SEX™



JOE CASEY BOOK THREE PIOTR KOWALSKI

BROKEN TOYS

WITH DAN MCDAID · LUKE PARKER · IAN MACEWAN
BRAD SIMPSON · RUS WOOTON · SONIA HARRIS

THIS ONE'S A REAL
MOTHERFUCKER, THREE...

"... if you miss the honed sense of danger you got when reading *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen* and *American Flagg!* it might be time for you to check out the Image comic, *Sex*."

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BOOK THREE: BROKEN TOYS







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DIGITAL EDITION.

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RUS WOOTON LETTERER

SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

MEET THE CHARACTERS



SIMON COOKE
RICH. RETIRED. REPRESSED.



ANNABELLE LAGRAVENESE
CLUB OWNER. CATTY. CONFIDENT.



QUINN
MENTOR. PUPPET MASTER. DECEASED.



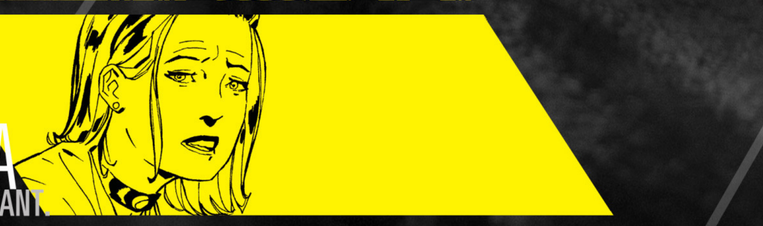
ELLIOT K. BARNES
LOYAL EMPLOYEE. INNOCENT. AWKWARD.



LORRAINE BAINES
"LARRY". COOKE COMPANY EXEC. CAPABLE.



ALBERT EISENHOWER
OPERATOR, INTEL NEXUS, DECEASED?



SHEILA
PERFORMER. PROVOCATIVE. PREGNANT.



SKYSCRAPER
BREAK MUSCLE. BIG. BASTARD.



KEENAN WADE
DISHWASHER. MYSTERIOUS. AMBITIOUS.



THE ALPHA BROTHERS
CHA CHA & DOLPH. CRIMINAL. AMBIGUOUS.



THE PRANK ADDICT
REMNANT. ON THE PROWL. UNHINGED.



THE OLD MAN
GANGSTER. WEARY. UNDERESTIMATED.



WARREN AZOFF
LAWYER. CONFIDANT. PIMPMEISTER.



MASAI
BREAK. BOSS. BAD ASS.



JULIETTE JEMAS
JOURNALIST. SINGLE. SINGLE-MINDED.

SEX TIMELINE

THE ALPHA BROTHERS MAKE THEIR MOVE;
CRIME WAR BEGINS

THE PRANK ADDICT ESCAPES

WARREN IS CAUGHT WITH HIS PANTS DOWN

THE OLD MAN TORTURES THE PRANK ADDICT

KEENAN IS INITIATED INTO THE BREAKS

MAYOR SEDGWICK MAKES A LOVE CONNECTION

KEENAN CONFRONTS HIS MENTOR

REPORTER JULIETTE JEMAS GETS A NEW ASSIGNMENT:
INVESTIGATE SIMON COOKE

LARRY GETS HER GROOVE ON

SIMON RECEIVES STRANGE INFORMATION

SIMON AND ANNABELLE COME VERY CLOSE...

WARREN AZOFF LEARNS OF THE SATURNALIA (THE ULTIMATE ORGY OF
THE SOCIAL ELITE) AND BRINGS SIMON TO THE PARTY

KEENAN IS GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY

SIMON'S "CIVILIAN CURIOSITY" RISES. BUT HE JUST CAN'T CLOSE THE DEAL

THE OLD MAN WANTS INFORMATION ON HIS ENEMIES
AND GOES TO BRUTAL LENGTHS TO GET IT

ANNABELLE LAGRAVENESE MISSES HER FORMER LIFE

KEENAN WADE TARGETS THE ALPHA BROTHERS

EIGHT MONTHS LATER, SIMON COOKE RETURNS TO SATURN CITY AND
HIS POSITION AS CEO OF THE COOKE COMPANY

THE ARMORED SAINT RETIRES

SEX



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BROKEN TOYS

JOE CASEY WRITER PIOTR KOWALSKI ARTIST BRAD SIMPSON COLORIST RUS WOOTON LETTERER SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

SATURN CITY; THE COOKE COMPANY:

COME ON IN, ELLIOT...

... LISTEN, I KNOW THE PAST FEW DAYS HAVE NOT BEEN *FUN* FOR YOU.

I GOT YOU MIXED UP IN SOMETHING THAT... *ESCALATED* INTO SOMETHING A LOT MORE *COMPLICATED*. FOR *THAT*, I SINCERELY *APOLOGIZE*.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE'RE HIP-DEEP IN IT *NOW* AND IT LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT NO *CHOICE* BUT TO GO EVEN *DEEPER*...

... AND WE STILL NEED YOUR *HELP* IN THIS MATTER.

YES, SIR. I UNDERSTAND.

WELL, THEN YOU'RE ONE UP ON *ME*... BECAUSE I'M *STILL* TRYING TO WRAP MY HEAD AROUND THIS MESS.

ANYWAY, *WARREN*...?

RIGHT.

AS MISTER COOKE'S PERSONAL *ATTORNEY*, I'VE FIGURED OUT OUR NEXT MOVE.

THE KANSEI EXECUTIVES ARE STILL IN TOWN... STILL TRYING TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE DEATH OF THEIR CEO...

... AND THEY HAVE *INFORMATION* THAT WOULD BE *HELPFUL* TO US AS WE TRY TO SORT THROUGH ALL THIS NONSENSE.

WHAT... EXACTLY DO YOU WANT ME TO FIND OUT?

SPECIFICALLY? WE NEED TO KNOW THE EMPLOYMENT ORIGIN OF THE WOMEN THEY HIRED THAT NIGHT.

AS OF NOW, WE HAVE NO IDEA HOW AND WHERE THEY... PROCURED THEM. AND WE NEED TO.

WE'VE GOT TO GET AHEAD OF THIS THING, ELLIOT. I'VE SPOKEN TO YOUR PAL, MISTER INOUE, AND HE'S INSISTENT THAT WE TRY TO HELP SMOOTH THIS OVER.

HE'S NOT MY PAL.../

AND YOU WANT ME TO... FIND THEIR PIMP...?

WELL, I DOUBT WE'RE DEALING WITH A PIMP, PER SE. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY EXPENSIVE STOCK.

I'M IMAGINING AN OPERATION THAT'S AS CORPORATE AS WE ARE.

HOPING, EVEN.

EXACTLY.

MISTER AZOFF... I CAN APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO DO...

... BUT THESE JAPANESE... THEY ARE A PROUD PEOPLE. I DON'T KNOW IF THEY'RE EVEN GOING TO ADMIT THEY ACTUALLY PAID FOR...

... WELL, YOU KNOW...

YEAH, THERE'S SOME CULTURAL HURDLES THERE, TO BE SURE. THEN AGAIN, THEY DID THROW THE PARTY...

... AND, AT THE MOMENT, WE DON'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE.

LISTEN, IF IT HELPS AT ALL... INOUE DID NOTHING BUT SING YOUR PRAISES.

HE RESPECTS YOU.

THIS IS NOT YOUR JOB, ELLIOT. I GET THAT. THIS IS A FAVOR TO ME.

=SIGH=

WELL, IF IT HELPS IN MOVING THE COMPANY FORWARD, THEN I SUPPOSE I CAN GIVE IT A SHOT...

THAT'S ALL I ASK. IF IT GETS TOO HAIRY, YOU PULL OUT. DON'T TAKE ANY UNNECESSARY RISKS.

YES, SIR.

I'LL... LET YOU KNOW IF AND WHEN I KNOW SOMETHING...

GOOD MAN.

WELL, THIS IS A BIT OF A SHIT SANDWICH, ISN'T IT...?

THOSE JAPANESE HAVE A REAL THING ABOUT BEING DISHONORED, DON'T THEY?

NOT SO MUCH THAT IT STOPS THEM FROM GETTING LAID, THOUGH.

GO FIGURE.

NOT THAT I'M AN *EXPERT.* SPEAKING OF WHICH, I'VE BEEN THINKING.

ABOUT WHAT?

WELL, AS IT TURNS OUT...

... IT WAS SOMETHING *YOU* SAID.

WHO, ME?

WHAT'D I SAY...?

I THINK... *ALL* OF US WANT *SOMETHING.* WHATEVER THAT SOMETHING *IS* -- WHETHER IT'S ANOTHER PERSON OR A PARTICULAR STATION IN LIFE OR *WHATEVER* -- AS LONG AS YOU CAN *IDENTIFY* IT, THAT'S THE FIRST STEP TO FINALLY LIVING YOUR LIFE.

NOT ANYONE *ELSE'S* LIFE. *YOURS.*

OH YEAH... SO GREAT THAT YOU REMEMBER...

SO... IS THIS YOUR WAY OF TELLING ME YOU NEED ME AS YOUR *WINGMAN* AGAIN...?

NOT EXACTLY. BUT THANKS FOR OFFERING.

NO, I'M THINKING AS LONG AS I'M PLAYING *GROWN UP* IN MY *BUSINESS,* I MIGHT AS WELL STEP UP IN *OTHER* WAYS...

... FINALLY GET IN THE GAME *FOR REAL.*

CITY HALL:

THIS SIMON COOKE IS TURNING OUT TO BE A BIT OF AN *ENIGMA...*

... I FIND IT EXTREMELY *ODD* THAT HE CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN HIS DISTANCE.

CERTAINLY, *YOU* LED ME TO BELIEVE IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF MAKING *CONTACT* AND HE'D BE *MORE* THAN WILLING TO COME ONBOARD.

WELL... *AAHHH*... THAT'S ONLY *PARTIALLY* ACCURATE, MISTER WEBER. I SAID I COULD GET YOU TWO *TOGETHER.*

AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I *DID.*

NOW, YOU HAVE TO *ADMIT*... YOU EMPLOY A FAIRLY *CRYPTIC* APPROACH TO YOUR *RECRUITMENT* PROCESS.

MAYOR SEDGWICK.

WE DO NOT "*RECRUIT*". WE *ABSORB.*

I UNDERSTAND. AND I'M JUST AS COMMITTED TO DELIVERING COOKE TO YOU...

... HE'S JUST ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF AN *ODD DUCK.*

NEVERTHELESS, THERE'S A *MEETING* TAKING PLACE IN JUST A FEW MONTHS...

... AND THE STEERING COMMITTEE WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE IT IF SIMON COOKE WAS IN ATTENDANCE.

WE'VE BEEN *WATCHING* HIM VERY CAREFULLY...

... IF HE'S READY TO EXPAND HIS *BUSINESS INTERESTS,* THEN PERHAPS *HIS* OBJECTIVES ARE FINALLY READY TO FALL IN LINE WITH *OURS.*

I DON'T HAVE TO *TELL* YOU WHAT'S AT *STAKE,* MISTER MAYOR...

... FOR HIM *AND* FOR YOU.

I... GET THE MESSAGE.

DON'T WORRY. I'LL DELIVER HIM TO YOU ON A SILVER PLATTER.

GRAVITY SLUMS:

I'M SURE YOU DON'T GET OUT TO THIS PART OF TOWN MUCH...

... BUT, *BELIEVE* ME, THIS IS WHERE THE REAL SHIT *HAPPENS.*

RIGHT UNDER EVERYONE'S NOSES.

EVEN *YOURS,* MISS JEMAS.

CALL ME *JULIETTE...*

... NOW YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TRY AND IMPRESS ME WITH YOUR FANCY GEAR AND YOUR TECH TALK, ARE YOU...?

PROBABLY WON'T WORK ON ME.

ARE YOU KIDDING? YOU FIND SOMEONE *ELSE* WHO CAN BUILD THIS SYSTEM FROM *SCRATCH*... HELL, *I'LL* SUCK THEIR DICK.

WE'RE TALKING *BEYOND* PROTOTYPE. *THIS* BABY GIVES THE GODDAMN *CHINESE* A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY. A *CRAY* SYSTEM WANTS TO FUCK *THIS* MACHINE.

LET ME PUT IT *THIS* WAY... DOES THE TERM "*PETAFLOP PER SECOND*" MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?

NOPE. BUT IT *SOUNDS* IMPRESSIVE.

OH, IT IS.

AND YOU WANNA HACK PAST *TOR* AND GO DIVING IN THE DEEP WEB... FOR *WHAT* REASON, EXACTLY....?

I'M DOING A STORY FOR THE SENTINEL ON *SIMON COOKE.* EVER HEARD OF HIM....?

YOU MEAN COOKE COMPANY SIMON COOKE? SURE I HAVE --

-- ALWAYS FIGURED HE WAS JUST AN EMPTY SUIT. BUT YOU THINK HE'S GOT HIS SHARE OF *SKELETONS,* I TAKE IT.

LISTEN, CAN YOU GET INTO HIS ENCRYPTED LIFE OR *NOT...?*

C'MON. EASY HACK.

A FEW MORE KEYSTROKES AND I BET DOLLARS TO DONUTS THAT YOU'LL KNOW HIM BETTER THAN HE KNOWS *HIMSELF.*

HOLD ON... YOU SAID YOU WRITE FOR THE *SENTINEL?* THEY STILL PRINT THAT ON *PAPER...?*

OF COURSE THEY DO.

JEEZUS... JUST DO WHAT I'M PAYING YOU FOR, OKAY?

SUFFER TOWN:

SO SOMEBODY'S SUDDENLY GROWN A PAIR...

... AND DECIDED TO MAKE A *PLAY.* RIGHT IN THE HEART OF MY *TERRITORY.*

ON TOP OF THAT, THEY'VE GONE *OLD SCHOOL* TO *DO* IT...

... THEY'VE SPILLED *FIRST BLOOD.*

'DIS SOME *FUCKED UP SHIT,* OLD MAN.

WE GOTTA' FIND OUT WHO *DID* THIS...!

YOUR COMMAND OF THE *OBVIOUS* IS --

=KAFF! ACK!=

=KOFF! KOFF!=

BOSS-?!

HRRNNN --

-- UHH =KAF!=

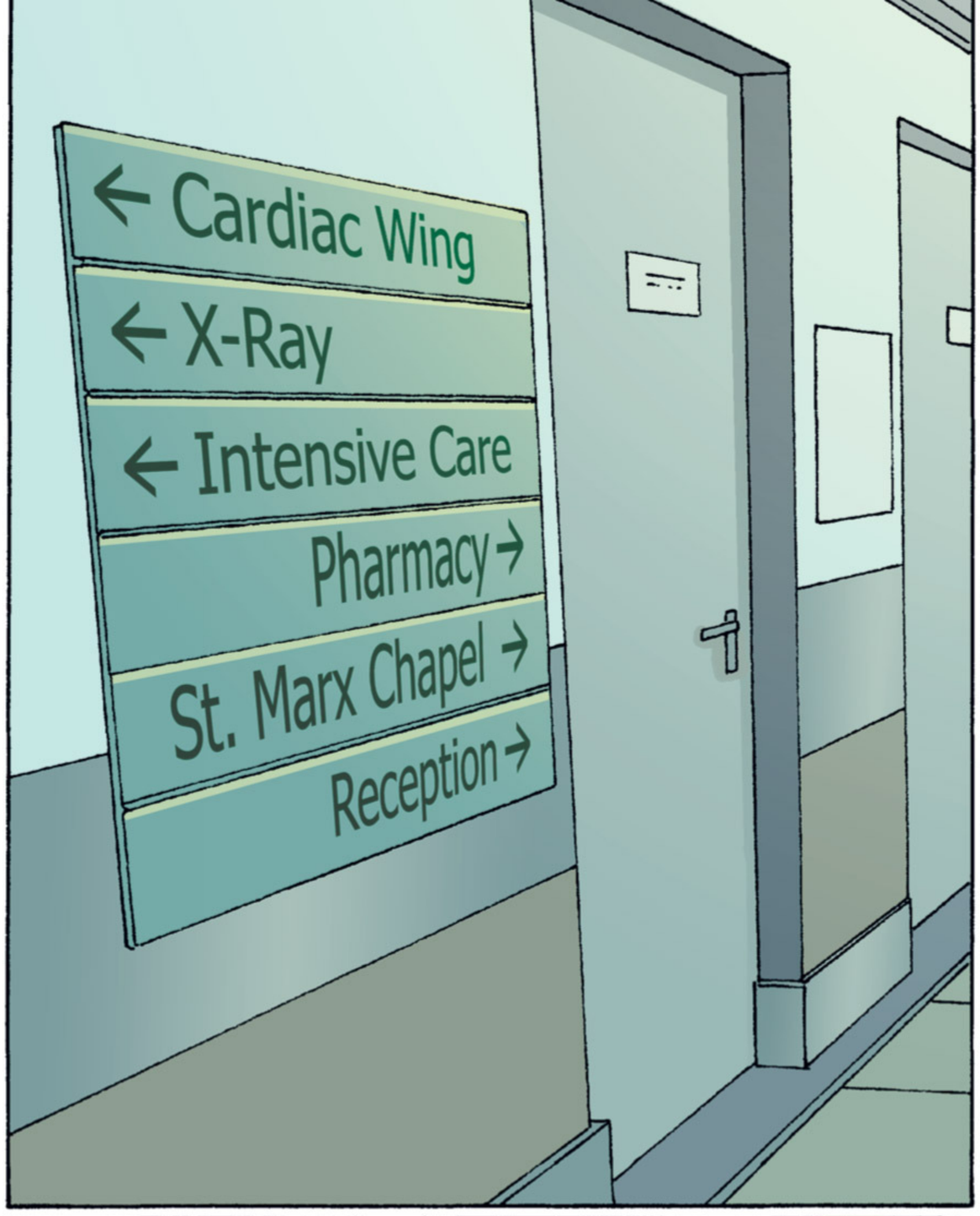
GYUH-!

FUCK...!

TH-THANK YOU, RAYMOND...

SOMETIMES... IT'S EASY TO *FORGET...*

... HOW SICK I REALLY *AM.*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Pharmacy →
St. Marx Chapel →
Reception →


... SO SHE SAYS IT DIDN'T MATTER TO HER THAT I'M IN DEBT UP TO MY EYEBALLS.
SHE HAD A WHOLE DIFFERENT REASON SHE DIDN'T LET ME CLOSE THE DEAL.../
I CAN'T IMAGINE. SO...


... ANY UPDATE ON OUR LATEST "JOHN DOE"...?
I HEARD HE CAME IN NAKED AFTER GETTING RUN OVER IN SATURN CENTER PLAZA...


NOTHING NEW. STILL COMATOSE...


... ALTHOUGH WE'RE READING BRAIN FUNCTION, SO HE'S IN THERE SOMEWHERE.
BUT WHO THE HELL KNOWS IF HE'LL EVER REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS...


I've finally got it figured out --

... I know exactly what the fuck I'm doing here.

=SIGH= GODDAMN, KEENAN...

... YOU ON SOMETHING AND NOT TELLING ME....?!

I MEAN, YOU'RE ON FUCKIN' FIRE...

HEY, WHAT CAN I SAY? I'M INSPIRED...

YOU'RE IN BED WITH A MAN WHO'S GOT HIS SHIT TOGETHER.

OH, I AM, HUH...?

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW. AROUND *HERE,* IT'S EASY TO FALL IN WITH YOUR TYPICAL *LOSER...*

YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT *LOSING* SOMETHING...

... HOW 'BOUT YOUR *SHIT,* BABY...?

?!

YOU JUST... GET RIGHT *TO* IT... DON'T YOU...?

... I KNOW WHAT TO *DO* WHEN I GET THERE.

YEAH, I DO.

I *KNOW* WHERE YOUR SWEET SPOT IS...

!

HUH...?

WH-WHY'D YOU *STOP*, BABY..?

I HEARD SOMETHING...

... JUST OUTSIDE...

Y'KNOW, THE LAST TIME I *CHECKED*...

