

THE BEACON TO INDEPENDENT STORYTELLING

CATALYST

**ALL-
KICK
STARTER
ISSUE**

ISSUE 03 - AUG 2021

**QUICK - MARTIN
PRIMROSE - SIKES
BURTON - SMITH
SHORT - ZUJOVIC**

**COMICS - PROSE
INTERVIEWS
GALLERY - TIPS**

CAN IT EVEN BE LATE IF I SET THE SCHEDULE?

CATALYST

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Well they always say that change is the only thing that's certain in life. While it is true that the magazine is late again, the truth is two-part. One is of course my own lack of drive, another is the fact that I lost my job recently, and had to spend some time focusing on applications, insurance, and all sorts of daily nonsense.

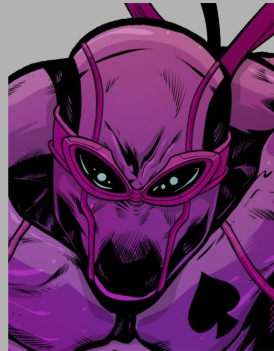
But here we are, in our first ALL-KICKSTARTER issue! I'm featuring people and creations that I've found through Kickstarter, that are soon going to Kickstarter, or have recently successfully funded!

Platforms like Kickstarter have given a lot of people the opportunity to bring their work to reality without having to go through the red tape and "approval" process of the big companies. This gives the market to decide what succeeds, and not some rando in a corner office. To that end, please make sure to follow links and support where and how you can.

I would like to announce that the people have won the Battle for Independents!

Enjoy!

-Dalibor



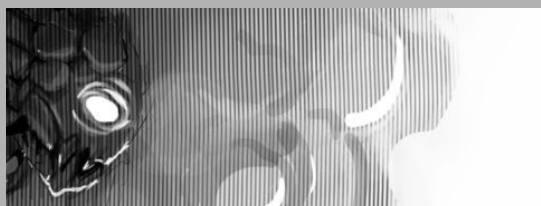
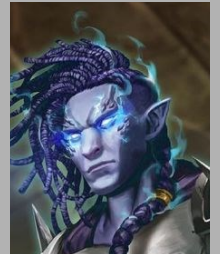
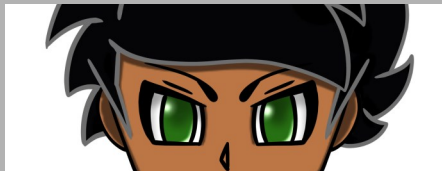
COVER ARTIST

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(provided by 4th Wall Productions)

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JASON MICHAEL PRIMROSE



2052
TIME AND SALVATION

THE LOST CHILDREN OF ANDROMEDA

205Z

TIME AND SALVATION

Jason Michael Primrose

Illustrations by The CMD Studios

Quote designs by Kieron Anthony Lewis

PROLOGUE

ALLISTER ADAMS

Cumberland falls, Kentucky, 2040 AD

Allister Adams hoped the worst had come and gone.

It was well-intentioned hope. A child's hope. As flashes of blue light spread through the passing thunderclouds. The sky rumbled a few times more, sounding angry, the last of its evening thunderstorm threatening the quiet town.

Allister, a boy midway through his seventh trip around the sun, sat on the grooved floor of his dad's car, an Ukimoto Hover Model X. His arms were wrapped around his legs, his chin pushed against his thighs. He was sulking. His dad had always said nothing was the same after the West Coast earthquake. But now something else was coming, something more powerful, if that were even possible. It seemed the worst was still on its way.

The conversation about the car rules neared its end. His dad knelt in the passenger doorway wearing an uncharacteristic scowl. Mostly because he was telling Allister to stay out of sight. His beard was overgrown. His long, dreadlocked hair was tied on his head like frayed rope in a loose knot.

"No matter what you hear outside, don't you go gettin' up in that seat," his dad warned.

Allister side-eyed him, impatient, suspicious, waiting for his dad's often-comforting smile to reappear.

"But, Pops...what if the...the storm comes back...and...and...you need help?" he finally asked.

"Storms aren't made to hurt us. They're just Mother Nature tellin' us how she feels." His dad flipped the straps on his overalls and smiled at last, though it wasn't very big. He stood after he finished and stared out at something Allister couldn't see. "Stay low, okay? It's too dangerous out here, son."

Allister frowned.

There went the *D* word again. When something was dangerous, then it couldn't be done. Those were the house rules.

His dad lowered the car's door and left Allister alone in the power plant's parking lot, the place he spent most nights when both his parents were called to their separate out-of-the-house duties.

Allister's smooth, steady breaths came with ease, even in the car's confined space. But a sense of wonder kept pulling his eyes to the windshield, as he hoped to catch a glimpse of a lightning strike in the forest or wind twirling objects into the air. Hoping to experience this *dangerous* his parents always warned about.

He picked up his toy unicorn, which had been stuffed beside him in the seat, and nodded as he repeated, "Stay low," to himself, once again comforted by his own imagination. With a quiet *whoosh* from his lips, he lifted the unicorn up, letting it take off toward a pretend sky.

Then the car began rocking back and forth, swaying like their house often did against the wind, clanking like loose pipes as it moved. He froze.

The wind howled, sweeping through the air in sudden bursts. A light too bright to be lightning blasted through the windshield. An engine somewhere above screamed. It was louder than any thunder he'd ever heard.

His dad's warning to stay low repeated in his ears. Also present was his own curiosity about the powerful thing on its way. He climbed onto the seat for a better view and plastered his hands against the dashboard to look out over the grass.

There he saw a squiggly line of blue light soaring up from the facility's open ceiling toward a break in the clouds. The strange light quivered and flashed and fizzled and brightened, struggling to stay connected to a glowing oval that was falling, as if from space.

Allister blinked in disbelief, his heart thumping, his mouth hanging open. He could only hope that his dad had aimed and was somehow shooting the beam into the sky to stop that speeding object—but even if he was, the object wasn't quieting, wasn't dimming, wasn't slowing.

Every time the tiny oval flashed, the blue light from the plant faded.

Another earsplitting *boom* echoed overhead. Light spread across the atmosphere, expanding from the tiny oval in a ring of blue. The sound reached Allister seconds after the light did, loud enough to crack the windshield and shake the car more violently.

He screamed and tried to cover his head and his ears at the same time.

Something was wrong.

The brave-sounding voice in his head told him not to hide. Not to be afraid of this oval object, even if it seemed *dangerous*. He needed to stay alert in case his

Still positioned above the dashboard where he wasn't supposed to be, Allister looked up at the sky again.

As quickly as the blue light had appeared, it zoomed back down and disappeared into the plant. That was when the other voice—fear—took hold of him. Something was wrong. The blaring noises were getting louder, and the light overhead was getting brighter. All of this happening as the clouds were swelling higher.

Allister wanted to understand what Mother Nature was trying to say. It was a storm like he'd never seen or imagined. And the flashing oval didn't have too much longer before it—his eyes followed its trajectory down—would crash into the plant.

"Pops!" he screamed. "Pops, get out of there!"

He felt the tears rising in him, ready to spill from his eyes if his dad didn't emerge that moment.

Suddenly his dad burst through a side door, running at a full sprint.

"Yes!" Allister pumped his fist into the air. "Come on, Pops, you can make it! You can...make...it."

He'd stopped cheering as hard because his dad's mouth was opening and closing like he was shouting, and he kept looking up at the sky every few strides.

Then his dad looked straight ahead and pointed at Allister, eyes widened. What he was yelling became very clear.

"Get down! Get down! Get down!"

Allister refused to get down, not until his dad made it to the car safely.

"Get down!" his dad repeated.

He had never seen his dad this way. Furious. Screaming. Likely running too fast to properly catch his breath. His dad's arms were covered in the same blue as the light, as if they had been painted. Allister couldn't begin to guess why, and wouldn't dare ask.

"Allister!" his dad shouted, now close enough to be heard. He opened the door and jumped in the driver's seat, gasping. "Didn't I tell you"—he pulled Allister down into the seat—"to stay down!"

"I'm sorry, Pops, I just heard the—"

His dad's voice was shaking as he interrupted. "I asked you to do one thing. One thing!"

He jammed his finger onto the acceleration button, then shifted the gears and turned the wheel, whipping the car around as it lifted off the ground. The

rear boosters blasted behind them, fiery and loud like a trash incinerator, rocketing the car forward.

Their vehicle alternated between a series of nauseating movements: swerving side to side, leaning hard through winding turns, which forced Allister to lean, too, and ended with a burst of speed when the road opened up.

But still, he watched his dad, who was hunched over in the driver's seat, quiet, brooding, periodically hitting the wheel. His dad was soaked in sweat, his clothes covered in soot. His sleeves were nothing but scraps of burned fabric. Allister knew the man driving looked like his dad. He also believed that it couldn't be him, not without the offer of reassuring words in that signature southern twang or that comforting smile to show everything would be okay.

Maybe everything won't be okay this time, he thought to himself, somewhat antsy.

Was that ring of light the more powerful thing his dad had mentioned, or was it the oval object? Nothing Allister thought of could be more dangerous.

By then, his heart was beating so hard he thought it might break free from his scrawny chest. He clutched himself with both hands and checked the rearview camera. What he saw was much worse than anything he could've expected: that same glowing oval had plunged toward the ground and was getting closer every second—and with it came fire the color of the sea. The strange oval was all but engulfed in those turbulent blue flames, yet he realized that it was somehow the source of light, now illuminating the sky with the radiance of midday when it was meant to be midnight.

The odd-colored fire flashed bright around the vessel and hit the ground, setting the surrounding forest ablaze.

Allister jerked his head away and squeezed his eyes shut just long enough to catch his breath.

His dad had always told him to be brave. And Allister thought that to be brave, he should imprison his fear. How could he contain a fear unlike anything he'd ever felt? The intensity of it rattling the bars of the imaginary cage, threatening to burst free. He wondered—between stuffing away his sobs and rapid-fire questions and the sickness swimming in him—if this new strain of fear was multiplying in his dad with the same quickness.

He opened one eye to see.

His dad was frowning deeply, but he seemed to have calmed into the dad Allister recognized. Placing a firm hand on Allister's leg, he exhaled. Though he didn't offer the smile Allister had been hoping for.

"I should've listened to your mother," he said. "Kept my potentials—" He ended his sentence abruptly.

Allister stared down at his dad's hand, which was double the size of his, looking for the reassurance he was meant to feel. What he found was the urge to suck in more tears, because he could tell his fear had broken free, infecting his dad, too.

"Foeht Zeorgen?" his dad whispered aloud, sounding confused. "If 2052 ends with Z, the experiment should've worked..."

His dad shook his head and mumbled the two strange words again as he strangled the car's wheel one-handed.

Allister put his hand on his dad's hand and squeezed. "Are we gonna make it home?" he asked.

"Just keep your head down and pray a little bit," his dad replied. His face was apologetic as he took back his hand and stared ahead at the stretch of civilization left.

Allister, however, kept his eyes cast out the passenger window.

The car was silent, though everything around them was erupting in chaos. Destruction was inevitable, the flames limitless, as if they would never stop spreading. Even the storm cellar beneath their house didn't seem sturdy enough to protect them—nowhere did.

Allister covered his mouth in shock. "Is Mommy okay?" he asked through his fingers.

"Your mom's on her way to the special place I built to keep us safe. I promise, we'll all be together soon."

To Allister, it sounded as if they were almost there.

"How soon?"

His dad opened his mouth to say more, and instead was forced to jerk the car to the side. Something heavy and burning landed hard where the car had been, then scraped the pavement before bouncing ahead of them and exploding.

Allister contained the intense urge to cry out, though his lip quivered as he asked slowly, "Did the Evolutionaries make the blue fire come? You know, the ones Mommy hates?"

"Ah, my little EV...come here."

Frightened, Allister leaned over. His dad hugged him. He hugged back.

"Not all Evolutionaries are scary, some are even tryin' to save the world."

His dad's voice cracked as he kept speaking. "I thought we could contain it.. I thought I understood the—" He stopped midsentence, his face falling and tears falling with it. "I did it. I made the blue fire come. And I think you can, too."

"Pops?" Allister asked. "What do you mean?"

"We're—" His dad gasped and glanced down, then frantically looked back through the window as though he'd seen a monster in the rear camera. He shouted a curse word—one of the really bad ones—and tried pushing Allister back into his seat while maneuvering the car. Allister wouldn't let go. He was too frightened of the rabid inferno attacking them from all sides.

Allister didn't know how it had caught up to them until he realized why his dad had lost the color in his face and kept pushing the accelerator button with desperation.

Something sped at them from behind.

Moving too fast.

Getting too close.

It could only be the oval object shooting forward like a launched firecracker and shrieking with the high-pitched whistle of one. The sound deepened into a deafening rumble as it caught up, and the car sputtered and sank lower, unable to stay airborne.

—



Artist: Lester Niesta/ The CMD Studios

—

Allister tried to sit up. Before he could peel away the other arm, his heartbeat disappeared into the harsh vibration of the vehicle shuddering around them.

The oval ripped their Ukimoto straight down the middle. A white flare blasted Allister's skin with searing heat. Reverberating booms drowned out his involuntary screams. And within seconds, the car exploded in opposite directions.

With him still strapped inside the seat, Allister's half of the car spun out like a top and landed on hard asphalt with enough impact to bounce, flip over itself, and land again.

The car screeched along the pavement until it skidded to a stop.

The world fell still.

Allister screamed in agony, shocked at the strange pain bombarding him on his left side, though it was mostly concentrated near his shoulder.

It didn't matter that his overalls were torn from the waist to the leg. Or that his green turtleneck was blown to scraps and his unicorn burned toward a dusty grave at his feet.

Because he could see that the arm he'd kept wrapped around his dad was missing. The pain tearing at him made sense, as did the screams clawing at his throat, scratching it raw.

His heartbeat slowed. A cold sank beneath his skin, gripping his bones with the chill of death.

Shuddering, he went quiet.

The night became nothing more than whispers of a wildfire. Smoky darkness danced across his eyes.

"My arm," he whispered, his voice filled with fatigue. He placed his shaky hand just under the gaping wound. "Pops, my arm is gone."

His dad didn't answer.

A soft wind whipped at the exposed, bleeding socket, stinging him deeper with every gust.

Allister's surroundings refused to take shape and so he closed his eyes and counted the seconds until his inevitable end. Until his heart stopped beating and his oxygen stopped flowing. But no matter how high he counted, neither happened. Just over a minute passed before his violent shaking eased to shivers and the throbbing in his shoulder to a dull pressure. The blood dried as a familiar tingling weaved its way through his mutilated flesh.

He guessed it was happening again.

Wailing with more uncertainty than pain, he lifted up his head and rested it on the seat back. His eyes fluttered open. In his peripheral vision, he could see muscles stretching from his shoulder and reattaching to the bone growing from the socket. Skin climbed over new tissues toward what might become an elbow. Allister gagged and turned away.

He'd seen something like it before, watched as his body recovered from small injuries, cuts during afternoon play, tiny bruises from wrestling around the living room, and the occasional sickness—rapid healing, his mom called it—but nothing like this. The car crash should have killed him.

Against the agony of nerves pinching at his skin, he unclipped the seat belt and stumbled onto the street. He wondered where his dad was, wanting to

believe he'd been just as lucky, yet he couldn't keep focus on anything except his half of an arm, which continued to grow until the bones of his wrist and fingers began to interlace, putting themselves back together as if they were puzzle pieces come alive.

Soon he knew the muscle would begin to reappear, then the tendons and ligaments, and last, the skin. The final stages of his healing seemed to drag on forever, and just when he thought it might end, the sharp pain returned. Now, wishing for the sensation to soften into a semblance of relief, he could hear his hometown burning in the distance. He was almost positive that no one could heal in that town but him.

Then why were there booster rockets creeping over pavement? He heard folks shouting. Had some people survived? His ears perked up—his eyes, too. The harsh beams of vehicle headlights rounded a corner, temporarily blinding him. He covered his eyes with his good hand as he took a step back. The vehicle stopped advancing on him.

"Turn 'em down, team," someone commanded.

The headlights dimmed.

Allister's sight began to clear—first revealing the dense, wide trucks hovering above the pavement, then the soldiers. They were untouched by the blue fire, each holding either a charging energy weapon or an automatic gun.

"Who's there?" Allister asked.

No one answered.

"Don't shoot," he heard his dad say, straining on every word. "That's my son. Please don't shoot him."

Allister gasped at the sound of his dad's voice and twisted around to see where he was.

"Everything's going to be all right, long as little Allister cooperates," said one of the soldiers in a voice as rough as ground pavement.

Allister squinted. "Pops, are you there? Where's Mommy?"

"Everyone's here," the same soldier answered. "Safe and sound as long as you come with us." The soldier pulled Allister's fussing, kicking mom out of the armored vehicle and forced her to stand up straight. He took her by the neck with one hand, then held a shiny weapon to her head with the other.

It was devastating to see his mom's soft curls touching the end of something so dangerous.

"Hey, sir," Allister said, trying his hardest to sound brave. He took a small step and wobbled on an unsteady ankle. "I'll come with you. Just don't hurt them, please."

"That's right, Allister, honey, come to Mommy," his mom pleaded. She spoke without steadiness, and she was paralyzed, no longer struggling against the soldier's grip.

He recognized that stiffness.

Fear.

She must've known something, seen something he couldn't see along the now intensely dark edges of the main road. "We're going to do what these nice soldiers say so they'll help your daddy," she said. She tried turning to the soldier, her arm extended toward the charred field beside them. "Is that Patrick, at the edge there? Won't one of you help him? Please...he's bleeding out. Nicolas, I'm begging you. I'll do anything."

The soldier—Nicolas—squeezed her neck, pressed the weapon deeper into her temple.

"Shut up," he said.

She flinched in pain.

Allister took another lopsided step.

"You promise to keep us safe, together?" he asked the soldier.

"Pinky promise," the soldier replied.

"Son, don't you move," his dad said. "Don't. You. Move."

The soldier dragged the gun from his mom's head to a spot near the road.

"You don't want to do this, Nic," his dad said. "We'll still find a way to save your daughter. Neight promised."

"Well, now he's dead!" the soldier shouted, beginning to squeeze the trigger.

"Wait!" Allister yelled.

The soldier stopped, loosened his finger, and turned to him. His mom's mouth fell open. The other soldiers stepped back and started talking over a radio about the return of the blue light that had scorched the sky.

It was true, the fiery blue glow had returned, right next to Allister.

Initially, he didn't feel anything at all. He watched it spread over pavement slick with fluids and littered with car parts, and tensed as it covered the row of soldiers and their trucks.

On his left side, the side where the light had appeared, he felt burning. It wasn't from fire, like he thought, but the vibrant blue light crackling around what had become a limb. It stretched, then squeezed, solidified, compressed, taking the stringy shape of what had returned. A seven-year-old's human arm.

The feeling of a million tiny needles pricked Allister under fresh bright-blue skin.

That's when he realized the light wasn't next to him.

It was part of him.

"Pleased to see we've got ourselves another Evolutionary," the soldier said. His mom shook her head, the terror in her eyes as unbearable as what he could now see: his dad lying bloody, barely moving on the side of the road.

"Pops...", he said, about to take a step in that direction. He stopped when he saw his mom gave him the stern look that meant no. It seemed his bravery would only make the situation worse.

"Please...the spaceship," his dad said. "The Z-energy, it's there... You have everything you need to save her. Leave...my wife...and my son alone."

The soldier threw Allister's mom back into the vehicle, knelt down on the street, and pressed the shiny weapon to his dad's head.

"I'd be happy to."

Allister knew he had to save his mom and his dad, and the burning inside his fast-beating heart told him he could. There came a deep voice that sounded like bravery. With it came the strange words his dad had recited in the car, chanting inside his mind, louder with each repetition.

Foelt Zeorgen, Foelt Zeorgen, Foelt Zeorgen.

Allister looked down at his new arm, mesmerized by the light beaming from it. Unable to think of anything else, he whispered, "Foelt Zeorgen."

The soldier must've heard because he faced Allister again.

He growled to the other soldiers, "Get. Him."

The dozen or so of them obeyed immediately, rushing at Allister with weapons aimed.

I can do what the fire did to the sky, he thought as they got closer.

He didn't step back, he didn't step forward, just waited with both fists clenched for the soldiers to surround him, the conviction and determination building in him like a volcanic eruption.

Allister threw his hands up and yelled out, "Foeht Zeorgen!"

The light beside him grew. Beyond his arm. Beyond comprehension.

A wave of raw energy burst from his body and surged forward, each moment of its eruption a flurry of burning anguish. His eyes rolled back into his head. From somewhere in the chaos, he could hear his mom's screams, soldiers' yelling, and the single shot from that shiny weapon.

Everything faded to a tense quiet.

The light retreated into him. Left him relishing in the same calm that chases a stream, breathing air free of danger, listening to the thirsty licks of nearby flames.

