



**BASEMENT BOYS**

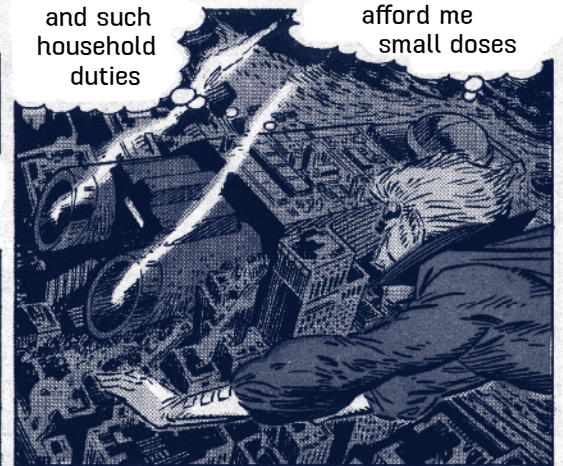


**2.1** IT'S SATURDAY AFTERNOON AND I'M IN THE BASEMENT SWITCHING OUT LAUNDRY.



and such household duties

afford me small doses



of sanctioned absence. But then the

laundry also goes too quickly.



So I scroll my phone

before heading upstairs...



for a minute,

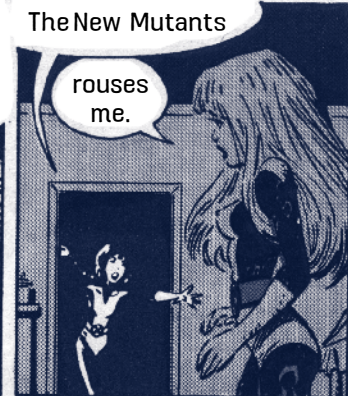


WHEN  
A post with  
the Marvel  
Comics' trailer  
for a movie  
based upon

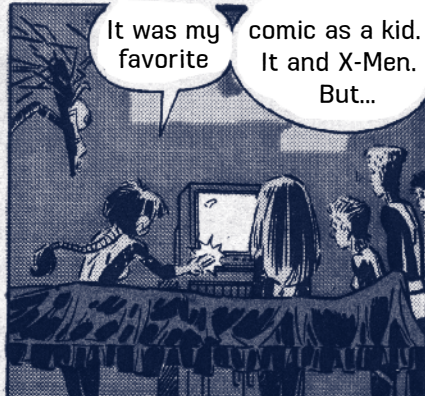


The New Mutants

rouses  
me.



It was my  
favorite  
comic as a kid.  
It and X-Men.  
But...



I lost interest, once  
deep into puberty.



when Marvel  
began making  
huge  
budget films  
based on comics  
like  
X-Men,  
I went to see  
them, I admit.



A dozen  
years later,

OR A VERSION OF ME DID. MY SEVEN-YEAR-OLD SELF, STILL PROSTRATE ON MY PARENTS' BASEMENT FLOOR, PORING OVER AND COPYING IMAGES FROM COMICS, WAS EXHILARATED TO HAVE THESE MOVIES DOMINATING BOX OFFICES. BUT AFTER A FEW INSTALLMENTS, THE FORMULA BORED ME.



Now that brings back the old highs. It is  
a superhero movie I will definitely see.

That is, until I stop fantasizing  
and actually watch the trailer.

But a movie  
version of The  
New Mutants?



Is it set...



...in a psych  
ward?

With

a controlling, gruesome-death-plotting  
doctor and lots of jump scares.

It's going to be  
a horror film.

Ever since  
seeing



the inescapable image  
of two skinless  
people groping each  
other on a blood  
covered  
mattress in  
Hellraiser II, which  
I only saw

because an older  
girl asked me to

and I  
expected to  
make out,



I've been aware of the limited tolerance of my  
central nervous system for horror.

Even this movie  
trailer frightens  
me a little.



I know at once  
I won't see it.







2.2

In line

with my third-grade classmates on the playground of Southwest elementary, I'm overtly watching a sixth-grade boy named Ted.

Smaller than me, he wears a collared, white shirt tucked into belt-cinched corduroys, velcro shoes, and carries a black portfolio.

I study him because the art teacher had mimeed his drawing for the class.