... GETTIN' IN THE *BREAKS* DIDN'T MEAN YOU MOTHERFUCKERS COULD BREAK DOWN MY *DOOR* WHENEVER YOU FEEL LIKE IT.

YOU BEST STAND DOWN, KEENAN WADE.

YOU MAKE FISTS YOU DAMN WELL BETTER BE READY TO USE 'EM.

YOU TWO SEE ME TAKE DOWN SKYSCRAPER IN MY INITIATION? YOU THINK I'M PISSING MYSELF OVER YOU?

MASAI WANTS TO TALK.

YOUR INITIATION AIN'T OVER JUST YET.

OH, IS THAT A FACT? WELL, YOU TELL MASAI --

Y'KNOW, I'M ALL FOR A LITTLE GANG WARFARE...

... BUT CAN YOU ASSHOLES TAKE IT OUTSIDE, AT LEAST?

TOO MUCH TESTOSTERONE IN ONE PLACE IS NOT A TURN ON FOR ME, KNOW WHAT I MEAN...?

RIGHT.

OKAY... DON'T WORRY, VERNITA. WE'RE CHILL.

THESE GUYS'RE... LIKE THE WELCOME WAGON FOR MY NEW GIG.

MM-HMM...

IF THIS IS THE KIND OF SHIT WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO ON A REGULAR BASIS...

... THEN YOU AND ME ARE GONNA' HAVE A SERIOUS PROBLEM, K.

Okay, maybe I don't have everything figured out...

... life's going to have its share of static, no matter what.

THE FREIHEIT DISTRICT:

I DON'T *NEED* THIS RIGHT NOW, GIRLS...

WE TRIED TO TALK HER *OUT* OF IT, MISS LAGRAVENESE. BUT SHE SAID SHE *WANTED* TO WORK.

WE PUT HER IN YOUR *OFFICE*...

AH, THE SMELL OF *VOMIT*... *THAT'S* WHAT YOU WANT WAFTING THROUGH THE AIR OF YOUR NIGHTTIME ENTERTAINMENT ESTABLISHMENT...

SO...

... WHAT'RE YOU *DOING* HERE, SHEILA?

YOU DON'T ACTUALLY THINK THIS IS SOMEONE'S *SECRET FETISH*, DO YOU...?

I... I'M SORRY. I JUST THOUGHT--

WAIT. BEFORE YOU TRY AND EXPLAIN... YOU CAN'T BE DOING THIS.

YOU'RE IN NO CONDITION TO PERFORM...

I THOUGHT I'D BE FINE, OKAY...? I THOUGHT THE NAUSEA HAD GONE AWAY...

UH-HUH.

CLEARLY, YOU'RE NOT UP ON WHAT HAPPENS IN WHICH TRIMESTER --

UMMM... SORRY TO INTERRUPT, MA'AM...

... BUT AMBER'S HAVING A FEW BOUNDARY ISSUES WITH A CUSTOMER IN THE BLUE ROOM.

HE'S NOT LETTING HER GET TO HER NEXT APPOINTMENT. WE CALLED SECURITY, BUT THEY'RE NOT QUITE --

ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT...

... I'LL BE IN THERE IN A MOMENT.

CALGON, TAKE ME AWAY.../

"BOUNDARY ISSUES". FOR CHRIST'S SAKE...

"... YOU GIRLS HAVE NO IDEA."

POLICE

YOU KNOW YOU LOVE IT!

HHGGKK~!

POLICE

HERE'S YOUR FLOOR.

HAVE A NICE EVENING, MISS LAGRAVENESE.

CECIL, IF YOU DON'T START CALLING ME ANNABELLE, I MIGHT HAVE TO RIP YOUR LARYNX OUT.

REMEMBER THAT, NEXT TIME.

NICE PLACE...

... LOTS OF SPACE.

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, BUT I LET MYSELF IN.

WHY WOULD I MIND? THAT'D BE ONE HELL OF A *DOUBLE STANDARD*, WOULDN'T IT?

ALTHOUGH, SADLY, I DON'T DO MUCH BREAKING AND ENTERING THESE DAYS.

SO WHAT WOULD COMPEL *SIMON COOKE* TO POP IN AND --

DO YOU MIND IF WE SKIP THE BANTER FOR NOW?

I DON'T WANT YOU TO *MISINTERPRET* MY BEING HERE.

YOU THINK THERE'S A CHANCE I *MIGHT?*

YOU'RE STILL DOING THE *SUIT-AND-TIE* BIT... DON'T TELL ME, YOU WANT TO DISCUSS MY STOCK PORTFOLIO...

YOU'RE BEING UNCHARACTERISTICALLY *GLIB* FOR SOMEONE WHO CLAIMED TO *KNOW* ME SO WELL.

THE FACT IS... I'M STILL TRYING TO MAKE *SENSE* OF A LOT OF THINGS. TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S *"NORMAL"* VERSUS WHAT'S *NOT.*

SOME DAYS, I'M NOT EVEN SURE HOW MUCH THAT EVEN *MATTERS.* LIKE *TODAY,* FOR INSTANCE.

SO, IN THAT SPIRIT...

... WOULD YOU LET ME TAKE YOU OUT TO DINNER...?





XES



SEX



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DEEPER STILL

JOE CASEY WRITER
PIOTR KOWALSKI ARTIST
BRAD SIMPSON COLORIST
RUS WOOTON LETTERER
SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

... SO WE GOT THAT *PAYROLL* ISSUE ALL STRAIGHTENED OUT. SHOULD BE FINE FROM NOW ON.

LAST NIGHT, A *SCPD DETECTIVE* WAS SPOTTED IN THE COMMUNITY LOUNGE. TURNS OUT HE WAS OFF-DUTY.

MISS LAGRAVENESE... ARE YOU *LISTENING...?*

MMM...?

SORRY, WHAT WAS THAT...?

JUST TRYING TO KEEP YOU UPDATED ON THE CLUB'S DAY-TO-DAY NONSENSE, MA'AM.

YOU SEEM REALLY *DISTRACTED* BY SOMETHING...

IT'S *NOTHING,* OKAY?

IT'S JUST... SOMEONE ASKED ME OUT TO DINNER...

BUT... YOU DON'T *SEEM* EXCITED...

OKAY, WELL... THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO *FIND OUT,* RIGHT?

MAYBE THINK OF IT AS A NEW *EXPERIENCE...*

WHOA... YOU'RE GOING ON A *DATE...?*

I DON'T RECALL YOU EVER *GOING OUT* ON A BONA FIDE DATE BEFORE. PRETTY *EXCITING...*

HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW *HOW* I FEEL ABOUT IT. KINDA CAME OUT OF THE *BLUE.*

BESIDES, I'VE NEVER CONSIDERED MYSELF THE DATING *TYPE...*

RIGHT...

... BECAUSE I NEED MORE OF *THOSE.*

HE HAD SUCH A LIGHT TOUCH, Y'KNOW...

... IF HE'D BEEN SOBER, IT MIGHT'VE ACTUALLY MEANT SOMETHING.

THAT'S A BIG "IF".

NO SHIT. IS IT SOMETHING ABOUT ME... WHERE I SEEM TO ATTRACT THESE LOSERS?

IT'S YOUR ENVIRONMENT, RAQUEL. I WENT THROUGH A PHASE WHERE EVERYONE I SLEPT WITH WORKED IN MY BUILDING IN SOME CAPACITY.

YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT. I'M SURE IT'S A PSYCHOLOGICAL THING. SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY BRAIN...

AIN'T NOTHIN' WRONG WITH A LADY LOOKING FOR A GOOD TIME. YOU'RE BOTH FINE.

SO, Y'KNOW, MAYBE IF YOU DIDN'T HANG OUT IN BARS SO MUCH...

'SCUSE ME. ANOTHER COPPOLA OVER HERE...?

ESPECIALLY YOU, DARLIN'.

WOW. THAT'S DEEP, BIG BOY...

... MAKES IT SO EASY TO IMAGINE YOU'VE GOT A PENETRATING AND THOUGHTFUL PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE...

... ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING YOU'VE BEEN WASTING YOURS STANDING ON THAT SIDE OF THE BAR, I MEAN.

GO AWAY. I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN I NEED ANOTHER REFILL.

DAMN, JULIETTE. THAT WAS COLD.

HEY -- Y'KNOW, THIS *GUY* YOU'RE DOING YOUR STORY ON...

SIMON COOKE.

YEAH... WHO'S HE *DATING?*

I MEAN, ISN'T *THAT* SOMETHING WORTH INVESTIGATING? YOU CAN TELL A *LOT* ABOUT SOMEONE FROM THEIR VARIOUS *LIAISONS,* RIGHT...?

OKAY... WHILE I CERTAINLY *APPRECIATE* YOUR BACK SEAT OPINIONS ON THE NATURE OF *JOURNALISM...*

... *THIS* PARTICULAR STORY IS A WHOLE LOT *DEEPER* THAN THAT.

NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I NEED TO CHECK IN WITH ONE OF MY MORE *LEGITIMATE* LEADS...

WOMEN

ALRIGHT, FRESNO, I'VE GIVEN YOU PLENTY OF *TIME...*

... *TELL* ME I'M NOT WASTING MY *MONEY* HERE. TELL ME YOU'VE *GOT* SOMETHING.

WELL, OKAY... LEMME TRY AND *EXPLAIN,* MISS JEMAS --

-- THIS WASN'T QUITE YOUR RUN-OF-THE-MILL *BACKGROUND CHECK.* YOU *KNEW* THAT.

JUST THE *SIZE* OF THE DEEP WEB... WELL, WHEN YOU EGO SURF YOURSELF ON GOOGLE, YOU'RE JUST ACCESSING ABOUT *ONE PERCENT* OF WHAT'S ACTUALLY THERE...

... ON TOP OF WHICH, YOU KNOW THAT THIS COOKE GUY'S PRETTY HEAVY INTO HI-TECH R&D --

HEY -- JUST CUT TO THE CHASE...

... DID YOU FIND OUT ANYTHING WORTH A DAMN OR NOT?

UMMM... WELL, HERE'S THE THING...

... IT MAKES SENSE THAT A CORPORATE CEO WOULD BURY STUFF ELECTRONICALLY. IT'S A SECURITY THING... DIGITAL HISTORY CAN OFTEN BE VERY INCRIMINATING...

... BACK ROOM DEALS... SIDE-STEPPING GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS... CORPORATE MALFEASANCE... ALL THE DIRT YOU WANT IS THERE IF YOU HAVE THE SKILLS TO DIG IT OUT.

AND I DO.

HAVING SAID THAT... THE COOKE COMPANY FILES ARE EASY ENOUGH TO ACCESS. NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY THERE.

BUT YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SIMON COOKE SPECIFICALLY. DIGGING AROUND FOR SHIT ON HIM... WELL, IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE --

ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?!

DO I HAVE TO COME BACK DOWN THERE AND HOLD YOUR FUCKING HAND?! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE BEST AT THIS SHIT--!

I-I AM THE BEST... I'M TELLIN' YOU...

LOOK... I'M NOT DONE HERE. I'LL GET BACK TO YOU, OKAY...?

...

GODDAMMIT...!

'DIS THE PLACE.

OPEN UP! I GOT THE OLD MAN OUT HERE!

YES, YOU CERTAINLY DO. PLEASE COME IN. WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.

WELCOME TO THE BLACK LODGE, SATURN CITY BRANCH.

... BROKEN NOSE, ORBITAL SOCKET, NASAL PASSAGE... HIS JAW IS SHATTERED... MULTIPLE LACERATIONS... HE'LL PROBABLY LOSE THAT EYE...

... HE'S BEEN SLIPPING IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS ALL NIGHT.

HE SAID HE WAS ONE OF YOURS.

HE IS. HIS NAME IS FEDERICI.

YOU PERFORM A VALUABLE SERVICE, DOCTOR. CLEARLY HE OWES YOU HIS LIFE...

... SUCH AS IT IS, AT THIS POINT.

OBVIOUSLY, HE WAS NOT MEANT TO ACTUALLY --

... IZZAT... YOU, B-BOSS...?

... I-I... TRIED... I S-SWEAR I DID...

... THEY'RE JUST SO... FUCKIN' BRUTAL...

FEDERICI... TALK TO ME. WHERE IS THE REST OF YOUR CREW...?

... THEY'RE ALL DEAD, BOSS... C-COMPLETE MASSACRE... AT THE SOUTH DOCK WAREHOUSE...

GO ON.

... THEY TRIED... TO SQUEEZE ME... FOR INFO... BUT I-I WOULDN'T SAY SHIT...

... I... COULDN'T SEE 'EM... B-BUT I COULD... HEAR 'EM...

THIS CITY'S BEEN STAGNANT LONG ENOUGH, DON'T YOU THINK? THE OLD MAN THINKS HE'S GOT EVERYTHING ALL LOCKED UP...

BUT THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU'RE NOT LOOKING OVER YOUR SHOULDER AT ALL TIMES.

YOU END UP GETTING ASS-FUCKED.

... T-TALKED ABOUT... HOW THEY WERE... GONNA TAKE IT ALL...

BEING ON SUCH A ROLL, BURNING THROUGH THE OLD MAN'S TERRITORIES, WE WOULDN'T NORMALLY PAUSE TO ADD THIS KIND OF PERSONAL TOUCH.

BUT SOMETIMES... WE LIKE TO SIGN OUR WORK.

... THEY SAID... YOU KNEW THIS WAS COMIN'...

... THAT IT WAS JUST... A MATTER OF TIME...

BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE TREATED ONE OF *YOUR* SOLDIERS...

... I SUPPOSE THIS MEANS THINGS'LL BE *HEATING UP* AROUND HERE.

LISTEN... I KNOW I'M NOT YOUR *PERSONAL PHYSICIAN,* BUT I'VE HEARD THE *RUMORS.* Y'KNOW, ABOUT YOUR *CONDITION...*

IF THERE'S ANOTHER *TURF WAR* ON THE HORIZON, AS THE LOCAL BLACK MARKET *HEALER,* I CAN'T HELP BUT SHOW A LITTLE *CONCERN.*

IT'S NOT EXACTLY THE MOST CONVENIENT TIME FOR YOU TO BE --

THAT'S QUITE *ENOUGH,* DOCTOR.

RAYMOND, IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND...

HK~!

NOW GET THIS *STRAIGHT,* "DOC"! I DON'T GIVE A GODDAMN *WHAT* YOU THINK YOUR CREDEN-TIALS ARE!

YOU'RE NOT *QUALIFIED* TO TALK TO ME ABOUT *MY "CONDITION"* -- YOU *HEAR* ME?!

... NGGGG...!

YOU EVEN *BREATHE* THAT I'M ANYTHING LESS THAN *ONE HUNDRED PERCENT* TO *ANYONE,* INCLUDING *ME* --

-- AND I'LL *BURN* YOUR BLACK LODGE DOWN TO THE MOTHERFUCKING *GROUND...* WITH YOU AND YOUR STAFF STILL *IN* IT!

FREDDIE GOT *FUCKED UP,* OLD MAN...

INDEED HE DID...

... AND HIS EAR-WITNESS ACCOUNT CERTAINLY *CONFIRMS* WHAT I'VE BEEN EXPECTING FOR *MONTHS* NOW.

=KAFF!=

THIS IS ALL A DELIBERATE PLAY FOR *POWER.* THEY *WANT* WHAT I'VE *GOT.*

YEAH, SPEAKING OF WHICH... I DID SOME ASKING AROUND WITH *MY* PEEPS...

... I WUZ WONDERING IF THIS *"HISTORY'S HERETIC"* LABEL WUZ SOMEONE'S *STREET HANDLE...* SOMEONE *OUTSIDE* THE NORMAL CIRCLES.

I HEARD SOME REAL *NIGHTMARE SHIT.* LIKE, *BIBLICAL* SHIT, EVEN...

... AIN'T NOTHIN' T'DO WITH *TURF,* NEITHER.

I NEVER ASSUMED IT *DID,* RAYMOND.

I KNEW WHEN THE WAR *CAME...* IT WOULD COME ON *MULTIPLE FRONTS.* THE *GAMES* WE USED TO PLAY WITH THE *SAINT* ARE AN ANCIENT MEMORY NOW.

SO, WHADDA WE GONNA *DO,* BOSS?

I'M KINDA *FREAKED* HERE. NOT TO MENTION WHAT THE *DOCTOR* SAID --

REST ASSURED, RAYMOND, I HAVE NO INTENTION OF DYING ON MY *KNEES.*

I'LL FIGHT THIS WAR IF I HAVE TO TAKE THE WHOLE *CITY* DOWN WITH ME.

so I'm hanging in there, but I know there's things you can't plan for...

KEENAN WADE.

TIME TO *STEP IT UP,* ROOK.

TIME TO GET A LITTLE *FIELD WORK* YOUR BELT...

...but I'm ready to roll with anything right now.

Like when Masai wants to talk to me. I still have to pretend like I'm willing to hop to it.

I can be a good soldier.

... THINK OF IT AS THE *FINAL STEP* N YOUR INITIATION INTO THE BREAKS.

Y'DIG?

COUPLE A LOW CLASS OUTFITS ARE WARRING OVER THE CASTRO HOUSING PROJECTS OVER ON SEVENTY-FIFTH STREET IN MOORLYN.

THE *PLAYA TRAYS* AND THE *ROLLIN SEVENS.* BOTH OF 'EM SO FAR DOWN THEY AIN'T EVEN ON THE MAP. BUT THEY MAKE A BIG *NOISE* AND *WE* NEED TO STEP IN AND KEEP 'EM IN LINE.

SO WE'RE LIKE... NEGOTIATING A *PEACE TREATY* OR SOMETHING...?

YOU COULD SAY THAT. IF THEY *BLOW UP...* THAT'S TOO MUCH *LIGHT* SHINING DOWN. MAKES *OUR* BUSINESS TOUGHER TO DO.

SO THE IDEA IS TO KEEP IT QUIET. I GOT IT.

SOMETHING *ELSE* I WANNA TALK TO YOU ABOUT --

-- THE BOYS TELL ME THEY FOUND YOU SHACKIN' UP WITH SOME FINE HONEY.

DON'T TELL ME IT'S LOVE. THAT COULD BE A PROBLEM.

YOU CAN'T HAVE TOO MANY ATTACHMENTS IN YOUR SITUATION. TOO MUCH TO LOSE.

WHAT... ARE YOU SAYING...?

I'M SAYING A BREAK CAN'T WORK THE STREETS WHEN HE'S GOT SOFT SPOTS --

-- A BREAK'S GOTTA RUN TIGHT. YOU GOTTA BE A ROCK.

HNNG--!

YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT'S AT STAKE, WADE. I KNOW YOU DO. YOU AIN'T STUPID.

SO TAKE MY ADVICE... DON'T PUT YOURSELF IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU'RE VULNERABLE IN ANY WAY.

WE'RE SERVING A HIGHER ORDER HERE.

THAT TAKES DISCIPLINE.

something about the way Masai talks... like he knows something the rest of us don't.

could be a complete bullshit act.

Then again, something he taught me back in the day...

... never take anything at face value. There's always something buried underneath.

YOU... UMMM... NEVER INVITED ME IN HERE BEFORE.

THIS IS... IMPRESSIVE.

A YEAR AGO, THIS PLACE WOULD BE LIT UP LIKE A CHRISTMAS TREE. NOW, NOT SO MUCH...

LISTEN, I KNOW I'VE GIVEN YOU A HARD TIME ABOUT COMING DOWN HERE, BUT THAT WAS JUST... Y'KNOW...

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, WARREN. I'VE ENGAGED IN MY SHARE OF ASSHOLE BEHAVIOR, TOO.

SOME OF THIS GEAR STILL COMES IN USEFUL.

MAYBE YOU SHOULD'VE USED THIS STUFF TO RUN SOME SORT OF BACKGROUND CHECK ON THE LATE MISTER TANAKA...

... AT LEAST YOU COULD'VE BEEN PREPARED FOR THE KIND OF FREAK HE WAS BEFORE YOU GOT INTO BED WITH HIM.

