

THE DRUMBEAT BELLY PRESENTS: 1991 (A GRAPHIC NOVEL)

CW: GRAPHIC PLUS IMPLIED VIOLENCE

WRITTEN BY

ROB PLUMPTON

(Note that images used are taken from shutterstock)

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THE DRUMBEAT BELLY: GENERAL PREMISE

The Drumbeat Belly is a supernatural action thriller, with each narrative accommodated within a particular year. There are two main branches:

- *1978 to 1991* (a principal narrative that charts the protagonist's development)
- *1996* (a linked miniseries that prologues every narrative, demonstrating the protagonist's developmental destination)

These centre upon a human/demon hybrid named *Joseph Aites* who is subject to extensive military training. If he fails to attain the necessary competency he will likely fail his forthcoming missions.

THE DRUMBEAT BELLY - STATEMENT CONCERNING THE WORLD IN WHICH IT IS SET

LOCATION ONE: SHELTERN (OFF ENGLAND'S NORTHEAST COASTLINE)

This town is built upon a supernatural landmass: The Leviathan herself. Having been built upon the slumbering demon, paranormal occurrences are commonplace; many of these are expressions of The Leviathan's dreams, as conceived by her subconscious. Located just off England's northeastern coastline, Sheltern is the crucible for a hybridised religion named *Daelism* (more on that later).

In terms of appearance, much of Sheltern's buildings stem from the 18th Century after a disaster destroyed much of its housing in the late 1600s. Many of these are fishermen's cottages, but some streets have terraced housing. The people are generally *Daelist*, with an open and cheery outlook.

The major industry here is fishing. However this was compromised by a chemical spill in the late 1970s. *The Amendation*, a cargo ship carrying substances linked with *The Bird Institute* ran aground, the resulting slick killed many of the nearby fishes, leading to a need for fishermen to travel further. This placed a strain on families and this misery was absorbed by The Leviathan. The resultant supernatural events grew more sinister and pernicious. With help from *The Bird Institute*, Sheltern is once again enjoying a period of ascendancy.

LOCATION TWO: VESLOSTOY (A BALTIC NATION)

This is a Baltic state that adopted *Daelism* after granting exile to a demonic prophet known as *Malcorvus* and accepting his proselytising words. *Malcorvus* fled Sheltern after his attempt at self-immolation failed, but the resultant dark energies he released had destroyed most religious buildings plus a significant number of residences. This created the first deluge of negative energies within Sheltern and, in shame, he sought solitude.

Malcorvus' sojourn within Veslostoy began in the late 1700s. In this period, his demonic charisma led to several disciples following him against his will. These eventually brought a variant of *Daelism* to the Baltic nation. However, religious strife led to a schism that was characterised - though not with complete accuracy - as Northern versus Southern Veslostoy.

The Southern territories adhered closer to *Malcorvus'* teachings, and he accordingly founded *The Ancestral Sabre*. This is an enduring agreement that all holders of his demonic bloodline would provide military service within Veslostoy for ten years, upon reaching their eighteenth birthday. This is most prominently demonstrated via the 1996 mini-narrative.

DAELISM (A HYBRIDISED RELIGION)

This is a hybridised pantheistic religion that blends traditional Christian teachings with worship of the angelic choir. These angels - loyalist and fallen - all have a place and are considered gods. The angels are grouped alongside each other. Every element has a choir of heavenly and hellish representatives; the idea behind this is founded upon the desire for neutrality, with the good and evil cancelling one another out.

The highest-ranking deities are considered neutral (as they exist within the earthen plane), thereby aligning themselves with the earthen element. This is important, since the ten human / demon hybrids who existed between 1978 and 1987 were referred to as 'The Gifts of Demeter', this appellation being an allusion to their neutrality.

Daelism was, generally, a religion of peace, but this was subject to substantial revision by the prophet *Malcorvus* whilst in *Veslostoy*. Nowadays, a significant portion of this religion is centred upon combat and relevant preparations, particularly those who hold *Malcorvus'* bloodline.

This religion is administered by senior personnel within *The Bird Institute*, within which the only surviving text written by *Malcorvus* is preserved, and set alongside the significant revisions. These are used to justify military and paramilitary actions within *Veslostoy*, all undertaken surreptitiously by highly trained special forces personnel.

THE ANCESTRAL SABRE

The Ancestral Sabre is an agreement forged and ratified with blood and ichor. It is an acknowledgement, by the demon prophet *Malcorvus*, that a perceived blood debt was forged after *Veslostoy's* southernmost population accommodated him for a significant period. It is, in short, an agreement that all holders of *Malcorvus'* genetic line will provide ten years service within South *Veslostoy* upon reaching their eighteenth year.

This agreement is maintained by *The Bird Institute*, who sponsor research projects aimed at improving weaponry, developing supernatural arms plus armour, along with training for a group of special forces soldiers named *The Myrmidon*. The latter are indoctrinated into a *Daelist* cult of combat and swear fealty to all holders of *Malcorvus'* line. Quite often, *The Myrmidon* operate behind enemy lines, utilising highly experimental demon engines along with arms and armour enchanted with demonic blood and stem cells.

OCCULT SYMBOLISM WITHIN THE DAELIST RELIGION

With the above in mind, there are three core kinds of symbol, each of which is expressed as one of four elemental versions: earth, air, water, fire. This document will focus upon the earthen expression of these.

The three core kinds of symbol are listed below:

THE SPIRAL (also known as 'The Wyvern', 'The Wurm', and 'The Lesser Dragon'): This symbolises healing, based upon worms' ability to regenerate. The central legend is known as *The Leviathan's Tongue* and is associated with spreading *The Leviathan's* message as its master slumbers. According to legend, it was eventually killed by 'The Spiky Knight'.

Due to its association with healing, this symbol often demonstrates proficiency in medicine and, in the case of *Joseph's Myrmidon*, indicates that the holder of this badge is a trained medic.

THE TRIANGLES (also known as 'The Spiky Knight', 'The Pointed Fighter' and 'The Warm SLayer'): This symbolises bravery, and is based upon the legend of a commoner who donned a suit of spiky armour. This protective suit facilitated *The Worm's* defeat, as it

bled to death in its attempt to constrict the spiky fighter. The Spiky Knight then severed The Worm's head and, before this creature could regenerate, cut its tongue preventing it from spreading the message. Once it was silenced, this beast was destroyed by its master, The Leviathan.

This is used to indicate bravery and often features upon Daelist service medals. In the case of those bound by The Ancestral Sabre, it indicates a tour of duty within Veslostoy.

THE OVAL (also known as 'The Cosmic Egg', 'The Message from Heaven', 'The Message from Hell', and 'The Earthen Word'): This indicates knowledge and general proficiency. It can be used to symbolise three things:

PROTECTION: As eggs have shells, this is considered an armour of sorts. The colour used indicates the kind of protection employed. So, red is physical, blue is supernatural. Quite often, there will be a helmet within the oval.

