



In the next few minutes Veidt watches his putative success at establishing a new world order while Night Owl strips his costume and Dan and Laurie find a secluded area and make love. Jon follows Rorschach outside. Rorschach is preparing to return to New York City and disclose the Veidt plot, because he feels that evil must be punished, not covered up. Jon says that he will not allow Rorschach to reveal the truth. Rorschach demands justice, and Jon 'unmakes' Rorschach. Jon then returns to Veidt's fortress and walks through the area - he sees Dan and Laurie, nude and sleeping together, and seems pleased. He then talks with Veidt and subsequently vanishes.

Several weeks later, a disguised Laurie and Dan visit Sally at her retirement home. They have altered their appearances and assumed a pseudonym. They make small talk and then Laurie tells Sally she has realized her biological father was the Comedian. Sally is dumbstruck, but Laurie tells her mother everything is all right. After a brief visit Laurie and Dan leave, and Sally sits and cries.

Some time later, the graphic novel's concluding scene shows Hector Godfrey and Seymour are putting together the next issue of *New Frontiersman*. Robert Redford is running for president in 1988 and Godfrey is in need of some filler copy for the last page. He tells Seymour to grab anything from the crank file and set the type. Seymour reaches into the pile and randomly fishes out Rorschach's journal.

Chapter 12 A Stronger Loving World Analysis

Chapter 12 takes place in the early hours of November 2, 1985. After some initial skepticism, Night Owl realizes that Veidt has, in fact, carried through his monstrous plot. Nearly everyone, once they take stock of the situation, appears to conclude that whether Veidt is morally justified he has, in fact, averted nuclear war, and brought a new united spirit of cooperation to the world's superpowers. Therefore, Night Owl, Laurie, and Jon accept that the truth about Veidt's criminal activities must be suppressed. Only Rorschach feels that the ends do not justify the means - Rorschach intends to return to New York City and expose Veidt's actions.

Jon has returned to earth with the stated goal of saving the planet from destruction, yet he has not stopped Veidt's murder of millions. Instead, his saving action is to unmake Rorschach and thus insure that Veidt's secret is not exposed. Presumably, Rorschach's revelation would have ignited renewed rounds of hostility ending in nuclear war. Thus, Jon's elimination of Rorschach is the action that actually saves planet earth. It's an action he takes, while Laurie and Dan are having sexual intercourse. As Jon predicted in Chapter 11, he stands in the deep snow and kills someone. Jon's action concludes the failing fortune of Rorschach, the hero, and sets a somber tone that continues throughout the denouement of the graphic novel.

Dan and Laurie's visit to Sally's home takes place around Christmastime, 1985, though the exact date in December is not presented. Presumably, the concluding scene in the print office of *New Frontiersman* happens just days before the New Year, 1986. However, it could be interpreted as happening anytime between the end of 1985 and



the end of 1987, because an election is noted as being planned for 1988. Note that Seymour steps on an undated fragment of newspaper, which suggests that the New York City explosion happened in the fairly recent past.

Seymour's apparent selection of Rorschach's journal to run as filler copy is humorous but is unlikely to change the status quo. Jon, for example, would seemingly know the future and would have foreseen any serious consequence of Rorschach's journal's surfacing, and therefore prevented it. Instead, the yellow journal *New Frontiersman* will simply spawn yet another conspiracy theory based on an unverifiable document. All of which assumes that the journal could even be understood or read - consider that Rorschach's notebook was deemed unreadable by the police due to a crabbed and eccentric writing method and Rorschach himself writes in the journal that he has attempted to make it legible. More than likely, Seymour would struggle through the journal for a few moments and then select another crank-file piece, failing that the notations in the journal are fairly strange and would not appear to develop a convincing summary of Veidt's involvement.

The first image in the graphic novel shows the Comedian's bloodied smiley-face button in close up. In the last scene of the novel, the slovenly Seymour gobbles take-out food and spills ketchup on a smiley-face button. Thus, the final image in the graphic novel shows a smiley-face button smeared in red bringing the illustrations in the graphic novel full circle, just as Rorschach's journal both opens and concludes the narrative elements.



Characters

Rorschach AKA Walter Joseph Kovacs

Rorschach, the graphic novel's primary protagonist, was born Walter Joseph Kovacs in 1940 in a tenement slum to Sylvia Joanna Kovacs nee Glick, a drug-using prostitute. Rorschach is killed November 2, 1985, by Jon Osterman. In 1951, at the age of 11, Walter was attacked on the street by two teenager toughs. In the ensuing fight, Walter was easily victorious but partially blinded one of the older boys by sticking a lighted cigarette into his eye. The resultant investigation uncovered Walter's seriously deficient living conditions, and he was taken into the State's Child Protective Services program. Walter's mother never made an attempt to contact him. When Walter was notified of her death in 1956, he appeared unaffected. Walter left the protective service in 1956 and worked for several years at a dry-cleaning laundry service. While at the laundry, Walter obtained a dress made from an advanced heat-and-pressure-responsive polymer sandwiched between two layers of flexible latex. Walter later used material from the dress to manufacture his signature facemask of a blank white background with a constantly shifting symmetrical black blotch, resembling a Rorschach inkblot. Like many costumed heroes, Rorschach maintained an essentially distinct secret identity for over a decade of fighting crime.

In 1975, Rorschach investigated the kidnapping case of Blair Roche, a six-year-old girl. Rorschach tracked her to a building occupied by Gerald Grice and guarded by two fierce dogs, and there discovered that Grice had murdered her, butchered her body, and fed her to the dogs. Rorschach used a meat cleaver to execute the dogs. The image of their split heads follows him throughout the remainder of his life. Rorschach then waited for Grice to return, terrorized Grice, chained him to a pipe, handed him a hacksaw, and set the building on fire. Grice died in the flames. After this case, Rorschach's mental state changed radically and instead of being Walter Kovacs, who was a costumed hero he became Rorschach, his speech altered, his voice became a monotone, and he became, more or less, a vagrant when not in costume. During the day, Rorschach can frequently be seen walking the streets with a sign stating the end is imminent. It's strangely accurate considering the neighborhood he patrols.

