

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

FIONA STAPLES



Saga

FS'11

VOLUME
ONE

VOLUME
ONE

SAGA

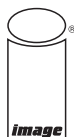


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W R I T E R

FIONA STAPLES

A R T I S T

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L E T T E R I N G + D E S I G N

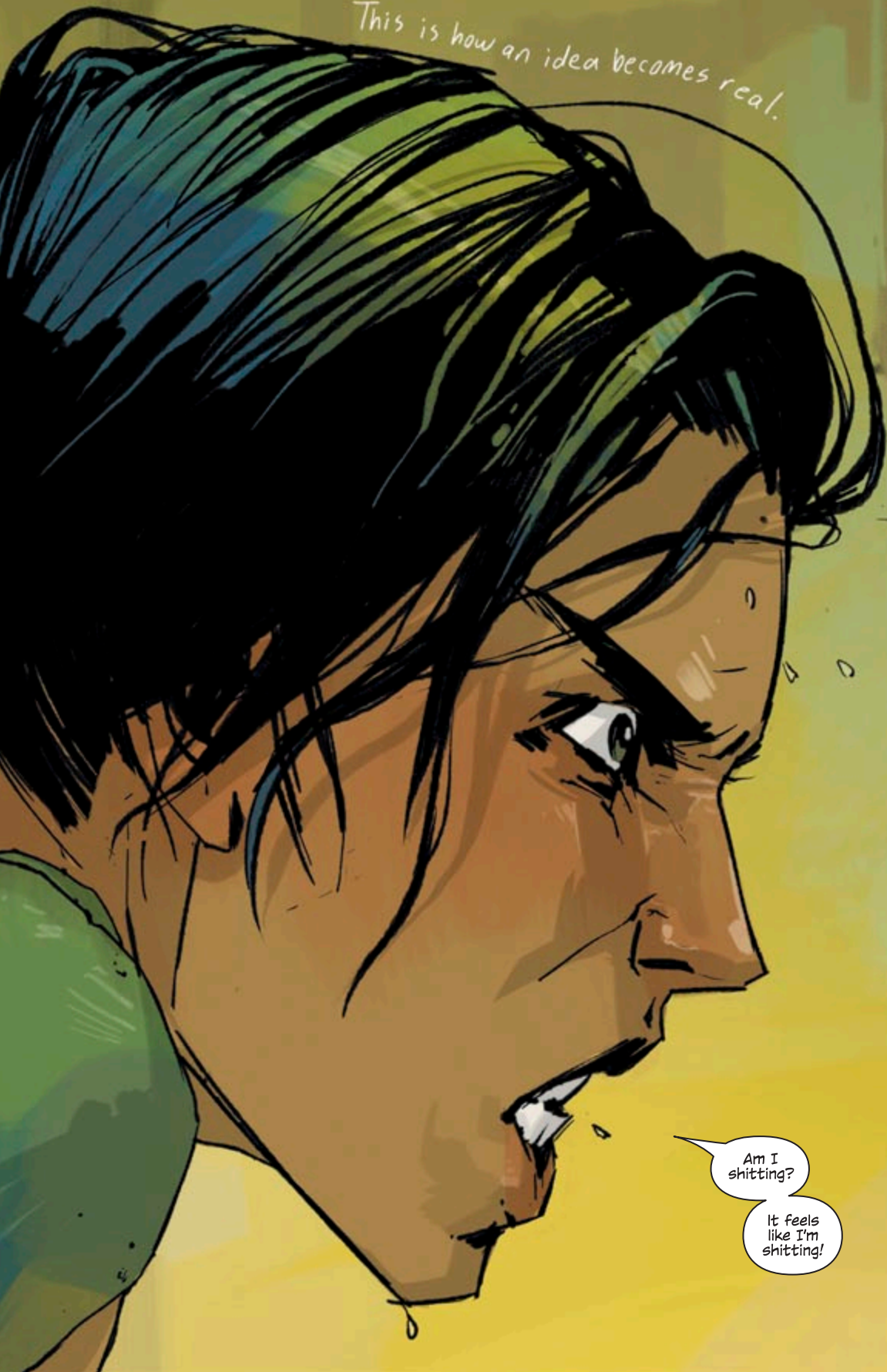
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C O O R D I N A T O R



CHAPTER
ONE

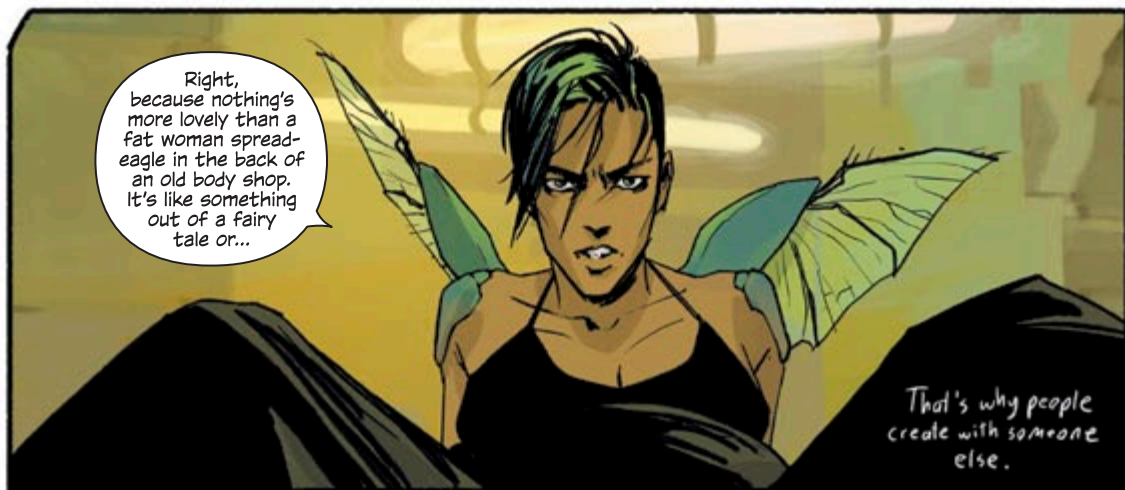
This is how an idea becomes real.



Am I
shitting?

It feels
like I'm
shitting!





Right,
because nothing's
more lovely than a
fat woman spread-
eagle in the back of
an old body shop.
It's like something
out of a fairy
tale or...

That's why people
create with someone
else.



**AHHH
HOLY
FUCK!**

Do you need
a healing spell?
We agreed, Alana!
No shame in
managing pain!

Two minds can sometimes improve the
odds of an idea's survival...



It -ehn-
doesn't
hurt at all.
It... it feels
good.

Is it
sick that
it -ehn-
feels so
good?



... but there are
no guarantees.



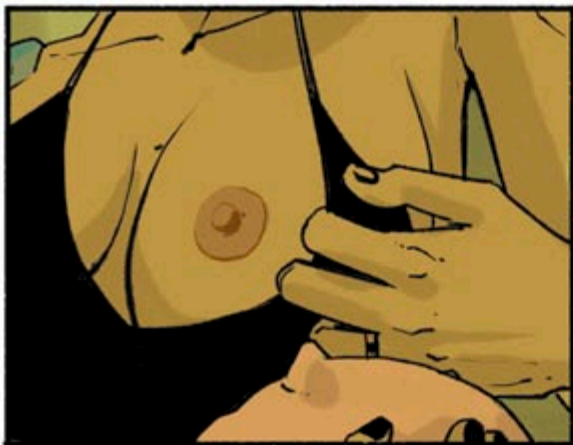
You're
crying. You
never cry.

What's
wrong?
Marko,
what is
it...?

It's a
girl.

Anyway, this
is the day I was
born.







They're not the same green as mine. Not quite your shade of brown either.

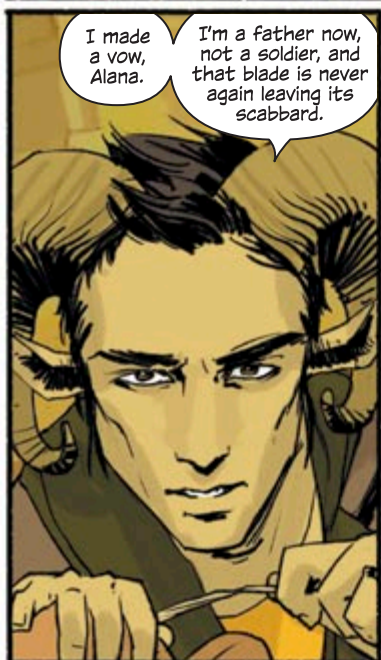
They kinda change depending how you...



Marko! What the hell are you doing?!

Cuhhing thu mbilical?

You have a sword! You are wearing a sword!



I made a vow, Alana.

I'm a father now, not a soldier, and that blade is never again leaving its scabbard.



Rnnf.

Wasn't expecting... this much gristle.



Well, Pico.

That's your daddy.



Pico?
What happened
to calling her
Beatrice?

Honey,
Beatrice is a
name for a
good girl. Does
this look like a
boring good girl
to you?

It's just,
Pico means
something kind
of... filthy
where I come
from.



Well, we
don't have to
make a final
decision until
her wing-
bleeding.



What?!
No way!

You said
when we started
this--no politics, no
history, and no more
barbaric religious
nonsense!



Wing-
bleeding isn't
religious, it's...
cultural.

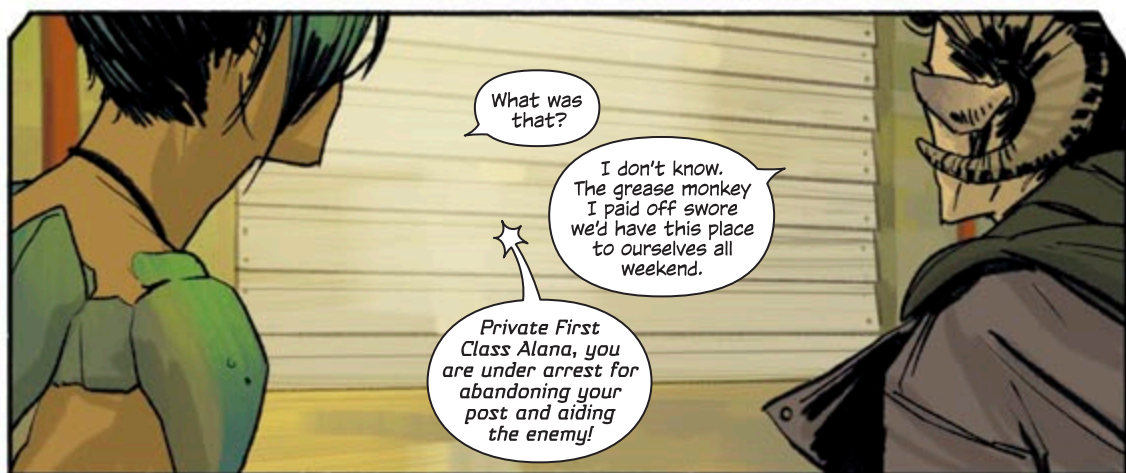
What is
cultural about
mutilating
an infant?

Are we
really having a
fight now?



Because
that's how
we ended up
making this
one.

BANG





Go, I'll try to buy you two some time.

Go?
Go where?!



They never cover the roof.

Because they know my wings are useless!

I couldn't fly a *kite*, much less all this fucking baby weight!



Bullshit!
Please, you can do this! I know you can!

TSSSSSS



She needs a name.

I don't want my child to die without a--





Drop whatever you're holding and put your hands in the air.



Suck my hemorrhoids!

You don't have to do this.

We just want to live our lives.



Is that moony speaking *Language*?

We should cut its fuckin' tongue out.



You can't do this. We're on civilian territory, not a sanctioned battlefield!

We are duly licensed military police officers on an approved law enforcement mission. Now step away from the prisoner and--

Your excellency!



D-meter's picking up exotic matter.

We've got *magic* incoming.













I was born on a planet called CLEAVE,
an ancient ball of mud circling a
faded old star.


It never had much strategic value, but
the place still mattered. To me, anyway.

See, this is where
my parents met,
but it's not where
they were from.

They grew up way over here, back where the war began. ↗



This is LANDFALL, largest planet in the galaxy,
and also my mother's home.

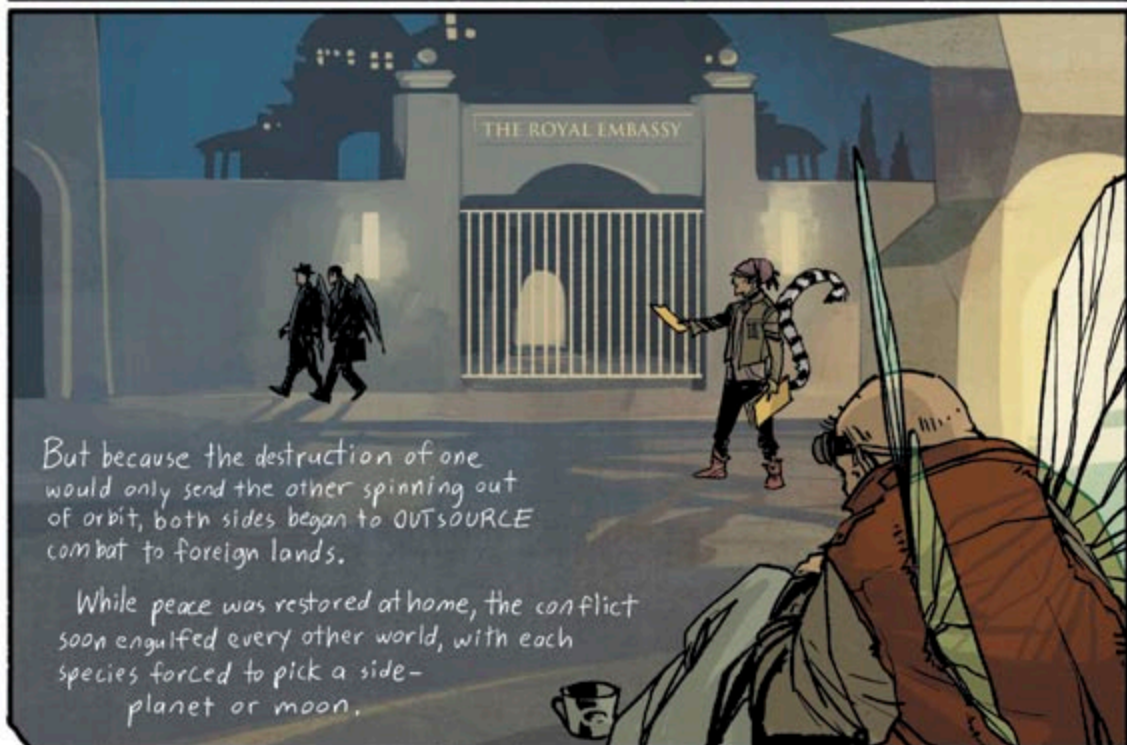


Its one and only satellite is WREATH,
my father's native moon.

