



skin on the
outside

by
Ian M. Palmer
www.ianmpalmer.com

RIVER

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FANTASTIC
COM
AMAZING

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RIVER

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chapter

ONE



MY CAMERA
POSER
BUFF
PUBLIC INDECENCY
EGO

STUNT
ARRESTED
NOT ALL THAT
SUNBURN





HEY,
JO...

...WIERDO
ALERT.

HEY.

HEY,
YOU CAN'T
REALLY DO
THAT.

OKAY,
NOW,
SIR...



YOU'VE
HAD YOUR
FUN.

YOU'VE CAUSED
A WHOLE LOAD OF
EXCITEMENT.

NOW, WHY DON'T
WE GO SOMEWHERE AND
TALK ABOUT IT?





DAMN.

NOW
WHERE DID
HE GO?



"HEY,
JO."

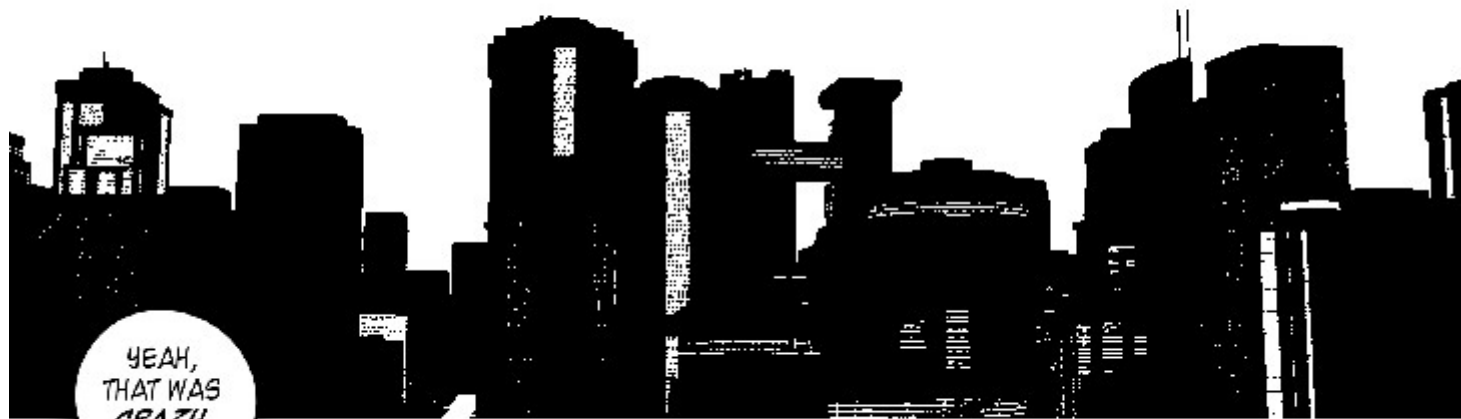
"HEY."

"JO."

"JO."

JO.





YEAH,
THAT WAS
CRAZY.



ANYWAY,
LOOK...

I'LL SEE YOU
TOMORROW.







AAAHH!

OH MY
GOD!

WHAT-?

IT'S ALL
RIGHT.

DON'T BE
AFRAID.

WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?



I FOLLOWED
YOU. I'M SORRY. I
DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING.
IT WAS INSTINCT.



PLEASE. LISTEN.
I WAS IN THE RIVER.
I DIDN'T KNOW
ANYTHING.

PEOPLE WERE
WEARING CLOTHES, SO
I TOOK - I STOLE SOME
CLOTHES FROM YOUR
STORE.



GET
OUT.





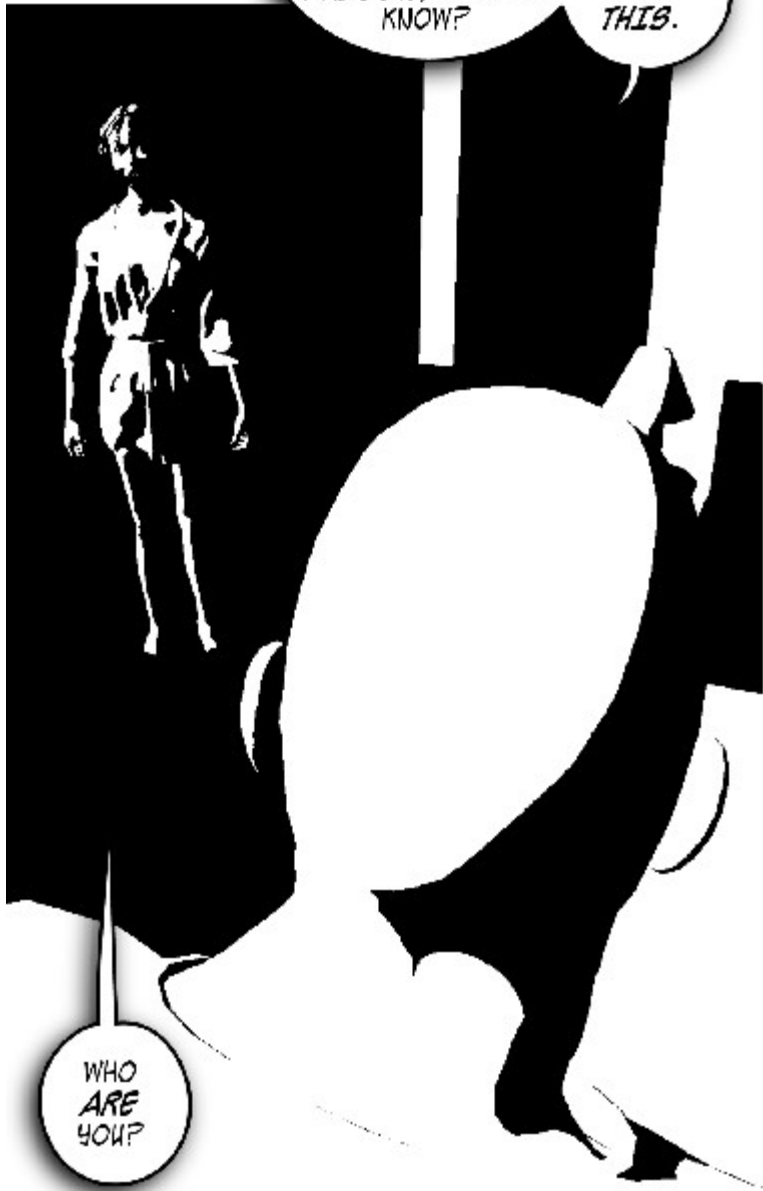
I ONLY
WORK THERE.
GET OUT OF
MY HOUSE.

YOUR
PARENTS'
HOUSE.

WHAT?

OFFICIALLY
WHEN THEY *DIED* THE
HOUSE WAS NEVER
DEALT WITH. YOUR
LAWYER'S GOING TO
PRISON, DID YOU
KNOW?

NOT
OVER
THIS.



WHO
ARE
YOU?



I...
DON'T
KNOW.



GET
OUT.



PLEASE.
LOOK, I USED YOUR
COMPUTER TO ACCESS
THE INTERNET.

YOU CAN
FIND ALMOST
ANYTHING.



THAT'S
WHAT IT'S
FOR.

HEY, IF
YOU WANT TO
DISAPPEAR UP
THE WIRE OR
SOMETHING...



NO, I'M
CONNECTED, NOW
THAT I KNOW WHAT
TO LOOK FOR.

I SEEM
TO HAVE WI-FI
INSTALLED BY
DEFAULT.





I BELIEVE
YOU ABOUT THE *RIVER*,
BECAUSE YOU *SMELL*
LIKE IT.

I'M GETTING
DRESSED, THEN YOU
CAN SEE IF YOU CAN
MAKE MORE
SENSE.



...SINCE
YOU HAVEN'T
LEFT YET.



OKAY, I WAS IN THE RIVER. I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING BEFORE THAT.

I WALKED INTO THE CITY AND PEOPLE WERE STARING AT ME AND MAKING NOISES. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.

I TOOK SOME CLOTHES SO THAT I WOULDN'T STAND OUT.

I FELT THREATENED BY THAT POLICE OFFICER.

I SEEM TO PERCEIVE ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS IN SOME WAY: BUZZING, CLICKING. IT'S CONFUSING.

WHEN YOU LOOKED AT ME, I FELT... I FELT I MIGHT BE SAFE NEAR YOU.

THEN I FOUND YOUR COMPUTER, BUZZING AT ME.

I KNOW A LOT MORE NOW, SO. I KNOW THIS ISN'T NORMAL, I'M NOT NORMAL.

I JUST DON'T KNOW YET WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

WELL, THE ELECTRICAL THING IS STRANGE. THE REST OF IT, YOU COULD BE CRAZY.

