



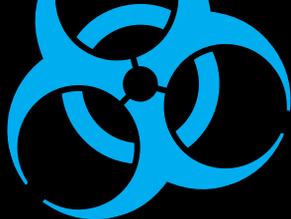
THE TOXIC AVENGER

COMICS

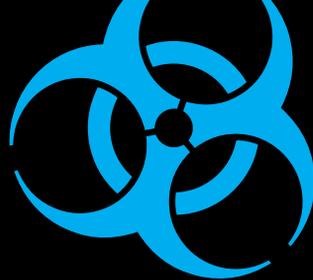


**SHOCK
HORROR
ISSUE!**

EXTRA! PROSE & PIX from
ROBERT JESCHONEK, JOE ORSAK,
CARL CAFARELLI, and ED CATTO!



A major hazardous chemical spill in sleepy Tromaville, NJ turned the town into a toxic site, some of its residents into weird creatures, and outcast teenager Melvin Junko into the world's most grotesque fighter for justice, the Toxic Avenger!



THE TOXIC AVENGER

SOMETHING IS MUTATING THE CHILDREN

MATT BORS
FRED HARPER
LEE LOUGHRIDGE
ROB STEEN

WRITER
 ARTIST
 COLORIST
 LETTERER



THE AGE OF REASON, 1794–2025

ROBERT JESCHONEK
JOE ORSAK

WRITER
 ILLUSTRATOR



BULLETS FROM THE COPPERHEAD DETECTIVE

CARL CAFARELLI
ED CATTO

WRITER
 ILLUSTRATOR



FRED HARPER
MATT BORS
MAYDAY TRIPPE
TOM NAPOLITANO
JOHN J. HILL
ROB STEEN
MARK KAUFMAN
TOM PEYER

COVERS A and D (TRADING CARD EDITION)
 COVER B
 TRADING CARD ART
 TRADING CARD DESIGN
 PUBLICATION DESIGN
 PRODUCTION
 LOGO
 EDITOR



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YOU WANT TO SEE THE SIGHTS OF TROMAVILLE, DO YOU?

NOTHING GETS IN OR OUT THESE DAYS. NOT AFTER THAT TOXIC WASTE SPILL STARTED TURNING PEOPLE INTO **HIDEOUSLY DEFORMED FREAKS**. NOT AFTER A **FORTY-FOOT MUTANT TEEN** KILLED THE MAYOR AND A SWARM OF **NUCLEAR CICADAS** TOOK OVER. AND **DEFINITELY** NOT AFTER THE VIDEOS WE'VE SEEN OF **ALIEN BUGS**.

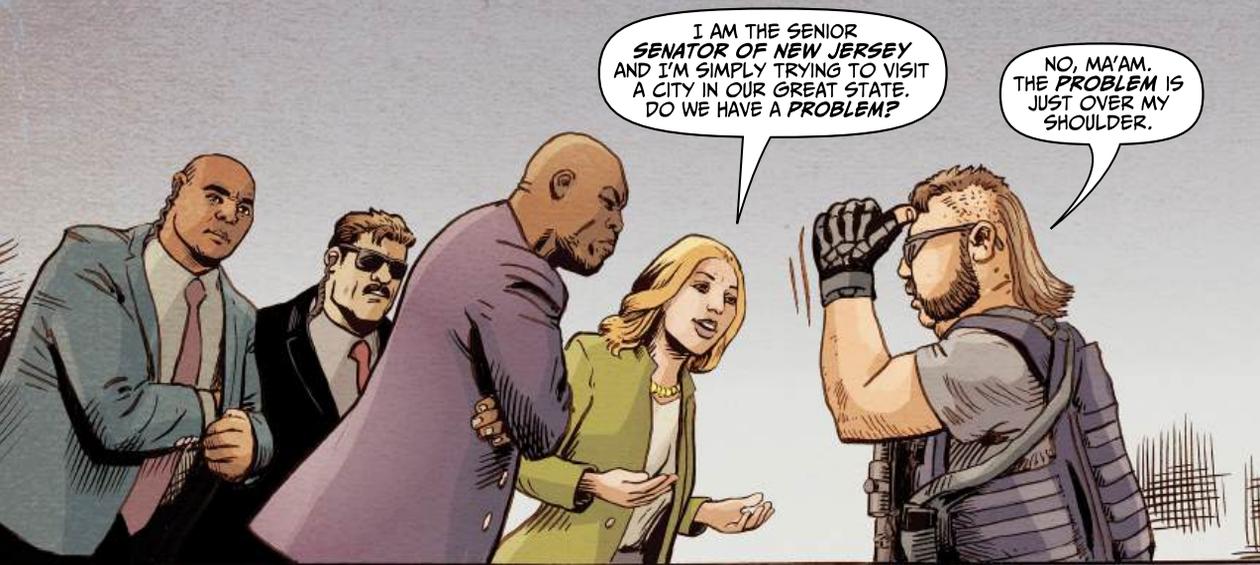
THE RUMORS OF WHAT'S HAPPENING THERE NOW ARE **EVEN WORSE**. NOT A **SINGLE DROP** OF THAT GREEN SLOP GOT CLEANED UP. NO LAW AND ORDER WHATSOEVER.

WE CAN'T TELL THEM HOW TO RUN THEIR **MUTANT HELLHOLE**, BUT WE CAN PREVENT THEM FROM MAKING IT **OUR** PROBLEM. YOUR GOVERNMENT SURE AS SHIT ISN'T HELPING.

