

The watchmen essay sample



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The Watchmen and The Tales of the Black Freighter interweave to form a complete narrative, revealing character motivations, thoughts, and likely conclusions. The Watchmen is a work rich with symbolism, social themes, and thought provoking concepts. The Tales of the Black Freighter is a comic within the comic, and tackles similarly profound topics. Adrian Veidt from the Watchmen, known as his superhero name Ozymandias, was an industrialist genius who used his unique talents to build an empire. Veidt was a renowned celebrity known for his intelligence, handsomeness, elegance, business savvy, and his past career as a masked vigilante.

The mariner was a pirate attack survivor from The Tales of the Black Freighter who only wanted to save his family. Both men desired to save their home, Earth and Davidstown respectively, and were willing to do whatever was necessary. Though superficially different, the journey of the mariner closely follows the path of Adrian Veidt. Both men experience very similar opposition and struggles, culminating in an all too similar conclusion. The Tales of the Black Freighter was a popular pirate comic series in the fictional " Watchmen" universe.

It was written by Max Shea, whose popularity began with the thirty issue pirate series and continued into his novel writing career. " Marooned," a two-part storyline, was the most popular story from the series. In the Watchmen, a youth named Bernard read the second half of the first issue and the second issue on a New York street corner. The story detailed a mariner marooned by the pirates of the Black Freighter, who becomes obsessed with returning to his home of Davidstown to warn of the impending pirate attack.

After he built a raft made of fallen shipmates, he slowly descended into madness on his journey back.

After braving the ocean and its perils, he arrived back to his hometown in a daze, culminating in a disturbing twist of fate. The major events of this story parallel the same struggles and decisions that Adrian Veidt faced. Adrian Veidt was an intelligent youth who dedicated his life and inherited fortune to personal betterment and to the problems of the world. He used his immaculate conditioning and superior intelligence to become a masked vigilante. Veidt understood early in his crime-fighting career that masked heroes only treated the “ symptoms” of crime rather than the actual “ disease” (Chapter 11.

Page 19. Panel 2). At the first meeting of the Crimebusters, the Comedian enlightened Veidt through a harsh but undeniably true rant about the world’s problems, “ An’ it takes a moron to think they’re small enough for clowns like you guys to handle... You think that matters? You think that solves anything? It don’t matter squat... it don’t matter squat because inside thirty years the nukes are gonna be flyin’ like maybugs... and then Ozzy here is gonna be the smartest man on the cinder,” (2. 10-11. 7-5). This sparked Veidt’s pursuit to solve the ultimate problem of impending global war.

The beginning circumstances, emotions, and thoughts of a naive Veidt closely mirror the marooned mariner from *The Tales of the Black Freighter*. The mariner was “ unable to bear (his) circumstances” and almost could not believe the horrors that lay waiting for humanity in the future (3. 2. 5-6). The mariner realized that he was the lone survivor (3. 18. 2), and in Veidt’s

situation, the only person who fully realized the problem and the need for a definitive solution. This realization led to their god-like beliefs that they were meant to save their “ home.

The mariner believed that “ everything (he) loved, everything (he) lived for depended upon (his) reaching Davidstowen in advance of that terrible freighter,” (5. 9. 1). The Black Freighter became the threat of the end of Davidstowen for the mariner and a symbol of the looming apocalypse for Veidt. The New York News Vendor accidently described the personal feelings of both men while describing himself, “ the weight o’ the world’s on him, but does he quit? Nah! He’s like Atlas! He can take it! He’s a survivor? ” (3. 2. 5-6). They both believed that their world depended on them, because they were survivors and its saviors.

Upon realizing and understanding their respective problems, Veidt and the mariner developed their plans for salvation. After the realization of the insignificance of masked heroes, Veidt concocted his grand scheme. He decided that there would need to be a global catastrophe in order to unite the world against a common enemy. After he determined that he would create a fake alien attack, he assembled the necessary assets to enact his plan. Veidt hired a team of scientists and geneticists to research cloning and dimensional teleportation.

Under the guise of a new movie, Veidt also lured the most creative artistic minds of the time to establish a fictional alien race and world (Chapter 11. Page 24. Panels 2-3). Combining the two aspects of his plan, Veidt planned to teleport the fake alien into New York, killing millions and driving countless

others insane. Veidt's process of devising a realistic but ambitious "solution" was emulated by the mariner's plan to escape the island and return home in *The Tales of the Black Freighter*. Freshly motivated by his desire to save his home, the mariner decided to try to build a raft, "although inwardly (he) doubted it would float," (5. . 3-4).

The mariner's raft represented Veidt's plan for salvation. The mariner recalled the bodies of his slain shipmates and realized he could use them, in conjunction with the raft, as a floatation device. These murdered bodies represent all of the slain and innocents that Veidt used for his plan, including the artists, scientists, personal assistants and numerous others that he deemed necessary to sacrifice. The mariner and Veidt both progressed on the "backs of murdered men," (5. 9. 4, 12. 27. 2). Both men believed that they had no other choice but to sacrifice what was necessary for the greater good of their respective homes.

