

GILLEN MCKELVIE WILSON COWLES



THE WICKED + THE DIVINE

BOOK TWO

GILLEN

McKELVIE

WILSON

COWLES

VIDEOGAMES

As Jamie was away for this arc, we wanted to include an extra page by him in each issue to show that he hadn't just run away and left us. So was born a series of short one-page comics, acting as grace notes or introducing other aspects of the world, tied together by the fact they're all recorded. Hence, *Videogames*. To stress, these are all part of the *WicDiv* canon, which is a phrase we can't write without giggling at ourselves.

LONDON.

YES,
I'VE TRIED
TO LIVE MY
LIFE WITHOUT
REGRETS...

...BUT THAT
DOESN'T STOP
YOU REGRETTING
THE RESULTS
OF WHAT
YOU DID.

25.MAY.2014
04:56

THE ONLY
WAY OUT OF
THAT IS NOT
TO CARE. AND
YOU *CAN* DO
THAT.

OH,
YOU CAN DO
THAT. LOOK AT
SAKHMET.

25.MAY.2014
04:56

BUT I'D
RATHER DIE
THAN NOT
CARE.

25.MAY.2014
04:56

MY
REGRETS ARE
THE ONE THING
I *DON'T*
REGRET.

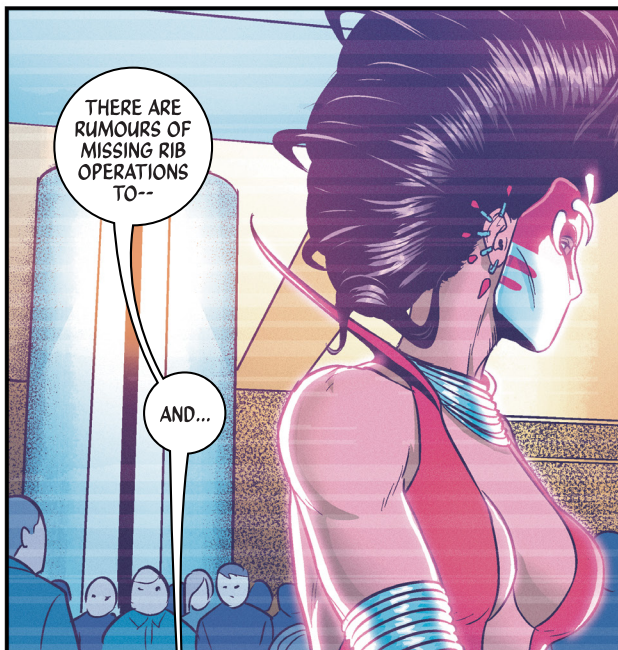
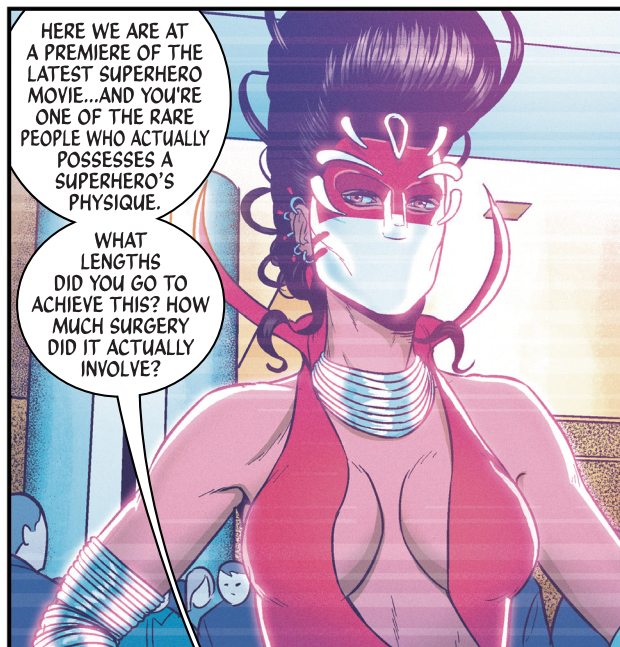
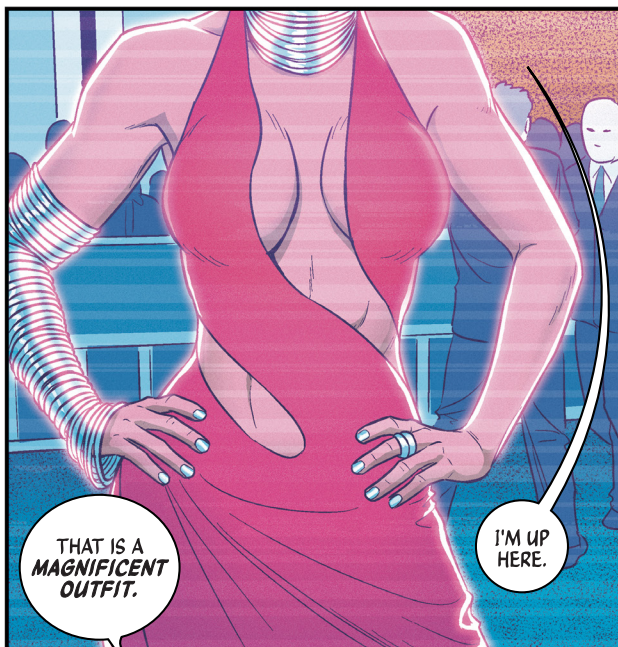
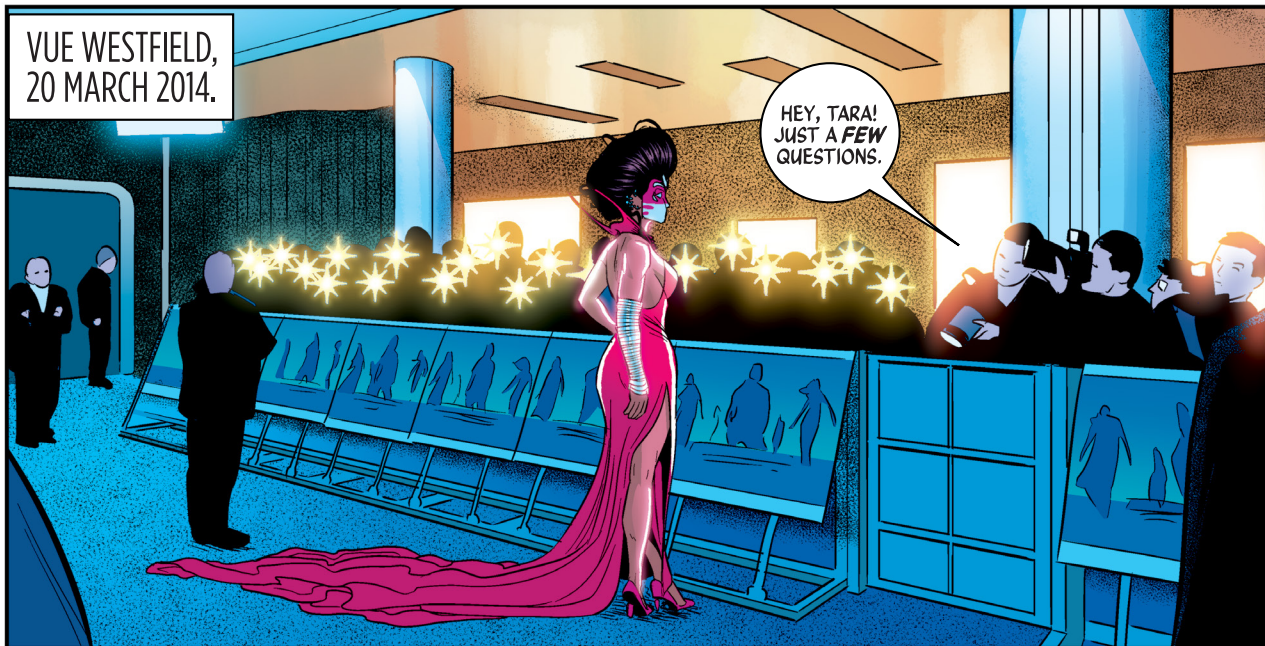
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NEXT
QUESTION,
PLEASE.

VIDEOGAMES #1

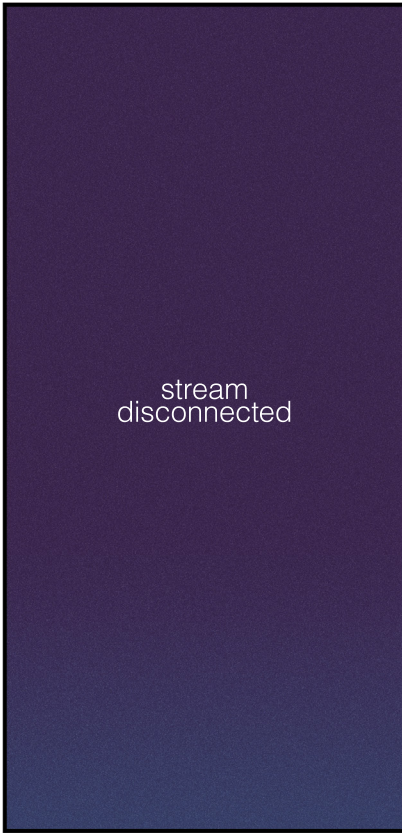
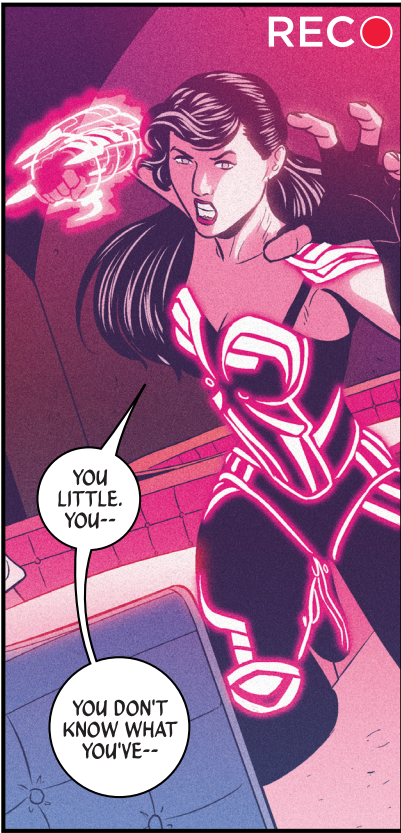
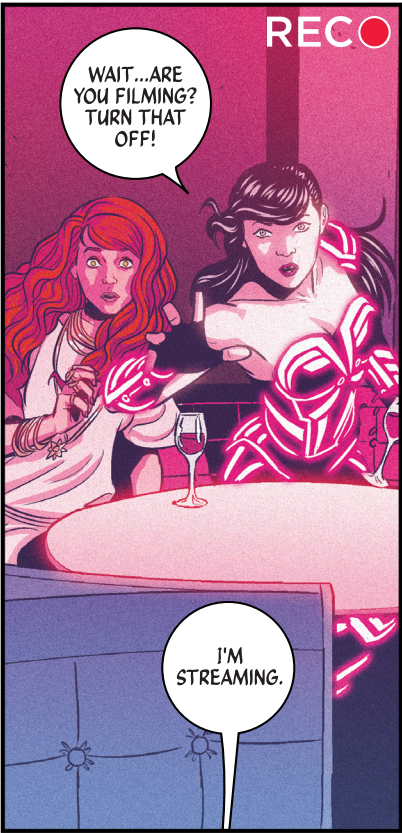
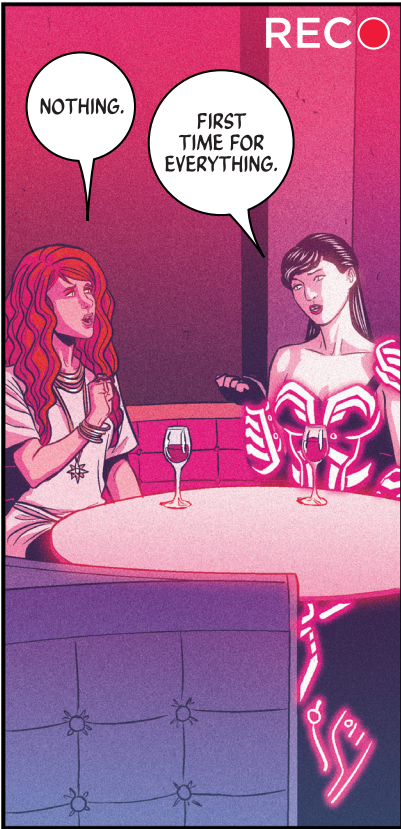
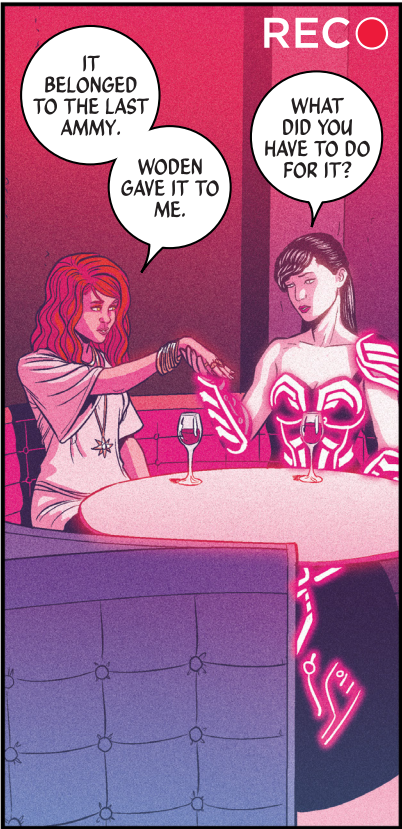
GILLEN MCKELVIE WILSON COWLES

VUE WESTFIELD,
20 MARCH 2014.



VIDEOGAMES #2

GILLEN MCKELVIE WILSON COWLES



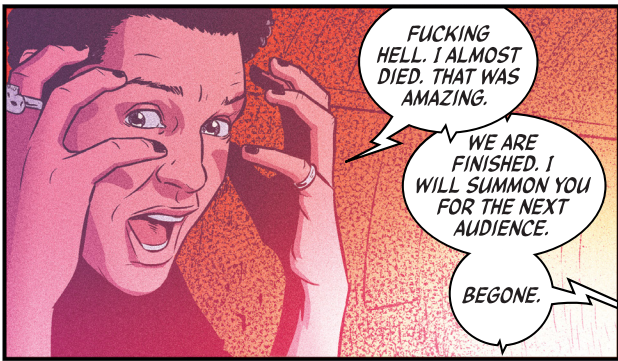
VIDEOGAMES #3

GILLEN MCKELVIE WILSON COWLES



DID YOU GET HER?

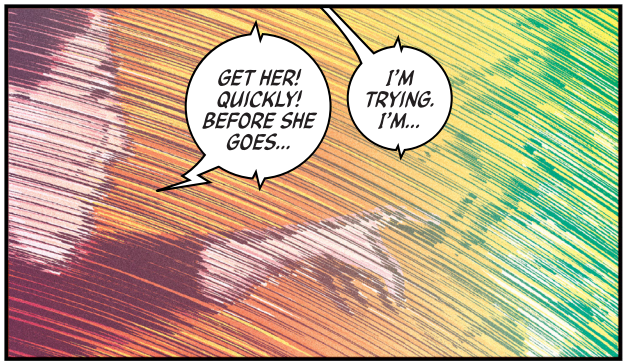
GIVE ME A SEC. JUST ONE MINUTE...



FUCKING HELL. I ALMOST DIED. THAT WAS AMAZING.

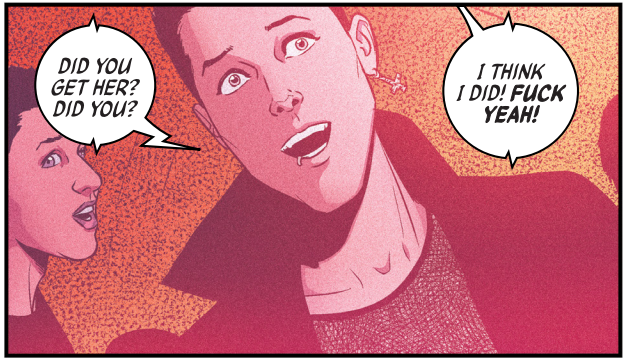
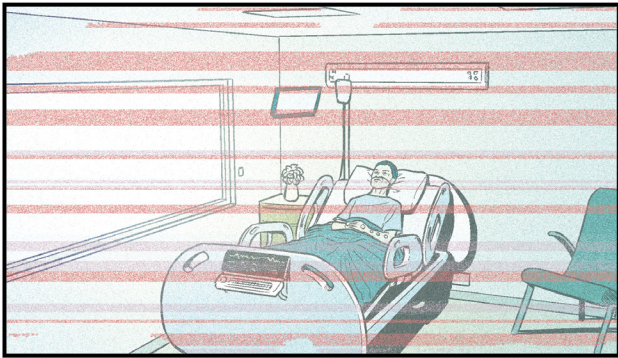
WE ARE FINISHED. I WILL SUMMON YOU FOR THE NEXT AUDIENCE.

BEGONE.



GET HER! QUICKLY! BEFORE SHE GOES...

I'M TRYING. I'M...



DID YOU GET HER? DID YOU?

I THINK I DID! FUCK YEAH!



WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

ALTERNATE COVERS

Look and style are such a huge part of *WicDiv*, and we try to make our alternate covers part of that endeavour. When we realised we'd be doing them for the whole run, we tried to make them be a collection of the definitive comic artists of the period of the book. That's the aim. We think it's going pretty well. We're very proud of getting to showcase this array of living gods.

Kate Brown

Issue 12 cover

Tula Lotay

Issue 13 cover

Grimes

Issue 14 cover

Stephanie Hans

Issue 15 cover

Leila del Duca & Mat Lopes

Issue 16 cover

Brandon Graham

Issue 17 cover

Matthew Wilson,

Jamie McKelvie

Issue 18 ECCC cover

Matthew Wilson,

Jamie McKelvie

Issue 18 cover

Kris Anka

Issue 19 cover

Jenny Frison

Issue 20 cover

David Aja

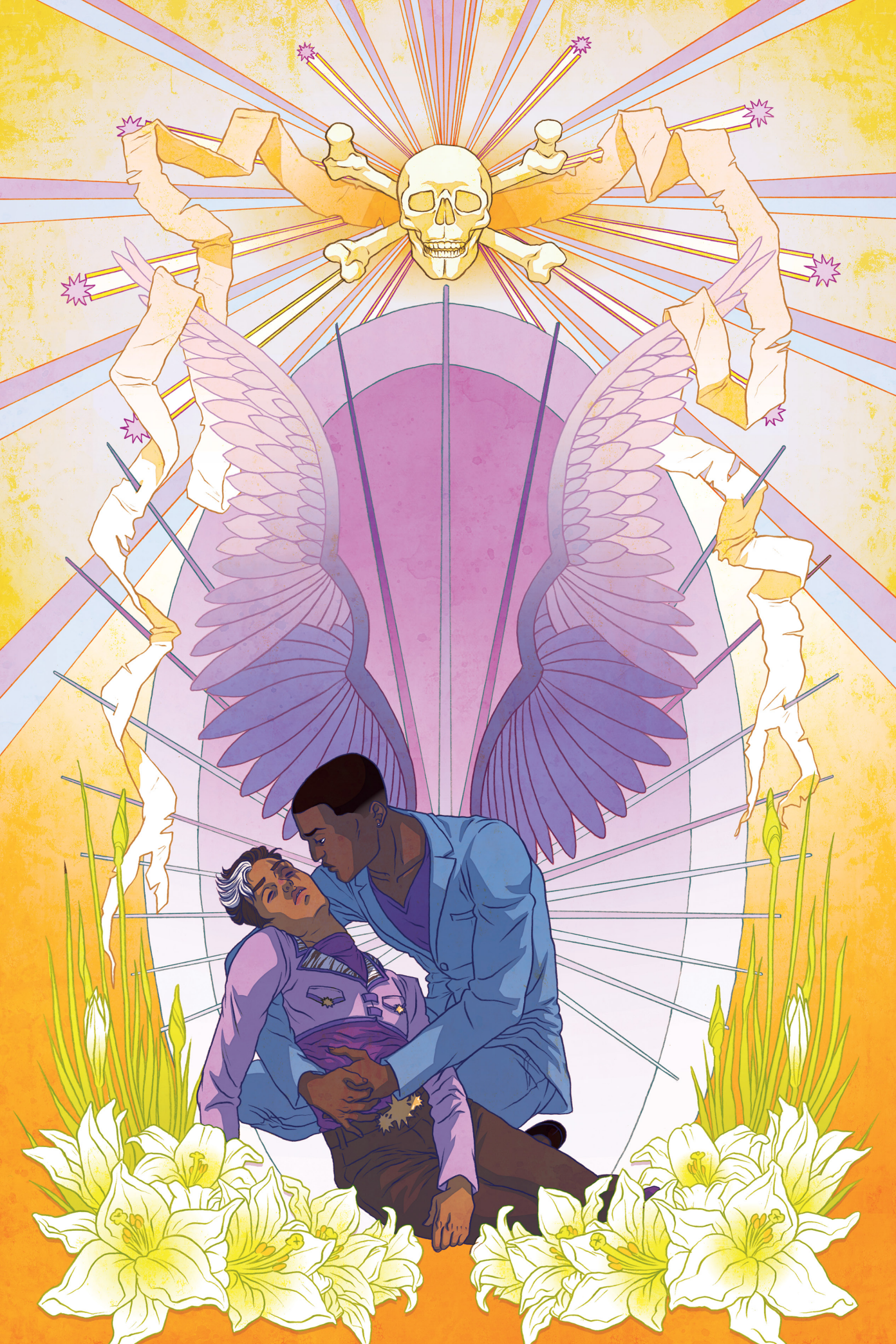
Issue 21 cover

Olly Moss

Issue 22 cover

Jamie McKelvie

Bookplate made for Forbidden Planet

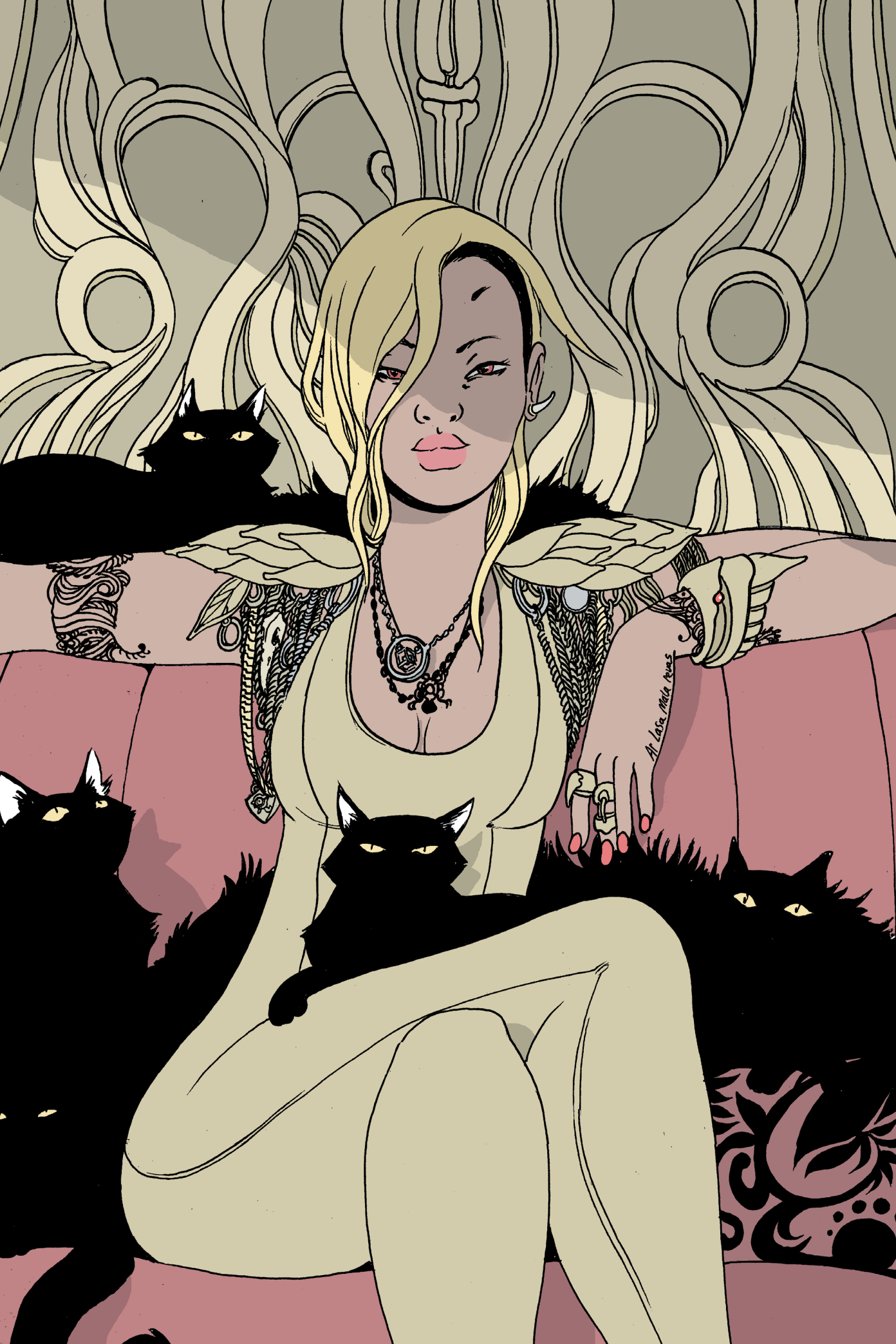




















\$3.50



The **WICKED**

THE **DIVINE** image

GILLEN

McKELVIE

Wilson

COWLES

issue 21

GILLEN McKELVIE WILSON COWLES

THE
WICKED

+

DIVINE

THE





THE
WICKED
+
DIVINE
THE

MAKING OF

As the Writer's Notes will show in the next section, we're quite into revealing a little of the means of production. As Jamie and I came to comics late, we're interested in doing the comics equivalent of showing the audience who the Best Grip is and What The Hell They Do. On the following pages are a selection of processes showing how this thing called *WicDiv* arrives in your hands.

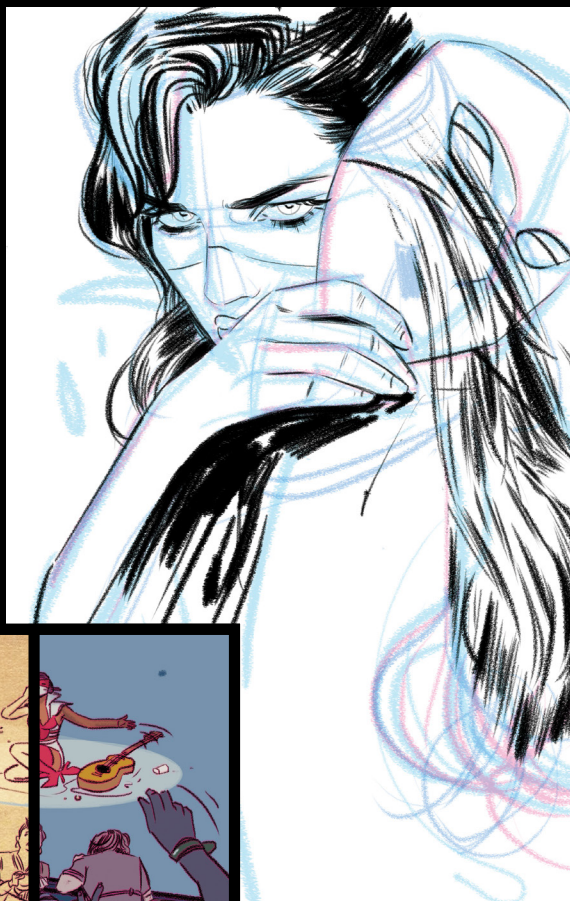


Here are some layouts **Kate Brown** puzzled over for the centre spread of Issue 12, with a comment from Kate herself:

"I decided, stupidly, to try and shoe-horn Inanna in there somewhere by making his star-icon into a layout. This was quite challenging. Initially, I had it reading down the page as opposed to across as it is in the finals, but this wasn't working so well, and we changed it about a bit until we got something that did. As you can see the bottom-right corner doesn't really change — I often work backwards when doing thumbnails and try to solidify the page-turn first."

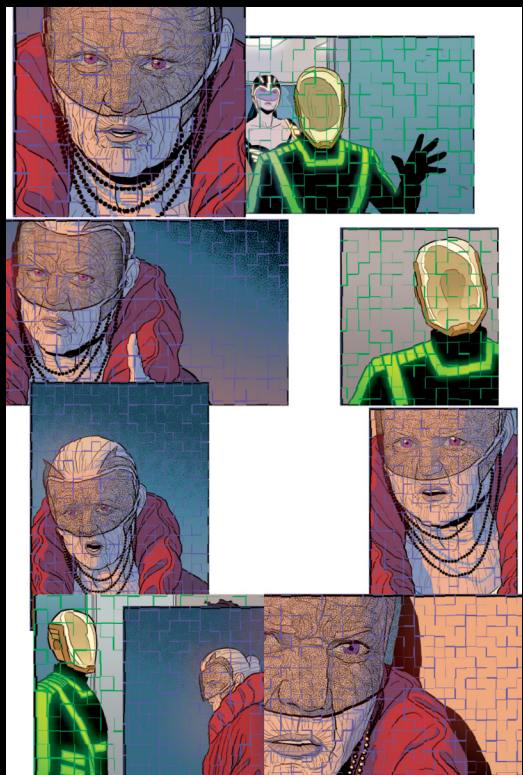


Tula's original concept for the cover was Tara on a throne, but after really picking over the issue, we ended up doing very much an alternate cover. While Jamie's concentrates on Tara's body, objectifying Tara as a comment on the issue, Tula's reverses the gaze on the reader. Er... normally we don't say serious stuff in the back matter to trades. We're sorry. We must be ill.

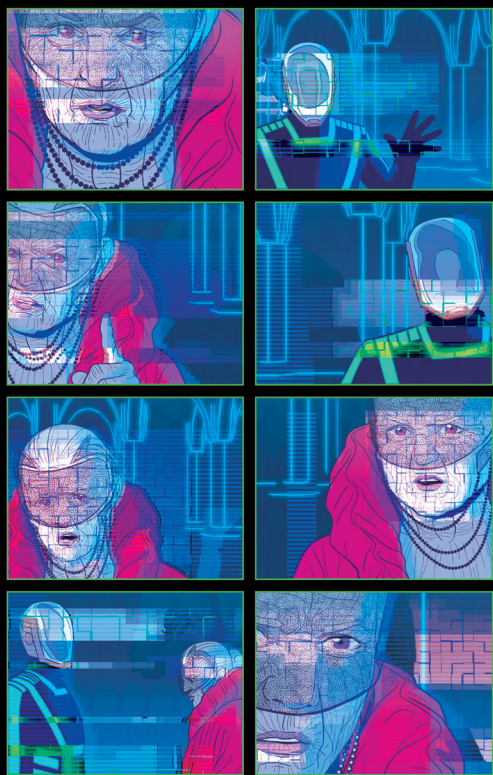


Tula's a non-traditional comics artist, and this was the first time she worked with a flatter. Dee did the basic shapes of colours, allowing Tula to paint on top of them. Tula thought about having someone actually do all her colouring, but we urged her to do it herself. There's something specifically about Tula's choices of colours which seemed appropriate for Tara, and we wanted to use that. Oh no. It's another serious caption. What is wrong with us?

The team had the idea of doing a remix issue back when working on *Young Avengers* for Marvel, inspired by seeing people do edits of their work online. We realised that the Woden issue would be the perfect time to see if it was actually possible. There were alternate plans if it all went wrong and simply was unsustainable, but it actually worked out surprisingly seamlessly.



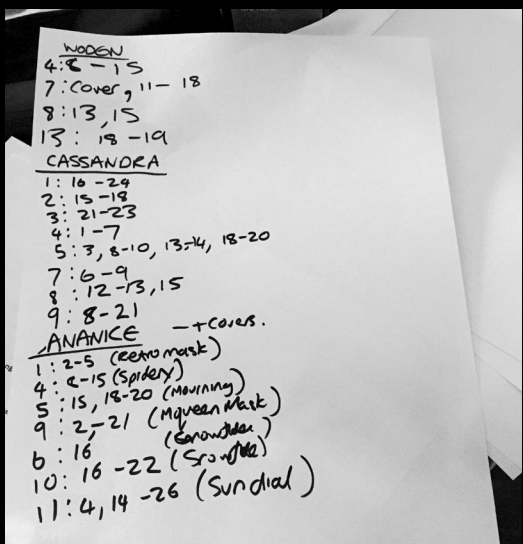
Matt, leaning on the remix aspect of the issue, thought that it may be fun to have a little visual “ghost” of the scene it’s sampling from showing through. He started with composite images like so.



Then Matt composited that layer with Jamie’s re-arranged panels to create the final images. If individual artefacts were too distracting, they were tweaked appropriately.



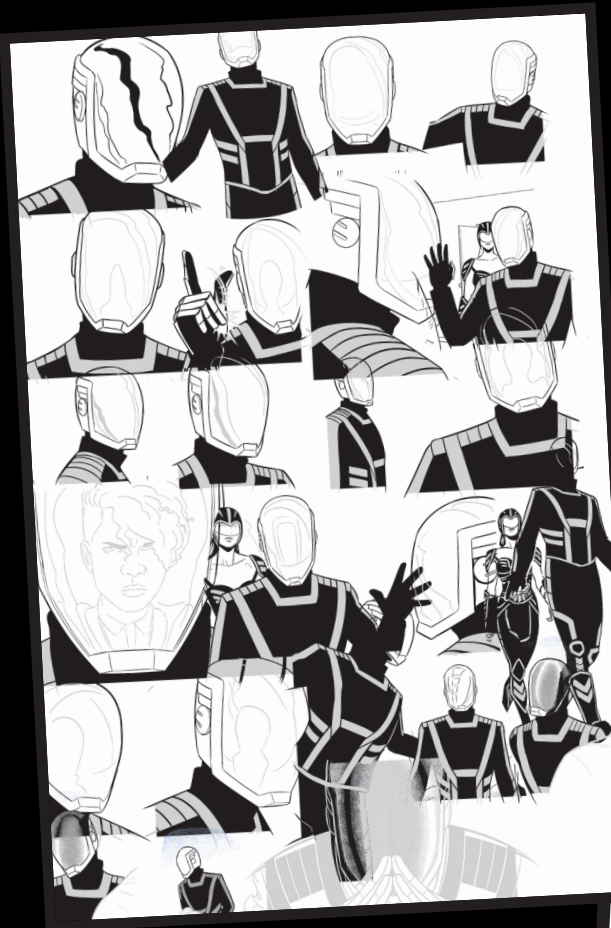
Kieron’s biggest problem was working out what story you could tell by a remix issue. Part of that meant labelling every relevant panel, so it could be referred to in his script.