SO TO SPEAK.

KANSEI WASN'T MY IDEA, BELIEVE ME. BUT...

... LOOK, I'M NOT GOING TO PASS THE BUCK HERE. I WAS ADVISED, I SAW THE NUMBERS, I MADE THE DECISION.

KANSEI

HEY, THAT'S YOUR JOB.

BUT JUST OUT OF CURIOSITY... WHY THE JAPANESE...?

THEY'RE NOT EXACTLY THE CORPORATE GIANTS THEY *USED* TO BE...

NEITHER ARE WE.

HEY, I WASN'T IMPLYING *ANYTHING*, SIMON. I'M *YOUR* LAWYER, NOT YOUR COMPANY'S...

I KNOW, I KNOW. IT'S... A VALID QUESTION.

IF I'M GOING TO *BE...* SIMON COOKE -- FOR *REAL* -- I NEED TO ACTUALLY *GIVE* A SHIT.

ABOUT MY FINANCES, ABOUT MY EMPLOYEES, ABOUT THE REALITIES OF RUNNING A COMPANY OF THIS SIZE...

LOOK... YOU *ARE* SIMON COOKE.

AND IT WAS THE *SMART PLAY.* WHO THE HELL COULD'VE PREDICTED ALL *THIS* NONSENSE...?

RIGHT. SPEAKING OF WHICH...

INITIATE VOICE ACTIVATION. DISPLAY ELLIOT'S LOCATION...

ACKNOWLEDGED. MAPPING...

THIS IS SOME TOY BOX YOU'VE GOT IN HERE. MUST'VE BEEN SOME *FUN...*

IT HAD ITS MOMENTS, ELLIOT...

... IT *DEFINITELY* HAD ITS MOMENTS.

THIS IS... A PART OF TOWN I NEVER REALLY *VISIT* MUCH...

... OR RATHER, NOT AT *ALL*... ACTUALLY...

I WILL RESPECTFULLY IGNORE THE FACT THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR OWN *CITY*, MISTER BARNES.

AN *HONORABLE* CITIZEN WOULD.

OUR LATE MISTER TANAKA TOOK GREAT *PRIDE* IN HIS FAMILIARITY WITH EACH AND EVERY METROPOLIS HE WOULD VISIT. INCLUDING *YOURS.*

SUCH A SHAME THAT IN *THIS* INSTANCE, HIS DESIRE FOR THAT *INTIMACY* PROVED TO BE HIS *UNDOING.*

AH, HERE WE ARE...

UMMM... NOT TO CAST ASPERSIONS, MISTER INOUE...

... BUT ARE YOU *SURE* THIS IS WHERE YOU PROCURED YOUR... ENTERTAINMENT SERVICES...?

OF COURSE I AM. TOP NOTCH RECOMMENDATION. TRUSTED INTERNATIONAL REFERENCES.

WHEN YOU *SPEAK* TO THEM, SPEAK WITH *RESPECT.*

WAIT... WHAT...?

ME SPEAK TO THEM?!

H-HOLD ON, MISTER INOUE...

... I THOUGHT AT THE VERY *LEAST...* WE'D GO IN *TOGETHER...*

... THIS ISN'T EXACTLY MY AREA OF *EXPERTISE...*

I'M A *MONEY* MAN, NOT... WELL, NOT A --

WE ARE HERE AT *YOUR* REQUEST, MISTER BARNES.

IF YOU SEEK TO ASSIST US IN CORRALLING THE *ELEMENTS* OF THIS UNFORTUNATE MATTER, *THIS* IS WHERE YOU BEGIN.

BUT KNOW THAT YOU HAVE MY SUPPORT.

"HELLO, MY NAME IS ELLIOT K. BARNES. I HAVE A B.S. IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION FROM NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY WHERE I WAS HEADHUNTED BY DANTEC ELECTRONICS. FOR SIX YEARS, I WAS A SENIOR VP AT KENNETH INDUSTRIES.

"FOR FOUR YEARS, I SERVED AS CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER FOR THE COOKE COMPANY...

"... BEFORE RESIGNING IN *DISGRACE* AFTER GETTING MIXED UP IN AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT INVOLVING *KILLER CALL GIRLS.*"

QUITE A RESUME THERE...

HUH.

YOU LOOKIN' FOR A *GOOD TIME* OR WHAT?

AHHH...

... Y-YOU COULD SAY THAT, SURE.

I'VE COME TO SPEAK TO THE "ENTERTAIN-MENT DIRECTOR"... A-AND I'M WILLING TO... *PAY* FOR THE PRIVILEGE.

MONEY TALKS, M'MAN. C'MON IN.

OH... OKAY...

... GREAT...

SIMON...?

IS THAT YOUR PHONE RINGING...?

MMM...?

OH YEAH... THAT'S ME.

"UNKNOWN NUMBER"? WHO THE HELL IS CALLING ME RIGHT NOW...?

SIMON COOKE.

NO SHIT. I CALLED YOU...

... BUT I SUPPOSE A TOP CORPORATE OFFICER SHOULD ANSWER THE PHONE IN AS PRETENTIOUS A MANNER AS POSSIBLE.

SO... IS THIS A BAD TIME...?

ANNABELLE...?

AHHH... NO, THIS ISN'T A BAD TIME.

WELL, HERE'S THE THING...

... I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOUR LITTLE VISIT THE OTHER NIGHT.

SINCE YOU'RE NOT KNOWN FOR YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR, I'M GOING TO ASSUME YOU WERE SERIOUS. I'D BE WILLING TO CONSIDER YOUR OFFER.

BUT I HAVE A FEW CONDITIONS...

... FIRST OF ALL, YOU NEED TO GET YOUR PERSONAL APPEARANCE IN ORDER. I MEAN, IT'S DIFFERENT WHEN I HAVE TO LOOK AT YOU UNMASKED.

I LIKE MY MEN CLEAN-SHAVEN. WELL GROOMED. KNOW WHAT I MEAN...?

RIGHT. ANYTHING ELSE...?

A LITTLE WARDROBE ADJUSTMENT. DRESS LIKE YOU KNOW HOW TO HAVE A LITTLE FUN FOR ONCE.

I MEAN, IF WE'RE NOT WEARING WHAT WE'VE USUALLY WORN WHEN WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER IN THE PAST.

YOU LET ME KNOW IF YOU CAN HANDLE THAT.

ADIOS, MISTER COOKE.

WELL...

... THAT WAS INTERESTING.

WHO WAS IT...?

YOU REMEMBER SHADOW LYNX? JEWEL THIEF... SOCIAL MALCONTENT... WISE-ASS...

I DO REMEMBER. KIND OF A HOT LITTLE NUMBER, IF I RECALL...

YOU TWO EVER...?

NO... BUT IT'S ONE OF THOSE THINGS...

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT HER A LOT. I'M NOT SURE WHY...

SO, WHAT... ARE YOU PLOTTING SOME SORT OF HOOK-UP...?

NOT TO CAST ASPERSIONS, BUT... YOU THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA...?

YOU'RE GOING TO LECTURE ME ON WOMEN, WARREN...?

CONSIDERING THE KIND OF SCENE YOU'VE BEEN --

ALERT! ALERT! DETECTING FOREIGN NETWORK ENUMERATION --

WHOA. WHAT THE HELL DOES *THAT* MEAN...?!

IT *MEANS* -- SOMEONE'S TRYING TO WORM THEIR WAY INTO MY BLACK FILE DATABASE FROM THE *OUTSIDE.*

COULD BE A KIND OF VULNERABILITY BROKER. OR MAYBE A STRAIGHT UP SECURITY HACKER.

TRYING TO GET AT MY *PERSONAL* FILES...

CAN SOMEONE *DO* THAT...?

THEY CAN TRY. BUT I HELPED *BUILD* THIS DATABASE... *AND* ITS SECURITY. THE PENTAGON COULD LEARN FROM *MY* SET-UP.

I CAN *TRACE* THIS HACK *AND* PUSH BACK WITH A *VIRUS* THAT'LL KNOCK OUT HIS SOFTWARE *AND* PROVIDE SOME INTEL ON WHOEVER IT *IS*...

... LIKE A CYBER "*BEWARE OF DOG*" SIGN THAT *BITES BACK.*

PROTECTION FROM THREATS ABOVE *AND* BELOW.

PRICE OF DOING BUSINESS, THEN...?

WELL, TO BE HONEST...

... I'M STARTING TO WONDER.

One of the first things he taught me when I started...

... was that people in our line of work tend to have a unique relationship with our pasts...

... you can run, but you can't hide.

REGISTERED LETTER? SERIOUSLY...?

SIGN HERE...

WAIT...

... THE *DATE* ON THIS -- THIS LETTER IS FROM SEPTEMBER, *LAST YEAR.*

WHY AM I JUST GETTING THIS *NOW...?*

WHADDYA WANT FROM *ME?* SENDER'S INSTRUCTIONS.

HAVE A GOOD ONE.

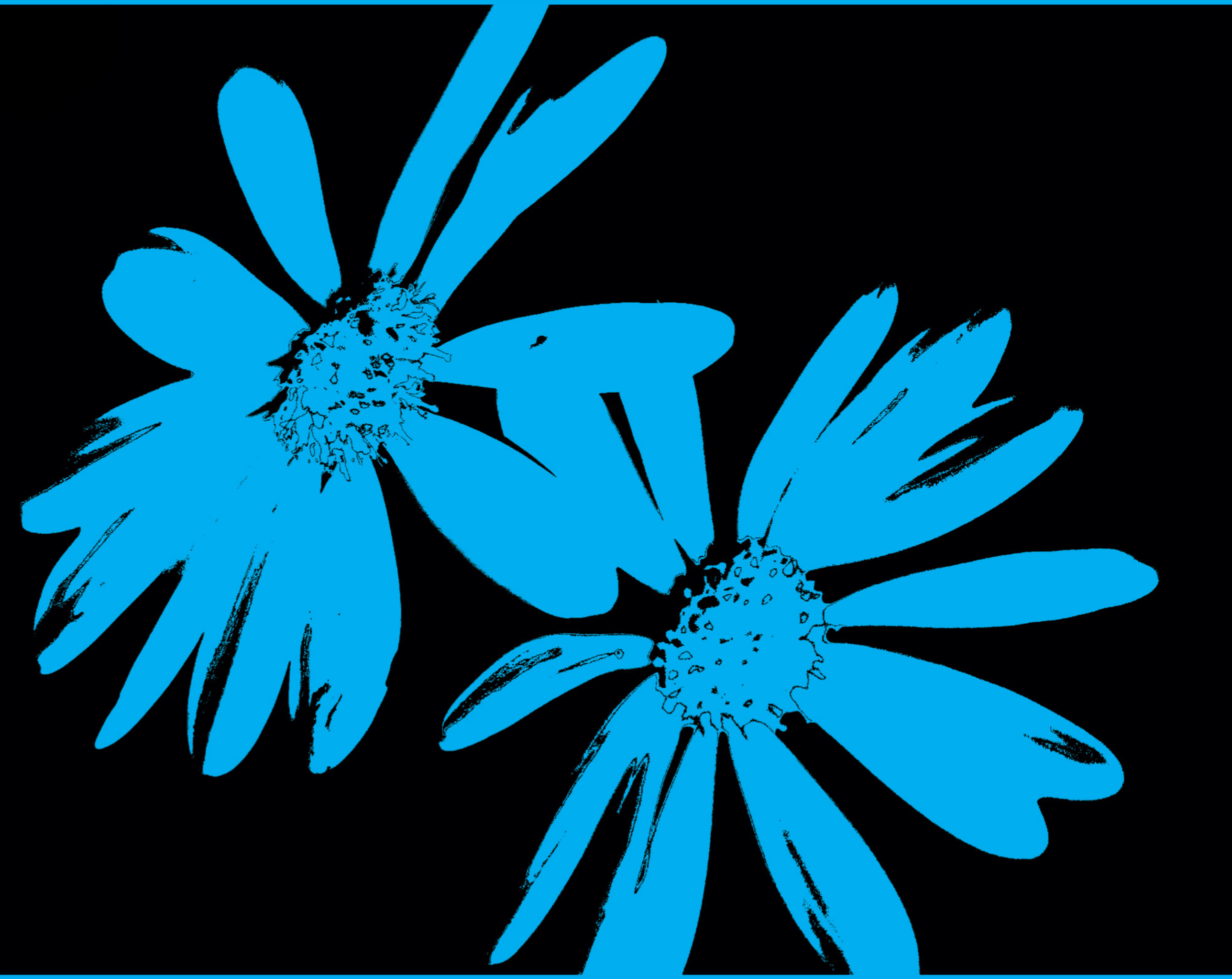
NO RETURN ADDRESS --

-- WHAT THE HELL...?

Keenan --

If you're actually reading this, then I have been dead for exactly one year...

NO SHIT.../



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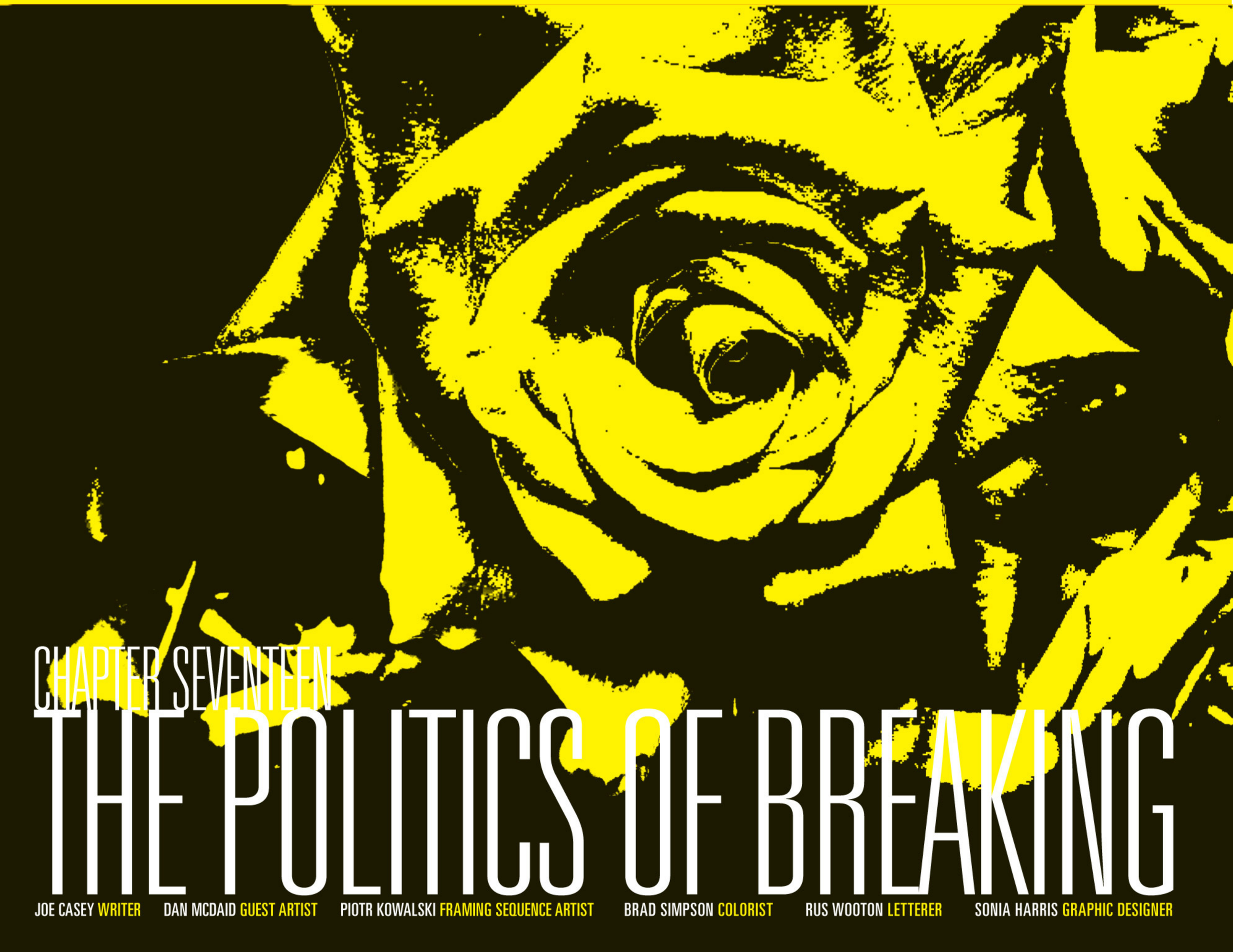


CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE POLITICS OF BREAKING

JOE CASEY WRITER DAN MCDAID GUEST ARTIST PIOTR KOWALSKI FRAMING SEQUENCE ARTIST BRAD SIMPSON COLORIST RUS WOOTON LETTERER SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

I TAKE IT YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME LOOK *GOOD* IN THIS MEETING...

... CAPABLE, DECISIVE, A TRUE CAPTAIN OF INDUSTRY...

IT'S WHAT I *DO*, ISN'T IT...?

YOU'RE NEEDING ME LESS AND LESS FOR THAT, YOU KNOW.

I WOULDN'T BE SO SURE ABOUT THAT.

IN FACT... MAYBE THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO EXPLAIN *MISTER BARNES'* RECENT ABSENCE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? ELLIOT TOLD *ME* HE WAS GOING ON VACATION...

NOT THAT I *BELIEVED* THAT...

SORT OF A *COVER STORY* I TOLD HIM TO TELL PEOPLE.

I'VE GOT HIM ON... WELL, LET'S CALL IT "*SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT*". *FACT FINDING*, REALLY. IT'S A BIT *MURKY* RIGHT NOW, SO I FIGURED THE FEWER IN THE LOOP, THE BETTER --

SIMON.

WHAT'RE YOU DOING BACK *THERE...?*

UMMM... TRYING TO *PROCESS* WHAT IT IS YOU JUST SAID.

YOU SENT *ELLIOT* TO DO SOMETHING YOU FELT THE NEED TO KEEP *QUIET?* I THOUGHT *I* WAS YOUR HATCHET MAN.../

THIS IS ALL ABOUT *TANAKA* AND *KANSEI*, ISN'T IT...?/

LARRY... C'MON...

... *YOU* KNOW WHAT KIND OF PUBLIC RELATIONS *NIGHTMARE* WE'RE SITTING ON. NOT TO MENTION THE *INTERNATIONAL* IMPLICATIONS.

I HAD SPECIFIC *REASONS* FOR PUTTING ELLIOT ON THIS INSTEAD OF YOU...

... FOR NOW, YOU JUST HAVE TO *TRUST* ME ON THAT.

OH, I DO. TRUST IS NOT THE *ISSUE*, SIMON...

... AND YOU *KNOW* IT.

FUCK.

THIS IS TOO PERFECT. TO BE ABLE TO SEE THINGS THIS *CLEARLY*...

... WELL, THAT'S *ACTUAL* SUPERIORITY, ISN'T IT...?

I hope that this letter finds you well (if it finds you at all)...

... and I also hope you'll forgive its cryptic nature. A missive from the afterlife can be somewhat disturbing, I'm sure.

But you know me -- if I didn't think you could handle it, I wouldn't have bothered.

I also know you're well aware that life is generally unmerciful and, often, even spiteful as it moves forward.

However, if we don't cower in the corner, if we don't shy away from those cold circumstances...

... that's where the glory of our chosen profession lies.

NOW THAT I'VE GIVEN YOU SUFFICIENT *TIME* TO GET *USED* TO THESE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES, WE CAN TALK SOME *TRUTH*.

IN OTHER WORDS, THIS IS *NOT* A VOICE FROM BEYOND THE *GRAVE*, CHILD...

... think of this more as your own conscience still echoing in your brain, just in case you've forgotten certain things you were taught.

I can only imagine how bad it's gotten in Saturn City over the past year...

... and how much that might actually appeal to you.

Because there were aspects of the city that he really had no idea about...

... but that you knew all too well.

