

The Tragic Tale of Aaron Appleshift

ISSUE #1

By DAVID BAILLIE

PAGE 1

1 - The panel is filled with golden flames with scarlet tongues.

CAPTION :

Oh my God.

2 - More flames.

These should be the kind of flames that if you look at them long enough you start to see shapes in them; faces, animals, buildings.

CAPTION :

Oh my God-

3 - We can see an arm, bent at the elbow, amid the fire. We can't see its owner, or anything in the background, except the licking flames.

CAPTION :

Now I know what brains smell like when they burn...

4 - An empty black panel.

PAGE 2

1 – Another empty, black panel.

CAPTION :

Sometimes I feel like there's no one here.

CAPTION :

Even when **everyone** is here.

2 - The interior of a very dark room. We can see the outline of our main character, Aaron APPLESHIFT, and some furniture. There is very little light and so we can just barely make out the shapes.

CAPTION :

Sometimes I feel like there's no one to hear me.

CAPTION :

Even though I'm saying nothing that can be heard.

3 – He opens the window blinds of the room he is in, letting in halogen light from the street lamps outside. With this light, which still isn't very strong, our main character is more visible.

He looks about forty-ish, with bushy receding hair. He is lean and unshaven. His nose is pointy, as is his chin.

As he opens the window blinds he peers at the world outside.

CAPTION :

I think if one can't articulate -

CAPTION :

with words...

CAPTION :

Then one must seek an **alternative** method of communication.

4 – As APPLESHIFT runs his fingers through his thinning hair, he speaks...

APPLESHIFT :

We all need to communicate.

APPLESHIFT :

We all want to be heard.

PAGE 3

1 – He has now turned away from the window and is holding up a shirt, scrutinising it in the dim light.
He continues...

APPLESHIFT :

From the fly crawling across a table in a coffee shop above a London book store to the president of the United States of America.

APPLESHIFT :

Every living thing on this Earth wants to be heard...

APPLESHIFT :

Thinks that it has something to say.

2 – He puts on the shirt. HE speaks without showing any emotion or giving any clue as to whom he thinks he is speaking.

APPLESHIFT :

Wants to share its emotional state with someone or something.

APPLESHIFT :

Anyone.

APPLESHIFT :

Or anything.

3 – He wanders to the other side of the room, feeling his way in the semi-darkness as he goes. We can see that he isn't wearing any pants. We also now see that this room is his bedroom.

Or at least there is a *bed* in the room...

APPLESHIFT :

I think I'm feeling like this because I can't tell anyone what I'm feeling.

APPLESHIFT :

I simply can't describe it.

APPLESHIFT :

There's no one to tell, and nothing to say.

4 – He flicks on a light switch at the side of the bed, and we see that his bedroom is in complete disarray. There are clothes and other stuff strewn everywhere. It's a bit like my bedroom actually (*photo reference available if required*)

APPLESHIFT :

But I want to be heard. I want someone to know how I feel.

5 – He starts rummaging through his mess, to find a pair of pants. He scoops up handfuls of stuff, shoving it to the side so that it causes mounds of rubbish at the walls. This is a *really* messy room!

APPLESHIFT :

In doing this thing today, I know that many will misunderstand me.

PAGE 4

1 – He finds a pair of pants, and holds them up to his own eye level. They are crumpled and dirty, unlike his nicely pressed shirt. He looks dismayed at the state of his trousers.

APPLESHIFT :

But maybe, just maybe, of all the millions that will hear about this.

APPLESHIFT :

Maybe one.

APPLESHIFT :

Will know what I'm trying to say.

2 – Now he looks alarmed. Is he doing this right thing? He lets his arms fall by his side.

APPLESHIFT :

Oh fuck.

APPLESHIFT :

Am I doing the right thing here?
Is anyone going to **listen** to this?

3 – He sits on the bed. He's still holding the trousers.
On his bedside table, along with lots of other junk - food wrappers, credit card receipts etc. - a small blue dictaphone now takes centre stage in the foreground. The record button is depressed.

