

Blackout City

webcomic, sci-fi/fantasy, 2015

.../LI BROS' AUTOMOTIVE FACTORY

They enter into a hallway that opens through several large doors into a huge room where the fight is being held. A space is cleared in the center for the combatants, but the crowd is too dense for them to be seen very well from outside of the room. Ahead of Coda someone in Merrigo's group has turned on a flashlight. A second floor is open around the arena with a balcony running the room, spotlights hooked up to heavy batteries hanging from the railings. Coda pauses for a moment and watches, keeping in the shadows while Merrigo and the others head down the hallway. They pass through a door at the end and Coda hurries down the hall after them. Through the door he finds himself in a stairwell, through which the group's footsteps echo loud and metallic. Coda waits at the bottom until they've all gone through a door at the top.

CODA: What's going on here?

Upstairs he catches sight of them disappearing through a door at the end of the hallway. Here there is a ramp all the way around a wide opening with people standing up against the railing, watching the fight below. Coda makes to follow Merrigo into that room, but Maddes steps away from the crowd and throws him against the wall. Coda drops the shopping bag he's been carrying all this way.

MADDES: Fight's this way, kid.

CODA: I have business with them.

MADDES: [smiles and cracks his knuckles] I don't think you do.

From below the crowd lets up a collective yell.

REFEREE: OUT!! THE WINNER IS NEW FANTASY!

With the roar of the crowd drowning out any other sounds, Maddes approaches Coda and grabs his arm, twisting it around into a position that threatens to break it. Leaning close he speaks into Coda's ear.

MADDES: You want to keep this arm, you find some other business.

CODA: Let go of me.

Maddes twists his arm harder.

CODA: Ah!

MADDES: That's what I thought.

REFEREE: Next up, Blackout versus DragonFish!

Maddes reaches down and picks up the unopened bottle of soda that has rolled out of Coda's bag. He opens it and takes a long drink, watching Coda out of the corner of his eye all the while.

MADDES: How about we watch it together?

Fever☆Dream Saga

visual novel, sci-fi/fantasy, 2016

SCENE: DW - Alle's House

ANNO: Alle!

NARRATION: As usual, Alle is hunched over his desk. He's grinding something with a mortar and pestle while leaning over a book he has held opened with a paperweight. He doesn't even notice me until I call his name.

ALLE: Anno! Always a pleasure to see you.

NARRATION: He says this even though he hasn't seen me. You'd think whatever he's working on must be really interesting, but that's rarely the case. Alle's just the type to be laser-focused on whatever task he has to do. Still, I can't help but be curious.

ANNO: Yeah. You too. What's up?

NARRATION: Even when I pull up a chair next to him he doesn't look up from his work, aside from shooting quick glances towards his book. I used to hate it, but it's a surprisingly endearing quality. These days I've come to admire how focused he is.

ALLE: I'm making a remedy for nightmares.

ANNO (mocking): Why? You having nightmares?

ALLE: Oh no, it just sounded interesting. Do you know anyone I could test it on?

ANNO (dismissive): Nah.

NARRATION: Up close the mixture has an overpowering scent. It's sweet like spring and sharp like the air after it rains. It feels like there are flowers growing in the back of my throat.

ALLE: Hm. Well it makes good incense too. So Anno, what brings you here?

ANNO: Lili and Nat forgot about the cat fruit for the festival.

ALLE: So they sent you to get it?

ANNO: Right.

ALLE: I don't have it.

ANNO: I know that.

ALLE: It's deep in the forest.

ANNO: I know. Aren't you normally more helpful?

ALLE: Nova probably has a book on it in the library.

ANNO: What?! This sucks! You suck!

ALLE: Oh, and only the ceremonial knife can cut the fruit down. You'll need to get that from Mils.

ANNO: Ugh, fine.

ALLE: Sweet dreams.

ANNO (annoyed): ...