SO WE'RE MEETIN' WITH THE DELEGATES FROM THE *ROLLIN SEVENS* IN THE LOBBY OF THEIR BUILDING...

... THEY KNOW WE'RE *COMIN,'* BUT THEY COULD STILL *FUCK* US.

MASAI SAYS *NEITHER ONE* OF THESE CLUBS ARE IN THE NETWORK.

NO SHIT. WE'LL SHOW 'EM WHAT'S WHAT.

You never hid from your past, did you?

DAMN STRAIGHT...

... WE GOT THE *MUSCLE,* DON'T WE...?

SO...

... YOU WANNA FUCK ME UP...?

It's one thing to observe the darkness... it's another thing to have lived in it.

THEY CALL YOU *SKYSCRAPER,* RIGHT? WELL, LOOK HERE...

... WHAT HAPPENED *BEFORE,* YOU GOTTA SHAKE IT OFF.

I SEE HOW YOU BEEN EYEBALLIN' ME ALL NIGHT. YOU'RE PROBABLY RUNNIN' THE *REPLAY* IN YOUR HEAD RIGHT NOW...

Fundamentally, that was the difference between you and him.

... BUT IF *YOU'D* COME OUT ON TOP, *I'D* BE FUCKIN' *DEAD.* AND I AIN'T DOWN WITH THAT.

SO, WHATEVER... MAYBE YOU GOT PROBLEMS AT HOME. MAYBE YOU'RE JUST *STUPID.* I DUNNO...

BUT LETTIN' YOU *LIVE* DOESN'T MAKE ME YOUR ENEMY. PRETTY MUCH THE *OPPOSITE,* Y'DIG...?

And he knew it, too. He was painfully aware.

HOW'D *YOU* KNOW I GOT PROBLEMS AT HOME...?

UHHH...

... HUH?

GOT A LIL' GIRLFRIEND. SHE AIN'T DIGGIN' ME RIGHT NOW.

TRUTH IS, SHE'D LOVE IT IF I JUST FUCKED RIGHT OFF...

-- CAN YOU JUST FUCK OFF, 'SCRAPE?!

SHIELA --

I MEAN, DAMN... I CAN'T EVEN STEP OUTSIDE MY FRONT DOOR WITHOUT YOU BREATHING DOWN MY NECK...!

WE WENT ON ONE DATE. YOU GET IT?!

THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU GET TO KEEP HANGING AROUND LIKE SOME STRAY DOG I ACCIDENTALLY FED...!

SPEAKING OF...

LA BOMBA DE TACO

HOLA. WELCOME TO LA BOMBA DE TACO --

OKAY, AHHHH...

... I'LL TAKE A MAÑANA MELT. MAKE THAT TWO. EXTRA CHEESE ON BOTH. THREE OF THOSE NEW QUESARITOS...

... TWO CALIENTE STACKERS WITH HOT SALSA... FOUR BAZUCA BURRITOS... FOUR EXPLOSIVO CHALUPAS, NO SOUR CREAM...

... TWO ORDERS OF NITRO NOCHE NACHOS, LARGE... TWO GIGANTE GRILLERS... THREE OF THOSE ATOMICO CRUNCHWRAP THINGS...

AAAANNND FOR DESSERT...

YOU BEEN TO SEE SOME KINDA BABY DOCTOR YET?

I MEAN, I DON'T KNOW SHIT ABOUT THIS STUFF... BUT THIS CAN'T BE NORMAL, GIRLFRIEND...!

STOP CALLING ME THAT!

HAVEN'T YOU EVER HEARD THE PHRASE, "EATING FOR TWO"...?

SO QUIT STARING AT ME...

... THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW MOMENTS WHERE I'M NOT PUKING MY GUTS OUT.

HUH.

YEAH...

SO LISTEN UP, SHEILA...

... SOMEONE DID THIS TO YOU. AND YOU AIN'T SAID JACK-SHIT AS TO WHO.

BUT I DON'T SEE NO OTHER MOTHERFUCKER AROUND. SO I'M PUTTIN' THE HAMMER DOWN. YOU'RE TELLIN' ME WHO... WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT...

... I-I MEAN...

... MAYBE YOU COULD TELL ME WHO...

OH DAMN.

YOU'VE GOT THE BALLS TO TRY AND GET ALL UP IN MY BUSINESS?! TO DEMAND TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT MY LIFE?!

IN FACT --

-- GET OUTTA HERE, YOU PSYCHO FUCK! GET OOOUUUT--!

SO, Y'KNOW, IT'S JUST A LIL' BUMP IN THE ROAD...

YEAH, SOUNDS LIKE IT.

DUNNO WHY SHE'S *HIDIN'* IT, THOUGH...

ME NEITHER. HORMONES, MAYBE.

OKAY NOW, AS THEY SAY, LET'S GET INTO CHARACTER...

You had a certain insights into aspects of the job that I thought were extremely valuable.

We both know he didn't agree. A true partnership just wasn't in the cards.

I THOUGHT WE'D BE MEETING WITH *MASAI*...

YOU THOUGHT WRONG, SEVEN. YOU WANNA TALK TO THE *BIG MAN*...

... YOU GOTTA SHOW YOU AND YOUR PLAYA TRAY HOMIES GOT THE BRAINS TO *CHILL OUT* ON YOUR SHIT --

On one level, I was worried about where you'd go from there...

... on the other hand, I figured you'd be able to adapt a lot more easily than he would.

DOWN--!

GODDAMN MUTHAFUKKA--!
C'MON --
WHAT THE FUCK, YO?!
KEENAN --
One thing you should know... your involvement in any of it was basically my idea.
-- DIS SOME KINDA TRAP OR WHAT?!
I DON'T THINK SO --
I just had an instinct about you. And I've learned to trust my instincts.
-- THINK WE'RE JUST IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME.
THE PLAYA TRAYS ARE MOVIN' IN.
AH, SHIT! WE GOT MORE SEVENS IN HERE --
WHAT THE FUCK--?!
-- THEY WASTED MIGUEL, MAN --
-- GONNA UNLEASH ON THESE MUTHAKUKKAS --

NOT SO FAST --

NK--!

DIS IS FUCKED--!

WHAT

You never shied away from the fires that probably still burn within this city...

... but you also had your own agendas that you followed despite his orders to the contrary.

OUT THE BACK --

-- MOVE IT--!

You never really fit into the "sidekick" role, did you?

FUCK -- WHAT NOW?!

THIS IS WAR -- AND WE AIN'T PACKED, YO!

CHILL OUT, SKY. THIS AIN'T EVEN CLOSE TO "WAR"...

There's a certain kind of light that shines on you when you agree to wear the uniform.

Not everyone can handle living in that light.

But I suppose it's far too late to start bemoaning the perils of the profession.

You and I had many late-night discussions on the fabled Thirteenth Floor...

... talking about the nature of good and evil and the practicalities of selective morality...

... and although it pains me to say that I got to know you a lot better than he was willing to...

... it also means I had a much clearer understanding of what you're capable of.

Personally, I think we only scratched the surface.

You have something, Keenan. Something indefinable...

... something that he trained for most of his life to embody (to only limited success, in my opinion).

SO, YEAH.

LET'S GET THE FUCK UP OUTTA HERE.

From the beginning, I felt that you might be the missing piece of the puzzle.

But I finally realized... it was the puzzle itself that was flawed.

I've done what I can to remedy the situation. But I could only do so much.

WELL, FUCK ME... LEAVE IT TO *SATURN'S FINEST* TO GIVE *OUR* ASSES A WAY OUT...

WE *LOST* A FEW... AND THE BLOWBACK FROM *THIS* SHIT'S GONNA BE *INTENSE.*

M'S GONNA GO *NUCLEAR...*

DON'T SWEAT MASAI. I'LL TALK TO HIM.

I KINDA GOT THE FEELIN' THAT KEEPIN' THE PEACE HERE WASN'T THE POINT...

I CAN TELL BY YOUR EXPRESSION THAT YOU KNOW THAT WAS SOME FULL-ON KOBAYASHI MARU SHIT I SENT YOU INTO.

THE COPS WERE JUST AN ADDED BONUS.

BUT YOU WENT IN THERE WITH DICKS SWINGIN' AND YOU GOT YOURSELF OUTTA THERE... AND YOU PULLED SOME POOR FUCKERS OUTTA THE FOXHOLE WITH YOU...

... SEE, I KNEW YOU WERE EITHER GONNA SHOW ME SOMETHING...

... OR YOU WERE GONNA CHOKE.

AND I DON'T NEED ANY MORE BITCHES WHO CAN'T OPERATE UNDER PRESSURE, Y'KNOW WHAT I'M SAYIN'...?

I'm sure I've left him twisting in the wind... clumsily dealing with the social inanities that the rest of us deal with every day.

I DO WHAT'S NECESSARY TO KEEP THE BREAKS THE MEANEST MOTHERFUCKERS IN SATURN CITY. AND SO DID YOU.

MOST IMPORTANTLY... YOU'RE NOT QUESTIONING MY METHODS. YOU'RE NOT EVEN THINKING IT, ARE YOU?

YOU KNOW THE CHAIN OF COMMAND... YOU KNOW ABOUT GENERALS AND SOLDIERS, DON'TCHA...?

NOT EVERYONE'S GOT YOUR BRAINS, WADE...

I have a sneaking suspicion you're faring much better, Keenan.

SO... IT APPEARS THAT BOZZI HERE IS UNSATISFIED WITH MY LEADERSHIP SKILLS.

THINKS THAT HE SHOULD BE KING OF THE BREAKS.

... BOZZI CERTAINLY KNOWS, DON'T HE...?

AWWWW SHIT-!

DON'T DO IT BOZ!

SO YOU'RE CALLING ME OUT, BOY? YOU THINK YOU CAN TAKE ME?!

ANOTHER IN A LONG LINE OF CHALLENGERS TO THE THRONE.

WELL, WE ALL KNOW HOW THINGS LIKE THAT GET SETTLED AROUND HERE...

THEN TELL ME SOMETHING...

... WHY IS IT YOUR BALLS ARE SO SHRUNK UP LIKE THAT? THEY KNOW SOMETHING YOU DON'T...?

THAT'S IT, BITCH --

-- WAY PAST TIME SOMEONE FUCKED YO' SHIT UP!

The short time you were with us was still time well spent.

The skills you learned have only enhanced the talent you already possessed.

Now... what are you doing with them?

I'm convinceed you have a destiny, Keenan Wade...

SO THAT'S ALL SHE WROTE FOR THIS UPPITY MOTHERFUCKER --

-- AND YOU ALL SAW HOW I HANDLED THIS SAD EXCUSE FOR A COUP D'ETAT.

THINK I SWEAT HAVIN' TO DEFEND MY PLACE ON THE FOOD CHAIN...?

HELL, NO.

I'LL KILL THIS CHEESE-EATIN' FUCKHEAD AND TWELVE MORE JUST LIKE HIM...

... AND I'LL LOVE IT EACH AND EVERY TIME.

SO THE NEXT TIME ONE A' YOU THINKS YOU'RE READY TO BE KING, JUST AS WE'RE RISING UP AGAIN... RECLAIMING OUR OLD GLORY... REMEMBER HOW BOZZI THOUGHT THE SAME DAMN THING --

-- AND REMEMBER HOW HE ENDED UP.

BREAKS!

DAMN STRAIGHT!

... and this letter is the first step in helping you achieve it.

There are more steps to take.

Now, given what I know of your attention span, I'm not going to waste your time...

... if you're even interested in moving forward, then use what I've included in this letter.

Now that I'm dead, it's the most valuable thing I could possibly give you, Keenan...

... the key to your future.

Your friend, Quinn

WE HAD ABSOLUTELY NO WARNING --

-- HE JUST OPENED HIS EYES ABOUT A HALF-HOUR AGO!

WELL, THAT MIGHT NOT MEAN ANYTHING! LEMME SEE HIS CHART --

OKAY, LOOKS LIKE SOME OF THE SWELLING'S GONE DOWN...!

SO I WANT ANOTHER MRI DONE WITHIN THE HOUR! WHO KNOWS --

"-- MAYBE THIS MEANS WE CAN FIND OUT WHO THE HELL THIS 'JOHN DOE' ACTUALLY IS...!



SEX



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BANANAFISH

JOE CASEY WRITER LUKE PARKER GUEST ARTIST PIOTR KOWALSKI FRAMING SEQUENCE ARTIST BRAD SIMPSON COLORIST RUS WOOTON LETTERER SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

... SO HE'S AWAKE, BUT STILL COMPLETELY UNRESPONSIVE.

WELL, THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED...

... EMERGING FROM THE COMA DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN THE PATIENT HAS RECOVERED FROM THE TRAUMA.

HE WAS HIT BY A CAR, THEN...?

WELL, OKAY... HE WAS FOUND IN THE PLAZA AFTER GETTING HIT, BUT HIS INJURIES INDICATED ALL SORTS OF DAMAGE...

HE WAS BADLY BEATEN. WE EVEN FOUND EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS SEXUAL ASSAULT...

DO YOU WANT HIM MOVED UP TO THE PSYCHE WARD...?

WELL, THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE TO ASSESS.

GIVE ME SOME TIME WITH HIM. I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK...

SO... "JOHN DOE". YOU'D THINK THEY'D COME UP WITH A BETTER NAME FOR A PATIENT THEY CAN'T I.D., EH...?

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, BUT MY NAME IS DOCTOR PAUL. I WORK UP ON THE TWELFTH FLOOR, PSYCHIATRICS. I'M JUST GOING TO SIT WITH YOU AWHILE... MAYBE WE CAN TALK A BIT...

... TRY TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU'RE ALL ABOUT.

YOUR DOCTORS TELL ME YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH HELL...

I was eight years old when I watched my mother die.

pretty young to witness something so completely fucked up...

... especially considering that she died *laughing.*

she'd been sick for a long time. Finally they identified the disease by name... they called it ***kuru.***

The end was fucking brutal. No muscle coordination. Incontinence. Ulcers inside and out. And uncontrollable, cackling ***laughter...***

(years later I learned you could catch this disease if you were a practicing ***cannibal.*** considering what I actually ***remembered*** about my mother, I wasn't surprised.)

Being an orphan wasn't so bad. I evaded social services for ***years*** afterwards, squatting in my own home. When they finally cut the power, I said ***"fuck it"*** and stuck around.

I started living mainly in the ***library.*** My mom had strange tastes in printed material.

I spent months absorbing all her books. Taken together, they seemed to lay out the sheer ***absurdity*** of our own existence, how we've continually ***bungled*** our way through history. It was my own, personal ***education,*** but I already knew I was just scratching the ***surface...***

... when I was done reading, I did the only thing that made ***any*** sense:

I burned it all down.

A ***great*** fuckin' prank...

... played on the kid that I ***was...***

... by the kid that I'd ***become.***

At that point, I hustled my way around the world. curious... *searching*...

... for *what*, I had no clue. All I knew how to do was what I'd done while I was squatting in the old house. I sought out hidden corners of knowledge...

... burrowing through countless, forgotten libraries, pouring over countless, forgotten tomes which, if you read them in the right *order*, seemed to tell some secret, alternative history of the world. Accounts of long-lost *magicks* and *occult legends*. All the *gags*... all the *conspiracies*... all the *near-misses* to Armageddon.

I wasn't the hot shit I turned out to be back in saturn city. I was just warm snot, trying to build up a personal *point of view*...

It was the moment I'd come across a *name* I'd never read before -- in *any* book, *anywhere* -- that the *first contact* was made...

NO *OTHER* HAS COME THIS FAR...

... IF YOU SEEK A *VISCERAL* EXPERIENCE --

?

-- *THIS* IS HOW IT BEGINS.

*

WHAM!

I'd thought it was all a goddamn *game*.

Long dead knowledge that didn't add up to jack-shit. I had *no idea* I was putting actual *puzzle pieces* together...

... but the joke was on *me*.

These cocksuckers weren't *hospitable*, to say the least. I didn't even know what *country* I was in...

... not that it *mattered*.

SO *THIS* IS THE ONE...

... THE *PLEBEIAN* CRAWLING HIS WAY THROUGH THE MUD AND THE FILTH OF THE WORLD... ALL THE WHILE, POSSESSING A CURIOUS THIRST FOR *TRUTH*.

THEY TELL ME YOU *TOOK* YOUR BEATINGS... *ABSORBED* YOUR PUNISHMENT WITHOUT QUESTION AND NEVER BEGGED FOR A RESPITE...

THUD

... VERY CURIOUS INDEED.

I AM CALLED *MAGHAZO*. WHATEVER YOU'VE READ... WHATEVER YOU'VE HEARD... YOU ARE NOW DEALING IN *REALITY*.

MY MASTER TRAFFICS IN *LOST SOULS* HERE. WE *FIND* THEM, WE *HARBOR* THEM, WE *TRANSFORM* THEM.

THIS IS HOW TRUE *EVOLUTION* OCCURS.

BUT KNOW THAT WHATEVER PAIN YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED SO FAR WAS MERELY *PROLOGUE*.

THE TIME HAS COME TO TAKE IT TO THE *NEXT LEVEL*.

I figured I was good and **fucked**...

This is what they DO. They were *testing* me. Testing my *limits*. Breaking me down into my *simplest* parts. Cutting me into tiny little squares.

... these bozos were *world class* in their torture capabilities. But I *knew* they were way more than mere *sadists*.

I just had no idea *why*...

... and I sure as hell didn't expect these fuckheads to *tell* me.

THE WAY YOU *SCREAM*...

SSSSS

... NOT FROM *TERROR*, BUT FROM *RELEASE*. VERY INTERESTING.

YOU WANTED *TRUTH*. BUT *KNOWLEDGE* IS NOT TRUTH.

so *this* one was more of a *voice* than a physical form...

... that was the moment when I remembered my mom's *kuru*... and found it fucking *hysterical*.

That's what got me through.

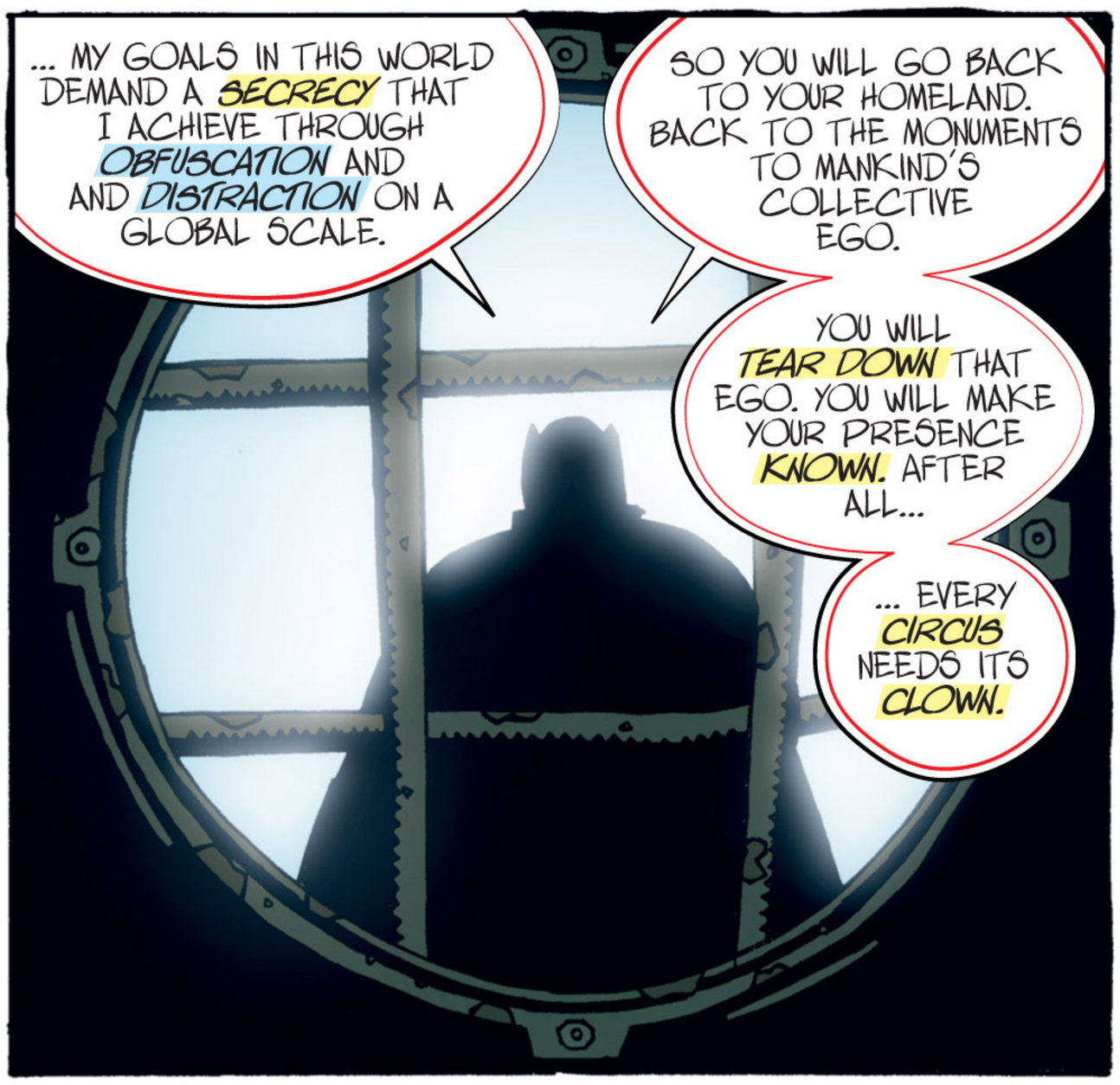
Everything I'd READ in my miserable life... every kernel of ***strange info*** I'd stumbled across... it was all finally making some sort of ***sense.***

There are ***paths*** that a man can take. ***choices*** he makes, both big and small. You ***learn...*** and then you ***act...*** and then you learn ***again.***

It had all lead me ***here...*** to ***him...***







CLANG!

