

Number Two

CRIMINAL



Ed Brubaker
Sean Phillips



by
**Ed Brubaker and
Sean Phillips**

**Colors by
Jacob
Phillips**

Bad Weekend

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CRIMINAL #2. February 2019. Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication: 2701 NW Vaughn St., Suite 780, Portland, OR 97210.

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July,
1997

I was out doing footwork on a job I was having trouble with...



And when I came home there was a message on my machine.



HI JACOB...
IT'S *MINDY*,
FROM THE
CONVENTION.

*COMIC
FEST*, I
MEAN.

COULD YOU
GIVE ME A CALL
BACK, *PLEASE*?
IT'S KIND OF
URGENT.

??



Apparently, *Hal Crane* was flying in to be given a *Lifetime Achievement Award* and they needed someone to... uh... basically be his *minder* for a few days. Make sure he got to the ceremony and his other appearances.

...I DON'T
KNOW... I'VE
GOT A LOT
GOING ON...

PLEASE... IT'S
JUST FOR THE
WEEKEND...

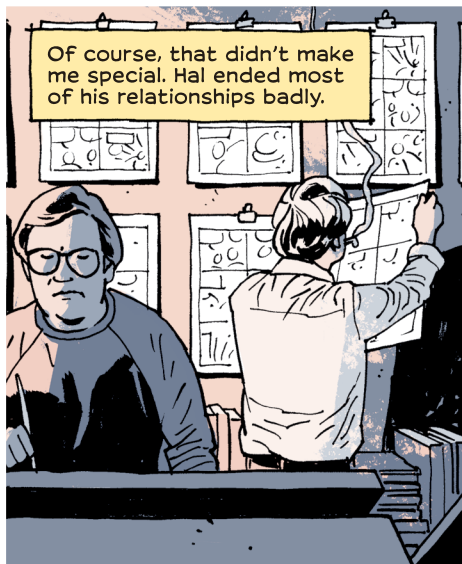
HE ASKED FOR YOU
SPECIFICALLY,
JACOB.



Right after high school, about ten years before this, I was one of Hal's *assistants*.

He went through three or four of them a year back then, and I guess I lasted longer than most...

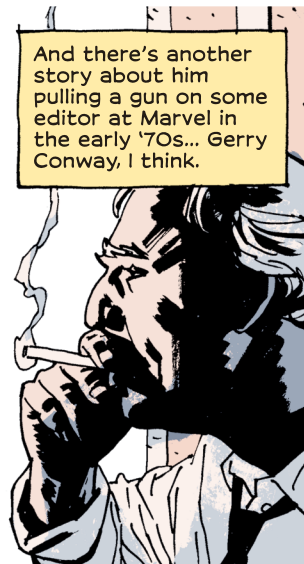
But it ended badly with us.



Of course, that didn't make me special. Hal ended most of his relationships badly.



Supposedly, when he quit working for *National* back in the day, he decked Julie Schwartz over a bad inking job...



And there's another story about him pulling a gun on some editor at Marvel in the early '70s... Gerry Conway, I think.



Hal said all that stuff was bullshit, that all he ever did was yell and throw some things around a few times...

WHY WOULD HE ASK FOR ME?

I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HIM SINCE I QUIT.

I DON'T KNOW, HE JUST DID...



...But you still hear lots of those stories, and no one has any trouble **believing** them.

I sure didn't.

LOOK, HE GETS HERE FRIDAY MORNING... WHAT CAN I DO TO PERSUADE YOU?

A LIFETIME PASS TO THE FEST?



In my experience, Hal Crane was a collection of bad habits and worse moods...



But somewhere under all the smoke and whiskey and sullen glares was one of the most talented artists you ever saw.



The kind of guy who could ink with a toothbrush or a broken stick and the page would still come out perfect.



Which is why everyone put up with everything else about him...

And why I said -

OKAY, I GUESS I'LL DO IT.

I was a sucker for Hal's punishment, because I was probably his biggest fan.

Friday



I realize I'm acting like you know who Hal Crane is, when you probably don't...

Unless you know a lot about comics.



But there are two reasons you might have heard of Hal anyway...



Things that had made him *kind of* famous in the "real" world.



First, because he was the main design and storyboard artist for **DANNY DAGGER AND THE FANTASTICALS**, a cartoon my generation grew up with.

DANNY DAGGER And The FANTASTICALS

Copyright ©1967 Harmony-Gems



Danny Dagger, Princess Yaz, her little brother Tanner and his pet dragon Stuffy were not huge hits when they originally aired...

But the afterschool reruns in the '70s had made the show a pop culture sensation... Syndicated and merchandised around the world.

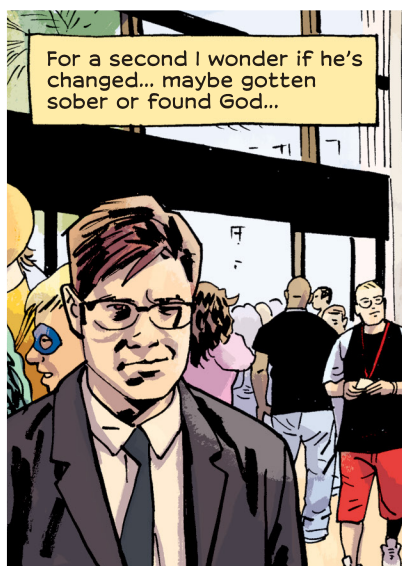
4 OCT '67
"DANNY DAGGER and the FANTASTICALS"
© 1967 - HarmonyGems

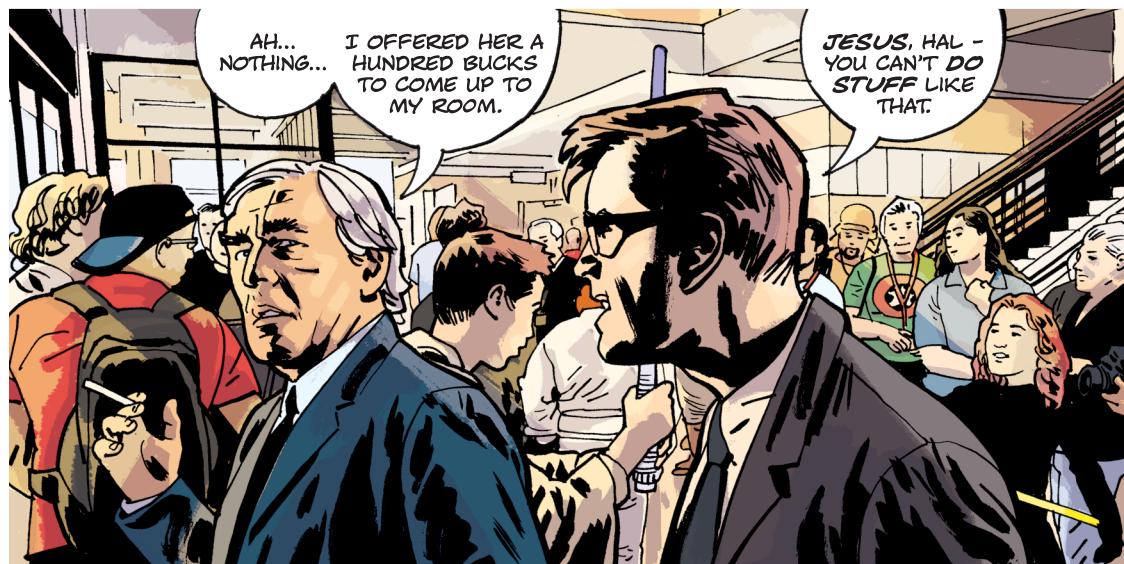


This is not something you want to bring up with Hal Crane if you ever meet him, by the way.

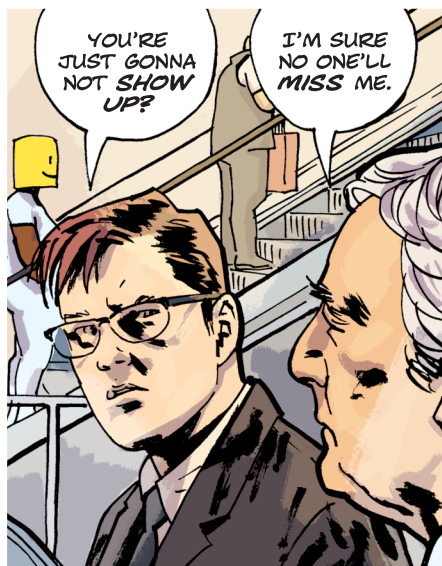
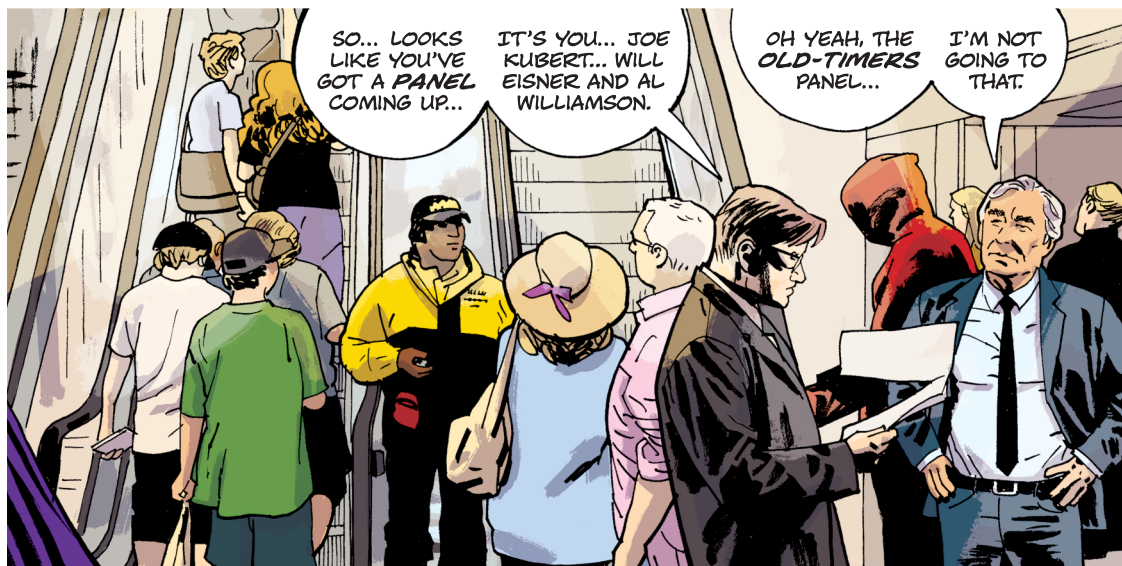
He hated that show, even before he felt ripped off by it.





