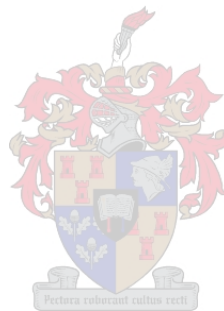


**Myth in the Heroic Comic-book:  
a reading of archetypes from *The Number One Game* and its models**

Robert A.C. Birch

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of



Master of Philosophy in Visual Arts  
Stellenbosch University

December 2008

## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 10 December 2008

Copyright © 2008 Stellenbosch University

All rights reserved

## Summary

Title: Mythic Formulations in the Heroic Comic-book:  
a reading of archetypes from *The Number One Game* and its models

This thesis considers the author's project submission, a comic-book entitled *The Number One Game*, as production of a local heroic myth. The author will show how this project attempts to engage with mythic and archetypal material to produce an entertaining narrative that has relevance to contemporary Cape Town. The narrative adapts previous incarnations of the hero, with reference to theories of archetypes and mythic patterning devices that are derived from the concept of the "mono-myth". Joseph Campbell's conception of myth as expressing internal psychic processes will be compared to Roland Barthes' reading of myth as a special inflection of speech that forms a semiotic "metalanguage". The comic-book is a specific form of the language of comics, a combination of image and text that is highly structured and that can produce a rich graphic text. Using the *Judge Dredd* and *Batman* comic-books as models it will be shown how *The Number One Game* adapts traditions of representation, such as in genre references, to local perspective to create a novel interplay of archetypes. It will be shown that this interplay in the author's project work and the rich potential of the comic-book as a site for mythic speech makes the mythic a useful paradigm for considering the expression of ideology in the heroic comic-book.

## Opsomming

Titel: Mitiese Formulerings in die Heroïese Strokiesprent-boek: 'n Interpretasie van argetipes in *The Number One Game* en modelle

Hierdie tesis neem die skrywer se projek-voorlegging, 'n strokiesprent-boek met die titel *The Number One Game*, as 'n skepping van 'n plaaslike heroïese mite in oënskou. Die outeur sal demonstreer hoe hierdie projek poog om deur interaksie met mitiese en argetipale materiaal 'n onderhoudende verhaal te produseer wat 'n verband met die hedendaagse Kaapstad het. Die verhaal gebruik aanpassings van vorige inkarnasies van die held, met verwysing na teorieë van argetipes en mitiese patroon-hulpmiddels (mythic patterning devices), wat van die konsep van die 'mono-mite' afgelei is. Joseph Campbell se voorstelling van mite as die uitbeelding van interne psigiese prosesse sal vergelyk word met Roland Barthes' se interpretasie van mite as 'n spesiale spraakinflexie wat 'n semiotiese 'metataal' vorm. Die strokiesprent-boek is 'n spesifieke vorm van die taal van 'comics', 'n kombinasie van beeld en teks wat hoogs gestruktureer is en wat 'n ryk grafiese teks kan voortbring. Met behulp van die *Judge Dredd* en *Batman* strokiesprent-boeke as modelle, sal daar getoon word hoe *The Number One Game* uitbeeldingstradisies soos in genre-verwysings na plaaslike perspektiewe aanpas om 'n nuwe wisselwerking tussen argetipes te skep. Daar sal gedemonstreer word dat hierdie wisselwerking in die skrywer se projekwerk en die ryk potensiaal van die strokiesprent-boek as 'n terrein vir mitiese spraak, die mitiese as 'n bruikbare paradigma vir die inagneming van die uitdrukking van ideologie in die heroïese strokiesprent-boek bewys.

## Contents

<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Introduction: the comic-book as a medium for myth</b>	<b>1</b>
Premise and introduction to the argument	1
An heroic comic-book for Cape Town	2
The mythic story-world and its narrative	3
“Cape Island”: The story-world for <i>The Number One Game</i>	5
Locating the discussion of comic-book narratives	9
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>The comic-book as a mythic text</b>	<b>15</b>
Defining the “language of comics” and the “comic-book”	17
Text and image as graphic signs	22
Alternative and mainstream traditions in the comic-book	25
Comic-book “fandom”	29
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>The mythic narrative representation</b>	<b>32</b>
Narrative, myth and archetype	32
Settings: Mythic city and archetypal cave	34
<i>The Number One Game</i> 's employment of “heroic” traditions	36
Ambiguous heroes: <i>Judge Dredd</i> and <i>Batman</i>	36
Judge Dredd as an archetype	37
Batman as an archetype	39
Joe K as an archetype	42
The villain: Nic Lord	44
The mentor figures: The Bergies	45
The mythic archetypal story in <i>The Number One Game</i>	47
Joe's heroic journey: Vogler's mythic narrative scheme	50
<i>The Number One Game</i> : South African myth of progress?	53
Conclusion	54
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>The mythic image in the comic-book</b>	<b>56</b>
Introduction	56
Myth as a depleted language: Roland Barthes	59
Visual Style considered as a modality within the genre of the heroic adventure comic-book	62
The visual expression of archetypes in a comic-book	65
The depiction of myth in drawing	70
The page as a visual rhetoric through guided eye travel	75
Lettering the text – Narration, dialogue and sound design in comic-books	85
Conclusion	87

<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Sources</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Addendum 1</b>	
<b>Story overview</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Addendum 2</b>	
<b>Point form summary of episodes</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Addendum 3</b>	
<b><i>The Number One Game: Episodes 1-3 complete</i></b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Addendum 4</b>	<b>156</b>
<b><i>The Number One Game: Story Bible</i></b>	

### **List of Illustrations**

1. *The Veritable History of Mr Batchelor Butterfly*, 1845, Rodolphe Töpffer  
page **20**
2. *Judge Dredd* comic strip, “Mermaid” from *The Daily Star*, 1986 (*script by John Wagner, art by Ron Smith*)  
page **39**
3. *The Legend of Batman*, Bob Kane, 1950. Reproduced from Vaz (1989:5-6)  
page **40**
4. *Judge Dredd* illustration from *Judge Dredd Annual 1986*. Artist: Pat Mills  
page **65**
5. Line-quality, detail of page from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993:125)  
page **71**
6. The “cartoon”, detail from page in McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1994:45)  
page **72**
7. “Mask” Effect, detail from page in McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1994:31)  
page **74**

8. An example of the finished page-edge, *The Number One Game* Page 05, see Addendum 4

page **82**

9. Batman # 393 "*The Dark Rider*", art by Dick Giordiano (March 1986). Reproduced from Vaz (1989:139)

page **84**

10. Hand-lettered "sound" versus font for "speech", detail, *The Number One Game*.

page **86**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction – The comic-book as medium for myth**

### **Premise and introduction to the argument**

In this thesis, “comic-books” will be shown to be a form of visual storytelling that are particularly well suited to the transmission and adaptation of myths. Seeing the reading and writing of comics through a mythic framework will be shown to have been useful in generating the comic-book project, *The Number One Game*, and will be used for describing its operation as entertainment in this thesis. The relationship between conventions of form and representation, cultural systems, and mythic narrative structures, serve to shape the relationship between the comic-book and its readership.

The most obvious synonym for *myth* is “fictive” or “false” and beyond that the word tends to have associations with archaic or classical tradition. However myth has also been held to preserve an “essential truth” or “fundamental expressions of certain properties of the human mind, and even of basic mental or psychological human organisation” according to Raymond Williams (1988:210). It is this conception of myth, in which archetypes and archetypal patterns are explored (as, for example, in the work of the mythological researcher Joseph Campbell), that I have referenced in constructing the narrative of my project. This use was based on my need for a structuring device, which is offered in derivations of Campbell's concept of the mono-myth, dealt with more fully in Chapter 3.

The other conception of myth that has become important to my project is that enunciated by Roland Barthes, particularly in his article “Myth Today”, which he introduces with the statement that, “myth is a type of speech”(2000:109). Barthes sees myth not as a body of content but as a “system of communication” and a “mode of signification” (2000:109) and therefore without a specific ideological purpose. On the other hand, bodies of myth with definite narrative content, such as those identified by Campbell and Christopher Vogler, are made by the encoder, the reader, and the common culture that they share. In spite of their differences, both these accounts of the mythic point out that it is a set of representations that can be charged with being “tired”, “worn-out” and lacking veracity. The derogatory senses of the word “myth”, particularly those that associate mythological speech with a conventionalised untruth, or with “primitive” societies or children’s entertainment, do seem to find purchase in discussion of popular comics in this way. I will argue later in this thesis that it is precisely these characteristics of myth that lay it open to such charges, that make it so

productive for my work as a comic-book author<sup>1</sup>. Contemporary mythic speech, it will be shown, can be an effective way of conceiving and delivering thematic material for entertainment that engages with societal concerns as in *The Number One Game*<sup>2</sup>.

### **An heroic comic-book for Cape Town**

I am aware that there is no pre-existing local (Capetonian or southern african) comic-book culture or reading network that my project can conveniently “slot” into. There have been a number of published anthologies, conferences and exhibitions, but no commercially viable, regular comic-books in the Superhero or other genre traditions. A possible exception to the rule is the *Supa Strikas* comic book, included in the *Sunday Times* newspaper, which takes the form of a proto-typical sports-comic (much like the various Japanese sports *Manga* genres) but set in South Africa. As it is a free supplement, however, fully subsidised by the brands which advertise themselves all over the stories, I would not call it a comic-book as much as an advertorial feature<sup>3</sup>. For the rest there are some irregularly published anthologies, such as *Mamba Comix*, *Outline* or *Bitterkomix*, but I would define these largely as alternative comics or “comix”<sup>4</sup>.

Such issues of sustainability, distribution and readership appear in many surveys of comic-book history and financial and market issues obviously have significance in enabling the production of comics. In this thesis the focus will be on the factors that have influenced creators in developing their relationship with an audience, rather than from a publishing or commercial point of view. The consideration of the potential role of the mythic in this project stems from a desire to please an (for now) imaginary audience. The comic-book creator outside of an established publishing environment is in the multiple positions of creator/writer/illustrator and reader/critic. It was helpful to me to separate these roles as phases in the process of creating the comic book and I hope to demonstrate that the mythic relates to each of them. As creator and conceiver of this project it was my original ambition to “mythologise” the landscape of Cape Town and its street people by involving them in

---

<sup>1</sup> When we consider some of the cultural histories of comics in Chapter 2, we will see that there is an historic tension (in Anglophone publishing cultures) between the aspirations of many of those working in the medium, the many adult readers of comics, and the commonly held popular and critical view that comics are a medium for children or the semi-literate. Debates concerning the relative merits, perceived audience and status of the medium are, strictly, beyond my purview except where they have bearing on creative choices available to me, as an author especially in relation to the formal values of existing comic-books.

<sup>2</sup> Though myths are more often generated by ruling hegemonies, myth is a mode that need not favour any particular cause, Barthes argues. He says: “Statistically, myth is on the right. There it is essential; well-fed” (2000:148). My intention is to appropriate it for “left” purposes – to use it to raise questions of social and political transformation.

<sup>3</sup> Although in Chapter 2 we will see that such material formed the origin for the Anglophone comics industry.

<sup>4</sup> This distinction I want to make between the “comic-book” and the “comix” work of, for example, Jo Daly, the contributors to the *Igubu* and *Green Mamba* collectives or the makers of *Bitterkomix*, will be fully set out in Chapter Two, where I define the comic-book and related terms.



an epic battle against evil. The conventional distinction between the events and settings of the story, and the structuring of those events into the narrative, is often made in the form of a “story-bible”, included here as Addendum 4 for *The Number One Game*.

### **The mythic story-world and its narrative**

In developing source material for what eventually became *The Number One Game* I started with some reference points that were distorted into elements that went into the “story-world” of Cape Island, the future-Cape Town setting that I constructed. Some of these elements were observed characteristics of real people, which I have exaggerated into “types” that could be seen as archetypes or stereotypes, while other elements were to do with settings or events. All of these elements made up a fictive story-world which could be used in constructing the plot of my comic-book. It will be shown that these elements can readily be employed in mythic speech, as defined by Barthes, and can also be seen to have the qualities of the archetype in Campbell's conception.

The use of this term “story-world” here relates to important distinctions in narrative terminology between the story-world, and terms such as plot and story. Paul Cobley (2001) provides these terms from concepts worked out by Russian Formalist writers in the post-World-War-One period<sup>5</sup>. Narratives, as presented in comic-books and other forms of storytelling are, according to Cobley, always presented in the form of a “*sjuzet*” – a *particular* narrative organisation that does not necessarily present events in the chronological sequence of their occurrence. An example of this non-chronological nature of the *sjuzet* is the “flashback” – wherein the reader or audience “travels back in time” to view past events.

The “*fabula*”, on the other hand, consists of the “raw materials” of the story which we could infer and reconstruct as a series of chronological events and details from experiencing the *sjuzet*'s organising of this material. These “raw materials” might be organised in different ways in the *sjuzet* – and this organisation will alter the effect of the *fabula* material through changing emphasis and perspective.

---

<sup>5</sup> “... *fabula* refers to the chronological sequence of events which make up the raw materials of a story; *sjuzet* is the way the story is organized...these influential terms are usually translated as ‘story’ and ‘discourse’ respectively, conflating ‘plot’ and ‘narrative’ in the process ...*fabula* is helpful because it designates events that are to be narrated; at the same time, however, such events are always *organized* in a way that presents itself as ‘the same’ as those events but, of course, is quite ‘different’. That is, it is always *reorganized* to highlight some events and downplay others, an activity designated by the term *sjuzet*.” (2001:15)

The “story-world” includes the material of the *fabula*, but goes further to include the full pre-histories of the characters (these are often called “backstories”) and any pertinent differences between the consensual-factual “actual” or non-fictional world of the reader and the story-world. Where the term *fabula* might refer only to story-world material that one knows about from reading that particular story, my definition of the story-world is broader. The story-world includes material that may remain unpublished or might only be employed in later plotlines. This story-world material thus remains useful in generating scenarios and plot-lines beyond the current project of *The Number One Game* into further possible narratives.<sup>6</sup> (Please refer to the Story Bible in Addendum 4.) In this process the writer of the comic-book can adopt a mythic approach, using the tools of narrative encoding as a basis for mythic speech.

A key mythic aspect, I would argue, of the story-world is its “counterfactual” structure in that the reader can experience not only the story-world by *comparison* to facts in his or her perception of their own world, but also other imagined and fictional worlds. The reader of fiction engages with the text in part by enjoying the narrative unfolding of the “counterfactuals” of the story-world. According to Jeff McClaughlin, (2005a:10): “Counterfactuals are just 'what if' questions where we present a different version of the world and try to determine what it would look like. Individuals may do this when they regret the performance of an action or lament the occurrence of a particular action.”

In *The Number One Game* the speculative “what ifs” that give rise to the story world, are drawn from what I perceive as important contemporary trends. Thus they express my (ideological) concerns about the future. It asks, for instance, what if the gap between rich and poor continues to widen? Or; what if, as predicted, water levels do rise – what will happen to people living just above sea-level like those on the Cape Flats? What if privatisation continues to such an extent that corporate entities took over the management and services of the city? The counterfactual gives a sense of the themes in question and their possible relation to the worlds of the reader and writer. I have used these kinds of questions to focus the imaginative work and play of constructing my story-world; however I also see this speculative pattern as a major part of the way the mythos is generated in the heroic comic-book (as embodied, for example, in Superman's “what if a person had super powers, super-strength and speed, and flight?”<sup>7</sup>).

---

<sup>6</sup> Narrative itself is a transformation, as Cobley puts it, “like metaphor, narrative is 'the same but different’” (2001:15).

<sup>7</sup> Novelist Michael Chabon provides a great fictive portrayal of the kind of conditions under which this question was asked in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay*, (2000).

Comic-books in the heroic adventure tradition entertain in large measure by the counterfactual elements of the fantastical story-worlds that allow readers to indulge in this sort of imaginative play. The attraction of the stories may often have to do with the aptness of the metaphor in the construction of the story-world. We can understand Superman, for example as, among other things, a symbol of fairness (or omnipotent self-righteousness if one prefers) from the idealistic imagination of mid-century America. In various formulations, the *Superman* story-world can create mythic links to the Christian narratives of Jesus, allowing access to metaphors of transcendence or mercy or grace. In others, Superman's origins as an immigrant may be emphasised. All is centred or constrained through the core "facts" of the established story-world of the *Superman* stories – born on Planet Krypton, sent to earth as a baby where he has superpowers by virtue of his alien heritage, which heritage is mitigated by his middle-American values and upbringing.

In the chapters to follow I will define narrative and visual terminology further; for now, it will suffice to say that, in my approach to both this thesis and the accompanying project, I am privileging the metaphoric value of the "what-if" and the development of a story-world that emphasises the mythic potential of such "what-ifs". It will be helpful, at this point, to begin describing some of the creative choices that have been made so far.

### **"Cape Island": The story-world for *The Number One Game***

The comic-book project that I am undertaking is set in a near-future Cape Town and the characters and story make use of cultures and situations local to the Cape.<sup>8</sup> I intend it to be an archetypal and epic expression of the process of individuation for a young southern African man. The story then, will set out the ethical and emotional problems that face him throughout the process of becoming an adult. This process of individuation is constructed (loosely) using a formulation of Campbell's mono-myth which Christopher Vogler (1996) calls the "Hero's Journey" (see Chapter 3) in its broad strokes; however the story-world itself in which our young protagonist, "Joe" finds himself is made up of the same confusing and heterogenous elements as the Cape Town we live in. Joe is an orphan, an almost Dickensian character who must make his way in the big city.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Number One Game* is set a few generations - about eighty years - in the future although I do not specify a date.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Green's local feature: *Twist*, based on *Oliver Twist*, is one local text that has already established the link between Dickens' London and contemporary Cape Town.

There are, of course, many traditions of protagonists or “heroes” who are social outcasts, poverty-stricken or simply outsiders. In this constructed story-world Cape society is corrupt from top to bottom, there is no economic mobility due to a scarcity of resources and the entrenchment of property rights over human rights. The poor are geographically and financially isolated from any centre of power. In effect; Cape Town has been privatised and has turned into a servicing centre for the worst aspects of tourism and mass-entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

This is merely an exaggeration, a “*reductio ad absurdam*” of the situation that I perceive emerging in South African, but particularly Capetonian society. Given a continuation of this situation and with increasing pressure on natural resources, there will come an increasing polarisation in society, with greater profits for some and a profound physical disenfranchisement for others. This vision belongs to a tradition of sorts. Many other recent South African fiction projects have featured characters who are disenfranchised.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the issue of social relevance, it seems simply more *interesting* to show members of our society who are struggling to survive than those who are “comfortable”. Characters in vulnerable or desperate situations have to deal with the tension between choice and agency all the time. When people have few options available to them, and very little power or agency, their choices will have inescapably heavy consequences.

Themes, images and dramatic situations that arise out of these sorts of power inequalities should be central to the development of a contemporary popular culture in this country not only for idealistic reasons but because they can make effective entertainment by engaging with issues relevant to contemporary life in South Africa. I do not propose a didactic fiction but one that demonstrates empathy with the characters while showing us the radical measures they have to take to defend their world from cynical manipulation by the powerful and corrupt. The protagonists in my story resist the machinations of Nic Lord, where resistance is seen as “criminal” by the state Lord rules. In this fictive formulation I am effectively transforming the state into the criminal figure. This is a strategy that has reference to South African history; this is a “what-if” that might have different meanings were the setting in a First World capital.

---

<sup>10</sup> Examples of these include increased property development, restricted by rising water levels from below and a walled-off Table Mountain; this has created dense and chaotic areas but also secure estates for the very rich and massive apartment blocks for those of average means. Citizenship of what has become “Cape Island” relies, in something like the ancient Roman manner, on earning it through privileged birth, service to the city or by purchase. The poor eke out a living on the marshes and shallow waters of what used to be the Cape Flats and struggle, without state assistance, to survive. Please see Addenda 1 & 2 for plot details and 4 for further Story World information.

<sup>11</sup> Here, for example, one could cite Meg Rickard’s short film of K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*, which has a street-child as a central character; the feature films *Tsotsi* (directed by Gavin Hood), which is about a minor gangster who finds his humanity, and *Yesterday* (director Darryll Roodt) which has a traditional, rural Zulu woman who contracts HIV/AIDS from her mine-worker husband as central character.

The original narrative premise for the Cape Island story-world was to feature characters who have chosen to live on the street as a deliberate act of renunciation of the prevailing order. These are the fictional Bergies<sup>12</sup> who become Joe's allies and who are intended to represent a kind of spirit of the Cape. This may not seem a likely or politically-correct scenario in present day Cape Town but I justify the choice, for now, by observing that it is not dissimilar to the renunciations written into the world's great faiths as the stories of their saints and saviours. Their choice reflects a resignation to and acceptance of physical hardship that is shared, of necessity, by all too many of the world's people. Such protagonists, then, are representative of large groups of people in terms of lifestyle but there are many examples in literature and other entertainment of characters who have made this choice. However this choice to live on the street is not understood by Joe for the bulk of the narrative, and his understanding of it has to grow along with ours.<sup>13</sup>

Our protagonist in *The Number One Game* becomes known as Joe K, the computer kid, and he conforms to the orphan or “special-child” archetype. Joe has absorbed the expectations of the First World environment he grew up in – a private Eastern Cape boarding school – until forced to trek to the Cape on foot, which is where the narrative *sjuzet* begins. Joe is offered help by a group of street-people, which he rejects, not being able to understand how they were trying to communicate with him<sup>14</sup>. Joe finds a place in a street-gang but, given his education and ability, is quickly set to work on a computer by one of the local gang-bosses. Joe cannot believe his luck when he is offered a trainee post at LordCorp, the biggest corporation in the Cape. It turns out that Joe is known to the owner of the company, the infamous Nic Lord himself. LordCorp runs the city and Lord himself is like a colonial governor with no King or Queen to report to. He could also be seen as a feudal lord, or as a large corporation, a kind of living “brand”. Lord is Joe's chief opponent. The later parts of the narrative are concerned with the conflict between Joe and his allies and LordCorp<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> The term “Bergie” is Capetonian slang for a homeless person. It derives from the Afrikaans word “Berg”, meaning “mountain” and reflects the idea that the indigent of Cape Town make homes for themselves on Table Mountain.

<sup>13</sup> Such figures who renounce the world, also have literary forebears in South African fiction. Zakes Mda's protagonist, Toloki, in *Ways of Dying*, for example, can be seen as a type of saddhu figure. Michael K, the protagonist of JM Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* is another fictional hero who is valued for his refusal, or inability, to live according to society's designated boundaries. Freedom for these figures is associated with abandonment, isolation, and deprivation.

<sup>14</sup> In the terms of Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* (1996) which will be examined further in Chapter 3, Joe is “refusing” the “call to adventure” to his “Hero's Journey” and then going through steps that lead him to understand the street-people who are trying to help him.

<sup>15</sup> Please refer to the following addenda for further story detail: 1, Overview, 2, Summary of Episodes and Addendum 3, *The Number One Game* itself.

This comic-book is intended to have the same sense of spectacle and emotional grandeur that one finds in Superhero comics, but without overt use of their more fanciful elements. While Superhero comics as a strict genre apparently do well internationally, the awesome scale of “superness” of many traditional superheroes is not appropriate, in my view, to the production of comics in a South African context. In *The Number One Game*, characters present “special” skills or abilities but not so much so that one could regard them as a separate “race” or “species” as in *Superman*, or altered by some biological manipulation or accident as in *Spiderman*. Batman is a useful reference here in that he is a “normal” man – albeit one with unusual athletic abilities and determination. The *Batman* mythos seems to be rooted in crime and hard-boiled detective fiction traditions, wherein the scale of exaggeration is subtler than in the “Superheroes as demi-gods” approach.

Unlike in “proper” Superhero comics, none of *The Number One Game* characters hides a secret-identity behind a mask, except, perhaps, the metaphoric ones of the main antagonist, Nic Lord. Joe does not get to invent his own alter-ego as Bruce Wayne does in the *Batman* origin myth (shown in Chapter 3), a feature shared with so many other “suited heroes”. Instead the “Game” itself – both in the sense of the tournament that takes up the later part of the story and in the sense of making one’s living in the world – offers Joe the fantastical opportunity of becoming something like a contemporary sports-hero, a virtual-reality gaming hero. In this way it is possible to stage “battles” which are spectacular visual representations of conflict, standard to the tradition I am drawing on, and in which Joe does acquire an alter-ego – that of a digital gaming celebrity.

In sum I am adapting many of the genre codes of the Superhero and Adventure comics<sup>16</sup> to local points of reference, excluding or altering, as a consequence, many of the classic features of such narratives. I am making the comic-book I would have liked to have been able to read when I was a teenager. I want to work in a popular mode but I do not have the opportunity (in this project) to develop a relationship with an audience as, say, a regularly published comic with a readership would be able to. In order to understand this relationship some of this social and economic history of the comic-book will be examined in Chapter 2.

---

<sup>16</sup> To a lesser extent, genres or sub-genres such as Crime, Hard-boiled action and Neo-Noir have also had influence.

## Locating the discussion of comic-book narratives

In relation to ideology in the theory and practice of making and reading comics, McAllister, Sewell and Gordon (2001:2) ask: “Why and how may comics challenge and or perpetuate power differences in society? Do comics serve to celebrate and legitimize dominant values and institutions in society or do they critique and subvert the status quo?” They go on to emphasise the complexities of talking about these problems, and the wide range of approaches there have been to their solution. Different comic-books or comic strips will, of course, have varied relationships to societal hegemony, and I would not argue that the comic-book as a medium has any particular or *inherent* relation to power differences. I hope, on the contrary, to demonstrate that the comic-book reader must be seen as an active participant in decoding the complex relationships of signs in the comic-book and that, therefore, many of the concerns critics have had about comic-books’ effects on readers are symptoms of a lack of understanding of comic-books as a medium.

In this thesis I will be using the framework of the mythic throughout to aid in demonstrating that comic-books can draw on both “mainstream” and “alternative” traditions in their formal qualities and authorial intent to produce critique and subversion. Comic-book texts can unite the goals of entertainment and ideological expression and thereby encourage readers to develop critical awareness.

In Chapter 2 I will first define what I mean by the “comic-book”, and find theoretical points of reference to position my approach to and use of key terms. In particular the special “grammar” of the “language” of comics must be considered – those formal graphic relationships on the page that are unique to comic-books and distinguish them from other forms of illustration and storytelling. Chapter 2 will make use of the formal analyses Will Eisner, Scott McCloud and others have made of the conventions of the comic-book, with a focus on those most applicable to *The Number One Game* and its major points of reference. These will be linked with those aspects of the historical development of a comics’ culture that inform the comic-book's delivery of its mythic narrative.

Some of the body of criticism and history of comic-books will suggest pertinent aspects of their cultural environment, which plays host to the traditions that have produced comic-books such as *Judge Dredd* and *Batman*. In the anthology, *Comics & Culture* (2000:209-224), for instance, Abraham Kawa offers an analysis in which he argues that narrative developments in the *Batman* stories, *Dark Knight Returns* (1997), and other Anglophone Superhero comics in the nineteen-

eighties, reflect revealing changes in the pre-occupations not only of creators but of readers as well. This reader-writer connection is often stressed by this generation of comics artists themselves.<sup>17</sup> The comic-book genre and sub-culture(s) I am concerned with depend on the mythic qualities of characters and environments to create a powerful sense of engagement. Many critics express concerns that dismissive perceptions of mainstream comics have dominated the creative possibilities available to the comic-book, for instance in their reputation as childhood or “fanboy” entertainment<sup>18</sup>. The past few decades, it will be shown, have seen an integration of mainstream and alternative approaches to the comic-book that can allow it to transcend these perceptions and its origins as a lowly commercial object.

These lowly origins are such a part of societal perceptions of the comic-book that some critical approaches challenge even the comic-book’s status as a form in its own right. Thierry Groensteen provides the example of comics being treated as a “paraliterature”<sup>19</sup>, and questions this implied demotion of comics to a marginal genre of literature, ascribing it to a false comparison between literature and the comics form (2000:38). Apart from any value or status issues this does not give an understanding of what Groensteen calls the “real economic and structural difficulties” of comic-book publication. I will not repeat in detail the history of attempts to limit certain comic-books and their genres legally or otherwise<sup>20</sup>. It is worthwhile, though, to note that the “moral panics” over the effect comic-books may have on their readership, especially the young or semi-literate, along with attempts to control their subject matter and representations, reflect a contradiction in the position of the comic-book in “popular culture”<sup>21</sup>. On the one hand the comic-book seems too slight to be treated as a fully-fledged form with its own unique linguistic properties, but on the other it seems to have an ability to attract especially, but not *only*, young readers in such numbers and at such high

---

<sup>17</sup> Frank Miller, creator of this *Batman* series, for instance, concludes his description of the process of developing the “*Dark Knight Returns*” by saying: “...I got to send a gift back in time to that kid in Vermont [himself at age 6] who opened a Batman comic and fell in, never entirely to emerge.” (1997:ii) Such a strong sense of engagement is reported by many “fans” and comics creators alike in the literature on comics and relates to fears of comics’ influence on readers.

<sup>18</sup> Sabin puts it clearly: “As we know all too well, comics in the US and UK have a history of being despised as an art form, barred from serious critical discussion and stereotyped as either kids’ stuff or as a pastime for nerds” (2000:48).

<sup>19</sup> Groensteen describes “paraliterature” as follows: “a badly defined set of popular genres that includes adventure stories, historical novels, fantasy and science-fiction, detective novels, erotica, etc.” Groensteen notes that two of the attendees of the first important French seminar on “paraliterature”, held in Cerisy in 1967 were noted comics theorists and that thirty years later there is still a “Centre for Paraliterature, Comics and Cinema” in Belgium (2000:38). Groensteen prefers hybrid approaches to the discussion of the medium, its readership and the thematic, aesthetic and mythic links many comic-books may have to “pulp fiction” or other low-status genres in publishing.

<sup>20</sup> This history can be seen, for example, in the enforcement of the American “Comics Code of Approval” and the obscenity trials for alternative “comix” described by Sabin (1993:117).

<sup>21</sup> To be precise, of course I mean a white, Anglocentric access to global mass media. Belgian, Japanese and Mexican comics production, no doubt, have vast differences in their histories and concerns.



levels of absorption that there are periodic outcries over their content. Various commentators draw wide-ranging conclusions from these contradictions and although, for some it chafes, for many comic book artists it is precisely the marginal position of the comic-book form that appeals as a medium for their ideas. Not being able to address all aspects of production of the comic-book I must favour those that can contextualise *The Number One Game* and its major reference points or “models”.

The dominant mode for publishing popular comic-books is as serialized stories, Groensteen maintains: “To forecast the future of long-form comics, we need to be aware of the real economic and structural difficulties that obstruct the creation of cohesive graphic novels. Even now, despite the blooming interest in graphic novels among mainstream publishers, serialization remains the one economically proven means of getting book-length comics into print...” (2000:162). This is part of what is supposed to make comic-books “easy” in that such serialized stories are understood to be endless re-workings of tried and trusted formulae, and are seldom seen to rise in narrative or thematic complexity to the level of, say, the novel. Presumably this is part of why many who crave more respect for the comic-book as a form for adults prefer the term “graphic novel”.

The comic-book is a specific story form with its own rigours and demands; its clear intention is to be read as an art or entertainment form in which, though the treatment of its representations is intentional they are not fixed in meaning by the author. Choices to do with genre reference points, the use of “dialects” in the visual and verbal elements of the page, as well as the use of the structuring “language” of comics and visual storytelling to dictate “pace” and “point of view” all make up layers of coded meaning that can grant the comic-book reader an experience offering great density, simplicity or polysemy. The comic-book story is always a narrative *re*-presentation, employing the expressive and linguistic potential of graphic traditions in the fine arts and illustration. Comic-books, certainly in their heroic form, have great mythic potential because they are made up of combinations of text and image that make them capable of highly explicit depiction of themes and events but also great complexity in their delivery of a visual experience. The process of reading comic-books, it will be demonstrated, relies on pictorial meanings that can be at the same time linguistic and subliminal elements. It is the irreducible sum of those meanings that provides reading pleasures that are uniquely that of the comic-book medium.

Groensteen, amongst others, stresses that the reader of a comic “not only enjoys a story-related pleasure but also an *art-related pleasure*,” and further a “*medium-related pleasure*” which is uniquely that of the comic medium and is not reducible to “the sum of the other two” (2000:162).

Chapter 3 of this thesis will set out the ways in which I have drawn on mythic narrative structures, and archetypal figures, to construct *The Number One Game*. Kawa proposes that Superhero comic-book work now engage with myths in highly sophisticated ways<sup>22</sup>. Discussing the way the comic-book can treat popular imagery of what many might call contemporary myths – such as alien abductions – Kawa observes that “as aliens, gods or metahuman precursors of the future, Superman and the other superheroes may also be seen as psychological manifestations of an evolving human consciousness”. Beyond the pleasure of entertainment Kawa seems to propose that the comic-book performs the traditional mirroring function of art. His argument is that as humanity is developing greater agency in the form of technology, what he calls “these magnificent, archetypal beings, be they angels, aliens or superheroes all try to show us the way to learn, survive and thrive” (2000:223). In other words they can provide models for us in an indirect, analogical sense – their struggles are appropriate and relevant to us as mythologized expressions of our own.

This ties in with the notion of the archetype as I will be using it in my work - a key element in what Carl Jung would call the “depth analysis” of a myth or other form of symbolic encapsulation (such as a dream or fantasy). For a schema of the central “hero” myths I rely largely on the research work of Joseph Campbell. My method of reading (and writing) comic-books employs a method that assumes a broadly understandable range of event-structures and character archetypes and settings.

The “mono-myth” terminology from Christopher Vogler’s *The Writer’s Journey* used in Chapter 3 is drawn from Joseph Campbell’s “depth research” of archetypal structures that, in turn, relies on Jung’s concept of the archetype. Vogler’s scheme will be used to describe the “heroic” progression of Joe, his allies and opponents. As Campbell emphasises, the “Hero’s Journey” provides a generic patterning based on his observations of archetypal similarities between various mythological traditions, this is not to be seen as a firm template for characters but as a range of represented qualities that seem to reflect some internal arrangement of the psyche. We will see how mythic structures such as these interact with the narrative and visual representations in comic-books.

---

<sup>22</sup> Such as in the “sweeping cross-cultural” *The Invisibles*, creator Grant Morrison’s Superhero “comic of ideas” as described by Kawa (2000:223).

In Chapter 4 I will argue for consideration of the active role of the reader/viewer in constructing meaning from the graphic representations on the comic-book page. To do this I will refer both to writings that support the way I am delineating myth, and its relationship to the comic book. For an understanding of the mythic inflexion as a historically contingent “metalanguage” I rely heavily on Roland Barthes’ writings, and in particular, as noted previously, his article “Myth Today” (written in 1953). In this thesis I also make reference to more contemporary authors who offer examples of analyses that are useful to the mythic comic-book project such as Matthew Althouse. Althouse’s *Kevlar Armor, Heat Seeking Bullets, and Social Order: A Mythological Reading of Judge Dredd*, (2001), provided me with a vivid example of the Barthesian method applied to a comic-book series.

Althouse’s example is not only useful for the thesis, but has proven valuable in thinking through the problem of self-critique in which one must imagine the responses of an audience. Althouse’s article made explicit for me how the Barthesian definition of a mythological reading could be applied to the relation between comic-book themes and the social concerns of the society that produced it – in his example, Margeret Thatcher’s Britain. *Judge Dredd* is shown to reflect some major concerns of this society in the mythic elements of the *Mega-City-One* story-world and narratives<sup>23</sup>. *The Number One Game* reflects societal concerns in a way similar to Althouse’s mythic reading of *Judge Dredd*. The comic-book creator can benefit from the Barthesian understanding of the operation of the mythic inflexion as a way of aiding in the production and editing of comic-book content, and as an analytical model for learning about the medium from other comic-books. In large part this semiotic understanding of what Barthes calls a “second order reading” allows one to compare and contrast the way comic-book authors (and readers) use the framework of cultural constructions, the sets of associations to encode ideology as *myths* of their times as source material to address the “real” culture or society in a mythic way.

Preparing a mythic reading of *The Number One Game* and its primary reference points has necessarily involved consideration of the broad fields of cultural, narrative and visual studies with a specific rhetorical and critical matrix that derives from semiotic theory and visual theory in the fine and applied Arts. In particular, there is a large body of material, both theoretical and technical to do with the construction of pictorial meaning through “visual storytelling”<sup>24</sup>. This material has aided me in developing the craft and technical approaches in the design and rendering of this comic-book

---

<sup>23</sup> The *Judge Dredd* series of comic book stories first appeared in the magazine-format comic-book, *2000 AD*

<sup>24</sup> Much of this material seems to derive from concepts arising out of “gestalt theory”. Rudolf Arnheim, often cited in the works of Block, Zackia and other similar authors notes that: “It is generally admitted that the foundations of our present knowledge of visual perception were laid in the laboratories of the gestalt psychologists” [1954:4].

project. The thesis will describe how I have relied on the mythic paradigm to focus the content and argue for the role of the mythic in the production of a rich and polysemic graphic text that can contribute to a nascent South African comic-book culture. In general terms this will be achieved by reflection on the relevant dominant mythic arrangements at play in the Anglophone tradition of the heroic comic-book, and the way I am adapting and reinscribing these in my own work. This reflection will make use of examples from *The Number One Game* and its primary reference texts – the British comic-book, *2000 A.D.'s Judge Dredd* series, and the 1980s conception of Batman as represented in *The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Killing Joke* – providing an analysis of what Barthes has called “the unquestioned presumptions of myths” (1982:201) to show the ideological assumptions that underpin their intention to entertain.

Such analysis has helped both interpret and produce the project work in *The Number One Game*. In developing the fictive elements of the Cape Island story-world for the plot of *The Number One Game* and then devising the episodes and writing, designing and rendering the first three episodes, this comic-book has been treated as a mythic site where pre-existing visual-narrative codes for archetypal values compete. The mythic framework is highly associative, both in its narrative and visual form, as I will show in Chapters 3 and 4. This becomes a device which enables my project to connect its fictional work, which is derived from my studies of the traditions of both Anglophone comics and Anglo-European myth, to the “real” world of South African socio-political relationships, represented here in the de-contextualized, and de-historicized form of mythic comic gesture.

## **Chapter 2: The comic-book as a mythic text**

In this chapter I will show that the comic-book form, like other manifestations of the broader category of “comics”, is an object that becomes the medium for signs – both verbal and visual – which are inseparable in their cumulative meaning. In defining these terms in this chapter, I do not wish to create what Charles Hatfield has described (2005:160) as an “immutable, oppressive rule” for the creative possibilities of the comic-book. Rather I aim to develop a definition that promotes understanding of the “real economic and structural difficulties” and traditions of readership that may affect the employment of a mythic approach to the comic-book form.

Much comic-book history and criticism is taken up with contextualising and distinguishing between terms such as “comics”, the “comic strip” and the “graphic novel”. Some prefer to coin terms in order to claim a particular quality or aspect of the form: Will Eisner (1985), for example, speaks of “sequential art”, foregrounding the visual dimension, and the term “comix” is often used for alternative comics. In using the hyphenated form of spelling for “comic-book”, which seems to be a less commonly used form than “comic book”, I intend to take some of the independent meaning, and misleading emphasis, out of the words; instead I am foregrounding the collaboration between the visual and the written forms.

The word “comic”, for example, has associations with humour, comedy and parody that are perfectly valid for some comic-book material, but not that of the tradition I am working from. There is little connection between my work and the humorous daily strips packaged into books, for instance. *The Number One Game*, and my primary comic-book reference points, *Judge Dredd* and *Batman*, all rely on the “adventure” tradition in comics, a category encompassing the heroic as well as genre such as detective fiction. Roger Sabin relates that: “The stereotype of a comic as something inherently 'comical' was one that dominated the initial emergence of the form in both Britain and America” but that adventure comic-books took up this dominance from roughly 1940 to 1970<sup>25</sup> (1996:44). Such adventure comics are not necessarily humour-less but are generally longer narratives, containing different emotional or dramatic registers and are the broader category in which Superhero, Pirate and Sci-fi comics find their home.

