

COMIX

ALAN GRANT

MIKE McMAHON

JOHN WAGNER

# LAST

the

# AMERICAN



Once the bombs stop falling, nuclear war won't really be all that bad. The radiation will obviously be worse in some places than in others, humanity will survive in small but resilient groups, and by banding together in nifty-looking stockades built from old cars and things, people will generally be able to ward off the depredations of whatever foul mutations come crawling out of the fallout. There'll be marauders and bandits and slavers and raiders, too, probably all wearing big spiky shoulder-pads, and the vehicles will be really, really cool.

Or so runs the theory in just about every post-apocalyptic tale written, filmed or drawn since Hiroshima and Nagasaki went up in smoke.

*Well screw you, Mister President. Screw you and your comic-book fantasies.*

The creators behind *The Last American* took a somewhat different starting point for their story of life after the bomb. If a man could survive the initial atomic exchange through cryogenic hibernation, they wondered, and set out into the wastelands with his robot buddies and whacking great radiation-proof tank, and search for what was left of civilisation - what would he actually find? In the real world, where - rumour has it - nuclear war will be the end of us all, what would be left of America?

There was quite a buzz behind this story when it first appeared, somewhere around the end of 1990. The creative team had a track record second to none, including such classic British series as *Robo-Hunter*, *Strontium Dog*, *Darkie's Mob*, *The ABC Warriors* and - of course - *Judge Dredd* (John Wagner created the character, Alan Grant co-wrote almost all the best stories with him, and Mike McMahon's depiction of Dredd is regarded by those in the know as truly definitive. You simply can't think of these three without The Judge coming to mind). As well as this, the series was a long time coming, having first been announced as early as '86. Everyone wanted to know what John, Alan and Mike had come up with.

And then, I'm sorry to say- because for me this is one of the very best comic-books ever published- *The Last American* sank without trace. Sales were okay, but not good enough to prompt a trade paperback collection at the time. Surprisingly few people that I've talked to since have even heard about it.

Maybe it was the art, which is as uncompromising as it is brilliant. Maybe it was the story, which was not what anyone was expecting: this is potent stuff, and not for the faint of heart (too late, you've bought it). Maybe people wanted mutants and bandits and stockades and spiky shoulder pads, and instead they got...well, wait and see.

Ulysses S. Pilgrim finds innumerate horrors waiting for him in the post-holocaust U.S.A., but none of them are ones you'll be ready for. From the grisly sights in *Goodnight Poughkeepsie*, to the ghosts of Broadway, to the terrible trick played on him by his well-meaning companions, Pilgrim has a gallery of nightmares to face beyond anything mere science-fiction or horror could offer. But he also finds hope, in the story's last and most affecting sequence, and that- perhaps- is *The Last American's* greatest surprise.

It's a real treat to see this story back in print after such a long time, and it's my fervent hope that it finally finds the audience it deserves. I can't help but smile at the thought of it, really, if only because I was one of the few who knew all along (one good thing about atomic devastation: no more smug people).

Here's a story about America, written and drawn by the Best of British.

I used to share a studio with **Mike McMahon**. Every day, for something like a year, we sat in the same room. We talked. About comics, about art, about music and about *Arsenal Football Club*. We listened to the radio, to *Derek and Clive* tapes and to the rain falling on the glass roof of our little outhouse. We drank coffee and ate *Hobnobs*. We smoked cigarettes; Mike actively, me passively.

And, there being bills to pay, we drew comics; probably some of the best work either of us ever did. In that humble shed, *Rogue Trooper* was born; numberless citizens fought their *Block Wars*; *Dr Who* was swept along by the Tides Of Time and the *Fink* held *Judge Anderson* hostage.

I'd work out a schedule for my work, pin it to the wall; rule up the board; draw my thumbnails, eight pages in a day; I'd pencil the pages, eight in four days, using a blunt hard pencil to lay them out and a sharper pencil to draw the details in more heavily; I'd letter them in a day; ink them, eight in four days, with dip pen, brush and Indian ink; put them in a parcel, mail them and cross them off the schedule. And so on. Simple, methodical, predictable.

Mike would take a day to cut some board to size, maybe discarding a third of it because he'd cut an edge microscopically wrong. He'd curse, throw a ruler down, light another cigarette. He'd do some fully inked thumbnails, detailed like jewellery, maybe for one page in a day, maybe three. He'd drink coffee. He'd start to pencil; a panel on one page, maybe a couple on another. He once took three days to pencil a single *Judge* boot. His pencil drawings were light, clean, pin accurate, wafted down with the most delicate touches of a soft 2B pencil. He'd ink some panels at random, quickly, almost impulsively, with a customized, Indian ink-filled fineline marker. He'd dunk a *Hobnob*. Then he'd switch back to pencilling, jumping around the pages as if filling in a crossword or assembling a jigsaw puzzle. This would go on for a couple of weeks. With a few days to deadline, he'd maybe have only a third of the job done. Then, in a frenzy, he'd finish the job, pencilling, inking, filling in blacks, the latter sometimes with my assistance. One timesaver was that his almost ethereal pencil drawings needed no erasing, the passage of his inking hand over them being enough to render them invisible. Despite the change of drawing speed, I can't now tell what was drawn slowly and what quickly. Eventually, the pages would be put in a tailor made parcel with a beautifully calligraphed address or, more likely, thrown into the back of his Mini and driven to the *2000AD* offices at speed.