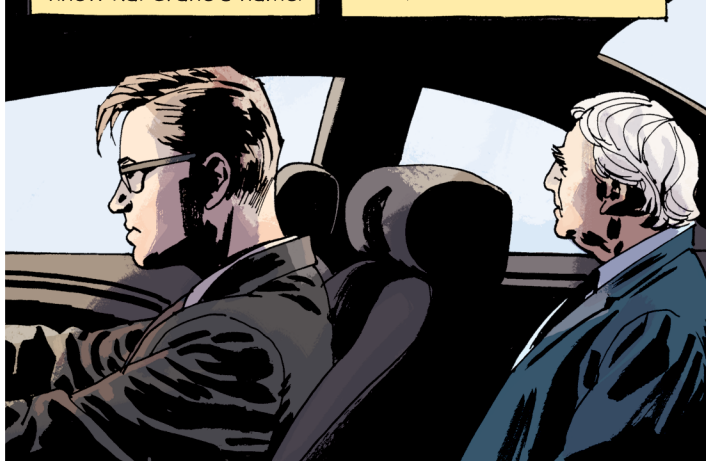






I said there were *two reasons* you might know Hal Crane's name.

And the second one is why he's sitting in the back seat, like I'm his chauffeur.



Hal was the other person in the car with *Archie Lewis* when he crashed in 1955.



It's one of comics' famous deaths, like Max Gaines or Jack Cole or Wally Wood.

The police ruled it an accident, but the rumors that Lewis was suicidal have never gone away.



Hal had been inking backgrounds on *STAR KING* for a few months before the crash.

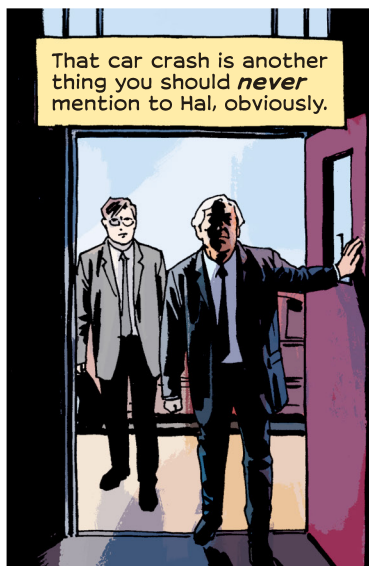
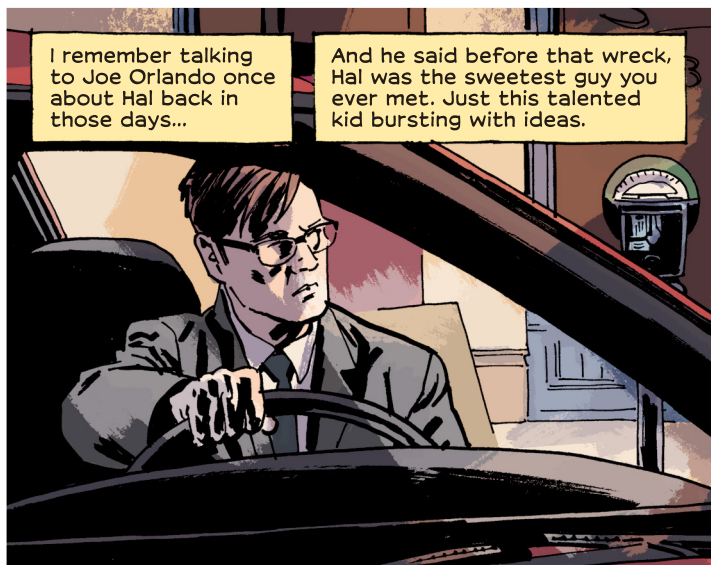


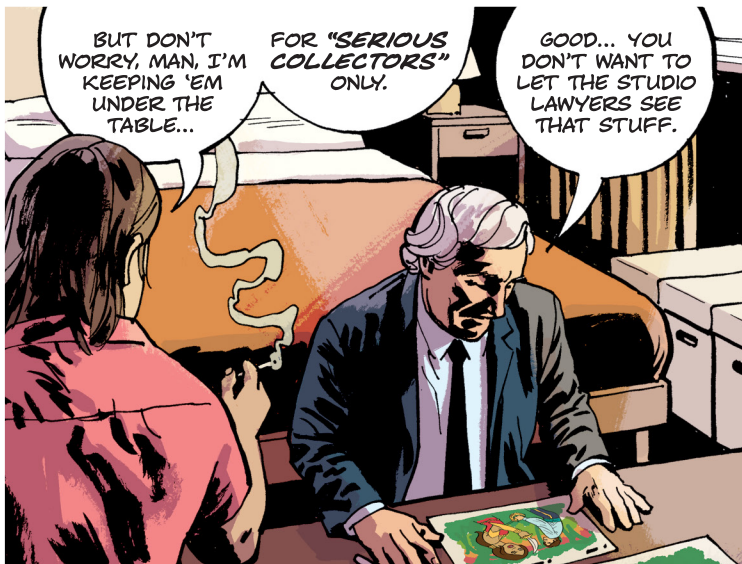
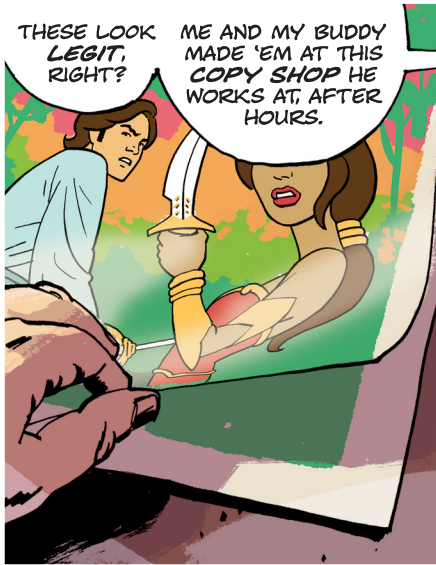
He was just a kid starting to make a name for himself...

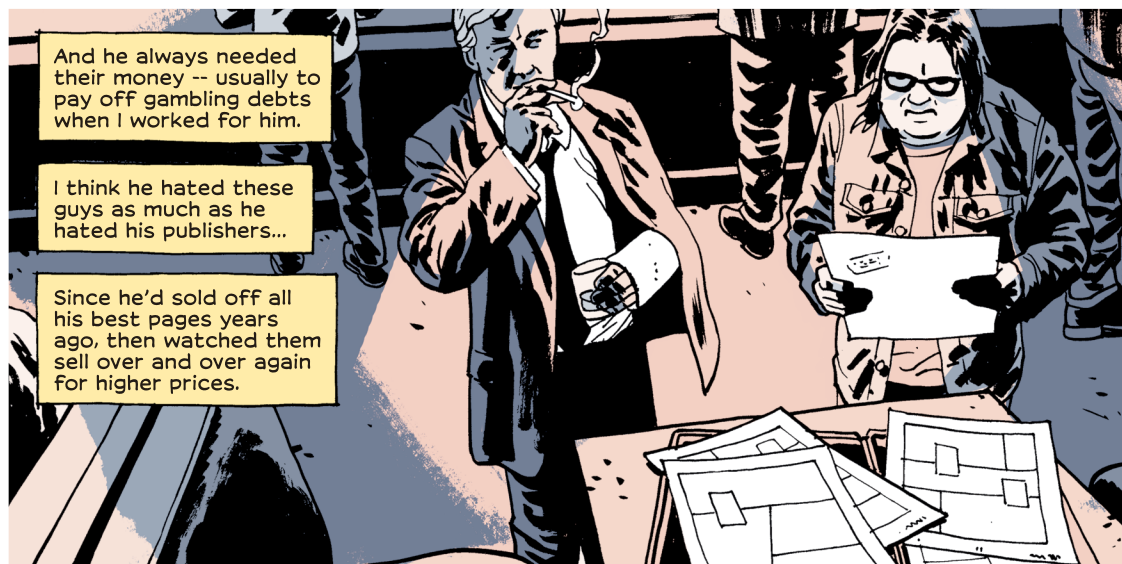


And then Archie Lewis drove into a wall and derailed his whole life.