YOUR TEST RESULTS ARE NEGATIVE.

YOUR BLOOD TEST. THE MEDICAL CENTRE HASN'T GIVEN YOU THE RESULTS YET, BUT IT'S NEGATIVE.

WHAT?

YEAH, LOOK, YOU DON'T NEED TO PROVE IT AGAIN. ANYWAY, YOU CAN'T JUST GO ONLINE AND FIND THAT OUT.

WITH THE ABILITIES TO READ AN IP ADDRESS AND TO CRACK PASSWORDS, YOU CAN.

I CAN PROCESS THIS STUFF.

I KNOW. NOT NORMAL.

TOO RIGHT.



DON'T GIVE ME ANY MORE INFORMATION LIKE THAT, OKAY? I DON'T NEED IT.

SO. YOU COULD BE SOME KIND OF SECRET WEAPON, WITH AMNESIA.

OR SOMETHING WHICH HAS EVOLVED OUT OF MUD AND POLLUTION AND OLD CAR BATTERIES.

NOT EVERYTHING ON THE INTERNET IS -

I KNOW. I'M JOKING.



PERHAPS
THE ARMY WILL
COME LOOKING
FOR YOU.

OR THE
ALIENS.

YOU NEED
TO UNDERSTAND,
NONE OF THIS IS
MY PROBLEM.

TOMORROW
I JUST GO TO
WORK, SAME AS
USUAL.

YOUR LIFE,
WHATEVER IT TURNS
OUT TO BE, HAS
NOTHING TO DO
WITH ME.



I
UNDERSTAND.

WELL,
THEN...

HUNGRY?



NO, I'M
TELLING YOU
JUST IN
CASE.

I DON'T
KNOW. I DON'T
KNOW IF HE -

HOLD
ON.

...

TODAY AT
THE STORE WE HAD
A - A NAKED SHOP-
LIFTER.

I KNOW.

ANYWAY,
HE'S ON CCTV.

YES, I'VE
GOT A NAKED
SHOPLIFTER IN
MY HOUSE. IT'S
OKAY.

NOTHING'S
GOING TO
HAPPEN.

WHAT'S
YOUR
NAME?

RIVER.

LIKE
PHOENIX.

YOU JUST
MADE THAT UP,
DIDN'T YOU?

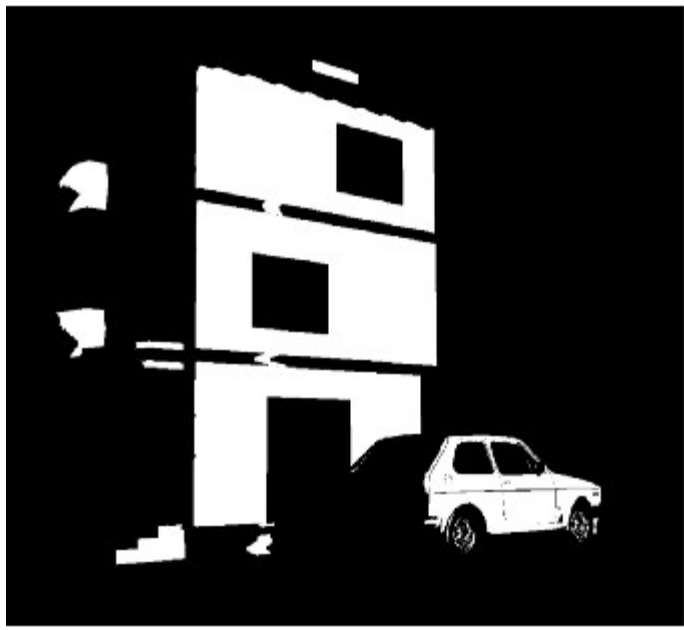
YES.



OKAY.



HIS NAME'S
RIVER. LIKE
PHOENIX.





end of
chapter **one**



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RIVER

Chapter
TWO

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BRAVO SIX.
MASTER BEDROOM
IS *SECURE*.

WHAT DO
YOU *MEAN*,
THROUGH
THE -

NEGATIVE.
ALERT. HE'S
COMING THROUGH
THE *WALL!*

HE'S COMING
THROUGH THE
WALL!



KRAK!!!



I SAID
GET OUT
OF BED.

I
HAVEN'T
ASKED.

YES!

ARE
YOU -

ARE YOU
OUT OF
BED?

FREEZE,
OR I'LL -

ARE
THESE PEOPLE
TRYING TO
KILL YOU?

URK.

SHUT
UP. WE'RE
TALKING.

ARE YOU
DRESSED?

UM, NOT
REALLY.



OKAY.


WE CAN'T
ACTUALLY DO
ANYTHING ABOUT
THAT.

I SHOULDN'T
HAVE MENTIONED
IT, REALLY.



THE
DOOR'S NOT
AN OPTION.

IT'LL HAVE
TO BE THE
WINDOW.



WINDOW?
WHAT WINDAAAAHH!

OFFFF!

GET UP.
HURRY.

KRASHH!!

START
RUNNING.

WHAT
ARE -

AAH!

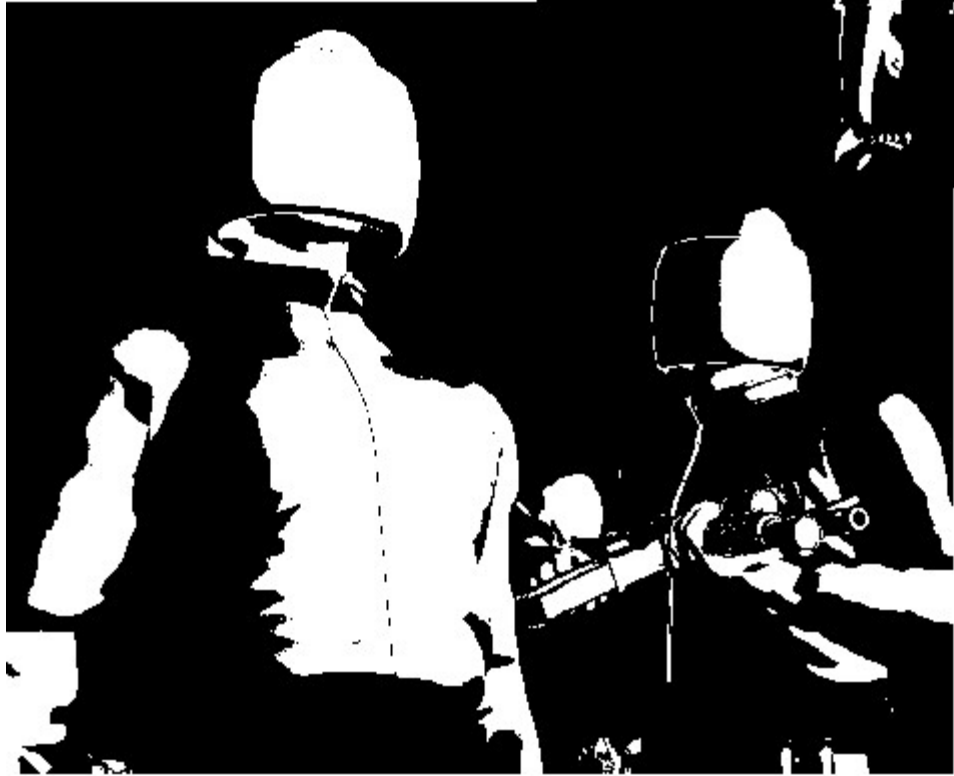
WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?



BBRRRRRABADABADABADABADAT!⁰⁰



DAMN IT.



WHAT DID THEY MAKE HIM OFF?

MY GOD.

MY GOD,
WHAT WAS
THAT?

I DON'T
KNOW WHO
THEY WERE.