---

<sup>25</sup> Sabin continues, “...once the psychological leap had been made that an 'adventure comic' was not necessarily a non-sequitor, the effect on the industry was transforming: as a result, any new stereotype would now have to incorporate the 'Biff! Pow!' of fisticuffs and the 'Bratt-att-att!' of machine-gun fire. This being the case, the adventure comics were the next stage in the medium's evolution, and their heyday can be dated to roughly the years between 1940 and 1970...” (1996:44)

Furthermore, my definition of “comic-books” incorporates stories that are published together with other “titles” or stories. These comic-books look a lot more like magazines, as in the case of single issues of comic-book “titles” like that of Judge Dredd in *2000 AD* or Batman in *Detective Comics*. Comic-books are freestanding publications containing mainly or only comics stories – whether these appear in the form of a single storyline “title” in an anthologised book or as a weekly magazine featuring instalments of several different stories.

I will demonstrate more clearly what I mean by tracing out some pertinent definitions and a few historical and contemporary factors that inform my use of the term “comic-book”. One of the interesting things about the medium is the lack of any commonly accepted canonical term and perhaps also, of a dominant object. This is in contrast to the status of the novel, in literature, or the feature film in cinema. I want to examine the potential of the comic-book as a site for myth by demonstrating the polysemy of the comics’ language and the rich possibilities for the depiction of archetypes in the comic-book. It will be shown that the comic-book is a form that is particularly suited for the employment of the mythic in both the terms of the mono-myth and Barthes conception of the mythic as a type of speech.

I distinguish between the terms “comics language” and “comic-book” because though they have a close relationship they are not in the same order, the former is a language and the latter a book, a type of object. The comic-book makes use of the comics language and conventions of representation that are derived from other media. There are a great variety of approaches to the problem of engaging storytelling using the language of comics that I would exclude from our definition though the broader pictorial and literary fields, especially in visual storytelling<sup>26</sup>, make up a wider context for the language of comics. The comics language lends itself to strategies of depiction that have strong reference points in visual systems of communication such as caricature, that are widespread in other fields and media, but the grammar that make up this language is quite specific, and will be investigated further below.

Nevertheless, such interrelationships between the comics language and other fields (whether formal, linguistic or social) enable many different levels of reference to the story elements and visual strategies of other media. The ability of the comics language to import and manipulate elements from other media, combined with its culturally marginal status, are what allow such a great variety

---

<sup>26</sup> Visual storytelling media include cinema, illustrated books, poster graphics, animation and older narrative forms such as the medieval stained glass window according to writers such as McCloud, Eisner and Block, who in his book *Visual Story* diagrams all contemporary commercial visual story fields from traditional to digital (2001:29).

of approaches to making comic-books. As Charles Hatfield says in the introduction to his book *Alternative Comics*, “both socially and aesthetically, comics are likely to remain an unresolved, unstable, and challenging form.” Hatfield maintains that the instability of comics as a “bastard” form is because of its root in the combination of image and text, but argues for the appropriateness of this combination in today's culture, asking: “What better form than comics to tune up our sensibilities and alert us to the possibilities of these [image] texts?<sup>27</sup>” (2005:xiii).

It is in first the semiotic and then the social and aesthetic senses that I construct a definition of these two levels of “imagetexts” – the language of “comics”, and the material and cultural form of the “comic-book” which shares the basic language of “comics” with other forms such as the comic strip. In relating aspects of the history of the comic-book the intention is to create a sense of the operating context for the comic-book project, *The Number One Game*. It will be my contention that any reading of the mythic in my project will be further inflected by the linguistic elements of the comic but also the genre codes, representational traditions formed by the cultural history of the comic-book as defined below.

### **Defining the “language of comics” and the “comic-book”**

Certain theoretical approaches to comic-books, such as semiotics and structuralism, have traditionally dominated critical conceptions of the comic. Semiology, according to Roland Barthes, is a “science of forms” (2000:111) which is concerned with “the great signifying unities of discourse” (quoted in Crow, 2003:56). Barthes describes the semiological system as being made up of two terms, the signifier and signified and their “associative total” or sign value (2000:113)<sup>28</sup>.

The “science” of signs, and the theory concerned with textual structure have both been influential for the establishment of what has been called a “grammar of comics” by comic book creators and theorists like Will Eisner and Scott McCloud. Hans-Christian Christiansen and Anne Magnussen, in their introduction to *Comics Culture*, situate various approaches to writing on comics and ascribe the early dominance of structuralism and semiotic theory to two factors: firstly, the contribution both made to media studies in general, and secondly, that comics contain what they call an “almost

---

<sup>27</sup> Hatfield claims that: “if comic art is some kind of bastard, to recruit a popular metaphor, then maybe bastardy is just the thing – our culture has it in for aesthetic purity anyway. In our age of new and hybrid media, interartistic collaboration is the king. Popular culture and high art alike are saturated with text/image combinations; we are encircled by imagetexts (a phrase I lift from W.J.T. Mitchell).” (2005:xiii)

<sup>28</sup> Crow emphasises that Barthes’ view of semiology was as a general “science of signs” that, “takes in many systems of signs, whatever the content or limits of the system. Images, sounds, gestures and objects are all part of systems which have semiotic meanings” (2003:56).

complete catalogue of semiological problems” (2000:12). These semiological problems have to do with the complex way comics can operate as “imagetexts”, combining text and image with visual sequencing devices such as panels and speech bubbles. In defining the “language of comics” one can ask the question: what separates comics from other forms of visual narrative such as the illustrated children's book? Why, to give another example, are single-image (or single-panel) “cartoons”, such as typical editorial cartoons found in the letters pages of daily newspapers, not, generally, “comics”?

David Carrier, in his *The Aesthetics of Comics*, helps us to address the “illustrated book” example in writing that comics make use of devices that make them “essentially a composite art: when they are successful, they have verbal and visual elements seamlessly combined” (2000:4). This is in contrast to the conventional printed page which, as J. Hillis Miller puts it, is often a “place of warfare” between text and image (1992:73)<sup>29</sup>. The comics language, I aim to demonstrate, is rich in its potential to create meaning through its formalisation of the relationship between text and image.

In the comics language text and image each find their context and sequence by their placement in visually defined areas, such as those defined by the panel and the speech-balloon (or “bubble”). The effect of the panel border is that the image within it is intended to be looked at in a certain way. That the image is a panel in a comic creates the expectation that it be read as a view into a dramatic or comic scene. Likewise the text in a speech-balloon can be “heard” as dialogue, text in a rectangle as a narrator's “voice-over”.

The single-panel “cartoon”, though it also employs the speech-balloon, lacks this property of sequence, which is particular to the comics language<sup>30</sup>. An editorial cartoon or children's book might *make use* of the language of comics if they present a temporal sequence of images to the reader but most do not work with the elaborate relationships of sequence possible within the comics language, especially the “grid” arrangement of panels common to the comic-book. Martin Barker emphasises this temporal nature of comics, defining comics as being, “made up of sequences of pictures. They tell stories using the convention of pictures following each other. This is not unimportant. Readers have to learn the skills of understanding the relation between separate

---

<sup>29</sup> Miller argues that picture and text juxtaposed will always have “different meanings or logoi. They will conflict irreconcilably with one another, since they are different signs, just as would two different sentences side by side, or two different pictures” (1992:95).

<sup>30</sup> Carrier notes: “Some caricatures [we might include the typical single-panel editorial “cartoon” in this category] are proto-comics because understanding them requires imagining a later moment of the action” (2000:16).



pictures: each one is a “still frame” out of a moving sequence; and that one is ‘later’ than this one” (1989:6).

However the properties of the comic-book are not limited to the formal or linguistic mechanism, but include a relation to the values or interests of readers. Carrier quotes Kunzle's four-part definition of the “comic” in which: “(1) There must be a sequence of separate images; (2) There must be a preponderance of image over text; (3) The medium... must be ... a mass medium;(4) The sequence must tell a story that is both moral and topical”(2000:3).

While the text-image ratio in Kunzle's second point may not *always* hold true, the above represents a useful orthodox view of the comic-book. Note that while the first two criteria are formal, the second two have to do with the operation of the comic-book as a consumer object - (3) and as entertainment or instruction - (4). Comic-books are physical objects that are subject to the pressures and vagaries of publishing, periodical or otherwise but they are also entertainments or at least instructional texts with some didactic value. The “morality” or “topicality” of a story relates to the ideological but the producers of the comic-book do not necessarily intend communication of political content. I would prefer to put it that the comic-book story must entertain through engagement with material that has relevance to readers (which relevance could be seen as moral or topical).

Barker describes a number of crucial “conventions” which, he claims, “allow still frames to represent an enormous range of things. Among these: speech, movement, relationships, emotions, cause and effect, reader-involvement, and the fictional nature of the comic book itself and its range of characters” (1989:6). Conventions that have developed around the use of the frame perform a major ordering function in the comics’ ability to create meanings. This is true whether we call the employment of those conventions a “code” or “system” or, as Scott McCloud does, a “language”<sup>31</sup>.

There seems a constant debate in the literature of comics about how inclusive one's definition of comics should be and this often takes the form of a dispute over an original comic. McCloud's well-known comic-book on comics, *Understanding Comics* (1993), for example, traces the comic to visual storytelling forms as far back as cave paintings and the Bayeux tapestry. Others argue for a more recent historical origin that requires the comic-book or comic to be mass-produced, and to have distinct aesthetic and formal attributes such as those described above. The positions that are

---

<sup>31</sup> As McCloud says, “words, pictures and other icons make up the vocabulary of the language of comics” (1993:47).

taken by the various commentators reflect their particular concerns which are at some levels ideological, or have utility for some analytical or critical approach they wish to take. These histories provide us with originary myths, which are, I believe, as loaded with ideology as any fiction.

Daniel Raeburn considers Rodolphe Töpffer to be the “father of comics”:

[I]n the 1820s, a Genovese school teacher and essayist named Rodolphe Töpffer began to write in an unspoken and unnamed language. At first it was difficult to say what this language was. Because it was visual, Töpffer decided to call it a language of signs... Töpffer derived the internal logic of these signs by studying physiognomy, the then-fashionable practice of judging a person's character by inspecting the shape of their head. Although Töpffer found in this quackery no science, he did discover a mother lode of stereotypes. He drew a series of caricatures to demonstrate that these stereotypes formed the signs and, therefore the basis, of this picture language (2004:7).

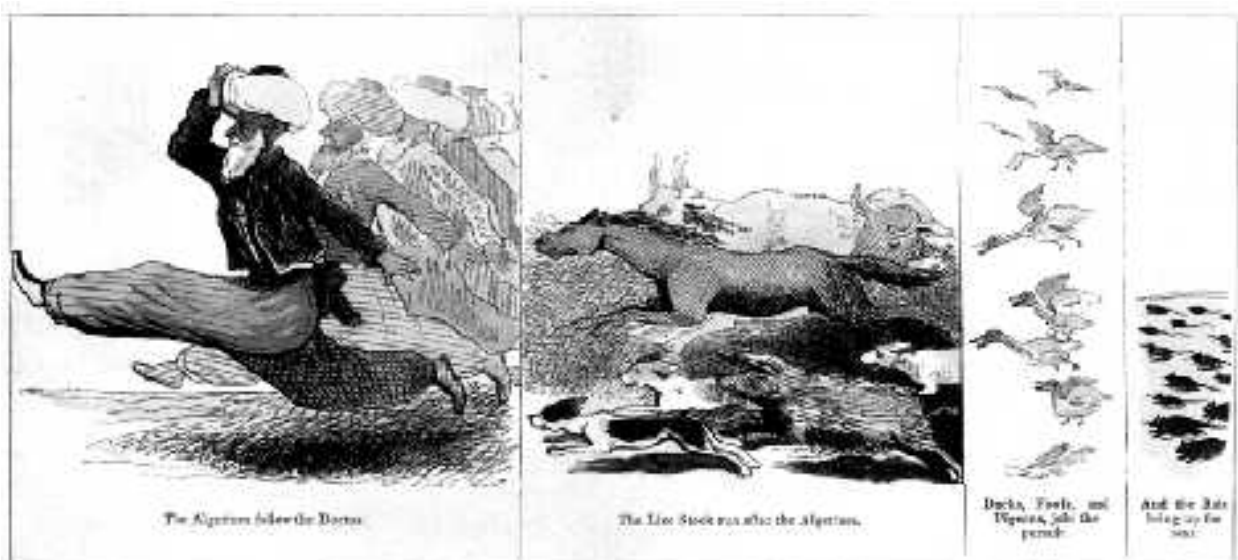


Figure 1: Rodolphe Töpffer's *The Veritable History of Mr Batchelor Butterfly*, 1845, Tilit&Bogue, London. Reproduced from Raeburn (2004:8).

The interrelationship between simplified or caricatured drawings that express archetypal qualities and words or short phrases is clear – both are read as signs and the special temporal sequencing of those signs into (and between) panels are what distinguish comics from other forms of pictorial narrative. Töpffer, as Raeburn observes, was writing with “cartoons” the “culturally ingrained symbols” employed in designing the pictures in his books<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> In the example, Illustration 1 above, drawn panel-frames separate parts of the image. This separation is one of time, as is clear from the text “the Algerians follow the doctor” (panel 1) and “the livestock runs after the Algerians” (panel 2). The decreasing width of each panel suggests a decreasing time-span for each panel “moment”.

Raeburn writes that Töpffer's insight into the use of caricature was elevated “to an insight about language” when Töpffer recognized that his stereotyped figures and scenes worked in combination. “Just as mathematics is powered not by numbers but by equations, and writing is powered not by words but by sentences, Töpffer’s “picture-stories” were powered not by individual signs but by combinations of signs working together in a sequence” (2004:7).

From this crucial combination and sequencing of visual signs, all narrative progression, character “performance” and the sometimes complex relationships of word and image in the comic-book have developed. In my scheme, therefore, the term “comics” refers to a language that can encompass many formats, from the traditional three-panel newspaper “funnies” to the sometimes elaborate “e-comics” on the internet, and is not limited by genre, duration or narrative or visual complexity in any way. Topffer's work is written in this language of comics, just as much as any Superhero comic, in that they share formal features, especially the use of panel-size to indicate the passage of time and the speech bubble, common in political caricature of the time.

“Comics” are a language of signs, employing the panel and speech-balloon to order the broader possibilities of visual storytelling, narrative and illustration. But the comics language is not, in its fully realised form “just slapping speech balloons on top of drawings” as comics creator Chris Ware<sup>33</sup> puts it in an interview with Raeburn (2004:10). The pleasurable experience specific to reading comics in Ware's view (and mine), is that, although visual, it is actually a time-based experience relying on the discrete visual and temporal units of the panel<sup>34</sup>. The page does not appear as a syncretic whole when we are reading it, but only if we look at it in a distanced way. Image-panels, text boxes and balloons create temporal sequence through their position on the page because the conventions of comics language dictate the sequence in which we read them, in the west from left to right and from top to bottom.

In his interview with Raeburn, Ware compares the comics’ page to both sheet music and architecture. Ware describes the panel by panel reading of the page “beat by beat as you would music” as part of the aesthetic experience of comics but notes that one can also “pull back and consider the composition all at once, as you would the façade of a building” (2004:25). This duality in the way one can perceive the page is part of the richness of visual communication

---

<sup>33</sup> Ware is the creator of *Billy Corrigan* and other comics characters from his *Acme Novelty Library Books*.

<sup>34</sup> There are exceptions to this in the form of comic-book panelling strategies such as the “splash” pages employed to break up the panel grid, the use of special devices such as these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

possible in the comic-book. The overall design of the page allows manipulation of pace and visual progression through the laying out of panels which are experienced temporally in reading the individual words and pictures<sup>35</sup>. The ways in which pictures can be read will be considered more closely in Chapter 4. For now we must consider that the comic-book and its language are a pictorial language which reconcile text and image graphically.

### **Text and image as graphic signs**

Is there a mode of meaning, specific to the graphic image, exceeding, supplementing or lying beside any meaning that can be expressed in words, therefore irreducible to any words, however eloquent? This would presumably be, as Alpers argues, some mode of presentation that the graphic arts accomplish and that is in no way possible through words. (Miller 1992:66)

In order to define the comic-book we must consider how it reconciles the pictorial and the narrative. It will be established that the form of the comic-book combines text and image in a way that renders the traditional western distinction between the two invalid. We will see below that the distinction between text and image in an Anglophone culture has to do with its particular writing system and cultural attitudes towards the properties of writing and drawing which combined with historical factors to separate text and image on the page.

Comic-books, along with other contemporary forms of visual communication, are opposed to a categorical separation between text and image, employing both as visual signs, albeit referring to and evoking different sense-stimuli in the “story-world”. The conventions of representation in the comics language hold that the drawings provide views into moments of the plot that takes place in the story-world of the comic-book. A speech balloon, the stem of which emerges from a figure depicted in the panel, tells us that that the figure is speaking, and the text written inside the bubble is what that character is *saying*. The speech balloon, according to Carrier, is “a defining element of the comic because it establishes a word/image unity that distinguishes comics from pictures illustrating a text...” and that it “...defines comics as neither a purely verbal nor a strictly visual art form...” (2000:4).

---

<sup>35</sup> Raeburn goes on to observe that the word “story” is an “etymological fossil that contains a missing link between narrative art and architecture. As Art Spiegelman has pointed out, “story” descended from the medieval Latin “historia” which meant picture as well as the horizontal division of a building. Latin users derived this conflation from the medieval practice of placing a picture in each window of a building, especially in churches. A storey was literally a row of coloured pictures.” (2004:26)

The convention dictates that we hypothetically *hear* what that person is saying<sup>36</sup>. The lettering in comics often seeks to convey a sense of speech, for example by giving emphasis to certain words by increasing the weight of their line and making them “bold”. In comics emphatic speech is often italicized while the use of different fonts can be used to give the effect of an accent. This link between the quality of the letter-forms and the way we hear the sounds represented has little to do with the phonetic qualities of the alphabet. Eisner notes that in the comic-book, as in pictographic calligraphy, the design and execution of letterforms can achieve a “welding of pure visual imagery and a uniform derivative symbol” (1985:14)<sup>37</sup>.

Eisner develops the connection between comics and the letterform as “symbol” in two directions. Firstly, the art of “lettering” in comics, as in Chinese calligraphy, is capable of a “range of style and invention” in conveying speech and narration. Though each letterform and word has its particular meaning, the expressiveness of the “brushwork” provides a unique inflexion.

The comic-book's visual way of transcribing “voice” uses expressive hand-lettering or typography for dialogue or “sound-effects”. Secondly, comic-book artists can use these “calligraphic style variations” to amplify the emotional content of the story by manipulating speech by stressing words, for example. This level of communication is largely subliminal for readers in that it makes use of visual techniques that lie below the level of representation, the manipulation of “line quality” and “line weight” which will be further investigated in the discussion of drawing that occurs later in Chapter 4.

It has been observed by writers on comic books such as Thierry Groensteen (2000), that the pedagogic and semantic problems critics observe and experience in working with a combination of text and image has a particular history and context. The fact that the western alphabet is relatively phonetic, rather than pictographic as in many Asian writing systems is one factor. The historical development of letter-press printing, which required the separation of text and image for technical reasons and the resulting conventions in publishing, is another.

These factors have created an expectation that there is some “natural” perceptual reason that we cannot read words and pictures together. Groensteen cites Foucault's observation that “to look and to read...are...the oldest oppositions in our alphabetical civilisation.” Groensteen goes on to note,

---

<sup>36</sup> This mixing of the visual and audible can be described as a *synaesthetic* effect . Zackia defines synaesthesia as “the ability of one sensory input to affect another” (2002:337).

<sup>37</sup> Eisner writes “Letters are symbols... In the development of Chinese and Japanese pictographs...the visual image became secondary and the execution of the symbol alone became the arena of style and invention.” (1985:14)

however, that for the Ancient Greeks one word, “*graphein*”, meant “to write” and “to paint” and that “our” culture is unusual in creating such strong distinctions and hierarchies between image and text (2000:36)<sup>38</sup>.

Groensteen goes on to connect the above described objection to media or art-forms that pair word and image with the low status granted to comic-books. The view of comics as a “bastard” form, doomed to creative poverty due to its illegitimacy is associated by Groensteen to an “ideology of purity”, rooted in specific (western) traditions of art theory. As Groensteen puts it, some critics will maintain “that comics have taken from literature and drawing their least noble parts: from the former, stereotyped plots and over-referenced genres, and from the latter, caricature and schematization” (2000:37). Although, of course, I agree with Groensteen that comics do not *only* take these features from writing and drawing I would argue that these are a part of the attraction of comics. I would rehabilitate this criticism of by agreeing that the reliance on precedent in plot and genre, the deformation and exaggeration in the depiction of characters as well as schematization of the drawn image<sup>39</sup> are intrinsic elements of the comic-book.

Moreover, many of the stereotypical plot devices and representational choices, including but certainly not limited to the cartoon, are to be seen by a reader (or certainly a fan) as modulations of previous literary or dramatic types – variations on the theme, for example, of evil or mad scientists so that any scientist character has reference to Dr Jekyll and Dr Frankenstein. Comics, like cinema, can draw on the traditions of these forms and combine them in ways unique to their language.<sup>40</sup>

The comic-book, though, is more specifically an *object* employing the comics’ language, whether containing anthologized material, or an “issue” or “instalment” of a specific storyline or “title”. As an object for entertainment, the comic-book can be further understood by pertinent aspects of its social history, typical content and means of distribution. The comic-book is, as Charles Hatfield notes the most “influential of those objects” that uses the language of comics and has dominated the

---

<sup>38</sup> Groensteen also observes that this “opposition and hierarchy...do[es] not exist, for example, in China and Japan... calligraphic signs and representative lines are executed by the same hand with the same instrument. The painters of the Far East often insert whole poems in their images. Moreover, it is virtually certain that western civilisation itself is in the process of changing its conception of the relation between text and image. In the day of multimedia, the age-old opposition is somewhat obsolete” (2000:36).

<sup>39</sup> McCloud includes a very clear explanation and illustration of the importance of the “cartoon face” as a sign value, how the schematized “cartoon face” plays a key role in the expressive possibilities of comics (1994:29). McCloud’s illustration (6) of the cartoon scheme is included in Chapter 4, page 72, where his theory is also briefly related.

<sup>40</sup> For a well-formulated argument that supports this statement see Hans-Christian Christiansen “Comics and Film: A Narrative Perspective” in Christiansen & Magnussen (eds.) (2000:107).

“identity of Anglophone comics in the long form”<sup>41</sup>. Comic-books are commonly: “Periodical in origin, typically populist in nature, and often characterized by the most mercenary of aims,” as Hatfield puts it (2005:6).

Long format comic-book stories, particularly those intended for publication as a single book, have been described as “graphic novels” – a term seemingly designed to overcome the association of comic-books with childhood simplicity and replace them with literary associations<sup>42</sup>. Although the term may be useful in claiming positive aspects of the novel for comics – such as the creative agency and autonomy of creator or author, the importance of more complex structuring enabled by the longer page format, and potentially more sophisticated narrative – it ignores aspects of the formal inheritance of the comic-book. These are, chiefly, the episodic and serial nature of comic-book narratives, as well as the design consequences of the serial narrative, the pressures of commercial populism and the associations of “bastardy” the hybridity of the form attracts.

### **Alternative and mainstream traditions in the comic-book**

Comic-books are not necessarily motivated only by commercial considerations, however; there has been a historical alternative to the mainstream in the form of “alternative” comics, or “comix”. To further understand the mythic potential of the comic-book it will be helpful to contrast the attributes and traditions of the “mainstream” and “alternative”. Roger Sabin provides a definition which links alternative “comix” to the roots of the “underground” in 1960s counterculture:

[The] term generally applied to comics that are alternative to the mainstream – meaning superheroes in the US and kids' comedy in the UK. They tend to be self-motivated and small scale: typically black and white, and either self-published (often referred to as “small press”) or put out by independent publishers. They generally sell in minute numbers compared to mainstream comics, but exhibit a much wider range of art styles and story content. (1993:37)

Sabin describes two other important factors in this alternative. Firstly, alternative comics have established a precedent of creator-ownership that is in contrast to practices of the mainstream comic-book industries of the United States and Great Britain; and secondly, that, though the price of this independence is that small numbers sold in serial form, there is the possibility of success with their work published in anthology. Sabin and others, such as Pustz and Hatfield, describe the

---

<sup>41</sup> Hatfield also states that they have been the “target of some of the most sustained and intense critical savaging of any cultural product in American history”(2005:6)

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Raeburn calls it “a shrewd new rubric” (2004:9) and notes further: “I snicker at the neologism first for its insecure pretensions – the literary equivalent of calling a garbage man a “sanitation engineer” – and second because a “graphic novel” is in fact the very thing it is ashamed to admit: a comic book, rather than a comic pamphlet or magazine” (2004:110).

difficulties and benefits of small-press publishing and the links it often has to fan cultures, both alternative and mainstream. *2000 AD*, the home of *Judge Dredd*, for example, featured many creators who came from small presses, and critics have argued that this migration imported a more adult, alternative sensibility into the book (See Sabin 1993:55; Barker, 1989).

These commentators also detail how some of the features of the adult comic described above have broadened approaches to making mainstream comic-books, citing contemporary mainstream comics' creators who often claim influence from the alternative comics tradition. As Hatfield puts it, "underground comic books... transformed something that was jejeune and mechanical into a radically new kind of expressive object" (2005:9). This transformation is important to my understanding of the comic-book in terms of the expressive potential of *The Number One Game* in that the meaning of the comic-book lives in the mind of the reader. Perceptions readers have of the form act to limit what creators may do with it if they hope to find an audience, for example, for adult themes that might require an adult readership. The association of the comic-book with a childhood object is one I hope to avoid and Hatfield notes that though "newspaper strips had long had an adult audience... [comix] did make comic *books* an adult commodity" (2005:7).

The difference between the mainstream and alternative traditions is that, as Peter Bagge<sup>43</sup> tells us, "comix" are "usually about one person's vision and self expression" (2002:102) whereas financial viability as a publishing concern is at the heart of the mainstream<sup>44</sup>. My definition of the comic-book will embrace both. One might question whether the comic-book can be made outside of a developed cultural, or commercial, tradition. The answer to this must be that, even if one is separated from the site and culture of production as reader or creator (as South Africans are from America or Europe), one can access these traditions and employ them nonetheless. Although the way the language of comics is employed, and the form and intent, and intended readership of these two types of comic-book may vary intensely, both types remain comic-books, employing comics language. Their differences are an example of the Barthesian idea that sign systems can employ a *dialect* within a given language.

---

<sup>43</sup> Alternative comics artist Bagge is interviewed in a study of counterculture publishing (Sabin, Triggs:2002).

<sup>44</sup> Independence from conventional routes of publication meant that comix were relatively unaffected by societal pressure to conform to restrictions on content, of the kind typified by the "self regulatory comics code [of America]", which "constrained comics in their potential role as oppositional culture" according to the editors of *Comics and Ideology* (2001:6). With such provisions as "Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority", the code exerted tremendous restrictions on content of mainstream comic-books in America for decades.



David Crow (2003:61) describes how Roland Barthes stresses the distinction between language as “what we say” and speech as “how we say it”, our “individual act of selection and actualisation”<sup>45</sup>. Speech can employ dialects in its selection and actualisation that may reflect regional, economic or social differences. Such groupings around dialects can be seen reflected in the above differences between alternative and mainstream comics but also in the genre or archetypal tastes of readers and creators.

In Barthes' terms, specific instances of the use of the language of comics, comic-books or strips can be seen as examples of individual (or corporate) *speech*, made in a visual language of signs using the structures I have described above. Because these speeches are meant to entertain, and use recognisable signs in the form of schematised drawings and stereotyped or archetypal characters, they relate themselves to the social conventions and values of readers in a fanciful way. It will be helpful to describe the special conditions for reading the comics language in the heroic comic-book. Traditions produce expectations for the reader in terms of plot, drawing, pacing and tone. Dialect might be shared in response to the audience's expectations due to genre, or due to the idiosyncratic practices of an individual creator, or a fusion of the two. *The Number One Game* employs such narrative and visual dialect in its execution, some of it arising from the mainstream and some from the alternative. Chapter 4 will outline in detail the different modalities and dialects that have affected the production of *The Number One Game*.

It is important to recognise that the Anglophone form of the mainstream comic-book is as a consumer object. Hatfield (2005:7) points out that the first examples of the format that we know as the comic-book were “promotional giveaways for industries otherwise unassociated with entertainment or art: oil companies, shoe manufacturers and so on...” Despite the humble, commercial beginnings of these comic-books, they had a long reach “read by thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands,” and were “apparently quite popular” (Hatfield, 2005:7). These promotional magazines prepared the way for the “sale of comics as self-contained commodities, independent of newspapers and general interest magazines” and that the early originators of freestanding comic-book material only *then* adapted to the longer format in creating work specifically for it:

---

<sup>45</sup> Crow, like Barthes, sees the semiotic sign system as able to encompass many areas of meaning. “Language, says Barthes, is language minus speech and at the same time it is a social institution and a system of values” (2003:61).

Early comic books, consisting mainly of reprinted strips bought from newspaper syndicates, were cranked out at great speed and minimal cost for a hungry audience of mostly juvenile readers; subsequent efforts to satisfy demand with new material, native to the comic book, had to compete with these formative, shoestring productions. Thus the industry favored a highly mechanical approach to creation from the outset – not as rationalized and routine as a Ford factory, but still artistically numbing. This was the “shop” or studio system of comics production, nearly an assembly-line affair, in which pages frequently changed hands and artists routinely finished each other's work...These economic conditions, inimical to reflection or revision, cemented the perception of the comic book as a shoddy, ephemeral diversion, a form of anonymous, relatively diluted, industrialized pabulum. Production schedules necessitated the interchangeability of artists and the reliance on already-inbred story formulas. (2005:10)

The historical roots of the American comic-book format Hatfield provides is significant as an explanation of the specific material conditions for the creation of a comic-book. This “sweatshop” system is responsible, as Hatfield points out, for the “Golden Age of fan lore” – the era in which characters like Batman and Superman were created. This history touches on an important aspect of the mythic potential in comic-books; though there may be little in the generic “inbred story formulas” and “diluted, industrialized” images that a broader culture considers of artistic or literary worth, those yardsticks are not central for our purposes in this thesis.

The major consideration of this thesis is how the comic-book form uses the mythic as a way to contain and express ideologies as entertainment. This early phase in the development of mainstream comics yields an important root issue. Generic story structures and other representational formulae, such as imitative page-design or the use of formulae in the proportion, pose and method of rendering of a figure for instance, are exactly the kinds of “already worked on” material where the mythic “inflexion” is to be found. As Roland Barthes maintains, “in general myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is relieved of its fat” (2000:127).

In the chapters that follow, I will distinguish between the mythic in the Barthesian and the Jungian senses. However, I argue that both definitions of the mythic, despite their differences, point to the cultural conventions which appear to produce “natural” and “obvious” meanings for the reader. This aptly describes the effects of the comic–book, which is at home with the clichéd or stereotype image and narrative. Comic-books have this quality in both their mainstream and alternative manifestations, and it applies equally to earnest or parodic quoting registers. Whether they are produced collaboratively or individually, painstakingly or carelessly, they rely on and

exploit a language of signs that employs a high level of compression of information and subjectively experienced “truth”.

There are specific representational practices to do with genre and mythic treatment in the comic-book that are learned through reading and other activities related to the characters and story-world of a given story. The exemplars of this kind of experienced reading are a specialised group of readers who can be described as “fans”.

### **Comic-book “fandom”**

Primarily in mainstream but also alternative comics, organized “fandoms” emerged which have developed dialogue with the production of comics themselves and influenced the formation of the Anglophone comic-book. Pustz gives as key examples of fan activity comics conventions, or “Comicons” and letters pages.<sup>46</sup> As Pustz explains, activities such as these cater for “fans” who are often extremely knowledgeable, and can have fierce loyalties to certain characters or storylines. Creators acknowledge the interests (and knowledge) of fans through the above and fan response can also influence the development of storylines and the inclusion or exclusion of characters.<sup>47</sup>

The production of mainstream comic-books is responsive to the interests and desires of a core of reader-fans, whose influence has been underlined by the emergence of a “direct market” for the sale of comic-books<sup>48</sup>. Sabin relates how the direct market of “fanshops” emerged from committed fans who established mail-order and comics-convention networks, and links this market to the success of alternative comics sales in “headshops” in the 1960s. One of the distinguishing features of this new distribution system, critical from the point of view of comic-book publishers, was that titles could be pre-ordered by fans so that comic-books could be

---

<sup>46</sup> Here fans “buy comics from a wide variety of dealers and get advice from comic book professionals” (1999:xiii). Conventions give fans a chance to interact with material relating to their favourite characters and stories in trivia quizzes and masquerade balls. They also “gather in the comic books themselves, as letters pages provide a textual meeting place. On these pages, readers can interact with each other (through debates), the creators of their favorite titles (through letters of praise or criticism) and the content of the comic book (through interpretation of the stories). Other fans gather in magazines or “fanzines” where they discuss broader issues in comic book culture” (Pustz, 1999:xiii).

<sup>47</sup> “Many professionals, most of whom were once fans themselves, are quick to create the sorts of fannish stories – aimed directly at devoted readers – that the creators would have liked to read... suggesting that comic book readers are among a select group that can help sell comics. This kind of salesmanship was part of the reason for the success of *E.C. Comics*, and it certainly contributed to the growth of *Marvel Comics* during the 1960s and 1970s” Pustz (1999:113).

<sup>48</sup> According to Sabin: “The late 1970s and 1980s saw huge changes in the way comics were marketed, designed and, eventually, in the way they were perceived. The old newsagent market was declining at an alarming rate, but at the same time a more specialized network based on specialist “fan” shops (selling solely comics) began to take off... by the mid-1990s, over ninety per cent of all comics were being sold through this channel” (1996:157).

supplied to shops in the correct volumes. In the previously dominant newsagent system, many copies were returned to the publisher if unsold. The emergence of the direct market allowed fans to exercise their tastes in committing to a certain story in advance, lessening the chance that a title they enjoy will be discontinued, and thus promoting loyalty to that title.

The above developments emphasise the dialogue between producers and readers in the establishment of a comics culture, and Hatfield also describes the development of fan culture as relying on these sites of social interaction for the fan<sup>49</sup>. In engaging with the material the fan typically expresses preference for one or other character or scenario suggesting plot-lines or elaborations on the finer aspects of a story-world.

However, this relationship between fans and producers does not move only in one direction. Hatfield also notes that the specialist comic-book shop, an environment dedicated to the comic-book, but often having strong links to certain genre from other media such as the science-fiction novel, has an ordering and “disciplining” effect on the reader. The periodical nature of the comic-book keeps “buyers coming back for more at regular intervals” while the “space/content relationship serves to discipline the consumer, making her or him a more sophisticated reader and fan” (2005:24):

The breakdown of comic book narrative into brief, relatively frequent instalments (along with the concomitant emphasis on the hoarding of successive issues) provides a strong material basis for the fan's heightened sense of intertextuality... comic shops are about *getting* and *keeping*; possession is key... In short, the shop environment itself functioned as an elaborate paratext to the comic books; consumer rituals defined the margins, sometimes even the core content, of the reading experience. (2005:24) [*original emphasis*]

The relationships between texts are formalised on the shelves of the comic-book shop where they are arranged according to type. This provides an intertextual experience encouraging imaginative comparison between different instances of heroes and villains. Comic-book stories and their attendant publicity in the mainstream are designed to exploit fully the suspense that can arise from the constant expectation of new instalments. Serialisation can, however, also create problems for the comic-book that does not respond to the narrative demands of storytelling in instalments. In

---

<sup>49</sup> These are, “such institutions as bookstores, small-circulation amateur “zines” (fanzines), amateur press alliances (APAs), conventions, mail-order businesses, and “letterhacking” (that is, writing letters for publication in comic books and corresponding with other such writers, or letterhacks). Born out of science fiction fandom in the days of the hectographed and mimeographed fanzine, comic book fandom rose to prominence – to self-consciousness, anyway – with the advent of comics-specific fanzines and price guides in the early-mid sixties, followed shortly by the establishment of specialized conventions in 1964” (2005:21).

discussing the difficulties of serialisation versus the long form comic-book, Hatfield notes with caution that if a story is serialised, the narrative segments must be “semi-autonomous” – readers need some kind of narrative arc in each instalment<sup>50</sup>. The role of periodicity here is similar to that in the television series – or the originally serialised stories of Charles Dickens – in that it requires the story to work with two kinds of arc: one internal to the episode or instalment and the larger arc of the whole narrative. The features of the narrative arc of *The Number One Game* that will be discussed in Chapter 3 were designed with these considerations in mind.

The fan can enjoy the suspense created by periodicity and the variations on, say, the heroic adventure on offer, as gaps that encourage the intertextual play of associations. In the unfolding reading of several heroic adventures over time, he or she can compare the attributes of characters *between* the instalments and titles as well as in them. These practices of comic-book reading allow a sense of interaction with the various comic-book story-worlds.

Barker lists the key features of modern mainstream comic-books as being mass-production, their appearance at “regular intervals” and the use of “recurring characters, with relatively predictable ranges of behaviour”. These characters tend to “appear within distinct genres among other characters of the same kind” and are “involved in similar kinds of actions and events” (1989:6).

Though in my formulation the comic-book need not appear regularly, the *ideal* comic-book certainly would. Similarly, though my work aspires to relative sophistication in plot terms and relates to an undercurrent of heroic adventure stories, in which the heroes display ambivalent qualities (heroes such as Judge Dredd, Batman and Joe K), the recurrence of characters and their predictability has bearing in *The Number One Game*. Though created in a very different environment and with different aims from a typical mainstream comic-book, it aims to benefit from the signifiatory strength and clarity possible with these conventions, traditions and language. It is clear that a culture has emerged around the Anglophone comic-book that has impacted on these possibilities for representation. The kinds of archetypal and genre reference points discussed in Chapter 3 will be readily understood within a readerly tradition at home with the adaptation and alteration of formulae and representations that allows relatively arbitrary significations to be recognised. To such familiar “mythic” material, my own comic-book will add the mythic potential

---

<sup>50</sup> Hatfield quotes reviewer Robert Boyd's criticism of a comic-book conceived as a long story but released in instalments: “I understand acutely the need to amortize the costs of production, which serialization accomplishes, but if you're going to serialize something, each chapter should be a semi-autonomous story unit” (2005:160).

of a local iconography of South African representations that will interact with more global tropes to expand the mythic frame of reference.

### **Chapter 3: The mythic narrative representation**

In this chapter, I will show that I am using conventions long established in Anglophone comics and that I am adapting these conventions to articulate a body of myth in my comic-book that expresses Capetonian-ness. This “body of myth” includes traditional (Anglo-European) mythic structures, the use of relevant comic-book archetypes and more contemporary (often, South African) urban legends. This chapter will show how “mythic narratives”, and associated archetypal characters and settings that derive from the psychoanalytical tradition of Carl Jung, drive the story of *The Number One Game*. Furthermore, it will analyse the mythic representations in two comic-books that I see as important influences on my work, namely *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*. I will argue here that the Jung-derived notion of the “mythic narrative”, especially in the form in which Christopher Vogler presents it (to writers, artists and film directors) is a potent tool for generating mythic stories that attract and entice a readership. In particular, as I will show in this chapter, my work has been influenced by Vogler’s account of the “Hero’s Journey”. In Chapter 4, however, I will explore a different definition of “myth”, set out by the cultural critic Roland Barthes. Where Vogler and his influences regard “myth” as expressive of universal psychic formations, Barthes’ definition of “myth” points to the way in which familiar stories and images are become “naturalised” as myth. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will seek to describe the way in which Vogler’s terms apply to my own work.