Rorschach is guided by an unfailing code - evil must be punished. There are no exceptions to this rule and Rorschach seeks to enforce the common good regardless of how petty or insignificant the infraction. Rorschach hides his mask and costume, essentially just trousers and a trench coat like a dime-novel detective might wear, under garbage in an alley near his rented flat. He refers to his mask as his 'face' and sometimes even sleeps with it on. Rorschach is noted as smelling bad and having a creepy voice.



Dan Dreiberg AKA "Night Owl"

Dan Dreiberg is the second Night Owl costumed hero (refer to Hollis Mason). He graduated with dual master's degrees, Aeronautics and Zoology, from Harvard University. In 1962, he contacted Hollis and requested permission to carry on the Night owl tradition. Hollis readily consented. Dan is a respected ornithologist, who has published at least one paper. He is also somewhat of a romantic and prefers carefully planned action to Rorschach's impetuosity. For at least a decade prior to 1975, Night Owl and Rorschach formed a team of two and frequently operated together. However, beginning in 1975, Rorschach became increasingly mentally agitated and Night Owl operated solo until retiring after the passage of the Keene Act in 1977, leaving behind a history of fifteen years as a costumed hero. Night Owl briefly teamed up with the Comedian during 1977 to attempt to suppress anti-vigilante rioting in New York City. Dan, as Night Owl, is not particularly fast or strong but he is incredibly intelligent and derives most of his hero abilities from his inventive genius. Dan is always surrounded by numerous pieces of useful equipment with which he fights crime and performs rescues. His intuitive sense and insight contribute to his success as a costumed hero. Dan finds the younger Laurie very attractive, even before their relationship begins, and is ecstatic, when she hooks up with him. The artistic rendering of Dan's character is a definite highlight of the graphic novel, and Dan is the only major character, who does not indulge in regular flashback memories.

Adrian Veidt AKA "Ozymandias"

Adrian Veidt, the graphic novel's antagonist, was born in 1939 into a wealthy family and was quickly realized to be a child prodigy. At an early age, he began to disguise his abilities to avoid unwanted attention. He became an orphan in 1956 and, as a young man, idolized Alexander the Great. Veidt decided to, in essence, become Alexander. Thus, he gave away his entire sizeable family fortune and traveled the world in Alexander's footsteps. He eventually decided that Alexander had ultimately failed and subsequently idolized the Egyptian pharaohs. Veidt first became the costumed hero Ozymandias in 1958. He was active as a costumed hero until 1975, when he publicly revealed his secret identity and retired from the costumed hero business. He subsequently founded an enormously successful business empire and became incredibly rich.

Veidt is in perfect physical shape and has blonde hair and a solid build. He is the self-proclaimed smartest man in the world and, indeed, appears to never make mistakes or miscalculations. His physical abilities are also far beyond the norm as demonstrated by his ability to catch a bullet which is fired at him. Veidt, however, is something of a megalomaniac and becomes determined to save the world by uniting it in a common cause. His solution involves an elaborate plot to make the world believe it faces an imminent attack from extraterrestrial monsters. Veidt's execution of his plot, as well as its gradual discovery by other costumed heroes, forms the primary plot element of the novel. Veidt is somewhat likable although extremely arrogant and completely amoral.



For example, his plot involves the murder of millions of people to be convincing. Therefore, Veidt causes the deaths of millions of people. Although his terror plot is indeed horrific, it does appear to unite the world against a perceived external threat and thus stave off nuclear holocaust.

Jonathan "Jon" Osterman AKA "Dr. Manhattan"

As a child, Jon planned to become a watchmaker and practiced disassembling and reassembling his father's watch. On the day that Hiroshima was bombed, Jon's father determined that watch making was an obsolete trade. Jon therefore entered Princeton University where he graduated in 1958 with a Ph.D. in Atomic Physics. He worked at Gila Flats, Arizona, at a government research facility where he was apparently killed in a freak 1959 accident. However, instead of being killed outright he underwent a strange transformation and after several weeks reappeared as a being imbued with supernatural abilities such as teleportation and direct manipulation of matter. In 1966, he met the younger Laurie and the two began an intimate relationship which lasted until 1985. At the request of President Richard Nixon, Jon directly intervened in the Viet Nam war bringing a rapid and complete victory to the United States of America in 1971. In 1977, he was briefly involved in riot suppression activities. After the passage of the Keene Act made vigilantes illegal, Jon continued his work as a super-hero under the direct guidance of the government. Due to his enormous powers, Jon gradually becomes the lynchpin of the United States of America's strategic defense program. Over the years, he also becomes less and less interested in human affairs and eventually, estranged by a plot of Veidt, Jon leaves the earth and travels to Mars.

Later he once again speaks to Laurie, who convinces him to intervene in the world's affairs to prevent a nuclear holocaust. Jon agrees to intervene and his action, simply killing Rorschach to prevent the disclosure of Veidt's terror plot, appears to indeed save the world from nuclear war. Jon's physical appearance is strange. He appears as a hairless man, who is light blue. He has emblazoned the image of a hydrogen atom on his forehead, and he typically eschews clothing. Jon appears to exist largely outside of a traditional timeline, and is able to effectively remember the past, future, and present all at the same time.

Laurel "Laurie" Jane Juspeczyk AKA "Laurie Jupiter"

Laurel Jane Juspeczyk was born in 1949 and has long brown hair and an attractive figure. Her mother was Sally Jupiter and her biological father was Edward Blake Morgan though she was raised, at least briefly, by Laurence Shexnayder. She was raised from birth to be a costumed hero. At the age of 17, she began to fight crime, a career which she pursued until age 27. She smokes cigarettes through an interesting filter device, though she occasionally tries to quit.

Laurie does not appear to have a distinct secret identity and is presented the same whether out or in her skimpy costume, which is little more than lingerie. She met Jon



Osterman in 1966, at age 17, and the two began a love affair which resulted, eventually, in a somewhat permanent relationship. She leaves Jon in 1985, at age 36, when she realizes he is no longer concerned with human affairs, and begins another relationship with Dan Dreiberg, apparently preferring much older men. Laurie's sway on Jon convinces him to intervene to keep Veidt's plot a secret and, thus, a success. Although she never particularly relishes the life of a costumed hero, she does not find it distasteful. Laurie is the only major female character in the graphic novel.