That moment was maybe the most ***scared*** I'd ever been.

Trapped in a ***darkness*** I couldn't even measure.



And then... the ***future*** opened up to me...





"You will make your presence *known*," he said...

FRANK ANDIG.

No fucking shit. I made my presence known *right away.*

You think Saturn City ever suffered from a goddamn *sinkhole* before I got there? No way...!

My shit was on a *grand scale.* Like when I took control of Centerland Isle's entire *power grid.*

Played it like a *video game.*

I crashed countless *blue blood events.* That's where my brand of social terrorism truly became an *art form.*

I'd get my hands on their *five course meals...* and turn them into my own, personal *chemistry experiments.*

I was on a fuckin' *roll,* no doubt about it.

QUITE A *TURNOUT,* EH, MAYOR QUINCY? JUST IMAGINE --

-- IF ALL THESE POOR FUCKERS ACTUALLY VOTED FOR YOU IN THE LAST ELECTION?!

I was the greatest show on Earth. Fuck Ringling Brothers.

PROBABLY WORTH MENTIONING THAT ALL THESE SATURNITES GOT THE SAME ANONYMOUS E-MAIL TO MEET UP HERE...

... THEY SURE AS HELL KNOW A HAPPENING WHEN THEY'RE INVITED TO ONE...

I saw it as my holy mission to expose the hypocricy of their policies, their democracies...

... to rub their noses in the absurdity of it all. To use the structures they'd built against them.

I knew that history would ultimately tell a different story than they one they were telling us.

JUST GOES TO SHOW... OUR LEADERS DON'T MEAN SHIT! THE WHOLE CONCEIT IS ONE, BIG FAKE OUT!

SO IN CELEBRATION OF THAT FACT, RIGHT HERE IN SATURN CENTER PLAZA --

For awhile, they couldn't touch me. couldn't get close enough.

SATURN CITY

I could smell the revolution in the air.

-- WE'RE ALL GONNA WATCH HIS BALLS DROP.

RIGHT TO THE GROUND.

FREEZE, ASSHOLE! DON'T YOU FUCKIN' MOVE--!

All I had to do... was just keep **bobbing** and **weaving**.

OH, I GOTTA MOVE! DON'T YOU GET IT? IT'S ALL JUST ONE, BIG DANCE CONTEST!

AND I CAN DANCE A LOT FASTER THAN YOU DICKHEADS--!

WHOA--!

Now, in every equation, there's always an **unknown variable**...

SMASH

... something that won't conform to the **system** you're trying to put into place. That's what **he** was.

But I realized pretty fuckin' **quick** --

-- he was also the **reason** I was sent **here**.

I was sent here to fuck shit up on *his* turf.

The media called him the *Armored Saint.* Saturn City's very own vigilante protector and deliverer of *street justice.*

So, naturally, we had our *run-ins...*

SMASH

Like the time I filled *city hall* with marshmallow fluff... *while* all the government employees were still *inside.*

He was a *motherfucker,* alright. And I was the proverbial thorn in his side...!

I could only *imagine* how many man hours he put in, trying to figure out where I was really *coming* from.

And I don't think he ever did.

Small consolation, in hindsight.

I *took* my occasional beating. I'd certainly had *worse...*

It really didn't *matter* how many times we played out that same ol' fuckin' paradigm. That was *part* of it...

... and, y'know, I was buzzing too hard to **care.** I'd found my **calling.**

And there were others just **like** me...

IT'S GETTING KINDA *FUN* OUT THERE...

... DOESN'T TAKE *MUCH* TO GET HIM REALLY *PISSED OFF.*

AND I'VE GOT THE MISSING TEETH TO *PROVE* IT.

MAYBE IT ACTUALLY *ENHANCES* MY WHOLE LOOK --

IT APPEARS YOU'RE REALLY GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT OF THIS *LIFESTYLE,* FRANK.

BUT DON'T GET *AHEAD* OF YOURSELF...

The Old Man. Running the city for as long as I've been here.

WHADDYA MEAN...?

OH, FUCK YOU. THAT WHOLE *PLAZA* STUNT...!

GOOD SHIT, BUT YOU CLEAR THAT KIND OF THING THROUGH *MY* ORGANIZATION FIRST.

WE'RE DEALING WITH A *KINDERGARTNER* HERE, OLD MAN.

Annabelle Lagravenese ran around safurn as the masked kitten, **Shadow Lynx.** Turning burglary into a profitable business...

HE'S STILL *LEARNING* HOW IT WORKS. THE PECKING ORDER AND ALL THAT...

GIMMICK'S NOT BAD, THOUGH.

NOT EVEN MY *BEST* OR MY *BIGGEST,* GIRLFRIEND. I'D SHOW YOU...

... IF I THOUGHT YOU COULD *HANDLE* IT.

⇒ NK! ⇐

DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT I CAN HANDLE, "PRANK ADDICT"...

GYAH--!

NNNFFF.../

... UNLESS YOU WANT TO TRY AND TOUCH ME AGAIN.

ALRIGHT -- ENOUGH! I DIDN'T CALL YOU BOTH HERE TO ACT OUT SOME RIDICULOUS PSYCHODRAMA.../

CONTROLLED CHAOS IS THE NAME OF THE GAME, FRANK. BUT YOU NEED TO KNOW WHEN IT'S CONTROLLED... AND WHEN IT'S CHAOS...

DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT CHAOS, OLD MAN!

ME -- I GOT A PERSPECTIVE YOU'LL NEVER HAVE!

KRAK

I'M SURE YOU DO.

I'VE HEARD ALL ABOUT YOU. BUT I SERIOUSLY DOUBT YOU'RE THE STREET PROPHET YOU THINK YOU ARE...

IN THE MEANTIME, IF YOU WANT TO RUN WITH THIS CROWD, YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING...

... SHADOW LYNX IS CORRECT. THERE IS A PECKING ORDER. A SOCIAL LADDER, IF YOU LIKE, THAT ONE MUST CLIMB IN ORDER TO GAIN TRUE AUTHORITY IN THIS CITY.

AND AT THE MOMENT...

... YOU OCCUPY ITS LOWEST RUNG.

They thought I was some kinda bullshit artist --

-- but I was just getting *started.*

I don't think any of *those* fucks were willing to take the Saint *head-on* as much as *I* did...

... and I *still* got my rocks off rat-fucking the city at large on a fairly regular basis. Rigging the saturn *mayoral race* was a *good* one.

FOR MAYOR

THE BALLOTS HAVE BEEN *COUNTED,* PEOPLE! THE NEWS MEDIA IS TOO SCARED TO *CALL* IT!

BUT I'VE *RUN AWAY* WITH THIS *ELECTION!* SAY HELLO TO YOUR NEW *MAYOR!*

Then there was that time I faked my own *death.* I had *everyone* convinced.

well, *almost* everyone.

THUD

PR-8NK

Funny thing. I was getting the sense that *he* was as locked into the cycle as *I* was.

I even got the feeling... he *needed* me.

I wish I could've *enjoyed* it even *more*...

... but I had a few *other things* on my mind.

Especially when I *slept*...

I should've *known* it still had a grip on me...

... I just didn't know how *tight*.

There's always a past that you *can't* escape.

YOU WILL NOT TEST MY *RESOLVE*...

... YOU WILL *PRESS FORWARD* AND *TEAR DOWN* EVERYTHING THEY HAVE BUILT UP.

AND WHEN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS HAS BEEN IRREVOCABLY *ALTERED* BY YOUR ACTIONS...

... YOU WILL HAVE PROPERLY SERVED *HISTORY'S HERETIC.*

And then, out of nowhere, the whole fuckin' thing turned **upside-down.**

If I'm being totally **honest** with myself, I didn't **take** it well at first...

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN SIX WEEKS SINCE SATURN CITY'S SELF-STYLED PROTECTOR HAS MADE AN APPEARANCE...

... WHILE LABELED A VIGILANTE BY LOCAL AND FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT, UNNAMED SOURCES WITHIN THE SCPD HAVE CONFIDED TO OUR ACTION NEWS REPORTER --

-- IF THE ARMORED SAINT HAS FINALLY RETIRED FROM WHAT WAS A RELENTLESS WAR ON CRIME, HE WILL BE MISSED...

And my fellow bastards wasted no time in twisting the knife...

FUNNY HOW QUICKLY THINGS CAN CHANGE...

... CLEARLY THIS CITY'S GOING TO BE A LOT DIFFERENT WITHOUT HIM AROUND, EH...?

MAYBE IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY... Y'KNOW, FOR ALL OF US.

Dolph and cha-cha. The goddamn **Alpha Brothers.** I could never tell which was which...

OKAY, WELL... FOR SOME OF US, AT LEAST.

VERY TRUE. I'D IMAGINE NOT EVERYONE WILL BE ABLE TO PROPERLY EVOLVE.

NOT EASY TO FIND YOUR PLACE IN A WHOLE NEW WORLD. A SEISMIC SHIFT LIKE THIS...

... IT'S BOUND TO LEAVE AT LEAST ONE OF OUR CROWD STRANDED ON THE SCRAP HEAP.

so, what do you do when you suddenly feel completely *lost*? where do you *go*...?

... YOU JUST HIT EVERY STREET YOU CAN PHYSICALLY DRIVE ON.

A SIMPLE "PAUSE/RECORD" BUTTON CONTROLS THE CAMERA. A SERVER IN THE BACK HANDLES THE UPLOADS...

It's like you're *sleepwalking* through your own miserable life.

DON'T MESS WITH ME!

I GOT HISTORY IN THIS TOWN!

you take your laughs where you can *get* 'em.

you start to make *connections* that you'd never made before.

... SO WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS -- DOES THE NAME "VIZ IBN ZIYAD" MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?

you start to see the world for exactly what it *is*.

you start to finally *understand* what really needs to be *done*.

LISTEN... IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU'VE HAD A FEW *BAD EXPERIENCES...*

BUT THERE'S NO REASON YOU CAN'T JUST *TALK* TO ME...

... I'M HERE TO TRY AND *HELP* YOU.

BUT I *CAN'T* HELP YOU IF YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO ACTUALLY... Y'KNOW...

=SIGH=

MY INITIAL TAKEAWAY: HE'S PRETTY FAR GONE. I DON'T KNOW IF GOING FROM COMATOSE TO *CATATONIC* IS ANY KIND OF *IMPROVEMENT...*

... FROM A MENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVE, I MEAN.

WELL, *PHYSICALLY,* HE'S GETTING STRONGER EVERY DAY, SO I'M NOT SURE *WHAT* WE SHOULD DO WITH HIM...

DON'T WORRY, DOCTOR. I DON'T GIVE UP *THAT* EASILY.

THIS IS A *PROCESS.* SOMETIMES A *LONG* ONE. BUT WE'LL GET THERE.

LET'S HAVE HIM MOVED UP TO TWELVE TOMORROW.

Fuckin' shrinks. They don't know *jack-shit* about real life...

... and even *less* about what it takes to pull off a good *prank.*

I'M JUST SAYING... YOU SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED THAT I'M PICKING UP THE PROVERBIAL *GAUNTLET* YOU THREW DOWN...

... I'M THE ONE WHO ASKED YOU OUT, REMEMBER?

SO AS FAR AS YOUR LITTLE CHECKLIST IS CONCERNED --

SEEING IS BELIEVING, SIMON --

-- I'M A WOMAN OF WEALTH AND TASTE. WE'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH IF THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD.

KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING...?

SOME SORT OF DOUBLE ENTENDRE, I'M ASSUMING...

I HAVE EVERY INTENTION OF RISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF... WELL...

SAVE THAT RAPIER WIT FOR DINNER, COWBOY.

MISTER COOKE...?

WHU... H-HOLD ON ONE SECOND...

ELLIOT... WARREN... WHAT'S UP...?

CONGRATS, SIMON. TURNS OUT YOUR CFO IS THE KIND OF MEAN MOTOR SCOOTER WHO'S NEVER SICK AT SEA.

S-SIR... I WAS ABLE TO MEET WITH THE GENTLEMEN WHO... I-I MEAN, THEY, UHHH --

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE WHO'S RUNNING THE FLOCK THAT KANSEI HIRED...

...

HELLO...?

ANNABELLE.

I'M... GOING TO HAVE TO CALL YOU BACK.

SEX



CHAPTER NINETEEN

SATURN CAESARS

JOE CASEY WRITER IAN MACEWAN ARTIST PAGES 3-15 PIOTR KOWALSKI ARTIST PAGES 1-2 & 16-18 BRAD SIMPSON COLORIST RUS WOOTON LETTERER SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

SHOULD I ASK HOW *SURREAL* THIS IS ALL GOING TO GET...?

DEPENDS ON YOUR *DEFINITION.*

GO AHEAD, ELLIOT.

W-WELL... IT WAS CERTAINLY *INTERESTING,* I CAN TELL YOU THAT...

... ORIGINALLY I THOUGHT THAT MISTER *INUOE* WOULD BE *ACCOMPANYING* ME ON THIS... MEETING.

BUT APPARENTLY, ALL INTERACTIONS -- AND *TRANSACTIONS* -- OCCURRED THROUGH AN INTERMEDIARY. NO ONE IN THE KANSEI CROWD WAS GOING TO BE CAUGHT *DEAD* PERSONALLY HIRING *PROSTITUTES.*

SO IT WAS UP TO *ME* TO MAKE CONTACT.

THIS PLACE WAS LOCATED IN A FAIRLY *DISREPUTABLE* PART OF CENTERLAND.

I PAID OFF THE DOORMAN AND WAS TAKEN RIGHT IN TO SEE THE SO-CALLED *"ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR"...*

=AHEM=

... SO, AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, THIS IS AN AWKWARD, *SENSITIVE* SITUATION. I'M JUST HERE TO GATHER *INFORMATION,* REALLY.

UMMM... SORRY, I DIDN'T CATCH YOUR *NAME...*

DREXLER.

AND YOU GOT SOME *NERVE,* LITTLE MAN. WALTZING IN HERE LIKE YOU KNOW MORE THAN *WE* DO.

WELL, I HONESTLY DON'T THINK THAT'S THE *POINT,* SIR...

SHUT THE FUCK UP.

THEY DIDN'T LET YOU IN SO WE COULD HAVE A PLEASANT FUCKING *CONVERSATION.*

YOUR *TIMING* IS THE POINT...

... A GROUP OF OUR FINEST TAIL GOES MISSING AND WE CAN'T TRACK WHO THEY WERE SERVICING. THAT DON'T HAPPEN.

THE SKINS DON'T LIKE GETTING PLAYED. ESPECIALLY NOT IN THIS BUSINESS. NOW HERE YOU ARE, ASKING QUESTIONS THAT INVOLVE THAT VERY THING.

YOU FEELIN' ME, DOG...?

YOU UP IN HERE TRYIN' TO PLAY ME?!

S-SIR... WHAT YOU'RE IMPLYING COULD NOT BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. B-BESIDES WHICH.....

... I HAVE TAKEN CERTAIN... PRECAUTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NATURE OF MY VISIT AND THE... ISSUES INVOLVED.

⇒ AHEM! ⇐

IF I DO NOT REPORT BACK TO MY SUPERIORS WITHIN THE HALF-HOUR, THERE WILL BE IMMEDIATE REPERCUSSIONS.

S-SO... SHALL WE ENGAGE IN CIVILIZED DISCOURSE NOW...?

HUH...

... YOU GOT SOME BALLS ON YOU.

I LIKE IT.

COME ON...

SOUNDS LIKE ELLIOT MADE A NEW FRIEND, RIGHT...?

IN ANY CASE, THE SKINS RUN THE GIRLS THAT WERE HIRED... AND SUBSEQUENTLY KILLED BY THE JAPANESE.

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE AWARE OF THE SKINS, MISTER COOKE. THEIR CLASSIFICATION RANGES FROM STREET GANG TO FULL-BLOWN CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION. VERY DANGEROUS.

IN OTHER WORDS...

... THIS ALL JUST GOT MUCH MORE COMPLICATED.

... AS THE VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO ESCALATE ON THE STREETS OF SATURN CITY.

AUTHORITIES ARE STILL TRYING TO PIN DOWN THE SIDES IN THIS LATEST CRIME WAR... BUT WITH OUR ERSTWHILE PROTECTOR STILL MISSING IN ACTION, IT LOOKS LIKE THINGS MAY GET WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER.

ORGANIZED CRIME WAR?

ARSONIST FIRES RIPPED THROUGH GRAVITY HILL LAST NIGHT, TAKING OUT A WAREHOUSE SUSPECTED OF FRONTING AN ILLEGAL EXPORT BUSINESS...

... SEVERAL FATALITIES WERE REPORTED, BUT POLICE ARE NOT YET CONFIRMING IDENTITIES.

AMATUER VIDEO - GRAVITY HILL

HERE ON THE STREETS OF ZOOLOGISCHER GARTEN, A FIREFIGHT ERUPTED BETWEEN UNIDENTIFIED MALES...

... SEVERAL BYSTANDERS WERE CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE. THE COUNT IS FIVE DEAD AND TWO MORE WOUNDED.

WHATEVER IS MOTIVATING THIS BLOODY CONFLICT, IT SEEMS THERE IS MORE VIOLENCE TO COME...

LIVE - ZOOLOGISCHER GARTEN

MERCER STREET:

OVERTON CENTER SQUARE:

PORT COLLINS:

FREEMOUNT SPAN:

SO WE'RE HAVING A PRETTY GOOD WEEK...

OH, *FUCK* YES. THE OLD MAN'S OPERATIONS ARE TAKING HITS LEFT AND RIGHT. WE KNOCK 'EM *DOWN,* THEY DON'T GET *UP* AGAIN.

IT'S GODDAMN *GLORIOUS,* ISN'T IT...?

WE NEED TO TIGHTEN OUR GRIP, THOUGH.

I WANT TO MAKE A DECISIVE MOVE... SOMETHING THAT'LL CRIPPLE HIM BEYOND REPAIR...

BACK FROM NEW RUTHERFORD...

... WE TOOK 'EM RIGHT THE FUCK DOWN.

