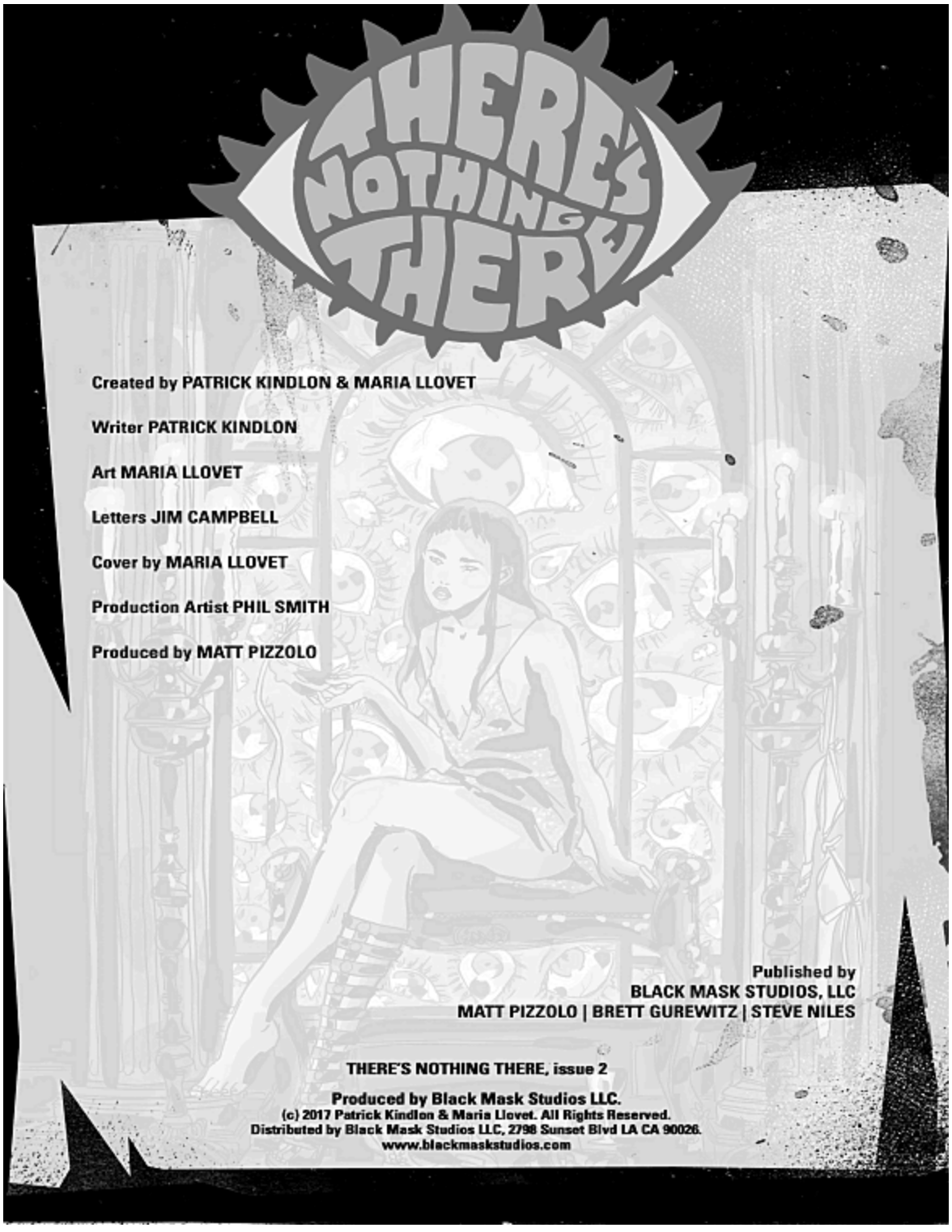

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#2
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Created by PATRICK KINDLON & MARIA LLOVET

