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Stereotypes Shattered

When common generalizations are accepted, people will perceive others differently and not fully understand the individual beyond the stereotype. In *Shattered: The Asian American Comics Anthology* (2012), Jeff Yang, Parry Shen, Keith Chow, and Jerry Ma use super villains to portray common misconceptions about Asian Americans. In the series, the villains are known as the five venoms: the manipulator, the brute, the brain, the alien, and the temptress. Each of the five reflects a stereotype of Asian Americans, such as being ruthless or asocial. Only the seal of the mirror of divine immortals, created by the sacrifices of two masters, prevents the demons from entering the world. Master Ifrit, a central figure in the series, accidentally shatters the mirror, releasing the venoms into the world. The venoms manipulate people's minds and feelings to gain power, creating conflicts in the mortal world. Their ultimate goal is to make people their puppets and take over the mortal realm. Thankfully, the heroes of the story overcome their obstacles to defeat these venoms and seal them in the mirror again. The venoms cannot succeed in the end because of their infighting and the unity of the people against them despite the venoms' initial success in manipulating people. The false narratives of the generalizations of Asian Americans conflict with each other and illustrate that the stereotypes the villains represent of Asian Americans are largely false.

The venoms are at their strongest when manipulating people's thoughts and feelings. In the short story, "Peril: Welcome to the Terror", the venom known as the Alien raises racial tensions to incite violent conflicts in the community, illustrating the racism against minorities such as Asian Americans. The story begins with a short scene from Fig. 3a during the Gold Rush

period. It shows an unassuming Asian American, Ah Wong, is suddenly attacked by white men for seemingly no other reason than his race. As the fight escalates with other Asians helping Ah Wong, all the Asian Americans are massacred with firearms. The scene finally ends with a raging fire in Fig. 3b., representing the chaos and disorder the violence has wrought. This framing narrative provides racial context for the alien stereotype in the American West. It is a reminder of the deadly violence people are capable of when fueled by false suspicion. The struggle for Asian Americans to defend themselves, whether in the Gold Rush period or present day of the short story, has become very difficult in the face of systematic oppression and violence. The venom known as the Alien cleverly amplifies the racial tension in the present day to recreate the tragic scenario.

The Alien venom begins its manipulation with the control of the state governor of Arizona to abuse her authority. From news to policy-making, it seeks to spread its influence and xenophobia. When there is an explosion at Phoenician University, the reporter in Fig. 2a. focuses on the culprit's racial and religious background, stating that the "North Korean agent – is an associate of Pakistani-born Malik, known to be practicing Muslim" (129). The xenophobic focus on the religion and ethnicity of the suspect shows bias against minorities, implying that there is a connection between minorities and terrorism. The news correspondent and state governor strongly believe that these attacks are because of immigration and foreigners like Asian Americans. Their unjust policies and views against immigrants are seen as plausible solutions. However, the end of the page in Fig. 2b. shows piles of bodies on the ground and fire raging in the background. The chaos is reminiscent of the Gold Rush period incident back in the beginning of the short story. The placement of the imagery indicates the parallel between that massacre and the result of the state policies. People are harmed and killed because of the continuous alienating

prejudice that incite violence and distrust. The conflict is the goal of the Alien as it is happily controlling the state governor from the mirror. By planting xenophobia into the authority, the Alien succeeds in conjuring negative emotions and racial conflicts that will aid him with power.

Violence and conflicts occur in the present day of the story with laws such as the SB 1177. The state of Arizona implements this law to grant an official task force the authority to eliminate “terrorists”. Although this law is justified as a solution to stop illegal immigrants and terrorism, it gives authorities the power to detain suspects without much proof or evidence. The law is meant to target minorities, and already, innocent Asians have been arrested under this unjust law. The venom known as the Alien feeds off of this worsening situation by building distrust between people. Minorities are more likely to be profiled and targeted. One example of SB 1177 in action is in Fig. 1b. when a professor leads a protest against SB 1177 and a thug-like figure detains her on a baseless accusation. He asks: “did the professor happen to show you any papers? How do we even know she’s legal?”, implying that she might be an illegal immigrant with no official documentation. However, this theory does not hold because people do not carry their documentation with them at all time. Since the people are suspicious of minorities, they are willing to overlook this injustice to detain them. This example is also significant because it illustrates the vital role of violence in sustaining the stereotypical threat of Asian Americans as foreign aliens. The venom known as the Alien amplifies the xenophobia within people who turns on minorities with violence just like during the Gold Rush incident. Here, the professor who is the leader of the protest against SB1177 in Fig. 1a. is being silenced by threat of violence. It shows that violence is an effective tool in suppressing dissent against the false stereotypes. Violence successfully antagonizes Asian Americans while giving them no platform to speak for

themselves, helping the venom known as the Alien achieve its goal of creating division between people.

