

THE BEACON TO INDEPENDENT STORYTELLING

CATALYST

IN THIS ISSUE:

**URSA
MINOR
& MORE!**

ISSUE 06 - APR 2022

**HUTCHINSON
DONOVAN - DOHERTY
COVINGTON - LEE
TITUS - ŽUJOVIĆ**

**COMICS - PROSE
INTERVIEWS
GALLERY - TIPS**

YOU'RE A FOOL IF YOU'RE NOT SUBSCRIBED!

*MANNIX
Gala
Cova*



CATALYST

CATALYST MAGAZINE BROUGHT TO YOU BY NEXUS STUDIOS, INC.



elcome to our

BIGGEST ISSUE YET!

We have six, count 'em—SIX featured creators, three full comics, one comic preview, a novel preview, and even a short story from yours truly! Oh and a new leading column!

This issue is so big, I even cut the Editorial. Or maybe it was because I didn't have anything interesting to say. You'll never know.

While I am editing my first book, which was the short series you all read in its nearly-rawest form over the last five issues, I am also working on a full-length novel, and going through the entire process along the #Publish2022 crew. Outlining technically finished last month, but I'm still fleshing out characters. I'm also quite a bit ahead on the writing so I've given myself a handicap month on the outline. When I've got a solid first chapter, I'll be sharing it here first, as always.

Anyway, don't let me ramble on, nothing interesting to say, remember?

Enjoy the issue!

-Dalibor



COVER ART

Originally created for the
Ursa Minor 2014 Annual

by Mannix Francisco [@Mannix_F](#) (Twitter)
and Ceci de la Cruz [@cecidacruz](#) (Twitter)

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COMING SOON

For the skimmer types, I wanted to include a quick overview of all the live or upcoming campaigns from our featured creators.

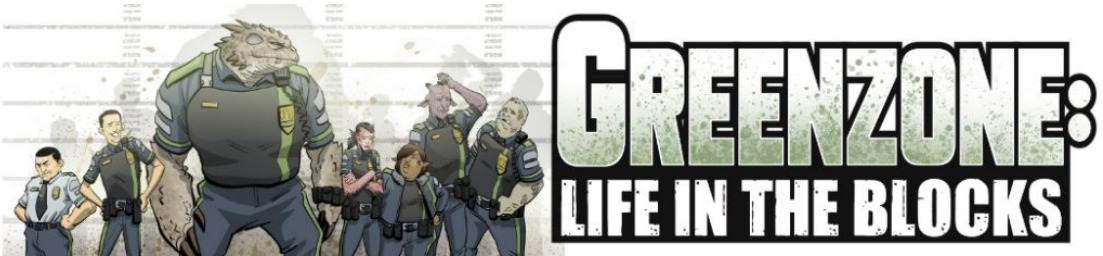
From Tom Hutchinson [[LIVE NOW]]

URSA MINOR: DRACULA RISING



From Fish Lee [[LIVE NOW]]

GREENZONE: LIFE IN THE BLOCKS



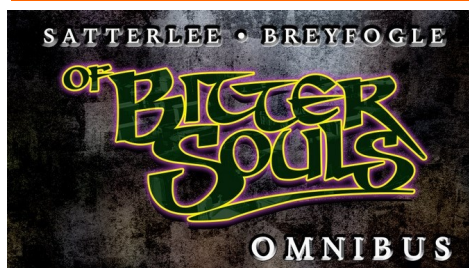
From Anthony D. Stokes [[COMING SOON]]

DECAY ISSUE 2



From Chuck Satterlee [[LIVE NOW]]

OF BITTER SOULS OMNIBUS





From big brand partnerships with Aspen Comics to independently launching their first action figures, Big Dog Ink has been pushing the indie publishing envelope for a long time. At the wheel? Why it's

Tom Hutchinson

For those in the know, Big Dog Ink has been around for quite a while in the indie space. What would you say is the secret behind your staying power?

Creative diversity for one. I write a number of different genre styles from super heroes to westerns to horror and well beyond. Even smaller niche things like kaiju. Having something for essentially anyone that walks up to our booth at a convention lets us point new readers in the right direction when they don't know anything about us. I'm a pop culture guy myself so one someone says "OK I like Buffy" or "OK I like monster movies" I can point them to something sitting right on the table and tell them all about it. Connection between creator and reader/fan/collector is a big part of our success as well. I'm very active on social media talking about movies and TV and comics and engaging not only with other creators but with our fans and followers as well.



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

I dropped my first books as soon as they were done. There was no moment of thought as to whether it was ready for "prime time" or not. It was done and I was happy and excited and it was sent to Diamond and retail stores.

We had great initial sales success with Penny for Your Soul and that put us on the map fairly quickly in the eyes of the bad girl fans and art collectors. From there Critter, Legend of Oz and Ursa Minor followed and we continued to grow our fan base through the various genres.



Ursa Minor is celebrating ten years, you just successfully crowdfunded your first Action Figure line for Critter. With decades under your belt and behind some of these characters, are they now where you thought they would be when you started?

All the books I write were lined up and plotted through well before we got our first book in stores. They are MOSTLY where I expected, but there are fun twists and turns in the stories that were unexpected even for me. I write organically, meaning I listen to the story and the characters as I go and sometimes they suggest things I hadn't considered. That keeps the writing fun for me as a sort of choose your own adventure and I decide if I'm taking that suggested path or not...or saving it for down the road. But overall, the bullet points of the plots are on course and I just want to get more and more out to our supporters.

Have you ever given up on a project?

Never. But that doesn't mean there isn't a shifting of projects if something stalls. I have a number of story ideas that people have no clue I'm even contemplating much less working on. But it's all back burner stuff and each gets attention as it is available. I have a lot happening right up front with the obvious things we are doing like Ursa Minor, but behind the scenes I'm always creating new things and it's simply a matter of timing as to when they are ready to be brought to BDI fans.



Is there a project that you've never gotten around to, but still want to write?

Like I said, I have dozens of things I want to write, and I will get to them all one way or another. Now if you mean externally from Big Dog Ink...oh yes. I started reading comics with Godzilla #16 from Marvel. That's where I began my comic book journey so to be able to write a Godzilla story would be the absolutely icing on my comic book creator's cake.



There you have it—as many projects as you can put out, there will always be another story to tell.

Now scroll, flip, or whatever you do to get to the next page, as we have a special preview of the first ever issue of Ursa Minor!



HUTCHISON • SNYDER • GUERRERO



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BIG DOG INK PRESENTS

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IAN SNYDER

i n k s

SONY MERBITT

c o l o r s

LUIS GUERRERO

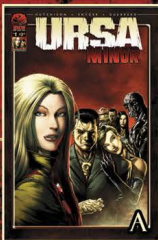
l e t t e r s

HDE

d e s i g n

ROB DUENAS

URSA MINOR




COVER A: IAN SNYDER - COVER B: NATALI SANDERS - COVER C,D & E ERIC BASALDUA & NEI RUFFINO

VISIT US AT

W W W . B I G D O G I N K . C O M


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2012 CAME AND WENT WITHOUT MUCH FANFARE. NO EARTHQUAKES TO SEND CALIFORNIA TO THE BOTTOM OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN...



NO GIANT MONSTERS WERE UNLEASHED BY ANCIENT PROPHECY OR BY MAN'S DESTRUCTION OF NATURE...



NO TSUNAMIS SWALLOWED CONTINENTS WHOLE...



BUT THERE WAS AN ELECTION, AND THAT ELECTION BROUGHT ABOUT A GLOBAL CHANGE THAT NO-ONE COULD HAVE SEEN COMING.

NOW THE ELECTION WENT OFF WITHOUT A HITCH. BUT IN JANUARY OF 2013, ON THE DAY OF THE INAUGURATION, THINGS WENT SIDWAYS.



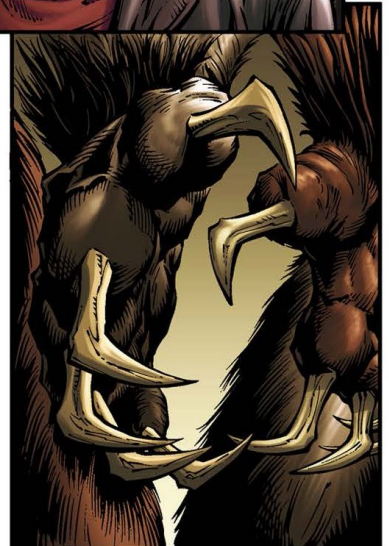
THAT WAS
THE DAY
EVERYTHING
CHANGED.



IT'S
TIME.



I KNOW.



THEY SAY THE ATTACK WAS POLITICAL. PERSONALLY, I NEVER KNEW WOLVES CARED ABOUT JACKASSES OR PACHYDERMS OUTSIDE OF THEIR CALORIE COUNT.



THE ATTACK WAS QUICK, PRECISE AND BRUTAL.



Awooooooo!




AND JUST AS FAST AS IT STARTED, IT WAS OVER. THEY WERE CALLED HOME.

BUT THEIR ACTIONS WOULDN'T BE FORGOTTEN. NOT ONLY HAD THEY SHOWN THE WORLD THAT WERE-WOLVES WERE REAL, THEY HAD KILLED THREE MEN ON NATIONWIDE TELEVISION.



IT WOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE THE UNITED STATES TOOK A PAGE OUT OF ITS OWN HISTORY AND THE HUNT FOR THE WOLVES BEGAN.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA QUICKLY DEVOLVED INTO A PARANOID MOCKERY OF ITS FORMER SELF. IT WAS A SOCIETAL COLLAPSE THE LIKES OF WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN DREAMED OF. NOT EVEN THE TERRORISTS WE HAD BEEN FIGHTING COULD BELIEVE HOW FAR AND HOW QUICKLY WE FELL.

HISTORY'S A BITCH, AND IT'LL COME BACK AROUND AND BITE YOU RIGHT IN THE ASS WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT.

BUT WE WEREN'T THE ONLY VICTIMS. THE WOLVES APPEARED ACROSS THE GLOBE TAKING OUT A PRIME MINISTER HERE, AN EMPEROR THERE, AND IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR US AS A SPECIES TO RALLY TOGETHER AGAINST A COMMON AND TERRIFYING FOE.



THEY OUTED THEMSELVES VOLUNTARILY, BEFORE WE WOULD INEVITABLY STUMBLE ACROSS THEM IN THE WOLF HUNTS. THE WORLD WAS SHAKEN TO LEARN YET ANOTHER LEGENDARY CREATURE DID IN FACT EXIST. BUT THIS TIME...



THE VAMPIRES CUT A DEAL WITH HUMANITY. THEY WOULD ERADICATE THE WEREWOLVES, WERERATS, WEREDEER AND ANY OTHER SHAPE-SHIFTING CREATURE ON THE PLANET IN RETURN FOR THE FREEDOM TO EXIST AMONG THE HUMANS.



AS THE WOLVES WERE TAKEN OUT ONE BY ONE, OTHER MAGICAL SPECIES WERE UNCOVERED AND EXPOSED TO THE WORLD. NOT LONG AFTER, THE HUMANS SUDDENLY FOUND FORGIVENESS FOR THE WOLVES. OR MAYBE THEY JUST DIDN'T WANT TO LOOK RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EXTERMINATION OF YET ANOTHER SPECIES.

DANGER



WHY DOES IT ALWAYS TAKE THE THREAT OF EXTINCTION TO MAKE HUMANS PAY ATTENTION?

SO ON FEBRUARY 10, 2019, THE WOLVES WERE DECLARED AN ENDANGERED SPECIES AND WERE NO LONGER TO BE HUNTED.

ANY NEW WOLVES THAT WERE FOUND WOULD SIMPLY BE TAGGED BY THE VAMPIRES AND ALLOWED TO LIVE THEIR LIVES.



THIS IS THE CARNIVAL. IT'S MY HOME. THE VISITORS HERE COME TO MARVEL AT THE SUPERNATURAL FREAK SHOW PAPA GAMBOLI HAS PUT TOGETHER. EAT. DRINK. STARE IN AMAZEMENT.

the carnival

25% NIGHTCLUB.

75% ZOO.

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE NOW, I SUPPOSE.



ENJOY THE SHOW...





GREAT. VAMPIRES. GO TELL PAPA.



AND NATURALLY THEY GET PUT AT ONE OF MY TABLES. OH YOU DO WORK IN MYSTERIOUS AND UNREASONABLE WAYS, DON'T YOU, LORD?



THEY BETTER LEAVE ME A BIG TIP OR I'M GONNA MAIL SOME GARLIC POWDER TO THE VAMPIRE EMBASSY AGAIN.



SORRY ANGELA. THEY RESERVED THAT TABLE SPECIFICALLY. NOTHING I COULD DO.

WHATEVER, CLAUDIA. YOU OWE ME YOUR SPOT IN LINE AT ONYX'S AFTER PARTY TONIGHT.



WELCOME TO THE CARNIVAL. I HOPE THIS TABLE IS ALRIGHT.

AS LONG AS WE CAN SEE THE DANCING GIRLS SHAKE WHAT THEY GOT, WE'LL BE JUST FINE.

ICK, ALBERT.



YOU BITCH!
I'M GONNA DRINK
YOU DRY!



ALBERT, RELEASE HER
AND SIT DOWN. I WILL
NOT ASK AGAIN.

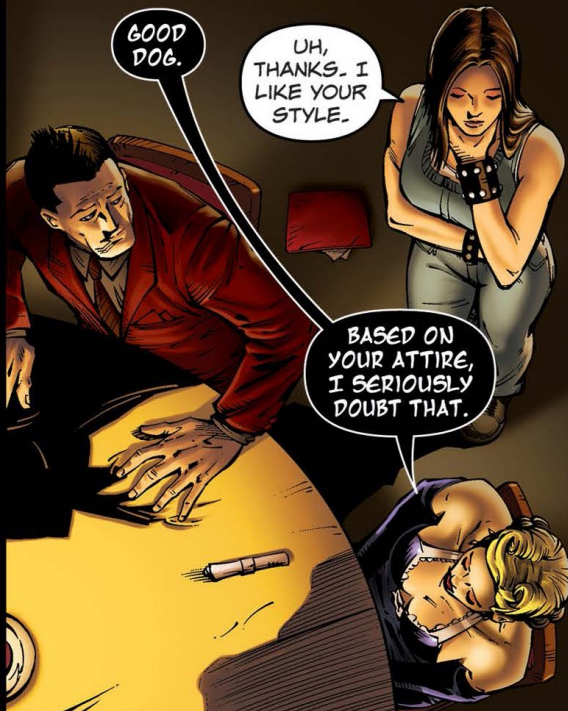
NOT
POLITELY,
ANYWAY.



GOOD
DOG.

UH,
THANKS. I
LIKE YOUR
STYLE.

BASED ON
YOUR ATTIRE,
I SERIOUSLY
DOUBT THAT.



THE MAN TO MY LEFT WILL
HAVE YOUR BEST IMPORTED
ALE. YOU WILL BRING ME A
RED WINE THAT WOULD GO
WELL WITH A PIECE OF
RARE MEAT. THE OTHERS
WILL SIT QUIETLY.

YOU
MAY GO
NOW.





FORGET THE DRINK, I'VE HEARD ABOUT THE MAN MADE OF STONE WHO GIVES THE GREATEST MESSAGES ON THE PLANET.



YOU *SURE* THERE'S NO MORE ROOM AT YOUR PARTY TONIGHT?



