

MILESTONE FOREVER

Dwayne McDuffie
Script for 64 Pages
First Draft, 6/1/99

Cover 2
(inside front cover)

TYPESET INDICIA

Text TK

Page

SPLASH.

The page is almost entirely BLACK, broken up by different-sized Dharma VISION GLOBES, floating in the mostly empty blackness. These globes each have a picture of a different Milestone Hero inside, usually head and shoulder shots. We see ICON, HARDWARE, STATIC, XOMBI, KOBALT, DMZ, KWAI, DONNER, BLITZEN, et cetera, all inside individual globes. There will be lots of type down the center of the page, so put the globes mostly around the edges, almost like a border but not so obviously.

TYPESET CAPTION

"Sometimes I have a dream. I am in the cave in Plato's Republic sitting on the cold ground, my hands and feet bound in iron chains. Through an opening at the end of the cave, I see a turnstile and a neon sign. It flashes 'World's Oldest Operating Metaphor'. This does not, however, appear to be a very popular attraction anymore."

—Jeremy Levin

TYPESET CAPTION

"The secret to Funk is to pay attention."

—George Clinton

LOGO

MILESTONE® FOREVER

TYPESET TEXT

Written and Edited by
Dwayne McDuffie

TYPESET TEXT

**Wrap-Around and Interludes: DHARMA,
"Meta Fictions"**

John Paul Leon
J.J. Birch

Pencils
Inks

TYPESET TEXT

**Chapter One: ICON, "Blood Will
Tell"**

Mark Bright
Romeo Tanghal

Pencils
Inks

TYPESET TEXT

Chapter Two: HARDWARE, "Escape"

Denys Cowan
Prentis Rollins

Pencils
Inks

TYPESET TEXT

**Chapter Three: STATIC, "What Ever
Happened To All The Fun In The
World?"**

Pencils
Inks

TYPESET TEXT

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Page

SPLASH

DHARMA broods in the darkness of Shadowspire. Around Dharma floats various sized VISION GLOBES. In the globes are images of HARDWARE, ROCKET, DEATHWISH, CATHOLIC GIRL, IOTA, ORO, PAGE, BRICKHOUSE, et cetera. Leave room for too many captions.

DHARMA CAPTION

(forest green drop
shadow)

I am Dharma. It is about to begin...

DHARMA CAPTION

What's done is done, what will be done is done.

DHARMA CAPTION

The entirety of history, past, present and future, is an open book to me.

DHARMA CAPTION

All except for one maddening page.

DHARMA CAPTION

This is my power. And my curse: A single moment in all of history that *I cannot see*.

DHARMA CAPTION

And beyond that moment, I see only doom.

TITLE

"Meta Fictions"

BOTTOM CAPTION

(typeset)

"Time forks, perpetually into countless futures. In one of them, I am your enemy."

—Jorge Luis Borges

Page

Panel 1

Close on Dharma's face. He's looking at a large Vision Globe, filled with FIRE. His face is lit by the light from the fire.

DHARMA CAPTION

My omniscience is marred by a blind spot. But after that lapse, the future is clear.

DHARMA CAPTION

Dhosha. The great Evil. Suffering. Fire. The death of a Universe.

Panel 2

Wider, Dharma thrusts the fiery globe away from himself. We can see other globes, hovering about.

DHARMA CAPTION

And I alone am responsible.

DHARMA CAPTION

But how? A decision I make? A decision I fail to make?

DHARMA CAPTION

I do not know.

Panel 3

Vision Globes swarm around Dharma, who has regained his composure.

DHARMA CAPTION

Nevertheless, I have prepared for this day.

DHARMA CAPTION

I have gathered around myself beings of great power, in the hope that one of them might be able to stop me, should that be required.

Panel 4

A thoughtful Dharma is surrounded by Vision Globes of STATIC, WISE SON BOOGIEMAN, IRON BUTTERFLY, AQUAMARIA, THIRD RAIL.

DHARMA CAPTION

For I have already done evil in the name of a greater good. At the "Big Bang" I killed hundreds of innocents, in order to create a mere handful of potential heroes.

DHARMA CAPTION

Perhaps it will be one of my own creations that saves me. Or ruins me.

Panel 5

Big panel, Dharma holds and views a LARGE VISION GLOBE containing an image of ROCKET'S FACE, looking down at something off panel. The globe is panel right and in the foreground.

DHARMA CAPTION

I am blind to my ultimate decision.

DHARMA CAPTION

My hope, slim though it may be, is that by observing the final fates of those who could oppose me, I might somehow deduce my own future.

DHARMA CAPTION

Time fast-forwards, then plays itself out. The future unfolds, as it must...

Page

SPLASH

ROCKET, back in her original costume, is standing over her Grandmother's GRAVE MARKER (this is not a headstone. It's a simple stone plaque, set into the ground). The Marker reads AMELIA HYLAND. Flowers left on the grave conveniently obscure birth and death dates.

ROCKET CAPTION

(light blue drop
shadow)

Although the marker's been down for a couple of weeks, this is the first I've seen of it. I haven't been out much, lately.

ROCKET CAPTION

But that's gotta stop. Time to shake this thing and get over myself.

ROCKET CAPTION

My name is Raquel Ervin. When I'm in my work clothes, they call me Rocket.

ROCKET CAPTION

And it's past time I went back to work.

OFF-PANEL SPEAKER

Rocket?—

LOGO

ICON

TITLE

"Blood Will Tell"

TYPESET TEXT

"To dream the fantastic is to dream the dream of the Other."

—Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Page

Panel 1

New angle reveals Rocket turning to see FLASHBACK.

FLASHBACK

—I'm really sorry to hear about your grandmother.

ROCKET

Flashback? What are you doing here?

Panel 2

Favoring Flashback, a wry smile on her face.

FLASHBACK

Looking for you. You haven't been around very much since your grandmother passed. You're about to blow your cover.

Panel 3

On Rocket, surprised.

ROCKET

Cover? I don't even know what you're talking about.

Panel 4

Flashback puts a hand on Rocket's shoulder. Rocket is confused.

FLASHBACK

Oh, please! I already figured out your so-called secret identity. You think I don't know what you're really up to?

ROCKET

Then why...?

Panel 5

Favoring a shrugging Flashback.

FLASHBACK

Cause I like you. It's not that big a deal. The Blood Syndicate's full of undercovers, these days.

Panel 6

Flashback has her arm around Rocket's shoulders.

FLASHBACK

What we don't have enough of are friends.

Page

Panel 1

BIG PANEL 2/3 page SPLASH. Rocket and Flashback are flying through the sky.

FLASHBACK

Why come you're back to wearing your old costume? Don't you like the one I got you?

Panel 2

Close on Rocket.

ROCKET

I like it fine. It's just ... it seems right to wear this now.

FLASHBACK

I don't get it.

Panel 3

On Rocket, grim.

ROCKET

Me either, really. I just got this feeling, like you only get so much time in the world. I want to go out the same way I came in.

Panel 4

Flashback and Rocket's are flying away from the camera and towards the FACTORY.

FLASHBACK

Don't get all morbid on me, girl. We both got plenty of life left in us.

Page

Panel 1

Small panel. Exterior CITY HALL.

CAPTION

City Hall...

TALKING BUILDING

I can't say I'm happy to see you.—

Panel 2

Big panel. The MAYOR'S OFFICE. MAYOR JEFFERSON is seated calmly behind her desk. She doesn't even look up from her papers. HOLOCAUST is standing in her still-smoldering doorway.

CAPTION

Her Honor, Mayor Thomassina Jefferson,
presiding...

MAYOR

—I can't even say I'm surprised, Leonard.

HOLOCAUST

(always with red double
border)

My name is Holocaust!

Panel 3

Close on the Mayor, finally looking up from her papers.

MAYOR

You're name is Leonard. I named you and
if you don't straighten up, I'll spank
you. Again.

Panel 4

On Holocaust's face. His eyes are literally burning.

HOLOCAUST

Listen to me, Bitch. Organized crime in
this city is mine. You keep getting in my
way, I'll do you, Mother or no.

Panel 5

Flashback panel. Grey tone colors, except for the blood. A TWELVE YEAR OLD LREONARD looks insane, standing over the broken body of his FATHER. Leonard stares at his hands, and the blood that runs down them.

HOLOCAUST CAPTION

(flaming border)

"On my twelfth birthday, I killed my
no-account father with my own hands."

Page

Panel 1

Back in the Present. Holocaust looms, leaning into the terrified face of the Mayor.

HOLOCAUST

I got no problem completing the set.

Panel 2

New angle, Holocaust reacts to an off-panel speaker.

OFF PANEL ICON

I think you're projecting, Leonard.—

HOLOCAUST

Who...?

Panel 3

New angle reveals cocky ICON.

ICON

—You're not really mad at your mother.
You're mad at me.

HOLOCAUST

Icon!

Panel 4

The two men face off.

HOLOCAUST

Guess I'm supposed to be so angry that I
throw down with you here and now? One on
one?

Panel 5

Favoring Holocaust.

HOLOCAUST

I got nothing to prove to you, old man.
Just a score to settle. But that's later.
Right now, I'm leaving.

Page

Panel 1

Icon bars Holocaust's way.

ICON

I don't remember giving you permission to
leave.

Panel 2

Holocaust, his back to the picture window. The sky
behind him is filling with fire.

HOLOCAUST

I don't remember asking.

Panel 3

Big Panel. The window behind Holocaust EXPLODES INWARD.
An enormous fireball just flew in. Holly is a silhouette
at the center of the fire. Icon is already moving
towards the Mayor.

ICON

(burst)

Get down!

SFX

KA THOOOMM

Page

Panel 1

The Mayor on her knees, covering her head with her
hands. Icon crouches over her, protecting her from the
fire and falling glass all around them. SILENT PANEL.

Panel 2

Wide on the room. Suddenly the fire is gone. So is Holocaust. Don't let us get a good look at the floor.
SILENT PANEL.

