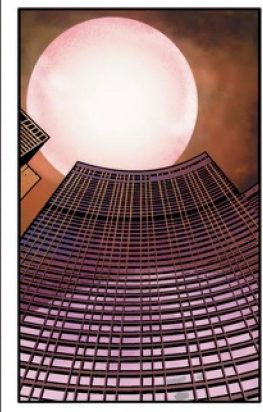


FINALLY.



FINALLY YOU DO MORE THAN JUST THINK ABOUT IT.

FOR A MOMENT IT SEEMS YOU'RE FLOATING ON THE HOT, THICK HONG KONG AIR. BUT LIKE SO MUCH IN YOUR LIFE, THIS IS AN ILLUSION.



PURE ANIMAL FEAR GRIPS YOUR THROAT AS YOU FALL, BUT THIS SOON PASSES.



WHAT ARE YOU SO SCARED OF LOSING?

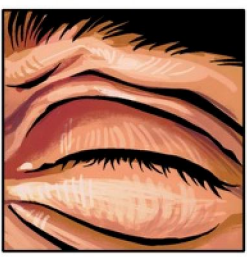
YOUR LIFE?

TRUE, IT'S A LIFE ENVIED BY MANY. POWER, MONEY, STATUS.

SO WHY DO YOU CONTINUALLY STARE AT HIGH WINDOWS AND IMAGINE STEPPING OUT?



WHY WHEN YOU WAKE SCREAMING AND CRYING AT NIGHT IS THE THOUGHT OF FALLING TOWARDS OBLIVION THE ONLY THING THAT CAN CALM YOU?



WHY DOES THE THOUGHT OF YOUR DEAD BODY SPLATTERED ON THE SIDEWALK FILL YOU WITH NOTHING BUT PEACE?



"I WANT YOU TO REALLY SLOBBER," I TOLD HIM. JUST LIKE YOU ASKED ME TO.



THAT SHOULD BE PERFECT. THANK YOU.

IT WAS ACTUALLY FUN, DEMEANING THAT POWERFUL OLD GUY.



I'M GLAD YOU ENJOYED IT. HE DIDN'T NOTICE THAT YOU WERE WEARING FALSE TOENAILS?



NAH, THE POOR SCHMUCK WAS TOO BUSY TRYING TO PRODUCE ENOUGH SPIT TO NOTICE ANYTHING.



IT'S FUNNY, DOING THIS, HELPING YOU... USING CORNELL... FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS I'VE FELT TOTALLY...TOTALLY...

GENUINE?



THAT'S IT, GENUINE! EXACTLY. GOD, IT'S SO GOOD TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO REALLY GETS HOW I FEEL.



BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO SEE EACH OTHER AFTER THIS, ARE WE?

WHY SPOIL A PERFECT TWO DAYS?



AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TELL ME WHY YOU WANT THOSE TOENAILS?

I'M SORRY.



NO, YOU'RE NOT. BUT THAT'S OKAY.

AWA UPSHOT

PRESENTS

AMERICAN RONIN

PETER MILLIGAN

WRITER

ACO

ARTIST, COVERARTIST

DEAN WHITE

COLORIST

SAL CIPRIANO

LETTERER



MR. CORNELL?
MR. CORNELL,
SIR?



THE ENTERTAINMENT
HAS ARRIVED.



MR. BURKE,
THIS WINDOW.
CAN IT BE
OPENED?



OPENED? UH, YES,
SIR. BUT THAT REALLY
ISN'T ADVISABLE.
WE'RE ALMOST IN
THE CLOUDS
UP HERE!



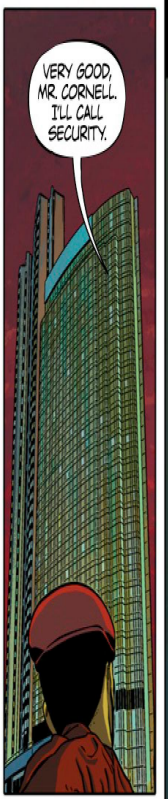
THE AIR'S FINE.
FORGET IT.



