*“A cliffhanger in every panel!”*

Digital Comics, Field of View and Narrative Suspense

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The title of this paper comes from a remark made by comic book writer Kyle Higgins during a 2013 interview for film-maker and fellow comics writer, Kevin Smith's podcast *Fatman On Batman* (August 8th). Higgins and Smith were discussing Higgins' work on DC's 'digital first' comic *Batman Beyond 2.0* (2013-14), a series designed to be read online using the 'Guided View' feature of the ComiXology digital comics platform (established in 2007 and acquired by Amazon in 2014). Guided View, a proprietary system owned by ComiXology, allows readers to reduce the field of view of a comic from single or double page to single panel. In doing so, it also increases narrative suspense for the reader whose eye is no longer capable of 'wandering' across the page or pages and 'spoiling' surprises in the story. As ComiXology's co-founder John D Roberts argues, in print or full-screen comics the only 'true reveal' is the first panel of the first page: because of its reduction the field of view, in Guided View, by contrast, 'every reveal is a true reveal' (The Comic Archive: 2015). This reduction has an effect too on the narrative techniques deployed by 'digital first' writers such as Higgins. Aware of the change in field of view, Higgins altered his approach towards the page so that each digital panel transition aims be the equivalent of turning a printed page in terms of the generation of narrative suspense, producing, as he remarked to Smith, 'a cliffhanger in every panel'.In this essay, drawing on the narrative 'codes' outlined by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975 [1973]), I discuss the relationship between field of view and suspense in not only comics read using Guided View, but also in the webcomic *Freak Angels* by Warren Ellisand Paul Duffield (2008-2011) and publications available through ComiXology's competitor, Thrillbent (2011-).

In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes identifies two particular narrative codes involved in the generation of narrative suspense: the hermeneutic (enigma) and the proairetic (action). The former is deployed to raise questions and create intrigue; the latter stimulates anticipation over the consequences of actions. These codes *propel* the first-time reader through the narrative, which is read in expectation of a resolution to suspense and the attainment, consequently of closure. Although books, like comics but unlike cinema, are a highly controllable form of media, the excitement raised by narrative suspense not only propels but also *compels* the reader: this is why, in English, gripping texts are often referred to, particularly in review journalism, as 'page-turners' and 'unputdownable'. While such texts need not necessarily foreground suspense, both phrases are regularly used to describe fiction from genres such as crime, thriller and horror which *do* prioritise the hermeneutic and proairetic codes. Both the superhero genre generally, and Batman comics in particular, contain elements of these, and other genres. Batman is, of course, a crime fighter and it the character's first appearance was in an issue of *Detective Comics* (#27, May 1939). The issues of the series which preceded Batman's debut drew on the stylistic and narrative conventions of crime stories from 'pulp' magazines and novels, and featured such 'hard-boiled' characters as FBI Agent Speed Saunders, and Slam Bradley, a private detective, both of whom appeared in *Detective Comics* #1 (March, 1937). Bradley was developed from a concept by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, also responsible for Superman who made his debut appearance in *Action Comics* #1 the following year. The success of Superman spawned a host of variations and imitations and the foundation of the superhero genre. Batman was one of Superman's first successors and is his polar opposite: lacking in any superpowers other than is his indomitable drive; operating nocturnally rather than in broad daylight; dressing in a night camouflage costume of black and grey instead of bright primary colours. In his earliest adventures, Batman also carried, and used, a gun, whereas Superman eschewed weaponry. However, as Richard Reynolds notes, both characters, and most other superheroes of the genre's 'Golden Age' (c.1938-1945), shared a 'reverential' attitude towards knowledge, particularly of the scientific kind (53). Detective fiction is, as Brian McHale has described it, the 'epistemological genre *par excellence*' (16) in which the investigator 'needs to know' the solution to the mystery (22). While most superheroes are crime-fighters not all crime-fighters are detectives: Batman, of course, is all three and therefore investigation, and the narrative suspense that comes with it, is often prioritised in the character's narratives.