This is the *whom* to which he speaks.

APPLESHIFT :

My name is Aaron.

APPLESHIFT :

Aaron Appleshift.

PAGE 5

1 - Change of scene: the interior of a school HEADMASTER's office.

A young APPLESIFT, about six years old judging by the size of him, sits beside his MOTHER on the opposite side of the desk to the HEADMASTER.

His MOTHER is a plump middle aged woman in floral dress, while the HEADMASTER is a boringly dressed plump man with a few strands of greasy black hair scraped over his bald scalp.

Young APPLESIFT is in short trousers.

HEADMASTER :

I don't quite know how to explain this incident to you this Mrs Applesift without it sounding utterly absurd.

HEADMASTER :

I'm not even sure what to think of it myself.

2 - Close up of MOTHER, with a scornful look on her ace.

MOTHER :

I don't think anything you say could **surprise** me, Mr Drew.

3 - Middle shot of HEADMASTER, frowning. He plays with a pencil as he talks.

HEADMASTER :

Well...

HEADMASTER :

I discovered young Aaron here playing cricket in the sports field on his own this morning.

HEADMASTER :

With a...

HEADMASTER :

Dead crow.

4 - A silent panel as an obviously disappointed MOTHER looks down at the bewildered young APPLESIFT

5 - Same panel again, but this time the MOTHER is looking up (at the HEADMASTER).
APPLESHIFT's expression remains unchanged.

MOTHER :

What's cricket?

PAGE 6

1 – APPLESHIFT irons his pants in the hallway of his disastrously messy apartment. There obviously hasn't been a female of any description near it for years. If ever! The small blue tape recorder sits on the end of the ironing board.

APPLESHIFT :

In the cell phones of those who know me My name is usually listed first.

APPLESHIFT :

Regardless of whether they use my first or second name to index me.

APPLESHIFT :

If anyone is accidentally called when they sit down, on a bus or train or at work, then it's usually me.

2 – New scene. Appleshift is wearing different clothes, answering his cell phone. No response at the other end.

APPLESHIFT :

Hello.

APPLESHIFT :

Hello?

CAPTION :

I **forever** get phone calls with no one at the other end.

3 – Change of scenery again; APPLESHIFT in different clothes, eating breakfast in a diner...

APPLESHIFT :

Hello.

APPLESHIFT :

Hello?

CAPTION :

I listen to their ass shift about on a seat.

CAPTION :

I listen to a conversation they're having with someone on a train, or a bus, or at work.

4 – Same scene as before, now he looks surprised by the response he's getting from the other end of the call...

CAPTION :

Once I heard a girl called Sally screw her boyfriend.

CAPTION :

He made loud noises like a goose when he came.

CAPTION :

I listened all the way through.

5 - APPLESHIFT looks up at the reader, and speaks directly to us. He lowers his cell phone as he says...

APPLESHIFT :

I didn't hang up.

APPLESHIFT :

I'm the only person in the world that knows that.
Unless they did it deliberately.
Do you think they did?

PAGE 7

1 - New scene.

Three guys sit on cheap plastic chairs around a cheap Formica table, eating lunch together in an office canteen. The canteen is quite busy, and people walk around in the background carrying trays of food, looking for colleagues they recognise to lunch with.

GUY1:

No fucking way. A mail order bride. Like from Bangkok or somewhere?

GUY2 :

I think Hong Kong

GUY3 :

And he what - he just sent her back?

GUY2 :

Like she wasn't up to his specifications? Shit!

GUY3 :

Fuck me. I knew he was -

2 - APPLESHIFT shows up. He's carrying a tray and has just overheard the conversation. The three guys stop talking as they spot him.

3 - They all look up. GUY1 offers APPLESHIFT the spare seat at the Formica table.

GUY1 :

Oh.
Hi Aaron.

GUY1 :

You wanna sit?

4 - Black panel

CAPTION :

I think

PAGE 8

1 – APPLESHIFT is back on his bed, in his messy bedroom. He's wearing nicely ironed pants now.

He holds his little blue dictaphone tightly in both hands.