#### **Narrative, myth and archetype**

Jung is cited by both Vogler and Campbell as being the originator of the theory of archetypes that they employ. The term “archetype” is often misunderstood as meaning definite mythological images or motifs. Jung, however, defines “archetypes” as a tendency to form representations, rather than an established set of representations themselves. He says:

[Archetypes] are, at the same time, both images and emotions. One can speak of an archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word-picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must flow from it. I am aware that it is difficult to grasp this concept, because I am trying to use words to describe something whose very nature makes it incapable of precise definition. [...] They are pieces of life itself – images that are integrally connected to the living individual by the bridge of emotions. That is why it is impossible to give an arbitrary (or universal) interpretation of any archetype. It must be explained in the manner indicated by the whole-life situation of the particular individual to whom it relates. (1990: 96)

Here Jung foregrounds the affective force of archetypal values, but also their unique and situated signification. In spite of this caveat, Jungian critics have, however, emphasised the appeal of mythic archetypes across periods and cultures in as far as they express the inner workings of a person's unconscious mind. Joseph Henderson, for example, writes the following in his essay in Carl Jung's collection *Man and His Symbols*:

For the analogies between ancient myths and stories that appear in the dreams of modern patients are neither trivial nor accidental. They exist because the unconscious mind of modern man preserves the symbol-making that once found expression in the beliefs and rituals of the primitive. And that capacity still plays a role of vital psychic importance. In more ways than we realize, we are dependent on the messages that are carried by such symbols, and both our attitudes and behavior are profoundly influenced by them. (Henderson:1990:106,107).

This sense of the universal applicability of mythical structures has inspired the notion that all stories follow a patterned emotional "journey" of mythic stages that is natural or inherent to humanity; an idea which culminates in Joseph Campbell's concept of the mono-myth. In his introduction to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell makes a claim for the universality of myth:

The wonder is that the characteristic efficacy to touch and inspire deep creative centers dwells in the smallest nursery fairy tale – as the flavour of the ocean is contained in a droplet or the whole mystery of life within the egg of a flea. For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented or permanently the germ power of its source. What is the secret of the timeless vision? From what profundity of the mind does it derive? Why is mythology suppressed? They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume? (1949:4)

*The Number One Game* is a mythic narrative in that it employs a highly symbolic patterning of heroic events, with archetypal characters. Thus the story is concerned with the representation of the major character dynamics, notably between the protagonist, Joe K and his antagonist, Nic Lord. The culmination of their conflict will be a visual expression of their archetypal values – we will literally see Joe as a knight in a shining jumpsuit slaying Nic Lord in the form of a dragon. I will show, with reference to Campbell's description of the "Hero's Journey", how the unique circumstances that serve to shape Joe and the challenges he faces establish him as an archetypal hero figure. In this thesis I will show further, that, because the figure of Joe is drawn from literary, mythical and comic antecedents, as well as from characters in South African fiction and urban legend, he brings a new inflection to the literary and mythological "hero" figures that gave rise to him. This "alternative" quality to his heroism is partly in the stylistic deviation from the "Superhero tradition" which constitutes much of the mainstream comic tradition, but it also derives from his socio-political



context. This is both local and South African, but also located in the global economy in which the power and politics of multi-national corporations are a powerful shaping force in the lives of ordinary people in the so-called “Third World”.

### **Settings: Mythic city and archetypal cave**

Setting determines much of the context of the interpretation of specific expressions of the archetype, as in *The Number One Game* and its primary references, *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*. Both of these references have central characters who are specifically distorted expressions of well known fictional types and are also set in “familiar” fictional cities. *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*’s story-worlds refer to the same “real” world setting (New York is the setting in both cases – Judge Dredd’s Mega-City-One and Batman’s Gotham City are both versions of New York City, according to Sabin (1997:54) and Vaz (1989:4).) – all of which are signs that have a rich associational value in popular culture<sup>51</sup>. New York is the ultimate “Big-City”, the site of millions of people’s aspirations and the setting of many thousands of popular stories. Obvious mental associations one might make would be the “New York, New York” showtune, with its refrain: “if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere”; the siting of the Statue of Liberty to be the first landmark that new arrivals, especially immigrants, pass on their way into the city by boat; the skyscrapers and big businesses they represent; and the theatres of Broadway. Opportunity exists in the big city, as does hardship and alienation. These associations are with the metropolitan city as the rightful seat of late capitalism, where extremes of wealth and poverty can be contained and accepted as a natural part of the city as an organism. The fictional societies in the cases of both *Batman* and *Judge Dredd* are thus fragmented into extreme poles of lawlessness and strict social control. The big cities in these stories are stable organisms, occasionally threatened by criminal villains. Both Batman and Judge Dredd must play the role of defenders of the city, though with differences in emphasis. The fictional tropes of “big-city”ness are drawn from perceptions of the reality of big cities, but they are extended and elaborated by repeated use in genre entertainment and the social mythologies that surround a city like New York.

These tropes concerning the big city have the “well-used” or “worn-out” quality that Roland Barthes ascribes to the mythic. This quality provides broad and recognisable possibilities for scenarios and stories, which are naturalised by their familiar form, which makes them seem

---

<sup>51</sup> There are other story-lines that take place in both Gotham and Mega-City One, published sometimes in the same magazine, other Judge’s activities – like the Psi (Telepathic) division. Well-established companies like Detective Comics (D.C.) or Marvel can make such elaborations on the story-world very complex indeed.

“obvious” to the reader. While, for Barthes, this naturalising process helps to obscure the assumptions and ideologies underlying myth, from my point of view as a creator it establishes tropes – clichés even – that readers recognise and enjoy for their familiarity.

Our pre-existing sense of the place New York City, whether seen first-hand or represented factually (say, in the news) or in fiction can be seen as open to use by sets of cultural myths to do with the city and what is “natural” in a society. Roland Barthes argues that: “What the world supplies to myth is a historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality”(2000:131). From the viewpoint that Barthes adopts as a cultural critic, myth removes any historicity from the idea of the big city and gives it the apparent value of being natural. For Barthes myth is “depoliticized speech”.

In *The Number One Game* I am employing this idea that popular perceptions and representations of a city can form the raw material for the mythic analogies in the text. So, for instance, the idea of Cape Town as a kind of leisure paradise, as it is so often represented to visitors is incorporated in *The Number One Game* into the promotional material surrounding the Lordcorp tournament<sup>52</sup>. Lordcorp itself, the dominant organisation in the Cape, and effectively its government, has reference points to the Dutch East India Company, which brought the first European settlers to the Cape, and its historical rule of the Cape.

In contrast to the public space of the city, there are archetypal settings in my story that provide a stage for the more intimate, internal psychic processes in the Hero’s development. In the Hero’s Journey schema, the cave is the space of revelation<sup>53</sup> In *Batman* the “bat-cave” is where the accoutrements of the Batman ego are housed while Bruce Wayne, Batman’s alter-ego, occupies the manor-house above ground. My story employs both literal and metaphoric cave-spaces: it is in a cave on Table Mountain that Joe is shown his vision of the future by the *Bergies* (2007:11). In a similar way, Nic Lord’s underground caverns below Signal Hill hide his activities from the public eye. In this, Lord’s headquarters are perhaps more like those of Bond villains, or that of Lex Luthor, Superman’s nemesis, and are meant to be the visual embodiment of his control of the Cape. The final “Inmost Cave” in *The Number One Game* is the transcendental space in which Lord and Joe confront each other, in the “eye of the storm” in Episode 8.

---

<sup>52</sup> For which, please see the Story Bible in Addendum 4.

<sup>53</sup> Vogler provides a narrative section on what kinds of meanings the “Inmost Cave” is associated (1996:145-157).

### ***The Number One Game's* employment of “heroic” traditions**

As I have argued in Chapter 2, as a comic-book, *The Number One Game* is intended to fall between the poles of mainstream Superhero comics, and more idiosyncratic fare that might be called “alternative comics” or, perhaps, “graphic novels”<sup>54</sup>. Given that I am writing from the southern tip of Africa, with no major indigenous comic-book culture of our own, and given that the story takes place here in the Cape, it will fall on the margins of the mainstream of the English-speaking comics’ industry in terms of the settings, people and world-views it presents. Dominated as that world is by American Superhero comics, many of the representational choices I am making would seem to defy the conventions of the “heroic” in the comics tradition.

On the other hand, my story still makes use of a “heroic” tradition, and thus is not part of the alternative tradition of graphic novels, as represented by authors such as Scott McCloud or Chris Ware. Therefore I have chosen two popular, well-known comic-books - *Batman* and *Judge Dredd* - as my point of reference for my own comic-book. Both stories show ambivalent heroes, reflecting cultural values that might, at times, be equivocal or even self-contradictory as my later discussion in this chapter will show. This is also the case with my own hero, Joe K., in *The Number One Game*. I argue below that this ambivalence about the hero’s character is partly what constitutes elements of an “alternative tradition” in both of these ostensibly mainstream comic-books. It is the ambivalence, in my view, that sets these two comic-books apart from the mainstream, and makes them interesting to wider audiences that are not strictly solely consumers of comics.

### **Ambiguous heroes: *Judge Dredd* and *Batman***

*Judge Dredd* and *Batman* are both products of established comic-book entertainment industries and, as such, display typical features of the mainstream comic-book. Firstly; they are made in a collaboration of editors writers, artists (often, art for either comic is pencilled, inked and coloured by separate artists)<sup>55</sup>. Secondly; they are periodical and their production by different groups of people and for different audiences (separated if only in time and place) means that the use of genre, code, materials (pen and ink, or paint – what can be called physical medium of the drawing and lettering) and modes of communication will respond to these changing relationships. Thirdly, the

---

<sup>54</sup> Roger Sabin provides helpful distinctions between Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels in his book of that title. Sabin associates the mainstream of comics with Superhero titles, giving as examples in the 1980s the X-men and revisionist *Batman* and *Superman* titles. He offers an excellent summary of major Anglophone publishing activity of this period which indicates the dominance of the Superhero in mainstream American comics. Comics that are not made by the big publishers (or what would confusingly be called the “big independents” – medium sized publishers) would automatically be considered non-mainstream, the more so if they come from outside Britain or America (Sabin, 1996:62-178).

<sup>55</sup> In D.C. Comics publications the convention is now to credit all of these artists, including letterers, for their work.

physical form of the comic-book is constructed in accordance with projected reading desires of the audience<sup>56</sup>.

Part of what is unusual about *Batman* and *Judge Dredd* is the degree of their commercial success, as witnessed by their long careers in print and other media<sup>57</sup>, and their popular and critical acclaim, as witnessed by the wealth of theory and “fan” material available on them. Combined with the three typical features of the comic-book, cited above, that they display it is this longevity and popularity that makes them good examples – “role-models”, if you like, of the comic-book for my production of *The Number One Game*.

Both Batman and Judge Dredd have served as creative models for me in a number of different ways. The chief model among these is that both these characters have been able to engage audiences across cultures and ideological barriers. I believe that they do this by allowing space for moral conjecture, even ambiguity, in their “heroism” that have allowed them to transcend their genre origins. I suggest that all three characters – Batman, Judge Dredd and Joe K – appeal to a wider audience because they are morally ambiguous: Judge Dredd for being so extreme and severe in his upholding of the law that even his fellow judges fear him, Batman for his personal sense of vengeance against criminals making him an outlaw, and Joe K for his temporary co-option into corrupt power. Thus no victory is unalloyed (in *Batman*, this is true of the versions of the 1980s) or without an ironic or pyrrhic quality.

### **Judge Dredd as an archetype**

Judge Dredd is the ultimate of the street Judges, both for his strict policing and his toughness, and will never become a senior Judge in a desk-job. As a cadet, he turned his own brother in, showing his lack of “human” characteristics – such as compassion and empathy – which becomes a constant feature in his comics<sup>58</sup>. Dredd seems to be the focal point of his story-world because he is the most

---

<sup>56</sup> My notion of what these desires are is based on conventions established in the language of comics and the visual cultures of the comic-book, which develop sets of representations such as agreed meanings for genre codes, which can be employed to encode the narrative pleasure of myth. In periodical publishing there is the opportunity for constant feedback from audiences via letters and sales figures that allows for the development of a relationship but there are other opportunities for reader/writer interaction in the form of comics conventions.

<sup>57</sup> Both characters continue to appear in comic-books. Batman has appeared for over six decades now, and it is a respectable three decades in the case of Judge Dredd. See surveys by Goulart (1991), and Sabin (1993).

<sup>58</sup> In *Waiting for Dredd* (2000:91) Barker provides a clear analysis on the demands of the long form “feature” story in an essay on the *Judge Dredd* feature film, this version of the story extends the representation of him as an outsider, by sending him out in the cursed Earth, on the run from Mega-City-One. Dredd even removes his helmet, something never seen in the comics. In Vogler’s terms, this demonstrates a full dramatic test of the resources of the hero – even a character fanatically upholding the laws of his society needs to be threatened by isolation from it.

effective, toughest Judge, and has accumulated perhaps the most bizarre experiences. Moreover, the authority Dredd has amongst his peers, while still being active on the street so as to provide direct experiences for the audience, aids in providing a point of view. As I will show, my story shares this element in that the Bergies in Joe's story serve the same function.

In the title stories Dredd is not always the character who undergoes the most challenges and he seldom varies his severe and brusque manner. Thus he is not, in contemporary scriptwriting convention, a typical narrative protagonist in that he does not seem to change<sup>59</sup>. In the broader Mega City One story-world in the 2000 AD comics, Dredd seems to be in place only as a kind of minor narrative function at times, and at others is actively involved in the plot which, inevitably, has him upholding the letter of the law. Seemingly his only motivation is expressed with his well-known catch-phrase "I am the Law". This lack of nuance in the establishment of his character indicates that Dredd has something of that same archetypal quality of a force or property of the psyche which has been associated with both heroic and comic characters. Dredd's function seems to be as an icon of the repressive aspects of the law and may also be a rather cynical interpretation of the stoical hero as being entirely without feeling.

Dredd is attractive as a character then, not because of some sympathetic character trait – as Althouse observes, even his fellow cadets in training referred to Dredd as "old stoney face"(2001:196) – but because of his physical attributes and because his attitude is so extreme and unchanging. In fact, in the story-world, Dredd is a clone of a previous judge and can therefore be seen as not fully human at all, he certainly does not seem to have the attributes of a private life even as in the "secret identity" tradition of the typical superhero comic-book. His character, in the Aristotelean sense, is revealed in action, and is immutable. The Greek word for character, "ethos", suggests that the concept of character in Aristotle is strongly ethical. Character can only be revealed in action: if it is not manifested in some outward way, there can be no character. According to Stephen Halliwell, "character is a specific moral factor in relation to action, not a vague or pervasive notion equivalent to modern ideas about personality or individuality – least of all individuality, since ethos is a matter of generic qualities (virtues and vices)" (1991:151). In the Aristotelean sense the function that character has of showing morality and thought is shown in action and need not display "notions equivalent to modern ideas about personality or individuality" (Tambling 1991:52).

---

<sup>59</sup> Chris Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* and Syd Field's *Screenplay* among others, maintain that the Hero, or anti-Hero is most satisfyingly (and almost always) the character who undergoes the most growth.

In the case of Judge Dredd we can use this insight that character is about qualities demonstrated through actions, to infer some of Dredd’s characteristics. The strip from the Daily Star in the illustration (2), below, shows Dredd observing a kind of half-caricatured scientist character (note the overlarge head) unveiling a “half-woman, half-haddock” “Mermaid”. The scientist (seemingly unknowingly) has committed the crime of contravening the “laws on permissible genetic experimentation”. Here, we can see his unsympathetic, severe character in action both as a visual image (a constant scowl) and in the narrative’s dialogue.<sup>60</sup>

Figure 2: Judge Dredd comic strip, “Mermaid” from *The Daily Star*, 1986 (script by John Wagner, art by Ron Smith). Reproduced from Judge Dredd Annual (Sn.) (1986:42)



### Batman as an archetype

Batman is, strictly speaking, a vigilante and, though admired by much of the population of his Gotham City he is often portrayed as such in the media<sup>61</sup>. Batman’s characteristics have evolved over the years but he has always been a relatively dark character, derived more from crime fiction<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Of course, Judge Dredd's immutability is related to the serial nature of the publication format of this comic strip.

<sup>61</sup> In Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* the television provides editorial voices for and against Batman (1997:144).

<sup>62</sup> Bob Kane is widely acknowledged (most importantly by *D.C. Comics*) as having created *Batman* in 1938, although Ron Goulart's *Over Fifty Years of American Comics* cites Bill Finger as having written the earliest scripts and thus gives him co-credit as creator. In Goulart's survey, Finger is quoted as saying, "My first script was a take-off on a Shadow story... I patterned my style of writing Batman after the Shadow. Also after Warner Bros. movies, the gangster movies" (1991:88). This serves to confirm Batman's pedigree as a descendant of crime fiction, but it also shows how popular storytelling (certainly in the twentieth century), relies heavily on the precedents established by previous creative work in a variety of media and story forms, ranging from literary to cinematic.

than the utopian science fiction ideas that seem to relate to Superman.

The origin story is a device used in serialised stories to expand on the myths of already-established characters such as Judge Dredd or Batman. The origin story seeks to explain the state of things and in this it bears relation to the myths of the youths of all heroes. As Campbell puts it, “...the makers of legend have seldom rested content to regard the world’s great heroes as mere human beings who broke past the horizons that limited their fellows [...] the whole hero-life is shown to have been a pageant of marvels with the great central adventure as its culmination” (1949:319). Campbell goes on to reflect that this tendency to give biographies for heroes that set them apart and mark them as extraordinary from the moment of birth or even conception, suggests there is a predestined fate for the hero. This predestination itself indicates that the hero’s story is not to be read in a literal way, but in a way that understands, “...that the hero is rather a symbol to be contemplated than an example to be literally followed” (1949:319). All origin stories seek, as Bob Kane has it in the illustration (3) below from *Batman*, to explain how things are by explaining how they came to be.



Figure 3: *The Legend of Batman*, Bob Kane, 1950. Reproduced from Vaz (1989:5-6)

The “origin” story of Batman did not, according to Goulart, “...appear until Detective #33 (November 1939). In a terse two-page account readers were told that fifteen years earlier Bruce Wayne’s parents were gunned down on the street by a stickup man”.(1991:88) This story in essence explains the moment of individuation of the boy Bruce Wayne into manhood. The mythic inflexion is used to justify Batman’s vigilantism – his extreme dedication to crime-fighting represented as the logical consequence of the loss of his parents. Here the myth perhaps is concerned with the necessity of vigilante action – represented as pre-emptive self-defence – which one might associate with a kind of conservative “might-makes-right” philosophy.

However Batman’s vigilantism, like Dredd’s severity as a lawman, does not have a single, literal meaning for readers along the lines of proposing vigilantism. Batman is made to brood over his actions often and is constrained from killing in most cases. In the terminology of Chris Vogler’s *Writer’s Journey*, this story is a clear example of a (fairly bleak) “Call to Adventure” (1996:99-107), in that it sets Bruce Wayne’s character into motion to turn himself into the Batman – the heroic realisation of his character.

Judge Dredd, Batman and Joe K are all orphan children, and thus share some of the same character attributes. Being parentless allows all three characters to transcend the psychological norms we associate with a place in family life and seems to symbolise the search for identity. Orphans have no models and often, little help, in their path to individuation. Orphanhood also serves to indicate the archetypal nature of these characters – that they are less people than they are archetypal qualities of the psyche. Denying the possibility of early loving relationships with parents is seen to drive the characters into self-reliance and self-doubt. This independence and isolation is mitigated, in the case of Batman by Alfred, the Butler and Robin, the sidekick, and in the case of Dredd by his interactions with other judges (Dredd is a clone of a previous Judge, and has no parents, having been raised in the Judge Academy). In *The Number One Game*, the Bergies become Joe’s family once he accepts their help.

Joe’s origins are still obscure in the body of *The Number One Game* but his parentlessness, like Batman’s, can be seen to shape his character and the eventual “mythos” of his character. In the case of Batman, the response is retributive, to avenge, the source of Batman’s famous bravery, in the case of Joe it becomes the drive to excel and find for himself a useful role in society. However it is also what makes Joe an ambiguous hero, like his fictional ancestors, Batman and Judge Dredd.



While Joe wants to be a force of good, his fragile sense of self, and his anger at his abandonment and lack of inheritance are his weak points. Nic Lord and the forces associated with him will try to corrupt Joe by stoking these resentments, and making him wish for power and authority.

Having explored the distinctive nature of both *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*, it should be noted that both stories appear in a variety of forms. Batman and Judge Dredd come from their own specific genre and mythic traditions and have their own archetypal qualities, and their own historical and production context. This will have had an influence on the way their characters were explained to the readership; in this case the serialised nature of both of their productions encourages a kind of stasis in the character so that neither can grow older<sup>63</sup>. It is notably when they take the form of longer stories – such as the feature film format of *Judge Dredd*, or the intended graphic novel format of Miller's *The Dark Knight* – that the narrative tends to follow a “Hero's Journey” format, such as the one I am using in my serialised, but sustained narrative of *The Number One Game's* comic book format.

What is attractive about these two alternative hero figures for me is that these references have been mixed with other elements and into many media and for a range of audiences – they have appeared in newspapers, on T-shirts, in feature films, on daytime television and attract punk rockers, and young children alike.

### **Joe K as an archetype**

The name “Joe” brings with it associations to “GI Joe” (the colloquial second World War era term used for American infantrymen, associations with war comics and action figurines), the anonymity of “Joe Soap” and the biblical Joseph with the technicolour dreamcoat, who was cast out of his homeland and enslaved by the Pharaoh. The “K” further implies associations with Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* as well as Kafka's characters, known as K, in *The Castle* and *The Trial*. Both Kafka's K and Coetzee's Michael K find themselves at the mercy of a bureaucratic edifice that does not serve the people it is designed for, they are buffeted by powerful forces that cannot be understood or penetrated<sup>64</sup>.

---

<sup>63</sup> Except that, significantly, Batman feels his age in *The Dark Knight Returns*, Miller's revisionist *Batman* (1997:81).

<sup>64</sup> Of course in *The Number One Game* it is clear that the edifice is intentionally obstructive, whereas for the Kafka characters there is no sense of opposition to the system: it exists simply as a fact and must merely be obeyed. This reflects a difference perhaps that is ideological, that sense that the problems facing characters have some fault at heart and are not simply insurmountable situations, like the edifice of the Law in Kafka's *The Trial* – *The Number One Game* is not existential in spirit, Nic Lord is set up to embody the attractive villainy of the exploiter.

Joe's nickname as a contestant is "Komputer" Joe because he is always on his computer. This nickname is hardly as fearsome as those of the other contestants (who will have representatively bloodthirsty names like BloodKlaw). It also refers to the nickname of the soccer star "Computer" Lamola, who played for the popular South African soccer club, Kaiser Chiefs. His surname, Khunga, means devotion in Xhosa. This name refers to Joe's devotion to the idea of "purity of heart", which lies at the core of the incorruptibility that will save him from being a servant of Nic Lord. In designing this narrative I was looking for a figure who could move through this futuristic landscape and embody certain virtues. He is emblematic of the spirit of coming of age, questing and searching, of hopes and fears. Joe embodies both the idealism and the uncertainty of coming of age. One would assume that Joe's surname either comes from his family or was given to him and this seems to fit with his sense early in the story that he has a special fate.

In Cape Island Joe is the foreigner, the newcomer, while Nic Lord, the evil CEO of the multinational empire, is established in the area, despite only having arrived a decade or two previously. This is an analogue of the situation in present day Cape Town in that urban migration from the Eastern Cape creates a situation where black Africans are newly arrived to a city dominated by white and coloured interests. The question, then that framed the use of the archetypes in Joe and the characters and settings of *The Number One Game* was what heroic qualities would be needed for this future-Cape setting, which contains representational vestiges of its colonial history, and the social and economic world that has emerged from that history. The answer to this question is partially ideological. What is needed is someone who is progressive and gentle – who refuses to participate in the violence of the world around him – but who is also admirable for competitive qualities that are physical and visible, and that will enable him to challenge the powers that be (thus the invented sport in which Joe competes). Because he is representative of the poor and disenfranchised "non-citizens" of Cape Island, Joe K. is not, and could not be, a Superhero. He has, (for most of the narrative, at least) no mask, no hi-tech gear of his own and no secret identity; he never gets to fight crime nor does he get the girl; he is not unusually strong and he belongs to a marginalised group – the non-citizens of Cape Island. Moreover, it could be argued that the comic-book Superhero of the big industrialised nations of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, with the world as his stage, reflects a fantasy of near-omnipotence of the ruling cultures of the post-World-War-Two period. By contrast, in *The Number One Game*, the hero's actions are relatively local, being restricted to a future Cape Town, the Cape Island. (Later on in this chapter I will consider the similarities between this and Judge Dredd and Batman, who are linked to specific interpretations of New York.)

In these ways, Joe's "heroism" departs from mainstream Superhero representations, and is closer to the figures in mythological "coming of age" stories. Joe resembles fictional characters in the *Bildungsroman* tradition (Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, for example), in which the main character develops from boyhood to adulthood. Many traditional myths also involve coming of age, such as the myth of Phaeton<sup>65</sup>, who drove his father's sun-chariot, or include the prodigious feats of the infant or child hero such as Hercules/Herakles strangling the serpents sent for him by Hera/Juno (in Campbell, 1949:327). Campbell observes that "the child of destiny has to face a long period of obscurity. This is a time of extreme danger, impediment, or disgrace." (1949:326) "...The myths agree that an extraordinary capacity is required to face and survive such experience" (1949:327). Joe, therefore, will undergo these tests, and in showing his ability to face up to them, will become a man and a leader.

When we first meet Joe, he has made his way on foot to Cape Town, having survived an explosion at his boarding school. Joe has become one of many homeless South Africans trying to eke out a living in the big city. Joe, therefore, is a "hero" in the sense that he becomes publicly acknowledged in a world in which he seems destined either to live in poverty and obscurity along with the mass of black South Africans, or to sell out to the forces of international capital. Joe's task then is to become a unifying force for all the disenfranchised residents of Cape Island, and to show the middle classes that they need not be eternally grateful for the "savior" role that Nic Lord claims.

### **The villain: Nic Lord**

Nic Lord, the villain, is both a feudal and corporate figure. "Lord Nic", as he is known, is the tyrant king in traditional myth, here expressed as "Holdfast, the dragon", an archetype described in Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In his section "The Hero as Warrior", Campbell describes this "monster of the status quo: Holdfast, the keeper of the past" (1949:337). Campbell goes on to describe the kind of archetypal power relation Joe has to Lord, "From obscurity the Hero emerges, but the enemy is great and conspicuous in the seat of power; he is enemy, dragon, tyrant, because he turns to his own advantage the authority of his position...The tyrant is proud and therein resides his doom."(1949:337).

---

<sup>65</sup> For a particularly vivid translation of this myth see Ted Hughes' *Tales from Ovid* (1997:24)

The name Nic suggests “Old Nik”, the devil (as in mid-seventeenth century English folklore). The name Lord implies inherited power, and also connotes the dark Lord, Satan. He is a self-made man, despite the veneer of aristocracy that he uses to legitimate his power, and which makes it appear natural and immutable<sup>66</sup>.

In the South African context, this archetype relates to the colonial history of the nation, in which “ordinary” white Dutch and British men and women acquire an inflated sense of power, especially over the lives of indigenous black South Africans, because of the way in which colonial and later apartheid rule inflated the position of white citizens. Nic Lord’s claim to power then, is a late capitalist version of this historic inflation, and makes him able to be “bigger” than he really is. Lord’s power, then, both reflects, in archetypal terms, the power dynamics that typify First World and Third World relations.

### **The mentor figures: The Bergies**

The above approach of figuring a central character which is key to the experience of the narrative is only one way to construct a story. Originally, in the development of this project, the focus was to be on the Bergies – Rosie, the Prof and Nestor as an ensemble cast as is often found in alternative comics, in which a few characters have equal representation – and the project was even to be called “Bergie”<sup>67</sup>. The Bergies were to be like the “family of the endless” – a fictive pantheon of gods based on European folklore, Greek myth, and informed by gothic subculture. Like these gods, as represented in Neill Fairman’s successful graphic novel, *Sandman*, they were each to have their own adventures, doing battle with evil in their own idiosyncratic way. However the Bergies always seemed too fixed in their natures to be like heroes – they would not “change” and seemed more in the nature of the mentor or guardian figures that recur in myth<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, in contemporary culture it seems there is more potential for our “identification” or empathy with a central character; this then seemed to me a more entertaining narrative device. Please see the “Main Characters” section in Addendum 4 for illustrations and more details.

---

<sup>66</sup> Nic Lord is a pretender to the mantle of hero in that he claims to be the western individual success story that Joe, in fact, represents. In his efforts to entice him to become a part of his world, he tells Joe that they share similar histories, and that he, too, has struggled and prevailed to achieve his goals. However he falls within the tradition of the megalomaniacal villain of the Superhero text: he resembles Superman’s Lex Luthor; a man impervious to the fate of the world, driven by personal greed.

<sup>67</sup> The term “Bergie” is Capetonian slang for a homeless person. It derives from the Afrikaans word “berg”, meaning “mountain”, and reflects the idea that the indigent of Cape Town make homes for themselves on Table Mountain.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Campbell describes the role of “benign presences” in assisting the hero in his quest: “an angel appears, a helpful animal ... a crone ... (The child is) (f)ostered in the animal school, or, like Siegfried, below ground among the gnomes that nourish the roots of the tree of life” (1949:326).

Joe K, then, relies on his main allies, the Bergies Rosie, the Professor and Nestor, to understand how Cape Island “really” works and for support and protection. Rosie is a maternal figure – she can be seen as an Earth Mother type, but also as Mother Mary, as well as Mary Magdalene. She is a fallen woman, with a good heart. Like a blues singer she has both the tendency for hard living and a special ability to sing so that people cannot think about anything else (she uses this ability towards the end of Episode 4), and in this ability she resembles one of the Greek Sirens. She is warm and friendly with everyone she meets but is quick to give her (often scathing or patronising) opinion.

The Professor is a mad scientist figure in the tradition of Daedalus, the engineer father of Icarus and Dr Frankenstein with the associated risk that knowledge will make him fall – and indeed the Professor’s problem is that he knows too much. The Professor is the only character who knows that he is in a comic-book and often addresses the reader directly. The Professor is there to remind us that philosophy does not rely on materials or equipment – his position is that true alchemy takes place in the mind and the heart. The Professor also relates to the biblical prophets or the Desert Fathers of early Christian mysticism (his clothes are worn a bit like the robes we see in biblical illustrations).

Nestor is a kind of pan-African super-soldier, like Aries, God of war he is the perfect warrior. Nestor is also in the tradition of Obi-Wan Kanobi, “Jedi” mentor of *Star Wars* fame and will act as Joe’s bodyguard in the later stages of the tournament when LordCorp techs will try to interfere with Joe’s OVR machine. Nestor is the closest in nature to the Judge Dredd and Batman characters in that his primary skill, like theirs, is his physical and mental toughness.

The effect of the Bergie mentors is that there is a (small) pantheon of Gods on Joes’ side. The Bergies are like pagan or animist demi-gods. Or as in the Greek stories Joe is supported by Gods in disguise just as Hercules was<sup>69</sup>. In the third act, Joe will realise that the Bergies are not on the street because they are mad or alcoholic – they have chosen this life, and celebrate their freedom from the controlling rules. He realises that they have been modest about their popularity when he goes to Stilt-town with them and they are greeted as heroes. Like hermits and ascetics, they do not buy into the comforts of modern life, and in fact defy social taboos about food and dress, living off whatever there is to hand. This allows them to think and act as independent figures, beyond the control of the forces of LordCorp, and thus they enable resistance to the political and economic status quo.

---

<sup>69</sup> Robert Graves’ *The Greek Myths*, (1955:452-457).

Joe adapts to the challenges with the help of his allies, who behave with the strong enthusiasm that is in keeping with their role as mentors. The mentor archetype is included with Vogler's archetypes and usually comes in the form of a wise old man or woman. Vogler points out that the quality of enthusiasm associated with good mentors has a root in the Greek "en theos, meaning god-inspired, having a god in you, or being in the presence of a god" (1996:47). In ancient Greek hero myths there are many mentors who have a link to the divine, such as that great classical mentor, the centaur Chiron who tutored Jason (of the Argonauts) and Achilles among others. According to *The Dictionary of World Myth* (1995:47) in classical myth Chiron became the constellation Sagittarius when he died. Centaurs are, in Greek myth, generally wild and driven by great lusts and passions, and Chiron is the great counter-example to that rule<sup>70</sup>. The Bergies similarly are in touch with their natural drives and their condition is, like Chiron who himself learned from the Greek Gods Apollo and Artemis, semi-divine if mortal.

That the Bergies seemed "fixed in their natures" might stem from a tradition of South African narratives about the lack of social mobility for homeless people. Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* is an early example of this. In some, more recent fiction, homeless figures – such as Toloki in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, and Vercueil in JM Coetzee's *Age of Iron* – become witnesses to the traumas of the society around them. They too, at moments, offer commentary that guide our understanding of that society. Thus there is a literary precedent for treating the street people of Cape Town as both fixed in their social position, but also valuable in that they see and understand more of the world than those who live lives of action.

### **The mythic archetypal story in *The Number One Game***

Campbell's idea was that all traditional myths were localised variants of certain generic patterns which form a "mono-myth", with which we unconsciously understand our lives. In a related argument, Chris Vogler, in his book *The Writer's Journey*, describes how certain "universally satisfying patterns", specifically those identified by Joseph Campbell, seem able to generate entertainment that people find particularly exciting. Using Campbell's research in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Vogler has formulated a systematic guide for employing these mythical patterns, especially in screenwriting for film<sup>71</sup>.

I worked with Campbell's idea of the "Hero's Journey" to understand the phenomenal repeat

---

<sup>70</sup> See also Robert Graves' *Greek Myths*. (1955)

<sup>71</sup> Feature films are typically 120-minutes in length, and *The Number One Game* is 120 pages. I think of it as following a "feature" length.

business of movies such as *Star Wars* and *Close-Encounters*. People were going back to these films as if seeking some kind of religious experience. It seemed to me that these films drew people in this special way because they reflected the universally satisfying patterns Campbell found in myths. They had something people needed. (1996:2)

Vogler offers a detailed outline of the “Hero’s Journey” as what he calls a “technology” for the construction of entertaining narratives, a “map” of the emotional needs of an audience and even a paradigm for understanding one’s own progress through life. In this Vogler follows Campbell’s idea of the numinous nature of myth – its power is our belief in it. Vogler further claims that the “Hero’s Journey” is not “an invention, but an observation...(of) a beautiful design, a set of principles that govern the conduct of life and the world of storytelling the way physics and chemistry govern the physical world.” (Vogler ix) As a comic-book creator, the challenge then for me has been to formulate narratives and images that carry archetypal force, which will, in turn, allow the reader an intense and emotionally satisfying experience of the text. Vogler’s particular formulation of Campbell’s work is, for me, a readily useable template that matches the needs of my comic-book – to generate an epic, heroic “Hero’s Journey”.<sup>72</sup>

The major mythic reference point for the narrative, or mythic central “theme” lies at the climax of the story and is represented in the image of “slaying the dragon”, as exemplified in the story of St George and the Dragon, or in *Beowulf and Grendel* and countless other versions. This is a western European traditional story that is a variation of the idea of “overcoming the monster”<sup>73</sup>.

In *The Number One Game* the heroic dragonslayer is Joe K, our protagonist, and the dragon turns out to be Nic Lord, the most powerful man on Cape Island. Joe realises that he must challenge his opponent on his own turf and on his own terms. The extreme difference in power relations will, I think, suit a social landscape such as South Africa’s and is calculated to maximise the excitement.

Furthermore, following in the tradition of comics such as *Judge Dredd* and *Batman*, a feature of *The Number One Game* is that the conflict must be visible. Thus my starting point was the growth in popularity of computer games and the growth of technology. The climactic moment of visible conflict in the story is when Joe and Nic Lord face each other in the final stage of a computer-

---

<sup>72</sup> Certainly the concept of the mono-myth has exerted enormous influence in the narrative production, especially, of feature films in Hollywood. Vogler has excellent credentials as a story consultant, having worked on many major films such as the Lion King, for Disney and other studios including Warner Bros., Twentieth Century Fox, and United Artists.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Booker’s *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories* on narrative construction, identifies “Overcoming the Monster” as one of the seven basic plots (2004).

gaming tournament in which digital avatars created and controlled by the players battle each other. These are seen as holograms inside a ring between the players, for detail of which see Addendum 4, Technology.

The setting of this “dragon-slaying”, then, is such that Joe does not actually physically kill Nic Lord but rather “kills” his image. The nature of this conflict resembles magic in the story world context. In providing a hero for the Cape it was evident that there would be much satisfaction in Joe beating a character who seems to control everyone. The question for the disenfranchised, in my view, who want to work for a living and earn respect in the world of capital always seems to be how to beat the owners of the system at their own game. Joe reacts to the threat posed by Lord not with real violence, but rather by developing the skills to be able to beat his enemy, literally, at his own game. Thus I am suggesting that the kind of values that are admirable in today’s context in the Cape are to do with learning to deal with the first world on it’s terms without losing oneself (or one’s own values) in the process, and then being able to make those first world tools one’s own. This, in turn, reflects the cultural (and linguistic) struggles of a decolonizing nation, that needs to forge and maintain its own unique identity while competing on a world stage.

There are obvious parallels here with the figures of both Batman and Judge Dredd (in his comic-book, rather than comic-strip manifestation) in that both they and Joe have visually dynamic conflicts with “monsters”. In the Superhero narrative and the hard-boiled and action traditions that inform the story worlds of both the *Judge Dredd* and *Batman* narratives, physical and spectacularly visible conflicts drive a lot of the experience of reading the comic.

Joe’s story in *The Number One Game* also relates to the Promethean story of bringing fire to mankind (Willis, 1995:175) in that Joe ultimately brings computer competence to the poor, a key tool for self-upliftment. There is a further suggestion, represented by the nature of the computer-game, that participation in digital media leads to control of one’s self-image. Information technology is to be seen, like fire in the origin state of the Promethean myth, to be in the hands of the “gods” or rulers of Cape Island, these being in the pay of Nic Lord and his henchmen<sup>74</sup>. Joe’s skill in computing shows that one need not be born into the middle class to learn these skills. And in

---

<sup>74</sup> Joe’s story can also be related to the Ancient Greek myth of the overthrow of the Titans by the Olympian Gods (Graves, 1955:41) in that they suggest that there are qualities in humans that, when exercised, can allow us to overcome insurmountable obstacles or perform miraculous feats. Central to the idea of the Hero, from the Greek Hero legends (such as that of Herakles) (1955:462-494) onwards, is the idea of people who demonstrate tremendous feats of strength or (as in Homer’s *Odyssey*) *Odyssean* cunning. (Graves, 1955:716)



this case, through the medium of the comic-book, how Joe's journey from being a nobody to becoming an activist and leader shows, to some extent, how each of us could contribute to that progress, and achieve great things, no matter how lowly, with a little help. It is important to note, however that, as entertainment, *The Number One Game* is not intending to preach but to present Joe's progress as an emotionally satisfying narrative. In essence this is the story of Joe's origins as a hero, the choices he makes in the future will relate to the situations we see him in here. Joe is in progress in *The Number One Game* towards being a publicly recognised hero, and growing towards full adulthood. Thus, in keeping with his South African origins, Joe's "heroism" is closer to being that of a political revolutionary.

