

VERTIGO
DC COMICS

WARREN ELLIS • DARICK ROBERTSON • RODNEY RAMOS

NO. 26
OCT 99

LATE EDITION ★ ★ ★

TRANSMETROPOLITAN™

\$2.50 US

\$3.95 CAN

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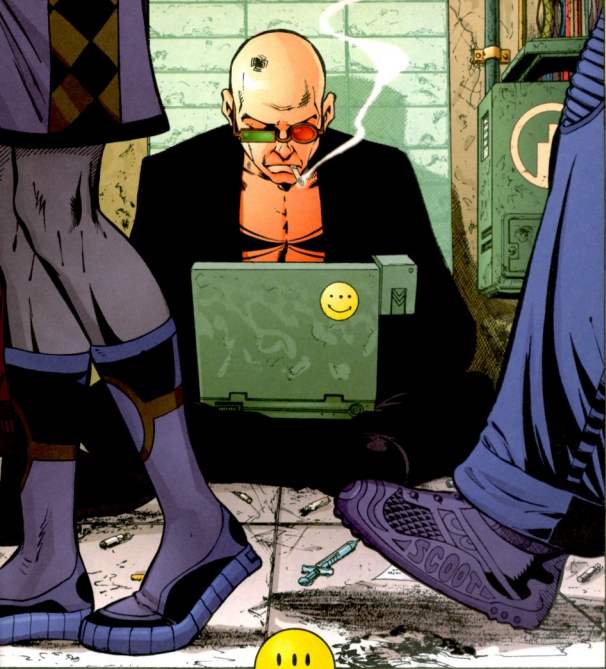


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21 DAYS IN THE CITY

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TRANSMETROPOLITAN 26, October, 1999. Published monthly by DC Comics, 1700 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to TRANSMETROPOLITAN, DC Comics Subscriptions, P.O. Box 9928, Babylon, NY 11510. Annual subscription rate \$30.00. Canadian subscribers must add \$12.00 for postage and GST. GST # is R125927072. All foreign countries must add \$12.00 for postage. U.S. funds only. Copyright © 1999 Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson. All Rights Reserved. All characters, the distinctive likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson. VERTIGO is a trademark of DC Comics. The stories, characters and incidents featured in this publication are entirely fictional. Printed on recyclable paper. DC Comics, A Division of Warner Bros.—A Time Warner Entertainment Company

Printed in Canada.

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My name's Spider Jerusalem. I am the most beloved man in this City. I am a journalist. I write a column for a newspaper called THE WORD entitled I HATE IT HERE. Because I do. I hate it and I hate you. And you love me for it. That's the way it works. And if you argue with the way it works, I'll kick off the top of your head and shit on your living brain. And you will love me for it.

Thank God for me.



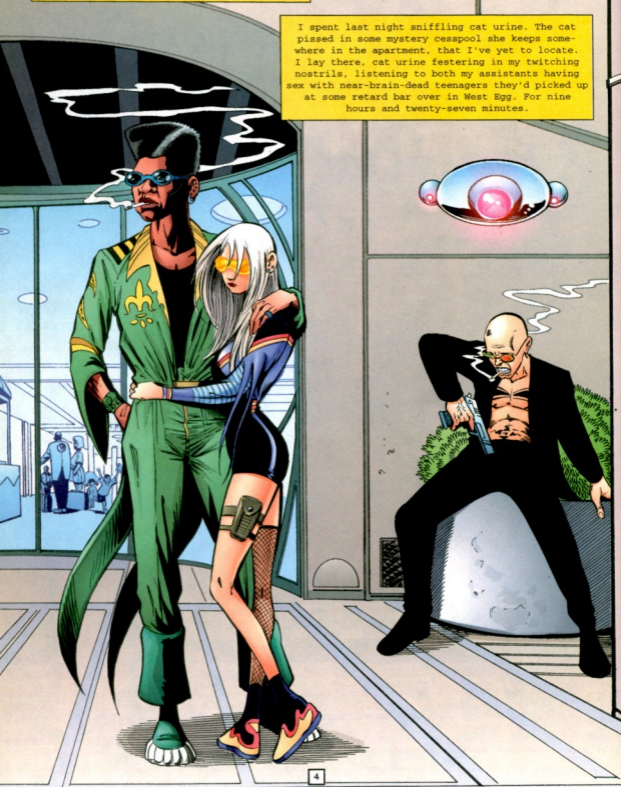
The City changes its makeup. Its foundation's gone scabby, lipstick kissed off, mascara run down its face. Down come the Beast's colors, all grey and doomed, their bite and bluster all dried up and blown down rustling autumn streets. And everywhere, blooming, The Smiler's colors, a blaze of victory bouquets all across the City.