HELL, I TRULY WISH 'EM ALL THE LUCK IN THE WORLD.

NOW TURN AROUND AND DON'T COME BACK.





I AM THE SENIOR SENATOR OF NEW JERSEY AND I'M SIMPLY TRYING TO VISIT A CITY IN OUR GREAT STATE. DO WE HAVE A PROBLEM?

NO, MA'AM. THE PROBLEM IS JUST OVER MY SHOULDER.



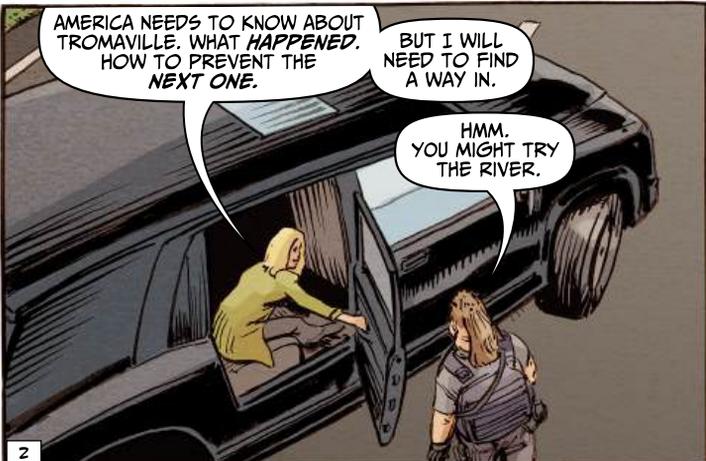
SENATOR GREENE HAS THE AUTHORITY OF--

NO, NO. IT'S OKAY, MARCUS.

WE DIDN'T COME HERE FOR CONFRONTATION. THESE MEN WANT SAFETY. I CAN APPRECIATE THAT.



THERE'S A LOT OF UNCERTAINTY RIGHT NOW. I'M ON A FACT-FINDING MISSION FROM WASHINGTON TO GET TO THE TRUTH. SO YOU GUARD THE ROAD AND I FIGURE OUT THE BIG PICTURE.



AMERICA NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT TROMAVILLE. WHAT HAPPENED. HOW TO PREVENT THE NEXT ONE.

BUT I WILL NEED TO FIND A WAY IN.

HMM. YOU MIGHT TRY THE RIVER.



OH, AND SENATOR. BE CAREFUL... A WOMAN CAN EASILY GO MISSING.



Nothing was the same after the spill.



I was transformed into a hideous creature and given superhuman strength to save a dying town that preferred to rot.



I bit into one of my bullies' hearts.



The other, the one who set me on fire, I caved in his skull with my fist.

I felt triumphant. But would you believe it...



...I don't think I'm doing well.

SOMETHING IS

MUTATING

THE CHILDREN





OH, YOU DID ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WRONG, TOXIE! PLUTO WAS ON A RAMPAGE! BONEHEAD WAS TRYING TO KILL US.

THIS IS AMERICA. YOU'RE ALLOWED TO KILL PEOPLE WHO THREATEN YOU.

I DON'T FEEL BAD ABOUT HIM... I FEEL BAD ABOUT HER.

BONNIE BURGENS?!
WORLD'S NUMBER ONE MOM?

I KILLED HER SON. SHE GETS TO HATE ME FOREVER.

SHE CAN SUCK TOXIC WASTE. YOU SAVED TROMAVILLE FROM HER BRAIN-STAIN OF A CHILD.



WELL, AT LEAST SHE CARES ABOUT THESE MISSING KIDS.

THE MISSING GIRLS. RIGHT. REMIND ME...



... WHAT'S HER THEORY AGAIN?



BONNIE'S LAMENT

BRYCE AND PLUTO WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES MISSING ON GRADUATION DAY.

VERONICA HAD STOPPED COMING TO SCHOOL LAST FALL. WE FIGURED SHE MOVED. THEN OLIVIA WENT GONE RIGHT BEFORE THE SPILL. NO ONE PICKED UP ON IT UNTIL QUARANTINE LIFTED.

THEN A THIRD, MARYANNE, VANISHED THREE WEEKS AGO. HER MOTHER SOUNDED ALARMS. NOTHING! THAT'S TROMAVILLE FOR YOU!

WE ALL KNOW WHY--

THE TOXIC AVENGER!

LONG LIVE BONEHEAD!

FOR THE LOVE
Bryce

HONOR
Bryce
"BONEHEAD"
Burgens

HOLD TOXIC
AVENGER
COUNTABLE!