This is the case with Higgins' scripts for *Batman Beyond 2.0*. (2013-2015; *2.0* hereafter) - a continuation of the animated TV series *Batman Beyond* (1999-2001), set in a future in which the mantle of Batman has been passed by an elderly Bruce Wayne to the teenaged Terry McGinnis – which combine criminal investigation with superhero action. The series' 'digital first' status is evident in the first page of #1 (2013) which is a 'splash' – i.e. a page consisting of a single panel - of 'Neo-Gotham', the future megalopolis which has developed out of Batman's established home of Gotham City, in which a speech balloon stems from the new iteration of the Arkham Institute, a facility housing the criminally insane. Another, smaller, panel is overlaid on the Neo-Gotham panorama, showing a corridor within Arkham, continuing the dialogue from the first balloon and identifying the speaker as the city's Mayor. Reading the page on the ComiXology platform in 'full screen' mode, the reader sees both the splash and the inset panel simultaneously, moving from the former to the latter following the speech balloons. In 'Guided View' mode, however, the reader is presented first of all with only a section of the splash in which only part of Arkham is visible. Rather than 'turning' the digital page, using the right arrow key to move 'forward' enlarges the splash, revealing Arkham in its entirety and presents an editorial caption which, in typical superhero comic book fashion, supplies a publication reference in response to an asterisk in the speech balloon indicating that events mentioned in the dialogue have been published elsewhere. Pressing the right arrow again replaces the splash with the inset, which effectively becomes another splash.

This page, then, provides two examples of the relationship between narrative suspense and field of view when reading in 'Guided View' mode. First, the enlargement of the splash provides the reader with the identity of the building from which the opening line of dialogue originates, which is immediately available in full screen mode (if, of course, the reader is familiar with the architecture of Neo-Gotham), and to ascertain that events mentioned within the dialogue have already been published; second, the repositioning of the second panel from inset to splash means its appearance , and the continuation of the dialogue and identification of the Mayor it contains, are *delayed* for the Guided View reader. As the appearance of the second panel relies upon reader action – pressing the forward arrow/turning the page – then this delay is potentially infinite. The full-screen reader, on the other hand, is presented with all of this visual information simultaneously and, therefore, runs the risk of their eyes 'wandering' across the page and 'spoiling' narrative revelation (although, admittedly, the revelations on this page are not particularly pivotal to the plot).

The enlargement of the splash is comparable to a cinematic zoom-out, albeit without a similarly gradual expansion of the field of view. However, unlike a cinema spectator the Guided View reader has to *execut*e the zoom; furthermore, they may not expect the zoom, or any other similar visual effect, to be the result of digital 'page-turning' which, like the turning of a printed page, serves to reveal a pre-determined narrative choice by the comic-makers. That said, the manipulation of the hermeneutic and proairetic codes by Higgins, artist Thony Silas and editor Alex Antone, informed by their awareness of the reading experience provided by Guided View as Higgins explained to Smith, both propels and compels the reader to the extent that page-turning might not *feel* like a voluntary action.

In this case, narrative suspense, and the excitement it stimulates, is a source of pleasure. However, Barthes himself had an opposite view about what constituted the true 'pleasure of the text' (10) which he found instead in 'the opportunity to 'graze' and 'browse scrupulously' provided by the controllability of the printed page, which allowed readers to become 'aristocratic' (13). That said, Barthes acknowledges that there are 'two systems of reading': fast and slow. While aristocratic reading is slow and dwells upon the 'play of language', fast reading 'goes straight to the articulations of the anecdote' (13): in other words, it is *plot-driven*. Barthes admits that he is a fast reader when it comes to the work of Jules Vernes, a writer renowned for his *Voyages extraordinaires* series of adventure novels in which suspense and excitement are prioritised. In comparison to his reading of Vernes, Barthes' aristocratic reading 'skips nothing' which acknowledges both the propulsive and compulsive aspects of plot-driven reading: in their excitement, fast readers 'lose discourse' in their lack of attention to the 'play of language' (12-13). This is not an irretrievable loss, however, as a text can always be read again; indeed, for Barthes re-reading – to 'dip in again' - (12) was, as he explained in *S/Z* (1991, [1970]) a great source of textual pleasure because it moved reading away from 'consumption' and into 'play' (16). In re-reading a text which has already provided the closure of narrative resolution, which Barthes calls 'novelistic satisfaction' (10) - that is, if one already knows what happens in the story – the reader's focus shifts from suspense to that which may have been overlooked on the first reading: in Barthes's terms, the 'play of language'.