Writer PATRICK KINDLON

Art MARIA LLOVET

Letters JIM CAMPBELL

Cover by MARIA LLOVET

Production Artist PHIL SMITH

Produced by MATT PIZZOLO

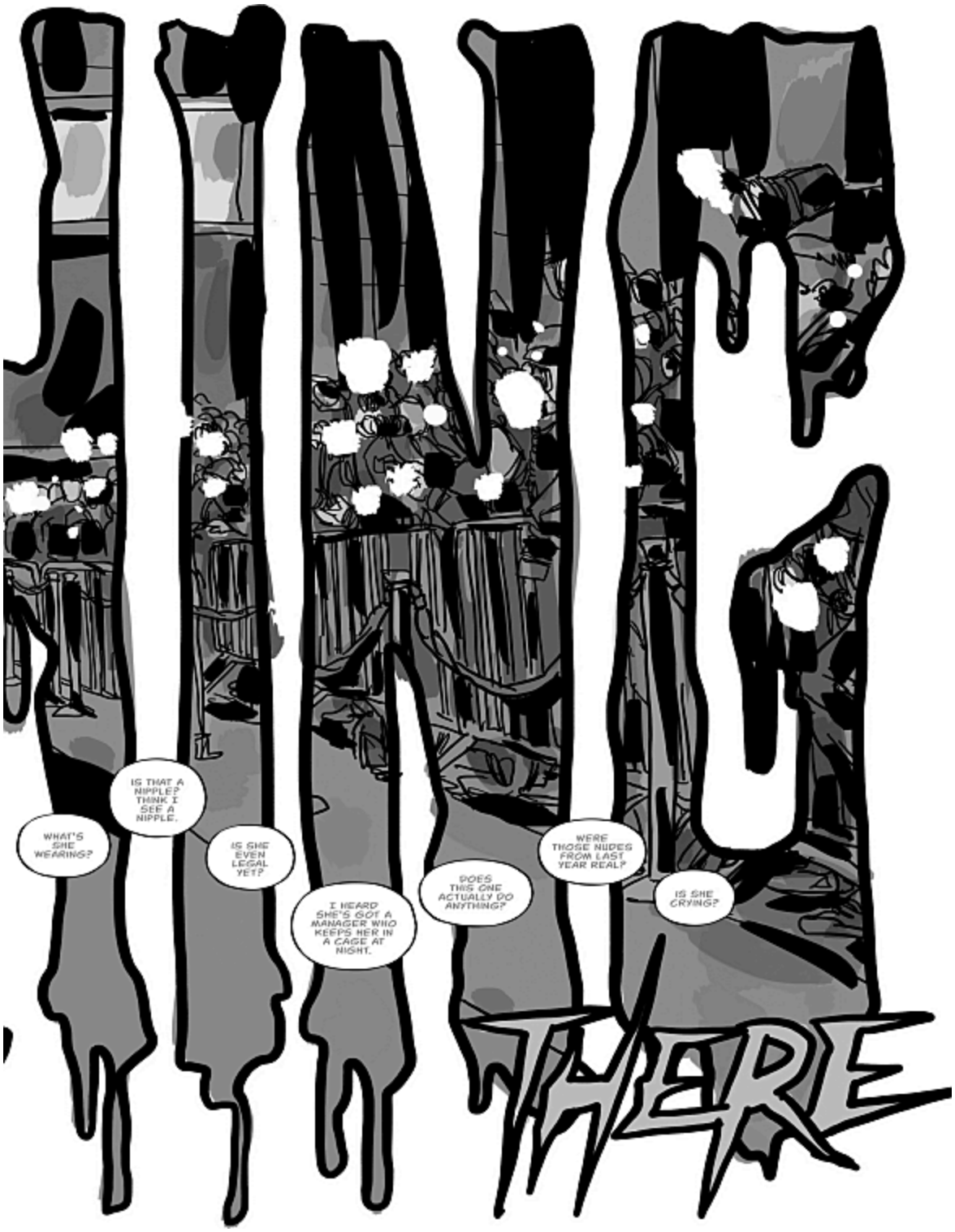
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THERE'S NOTHING THERE, issue 2