I have watched this process many times, often even looked over his shoulder as he worked. I know him and his work probably as well as anyone in the business, but I still have absolutely no idea of how he does it. How he can pull such magic out of such chaos. How such an erratic approach can produce such consistently fine work.

I also have no idea why his work is not more popular. His character designs are distinctive, nuanced, subtle and yet direct. His drawings, although they are the product of much time and mental effort, never look laboured. His compositions are always fresh, innovative, free of clichéd solutions. His line is consistently spontaneous, expressive, alive. His colours are unfailingly bold, inventive, surprising. For whatever reason, be it his own high standards or the iconoclastic, even eccentric nature of his art, Mike has only produced a relatively small amount of published pages. Happily, much of his *2000AD* work has been collected in the frequent reprintings of *Judge Dredd*, *Slaine*, *Ro-Busters* and *ABC Warriors* and is well worth seeking out.

**THE LAST AMERICAN**, however, has never been reprinted since its original publication as four comic books by **Marvel's Epic** imprint back in 1990. Under the editorial guidance of the late, greatly missed **Archie Goodwin**, with darkly funny scripting by **John Wagner** and **Alan Grant**, Mike fashioned some of his finest pages. Here are all the elements that characterize his work. His idiosyncratic vision, his command of storytelling, his sense of humour, his sense of drama and his sheer good draftsmanship.

Despite his talents, Mike is a modest, down-to-earth man of few words. I, however, am a man of many words. Perhaps that's why we got on so well. Anyway, while I have the opportunity, I'd like to embarrass him just a little more. Or, to use an expression of mine from those studio days: "Since I'm already speaking, I'll carry on."

There's often talk of 'Artists' Artists'; those practitioners whose work is particularly beloved of their fellow professionals. Artists whose work inspires, amazes and reinforces one's enthusiasm for the art itself. **Alex Toth** is often, and rightly, cited as an example. So is **Sergio Toppi**. And so is **Mike McMahon**.

Don't take just my word for it. Ask **Frank Miller**. Or **Walter Simonson**. Or **Brian Bolland**. Or a host of others.

Or just read this book for yourself. And, if you can figure out how Mike does it or why his work is not more popular or, while we're at it, why he supports *Arsenal Football Club*, please let me know.

**The Last American** ...yet another panel with the wagon, gonna get the wheels right this time. Oh well, get 'em right next time. Pilgrim's kid could be wearing a ball club jacket, could use that team, what are they called...saw them play the other night...do a lot of base stealing, that guy Coleman...the Cardinals, got that nice bird symbol. Bollocks, it's another of John's songs, singing and dancing in New York this time...always have a problem with John's song stuff, but it's turning out OK, that Uggo and Uglika stuff turned out OK too, don't know why I take against it, that pic of the guy atop the ruins looks really tasty, but now the other dance pics don't look so good...we're stuck with them. That must be the worst drawing of a Zippo in the history of the universe, but getting near to finishing, always go off the boil near the finish. All these Baseball magazines and not a single picture of Yankee Stadium. What is wrong with this paper, it's not absorbing the markers at all...fucking typical, halfway through something and they've changed the spec! This time will definitely sort out the wheels. Could have latin on the flag like them English Civil war flags I was looking at, "til peace return to earth" or something, must find that book again...what have I done with it? None of these house plans seem to use any bricks...does this mean they'd all burn to nothing if they was nuked...is the USA a huge fire risk or what? How can I show that something is a flashback without using those poxy curvy panel corners, I hate that...could use monochrome, that might work. There's fifty stars in the flag and they are arranged in...getting fed up having to look this up all the time. That must be the worst drawn picture of Sonny Bono in the history of the world, it's more like that bloke in The High Chaparral, what was his name, had that nice looking sister married to Big John Cannon. That flashback sequence is rubbish, the most half-arsed colouring ever...but the damage is done. Why have I started using a light-box, I must be mad, it's like clambering about on a tank turret. Been to every art store in the south of England and still can't get enough of the 'old stock' paper...bastards! How can I show the rain, could just paint on some white streaks, never pulled it off before but you never know. Manolito, that was it, always drinking and hanging around with saloon gals! Ah, double sided tape, the artist's friend...whatever would I do without you. What is that smell? Another packet taken by the FedEx man, what a relief...milky coffee, digestives and the Test Match, I think. The wheels, the wheels, the fucking wheels! These trouser stripes should go down the side, why have I put them down the front...and I've used the wrong colours, wanted to make them like that American Football team...oh well. Brilliant, get hold of Yankee Stadium reference about six months too late, anyone drawing it would put that roof thing in, it's really distinctive, like the clock at Highbury...can't fix it. It's the paper, watercolour paper that stinks the place out if you put water on it...will have to use markers, can't be doing with that. This storm stuff is looking good, scratching the rain with the scalpel works a treat, Pilgrim looks wet through...but now the rest of the stuff is looking really weak...but can't fix it, too much work done to start again. Hmmm, them wheels not too bad...tracks looking a bit iffy though. Pilgrim's haircut, always wanted to have someone with that cut Charlton Heston had in The Warlord, they all had one, the Normans anyway...haven't seen that for years. Now, there's thirteen stripes, is the top one red or white? Seems a bit old hat showing the Statue of Liberty all busted up but could have been worse, might have had to draw the Brooklyn Bridge, all those cables...nurse! Am taking much too long, whole careers are rising and falling and this is still going on...lost count of how many editors we've had. Is it any good? Oh no, gotta draw a load of US Presidents, have to make sure they're more on the money than Sonny Bono...but couldn't be any worse. A happy accident...merging two of the really 'spready' markers gives a really good scumbly look that will take more marker on top, should get some mileage out of this. Should have got a better light-box. Should be putting more stuff in, more 'americana', but can't take the time to get the refs...should have listened to the advice in that Walter T Foster book on cartooning about starting a 'morgue'...but didn't, too late now. The script says that the car is supposed to be a Toyota...does it matter or must I go out to get a car magazine to see what a Toyota badge looks like...do they use the same symbol here as in the USA? This cover is looking sweet, maybe I should redo the first one, it could be so much better...if there is time I will definitely do it again. Been putting it off, but sooner or later I'm going to have to draw that...