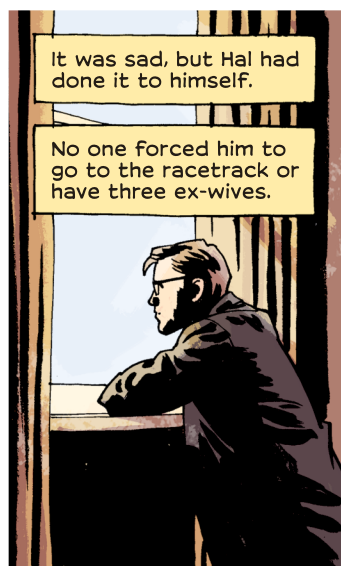




And he always needed their money -- usually to pay off gambling debts when I worked for him.

I think he hated these guys as much as he hated his publishers...

Since he'd sold off all his best pages years ago, then watched them sell over and over again for higher prices.



It was sad, but Hal had done it to himself.

No one forced him to go to the racetrack or have three ex-wives.



HEY DICK... YOU HEAR ABOUT ANY OF MY STUFF GOING ON THE MARKET RECENTLY?

UH... THERE WAS THAT PRINCESS YAZ CHARACTER SHEET LAST MONTH...



NO... THIS WOULD BE A BIGGER DEAL THAN THAT...



I DON'T KNOW, MAN...

WITH THE NEW SHOW COMING UP, PRINCESS YAZ IS A PRETTY BIG DEAL NOW.



WHAT NEW SHOW?





...SO YOU'VE GOT A DINNER WITH SOME OF THE ORGANIZERS AND THE OTHER GUESTS IN A LITTLE WHILE.

YEAH? IS FRANK HARMONY GONNA BE AT THAT?



NO, BUT STAN LEE AND MARVIN RAY GOODMAN WILL BE...

BULLSHIT... STAN LEE ISN'T GOING TO ANY ORGANIZER DINNER.

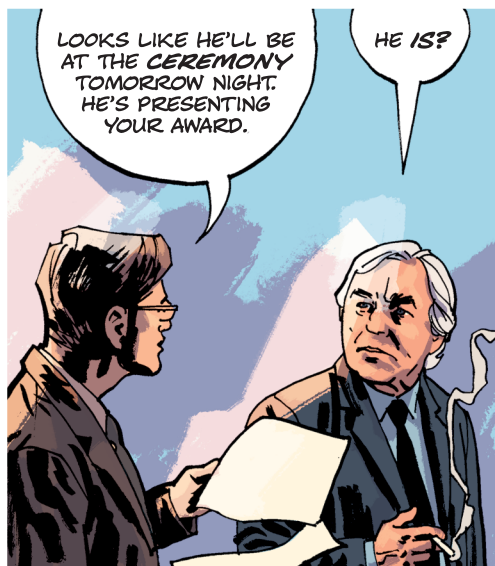


WHERE CAN WE FIND FRANK HARMONY?

I DON'T KNOW... PROBABLY IN A PENTHOUSE SUITE SOMEWHERE.

Frank Harmony was the co-founder of the animation studio Hal worked at...

The guy who got rich off *Danny Dagger*.

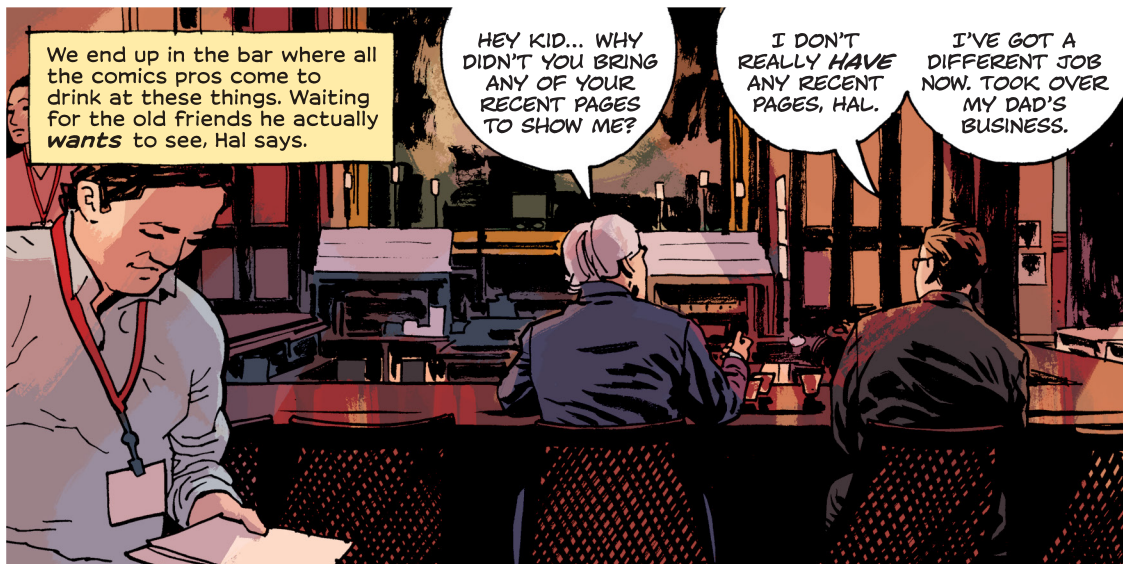


LOOKS LIKE HE'LL BE AT THE CEREMONY TOMORROW NIGHT. HE'S PRESENTING YOUR AWARD.

HE IS?



...JESUS CHRIST... INSULT TO FUCKING INJURY...



We end up in the bar where all the comics pros come to drink at these things. Waiting for the old friends he actually *wants* to see, Hal says.

HEY KID... WHY DIDN'T YOU BRING ANY OF YOUR RECENT PAGES TO SHOW ME?

I DON'T REALLY HAVE ANY RECENT PAGES, HAL.

I'VE GOT A DIFFERENT JOB NOW. TOOK OVER MY DAD'S BUSINESS.



YOU THREW IN THE TOWEL... REALLY?

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SAID I WOULDN'T MAKE IT.

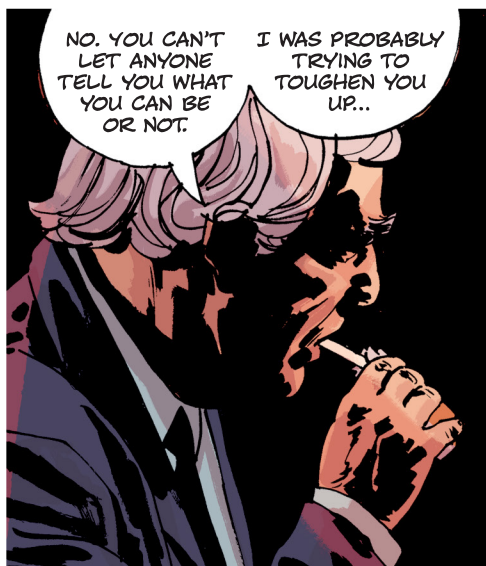


I NEVER SAID THAT...

AND WHY THE HELL WOULD YOU LISTEN TO ME, ANYWAY?



UH... BECAUSE I WAS YOUR ASSISTANT?



NO. YOU CAN'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU WHAT YOU CAN BE OR NOT.

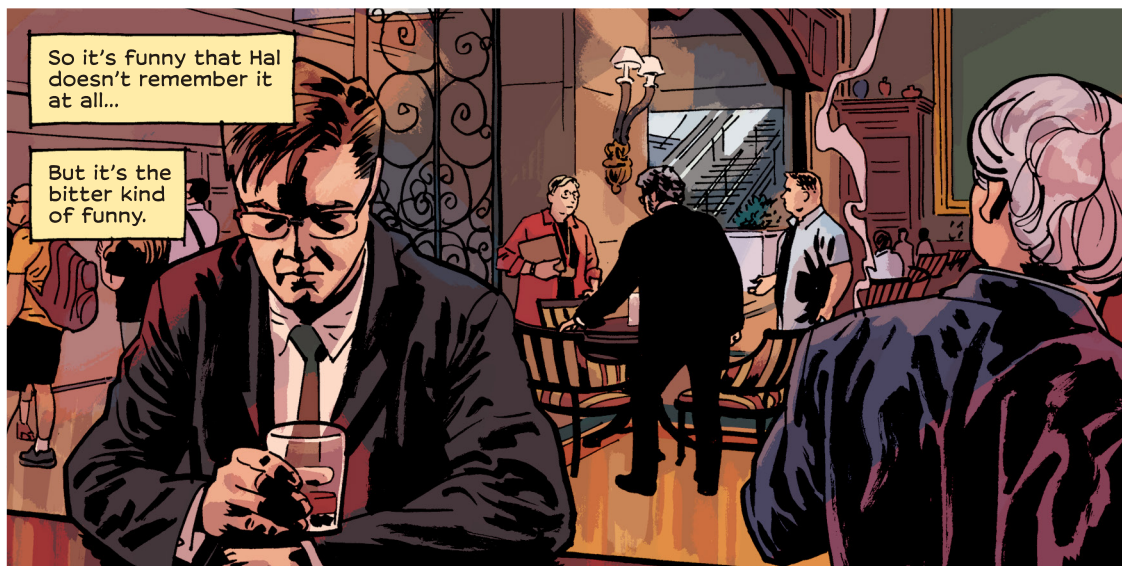
I WAS PROBABLY TRYING TO TOUGHEN YOU UP...