If there was ever a time
these two got along, nobody
remembers it.



When the war with Wreath started, it was fought amidst the general population, in cities like this one, Landfall's capital.



But because the destruction of one would only send the other spinning out of orbit, both sides began to OUTSOURCE combat to foreign lands.

While peace was restored at home, the conflict soon engulfed every other world, with each species forced to pick a side-planet or moon.

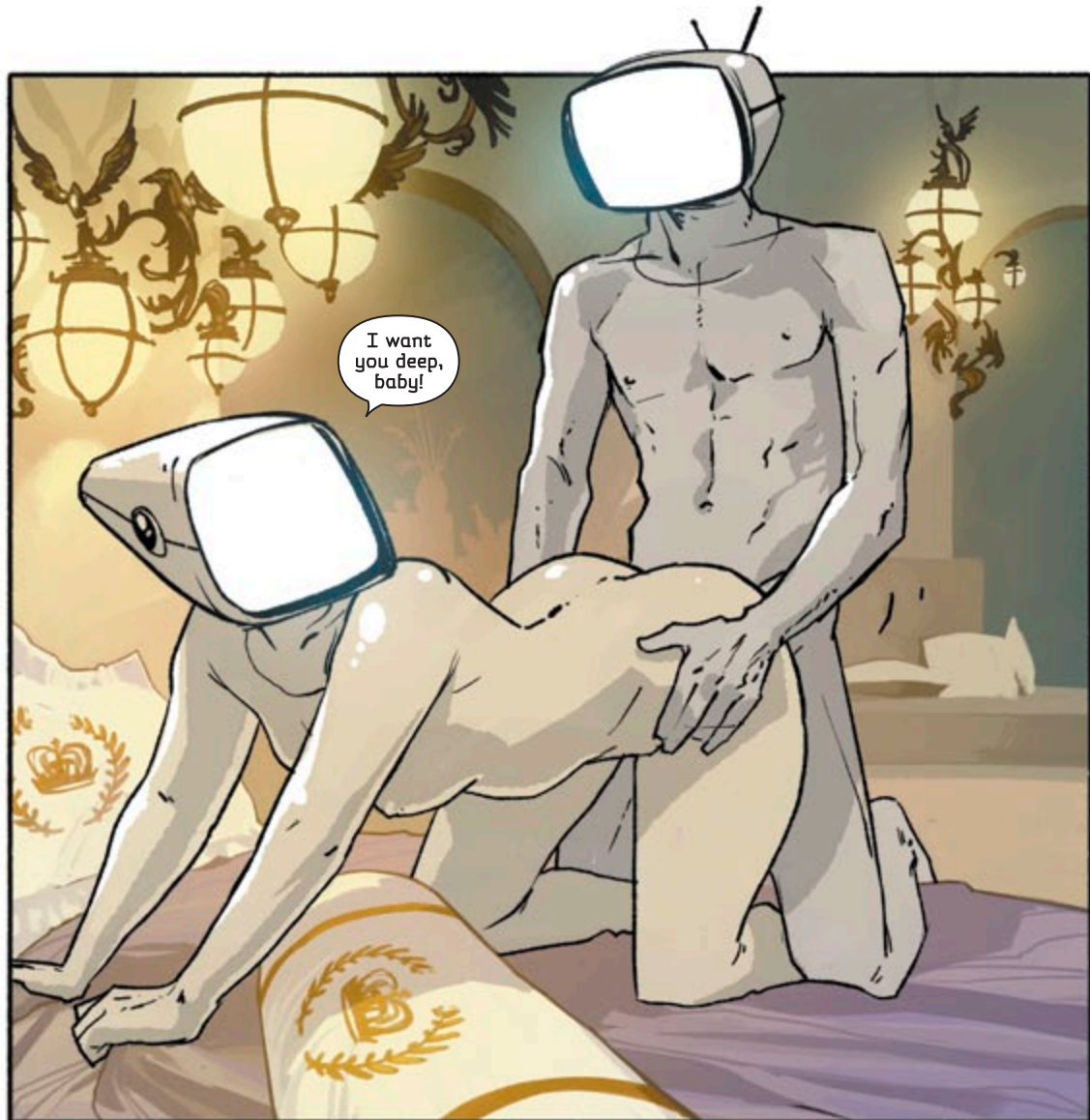


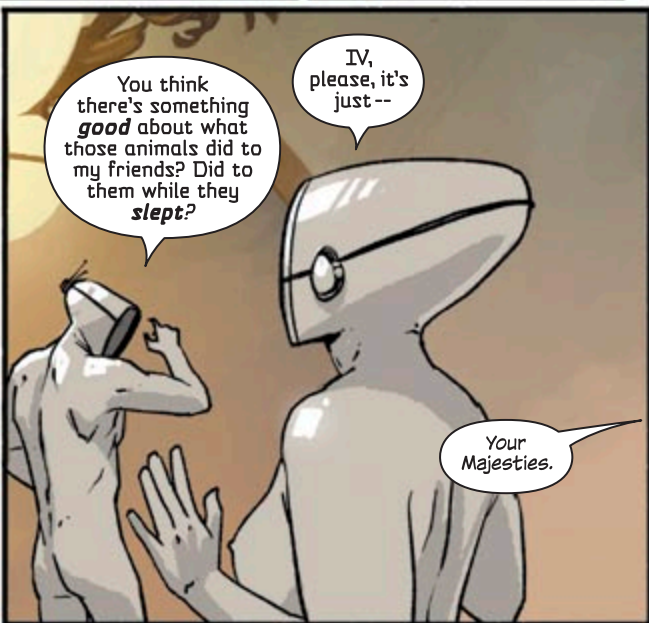
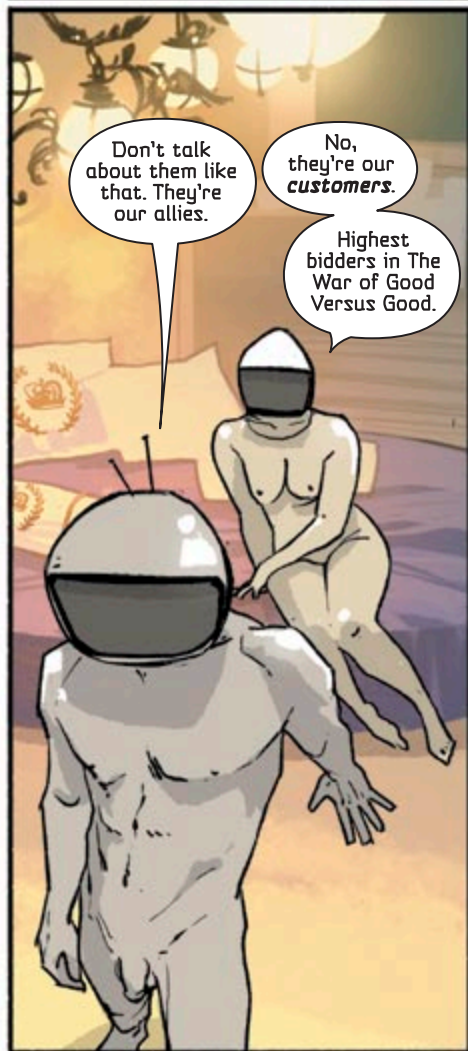
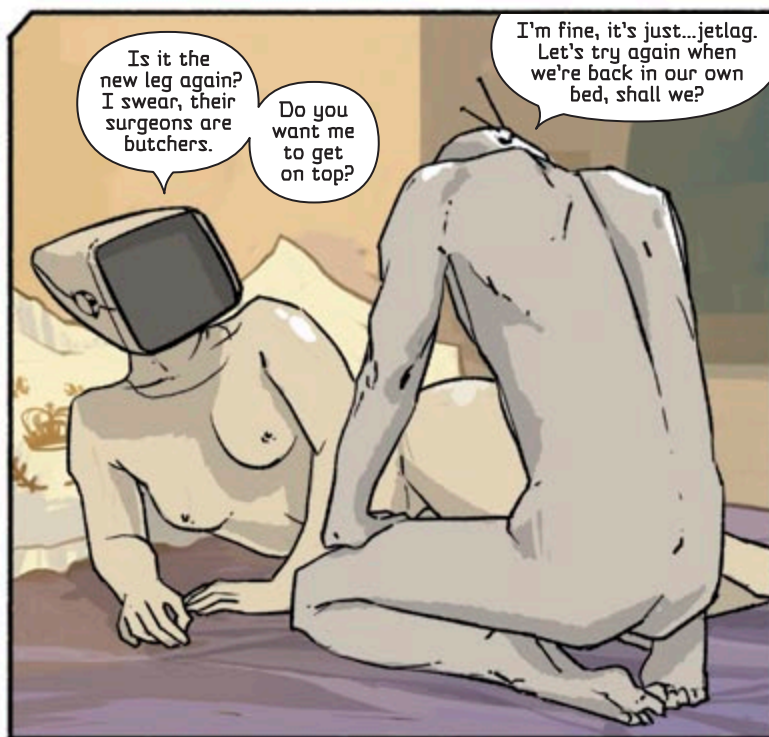
Some of the locals never stopped thinking about the battles being waged in their names on distant soil.



Most didn't really give a shit.

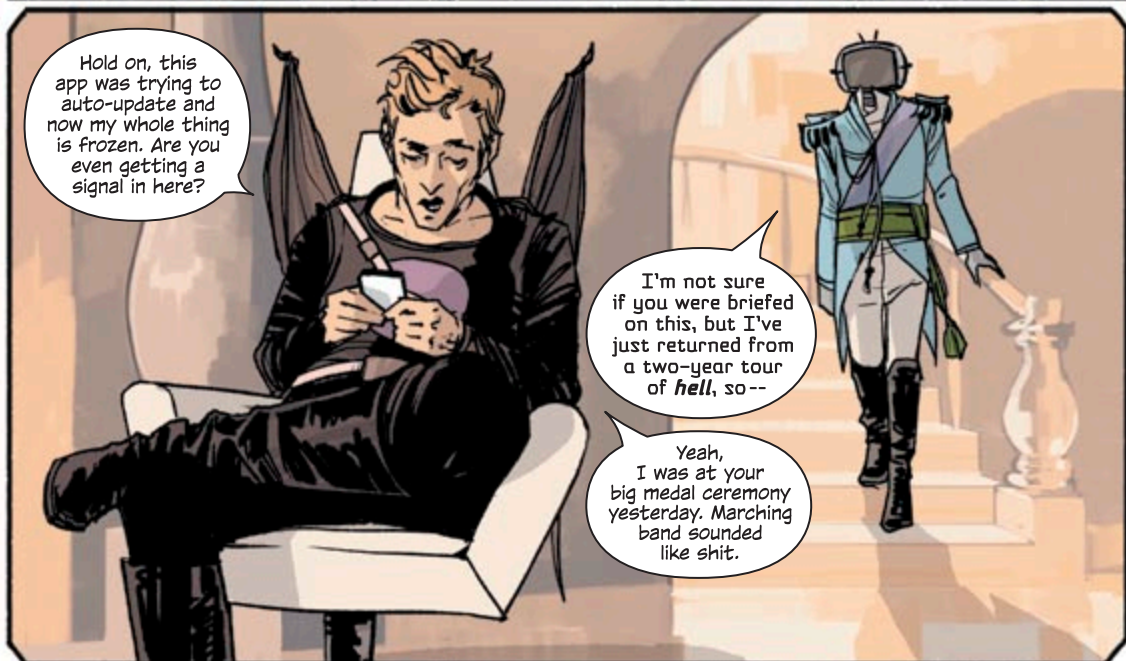
Deeper!







May I help you?



Hold on, this app was trying to auto-update and now my whole thing is frozen. Are you even getting a signal in here?

I'm not sure if you were briefed on this, but I've just returned from a two-year tour of *hell*, so--

Yeah, I was at your big medal ceremony yesterday. Marching band sounded like shit.