The soldiers were scattered away from Allister on their backs. And his mom...his mom was staring at him through the car's now-shattered window, weeping between screaming and hitting the seats. Though the town of Cumberland Falls was still charred from the inferno, Allister felt safe. The burning in his arm was gone. But when he searched for his dad, he was gone too.

—



Artist: The CMD Studios

Like it so far? Order your copy here— [PAPERBACK](#)—[HARDCOVER](#)—[KINDLE](#).

I started a Black Creator Spotlight weekly post on IG last year and came across Lost Children of Andromeda, which you have now had a taste of. The universe architect has graciously given us a chance to peer into his mind, so I give you

JASON MICHAEL PRIMROSE



Have you always been passionate about writing, and particularly writing Lost Children of Andromeda – or was that something that you discovered a love for more recently?

I have always, always been passionate about writing. I grew up reading books as a kid, and would you imagine my excitement when I found out I could make up my OWN? I started publishing books when I was 10. Granted, they were just through the school, but still, I was bringing stories to life. Dragon Wars was one of the first titles I penned (and illustrated.) Since that's grown into the Lost Children of Andromeda, you could say that I've always been passionate about this series and these characters.



There is a book called “The Andromeda Project” on Amazon that you explicitly told me not to read because 205Z was a retooling of the story. How different is the new book, and why the change?

It's too different for words. It's more than a retooling, I think. It's a complete reimagining of the Lost Children universe from its inception. So it's nothing like that first book, except that it features the same characters, but even they're different. The Andromeda Project was my first attempt at publishing my story. I made a lot of mistakes. It wasn't well-received, and I didn't feel confident about it. I learned from my mistakes and applied that new knowledge to 205Z. Think of it like a remastered album with some additional, really dope songs. You wouldn't go listen to the old thing, would you? Well, maybe.



As a sort of follow up to the previous question, have you ever outright given up on a project – spent time and energy and then just said “this isn’t going anywhere” and moved on to something else?

I have a bunch of unfinished stories and screenplays from other characters and fictional universes. I always end up saying this isn’t going anywhere because I can’t see the story as clearly as I see the stories from the Lost Children of Andromeda. The Lost Children of Andromeda is like a life partner. I’m committed to its completion, and loyal to those stories and characters.

What is the best and/or most challenging thing about publishing independently?

Best - the journey, learning, getting to experiment, creating without permission.

Most challenging - Money, resources, awareness/visibility.

You’ve got the new book, a podcast, you’ve even dropped an NFT! What is the next thing coming from you that people should be excited for?

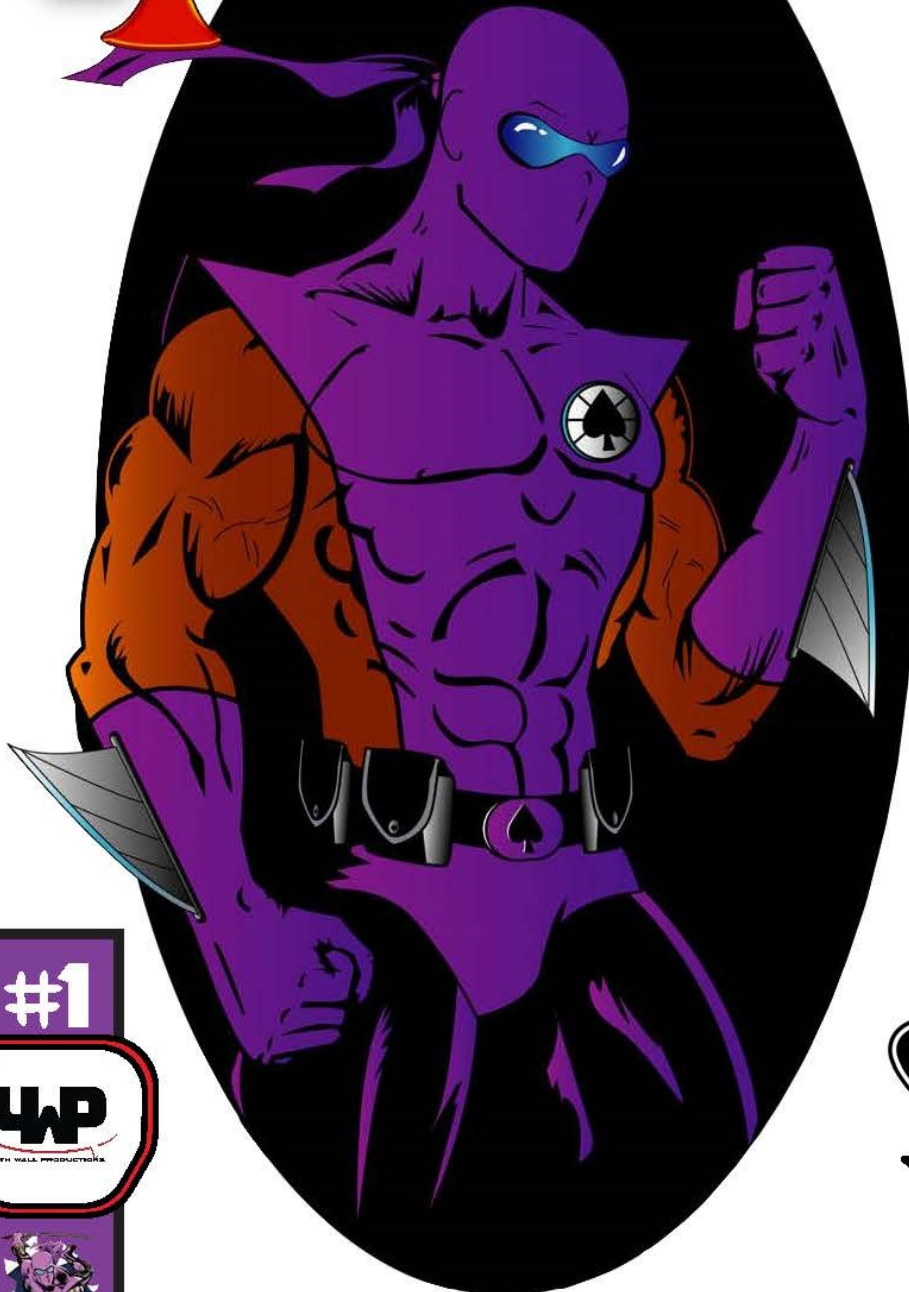
hmmmmmm lots of things cooking. An immersive experience, and of course, another novel. M

Well color me thoroughly intrigued! While we wait for future projects to be revealed, let’s all add 205Z: Time and Salvation to our respective reading lists! I’ve just started and I’m absolutely hooked!

Learn more [on the website](#) and get your copy of 205Z:Time and Salvation today— [PAPERBACK](#)—[HARDCOVER](#)—[KINDLE](#).



ACEBLADE



#1

WP

6TH WALL PRODUCTIONS



HOLLARS • QUICK • REMOT • KELLAR • CARDOSO



VIGILANTE COMPLEX
PART 1

WRITERS

DANNY J QUICK
CHRISTOPHER HOLLARS

PENCILS

VHON REMOT

INKS

MICHAEL W. KELLAR
SILAS DIXON

FLATS

RICHARD CARDOSO
ANTHONY CUIZON

COLORS

RICHARD CARDOSO

LETTERING

DANNY J QUICK

JIMBO! &
KO!
-2012-

ACEBLADE CREATED BY
CHRISTOPHER HOLLARS



THIS IS THE STORY OF ACEBLADE...
THE VEGAS VIGILANTE.

HE FIGHTS AGAINST VEGAS CITY'S
OVERWHELMING GREED AND HATRED.

AS A MAN HE COULD
HAVE BEEN AN EXAMPLE
TO THE PEOPLE OF HIS CITY...



AS ACEBLADE

HE WOULD BECOME
A BEACON OF LIGHT

PIERCING THROUGH THE
DARK CLOUD OF EVIL,
ENCIRCLING HIS HOME.

HE WOULD DO ANYTHING,
HE WOULD GIVE EVERYTHING,

TO RID VEGAS CITY
OF THAT EVIL...

IN DEATH
HE WOULD BEGIN
TO LIVE.

...EARLIER THAT NIGHT





AND FIGHTING OUT OF THE RED GATE!

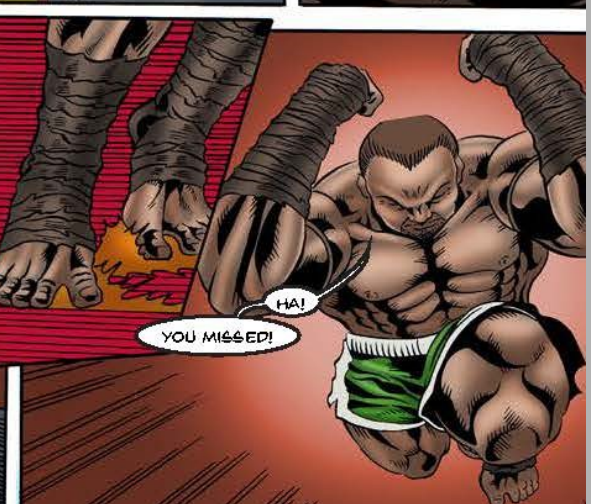
HE NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION!

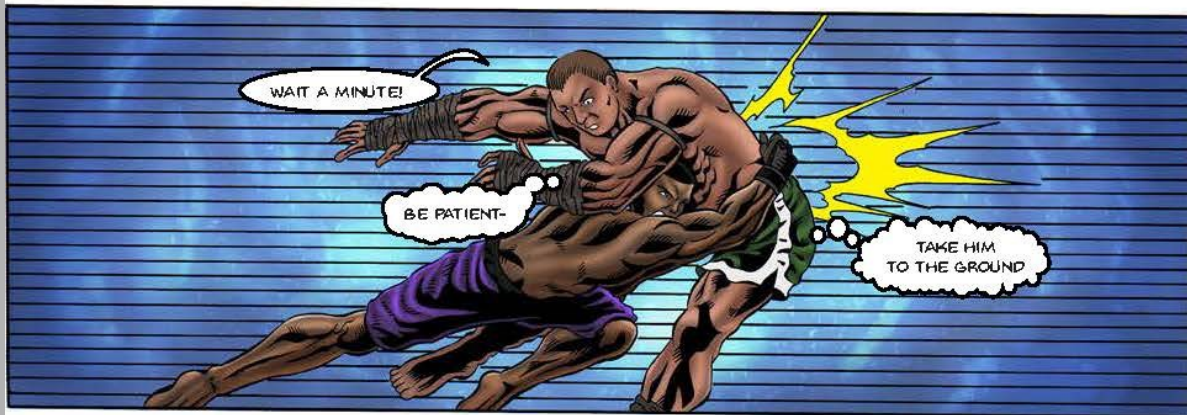
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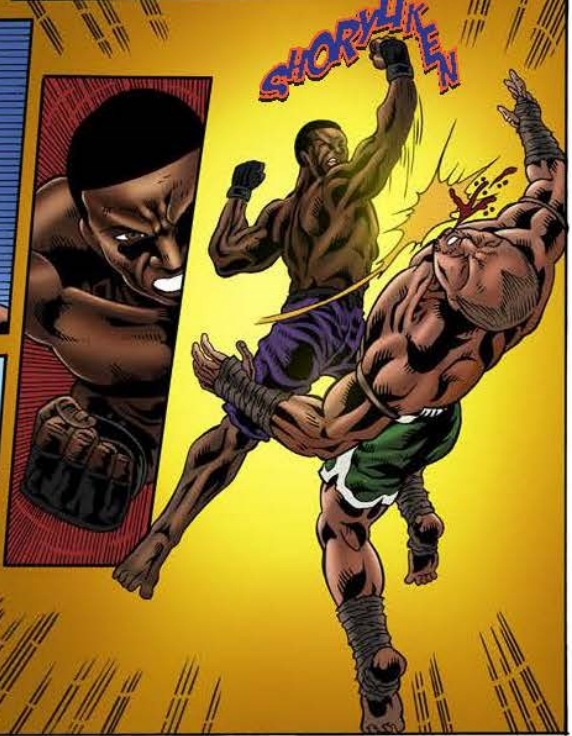
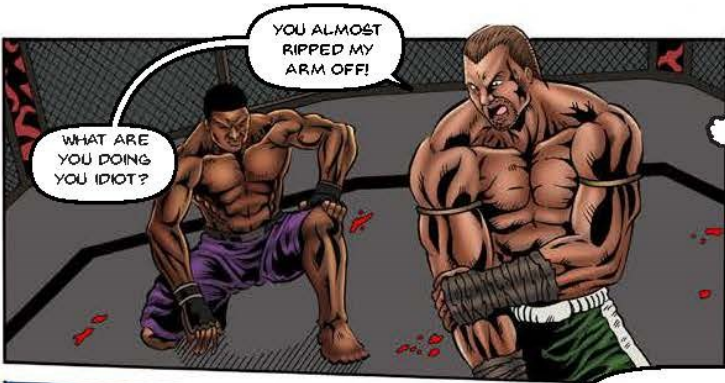


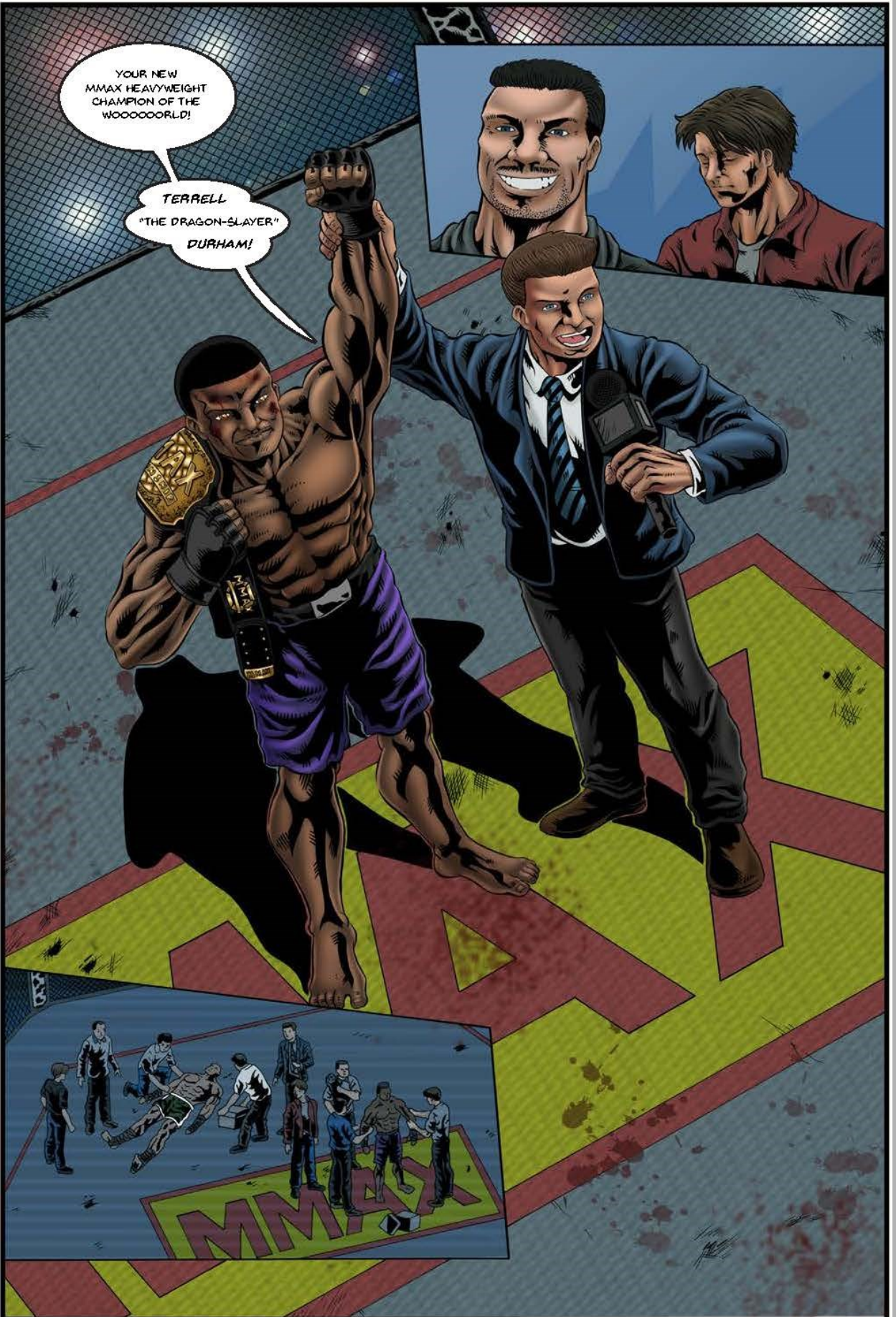
CHRIS "THE PROWLER" FOWLER











YOUR NEW
MMA HEAVYWEIGHT
CHAMPION OF THE
WOOOOOORLD!

TERRELL
"THE DRAGON-SLAYER"
DURHAM!





AFTER THE FIGHT...

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING! TAKING A PAYOFF FOR MY FIGHT!?

YOU KNOW YOU'RE FIRED RIGHT?

I'M SORRY... I NEEDED THE MONEY.

I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D WIN ANYWAYS.



WHAT?! I HAVEN'T LOST A FIGHT IN YEARS CHUCK!

YOU KNEW I COULD BEAT THIS DUDE!

THEY WERE FIXED TOO.



WELL... FIVE OF 'EM WERE...

I KNEW YOU COULD BEAT THOSE GUYS. I DIDN'T SEE ANY HARM IN TAKING THE SETUP.



YOU'RE SAYING FIVE FIGHTERS TOOK FALLS FOR ME TO GET THIS FIGHT?

WHO'S BEEN PAYING YOU?

THAT'S JUST STUPID.

YEAH.



I DUNNO REALLY- THE MONEY IS JUST THERE IN OUR BOOTH AT THE LOUNGE.

SORRY BLADE. I GOT GREEDY. I'LL GET THIS SORTED OUT.



LET HIM DEAL WITH THIS ON HIS OWN.

I GOTTA AT LEAST MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T GET HURT DOWN THERE.



HMPH. YOU GOT A BIG HEART CHAMP.

BUT YOU GOTTA PICK YOUR BATTLES.



HEY TERESA... DID YOU SEE THE FIGHT?

HAHA. YEAH, THANKS.



HEY, DON'T WAIT UP TONIGHT---

I'M GONNA BE COMING IN LATE.

IS THAT OKAY? ARE YOU OKAY?



NAH. NO PARTYING.

JUST FINISHING UP SOME WORK WITH CHUCK AND DENNY.

GET SOME SLEEP MARSHMALLOW-GOODNIGHT.



YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO PICK ON PREGNANT WOMEN.

YEAH... PROBABLY.

SHE'S GONNA BEAT YOU DOWN WHEN YOU GET HOME.



JUST GO HOME TERRELL.

WE'LL HANDLE THIS IN THE MORNING.

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING COACH.

BUT I GOTTA FIND OUT WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON.



WELL, BE CAREFUL KID.

I WILL.









HEY WAIT!

WHO THA-

BANG!

HEY PUNK!

BANG!

OOPH!



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CHUCK?!



I THINK-



OH NO!



I'VE GOT YOU-

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE ALIVE.

I'M GONNA

PASS OUT AGAIN



HI! MY NAME IS ROOSTA

I'LL BE YOUR EXECUTIONER TONIGHT! HA HA!



WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO TERRELL?



I'M WORKING ON IT!



ISN'T THIS FAR ENOUGH?



HOW DEEP IN THE DESERT DO WE HAVE TO GO?



OH! IT MUST BE PAST STREET'S BEDTIME



YOU JUST MAKE SURE THE BOSS' STUFF IS RIGHT THIS TIME!



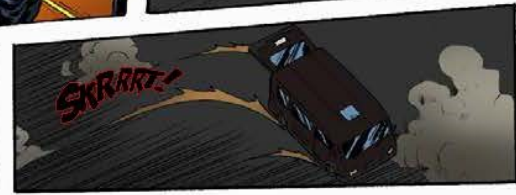
THIS SHOULD BE FAR ENOUGH DOMINOE.

THERE'S NOBODY OUT HERE THIS LATE.



HEY HEY HEY!







TO BE CONTINUED...

Like it?

Buy Volume 1 now on the [4th Wall Productions Website!](#)

I have admittedly spent an obscene amount of time on TikTok. However the benefit of that has been that I've been exposed to incredible talent like the writer of the very story you just read,



DANNY J QUICK



Have you always been passionate about making comics, or is that something that grew out of another pursuit?

I've always loved art and storytelling. I didn't even DREAM of making comics until I was older though. That spark came from the first time I ever went to a comic book convention. Meeting the actual creators of comics opened my mind up to the reality that there were actual PEOPLE making these books. And if they could do it, why couldn't I?



What is the driving force behind your comics? Are you looking to teach, entertain, a bit of both?

Always both. I don't think you can really teach (especially young people) without a bit of entertainment. I always learned best from my teachers that could keep my attention and the best way to do that was to be funny or quirky.



Do you have any influences and if so who are they and why?