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YOUR OUTFIT IS PERFECTION.
JUST DON'T BEND OVER.
THOSE LIL TIDDIES OF YOURS WILL BE ON FULL DISPLAY.
:CHHOKE:
HOW CAN YOU BE SO CASUAL?
WE SAW A GHOST, CEL. A FUCKIN' DEAD LITTLE GIRL.
I'M NOT CASUAL. I'M PANICKED. BUT PRESSURE MAKES DIAMONDS.
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE WE ARE.
DO YOU HAVE ANY XANAX?
SMAKK
THE HELL?!
I'M OUT OF XANAX.
LISTEN. YOU'RE AT THE PREMIERE OF AIR MEN, A MOVIE ABOUT THE TUSKEEGEE AIRMEN WITH AN ALL RAPPER CAST.
JESUS.
HOW DO I EXPLAIN THESE PUFFY WET EYES I'M ROCKING?
TELL THEM YOU'RE CRYING OVER SYRIA. IT'S VERY NOW AND YOU DO GET SAD OVER IT.
TRUE. OK, HOW LONG UNTIL WE GET THERE?
WE'VE BEEN PARKED OUT FRONT FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES.


THERE'S
DID YOU SEE HER MELTDOWN YESTERDAY?
SHE'S A MESS, BUT HER BODY IS LOOKING TIGHT.
DRUGS. DEFINITELY DRUGS.
FIGURE IT WAS A STUNT?
I HATE THIS ONE, TOO ALOOF.
WHO'S SHE WITH AGAIN? THE SPANISH KID FROM THAT DISNEY SHOW?


WHAT'S SHE WEARING?
IS THAT A NIPPLE? THINK I SEE A NIPPLE.
IS SHE EVEN LEGAL YET?
I HEARD SHE'S GOT A MANAGER WHO KEEPS HER IN A CAGE AT NIGHT.
DOES THIS ONE ACTUALLY DO ANYTHING?
WERE THOSE NUDES FROM LAST YEAR REAL?
IS SHE CRYING?
THERE


MY NAME IS JOAN.
H-HI, JOAN. I'M-M, RENO.
YOU'RE IN TROUBLE.
SAY AGAIN?
I HAVE TO GO.
BRUUM BRUUM
WAIT!
BRUM


COME BACK.
COME BACK, MA. YOU'RE OK.
DID I PASS OUT?
ON THE GODDAMN RED CARPET, PUSHING THE GODDAMN EVENT BACK FORTY FUCKING MINUT--
YEAH. YOU FAINTED.
DID ANYONE NOTICE?
DID ANYONE NOTICE?! SIXTY PHOTOGRAPHERS SCRAMBLED TO GET AN UPSKIRT SHOT. THE GOSSIP SITES ARE SAYING YOU STARTED FROTHING AT THE MOUTH AND COLLAPSED.
GOSSIPHEAD
DRUGS OR JUS
COULD YOU HOLD THE SCREEN HORIZONTAL? THE VIDEO IS LANDSCAPE.
GOSSIPHEAD
DRUGS OR JUST AN IDIOT?
FUUUUUUUUUU--


--GUUUUUUUK.
SPLISH!
KREAAK
HELLO?
IF YOU'RE A REPORTER, I FELL DOWN TO BRING ATTENTION TO SYRIA.
I WAS A REPORTER, OF A SORT. YOU FELL DOWN? ARE YOU OK?
URK.