**Mike McMahon** | January 2004

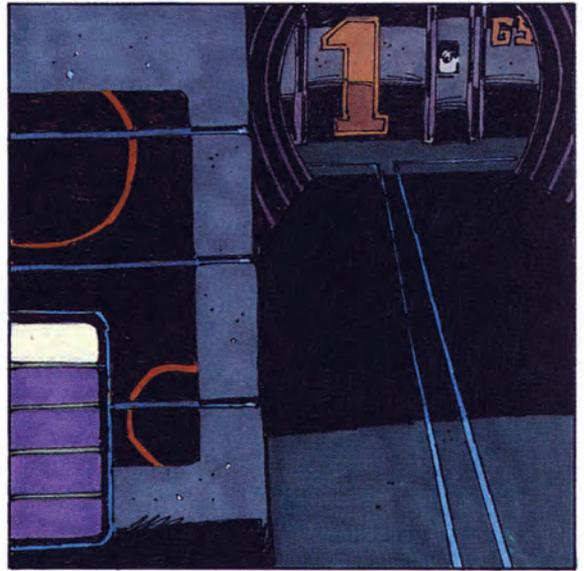
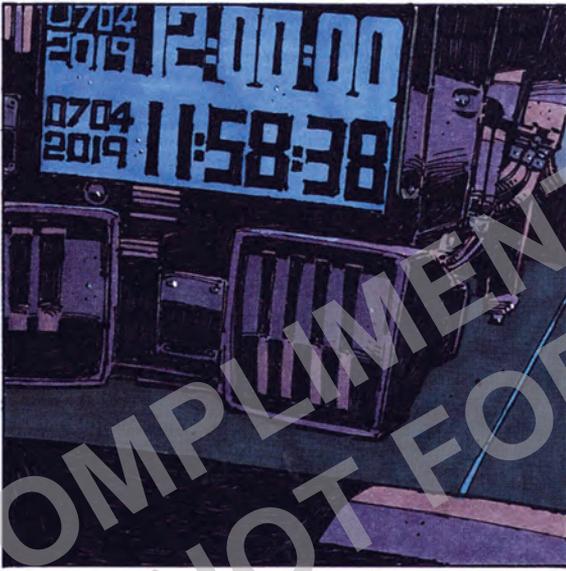
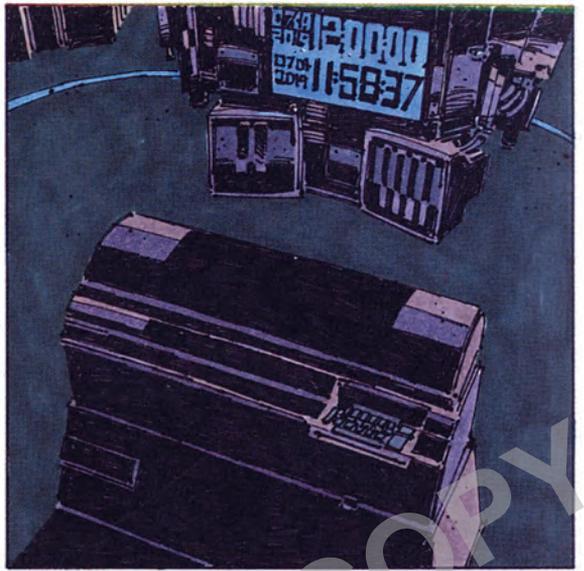
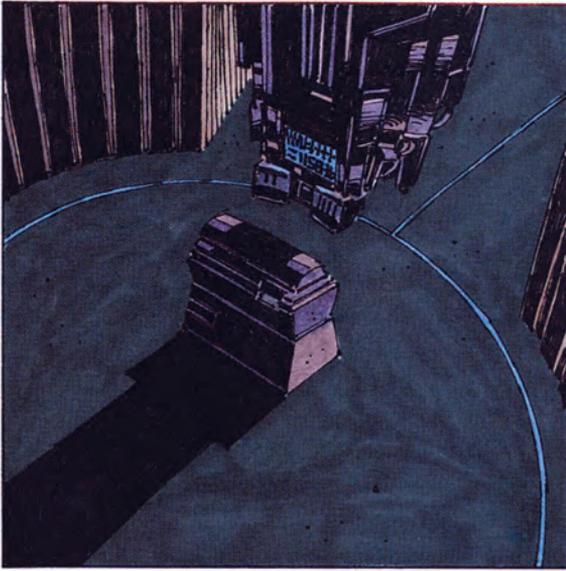
## **The Last American**