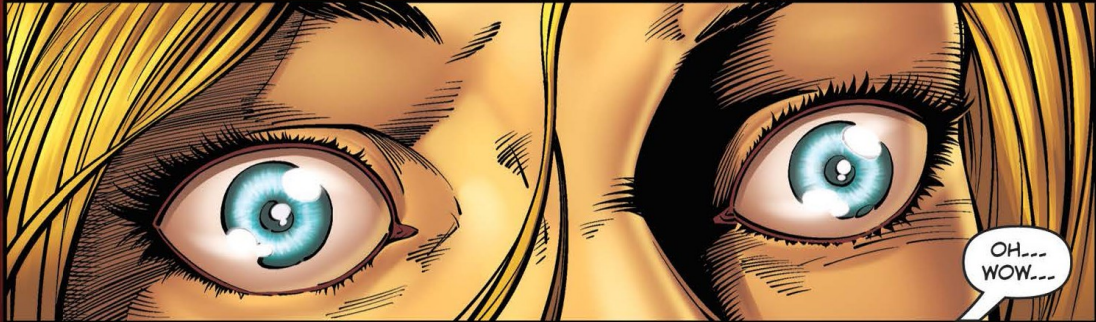
HEH. I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO.



LOOKS LIKE THE SHOW'S ABOUT TO START.



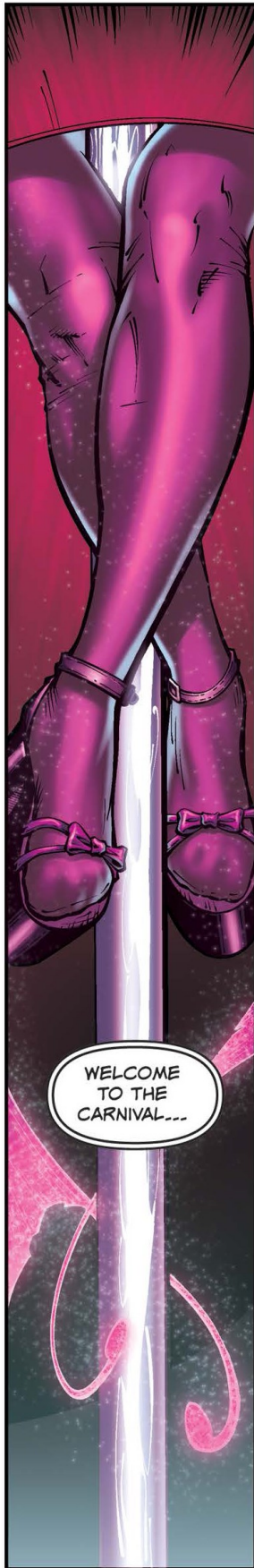
EYES FORWARD, WE CAN TALK AFTER.



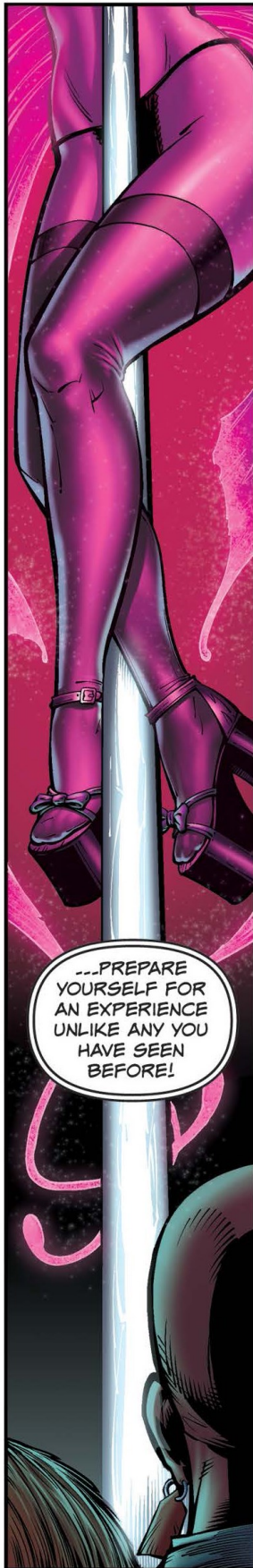
OH... WOW...



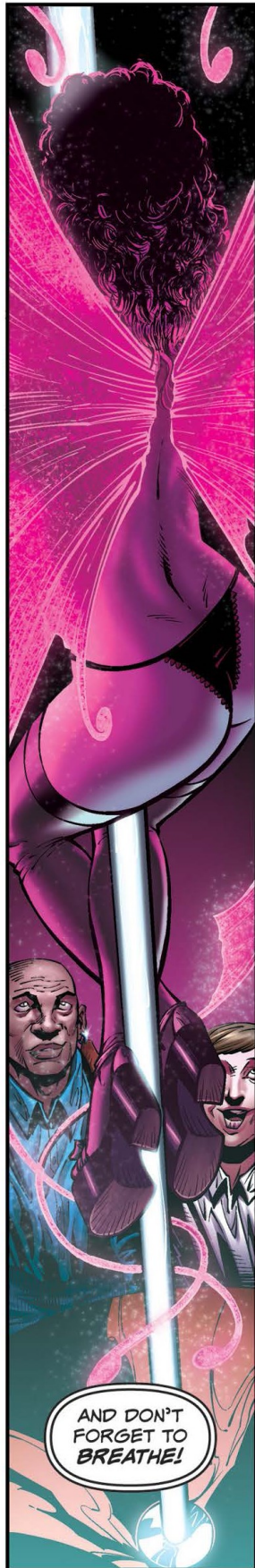
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GOOD EVENING!



WELCOME TO THE CARNIVAL...



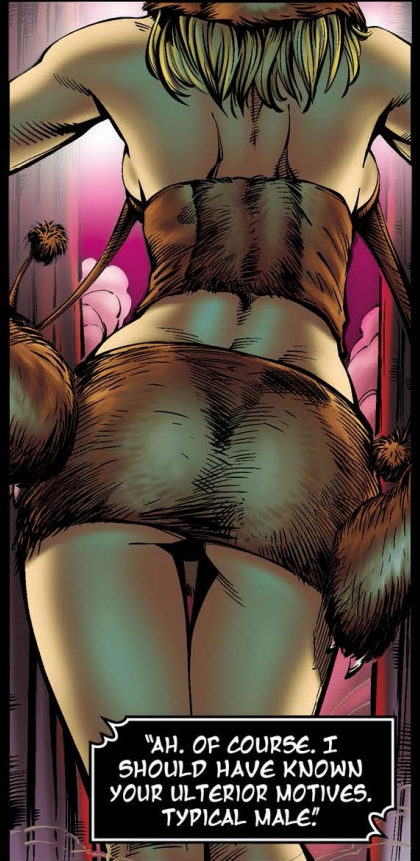
...PREPARE YOURSELF FOR AN EXPERIENCE UNLIKE ANY YOU HAVE SEEN BEFORE!

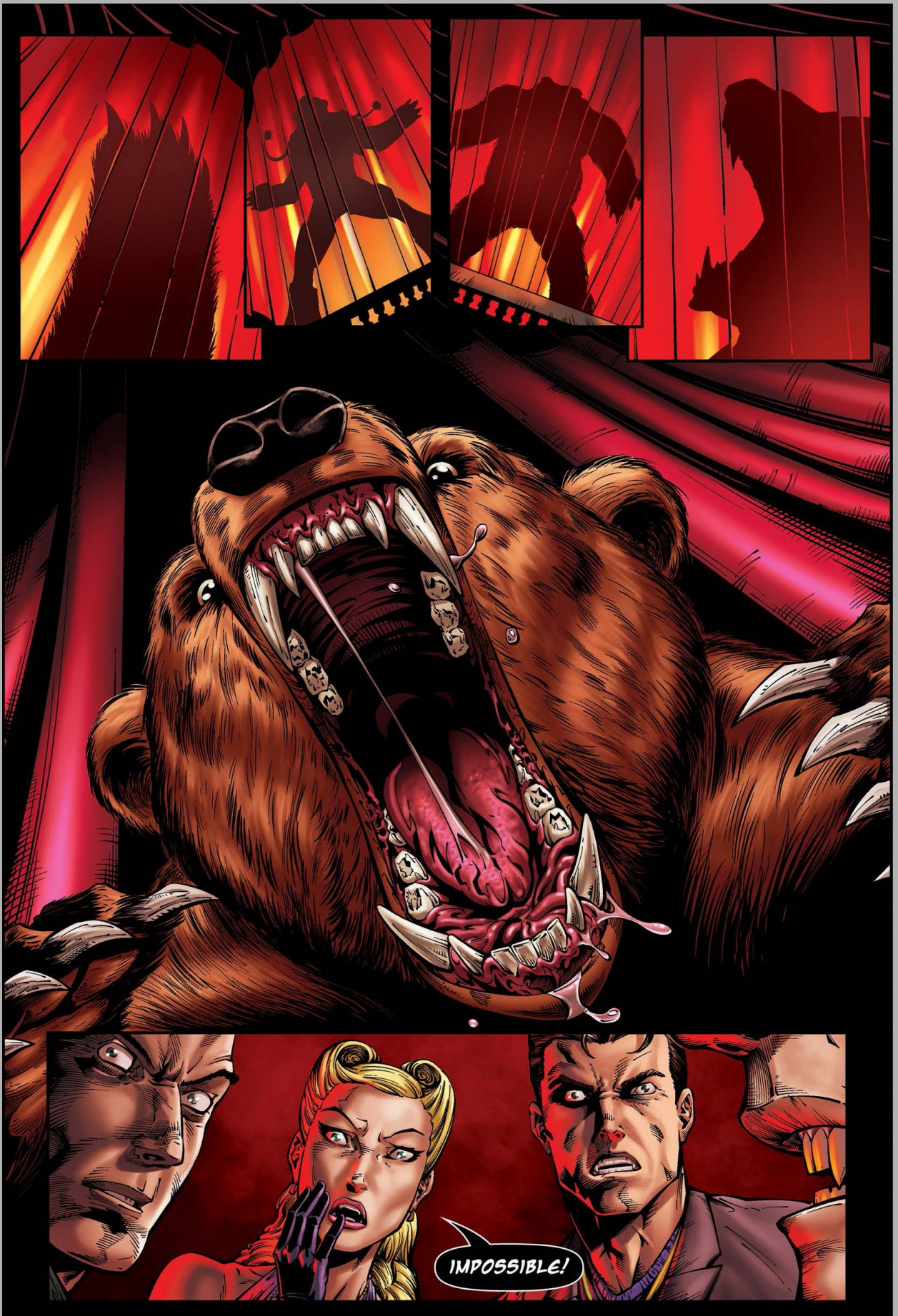


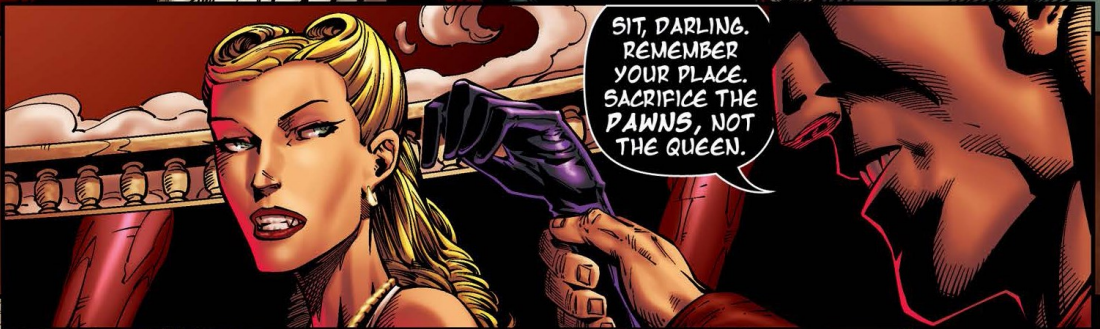
AND DON'T FORGET TO BREATHE!











SIT, DARLING.
REMEMBER
YOUR PLACE.
SACRIFICE THE
PAWNS, NOT
THE QUEEN.



"THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS
AS THEY APPEAR!"



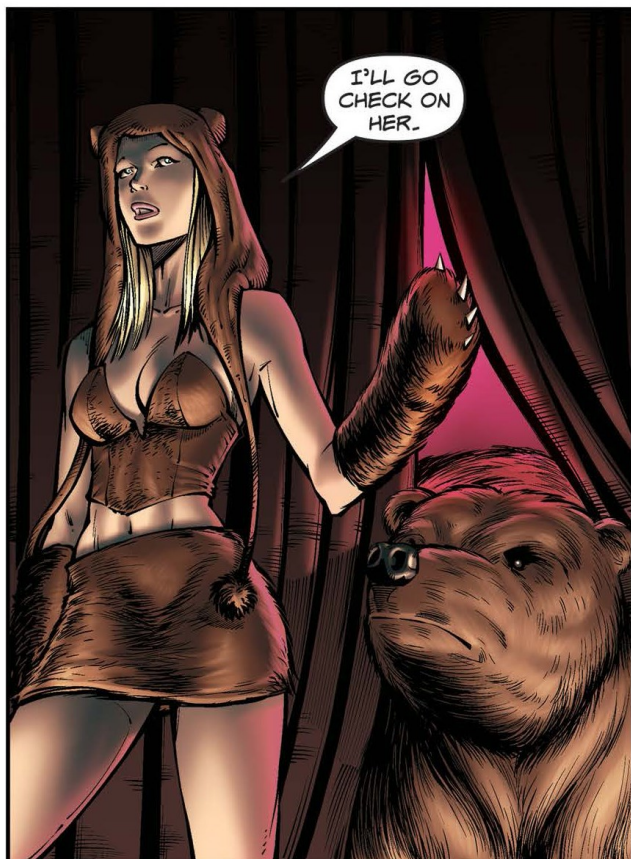
OH, YOU'RE GONNA
PAY FOR THAT, YOU
WALKING RUG!



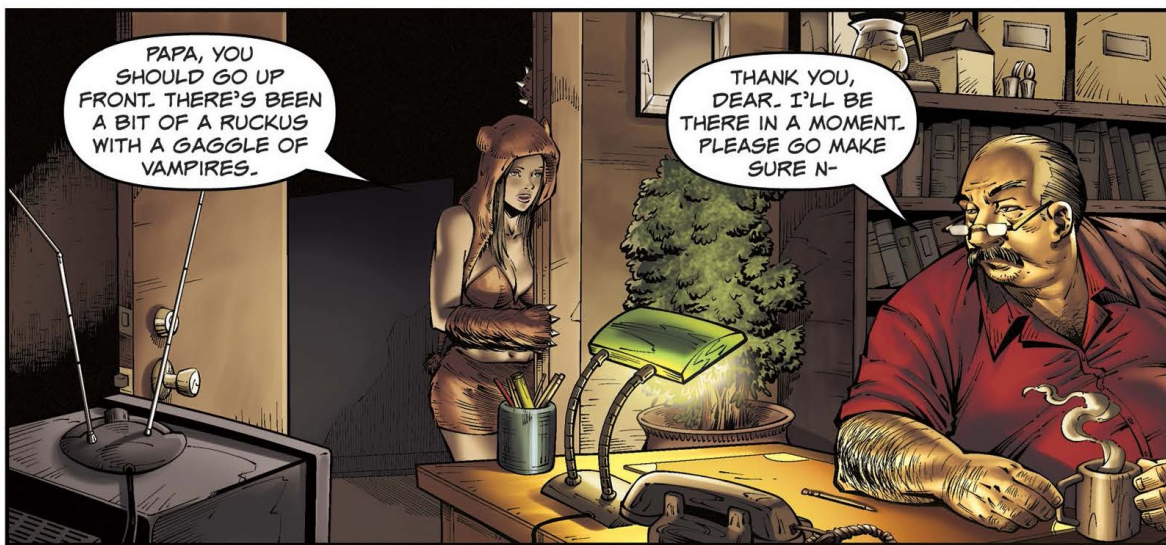


OH BOY,
ONYX LAID THAT
VAMP OUT.

SERVES HIM RIGHT,
BUT SOMEONE MAKE
SURE NAOMI IS OUT OF
SIGHT FOR NOW.