It's getting lighter outside as the sun starts to rise.

APPLESHIFT :

I think.

I think.

I think I think too much sometimes.

2 – He runs his hands through his thinning hair again. He looks tired.

APPLESHIFT :

Coffee makes me think even more. I can't stop thinking when I've had a coffee.

It makes my synapses fire so much more quickly, I can almost feel them.

3 - He returns his other hand to holding the tape recorder. He has a look of concentration on his face. He wants these words to mean something.

APPLESHIFT :

Thoughts run through my brain wires so quickly, and they all link so beautifully, like high wire acrobats flying through the air, hundreds of feet above their audience, catching each other so very gracefully.

4 - His eyes glaze over

APPLESHIFT :

Thoughts.

No net.

My thoughts have no net.

5 - Change of scene, but we keep APPLESHIFT in the clothes he's wearing, and with the same pose. He's still talking into the recorder, but now he's sitting at a table in a cafe.

As the monologue explains, this is a cafe in London, some time ago, which we're visiting through his memory.

A small cup of cappuccino, on a small saucer sits in front of him. Beside the cup, on the table, is a fly.

6 - The vanishing points of this panel drop to the eye level of the fly. From here APPLESIFT looks huge, and the coffee much larger in proportion. The fly is large enough in this panel that we can see it in all its glory. It appears to be looking up at APPLESIFT.

He is looking down at it with his gargantuan eyes.

APPLESHIFT :

I mention this because this idea came to me while I was drinking coffee.

In a coffee shop.

In London actually. I was watching a fly, crawling across the table in front of me.

It was trying to talk to me-

7 - APPLESIFT is holding the tape recorder near the fly so that it can attempt to record its thoughts. Its two front legs are in the air, and its head is pointed directly at the recorder.

APPLESHIFT :

Trying to communicate with this huge being before it. I could feel that it had something it wanted to say.

But it didn't know how.

PAGE 9

1 - APPLESHIFT is now a few years younger. He has a bit more hair, and is altogether tidier looking. He's having a fraught conversation with a GIRL at the door of his apartment, which isn't in the mess it currently is.

GIRL :

I'm really sorry Aaron. I just - I just don't see this relationship going anywhere.

2 - We get a better look at this younger APPLESHIFT. he really is a better looking package. He looks quite physically fit, and his clothes are a better fit for him. He implores his GIRL...

APPLESHIFT :

But I - I love you!

3 - Back to the girl, who is trying to be patient with him.

GIRL :

And I love you too

GIRL :

But you also drive me up the fucking wall sometimes...

4 - GIRL again. She looks apologetic for what she has said. She doesn't want to hurt his feeling, but she wants out.

GIRL :

Sometimes...
Sometimes I just wanna scream.

5 - APPLESHIFT looks devastated. His head hangs.

APPLESHIFT :

I'm

APPLESHIFT :

Sorry

6- The GIRL makes moves to leave. Her body is turned, and she is opening the door. She looks APPLESIFT in the eye, with a half smile.

GIRL :

Don't be.

GIRL :

It's not your fault.

PAGE 10

1 – APPLESHIFT is back in his apartment. He pulls a thick black briefcase from the chaos of his floor. The dictaphone is in the foreground on the bedside table. He is in the background, behind the bed.

He's still speaking...

APPLESHIFT :

I suppose that's how art came about wasn't it?

An artist is just someone who tries to express himself in the usual way and fucks up. He can't.

2 – He puts the briefcase on the bed, and opens the catches. He looks up at the tape recorder as he says...

APPLESHIFT :

So he has to resort to some unconventional method to let the world know how he feels.

What he's thinking.

3 – He opens the briefcase, and looks inside. He is satisfied by its contents.

APPLESHIFT :

That's what they're trying to do.

The genuine ones.

They're not really trying to entertain you - that's just a side effect of their attempts at communication.

4 – He looks back up, his eyes haven't quite glazed over, but his thoughts are elsewhere.

APPLESHIFT :

The genuine ones.