My kids really. And not in the normal mushy way... I mean, I want to make them proud, but watching them always influences me to try new things. They were the reason I tried tiktok, and if I would have listened to them earlier, I would have been able to catch the Twitch wave too. I think it's important to think about how we tell our stories. joining the past with comics, and the future with new technologies and platforms is really the only way we can keep it alive.



What is the best/most challenging thing about publishing independently?

It's used to be logistics. I absolutely hated the process of getting my books from my hands to other peoples. I always enjoyed the selling part, but doing it

online is a whole other beast. Getting someone to trust you enough to purchase your product and then keeping that trust by making sure it's great quality and that it gets to them in a timely manner is hard.



Is there a project that you haven't talked about or worked on that you intend to make?

Several of them. I have a book that I want to make with my wife about an ancient race of humans coming back to earth in search of help for their dying planet. It's called Queen Zadye. We also have a couple of short films we have written, "Aceblade CREAM" and "To Kill a Stranger" but we don't have the expertise to make those... yet.

Now that you've got a little insight into the mind of the creator, check out the website to catch up on Aceblade and check out Lumberjax, King Supreme, and more!



GALLERY



Yeah that's quite an image to turn the page to, isn't it? I wanted to start this gallery feature with an incredible example of the talents of

MAC SMITH

I talked about Scurry last issue, but I wanted to specifically spotlight Mac's art. As you read Scurry, you get a real sense of scale and feel like you're between blades of grass right alongside Wix, Pict, and all the rest. I've got a couple more below and on the next page but check out www.mac-smith.com for more beautiful art.

If you're digging Scurry, buy it at www.easypreyentertainment.com or via these Amazon links:

[Book 1 Physical](#)—[Book 2 Physical](#)—[Book 3 Physical](#)







Written by Dalibor Zujovic
Edited by Celeste A. Short

CHAPTER 3

November 14, 2011

The feel of the clothes is foreign, almost as much as the fluorescent lighting. Nearly six months in captivity, Brian's body has to re-adjust to the modern world. The quiet hum of the elevator allows him a few minutes to think about his next steps. It's been months since he touched down in Rio, but he's still got a job to do. "Once I have the information, I'll fly back and check in with the General. Hopefully I can talk him into giving me a few days to breathe free air before sending me out on another job." Brian's thoughts are interrupted by the pleasant ding of the elevator doors opening to reveal a bright mezzanine with a direct view of the Catedral Metropolitana de São Sebastião. He has his bearings now. "The Ventura building. Incredible. Whoever Renee's boss is clearly has connections at the top levels. To have built that dungeon inside the Ventura building without anyone knowing or doing something about it..." He lets his thoughts trail as he notices Renee outside in his white suit waiting intently.

Brian walks out of the double metal-framed glass doors, and Renee opens the passenger door of a black Bentley Continental GT. Thinking he may be able to ditch Renee, Brian notices two black SUVs waiting a respectable distance behind the Bentley and abandons that idea.

"Change of plans, Mr. Martin. While you were getting ready, my people on the street informed me that your contact had taken a late lunch by the pier."

"I could use the sun." Brian sits down in the luxurious leather seat, as Renee quickly comes around the front of the car to enter the driver's side.

"I know this is a bit ostentatious, but I so rarely get to drive my own car. We'll be there in roughly 10 minutes." Renee hits the gas and Brian's head slams back against the well-cushioned headrest. "The misconception with the Bentley brand is that it is a luxury vehicle rich people get in order to show off their wealth. As you can see here, that is not the only benefit. They announced this at the beginning of the year in Frankfurt where I fell in love with the design. The twin-turbo W12 motor is an enormous rush of adrenaline and any excuse I have, I will 'punch it' as they say in the movies."

"I'm not a car guy. Computers are more my speed." Brian is unimpressed and provides the minimum amount of conversational information while absorbing everything being provided. Renee is a thrill-seeker and travels a lot. Frankfurt in January for the International Motor Show, and he's been out of Brazil for the last five months. Brian keeps a tab of any potentially useful information he encounters.

As they take the on-ramp to get to the pier, Brian laments the city planning aloud. "A city of 16+ million and the only direct route to the pier is by foot. It's a shame that we have to get on to a highway, and back off to essentially get across the street."

"But without the highway, how could I enjoy myself?" Renee presses the accelerator to the floor with a big grin, and even Brian smiles. He takes note in the rear-view mirror that the SUVs are keeping pace behind them. This is clearly not their first drive with Renee.

"I'll admit it's not the worst sensation." Brian is impressed by the fact that he doesn't have to yell at nearly 200kph. "Luxury does have its benefits," he thinks.

After a U-turn and an off-ramp they pull into private parking. Renee waves to the guards and they open the gate to allow access. Brian steps out of the car as soon as it's parked. He notices two other black SUVs parked in the lot. "Thanks for the ride. I'll find my own way from here." Brian waves to Renee seeing that he was getting out of the car.

"One more thing, Mr. Martin. As our unfortunate misunderstanding has caused you to miss your flight back, we've arranged your ticket back to Washington D.C. First class. You may check in to the airport at any time, they will get you on the first available flight."

Brian takes the news in stride, as he has more pressing matters. His original return ticket was for D.C., so there's no concern about them knowing anything they shouldn't. "That is appreciated. Thanks again for the ride."

"It has been a pleasure. Once again our apologies for the mix-up." Renee shakes his hand with a genuine smile.

As Brian walks away he thinks "This man is insane. He actually thinks this entire ordeal hasn't been anything more than a 'whoopsie.' I lost months because of them! If I was not behind on my task, I'd make something out of this, but for now I must press on."

Entering the restaurant, he spots his informant sitting at a table alone, looking out at the Marina da Glória. Walking towards the individual, he is a bit surprised to see a second drink.

"Here with someone, or is that for me, Sal?"

Sal doesn't turn around but answers. "It's for you. Am I fucking new? You didn't think I'd notice Renee's goons trailing me all day? This is a bit over the top, Brian. I thought you just needed information. Plus you're almost six goddamn months late."

Brian sits down at the table and takes a sip of the drink. "Tequila sunrise. You know me well."

"You were my trainee at the Agency, I better. What the fuck are these sheanigans?"

"My apologies for the tardiness. I've been - detained - by Renee's people since I got here almost six months ago. Case of 'mistaken identity' they say. They offered me a shower, shave, and clean clothes, and got me to you. I didn't even know where I was. Looked like -"

"-a dungeon, but you were on the top floor of the Ventura building." Sal looks at him for the first time directly. "I heard rumors but I didn't think they'd actually done it. Fucking psychopath."

Brian takes stock of his old friend. Buzz-cut hair, probably because of the slight patch of gray coming in on the left side. Sal's face is showing wrinkles appropriate for a 43-year-old. Dressed in loose bright blue shorts and a white linen shirt. "Sal, you look good. Brazil treating my best gal well?"

Sal slaps Brian. "Fuck yourself with that 'best gal' shit."

Brian rubs his cheek, knowing he deserved the hit. "Seriously, though. How has it been here? I know Brazil's not the most tolerant place."

"I manage. I don't talk to anyone long enough for them to get personal, and those who take interest either treat me with respect or they get their ass beat. I'm non-binary, not helpless."

"Anyone keeping you warm at night?" Brian asks before he even realizes the question is coming out.

"Once in a while I bring home someone from the bar, but it's rare. I'm thinking about heading back to the States to actually look for someone."

Brian's eyes open wide. "Aren't you concerned about the Agency? You did kind of bail on them."

“Of course I did. I was sick of having to put on the girly act to get any respect. Want to know a fun fact? They repealed Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. Final provisions just went through a couple months ago.”

“Oh shit. That’s great!” Brian clinks his glass against Sal’s.

“Well it’s not like I’m going to just go get my job back. The Agency takes job abandonment a little more seriously than your typical employer. Luckily they’ve been looking for Sally Norman, not Sal White.” Brian spits out his drink as he bursts into laughter.

“White? Really?”

“Couldn’t think of anything else. Not that it matters. I can change it any time. It’s surprisingly easy to get fake documents here.” Sal hands Brian a manilla folder. “Speaking of documents.”

Brian opens the folder and sees a heavily redacted military profile of a Black man with a military fade haircut. All the details are redacted. Flipping forward, he finds five other identical profiles. Behind those, there is a single page analysis. “This is it?”

“This is everything I could find officially. Now you know me, I don’t shy away from unofficial sources. That’s where this comes in.” Sal hands Brian another folder. This one is filled with various Congressional requisition forms, committee minutes, budget plans, and what looks like hundreds of pages of other documents. “This is the juicy stuff. The long and short of it is that in the early 90s, an idea was concocted to augment US soldiers to make them more efficient and more capable in the field. The proposal, page 24 by the way, was started from Schwarzkopf’s office believe it or not. No evidence if he knew about it, but it was on his letterhead. It made its way through various proposals and votes and kept winding up in those six-inch-thick bills up for vote until it eventually passed. The form it finally took was a “Renewable Energy Research” investment, which eventually got the money where it needed to go. There appears to be a dusty building sitting empty on federally-owned ground in Georgia, just outside of a small town named Abbeville. You haven’t heard of it, trust me. The money that was supposed to be going there was going to fund a program that as far as I can find has no name.”

Sal pauses and looks at Brian. Brian just asks “That’s it?”

With a smile, Sal continues. “Just a dramatic pause. Here’s where the *really juicy stuff comes in. It’s also where the most speculation is happening, so take it with a grain of salt. I’ve pieced this part from the last 100 pages you have. Incomplete redactions, a word here, a name there. This program seems to have been utilizing technology and magic to somehow bind, or maybe merge two soldiers together. Some sort of shared pool of energy or strength.*”

Brian interjects - “Like fucking *Voltron?*”

“Hard to say.”

“Wait, you said technology *and magic? How do parlor tricks come into play?*”

“Like I said, this is very speculative. As for magic, while the majority of people believe in the little bit of magic they see, there is more to it. While Shamans are still more myth than fact, they do exist. Remember that Mindfreak guy? Could walk through walls? Where do you think he went?”

Brain’s face contorts into confusion. “Obscurity? What’s that got to do with this?”

“Patience, young one. In some circles that I find myself in, there is talk that when a theatrical magician reaches a certain level of capabilities, they’re secretly invited to join an advanced training program in the Nevada Desert. The parlor tricks are honed, the knife sharpened as it were, and if they’re good - like really good - they become Shamans. Truly magically adept individuals. We’re talking real magic. Merlin, Jericho Drumm, John-fucking-Constantine *mag-ic.*” *Brian’s bewilderment urges Sal to continue. “If the rumors are true, there are fewer than 50*

of these people alive. But what's more important about that number, is that before 1992, there were over 100. They call it 'The Culling.' Theories vary from a ritual gone bad to mass suicide, but the timeline matches conspicuously to the dates on those forms. I think the government 'recruited' these people to use for this nameless program to make these enhanced soldiers."

"Fuck me. This is insane. So what happened from there? That was almost 20 years ago."

"When you create a new weapon, what do you have to do?"

In unison, they say "You have to test it."

"Since there was only one major conflict in the early 90s, the program sent in their early trials into the Balkans. Why do you think the legend of Bill Clinton is so big in Bosnia? They saw Americans killing Serbian chetniks and figured America sent reinforcements. Of course good ol' Bill was too busy getting his dick wet to even have a single fucking clue about any military ops, let alone secret ones, but he was happy to take the credit. After that there's less details, but I picked up further evidence of the program after Bush was elected. With the budget being such a big platform of his, everyone started poking around to find ways to cut spending. The Budget committee found the "Renewable Energy Research" money and eventually traced it to its destination. I've found a few documents showing that some retired military men were hired on as consultants to the military at exorbitant salaries, which in turn seem to have gone to further fund this program. When 9-11 happened, the - possibly only - team the program had was sent to the Middle East. When the Bin-Laden video was released the next day, a kill order was issued. There's a reason the military proper couldn't find him for ages."

"But they just killed him in May." Brian's skepticism is growing.

"Plant. They needed a win before next year's elections. Pakistan didn't know he was down the street? How much do you believe in that? No, that I can tell you from specific documents that I've seen with my own eyes, was a plant. A random man who was hired, made to look like Bin-Laden, and whose family will be living a very comfortable life in America as the fastest-naturalized citizens in history. The evidence here points to the program ending Bin-Laden before end of business on Friday, US time. This seems to have been a demonstration of the program's capabilities, but since the US was officially considering broad military action, and NATO enacted Article 5 on Thursday, Friday was too late. The now-infamous 'War on Terror' was under way. A few attempts were made to annex this program to the military, and even to the Agency at one point, but they all failed. As old white men do, the main guy behind these attempts croaked. Heart attack. Only a few people knew about the program, and aides don't get paid enough to make anything happen, so it pretty much died. The last mention of any of this was in 2007. One of the former aides tried to sell the story of the secret assassination of Osama Bin-Laden but not even the Enquirer would bite. They labeled it too far fetched. The fucking Enquirer!" Sal takes a drink.

"Wait, if that's the last piece of information, what do I have to deliver besides a dead end?"

Sal looks at Brian from their drink. "Oh did I skip that? It is a lot of information. Remember I said that they traced the money? They traced it to Alaska. A facility deep in the woods outside of Anchorage on protected ground. Nobody would build on it or look around too hard. Satellite photos don't show much, but maybe an in-person visit could give you something to go on."

As Brian locks the folders in his briefcase, he can't hold back his excitement. "That's definitely something to go on. This is incredible work, Sal. I could kiss you."

"I just might let you." Sal raises an eyebrow with a smirk.

Brain smiles. "I mean I do have an open-ended ticket. First class. Free of charge."

"Oooh you talk dirty! Come on, my spot's docked right down here." Sal grabs Brian by the hand and leads him to a houseboat, the pair start kissing and undressing one another as they close the door behind them.

November 15, 2011

As the sun pushes its way through the blinds, Brian wakes up with his arm around Sal, whose eyes are already open. "Still an early riser, eh?"

"Got into the habit at the Agency and haven't kicked it since. But down here it helps. I get to enjoy the most out of every sunny day." Sal turns and kisses Brian. "Thanks for last night. Three months never feels like a long time until I get some again."

"I guess we both needed it. You were incredible"

"You did alright. You're out of practice though. Six months in a prison with nothing but Righty and Lefty, you were bound to be rusty."

"Nope. Six months of nothing. I couldn't be sure I wasn't being recorded, so I didn't want to give anyone any ammunition. Even tucked when I took showers."

"Holy shit, how did you survive? I couldn't do six months without an orgasm." Sal sits up, letting the blanket fall off their body.

Brian laughs. "Well you helped me even up the average last night. I didn't think you could get that last one out of me, but you are, as with all things, incredible."

"Kind words from the self-proclaimed 'Master of Sexpionage' at the Agency."

"Holy shit that was one mission and those files are gone. I destroyed them myself!" Brian's cheeks redden.

"Oh nothing to be ashamed of. It was your first year. I eavesdropped on most of your early cases. I keep tabs on people I care about."

Brian stands up and kisses Sal. "Are you getting soft on me?"

"Must be old age." Sal kisses Brian once more, and pulls away to slip on a light yellow linen shirt. "What's the plan with that information?"

As Brian puts on his pants, he looks up, he replies "I've got to check in with the General, he might have me go to Alaska to dig around. I was thinking I'd need a few days of free air, but after last night I feel renewed and ready to go. Have I mentioned you're incredible?"

"Keep sweet-talking me, I like it." Sal smiles, throwing Brian his shirt.

Brian slips on his shirt and looks at Sal intently. "Happily. You're brilliant, beautiful, and just the best in every way. And you have the perfect lips for kissing." He kisses Sal deeply, with more emotion than either were expecting. Neither of them pulls away though. They go with it, and for countless seconds they share more with each other than they had in the whole ten years they'd known one another.

The kiss finally ends, and Brian and Sal look at one another. Sal is the first to speak. "Wow. That was...wow."

"Yea. Yes it was. What do we do now?" Brian starts to sit.

Sal grabs him by the arm and ushers him towards the door. "We keep that moment and not overthink it. You have a job to do. Get on deck, I'll take you across the Marina to the Airport."

"Of course, and you have a life here. Absolutely right." Brian picks up his briefcase and steps out on the deck.

The ride across the water is brief and quiet. Sal navigates to a private pier for what appears to be a car rental agency. "Friend of mine owns the place and lets me dock here when needed.

They don't particularly like me at the Airport though, so you're on your own from here."

Brian comes in for a hug and kisses Sal on the cheek. "If you do make it to the States, you know how to find me. Maybe we can talk more about that kiss."

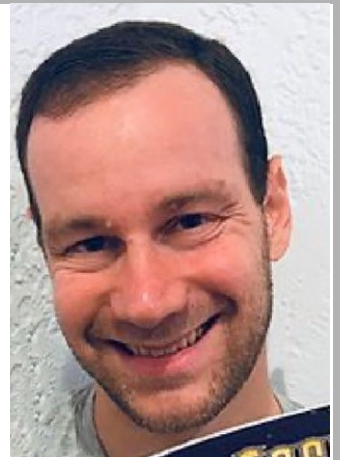
Sal looks up at Brian, who stands just six inches taller, and gives him a peck on the lips. "I might do that. Get going. I put a burner number in those files. If you need anything, call me."

"I will." Brian steps onto the pier and walks up the metal stairs and heads across the street to the airport gate.

He finds that Renee was true to his word and his name is on a First Class standby ticket, with a flight to D.C. leaving in two hours. He should be in the US by lunch time.

To Be Continued

Conventions (remember those?) are a great place to meet indie creators, and I had the pleasure of meeting this one at C2E2, where he pitched me one of his books. He's made a bunch more since, and most recently completed a Kickstarter campaign, and is about to launch another one! I tell ya, we should all be as busy creating as



FRANK MARTIN



What is the driving force behind your writing? Are you looking primarily to entertain, or teach the reader a lesson?

I would say it's a combination of factors. Primarily I write for me. Because my mind is packed with stories and characters and if I don't get them down on paper it just drives me crazy. I also like to write because it leaves behind a little bit of a legacy. Something for my kids to look to and say, "hey. My dad did that." As far as entertainment vs. teaching...depends on the project! Sometimes I just want to have fun with something and be stupid or silly or scary or whatever. And sometimes I genuinely have something to say. Sometimes I do both at the same time.

Do you have any influences and if so who are they and why?

This is always a weird question for me. Whenever I think of specific influences I never look at someone and go "they INFLUENCED me." But yeah. Obviously people have without me realizing it. I would say a huge influence in my work has been *Are You Afraid of the Dark*. I watched that show religiously growing up and it's just so wide spanning in its stories. Fantasy. Sci-fi. Horror. Comedy. It has a bit of everything...just like my stuff.



What's a project you've given up on, and will you ever go back to it to finish?

I never say never for anything. There's a couple things I started and then abandoned for a bunch of different reasons. Either the story wasn't working or time commitments or collaborators dropped out. I will bring up one story I started about a *Modern Family*-like take on

the Greek gods. It was a cool premise/concept, but I never had an actual plot. So I dropped it. Maybe one day though.



You previously published through a now-defunct indie publisher – what has changed since going independent again?

I was never truly independent before. I always looked for a publisher to put my work out as I didn't want the responsibility of releasing stuff. That has changed tremendously for me and for the better. I feel so much more in control of both my career and my work. Yes. It is a lot and the responsibility is heavy, but it's also freeing. And, ironically, has gotten me more interest from publishers. So I try to balance both now.

When you begin work on a story, are you seeing the final product and format (comic, short story, novel, etc) in your head and just working to get there, or do you approach it in more of a free-form workflow and whenever it's done it's done?

I'm a planner. I need to know everything ahead of time. What somethings gonna look like, how it will be delivered, where it will be available, etc. Sometimes I write not knowing how or when something will be used. Especially in the early stages of story development. But for the most part, once something is being actively produced, I always have an endgame for it in mind.

Now that you've got an insight to the creator, check out the first chapter of Polar Paradox!

Turn the page already, what are you waiting for?