I'LL GO
CHECK ON
HER.



PAPA, YOU
SHOULD GO UP
FRONT. THERE'S BEEN
A BIT OF A RUCKUS
WITH A GAGGLE OF
VAMPIRES.

THANK YOU,
DEAR. I'LL BE
THERE IN A MOMENT.
PLEASE GO MAKE
SURE N-



MAKE SURE
NAOMI IS ALRIGHT.
ON IT, PAPA.

GOOD
GIRL.



NAOMI?
YOU OUT
HERE?



SNOW
IN LOS
ANGELES.
GLOBAL
WARMING
MY BEAR
BUTT.



NAOMI!
QUIET, YOU
DITZ! I'M BACK
HERE.



OH, THERE
YOU ARE. THE
VAMPIRES BOUGHT
IT AND THOUGHT
THE WERE-BEAR WAS
A SCAM. THERE WAS
A LITTLE SCUFFLE,
BUT ONYX TOOK
CARE OF IT. THEY SHOULD
BE LEAVING
SOON.

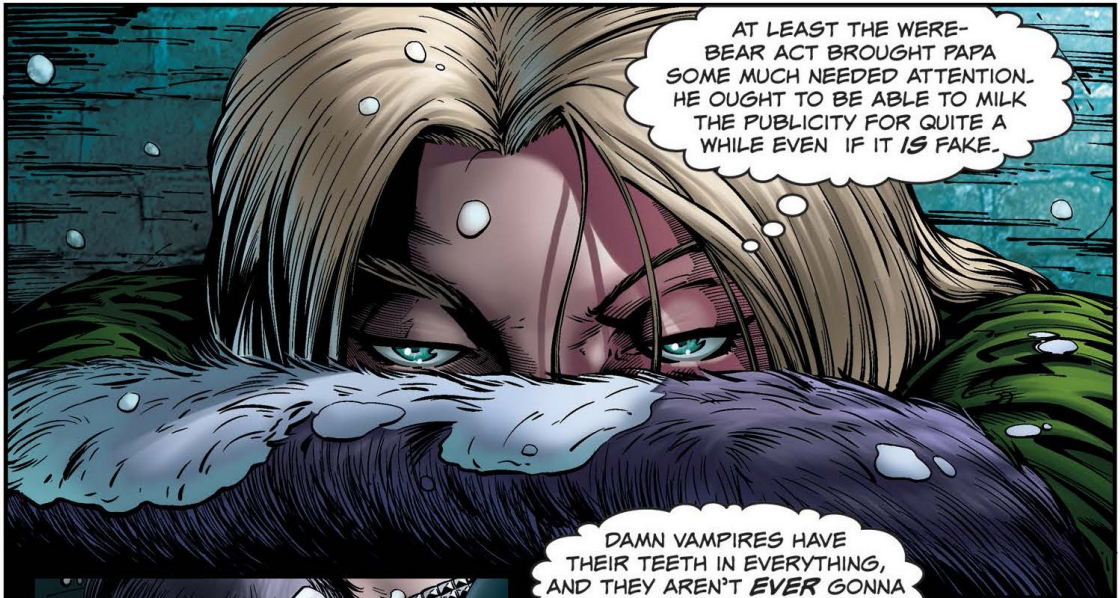
ARE YOU OK
OUT HERE? YOU
NEED A BLANKET
OR ANYTHING?

NO, I'M
FINE. GO BACK
INSIDE.



OK. I'LL
COME GET
YOU WHEN
THEY'VE
LEFT.

LOOKS LIKE MY
SHOWGIRL DAYS ARE
OVER. CAN'T SAY I'LL
MISS THE THONG.

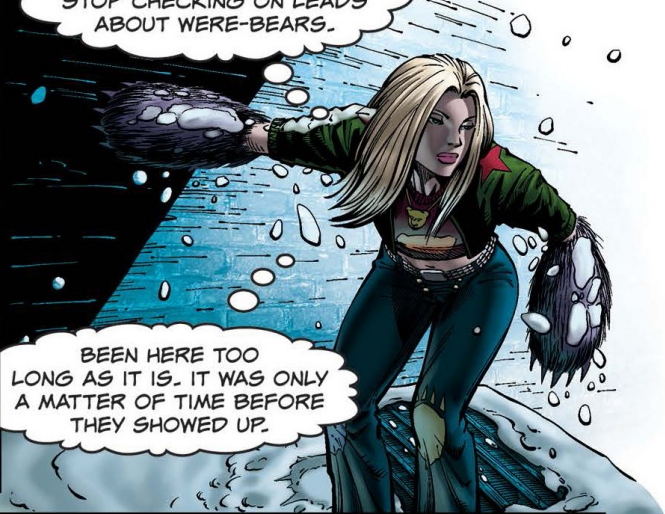


AT LEAST THE WERE-BEAR ACT BROUGHT PAPA SOME MUCH NEEDED ATTENTION. HE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO MILK THE PUBLICITY FOR QUITE A WHILE EVEN IF IT IS FAKE.

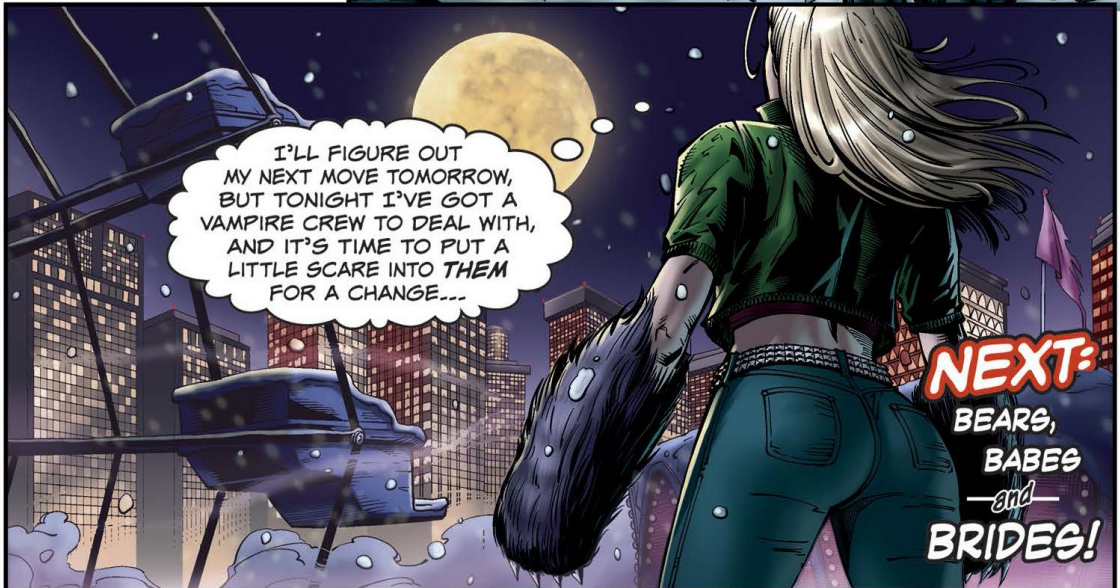


WHAM

DAMN VAMPIRES HAVE THEIR TEETH IN EVERYTHING, AND THEY AREN'T EVER GONNA STOP CHECKING ON LEADS ABOUT WERE-BEARS.



BEEN HERE TOO LONG AS IT IS. IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY SHOWED UP.



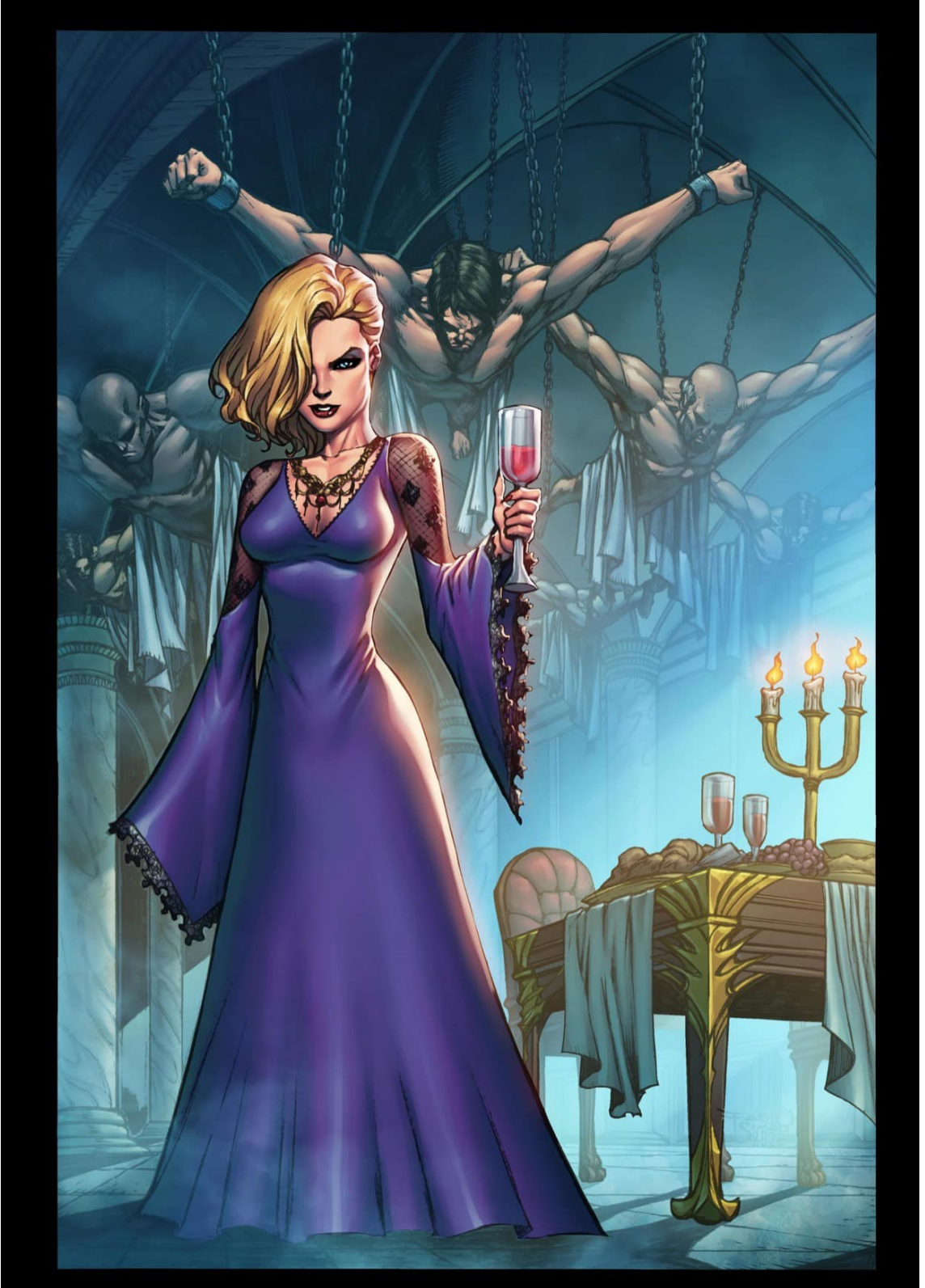
I'LL FIGURE OUT MY NEXT MOVE TOMORROW, BUT TONIGHT I'VE GOT A VAMPIRE CREW TO DEAL WITH, AND IT'S TIME TO PUT A LITTLE SCARE INTO THEM FOR A CHANGE...

NEXT:
BEARS,
BABES
—and—
BRIDES!

Hot, right? I know you're bought in.

Well now's the time to buy in for real! Ursa Minor is on Kickstarter

RIGHT NOW



This is a story I wrote as a stream of consciousness years ago, and have polished and refined over the years. It still feels incomplete, and at points rushed, but I still like the idea. It feels like a good framing device. Something to maybe write more stories in. I'm taking submissions, let's make an anthology.

—

AT THE END OF THE DAY

By Dalibor Žujović

A middle-aged man sits in his chair reading the newspaper. With a sigh of disgust, he pulls the paper away from him and looks out the window.

Again, he thinks. Again, they've managed to let the clearly guilty go free. Thirty people are dead, and because of "inconsistent procedural adherence" the son of a bitch goes free. It's a fucking joke. He stands and walks to his balcony. Orange and red paints his face as he stares at the sunset. He should burn. Fucking scum should all burn.

ONE YEAR LATER

"The mob's getting restless, Andy." Eric Dwyer has been the press secretary for the DA for six months. He was brought on to deal with the impact of the *Huntsman* case going to trial. The city has been erupting in violence over the opposing viewpoints." The *Huntsman* managed to kill seventy-three individuals before being caught.

"Eric, the mob's always restless. Someone must tell them that this monster will hang for his crimes."

The doors of City Hall open, and the crowd freezes. A dead silence falls over a gathering of thousands, as they wait for the results of the trial.

Andrew Jackson, the youngest DA the city's ever elected steps up to the microphone. He was hand-picked to lead this case because his relentless dedication to the law.

"Ladies and gentlemen— "Before he could speak, the doors behind him again opened, and Robert Huntley steps out. He offers no resistance, but is notably handcuffed, and escorted by ten armed guards.

The crowd remains silent, as a single reporter directs her microphone toward Huntley. He stops, and looks at the crowd, then speaks into the microphone.

"A hundred years from now, no one will remember this day. But no matter what, I go to my end knowing I did what was right. Every single one of those people was scum; they got away with murder, rape, and worse. All because of errors made in due process. What I did was wrong in the eyes of the law, but it was the right thing to do. At the end of the day, you must stand for what is right, even if everyone is against you."

100 YEARS LATER

It's the third damn day. When the hell are they going to run out of bombs? John Jackson, leader of the Free-Thinking Party, de-facto leader of the government-dubbed "Insurgent Rebels," watches from his secure post in the mountainside. *It's getting ridiculous.* He looks around his bunker; three guards, underfed and overworked. *We're damn near out of supplies, and they don't seem to be slowing down. Dwyer and his boys better make it back soon, or we're going to starve to death before they bomb us to kingdom come.*

The door busts open, and a winded young woman stands in the frame. "The sentries spotted Dwyer's men!"

Jackson runs out behind the young woman, followed by his three guards, with renewed spirits. As they near the compound's entrance, they see the doors close, and three men, overloaded with bags standing there.

"Phillip, where's Rick? Where's Rick, damnit?"

A young man, not over 20, looks up at him, with a dark face.

"He stayed behind, sir. General Dwyer said to go to Delta Protocol."

"That son of a bitch!" John stands there, angry, with tears falling from his eyes. He raises his hand to his chest, and grabs his two-way, pushing the button. He sniffs and takes a deep breath. "Delta Protocol, everyone. Now. Get below and gather all the weapons. We push forward in five hours. Remember people we're standing up for what's right. At the end of the day, they will remember that."

100 YEARS LATER

An eager young boy raises his hand in class. "Miss Jackson?"

"Yes, Billy?" She smiles at him and waits for his question.

"Miss Jackson, why is it that we say the pledge every day?"

"Billy, it's because two hundred years ago, one man had the courage to stand for what was right. Because of him, one hundred years ago, a lot of people stood for what was right. And every free day we have in this world, we must remember to do the same, lest we fall into the darkness. Will you lead us in the pledge?"

Without an answer, Billy stands up, tall as a fourth grader can, and recites what he's been taught since he could talk. "I pledge allegiance to the Truth, and pure and swift Justice; to the World, and every soul in it, and swear to stand for what's right at the end of the day."

