

OWLS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

A CREATIVE PROJECT

by

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A THESIS

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An exploration of creativity and imagination and an analysis of the new role of advertising in people's thoughts and dreams. The 26 page graphic novel introducing the characters of Kushana, Droog and the goddess Nike illustrates the conflict between analysis and instinct, logic and creativity, and reality and dreams. Also enclosed is the author's analysis of the work.

preface

I have, to my own amazement, created a graphic novel— an exploration of my views on creativity and the creative process. By producing this creative thesis, I've accomplished two things. I'm tangibly closer to my goal of working in a creative shop—specifically Wieden and Kennedy. I feel I can use this work as a supplement to my portfolio and show it to potential creative directors. Without a doubt, it will demonstrate my dedication, my work ethic and the way I think.

In addition, during my graphic novel's creation my own views on advertising and creativity changed. While I created, I examined how I work as a creative being— from the tiny details of what time in the morning I work best in, to where my ideas come from. This exercise has given me confidence and I have learned to trust my muses, relax and enjoy the process.

on why a four foot tall owl-girl and her friend the blue troll have anything to do with advertising

So what does a graphic novel have to do with advertising?

Graphic novels unite words and pictures into a cohesive whole, and explore themes ranging from death to war to love. They can be intelligent and thought-provoking, all qualities which the best advertisements possess. In addition, like comics, advertisements aren't always considered "art."

My work represents the first chapter of a graphic novel. Initially, I viewed the book as a “self promotional piece” that I would send to potential agencies to demonstrate my skills with art and writing. I still believe it serves that purpose, but the project itself has grown in meaning and in scope, opening doors I didn’t know existed. I have realized that my art is as important to me as my writing, and that I don’t need to sacrifice one facet of my creative being to cultivate the other. In the graphic novel, both writing and art worked hand-in-hand, I wrote what I couldn’t draw, and vice-versa. The synthesis of the two created a stronger, more dynamic story that entertains, and provokes thought. I have realized that I am strongest when I allow both aspects of my creativity to play.

This creative epiphany also shed light on my own views of advertising. The best advertisements are not only artistic, they are art. The fine balance between entertainment and information, the skill involved in telling a story in thirty seconds, and the rigor and dedication of the craft all point to advertising’s artistic merit. Advertisements have agendas, true, but so do most works of art. Some advocate the artist’s aesthetic sensibilities. Dali’s art reached beyond that, promoting the movement of surrealism as well as blatantly promoting his own genius. Rembrandt’s portraits promote a patron, as do countless other artists whose masterworks hang in galleries and museums. In fact, there are commercials in MOMA’s collection, and other museums are devoted entirely to the showcase of advertising.

In addition, while boarding out the pages, I realized how similar graphic novels are to TV. Both media tell quick stories visually, and allow for quick transitions, quick reads and easy digestion. I essentially became a director, determining camera angles, lighting and special effects. I now have a greater grasp of the intricacies of TV and the decisions a writer must make to design a television commercial, form the script and keep the audience interested and engaged.

Nike inspired me to think about the current culture of advertising, and how advertisements create a new mythology in our culture. The mass media creates a common cultural experience that we all share and participate in. We know the story of the taco bell dog, and his quest for chalupas. We know that Avis tries harder, and consequently root for the underdog. Advertising has taught women to shave their legs, men to drink lite beer, and kids to scream for pokeman. It has also told us about the plight of the rain forest and kept consumers informed and entertained.

In my work, advertising surfaces as an enemy, and as a protagonist. Kushana herself represents good creative thinking, which can find expression through advertising. Within the text, the Ginsu knife man is, obviously, evil and represents the worst side of commercialism—advertising without art.

methodology

The research and reading ranged from Neil Gaiman's graphic novel, *The Sandman*, filled with references to dreams, strange characters and twisted plot lines, to Carl Jung's *Word and Image*, a work featuring his thinking, writing and visual art. These texts initially appear worlds apart, but they both combine art with words to illustrate powerful ideas. The most powerful works I've encountered unite these three things— and produce a creative triad— idea, words, visuals.

In addition to my research and reading, I've kept a sketch book and observed life in the 'real world.' Most interestingly, since studying perspective, I've caught myself looking for the vanishing point in lecture halls, or while walking down a hallway. My eyes search out patterns, shadows and look for angles that may translate into my graphic novel. While in New York, I spent hours staring at the street scenes, observing people, cars, pigeons, bags of trash. My senses feel sharpened.

Similarly, I've watched lighting on people's faces, on spherical objects, studied gleams of light off of windows, kitchen counters, glass bottles, friend's eyeglasses. I've studied the world around me, becoming an active observer and a visual thinker. I feel this may be the greatest skill I'll take from this experience.

on obsession

Morgan Worthy, in his book AHA! discusses the power of creative obsession. “Whenever we study the lives of great thinkers, scientists or inventors, we find that these people allowed themselves to become completely caught up in their own area of creative endeavor” (Worthy, 4). This work, and advertising itself has obsessed me. Kushana herself has dwelt in the back of my skull for years. She originally grew out of a friend’s request to illustrate a fairy tale. The project itself died, but the character I created refused to sink into anonymity. She dragged out a stool and set up camp in the back of my mind, arms akimbo. I found myself doodling her face on the back of napkins, rough drafts of term papers, on the margins of class schedules.

As I thought about Kushana, I realized that this is what advertising does. The idea can stick like gum to the bottom of your shoe, sometimes as a hummed jingle in the back of your throat, or best of all, like a spoonful of honey. I remember the best advertisements because I want to. They’re witty and entertaining, or perhaps they inspire thought or action.

Creative obsession is fruitful. Daily, copywriters produce on command—crank out ideas that both they and the client can believe in, and balance ethics and aesthetics with the realities of the capitalist culture.