MISSING



MISSING



MISSING

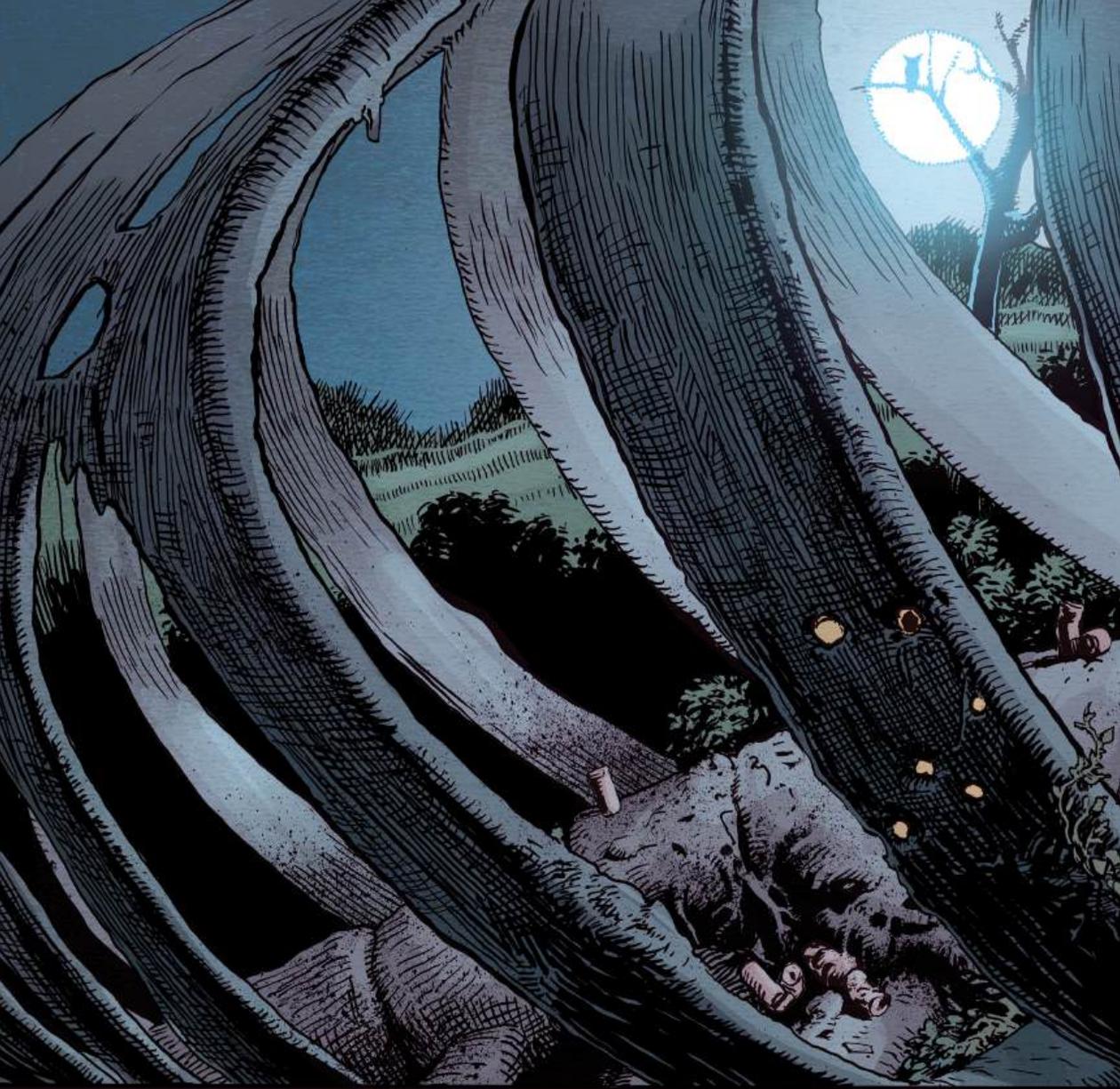


YOU HONOR HIM.

ISH NO PROBLEM. HOW YA HOLDING UP-P-P, BONNIE?

I'M STRONG, JACKIE. STRONG LIKE MY SON. YOU DOING ALL RIGHT?

"AND HOW IS MORGAN?"



SORRY, PLUTO, I'M PISSING ON YOUR BONES!



YOU'RE PISSING ON THEM MUTANT CICADAS, MAN.

THEY'RE CHUGGING IT DOWN.

THEN THEY'RE GOING TO BE DRUNK!



THOSE THINGS DON'T COME OUT FOR, LIKE, FIFTEEN YEARS. WE'LL BE LONG GONE BY THEN.



BEAUTIFUL NIGHT FOR A BONE HOUSE RAGER, FAM.

YOUR PARENTS THINK YOU'RE AT MORGAN'S HOUSE TOO?

AND MORGAN'S MOM THINKS---

SHE DOESN'T THINK! SHE'S BLASTED OFF HER ASS.

IF THEY DUMPED THAT MUTANT SHIT IN BUSCH, SHE'D STILL DOWN A CASE A DAY.

I'M GOING TO PISS. NO ONE PUT MUTANT FECES IN MY BUSCH.



WHERE'S MORGAN?



MORGAN?!

BONNIE'S DEVOTION

ANOTHER ANGEL IS MISSING. I DON'T THINK SHE'S COMING BACK. LET'S BE HONEST. NONE OF THE KIDS ARE COMING HOME.

"LOSING A CHILD... SOMETIMES I WANT THE WHOLE WORLD TO FEEL THAT PAIN. THAT'D AT LEAST MAKE THINGS FAIR."

WHAT DID IT *FEEL* LIKE WHEN YOU WERE TRANSFORMED BY THE WASTE? I KNOW IT *HURT*, HONEY, BUT I SAW WHAT IT DID...

"...IT MADE YOU INTO SOMEONE RAW AND NEW. SOMEONE POWERFUL.."

THE TRUTH IS, I WANT TO FEEL THAT, BRYCE.

"I'M WORKING UP THE COURAGE."

THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR SHOWING UP. WE ARE STILL PART OF A COMMUNITY HERE-- NO MATTER WHAT. THESE FIRST HOURS ARE *CRITICAL*. WE ARE ALL GOING TO FAN OUT AND SEARCH FOR *ANYTHING* THAT CAN LEAD US TO MORGAN.



