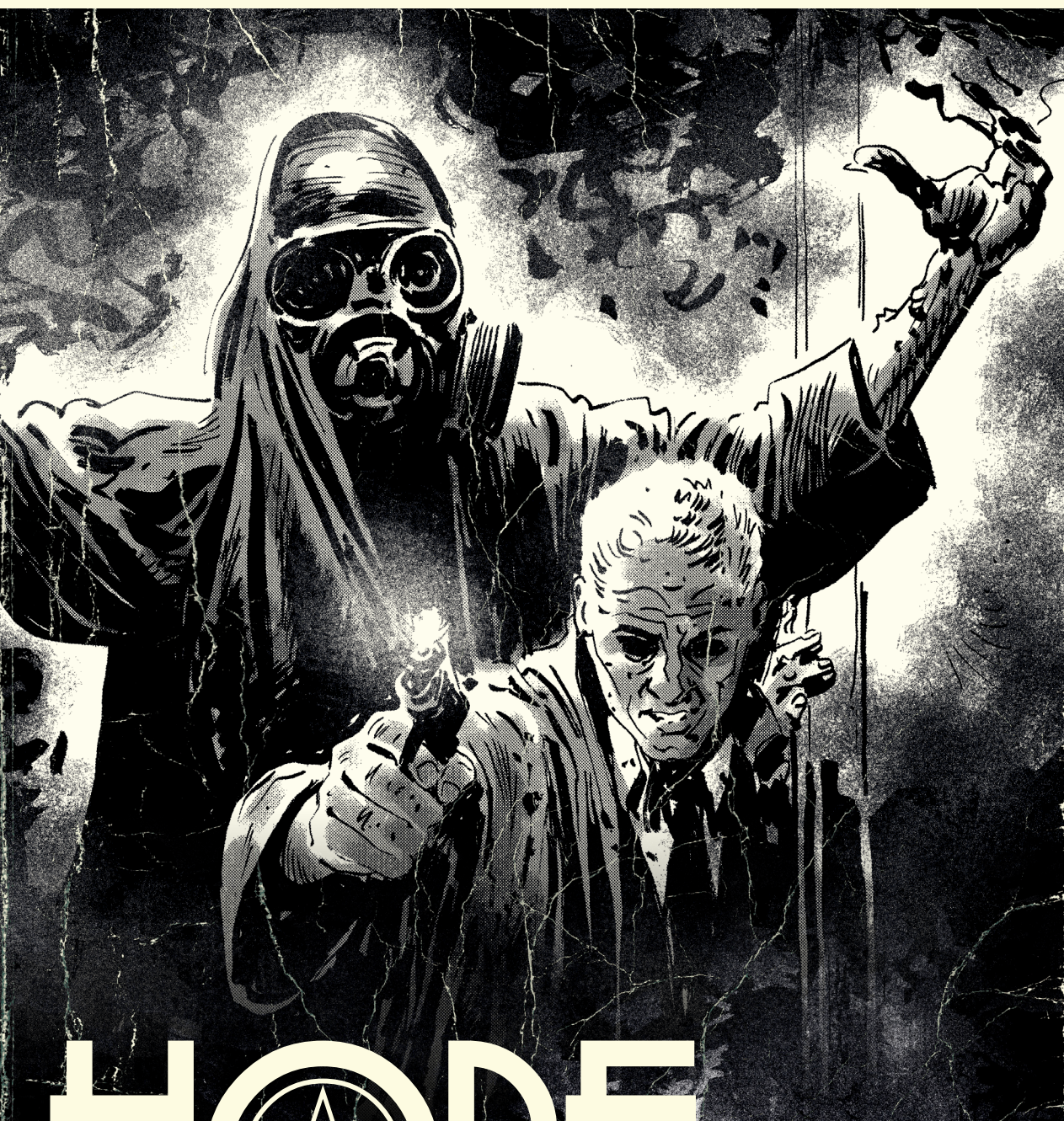


IN THE CITY OF ANGELS, HOPE MUST CONFRONT HIS DEMONS!



HOPE

...FOR THE
FUTURE

GUY ADAMS



JIMMY BROXTON

GUY ADAMS

Writer

JIMMY BROXTON

Artist

SIMON BOWLAND

Letters



Creative Director and CEO: Jason Kingsley

Chief Technical Officer: Chris Kingsley

Head of Books & Comics: Ben Smith

2000 AD Editor in Chief: Matt Smith

Senior Graphic Novel Editor: Keith Richardson

Junior Graphic Novel Editor: Oliver Ball

Graphic Design: Oz Osborne, Sam Gretton & Maz Smith

Reprographics: Joseph Morgan, Richard Tustian & Emma Denton

PR: Michael Molcher

Publishing Assistant: Owen Johnson

Originally serialised in **2000 AD** Progs 2011-2016 & 2044-2049 . Copyright © 2016, 2017, 2018 Rebellion 2000 AD Ltd. All rights reserved. *HOPE* and all related characters, their distinctive likenesses and related elements featured in this publication are trademarks of Rebellion. No portion of this book may be reproduced without the express permission of the publisher. Names, character, places and incidents featured in the publication are either the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead (except for satirical purposes) is entirely coincidental.

Published by Rebellion, Riverside House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, UK

www.rebellion.com

ISBN: 978-1-78108-658-2

Printed in Malta by Gutenberg Press

Manufactured in the EU by Stanton Book Services,

Wellingborough NN8 3PJ, UK.

First published: November 2018

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For information on other **2000 AD** graphic novels, or if you have any comments on this book, please email books@2000AD.com

To find out more about **2000 AD**, visit www.2000AD.com

HOPE

...F°R THE FUTURE

HOPE CREATED BY
GUY ADAMS & JIMMY BROXTON

Originally published in 2000 AD Progs 2011-2016 & 2044-2049



So, yeah,
there's this...



Danny Filbardi. Three
gallons of horseshit in a
two-gallon barrel. He's
clearly saying something
but I've got bored of
listening. Hang on...



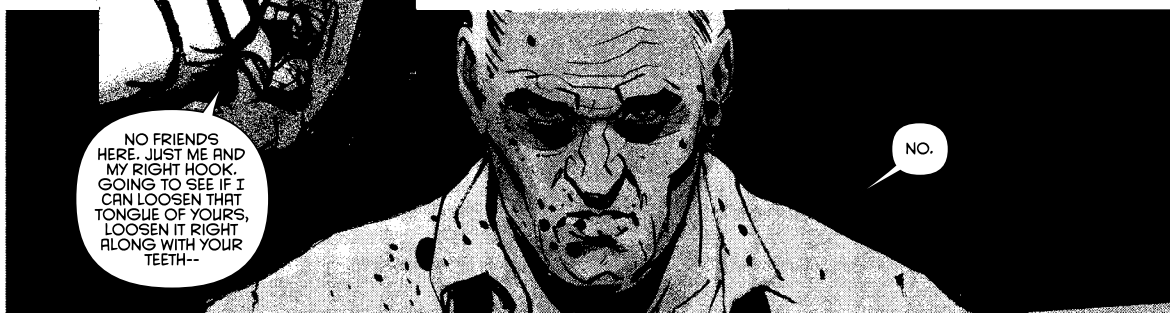
No, I'm not
missing anything.

Six months ago he decided to run side
bets at the club where he works.
Figured nobody would notice. Never
imagined his boss would hire somebody
like me to look into why action was
down. Worst gamble he ever made.

This from the guy
who decided to
come here alone.



Well...as
good as.





Let me tell you
about magic.

It's the black math
at the heart of the
universe. I've been
burned by it.
Ruined by it.

It's powerful. That's why so
many flock to it, swum in it
until they've drowned,
panicked lungs filling with
oil-black, syrupy water.

I've used it. Hell, I'm
using it now. Don't want
to, but I'm out of options.

Filbardi can feel it. "What's
that crawling under my
skin?" he thinks. "Feels like
ants chewing on the bone."

Reality takes a swerve.
The world rewritten.
Our roles reverse. The
captor now captured.

But while magic has saved me
in the short term it poisons
me for the future... what little
future I have left.

I'm lacking a lot in this life,
felt almost everything slip
through my fingers. A wife,
a son, a job, a faith... but the
main thing I've lost is HOPE.

The only place I can
find that now is in the
name written on my
damn business cards.

And that's all
because of magic.

Feel sick to my stomach and it's not from the beating. Using magic is like drinking methylated spirits—it gets the job done but rots away at your insides. You want proof? Take a look outside your window.

Your government denies it. ALL the governments deny it. What else is new? They won the war using magic. Dark magic, the kind that people can't come back from. Where do you think Roosevelt went? Heart attack? Give me a break. He pulled the trigger that brought that whole mess down and paid for it with his life and soul.

"There ain't no such thing as magic," you say. Well, you just keep believing that. The powers-that-be are running scared from it. They saw what it could do, out there on the battlefield. But, believe me, there are others—greedy, dangerous people—who are diving in with both cloven feet. I know that better than most people.

They're everywhere. Underground. Meeting in secret. Making plans. One of their biggest groups? Right here.

Where the sun shines bright and the shadows are even darker.





Which is why
I'm here.
Unfinished
business.



And while that
rolls on? All the
beatings a man
could need.



But that's OK.
Scotch and
smokes don't
buy themselves.



HOPE, PRIVATE
INVESTIGATIONS.

I...I
NEED YOUR
HELP...



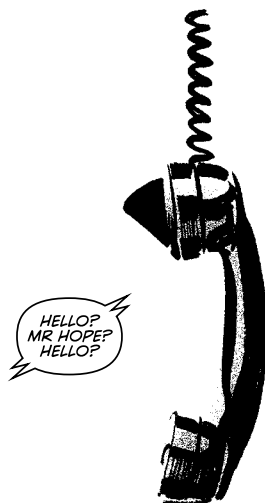
IT'S MY
SON.



SOMEBODY'S...
SOMEBODY'S
TAKEN MY SON.



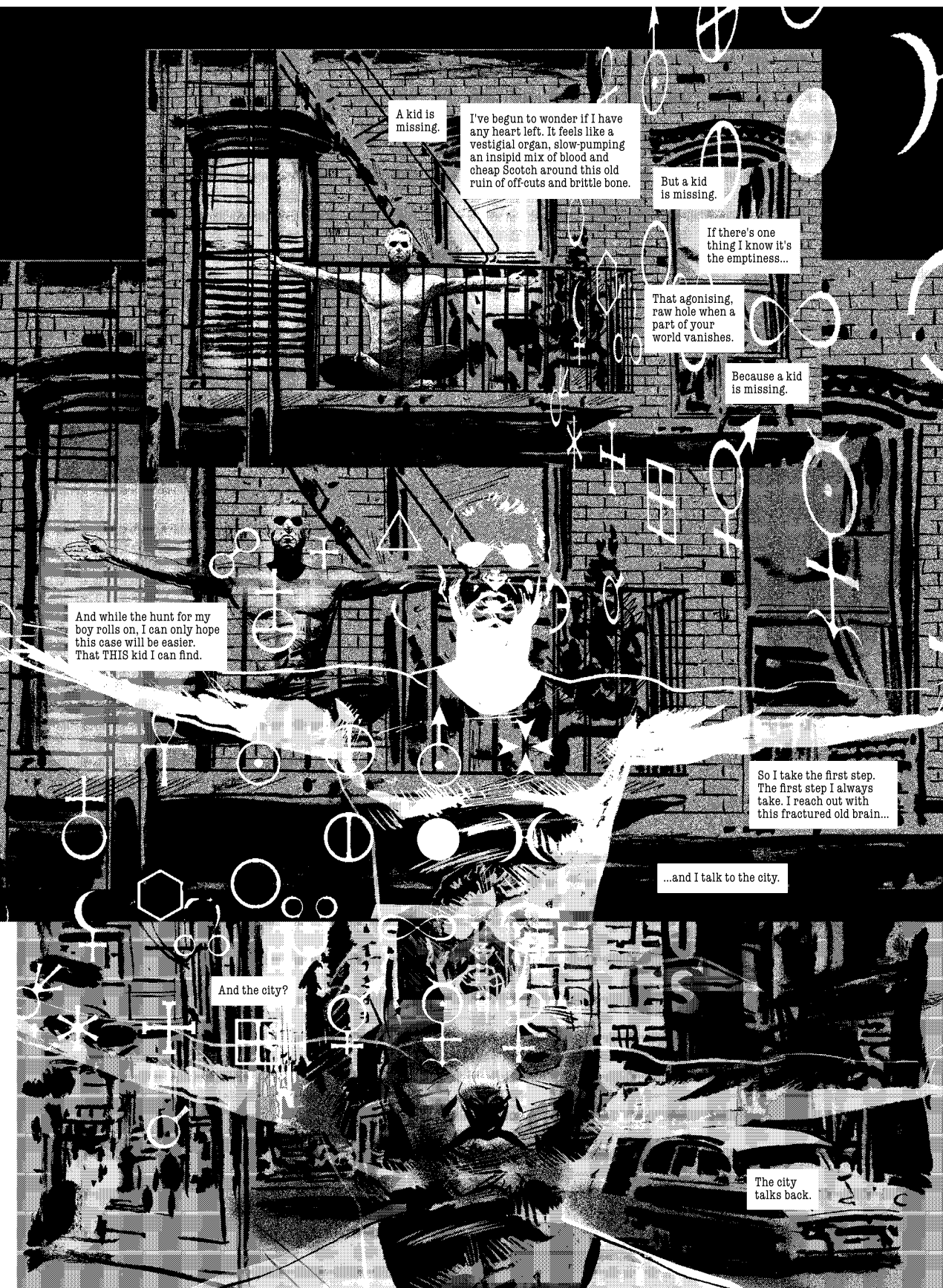
DADDY!



HELLO?
MR HOPE?
HELLO?



KEEP
TALKING.



A kid is missing.

I've begun to wonder if I have any heart left. It feels like a vestigial organ, slow-pumping an insipid mix of blood and cheap Scotch around this old ruin of off-cuts and brittle bone.

But a kid is missing.

If there's one thing I know it's the emptiness...

That agonising, raw hole when a part of your world vanishes.

Because a kid is missing.