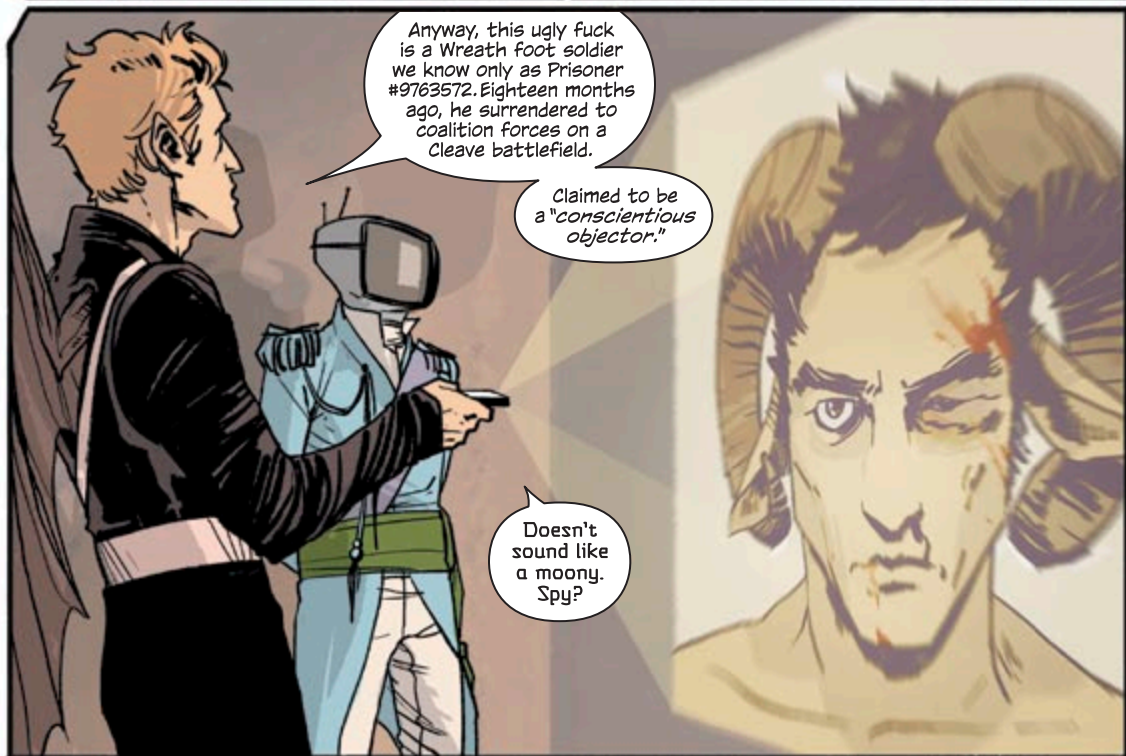
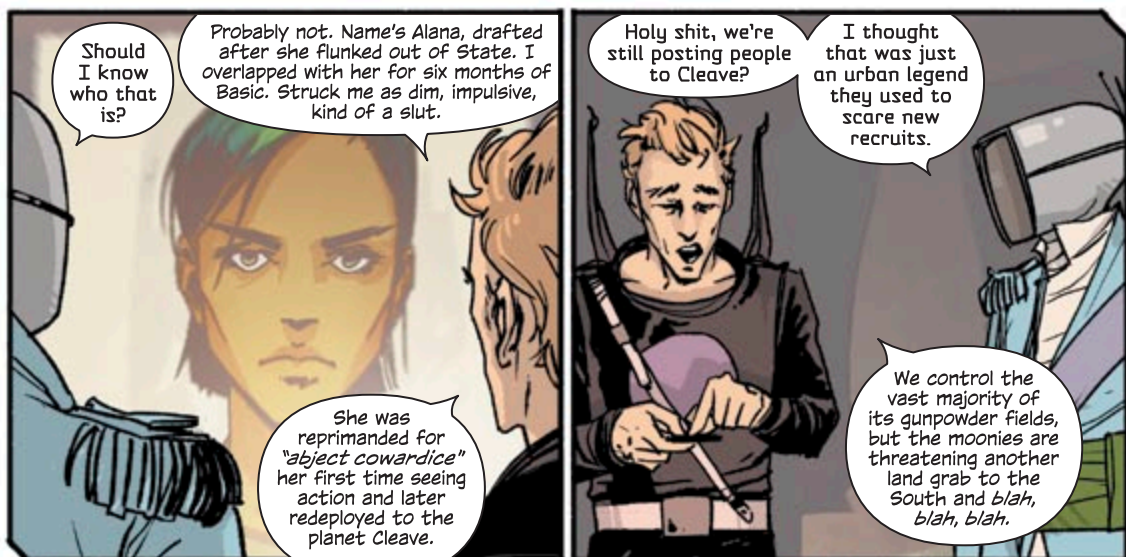
Special Agent Gale, Secret Intelligence.

Sorry, am I supposed to genuflect or something? I'm not up on my royalist protocols.

Look, what is this all about?



Her.





So the moony kidnapped her?

We hoped.

But then three months ago, an ATM camera on civilian turf caught this image.



Pregnant? I didn't even know your people could *mate* with their kind, much less reproduce.

Yeah, I've heard about female soldiers of ours being forced to give birth to half-breeds in the rape camps on Wreath, but those things usually died within a year.

Can't imagine our turncoat's love child will live much longer in the wild.

Love child? Surely, he forced himself on her.



Take a look at their hands. Matching rings. Apparently, it's a tradition on Wreath.

A *wedding* tradition.



You're saying she *willingly* laid down with one of those monsters?

Why?



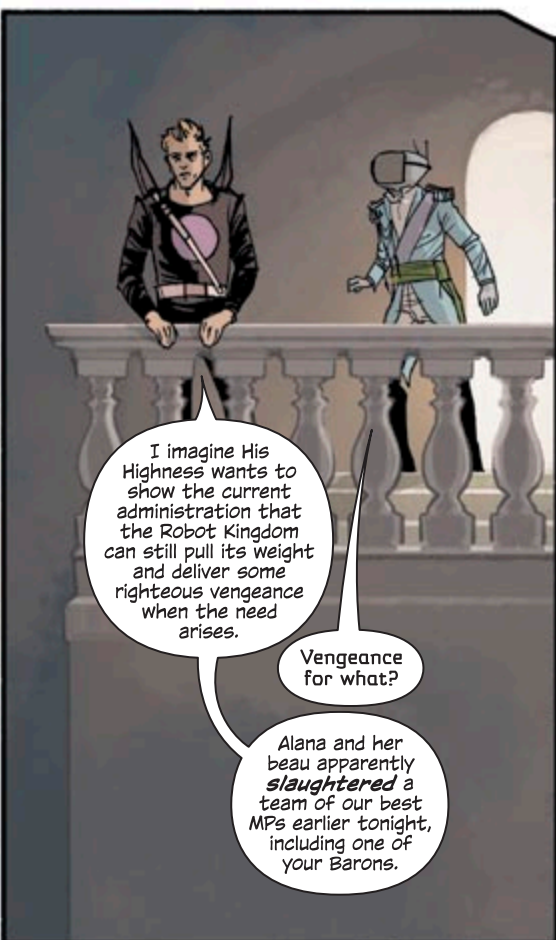
We don't know, but your father would like *you* to deal with the situation before anyone finds out.



The **King** sent you?

But... I've already served my time! I just survived one of the worst sneak attacks in military history!

And yet, surviving isn't exactly **winning**.



I imagine His Highness wants to show the current administration that the Robot Kingdom can still pull its weight and deliver some righteous vengeance when the need arises.

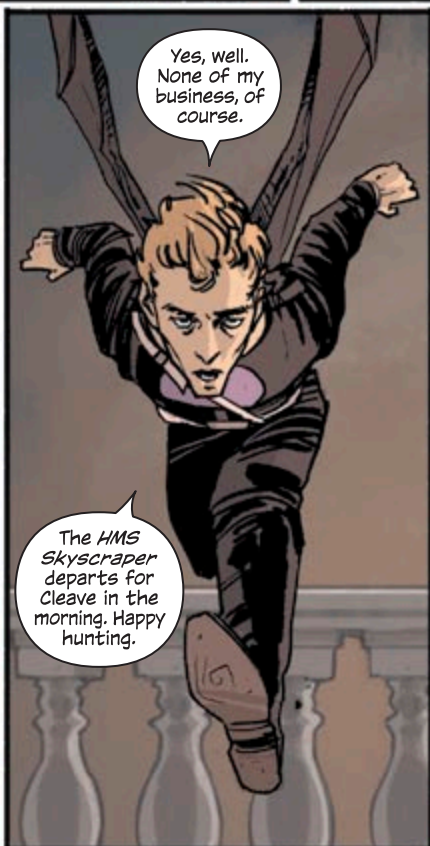
Vengeance for what?

Alana and her beau apparently **slaughtered** a team of our best MPs earlier tonight, including one of your Barons.



I don't understand.

I told my parents I wanted to start a **family** this year.



Yes, well. None of my business, of course.

The **HMS Skyscraper** departs for Cleave in the morning. Happy hunting.



From my very first day, I was pursued by men.

All of them tried to hurt me, but only one managed to break my heart.





Wait, you had a dog?

I didn't know you had a dog!

Rumfer. He was run over by my school bus when I was twelve.



You called your dog Rumfer?

We're never gonna agree on a name for this kid, are we?



Let's just keep moving.

To where, exactly? That mechanic didn't leave us a deed to a new safehouse, did he? A safehouse with a soaking tub?



Surprising no one, he died for nothing.

It's just a worthless old map.

Wait, a map? Like, to *treasure*?



I told you, it's nothing.



"The Rocketship Forest?"

Are you kidding me?



This is exactly what we've been waiting for!

Alana, it's not real.

Says who? Most of this planet is still uncharted, even by the natives. And we've both seen weirder shit out here!



Even if spaceships *did* grow on trees, where would we take one?

There's no escaping this war. It's poisoned every last inch of the galaxy.



Then we find *another* galaxy. I've heard about draft dodgers getting offered sanctuary...

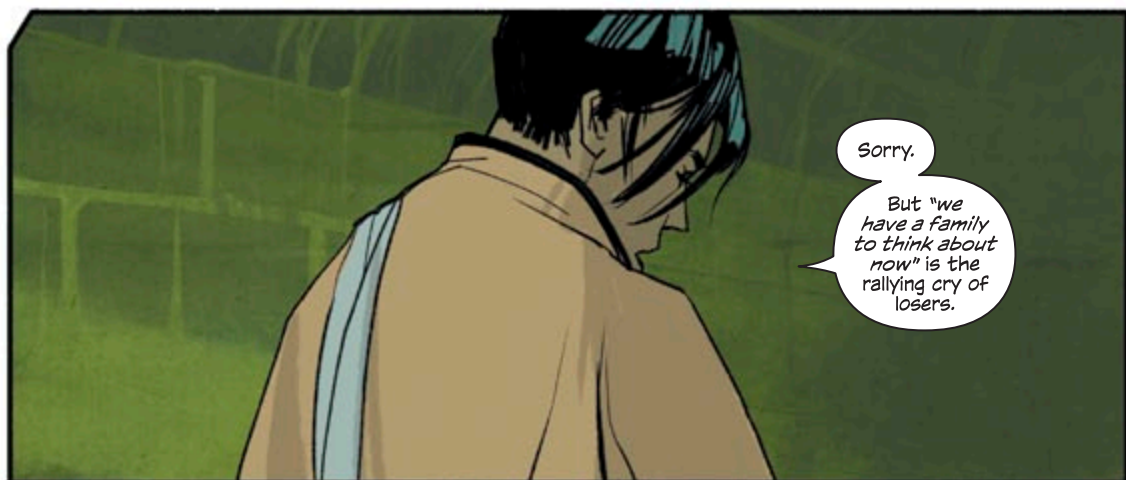
We're not draft dodgers, we're *deserters*. There's a difference.

Face it, our only choice is to lay low and stay out of trouble. We have a family to think about n--



Don't!

Don't you ever say those words to me!



Sorry.

But "we have a family to think about now" is the rallying cry of losers.



My old man threw his life away working a job he hated so he could "take care of his family."

In the end, it just turned him into a monster who treated us like crap the few times he was actually around.

So what is it that you want, Alana?



I want to show our girl the universe.

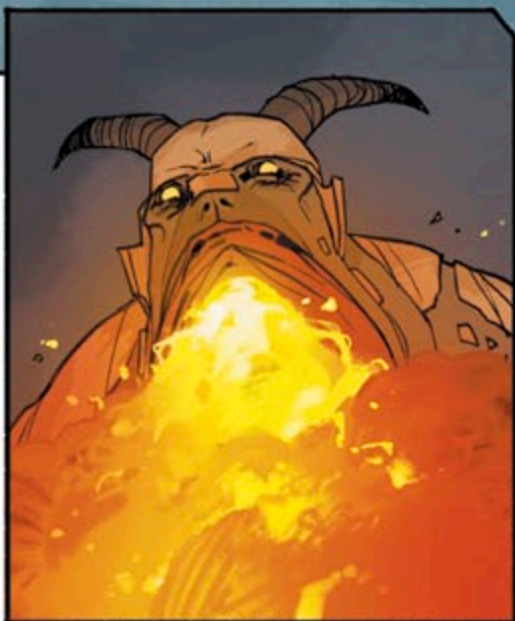


He just couldn't say no to her.