ALWAYS NICE WHEN THERE'S A BIT OF BLOODSHED, EH? SENDS A BETTER MESSAGE.

... WE TOOK DOWN ONE OF THE OLD MAN'S CHOP SHOPS IN THE OUTER RIM.

NO BIG DEAL. JUST A FEW SLUGS WILLING TO DEFEND IT...

LISTEN, BOSS... WE HEARD SOMETHING... FROM MORE THAN ONE SOURCE NOW...

THERE'S SOMEONE HOLED UP IN THE SOUTH STREET MISSION THAT MIGHT BE WORTH CHECKING OUT.

SOME HOMELESS FUCK'S BEEN MUTTERING TO HIS BUNKMATES THAT HE WAS BIG TIME... EVEN THOUGH HE'S A COMPLETE MESS. ANYWAY...

... YOU REMEMBER THE OPERATOR?

ALBERT EISENHOWER? THE NEXUS OF ALL INTEL? HE'D FALLEN SO FAR OFF THE GRID WE FIGURED HE WAS DEAD...

HUH. NOW THERE'S AN ASSET THAT'D BE WORTH EXPLOITING.

WONDER IF THE OLD MAN KNOWS...

SATURN CITY'S ON FIRE, BOYS...

... BURNING DOWN ALL AROUND US...

... AND HERE I AM TRYING TO SUCK DOWN AS MANY ALKYLATING AGENTS AS THESE BRITTLE BONES CAN HANDLE.

PATHETIC.

I NEED YOU TO RUN A QUICK *ERRAND,* RAYMOND.

SHO 'NUFF, OLD MAN. YOU NAME IT.

FEDERICI HAS DIED.

PICK UP HIS BODY FROM THE BLACK LODGE AND *DISPOSE* OF IT.

NORMALLY, I WOULD GIVE THIS TO A LOWER LIEUTENANT, BUT WITH EVERYTHING THAT'S GOING ON... I NEED TO PUT *YOU TWO* ON THIS.

STANDARD PROCEDURE. LEAVE NO TRACE OF IT BEHIND.

I DON'T KNOW IF I'M *FEELIN'* IT, RAY.

Y'KNOW, HE STILL DON'T KNOW MY *NAME.* KEEPS THINKING I'M *YOU.*

DON'T SWEAT IT, REGGIE...

... BESIDES, IT AIN'T ABOUT NAMES. IT'S ABOUT *NUMBERS.*

YEAH, WELL... SPEAKING OF WHICH, 'DIS WAR IS *ESCALATING* LIKE A MOTHERFUCKER...

... AND I AIN'T CONVINCED WE'RE ON THE *WINNING SIDE* ANYMORE.

ON BEHALF OF THE ENTIRE BLACK LODGE STAFF, SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS.

NO WORRIES. DIDN'T KNOW HIM ALL THAT WELL.

I KNEW WHEN I SAW HIM *LYIN'* THERE THAT FREDDIE WASN'T GONNA *MAKE IT...*

... THEY FUCKED HIS ASS UP *REAL* GOOD. YOU KNOW WHAT THAT TELLS *ME* --

HOLD UP. OH DAMN.

WE GOTTA GET *THIS* STIFF TO THE NEXT BLOCK...

... BUT LOOK AT *THIS* SHIT WE GOT GOIN' ON UP HERE.

THINK THAT'S GOT ANYTHING T'DO WITH--

I DUNNO. BUT I AIN'T IN THE MOOD TO *FIND OUT.*

USUAL DROP SPOT'S *OUT,* I GUESS. IT'S COOL, THOUGH...

... I GOT *ANOTHER* ONE WE CAN HIT.

IT'S ALL ABOUT *MOMENTUM*, YOU KNOW...

... AND WE'VE *GOT* IT, DON'T WE?

I CAN *FEEL* THE OLD FOUNDATIONS CRUMBLING. IT'S... *ORGASMIC.*

DON'T GET *COCKY*, CHA-CHA. NO PUN INTENDED.

THIS IS STILL *GUERILLA WARFARE.* WE'RE STILL CHIPPING AWAY AT THAT FOUNDATION, BIT BY BIT. THE *BIG* MOVE...

... WELL, I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT IT *IS* YET.

YEAH... BUT I'VE JUST GOT THE *FEELING.* IT'S THE SMELL OF *NAPALM* IN THE MORNING...

WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED *SO FAR* IS JUST THE TIP OF THE PENIS. I REALLY WANNA GO *BALLS DEEP.*

AND I HAVE TO BELIEVE... IT'LL ALL BE *WORTH IT* IN THE END.

Y'KNOW, AS WE GET *OLDER*... IT GETS TOUGHER TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE *THINKING.*

DO YOU EVER... I DUNNO... *MISS* THE WAY WE COULD...

ARE YOU *SERIOUS...?*

OF *COURSE* I DO.

BUT WE BOTH *KNOW* WE'VE GOT DO THIS THE *OLD FASHIONED WAY...*

... AND WATCH THE BODIES *PILE UP.*

WELL, THERE'S NO CERTAINLY NO *VICTORY* WITHOUT *SACRIFICE.*

WE'VE MADE *OURS.* NOW IT'S SOMEONE *ELSE'S* TURN.

SPEAKING OF WHICH... THIS *EISENHOWER* RUMOR. I'VE BEEN THINKING MORE ABOUT IT.

I REALLY THINK THIS IS AN *OPPORTUNITY.* IF IT *IS* HIM, HE MIGHT ACTUALLY HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER.

WELL, I'M STILL SKEPTICAL. BUT IF YOU THINK IT'S WORTH THE TRIP...

... LET'S DO IT.

SO WHAT THE FUCK'S *THIS* PLACE ALL ABOUT...?

Y'KNOW, IT'S JUST A *BACK UP* WHEN MY *USUAL* SPOT AIN'T HAPPENING. TOTALLY OUTTA THE WAY. NO ONE ELSE REALLY --

-- KNOWS ABOUT IT...

MOTHERFUCK.../

AWWW *SHIT*...

... CAN WE NOT GET SOME *PRIVACY* UP IN HERE?!

THINK YOU *BREAK* MUTHAFUKKAS PICKED THE WRONG INCINERATOR...

YO. BROTHERS ARE *PACKIN'*.../

YOU THINK THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE HAD *GUNS* POINTED AT US, YOU BEST *THINK AGAIN.*

BUT IT'S *ONE* THING TO *SHOW* US YER DICK...

... IT'S *ANOTHER* THING TO *USE* IT.

YOUR MOVE.

Y'KNOW WHAT...

... I REALLY AIN'T IN THE *MOOD* FER THIS SHIT.

WE'RE JUST HERE TO GET *RID* OF THIS DEAD WEIGHT. WE GOT NO BEEF WITH THE BREAKS.

YEAH, WELL... HOW 'BOUT WE *BOTH* JUST GET ON WITH OUR BUSINESS AND GET UP OUTTA HERE...

THERE'S *ENOUGH* NOISE IN THIS TOWN WITHOUT US *ADDING* TO IT.

I HEARD *THAT.* SO WHAT'RE *YOU* HERE FOR...?

SAME THING *YOU* ARE. JUST TAKIN' OUT THE TRASH.

BOZZI HERE GOT IT IN HIS HEAD TO TAKE A SHOT AT THE TITLE...

... WELL, Y'SEE HE DIDN'T MAKE IT OUTTA THE FIRST ROUND.

SO YOU TWO AIN'T *AFFILIATED.* YOU WORK FOR ONE OF THE *BOSSES...?*

YEAH, YOU COULD SAY THAT...

... FOR *NOW,* AT LEAST.

I DUNNO. KINDA *LOOKS* LIKE HIM, I GUESS...

... BUT HE'S ALL *FUCKED UP*, ISN'T HE....?

NNNNN...

... WHOOTH BUTH'RIN... ME NUH....?

INTERESTING. I THINK I REMEMBER HIM BEING MUCH MORE *WELL-SPOKEN*...

HEY... IF YOU'RE REALLY *ALBERT EISENHOWER*... WAKE UP.

LET'S JUST GET ON WITH IT.

I GOT MY *BOSSES* HERE. THE *ALPHA BROTHERS.* THEY WANNA *TALK* TO YOU.

WH-WHU DUH HULL....?

UH... DUHN'T WUT... ENUFFIN' T'DUH W'UNY *BOTHES*...

... UH... DUHN'T WUNNA... NNNN...

WELL, THIS IS JUST *DELIGHTFUL.* NOT TO MENTION, THE *SMELL* IN HERE...!

SORRY, I'M STARTING TO THINK THIS TOOTHLESS PIECE OF SHIT IS WASTING OUR TIME.

GIMME A SECOND.

ALBERT... DON'T FUCK WITH ME. YOU *ARE* THE OPERATOR, AREN'T YOU? THE INFORMATION SPECIALIST?

WELL, WE NEED *INFORMATION.* YOU GET IT?

WHADDYA YOU KNOW ABOUT THE *OLD MAN...?*

DUH... UUUUHHH...

I KNOW... YOU'RE USED TO THE *FREELANCE* LIFESTYLE, ALBERT... AND ALL THE *DIRT* YOU KNEW... KEPT YOU RELATIVELY *SAFE...*

... WELL, THAT'S *OVER* NOW!

AAUUUUHHGGG--!

UHHH WUZ... *UNTOUCHABLE* FER UHHHH LONG TIME...

... DUH OL' MUN'S *SOLDIERS...* GRABBED MUH... BROUGHT MUH IN... TUH FIND OUT *NEW* INFO... JUS' FUH *HIM...*

... UN SO UH *DID...* FUND OUT UH FEW TINGS...

... BUHT... DEY *KEPT* MUH... LIKE UH GUHDDAM *ANIMAL...*

HIT HIM *HARDER,* THEODORE...

N-NO -- GYAAAHH--!

... UND WHEN... HE WUZ *DUHN* W'MUH...

... HE JUS' *DUMPED* MUH... IN DUH GALULEO RIVUH... LUKKU BUNCHA *GARBAGE...*

... HE WON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO DO *ANYTHING*...

... EXCEPT *DROWN.*

HE *DID,* HUH? WELL, THIS WHOLE THING JUST GOT *WAY* MORE INTERESTING...

SO THE OLD MAN THINKS YOU'RE *DEAD,* IS THAT IT...?

UH DUNNO... UH'D IMAGINE *SO*...

... UH WUZ... *IMPORDAND* IN DUS CIDDY...

AND YOU WILL BE *AGAIN,* ALBERT. THAT IS, IF YOU'RE *READY* TO GET BACK IN THE GAME...

RIGHT. THAT'S THE *QUESTION,* ISN'T IT?

SPEECH IMPEDIMENT *ASIDE,* IT REALLY COMES DOWN TO WHETHER OR NOT HE *WANTS* TO MAKE A BIG COMEBACK...

YUH THINK... UH DUNNO DUH *ULFA BRODDERS...?*

UH WATCHED YUR *RISE...* FRUM *SERGIO'S* BOYS TUH BONA FIDE *PLAYUHS...* BUT DUH OL' MUN WUZ ALWAYS UN YUR WAY...

BUH... THERE'S *MORE* OUT THERE... UH *LOT* MORE...

SO...?

...

YEAH...

... LET'S GET HIM OUT OF HERE.

... YOU TELL THE COMMISSIONER -- FOR ME -- THAT I WANT MORE COPS ON THE STREET.

THIS CITY'S NOT GOING UNDER IN SOME GODFORSAKEN CRIME WAR ON MY WATCH!

I'M NOT KIDDING AROUND, FELLAS! YOU TELL HIM!

UN-FUCKING-BELIEVABLE.../

YOU'D THINK THE WAY I TOLERATE THE AMOUNT OF CORRUPTION IN THE DEPARTMENT ALREADY... THAT MIGHT AFFORD ME SOME LEEWAY WITH THESE ASSHOLES --

MISTER MAYOR, I, UHHH... NEED TO REMIND YOU...

... YOU'VE GOT A CALL WITH WEBER IN TEN MINUTES.

YOU KNOW HE WANTS TO TALK ABOUT SIMON COOKE. AND, BETWEEN YOU AND ME, I'M A LITTLE CONCERNED.

DO YOU REALLY THINK WE SHOULD BE HELPING HIM TO --

TUCKER, I HEAR YOU. BUT THAT TRAIN HAS LEFT THE STATION, I'M TELLING YOU.

THEY'VE ALREADY STARTED SURVEILLANCE ON COOKE.

I'M NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THIS, EITHER. BUT MEN LIKE WEBER... AND THE PEOPLE HE REPRESENTS...

... THEY DON'T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER.

HEY -- SLOW DOWN, WILLYA?

SORRY, MISS JEMAS...

... BUT I GOTTA MOVE MY FAT ASS, OKAY?

HOLD IT, HOLD IT, HOLD IT.../

YOU THINK YOU MIGHT BE JUMPING THE GUN HERE...?!

S-SO... YOU'RE JUST PACKING UP AND, WHAT, LEAVING TOWN?! I DON'T GET IT!

HEY, FRESNO --

YOU DON'T "GET" IT?!

Y'KNOW, I KNEW THIS ONE WAS GONNA HAVE SOME STATIC... I JUST DIDN'T THINK IT'D BE THIS KIND OF STATIC!

I MEAN, I AM SO FUCKED NOW.../

I HAD TO LEARN THE HARD WAY -- YOU DON'T GO SNOOPING AROUND SIMON COOKE'S BACKYARD WITHOUT GETTING SOME MAJOR BLOWBACK!

MY WHOLE SYSTEM GOT FRIED! AND I'M PRETTY SURE I GOT BACK-HACKED IN THE PROCESS!

MY BUSINESS... TOTALLY FUCKED --

OKAY, CALM DOWN. I'VE OVER THE DRAMATICS.

JUST TELL ME WHY.

WHY? BECAUSE YOUR MISTER COOKE DOESN'T LIKE BEING CYBER-STALKED. AND HE TAKES SERIOUS ACTION WHEN IT HAPPENS.

AND WHEN I SAY "SERIOUS"... I MEAN SECURITY THAT EVEN I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. AND I'VE SEEN IT ALL.../

I-I WAS... GONNA BE THE NEXT OPERATOR...

SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT -- YOU'RE RECOMMENDED TO ME AS THE BEST *INFO-HACKER* AROUND, AND YOU DIDN'T DIG UP A GODDAMN *THING* ON HIM?!

I *PAID* YOU --

I KNOW... AND I'M *SORRY*, OKAY? BUT LISTEN...

... MAYBE LOOK AT THIS -- AT *ME* -- AS A CAUTIONARY TALE.

I'M ALL *DONE*. NOW IF I CAN AVOID GETTING *PINCHED*, I'LL BE *LAYING LOW* FOR GOD KNOWS *HOW* LONG.../

YOU MAY WANNA RETHINK DOING YOUR NEWS STORY. SIMON COOKE ISN'T WORTH *THIS* HASSLE, BELIEVE ME...

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!

NO *WAY* I'M GIVING UP *NOW*.../

SHAVIN CREA

WHAT ARE YOU DOING...?!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING...?!




SEX

CHAPTER TWENTY

ONE OF THESE NIGHTS

JOE CASEY WRITER PIOTR KOWALSKI ARTIST PAGES 1-5 & 9-18 IAN MACEWAN ARTIST PAGES 6-8 BRAD SIMPSON COLORIST RUS WOOTON LETTERER SONIA HARRIS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

8:45 PM

9:23 PM

10:07 PM

SO...

... HERE WE ARE. THE TWO OF US.

OUT HAVING DINNER. TOGETHER.

JUST LIKE "NORMAL" PEOPLE.

NOW WHAT...?

WELL, PERSONALLY...

...*I'M* JUST SITTING HERE TRYING TO THINK OF SOMETHING TO SAY THAT DOESN'T DRAW ON OUR... *SHARED EXPERIENCES.*

WHICH *MEANS...* I NEED TO BE *CAREFUL.*

RIGHT. FLIRTING ON THE PHONE IS *ONE* THING...

... EYEBALL TO EYEBALL IS SOMETHING ELSE. NOWHERE TO *HIDE,* IS THERE...?

SO... THIS IS AWKWARD FOR *YOU,* TOO...?

THAT'S A LITTLE SURPRISING. I FIGURED YOU'D BE A LOT MORE *ADEPT* AT BEING NORMAL THAN I AM.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT "AWKWARD", SIMON. BUT I *DO* KNOW THAT IT'S DIFFICULT FOR *SOME* PEOPLE TO CUT THROUGH THE *BULLSHIT.*

NOT TO MENTION, WHAT *PASSES* FOR "NORMAL" IS COMPLETELY AND RIDICULOUSLY *SUBJECTIVE...*

... BUT, YES, I *AM* MORE ADEPT AT THIS THAN YOU. BIG SHOCKER, HUH?

AND I CERTAINLY KNOW *BETTER* THAN TO TALK ABOUT OUR *PAST...*

... NOT IN *MIXED COMPANY,* ANYWAY.

SHOULD WE... TALK ABOUT *WORK...?*

UMMM... IF YOU THINK YOU CAN *DAZZLE* ME WITH TALES OF THE *BOARDROOM,* SURE...

WELL, I KNOW IT WON'T DO *THAT.*

IT'S BEEN... *INTERESTING,* TO SAY THE LEAST. MAKES ME REALIZE HOW LITTLE I REGARDED IT *BEFORE.*

IT WAS ALWAYS JUST... I DON'T KNOW...

PART OF THE *ACT,* MAYBE?

Y'KNOW, I UNDERSTAND BETTER THAN YOU *THINK* I DO. RUNNING A BUSINESS -- *ANY* BUSINESS -- IS NO PICNIC.

YOU'RE EQUATING WHAT *YOU* DO... WITH WHAT *I* DO?

INTERESTING...

OKAY, I HEAR THAT HINT OF *CONDESCENSION* IN YOUR VOICE, BUT YOU *KNOW* IT'S TRUE.

ALTHOUGH I'M IN LESS *DENIAL* THAN YOU...

HEY, I'VE *ACCEPTED* WHAT I AM NOW. *EMBRACED* IT, EVEN.

I'M NOT *PRETENDING* ANYMORE.

I'M NOT SURE I WOULD'VE BEEN ABLE TO *GET* YOU HERE OTHERWISE.

YOU HAVEN'T "GOTTEN" ME *YET.*

BUT KEEP TALKING.

LOOK, I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND SOME WAY TO... I DON'T KNOW... *RECONCILE* ALL THE FACTORS THAT ARE SWIRLING AROUND MY LIFE NOW. YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

IN TERMS OF YOU AND I... I DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE THAT OUR *PAST* IS OUR *ONLY* CONNECTION, DO YOU?

HONESTLY, I HAVEN'T REALLY CONSIDERED IT.

WHICH ISN'T TO SAY...

... I HAVEN'T HAD CERTAIN *THOUGHTS.*

I HAVE.

YEAH, WELL... SO HAVE I.

THAT'S WHY I... WELL...

... CERTAIN THINGS SEEM LESS *CONFUSING* THAN OTHERS.

ALL MY *REGRETS...*

DON'T GET CAUGHT IN *THAT* TRAP, SIMON.

TRUST ME.

NOW, WAIT A SECOND. I'M NOT *WALLOWING.* FAR FROM IT.

I'M JUST *SAYING* THAT I THOUGHT I WAS STRIPPING AWAY THE *ARTIFICE* THAT I'D BUILT MY WHOLE *IDENTITY* ON...

... BUT I'VE ENDED UP FINDING ARTIFICE IN THE MOST *UNLIKELY* PLACES.

IF I HADN'T *MENTIONED* IT BEFORE, I'M NOT A BIG *FAN* OF THE WHOLE *CLOAK AND DAGGER* THING...

Exit

... SOMETIMES A *PHONE CALL* WILL DO JUST FINE.

UNDERSTAND SOMETHING, MISTER MAYOR... OUR RELATIONSHIP EXISTS AT *MY* CONVENIENCE. NOT YOURS.

NOW, CONCERNING *SIMON COOKE*...