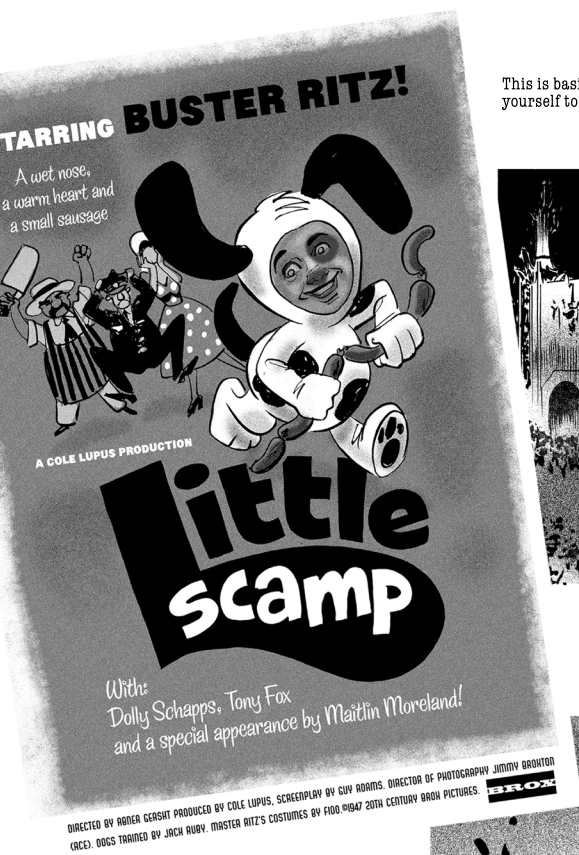
And while the hunt for my boy rolls on, I can only hope this case will be easier. That THIS kid I can find.

So I take the first step. The first step I always take. I reach out with this fractured old brain...

...and I talk to the city.

And the city?

The city talks back.

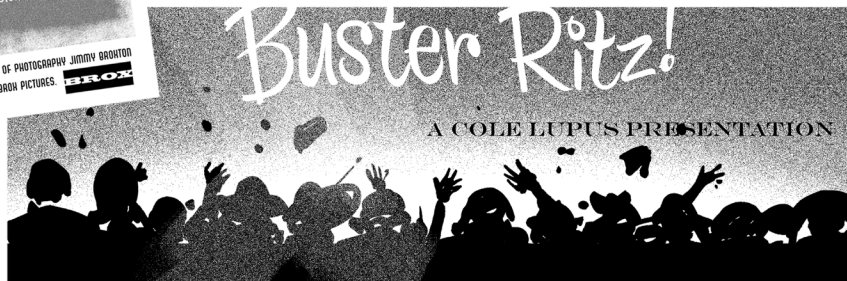


This is basic magic. This is opening yourself to the world around you.

The missing kid is Joey Fabrizio, better known as Buster Ritz! The kid is a goldmine.



His slapstick comedies have all grossed top dollar. Not my kind of thing. When I see people falling down stairs or beating each other with planks of wood I'm reminded of my day job and there's nothing about that to raise a smile.



But many love him with that long-distance adoration only cinema can provide. Two-dimensional titans of the silver screen. Unreal yet more solid than flesh.



But to his parents, Buster's a living, breathing ten-year-old kid.



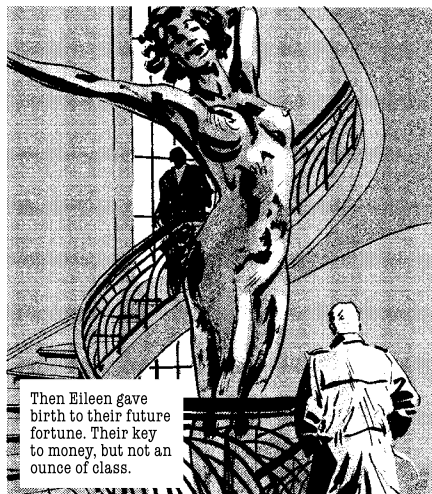
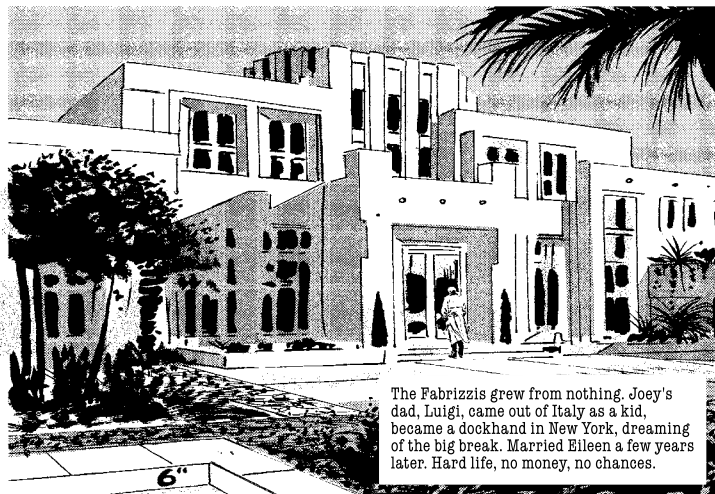
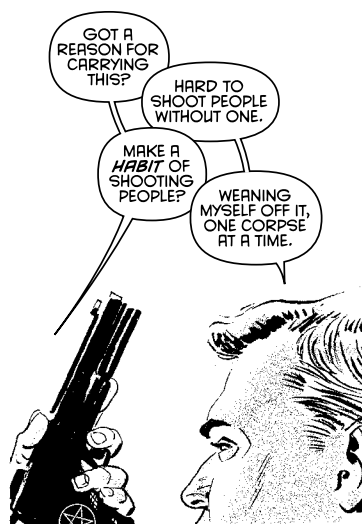
It's the mom who called me, which may already tell me something. On a case like this it's usually the agent or the assistant. It's never personal. It's never the people who are doing the actual crying.

So why did the mom call? Probably it's just impatience. Maybe the cops are moving too slow.



Time will tell. I watch her. I try to get a read off her, but at the end of the day...

...you can only ever really know something by looking a person in the eye.





HE...HE WENT MISSING LAST THURSDAY. IT'S ALL...I DON'T KNOW, SCREWED UP. NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW *WHAT* HAPPENED. HE WAS IN HIS TRAILER AND THEN HE WASN'T.

STUDIO SECURITY IS AS TIGHT AS A NUN'S ASS-- NOBODY SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET IN THERE AND GRAB HIM. HE'D FINISHED THE SHOOT, PEOPLE SAW HIM HEAD BACK TO THE TRAILER. TEN, MAYBE TWENTY MINUTES LATER, THE DRIVER SWINGS BY AND THE TRAILER'S EMPTY.



PEOPLE?

Huh?

YOU SAY "PEOPLE" SAW HIM HEAD BACK TO THE TRAILER. WHO?

YOU KNOW, JUST PEOPLE.

MAKE-UP GIRL, ONE OF THE SCENERY GUYS, COSTUME GIRL...SHE WAS KIND OF SWEET ON HIM.

ALWAYS GIVING HIM CANDY AND SHIT.

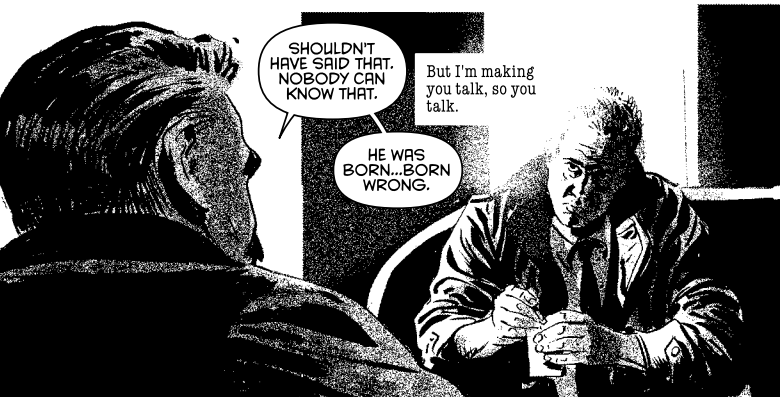


PEOPLE COULDN'T HELP IT.

IT WAS... IT WAS... *MAGIC.*



MAGIC?



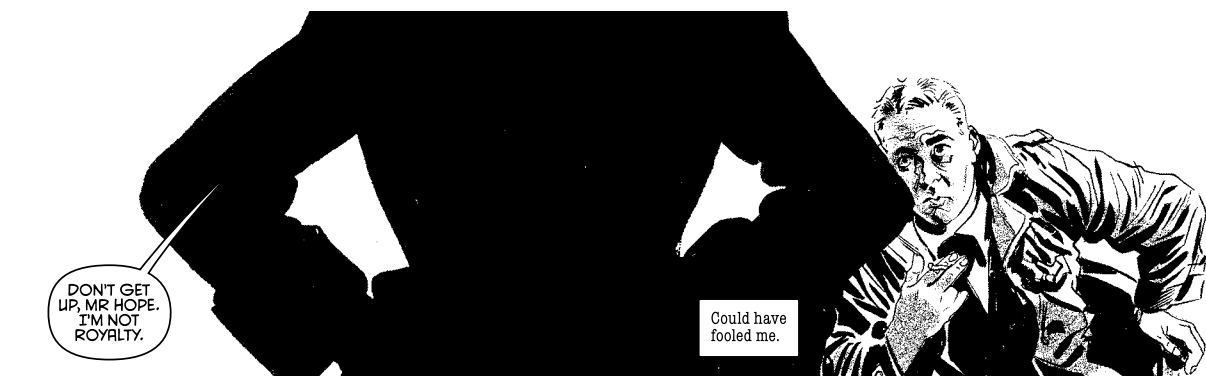
SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT. NOBODY CAN KNOW THAT.

But I'm making you talk, so you talk.

HE WAS BORN...BORN WRONG.



NOT WRONG. GIFTED.





"...I JUST DIDN'T KNOW IT WOULD BE *HELL*."







THEY SAID I
DREAMED IT. THAT IT
WAS...I DON'T KNOW,
GAS OR SOMETHIN'.
MAKING ME SEE
THINGS. BUT IT WASN'T
JUST ME. LOTS OF
GUYS SAW STUFF.
STUFF THEY COULDN'T
EXPLAIN.

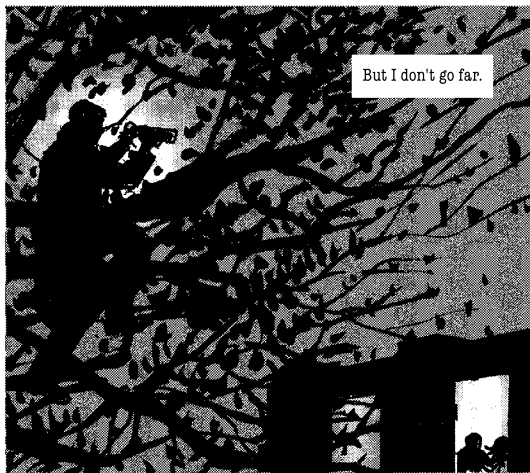


It's true, of course. Every word. I know
that. I also know it has nothing to do
with the way he treated his kid, however
much he's trying to change the subject.

I don't need magic to read this guy. His
temper's hot enough you could warm
yourself on a cold night just by standing
near him. Some fathers just can't help
being jealous of their kids. The alpha
male losing dominance, trying to claw it
back with a flat hand and plenty of
backswing.



I spend another
half hour taking
down boring
details, then
leave them to it.



But I don't go far.



Luigi just can't
keep his hands to
himself, can he?

I shouldn't
interfere...



...but I never
could stand a bully.



Now every blow
he lands on her,
he'll feel himself.



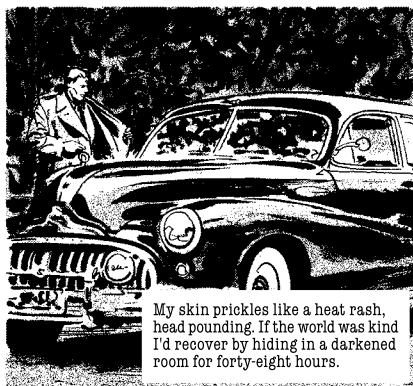
Soft heart,
rotten guts.



No more magic.
Getting lazy,
dipping too often
into the rancid pool.



Yeah, I see you.
Enjoy the show,
damn you.



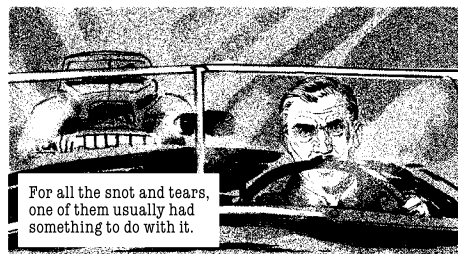
My skin prickles like a heat rash,
head pounding. If the world was kind
I'd recover by hiding in a darkened
room for forty-eight hours.



But the world
is rarely kind.



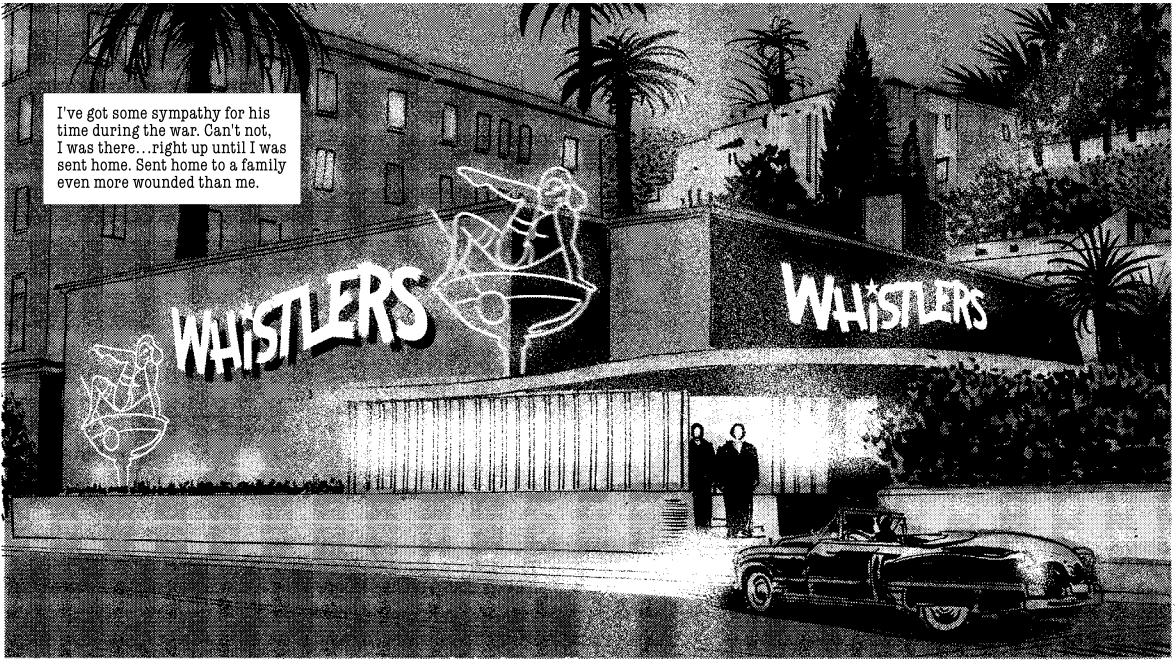
So here's the thing.
Nine times out of ten,
when a kid goes missing
you look to the parents.



