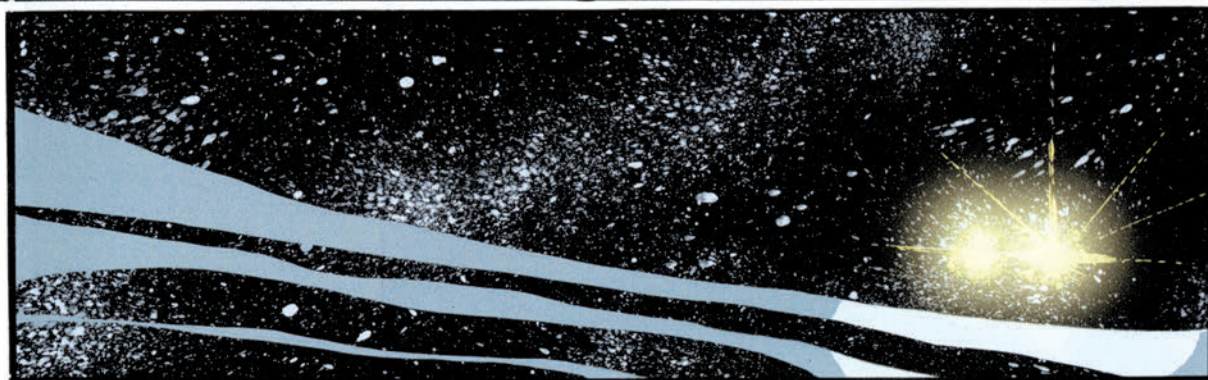



Wainwright, Alaska.
Second week of darkness.




HENRY-LEE "PATCHES" BROWN
SPENT THE BETTER PART OF HIS
FORTY-FIVE YEARS IN ALASKA.