Panel 3

Closer on Icon and the Mayor, they are standing now, she is shaky, leaning on him for support.

MAYOR

We could have been killed!

Panel 4

Favoring a thoughtful Icon.

ICON

No. I doubt it.

Panel 5

Wide on the room from above. Still burning in the carpet is the message: NEXT TIME IS THE LAST TIME!

ICON

He was merely leaving me a message.

Page

Panel 1

Exterior the Factory.

TALKING BUILDING

That's it, Rocket—

Panel 2

In Flashback's room (it's neat and clean, now). Flashback is holding up a small shoebox full of crack pipes and vials. Rocket looks at it askance.

FLASHBACK

—That's all of them.

ROCKET

All?

Panel 3

Rocket is dumping the shoebox in a trash can.

ROCKET

This is a big step, Sara. I'm proud of you.

Panel 4

Rocket BLASTS the garbage can with a bolt of her signature energy. It's vaporized as Flashback looks on.

SFX

ZRRRAKK

Panel 5

Close enough to see Flashback holding up one crack pipe.

FLASHBACK

I kept one, Rocket. To remind me not to do it.

Panel 6

Cocking her finger like a toy gun. Rocket fires a thin beam of her signature energy at the pipe. It shatters in a surprised Flashback's hand.

SFX

PLINNK

ROCKET

Tell you what, you need reminding, you call me. Anytime.

Page

Panel 1

Flash hugs Rocket, both are smiling.

FLASHBACK

You know, if I want to start again, breaking that pipe won't make any difference.

ROCKET

This is true. How about I break your neck?

Panel 2

New angle. Both react to an off-panel speaker.

HOLOCAUST
(off-panel)

It's time, Rocket.—

Panel 3

Wide to reveal Holocaust.

HOLOCAUST
—You gotta take a stand.

Panel 4

Holocaust towers over a nervous Rocket, his arm around her shoulders.

HOLOCAUST
I'm about to take your ex-partner out of the box. I gotta know, you still down with the Blood Syndicate?

Panel 5

On Rocket's face. She looks like she's lying.

ROCKET
Yeah.

OFF-PANEL HOLOCAUST
I owe you a little sump'in sump'in for how you helped Flashback—

Page

Panel 1

Big Panel, entire top tier. Holocaust is shooting a huge WALL OF FLAME at Rocket.

HOLOCAUST
—But girl, you can't lie for [!

SFX
FOOOOOSH

Panel 2

Flashback reacts as Rocket is trapped in a huge cylinder of flame.

FLASHBACK

(burst)

Holly, no!

Panel 3

Holocaust pulls Flashback away from the flame.

HOLOCAUST

She'll be fine, long as she don't try to get out. What's coming next, I don't want her involved.

Panel 4

Outside. High in the sky, FADE floats in mid-air, puzzled. He's looking for something.

CAPTION

Nearby...

FADE

(thought)

How did he lose me? I was right behind him.

OFF-PANEL SPEAKER

I'm over here, Fade.

Panel 5

New angle reveals Icon, hovering nearby, arms folded confidently.

ICON

If your intent was to sneak up on me, you failed miserably. And if it was to lure me into an ambush, I'm doubly disappointed.

Panel 6

Favoring Fade.

ICON

You don't belong with Holocaust. If you want out, I promise I'll help you protect your sister.

FADE

I feel you, Icon. But things ain't always how we want them to be. Sometimes they ain't even how they look.

Page

Panel 1

Fade flies away from Icon, down towards the factory. Icon follows behind.

FADE

We both know what we gotta do. So let's do it.

ICON CAPTION

(green drop shadow)

I had always felt, in my heart of hearts, that many of the Blood Syndicate had the potential to be heroes.

Panel 2

Tight as Fade passes through the wall of the Factory.

ICON CAPTION

None, I thought, had more potential than this ... temporal smear of a man.

Panel 3

Icon lands next to the wall Fade just passed harmlessly through.

ICON CAPTION

This isn't the first time I've misjudged someone.

Panel 4

Icon blasts a hole in the wall with a one-fisted power blast, ala Space Ghost.

ICON CAPTION
Nor, I suppose, will it be the last.

SFX
CHOOOomm

Panel 5
From inside, Icon steps through the hole he made.

OFF-PANEL HOLOCAUST
Come in, Icon.—

Page

Panel 1
2/3 page SPLASH. ICON is surrounded by the BLOOD SYNDICATE; FADE, FLASHBACK, BOOGIEMAN, TARMACK, BAD BETTY, HARM, BUBBASAUR and Holocaust. Captions label the team.

HOLOCAUST
—We were expecting you. Meet the new BLOOD SYNDICATE!

CAPTION
Fade.

CAPTION
Flashback.

CAPTION
Boogieman.

CAPTION
Tarmack.

CAPTION
Bad Betty.

CAPTION
Harm.

CAPTION
Bubbasaur.

Panel 2

Closer, a smug Holocaust in Icon's face.

HOLOCAUST

See! You thought I was the fool. But
who's here without any back-up, now?

OFF-PANEL HARDWARE

I give up, Holocaust.—

Panel 3

Holocaust reacts to the towering figure in silhouette
behind Icon. It's HARDWARE 3.0 but his eyes are the only
visible detail.

HARDWARE

—Who?

Page

SPLASH

The money shot, this is the last bow of the Dakota
universe. Make it good. A powerful Icon is backed up by
an imposing Hardware, a cocky Rocket and a crackling
STATIC, who is hovering above on his disk.

OFF-PANEL HOLOCAUST

Hardware? Static?—

Page

Panel 1

Closer. Holocaust is puzzled by Rocket.

HOLOCAUST

—And Rocket? But I left you—

ROCKET

In a column of fire. I know. It burned
through the floor, genius.

Panel 2

On a raging Holocaust.

HOLOCAUST

It don't matter. The four of you still
can't beat us all.

OFF PANEL SPEAKER

Five, Holocaust—

Panel 3

Wide to reveal Harm, stepping up to Holocaust.

HARM

—There's five of us.

HOLOCAUST

Don't be stupid, Harm. This ain't no time
for a power play.

Panel 4

Panel left Holocaust is dressing panel right Harm down.
Harm is flashing a badge

HOLOCAUST

You're way out of your league.

HARM

What I am, Dickweed, is a federal agent.
And your fiery ass is busted.

Panel 5

Wide. Holocaust bursts into flames.

HOLOCAUST

Don't matter, cop. None of you got a
weapon to stop me.

Page

Panel 1

Foreground Icon points at his temple to demonstrate.
Static is zooming along in the background nearby.

ICON

We have the best weapon of all,
Holocaust. Our minds.

STATIC

I'll say! My mind's where I keep all my
retorts.

Panel 2

Static dive bombs down towards Bad Betty, firing
LIGHTNING BOLTS from his hands.

STATIC

Dibs on the Bionic Woman!

STATIC

Nuhnuhnuhnuh...Dididididididid*

SFX

SHRZZZZK

BOTTOM CAPTION

* Static's extremely poor imitation of a
"bionic" sound effect.

Panel 3

Hardware is wary, as Tarmack flows towards him, a living
wave, with a giant, hate-filled face embedded in it.

HARDWARE

Guess I get this one, then. What's it all
about, Alva?

ALVA CAPTION

A moment, if you please. Downloading
files from Heroes database... Ah!

Panel 4

Close on Hardware's face, a semi-transparent,
holographic image of ALVA'S FACE (The Alva AI), is
superimposed, nearby.

ALVA

He is a bang baby, composed of a
substance comparable to molten tar. He is
known as Tarmack.

Panel 5

Hardware (no visible Alva) has one Omnicannon ready to fire. Tarmack is congealing into human form, and has one arm molded into the form of a huge sledge hammer. He's going to brain Hardware.

HARDWARE

Then I'll refrain from throwing him into the briar patch. Pop open a cold one, Alva.

ALVA CAPTION

Cryonic shells loaded, Curtis.

Page

Panel 1

Hardware fires a shell into Tarmak's chest.

ALVA CAPTION

Omnicanon blast, on target.

SFX

POOMF

Panel 2

New angle shows Hardware looking at a flash-frozen Tarmack. Icicle drip from him, he was stopped in mid-swing. Alva's head floats nearby.

ALVA

Target frozen solid.

HARDWARE

Thank God.

ALVA

If God could do the tricks we can, he'd be a happy man.

Panel 3

Harm is punching the crap out of Bubbasaur.

SFX

KRAK

HARM

Nailed ya, you big, ugly, purple-ass
Barney wannabe!

HARM

Now, just give me two minutes with the
Teletubbies and everybody gets their
VCR's back from the toddlers.

Panel 4

Static stands over a fallen Bad Betty, electrical energy
still crackling over her.

STATIC

(wavy balloon with
musical notes inside)

We're going to turn it onnnn! We're going
to bring you the pow-errr!

STATIC

C'mon Tin-Lizzie! You're not singing with
me.

BAD BETTY

("weak" balloon)

Uhhhh...

STATIC

Spoilsport.

Panel 5

Rocket, fists charged up and ready to blast, faces off
with Flashback, who has her palms up, to ward Rocket
off.

ROCKET

I wish it didn't have to be like this,
Sara.

FLASHBACK

It don't. Just hold up a second!

Panel 6

Holocaust pointing at Icon. He is standing between Fade and Boogieman.

HOLOCAUST

Fade, Boogie! Grab Icon! Hold him while I burn him.

ICON

Stay out if this and you won't be harmed. This is between Holocaust and myself.

OFF-PANEL SPEAKER

Beg to differ with you, Big Man.—

Page

Panel 1

On WISE SON. He's bald and hatless but wearing his shades. He's casually leaning against a wall, holding a cap

WISE SON

— This is between Holocaust and me.

HOLOCAUST

Wise Son!?!