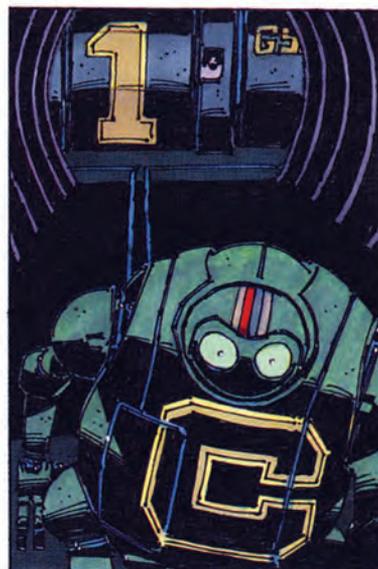
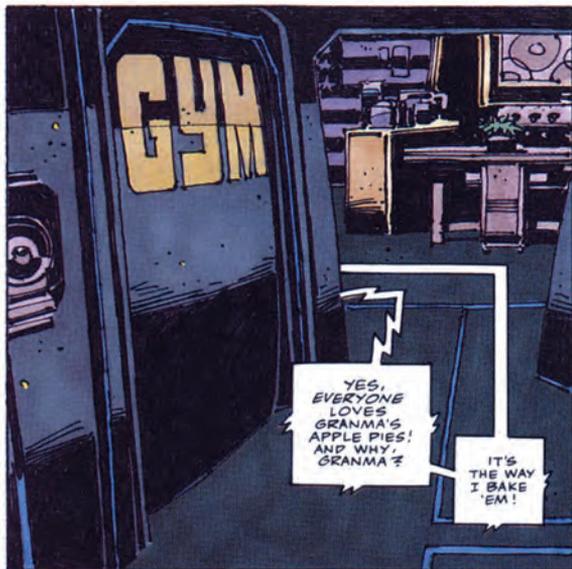
Created by | Alan Grant | Mike McMahon | John Wagner  
Written by | Alan Grant | John Wagner  
Pencils, inks and colours by | Mike McMahon  
Lettered by | Phil Felix

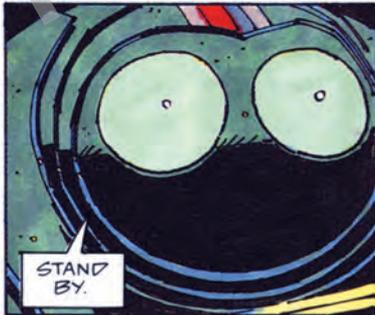
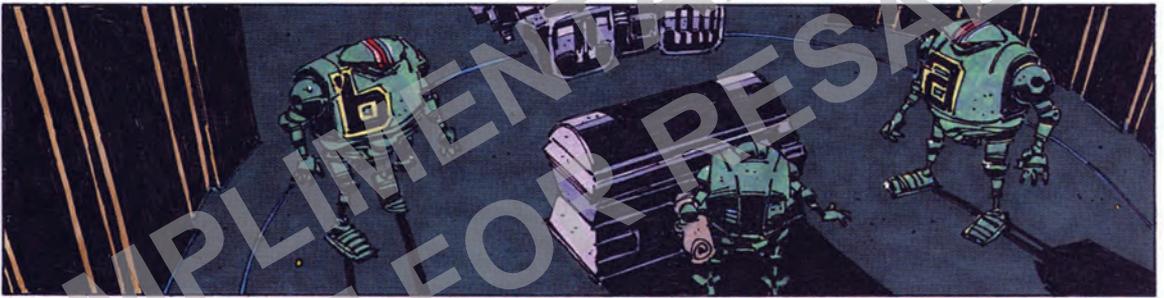
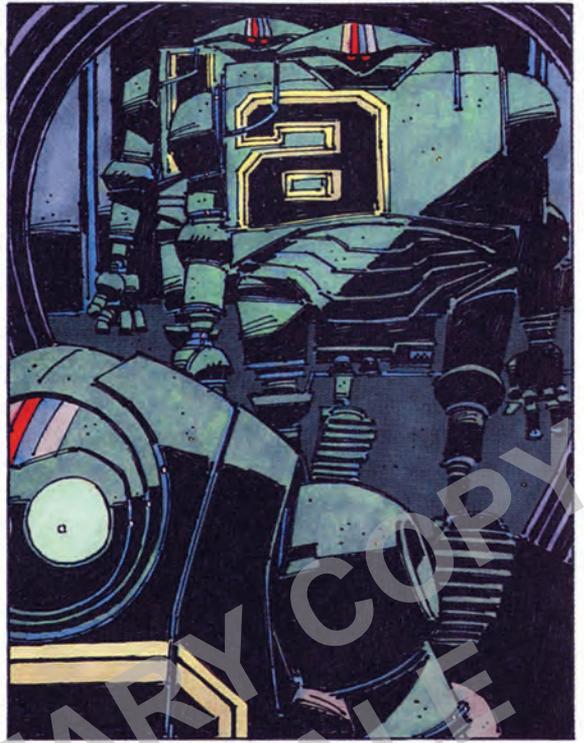
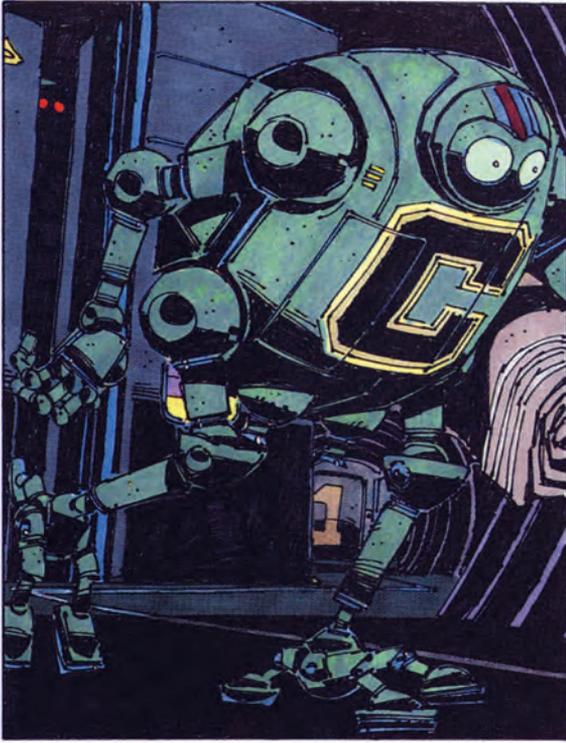
## **The Last American** : The Collected Edition (Digital Version)