4 – He focuses again on the tape recorder, and looks quite angry. One of his hands is in the air in disgust.

APPLESHIFT :

The commercial assholes, those that are just out to make a quick buck.

They can go fuck themselves.

APPLESHIFT :

They've got nothing to say.

PAGE 11

1 - A younger APPLESIFT enters a bookshop, by the glass front doors, passing through the alarm mechanism at the front which catches thieves.

He's wearing an Hawaiian shirt.
and carrying a plastic bag.

2 - He freezes about five paces inside the shop, beside the magazine rack just by the entrance. he's facing into the shop, but completely motionless.

3 - He is still completely motionless. The shop ASSISTANT at the front desk takes notice of him.

4 - She's quite alarmed, now and calls for assistance.

ASSISTANT :

Frank!

Frank - quick

we got a live one here.

I think he's shit himself!

PAGE 12

1 –Back to the bedroom.

The alarm goes off on the digital clock radio he keeps by his bed.(the time reads 9:30)
He looks over at it and continues his oration.

SFX :

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

APPLESHIFT :

I've got something to say.

2 – He clambers over the bed and presses the stop button on his alarm. The beeping stops.

APPLESHIFT :

Revolutionaries are artists too.

They can't express how they feel adequately with words. They have to resort to bullets.

Maybe I'm a revolutionary.

3 – He lies on the bed, facing the ceiling. He puts his hand in his pocket.

APPLESHIFT :

Well I'll be using a bullet to express myself.

I'm going to have to think about the rest of the definition and see if I fit.

4 – Close in on APPLESIFT as he produces a single silver bullet and holds it above his head.

APPLESHIFT :

So this fly...

PAGE 13

1 – New scene – interior of a zoo like office, all the workers sitting at desks housed within low wall cubicles.

APPLESHIFT sits at his desk in a suit and striped tie, tapping away unenthusiastically at his keyboard. He is surrounded by hundreds of drones all doing exactly the same thing.

2 – A young exec appears behind APPLESIFT's swivel chair, he is Aaron's junior by a couple of decades, but is clearly his superior in the workplace. He is sharply dressed and clean cut.

MR NICKS :

Mr Appleshift?

3 – APPLESIFT wakes up from a bout of screen-staring, upon hearing his boss's voice.

APPLESHIFT :

Oh - Hi Mr Nicks.

NICKS :

Mr Appleshift, I think we need to have a chat.

4 - The heavy set woman in the next cubicle along from APPLESIFT takes an interest in their conversation and starts to eavesdrop. Everyone else continues to tap away at the keyboards.

APPLESHIFT looks concerned.

APPLESHIFT :

Oh.

APPLESHIFT :

OK

5 – The Mr NICKS starts to walk away from APPLESIFT's cubicle, clearly uncomfortable mixing with the lower members of staff.

NICKS :

Ummm... In my office?

PAGE 14

1 – The interior of MR NICK’s office, as he and APPLESHIFT enter.
NICKS has a nice big comfortable swivel seat by the window in his luxurious office.

NICKS :

Close the door behind you, Aaron.

2 – APPLESHIFT has to sit on a considerably smaller, less comfortable looking seat than the plush window side one. The scene looks vaguely reminiscent of the school scene earlier.

NICKS :

I can call you Aaron can’t I?

APPLESHIFT :

Of cour-

3 – MR NICKS looks down at his desk as he delivers some bad news to our hopeless protagonist...

NICKS :

I’m sorry Aaron, we’re going to have to let you go.

4 – Close up of APPLESHIFT, clearly stunned by this bombshell.

APPLESHIFT :

I’ve been here fifteen years.

6 – NICKS looks as sympathetic as he can... Unfortunately it’s hard for this guy to have any sympathy, he has no frame of reference. He’s in his mid twenties and his career is soaring just fine.

NICKS :

I’m sorry Aaron, it’s not your work.

NICKS :

Your work is fine.

NICKS :

It’s margins. We need bigger margins.

7 – Close in on APPLESHIFT again, his head bowed.

APPLESHIFT (*very small font*):

fuck

PAGE 15

1 – Back to the usual scenery.