Panel 2

Wise son is between Icon and Holocaust, looking up into Holocaust's enraged face.

WISE SON

No other. And since Tech-9 died, I've been the rightful leader of the Blood Syndicate.

Panel 3

On Wise Son, he's putting on Tech 9's hat on his head.

WISE SON

This is Tech-9's cap. And I'm wearing it, not you.

Panel 4

Favoring Wise Son, in Holocaust's face.

WISE SON

You thought the Blood Syndicate was a gang and its members a bunch of gangsters. That ain't it, bro. That ain't never been it. We're family.

Panel 5

Icon and Rocket are visible behind Wise Son as Wise continues. Holocaust doesn't like this one bit.

WISE SON

A while back, Icon told me there would always be justice in the world, long as there were people willing to fight for it.

WISE SON

As of today, the Blood Syndicate is ready to fight. What about you, Holly?

Panel 6

Holocaust whirls to see Fade, Boogieman and Flashback, standing defiantly against him.

HOLOCAUST

You're all in on this! You're all with him!

FADE

And that's the least of it, *pendeja*.

Page

SPLASH

Wise Son flanked by DMZ, THIRD RAIL, AQUAMARIA, BRICKHOUSE, ORO, twelve year old NINA (Kwai) LAM, holding her cat in her arms, and DOGG (in the foreground and panel left). They bad.

DOGG

Bow wow wow, yippie-yo, yippie-yay, bitch!

CAPTION

Dogg.

CAPTION

DMZ .

CAPTION

Third Rail.

CAPTION

Aquamarina.

CAPTION

Brickhouse.

CAPTION

Oro.

CAPTION

Kwai.

WISE SON

So here's what it be like, Holocaust.
Turn yourself over to the supercop there.
Or face BLOOD SYNDICATE justice.

Page

Panel 1

Holocaust smiles down chillingly on Wise Son.

HOLOCAUST

I don't have to fight all of you. All I have to do is beat your sorry ass. Make your move, punk.

WISE SON

Ladies first.

Panel 2

Holocaust clocks Wise Son with a vicious, flaming fist.

HOLOCAUST

I challenge your claim to leadership.

SFX

THOK

Panel 3

On the crowd. Hardware stands impassively. Rocket is holding Icon's arm to keep him back.

ICON

This has gone far enough!

HARDWARE

Not quite. Let it play out.

ROCKET

He's right. Wise has to earn their respect again.

Panel 4

Holocaust and Wise Son grapple hand-to hand, Holocaust has the advantage and is pressing down. Wise is on one knee, trying to get back up on his feet. Holocaust is BURNING.

WISE SON

You... can't beat me, Holly. You know what my power is. Nothing can hurt me.

HOLOCAUST

Nothing so far. Burn, Wise Son!

Panel 5

Similar to previous, but the flames are MUCH hotter. Both men are visible only as silhouettes.

HOLOCAUST

Burn!

Panel 6

All white panel.

HOLOCAUST

Burrrrr-

Panel 7

From above. Wise Son stands at the center of a charred circle on the floor. Holocaust's bones are white.

WISE SON

Damn. I think I was starting to feel that.

WISE SON

C'mon, Bloods. Let's go home.

Page

Panel 1

Outside the Factory, Harm, Static, Hardware, Icon and Rocket are gathered. Icon is sorrowful.

CAPTION

Later...

STATIC

Well, the ending was kinda creepy but all in all not a bad day's work.

ICON

The cost of our victory was high.

Panel 2

Favoring Harm.

HARM

Not from where I'm standing.

HARM

They say if you don't have anything good to say about the dead, you should keep quiet. I say, "He's dead. Good."

Panel 3

Hardware has one hand on Icon's shoulder as he ticks off accomplishments with his other hand. Rocket is sitting on the curb, looking at Hardware.

HARDWARE

Look, Ike. We've dealt organized crime in Dakota a crippling blow. Even the Blood Syndicate have come over to the side of the righteous.

ROCKET

At least as much as the next guy.

HARDWARE

Touché.

Panel 4

Favoring Rocket. Icon rubs his chin, considering.

ROCKET

He is right, though. We accomplished a lot together.

ICON

I must admit, I am impressed at how well we worked as a team. Perhaps it's time we formed a more permanent alliance.

Panel 5

On Harm, Hardware and an excited Static. Harm is waving the idea off.

STATIC

Oh, how cool is this? Can we have our Secret Headquarters on the Moon?

HARDWARE

You're yanking me, right?

HARM

Uh, I'm not really what you'd call a team player...

Panel 6

Icon has changed his mind. Static is crushed. Panel right Rocket dominates the panel, she pats Static on the shoulder.

ICON

No, you're right. Silly notion. I don't know what came over me.

STATIC

Awww!

ROCKET

Cheer up, Static. It's like they say in that crappy old slave movie, "Tomorrow is another day."

ROCKET

You never know what the future might bring.

Page

Panel 1

Shadowspire. Dharma is sitting, holding the Vision Globe of Rocket's Face, looking down at something off-globe.

DHARMA CAPTION

How succinct.

DHARMA CAPTION

Rocket's great destiny still lies ahead of her. I'd dared hope to be a small part of it. But she is not the one.

DHARMA CAPTION

And so very few possibilities remain.

IRON BUTTERFLY

(Off-Panel)

Harry?

Panel 2

Dharma turns to see IRON BUTTERFLY. She is carrying a metal TRAY OF FOOD. There is a plate, a teapot and china cup on the tray. There are no Vision Globes here.

DHARMA

No, Iron Butterfly. I am Dharma, now.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Whatever you choose to call yourself, you still require food.

Panel 3

Dharma, still sitting, takes the teapot and cup. The tray is "melting" away, it's part of Iron Butterfly's armor. She is holding the plate and smiling wryly.

IRON BUTTERFLY

You cannot expect to brood properly on an empty stomach.

DHARMA

Do not attempt to lighten my mood. The dark day I've spoken of is upon us.

DHARMA

My blind spot looms ever closer, obscuring more and more of my vision.

Panel 4

Favoring Iron Butterfly. She has placed a hand gently on Dharma's shoulder. Dharma rests the plate in his lap.

DHARMA

The future is no longer predetermined. I have reached a fork in the path. And I cannot choose. I am paralyzed.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Everyone has to make choices without knowing how they will turn out ahead of time.

Panel 5

Dharma leaps to his feet, propelling the tea pot, cup and plate towards Iron Butterfly. She doesn't flinch. Part of her armor warps into a SHIELD and the dishes break harmlessly against it.

SFX
(dishes shattering)

KSSSSH

DHARMA
(burst)

Not me!

DHARMA
Not for stakes like these.

IRON BUTTERFLY
Make your choice, Harry. If you're wrong,
I promise I'll stop you.

Panel 6

Foreground panel right Dharma has turned his back on background Iron Butterfly. He gazes down into a large Vision Globe, with an image of a PARAKEET IN FLIGHT against a sky-blue background inside of it.

DHARMA
No, Kahina. You won't.

DHARMA CAPTION
But perhaps one of the others will...

Page

Panel 1

The next two pages are the parakeet sequence from HARDWARE #1, pages 1 and 2. Swipe away. Eight year-old CURTIS METCALF is opening a bird cage, beginning to reach for the PARAKEET perched calmly inside.

HARDWARE CAPTION
(red drop shadow)
Stop me if you've heard this one before
but when I was a kid, I used to have this
parakeet.

Panel 2

The bird flies past a surprised Curt's face.

HARDWARE CAPTION

And sometimes, when I'd open up his cage
to clean it...

Panel 3

Curt reaches out to grab the fast-flying bird, but
misses.

HARDWARE CAPTION

...He'd escape.

Panel 4

Curt chases as the bird loops around the room before
heading towards the window.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The little bird would see the backyard
and make his move.

Panel 5

The bird flies towards the camera, seemingly oblivious
to the glass of the windowpane in front of him.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Invariably, he'd head straight for the
window, fast as he could.

Panel 6

Reverse angle, longer. The bird rebounds off of the
glass.

HARDWARE CAPTION

And inevitably, crack his head on the
windowpane.

Page

Panel 1

The bird slams into the window again.

HARDWARE CAPTION

A barrier of glass, unseen and
incomprehensible to him.

Panel 2

Closer as the bird slams into the window yet again.

HARDWARE CAPTION

So he'd try again, over and over...

Panel 3

Closer still as the bird hits the window again.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Until, spent and defeated, he couldn't try any longer.

Panel 4

Curt walks over to the window sill, where the bird lies.

HARDWARE CAPTION

My bird made a common error.

Panel 5

Curt, bird in his hands, heads back over to the cage.

HARDWARE CAPTION

He mistook being out of his cage...

Panel 6

Curt closes the cage on the defeated bird with a harsh CLANGG.

SFX

(cage door)

CLANGG

HARDWARE CAPTION

...For being free.

Page

SPLASH

Again, echoing the pose from HARDWARE #1, page 3. It's HARDWARE 4.0, in full Exo-armor (you get to make it up. Evoke the original armor but do your own thing. The Exo armor should wrap around the inner, black, form-fitting shell) is zooming up towards the reader, jetpacks blazing. He has never looked quite so cool. Leave room

for too many captions, and for the title and credits at the bottom.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The bird died a long time ago, he never made it outside.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The boy grew into a man, who spent many years bumping his head against a similar barrier, a ceiling of glass, unseen and incomprehensible to him.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Unlike the bird, the man was capable of self-delusion. He believed, once aware of the glass, he could break through it.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Eight years later, he's learned the truth: This glass is still too thick.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Or maybe it's just me.

HARDWARE CAPTION

My name is Curtis Metcalf.

LOGO

HARDWARE

TITLE

"Escape"

Page

Panel 1

From behind Hardware, his path is blocked by a huge and futuristic military HELICOPTER.

HARDWARE CAPTION

I'm long since tired of this game.

TALKING COPTER

(radio burst)

Hardware, give it up! You can't win.