In my eyes, Ted is the school's master draftsman, with a deftness

for line and shading



that I will never attain. Never mind that he

is four years older.



The next morning I sit next to him on the bus. From my back-pack,



I pull out a Marvel comic, *What If The Mighty Thor*

Battled Conan the Barbarian,

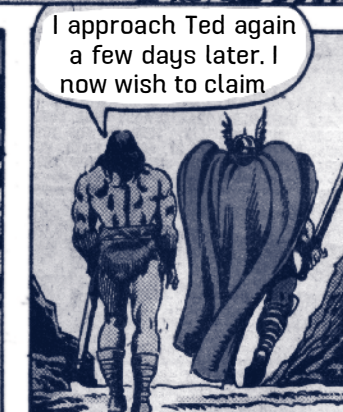


and a plastic bag with \$1.50

in coins that I offer to pay him for a drawing of the cover.



He agrees. But then after thinking it over,



I approach Ted again a few days later. I now wish to claim



THE DRAWING AS MY OWN.



He hands over the drawing with one of the two



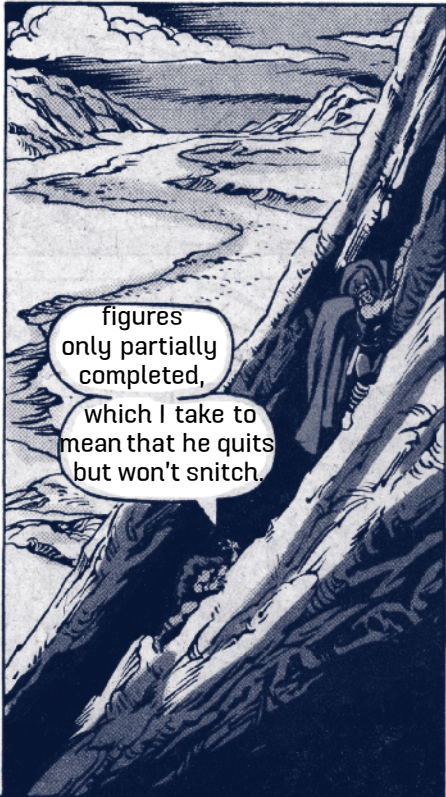
After laboring days to finish the copy, I sign it in the timid cursive



I had only recently learned to scribe.



figures only partially completed, which I take to mean that he quits but won't snitch.



SOMETIME SOON THEREAFTER...



FULL OF SHADINESS AND DOUBT...

I present...



THIS DRAWING TO MY MOM, NERVOUSLY AWAITING

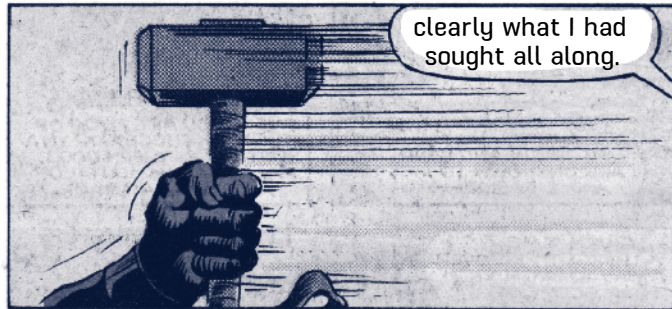
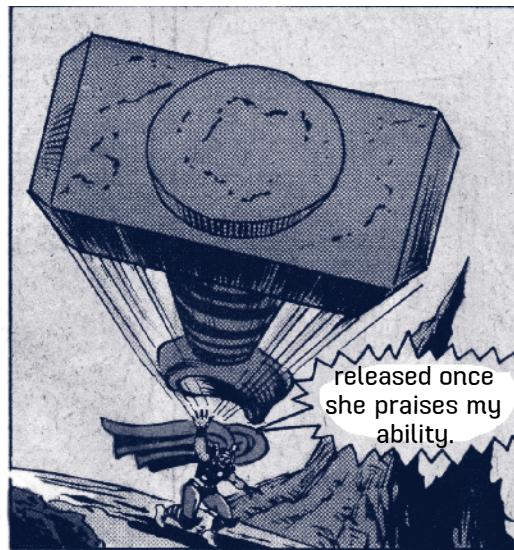
her questions about