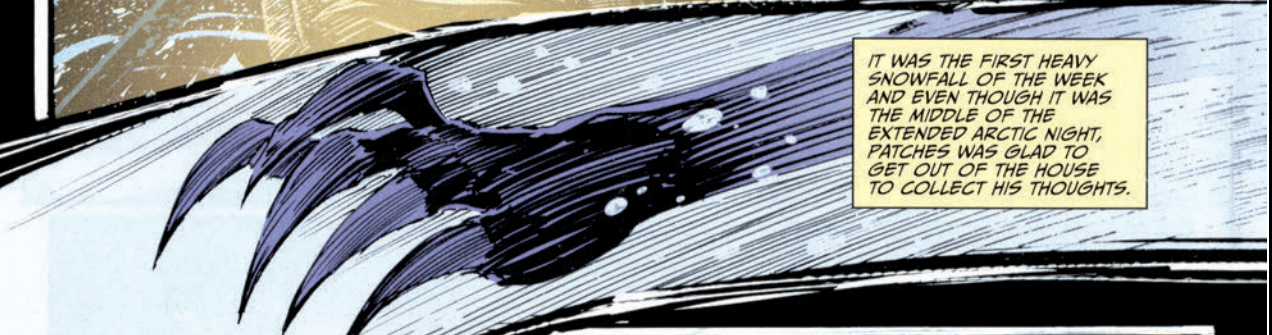




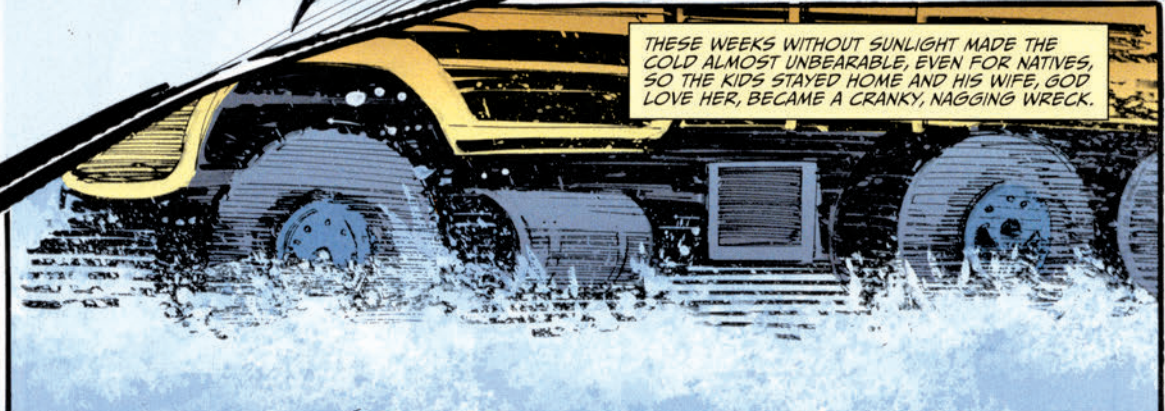
EXCEPT FOR A BRIEF STINT IN THE NATIONAL GUARD AND A HONEYMOON, HE ALWAYS FOUND THE FROZEN TUNDRA OF THE NORTH TO BE THE MOST COMFORTING.



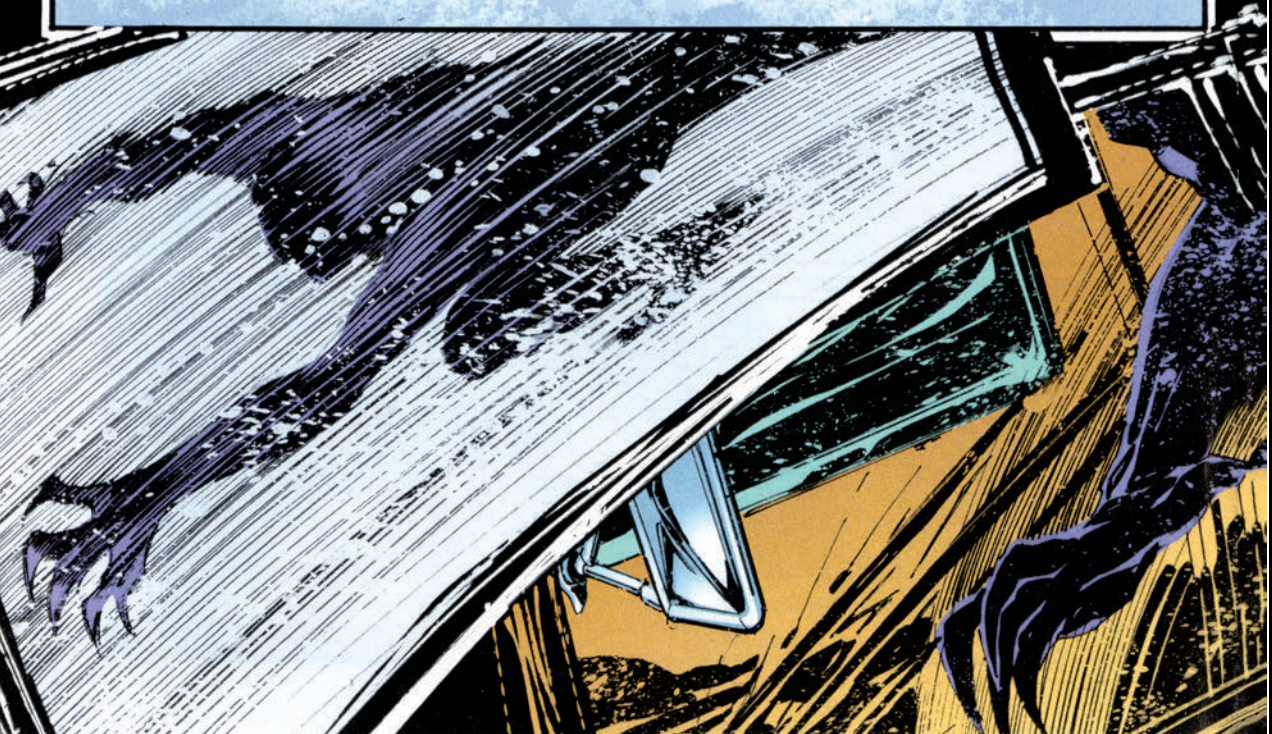
AS A BOY AND EVEN A TEEN, PATCHES AND HIS FRIENDS RACED SNOWMOBILES UP AND DOWN THESE OPEN ROADS LONG BEFORE IT WAS HIS JOB TO PLOW THEM.