First he fucks the City, then he buys her a new dress. Lovely. Maybe we should count ourselves lucky he didn't just wipe his dick on our knee and toss five bucks onto the bed.



She hasn't brushed her hair. His hair is still dewy with droplets from the shower. Their eyes, too used to half-light, get half burned out by the sunshine. They groan, lean on each other and laugh at themselves. Share his last cigarette in front of the hotel, waiting for a cab, or perhaps two.

I spent last night sniffing cat urine. The cat pissed in some mystery cesspool she keeps somewhere in the apartment, that I've yet to locate. I lay there, cat urine festering in my twitching nostrils, listening to both my assistants having sex with near-brain-dead teenagers they'd picked up at some retard bar over in West Egg. For nine hours and twenty-seven minutes.



"I'm doing mechanics," he says, fingers tapping in unconscious urgency on the sharp edges of a credit-card-sized AI computer brain; some kind of servant-mind you find in your Maker, one that comes with the standard chemical scanning gear that checks your food as fit for consumption. Some bastard here's selling mechanics, and he wants some. Not needs. Not yet. Mechanics is - at least begins as - a drug, one new enough that we haven't yet developed addiction resistance to it. A drug whose chemical code is also machine code. Make the AI card scan the drug, do the drug yourself, and you and the machine intelligence both get good and fucked up. The drug creates a connection between your mind and the AI. The AI breaks into your head and starts messing around with your DNA. Move a human chemical here, juggle some more there - and human tissue becomes mineral matter. You grow mechanics. The high passes. The mechanics remain.





COK
AS SEEN ON TV
THE ORIGINAL 10 APPROVED STENO-PHILIC DEVICE

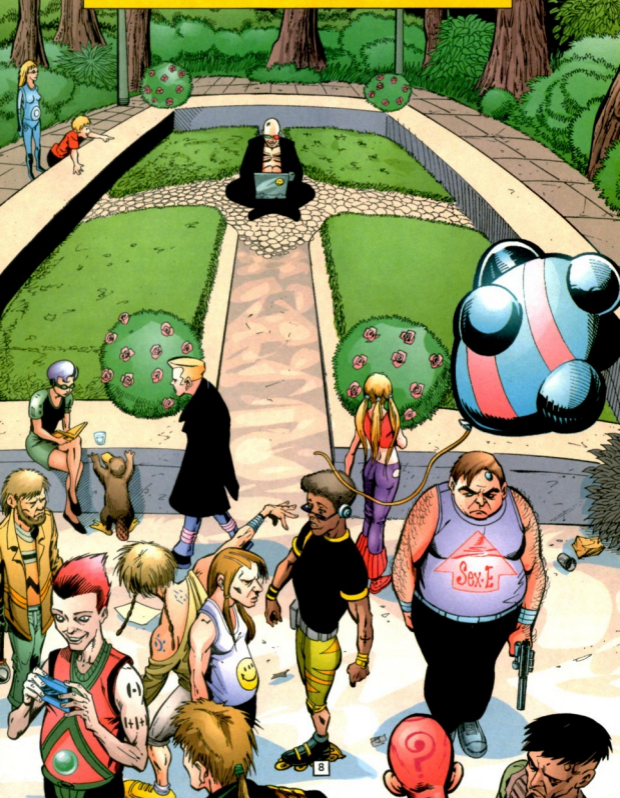
GINGER
WORTHY

Matteo bought himself a new set of genitals today. He's very proud of them. They were made by an Uruguayan firm known for the reliability and sensitivity of their product. They're also known for having their products built by children working in dangerous conditions earning less than a dollar a month, but that doesn't bother Matteo. Oh no. Matteo's got the genitals he always wanted now. They're exactly like the genitals he used to have. Only with a MiniDisc player.



Sometimes this place just stops and hits you in the eyes. I'm on a train to Venetian End to cover the intestine-rinsing competition at the public sinks there, passing through the western Lakes. Sunny day. Trout and salmon blasting through the channels and rivers that connect the Lakes to each other and the sea. And then I see a dolphin. And then I see a Temp, someone wearing animal traits for a weekend. And for a moment there, I don't have any words.