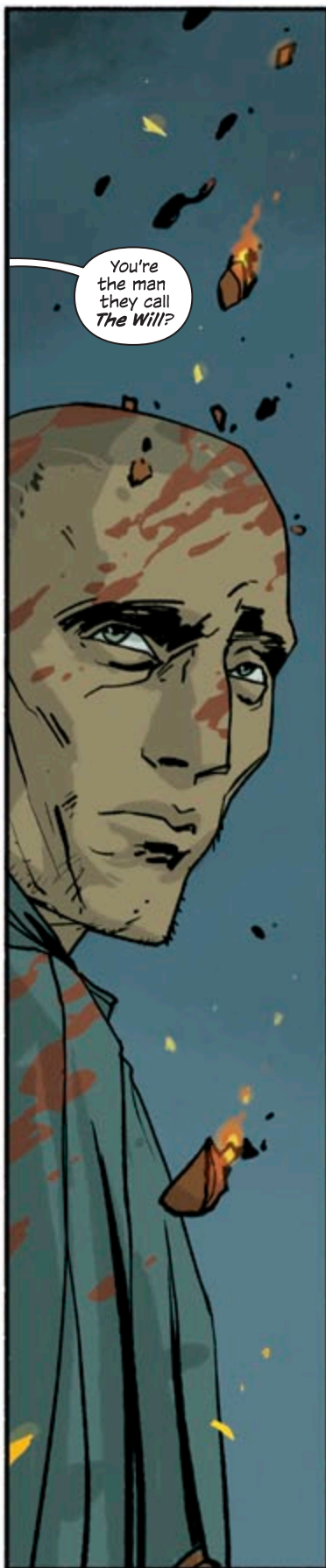


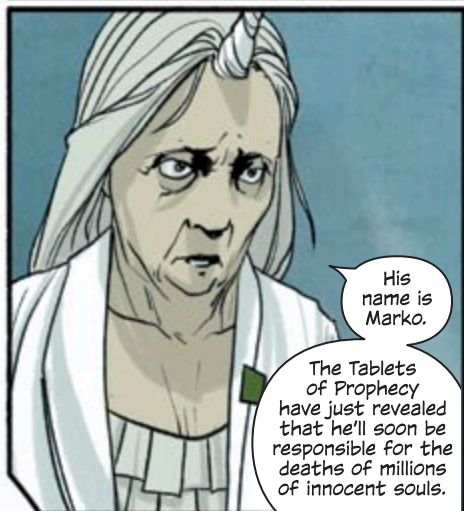
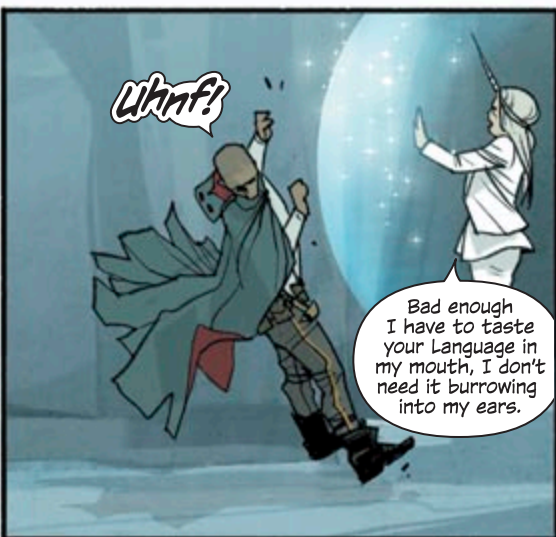
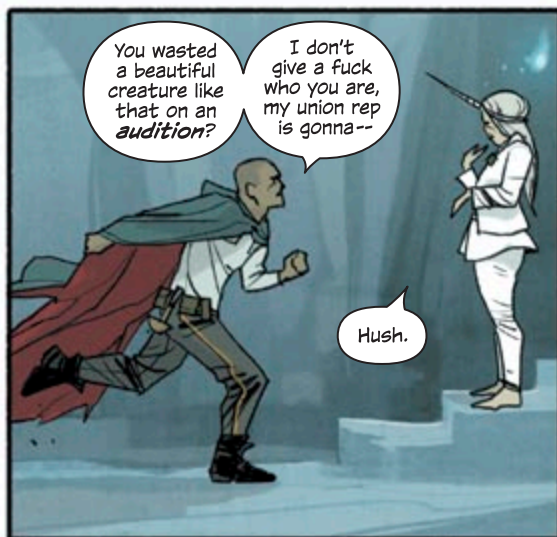


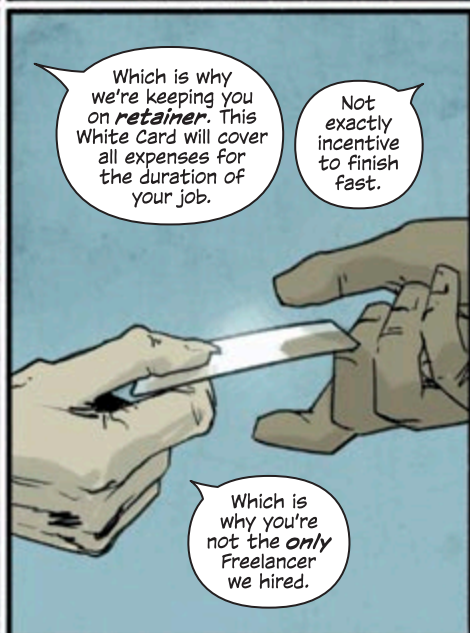
RAAAAR











One last thing. If our intelligence is accurate, your targets may have already sired **offspring** together.

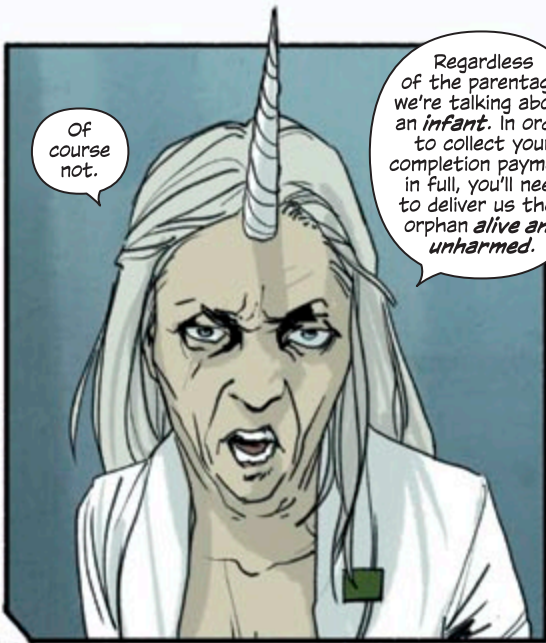


And?

You want me to drown the mongrel after I do its folks?



Of course not.



Regardless of the parentage, we're talking about an **infant**. In order to collect your completion payment in full, you'll need to deliver us their orphan **alive and unharmed**.



Good luck, The Will.



What kind of assholes bring a kid into worlds like these?



Boom.



Looks like a regular old forest to me.

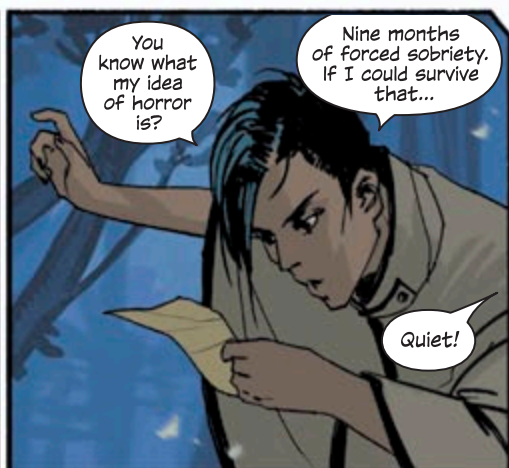
That's because it is. But if I'm reading this thing right, the Rocketship Forest should be just beyond the next valley, on the other side of something called the Uncanny Bridge.

Excellent, so we're trusting our future to the map a disreputable snitch likely tore out of the back of some overdue library book.



Honestly, we shouldn't be traveling after dark.

This is when the *Horrors* come out.









Thought I heard something.

It's not fair. The frontline was on the other side of the planet last year.

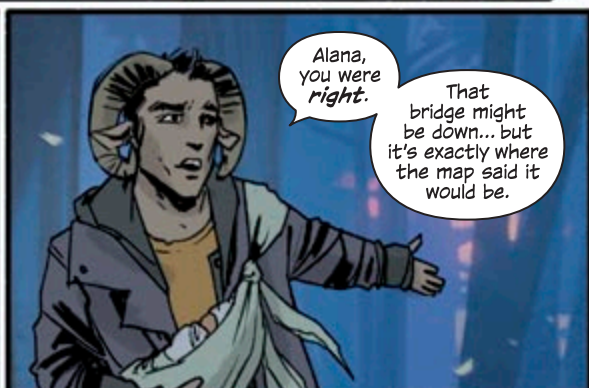
How are both of our armies already fighting *here*?



Alana...

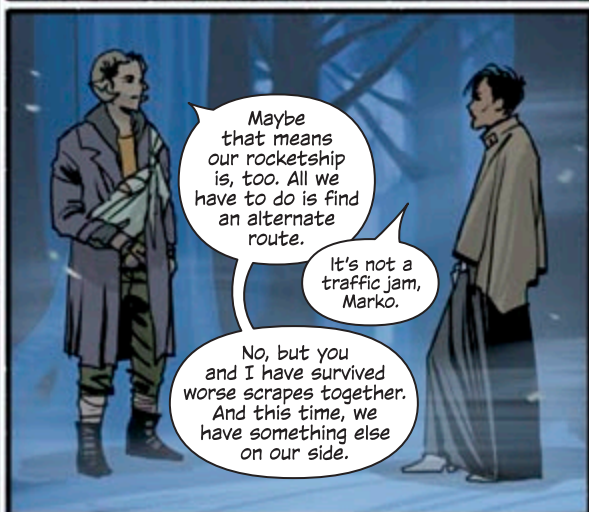
I know, okay?

I was stupid to think we could ever outrun this retarded fucking war!



Alana, you were *right*.

That bridge might be down... but it's exactly where the map said it would be.



Maybe that means our rocketship is, too. All we have to do is find an alternate route.

It's not a traffic jam, Marko.

No, but you and I have survived worse scrapes together. And this time, we have something else on our side.



We have Hope.



If you think I'm calling my daughter that, I want a divorce.

My name is Hazel.



Seriously?

Too corny?

I started out as an idea, but I ended up something more.

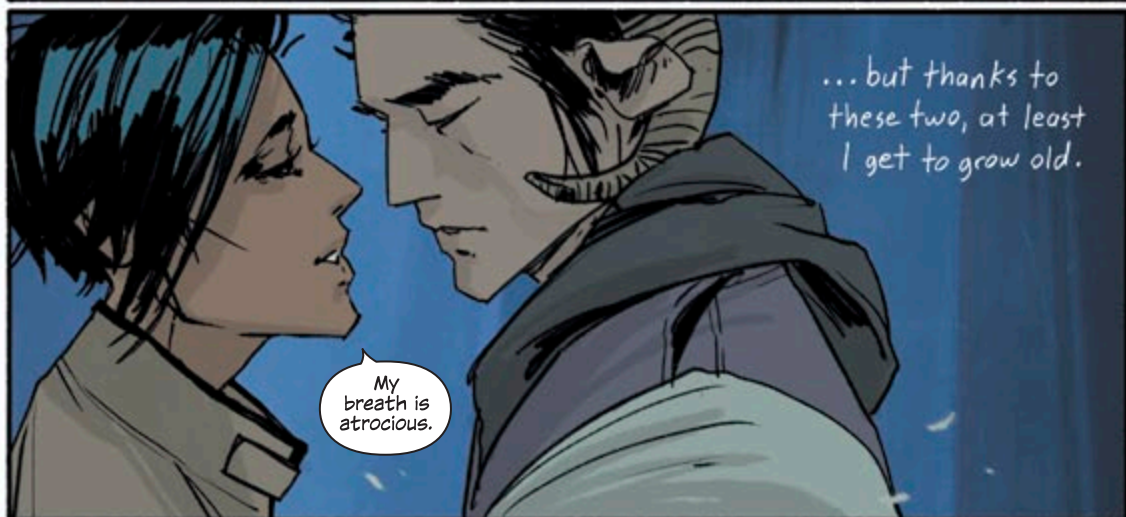


Not much more, to be honest. It's not like I grow up to become some great war hero or any sort of all-important savior...

Well, I do like something with an H.

We're getting close.

It's on the tip of my tongue.



...but thanks to these two, at least I get to grow old.

My breath is atrocious.

Not everybody does.



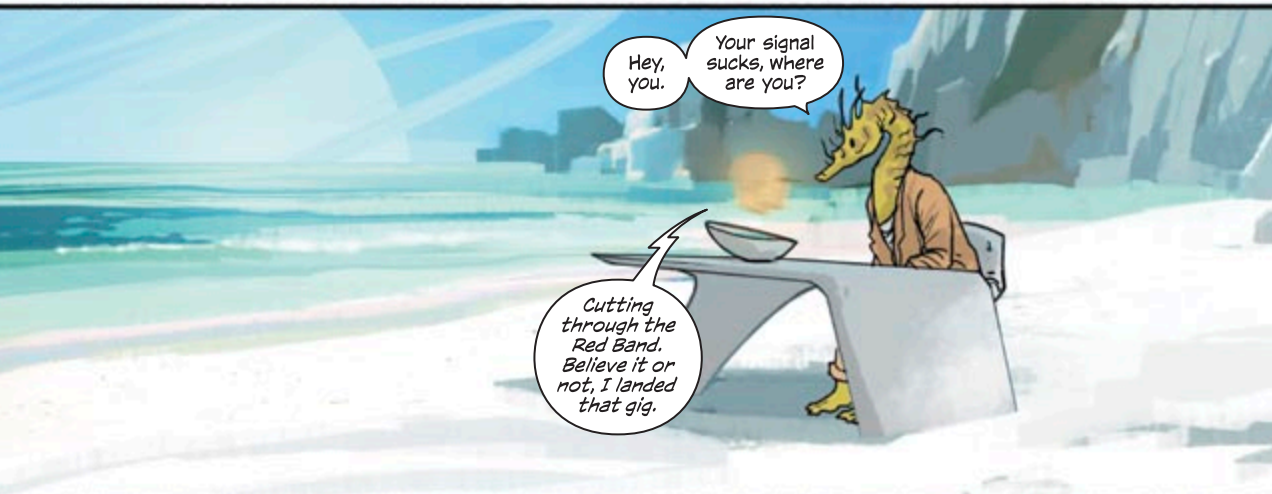
end chapter one




CHAPTER
TWO



Phone:
call my
agent.