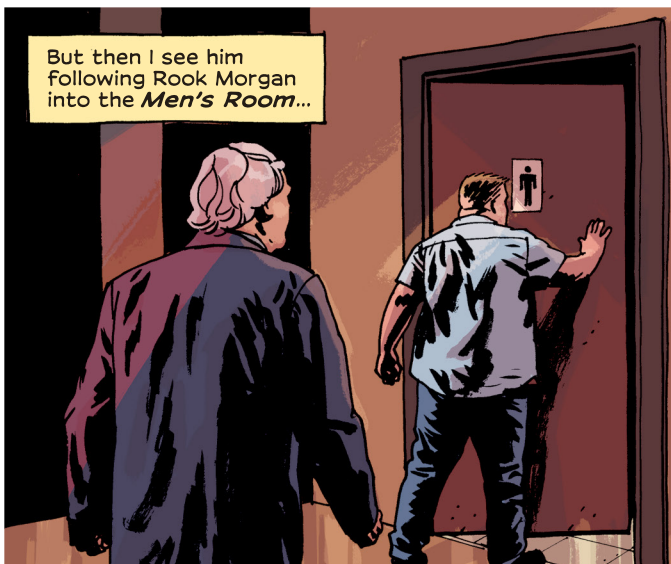


...*IF* I SAID THAT.



...YEAH... OKAY...





But then I see him following Rook Morgan into the *Men's Room*...



And something about that just feels wrong.

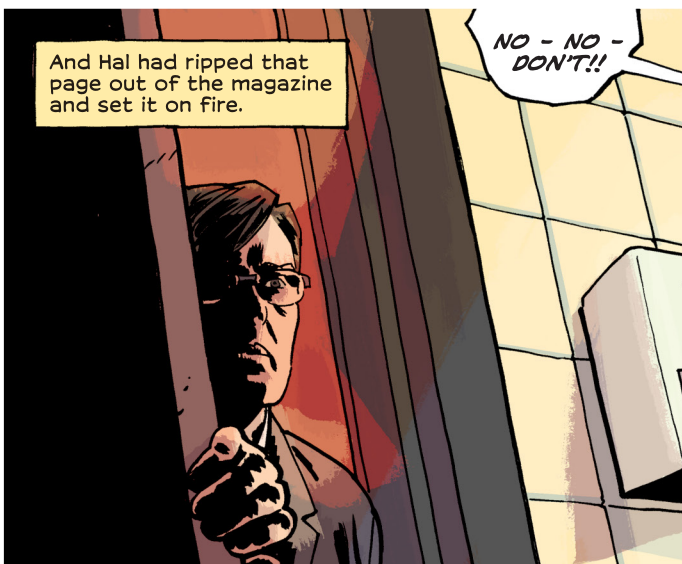


Rook Morgan is another name you won't know.

Rook spent his career doing fill-in issues of books like *MAN-THING*, *CAT-LAD*, and *THE HAUNTED TANK*, and was never anyone's favorite artist.



Years ago he gave an interview where he called Hal his *mentor*...

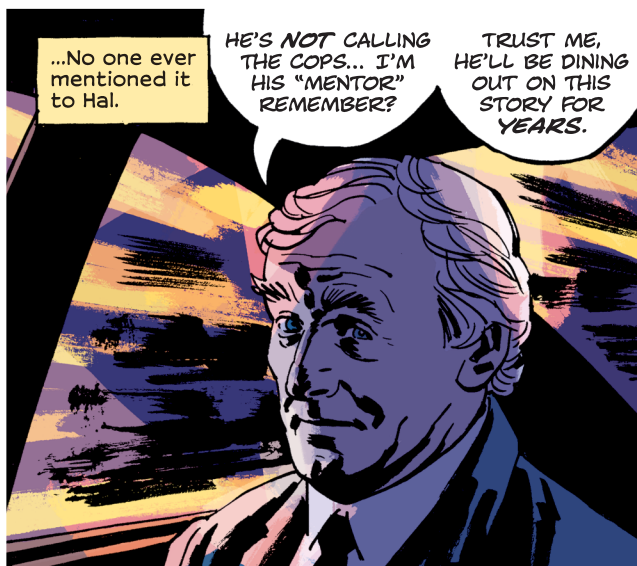
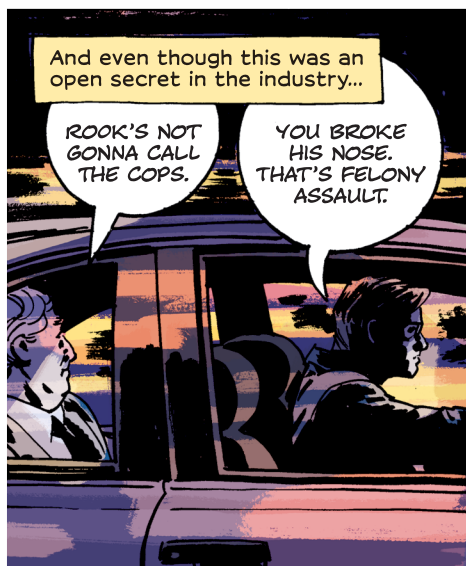


And Hal had ripped that page out of the magazine and set it on fire.

NO - NO - DON'T!!

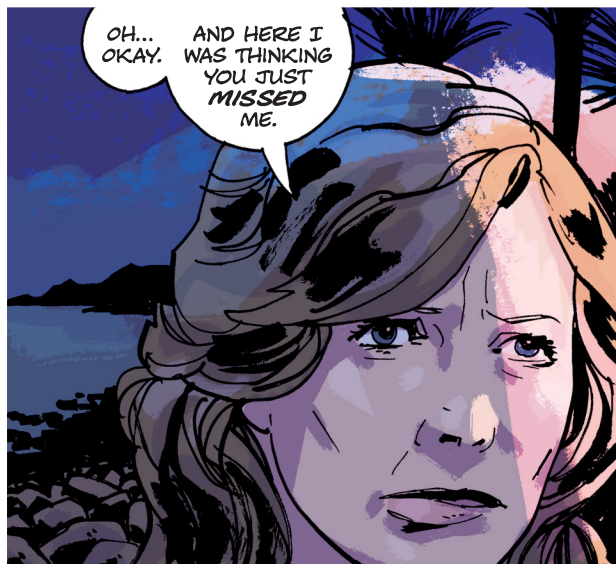


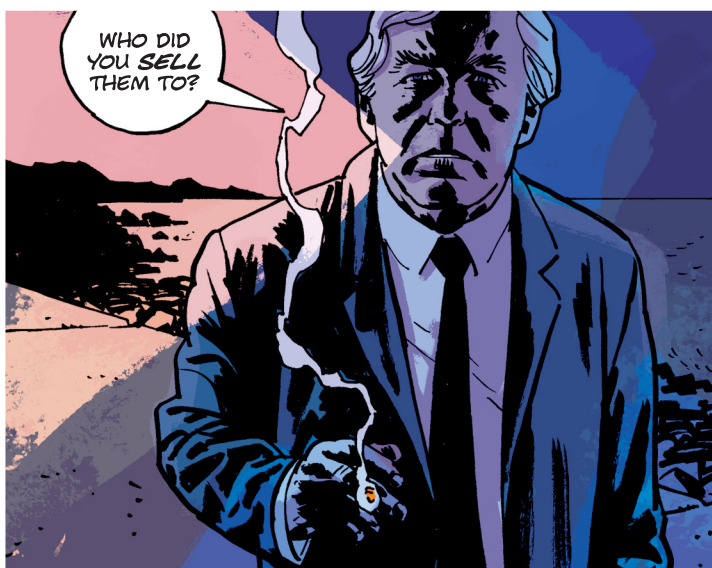


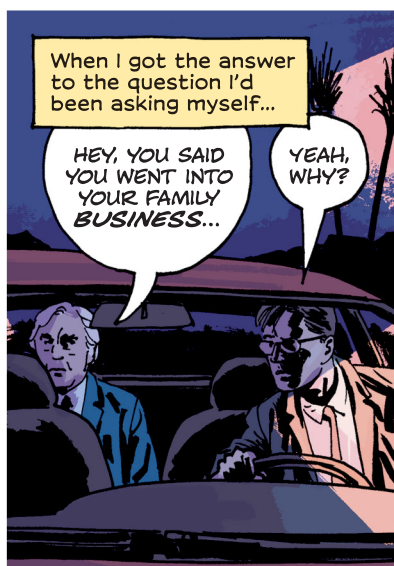












For anyone confused as to why this issue isn't a continuation of last issue, I did warn you this series was going to be unpredictable.