Here’s Cassandra, Woden and Ananke’s every appearance in the series listed for easy access. Woden and Cassandra’s limited wardrobe was a boon. Ananke’s changing garb was the hardest thing to plan for.

The back of the issue was broken when Jamie came around to Kieron's hovel.

The script was a good basis, but shouting at each other in the same room proved to be the best way to do it. Inevitably, the wine eventually came out. As part of it, Jamie created a palette of Woden's every headshot in the book, which is quite the thing.



This transcript shows what editor Chrissy managed to note down of Kieron and Jamie's conversation in the height of the Woden reshuffling. You may (and hopefully) recognise the "sexy" panels as not something that's appeared in *WicDiv* before. They're actually lifted from Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky's *Sex Criminals*, where they did a cheeky *WicDiv* porn parody. The circle is now complete.



KIERON: We'll have something sexy there. Woden. Woden here. Sexy sexy. Sexy there, sexy Amaterasu, Amaterasu, and sexy image here.

[lots of excitable pointing and instruction]

KIERON: Those two. No wait. That one!

[pause]

KIERON: We haven't got enough sexual enough images!

JAMIE: What if Luci was there, Ami was there, and Cassandra was there?

KIERON: We can't. It forms a column.

KIERON: Wait wait before you move anything! I have to get the rhythm right!

JAMIE: Is it worth squashing those up into a long one?

KIERON: NO.

JAMIE: I mean, you get what's going on?

KIERON: Trust me. I can make this work.

KIERON: Put the gasping there....
I CAN MAKE IT WORK!

[etc...]

We set up the Dionysus mailing list in Issue 7, having no idea what we'd use it for. In the lead in to NYCC, with our plan to sell Dionysus' T-shirts there, we thought it'd be fun to announce it via that. Of course, sending a grotesque commercial mailout felt crass, so we turned it into a continuity insert set just after Dionysus leaves Tara in Issue 15.

From: Dionysus <dionyssiankissstory@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 4:11 PM

Subject: A Giggle At the Funeral

FFFFFFFFFUUUUUUKKKKK YEHHHHHHHHHH!!

Shit.

No, can't fake it. Sorry, but Brother Dionysus is just got back from seeing Tara.

It's a mess. I'm so... angry?

I didn't exactly do myself proud there. Ended up saying some shit I regret. Only to Woden, but I still regret it. I stay away from Pantheon business. I really do. I've got my work, they've got theirs, and I'm about being there for as many as I can until this is all over. Together, we're immortal. The night's not so dark when we can see by each other's light. You're there for me. I'm there for you.

Wasn't there for Tara though, was I?

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I can't believe it was Baph. I know half of you will hate me for that, but I can't. I still can't.

You ever been let down that bad?

Maybe I've always just been rainforest frog carrying a scorpion on my back. What a surprise! It stabs me.

Standing there, I wanted to fight them all. I'm not a fighter. I'm a lover. I've always stayed away from the Pantheon. The stink of Woden in that place. Hate it. They came to me, and in my church we're all equal. They've been barred since they've locked up the Morrigan. They don't get my communion if they act like that.

None of you know what they did to her to bring her in.

I only came to them at because of Tara. Sorry, girl. Never met you. Can't but help feel it was my fault.

I wanna be your messiah. It's not complex, guys.

I want you to go and call a person you love who you haven't talked to for a while. Call them and tell them that you love them and your life was better for having them in it.

If you don't have anyone like that, just hug yourself, even if you don't love yourself. You should. You're better than you give yourself credit for.

God. Got to get back. No time for this. Coffee is kicking in at least.

So...

LET'S SEE YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR!

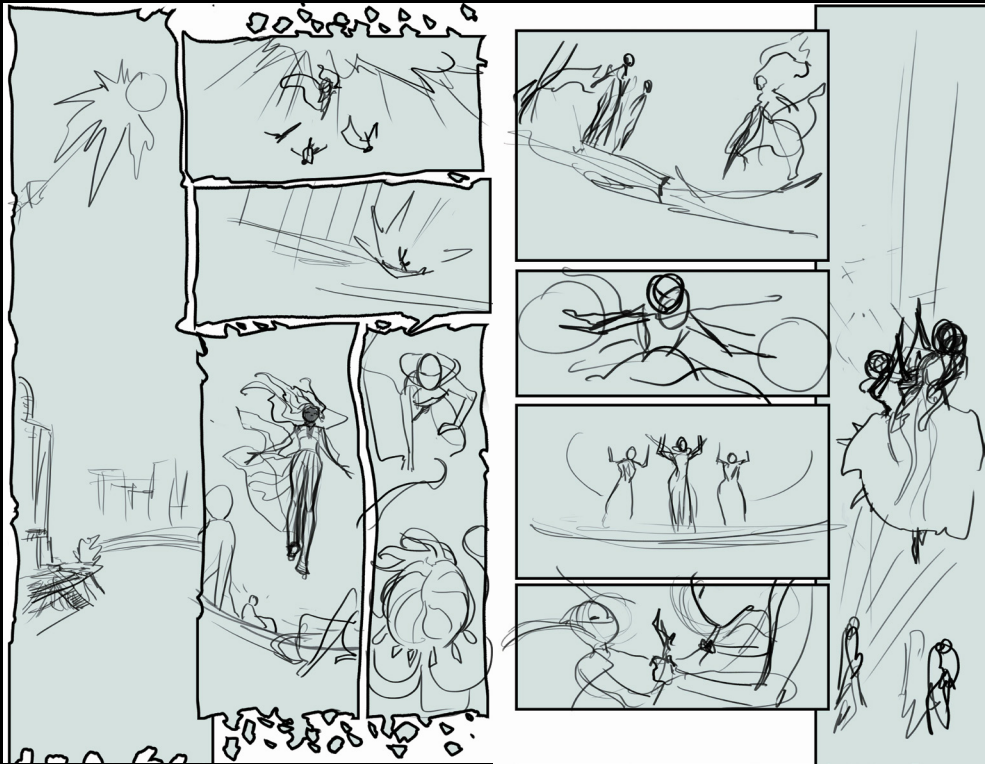
<Plug for NYCC T-shirts deleted, as it's kind of irrelevant>

Okay. I'm done. Peace out.

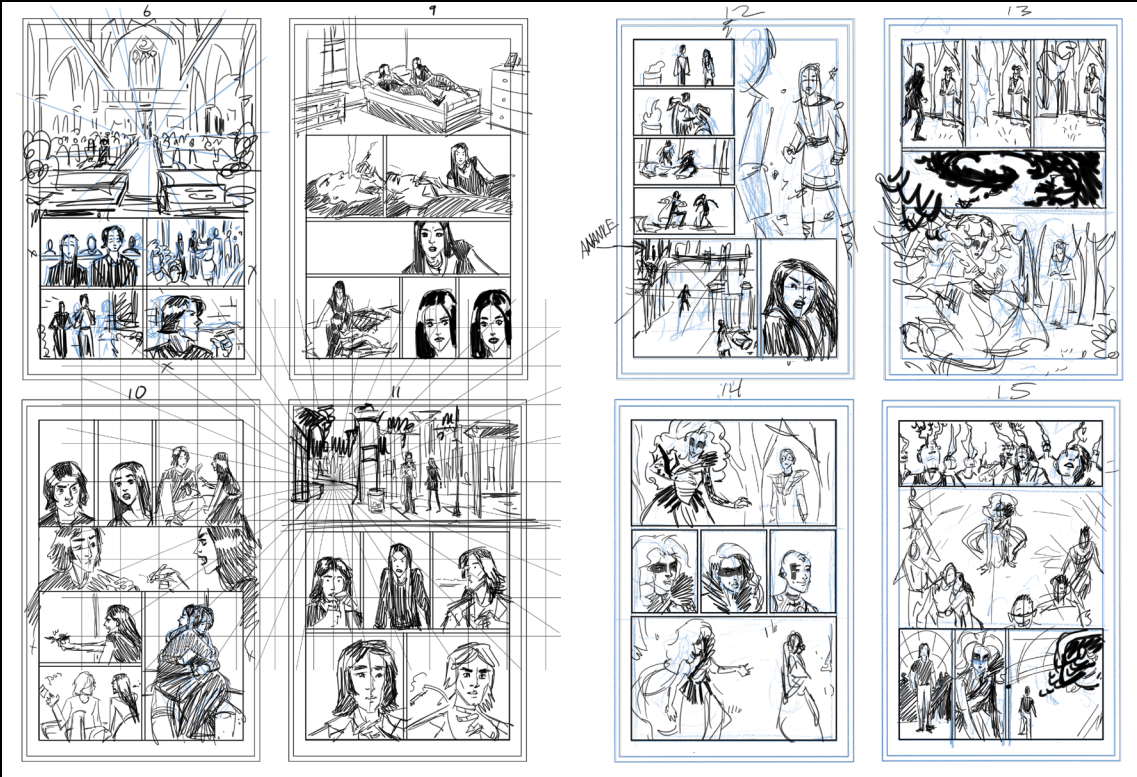
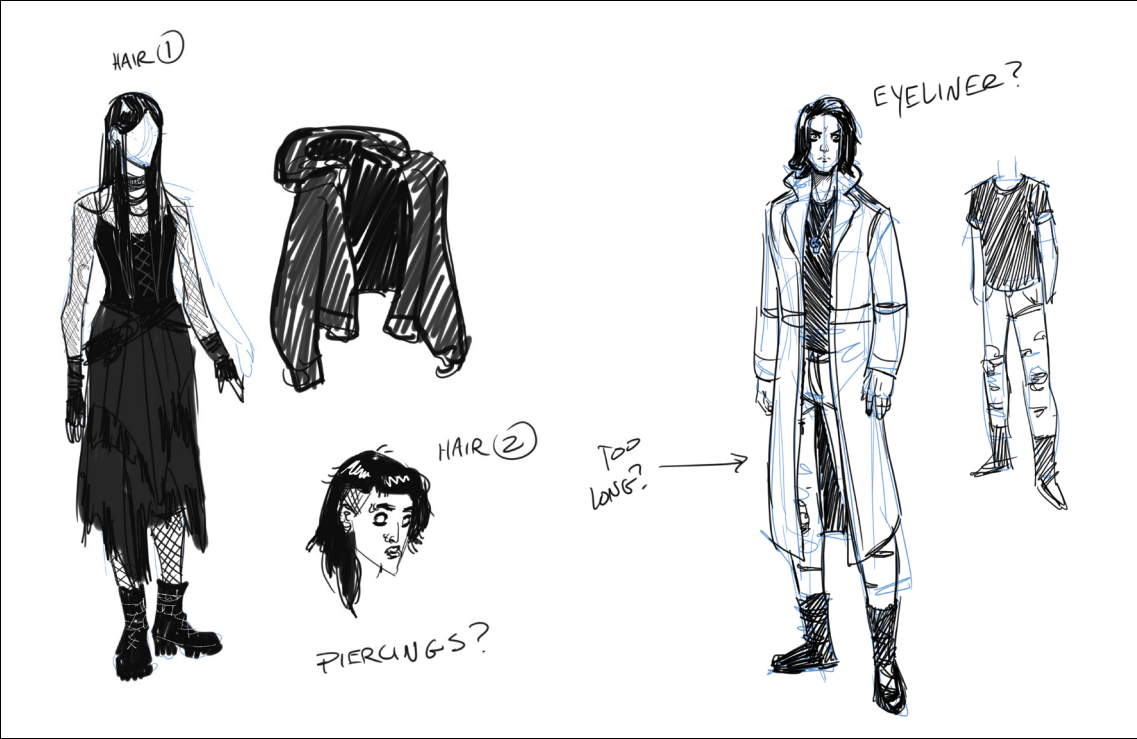
Sleep when you're dead.

Love
Dio.

Having worked with **Stephanie** on *Journey Into Mystery*, Kieron had an idea of Stephanie's process. Like Jamie, he wrote certain sequences in Marvel method, to allow her to interpret things in her own style. The experience taught Kieron that Stephanie was really good at compressing dramatic images into a multi-panel page and remaining powerful — as such a fight sequence which would normally have been much longer was compressed into a few pages, like so.



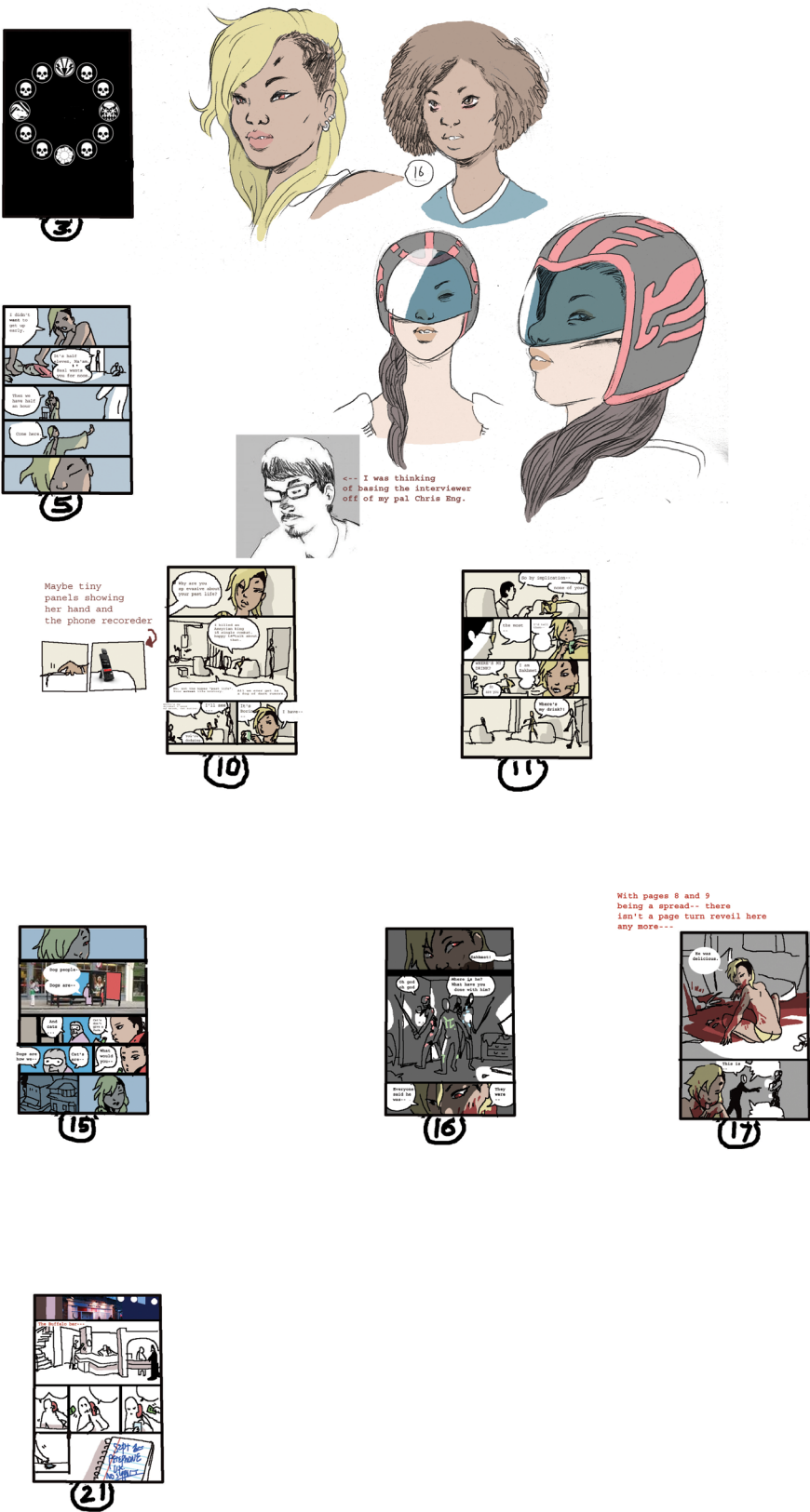
Kieron was most familiar with **Leila's** work via her collaboration with Joe Keatinge, *Shutter*. There she uses space to display some gloriously baroque monsters, working mostly in low-panel count pages. Writing the issue, Kieron wrestled to create as much space as possible for her to do that, trying to alternate between the more spacious visual set-pieces and the more compressed Chynna Clugston style teen drama panel-counts. The latter especially allowed Leila to showcase her storytelling. In many ways, the character-designs/roughs/notes-on-roughs/final pages system was the most traditional comics process of the arc.



Brandon, as a cartoonist who primarily writes for himself, made Kieron just want to step back and leave space for Brandon Graham to “be” Brandon Graham. Normally, lettering is done last.



With Brandon handlettering, Kieron did his final draft based upon these assorted roughs. Also note how Brandon basically creates this whole single image document for the issue, including reference and character design.



Each of our examples follows the process of the comic. We have Kieron's script, Jamie's pencils and inks, followed by Dee's flats (which delineates area of colour for future elaboration) then Matt's colours. There's a final stage we've included where there's small tweaks Jamie (and occasionally Kieron) calls for after the pass. There's also all manner of other chat that happens around all this, of course, but we'd have to give you access to our email, IM, Slack, etc to see all that. So (er) we're not.

ISSUE 18 - PAGE 1

1.1

We open on Laura/Persephone. She's sitting in front of a mirror in a changing room, backstage at the Buffalo Bar. She's glancing back at us. This could actually be quite distant, showing the room... but I suspect it'll work better quite tight. A classic "here is someone" first page transition from the cover.

Point being - HERE'S LAURA, have you missed her?!?!?

There's a slight smile here. We will see that Laura has changed? She has a certain weariness to her. She's been through hell, both literally and metaphorically.

She's in stage gear here - as in, a riff on her Persephone outfit. It could be the original one, which makes a lot of emotional sense for her... especially with what she's going to do when she actually goes on stage.

She has room for a costume change before the end of the Episode if you're worried about that, Jamie.

LOC CAP: Highbury & Islington, London.

LAURA: Yeah, I'm ready.



Let's Marvel Method this, though it's almost certainly a three panel page — maybe we can do something clever with small panels though. This is very much a dramatic fight scene we should perhaps try and work out clever stuff with.

And there's an ELECTRICITY BURST arc flying out of the owl. Everyone goes flying...

And standing there, crackling, fists clenched, is Baal. Can we have him wearing shades? Oh god, I want him wearing shades so I'm going to write it, and you can go with it or not. Largest panel on the page, I suspect. Everyone spread in all directions, coming to.

And tight on Baal, either removing the glasses or tipping them down so you can see his eyes. "Round Two." His other hand is raised, with a KLLK!



And she transforms to Badb: "Because I'm tearing out your fucking tongue."

Screaming brutally, she warps into a mass of crows and ravens. We did a little of this last time, but that was in a much smaller grid. We may not have even see it — here we do, and here we get that awfulness of Badb's face being half-raven and transforming into raven, and raven with teeth. Hell, we probably have accelerated to them having metal-edged wings. They are dark and increasingly dark, flying across the room...

And Baal is engulfed by the slashing, biting ravens... as as is Minerva.

From the blackness, Minerva screams.

We may want to do something clever here, in terms of layout, in a Young Avengers way. Raven panels? I dunno. I suspect an awesome raven attack would do, especially if we linger on how strange these ravens are getting. And, yes, they're crows, but for some reason I keep on writing ravens.

Minerva drops away from the melee, as Badb's raven swarm and Baal falls backwards. He's dropped her. We can see Minerva has a bunch of thin cuts. Baal will probably insult her noting this is irresponsible... which is entirely correct.



22.1

And big dramatic reveal on our boy, Baphomet, looking at himself in amazement.

Like all the changes, this is Baphomet as his most baphomet-y. He is his rock and roll god, fire dripping off him, surrounded by the circle.

We could have details here – most of them have some element around him. Perhaps the floor he lands on has transformed into skulls... as in a layer of burning skulls across the floor? Or maybe rather than landing on his feet, he's landing on a throne made of skull, in the full on Khorne-y way?

Basically, a moment of him loving it...

ANANKE: We meet again...

ANANKE: ...Nergal.

22.2

And Baphomet bounces up, growling angrily. Ananke is caught by surprise by the strength of the outburst.

ANANKE: I missed y--

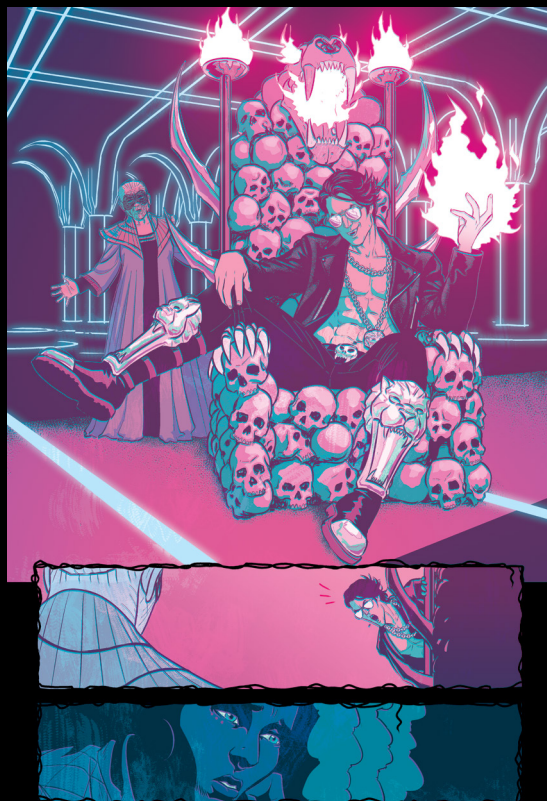
BAPHOMET: **NERGAL? (SHOUTED)**

BAPHOMET: **ARE YOU TAKING THE PISS? (SHOUTED)**

22.3

Back in the real world. Laura, frowning. This is... a different sort of expression from where she was. She's not been jolted out of her depression or something, but at least it's something different to think about. This would be where we would start to bring up the colour, if we wanted.

LAURA: What's wrong with being Nergal?



21.1

And we're on the view of the machine, opened up in all its magnificence. In the centre of this swirls of sinister light and colour is our Minerva, bound suspended in mid air, arms and legs at 45 degrees. She's still unconscious. Cogs whirl nearby, slowly turning. This is a rube goldberg monster machine, and the light makes everything strange...

Ananke is standing before it, watching, with her back to us...

ANANKE: Hmph.

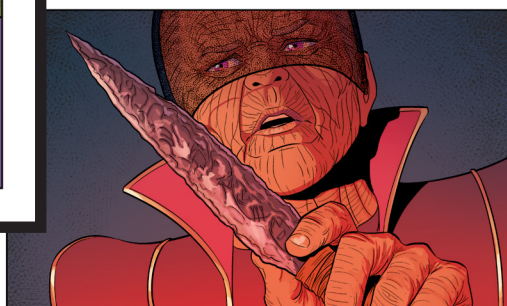
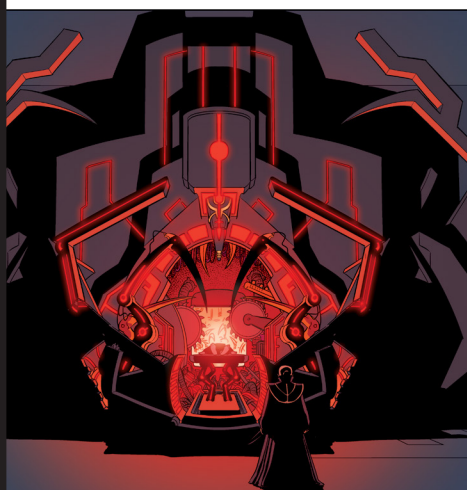
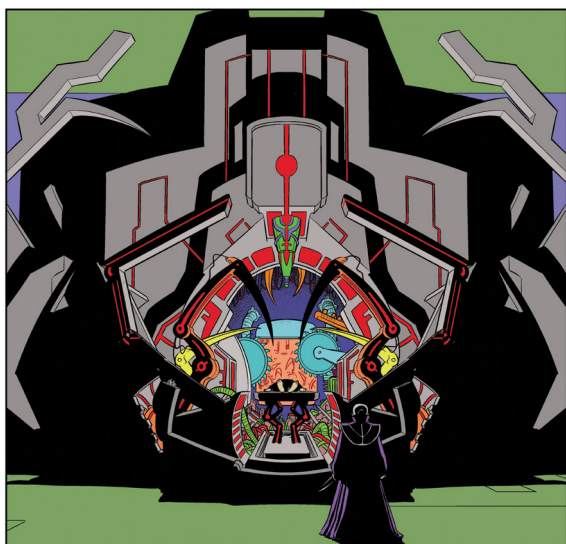
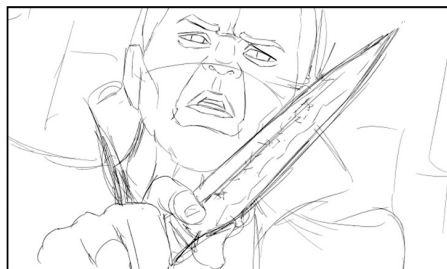
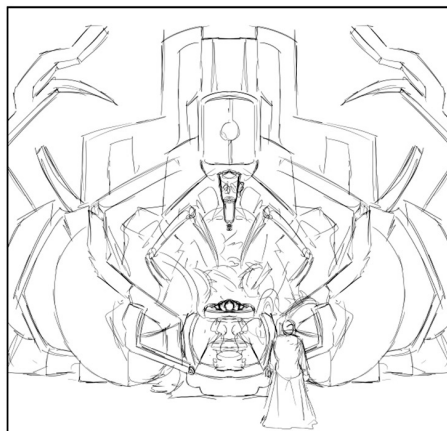
21.2

And on Ananke. In her hand is a knife. Stone knife. Obsidian would be my preference, which is *very old indeed*.

I'd add symbols to the blade, related to the Pantheon. Perhaps the symbol we used for ANANKE in issue 20?

She tests the edge on the palm of the remaining flesh of her burned hand. A drop of blood forms between the blade and her flesh.

ANANKE: Will this never end?



PAGE 2-3

Double page spread, with two inserts. One insert is top left, one is bottom right.
And this spread is... hard. It should be hard. We've set up an awesome fight last issue, and we're just not going to do it. We don't have space, and I probably wouldn't do a proper fight anyway. This is tableau-based storytelling, trying to create a place to explore, a place to make everyone's imagination to go wild in. This is the page we want all over the Internet. But basically, the job is to get all the awesome of VOLTRON VALKYRIE vs EVERYTHING into a panel of UTTER FUCKING CHAOS.
Sorry, guys.

2-3.1

The top left insert.

And we're on Amaterasu and Cass, fading into existence, wind rushing past them.
They're all kind of shocked.

(The other two Norns will be here too, though don't necessarily need to be on panel.)
LOC CAP: Valhalla, London.

CASS: Oh god.

2-3.2

The main DPS.

The battle outside Valhalla.

In the centre is THE VOLTRON VALKYRIE, enormous, with the Crowd swarming up its legs like raver ants. It swings its club, sending people flying. They crackle a little - Dionysus' protective magics and their own energies. Its Skyscraper stilettos press into the ground. It is mainly fighting Persephone, who has summoned up masses of crystal vines too do so - her as a tiny figure in this mass of writhing crystalline material, almost a cthuloid creature of vines. The Valkyrie-Voltron's breasts/bra are currently TWO ENORMOUS MINIGUNS firing tiny blasts that look like translucent glowing angels. (To stress - the whole "The good guys look like bad guys" this is very much there. In this fight, we're rooting for Cthulhu.)

Yes, it's likely the bad guys will lose... but it's still a mess.

Work in the other gods around this whole fucking mess - Sakhmet vs the Morrigan. Baal moves, crackling lighting, dancing with Baphomet. Woden is in the second hole in the wall (where Baph came through), firing his gun... and standing beside his PINK VALKYRIE.
Chaos! Glorious chaos!

Cass/Amaterasu are tiny figures in the sky high above this clusterfuck

- use Amaterasu's halo to guide the eye.

Sorry, guys. This is the poster.

CASS: It depresses me to know that someone, somewhere is wanking over this.

2-3.3

Second insert.

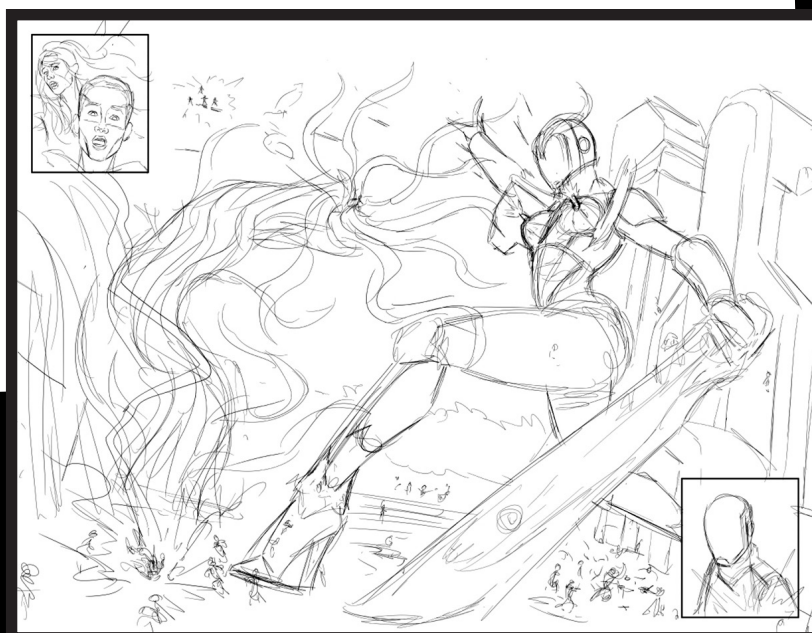
We're tight on Woden,
firing one of his guns.

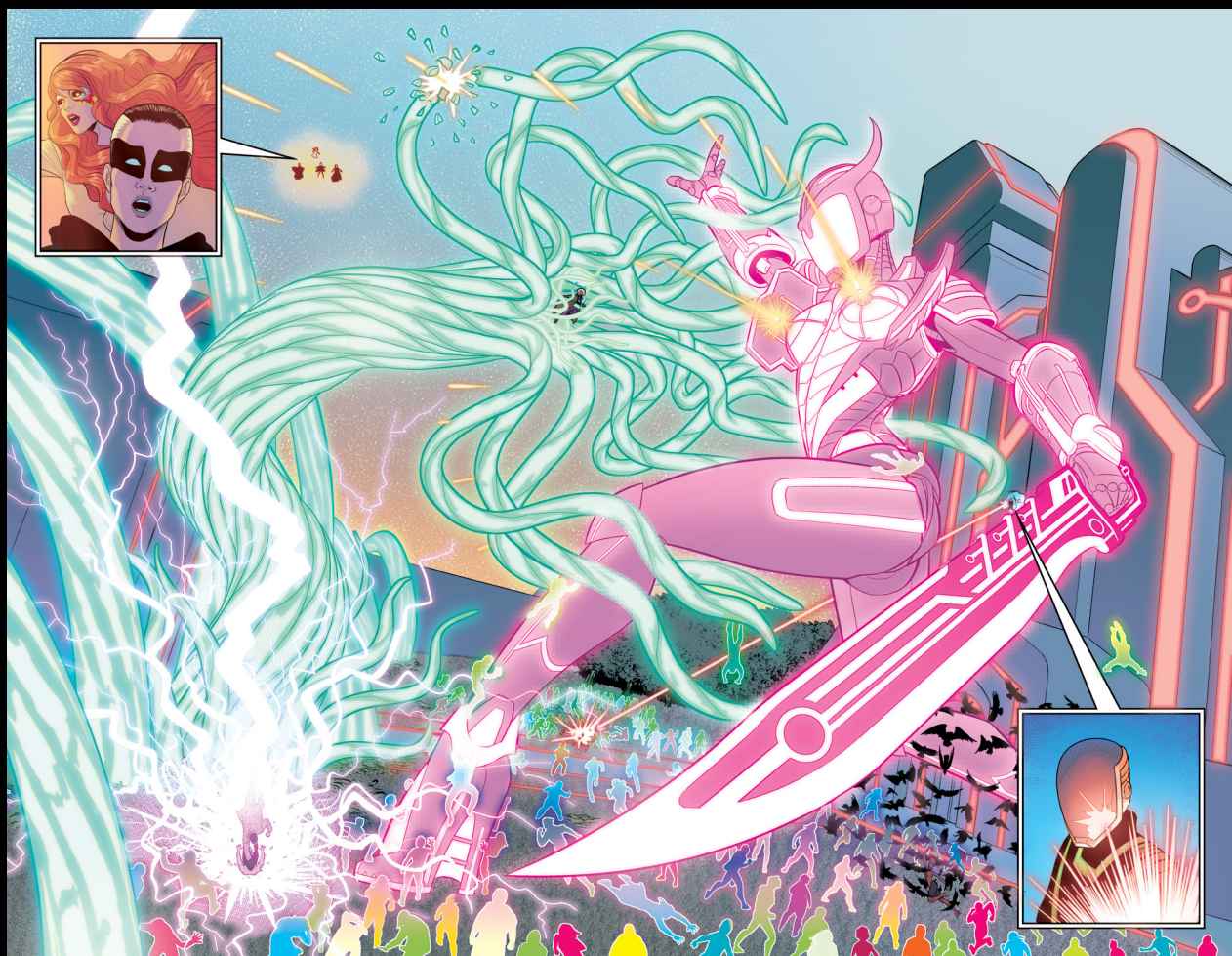
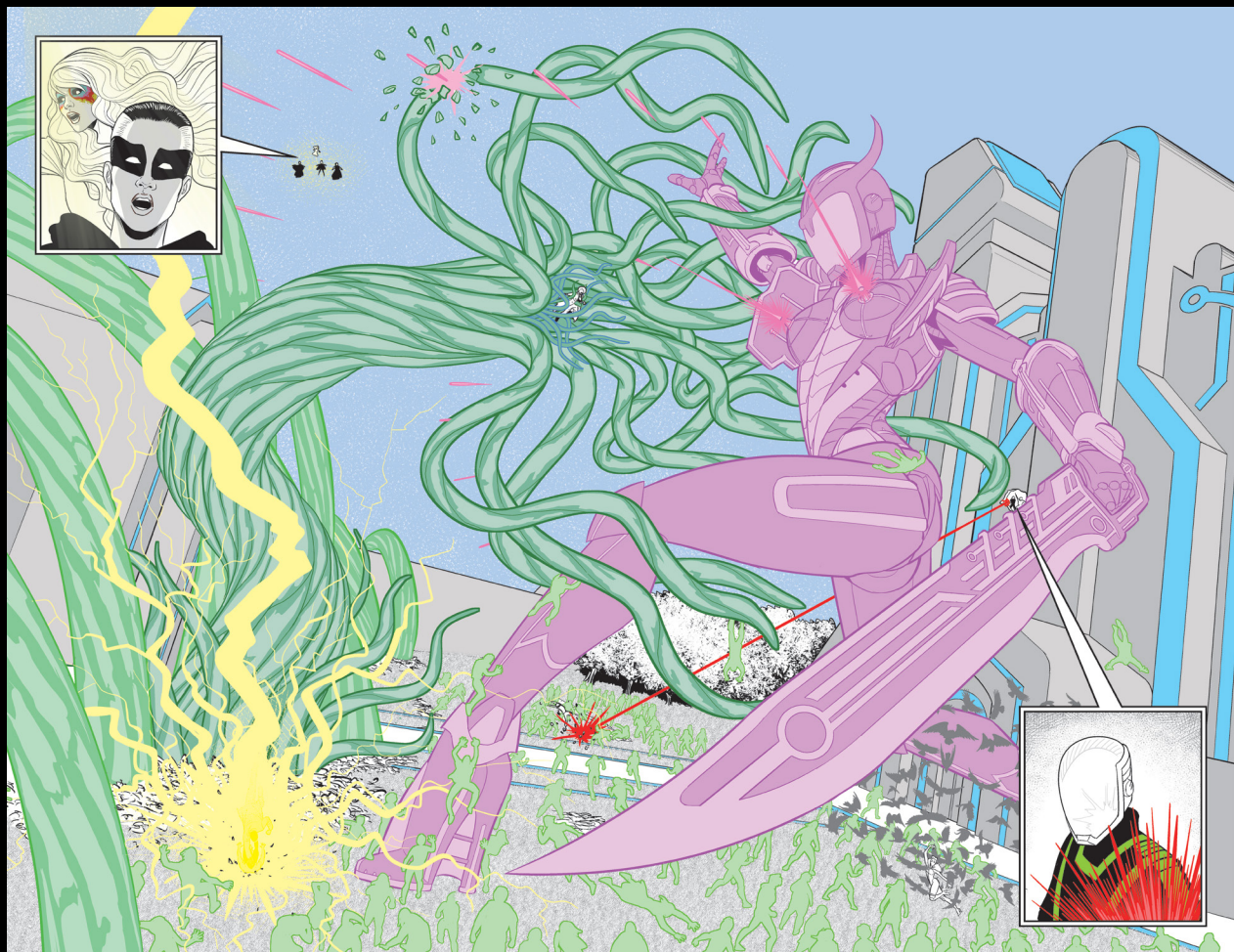
WODEN: **FUCK!!!!**

(SHOUTED)

CAP: For once, I'm saying
how I feel.