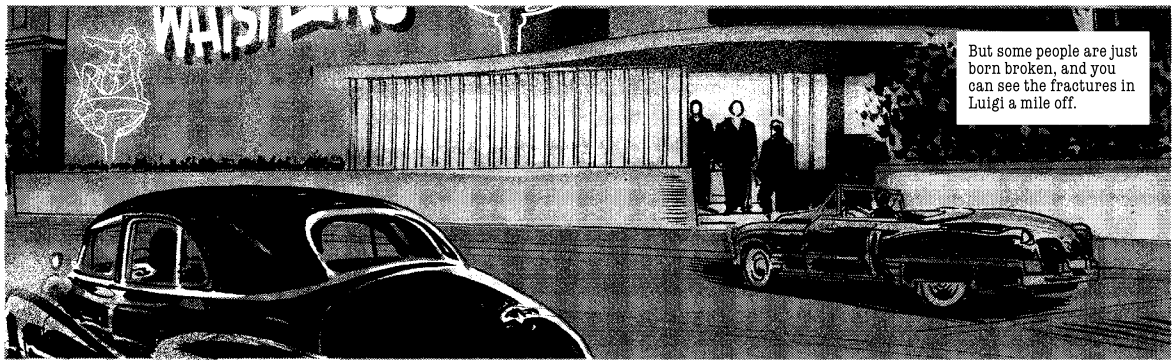
For all the snot and tears,
one of them usually had
something to do with it.



So while I have a
notebook full of people to
talk to, they can wait. For
now I only have eyes for
the man with a temper.

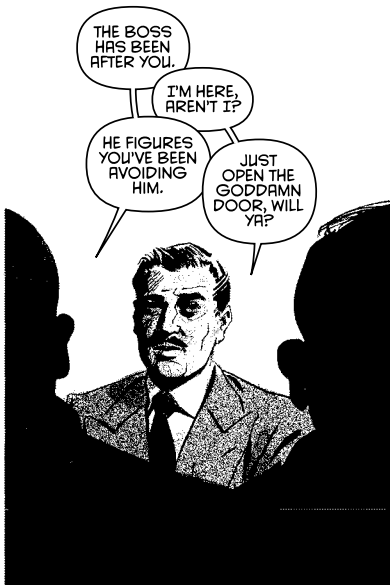


I've got some sympathy for his time during the war. Can't not, I was there...right up until I was sent home. Sent home to a family even more wounded than me.



But some people are just born broken, and you can see the fractures in Luigi a mile off.

Private club. Crime connections. I can smell Jack Dragna's aftershave from across the damn street. So what's Luigi doing here? Only an idiot would try to blag his way in to find out.



THE BOSS HAS BEEN AFTER YOU.

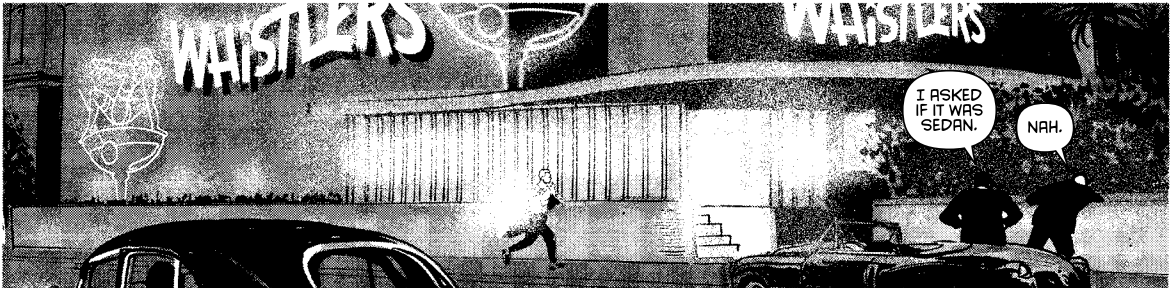
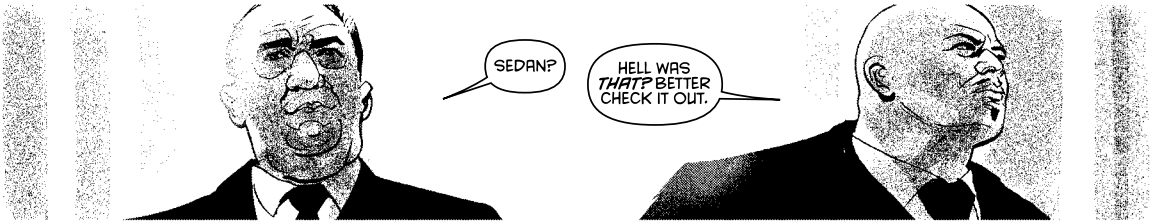
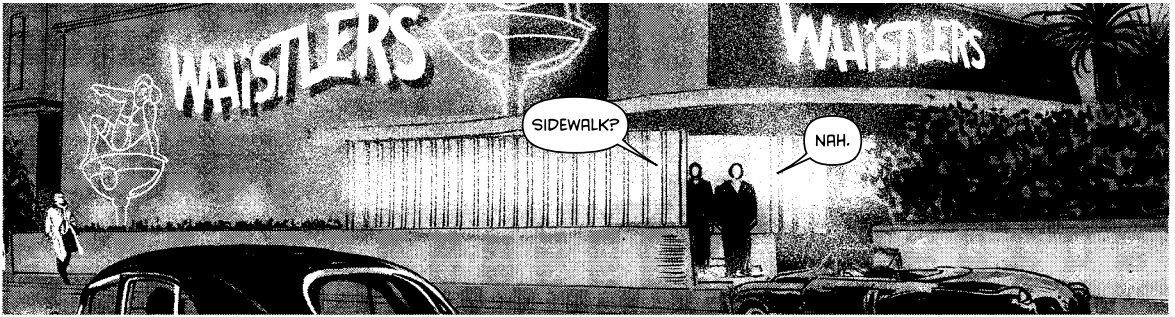
I'M HERE, AREN'T I?

HE FIGURES YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING HIM.

JUST OPEN THE GODDAMN DOOR, WILL YA?



To hell with it. It's been hours since my last beating...

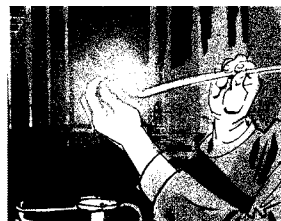




L.A. in a nutshell.
Gloss on the surface,
dirt underneath.



There's
weed-smoke in
the air, and
sweat, and sex.



The decor is
expensive,
the gambling
stakes high.



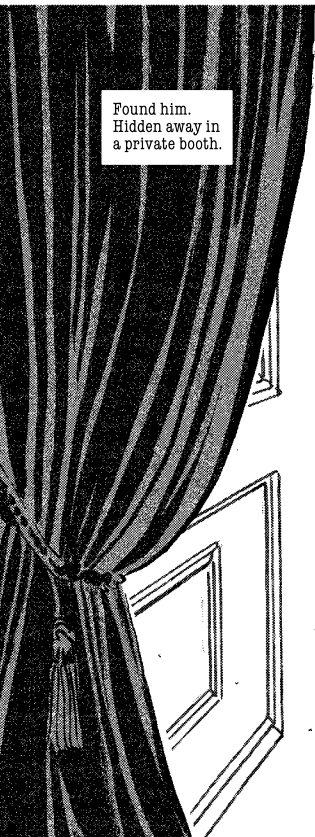
The women are beautiful, giving
off the sort of promise that
never quite reaches their eyes.



I guess most of them
are staff and they're
not here to pour
drinks or count chips.



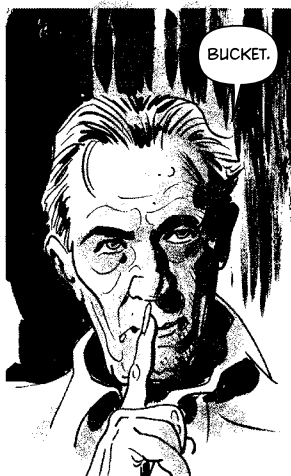
So what's LUIGI here
for? The gambling or
the women?



Found him.
Hidden away in
a private booth.



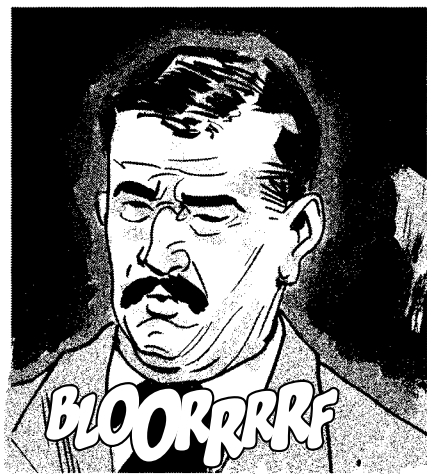
HEY, FATS.
SORRY I
HAVEN'T COME
IN BEFORE.
IT'S BEEN--



BUCKET.



WE ALL HAVE
APPETITES,
LUIGI--AND
APPETITES COME
WITH A PRICE.



BLOORRRRF

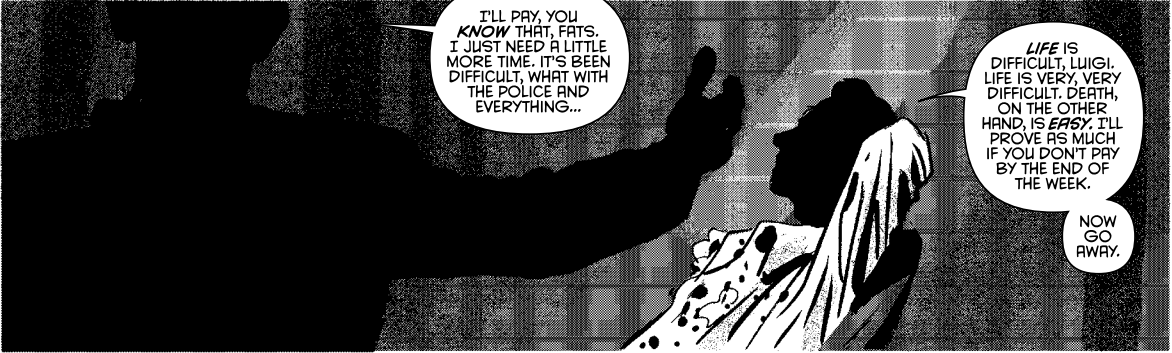


WE CAN DO
WHATEVER WE
WANT IN LIFE, LUIGI.
ANYTHING. BUT
WE HAVE TO PAY
FOR IT.

I HAVE JUST
PAID FOR LOBSTER,
FILLET STEAK WITH
TRUFFLES, AND A
CHERRY SUNDAE.
WHEN ARE YOU
GOING TO PAY FOR
YOUR EXCESSES?



Gold
bucket.
Classy.



I'LL PAY, YOU **KNOW** THAT, FATS. I JUST NEED A LITTLE MORE TIME. IT'S BEEN DIFFICULT, WHAT WITH THE POLICE AND EVERYTHING...

LIFE IS DIFFICULT, LUIGI. LIFE IS VERY, VERY DIFFICULT. DEATH, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS **EASY**. I'LL PROVE AS MUCH IF YOU DON'T PAY BY THE END OF THE WEEK.

NOW GO AWAY.

So Luigi owes money. I guess it doesn't matter how rich you are—or how rich your kid makes you—you can still blow it if you're the right kind of idiot.



But what about the death threat? Was he saying he'd kill Luigi? Or has Joey been taken as collateral? A hostage against the debt?



I DON'T KNOW YOU.

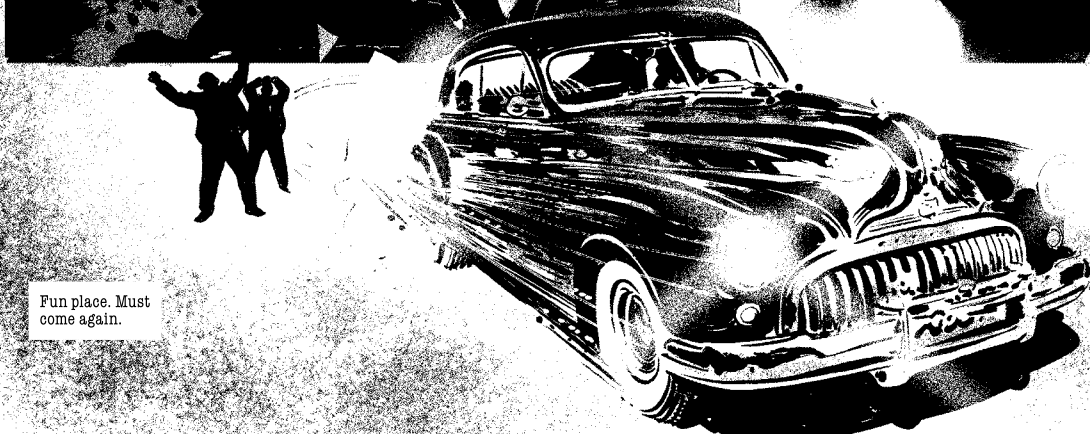
Great.

SURE YOU KNOW ME. YOUR BOYS LET ME IN, DIDN'T THEY?

I DON'T KNOW YOU. SHOW ME YOUR MEMBERSHIP CARD.

SURE. I'VE GOT IT RIGHT HERE--





Fun place. Must
come again.



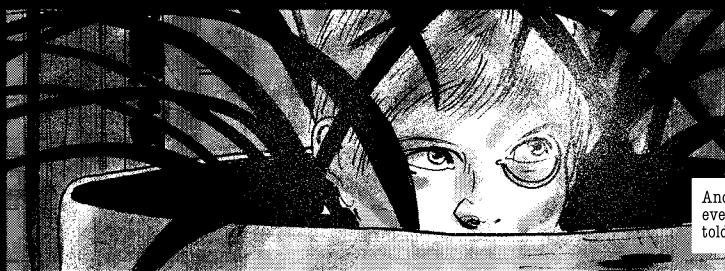
I manage to find a theatre screening a Buster Ritz! picture: THE SPOOK OF SPILSBURY CHASE.