Actually, against
all odds, I'd been alive
three whole days.

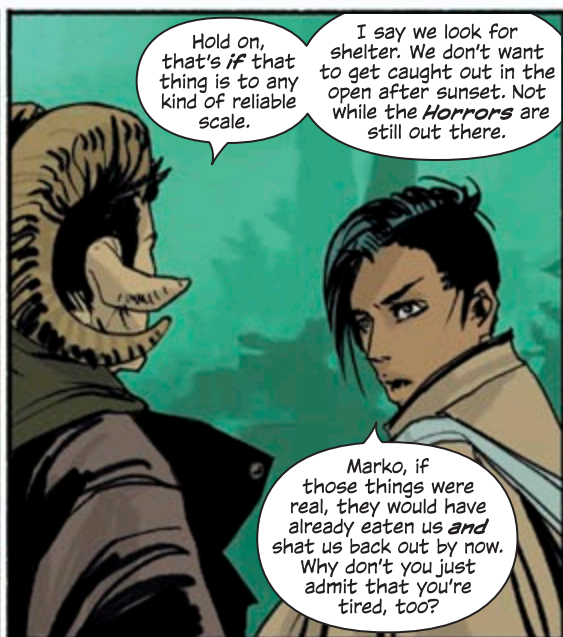
This is
what I get
for marrying a
vegetarian!

Even
the goddamn
plants want
us dead!

My family's quest
for Cleave's mythical
Rocketship Forest had
sent us doubling back
into its all-too-real
Endless Woods.







If there's an opposite of a honeymoon,
it's the week after a couple's
first child is born.



I love our
girl. Don't you
love the way
she smells?

mhm

Don't
you...
just...?

No matter how hard they try,
no matter how pure their
intentions...



... everything will
go wrong.



hmmk

And that's when
the gawkers
show up.





*From far and wide they
come to inspect the
hapless new parents.*

Welcome
to Cleave,
Your
Majesty!

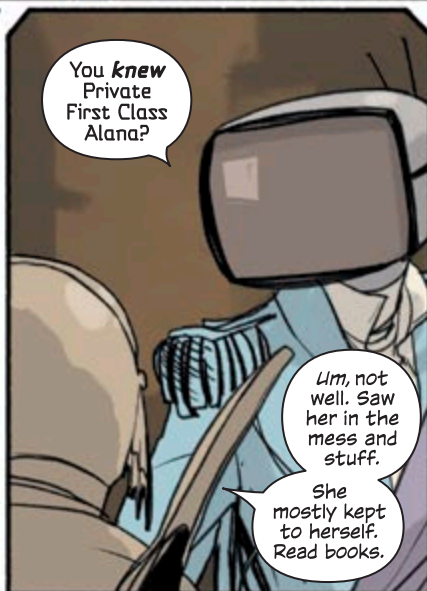
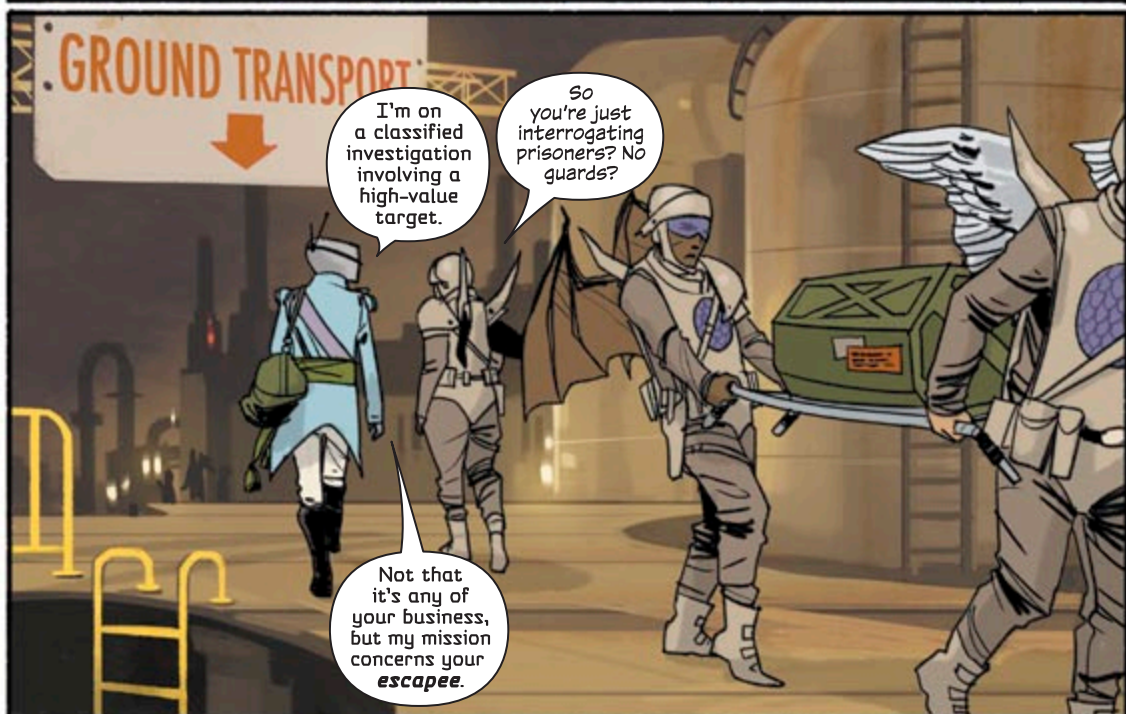


Lance Corporal
McHenry, 372nd
Company, at your
disposal.

How
was the
trip in from
Landfall,
sir?

*The nice ones
bring food.*

Dreadful.
I'd rather
fly commercial
than another
one of those
godforsaken
things.







Whuzzuh?



Alana,
we have
to go.
Now.

What...
what's wrong
with Hazel?
I've never heard
her cry like
this.

We've been
asleep for hours,
she's probably
starving.



No.
She
sounds
scared.

KLICK



Something's here.

Then we run.



Too late for that.

We have to count on our *rings* to make whatever's out there understand.



If you can hear my voice, we mean you no harm, and... and we apologize if we have trespassed on your land or done anything to offend you.

My wife and I may *look* like the armies that have invaded this world, but we are *not* like them. We have renounced violence in every form.

Most forms.



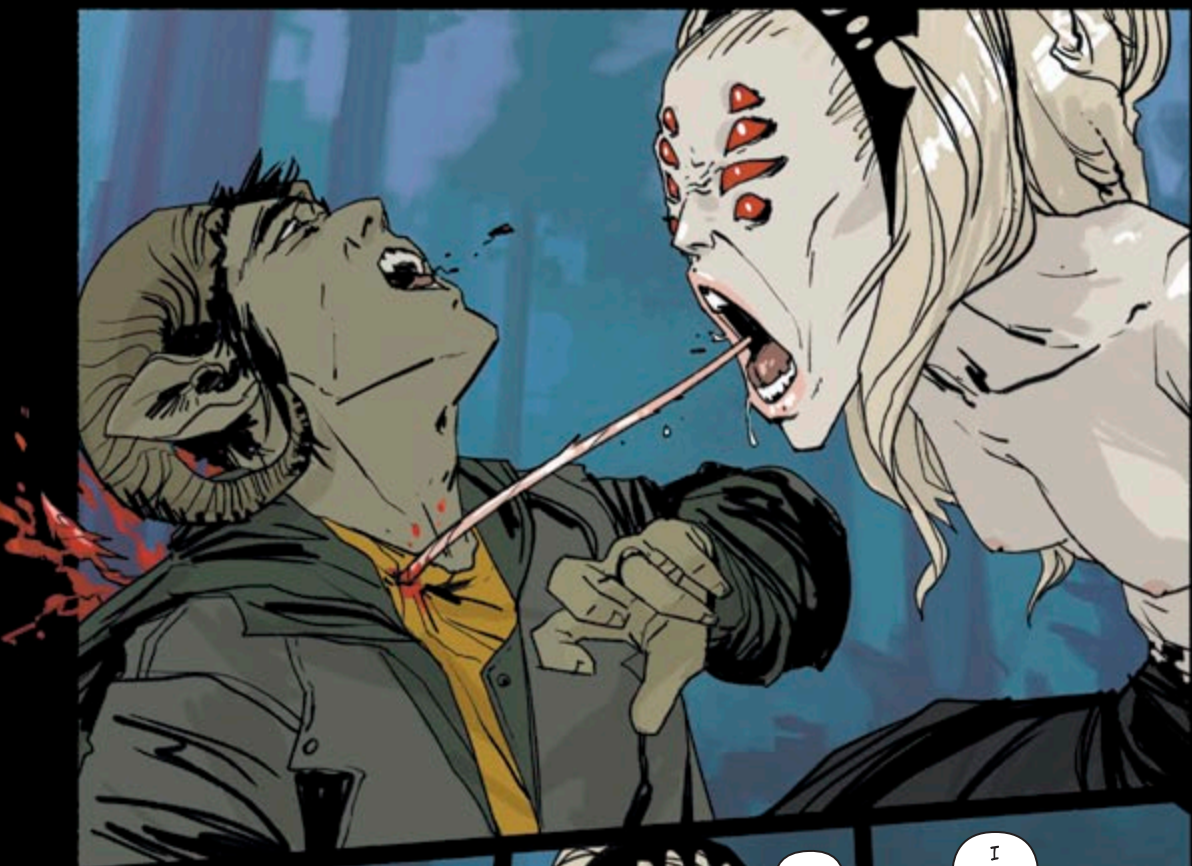
I lay down my weapon as a gesture of good faith.


Please, may my family pass in peace?











Not with
a *stun* gun,
you won't.

Sorry,
sister.



I know a
thing or two
about this
game.



Then shut
up and,
and kill me
already!

I will.

But you'll be
relieved to know
my employers have
requested that I
bring them your
creepy mutt
*unharm*ed.



Sorry about
doing your
baby daddy in
front of you
like that.

For what it's
worth, sounds
like he was quite
the vicious piece
of shit back
in the day.



You're
lying.

I told you, if
you want to scare
me, you'll have to
do better than a
Heartbreaker.

That
thing would
barely break
my *skin*.



Maybe.

But it'd
be more than
enough to
kill *her*.



You wouldn't.



You don't think I'd do whatever it takes to save my only child from ending up with a *cunt* like you?

Easy, let's all just take a deep breath and give this some--



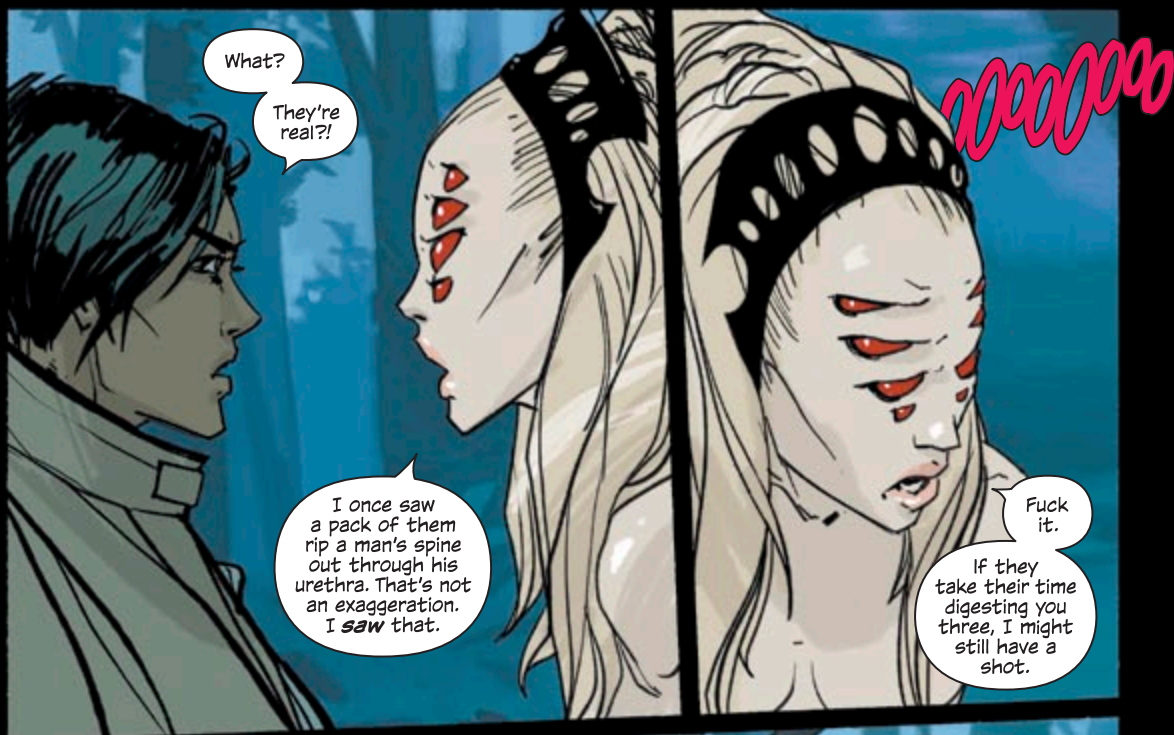
Damn, bitch.



What is that? Stop making that noise!

It's not me.

It's Horrors.





Baby!



Baby,
baby,
baby.



Baby,
please.

We need
you. They're
coming and, and
we need you.
I need--

Hello?



AAAA!

Hello?

Hello?

Hello?

Hello?

Hello?

Hello,
we've been
watching
you.


Looks like you could use a hand.



end chapter two



CHAPTER
THREE



My mom once said
the hardest part of
parenting is knowing
when to ask
for help.