Edward Blake Morgan AKA "The Comedian"

Edward Blake Morgan was born in 1924 and was murdered in 1985. He was a member of the Minutemen throughout their entire period of activity. However, he apparently operated on his own for much of the time the Minutemen were active. For example, he was a noted war hero in the South Pacific during 1942. In the early 1970s, Blake was a soldier in the Viet Nam war and helped Jon Osterman achieve total victory for the United States of America. While in Viet Nam, Blake met and impregnated a local Vietnamese woman. When she subsequently demanded his attention, he publicly denigrated her until she slashed open his face with a bottle at which point he murdered her. In late 1985, the Comedian accidentally discovered much of Veidt's plot to perpetrate a massive terror attack on New York City, before the Comedian could reveal his knowledge he was murdered. The Comedian is deliberately amoral and, in general, a very unlikable human being though his keen insight into the way the world operates earns him the begrudging respect of most of the other characters in the graphic novel. His character development is interesting in that the graphic novel's opening scenes depict his murder. Thus, his numerous but brief appearances in the novel are present only in flashback sequences remembered by other characters.

Hollis Mason AKA (the original) "Night Owl"

Hollis Mason was born in 1916 and was murdered in 1985. In 1939, he became the original Night Owl, one of the first costumed heroes. He joined the Minutemen and remained with that organization until their disbanding in 1949. Hollis eventually disclosed his secret identity and wrote a book, *Under the Hood*, which is a tell-all autobiography of his days as a costumed hero. Hollis retired as an auto mechanic and ran a garage in a poor section of town.

After revealing his identity, Hollis was contacted by Dan Dreiberg, who requested permission to use the name Night Owl and continue the costumed hero tradition. Hollis agreed and subsequently became good friends with Dan. Hollis is murdered by drug-addled Nazi punks, who go on an anti-vigilante rampage. Had Hollis not been murdered, however, he would almost certainly have been killed by the explosion resulting from Veidt's plot. Hollis is a minor character in the graphic novel.



Detectives Steven Fine and Bourquin

Detectives Steven Fine and Bourquin are two New York City Police Department officers, who investigate the murder of Edward Blake. They are also involved in several other plot elements, including the arrest of Rorschach outside of Moloch's apartment. They are relatively minor characters in the graphic novel, and they are both killed in the explosion caused by Veidt.

Sally Jupiter AKA "Silk Spectre"

Sally Jupiter was born Sally Juspeczyk in 1920. As a young woman, she had curly red hair and a full figure. At age 65, her hair is white. She was a costumed hero named Silk Spectre that first appeared in 1939. She entered the costumed hero business primarily as a means to self-promotion and her primary talent appears to have been as a pin-up girl. She was a member of the Minutemen from 1939 until their disbanding in 1949. She was originally involved with Hooded Justice but married her public-relations handler, Laurence Shexnayder, in 1947. She conducted an extra-marital affair with the Comedian c. 1948 despite his attempted rape in 1940. The affair resulted in her pregnancy with Laurie Juspeczyk, who was born in 1949. She subsequently divorced Shexnayder in 1956. Some time later Sally retired to Nepenthe Gardens Rest Resort where she hosts occasional small gatherings of friends. She is a relatively minor character in the graphic novel.

Hooded Justice

Hooded Justice was the original costumed hero, first appearing in 1939. He was apparently quite successful being a vigilante and, for a brief time, formed a couple with Sally Jupiter. During the 1950s 'red scare' congress demanded Hooded Justice testify. Instead, he simply disappeared, never revealing his secret identity. Hooded Justice is a relatively minor character in the graphic novel.

Nelson Gardner AKA "Captain Metropolis"

Nelson Gardner was a costumed hero named Captain Metropolis that first appeared in 1939. He was a member of the Minutemen from 1939 until their disbanding in 1949. In 1966, Captain Metropolis organized a meeting of several costumed heroes to propose the formation of another crime-fighting group which he tentatively named the Crimebusters. His suggestion was met with open derision by the Comedian although Ozymandias seemed to listen attentively to Captain Metropolis' warning of rampant crime and the eventual dissolution of society. Although the Crimebusters never got started, some of the costumed heroes at the abortive organizational meeting later formed alliances - but Captain Metropolis apparently was not included among them. Nelson Gardner remains a friend of Sally Jupiter through the end of the graphic novel. He is a minor character in the graphic novel.



Byron Lewis AKA "Mothman"

Byron Lewis was a member of the Minutemen from 1939 until their disbanding in 1949. His costume, with large moth-like wings, allowed him to glide for long distances. By 1985, he had become an alcoholic and was institutionalized. He is a minor character in the graphic novel.

The Silhouette

The Silhouette was a costumed hero that first appeared in 1939. She was a member of the Minutemen from 1939 until 1946. In 1946, she was publicly exposed as a lesbian and was subsequently expelled from the Minutemen by the public-image-conscious Laurence Shexnayder. The Silhouette is a minor character in the graphic novel.

Dollar Bill

Dollar Bill was a costumed hero that was sponsored by a bank to promote their public image of security. His costume featured a large dollar bill sign on the chest and included a cape. He was a member of the Minutemen from 1939 until he was shot to death c. 1946 during a bank robbery, when his cape became entangled in the vault door. Dollar Bill is a minor character in the graphic novel.

Laurence Shexnayder

Laurence Shexnayder is a public relations and marketing man, who originally promoted Silk Spectre and then the entire group of the Minutemen. He eventually married Sally Jupiter AKA Silk Spectre in 1947 and divorced her in 1956. Shexnayder is a minor character in the graphic novel and is presented as an unlikable con man.