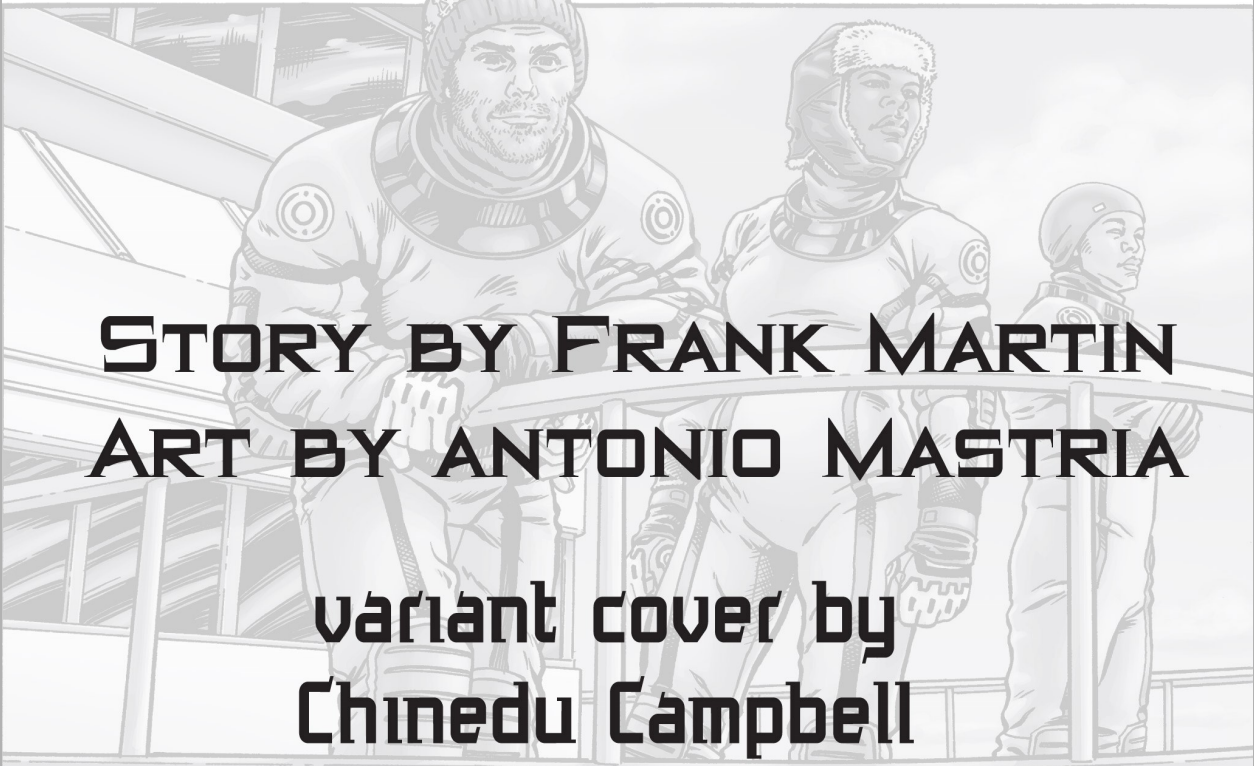
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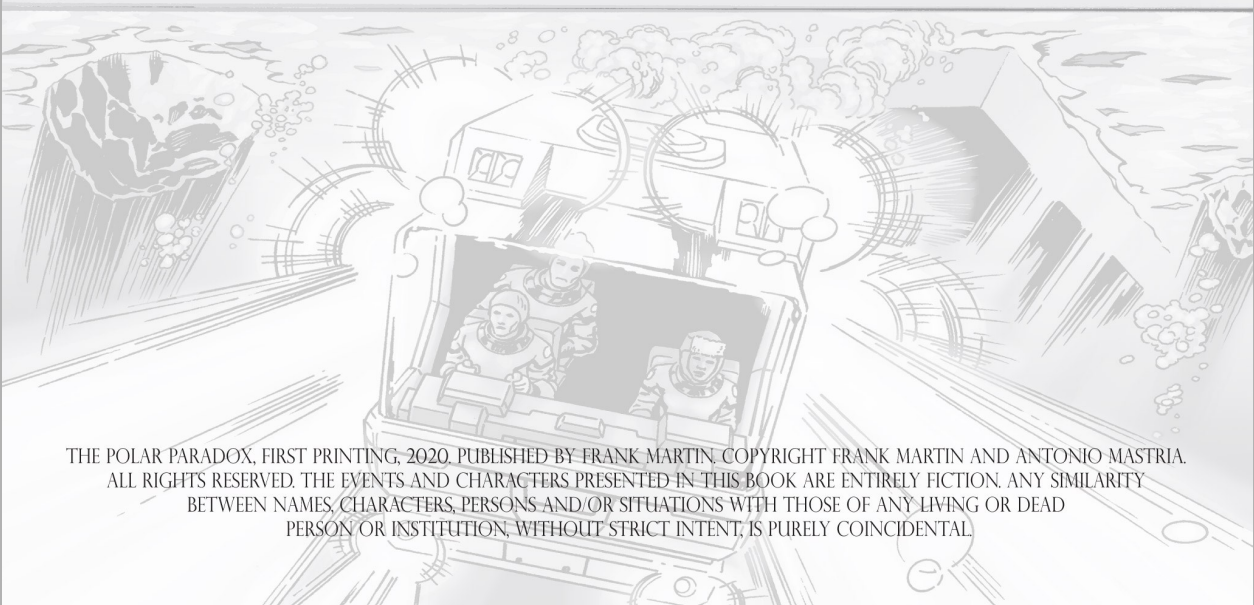
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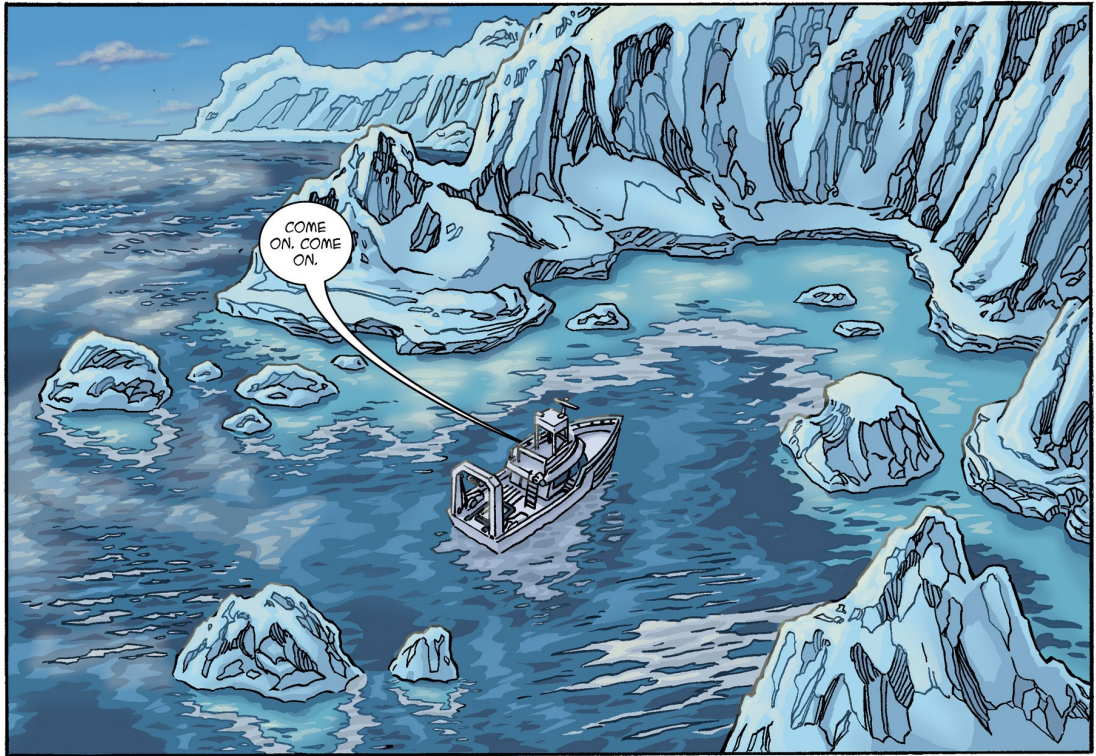
PART 1 OF 2



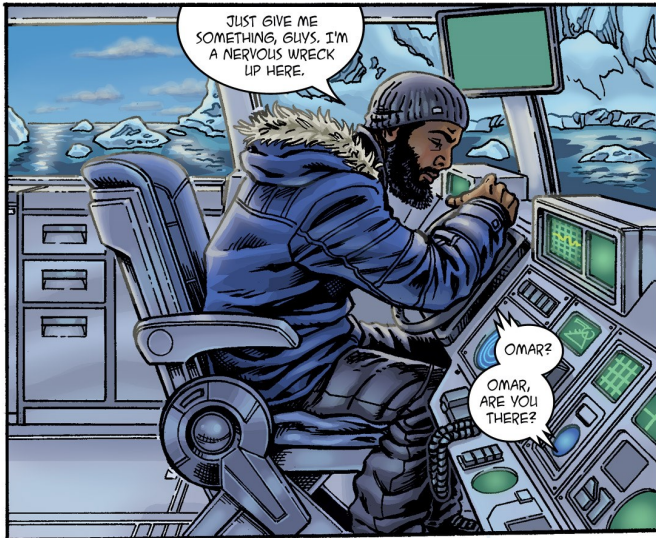
STORY BY FRANK MARTIN
ART BY ANTONIO MASTRIA
variant cover by
Chinedu Campbell



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COME ON. COME ON.



JUST GIVE ME SOMETHING, GUYS. I'M A NERVOUS WRECK UP HERE.

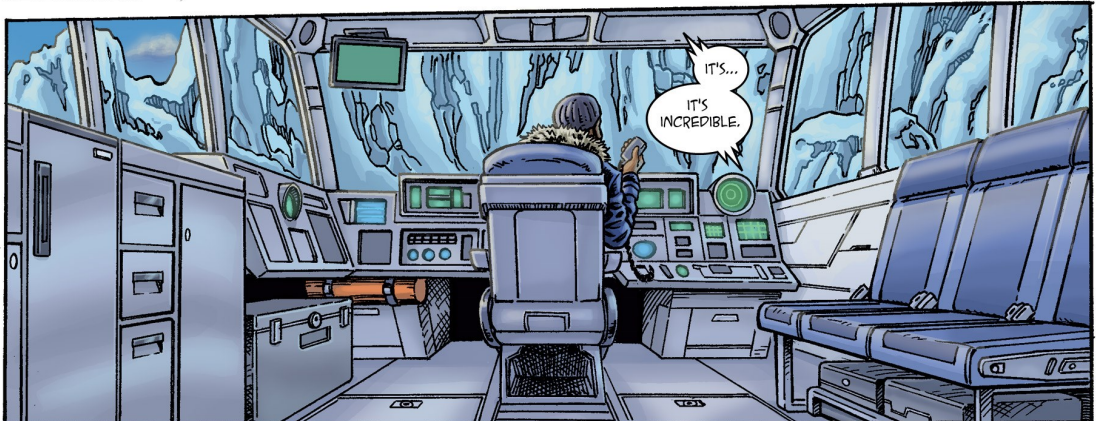
OMAR?

OMAR, ARE YOU THERE?

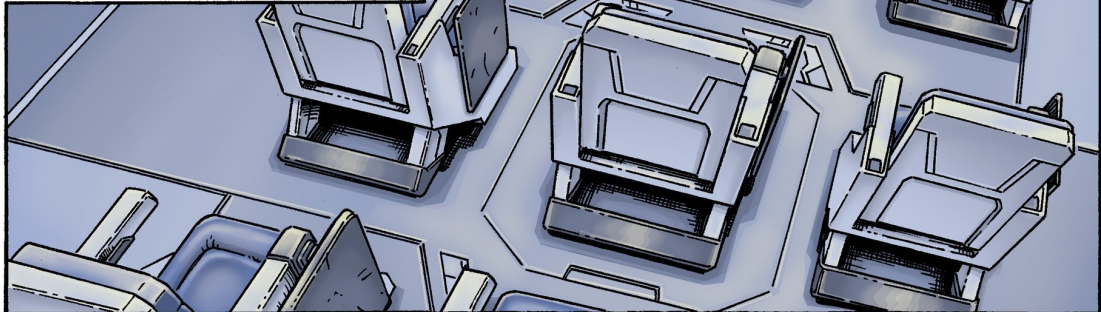
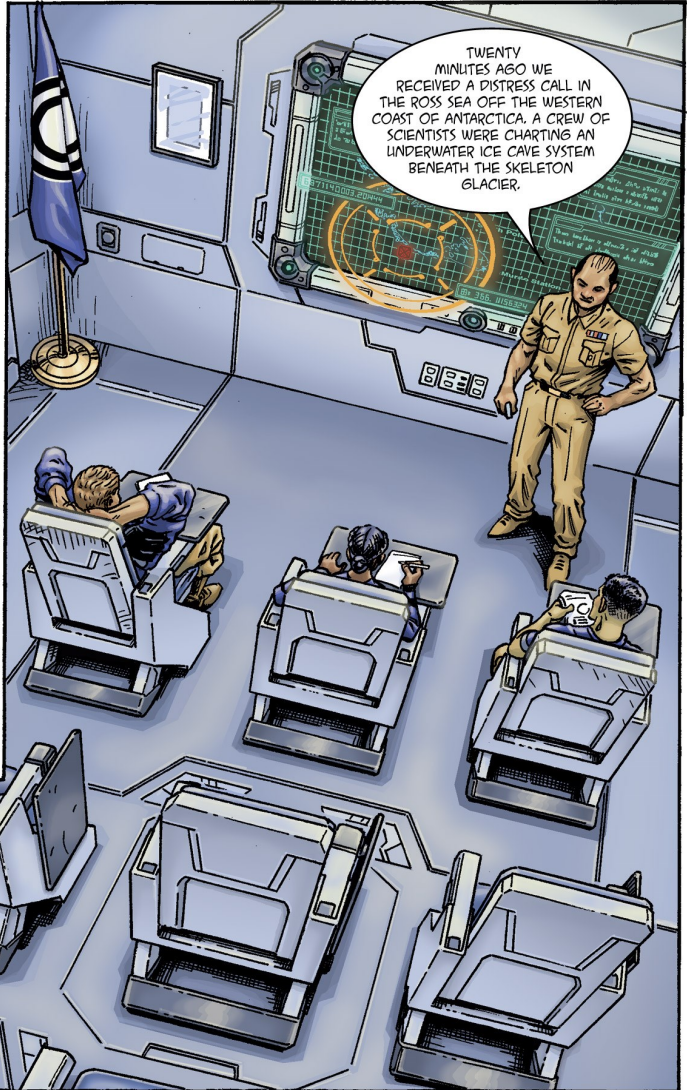
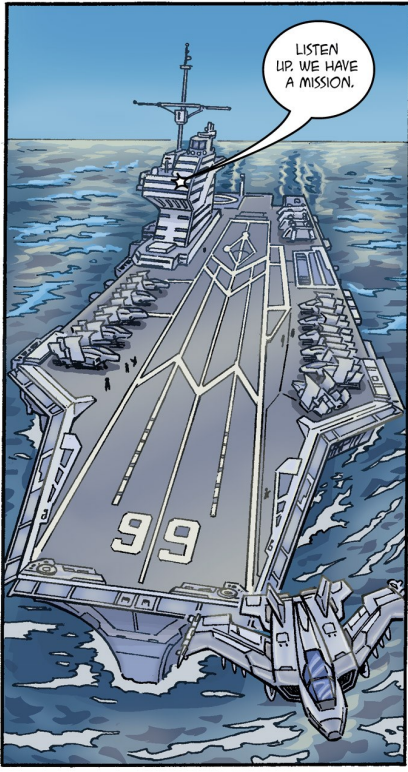


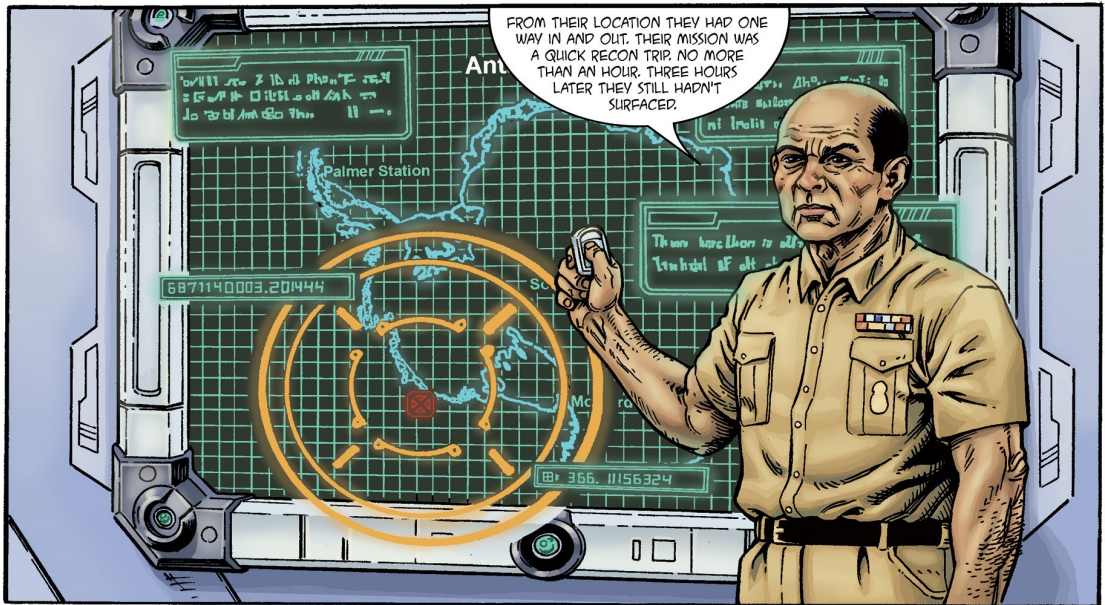
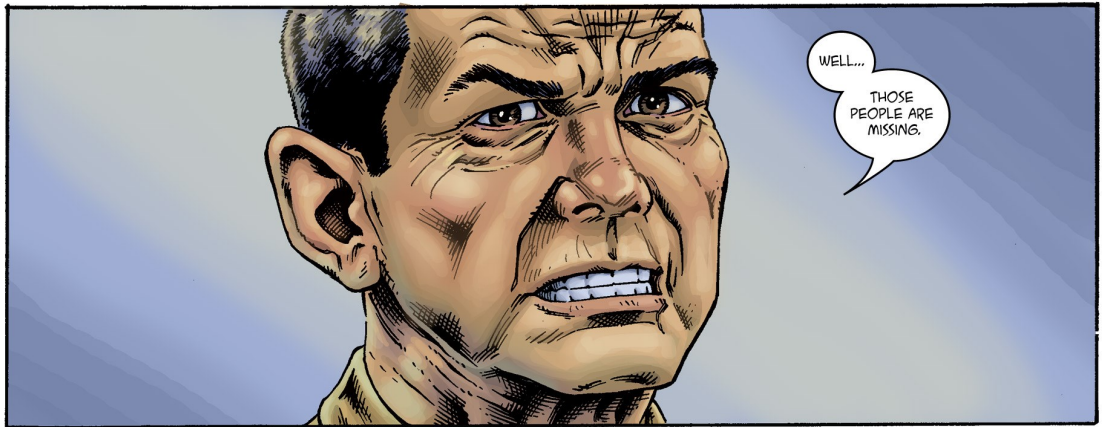
WANDA, I'M HERE. THANK, GOD. I WAS SO WORRIED. WHERE ARE YOU?

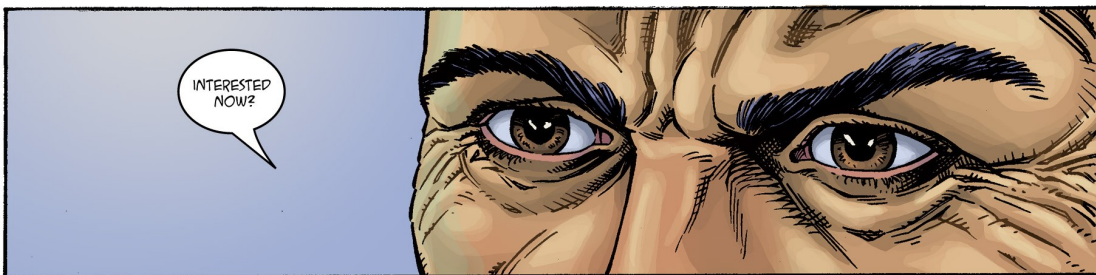
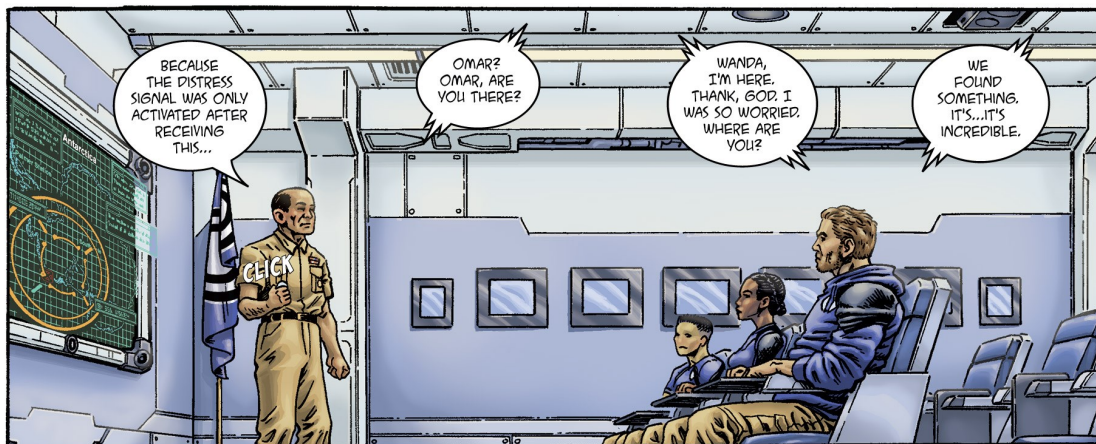
WE FOUND SOMETHING, OMAR.