This self-anointed power to use others as they determined necessary shows their delusion and the beginning of the descent to madness. During the middle of Veidt's plan, the Comedian stumbled upon the creation of the alien on a remote island. Succumbing to the enormous pressure of having knowledge of the plan, the Comedian became mentally unstable. Veidt, with some bitter resentment over a previously lost fight, found it necessary to eliminate him (Chapter 11. Page 25. Panels 2-6).

He later admitted that he did not actually feel repentant, but did regret that the Comedian was involved (11. 4. 5). Veidt's final interaction with the Comedian closely follows the mariner's attack against the seagull. While

sailing in the morning, a seagull attacked his corpse ridden raft. The mariner snatched the seagull out of the air, and devoured the bird due to his immense hunger (5. 9. 5-6). The seagull finding the corpse raft represented the Comedian and his discovery of Veidt's plan. The hunger that the mariner felt before killing the seagull also matched the resentment Veidt felt from losing an early fight against the Comedian, a bitterness that was finally able to be unleashed.

However, like Veidt, the mariner also felt as though " the enormity of (his) savage breakfast struck (him) and (he) grew faint. (He'd) swallowed too much birdflesh. (He'd) swallowed too much horror," (5. 12. 2-3). The mariner did not regret killing the seagull but regretted that he satisfied his hunger, in the same way that Veidt was not apologetic for killing the Comedian, but only for having become involved in the plan. One of the clearest cases of symbolism between Veidt's mission and the mariner's plan was the relationship of Rorschach and the shark.

Veidt perceived Rorschach as the only real threat between the remaining masked heroes. Rorschach was following an incorrect theory that there was a costumed-hero killer slowly eliminating the old heroes. Rorschach unwittingly grew closer to the real plan, little by little, which forced Veidt to act. To neutralize Rorschach, Veidt framed him for the murder of Moloch, a former criminal (Chapter 5. Page 22. Panel 5). In *The Tales of the Black Freighter*, after the seagull incident, the mariner's corpse ridden ship again attracted the unwanted attention of a predator, a shark.

The shark became entangled in the raft's ropes and bottom, forcing the mariner to act (5. 20. 3). The shark represented Rorschach and his pursuit of the Comedian's killer. Rorschach followed a trail of bodies accidentally becoming entangled in Veidt's grand scheme, in the same manner that the shark pursued the bodies of the mariner's raft. The mariner attempted to describe the shark but it was "like no shark (he'd) ever heard tell of" (5. 20. 2). Rorschach was completely unlike any person Veidt encountered. Rorschach was persistent, motivated by a merciless black-and-white system of justice, and would never compromise.

Veidt, like the mariner, decided that the interferer had to be neutralized, and if necessary eliminated. Rorschach was later able to escape from prison with the assistance of Night Owl and the Silk Spectre, and confronted Veidt only to discover that his idea came into fruition. Rorschach was then determined to reveal what actually happened and punish Veidt. While Night Owl, Silk Spectre, and Doctor Manhattan realized that they needed to compromise to protect the temporary world peace, Rorschach was unable to compromise (Chapter 12.

Page 20. Panel 20). Veidt knew that he could not allow Rorschach to leave, but he needed time to reflect on how to act. Doctor Manhattan reached the inevitable conclusion first, confronted Rorschach, and eventually killed him, essentially on behalf of Veidt (12. 24. 1-3). The mariner faced a similar situation with the shark entangled in the ropes of his raft. He speared the shark with a splinter of the mast of the raft, "and, in that instant, (they) knew each other," (5. 20. 5).

Rorschach, as the shark, was too entangled in Veidt's plan, as in the mariner's raft, and was ultimately killed by Doctor Manhattan, as in the mast of the raft, which represents part of Veidt's complete plan. Before his death, Rorschach exclaimed "one more body amongst foundations makes little difference," alluding to the lives that Veidt sacrificed and to the bodies of the mariner's raft (12. 24. 2). Later the same night of the attack, the mariner ate the shark raw, creating the term "raw shark," a near homonym of Rorschach.

The detectives who previously arrested Rorschach confused the term "raw shark" on the phone from their anonymous tipster, who was secretly Veidt (5. 22. 6-7). The remaining sharks around the mariner's raft represented Night Owl and Silk Spectre. "The other sharks circled, closer than was comfortable. They worried the morsels from my raft which I prayed would satisfy them. After eating they departed, replete," (5. 21. 4-6). Night Owl and Silk Spectre compromised and accepted that the plan was already enacted and settled for the temporary peace it established.