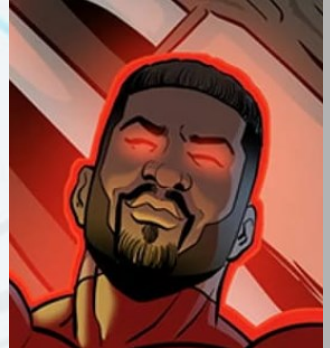


As the list of people I was introduced to through TikTok grows, people start falling into categories. At the top of the Educator and Freelancer game is the man, the myth, the legend,

FISH LEE

Let's get some self-promotion out of the way – Besides Greenzone: Life in the Blocks what else are you creating out in the world?

I'm also Illustrating "Kevin Terry Is Fivestar" also published by Freestyle Comics and will soon be available for purchase at www.fsknow.com the latest issue on "The Sentinels" I penciled will soon be going out to backers, and will "The Indieversity Project" but Eric N. Bennett featuring DOZENS of awesome worlds for MANY indie publishers! And I will be Illustrating the next issue of "Power Company" coming out by the end of the year... but by the end of 2022 I hope to switch over to just Illustrating Greenzone full-time.



Have you always been a comic book creator, or is this something that came to you later in life?

I've always been creating comics, stories, and characters my whole life... but I only managed to turn it into a JOB in my 40's! I've always worked as an artist in some fashion. either in T-shirts, signs, murals, or logo and business card design. I love finally getting to live my dream job now. sure, I make per DAY now what I used to make per HOUR doing logo design... but I'm always working with a great group of clients, that are used to working with artists, and they are always SUPER excited to see the finished pages! the joy and stress free work life is WELL worth the pay cut. I'm so much happier now, and more fulfilled on so many levels.

What was your first piece that you felt was ready for public consumption, and can we see it somewhere still?

For years I was crippled by my severe Tourette's syndrome, which kept me shaking so violently I couldn't feed myself, much less draw. when things started to get a little better I volunteered to illustrate issue 9 &10 "The Creatur" (no E at the end for some reason) for my friend Quentin Bennet at www.severecomics.com just to see if my skills were back up to snuff and ready to try working on one of my own books. through a friend of a friend I saw a post on FB and landed my first paying gig in indie comics inking the book "Empyrean Command" for Andrew Rowland which is still available on www.indyplanet.com





Have you ever given up on a project, and if so why?

After a hurtful but honest review of my work by Erik Larson, I made a promise to myself I would NEVER again put out any ugly work for any reason. didn't matter how much they paid, or how short the deadline, or how big a jerk the client is... this job will be done the best I possibly can. You don't ever have to work for them again if you don't want to... but this job will look the best it can. you won't be standing there to explain to the reader WHY it looks bad. they just see your name, and bad art, and think that's the kind of work you do. there has only been ONE client since that I had to refund his money and cancel the job. he kept demanding I make the piece look bad. demanding that one character with a cube for a head be shown with both his face AND the side of his head showing completely... I explained that you can't see both sides FLAT at the same time, and it was around this time I realized he didn't have the best gripe on reality. this was on the 20th round of revisions (I rarely have ANY revisions) and it became clear he was never going to be happy, and I refused to make an ugly drawing I was ashamed of, because it would have my name on it. to which he replied "I was never going to credit you anyway, so no one will know!" I apologized for not being able to satisfy him and refunded his money in full. he proceeded to message me THOUSANDS of times over the next week, threatening to sue me in the supreme court for copyright infringement because I drew his copyrighted characters... AT HIS REQUEST! he blasted me all over social media for being a thief, etc... it was nuts! the funny thing was... he had SUCH a horrible reputation on line, and had burned HUNDREDS of artists over the years... by the end of the week I had a dozen people reach out and offer me jobs to make up for the money I lost working with him. I made 3 times the money and added 5 regular clients to my roster! (the crazy guy ended up stealing the low res proof of my art anyway and ruining it and paying some other poor sap to color it... but you can't fix crazy)

You provide a lot of free indie comics education, you work on tons of other creators' projects, and of course your own books. I have to ask, do you sleep? How about water, are you staying hydrated?

LOL... I have about an hour or two when I wake up that I drink my coffee and scroll social media while I watch the news... then I turn off the TV, put on my music, and start to work... and keep working until I start dozing off at my computer at night. then go to bed, lather, rinse, repeat. sometimes people get frustrated that social media shows me "online and active" but they don't get an immediate response... but they don't understand how much I work. right now with the Kickstarter coming, I'm regularly putting in 16 hr days, I MEAN to get back to people, but between the amount of work and the volume of messages I get... a "hi" gets lost in the sea of messages that HAVE to returned to my publisher, artists I commissioned for variant covers, clients, etc...



Go ahead and turn the page to get a taste of Greenzone!

COMING TO KICKSTARTER APRIL 2022

GREENZONE: LIFE IN THE BLOCKS





CREATED BY MR FISH LEE

GREENZONE: LIFE IN THE BLOCKS



WHEN ANYONE COULD BE BORN WITH SUPERPOWERS,
GENOMES ARE VIEWED AS SUPERVILLAINS WAITING TO HAPPEN.
THEY ARE CAST OUT OF SOCIETY AND FORGOTTEN.
IF YOU WANT TO EARN YOUR WAY OUT OF THE BLOCKS,
AND GET YOUR CITIZENSHIP BACK, YOU HAVE TO SERVE
THE GREATER GOOD AS A CIVIL SERVANT FOR FIVE YEARS.

THIS IS THE STORY OF THREE NEW
RECRUITS TO THE POLICE FORCE...

"FIRST SHIFT"

PART 1 OF 4

FISH LEE
WRITER / PENCILS / INKS
COLORS / LETTERS

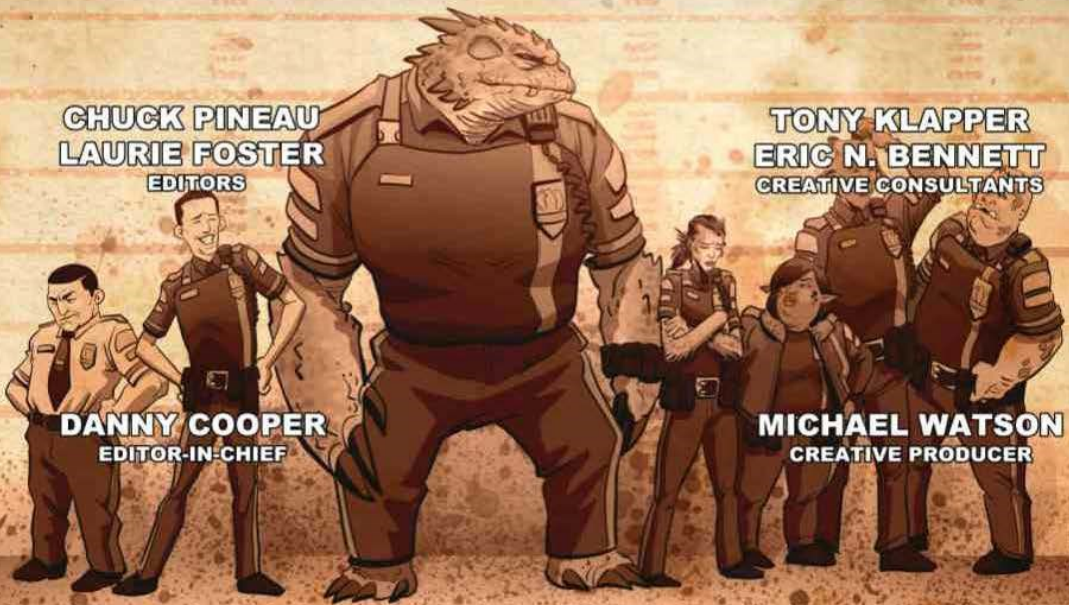
HANNAH SHAYNE CUI
COLOR FLATS

**CHUCK PINEAU
LAURIE FOSTER**
EDITORS

**TONY KLAPPER
ERIC N. BENNETT**
CREATIVE CONSULTANTS

DANNY COOPER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MICHAEL WATSON
CREATIVE PRODUCER



SPECIAL THANKS TO: COLBY LEE, TONY KLAPPER, ERIC N. BENNETT, ROY JOHNSON, MICHAEL WATSON,
DANNY COOPER, LAURIE FOSTER, HANNAH SHAYNE CUI AND CHUCK PINEAU.
THANKS FOR HELPING ME GET THIS BOOK MADE. I COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU ALL!

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GREENZONE: LIFE IN THE BLOCKS

GREENZONE,
CAPITAL CITY.
2001

"THE BLOCKS—
FEDERAL HOUSING
FOR LOW INCOME
AND UNLICENSED
GENOMES..."

"...THOSE BORN
WITH GENETIC
ANOMALIES,
SOME SUBTLE,
SOME DRASTIC."

**SANDERSON
INCORPORATED**

"BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE IN THE GREEN ZONE!"

The advertisement shows a man in a suit, a woman, and two children standing in front of a suburban house. The man has his arm around the woman, and the children are smiling. The house is a two-story yellow house with a green roof and a white picket fence in front.

"GROWING UP AS
A GENOME IN
THIS WORLD IS
HARD ENOUGH"

"HAVING TO DO IT PACKED IN THE BLOCKS LIKE CATTLE IS MISERABLE"



"THERE ARE SO FEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOY."

"WHEN THE COPS SHOW UP, THINGS GO BAD."



"WHEN IT'S GNOME COPS..."

"IT GETS WORSE!"



"WELL, WELL, WELL..."

"SLUGS"

"WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE, CHET?"

"CHROME GNOMES"

"I DON'T KNOW..."



LOOKS LIKE AN UNLAWFUL PUBLIC USE OF GENOME ABILITIES TO ME, DOUG!

THAT WOULD BE A FELONY, WOULDN'T IT, CHET?

IT SURE WOULD.

"TOY SOLDIERS..."

"THE G-UNIT HAS A LOT OF NAMES"



"THEY'RE ALL RACE TRAITORS WHO TURNED ON THEIR OWN KIND."



"IN THE '40'S THE "GENOME SERVICE ACT" GRANTED CITIZENSHIP AND VOTING RIGHTS TO ANY GNOMES THAT "SERVE THE GREATER GOOD IN CIVIL SERVICE FOR A PERIOD OF NO LESS THAN FIVE CONSECUTIVE YEARS"

"SO THEY SELL OUT FOR THE CHANCE TO MOVE UP AND GET OUT OF THE BLOCKS"



"NEVER ACCEPTED BY THE HUMANS, AND HATED BY THEIR OWN KIND..."

"THEY LOVE TO COME TAKE THEIR ANGER OUT ON THE BLOCKS"



YOU THREATENING AN OFFICER, BOY?!



NO, SIR.



NO, "SIR"?! YOU THINK YOU'RE A FUNNY LITTLE @\$#@?!
YOU MAKING FUN OF US, MUTT?!



NO, SIR.



SIR?!?

OH, YOU JUST WANT TO GET SHOT, YOU SCALE-FACED---!!

LEAVE HIM ALONE!



HE'S ONLY FIVE YEARS OLD!



WHAT THE---

THAT THING IS ONLY FIVE?!

GRRRRRRRRRR





LINE UP AGAINST THE WALL FOR INSPECTION!

ALRIGHTY BOYS, WHAT DO WE HAVE IN THE NEWEST GROUP OF WASHOUTS?

YOU GOT A COUPLE REAL TREATS THIS TIME AROUND.



GOOD GOD!

WHO THE HELL LET THIS THING THROUGH?



DOC'S GONNA HAVE A FIT...

IT'S TIME FOR RANDOM GENETIC TESTING.

OH! WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT...

WHO WILL WE PICK?



YOU, YOU, AND YOU.



HEAD DOWN-STAIRS TO THE LAB.

FOLLOW THE WHOLE STORY IN THE BRAND NEW SERIES:

GREENZONE: LIFE IN THE BLOCKS

COMING SOON FROM



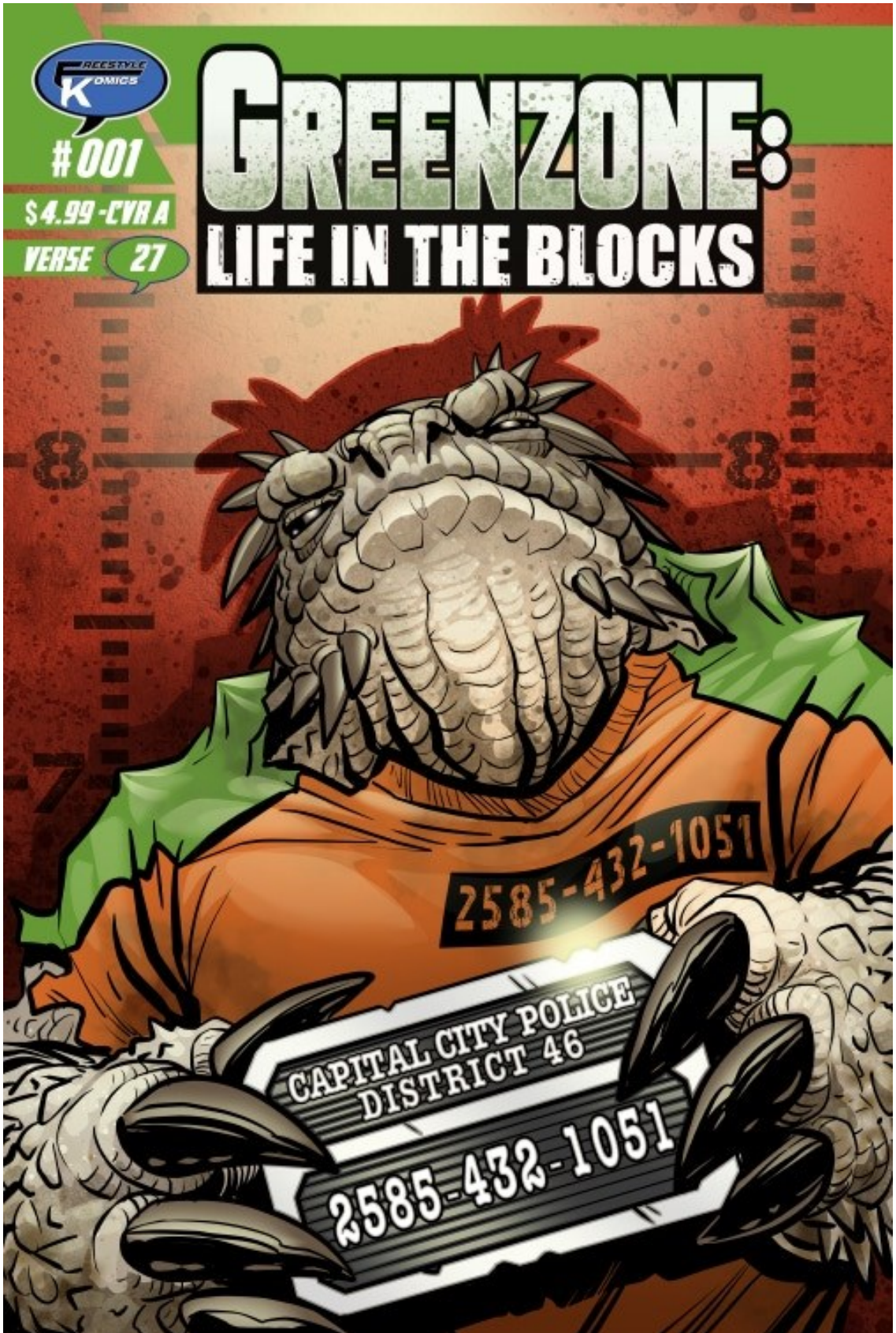
WWW.FSKNOW.COM

What a sample, right?

Get going then!

Greenzone: Life in the Blocks is on Kickstarter now!

Click the link below and get your copy!