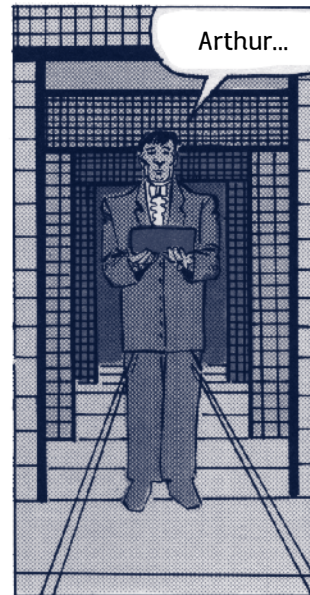
THE OBVIOUS SHAM.







2.3



WE WERE PLAYMATES AND HAD SLEEPOVERS BEFORE HIS FAMILY MOVED AWAY A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO. AND NOW THEY HAVE MOVED BACK TO TOWN. WE'VE ONLY CONNECTED ONCE OUTSIDE OF CHURCH, WHEN OUR WHOLE FAMILIES GOT TOGETHER.



concentrated time alone with him.



TO PREPARE.

I UNZIP AND LAYER TWO SLEEPING BAGS MAKING A SOFT FLANNEL PALETTE ON THE BASEMENT FLOOR IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION.

On previous overnights, before Arthur moved away,



my mom would take us to Poppingo Video where we could rent one or two VHS tapes

and a VCR in a blue, plastic suitcase.

But now we have Atari

with Galaga.

And this weekend there is

a free trial of HBO on

channel 2.

When Arthur arrives we head to the basement, immediately.



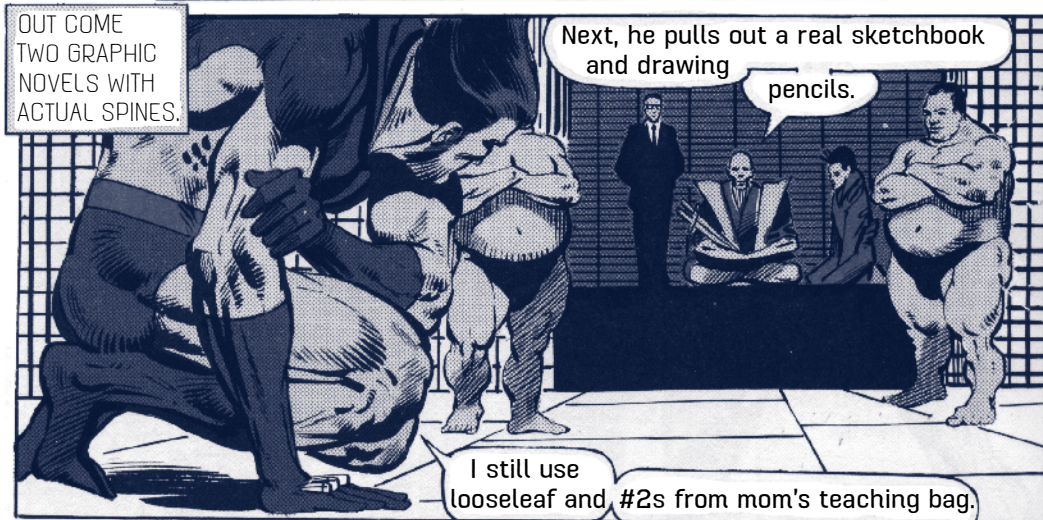
AS HE UNZIPS HIS BACKPACK

I ANTICIPATE A THICK WAD OF COMICS IN SLIPPERY PLASTIC BAGS STIFFENED BY BACKING BOARDS BUT...



OUT COME TWO GRAPHIC NOVELS WITH ACTUAL SPINES.

Next, he pulls out a real sketchbook and drawing pencils.



I still use looseleaf and #2s from mom's teaching bag.

His abilities have advanced greatly since we last copied comics together on a sleepover. Art.

EVEN HIS NAME—ARTHUR—IS ART.

I WAS ALMOST ART.

ARTHUR KENNETH SHAW III, MY PARENTS NEARLY

NAMED ME.