LOVE YOUR OUTFIT. NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.
HRHH. OK. OK.
YOU'RE... YOU'RE A FUCKING GHOST, RIGHT?
WELL, I'M NOT AS HERE AS I SHOULD BE. Y'KNOW?
WHY... WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?
OH. EVERYONE'S BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU. ASBEEL HAS A THING FOR YOU. AND THAT'S NOT GOOD.
THAT NAME. I HEARD THAT NAME. WHO IS THAT? WHY ME?
DON'T HIDE YOURSELF.
WHAT? WHAT DOES THA--
KREEEAK


RENO. GLAD I FOUND YOU. HI, I'M A SYMPATHETIC EAR FROM THE ONLINE OUTLET CELEBICIDE.
I'D LOVE FOR YOU TO TELL OUR READERS WHAT HAPPENED TONIGHT ON THE RED CARPET.
FUCK.
UH.
SYRIA?


SO, WHAT YOU WANNA DO?
SAY AGAIN?
HOLD THIS.
I'M SAYING THIS MOVIE IS THREE HOURS AND THEN SHE'S GOT THE AFTER PARTY AND THEN THE AFTER AFTER PARTY. SO...
YOU WANNA HIT A BAR OR SOMETHING? I KNOW A PLACE IN THE VILLAGE. ARE YOU GAY? YOU LIKE TO DANCE?
I TYPICALLY CIRCLE THE BLOCK UNTIL I'M CALLED.
CIRCLE THE BLOCK?! YOU EVER THINK ABOUT THE GAS EMISSIONS ON THAT? YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT? HAVE YOU CONSIDERED YOUR ROLE IN GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE?
I'LL TAKE THAT. THANK YOU.
PULL OVER, I'LL HAVE MY GUY DELIVER SOME WEED. WE'LL HAV--
SHIT.
CHATTERHUB
CHATTERWORLD:
A STAR HAS FALLEN! RENO'S COLLAPSES AT MOVIE PREMIERE. VIDEO IN LINK.
SHIT. TURN AROUND!


RENO!
OH JESUS.
I KNOW YOU, YOU FUCKING VULTURE! CAN'T YOU SEE THIS WOMAN'S GOT A MEDICAL ISSUE?
KYLE, WHAT'RE YOU WEARING? I'M FINE, BY THE WAY.
IT'S FOR THE PREMIERE, SORTA A HIP-HOP FLYING ACE MASHUP. YOU LIKE IT?
I'M STILL SOAKING IT IN. A LOT OF BUTTONS. WHAT'RE YOU DOING IN THE WOMEN'S BATHROOM?
KYLE LAGGENSWORTH, OF THE LAGGENSWORTHS? ARE YOU TWO DATING? CAN I GET A STATEMENT ON THE HEALTH OF YOUR GIRLFRIEND?
WELL, WE--
HELL FUCKING NO WE'RE NOT DATING! NOW, GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I--
RENO!
WHAT NOW?


RENO! ARE YOU IN HER--
YES, CAN EVERYONE STOP WITH THE YELLING? MY HEAD IS KILLING ME.
SECURITY! COME GET THIS SCUMBAG GOSSIP COLUMNIST BEFORE I DROWN HER IN THE TOILET!
CRAWL BACK TO YOUR GRUBBY HOLE, DEBORAH. NO SCOOP TONIGHT.
YOUR FALL SHOE LINE SUCKED, CELIA.
AT LEAST I'VE GOT A SHOE LINE, GRANDMA! YOU LOOK LIKE A GODDAMN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER!
AGAIN WITH THE YELLING.
SORRY. ARE YOU OK?
YEAH. JUST...NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE.
DID YOU KNOW YOUR DRIVER CIRCLES THE BLOCK WHEN YOU'RE AT EVENTS?
I GUESS I NEVER ASKED. THAT'S BAD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.


KNOKK KNOKK KNOK
SHHK SHHK
JUUUUST A SEC.
DEVIN?
COMING!
WHY KNOCK IF YOU'RE GONNA TRY THE DOOR-KNOB? DENSE BITCH.
HI, EMILY.
UH, WHATSUP?
HEY, ROOMMATE FIELD TRIP TO GLUTTONY PIZZA. KAITLYN'S INVITING SOME FRIENDS FROM HER WORK. SHOULD BE FUN.
OH, UH, DO YOU NEED ME TO...KEEP WATCH OF SOMETHING WHILE YOU'RE GONE?
NO, DEVIN, WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME? C'MON.
AH! THANK YOU!
BUT, I'VE GOT SOME WORK. SCHOOL WORK. HEAVY READING AND...
ARE YOU SURE? IT'LL STILL BE HERE WHEN YOU GET BACK.
FOR SURE. THANK YOU THOUGH. HAVE A COOL TIME. SEE YOU LATER. BYE.
UM.