And just to get it out of the way, this issue's story isn't based on anything or anyone in particular. It's got bits and pieces of reality and history sprinkled in around the fictional "comics world" of CRIMINAL that we saw previously in BAD NIGHT and WRONG TIME, WRONG PLACE, but it isn't meant to be an expose of the comics industry. It's really a crime story wrapped around a character study, about a young guy and his one-time idol, which is something I think a lot of us can identify with (regardless of your interest in real or fake comics history). I point this out because there are names of real comics people next to made up ones in this story, and I just want to be clear that as far as I know, no one ever pulled a gun on Gerry Conway when he worked at Marvel Comics in the 1970s.

Anyway, I hope you're enjoying this one so far. The story goes to some different places in the concluding chapter next issue, and we'll see some familiar faces there, as well.

The Secret Ingredient is Crime

Okay, so let's get to some recommendations...

I completely missed ESCAPE AT DANNEMORA when it was airing on Showtime, but I watched the entire mini-series last weekend and it's pretty great. A long and detailed look at the entire story, with amazing performances by the four lead characters. I highly recommend it, but it is seriously fucked up. You find yourself rooting for these guys before you really know how bad they are.

TRUE DETECTIVE season three grabbed me with the first two episodes. I liked the slowness of it, and the way it played with time, most of all. It'll be almost over by the time you read this, I guess, but it seems like a return to form.

I mentioned this in my newsletter a while back, but THE BIG BOOK OF THE CONTINENTAL OP is a pretty amazing thing I never thought would exist.

It collects all of Hammett's Continental Op stories from Black Mask and the serialized versions of both his first novels, the way they were published originally. Like RED HARVEST is still called POISONVILLE and is a more complicated (and violent) story. This is a Hammett fan's dream. Check it out.

And CORPORATE on Comedy Central is my favorite new sitcom. I was late catching up to it, but I haven't laughed this hard at a US sitcom in a while. Lance Reddick has a scene at the end of season two's first episode that had me in tears, honestly. Go watch it.

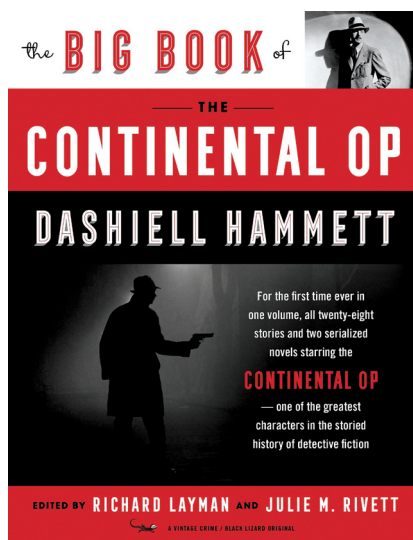
We got a lot of nice feedback from readers on issue 1, and I am again shocked at how many of you have never read any of the previous CRIMINAL books, but glad to hear you're snapping them up. We've actually had to go back to press on some of them. Anyway, here's some letters:

Through the years I've learned you are a big fan of Ross Macdonald. It was because of your mentions of him, I started reading him too and discovered that a movie I once saw with Paul Newman and liked very much - The Drowning Pool- was actually based on a Ross Macdonald novel.

With the mentions of Santa Teresa in the CRIMINAL universe, I started wondering if you've ever considered doing a GN adaption of a Lew Archer story? I always loved the PARKER adaptations by Darwyn Cooke (I reread them pretty much every year) and the Lawrence Block one was also pretty good.

Anyway, it's great to have CRIMINAL back.

Kevin



Good question, Kevin. Santa Teresa is indeed a nod to the Lew Archer books, just like Bay City and Center City are nods to old fake city names in crime novels and movies. A bunch of crime novels have mentioned Santa Teresa over the years, the same way horror writers mention Arkham, basically.

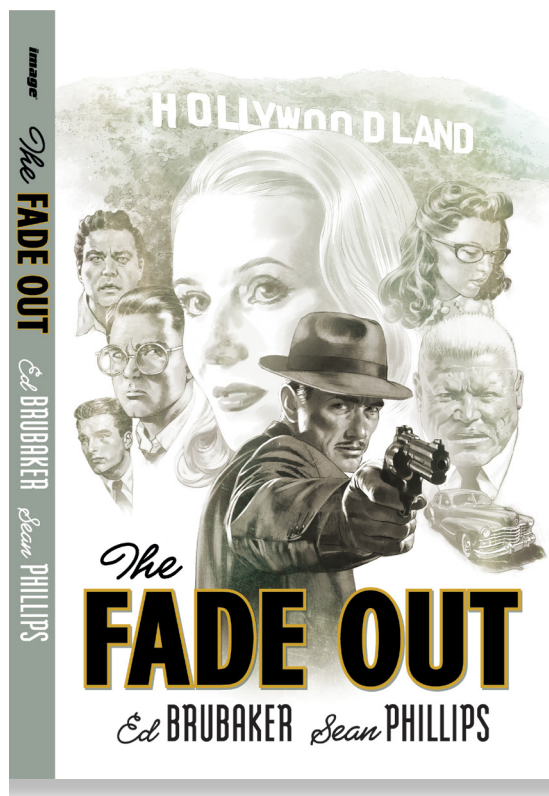
As for adapting one of the Archer books – or really any book – into a comic, that's not really my thing. I mean, all the fun parts would be done already, and I'd just be making technical decisions, since I'm the writer. With the PARKER books, Darwyn Cooke got to basically collaborate with his favorite crime novelist, by taking the books and making a lot of decisions about what to leave in or out, how to cut text and show it instead, stuff like that, because he was doing all the art and storytelling. Much as I love Macdonald's work, I'm better off and happier just writing my own crime stories.

Just read the first issue of CRIMINAL; I love the comics you and Sean make, and CRIMINAL is one of my favorite series. I like how you use CRIMINAL to reference other media and genres, like Bad Night using the Dick Tracy pastiche strip "Frank Kafka, P.I." or The Last of the Innocent exploring Archie Comics via a darker lens (well before the publisher raised its profile by doing so) or incorporating 1970s style black-and-white comics magazines in your stories. I was curious whether you might want to explore a darker take on the teen detective genre like Nancy Drew or the Hardy boys in CRIMINAL – does that sub-genre of crime fiction interest you?

Reed

Thanks for asking, Reed. As you can see in our current story, I'm still building on some of those ideas, or expanding them in different directions, at least. So much of my own life – and probably most of us who buy and read comics – has been about comics and magazines and movies and comic strips, so including a fictionalized version of pop culture into the CRIMINAL world felt like a strange but right move to make. I have always loved fake works of fiction in other books or movies, even when it's obvious what they're inspired by or standing-in for.

I have thought about teen detectives, for sure, and there's even an analog of Encyclopedia Brown in THE LAST OF THE INNOCENT – Britannica Black is his name. I have a plan to do something with a private eye in CRIMINAL, actually, but not a teen one. Still, I've always had a fondness for that subgenre, and do have some ideas about it, but where they'll go, I can't yet say.



Since I devoted the last issue's letters page to talking about the history of CRIMINAL, I didn't have a chance to mention that we put out a new edition of THE FADE OUT a few months back.

This is a trade paperback collection of the entire novel, with a new design from Sean. The three "act" trades are now out of print, and this and the Deluxe hardback are the only way to get THE FADE OUT, which is something that makes me really happy. And Sean really did a great job on the new design and cover.

Signed prints of the cover and other goodies are available from seanphillips.bigcartel.com.

In our back pages this month, our friend Kim Morgan brings us a great piece about ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES and Sean draws the hell out of the illustrations.

