

DISH SOAP

Written by

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An original story
based on the DC Comics
character Blue Beetle

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - HILLSIDE FOREST - DAY

A meteor crashing to earth, carving the sky with a halo of cosmic gases. A massive explosion of debris and flames as the meteor makes impact. A spectacle of an intense blue fire raging across the Highwater Hills mountain side.

EXT. HIGHWATER DISTRICT - CITY STREET - DAY

Across the city sirens echo. The hillside forest imploding as the atmosphere is consumed. Tsunami flames jump 1000's of feet into the sky, making ultraviolet fireworks. A woman and a boy stare at the phenomena in the glowing sky.

WOMAN

Look Tommy, a jumping jack!

A massive violet flame leaps across a cascade of gas clouds, then falls from the sky, starting new fires on the ground. Terror ensues. An entire city block is consumed in seconds. No time for evacuation. The woman and the boy run for their lives.

EXT. HILLSIDE FOREST - CHARRED SPACE ROCK - DAY

A small glowing jewel emerges from a burning space rock, contained by a glass cocoon that shatters as it cools. An arthropod shaped artifact exposed, convex and crystalline, glowing neon blue against a crossing draft of smoke and embers.

EXT. CAMPUS QUARTER - ROUNDABOUT ROADWAY - DAY

Another district bombarded by a shower of metallic hail. Lethal mineral dust falls like alien snowflakes. City dwellers ducking for shelter as debris falls from the sky.

A group of hoodlums, known as the "garbage punks," sell reclaimed titanium umbrellas on the sidewalk to passersby as protection from the cosmic fallout.

PUNK

Looking umps! Tite-umps! Ambrillos!

EXT. HILLSIDE DISTRICT - RURAL NEIGHBORHOOD/JUNKYARD - DAY

Adjacent to the impact center, on the industrial side of town, residents are evacuated by emergency officials.

Nearby, at the edge of the forest, a junkyard where a young

man, GUSTAVO (19), collects used car parts under a violent haze of smoke and carbon.

He feeds his dogs a couple scraps of food from an old refrigerator under a tin roof, next to a lone tree, and a gutted sedan which he lives in.

He puts the spare parts in a messenger bag and makes his way across a field of abandoned cars and trucks. Around him, large scale industrial machinery slowly decomposes into the earth.

One of his dogs, a scrappy shepherd, follows him to the property line -- where he ducks under a chain link fence.

GUSTAVO

Stay, boy! Go back to the house.
I'll bring you some food later.

EXT. HILLSIDE DISTRICT - STOREFRONT - DAY

A senseless crime is ignored. An OLD LADY (64, later as MRS. FROST) battered and beaten by a unknown fashionable man, later as the ASSAILANT (30), stealing her groceries, tossing her to the ground.

The old lady helps herself off the sidewalk.

OLD LADY

It didn't used to be this way. The young people were polite. They would carry your groceries, not beat them out of your arms. It's a different city. Nobody cares anymore.

SHOPKEEPER

You ought to carry a gun, ma'am. Protect yourself. Every twenty three minutes a crime happens in the city.

OLD LADY

A gun? I don't even own an umbrella.

The old lady dusts herself off.

OLD LADY (CONT'D)

(to herself)

I would have gladly made him breakfast.

(MORE)

OLD LADY (CONT'D)
Everybody needs a little help. You
don't need a gun to get what you
want.

SHOPKEEPER
(with sincere regret)
Ma'am, the sky is falling.

A cataclysmic sky fills the horizon.

EXT. HILLSIDE DISTRICT - FILLING STATION - DAY

On a shelf, in the garage, a RADIO plays the NEWS as a
MECHANIC (55) works under a hood. An ALERT SIREN beeps.

NEWS CASTER (V.O.)
Fatal crimes have exceeded the
birth rate once again.
Municipalities must comply with
Federal law within 120 hours of
notification and show positive
population growth. Residents are
now subject to Martial Law in the
Highwater District due to space
weather activity, and the Hillside
District has been closed.

Gustavo makes his first stop of the morning entering the
local mechanic shop. The alert siren FADES.

NEWS CASTER (V.O.)
Light chance of dusty fires and
metallic hail, so get out your
titanium umbrellas and be sure to
wear your fire retardant overcoats,
if you're out enjoying the day. I'm
Sam Frost for WHH2, Highwater Hills
radio.

The radio begins playing a song in the SPACE ROCK genre. The
mechanic rears his head from under the hood.

MECHANIC
We're closed. Feds shut us down.
The whole area's going to be closed
off from the public. The city
doesn't want to spend money
protecting a meteor zone.

Putting his shop rag down.