Please...
please don't
kill me.

Please
don't orphan
my girl.

Even the most independent of new parents will need backup weathering the occasional shitstorm.

Relax, your husband's not dead.

Not yet, anyway.

It doesn't take a village to raise children, it takes a whole galaxy—former friends, random acquaintances, complete strangers...

How do you know?

How do you think, lady?

... even other children.

We're fucking *ghosts*.



No, you're... you're **Horrors**.

Is that seriously what you guys call indigenous peoples?

That's kind of racist, don't you think?



You're monsters.
Marko said you **slaughter** innocent men and women.

Nah, we can **project** some nasty stuff into outsiders' heads, but that's just an illusion.



After us locals die, we get to live on as "spiritual defenders of Cleave."

But clearly, that's a suck-ass evolutionary plan, since your two armies had no problem wiping our people off the map.



I swear to you, we have nothing to do with this war.

We just want to take care of our--

hzi...



...how's... hazel...?



She's fine.

She's got the only decent man in the universe for a daddy.



He looks like the ones who burned our village.

Just 'cause we can understand these two doesn't mean they're good guys.

But he's not. You heard how sweet he was with his kid, right?

Whatever, I don't wanna be here when the horned one kicks.



They can't hurt us, you big babies! We're *intangible*!

Why are you guys acting like you just died yesterday?

So... sorry...



Shut up with that. What about a spell? You said you knew *healing spells*, right?

...no... only one ingredient... for wounds this bad...

What? What do you need me to get?

...*show*...



Marko, it's
sweltering
out.
I, I don't
even know
where to find
water.

I can
get you
what you
need.



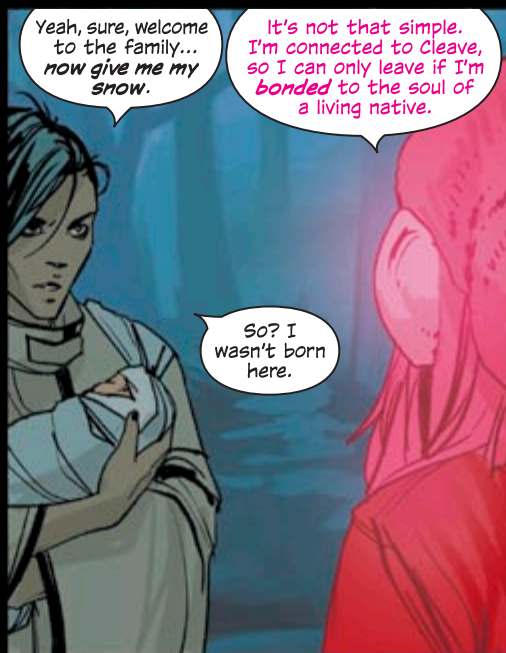
For a
price.



Talk
fast.

You two are
trying to find
a way off my
stupid planet,
right?

*Take
me with
you.*



Yeah, sure, welcome
to the family...
*now give me my
snow.*

It's not that simple.
I'm connected to Cleave,
so I can only leave if I'm
bonded to the soul of
a living native.

So? I
wasn't born
here.



Wasn't
talking about
you.

Despite what you
may have heard,
good help isn't
all that hard
to find...

... it's just hard to find cheap.

I've come a long way to speak with you, so listen carefully.

NO PHOTOGRAPHY

My name is Prince Robot IV, and I can make life in here at least somewhat more tolerable for you.

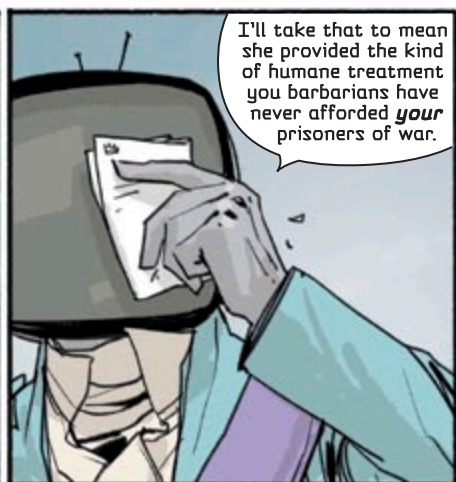
Can you understand Language?

Fiku vin mem!

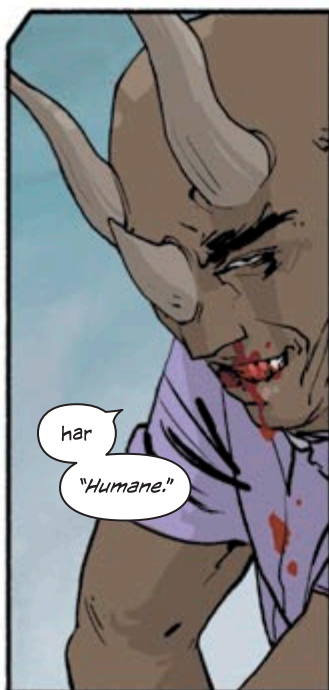
Good enough.

I'd like to ask you some questions about a **guard** who used to bring you your meals.

What do you remember about this woman?







har
"Humane."



Your
majesty!



What
the heck
are you
doing?



Commencing
my interview.

Now
be a dear
and **fuck
the fuck
off.**

Help can be nice,
but some jobs are
just too important
to delegate.



~Mmf~

This is so stupid.



No ~Mmf~ it's not. My map says there's something called the **Fort and Mountain** ~Mmf~ on our way to the Rocketship Forest.

At that elevation, there's bound to be ~Mmf~ snowfall.

Yeah, but your husband will **bleed out** by the time you lug him there.

I know a **shortcut**. All you have to do is let me hitch a ride with your kid!

Forget it, I'm not about to share my newborn with some anonymous spook from--

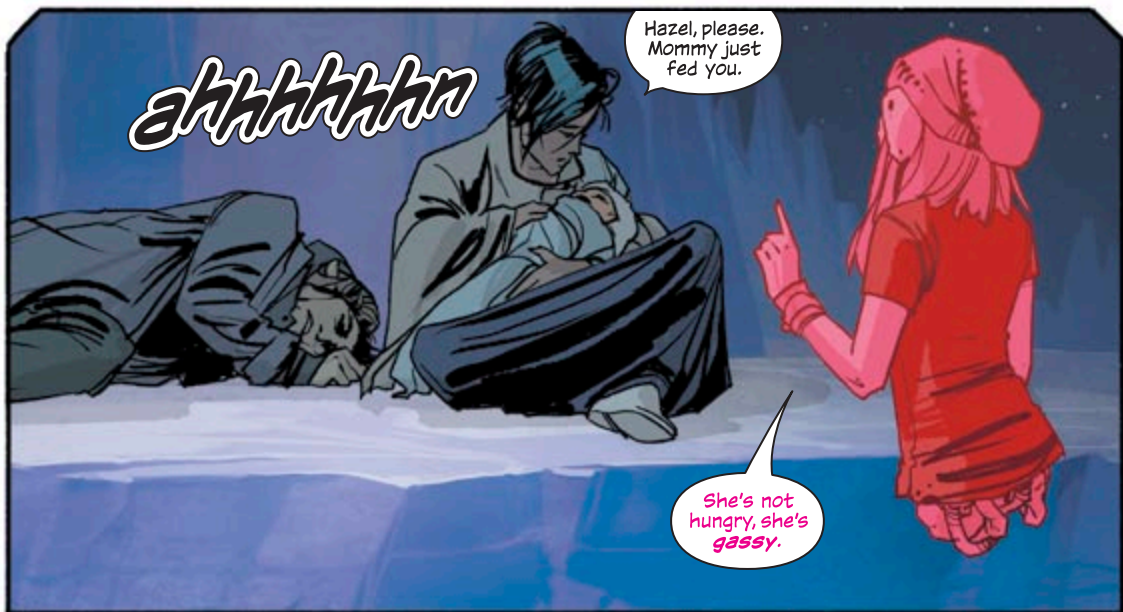
UHNH!



I'm not anonymous.

My name is Izabel.





ahhhhhhhn

Hazel, please.
Mommy just
fed you.

She's not
hungry, she's
gassy.



You've been
burping her
all wrong.

You gotta
get right
between
the wingtips
with the flat
of your palm.
Don't be afraid to
really whack the
crap out of her.



ahhhhhn...



whap



Oldest
of seven
here.

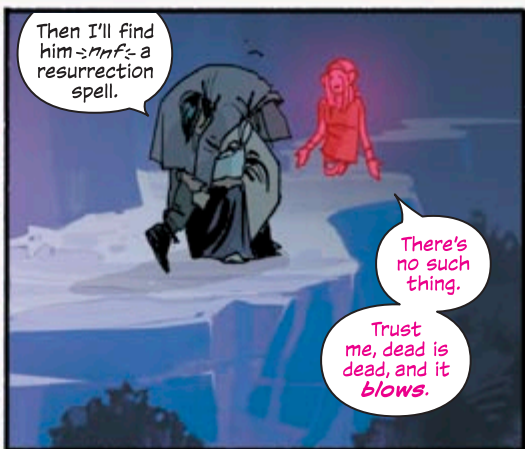
I'm
guessing you
were an only
child?



I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I can't trust my only child to someone I just met.

I'd have to discuss it with my husband before--

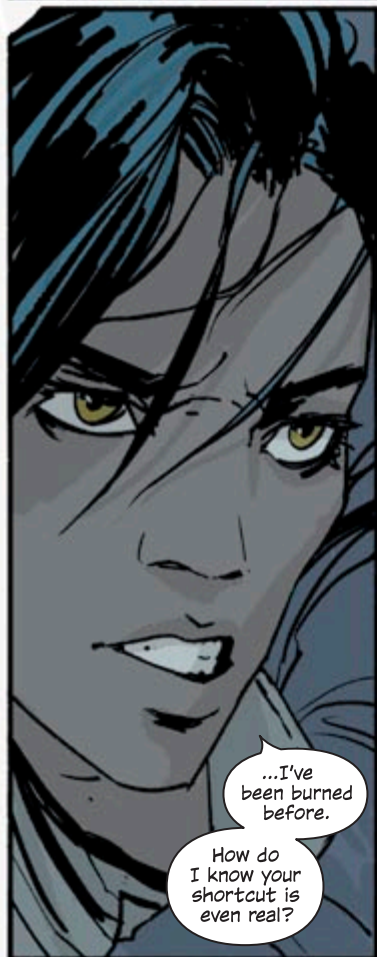
Dude, your husband is gonna die!



Then I'll find him--~~mf~~ a resurrection spell.

There's no such thing.

Trust me, dead is dead, and it **blows**.



...I've been burned before.

How do I know your shortcut is even real?



I'll show you.

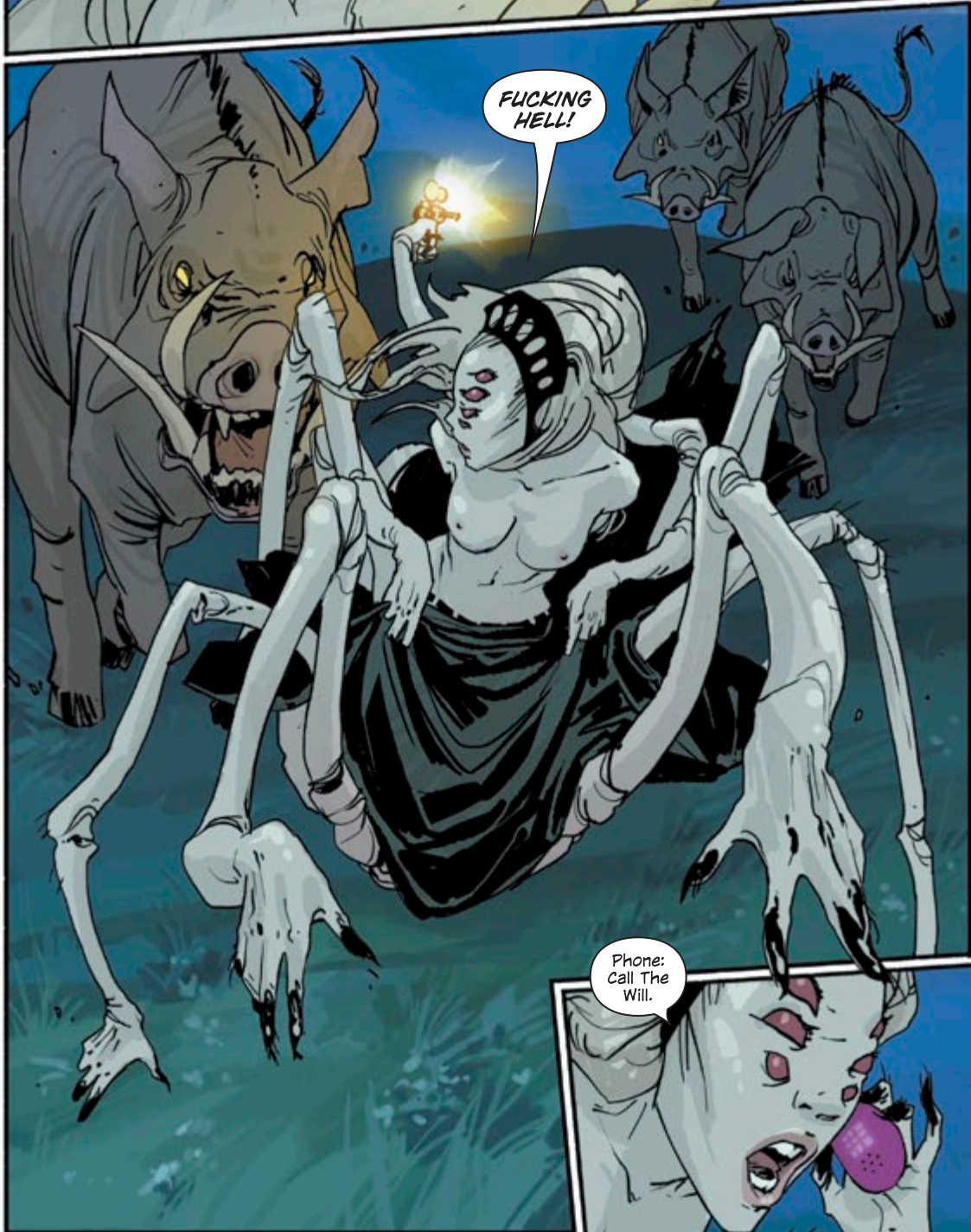
Come on, follow me!