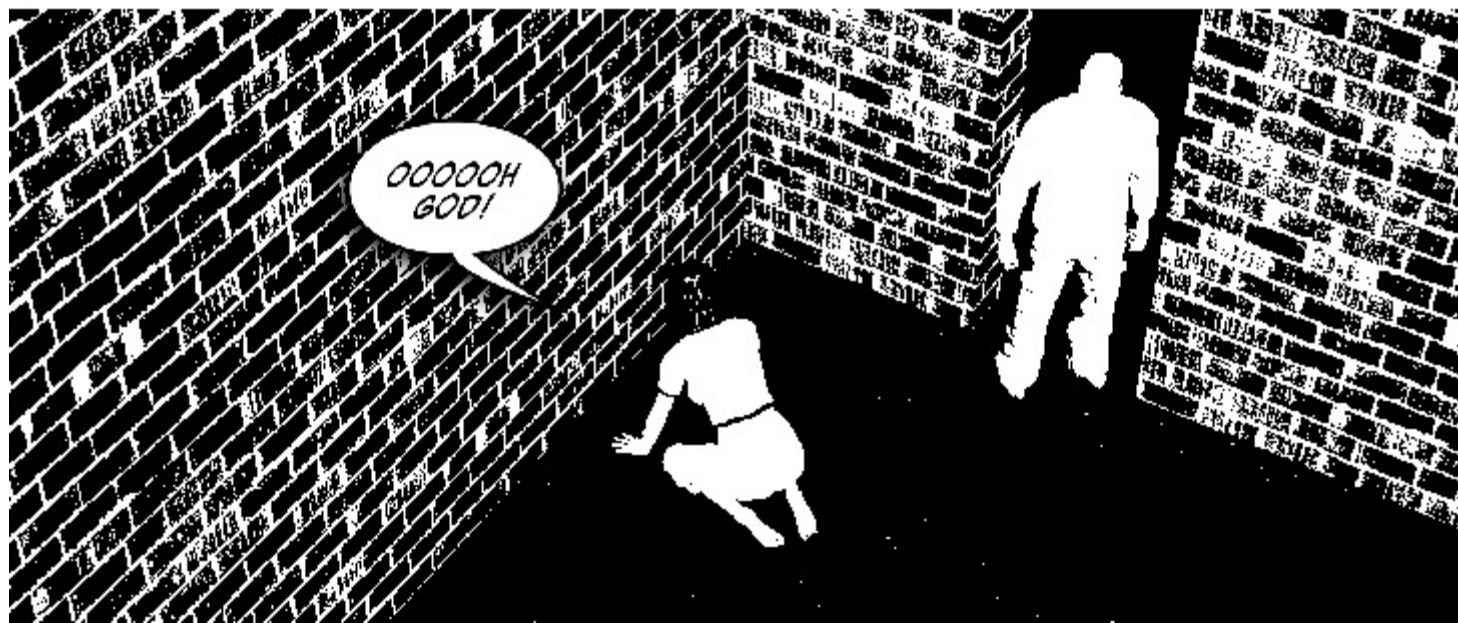
BUT I
KNOW WHERE
THEY CAME
FROM.



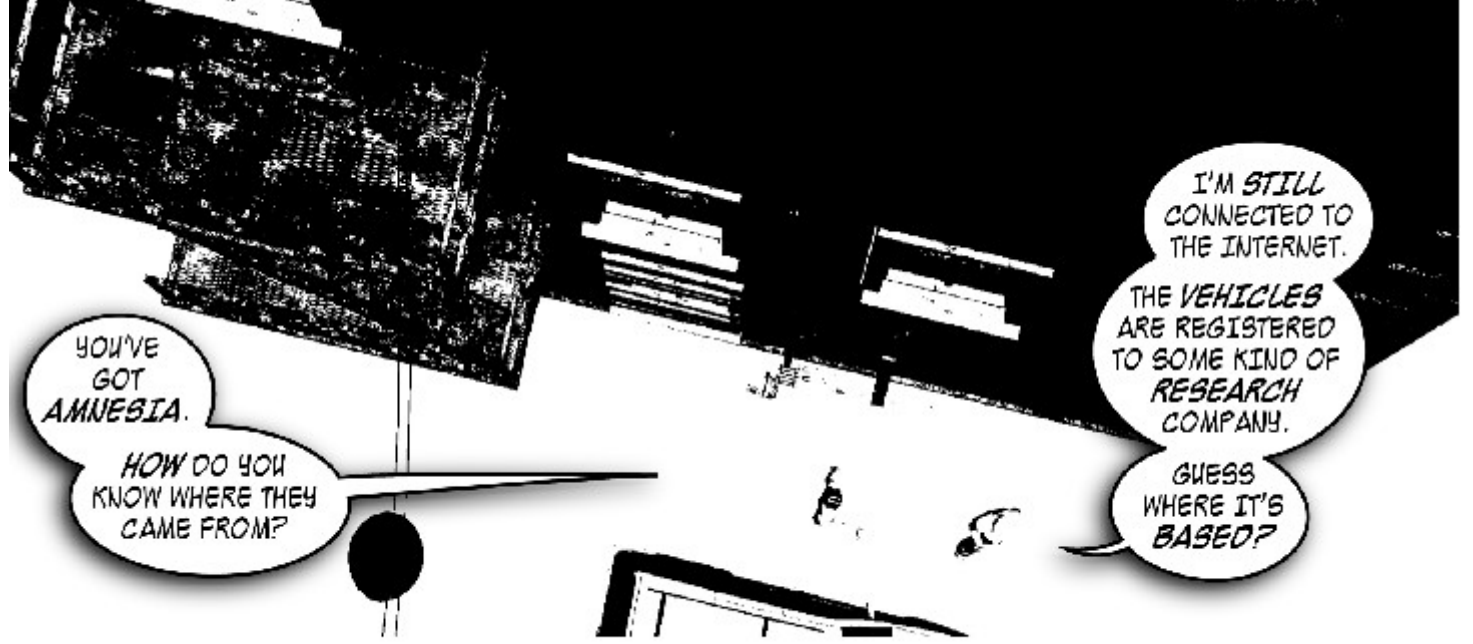
WHAT?

WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?

WAIT.
I'M GOING
TO BE -



OOOOOH
GOD!



YOU'VE
GOT
AMNESIA.

HOW DO YOU
KNOW WHERE THEY
CAME FROM?

I'M *STILL*
CONNECTED TO
THE INTERNET.

THE *VEHICLES*
ARE REGISTERED
TO SOME KIND OF
RESEARCH
COMPANY.

GUESS
WHERE IT'S
BASED?

HOW IN
GOD'S NAME
WOULD I -

OH.

THE
RIVER?



THE
RIVER.

WHERE
I CAME
FROM.



I CAN'T WALK THERE. MY FEET ARE *CHT*. I HAVEN'T GOT ANY *SHOES*.

RIVER, I CAN'T WALK THERE.

OKAY.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

STEALING THIS CAR.

HM, OKAY.

IT'S GOT ALARMS, AND IT STARTS WITH A KEY...

I CAN'T DRIVE! LOOK AT MY FEET!

WHAT, YOU CAN FIGHT, LIKE, TWENTY MEN AND YOU CAN'T DRIVE A CAR?



ELECTRICS. YOU KNOW I CAN DO ELECTRICS.

GET IN.



APART FROM THE FIGHTING, I LEARNED EVERYTHING I KNOW FROM THE INTERNET.

NOBODY DRIVES ON THE INTERNET.



BUT YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S ONLY A MACHINE.

HOW HARD CAN IT BE?



BAAAAARRRPP!!

AAAAHHH!!

WHAT?



UM,
NOTHING.

UH...
WHAT ARE YOU
PLANNING TO DO
ONCE YOU GET TO
THIS - THIS PLACE
ON THE WATER?



I NEED TO
GET *INSIDE*.

THERE'S SOME
KIND OF LAN THERE,
I CAN FEEL IT.

I JUST
CAN'T FIND A
CONNECTION.

SOME
KIND OF
WHAT?

LOCAL
AREA NETWORK.
COMPUTERS.

ONCE I'M
INSIDE, I CAN
FIND OUT WHO
I AM.

WON'T
THERE BE
CAMERAS?
ALARMS?

OH, I
KNOW:
YOU CAN DO
ELECTRICS.



I DON'T
THINK SO,
NO.

SO I'LL
NEED TO
BE CAREFUL
ABOUT THAT.

WE'RE
THERE.

YOU'RE NOT
BULLETPROOF,
ARE YOU?



I THINK
IT'S WORTH
REPEATING.

IF THIS
WAS ME, I'D BE
HEADING THE
OTHER WAY.

VERY
FAST.

IT IS
YOU, JO.

THEY CAME
TO YOUR HOUSE
WITH GUNS.

WE DON'T
KNOW WHO THEY ARE,
WHAT THEY WANT, OR
WHO I AM...



I THINK
I LOST TRACK OF
THE PART WHERE I
DID ANYTHING TO
DESERVE ANY OF
THIS.

I'M
SORRY.

I ATTACHED
MYSELF TO YOU
BECAUSE I DIDN'T
KNOW ANYTHING. I
NEEDED SOMEONE,
WHICH WAS
SELFISH.

I DIDN'T
KNOW ANY OF
THIS WAS GOING
TO HAPPEN.

...AND THIS
IS THE ONLY PLACE
TO LOOK FOR
ANSWERS.

PERHAPS
I SHOULDN'T
HAVE BROUGHT
YOU HERE.



I WANT
TO PROTECT
YOU.