Instead they decided to name me Tate Jackson, calling me T.J. for short.







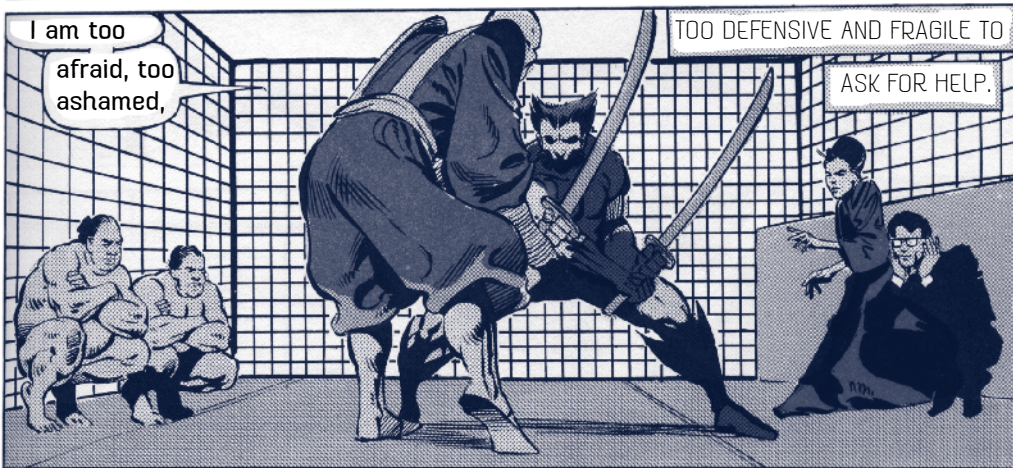
I have always almost been Art. I have always almost been the best artist



in class, my drawings always almost complete,

always almost alive.

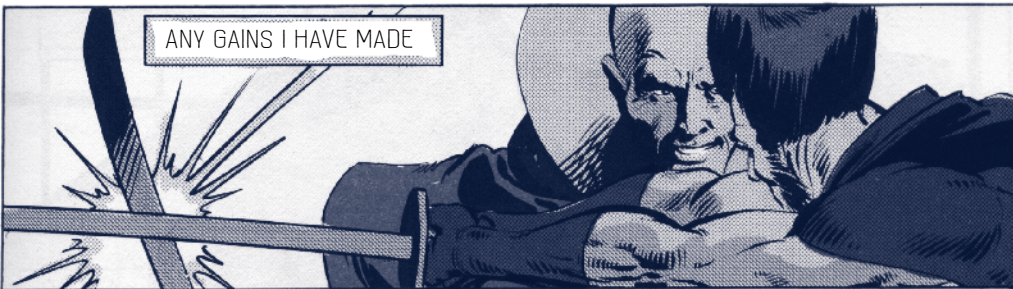
Almost always...



I am too afraid, too ashamed,

TOO DEFENSIVE AND FRAGILE TO

ASK FOR HELP.



ANY GAINS I HAVE MADE



COME SOLELY FROM COPYING COMICS...



...ALONE.

ART'S BOOKS

PUNCTURE MY CONFIDENCE. HOW HAVE I NOT KNOWN ABOUT AND READ THEM?



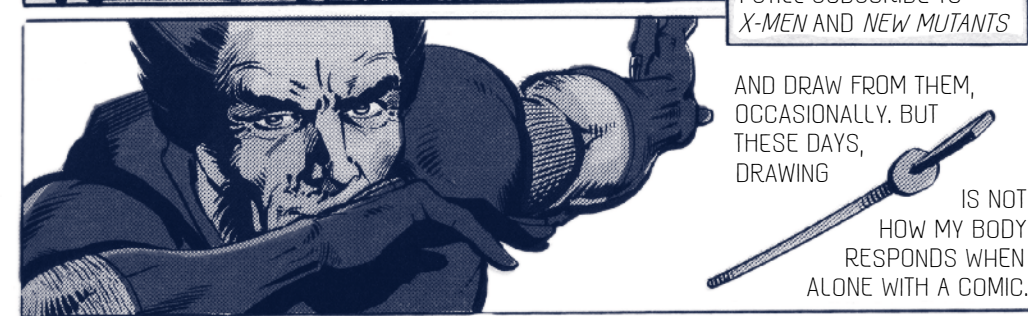
AND HIS DRAWINGS—FLIPPING THROUGH HIS SKETCHBOOK



PARALYZES MY PRIDE. HE WILL ALWAYS BE BETTER THAN ME.