... WE'VE BEGUN KEEPING *TABS* ON HIS ACTIVITIES. SOCIAL *AND* BUSINESS.

I WANTED YOU TO BE AWARE THAT WE'VE GOT OPERATIVES IN THE FIELD. I WANT THEM GIVEN EVERY CONSIDERATION SO THEY CAN EFFECTIVELY DO THEIR JOBS.

I *ALREADY* KNOW YOU'VE GOT PEOPLE *WATCHING* HIM. AND IT'S A LITTLE *OVER THE TOP,* IF YOU ASK ME.

YOU MIGHT JUST END UP EXACERBATING WHATEVER *PARANOIA* HE'S --

SIMON COOKE'S SENSE OF PARANOIA IS *NOT* MY CONCERN...

... NOR SHOULD IT BE *YOURS.* I'M ONLY CONCERNED WITH THE DESIRED *OUTCOME.*

HE BELONGS WITH US. WHETHER *HE* KNOWS IT OR *NOT.* IT'S HIS *DESTINY.*

I'M SURE *YOU* WOULDN'T WANT TO BE THE ONE WHO *INTERFERED* WITH THAT DESTINY...

...*WOULD* YOU, SEDGWICK...?

FIVE YEARS AGO:

SO... A CHACHAPOYAN *FERTILITY IDOL.* SOLID GOLD. WORTH MILLIONS.

BUT A LITTLE *OBVIOUS...*

A-HA. *THERE* YOU ARE --

-- BEEN *EXPECTING* YOU.

SURE YOU HAVE.

DON'T TELL ME YOU DON'T *LOVE* THIS...!

MIGHT AS WELL TAKE IT *OUTSIDE* --

PRETTY GOOD --

THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT, ISN'T IT?

HAVE YOU EVER FELT MORE ALIVE THAN THIS?! I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU--

-- BUT THIS IS THE KIND OF THING THAT TOTALLY GETS ME OFF...!

HUHHNOT--!

-- BUT NOT QUITE GOOD ENOUGH.

HOLD ON. WHAT ARE YOU *SMILING* ABOUT ALL OF A SUDDEN...?

HMMM...?

OH...

... NOTHING.

I'M SURE.

AND HERE I WAS THINKING YOU WEREN'T *ENJOYING* YOURSELF...

DESSERT MENU, MA'AM...?

UMMM... SURE.

THANK YOU.

AHHH... HMMM...

Y'KNOW, I DON'T THINK I'M ALL THAT *HUNGRY* FOR --

ANNABELLE...

... IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS.

PUT YOUR GLASSES ON.

PUT MY... *WHAT...?*

IF YOU'RE TRYING TO *SEDUCE* ME, SIMON, THIS ISN'T --

HEY, IT'S *OKAY...*

... I KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM WITH YOUR *EYES.* YOU *TOLD* ME, REMEMBER? SO JUST PUT THEM ON.

I WANT YOU SEEING THINGS *CLEARLY* TONIGHT.

YOU *DO*, HUH? WELL...

... IT REMAINS TO BE *SEEN* WHICH ONE OF US IS SEEING CLEARLY.

OKAY. HOW'S THAT...?

THE *POINT* IS... THE *REASON* I ASKED YOU TO... WELL...

YOU ONCE *TOLD* ME THAT ALL WE CAN DO IS RIDE THE CHAOS...

... WELL, HERE WE *ARE*.

"HERE WE ARE?" YOU MAY CLEAN UP *NICE*, SIMON...

AM I RIGHT...?

... BUT I HAVE A FEELING YOU'RE ABOUT AS OUT OF YOUR ELEMENT *HERE* AS YOU ARE IN THAT *OFFICE* AT THE TOP OF THE COOKE COMPANY BUILDING.

THAT DEPENDS. I DID MY SHARE OF... *SOCIALIZING* BACK IN THE DAY.

BUT THAT WAS...

PART OF THE *ACT*, I KNOW.

THE *APPEARANCE* OF A STABLE, MATURE ADULT. AS OPPOSED TO REALLY *BEING* ONE.

PERSONALLY, I THINK YOUR *STANDARDS* MIGHT BE A LITTLE *OFF*...

... BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO *ACT* ANYMORE, DO YOU? YOU WANT TO DROP THE *PRETENSE*.

YOU WANT SOMETHING... *REAL*.

THAT'S RIGHT.

IT'S PAST TIME FOR ME TO *GET ON* WITH WHATEVER LIFE I'VE GOT LEFT.

I MEAN... I JUST DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE THAT IT'S *IMPOSSIBLE* FOR... WELL, PEOPLE LIKE *US* TO --

HOLD ON.

NOW YOU'RE ASSUMING THAT YOU AND I ARE EXACTLY *ALIKE...?*

WE'RE *NOT.*

FOR *ONE* THING, I'M A LOT MORE *HONEST* WITH MYSELF THAN YOU'LL *EVER* BE.

AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT *LEGAL* DISTINCTIONS.

YOU WANT TO GET *HONEST?* YOU WANNA GIVE ME SOMETHING *REAL?* OKAY, THEN...

... I GET THE FEELING YOU WERE EXPECTING SOMETHING *DIFFERENT* TONIGHT.

SOMETHING *MORE* THAN JUST... TWO PEOPLE SPENDING *TIME* TOGETHER...

... BUT ONE THING I'VE *LEARNED* THIS PAST YEAR... IS THAT WE HAVE TO START *SOMEWHERE.*

AND YOU AND I -- EVEN BACK *THEN* -- IT WAS ALWAYS MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER...

... I MEAN...

SIMON.

TAKE A BREATH.

SO I FIGURED OUT A FEW OF YOUR *SECRETS.* BIG DEAL.

IN *YOUR* CASE, IT DIDN'T TAKE A SHERLOCK HOLMES TO SUSS OUT WHO YOU WERE.

THE FACT IS... NONE OF THOSE OTHER IDIOTS *CARED* WHO LIVED UNDER THE CAPE.

I *NEVER* HID WHO I WAS. I JUST NEVER LEFT *PROOF.*

OF COURSE, I HAD LESS TO *HIDE.*

AND YOU HAD OTHER *PRIORITIES.*

W-WAIT... ARE YOU--?

DON'T WORRY, SIMON...

... I'M JUST GOING TO POWDER MY NOSE.

IT'S WHAT WOMEN SOMETIMES *DO* WHEN THINGS GET *REALLY* AWKWARD.

BACK IN A BIT.

EXCUSE ME...

... TURNS OUT I NEED TO LEAVE IN A BIT OF A *HURRY*... AND I THINK MY DINNER COMPANION IS STILL *IN* THERE...

I CAN CHECK ON HER, IF YOU LIKE.

GREAT...

SIR...?

I... UHHH... DIDN'T *SEE* ANYONE. ARE YOU SURE SHE CAME *IN* HERE?

WHAT...?

RIGHT.

NNNFF

DAMMIT.../

ANNABELLE!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!

WAIT!

DON'T DO THIS--!

COME ON--

--DONT--

GODDAMMIT --

-- THIS IS NOT WHAT I HAD IN MIND!

ANNABELLE --

I DON'T GET IT --

-- WHAT'RE YOU TRYING TO PROVE HERE?!

YOU DON'T SERIOUSLY THINK THAT I --

YOU WANTED HONESTY, RIGHT? THIS IS AS HONEST AS IT GETS, SIMON!

THIS IS ME... CUTTING THROUGH THE BULLSHIT.

THINK YOU CAN HANDLE IT?!

I KNEW YOU'D COME AFTER ME. I FIGURED IT WAS MORE ABOUT THE CHASE AND NOT THE CAPTURE...!

THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS WAS ABOUT AND YOU KNOW IT!

DO I?!

YOU THINK PUTTING AWAY THE MASKS IS GOING TO CHANGE ANYTHING BETWEEN US? YOU DON'T EVEN REALIZE...

... YOU'RE STILL WEARING ONE OF YOURS, SIMON --

-- IT'S JUST NOT THE ONE YOU WANT...!

I KNOW YOU'RE STILL STRUGGLING. IT'S PRETTY GODDAMN OBVIOUS.

BUT THE NEXT TIME YOU PUT SOME THOUGHT TOWARDS THE SUBJECT OF YOU AND ME --

-- YOU MIGHT WANT TO THINK AGAIN.

TO BE CONTINUED

DIRTY TALK: SPECIAL EDITION

The following are excerpts from a recent interview of Joe Casey by David Dissanayake that was published in August of 2014.

DAVID DISSANAYAKE: I wanted to get into the title SEX. While the overall story itself could be considered a "post-superhero" take that deals with notions of leaving things behind and facing up to one's self. With that said, I'm curious where the sex part came from. Of course sex is a big part of life -- even a central one -- but it's certainly not the only one Simon is dealing with. The title certainly grabs attention, but I wanted to hear about why that was the title when the story seems to be about so much more than what the title suggests?

JOE CASEY: I think sex -- the notion of it, how we relate to it as human beings -- has less to do with the physical act itself and everything to do with intimacy, which is a much more profound notion, completely unique to the human experience. Even when a sex act is performed specifically in order to resist intimacy, there's still intrinsic relationship between them. And what Simon is dealing with, on multiple levels, is a distinct lack of intimacy in his life. And it's not just Simon. A lot of the cast are looking for some sort of connection to something deeper... either inside themselves or with other people.

Titling a comicbook series is a much more complex endeavor than it's ever been in the history of the medium, because a lot of the material has become more complex. Comicbook titles aren't just automatically the name of the lead character anymore. Oftentimes, you have to be a little more clever than that. But I'm also trying to get the work out there and get it noticed in an over-crowded and very competitive marketplace... and that means taking at least a few stabs at commercial viability wherever and whenever I can. Hence, a title that's pretty goddamned crass in its blatant commercialism. But, luckily, I'm the kind of guy that knows how to harness that crassness and use it for noble purposes. It does warm my balls just a bit to know I've got the simplest, most direct title for what is absolutely one of my most complex series.

DD: I wanted to get a little in to the structure of the story which seems more novelistic in its approach than some of your past work. What do you think are some of the draw backs and benefits of structuring a monthly serialized story like SEX where it's not really until the end of the 8th -- or maybe even 9th issue -- that the gears all begin to connect.

JC: It's a fucking tightrope to walk, no doubt about it. We live in a short attention span culture, so there's that hurdle, first and foremost, keeping readers dramatically and emotionally engaged over the long term. Then there's keeping the book itself on schedule. It gets tough to keep those balls in the air, month after month. You definitely risk burnout at every turn. But this isn't the first time I've written like this... the Wildcats stuff I did was purposefully novelistic in its structure and even GØDLAND had a bit of that mojo, too. Maybe it's how I consumed comicbooks as a kid -- that "endless narrative" approach that were the hallmarks of most mainstream superhero books -- that still influences me now.

So playing the long game like this... it's just more fun for me personally. I like to discover things as I'm writing, I like to make certain connections in the narrative that maybe started out more subconsciously and became more obvious as I go further along. I like to dig out new areas of subtext once I've laid down a foundation. I mean, if I've got it all figured out beforehand, every last detail, why bother writing the book at all? So, to have that kind of fun, I have to set up a situation where those kinds of things are possible. I guess the real balancing act is to try and keep it fun for me and the readers at the same time.

At the same time, the story and the characters are really cooking in a good way. A series like this is kinda like a stew... I just keep adding ingredients, stirring the pot, giving it an occasional taste and letting things continue to simmer. It's a pretty big tapestry, a lot of world building and character building. But that's the type of series it is... a dark epic of very human proportions.

DD: Do you know the eventual ending planned for the series and a general time line or is it something you want to find when it feels like the time is right?

JC: That's a good question... and I really don't have a pithy answer to whip out and slap down. The truth is, I haven't been building this series with any definitive ending in mind. But neither did Lee and Kirby when they created the Fantastic Four. Nor did Aaron Sorkin when he created the West Wing, I'd imagine. You catching my drift? You just go for as long as you're inspired, for as long as it's fun, for as long as there seems to be an audience out there for it. I certainly don't want it to end any time soon, because I feel like there's plenty of exploration left to do, plenty of dramatic avenues left to travel down, plenty of laughs to still be had. I'm still on the ride.

DD: Going back to the topic of the work's impact on you as a person, how does SEX compare to some of your other work like Automatic Kafka or GØDLAND and the impact they had on you? I know you said that things are still kind of bubbling under the surface, and it might be a while, but I'm curious how -- so far, at least -- SEX compares to the other personally important works of your career and the psychological feedback you got from them.

JC: In retrospect, some of those other books had more to do with pure experimentation, pushing myself and my craft to new levels of creative freedom and personal expression. The content itself of those series contained its fair share of subtext, I'm sure, but I look at them mainly as deep cuts of creativity in an overall body of work. They were constructed fairly specifically so I could push the envelope as a writer within each one of them, to stretch the boundaries of my craft and hone my voice as best I could. On that level, they all worked like a motherfucker. I learned valuable lessons on those books that I was able to apply to other books that came later (to great effect, I hope). They taught me how to cut loose and really go for it. Like I said, I'm sure there were nuggets of personal, emotional resonance buried in each one of them, but I guess I've gotten to a place in my life now where I'm more open to mine more of my own psychological damage through the work itself. Even if I can't tell you exactly how it's working itself out in SEX, I know something's going on there...!

I absolutely subscribe to the notion that profound human experiences can be explored within the parameters of most literary genres, even when those parameters -- on the surface -- seem very limiting. And this is a genre book, to be sure. So that's what I'm going for... which, I hope, lines up with one of the important, overall themes of the book, which is how to find true intimacy when you have no evidence that you're equipped as a human being to do that.

DD: So in SEX, along with some of your other more recent works like Butcher Baker the Righteous Maker, there are some thematic ties of what I guess you could call "post-superhero." It seems like you've been doing a lot of exploration into that territory in a way a lot of people haven't before, and I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about that narrative territory and what it is about it that interests and excites you.

JC: This is a minor epiphany I've only come to recently, but I think the fact that I'm on the other side of working so heavily in the Marvel/DC factories might have something to do with it. For a good run of years there, relatively early in my career, I was primarily a Big Two writer. And, let me add, perfectly happy to be there when I was. It was a dream come true on many levels. And let's face it, I made my professional name writing for those publishers. I had substantial runs on big franchise books, did big projects with many iconic characters, got to revisit areas of shared universe histories that meant a helluva lot to me (both as a kid and as an adult). Most of the time, it was shit-hot fun. Sex, drugs, rock n' roll... and company-owned superheroes. And even now, my company -- Man Of Action (plug, plug) -- is coming off a pretty intense experience writing and producing the big animated series for Marvel TV. It was all time well spent, but there is an arc to it. You do evolve and change within that experience and come out the other side a different person than you were going into it. I was practically a kid when I started... and if I'm not a fully-fledged adult by now, then I wouldn't know what one is.

But I certainly have a different attitude towards those Marvel/DC characters than I did before I spent those years writing them. So, in a way, I'm personally living a "post-superhero" existence. And I would imagine that, if I were purely a dedicated reader of superhero comicbooks, over the last thirty years or so, the same cycle of stories and trends have come around so many times, how could you not feel a little jaded by the latest "event" or the latest change in the status quo or reboot of a particular character...? I still love comicbooks, though. And I still think the concept of the superhero has a lot of literary value. So how do I write honestly about this stuff? How do I provide material that might appeal to readers who are in the same boat that I am? Well, a story about retired superhero might be a small step in the right direction. I'll take further steps down this path, I'm sure, but this is a starting point for me.

I think a lot of us who work in the industry are living under those same circumstances right now. We all know the readership hasn't refreshed itself with a new generation of kids -- as it had with every generation previous -- since the early days of Image, I would imagine. Now, that's not a problem for me personally, because I write for myself, first and foremost. It just so happens that I know there's a fairly sizeable chunk of readers in my age demo. I mean, why are we back to endless variant covers and hyped events meant to get mainstream media attention, but that rarely translate into blockbuster retail sales (beyond the occasional spike that never, ever sustains)? Because that massive audience of kids who used to comprise our readership simply doesn't exist, so we're trying to milk the shit out of the one that does. And in doing so, we're left with a rapidly aging audience that, from what I can see, has been slowly but surely losing their patience with the things they used to depend on when they were kids and head over heels in love with superhero comicbooks. Just like I was.

Part of the underlying theme of SEX is how we process those particular feelings... and how difficult that can be for some of us. Hell, for most of us. Early on, there were readers that complained that Simon wasn't "doing" anything with his life, after he gave up the mask and cape. To which I would respond, "Well, what are you doing with your life?" In a weird way, it's definitely putting a mirror up to what's actually happening in our "extended adolescence"-style culture.

So, that's what interests me about it. Hey, you asked...

DD: One thing that has stood out to me in SEX is the issue of class in Saturn City. I'm not sure if this is a topic you're explicitly trying to deal with in the story, but there definitely seems to be a resonance with the topic, specifically when you look at Simon and Keenan. Simon being the white billionaire he is, had the luxury of being able to step away into his sky scraper, safe from the dirt and crime. On the other hand, Keenan -- a young poor black male -- can't walk away from the grit and danger because it's an active, ever present part in his life. Class is an intimate part of superheroes, and I thought it'd be interesting to hear your thoughts on that, and how they may or may not relate to SEX.

JC: I've been asked about this before. I see what you're getting at, and it's definitely an interesting aspect when you're world-building in a series like this. But, to be perfectly honest, I guess I'm more interested in the genre-specific social structure that identifies superheroes, sidekicks, super-villains, henchmen, etc. as their very own classes. And I haven't put too much thought into how those genre-specific classes might match up to a more real world class system that exits, particularly in big cities all over the world. But my own personal experience hasn't allowed me to directly confront the subject deeply enough to feel confident writing about it in such a direct way. Through metaphor and symbolism, maybe. Hopefully, I'm still doing that. But I've never cared if someone made more or less money than me, or if they somehow occupied a higher or lower social strata than me. For better or worse, I just don't pay attention to that stuff. I'm too busy making art, y'know? So I never really matched up Simon and Keenan in the way you're suggesting, aside from believing they were interesting character types that would provide for good dramatic conflict. Y'know, Iron Man and Batman are basically rich white guys, too. Frank Miller recast his Robin as a punk girl. I recast mine as a black kid.

Now, I should bring up something tangentially related to that... something that most readers (outside of our letter column) haven't seemed to pick up on... is that Simon Cooke isn't really the main "hero" of the book. It's an ensemble story, but the real protagonist, the guy who still trying hard to do something significant with his life, is Keenan. So it's weird when readers expect Simon to play out a certain role within the narrative, when it's obviously Keenan who's serving that same function in a very visceral way. Keenan's also got the most well-adjusted sex life out of all of the characters introduced so far. That, to me, is not an insignificant detail. And then there's Annabelle, who I think might be one of the strongest female characters I've ever written. Again, where Simon is often very reticent -- especially with his emotions -- she's usually putting it all out there. So far, she's owning her own baggage in a very mature way.

Again, maybe it's the series' title -- not to mention my performance art style of marketing it -- that has somehow obscured the fact that we're telling stories about some fairly progressive characters... at least in the arena of so-called "mainstream" comics. But, for me, it's probably one of the more important aspects of doing the book in the first place.

DD: I wanted to delve into the different kinds of sexual/intimate relations that are happening in the book and their reflections on the characters. Simon can't get it up, while Annabelle gets herself off with thoughts of her/ Simon's past life, Keenan gets laid all the time from his smoking hot, affectionate, insatiable girlfriend, The Alpha Brothers do each other while they talk about power, The Old Man snuff fucks prostitutes, while the Prank Addict is emotionally manipulates vulnerable women into sleeping with him -- oh, and Warren is into getting gang-banged by grandmas with strap-ons. I'm interested in hearing from you about coming up with the different characters and sexual relations they have, and what those proclivities mean to you and to the characters.

JC: Just to clarify something... Simon can get it up, physically. He's got the tool needed to get the job done. He's just having a rough time getting it up, emotionally. So he can get it up, but he can't get it on (so to speak).