IT'S...
IT'S INCREDIBLE.



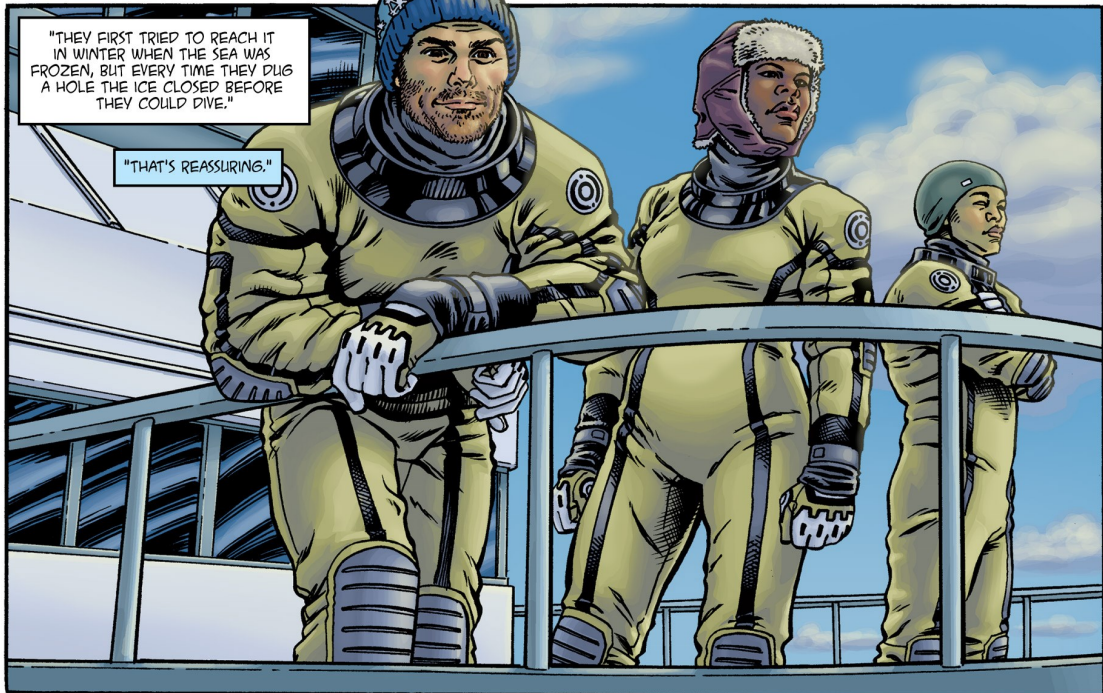






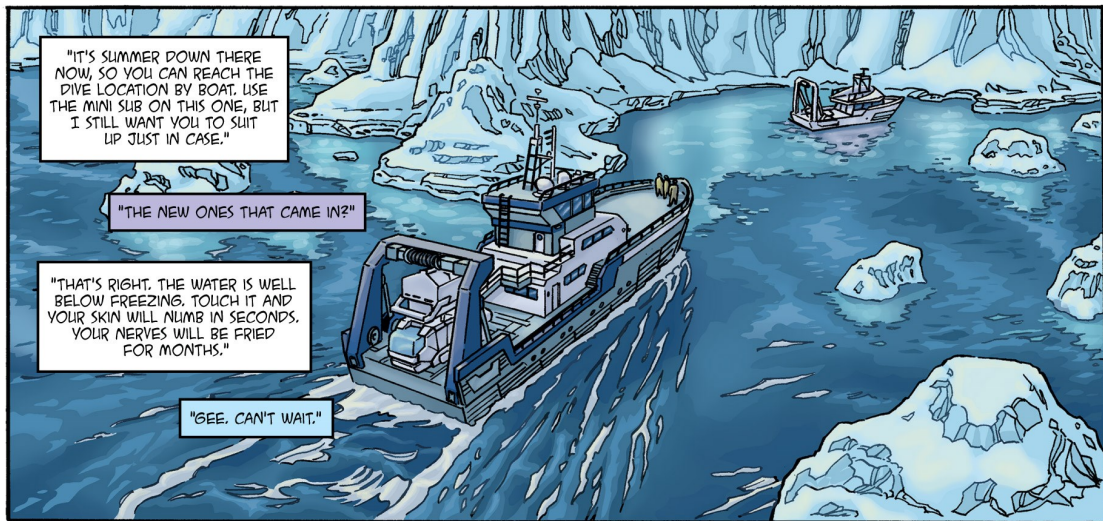
"DO WE HAVE ANY INFORMATION ON WHAT THEY WERE DIVING INTO?"

"FROM WHAT I'VE BEEN TOLD THE CAVE SYSTEM GOES DEEPER THAN ANY PERSON HAS EVER BEEN TO IN ANTARCTIC WATERS. WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY COULD'VE FOUND DOWN THERE."



"THEY FIRST TRIED TO REACH IT IN WINTER WHEN THE SEA WAS FROZEN, BUT EVERY TIME THEY DUG A HOLE THE ICE CLOSED BEFORE THEY COULD DIVE."

"THAT'S REASSURING."

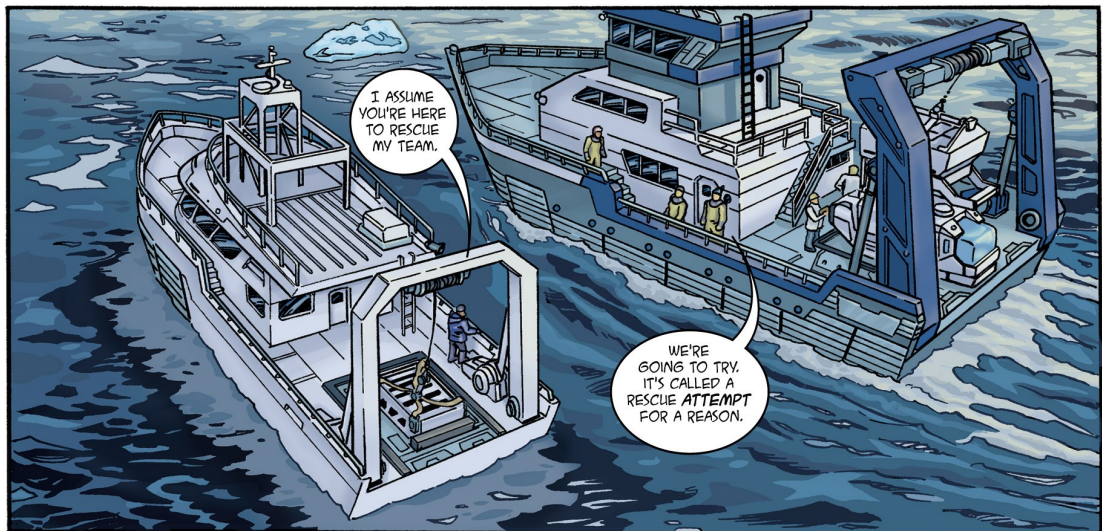
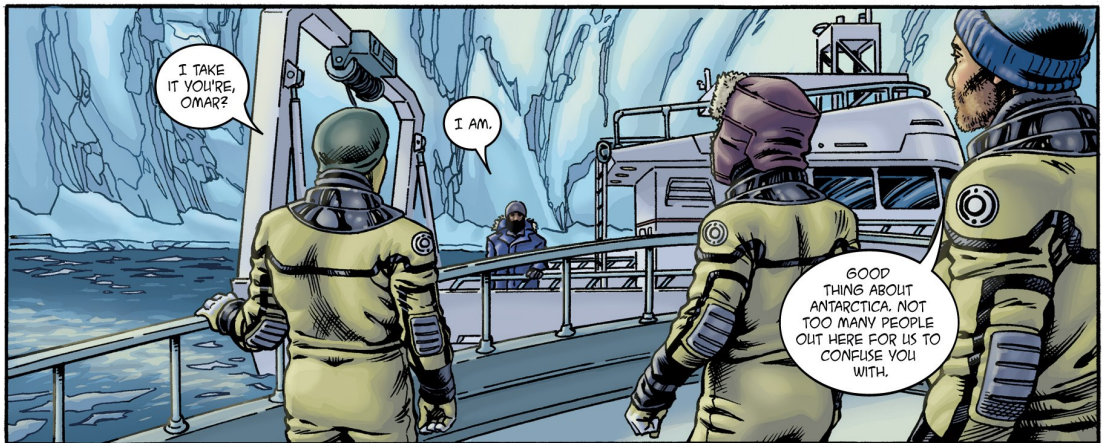


"IT'S SUMMER DOWN THERE NOW, SO YOU CAN REACH THE DIVE LOCATION BY BOAT. USE THE MINI SUB ON THIS ONE, BUT I STILL WANT YOU TO SUIT UP JUST IN CASE."

"THE NEW ONES THAT CAME IN?"

"THAT'S RIGHT. THE WATER IS WELL BELOW FREEZING. TOUCH IT AND YOUR SKIN WILL NUMB IN SECONDS. YOUR NERVES WILL BE FRIED FOR MONTHS."

"GEE. CAN'T WAIT."





WHAT ABOUT ANIMALS? ANY SEA LIFE WE SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT?

NOT A CLUE. IT'S AN ISOLATED WORLD DOWN THERE. WHO KNOWS WHAT KIND PATHS OF EVOLUTION CREATURES MIGHT'VE TAKEN.



WELL, I'M NOT TOO WORRIED, AS LONG AS WE'RE IN THIS BAD BOY, NOTHING CAN STOP US.

YOU'RE GOING DOWN IN THAT THING?

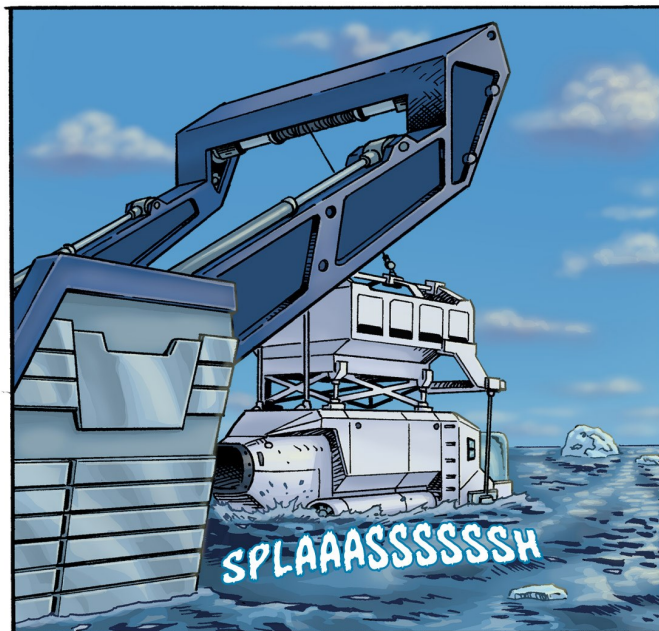
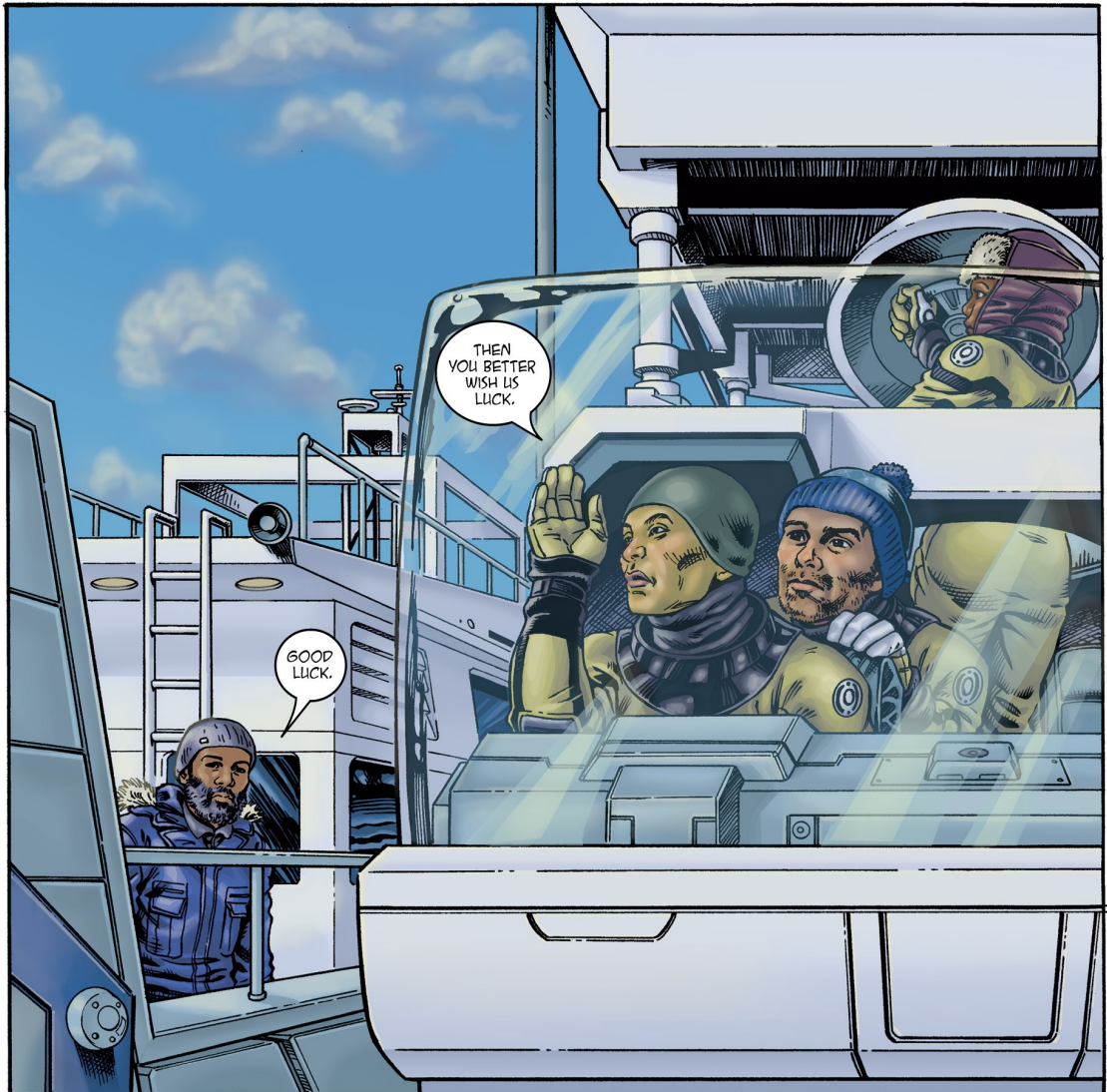


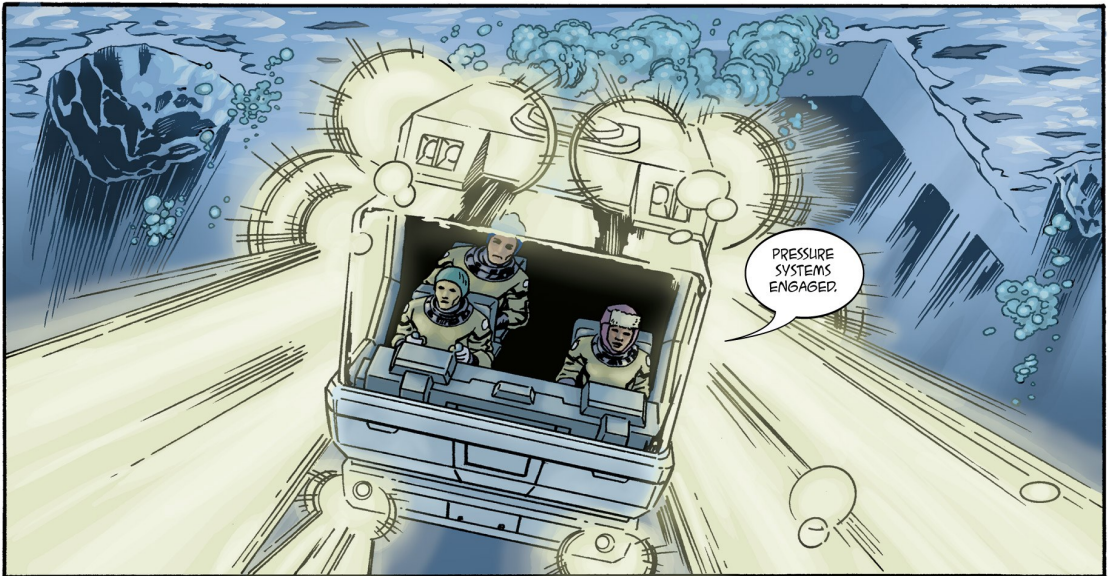
THAT WE ARE.

THIS MINI SUB IS LIKE AN UNDER-WATER TANK. IF YOUR TEAM IS STILL DOWN THERE THEN THIS IS HOW WE GET TO THEM.

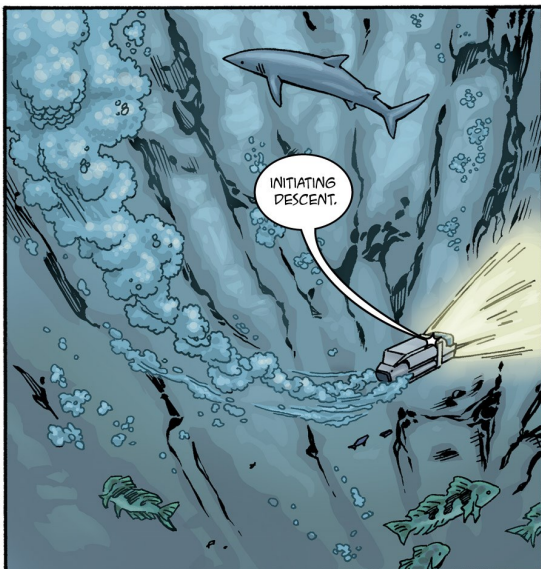
PLEASE...

HOWEVER LONG IT TAKES... I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL THEY'RE FOUND.





PRESSURE SYSTEMS ENGAGED.



INITIATING DESCENT.



IS ANYONE ELSE GETTING A LITTLE CLAUSTROPHOBIC?

YOU DO REALIZE YOU'RE ALREADY IN A TIGHT SPACE, RIGHT?



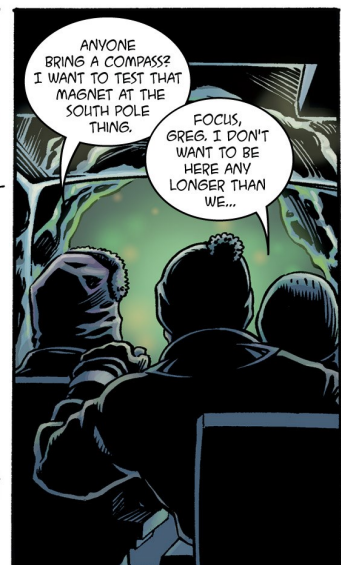
THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING STUCK INSIDE A CRAMPED MINI-SUB IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN...

...AND BEING STUCK INSIDE A CRAMPED MINI-SUB IN A CAVE UNDERNEATH A GLACIER.



LINDA, IS THE SONAR PICKING ANYTHING UP?

THERE'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING DOWN THERE BUT IT'S NOT RESPONDING THE WAY IT SHOULD.



ANYONE BRING A COMPASS? I WANT TO TEST THAT MAGNET AT THE SOUTH POLE THING.