MECHANIC (CONT'D)

That mountain there is like a magnet for meteors. If you could put a switch on it, you could power the whole town. An old industrial town like this needs a new way to survive.

Going back under the hood.

MECHANIC (CONT'D)

It's over for the Hillside District. I'm headed for the city. When change comes from the big sky you have to think on your feet. Instinct Gus, that's all that's left for you here.

GUSTAVO

You're not afraid of the city?

The mechanic throws his tools, answering with a question.

MECHANIC

Pedestrian crimes have you worried?
We won't survive the meteors.

EXT. HIGHWATER HILLS - TOWN HALL - DAY

A group of citizens are gathered as city officials discuss how the random nature of extreme weather has influenced many citizens to embrace senseless crime.

Two CULTURAL LIASONS (30's and 40's) presents photographic evidence, on an oversize mediascape, of a transition in the make up of criminals across the city, with the population skewing younger and more successful.

CULTURAL LIASON #1

Let's start with the facts. We know that citizens have a 62% chance of experiencing crime throughout their day, directly or indirectly. What used to be known as "dandy's, punks and beats," are now classified as "puffers, grunks and tubes." Though the names are different, they are deviant aspects of a despondent social fabric.

CULTURAL LIASON #2

Don't let the names fool you.
Puffers, grunks and tubes are
robbers, bandits and pirates. They
are committing crimes against other
citizens.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Most notably the trendy group of
young professionals have made a
fashion out of senseless crime,
embracing a fatalistic lifestyle,
celebrating wish fulfillment, with
often violent consequences.

CITY MAYOR

This new criminal has been dubbed
by media outlets as the "social
criminal." He's friendly, well
dressed, often attractive or
seductive in a way that catches the
victim off guard. And he or she
travels in groups.

CITIZEN #1

Wouldn't it be easier to just
arrest everyone of a certain age --
for instance in the student
quarter? Or the artists with higher
income?

CITIZEN #2

Why isn't the media doing something
to educate the public? We have a
right to know our offenders.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

It's true the media has glamorized
crime. But catastrophic weather -
more than crime - has created the
conditions for social unrest. Due
to the sociological complexity of
the problem we have hired a
consultant from the university to
help our agency come to terms with
a solution.

On the mediascape, a photo of Dr. Frost, a university
professor of social forensics.

CITY MAYOR

We have an epidemic.

(MORE)

CITY MAYOR (CONT'D)

And if we don't correct the problem with a stop-gap measure the current rate of population loss could force the city to hand over it's charter to the Feds.

CITIZEN #3

Everybody knows the Feds want this land to establish a ground unit for Space Corps. They want to extend martial law into a land grab.

The crowd grows loud and unruly -- then begins chanting.

CROWD

False truth...! False truth...!
False Truth...!

CITY MAYOR

Settle down. That's not going to happen. If we agree to approve a solution that reduces crime.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

And when the crime rate is down, growing population rates protect us from eminent domain. A stable population keeps Space Corps out.

CITIZEN #4

We only have 5 days before our charter expires. Is that true?

CITIZEN #5

Stop the criminals!!!

The crowd chants loudly.

CROWD

Stop gap...! Stop gap...! Stop gap...!

CITY MAYOR

(yelling over the crowd))
Unfortunately that is true. We've reversed the downward trend before, and we can do it again.

EXT. HIGHWATER DISTRICT - WALK-UP FLAT - DAY

PROFESSOR FROST, a doctor of social forensics, prepares tea for two in her apartment as she comforts her mother who has just escaped a senseless crime within an inch of her life.

Lacking groceries for breakfast due to the robbery they share a crumpet as the daughter gets in close to tend to her mother's scrapes and bruises.

PROFESSOR FROST
(washing down a facial
nick)

I told you not to go out in the morning. People are hungry. You can get a bag of groceries from one of the grunks. They'll bring it right to your window.

MRS. FROST
All we had was crusty butter...

PROFESSOR FROST
Well, now you have nothing.

MRS. FROST
Highwater Hills is not what it used to be. When I was a girl, your father and I would go for long walks in the forest.

PROFESSOR FROST
That's all gone now.

Out the window a smoky horizon. On the TV, the hillside forest burnt to the ground.

MRS. FROST
You were conceived there...

PROFESSOR FROST
Is that so...? I never heard that.

MRS. FROST
I never told you. It was a secret.

Professor Frost puts down her first aid tools, then retreats to her half of the crumpet.

PROFESSOR FROST
Just the same, I don't prefer to unthink you a proper lady, mother.

MRS. FROST
I was one of the first spinning Jennys. That's how I met your father. He gave me a nickle, and I played him a song.