As far as the other characters, I just knew going into this series that one of its main aspects would be the characters' various sex lives. Kinda implied with the title, right? I also knew that there would be some obvious symbolism involved with whichever sexual preference or kink I associated with which specific character. It wasn't just picking names -- or Kama Sutra positions -- out of a hat. Each one serves as a way to illuminate character. Sexual characterization, I guess you could call it. It's not something you see in many comicbooks, so I guess we've got that going for us...

DD: Now I'd be remiss if I didn't ask about your collaborators on this project. How did you come to work with Piotr Kowalski? Piotr definitely has more tall, angular, BD type of sensibility that really works for this book. How did you find him and what's it been like working together?

JC: I honestly can't remember exactly how I first became aware of Piotr's work. Here in the USA, he'd only done the one mini-series at Boom (which I didn't even know about when it was out on the stands). I probably got his e-mail from an editor at Boom and I just wrote to him out of the blue, telling him I liked his stuff and asking if he'd like to work together. Luckily, he threw himself into the world-building aspect of this series as deeply as I did, and the proof is right there on every page. Saturn City has a distinct visual identity, and that's all down to Piotr's talent. His style is also very understated, but without losing any sense of drama or power. It's perfect for this kind of book, where we present shocking visuals in a very matter-of-fact manner. We're not out to be exploitative at all, we're just telling stories and letting readers in on the inner lives of these characters, no matter how twisted they might be.

DD: I'm really interested in the teams approach to color in SEX. Brad Simpson is taking a really unique approach to the coloring with distinct palettes for adjacent scenes and I like his balance between muted and vibrant tones. I think it's interesting that sometimes he'll paint a character in a solid red or blue or yellow for just a single panel. Is that part of the coloring direction or a liberty that he takes, and in general, how much does color play into the scripting?

JC: Well, there's two things at work there. One, we wanted a striking color palette. Something more European in its sensibility. Colors that have more to do with emotions than with reality. I knew early on that straightforward coloring would not work on this series. The second part of it is... look at any comicbook from the 1970's and you'll see the wildest color choices, totally subjective, completely random, all over the place. It was the standard color vocabulary... and I'd imagine it was a way to make things pop in an otherwise drab newsprint landscape, where you couldn't even hope for subtlety. As the technology got better -- with computer coloring and better paper and printing -- you were able to get more subtlety, so naturally the coloring went in a more realistic direction, trying to replicate movies or TV or just trying to convince you that Superman was real or whatever. But I don't necessarily think it was an overall better direction. Something got lost... a certain kind of emotional impact that bolder colors could provide. A certain madness got lost, too.

So, working with Brad, I was able to nudge him in that direction. He's fairly new at this, he comes from a fine art background, so he wasn't completely set in his ways like a more established colorist might've been. He was open to try something different. And, as it turns out, people have really noticed his contributions each issue, which is always a cool thing.

DD: While I have you here, I'm curious what your thoughts are now on the market. We're now well into this rise of creator-owned comics and a much more diverse market in terms of the types of books available now. As someone whose been doing this for a little while now, I'm curious what your thoughts are on comics as both an artistic medium and as an industry as it stands at this particular moment in time.

JC: I suppose I have less of an opinion about industry machinations right now than I usually do, mainly because I've been too busy busting my ass working to pay that close attention or to expend energy formulating some incendiary opinion that looks good in an interview like this. But as an artistic medium... it's never been healthier in its entire one hundred year history. And by saying that, I don't mean that we're all doing better work (although I think there's plenty of great work happening right now)... what I mean is that the potential exists in a way it never did before. The opportunities exist in a way they never have before. Between the Internet and self-publishing and the various independent publishers -- and, by that, I guess I mean everyone that's not Marvel or DC -- if you want to make comics then you can make them and you can get them seen. Nothing's stopping you. The connectivity of things just blows me away. I've found plenty of new artists to work with just from seeing their work online. It's how Piotr and I found each other.

For me, personally, things have never been this good, in terms of pursuing my own creative urges. I can follow my bliss in a way that I could've hardly even dreamt of as a kid. It's a fucking amazing thing... how I make comicbooks now is as close to what it felt like when I was ten years old, sprawled out on the floor of my parents' den, writing and drawing my own horrible comicbooks on ruled notebook paper, starring my own dumb superhero knockoff characters. It's that same buzz of creating something from nothing and having complete creative control. There's nothing else like it. Having the ability and the opportunity to create art -- of any kind -- is such a deeply profound thing, Forget about sales figures and royalties and the parts of this equation that involve money. What it comes down to is that I get to have ideas, I get to develop them as I see fit and I get to see them through to completion -- printed and distributed to comicbook stores nationwide -- and, on top of that, I either own or co-own them. It's hard to describe how satisfying that is, just on a purely human level. So, at this particular moment in time, I think about that... and I ride my own melt.

NOTE: A version of this interview originally appeared online.

David Dissanayake who is, among other things, a comic book critic who writes for Comicbook.com and Bleeding Cool. He lives in San Francisco and works at Mission: Comics and Art.

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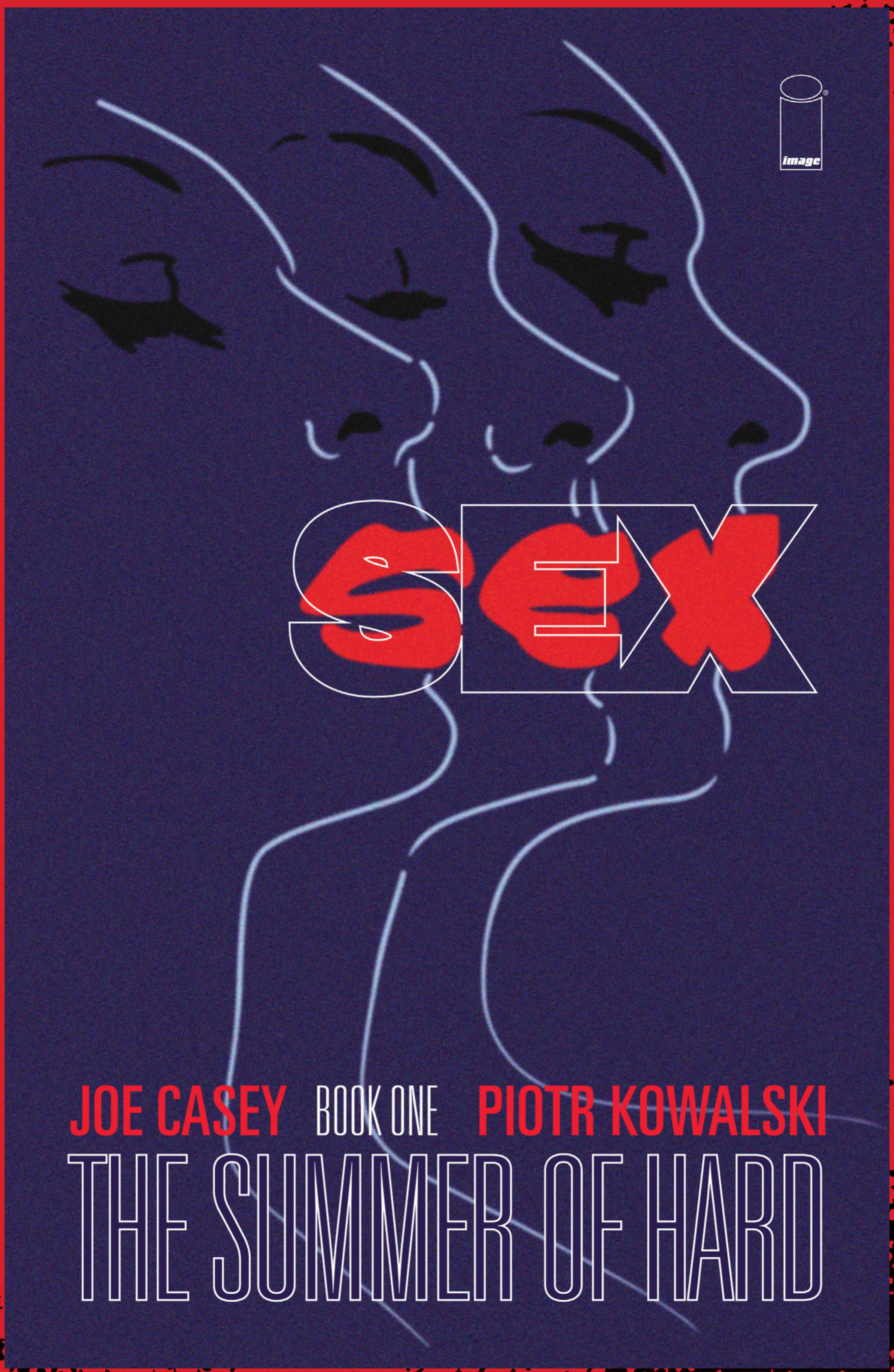

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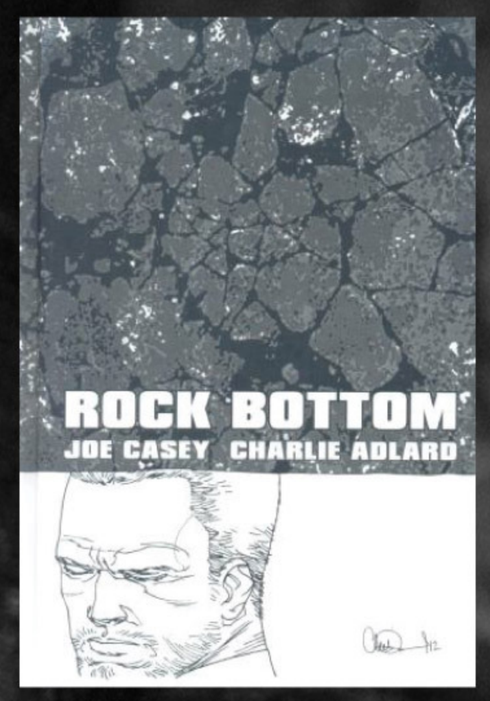

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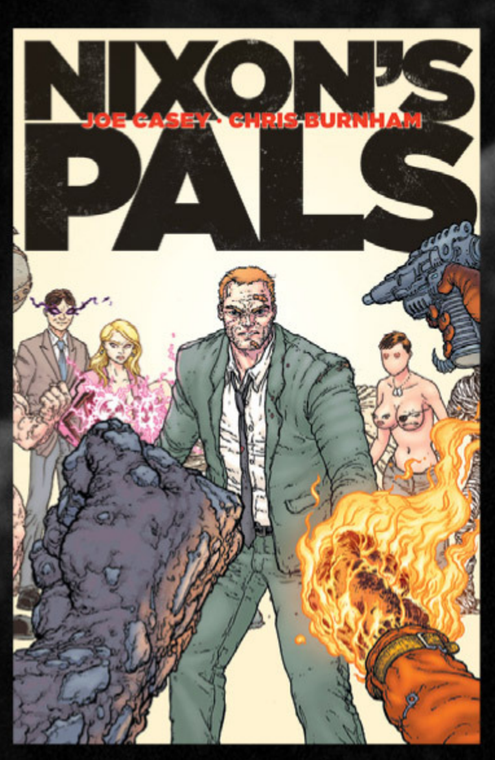
(WITH AXEL 13)



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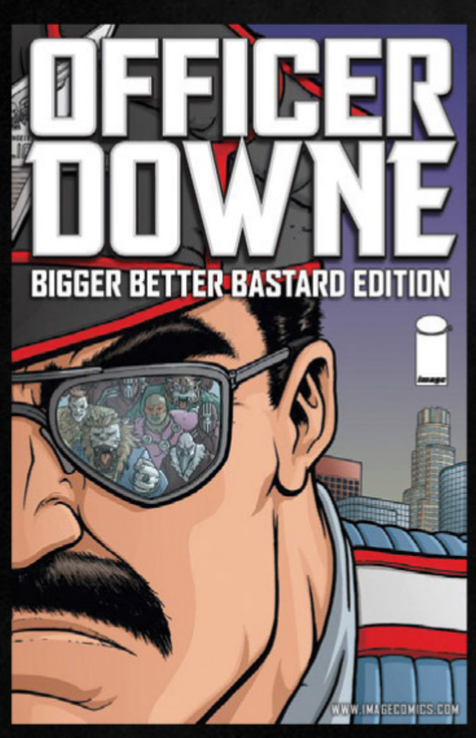
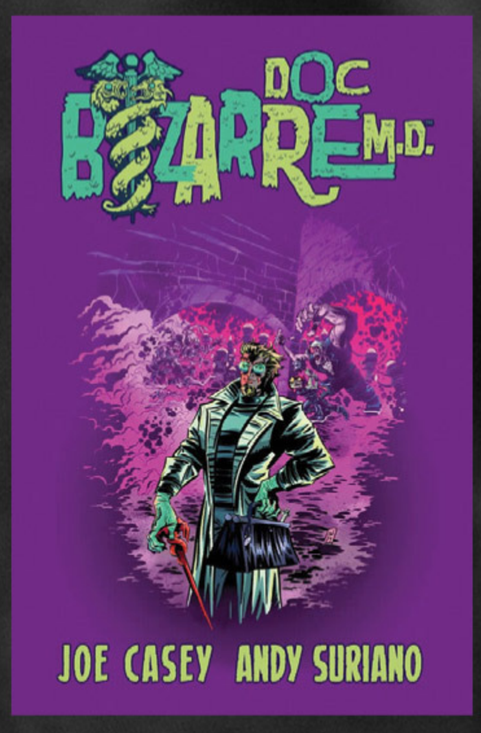
(WITH CHRIS BURNHAM)



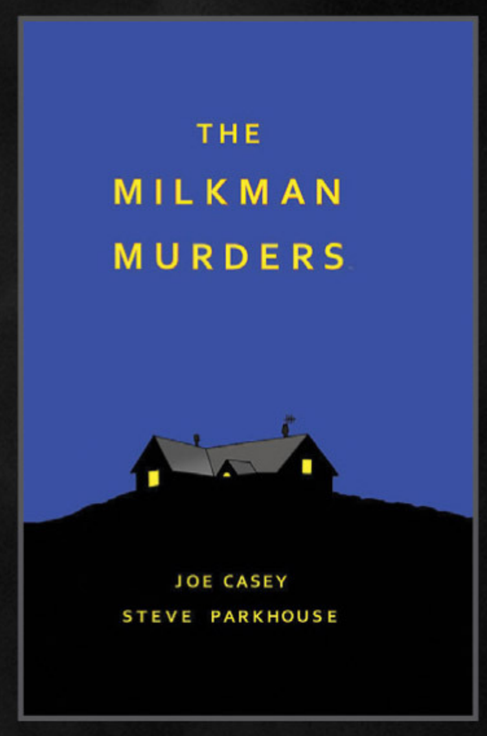
OFFICER DOWNE
(WITH CHRIS BURNHAM)



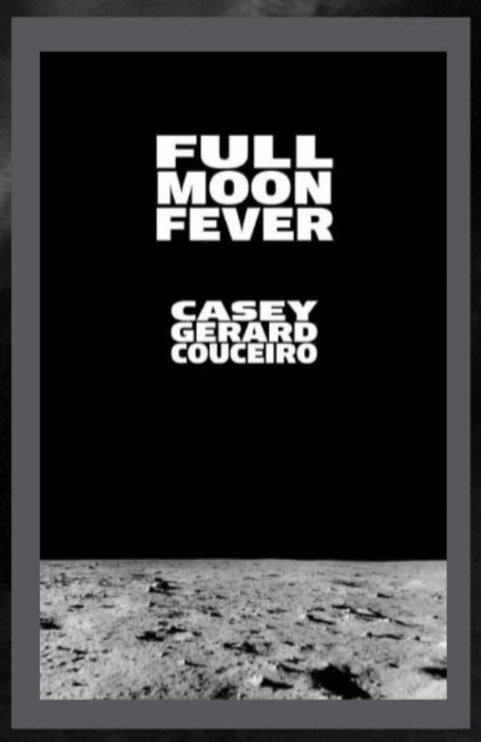
CHARLATAN BALL
(WITH ANDY SURIANO)



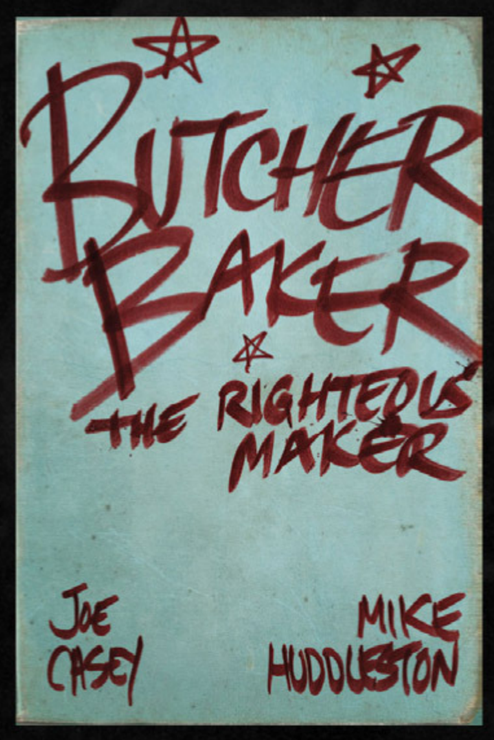
DOC BIZARRE, M.D.
(WITH ANDY SURIANO)



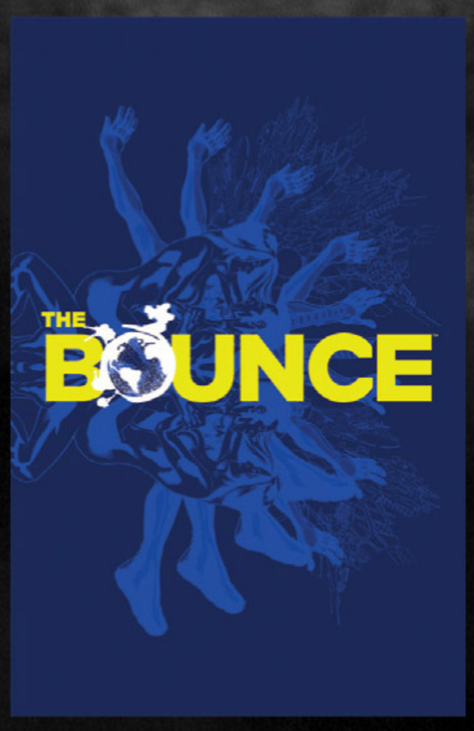
THE MILKMAN MURDERS
(WITH STEVE PARKHOUSE)



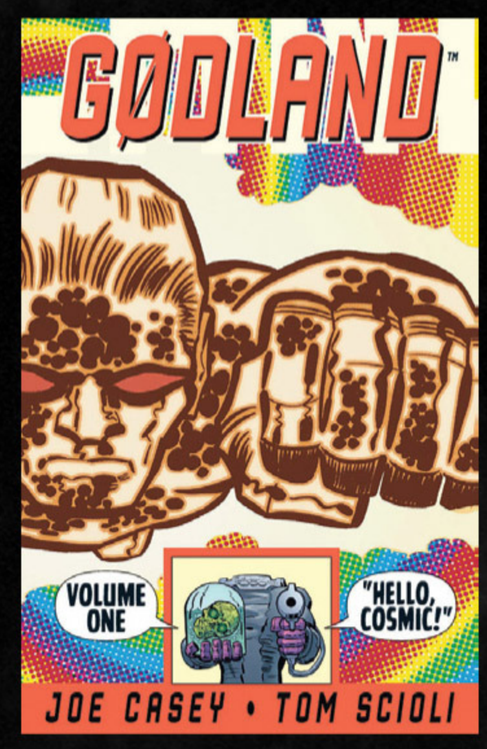
FULL MOON FEVER
(WITH CALEB GERARD/ DAMIAN COUCEIRO)



BUTCHER BAKER THE RIGHTEOUS MAKER
(WITH MIKE HUDDLESTON)



THE BOUNCE
(WITH DAVID MESSINA)



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