Edgar Williams Jacobi AKA Moloch

Jacobi is the only costumed villain presented in the graphic novel. He started out as a magician and, due to his talents and deformed appearance, was somewhat successful on the stage. He later turned to a life of crime where he was opposed for many years by the Comedian. After spending many years behind bars, Jacobi gave up his life of crime and carried on a lower-class working existence in a poorer section of town. He contracted cancer, due to Veidt's experimentation, and is inexplicably visited by the Comedian, who tells him of a secret plot. Jacobi is then harassed by Rorschach and finally murdered by Veidt.



Bernhard the Newspaper Salesman

Bernhard is a newspaper sales clerk, who constantly offers his unique perspective to anybody who will listen, as well as to himself, when nobody else is around. He provides Bernie with comic books and sells newspapers to Walter Kovacs. He is a fairly minor character in the graphic novel, although he does provide the street-level opinions of the citizens of New York City. Bernhard is killed in the explosion caused by Veidt.

Bernie the Comics Aficionado

Bernie is a young black man who loiters around the newspaper stand of Bernhard. Bernie likes to preview comic books before he buys them. He reads them in their entirety and then decides they are not suitable for purchase. He likes to read while sitting against a fire hydrant, and only occasionally engages Bernhard in conversation. Although a minor character in the graphic novel, Bernie is important to plot development as he reads *Tales of the Black Freighter*. He is also, of course, a meta-fictional representation of the reader. Bernie is killed in the explosion caused by Veidt.

Dr. Malcolm Long

Dr. Malcolm Long is a criminal psychiatrist who interviews Rorschach after his arrest. At first, Dr. Long appears professionally excited to be entrusted with such a high-profile case and takes copious notes with an eye toward eventual publication. Rorschach, however, quickly gets inside of Dr. Long's head and before long Dr. Long is sitting up nights, disrupting dinner parties, and generally reevaluating his own life. Dr. Long eventually wears some type of strange hat, reminiscent of a costumed hero's helmet, and walks the streets of New York City intervening in at least one fight. Dr. Long and his wife are both killed in the explosion caused by Veidt.



Objects/Places

The Minutemen

The original group of costumed adventurers, the Minutemen formed in 1939 and disbanded in 1949. The group originally consisted of The Comedian, Night Owl, Sally Jupiter, Mothman, The Silhouette, Hooded Justice, and Dollar Bill. Although most of the costumed heroes from the Minutemen play some role in the graphic novel, the Minutemen as a group are relatively insignificant to the graphic novel's plot development.

New Frontiersman

An ultra-right-wing newspaper filled with conspiracy theories, anticommunist ranting, and yellow journalism. *New Frontiersman* is frequently read by Rorschach, who apparently gleans a large amount of useful information from its pages. Rorschach mails his journal to *New Frontiersman* before he travels to Antarctica where he meets his demise. The paper stands in traditional virulent opposition to the opinions expressed in *Nova Express*. The paper is edited by Hector Godfrey, who employs, as factotum, a younger man named Seymour.

Nova Express

An ultra-left-wing newspaper filled with conspiracy theories, anti-fascist ranting, and yellow journalism. The paper takes its name from a William S. Burroughs novel. *Nova Express* breaks the false story about the Dr. Manhattan-cancer victim connection precipitating Dr. Manhattan's flight from earth. The paper stands in traditional virulent opposition to the opinions expressed in *New Frontiersman*. One of the principle reports of *Nova Express* is Doug Roth, a minor character, who appears a few times throughout the graphic novel.

Institute for Interspatial Studies

A company fronted by Veidt Enterprises and located in downtown New York City. The Institute for Interspatial Studies is in actuality the receiving end of a huge teleportation device that Veidt uses to teleport an artificial monster into the heart of New York City, simulating an alien attack on earth. The company is alternatively known as the Institute for Extraspatial Studies.

Archie

Archie is the name of the flying ship of the costumed hero Night Owl. The ship is fairly small and very streamlined, perhaps the size of a typical panel truck. It can fly, submerge, and is equipped with a variety of lethal and non-lethal weapons and various gadgets. The ship is used extensively throughout some chapters of the graphic novel.



Nostalgia

Nostalgia is the name of a perfume manufactured by one of Veidt's companies. The perfume is marketed in a purple disc-shaped bottle emblazoned with a stylized 'N' and topped with an atomizer. Nostalgia is Sally Jupiter's favorite perfume. Sally gives a bottle to Laurie, who happens to have it in her pocket, when Jon teleports her to Mars. Laurie subsequently flings the bottle away in anger and it shatters against Jon's huge clockwork mechanism, simultaneously shattering the clockwork. The costumed hero Rorschach inexplicably carries a bottle of Nostalgia with him, and it shatters during his unsuccessful escape attempt following his frame up for the murder of Moloch by Veidt. The arresting officers note the heavy and pervasive smell of Rorschach after he is arrested. The perfume provides a recurring visual element, as bottles of it are drawn in the backgrounds of many panels and billboards advertising the perfume are illustrated in other panels. In the narrative, it is symbolic of the past - Veidt retires the fragrance and replaces it with a new perfume, Millennium, after his terror attack on New York City.

Karnak

Karnak is the name of Veidt's Antarctic retreat. Somewhat reminiscent of a fortress, Karnak is very inaccessible and proves to be the primary hub of Veidt's activities. It is the setting for portions of Chapters 11 and 12 but is otherwise somewhat unimportant in the graphic novel. Karnak has a media center where Veidt can watch hundreds of television channels simultaneously. It also has a large tropical garden covered by a clear dome and appears to be very commodious and comfortable.

Bubastis

Bubastis is a large and formidable crimson feline with lynx-like ears. The animal is a genetically engineered pet of Veidt and prowls around Karnak like an overgrown housecat. Bubastis is killed, when Veidt lures Jon into a trap.

The Extraterrestrial Monster

Veidt's plan to unite the world requires an external motive force which is supplied by his faked extraterrestrial invasion of earth. He assembles a team of scientists to genetically engineer a monster. The monster is then fitted out with the stolen brain of a powerful psychic which emits a strong telepathic wave upon death. The brain is programmed with awful images, horror stories, and eerie sounds. When the monster is teleported to New York City, it causes a massive explosion, because its atoms intermingle with the atoms of the destination building. As the monster dies, the psychic brain emits images of madness and horror. The resultant explosion kills millions, and the psychic wave causes insanity and mental unrest in the survivors, apparently convincing the world that the monster is extraterrestrial. All those involved with the creation of the monster and killed to preserve its secrecy - Veidt's murder of his hirelings is reminiscent of the pharaohs'



reported murder of all those involved with the construction of their burial chambers in the pyramids.