In terms of mythology the story has parallels with the story of the Buddha, probably, the journey out from the palace into the world, seeing the suffering in the world and the response, to use one's mind and spirit to try to fix it. The dictionary of world myth contains the following succinct description of the Buddha's origins, "Born miraculously from his mother's side as she grasped a tree. Gautama (Buddha) was received by Brahma and the other gods...(H)he was raised in luxury in the palace of his father, called King Shuddhodhana. He married and had a son. One day Gautama rode his chariot outside the palace and discovered sickness and death. He decided to search for enlightenment." (1995:39)

*The Number One Game* is not a Buddhist story though, Joe's journey into the world is not his choice, he is thrown into it. Joe's responses to his situation will be to do with survival and social status as well as moral. This is because Joe does not become, yet, the fully realised "world redeemer" of Campbell's terminology but remains a warrior in the terms from Campbell's Chapter on "Hero as World Redeemer"(1949:345) and "Hero as Warrior" (1949: 334).

### **Joe's heroic journey: Vogler's mythic narrative scheme**

I have derived the idea of this mythic schematisation, contained below, of the narrative of *The Number One Game* from Vogler's screenwriting guide, *The Writer's Journey*. Vogler's terminology has been used as a structuring tool for conveying the way the archetypal qualities play out in the narrative, just as it has been used to structure archetypes in the story of *The Number One Game*.

The mythic or heroic narrative requires that there is progression that can be seen in the form of a series of separations, initiations and returns (Campbell, 1949:31). Joe goes through a process of change in his idea of himself, both in terms of his social status (fitting in as a schoolboy, as a

streetkid, then minor gang member, then graduate, outlaw and finally gaming celebrity) and in his conception of himself and his agency in the world.

The pattern of Joe's journey can be seen to follow that of Vogler's "Hero's Journey" in the changes that take place in his relationship to the archetypal figures of his the story-world. These changes reflect Joe's changing values.

Cycle 1: Stages of the journey: The first act:

Initially Joe's Ordinary World is his boarding school in the Eastern Cape, he receives a Call to Adventure in the form of the bombing of his school. Like the young Bruce Wayne (Batman) Joe feels tremendous shock at these events, and feels threatened by them. Joe leaves for Cape Island, and after various tests he meets with the Bergies and goes up the mountain with them to the cave, where he has a vision. This constitutes his Meeting with the Mentor. Joe's Refusal of the Call consists of his rejection of the Bergie's help and denying seeing any vision.

This terminology indicates a basic pattern of separation, initiation, and return (terms taken from Campbell, 1949:31) that can repeat itself in the narrative. In this sense we can see Joe's progress in Episode 1, from when he meets the Bergies to when he leaves them at the beginning of Episode 2 as the first phase of Campbell's three-point pattern. Firstly the separation – from his illusions of what would happen when he came to Cape Island from the secure world of his school; then initiation, where the Bergies show him the vision; and then his return to his self-reliance, when Joe runs away from them. This leads Joe into deeper difficulties, when he becomes separated from his freedom by Daimler, and initiated into his street-gang.

In terms of his own growth as a character, Joe's running away leads to his Crossing the First Threshold, joining the gangs where he undergoes tests, finds some Allies, and we are presented with some possible Enemies. Joe's Approach to the Inmost Cave is the process of being "graduated" from streetkid to bookkeeper for Uncle September. He undergoes the Ordeal of being made to beat someone up but his Reward (Seizing the Sword) is to be inducted into the Lordcorp training program. The Road Back for Joe is to leave his (highly prized) job at Lordcorp once he realises what is going on, his Resurrection is achieved with the help of the Bergies – at which point the story-dynamic changes and we move into a new cycle. The Return with the Elixir is the completion of the Bergie's explanation of their origin and the revelation of Joe's origins.

Cycle 2: Stages of the journey: The second act:

The Ordinary World is now Cape Island as seen from the fully vindicated point of view of the Bergies, the outsiders. The Bergies and Joe now function as a team, and the Call to Adventure is that Lordcorp has a number of evil tricks up its sleeves. The Bergies are able to confirm many things Joe had begun to think about the way Cape Island runs. Joe has another Meeting with the Mentor in the form of physical and martial training with Nestor. When the Bergies discover that Joe could have a chance to compete in the World Video Games, he again “refuses the call”, saying he cannot do it. Rosie explains the “theme” of the moment in her self-reflexive way: it’s only not trying that constitutes a failure, and in fact he may just win. It is Joe’s joy in virtuosity that will pull him through. We see Joe Accepting the Challenge and thereby Crossing the First Threshold. And while he is busy the Bergies are in parallel Crossing the First Threshold – they are beginning to organise.

Cycle 3: Stages of the journey: The third act:

In the Third Act we build up to the tournament where Joe matches Nic Lord. Lord makes him the devil’s offer of “you cannot beat me, therefore you should join me”, promising many rewards. Joe refuses to join him, and it is his incorruptibility that makes him unique. The fight is resolved – an action replay reveals that Joe is the moral victor and Lord disappears. Elections for a new city council are to be held. Joe has progressed from being a troubled adolescent to being a leader in his own right – he has his own sense of his qualities.

In summary the first phase for Joe is a movement from feeling safe to unsafe, then through desperation becoming an insider, then rejecting that and becoming rebel, from his rebellion his initial allies – the Bergies – can help him because they are veteran outsiders of a different kind (Joe is to tackle the system, whereas the Bergies are accustomed to being excluded from the system). The Bergies know that they do not have access to technology, they do not want it for themselves but for the youngsters of the poor areas like Stilt-town. None of them can be the person who breaks system, they are limited to the local but they can be mentors or guardians. They can help him in their different ways as mentors – Nestor can train him in self-defence, the Professor assists him with arcana and Rosie can educate his heart. This shows how societies adapt to new circumstances, where elders help youngsters by promoting and supporting them into new fields even if they themselves can't adapt.

(Please refer to Addenda: 1 for a Story Overview, 2 for Story Summary and 3 for the Episodes)

### ***The Number One Game: South African myth of progress?***

*The Number One Game's* story is really a form of the myth of progress, using the steps of the "Hero's Journey" embodying the sentiment that things can and will get better. The hero in this myth is a prophet of a new age, bringing word of a better way, having first to go through the stages of initiation to gain the knowledge that is necessary to revitalise a community. This corresponds to the final, twelfth stage of Vogler's scheme, "Return with the Elixir", in which the hero returns bringing "new life to our land" (1996:221). In the case of the story-world, Cape Island, this knowledge is technical and linguistic/symbolic – involving mastery of the futuristic forms of information technology that are implicitly the preserve of the First World wealthy citizens of Cape Island.

The tournament that Joe competes in is out of reach for most people and the future world has devolved into a resigned acceptance of extremes of wealth and poverty. The position that Nic Lord represents is that this inequality is the natural order of things, a by-product of humanity's weaknesses, and Joe, by defying and beating him demonstrates that this "myth" is untrue. Joe becomes symbolic of achievement in the face of adversity, and is adopted as a hero of the poor by the residents of Stilt-town, as well as an example to all that with the right opportunities all sorts of people can achieve great things.

The question we must answer is: what is the point of Joe's progress as a character. In *Great Expectations* Pip's transformation from blacksmith's apprentice to gentleman makes us think that his early innocence is situational – riches turn him into a different person. He can't help renouncing his roots to some extent. In *The Number One Game* Joe, like Pip, hungers for status. In Pip's case it is the contact with Miss Havisham and Estella that creates an emotional need to become refined, before his expectations are improved. In the case of Joe it is the experience of having been comfortably part of an (upper class) institution that makes him want to return to the security of being part of something. Joe is driven, in the first act, to be part of something powerful so that he cannot see the power of what the Bergies are offering. It is Joe's desire to prove himself that pushes him along at first, and it is only when Joe leaves Lordcorp in Episode 4 that he becomes of use as a Hero to others. Joe has to give up on the desire to please those in power before he can have power of his own.

The journey of the hero is really one of integrating the point of view represented by the Bergies – humanist, egalitarian – with the opportunities and challenges of the information age. Openness to change, humility and concern for others are values that centre the representations in this comic-

book. The main sympathetic characters of the story also tend to mistrust the powerful, and operate on the assumption that they are inherently corrupt and do not use that power to help others, unless it serves their own purpose.

Nic Lord represents the precepts of a late neo-liberal capitalism that argues for trickle down economics and represents Africa as “underdeveloped”. The implications of this are that a) it is a land of opportunity for corporations and b) that their exploitation of cheap labour and resources is defensible and “good” in that it brings enlightenment and money to the Third World. By having Joe - an example of individual merit allied with and supported by characters who are outcast, and who represent the virtues of selflessness and warmth - beat Lord I intend to create a heroic narrative that will be satisfying and appropriate to the issues of contemporary South Africa. For “things to get better” will take people like Joe, the Chief Technician and the Bergies, not people like Nic Lord. The specific values that lie behind the idea of “things getting better” would be the presence of equal opportunities for all, an end to poverty, the careful use of technologies and social development in order to allow humans to co-exist with the world’s ecology, and personal ethical behaviour and values, such as pride and honour.

The archetypal progression of the central character is from rags to riches, outsider to insider<sup>75</sup>. This narrative is then reversed when Joe decides to leave the LordCorp company and find out about his origins. At this point, the progression is from employee to rebel, competitor and, finally, acknowledged victor. In the final part of the story Joe battles to make the transition to being a leader. At the close of the narrative Joe is seen giving his first major speech. His new journey as a leader will be in another story.

## **Conclusion**

*The Number One Game* relies on the use of conventions from the broad study of arts and letters but also those of (primarily, but not only) Anglophone entertainment industry, an industry that has its own historical pressures and traditions. This comic-book attempts the re-figuring of those conventions to speak about a specific place with a particular history. As Copley argues (2001: 213) “changing experience of a formula, on the other hand, even when the changes are small or subtle, offers a greater potential for pleasure. In the latter case, such change may involve a different

---

<sup>75</sup> Booker’s analysis also identifies “Rags to Riches” as one of the seven plots using, as one example, Dickens’ *David Copperfield*. The first section of *The Number One Game* can be seen as a failed “rags to riches” story. *The Number One Game* is more closely related to *Great Expectations* in its view of success is moral, happiness has to do with virtue, not wealth.

performance by the oral storyteller or slightly different content to the narrative; equally, though, it will involve changed investments by the reader, sometimes prompted by the variation in performance or contents.”

The pleasures of the text for the reader are connected to the dangers that Heroes put themselves through but also their expectations of both familiarity and surprise. Joe is at moments unpredictable and remains an unknown quantity which lends excitement. In the underexplored context of a mythic South African comic-book there must be changes to the familiar structures of heroic comic-book myths.

## **Chapter 4: The mythic image in the comic-book**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will offer examples of the relationship between mythic narrative and the use of visual-narrative language in *The Number One Game*, *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*. These examples will demonstrate the special nature of the interdependence, in the comic-book, of the text and image elements in generating narrative associations by way of genre and what might be termed stylistic considerations. I will also show, using the same examples, how these relationships can be controlled by the comic-book creator to deliver archetypal material that can develop a narrative with strong mythic associations. These representations are understood not only by their relationships to each other in the comic-book but also to pre-existing representational systems and previous uses of such representations in stories and depictive images.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the genre traditions to which *The Number One Game* relate most strongly are the Superhero or Action Comics of the United States and the Adventure comics of twentieth century Britain. These, in turn, relate to the penny-dreadfuls and pulp fiction of their countries, and have strong genre relationships to content in other popular entertainment forms, such as motion picture, and interactive entertainment, such as gaming. South African stories, chiefly in the form of the novel and less formal influences such as street dialects and urban legends also help to construct the special idiolect of *The Number One Game*. The narrative of the comic-book seeks to hero-ise marginalised Capetonians, particularly the *Bergies* and street children of Cape Town. This is achieved by retaining some of the directly observed patterns of speech, body language, dress and characteristic manner of real Capetonian street characters in the construction of the fictional *Bergies* and other Cape Island characters, such as Daimler and the Chief Technician.

Through this combination I hope to draw readers into a world-view that validates the struggles and aspirations of the poor and the marginalised. The mythic centre of this narrative, as described in Chapter 3, is the myth of progress which takes the form of the heroic overcoming of a “dragon” – a villain who represents the conservative forces that are the root causes of inequality: here, the selfishness that lies behind vested capitalist interests and media hegemony. The visual design of *The Number One Game* supports and amplifies this myth through representational and aesthetic choices that include the use and adaptation of visual archetypes and references.

The way in which archetypal reference points are arranged in a specific comic-book story will establish sets of associations that, I will argue, match Barthes' description of the mythic register of speech. In *The Number One Game* I have attempted to make the mythic nature of my constructions as robust and visible as possible. Showing the operation of the structuring, archetypal and genre elements at play in the comic-book will help to illustrate some of the myth-encoding strategies readily available to the creator. Strategies that make use of archetypes or stereotypes are understood by comics' creators to have meaning for their readership, and here I will show some examples of demonstrably "established" meanings<sup>76</sup>.

The interaction of comic-book structuring elements (the "architecture" if you will), such as panels, figure drawings and speech bubbles, guide the viewer's attention and provides, both the sequencing of narrative and the pleasure of visual rhythm and variety. These are the comics' language's unique "grammatical" devices which combine with other representational systems and traditions rooted in writing and drawing and the unique historical circumstances of the project. These combined factors produce in the comic-book a sequence of elements that will have a particular aesthetic. This is not only informed by genre associations and conventions to do with comic-book drawing, but also by an individual sensibility in writing and drawing, which is commonly called "style". I suggest below that the more useful term to describe this is "modal value". Appreciation of both artwork and story are associated with the specific pleasure of reading a particular comic-book. Much of this pleasure-giving is in the manipulation of the signification of the visual representation – that is, what is shown – and also in the fine units of visual construction – how it is shown – by altering viewpoint or proportion or by changing the weight of a line or perhaps using a different tool or quality of mark to draw out the figure.

There is a wide range of ways in which a comic-book creator can treat and vary the recurring elements of text and image visually. The interplay of these modal qualities in the drawings, lettering and framing elements of the comic-book with the narrative creates the precise visual-temporal experience of reading the story. It will be shown how the employment of these aspects of the comic-book can contribute to the encoding of a mythic story. Investigation of the above factors in the entertainment value of the comic-book has contributed to the production of this comic-book but will also facilitate understanding of the comic-book as a medium for the expression of individual (or

---

<sup>76</sup> Noted comics artist Will Eisner provides, in his book, *Comics & sequential art & graphic storytelling*, a series of drawings of "types" of people – policeman, thief, boss. These images of types can be seen as stereotypes or archetypes. Eisner maintains that it is a central property of comic-book drawing that characters can be represented with an emphasis on the easily recognisable type (1996:18).



corporate, in the case of the big comic-book publishers) opinions and ideologies. This understanding matches Barthes' first level of reading myth, the focus on myth as an empty signifier (2000:128) in which the encoder of myth fills the form with a meaning. In the comic-book form, I will argue, because of the wide varieties of narrative and depictive modes of reference there are many techniques available to the encoder of myth, creating much potential for mythic associations.

A major aspect of the mythic encoding in the language of the comic-book lies in the specifically pictorial mode of its depiction of characters and settings. Consideration will be given to the main areas for manipulation in this pictorial language, from the qualities of its most basic unit, the line, to the use of cinematic point of view.

Comic-books can make use of many different strategies and visual modes in the depiction of figures and settings, but, though they share features of visual rhetoric with photographic media such as magazines and cinema they are, crucially, drawn pictures (there are, of course, photo-comics). Further, it will be shown that, for various reasons, comics seldom contain highly illusionist images. Metaphoric, literal or rhetorical deformations of the illusionist "real" are a feature of the comic-book drawing whether in the form of the cartoon face, caricature or the idealised superhero physique. These features can be used for visual myth encoding strategies and, through visual examples from *The Number One Game*, *Judge Dredd* and *Batman I* will show how the visual aspects of the mythic inflexion operate.

The "Hero's Journey" mono-myth in Vogler's formulation (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), helped to crystallize the conception of narrative in *The Number One Game*, but it is not the only way in which myth has a bearing on the production of this comic-book. Barthes' understanding of mythical speech as one that abstracts an object from its "history", while simultaneously "naturalizing" its meanings, remind us that it is the way in which the previous incarnations of these character archetypes and archetypal events have been used, their social and historical context, that give us an idea of their ideological intent. In adapting the image of the "knight in shining armour" that is so strongly connected to the Anglophone idea of the hero, one invokes previous representations of the hero in the imagination of the viewer. The concept of the hero itself has tremendous mythic value, particularly within the tradition this comic-book calls on. In practice this means that all previous images of heroes, visual or poetic, come into play and that the visual and narrative associations of hero and villain will orient us in reading the text.

The way the mythic reference point is adapted and reformulated shows one's ideological hand, both for the reader/viewer and for the writer/artist. This adaptation and reformulation will involve genre and other conventions, both literary and visual. (Thus, for example, previous experience in the mythologies of ancient Greece but also in popular fiction, tells us that characters who hide in lairs permanently are probably examples of Campbell's "Holdfast the Dragon" archetype, as discussed in Chapter 3, and, therefore usually a villain.)

### **Myth as a depleted language: Roland Barthes**

The "mythic" is not simply a previously encoded set of conventional meanings. The work of Roland Barthes serves to demonstrate how any situation, event, history or object can become "mythic". Where Campbell formulates what he considers a narrative structure that is "mythic" in its universal appeal, Barthes' use of the term points to the way in which ordinary aspects of the world around us all have "mythic" potential. While I have used Campbell's plots to organise my narrative development, Barthes observation is useful in that I have mythologized a setting, which is not yet familiar in the mythic form of the comic-book. (This world is that of Cape Town, of South Africa – a world in which the primary issues are race, poverty and disenfranchisement.) Barthes explains how familiar objects, replete with their own histories and contexts, become depleted mythic objects when they are de-contextualised.

In his article "Myth Today", Barthes offers the example of an image of a "Negro" French Imperial soldier saluting the "Tricolour" in a magazine. Despite knowing that this image is manufactured, in order to represent French Imperialism as egalitarian and non-racist, "it has an indisputable presence" for the reader of myth. In Barthes' example the concept that is suggested by the mythic image (the image of a "saluting negro soldier"), is the signified, and the photographic object's form itself is the signifier. These two terms can be "viewed" in three different ways. The first two views focus only on the signifier and signified as being "full" or "empty".(2000:128). In the first, as Barthes puts it, "cynical" view, we perceive the producer/creator of content filling the form with his concept, and we focus on the signifier; the second view centres on the signified - this is the "demystifying" view where the soldier is seen as the "alibi" of French imperialism. These first two views negate the effect of the myth, destroying it, either by "making its intention obvious, or by unmasking it" (2000:128). These readings of myths are "static" according to Barthes who sees a third way of reading, in which the meaning and form are combined. In this reading, the soldier can be seen as the first term in a second, mythic chain of signification, where he becomes a "mythical signifier as a whole made of meaning and form" (2000:128). In this way the soldier's mythic

meaning can be “both true and unreal”, he “becomes the ‘very presence’ of French imperialism”. Elsewhere, Barthes describes this presence as being like a “call” to the receiver – it feels as if the image “has just been created on the spot, *for me*, like a magical object springing up in my present life without any trace of the history which has caused it” (2000:124).

This appearance of a magical world, which arises without history, is a feature of the comic-book form, and allies it closely with a mythic register. It is made up of drawings (and stories, quite often) that exist on the plane of signs – they are more often highly ideographic than realist. Barthes uses for myth the simile that it is “a pure ideographic system, where the forms are still represented by the concept which they represent” but, he continues, have become less and less motivated, like western ideographic letter-forms that have lost their conceptual association for a phonetic one (2000:127). In my discussion of comics language below, I will show how the visual and ideographic representations in comics are familiar codes which readers can readily invest with meanings. However, these codes are separated from historical or socio-economic context – and in this sense they are, as Barthes describes them, the “poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols etc”(2000:127).

Similarly, the cover image in *The Number One Game*, included at the beginning of Addendum 3, introduces the mythic image of Joe, as hero-to-be, on his unnamed quest arriving in a strange land. The image shows Joe on top of a mountain, looking across the bay at Cape Island, his, and the reader's, first sighting of this future Cape Town. The image is intended to convey the potential of his relationship with Cape Island. It is separated from him by a huge band of water, and it is rendered miniature by perspective, foreshadowing his journey to it, and his conquering of it. At the same time Joe appears vulnerable, dressed in rags and isolated on top of a precipitous cliff, implying the dangers of the journey, and his outsider status. Joe then can be read, mythically, as “the indisputable presence” of the heroic potential of outcast, disenfranchised Southern Africans. In mythologizing South African-ness in *The Number One Game*, my narrative de-contextualizes it in the way Barthes' describes. Both Joe and the French imperial soldier are “deprived of their history, changed into gestures” (2000:122) in one sense, by myth; and yet they can be seen to retain some of their “presence” in the background –the reader/viewer will invest these images with meanings that seem entirely natural and obvious, because they are motivated by the association with the now-obscured history. The process for me, as a comic-book encoder of myth, has thus been one of abstracting images with mythic potential from the “real” images of poverty around me and

designing them to resonate on linguistic and subliminal levels.

Barthes goes on to describe a way of reading myth that can retain the integrity of the sum of the concept and form of the image. Barthes describes this as a “dynamic” type of “focusing” which “consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal” (2000:115). In this way of reading myth the intention of the encoder need not be seen to dictate the responses of the reader, who can use their own agency to determine the function of the image in their imagination. This is not to say that the mythic effect is not deducible in some way but that the reader of myth-dynamics must perform this reading by responding to what Barthes calls the “constituting mechanism of myth”(2000:115), which relies on the way in which cultures include shared bodies of representation.

Such representations are used overtly in comic-book language, and this is often a point of critique about its limitations. Hatfield, for example, describes early mainstream comic-books as “jejeune and mechanical” (2005:9), and makes further reference to “inbred story formulas” and “diluted industrialized images” (2005:10). However, my argument in this thesis is that it is precisely this depleted, apparently “formulaic” quality to comic-books that give the potential for intense imaginative investment by the reader – particularly if the text offers a series of coded meanings that are combined in unfamiliar ways. The visual iconography – being, as it is non-realist and de-contextualised, and thus easily associated with “mythic” representations – is precisely what invites the investment of meaning by the reader. As Barthes puts it “even with pictures, one can make use of many kinds of reading: a diagram lends itself to signification more than a drawing, a copy more than an original, and a caricature more than a portrait” (2000:95).

Barthes also points out that, while the meanings attached to signs can be completely arbitrary, in myth they are partially motivated. In his terms “myth plays on the analogy between meaning and form” (2000:126). The motivation for a meaning invested in a myth is not, however, “natural” – it is provided by a history, although this history itself is occluded by the myth (2000:127). For example, aspects of the history of South Africa will motivate the associations made with the figures in *The Number One Game*, while that history itself is absented in favour of archetypal figures. Thus, by generating a simultaneously “worn-out” and yet invitingly fantastical set of mythic images, the South African context becomes part of a mythic imaginary that can be accessible world-wide while retaining the specificity of its unique place and time of production.

## **Visual Style considered as a modality within the genre of the heroic adventure comic-book**

J. Hillis Miller, too, points to the abstracted nature of visual imagery. He says: “The power of a picture is to detach a moment from its temporal sequence and make it hang there in a perpetual non-present representational present, without past or future” (1992:66). Thus, as argued above, the visual representations in comic-books are particularly suited to the kind of de-contextualised mythic signification that Barthes speaks of – a signification that at once both organises the possible associations of the visual images, but also depletes them in such a way that the reader can invest them with his or her own meaning.

There is a confusing breadth of possible theoretical approaches to the consideration of meaning in the visual. Our main concern here must be with how the form of the comic-book can employ visual values and principles of design to manipulate representation. To do this consideration must be given to the aspect of these values that might commonly be referred to as visual “stylistics” or, as I would rather consider it “modalities”. For, according to Svetlana Alpers (1979:158), there are dangers inherent in the use of the term “style”. Alpers makes the observation that what she describes as the “study of styles” is “always in danger of extracting, by naming and singling out, the accomplishments of specific modes that seem by virtue of this nomination to have preeminence.” This danger points to a concern in criticism associated with cultural studies, that if a style is something that needs to be agreed upon, then which people or what institutions get to do the agreeing? Without delving too deeply into these critical concerns around the discussion of imagery it must be noted that the comic-book does contain clear codes and traditions for “styles” and, in the mainstream comic-book, it seems that there are definite procedural and cultural filtering mechanisms for visual artists to conform to certain “styles” of visual representation.<sup>77</sup> My own illustration work is certainly constantly informed by such influences, while not defined solely by them. To some extent the comic-book must reconcile the unique and non-replicable eccentricities in the individual draughtsman’s hand and the nature of their personal visual perception with the expectations of potential readers and commercial understandings of these.

Alpers goes on to write that the main concern “should be modal. And it goes something like this:

---

<sup>77</sup> This refers back to the discussion in Chapter 2. These mechanisms include the preparation of portfolio submissions to editors by aspiring artists (who will also frequently seek advice from and imitate established illustrators), and the association of certain genres of comics with certain kinds of characters. In horror comics, zombie-rendering for instance, in comics-buyers guides the notation “GGA” (Good Girl Art) or the repetition on the theme of the fight scene. On a more general level McCloud proposes his own system for evaluating the modal value of comic-book imagery, which involves a triad of visual concerns (picture plane, reality and meaning), between which modes of drawing are positioned in various ways (1993:52).

What would it (reality, the world) be like if the relationship between us and the world were to be this one? This formulation has the virtue of not distinguishing form and content, of not excluding function, of not choosing in advance between the parts played by the individual maker, his community, certain established modes of perceiving the world, or the viewer” (1979:158).

There are many areas in which comic creators can work with different modalities in the sense described above, from the encoding of the narrative at the script level, through to the design and rendering of the figures or lettering of the dialogue. These modalities will be the sum of the influences of both established societal codes and the specific individual’s creative abilities and intent. The visual and (narrative) approaches and modes that the specific comics employ will situate that work, for the reader, somewhere on the terrain of previous comics' production if they have any comics-literacy or, if not, at the minimum there will be an awareness of the form, and the recognition of visual elements from other media (for instance the science-fiction film). This is not to say that the individual comic-book will not be read as a unique object but that this reading is subject to the contextual awareness of previous production of comics and other forms.

The way in which conventionalised associations of meanings interact with individual modalities in the comic-book culture and its language can be described as comic-book creators having unique “voices” and “hands” that employ existing dialects, which may be borrowed and invented in various proportions to construct the work. Thus the heroic adventure comic-book can be understood as a dialect within the language of comics and my version of it as being in a specific “voice”. The modal aspects of narrative representation and visual depiction in my work have been turned to the employment of a mythic register that answers emotional needs and proposes its own myths.

The heroic dialect within which I am constructing *The Number One Game* employs a high degree of archetypal material and mythic speech, a rich field for the presentation of ideology as natural. Other influential factors on the tone of not only my work, but also the *Batman* and *Judge Dredd* stories, are genre elements such as those from crime, fantasy and science fiction.<sup>78</sup> The reference points for these genre scenarios can be found in forms as diverse as movie posters, book cover art, comics in those genres, imagery from films or, these days, very often in computer games.

---

<sup>78</sup> The post-apocalyptic aspect of the setting of *The Number One Game* (this in the sense of global warming, extreme weather and the flooded Cape Flats) is shared with *Judge Dredd* and is a staple of much speculative fiction, this feature can also be found in many of the story-world settings of D.C., Marvel and many other heroic comics, films and books ) Detective and crime fiction, especially with a pulp or “Noir” feeling, such as influenced the early *Batman* stories and Frank Miller’s *Sin City* books has also been an influence.

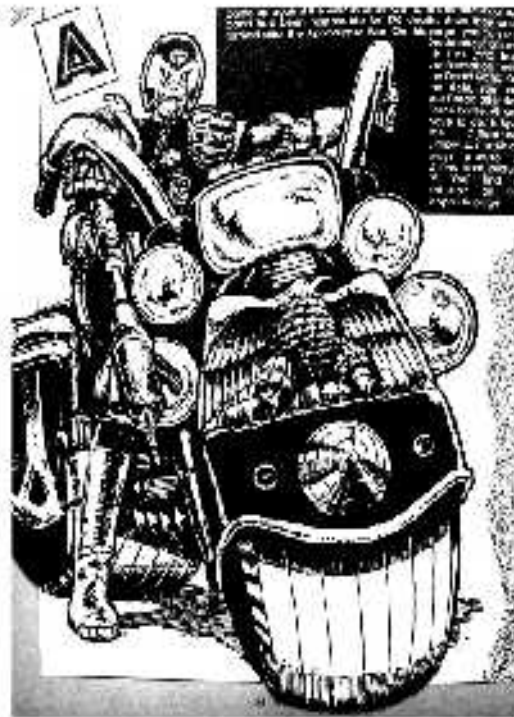
The employment of genre elements creates an environment rich in potential for mythic scenarios and broadly defined, archetypal relationships. Associations created by these relationships can accommodate novel visual and narrative inflections of the archetypal or genre reference point. Archetypes cross over genres so that Judge Dredd's grim law-enforcer and Nestor's battle-scarred warrior, though aligned with the genres of the western and the war-comic respectively, can both also refer to what might be called the "hard-boiled" genre's tradition of the tough guy. As Paul Cobley writes in his book *Narrative*, "Genre, in contrast to formula, is concerned precisely with the issue of how audiences receive narrative conventions" (2001:213). And further, "every consumer of narratives has a rough idea of what 'genre' means: a shorthand textual classification, determining whether a particular fiction is expected to conform to previous experiences of texts on the part of the consumer. As such, then, genre is properly an 'idea' or an 'expectation' harboured by readers" (2001: 214).

The gunman figure from a western can recur as a future lawman, and be recognisable based on these expectations derived through previous experiences of entertainment texts. Readers of comics can tell just from looking at them that characters like Batman and Judge Dredd are a certain inflection of "tough" and can recognise their reference to various genre traditions of the ambivalent hero. There are more general archetypal associations also, such as to the mysterious benefactor figure familiar from fantasy and myth, who can be treated in various ways. The reference points for Nic Lord's character vary widely, for instance his technology at times will seem fantastical, placing him in the tradition both of James Bond's Blofeldt and of Willy Wonka (the bizarre factory owner from Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*). Lord's interference with Joe's life, and his obsession with wealth and power, remind us of the gods and demi-gods of Greek myth, and other great pantheons, who seem to find purpose meddling in the affairs of mortals. The Professor's archetypal aspect of alchemist, fool or blessed madman can be recognised through obvious visual signification like beard and robes but at various times he can seem specifically like an old testament prophet, an embodiment of the "zany" figure of genius as in Socrates or Einstein, or, as a parody of the Richard Attenborough nature-documentary style of narration (for this see Addendum 3 *The Number One Game*, Middle Tier, Page 33 Episode 3). The potential for emotive association and imaginative play in such a signification-rich environment is high.

### The visual expression of archetypes in a comic-book

Barthes observes that “the worn out state of myth can be recognized by the arbitrariness of its signification” (2000:114). From this we can understand that the more “worn out” myths can acquire a greater economy of expression. The illustration (4) below of Judge Dredd shows his uniform and accessories and appears in one of the “non-story” parts of this comic-book annual, in this case the visual puzzle of “spot the difference” where image “A” (illustrated below) has subtle differences to image “B”(not illustrated here). There are a number of possible levels on which we can interpret character information from the mode of drawing and character design’s representational references.

*Figure 4: Judge Dredd. Artist: Pat Mills Reproduced from Judge Dredd Annual (86:86)*



To illustrate this we can use the example of Dredd’s uniform and accoutrements and the way these signify mythic value. As a costume, the design has rather more elaborate symbols than a typical contemporary police uniform, including as it does the Bald Eagle – the national bird of the United States, which suggests of the power of the State – on one shoulder pad. A helmet hides Dredd’s face from the nose up allowing us to see only his permanently scowling mouth, and hiding his eyes, thus suggesting that he is not an ordinary human personality. Dredd also wears a dark “kevlar” bodysuit and enormous knee and elbow pads that, like his utility belt and weapon, indicate his readiness for



action. The asymmetry of his shoulder pads, too, suggests a kind of gladiator. If Dredd is a policeman, then clearly policing on his beat calls for a great deal of physicality. The excessive nature of his facial and bodily design suggests the extreme nature of his typical response to crime.

The overall signifiers above add up to the sign: “lawman”, but with a particular intonation that is associated with the genre and mythic reference points at play in that particular comic. Dredd has reference to archetypes like the inquisitor and hangman, to various gods of the underworld or other figures of death, all of which have carry a sense of being weighers of sins, and represent myths that show the law as a repressive force. The bald eagle is, of course, a flesh-eating bird, and in its design here its beak has a graphic effect similar to a spike or hook as on mediaeval armour, while the feathers resemble armour plate. The masking of the eyes with slanted slits and the overall triangular shape of the body all suggest the character type of the “tough guy” anti-hero.

These significations seem to fit within a tradition of action and science fiction but are slightly “scrambled”. Dredd looks like a punk Darth Vader, while the perpetrators he collars look more like us. As Sabin points out, “Dredd is only Dredd because he is the opposite of the punks on the street – in whom we half-recognise ourselves ... The comic transposes us to “America” to play out the futuristic drama of the complete realisation of Thatcherite law and order politics. Dredd must be both hero and villain” (Sabin, 1996:138).

The way we scan the drawing and recognise the overlapping shapes and spatial construction as representing space may relate to how we look at the “real”. However we must then interpret that drawing, knowing that it is part of a comic-book, and look for signifiers in it that will impart character or plot information.

These can take the form of wardrobe and accessories such as can be seen above. Items such as the outsize side-arm (Dredd’s side-arm is called the “Lawgiver” and has many settings) his helmet, insignia, and mode of transport all become part of the attributes of the hero and his myth. Batman also makes use of futuristic technology and these have often been fetishized through “special inserts” such as those on the bat-cave (for which see Goulart – 1986:27; 110-112), bat-boat and gadgets in his belt such as the “batarang”. This fascination with costume and gadgets is underscored by the manufacture of toy figurines of Superheroes. There is also a link to the emblems of traditional mythological figures, such as Zeus’ thunderbolt or Poseidon’s trident.

Although not only character information is provided (we know the weapons and vehicle do not occur as “real” law-enforcement tools, so we may guess at the future or alternative world, for instance) and although one might not guess it at first sight of this character, for a reader of the comic-book these signifiers will add up to the denotation “lawman” – they will know that the wearer is a Mega-City Judge and see him within the context of the story-world and supporting genre and fictive traditions.

It is at this broad level of reading the comic, the level of the overall “motivated form” (2000:127) that Barthes identifies at which the mythic inflexion begins to operate most obviously in the drawing. This “lawman” signification brings with it a whole host of connotations, implied sets of meanings or associations that form a major part of the reading of the character. Dredd can thus be associated with all the various roles of the “lawman” archetype, despite looking very little like the more established pop-culture lawmen – Sheriffs, Police Detectives and the like. On a visual level, the signifiatory emphasis on “lawman-ness” is low but the myth is so well established (along with myths to do with comics themselves) that the codes for it are recognised through repetition. An interplay then can occur where the relatively low motivation of Dredd’s image as a “lawman” – essentially a gun and a badge – can be counterpointed with other aspects of his appearance.

Although the bike does not rule out law enforcement it also suggests the loner type, an outsider who does not follow rules. It has the distinctive “Chopper” style of handlebars – a type of motorbike design associated with outlaws such as the Hell’s Angels. Dredd has links to the cowboy trope where the outsider becomes the reluctant redeemer of a corrupt society, or a rescuer of innocent homesteaders from persecution. Dredd, though, as the name suggests, is designed to be “dreaded”, unlike a typical hero. Aspects of his appearance, like the enormous shoulder pads and hidden face are more commonly associated with the villain in the Anglophone tradition than the hero.

As Barthes puts it, “motivation is necessary to the very duplicity of myth: myth plays on analogy between meaning and form, there is no myth without motivated form” (2000:127). Dredd may be an anti-hero, and possibly a villain for some, but the utility of our mythic reading does not prescribe an orientation or identification for the reader. Matthew Althouse(2001), who applies a Barthesian mythic analysis to *Judge Dredd* comic strips in his article, describes how readers might relate to Judge Dredd regardless of their ideological affiliations<sup>79</sup>. Althouse’s use of Barthes’ third type of mythic reading allows him to describe the mythic point of reference in *Judge Dredd* to Thatcher’s

---

<sup>79</sup> Althouse examined, at his estimate, 180 strips of *Judge Dredd* appearing in the *Daily Star* between 1981 and 1986, a period he characterises as seeing, “some of the most vocal protests against Thatcher” (2001:202). The strips are short-format stories set in the same story-world as those appearing in the comic-book *2000 AD*.

Britain without prescribing a relationship between reader and text.

Althouse contrasts possible liberal and conservative readings of *Judge Dredd*, and discerns themes such as “unemployment” “freedom of expression” and “law and order” (2001:215) in the text that had relevance for the comics’s contemporary audience. By showing that the equivocal nature of Judge Dredd’s character makes the comic a rich text, capable of sustaining identifications “for” or “against” Dredd, Althouse demonstrates that the strip’s employment of these themes is too complex to be seen in the first two ways of reading myth that Barthes describes in relation to the photograph of the black French soldier. These two readings are static. The dynamic, third way of reading in which a mythical effect is produced, compliments “formalist” studies such as McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*, Althouse maintains, in that it can deal with “how readers associate real-world political and social issues with their reading of texts” (2001:216). This approach then counteracts the risk of singular readings of a comic-book text; readings which lead to familiar and limiting generalisations such as the claim that comics provide an escapist “buffer against reality” (2001:216). The example of *Judge Dredd* shows that the real process of interpretation is more complex.

Dredd’s ambiguity as a heroic figure – he is, then, simultaneously a desperate measure for desperate times and a repressive force – expresses a paradox in the Britain of the time, that Thatcher’s economic measures may have been necessary, but that her form of conviction-based leadership offended “an implied social contract” (Althouse, 2001:216). In the comic-book form of visual representation the ambivalence of the text is expressed in the visual design of the character.

Batman, based as he is on crime fiction and the idea of vengeance, has an ambivalence in his heroic design similar to that of Judge Dredd’s. In Batman’s case, the masking of his eyes, and the Bat symbols provide an overtly “sinister” connotation in the popular traditions of western culture. However the mythos salvages Batman’s “virtue” in that, as illustrated in the origin myth in Chapter 3, his self-confessed intention is that his “disguise must be able to strike terror into their (cowardly criminals) hearts” (Please see the illustration Fig. 3). In the story-world of *Batman*, Bruce Wayne has put much effort, wealth and skill into the design of his heroic alter-ego’s wardrobe, weapons and futuristic or fantastical technologies. This is all part of his fanatical fight against crime and shows his extraordinary will.

In contrast to Judge Dredd, Batman's design allows for some eye- and brow-shape expression in the form of the white on black marks for the eye holes (see in this chapter below Illustration 9, on page 83) that can give expression. This effect, then, is more like having no pupils than hiding the eyes completely. Dredd's helmet has the effect of making him robot-like, while Batman's eyes make him seem to be in a trance. The "blank-pupil" device will be used for Joe in his heroic state, described below.

The appearance of characters offers much narrative information, whether in their bodily and facial shape or in the design of their props and wardrobe. In *The Number One Game* Joe's facial and body design must change to reflect his growth towards adulthood, but his wardrobe also suggests narrative developments to do with power. Joe is shown in the ragged clothing of a street-child for the first episode, and then his appearance begins to change<sup>80</sup>. By the time of his graduation, Joe has reached the promise of an income and this is reflected in the environments we see him in and wardrobe he has acquired. By the end of Episode 3, he is a suave figure.