Barthes compares the pleasure of suspense to that of the striptease, describing both as a 'gradual unveiling', the 'entire excitation' of which lies in the 'hope' of revelation (10). The 'delaying' aspect of Guided View prolongs the unveiling even more than the controllability of the full page or screen does, because of the reduction of field of view. Combined with this reduction, the compulsive aspect of plot-driven reading has the result that Guided View approaches the condition of animation, providing what Roberts calls 'subtle animation' (The Comic Archive: 2015). Avoiding achieving the state of full animation is crucial to the 'North Star philosophy' of Mark Waid, writer and co-founder of the digital comics platform Thrillbent (2012-) which is that 'the reader needs to control the experience' (Spurgeon: 2013). Waid is particularly concerned that digital comics don't become another version of 'motion comics' and Roberts too has stressed that Guided View is not a version of this form because it requires reader 'interaction' (The Comics Archive: 2015). Motion Comics present rudimentary animations of existing comic book pages rather than adaptions of comics to the medium of animation: as such, Waid has described them as 'neither fish nor fowl' (Wilson: 2013). Like ComiXology, the Thrillbent platform hosts both original 'digital first' comics, including Waid's own superhero series *Insufferable* (2012-) and scans of existing titles, such as Terry Moore's long-running *Strangers in Paradise* (1993-2007), which ended its serialisation before the establishment of the platform. Designed to be read on-screen, in landscape format, 'page-turning' in *Insufferable* often involves additions and subtractions to the field of view which creates the impression of panels appearing and disappearing on a single page. This is the case in the first issue of the series which opens with a kidnapper broadcasting his demands online and, soon after, the discovery and rescue of his hostage. Page 1 is a distorted splash of a head and shoulders shot of the kidnapper addressing, and tapping, as indicated by a sound effect, a webcam. The image corruption is improved in the next page – the page numbers are indicated on-screen - and explained by the kidnapper as the result of poor Wi-Fi in his lair. This page is identical to the first except for the distortion and the sound effect, both of which have been subtracted, and the addition of new dialogue: these three elements indicate the very brief passing of time between the two pages. As they are near-identical splashes, the movement from page one to page two approaches the condition of animation and is much smoother than the typically stiff animation of motion comics. Pages 3-9, which shows the apprehension of the kidnapper by the superhero Notcturnus, contain three or four panels and resemble scans of printed comic book pages, albeit at roughly half the size of a typical American comic page and in landscape rather than portrait orientation. (Each page digital of *Batman Beyond 2.0* is also half of a page in its print version; both formats are in portrait orientation). Things change, however, with page 10 in which a single panel – showing Nocturnus discover the hostage - takes up about a third of another wise blank, white page, its 'edges' delineated by the red on-screen arrow 'buttons' used to navigate the comic. Pressing the forward button 'turns' the page with the result that a new panel appears next to the existing one, creating the impression of an addition to page 10 rather than an entirely new page. On page 10, the hostage speaks the line, “Hurry, Mr Nocturnus...” which remains on the first panel of page 11. The second panel, a close-up of the hostage, half the size of panel one, repeats the line “hurry”, preceded and followed by ellipsis. The urgency is due to the mineshaft in which she is imprisoned collapsing, the result of Nocturnus's earlier altercation with the kidnapper, and is heightened by the addition of this, and, in the next page, a close-up of Nocturnus's mask, the same size as panel two which resembles a gradual 'unveiling' of a single printed page. In the close-up, Nocturnus is wide-eyed and sweating, indicating mounting panic. This panel is introduced in page 12, which retains the second panel from page 11 but subtracts the first panel – Nocturnus encountering the hostage - continued over from page 10, leaving only empty, white space. Page 13 consists solely of the close-up of the panicked Nocturnus. This is retained for page 14, which also includes an unattributed speech balloon containing the dialogue 'Give her to me', in the space to the right of the panel taking up the remaining sixth of the page.