The Gordian Knot

Legend reports that the son of Midas tied an elaborate knot at Gordium that could not be untied. An ancient oracle declared that whoever undid the so-called Gordian Knot would become king of Asia. Alexander the Great reportedly traveled to the knot and, instead of trying to untie it, simply cleaved it apart with a sword - the so-called 'Alexandrian solution.' Subsequently, of course, he became king of Asia. Veidt feels that Alexander's solution was a remarkable example of thinking outside of normal confines and Veidt uses a similar 'Alexandrian solution' to unite the world against a perceived external threat. Veidt certainly compares himself favorably to Alexander the Great, and has at least one huge mural showing Alexander sundering the Gordian Knot.

Veidt is not the only character, who can undo a Gordian Knot, however. After Rorschach breaks into Dan's apartment, Dan has the Gordian Knot Lock Company replace his lock with their top-of-the-line product. Their best 'Gordian Lock' poses no challenge to the resourceful Rorschach.

Rorschach's Journal

The costumed hero Rorschach keeps a journal wherein he records notes detailing his investigations. The journal is fairly strange, containing references to dog's entrails and streets filled with scabbing blood, and it is written in Rorschach's hand which is reported to be illegible. Nevertheless, the journal also contains salient details which implicate Veidt in a terror plot. Rorschach mails the journal to *New Frontiersman* where it is tossed into the so-called crank file for several months before it is, apparently, reproduced on the back pages of that newspaper.

Tales of the Black Freighter

Tales of the Black Freighter is a serial comic book, authored by Max Shea, which is presented as a comic-within-the-comic. The comic appears throughout several chapters as Bernie reads the comic issue by issue. The story tells the tale of a hapless seaman, who is marooned by the bloodthirsty pirates of the Black Freighter. He makes an unlikely escape and returns to his hometown which, he believes, has been ravaged by the pirates. In order to exact his revenge he sneaks into his house and beats a presumed invader to death, only to realize he has murdered his own wife. He then flees the town, nearly insane, and finds the Black Freighter waiting to take him aboard as their newest savage recruit.

Themes

Evil Must Be Punished

The graphic novel's protagonists are all costumed heroes. They're vigilantes who patrol the streets and prevent crime without any special commission from the State.

Rorschach's final comment sums up the major theme of the novel. Evil must be punished. The novel's primary plotline focuses on the origin of the costumed hero from 1939 continuing through 1977 until 1985. The original costumed hero, Hooded Justice, appeared in New York City to fight against crime - his example was quickly followed by several other costumed heroes. The original group of costumed heroes, the Minutemen, banded together to enjoy the synergistic capabilities of a group in fighting evil. As the original generation of costumed heroes retired or were killed, they were replaced by a second generation of costumed heroes.

Although the second generation did not form a group analogous to the Minutemen, they did continue the tradition of punishing evildoers. Although their goals were largely the same, many of them - notably the Comedian - used tactics that were not deemed appropriate by the country at large. Due to media coverage of extreme vigilante actions, the public became outraged with vigilante activity and demanded it be stopped. The government responded to widespread and prolonged pro-police/anti-vigilante riots by passing the Keene Act which effectively outlawed costumed heroes. By that time, however, Dr. Manhattan, who was the only real super-powered super-hero, was firmly entrenched in the government's strategic plans and the Comedian was an official government operative. Thus, Dr. Manhattan and the Comedian continued to operate under the nominal control of the authorities. All other costumed heroes, as well as costumed villains, retired. This was with the exception of Rorschach, who continued as a vigilante, because his world view was black-and-white and demanded that evil must be punished.

The End Justifies the Means

In 1985 nuclear holocaust between the United States of America and Russia looms in the immediate future. Russian armies are invading Asia and President Richard Nixon hides at NORAD running nuclear first-strike simulations. Dr. Manhattan leaves earth and the United States of America is wide-open to nuclear devastation. The army's senior staff estimates hundreds of millions of American casualties. Adrian Veidt, putatively the world's smartest man, has also concluded that nuclear war is inevitable - unless someone causes the world to unite in a common cause. Veidt, who considers himself as a sort of superior Alexander the Great is determined to become the man who unites the world in a meaningful and lasting way. Veidt's plan, unfortunately, entails the deaths of millions of people and the foisting of an enormous lie on the world. Veidt carries out his plan, millions die, and the world is convinced that an attack by hostile extra-terrestrials is imminent. Nuclear war is avoided, and the world's superpowers begin to cooperate



against the perceived common enemy. Additionally, Veidt murders nearly everyone who knew about the plan, ensuring his success remains irreversible.

Only four people, besides Veidt, know about the plan - Jon Osterman, Dan Dreiberg, Laurie Juspecky, and Rorschach. Dan and Laurie appear to believe that however amoral Veidt's plan the outcome justified suppression of the details. In other words, the ends justify the means. Jon seems largely beyond human morality and the concepts of right and wrong. Nevertheless, he has promised Laurie he will save the world from destruction and thus he murders Rorschach to prevent the disclosure of the plot. Again, the ends justify the means. Only Rorschach appears to disagree with this premise, and he states his plan to return to the world and disclose Veidt's plot.

Personality of a Costumed Hero

All of the costumed hero characters in the graphic novel have very strong, perhaps even unstable, personalities. Many of them comment on their strange desire to dress up in tight-fitting and conspicuous costumes to run about in public chasing down bad guys. Yet, all of them enjoy realizing their desires.