Into the ominous cave of doom?



Or you can take your chances out here.

But fair warning, not all the locals are as awesome as me.





Incoming
call from...
The Stalk.

No.

No
way.

I'm never
picking up for
that bitch
again.



LYING





What
do you
want?

Nice
to hear
you, too,
Will.

How's
my favorite
duo these
days?



We're
busy, real
busy.

I bet. Look,
I found those two
deserters and their
gross kid, the ones
Wreath High Command
is offering a boat-
load for?

So you're
calling to
gloat?



I found
them, but I
haven't captured
them...yet.

This planet
is trickier
than I thought.
I could use a
partner.

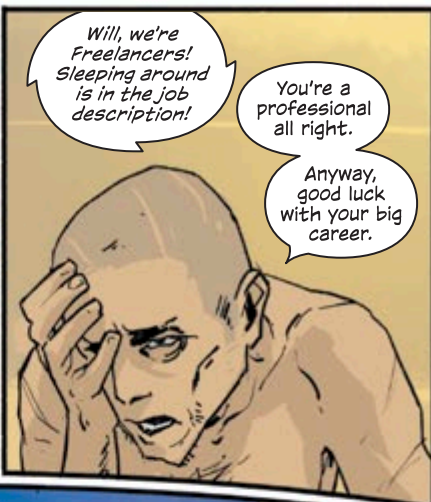
Actually,
maybe it'd be
best if you and I
just kept our
distance.



What...?



This isn't about the Dortminster assignment, is it?



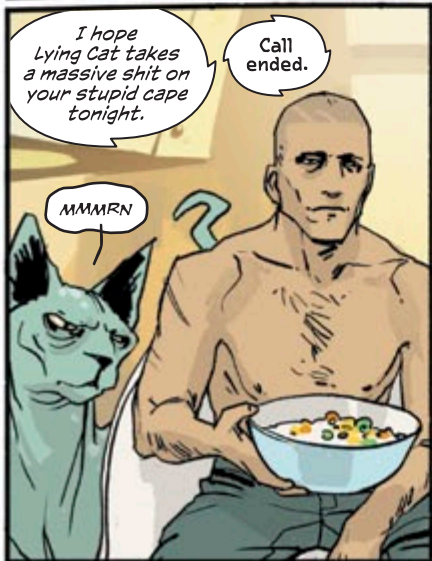
Will, we're Freelancers! Sleeping around is in the job description!

You're a professional all right.

Anyway, good luck with your big career.



Oh, fuck you, you self-righteous piece of... bald!



I hope Lying Cat takes a massive shit on your stupid cape tonight.

Call ended.

MMMRN



Women.



Right
this way,
ladies.



You do
realize you're
the only one here
who's no longer
flammable,
right?

Chill, this
inferno is just
another *mental
mirage* we use
to mess with
trespassers.

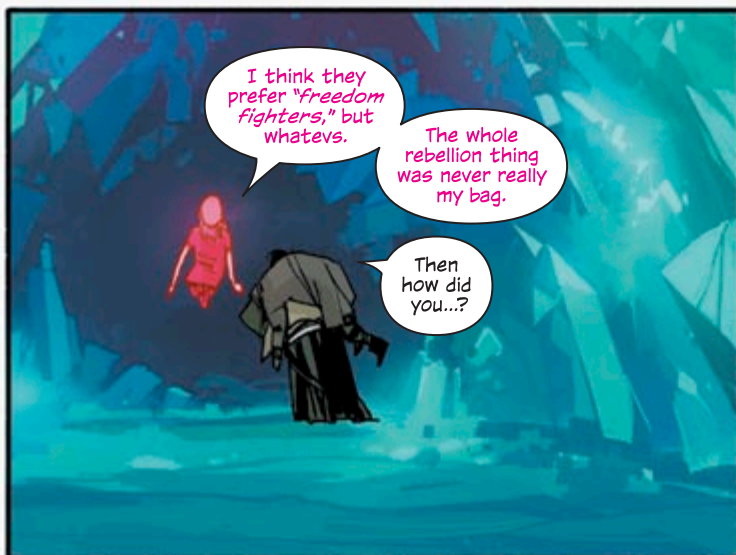


But if you let me
tag along, I can
help you navigate
these Hopscotch
Tunnels.

My parents
built them
to hide the
resistance from
invaders like
you guys.



Back up,
your family were
terrorists?



I think they prefer "freedom fighters," but whatevs.

The whole rebellion thing was never really my bag.

Then how did you...?



...get my ticket punched?

Stepped on a random landmine. Don't know whose.



I guess it's my patriotic duty to stick around and, like, haunt the enemy, but my heart was barely in the fight when I was alive.

Just gimme a little peace and quiet already, you know?



... This soul-bonding thing. Will it hurt my girl?



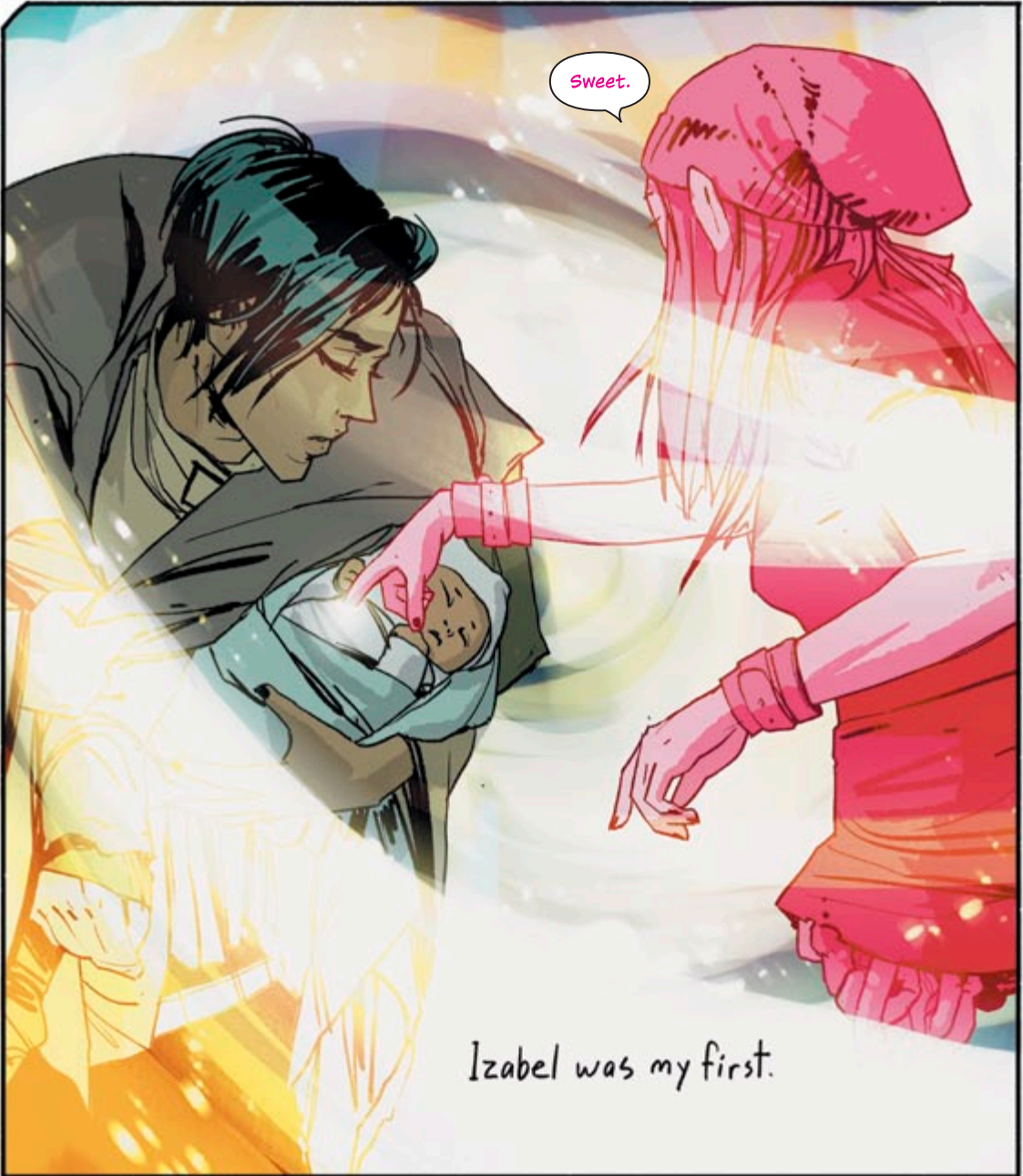
Only on the day it ends.



Rich kids get nannies, but
the rest of us have babysitters.

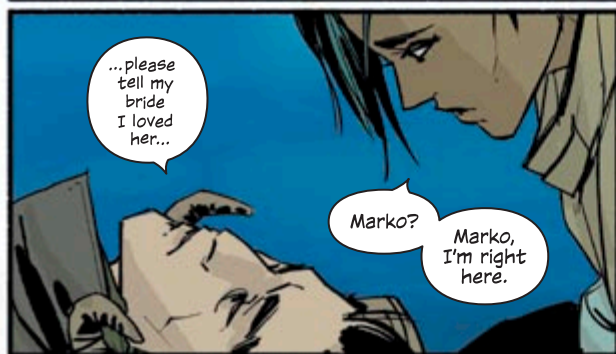
Fine.

Just
make it fast,
please.



Sweet.

Izabel was my first.





Who the fuck is Gwendolyn?

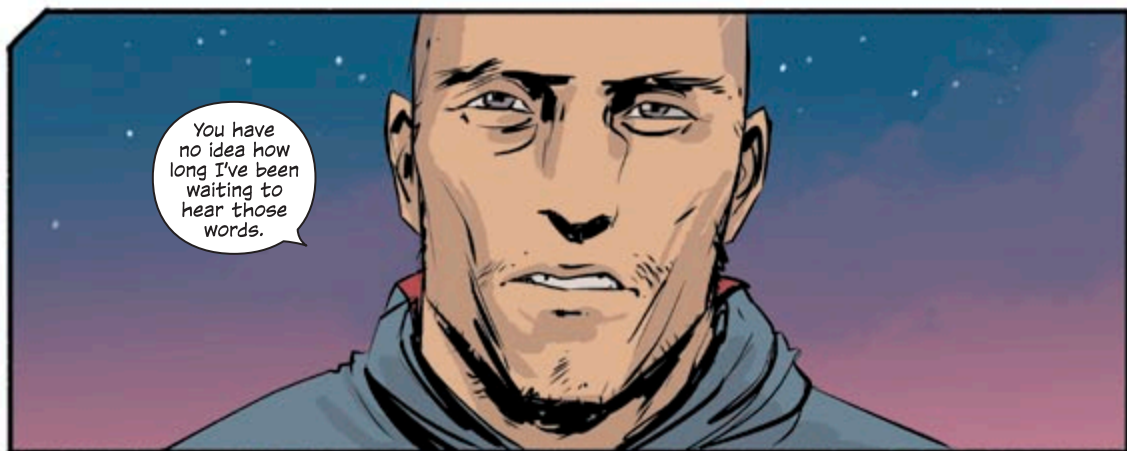
end chapter three



CHAPTER
FOUR

**WELCOME TO
SEXTILLION!**







That's what Mom was beginning to realize on the other side of the galaxy, where my father was still fighting for his life.

Why isn't anything happening?

With the help of our new sitter, my parents and I had traveled halfway across the planet Cleave in search of a miracle.

This magic crap takes time, Alana.

But as long as the snow keeps up, I think your husband's gonna pull through.

Hrr.

Not if I cut his heart out first.

The trip had not been without complications.



You're still pissed he was rambling about some other girl?

It wasn't some other girl, it was his *bride*.

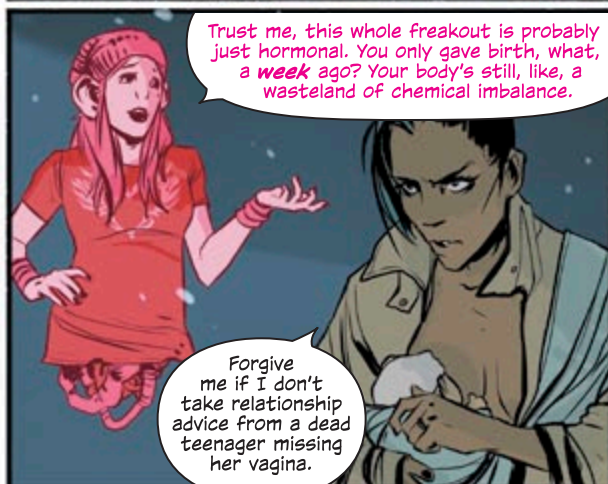
He never told me he used to be *married*.



So what?

He's good to you and Hazel now, isn't he? Who cares if he's got history with some other broad?

If Marko could hide this from me, what else is he hiding?



Trust me, this whole freakout is probably just hormonal. You only gave birth, what, a *week* ago? Your body's still, like, a wasteland of chemical imbalance.