Panel 2

New angle is wider, there are two of the copters, one on either side of Hardware, dwarfing him.

TALKING COPTER

(radio burst)

You're surrounded. Give yourself up, turn over the armor and you won't be hurt. I'll give you to the count of three.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Everybody always wants to take my stuff.

Panel 3

Close on Hardware pressing a button on his wrist gauntlet.

TALKING COPTER

(radio burst)

One...

HARDWARE CAPTION

Don't they realize that's why I started all this in the first place?

HARDWARE

You want Hardware?

Panel 4

Close on Hardware, firing a powerful wrist weapon at the camera.

TALKING COPTER

(radio burst)

Two...

HARDWARE

You got Hardware.

DOBIE CAPTION

Wrist Plaser: SELECTED

Panel 5

Wide, the beam arcs into the frame and cuts clean through the Helicopter's rotor assembly, severing the copters blades from its body.

DOBIE CAPTION

Wrist Plaser: DEPLOYED

SFX

ZZRAKK

HARDWARE

I think he was going to say, "three."

Page

Panel 1

Wide, the copter rolls one way, the still-spinning rotors go the other.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Damn.

Panel 2

Big panel. The blades fly into the other copter.

SFX

(crashing rotor)

SSHHHRAK

HARDWARE CAPTION

I just never learned how to make things easy for myself.

Panel 3

Hardware flies away from the camera into the rotor-damaged plane, smashing into the cockpit.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Not a lot of time, here.

Panel 4

Reverse. Hardware flies towards the camera, crashing out of the other side of the cockpit, towing the surprised PILOT with one hand.

SFX

CHOOOM

Panel 5

Similar to previous, both men are lit by the fireball of the EXPLODING Copter, receding behind them.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Hope there aren't any boats out on the water.

Panel 6

Hardware DROPS the surprised Pilot and zooms away.

PILOT

NOOO!

HARDWARE

Hold that thought.

Page

Panel 1

Long on the Rotor-less copter. An EJECTOR SEAT is bursting from the cockpit. The chute is open.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Huh. Looks like he's made his own arrangements for a ride.

Panel 2

Long on the Helicopter, in free-fall.

HARDWARE CAPTION

But that copter's falling way too close to the shore.

Panel 3

On Hardware, holding both fists in front of him. They crackle with an eerie energy.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Can't let it hit the ground.

DOBIE CAPTION

Sunburst Plasma Weapon: SELECTED

Panel 4

Wide. Hardware fires a GLOWING ENERGY BALL from his fists.

SFX

FOOOM

DOBIE CAPTION

Sunburst Plasma Weapon: DEPLOYED

Panel 5

The fireball hits the falling Helicopter, which glows with white light.

SFX

RZZZZAKK

DOBIE CAPTION

Target: HIT

Panel 6

Similar to previous. The sky is empty.

DOBIE CAPTION

Target: DESTROYED

Page

Panel 1

On the Pilot. He's still falling.

PILOT

(burst)

Aaaaaaaaaah!

HARDWARE CAPTION

Back in the day, this stuff was a lot easier. Just let 'em fall and scrape up whatever was left.

Panel 2

Similar to previous but the pilot is hanging in mid-air, held by the scruff of the neck by Hardware's hand, which comes in from the top of the panel.

PILOT

Aaaaah?

HARDWARE CAPTION

But I'm a changed man now. I guess.

Panel 3

Wide, reveal Hardware is holding the Pilot.

HARDWARE

I bet you thought I forgot about you.

Panel 4

The Pilot has pulled a pistol, he fires multiple shots into Hardware's face.

SFX

BLAMM BLAMM BLAMM BLAMM BLAMM BLAMM

Panel 5

Closer on the Pilot, still shooting his now empty gun at a completely unperturbed Hardware's face.

SFX

CLIK CLIK CLIK CLIK

HARDWARE

You're not a smart man but I'll say this for you-

Panel 6

Very wide to show how high up they are. They are specks, a thousand feet above the ground.

HARDWARE

—You got no shortage of balls.

Page

Panel 1

Exterior HARD COMPANY. Hardware is flying towards the roof.

HARDWARE CAPTION

First it was about vengeance, now it's about making payroll.

Panel 2

Interior Curtis' office. Hardware's outer shell is split open. Hardware walks forward, in his slim, form-fitting, black Hardware shell.

HARDWARE CAPTION

You get older, your situation changes, your motivations change.

Panel 3

Curt has pulled off his helmet, and is pulling off his mask.

HARDWARE CAPTION

And one day you wake up and realize you have no idea what you've been struggling so hard to achieve.

Panel 4

Curtis sits at his desk. He looks very tired.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The original goals, all long-forgotten. Only the struggle remains.

OFF-PANEL SPEAKER

Curtis?—

Panel 5

Wide to reveal AUGUSTUS (Icon) FREEMAN, in one of his better suits, carrying a thick MANILA ENVELOPE. Curtis sees him.

AUGUSTUS

-Is this a bad time?

HARDWARE CAPTION

Augustus Freeman. He's my lawyer, among other things.

Panel 6

Favoring Curtis.

CURTIS

I'd ask you how you got in past all the security, but I suppose that'd be a waste of time. What'd you bring me?

Page

Panel 1

Augustus puts the envelope down on Curtis' desk.

AUGUSTUS

The keys to the kingdom. You've won.

Panel 2

Big panel. Leave room for captions. Curt sits at his desk, reading through the papers, Augustus is over his shoulder, explaining things.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The short version. Edwin Alva, a man who I could never decide if he was friend or foe, died a few years ago.

HARDWARE CAPTION

In his will, he left me a multibillion dollar company. I guess that counts as one for the "friend" column.

Panel 3

Curt is staring at the papers in disbelief.

HARDWARE CAPTION

So. Now, Probate's over and the various lawsuits are all settled in my favor.

CURTIS

I'm a very rich man...

Panel 4

Favoring Augustus, he's almost smiling.

AUGUSTUS

Have you considered the possibilities?
There's so much more good you can do,
now.

Panel 5

On Curtis, his expression unreadable.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Yeah. That's one way I could go with
it...

Page

Panel 1

Exterior, THE MASON BUILDING -night.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The Mason Building, World Headquarters of
Alva Technologies.

Panel 2

Curtis, master of all he surveys, stands in front of the huge picture window in an obscenely large office. Note the PARAKEET on an uncaged perch somewhere in the room.

HARDWARE CAPTION

My office.

Panel 3

On Curtis' face, illuminated by the city lights.

HARDWARE CAPTION

It's taken me over a year, but I've finally remade this company to my tastes.

Panel 4

Wide. Curtis crosses the room, heading for an exit.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Only three more things to attend to. Then I'm finished.

Panel 5

On Curtis, opening large wooden double doors to a room we can't see inside.

HARDWARE CAPTION

This was the old man's office. Alva's. I haven't changed a thing since the day he died. Not that I'm sentimental. Trust me.

Panel 6

BIG PANEL. Curtis has just entered a HUGE office, dominated by an ENORMOUS painting of Edwin Alva. This is the one we've seen many times in the early issues of the series. The angle exaggerates the size of the painting. Curtis is a small figure, absolutely dominated by the great man.

HARDWARE CAPTION

I just could never figure out where to put the painting.

Page

Panel 1

On Curtis' face, we're looking up past him. Alva's face fills the entire background.

HARDWARE CAPTION

I hate this room. Edwin Alva, as always, looming over everything.

Panel 2

Wide, Curt is a speck beneath the huge picture.

HARDWARE CAPTION

A pathetically obvious metaphor for my whole life.

Panel 3

Close on Curt, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Not that, for all its puerility, it's any less accurate.

HARDWARE CAPTION

I've always been defined in terms of Alva.

Panel 4

Flashback Panel. Young Curt is winning the science fair as in Hardware #1. Alva looks on approvingly.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Alva's discovery.

Panel 5

Flashback Panel. Young Curt is building an incredibly complex ROBOT.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Alva's prodigy.

Panel 6

Flashback Panel. Alva looks on as Young Curtis, wearing a prep school blazer, stands outside the door to a classroom.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Alva's charity case.

Page

Panel 1

Adult Curtis, he just got his job. He's wearing a lab coat and Alva is shaking his hand.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Alva's employee.

Panel 2

Flashback Panel. HARDWARE 1.0 (original armor) is about to punch Alva in the face.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Alva's enemy.

Panel 3

Flashback Panel. Curtis is standing in the rain over Alva's grave.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Alva's heir.

Panel 4

Back to the present, Curt is still standing in the room.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Even his death didn't free me.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Computer? Respond.

Panel 5

Wide to reveal the smiling holographic image of the ALVA AI appearing in the room.

ALVA

You summoned me, Curtis? What an unexpected surprise.

HARDWARE CAPTION

This, I suppose, requires some explanation. I didn't bring him back to life, exactly.

Panel 6

Curtis heads out of the room, Alva follows.

CURTIS

Come with me, Alva.

HARDWARE CAPTION

My digital playmate here is just a hologram, projected by a self-programming, learning system designed to behave as the real Alva would.

Page

Panel 1

Close as Curt electronically locks the door.

SFX

BRRRTKLAK

ALVA

Entertainment, do you require?

HARDWARE CAPTION

It ought to be some consolation that I am the only man on Earth smart enough to create something quite this irritating.

Panel 2

Wide. Curt is walking into his own office. Alva looks at the locked door in mild dismay.

ALVA

I've been dabbling in the composition of original limericks.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Like I said, it ought to be.

Panel 3

In Curtis' office. He is seated behind his desk. Alva is standing in front of it, one finger raised as he regales Curt with his creation.

ALVA

There once lived a bassist named Mingus, with a preternatural gift for cunni..."

Panel 4

Curtis stands, cutting him off.

CURTIS

Enough, Alva.

HARDWARE CAPTION

The Alva AI believes that its purpose is to help me come to terms with my ... personal issues. Sort of a cyber-shrink.