With my thesis, I forced myself to adhere to a strict deadline, and produce page after page. I clashed with my strongest critic, myself. Ideas came in different ways. Some arrived haltingly, like stubborn children digging their heels in the dirt. Others leapt ahead of me like will’o’the wisps, and I had to run to keep up. Occasionally I lost their elusive gleam entirely.

To side-step my inner critic, I forced myself to create, not edit. I tried not to censor. This became an exercise in rampant, unbridled creativity, the only rule — produce. This in itself was a challenge, and ultimately beneficial. As I grew more proficient, I found myself finishing pages quicker, seeing the layout in greater clarity sooner, and simultaneously making fewer mistakes. To illustrate this fact, the first page took a week, and the last, one day.

As I obsessed over the work, I discovered that ideas surface in random places. I developed the riddle while making spaghetti sauce, and the end fell into place on the plane, sandwiched behind a screaming child. I kept myself open to creativity and listened to the crazy little voices.

on creation

Sit down, get up, make coffee, sit down, drop pen, curse, pick up pen, wipe up ink splatter, stare at formidable expanse of white Bristol board. Draw line. Draw another line, repeat.

Over the course of my thesis, I've learned the sheer dedication it takes to create something as labor-intensive as a graphic novel. In the comic industry at least five people work on one book— a writer, a penciler, an inker, a colorist and a letterer. I bypassed the color, but assumed the other four positions. When I began, I didn't realize how much work I was taking on. The inking itself was amazingly time-consuming.

Throughout this process, I merged my writing and visual art, allowing both aspects of my creative being to play. Admittedly, I enjoyed the penciling and inking the most— in some cases I feel the visuals overpower the words and ideas, but it's when the two merge that I'm most proud of my work.

Albert Einstein, as quoted in Ghislen's book, *The Creative Process*, states, "The words or the language do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined." (Ghislen, 32). Clearly, visual thinking opens doors to creativity and free-associations.

Similarly, at the One Show, the Oscars of advertising, most advertisements that won demonstrated the power of visual association, and combined a powerful, thought-provoking visual with well-crafted headlines. While advertising certainly isn't on the same level as Einstein's thinking, his observation certainly applies to advertising and the creative process.

My new-found visual awareness will help me in the future. Teams produce most advertising, and my awareness of the fruitful marriage between words and visuals will produce better advertisements. I feel stronger and more confident with my visual thinking, layout and design skills, as well as with my artistic technique. I also feel stronger as a creative and as a creator. Finishing my work gave me a rich sense of accomplishment and validation. I have achieved a life-long goal, created a piece that I am extremely proud of and furthered my own creative and personal growth.

Technically, as I began to ink the pages, I acquainted myself with my media. The first pages are rough— I hadn't learned the intricacies of the India ink, nor the peculiarities of the brush. All of my previous work had been produced with professional pens, which create a flatter image. Brush work allows for a fluid line, adding depth and energy to the figure. Gary Martin in his book, *The Art of Comic Book Inking* states, "Do not use technical pens or felt-tip markers when inking figures. Tech pens produce a flat, dead line that will not add variety or life to your work." (Martin, 67). Admittedly, my brush work is still sloppy and I'm certainly not at a professional level, but I've come a long way. I'm amazed at the growth evidenced in the pages.

My pencil work also became tighter, and I left clear lines for the ink to follow. While inking, I learned more about penciling, and vice-versa. Overall, I have become a stronger artist, more confident and better educated in perspective and with my media.

on execution

Think above the haze of distraction, the smog of the conscious and flip myself around to view the world from a different angle. For me harnessing my creativity is like walking on my hands— suddenly the world looks different, but I still see things in my way. For this project I placed my hands where my feet were. I became an art director first, instead of the other way

around. At first I tottered. It was hard to keep my balance, and all the blood rushed to my brain.

As evidenced by the first couple pages of the book, my technique was sloppy, my characters ill-defined, and the world a little skewed. However, once I caught my balance, I began to loosen up, have fun and explore. I allowed myself the room to create. I gave myself freedom to make mistakes, and take chances. Out of these risks came opportunities.

For example, when Kushana enters Droog's apartment, I decided to play with shadows. I darkened the character's eye ridges, their cheekbones, blocking out detail with swatches of black, and blending bodies into the shadows. Suddenly, my pages grew more visually interesting and my light sources appeared more sophisticated and realistic. Exploration led to a greater understanding of my media and a more dynamic graphic novel.

I further used shadows to communicate mood, movement and forward the action. The ink allowed me to say "worried" without spelling it out in the text. It also heightened the realism and helped build a believable 'world' for my characters to interact in. Droog's couch suddenly gained depth and believability, and the television explosion created a veritable crater in the page.

In addition to my use of shadows and lines, I studied perspective. Initially, it terrified me. Math—in art? Only after studying David Chelsea's invaluable book, *Perspective for Comic Book Artists* did I adopt his theories. Chelsea says, in his preface, "Without an understanding of perspective, each

object we draw becomes a unique new problem, to be solved either by finding a reference photo or by laborious trial and error.” (Chelsea, 9). My preliminary boards are erased and re-erased because of my difficulties with perspective. Although I didn’t know precisely what was wrong, the scenes I erased looked ‘skewed’ and ‘off.’ With the aid of Chelsea’s manual, I built a foundation for my characters and provided a concrete world for them to play in.

In addition, I began to look at the panels differently. I changed my style of composition, using a bird’s eye view in some cases, and dramatic up-shots in others. Buildings were no longer just rectangles, I explored new angles and different forms. This broke up the monotony of the black and white and lent power to otherwise dull composition. After reading Chelsea’s book, I truly looked at the world from a different perspective.

analysis

I hesitate to label my work. Is it a fable? It could be said to involve animals, and I’m sure a close textual analysis will yield a moral lesson. However, for sheer simplicity, I tell friends and family I’ve created a graphic novel. It looks like a graphic novel, it reads like a graphic novel, and I’ve allowed myself to use multiple exclamation points, but that answer doesn’t completely satisfy me either.