A MESSAGE: The egg is also seen as a container of value. This translates into sacred words from Heaven, Hell or The Earthen Plane. Each of these iterations is determined by a symbol within each 'egg':

- A square indicates earth
- A triangle indicates Hell
- A circle indicates Heaven

COMPETENCE: This is commonly used to indicate martial prowess. Once competence is achieved with a particular weapon, an indicator will feature. For instance, the Okkar 740 assault rifle will be represented in the centre of an oval, as a badge worn by the competent party

THE SKY IRIS

In 1998, an errant demonic hybrid, *Johannes Aites*, undertakes a massive project to construct an aerial that will open a portal to Heaven, thereby facilitating judgement upon humankind by the choir of loyalist angels. Whilst operating in North Veslostoy, the hybridised being known as *Codename: Shrike* is charged to, with his *Myrmidon*, locate and destroy this construction.

THE TEARS OF NOVEMBER

On Friday 13th November 1987, nine human / demon hybrids were euthanised following advice from *The Bird Institute's* resident telepath after dangerous emotional instabilities were detected. A sole survivor, *Joseph Aites*, aided this act at the age of nine years, and this haunts him eternally. This day is known as 'The Tears of November'.

THE DRUMBEAT BELLY PRESENTS: 1991 (PREMISES)

PREMISE (1996 - PART ONE): EVENT DAY -3. Preparations for the covert mission named *Operation Grey Oyster* are underway. A senior officer briefs his squad of twenty one special forces personnel concerning the loss of communication with a camp associated with training guerrilla combatants. The squad are given three tasks: infiltrate the North Veslostian forest, locate *Camp Epsilon*, kill all enemies encountered.

PREMISE (1991 - PART ONE): This action thriller in the style of sci-fi charts the foundations of an innocence lost. Focusing upon a human/demon hybrid named Joseph Aites, it begins with an affectionate exchange and ends with the hybridised being's conscription. The denouement is a confrontation between Joseph and a demonic force known as The Triumvirate.



Joseph's Dreamscape



The Dreamscape Invaders (e.g. The Triumvirate)

CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS

PROTAGONIST

SHRIKE (1996 / AGED 17-18): At the age of 17 the demonic 'super-soldier', Shrike, attends a briefing for his first military undertaking. This mission is scheduled for the 25th August - one day after Shrike's eighteenth birthday. This is in line with *The Ancestral Sabre*. He is grey-skinned with wild black hair and two small antlers, akin to those sported by a muntjac deer, upon his forehead.



Shrike is a demonic 'living weapon'; militarily competent, but 'Green'. This forthcoming mission will be a 'proving ground' for him. An experimental endeavour in a life of experimentation. His speciality is aerial insertion via HALO or HAHO, which is augmented by him being trained in instructing paramilitary forces. Like his handpicked Myrmidon, Shrike is competent in several weapon systems.



Standard Veslostian camouflage pattern

JOSEPH AITES (1991 / AGED 12-13):

A lonely child, Joseph Aites' soul bears the shadow of guilt deriving from his participation within the euthanasia of nine demonic siblings. On 24th August, 1991, Joseph celebrates his thirteenth birthday. As Joseph enters his teen years, his childhood is left behind - not simply from the standpoint of biological development, but also because he begins his extensive military training. This is justified by *The Ancestral Sabre*.



A young Joseph Aites

Joseph is, like his adult form (*qua* 'Shrike'), a grey-skinned half demon. He is raised lovingly, just like his forebears: Malcorvus, Malvetius and Johannes. His contemporaries also enjoyed a decent childhood, prior to their murder in which Joseph participates.

Like his demonic siblings, Joseph was born with a set of preternatural powers. His principal ability is the power to sedate any living being, using thought alone. This talent is used to prevent his siblings fighting back during their euthanasia in 1988. The guilt taints Joseph mind and this makes him vulnerable to The Triumvirate's machinations.

As an extension to demonic influence, Joseph is also vulnerable to Johannes' influence. This occurs within *The Dreamscape* when Johannes exercises his 'Dream-walking' ability.

ANTAGONISTS

THE TRIUMVIRATE (1991): These vassals to The Leviathan enact and exercise their interpretations of her will. Principally, they operate within *The Dreamscape* as an invasive force. Their appearance shifts in accordance with the situation presented. They adopt several animalistic and demonic forms.



The Triumvirate are often preceded by The Dreamscape's nocturnal sunrise

JOHANNES AITES: Trained in magic, firearms and close combat, Johannes Aites is a formidable opponent. He operates within the physical realm and Joseph's *Dreamscape*. This latter aspect becomes more potent after Joseph begins his military training since he attempts to channel Johannes, with the aim of improving his own abilities with great rapidity

In 1947 Johannes is cajoled, by The Triumvirate, into killing twenty seven members of staff within The Bird Institute. This massacre leads to a deluge of corrupted souls that are duly consumed by The Leviathan. This demon then withdraws into an indefinite digestive torpor.

It is worth noting that Shrike is charged with locating and eliminating Johannes in North Veslostoy, upon deployment although, as his location is not ascertained it is considered a secondary mission.



Rat Kings: the symbol for Johannes

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

THE BIRD INSTITUTE (1991, 1996): Founded within the late 1600s, this research centre is intimately linked with the demonic bloodline. It was founded upon the birth of a being who would eventually be known as Malcorvus - a human/demon hybrid who was first to carry the demonic genetic sequence. Its primary function, from the 20th Century onwards, is facilitation of *The Ancestral Sabre*.



Bird Institute Headquarters

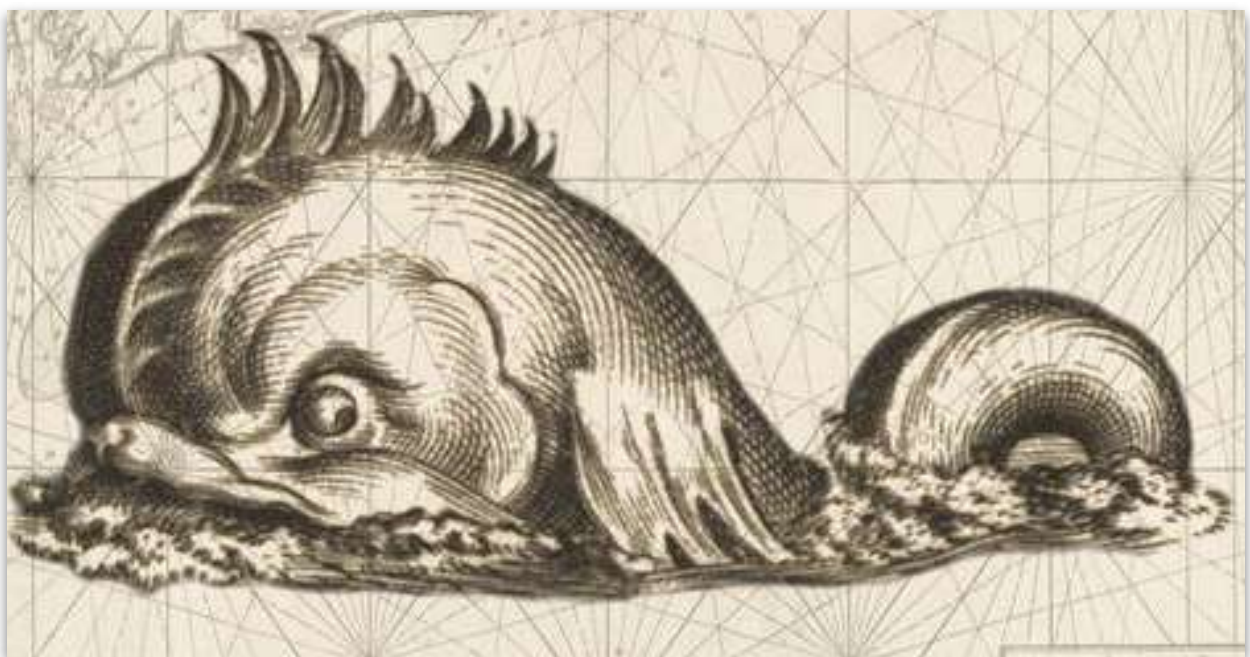


Bird Institute Orderly c.1991

THE MYRMIDON (1996): These are special forces operatives operating under The Bird Institute's guidance. They are handpicked troops who undertake dangerous missions; there are several branches, each possessing differing specialisms. The unit associated with Joseph Aites are primarily involved with training paramilitaries in enemy territory. They follow orders without question, and swear an oath of loyalty to Joseph. They usually dress in flecktarn.