Email us with questions and comments at: criminalcomic@gmail.com

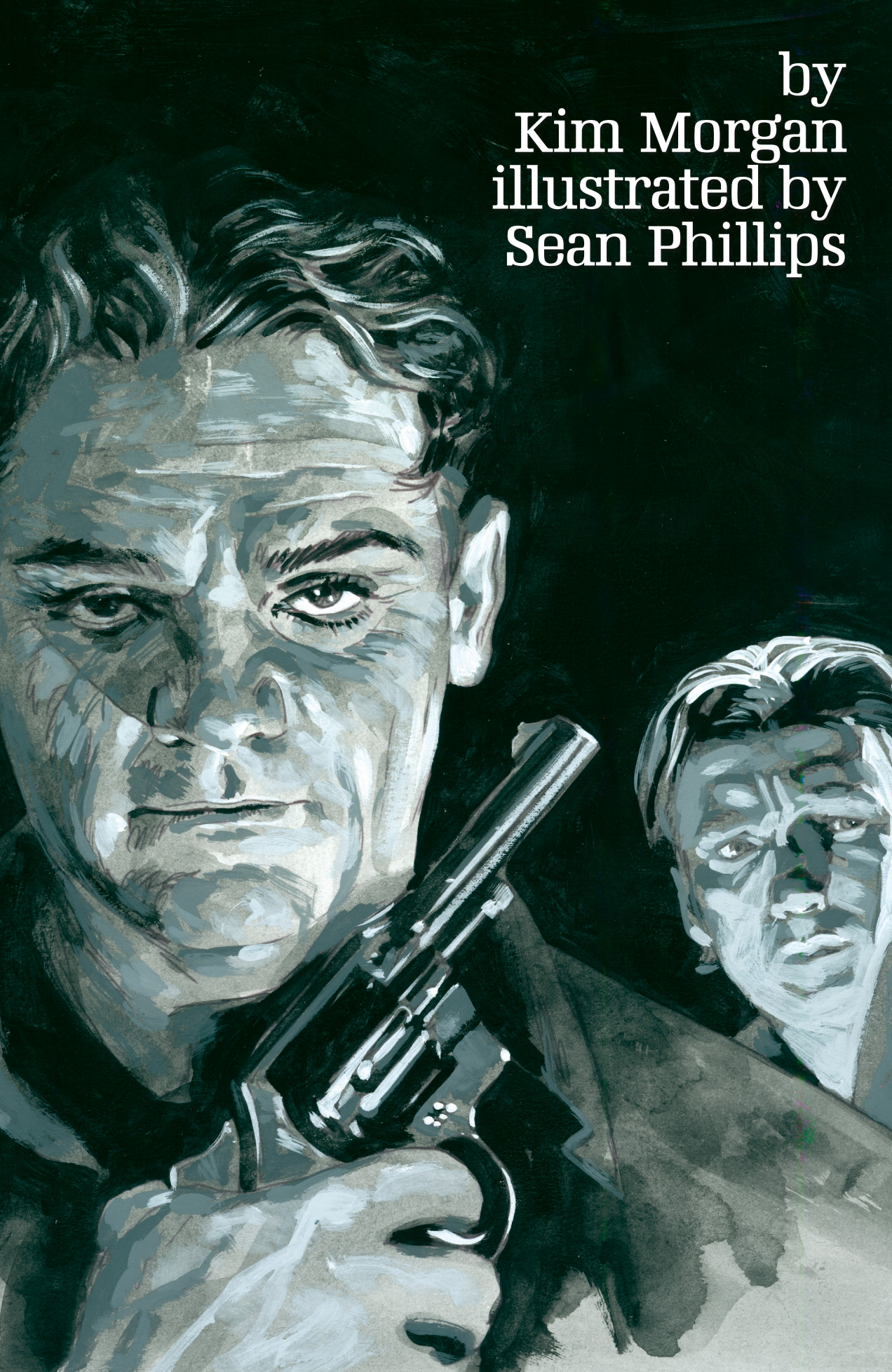
We'll be back next month to wrap this story up, and you can find the cover to said issue on the next page...



Angels With Dirty Faces



by
Kim Morgan
illustrated by
Sean Phillips



"The character I played in the picture, Rocky Sullivan, was in part modeled on a fella I used to see when I was a kid. He was a hophead and a pimp, with four girls in his string. He worked out of a Hungarian rathskeller on First Avenue between Seventy-seventh and Seventy-eighth streets—a tall dude with an expensive straw hat and an electric-blue suit. All day long he would stand on that corner, hitch up his trousers, twist his neck and move his necktie, lift his shoulders, snap his fingers, then bring his hands together in a soft smack. His invariable greeting was "Whadda ya hear? Whadda ya say?"

- James Cagney from "Cagney By Cagney"

"You'll slap me? You slap me in a dream, you better wake up and apologize."

- Rocky Sullivan

How can you not love Rocky Sullivan?

And not just love him if you're Spit/Spike/Bim/Slip/Muggs or whomever else Leo Gorcey embodied as his days as a Dead End Kid/East Side Kid/Bowery Boy... but as an audience member watching *Angels with Dirty Faces* delighting in the pugnacious charm of James Cagney.

And we love him just as much, even more, as he's fried at the end. He turns and pretends (though we'll never know for sure) to be yellow. He howls for mercy as the jailers drag him to the electric chair in that gorgeous, horrifying, shadowed death chamber sequence. *"No! I don't want to die! Oh, please! I don't want to die! Oh, please! Don't make me burn in hell. Oh, please let go of me! Please don't kill me! Oh, don't kill me, please!"* Rocky is either really scared or a really good actor or both – we feel like crying whichever way it goes. Some of us do cry when Rocky gets it. The guard sounds almost Shakespearean once they finish him off: *"The yellow rat was gonna spit in my eye" ("Why dost thou spit at me?").*

Pat O' Brien's priest Jerry Connolly, while being so visibly moved at Rocky's cowardice or courage, practically sees the skies opening and hears angels singing, readying for Rocky's hoofing it into heaven. Rocky can't be burning in hell. No way. There's no way God is going to allow Satan this one, and not after Rocky granted Jerry that kind of courage, a courage "born in heaven." He made himself straight with God. Unless God is a double crosser, lost a bet with Satan. But we hope not.

We believe in Rocky.

A tear drops from gentle Jerry's eye and we, somehow, hold nothing against him for asking Rocky to ham it up before death – a pretty unreasonable request if you ask me – and Rocky says so too: *"You ask a nice little favor, Jerry. Asking me to crawl on my belly the last thing I do."* Indeed.

And indeed, when we think about the Hollywood production code led by Catholic censor Joseph Breen meddling with movie morality, passing on his suggestions/demands especially here, as this is, a movie in 1938, following the friendship between a priest and a gangster, was of keen interest to him. Breen was concerned earlier gangsters were shown in too glamorous and sympathetic light – he worried those rebels, like a pre-code Tom Powers (Cagney, in *The Public Enemy*) or Tony Camonte (Paul Muni, in *Scarface*) were leading the public astray. They were just too damn sexy and exciting for the depression-era audiences and he feared they sided with their rejection of what would be deemed a square society. A society of suckers because, look how bad things are anyway? Why go straight?

But Breen's not really getting his wish granted with Michael Curtiz's incredibly entertaining, moving, at times masterful *Angels with Dirty Faces* (gorgeously shot by cinematographer Sol Polito), even if he thought he might be. Sure, we have a priest "winning" in the end – if you call that winning. And, yes, we've got a melodrama about good and evil and those that society are most worried about – the impressionable children who hero worship gangsters, the kids who quite understandably wonder why in hell they should work as hard, and for peanuts, as their parents do... if their parents are even working at all. Those kids this time are, as mentioned before, the Dead End Kids – Billy Halop as Soapy, Bobby Jordan as Swing, Leo Gorcey as Bim, Gabriel Dell as Pasty, Huntz Hall as Crab, Bernard Puntzley as Hunky – I think I got them all. But nothing can erase the unescapable magnetism of Cagney's Rocky Sullivan, no matter what the headline hollers after his death: *"Rocky Dies Yellow: Killer Coward at End!"*

Those kids, led by Soapy, are introduced to Rocky's swagger the moment they steal his wallet. Rocky's out of prison and back to his criminal ways and, not knowing that this is THE Rocky Sullivan, the little toughies rob him. He figures it out quickly, and heads down to their hide-out, a place that used to be his old hide-out with his pal, Jerry, who was once a hooligan like him, and is now a priest. We've learned that

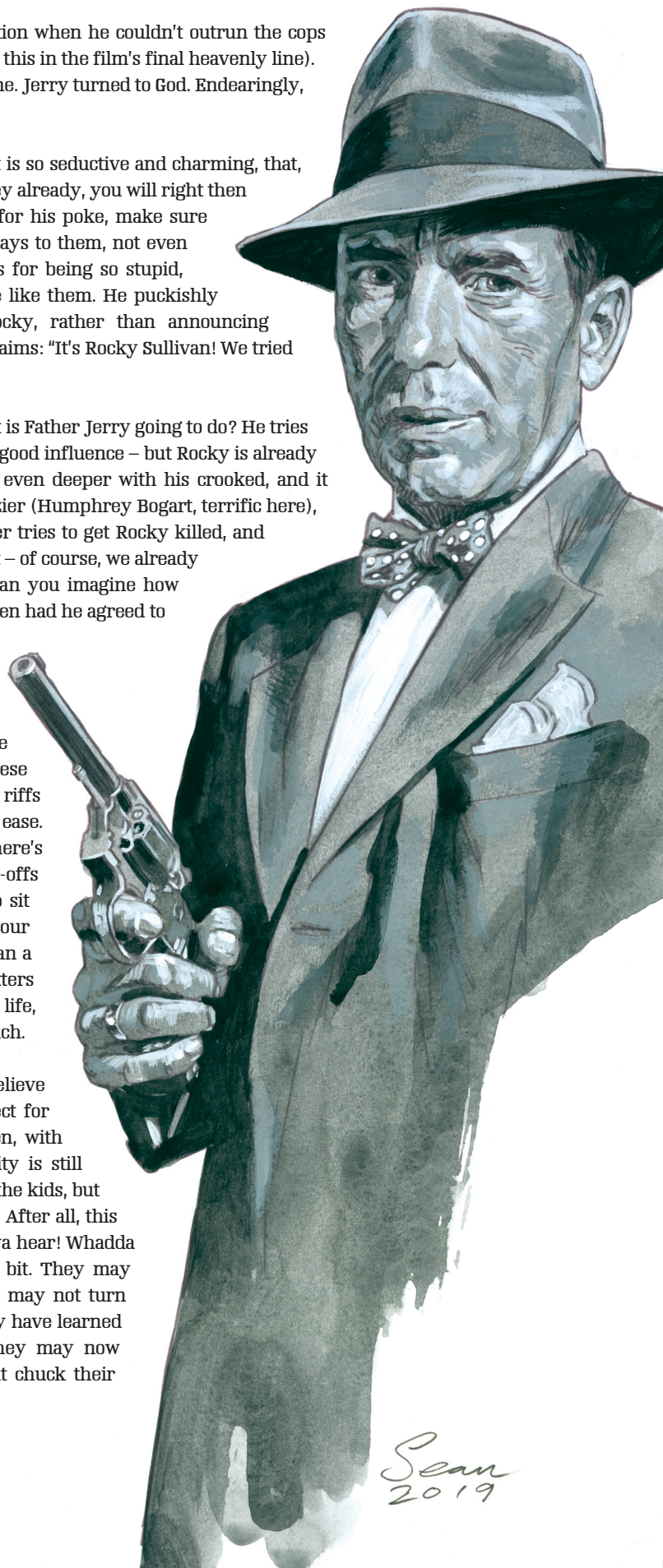
Rocky was chucked in juvenile detention when he couldn't outrun the cops like Jerry could (you'll be reminded of this in the film's final heavenly line). And, so, Rocky turned deeper into crime. Jerry turned to God. Endearingly, they remained friends.