"I-I'M NOT QUESTIONING YOU. I WOULD NEVER. I JUST MEAN TO SAY, EVERYTHING WAS ACCORDING TO PROTOCOL.
"THE RITE WAS... PERFECT.
"AND, AND THERE WAS A PRESENCE. I FELT IT. THE ACOLYTES, THEY ALL FELT IT."
"Perhaps you aren't qualified to feel."
"I...I HADN'T CONS--"
KNOK KNOK
SIR, THE--
YOU KNOW BETTER THAN TO DISTURB ME HERE.
IT'S THE BONES, SIR.
OH.


THIS IS NOT GOOD. I HOPE YOU'RE MISREADING.
THAT WAS HIM, IN THE CHAIR. I'D NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE.
HUH?
LORD STUYVESANT. IN ALL THIS TIME, I'D NEVER ACTUALLY SEEN HIM.
YOU STILL HAVEN'T.
IF YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT THE BONES, THIS'LL MARK THE FIRST TIME I'M GRATEFUL FOR YOUR INCOMPETENCE.
LIKEWISE, SIR.
WHAT'S IT MEAN?
SIR?


♪UUUMS♪ NAMES. ♪BURP♪
SIR?
♪MUUUGHN♪
NAMES OF EVERYONE AT THE PARTY. A LIST.
FUCK.
SURVEILLANCE ON THEM ALL. WE'VE GOT TO GET AHEAD OF THIS.
THERE WERE OVER A HUNDRED GUESTS...
WORK IN SHIFTS. DO SPEED. I DON'T CARE.
START WITH THE FAMOUS GUESTS.
THE BEAUTIFUL ONES.
SAY AGAIN?


I SAID, IS THIS A REHAB SITUATION? BE HONEST. MY DAD CAN GET YOU INTO PATHWAYS LAGUNA. HE'S ON THE BOARD.
NO! CELIA, HELP ME OUT HERE.
HOW?
YOU SAW WHAT I SAW! AT THE CONDO!
THE F-U-C-K-I-N-G G-H-O-S-T!
GOT TWO MELTS AND A PICKLE.
THANK ‡KRUNCH‡ YOU.


I GET IT. THIS IS AN EATING DISORDER THING, RIGHT?
I'M NOT READY TO CALL WHAT WE SAW A G-H-O-S-T!
ARE YOU KIDDING? WE'RE BACK TO THIS?
WE CAN GET YOU HELP.
IT WAS A CREEPY CHILD AN--
A CREEPY DEAD CHILD. THAT'S A FUCKING GHOST, CELIA!
MY SISTER WRESTLED WITH BULIMIA. SHE'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF IT NOW.
KYLE, PLEASE, SHUT THE FUCK UP. I HAVEN'T HAD AN EATING DISORDER SINCE HIGH SCHOOL. I'M JUST NOT HUNGRY.
AND ARE YOU FOR REAL HERE? TERRIFYING CORPSE-LOOKING CHILD THAT DISAPPEARS? WHAT DO YOU CALL THAT?
UGH. I DON'T WANT TO SELFIE WITH KIDS RIGHT NOW. I LOOK LIKE THE DEAD HOOKER IN EVERY EPISODE OF SVU.
WHERE ARE MY SUNGLASSES?