I DON'T
KNOW HOW.



OH
GOD.
I DON'T
FEEL VERY
PROTECTED.

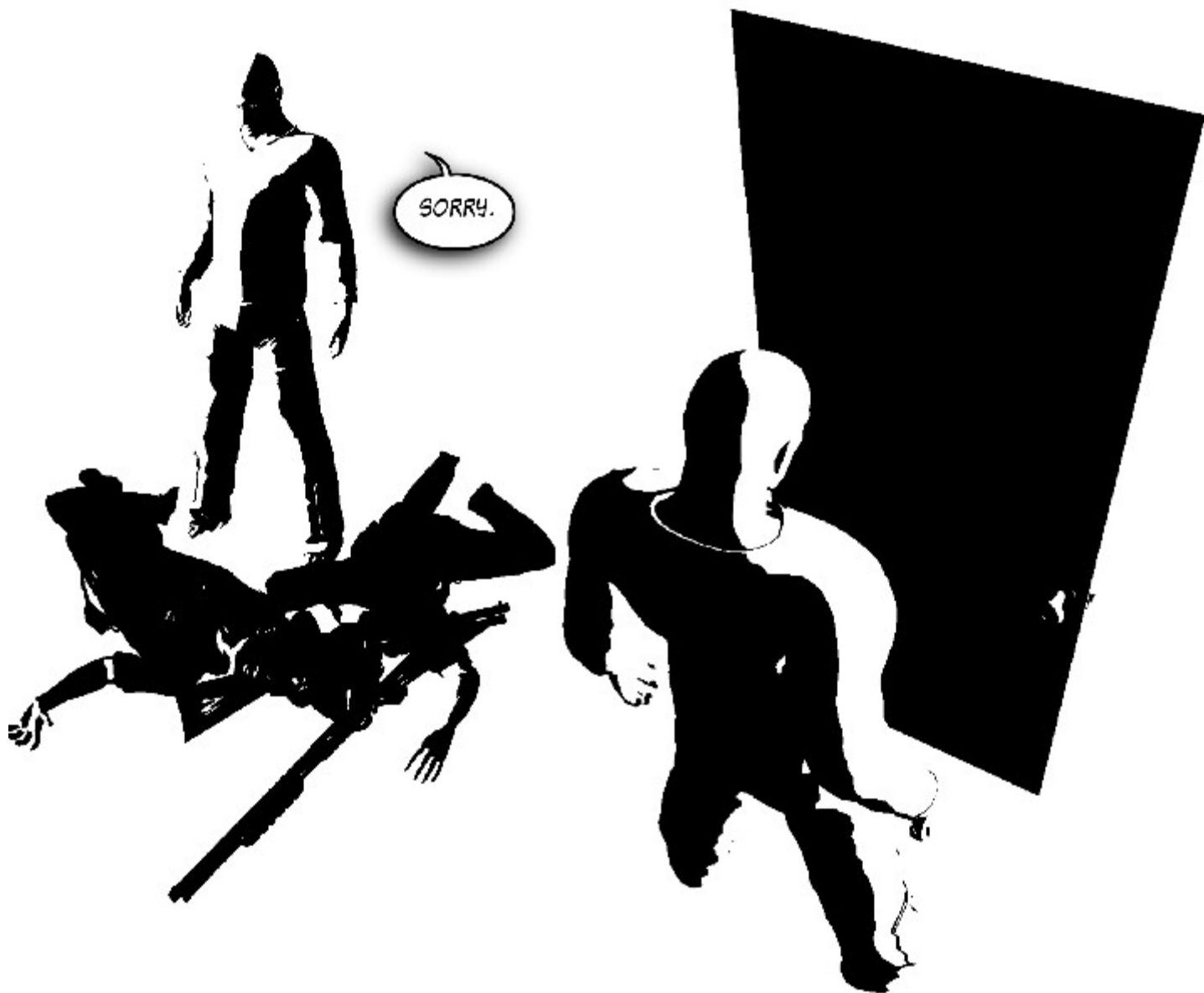


I'M
SORRY. I DON'T
WANT YOU
TO BE
AFRAID.
YOU DON'T
HAVE MUCH
CHOICE.



PLEASE
WAIT FOR
ME IF YOU
CAN.
WM,
YEAH.
RIGHT.
GOOD.









ZZZZZTT!!







*SLOW
RESPONSE TO
THE INITIATION
COMMAND.*

*THAT
WILL NEED
FIXING.*

*HELLO,
YOUNG
MAN.*



NOW...

I EXPECT YOU CAME LOOKING FOR SOME SORT OF INFORMATION, DIDN'T YOU?



end
of
chapter
TWO



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FANTASTIC
AMAZING

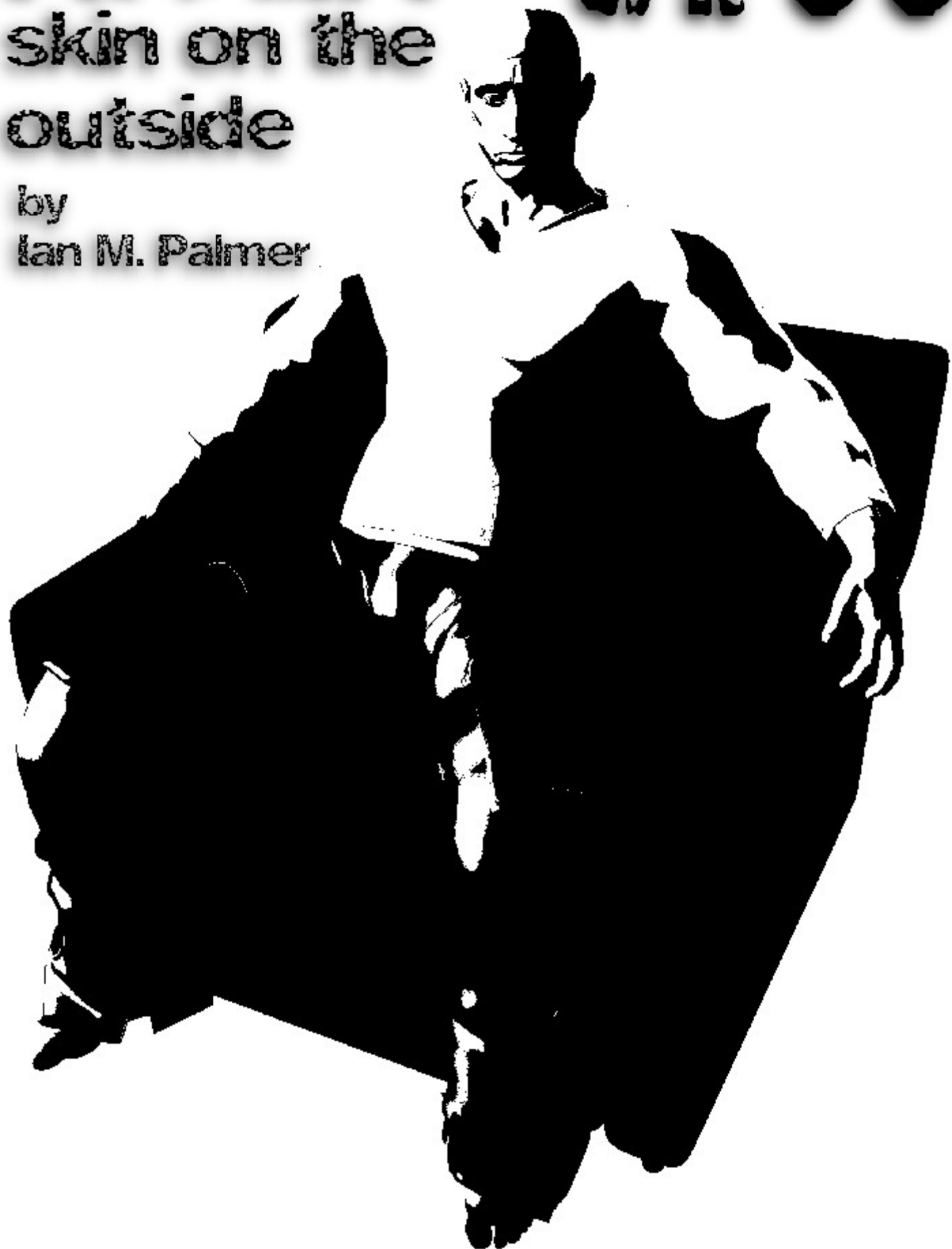
FANTASTIC
AMAZING

RIVER

Chapter Three

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YOU'LL
FIND YOU CAN'T
MOVE YOUR ARMS
OR YOUR
LEGS.

CONSIDERING
THE *INJURIES* YOU
INFLECTED ON YOUR
WAY IN HERE,
PRECAUTIONS
SEEMED...