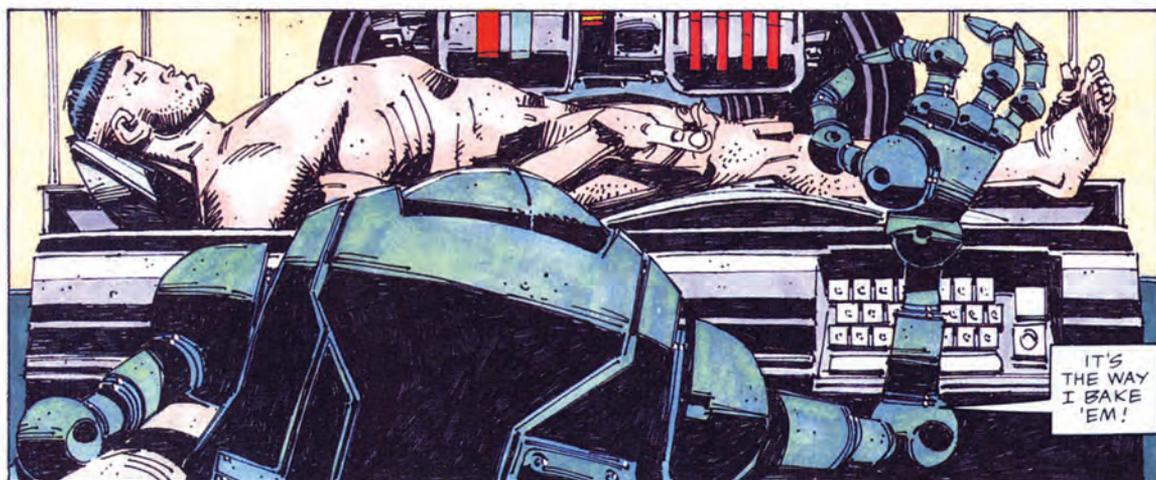
Published by | com.x : Eddie Deighton | Ben Shahrabani | Jon Sloan  
Edited by | Ben Shahrabani | Jon Sloan  
Logo and collected edition designed by | Eddie Deighton  
Front cover illustration by | Mike McMahon  
Back cover photography by | Sarah Bennett  
Special thanks to | Rufus Daylo

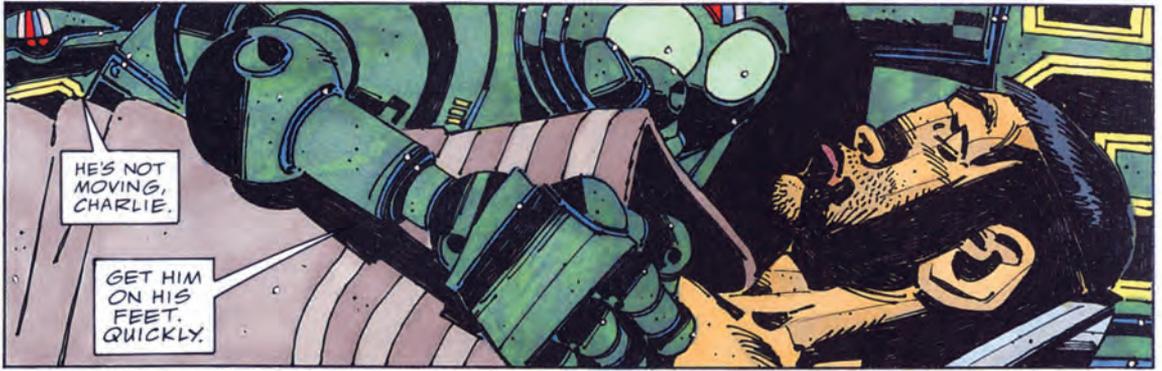
**The Last American** ©1990-2012 Alan Grant, Mike McMahon, John Wagner | All Rights Reserved | The Last American (including all prominent characters featured in this publication and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof) are trademarks of Alan Grant, Mike McMahon and John Wagner. **The Last American** : The Collected Edition was first printed April 2004 | Any similarities to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. None of the contents of this publication may be reprinted without the prior permission of com.x ltd | **com.x ltd** | Suite C | 2nd Floor West | Cross Keys House | 22 Queen Street | Salisbury | Wiltshire | UK | [www.comxcomics.com](http://www.comxcomics.com) | twitter **ComXcomics**











HE'S NOT MOVING, CHARLIE.