The plot itself is straight-forward. The protagonist, Kushana is initially attacked by some of the things she feeds on —invisibles, which are essentially

dream fragments that have developed lives and wills of their own.

Frightened, she escapes, transforming herself into an owl and flies to Droog's apartment. There, after turning on the television, the two fall asleep. Out of the darkness the Ginsu Knife man appears, attacks, and is defeated by a very grumpy troll. When he retreats, after serving the pair with a warning, he destroys the television set, and Droog and Kushana run to the street.

Worried, they walk, until Kushana leads them to a park. There, Kushana confronts the goddess Nike, awakened by the thousands of voices who know her name. Nike nearly destroys the owl-girl, but Kushana challenges her to a game of riddles, wins and is victorious.

Although the plot itself is simplistic, the characters are not. Nike herself owns baggage too complex to fully explore. I saw her in the Louvre this summer, wings upswept, light as air. She mocked the stone that held her. The statue sailed above the pilgrims armed with cameras and tired grins. She was faceless and armless, but her strength radiated. This is the image I captured. I created a new mythos of the goddess of victory, daughter of Athene.

I kept with the Greek tradition of documenting their divinity's faults. Olympus was always filled with squabbling, back-stabbing and petty jealousy. The Greek gods were petty and cruel, but simultaneously generous and strangely beautiful. In my work Nike is fiercely competitive and ego-centric. She has found herself in a world that has forgotten its old gods and goddesses, save her. Without question, she capitalizes on this opportunity, creating her

own Pantheon of athletes and heroes. Supported by her advertising, she's grown huge. She herself isn't an evil force, but she's monumental.

The company Nike, like the goddess, is concerned with victory. It spends millions of dollars on advertising alone, so can afford to be pushy and aggressive. On the other hand, its size also creates problems. It's easy to become over-confident and pushy. However, despite its size, Nike takes creative risks. Its image and its equity depend on its ability to push the envelope and encourage innovation. In order to remain strong, Nike cannot become stale and cannot ignore the importance of creative, thoughtful advertising.

Kushana is the little guy. She represents the creative process, the unconscious, and madness. She's the weird bit in your own head that insists on finding faces in carpet patterns or compels you to doodle on the yellow pages. She's small and wild, but the other characters listen to her, and her ideas and free-thinking rescue her from danger. She views the world upside-down, even through different eyes. She shape-shifts—becoming an owl, and her flexibility rescues her from danger. She's agile, slippery and frustrating. It's hard to pin her down.

When drawing her, I allowed her face to shift and change on the pages. Droog remains solid, but Kushana's face is mobile and malleable. Her basic features remain constant—big eyes, wild eyebrows, spiky hair and sharp nose, but she can contort while remaining true to her nature.

The conflict between Kushana and Nike lies in the fact that both need the invisibles. Kushana eats the dreamlets, crunching them as a midnight snack. If she ate nothing, she'd die. In doing so, she destroys the weaker ideas—culling the herd so to speak. She gains strength from the collective unconscious, selecting fragments of dreams and hopes that help her grow stronger. Kushana constantly absorbs new ideas and this flexibility is her greatest asset. She uses the invisibles as a resource.

On the other hand, Nike is creating a new mythology, a new pantheon of minor gods and goddesses, urban deities and heroes, and needs the dreamlets as subjects and support. She encourages the dreamlet's growth, nurturing and cultivating any beings she runs across. With strong support from the dreams and the inspired human dreamers, Nike assures her dominance.

In addition, Nike fears that Kushana may awaken her rival and mother, Athene. Owls are sacred to the goddess of wisdom, and having a half-human half-avian madwoman running around is doubtless the best way to attract her attention. Kushana herself doesn't fit into the traditional Greek mythology. If anything, she is Pooka, an Irish faerie that shifts forms between human-like and animal. Brian Froud, in his book *Faerie* describes Pooka in this way.

"The Pooka is an Irish goblin with a variety of rough, beast-like forms.

As a seemingly friendly, shaggy, sway-backed pony, the Pooka offers the

unwary traveler a welcome lift; but once astride he is taken for a wild and terrifying gallop across the wettest and most thorny country, eventually to be dumped headlong into the mire or deposited in a ditch." (Froud, 36).

The Pooka also connects with my Irish roots, and resonates with my own subconscious. Many hot summer nights, my grandmother told me faerie tales before bedtime, and I myself read them to my sisters when my mom was sick. Kushana isn't an evil goblin, but like the Pooka, she's mischievous and head-strong and delights in outwitting the unwary.

Droog is the voice of reason. He's a troll that lives in a small flat, not under a bridge. Unlike Kushana who runs rough-shod through the city, startling people, he has blended in with society, wearing a hat to conceal his horns and slouching to appear smaller. As with Kushana, most humans do not notice his idiosyncrasies, or pretend not to, and look the other way. He represents the conscious mind, stability, security and common sense. Droog blends in with the mundane society. His solid base allows Kushana to explore. She enjoys maneuvering around him. He often is the butt of her jokes, or gently ridiculed.

While these two often miscommunicate, they're perfectly matched in other ways. They hang together as a team— and each is lost without the other. Kushana needs a bit of stability to keep her sane, and Droog's solidity relaxes when Kushana's around. Indeed, in the text itself, I felt the most

interesting, most provocative pages illustrated the interactions between Droog and Kushana, and highlighted the inherent tension in their natures.

This project has been a tremendous triumph. I've accomplished a goal I've had for years. I produced, wrote and illustrated the first chapter of a graphic novel. Honestly, I'm still in shock. After inking my final page, I rolled my chair away from my drafting table and stared. My studio looked like a war zone—ink splatters everywhere, pencil erasings peppering the wood floors, dusting the illustration manuals and the lolling coke cans, but before me stood my little masterpiece. Humble, smudged and a bit awkward, but something wholly my own. It felt wonderful. It feels wonderful.