CAP: Now I've tried it,
I have to say honesty is
desperately overrated.





As mentioned earlier, we set up a mailing list for Dionysus way back in Issue 7, just because the flyer which introduced Dionysus really felt like it needed to include one. We had no idea what we were going to do with it. Since then, we use it for an occasional in-character stream-of-consciousness download from Dionysus. This was sent out the day Issue 22 came out, to mirror Dionysus' in-world recruiting of his crowd.

From: Dionysus <dionyssiankissstory@gmail.com>

Subject: UNDERGROUND DIONYSUS KISS STORY PARTY XXVIII After Party

Okay, that's a lie. There's no actual after party. It's more of a party in a "We're playing *World of Warcraft* and we're off to beat up a dragon" way than anything I'd actually enjoy doing in 2014.

Morrigan has just turned into Badb, and made a hissing noise at me for writing that. I didn't mean it like that. Now she's telling me to hurry up, but she's not exactly making me relax. I didn't know that crows could hiss, but BREAKING NEWS! it is not a relaxing noise.

Cut to the chase. I need your help. Anyone on this mailing list around London and can get to Valhalla in the next half hour or so? This is to you. Everyone else, get back to bed or get back to whatever you were doing.

I've already got the XVIII crowd with me, except those who dropped out. More came than I thought which... I dunno. I'm humbled. Sometimes it feels like I'm giving too much, but this just shows that you give, and stuff comes back. Or maybe everyone just wants to feel like a superhero for once.

I'm getting off point: we need to storm our way into Valhalla and need every hand we can get. And who has more hands than the dancefloor that marches like a man?

This could be dangerous. How dangerous? I don't know. But you have to believe me, this is life and death. If we don't pull this off, I'm pretty sure... okay, I don't want to write it. Writing makes it real, and making it real may stop me. I'm basically running on autopilot here, guys. Well, autopilot and energy drinks.

It's odd. It's like a state of grace. Every step I'm making feels right. We have to do this. That makes it easier? The choice has been removed. There's only action. It's like dancing, and step follows step follows step.

Okay, I'm getting spacey and Morrigan is doing growly beakface.

So — storming a place full of gods. I can't promise you'll be fine, but... we do have an edge. You know my parties? Ever noticed what *doesn't* happen there? Pain. No one gets hurt. People fall over and there's no bruises. No sprains even. That's me. That's what I give you when you're in my crowd. I promise, I won't take it too far when we go in. If it looks like something is going to hurt *any* of you, and I'll pull out. You're all precious.

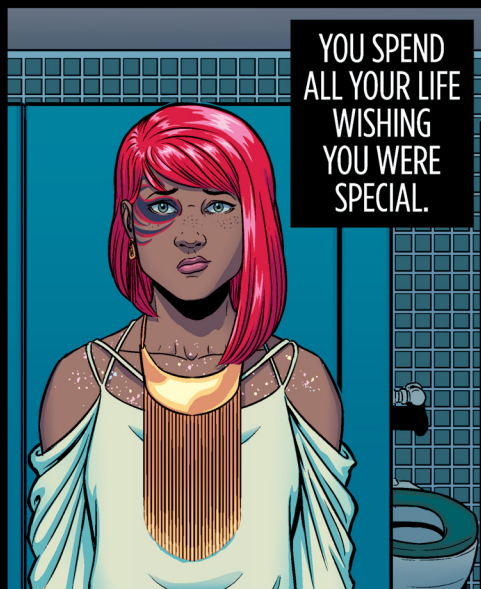
I'm not into violence. But i'm into life, and sometimes you got to fight for your right to party. We want the night to last forever and have something happy in it. If we don't do something quickly, this night ends for a little girl and there's nothing happy any more.

Hope to see some of you soon, and see everyone else soon after that. But if I don't? I love you all.

Peace out.

Dio

(Over) As Issue 18 was our big comeback, with Jamie and Matt returning to the book, we wanted to make some serious noise. We had the idea of cutting a "trailer" of images from the issue, in the manner of a movie. Here's what we came up with...



YOU SPEND
ALL YOUR LIFE
WISHING
YOU WERE
SPECIAL.



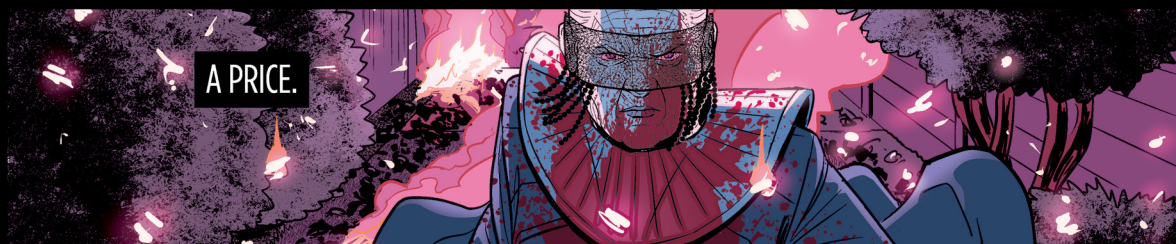
AND THEN YOU
FIND OUT YOU ARE.



BUT NOTHING

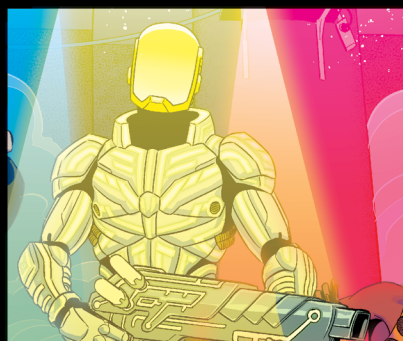
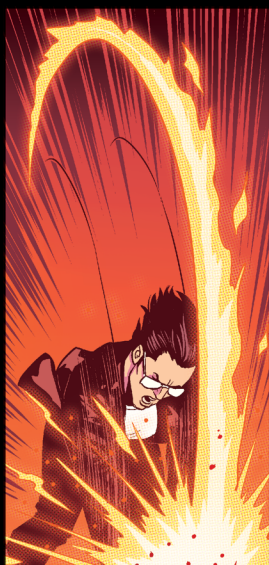
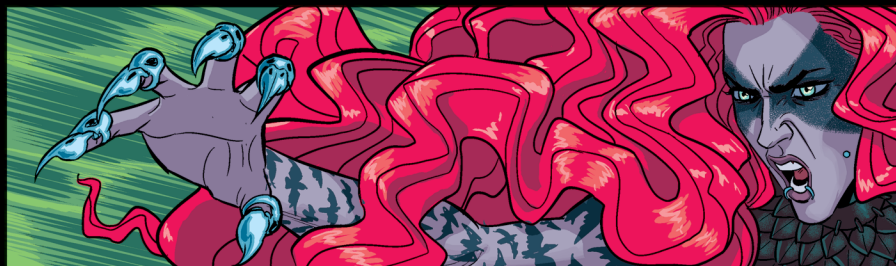


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WRITER'S NOTES

Every issue, Kieron writes what amounts to a little director's commentary. When we say "little", we mean "far too long". And when we say "writes" we mean "assembles typos in rough chronological order". When we do a hardcover, Chrissy gathers the writer's notes together and does her best to tame the typos into prose. They follow. If you want to read the raw ones as they come out, look at the writer-notes tag on www.kierongillan.tumblr.com.

ISSUE 12

This was obviously a stressful one, as it was the first of the Guest issues and follows directly on from Issue 11. Kate's great, but I felt for her, as she was going into a pretty intense crowd. The general response was what we expected. What surprised us was the regularity of comments that had no idea we were doing a Guest arc — as in, the number of people who don't read anything in the backmatter, ever. That we had people mailing and messaging us to ask about it implies there's people who follow us closely enough to actually know where to find us online, but who don't read the writing at the back to see if it tells them the answers to their questions.

Obviously this isn't judging them — seeing how people choose to process information, and using that to see how best to reach them, is kinda part of the job. But it was a bit of a surprise, and has made us consider a few other things, in terms of the backmatter.

Main Cover. First of the new design. We'll be keeping this until Issue 17, I think, and then changing up when Jamie comes back on the book. I like this a lot.

Kate Brown Cover. We bounced ideas off each other, and basically both went "Pieta". Sometimes it's easy.

Kate's an enormous fan of Inanna. When we first asked her to do an issue, and the Inanna one, she was enormously excited. Then she read the issue and clearly wanted to kill me. Sorry, Kate. Love you!

1. I look at this and think "At last".

I've been trying to do a straight six-panel interview format for the whole fucking series. It was originally going to be a motif across all of *Fandemonium*, interviewing a different random person or fan about their relationship to the gods, building towards the end of Issue 10, which would be Laura being interviewed post-Cassandra becoming Urðr.

But there was never any space.

Like, ever.

So it always ended up on the cutting room floor. Oddly, it makes it somewhat appropriate that it appears in a scene which is actually set in a cutting room.

This is basically the interview I'd have ended Issue 10 on, but used in a different way. When originally thinking about Issue 12, I was thinking the whole issue may be interviews like this — basically a version of the documentary Beth described. Thinking about it some more, I realised I was much more interested in pursuing the character's logical next steps from this disaster — specifically, throwing Baal and the Morrigan at each other.

We talked to my friend, Sian Fever, about all the editing set up here. Thanks, Sian. You're a hero.

Really like the round edges Kate did here. I was thinking of what Kate and I did with *Young Avengers* 6, which also used some steady-angle shots.

2. And welcome back, Beth, last seen in Issue 7, trading barbs with Cassandra. She isn't any happier now, evidently. I remember seeing some people surprised

that Issue 4's text ever came up again. Well, now you know.

I was a little surprised by how many people seemed to quite like Beth. For me, she's basically got all of Cassandra AND Laura's bad points, plus a whole bunch of her own. I find myself thinking that there's characters you would hate to know, but are fine watching in fiction. She does have a way with a one-liner.

Robin and Toni make up Beth's own trio. There's probably a TV Trope name for this triad of personality types. I feel for Robin, whose long-suffering expression through all of this says a lot.

3. Hey, it's that scene in Issue 3. I wonder if there's a reason we're reminding people of that.

There's a lot of restating information across this scene, with that re-cap turned into something other than just "Hey — remember that time a month or two ago when you cried?" by leaning on the "how the events were perceived on the outside". As this is the first chapter of the third volume, this is particularly important. Key relationships and facts have to be restated.

Oh, Toni. That extra O in COOL. What are you like?

I suspect the reason people may like Beth more than I expected is actually down to Kate's cartooning. Her frustration on the table here is pretty wonderful.

4. Tara, next month. Worth reminding people of some key facts about her.

Kate nails the transition between panel 2 and 3.

One thing about Kate's slightly more cartoony style than Jamie's is that it brings the emotions of the character nearer the surface. Also, it stresses their age.

5. *Left Behind* being the series of Christian Rapture fiction I have never read and undoubtedly never will. Or watch the movies. I think I may have reviewed one of the games once. Wait — no I didn't. I passed it off to a freelancer. The power of Reviews Editors.

6. Purple flowers, because it's Inanna, innit?

I was probably thinking about England the week after Diana died with Beth's first line.

Oh, hello. Lightning from the sky. Who's this?

7. I don't think I've ever included "Oi" in a script before. Actually, maybe *Über*.

We originally put Baal in an all white suit, but thought it carried too much of Lucifer's semiotics, so added the black T. Baal in white is semiotically loaded — this is mourning colours, in his own way.

Kate sells the steady-angle shot here across the last four panels. Cute tiny hand action in the last two on the police too.

8. Kate's got a more muted palette than Matt. I think the issue leans low-key — especially the opening half, which makes me think of this in the format of documentary TV. Or even Reality TV, y'know?

I suspect a lot of his issue's merits fall on how much you care about the Inanna/Baal of it.

9. Of course, twitter's DM rules have changed by now. Oh, how will the kids of 2016 understand *WicDiv* now?

In case you didn't know, "Gold Standard Lesbian" is a horrible phrase, and very much a tell about Beth.

Baal's urgency in panel 3 is pretty cute. Aw, Baal, you big puppy.

10-11. Once again, with the steady angle. "Looking" is very much the visual theme of the issue, which Kate leans into at various points. This is a pure performance sequence.

I sat and wrote this, and tried to work out a natural flow taking in as much as possible. Just wrote it as a monologue, and then I edited, and worked out how it would fit into a six-panel grid.

The cup of coffee as a prop makes me worry he's going to spill it on his nice white suit. Don't do that, Baal.

12. You know *WicDiv* is a book about cycles and recurrences and stuff? Well, here we go again. Obviously this whole sequence mirrors the one in Issue 5. It's all very compare and contrast, which is one of those favourite devices of mine. *The Singles Club* was entirely built around it.

Oddly, Highbury & Islington turns up a bunch in *The Immaterial Girl*. Soon we'll be able to have a GillenMcKelvieWilson walking tour of North London.

You can say many things about Beth, but she's certainly committed.

13. Kate's original roughs took the last three panels in a different way. In the end, I asked her to take it as a 1:1 on Jamie's pages. If the point is the parallel, we'd want the parallel to be as precise as possible.

The Morrigan shows her age here, which I kinda love.

14-15. This page took a lot of work. Lots of roughs and trying to work out how to create a reading line — getting it across the page is tricky enough, but with the unusual panel shape, it's even trickier.

Having the whole page as Inanna's symbol was Kate's idea, and is well clever. Visual subtext. The central image being the lens is also pretty nifty. We are looking.

I'm always a big fan of impact craters in walls. The question has to be why Morrigan doesn't fight back, of course. Issue 16.

I do like the rhythm of this sequence. It's pure fight scene as character stuff.

16. Oh — this whole sequence was written Marvel Method.

I'm not sure the sub-visual element here works as I'd have hoped — that Beth approached closer than the others and got hit herself. It's only a secondary thread, but I suspect I may have been better writing in a different way. C'est la vie.

17. "They'd" is key, of course. Yes, it's clear that Inanna is driving this, but Baal is very aware Inanna wasn't the only death.

I winced at this sequence, worrying if it was too much. I worry a lot.

"Love Makes Fools Of Us All" is a Thackery quote, but it lodged in my subconscious from being used as a subtitle of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* screen adaptation. It's a pretty good summation of what *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about. Morrigan going down quoting is very Morrigan.

Ah, foreshadowed crying, you are the worst.

The intensity in the colours is key here. Compare and contrast to how it's used earlier in the issue.

18. I think I asked Kate to give me jRPG weapons on the Valkyries, and she certainly provided.

Jamie and Kate had to talk through a bunch of the storytelling in this whole sequence — in terms of where the Morrigan moves during the fight, how Baal pursues, etc. This is highly tricky to do.

When writing an ongoing series, no matter how much of a conception you have of a character beforehand, they naturally grow as you're working. It was during this issue on this page where I realised that Woden quoting people and using their words against them was a very Woden thing to do. He's a DJ Producer god. He's all about sampling, y'know?

19. Baal was the first god to emerge, hence "doing it the longest". I said "Doing it".

20. A lot of this page is trying to segue between this scene and the final beat. That panel 4 creates a little stillness, plus the sense of them being watched (which is a little like the last panel on the previous page). And hello boots!

21. Burning feathers may be a *WicDiv* thing.

Repeat of Baphomet's core statement, obv.

(The *WicDiv* playlist has just played 'It's cold here in the dark' from Roadrunner. I like that kind of coincidence.)

22. *The Queen Is Dead* being the Smiths album (and song). Queen of the Underworld was how Morrigan considered herself. No, she's not dead (though no one presumed that which I saw.)

23. A rework of the design page so we can finally get Dee a full credit. We both wince and smile at the CREATED BY credit at the top.

The Backup. Actually, the main worry from understanding people aren't reading the backmatter was that perhaps people are going to entirely miss that there's another one-page vignette drawn by Jamie. As in, they'll just shut the comic.

The problem becomes where to put it. Putting it straight after the credits would break the effect of the main story — like having another random bar at the end of the chapter. Shall we move it nearer the front? We'll see. Issue 13 basically fills the issue, so it's less of a problem, but we'll have to do some thinking.

The concept of the backup stories is pretty basic — a fragment of an interview. *Videogames* is a standard pun — a game of video. Anyway — this one I used to twist the knife a little more. Oh, Inanna. Sniff.

Right — less than a week until the next issue. Will be interested to see what you make of it.

Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 13

So, that was a hard one.

This is the story about a lot of things. Many of those things are pretty fucking sledgehammer.

Tara was the last of the gods to be added to the cast. I was going to tell the story about how precisely the Tara of her came about, but I think that had better wait for another time — it touches heavily on other ongoing plots, and I'd rather not give anything away. She was actually added to the narrative the morning after we announced *The Wicked + The Divine*, also for reasons I'll save talking about until the end — don't worry too much about trying to figure that out though. It's not something integral to the narrative.

Pretty much everyone condemns internet harassment. Hell, even those who are part of hate mobs do so, while refusing to admit that's actually what they're doing. The sadness for Tara is obviously a big part of it, but "Oh, here is a sad thing" doesn't necessarily teach us anything other than sad thing is a sad thing.

In other words, the cautionary, critical element is — *we are all complicit to some degree in this culture and we should be careful about what we say and do*. That's key to the book.

I've seen some people wonder whether the meta element was deliberate. Yes, it was. To be honest, *WicDiv* is a very difficult book to read too much into. We're nothing if not over-thought out.

The story was there all along — it's foreshadowed from the first issue, with that first "Fucking Tara". The last year has only made things more pertinent.

The obvious influence is far from the only one, but it'd obviously be a lie if what happened in games wasn't there. I'm an ex-game critic. I'm friendly with several of the people who got some of the worst harassment. I spent a good chunk of last year with a ritual of following their @s, just to see what they were living through, and watching that steady churn and thinking about the steady erosion of the soul.

Tara's exit was a very literal one, but the idea that anyone would remain in that medium with all that and not just leave was amazing.

While it was primarily that sort of thing, it wasn't *just* that though. At least part of it came from watching a minor creator I knew vaguely (who I won't even say which medium they worked in — their identity is irrelevant, and I'd appreciate you not trying to work it out). They fucked up, and then got torn apart by what I'll vaguely bracket as the progressive side of their medium. Now, calling out is good. The creator's response to the critique was knee-jerk and bad. And while there were all sorts of responses, there was enough that was *brutal* to the level of dehumanization that made me pause. Because, I also knew how mentally unwell the creator was, specifically their depression. Would people have moderated the level of viciousness of critique if they knew? I suspect so. But, in a real way, who ever knows what someone else

is going through? It's very easy to forget the humanity of people we despise, especially when we reduce their entire existence to a single tweet.

So, while our primary thrust is pretty clear, I wanted to make it more difficult than "Oh, those misogynists are evil". That can be powerful, but the point is wider. Without saying all things are equal, we are all victim to these tendencies. The smallest fragments of information from people (especially people we like, especially if it's funny) can align us against people. If we're on social media, we've all done this at different times.

"Try to be kinder", is a small thing, but a pure one, and one worth remembering.

(Being *kind*, of course, is a different thing from being *soft*.)

So, all this is set up by the drip-feed of info on Tara. Laura's hatred is almost certainly based on having gone to a Tara gig and walked away disappointed when she quote-unquote Didn't Play The Hits. Luci's own defensiveness — one of Luci's worst traits. Quotes from Tara which seem to have one meaning when she clearly meant them in a different way. Most importantly, the Fucking Tara running joke — a little mimetically sticky thing I suspected people would leap on, and they certainly did.

In other words, making the reader complicit in a small way to this fucking horror show.

I feel guilty a lot when writing *WicDiv*, and especially following fan response, because I know where it's all going and can see things working. You feel cruel, because it is cruel. But it's important. You get this strange idea from people who do a surface reading of what McKelvie and I do that it's somehow pandering, when really what we do is tough as balls on our cast (and readers and ourselves). It's the sort of reading which assumes that *Young Avengers* is about Evil Parents went it's actually about Teenagers Fucking-Up And Eventually Realising It And Owning It.

WicDiv is about fandom in many ways, but it's not a complimentary portrait.

Anyway — all that said, the response I got seems to imply that most people got why we did it, and found it powerful and meaningful, which is good.

Er... also worth noting that it's not just about online discourse. It's clearly the issue that's most informed by the women in my life and my feminist reading. It's a big complicated thing, that I tried to put in front of a bunch of people and make sure it was what we wanted to do. (Post *Airboy 2*, this only intensified. We felt our ethical intent was clear, but we use many more slurs than *Airboy*, and much more aggressively.) I was always pretty sure it was either really good or utterly terrible.

I'm glad that the consensus seems to have come down hard on the former.

At the same time, it doesn't sit comfortably to be praised for it. A lot of the power of the issues rests on the real abuse of real women. I feel a little like the pirate in *Watchmen*, being carried along on a raft of bodies. I have the odd double-think of being glad the book exists, but not liking it was me who wrote it. I'm also aware that I'd be more worried about myself if I *didn't* feel like that. I should feel uncomfortable.

To stress, this is me being transparent — I'm not looking for anyone to comfort me. I talked about this a bunch with friends (and thanks to them all for putting up with my shit) and came to a place where I'm secure in my insecurity. And certainly don't let it stop you expressing your own response to the book around me. When people talk about the work, I try to step back and watch and listen. I've very Death Of The Author.

Er... this has been a long pre-amble, perhaps unsurprisingly.

Main Cover. One of the more over-thought of elements of the book. This is a story about objectification — but that isn't an instant get-out-of-jail-free card for doing an objectification cover. Walking the line between making clear the point (*especially* in retrospect) and not going too far was what we were trying to achieve. We showed it to a lot of people, seeing if they felt it was too much. No one's said anything about the cover — perhaps predictably. Against the background radiation of comic culture's general presentation of women, it doesn't even register. It's only noticeable in the context of *WicDiv* covers, rather than covers per se. The cover frames Tara like she is shown by the cameraman in the one-pager. We lose her head — obviously loaded with how the story ends. Oh — and this was what Jamie did as the guideline for Tara's aesthetic. The sci-fi mode is pretty clear — a god can get away with some pretty fancy fashion if she chooses. Tula took this, and riffed on it to create her later outfits.

Tula Lotay cover. Tula had various ideas, but we ended up talking ourselves into this — if one cover is about Tara as a body, this is her face. Tula is... well, she has many strengths, but one is that her women are almost supernaturally beautiful. What she does here is very simple and very powerful — how does Tara read at first glance here? I suspect somewhat different from after you've read the story. That gaze strikes me as quietly and powerfully accusing. *J'accuse*.

The morning it came out, I re-read the issue. I often do that with my creator-owned books, just to see how it feels. I did, then flipped it over, and looked at Tula's cover and then said my first spoken words of the day: "I'm sorry, Tara."

Tula got me verbally apologising to my own characters. She's quite the artist.

1. First opening splash for a while. There's a lot of space in this book, and that means when you want an image to feel even *more* open it has to be bigger. If you're working on three panel pages, that means splashes.

The other purpose was to immediately put the reader in Tara's shoes. This is her, staring out. We move from seeing Tara to being her. In other words, the PoV makes it clear this is about her interiority. The world looks at her and this is what she sees.

There's also something really sad about the juxtaposition of caption and image — the implicit disaster before anything happened. "They loved me" has a very sad past tense to it.

Tula coloured her own work, btw, but it was flatted by

Dee. I'm glad Tula had time — her own colour choices were one of the many reasons I wanted her to do this issue. They're idiosyncratic in their effect and have their own mood. I wanted Tara to have her own mood.

The suicide-letter-as-narration is something I chewed over. It's been done a few times, and works particularly well in comics.

I did less gigs in 2014 than in many years, but went to the Roundhouse a few times. I suspect I chose it because of the Manic Street Preachers' *Holy Bible* gig I saw towards the end of the year.

2. People ask me whether I change the script for the artist. Yes, always, but more so here. I knew the mood I was looking for — stately, to say the least — but I had also picked apart Tula's work for far. For my money, the most effective has been on *Supreme: Blue Rose* with Warren. I shouldn't be surprised. I think one of Warren's greatest talents is unlocking artists — as in looking at someone's style, then finding ways to transform them into superstars. I'd say you could make a list of artists whose careers can be sharply divided into Before Warren/After Warren.

Anyway — in *Supreme: Blue Rose*, Warren gives Tula a lot of space. It basically runs off three-panel pages, generally in a full-tier format. I lifted it.

I suspect I was thinking something more griddy, but Tula (and I keep on typoing "Tara", which is strange) wanted to play with space, which I think was a smart call and works really well.

I didn't really see any Paul Pope influence in Tula's work until looking at the third panel of this right now.

3. We lose the colours — the full Tula experience is saved for the performances, and we go a lot flatter for everything else. The gods' performances are literally above and beyond everything else. Everything else is comparatively mundane.

The mask comes into play, which is probably a metaphor or something.

This page is probably the most explicit reminder that what the gods do is not actually music. As said in Issue 1, it doesn't record — all they have from the 1920s is some film of people freaking out over nothing. Rather than this divine thing, Tara is about to play some music.

4. Which doesn't go down well.

As I said earlier, you can probably assume that it was something like this which turned Laura against Tara.

And in last panel, enter the theme.

5. This is the page we showed in previews in the previous issue. It was one of the ones which was completed, but it was also one which really showcases a lot of what Tula does. The colour sweep across the page, the incredible expression in the second panel.

Note how sparse the narration is here. Generally speaking, I cut it to the bone while trying to keep enough of her voice.

In the first caption, there's an implication — yes, Tara is a physical powerhouse. We touch on this a few times.

6. And time cut.

Back in 2010, I found myself in the somewhat odd position of doing interviews about catcalling. Specifically, the videogame *Hey Baby*, which had become controversial. (If you want to know a bit more about that period, googling Kieron Gillen *Hey Baby* rockpapershotgun.com should get you to a piece where I try to explain male privilege and what catcalling felt like to a website with a predominantly male audience.)

Odd times. Clearly a lot of dudes were enormously defensive, but I was pleased with the number of people who actually *Got It* after reading it. Which is awful in a different way — that a man's opinion about this stuff is listened to in a way that women's is often not.

Eleven was hard. I could have gone younger. Equally, the shout. There's far worse misogyny in this issue, but this is one that was a line of dialogue you had to read. Choosing where the what-is-acceptable line is was a big part of trying to make this issue work.

7. The second caption was tweaked to try and make it implicit she's talking about catcalling with her choices of example. The general point would hold anyway, but it felt necessary.

Lots more dialogue on this page originally, but all cut away, especially the more florid aspects. EditEditEdit.

Tula changed the time periods of the script a little — they were divided more equally across the years between 11 and 20. I see Tara as a second-year university student.

The glances of everyone on this page break my heart.

8. The dog is very small and hiding behind one of the men's legs.

We discussed a lot about how to do bold in the script, and decided that underlining was the way to go.

The "Were They Really My Friends" line is a little like many of the ones I decided to cut. This survived the cull because I felt it brought to the foreground an aspect of her I felt key.

I considered that perhaps Tara should be asexual early on. The juxtaposition between how the world sees her and what she actually desires was an interesting angle. I decided to not do it, as I think the story would imply that she's asexual because of her experiences, and by implication that asexuals are actually fearing sex and intimacy because of something that happened to them rather than an expression of their identity — as in, Tara is asexual as the world has fucked her up. Clearly, that's not something I would ever want to imply in a story. I suspect I could have written around that, but even explicit in-text explanations don't stop people taking an unwanted implication (e.g. Prodigy's bisexuality in *Young Avengers* — David's explicit "No, I didn't catch Bisexuality" statement didn't stop people going that way) and when there's so much else we've got to worry about in this issue (and things which if they went wrong, would have been disastrous) I decided it would be overloading the issue. It was one which needed to do everything it chose to do as good as it was possible for us to do it. The more you add, the more impossible that becomes.

Plus introducing an asexual character and her dying in the same issue is also a problem.

Anyway, I really like Tara's pre-godhood costume here. Nice work, Tula.

9. I didn't originally have the fucking in the last caption. Chrissy suggested it strongly, and I agreed.

This is the first god transformation scene we've seen from an external view rather than the subjective view of the participant. That strikes me as interesting. It's a very prosaic approach to that core bit of our mythology.

10. And hey! It's the gods! Plot progression!

This was originally a two-panel page, but Tula pushed it to a three. It works great.

We originally forgot Minerva's Owl in various panels, but managed to patch it in. Phew.

This is one of the heavier captioned pages. Originally we had more, but it was rewritten a bunch of time. Core reasoning of Tara's thought processes and how those were shaped by Ananke's support. In a real way, it has to answer the "if you hate this so much, why did you do it?" question — the "You have two years to live — how do you spend it?" She wants to bring her art to as many people as possible. She feels she has to use what she's got.

A few weeks ago, I was stepping out the shower, and I found myself thinking about what I'd do if I went to the doctor and I was told I had six months to live. My first thought was "If I cancel all other commitments, I *think* I have enough time to write the rest of *WicDiv*."

I worry about creators.

Anyway — look at Amaterasu trying to be chirpy here. Amaterasu is totally stuck in the wrong comic for her temperament.

11. Six-panel grid. Basically sticks on six panels for rest of scene. For conversation, the three-panel just isn't efficient enough for me.

I love seeing Tula's take on all the gods. Woden and Minerva are especially good here.

I suspect that last panel is the most emotion we've ever seen Sakhmet show.

Woden's quote is the back cover quote. Some people came away from last issue with fonder feelings for Woden. I suspect they've entirely evaporated at this point.

This sequence is obviously progressing the plot.

12. Woden's "enthusiasm" is really fucked up.

The fifth panel is us stressing one aspect of Tara which I wanted to make clear. Tara is *tall*. We reference her superheroine's physique in the one page story at the end, and that doesn't just mean "is extremely conventionally hot". Baal is about six foot. Tara is a little taller, and more so in heels.

At least part of deciding to make her as tall as she is was for body diversity reasons, coming from the same place that lead to the Norns. We were limited in various ways, and Tara had to have a certain physical presence to work... but there was no reason she couldn't be really tall.

People have asked about the influences on Tara. It's a bit more subtle than most. 50s movie icon turned sci-fi was one part of it. In some ways, I think of her as a Lady Gaga/Taylor Swift collision. Her height was definitely part of the Swift.

13. Yet more Woden sinisterness, promptly upped by Sakhmet.

14. A few more bits of information for the "what Tara is Tara?" riddle for people to chew over, obviously. All interesting stuff to think about. I think it's safe to say that she isn't Tara from Buffy.

Tara's background is Hindu, and she's anglo-Indian. The racial slurs in the DPS are racists being ignorant shits.

15. First panel: yes, Ananke really cares about Tara, definitely, for sures.

16-17. Ugh.

I put off writing this for as long as possible, and it took me a whole afternoon to write when I dug in, because I kept on having to stop. As mentioned earlier, I followed a lot of people's abuse, but I deliberately dug out some logs of it, and based a lot of the style and format of the tweets on real examples of harassments. No 1:1, at least as far as I'm aware (though the simple ones almost certainly have been used).

I hope many (in fact, hopefully most) people stopped reading it. It's a visual effect as much as something to read. It's an overwhelming wall of it. I hope people look away.

Honestly, just tried glancing at it now, and I can't.

I wrote more than was included here, but the design led to less. Sergio had the idea of doing it as an actual tablet design, which has the interesting effect of turning the comic you're holding actually into a tablet. For a second, you are Tara, holding that pad.

We used a lot of symbols in the usernames that can't be used in actual twitter accounts, because we didn't want to drag anyone into this or have someone create a Tara account or something.

18. Important glance there, obviously. Sigh.

19. Sigh. There's no really words here.

20. Tara isn't perfect, but I hope she's understandable in her decisions and perspective. Life is hard and we are not perfect. "Try to be kinder. You have no idea what people are going through." isn't much, but it's something I'm trying to remember in my own life, as hard as it often is. We're stuck in this together.