GET HIM ON HIS FEET. QUICKLY.



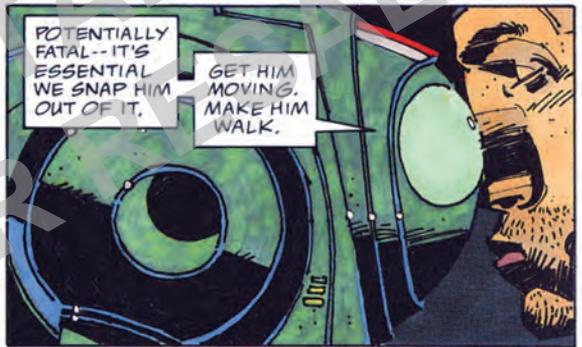
SPEAK TO ME! DO YOU HEAR ME?



CRYONIC NARCOSIS. JENNER CAUTIONED IT WAS A POSSIBILITY.



IS THAT SERIOUS?



POTENTIALLY FATAL--IT'S ESSENTIAL WE SNAP HIM OUT OF IT.

GET HIM MOVING. MAKE HIM WALK.

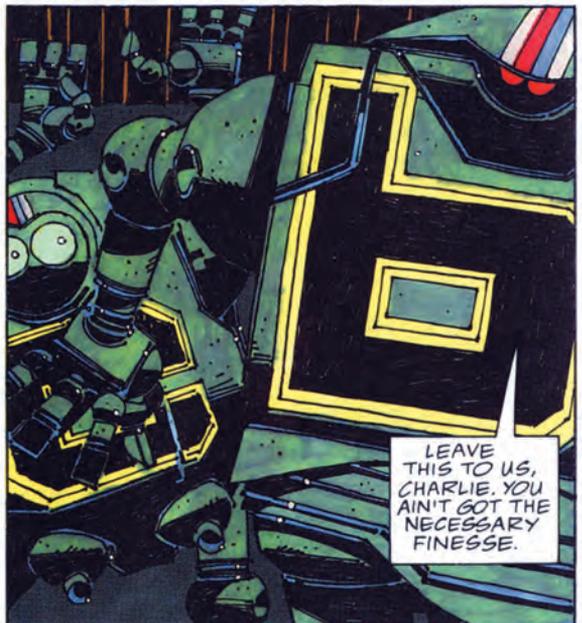


C'MON! SHAKE THE LEAD. PICK THOSE FEET UP!

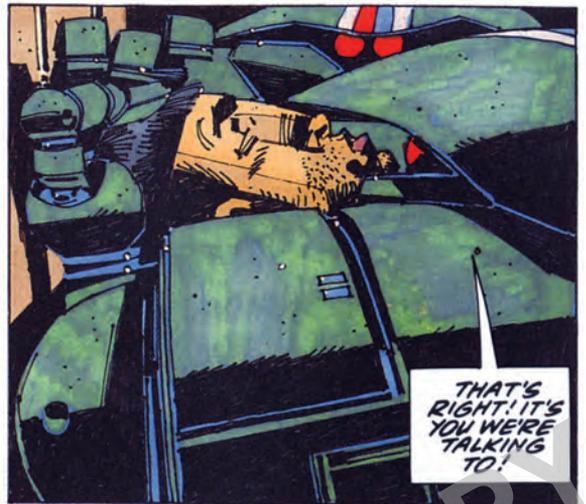
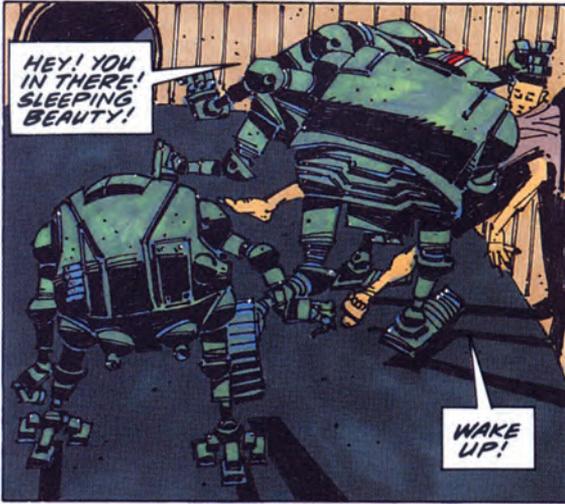
HUP-TWO! HUP-TWO!

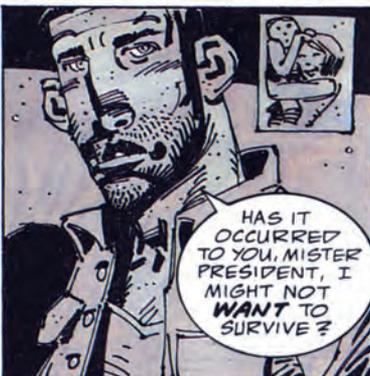
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

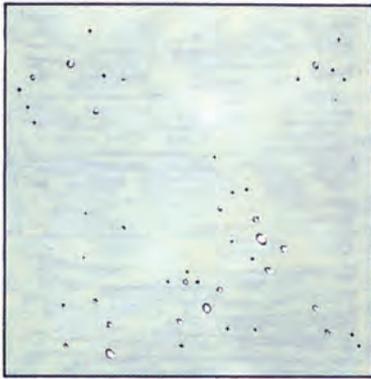
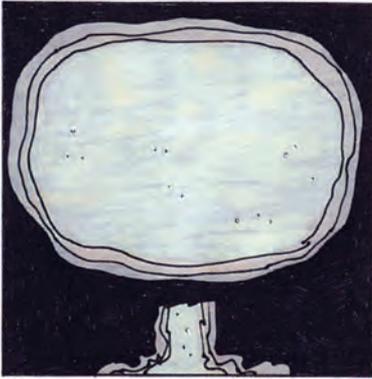
SAY IT!



