

APHRODITE

V

#1



TOP GUN
PRODUCTIONS, INC.

image

BRYAN HILL
JEFF SPOKES



Artista's signature

APHRODITE

V

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AGENCY DISCLAIMER

The Aphrodite Program fostered the creation of many cybernetic agents, numbered I-XV, and not every model within each generation performed the same tasks for the same agencies. What might seem the work of one Aphrodite V might have been performed by two -- or vice versa.

Cyberdata Industries is not responsible for any discrepancies that may seem at odds with other reports -- namely Cyberforce, Aphrodite IX, or the hypothetical IXth Generation.

History is not written in stone.

-Francesca Taylor, Chairwoman, CDI
Dictated, not read

LOS ANGELES.

"WE LOST 2,500 SOULS TO A SUICIDE BOMBER A MONTH AGO.

"A BOMBER STRAPPED WITH A MILITARY GRADE, HIGH YIELD EXPLOSIVE.

"AN EXPLOSIVE THAT MY TECHNOLOGY COULD HAVE IDENTIFIED BEFORE HE GOT INTO THE BUILDING.

"HIS DATA COULD HAVE BEEN TRANSMITTED TO A POLICE FORCE UNIFIED BY MY NETWORK. RESPONSE TIMES WOULD HAVE BEEN NEAR INSTANT.

"THE BOMB SQUAD COULD HAVE BEEN USING MY LETHAL AND NON-LETHAL GEAR.

"THE EXPLOSION WAS A PREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCE OF THE EVOLUTION OF OUR WORLD. I SAW THIS COMING. I SEE WHAT'S COMING NEXT.

"I HAVE A TEN-BILLION-DOLLAR INITIATIVE TO STOP WHAT I SEE, AND THE RESOURCES TO PUT THAT INITIATIVE INTO ACTION TODAY.

"CARVER INDUSTRIES IS READY TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE, AND MAKE NO MISTAKE--

"EVERY MOMENT OF INDECISION IS THAT FUTURE. WE'RE LIVING AGAINST A TICKING CLOCK, MR. MAYOR.

"TICK.

"TICK.

"TICK."

APPROVE MY INITIATIVE, MR. MAYOR. I CAN STOP THE COUNTDOWN.

SIX MONTHS AFTER IMPLEMENTATION, LOS ANGELES WILL BE THE SAFEST CITY IN THE WORLD. THE ROME OF THE UNITED STATES. YOU CAN TAKE THE CREDIT FOR HAVING THE VISION.

AREN'T 2,500 BODY BAGS ENOUGH?

LISTEN, YOU MILLENNIAL PRICK--



--I ONLY TOOK THIS MEETING TO LET YOU KNOW THAT I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOUR SCIENCE-FICTION FANTASIES CROSS MY DESK AGAIN.

MR. MAYOR, I KNOW WE'VE HAD OUR DIFFERENCES AND I VOTED FOR THE WOMAN WHO SHOULD HAVE YOUR DESK-- BUT HERE WE ARE. IF CARVER INDUSTRIES PRIVATIZES THE POLICE DEPARTMENT, I CAN--

YOU WOULD OWN THE GODDAMNED CITY, WHICH I AM CONVINCED IS ONE OF YOUR MANY AMBITIONS. THAT WOULDN'T EVEN SHAKE MY CAN OF SODA--

IF YOU DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE ENTITLED TO IT.

I'VE GOT THE UNIONS. I CAN INCREASE THE AVERAGE PEACE OFFICER SALARY BY 15% IN THE FIRST QUARTER--

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY TAUGHT YOU AT YALE, OR HARVARD--

MIT. I GRADUATED WHEN I WAS 13.

GOOD FOR YOU. I'M SURE YOU'RE THE CROWN JEWEL OF THEIR DIVERSITY PROGRAM.

I AM NOT GOING TO BE THE FIRST MAYOR THAT PRIVATIZES LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND EVEN IF I WAS, CALIFORNIA DOESN'T WANT YOU GETTING THE TASK.

YOU'RE BIG BUSINESS AGAINST BIG BUSINESS. YOU DON'T PLAY NICE WITH THE COUNTRY CLUB CROWD, SON.