The speaker of this line is revealed after turning the page twice: page 15 introduces his hand to the panel from page 15 and page 16 is completely new, changing the focus in its first panel to the speaker who we later learn is Nocturnus's former side-kick, and now nemesis, the obnoxious Galahad. The conflict between the two is indicated in their first exchange on page 16 in which Nocturnus initially rejects the offer of assistance from Galahad, who refers to him as 'old man', before passing the hostage to him in the second panel. Both panels are present simultaneously on the page/screen, and the next three pages also resemble scans of traditional comics pages. The use of addition and subtraction returns in the final six pages, 20-25. The transition from page 19, which shows a boastful Galahad speaking to a TV reporter after rescuing the hostage, to page 20 which cuts to Nocturnus observing the interview from a rooftop, is indicated by the continuation of Galahad's claim to the reporter that his separation from Nocturnus has been 'good' for them both. That this line is overlaid on an image of an upstaged Nocturnus who has been ignored by the media creates an ironic juxtaposition of image and text, a common technique in comic book storytelling often referred to as an 'Alan Moore transition' after the writer's use of this method in eighties' comics such as *Swamp Thing* (1984-87) and *Watchmen* (1986-87). Page 20 consists of a single vertical panel in the left hand third of the page showing Nocturnus alone on the rooftop outside the mine-shaft. Page 21 retains this panel and adds another, horizontal one in the top right hand two thirds of the remaining space, with the unattributed dialogue, “Figured you'd be around'. Page 22 retains this panel but subtracts the one continued over from page 20, leaving empty white space, and introducing the speaker, a woman revealed on the next page to be a police officer, Lieutenant Rainwood. Rainwood provides further exposition about the antagonism between Nocturnus and Galahad. Page 23 is a single panel of conversation between Nocturnus and Rainwood, taking up two thirds of the page which is retained in the next and penultimate page. Page 24 introduces two new panels, which form a column in the remaining third of the page. In the closing dialogue of the last panel, which is also the closing dialogue of the issue, Nocturnus reveals that Galahad is not only his former partner, but also his son.

Given the pattern of addition and subtraction established thus far, and the Thrillbent platform's capacity to erase the distinction between panel and page – again, approaching, but crucially, for Waid, not achieving, the condition of animation – Waid appears to have made a puzzlingly conventional narrative choice by including the final panel of page 24 along with its two immediate predecessors rather than making it a discreet addition which would have maximised the impact of Nocturnus's revelation as a 'cliffhanger' ending to the issue. However, and as noted above, another page is yet to come, which fully exploits the unique properties of the digital platform for narrative effect. Like page 2, page 25 is almost exactly identical to its predecessor; but where page 2 was an 'improvement' of page 1, and included additional dialogue, all that is changed in page 25 is the overlaying of a grey filter and the floating caption, “To be continued...” on the final panel. Both of these additions emphasise the cliffhanger, recalling, in the implication/imitation of a fade-out, the similar endings of episodes of movie serials such as *Flash Gordon* (1936)and *Buck Rogers* (1939) as well as the conventional closing of episodic issues of print comics.

Waid combines ironic juxtaposition with the method of addition and subtraction in *Insufferable* #3 to represent the differences in lifestyle between Nocturnus and his much more successful and popular son. The first page is a single vertical panel taking up half of the available space, showing an unmasked, grimacing Nocturnus, revealed to be middle-aged, removing the top of his costume to show a heavily lower torso. The panel's dark palette of teal and grey, combined with Nocturnus's scars, strained expression, and apparent isolation, creates a poignant atmosphere, which is heightened by turning the page. Page 2 retains the panel of Nocturnus, juxtaposed with a brightly coloured panel of a beaming Galahad being undressed by two bikini-clad young women. The contrast in circumstances continues over the next seven pages, repeating the pattern of panel arrangement, page layout and palette established in pages 1 and 2: page 3 is dark image of Nocturnus showering alone which is retained for page 4 and juxtaposed with a bright representation of Galahad and his two companions in a jacuzzi drinking champagne; page 6 juxtaposes Galahad reaching for a magnum of champagne with Nocturnus pouring pills from a bottle of painkillers into his hand, a panel retained from page 5; page 7 shows Nocturnus climb, gingerly, into bed alone which is placed, on page 8, against a panel of Galahad awake on top of a bed between his two sleeping companions who are beneath its sheets. The 'lighting' of this panel is significant, serving as the first indication that Galahad might not be as content with his lot as we have assumed from his earlier appearance: while the two women are in shadow, and sleeping blissfully, Galahad is illuminated in the centre of the bed, suggesting his isolation from them even while being the focal point in their relationship. The flatness of his facial expression suggests further emotional distance. This expression is continued on to the next page, which varies the established pattern: page 9 retains the panel of Galahad from page 8 but shifts it to the left of the page and darkens it slightly; the panel is repeated on the right hand side and darkened further. This darkening communicates the passing of time while also suggesting the deepening of Galahad's mood, despite his fixed expression, stimulating interest, and speculation, in the reader over the root of his problem and the true state of his relationship with his father whose apparent sadness Galahad may, the darkened palette suggests, share.