THE LEVIATHAN: A spiritual detritivore. The somnolent demonic landmass, Leviathan, is situated off England's northeast coast. In her somnolent state, she directs her vassals' actions through nebulous, subconscious, instructions. She is aligned with the earth, namely creatures that crawl, slither and slide. In addition, The Leviathan shares an affinity for any birds that roost on land.



JULIA (1991 / AGED 50): The Bird Institute's most powerful magic user, Julia is instrumental in unlocking Joseph's powers. She is a maternal figure, demonstrated, on one occasion, by her providing Joseph with a Valentine's Day gift.



MINOR CHARACTERS

YEVSEY: A Russian whose family fled the Soviet Union and found themselves in Veslostoy. He is a senior figure within the Southern Veslostian military machine.

THE BIRD INSTITUTE SECURITY (1991): Following Johannes' massacre in 1947, intensive research was undertaken into a psychic/magical defence force. The end result is a unit of skilled fighters who wear armour that disrupts psychic and magical waves/abilities, in addition to physically protecting them. In order to soften their appearance to the young demonic hybrids, these suits of armour are fashioned after teddy bears.

POOM-POOM-PIGGELOW: This character exists within a media franchise titled *Jive Lemon*. He is the principal presenter, a fluffy troll akin to something you would see from Jim Henson. He presents and narrates a series of shows and stories that are developed to lend a sense of 'normality' to the demonic children. These shows are retained for Joseph's benefit after the remaining nine children are killed.

TREATMENT

SECTION ONE: 1996 (ANTICIPATED 8 PAGES)

23rd August 1991 - three days prior to deployment.

Within the first panel, WHITE TEXT is set against a black background. It reads: "Friday, 23rd August, 1996". The next panel reads: "OPERATION GREY OYSTER". The following panel contains further text: "EVENT DAY -3".

Subsequent pages are standard presentation. Joseph and twenty of his Myrmidon filter into a utilitarian room furnished with sufficient chairs, a projector and screen. YEVSEY, operating on behalf of The Bird Institute, briefs the personnel with regard to their forthcoming mission.

It is a covert operation within enemy territory, Northern Veslostoy. The insertion point will be thirty miles from camp. This is the closest these combatants can be dropped safely, given the density of enemy troops. It is made clear that the personnel are tasked with training paramilitaries, operating on behalf of the Southern sector, within Northern Veslostoy.

Within the drop zone, enemy forces are active, but not so dense as closer to their eventual objective. Due to the presence of enemy forces, however, they are undertaking a HAHO jump, thereby removing the risk of detection by the noise made when parachutes open.

Their equipment will reflect these combatants' location. Their armament is all produced in North Veslostoy's munition factory (in a city named Yuttia), rather than the Southern centre known as Ottriviya. This ensures that locally available ammunition etc is compatible with their weaponry. In addition, these are the armaments that will be used by their paramilitaries.

The meeting is subsequently dismissed. Joseph and his Myrmidon exit. Their interactions indicate that they are a close-knit unit.

SECTION TWO: 1991 (ANTICIPATED 32 PAGES)

The opening panels accommodate the lyrics to Massive Attack's song, *Unfinished Sympathy*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWohPJHicFE>

Valentine's Day, 1991.

Five panels are presented on this page. Each accommodates one section of a heart in red. The central panel reads: "Thursday, 14th February 1991". Julia writes an affectionate, anonymous, message to Joseph, within a card. She places it within the envelope, and leaves it on Joseph's bed.

Joseph is undertaking a *Daelist* ritual (*Daelism* being a pantheistic religion specific to Sheltern. The demonic force known as OUTIS is a dominant figure, alongside The Leviathan). After this, he is 'purified'.

Joseph returns to his quarters and, opening the card, smiles. Julia walks in, and sets beside him on the bed. Joseph indicates that he is fearful of the forthcoming training that will begin on his 13th birthday (24th August 1991). Julia reassures him, and makes it clear that he has a bold future. This is reinforced by a vision she receives whilst scrying in Joseph's presence. After this, Joseph enjoys a final 'freedom', by watching a series of *Jive Lemon* shows.

24th August, 1991.

White Text on a black background reads "Sunday, 24th August, 1991". Joseph's 13th birthday. He is, at midnight, tormented by The Triumvirate. They emphasise that 'certain avenues' will shortly open, providing him with choices concerning his ultimate allegiance. In particular, images of violence are presented. Joseph is able to dismiss The Triumvirate but, as a parting shot, he is given a vision of his deceased siblings.

Joseph wakes. The Triumvirate are present in his room, but rapidly fade. He is greeted with bunting, and given a cake. He hugs Julia, along with senior Bird Institute staff. The Bird Institute's PROGRAMME DIRECTOR presents Joseph with an ornate pistol, with matching leather holster, that he is ordered to carry at all times. This is Joseph's first military instruction.

Joseph then interacts with a couple of BIRD INSTITUTE SECURITY GUARDS, indicating their paternal role. They escort him through The Bird Institute's corridors, providing an opportunity to present the vast and subterranean nature of this Art Deco construction.

Eventually reaching a training area, Joseph is presented to his loyal Myrmidon. These are the only combatants who know Joseph's demonic origin. They swear to serve and protect Joseph, and all engage with a blood ritual in Joseph's presence. At this stage, Joseph is provided with his training uniform. It is dour, reflecting him beginning with nothing.

25th December, 1991

White Text on a black background reads: "Christmas Day, 1991". This shows Joseph outside of the training environment that presently dominates his being. He is in 'civilian' dress, as he opens presents. He receives several action figures linked with *Jive Lemon*. In addition, he is given a soft toy (Poom-Poom-Piggelow). Joseph is grateful for all he receives.

27th December, 1991

White Text on a black background reads: "Friday, 27th December 1991". Joseph's training is earnestly underway. He demonstrates competence in several weapon systems, as shown by him stripping and reassembling a gun manufactured within the Yuttia factory. His uniform is embellished with several badges, reflecting his competencies.

31st December, 1991

White Text on a black background reads: "Tuesday, 31st December 1991". Joseph is permitted to drink a single can of beer to toast the new year. He is sent to bed at 00:25, and is advised that - like Christmas Day - training will be suspended tomorrow.