Our pocket-sized hero takes on a pair of crooks, whose plot to rob an old house of its silver involves some bed linen and a lot of unnecessary howling.



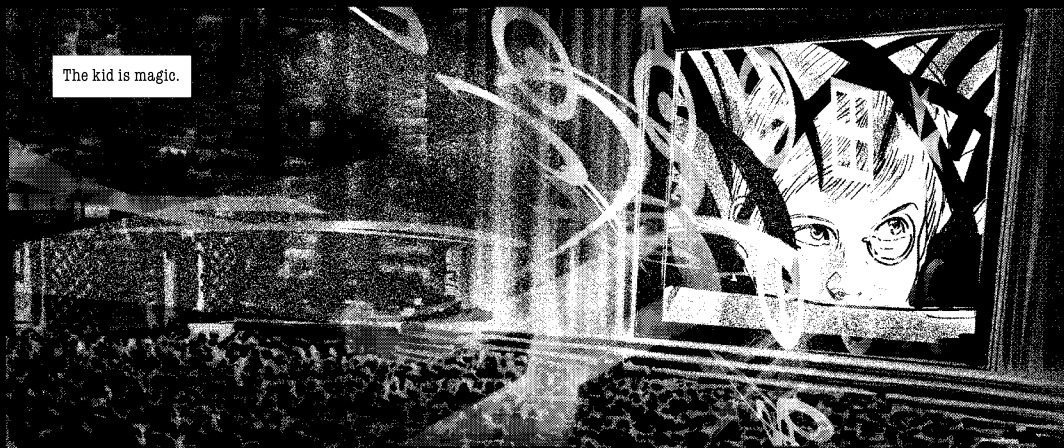
The inept burglars aren't the only ones wailing. The entire audience - and the place is packed out despite this being an old movie - are acting like they're witness to the Second Coming.

No slapstick routine is too laboured, no wordplay too clunky. If lame comedy was food, these people are gluttons.



And I realise that everything Luigi told me is true.

The kid is magic.



And none of us can resist him.

I've got a hangover, and for once it's not the booze. Well, not JUST the booze..



It's the magic of Buster Ritzl. It's left me drained and hungry for more. It's all I can do not to run out of my room and find a morning screening somewhere, grab another celluloid fix.

But I don't need to find Buster Ritzl. I need to find Joey Fabrizio. The real thing, not his cinematic ghost.



My next stop is his agent: Martha May.

May
Talent
Agency



Not the glitzy office I'd imagined, but then May has represented Joey ever since he started. She should take some of the money he's made her and install a goddamned elevator.



NOT FAIR! *NOT FAIR!* I WANTED THE PART I CAN PLAY THE PART I'M BETTER THAN THEM THEY'RE NOTHING THEY'RE UGLY I WISH THEY WERE *DEAD!*



Wish I'd brought my gun...

...I could have shot myself with it.

--AND OF COURSE THEY ALL WANT MY *TIMMY* TO PLAY THE PART. WHY WOULDN'T THEY? HE SINGS LIKE A NIGHTINGALE, AS I'M SURE YOU KNOW.

SCREEN GEMS MAGAZINE CALLED HIM "THE MOST PROMISING CHILD STAR OF HIS GENERATION".

NEVER HEARD OF HIM.



SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING, MR HOPE.

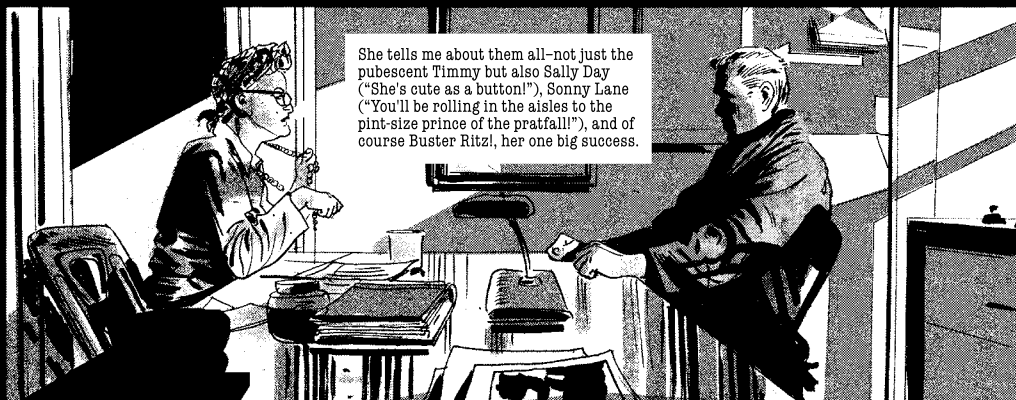
GOOD TIMING. ANOTHER MINUTE IN THERE AND THE MOTHER OF SOMEONE CALLED *TIMMY BYRD* MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO KILL ME.



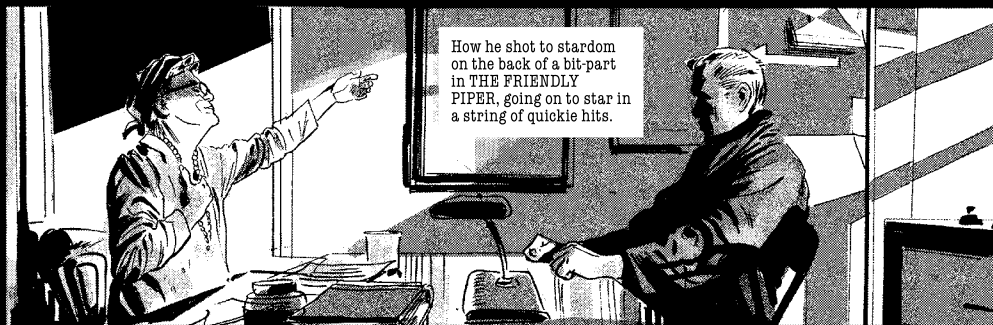
OH POOR *TIMMY!* SUCH A MIXED-UP LITTLE DARLING. HE THOUGHT HE HAD A WHOLE CAREER AHEAD OF HIM BUT SO FEW EVER DO...THEIR AWFUL LITTLE BALLS WILL *INSIST* ON DROPPING.

HAPPENS TO THE BEST OF US.

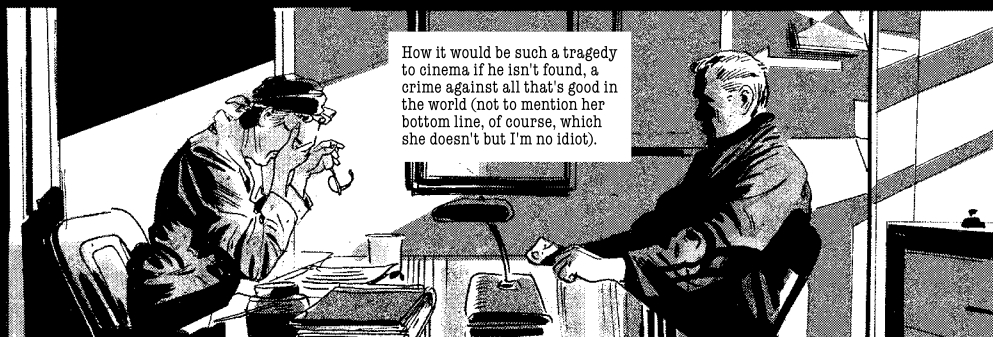




She tells me about them all-not just the pubescent Timmy but also Sally Day ("She's cute as a button!"), Sonny Lane ("You'll be rolling in the aisles to the pint-size prince of the pratfall!"), and of course Buster Ritzl, her one big success.



How he shot to stardom on the back of a bit-part in **THE FRIENDLY PIPER**, going on to star in a string of quickie hits.



How it would be such a tragedy to cinema if he isn't found, a crime against all that's good in the world (not to mention her bottom line, of course, which she doesn't but I'm no idiot).



None of it helps. It's all just noise.



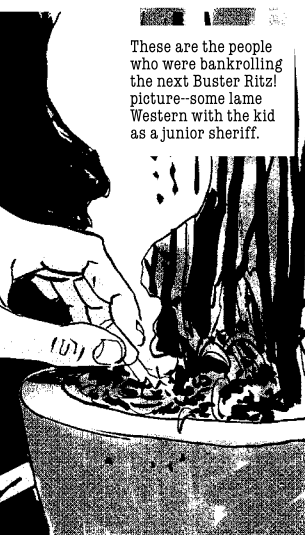
CREEP.

WHAT WAS YOUR NAME AGAIN?



Everyone I meet needs Joey alive. He's the cash cow, the golden goose...

Why the hell would anyone want him gone?

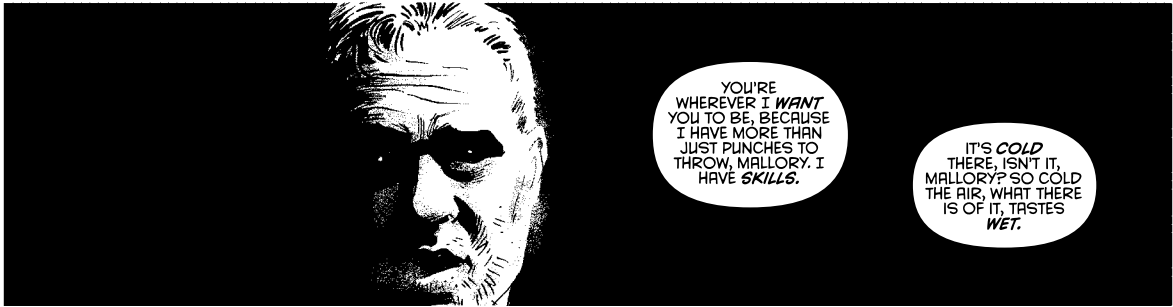






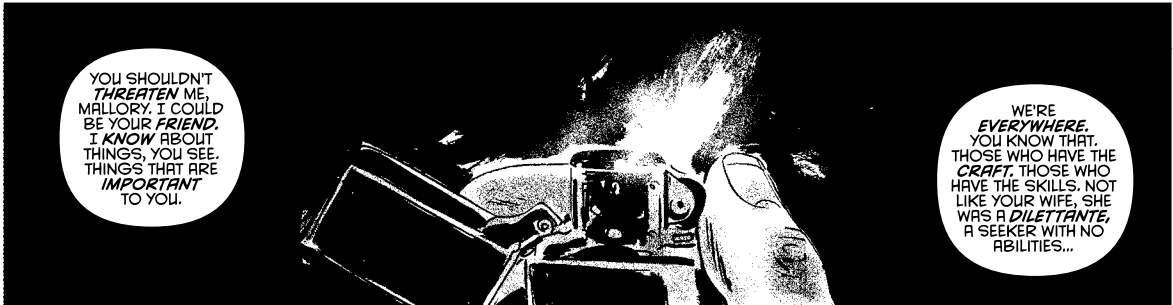


BUT
WHERE ARE
YOU? CAN
YOU SEE?



YOU'RE
WHEREVER I *WANT*
YOU TO BE, BECAUSE
I HAVE MORE THAN
JUST PUNCHES TO
THROW, MALLORY. I
HAVE *SKILLS*.

IT'S *COLD*
THERE, ISN'T IT,
MALLORY? SO COLD
THE AIR, WHAT THERE
IS OF IT, TASTES
WET.



YOU SHOULDN'T
THREATEN ME,
MALLORY. I COULD
BE YOUR *FRIEND*.
I *KNOW* ABOUT
THINGS, YOU SEE,
THINGS THAT ARE
IMPORTANT
TO YOU.

WE'RE
EVERYWHERE.
YOU KNOW THAT.
THOSE WHO HAVE THE
CRAFT, THOSE WHO
HAVE THE *SKILLS*. NOT
LIKE YOUR WIFE, SHE
WAS A *DILETTANTE*,
A SEEKER WITH NO
ABILITIES...



SHE
COULD OPEN
THE DOOR.
OH YES.

BUT SHE
HAD NO IDEA
WHAT MIGHT BE
ON THE *OTHER*
SIDE OF IT. DO
YOU?



CAN YOU
REMEMBER
HOW IT FELT
TO BE IN ITS
PRESENCE?

BALLS
TIGHTENING.
BREATH SHORT.
THE SMELL OF
SOMETHING
DEAD. DEAD
FOR FAR TOO
LONG...

YOU CAN *FEEL*
IT AS WELL AS SEE
IT, CAN'T YOU? IT HAS
GRAVITY. IT'S SO HEAVY.
INTRUDING INTO OUR
WORLD, BENDING OUR
REALITY JUST BY
BEING THERE.

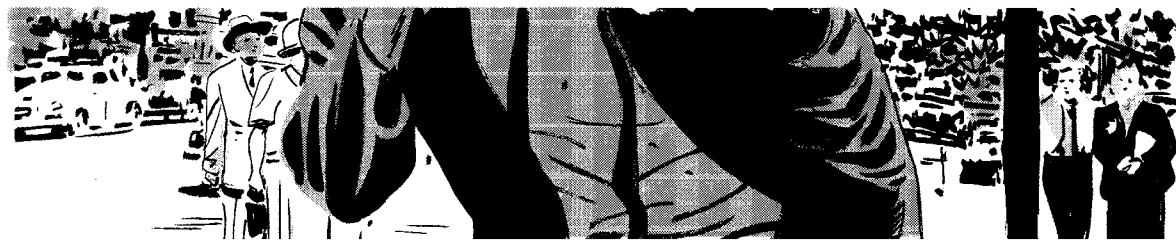


AND IT *TOOK*
THEM, DIDN'T IT?
TOOK THEM FOR
ITS OWN PLEASURE.
YOU'D LOVE TO
FIND THEM AGAIN,
WOULDN'T YOU?

BUT I WONDER...
HOW MUCH OF
THEM IS *LEFT* TO BE
FOUND? I WONDER
HOW LOST THEY
REALLY ARE.



AS LOST
AS *YOU*



And here she is...



I should tell you
about the bitch.
I should tell you
about Cade.

I've avoided it up until now
because...well, just because.
I ain't proud of having her
hang around, a sulphurous
abatross in a wimple, a
dead weight, a reminder.

Magic is like sex: if
you do it often enough,
do it in the wrong
place and at the wrong
time, you might just
catch something.

It was after what
happened in New
York. Just after what
happened to my kid.
After they took him
away from me.