Body shape and facial design can also communicate characteristics such as physicality, temperament and life experience. Varying head to body proportion, for instance can suggest an athletic or childish physique while basing a facial design on the basic shape value of the circle rather than the triangle will drastically alter its effect<sup>81</sup>. The comic-book relies on these design possibilities to make characteristics visible. Drawings can make use of a huge variety of modes and techniques for the expressive depiction of body and face design but a first broad distinction, and one at play in *The Number One Game*, is that between the modes of the caricature and the heroic.

David Carrier (2000:16) argues that both these modes relate to values and ideals: "Caricature is inherently an art of exaggeration. The Neoplatonic tradition involves creating ideal beauty finding that perfection realized only imperfectly in actual individuals; caricature (and the comic) involves deformation." Both caricature and the heroising mode of rendering the figure relate to concepts of ideal beauty, albeit in opposing ways, the former using physical or character flaws to magnify and use for deformation and the latter foregrounding the ideal and placing it above any real model. These concepts of ideal beauty are themselves related to conceptions of power, desire and truth that have roots in the ideological and are subject to their own mythologies.

---

<sup>80</sup> Rosie, the Professor and Nestor all make observations about Joe's appearance. See Rosie's narration on Page 1 and Nestor's on Page 21, Tier 3. When they first meet on Page 5 the Professor notes with disappointment that Joe is "not very shiny".

<sup>81</sup> Tom Bancroft's *Creating Characters with Personality* also gives clear illustrated guidelines for these (2006:28-34).

Bruce Block, author of *Visual Story*, a manual for writers, illustrators and designer acknowledges that “most lead characters in comics and in animated films and interactive games based on comics have idealistic proportions and features – rendered in an approach called ‘heroic representation-ism’”. One example is that of head-body proportions. Charts prepared by Andrew Loomis in 1943 show a toddler standing four heads high while the proportion for an “ideal” male would be eight heads (Block, 2001:91). According to Block, the heroic figure tends to be around nine heads while the caricature tends to be at, or below, the toddler proportion. These proportions clearly manipulate the perceptible power and status of the character which can be used for narrative and mythic suggestion. For instance, *Batman* and *Judge Dredd* are heroic in their physical proportion, but Joe, an “underdog” figure, is physically of lesser dimensions. This is because a key aspect of the story is whether he can win his fight with Nic Lord. Lord and the other contestants will be represented as larger than Joe and, though it is a virtual game, it will be suggested that the tournament still favours physical stature.

In *The Number One Game*, Joe does have an alter-ego with Superhero-like powers in his aspect of Joe K, the computer-kid. The heroic visual transformation that Joe undergoes is in the digital form of the shiny jumpsuit of his Virtual Reality Avatar; his weapon is a long stick, similar to the one Nestor will train Joe with (this will be shown in Episode 7 but is foreshadowed in Joe’s vision on Page 11 of Episode 1 where Joe appears in the shiny suit of his Virtual Reality Avatar holding the stick or staff)<sup>82</sup>. Where Batman is the visible presence of vengeful justice, and Judge Dredd of the Law, both oppressive and embattled, Joe K is the visible presence of progress, with its potential to be corrupted by the capitalist forces that drive it.

### **The depiction of myth in drawing**

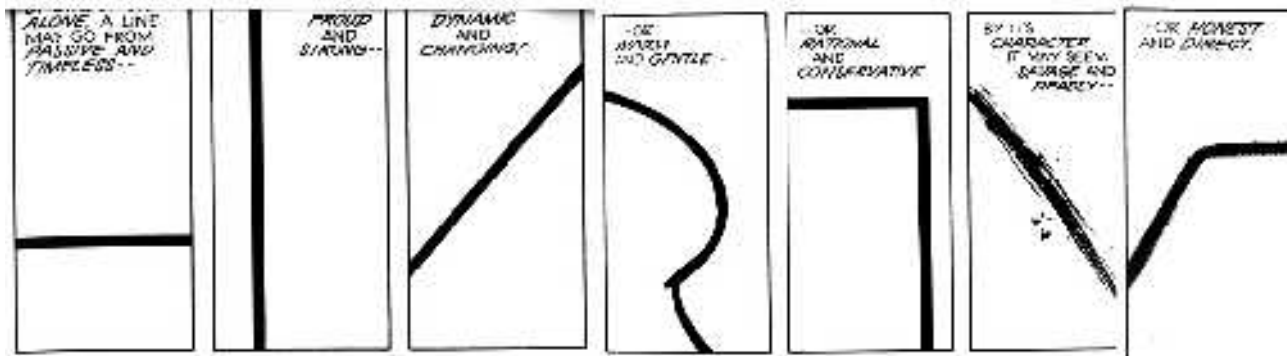
Comics are made up of texts and drawings that operate as signs but also offer subliminal effects through virtue of the precise visual qualities of composition and rendering. The quality of a single line, as in McCloud’s example illustrated below (Fig. 2), can produce characteristic emotive effects. The expressive nature of such lines may draw attention to themselves and be noticed consciously, or they may operate on the subliminal visual level.

---

<sup>82</sup> For further accounts of Joe’s ageing, compare Episodes 1-3 to information in the Character Sheets in Addenda 3 & 4, which shows a fully adult Joe, and illustrates his face in his heroic aspect more clearly.

The emotive values McCloud links to these lines below allow them to alter the feeling a viewer may have for a character, setting or situation. Indeed in the literature of the visual arts there is much material that suggests the subliminal and emotional effects that can be created through the use and variation of specific line-qualities in drawing.

Figure 5: Line-quality, detail of page from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993:125)



The visual depiction in this case is drawing, and as in the illustration (Fig. 5) above it is black-and-white line-art. The opportunities available to the creator for expressive depiction using the materials of brush, pen and ink are key determinants of the mythic effect possible in the comic-book. These are uniquely to do with the modality of drawing/painting in depicting characters and environments, and the use of interpretive/expressive or distortive line/surface qualities in visually representing the scene or character. Michael Podro, in introducing his book on *Depiction*, describes the multiple factors at play in the recognition of depiction by the viewer and the complex relations these can have to the meanings accumulated by that viewer.

[D]epiction utilizes vision in the work of the imagination. Eliciting recognition allows a multiplicity of factors to be recruited including the material character of the surface and our own psychological adjustments. Such imagining is not restricted by the requirement of consistency or conformity with our beliefs about the world; rather it is restricted by how recognitions can sustain and expand themselves to take on an internal architecture of correspondences, allowing the mind to occupy and move about within them, attentive to its elements and gestures and analogizing and connecting them for itself. (1998:28)

Podro's “internal architecture of correspondences”, as he maintains above, allows the viewer to recognise pictorial conventions including those associated with genre, such as in the adventure comic. Sabin (1996:44) describes this broad genre of adventure comic as the “next stage in the medium’s evolution” away from being “comical” and notes that:

Invariably, the style would have to be “realistic” in order to carry the story, and this required a new attention to detail. For young readers, meticulous accuracy was a large part of the spell: as many artists have testified, the sin of getting the turret-shape wrong on a tank, or the type of sword wrong for a particular period, could be greeted by complaining letters. Cinematic techniques also now became appropriate in a way that had not been previously considered: panoramas, close-ups, long-shots and exciting “cuts” increasingly became the action comic’s stock in trade. (Sabin, 1996:44)

The visual dialect of *The Number One Game* relies in part on visual expectations of the adventure comics genre, in terms of fidelity to detail and the use of cinematic techniques. This affects the modalities employed in the drawn image in terms of detail and distortion.

The term “motivation” is used by Barthes to describe the analogical quality of an image. Moreover, the word “image” is often used metaphorically. In this case we are considering the graphic image<sup>83</sup> which may have a seemingly causal relationship to the subject represented, as in a photograph which suggests the presence of a photographer and a “real” subject. There is infinite variety in drawn depictions, but on a notional scale of complexity that has at one end the photo-realistic and at the other end the cartoon or iconic face the one that has the highest level of motivation is motivated by analogy to the values and proportions of a notional optical “real”. This is irrespective of the photograph’s interpretive and distortive capabilities as it has to do with the extent of the claim to illusion that the drawing makes as an image. Level of motivation in drawings, then, has to do with the degree of the attempt at visual illusionism within the given media. Deviation from illusionistic aims may be in various directions however, for example in the distorted or exaggerated depiction of character morphology, shape, or use of line rather than simply an overall reduction of visual detail in the treatment, as illustrated (Fig. 6) below.

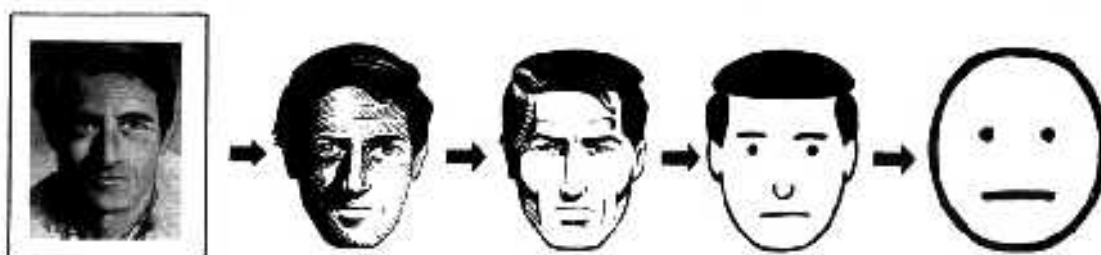


Figure 6: The cartoon, detail from page in McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1994:45)

<sup>83</sup> Mitchell supplies a table of uses of the term “image” in which categories range from *graphic*, *optical* and *perceptual*, which we are concerned with here, to the *mental* and *verbal* images that belong to Chapter 2 (1986:10).

Jacques Aumont notes that the visual representation is always somewhat motivated in the sense given above as opposed to the pure linguistic sign. Aumont goes on to express concern that theorists have often assumed that images that are seen as “realistic”, that make use of perspective conventions that reproduce proportions similar to those captured by a camera – are somehow “natural”. Representation, according to Aumont, relies on a convention that agrees to depict (1997:74). Aumont ascribes a large part of the assumption of this confusion over “naturalness” to the conflation of “illusion, representation and realism” and, to prevent this confusion, distinguishes between two levels of “realism”:

The psycho-perceptual...all human being’s responses to the image are largely similar. Concepts such as “resemblance”...or “visual outlines” are common to all able-bodied human beings, even if only in a latent form; the socio-historical: some societies attach great importance to verisimilitudinous images, and are consequently driven to make rigorous definitions of the appropriate criteria of realism, which can vary and which set up a hierarchy in the acceptability of various images. (1997:74)

Comics artists turned theorists, such as Eisner and McCloud, and others, demonstrate that the comic-book creator can employ manipulation of both the psycho-perceptual and the socio-historical levels to affect how the story is read<sup>84</sup>. Low visual motivation, or “cartoon”-iness, as McCloud maintains (1993:36), is at the heart of comics language, in that it allows the character to be a kind of everyman, eliding specific physiological or cultural detail. But the image is not made up of just one element and, crucially, levels of motivation can vary, in comics, from, say, character to setting.

McCloud devotes much of a chapter (1993:34-46) to describing what he calls a “masking effect” that the “cartoon” face has on the viewer’s apprehension of the comic-book characters and comes to the conclusion that, “by de-emphasizing the appearance of the physical world in favor of the idea of form, the cartoon places itself in the world of concepts” (1993:41). McCloud connects this effect with our human tendency to perceive faces in the simplest random arrangements of shapes and connects that with our need to project our emotional life into the world.

McCloud also makes note of a comic-book convention in which comic-book panels can contain different levels of “cartooniness”, which is to say visual motivation, or detail in their visual content,

---

<sup>84</sup> David Crow concisely describes Barthes’ use of the term motivation as meaning: “to denote how much the signifier describes the signified. For example, a photograph is a highly motivated sign as it describes in detail the subject in the image. It looks like the thing or the person it represents. ... [A] photograph... is highly motivated whilst a cartoon... is less motivated” (2003:58).



in a single panel. This can be seen clearly in the illustration (Fig. 7) below where the character in foreground is rendered with a simple linear value in contrast to the use of tonal cross-hatching in the rendering of the background.

Figure 7: “Mask” Effect, detail from page in McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1994:31)



McCloud’s example (1994:31) shows that part of the visual coding the comic-book can employ is *shifting* levels of motivation between the layers of foreground, midground and background. This allows a single panel to operate in multiple modalities for the viewer, despite being a syncretic “whole” image. This freedom in the way one can treat the depiction of characters and environments within the same panel allows for great variation in treatment and varieties of progression from panel to panel.

In the introduction to his book on rendering, *Dynamic Light and Shade*, Burne Hogarth relates the well-known story of a nineteenth-century European ambassador who presents a painting of his king to a Chinese emperor. The painting is executed in the chiaroscuro manner popular at the time in Europe where strong directional lighting create highlights and dark shadows that model the face. The Chinese, whose code for the desirable portrait was linear with flat areas of colour and bi-lateral symmetry, could not understand this portrait and assumed there was something wrong with the king or that he had covered half his face in black make-up (2002:9).

This story makes explicit that Aumont's second level of realism – the socio-historical construction of codes for representation (1997:74) – deeply entrenched though they might be, are not common across all cultures and have a deceptive relationship to notion of the “natural”.

Aumont links the word “illusionism” to the first, “psycho-perceptual” level, but cautions that the need for illusionistic images should not be regarded as having developed in an “unambiguous way”. We can talk then about illusionistic images when we refer to black and white drawings which have the value of a high level of pictorial motivation despite not being mistakeable for the object (1997:72). It is important to note that illusionism has an agreed modal value. Illusionism requires us to understand the representational property of the image. When we look at drawings we know that it means something particular to show lots of detail, unlike when in photography we know that each shape has to be drawn in and rendered and so forms of “realism” in the comic-book indicate virtuous labour as well as modal choice which will carry meaning in very different ways from in photography. There are other modal reference points, however, that can make of associations to previous work in a given drawing medium or in other graphic media.

In *The Number One Game*, for instance, though I am making use of many of the realistic pictorial conventions of the adventure comic, I am also working with black and white line-art, particularly brushwork, that recalls print forms like the lino-cut, a form of artwork which has a proud tradition in Southern Africa and associations with the resistance art-forms of our recent history<sup>85</sup>.

### **The page as a visual rhetoric through guided eye travel**

In their visual presentation comic-books may vary widely, from glossy colour to photocopied black line-art, with even greater variety in page number and size. However, certainly in what one might call “mass-market” comics visual choices are seen by comic-book creators as being inextricably linked to the narrative elements of the comic-book. This responsiveness to the dictates of storytelling will determine design decisions to do with the “pace” and style of the visual narrative.

In the commercial production of comic-books (as seen in Chapter 2) these decisions are interdependent with its publication format and “market segment”. Pascal Lefèvre, (2000:91) argues for seeing publication format as guiding reader's expectations and the “possibilities and limitations put on the artists’, to quote the editors of *Comics and Culture* (2000:iii). The size and number of pages in the book, and also whether it is serialised (broken into parts), affects how a comic-book is produced, distributed and read. The decision to try to do *The Number One Game* as a long form

---

<sup>85</sup> Perhaps exemplified by Namibian lino-cut print artist John Muafangejo in his monograph *I Was Lonelyness* (1992).

book had implications beyond the opportunity of an epic hero's journey for Joe. It also affords the opportunity to work with visual progression over many pages and even episodes which then highlights the demands of layout in the long form comic-book.

*Panel Discussions* (Talon, 2003), a book of interviews with comic book writers, editors and artists, includes much useful material describing how comic-book creators see the process of encoding their projects. The interviews with noted creators of comic-books offers a useful producer perspective on visual story communication, which has an emphasis on the techniques of layout, composition and pacing of comics, particularly in longer stories. These techniques include the manipulation of the size and shape of the panel and the composition of the whole page in relationship to the individual panel but also emphasises the notional viewpoint of the drawing. There is use of terminology from film language, a good example being the concept of positioning a "camera" viewpoint<sup>86</sup> and the selection of 'shot-sizes'<sup>87</sup>.

Examples given show how aspects of the figure and scene can be emphasised by certain shot-sizes, for example the "Close Up" typically focuses on the face and tends to convey emotion rather than action. (Talon, 1991:203). This variation of size of the figure in the frame is a major device in many comic-books and a clear variety of shot sizes is visible on most pages of *The Number One Game*. In the illustration from *Batman* (Fig. 9) on page 83, below, there is a clear variety of sizes of objects, linking to narrative emphasis and design progression in the fight scene. This functions both to create progression in events and to emphasise the dynamism of the events. Scenes representing, for example, long conversations, and thereby heavy with dialogue (and, of necessity, speech bubbles) will require a different visual treatment to action scenes.

The common use in visual storytelling media of the "cropping" of the figure to a close up, in which only the head and shoulders of the character are visible, or mid-shot, normally from the waist up, and other approaches such as the use of silhouette or viewpoint to hide or reveal the features of a character can provide a sense of "cinematic" narrative. That is to say the panel by panel "viewpoint" is manipulated for the reader to orient themselves in their enjoyment of the story. These devices rely heavily on the notion of "closure" in conveying parts of the figure or scene.

---

<sup>86</sup> Eisner demonstrates camera viewpoint, showing the use of "worm's" and "bird's eye views" for instance (1996:90).

<sup>87</sup> The term "Shot size" refers to designations such as "Close-Up", "Mid-Shot" and "Long-Shot" (or "Full Shot") from filmmaking which refer to the size of the figure in the frame. These are illustrated by Mike Mignola in *Panel Discussions* (Talon, 2003:203). The "close" to "long" system is based on the idea of the camera viewpoint, how far the camera is from the subject and this suggests that the viewer is an observer situated in a specific spatial relation to the represented scene, in this way the viewer's psychological point of view can be manipulated.

In describing “closure”, Richard Zackia<sup>88</sup> uses the examples from fine art of Michelangelo’s famous Sistine Chapel fresco panel that shows the figures of Adam and God stretching their arms out to each other (2002:55). There is a gap between the fingers of the two figures, which is small but noticeable and it is this gap that allows the viewer to create closure, to imagine the moment of the fingers touching or the power that must flow or did flow, invisibly perhaps, from the one to the other. Zackia emphasises the near-interactivity of this technique that selects a moment or view that will force the viewer to apply closure, to imagine (2002:55). This kind of closure is commonplace in all contemporary visual media, for instance many photographic and painted images of people crop off the lower parts of the body with the frame. The codes of visual representation allow us to understand that those legs exist in a notional space outside the margin of the picture. Closure allows us to imagine those legs and the rest of the environment that the represented person is occupying and in this can apply to *space* but closure can also apply to our understanding of the representation of *time*. As in the example of the fingers of Adam and God above we might imagine an earlier or later *moment*.

Closure is a central feature of reading the comic-book in that it promotes the imaginative participation of the reader and allows them to richly construct the fictive world<sup>89</sup>. The interviews in *Panel Discussions* (Talon, 2003) with noted comics artists like Dick Giordano, Mike Mignola and David Mazzucchelli are dominated by the control of visual information through such techniques of closure. It is the “layout” of this information that controls pacing and story delivery, in these interviews there seems a strong consensus that design choices such as the shapes of panels determine their “duration”. Mazzucchelli, for one, sees the “rhythm and flow” of the work as being dependent on panel arrangements; “how you read the panels across the page is very interesting, and really controls what’s going on” (Talon, 2003:113). It is clear that in the comics language *what* is being shown in the panel is not the only determinant of how we read the image or what we read from it. The shape and size of the panel, as well as its relation to the other panels constructs meaning through creating sequence and emphasis.

In the visual sense it is this treatment of the drawn subject that creates our reading of character from panel to panel (not to discount what may exist in dialogue or as summary in a script or in another

---

<sup>88</sup> In Zackia’s *Perception and Imaging* he writes about what he describes as the “Gestalt-derived” principles that include “Closure”(2002:48).

<sup>89</sup> McCloud and Eisner both refer to panel to panel inferences as being major indicators of story and McCloud devotes much of the fourth chapter of his *Understanding Comics, Time Frames* (1993:94-117 ) to the control of time by panels.

medium's, say filmic, adaptation). We see the characters "perform" from a particular viewpoint (even if the treatment of perspective and form is too simple to associate with photography), showing themselves to us by the created shapes of their outlines, the fall of shadow on them (or not), their facial features, the extent of their rendering and their placement in the space of the composition.

The putative reader, then, sees much more than just "what" is there. "Where" it is is equally important, as well as "how" it is treated and what is not there but should be, what *is* where what should be is not, and so on. In the decoding of meaning from a comic-book text viewers are involved in the general activity of reading pictorial representation but made more specific by their awareness of the structuring devices common in comic-books. The special, learned, structuring devices in the comic-book and the creator's approach to their use in depicting story material become a part of the audience's perception of that work, part of their sense of its aesthetic.

It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that the "percept"<sup>90</sup> each reader may have of each image is not identical, influenced, as it would be, by personal and literary/cultural experience but that there are conventional and generally accepted ways of guiding visual responses in the development of the percept. For instance, Dr Margaret Livingstone describes the experiments of a Dr. A.L. Yarbus, in which a device is used to trace the precise direction of a person's acute central area of "Foveal" vision (2002:79)<sup>91</sup>.

Yarbus found that the subject tended to look most at those parts of the picture that contained high-contrast and fine detail, as well as items of biological significance (like other humans). It must be that our peripheral vision picks out those areas of the visual scene with high detail and contrast or potential interest and sends a message to the eye-movement system to plan the next eye movement so that the fovea lands on a part of the visual scene that is rich in information (2002:78).

It seems from Livingstone that there is some innate subjectivity, but commonality also in visual perception and that, though we are not all seeing the same image in the same way there are some typical patterns to how we perceive them. In the illustration of Dr Yarbus's eye-travel experiment, black lines are a literal record or trace of eye movements of the test subject over an image. The composition of the image relates strongly to the pattern of eye-travel revealed by the trace, which,

---

<sup>90</sup> The term "percept", is used to distinguish the image as it exists on the page from the image that a person sees, what is *perceived* visually. As Zackia defines it, the percept is the "product of the sum" of a viewer's perceptual process, optical, neuro-biological and mental, as opposed to the physical or source image(2002:62).

<sup>91</sup> Livingstone illustrates this experiment in her book, *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing* (2002:79).

however looks like a rough, repeated traced line over the elements of the picture. The movements of the eye seem to replicate the placement, direction and orientation of the visual elements of the picture. Traces reveal movements primarily up and down strong graphic elements such as tree trunks and branches, and a heavy focus on the human figure in the middle foreground, revealing psychological interest.

From the above we can see that the viewer's percepts are formed by the process of the eye's tracing of the image. The composition in a real way guides our apprehension of the visual material depicted, bringing a suggested sequence for reading *within* each drawing in its a panel, as well as from panel to panel. Thus visual-rhetorical devices that guide eye-travel (visual design and composition) provide a powerful and emotive experience out of the reading of the indisputable “fact” of the form. Visual storytelling that exploits both the representational and abstract qualities of the graphic form can be strongly mythic in the Barthesian sense as they can defy a clear analytical response through this combination and the participation of the viewer through closure.

Comic-book artists are attuned to the responses of the reader's eye and have developed ways controlling this. Artist Dick Giordiano maintains that “the way the eye moves from panel to panel on the page must be controlled. Typically, the eye will move from shape to shape in quick succession especially if a trait or form repeats. When the reader sees a white oval surrounded by color and tone, the eye immediately searches out the next oval in succession. This is how the comic story is read. Art can also take advantage of this concept to link visual information” (Talon, 2003 :74). The language of comics, then, employs visual structuring devices such as what Giordiano refers to as “spotting blacks” to guide the pattern and pace of the reader's eye travel in part through the repetition of elements such as speech bubbles and panels. Another *Panel Discussions* comic-book artist, Mike Wierengo, demonstrates how the “panel-grid” can be used to pace out narrative information and lend emphasis to certain moments. Wierengo notes that the use of panel-grids avoids readerly “confusion about moving from left to right, top to bottom” (Talon, 2003: 51).

The illustration of a page from *Batman number 393 The Dark Rider* (Detective Comics, March, 1986; please see Fig. 9, below) offers specific examples of treatment in the moment chosen and depicted as an event. The event is composed using the figure drawings, and from our ability to form closure – to deduce the links between poses. Frozen moments are like a high-speed photograph and stand in contrast to blur or speed lines, another way of depicting time. My own examples in *The*

*Number One Game* of the use of the frozen moment are when Joe jumps backwards into the water on the top tier of page 4 and on page 13 on the second tier when he remembers himself running from the fire. Speed lines are used on page 5 for Nestor's jump off the mountain and bullet-paths on page 19.

Dick Giordiano, contributor to this *Batman* comic, uses the term “spotting blacks” for “heavy areas of ink on a page which move the eye in a planned way”. This is one means of creating visual weight on the page, by punctuating it with areas of solid black<sup>92</sup>. Please see below (Fig. 9) for Giordiano's use of this technique. I have also used it, see Page 6 of *The Number One Game*, for example, where I have used the darkness of shadow areas in the alley to punctuate the Bergies interaction with Joe. Joe remains on the edge of the light areas throughout the conversation, while the Bergies appear as light on dark. This serves to separate both from their background while creating a rhythm and flow through the counterpointing of dark and light areas through the page.

This is intended to subliminally represent aspects of the characters' dynamic with each other, and in the panels where they are seen in a frontal view, how they seem to each other. Joe, as can be understood from the dialogue, was expecting a “proper” building to be there when he meets the Bergies. This is a critical moment in the narrative and I wanted to emphasise the dinginess and darkness of the alley the *Bergies* are in to associate them with the dimly lit and obscure. The modal use of chiaroscuro in black and white in *The Number One Game*, brings them out as light emerging from dark while Joe comes off dark against the light background. Joe is seen first from their point of view, surrounded by light, and this creates a contrast between him and the *Bergies* that continues into the panels that show a side view of the trio. On the level of visual signification I was hoping to associate the Bergies with darkness, the unknown, the strange. This is also why they take Joe up to a cave, with its associations of hidden knowledge and ordeals.

---

<sup>92</sup> Giordiano goes on to say, “spotting blacks anchor important information on the page. Solid black areas place shadows and differentiate between the three planes of foreground, middleground and background. These heavy values pull the eye and move the reader through the story like stepping stones along a path. An interplay between positive and negative shapes occurs. At a quick glance, the eye sees the dark areas and the mind tries to connect them [...] [they] serve to frame an element, direct the eye, anchor objects, or create a mood” (2003:75).

This visual decision associates the Bergies with an archetypal value: they are twilight creatures, slightly removed from the world. This is an example of how a subliminal aspect of visual design relates to the mythic encoding of the narrative, a device like the flat black area can make a character seem more fearsome, as in *Batman*, or as a certain kind of mentor character, as in *The Number One Game*.

The panels from pages 1 to 4 from *The Number One Game* are good examples of panel dimensions varying the sense of the duration of the image it contains. Pages 2 and 3 contain small panels in top and bottom rows which have short durations suggested by the events shown. The central aerial view of Cape Island seems relatively long, due to its detailed representation of scale and the subject – these relative proportions indicate decades-worth of difference between the “now” of the story and the “now” of the reader. A further example of this can be found in comparing the last panel of page 36, to the images on page 5. On page 36, Joe is lying in bed; and that this is a long moment is shown by the size of the image, the stasis of the figures and the breaking up of text into separate boxes. On the other hand, on the lowest tier of page 5, the moment must be short given the narrowness of the panel, the fact that Nestor is suspended in space and that the dialogue in the speech bubble is minimal. Multiple moments can also be shown in one frame as in a cinematic montage, such as in *The Number One Game*'s montage of Daimler's “businesses” and Joe learning the details of them as shown on the middle tier of page 36.

There are also moments of ambiguous duration of such as in the “moment” shown in *Batman The Dark Rider*'s last tier in the illustration (Fig. 9) below. In this panel Batman seems to think (there is a thought bubble), throw one gangster into another while running towards the viewer and think again while seeming to notice, along with us, the final pictorial element of the panel in the bottom right-hand corner, a close view of the gun pointed at him. In the panel there are four figures posed frozen in mid-action but the poses do not seem to sustain a moment long enough to contain all the events being represented. However this convenient temporal ambiguity serves the narrative premise well in that it helps to represent how Batman is overwhelmed, despite it being established in the *Batman* tradition that he is a canny, quick-thinking fighter. Access to Batman's interior thoughts allows us to identify with him amplifying the sense of urgency in the scene.

Similarly *The Number One Game*'s first story-image on Page 1 is temporally ambiguous in that it has what I would call a timeless quality. The image represents a drawing of an aged postcard of Cape Town from 2005 (the fictive “distant past”), lying in a rubbish bin, and is really a still life.



This is meant to point up the contrast with the following pages which is the fictive “now” of Cape Island, the most explicit way I could depict the changes to the environment. The view of rubbish bins also refers to and foreshadows the *Bergies*’ viewpoint in later pages as we see the Professor forage in them, on page 5 of *The Number One Game*.

Elements of the drawing can break the frame of the panel to create visual dynamism. For example in the illustration (9), below from the Batman story *The Dark Rider*, the gun in the top panel draws our attention by escaping the rectangle and Batman’s boot draws our eye down to the second tier of the page as well as emphasising the power of Batman’s kick. Note that although the gangster he has kicked must (in part, at least) be closer to us than Batman’s boot, he is contained within the rectangle to emphasise the power of Batman’s kick.

*Figure 8: An indication of the finished page-edge, The Number One Game Page 05, see Addendum 3*



Exclamations and speech bubbles can frequently overlap panel borders for visual emphasis and design considerations such as breaking up the grid of panels. For example on page 5 of *The Number One Game*, the lettering for the Professor’s exclamation of “AHA!” overlaps panel borders as does his exclamation “Godamnit!”, illustrated below (Fig. 10) for the sub-section on lettering. Another special technique is the use of the “open” panel that does not have a drawn border. This panel, as in the illustration (Fig. 8) above from *The Number One Game*, is intended to remain “open” to the edge of the printed page. Figure 8 shows the intended page edge of the physical paper in the final

publishable version of *The Number One Game* indicating with black the non-page area<sup>93</sup>. This device of “non-framing” can be used for an entire page or double-page as on pages 8 and 9 of *The Number One Game*, where the image’s drawn area is intended to go all the way to the edge. The term used in print media for pages in which the image has no margin and goes all the way to the edge of the page is “page bleed”. This “page bleed” is commonly used for double-page spreads or “splash” pages, such as in my example, that contain one large image over the two facing pages.

---

<sup>93</sup>Unfortunately the printouts of *The Number One Game* in the addenda for this thesis does not give page bleeds as they are printed here out of format therefore I provide the illustration above (Fig 8). Page-edges are provisionally indicated with a border in the version of *The Number One Game* printed for this thesis.



Figure 9: *Batman* # 393 “*The Dark Rider*”, art by Dick Giordano (March 1986).  
Reproduced from Vaz (1989:139).

## Lettering the text – Narration, dialogue and sound design in comic-books

Although they are both graphic marks, we must consider the apparent differences in function between the words and pictures of a comic-book as text and images, signs that are in totally different orders of communication<sup>94</sup>. I have argued that the comic-book integrates text and image signs into its own language, so that text often has an aural value but in a comic-book, that text is also really *lettering* and always has a perceivable visual form. As noted above, lettering is done by specific professionals in mainstream, traditional comics and, until the widespread use of computers, was executed almost exclusively by hand. The visual transcription of the letterform in their choice of “font” or “typeface” and the variety and employment of these is a major part of the modal control the comic-book creator has in delivering the text of his or her story. Different genres of comic-books will have different aesthetic and technical approaches. I have used digital typeface for the same reason, as it is now used in the mainstream comics industry and many by independent comics’ creators, for its speed and flexibility<sup>95</sup>.

Chris Ware, for instance, hand-letters his work, and does not attempt to imitate machine fonts. In his interview with Ware, Raeburn notes that Ware has practiced from “old hand-lettering manuals” (2004:39) in order to master the connection between type-design and the hand-drawn associations of his work. Hand-lettering, like drawing in an age of digital manipulation of found images and letterforms, declares itself as a creative choice and as such, is meaningful in itself<sup>96</sup>.

Anecdotally people seem to find a difference between how typography and hand-lettering “feel”, a sense that “type” is somehow cold. Technically, hand-lettering allows a more idiosyncratic look, as it is easier to vary the things that a computer is good at keeping constant such as the “base line”, “x height”, “kerning” and “leading” of the text<sup>97</sup>.

---

<sup>94</sup> This despite that, as Miller puts it: “both text and image are something seen with the eyes and made sense of as a sign.” Miller also asks the question that underpins the consideration of this relationship, “What, in fact, is the difference between reading a word and making sense of a picture?” (1992:73).

<sup>95</sup> In *The Number One Game* I have used the digital font “*A.C.M.E. Secret Agent*” for the all dialogue and narration, largely because it is a good replica of standard adventure-comic hand-lettering.

<sup>96</sup> Ware, though, really fits into an alternative comics’ tradition, having studied at art school, exhibited in major galleries, and published in alternative newspapers. Raeburn’s monograph on Ware includes photographs of Ware’s sculptures and is published by Yale University Press.

<sup>97</sup> I rely on Jury for definitions for these typographic terms and theory, Eisner and McCloud focus more on how shapes, values and line-weight of the letterform can create certain “voice” effects in comics. Jury gives a useful scheme for language in the context of typographic design – with three classes of information: “phonology (sound patterns), syntax (arrangement), and semantics (meaning).” Jury notes that, with the exception of onomatopoeia, written or printed words are a “purely arbitrary sound-sign, the meaning of which must be learned.” Nuance of voice, body language and facial expressions are key elements of communication that are not, according to Jury, generally captured in typefaces although there are *pictographic* fonts that work like “emoticons” – smiley faces and so on (2002:134).

Figure 10: Hand-lettered “sound” versus font for “speech”, detail, *The Number One Game* Page



This forms part of the explanation for the hand-lettered look of even the digital fonts used in many comics, including *The Number One Game*, *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*. The body text of a comic is made up of narration and dialogue that is intended to capture the voice of characters, though this must be limited by stylistic consistency. Jury (2002:134) explains that “typographic” languages have been more stable than the spoken word due to the role of formality and tradition within the process of authorship, type composition, and proof-reading. The indefinite length of time that a recorded “arrangement” survives in its printed form is also an important factor...The spoken word is, generally, less formal.”

Either way of generating letters can make use of a variety of “font” effects, however. Within the language of comics, where lettering may display the title of the strip or book, or be read as speech due to its place inside a bubble, lettering has a specified function according to where it appears. There are a number of categories that we can distinguish for sounds that appear in comic-books but the first distinction should be between “voices” and “noises”. The human voice, like the face and body, exercises a certain fascination for the reader. What this means in effect is that the human voice, including narration, or voice-over, or dialogue<sup>98</sup> is treated in a different way from sound

---

<sup>98</sup> Which can be further divided between *audible* dialogue and what might be termed “vocalisation”– as in the Prof’s frequent indistinct mutterings along the lines of “Brrmrwr”.

effects or “foley” and ambient sound. The typographic treatment of sound effects is usually more elaborate than that of dialogue; they are usually treated as “display” rather than “body” type and not put into a text box or speech bubble.

Whether meant to be read as shop-signage in a drawing of a street (as on page 14 of *The Number One Game*), the names of the clubs such as “Query” and “Passion” or as dialogue in a speech-bubble, lettering will also be distinguishable by its placement and size, its bounding frame (if any) and the nature and complexity of its design. Graphic and typographic designers refer to the difference between “body” or “text” type” and “display” type in the design and placement of lettering<sup>99</sup>. This distinction is helpful for instance in the illustration (Fig. 10), above, taken from Page 6 of *The Number One Game*, which shows the Professor shouting and then talking (loudly), with the shouted “Godamnit” being hand-lettered to convey the roughness of his voice and then the use of the font (but in bold) for his speech which is effectively the “body type”. The decision to limit hand lettering to display faces helps to keep continuity but limits expressive possibilities.

Narration is a problematic issue in *The Number One Game* in that I have received feedback from various readers, and I agree that the narrator is not clear in the current version of the first three episodes. The idea was that there would be a sequence of narrators, one per episode, these narrators being listed at the top of each of the Episode Page Summaries in Addendum 2. Project exhibition feedback helped me to understand that the identity of the narrator was not clear enough and I am considering minor rewrites in the future to simplify this aspect of narration. A temporary solution to the problem is provided in Addendum 4 through the use of explanatory covers at the front of each episode that might be used in any serialised form of the comic-book either as covers or possibly as promotional images.

## Conclusion

I hope to have shown how the operation of the formal devices and density of meaning specific to the comic-book makes it a particularly viable medium for mythic speech. As established above and in Chapter 3, the comics language and the comic-book object have been historically associated with various genre of entertainment and types of reader. *The Number One Game* bears similarities to

---

<sup>99</sup> David Jury’s *About Face*, a typographic guide, contains the following distinction, “the sub-division of type into text and display serves to emphasise that there are fundamental differences in the way text and display types are used and expected to function. Text type is used for continuous text – cool, quiet, and, up to a point, ‘invisible’... Display is reserved for titles, headings and sub-headings. Display characters, by their very nature, are designed to shout; draw attention to themselves and to work more independently of each other” (2002:30).

*Judge Dredd* and *Batman* in terms of approach, genre and use of mythic and archetypal reference points. *The Number One Game*, as discussed above, and in Chapter 2, features characters who have archetypal qualities although they are also rendered unique by their cultural specificity.

Visual expression here interacts with the formal “linguistic” possibilities available to a comic-book in terms of drawing and writing. This requires representational strategies to do with the manipulation of the signficatory value of the images, exaggerated or abstracted, and making use of genre, composition, voice, tone and rendering. The qualities of the resulting words and images interact with each other and those of previous comic-books and other traditional and popular representations to make up the comic-book’s delivery of its mythic constructions.

Having provided narrative and mythic analyses of these characters’ story worlds and archetypes in Chapter 2, here, the use of comics-specific visual devices and storytelling tools for the construction of the heroic comic-book narrative has been considered. This aids in elaborating the role of the mythic in both my own project work and that of my primary references. The many aspects the comic-book for expressive interpretation of the story have utility in making the comics language a fertile ground for mythic speech in the Barthesian as well as Campbellian sense.

The designer of the comic-book page uses the formal conventions mentioned in Chapter 2 and further identified in this chapter above to make up a dynamic space of pictorial narrative that moves us through combinations of visual and verbal representations of the events of the story. In a comic-book, this is how the plot is communicated, page by page, panel by panel. One can, of course, make decisions of what is to be shown and what is to be implied in the script or planning but it is established that this planning is always centred around how the comics page works, its format, design and graphic nature. For example the decisions not to show Joe’s assault of the “client” that takes place in the first episode, or the sex act between him and the girls he takes to his room after the graduation is primarily because such forceful images would make Joe *too* ambiguous a heroic figure.

It is further established that pacing and rhythm are determined by the design of pages and their dynamic interplay, the overall composition of facing pages, the holding back of revelations until the turn of the page, or next week’s instalment. The unique visual and tactile property of the bound book, whether comic-book, or illustrated book, is that one has the experience of turning a page, in a moment seeing that overall page or, more usually double-page, as a whole visual entity before

reading the sum of the text and images “properly”. This overall impression and then sequenced reading is not quite replicated in any other form.

The variety, quantity, placement and dimensions of the image elements on the page, the number and content of the text boxes and speech bubbles, the relative width, height and line-weight of the panel borders and the use of special devices such as overlapping, all make up the aesthetic and lexical structure of the comic-book within which the representational strategies and modalities of drawing and writing employed by the creators interact.