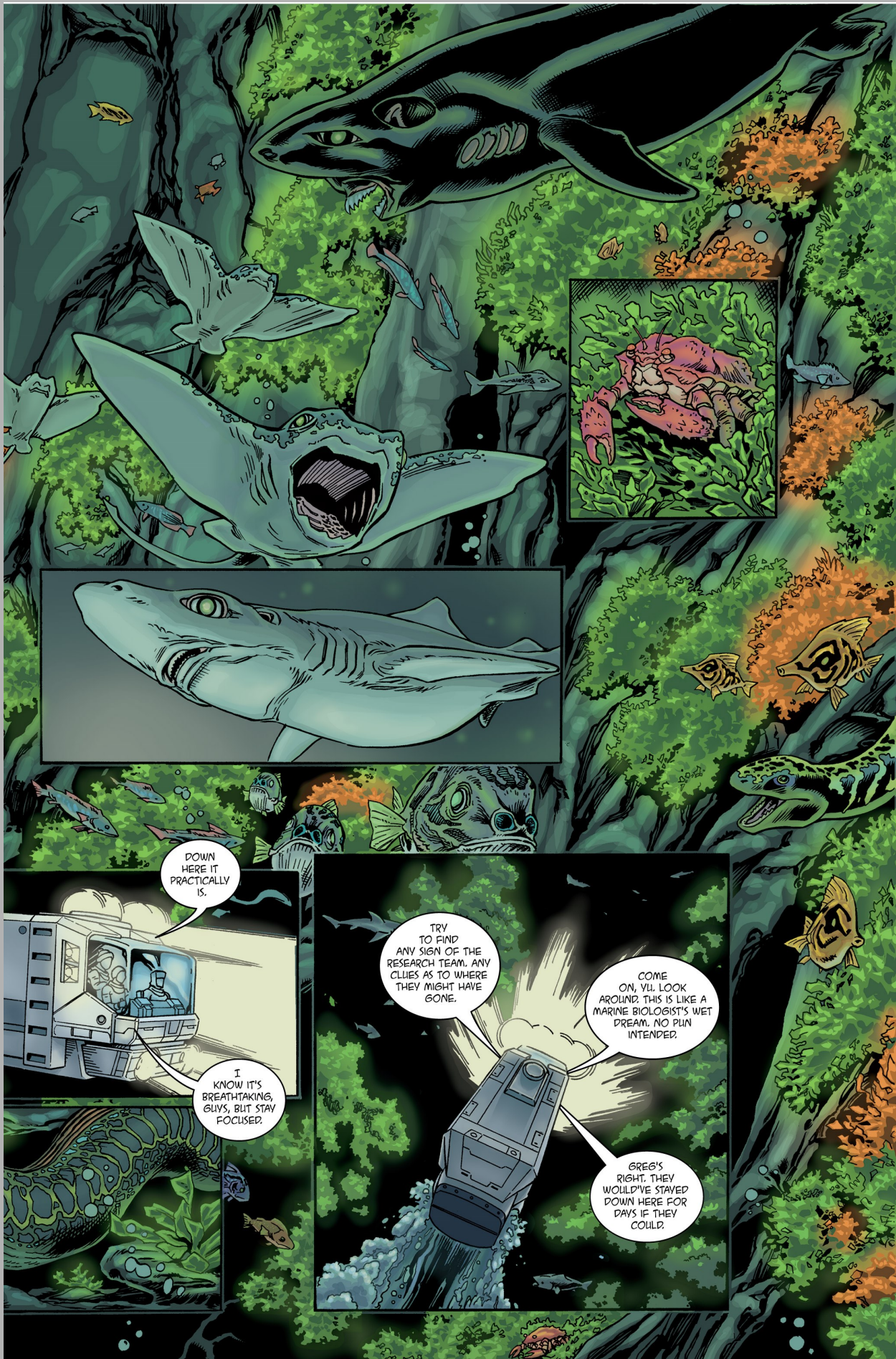
FOCUS, GREG. I DON'T WANT TO BE HERE ANY LONGER THAN WE...



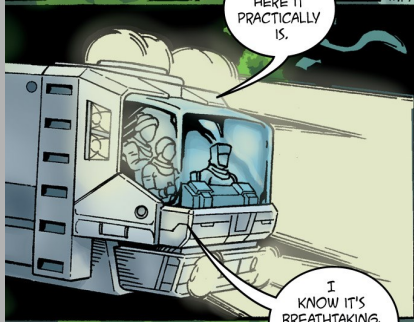
...HAVE...
...TO.

NOW THIS...
I WAS NOT
EXPECTING.

ARE
WE STILL IN
ANTARCTICA?
IT'S LIKE WE'RE ON
A DIFFERENT
PLANET.



DOWN HERE IT PRACTICALLY IS.



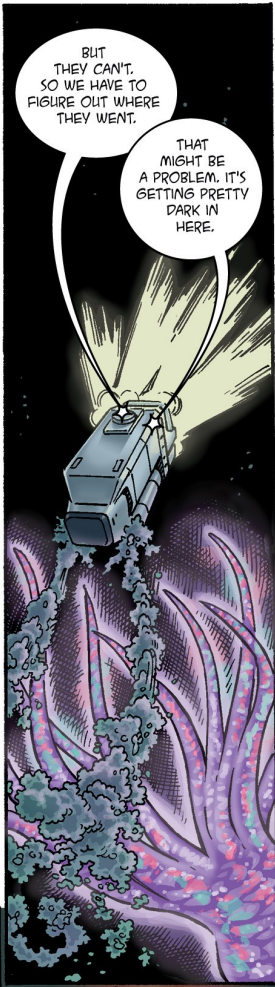
I KNOW IT'S BREATHTAKING, GLUYS, BUT STAY FOCUSED.

TRY TO FIND ANY SIGN OF THE RESEARCH TEAM. ANY CLUES AS TO WHERE THEY MIGHT HAVE GONE.



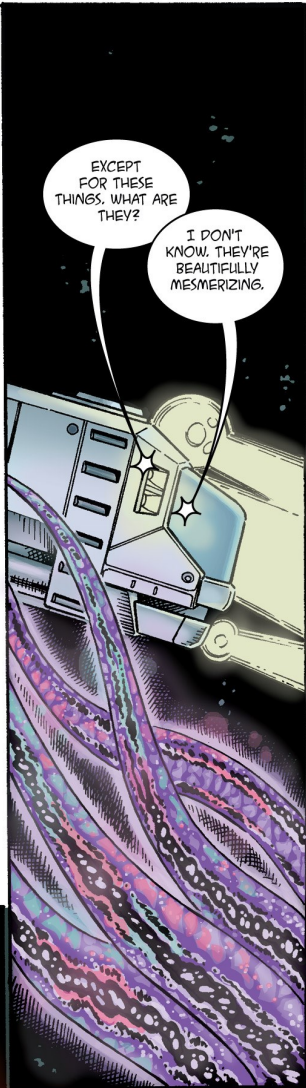
COME ON, VII. LOOK AROUND. THIS IS LIKE A MARINE BIOLOGIST'S WET DREAM. NO PUN INTENDED.

GREG'S RIGHT. THEY WOULD'VE STAYED DOWN HERE FOR DAYS IF THEY COULD.



BUT THEY CAN'T, SO WE HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHERE THEY WENT.

THAT MIGHT BE A PROBLEM, IT'S GETTING PRETTY DARK IN HERE.



EXCEPT FOR THESE THINGS. WHAT ARE THEY?

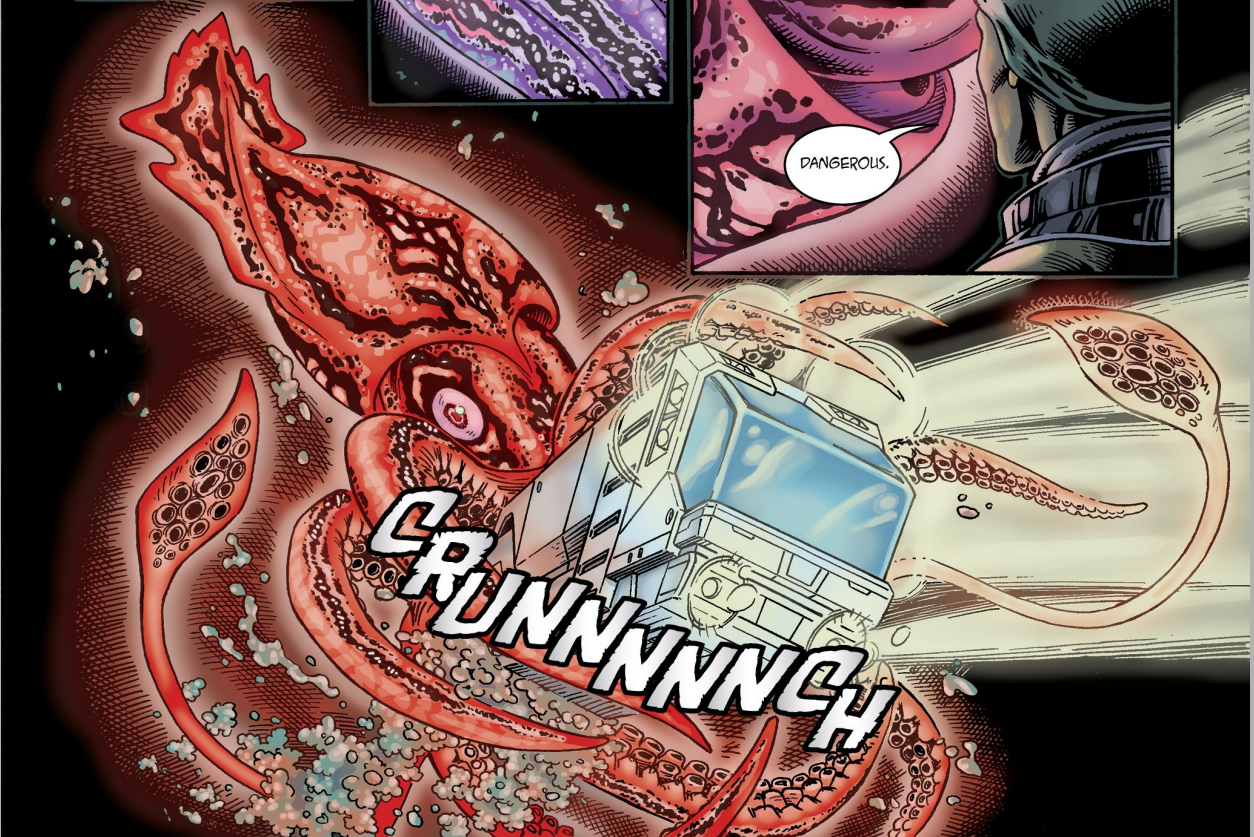
I DON'T KNOW. THEY'RE BEAUTIFULLY MESMERIZING.

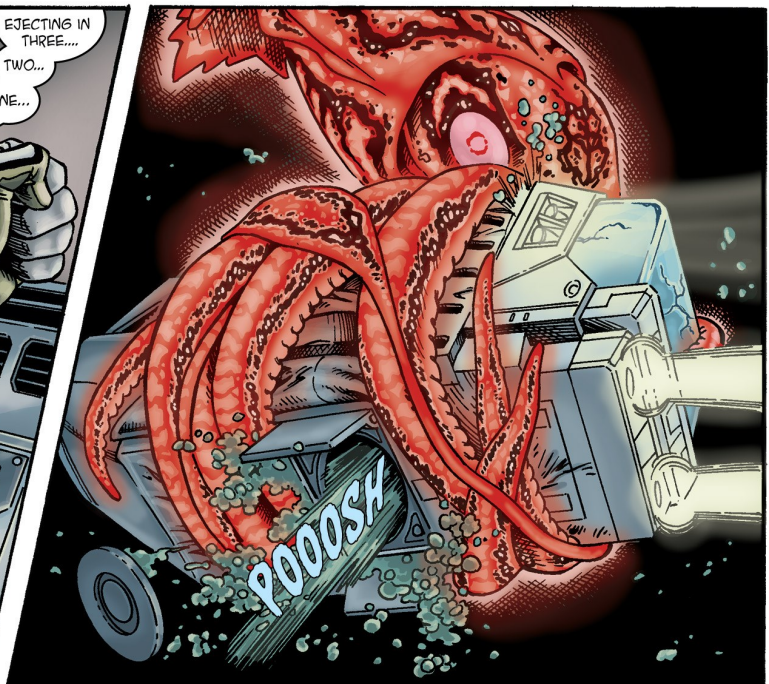
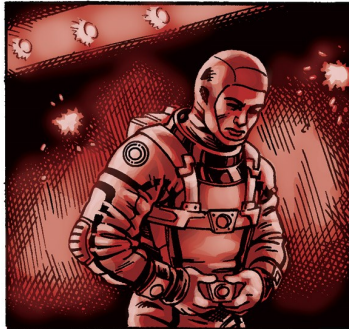


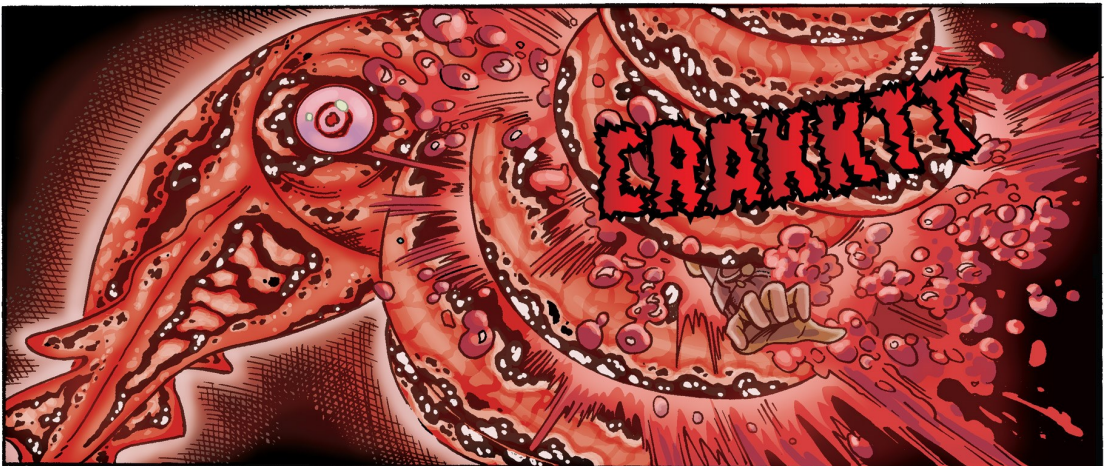
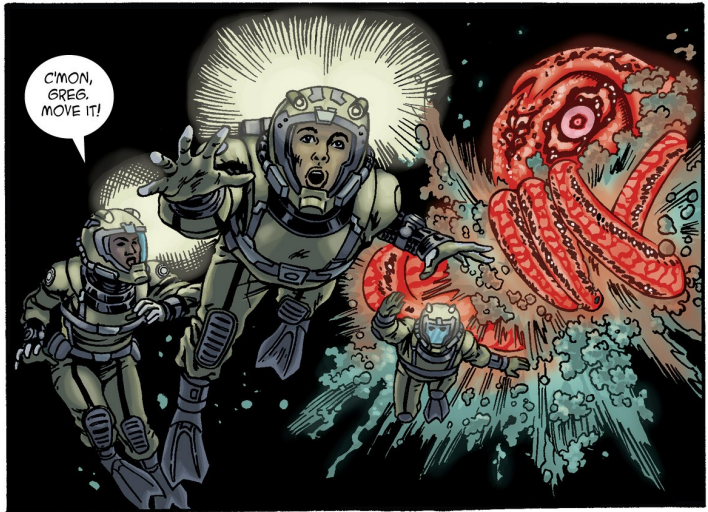
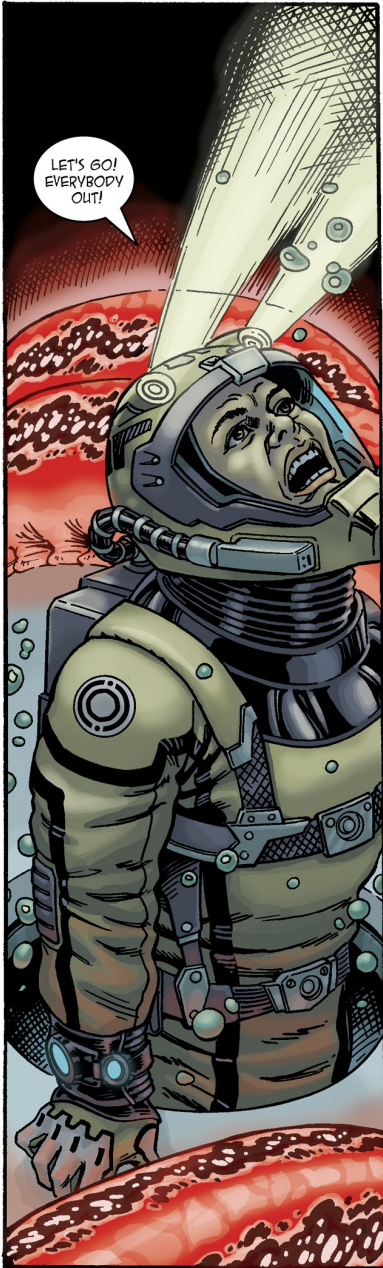
ALL THE MORE REASON TO STAY AWAY FROM THEM. THEY COULD BE...

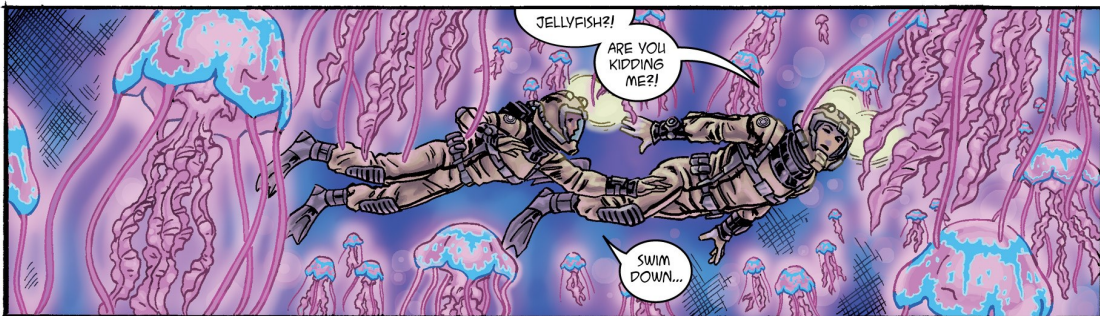


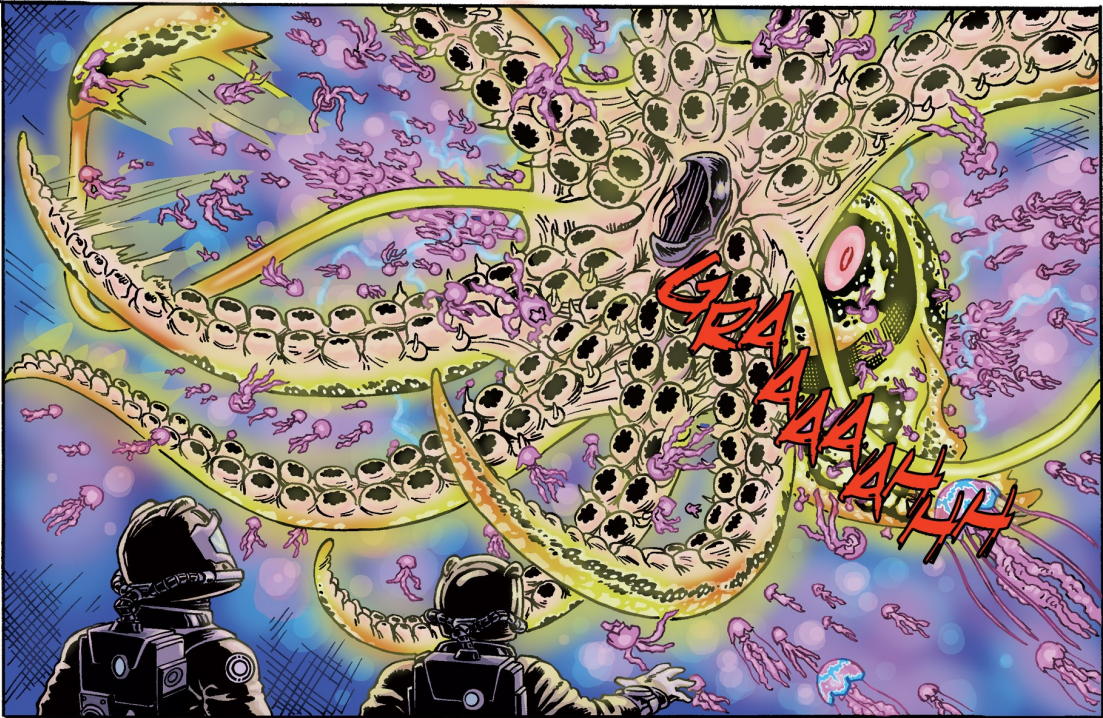
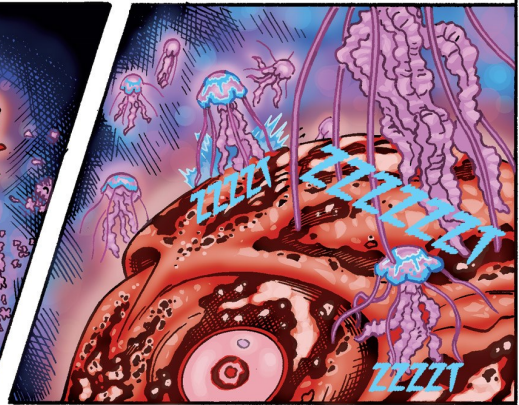
DANGEROUS.