Although Waid has stated his dislike for digital comics which reduce the field of view from page to panel (Alverson, 2012), such as Guided View allows, his method of abstraction and subtraction in *Insufferable*, combined with the the tendency towards single-panel pages which are not splashes, containing instead empty space implying missing panels, does at times resemble a similar reduction in the viewing field. However, under Waid's method the empty, or negative, space on pages becomes a form of extended 'gutter', the name used in the Anglophone comics industry for the space between panels. In *Understanding Comics* (1993), Scott McCloud describes the comic book panel as 'a sort of general indicator that time or space is being divided'; for McCloud the 'durations of that time and the dimensions of that space are defined for by the contents of the panel than the panel itself' (99). As we have seen, in *Insufferable* the visual distinction between panel and page is often erased, however McCloud's observation remains relevant: the extended gutters created by the empty space on certain pages does not delay the presentation of further information in the same way as occurs in Guided View's reduction of the field of view from page to panel, because in *Insufferable* no such reduction takes place. McCloud explains how the gutter allows comic readers to perform 'closure', his name for the practice of 'observing the parts but perceiving the whole' (99). By performing closure, the comics reader becomes an active participant in the production of meaning by filling in the gaps - temporal and/or spatial – between panel and page transitions. This remains the case with *Insufferable*'s extended gutters and the addition of panels is literally an act of 'filling in' both on the page and in the narrative. Panel subtraction, on the other hand, which creates gaps, serves to emphasise the passage of time from the past to the present moment(s) visible on the page. Although Waid eschews any use of zooming – which he also dislikes in comics (Alverson: 2012) – in *Insufferable*, with the result that the full page is always, and only, present on screen, the use of addition and subtraction creates the impression of page *construction* being undertaken on-screen. This is thwarted, however, in examples such as the sequence between pages 10 and 12 from #1 discussed above: although page 11 appears to build on page 10 by adding a new panel to it, the expectation that a third panel will be added to the empty space to 'complete' the page is frustrated: a new panel is provided by turning the page, but the first panel is subtracted, leaving empty white space. But, as argued above, this subtraction is not a reduction; instead it is an *emphasis*.

Both *Batman 2.0* and *Insufferable* are 'native' digital comics, designed to be read on-screen. As such, they take full advantage of the narrative potential offered by their respective platforms. ComiXology's most downloaded and top grossing comic of 2013 was the first issue of the webcomic *The Bunker* (2013-), the creators of which, Joshua Hale Fialkov and Joe Infurnari, chose to release digitally in order to save on print and distribution costs (The Comics Archive: 2015). However, Fialkov and Infurnari also exploit the formal properties of Guided View in a way which is consistent with *The Bunker's* themes of time travel and prophecy. On page 4 of the first issue, for example, the five protagonists come across the titular bunker at the site where they plan to bury a time capsule; the bunker's door has a list of all their names with one exception, Billy Ryder. Read in full-screen mode, this information is presented across a page-wide row of single panels showing each character beneath their name, as stencilled on the bunker door, with the exception of Billy who is presented unnamed. The row is halved in Guided View – with the panel showing Billy's sister Heidi repeated as the last panel of the first row and the first panel of the second – in a kind of panning effect which reveals Billy's omission from the list (but not from the row), which disturbs him. The row formation - and, in Guided View, the halving and panning - is repeated on page 6, when the protagonists enter the bunker to find their names on the wall above a row of hand-written letters, again with the exception of Billy. In both instances, the revelation provided to print and full-screen readers is delayed for those in Guided View, increasing narrative suspense. The delay also foreshadows later events in the comic pertaining to its time travel and prophecy themes, as does the reference, on page four, to the TV series *Lost* (2004-2010) which used prolepsis in its narrative. Unlike cinema or broadcast TV audiences, readers of both comics and prose are able to 'flash forward' regardless of authorial intention due to the controllability of these media: Barthes refers to his tendency to 'skip ahead' in *The Pleasure of the Text*, as mentioned above. Alan and Moore acknowledged this aspect of comic books with the character Dr Manhattan in *Watchmen* (1986-87) for whom, like the reader, past, present and future exist simultaneously. This is the case for both print and digital readers, with the difference lying in the field of view: however, reading *Watchmen* in Guided View is not only a reduced but a *diminished* experience as the 9-panel grid format and use of symmetrical page layouts, which are crucial diegetic elements, are both lost. Narrative suspense is however, increased and intensified, and the reader does, of course, have the option to 'toggle' between reading modes; furthermore, the density of *Watchmen*'s narrative and the intricacy of its design reward re-reading. Steven Shaviro – in his 'theoretical fiction about postmodernism' *Doom Patrols* (1997), itself named after the DC Comics 'superteam' Doom Patrol - describes the consumption of comic books as involving two modes of reading:

On the one hand, you need to leaf through them quickly, with what Walter Benjamin calls distracted attention: it's precisely in this suspended state that they become so strangely absorbing. On the other hand, you need to go back over them, studying every word and every panel, with a fanatical attention to detail. (4)

Again, while the reader is in control in both cases, compared to the relatively 'powerless' cinema or TV viewer, the excitement created by the 'suspended state' of the first, 'quick' (or, in Barthes's terms, 'fast) reading, undertaken with 'distracted attention', can seem like an involuntary act. Both 'suspended' and 'suspense' share a common root, from the Latin *suspendre* via the Old French *sospendre* and the Old French root of suspense is *sospense*, one meaning of which is 'delay'. The Guided View reader, then, experiences a double-delaying which can be followed up by a more 'aristocratic' reading in full-screen mode or print format. Published by Oni Press since 2015, the print version of *The Bunker* contains sections re-drawn by penciller Joe Infurnari to, in Roberts' words, 'add some specialness between the digital version and the print version' (The Comics Archive: 2015). This raises a number of questions pertaining to the exploitation of readerships outwith the purview of this essay, but the move from digital to print form is not without precedent. The webcomic *FreakAngels* (2008-11)by Warren Ellis and Paul Duffield, for example, was published in six volumes by Avatar Press, publisher of many of Ellis's creator-owned printed comics.

Like *Watchmen*, *FreakAngels* uses a grid structure, 2x2 rather than *Watchmen*'s 3x3, with panels occasionally being collapsed together, as is also the case with *Watchmen.* Initially hosted, through Avatar, on its own dedicated website, the series is now available digitally via ComiXology with the option to read in Guided View mode. As with *Watchmen*, this mode removes the grid structure from the reader's field of view which is presented on a panel-by-panel basis. Occasional use is made of zoom-outs, as in, for example, the very first panel of the series: in printed and full-screen mode this panel takes up the top half of the page; in Guided View, the reader is first presented with the panel's top left corner, which contains a detail of a partially submerged London and a floating caption establishing both the premise and setting for the series; as with page 1 of *Batman Beyond 2.0* #1, pressing the forward arrow executes a zoom-out, revealing more of the flooded cityscape, including the landmark Houses of Parliament, to powerful dramatic effect. While the image of a drowned London on the full-screen or printed page is still arresting, the impact created by the zoom-out in Guided View is comparable to the famous revelation at the end of *Planet of the Apes* (1968) that the film is set in the future rather than on an alien planet as both the audience and the protagonist had assumed up until this point.