Panel 5

Curtis walks past Alva to the PARAKEET'S PERCH.

CURTIS

This is going to be our last session, Alva.

ALVA

Really? How fascinating. And pray tell, why?"

Panel 6

On Curt, the bird is now perched on his index finger.

CURTIS

Because I finally understand my problem. I'll demonstrate.

Page

Panel 1

On Curt's face yelling at the bird that was just on his finger. The bird has just hopped backwards and off, fluttering its wings frantically.

CURTIS

(burst)

Shoo!

Panel 2

Wide as Curt waves his arms at the bird. Speedlines show the bird looping in circles around him.

CURTIS

Get out of here. I'm letting you go! Get!

Panel 3

The bird flutters to the foreground perch. A calm background Curt watches. A thoughtful Alva is beside him.

CURTIS

See?

Panel 4

Curt has turned to face a large BOOKCASE. His back is to us.

CURTIS

When the cage is all you've ever known, it doesn't matter if the bars are still sturdy. It doesn't even matter if the bars are still there."

Panel 5

Similar to previous. The bookcase splits open down the middle, sliding back to reveal the HARDWARE armor.

CURTIS

When I escaped the cage that circumstance had made for me, I built myself another.

Panel 6

Curtis has turned his back on the Armor, it's behind him, looming.

CURTIS

Instead of living my life, I've been playing with toys. It's time to put them away. It's time I grew up.

Page

Panel 1

Curt speaks to a bemused Alva.

CURTIS

That's it, Alva. I don't need you anymore.

ALVA

No. No you don't.

ALVA

End program.

Panel 2

Favoring Alva, who is fading away, much more transparent, as is the lettering in his balloon.

ALVA

Fare thee well, friend Curtis. It occurs to me that, while I did not fully appreciate you while you were here, I shall miss you.

ALVA

(text fading)

I'd quite fallen in love with the dark side of your nature.

Panel 3

Exterior HARD CO. Night.

HARDWARE CAPTION

One down, two to go. But this is the easy one.

Panel 4

Curt sits at the head of a boardroom table. Seated around him are DEACON, ANN KIM, EDDIE ALVA JR. and Augustus Freeman.

CURTIS

I'm glad you could all make it. I know I haven't had a lot of time for you since I took over Alva Technologies but that's because I've been busy.

Panel 5

Favoring Curt, continuing.

CURTIS

I've been restructuring Alva Tech. Now it's narrowly focused on scientific Research and Development, and has been shrunk to a manageable size.

Panel 6

On Ann, Deacon, and Eddie Alva Jr., jaws agape in shock.

CURTIS

My attorney will handle the details but the crux of the matter is this: From now on, Alva Industries belongs to you three. I quit.

Page

Panel 1

Ann sputters, Alva, Jr. and Deacon are equally agitated.

ANN

But you can't...

ALVA JR.

Curtis...!

DEACON

Curt, what about Hardware?

Panel 2

Favoring Curt, hands folded in front of him on the desk, completely serene.

CURTIS

Hardware is history, people. I enjoyed the ride. I hope you did too. In any case...

Panel 3

Exterior a nice little brownstone in GEORGETOWN.

HARDWARE CAPTION

...Hardware is History.

BOTTOM CAPTION

Washington, DC...

Panel 4

Curtis is at the front door of an apartment, bearing flowers. He's pushing the bell.

HARDWARE CAPTION

Two down, one to go. As usual, I left the hard stuff for last.

SFX

BZZZZZT

CURT

Barraki, open up! It's me!

Panel 5

Favoring BARRAKI, who has just opened the door to see Curt. Her hair is long again, it's been a couple of years. She is very surprised, and very beautiful.

BARRAKI

Curtis? What...what are you doing here?

Panel 6

Favoring Curtis, Barraki looks up at him in amazement.

CURTIS

I quit being Hardware, and I sold my company. You want to get married?

Panel 7

Her arms are around him. She's kissing him hard.

BARRAKI

Hell yes.

Page

Panel 1

Time cut. Curt and Barraki are outdoors, walking arm in arm past a fountain.

CURTIS

...So the good news is, after selling off the junk, I managed to put a nice piece of change in my pocket.

BARRAKI

Knowing your gift for understatement, I'd guess that means you're a millionaire now.

Panel 2

Closer, Favoring a smug Curt.

CURTIS

Billionaire, actually. And that should be, we're billionaires. Plenty of money to fund my next project.

BARRAKI

Next project?

Panel 3

New angle, Curt lost in thought.

CURTIS

Hardware was born of bitterness and anger. I did some good with it but that good always felt tainted, half-assed, even.

Panel 4

Medium shot, Curt has turned and put his arms around Barraki's waist. The fountain blooms behind them.

CURTIS

Now I want to create something entirely new, without all the baggage. Something with no restraints except the limits of my own vision.

Panel 5

Favoring a concerned Barraki,

BARRAKI

That sounds wonderful but you've always said Hardware was necessary. Not that I'm volunteering you for the job again..."

Panel 6

Smiling Curt kisses Barraki on the cheek.

CURTIS

Don't worry. I took care of it.

Page

Panel 1

Exterior Mason Building, night.

HARDWARE BALLOON

(from inside building)

Excuse me, Mr. Stuart?—

Panel 2

In a very nice office, Deacon looks up from his desk in surprise at the off-panel speaker.

HARDWARE BALLOON

—I'm ready to report for work.

Panel 3

Big panel. Hardware 4.0 is standing there, powerful and gleaming in the full exo-skeleton.

DEACON

(burst)

Hardware!

Panel 4

The armor has split open down the middle. Stepping from it is a beautiful WOMAN, clad in the skintight, black Hardware shell.

HARDWARE BALLOON

Do I look like Hardware?

Panel 5

Medium. The beautiful, powerful-looking female Hardware shakes a smiling Deacon's hand.

HARDWARE BALLOON

Mr. Metcalf informed me that you folks might need some help around here. My name's Tiffany Evans, but you can call me Technique.

Page

Panel 1

Exterior a large colonial split level.

CAPTION

Virginia, three weeks later.

TALKING HOUSE

Curtis, this is beautiful.

Panel 2

Interior the huge, already furnished living room, Curtis, in tux, is obviously carrying the wedding dress-clad Barraki across the threshold.

BARRAKI

But I still don't see why you were in such a big rush to move. What's your problem with DC?

CURTIS

Don't get me started. This is supposed to be a compromise...

Panel 3

Curt deposits Barraki on the couch.

BARRAKI

Hey! Where're you going?

CURTIS

I've got one last little chore to do.

Panel 4

Curt is carrying a bird cage with a parakeet in it over towards an open window.

CURTIS

I'm not what I want to be. I'm not what I should be. I'm not even what I'm going to be. But thank God I'm not what I was...

Panel 5

He just lifted the cage top off and he smiles as the bird flies straight for the window.

CURTIS

Okay, buddy, this is it.

CURTIS

(burst)

Fly!

Panel 6

Big panel. The Parakeet, in full flight, against a very blue sky.

TYPESET CAPTION

"Sometimes I suspect that we build our traps ourselves, then we back into them, pretending amazement the while."

—Neil Gaiman

Page

Panel 1

A distraught Dharma is gazing into a Vision Globe of a Parakeet flying against a sky-blue background. A concerned Iron Butterfly is in the background, watching him.

DHARMA

No. Not him, either.

IRON BUTTERFLY

You can make this decision without knowing the outcome. Just do what you think is right.

Panel 2

Iron Butterfly takes Dharma's face in her palms. She looks him in the eyes.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Don't be afraid, Harry. There are a lot of people here who love you. We'll back you up.

DHARMA

No one loves me but you. And I am undeserving even of that.

Panel 3

Favoring Dharma.

DHARMA

If you truly understood what I dare to contemplate, your love would not survive.

DHARMA

Still, you deserve to see the truth for yourself.

Panel 4

Wide. Dharma stands away from Iron Butterfly, his head is back, he's speaking to the room.

DHARMA

Mechanic?—

Panel 5

INTERIOR MECHANIC'S CONTROL ROOM. Mechanic is at his post, smoking a cigar and listening to Dharma's instruction.

TAILLESS RADIO BALLOON

—This is Dharma. Prepare to shadowslide, you know the coordinates.

MECHANIC

Boss, you ain't going back there again, are you?

TAILLESS RADIO BALLOON

I am indeed. And I'm taking Iron
Butterfly with me.

Panel 6

Dharma and Iron Butterfly are fading away in the
distinct signature of the shadowslide.

TAILLESS RADIO BALLOON

Slide in progress. Be careful in there.

SFX

(shadowslide)

WHZZSNZZ

Page

Panel 1

Iron Butterfly and Dharma SLIDE into a VOID. The back
ground is an eerie swirl of blues and indigos. Later it
will be revealed that this background is a detail of the
character RIFT.

SFX

(shadowslide)

WHZZSNZZ

IRON BUTTERFLY

Where are we?

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

Speak softly. There are forces here I am
not yet ready to disturb.

Panel 2

Favoring Dharma.

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

We are inside of shadowslide, the
extradimensional realm we use for
teleportation.

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

I recently discovered, at the outer reaches of this dimension, a source of extraordinary energy.

Panel 3

Iron Butterfly spreads her wings, she has Dharma under the armpits and is towing him "up" into the air. The blues and indigos now make up the "floor," stretching to the horizon. The "sky" is pure black.

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

Lift me into the air. It's difficult to see from here.

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

What I have found resides between the borders of our reality and ... elsewhere.

Panel 4

We're high enough now to look down on Rift, although we can't make him out yet.

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

Properly utilized, it erases the barriers between thought, matter and energy. It is a pool of pure creative force.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Oh, dear God...

Panel 5

Big Panel, high in the foreground, Dharma and Iron Butterfly are specs. Down below, gigantic and sleeping in a fetal position, is RIFT.