YOU GIVE MONEY TO THE WRONG PEOPLE. THE WRONG CAUSES. YOU TALK ABOUT NON-VIOLENT SOLUTIONS TO MSNBC AND THEN YOU COME IN HERE ASKING ME TO PUT THE COPS IN YOUR POCKET.

YOU WANT TO GIVE THE BOYS ON THE FIELD NEW UNIFORMS AND HELMETS? BE MY GUEST.


BUT CARVER INDUSTRIES *WILL NEVER OWN* THE TEAM. GO BACK TO YOUR BEACH HOUSE, BILLIONAIRE. RIDE YOUR HOVERBOARD. TWEET SOMETHING.

TODAY YOU LEARNED EVEN RICH KIDS NEED TO KNOW THEIR PLACE.




WOULD YOU LIKE SOME COFFEE WHILE YOU'RE WAITING FOR THE MEETING TO FINISH, MISS?

YOU KNOW, I HAVE TO BE HONEST. YOUR GUN MAKES ME A LITTLE NERVOUS.




A GUN IS JUST A TOOL. BE NERVOUS IF I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO USE IT, OR WHEN TO USE IT.

NO THANKS ON THE COFFEE. CAFFEINE MAKES MY HANDS SHAKE.



SANCTIMONIOUS, SMALL-MINDED--

HUI-MEN, WE'RE LEAVING.



YOUR BOSS IS STANDING IN THE WAY OF PROGRESS. PROGRESS ALWAYS WINS.




MARTIN, LET'S GO--

YOU'RE ALL LIVING ON GLASS AND HE'S TELLING YOU IT'S CONCRETE. HE'S A COWARD AND A LIDDITE! YOU TELL HIM THAT!




OKAY...I'LL LET HIM KNOW, MR. CARVER.

DO YOU NEED YOUR PARKING VALIDATED?



YOU THINK I'M NAIVE TO EXPECT THEM TO GREEN-LIGHT MY PLAN. YOU CAN SAY IT. YOU'VE BEEN WAITING TO SAY THAT ALL DAY.




I THINK YOU'RE LUCKY HE DIDN'T HIT YOU. I WAS WAITING FOR HIM TO HIT YOU.



IT CAN WORK, HUI-MEN.

I BELIEVE IN YOU. YOU KNOW THAT.



BUT IF YOU PUT YOUR FAITH IN PEOPLE, PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS DISAPPOINT YOU.

AND IF YOU WANT TO DO ANYTHING WORTH A DAMN, THEN YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO HAVE TO DO IT ALONE.




THAT MEAN YOU'RE QUITTING?

NO, SIR. WE HAVE AN UNBREAKABLE BOND.



WE BOTH HATE THE SAME THINGS.



GET IN THE BACK. LISTEN TO SOME KILLSWITCH ENGAGE AND COOL OFF. I'LL DRIVE.









"LET ME DO
THE TALKING."

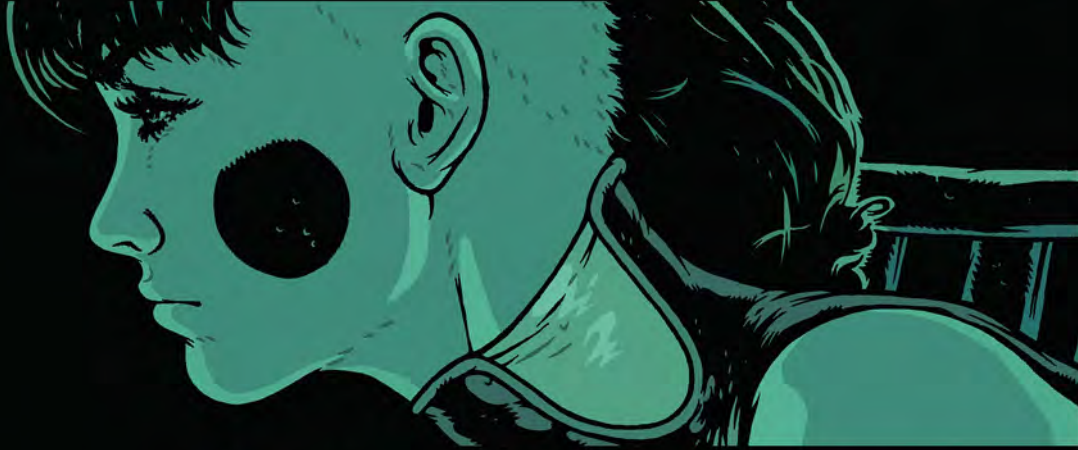




SHE HASN'T *SPOKEN* A WORD IN THREE HOURS. SHE *HASN'T MOVED* SINCE WE SAT HER DOWN. I MEAN LIKE, SHE'S BEEN A *MANNEQUIN*. NO I.D., NOTHING IN THE SYSTEM.