I considered losing the Fucking Tara. I wondered if it was too much of a twist of the knife.

I decided no, sometimes you twist that knife, just to make sure everyone knows a knife has been stuck in them.

21. Yes, the suicide note we've just read? No one in the world of *WicDiv* will ever read it. No one will ever know Tara like we know Tara.

Clearly, this is plot-y, as picked up in the tweets over the page. Who goes around killing gods and setting them on fire? Well, Baphomet.

22-23-24. Had a few plans for how to do this, but this one works.

The fading of the colours is obviously a fade to black, but also matches the sunset timing of Tara's death.

Click Holy came to me late. Sat down and listed all the site names of that sort, and tried to pun riff on them all. Click Holy was clearly the best.

Page 23 has things getting more complicated. Wanted to try and capture the game of whisper and response and knee-jerk and hot-take we all live in. Includes first notes of "It must be Baphomet".

I wonder if 24 should have been a little further out — it may be close enough to make people think they should be able to read it, when this is meant to be a pure visual effect.

25. And title drop for the arc.

The Backup. Obviously inspired by the sexist treatment of actresses in interviews. There's enough gif-sets that basically duplicate what happened to Tara here.

She's actually at the *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* premier. We were going to stick it in the Loc Cap but decided it may be a little self-referential and/or we may get sued. Jamie and I actually went to that one. Sitting and watching all these beautiful men was the moment I went "you know — I probably should go to the gym for once in my life" and started working out a bit.

(Went from a 37 waist to a 32 inch waist since then. Still not entirely sure how I feel about that.)

Jamie loved drawing this page, and Tara specifically. She's fun to draw, apparently. Clearly, I spoiled any form of fun for Jamie by doing this story with Tula. I am the worst in many ways.

Back Cover. We use quotes from other people about the lead character on the back for this arc. It was bad in its original context, but at the end of the story, it's obviously even worse. If the ending left you more sad than angry, I suspect the Woden quote may ignite that rage a little more.

And, in a special feature... here's some spoilery questions being answered in private.

Anonymous said:

WicDiv #13 Spoilers You've said that being inside Woden's head is unpleasant, but how is it compared to the double-page spread in #13? Like is it better, worse, worse in a different way?

It's a different sort of challenge, really. With the tweets, as horrible as it is, you're writing a form. Harassment tweets have a structure. I can study what people do when writing them, and duplicate it. I don't have to go into the deeper level of their thinking. This is surface stuff.

With Woden, you have to submerge yourself in his

worldview, and try and make it coherent (or rather, coherent given his axiomatic elements).

Obviously more on this next month. It's a hard issue.

kayla-bird said:

How far ahead are you outlining? What I mean is — you've got a teeny ensemble cast and you're killing them off in a way that'll make George R.R. Martin look proud. This is part of some sort of plan, right? I don't need to see your outline, I just really want to know it exists and that we'll get a dramatic payoff for all this suffering.

It's planned out in a fairly robust way all the way until the end. There's room for detours and improvisation in approach, but I could write most of the final issue right now.

That said, I'm not sure if I'm killing them off that quickly given the mission statement of the book. It's Issue 13 and three gods are dead (EDIT: i.e. of the twelve on the wheel). At this rate, they'll all be dead by Issue 52, which is the top range of the 30-60 issues' length of series we've said.

As a vaguely comforting thing, however, there are ups and downs on this road in terms of joy and sadness. This arc is an obviously dark one.

xinecoultter said:

The Wicked + Divine #13 is the strongest issue so far. I can't say that I really enjoyed reading it though; it exposes some very ugly truths about our society and that's a bitter pill to swallow. Yet another example of a masterclass in writing. You wrote earlier that this was a difficult issue to write. Was there anything you did to get into the correct mindset to write it? Was there anything you did to get yourself out of it?

Really, it's just research. To get out of it, you run as far away from the keyboard as possible and do anything, anything else.

And now back to work. Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 14

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was a nightmarish amount of work. For once, more of it landed on my lap. It took Jamie longer than we'd hoped — about a week or so, which isn't a small thing when you're also doing *Phonogram* at the same time. Matt was obviously MVP for it. He attacked it pretty hard, and we did a lot of tweaks looking for the effects we were going for.

Me? Took about a month to write the issue. I find myself thinking of something I recall being common wisdom back in the days of games journalism, talking about development. Specifically, that you should only really try to do something difficult in one area at once, especially if it involved innovation. If the rest is stuff you know you can do, you can explore the area with some degree of security. If you try and do two at once, neither

can be really completed until both are. It becomes exponentially more difficult, as you're trying to get these two systems to align.

(I suspect this is a reason why AAA games are often so fucking dull, but that's not strictly speaking relevant.)

In short: I suspect something like that was happening here, which is why it took a month. The two problems were...

i) can you do an issue entirely comprised of rearranged panels from previous issues?

ii) can I write a convincing interiority of a complete fuck of a character that people would want to read?

The main problem with the first one is even working out what story I could possibly tell. What images do we have? How can they be rearranged? And what of my material of the larger story of *Wicked/Divine* can I actually use with it, etc.

There was also the option that it just may not work. I tried to write it early enough that there was time to press eject. If I couldn't make it stretch to 20+ pages, we could get a guest artist in, something like a guest rapper. If it was really bad, there was always the chance to get multiple artists in, in a "multiple rapper" sort of setup.

First step was just throwing this stuff on the floor and going through the issue and working it pretty methodically. Later on, I went through *WicDiv* labelling the appearances of each character numerically so I could reference them, but early on it was just about obsessing over what pictures we had.

(When we came to assemble it, Jamie came over to my house to break the back of it. This resulted in a manga studio page full of all the Woden heads, ever, which we used like a palette. It is a very disturbing page.)

Among the things that caught my eye was that Woden's helmet, lacking features as it does, could easily support an issue. Cassandra wears nearly the same clothes for the majority of the run, in which case stuff involving her seemed necessary. The problem was Ananke, who needed to be involved in the story, and who changes her clothes pretty regularly. She was the limiting factor, and involved the most planning.

Ideas occurred to me. Things that could be used, stretched, warped.

(The script I did was then scribbled on when Jamie was over, with suggested panels to use for Jamie's editing.)

Jamie didn't just cut, paste and generally edit panels. There're a couple of tiny new things which I'll point out as we progress. There're a few closing lines. There're also bits where it may appear that it's a new figure, but in reality is actually a frankensteining together of multiple images. In an ideal form, I suspect the only new image in the comic should be the final figure who's revealed. We didn't quite pull that off, but we did okay.

Matt came in after the pages were completed and we talked through the concepts of how to do it. He had the idea of sampling the original art of the page it was in, and working it in as a separate layer. You get the hauntology aspect to the book like that. There's also an element of psychosis to the colours, as they increase in intensity as we move through the book.

While all that was going on, I was trying to get close to

Woden. He's a shit, but I wanted him to have the reality of any of the other characters. There are no monsters. There are just people. If I was going to write a sexist, I had no desire to write one who was a straw man. He believes his stuff for his own reasons. He's self-aware (but tellingly not entirely self-aware). There has to be a reason to be interested in him, and know why he's doing what he's doing, etc.

This basically involved wallowing in shit for the month, just trying out dialogue and trying to conceive of a misogynist that magnifies the very worst parts of me in a fairly internally coherent way.

Which isn't an easy sentence to write. I said all the characters were me, and that includes fucking Woden.

Woden is scary. He scares the living shit out of me. I showered hard after writing this.

The whole "ceremonial annihilation of self" is a big part of *WicDiv*, as I've talked before, but there's bits that I'm going to be glad to watch burn.

Anyway — let's dig into this.

Main Cover. Like the pugnaciousness of Woden here. The cracking of the knuckles and the fist. It's a threatening look, obviously.

Grimes Cover. Jamie and I basically said "riff on the Norns or the Valkyries or something and see what you end up with." We ended up with this. *WicDiv* is a lot of fun sometimes.

Intro page. The dedication foreshadows the sample. We were considering having it be "THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO MATT FRACTION AND CHIP ZDARSKY. YOUR MOVE." but that would only have encouraged them.

1. One of the new drawn pages, and obviously a relatively simple one. In an initial draft, I had the voice coming from off panel, but it involved some cheaty stuff to avoid revealing that the character is also speaking in a distorted Woden-style voice. Like, Woden turned off his distortion halfway across the page, etc.

In the end, a sort of implicit conversation was the way we went. I suspect some people will miss that Woden is telling the story to someone, but they'd get it in a reread. This is clearly an issue people will reread.

(I'd hope most of *WicDiv* would be that, but this one especially.)

2. Thought it was probably worth telling people this is a remix issue, y'know? There have been some reviewers who didn't notice. I suspect this is a reviewing competency test.

3-4-5. Jamie's arrangement of this was pretty clear and simple. Matt added the idea of resampling the pages where they were originally used, and having some of that leaking in. It immediately makes this sequence more berserk.

You'll see the main technique I used to keep the thing from falling apart — namely, a more authoritative narrator than we've ever used in *WicDiv* before. In

comics, the push and pull between words and pictures is key. The more weight the words take in terms of supplying meaning, the more the imagery can wander.

(This is really basic stuff, obv — you'll get this from *Understanding Comics*, but it's always worth remembering.)

As said, I wrote a lot more than we ended up with. There was a lot of Woden rambling and I cut down to what basically worked on the page.

Why start with Kerry's assassination attempt? In a basic way, when analysing the story, it's where you have the easiest new information for the reader, picking up a scene where we left it in Issue 7. Woden and his Valkyries is the key relationship, and worth restating that.

I saw a couple of people say this reminded them of the start of Ellis/Jiménez's censored Hellblazer comic *Shoot*, and they wouldn't be wrong. Fascinating comic.

Immediately we get one of those core parts of Woden that hold him together — that self-hatred. It's an issue which answers a lot of mysteries, but also sets up a bunch.

The head shot blowing a bunch of *WicDiv* images over the page is very much what the issue is. It's like mopping up brain matter, this issue.

6. Odd seeing Laura again.

This is one of the clunkier pages in terms of the storytelling — that middle panel is one of the ones where the remix nature of the book is clear. There's some minor cleaning up work too — a removal of a Minerva, and a stolen pose for Ananke, a slightly off Woden, etc.

With Ananke, we basically sampled an Ananke from one scene in a previous book per scene. This was the Issue 9 with Cassandra one.

Yes, this is a "Woden almost peed inside his suit" joke.

7. And we set up the basic device which made me realise the issue could work, and an unplanned for advantage of the Team *Phonogram* traditional eight-panel grid. As we have a fairly standard panel size, a lot can just be used direct, or recropped, etc.

(Did I tell Jamie to do scenes with this issue in mind? No. Or at least, not in a way which reached the page.)

Jamie uses 3D models for his backgrounds, as a basis for inking, and that's used here in parts.

We're not a comic about THE GOVERNMENT AND SUPERHEROES!!!! (It's overdone territory and so pretty tedious) but I felt it was worth saying why it's not an issue. Well, at least here.

One day I'll do a Carthage story. One day.

8. Nice use of losing the distortions to show a flashback in panel one by Matt.,

The odd thing about much of this issue is how much it works as an issue. I thought it'd be a lot rougher, more DIY aesthetic... but as far as a remix goes, it's pretty seamless. I guess that says something else.

9-10-11-12. As a major part where Woden interacted with the plot, I knew I'd want to expand this exchange, and I just let the conversation sprawl out.

I smile at Cass in the final panel of page 9. Bless her.

“The Patriarchy Hurts Everyone” is a mimetically sticky phrase which I’ve been thinking about a lot over the last few years. Putting it in the mouth of Woden makes it awkward. I suspect Cass’s response would be most feminists’ response to Woden. As in, really? *Really?*

The most surprising thing about Woden’s speech on pages 10-11 is that Cassandra doesn’t interrupt it. I like to imagine her sort of standing there, blinking.

The responses to this speech have been interesting. I suspect I’d better not comment on that.

In terms of character, at least part of what happened when I was thinking of Woden was the realisation that a slightly self-aware Woden would obviously despise most MRA sorts, even while acting in a way often aligned to it. He’s not a men’s right activist. He’s a Woden activist. Fuck everyone.

In terms of what stuff went into the ramble, it involved a synthesis of three main sources.

The first would be Laurie Penny’s last book, *Unspeakable Things*, where the core “Patriarchy is about the Fathers” line of argument comes from. As a book, I like it a lot, and like Laurie generally. It’s well worth buying. Laurie reads *WicDiv* in trades, and I can only imagine her horrified face when she reaches this bit.

(One of the many fascinating things about *Mad Max: Thunder Road* is the War Boys. The whole “The Patriarchy Hurts Everyone” aspect is shown incredibly clearly by those poor, desperate-to-please kids. A lesser film would have made them stooges of the regime. This made it clear they were, in their own way, victims too. Yes, they had privilege above many, but their job was to be used up and die for their father figure, etc. I digress.)

The second was a book about Sexual Selection I read back when I was a student, *The Red Queen* by Matt Ridley. It’s twenty years out of date, so I wouldn’t trust it, and like most evolution-as-applied-to-humans books, you need to read it with a really careful mind, but the whole stuff about Wot Fathers Do When They Get Power was taken from there. Mashing that into Laurie was the majority of the thought here.

The remainder was a moment when listening to a particular moment of horror in one of the recent *Hardcore History* episodes about WW1 (The whole “Blueprint for Armageddon” series is essential) where I just had a moment of perspective on the whole thing.

Synthesising the whole lot was really the job, into something Woden could say and maybe even believe — the question of how much is honesty and how much is the pose of honesty is also a key thing throughout the Cass/Woden conversation.

As a larger thing, this is probably a clear bit of how I see Woden — someone who’s read all the Tumblr essays, knows a good chunk of the theory and just shrugs. “So what?” Nihilism is an awful position, but it’s also a hard one to argue against.

In terms of craft, the backgrounds are public domain images which can be used rights free. We tried various ones before settling on these.

13. Obviously one of the less fancy pages, very much turned to out of a need to link one scene to the next. Functionality, etc.

Cass has been in many ways the angry moral centre of the book, but on this page you see her (via Woden’s eyes) in a different light, and a much less favourable one. She’s the person who can handle herself, but I suspect after this, you see how young she actually is more. Also... a writer friend who reads this in advance commented that the issue made a lot of the gods tarnished. They seem smaller. Clearly, that’s deliberate — Woden makes everything smaller, as a petty side of eyes tends to — but it’s a hard one. Seeing Cassandra being played by Woden is hard for me. Of course, now I’m also scared for her.

14-15. I didn’t know I was including this in this issue until I wrote it. I have a lot of material, and it’s a question of knowing how to use it. When planning it, I couldn’t see a single good reason to keep the murder mystery running any more. It’s much more interesting to close it. There’s something oddly appealing about doing a clues-fitting-together scene in an issue which is literally about fitting shit together.

(Obviously *WicDiv* loses people at various points, but Jamie and I have been surprised by people not knowing what the plot is any more. The one-sentence version being: “ANANKE IS KILLING HER YOUNG CHARGES. WHY?”)

The Ananke-over-shoulder is a new image. In my plans, I had a different setup, but it’d have been clunky as hell, so Jamie just did a simple outline. Frankly, as simple single line filled in, it almost doesn’t count, does it? I could probably do it. Badly, but still.

“ANANKE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING!” makes me laugh for some reason.

16. As I said, the issue was inspired by internet remix culture. I suspect I thought more of the issue would have worked like this, but in the end, I much preferred pushing the plot forward rather than snark.

You know the bit earlier about this issue reducing the gods? This page. Very much this page.

We originally did this in a different font. I SHOUTED FOR IMPACT.

That second panel with Baal strikes me as an excellent T-shirt.

Epic colouring here by Matt. Really like it. Unusual, striking.

17. In the same way as “Wait — I can use public domain images” was done earlier, this page comes from me thinking of alternate ways to use our resources — and one of the resources was Jamie’s 3D SketchUp models. By taking a screenshot and processing it, you could have an interesting effect. Clearly, the computer-aided-design vibe is appropriate for Woden both as the builder of Pantheon, and because of the *Tron* aspect.

18-19. Oh god.

If it’s any help, it’s actually more disturbing in black and white.

When originally planning the issue, I was thinking we’d get a sample from another Image book that’d work as a “chorus”. I was thinking maybe a Casanova-talking-

to-reader panel, reused as a refrain, repeating riffs of a similar thing. It was only relatively near starting work the idea of... wait! We can use *Sex Criminals*! This would close the circle.

It's also, in Woden's world, incredibly appropriate — that Woden in our comic in the dance sequence and the pose Chip did with Kieron were identical almost makes it seems like we planned it.

The pages are fucking horrible, and hopefully a lesson in how context works in comics, and how images warp depending on how they're used, and how arguments that take an image and take it apart in and of itself with no other reference to anything else are fundamentally flawed. What appears playful and joyous in *Sex Criminals* is turned into this. Comics are *read*.

These pages were coloured by Dee Cuniffe, who has been flattening for all of *WicDiv*. Matt suggested Dee do it, in the spirit of the whole remix-structure of the book, and the results are excellent. That drop to the greys on Cassandra is fucking amazing. The pacing across the second page is one of my favourite things in the issue, in terms of "doing what we want to do". Clearly, it's grotesque.

(The whole issue is meant to be building in intensity, with these micro-climaxes, before falling away a little. That's both in terms of visuals and emotional content. By the end... oh, we'll get there.)

The last two panels on page 18 form one of those slight twists on Woden which are key to him. Trying to get the push and pull of his hypocrisies was hard. The core nihilism of Woden is very much "what do you say to someone who's educated themselves and still doesn't care?"

Yeah, still worried for Cass.

20. In the original "script" this first caption was planned to be done on the previous page. Actually... well, "script" is probably overstating what actually existed. I suspect we'll show some of it in the trade, but half the time it was very much commission. There were bits where I'm more "use these images from this stuff to create a whole new page". There's other bits where I'm just doing dialogue in the panel, and know we're going to be picking and choosing from what we've got, etc. I mean, on this page, the last four panels were basically INCREASING CLOSE-UP ON WODEN, which Matt then amped up with the colouring. The dialogue was more in the script, but I cut a bunch to get a slight change of momentum. Two two-caption panels, followed by two one-caption/balloon panels. That's a speeding up. Plus the THREE-CAPTION PANELS followed by ONE PANEL OF SPEECH.

(Decompression isn't quite as much of a hot potato as it was back in the 00s, which was always fogged up by some people not quite getting what the word actually meant, and using it pretty much randomly for when they don't like a story. These four panels are pretty much classical decompression, in terms of choosing to stretch out a moment for increased aesthetic effect. In this case, freezing it and letting us linger on Woden's temper snapping.)

Anyway — going back to the start of the page. The script for 18-19 was basically a lot of dialogue, and

various ideas of how we could work the pacing of the image to create an effect. When I actually did that, we realised that ending with a link to the next scene would actually break the effect of the two pages. We needed that single image to be a punchline...

In which case the first panel here is carrying more weight than is actually elegant. The captions need to do a lot of lifting. Not exactly my favourite solution in the book, but it does the job.

21. Ananke's not-happy face isn't any more comforting when we reuse it, is it?

Ananke looks a little like some awesome electroclash band in the third panel.

Yeah — this is Matt in virtuoso mode. Matt Wilson for Eisner, etc.

22. "Hey, Jamie — can we make a cylinder of pre-existing Woden heads? Please and thank you."

Another page which Matt really brought into focus. Before the treatment, the cut and paste Woden wasn't quite working in the falling — after the treatment, the repeat becomes a meaningful thing, in terms of actually feeling like a descent.

As I said, as we get near the end, the cleanness of Woden's perspective is starting to fall apart.

23. I believe I wrote in the script the finger-click to remove the blood so we got to use slightly different faces on the page. I'm not sure if we needed to.

24-25. The first pages I wrote for the issue, as it was basically the thing I was sure would work, and the key thing in terms of "I'm sure that Woden's conversation will lead to here."

Biggest conversations were in terms of box shapes and colour choices. Making sure the ? read as one of the pictures rather than as a number was the main worry, which basically seems to work. The red holds it together.

Choosing which panel to use for each of the "these people are alive" shots felt particularly cruel. "Where did Inanna look most adorable and hopeful? Oh, that one."

26. With the conspiracy theories flying around, I suspect I'd better keep my commentary here minimal.

As said, this is an issue which closes some previous mysteries. Appropriately, it opens a few more.

27. Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory) were Woden's two ravens.

And that's it. See you next month, where we're joined by Stephanie Hans and Amaterasu.

See you then. Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 15

Stephanie is one of my favourite artists and people in comics, so having her do Amaterasu made a lot of sense. It was instantly something I wanted to do after seeing her alt cover early on. I think the issue's merits are primarily hers. The last two issues are some of the best things *WicDiv* has ever done, in my opinion. This is more

core-*WicDiv* quality, I think. You tell me, y'know?

I suspected this one may be tricky for some folks. Also suspected the Tumblr fanbase may have it hardest, as it's a especially tricky one for its common mode of discourse.

WicDiv is, as I said at its opening, a book about problematic people doing problematic things. That's true of all of the cast. As such, it's hard for any character to be written as 100% in the wrong. The question is often more "what are they wrong about in this specific context?". I don't black hat my villains, with the possible exception of Ananke, and even with her, give me time.

However, our argument ends with Amaterasu doing something so offensive that even she realises it's not right, prompted by Cassandra's words (but tellingly, only because how her words connected to Hazel's own life). I think that almost certainly shows our hand. I think any argument that forwards that the creators think a nuclear bomb above Hiroshima is a positive thing is not a strong one.

It's also the start of her plot.

The point of these sorts of issues is to show what drives the characters, from Woden's self-hating nihilistic hedonism to Dionysus's giving-everything-up-for-everyone-else-but-at-what-cost. As I've said before, all the characters are driven by a hamartia — that tragic flaw. I hope that people at least get a sense of what Amaterasu's may be by now.

(And Cassandra's too, for that matter.)

Main Cover. With the exception of the forthcoming Sakhmet cover, I think this is our favourite of the team *WicDiv* bodyshots. What's going on with the sun is a lot of fun here.

Stephanie Hans Cover. Stephanie's whole issue was fitted into an amazingly small space of time considering what she does, and to make it worse, the fact she was doing a cover slipped in our planning. We played with various simple ideas, but Stephanie wanted to do clearly far too much work. Again.

Stephanie notes her Amaterasu is based on Margarita Kareva btw. Google her up — she is amazing.

Also, have a look at www.stephanie-hans.tumblr.com for her process. You should find some of her *WicDiv* stuff on there if you dig through.

1-2. I suspect these two pages are my favourite in the whole book. Childhood anecdote which is about key elements of her personality. This is not a comforting open, to say the least. I suspect if I was to show you two pages to cut to the core of what Amaterasu is about, I'd give you these.

(This two-page opening is something we do down the line again, as I liked it that much. Compare/contrast being our main mode, y'know? Our plots are always Hegelian in structure.)

Hazel Greenaway, as mentioned in Issue 1, was born in Exeter. She was a private school girl, but worth stressing a uniform is nothing to do with going to a private school in the UK.

That's Exeter Cathedral they're walking past, which is really lovely.

I like how Stephanie brings in the reds as Hazel shows her teeth.

Main dialogue tweaks were to up the language from the boy to make it clear it's gone from surprise to actual pain.

"Emi": I mention in the back it's short for Emily.

The plushie is the lead character from Clover's masterwork, *Okami*. In the game, the wolf is the god Amaterasu.

I don't know about anyone else, but the last panel on page 2 scares the living shit out of me.

3. Take as thou wilt.

We tried to work out how to do the icons here. Abstractly, they should all be skulls because none of the gods were on earth in 2010. In practice, we've already done a retro flashback one (Woden's) and kept them all as the current state of play, so we decided to keep it as is. If we ever do a whole issue back in another period, I suspect we'd have the correct icons.

4. Meiji Shrine in Tokyo. I started work on this issue when I went to Japan last year. All the places are places I went to. I suspect I may use more in time — we spent a lot of time visiting shrines.

Actually, that segues into something — I saw some people saying I said Shinto was a dead religion.

I don't believe I've ever said that.

To paraphrase what I said, is that I preferred to use dead religions (or, in a second best way, revived religions) unless there was a *really good reason otherwise*. Or if it's Christianity, in which case it's the tradition I was raised in, so anything goes.

(Yes, the italicised bit begs a question, but I would hope that this issue makes an argument. Most of the reviews seem to get it, so read them. I don't like explaining plots, because I don't like Word Of God-ing stuff. Also, the point is the story. Any definitive commentary from me only flattens the work. As I say repeatedly, these writer notes are some random thoughts and only a tiny part of the thought that goes into any issue. This shit is complicated. It has to be.)

That said, I can't work out why anyone would even *think* I would mean Shinto was a dead religion, as it clearly isn't. It'll be as ludicrous as me saying Christianity or Hinduism or any other religion with millions of believers is a dead religion. Why would anyone say that?

Anyway — Meiji Shrine. Lovely.

Amaterasu is travelling via sunbeams. We've checked the time differences quite carefully here — the Shrine closes before this time of day, which is why it's this quiet. The whole issue takes place in the time just before sunset.

(Generally speaking, my rule with Amaterasu is that she can travel anywhere where there's sunlight. It's the opposite of Inanna, who travelled by Starlight. Yes, she better pray quickly and get home at the end, or she's going to get stuck.)

We lean into *Okami* here. I suspect this is lifted from either Fraction or O'Malley, and I can't remember who.

5. Yet more sunlight travel, as done in lovely Stephanie Hans-o-vision. I saw one review which noted that she's

an artist who has such a firm sense of what her book should look like that it makes you wonder what *WicDiv* would look like if she was the main artist.

Stephanie and I talk about doing something bigger together a fair bit. I hope it'll happen. It would be awesome.

First of the flashbacks in the middle of the page. When I said that I was worried this issue may be a bit subtle, I wasn't actually talking about whether Amaterasu was in the right or not. I'll talk about that as we proceed. I was talking about people understanding the flashbacks, and how they tie to the presence. This single-image-unexplained approach is basically what I'm running *Darth Vader* off, and I'm pretty fond of it. Admittedly, when it's stuff you haven't seen before, it's a bigger leap for the reader. I hope it comes across as evocative anyway.

6. And Stephanie Hans's take on the Pantheon, which I like a lot. Very much the facial structures of them, and their looks, but distinctly hers. Great stuff.

I love the mood she's brought here — it's one of those mundane surreal images, of gods standing around a hospital room with a corpse. I suspect if the TV show ever took off, this would be the sort of thing they'd love.

Key element — what Stephanie did in Woden's mask. We have the gaze, and the reflection. It's really powerful and creepy, at least for me.

Callback to Fucking Tara, obv.

7. Spoonerised 'Do not go gentle into that good night', from Dylan Thomas.

8. Ananke just doing a little Ananke-ing.

This is basically how our character issues have been working — we reveal some things, we do major character work in terms of motivation on people who we haven't seen much of, and we push the plot forward a few key steps. Here, we have some more of the world's mythology. We've talked about the forces of darkness. Now we have demons and a coming war.

Nothing like a good prophecy.

9. For those who are on Dionysus's mailing list, I suspect this scene reads differently. This is the confrontation with Woden he was talking about when writing to you guys.

After last issue, I also suspect Woden reads differently.

I personally think they fight over who has the best custom font. Lucky the Norns aren't in the room as well.

10. I originally wrote Baal's line as Puss-in-thigh-boots but we decided some people would take it too literally and be distracted. I'm sure I'll get it in there eventually.

Anyway, everyone is totally taking Tara's death well and not on the edge of their nerves in any way whatsoever.

Looking forward to Sakhmet's issue. She and Amaterasu are the gods who've been in play longest without having their core explored. This basically does the work on Amaterasu. 17 should do the same for Sakhmet.

11. Smooth moves, Woden.

Second flashback: Amaterasu has memories of covered bodies in hospital rooms.

12. And talking about gods who I need to spend more time on, it's Minerva. She gets some more play in the back half of this arc, starting here.

I like that Beth's film crew are just sort of slumming around and doing a half-arsed job.

Third flashback: looking beneath the sheet and seeing something she rather wouldn't.

13. Hey, someone's noticed something is off, I hope no one interrupts and...

NORNS! WHAT ARE YOU LIKE!

14. Enter the Norns. Stephanie's mood of the three of them is fierce. Seeing Norn cosplay in the flesh is pretty amazing — there's a sense of momentum when they move around.

I worried about the repeat of the FUCK in the first panel from the last on page 13, but — y'know — Cassandra.

Quiet plot movement with Beth, Obv.

This argument is obviously at the core of the issue, at least in verbalising stuff.

Worth noting that I'm not writing an argument here — I'm writing characters having an argument, and a big chunk of what's going on here is nothing to do with what they're actually saying.

Because that's how people work.

Starting condition: Cassandra has clear contempt for Beth and Amaterasu. Cassandra doesn't suffer fools gladly, and her definition of "fool" is pretty much "everyone".

The last panel of 14 is my other favourite of the issue. Uh-oh. Someone's threatening to take away her plush toy. Insecurity igniting into *this*.

15. I went back and forth over the third of Amaterasu's insults. The other two are bad. The third is utterly noxious. Questioning the ethnicity of a mixed-race kid is incredibly hurtful and offensive, in many ways.

(While readers often got Cassandra's mixed-race English/Japanese background, a lot of people didn't. As such, this makes it a little meta.)

Even as angry as she is, would she say that? Talking it over with C, we decided yeah. In fact, she probably has no idea it's as offensive as it is.

(Compare and contrast with Luci, who knew *exactly* how offensive her line was, which is why she presented it in a way she could deny that's what she meant if called on it.)

I often don't think Americans realise how white the UK is. Last census had it at 87% white. London is not the UK, and places like Exeter are unbelievably mono-cultured.

Cassandra shoots from the hip here. You give her a blogpost or time to think, she'd do better. Cassandra reaches for a practised stance and hits Amaterasu with it as hard as she can.

This is how fights escalate, of course. The Norns are a little more controlled across this sequence, but that's the age difference.

The last three panels by Stephanie are incredible here. Look at all those reds!

16. Yeah, we went to Hiroshima too. C took me for a walk the night we arrived, and I had no idea it was the Peace Park until she actually pointed out the dome. I had no idea.

Honestly, I didn't think of it as teleporting there until literally now, but I suspect subconsciously that's where this scene comes from.

(The journey will also be pretty influential on Volume 2 of *Über*, but that's by the by.)

I originally had Cass' line as "the inappropriately culturally appropriative avengers" but decided it was a little tortured for Cass to actually say right then. Believe it or not, even I have a limit on clever-clever bullshit.

The whole sequence was tricky — with everything else happening in the issue, things are a little cramped. Most superhero comics would give a lot more space to some of these images... but working with Stephanie over on *Angela* made me know she handled these intense sequences particularly well.

She totally nails it.

If you're studying craft here, look how Stephanie uses the page's verticality, both here and on the next page.

This sequence was all written Marvel method.

17. Honestly, just look at Stephanie's use of colour on this page. The gods' colour palettes clashing has always been a thing in *WicDiv*, but this is probably the biggest example in the book — panel 1, especially.

I think I called for a Captain-Marvel-esque hand-circle in panel 2.

Panel 4 is the exactly moment when Cass' contempt cracks and we see fear. I suspect she had no idea what Amaterasu was really capable of until now.

Anyway — verticality in that last panel. Woooooosh!

18. Clayton really going for it with the lettering, of course.

C and I were particularly worried about this sequence before it was drawn — specifically, that Stephanie's art is so beautiful the fact this is offensive and wrong might be overlooked. We talked about it to Stephanie in advance — it's always best to talk to artists about issues like this. I hope it handled okay.

Following some of the commentary, I suspect this is the first time in all criticism that an artificial sun above Hiroshima has been considered "too subtle".

(Some of the above worries may have fed into this, but it's hard.)

Fourth flashback. With the others, I'd have hoped this all ties together to the rough shape of Amaterasu's past. Obviously we'll make it more explicit further in the story, but the broad shapes are there.

(Well, I hope — as I said, it's this stuff I worried about most.)

Really lovely panel that one, especially after all the rage and horror earlier.

19. Change of mood. Much more naturalistic colours. The argument has burnt itself out. Now they're actually talking.

I find the third panel oddly funny, and I'm not quite sure why.

We give Inanna's original name here. Eleanor is obviously Luci. I'd hope by mentioning it in the second panel, and then giving the god names in the fourth panel, people could tie all this together. Getting it all in one panel seemed entirely unnatural, no matter how I rewrote it.

Hmm. Wish I managed to sort that lettering better in the final panel. Or split it into two panels.

20. I suspect the compare/contrast structure of *WicDiv* is rarely more fucking obvious than here.

I once had a screaming row with someone in a club with this exchange, prompted by a Limp Bizkit song. Life is very strange. EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON! NOTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON! Repeat to fade.

Er... Cass and Ammy handle it better than we did, obv.

I originally had Ammy swear before leaving, before realising that, no, that's not her at all. "Oh Poo" is about the right level.

For those of you who are worried about Cass, I'm sure she'll get home fine. She has her mobile. I can imagine Amaterasu being overly apologetic when she comes to pick them up.

20-21. Really beautiful stuff from Stephanie here. When I talk about being worried about not having enough space earlier, you may wonder at two pages for this quiet scene. The mood is just more important than the fisticuffs. The final scene has to feel like its own world, etc.

The "tomorrow" is telling. She does this a lot.

Had to work the fade out quite hard to make it work — Clayton putting them in a circle I think is the key thing. Trying to imply the prayers go on was the key thing, and comics don't do endlessness in words well.

I'm hoping in context that Aruna is Tara is clear, but does involve a cognitive leap. I suspect with a reread of the issue it'll be clear.

Obviously, you could take this as a prayer to Izanagi, but I'd suggest you have a reread if you think that's all this scene (or issue) is about.

22. I suspect I was thinking about the Shellac song, except not really.

The Backup. I swear we had the time on this at some point, but it's not here in the press. This happened somewhere after Luci dying but before the con Laura debuted at. I mean, you can work that out for yourself (as in, the events almost certainly must have happened then) but would have been good to be confirmed.

I think this is my favourite of the published *Videogames* so far. The other two were more like grace notes to the story, while this is formally smarter and actually pushes the plot forward a few more. As I say, with *WicDiv*, it's all about how I choose to present the material, and using these fragments to hit stuff I'm not sure I'll get to elsewhere seems fruitful.

If we did one for the Woden issue, it'd have been a

Brunhilde interview, so this is me merging that with Amaterasu to get this. Glad to show Brunhilde in her valkyrie costume too.

Basically, the other two *Videogames* are more like this one than the previous two.

Anyway — thanks for reading. Next up — Leila del Duca and the Morrigan (and Baphomet).