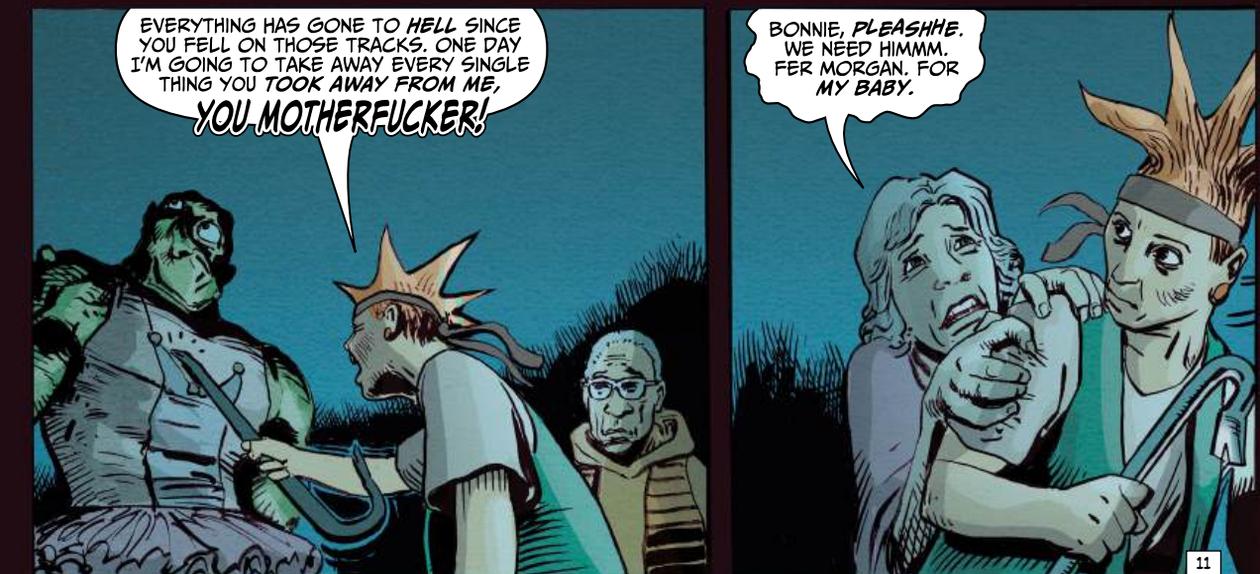
YOU CAN'T LET HIM BE PART OF THIS! HE'S BEHIND IT!

BONNIE, WE NEED ALL HANDS ON DECK HERE.



EVERYTHING HAS GONE TO HELL SINCE YOU FELL ON THOSE TRACKS. ONE DAY I'M GOING TO TAKE AWAY EVERY SINGLE THING YOU TOOK AWAY FROM ME, **YOU MOTHERFUCKER!**

BONNIE, *PLEASE* HE. WE NEED HIMMM. FER MORGAN. FOR MY BABY.





MAYBE YOU SHOULD KNOCK BONNIE'S BLOCK OFF TOO.

C'MON, YVONNE. SHE'S JUST... GRIEVING.

OKAY, WELL, I HOPE SHE GETS PANCREATIC CANCER AND DIES SLOWLY. AS A PARENTING REWARD.

UGH, I CAN'T SEE FOR SHIT OUT HERE!



WHAT IS IT?

NOTHING.



NO, LISTEN...



YOU HEAR THAT?

WIND.

A MOAN.

MuuuAAA



MuuuAAAAAAoo

MULLAAMM

GET IT OFF ME!
GET IT OFF!