WRITER'S STATEMENT

The Drumbeat Belly's title derives from considerations relating to rhythm and its origin. Positing that it derives from within the womb, it is a logical step that those denizens of Hell, who were created not conceived, would not benefit from being accordingly imbued. The hybrids, however, are conceived. As they develop in the womb, rhythm is bestowed. The surrogate carriers of these demonic creatures are known as '*Drumbeat Bellies*'.

It is a rhapsody of love. This particular instalment explores maternal, paternal and fraternal affections. For instance it is demonstrated, via flashbacks, that Joseph loved his siblings even though they themselves rejected him. This, coupled with his participation in their euthanasia, in no way diminishes his love although Joseph is tormented by their spirits within *The Dreamscape*. This is explained in much greater depth within the following instalment, *The Drumbeat Belly Presents: 1975*.

In terms of the timeline within each instalment, these titles will not by and large, be chronologically arranged. This placement is driven by the narrative requirements, as opposed to the step-by-step telling of my story. Every section of this narrative will, however, be preceded with an element set in 1996. This is known as *Operation Grey Oyster*, a military operation for which Joseph has trained over a five year period.

It is worth mentioning that there are no clearly evil characters here. Perhaps the closest to pure evil are The Triumvirate; being significantly weaker than The Leviathan, they are forced into calculation and scheming in order to extend their influence. These were created with the imperative to corrupt, which they do instinctively. These vassals to The Leviathan's will gradually erode Joseph's moral compass and provide justifications for unethical behaviours.

Veslostoy exists as a theatre for spiritual, guerrilla and conventional warfare. A melting pot for combats of prosaic and exotic kinds. It is split into two districts, Northern and Southern. The former is governed by Johannes, and the latter is influenced plus maintained by The Bird Institute - this is achieved by converting the population to *Daelism*.

The Ancestral Sabre is a powerful narrative element. It is a contract, forged in blood and ichor. Initiated by the demon MALCORVUS, who was exiled from Sheltern due to his attempt at self-immolation that destroyed and killed significantly. In thanks to the population of Veslostoy, many of whom he converted to *Daelism*, he promised that all holders of his bloodline would provide ten years military service upon their 18th year. This is the driving force between most narratives within *The Drumbeat Belly*.

An additional element is The Bird Institute's media franchise, *Jive Lemon*. This is an exercise in normalisation, aimed squarely at the demonic hybrid children. It implies that there are many more like them around the world, making these beings feel less isolated. Following the euthanasia of his siblings, Joseph clings to the likes of Poom-Poom-Piggelow in order to retain his innocence.

Lastly, this particular instalment has an audible motif: Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy*. This inclusion has a purpose - in addition to anchoring certain emotions, its year of release matches the narrative date/timescale. This temporally marks the narrative.

NOTES CONCERNING THE GENRE (OR, "REASONS WHY THIS IS A THRILLER")

CONCERNING THE THRILLER GENRE

THE CENTRAL ACTIVE QUESTION FOCUSES UPON A MYSTERY WHICH MUST BE SOLVED.

There are two mysteries in play here: first, in 1996 - the fate of 'Camp Epsilon'; second, in 1991 - the route of Joseph's disappearing innocence.

THE CENTRAL PROTAGONIST FACES DEATH - THEIR OWN OR SOMEONE ELSE'S

In 1996, the protagonist Joseph (*qua* SHRIKE) suffers several brushes with death and witnesses death and injury to his fellow combatants. In 1991, Joseph carries the burden of participating within his siblings' euthanasia.

THE FORCES OF ANTAGONISM MUST INITIALLY BE CLEVER AND/OR STRONGER THAN THE PROTAGONIST

There are two elements in play here: The Triumvirate, who are smarter than the protagonist and use extensive machination to achieve their aims; and Johannes, a human/demon hybrid who is physically and psychically powerful.

A NOTION OF INNOCENCE MUST BE AT RISK

Joseph's ability to redeem himself in the eyes of Heavenly powers is at risk since his latter childhood is robbed from him.

THEMATICALLY, THRILLERS CENTRE AROUND INJUSTICE & THE MORALITY OF INDIVIDUALS

This is a very strong concern. It wrestles with the morality of actions committed by the protagonist alongside this tale's antagonists.

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION IS DOMINATED BY THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

This follows Joseph Aites through his childhood and adulthood. He is present at all portrayed events.

THE MAIN STORY IS A QUEST

There are two senses. First, in 1996, there is an introduction to the principal quest: locating 'Camp Epsilon' and determining its fate. Next is the march towards military and ethical competence.

CONCERNING THE ACTION THRILLER SPECIFICALLY

THE PROTAGONIST, JOSEPH AITES, IS A DIRECT VICTIM OF THE ANTAGONISTS' ACTIONS. THERE ARE TWO ANTAGONISTIC ELEMENTS AT WORK HERE.

First, THE TRIUMVIRATE: These are calculating demons who are in service to THE LEVIATHAN, who craves corrupted souls. Historically, these have operated to undermine the consciences of Joseph Aites' siblings, sullyng their souls and making them ripe for consumption. Further back, these demons corrupted one of Joseph's predecessors.

Second, there is JOHANNES AITES. He was corrupted by The Triumvirate but fled The Leviathan. He operates in, and arguably rules, Northern

Veslostoy. Bye is, however, able to communicate with Joseph directly through The Dreamscape.

THE PLOT IS DOMINATED BY ACTION SEQUENCES

These are initially understated but, as the story develops, ultra violence ensues. There are, at the start, allusions to violence via verbal descriptions plus visual depictions of violent actions. This is, in particular, prevalent within the 1996 narrative. This takes a more sinister turn in the 1991 narrative where action, in the capacity of training, is used by Joseph to disengage from guilt inflicted by his participation in the demonic siblings' euthanasia.

THE PROTAGONIST HAS THE SPECIFIC SKILLS TO UNDERTAKE THE TASKS SET THEM

Joseph/Shrike possesses the motivation and means to engage with his training through 1991. In addition, within 1996, he is fully trained and ready to kill.