Now that I've taken the first step, and actually produced a graphic novel, I have several plans for different books, some featuring Kushana and Droog, and others exploring new characters. I've opened a new world for myself, and while I don't think I'll support myself with my comic art, I will continue drawing and inking. I've even approached a friend and asked him to write a script. I'd love to see what a partnership could produce.

In summation, I believe it is the tension between chaos and order, madness and banality that nurtures great creative ideas. With a solid basis in research and knowledge creatives give their minds tools to work with, and simultaneously, toys to play. When the logic and the madness combine, the world sits up and listens.

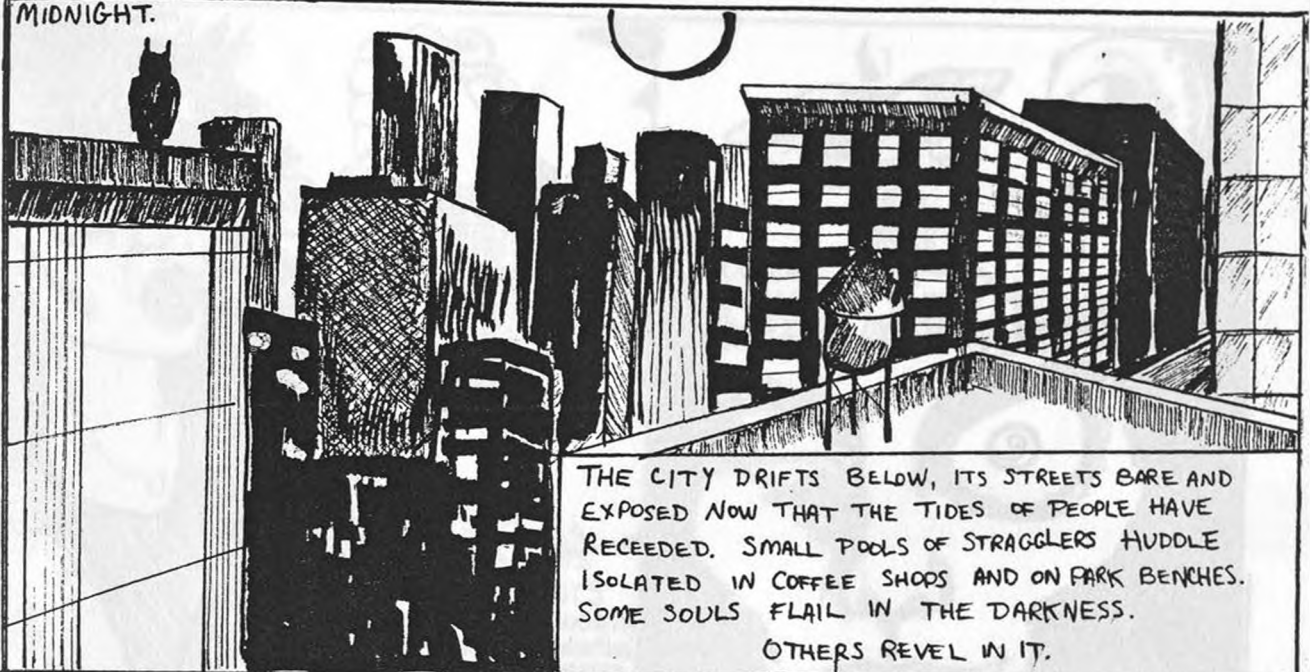
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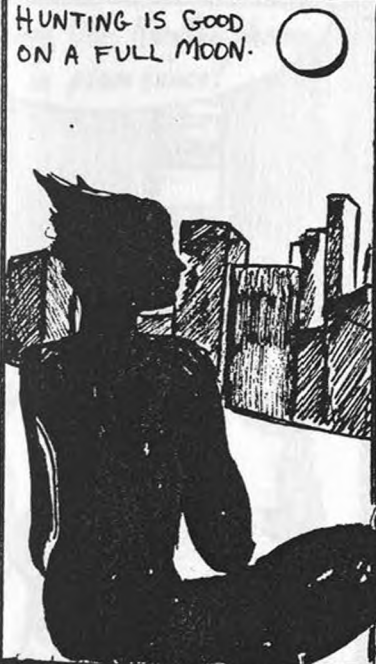
MIDNIGHT.



THE CITY DRIFTS BELOW, ITS STREETS BARE AND EXPOSED NOW THAT THE TIDES OF PEOPLE HAVE RECEDED. SMALL POOLS OF STRAGGLERS HUDDLE ISOLATED IN COFFEE SHOPS AND ON PARK BENCHES. SOME SOULS FLAIL IN THE DARKNESS.

OTHERS REVEL IN IT.

HUNTING IS GOOD
ON A FULL MOON.



ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHO
PURSUE DREAMS.

GOOEY MASSES OF
HALF-REALIZED
GLAMOUR.





KUSHANA EATS
THE FRAGMENTS
OF LOST THOUGHTS,
SUDDEN INSPIRATION,
BROKEN PROMISES.