I'LL GET THEM OUT OF HERE.
YOU LOOK DEAD. DEATH IS A GOOD EXCUSE NOT TO POSE FOR SELFIES.
NO. IT'S FINE. I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL THEY'RE NOT SCARED OF ME AFTER THAT MESS ON THE RED CARPET.
RENO?
EEYAAH!
RENO. COME BACK. GIRL. YOU'RE HAVING A PANIC ATTACK.
UH. HI. RENO SELLETTI?
WE'RE FANS.
HUGE FANS.


OK. SO. WHEN IS THE NEW SEASON OF WEALTH & OPULENCE?
IS IT TRUE YOU DATED ZACH QUINTO? HE'S SO OLD.
NOTREAL NOTREALNOT REALNOT REAL
CAN WE GET A SELFIE?
SMILE!
CELIA? I... SOMETHING'S WRONG...
RENO! KYLE, PAY THE CHECK. WE'RE LEAVING.
SHE'S ALLERGIC TO PICKLES.


LIFT HER.
KYLE. LIFT HER, YOU BOOB.
I'M LIFTING!
THEY'RE ON THE MOVE.
FOLLOW AT A DISTANCE.
GUYS?
HERE, RENO.
I'M LOSING IT. I DON'T WANT TO OPEN MY EYES.
I KNOW, BABY. I KNOW. WE'RE TAKING YOU HOME, OK?
I'M NOT NUTS, RIGHT?
EVEN IF YOU ARE, WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT, OK? NUTS IS TEMPORARY THESE DAYS.
IT'S GONNA BE OK?



—End Chapter Two—

Writing this one in the midst of a fever and refusing to edit it later. I don't do drugs, so this is as close as you're getting. Enjoy the run-on sentences.

So, the feedback from last issue was super-positive, and I'm grateful for that. No matter how this series sells, I'll prolly get to do this again.

Which I guess leads us to the (loose) topic for this backmatter: I don't check sales. I know this seems insane to the more business-minded among you, and I concede it's not terribly professional. But, for real, no. Book could be doing great, average, poor, I won't know.

I'm spent on the idea of the comic writer as a brand. I'm tired of comic writer as carnival barker. I'm burnt on companies asking for social media follower counts before a hire. And more than anything, I'm over the idea of a comic creator as a mogul.



I'm into some niche shit: Writer as writer.

Collaborator. Teammate. Invested partner. Sure. All that. But writer as writer, first.

Comicbook writing is a specialized skill. You can train anyone to do it, in the same way you can train anyone to paint a landscape. But the in end, a master craftsman and someone who just-doesn't-have-it are going to produce demonstrably different work.



This seems to be lost on some members of the comic readership. Maybe because for decades, you could give a name-brand Big Two book to the best writer in the world or the worst, and see only a 10% sales difference. This may've given some less-discriminating readers a false sense of what we do here. As if parts are truly interchangeable.

They are not.



Sales keep the lights on and the books printed. Without them, nothing happens. But there's a difference between fostering a healthy market and stuffing coffers. Likewise, there's a difference between being your own best advocate and a crude approximation of a businessperson.

Divsion of labor. You do you. We write.

And for a second, you seemed to get that. If you wonder why I am constantly referring to classic Vertigo as some sorta golden age, it's because for writers, it was. The readership deferred to the idea that the people writing were exceptionally good at their jobs. They may not have been even reading those books, but they got that something important was happening. Something skilled.

Whenever there's minor dips in the comic sales landscape, pundits (often of the comments section variety) come forward to offer explanation. Almost uniformly, they start from bias and cherry-pick facts to support those biases.

I'm not throwing my hat in that ring. I would however, like to offer a wholistic criticism that isn't about any little dip: well-written comics bring new readers in, and retain old readers longer. It is in the interest of the industry to cultivate a writer who spends 12 months a year generating great stories, rather than a writer who must spend summers as a traveling attraction/lobbyist/auditor.

'Long-term.' Not an easy thing to think about when you've got a mortgage that needs paying today. I get it. But, craft will keep us fed in perpetuity. Everything else is just a bubble. I'm out of space.

Help craft the conversation moving forward by emailing patrick.kindlon@gmail.com