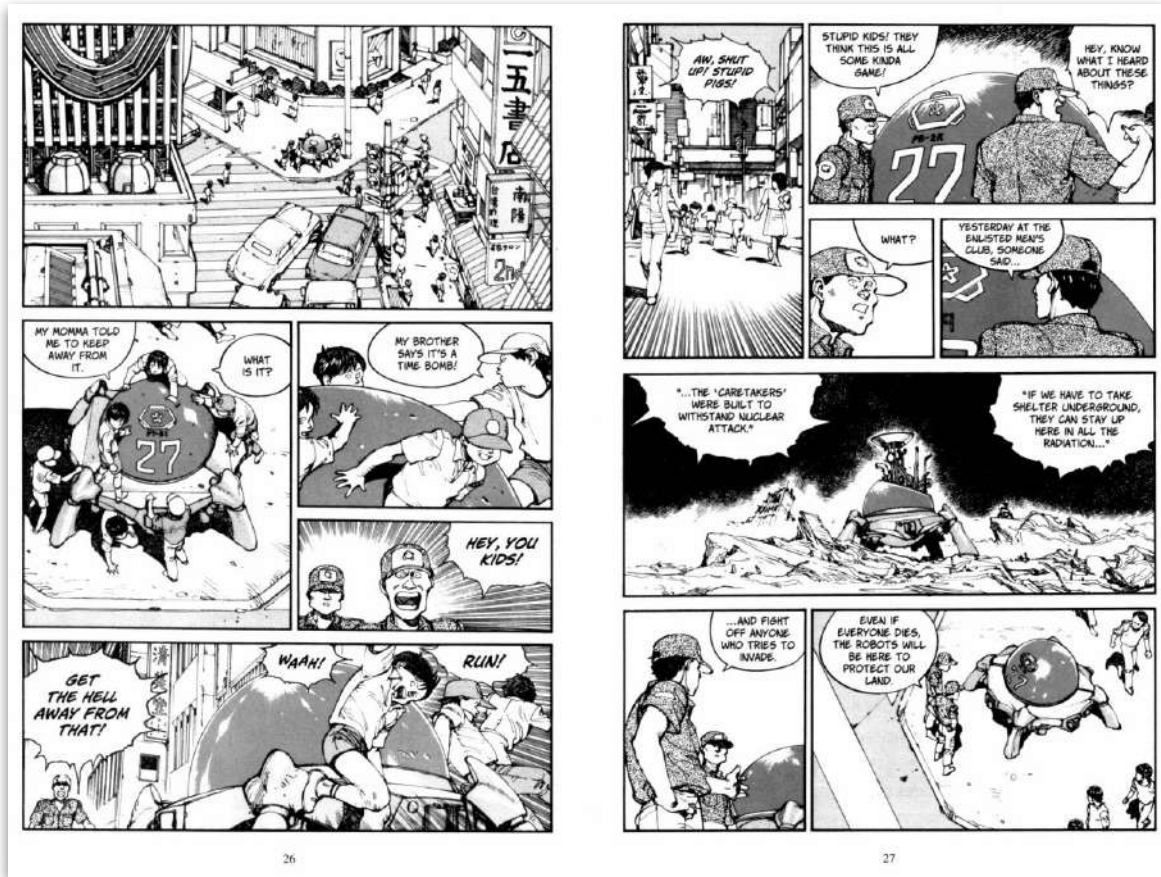
VICTIMS MAY BE NUMEROUS, AND INCIDENTAL, TO THE CENTRAL DRAMATIC CONFLICT

There are numerous casualties in the ongoing war, fought in several theatres: physical, metaphysical and spiritual. Their deaths pose no significance to the overall narrative.



AESTHETICS

SEQUENTIAL ARTWORK will be black and white, akin to the example below:



Covers will be minimal in approach, with a logo and embellishment suited to the narrative. These could be black and white or colour. For example:



In addition to the above, there will be some 'Night Vision' scenes. These will be linked with the '1996' narrative, during which several military personnel undertake nocturnal missions. The colouring will be as follows.



THE DRUMBEAT BELLY - LIST OF GRAPHIC NOVELS / PREMISES (SET ONE)

The focal point of this set of narratives is a hybridised being belonging to human and demonic genetic lineages. His name is Joseph Aites, and this introductory narrative explores his inexorable fall from grace. Beginning as an innocent, his approaching teenage years bode a violent destiny.

Each graphic novel will have two narrative branches:

NARRATIVE BRANCH ONE: 1996: An exploration of Joseph's murderous end game as he embarks on his first combat mission (Operation Grey Oyster) and swiftly sheds his 'green' apprehensions towards killing. Within the 1996 narrative, Joseph is 18 years old. Each of these instalments is 8 pages.

NARRATIVE BRANCH TWO: 1991, 1979, 1987, 1988: These editions will explore Joseph's leap from innocent childhood to his combat training once he has reached 13 years of age. He experiences various kinds of love (maternal, paternal, fraternal) but is exploited by The Bird Institute who, under The Ancestral Sabre, utilise his talents to further Daelist influence in Veslostoy.

NOTE: '1991' will be split into two parts. This is so that sales of Book One can pay for the artwork etc for Book Two.

BOOK ONE: 1991 (PART ONE)

1996 (EVENT DAY -3): Joseph Aites, qua 'Shrike' is briefed with a unit of chosen men, concerning Operation: Grey Oyster. It is a twofold mission. First, link up with a guerrilla camp in North Veslostoy, with whom HQ have lost contact; second, search and destroy the elite cadres. It is essential that they remain undetected for a significant period as their activities over the border can be seen as a declaration of war.

1991 (PART ONE): An introduction to the human/demon hybrid, Joseph Aites. He is, at this stage, a delicate petal soon to be tested by intensive military training from the age of 13. He is approached - within his own Dreamscape - by The Triumvirate. Just like his forebear (Johannes), Joseph is tempted by violence. This side of Joseph's character is nurtured by his mentors, who desire a bloody destiny for him.

BOOK TWO: 1991 (PART TWO)

1996 (EVENT DAY -2): In an affectionate farewell, one of Joseph's chosen Myrmidon speaks on the telephone to his wife. He advises that he is limited with regard to what can be said. He vaguely describes his future involvement with a 'forthcoming security detail'. The palm of his left hand bears a deep scar, referencing his firm commitment to Joseph.

1991 (PART TWO): The moment that innocence is lost. This is in two senses with the first being biological development, and second his effective conscription into The Bird Institute's military machine. The Myrmidon are a principal unit associated with Joseph's military development. They are tutors, committed guards and eventual subordinates. The training will eventually rob Joseph of his innocence as he transitions into 'Shrike'.

BOOK THREE: 1978

1996 (EVENT DAY -1): Several Myrmidon practice their weapon handling drills as Shrike proficiently strips, cleans and reassembles a modified North Veslostian assault rifle known as the *Okkar-740*. This will be The Myrmidon's principal armament for *Operation Grey Oyster*. Training is interrupted by an officer who states that their forthcoming activity could be seen as a declaration of war.

1979: This introduces Joseph's siblings. There are ten Gifts of Demeter, including Joseph. These are all earth-aligned demonic beings who were born during 1978. These demonic children are forcibly taken from their biological mothers in 1979. This sows the seeds for their corruption by The Triumvirate and eventual euthanasia in 1988 (in which Joseph was pressed to assist).

BOOK FOUR: 1987

1996 (EVENT DAY -0): With twenty of his Myrmidon, Shrike boards a South Veslostian aircraft. This marks his 18th birthday and the beginning of *Operation Grey Oyster*. They are physically prepared for their forthcoming HAHO jump, utilising pure oxygen to prevent decompression sickness. In this nocturnal scene, all is in shades of green and black to emulate night vision. The plane, a Veslostian 'Sibh-819', launches and disappears into the night sky.

1987: This instalment explores the dynamic between each Gift of Demeter. Their burgeoning preternatural and supernatural abilities are presented here, during which they are categorised in accordance with displayed abilities/talents. Concerns relating to their instabilities are presented here, along with possible courses of action. The Triumvirate are a very real threat at this stage.

BOOK FIVE: 1988

1996 (EVENT DAY +1): Within a North Veslostian briefing room, an officer reflects upon the apparent carnage inflicted by a hitherto unknown force. In particular, the loss of contact with a small convoy travelling through a wooded area in North Veslostoy's Okkar Forest; in addition, personnel linked with a nearby roadblock have disappeared. Fifty special forces combatants are briefed, indicating that they need to investigate these incidents.