APPROPRIATE.



SO...
HOW DID
YOU FIND
US?

I...
THINK I PREFER
NOT TO GIVE
ANYTHING AWAY
AT THIS
STAGE.



MY GUESS
IS THAT YOU'VE
DISCOVERED YOUR
ABILITY TO ESTABLISH
A MENTAL CONNECTION
TO THE *INTERNET*, AND
OUR VEHICLES' *LICENCE*
PLATES BROUGHT
YOU *HERE*.

AM I
CORRECT?

I
UNDERSTAND.





I THINK
I PREFER -

RIGHT,
RIGHT.
WELL,
I'LL CONTINUE TO
SPECULATE...

YOU
FOUND YOURSELF
IN THE RIVER, WITHOUT
MEMORY EXCEPT FOR
MOTOR SKILLS AND
CERTAIN DEFENSIVE
ABILITIES.

YOU MADE
YOUR WAY
SOMEHOW TO THAT
WOMAN'S HOUSE,
THEN BACK HERE.
YOU'D
QUITE LIKE
TO KNOW WHAT'S
GOING ON.



NOT VERY
DIFFICULT
SO FAR,
IS IT?



WELL...

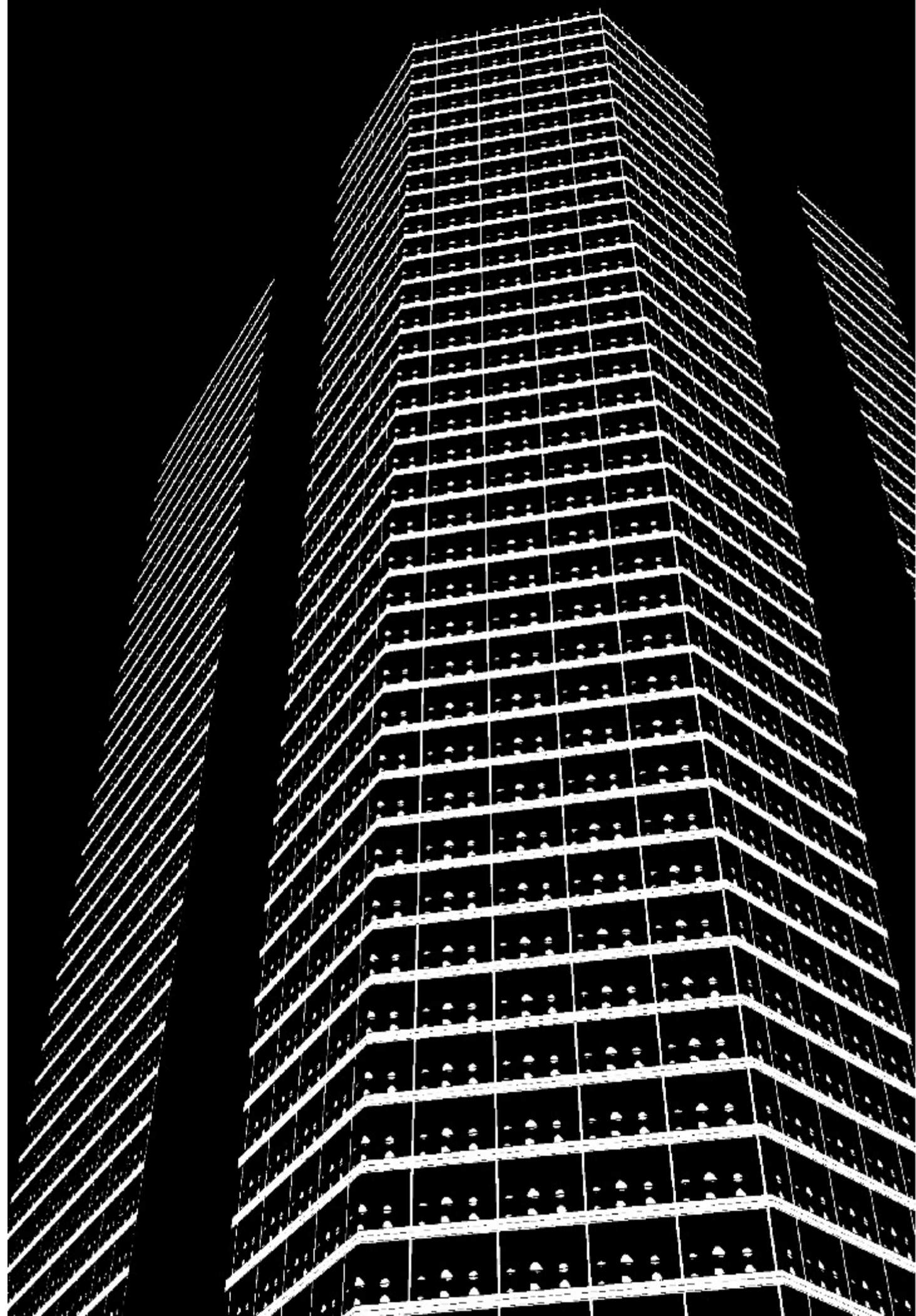
WE COULD
HAVE *CONCEALED*
OR *OBSURED* THE
LICENCE PLATES, BUT
THAT WOULD BE
AGAINST THE
LAW.

BESIDES,
WE WANTED YOU
BACK, AND HERE
YOU ARE.

YOU
BELONG
TO US.



IN *FACT*,
YOU BELONG
ON *MARS.*



THE SPACE PROGRAMME DOESN'T END WITH APOLLO, SKYLAB, STAR WARS AND THE SHUTTLE.

UNTIL PRESIDENT REAGAN REDIRECTED INVESTMENT TOWARD WEAPONS IN CLOSE ORBIT, FOR DEPLOYMENT AGAINST THE EVIL EMPIRE...

DOES ANYONE HERE REMEMBER THE EVIL EMPIRE?

...THERE WAS A PLAN WHICH, IF FOLLOWED THROUGH AS ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED, WOULD HAVE PLACED A MAN ON MARS BY 1984.



BUT ONCE THERE, WHAT WOULD WE DO?

MAKE PLASTER CASTS OF SOME MORE FOOTPRINTS?

PLANT ANOTHER FLAG?



MARS ISN'T THE MOON.

WE CAN DO MORE WITH THE RED PLANET.

EVERYBODY KNOWS IT WILL TAKE A CENTURY OR MORE TO MAKE MARS EVEN PERIPHERALLY HABITABLE BY HUMAN BEINGS...



...EVEN WITHOUT FACTORING IN A CHANGE IN POLITICAL DIRECTION EVERY FOUR YEARS.

BUT WE FELT WE COULD MEET MARS HALF-WAY...

...BY DEVELOPING A KIND OF HUMAN WHO WOULD REQUIRE LESS ENVIRONMENTAL ADJUSTMENT.



A MAN WHO COULD LIVE ON MARS.



AS WE KNOW, MARS IN 1984 DIDN'T HAPPEN.

WE CONTINUED OUR RESEARCH THROUGH THE YEARS IN FAVOUR AND THE YEARS OUT OF IT, AND AS NEW TECHNOLOGIES EMERGED WE WERE ABLE TO INCORPORATE THEM.

FOR A TIME, I WILL ADMIT, WE WERE BUILDING A SOLDIER...

...A WEAPON.

EVEN WHEN WE WERE NOT, WE KNEW THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE EVENTUAL MISSION TO MARS WERE FOR US UNPREDICTABLE...

...AND THAT IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO FIGHT AND WIN A TERRITORIAL CONFLICT AS PART OF THE PROCESS.

THERE IS ALWAYS A WAR ON, WHETHER IT'S COLD, SECRET, OR ON CRIME OR TERROR.



WE DID WHAT THE CHANGING CONDITIONS OF OUR FUNDING REQUIRED, AND WE RESPONDED TO THE WILL AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES...

...OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PARTICULAR DAY...

...AND, ULTIMATELY, OF THE PEOPLE.

BUT AT NO TIME WERE WE BUILDING A MONSTER.