And when the sun falls down on this City, it's transformed; it blooms again, in impossible blazes of a million colors you'd forgotten even existed, winter's been here so long. It wakes me, shakes me from the grey I'd been living in, reminds me why I'm alive, why I'm here, why I do what I do. My filthy assistants disagree and I have to force them blinking and cursing into the light, as if prodding them into walking the plank. Which thought also warms me as if the sun were in my belly.



My editor, Mitchell Royce, makes me attend a Media Exploitation meeting at the offices of THE WORD, the crapulous rag you currently have slowly dissolving in your hands. It does not go well. I am shown Magical Truthsaying Bastard Spidey, animated versions of my columns in the manner of Japanese cartoons. I am shown enough useless shit to make shelters for every war refugee in western England. I am forced to remonstrate physically with the media rep, until Royce stuns me with wads of royalty money.



水はる子マキコ
DON'T COME NEAR! I AM WILD AND DANGEROUS!

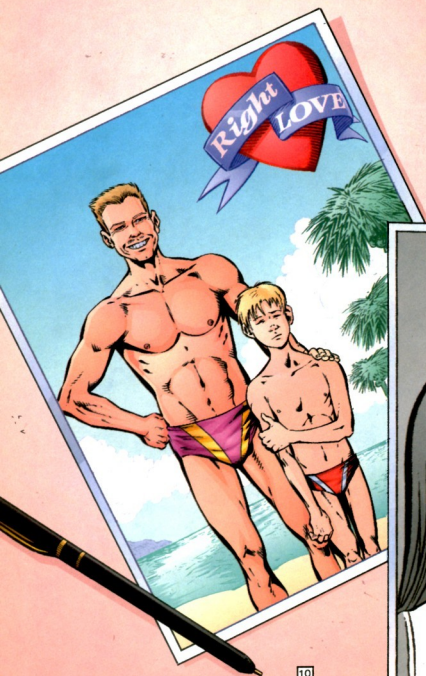
Spider!
"I love it here!"

image campaign

TALK SHOW!



Right Love is somehow becoming a cause célèbre among the great and the good. Huey Three-Flint-Knife, their founder and spokesman, is handsome, witty and impassioned. His friends, like Bobby Long, plainly worship him - Long spent his two years in jail writing a history of the movement that was nothing more than a hymn to Huey. Influential producer and cultural compass Bert Shenfield said upon meeting him, "If he's not Mao, I'll eat it." Please allow me to remind everyone that Right Love's aim of "freeing sexuality" is quite specific: having sex with pre-sexual humans. Don't look for media-approved ideologically sound Right Causes where there are none. Look out of the window instead, and do something about what you see there.



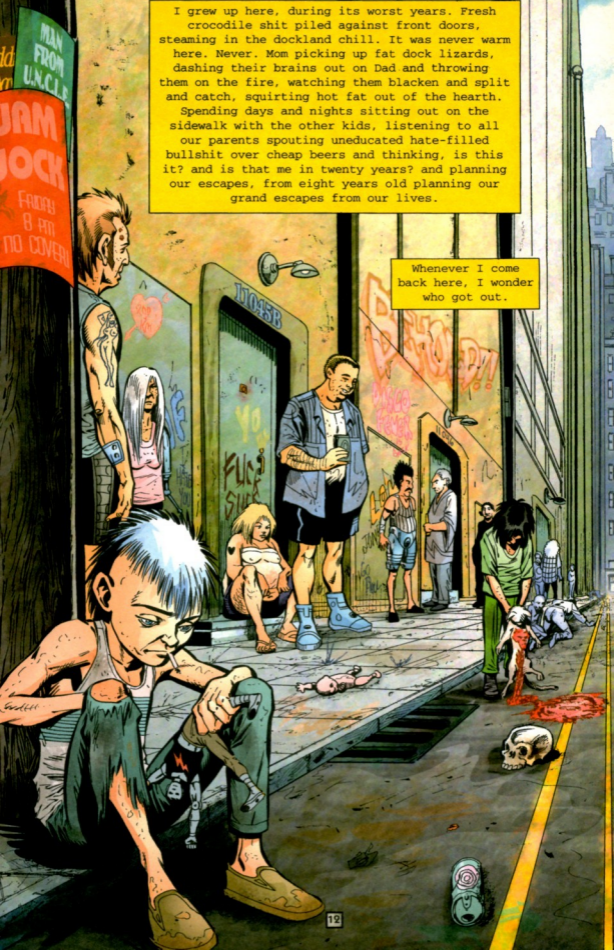
My dreams come true. A strain of intelligent sociopathic dog has arisen in the dank sewers of Hilbery Depths, northeast of the Fourth Canal terminus. These criminal vermin have terrorized the decent people there so badly, and have bred so prodigiously, that Civic Center is permitting, for only the third time in living memory, a Cull. Smart or not, dogs have no rights. I ponder this awful, searing injustice as I fondle my Volunteer Cullmaster pass and assemble my arsenal.