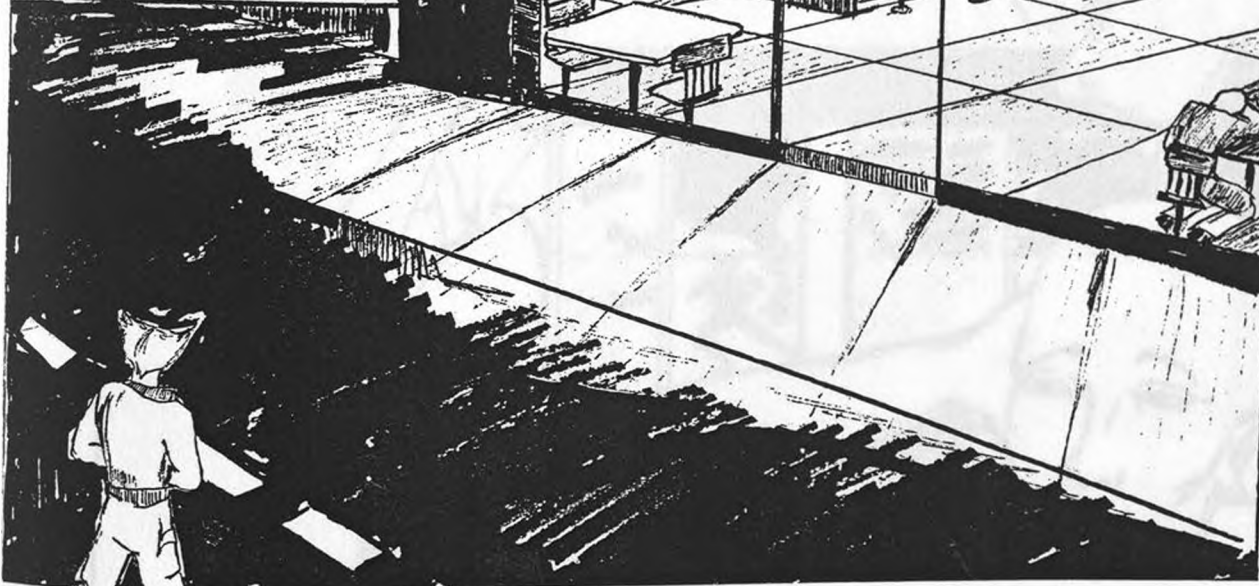
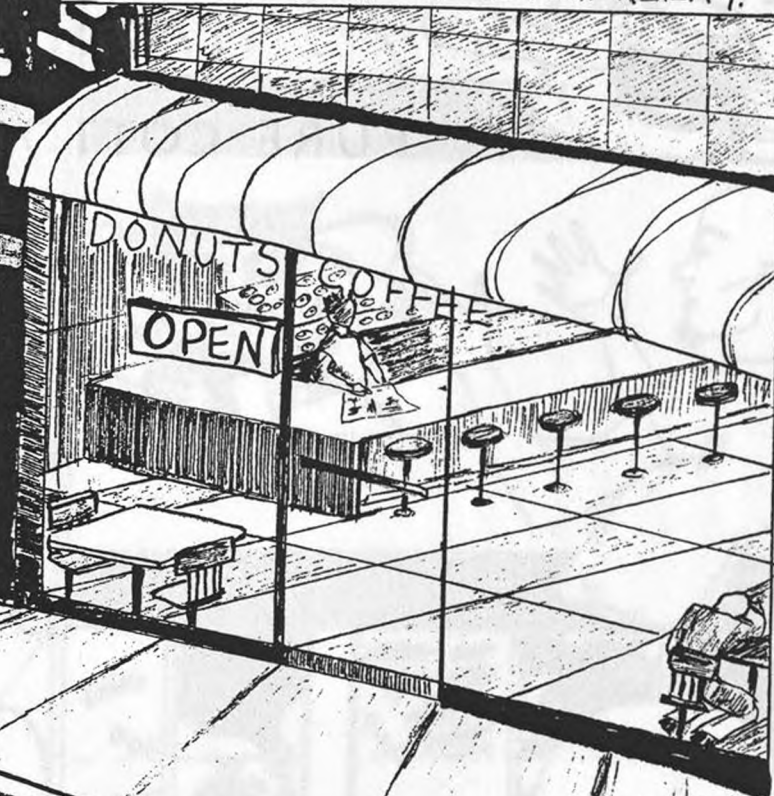
CRAWLING ALONE
UNSEEN BY HUMAN
EYES. INVISIBLES.

tangy, like kung pao shrimp
in plum sauce?

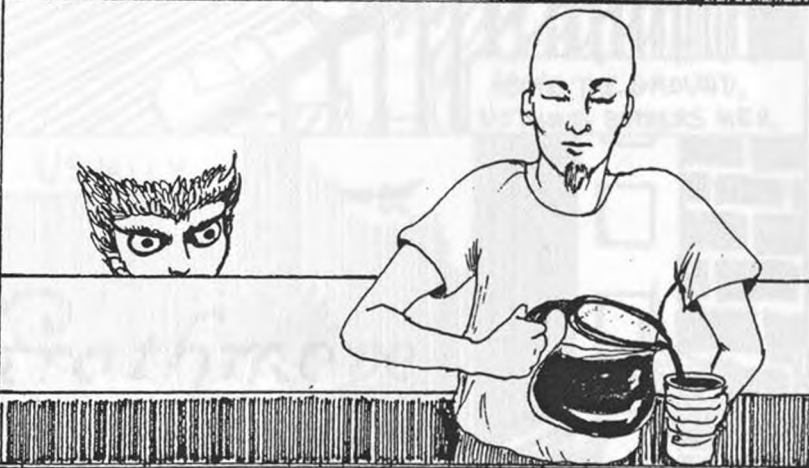
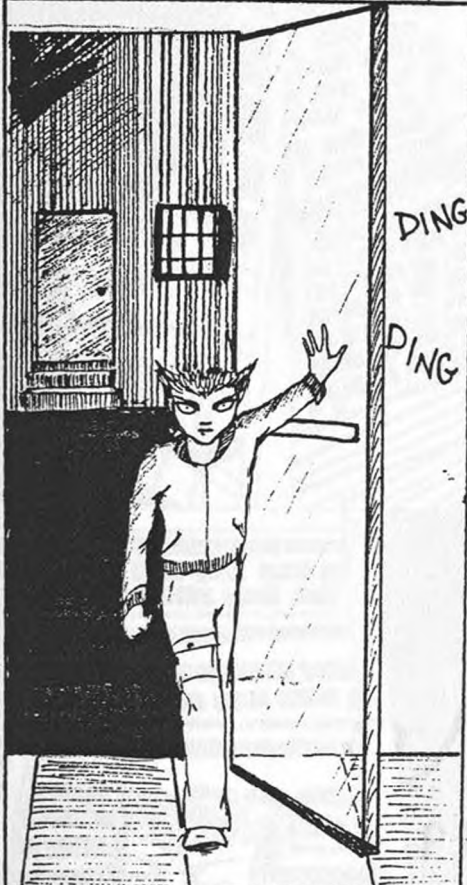
PARTAKING OF THEIR DREAMS, SHE ALSO BECOMES
PRIVY TO THEIR VICES.
AND SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, THE HOT
BLACK LIQUID LEECHED INTO HER OWN REALITY.