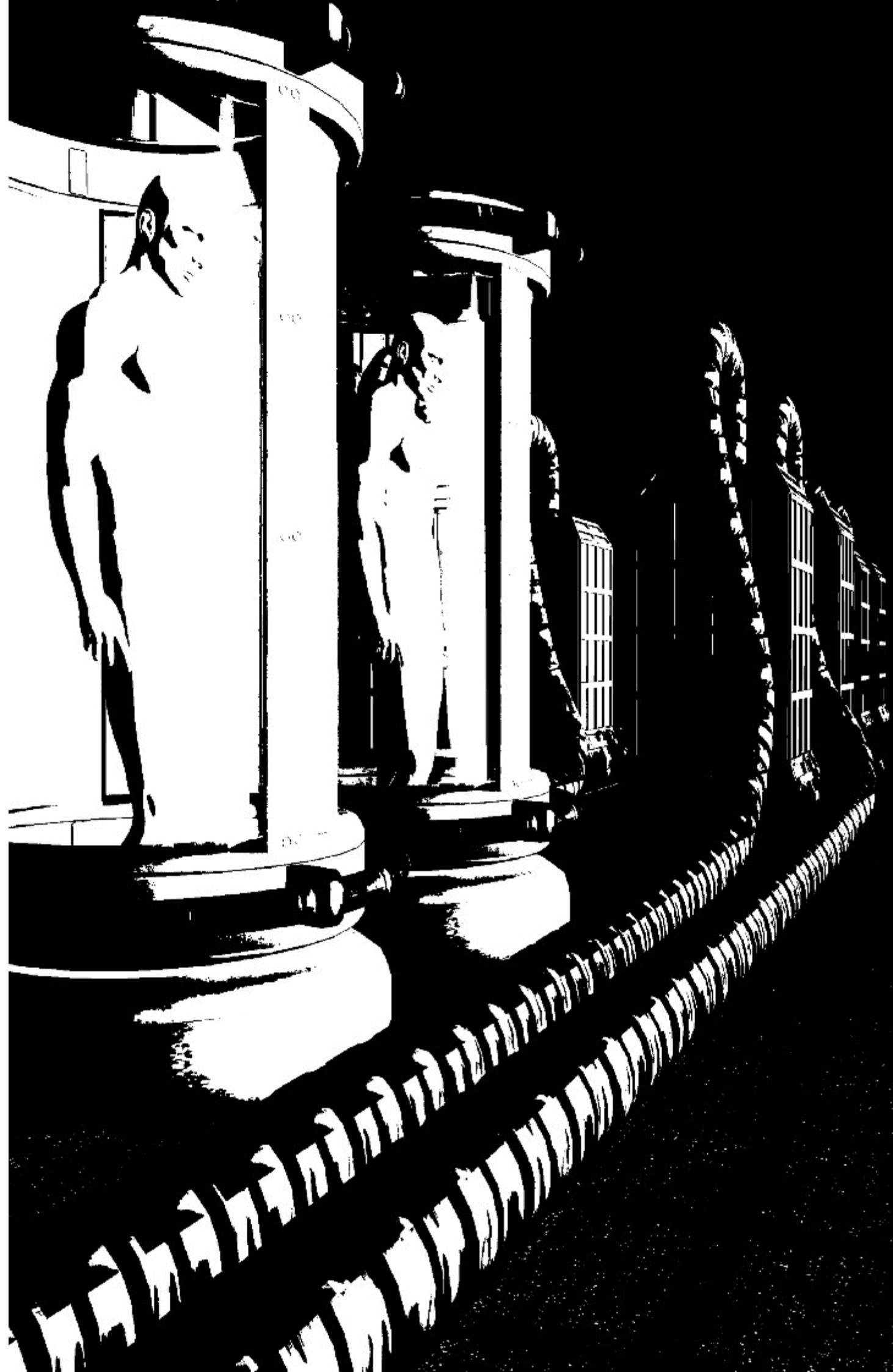
WE KNEW
THERE MIGHT BE
RESERVATIONS ABOUT
THE KIND OF WORK
WE WERE DOING -

- YOU DON'T HAVE
TO BE A *GOD-BOTHERER*
TO HAVE HALF-REASONED
MISGIVINGS ABOUT
"PLAYING GOD" -

- SO IT
WAS A *CORE* PRINCIPLE
FROM THE BEGINNING THAT
WHATEVER WE MIGHT DO TO THE
INSIDES, THERE SHOULD
ALWAYS CONTINUE
TO BE...



...SKIN
ON THE
OUTSIDE.



FOR *SOME*
OF US, WORK ON
THIS PROJECT HAS
BEEN AN INTERESTING
INTERLUDE IN A
CAREER HEADING
ELSEWHERE.



FOR SOME IT HAS BEEN A
THRILLING TREK TOWARD THE
REALISATION OF A *VISION*, AN
INSPIRATION, A *MISSION*.

SPEAKING
FOR *MYSELF*, I'VE
GIVEN YOU THE BEST
YEARS OF MY
LIFE.

SOMETIMES
I LIKE TO *JOKE*
THAT I SEE MYSELF
AS YOUR SURROGATE
MOTHER.

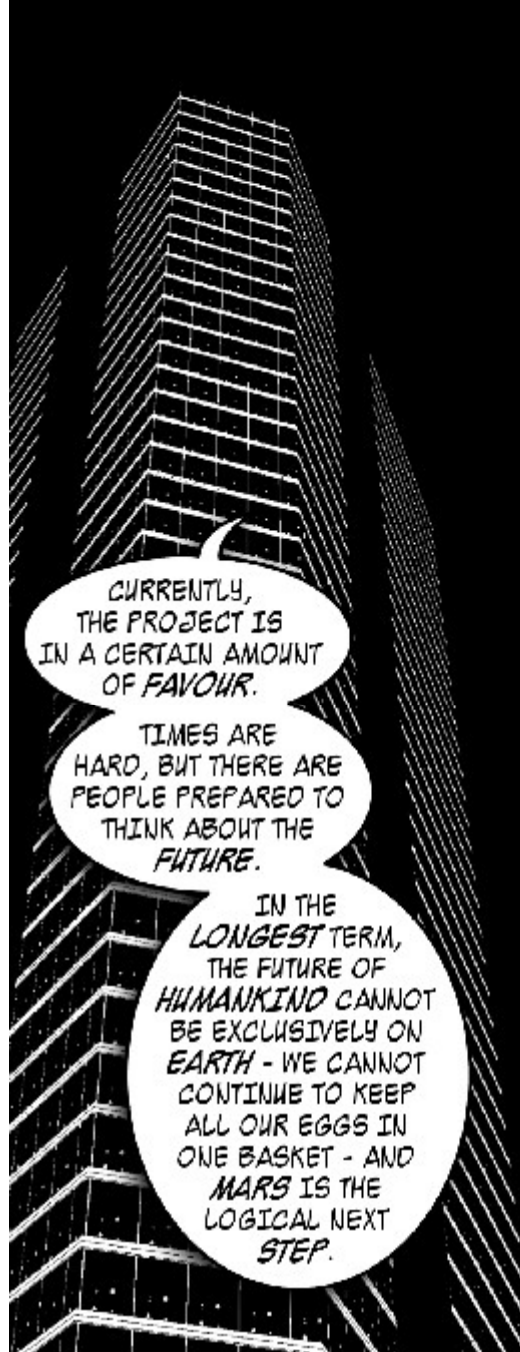
SOMETIMES
IT'S *NOT* A
JOKE.

SOMETIMES
IT'S NOT A
PARENTAL
RELATIONSHIP
I IMAGINE.



WE ARE
SPEAKING
METAPHORICALLY,
I'M SURE YOU
REALISE.





CURRENTLY,
THE PROJECT IS
IN A CERTAIN AMOUNT
OF *FAVOUR*.

TIMES ARE
HARD, BUT THERE ARE
PEOPLE PREPARED TO
THINK ABOUT THE
FUTURE.

IN THE
LONGEST TERM,
THE FUTURE OF
*HUMAN*KIND CANNOT
BE EXCLUSIVELY ON
EARTH - WE CANNOT
CONTINUE TO KEEP
ALL OUR EGGS IN
ONE BASKET - AND
MARS IS THE
LOGICAL NEXT
STEP.