YOU'D THINK A SHIT-KICKING SUPERMODEL WOULD BE IN THE DATABASE.

LET ME SPEAK WITH HER, DETECTIVE.



IN PRIVATE. TURN THE CAMERAS OFF. JUST ME AND HER.

I ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT HAPPENS. YOU'RE OFF THE HOOK IF SHE KILLS ME.





GREEN IS MY FAVORITE COLOR TOO.
I'M MARTIN CARVER. MAY I SIT DOWN?

NO ONE'S WATCHING US. NO CAMERAS.



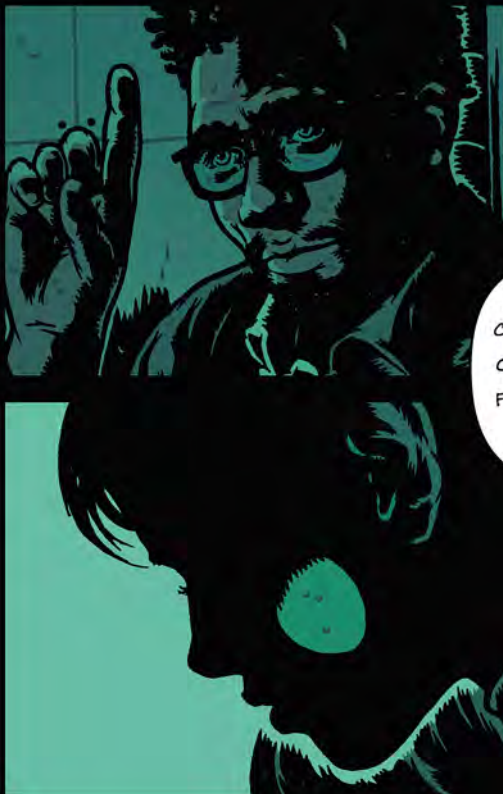
I KNOW.

TWO ROOMS AWAY THEY'RE TRYING TO CHARGE ME WITH SOMETHING BUT APPARENTLY I HAVEN'T ACTUALLY BROKEN THE LAW. ONE OF THEM THINKS I MIGHT BE AN ALIEN.
I'M NOT AN ALIEN.

SO WHAT ARE YOU?

I SAVED YOUR LIFE BECAUSE YOU LOOKED LIKE SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T DESERVE TO DIE. WE DON'T HAVE TO BE FRIENDS.

WHAT I AM WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO...UNDERSTAND.