1988: Following several disturbing visions, a telepath named 'Uncle Toby' makes certain reservations very clear. It is apparent that nine *Gifts of Demeter* have been deeply affected by The Triumvirate and there are concerns that a massacre akin to that inflicted by Johannes could recur. It is eventually, after painstaking deliberation, agreed that the errant hybrids should be euthanised.

THE DRUMBEAT BELLY PRESENTS: 1991 (SCRIPT & STEP OUTLINE)

SAMPLE

SECTION ONE / PROLOGUE: 1996

PAGE ONE (TWO PANELS - WITH WIREFRAME)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Entire page. This provides the background over which Panel 2 is placed. It is a top-down view of several MYRMIDON queuing outside the briefing room. There are two clocks on the far wall (one is labelled 'GMT' and the other as 'VESLOSTOY').

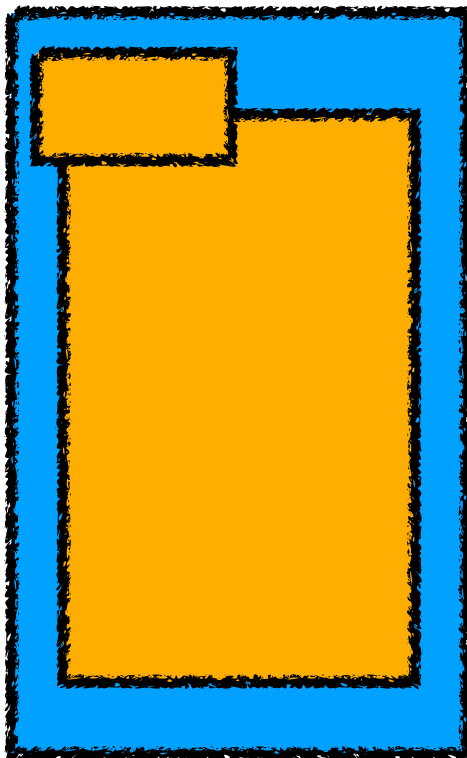
The GMT clock reads 13:29. The Veslostoy clock reads 14:29.

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Centrally-placed panel. Grungy WHITE TEXT, emulating dirty fluorescent lighting is imposed over the black background.

WHITE TEXT:

Friday, 23rd August 1996.



PAGE TWO (THREE PANELS - WITH WIREFRAME)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Rectangular horizontally-oriented panel. BLACK TEXT is placed over a grey background.

BLACK TEXT:
EVENT DAY -3

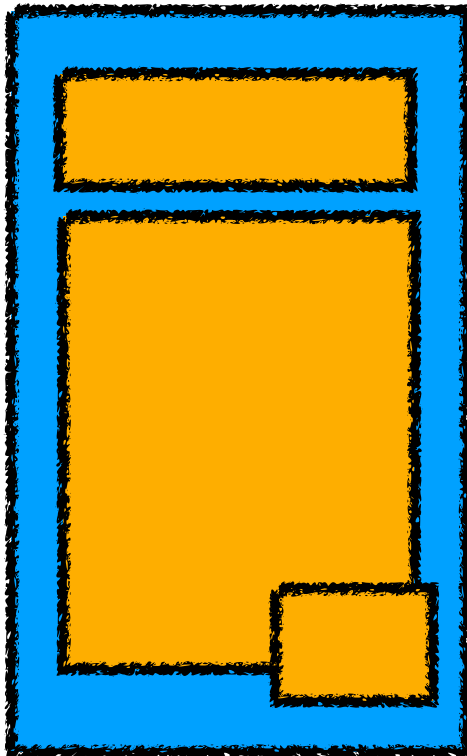
PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Long view inside a dimly-lit briefing room. The sole occupant is an officer named YEVSEY. GREY TEXT over this character's head indicates his name.

GREY TEXT:
Yevsey!

PANEL 3: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close-up view of Yevsey's eyes. They are dilated in the dimness.



PAGE THREE (FOUR PANELS - WITH WIREFRAME)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close-up of the projector. A standard nineties model with slides in a carousel. Its power switch is in the 'Off' position.

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Following on from the above. The projector is switched on by Yevsey.

SFX:
click

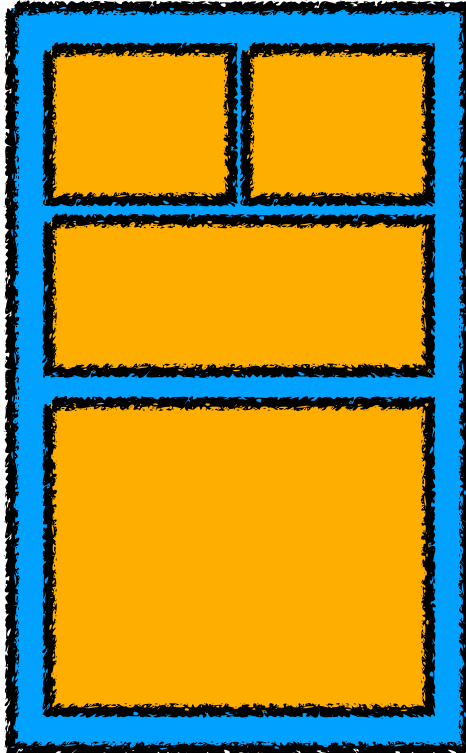
PANEL 3: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close-up view of Yevsey's eyes. The projector's beam constricts his pupils.

PANEL 4: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of the clock. It indicates that the time is 14:30. There is a knock on the door.

SFX:
knock-knock



PAGE FOUR (THREE PANELS - WITH WIREFRAME)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close-view of the door handle - a polished stainless steel example that reflects the light intensely.

YEVSEY (O.C):
Come in!

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

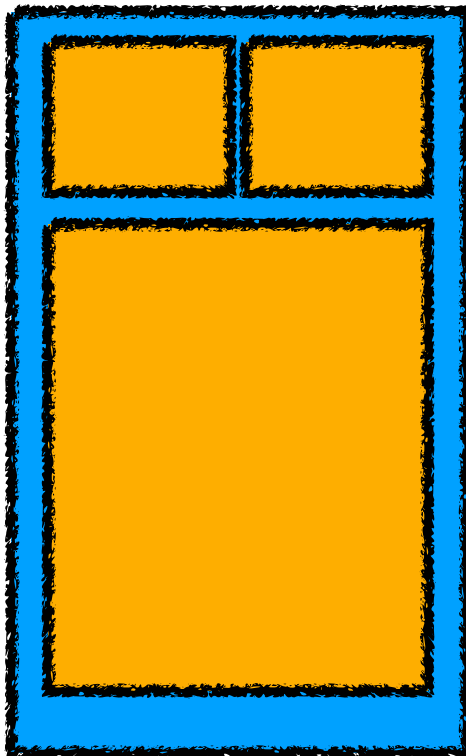
Close-up view of Yevsey's eyes. The pupils are constricted in the light.

PANEL 3: INT. CORRIDOR

Two MYRMIDON stand either side of an individual with rank insignia consistent with high placement within Daelism.

Grey Text is placed over the Myrmidon.

GREY TEXT:
The Myrmidon!



PAGE FIVE (FOUR PANELS - WITH WIREFRAME)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Inside the briefing room. Long view. The projector is on. The beam shines onto the screen, which accommodates black text.