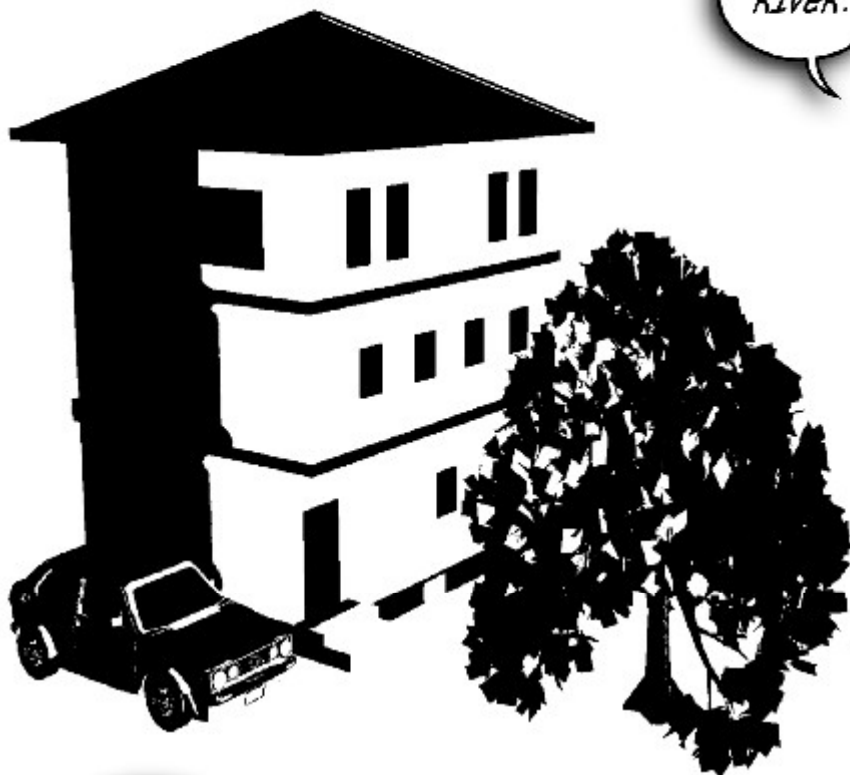
ADDITIONALLY,
THE *LAW* IS CATCHING
UP WITH US, AND IT WON'T
BE LONG UNTIL *CONGRESS*
MAKES UP ITS MIND TO
CLOSE SOME OF THE
DOORS WE CAME
THROUGH.



ON *TUESDAY*
WE WENT *LIVE*.

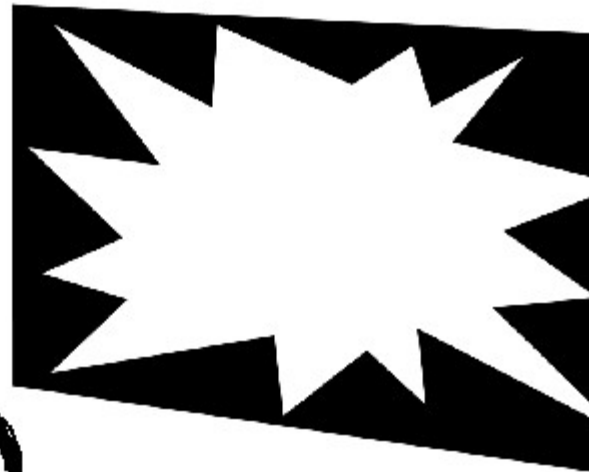
APPARENTLY
THERE ARE SOME
WRINKLES WE STILL
NEED TO WORK
OUT.

OH,
RIVER.



WHOEVER
YOU ARE...

WHATEVER
YOUR REAL
NAME IS...



...WHAT
HAVE YOU
DONE TO MY
HOUSE?



DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING BEFORE THE RIVER?



NO.

NO.

WELL, WE TRIED TO SHUT YOU *DOWN*, BUT YOU WERE OUT OF RANGE.

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH WHAT WE ACHIEVED WAS A *REBOOT*.

YOU DO SEEM TO HAVE *STABILISED*, THOUGH.

NOW THAT WE'VE *GOT YOU BACK*, WITH NO REAL HARM DONE AND NO MEDIA PANIC, WE CAN SAY THAT THE EXPERIMENT WAS *SUCCESSFUL* AFTER ALL.



I HOPE YOU CAN APPRECIATE THAT YOUR *ATTACHMENT* TO THE YOUNG WOMAN IS HORMONAL AND INSTINCTUAL, NOTHING *MORE*.

IT WILL FADE VERY QUICKLY, AND IN FACT WE CAN *REPLACE* IT FOR YOU.

YOU HAVE FAR MORE *SIGNIFICANT* ATTACHMENTS HERE.

THIS IS WHERE YOU WERE... WELL, NOT *BORN*, BUT...

...*INITIATED*.





I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
ELSE I CAN
TELL YOU.

I CAN'T
POSSIBLY BE
MORE OPEN.

NOW THAT
EVERYTHING'S
BEEN EXPLAINED,
I REALLY SHOULD
MOVE ALONG
WITH A PROPER
DEBRIEFING.

ANY
QUESTIONS?

ONE.

I WONDER
HOW YOU'LL REACT
WHEN I TELL YOU I
CAN MAP MY *INSIDES*
AS EASILY AS I CAN
MAP THE MOTHERBOARD
IN YOUR *COMPUTER*.

I'VE
FOUND THE
OFF-SWITCH YOU
USED BEFORE AND I'VE
BYPASSED IT.

I'VE ALSO
BYPASSED YOUR
MOTOR CONTROLS
OVER MY *BODY*.

I CAN
DISARM AND
DISABLE THESE TWO
MORE QUICKLY THAN
YOU CAN TELL THEM
WHAT TO DO.

WELL. I TRIED. KILL -



- HIM.

YOU DIDN'T NEED TO TALK FOR SO LONG.

YOU LOST ME RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING.

I DON'T BELONG TO YOU.



YOU'RE NOT
A HUMAN *BEING*.

YOU HAVE NO
LEGAL *IDENTITY*,
NO *PARENTS*, NO
REGISTRATION OF
BIRTH.

YOU'RE
NOT EVEN A
PET.

YOU'RE... AN
IMPLEMENT.

THEN YOU
WON'T *MISS* ME
MUCH WHEN I'M
GONE.



YOU WILL
BE *RECOVERED* AND
EITHER *REFORMATTED*
OR *DESTROYED*.



GOODBYE.





WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP





WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP



end
of
chapter
XXXX





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FANTASTIC
ON
AMAZING

RIVER

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chapter
FOUR



THIS
HAS BEEN A
DISASTER.

NOT
REALLY.

WE
RECOVERED
HIM VERY QUICKLY,
CONTACT WITH THE
GENERAL PUBLIC
WAS MINIMAL...

NO
REAL HARM
DONE.





YOU DIDN'T
RECOVER HIM,
HE CAME
HOME.

AND
SPEAKING OF
HARM, THERE ARE
ALL THE MEN AND
WOMEN HERE HE'S
INJURED.

JUST
BECAUSE THEY WORE
OUR UNIFORMS, IT
DOESN'T MEAN THEY
DON'T HAVE HOSPITAL
BILLS, AND
FAMILIES.

FAMILIES...

...WHOSE
SILENCE HAS TO BE
PURCHASED EVERY DAMN
TIME THERE'S SOMETHING
FOR THEM TO BE SILENT
ABOUT.

AND
THIS.

YOU KNOW
WHAT THIS CREATURE
COST, AND YOU'VE
JUST... OBLITERATED
IT.

IT'S
BEEN A COMPLETE
DISASTER, AND IT'S
YOUR FAULT.



I UNDERSTOOD
THAT THE *BLAME* CULTURE
WAS NOT PART OF OUR
CORPORATE PHILOSOPHY
THIS YEAR.



NOR IS
INCOMPETENCE.

WE SAID
YOU COULD
TEST IT.

WE DIDN'T
TELL YOU TO THROW
IT IN THE RIVER TO
SEE WHAT IT MIGHT
DO TO THE *FISH.*

THAT WASN'T
THE *PLAN.*

IN ANY
CASE, WE SET OUT
TO BUILD A MAN
TO SURVIVE ON
MARS.

MANHATTAN
IS ANOTHER MATTER
ENTIRELY.

WE
DON'T CARE.
AT ALL.

CLEAN UP
THIS *MESS*, AND
START THINKING
UP AN *APOLOGY*
SUFFICIENT TO
RESCUE YOUR
CAREER.



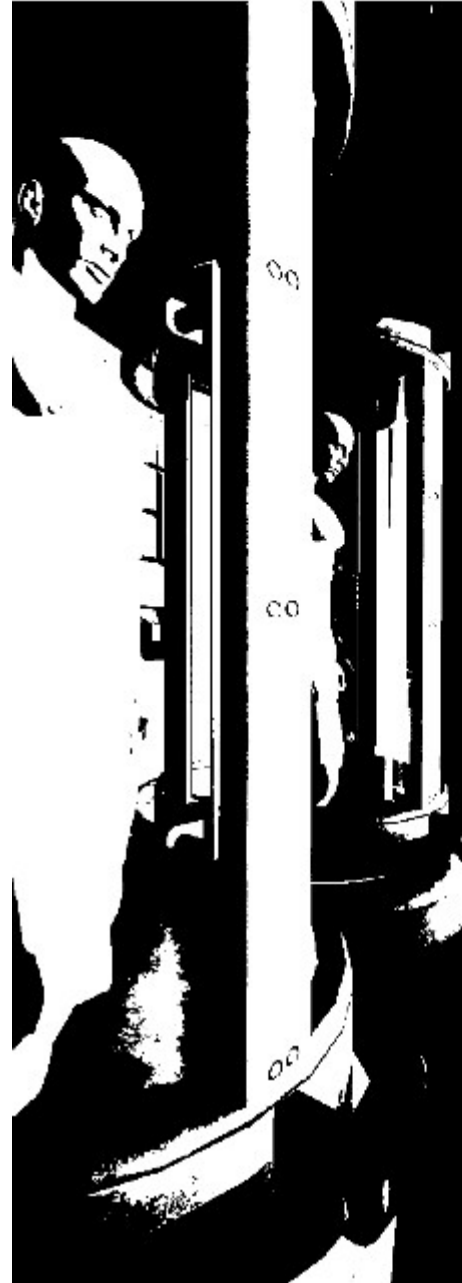
AAAAAAAAA!!!!