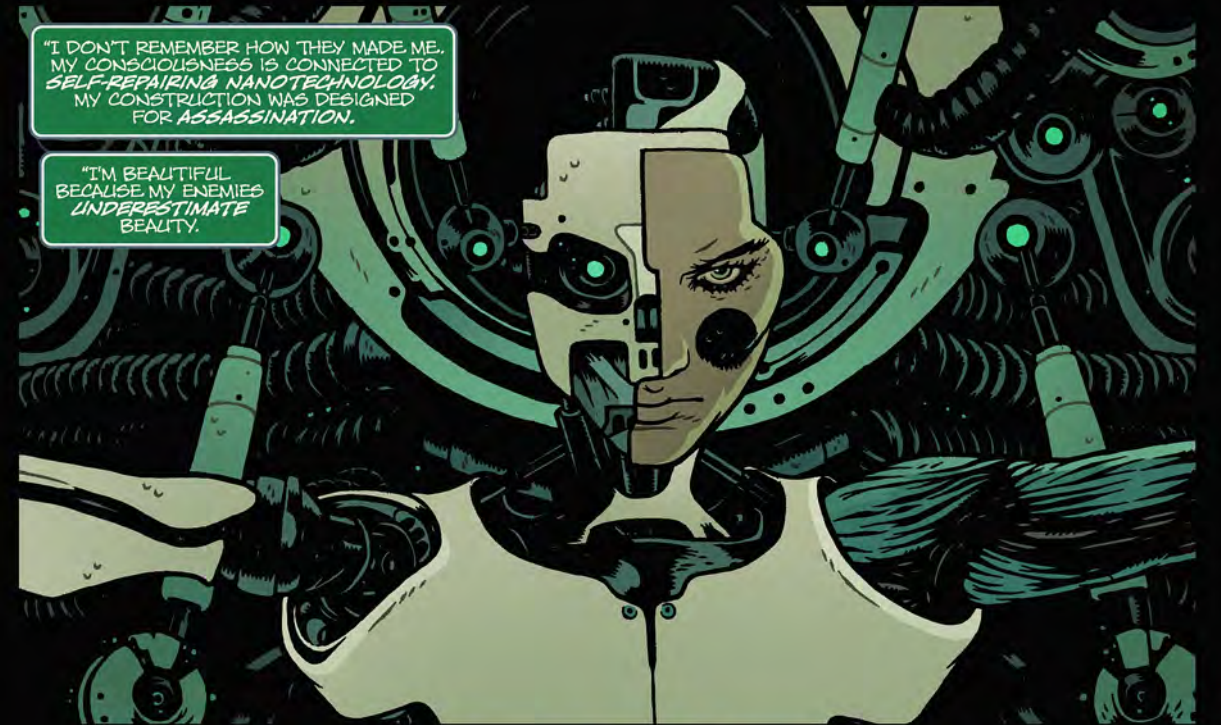
I'M A GAY BLACK BILLIONAIRE WITH A 195 I.Q. YOU'D BE SURPRISED WHAT I CAN UNDERSTAND.
I PROMISE YOU THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TELL THE TRUTH. DON'T WASTE IT.

I'M A SENTIENT, ARTIFICIALLY INTELLIGENT ROBOT CREATED BY A GLOBAL CORPORATION BENT ON CONTROLLING THE WORLD. THERE WERE FOUR OTHERS BEFORE ME THAT WERE DISCARDED IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS.

I LEFT MY CREATORS BEFORE THEY COULD DISCARD ME.



THAT ACTUALLY EXPLAINS QUITE A BIT.
OKAY. I'LL PLAY ALONG. YOU WERE CREATED. HOW?



"I DON'T REMEMBER HOW THEY MADE ME. MY CONSCIOUSNESS IS CONNECTED TO SELF-REPAIRING NANOTECHNOLOGY. MY CONSTRUCTION WAS DESIGNED FOR ASSASSINATION."

"I'M BEAUTIFUL BECAUSE MY ENEMIES UNDERESTIMATE BEAUTY."



"AND THAT MAKES IT EASIER TO KILL THEM."

"FOR MY CREATORS, I HAVE KILLED MANY."



"THEY ALLOWED MY PERSONALITY. THEY ANTICIPATED A CONSCIOUSNESS."

"THEY DIDN'T ANTICIPATE A CONSCIENCE. THAT MADE ME... UNSUSTAINABLE."



"MY CREATORS WANTED TO DESTROY ME."

"UPGRADE ME INTO SOMETHING LESS... PROBLEMATIC."

"THAT WAS THE WORD THEY USED."




"SO I RAN."



"LIKE MOST PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO IDEA WHO THEY ARE, OR WHAT THEY WANT TO BE--"




"I LANDED IN CALIFORNIA."




OKAY, FIRST
THING--**NEVER**
TELL THAT STORY
TO ANYONE
ELSE.

EVER.



I CAN TELL
THE POLICE YOU'RE
PART OF MY SECURITY
TEAM. IF WE KEEP THAT
STORY, YOU DON'T
HAVE TO WORRY--

I'M NOT
WORRIED.



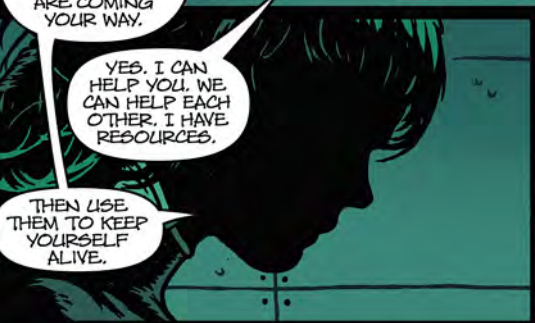
THESE
PEOPLE CAN'T
KEEP ME
HERE.