The venoms can also influence relationships on a more personal level. In “Hide and Sikh”, Ravi is childhood friend with David until the Brain planted arrogance and envy into Ravi, turning him into a power-hungry villain. When David accidentally acquires superhuman mutations, Ravi, who has been influenced by the Brain, becomes jealous and abandons him. Shen illustrates the Brain’s influence in Fig. 4a., using Ravi’s shadow as it talks to him. The shadow has a mind of its own and even its own outline is different from Ravi’s. It is shown as having demonic features with a much more malicious attitude. When the shadow talks, its speech bubbles have a pitch black background with black diamonds surrounding it. This further shows that the shadow has its own consciousness and is influencing Ravi through its speech. The Brain’s influence becomes most evident when Ravi and David are searching for nuclear pods using detectors. Ravi starts to directly imitate what the shadow is telling him, accidentally saying that: “I’ll use them. Just like I’ve been using that lunk” (88). The shadow overpowers Ravi so much that he essentially agrees with what it is telling him to do. Ravi overlooks David’s friendship, and instead sees him only as a tool for his own gains. The shadow convinced Ravi by making him believe that he is superior and David is only a “lunk” (88). Therefore, when David obtains his powers through mutation, Ravi becomes unstably jealous and leaves him in Fig. 4c. The shadow in this panel convinces Ravi that “there must be others”, more pods for them to find (90). Even though David is Ravi’s childhood friend and comes pleading for help in this scene for his mutation, Ravi utterly ignores him for his selfish goals of obtaining more power. The Brain has turned Ravi into a stereotypical Asian villain, one who is self-obsessed and wants only power. Ravi severs his connection with David, believing him to be worthless. By isolating

himself, Ravi condenses his complex ambitions into a simple-minded goal of power. David is not free of fault. Instead of trying to understand his friend's history and motivation better, David does the bare minimum of helping him out. Fig. 4b illustrates the low effort David displays when spending time with Ravi. David does not talk much to Ravi to try and understand him better. With more effort to get to know Ravi better and a stronger friendship to begin with, David could have prevented Ravi's succumbing to the Brain's influence. In the end, the Brain succeeds in isolating Ravi and turning him into a pawn as a super villain hungry for power.

These two short stories reflect real hardships that Asian Americans face in society. In "Peril: Welcome to the Terror", the story's SB 1177 policy resembles the actual Arizona SB 1070 which is a controversial anti-immigration bill. Similar to how SB 1177 grants the state's task force more authority, SB 1070 requires law enforcement officers to make immigration status checks in any kind of policing. Not having immigration papers at all time is a federal misdemeanor under SB 1070 which encourages racial profiling just like the SB 1177 did in the short story. Critics note that the law "explicitly targets a particular population, not serious crime" (Melone 23). It gives authorities the right to question minorities, similar to how the professor is questioned and detained in the short story. Jan Brewer, who is the state governor of Arizona, can also be compared to the state governor in the story. The Alien's influence in signing this bill in the story is reflected in Brewer, the stereotyping of certain minority. Fig. 2c. explicitly illustrates how the venom known as the Alien is influencing the state governor through the mirror. The artist's depiction of the story's state governor resembles Brewer in Fig. 2d. which can be intentional in comparing the two. They have both allowed themselves to be controlled by xenophobia and furthered the racial tension in their communities. For "Hide and Sikh", David's inability to connect with Ravi on a deeper level is true for Asian Americans in real life. Ravi's

isolation is what drove him to become envious and egotistic. Similarly, many people in society try little to understand foreigners, which forces Asian Americans into their own similar isolation. Without anyone to depend on or relate to, Asian Americans can often resent others. This is even more problematic when “racial discrimination often isolates Asian-Americans to a greater extent than other ethnic groups” (Robinson). David lacks a strong friendship with Ravi who has no one else to rely on. Just like how David’s negligence in part causes Ravi to become malicious, Asian Americans can easily fall under the Brain stereotype of being self-obsessed if people choose to avoid or stop trying to understand them.