Mrs. Frost lifts her teacup, shaking.

PROFESSOR FROST
Oh, now you're fabricating.

MRS. FROST
It was an Italian number.
(blissful; musing)
He was the Valentino type, very popular in Italy. Oh, everybody sang his song here. But he had family here and he performed down in the student quarter.

PROFESSOR FROST
(choking on her tea)
At the Cantina? That's ridiculous. You, a spinning Jenny?

MRS. FROST
They put him in the jukebox after that. I was in love with his voice. I never understood the lyrics. But that song I played for your father was an Italian love song.

Professor Frost at the coat closet, reaching for her overcoat.

PROFESSOR FROST
(grooming her coat)
You've spun quite the tale. Am I to believe you over the holes in my overcoat, that my father was a famous crooner? Or maybe you've hit your head this morning.

MRS. FROST
I should tell you who he was. It's his coat that you wear -- leave it.

PROFESSOR FROST
Me go shopping? After what you've been through this morning. Besides, I'm more interested in why people choose a life of crime. Not some fancy about a romantic criminal.

The professor puts a scarf over the burn holes on the collar, buttons up and walks out the door.

INT./EXT. EL TRAIN/HIGHWATER DISTRICT - DAY

Gustavo rides the el train into town. The billboards display public messages intended to ease the population from the

stress of catastrophic space weather.

As the train moves along the raised platform Gustavo observes the very fashionable city types, dressed to the nines, then stares out the window at a view of the hilly city.

GUSTAVO'S POV - A SERIES OF BILLBOARDS: "You're more likely to overheat, than get burned by a space rock." "Space weather is natural. Enjoy the colors." "Highwater Hills, a beautiful place 40% of the time." "Space Corps protects your habitat. Vote Yes to Space Corps Annex."

A familiar dapper man, the assailant, on the el train embraces a small bag of groceries, in his arms, torn and crinkled.

EXT. HIGHWATER HILLS - CAMPUS DISTRICT - DAY

Gustavo walks through an outdoor arcade of the campus district toward a roundabout, where a crime is taking place.

The man under attack, an OLDER GENTLEMAN and an upright citizen, defends his wallet as a crowd gathers.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
(beating the Puffer with
his umbrella)
I'll have none of this. Back off!
Let me go! Take your hands off me!

The PUFFER (20) puts the citizen in a full body hold and brings him to the ground. The Older Gentleman fights to his best ability. The crowd seems amused by the unlikelihood of the old man's resistance.

PUFFER
Give me your wallet old man.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
I will not give you my wallet. It's
mine. Get a job you grimy grunk!

PUFFER
I'm a puffer, and I will take
everything you have.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
(his last words)
Puffer? What kind of man takes --

The Puffer shoots the man, as the crowd runs, removing all of his clothes as he gasps for air, stuffing them in a satchel, then grabbing his wallet -- arms triumphantly in the air.

PUFFER
(to the dispersed crowd)
Look what I got! Look what I got!

People pretend to mind their own business, moving on through the quarter. Across the street Gustavo stares, despondent at witnessing a senseless crime, then crosses the street to see if the man is still alive.

The puffer vanishes around the corner. Gustavo covers the disrobed man with his jacket, and holds him as he chokes on his own blood, gasping his last breath as the sirens approach.

EXT./INT. SIDEWALK/MESSINA'S CANTINA - DAY

A GIRL (24) stares from the storefront doorway. Beside her there is a "Help Wanted" sign hanging in the window. Gustavo notices her as she disappears to the interior of the restaurant.

The paramedics take the body and hand Gustavo his bloody jacket. From a balcony, a photog has been taking pictures of Gustavo's chivalrous gesture. Shutter bulbs overtake the daylight.

EXT./INT. MESSINA'S CANTINA - DINING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Gustavo grabs the sign from the window and heads to the kitchen where a pile of dishes reach toward the ceiling. From where Gustavo stands, the girl is nowhere to be found.

At the back of the restaurant, a tall swarthy man, CHEF OSCURO (54), hunches over a burning stove. The man looks at Gustavo, measuring his quality. Then takes the sign from his hand, returning to his task.

Gustavo takes one more look for the girl then recedes into the pile of dishes. The prep cook gives him an apron.

INT. HIGHWATER DISTRICT - CITY HALL - DAY

In the audience, two male CITIZENS seated side by side speak matters of self-defense as the speakers collect on the stage.

CITIZEN #6

If you carry a gun, the longer you live. Ten percent chance of crime. That's what you wish for.

CITIZEN #7

Ten minutes to the grocery store, what do I need a gun for? It's the Dickens out there runnin' half scared. I won't do it.