DHARMA

(whisper balloon)

Yes. A sleeping God, who will awaken to do my bidding, should I dare to ask.

DHARMA
(whisper balloon)
Neither Alpha nor Omega, but all that
lies between. He is Rift.

Page

Panel 1

On Iron Butterfly and Dharma, they begin to FADE AWAY in
the distinct signature of the shadowslide.

DHARMA
(whisper balloon)
Mechanic. Return us home.

SFX
(shadowslide)
WHZZSNZZ

Panel 2

Iron Butterfly and Dharma FADE IN to Dharma's chamber.

SFX
(shadowslide)
WHZZSNZZ

DHARMA
And now you understand. I have at my
disposal a source of power sufficient to
prevent the coming disaster.

Panel 3

Dharma is on the ground again. Iron Butterfly stands
nearby.

IRON BUTTERFLY
Or perhaps, to cause it.

DHARMA
That is, of course, the other
possibility.

Panel 4

Looking past foreground Iron Butterfly's hip. Her gauntlet flows, it's transforming into something (a knife). Background Dharma is surrounded by Vision Globes, he's reaching for one.

DHARMA

The temptation is great. Even if my choice to harness the Rift power is what causes the *Dhosh*, that very same power should allow me to make things right again.

Panel 5

New angle from behind Iron Butterfly, she hides a HUGE KNIFE BEHIND HER BACK. Dharma is oblivious, he has his back to her, looking at one of the Vision Globes.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Do you truly believe that kind of power can be controlled?

DHARMA

An excellent question. There is still a chance I need never test the theory.

Panel 6

Close on Dharma, peering into a large Vision Globe. Inside the globe is an image of STATIC'S FACE.

DHARMA

Although he has reached but a fraction of his potential, he is the most powerful being on Earth. Surely if I am to be stopped, it would be by him.

DHARMA CAPTION

My heart rises in my chest, as images of my final hope unfold before me...

Page

SPLASH

Exterior HEMINGWAY HIGH, Night. In the extreme foreground is one of those display signs you see in

front of High Schools, it says "Hemingway High School" in permanent letters above a white field. Spelled out on the sign, in those movable letters (like on a theatre marquee) is "WELCOMES THE CLASS OF 2002". Also in the foreground, looking at the sign and lit by the light from it, is VIRGIL HAWKINS. His back is to us. He's twenty-seven years old, taller and a bit broader. He's wearing a black TUXEDO.

VIRGIL CAPTION

(dark blue drop shadow)

They say time flies when you're having fun. Seems to me it moves along pretty quick whatever you're doing.

LOGO

STATIC

TITLE

"What Ever Happened To All The Fun In The World?"

Page

Panel 1

New angle reveals VIRGIL'S FACE. He's older and wears a somewhat cheesy moustache. His hair is substantially longer, but still in braids. Still in all, he turned out to be quite a handsome young man. He's reading the sign wistfully.

VIRGIL CAPTION

Case in point; all of a sudden it was ten years later...

OFF-PANEL SPEAKER

Virgil!-

Panel 2

Virgil turns to see a smiling RICK MASON, similarly aged. Rick dresses like a well-to-do Hollywood hotshot. His hair is still too long but in a ponytail.

RICK

-Virgil Hawkins!

VIRGIL

Rick? What's it been, five years?

RICK

At least.

Panel 3

They hug, smiling and clapping each other's backs.

VIRGIL

So, what are you doing now? You still work for the ad agency?

RICK

Nope. Moved to LA. I'm directing 3-V commercials.

VIRGIL

Damn, you're cool.

Panel 4

They've broken the hug. Virgil looks troubled. Rick is uncomfortable, like he put his foot in his mouth.

RICK

Always was. Hey, I heard about Frieda. Sorry man. I really am.

VIRGIL

Um, I don't really feel up to talking about her yet...

RICK

...

Panel 5

A too-cheerful Virgil indicates the open front doors.

VIRGIL

(letter quote marks)

"Breaking the uncomfortable silence, the caped crusader points to the open portal and barks a terse command to his partner:"

VIRGIL

(burst)

"To the gymnasium, boy wonder!"

RICK

How many times do I have to tell you? I'm
Batman, you're Robin.

VIRGIL

Nuh uh. I'm Batman.

Panel 6

From behind Virgil and Rick as they enter the big front
double doors.

RICK

Fine, I'm Galactus.

VIRGIL

Then I'm Darkseid.

RICK

Be Darkseid. Galactus would eat Darkseid.

VIRGIL

There's an ugly image.

Page

Panel 1

Inside the Gym. Rick is still talking. Favoring Virgil,
reacting to the sight of the room.

RICK

Could be worse. Could be vice versa.

VIRGIL CAPTION

I hadn't set foot in this place since
graduation.

Panel 2

Our first good look at the GYM, all decked out for the
party. It's full of people, dancing, grouped in clusters
and talking, et cetera. There is a big banner,

dominating the room, WELCOME CLASS OF 2002 -10TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

VIRGIL CAPTION

The sights and sounds of high school came
back to me in a Proustean rush.

VIRGIL CAPTION

Okay, that came off a little on the
pretentious side but sometimes there just
aren't any appropriate Star Trek
references at hand.

Panel 3

Virgil and Rick work the party. They greet FELIX and a
woman who must be his WIFE.

VIRGIL CAPTION

I caught up with my friends and old
memories replayed in my mind.

Panel 4

DAISY and some women you can make up are hugging and
greeting the guys.

VIRGIL CAPTION

The weakness in my knees as I walk in
here the first time, a lowly freshman.

VIRGIL CAPTION

The squeak of my locker door as it opens,
the clang as it slams shut.

Panel 5

CHUCK just told a joke, Virgil is doubled over laughing,
the others laugh too.

VIRGIL CAPTION

The dampness on the bottom of the
lunchroom tray that I hope is just
condensation.

Panel 6

Virgil sitting on a folding chair near a punch bowl. He's ignoring the party around him, absorbed in the YEARBOOK he's reading, a wistful smile on his face.

VIRGIL CAPTION

That lovely girl I fell for and her wonderful smell; chamomile tea with a hint of copper, like the taste of the edge of a spoon.

VIRGIL CAPTION

I suppose my high school memories are pretty typical.—

Page

SPLASH

Virgil's head in the upper right hand corner, dissolving into a FLASHBACK PANEL of a STATIC figure, lifted from STATIC #1, page 2. He hovers in mid air on a garbage can lid, electrical energy crackling around him. Behind him, (black lines knocked back to gray and all colored in pastels), a MONTAGE of his friends and foes: DUSK, LARRY WADE, PUFF and COIL, DONNER and BLITZEN, TARMACK, HOT STREAK, D-STRUCT, A GLOWING CHIHUAHUA, RUBBERBAND MAN, THE GARDNER, *et cetera*.

VIRGIL CAPTION

—All things considered.

VIRGIL CAPTION

You see, I wasn't just Virgil Hawkins, teen-aged fanboy and owner of the fastest mouth yet produced by human evolution.

VIRGIL CAPTION

I was also a bona-fied super hero: Static, master of electricity, protector of the weak, booty-kicker of villainy.

VIRGIL CAPTION

You know, the good guy.

VIRGIL CAPTION

But I gave all that up a long time ago. I
don't suppose many people these days
remember there ever was a Static.

Page

Panel 1

Big panel, the front door EXPLODES, revealing FIREWHEEL.
This is Hotstreak, older and redesigned. The central
image of his new costume is his flaming swastika. He
should also be wearing modified shorts with suspenders
over his body suit. Partygoers dive for cover.

VIRGIL CAPTION

But I've been wrong before...

SFX

KA-CHOOM

FIREWHEEL

All right, which one of you [ers is
Static!?!]

Panel 2

Firewheel is holding a FLAMING SWASTIKA in his fist.

FIREWHEEL

C'mon out, Static. Prepare to die at the
hands of Firewheel! You hear me? I'mo
kill you!

Panel 3

On Virgil and Rick. Virgil is literally rolling his
eyes. A thought balloon leading to Virgil has a PICTURE
of a BASEBALL with a giant SCREW through the middle of
it.

VIRGIL CAPTION

"Firewheel." Back in high school, the
little Nazi used to call himself
Hotstreak.

Panel 4

Rick is yelling at Firewheel. Virgil is ducking out of the panel.

VIRGIL

(whisper)

Cover for me will you, Rick? I might still have some work clothes stashed around somewhere.

RICK

Hey! How do you even know Static is here?

FIREWHEEL

I always figgered he was in this graduating class.

Panel 5

Rick and others scatter as a flaming swastika rips into the floor.

SFX

FOOOSH

FIREWHEEL

For your sake pervert, you best hope I'm right!

RICK

Oh sure, you're wearing *Lederhosen* to a formal function and I'm the pervert.

Page

Panel 1

Virgil is at a LOCKER, sending an electrical jolt through the lock that SHATTERS it.

VIRGIL CAPTION

With any luck, nobody ever found my hiding place...

SFX

ZZRAK

VIRGIL CAPTION

I've managed to keep my identity a secret this long. No need to blow it for skippy the skinhead.

Panel 2

Virgil has opened the locker and scattered its contents, he's peeling back a false rear wall, and pulling out his COSTUME. Visible in the locker is a baseball cap.

VIRGIL CAPTION

Over ten years and it's still here! When they give out the Nobel prize for costume hiding...

VIRGIL CAPTION

Well, I guess it should go to the Flash. Still, this is pretty respectable.

VIRGIL

(thought)

Hey, nice cap!

Panel 3

Big panel, entire second tier. Back in the gymnasium. Flames are everywhere. Flaming swastikas cut through the air. People are running, Firewheel is at the center of it all.

FIREWHEEL

So I spend years rotting away in prison, while niggers and Jews and faggots be roaming the streets, free as they please.

OFF-PANEL STATIC

(static balloon)

Yadda, yadda, yadda. Cats and dogs, living together!