For Jason Michelitch, *FreakAngels* is a 'Western comic that breathes like manga’, a description derived from Ellis's own definition of the manga as 'emotional comics' which solicit the reader to 'breathe with them' in order to 'conspire with lives' (Michelitch: 2011). Both Ellis and Michelitch identify an emphasis on storytelling over narrative resolution in manga compared to Western comics; Michelin cites the adage that Western comics are concerned with 'destination' while manga is more concerned with ‘journey' and as such is less 'plot-focused (2011)'. While *FreakAngels* shares this approach, and although, like manga, it is a serial of short chapters – six weekly pages rather than the monthly twenty-four of a standard American superhero comic – for Michelitch it does not 'feel slow' because of the intrigue generated by the premise and Ellis and Duffield's skill in creating the world of the series rather than 'hitting major plot points with each new instalment'. The comic-makers avoid the temptation of 'choking each instalment full of plot' and as a result the reader becomes more aware of the series-world and the characters who inhabit it, one of whom, a gardener, admits he prefers things since the flood has destroyed the modern world because 'I like things slow' (Ellis and Duffield: 2011, NP). *FreakAngels* mayfeel 'faster' when read in Guided View than on the printed page or in full-screen mode because of the increased suspense, however as the series, although digitally 'native', was not designed with Guided View in mind there is not a 'cliffhanger on every panel' to propel and compel the reader through the narrative. Each Guided View panel may be a 'true' reveal but Ellis and Duffield focus on absorbing readers into the pace of life post-flood, more than in hooking them with suspense, although, as Michelitch observes, *FreakAngels* 'certainly can ramp up the potboiling plothammer when it needs to' (2011). One remarkable example of this occurs in a confrontation between the psychic characters Luke and Arkady in which the latter manipulates Luke's mind. In the original format, the manipulation begins in the bottom right hand corner of the page and is signified by the start of a whiting-out of the background (a shabby apartment) behind a head and shoulders close-up of an aggressive Luke. In the panel, Arkady raises a finger towards Luke's head. The next page is a splash, showing an addled Luke with Arkady's finger against his temple in the bottom right corner, against a completely white background. Panel one of the next page is a close-up of Arkady's widened eyes, again on a white background; panel two cuts to Luke in a foetal position on the apartment floor with an implied 'fade-in' of partial background detail. The third panel cuts to Arkady gently rousing a victim of Luke's own mind control abilities: the background detail has completely returned here but there is still a ghostly filter over the panel, signifying the victim's condition. The filter is removed in the final panel of the page, indicating the victim's recovery.

In the original format this sequence is already powerful; in Guided View mode its impact is intensified. While Guided View effectively turns each panel of a comic into a splash, not every panel is designed to make the kind of visual impact usually expected from splashes. In the confrontation between Luke and Arkady however, the reduction of field of view from page to panel, and the specific information included in this five-panel sequence, makes for a highly engaging, and affecting, reading experience: the removal of background detail, and its subsequent gradual return, warps the narrative both spatially and temporally, defusing Luke's rising aggression by moving from a physical interior (the apartment) to a mental one (Luke's mind, and Arkady's control of it). Here, then, we find an example of how a comic not designed to be read in Guided View is nevertheless enriched by that mode of reading.

ComiXology's success as a hosting platform for other publishers led to its diversification into becoming a distributor with the launch, in 2018, of its ComiXology Originals line of creator-owned, small press titles. One of the first titles to be published in this line is *Superfreaks* from the creative team of writers Elsa Charretier and Pierrick Colinet, artist Margaux Saltel, and letterer Ed Dukeshire. Although a digital first comic, like *Batman Beyond 2.0*, *The Bunker*, *Insufferable* or *FreakAngels, Superfreaks* is so in terms of distribution rather than conception. And while it is an engaging coming-of-age superhero narrative, *Superfreaks* only occasionally exploits the storytelling potential of its medium, and resembles a scan of a print comic more than one which is digitally 'native', which is also the case with several other titles in the Originals line. Reading these comics online does not diminish the reader's experience, and using Guided View occasionally embellishes it; however, compared to the examples listed above, *Superfreaks* and other ComiXology originals, are rather traditional in their approach towards sequential narrative. Nevertheless, the reduction of field of view offered by Guided View subjects these comics to the same delaying process as all the other titles mentioned in this essay and so, while *Superfreaks* may not be designed to have a 'cliffhanger in every panel' or to have only 'true' reveals, these elements become part of the conditions of a reading experience in which field of view is reduced, but the pleasure of the text, for a certain kind of reader, is increased.

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