Sometimes,
life is
sweet.

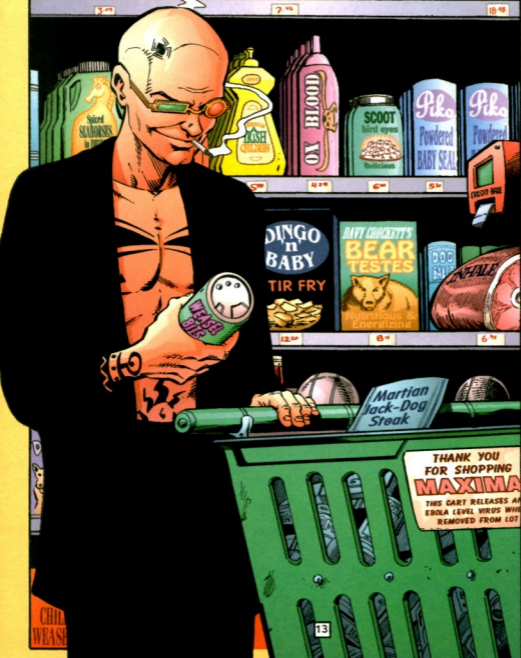


I grew up here, during its worst years. Fresh crocodile shit piled against front doors, steaming in the dockland chill. It was never warm here. Never. Mom picking up fat dock lizards, dashing their brains out on Dad and throwing them on the fire, watching them blacken and split and catch, squirting hot fat out of the hearth. Spending days and nights sitting out on the sidewalk with the other kids, listening to all our parents spouting uneducated hate-filled bullshit over cheap beers and thinking, is this it? and is that me in twenty years? and planning our escapes, from eight years old planning our grand escapes from our lives.

Whenever I come back here, I wonder who got out.



I love shopping. No, really. Nothing pleases me more than wandering through a good market's aisles, my gun tapping musically on the cart's steel, stun grenades bumping my leg companionably. Spiced seahorses in brine, fresh chimp heads on ice along with the salmon, manatee and whale ... powdered children from Ireland mixed up in a jug of vodka for those summer days on the balcony ... what a time to be alive, when delicacies from all over the world, some only half-imagined, are there to be had on a nearby shelf...



I had one of those weird crossed lines the other day, the ones that connect you to Mars. I'm guessing it's something to do with the revolutionary faction on Pylon Nine, whom most people are certain are only rebelling because they feel they really ought to. It's a cultural expectation. I ended up having phone sex with a nominal female who had a sequence of filtration pipes, vacuum seals and musical valves instead of a mouth. She sent me a picture later, though, and she had pretty lips. I'm oddly depressed.

Listened to filthy assistants having wild fantasy steroid monkey sex again last night.





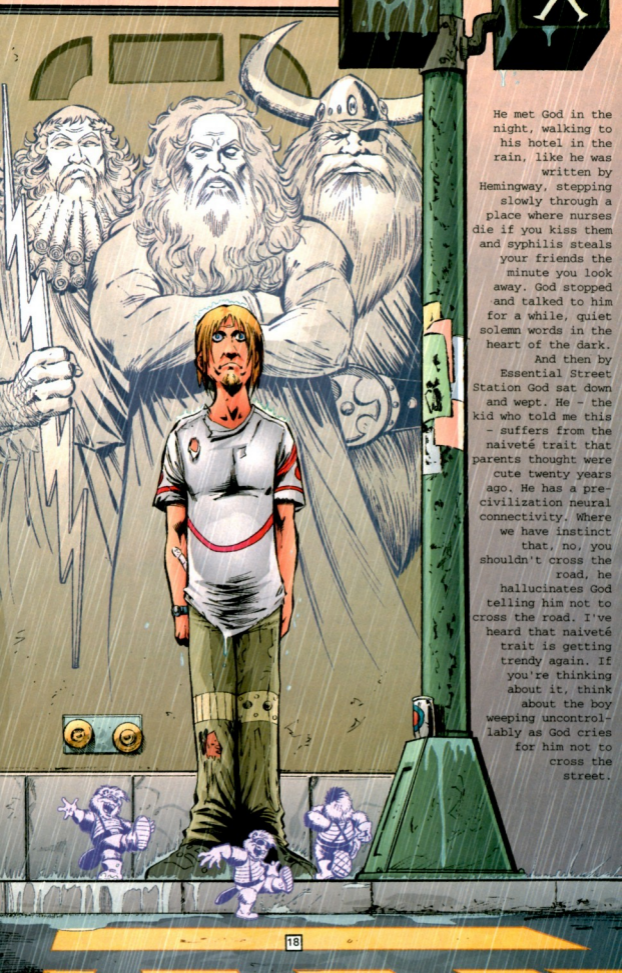
I live behind a wall so high it gets more difficult each day to see over it. When I first returned to the streets of the City, I was put in a hopeless shithole. Once I'd made the Word some money, I got them to move me to Pupin Grove, which was nicer, if filled with people who were something-in-media. That place turned out to be insecure, and I was moved to expensive, safe Chase Square. And when I broke the Josh Freeh story, they set me up in ultra-exclusive Puritan Mews here. And now I can't see the street anymore.