COME
WITH ME.

I HAVE
A BILLION
QUESTIONS
AND YOU NEED
A PLACE
TO STAY,
RIGHT?

YOU DON'T
KNOW WHY THAT
MAN TRIED TO
KILL YOU. AND
YOU'RE WORRIED
MORE LIKE HIM
ARE COMING
YOUR WAY.



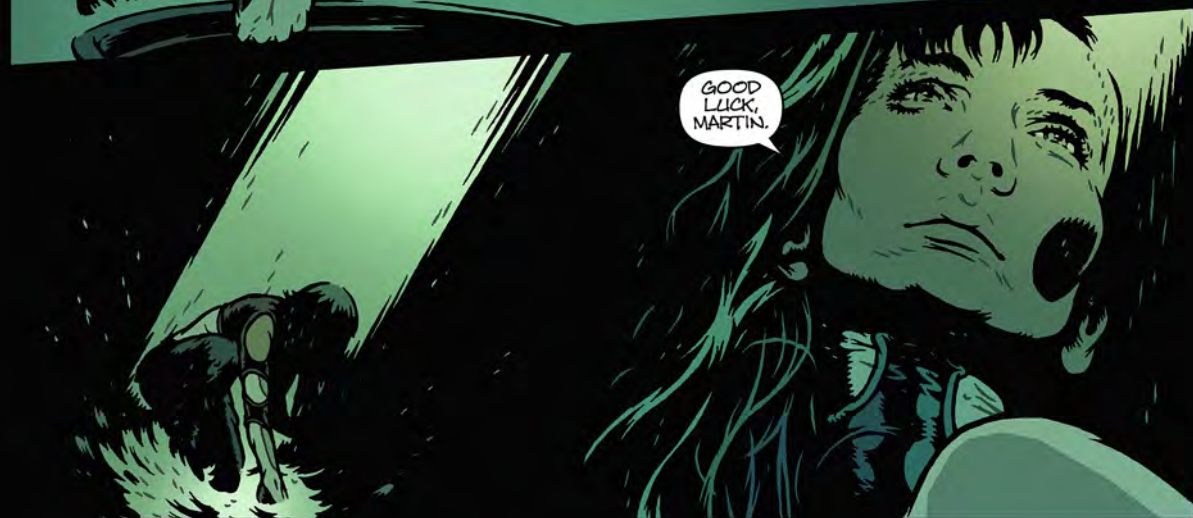
YES, I CAN
HELP YOU. WE
CAN HELP EACH
OTHER. I HAVE
RESOURCES.

THEN USE
THEM TO KEEP
YOURSELF
ALIVE.



WAIT--







SO WHOSE
LITTLE
NIGHTMARE
ARE YOU?

HOW MUCH DID
IT COST TO BRIBE
THEM INTO LETTING
US KEEP THE TIN
MAN?

MS. GREEN HAIR WENT
HER OWN WAY. LONG
STORY, I'LL TELL YOU IN
THE MORNING.

STOPPED BY
RAILWAY, BOUGHT
YOU A TUNA
SANDWICH AND A
COOKIE.

500K TO THE
COPS. I USED THE
PETTY CASH. WE HAVE
24 HOURS BEFORE
WE HAVE TO GIVE
HIM BACK.

CRUDE TECH,
BUT IT STILL TAKES
KNOW-HOW. HE'S BEEN
FUSED WITH THE SUIT. I
THINK THAT'S WHAT IS
KEEPING HIM ALIVE.

HIS NAME IS
GEORGE BURROUGHS.
LIVES IN SACRAMENTO.
DIVORCED AND HAS A
DRINKING PROBLEM. HE'S
JUST *SOME GUY*,
MARTIN.

SOME GUY WITH
AN ARMORED SUIT THAT
TRIED TO KILL ME.
HIS VITALS ARE STABLE.
I'M GONNA GIVE HIM A
SMALL ADRENAL JOLT
AND WAKE HIM UP. HE
CAN TELL ME WHY
SACRAMENTO WANTS
ME DEAD.