GALLERY

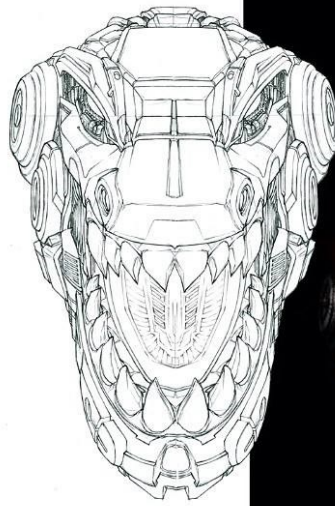
Years ago, I met a young artist at a Chicago comic con who had a very unique style—at least unique to me at that time. Very exaggerated forms, almost caricature-like characters, but still so very much superhero and detailed and sci-fi and all of the things I loved. His was one of the very first sketchbooks I purchased and one of the few I go back to constantly just to truly enjoy a different approach to some classic characters and interesting concepts. And then he also does this beautiful, realistic depictions of characters and creatures with incredible shadow and ink work. So it made sense that when he partnered with Kings Wild to work on this Mistborn card set, I was absolutely going to buy it. I have never read Mistborn, but I love the art, and so I share with you a sampling of work by

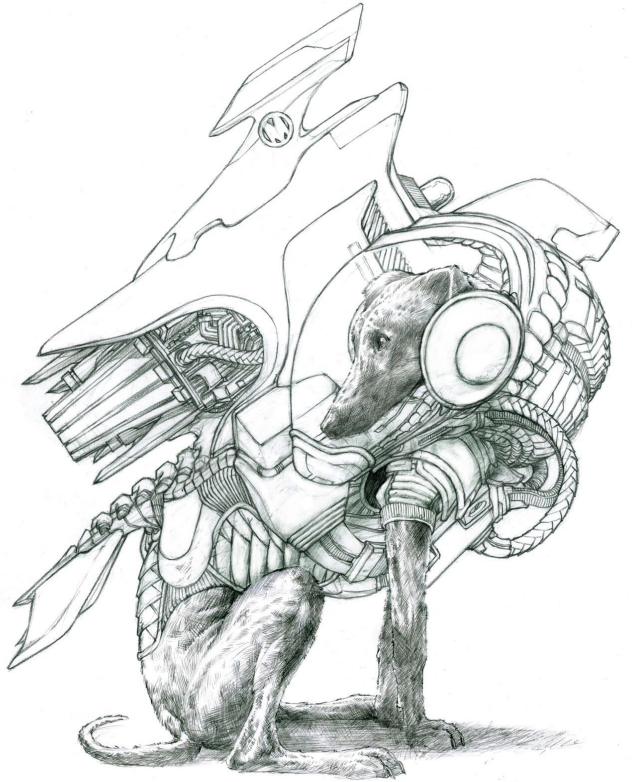
GREGORY TITUS











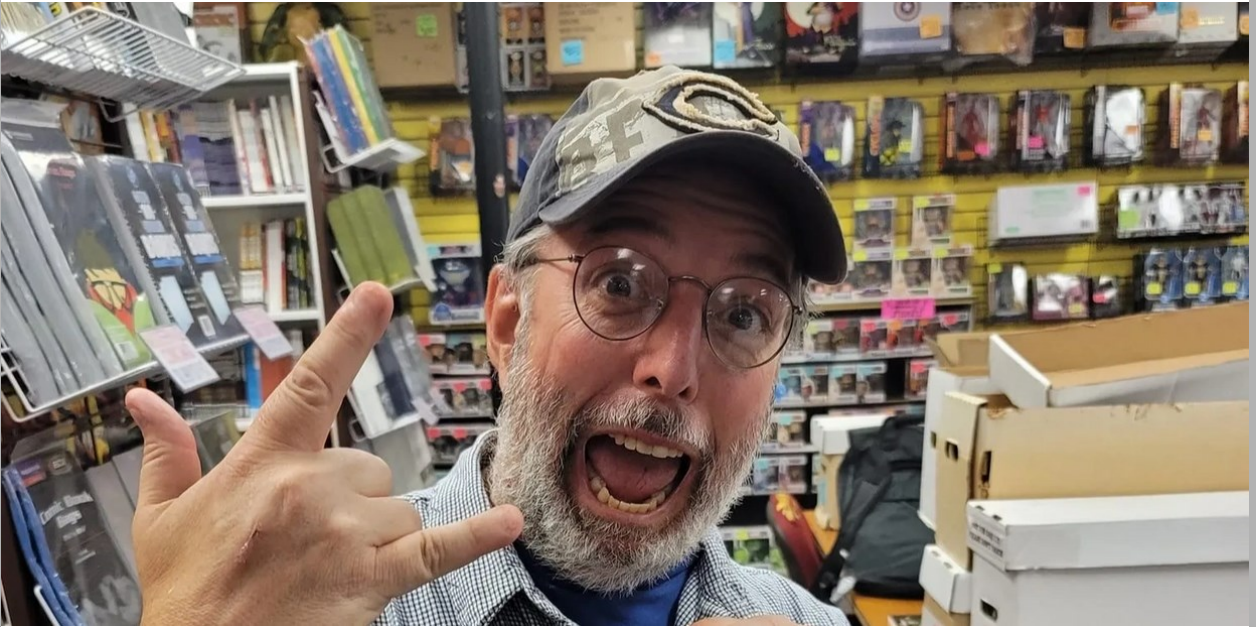
Now that you've had a taste, go and follow Greg's work:

www.gregorytitus.com

Instagram: [@gregorytitus](https://www.instagram.com/gregorytitus)

I'm a member of several indie comics groups on Facebook, and I always check out projects that I see shared. In just such a manner I was introduced to

CHUCK SATTERLEE



Looking at your bibliography, you've been creating for a long time. Have you always been passionate about writing comics?

I grew up across the street as a only child ... from a comic book store... in Chicago in the 70s. My bedroom looked down on the big gigantic panels outside the store that took the place of windows. Huge paintings of Batman, Captain America, Superman and the rest of the big guys. To say I was passionate about comics in general from an early age is an understatement. Comics helped raise me. My mom had to work... a lot. I spent a lot of time at that store... annoying the owner. But writing comics was a different story. In 1986... I read Frank Miller's The Dark Knight Returns and my head exploded. I knew I wanted to write comics but had no idea how to do it. So I learned. I read anything and everything. In 1995, I self-published a book through Diamond called AGONY ACRES and learned a bunch. And from there... I just kind of kept learning and hopefully... getting better.



What was the first work you created that you felt was ready for public consumption?



AGONY ACRES was published by ... me & a partner ... in 1995. I was proud of it at the time but looking back... it wasn't ready for prime time. But you asked for the first one I felt was ready and so that was it. I showed an ashcan to George Perez and he was nice enough to offer to ink our covers so he perpetuated my fantasy that it was good. George Perez is amazing and he gave us credibility. But really... that series was not very good, looking back.

With such a broad catalog of work, have you ever given up on a project?

Nah.

Everything, even the stuff I didn't do yet... is filed in the "do it later" category. So no.

When you sit down to write something new, do you start with a character, a plot, or something else?

When you're creative... as I claim to be... and hope I am... inspiration comes from everywhere. On a bus when seeing a billboard or interesting person... middle of the night when waking up and going to the bathroom... anywhere. But when writing the script for an actual project... I start with notes, then an outline... then I go straight to scripting. That said, when I finish a script, I'll ultimately rewrite the damn thing at least a few times. By the time an artist sees it, it has probably been scripted and rescripted 5-6 times.



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

The best thing is no bosses telling me to do this or to do that. But that also brings with it a duty to be your own editor. Also... when you are self-publishing... it is all on you. So... good... and bad.

Wise words from an indie mainstay creator. If you're already interested in the work, wait no longer and click/tap the photo below to go to the Kickstarter page for the Of Bitter Souls Omnibus!



If you need a little more convincing, scroll on and check out the first chapter of that very story!

OF BITTER SOULS



today

THE CITIES OF THE DEAD...

...ARE ONE OF THE **BIGGEST** ATTRACTIONS WE HAVE HE-AH IN NAWLINS.

AND UNLIKE OTHER TOURS IN THE CRESCENT CITY, WE GIVE Y'ALL THE **REAL DEAL**.

MARIE LAVEAU, THE FAMOUS 19TH CENTURY VOODOO QUEEN FROM OLD NAWLINS, WAS ONCE SAID TO BE A VAMPIRE.

SHE WAS NOT.

BUT A NOTED NAWLINS WRITER IN THE LATE 1800'S, LAFCADIO HEARN, SAID SHE **WAS**...AT LEAST IT WAS SO SPECULATED.

HE WAS **PROBABLY** SPEAKIN' OF HER DAUGHTER, ALSO NAMED MARIE, WITH WHOM HE PURPORTEDLY ONCE LIVED.

THEN AGAIN, MR. HEARN WAS A ROMANTIC.

BORN IN GREECE, RENOWNED AS A JOURNALIST AND WRITER IN NEW ORLEANS WHERE HE BECAME FAMILIAR WITH THE VOODOO COMMUNITY...

THIS IS SO COOL!

YEAH, YOU SURE YOUR PARENTS WON'T MIND THAT WE WENT ON THIS TOUR?

HELL NO! THE REASON THEY LET ME BRING YOU GUYS IS SO I'LL HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WHILE THEY'RE AT THAT DAMN LEGAL CONFERENCE THING.

WHOAH!





THIS IS TOO COOL!

LOOK AT WHAT IT SAYS FOR AN EPITAPH!

THAT'S JUST CREEPY, MAN. LET'S HEAD BACK.

COME ON, GUYS. YOU THREE STAND IN FRONT OF THE CRYPT. I'LL SNAP A PIC AND WE'LL BOLT.

I DON'T KNOW...

COME ON!



OKAY-- EVERYONE SMILE AND SAY 'SKINNY PUPPY!'



SKINNY PUPPY!



HOLY SH...



OH MY GOD!



OH MY GOD!







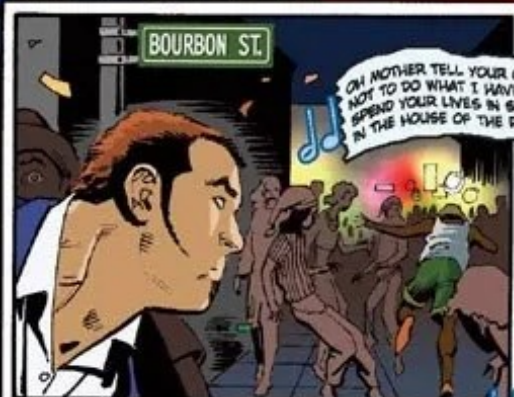


Mardi Gras, Bourbon Street, New Orleans

Three years ago...

THERE IS A HOUSE IN NEW ORLEANS
THEY CALL THE RISING SUN
AND IT'S BEEN THE RUIN OF MANY A POOR BOY
AND GOD I KNOW I'M ONE.









today

BELOVED!!!!

DO NOT FRET, SWEETHEART.

I'M FINE.

BUT...
I THOUGHT...

GLURP...

HOW?

IT'S REALLY SIMPLE, ACTUALLY.

NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER.

Tchoupotoulis Street, New Orleans

Three years ago

BAR
LOUNGE



George Parker...



...it's time to go.

Barden District, New Orleans

Three years ago



UH...
YEAH...
SURE...
RIGHT HERE...
SOMEWHERE.





THAT'S COMING OUT OF MY PAY.

HEY! THAT ID WAS FAKE!

SEVEN OUT!

MAN! I WISH I COULD TURN BACK TIME.

Lynette Story...

...It's time to go.



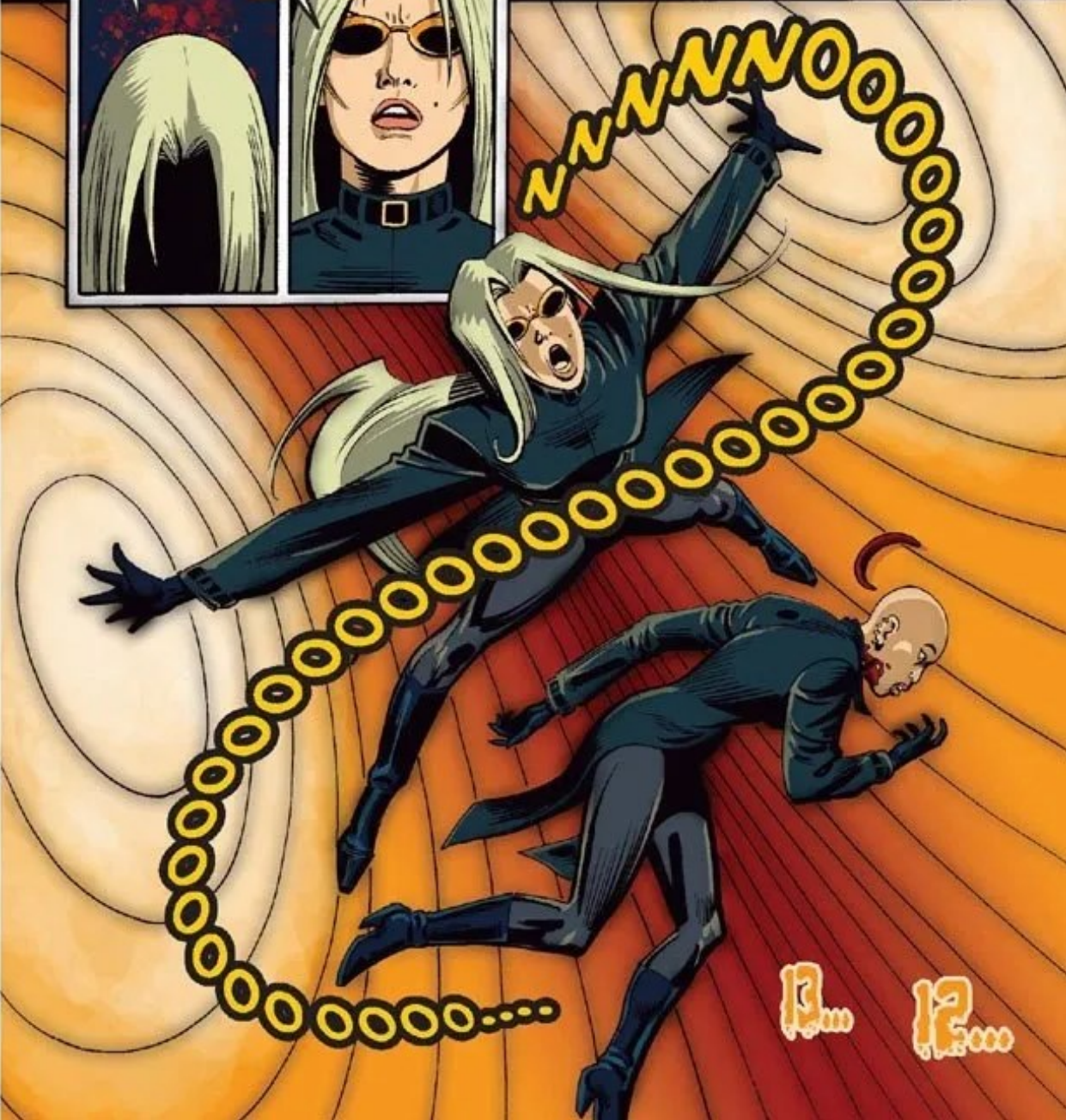
today

NOOOOO!!!!



NO...

NO.



NNNNNOOOOO

P...

P...



11... 10... 9... 8... 7...





today

LET US AVENGE OUR PARENTS, SISTER!

INDEED, SISTER!

MAGZI! LOOK OUT!

I'M FINE.

DIE!

HMMMPH!

MAGZI!

TURN AROUND!



THOSE WERE
V-V-V-V...

V-V-V-V...

VAMPIRES...

THEY
AREN'T S'POSED
TO BE REAL!



IT'S OKAY.
DO YOU
WANT TO KNOW
WHY?