APPLESHIFT looks pleased with himself, if a little psychologically unhinged. He is now sitting by the window, with the open suitcase in front of him. He unfolds a long jacket.

APPLESHIFT :

I've gone the whole hog with this one.

2 – He produces a book from one of the pockets and smiles (as in the monologue it is Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*).

The single bullet is sitting against the edge of the briefcase, which we can't quite see into at the moment,

APPLESHIFT :

I've even got a dog eared copy of *Catcher in the Rye* in my coat pocket.

Its spine is rolled and tattered and it has a coffee stain that has soaked through its pages from the front cover all the way to page 45.

3 –

I like old books. I like reading something that someone else has read, from exactly the same page **they** read it from. My fingers where their fingers have been.
Transferring history.

4 –

Our lives joined at the page.
At the word.
At the period.

5 –

I sometimes wonder who owned the books before I did.
Why did they give it up?
Are they dead?

PAGE 16

1 –

Did the owner of this book, the one who spilled the coffee, did he wonder who would read it after he let it go? Did he imagine me?

2 –

Did he imagine what I would use it for?

3 –

Quite a symbolic tome after all. If I owned a copy and sold it on, or left it on a bus then I'd wonder if someone would do this with it.

4 – APPLESHIFT returns the book to the pocket of his jacket.

APPLESHIFT :

Leave it in their pocket.

5 – Now we can see inside the briefcase. It contains a professional sniper rifle, in two pieces. There is a separate viewfinder, which will be mounted above the main part of the gun.

The gun pieces are packed in a foam, custom designed padding.

APPLESHIFT strokes the barrel as he speaks...

APPLESHIFT :

And kill someone.

PAGE 17

1 - Switch scene again.

This time we see APPLESHIFT walking down a very busy high street. He is wearing a suit and tie, despite it being mid day in the height of summer.

All around almost everyone else is wearing more appropriate clothing for the weather. There are tourists, and shoppers, and some business people looking for somewhere to purchase some lunch.

Busy street. Hot day.

Lots of shops. Shoppers everywhere.

2 - A guy dressed in those ridiculous short trousered suits with a large square shopping bag walks past APPLESHIFT - knocking his arm as he passes. The guy continues oblivious to the collision, but APPLESHIFT isn't best pleased about it.

2 - APPLESHIFT stops in the street, bringing the human traffic immediately behind him to a halt. His fists are tightly clenched. He glares back at the guy with the square bag, his eye brow is creased and angry and his eyes almost demonic in their malice.

3 - He reaches out and grabs the guy with the stupid shorts, reaching around his body and grabbing his lapels, swinging him around to face him..
He shouts straight into the guy's face, spitting his words:

APPLESHIFT :

You fucking prick -

APPLESHIFT :

Watch where you're going!

4 - The shorts guy is pretty taken aback, and certainly isn't brave enough to do anything about the situation. APPLESHIFT continues his verbal assault...

APPLESHIFT :

How dare you fucking disrespect me like this in the **street** -

APPLESHIFT :

you don't even fucking know me!

6 - Black panel

CAPTION :

Fucking prick.

PAGE 18

1 - Exterior view of APPLESHIFT's apartment, which we can now see is on the fourth floor.

The sun is high in the sky and it is blisteringly hot.

There is a bandstand of some sort set up across the street from the apartment, around which a great crowd has gathered.

There are members of the public and press, jostling for a good view of what's going on.

There is also a heavy police presence, but the cops looks fairly relaxed.

Nothing in particular appears to be going on just yet.

2 - We close in on APPLESHIFT's bedroom window.

Behind the building we can see the scorching sun, burning up the sky. We can also see into the window.

Within his bedroom APPLESHIFT is in the closing stages of assembling a sniper rifle.

Despite the obvious heat he is now wearing the trench coat from earlier. Now that it's on we can see that it's pristine and new.

3 - We see the bandstand from just above the heads of the crowd.

We can see someone who looks like a mayor, portly and middle aged, with a mayoral 'medallion' around his person.