I want some
coffee.



MOST EYES SEE WHAT THEY
WANT TO SEE.
KUSHANA HIDES IN PLAIN SIGHT.



IN THE CITY SHE
CLIMBS ABOVE
THE CARS FOR
PRIVACY.

PEOPLE NEVER LOOK UP. THEIR FEARS LURK IN ALLEYS,
IN DARKENED APARTMENTS, UNDER THE BED. KUSHANA CONTINUES
HER SURVEILLANCE UNHINDERED.



ABOVE THE GROUND,
NOTHING BOTHERS HER.

USUALLY.









never have they attacked
—the dreamlets, the chimera
never mobbed me before never
came out of nowhere.



never ever and now
where do I go if they
come back what do
I do then — fly?



but what if I'm asleep and the things come
out, slithering with poisonous fangs.



they may be in the shadows now. watching.



I'll go somewhere — safe — safe — safe.



Droog.



KUSHANA!



KUSHANA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? HOW ARE YOU? IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN! WANT A COOKIE?



TROLLS USED TO LIVE UNDER BRIDGES, IN CAVES, BEHIND WALLS, BUT DROGG HAS ADAPTED. HUMANS IGNORE WHAT THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND, AND AN EIGHT-FOOT MAN WITH HORNS FALLS INTO MOST PEOPLE'S "I THINK I'LL LOOK THE OTHER WAY." CATEGORY.

KUSHANA ENTERS LIKE A GUST OF AUTUMN AIR, FLOODING THE TROLL'S APARTMENT WITH THE SMELL OF OLD LEAVES, DARK PLACES AND MOSS.



That's right, Droog. I flew across town to eat a cookie.



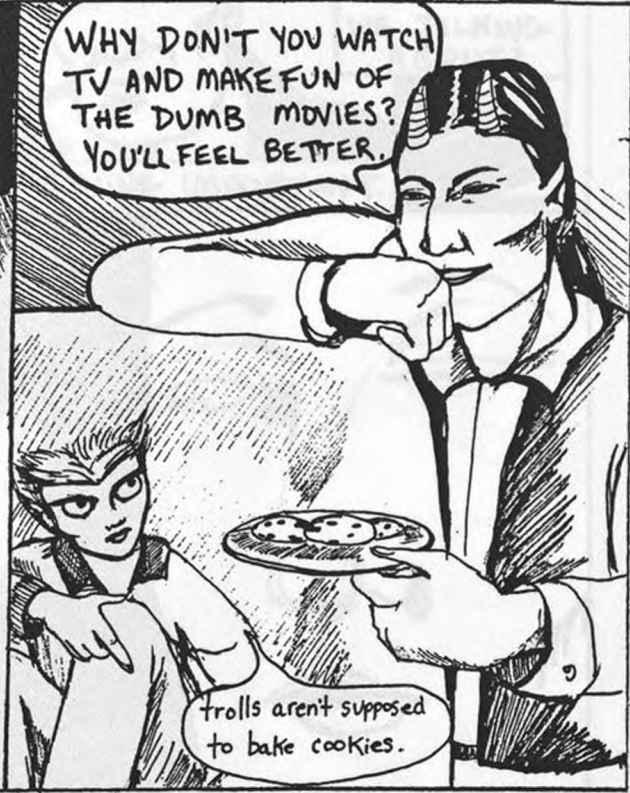
HOW DID YOU KNOW I...
OH.
YOU'RE IN A BAD MOOD.



I'm not in a bad mood and I'm NOT cold and NOT hungry



and I'm definitely not afraid.



WHY DON'T YOU WATCH TV AND MAKE FUN OF THE DUMB MOVIES? YOU'LL FEEL BETTER.

trolls aren't supposed to bake cookies.

OWLS AREN'T
SUPPOSED TO
TALK.

I get the
CLICKER!

WHAT
WERE
YOU
RUNNING
FROM,
KUSHANA?

I never run when I can fly. Look at his hat!

Follow me, Conan!
I know the way!

I ONLY ASKED
BECAUSE YOU
SEEMED SCARED.

Why are
you all
dressed up?

HUH?
I'M A SECURITY GUARD
I WATCH A WAREHOUSE—
BUT YOU WERE SHAKING.

I'm not security.
I'm the vice-president
of a multi-national
corporation, and we're
staging a global coup.

THAT'S ON
TV, KUSHANA.

Oh, well my secretary
has a run in her
stocking.

SHE'S PRETTY.
....

WHAT WERE
WE TALKING
ABOUT?

SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

Cookies?

Lulled to sleep by the drone of the television, Droog and Kushana dream. The world onscreen continues unabated. Contained in the little box, dramas unfold, hearts are won and lost, and things are sold. Arrogantly, it plays without an audience.



Ginsu Knives!
Cut through just
about anything! Tin cans-



Tomatoes
and tommy
guns!