ISSUE 16

Doing these early, as we're at Thought Bubble this weekend, and things will be hectic afterwards, so there's a chance I just wouldn't have time.

Here we finally get to the Morrigan's and Baphomet's background. I suspect the worst issue of *WicDiv* is issue 3, and I've been doing repair work on Morrigan/Baphomet ever since, in terms of trying to delineate their relationship (There's quite a few people who love issue 3, but it's definitely the one where we've seemed to lose people.) I knew this issue would come originally, but I suspect with retrospect I'd have brought at least one of the key points explicitly forward to that first appearance. We've said implicitly that Morrigan is to "blame" for Baphomet in some way, which is obviously right at the heart of them.

(I'd also have had Morrigan enter in her normal form, then transform. The urge to keep her strange was key, but I leaned a little too confusing. I know it holds up better with a reread.

If I did that, it wouldn't have changed this issue much. Rather than being a confirmation, it'd be a story about how all that went down. The "How *is* Morrigan to blame?"

Also this morning I've just kicked myself over something I wish I'd done in the issue. Ah, inspiration. That she mostly arrives at the perfect moment doesn't mean she's always entirely on time.

Anyway, issue.

Main Cover. Penultimate body shot, and it's fun. The Morrigan's always had the most interesting dresses of the cast, so a close-up on the detail is useful.

Leila del Duca Cover (with Mat Lopes). Jamie's cover is austere — Morrigan in her mood of queen. I suggested that we do something which captures the doomed romance of the pair. Leila had a few roughs, but this one — Morrigan protective over the emotional Baphomet — struck me as the saddest. Morrigan's look to camera is pretty amazing too.

The eye-stripe was added by Mat, who jumped on the project as colourist relatively late when Leila's normal colourist couldn't fit in his schedule. He did great.

1. I fully admit to loving having Baal and Minerva bounce off each other.

Craft-wise, to state the obvious, this is mainly about recapping the current state of play. Mood is interesting, of course.

Leila on *Shutter* does their fantastical images with a low panel count. I knew that I'd had to have some sequences which were much tighter than that, but I tried to leave her space in key sequences. I'd have loved to

have got her a double-page spread though. C'est la vie.

I had to rework "Eyeliner made of eyes" a few times, as it kept on feeling too close to a joke from *The Thick Of It*. That insult-as-performance is definitely an influence on Baal, but it felt too close.

In passing, I love *The Thick Of It*. Enormous fan.

2. Matt gave a bunch of tips to Mat in terms of how the *WicDiv* palette works on the magic. Clearly, we move it around a bunch in the guests, but there's certain key things that are *WicDiv*. The lights on the cage would be one — basically, Matt said the bars should be about a 6 on the *WicDiv* Scale of hyper-bright.

The cage is inspired by one specific section of the Alexander McQueen exhibit that was in London recently. This ornate detailing surrounding these fashion-model dummies. I went around the place wanting to do a fight scene there. Maybe we will, y'know?

3. Baal and Morrigan are also fun to fence, in a completely separate way. Like how Minerva is hanging back here too.

The shape-change without any linking between the two is the Morrigan's key visual effect. Have to be careful with identical poses to make it work.

4. Alternate title for the issue was 'The Pit'. This was the original one, and we decided to keep it. 'The Pit' may turn up later, of course.

We had a bunch of internal debates about what icons to include here. As it's set over a period of time, do we do the icons at the start? That's kind of what we wanted to do... but we also realised that we've already done some scenes which haven't had that. We kept it like this.

5. I've never played *Vampire*. Owned the manual, but I own a lot of manuals. Played a few videogames, and have certainly had enough people play it to pick up a bunch of stuff by geek osmosis. Ray Fawkes looked over the scene for me, and his only note was that Childer's plural is Childer. Which is pretty impressive, I think.

That Pttth was a late addition to panel 2, but I think an important one.

The cave system was inspired by one near my university in Bath where LARPer's use to go and do stuff. Fun place. Once took a girl on a date down there, which is probably also an inspiration for this. Er... we didn't fuck down there.

6. Like what Leila did with the split panel on the first and second panel.

"Some people deserve to be annoyed" is very much a Baphomet motif.

7. This may be the first example of badly painting citadel miniatures to act as foreshadowing.

I see Marian and Cameron in their first/second years at University through most of this. In a real way, the shared flat does have that kind of vibe.

All the painting tips are good ones, but I'd say that if you're wash-heavy you can remove a lot of problems with a white base.

The figures aren't based on real ones, as Games Workshop are Games Workshop. The Vampire Lord is from the Vampire Counts army. Marian is painting something vaguely Nurgle related.

The panel counts through this sequence are high — that seven beat. With Leila, I think I was actually thinking of Chynna Clugston's *Blue Monday*, a big influence on Jamie and Me. *Blue Monday* leans lighter and teenage falling apart, like Archie Gone Mod. While it's a serious issue, there's a lightness to it here. I wanted to do something cute, drawing from bits of my own teenage life and done in that style. I suspect it was a surprise for many people.

Er... I get excited about when an issue is actually basically competent. From this page until Ananke turns up is stuff I like a lot. It does exactly what I wanted it to. Leila was wonderful.

8. Church is based on Saint Austin's in Stafford. Leila offered me a page, which is incredibly kind. I asked for this one. Partially as it's just lovely, but mainly I didn't want anyone else to own it. Saint Austin's feels a bit too close to home. This is where all my family funerals happen.

Originally Leila did Baph/Morrigan faceless in panel 3, but we added expressions to underline how separated they feel from the rest. They're on their own.

9. Baphomet's childhood bedroom. Poster marks on the wall from where things have been taken down.

Nice work on the framing in panel 3, and the horizontal space in panel 4. That last one really isolates her.

Dialogue was reworked a bunch.

10. I can't believe I didn't include 'No Time To Cry' by the Sisters on the playlist until this week, as it completely has the *WicDiv*-centric "Everything's going to be okay" as a lyric. Trust Cam to use it sarcastically.

I played with a few other options with the cigarette, before deciding against it.

I just love how fierce Marian is in the sixth panel.

11. I did wonder whether Baph's coat should be black, but that would have made him entirely invisible.

This sequence is all about the transitions between page stanzas, of course. They're pretty hard cuts in mood. Last panel has them at their most intimate, and now he's confessing he's cheated on her.

Good choice in panel 3 by Mat, in terms of the red. The expression and body-language is golden as well.

Decompression on those last three panels. Sell the change of him as we move between the different feeling. Panel 5 you can see the sadness and horror of it all, and Panel 6 with the flick it's defiant and angry. CONFLICTED CAMERON IS CONFLICTED.

Really, Leila did astoundingly here. She gets them as young people in a very really lived in way.

12. Mood change to what feels like the purest burst of *Blue Monday*, which always amped up the grid. Inspired when I flicked a cigarette into a bit once, without thinking. Didn't go like this, but could have easily.

Very funny by Leila. Also, to state the obvious, entirely undercutting the posture on the previous page.

13. And hello actual the Morrigan!

Ananke seems to be pretty curt for once.

We're getting through the transformation scenes. Still not sure if I'll show them all, but they're certainly fun when we do it.

Mat added the green to the Ravens to keep the Morrigan-ness of it all.

14. Middle transition to sell her multiple self concept. And Gentle Annie! Long time, Gentle Annie. She needs to get some screen time soon.

In the roughs, Leila got the aspects mixed up throughout. This has been a thing for most of the guests. You can probably tell a character is too complicated when this happens. We'll learn, one day.

15. I originally planned to have this gig in the cave sequence at the start (for circularity) but Leila went for the Underground, and it made sense in another way, so I leaned into it. Comics are collaboration.

The motifs for gods' performances are always a giggle. We've never seen a Morrigan gig outside of Laura's subjective perspective, so the first panel is fun.

Crowd seems to have had a lovely time.

I suspect if I had more space, I'd have given a page to the gig. Whole scene gets worked into a page. Leila holding this stuff together is excellent.

16. Due to velocity, this page was tricky. I realised the flashlight had gone missing, and problems with lighting, etc. The "Banish the light" and the CLLK was my solution to it. I actually wrote it as a KLLK, but Clayton correctly noted it's probably best we keep *that* sound for the finger-clicks.

The overlapping captions leading from one page to the next is stuff I added later because...

17. When I got the page over, I realised it would work much better if Ananke's line wasn't in that panel. Morrigan with all that vertical space and a single line is a much more pleasing aesthetic thing.

(The "Caption to bridge scenes" is obviously basic comic craft — but not really one I often use in *WicDiv*. It's much more a *Phonogram* technique. In terms of modern writers, I always connect it to Rick Remender.)

I really do like how the Morrigan is standing here.

I was going to use a technical term for the King-for-a-year, but decided it would be better to spell it out.

Once again, a bridging caption between scenes — and a mid-page scene-change. Clearly, this is a space thing — we wanted a big image on the next page — but Leila handles it well. The page basically works as two units. The top half and the bottom are their own entities.

I smile that Leila managed to get some of Cam's graphic novels in here. *Phonograms* and *Shutter*.

18. Key Gothic romance image of the issue. I believe I said to Leila that she could completely amp up Morrigan's outfit here, as it's only in a panel. Go to town!

Morrigan would have got changed into something fancy for a moment like this.

Let's fall. Why not. What's the worst that could happen?

Once again with that Sistine Chapel imagery.

19. I wanted an interstitial going out, but this would have broken the transition, which I wanted to smooth.

Baal's line was originally "Gothic Lack Of Charm School" as a nod towards the excellent site and book, but I didn't think Baal would necessarily be familiar, so lost it. The reference to Iain M Banks' *The Crow Road* sort of picks up from something Baal said last issue.

20. And Minerva helpfully puts a nice big lampshade over what could have been considered a plot-hole. Thanks, Mini!

The biggest response to this issue was the pun. Those who were closely reading will recall we actually used it in Issue 7, in the map of the con's fast-food. So, yes, this whole sequence was foreshadowed.

(Bap-o-meat was the first in-universe foodstuff I made up. I just pictured a van selling burgers with ketchup pentagrams. There was no way I wasn't going to use that.)

21. Due to the lack of an interstitial, this means that this is on a right hand page. Not ideal, but the best choice available.

Writing a Ketchup Golem was a fun day.

22. NO MORE perhaps gives a sense of where this is going? Or maybe not.

The Backup. This is actually the last *Videogames* (for now) as we realised we're going to do something a bit different next issue. I think it's my favourite. I think we've got better as went along. The first two were just grace notes to the issue, but the third actually is an important scene adding new information (i.e. What Brunhilde did to anger woden). This one is the start of a whole new plot, and one you can't over-read things into.

I actually tried to write this in a relatively easy mode, as we were close to deadline. And then Jamie decided to draw Strand Station. Jamie kills himself for you. Love that man.

This is a call back to Issue 2, for those with long memories. We realised that it was unlikely anyone would realise the guy holding the camera's identity, so we added the Smilie Badge. Yes, it's pre-transformation Dionysus, as set up in Issue 8.

Anyway — next up, Brandon Graham and Sakhmet. See you there.

ISSUE 17

It's an issue I was nervous around. It's an issue which had the potential to be enormously offensive — I had a critic friend of mine who writes well on issues of race and gender look it over to see if there was anything which tripped her up particularly. It was fine, which I thought and hoped it was — but that's why you get

people to look over stuff. 9/10 fuck ups are things you literally weren't thinking about in the slightest. When the story is one where a black woman has taken on the characteristics of an animal, it's clearly got the potential to be an absolute racist clusterfuck.

(I've been mildly surprised that Sakhmet has been barely critiqued at all by people who dislike the book. There's a reason why we lampshaded it in Issue 1, in the same balloon we highlighted the Amaterasu problem.)

Sakhmet, as her appearance in the first issue may suggest, is a cast member who I had the core of pretty early. The story alluded to in this issue was always there, and her fundamental drive and style. Oddly, it wasn't until considerably later I realised *exactly* which part of me I was writing about with her. I suspect I'll come back to that eventually.

It's problematic in another way — I'm writing for Brandon Graham, who as well as being an artist is at least as acclaimed a writer as me — and far more acclaimed in many highly credible circles. Working out how to write for him, to leave space for Brandon to do the Brandon-ness of things, and all of that was key. We wanted this to be a Brandon Graham issue of *WicDiv*, and I think it is. I think we were all pleased with the results. Sakhmet was pretty ideal for the sensuousness in Brandon's work.

(Brandon has also done his own notes on the issue, which you'll find at www.royalboiler.wordpress.com)

Main Cover. One of the best of the body covers. Matt only colouring the gold was inspired.

Brandon Graham cover. We were right up against the deadline on this issue, and we'd actually somehow forgot that Brandon had to do a cover until half way through the issue, when the tightness was already there. Brandon wrapped up, and went onto this, and it turned out amazingly.

Intro. Issue is dedicated to my friend and *Ludocrats* co-writer Jim Rossignol's cat, Olly, who died just as the issue was going to press.

1. Open with a two-page vignette summing up the issue's themes, a device we've used before in Issue 15 with Amaterasu.

I left writing this quite late, and needed to start work on it sharply. I realised I needed something to kick me off, so I went to see if there was anything I could particularly use in the British Museum. Despite the fact I've been there before, I didn't realise they had a load of Sakhmet (Sekhmet) statues. My mum was down for the weekend, so I dragged her out and we wandered about the place. There was a lot of other stuff I wanted to use — I suspect I will eventually — but when staring at the main statue all this came to mind. Of course.

I took a bunch of photos and sent them to Brandon, including the one at the top of the next page.

I nosed around the area where I wanted Ruth to come from to choose a high school for her to go to, and so select the uniform. Worth stressing for Americans that uniforms are just a common thing here — it's not a signifier of anything else.

I love the sullen shrug of Ruth in the second panel.
Three-panel page, strict tiers. This is very much an un-Brandon layout, and very *WicDiv*.



2. I looked up at the Sekhmet statue and stayed there for a while, trying to read the expression. It really is an odd melancholy to it.

The blacks on the second panel are wonderful stuff by Brandon.

The eyes in that third panel. Oh man.

3. I think I played with BAD KITTY before going here. That made the compare/contrast with the GOOD DOGGY opening for Amaterasu clearer, but I felt the irony was perhaps a little self indulgent.

4. Basically, year three of *WicDiv* is going to be like this page constantly. With the possible exception of the Inanna orgy, probably the most decadent scene in *WicDiv* so far.

This is very much where the book could fall apart in lots of ways — this is all obviously sexual stuff. The aim was to be neutral on the eye here, to show a sexual aftermath in a casual fashion, but always could tip into objectification. Brandon did well. The only person who treats Sakhmet like an object is herself.

Lots and lots and lots of Brandon in-jokes here.

“Why Did You Let My Kitten Die” just came on the *WicDiv* playlist. Honestly, not even a Sakhmet song.

5. A lot of Sakhmet comes from just watching my cat, Lemon. The word here would be “languid”.

Actual naming of a second Valkyrie, in the form of Eir. I played with various other Valkyrie names, but I’ve used a bunch of them for the Disir in *Journey Into Mystery*, and repeating them would be distracting.

Eyes closed at the end of the page. The issue is trying to induce an atemporality. We move from moment to moment, as if we’re watching a movie and not really paying attention as it just doesn’t care. That’s very much how Sakhmet lives.

There’s a second thing — blinking is important to cats.

I’m told that a slow blink is how cats express love. All scene transitions are based on eyes closing. Clearly, no one is going to get this, but I mention as an example of how inspiration works.

6. I feel this is one of the most Brandon Graham-esque sequences in the book — the inserts, the panels, the amount of space looming above the characters, etc.

Love the lightning bolt Brandon has given Baal’s dialogue.

We’ve seen Woden animate armour before back in Issue 7. This is something different. It’s also... well, you know I say *WicDiv* is totally a superhero book? This is very much a “Teenagers brought into a private retreat by a frankly sinister old person? Ring any bells?” nod. This is a pure Danger Room scene.

(Compare and contrast the X-men’s “Welcome to the X-men — I hope you survive the experience” with *WicDiv*’s “Welcome to the pantheon — you won’t survive the experience.”)

The fleshiness of Baal in this sequence is great. Also, good side-eye, Sakhmet.

7. I love panel 2.

Third time in this arc we make a Minerva Goddess Of Wisdom joke. She’s the character who is still in most need of more screen time. We’ve been bringing her forward in the mix in this arc, and suffice to say, she gets a lot more play in the next.

Minerva is not wrong, as the story shows.

8-9. This is the Brixton academy, and hilarious. This is the sort of thing Brandon does magnificently, so I wanted to try and create space for it. He suggested upping it to a double-page spread, and I agreed. The sort of thing which would work perfectly as a print.

As previously mentioned, what the Gods do isn’t strictly speaking music, so the instruments on stage may be a little odd. Brandon did ’em and I figured that it’d fit perfectly well in the debauched atmosphere. Just because what Sakhmet does isn’t purely music doesn’t mean she can’t do music.

So many awesome psychic cats in the audience. My favourite is the enormous pyramid fat one on the balcony.

“It’s difficult to be adored” is something we say to Lemon a lot when she’s having her belly rubbed.

10. Perhaps the most trad *WicDiv* scene in the issue. As in, a god gets interviewed. Brandon used his friend as the inspiration for interviewer, which is lots of fun.

(Look at the close-up to the recording mic — that punch in stuff is lovely.)

I may get around to the story about the Assyrian King eventually.

Oh — Brandon hand-lettered the issue.

With Brandon, it’s very much a holistic art thing, so anything which fed into that was great. The biggest problem was that I normally rework dialogue a bunch after Jamie (or the artist) has drawn — normally as a response. Here, we had to lock it down earlier. It was relatively painless because Brandon’s thumbnails are so

solid I could work off them. Brandon also said he'd be fine with tweaking stuff, but in the end, there was only a few really minor changes. Adding a Loc Cap on the entry to Valhalla was the main one.

(I was reminded of the hand lettering due to the panel we drop to lowercase.)

Lots of great expressions here. As always, the question has to be how much you choose to believe the characters.

Cat Butler was inspired by a tweet I did while writing the issue — “you intrinsically know that a ‘Dog Butler’ is a dog trained to be a butler while a ‘Cat Butler’ is someone who looks after cats.”

Dog people and cat people. Sounds like a theme.

11. Sakhmet is evasive. I am too. That she has trauma in her past is enough. She doesn't owe you the details.

If this was the first two arcs where we put quotes from the character on the back cover, I suspect “I feel nothing” would be on the back. This arc we put quotes said by other people in the issue, normally about the lead.

I'm coming close to writing too much about what's going on here.

12. The tiny annoyed interviewer in panel 2 is golden.

13. I originally wrote the window open and Sakmet just went for it. Brandon suggested doing a finger-click to open it, which I loved. The whole scene is quietly, casually miraculous — going from this tedious part of stardom backstage in seedy rooms to this leap across Brixton. Part of my core love for Modern Fantasy of all sorts (and many superhero comics fit under that internal banner for me) is that juxtaposition of the fantastic and the world we live in. As I wait for the P4 in Brixton, part of me is glancing up, looking for a Sakhmet.

14. Love the framing on the first panel.

Sakhmet has gone off the reservation. There's a listlessness I was trying to capture throughout here, the mercurial nature of cats.

Chrissy suggested Sakhmet bat her phone off the roof when were in script stage. An excellent idea.

15. The Jamie/Kieron kissing on the poster on the bus stop is hilarious.

Love Brandon's Ananke.

I was never really a pet person. We had them in the house, but I don't recall being obsessive over them. I always liked animals — I did a Biology degree — but I didn't think I had it in me to be interested in looking after an animal, any more than I could be a father. That changed via people in my life, mainly Chrissy. Chrissy adores dogs, so she was my gateway into that. I looked at them hard, as an outsider. Chrissy in turn discovered cats, and took me with her. I'm fascinated with our cat, everyone else's cats, dogs, etc. I forget when I had this thought, but it seemed relevant enough to get into the book.

That Sakhmet is already a heavy drinker before she's transformed is an important point. In a messed up way, it gives her more agency.

Lights off in the house. Someone's gone to bed.
Eyes shut.

16. Black page. Implied gap. In the original script, it didn't exist. It was added because we'd turned the gig into a double-page spread, and we wanted to keep the page turn. Actually works well enough as a disruptive moment that I much prefer it like this.

17. Uh-oh. This doesn't look good.

I'm sure I'll get around to a Valkyrie perspective issue eventually, but I like to imagine these three making their way around the house like it's *Aliens*. Love the Iron-Man-esque lights in Woden's armour too.

18. Core Sakhmet image, pretty much the first one I thought of when inventing her. A girl, covered in blood, having eaten her own father.

Yes, when the ‘Bitch Better Have My Money’ video dropped, I blinked a lot.

In retrospect, I wonder if I should have made Woden's line more hand-holding. Something like... “THIS IS YOUR FAULT, EIR. YOU DON'T LEAVE SAKHMET ALONE, ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE'S SOBER. SHE MIGHT DO SOMETHING LIKE — I DON'T KNOW! — RUNNING OFF AND EATING HER OWN DAD!”

19. Hurt people hurt people, and occasionally eat them afterwards.

I suspect how much you like the issue will be based on how much you're interested in trying to make a leap of faith over Sakhmet's mask.

I mentioned there was a theme in the second half of *Commercial Suicide*. Well, there's several. The one I was thinking of was simple: dead parents. Amaterasu's hero worship. Baphomet's prompting for an ejection of his moral code. Sakhmet's rage-in-denial.

The “I just want to eat people” panel is one of Brandon's best. Just brooding. Sakhmet scares the shit out of me. You were right, Minerva.

Lucky, Woden's here with a bottle and an enabling attitude. Well, “lucky”.

If you're unaware of Sakhmet — and she's one of the less famous gods we've used — you may want to go and read her core myth. There's a lot which will feed into this issue.

20. Drunk Sakhmet in the first panel may be my favourite in the issue. Taken out of context, it's adorable. In context, it's awful.

An excellent selection of cats here. I actually asked readers for photos of their cat, and then compiled the whole lot and sent them to Brandon. He used them, but has no idea which ones. So — er — if you recognise any of these cats, it may be yours.

There's an interesting chemistry between Sakhmet and Morrigan I wasn't quite expecting. Brandon's Morrigan really brings out how young Morrigan is — with her general imperious attitude, she tends to read older.

21. And a little setup for the next arc. Shit meets fan.

I really like the stern cat on the left.

Anyway, that's the end of *Commercial Suicide*, and...

22. What's this?!?!?!?!?

23. Originally Brandon was going to draw this page, and we'd have had another *Videogames* (probably Sakhmet's response to Amaterasu's actions at Hiroshima) but as deadlines were so tight, we realised that it would make a lot of meta sense if Jamie drew this.

This is the Buffalo Bar, btw, now closed. Last seen in *Phonogram*. Highbury & Islington will also be familiar from where Lucifer died.

We tweaked the text at the last minute to add the LIVE to really lean into it.

This is... understated for something that seems as bit as it is. In a trained comic universe of space = meaning — the BKV/Millar splash reveal — this is unusual. The idea of doing something like this in one tiny panel seemed meaningful, and characteristic of the arc as a whole. In the same way Laura changed her life by pressing a single button on her phone back in Issue 6, everything changes with a scribble on paper.

Life is strange.

Right, that's *Commercial Suicide*. We're back in April.

Commercial Suicide has been interesting. It's got some of the most acclaimed work in the whole run in it, but it's definitely the time to change it up again. I said this was our *Blue Period*, the Bowie in Berlin. Next arc... isn't.

Once more we return.

I'm still not 100% certain about the arc's name. It can wait. A lot of things explode. It is a rock and roll arc. It's basically Taylor Swift's 'Bad Blood' video, but for five issues.

Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 18

Annnnnnd back. The hiatus was obviously a thing, and a thing we think we'll be able to avoid going forward. It really was far too stressful for dozens of reasons. So the issue was explicitly planned as both a jumping-on point, a place to return for lapsed readers, and something to remind the faithful why they're along for the ride. As we baited with its title, *Commercial Suicide* could have killed the book. In the end, sales were great, but we always planned this issue as a possible way to try and reboot the entire series if the audience had fucked off.

It's also the point where the meta of it all comes into play. Jamie's been away for six issues. Persephone's been away for six issues. It's Spring, etc. I could probably write this whole essay on that stuff, but I won't.

Jamie used the break after *Phonogram* ended too. He's been going through a period when he's been unsatisfied with his work, and wanted to rethink a bunch of stuff. As such, the issue took about twice as long to draw as usual, mainly as he basically drew the whole issue twice and threw the original take in the bin. I would say this issue is definitely one to put under a close eye if you're trying to study Jamie's style and its evolution. I'll pull out a few elements as we go through here, obviously.

I put off writing this issue for a long time. I'd last written

Laura in March. I only wrote 18 the week before the new year, sending Jamie the script at just past midnight on New Year's Eve (so the first seconds of the new year). We were at a party at my house, so it just went across the room. I did that with the first issue of *WicDiv* as well (though we were at separate parties). Once more, we return.

After the break, I was a little scared to be writing Persephone. This character comes from a difficult place for me. I wasn't even sure if I would be *able* to write her.

In the end, it was fine. It was freeing, even. Writing the issue was as much fun as I had writing anything all year. I went on to write the rest of the arc before the end of January (as well as a bunch of other stuff). I'd basically spent so long chewing over what would happen in this arc, it was all just there, and it unfolded. I finished that month with the urge to just write the whole rest of *WicDiv*, as I can see it unfolding ahead of me.

(I didn't, as I have other stuff to write, but the urge was certainly there. I've done some actual dialogue work on the last issue, which is years away for you guys.)

Anyway! We're back, and this was fun for us. I hope it was as fun for you. "Fun." Now there's a very un-*WicDiv* word.

Main Cover. We wanted to reboot the covers as well, and Jamie went and had a little think about where fashion photography was. The big white borders are very much a thing right now, and we're playing with the deep focus on three levels. Basically, all the covers are working on this axis. Not sure how long we'll keep it — I think they're flexible enough that we may keep them into year 3, but we'll see.

The Head Cover. Instead of having an alternate cover by another artist, Jamie wanted to do a final head shot. Clearly, this gives closure. You've come a long way, girl.

Intro page. For the jumping-on-point reasons, we wanted to have something a little more detailed than the traditional austere wheel. We tried to work out methods to keep the wheel and annotate it, but it just became too messy. Designer Sergio ended up with this, which is really strong. The biggest problem on the creative side was balancing my urge to overwrite every single caption and Jamie's urge to make the page not look fucking hideous.

(Sergio's solution for signifying the dead characters with the red works well — we played with some more, but this was the best.)

We'll probably work this into the trades as well, and maybe retroactively add it to future printings of the earlier editions. When a trade only comes out once every six months, I think a little reminder before diving in is worthwhile.

I think "Shithead god" may be my favourite bio. Or "Ate her dad. No, really." which is very much bringing my games journalist voice to the page.

1. You may not have noticed — especially if you're used to the usual *WicDiv* trickery — but this issue is longer than usual. Normally we have 20 pages of content. This

actually has 24 pages of drawing (Though longer than that due to our cheat modes). We wanted to come back big, and really motor, and give it space.

Even so, this is the only splash page in the issue. I suspect with our reputation many readers may not have believed that she'd actually be back until we showed her. Here she is. Space = meaning. Lots of big things drop this issue, but this is the biggest and we treat it as much.

Jamie is kicking himself over giving Persephone that chainmail hoodie. Talk about giving himself a rod for his back.

Highbury & Islington is where Luci died, of course.

2-3. This was originally written as a single page in a three-panel tier, with an interstitial on the right. Jamie's executive assistant, Katie West, noted that if you were just jumping onto this issue then it's entirely possible that you'd think Ananke was perfectly reasonable. As such, the flashback to tell new readers of Ananke's most relevant awful crime underlines that Ananke is a murderer.

(This is in the intro, of course. But people don't always/often read the text. We've become aware that people don't read the letters at the back of the issue, for example — people regularly tweet us asking questions we answer in the first line of the letter in the issue.)

Matt does more Matt Wilson magic on the flashback, of course. There's a reason why we get away with this stuff as much as we do, and it's 100% Wilson. This is another "two pages actually one page of new content so only one page off our budget" one.

This is the Buffalo Bar, which has since closed. Last seen in *Phonogram: The Immaterial Girl* #2. Intertextuality, we are in your house, textualising your inters.

We normally take pride in using real locations accurately. In this case, we've cheated. The Buffalo Bar never had a backstage room. It had a little crap alcove to the left of the stage. Sue us.

Jamie had a lot of fun with the graffiti.

Glad to get the *Uh-huh* back in play.

4-5. Woden's big tower being a dong amuses me enormously.

First external view of the whole of Valhalla. Also first attempt to put it in the context of London itself — that's the Shard in the far background. First close-up of Minerva's parents too.

If you're looking for elements that Jamie is developing, this would be a good first place to nose — he's breaking the panel a bunch here, and continues to do so throughout the issue.

The second page's steady angle repeated panel is very us (and me, specifically. I have a weakness for this sort of thing, and use it to fetishised excess over in *Über*). We were a little worried about whether or not the meaning of this page would come across to the reader, even with the next page (Minerva isn't wearing her glasses here, for example).

We considered adding a caption to the last panel, with some dialogue leading into the next scene, along the lines of "I've left a decoy. They don't know I've skipped out..." but thought fuck it. You push and pull

between clarity and artistry, and here we'd rather keep the aesthetic effect of the silent panel rather than hand-hold to ensure everyone gets it.

(We thought almost everyone would get it, it's worth stressing. If it was a case that we felt many would miss it, we'd have leaned the other way.)

6. On a craft level, the small external to show where Morrigan is in the building would be what to watch. This issue involves moving around Valhalla a bunch, so it's pretty key.

Finally have Minerva call bullshit on the Wisdom jokes. Guys! Don't!

(When signing comics I never make jokes about anyone's name or even say "Like XYZ FAMOUS PERSON" when asking for the spelling, as I assume it's likely that everyone is sick of hearing that sort of thing.)

First time Jamie gets to draw the cage, and Matt to colour it. It's fun to see here. I love the blues, especially with how it changes to the reds of the next scene. The aesthetics are great, but the storytelling as we move between all these different locations is key — especially when we're doing a lot of one-page scenes.

(When I lobbed the synopsis for the issue over to the rest of the team, there was an element of "Fucking hell, that's a lot." The one scene page to handle a beat is very much what I lean on — a page makes sure that the information is treated with seriousness by the reader, while still motoring. All these things are big things, and do need some space.)

7. I mean, "Persephone goes on stage for her first performance?" would be justified in giving much more room, in a slow build up, but no, we have other fish to fry.

If you want to trace some of the work Jamie is doing at the moment, I'd look at figures and faces. It's especially true here.

People have been wondering what Persephone's been up to. Clearly, she's been up to crunches.

In the first draft, we had Persephone drenched from head to foot in blood for her entrance. We decided against it. The jaw-drop response is natural enough, anyway.

The skull eyes are Jamie's idea, I believe, and one of the best ones he's ever had. Correct me if I'm wrong, Jamie? This issue was a blur.

8-9. Another two-pages-one-page-of-content one, and Persephone's first performance. Well, second. The first one was cut short.

I had various different texts to use in the performance, some which were much wordier, but the poet-editor glared. In the end, with the general sparseness of this issue, this is much better. PERSEPHONE'S IN HELL is obviously a THING.

Been a while since we've had a close-up on a performance, in terms of audience response. I suspect this is the most intimate one since the first issue, in fact.

10. See, sparse. SHUT THE FUCK UP, WRITER.

Another nice steady angle by Jamie, and a couple of good poses from Persephone. ("Nailed it.")

The red and the white-out of the flashes in the last panel is particularly on point by Matt.

11. Originally this was coloured a much purer white and blue, in the Valhalla style, but we wanted it to be more ominous. Matt's thinking was good — basically the movement between a Valhalla palette and a Club palette. In this case, we wanted to make sure this was more ominous. We threw a bunch of ideas at him — I remember lobbing him some Warhammer 40k Necrons, which make me smile.

(There was an element that making it darker also implies its position in Valhalla. But we'll get to that.)

The machine is one element in this arc that I'm not 100% okay with how I set it up in *Commercial Suicide*. My standard plotting would have had at least one big nod to it before it appears, and I'm not sure that "Woden builds stuff for Ananke on demand, as set up in 14" is enough for me. I suspect no one else cares, but it's the sort of thing which bugs me.

(Another "this could have been a splash" image at the top, of course.)

Lots in this page, clearly, but my favourite thing is that Woden has google alerts set up for new gods. He is very much the sort of guy who searches his own name and responds to people saying stuff.

12. The throne room! One of my favourite locations in *WicDiv*, and not just because it's really hard for Jamie to set scenes in. Last seen in... was it Issue 4? It may be all the way back in Issue 4. I'm tired and am not going to check.

It's the new season, so new looks. Baal's beard is on point. Sakhmet looks great too. The reaction shot is, of course, pure Jamie, and really on point.

Fascinated by how Matt works the skin tones with the lights.

13. Even Woden has an upgrade between seasons. I wish I'd thought of the spotlights-as-teleporter effect earlier on, as it's very much a good *WicDiv*-ian take on a classic.

So much in Sakhmet is in the body language. That languid stretch in the second panel is golden. The flick of the finger as she disappears in the portal.

Definitely crunching stuff here. It's only five panels, but it's the closest to a mid-page transition that we do. I originally wrote it as six panels, with a panel of Baal walking back towards the house before slamming the door, but I sacrificed it to buy more room for the first panel.

Who's that at the door?

14. AND ACTION MODE STARTS!

I've said all along that *WicDiv* is a superhero comic (in the way *Buffy* and *The Matrix* were), but I suspect this is the arc when people may start to agree. It's very much when we're bringing what we learned on *Young Avengers* to the fore.

I originally wrote "Marian" instead of "Morrigan" here, but for accessibility's sake, kept it as Morrigan. She hasn't been referred to as Marian yet, and it's not clear

to whom Baphomet is referring.

Lots to love on the page — it's very much our take on a classic sort of beat — but the pose of Baphomet running in the last panel is exactly what I was thinking when writing it. Brain-meld in full effect.

15. Well, I said ACTION MODE starts, but it's really starting here, as it's the point where I switched to Marvel Method.

This is packed, obviously, and choosing what dialogue was required was tricky. In the end, that single line is the only thing to guide the storytelling. We had a line in the last panel, but the expression sells it, and speaking at all there extends the time before the explosion on the next page.

When you realise what Persephone/Baph's plan is, this is in retrospect the moment when they realise they underestimated how ruthless Ananke can be.