BLACK TEXT:
OPERATION GREY OYSTER

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

The Myrmidon filter in. Some are caught in the beam. An individual is silhouetted. Grey Text indicates his name.

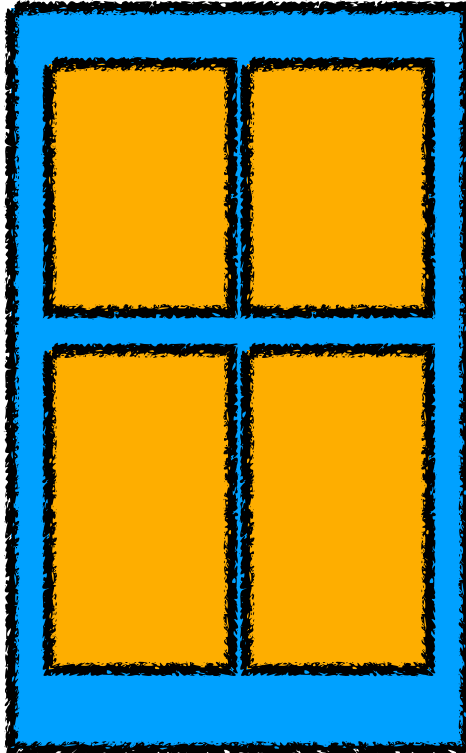
GREY TEXT:
Codename: Shrike!

PANEL 3: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

The briefing room is half-filled with more individuals filtering in.

PANEL 4: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

The final occupant has entered and closed the door. The presentation is starting.



PAGE SIX (EIGHT PANELS)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of Yevsey's face.

YEVSEY:
Let's begin ...

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of Shrike's holstered, ornate, pistol.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... Gentlemen ...

PANEL 3: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of a Myrmidon's eye, which reflects a slide. It shows a map.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... This is the location of 'Camp Epsilon' ...

PANEL 4: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of a Myrmidon's face as he focuses upon the presentation.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... Our principal designated area ...

PANEL 5: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM / SLIDESHOW

View of the slide. It is a map depicting a segment of Northern Veslostoy.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... for recruiting, vetting and training paramilitaries ...

PANEL 6: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Top-down view of several Myrmidon focusing.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... Who are sympathetic to Daelism ...

PANEL 7: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM / SLIDESHOW

View of a slide depicting an instructor with

YEVSEY (O.C)
... and the plight of our Southernmost allies!

PANEL 8: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM / SLIDESHOW

A Southern Veslostian instructor bound and gagged, with a gun pointed at his head. Another, to his left, is laying dead.

YEVSEY (O.C)
Sadly, we lost contact with Camp Epsilon. Intelligence suggests that hostages have been taken, but we can't confirm their veracity.

PAGE SEVEN (SIX PANELS)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of the clock. It reads 15:28

YEVSEY (O.C)
So, your mission is simple ...

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Long view of Yevsey as he wraps up the presentation.

YEVSEY
... Insertion by HAHO jump ...

PANEL 3: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM / SLIDESHOW

Slide featuring anti-aircraft batteries.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... We can safely get you to within forty miles ...

PANEL 4: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Long view of Yevsey as before.

YEVSEY
... but, given the presence of enemy forces ...

PANEL 5: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM / SLIDESHOW

Slide featuring an aerial shot of a North Veslostian military base.

YEVSEY (O.C)
... we can't risk them hearing your 'chutes open ...

PANEL 6: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Long view of Yevsey.

YEVSEY
... So, this is 'Operation: Grey Oyster'. Gentlemen, your objectives are clear!

PAGE EIGHT (FOUR PANELS)

PANEL 1: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Long view of Yevsey. He is wrapping up his briefing.

YEVSEY
Primaries: Insertion by HAHO (make sure you land safely) ...

PANEL 2: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of a combat boot that is coated in polish that doesn't shine.

YEVSEY

... cover the forty miles in three days. By any means possible, of course ...

PANEL 3: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM / SLIDESHOW

Spy plane photograph of 'Camp Epsilon'. It is an extensive residential and training area in deep forest.

YEVSEY

... Locate and access 'Camp Epsilon'. Rescue any hostages and set up a new training area.

PANEL 4: INT. THE BRIEFING ROOM

Close view of a well-used, carbonised, combat knife. It has a slight curve to it and a pronounced point, making it a thrust and slash weapon.

YEVSEY

Secondary: locate and liquidate the enemy's elite cadres. This is a rescue first and foremost, but with a 'search and destroy' element!

THE DRUMBEAT BELLY PRESENTS: 1991

SECTION TWO / MAIN NARRATIVE: 1991 PART ONE

PAGE NINE (TWO PANELS, DIFFERENT SIZES)

PANEL 1: WHITE TEXT ON BLACK BACKGROUND

Small square panel at top left of page. Distressed WHITE TEXT on a warped black background.

WHITE TEXT
1991

PANEL 2: BLACK TEXT ON GREY BACKGROUND

The opening lyrics for Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy*, in BLACK TEXT against a grey background.

BLACK TEXT
I know that I've imagined love before
And how it could be with you ...

PAGE TEN (SIX PANELS UNIFORM IN SIZE)

PANEL 1: INT. CORRIDOR (1)

Within THE BIRD INSTITUTE, Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy* plays over a PA SYSTEM. These devices appear in several locations within The Bird Institute's labyrinthine corridors.

PA SYSTEM
... Really hurt me, baby, really cut me, baby
How can you have a day without a night?
You're the book that I have opened
And now I've got to know much more ...

PANEL 2: INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM

A continuation of the above. A vacant, clean and tidy child's bedroom. There are JIVE LEMON posters along with a similarly themed duvet.

PANEL 3: INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM

This panel closes in on JULIA'S hand placing a sealed envelope on Joseph's pillow.

PANEL 4: INT. CORRIDOR (1)

Some lyrics are accommodated within this panel, via the PA system.

PA SYSTEM

... The curiousness of your potential kiss
Has got my mind and body aching ...

PANEL 5: INT. CORRIDOR (1)

Lyrics are, again, visible in this panel via the PA system.

PA SYSTEM

... Really hurt me, baby, really cut me, baby
How can you have a day without a night?
You're the book that I have opened
And now I've got to know much more ...

PANEL 6: INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM

Close-up of the envelope, upon which is HANDWRITTEN TEXT.

HANDWRITTEN TEXT

To my beloved Joseph!

PAGE ELEVEN (SIX PANELS, UNIFORM IN SIZE)

PANEL 1: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Further lyrics as transmitted by the PA system.

PA SYSTEM

... Like a soul without a mind
In a body without a heart
I'm missing every part
He he-hey, he he-hey, he he-hey, ay, ay ...

PANEL 2: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

JOSEPH AITES walks hand-in-hand with MALE BIRD INSTITUTE ORDERLY ONE. Joseph is looking up affectionately. Joseph carries a Jive Lemon action figure (most likely POOM-POOM-PIGGELow) and wears a holstered toy pistol.

PANEL 3: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Continuing the above, these figures progress through the long corridor, positioned more distantly than before.

PANEL 4: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

The PA system. Lyrics are, as before, pumped out.