Three examples are illustrative of the theme of strong personality. First, Laurie Juspecky is one of the most normal principle characters in the graphic novel. She was raised from birth to be a costumed hero by her mother, Sally Jupiter, who was also a costumed hero. Laurie is largely unwilling to look beyond the flaws of character that mar individuals such as the Comedian, because she herself is not preoccupied with the role of being a costumed hero. Laurie can either take it or leave it, and her character forms the most easily accessible role in the graphic novel. This is not to say that she is a weak character, but simply that she does not suffer from the excesses of personality found in the other costumed hero characters. Laurie is the exception that proves the rule.

Second, Jon Osterman is originally a fairly traditional and normal character, who is transformed into a super-powerful being by an accident. Jon's motivation and personality then gradually shift away from traditional human values to somewhat arbitrary and generally incomprehensible values as may be expected from an individual who exists outside of conventional time and space. Nevertheless, he begins to see himself as a type of God-like being, who can either make or break the entire world. Instead of wanting to be just left alone, he announces he wants to be left alone and then continues to involve himself in human affairs.

The third and final example to consider is Adrian Veidt. He refers to himself as the world's smartest man, and he indulges in limitless physical and mental training. Veidt strokes his own ego by recalling how he started out rich but gave it all away to prove he could start with nothing and still accomplish everything. In his early adulthood, he begins to view Alexander the Great as a failure and decides he will do better. Veidt then proceeds to be a costumed hero until it bores him at which point he founds and runs a business empire that makes him fabulously wealthy. Then, he decides to unite the world and conceives and executes an elaborate plot. Unfortunately, millions must die, but

Veidt reasons that is simply the price of his success. Nearly all of the costumed heroes in the graphic novel are similar, to one degree or another.

Style

Point of View

The graphic novel is narrated in the third-person omniscient point of view common to most comic book narrative styles. The focus shifts quickly from one character to another, often back and forth several times within a single set of graphic panes. This technique would not be possible with more traditional fiction, but with the assistance of the artwork, the shifts are easily followed. The point of view is appropriate for the graphic novel which relates a story spanning many decades and two planets, involving a very large cast of characters. Many have two identities.

The comic-within-the-comic, *Tales of the Black Freighter*, makes an interesting contrast to the graphic novel. The hapless seaman in that story relates his plight in the first-person limited point of view. The sub-narrative development is simple and depends upon the first-person point of view. The juxtaposition of the two points-of-view used in the two narratives is interesting and enjoyable.

Setting

The graphic novel has numerous minor settings but for the most part the action occurs in three principle locations. They are New York City, Mars, and Veidt's fortress-like retreat in Antarctica. Additionally, the graphic novel has a meta-fictional setting of a seacoast town which is presented during the reading of *Tales of the Black Freighter*.

New York City is the principle setting for chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10. Indeed, most of the graphic novel's narrative takes place somewhere in the city. The city is portrayed as a sprawling metropolis with a central area filled with crime, drug-addicts, punks, and other lowlife characters. Various locations within the city are depicted, including Rorschach's slum tenement, Dan Dreiberg's house, the prison where Rorschach is held, various crime scenes including the Comedian's apartment, and several streets. In one sense, Bernhard's newspaper stand can be viewed as the central location within the entire graphic novel as nearly all of the narrative action somehow impinges on this single location.

Mars is the principle setting for chapters 4 and 9. Jon Osterman, estranged from humanity, teleports himself to the planet Mars and spends time there reminiscing about his past life as a human. He later returns to earth to fetch Laurie to Mars and the two characters essentially 'break up' their relationship on the red planet. Mars as a setting is used within the narrative development to postulate an alternative existence to that of the crime-ridden, war-ravaged, hustle-bustle of humanity and earth.

Antarctica is the principle setting for chapters 11 and 12. Adrian Veidt owns a large fortress-like complex somewhere on Antarctica that is remote and inaccessible. From this location, he plots the destruction of much of New York City as the climax of his



nefarious plan to unite earth's warring factions against a perceived common enemy. Antarctica is realistically represented as a desolate sterile waste, which stands in contrast to the dirty, gritty, colorful scenes of New York City. Antarctica is also the location where Rorschach is killed by Jon Osterman.

Tales of the Black Freighter is a comic-within-the-comic, which features a meta-fictional setting of a deserted island, a pirate ship, and a vast ocean. The south seas to New England voyage of the hapless seaman carries him through a variety of garishly colored landscapes of horror and makes an interesting comparison to the realistically portrayed areas of New York City and Antarctica. *Tales of the Black Freighter* is gradually read by Bernie in chapters 3 through 11.

Language and Meaning

The graphic novel uses fairly simple language and is easily accessible. The simple style is engaging and invites a quick and complete immersion in the narrative experience. Most of the characters speak in believable, concise English with enough slang to add texture but correct grammar and construction which aids understanding. Nearly all of the characters have their own, unique voice which is recognizable and demonstrates the strength of the characterization used in the development of the narrative.

Some characters are particularly notable. For example, Rorschach begins in life speaking with fairly normal diction and pronunciation but after a particularly traumatic experience changes his profoundly he begins to speak in what is described as a creepy monotone voice. Additionally, his sentence construction changes to a choppy and fragmented style which is minimal. Rorschach's altered speech is further set apart by being enclosed in a rough-edged speech bubble, a nice artistic touch. Jon Osterman's voice is also noted as being distinct not by narrative exposition but by artistic representation using a different background within the text bubble. One of the most humorous characters in the graphic novel, Bernhard the newsman, uses a street-level diction full of rampant speculation which is largely meaningless but always enjoyable.

Structure

The 408-page graphic novel was originally published serially in 12 parts. The collected serialized segments are presented as 12 distinct chapters which are numbered and also named. The first eleven chapters begin with approximately 30 pages of graphics with text, followed by a few pages of printed text purported to be from a variety of authoritative sources. The final chapter has a similar format, but lacks the typical concluding pages of text.

Chapters 3 through 11 also contain scenes from a comic-within-the-comic read by one of the graphic novel's minor characters. The scenes give a parallel structure and development to a sub-narrative element within the graphic novel which is enjoyable and compelling.



The graphic novel's principle timeline is fairly straightforward and is related chronologically. The timeline covers a period of only three weeks from October 12 through November 2, 1985. Within the primary timeline, however, there are a huge number of flashback sequences that are related through the memories of several characters. The flashback sequences cover a period of time, from roughly 1939 through 1985, a vast period of 46 years. Of course, some points in that time are periods of importance, such as one particular day in 1966, when many characters came together for a meeting, while most of the larger period is not examined in any detail.