SHALL I HAVE THE
ENTERTAINMENT WAIT
IN THE PLAYROOM,
SIR? I THINK YOU'LL
BE AMUSED BY THEM.
SHARON'S OBSCENE
KISS IS THE TALK OF
HONG KONG HIGH
SOCIETY.



I DON'T DOUBT IT,
BUT I THINK I'LL
GO OUT FOR A WHILE
INSTEAD.



VERY GOOD,
MR. CORNELL.
I'LL CALL
SECURITY.



I HAVE BEEN TRACKING BARRETT CORNELL FOR TEN DAYS NOW.



LIKE ALL OF HIS ECHELON, CORNELL MOVES AROUND THE GLOBE, NATIONAL BOUNDARIES BEING MEANINGLESS TO PEOPLE LIKE HIM.

OF COURSE, THESE BOUNDARIES, AND THE DEMOCRACIES THAT PURPORT TO RULE THEM, ARE THE GREATEST FICTIONS OF THE AGE.

IT'S THE PANCORPS-- BEHEMOTHS LIKE LINCOLN'S EYE AND AMERICAN DREAM-- THAT REALLY RUN THE WORLD.



EVEN HERE IN CHINA, BOOK OF CHANGES INC-- WITH ALL THEIR MATOR DECISIONS REPUTEDLY BASED ON COMPUTERIZED READINGS OF THE I CHING--ARE SAID TO CONTROL MUCH OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY.



BARRETT CORNELL IS INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT TO GET CLOSE TO.

HIS SECURITY GUARDS ARE TRAINED FROM THE AGE OF TEN TO SERVE THEIR MASTER, THEIR WATCHFULNESS MATCHED ONLY BY THEIR READINESS TO KILL.



BUT EVERYONE HAS A WEAKNESS. I SHOULD KNOW.

I JUST NEED TO GET CLOSER...



YES, THEY'RE GOOD. IT'S MY SUDDEN ACCELERATION. THE WAY I WEAVE THROUGH TRAFFIC TO KEEP UP WITH THEM.

A MYRIAD SMALL SIGNALS THAT SAY I'M FOLLOWING THEM.



THAT SAY I'M PROBABLY AN AMATEUR.



HONG KONG'S BACK ALLEYS ARE A DIFFERENT WORLD. A LABYRINTH CRISGCROSSING THE FUTURISTIC STREETS AND SKYSCRAPERS.



AND, LIKE ANY LABYRINTH--



--FULL OF DEAD ENDS.



MOVE AND I SHOOT,



PIECE OF [REDACTED] WHO ARE YOU? PRESS? DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE?

YOU CAN'T BE FROM AMERICAN DREAM OR ADAM'S CURSE, YOU WOULDN'T BE SO DAMNED EASY TO CHASE DOWN.

GOOD.



HE REALLY THINKS I'M A CMLIAN...

BY THE TIME HE REALIZES HIS MISTAKE IT'S TOO LATE.



UNGH!



OF COURSE HE'S TOUGH.

AKK!



HE'S BEEN TRAINING FOR THESE CONFRONTATIONS SINCE HE WAS TEN.



UNLUCKILY FOR HIM, I'VE BEEN PREPARING FOR IT SINCE I WAS SIX.

UNGH!



YOU AND I ARE GOING TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING.



ANY TIGHTER AND I CRUSH YOUR CAROTID ARTERIES, LEADING TO CEREBRAL ISCHEMIA AND DEATH.

WH-WHAT THE HELL...IS THIS?



GIVE ME WHAT I WANT AND I LET YOU LIVE. AND NO ONE NEED EVER KNOW WE HAD THIS CONVERSATION.



NOW. LET'S TALK ABOUT BARRETT CORNELL.



FOR PEOPLE LIKE CORNELL—WHO CAN BUY ANYTHING AND ANYBODY THEY WANT—LIFE DOESN'T OFFER TOO MANY CHALLENGES.

WHEN CAN I MEET YOU?

YOU ARE VERY PERSISTENT, BARRETT.

BUT IF YOU REALLY INSIST, I'LL SPARE YOU APPROXIMATELY TEN MINUTES AT MY FATHER'S GALLERY.