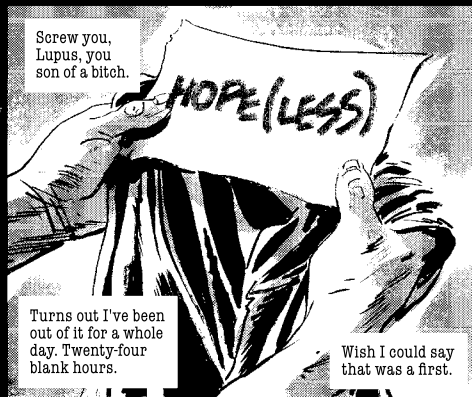
I was desperate, I didn't know
the risks, wouldn't have cared
if I had. I tried everything,
diving down into those black,
magical waters, hoping to find
him. I'd have given anything,
PROMISED anything, just to
have my son back in my arms.

In a way I was lucky. Things swim in
those waters, dark, dangerous things.
I found Cade—or maybe, I guess, she
found me—but it could have been worse.
I could have found something that
would have eaten me whole. They're
down there, believe me. They're down
there and they're hungry.

But I got her. A leech, a parasite.
She won't kill me, though I know
at times she'd like to. She just
watches, attached to whatever
passes for my soul, feeding on
the misery she finds.

At least I'm
never lonely.

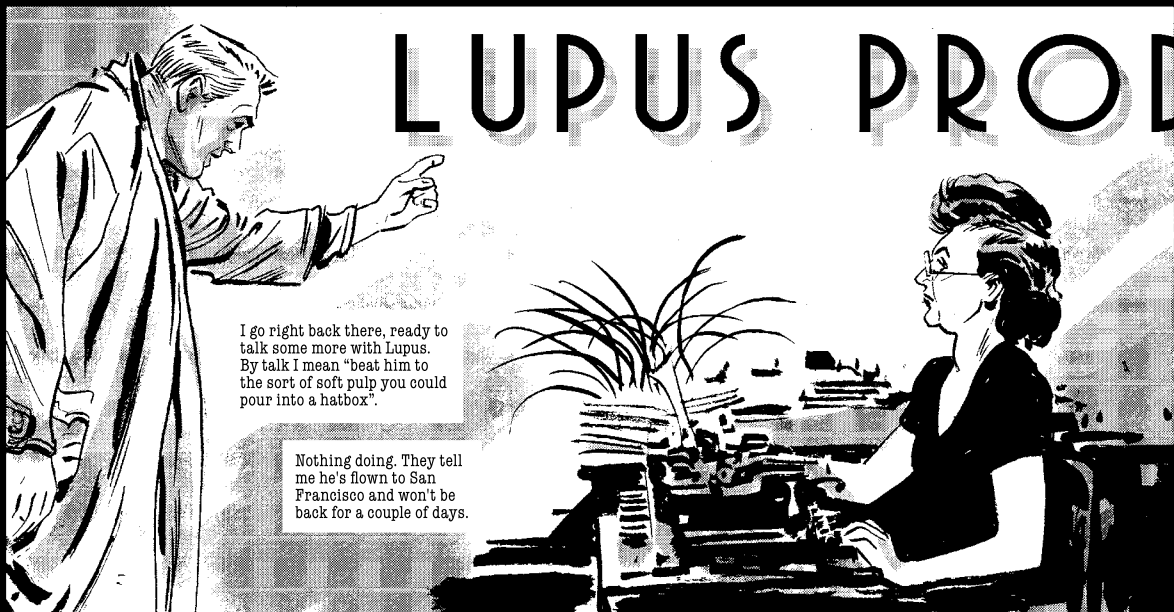




Screw you, Lupus, you son of a bitch.

Turns out I've been out of it for a whole day. Twenty-four blank hours.

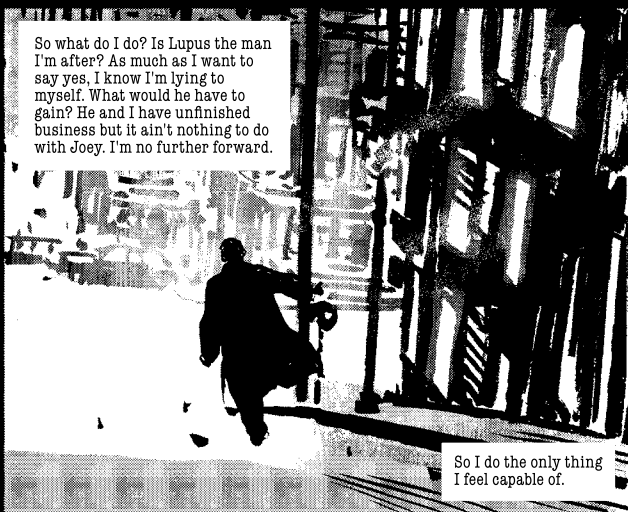
Wish I could say that was a first.



LUPUS PROD

I go right back there, ready to talk some more with Lupus. By talk I mean "beat him to the sort of soft pulp you could pour into a hatbox".

Nothing doing. They tell me he's flown to San Francisco and won't be back for a couple of days.



So what do I do? Is Lupus the man I'm after? As much as I want to say yes, I know I'm lying to myself. What would he have to gain? He and I have unfinished business but it ain't nothing to do with Joey. I'm no further forward.

So I do the only thing I feel capable of.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

Eileen Fabrizzi.
The client.
Joey's Mom.

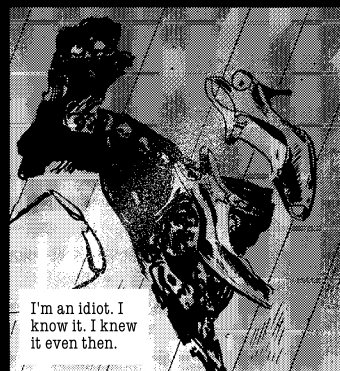
SAME
THING AS
YOU, I'D
GUESS.

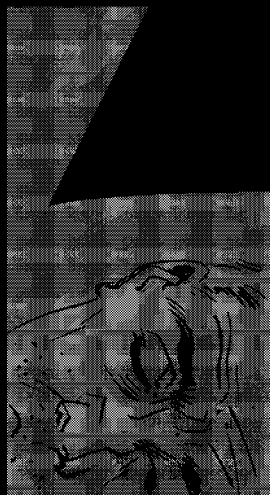
MAYBE.

YOU
LOOK LIKE
SHIT.

YOU
DON'T.

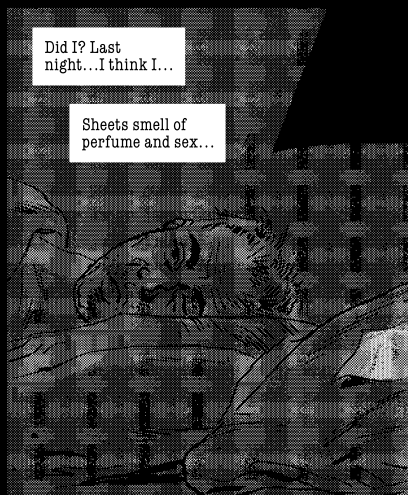
SO
BUY ME A
DRINK.



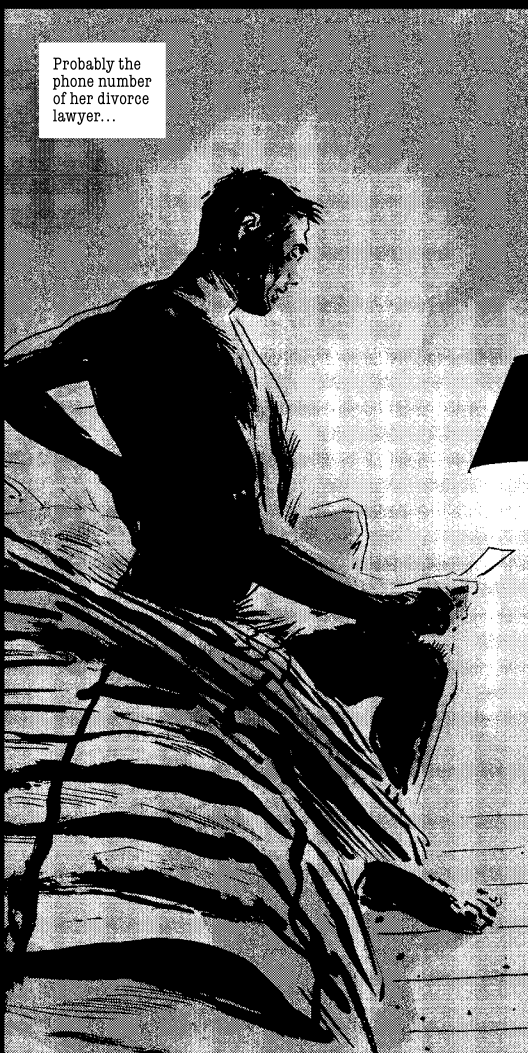


Did I? Last night... I think I...

Sheets smell of perfume and sex...



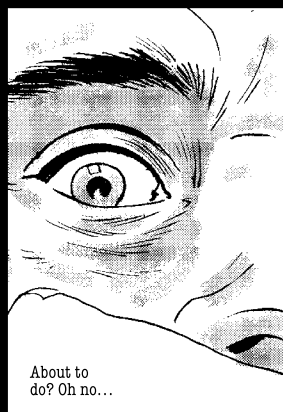
Hope? You're the worst.



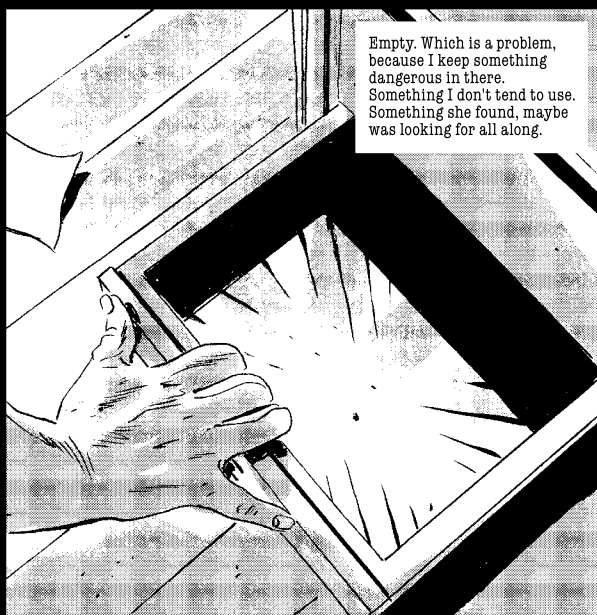
Probably the phone number of her divorce lawyer...



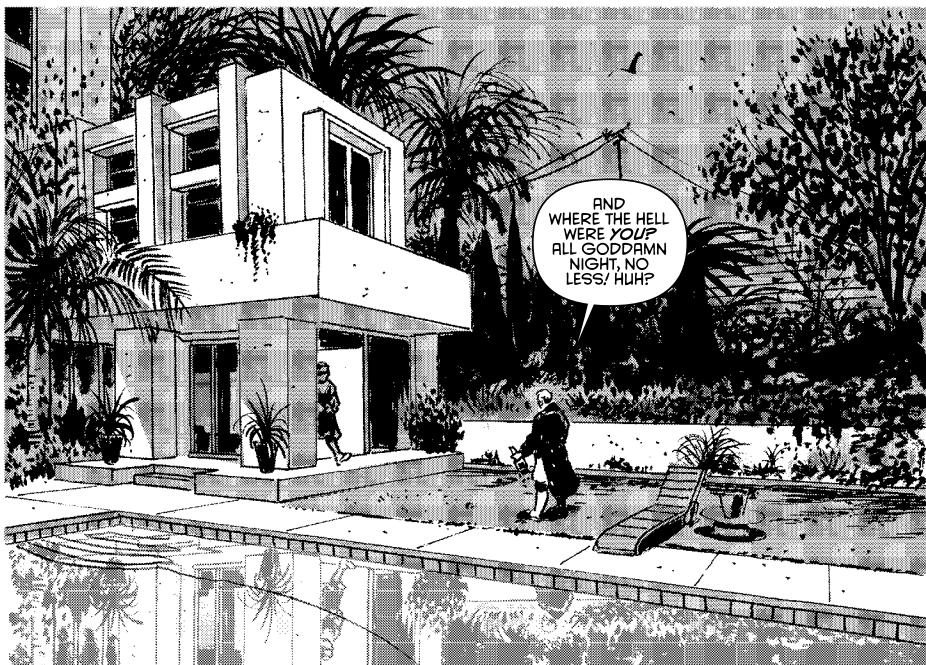
Please find my son, and forgive me for what I'm about to do.



About to do? Oh no...



Empty. Which is a problem, because I keep something dangerous in there. Something I don't tend to use. Something she found, maybe was looking for all along.



WELL? DUMB BITCH! DO I HAVE TO SLAP AN *ANSWER* OUT OF YOU?

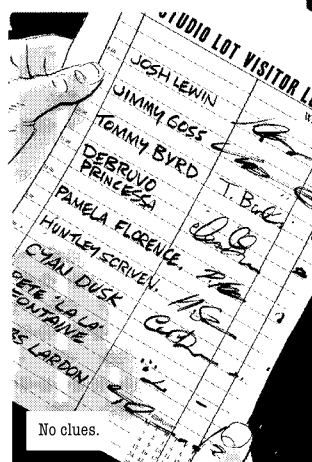
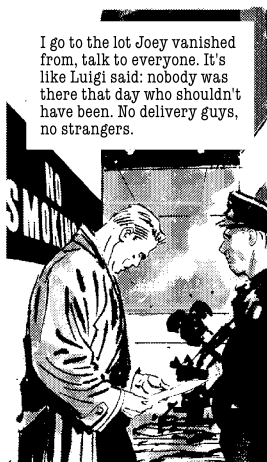
YOU'LL BE FULL OF ANSWERS BY THE TIME I FINISH WITH YOU!

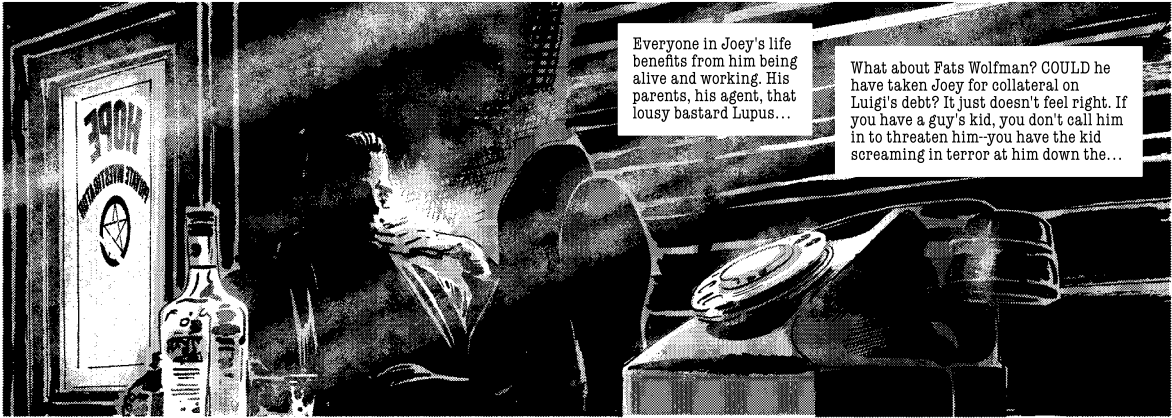
YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO LEAVE THE HOUSE FOR A GODDAMN *WEEK*, BITCH!