Did you ever want to set someone's head on fire, just to see what it looked like? Did you ever stand in the street and think to yourself, I could make that nun go blind just by giving her a kiss? Did you ever lay out plans for stitching babies and stray cats into a Perfect New Human? Did you ever stand naked surrounded by people who want your gleaming sperm, squirting frankincense, soma and testosterone from every pore? If so, then you're the bastard who stole my drugs Friday night. And I'll find you. Oh, yes.



Sumo is the most perfect of sports. It has elegance, ceremony, danger, art, speed, and, most important, two fat bastards smacking the shit out of each other. It is immaculate, which is why it has remained essentially unchanged for thousands of years. It remains the only thing in the world that I want to see stay static. The only thing I love that loves me back.





He met God in the night, walking to his hotel in the rain, like he was written by Hemingway, stepping slowly through a place where nurses die if you kiss them and syphilis steals your friends the minute you look away. God stopped and talked to him for a while, quiet solemn words in the heart of the dark.

And then by Essential Street Station God sat down and wept. He - the kid who told me this - suffers from the naïveté trait that parents thought were cute twenty years ago. He has a pre-civilization neural connectivity. Where we have instinct that, no, you shouldn't cross the road, he hallucinates God telling him not to cross the road. I've heard that naïveté trait is getting trendy again. If you're thinking about it, think about the boy weeping uncontrollably as God cries for him not to cross the street.



I'VE GOT A DATA MINER RUNNING. IT'S COMPARING MISSING PERSONS AGAINST PERSONALITY TRAITS AND DOMESTIC SITUATIONS. THE PERSON WHO KILLED VITA SEVERN WAS SO THOROUGHLY VAPORIZED THAT NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER REMAINED, APART FROM THE GUN, WHICH WAS SANITIZED. ONCE I'VE GOT A SPREAD OF NAMES, I CAN HAVE QUESTIONS ASKED. I CAN COVER THE STORY. NO ONE'S GETTING AWAY WITH THIS. THE NEW PRESIDENT HAS PROMISED TO FUCK ME OVER. BUT IF I CAN MANAGE THIS, I CAN GET HIM FIRST. IF.

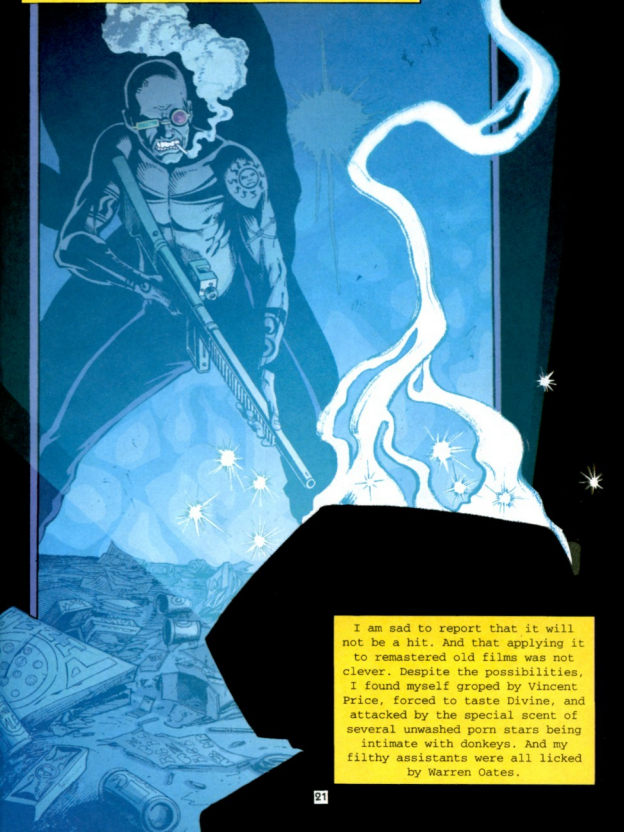
I'VE BEEN GETTING HEADACHES LATELY.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION.)