The comic-book controls the pacing out of the story through choices that determine the perceived duration of the “moment” shown in the drawing and through counterpointing that “moment” with what is “told” – by the lettering that conveys the dialogue, narration and other sounds. The placement of these units in the design-structure of the page, and their proportional relationships, also affects the duration of notional time depicted in, and between each panel. For instance, in *The Number One Game* there is much dialogue between Joe and the Bergies on page 6, Episode 1. This dialogue drives the rhythm of the page and slows down the seeming intervals between the drawings. The treatment of this scene tries to emphasise a dynamic between the characters that has Rosie dominate the conversation while Joe hesitates and is constantly interrupted<sup>100</sup>. On the comic-book page, the relative sizes of their speech bubbles physically show the different quantities of “speech” each character has and so represents this dynamic visually before the dialogue is even read.

The degree and nature of the visual and “verbal” complexity in the comic-book can change and develop, which provides progression in the experience of the story. These kinds of variables make up what one might call the poetics as well as aesthetics of the comics language. These interact with the use and adaptation of existing archetypal representations to produce an interpretation of a fictional story that emphasises the appropriate dramatic moments and interactions. The story itself will have mythic elements that bear some relationship with ideology. The techniques employed by comics artists and writers to influence the experience of the reader are themselves devices for the decoding of myth. The accumulation of these aspects of the treatment of visual-rhetorical elements, elements which may not be unique to comics but are developed into a particularly elaborate system in this language, allow for a particularly high level of compression of archetypal and mythic associations. However, as I have shown in discussion of the three comic-book texts, it is when these associations are combined with conventions from different narrative or visual genres that the mythic

---

<sup>100</sup> This and Nestor’s arrival at the bottom of that page is to help motivate why Joe does not just run away then.



nature of the story invites more complex readings than those set out by conventional associations. In the case of Joe K, it is the evolution of his depiction over time that invests him with a more enigmatic persona – one with heroic potential that will only become manifest later in the story – than that of the typical Superhero figures. Like Batman and Judge Dredd, Joe participates in actions and decisions that may make the reader uncomfortable about his heroism. Yet the visual representation of him leads us to recognise him as heroic, from the cover and opening episode that show him stoically accepting his fate to the planned images for the climactic final battle with Nic Lord. Thus the reader is left to reconcile the (visually) sympathetic protagonist, with the lost, potentially corruptible figure who turns away from the forces of good who are meant to guide him, who participates in assault, who becomes drawn into an evil empire and in other ways makes doubtful choices. That we know he is our hero is a function of visual convention – therefore we have to consider these flaws as a critical part of who he will become, and what his failures tell us about the world he lives in.

As Barthes reminds us, myth has in it the nature of an “alibi” for the concept<sup>101</sup>. The form of the comic-book is shown to be able to produce an experience that is richly constructed for various emotive effects, aspects of which have been shown in this chapter. These aspects of the comic-book are specifically designed to deliver the story in a way that draws the reader into imagining the represented events, settings and characters. This “drawing in” gives pleasure in itself but also functions precisely as the “alibi” for the ideologies inherent in my mythic comic-book, *The Number One Game*. In the equivocal comic-book text the knowing audience member may also have the pleasure of being addressed as an experienced reader of the heroic myth dynamic.

---

<sup>101</sup> He claims that: “the ubiquity of the signifier in myth exactly reproduces the physique of the *alibi*”(2000:123).

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a production of poetical fantasy from pre-historic times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Müller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these. The various judgements are determined by the viewpoints of the judges. For when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age (Joseph Campbell, 1949:382).

Joseph Campbell's mono-mythic patterns answer some faculty of the psyche involved in the personal imaginings and emotional life of the individual. Thus he stresses archetypal generalities and tendencies, abstracted from their historical contexts. Roland Barthes, on the other hand, uses semiological analysis to show how myth simultaneously “depletes” and simultaneously indexes cultural and historical contexts. While Campbell is concerned with the general patterns of archetypes abstracted from their history into *story*, Barthes' conception of myth is as a mode of speech that falls outside of history and context, and yet lays claim to a naturalized link to that context. Where Barthes' concept of a mythic inflexion in speech sees myth as a distorting kind of speech, Campbell focusses on the emotional truths that can be conveyed via myth.

This thesis does not claim to reconcile the Barthesian view of myth with that of Jung and his followers. However I would argue that the idea of the “mono-myth” can be understood as another layer in the chain of signification, somewhere between the levels of narrative generally, and specific media. In the preceding chapters I have shown how many communication strategies used by comic-books are shared between media; thus the comic-book enjoys both a hybrid use of such strategies and a range of ways to “mythologise” values, and provide readerly pleasure.

In my own work, my aim is to create a hybrid form of comic-book that combines genre elements and mythemes (previously constructed pockets of myth) to re-work my subjective perceptions of a real, historically contextualised society into a fictitious, futuristic, abstracted (which is to say, mythical) story world. On the one hand, this story world will seem familiar to readers of comic-books familiar with the conventions that inform the visual modalities and heroic narrative. On the other hand, the representation of the unfamiliar settings, characters and the narrative will appear

“naturalized” to the reader, because of the suggestion that they are “motivated” (to borrow Barthes’ terminology) by the history and socio-economic context of South Africa, and of Cape Town in particular.

In the comic-book project *The Number One Game*, I am trying to unite the goals of personal expression and entertainment using a form which is poorly established in South African society. It has always been my understanding of the heroic adventure in comic-book form that it makes use of archetypal characters with exaggerated powers who play out dramatic conflicts. I have employed a heroic narrative patterning, including archetypal figures, to structure the visual images as well as the story-line. This patterning derives from an understanding of the mythic as expressing fundamental processes of the human psyche. It is clear from authors such as Vogler and Campbell that these archetypes and the narrative pattern of the heroic mono-myth provide only a suggestive schema; they are abstracted from the richly specific body of world myth. Use of these structures allows me to adapt my perspectives of “my” city, Cape Town, to the fictional future story-world of Cape Island, in which my narrative, a myth of progress, unfolds. The combination of this tradition of representation and local, idiosyncratic material seemed the most relevant and powerful approach to create novel entertainment in comic-book form.

Creation of such a mythic entertainment requires consideration of the mainstream heroic comic-book, as embodied in the dominant superhero trope from the action and adventure genre of comic-books, as discussed in Chapter 2. The adaptation of the traditions and techniques of such heroic comic-books into the novel context of Cape Town has led me to devise a comic-book in which unusual protagonists (Joe K and his allies, the Bergies) do battle against a figure of First World corporate hegemony and capitalist neo-colonialism.

In chapter 3 the narrative construction of *The Number One Game* has been considered. In my comic-book, archetypal values and patterns in the arrangement of narrative and visual representations have been used to generate an accessible hero-myth for the Cape. In conceiving this myth I hope it is in the nature of a self-fulfilling prophecy, that a reader might read *through* the myth that if one has a good heart and a strong will, and a little help, one can find the skills one needs to adapt usefully to one's society.

The hero must go further than achieving personal success, and perform selfless acts on behalf of others, as Batman does on behalf of victims of crime and Judge Dredd does for the law. As Vogler has it, “at root the idea of Hero is connected with self-sacrifice” (1996:35)<sup>102</sup>.

It has been argued that the heroic story hinges, then, on what qualities are tested in the hero, and how that hero has to grow to meet those tests. Joe is a different kind of hero from those in the mainstream Anglophone heroic comic-book because the story-world relates to the issues and concerns of Cape Town, and not New-York or London, as in the case of *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*. My intention in this story has been to offer a heroic depiction which is indigenous to my home town and which portrays both the hardships and the openings that a capitalist modernity has to offer.

In the *Number One Game* I am seeking to create a myth concerning the nature of merit and success, dominant values in a consumerist society which my narrative will interrogate. I am not making a didactic tract, however, and am aware that readers will construct their own meanings from the comic-book. The Barthesian approach allows me to avoid deterministic readings of my own work. *The Number One Game* is relevant, in my view, because it engages with popular myth and challenges traditions of representation that it forms part of.

Comic-books are an inextricable combination of the pictorial and verbal arts in that their images are made into and for the purposes of language, while their text is spatially arranged and graphically significant. The drawings in a comic-book are always meant to be seen as fictional and representing events that are intended as entertaining. These drawings are also always part of a sequence and there is a visual structure for the apprehension of text and image that is manipulable to create variations of duration and sequence in the delivery of the narrative. The comic-book employs lettering, panelling and pictures, which themselves depict time and take up varied amounts of the reader's time in the reading of them. Thus comic-books have potential for a wide variation for imparting story information as they guide the eye around the drawings and letterings. Chapter 4 shows the connection between the mythic image and the use of graphic images that are both read as signs and have subliminal effects. These effects are employed and combined with the treatment of the narrative scenario to provide entertainment.

The comic-book tradition I am drawing on is defined both by the mainstream and the marginal (often termed “comix”). I want *The Number One Game* to be defined as a “comic-book” with

---

<sup>102</sup>Vogler continues that “the Hero archetype represents the ego’s search for identity and wholeness” (1996:35).

emphasis on the word “book”. The comic-book can draw on the pleasures specific to both the language of comics, and that of genre which arises out of visual storytelling media such as cinema and illustration. In the industry and culture where the Anglophone comic-book originates, familiar tropes *are* frequently recycled according to tired formulae. However there is also comic-book material, both mainstream and alternative, which invite more complex responses from the reader. Either type of comic-book may make use of mythic approaches, and include archetypes or stereotypes; however, through the adaptation and deformation of “type” characteristics, a comic-book can also become autonomous in its meanings. The mythic inflexion can be used to generate alternative narratives by speaking against dominant forms of pleasure. The comic-book I am proposing would appeal to both comics audiences in serialised form, but might equally be read by readers of prose fiction. I suggest that the comic-book can encompass both the desire for pure escapism, and more literary or philosophical expectations. My references to *Judge Dredd* and *Batman* show an equivocality of position – they are mainstream and popular but certainly not typical, and they use familiar codes and “formulae” in ways that can appear to raise ambiguous, even self-contradictory representations. Thus they challenge the reader to make sense of their unique combinations of the codes of comic language, and the codes of myth – and in this sense they serve as a model for my work.

## Sources

- Alpers, S. 1979. Style is what you make it: The Visual Arts Once Again, in B Lang (ed.) *The concept of style*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.
- Althouse, M. 2001. Kevlar Armor, Heat Seeking Bullets, and Social Order: A Mythological Reading of Judge Dredd, in *Comics & ideology*, edited by M McAllister, E Sewell & I Gordon. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Arnheim, R. 1954. *Art and Visual Perception*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Arnheim, R. 1970. *Visual Thinking*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Aristotle. 1987. *Poetics*. Translated by R. Janko. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Aumont, J. 1997. *The Image*. London: British Film Institute Press.
- Bancroft, T. 2006. *Creating characters with personality*. New York: Watson-Guptill.
- Barker, M. & Brooks, K. 2000. Waiting for Dredd, in *Action/Spectacle Cinema, a Sight and Sound Reader*, by José Arryo (ed). London: British Film Institute.
- Barker, M. 1989. *Comics: ideology, power and the critics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barthes, R. 2000. Myth Today, in *Mythologies*. London: Random House.
- Belsey, C. 2005. *Culture and the real: theorizing cultural criticism*. Routledge: New York
- Berger, M. 1998. *The crisis of criticism*. New York: The New Press.
- Block, B. 2001. *The visual story: seeing the structure of film, TV, and new media*. Burlington Ma: Focal Press.
- Booker, C. 2004. *The seven basic plots: why we tell stories*. London: Continuum.
- Burton, T (dir.). 1989. *Batman*. [Film]. Warner Bros.
- Callahan, B. (ed.). 2004. *The New Smithsonian Book Of Comic Book Stories*. U.S.A.: Smithsonian/New College Press.
- Campbell, J. 1949. *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cannon, D (dir.). 1995. *Judge Dredd*. [Film]. Hollywood Pictures.
- Caputo, T. 2003. *Visual storytelling: the art and technique*. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications.
- Carrier, D. 2000. *The Aesthetics of Comics*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press

- Christiansen, H & Magnussen, A. (eds.) 2000. *Comics & culture: analytical and theoretical approaches to comics*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Cobley, P. 2001. *Narrative*. London: Routledge.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1983. *Life and Times of Michael K*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1990. *Age of Iron*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Crow, D. 2003. *Visible signs: an introduction to semiotics*. Lausanne: AVA Publishing.
- Dews, P. 1987. *Logics of disintegration: Post-structuralist thought and the claims of critical theory*. London: Verso.
- Eisner, W. 1996. *Comics & sequential art & graphic storytelling*. Tamarac: Poorhouse Press.
- Elkins, J. 2003. *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Field, S. 1979. *The foundations of screenwriting*. New York: MJF Books.
- Gibbons, C. & Varnum, R. 2001. *The language of comics, word and image*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Goulart, R. 1991. *Over 50 years of American comic books*. Lincolnwood: Publications International.
- Graves, R. 1955. *The Greek myths, complete edition*. London: Penguin.
- Green, T (dir.). 2004. *A boy called Twist*. [Film] South Africa. [Sn].
- Groensteen, T. 2000. Why are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?, in *Comics & culture. Analytical and theoretical approaches to comics*, by H Christiansen & A Magnussen (eds.). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Hatfield, C. 2005. *Alternative comics: an emerging literature*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.
- Miller, J. 1992. *Illustration*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Hood, G. (dir.). 2004. *Tsotsi*. [Film]. South Africa. Premier Productions.
- Hogarth, B. 2002. *Dynamic light and shade*. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications.
- Hughes, T. (ed.). 1997. *Tales from Ovid*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Judge Dredd Annual* (sn). 1986. London: IPC.
- Jury, D. 2002. *About face: reviving the rules of typography*. Switzerland: Rotovision SA.
- Jung, C (ed.). 1990. *Man and his Symbols*. New York: Penguin.

- Kawa, A. 2000. What if the Apocalypse Never Happens: Evolutionary Narratives in Contemporary Comics, in *Comics & culture: analytical and theoretical approaches to comics*, by H Christiansen & A Magnussen (eds.). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Lang, B. (ed.). 1979. *The concept of style*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lefevre, P. 2000. The Importance of Being 'Published'. A Comparative Study of Different Comics Formats, in *Comics & culture: analytical and theoretical approaches to comics* by H Christiansen & A Magnussen (eds.) Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Livingstone, M. 2002. *Vision and art: the biology of seeing*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- McAllister, M, Sewell, E. & Gordon, I. (eds.). 2001. *Comics and ideology*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- McCloughlin, J. 2005a. DC's Crisis and Leibnizean Possible Worlds, in *Comics as philosophy*, by J McCloughlin (ed.). Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.
- McCloughlin (ed.). 2005b. *Comics as philosophy*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.
- McCloud, S. 1993. *Understanding comics: the invisible art*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Mda, Z.1991. *Ways of Dying*. South Africa: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Miller, F, Janson, K, Kane, B, Costanza, J & Varley, L. 1997. *Batman: the dark knight returns*. DC Comics. (Batman Series).
- Miller, F. 2003. The Interviews: 1981-2003. *The comics journal library*. Vol 2. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. 1986. *Iconology: image, text, ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moore, A & Bolland, B.1995. *Batman: the killing joke*. DC Comics. (Batman Series).
- Norris, C. 1982. *Deconstruction theory and practice*. London: Methuen.
- Podro, M. 1998. *Depiction*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pustz, M.J. 1999. *Comic book cultures*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.
- Raeburn, D. 2004. *Chris Ware*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rickard, M. (dir.). 2003. Thirteen Cents. [Short Film]. MA Project. London International Film School, London.
- Rubenstein, A. 1998. *Bad language, naked ladies and other threats to the nation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Roodt, D. (dir.). 2004. *Yesterday*. [Film]. HBO Films.



- Sabin, R. 1993. *Adult comics: an introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Sabin, R. 1996. *Comics, comix and graphic novels*. London: Phaidon Press Limited.
- Sabin, R. & Triggs T. (eds.). 2002. *Below critical radar: fanzines and alternative comics from 1976 to now*. Hove: Slab-O-Concrete.
- Sabin, R. 2000. Crisis in Modern American and British Comics, in *Comics & culture: analytical and theoretical approaches to comics* by H Christiansen & A Magnussen (eds.) Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Salecl, R & Žižek, S. (eds.). 2000. *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sontag, S. (ed.). 1982. *A Roland Barthes reader*. London: Random House.
- Talon, D. 2003. *Panel discussions, design and sequential art story telling*. Canada: Tomorrows Publishing.
- Tambling, J. 1991. *Narrative and ideology: an open guide to literature*. London: Open University Press.
- Thomson, I. 2005. Deconstructing the hero, in *Comics as philosophy*, J McClaughlin (ed.). Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.
- 2000 AD. 1977. [SI]: Fleetway/I.P.C
- Vaz, MC. 1989. *Tales of the dark knight: Batman's first fifty years 1939-1989*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Williams, R. 1970. *Keywords*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Willis, R. 1995. *Dictionary of World Myth*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.
- Wollheim, R. 1980. *Art and its objects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Vogler, C. 1996. *The writer's journey*. London: MacMillan.
- Zackia, R. D. 2002. *Perception and imaging*. [SI]: Focal Press.

## **Addendum 1:**

### **Story Overview: *The Number One Game* – the story of Joe the Computer Kid and the *Bergies* of Cape Island:**

*The Number One Game* is a comic-book set in a future Cape Town. It is the story of Joe K, a young man who arrives on 'Cape Island' with nothing, believing that he has a special destiny. When he eventually arrives at the building he was directed to (we find out only later by who), he finds it in ruins and inhabited by street-people (or *Bergies*). Two of them, 'Rosie' and 'the Prof', greet him like an old friend or long-lost nephew. Joe thinks they must be mad, drunk or high on something but he follows them and 'Nestor' – a tough-looking Rasta – up the mountain, at their insistence. They tell him he will meet 'the Old man', who, it is assumed, will explain things to Joe's satisfaction.

After a ritual in which Joe catches a glimpse of his future (but will not admit it), Rosie tells Joe to go with Nestor who has a place for him to stay (Rosie and the Prof live on the street).

Joe runs away from Nestor's place and lands up in the gangs where he finds work as a book-keeper and, later, IT manager. Joe attracts the attention of the owner of LordCorp, the largest company in Cape Island, Nic Lord. Lord Nic (as he is called in the tabloids) is a sinister European Prince of Darkness type with touches of Lord Charles Spencer, Tony Blair and Richard Branson.

Lord has Joe placed in a training program within his company headquarters (we find out later why), although they do not meet at this point. Joe does meet a fatherly scientist figure who is known as the Chief Technician. Joe has, in addition to his good education, a special affinity for computers and excels at his training. He graduates quickly and uses his newfound status as an honorary citizen of Cape Island to log on to Online Virtual Reality (OVR) game-platforms again, like he used to at school.

Eventually, though, Joe realises that LordCorp is at least as corrupt as the gangs he had been forced to join, and he makes plans to leave Cape Island. Joe does not realise how closely he is being watched by the company and he quickly runs into trouble. Rosie and Nestor help Joe out and display some extraordinary (although not impossible) abilities and they get away to the mountain. Nestor cuts a tracking-receiver out of Joe's body and promises to train Joe to be a 'dreadlock-ninja-warrior'.

It turns out that Nic Lord is planning a launch of his new OVR gaming platform and wanted Joe to be a kind of token contender in the tournament. Perhaps Joe should not have left the company. The Bergies have always shown disapproval of these 'computer-movie-games' but they explain to Joe that one of the problems facing the poor has been that they have no access to information or communications technology. They have their own, bad portals to information but they cannot get access to the kind of networks the 'citizens' and 'institutions' of Cape Island have.

Lordcorp begins to gear up for the massive launch of their new product, and invite all sorts of people to Cape Island. The Bergies tell Joe of their plan: that Joe enters the tournament to show the people of the Cape that OVR and the world information net are not the sole preserve of the wealthy. The Chief Technician turns out to be an old friend of Rosie's and offers to help them set up their own system so that Joe can practice without interference from Lordcorp. The four go to this meeting but it is a setup. Joe escapes but it looks like the others are all captured. All seems lost and, as Joe walks through the city he sees a news announcement officially inviting him to join the tournament. Nic Lord offers Joe a place in the tournament, promising to release the Bergies if he will co-operate. Joe agrees.

The tournament itself is a huge success with a live stadium audience and broadcasts all over the world. We see Joe competing against the best, and winning. We learn how the game is played and what it means for the public and competitors. In the final match between Joe and Nic Lord, the energy released by them destroys the tournament hall, just as a storm comes up and threatens Cape Island. Several things occur at this point: Rosie and the Prof escape from captivity, Nestor turns up to protect Joe from Lordcorp's interference and the holograms that are generated for the fight grow enormous and cover the landscape of Lions Head and Signal Hill. Everyone witnesses what looks like Joe destroying Nic Lord.

In the aftermath Joe is celebrated as the winner and Nic Lord has disappeared. Joe is féted all over town and is taken to meet the leaders of the poor communities around Stilt-town. Joe is annoyed at being turned into a celebrity when he wants to be a man of action like Nestor. Incidentally Nestor and Nazli are up to something together and Joe is jealous. We end with the knowledge that Nic Lord is alive and well but in hiding, and that Joe will be put up as a candidate in the elections for membership of the city council, but that he is uncertain in this new leadership role.

## Addendum 2:

### Point form Summary of Episodes 1-10

'The Number One Game': EPISODE 01

SYNOPSIS,

So It Goes...

(Narrated by Rosie)

1. We see an old postcard of Cape Town in about 2005 on top of a pile of rubbish.
2. While Rosie greets us and starts telling us about how hard life is for some, and various other portentous things, we see a teenage boy, 'Joe', walking through mountains.
3. Joe reaches the top of the Helderberg and sees Table Mountain for the first time.
4. Alongside a panorama of Cape Island and surrounds we see Joe making his way to the city.
5. Joe has to squeeze through fences, swim, cheat, climb his way into the city, Rosie explains.
6. Joe makes it into the city, and we see Rosie and the Prof together, talking – Rosie is clearly narrator for this episode as she shifts from voice-over to speech bubble smoothly.
7. Nestor on the mountain, Rosie asks Prof to contact him, Prof talks to him, Nestor is coming.
8. Prof predicts that Joe is about to arrive just as he arrives Joe: Can you help me?
9. The excitable Bergies crowd Joe and confuse him, he doesn't understand them.
10. The Bergies take Joe up the mountain, his attempts to find out what they know fail.
11. In a cave on the mountain the 'Old Man' they were to meet turns out to be a vision (or is it a drug-induced hallucination) of the future. Joe sees things he doesn't like but won't admit it.
12. Joe is to go with Nestor to his 'place', he lies there, on a filthy bed, thinking.

(narrated by Nestor)

1. Joe lies awake, we see flashbacks of him leaving school, he gets up and leaves Nestor's place. Nestor wakes up, runs outside and realises Joe ran away, Nestor apologises to Rosie
2. Joe wanders the streets, witnesses all sorts of things, it is not how he thought the Cape would be – he is welcome nowhere, lots of areas are off-limits to him
3. Joe walks around at night, lots of bars and eateries open and drunk people and street-kids and security guards, drug dealers and prostitutes. Nobody notices him.
4. Eventually he is too tired, can't walk anymore and sits down on the pavement, another boy walks up to stand next to him and greets him, giving him some scavenged food
5. The other boy, Daimler, asks Joe about himself, why he is on the street and where he comes from. He finishes by telling Joe that if he can't pay for the food he must work it off, he takes him to somewhere he can sleep, takes away his shoes and leaves him until morning
6. Daimler runs a street where 'laaities' beg and steal from unsuspecting people, he pays off the cops and his own boss who runs the area (foreshore/longstreet) and collects anything that may help him make money – information, people, weapons. He is restricted by his seniors to 'simple' weaponless crimes and petty fraud.
7. Daimler is impressed that Joe is literate and makes him keep books for him more as an affectation than out of necessity, Joe learns about the street businesses.
8. This gets Joe noticed by an older, more senior gangster – Uncle September, one of the 'generals' of the crime world. Joe goes to live at 'Xanadu' - September's premises in Sea-Point to do 'paperwork/bookkeeping'.
9. Over time he is trusted and has to hand-deliver and collect parcels to various places, one of

- these places is a bar/brothel in Woodstock (the Pearly Moon) where he sees a girl who catches his eye, she is in a similar position to him, he thinks.
10. Joe keeps on working, he has good and bad experiences. He knows he should not be involved in crime and he is increasingly implicated in violence but he is terrified of going back to live on the street and he knows that the 'businessmen' he has been dealing with won't let him – they just gave him a cred-ID. He has a conversation with Marvin, a drug dealer, in which 'Marv' warns him that he is definitely going to get dirty hands soon.
  11. Joe is made to take part in an assault on somebody, all the 'soldiers' who work for the gangs have to commit an assault before they are properly 'members'.
  12. Lord Corp knows about Joe (we don't, at this point, know why) and asks Uncle September to send him to Lordcorp for training.
  13. Joe meets the Chief Technician and is shown around the informatics division. Joe, it seems has demonstrated a particular knack for 'data-diving' detecting patterns of information subconsciously, an accumulation of information that the brain cannot process consciously. Joe's new boss, Nic Lord and the Chief Technician had him monitored while he was working for Uncle September. Joe's job is not made entirely clear, the Chief Technician tells him what the unit does, officially keep the data streams running but also to look for anomalies in data useage, collecting information on users, work out informatic models on people. Joe is taken on a tour of the facility, which extends under Signal Hill from Buitengracht Road all the way through to Clifton.
  14. Joe goes to the 'Pearly Moon' to visit the girl at the bar but she is not there, he was attracted to her but relatively innocently – he feels a kinship with her. Daimler turns up to talk to Joe, 'Big D' has been stuck on his 'street' and is frustrated, even though he has been promoted to 'Captain', Daimler offers to find the girl but implies to Joe that she is probably a prostitute now.

(narrated by the Prof)

1. Colin and Rosie on the street, Rosie is going to 'town' while Colin makes an assemblage, he uses this as a 'map' to show us things: How well Joe is doing in the Informatics training and some of Cape Island's history.
2. We pick up the scene again at the Pearly Moon, Daimler offers to look for her in exchange for Joe 'putting in a word for him'.
3. Cape Island backstory – how the rising water took out the Cape Flats, how Nic Lord took over Cape Town and the Prof is just about to tell us a bit about himself, Rosie and Nestor when Nestor interrupts him: 'Hey Old Man who are you talking to?' Prof, annoyed, replies along the lines of: 'I could tell you but your brain would explode from the implications.'
4. Nestor takes the Prof to watch Joe's entrance to the Big Party to celebrate the trainee graduations (Joe was top of his class). Owned by citizen Lord, LordCorp functions pretty much as the 'real' government while the city councils are underfunded and decayed institutions. Many different sorts of company officer are being promoted to full citizenry by the company. There is some ceremony and a party...
5. At the party Joe is introduced to various people by Marvin, his drug-dealer friend from the Uncle September days. The evening proceeds to a night of drink, drugs, dancing and, finally, the two girls he lands up with. Daimler would have loved it.
6. Joe wakes up in bed with the girls sleeping on either side of him.  
He cannot but think of ... Joe feels restless, the girls sleeping as he stares at the ceiling.



(narrated by Joe)

1. We see Joe walking through the poorer parts of town. Then, in his dreams, an image of the world slipping through his fingers, the people and the Cape itself destroyed. He wakes up with the realisation that he should go back to the Eastern Cape and question his old caretaker/housemaster.
2. Joe travels to work and gets to his workstation but finds himself preparing to run he sets up a dummy version of his web presence, books himself a ticket into the S.S.A. (Southern States of Africa) and otherwise acts normal, at the first opportunity he goes 'out to lunch'..
3. Joe has a packed bag and goes into a dodgy shop/internet cafe, creates for himself a false citi-cred identity, he goes to get a drink somewhere near the Athlone docks (Nestor observes in the background).
4. The data bureau under the hill catches wind of what Joe is doing, they send people looking for him and set up strict watches on all the docks.
5. Joe anticipates some, but not all of this attention, he is on a tight schedule, he gets up, leaving his drink unfinished.
6. As Joe walks up to the harbour a unit of GaurdCorp police approach him but just as they do Nestor pounces. In an amused, disdainful way he despatches the dozen troops. While he does this he tells Joe to run. But Joe wants to leave via the docks. Nestor is about to hit him when Rosie comes up and tells him to 'calm down child'.
7. Joe is determined, he won't listen to them so as Nestor and Rosie retreat Joe walks up to the gate. Rosie tells Nestor he must go, that she will take care of the situation – Rosie, and then we, watch as:

More troops arrive and Joe is ludicrously surrounded. Rosie walks into the fray, patting her clothes as if about to go onstage.

8. Rosie begins to sing (not sure of the song yet) and do a sort of musical number, charming all the guards and officials, she 'magics' them into giving Joe up and she walks off.
9. Joe & Nestor up the mountain montage – they are pursued by LordCorp troops in helicopters and buggies. After a helicopter pursuit they find the entrance of the old man's cave. Nestor grabs Joe and cuts a receiver out of him.

(narrator: Rosie singing) her recollections, starting with her  
and Prof in a cell, tin cup etc. and telling this one in a song.

1. Joe and Nestor wait for word, Nestor tells Joe some things, Joe reciprocates, both are surprised at how much the other knows, the Prof & Rosie turn up and are not surprised
2. Prof & Rosie describe how the LordCorp tournament is beginning soon – it is Lord's crowning achievement in Cape Island and will bring him all sorts of leverage
3. LordCorps effect on the Cape (elaboration from Prof's story) and it's current grip on the City. The Bergies want Joe to use his gaming skills to antagonise Lord and inspire the youth of the Floating townships to pursue computing, in a healthy way.
4. If Joe is willing to do this he will have to forfeit his career at LordCorp but the chief technician Doctor at L.C. will be prepared to help Joe set up his system.
5. The meeting is a disaster (Nestor was right!) - it *is* a setup – the Bergies are caught (troops are Rosie-proofed), Nestor *just* buys time to allow Joe to escape.
6. Joe is walking the streets, alone and with nowhere to go again: he sees a huge media display on the street. Lord is on the broadcast and invites Joe personally into the tournament – as a sponsored entrant.
7. Joe visits Nic Lord – we are not sure if he has a plan to beat him or if he is going to be manipulated to throw the match.
8. Build-up to tournament, talking heads on television give a sense of the 'hyped' public atmosphere around the event.

(narrated by the Prof)

1. Opening ceremonies of the tournament; Lord Nic makes welcome speech, irony of his benevolent posing and his 'deal' with Joe (If Joe wins against Lord the Bergies will be killed, if Joe reaches the finals and throws his fight against Lord he will get a job)
2. Joe faces his first opponent: A Russian mercenary; we find out how the game works
3. Joe wins and continues in competition, Lord shows his cruelty in defeating an opponent. It is possible to get injured in the game though this is unusual.
4. The Bergies talk about their situation, Nestor must protect Joe's platform from interference in the final and they must escape from captivity, then Joe can win.
5. The Bergies implement their escape plan, this will look completely mad at first and then inspired. Rosie manages to charm a guard into giving her a key and they work out a way through the utility ducts using a pendulum the Prof makes.
6. Joe continues in competition – more opponents, we learn more about the game

(narrated by Nestor)

1. Lord plots the downfalls of his opponents, it is clear he relishes their humiliation
2. The Bergies arrive, Nestor rushes to Joe's aid, guarding his platform and computer connections from obvious interference while Rosie and the Prof do something at first aimless-seeming but ultimately essential.
3. Lord and Joe face up, Nestor watches Joe's platform while guards make for the Bergies
4. Joe and Lord light up the night sky – a giant hologram of them appears over signal Hill, visible from all over the Island and the Southern African coast.
5. The Bergies are now obviously escaped from captivity and this news and other problems distract Lord at first, he didn't expect Joe to be this good. He ups his game, Joe struggles a bit but seems confident. The stakes go up, each player able to transform himself into the shapes of mythic figures.
6. Rosie and the Prof wander into the back of the stadium chatting. They agree that this game needs a 'truth serum' and that Lord's pose of being a 'Knight in shining armour' needs correction – Lord is the Demon. Rosie talks them into a terminal in the server room and the Prof does some programming. Lord morphs from knight to dragon and Joe changes to his fixed 'heroic' shape too, this 'silver jump-suit' is illustrated on Joe's character sheet.
7. Into the final phase of the match – Joe and Lord seem to destroy each other in 'battle', the platforms explode, there is a terrible storm, the hologram displays some bizarre images.

(narrated by Joe)

1. The City, aftermath of Storm, the sun is out but there is much destroyed
2. Joe arisen from the ashes, Bergies greet him as city wakes up to his victory
3. News crews spread the word, Joe is a big celebrity, other fighters salute him
4. Bergies amused at all the attention but Joe is disturbed and wants to be left alone
5. B's decide to give him a 'holiday' and spirit him away to Stilt-town
6. Joe's Flashback, he is seated lotus-like facing NL, who is offering him the proverbial temptations; power and success, all that Babylon can offer...we don't hear Joe's reply
7. While travelling to Stilit-town (they prefer to walk) Rosie, Prof and Nestor explain the various personalities and what they want:
8. Rosie: Council, what happened to the Chief Tech, her history as a nightclub singer
9. Prof tells how he got kicked out of the university for activism – after Lordcorp bought it and how the people of Stilt-town had helped him
10. Nestor explains the various factions of the city and they talk about what may happen now.

(narrated by Rosie))

1. Joe and Bergies arrive at Stilt Town, feted as the people's heroes. Joe is surprised at how famous Rosie is, they meet the Stilt Town 'council'. Joe sees Nazli in background
2. Joes talks to Nazli, how did she escape the uncle's? She: 'can look after myself, thanks', she doesn't seem keen to get to know him.
3. Strategy: Joe, Rosie, Prof and Nestor talk to various leaders to try to unite them in the recovery of the poor communities. The chief technician (retired) joins them.
4. Uncles shown to be bribing Stilt Town people to betray Joe and the Bergies.
5. Lordcorp has a temporary new leader who announces the relocation of various facilities from Cape Island to elsewhere in the world, for some this is a disaster, for other good news.
6. Nestor meets with Nazli and her 'crew', they plan several interventions against Lordcorp, including the disruption of their transporting of assets away from the Cape.
7. Joe is aware that Nestor is up to something with Nazli, Rosie and the Prof urge him to concentrate on his political role – can't risk getting involved with stuff that will discredit him in the eyes of the propertied councillors. Joe is unhappy but takes their advice.
8. Joe launches an OVR training centre in Stilit-town, meanwhile Nestor, Nazli and a company of free fighters hit the docks to observe the activities of Lordcorp and the gangs.

(narrated by Nestor, ending with Joe's speech in voice-over)

1. The docks: Nestor, Nazli and company observe the offloading of contraband and the loading of people into ships. (these are effectively Lordcorp slaves).
2. While they document these events and interfere with them we learn more about the relationship between the gangs and Lordcorp – with Nic gone Lordcorp is less concerned with their public reputation.
3. We see a shadowy Nic Lord giving instructions to the replacement Lordcorp head.
4. Joe keeps track of events via his OVR equipment and even helps Nestor and Nazli by manipulating electronics and computer systems
5. Action set-piece, while Joe fights online defences Nestor, Nazli and company battle the gangs and Lordcorp troops.
6. The chief technician disconnects Joe and Rosie, the Prof and he explain why Joe mustn't get involved in these activities which are strictly illegal – he needs to maintain his legitimacy in advance of the elections for a new council.
7. Joe, realising that Nazli was abrupt with him before because she didn't want him to know what she was up to talks to Nestor who explains their relationship. Joe can't get involved with Nazli because she is patently a rebel activist and it will scare the propertied if he is seen with her. They discuss the injustice of this.
8. Joe gets to talk to Nazli who tells a little bit of her history especially her escape from the Uncles and a future of prostitution.
9. Joe begins the campaign trail, describing the import of recent events and outlining his policy... to be continued.



Addendum 3: *The Number One Game*

Episodes 1 – 3

# the Number 1 GAME

**episode**

**1**

**narrated**

**by**

**Rosie**



So it goes...

A small illustration of a hand holding a string of beads or a necklace. The hand is positioned at the bottom right of the text, and the string of beads is draped across the bottom of the text.



1

So it goes...

'WELCOME TO CAPE TOWN,'  
 'THEY USED TO SAY 'NAI NOT IF  
 YOU DON'T GOT ANY MONEY!  
 HEH, HEH, HEH. I S'POSE 'TTE WILL  
 ALWAYS BE HARDER FOR SOME.



LOOK AT THIS YOUNGSTER. DO  
 YOU KNOW HOW FAR HE HAS HAD  
 TO WALK ALL THE WAY FROM HIS  
 SCHOOL TO HERE? ON ITS IT  
 A2165-104W!



OTHERS HAVE GONE BEFORE HIM,  
 AND WILL COME AFTER. IT IS AL-  
 WAYS A HARD JOURNEY BUT WEL-  
 COME HE WHEN I SAW THAT THIS  
 BOY IS SPECIAL...



FOR MEY IT IS ALL JUST THE REG-  
 TRARY: LIGHT AND DARK ATTRACT  
 HIM STRONGLY. WE WILL TRY TO  
 HELP HIM BUT HE WON'T TRUST US  
 AT FIRST.



HE WILL HAVE TO MAKE MANY DEC-  
 ISION: CHOICES AND SOME BAD  
 MISTAKES. OH, WISHING HE FOUND A  
 PLACE FOR HIMSELF AND MAKES A  
 HOME.



BUT FOR NOW THE BOY  
KNOWS WHAT TO DO...

DON'T DRAW  
ATTENTION  
TO YOURSELF



STICK TO THE POOR  
PARTS OF TOWN



THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL FIND  
THE GAPS IN THE TRACKS

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...  
YOU CAN SEE A LOT OF BAYTH HAS  
MOVED: RIVS STORMS CAME AND THE  
NEEDING WATERS TOOK AWAY THE  
WHOLE CAPE FLATS. THE RICH MOVED  
UP THE MOUNTAINS AND THE POOR  
GOT STUCK ON THE WATER. IT'S STILL  
LIKE THAT.