The parallels between Veidt and the mariner could be seen clearly in the relationship between Rorschach and the shark, and further into their respective, yet similar, descents into madness. Veidt's plan eventually reached its conclusion. The fake alien was teleported into New York, killing millions and disorienting even more. All of the loose ends in his scheme were closed through death or compromise, leaving Veidt to reflect on his actions. The mariner also reached the end of his plan after his arrival to his home of Davidstown.

Disoriented and growing insane, the mariner killed two innocent people who discovered his beached corpse ridden raft. The mariner described the murders as “ over-ripe the moneylender’s head burst with a single blow, exploding as if pressurized by the guilt within... The woman I strangled. This took considerably longer than I had anticipated,” (Chapter 10. Page 12. Panels 8-9). The man’s quick death represents Veidt’s murder of the Comedian. The Comedian only needed a slight mental push before breaking down under the guilt and pressure of his life leaving him vulnerable for attack.

The woman’s slow death represents Rorschach’s slow struggle and ultimate demise. Though, the endings for the two protagonists seemingly differ in literal outcomes. The mariner mistakenly believes, from his delusion and growing madness, that the pirates already seized the town and decided to seek his revenge. Upon entering his house, the mariner struck down the first human he saw, which was revealed to be his wife. “(He) looked up into faces familiar save for their terror. The children wailed. (He) looked down at the figure beneath (him). Through puffed and bloodied lips she mouthed (his) name,” (11. 6. 4-7).

The mariner killed the innocent, believing he was doing what was good and necessary to save, or at least avenge, his home. The mariner fled from the town back to the ocean, upon where he saw the Black Freighter and realized that the pirate ship never intended to attack Davidstown, and instead was waiting to take his damned soul aboard. In this same way, Veidt kill millions of innocents without any guarantee that his plan would work, if the forced peace would last, or if war was at all imminent. Though both men

immediately reflected after their actions, only the mariner was certain of his damnation (11. . 9).

Veidt questioned Doctor Manhattan to see if he did the right thing in the end to which Doctor Manhattan replied “ nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends,” (12. 27. 5). At the end of his plan, Adrian Veidt was left with crippling doubt about his actions. At the conclusion of the mariner’s and Veidt’s paralleled stories, the Black Freighter completely symbolism is completely transformed. While speaking with Doctor Manhattan, Veidt began to reveal that “ by night... well I dream, about swimming towards a hideous... no. Never mind. It isn’t significant,” (Chapter 12. Page 27. Panel 1).

This hideous object that Veidt dreams about is essentially the Black Freighter. The Black Freighter changed from a symbol of the apocalypse to a symbol of Veidt’s moral decay. The mariner’s raft “ grew increasingly grotesque, reflecting (his) own gradual transformation,” (5. 21. 8). Veidt murdered millions and became obsessed with his plan, which led to his dreams about the Black Freighter, his moral decay. Having the Black Freighter appear in Veidt’s dream also alludes to that Veidt would share the same fate as the mariner, that Veidt made the wrong decision to kill the innocents and will have to live with it for the rest of his life.

At the beginning of the last chapter, the symbolic clock counting the minutes to the apocalypse is set at one minute to midnight. After Veidt viewed the televisions showing the aftermath of his fake alien attack, he lifted his arms in a position so that his smaller arm, in an angled perspective, was at the figurative “ twelve” mark while his longer arm was set at the figurative “

eleven" mark, all in the clocklike yellow semicircle backdrop, signifying that he only moved the apocalypse clock back to five minutes to midnight (12. 19. 7).

This symbol of only temporarily delaying the apocalypse and the looming Black Freighter shows that Veidt followed the same failed path as the mariner. This leaves three likely scenarios how the Veidt would be proven wrong: Rorschach's secret journal could be published by the newspaper, or nuclear war was inevitable and he only delayed the apocalypse, or simply, like the Black Freighter, nuclear war was never destined to happen. Given the evidence of the mariner's conclusion that the Black Freighter never actually attacked Davidstown, the third option was very possible.

Veidt and the mariner believed they were acting for the good of all people, but ended up hurting them more than the disaster they were trying to prevent. Adrian Veidt and the mariner from *The Tales of the Black Freighter* shared similar paths as they took good intentions and performed unthinkable horrors. Both men descended into madness, though the mariner was more pronounced in his twisted progression. Both men "reached this appalling position, with love, only love, as (their) guide," (Chapter 11. Page 9. Panel 9) and when "faced with horrors both intolerable and unavoidable, chose madness," (8. 3. 9).

Veidt became the murdering horror he set out to stop, and only slowly and reluctantly began to grasp that realization after it was too late. The Black Freighter transformed from a symbol of the apocalypse to a symbol of moral decay and depravity. It came to represent all the wrongs the two men

committed on their obsessive path to “salvation.” For the best possible reasons, both Adrian Veidt and the mariner did the worst possible actions, succumbing to the same corrupted fate.