ALWAYS ART.



I STILL SUBSCRIBE TO X-MEN AND NEW MUTANTS

AND DRAW FROM THEM, OCCASIONALLY. BUT THESE DAYS, DRAWING

IS NOT HOW MY BODY RESPONDS WHEN ALONE WITH A COMIC.



SOME MONTHS AGO A TRANSFORMATION STARTED IN ME. IT IS EXAGGERATED IN THE *THE NEW MUTANTS*' POWERS THEMSELVES:



HAIR GROWS IN NEW AREAS SIMILAR TO WOLSBANE'S SHIFTS

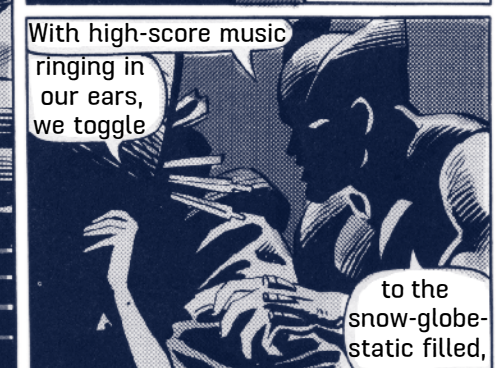


AN EJACULATE DRIVE FIRES WITHIN ME, LIKE CANNONBALL'S THERMONUCLEAR PROPULSION THROUGH THE AIR.



AFTER AWHILE MY ANXIETY REGULATES TO ITS USUAL AMBIENT LEVELS, MAKING ME CAPABLE OF ADMIRING HIS DEVELOPMENT. WE INVENT A CHARACTER AND SHORT STORYLINE, WHICH HE DRAWS. AND AS I WATCH HIM CONCENTRATING, I'M REMINDED THAT IT'S ACTUALLY HIS

quietude, kindness, and seriousness that make him so agreeable to be around, not his ability to draw.