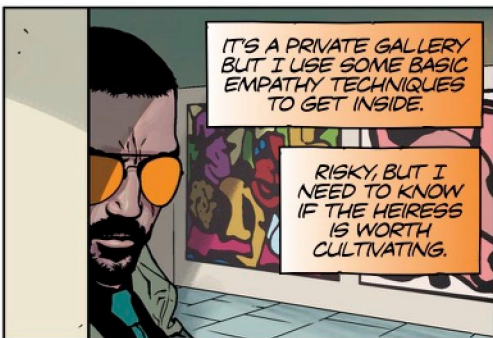
MAYBE THIS IS WHY CORNELL HAS A THING FOR A CERTAIN KIND OF WOMAN, AT LEAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS HIS JUNIOR...



GIGI LO IS HEIRESS TO THE LO ELECTRICS GIANT.

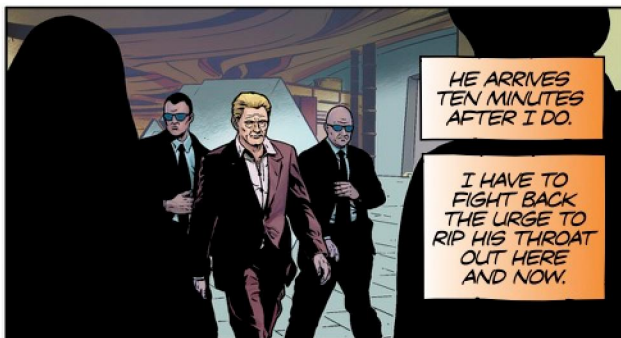


AND YES, HER CLAWS ARE SAID TO BE EVERY BIT AS SHARP AS THE ONES BRANDISHED BY THE PET CHEETAHS SHE LIKES TO BE SEEN WITH.



IT'S A PRIVATE GALLERY BUT I USE SOME BASIC EMPATHY TECHNIQUES TO GET INSIDE.

RISKY, BUT I NEED TO KNOW IF THE HEIRESS IS WORTH CULTIVATING.



HE ARRIVES TEN MINUTES AFTER I DO.

I HAVE TO FIGHT BACK THE URGE TO RIP HIS THROAT OUT HERE AND NOW.



WHAT WILL HE SAY?
WHAT'S HIS OPENING
GAMBIT? SOMETHING
SOPHISTICATED, AS BEFITS
HIS STATUS AND POWER?

THE IDEA OF
SCREWING YOU IS
THE ONLY THING
THAT GIVES MY
LIFE MEANING.



AND I THOUGHT
WE WERE HERE TO
DISCUSS ABSTRACT
EXPRESSIONISM.



DON'T GET TOO
CLOSE, BARRETT.
YOU MIGHT
GET HURT.



I DON'T
CARE.

I OWN SEVERAL
SMALL ISLANDS IN
THE CARIBBEAN. ONE
OF THEM IS YOURS
IF YOU SPEND THE
NIGHT THERE
WITH ME.

HER LAUGH
SOUNDS CRUEL,
MOCKING.



OR AM I IMAGINING
THAT? DO I SIMPLY
WANT HER TO CRUSH
HIS ATTEMPTS AT
SEDUCTION WITH HER
YOUTH AND BEAUTY?

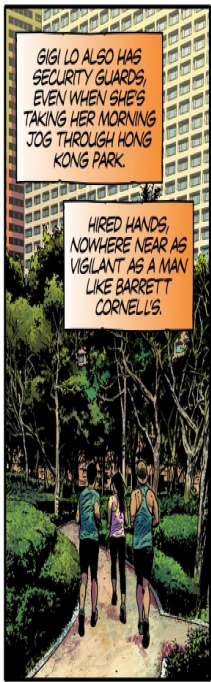


ON THE SURFACE
CORNELL SEEMS
NERVOUS. IS THIS WHAT
HE WANTS? A CRAVING
FOR HUMILIATION?
PSYCHOLOGICAL
MASOCHISM?



