



**THE DEATH-RAY**  
BY DANIEL CLOWES

super-strength, thanks to an experiment by his late scientist father who didn't want him to be a "weakling." Searching through his father's effects for answers to why he has these powers, he finds a death ray that looks like it fell off Flash Gordon's hip. Anyone or anything hit by it is disintegrated. He tells his one friend, Louie, and soon they are stalking all of Louie's high school tormentors.

If you think it's a bad idea for a high school student to have super-strength, a death ray, and only one friend, you're right: the petty vendettas of high school go from hilarious to scary as each is given a bloodier finish than the last. Andy, under Louie's spell, deals out rough justice after rough justice until he finds himself overcome with remorse and sells the gun (swearing off cigarettes as well). But he and Louie are drawn back into managing one more vendetta; when he arranges to buy the gun back from someone who has never known how to use it, tragedy follows close behind.

Clowes is an artist who works in nervous laughter and discomfort as much as comics. His hero, Andy, is a masterpiece of suburban-everyman satire as well as an homage to the golden age of superhero comics. We meet Andy first as a middle-aged white man and then move quickly to his childhood as a teen science hero, right out of the 1970s. The story moves between past and present to the anonymous misery of Andy's later years, when his only mask is a bland, insurance salesman's face. He has become the guy who demands you pick up your litter on the street when you didn't notice it fall, his deadly powers a chilling secret underneath his clean, sad-looking windbreaker. When Andy says, at the end, "Who am I? I am your worst nightmare," we laugh,

but we also know his lonely existence for the sad truth any superhero tries to hide: Superpowers could never change you enough to stop you from being who you are. And they can't protect you from who you were always going to be.

— ALEXANDER CHEE is the author of the novels *Edinburgh* and the forthcoming *The Queen of the Night* and currently teaches the graphic novel at Columbia University's MFA program in writing. He lives in New York City. Read Chee's interview with Daniel Clowes on BOMBsite.



**BODY SWEATS: THE UNCENSORED WRITINGS OF ELSA BARONESS VON FREYTAG-LORINGHOVEN**

edited by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo  
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MT Baroness, you brought your poems to life in performance. You were the "only one living anywhere who dresse[d] dada, love[d] dada, live[d] dada," quoting Jane Heap, coeditor of *The Little Review*. Sadly, there are no recordings of your performance poems. Give us a hint of one.

EVFL "Merdelamerdelamerdelamerdelamer... // de l'a A merique!"

MT You wrote sound poetry too. EVFL "Thy living word tolls soundunspelled —"

MT You captured the sounds of your adopted New York. How was it different from your native Germany? EVFL "Ready-to-wear — / American soul poetry." MT An example please? EVFL "After every meal — no boiling / Required — keeps the / Doctor a day — / Just Musterole / Dear Mary — the mint with / The hole — oh Lifebuoy!" MT Your American editors call this "subvertising." You wrote in German

too. EVFL "I hate hate / Hate something / About German / Sound — words / That 'longoutdrawnness —'" MT People were outraged at your art's obscurity. EVFL "If I can write — talk — about dinner — pleasure of my palate [ ... ] with my ease of manner — can afford also to mention my ecstasies in toilet room!" MT As a Dadaist, wasn't it your intention to make anti-art? EVFL "Art never insults life! loves — caresses every form — shape." MT But you have to admit that your voracious, polymorphous sexual appetite was pretty scandalous. EVFL "Madam—I firmly stand that ground / Coitus is paramount / Ab-so-lu-te-ly!" MT How does it relate to poetics? EVFL "As poetry — coitus urges / Driven courses rhythmic surges / Energy — / Executive ability." MT Did your peers share this sentiment? EVFL "Psh! Any sissypoet has sufficient freezing / Chemicals in his Freudian icechest to snuff all / Cockiness." MT Heap argued that madness was your "chosen state of consciousness." Others thought your neurasthenia was out of control. EVFL "Is it not wonderful to be able to control that then, that emotion, which otherwise would throttle you?—but take it by the neck and make Art out of it? and be free?" MT Your friend Djuna Barnes wrote that death came to you in Paris, in 1927, "by gas, a stupid joke that had not even the decency of maliciousness." And in his autobiography William Carlos Williams mentions the rumor that you were "playfully killed by some French jokester" while asleep. EVFL W.C.? Please! "Did not he lynch Art? / Pitiful!" MT Sorry, but didn't you meet him after your arrest for stealing an umbrella? I'm curious about you and Duchamp also. EVFL "I loved Marcel Dushit / He behaved mulish — / (A quit.)" MT We'll leave that for next time. In your desperate 1927 letter to Peggy Guggenheim you said: "'Hope is bloodmoney.' Account overdrawn. I had no balance." Suicide ran in your family. Was it a joke? EVFL "Death / Is / 'A good one' / On / Life // And // Altogether — — —"

—MÓNICA DE LA TORRE is BOMB's senior editor.