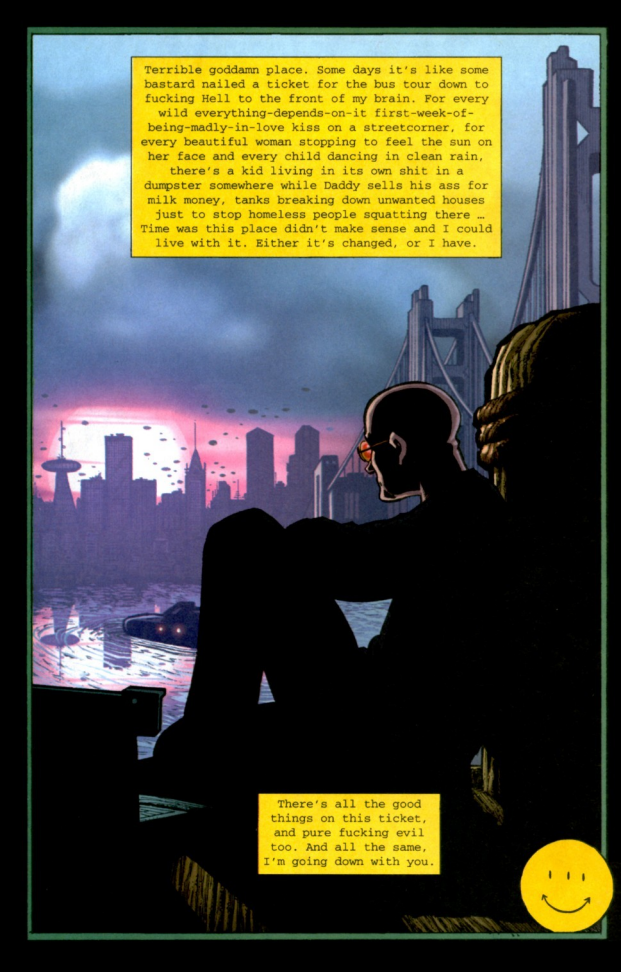
The internal strife in Ludgate East finally burned itself out a couple of years back. Everyone thought the bombed-out district would just rot, since there was no way Civic Center were going to send cash. No one figured on the assholes, though. The tourist assholes come for a holiday in someone else's misery, in their retro-Vietcong black pajamas and urban camo dresses, here to see what an actual war looks like. And the rebels smile and say Hi, I'm Marcellus XXX, I'll be your guide for today, selling toy ramcars made from spent shells...



So this corp wants to show me they love me like unto a god by giving me a new forfuck'ssake television set. Approximedia, they called it. Rider signals on the regular digital feed talk to a small Maker inside the set, which pumps out olfactory mix and forcefeed waves. You can see TV, hear it, and now smell it, taste it and feel it.



I am sad to report that it will not be a hit. And that applying it to remastered old films was not clever. Despite the possibilities, I found myself groped by Vincent Price, forced to taste Divine, and attacked by the special scent of several unwashed porn stars being intimate with donkeys. And my filthy assistants were all licked by Warren Oates.

A man in silhouette is sitting on a bridge railing, looking out at a city skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue, purple, and orange. In the background, a suspension bridge is visible. The man is wearing sunglasses and has his arms crossed. The overall mood is contemplative and somewhat melancholic.

Terrible goddamn place. Some days it's like some bastard nailed a ticket for the bus tour down to fucking Hell to the front of my brain. For every wild everything-depends-on-it first-week-of-being-madly-in-love kiss on a streetcorner, for every beautiful woman stopping to feel the sun on her face and every child dancing in clean rain, there's a kid living in its own shit in a dumpster somewhere while Daddy sells his ass for milk money, tanks breaking down unwanted houses just to stop homeless people squatting there ... Time was this place didn't make sense and I could live with it. Either it's changed, or I have.

There's all the good things on this ticket, and pure fucking evil too. And all the same, I'm going down with you.

