

It's probably too much to hope that this will become a trend in comics, but the best part about *The Fade Out* is it's a straight-up drama—for now, at least—that doesn't fuss around with radical concepts or genre conventions. Novelists have been doing this for ages, but the vast majority of comic book creators seem adverse to the very idea. Even among the greats, you'd be hard-pressed to find a single series that isn't sci-fi/fantasy/superhero in some way. *The Fade Out* runs on the strength of its characters and the tangle of relationships among them, so it's necessary that Brubaker's character work be excellent. In a way, he might be the best among character writers for his ability to write an entire cast of relatively normal people yet give each a distinctive voice without reducing them to clichés. Neither does Brubaker go out of his way to defy expectations, pushing the characters against the extremes of human behavior to make them interesting. We likely won't relate to their lives, but we can recognize their psychology. After all, not many of us have much in common with Victor Thursby, self-made film industry tycoon, nor have many of us had the experience of driving into the mountains, abandoning our cars and clothes, and joining a hedonistic cult.* But some of us can understand the feeling of being trapped by success and those who can't can understand the suffocation of a job that's lost its flavor. And once Thursby is pressured into leaving the Divine Order of the Great Eleven, we have a deeper empathy with his current, lost state of mind. He's an escaped animal forced back into his cage. This perhaps explains why he's later seen prowling the halls of Victory Street Pictures, winding up in the dressing room of Valeria Sommers' replacement, Maya Silver, only to realize he has no idea what the hell he's doing there. That he had a particular resonance with Valeria is clear from the last issue; it could be the vibrance of her personality was the closest thing he had to that constant, post-coital glow of freedom he once had, and the two became synonymous in his mind. Chasing after her spirit is the same as chasing after the more essential thing he lost. Valeria's special pull can be more easily seen when contrasted to her successor. Like Thursby, you recognize a part of Valeria in Maya, especially in the way she lights up the screen. So long as she can wrap herself in that glamour, the differences between her and Valeria are harder to see. But it's significant that once Thursby breaks her daydream, she strips off her robe and exposes the mortal woman inside. Unlike Valeria, who retains her brightness when the cameras aren't rolling, Maya's light grows dim as the klieg lights do. [It's worth noting, however, that the time jumps between Maya's audition and present day of filming can be a bit disorienting from their lack of transition.] The separation between the late and current actresses is one of internal security. Valeria might joke about how being nice hasn't worked out for her so far, but she's still entirely confident in that choice. It's impossible for Maya to have that degree of self-worth, being sold out by first her husband Armando ("You sold me. You took [talent agent Tom] Greavey's money and you ran."), then Greavey himself, as he encourages her to use her sexuality to move up in the Biz. But if there's one thing we're beginning to understand from this series, it's that the Biz makes monsters out of a lot of people. Sometimes that monstrosity is looming, like Brodsky, whose power reveals itself more and more with every issue; even Thursby can't escape his reach. Other times the monstrosity is subtle, luring its prey to their doom. Dottie's ability to distract Maya with meaningless chatter and charming introductions can be no less destructive than Brodsky's physical threats, especially when Dottie has the means to cover her tracks afterward. One day, I'll be able to pin down how Phillips can accurately capture a specific period yet make it look completely relevant and contemporary, not just set-dressing. The characters look very much of their time, yet also human and accessible (although the women tend to look the same, especially Valeria and Maya). It's Breitweiser who really impresses this issue, however. Much of Maya's appeal is due to the effervescent, silvery light

that surrounds her as she savors the joy of the day's filmmaking, as if she's becoming a star before our very eyes. Some Musings: * Well, I haven't. I don't know about you. - Don't crush on Rath, Maya. That's a recipe for disaster, right there. The post The Fade Out #3 – Review appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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