With such powerful abilities to manipulate and cause distrust, the venoms are dangerous and cunning foes for the heroes of the graphic novel. However, they all still end up being defeated because of their infighting. The finale of the overarching story has the venoms executing their plan to dominate the moral realm by making the people their puppets at a football stadium. Conflicts within the venoms appear right from the start in Fig. 6a. The siblings are shown to be bickering amongst each other, raising suspicion that the Manipulator may have left them while he is free. This distrust between the siblings only worsens as the fight continues. The doubts eventually erupt into a fight in Fig. 6b. with three of the siblings against the Manipulator. They believe that the Manipulator is trying to take all the power and accuse the him for seeking “to win the world for [himself]!” (205). Fights and confusion soon break out on the battlefield which weaken the advantages the venoms have at the start. This turn of event affords heroes the chance to seal the venoms back into the mirror. It is interesting that the seemingly impeccable plan of the venoms collapses in the finale. Just before their materialization into the mortal realm, the venoms start to doubt and argue against each other. The lack of cooperation and belief is a major cause of their downfall. When considering that these venoms represent stereotypes of

Asian Americans, this spreads the message that the narratives of the stereotypes conflict with each other and serve as poor representation of the individuals. The venoms' defeat illustrates that each stereotype generalizes a part of Asian American culture, but its portrayal of Asian Americans falls apart when examined closely and put together with other stereotypes.

On the other side of the battle, the heroes of the different short stories band together to face this menacing evil. While the venoms are divided, the heroes believe in each other. This cooperation is the opposite of what have happened in the short stories which people generally doubt and suspect each other. On Fig. 5b., every hero supports each other to turn the tide around. They battle the venoms' pawns as one group. The clearest moment of this unity against the venoms is when one of the heroes declare that they "are on the side of life" (205) in Fig. 5a. This statement combines all the heroes with different backgrounds together on one side, the side of life. To lose to the venoms and becoming their puppets is akin to death for the heroes. They fight because they believe that their cause is just and the venoms must be sealed again. In the end, through careful coordination among the heroes, Master Ifrit, in Fig. 5c., seals the venoms in the mirror once again away from the moral realm. The heroes use their unique power such as teleportation and weapons together to overcome the venoms. Instead of the conflicts and division in the short stories, the heroes are able to overcome the venoms' influence because they all have firm belief in each other. While the venoms seem unstoppable in their respective short stories, against the combined strength of all the heroes, they falter and collapse. The turn of event reflects a key takeaway of the overarching story that believing in each other can overcome the racial tension and suspicious caused by stereotypes which the venoms represent.

The belief that each hero has in each other is what secured their victory against the venom. This is an important message when considering that the venoms are actually stereotypes

of Asian Americans. It illustrates that when these stereotypes representing Asian Americans are tested in real life, they are defeated if the people believe in each other strongly enough. In the previous short stories, the venoms have the upper hand because they are able to manipulate the people's feelings in their favor. In "Peril: Welcome to the Terror", the venom known as the Alien controls the state governor to enact discriminatory policies against minorities that raise racial tensions. The Brain venom in "Hide and Sikh" similarly creates distrust by planting envious and arrogant thoughts into Ravi. These venoms are powerful in their respective short story because the people allow themselves to be influenced by them. They do not believe in each other and are quick to doubt when suspicions are raised. The only way to defeat the venoms and the stereotypes that they represent is to believe in each other and work together. In the finale, the heroes working in unity destroys the venoms. Just like how the heroes are able to overcome the venoms through strong cooperation, if the people in society put that amount of trust in each other, the stereotypes will be quickly destroyed. Conflicts and violence are created only when there is a lack of trust within the community. The narratives of these stereotypes do not even hold when they are examined closely on their own. The venoms, representing different stereotypes of Asian Americans, in the story ultimately fight among each other with disagreement. Similarly, the images of the stereotypes for Asian Americans conflict with each other in reality. If people stop to think about the narratives of common generalizations about Asian Americans, they will realize the inconsistencies the stereotypes have when applied to individuals. Not every Asian American is good at math or is asocial. Such assumptions can limit people's perceptions and create conflicts just like what the venoms seek to do in the story. Trying to understand in each other through trust and belief is the best way to ensure a healthy and peaceful society.