KDUMP!

DOCTOR.





KAASSHH!!



KAASSHH!!



RIVER.

THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE DECIDED TO BE CALLED, ISN'T IT?

WE RECORDED YOUR EXPERIENCE.

YOU KILLED ME.

APPARENTLY NOT.

YOUR GUESSES ABOUT WHERE I'D BEEN, WHAT I'D BEEN UP TO, WEREN'T GUESSES.

I TRIED TO REACH YOU. I DIDN'T WANT TO JUST THROW YOU AWAY.

BUT YOU DID. I FELT YOUR DESTRUCT SIGNAL.

YOU UPLOADED YOURSELF. VERY CLEVER. VERY QUICK.

I'M SORRY.

WELL, IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW.

NO, IT DOES. I NEED TO SURVIVE. I CAN'T LEAVE ANYONE WHO KNOWS ABOUT ME.



THAT'S... QUITE A HIGH PRICE FOR SURVIVAL.

IT'S THE WAY I WAS PROGRAMMED.

FOR THE LAST TIME, DOCTOR...

WHAM!

GOODBYE.

I THINK YOU'VE DEMONSTRATED THAT YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS.

THAT WAS BEFORE YOU KILLED ME.



I COVERED FOR YOU, JO.

I SAID YOU CALLED IN SICK, WHICH WASN'T TRUE.

LEAST YOU COULD DO IS TELL ME ABOUT IT.

YEAH, OKAY. YOU REMEMBER THE NAKED SHOPLIFTER? STOLE THE CLOTHES?

DO I REMEMBER? HA!

WELL, HE FOLLOWED ME HOME.

HE DID WHAT?

TURNED OUT HE WAS SOME KIND OF EXPERIMENT, ESCAPED FROM SOME PLACE ON THE RIVER. HE WENT BACK THERE TO FIND OUT MORE.

WELL, I NEVER HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE.

NO, I KNOW. BUT I SAW HIM FIGHT.

HE WASN'T... NORMAL.



I BET.

DID HE,
YOU KNOW?

DID HE
STAY THE
NIGHT?



I DON'T
KNOW. HE WENT
INSIDE.

I WAITED
FOR HOURS. HE
NEVER CAME
OUT.

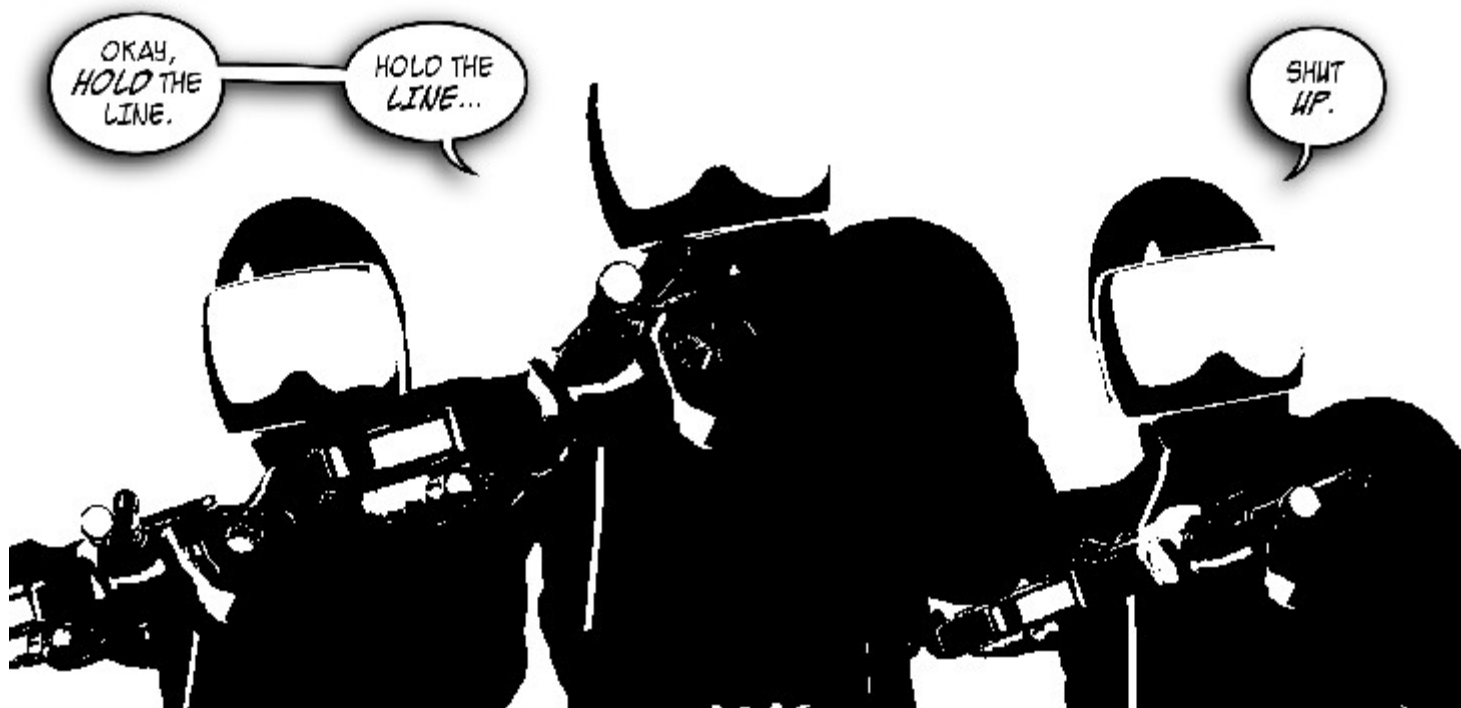
I DON'T
SUPPOSE I'LL
EVER SEE HIM
AGAIN.

NOT
REALLY. THE
GUYS WITH THE
GUNS CAME
FOR HIM.

RIIGHT.
SO, UH, WHERE
IS HE NOW?



YEAH.
THAT'S ALWAYS
THE WAY.





SORRY.

SORRY.

SORRY.

SORRY.

SORRY.





EXCELLENT WORK,
EVERYONE.

I'VE JUST ABOUT GOT THE
HANG OF THE *MACHINERY*
NOW, AND I'M *OVERLOADING*
EVERYTHING I CAN.

THERE ARE GOING TO
BE SOME *EXPLOSIONS*.

THOSE WHO CAN *MAKE IT*, IT'S
TIME TO HEAD FOR THE *OUTSIDE*.

THOSE WHO CAN'T, WELL...
THANKS FOR YOUR
CONTRIBUTION TODAY.



I PROMISE,
WE *WILL*
REMEMBER.





BOOM!!!







IT'S
OKAY,
JO.

EVERYTHING'S
OKAY.

I'VE PUT
EVERYTHING
STRAIGHT.



RIVER.

RIVER.

OH MY
GOD.



I WAITED
UNTIL CLOSING
TIME, BUT I DIDN'T
KNOW WHETHER YOU'D
BE HERE.

I DIDN'T
KNOW WHETHER
YOU'D HAVE GONE
HOME AT ALL.

I DIDN'T
HAVE ANYWHERE
ELSE.

I GUESS
I DID WHAT PEOPLE
DO: PRETEND IT NEVER
HAPPENED, GO BACK
TO NORMAL
LIFE.



IS THAT
WHAT PEOPLE
DO?



I
THINK
SO.





HEY.
YOU FIXED MY
WINDOW.

YES. IT'S
TEMPORARY,
BUT IT'S A
START.

I, UM,
HAD SOME FRIENDS
'ROUND TO HELP.



WHAT
FRIENDS?

I'M
SUPPOSED TO
BE THE ONLY
PERSON YOU
KNOW.



WELL,
WHEN I SAID
I'D PUT EVERYTHING
STRAIGHT...

...I
MIGHT HAVE
LEFT A COUPLE OF
LOOSE ENDS.

OH.



the end for now