16. Jamie's use of the backgrounds here in the first is another area where he's pushing himself to add dynamism to images. Also, first show of Persephone's miracles here.

Yet more colour magic. Matt's on form here, again.

We had the last panel silent, which captured the stunned aftermath, but decided a line was really needed for clarity. We make it doubly clear that no one's died next issue, but we had to nod to it here.

17. Another near-splash.

Yes, everyone can costume change when they step into the spotlight. It's a stepping-on-stage beat.

Originally these were coloured a little more like *Magik*'s stepping portals — so the light was from below, glaring up. Clearly, we moved to lean into the spotlights, with light as above.

There is nothing that is not funny about Woden's look here. Jamie suggested it and I couldn't say "YES!" loud enough.

18. Another one-page beat. I'm immediately fond of the chemistry between Baph and Morrigan. Plus hyper-cute Minerva hand-wave.

The "Deadline as a line if you cross over YOU WILL BE DEAD" first appeared in my commissions for writers when I was Reviews Editor on *PC Gamer*. Good to finally get it out in public.

Necessary Exposition on the quiet here.

Doing The Right Thing And Not Liking It At All is peak Baphomet.

I had to fight to keep the MUM AND POP SAVIOUR HOUR line, but it has turned out to be one of the more quoted bits of the issue. This pleased me.

19. Yet more establishing the area before starting a fight scene.

Never change, Sakhmet.

A very popular panel, the penultimate one.

20. This is some lovely stuff from Jamie here. We think a lot about various gods' fighting style, and — taken from FKA Twigs — this is very modern dance/ballet.

Jamie's main reference when thinking of Persephone's movement was American dancer, Misty Copeland.

That middle panel is immaculate. Seriously, proud of you.

Peak Woden in the last panel, of course.

21. Talking of clarity, the phone originally had a pun-name on, presumably suggested by Baphomet. However, making it into wordplay added a second level of interpretation which takes away from the moment. It was 100% necessary that 100% of the audience knew what was happening here, or the story falls apart.

I quite like Ananke and Woden's relationship reversing for a second here. It's telling that for a second Woden is ahead of Ananke, I suspect.

Also: good to see the phone back. *WICDIV* ICON IN FULL EFFECT.

22. Tricky storytelling problems solved by Jamie here, in terms of making sure the location of the various figures are positioned in space. The dialogue tries to assist as best it can — that long tail Clayton has added in the first panel is a useful example of a mid-panel time extension. Generally speaking, panels aren't single moments in time, and you can create the many more effects.

Valkyries with guns pleases me.

I played with an alternate line in the third panel — something akin to "I **HATE** THE SISTERS OF BATTLE" — but decided it was a too deep nerd cut.

23. Obviously the headbutt would have hit harder on a page turn, but you can see why the next page outranks it in importance, y'know?

(Oh no! Baph's lost his aviators.)

Good implication of lateral motion in second panel — plus I think the best example of a Morrigan transformation, in terms of it being the hardest to pull off. The shared pose and broken line guides you, even when they're very different levels of zoom.

In the Badb panel, the green background with the red of her hair is strong.

I saw we lost a mark in a review for Badb's swearing here. Which — er — made me smile?

(Badb's swearing being on a different level to anyone else's is very key to her, of course. A good portion of the cast are pretty foul mouthed. For it to register at all, it has to be at a higher volume.)

Am I the only one really disturbed by the Badb dissolving into Ravens panel?

"It's going to be okay" is about as loaded as it gets in this book.

Great rage in the last panel by Jamie and Matt. STRONG!

24. Good work, Persephone.

Of course, this isn't how you eat a pomegranate, but posing is important. I think she's peeled the pith off one side and is picking seeds out. And posing. Posing is very important.

Best look at Persephone's power signature. I originally talked about it being more organic, with vines leaking blood and so on... but thinking about it again, we

realised that doesn't actually work well with our visual style. Turning the electronics up gave us a look which was very us...

25. ...though the exploding into petals keeps a little of the original idea.

So much in that second panel, right? Talk about cramming it in. The one bit of exposition I wish I got in earlier was that Morrigan/Baph couldn't just bash out the walls, but we go from "Baph/Morri/Mini cornered" to "they are rescued" so quickly there's not enough time for the reader to register it. Woden being surprised that Persephone could bash a hole works as an after-the-fact smaller note.

Ananke, always ready with a classical allusion when causing trouble.

Great look between Baph and Persephone on the last panel.

26. Oh, Persephone. Persephone And Baphomet. But mainly Persephone.

27. And the interstitial is back. Wanted it earlier in the issue — as said, it would have been page 3 — but there was no place after that was excised.

Reference to LL Cool J's 'Mama Said Knock You Out', whose general pugnacious ass-kicking was very much the mood we were going for in this issue.

Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 19

I originally planned Issue 2 in this arc to do the job of explaining what has been going on up to here. When I broke it down more tightly, it simply didn't fit. I realised it'd be better to put it off for ANOTHER issue, where there was a plot-specific reason for it.

Main Cover. Dionysus, who makes his return this issue. The Dionysus colouring remains one of my favourite things in the book. Same three-level white-border structure.

Kris Anka Cover. Oh, hello.

I suspect the most (er) popular cover in quite a while. I saw quite a few people tweeting about not being able to get a copy as their shop had sold out.

Honestly, Kris killed with this. I suspect that Baal's standing in the WHICH GOD DO I WANT TO "DO" poll question may have something to do with his appearance here.

The Inanna tattoo was Kris's idea, and beyond perfect. I believe I suggested the lightning on the champagne. Colouring was Kris's own.

1. I mentioned we'd be returning to this scene last issue, so Jamie could reuse his background.

Minerva's dad's pullover is the most sinister fashion choice in the whole comic.

"Clever girl" seems to be a catchphrase for Ananke. She also said it to Cassandra way back in Issue 9. She is very patronising.

2. Hardcore RPG references. I tweeted this for a reason I can't really remember, and was in need of a chapter heading.

3. The colouring shift from the pop to the openly dingy is very much the point.

We haven't seen much of Dionysus since Issue 8 — bar an appearance in Issue 15 — so him reappearing in the plot is key. With a cast as big as ours, there's obviously some pacing to get everyone in the same place.

But yes — this perhaps highlights what's been going on with Dionysus. Yeah, I'm concerned too.

4. Honestly, South London Chicken shop is the ultimate case of Write What You Know. Now I'm hungry for fried chicken. This book is bad for me, in many ways.

In the original draft, I didn't have the TV speaking, but when Issue 1 came back, I felt the need to stress the situation of what happened there. As in, no deaths.

Three panels in the middle on a steady angle, showing full body. "Comedy lives in the middle shot", to paraphrase Tracy Jordan.

The Underground again. Our mission to continue to be the comic that wastes most black ink in the history of the medium continues.

5. Group shot! They're the kids in the underground, etc.

We were looking to have a very casual take on the classic comic group hero shot. As in, here they are.

Still haven't got used to Persephone's abs.

6. Setup for the reveal in the end of the issue, of course.

Woden and Ananke scenes are always fun to write. Woden brings out the worst in Ananke. Hell, Woden brings the worst out in everyone.

This issue has a different purpose to the last one, but it's still leaning on that short-scene structure. One page, one page, etc.

7-8. These lights really do make Amaterasu look pallid. Sun god, get some sun.

I've mentioned how I break down an issue? Google KIERON GILLEN MASTERPOST, and it includes a link. The basic one is that I write a hyper-rough synopsis, and put a number by it to show how many pages this takes.

This one basically read "Ananke talks Valhalla gods into going after Persephone and crew". But the process of writing it is working out the arguments. What would Ananke say? Amaterasu gets the top level... and it's worth noting that she's not talked into actually fighting people. I write Baal, and the line is obvious — she uses Inanna as leverage.

(And great close-up on Baal's hand there, Jamie.)

And then I get to Sakhmet, and I realise Sakhmet doesn't need convincing, and the scene twists another way. That was one of the moments when writing which made me smile most.

The extended fingers are a lovely gesture.

I said I'd add a line to the last panel if Ananke's expression didn't carry the beat. It's Jamie. Of course the expression carried the beat.

9-10. Another steady angle shot to open the scene. Yet more physical comedy... though really for the dramatic beat.

Obviously lots of clues and referentiality here, but that can wait.

(In passing — I doubt I'd have written this without you knowing Baphomet this well. That is obviously a Baphomet line, so we don't need to show him.)

Structurally, this is a mirror of the last one — there Ananke convinces the Overworld gods. Here, Dionysus is recruited. In the same way as above, my synopsis was "Dionysus gets the situation explained to him — he is convinced." When writing it, I had no idea how exactly that was.

Dionysus is one of the more tentative characters in the book. He clearly doesn't like a lot of what much of the Pantheon lives off. So I wandered around the argument — do they believe Persephone? How is Morrigan and Baph's relationship?

(And the two panels at the start of 10 are great by Jamie — the mirroring, the sense of drawing a line between them.)

Anyway, I hit Minerva who gives the download... and then I realise exactly what convinces Dionysus. Minerva doesn't use facts. Minerva just says how she feels... and Dionysus instantly gets it...

...and then I remember Dionysus hasn't met Minerva, which gives us the final beat.

Honestly, there are times when your characters just delight you. This arc has a string of moments which I've come to think of as a character's finest hour, where you see them at their best.

This one was Dionysus's.

Minerva's expression on the "Mum and Dad" panel is heartbreaking. I'd go and fight gods for that too.

Also — we give the owl a name. Its working title was Owly, and I was thinking there would be something else that would occur... but in the end, we liked Owly. (I also realised it could be taken as a plug for the excellent *Owly* comics, which cemented it in place.)

11. Primarily about the atmosphere, obv.

Would it have been better to have the Owl eyes appear on the end of the last page? Probably, but there are far more interesting things happening on that page, none of which could be sacrificed for a little fake tension.

I fully admit to grinning when writing BEE-BOOP!

12. And we kick off.

Purple suit is obviously loaded with Inanna being dead. Good colouring choice there by Matt. Once more, I wish I had the suit.

This arc is very much pop video as fight scene, so we certainly lean into a little swagger.

Lightning crackle panel borders, obviously — this whole section is written in Marvel Method, perhaps unsurprisingly. Good call by Jamie.

Played with something a little more meta and leaning into our theme in the last panel ("TRACK TWO") but we're really not that kind of book, at least when things are as serious as this.

13. And here's the team! Colour choices are interesting by Matt here.

This is a fight arc.

It's not *just* a fight arc as you'll see, but the escalation and changing of stakes is key. This issue is a fight between two groups. I played with bringing the Valkyrie along too... but that escalates too quickly (and there's an in-world reason why they're not here too, of course). What can be interesting?

Basically, it's about pairing people up and showing personality. It's a visual medium, etc.

Yeah, Morrigan is pissed.

14. Vivid and sickly colour choices here. Really exciting and unusually — oddly brings to mind some of the choices that Bettie Breitweiser makes. Which probably means "is good with pink".

Another alternate-panel structure here, using the ravels to delineate space. After an issue which has been in very formal grids, this obviously captures something of the chaos.

Also, by far the least comforting the Morrigan has been for a while.

15. I was thinking of those pop-plate things that send dancers bouncing into the air from beneath the stage with Baphomet here.

Amaterasu's armour on the arm in the second panel is clearly this month's cosplay challenge.

Sakhmet/Dionysus is a fun pair-up. As a Marvel Method scene, I had a variety of dialogue here, but went in this direction...

("I'm not a lover or a fighter. I'm a writer." is one of my standard crap one-liners.)

16. Obviously shitloads happening here. I suggested David Aja as an influence to Jamie, but looking at it some more, this looks like a pop take on *Daredevil*-era Miller. Is that just me? The sixteen-panel grid structure always brings Miller to mind of course.

Sakhmet had a bad showing last issue, of course. Always worth stressing that no, she's about as deadly as everyone thinks she is.

The multiple-image tricks in the penultimate panel work really well too.

17. Another page unit worth looking at — the triangle structure Jamie creates interacts with the laser-structure of Amaterasu's motion here. The whole thing has an angular momentum to it — it's particularly strong on panel 4, with her laser emerging from the thinned part to the widest part of the triangle seeming to add to her speed.

I like frozen time beats — panel 1 and panel 3 basically happen simultaneously. Amaterasu is fast.

I asked for the second panel to evoke Amaterasu's glance in the first sequence I the gig. Her eclipse eyes are one of my fave "things".

If I said that the main influence for her laser movement in the third panel was Darkseid's Omega Effect beams would you throw stuff at me?

18. Nice panel breaking by Jamie here on the second panel.

Yes, surprise attacks against people who aren't expecting it is Baphomet's go-to move. Three so far in this arc, by my count.

Sakhmet's in the fourth panel is my favourite expression of hers in the whole issue.

I originally had Baal have a different moniker for Sakhmet here, but it was too complicated, irrelevant to the current situation and broke the mood. Instead, I went much simpler one — Blundercat — which is actually much funnier than it should be in context.

(His original one-liner will find a place eventually, I'm sure.)

19. My first draft for Badb's dialogue in this issue really did leave a lot to be desired, and C interrogated me pretty heavily over it. Much happier with where it ended up. "Slake" is a good word.

Badb reforming works really well here, in an uncomfortable way.

"Hedwig" was on the list of alternate names for Owly, but that would have meant losing Baphomet's line here about Hogwarts' tat.

Standard same-angle change-pose mode.

Gentle Annie! Long time, no see, etc.

20. Oh noes! Woden's last line allows us to realise when this would have been recorded — or at least, is a very good hint towards it.

21. The first two panels' lines were much more complicated, but we realised that a mid-word transition was much more powerful.

"Cute kid Foie Gras" is very Baphomet.

And, yes, we clearly should do skull-icon contacts for *WicDiv* merch.

22. Title a Socrates nod, obviously — "THE ONLY TRUE WISDOM IS KNOWING YOU KNOW NOTHING." Glad to finally get my classical education into play. As in, repeatedly watching the first *Bill and Ted* for years.

Next: Cassandra's back. And is she happy? Of course not. She's Cassandra.

Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 20

As I start this, 'Nobody's Empire' by Belle & Sebastian comes on shuffle, and immediately unsettles me. Arguably Stuart Murdoch's most autobiographical song, and it's one that's haunted much of *WicDiv*. "When I was in hell" and all that, and it runs through this issue.

Hmm. Let's start with a random aside. When I was getting into comics as a creator, there was one thing Grant Morrison did which I hated. It was when he did an interview and said what the book was all about. Now, I didn't hate it because of that — fair game, etc — but because of its effect on the discourse. 95% of the criticism — and Morrison was at the height of his sacred cow status post-*All Star Superman* — just recited it back.

So, when I started doing comics, I didn't do that

much, especially with the WFH stuff. I had my angles, and certainly wouldn't fucking shut up (as evidenced by these writer's notes) but I would try and leave people to figure it out for themselves.

I soon realised what I suspect is the secret reason why Grant does it. If you don't tell people at least SOMETHING then most critics don't seem to notice even the least subtle stuff.

I mean, Matt and my first *Uncanny* arc? A laceration at any creative working in superhero WFH as ethically bankrupt, especially ourselves. No one noticed. The *Fear Itself* arc had a huge mutant hating mob marching to San Francisco (where the mutants lived) to destroy this home of abominations against nature and the most I can recall about something even that sledgehammer was someone on a forum going "Wait — is something else going on here?"

So I started saying a little more in interviews. But certainly not everything.

(WFH has been useful to me, in terms of learning about various modes of obtuseness. I suspect I'm always going to lean slightly too opaque — and my mixture of opaque and hilariously unsubtle is always a strange one anyway — but it mitigated my instincts. I did things I thought would be obvious and realised that people are just going to miss 95% of the stuff. I mean, *Generation Hope*'s first arc featured someone basically turning into Tetsuo from *Akira* — it was a whole art/inspiration/derivative story, etc. I had the whole first page as him going on about I AM BECOMING ART and all that jazz, and figured that was fine. No, it wasn't. I don't think anyone got it, and I had to leverage some stuff in later in the story to make what I thought was obvious clear. If I were to rewrite it, I'd have plastered an *Akira* poster in his room, at the very least.)

Point being: I am fascinated by what is too much and what is too little, and trying to work how to make work of different sorts dance in different ways in front of different people. I am figuring it out, and will be figuring it out forever.

I'm rambling.

WicDiv is us trying to do our most commercial work while cramming everything inside it. As such, I don't assume much, and build the toolset we're using in front of you, cycle by cycle. It's a book which is trying to teach people how to read it — it's where the *Watchmen* influence is strongest.

(And the *Watchmen* influence is particularly strong in this issue, on the quiet, and not so quiet.)

Basically, what I'm saying it's a book about death and art... but it's not just about that, and by now I suspect the nagging "Wait — what IS this about?" may be coming to the fore.

So yeah.

In other notes, dunno how you felt about this issue, but it was nightmarish for me. It's one of the issues I've known would be at this point, and is basically a big black hole.

Persphone's in hell. I was too.

Main Cover. The Norns! My second favourite of this five, I think. Love the thread, the three-in-one as three

levels, etc. Also showing that Cass is returning to the story...

Jenny Frison Cover. I've loved Jenny's stuff for years, and very happy for her to do one. There's a real opulence and decadence to this, which is very suiting. And sadness.

1. And hello, Norns! Been a while.

I have been watching people's concerns about how they got back from Japan, where we last saw them in Issue 15. I suspect it'll come up in conversation the next time the Norns and Amaterasu have a quiet moment together. That may be a while.

There was some debate on how Laura should appear in Cass's phone. We did think about it being an insult or just "the fangirl", but the more methodical "Here is a name, and here is something to help me remember who she is" struck us as a more Cass approach. It at least shows how Cass thought of Laura when she put her number in her phone.

Cass's response to the text — that it's a prank — is very much her in her usual pragmatism. I've missed Cass.

2. Yes, the layout may be a bit familiar.

I did smile at the the readers analysing what's happening in the garden in the tags.

3. I really wanted to have an interstitial here, but it would have made the issue too long. Instead, we go straight to Cassandra having her first god experience.

When doing a page like this, it's definitely useful to have someone like Jamie on expressions. Great panels, great use of space.

4. And a remixed page, mashing two pages together from Issue 11.

Matt was in an awful place with work, and Jamie had his own pressures on time here. Matt — in a series of other bad things — had jury duty when he was colouring this issue, so it was really tricky to do anything. He was also aware he hadn't pushed the colouring for a little while, and wanted to do something radical. We ended up with this, which is obviously striking, but is also a quicker style than normal. People have been really complimentary about it, so it seems to have gone down well.

It's not a straight page mash — Jamie added the broken tendrils of the panels. This is Persephone performing this story to Cassandra, so is all warped by how she does things.

5. Clearly we'd have preferred this on a page turn, but there are far bigger fish to use the page turns on... plus, I had written something that bumped right against the page count.

Of all the incredibly detailed things that fans have talked about and had theories about, that I'd never seen anyone talk about "Wait — how did Inanna know what Baphomet was doing?" surprises me slightly.

I removed a FUCKING from the last panel. Baph using FUCKING in both the previous panel and that one

seemed overplayed — and it was more effective in the “CLEARLY KNOWING I FUCKING WOULD”. The self-directed hatred rather than the hatred lashing out, etc.

6. The premature ejaculation joke makes me smile, and the little wry human smile of Baph is cute as well.

Yeah, I think these two would have got on surprisingly well.

Inanna’s divination last seen in Issue 6, I believe. God, that seems a long time ago now. That said, Issue 11 was too.

7-8. Actually one page of new stuff, and one page of the old issue reworked. It really is our signature move. Only change to old panel — bar colouring and reworked panel borders, as everywhere else — was to merge the DON’T YOU WANT TO SING from the next panel in Issue 11.

Inanna has had a costume change here.

This issue was the one we were working on when Prince passed. With what was happening — especially the stuff in a few pages from now — that added to all the strangeness of our oddly prophetic book. We knew that the last thing we wanted to do was to present an image where someone who looks like Prince is being killed. As such, we move him away from the visual resemblance, so it can’t be used by someone in any way we wouldn’t like.

My favourite thing about this sequence is how Baph/Inanna’s response to the events of #11 mirror the readers’ response. HEY! LAURA IS A GOD! And then WHAT THE FUCK ANANKE!

9. Inanna hits the floor and gets knocked out.

Oddly, I’m just doing lettering tweaks for Issue 21, and there’s a line Ananke says which makes me think I may be being a bit meta about the card-trick plotting here.

10. We originally didn’t have the magic flash in the second panel, in our attempt to try and downplay the image as much as possible while still being in *WicDiv*’s aesthetic. We wouldn’t have lingered on Inanna’s death anyway — his reappearance before showing his real death is something which some people have thought cruel, and I wouldn’t necessarily disagree. As much as we could, I was trying to minimise it.

Though Ananke here? She really is a fucking monster. That expression in the last panel! Also, Baph’s in the third panel.

I’m shutting up a lot in these kind of moments of real violence and horror. You can compare and contrast with the music video sequence fight scenes, if you wish.

11. Remixed image, half from #11, half new.

First panel we decided it didn’t need the kill — mainly as it’s about Baph’s dodge rather than Ananke’s action. Subjectively speaking, it’s about that second part.

12-13. Directly from the issue. The other primal crime, fading into the fires.

I originally wrote that Jamie should use all the fires we used in the comic, and put them together. Part of that was meta — this is the core burning away which destroys

Persephone, and everything has been building to this — and the other part was that I had hit the page budget and thought that a “free” page may get around it.

Jamie said it’d be less work to just draw it. So he did. Thanks, Jamie.

I originally fucked up and got Jamie to do the wrong page on the left too, which meant he had to rework the fire. He should punch me. He really should.

14-15. Dropped page furniture on left on interstitial so it merged with the image on the right. After the fire, a black hole.

I did include this bit in my script...

“In passing — the halfway point of the issue in the halfway point in the arc in the halfway point of the series. You’re welcome. I will take all your Eisners now.”

Er... I tend to use THIS TIME WE’LL GET EISNERS as a running joke. I suspect I said it in the first *Phonogram* script. It will never happen, and if it ever did, it wouldn’t be because of that kind of thing.

It’s not quite true on the larger scale, but there’s something formally pleasing about this black hole being at the centre of this arc. We’ve had HELL imagery running from the very start, and PERSEPHONE IN HELL kind of that coming together. I suspect PERSEPHONE IN HELL is one of the phrases that’ll haunt the book for a good while yet.

Yes, Baph is bringing her a Happy Meal. Irony. And puns.

“I’m full of ash” was added to make things a little clearer, in terms of the last few pages, and why we linked everything together.

16-17. Dovetailing with what happened in the meantime. Storytelling which definitely leans towards the non-literal. Clearly she would have moved, but she wouldn’t have felt like it.

She gets her clothes from the same place Lucifer did when she was in prison.

(Oddly, this reminds me of the sequence with Billy towards the end of ‘Children’s Crusade’.)

Baphomet has to do the heavy narrative lifting. Yeah, the “HER OR ME” inversion is revealed here. I was looking for a place to give it more weight in the arc, but it was a relatively small detail comparatively.

Love the colour choices specifically in the panel where Baph is stomping around.

The sound effect TAP TAP is pretty amusing, in an awful way.

18-19. Performative masculinity, eh?

A story in a story storytelling here — it’s something we do go back to a bit. Another of the ANANKE ORIGIN STORIES, which obviously builds on Issue 16. Due to space, this is a half-page transition, which I’d normally avoid, but Matt’s choices manage to make it work...

My favourite thing Ananke does is basically her “Hmmpfs”.

20-21. And the fourth time we’ve reworked these pages (fifth time we’ve done it — if we include Woden). Actually much more work than you’d think, or Jamie

tells me now, after we've done this for the last time for a while. I need to buy Jamie a drink.

22. This page makes the whole team laugh pretty hard. Oh, Baph.

Another mid-page transition. As I said, there's a lot of fish frying.

Baphomet's god issues is one of the floating mysteries, of course. I suspect that "Baph isn't the god he's claiming to be" is one idea which hadn't come up. I hope in retrospect the breadcrumb trail is more visible.

23. The first draft of this page's dialogue forms some of the earliest notes I'd written for the series. It changed considerably, obviously — I originally had the joke as Spider-Man/Spiderman and "Why isn't Spider-Man in the Avengers?" but with the recent news, I figured it was worth tweaking away to something that still works.

Some minor tweaks here based in terms of how likeable we thought a statement made them. Baph was a little more — though only slightly — gatekeepy in his first line. Persephone was slightly harder against why Baph cared, etc. I only mention as normally I suspect people think we push characters pretty hard into unlikeable places, and any example of us moderating it is interesting. I think they were the right calls.

So — Nergal? Well, you don't really need to know. There's certainly a bunch which could go — the musician, the *Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy* character, the bit-part demon in *Hellblazer*, etc. I suspect Baph would know most of them. The one most relevant is actually Nurgle, the Chaos god in all the Warhammer universes. Yes, the miniature painting was foreshadowing in multiple ways (Baph was painting a Vampire count. Marian was painting a Nurgle chaos creature.)

Clearly, Nergal is a god with an interesting cultural history. Well worth digging into it. Babylonian gods are fascinating.

Anyway — they kiss. Is this the first actual kiss in *WicDiv*? Bar the *Sex Criminals* pages? And the orgy? We tend to actually cut away from the kissing and sex, and do beats around the bedroom. I mean, that's what we do here — it starts, and then we immediately cut away.

Er... if this arc is about violence, the next is about sex. Or at least, I mean the type of action is more about sex than violence. Mostly.

I just started work on it on Wednesday, actually, and felt the odd strangeness of writing pages which have the date 2015 on them.

24. As much as I love people digging into the "Baphomet is very bad at sex" running jokes, the "I felt alive for a few seconds" isn't intended to be about the sex itself, but the reason why Persephone decided to initiate the kiss (and the sex).

Clearly I didn't want to write a scene which implied "Hey! Persephone's depression has been cured by Baphomet's magical penis" so there's a lot here to mitigate against it. I haven't seen anyone have that particular problem with it, so maybe we pulled it off.

25. The next piece of *WicDiv* merch will be the official

WicDiv fuck pole, clearly.

I love Cass in this sequence. More Cass! More Cass! Plus the interaction between the two of them, is absolutely key.

(Also — perfect pause panel by Jamie at the end.)

26. AND THEN CASS FREAKS OUT!

Bless her. The bread into toast line was me trying to find something that was even half as good as the *Preacher* beat where Starr says something like "Water into wine? He can barely turn water into urine."

We can certainly debate who's being the realist here.

27. "I did it half an hour ago."

For a structurally-*Watchmen*-y issue, the nod is there... and I did play with making it much more explicit. I tried to make a line akin to "Baphomet said I should say "I did it half an hour ago" but I'm not sure why" but couldn't make it work, not least because it breaks the tone. This is not a wink-wink scene. This is a serious scene of drama.

Yes, this is the first time anyone has used a machine to perform their powers. We're getting a lot of use of Owly this arc. He's the breakout star of 2016.

Really lovely elegiac vibe in that final panel.

28. Reference to PJ Harvey song, where Peej somehow convinced Thom Yorke to sing "all night and day, I dream of making love to you now baby" which is something Thom should do more of. I'm still waiting for his cover of Sisoq's 'Thong Song', clearly retitled 'Thom Song'.

Right — that'll do. This was a gruelling one. The next one is more fun... well, at least in *WicDiv*'s idiom.

Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 21

I find myself thinking of the structure of this arc — the hole in the middle and then... this. Which makes me think of a sort of drop before the everyone-hands-in-the-air or something. It was probably deliberate.

As said before, this is the music video arc. To some degree, it's about spectacle, and structurally speaking needs to build so we have novel and entertaining spectacle. Obviously there's more to come, but this probably has the highest concentration of this kind of thing. My main response to getting pages for this issue was to laugh and go "SO, SO DUMB."

This issue, we wanna be your Joey Ramone.

I'm writing this on the train on the way to SDCC with Jamie, Katie and Chrissy, which makes this one a little strange.

Main Cover. First Valkyrie cover. It's... pretty? They're framed in a non-threatening manner here. I'd go as far as use the word "submissive." Compare and contrast with their appearance in the issue.

David Aja Cover. David's one of our favourite comic artists — I suspect he's the artist I most regularly reference in scripts, normally when I'm trying to get twenty panels onto a page. His covers are always visual design showcases, but this was a surprise for us. It's

a rare case where we're very happy to break the logo to do something completely different in the Jami Reid homage. Our one fear is that the Queen dies at some point during this month.

1. I suspect Jamie got inspiration for Ananke's room from the Yotel in New York, which is basically like living inside an iPod. Matt's colouring scheme for Valhalla is normally based around how high in the building they are — stuff that's above the surface tends to be lighter, with the colouring changing depending on building alerts.

External shot on final panel to allow people to reorientate themselves with Valhalla's layout. We've been away for a few issues, and a lot of the action in the next two issues is set here. We want people to be able to imagine the space.

2-3. Worth noticing that there's no big images in these first three pages, as we're saving that. Also the large setup on the first panel, showing Beth and her crew in there. This is obviously important down the line in the issue, and we did wonder whether this was enough.

This whole sequence was oddly hard to try and finesse the dialogue to work the necessary exposition. Sakhmet's entrance tended to be a little confusing. Plus obviously we have Amaterasu talking about her inability to use her powers during the night. The "when is dawn" clock is ticking throughout this issue — follow Matt slowly pushing up the lighting.

Love Sakhmet's ear piece. Also, hello Minerva's parents.

The main thing that makes Jamie swear across this arc is keeping track of the injuries. Clothes can be fixed by the gods relatively easily, but we like to keep the physical continuity pretty tight.

4-5. Payoff of the location of the party joke.

I — I mean, Dionysus — sent out a message to the Dionysus mailing list in Issue 7 basically recruiting this people into the mob. Includes some added information on people in the crowd which I'll obviously work into this. The short of it is "they become slightly superhuman" when they're part of the crowd.

Now, as much as the "crowd looks awesome" in the colouring, this is also me trying to avoid setting a visual challenge which will break the team. Crowd scenes just devour time. People use a lot of shortcuts, especially when they're trying to ship a regular book (*WicDiv* is a *very* regular book) and many shortcuts, while effective, can limit an effect. The idea of doing the crowd as the neon outlines lets us have our cake and eat it. A good example of how Matt is a key part of how the book operates.

6. The SHIT JUST GOT REAL through a pretentious filter.

7. Panel 4 is one of my favourite images of Baal ever, I think. I don't think Jamie's drawn him looking as furious. Baal, for me, is one of those people who become interesting when his control cracks.

And this reveal of information from Baphomet — I played structurally with where to place it a few times.

Definitely happy with it ending here, because there's a moment of connection and then...

8. We make the fact this arc is dancing with 'Bad Blood' a little explicit, by doing something which comes very close to it — specifically, the climaxes of the villages. Our fire is green, because of Woden.

You've seen 'Bad Blood', yeah? If not...

Worth noting that there are details here which are only really explained later — Eir's sword, for example. Also worth noting that the other Valkyries are armed with mauls and it's only Eir who has a weapon with a blade.

We were a little worried that the green fire may end up looking like trees rather than fire due to the patented *WicDiv* pixelation effect, but I think it turned out fine.

9. Keeping the STOP/THE/DESTROYER was an approach I did at lettering, and probably the tweak I'm happiest with. Adds an element of sinister rhythm and momentum to the Valkyrie's attack.

Cripes: we may have used every single colour in existence in the first panel on that page.

You may have noted we're deep in spectacle and novelty territory now. Dionysus's move here was inspired when I was at Christian Ward's wedding. It was (perhaps surprisingly, considering my generation) the first wedding I've been at which had a 90s rave set in the middle of the wedding disco. Also, there were glo-sticks.

So, as whirling these around and tracing the lights I find myself thinking...

10. ...it'd be awesome if someone had a pair of nunchaku made of glo-sticks. Matt Wilson would do astounding things with that. And lol! He does.

Honestly, have no idea how he's managing all the hues in the second panel. I also just noticed the extreme pixelation on Eir's sword in the foreground.

One of my early readers, when sent a PDF of the issue, noted that in the month of Orlando she found it particularly powerful to see a god of the dancefloor say this. Obviously nothing we planned, but I can't see this panel without thinking about that now.

11. Dialogue cut off by a double-hyphen is one of the comic dialogue tropes that I've grown to love the more I've written comics. The use of punctuation in comics is very much its own thing.

Worth noting: the light in the window. It is now dawn. Ergo, Amaterasu can use her teleportation powers.

Jamie does great things with Mini's expressions across this page. The middle tier is especially good.

Ananke's entrance with an upshot definitely sells her sinisterness.

This issue is packed, to say the least, but there was no way this was ever not going to be on the right...

12. So this can be on a page turn. Still — it speaks a lot about this issue that this is still a three-panel page.

This came out grimmer than Jamie expected — if you ever see the inks, you'll see it. Matt's pop-colouring takes away from that a little, but it's still clearly brutal.

The second panel is perfect Jamie. Amaterasu and Minerva's response of complete and utter panic. FUUUUCCCCKKKK!

I dropped to silence after Minerva's parents died in an attempt to try and get that sense of disassociation. Having (say) screams from Ammy/Mini or similar would have detracted from the moment.

Frankly, this could also have been a page turn, as Ananke's fingers aiming at someone are always going to have a moment of tension.

13. And Amaterasu does her laser travel thing and gets the fuck out of there. The laser beam effect is one of my favourite looks that have come to the fore this arc, actually.

The broken panel to show Ananke missing the film crew is obviously key. I was a little worried about the dialogue here being too funny, but after a variety of approaches, it seemed to work.

14. Where we're starting to compress here.

One page for this is clearly pretty cramped, and meant Jamie had a lot to do. I suspect many writers working in the modern style would have done it as two pages — we really have two fairly intricate sequences, one where Sakhmet beats them, and another when she gets distracted and misses someone getting in.

It also highlights the biggest problem in the script-to-issue — as in, when I had written it all, I didn't know Jamie was going to put the hole on the third floor, and when Jamie drew it he didn't know the gods were going to be reusing it.

If you're wondering, this one is on me — I should have highlighted its future use in the script.

(This is assuming I knew the hole would be this important, of course. I don't think I did. I think that naturally just came from writing a setting.)

In short: c'est la vie. Turned out okay — the long shot actually stresses how quick Sakhmet is (assuming people can follow the storytelling here).

Considered putting some dialogue in the third panel to stress that she's still conscious, but we decided it'd be fine.

The laser beam is Amaterasu, which is a tell that this scene happens simultaneously with the last one. I don't really like doing this sort of thing, but any other approach in an issue as dense as this was going to be even more confusing.

The red dot pays off something set up all the way back in Issue 1.