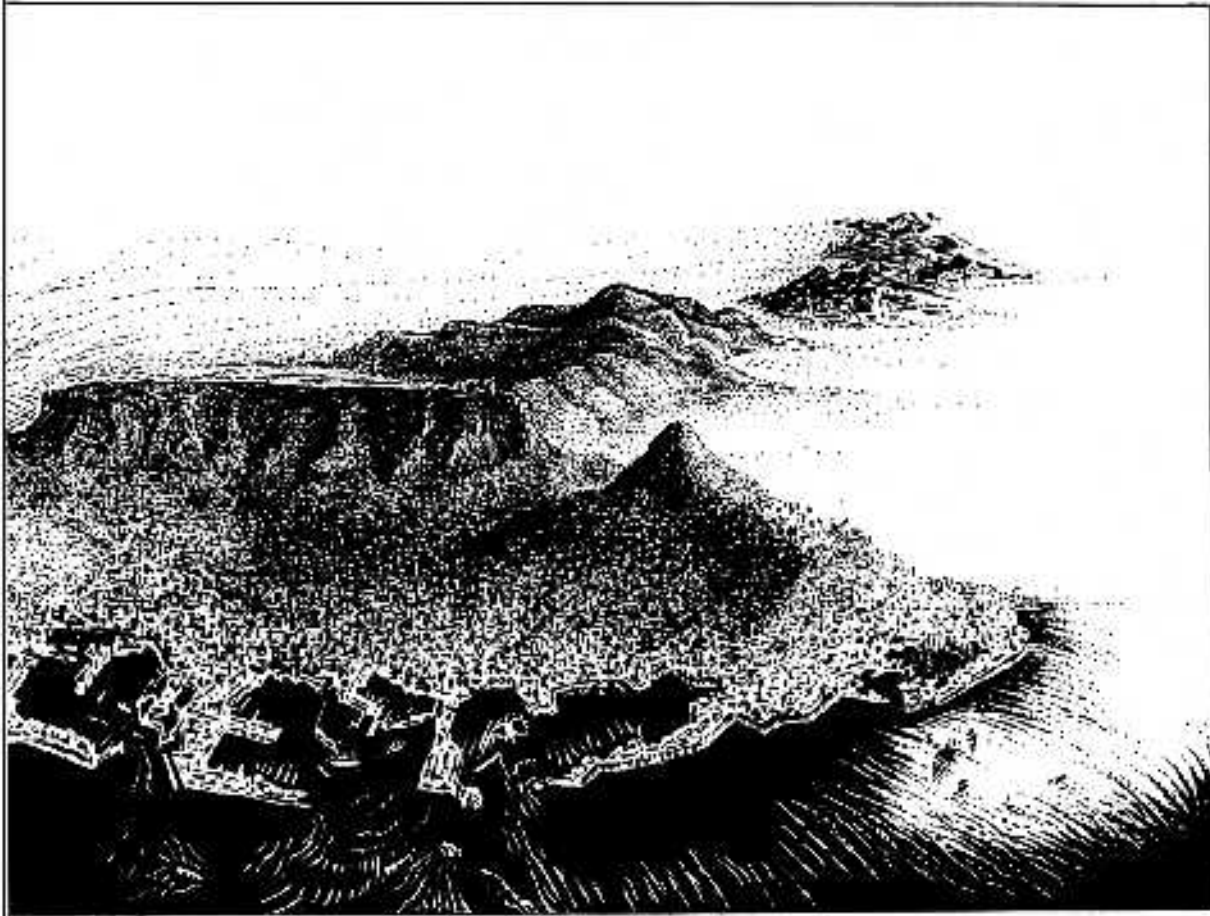
... THE MORE THINGS STAY THE SAME...  
ALTHOUGH THE NAME HAS CHANGED THE  
IMPORTANT THINGS REMAIN: SOME FOLK  
STRUGGLE WHILE OTHERS FLOAT AWAY...  
SO IT GOES FOR THE POOR OF CAPE ISLAND  
BUT IF YOU HAVE A LOT OF HEART AND A  
BIT OF BRAINS YOU CAN MAKE SOME DIS-  
PERENCE - NO MATTER HOW SMALL YOU ARE,  
OR YOUNG, OR POOR. HAH-HAH...



YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET THE RIGHT  
BOAT FIRST - SOME CREWS DON'T  
LIKE HAVING PASSENGERS.

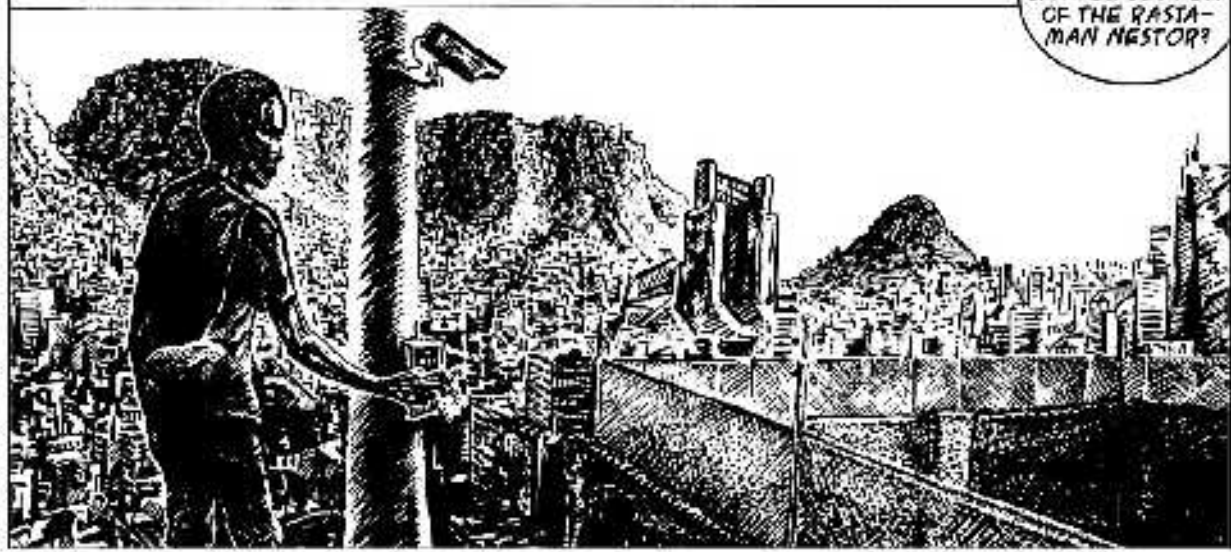


TRY AGAIN, OR YOU WILL  
HAVE TO HOLD ON TO THE  
ROCKS - A COULD BE RISKY.





SPLASH





COME NOW,  
NESTOR, PICK UP  
PICK UP THE...  
OH, NOT A  
PHONE, A--



-- ROTTEN  
CARROT!  
AFTER ALL...  
BUT I THINK  
HE WILL  
COME...



...  
WON'T YOU,  
OLD BOY?

SURE,  
PROFESSOR



EMPTY



AHA!



OH MY  
WAY!



POOR BOY,  
LOOK AT HIM!



NOT VERY  
SHINY

















NOTHING.  
I SEE NOTHING.



YOU MUST GO WITH NESTOR.  
WHY HERE?  
HE HAS A ROOM.  
WE WILL MAKE A PLAN.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS.



WHEN WE SHOULD'VE HAD MADE HIM GO WITH THE BOY. HE DIDN'T TALK MUCH TO THE KID.



THE BOY'S HEAD WAS FULL OF QUESTIONS.



HUNGRY?  
THANKS.

GET SOME SLEEP KID  
YOU ARE SAFE HERE  
I'M RIGHT OVER THERE.



AND HE LAY AWAKE AND WORRIED THAT HE MIGHT'VE COME TO THE WRONG PLACE.

HOW COULD THESE STREET-PEOPLE BE THE ONES TO HELP HIM?

# the Number 1 GAME

**episode**

**2**



**narrated**

**by**

**Nestor**

*An Offer You CANT Refuse*

# AN Offer You CANT Refuse









DON'T EVER THINK OF GOING THERE



TRY NOT TO LOOK AT A THE FOOD AND THERE ARE MONEY.



IT WILL JUST MAKE YOU THINK OF WHAT YOU WANT FOR WHAT YOU WILL NEVER HAVE



NO MANY PLACES IN YOUR YOU NOT EVEN ALLOWED NEAR TO - IS SIMPLY POINT SEE YOU THE CAMERA U.L.



HUNGRY

STAND LAITIE! YOU COMING WITH ME. YOU CAN'T STAY HERE.

A FEW DAYS OF STARVING AND BEING CHASED AROUND FROM PLACE TO PLACE, NO WORK, NO MONEY - EVENTUALLY YOU ARE READY TO ACCEPT "HIRE"



THIS HERE'S MY RENCH, AND YOU OWE ME RENT!



THIS MESSY LITTLE GUY IS DAIMLER, AND HE KISS T-ES BLOCK.

HIS BOYS TAKE MONEY FROM EVERYONE ON THE STREET, BUT DAIMLER'S BOSS UNCLE SEPTIMIAN IS CROSS WITH HIM FOR NOT KNOWING HIS FIGURES. SO WHEN 'BIG D' REALIZES THAT JOE CAN DO NUMS AND KEEP RECORDS - HE DECIDES THAT OLD JOE WILL BE THE NEW AN ANSWER TO WHAT THE UNCLE'S





SAM & MARY'S GOT SOME CLEVER  
DEALS ON THE GO. JOE'S GOT TO  
KISS OFF HIS "WISDOM" SO THAT  
HE CAN CHECK THEY NOT GETTING  
STIFF FROM THE INSIDE.



TO BEST HIS WIFE'S NOT ONLY ON  
THE WORK, HE LIKES TO VISIT THIS  
PLACE IN PARTICULAR. THIS GIRL...  
HE'S TOO SHY TO TALK TO HER, BUT  
THERE IS SOMETHING



ANYWAY, JOE JUST LOOKS AT THE  
RECORDS, AND KLEIN-PEARL, THE  
PRICIPAL ENFORCER, GETS THE  
FINDINGS FROM THE "SECRET." JOE  
DON'T LIKE IT.



BUT THIS IS HOW THE SYSTEM IS,  
JOE KNOWS HE IS LUCKY NOT TOO  
MANY STREET-KIDS KNOW COMPI-  
TERS. AND ANYWAY, MARY ALSO  
COULD BE BORN



AND NOW YOU CAN HAVE YOUR  
VERY OWN CREDIT CARD FOR YOUR  
PAY.



THOSE COPS ARE HOW THE  
M-101 STREET TOWN BUNS.  
SEE HERE HE FEELS LIKE A  
REAL AB FASHION MODE...  
LOOK AT THOSE SHOES.



AND NOW - IF NOT ALL -  
THE CITY IS OPEN TO HIM.  
NOT BAD



SO THE KIDS QUITE HAPPY FOR  
NOW WORKING AND PLAYING  
ON HIS COMPUTER. STARTED  
SMOKING WITH THE DEALER  
CAN MARRIN' - HE'S OKAY.



I BEEN  
ALL AROUND I'M  
TELLING YOU, MAN,  
ALL THE WAY UP THERE'S  
NO INNOCENTS IN  
THE CAPE.



COME ON, SUCH  
A CYNIC! THERE MUST  
BE SOME. EVEN IN THE  
BANGS SOME OF US DON'T  
DO ANYTHING BAD TO  
ANYBODY.



I'M JUST  
LOOKING AFTER  
THE NUMBERS, MAN.  
DO WHAT I'M TOLD  
KEEP MY ROSE  
CLEAN, NO FUNNY  
STUFF.

FOR HOW  
LONG, JOE? MAYBE  
NOBODY TOLD YOU, BUT  
YOU'RE IN THERE, MAN. THE  
MORE THEY WANNA TRUST YOU  
THE MORE THEY'LL MAKE YOU  
DO STUFF. BAD SHIT,  
EVEN.

EVERY MEMBER  
FROM FOOTSO' SCHE' IN  
HAS TO DO AT LEAST A BAR  
BEATING ON SOME VIZANT.  
GUY'S NORMALLY YOUNGER  
THAN 18. HOW OLD  
ARE YOU?

LIKE WHAT  
THEY GOT  
SAYS FOR  
THAT, MAN.



SEVENTEEN.

SURE ENOUGH, JUST BEFORE HIS EIGHTEENTH BIRTH-DAY, KLEIN-PELTY'S AT THE DOOR, 3 A.M. THIS IS HOW THEY DO IT...











YOUNG JOSEPH KHANSA, I'VE BEEN HERE.

WELCOMING



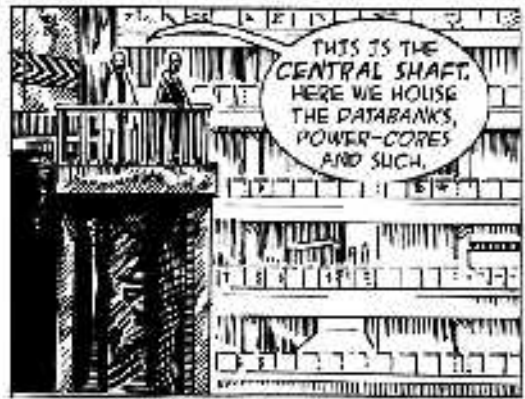
THIS GUY IS THE CHIEF TECHNICIAN. HE MAKES ALL THESE MACHINES AND THE BIZ COMPUTERS RUN. I DON'T KNOW THIS GUY BUT HE SURE SEEMS TO LIKE YOU.



HE'S GOT SOME STORIES ABOUT HOW THEY ALWAYS WERE 'VAGUE' AND HE HAS A PLACE IN A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. HUH.



STEP INTO MY, AH, LITTLE OFFICE...



THIS IS THE CENTRAL SHAFT. HERE WE HOUSE THE DATABANKS, POWER-CORES AND SUCH.



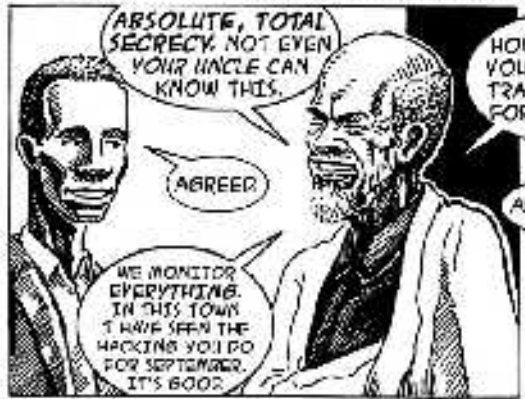
YOU DO KNOW THAT WE RUN ALL THE I.T. FOR THE ENTIRE CAFE?

SURE.



HOLD ON A SECOND JOB

IF WE ARE TO GO ANY FURTHER THAN THIS, YOU MUST ABBRE TO, AH... CERTAIN TERMS AND CONDITIONS.



ABSOLUTE, TOTAL SECRECY. NOT EVEN YOUR UNCLE CAN KNOW THIS.

AGREED

WE MONITOR EVERYTHING. IN THIS TOWN I HAVE SEEN THE HACKING YOU DO FOR SEPTEMBER. IT'S GOOD.



HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRAIN HERE, FOR A JOB?

ABSOLUTELY.



STUDY THE TEXTS IN HERE. THERE IS ALSO A HIGHER CRED-I.T. FOR YOU.



THESE LOGS ARE THOUGH, IS NOT A CHANCE TO LOOK AT IT? IT'S MAMMON, BROTHERS AND SENSED THE BIGGEST BARRETT COMPANY-SON IN AFRICA THE BOSS, LONG AGO, DANKS MOST OF AFRICA TO HIS NAME AND HIS MIND. HE SETS LIKE A ROZSAM-TOO, SUCCEED THE SOIL ONLY THE NO FAR, I CAN SW.

I WANTED TO WARN THE KID THAT HE WAS MAKING A MISTAKE, BUT HE WOULD HAVE REGRETS. I SHOULD HAVE TOLD HIM MY STORY.



BUT I DIDN'T SAW ACTION WHEN HE RAPS WITH ME, WHEN I COULD HAVE. I LOST MY CHANCE THEN.



SO I JUST DID WHAT ROSIE TOLD ME TO DO. WATCH.



MANY THINGS THE DEEP SAW AND HE NEVER SAID A WORD I FEEL THAT I'VE FORGOTTEN...

CAN'T SAY WHAT HE THOUGHT BUT HE WAS ALWAYS ALONE. LOOKING AROUND WASTED HE WAS JUST LONELY ONE MORE TIME HE WENT TO SEE THAT GIRL...



OH, THE GIRL...

LONG GONE FROM HERE

DRINK?



BIG D! LONG TIME...

COMPUTER JOE! LOOKING GOOD



THANKS! AND YOU, HOW IS THE ROCK?

NO COMPLAINTS, BUT YOU, I HEAR YOU WORKING FOR THE CORPORATION.

TRAINING.

STILL MY LITTLE BAREFOOT LAATJE IN A SUIT! EVEN THOUGH I'M NOW A CAPTAIN, I'M IMPRESSED!

WHATCHA DOIN' IN A DIVE LIKE THIS?



JUST LOOKING FOR SOMEBODY...

A GIRL? HAVE YOU TRIED AH... UPSTAIRS?



YOU SHOULD HAVE A GIRL!

IT'S THIS BEAUTIFUL GIRL. I JUST WANTED...

I GOT IT! SHE'S A WIFE. I'LL HELP YOU FIND HER, NO PROBLEM! I KNOW ALL THE PROSTITUTES IN THIS TOWN!

# the Number 1 GAME

3



narrated

by

the Prof

the VALUED CITIZEN



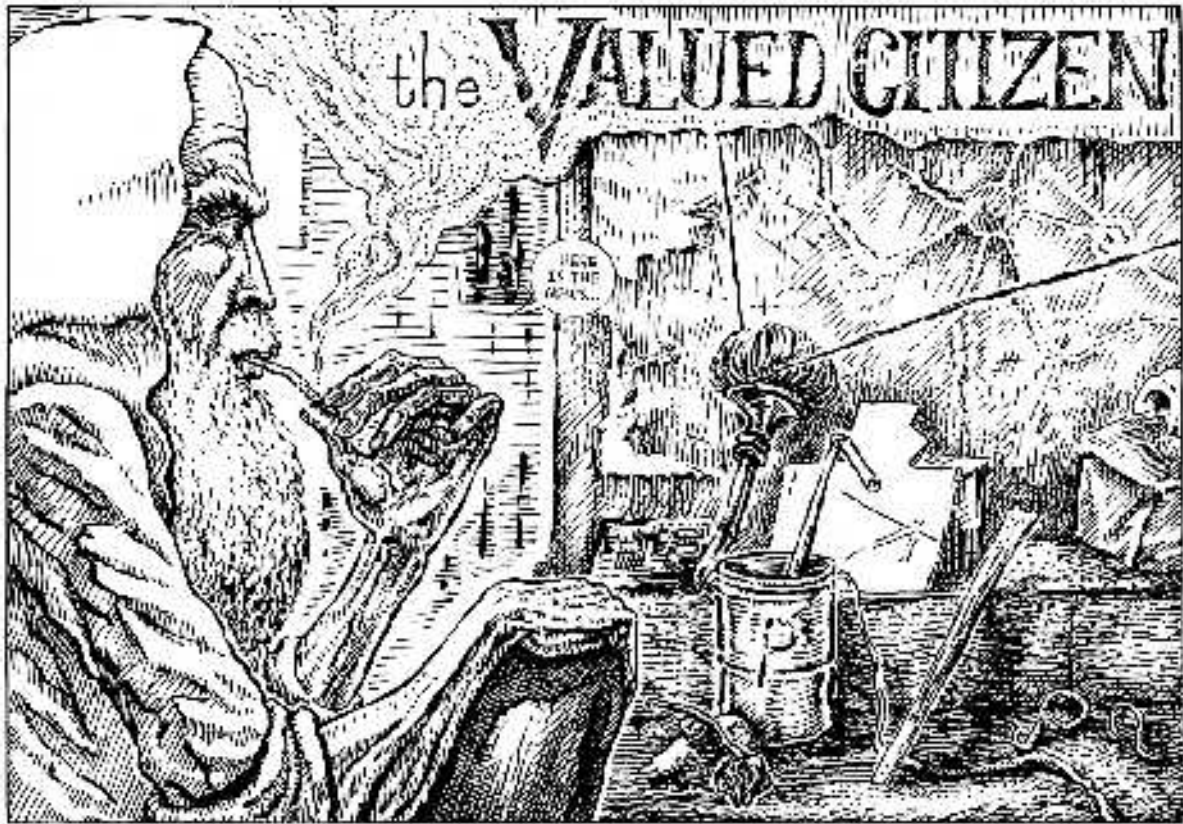
AM GOING INTO TOWN. NO MORE NEED ANYTHING.

AAA...



GRAND BANANAS, EGGS, ELECTRIC RICE, PEASANTS, SPINNING WHEEL, HEMP, COTTON...

OK, I'LL SEE WHAT TACTICS...



the VALUED CITIZEN

HERE IS THE...



THE DRIVERS TO A NAV, A TOSS, A WEST AND INTERIOR 8-DIMENSIONAL DIAGRAM.

EACH PART COMPLETES A PARTICE OF THE WHOLE, AS ARCHITECTURE ALLOW.

WED TO LIVE LONGER WITH THE BUILT THROUGH THE WORLD OF THE...





NOW HE IS A REGISTERED  
ULTRA/ACT USER. HE CAN  
WAVE AROUND



ON THE COMPUTER USES  
A SPECIAL PROTOCOL OF  
HIMSELF



I FORGET THE NAME,  
BUT AN IMAGINARY  
"RENE"



SO MANY PEOPLE THAT COVER THE EARS  
IS THAT? WHOSE WORLD LOOPS? LINES  
TO KEEP IT THAT AWAY. ONCE THEY SET UP  
THEIR SUPPLIES OVER THE MOUNTAIN,  
THEY WERE SET.

AND HERE,  
DOCTOR, IS OUR  
BEST STUDENT,  
YOUNG JOE  
KHUNSA.

SENIOR  
STAFF, JOE,  
INTRODUCE  
YOURSELF I  
MUST SAY.



WE OVER MET THE DEVELOPERS  
OF HIS EARLIEST GAME



TO I AM  
TO THE "BACK  
UP" BEHAVIOR  
OF HIS CODE

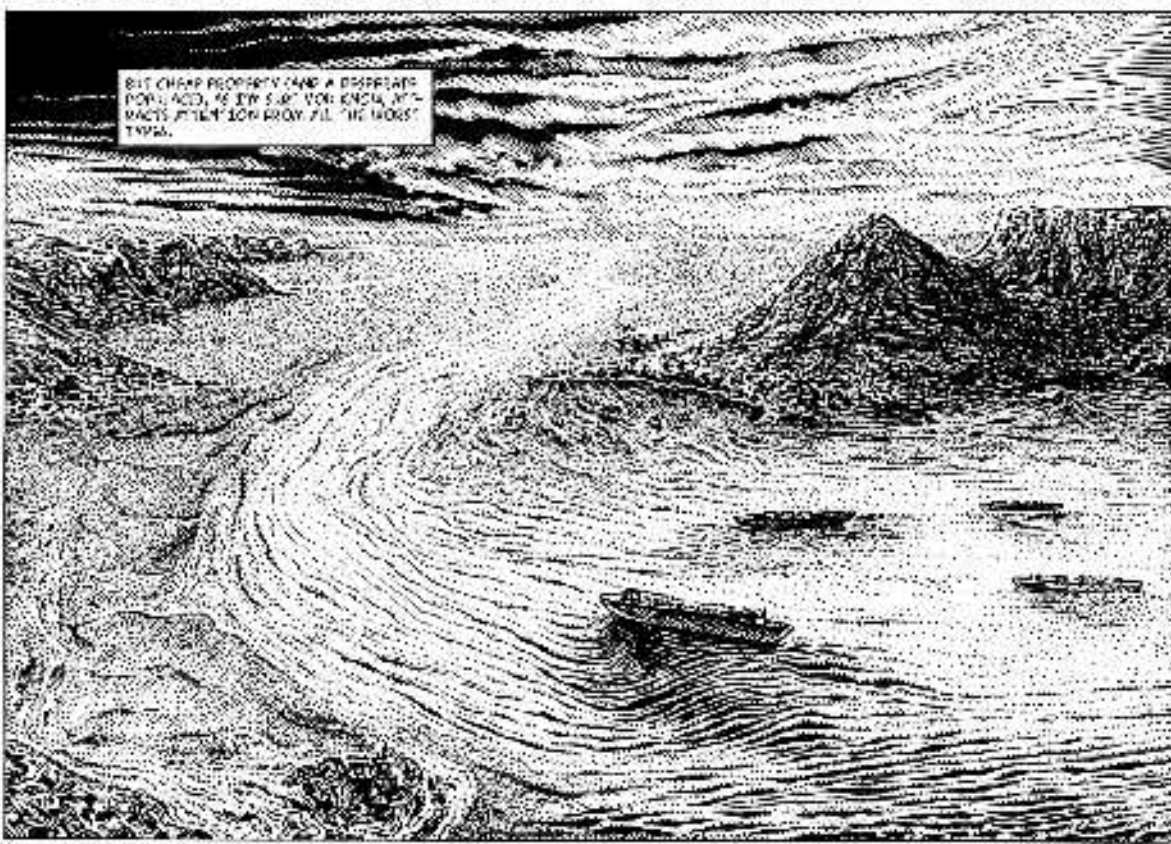








WITH THE RESOURCES WANE AND THE PAN-AMERICAN CIVIL WAR GOING ON, LITTLE COULD BE EXPECTED ATTEMPTS TO BRIDGE GROUND WITH LITTLE RESOURCES WENT ON INDIANLAND AND CAROLINA



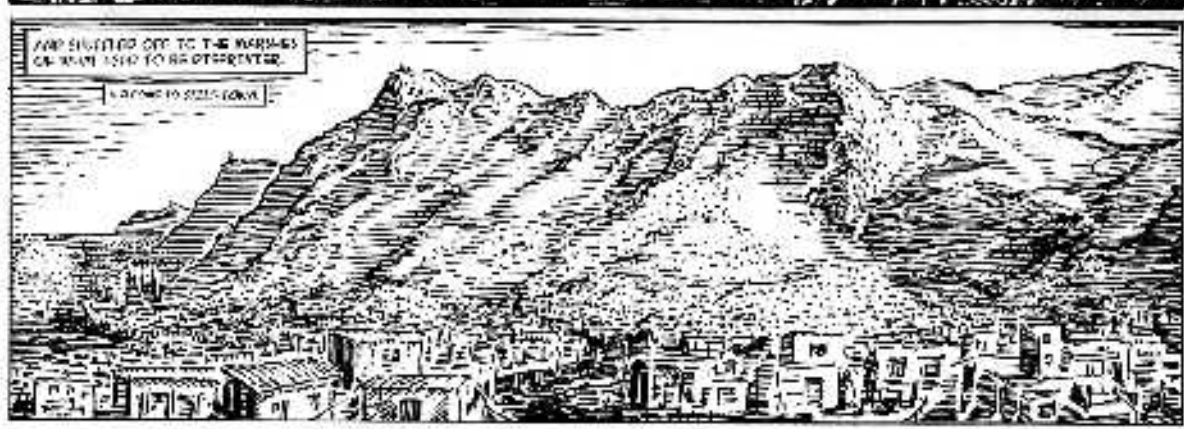
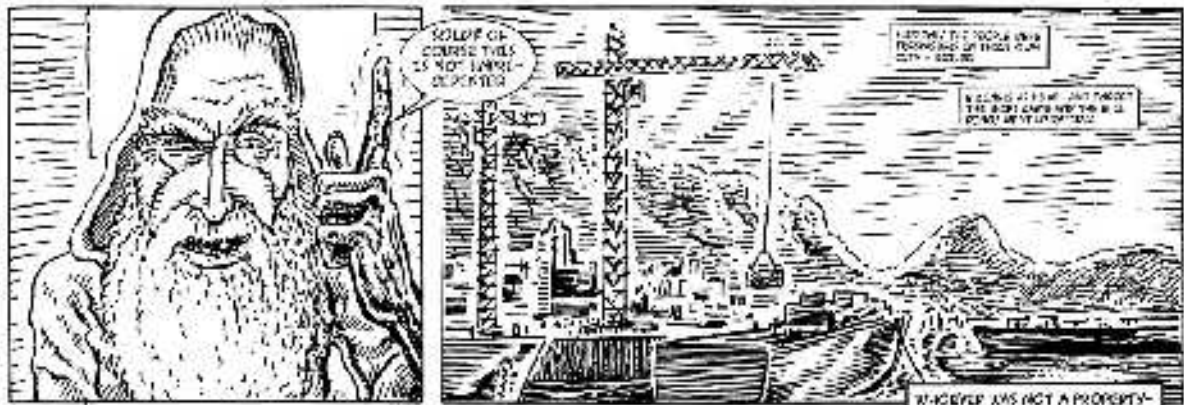
BUT CHEAP PROPERTY AND A DISPERSED POPULATION, AS IN THE "VON KNOX" FACTS ATTEMPTION PROV. ALL "THE WORK" TRAIL.



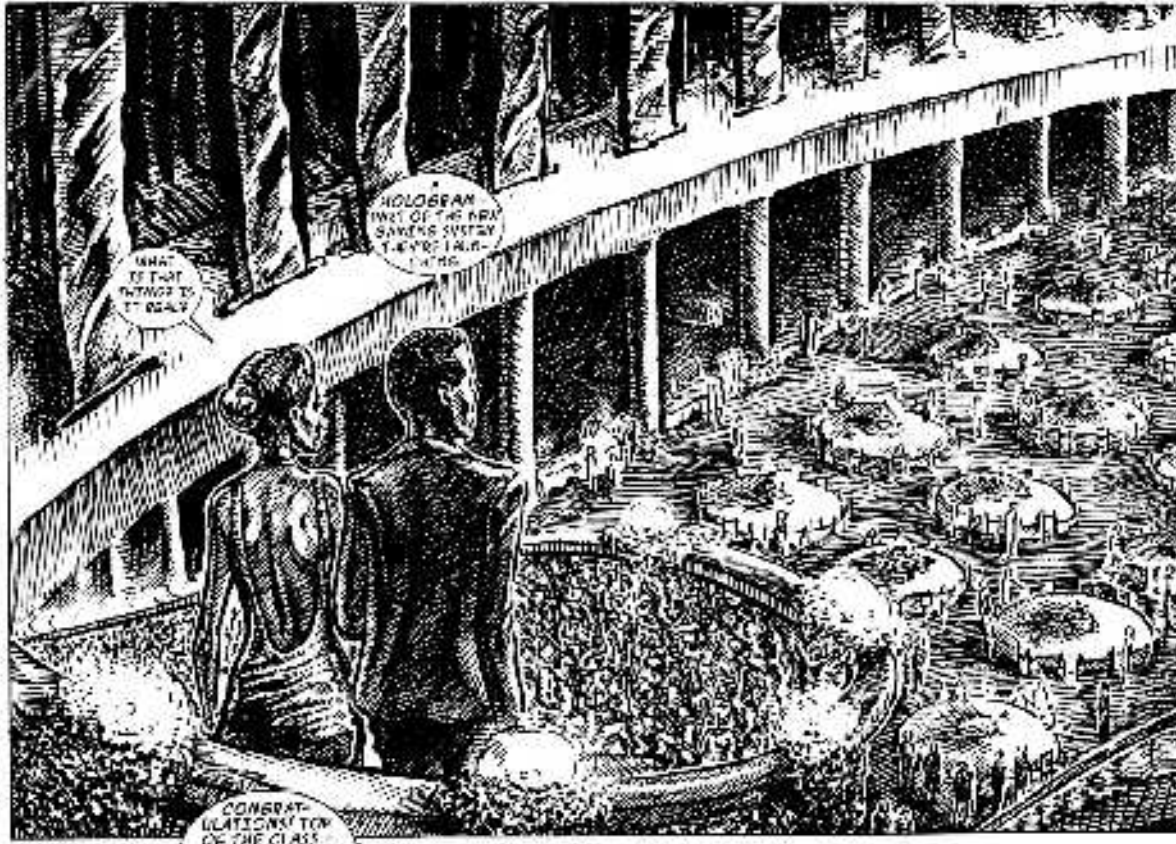
BUT THEY MIGHT BELIEVE A BRIDGE THEY WERE BUILDING THE CANAL. THAT IS TO BE THE CAPE PLATS.

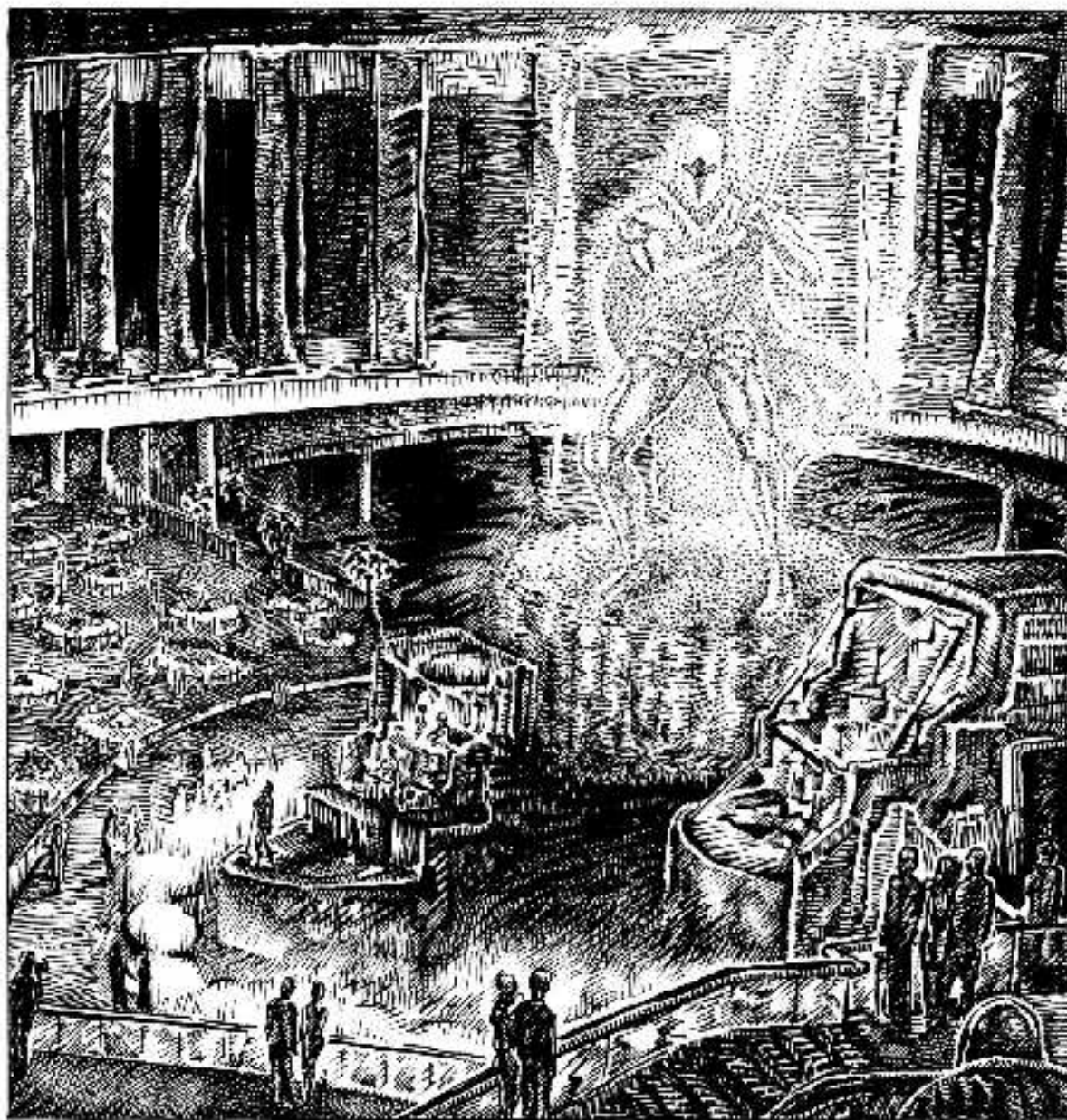
CAN A BRIDGE?















Addendum 4: *The Number One Game*  
Story Bible

# the Number 1 GAME

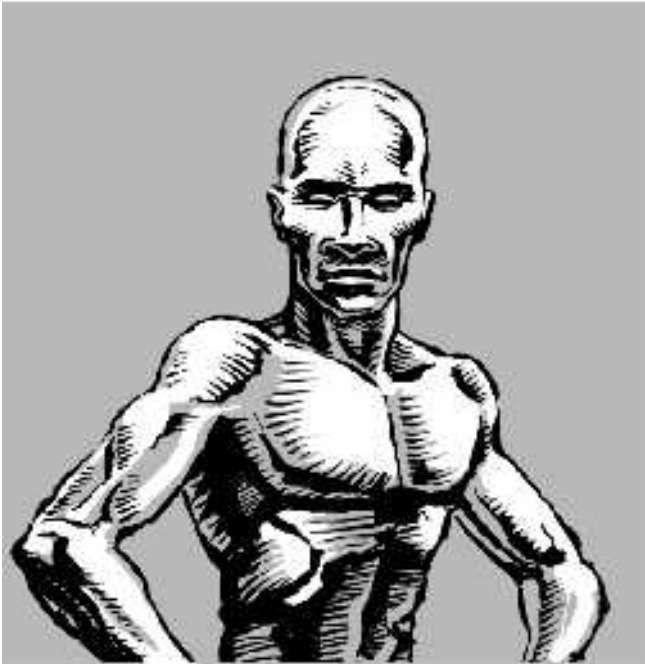
## **story – bible**

### **contents:**

- 1. Main Characters.....p.2**
- 2. Minor Characters.....p.7**
- 3. Story-world.....p.10**
- 4. Technology.....p.17**
- 5. Further stories.....p.20**

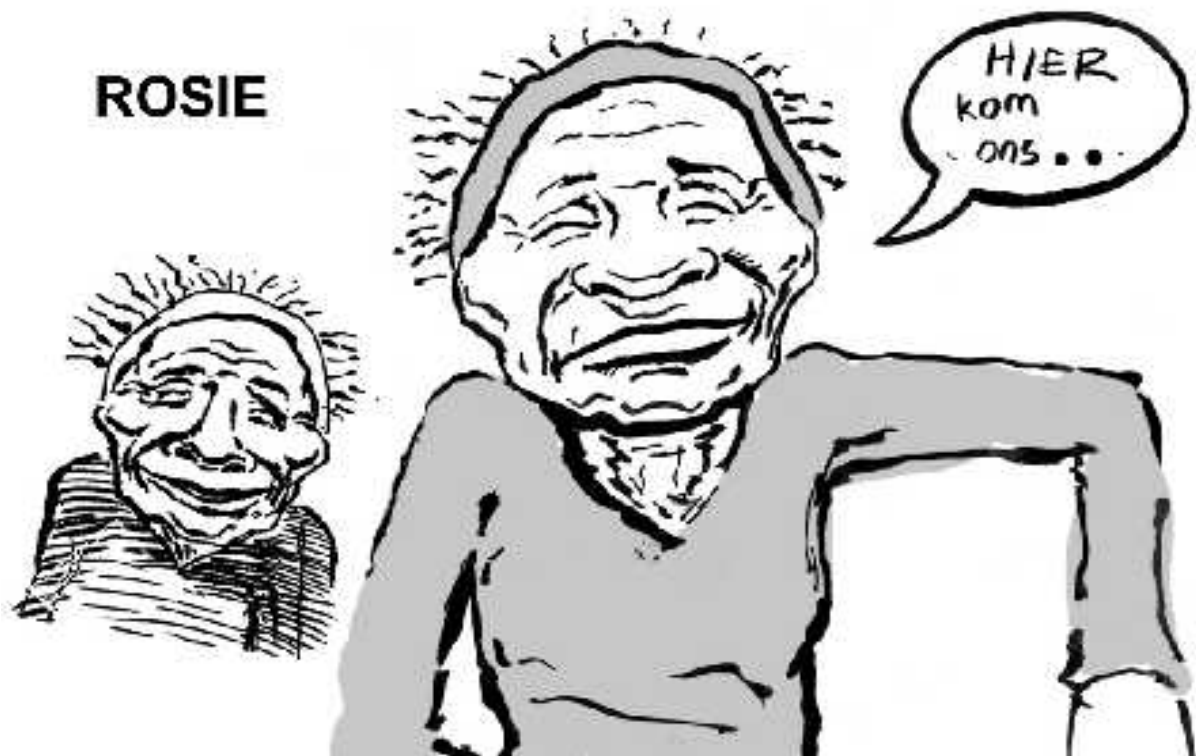
**MAIN CHARACTERS:** Joe, his allies the Bergies and his main antagonist

## 'Computer' Joe Khunga



Joe (or, variously, Joe K,' Computer Joe') is the special child, the prophesied one, or so he thinks. An orphan, Joe was sponsored by an anonymous philanthropist to live and study at a private Eastern-Cape boarding school. We meet Joe as he walks towards the Cape, and we follow him there. Joe goes to the address he was given and meets the Bergies, Rosie, the Prof and Nestor, but, scruffy as they are, they are not the allies he had imagined.

Joe does not believe the Bergies can help him and is frightened by the vision he has on the mountain so he hits the streets, landing up a gang member. Joe progresses in the gangs until he is offered a place as a trainee at Lordcorp. Everything seems to be going well for Joe but he realises that Lord himself is corrupt. Joe has to wrestle with himself – he could take the dark path being offered to him but his conscience will not allow him to. Joe uses his computer skills to challenge Lord Nic and, with the help of the Bergies, become a Hero.



