Discussion Questions and Answers:

1. Why does Moore see “piracy” as a better comic for the embedded narrative compared to other comics? What connections can we draw with Tales of the Black Freighter? How does this embedded narrative contribute to the understanding of the work as a whole? Why does Alan Moore include this story in such detail? Can there be any connections made between “The Sea Captain” and the main characters?

Moore uses piracy because he felt that in an age that everyday super heroes are seen everyday, the normal superhero comic would be irrelevant to a reader in this world. Moore wants us to connect characters from both narratives to show the similarities between them. For example “The Sea Captain can be seen as Adrian Veidt is some analysis because of how they both depend on their fallen companions for the better of oneself/the world.

2. Moore incorporates paratext materials at the end of each chapter that give the reader a more in depth look at its characters. Here, we see such materials as: the first few chapters of Hollis Mason’s Under The Hood, Dr. Malcolm’s case file on Rorschach, newspapers, Veidt campaigns and a variety of other gems. What do these additional pieces add to the novel and why did Moore present these elements of prose in this comics series?

Moore’s use of these additional documents at the end of each chapter give the reader the much needed back story to The Keene Act and how these superheroes were being forced out. The addition of the paratext makes the reader feel like they are reading a book rather than a comic or graphic novel. Moore’s intricate writing style and perfect placement of panels gives the reader a very enjoyable and exciting read. Moore’s paratext materials placement within the novel gives the reader the ability to jump into the world of the Watchmen because these paratexts are actual documents from Moore’s world.

3. Chapter Six gives us the origin of Rorschach. The only other character we get this sort of in depth origin story with in the comic itself is Doc Manhattan. In a text literally filled with superheroes and superegos, why does Moore focus so strongly on these two? What’s so special about them that they each get their own chapter of origin? Is there something Moore wants to show us about them as people? About their ideologies? An additional thought to consider: How do these stories fit within traditional conventions of the superhero genre and how do they break them?

The first important thing to note about these stories is that they are in a lot of ways keeping with the genre of the superhero comic. Pretty much anytime a new superhero gets his or her own issue one, the story is geared toward origins. And anytime a new
Batman or Spider-Man reboot is made, that origin story has to be told again even though we know by now that Bruce Wayne’s parents died and Peter Parker was bitten by a radioactive spider. That said, at the same time, Moore really darkens the genre with his presentation of these characters’ origins. One might argue that Rorschach is a very Batman-esque figure in his ideology against crime. But his origin is far darker which makes sense because the book as a whole is far darker than most mainstream Marvel or DC comics. With Rorschach we see all the brutality, all the filth, all the sex. And we see it morph him beyond the motive of revenge. In order to battle the disgusting, he becomes the disgusting. Doc Manhattan on the other hand loses humanity in another way. Whereas the accident for some superheroes is portrayed as this romantic, almost fortuitous event, Doc Manhattan’s origin involves him being physically deconstructed and reconstructed. He evolves beyond humanity. So while both these characters come from different places. They are both perhaps the least likely to let humanity stand in their way.

4. Why does the movie end so differently (without the alien monster thing)? What makes this change necessary for this adaptation to work? What can comics do that movies can't and vice versa? Those of you that have seen the movie may feel free to discuss other areas of diversion.

Well, first there are some logistic issues. By removing the whole alien thing, the film (which is already pretty long – especially in the Ultimate Cut) had no need to deal with the side story of the missing writers and artists. Max Shea is no longer a necessary character. So, the movie is able to save time and budget by cutting him. More importantly though, the comic ends in a very strange way. Comics readers are, by the nature of their preferred genre, perhaps more willing to suspend disbelief to the point that we can accept a big alien explosion that seems to come from nowhere. The comic better prepares us for this ending but in the film it would have made too little sense. Film audiences, not so much. Even in the most fantastic films, we still crave a sort of realistic grounding and straying too far from that is potentially upsetting. Then again, maybe we also have to think about time of publication. The eighties were weird, man. Maybe Snyder felt that he could create a more complete, character focused narrative if he had Veidt blame the whole crisis on Doc Manhattan.

5. The text is heavily grounded in the personal. These relationships, at times, become more chaotic and dangerous than the world itself. Break into small groups and find some particularly strong moments of these interpersonal relationships. Which moments for you are the most jarring?

The simple answer here is the scene in Chapter Nine where Laurie finds out the Comedian is her father and that realization drives Doc Manhattan to want to come back to Earth. It’s such a beautifully tragic moment of human understanding and one of the very few instances of hope in this horribly bleak text. Here, Moore shows us the world is a disgusting, confusing place but behind of all the violence and the horrors, we can still find hope if we look hard enough. Another great moment – perhaps one of the most endearing – is Chapter Ten page 10 where we see Rorschach apologize to Dreiber for being difficult. Rorschach – a character who until then had only shown emotions motivated by violence and horror – allows himself to become vulnerable. Dreiber is
literally Rorschach’s only true friend. Everyone else is either an enemy, an acquaintance, a professional colleague, or someone who just annoys him. Here, we see him recognize that fact in three beautifully composed panels (drawn from his perspective). Perhaps Rorschach knows he’s about to die and his final gift to his friend is this moment of sincerity.

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