The dialogue in the first panel was rewritten a bunch — the first draft was fucking terrible, but I'm fine with where it landed.

15. Another page that could have justified two if done in a different style. The "character catches another weapon" beat is normally sold a LOT harder than this here.

I suspect Ananke's line here is my favourite in the issue. That said, pretty much anything Ananke says from this point on seems to be on form. She's settling into the villain role pretty well.

16. Woden's multiple changes of mood in this panel only work as i) it's in a long shot and ii) he's wearing a mask. Also note that due to the framing of the letters you read it all before finally reaching the ask with surprise-icons around it. As in, you only see the surprise at the end... which is where the dialogue *is* surprised rather than clinical.

Love the framing of Ananke in the first panel. Really captures the sense of momentum to her.

Also — the last panel, with Ananke reflected in Woden's mask is very strong.

GOOD WORK, JAMIE.

17. A brief stop in the action to explain the plot. Don't worry, we're back to punching soon.

Woden's silent panel and walk away please me.

Jamie trying to work out how to do everything Ananke does on this page with one hand is obviously tricky. I would recommend writers try to avoid limb or hand loss in comics, just because it's something that artists (er) regularly have trouble with. Following Tyr and Hela's missing hands in *JIM* is probably going to win someone a whole bunch of no prizes one day.

18. What was I saying about spectacle? I would say Baphomet's torso would be included herein.

I smile a little at the detail in the second panel, specifically how the crowd is dragging down the Valkyries.

Woden's CLUSTER OF FUCKS line was originally on the back cover, but we decided having swears on our cover was probably bad for stores.

'Complete Control' is a song on the *WicDiv* playlist, of course.

19. Yes, there are twelve valkyries (13 including the pink).

Jamie took this a little more visually than I wrote it, which was probably a sensible way to approach this. It's a classic comic move, of course, but making sure people understood it is key.

(I had a diagram panel which had twelve tiny Valkyrie icons arranged in a human shape, and an EQUALS sign in the final panel.)

20. *Phonogram*-style main image/reaction panel structure.

I pitched this idea to Jamie by texting him. The exchange was something like...

K: Valkyrie Voltron?

J: What?

K: The Valkyries combine into a giant Voltron.

J: Yup.

This is how the magic happens.

You can say many bad things about Woden, but he certainly does the work.

21. Worth comparing and contrasting this to the previous page — both two-panel pages, but in this one the panels are split more evenly. This is as on the last page the second panel is subordinate to the main one, while here the two panels are both providing their own information. The knife is a new thing and needs to be

sold harder, and — to return to the standard line — space = meaning.

22. And we work in a literal nod to Taylor Swift.

Anyway — hope to see some of you at SDCC. #22 is with Image now, so should be with you soon. It's the end of the arc and — as you can imagine — somewhat apocalyptic.

Thanks for reading.

ISSUE 22

End of *WicDiv* arcs are interesting ones.

As a writer, I structurally back-end a lot of stuff, and I'm always particularly well-planned. I move with intent, and with something I want to talk about and to try to explore.

This arc is one of the most tightly-structured issues of the larger story — I had a pretty strong synopsis for the whole thing before starting, and wrote it all in a little more than a month (18 pages a few days before the new year and the rest in January — I also did another three comics in that month. It was the most productive period of the year so far.)

So there's a lot I knew, and what I was trying to do — and the conclusion is one of those scenes that I've been playing in my head every since I started. Dialogue for some of the key bits has existed before the whole thing started. It was strange to actually write it.

However, just because I know a lot of it, doesn't mean I know it all, and the process of writing illuminates things which are undeniably there. The main advantage of writing it all in advance was that I had the time to become aware of it, and then lean into the things I wasn't really 100% aware of when putting it all together.

(I mean, I've described *WicDiv* both as a hypothetical career journey of a person, with this as the planned-for crossover hit album. However, it's also a recapitulation of our own careers. This is very much the *Young Avengers* arc, even down to the whole thing happening in a less than a day, like YA's *STYLE > SUBSTANCE*. And, of course, YA was our own planned-for crossover hit, etc. So what comes next is living with that and...)

Well, I knew all that. But there's stuff I didn't know — and my own bitterness and cynicism towards a lot of things is definitely in there. The theme of the performance of violence in culture versus actually real violence grows across the whole thing, juxtaposing these things which are more like pop videos and dance routines with things which are just murder. I know that "Hey — violence is bad" isn't exactly a deep observation, but there's a tension in this arc between these two elements and I think it may even be the core of its appeal. It's aimed at the creators as much as anyone. What does this say about any of us?

Something a few people said after *Journey Into Mystery* finished was that, while they loved it, it made them no longer want to read another Marvel comic ever again. I found myself thinking "Oh, yeah, that's probably part of what I was trying to do on some level." I suspect that some of those ambivalent feelings towards the dominant genre in the mainstream are in here, even as we show that we can do it (and this is self-congratulatory,

but seems to be the general timbre of a lot of reviews) really fucking well. Yes, we can do this, but should we? "You wanted this — now we've given it to you: does that make you feel good?" is one of those *WicDiv* moves. Self-loathing is our jam.

I'm rambling here, clearly, as I'm looking at the work and trying to work out what's going on there bar the obvious. And this is also with me already into *Imperial Phase Part 1* which has a lot of anger in the material.

Also, I've been watching a LOT of *BoJack Horseman*, and it may have rubbed off.

Right — let's go through. As always, I'm not even saying a fraction of stuff that's going on in the book. It's a ramble, as evidenced above.

Main Cover. We finally give Minerva a cover. As some people have noted, the mode is a little different from the photoshoots of the other four. They seem to be about glamour, and what interested me there was the contrast of that poise on the cover and the contents. This is not a photoshoot. This is Minerva, lost in this brutal machine. I mentioned the Glamour → Reality aspect above, but I suspect this is part of that.

We're eventually going to do the other three headshots, btw, just so we have the set. We'll probably include them in the trade or something.

Olly Moss Cover. Olly just does some of the smartest work as an artist today — if you're not aware of him, do google. And if you google, you'll realise you're aware of him. He doesn't do many comic covers, and we're very honoured that he chose to do one for us. He wanted to experiment with doing some 3D modelling, and asked if it was okay to do Luci. We said sure. Basically, whatever he wants, he gets.

(Kevin Wada for Issue 23 also asked if he could do Lucifer, and I've worked out a way to get her into it. I mean, magazines print old photos all the time, right?)

Couldn't be happier with what results — really unusual, iconic, and beautiful.

1. I admit, there's nothing I don't like about Amaterasu and Cassandra's interaction on this page. "SHE'S A BADDY!" is peak Amaterasu.

The main thing which leaps out to me on the page is actually how Matt and Jamie have done panel 4. I suspected it would come across as quite callow... but there is actually something genuinely intimidating about Amaterasu's faith here. Her sun pupils are one of my faves as well. (Panel 5 with Cass' sneer is also strong.)

We had to work out at lettering the best way to really stress that Amaterasu's travel is much faster than anyone else — as in, teleportation. We ended up having Cass' line cut off on the N of NOW, and finished on the first panel of next page, so showing this is instantaneous. Lettering is always comics' problem solver.

You know I said that characters have their finest hour in this arc? Or at least a bit where they're very them and do something good? This may be Amaterasu's. In terms of realising WE NEED CASSANDRA and then doing it in the most her way imaginable.

2-3. We've included the script and the roughs of this in the backmatter, as it's clearly a ramble and/or attempt to kill Jamie, Matt and Dee. (Seriously, imagine flatting this fucker.)

After last issue's climax, we had to at least allow a little spectacle. We've promised it. However, as the issue moves towards the conclusion, we just don't have the space for the beat down. As such, we try to do it all in one image. Create this piece of total chaos and let people's imagination run wild.

(I haven't seen anyone complain about a lack of spectacle in this issue, so it may have worked.)

But yes, a fun one to pick apart, and you can imagine what the script said to get the attack boobs. I also like how the Voltron Valkyrie has those heels. OTP is our baseline.

One thing I noted in the script — that this is very much TECHNO CTHULLU vs VOLTRON. As such, our good guys look like the bad guys. That may be a thing.

We worked the lettering a bit here too, to try and work out what would work best — Cass's punchline being on the main panel worked. You want that juxtaposition.

Also debating where to put the FUCK! Was fun. Over the sword or over the falling guy or...

And here comes Woden!

4-5. Worth noting Woden has the first internal narration of the arc. In fact, he's the only person who's ever got internal narrative apart from Persephone. This makes me wonder whether this is me processing my love for *My (So Called) Life* with Woden as Brian to Persephone's Angela. I digress.

I like how Jamie gets the mirroring of the pose of the Valkyrie with the one here.

Why a narrative captions? It's not my first choice, but there's a lot of setup I have to get through here, and not much space to do it. Plus, to try and do Woden's betrayal of Ananke without this would take at least twice as much space AND may not be clear. Also, there was a lot of room for comedy here.

Persephone didn't get internal dialogue this arc. By the end of the arc, I suspect most people will know why. If we know what was really going on inside her head, it changes everything... but it's not as if it wasn't foreshadowed. "Tonight I'm going to kill" and all that. The holding back of internal dialogue is, of course, my go-to move for *Darth Vader*. No, that comparison isn't comforting me much either.

The parody old-skool superhero panel of 4.4 makes me smile. That level of monologue, the panel composition of figures, etc.

The "Valkyrie disappearing" panels had the captions added at the last minute when I decided that many people would presume that the Valkyries may all be dead.

It took a lot of passes to work out exactly how bright to make the Valkyrie Voltron before it explodes.

Er... it's not actually called "Valkyrie Voltron" in universe. It's just a useful phrase.

In terms of finest hours, this is Woden's. That he finds a way to do the right thing, in the slimiest, most self-serving way possible is also very him.

My favourite thing about this issue, as a general writing thing? This is a classic PLOT! comic, but it's all 100% based on the characters. I know it's the bare minimum, but it's still satisfying to see.

6. I quite like PUSSYCUNT. It's very Badb.

As this is the first issue ever that has all the surviving cast in, it made me think about everyone's voices a lot. Cassandra is more swearsy... but Badb's swearing is much worse than anyone else's. No one else uses "cunt" in the whole series... with the one-off exception of Woden, and clearly that's for different narrative reasons.

Anyway — I ramble.

Oh — we're talking finest hours? Cassandra is MVP for the whole issue, and this sequence is hers. Just coming in and bashing everyone's heads together...

I'm still laughing at Baphomet topless throughout all this.

7. One of my favourite pages in the issue. It's a nine-panel page, with a single word of dialogue — not even a real word! — and Jamie just nails it. Putting aside the expressions — have a look at the row of high-speed panels of Sakhmet's blows. The angling and movement off the grid gives a real sense of viciousness.

No, Sakhmet was never going to be reasonable.

8. At this point, I suspect one of the reasons we kept Cassandra offstage for most of this arc and ready to arrive as the cavalry is clear: the story just stops the second she arrives and starts bashing everyone's heads together.

She *is* the grown-up.

Amaterasu leaning in at Cass is very cute.

9. As a whole page this is a lot, but when it's the key threat, we really want to reestablish it. Matt's hot, simmering colouring around the machine is beautiful.

NICK BATCAVE is a very popular one-liner, and a last-minute addition. I had something much worse that was close to something I'd used before. I'm doing a letter pass on the way to LATITUDE FESTIVAL and trying to work out something better. I just throw random one-liners at Jamie, and NICK BATCAVE got the biggest laugh.

I almost didn't do it, due to "Does Baal know who Nick Cave is?" creeping in... but I like to think Baal is the sort of person who actively researches people he knows. Imagine him up late at night, reading wikipedia entries and scribbling down one-liners.

10-11. Matt's colouring takes it up a gear here. I can see why Comixology chose that panel to hype the book. That this came out in the same week as an issue of *Thor* pleases me. MATT WILSON FOR LIGHTNING COLOURING EISNER.

Also — the mood on the last panel, the reds behind Ananke and Baphomet emerging from it.

Thinking this sequence was tricky, in terms of who to bring forward and back in the mix. As said, this is the most *WicDiv* characters who've ever been in a room together. It's hell for Jamie to do, not least having them all occasionally visible.

For me it's a case of... who are the fighters? Who goes in first? What do they do? Baal, Morrigan and Baphomet are clearly the fighters in the group, so they get a chance to dance first...

...building up to Persephone's entrance.

The second panel on page 11 is not something I'd often do, in terms of this amount of dialogue on a single fast-moving momentary panel. It's a very TRAD superhero approach panel.

12. Jamie worked this page hard, in terms of expanding the rhythm in the middle row. Having more panels keeps the intensity of Persephone's approach... plus the vines creeping up behind her. Jamie's good at this comics thing.

Ananke and Persephone clearly having an enigma-off here as well.

I was thinking of the people being trapped in the wall in *Aliens* in the penultimate panel here.

13. Ananke has had enough of this shit.

There's some great Ananke here, but the one I linger on is actually the second panel, when we get a very rare group shot of the characters.

The composition of who's at the front and who's at the back, and who's REALLY at the back — how the characters interact with each other, how everyone's surprised... except the one person who isn't, etc.

Yes, Baal and Minerva are very cute here. There will be a fair bit more Baal/Minerva cuteness in *Imperial Phase* too, as a break from all the general ambience of decadence.

14. The second panel took a lot of tweaking — as we were flying out to San Diego, I'd realised that the Norns didn't know that Woden's machine was broken. I moved the dialogue around a bit to cover it. This mainly meant that I had to narrate a line correction to Chrissy for her to mail off to Clayton.

This led to me to having to say "WE GAVE IT A CASE OF THE BREAKSIES" in a Heathrow cafe to Chrissy, who immediately shuddered. Chrissy absolutely despises Gentle Annie's voice.

I suspect Cassandra has a stress headache this whole issue. Massage those temples, Cass.

Anyway, that sounds like a good plan, let's do that and go home and...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PERSEPHONE!?!?!

15. Panels with Cassandra just going WTF! Are the best panels.

(Yeah, there's never any chance Cassandra's approach would help Persephone here. Cassandra knows what's right, but doesn't often try to understand.)

I'm surprised that one of the literal translations of Persephone wasn't picked up by more people — I saw someone on twitter realise it, but that was it. There's a variety you can take — there's other people who break it down to SHE WHO DESTROYS THE LIGHT, which would obviously have been even better for our purposes — but talking to Lynn at Nottingham University's Classics department (my first *Three* academic friend), she thinks

that SHE WHO DESTROYS is perhaps the safest to go with.

I'm quite a fan of "Voice from off-panel, who is speaking?" page turns. Hmm. I'll probably try to cut down on them.

16. And the last of the arc's finest hours, it's Baal.

Some of the oldest existent dialogue I mentioned earlier, btw. I especially like the character dig at Lucifer. No, Baal is not going to let that go, even in this situation.

Panel 4 is the heartbreaker for me — the Persephone panels are great from Jamie, but there's a real tenderness in 4.

17. Now, when I first wrote this there was some movement — I wanted this to happen just as they were about to put her into the cage, so Persephone had more time to chew this over and come to it, and it nagging at her before breaking. Except as we had no space, it just didn't work. We kept it in one location, which ends up being a boon in lots of ways, as we'll see.

Good Jamie silent panel, obv, but the killer one (pun not intended, but maybe it is) is panel 3, which is just plain cruel.

Jenny was seen in page 2 of issue 2. People asking about her fate is one of my very regular asks. Now you know.

To state the obvious, that it's something most of us don't know at all is our intent and the point. We gain stuff, we lose stuff. You can unpack it yourself, obviously. Tara's "You have no idea what people are going through" line does come to mind suddenly.

18. The most brutal murder of the series so far. You wanted this. Does this make you feel good?

I suspect it does for more people than we'd like. Ananke has acted monstrously, and I suspect I'd have had to torture her across multiple pages to get the effect... but it's still a really horrible panel, and we've got another image to make people go "Wait — is this a good thing?" to come.

Strong surprise faces in the second panel. Dionysus' WHHHHHAAAAT! Is very much the one team *WicDiv* is fondest of.

19. I think Jamie added the silent panel — I didn't include one as I was worried about space, but we always have a "add more panels" rule.

Yet more glorious expressions. My fave is Cassandra's stress headache going into overdrive.

Baal and Cassandra both stepping in here. Of the pantheon, they're the two who consider themselves responsible grown-ups, in very different ways.

The last panel makes me think of Issue 20, and the "Do you want to help?" panel.

The relationship with the pantheon with power obviously is key going forwards.

20. Cass speaks for all of us.

And just when you thought a situation couldn't get any worse, here comes Woden.

(As said earlier about the team dynamics, this

plays to it too. With all the characters in the room — except Sakhmet — working out who should speak is key. Normally it's the one who feels strongest about something, as they forward the position most forcibly.)

Talking about swearing, I had some reservations on Amaterasu's oh fuck oh god, etc in the panel. Amaterasu isn't a swearing character. She actually uses very childish faux-swearing — "Oh Poo", for example. Is this too much? I breached it with C who agreed with my initial urge — that this is basically very nervous posh-girl swearing. You want to know what makes Amaterasu swear? Well, now we know.

I'm quietly pleased how this issue wraps up — we go from "murder Ananke" to "end of arc with hint of new status quo" in three pages. That motors. Hell, originally, it was two...

21. ...as this was originally one final panel on page 20. We only budget for 20 pages an issue. I did note in the description that it would be a great idea if we had the time to do more, and push that panel to a full image...

...and oh, god, yes. Very much right.

I'd written it as tight, glancing back at us with that cigarette. Jamie taking it further out really leans into what we were trying to do with Ananke's death. A girl, coated in blood, with entrails and limbs hanging behind her, in front of this grotesque, sinister machine. This is not a comforting image. It is an awesome image, but not in any way comforting.

(This is the main boon for keeping the final scene in the machine room — it gives us this as a backdrop.)

22. And the first interstitial of the issue, which also isn't at all loaded.

And so ends *Rising Action*. Next up... *Imperial Phase Part 1*. I was asked what it's like, and wrote the following...

"*Rising Action* was the pop track, the big hit, our take on the mainstay of mainstream pop comics of the last decade — namely the crossover. "A better civil war than *Civil War*" could be a useful description of intent. Bowie moving from the Berlin of *Commercial Suicide* and doing a mashup of 'Scary Monsters'/'Let's Dance'. It's a dumb pop thrill that is critical about the very concept of dumb pop thrills. It is a moment when an artist decides they want to sell a lot of copies, and have amassed the talent to allow them to do that, at will.

Imperial Phase is about living with that.

Instead of a pop single, it's a double album of sprawl. It is the proggy mess, the behind-the-music fall, the "I wish they cut this in half and it'd be the greatest album of all time" stage of an artist's career. It is *In Utero* with awesome orgasms, but the sort of orgasms that make you hate yourself. It is about decadence and self-indulgence — which means the trick is making it about decadence and self-indulgence without *being* self-indulgent. We're fine with the decadence, of course.

In short: *Rising Action* is all about sentences. *Imperial Phase* is about paragraphs."

That sounds about right, and certainly in character. See you soon.

And thanks for reading.

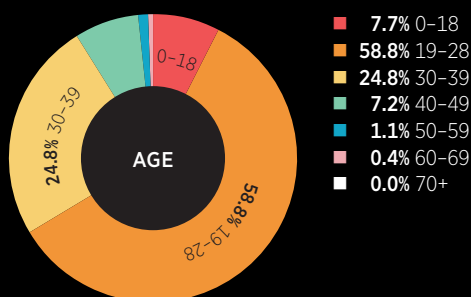
READER POLL

Around Issue 18, we decided to do a reader poll. We have a closer relationship with the readers than many, but in terms of getting some relatively hard numbers, like Johnny 5, we craved data. So using the power of Google Forms, we did one, then Kieron did his incompetent best to crunch the numbers. What follows are the results. There were around 1,500 responses, so it's a significant chunk of people. That said, we do suspect it leans towards the core. That over 70% of respondents have read *Phonogram* is telling. In terms of *WicDiv*'s full readership, that simply isn't true. In single issues, *Phonogram* sells about a third as much. In trades, it's about a tenth. It's also worth noting that as the poll was only linked in the single issues, it means that the trade readership is strongly underrepresented, and when that's the majority of our readers, it's obviously a skew. That said, with all caveats (the big one being that these polls date back to Issue 19), it has led to a lot of fun stuff. Namely, hot and sexy graphs.

DEMOGRAPHICS

I suspect this was the section we were most curious about. There's other bits which are actually useful for working out what to do next — but this is pure “who the hell are all these people reading our bloody comic book?” We have an idea from people who come to signings, of course, but I've always preferred HARD DATA because it can be made into the aforementioned HOT AND SEXY GRAPHS.

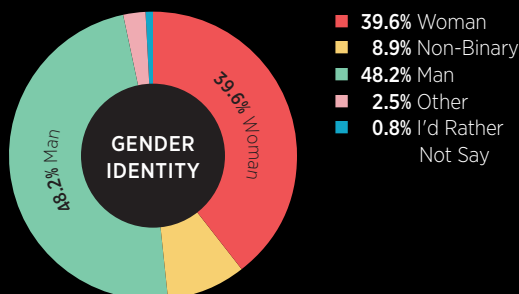
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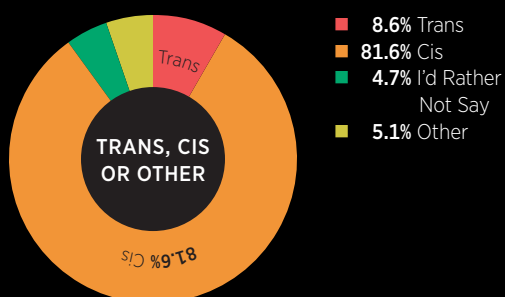
Clearly my first mistake was making the youngest bracket 0-18 instead of 0-17. Sigh! Anyway... while I suspect answering internet forms may be one of the things which skews relatively younger, that does mean that a massive 91.2% of our readership is under 40. When people still use the “the average comic reader is a 40-something dude” position, it's clear we're not that. Also, I find myself thinking of what I said about *Young Avengers* — as in, we were like Robyn, in that we were thirty-somethings, writing about teenage emotions for an audience primarily of 20-somethings. The results seems in line with that, though I'm now 40 so I'll be quiet.

Only 28.8% of you would have selected the option “I Am Ananke, I am Immortal” if it was available. Good on you.

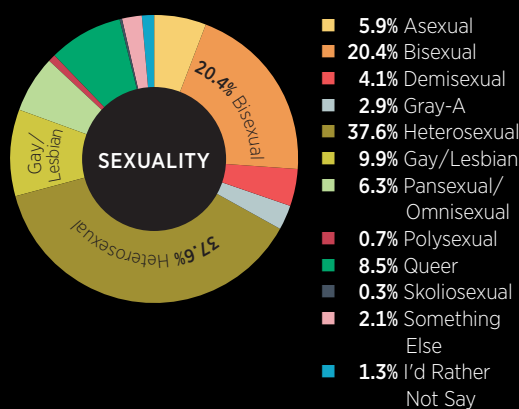
GENDER/IDENTITY/KISSY-STUFF



Dudes are the largest group, but not a majority. I suspect the 8.9% non-binary will be what people notice most here. Similarly, when asked if Trans, Cis or other, we get...



And most of all, when we ask for sexual preference...



...The *WicDiv* readers are helluva gay, etc.

In the poll we went to considerable lengths to avoid having a write-in-only option, simply because it means the math is a lot cleaner Katie compiled the list from various sources, trying to cover as many bases as we could — even then, we weren't perfect (We had “homosexual” and we'd have been better going with “Gay/Lesbian.”) Still — when asked, only 37.6% of *WicDiv*'s readership identify as straight. I'd guess this is a result of straight people's famous aversion to filling out forms. Oh, straight people, when will you learn to love the form?

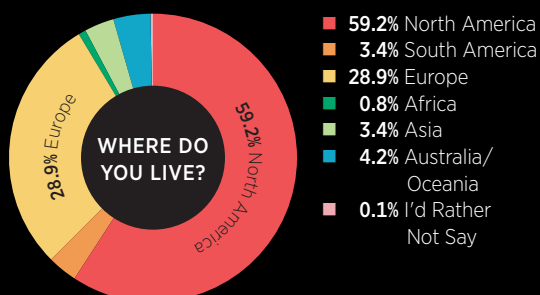
RACE, NATIONALITY, ETC

This is unfortunately where the form-filling starts to go to pot.

We decided there were just too many options, so we let people enter their own choice of ethnicity. This led to data which was simply impossible to simplify without stomping all over people's self-identification, made even harder by white people's tendency to make jokes rather than answer the question.

About the best I can say is that roughly 75% of the readers would fall under the general umbrella of "white", with all other ethnicities, including "other" making up 25%. But even that is far from a number I'm happy with.

However, we suspected that going in, so did something really basic to also include... in which case, we asked what continent you were in. And here you are!



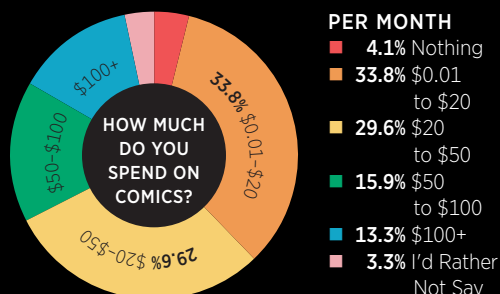
I suspect less North American focused than many comics, though if any of my peers want to run their own poll to compare, I'd be interested to see what comes up. Jamie and I being Brits may impact that Europe portion pretty heavily.

RELIGION AND EDUCATION

The Religion graph is so complicated that it's not actually worth showing due to the number of options and near identical colours. In the basic google form result the colour choices made it appear that 40.7% of our readers chose Islam, which would be a surprise (it was actually (0.7%). The top five answers were Atheist (40.7%), Agnostic (18.3%), Spiritual but not religious (12.3%), the enigmatic "Something else" (8.9%) and Roman Catholic (6.2%). The only answer in the poll which didn't have even a single selection was Shinto.

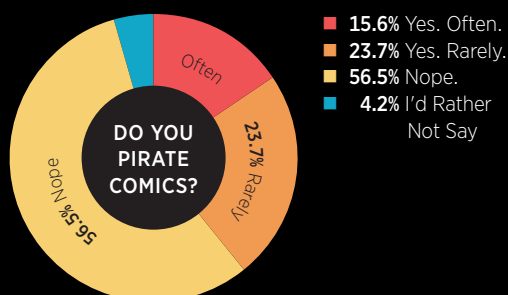
Education probably had the results which were closest to what I'd have guessed. 64.7% have some manner of higher education, 14.2% left education with a high school education, 18.3% had a post-graduate degree of some kind and 2.8% having a doctorate.

COMIC PURCHASING

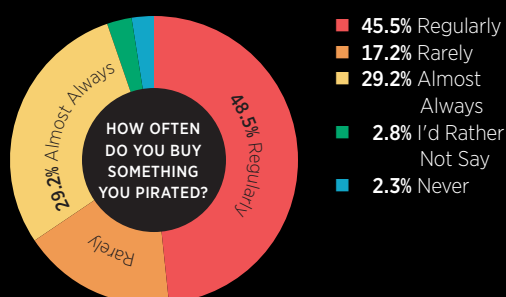


I suspect this is where all my peers are leaning in to read intently. How much do our readers spend on comics per month?

Up to \$20 and \$20-50 made up the majority. If you add together "I'd rather not say" and "Nothing" you'll get a maximum of 7.4% who hypothetically aren't spending any money on comics at all. This may be relevant when we look at the Piracy polls...



A majority don't at all, a little shy of a quarter do it occasionally and 15.6% of people do it regularly. 4.2% would rather not comment, which would mean a maximum of 19.8% who are regular pirates. Which could be taken to mean that at the absolute worst, there's twice as many pirates who also spend money on comics as those who don't spend any money at all. But are the purchases interlinked?



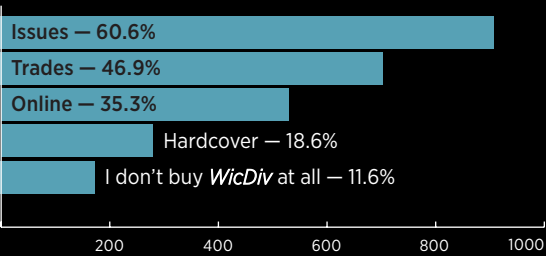
648 people responded to that one, of which only 15 admitted to never ever buying anything they pirate. Honestly? From a creator's perspective, these are pretty encouraging numbers. Also bless the people who didn't include their email

address when they admitted to piracy out of fear of us setting the cops on them. We're bad people, but not like *that*.

WHAT ABOUT WICDIV?

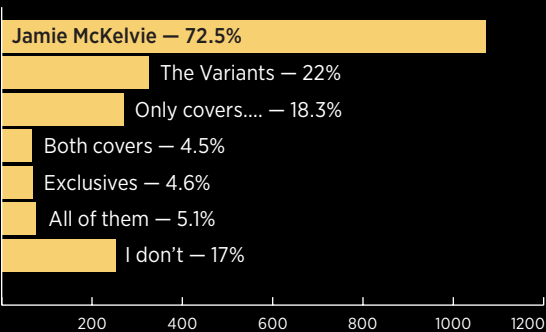
But enough about the industry — what about us?

Which formats do you buy *WicDiv*?



60.6% buy the single issues, 46.9% buy the trades, 35.3% buy it digitally and 18.6% have bought the hardcovers. So, yes, clearly that's some people double-dipping and speaks to how this really is a hardcore reader poll — nearly one in five having picked up the fancy hardback is as testament to that as anything. That said, 11.6% admitted to not buying *WicDiv* at all, which is also interesting to think about. Obviously we've talked Piracy above, but Jamie and I always were highly pro people sharing their copies with friends... and as the poll was passed around online, it's likely folks who don't even know who we are filled it in. I probably should have asked people to not just link to it. You live, you learn. Or not, mostly. (FYI There are no results which are so screamingly off that it makes me think this was significant. There's no sign of anyone deliberately trying to sabotage it.)

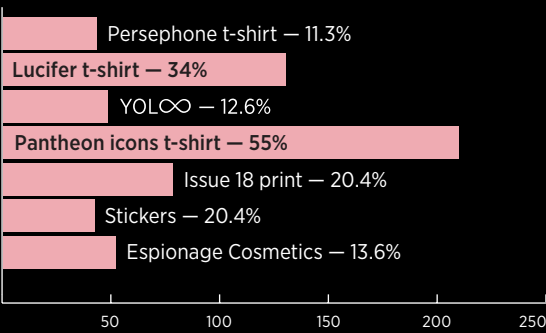
Which Covers Do You Buy?



In terms of covers, 72.5% of people buy Jamie's covers and 22% buy the variants. Only 4.5% buy both covers. Of all the results,

this is the one I think I found most relieving. We'd heard anecdotally from retailers that about 1 in 3 of their buyers bought both — and we thought that was high. At least in the core readership, the full on completism isn't that common.

Have You Ever Bought Any *WicDiv* Merchandise?

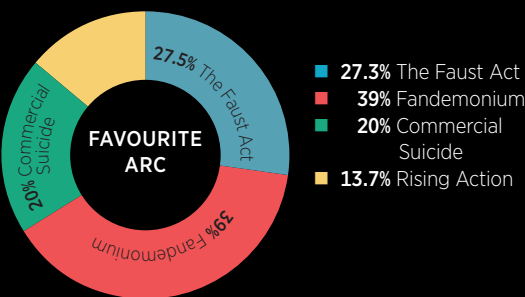


In terms of merchandise, 25.4% of people said that they'd bought something *WicDiv* branded. 55% of them have picked up the iconic *WicDiv* T-shirt, with 34% having the Lucifer Died for Our Sins T and 20.4% having the print of Issue 18's cover. Of course, now it's easier than ever to get *WicDiv* merchandise, with our brand new threadless shop, which you'll find at wicdiv.threadless.com.

(We are shameless.)

FAVOURITE ARCS AND ISSUES

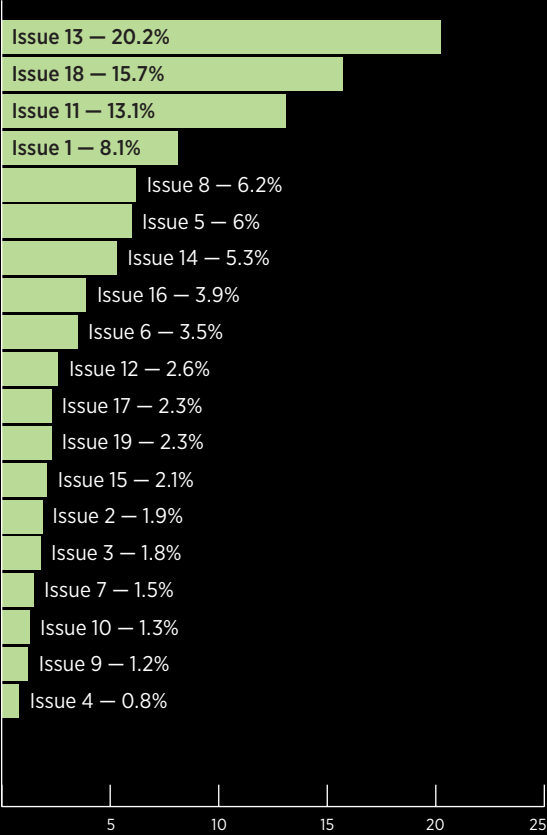
Here's what fans said their favourite *WicDiv* arc so far was:



Fandemonium was the clear leader, with 39%, and it's perhaps unsurprising that *Rising Action* only got 13.7% of votes given that people had only read one or two issues of it when casting their votes. Looking at it another way, 13.7% gave us the benefit of the doubt and said *Rising Action* was their fave, even though they'd only read one or two issues of it when casting their votes! Or maybe they just hated the other arcs

entirely and were glad they were finally over, the blessed masochists. Who knows? Anyway, it's interesting to compare and contrast with this...

What's Your Favourite Issue of *WicDiv*?



At a glance I think *Commercial Suicide* is punching higher on the “favourite issues” front than its standing would suggest, and *Fandemonium* a little lower. This also doesn't surprise me. A concentration of good issues doesn't mean the whole trade hangs together.

Issue 4 being at the bottom is a little bit of a surprise, but thinking about it, it does make sense. I suspect most of its best stuff is actually sucked into Issue 5 in people's memories.

On a personal level. I'm pleased that Issue 8 is so high up people's favourites as well.