CALL 1-800-GHOP NOW! TODAY!

Its eyes peer out, seemingly blind but then they refocus and a smile slides across its face. The knife shifts.



At the creak of a floorboard, Droog springs awake and launches his eight foot frame across the living room.





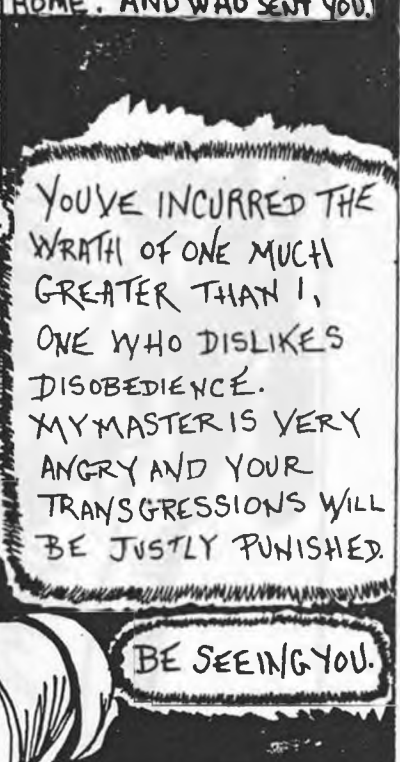
THING. I WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU'VE ENTERED MY HOME. AND WHO SENT YOU.



WHY, YOU INVITED ME IN... LEFT THE DOOR WIDE OPEN. BUT I'M NOT THE ONE YOU SHOULD WORRY ABOUT.



I'M JUST THE MESSENGER.



YOU'VE INCURRED THE WRATH OF ONE MUCH GREATER THAN I, ONE WHO DISLIKES DISOBEDIENCE. MY MASTER IS VERY ANGRY AND YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS WILL BE JUSTLY PUNISHED.

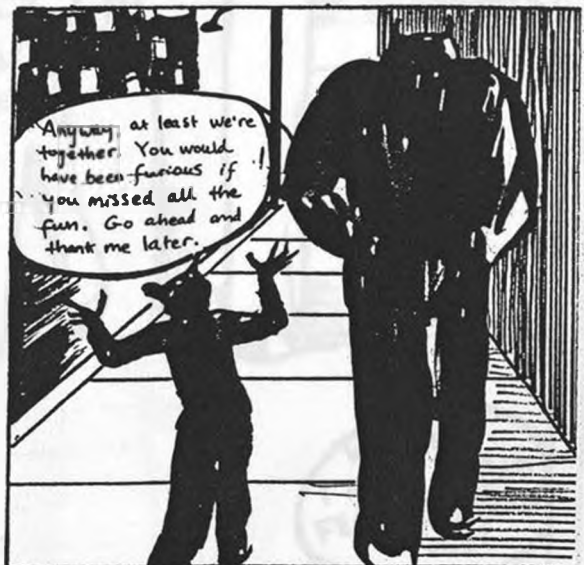
BE SEEING YOU.



KUSHANA. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?



EXPLOSIONS ECHO DOWN THE STAIRWELL
FADING AS THE TWO LEAVE THE BUILDING.





SO KUSHANA,
WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

DO YOU THINK WE'LL
BE ATTACKED AGAIN?

SHOULD WE ASK FOR HELP?

WELL, LET'S GO TALK TO SAM.

dunno.

dunno.

dunno.



NO. We can't involve any
others. Sam has a family. We
don't want him hurt.

THAT'S NICE
OF YOU. I HADN'T
THOUGHT OF IT
THAT WAY.

BUT THAT
LEAVES US
IN TROUBLE.

Well, this is what I'm thinking. I'm attacked when I feel safe,
but whatever it is doesn't want me safe, it wants me dead.
So if your couch is dangerous, then I should go to the
opposite of your house—somewhere really scary.



THAT DOESN'T
MAKE MUCH
SENSE.

Maybe not to you, but you're not very bright.
So logically, that means the park. There are lots
of trees and bushes to hide in, and high limbs
to fly to and saplings you can yank out
of the ground and use as clubs.

WHY DO
I HAVE A BAD
FEELING ABOUT
THIS?



THE PARK
SOUNDS PRETTY
SAFE FOR YOU.



didn't I just
say that? You're
deaf AND dumb fool-
boy. Climb faster.



KUSHANA
DO YOU HAVE A
PLAN, OR ARE
WE WAITING TO
BE AMBUSHED?
WOULD YOU
GIVE ME A
STRAIGHT
ANSWER FOR
ONCE?

I see trees!



AFTER ALL THIS,
I'M FORCED TO TRUST
YOU — SO I'LL LET
YOU DO WHAT YOU
FEEL IS RIGHT.



SO HOW ARE YOU
GETTING US OUT
OF THIS
MESS?



I can't explain anything to you. I've
told you every single thing I know
and THEN some. But let me tell
you this — if those cowards ever
show their faces, I'll stare 'em
right in the eye and tell them a
thing or two!





I'm not afraid of you!
You and the old ones have
lost your power. This isn't
your age. All your people
have been dead for centuries!



NO.
DIVINITY NEVER DIES. WE ONLY SLEEP.

I WEAKENED AS MY PEOPLE ABANDONED ME FOR HEDONISM.



WHEN WAR OBLITERATED MY TEMPLES AND MEN
SLAUGHTERED MY PRIESTS AND PRIESTESSES, I
SANK INTO DARKNESS.



AND IN THE DARKNESS, I SLEPT

UNCONSCIOUS UNTIL THOUSANDS
OF VOICES CALLED OUT MY
NAME. I SURFACED



FORGOTTEN FOR CENTURIES.



AND PEERED INTO A WORLD
EMBLAZONED WITH MY
SIGIL. MY ATHLETES
TRIUMPHED. MY EMPIRE
GREW. I CREATED
MY OWN PANTHEON.