I'M GOING TO BEAT YOU INTO A GODDAMN *COMA*!

NO. NO, YOU'RE NOT.

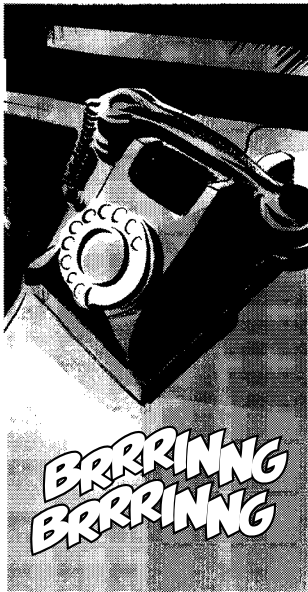




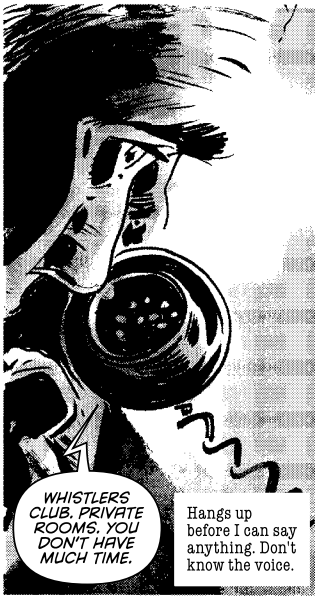


Everyone in Joey's life benefits from him being alive and working. His parents, his agent, that lousy bastard Lupus...

What about Fats Wolfman? COULD he have taken Joey for collateral on Luigi's debt? It just doesn't feel right. If you have a guy's kid, you don't call him in to threaten him—you have the kid screaming in terror at him down the...

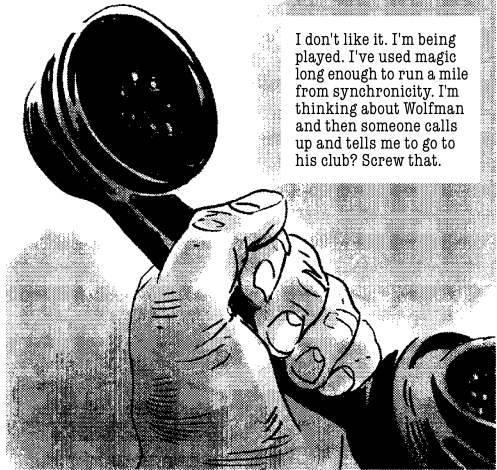


**BRRRING
BRRRING**

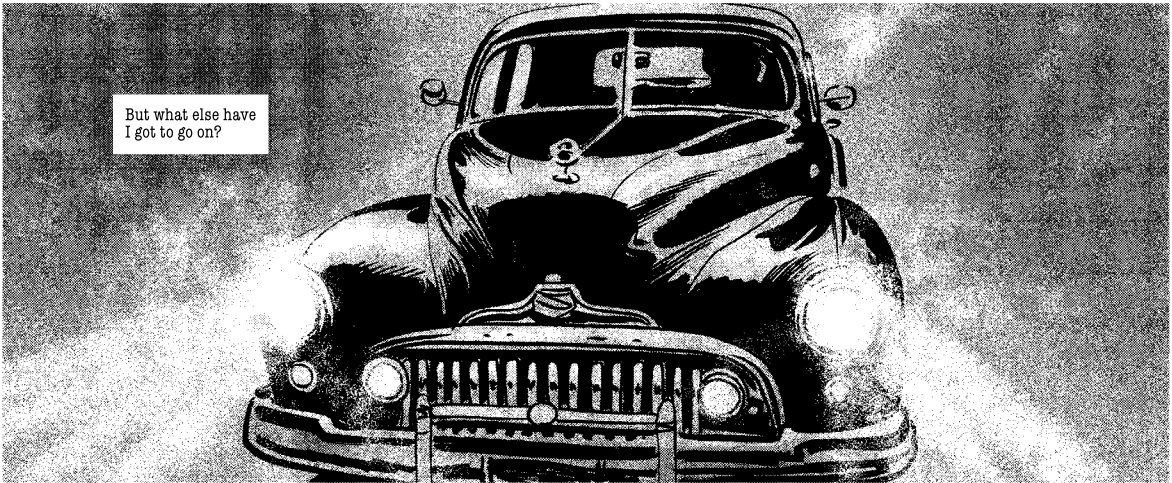


WHISTLERS CLUB, PRIVATE ROOMS. YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

Hangs up before I can say anything. Don't know the voice.

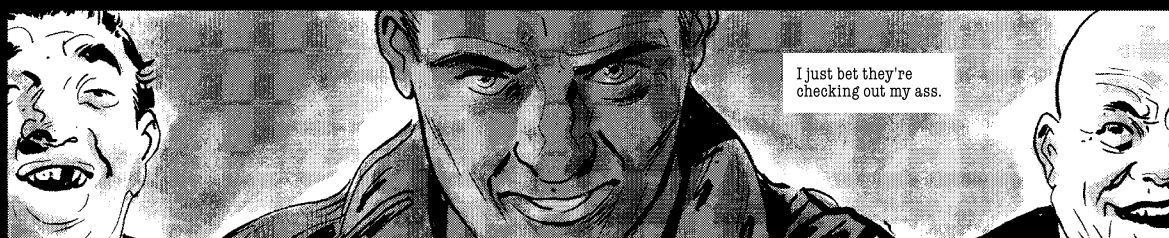
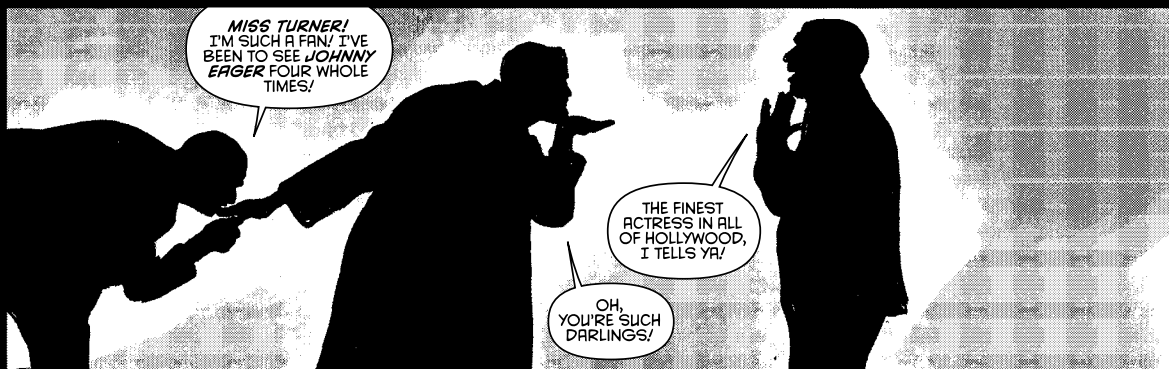


I don't like it. I'm being played. I've used magic long enough to run a mile from synchronicity. I'm thinking about Wolfman and then someone calls up and tells me to go to his club? Screw that.



But what else have I got to go on?

Stan and Ollie are still working, I see. That's OK, I can work around that.



And here she is. The albatross around my neck. There's blood here-she can smell it.





Always look
for the doors.

Doors are the lifeblood of a
private investigator's work.
You're always peering
behind them or running
away through them.

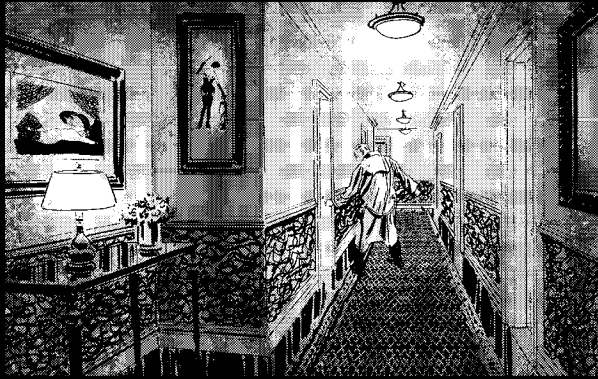


Locked. Good sign.
Decent secrets are rarely
found on the other side of
a door if it's easy to open.

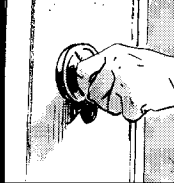
KLUNK



The air is charged.
The smell of money,
sex and death. This
is the REAL club.



So what next? Is Joey here? Even as I think that, I know the answer. Deep down, I KNOW it doesn't fit.



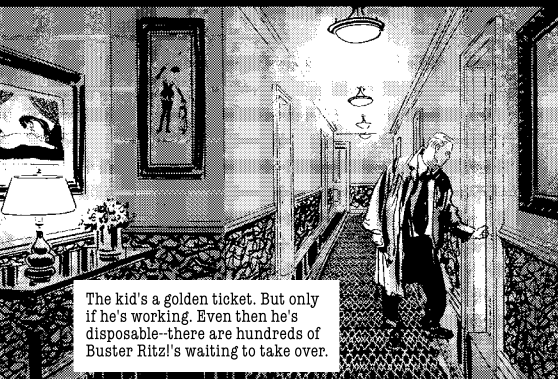
Naughty boy.

Because I'm missing something. I know it. I'm looking for whoever profits from Joey's disappearance and the answer, really, is nobody.



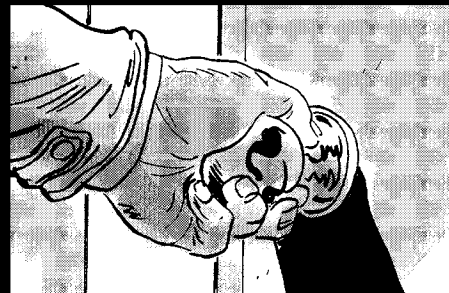
DADDY NEEDS SPANKS!

Daddy needs to take a long hard look at himself.



The kid's a golden ticket. But only if he's working. Even then he's disposable—there are hundreds of Buster Ritz's waiting to take over.

So what's the motive? That's what I'm missing. And somewhere, right in the back of my head, cogs begin to turn.



But right now I have more urgent things to think about.

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?

Run or double down?

Double down. Always.

YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE, "FATS". WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT BUSTER RITZ?!

THE CHILD? HE'S NOT HERE, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN.

IN FACT, I HAVE IT ON RELIABLE AUTHORITY HE'S NOT *ANYWHERE*, IN A WAY THAT WOULD BE OF USE TO HIS FANS, AT LEAST.

THE HEALTHY ONES, THAT IS. I HAVE SOME CLIENTS THAT WOULD NO DOUBT STILL ENJOY HIM.

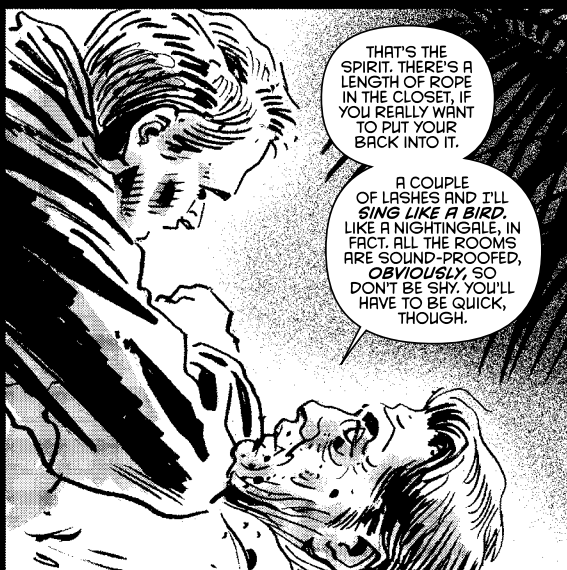
SOME DO LIKE THEIR CONQUESTS A LITTLE... CHILLY.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

SO MANY THINGS. I HEAR ALL THE SECRETS, ALL THE PILLOW TALK, ALL THE CONFESSIONS. THE GREAT AND GOOD OF THIS TOWN SPILL *EVERYTHING* HERE.

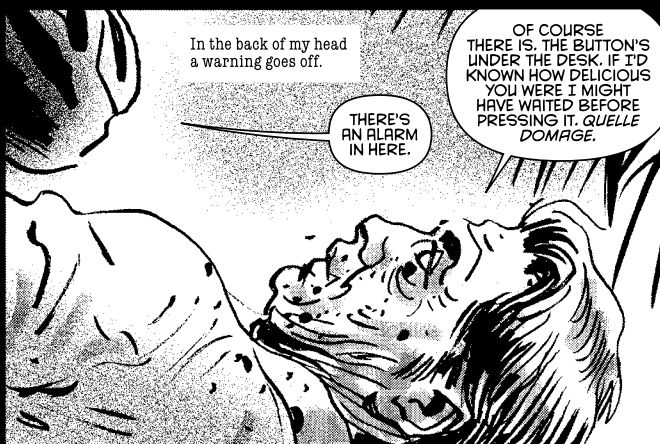


LOVELY. YES. VERY NICE. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ON MY DULL NIGHTS? GIVE ME ANOTHER AND I JUST MAY TELL YOU SOMETHING INTERESTING.



THAT'S THE SPIRIT. THERE'S A LENGTH OF ROPE IN THE CLOSET, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO PUT YOUR BACK INTO IT.

A COUPLE OF LASHES AND I'LL SING LIKE A BIRD. LIKE A NIGHTINGALE, IN FACT. ALL THE ROOMS ARE SOUND-PROOFED, OBVIOUSLY, SO DON'T BE SLY, YOU'LL HAVE TO BE QUICK, THOUGH.



In the back of my head a warning goes off.

THERE'S AN ALARM IN HERE.