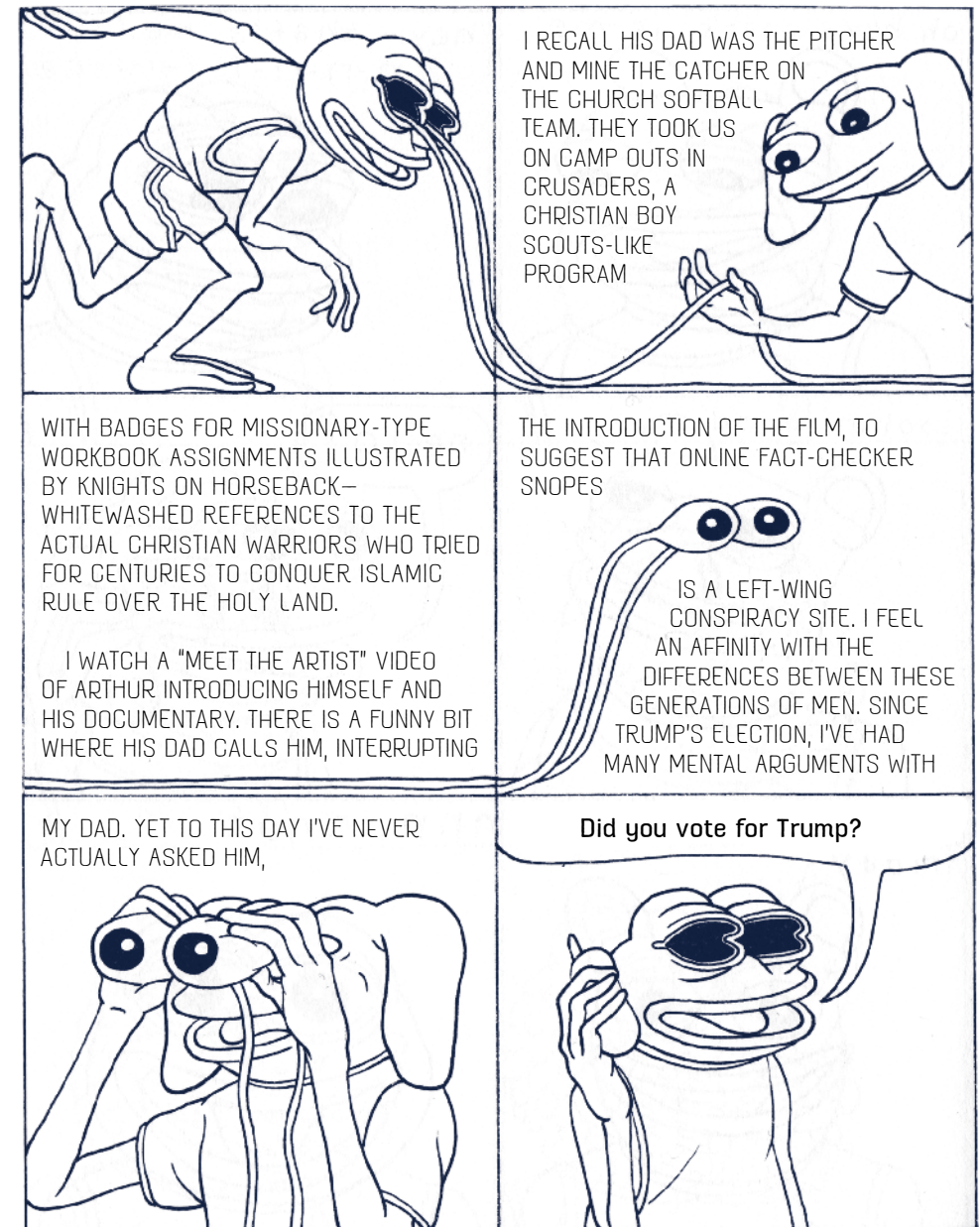
**2.3** WHEN I SHOW CHRISTINE THE PRECEDING PANELS ABOUT ARTHUR SLEEPING OVER, SHE SAYS HOW STRANGE IT IS THAT THESE BOYS WHO HAVEN'T SEEN ONE ANOTHER IN YEARS ONLY CONNECT THROUGH MATERIAL CULTURE.

ADDENDUM



WHILE LISTENING TO THE DISCUSSION I'M ATTENTIVE TO THE STORY OF PEPE'S USE IN THE MEMES OF AGGRESSIVELY SELF-ISOLATING BOYS IN BASEMENTS EVERYWHERE, AND FURIE'S EFFORTS AT WRESTING HIS IMAGE FROM APPROPRIATION BY HATE SITES LIKE "THE DAILY STORMER" AND UNAUTHORIZED USE IN ANTI-ISLAMIC CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS.

BUT I'M HYPER-CONSCIOUS OF ANY DETAILS ABOUT ARTHUR HIMSELF. HE IS AN OBSESSIVE COLLECTOR OF INDEPENDENT COMICS, WHICH IS HOW HE CONNECTED WITH FURIE'S STORY. HE MENTIONS GROWING UP IN A SMALL, CONSERVATIVE TOWN. THAT HIS FATHER'S SERIAL LISTENING TO AM RADIO EVENTUALLY TURNED HIS DAD INTO A TRUMPY.



I SUPPOSE I FEAR ANY RESULTING HEATED DISAGREEMENTS MAY FRACTURE OUR RELATIONSHIP AND THREATEN THE CONNECTION HE HAS WITH THEO. MOSTLY, HOWEVER, I REGRET FALLING INTO OUR ZERO-SUM SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE, ECONOMY, AND DISCOURSE SUCH THAT EVEN MY GENERATIONAL LOVE AND CONNECTIONS ARE NOW VIEWED ONLY AS WIN/LOSE.



2.4

"MWAHAHA

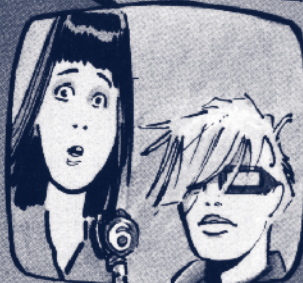
"YOU ARE MINE. SAY  
'YOU ARE FEARLESS.'"