A Mirage in Velia

comic, fantasy/slice of life, 2016

@ CALVO PARK, HIKING TRAILS, MORNING

Some leaves are starting to change color and fall, but it's a hot autumn in Velia. There are lots of interesting bugs about, observing the group hiking through the woods. The students have their bags with them and some are carrying observation diaries in their hands. A large beetle is watching one of the students, Renzo, who is watching it back. When he makes to grab it the beetle flies off.

Giuli is leading them and Camillo is in the back to make sure no one gets lost. A little group of students, shier or just more wary of nature than the others, has built up towards the back. Abruptly a student there, Caterina, stops walking and Camillo nearly trips over her.

CAMILLO: Cater--

Caterina is quick to silence him.

CATERINA: Shh! Look, there's a butterfly.

She points and indeed there is a butterfly, camouflaging into the bark of a tree. It's huge, bigger than Camillo's head. Caterina reaches into her bag and takes a sticker shaped like a small star. It's a spell for a photo. She sticks it onto one of her eyelids and it glows with a soft light.

CATERINA: Click.

Caterina blinks, then transfers the spell to a page in her observation diary. The photo appears in the shape of a star. Camillo is fascinated by this and by the butterfly. Caterina notices his reaction and responds sheepishly, embarrassed by the attention.

CAMILLO: That's a great clouded butterfly. Impressive, isn't it?

CATERINA: Yeah.

CAMILLO: That spell is really cool, too.

CATERINA: Anyone can do that.

Another of the students at the back of the group joins their conversation.

ELIO: It's not like you made the spell, you just got it at the convenience store.

CATERINA: That's what I meant!

CAMILLO: Can I try it? I'll take your picture with the great clouded.

Elio laughs mockingly.

ELIO: No offense, Mr. S, but I thought you couldn't use magic.

Caterina looks uncomfortable and embarrassed. She was thinking the same thing but it felt wrong to say it. She's not pleased that Elio is just going ahead with it.

ELIO: Other than your twitch, and it's not like you do that on purpose.

CATERINA: Sorry, I just don't want to waste them.

TOMASSO: Use one of mine.

Another of the kids at the back joins them. He has a roll of similar stickers but his are rectangular. Already he's peeled one off and is holding it out to Camillo on his fingertip. Camillo takes it gladly.

CAMILLO: Thank you, Tomasso.

The three kids position themselves as close to the butterfly as they feel they can without scaring it off. Camillo sticks the spell onto his eyelid where it does not start glowing.

CAMILLO: Click.

Nothing continues to happen. Camillo takes it off and returns it to Tomasso.

CAMILLO: Sorry.

TOMASSO: That's okay. I'll take your picture.

Camillo, Elio and Caterina stand in front of the butterfly and this time Tomasso takes the picture. He uses the same spell as he gave to Camillo. When he sticks it onto his eyelid it glows weakly.

TOMASSO: Say... "clean clams crammed in clean cans".

CATERINA: Clean clams clammed...

ELIO: What?

CAMILLO: Cheese.

TOMASSO: Click.

Tomasso sticks it into his observation diary. The others crowd around to take a look.

CAMILLO: Did it turn out?

It's a little washed out but clear enough.

ELIO: Hey, it worked!

CATERINA: Elio, your face looks really stupid.

ELIO: Shut up, you clam!

Dreameater

Supernatural fanfic, 2014

Spirals of dust and ash lifted off the floor to float in the thin columns of light that slipped through the cracks in the burnt husk of Dean's childhood home. He'd been so young when the fire happened that the few memories he had of the house intact were hazy, insubstantial things, blurred together with the charred relic from his dreams. Now he stepped briskly into the dining room. The wreckage was as ordinary and familiar as a messy desk; chaos to anyone who wasn't familiar with it. And Dean was more than familiar, knew *this* chaos like it was a part of him and for all he knew maybe it was. He took the nearest fallen chair, twisting a leg — the right one on the front, the one he knew broke easiest — until it splintered and tore.