Rosie (if you ask her) is The '*Lady of Song and Dance*', the '*Street-Mother*', the '*Bergie Queen*' but she starts off in our story trying to be an unlikely but enthusiastic maternal figure. Rosie is superficially based on the traits of a number of real-life Bergie ladies – alcoholic, patronising, and lyrical. She can be warm and humorous but is also prone to incoherence and volatile outbursts if upset.

Rosie has always done things in the hard-living tradition of the great Rock, Blues and Dance stars but she is really a pagan figure, an aged and outcast earth priestess. Rosie is a bit corrupted, like the earth, by human vices and undeniably rough around the edges but underneath all that she is courageous, indomitable and full of hope.

Rosie has a wealth of street-wisdom and knows everything there is to know about human weakness but believes in people's hearts this is her 'power'. Rosie, they say, can sing her way right into your heart if you are not careful.

Reference Points: the Good Witch of fairytale, Karoo folk singer Grietjie Adams, Nina Simone, Brenda Fassie, various real-life street-people



This Rasta-warrior has renounced the world, a former soldier and mercenary he has seen all manner of evil in his life. After all he had done for his land (as a soldier for the Southern African States) he still could not protect his young family from disaster and lost his reason for living as a result. Nestor came to Cape Island with a chip on his shoulder and became quite well known as a street-fighter and gangster's enforcer.

Nestor is a truly dangerous man and held a number of formal fight titles in his heyday but he was empty inside. Prone to 'battle-rage' Nestor is careful to control his temper until he can't anymore.

Nestor met Rosie late one night and she got him some of his heart back – he wept for days and after that night he never took another job for the gangs again. They tried to force him but he 'went mad' and became a pariah, finally to be forgotten by all but the most knowledgeable old-timers on the Cape streets.

Reference points: Bob Marley, Batman, Judge Dredd. Clint Eastwood characters like 'the Man with No Name', pretty much any outsider 'bad-boy' although on the intense, brooding side.

## the PROF

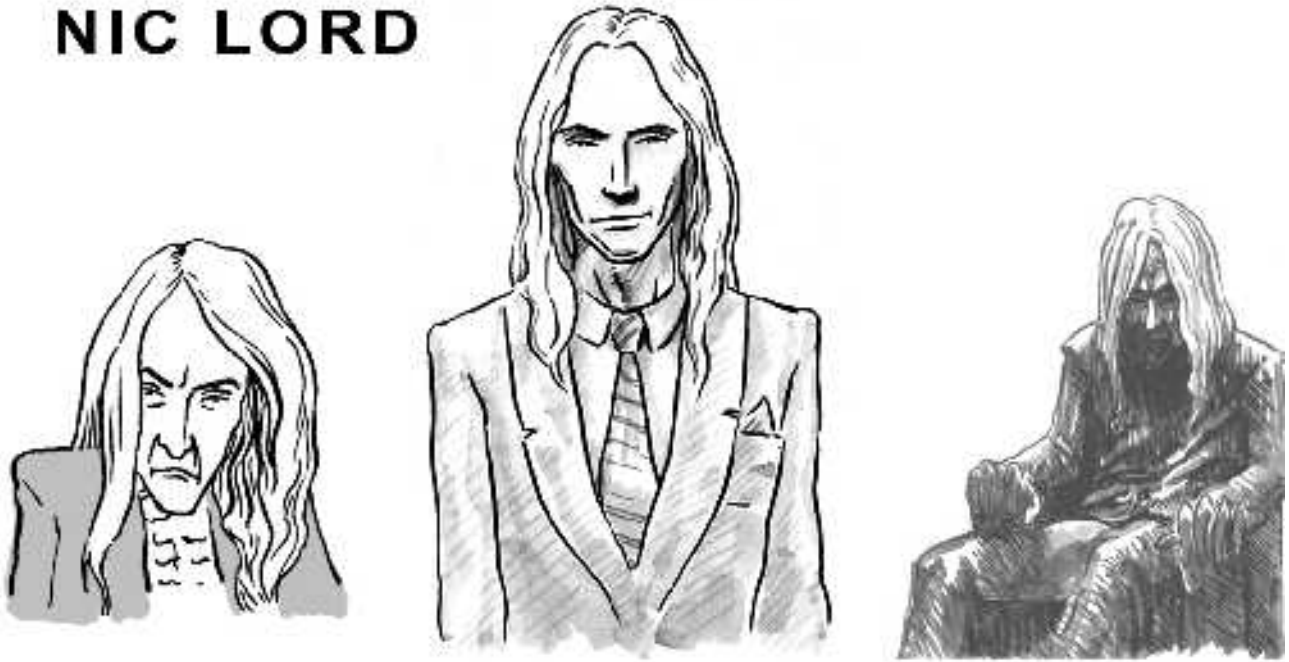


The Prof has had many stories told about him, one of the most popular being that he was a university professor before he went mad and started living as a vagrant. He has a short temper but only because he cannot stand the waste and stupidity he sees all around him. He is very sensitive and aspires to being a gentleman of the 'Old School' (although not sexist or racially prejudiced in any way). The Prof is an existential philosopher, but pragmatic, and is the only character in the comic-book who *knows* that he is only a character in a comic-book (but he never tells anyone). The Prof has become obsessed with reading patterns and chance arrangements as a form of divination and has a theory that we can see possible futures.

He believes that our physical surroundings are our connection to the endless chain of meanings and associations of energy that make up the world – we need only learn how to read them. The Prof makes elaborate constructions from bits of rubbish he finds to help him compute variables and is always *just* on the point of predicting something when it happens. Prof and Rosie have been hanging out together for many years and love and respect one another as complementary opposites – they are twin spirits.

Reference points: The alchemist is any mad scientist, really, from Drs Caligari, Faust and Viktor Frankenstein to Professor Calculus (from Tintin), Vincent Van Gogh (as played by Kirk Douglas in *the Agony and the Ecstasy*) and their mythic predecessors such as Daedalus. This archetype is embodied still in popular icons of genius such as Einstein.

# NIC LORD



Nic Lord is the villain of the piece, he is the local tyrant-king who has made his home-base on Cape Island for the last few decades. Lord Nic (as he is called in the tabloids) is the founder and owner of LordCorp and is a sinister european prince of darkness .

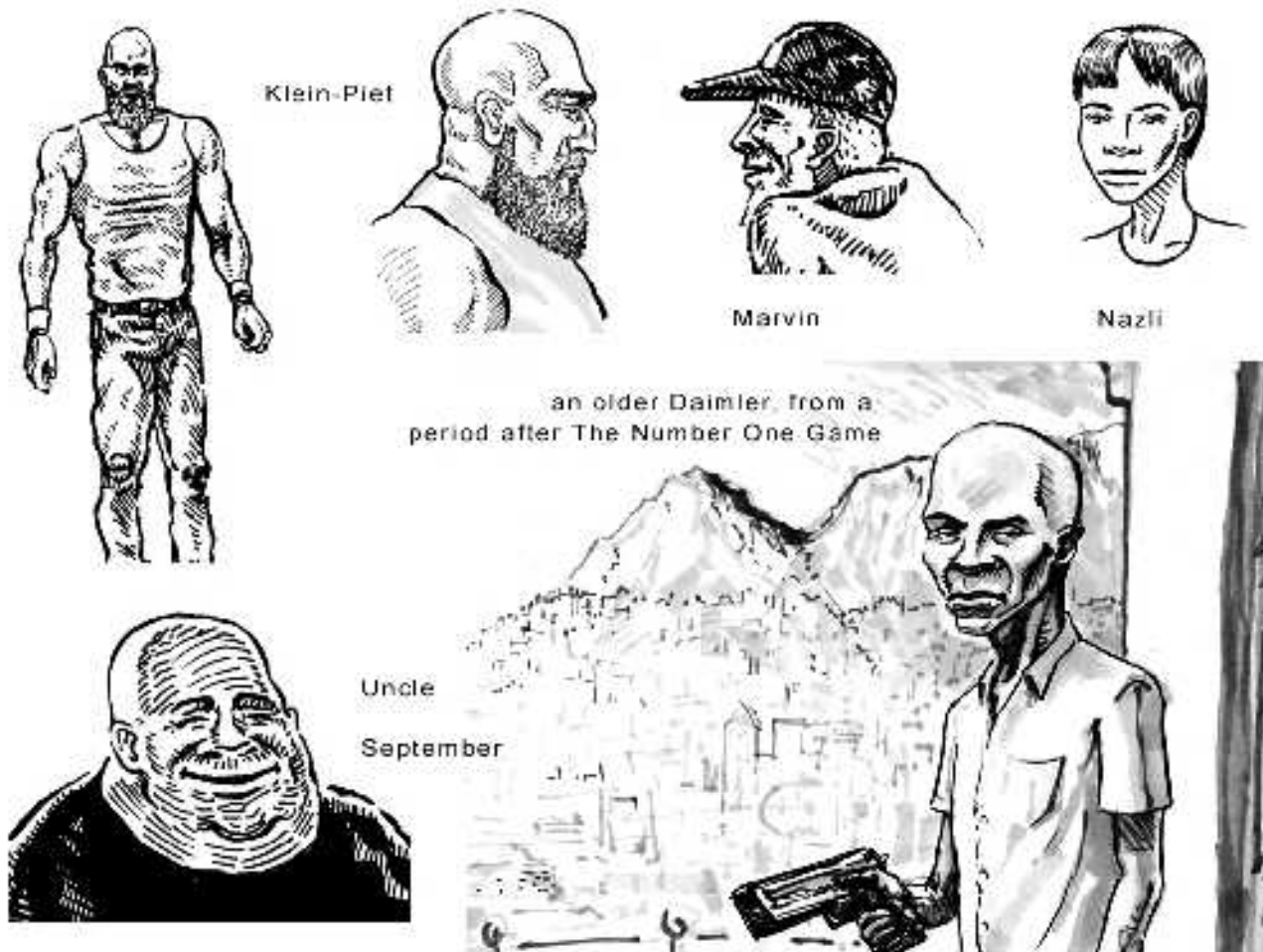
Lord basically wants to entrench his position as ruler of the place, he pretends to philanthropy but enjoys the excercise of power. He sees himself as more than human – a 'living Brand' – and aims to accrue as much power as he can. His eventual plan is to have his brain kept alive in an android body so that he can live forever.

Reference points:

Lord has touches of Lord Charles Spencer, Tony Blair and Richard Branson as well as more traditional fictive villains such as the Pharoah from *Joseph's Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Bond villains, and the traditional demons of lore: Mephistopheles, Satan as 'Old Nic, the devil'.

## MINOR CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

Daimler, Uncle September, Klein-Piet, Nazli and Marvin



## Daimler

is like a junior Fagan (from Dickens' *Oliver Twist*) but really represents peer pressure for Joe – it would be so easy for Joe to be like Daimler. Daimler will always feel that Joe owes him for 'setting him up' in the gangs and, thereby, LordCorp, and will never understand why Joe passes up on power and privilege. Later in Joe's life Daimler will threaten him seriously – it will be hard for Joe to stand against a guy who was the closest thing he had a to a friend, at one point in his life.

Daimler means well in his own way, but he is weak and self-serving and can't help being motivated by greed and self-interest.



## **Uncle September**

is 'Jabba the Hut' (from *Star Wars*) meets Falstaff, a typical Cape gang boss of his time, wealthy and respected like any successful businessman. His pleasure-palace (a Bar-Bistro-Drug-Den and Brothel) is called 'Xanadu' and he holds court all day in the main Hall, surrounded by flunkies. Vain, brutal and gluttonous September is glad to pass Joe on to Lord in exchange for future favours. Joe keeps living at September's until he runs away, though, as September thinks it will be useful to keep him around.

## **Klein Piet**

is the main enforcer working for Uncle September, he is enormous, dangerous and willing to do rough work but he has some ideals to do with honour and is fond of Joe. Piet is the one who leads the attack on the club and makes Joe beat the 'client' but will later ally himself with Joe and the Bergies.

## **Nazli**

is an unknown quantity in 'The Number One Game', all we know about her is what Joe projects on to her. Nazli deserves her own story, or at least three episodes in a later story than *The Number One Game*. Joe will try to rescue her, only to have to be rescued in turn. Nazli runs away from the 'Pearly Moon' when she is about to come of age and likely to be forced to give sexual favours, as a result of this experience she declares a personal war against the gangs.

## **Marvin**

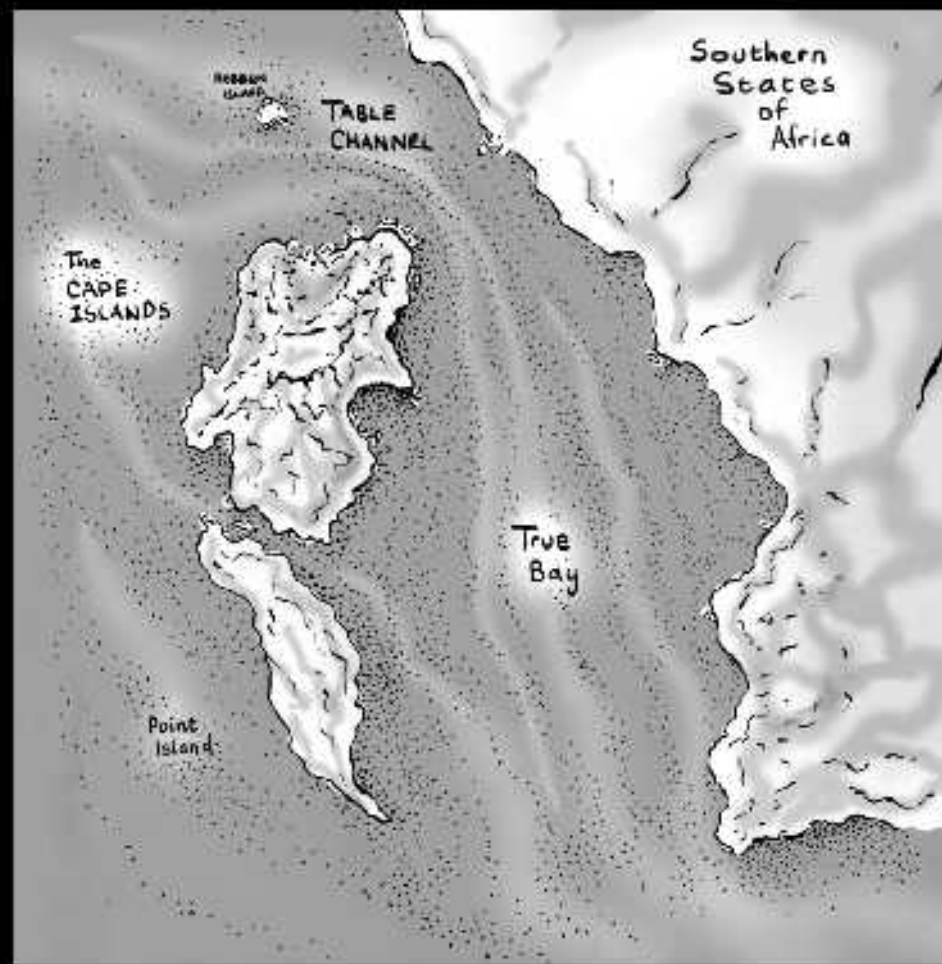
is a drug-dealer and all-round smooth-operator who meets Joe and becomes his friend. Marvin knows that the ethics of what he does are questionable but is looking out for himself in the absence of anything better. He is, potentially, an ally or opponent for the future.

# the Cape



# Islands

Cape Island lies just off the Mainland of S.S.A.



## **STORY-WORLD:**

Physical changes to the Cape, over and above the rising water, include the erosion of some rock due to harsher weather – there have been devastating rockfalls periodically – and huge devices that dwarf the old rock fences above Chapmans Peak Drive in an attempt to prevent further damage from erosion. There have also been a number of new developments further up the mountain line – on the saddle between Devils' peak and Table Mountain, above Table Road on the town side and all over Signal Hill.

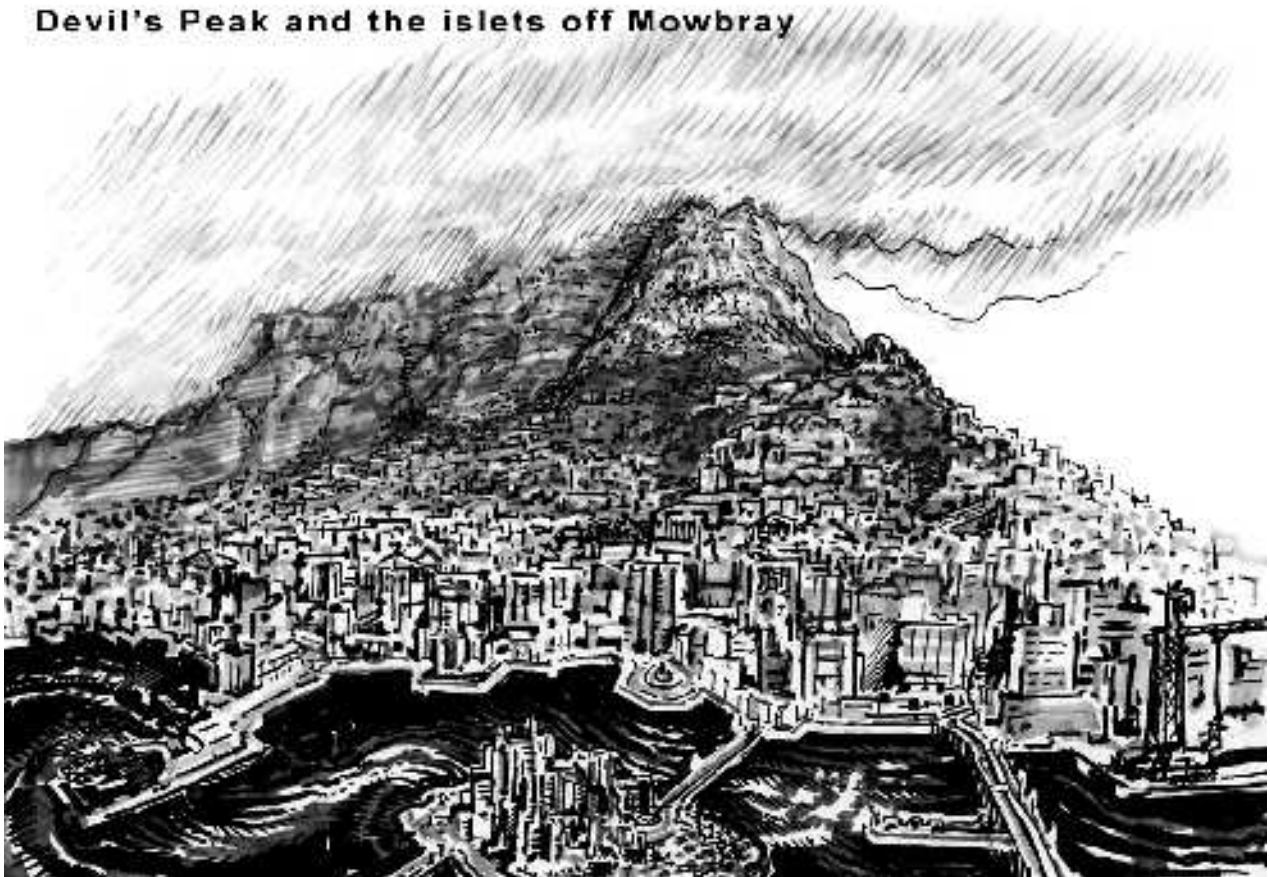
The Atlantic Seaboard is developed all the way south to Noordhoek where houses go up to the mountain's rock line while on the Eastern side the Southern Suburbs now exist mostly on the mountains and hillsides from Devil's Peak to Constantia Nek.

Shallow marshes and spits of land exist all along this eastern side of the Island, where the Cape Flats used to be has now been split by a deep channel formed by the current moving Southward from what was Table Bay to the former False Bay – now known as the True Bay.

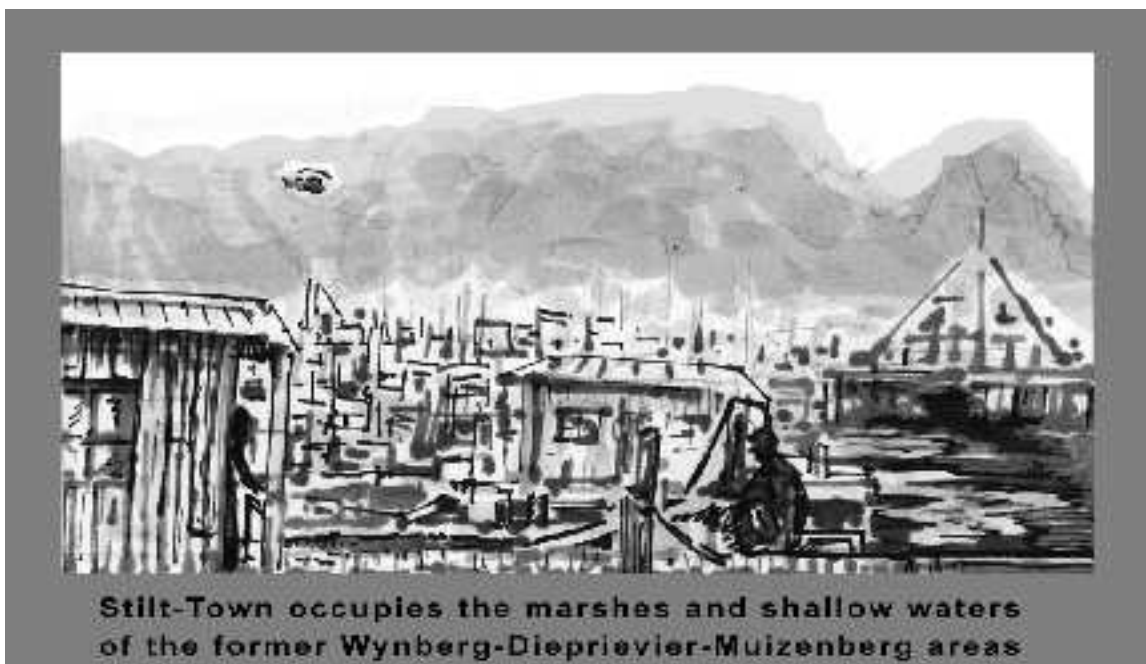
The new harbours stretch all the way from what used to be Mouille Point to Mowbray, south of which a series of hills and waterways make landing large craft treacherous.

Opposite Cape Island lie the Southern States of Africa, an amalgam of former SADC

**Devil's Peak and the islets off Mowbray**

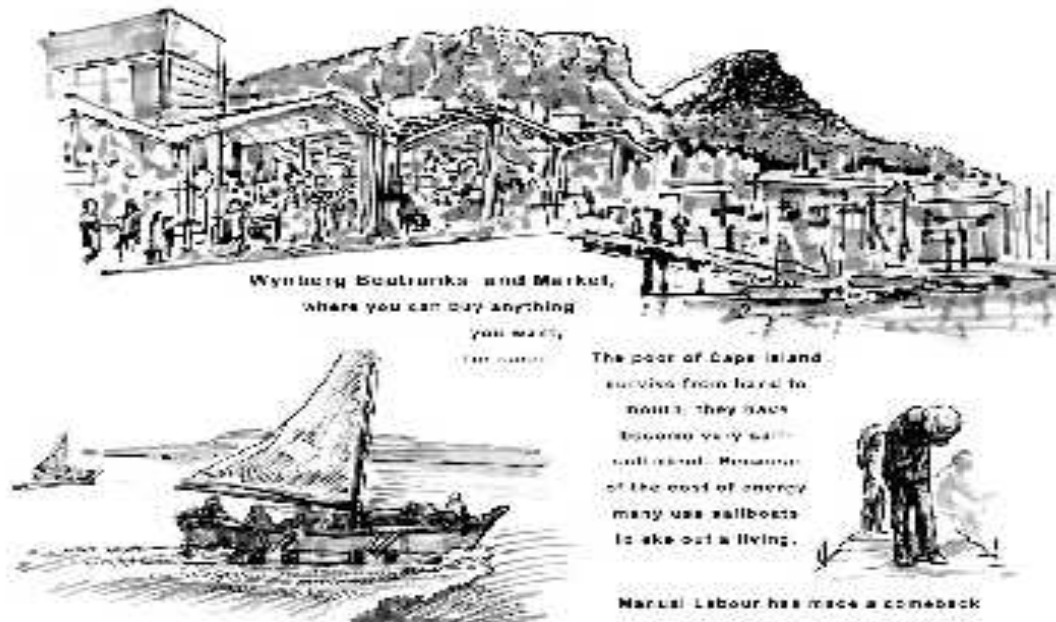


states . Lordcorp has many dealings with various leaders of this state and there is an autonomous statehood on Cape Island much as in former city-states like Venice or Milan.



**Stilt-Town occupies the marshes and shallow waters of the former Wynberg-Dieprievier-Muizenberg areas**

The poor of Cape Town still occupy some of the derelict and waterlogged buildings of old Salt River and Ndabeni but stick mostly to the Wynber-Muizenberg-Retreat areas where floating structures, stilt-houses and walkways stick tenaciously to the marshes and shallow bay. This is Stilt-Town, where people eke out a living in the mud and water.



Of course the better-off have access to motorboats, hydrofoils, yachts and jetskis but fuel is so expensive that it is common for people to attempt to 'catch a lift' across the bay by hooking ropes on to a vessel or clinging to its hull while it crosses the bay.

The history of LordCorp in the Cape and other material in quotes below may become part of the additional material in an eventual *The Number One Game* book.

"Since the period of the turbulent waters around the Cape LordCorp has been a main driver of environmental and developmental projects for the benefit of the citizens of this special area. No longer do people wonder where they will get fresh water or power, stability has been restored to service delivery through the generous offer of Nic Lord himself. "



The Resource Wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century make up a major part of the global backstory for *The Number One Game*. These tragic conflicts that wracked the world were provoked by the growing material demands of the world's newly rich superpowers: Chinasia and Indostan. Physical resources and commodities became globally scarce in the period before the flooding of Cape Town.

The United Americas (Central and Northern Continental America, incorporating Mexico, USA and Canada) reacted to growing economic pressure by annexing parts of Southern America, fueling conflicts in the West that still simmer. Old Europe, similarly, was wracked by internal division, especially between Eastern and Western EU states.

This history may be included in future episodes.

There is also promotional material for the Cape's 1<sup>st</sup> Interactive Games Tournament (sponsored by Lordcorp) such as below...

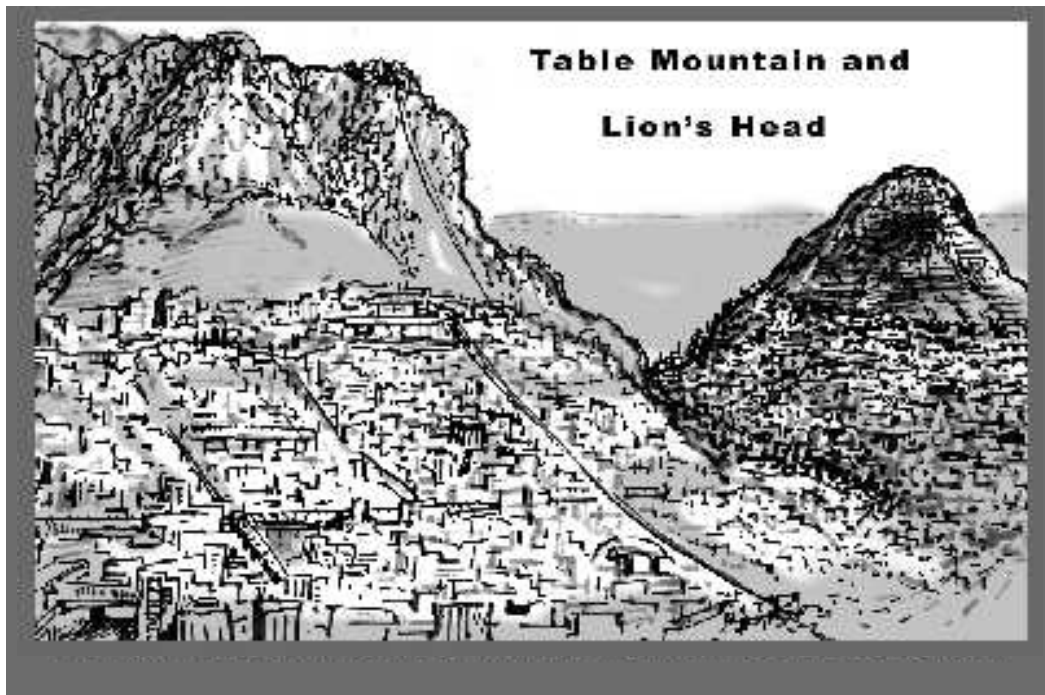
"The Beautiful and Exotic Cape Island Paradise awaits you..."

Although not exempt from the peculiar weathers the earth has been troubling us with lately the Cape Island is fully adapted for the contemporary climate. Hundreds of kilometres of

covered walkway through gardens and arcades bring relief from the wind and UV rays (these coverings are just visible just visible in the illustration of Table Mountain and Lion's Head running under the upper cablecar). Of course on those days when the weather permits the mountains and bays of this, the pleasure isle allows for bathing, walking and even natural rock-climbing. Portage for floating cities has been offered for over a decade and all manner of pleasure craft are available for hire.

Spectacular storms lash the coast periodically - standing in one of the casino terraces on Signal Hill will give you a prized view for one of the more extreme weather phenomena to develop over the last fifty years. Just make sure you are not stuck in the bay, You might land up famous on the Reality Deaths Broadcast!"





The tournament game itself is called 'Showdown' and is illustrated opposite.

This is a descendant of contemporary third- and first person fight and dueling games and trading card games. Entrants compete in the tournament with a given amount of card-points, they may trade and deal in cards during the tournament and these cards translate into anthropomorphic or bestial 'powers' but martial skill is still required. Each 'duel' takes place in a virtual space but for public matches this is displayed as a spheroid ring, with the competitors in their motion capture booths on either side.





**Players compete using the new Lordcorp gaming platform:  
Note the holograms of the players' digital avatars.**

Holograms of the characters are projected between them, visible to player and audience. These virtual avatar characters are subject to certain physical constraints – if one is strong

then it will likely be slow – that are calculated by a 'referee' program which also records all points and cards gathered and lost in the tournament.

**Examples of Top-of-the line VR gear before the LordCorp**



Full-Immersion-System came out,

This is now just the standard consumer stuff, due to be replaced for gaming and other OVR purposes

Users have a Goggle or helmet display



Hand-controls or full suits are used to manipulate 'avatars' - digital figures

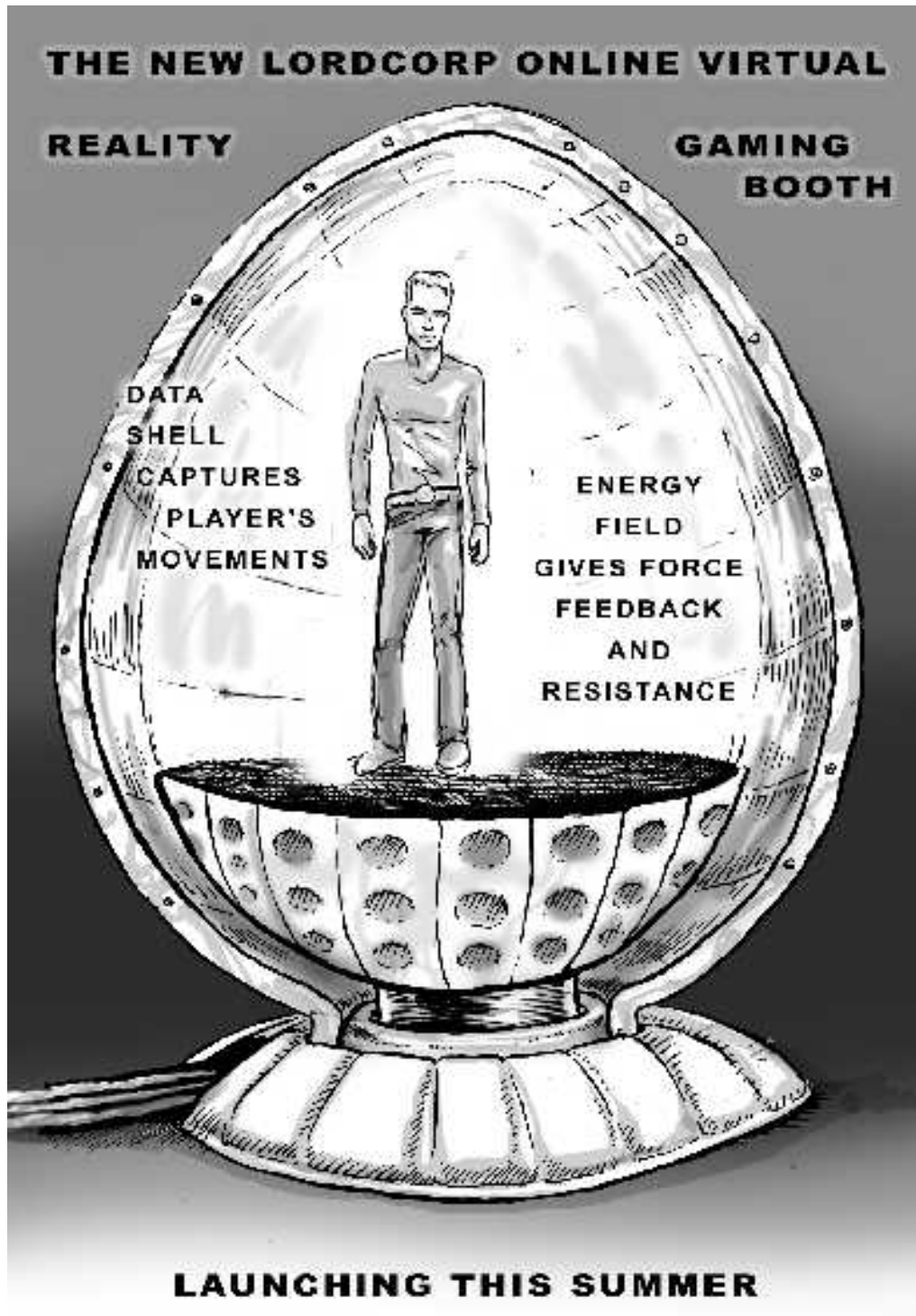


## TECHNOLOGY:

Lord's Tournament will showcase his technology as well as his gaming ability. Lordcorp's new gaming booth will be associated with the tournament. This online virtual reality gaming booth allows players to interact in a network in their digital avatar forms. The player's movements are recorded in real time and mapped on to the avatar.

The energy field and responsive floor allows players complete freedom of movement. They can for example, run and jump and the system will absorb their kinetic energy and provide

'force-feedback' so that it feels as if they are moving forward. Players can wear goggles or use a data display visible on the interior of the force field to see the virtual environment, though in the tournament players may choose to just watch the holograms in front of them.



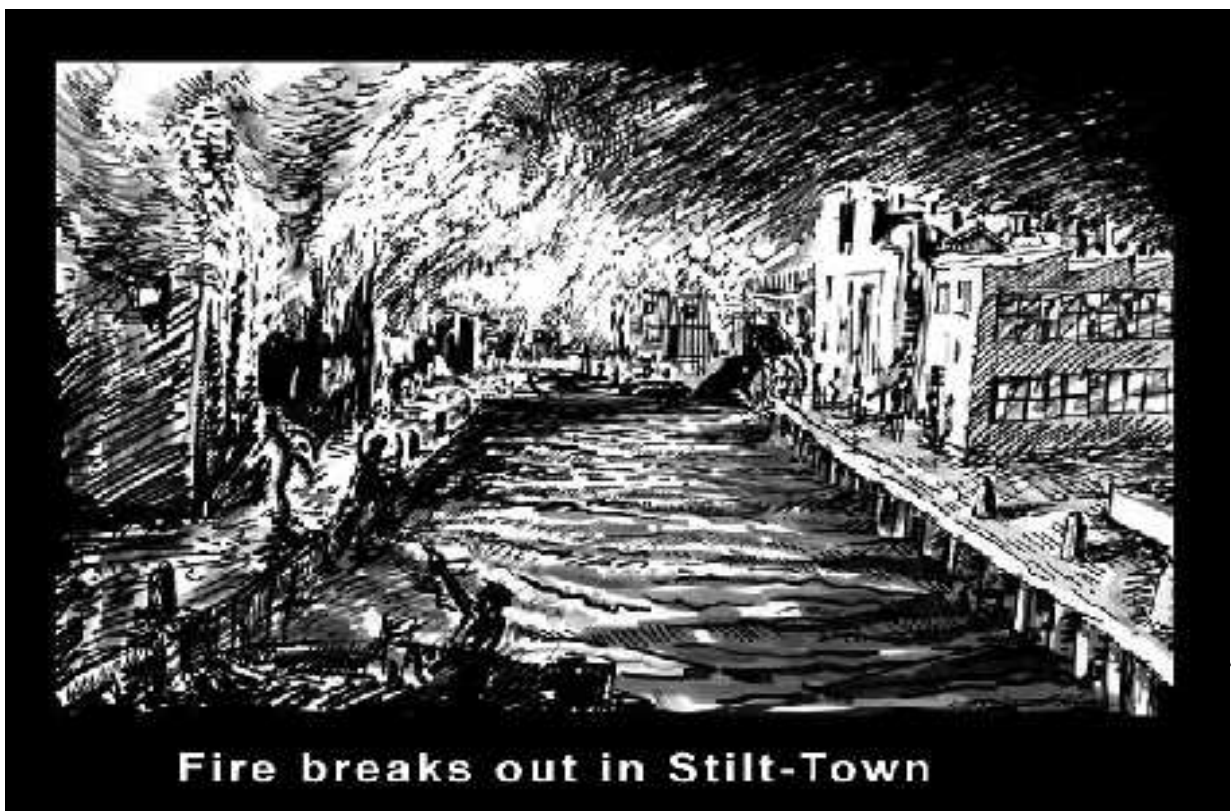
The main theme or 'take' *The Number One Game* has on technology generally is that

there has been progress apace, especially in computing, however energy supply problems will have made mass-manufacture a more difficult proposition than it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of financial market upheaval, weather problems and politics there is incredible technology available to the very rich but the poor majority of the world scarcely benefit.

The visible result of the above is still a fair amount of use of manual labour as it is relatively cheap. Although robotics are far-enough developed for them to replace, say, construction workers, they would only be used in impossible conditions for humans – underwater or during a storm or if people shouldn't know about the project.

Small scale consumer electronics and improved telecommunications are available to the public but not the net portals that are freely available to 'citizens' of Cape Island - those who have bought property or have credit and are on the Lordcorp grid. For everyone else electricity is unreliable batteries and registrations cost a lot of money, the poor of Cape Island rely on simple technologies like wind-up radios and printed flyers to communicate. Tourists, the middle class and the wealthy use the Lord Corp utility and telecoms grid for all their needs and consume large amounts of energy and materials.

Energy generation has become a small industry for the poorer people of the Cape using tidal and wind driven turbines but there is little storage capacity and wiring over water is dangerous. The burning of fuels and faulty electrics still causes regular fires in Stilt-Town



## FURTHER STORYLINES

Areas of the story world have been left open mostly because they won't fit into the page length of *The Number One Game* or don't further the main thrust of Joe becoming a hero. Narrative loose ends like Nazli's storyline and further conflicts between the Bergies and Nic Lord (both in the past and the future) can be developed.



Joe's travels to the Cape, for another example, have not been given any space in this plot, as this illustration below shows, he will have had many encounters on his journey.

Joe's first meeting with Nazli and his time with Uncle September generally has been given very little time in *The Number One Game* and it might be worthwhile to go back to it. Joe will have visited the Pearly Moon more often than I have shown, as well as other nightspots and dives in Cape Island's city centre.



On his way to Cape Island, Joe had many close calls and adventures. Here he hides from a convoy.



**The Pearly Moon, the bar where Joe first sees Nazli**