

# Imagination running wild

## Horrorful experiences rekindled in dreams

I had a nightmare when I was a kid. We'd hear over the radio, somehow it was always over the radio, bad news spoken by that articulate and disembodied voice I knew from the nights when I and my family would cover in the neighbor's basement listening to the weather reports and waiting for the tornado to bury us all under the debris of their house. There is something very "nighttime" about the voice of the radio in my dreams.

And in my dreams we would hear the bad news: a mad wolf, a raving lunatic from the asylum that all small town kids dream down the road, a gang of vicious bikers had escaped, been sighted, were coming our way.

We'd race around the giant house of my dreams, locking and bolting the doors and windows, only to find, as the last bolt was drawn, the last piece of furniture piled against the door that we had, true to the cartoon logic of my childhood dreams, locked the terror inside the house — just like in all the bad spooky stories in the world.

I dreaded these dreams and the endless games of hide and seek with unspeakable evil, always appearing in the room with you, always miraculously escaped through the secret passages we knew or discovered or sensed everywhere: trap door leading to trap door until you would have wondered if this house had any structural supports, any true walls at all, had you not been dreaming.

Had I not been dreaming and all in a panic too.

There is no way to convey the

horror these dreams inspired in me without seeming comic. The dreams themselves were comic, the villains regenerated, I fell from terrific heights, the house was endless.

In my waking hours I compensated for whatever insecurities inspired my dreams with day dreams I could more easily direct. There were always surprises in the good ones, but pleasant enough surprises, twists of pathos that I might never have purposefully introduced.

In most of them I was all powerful. Sometimes it was an eerie mastery of technology that gave me the edge I considered adequate — total control of others and material objects.

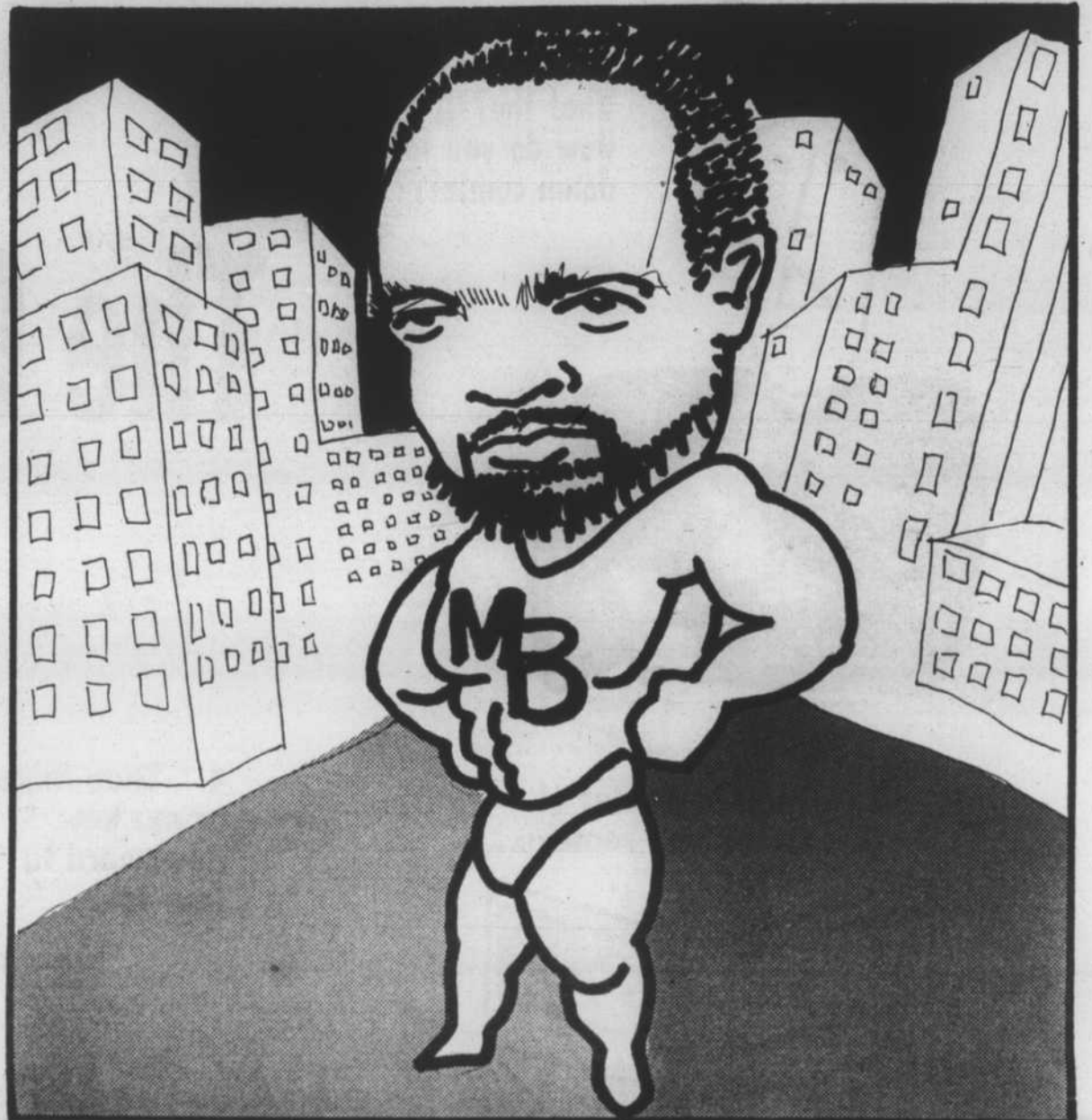
In other day dreams, it was more simple and direct magical power that set me above my peers.