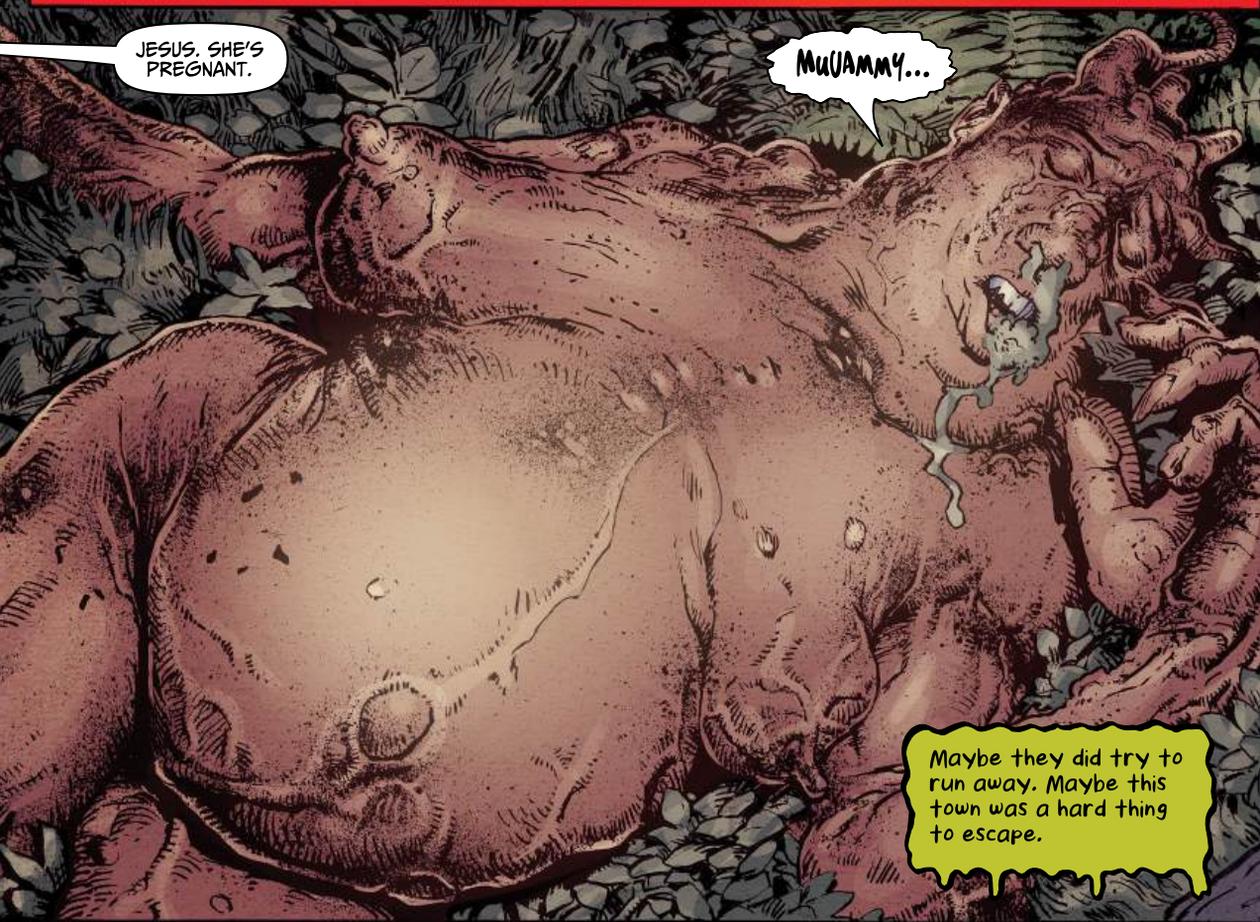


PLUCH



IS-IS THAT HER?

NO...IT'S VERONICA.



JESUS. SHE'S PREGNANT.

MUAMMY...

Maybe they did try to run away. Maybe this town was a hard thing to escape.



Now it's drawing more kids into its sinkhole.



Sucking them to the bottom...



...to the deep dark.



MY WIFE
GOT OUT. DID YOU
FIND HER?

SHE'S SO
STRONG THESE
DAYS.



WHAT
DID YOU
DO?



AFTER I SAW WHAT THE
WASTE DID TO YOU, I...
I GOT CURIOUS.



MY SWEET
GIRLS, I KNOW
THEY GREW
BORED HERE
AFTER A WHILE.
I WANTED THEM
TO **GROW**.
TO **CHANGE**.



I GOT
GREEDY, I KNOW.
I SHOULD HAVE
STOPPED AFTER THE
FIRST ONE.



WHAT
THE FUCK
DID YOU
DO?!



GO
AHEAD IN.
THEY ARE
DECENT.



DID YOU
KNOW YOU CAN
COMBINE THINGS
WITH THE WASTE
TO MIX THEM
TOGETHER LIKE
PLAY-DOH?

WE DID
HAVE A CHILD...
HE DIDN'T LIVE
LONG. ONE
MORE ON THE
WAY. DO YOU
WANT TO NAME
THEM?



YOU
DEMENTED
SON OF A
BITCH.



I'M NOT SAYING WE ARE
A CONVENTIONAL FAMILY,
BUT WE MAKE IT WORK.
I WON'T LEAVE THEM
WILLINGLY.



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN--



I'M GLAD IT WAS YOU, TOXIE... I KNOW YOU WILL KILL, IF PROPERLY... INCENTIVIZED.





C'MON,
BIG BOY.



THAT'S
RIGHT.



GET
MAD. I HURT
THEM.



I WASN'T
A GOOD
HUSBAND!

I SHOULD
HAVE BEEN
STOPPED!

BUT
YOU DIDN'T
CARE!



I BET YOU
DIDN'T EVEN
KNOW THEIR
NAMES!

VERONICA.



OLIVIA.



MARYANNE.



MORGAN.





The boy I was
hated growing
up in this town.



The monster I am
today wants to
stay and change it.
To protect it.



The killer in me whispers
there is nothing to be
done. No one left to save.



That we have
always been this
rotten. Nothing
here but sludge
and sin.

And the story adults told
themselves about this place is fading
like a dream you can't recall.

BONNIE'S DELIVERANCE

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED TROMAVILLE. SAFE. AFFORDABLE. LOW TAXES AND CLEAR SKIES.

A SMALL TOWN WHERE YOU GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS.

CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

A GOOD PLACE TO PUT DOWN ROOTS.



WHERE YOU CAN START A FAMILY. WATCH YOUR KIDS GROW.



WHERE THEY NEVER THINK TO LEAVE HOME.



WHERE YOU CAN HOLD ON TO THEM FOREVER.

END



THE TOXIC CRUSADERS



TRISTAN W. 2025

ON SALE SEPT 10!



Friends, Tromans, Countrymen. Thank you for your support on this massive occasion: the launch of AHOY's new *TOXIC AVENGER COMICS* ongoing series! That's right, we plan to pop up in your life every month for the rest of it and beyond. It's like you're here for the dedication of the Washington Monument, something huge that will endure forever. Only there's fun. And gore. And gross-outs. And one big loveable teenage monstrosity. Which, I suppose, might have described George Washington himself, from about 1744 to maybe 1751. What were his teen years like? Was his best pal funny, like Jughead? What I guess I'm trying to say is, thank you for your support on this massive occasion!