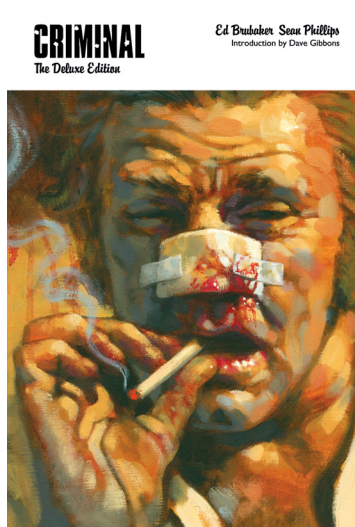
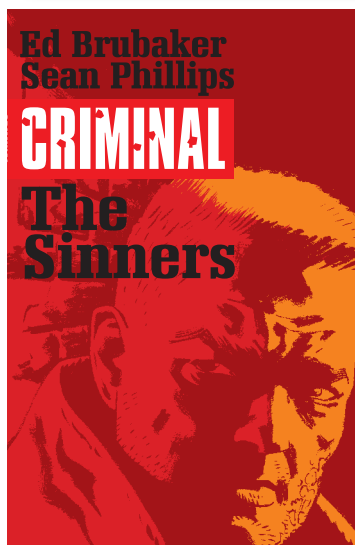
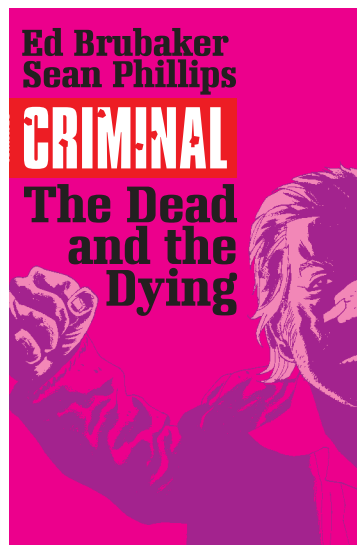
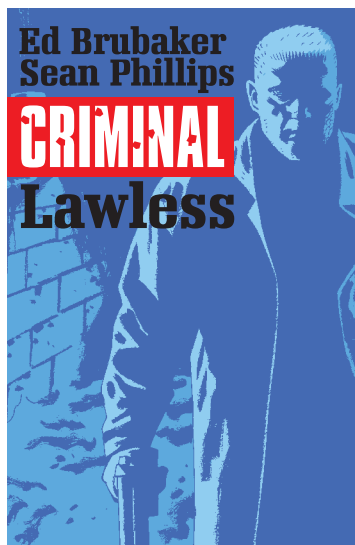
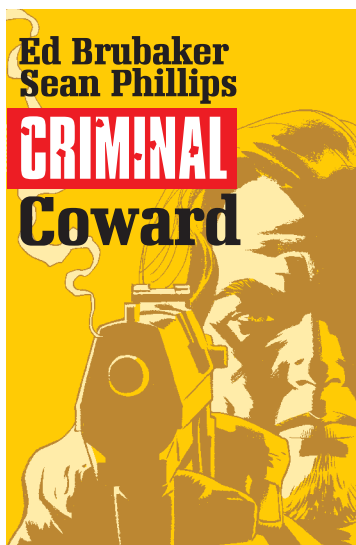
The scene where the kids figure it out is so seductive and charming, that, if you haven't fallen in love with Cagney already, you will right then and there. "Next time you roll a guy for his poke, make sure he don't know your hideout," Rocky says to them, not even angry, just kicking them in the pants for being so stupid, laughing along because he used to be like them. He puckishly winks as confirmation of being Rocky, rather than announcing himself, he doesn't need to. Swing exclaims: "It's Rocky Sullivan! We tried to hook *you*!? What a boner!"

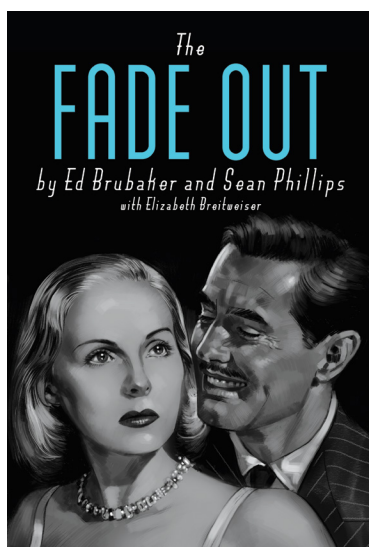
Well, now the kids idolize him. So what is Father Jerry going to do? He tries to get Rocky involved as some kind of good influence – but Rocky is already back to his criminal ways, getting in even deeper with his crooked, and it turns out murderous, lawyer, Jim Frazier (Humphrey Bogart, terrific here), who is the picture's real villain. Frazier tries to get Rocky killed, and even puts a hit on Jerry, a damn priest – of course, we already know that Rocky can't go that far. (Can you imagine how less sympathetic Rocky would have been had he agreed to that plan?)

Rocky's also got a likable love interest in beautiful, spirited Ann Sheridan who runs the boarding house Rocky initially rents once out of stir. These are good people around him, and he riffs and wrestles with the kids with such ease. There's famous lines here, and then there's just wonderful, rapid-fire little toss-offs too, like when Rocky asks the kids to sit down to lunch. He instructs, "Chuck your chest up to the wood." It seems to mean a few things by the very way Cagney utters it – sit down, listen to me, deal with life, grow the fuck up. Oh, and eat your lunch.

So, when it's all over, well, I just don't believe that these kids have *really* lost respect for Rocky, even if they appear to. O'Brien, with his lovely eyes and genuine humanity is still likable, we don't want him to fail with the kids, but we also don't think his plan will work. After all, this is Cagney as Rocky. This is "Whadda ya hear! Whadda ya say!" They'll get over the coward bit. They may even begin to disbelieve it. And they may not turn to crime, and that's good, but they may have learned some more know-how about life. They may now really – not just eat their lunch – but chuck their chests up to the wood.

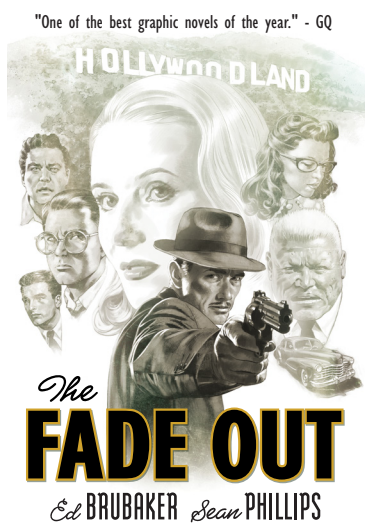






"CRIMINAL is equal parts John Woo's THE KILLER, Stanley Kubrick's THE KILLING, and Francis Ford Coppola's THE GODFATHER."