Some days within the principle three-week period are entirely skipped over while other days have a large amount of action which is represented in great detail. Additionally, one of the characters, Jon Osterman, lives largely outside the confines of conventional time and thus appears to experience the past, present, and future nearly simultaneously. Taken as a whole, the various chronological techniques used to construct the narrative structure are complex, rich, and accurate, and form one of the most enjoyable elements of the graphic novel.



Quotes

"Rorschach's Journal. October 12th, 1985. Dog carcass in alley this morning, tire tread on burst stomach. This city is afraid of me. I have seen its true face. The streets are extended gutters and the gutters are full of blood and when the drains finally scab over all the vermin will drown. The accumulated filth of all their sex and murder will foam up about their waists and all the whores and politicians will look up and shout 'Save us!'... ..and I'll look down and whisper 'No.' They had a choice, all of them, they could have followed in the footsteps of good men like my father, or President Truman. Decent men who believed in a day's work for a day's pay. Instead they followed the droppings of lechers and communists and didn't realize that the trail led over a precipice until it was too late. Don't tell me they didn't have a choice. Now the whole world stands on the brink, staring down into bloody hell, all those liberals and intellectuals and smooth-talkers... ..and all of a sudden nobody can think of anything to say." (Chapter 1, p. 1)

"[Night Owl:] 'Jon and Laurie are handling the riots in Washington. Rorschach's across town trying to hold the lower East side. He, uh, he works mostly on his own these days.'

"[The Comedian:] 'Rorschach's nuts. He's been nuts ever since that kidnapping he handled three years back. Him, Byron Lewis, Jon goddamn-walking-H-bomb Osterman... all nuts.'

"[Night Owl:] 'But not you?'

"[The Comedian:] 'No, not me. I keep things in proportion an' try ta see the funny side... Drop that can, you little freak!'" (Chapter 2, p. 18)

"Partly it was the beatniks, the jazz musicians and the poets openly condemning American values whenever they opened their mouths. Partly it was Elvis Presley and the whole Rock 'n' Roll boom. Had we fought a war for our country so that our daughters could scream and swoon over young men who looked like this, who sounded like that? With all these sudden social upheavals just when we thought we'd gotten everything straight, it was impossible to live through the 1950s without a sense of impending catastrophe bearing implacably down upon the whole country, the whole world. Some people thought it was war and others thought it was flying saucers, but those things weren't really what was bearing down on us. What was bearing down upon us was the 1960s." (Chapter 3 Under the Hood by Hollis Mason, p. 13)

"The option is Mutually Assured Destruction. Stated simply, Dr. Manhattan cannot stop all the Soviet warheads from reaching American soil, even a greatly reduced percentage would still be more than enough to effectively end the organic life in the northern hemisphere. The suggestion that the presence of a superhuman has inclined the world more towards peace is refuted [sic] by the sharp increase in both Russian and American nuclear stockpiles since the advent of Dr. Manhattan. Infinite destruction divided by two or ten or twenty is still infinite destruction. If threatened with eventual domination, would the Soviets pursue this unquestionably suicidal course? Yes. Given



their history and their view of the world, I believe that they would." (Chapter 4 Dr. Manhattan: Super-Powers and the Superpowers, p. III)

"[Edgar Jacobi:] 'Hwuh...? H-hello? Who's there? C'mon... I heard a noise. I know somebody's there... Hello? Uh-huh. I see. Well, Okay. Okay, if that's how it is... If that's how you want to play it. You think I'm scared, huh? You think I'm scared of some shaky little junkie with a switchblade? Huh? Is that what you think, that I'm scared? Hello?'" (Chapter 5, pp. 1-2)

"Shortly before Kovacs left the Charlton home in 1956, news was received that his mother, who had never made any attempt to contact her child and who had continued to become further involved in the world of small-time vice, had been murdered. Her body had been found in a back alleyway in the South Bronx, the cause of death being the forced ingestion of Drano cleaning fluid. A man named George Peterson, Mrs. Kovacs' pimp, was later charged with her murder. When the news was broken to Walter Kovacs, then aged sixteen, his only comment was 'Good.'" (Chapter 6 New York State Psychiatric Hospital West Branch - Early History: A Summary, pp. 1-2)

"[Laurie:] 'I already stopped a couple of times before, but it got so boring around the Rockefeller base, my willpower never held out long. Probably won't this time either.'

"[Dan:] 'Well y'know, that's a very negative attitude... I mean, I had a dangerous habit myself once.'

"[Laurie:] 'You did? What happened?'

"[Dan:] 'I quit, no problem. Oh, I mean, sure, at first I used to get cravings but I held on in there. These days it hardly bothers me at all.'

"[Laurie:] 'You're talking about, y'know, what we did. You still miss all that stuff?'

"[Dan:] 'No. No, not really, just sentiment, I guess. C'mon... I'm finished here. Take the rear exit so you won't get dirty crawling under Archie.'

"[Laurie:] 'Archie?'

"[Dan:] 'Oh, uh, well it's short for Archimedes, Merlin's pet owl in 'The Sword and the Stone.' I saw the Disney version once and... well, you know, it's just a stupid nickname. Here's the exit. Watch your step.'" (Chapter 7, p. 7)

"Adrift and starving, my darkest imaginings welled up unchecked, spilling from brain to heart like black ink, impossible to remove. I pictured Davidstown's quiet streets overrun by tattooed fiends. Recalling their brutality, I moaned. The Freighter had surely reached Davidstown already. My wife was almost certainly dead. These notions transfixed me, stopping time in its tracks. I remembered her waving goodbye from the verandah shadows, sunlight illuminating one cheek bone. Dead? Those glorious days; that innocence... dead? Dead: I imagined my shipmates' bloated corpses, carrying my raft on fisheaten backs... Dead: the putrefying shark, its snarl no longer convincing... Dead: I



hear her pleading; see their yellowed smiles, their cutlasses carving relentlessly until all her personality, all her subtleties of posture and expression are obliterated, reduced to meat... Dead. Finally, faced with horrors both intolerable and unavoidable, I chose madness." (Chapter 8 Tales of the Black Freighter, p. 3)

[Jon:] 'I read atoms, Laurie. I see the ancient spectacle that birthed the rubble. Beside this, human life is brief and mundane.'