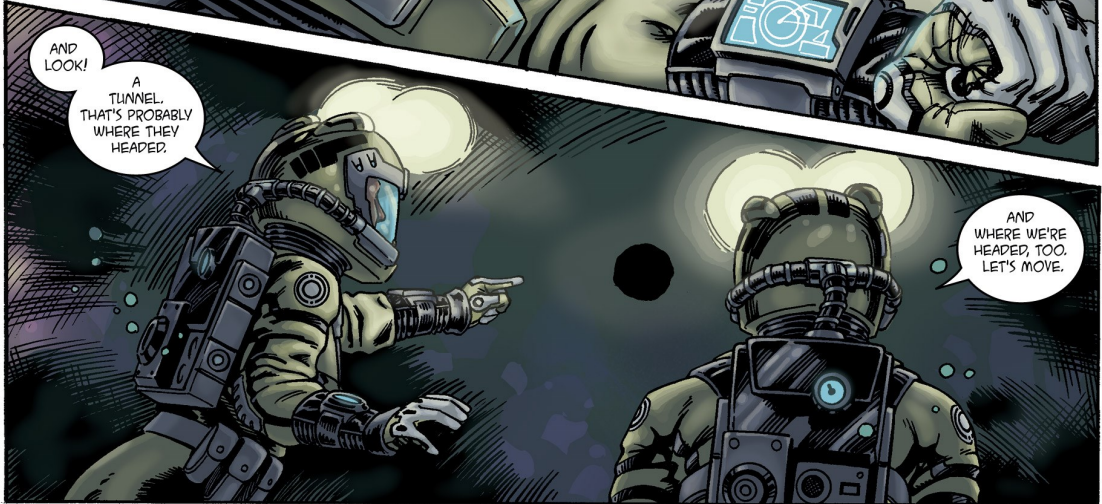








WE'RE GETTING CLOSER TO THE DISTRESS CALL'S ORIGINAL LOCATION. IT'S DEEPER IN THE ICE.



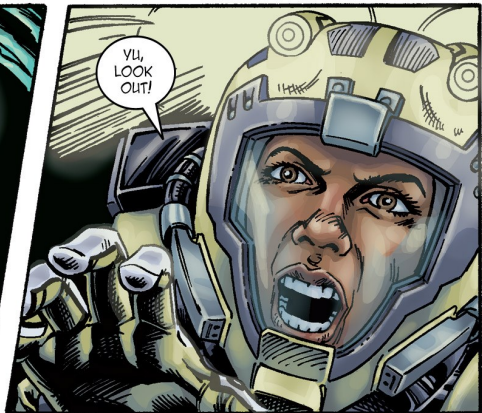
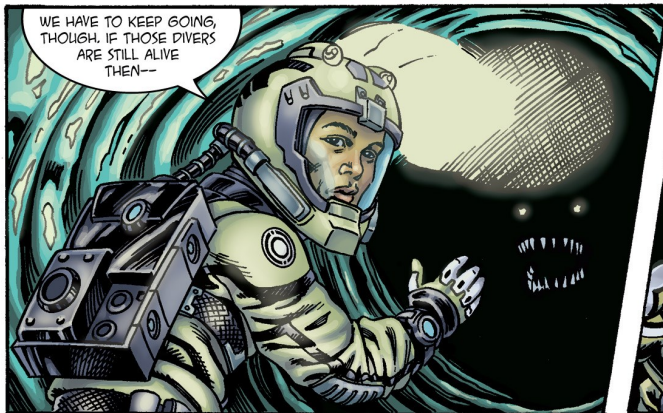
AND LOOK!

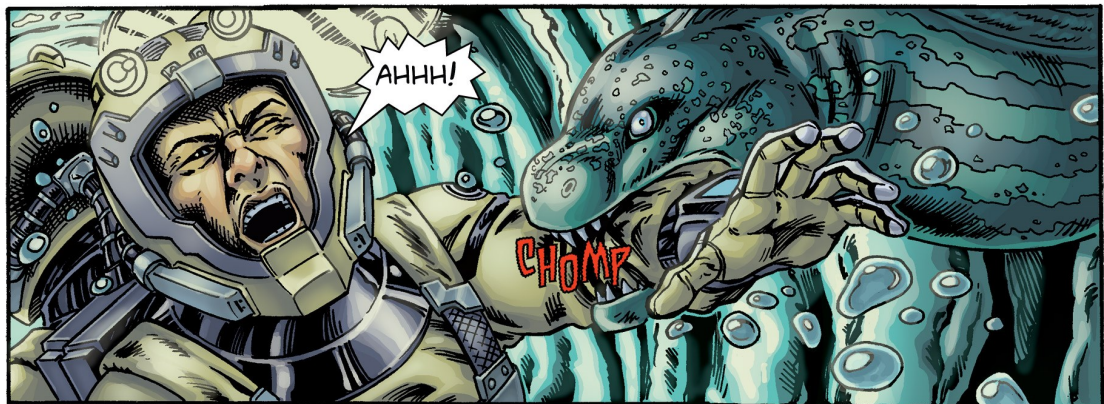
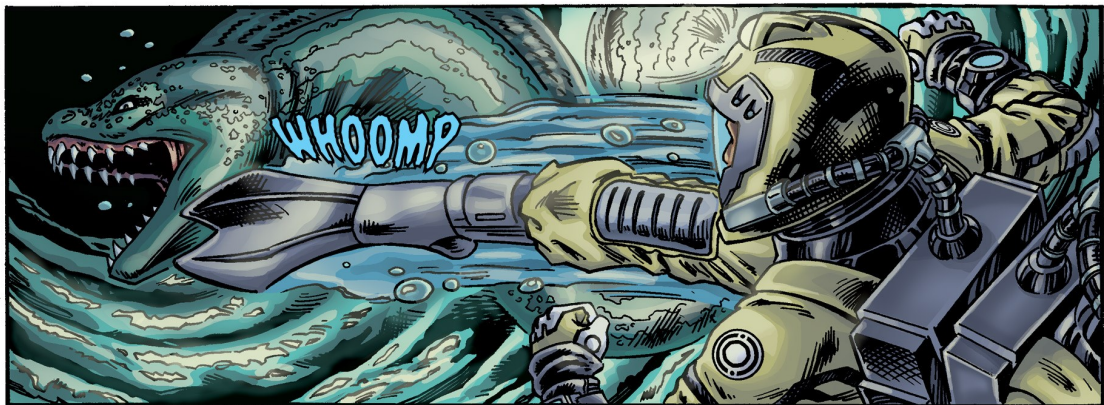
A TUNNEL. THAT'S PROBABLY WHERE THEY HEADED.

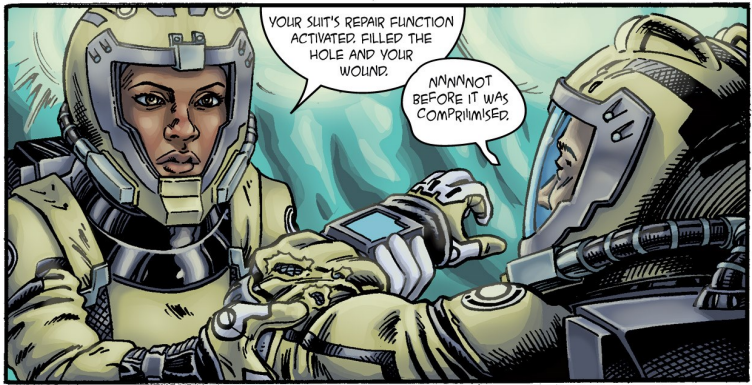
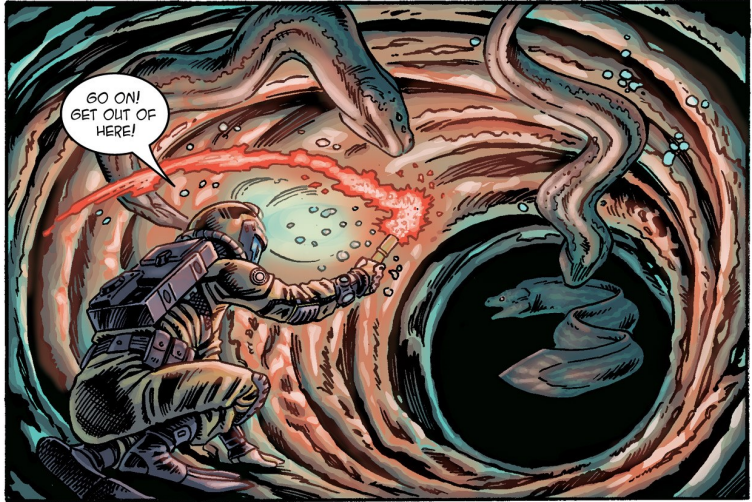
AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED, TOO. LET'S MOVE.

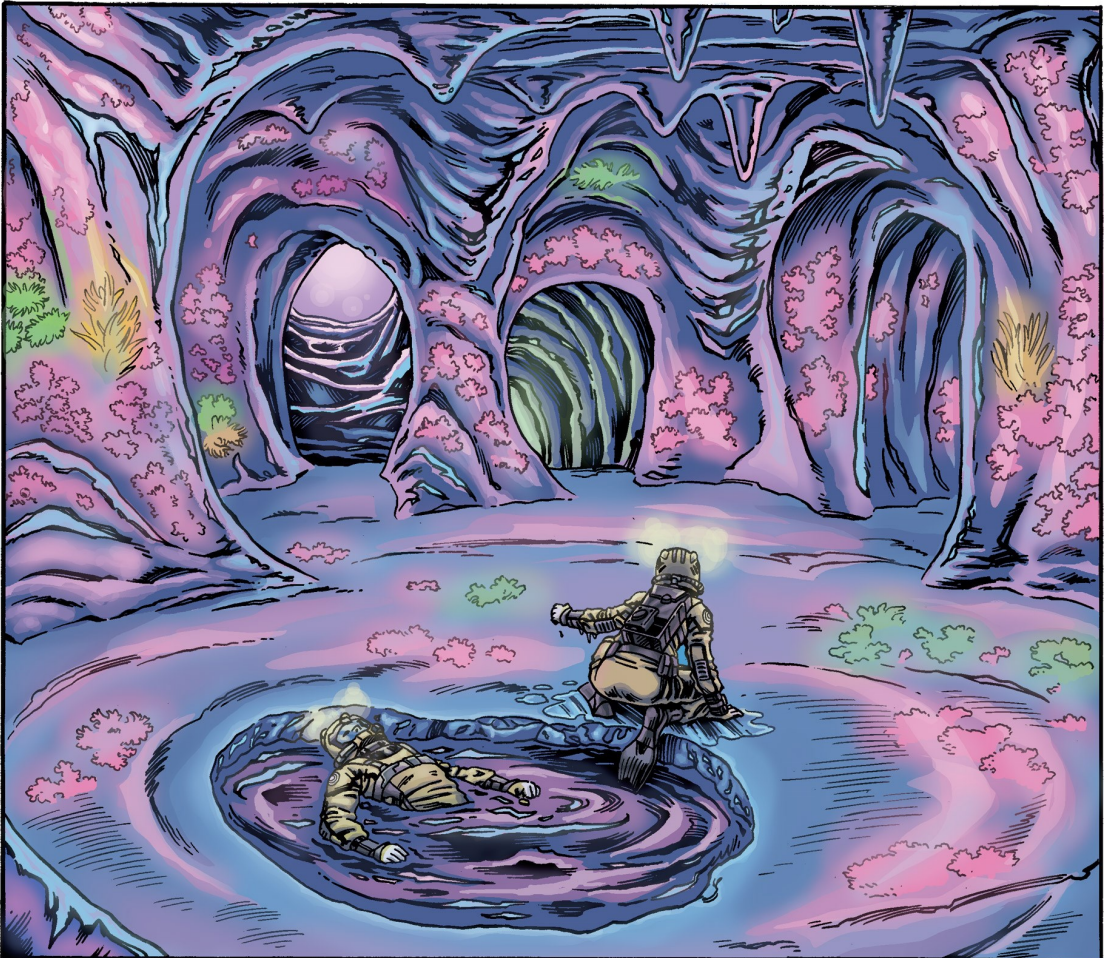


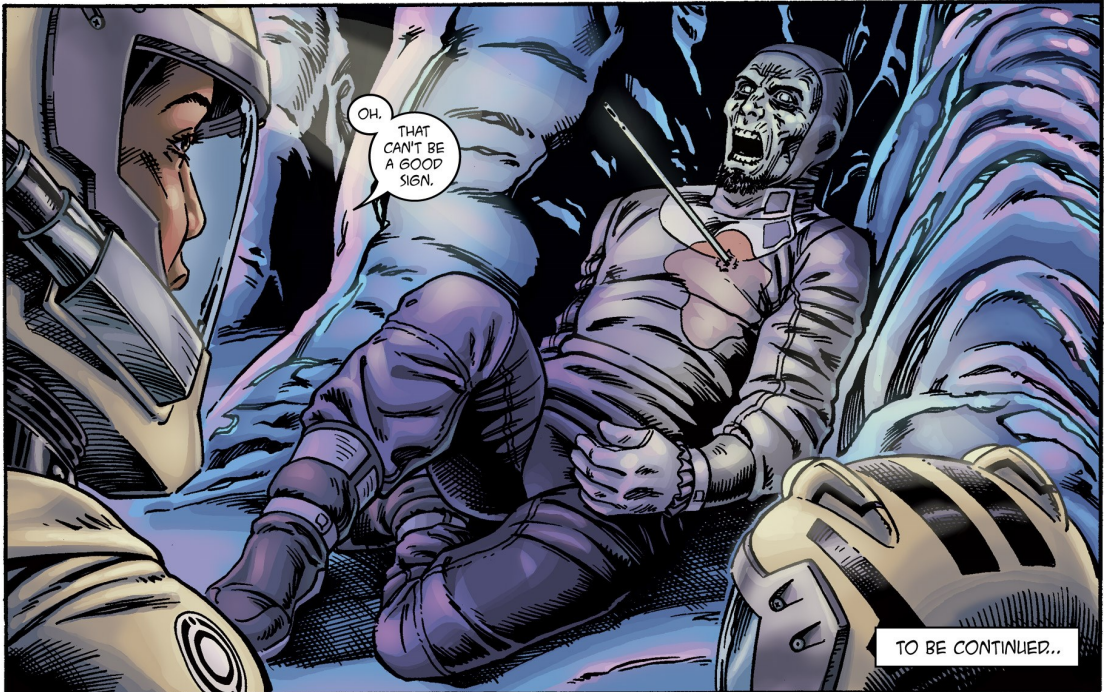
DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE WE GO.



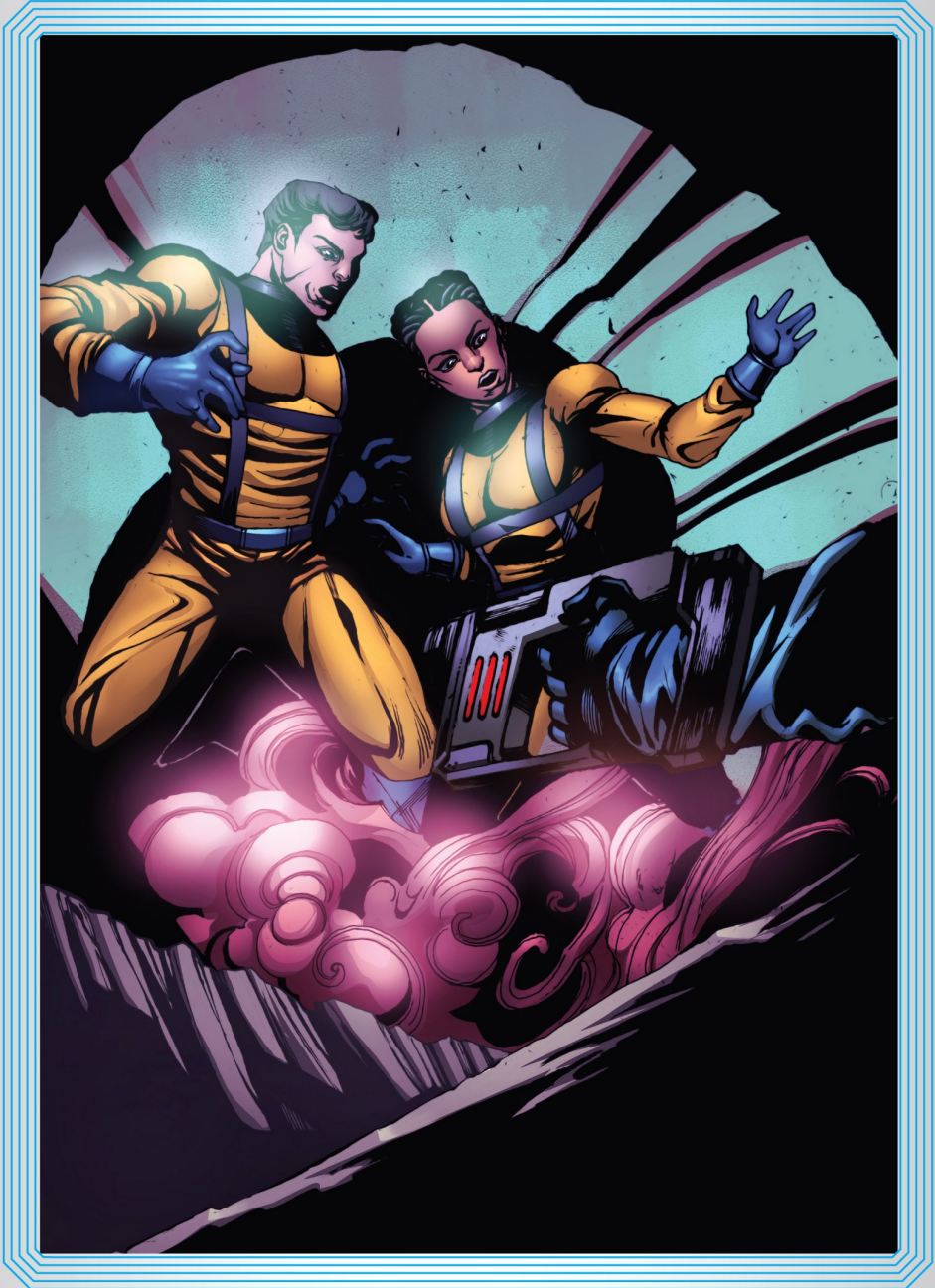








NEXT



**THE POLAR PARADOX
PART TWO**

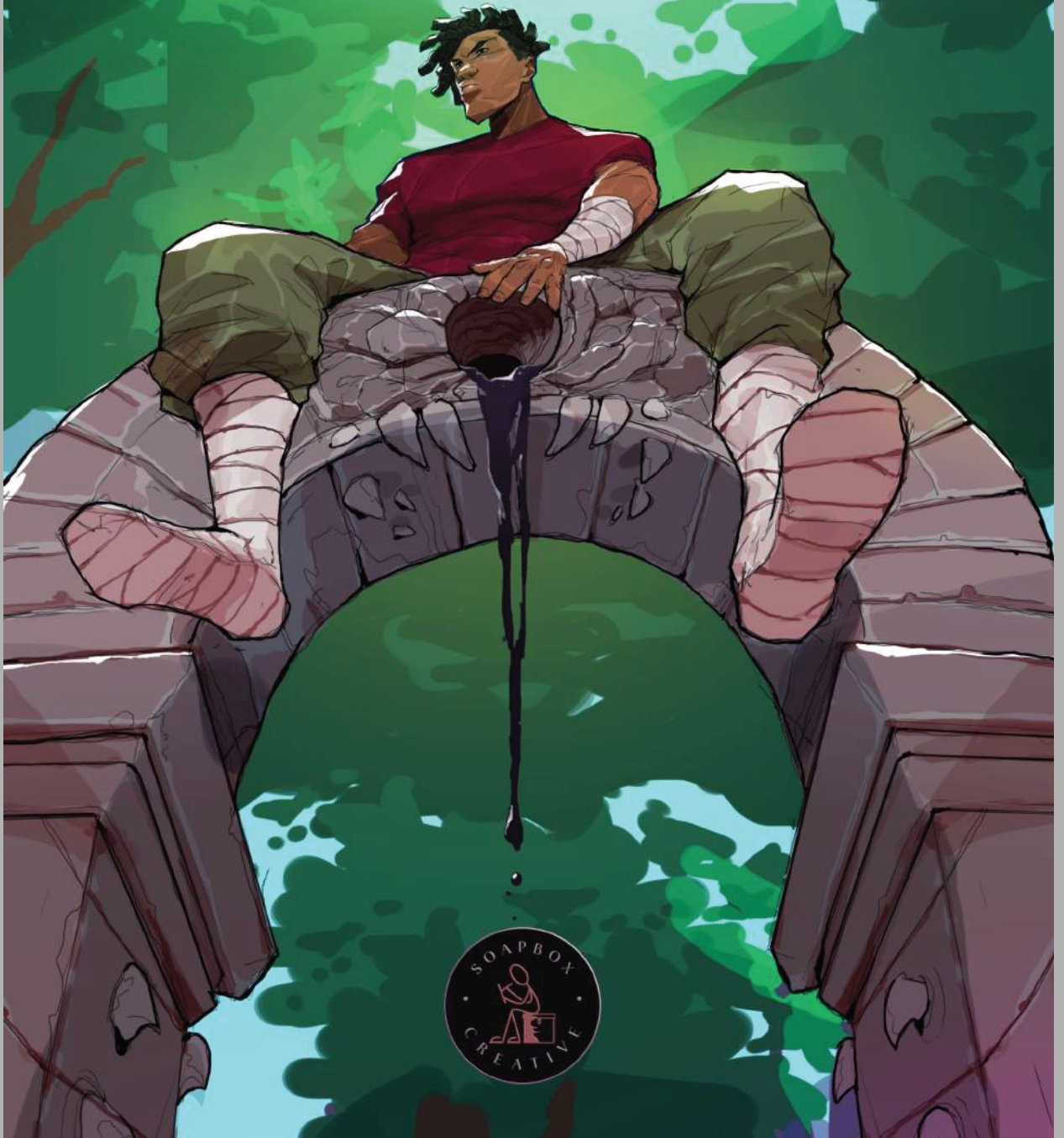
I think we would all have to agree—that can't be a good sign. Are you hooked? Well check out the next chapter of *Polar Paradox*, along with all of Frank's other work on his website—FrankTheWriter.com or you can add *Modern Testament* to your Kindle library [here!](#)



D.C. Burton Presents...