And now, for our feature presentation.

An arm with a twisted maze of joints reached down from the hallway ceiling. Spidery fingers grasped the door frame and pulled it downwards to meet Dean's eyes. It was a pale, fleshy thing, vaguely human, with clusters of tiny eyes set deep in their sockets.

Dean grinned, shifting his stance and raising the chair's severed leg in front of him. "You just keep getting uglier," he remarked. In response the spider-woman opened its mouth, the skin that had closed over it tearing as she did, to hiss at him through thin, glassy teeth like needles.

It swung into the room and Dean twisted, striking the monstrous form like a baseball. The broken wood made contact with a sound like cracking bones, for all the total lack of damage it seemed to do. Dropping to the floor, the spider-woman twisted and charged again. She grasped Dean's weapon before he could swing it, planting the other hand at his throat. They fell together to the floor, those horrible teeth inches from Dean's face. He swore through clenched teeth and made to roll over, switching their positions. The spider-woman hissed again and Dean felt the talons of the monster's feet ripping into his knee, pinning him in place. It reared back, regarding him with a hand still at his throat, preparing to strike. As it did, Dean raised his free hand and the nightmare met his fist head-on.

Glass teeth shattered on impact, leaving Dean's knuckles scraped and bloody, the creature's jaw hanging uselessly in a basket of torn flesh. Even as he wrenched his weapon out of the dazed monster's grip, Dean could see that skin knitting itself back together, new teeth rising to take the place of those cracked or broken. He dropped the leg of the chair, favoring the damage he'd done with his fist, and hit it again. This time, though, it was ready. It shifted, unhinged jaw opened wide to take in Dean's forearm as the momentum carried him forward. And then its jaws snapped shut.

You can't die in a dream.

But god, can you ever hurt.

Tiny eyes locked with Dean's, and then in a burning flash, they were gone. Fire washed over what was left of his sleeve, the skin beneath *churning*. Someone was screaming. Distantly, Dean thought it might be him. And then in a second the fire was gone, just like the monster preceding it. Dean lay back against what was once, in some other life, the linoleum tiles of his childhood home but which were now mostly charcoal. His ears rang, the ceiling buzzed with television static. The sounds faded eventually, all but the screaming pain across the right side of his body. That, and a scraping sound from somewhere upstairs, like something heavy and metal being dragged across the floor. Dean thought of ghost stories, spirits rattling chains in old attics. With a groan he stood, gathered up the leg of the chair. Wondered, what the hell could this be now.

For the most part, Dean's arm was burned shut where it had severed. Still, it dripped a sticky trail of blood in his wake as he limped out into the hall. Turning away from the stairs, he dragged himself over to the front door, a few blackened strips of wood hinged to the doorframe. Beyond that was sand and sea, leached of most colour by the sickly sunlight. With one foot over the threshold, Dean heard the thing crash to the floor at the bottom of the stairs behind him. The hair pickled along the back of his neck, and for a moment everything was still.

The tide rushed in, grey waves breaking over white rocks, foam washing against the sand. The smell of salt, thick enough to taste. A slight breeze, pleasantly cool against Dean's burnt flesh. Nowhere to run then, not tonight. He turned, instinctively raising his charred arm as if to take the chair's broken leg in both hands.

Back down the hallway was some sort of dog, perhaps. Huge and, Dean saw as it stepped forward into the light, inside out. Red veins streaked across the creature's thick muscles. Guts twined around its form, hanging loosely in some areas and swinging like sickening pendulums when it moved. Despite the definitively organic matter, brass gears clicked in its eye sockets, metal claws raked across the floorboards and steam hissed from between its teeth.

"The gate," it said, and laughed. A chuckle from deep in its throat, a sound like a ticking clock. "It's a pleasure."

Dean took a slow step back into the sand, brandishing his weapon and trying to shove aside the growing awareness that he was trapped, a man with one and a half arms and a few splinters caught between the ocean and the stuff of nightmares.