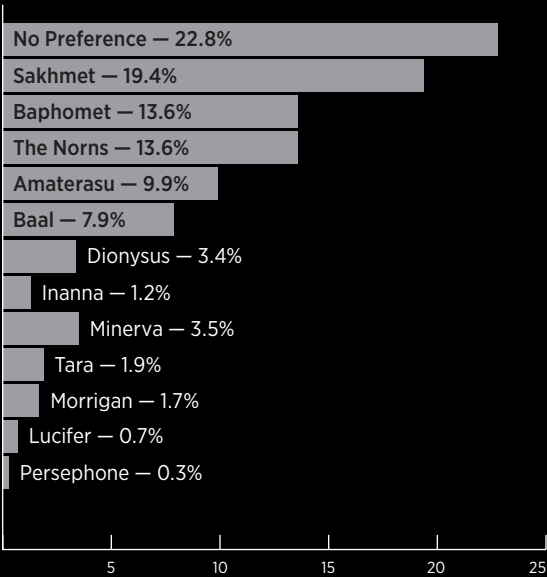
GODS

The fan questions are fun. On the next page you'll find a giant graph showing everyone's favourite and least-favourite gods. The gods with two-figure scores were Lucifer (19.9%) followed by Persephone (18.2%), Inanna (14.2%) and The Morrigan (13.9%), with everyone else beneath 10%.

Least favourites are overwhelmingly Ananke (27.1%) and Woden (36.6%) — and I suspect Woden would take bitter pride from actually managing to beat Ananke there. He's the best at being worst, etc.

Of course, that's why I did a second poll without the two obvious monsters in, which was much more interesting.

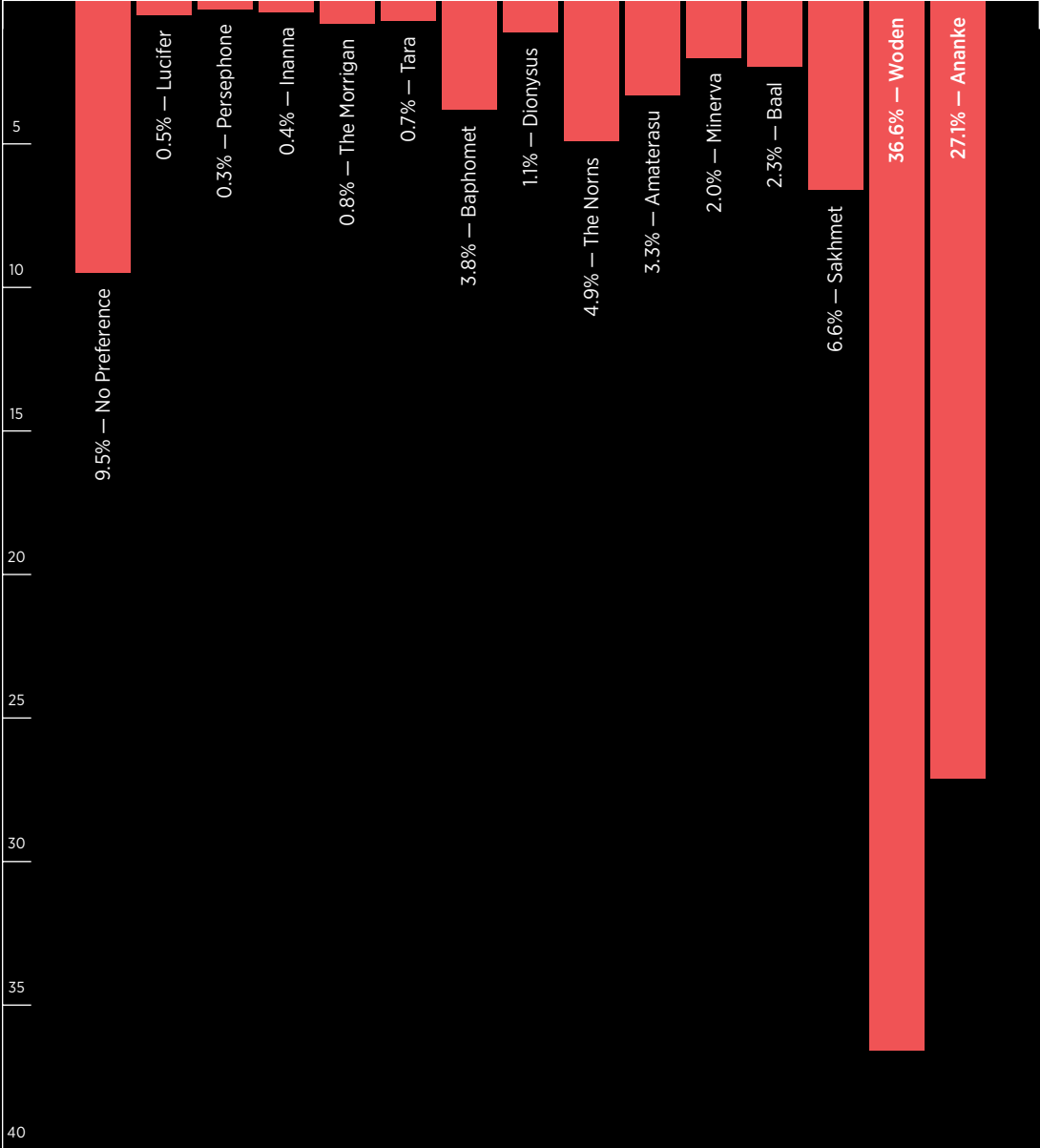
Who is your least favourite God (not including Ananke or Woden)?



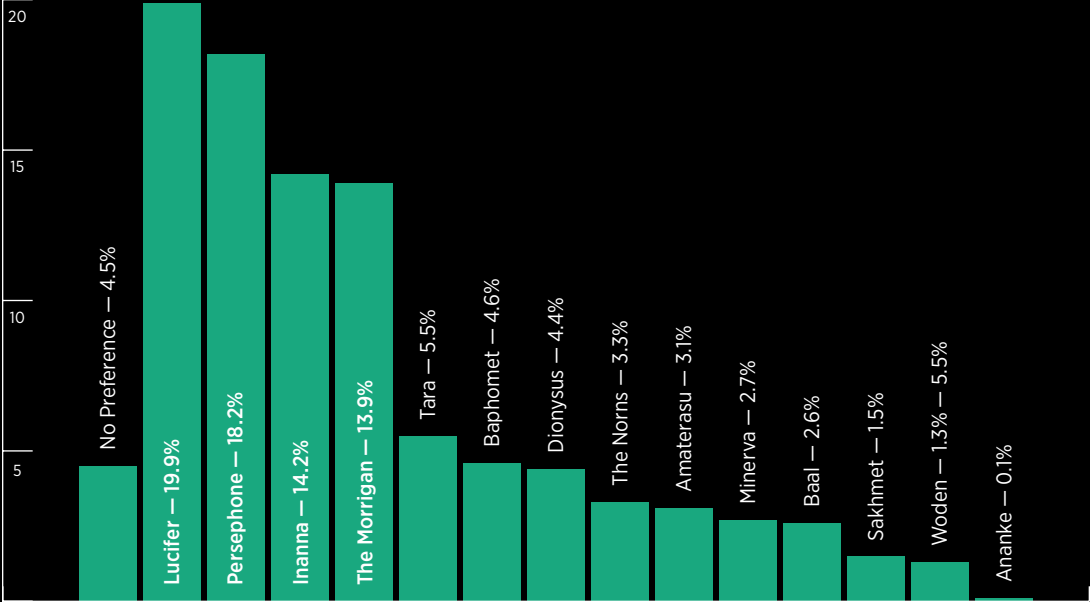
Not including no preference (which would be the winner), the top 5 were Sakhmet (19.4%), the Norns (13.6%), Baphomet (13.6%), Amaterasu (9.9%) and Baal (7.9%). Everyone else was sub-4%.

(I admit, I find myself thinking I wish I'd asked “Which *WicDiv* character do you think is least interesting” or even “which *WicDiv* character do you think is worst written” if I was feeling particularly self-lacerating. There were enough people saying “I voted them worst, but they're fascinating” to make me think this is actually polling too many things at once. That said, this keeps it pure in the teen mag *Smash Hits* way. I digress.)

Who is Your Least Favourite God?



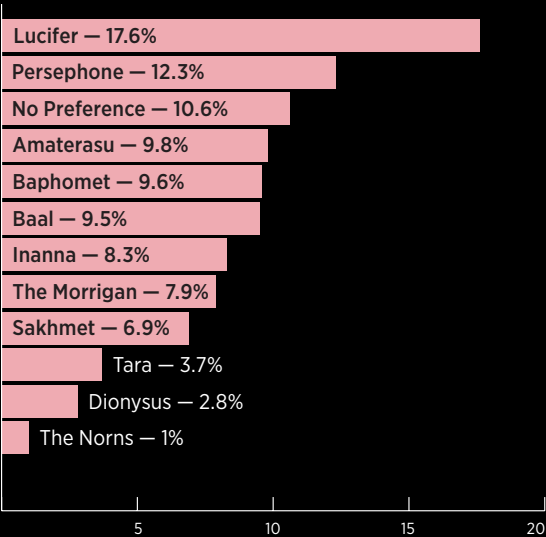
Who is Your Favourite God?



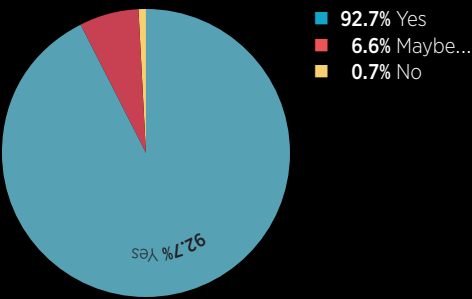
Anyway, talking about *Smash Hits*, in terms of who's making our readers have funny feelings in their stomach, things were pretty close.... with one runaway exception. Lucifer got a scorchingly hot 17.6%. Following here were Amaterasu (9.8%), Baphomet (9.6%), Baal (9.5%), Inanna (8.2%), Morrigan (7.9%), Sakhmet (7%), Tara (3.7%), Dionysus (2.8%) and the Norns (1%). No one wants to have sex with Woden! And in our poll!

(I think the biggest surprise was actually Amaterasu here. I also suspect Baal may have had a slight uptick with the Kris Anka cover. Purrerrrr, etc.)

Which God do you want to “do”?



When I said “do” I meant “have sex with.” Did you understand the allusion?

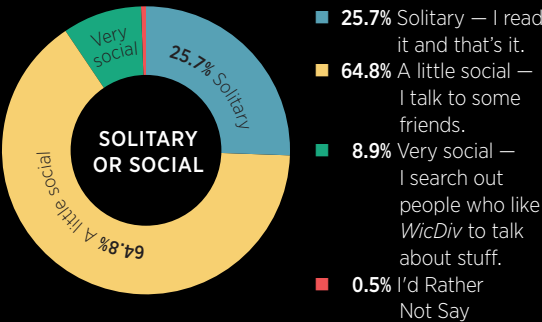


92.7% of the readership knows when I said “do” I was alluding to “have sex with”. 6.6% went with a more coquettish maybe. 0.7% of you were very confused.

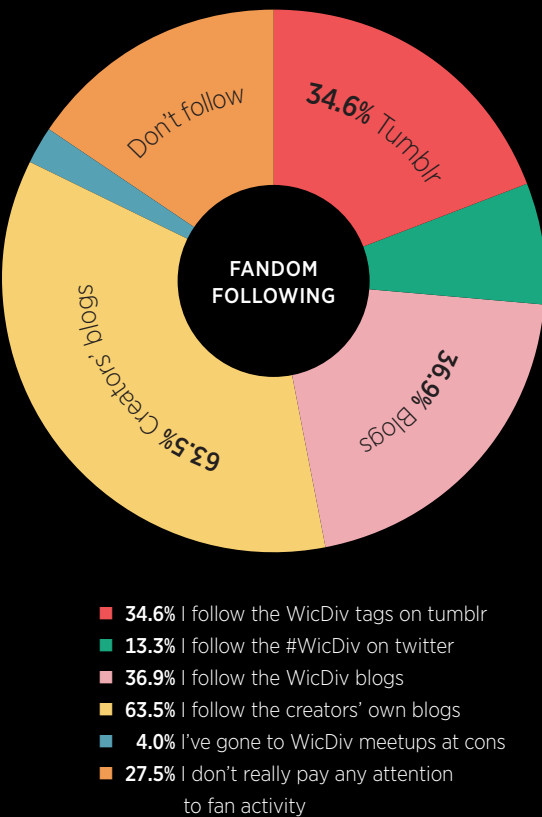
WICDIV FANDOM ACTIVITY

We’re fascinated by this kind of thing. Obviously we see a lot of people chat *WicDiv*, especially in the core readership, but we wondered how widespread that was and what forms that fan activity took...

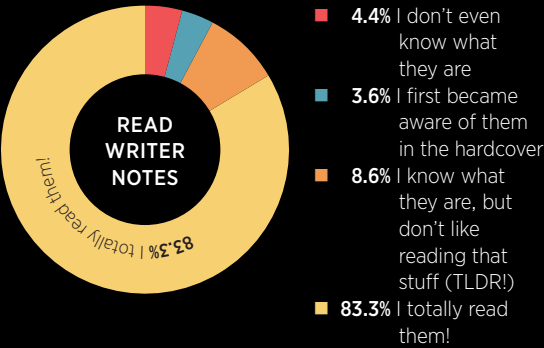
Is *WicDiv* a solitary or social thing for you?



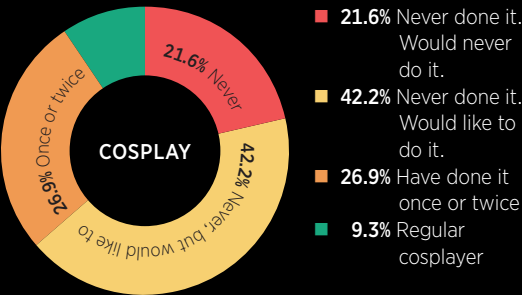
Which parts of *WicDiv* fandom do you pay attention to?



Do you read the writer notes?



Do you cosplay?

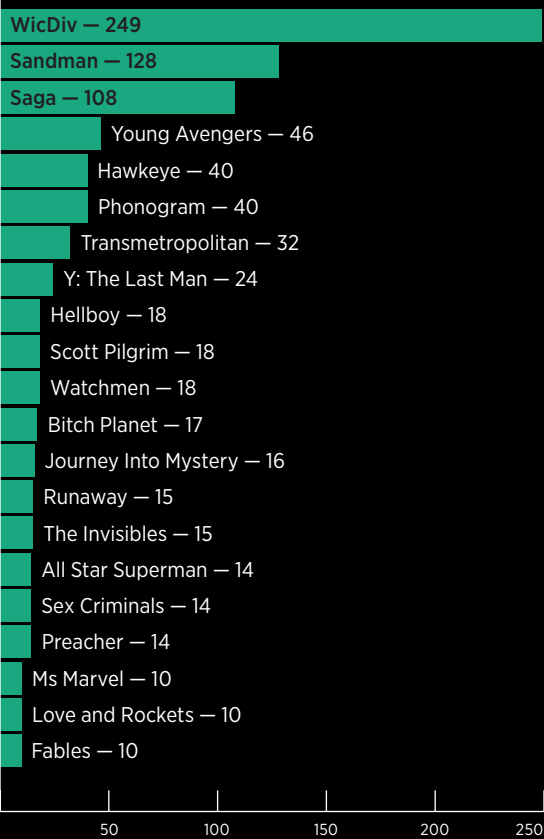


WHAT DO WICDIV READERS LIKE?

How to get into comics was far too complicated to show results for, but it's all really interesting to scan. Things akin to "Friends" seem most popular. However, it was also fun to make everyone's mind go SPANDANG! by asking favourite stuff. This obviously led to a lot of answers — most things got one or two votes at most — and as it was a write-in thing, many people entered multiple choices. Clearly, I stomped over all that doing huge search and replaces which basically turned the whole cell into one of the choices. What was my method? Whimsicality. Well, mostly. My whimsicality can be pretty brutal.

Worth stressing — all these are **total** counts. When you've got 1,500 people in the poll, most of these are showing anything that got more than ten votes in total.

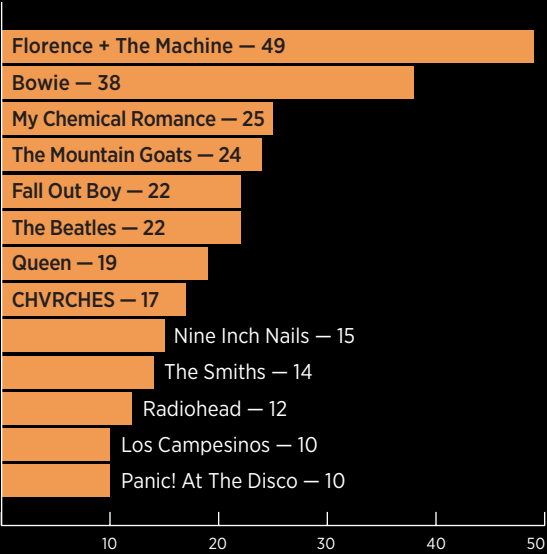
Favourite Comic?



Here is an exception. I turned all multiple votes into anything OTHER than *WicDiv*, as that seems the polite thing to do. We still did worryingly well. Here's the high scorers...

I mashed all votes in a set series together. I also, as trying to separate them out was far too tricky, mashed together all votes for *Young Avengers* together, whether it was V1 or our own V2. Other things which got more than 5 votes included *Loki: Agent of Asgard*, *Nextwave*, *Ultimate Spider-man*, *Angela: Queen of Hel*, *Daytripper*, *From Hell*, *Planetary*, *Hellblazer*, *Rat Queens*, *Morning Glories* and *Strangers in Paradise*.

Favourite Band?



I suspect Florence gained a boost from being one of the first people I searched/ replaced for, but still pretty impressive. I should have said “Musical artist” rather than band, but people seemed to choose whatever they felt like anyway.

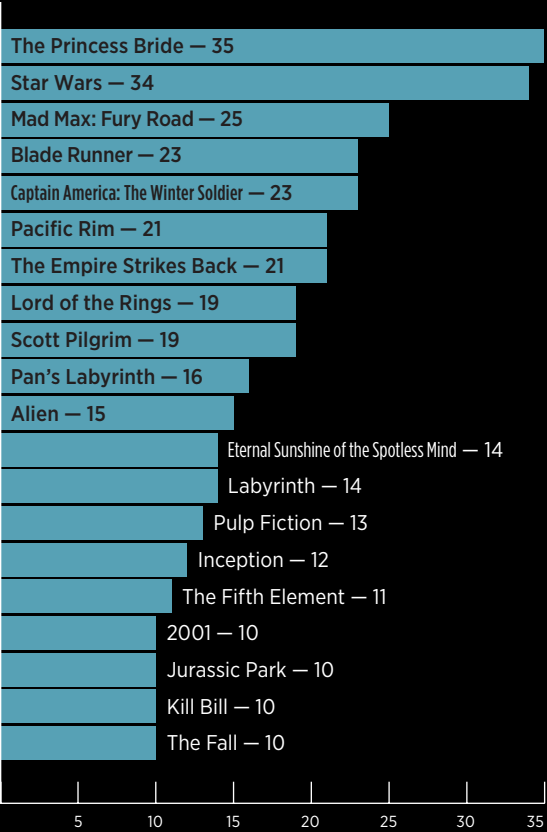
Apart from the above, all the following got 5 or more votes: Arctic Monkeys, Pixies, Prince, Marina and the Diamonds, Garbage, The Clash, Paramore, Daft Punk, Gorillaz, Muse, Nightwish, Sleater-Kinney, Arcade Fire, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, Queens of the Stone Age, Tegan & Sara, The Decemberists, The National, Weezer, Belle and Sebastian, Imagine Dragons, Iron Maiden, Blink 182, Bloc Party, Depeche Mode, Manic Street Preachers, Metric, Rush, Pulp, The Killers, St. Vincent and They Might Be Giants. Of course.

Favourite Song?

Basically nothing got more than 2 votes. One of the 2 votes was 2112, which I hoped was a typo, but I suspect shows there’s Rush fans in the house. All are welcome here.

(This whole section having people include comments about being afraid of being judged by yours truly made me smile. I’m not that mean. All love of pop music is good love of pop music. It especially made it smile when people were apologising for liking stuff I love.)

Favourite Movie?



Here I just gave up and lumped some series together, except *Empire Strikes Back* which I did by itself. Why? Don’t ask me. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Below the 10+ club in the graphs, the following got between 9 and 5 votes: *Ghostbusters*, *Aliens*, *Princess Mononoke*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Fight Club*, *Howl’s Moving Castle*, *Only Lovers Left Alive*, *Spirited Away*, *The Godfather*, *Back to the Future*, *Brick*, *Goodfellas*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Heathers*, *Stardust*, *The Prestige*, *Amelie*, *Brazil*, *Casablanca*, *Donnie Darko*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, *Her*, *Hot Fuzz*, *Mean Girls*, *Memento*, *Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Crow*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Trainspotting*.

Slightly further down the list with 4 was *What We Do in the Shadows*, which makes me want to suggest a *WicDiv* double-bill with that and *Only Lovers Left Alive*. That pretty much captures the Duality of Morri and Baph.

Favourite Book?



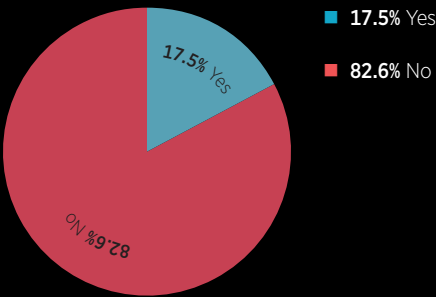
Another one with a mass of options in. I decided to be generous to the big series and lump them all together — the exception being Pratchett's Discworld books, which I kept separate. They just feel like their own things more than any of the other series, which is a thing I love about them, except it doesn't exactly serve them well in something like this. Nothing but love to you, Terry.

Getting between 10 and 5 votes were: *Ender's Game*, *His Dark Materials*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Road*, *Catch-22*, *Cloud Atlas*, *House of Leaves*, *Night Watch (Told you!)*, *The Hobbit*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Stand*, *Cat's Cradle*, *Small Gods (and again!)*, *The Dark Tower* and *The Little Prince*.

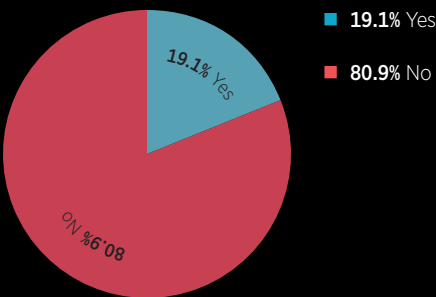
THE BIT WHERE KIERON WENT A BIT WEIRD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE POLL

My mind tends to wander. Forgive me.

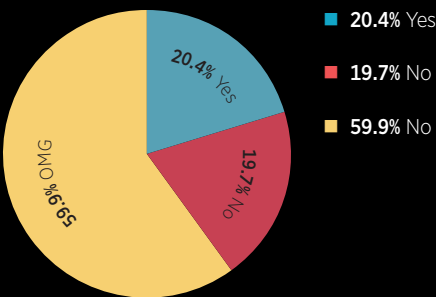
"Brian Vaughan and Fiona Staples are much better at this poll thing than you guys."
Is this something that you are thinking?



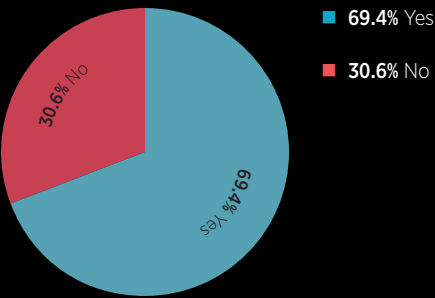
"Brian Vaughan and Fiona Staples are much better at everything than you guys."
Is this something that you are thinking?



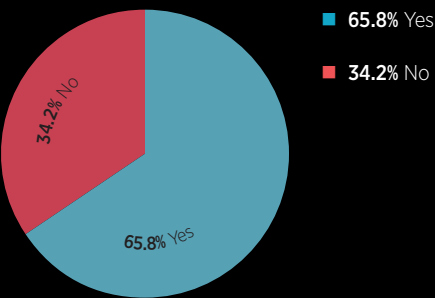
"Brian Vaughan and Fiona Staples should break into your houses, skin you and parade around wearing your fleshy remains as cosplay at the next con."
Is this something you are thinking?



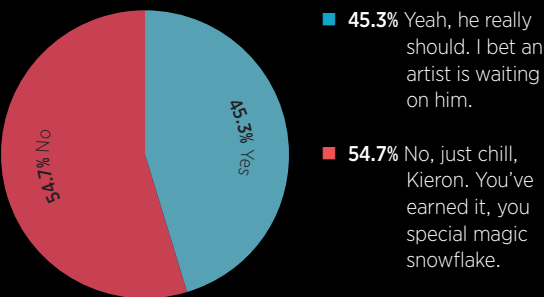
“This detour in the poll just got dark, guys!” Is this something you are thinking?



“Just stop now, Kieron. You’ve got a script to write, and you’re clearly putting it off with these blatant delaying tactics.” Is this something that you are thinking?



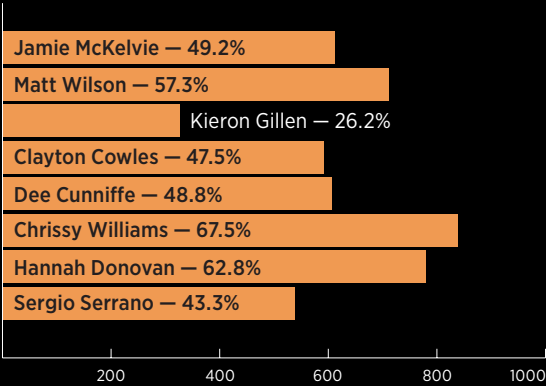
Seriously, Kieron DO SOME WORK!



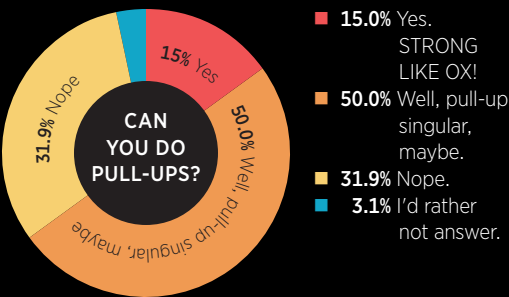
PHYSICALLY PHYSICALLY PHYSICALLY FIT

This is where we go all health goth.

Which team *WicDiv* members can do pull-ups?



In terms of us, 67.5% thought Chrissy could do pull-ups while I’m being personally victimised by the audience, with only 26.2% thinking I can do them. But who can? Clayton and Jamie claim they can beat the singular pull-up score above. Dee’s dad-body has stolen the ability from him. Hannah is laughing at us all. Sergio is being quiet. Heather Antos, Marvel Editor, who somehow got CC-ed into the mail, claims five. Matt and I can do more than ten. Chrissy tells us to get back to work. Anyway, here are reader’s answers:



CONCLUSION

This was a lot of fun. And I suspect that if anyone out there on a major site wanted to use Google Forms for a larger more general survey about comics, it wouldn’t be a bad idea.
Thanks everyone for writing.

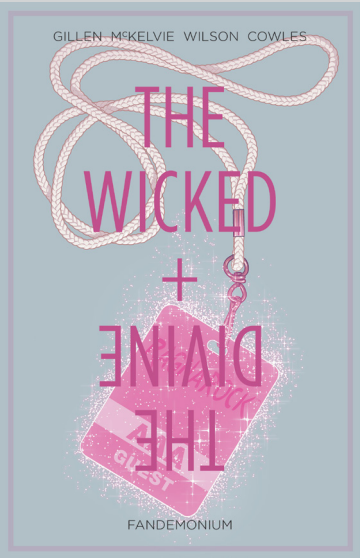
ALSO BY THE CREATORS

THE WICKED + THE DIVINE

VOL. 1: THE FAUST ACT
#1–5 COLLECTED



VOL. 2: FANDEMONIUM
#6–11 COLLECTED



VOL. 3: COMMERCIAL
SUICIDE
#12–17 COLLECTED



VOL. 4: RISING ACTION
#18–22 COLLECTED



VOL. 5: IMPERIAL
PHASE PART I
#23–28 COLLECTED



BOOK ONE:
#1–11 COLLECTED



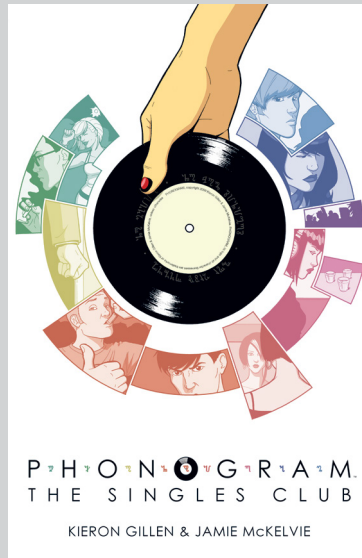
ALSO BY THE CREATORS

PHONOGRAM

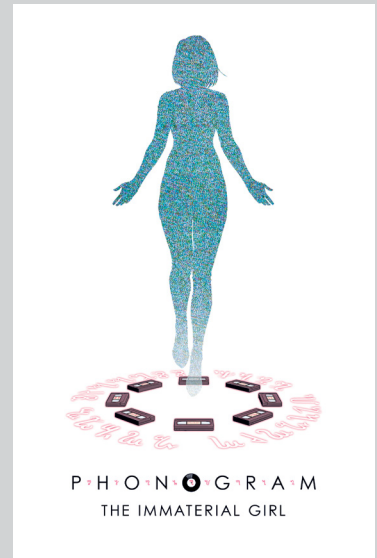
VOL. 1:
RUE BRITANNIA



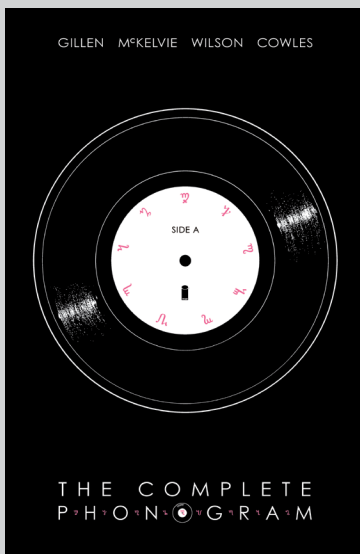
VOL. 2:
THE SINGLES CLUB



VOL. 3:
THE IMMATERIAL GIRL



THE COMPLETE
PHONOGRAM



THE COMPLETE PHONOGRAM COLLECTS

Vol. 1: Rue Britannia

Vol. 2: The Singles Club

Vol. 3: The Immaterial Girl

And the previously
uncollected
B-side stories.

FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION ON
**THE WICKED
+ THE DIVINE:**

www.wicdiv.com

major news, new issues,
merchandise.

#WicDiv

the hashtag on twitter
for *WicDiv* Discussion

WicDiv

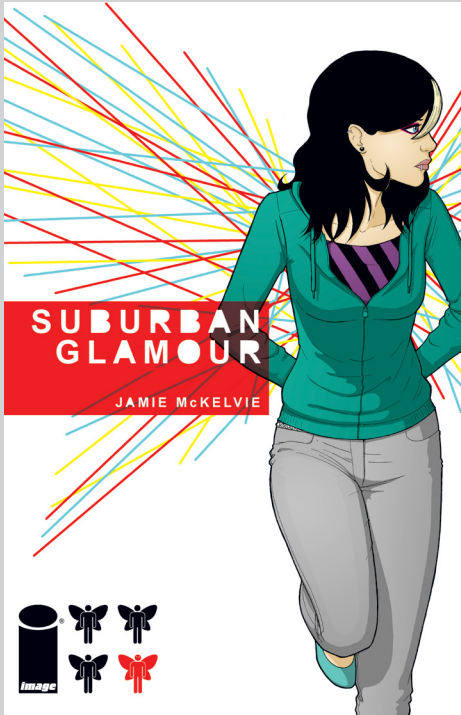
the general tag on tumblr
for the community.

bit.ly/WicDivPlaylist

the ever-updated Spotify
Playlist for the series.

ALSO BY THE CREATORS

SUBURBAN GLAMOUR



THREE



OTHER TITLES

BY KIERON GILLEN,
JAMIE MCKELVIE
AND MATT WILSON

YOUNG AVENGERS:
STYLE > SUBSTANCE

YOUNG AVENGERS:
ALTERNATIVE CULTURE

YOUNG AVENGERS:
MIC-DROP AT THE EDGE
OF TIME AND SPACE

WRITTEN BY
KIERON GILLEN

ÜBER
(Volumes 1-5)

MERCURY HEAT
(Volumes 1-2)

STAR WARS:
DARTH VADER

THOR: ULTIMATE
COLLECTION

JOURNEY INTO
MYSTERY: THE
COMPLETE COLLECTION
(Volume 1)

JOURNEY INTO
MYSTERY: THE
COMPLETE COLLECTION
(Volume 2)

SIEGE: BATTLEWORLD

WOLVERINE: ORIGIN II

And lots more, but that's
enough for now, methinks.

DRAWN BY
JAMIE MCKELVIE

LONG HOT SUMMER
(with Eric Stephenson)

X-MEN SEASON ONE
(with Dennis Hopeless)

And smaller work divided
widely in other places.

COLOURED
BY MATT WILSON

PAPER GIRLS
CRY HAVOC

And millions and trillions
of others, honestly,
he's so busy it's kind of
overwhelming.



Limited Edition
Officially Licensed!

**EXCLUSIVE
THE WICKED + THE DIVINE
NAIL WRAPS**

Two more nail wrap designs join the pantheon! Officially licensed with *The Wicked + The Divine*, these nail wraps are exclusively available at Espionage Cosmetics and pay tribute to Amaterasu & The Norns and Baphomet & Morrigan. Both sides of the design focus on the iconography and distinct colors associated with each character. The story doesn't have to end. Tell their story with these limited edition designs.



"You spend all your life wishing you were special. And then you find out you are." — Amaterasu

FEATURES:

- Gloss finish
- Glow-in-the-dark accents
- Silver foil accents
- Dual nail design



espionagecosmetics.com/WicDiv



Kieron Gillen is a writer who is a big scary animal.

Jamie McKelvie is an artist who isn't scared of any animal.

Matt Wilson is a colourist who has actually coloured a scary number of the comics Kieron and Jamie are posing in front of.

EVERY NINETY YEARS TWELVE GODS
RETURN AS YOUNG PEOPLE. THEY ARE
LOVED. THEY ARE HATED. IN TWO YEARS,
THEY ARE ALL DEAD. IT'S HAPPENING
NOW. IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN.



IMAGECOMICS.COM

WICDIV.COM, #WICDIV

RATED M/MATURE, MODERN FANTASY