In any case there was very little I could not do in my own imagination and in the daylight.

For taking on overweening powers by day I payed at night in sweat and terrors. I could hardly take out the garbage after sundown without running two thirds of the way. Something I saw in the bushes or leering over the fence made me shiver, pull away, stash the trash under the porch for later — to be forgotten.

I had a horror of all living things other than cats and dogs, the domesticated, pathetic creatures. The sight — even the suspicion of a rat put me in a panic to get away.

I felt superior to houseflies because they held no terrors, I could trap and kill them savorily. But I had nightmares even about butterflies, lest they touch me.



David Badders/DN

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I wanted to be Kal El, lost boy from space who, adopted by the kindly Kents, grows to discover he is really Superboy — only no one knew to tell him.

I wanted heat-ray vision and an invulnerable cape to swaddle myself in to protect me from the infernal flares of the surface of the sun.

I wanted to be protector. I was a smart boy and I wanted my smarts to count for something in a world where football spirals and the speed to run the bases were the things that really mattered. I wanted even to be above all that, to have to hold back in the games children played so as not to betray my true secret identity. And my terrible burden.

Praise meant nothing to me. The truth is, I had by then a monster of ego that I would not be content until all the world bowed before me. I did not want to say, Why thank you. I wanted to say, Rise my people, do not fear me, I am your god.

It was a strange childhood.

But I think now not so strange as all that. There were many boys, less fortunate in their imaginations than

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I, who pored over the deeds of Superman, Batman and Spiderman. They were pimply, for the most part, white boys with older brothers. They had red hair and some of them wore glasses. They touched themselves in secret and felt terrible fear and shame over the imagined consequences, and then went back to looking at the brightly colored comics and the glossy girly magazines.

Don't be surprised that I lump them together, comic books were a form of pornography, allowing little boys the luxury of violent, often gruesome, lingering death.

Both skin mags and comics had to be hidden from your parents. Both were sweated over and read until they fell to pieces. And not a few comic pages were stuck together permanently by a young boy's overenthusiasm for some scantily clad super heroine.

We had no power, even over our young bodies. And we desperately wanted power — Power to change the world, to make it safe for lesser people. And babes, we wanted babes. But we wanted them after we had the power, otherwise they would be terrifying.

But if we couldn't have it, we could identify ourselves with those who did.

It is for this reason that so many pubescent children are so touchingly devoutly religious. They have an instinct to ally themselves with power. It is not lost on children either, that there is something sexy in religion, there is an Elvis quality to Jesus, or the Jesus figure; persecuted though in the right and coming to wreak terrible vengeance in the future.

See **BALDRIDGE** on 15