MARTIN,
WAIT--

I BUILT THAT
UNIT TO CONTAIN
CONCUSSIVE
DETONATIONS. IT'LL
HOLD SOMEONE
NAMED *GEORGE*.



NO SOLACE...
FOR MANKIND...



BASILISK,
I HAVE
SERVED
YOU!



THE UNIT
DIDN'T HOLD
HIM, MARTIN.



BASILISK.

DOES
THAT MEAN
SOMETHING
TO YOU?



IT'S JUST THE THING THAT MADE MY FATHER KILL MY MOTHER AND PUT A GUN IN HIS MOUTH.

AND THE POTENTIAL DESTRUCTION OF HUMANITY AS WE KNOW IT.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND--



PERIMETER BREACH ON THE COMPOUND. SEE IF THE CAMERAS CAUGHT IT.

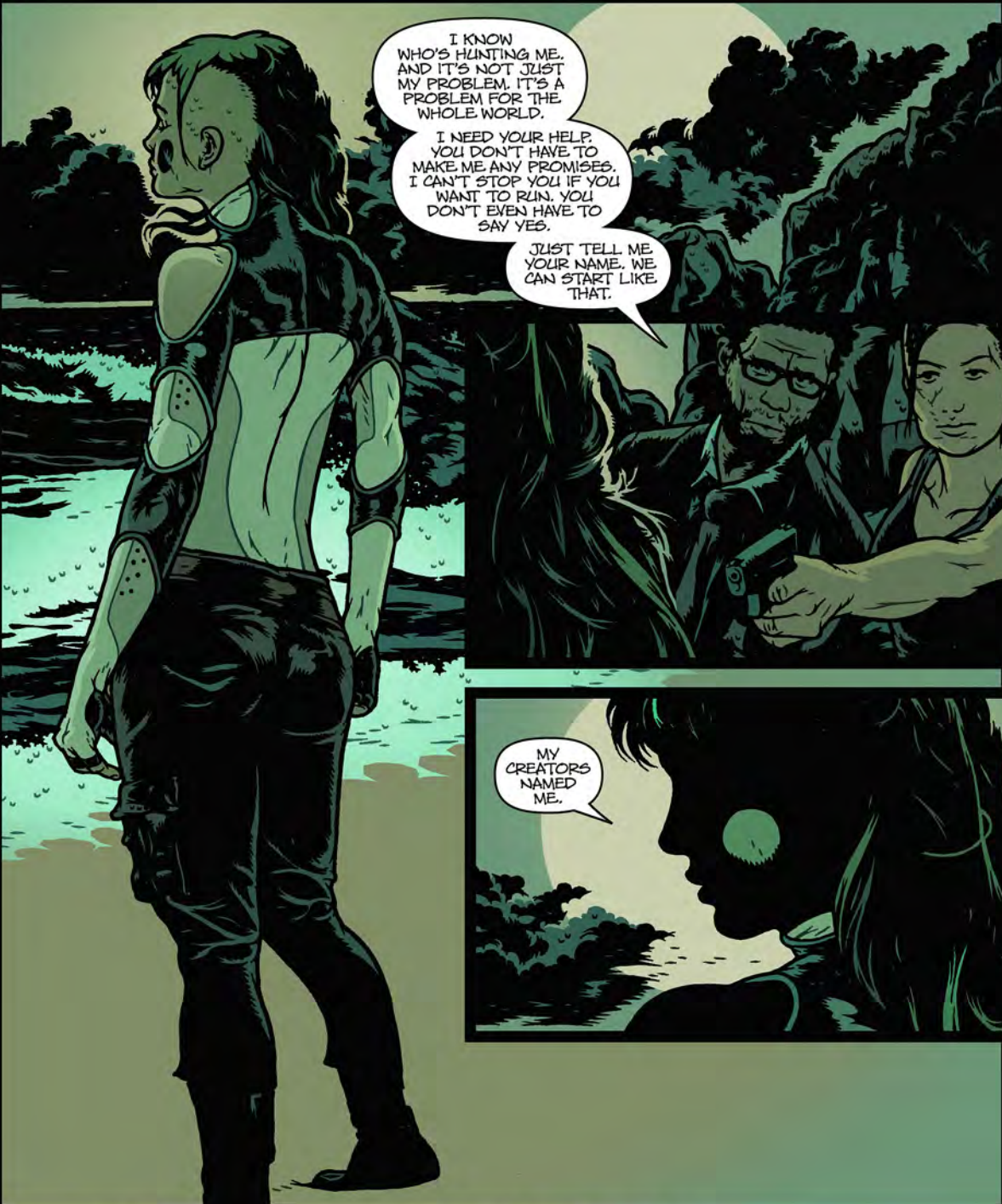
STAY HERE AND CALM DOWN. I'LL GO--

CLICK



NO, HUI-MEN. WE'RE GOOD.