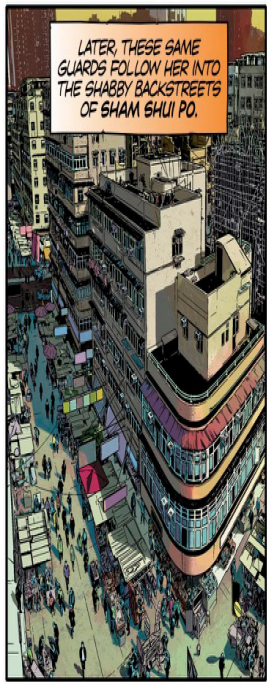
I NEED TO GO
BENEATH THE
SURFACE.

I NEED TO
GO WHERE
IT HURTS.



GIGI LO ALSO HAS SECURITY GUARDS, EVEN WHEN SHE'S TAKING HER MORNING JOG THROUGH HONG KONG PARK.

HIRED HANDS, NOWHERE NEAR AS VIGILANT AS A MAN LIKE BARRETT CORNELLIS.



LATER, THESE SAME GUARDS FOLLOW HER INTO THE SHABBY BACKSTREETS OF SHAM SHUI PO.



I STAY RIGHT BEHIND THEM.



NO CHEETAHS TODAY, NO HEIRESS CHIC, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW IT WAS HER.

NOT UNLESS YOU WERE REALLY LOOKING.



SHE MEETS NO ONE, SHE HAS HER DIM SUM AMONG THE WORKERS, SHE LOOKS LIKE A DIFFERENT PERSON.

OR MAYBE I'M SIMPLY SEEING HER PROPERLY FOR THE FIRST TIME.



A FEW DOLLARS BUYS THE CHOPSTICKS SHE ATE WITH.



A DAY LATER THE HEIRESS RETURNS TO HER HOTEL AFTER HER MORNING RUN.



I AM, OF COURSE, WAITING FOR HER...



SIT DOWN, MS LO. WE NEED TO TALK.



THAT. I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT IN HERE BUT YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET IT.

I'M FRIENDS WITH SOME VERY HIGH-RANKING PARTY OFFICIALS.



I NEED YOUR HELP, GIGI.

THE ONLY HELP YOU'LL GET IS FROM AN ELECTRIC CABLE WRAPPED ROUND YOUR BALLS.



IT'S ALL AN ACT. THIS WHOLE TOUGH GIRL ROUTINE.

GET ME CHENG NOW.

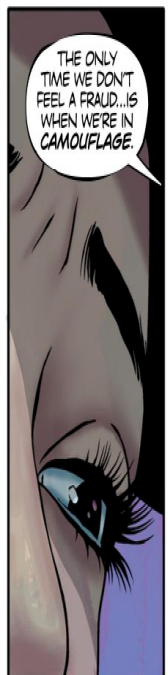
YOU SEE, I KNOW YOU, GIGI. I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.



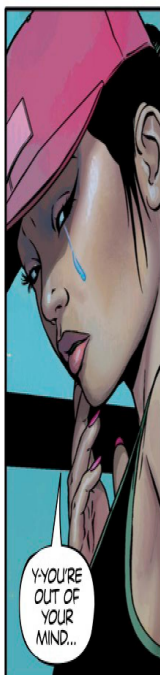
BULL. NO ONE KNOWS HOW I FEEL.



OUR ENTIRE LIFE, THE CHEETAHS, THE CLOTHES, THE DIAMOND-ENCRUSTED CELL PHONES-IT'S ALL A DISGUISE. WE'RE SO GODDAMN LONELY.