[Laurie:] 'Oh, I give up. This is just round in circles! Can't you tell me how this conversation ends and spare me the agony?'

[Jon:] 'It ends with you in tears... look there: Olympus Mons approaches!'

[Laurie:] 'Tears? Y-you mean I lose? You mean you don't come back to earth?'

[Jon:] 'I return to earth at some point in my future. There are streets full of corpses. The details are vague.'

[Laurie:] 'No. Oh no! Jon, what do you mean "vague"? There's gonna be a war? A real war? Oh God...'

[Jon:] 'I'm not sure. There's some sort of static obscuring the future, preventing any clear impression. The electromagnetic pulse of a mass warhead detonation might conceivably cause that...'

[Laurie:] 'Oh no.'

[Jon:] 'Beyond that, events grow even sketchier. I am standing in deep snow... I am killing someone. Their identity is uncertain. Look at it: a volcano as large as Missouri. Its summit fifteen miles high, piercing even the atmospheric blanket. Breathtaking.'

[Laurie:] 'Breathtaking? Jon, what about the war? You've got to prevent it! Everyone will die...'

[Jon:] '...And the universe will not even notice. We've been through this before, Laurie. You argued that human life was more significant than this excellent desolation, and I was not convinced. You attempted to compare the mere uncertainty of your existence with the chaos of the world beneath us... ...but where are the pinnacles to rival this Olympus? Where are the depths to match those of... Ahh, but we near the Valles Marineris. You may see for yourself. It stretches more than three thousand miles, so that one end knows day while the other endures night. Temperature differences breed shrieking winds that herd oceans of fog along a canyon four miles deep. Does the human hear know chasms so abysmal?'" (Chapter 9, pp. 17-19)

"[Mrs. Shairp:] 'I - it's... oh God, what are you doing here? I... Look, please, I don't want any trouble, Okay? I...'



"[Rorschach:] 'Mrs. Shairp. Long time no see. Told press I'd made sexual advances to you. Not true. Very bad.'

"[Mrs. Shairp:] 'No! I never said that! I got misquoted! Oh God, please, don't...'

"[Night Owl:] 'Rorschach? Come on, man, leave it...'

"[Rorschach:] 'Can't. Serious business. Slur on reputation. How much did they pay you to lie about me, whore?'

"[Mrs. Shairp:] 'Oh please don't say that. Not in front of my kids... Please. They... they don't know.'

"[Rorschach:] 'Got what we came for. Finished here now. Let's go.'" (Chapter 10, p. 6)

"[Veidt:] 'Each step was synchronized. Jon, being too powerful and unpredictable to fit my plans, needed removing. Thus, Dimensional Developments hired his past associates... ..and gave them cancer. Yes, Weaver first, Slater and Moloch later, unwittingly exposed to radiation, they were closely observed, cultivated as weapons against Jon. Meanwhile, taking advantage of new technology I researched Genetics... Bubastis was an early success... and Teleportation. Since Jon proved teleportation possible, why develop electric cars? My researches were vital... like my island, secretly purchased in 1970. The only hero retaining public sympathy, I quit two years before the Keene Act, concentrating on my plan. Unable to unite the world by conquest... Alexander's method... I would trick it; frighten it towards salvation with history's greatest practical joke. That's what upset the Comedian, when awareness of my scheme crashed in upon him: professional jealousy.'" (Chapter 11, p. 24)

"[Jon:] 'Where are you going?'

[Rorschach:] 'Back to owlship. Back to America. Evil must be punished. People must be told.'

[Jon:] 'Rorschach... you know I can't let you do that.'

[Rorschach:] 'Huhhh. Of course. Must protect Veidt's new utopia. One more body amongst foundations makes little difference. Well? What are you waiting for? Do it.'

[Jon:] 'Rorschach...'

[Rorschach:] 'Do it!'" (Chapter 12, pp. 23-24)



Topics for Discussion

At what point is the haggard-looking vagrant identified as Rorschach? Does a close reading reveal the connection before Rorschach's mask is removed?

The Comedian was, in many ways, a particularly unlikable human being, yet his funeral was attended by nearly all of his old acquaintances and even one of his old enemies. Why do you think they found the Comedian so compelling?

Is the portrayal of Jon Osterman's gradual detachment from human concerns convincing?

Jon Osterman starts life intending to become a watchmaker. On Mars, he constructs an elaborate and enormous clockwork mechanism. Describe the symbolic representation of time within the graphic novel.

Carefully examine the artwork depicting the fight between Adrian Veidt and the putative assassin (refer to Chapter 5). Could an attentive observer discern that, perhaps, things were not as Veidt suggested?

Walter Kovacs claims to have literally become Rorschach after one particularly disturbing case he handled in 1975. Is Rorschach suffering from mental delusion, or has he, in fact, fundamentally changed into another person?

Why do you think Dan and Laurie are attracted to each other?

Bernhard the newspaper salesman and Bernie the comics aficionado share the same first name. Bernhard seems to find this significant, while Bernie finds it meaningless. What other narrative events give rise to widely alternative interpretations?

The Comedian tried to rape Sally Jupiter in 1966. It was an attempt which resulted in a savage beating for both the Comedian and Sally. Yet, a few years later, Sally had an extra-marital affair with the Comedian. Why do you think Sally would do this?

In the graphic novel, Richard Nixon is still President of the United States of America in 1985. How do you think that may have altered the course of American history?

Adrian Veidt's plot appears to stop a global nuclear holocaust, but at the cost of massive deception and millions of lives. Did Veidt do the right thing?

When Jon Osterman suggests that he is about to kill Rorschach, Rorschach responds by telling him to do it. What do you think Rorschach was considering, when he replied to Jon's implied threat?