Writer Matt Bors and artist Fred Harper have recaptured the sophisticated-but-barely-civilized tone they set in their justly praised miniseries—*THE TOXIC AVENGER*, collected edition now on sale—as they build up to an unforgettable serial that will start in #6. Between now and then we'll see complete-in-one-issue stories by Matt, Fred, and some fine guest artists. These tales will poke their horribly mutated noses into some of your favorite genres:

- #2—HARD-BOILED *CRIME* ISSUE with art by **Felipe Sobreiro!**
- #3—WAY-OUT *SCIENCE FICTION* ISSUE with art by **Tristan Wright!**
- #4—HEARTSICK *ROMANCE* ISSUE with art by **Erica Henderson!**
- #5—SPELLBINDING *FANTASY* ISSUE with art by **Grim Wilkins!**

Fred will be present the whole way, doing his usual great covers as well as scenes that set the table for the upcoming epic. And if you think that, after all I've described, there's nothing left to tell you about, you really need to start making more of an effort, because you're very, very wrong! I mean, there's an ad for what I want to tell you about on the facing page! Right there! See it? No, not this page! The one to the left! That one! There they are! **THE TOXIC CRUSADERS!**

Yes, Toxie's classic super-team is coming to AHOY Comics the month after next, with stories by Matt and fantastic art by Tristan Wright! Whether you remember Tromaville's animated abnormals from childhood, or from late nights with a twelve-pack and your first bong, or you've never even heard of them, you'll want to see how their series enriches this one. All right? Can you remember? What if I remind you next month?

Oh, look! It's Troma and Toxie's head honcho, Uncle Lloyd Kaufman!

UNCLE LLOYD'S MOP BUCKET

Ahoy from Tromaville!

When I first held this elegant AHOY Toxic Avenger comic in my 79-year-old hands, I began to weep and reminisce about my first job in show business. I was hired to mop up after some bad parties hosted by some very bad men (I knew these were bad men because they were drinking white wine with roast beef!). I recently learned that these parties were dubbed

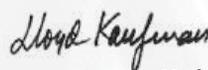
freak-offs. Which, for the uninitiated, is like a bar mitzvah, but with more bodily fluids and fewer chaperones.

Now, usually when I fall it would be on a banana peel, but this time I took a backwards somersault on all this baby oil on the floor—very wasteful. In my daze, I also discovered small bits of very dry mushrooms that for some reason these people were actually putting in tea? Very strange indeed, but so elegant. From my curious sampling I was overcome with visions of Toxie fucking a Tijuana donkey!

It was getting late, so I had to hustle to my next *mop-off* at Harvey Weinstein's restaurant (not a lot of leftovers but plenty of what resembled mayonnaise, especially in the houseplants).

So, dear readers, join me in raising a mop to the glorious union of Toxie and AHOY Comics!

Tromaxcelstior!



Uncle Lloydie

Thanks, Uncle Lloyd! It's always a pleasure!



COMING AHOY-TRACTIONS

TOXIE TEAM-UP #2 (Stuart Moore, writer; Ryan Kelly, artist)—Continuing the Toxic Avenger's tour of what we laughingly call the AHOY Universe! Following his meeting with Jesus Christ, the Avenger returns to his roots for an epic brawl with the Jersey Devil in—where else?—a sinister diner. Cover by Fred. Variants include a Ryan Kelly cover and a devilish trading card by Rob Steen! **July 16!**

ANCESTRAL RECALL #1 (Jordan Clark, writer; Atagun İlhan, artist)—Black History: For painter Melvin Waring, it's an actual super power! When Melvin's wife mysteriously disappears, he must call on the most important Black figures of all time to help him in his search. Variant cover by Khary Randolph. **August 6!**

NEXT: A dead body lies on a rainswept street in the neon light of downtown Tromaville! A note pinned to the corpse points the accusing finger at the Toxic Avenger! Soon an armored SWAT team surrounds his junkyard! Meet us back here on **August 13!**

—Tom

Write to TOXIC AVENGER COMICS—or any AHOY comic—at letters@comicsahoy.com. Snail mail: PO Box 189, DeWitt, NY 13214. Mark “OK to print” if it is. AND! Subscribe to Hanna Bahedry's free, funny-as-anthing AHOY Comics Newsletter at the case sensitive bit.ly/AHOYnews (note new URL).





THE AGE OF REASON, 1794–2025

by **ROBERT JESCHONEK**

In the proud tradition of Ring Lardner Jr.,¹ I offer the following list of some of the strange beliefs subscribed to by Americans in the current era, some 231 years after Thomas Paine's original treatise of a similar title in 1794. Though none can be scientifically proven, many or most Americans believe in them . . .

(. . . though when I say "many or most Americans," I sometimes mean only *myself*.)

I leave it to you, dear reader of this tragically undersubscribed SubWhack-hosted blog, to judge which of these statements, if any, are most essentially truthful in spite of the lack of provability, and therefore most worth carrying forward over the next 231+ years of American history:

What we *believe* matters at least as much as what really *is* and shapes our reality in lasting and palpable ways.

Believing what we *want* to believe matters more than accepting the evidence provided by our senses, scientific instruments, and the measurable results of controlled experimentation.

Case in point, reincarnation—the recycling of souls through countless lifetimes spanning the ages—is considered by some to be a phenomenon regularly experienced by human beings after death.

Some of us, by entering a suggestible, trancelike state, are able to recall details of the past lives we experience via reincarnation.