The mayor proudly holds a large golden, slightly goofy looking award.

We can just see the heads of the awardees as they climb the steps to the bandstand (or three of them anyway - a brown haired gent, and a blonde lady and blonde younger man).

3 - A middle shot of the portly mayor presenting the large golden award to the Fantastic Four.

REED RICHARDS accepts the award on behalf of his team, and looks as proud as punch.

SUE is also grinning like a Cheshire cat, while BEN and JOHNNY look bashful before the large crowd.

4 - Close up of REED through the viewfinder of APPLESHIFT's gun, the crosshairs focussing on Mr Fantastic's head.

5 - Profile shot of APPLESHIFT hanging out of his window pointing the sniper rifle down at the bandstand.

PAGE 19

1 - A similar profile shot of APPLESHIFT hanging from outside of the window with a determined expression, fire shooting from the end of his gun.

2 - Page wide (*to bleed*) panel showing the bullet flying through the air. Make it look cool!

REED's head sits unaware of the bullet at the bottom corner of the panel as the bullet approaches.

3 - The bullet enters REED's head, but instead of his skull exploding as we'd perhaps expect, it sinks into his plastic skull like in the cartoons, the bullet travelling past his other cheek - which is pulled out of shape.

So it looks kind of goofy and not at all in keeping with the tone of the book thus far. Reed has this stunned look on his face - not pain, because this doesn't hurt...

SUE has her hand over her mouth, BEN and JOHNNY look shocked, but ready to fly into action.

4- After reaching its maximum distance through Reed's head the bullet rebounds and returns in the direction from which it came.

PAGE 20

1 - The bullet returns to APPLESHIFT, missing his head by about five inches, taking a chunk of plaster out of the side of the wall.

APPLESHIFT :

FUCK!

2 - APPLESHIFT drops the gun. This wasn't part of the plan! He looks unsure of what to do - his assassination attempt in tatters.

3 - Back on the bandstand REED is in shock. Nothing like that's ever happened to him before.

SUE is paying him lots of attention, BEN and JOHNNY looks more concerned with where the bullet came from. The both look up, correctly, at the apartment building opposite.

The cops are running around like headless chickens unsure of what just happened or what they should be doing about it.

A couple of them have drawn their firearms and they're pointing them in seemingly random directions.

4 - JOHNNY *'flames-on'* and flies up toward APPLESHIFT's window.

PAGE 21

1 - Flames trails from JOHNNY's feet as he flies into APPLESHIFT's apartment via the window. The light from his fiery body brings a brightness to the room that we haven't yet seen. APPLESHIFT points the rifle at his flaming assailant, but without any sort of conviction.

JOHNNY :

Hey - you! What the **hell** do you think you're doing?

2 - APPLESHIFT fires off a shot from his rifle, this time the firing of the gun is far less magnificent.

The bullet just burns up as it comes into contact with Johnny's flame.

3 - The TORCH lands amid all of the junk on the floor, but stays aflame.

With his hands on hips, he's looking grim and judgemental. He's also proven invulnerable to APPLESHIFT's bullets so is pretty sure of himself.

Small fires break out from JOHNNY's contact with the floor. Scrap paper and the likes are starting to ignite. Of course JOHNNY doesn't care about this, but it seems to be causing APPLESHIFT some concern.

PAGE 22

1 - APPLESHIFT points the gun at his own head. He has a terrible sadness in his eyes as he does so. This is definitely his last resort, and quite a different outcome to the one he'd hoped for.

2 - Back to JOHNNY, who is seriously alarmed by this recent development. He reaches out, to try and stop APPLESHIFT from hurting himself..

3 - **BOOM.**

APPLESHIFT blows his own head off.

The flare of the gun throws sharp shadow against the wall behind him.

4 - Close up of JOHNNY, whose flame has gone crazy - externalising his emotions which have also flared unexpectedly. He one hand to his mouth.
This really isn't the way he wanted this to turn out.

JOHNNY :

Oh my God -

5 -Black panel.

CAPTION :

Oh my God.