THE NEKROS

PART ONE: NIGHTFALL



CREATED BY
D.C. BURTON

ILLUSTRATED BY
OLUMIDE EMMANUEL

COLORED BY
GITIZEE

LETTERING BY
MATTIA GENTILI

COVER BY
MURTHADA FADLI



Website: www.soapboxcreates.com
Facebook: facebook.com/soapbox.comics
Instagram: instagram.com/soapbox.creative

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WE GET IT, MATHIAS. YOU'RE THE LAST ONE UP, NO NEED TO SHOW OFF.

THAT'S A CONCEPT HE CAN'T COMPREHEND.



I LET THEM TALK.



YOU REALLY THINK HE'S READY?

EVEN IF THEY DON'T SAY IT--



--I KNOW THEY THINK IT.



ARE WE NOT WATCHING THE SAME THING?



AND EITHER WAY, I DON'T GIVE A DAMN.



HE
OUTCLASSES
EVERYONE IN
HIS UNIT...

...HELL
IN ANY
UNIT.

YET
I STILL HAVE MY
RESERVATIONS...

...ASTOUNDING.



I THOUGHT I GAVE YOU A GOOD HEAD START THIS TIME, CIDEL.

KEEP TALKING

SKILLS LIKE HIS WERE NEVER NECESSARY TO DEFEAT THE NEKROS...

...BUT A TEAM ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

AW, HELL!

C'MON LEVI, THEY CAN EASILY PLAY OFF HIS STRENGTHS.

OBVIOUSLY, I STILL HAVE A LOT TO TEACH YOU ABOUT HOW A TEAM WORKS TOO.



Y'ALL KNOW THE RULES.

MATHIAS, ONE MINUTE TO STRIKE THE ARCH.
NARIUS, DON'T HOLD BACK.



THE NEKROS IS STRONGER...



FASTER...



MORE RUTHLESS THAN ANY HUMAN.

WE DON'T FIGHT TO KILL THE NEKROS.



YOU CAN'T FIGHT FROM DOWN THERE.

WE SEARCH FOR ONE OPENING.

WANNA BET?

ONE CHANCE...

PART 1: NIGHTFALL

STORY BY:
D.C. BURTON

PENCIL AND INKS BY:
OLUMIDE EMMANUEL

COLORS BY:
GITIZEE

COVER BY:
MURTHADA FADLI

LETTERING BY:
MATTIA GENTILI

--TO STRIKE!

THAT'S
HOW YOU
DO IT!







WHOOBOY! Mathias has a temper on him, but is that going to be enough to take on The Nekros? Stronger, faster, and more ruthless than any human? What are they up against?

Well you can find out by picking up issue 1 and 2 of The Nekros on the Soapbox Creative [website](#)! \$5 for both!



Flip on over to the next page to hear from the creator, D.C. Burton!

I was thoroughly disappointed with the (now-cancelled) Chosen season on Netflix, and I really wanted to read some fantasy and magic. The Nekros Issue 1 campaign was recommended by one of the other campaigns I backed, and I have to say I was not disappointed. Dark Fantasy from the mind of

D.C. BURTON



Besides The Nekros what else are you creating out in the world?

This has been an interesting time. Since the Nekros is my first published work, I'm dedicating most of my attention to it, but I have recently started on a Sci-fi novel which I'm still working on a final name for. For now, I call it Project I.



What inspired The Nekros, and what in general inspires you to create?

My curiosity has always inspired me, questions usually based on philosophy or some related realm. The world of Awa in The Nekros spawned from the question, "What would happen in a world where God showed his presence?"

From there, it evolved into, "What would happen if he then had to leave?" 300 years later, and we have the beginning of the Nekros. In the same way, Project I look deeply at the idea of creationism. The ideas of religion and morality are always are the cores of my world, mostly because I so often think about them. After that, I pull on media inspirations that I loved growing up, like the Alien and Predator franchises for the Nekros.

Reading the Soapbox [website](https://soapboxcreates.com) (<https://soapboxcreates.com>) The Nekros, and any other projects are limited series. When you first begin work on a project, are you seeing the final product in your head and just working to get there, or do you approach it in more of a free-form workflow?

I am a very structured creative. I consider myself more technical than creative, and my workflow reflects that. Every story starts from a sentence or two that tackles what I see happening, and I grow it. Split those sentences into 4 act summaries, split those 4 acts into 24 plot points, etc. The key for me is never getting too attached to those ideas. Once I actually begin to write, and the characters become more real, I'm never scared to deviate from what I wrote. I just need to know my direction to start.

When you hit a roadblock in your work, how do you get over it?

Whenever I hit a roadblock, my reaction is to take a few steps back. If I hit a roadblock, it's usually one of two things. First, I've deviated so far from the plan I need a new plan. Second, I'm sticking to the plan, and it's not working for the characters I've written. When I've written a strong character, they tell me what they'd do. I step back and listen to what they say comes next.



What was your first piece of work that you felt was ready for public consumption?

The first work I felt was ready for public consumption was actually The Nekros short story. These days, I hate going back to read that piece and would very much say otherwise, but I thought it was great at that time. But that's the confidence you need as an early creator. Otherwise, you'd have a computer full of work the world will never see. (Although all traces of the short story are deleted from the internet, and the world can no longer see it.)

While we cannot see that original short story, we can absolutely check out The Nekros in its final form on the Soapbox Creative [website](#).





After working for years on his upcoming OGN *Righteous Creatures*,

King Sikes

has reached the finish line and will be launching his Kickstarter very soon. Keep an eye on his social media for the project launch. Before he starts his next adventure, let's get to know the creator.

What is the driving force behind *Righteous Creatures*? Are you looking to teach, entertain, a bit of both?

It's always been my goal with this project to translate my love for Jesus into a fun entertaining experience for readers. My ultimate goal was to share Christ in a unique way through storytelling and some dope pictures. I'd say there are definitely some teachable moments throughout the journey of this story and you'll definitely be entertained.

Who are your creative influences and why?

Oh wow so many where do I start?

Funny enough, although she isn't a prolific author —yet— my wife's creativity really inspires me. We partnered on this project, she wrote the story and I illustrated it and I'm always amazed at how her mind works and how she's able to put together words so perfectly and just tell a great story.



Artistically, I'm really inspired by veteran Animation Artist Arshad Mirza Baig. He's an amazing artist that specializes in traditional animation techniques —things like drawing animation by hand, and he's been in the game for over 20 years and has worked on projects everywhere from Cartoon Network to PBS. He's really guided me in becoming a better artist. His style is raw and he tells it like it is. He doesn't believe in gatekeeping and will actually spend hours doing step-by-step tutorials which are super helpful.

Then finally, I'd have to say Tetsuya Nomura. He's the creative behind Final Fantasy and the Kingdom Hearts franchises. I aspire to reach his level of skill and expertise.



Besides working on this book, what else are you making or working on?

The cool thing about *Righteous Creatures* is that there is a lot of story to tell. And because of this — we couldn't fit the whole story into just one book. I'm actually brainstorming the next Saga in the RC series.

When you hit a roadblock in your work, how do you get over it?

Wow this is a great question because I struggled with this for so long. What works best for me is to study and do some research and use references to inspire me. This used to humble me because I felt like it meant I wasn't good enough, but THEN I learned that some of the best artists use references. I once read that during the making of the animation of Beauty and the Beast, the artist would leap around with capes in order to capture the movement and flow of Beast's cape so that they could sketch it quickly. After that, I decided that if Disney animators needed references to get past their roadblocks then, it was okay for me too!

When you began working on Righteous Creatures, did you see the final product in your head and have just been working to get there, or did you approach it in more of a free-form workflow and let the ideas drive the story?



Well it was actually a little bit of both. The idea for Righteous Creatures originated when I was away from my family during a military deployment. I was really missing my kids and I wanted to create a project that would keep me busy until I could see them again. When I returned home I gave my wife the title, because that's all I had at the time and we kind of worked our way from there. It was very abstract and bare bones at the time and it stayed that way for a while as we tried to determine what Righteous Creatures was actually going to be. All we knew for sure was that the book needed to have a good message and be faith based. After that, my wife helped lay a foundation and gave legs to this project.

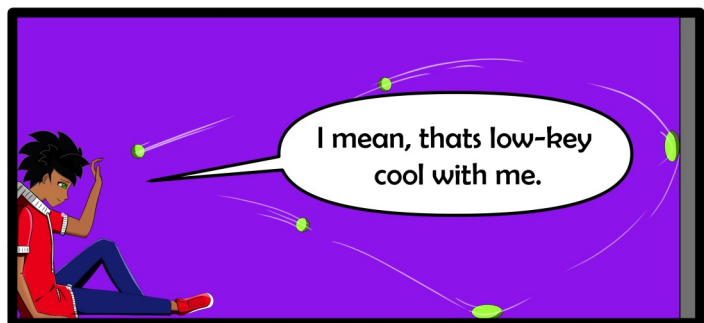
RIGHTEOUS CREATURES



Make sure you go check out King Sikes Art on all social platforms!

Now let's take a look at a sneak preview of Righteous Creatures!

MAXIMUS CROSS





TIPS 'N' TRICKS

Every issue, I'll be asking our featured creators to share their tips and tricks for navigating the creative markets.

Jason Michael Primrose starts us off simple but powerful:



Be Bold.
Take Your Time.
Get Supported.

Danny J Quick brings us some pragmatic advice:

Consistency is the key to everything.
Always have a backup plan because someone is going to quit on you.
Put your phone down a few hours a day and be intentional about it.



Frank Martin drops some gems here, pay attention:

1) Don't wait. Nobody will give you permission to write/draw/create. Just do it and do it often. Bad or good doesn't matter. You only get better and actually make stuff by putting in the work.



2) Surround yourself with positive people. Yes, some people will bring you down either on purpose or just by being who they are. But keep moving, keep interacting (online is fine), and eventually you'll form a network that can help you bounce ideas off of and make you enjoy doing the things you love.

3) Always be learning. Never think you know enough to succeed. Creativity is a journey without a destination. There is no end. I pity anyone who thinks they've mastered something.

We get some fantastic pragmatic advice from D.C. Burton:



1. Get feedback early: This depends on the person, but if you can handle it, try submitting to magazines or other avenues that provide you feedback. Without this, I never would have known what to focus on improving in my writing.

2. Fail Fast: This one comes from entrepreneurship, but it's important early in a creator's career. Try many different genres, styles, or mediums early on. Allow yourself to see what you might be naturally good at. Let yourself experiment and, in the process, expand your knowledge of different areas.

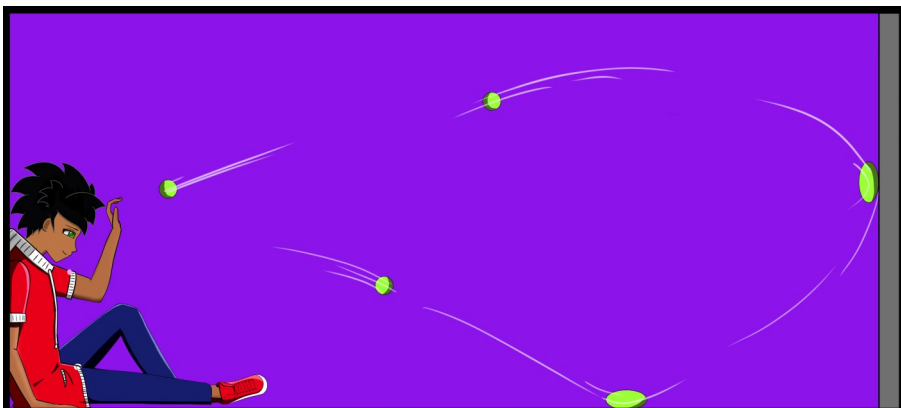
3. Find your network: Find other creators at different stages that you stay close to. It doesn't have to be a large group, but it helps to have people you can lean on when sharing tips and lessons learned.

King Sikes Art drops some gems and even a bonus!

1. Learn the basics. A solid foundation is needed in order for longevity.
2. Don't be Afraid! Don't be afraid to start over. Don't be afraid of rejection. Don't be afraid to make changes. Go forth and be fearless.
3. Remember that your style comes from things you're passionate about. If you're struggling to find anything from a niche to what medium to use... just try a bunch of things and see what makes your heart sing.

Bonus

4. Just keep going and Make Art Happen.



INDIE FINDS

This is a list of indie books I read since the last issue and have loved.



Freaky Tales is an anthology series with the first issue having two, and the second issue featuring three different—VERYdifferent—stories. You've got your hot babe medieval fantasy Three Thorns from the cover—which was way better than I expected, honestly. Then you've got Blade which is a sci-fi alien invasion mech battle sort of story—and I basically just eat that up. In the second issue they added Mountain in the Sky, another fantasy tale with a bit more whimsical appearance, if not content.

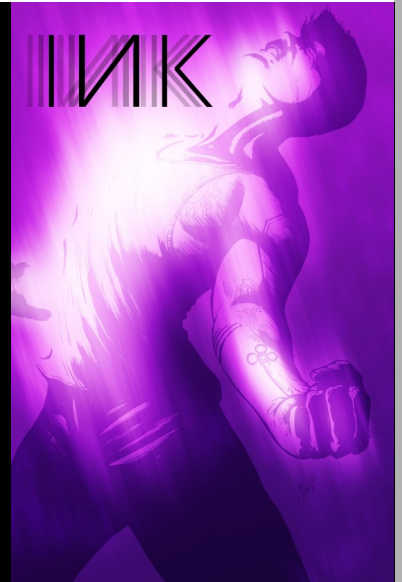
Check out all available issues at www.evoluzionepub.com

You know when you see a 13 page count, you think "did I not get a complete copy of the issue? Was it a bad download?"

Nope.

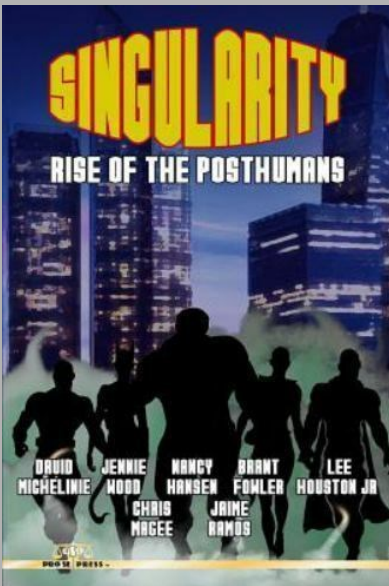
Just a hell of a cliffhanger, that I am going to politely demand be addressed with a second issue, post-haste.

Trying to find where to link to this comic for the magazine I was introduced to [SeerNova Comics](#), which appears to be a free indie platform, so check that out to read this, along with a bunch of other comics!



The first full-color issue of what I've just discovered is an ongoing [webcomic](#), which is in turn a continuation of a comic book property going back all the way to Dark Horse Presents Issue 4 in 1987! A fantastic read, this rings back to classic sci-fi and classic pulp, private eye, bounty hunter fare. Mercy St. Clair is a Trekker in a corrupt city, and she gets paid to bring in the bad guys, dead or alive.

Really fun to read, and available for purchase from the creator's [Etsy page](#) in physical format!



I finished this book and will now re-double my recommendation for it. Holy crap, that ending. Also give me more please.

This is a Steampunk universe with an assembly of authors weaving an interconnected tapestry of isolated stories.

Without delay, let your fingers do the walking [to this link](#) to buy it. Now.

P.S.—GIVE ME MORE OF THIS UNIVERSE.

You know those “Where Are They Now?” shows? Well what if “They” were child superheroes that disappeared, and an aging reporter decided he was going to flush them out, to get to the truth of the matter?

That’s how Starlite starts, and once I figure out how to buy the three issues that have been released, I’ll report back on how it continues, and where you can buy it.

The website has information on the story, but I have not found any way to buy new issues.

Check out <http://starlitecomicbook.com/>



Born into the outcast breed of werewolves known as the Monoki, eighteen-year-old Rodney Marcelli is reluctantly thrown into an ancient war between good and evil in today’s world where the line has blurred.

Well with that pitch I’m definitely in, I don’t know about you. I got this through a Kickstarter bundle. The cover art impressed me and the interiors did not disappoint either.

The first issue is definitely build-up, but it does have some solid twists.

Check out their [website](#) for the digital or print copies. The digitals are priced right, so that’s always a positive for me.

As late as this issue is, I still lost track of everyone I was speaking with and did not follow up on one feature, but I still wanted to include it since it's going to be going to Kickstarter very soon.

This is WarPigs!

"When there is an Enemy that likes to play in the mud, you send in the Pigs!"

Sign up to be notified when the Kickstarter Launches [HERE](#).



EDITORIAL

I think I've figured out the secret weapon for all comic book and creative kickstarters: digital items.

I know that a lot of people may be aware of this already and don't need my input on the subject, but I recently had a conversation where I found out that digital comics are looked down upon by some comic book creators. On top of that, digital bundles are not even known by some. Because of those facts, here is my petition to all creators to provide digital options. There are people out there like me who do not collect single issues and digital comics are an affordable alternative. For your end, digital comics will bring money to the campaign and will not increase your logistics by much. Sending emails is a lot simpler than having to package up another pack of comics and make sure you include everything that needs to be when sending it by mail.

The way I see it, you've got a few ways to include digital items; you can have your primary comic or creative work, any catch-up material such as back issues or previous books in a novel series, and then the real real top-tier option of having your creation along with a selection of other independent creators' books in a digital bundle.

I've said many times that when sold through a website or service such as comixology, digital comics should not be over three dollars from anybody. This includes Marvel and any other major company, as well as independent creators. However in Kickstarter I think there is a general genuine understanding that you are helping someone get their project done and bring their dream to life. As such I think there are no complaints when people see a five dollar price tag on a digital single issue of a comic book. This scales if you've got a previous issue to a \$7-10 catch-up price being reasonable. If you've got 5 issues, a \$20 catch-up bundle is in my opinion reasonable. Scaling further, if you have a couple different series you've been working on, you put all of them in a bundle, and add a stack of custom desktop and mobile wallpapers for the added value, and you're up to \$30 or more.

Those are great options if you have your own books and your own back issue library. However if you don't have those things there is an ever-growing community of independent creators who would love to cross-pollinate with your audience. If you bring together other creators to include their books or comics, that gives you a bundle you can price accordingly. Eleven comic issues priced at three dollars an issue is \$33 and if you just rounded up to \$40 that still feels to the buyer like a great deal. Fourty dollars for eleven books is not a bad deal, especially when you are helping someone get their project out into the world. I feature quite a few books I got by that very method in this issue - books I've gone on to back when the next issues came to Kickstarter. Books that I would not have necessarily backed without experiencing them first.

Outside of my hypothetical numbers, I reached out to a creator to get a tangible example. This is from

a real campaign that ended recently : Of a total of 476 backers, over one third were digital tiers! Most were the single volume digital, over 50 picked up a "catch-up bundle" and 4 picked up a digital library collection of all of their work! In total over 15% of the goal amount was JUST digital tiers!

The independent comic sphere is growing and if we all uplift each other we can all win. Years ago someone said the same thing to me and I didn't believe them but I know now that the old adage is true - a rising tide lifts all ships. Comic books are "in" now. We're a hot commodity. People are looking for interesting things to read and powerful people are looking for interesting things to convert into films and TV series. That's the tide rising because to put it simply, Hollywood doesn't know how to create new things so they rely on the authors, the poets, and the comic book creators to do that leg work. I know that my book (which you can read the first chapters of in this very magazine) is not necessarily going to be everyone's cup of tea at first glance. However if a Joystick Angels fan were to get the first chapters of my book as a digital download in a bundle and read it, they may discover that it is up their alley and they may go and purchase subsequent chapters. I don't want to beat a dead horse with this part but if we work together, we win together.

-Dalibor

Pledge £10 or more

Digital Catch Up

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anyone needs exam- I'm in- some from cam- I've backed.

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CREATOR INDEX

The whole point here is to get you the reader to interact with, consume, and ideally spend money with the creators I've spotlighted in this magazine. Below you will find a list of everybody's websites and social media tags. Go buy something you bums!

JASON MICHAEL PRIMROSE

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