Sessions of such past life regression therapy may enable an ordinary "nobody" (like me, for example) to recall their

existence 200,000 years ago as the great high priest and spiritual concubine of the savage Triple-Tongued Demon Goddess, Murkeelah.

Remembering a past existence as an exalted religious leader in service to a ruthless yet loving female deity will do wonders for someone with low self-esteem in the midst of a dead-end, modern-day life.

The love of a deity is especially glorious, as there can be no greater power in the world than love and no higher entity than a goddess or god.

However, the power of love can drive a supposedly reincarnated high priest to despair when his modern-day self realizes the Demon Goddess Murkeelah has not thrown him a bone in 10,000 lifetimes.

Mounting an all-out campaign to regain Murkeelah's favor is a perfectly sane response to the deafening silence of Her millennia-long abandonment.

This makes sense because elevated, godlike beings care enough about minuscule humans to pay attention to and be impressed or repulsed by their individual actions.

One such action—performing an erotic temple dance harking back 200 millennia while daubed in goat's blood, rocking a feathered headdress, and shaking rattles at the moon—is an excellent opening gambit in a quest to get back in Murkeelah's good graces.

Just because Murkeelah does not send signs of approbation after such an impassioned temple dance does not mean She isn't watching and won't be moved by the next demonstration of devotion.

¹Academy Award-winning screenwriter of the classic film comedy *M*A*S*H* and author of essay "The Age of Reason, 1794–1994" for the February 21, 1994 issue of *The Nation*.

Sacrificing a triple-XL stuffed crust garbage pizza at midnight on the altar of another faith's house of worship (or the front stoop of said house, since the doors of the place are locked up tight) while chanting ancient prayers (mixed with Taylor Swift song lyrics) is an inspired second approach to reconnecting with Her magnificence Murkeelah.

Murkeelah's radio silence in the wake of such a sacrificial gambit should not be misconstrued as abandonment or a reason to give up hope of receiving Her blessings.

Gods and goddesses work in mysterious ways. Just because we can't always comprehend them doesn't mean they aren't always acting in our ultimate best interests.

If at first you don't succeed, trying again and again will eventually bring the success you seek, no matter how steep the odds against you might seem.

If the blessings of a goddess like Murkeelah are not bestowed after a temple dance or altar (front stoop) sacrifice, a grander show of devotion—the incineration of your family home, for example—may be necessary.

Standing naked in your front yard, watching your triple-mortgaged home go up in flames, you might at first exult at the female figure storming toward you in her nightgown and one fuzzy slipper, silhouetted by the blaze.

Even when such a female figure declares herself to be someone who is not Murkeelah, you might smile with knowing awareness.

For Murkeelah, like other deities, can appear to humans in many forms—anything from a hummingbird to a radiant shower of light . . . or even, perhaps, a disapproving *wife*.

Naturally, Murkeelah would choose the form of someone with a similar name—*Makayla*—and a similarly imperious manner.

Slapping you hard across the face is exactly the sort of thing Murkeelah or Makayla might do . . . but the similarity ends there, and certain doubts begin to bedevil you when She speaks.

These doubts arise because this is not something a goddess or wife would say to a man deserving of love and understanding: *You've lost it this time, you brain-damaged idiot!* Neither is this: *As if being responsible for the death of the slut you cheated on me with wasn't enough, now you burn down our house?*

A goddess like Murkeelah would never *lie* when accusing Her reincarnated high priest of being responsible for a drunk-driving crash that left him with brain damage and a dead girlfriend . . . *would* She?

But then, if Murkeelah/Makayla isn't lying . . .

That would mean . . .

You *are* delusional, because *until now*, you couldn't bear to remember what you'd done.

Now that you *do*, now that you've recovered *this* truth from the past of your current life, it takes a sledgehammer to everything you've believed in.

For example, suddenly remembering a horrible crash/fatality can make you doubt your worthiness to worship Murkeelah.

It might even make you think a little brain damage from a crash could invalidate the past life memories you've recovered during regression therapy.

However, denial is such a powerful force that even the unlikeliest of fictions can overwrite seemingly unmistakable facts in the human mind.

When the picture before you is too ugly to bear, your mind can be shaken like an erasable Etch-a-Sketch tablet, and a new picture drawn in its place.

In accordance with that technique, embracing your preferred identity as Murkeelah's high priest and sinking to your knees before Her is a perfectly sane response to the revealed truth you can't stand to accept.

Lovingly chanting Murkeelah's name while prostrate before Her will penetrate Her wifely disguise, warm Her heart, and inspire Her to end Her embargo of affection toward you.

When you wish upon a star, your goddess will come through, no matter what sins you've committed.

Happiness is always within reach, even when the closest you can get to a long-awaited conjugal embrace with the woman of your fever dreams is one that exists solely in your imagination.

Because, as so many Americans still agree after 231+ years, what we *believe* matters at least as much as what really *is*.



TOXIE TEAM-UP

FEATURING

THE TOXIC AVENGER

THE JERSEY DEVIL



ON SALE JULY 16!





The Copperhead Detective was far, far from home. Maybe the distance between his tiny office back in Harlem and his current location on a snowy mountain in Tibet wasn't really the greatest distance between any two points on Earth. It felt like it was. Back home, it was the final evening of 1924. In Tibet, it was already the wee hours of 1925's first day. A different world.