IT WAS THE FIRST HEAVY SNOWFALL OF THE WEEK AND EVEN THOUGH IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF THE EXTENDED ARCTIC NIGHT, PATCHES WAS GLAD TO GET OUT OF THE HOUSE TO COLLECT HIS THOUGHTS.



THESE WEEKS WITHOUT SUNLIGHT MADE THE COLD ALMOST UNBEARABLE, EVEN FOR NATIVES, SO THE KIDS STAYED HOME AND HIS WIFE, GOD LOVE HER, BECAME A CRANKY, NAGGING WRECK.



PLOWING WAS HIS ESCAPE, HIS SANCTUARY; TIME ALONE TO LISTEN TO MUSIC AS LOUD AS HE WANTED, OR THE SILENCE THAT SEEMED TO EMBRACE THE METALLIC RUMBLE OF THE PLOW.



HE WAS HIS OWN BOSS, AND SOMETIMES HE WOULD JUST STOP, KILL THE ENGINE AND TAKE IN THE LANDSCAPE OF COLD WHITE SILENCE THAT SEEMED TO GO ON FOREVER, ALMOST GLOWING, EVEN UNDER DARK SKIES.

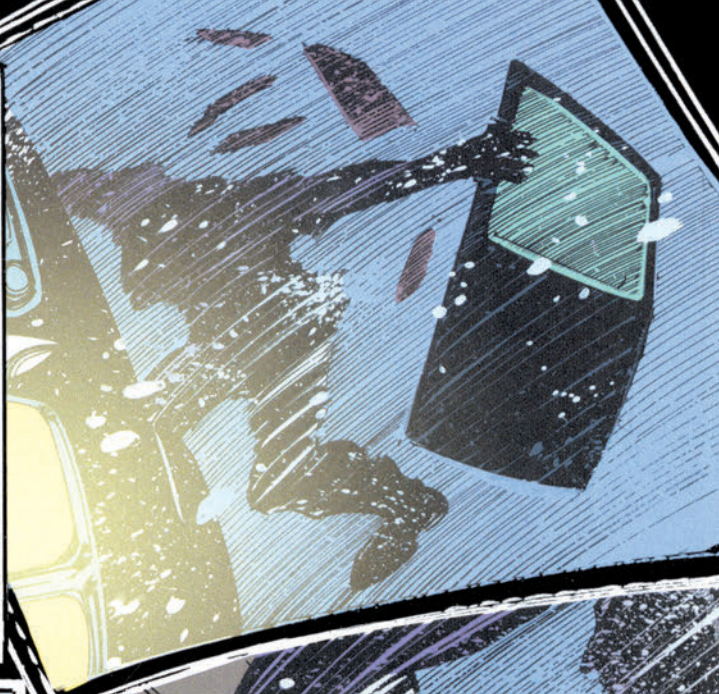


THIS LONG WINTER NIGHT, THOUGH, HIS THOUGHTS DRIFTED TO HIS FAMILY. DESPITE THE USUAL UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE, HE KNEW HE WAS A BLESSED MAN. HE LOVED HIS WIFE AND KIDS MORE THAN HE EVEN DARED ADMIT TO HIMSELF.



SHIIT!

RRRRRRRRRRRR!



**RRRRRR-
BBBB-
RRRRRR!**



BUT TODAY, PATCHES
BROWN WOULD BE
RETURNING HOME LATE.

