

After getting back from Vietnam, I enrolled in college. Planned on being a lawyer. Took some classes to make me *smarter*.

Never did become a lawyer. Whether or not I got any smarter is up for *debate*.

Took a course in literature, where the professor loved to focus on *word choice*.

"Your choice of words is like your choice of *weapons*," he would say. "A single word can drive a man to kill, or to love."

Never thought about it that way before.



For everything we want or need, there are the *words* to get it.



The key is to know the *right words* for the desired outcome--to know how to string 'em all together, so that the weapon we wield is the *most effective*.



Sometimes, it only takes a *single word*.

BANG

FIRE!



THE GODDAMN BUILDING IS ON FIRE!

FIRE!

Went into the Marines when I was *seventeen*. The judge gave me a *choice*--prison as an adult, or join the military.



By the time I was *nineteen*, I was in Vietnam.


Had my first confirmed kill *before* I turned *twenty*.




Killing came a little too *easy* for me.



OUTTA THE WAY!



First thing they teach you in the Marines is that the enemy *is the enemy*, not another human being.



This dehumanizes 'em. Makes it *easier* to kill.


GET THAT MOULINYAN!



YOU TALKIN' 'BOUT ME?

BANG BANG BANG

Thing about *dehumanizing* someone else is that you can't do it without givin' up some of your *own* humanity in the process.



AM I THE ONE YOU WANT?

BANG

That's the *price* you pay for being able to kill someone.





WHO...
WHO ARE
YOU?

NAME'S
SHAFT.



JOHN
SHAFT.

**TWO MONTHS
LATER...**



JOHN...?

WHAT'RE
YOU DOING
UP?

THIS IS
ALL PART OF A
DREAM, BABY.

There are times
when you wish you
could *sleep* forever.



JUST GO
BACK TO
SLEEP.



And then there's the
times when it feels
like you've been
asleep forever.



**WE-NEVER-
SLEEP-SO-YOU-CAN
ANSWERING SERVICE,
THIS IS MILDRED.**

MILDRED,
THIS IS JOHN
SHAFT...





Life ain't measured in hours, or days, or weeks, or years.

It's measured in *before* and *after*.



There was my life *before* meeting Knocks Persons...

BIG, BAD **KNOCKS PERSONS**, THE **GODFATHER OF HARLEM**--IN THE FLESH.

YOU WANTED TO SEE ME. HERE I AM



...and there's my life *after* Knocks Persons.

MY BABY GIRL GONE *MISSIN'*, AND I CAN'T FIND HER. *ANYWHERE*.

COPS *WON'T* HELP

I NEED A CAT THAT KNOWS *THE STREETS*, AND WHO CAN PULL A COP'S COAT. THAT'S YOU.

MONEY AIN'T SHIT, S'LONG AS I GET MY *DAUGHTER* BACK.



Man like Knocks Persons hires you, he ain't just gettin' your *services*. He's leasing your *soul*, with an option to buy.

Everyone is looking to get a *piece* of your soul.

Your *boss* at work.

The *general* that puts you in his army and tells you to kill.

The *woman* you love.



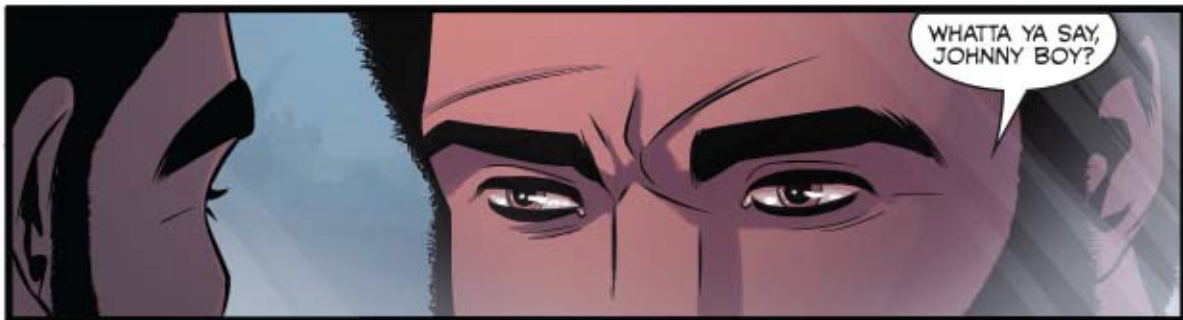
They all want a *piece* of your soul.



If you're not *careful*, there won't be enough of you left for *yourself*.



Could've said *no* to Knocks Persons and his money, and all the *trouble* it brought me.

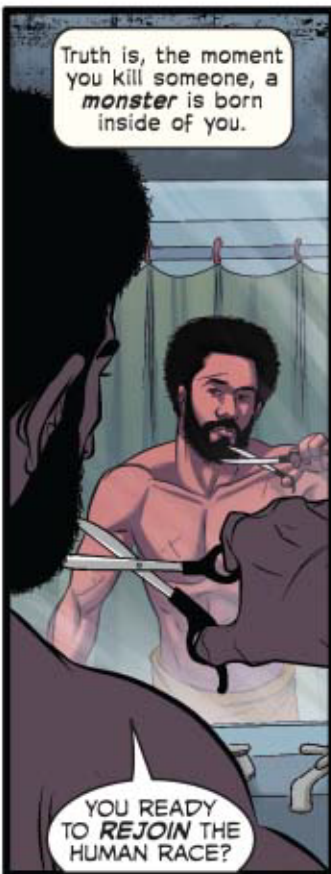


WHATTA YA SAY, JOHNNY BOY?