LEAVE THIS TO US, CHARLIE. YOU AIN'T GOT THE NECESSARY FINESSE.







THE WAR... IS IT...



IT'S BEEN OVER TWENTY YEARS, BOSS.

TWENTY YEARS...

WHO WON...?



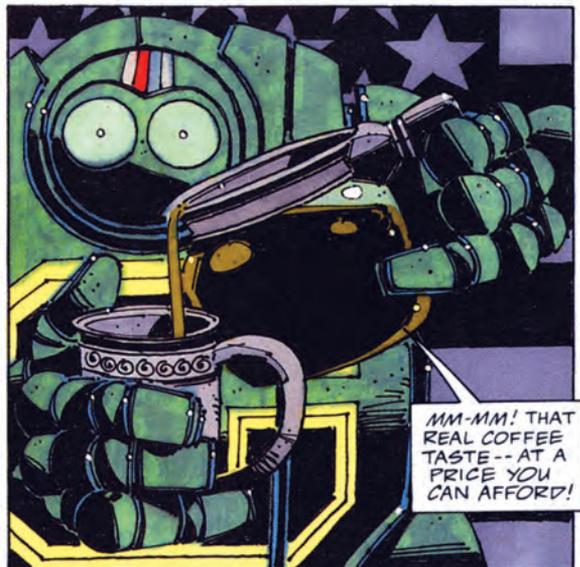
Dumb question.

COLD, CHARLIE... REAL COLD...



A SIDE EFFECT OF THE PROCESS. IT WILL PASS.

I'VE GOT CLOTHES AND HOT COFFEE WAITING.



MM-MM! THAT REAL COFFEE TASTE-- AT A PRICE YOU CAN AFFORD!



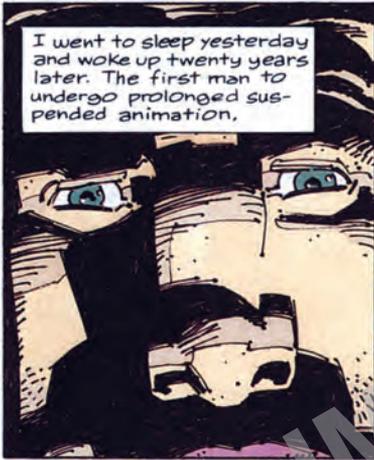
THERE WAS A TURTLE BY THE NAME OF BERT-- AND BERT THE TURTLE WAS VERY ALERT--



WHEN DANGER THREATENED HIM HE NEVER GOT HURT-- HE KNEW JUST WHAT TO DO...



HE'D DUCK AND COVER! DUCK AND COVER!



I went to sleep yesterday and woke up twenty years later. The first man to undergo prolonged suspended animation,



YOU AND I DON'T HAVE SHELLS TO CRAWL INTO LIKE BERT THE TURTLE, SO WE HAVE TO COVER UP IN OUR OWN WAY.



NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE OR WHAT WE DO WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER WHAT TO DO IF THE ATOM BOMB EXPLODES RIGHT THEN!

IT'S A BOMB!

DUCK AND COVER!

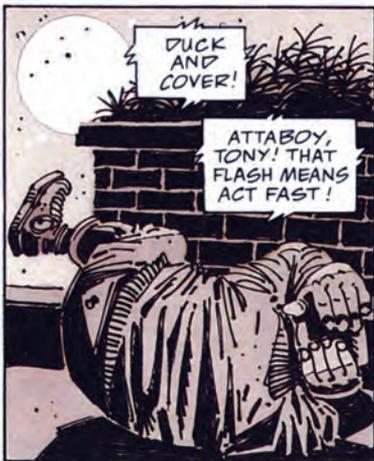


And while I slept the world went to war. After all the threat, menace-- living in fear... fifty years tottering on the brink of insanity--the nukes finally flew.



HERE'S TONY GOING TO HIS CUB SCOUT MEETING.

TONY KNOWS THE ATOM BOMB CAN EXPLODE ANY TIME OF THE YEAR, DAY OR NIGHT.



DUCK AND COVER!

ATTABOY, TONY! THAT FLASH MEANS ACT FAST!

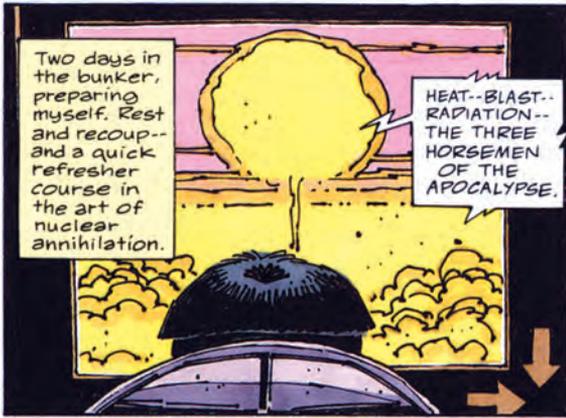


Tony...