PA SYSTEM

... Aye, aye, aye, aye
Like a soul without a mind
In a body without a heart
I'm missing every part
Like a soul without a mind
In a body without a heart
I'm missing every part
Like a soul without a mind
In a body without a heart
I'm missing every part (part, part, part) ...

PANEL 5: INT. CORRODOR (2)

PA SYSTEM

I don't know where this one came from
I don't know where this, I don't know where this
I don't know where this one came from

ANNOUNCER

That was *Unfinished Sympathy* by Massive Attack!

PANEL 6: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Clear mid-range view of Joseph. He is wearing a Jive Lemon t-shirt, featuring Poom-Poom-Piggelow. This garment is adorned with three Daelist badges that shine.

PAGE TWELVE (SEVEN PANELS, DIFFERENT SIZES)

PANEL 1: BLACK BACKGROUND

Black background panel. It accommodates panels 2 to 6.

PANEL 2: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Joseph's head. This panel is larger than the other four. This makes the focal point disproportionately large. He is looking up to his left.

PANEL 3: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Joseph's right arm. This panel is slightly smaller than the others, making the arm seem smaller than it actually is.

PANEL 4: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Joseph's left arm, he is holding the Male Orderly's hand. This panel is a lot larger to accommodate the Male Orderly's limb.

PANEL 5: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

The central panel, largest of all. Joseph's midriff is visible here. His badges are more detailed in this panel. They are representations of three significant Daelist symbols: The Wyrn; The Leviathan; Malcorvus.

PANEL 6: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Joseph's right leg. He is wearing early nineties denim.

PANEL 7: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Joseph's left leg, clothed as above. This panel is slightly larger than the previous.

PAGE THIRTEEN (FOUR PANELS, DIFFERENT SIZES)

PANEL 1: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

Low detail shot of Joseph's midriff. This provides the background for panels 2, 3 and 4.

PANEL 2: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

This is a highly detailed representation of a Daelist badge: The Wyrm.

BLACK TEXT

The Wyrm: the demon who was defeated, and gave us triumph.

PANEL 3: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

This is a highly detailed representation of a Daelist badge: The Leviathan.

BLACK TEXT

The Leviathan: the demon who accommodates and gives us our home.

PANEL 4: INT. CORRIDOR (2)

This is a highly detailed representation of a Daelist badge: Malcorvus.

BLACK TEXT

The Almighty Malcorvus: the demon who fled and gave us servitude.

PAGE FOURTEEN (THREE PANELS, DIFFERENT SIZES)

PANEL 1: INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM

Mid-range view of Joseph's bedroom door, from inside. There are several Jive Lemon posters along with Daelist symbols.

PANEL 2: INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM

Close-up of the door handle being moved downwards, allowing entry to the individuals who approach from outside.

SFX

click

PANEL 3: INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM

Close view of the door's bottom right corner as it opens, letting the harsh light from the corridor inside.

PAGE FIFTEEN (FOUR PANELS, DIFFERENT SIZES, APPROXIMATING A HEART)

PANEL 1: SECTION OF LOVE HEART

Top left crest of a traditional love heart, associated with Valentine's Day.

PANEL 2: SECTION OF LOVE HEART

Top right crest of a traditional love heart, in keeping with the above panel.

PANEL 3: SECTION OF LOVE HEART

The central section of a traditional love heart, in keeping with the above panel. White Text is displayed in this panel.

WHITE TEXT
Valentine's Day

PANEL 4: SECTION OF LOVE HEART

Lower section of the love heart, in keeping with the above panel. White Text is displayed in this panel.

WHITE TEXT
1991

THE DRUMBEAT BELLY PRESENTS: 1991

STEP OUTLINE

1996: SOUTHERN VESLOSTOY / PROLOGUE

SCENE 01: TEXT ONLY. Title panel - black background with white text: "Friday 23rd August, 1996"

SCENE 02: TEXT ONLY. Commentary panel - grey background with black text: "EVENT DAY -3"

SCENE 03: INT. BRIEFING ROOM. Shrike and his Myrmidon file into the room. They are briefed on their forthcoming mission. Several 'slides' are shown

1991: SHELTERN / MAIN NARRATIVE

14th February 1991

SCENE 04: TEXT ONLY. Black background with white text: "The Drumbeat Belly Presents: 1991". Lyrics for Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy* are included

SCENE 05: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE LIVING QUARTERS. There is an approximation of a heart over several panels. The central panel reads: "Valentine's Day, 1991"

SCENE 06: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE LIVING QUARTERS. Julia writes a Valentine's Day card and inserts it into an envelope. The card is left on Joseph's bed

SCENE 07: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE DAELIST CHAPEL. Joseph Aites undertakes a purification ceremony

SCENE 08: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE LIVING QUARTERS. Joseph returns and reads the card. Joseph smiles as Julia joins him. He expresses fear towards his forthcoming training

SCENE 09: INT. COMMON ROOM / TV SCREEN. Joseph watches an episode of *Jive Lemon* on the TV that is in the common room. Several security staff are present

24th August 1991

SCENE 10: TEXT ONLY. Commentary panel. White text on a black background reads: "Sunday, 24th August 1991. Joseph's 13th birthday"

SCENE 11: EXT. JOSEPH'S DREAMSCAPE. The Triumvirate torment Joseph. He is reminded of his participation within the other hybrids' euthanasia

SCENE 12: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE LIVING QUARTERS. Joseph wakes. The Triumvirate are present but fade rapidly. Joseph receives a vision

SCENE 13: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE CORRIDOR. Joseph leaves his quarters and notices a sign on the wall, indicating he should go to the common room

SCENE 14: INT. COMMON ROOM. Joseph is presented with gifts and a cake. The Programme Director hands over an ornate pistol with holster

SCENE 15: INT. THE BIRD INSTITUTE CORRIDOR. Joseph is escorted into the training area. Several Myrmidon practice their weapon drills. They formalise their loyalty to Joseph with a blood rite.

25th December 1991

SCENE 16: TEXT ONLY. White text against a black background reads: "Christmas Day 1991".

SCENE 17: INT. COMMON ROOM. Joseph opens his Christmas presents. It is a day of rest for him. He receives *Jive Lemon* related merchandise

SCENE 18: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE CORRIDOR. Joseph walks to his training area.

SCENE 19: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE TRAINING AREA. Joseph interacts with his Myrmidon and, under their supervision, practices tricks with his ornate pistol

27th December 1991

SCENE 20: TEXT ONLY. White text against a black background. It reads: "Friday, 27th December 1991"

SCENE 21: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE TRAINING AREA. Joseph sews an achievement badge to his training uniform. His uniform has preexisting embellishments

SCENE 22: INT. BIRD INSTITUTE TRAINING AREA. Joseph strips and reassembles an automatic rifle manufactured within the Yuttia factory

SCENE 23: EXT. TOP DOWN VIEW OF THE YUTTIA FACTORY. There is a brief piece about the Yuttia factory, as narrated by one of the Myrmidon

31st December 1991

SCENE 24: TEXT ONLY. White text against a black background reads:
"Tuesday, 31st December 1991", marking the close of 1991's narrative

SCENE 25: INT. COMMON ROOM. Joseph is allowed to drink a single can of beer to toast in the new year. He is told that training will be suspended for New Year's Day