YES.
PLEASE TELL
ME HOW THIS
IS OK.



YES.

PLEASE
TELL.

YES.

YES.

YES.



BECAUSE
IT DIDN'T
HAPPEN.

YOU HAD
AN ENJOYABLE
TOUR.

YOU
LEARNED
A LOT.



NOW...

WHERE WAS I?

FOR SOME REASON, I CAN'T REMEMBER WHERE I WAS.

I THINK IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH VODOO.



I HAVE A QUESTION...

VAMPIRES ARE SAID TO LURK IN THESE CEMETERIES.

ANY TRUTH TO THAT?

I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT STUFF IS THE STUFF OF MYTH.



Bangkok Spa, New Orleans.

Three years ago.







WHAT...
WHERE
AM I?

WHO IS
THAT?

WHO
ARE
YOU?!

WHO
ARE YOU
TWO?



WERE
YOU JUST
KIDNAPPED?

I
WAS JUST
KIDNAPPED!

SOMEONE'S
IN SOME DEEP
SHT!

DO YOU
KNOW WHO I
AM, MOTHER
F™ER,

GOD-DAMMIT!!

I SWEAR
TO GOD I'LL
BUST A CAP
IN YO' ASS!



My
name is
Secord.

You
are all here
because you
were chosen.

Your time
spent here will
be hard. There
will be rules.

Now
is a good time
for the first
rule.



Watch your mouth with that whole Lord's name in vahn thing.

ALPHA CLASS DINNER SIGN-UP SHEET

In February, I virtually attended Virtuous Con and had an opportunity to talk with a ton of new people, including an author who I would absolutely describe as a rising star in the fantasy genre,



BRYAN D. COVINGTON

Have you always wanted to write or did you find that passion more recently?

I've always loved writing. Poetry was 1st. It was a great help through those teenage years. I wrote and did visual arts then, but adulting makes me choose nowadays.

I recently finished my first complete work which I say basically wrote itself since I went in with no plan. When you began work on *Between Magic and Dreams*, did you sit down and plan out the whole series of books, or just start writing one chapter at a time?

Oh, I went in with only the 1st book planned. Books 2 and 3 set themselves up as I wrote. What was originally going to be a stand-alone novel became the beginning of a trilogy by its final words.



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

Well... not to sound cocky, but I don't get writer's block. I create my outline / beat sheet and then I always know what the next major steps are. For me, the space between the events are where the fun is.

Is there a project that you've never gotten around to, but still want to write?

Aww man! Indeed there is. I have a sci-fi piece I've been wanting to do. Between Magic and Dreams just won the coin toss of which one I'd work on first. Actu-

ally, I've already made moves to intertwine the two stories.



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

For me, the best part is being able to work and create on my own terms. I control the narrative. The challenging part is EVERYTHING ELSE! What you get out of your books is driven solely by what you pour into them. I've had to overcome a series of insecurities and mental hurdles to build a following, build bridges, build momentum.



If you like what you've read so far, check out the work:

Between Magic and Dreams— [Audible](#) | [Kindle](#) | [HC](#) | [Paperback](#)

Between Magic and Dreams : Reclamation— [Kindle](#) | [HC](#) | [Paperback](#)

If you'd like a taste before you buy, go to the next page and check out a sample from the first chapter of Between Magic and Dreams!

BETWEEN MAGIC AND DREAMS



Bryan D. Covington

Chapter One

Kwen anxiously checks his watch for the time as the train races him to his morning classes. With each bump and turn, the plastic blue seating proves unforgiving. The other passengers grasp for armrests and railings to keep their balance, desperately hoping not to fall into the strangers around them.

Glancing out the windows, Kwen catches the familiar sight of purplish-blue light columns that seemingly hold up the sky. The so-called “New Light”. They crawl across the cityscape as clouds do across the sky. The train enters a tunnel and for a moment the rail car is awash with coolness and fluorescent light from flickering bulbs. When the train emerges out the other side, red light floods in.

Kwen and everyone around him plaster their faces to the windows to get a better view of what’s happening outside. Both the sky and the city are ablaze. A cacophony of cries, wails, and screams bombards Kwen’s ears.

The light columns are much brighter now and crammed with people piled as high as the eye can see. They seem to be trying to break free of their luminous prisons. The noise is deafening but even over the rumble of the train and the sounds of despair, there came something louder.

A deep and terrible roar presses in on them from all angles. Kwen pushes his way through the crowd to see what was happening in the car ahead of them. To his further surprise, the windows to the train car explode in succession.

Passengers scramble about trying to avoid the lacerating winds around them. One after another with increasing speed, the windows burst inward as the roar grows louder, and just as the glass to the door Kwen’s looking through starts to blast into his face—

His alarm clock goes off.

Kwen shoots upright with a yelp, squinting around his room as he pants for breath. A cold sweat covers his forehead and he groans as he flops back down, staring blankly at the ceiling.

The alarm continues to buzz, and he knows he can’t simply lay there all day. He rolls out of bed and slaps at his alarm clock. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he runs his fingers through his locked hair. It’s black with red ends and short but he’s trying to grow it out.

He collects himself. The air in his bedroom is crisp and chills the perspiration on his skin. Rubbing his eyes, he looks out the window at his obstructed view of the city.

Looks like another cold one, he thinks, taking in the gray sky perforated with New Light.

He kicks aside a game controller on his way to the pile of unfolded laundry. After selecting the least wrinkled garments and completing his morning grooming rituals, he grabs his backpack and heads out the door. Once down the hall and the three flights of stairs to get outside, he’s just a parking lot away from the bus stop.

Kwen checks his watch and finds he has plenty of time to get to class. It is indeed cold out today. Luckily someone left a newspaper at the stop. Kwen places

it on the metal bench, using it as insulation.

He's just about to sit down when something odd catches his eye. There's a garden gnome in the grass right by the bus stop. Kwen frowns looking around. Who would leave that there and why? Feeling like those tiny eyes are watching him, he purposely turns his back to it and tells himself it's nothing to worry about. Just people being weird.

After a few moments of waiting, an older gentleman joins him and sits unusually close. Uncomfortably so for Kwen. He busies himself by syncing his new headphones to his cellphone and looking for video streams with anything of interest.

He finds himself watching something he usually tries to avoid— the news. The reporter is a woman probably in her thirties. Her makeup is so badly done its laughable. She's speaking of paranormal activities taking place all over Atlanta.

Kwen perks up at this. The paranormal is a topic he has a fondness for. The news tends to blow things out of proportion, though. He humors them and listens for the moment.

"—Have been suffering from missing time. They've disappeared for hours and have no idea where they were or how long they were gone. They all appear to be unharmed but badly shaken. The other phenomena are a bit more difficult to describe.

In earlier studies, scientists pronounced 'New Light' harmless. People exposed to it passively or otherwise had shown no ill effects. Their studies as of late have uncovered more of its properties, though. We send you now live to Seattle. Scientist Eric Dahlia reports."

"Uh, thank you, Ann. These columns of augmented light are the result of an ongoing project involving the ionosphere. Certain light waves are present that weren't before.

What we've uncovered about the New Light, from the data we received from Atlanta, is truly nothing to be alarmed about. They don't pose a threat through radiation or any other means. Their color and intensity have deviated slightly from when it first appeared.

Some folks can't even see these changes in the phenomenon, but it has the resemblance of dissolved sugar swirling about in colored water. These fluctuations in the intensities of the types of light which creates new-light are now showing energy emissions produced by the planet itself. All in all, it's merely a light show provided by good ol' Mother Earth."

Dahlia smiles through crooked pearly whites as though he'd sold a bucket of shit to a pig farmer.

"Well, there you have it. Thank you, Dr. Dahlia, for putting concerned minds at ease," states the reporter although her facial expression is notably far from ease. "In other news, we're bumping into record lows this holiday season so bundle up, Atlanta."

Kwen has his own thoughts about 'mother Earth's light show'. Since the appearance of the New Light a year ago, people began behaving strangely. Well, stranger than before. The accounts of oddness start to build up in his head as the bus pulls to the curb and wrecks his train of thought.

He gets up, steps toward the open doors, and gestures for the older gent to get on and grab a seat first. The old man merely stares at Kwen with intense eyes but no facial expression.

Kwen shrugs and enters the bus with transit card in hand. After hearing the satisfying beep indicating the successful payment of his fare, he scans the bus for an available seat.

He takes an aisle one next to a young lady who immediately clutches her purse and inches closer to the wall of the bus. It stings, but he pretends not to notice. A few minutes pass and the driver makes one of many stops. Kwen takes the opportunity to find another seat considering how the ride already seems longer sitting next to this lady.

"Excuse me," Kwen mutters while moving to another seat and watching the white-knuckled grip loosen on the woman's purse. Now at a window seat further back in the bus, he can see the city pass by and wonder about what's really going on with the New Light.

In recent weeks people had started congregating at the base of the columns. Some bask in the light or even sleep in any particularly slow-moving ones through the night. Kwen can't help but wonder what they see. What draws them in like moths to a flame?

Dink! rings the dented stop-request bell. The bus whines to a halt and some riders leave and a few step on, new faces Kwen tries to ignore, which will be a bit more difficult now.

His phone has died. The useless piece of tech is currently slipped into his jacket pocket, but he keeps his headphones in place in hopes it will deter any unwanted conversations. Six stops later the bus arrives at Midtown station.

The platform is congested with the morning crowd and Kwen is forced to make a mad dash for the train. The departure tone has sounded, and the doors are about to close. Pushing through a group of tourists trying to get their bearings, he stumbles a bit and slips past the closing doors just in time.

The recent influx of tourists keeps the platforms crowded. Winded, he looks for a seat but decides to post up by the doors since campus is only three stops away. The train pulls away from the station and Kwen's mind wanders.

He snaps back when a passenger exclaims, "Wow!"

"I know, right?" Replies her seat mate.

"Wait. Lemme see again?"

"Sure, but stop making a scene, Becka," she says lowering her sunglasses.

Kwen puts up his hood to hide how intently he's paying attention to their conversation.

"Does it feel any different?" Becka asks.

"No. I didn't even know it happened until I looked in the mirror this morning. It's cute, huh?"

"I'm so jealous. Did your mom freak when she saw?" Becka inquires while leaning in for a closer look.

“Not really. I think she’s a little jealous too, though. She had been doing those stand-in things with her group for weeks and she hasn’t picked up anything. All I did was walk through one of those light beams and the next day this appeared.”

“Honestly, Amber, I wouldn’t try to hide it. It looks so cool,” Becka squeals and Kwen winces at the high-pitched noise. “Besides, if anyone gets weird about it you can just say it’s a contact.” The train slows to a stop and Kwen hears the click of what he assumes is them taking a selfie.

Oh, I gotta see this, Kwen thinks as the girls stand to exit. He pulls back his hood as they approach the doors and briefly makes eye contact with Amber. One of her eyes is brown and the other a brilliant purple. He quickly blinks and affixes his gaze on the advert behind them. Now his mind is rushing with questions and ideas.

Is that why people gather in and around the light? What could her mom be hoping to ‘pick up’ from it? Does it affect everyone differently?

The train continues its path. Kwen starts looking each passenger in the face searching for the same eye coloration affliction as he saw in Amber. It doesn’t escape him, though, that he probably shares the same intense look as the old guy he tried to let on the bus.

Kwen begins spotting people around his area who have odd colored eyes, out-of-place expressions, and then weird clothes. An eye rub and double take later, all seems fine and ordinary. He face-palms himself.

Now I’m paranoid.

Kwen stares out the windows for the duration of the ride. There’s already so much on his mind and the day hasn’t even started yet. When he reaches his stop, he exits the train and freezes on the platform.

“Another one?” He mutters to himself. “No, not the same one. Stop freaking yourself out, man.”

But he can’t deny the fact that there is an exact replica of the gnome from the bus stop there on the platform. People bustle around him and he hurries to move on.

He strolls toward campus quickly. His watch shows he has about forty-five minutes before class, so he slows, deciding to take his time getting there. Leaves crunch underfoot with each step and the breezy morning air chills his skin.

The light traffic passing by worries him a bit. There had been a sharp rise in accidents as of late; mostly of single cars careening off the highway into a barrier or off road into the woods.

In auto-pilot leaving his mind to wander, Kwen bumps shoulders with a passerby. Good thing he’s not driving. He’d be right in line with all those other idiots.

“My bad,” Kwen chirps. He half turns to see whom he collided with but only sees the back of the person.

“No worries, lad,” the guy mutters without even a backward glance.

Kwen pauses, watching the figure stride farther off and trying to place the

accent. Then he adjusts his backpack and quickens his pace. A few minutes later he reaches campus.

From its outer edge, he sees it's as abuzz with activity as it is every morning about this time. Students are sitting on benches and steps awaiting someone from the staff to unlock the doors.

He removes his backpack to put the headphones away, then heads over to join the students in waiting. As he kneels to unzip his backpack, two shadows fall over him. He looks up to find what appears to be two homeless men. They look rough around the edges and smell of aged urine and alcohol.

"Spare some change, buddy?"

"Uh, well..." Kwen starts, "I have some, but I need it for the vending machines. Not much time between classes for a real lunch, you know?" Lies. "Vending machines?" Chimes the second homeless gentleman. "Me n' Larry luh dem snacks. Don't we, Larry?"

Kwen stands, feeling a little uncomfortable. He suddenly feels hot in the chilly December air.

Desperately, he looks past the vagrants to the common grounds hoping to catch someone's eye. Anyone who might be able to come save him from these guys before things get any weirder.

"Yeah, Benny. In fact, it ain't even gotta be change. We take cash too, college boy," Larry says, reaching slowly into the pocket of his tattered overcoat. "Ya got any cash?"

...

And we'll leave you hanging there! If you're enjoying the story so far, check out [Between Magic and Dreams](#)!

Between Magic and Dreams— [Audible](#) | [Kindle](#) | [HC](#) | [Paperback](#)

Between Magic and Dreams : Reclamation— [Kindle](#) | [HC](#) | [Paperback](#)

Another chance encounter in an indie comics group on Facebook, this next creator is producing a compelling series dealing with death, rebirth, and a lot more! Let's have a chat with



ANTHONY D STOKES

Is Decay your first project? If so, do you have plans to make other comics or if not, what else is out there with your name on it?

Decay is my very first project. I've been writing for 15 years so it was very nice to finally get something out there. I'm working on a pseudo-sequel to Decay right now. I feel as if I'll be making comic books for the foreseeable future.



I noticed in issue 1 of Decay that there is an absence of sound – onomatopoeia. Is there a storytelling reason for this, or just aesthetic?

Its purely aesthetic. If you see a gun go off your mind thinks "BANG" you don't need the word spelled out for you. My artist Marcelo does amazing work and I try to cover up his art as little as possible. Also I think it helps with readability. I've seen comic book pages that are almost 50% text and it makes my eyes hurt. You'll notice there's a lot of pages that don't have text at all which allows for more visual storytelling which is im-

portant since I'm working in a visual medium.

Decay is a pretty recent series. Have you just recently decided to make comics, or has it been something you've always wanted to do?

I started seriously considering making comic books in Summer 2019. I'm an aspiring filmmaker at heart but I love storytelling in general. Making a comic book was more practical and that's where my focus went. I would really work in any medium of storytelling if the opportunity presented itself.



Is Decay going to be an ongoing series, or is there a planned ending?

I started seriously considering making comic books in Summer 2019. I'm an aspiring filmmaker at heart but I love storytelling in general. Making a comic book was more practical and that's where my focus went. I would really work in any medium of storytelling if the opportunity presented itself.



I did also notice a complete lack of any publisher branding on the comic. What has been the most challenging and/or rewarding aspect of publishing independently?