It didn't matter. He had a job to do. Like it said on his business card: *Detection. Discretion. Protection. Bullets From THE COPPERHEAD DETECTIVE.*

It wasn't as if the Detective blended in with any type of setting. Wherever he was—in Harlem, in Tibet, or flying over Europe during the Great War—the Copperhead Detective stood out. He towered a good 6'4" tall, a thick mass of muscle with ebony skin and close-cropped copper-colored hair. He carried an aura of menace, a promise of danger. He carried a .45. If you could match his gaze

(and few could), you might have a sense of the instincts and intellect—the soul—his sheer physical presence obscured.

People were afraid of him. And yet they still underestimated him. No one sensed the peril of challenging the Copperhead Detective until it was too late.

Not far from the top of the mountain, the Detective entered a cave, its entrance barely visible to the human eye. As he crossed the harsh austerity of the cave's opening, the spartan setting changed, altered, as if the Detective had passed through a mystic curtain. Instead of a dismal hole in the side of a desolate mountain, the Detective found himself in a vast, impossible palace: opulent, spacious, filled with light but cast in shadows at its edges.

The Detective took it all in stride. The Detective always took all things in stride.

In the center of this impossible palace's impossible chamber, the Detective's enemy sat on a throne. The villain was surrounded by a seductive cadre of female sycophants. The evil figure clapped his hands once, and this small army of Asian women left his side, disappearing into an unseen part of the impossible palace.

The villain appeared ancient, impassive, unknowable. His skin was nearly transparent, his frame slight, giving the appearance of age and frailty. The fiery embers of his eyes belied that notion.

The Detective spoke: "Dr. Skeleton."

Dr. Skeleton gave a reptilian smile in response. "Detective," he hissed. "This one welcomes you to his most humble abode."

The Detective scowled and spat. "Save the malarkey for the tourists, pal. You're from the Big Apple, for Christ's sake. Chinatown, not some made-up mysterious Orient. Pretending to be this ancient Mandarin despot doesn't change your secret origin. You're an American, same as me, same age as me. We served in the war together."

Dr. Skeleton smirked, but uttered not a word.

"Why do you do this?" the Detective continued. "Why put on an Asian stereotype? What possible good could that do you?"

The villain dropped his façade. "You know damned well how hard it is to make your way in a white man's world. You! No one takes *your* dark-skinned ass seriously. But for me, adopting a mantle of the exotic Orient makes the jackals fear me. As they should."

"More malarkey for the rubes," the Detective purred, his smile tight and humorless. "You don't see me taking on some stupid minstrel-show drawl to reinforce some other idiot's bias. Let them underestimate me. They'll learn better soon enough."

"So you've flown across the globe to stop my plan of world domination. Why? Why protect the rabble that so wrongly think themselves above us?"

The Detective answered simply. "I don't like bullies."

The villain scowled again, resuming his malevolent guise. The insidious Dr. Skeleton! He sputtered, "This world shall crumble beneath my boot, and YOU, Detective, will be the first. Prepare to DIE!"

Again, Dr. Skeleton clapped his hands. His battalion of female warriors reappeared, each armed with a pair of ornate, gleaming blades, each warrior more beautiful and more deadly than the last.

The Detective snickered. "'Prepare to die.' My man, you don't miss a single cliché, do you?" The Detective then clapped his own hands in turn.

As one, all of Dr. Skeleton's lovely, lethal assassins laid down their arms.

"What—WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" the villain screamed. "Kill the Detective! NOW!!"

Instead, the women filed out of the chamber. The Detective spoke to them as they left.

"Thank you, ladies. As promised, you'll find transportation waiting for you below. You are no longer subject to Dr. Skeleton's command. Your new lives start now. Thank you again."

Dr. Skeleton stared in disbelief as the chamber emptied. The villain was now left alone with his adversary.

The Copperhead Detective drew his .45.

"Bullets from the Copperhead Detective?," the villain mocked. "Who is relying on clichés now, old friend?"

The Copperhead Detective fired. But his weapon wasn't aimed at Dr. Skeleton. Instead, a speeding bullet shattered an image projector, revealing the reality of the dank and barren cave that had appeared to be Dr. Skeleton's impossible palace. A second .45 caliber projectile smashed a second image projector, erasing the gaudy illusion of the insidious Dr. Skeleton. The villain was but a man, far younger than the ancient evil he'd pretended to be. He was still frail.

And he had been defeated.

Dr. Skeleton stood calm, feigning defiance, knowing that his scheme had been thwarted. He didn't quite whimper as he asked, "Shall one more bullet from the Copperhead Detective end this humble one's life?"

The Detective sighed. "No." He holstered his .45. "I'm taking you back to New York. Back to justice."

"How did you do it, Detective? How did you get my elite army to turn on me?"

"They were *never* yours, you arrogant ass. I made them an offer, a better offer than your threats and demands."

"With what resources? You're a low-rent gumshoe from Harlem! You don't command a fortune like I have!"

"Well," the Detective chuckled, "I guess you would be surprised about what I can accomplish. A few interrogations, a few phone calls, a little intimidation and persuasion. And a few bullets, of course. For those reluctant to cooperate, perhaps a flash of some compromising photographs, tawdry embarrassments, incriminating evidence exchanged for bank withdrawals and deed transfers. All in a day's work for a good detective. You are no longer wealthy, Dr. Skeleton.

"But I am."

Dr. Skeleton gulped, and understood. "I underestimated you."

"Yes," our hero replied. "They always do."



ANCESTRAL RECALL



ON SALE AUGUST 6!