I REWARDED THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST, THE SWIFTEST AND STRONGEST
WITH THEIR GREATEST DESIRE—VICTORY. TOGETHER WE'VE GROWN POWERFUL.



AND OTHERS
I'VE PUNISHED
WITH DEFEAT.

YOU'VE
DISPLEASED
ME LITTLE
OWL.



I'm innocent!
I didn't do anything.

YOU ARE ATHENE'S, OWL,
AND I FEAR YOU MAY
AWAKEN HER. THERE
IS MUCH WISDOM IN
YOUR MADNESS.
THIS, I CANNOT HAVE.

HANG ON
KUSHANA!

YOU EAT THE DREAMS THAT
GIVE ME STRENGTH.

I demand the chance
to defend myself!

I MUST
REIGN
UNQUESTIONED,
UNOPPOSED.

YOU ... DEMAND?

WHY SHOULDN'T I JUST KILL YOU NOW?

and refuse a
challenge? Your
victory will be
empty, and your
triumph meaningless



the oldest game. A riddle to win my life.



Then answer me this, goddess.
What is greater than the gods
Yet more evil.
What tastes sweeter than
ambrosia.
But if one eats it,
one dies?

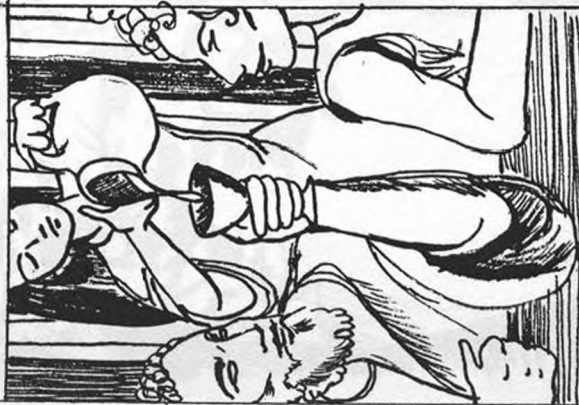
Wrong, goddess.

Victory isn't evil—
and is it greater than
you, than Zeus, than
the immortal Athene?

HA— SUCH A SIMPLE
QUESTION— HA HA! THE
ONLY THING SWEETER THAN
AMBROSIA IS VICTORY.

the answer is nothing.

Nothing is sweeter than ambrosia.



If you eat nothing, you die.



And nothing is more evil
or greater than the gods.



YOU HAVE YOUR LIFE
OWL — FOR NOW.

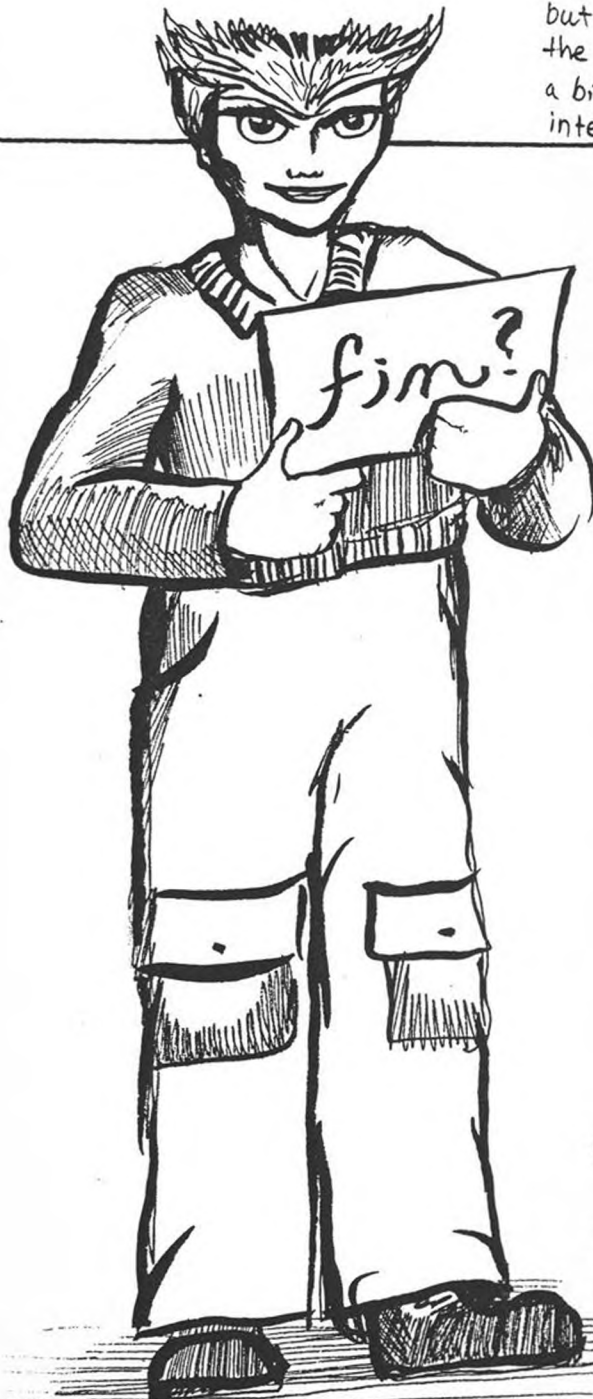




She's not evil, Droog. She's amazing. Strong, opinionated and maybe a bit ego-centric, but not evil. After all, she listened to me, and let me go.



this is the end
and the beginning.
the first of many chapters,
the last of the first.
in avoiding an
Euripidean ending,
loose ends are
left dangling,
but that makes
the next page
a bit more
interesting.



this chapter is
dedicated to my
muses

Kacie
Wolf
Kyle
Mike
and
Shep

with love to my
family, Ann
and to Cuyler and
her rhubarb pie.