OF COURSE THERE IS. THE BUTTON'S UNDER THE DESK. IF I'D KNOWN HOW DELICIOUS YOU WERE I MIGHT HAVE WAITED BEFORE PRESSING IT. *QUELLE DOMAGE.*



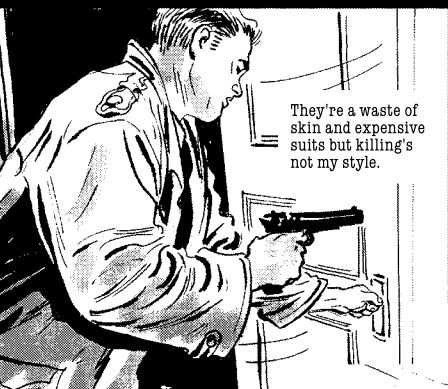
"Sing like a bird"... Why is that phrase stuck in my head?

PLEASE DON'T RUN.

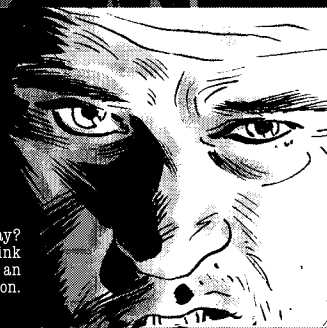
YOU'RE TOO FUN FOR A BULLET IN THE BACK.



Blocking the exit.
Am I going to
have to shoot my
way out of here?



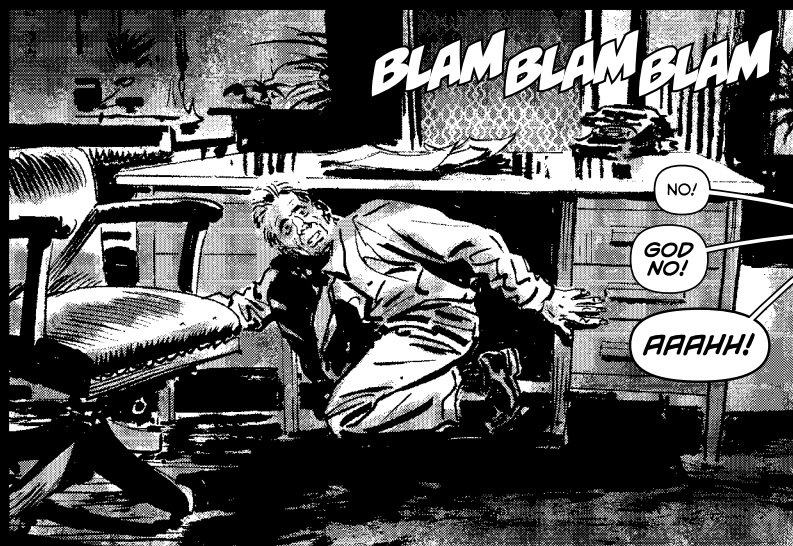
They're a waste of
skin and expensive
suits but killing's
not my style.



But today?
Today I think
I'll make an
exception.









Head buzzing. Heart beating. Terrifying how easily this comes. I could kill them all right now. Every last one of them. Just for being here. Just for being part of this.

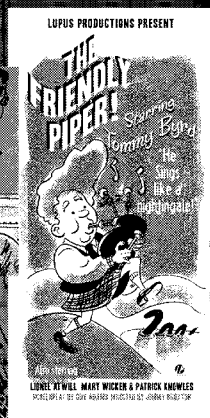


But I settle for threats. I've called the cops and they're on their way. This place is closed for good.

But even as I'm doing this, that quiet place at the back of my head is working. "Sing like a bird." That's what Fats said. And with that phrase, images are flashing into my head.



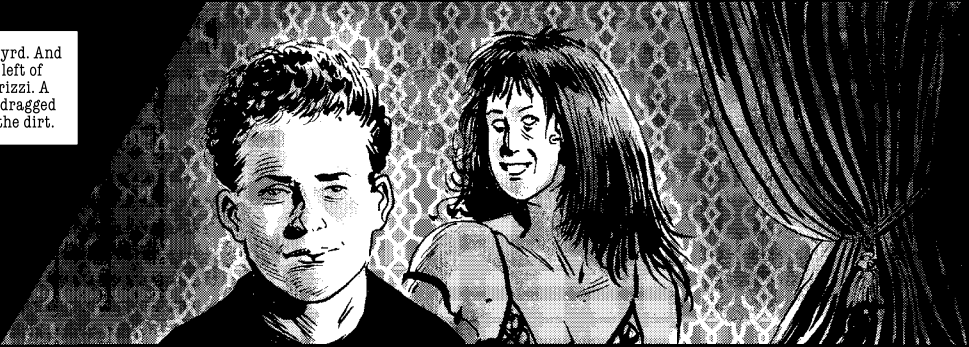
Because, somewhere in all of this, I have the beginnings of the answer. I don't KNOW... it's not as solid as that...but I FEEL the truth...taste it. And knowing can't be far away.





And there it is.

Tommy Byrd. And all that's left of Joey Fabrizio. A memory, dragged through the dirt.



A kid loved by millions—but never more than he was by his own mother—reduced to this. A paper mask and a sick fantasy. Forever trapped in two dimensions.



WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU LOOKING AT?



A MURDERER.





"YOU HAVE NO IDEA.
I MEAN, *REALLY*,
NO IDEA AT ALL
WHAT IT'S LIKE.

"ONE MINUTE YOU'RE
NOTHING. JUST A *KID*.
INVISIBLE. NOBODY
LOOKS AT YOU,
NOBODY CARES. LIFE IS
ALL ABOUT WHAT YOU
CAN'T DO. ALL ABOUT
WHAT'S NOT ALLOWED.

"*RULES*. EVERYWHERE THERE
ARE RULES. YOU WANT
SOMETHING, YOU HAVE TO
ASK, AND EVEN THEN IT
DOESN'T GET YOU ANYWHERE.
AN EXTRA COUPLE OF BUCKS
FOR A COMIC? NOT THIS WEEK,
KID. A TRIP TO THE RIALTO FOR
THE LATE-NIGHT SCREENING
OF A *FRANKENSTEIN*
PICTURE? NOT ON A SCHOOL
NIGHT, SON. THAT GIRL IN THE
SCHOOLYARD YOU LIKE? SHE
WON'T EVEN LOOK AT YOU
BECAUSE SHE'S GOT THREE
YEARS ON YOU AND YOU'RE
NOTHING. NOBODY. A KID.

"THEN THE MOVIES CHANGE
EVERYTHING. I MEAN,
ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING.
SUDDENLY YOU'RE *REAL*.
EVERYBODY WANTS TO KNOW
YOU. EVERYBODY WANTS TO
BE WITH YOU. ALL YOU HAVE TO
DO IS ASK AND IT'S YOURS.
ANYTHING. ANYTHING AT ALL.
RIGHT THERE, ON A PLATE. AND
IT'S AMAZING. IT'S JUST THE
VERY BEST THING.

"BUT IT DON'T *LAST*.
THAT'S WHAT NOBODY
EVER TELLS YOU. IT
NEVER LASTS, BECAUSE
ONE DAY YOU'RE GOING
TO BE NOTHING AGAIN.
NOBODY. JUST A KID.

"BECAUSE SOMEONE
ELSE HAS COME
ALONG AND NOW
THEY'RE ALL LOOKING
AT *HIM*, ALL LOVING
HIM, AND YOU'VE
VANISHED. GONE.
INVISIBLE. NOBODY.





"AND WHO IS THIS KID, HUH? THIS NEW YOUNG WHAT MAKES HIM SO SPECIAL? WHAT MAKES HIM BETTER THAN YOU? NOTHING. THAT'S WHAT. NOTHING."

"I MEAN...YOU KNOW...IF THE KID ACTUALLY HAD *TALENT*, MAYBE IT WOULDN'T PISS YOU OFF SO MUCH. SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST. I'M NOT STUPID, I GET THAT. SOMEONE COMES ALONG AND THEY'RE BETTER THAN YOU--AND I'M NOT TALKING ACTING HERE, NOBODY GIVES A SHIT ABOUT ACTING, THIS IS THE MOVIES--BUT THEY'RE BETTER-LOOKING, THE CAMERA LOVES THEM MORE? OK, THAT'S LIFE."

"BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS IS. ALL HE'S GOT, ALL HE'S *REALLY* GOT, IS THAT HE'S *NEW*."

"OK, SO MAYBE I'M GETTING KINDA OLD FOR THOSE PICTURES NOW, MY VOICE CHANGING, BUT I LOOK REAL YOUNG FOR MY AGE, I CAN HOLD ON A LITTLE LONGER. IT'S NOT THAT. NOBODY CARES ABOUT THAT. I'M STILL CUTE. CUTE SELLS."

"NO. IT'S JUST THAT THEY'RE *BORED*. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? BORED. THEY WANT THE NEW KID. THE NEW FACE. THE JOBS THAT WERE YOURS, *AUTOMATICALLY* YOURS, NOW *HE* GETS THEM."

"AND WHO IS HE? JUST SOME BIT-PLAYER FROM ONE OF MY MOVIES. THAT'S THE THING THAT REALLY STINKS. I *MADE* HIM. THE AUDIENCES CAME TO SEE ME. *ME*. HE WAS NOTHING IN THAT PICTURE, HE WAS BACKGROUND, HE WAS WALLPAPER. THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN HE'S STOLEN MY LIFE."

"I COULDN'T TAKE THAT. OF COURSE I COULDN'T."





"AND YOU KNOW WHAT IT TOOK? NOTHING. THE DUMB KID IS JUST SAT THERE SO I TELL HIM HE'S DONE FOR THE DAY. LET'S HOOK UP, YOU KNOW? HAVE SOME FUN."

"AND THIS IS THE FUNNY THING--I MEAN, *REALLY* FUNNY--YOU KNOW THE ONE PERSON WHO STILL GIVES ME THAT LOOK? THAT DOE-EYED. SURE, KID, I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU SAY' LOOK? IT'S HIM."



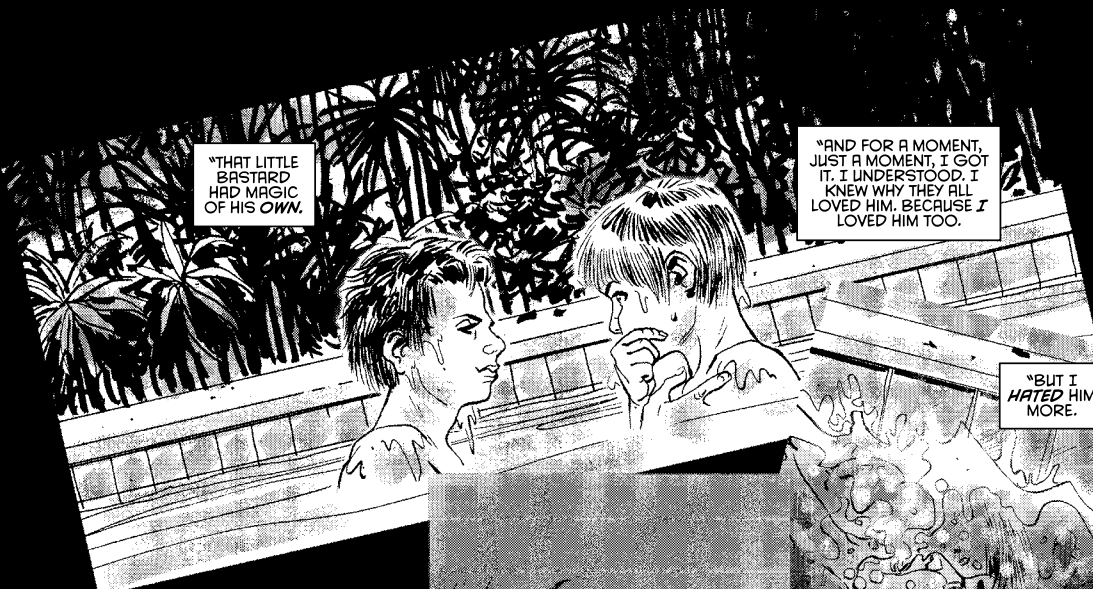
"I TELL HIM ABOUT *LUGOSI'S* PLACE, JUST UP FROM THE STUDIO. EMPTY NOW, 'COS THAT BOHUNK HACK IS LATE ON HIS PAYMENTS, SHOOTING SOME DUMB MOVIE IN LONDON. I TELL HIM HOW GREAT THE POOL IS. THAT WE CAN HAVE A PARTY IN *DRACULA'S HOUSE*, YOU KNOW?"



"AND HE NEVER ARGUES. I CAN SEE HE'S SCARED, WORRIED ABOUT THE TROUBLE HE MIGHT GET IN, BUT AT THE SAME TIME HE CAN'T SAY NO. MY *MAGIC*, YOU SEE? GOOD FOR ONE LAST PERFORMANCE."

"BUT YOU KNOW THE WEIRD THING? THE THING THAT REALLY SUCKED?"





"THAT LITTLE
BASTARD
HAD MAGIC
OF HIS OWN."

"AND FOR A MOMENT,
JUST A MOMENT, I GOT
IT. I UNDERSTOOD. I
KNEW WHY THEY ALL
LOVED HIM. BECAUSE I
LOVED HIM TOO."



"BUT I
HATED HIM
MORE."



"I'D PREPARED.
OF COURSE I
HAD. I'M A
PROFESSIONAL."



"A REAL
PROFESSIONAL.
WILLING TO WORK
HARD AND PLAN
AHEAD. I SHOULD
HAVE BEEN A
PLAYER IN THIS
TOWN..."

"LIFE
SUCKS."



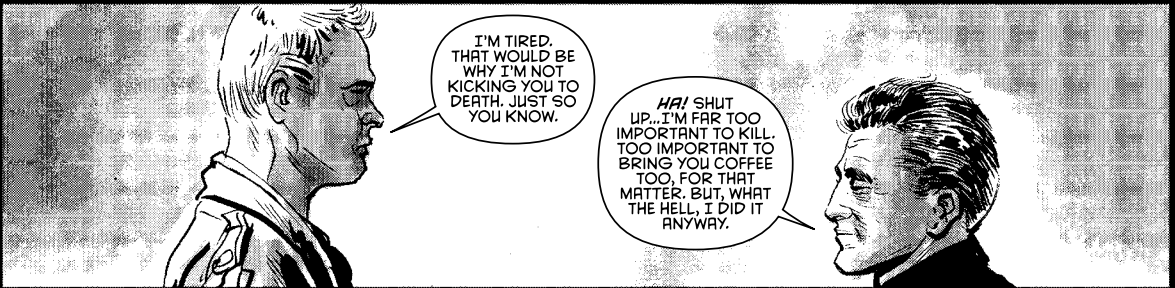
I leave Byrd to the cops.
Five more minutes in
that room with him
and I'd probably have
killed him.