Could've held on to a bit *more* of my soul.

Could've retained the humanity you gotta give up when you do *certain* things.

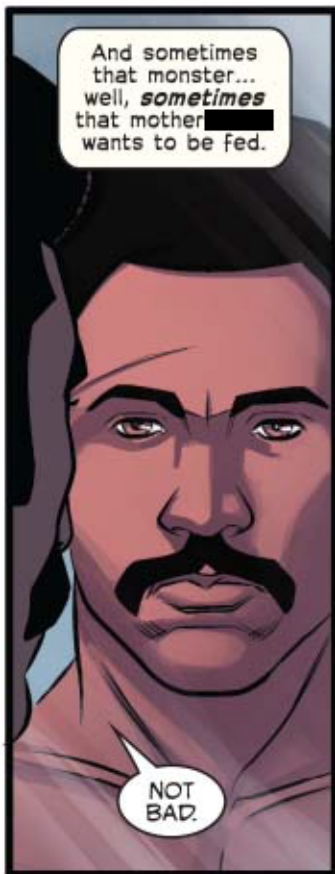


Truth is, the moment you kill someone, a *monster* is born inside of you.

YOU READY TO *REJOIN* THE HUMAN RACE?



It *feeds* on that humanity you give up whenever you take a life.



And sometimes that monster... well, *sometimes* that mother **f---er** wants to be fed.

NOT BAD.



The monster feeds, and the world *changes*. It becomes like some kind of *dream*--like you're sleeping.

And then, just like that, you return to the *real world*. It's like waking up.

The monster has been fed, and it's time to get back on with your life...



...like no *terrible* shit has just happened.



Like you ain't *responsible* for the terrible shit. Like someone else did it.

"THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO SEE US IN PERSON, MR. SHAFT."

1107

JOHN SHAFT
PRIVATE INVESTIGATION

...I DON'T THINK THERE'S MUCH I CAN DO FOR YOU.

HONESTLY, THIS ISN'T EVEN THE TYPE OF CASE I'D NORMALLY TAKE ON.

WE UNDERSTAND, MR. SHAFT.

IT'S JUST THAT NO ONE ELSE WILL EVEN TALK TO US.

NOT THE POLICE. NO OTHER PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS. NO ONE.

"LIKE I SAID ON THE PHONE, MR. PROSSER..."



MY COUSIN KNOWS A MAN HERE IN THE CITY...

A PRIVATE EYE NAMED BUTCH BUCHINSKI.

WE TALKED TO MR. BUCHINSKI, AND HE SAID YOU WERE A GOOD MAN—AN HONORABLE MAN.



WE JUST WANT SOMEONE TO AT LEAST TRY TO FIND OUR SON, MIKE. THAT'S ALL. JUST TRY.

IT MAY BE A WASTE OF MONEY, BUT IT'S OUR MONEY, MR. SHAFT.



NO OFFENSE, BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE YOUR SON DOESN'T WANT TO BE FOUND.

I MEAN... HE'S OLD ENOUGH TO MAKE HIS OWN DECISIONS.

HELL, ANYONE OVER EIGHTEEN ISN'T EVEN CONSIDERED A RUNAWAY.

WE KNOW, MR. SHAFT. IT'S JUST... WELL...



...THINGS ARE COMPLICATED WITH MIKE.


WE'RE FROM A SMALL TOWN UPSTATE, WHERE BOYS LIKE OUR SON AREN'T... UNDERSTOOD.

MY WIFE AND I, WE DIDN'T SUPPORT HIM LIKE WE COULD HAVE. LIKE WE SHOULD HAVE. THAT'S WHY HE LEFT.



THE *REAL*
REASON YOUR
SON LEFT...


IS THAT ALSO
THE REASON YOU'VE
HAD TROUBLE FINDING
SOMEONE TO TAKE
THIS CASE?



MY SON IS
A HOMOSEXUAL,
MR. SHAFT.

I CAN'T SAY
I'M *HAPPY* ABOUT
THAT, BUT I LOVE
MY SON.

SPEAKING
FRANKLY...



NO, I SUPPOSE
THEY *DON'T*.

SPEAKING FRANKLY,
MOST PEOPLE IN THIS
CITY DON'T GIVE A GOOD
GODDAMN ABOUT *ANYONE*
FROM *ANYWHERE*.



...NO ONE GIVES
A GOOD GODDAMN
ABOUT A *QUEER KID*
FROM SARANAC LAKE,
NEW YORK.

I'M SURE
OTHERS HAVE
ALREADY EXPLAINED
THIS TO YOU, BUT
JUST IN CASE...



"...EVERY DAY *HUNDREDS* OF KIDS
ARRIVE RIGHT DOWN THE STREET
AT THE PORT AUTHORITY.

"THEY COME FROM ALL
OVER--FROM PLACES WHERE
THEY DIDN'T FEEL LIKE THEY
FIT IN, THINKING *THIS* IS THE
PLACE FOR THEM."