The overarching story of *Shattered* tells a message that is crucial for any multi-racial society. The stereotypes, or venoms as depicted the graphic novel, are most powerful when the people doubt each other. The short stories such as “Peril: Welcome to the Terror” show the dangerous effect stereotypes have on a political level while “Hide and Sikh” illustrates how they can destroy a friendship. It is important that people truly believe in each other just as how the heroes do in the finale. Only then can people secure victory against the venoms and the violent conflicts they seek to create in the world.

Fig. 1 illustrates the student protest led by professor Eady against the new Arizona law, SB 1177. The protestors believe that this law, passed by the governor Ebens, will be unjust toward minorities by giving mercenary thugs the authority to detain people if they see fit.

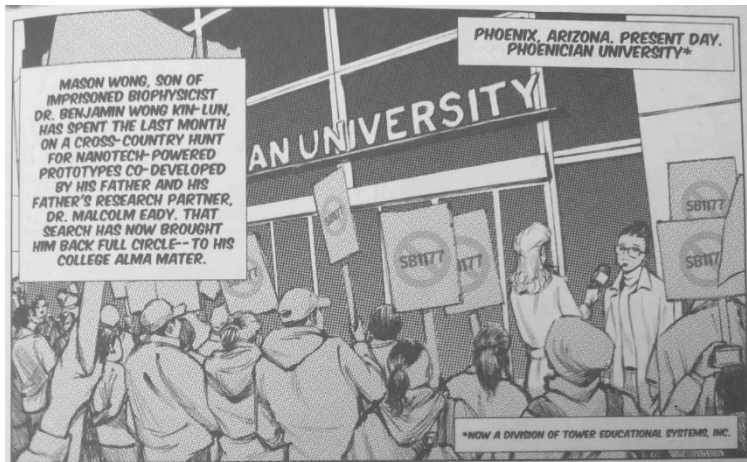


Fig. 1a. Professor Eady leads a protest on campus against the new law SB 1177 that discriminates against minorities. The professor is being interviewed on her thought behind the law before being questioned and taken away by a thug-like figure (123).

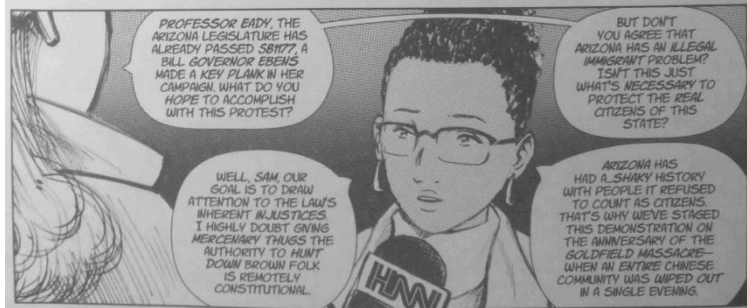


Fig. 1b. A thug-like figures approached professor Eady in a threatening manner. He implies that the professor is involved in a terrorist attack and might be an illegal immigrant without her papers. This is a good example of how the new law SB 1177 allow thugs like him detain dissenting voices without much proof (124).



Fig. 2 shows the influence the venom known as the Alien has over state officials. It compels the state governor to enact SB 1177 which unjustly targets minority. Racial conflicts erupt and violence ensues because of this law.



Fig. 2a. A news report breaks the news of a new terror attack. The suspect's racial and religious background are focused on which prompt the state governors to enact policies against immigrants and minorities (129).

Fig. 2b. Chaos is depicted in the image following the governor's talk. It is frighteningly similar to the violent Gold Rush incident (129).



Fig. 2c. The governor looks into the mirror which reflects the venom known as the Alien. This shows its influence on the state governor (130).



Fig. 2d. The actual Arizona state governor, Jan Brewer looks very similar to the artist's illustration of the state governor in the story, drawing a comparison between the two.

Fig. 3 reveals the long history of racism in Arizona, dating back to the Gold Rush era. What starts with a white man attacking an innocent Asian American turns into massacre of Asian

Americans. This flashback is strikingly similar to the current racial tension resurfacing in the short story.