Boo hoo...my life
didn't work out
the way I wanted.
Guess what, kid?
It never does.



MALLORY!
BUSY NIGHT,
HUH?

Lupus. Because that, and
a vicious couple of tugs on
my balls, is exactly what I
need right now.



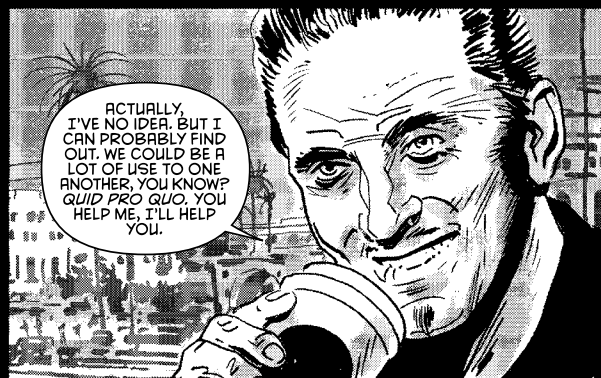
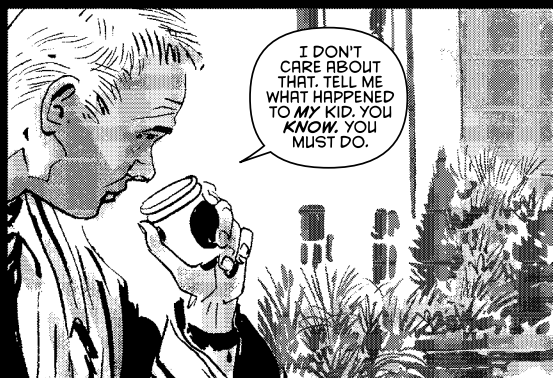
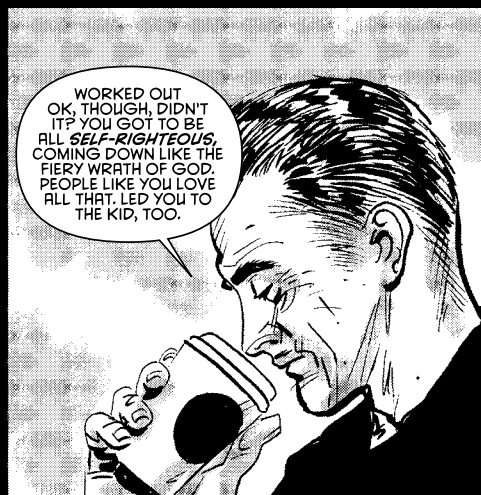
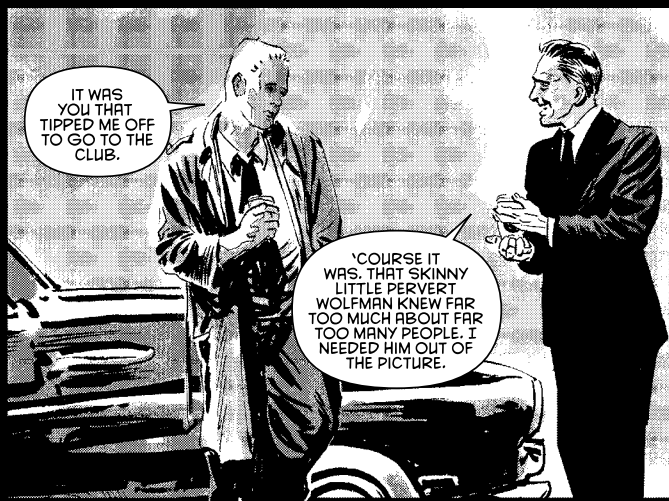
I'M TIRED.
THAT WOULD BE
WHY I'M NOT
KICKING YOU TO
DEATH. JUST SO
YOU KNOW.

HAI SHUT
UP..I'M FAR TOO
IMPORTANT TO KILL.
TOO IMPORTANT TO
BRING YOU COFFEE
TOO, FOR THAT
MATTER. BUT, WHAT
THE HELL, I DID IT
ANYWAY.



JUST SO
WE'RE CLEAR,
IT COMES WITH
NO STRINGS
ATTACHED.

I TELL YOU
THAT BECAUSE YOU
KNOW THE SCORE,
AND BECAUSE IT'S
PROBABLY THE ONLY
TIME I'LL GIVE YOU
SOMETHING FOR FREE.
SO TAKE IT, OR I'LL
BE OFFENDED AND
THROW IT IN YOUR
UGLY FACE.





I don't want to be here. Of COURSE I don't want to be here.





I couldn't save
either of them--
Eileen or Joey.



But I could
give her
something.

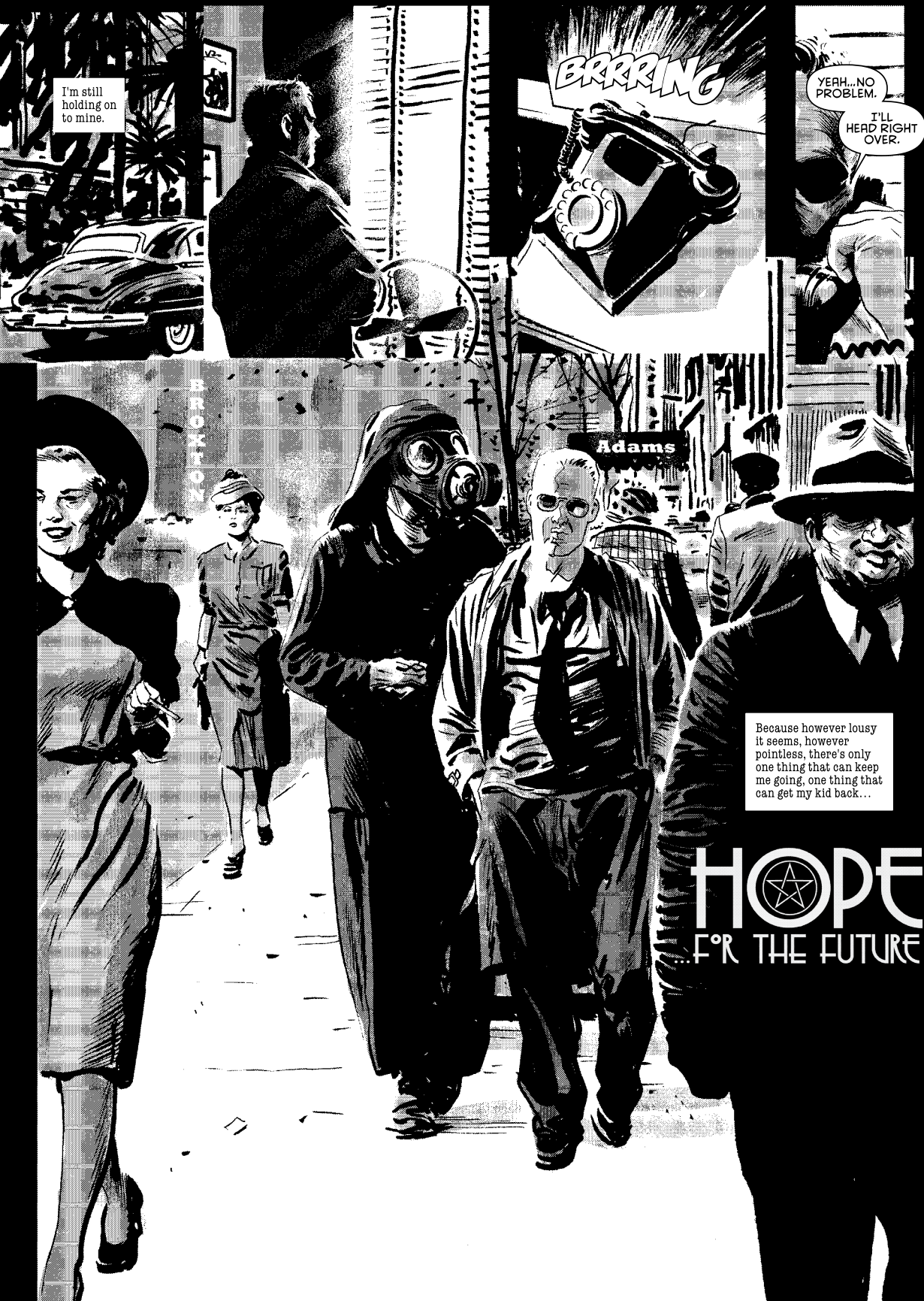


No pain. Just
a memory.

It's not real.
Just a dream.



But sometimes
dreams are all
we have.



I'm still holding on to mine.

BRRRING

YEAH...NO PROBLEM.

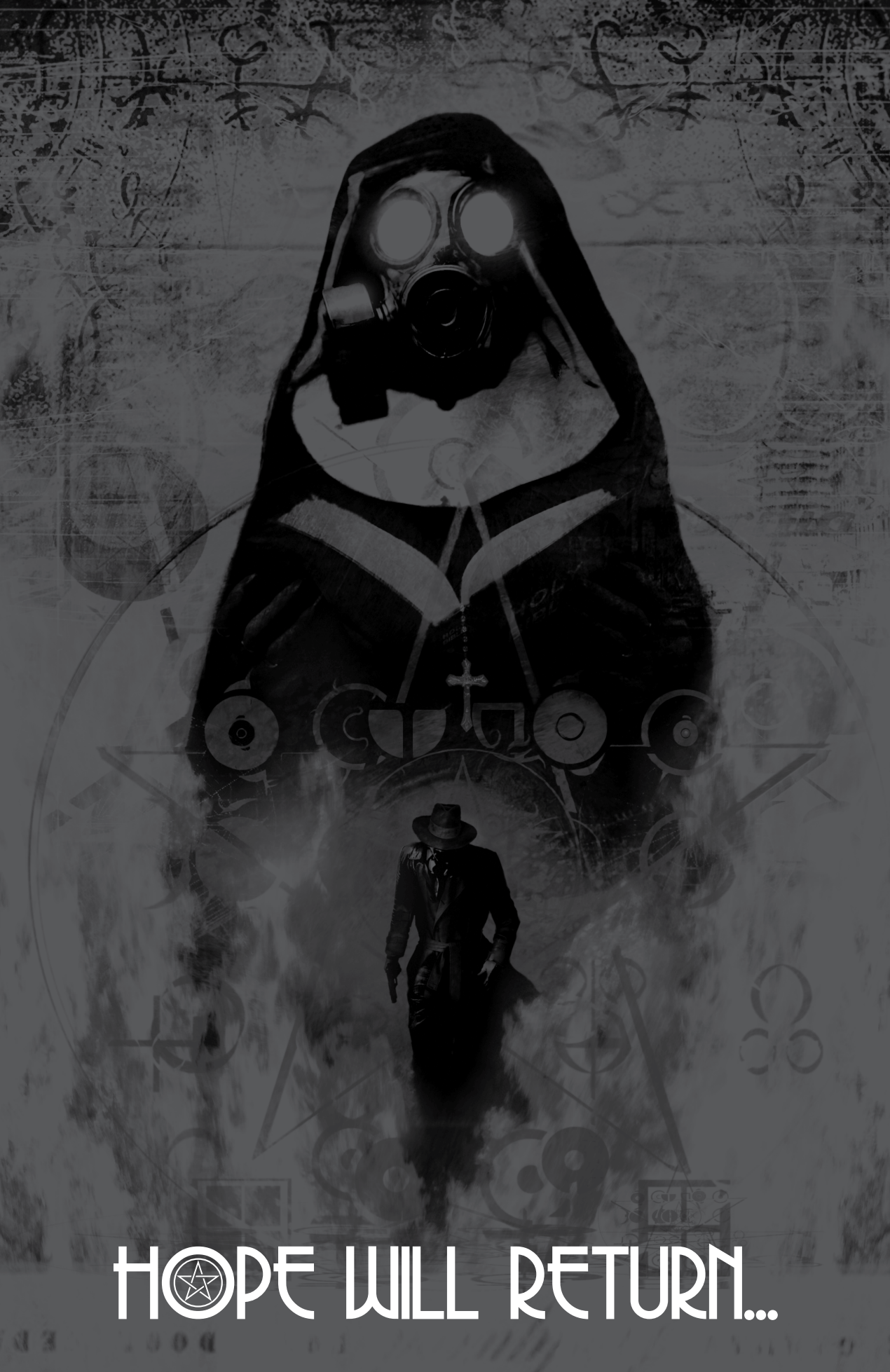
I'LL HEAD RIGHT OVER.

Adams

BROOKLYN

Because however lousy it seems, however pointless, there's only one thing that can keep me going, one thing that can get my kid back...

HOPE
...FOR THE FUTURE



HOPE WILL RETURN...

GUY ADAMS

Guy Adams lives with genius and writer A.K. Benedict in Rochester, Kent. He's the author of the *Heaven's Gate* trilogy of weird westerns, the *Clown Service* books and the *Deadbeat* novels. He's written countless hours of audio drama for Big Finish, from a wide range of *Doctor Who* titles to an adaptation of HG Wells' *The Shape of Things to Come* and the original horror series *Blind Terror: The Gods of Frost*. In comics he writes *Rogue Trooper*, *Ulysses Sweet: Maniac for Hire* and *Max Normal* for **2000 AD**. With his comics husband, Jimmy Broxton, he is the co-creator of *Goldtiger*, the sixties newspaper strip that never existed... until now.

JIMMY BROXTON

When not hard at work desperately trying to make sense of Guy Adams' mind bending scripts for the new series of *Hope*, dabbling in the Dredd-Verse for the **Judge Dredd Magazine**, or willing various creator owned projects into existence by the power of thought alone (including a follow up to *Goldtiger*, are you reading this Adams?) the artist can be found drinking fine Hellenic beers and driving German sports cars, but not necessarily in that order. He lives in Middle England, with too many books, not enough cats and a Mistress.

A HOPE IN HELL!

IN AN ALTERNATE POST-WAR 1940S
LOS ANGELES, where occult forces are
a fact of life, Mallory Hope is a private
detective haunted by his past... and
by the demon he works with.

When a new case involving a missing
boy reminds him of his own lost child,
Hope is determined to find him. But
he soon discovers all is not what it
seems, with dark powers lurking
behind the lights of Hollywood...

A gritty detective tale from Guy
Adams and Jimmy Broxton that
blends classic Hollywood noir with
the occult!



ISBN 978-1-78108-658-2



9 781781 086582

UK £9.99 US \$9.99 CAN \$12.99



www.
2000ad
.com