"SAY YOU ARE  
MY MASTER,  
BATMAN!"

THEO IS IN THE BATH  
DRAWING WITH WATER  
CRAYONS ON THE TILE  
WHILE PERFORMING  
MULTIPLE CHARACTERS.



CHRISTINE SPITS HER  
TOOTHPASTE INTO THE  
SINK TO ASK THEO,  
"DO YOU KNOW WHAT  
FEARLESS MEANS?"



HIS BACK TO US, HE  
STOPS DRAWING

BUT DOESN'T  
RESPOND, JUST

SITS IN  
SILENCE.

RECENTLY HE TOLD HER  
HE DOESN'T ALWAYS AN-  
SWER HER QUESTIONS  
BECAUSE HE'S BUSY.  
HE MUST BE BUSY NOW.



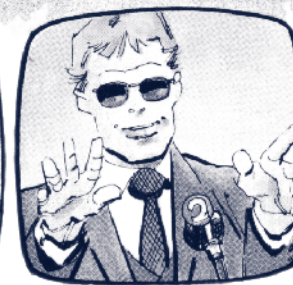
CAREFUL NOT TO SIGNAL  
CONCERN, I TRY A  
DIFFERENT QUESTION:  
"HOW DID YOU LEARN  
ABOUT BATMAN?"



"WE HAVEN'T READ  
OR WATCHED ANY  
BATMAN STORIES." STILL  
NOTHING. BUT HE DOES  
RESUME DRAWING.



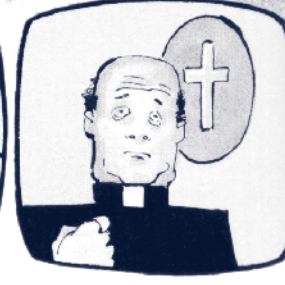
SWIRLS OF WAXY, FIGHTING  
LINES LAYER THE TILES AS  
HE MAINTAINS HIS SILENCE  
ON THE FEAR-LESS  
BATMAN MASTER



THIS HAS ME BLAMING A  
BOY AT DAYCARE WHO  
USED TO BITE HIM DAILY  
BUT IS NOW HIS MOST  
INFLUENTIAL PLAYMATE.



I BLAME THE BOY'S  
PARENTS FOR LETTING  
THEIR THREE-YEAR-OLD  
WATCH SUPERHERO  
STORIES ALREADY.



I BLAME US FOR PUTTING  
HIM IN DAYCARE INSTEAD  
OF A MUCH MORE COSTLY  
MONTESSORI SCHOOL.



I BLAME MYSELF FOR NOT  
TAKING A BREAK FROM MY  
SUPPOSED CAREER TO BE  
AT HOME WITH HIM.



I BLAME MEDIA CULTURE,  
THAT MISBEHAVING  
PROCESS...



SO DESPERATELY IN  
NEED OF A TIME OUT.





AFTER THE BATH CHRISTINE URGES THEO TO GO OUTSIDE TO SEE THE FULL MOON. HE REFUSES FOR FEAR OF...



bats.

I CARRY HIM—ALL FUZZY-HAIRED AND PINK-SKINNED, WRAPPED IN A TOWEL—EAGER TO GO OUT INTO THE DARK, WHEN SETTLED INTO MY ARMS.

HUGE PINES AND MAPLES CANOPY THE BACK-YARD. SPIDERS AND TICKS FLOURISH IN THE UNDERGROWTH. BATS HAVE BEEN TRAPPED IN THE HOUSE BEFORE, SO I KNOW THEY ARE OUT THERE. I'M PROBABLY MORE SCARED THAN HIM SO I PUT EXTRA FLEX IN MY ARMS, MORE PUFF IN MY CHEST. I DEEPEN MY VOICE AND STARE FIX-JAWED AT THE MOON, POINTING A FIRMLY OUT-STRETCHED FINGER, COMMANDING ITS GLOW...



IN AN



aperture  
of



branches.





# DOMINANCE DIARIES

PAMPHLET  
SERIES NO. 2

2021 © Tate Shaw  
Preacher's Biscuit Books