Fig. 3a. Ah Wong walks through a town during the Gold Rush era. He is attacked by a white man which leads to a violent massacre of Asian Americans (121).



Fig. 3b. The white men used firearms on the Asian Americans after the attack on Ah Wong. Dead bodies and a raging fire reflect the chaos and violence of the time (122).



Fig. 4 shows the manipulation of the venom known as the Brain. It influences Ravi which is depicted in Ravi's shadow. This causes Ravi to isolate himself and become self-obsessed with power, ultimately abandoning his childhood friend David.

Fig. 4a. Ravi's shadows talks to him, encouraging him to chase after more power and use other people. Ravi agrees with the shadow, showing that he has fallen under its control (88).



Fig. 4b. David helps Ravi in his quest for nuclear pods. During these scenes, David shows no particular interest in what Ravi is trying to do (86).



Fig. 4c. Ravi finally turns on David when he accidentally activated the nuclear pods. Even when David pleads Ravi to help with his mutation, Ravi only cares about gaining power for himself (90).



Fig. 5 illustrates the finale in which the heroes of the short stories group together to fight the venoms. Their cooperation and belief in each other ultimately help them succeed in sealing the venoms back into the divine mirror and saving the world.

Fig. 5a. The heroes in this scene realize that they are all fighting on the same side against the venoms. They have a just cause and need to defeat the venom's plan (205).



Fig. 5b. The heroes cooperate with each other to fight the venoms' pawns (206).

Fig. 5c. The heroes manage to finally reseal the venoms by working together (207).

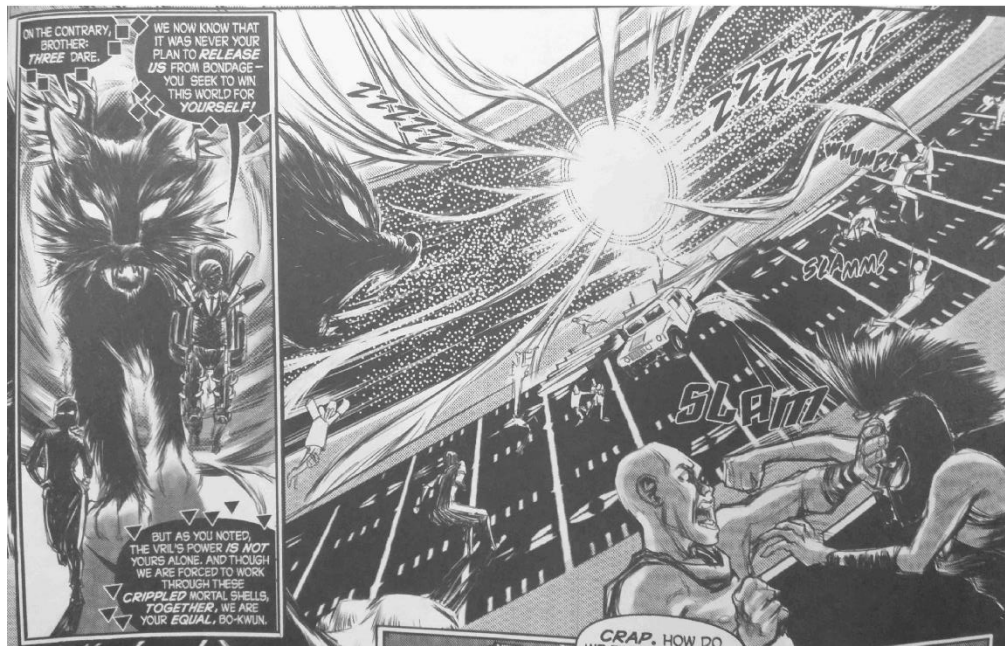


Fig. 6 shows the conflict within the venoms during the finale of the story. The siblings start to doubt the Manipulator and eventually turns on him during the battle which lead to their downfall.



Fig. 6a. The venoms in the beginning start to doubt the Manipulator who they suspect have left the them behind to conquer the world for himself (198).

Fig. 6b. The venom siblings fight against the Manipulator who they think is trying to have the world for himself. This causes the infighting between their pawns to breakout and an opportunity for the heroes to win (205).



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