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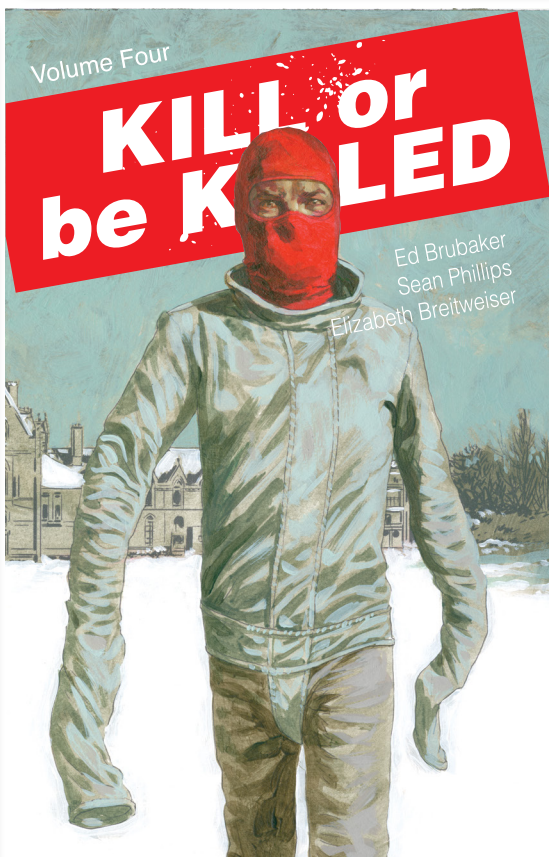
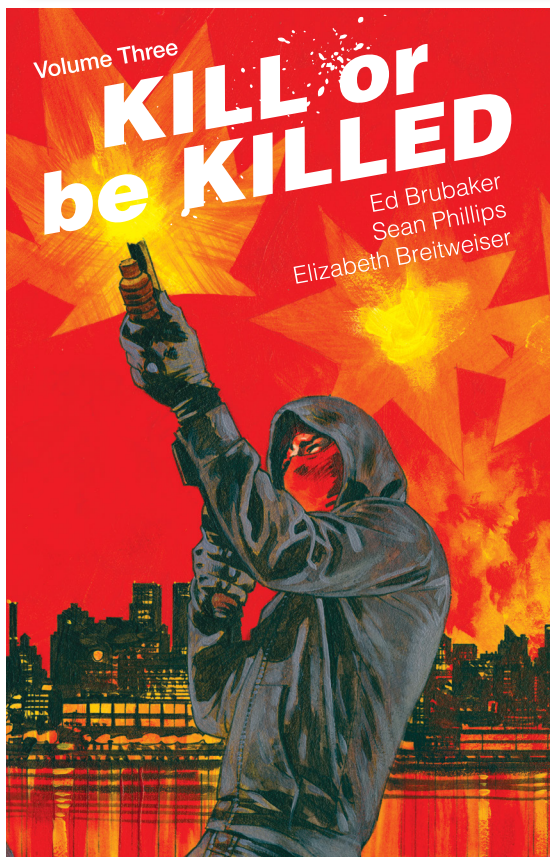
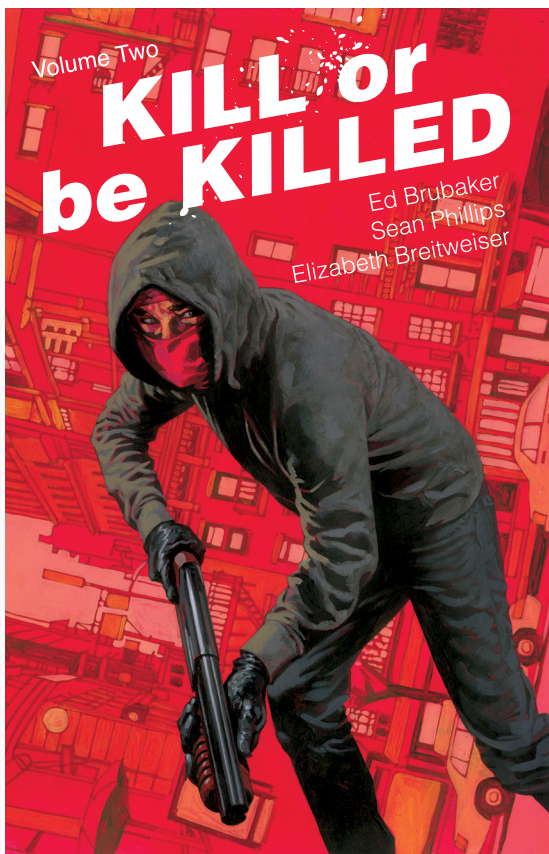
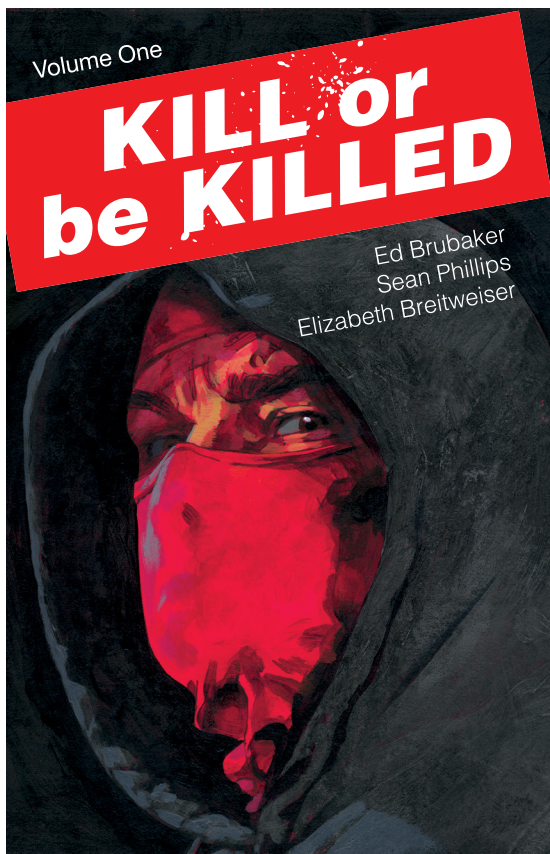


"One of comics dream teams delivers their best story yet in THE FADE OUT, an old Hollywood murder mystery draped against HUAC and the Red Scare."

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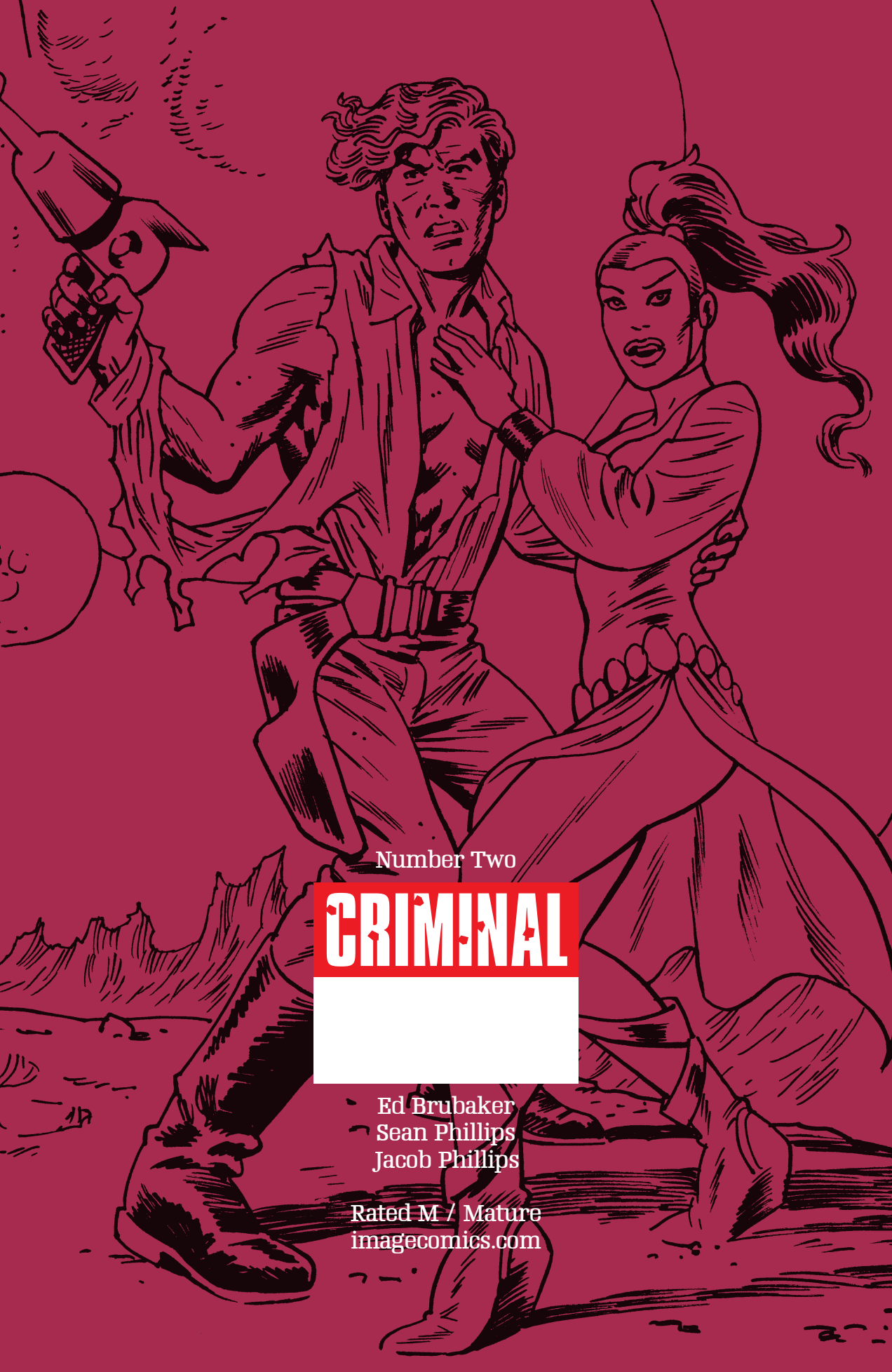
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"Immortality may be a double-edged sword, but it's one the intoxicating Jo wields with a boundless grace in this addictive page-turner."
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Number Two

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