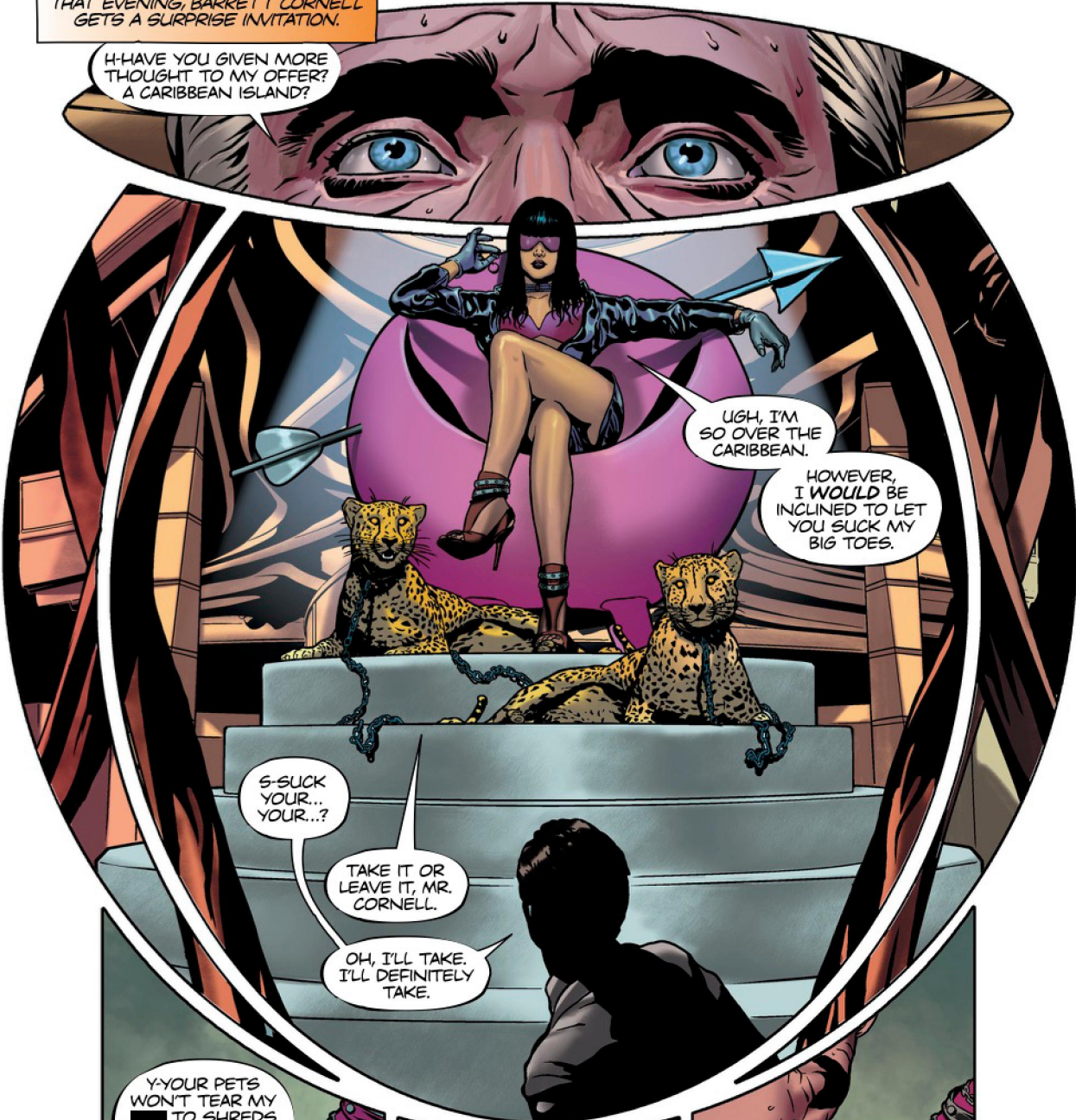
THE ONLY TIME WE DON'T FEEL A FRAUD...IS WHEN WE'RE IN CAMOUFLAGE.



Y-YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND...

THAT EVENING, BARRETT CORNELL GETS A SURPRISE INVITATION.

H-HAVE YOU GIVEN MORE THOUGHT TO MY OFFER? A CARIBBEAN ISLAND?



UGH, I'M SO OVER THE CARIBBEAN.

HOWEVER, I WOULD BE INCLINED TO LET YOU SUCK MY BIG TOES.

S-SUCK YOUR... YOUR...?

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT, MR. CORNELL.

OH, I'LL TAKE. I'LL DEFINITELY TAKE.



Y-YOUR PETS WON'T TEAR MY [REDACTED] TO SHREDS WHILE I'M, YOU KNOW... SUCKING?



I GUESS THAT'S JUST A CHANCE YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE.



NATURALLY, HE TAKES IT.



A LITTLE MORE SALIVA PLEASE, BARRETT. I WANT YOU TO REALLY SLOBBER.