Panel 4

STATIC, surfing on a trash can lid, zooms in towards Firewheel.

FIREWHEEL
(burst)

Static!

STATIC
Sorry I'm late, but you have no idea how hard it is to find a metal trash can lid these days.

Panel 5

Static dodges a spread of flaming swastikas from FIREWHEEL.

STATIC
So what's the beef this time? Affirmative Action keep you from getting that big KKK promotion you were expecting?

FIREWHEEL
Don't be mocking me, Static. Everything bad that ever happened to me was because of your kind.

Page

Panel 1

Static projects a FORCE FIELD that protects a couple of people from the flaming debris falling from the ceiling.

STATIC
"Don't be mocking"? That's it, no more Quentin Tarantino movies for you. C'mon buddy, conjugate with me!

Panel 2

Tight on Firewheel.

FIREWHEEL
Damn it Static! My life ain't no joke! The whole world is set up to hold back the white man. It's time you had to pay!

Panel 3

Wide, Static is firing a series of electrical bursts, easily picking Firewheel's flaming Swastikas out of the air.

STATIC

I'd rather sit through an odd-numbered Star Trek film festival than argue racial politics with you, but has it ever occurred to you that you're so miserable because...

STATIC

Well, because you're so miserable.

Panel 4

Static is flying behind Firewheel, who is running away at super-speed, leaving a trail of fire behind him.

FIREWHEEL

(burst)

I'mo kill you! I'mo kill you all!

STATIC

See, you're making my point for me. What kind of plan is that? Tell the truth, did you accidentally dislodge your brain cell?

Panel 5

Firewheel blasts the wall in front of him with a huge burst of flame, he's making a big hole in the wall.

SFX

KA-THOOM

FIREWHEEL

This ain't over, Static!

STATIC

Maybe not, but it should be. It's tired and bound to collapse from its own weight.

STATIC

Speaking of which, that wall doesn't look so good.

Panel 6

Static is projecting ELECTRICAL ENERGY to hold up the wall. A trail of flame leads out of the hole, and out to the horizon. Static yells back to folks at the party.

STATIC

Okay everybody, let's clear out of here. I can only hold this thing together for another few minutes...

Page

Panel 1

Night. Virgil (back in his tux), Rick, Chuck and Felix walk down the street.

VIRGIL CAPTION

Later, me and my friends went for a walk...

CHUCK

...and Hotstreak—

VIRGIL

Firewheel.

CHUCK

Whoever. He got away clean, huh? Getting kinda slow in your old age?

Panel 2

Favoring Virgil and Rick.

VIRGIL

Maybe. But at least no one was seriously hurt.

RICK

This time.

VIRGIL

Look, I'm betting he'll go for a rematch at the homecoming game tomorrow. If he does, I'll nail him then for sure.

Panel 3

Favoring Felix.

FELIX

What if he doesn't? You going to hang around for a while?

VIRGIL

I can't, I'm just a lowly resident. Even getting these two days off was a major miracle.

Panel 4

Wide, and from far enough back that we can see some of the street.

VIRGIL

If I have to leave before I catch Firewheel, I'll ask Icon to handle it for me. She still owes me a favor or two.

VIRGIL

Hey, Felix! Where are we going, anyway? Maybe I should fly back and bring the car around.

FELIX

No need, buddy.—

Panel 5

Exterior FANDOM'S LAIR. It's a comic book store. Felix has his keys out and is unlocking the front door. Virgil looks up at the sign.

FELIX

—We're already here!

VIRGIL

Wow! Fandom's Lair! We spent a lot of hours in here, back in the day.

FELIX

Not as many as I do now. I bought the place.

Panel 6

Inside the store. There are no comic books, just racks of CD cases, filled with DVD's. Foreground Virgil is peering at one ("The Complete Little Lulu"), he's opened the case and is looking at the disk inside. Chuck looks on disapprovingly.

CHUCK

Don't get your fingers on it! Put it back in the plastic!

VIRGIL

Comic books! I didn't know they still made them, anymore.

FELIX

Yep. Still hangin in there.

Page

Panel 1

Felix has taken the comic away from Virgil, and is putting it in a plastic bag.

FELIX

I've even got some of the old paper ones, in the back.

VIRGIL

I'm out of touch. What new stuff should I be reading?

FELIX

Uh, let's see...

Panel 2

Felix is over Virgil's shoulder as he studies a different CD case.

FELIX

This is Chaykin's new Supergirl revamp.
In issue 3 she crushes a piece of coal
into a diamond.

VIRGIL

So?

FELIX

No hands.

Panel 3

Virgil is handing the case to Felix. Chuck and Rick are
dragging out a card table.

VIRGIL

Wrap that up for me, will you?

CHUCK

Hey! Who's up for a little D&D?

RICK

Okay, but just for an hour or so. We've
all got a busy day tomorrow.

Panel 4

Exterior VIRGIL'S HOUSE, DAWN.

VIRGIL CAPTION

So, six hours later...

TALKING HOUSE

Well, look who's creeping in with the
dawn—

Panel 5

Interior, the Hawkins' LIVING ROOM. MOM, dressed for
work, is kissing Virgil, who is still in his tux
although he lost the jacket and tie hours ago.

MOM

—If it isn't my son the doctor! Out
carousing all night?

VIRGIL

In my way.

Panel 6

Virgil heads up the stairs. Mom is at the foot of the stairs, putting on her coat.

MOM

You've got just enough time for a quick shower. Your sister's making breakfast.

VIRGIL

Not to worry. If the Maalox doesn't work, I can always write myself a prescription for something stronger.

MOM

See you, baby.

Page

Panel 1

The KITCHEN. Virgil's sister SHARON is frying something in a black skillet, she's obviously pregnant. Virgil is looking over her shoulder. He's wearing a U of M baseball cap and he's dressed in jeans and a college letter jacket (again, The University of Michigan).

VIRGIL CAPTION

And, after a quick shower...

VIRGIL

Morning, Sharon. What you making, Spaghetti?

SHARON

Pancakes.

VIRGIL

That would have been like, my 3rd or 4th guess. Honest.

Panel 3

Sharon has turned around to face Virgil. She wields her spatula like a weapon. Both are making sour faces at each other.

SHARON

Dufus.

VIRGIL

Liver lips.

SHARON

Poindexter.

VIRGIL

Microcephalic.

Panel 4

Sharon is smiling and putting food into a plate.
Virgil's smiling too.

SHARON

You want bacon?

VIRGIL

Thanks. Want me to go wake Steven?

SHARON

He's working a double. You know we're trying to save for a house.

Panel 5

Both are at the breakfast table. Virgil's pouring syrup.
Both are wistful.

VIRGIL

This is really something huh? You're married and about to have a baby, I'm practically a doctor.

SHARON

Why is it I miss Dad the most at the happiest times? What's Mom always saying?...

VIRGIL

"Robert should be here for this."

Panel 6

Favoring Sharon. Virgil is standing, putting down an empty juice glass.

SHARON

Well, he should. So should Frieda.

VIRGIL

Yeah, well. Things don't always work out the way we hoped, do they?

VIRGIL

I gotta go, Sharon.

Page

Panel 1

Exterior the FOOTBALL FIELD. It's a good-sized high-school and the stands are full. Players are already on the field.

VIRGIL CAPTION

Later that day, at the Homecoming game...

Panel 2

In the stands, Virgil (in tee-shirt and jeans), Chuck, Felix and Rick (who is wearing a ball cap) are in the crowd, yelling their heads off.

RICK

I tell you, some things never change.

CHUCK

Yep, our football team still sucks!

VIRGIL

Uh oh.—

Panel 3

Entire second tier. Firewheel is spewing flames on the field. The players scatter for cover.

OFF-PANEL VIRGIL

-Looks like the halftime show's starting early.

FIREWHEEL

Static! I know you're out there! Let's finish this.

Panel 4

On Virgil and the gang, everyone's on their feet. They're straining to hear. Virgil

CHUCK

What? We can't hear you up here, moron!!

VIRGIL

No, but I got a pretty good guess what he wants.

Panel 5

Close on Virgil, pulling his mask over his face.

RICK

You can't change in front of all these people.

VIRGIL

Maybe I can. Let me try something...

Page

Panel 1

Virgil is a silhouette being struck by a mighty lightning bolt. Just like Captain Marvel.

VIRGIL

(burst)

SHAZAM!

SFX

BOOM!!

Panel 2

Similar to previous, most of a chagrined Virgil's clothes have been burned off by the lightning bolt, revealing his Static costume beneath. Scraps of clothes hang pitifully off of him. Rick and the guys are laughing their asses off.

STATIC

Just shut up and loan me your cap.

Panel 3

Static, on a HIGH-TECH FLYING DISK he must have got after the run of the series, zooms towards Firewheel, at mid-field.

STATIC

Look what you did, you wrecked the game —actually, I guess should thank you for that. We were losing pretty bad.

FIREWHEEL

It's on, Static. I'mo prove the white man's superiority by beating you down, once and for all.

Panel 4

Static barrel-rolls, nimbly avoiding a fusillade of flaming swastikas.

STATIC

Could you just get off that? This isn't the time or place for a serious discourse on Race. Race is complicated. You're simple.

STATIC

By the way, love the short shorts. What do you call 'em, "David Dukes"?

Panel 5

On Firewheel, running at super-speed, dodging electrical bolts from above and throwing multiple flaming swastikas.

FIREWHEEL

I'm gonna wipe that uppity smirk off your face. Then I'm gonna see if the black'll rub off you.

Panel 6

Panel left Static dodges a two-handed FIRE BLAST from an enraged panel right Firewheel.

STATIC

If that's all you want to know, just ask your mother. I was rubbing on her pretty good, last night.*

FIREWHEEL

(burst)

Don't talk about my mother!

SFX

FOOOOSH

BOTTOM CAPTION

(small text)

*Static never really slept with Firewheel's mother. It's just a tactic to distract him from the goalposts.