WHAT'S HAPPENING, DAD? WHY WON'T YOU TELL ME? WHY DO YOU HAVE TO GO?

I... DON'T HAVE A CHOICE, SON.



Two days in the bunker, preparing myself. Rest and recoup-- and a quick refresher course in the art of nuclear annihilation.

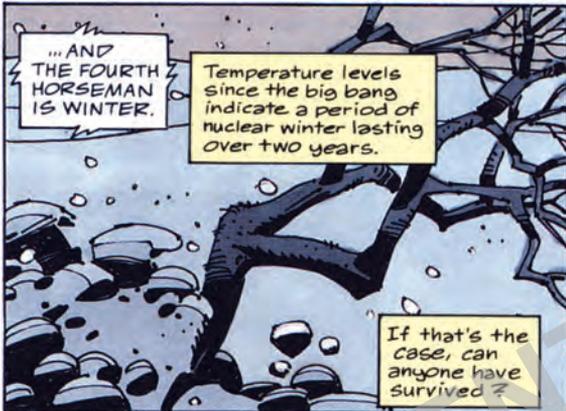
HEAT--BLAST--RADIATION--THE THREE HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE.



IN A TYPICAL TEN THOUSAND MEGATON STRIKE OVER TWO BILLION WILL DIE IMMEDIATELY--OR WITHIN THE FIRST FEW DAYS.

I don't know how bad things are up there. Charlie's been monitoring since the beginning.

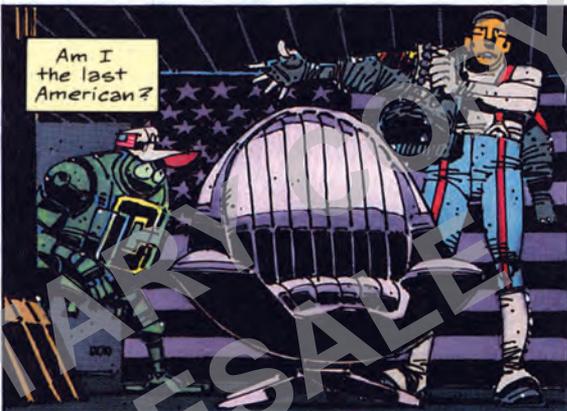
No radio traffic. That's the worrying thing. Background radiation varies between five and seven times normal. But that figure could be anomalous to this locale. There's no way of telling.



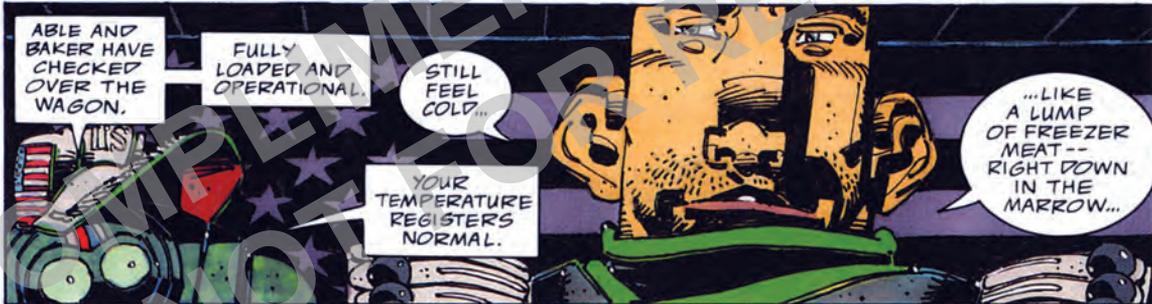
...AND THE FOURTH HORSEMAN IS WINTER.

Temperature levels since the big bang indicate a period of nuclear winter lasting over two years.

If that's the case, can anyone have survived?



Am I the last American?



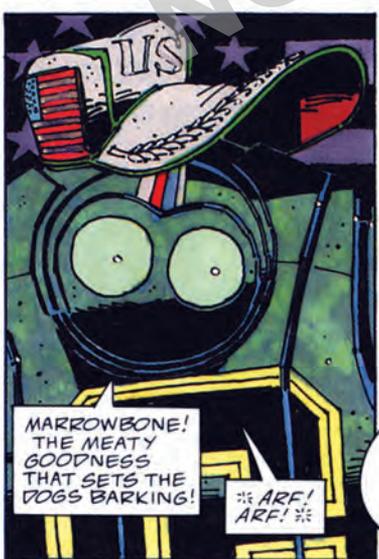
ABLE AND BAKER HAVE CHECKED OVER THE WAGON.

FULLY LOADED AND OPERATIONAL.

STILL FEEL COLD...

YOUR TEMPERATURE REGISTERS NORMAL.

...LIKE A LUMP OF FREEZER MEAT--RIGHT DOWN IN THE MARROW...



MARROWBONE! THE MEATY GOODNESS THAT SETS THE DOGS BARKING!

ARF! ARF!



WHAT GIVES WITH YOU CHARLIE. YOU SOME KIND OF T.V. JUNKIE?

THE LIBRARY HAS A VAST QUANTITY OF RECORDED OUTPUT. I FIND IT MOST INTERESTING.



YOU MADE A STUDY, HUH?

I TRUST THAT A CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE OF POPULAR CULTURE WILL PROVIDE A REASSURING FAMILIARITY IN AN OTHERWISE STRANGE AND HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