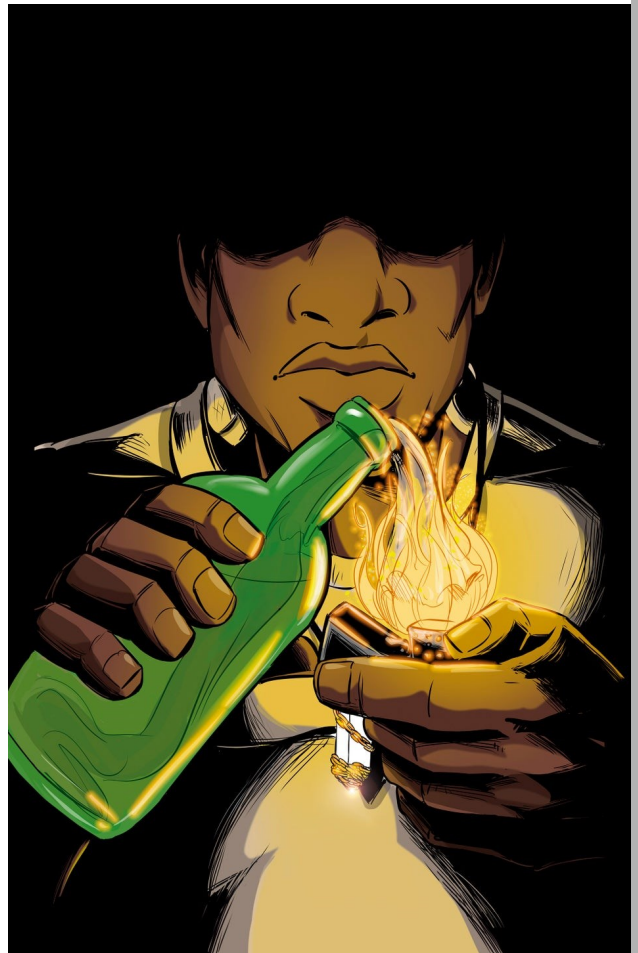
The most rewarding aspect has been that I can do anything I want. I'm in complete control of my brand and at this point in time I couldn't imagine doing it any other way.

The most challenging has been reaching out to people and getting no responses back. It's hard to tell if you're really making any progress until you hit that "Launch" button on Kickstarter. I can confidently say I will be looking for an independent publisher for my next comic book series.

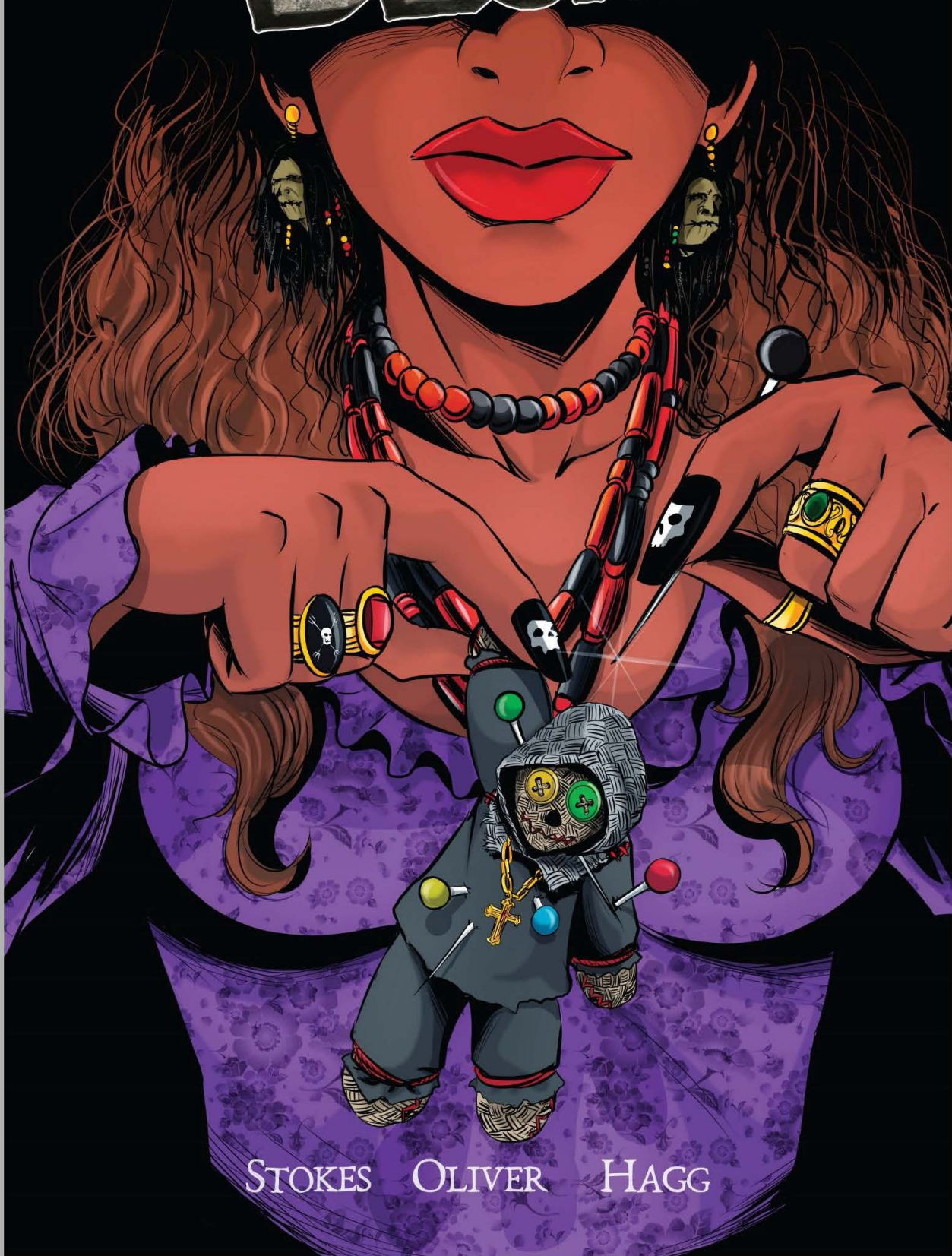
Decay is poised to hit Kickstarter soon with issue 2.

In fact, [go there now](#) and click "Notify Me" so that you will be informed when the campaign is live.

Until then, enjoy this preview of the Issue 2 cover, and scroll on to the next page to read the entire first issue!



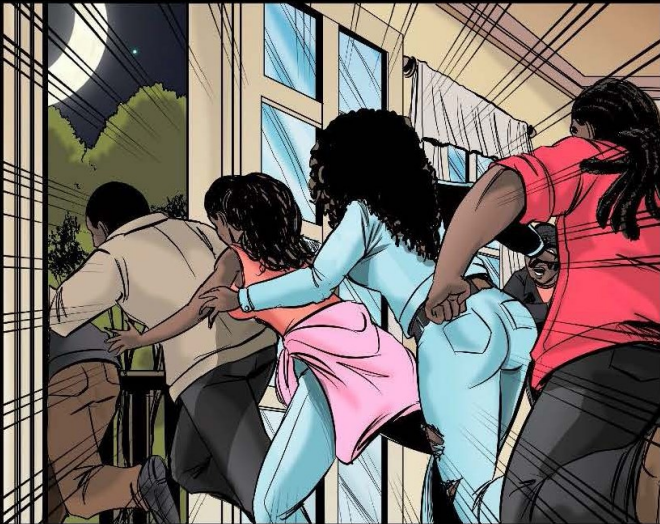
DECAY



STOKES OLIVER HAGG

PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME.







EARLIER THAT DAY.







THAT'S IT.
THAT'S THE COLOR
I NEEDED.



NICE AND SHARP.

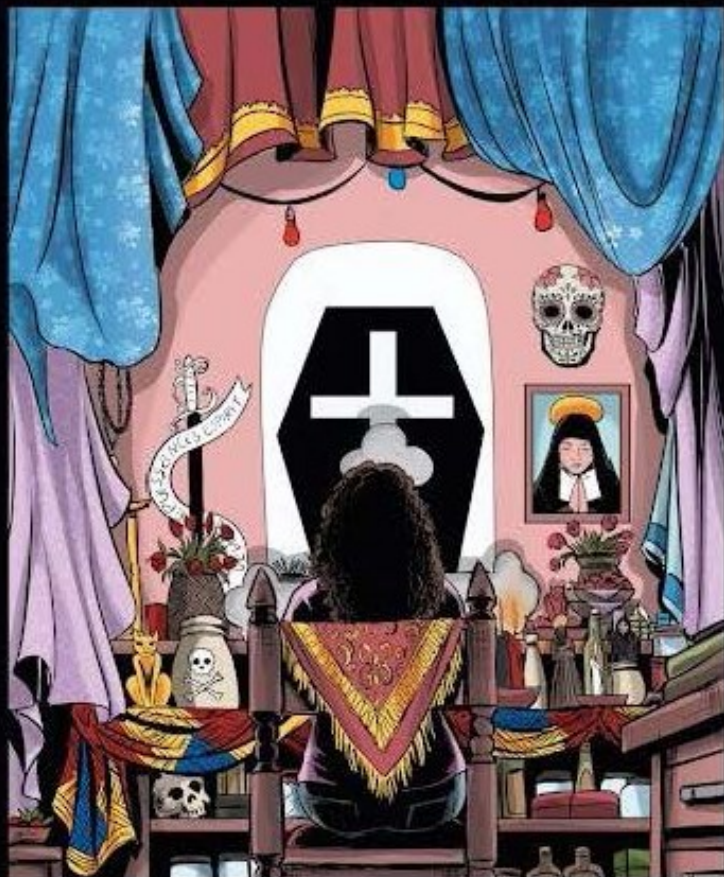


FINALLY DONE.



YOU'RE
FUNERAL READY.









ALL THIS FROM SOME WATER.

IT WAS A LOT OF WATER. HOW'S BUSINESS?



MARCUS WANTS US TO GO SELL SOME DRINKS AT A TRAP PARTY.



YIKES. GO, JUST BE CAREFUL.

SHIT WHO YOU TELLING? HOW WAS WORK?



I WAS WORKING ON THIS BEAUTIFUL GIRL.

SHE WAS TOTALLY YOUR TYPE.



I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DO IT.



I SAW THE BOTCHED JOB THEY DID ON MOM.

HAD HER LOOKING CRAZY.

I MAKE SURE EVERYONE LOOKS GOOD ON THEIR LAST DAY.



YOU EVER THINK ABOUT LEAVING THE CITY?



NOT WITHOUT YOU.



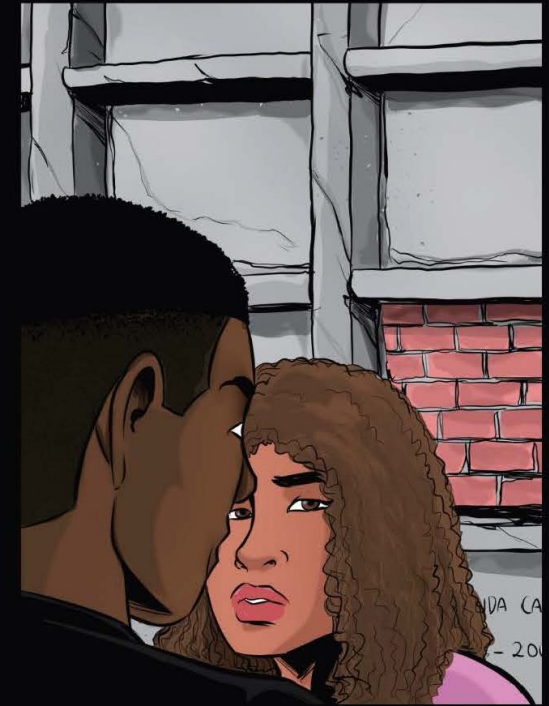
YOU EVER THINK ABOUT BRINGING THEM BACK?



WHY WOULD YOU ASK ME THAT?



CURIOSITY.







THE GUY WITH THE BRAIDS? THAT'S TRE. HE GOT SHOT EARLIER THIS YEAR.



HIM?



THE FUCK IS YOU DOING?



LET'S PACK UP.









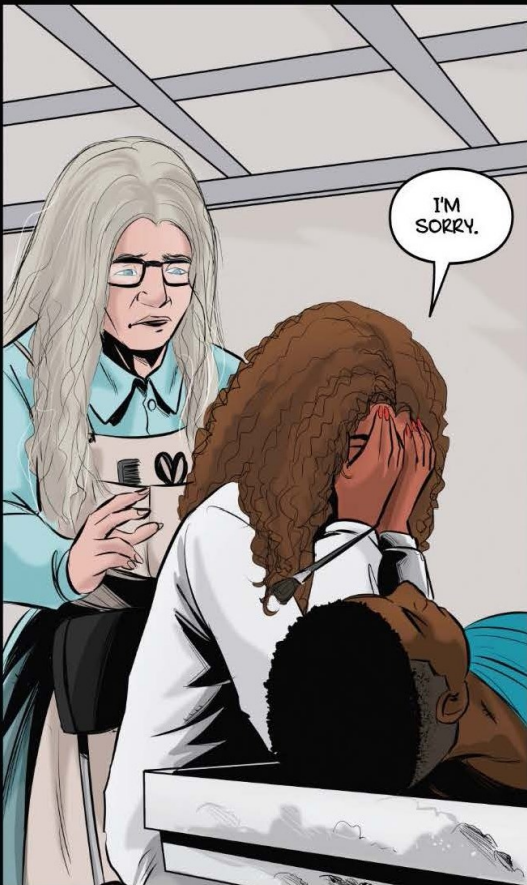
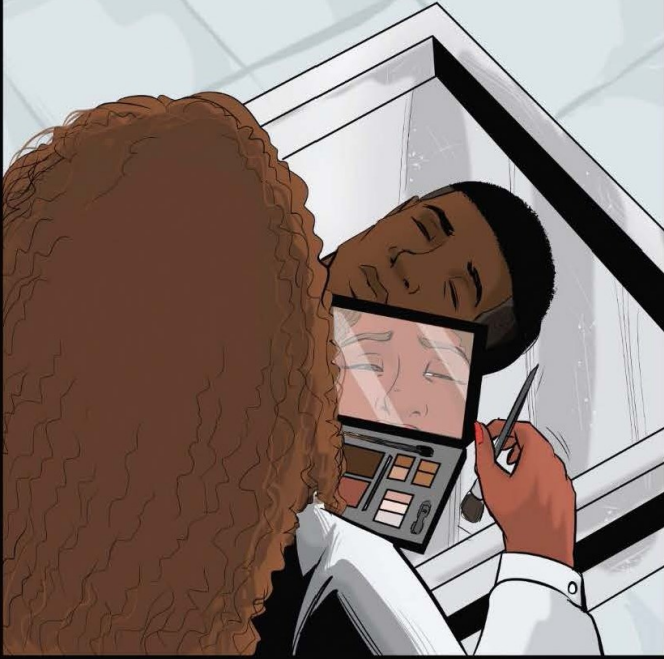




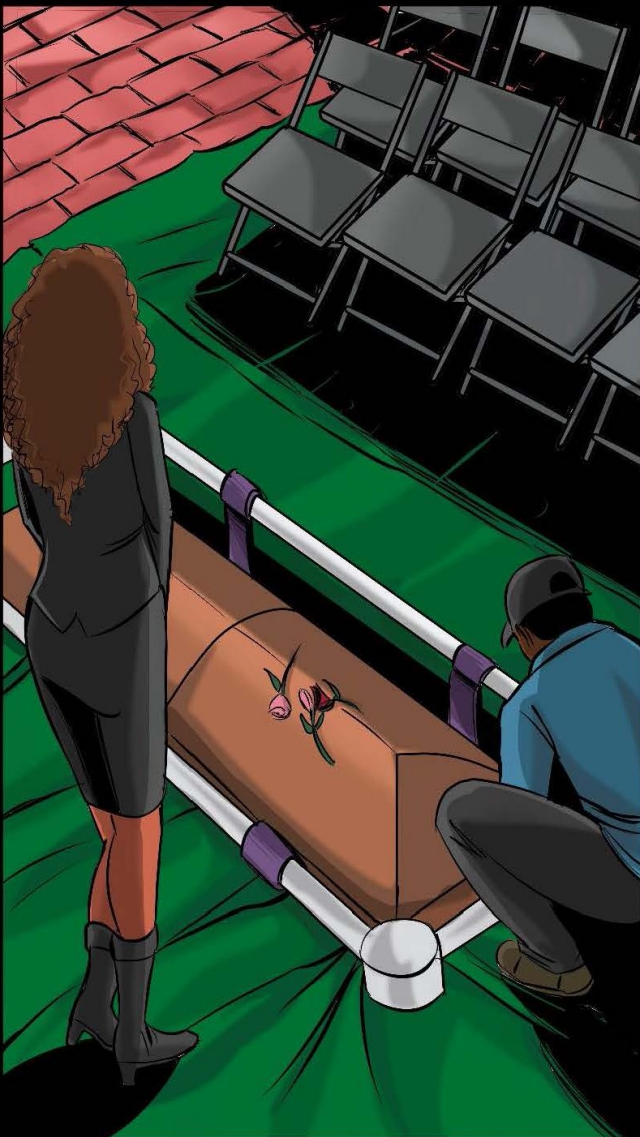




A FEW DAYS LATER.







PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME.

DID YOU
HEAR THAT OK?

JESS IS
CALLING FOR
YOU.

YES?

AM I DEAD?

SHE'S
CALLING FOR
YOU.

WILL
YOU GO TO
HER?

YES

I NEED TO GO BACK.

REACH OUT.

HUH?

REACH OUT.

LIKE THAT?

JUST LIKE THAT.

OKAY.

KEEP GOING.

ALRIGHT.

YOU'RE
ALMOST THERE.

ONE LAST PUSH.



Sometimes you find that you have been partaking in content that was published by a company that's been around almost as long as you've been reading comics. That's exactly what happened when I found out that this little indie series—Java! - which I read years ago, was put out by a company called Committed Comics, ran by Alejandro Cruz and international man of mystery,



THOMAS DOHERTY



Right out of the gate, with over 20 years of independent comic books under your belt, what are some secrets you've learned to maintaining a presence in an ever-evolving industry?

Wow that's a really big questions. I mean from when I started Committed Comics in 99 to now, I've learned a tremendous amount of secrets. Sadly, most of them I learned the hard way falling on my face and figuring out how to pick myself back up. I can say two things in that I think will help people; first is some advice that Jim Shooter gave me waaaaay back in the late 90's - He said if you're going to go into publishing take your time and use your own money. Coming from someone who has years of experience and tons of investors it was an interesting thing to say. The second "secret" I've learned is that I don't know everything. I know this seems silly to some degree, but everyone wants to think they are always open minded but a lot of times we get rooted in our own ideas, mindsets, thoughts, and we can miss things. In the past I've lost a lot of opportunities by thinking something was a bad idea or I knew more than the person giving me advice/suggestions.



With such a lengthy career, what drives you to keep making and publishing comics?

This is really simple; I love the comic book industry. There is something incredible about the ability to tell stories and make dreams come true. I also get a huge kick out of walking into a comic shop and seeing my books on their shelves or meeting a fan at a show and them saying they read our books and really enjoyed it. The comic book industry is also a lot different than any other type of creative industry. It seems like we are more on each other's teams than competing against one another. So feeding off other creators really helps too.

After all this time and success, is it just love of indie comics or something else that keeps you from going to one of the "big two"?

Well, the main reason I haven't gone to the "big two" is because



they aren't calling...no, but seriously: Even if they did I wouldn't go work for them. The other companies have characters that I love and will always love but I find that the way they operate is more financially driven. Now with that said, of course it is...I mean we all want to sell books, independent or "big boy" but meaning that they will sacrifice storytelling just to try and gain a larger market share. Not realizing that by making choices like that they are potentially losing a larger market share. Perfect example all the times Marvel or DC changes a character to reflect a current trend or hot topic and then changing the character back a year later. If it's good for the story then cool...if they are doing it just because it is a good PR move...then they wasted all the fan's time.



Who's a creator you still haven't, but want to work with and why?

Oh, wow this is a tough one. I mean there are a ton of legendary creators out there who I respect and love. I am a HUGE Jack Kirby fan so if I ever got the chance to work with Mike Royer that would be incredible. The closest I ever got to working with Jack Kirby was when we had Dick Ayers do the cover to our very first printed project. The fact that Dick and Jack sat in the same bullpen was enough to put stars in my eyes. Some people don't know this but a lot of creators asked to work with Jack back when he was pumping out a ton of work for Marvel and DC. Mike Royer was the only person who Jack asked to work with...

What's the next project we should all be watching for from Committed Comics?

The project everyone should be on the lookout for is called: *Annabelle*. It's from a super talented independent creator named Todd Rayner. Todd did a 4-issue mini-series all on his own called, *Icepick* and *Annabelle* is from that series/universe. He came to us wanting to expand on the reach of the first spin off series from his creator owned universe and I was happy to work with him. He showed us that he has a similar drive and love for the comic book industry by doing everything on *Icepick*. This will be a 4-issue series with a story by Todd and artwork by newcomer Sergio Rey and the rest of the creative team to be announced. We are hoping to launch it by the end of the summer.

So Sergio is expanding the reach of his series and you can too! Committed Comics takes submissions, so if your book is ready for a wider audience, check out their [website](#)! Make sure you follow across all their socials, I have it on good authority that something cool is on the horizon!

IG: [committed_eic](#)

Twitter: [committedcomics](#)

Facebook: [committedcomicspage](#)



NEW HOTNESS

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



Remember when Image comics came out and all these badass heroes made the big companies shake in their booties?

This book is a love letter to that era.

Bombastic action, time travel shenanigans, and more!

Check out *The Phalanx* and all the wonderful work from Jonathan Luna at <https://jonathanluna.com/>

Look, I'm new to reading this. Not new to loving it, certainly not! I've been a fan of Marcus Williams for years! I bought Volume 1 of this book months ago!

But I just read it recently.

Trained in secret, descendants of the original Tuskegee Airmen are called upon to defend the world from ... well you gotta read the book for that. High-flying action awaits you!

Buy the book at <https://tuskegeeheirs.com/>



Now I will warn you—this series is on hiatus currently.

However there is quite a bit of story to read, with seven full issues complete, and a few pages of issue 8. Here's the pitch:

Jemma Heiss is the greatest art thief in the world, and she's about to start one of the most outrageous jobs of her career. This will take crime out of this world.

Read it on [WebToon](https://www.webtoon.com/) or at <https://conceptualheist.tumblr.com/>





In a world full of superheroes, crime is minimal.

But no matter what the statistics say, crimes still happen, and people still die.

Max Buchanan's just been promoted to work with the biggest superhero in the world. But when the biggest superhero in the world doesn't want to help out the little guy, what is there left to do than take justice into your own hands?

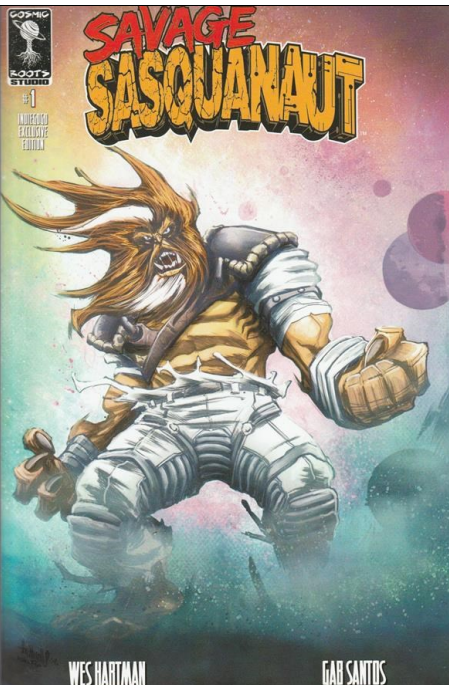
Check out Average Joe at [Vivid Panel](#).

He is the great Tyrant's Headtaker.

Nobody knows his identity. Only that he comes to mete out justice with the Wailing Blade—a relic of a long-forgotten time of technology. It wails with the anguished cries of the thousands of souls it's sent to the great void.

Feared and despised by the people for taking so many who are accused of crimes against the Tyrant, the Headtaker is called to the great city of Ordz to deliver justice again.

Check out Wailing Blade at [Comix Tribe](#) or get it for your [Kindle](#)!



I'm just going to say three words:

Sasquatch

In

Space.

Buy it at www.cosmicrootsstudio.com

TIPS 'N' TRICKS

As with every issue, I ask our creators to give a few tips and tricks for hopeful and aspiring creators. With such a collection of both new and seasoned talent, I am excited to get into the wise words shared this time around.

First up, the creator of our main feature—Tom Hutchinson, of Big Dog Ink:

This is always difficult because it's the most vague question possible. Especially when you consider "creator" isn't a single thing. Writers get different tips than artists and colorists etc. But it all starts at the beginning. Decide why you want to make comics. Is it a hobby and for fun? Or do you want this to be a career? Both directions are fine but require different mental attitudes.

Second I suppose would be prepared to be told no. A lot. And if you don't have the stomach for rejection, this

might not be the place for you. It's hard and can be emotionally brutal.

Have a thick skin and have a plan of attack for you and your creations. Don't let NO stop you from continuing on.

Third would be don't get stuck in the past. The comic book industry doesn't work the same way it did 20 years ago...or even ten years ago. This is a new world with social media, web comics, crowdfunding and more. Utilize it all to your advantage. The more you do the further ahead you push yourself in front of the people who are stuck in the systems of the past.

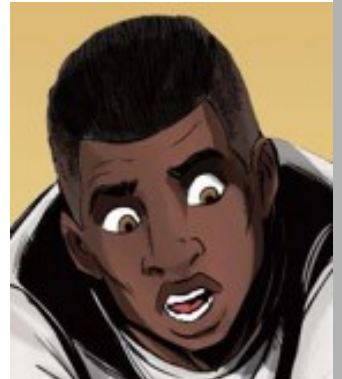


Now to our newest creator, Anthony D Stokes:

Tip #1 Don't be stingy with your PDFs. **[Did you think I scanned those pages you read earlier? Wise words here!]** If you're making a multi-issue series then giving out your Issue 1 can get you good feedback and more importantly can get good word of mouth going for your projects. They cost nothing to distribute and can win over people very quickly.

Tip #2 This may not be a popular tip but focus on making sure your personal life is stable. You don't want to have to deal with real life stuff as well as worrying about making deadlines.

Tip #3 Make it easy to become a fan. Sometimes I go to check out a comic book series and there's an appendix, an Issue 0, a novelization, etc. Too much lore can turn people off. All your favorite media franchises started off as something relatively simple. Star Wars is the knights of the roundtable with laser swords. Start off simple.



With two books under his belt, Bryan Covington is right in that middle-ground. Not new in the game, but not yet a veteran. Let's see what the *Between Magic and Dreams* has for us:

1. Stop talking and take action. Folks get so caught up in the excitement of an idea's potential that they forget to make the idea real.
2. Get at least one mentor. Not only will they save you time and money with their experience, but any good mentor would want to see you succeed.
3. No matter how slow going it may seem, DON'T STOP! Every step forward, no matter how small, is a step taken in the right direction.

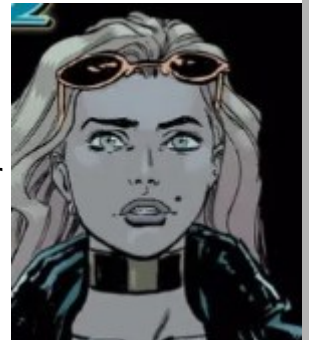


Now to get gems from a veteran of the indie comics game, *Of Bitter Souls* creator Chuck Satterlee:

- 1)Illustrator, Letterer, colorist, writer... doesn't matter. You must read and observe and practice... and not just comics. An artist should be practicing all the time and should draw things that are hard or that they suck at. A writer should read... EVERYTHING they can. Etc. Practice and keep at it.
- 2)Understand that this is also a business. So treat it as such.
- 3)When you ask for advice of a established pro... a good thing to do is say thank you. Relationships matter in a small industry such as ours.

And a bonus tip!

I'd also suggest to not be a dick and to right now... understand that diversity is a great thing. If you can't wrap yourself around the idea that different people tell different stories... then perhaps you're living in the wrong era. Comics have never been better with all the wonderfully diverse people telling the stories of the characters we have loved for generations... and new stories as well.



Another veteran of indie comics, Thomas Doherty of Committed Comics:

- 1 – When getting a portfolio review listen. The person who is giving you a review is taking the time out of their schedule to provide (hopefully) constructive criticism on your work. Don't try to justify the lines on the page to them. Just listen and filter out what they are saying afterwards.



2 – Treat the opportunity you get as a serious job. Many years ago, there was an artist who was given the opportunity to do some test pages for a large company at San Diego Comic Con. I was talking to that artist, and they said, “I’ll work on the pages when I get home after the show”. I told them that was a REALLY bad idea, and he should go back to his hotel and work on the pages right now. Even if he wouldn’t be able to get all of the sample pages done, he should get what he could do completed and then bring them to the show the next day and show the editor. He opted to not take my advice and after

the show he sent the pages in and the opportunity never went anywhere.

3 – Take creative breaks occasionally. A lot of times people get a great idea and try to execute the whole thing in one sitting (either writing or drawing). Sometimes that works great but more often than not, what happens is you start off strong and then start to lose steam or focus. Then by the end you have a product that isn’t as great or compelling as you had thought. It’s better to start strong with an idea and get a bunch done and then walk away for a little while. Even if it’s just to go to the kitchen and grab something to eat. During that time, you might find your brain go into a different direction and come up with something even better than your original concept.



And finally, the man who does it all, Fish Lee blesses us with some quick and simple gems:



- A. DON'T SPEND THE MONEY UNTIL THE JOB IS FINISHED!
- B. Post often, and post regularly... always letting folks know you are available for commissions (if you are)
- C. ALWAYS do your best work, no matter what... it pays off BIG in the long run!

- - -

As for me, I have to hit you with something I’ve talked about multiple times in Catalyst, and several times in this very issue: participate in the community. If I hadn’t gone to Virtuous Con, who knows when I would have crossed paths with Bryan? If I wasn’t in Facebook indie comics groups, when would I have gotten to read Decay? If I was not on TikTok, would I ever have found out about Greenzone, or for that matter FiveStar? If you want to make things happen—whether it’s comics or another industry—participating in that community is going to be the most important thing to move you forward. You want really tangible proof? Do a quick Google search on the impact of #BookTok on book sales in the last two years. Participate in the community where you want to make things happen.

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!

FISH LEE

www.mrfishcomics.com

Facebook - mrfishcomics

TikTok - mr.fish.comics

TOM HUTCHINSON / BIG DOG INK

www.bigdogink.com

Facebook - bigdogcomics

Instagram/Twitter - bdcomics

ANTHONY D STOKES

www.decaycomic.com

Facebook - DecayComicBook

Instagram - decaycomic

Twitter - StokesTheWriter

BRYAN COVINGTON

www.betweenmagicanddreams.com

Facebook/Instagram - betweenmagicanddreams

Twitter - Deedle_Deedee

THOMAS DOHERTY / COMMITTED COMICS

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Facebook - CommittedComicsPage

Instagram - committedeic

Twitter - committedcomics

CHUCK SATTERLEE / DEFECTIVE COMIX

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Twitter - comicschuck

GREGORY TITUS

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