Page

Panel 1

Static dives off of his disk and TACKLES Firewheel, who is blasting more fire into the air, a wild shot.

STATIC

You misunderstand me, sir. I hold your mother in the highest regard. Did you know I even have an affectionate nickname for her?

FIREWHEEL

>whoolf<

STATIC

I call her doorknob, 'cause everybody's had a turn.*

BOTTOM CAPTION

(small text)

*Static never really called Firewheel's mother "doorknob".
It's just a tactic to distract him from the goalposts.

Panel 2

Firewheel is back on his feet, throwing a flaming punch at Static, who steps back clear of it. Static is pointing at something off-panel and behind Firewheel. Firewheel is unaware that he is in the SHADOW of a large, off-panel object.

FIREWHEEL

(burst)

You {!

STATIC

Want to hear a few more? I got dozens of
'em.

STATIC

Oops! Out of time, the goalposts are
here.

Panel 3

Wide, we see, crackling with Static energy, the entire goalpost has been ripped out of the ground and is hurtling towards Firewheel, who has turned just in time to see his impending doom.

FIREWHEEL

(small letters, weak
balloon)

"Goalposts"?*

BOTTOM CAPTION

(small text)

*See? It worked! He never saw 'em coming.

Panel 4

Sound effect plus STARS AND BIRDIES only.

SFX

WHUDD

Panel 5

COMMISSIONER GIL SUMMERS OFFICE. Static hovers outside of Summers open bay windows, levitating Firewheel, who is wrapped, ankles to neck, in tubing from the yellow goalposts.

VIRGIL CAPTION

Later...

STATIC

Commissioner Summers? I've brought you a little present.

STATIC

Hmmmm. You know, that "commissioner" gag was a lot funnier back before you actually became the commissioner.

Panel 6

Similar to previous, Summers is on his feet looking at Static.

SUMMERS

It was never that funny, kid. But I'm glad to see you back. You planning on staying with us for a while?

STATIC

Nah, this is just a one-off. But you know what they say, if the demand is there, I'll be back with electrically charged bells on.

VIRGIL CAPTION

And that's pretty much it, kids-

Page

Panel 1

Virgil Hawkins is about 38 years old. He's dressed in Hospital Scrubs. Bouncing on his knee is a seven year-old girl, SADIE and a five year-old boy, LARRY. The children share features from both parents, light brown skin and long, curly hair. They're cute as hell. Virgil's been telling them this whole story!

VIRGIL

—That's the story of the very last time I went out and fought crime as Static.

LARRY

I don't get it though. That man hated people just because of what color they are?

Panel 2

Favoring Larry as Virgil explains.

VIRGIL

Not exactly, Larry. That was the excuse he used. What he really hated was himself. It's a sickness.

LARRY

That's sad.

Panel 3

Tighter. A smiling Virgil chucks Larry under the chin.

VIRGIL

Yes it is. But there's less of it every day. Maybe your kids won't have to deal with it at all.

LARRY

I'm not having no kids.

VIRGIL

Yeah, that's what I said.

Panel 4

Wider. Favoring Sadie, she's tugging on Dad's sleeve for attention.

SADIE

So Mommy never came to your tenth annivers'ry at all?

OFF PANEL FRIEDA

No, I didn't.—

Panel 5

New angle reveals (38 year-old) FRIEDA, stunning in an evening gown. She's putting on an ear ring.

FRIEDA

—but I wouldn't miss our twentieth reunion for the world.

VIRGIL

Zoiks and Double hubba! Look at the wife!

FRIEDA

C'mon, Virg. The babysitter'll be here in twenty minutes and you aren't even dressed!

VIRGIL

I'll be ready.

Page

Panel 1

Background Virgil has his arm around Frieda's shoulders, she has an arm around his waist. The look at the kids in the foreground. Sadie has a towel around her neck like a cape, she's tying one around Larry's for him.

VIRGIL

We've done pretty well for ourselves, haven't we Frieda?

FRIEDA

We sure have. We've had an incredible life.

LARRY

Help me put on my cape!

SADIE

I am!

Panel 2

The kids stand, hands on their hips in heroic poses.
Virgil and Frieda look on.

LARRY

I'm Static!

SADIE

I'm Icon.

VIRGIL

Traitor.

Panel 3

Closer on the kids. Sadie zaps her brother with an
ELECTRICAL BOLT.

SADIE

Got you, Static!

SFX

ZZRAK

LARRY

Ow! Daddy, Sadie zapped me!

OFF-PANEL VIRGIL

I've told both of you, no zapping in the
house!

Panel 4

On smiling Frieda looking up at a wistful Virgil.

VIRGIL

Those were such fun times...

FRIEDA

So are these, Love.

Panel 5

On the kids, running gleefully, their "capas" flowing
behind them.

OFF-PANEL VIRGIL

I could still do it, you know. Pull out the old tights, get back into shape...

OFF-PANEL FRIEDA

Virgil?

OFF-PANEL VIRGIL

Yeah?

Panel 6

Frieda pulls Virgil's face down and gives him a formidable kiss.

FRIEDA

Absolutely not.

VIRGIL CAPTION

It was pretty clear I wasn't going to win the argument. I resolved to table it, at least for the time being.

Page

Panel 1

Favoring Dharma's disappointed face. He's looking at a large Vision Globe, filled with Static's Face. Iron Butterfly is in the background, behind him.

IRON BUTTERFLY

It wasn't him.

DHARMA

No.

IRON BUTTERFLY

That means it probably wasn't anybody.

DHARMA

Probably.

Panel 2

Wider, Iron Butterfly is behind Dharma holding the knife high. She's going to stab him in the back.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Which means you're going to awaken Rift.

DHARMA

Yes.

Panel 3

On Iron Butterfly, knife held high. Tears run down her face.

IRON BUTTERFLY

Even though you believe that to be the very decision that destroys this universe.

DHARMA

Yes. I have to destroy it, in order to save it.

Panel 4

New Angle, Iron Butterfly holds the knife up to stab Dharma in the back. He is unperturbed.

DHARMA

Well? Aren't you going to kill me?

Panel 5

Iron Butterfly has let her knife arm drop. The Knife clatters to the floor. Unseen by Iron Butterfly, Dharma's hand GLOWS with PLUS ENERGY

SFX

(knife falls)

KLAK

IRON BUTTERFLY

I can't.

DHARMA

I know.

IRON BUTTERFLY

I'm sorry.

Panel 6

Dharma has turned around, he is projecting a POWERFUL
STREAM of PLUS ENERGY at the off-panel Iron Butterfly.

DHARMA

So am I.

Page

Panel 1

Wide, Dharma's energy beam is blasting Iron Butterfly,
battering her backwards. She's almost lost in the beam's
glow.

IRON BUTTERFLY
(burst)

Earrrrhgh!

DHARMA CAPTION
This was my final clear vision of the
future.

Panel 3

Dharma stands over Iron Butterfly's crumpled, battered,
smoldering corpse. Her Armor is in shreds.

DHARMA

Kahina.

DHARMA

I promise: if it is within my power, I
will bring you back.

DHARMA CAPTION
And so the story ended, as far as I could
see.

Panel 4

Dharma holds Iron Butterfly's body in his arms, like in
the Pietà. He's weeping.

DHARMA CAPTION
At the beginning, in an event someone
whimsically dubbed "the Big Bang," I

created some heroes, because they were
needed.

Panel 5

Close as Dharma kisses Iron Butterfly gently on the forehead.

DHARMA CAPTION

Now it is time, perhaps, to create anew.

DHARMA

Goodbye.

Page

Panel 1

Dharma, eyes closed, arms above his head, wind whipping past him, is FALLING RAPIDLY through a black void.

DHARMA CAPTION

Every act of creation is a blind leap
into an infinite void.

DHARMA CAPTION

A leap of faith.

Panel 2

New angle, looking down past Dharma, eyes still closed, if visible. He's falling towards RIFT (full figure), who sleeps far below.

DHARMA CAPTION

Experience has taught me that my faith is
usually misplaced. For that matter, so is
faith placed in me.

DHARMA CAPTION

But faith is all I have to offer.

Panel 3

New angle, straight on Dharma his arms spread as if crucified. He's still falling, but now his feet break the "surface" of Rift, which "splashes up", as if Rift were made of water. Remember, Rift is so big that we just see his texture, filling the bottom of the panel.

DHARMA CAPTION

So I cling to this merest of hopes:

SFX

SPLOOOSH

DHARMA CAPTION

Actions have consequences.

Panel 4

Close on the splash, from directly above, we see the SPLASH that shows where Dharma entered Rift. Radiating outward from the point of impact, are concentric "ripples" in the "fabric" of Rift.

DHARMA CAPTION

Actions create ripples that change the world around you in unforeseen but sometimes wonderful ways.

DHARMA CAPTION

Was this such an action? I do not know. History will make its own judgement. Meanwhile, the future unfolds, as it must.

Panel 5

On Rift, from above. We can see Rift's entire sleeping form and the black void around him. Concentric circles ripple outwards from the point of Dharma's impact all the way to Rift's edges. This should again be a PhotoShop effect, if possible.

DHARMA CAPTION

I am Dharma.

DHARMA CAPTION

It is about to begin...

TYPESET CAPTION

"Never think you've seen the last of anything."

—Eudora Welty

Cover 3

(inside back cover)

POSTSCRIPT

Runs above all DC and Milestone corporate credits.

TOP TEXT

(typeset)

"And although I knew no one man could do much about it, I felt responsible. All our work had been very little, no great change had been made. And it was all my fault. I'd been so fascinated by the motion, that I'd forgotten to measure what it was bringing forth. I'd been asleep, dreaming."

—Ralph Ellison

TYPESET TEXT

DC Comics Corporate Credits TK

TYPESET TEXT

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Cover 4

(back cover)

COVER COPY

TK