I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.



I KNOW WHO'S HUNTING ME, AND IT'S NOT JUST MY PROBLEM. IT'S A PROBLEM FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.

I NEED YOUR HELP. YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE ME ANY PROMISES. I CAN'T STOP YOU IF YOU WANT TO RUN. YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO SAY YES.

JUST TELL ME YOUR NAME. WE CAN START LIKE THAT.



MY CREATORS NAMED ME.



THEY CALLED ME APHRODITE.

CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE

APHRODITE



#2



S P O K E S

image+

INTERVIEW



APHRODITE V

BRYAN HILL & JEFF SPOKES RECONSTRUCT APHRODITE V





THE GIRL AND THE ROBOT

BRYAN HILL AND JEFF SPOKES RECONSTRUCT APHRODITE V FOR A CHARACTER-DRIVEN EXPLORATION OF PRIVATIZATION, POLITICS, AND BIG ACTION.

BY **VERNON MILES**



Aphrodite V may be science fiction, but writer Bryan Hill doesn't consider himself a futurist. The core of the new Top Cow comic, which offers an earlier version of the iconic, green-haired android assassin introduced by David Finch and David Wohl in 1996, lies in its characters. And those character don't just navigate issues whose prominence looms decades in the future—Aphrodite confronts the issues of today. "I don't worry too much about trends," Hill says, "but I do pay attention to the rise of corporate power in the world and how some sections of government and society want to privatize everything, putting profit incentive where it didn't live before. That's something I tackle in the story, for sure, looking at both the benefits and the hazards of that."

But the overarching political and ethical questions are only relevant in how they impact the ensemble of characters that Hill has assembled, illustrated with fastidious detail and moody veneer by Jeff Spokes. Hill says most of his work has focused on melding character-driven dramas with solid action, particularly in his previous Top Cow series *Postal*, co-written with Top Cow President and COO Matt Hawkins and illustrated by Isaac Goodhart. The story of criminals gathered in a single small town, *Postal* mixes action and political introspection with a wide cast of rounded characters. *Aphrodite V* embraces that same cocktail of commentary and catastrophe.

Within its pages, Martin, a "gay, black billionaire with a 195 IQ," is an outsider in every sense, and his brusque nature further isolates him from everyone except his right-hand woman, Hui-Men. Martin harbors big ideas: big and unpopular. He has the resources, technology, and drive to privatize Los Angeles' police force. In his mind and sales pitch, every life lost through inept policing is one he could have saved with the right tool in the right place at the right time.

The horrifying possibilities of this scenario are obvious to everyone except Martin, which grounds a fascinating dynamic between the eccentric entrepreneur and his closest associate.

"Hui-Men is a woman of violence, and Martin is, in many ways, a man caught in a permanent adolescence, his maturity defeated by his near-infinite resources," Hill explains. "She protects him, as a bodyguard, but also as a stabilizing force in his life. What Hui-Men receives is purpose, a place to direct her violent nature for the common good. It's a symbiotic relationship, but I'm not sure if it's a positive one. The story tests it, especially when Aphrodite is introduced into their world."

Aphrodite is a hyper-advanced android designed for combat. This version, V, precedes the legacy of *Aphrodite IX*, the aforementioned character debut about a future-forward amnesiac robot rebelling against her assassin programming.

"Technically, this is a prequel, as it happens in the near future, but it's really a standalone

science-fiction action story starring Aphrodite V," Hill clarifies. "You don't, and let me repeat, *don't* have to know the continuity of Top Cow to enjoy this. This can be your first Top Cow book; if you pick it up and it looks cool, you can trust that if you buy it, you won't be confused if you don't

know the history of *Cyber Force* [Aphrodite V was first introduced in the first issue of the 2012 series] or *Aphrodite*. My influences for this range from William Gibson to James Cameron to Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop*. The plan was to take this character and make a story that could stand on its own for all fans of sci-fi action."

Hill also cites pioneering crime director Michael Mann as a visual influence on the series, and that visual DNA bleeds into the debut issue with a broad-day shootout in downtown LA, reminiscent of the neo-noir *Heat*, with a heavily armored cyborg

"I DO PAY ATTENTION TO THE RISE OF CORPORATE POWER IN THE WORLD AND HOW SOME SECTIONS OF GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY WANT TO PRIVATIZE EVERYTHING."



BOTH PAGES:
concept art by series
artist Jeff Spokes

"HUI-MEN IS A WOMAN OF VIOLENCE, AND MARTIN IS, IN MANY WAYS, A MAN CAUGHT IN A PERMANENT ADOLESCENCE, HIS MATURITY DEFEATED BY HIS NEAR-INFINITE RESOURCES."

leaping over police cars, paying homage to the aforementioned *RoboCop*. Choreographed with kinetic grace by Spokes, the result is striking, mixing the tactile '90s aesthetic of metal-heavy cyborgs and dark police stations with the sleek, svelte ballet David Finch instilled in the original *Aphrodite* series.

But those influences run deeper than the ink on the page. *Heat* still stands as a testament to measured pacing and subtle character development. While the bank robbery escape is arguably the film's most famous scene, the moment of greatest tension comes when the two main characters—played by Al Pacino and Robert De Niro—sit across from each other in a coffee shop. Similarly in *Aphrodite V*, some of the greatest tension and character building comes from more subdued moments, such as when Martin sits down with the android that just saved his life. What follows is a candid discussion between a technological savant and the embodiment of all of his ambition.

"I wanted to write a story with *Aphrodite* that was accessible to people who either know the character from her iconic design and nothing more, or never heard of her but think she looks cool," Hill says. "It's why we're set in Los Angeles and not a far-off sci-fi landscape. This is a story that works as an entry point. Readers should feel good about taking the risk."



BELOW:
series writer Bryan Hill &
series artist Jeff Spokes





BRYAN HILL

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Writes comics, writes movies, and makes films. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

JEFF SPOKES

<http://jeffreypokes.blogspot.com/>

Jeff Spokes is a graduate of the Alberta College of Art & Design. While primarily working as a graphic designer and freelance illustrator he has dabbled his toe in the field of comics for the last twelve years. Those dabbles include cover work for Boom's *Irredeemable*, *Incorruptible* and *Cold Space*, Top Cow's *WITCHBLADE* and *CYBER FORCE: ARTIFACTS*, as well as projects for Frame Machine, *Virgins Comics* and *Graphic India*. *APHRODITE V* represents his first mainstream interior work.



Writer **CAITLIN KITTREDGE** (*THROWAWAYS*, *Coffin Hill*) and artist **ROBERTA INGRANATA** introduce an all new

WITCHBLADE

"I dug the hell out of this first issue and am excited to see where this series goes. I guess I'm a WITCHBLADE fan now."

—**NERDIST**

"They have captured and injected a world of emotion into these pages, bringing this property out of the 90s and into the modern times."

—**COMICOSITY**

"Sharp, powerful and cutting urban fantasy."

—**MONKEYS FIGHTING ROBOTS**

"There's enough of the original mythos present that longtime readers can find their way around, but this new beginning is also accessible... this is exactly what the series needed to move forward."

—**COMICON.COM**

"Buy! Does an excellent job creating a story that is intriguing and allows readers to ease into the legend of the Witchblade... the future is bright for the franchise."

—**ROGUES PORTAL**

"Every panel has a sense of urgency to its composition and the splash of bright colors is restrained until a bloody explosion is shown with a vibrancy for emphasis. It's a very post-*Jessica Jones* comic, but the juxtaposition of the trauma-centric themes with the urban fantasy setting make this a comic with a lot of potential."

—**NEWSARAMA**

"Ingranata and Valenza's art is stellar. They've set this story in a very realistic New York City, that's also the setting of a horror movie. The deep shadows, the strange angles, all contribute to a story that's more ghost story than the supernatural superhero of the previous volume of WITCHBLADE."

—**COMICBUZZ**

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