Forgive me if I don't take relationship advice from a dead teenager missing her vagina.



Fine, you're the boss.

And you were supposed to switch boobs ten minutes ago.

AKHH!



WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!

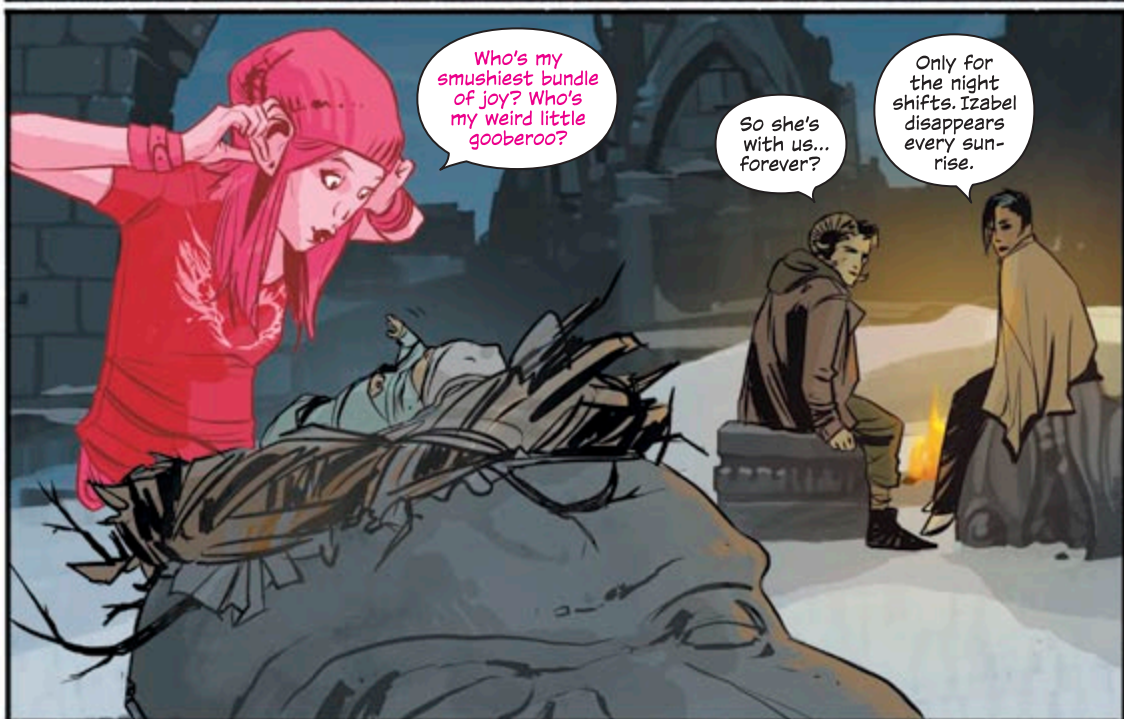


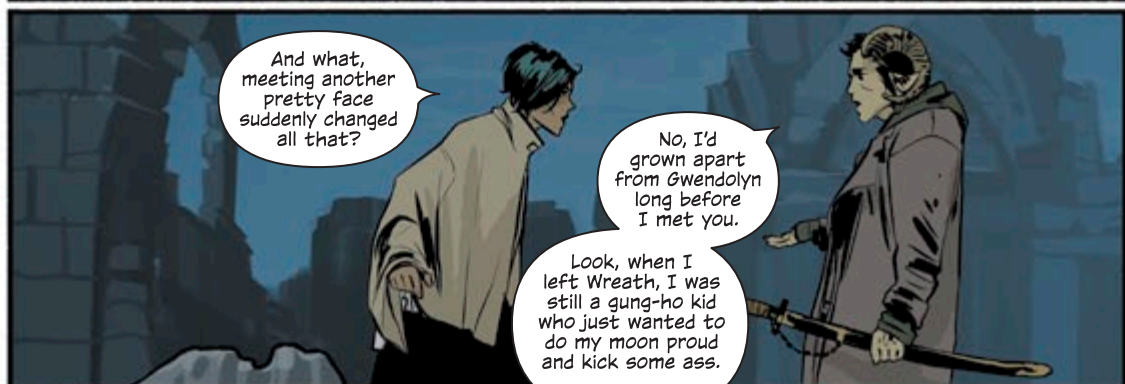














I tried!

When this all started between us, I asked how many people you'd... *been with*, and you said that part of our pasts should *stay* in the past.

I was talking about random hookups! This is your childhood fucking sweetheart! This is someone you love!



Someone I loved.

I don't know, sure sounded like you still had feelings for her.

Alana, I was delusional! I was *dying*!



But now I'm alive, and that's thanks to the last woman I ever want to be with.

You're sure?

You two don't have any "unfinished business" I should know about?



Not on my end...

...though I suppose I suppose Gwendolyn might like her *rings* back someday.



You gave me another woman's wedding ring?!



Actually, they belonged to Gwen's **grandparents**. They spoke two different dialects of Wreath's native tongue, so they had their rings enchanted with a **translator spell**.

I thought you and I might be able to put them to better use.

Great, so we can add "**scorned woman with missing family jewels**" to the long list of people who want us dead?



Alana, I'm so sorry. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?

Maybe.

Just tell me you weren't lying when you said I'm the hottest chick you've ever slept with.



I swear!

Gwendolyn may have been tall, but her hips were boyish, not womanly like yours.



You know, for a pacifist, you sure beg to get stabbed a lot.



DING



The hell are we?

The Inner Core.

This is where we keep our most valuable employees, all handpicked from camps across the galaxy.



Camps?

Refugees, mostly.

As soon as the wings and horns finish up with a planet, *we* start recruiting.



You decent in there, Slave Girl?

Anything but, master.



I taught her to say that.

Anyway, have fun...



Hi.







The Will wasn't the first bounty hunter to come after my parents, and he wasn't the last.



Like every Freelancer I had the misfortune to eventually meet, he was a fucking **MONSTER**.



But as my family was about to learn, some monsters are worse than others...

Thank you.





Royal Vondertank. I used to man a turret on one. Probably a half dozen guys from my side in there.

Maybe... maybe I can convince them you're a **prisoner** I captured in--

No, talking almost got us all **killed** last time.



Marko, we'll never make it back to the tunnels in time!

What other choice do we have?



The last one.

SKA-TINK



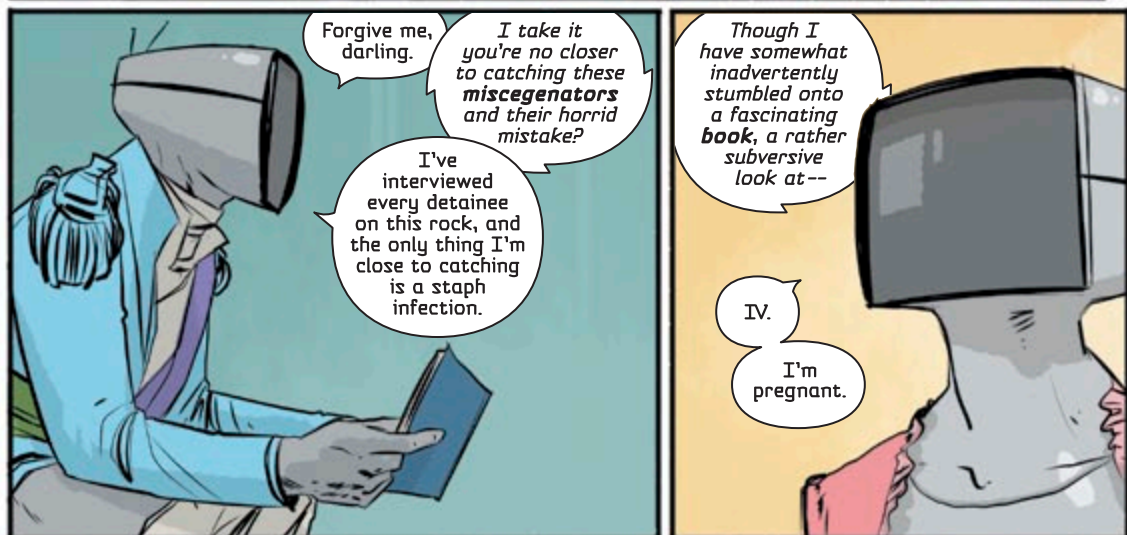
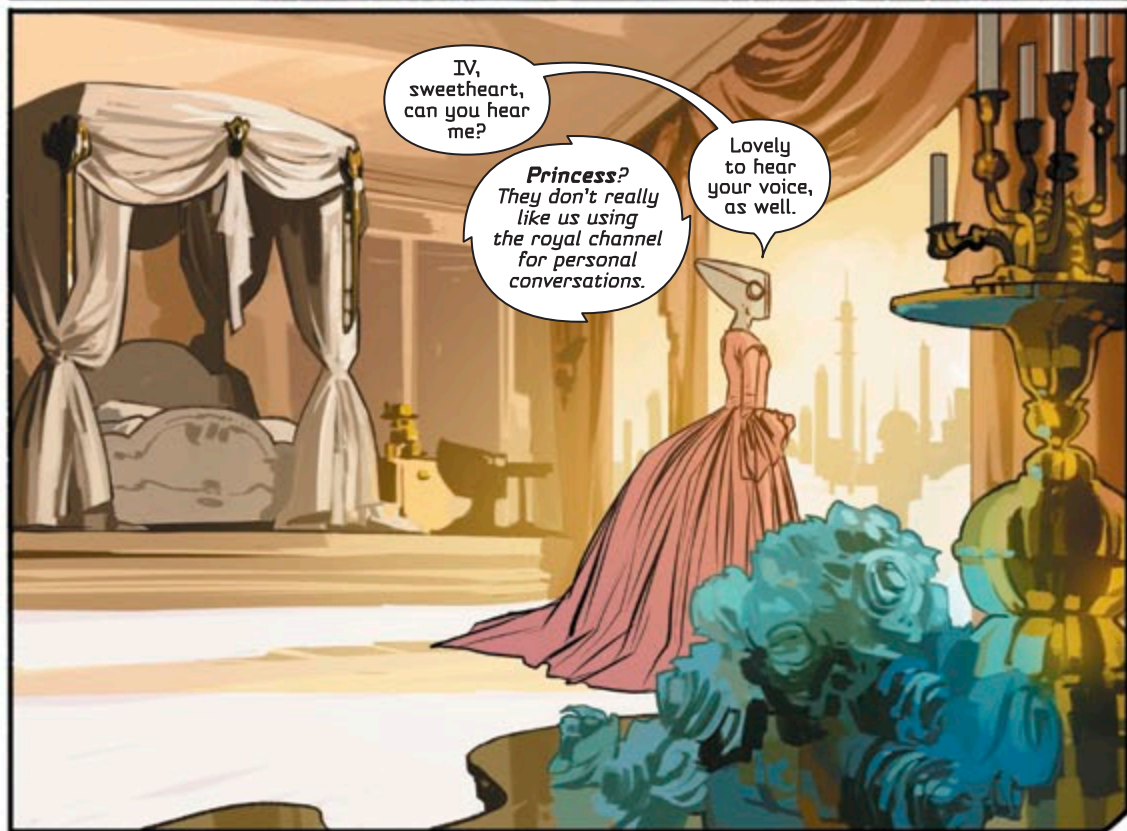
We
fight.

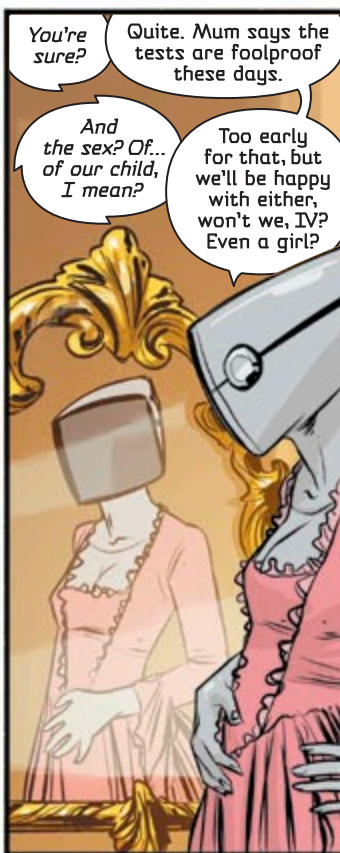
end chapter four



CHAPTER
FIVE













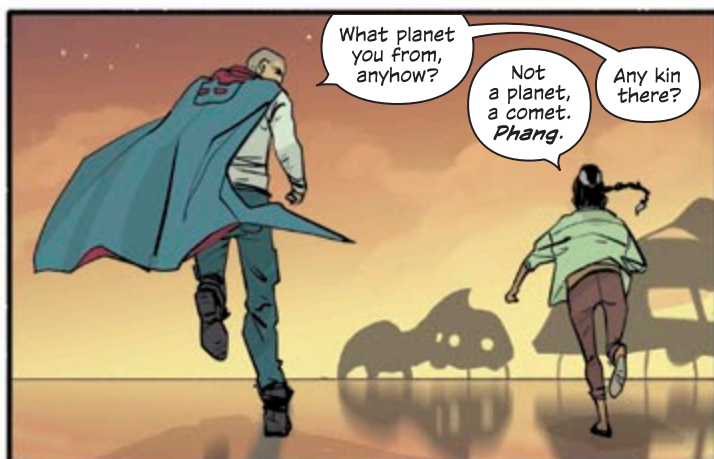












What planet
you from,
anyhow?

Not
a planet,
a comet.
Phang.

Any kin
there?



Just my
uncle.

He's the
one who sold
me to this
place.



The hell
would your
own *blood* do
something
like that?

The horns
arrested my brother
'cause they said he
was helping the
wings, even though
he wasn't.

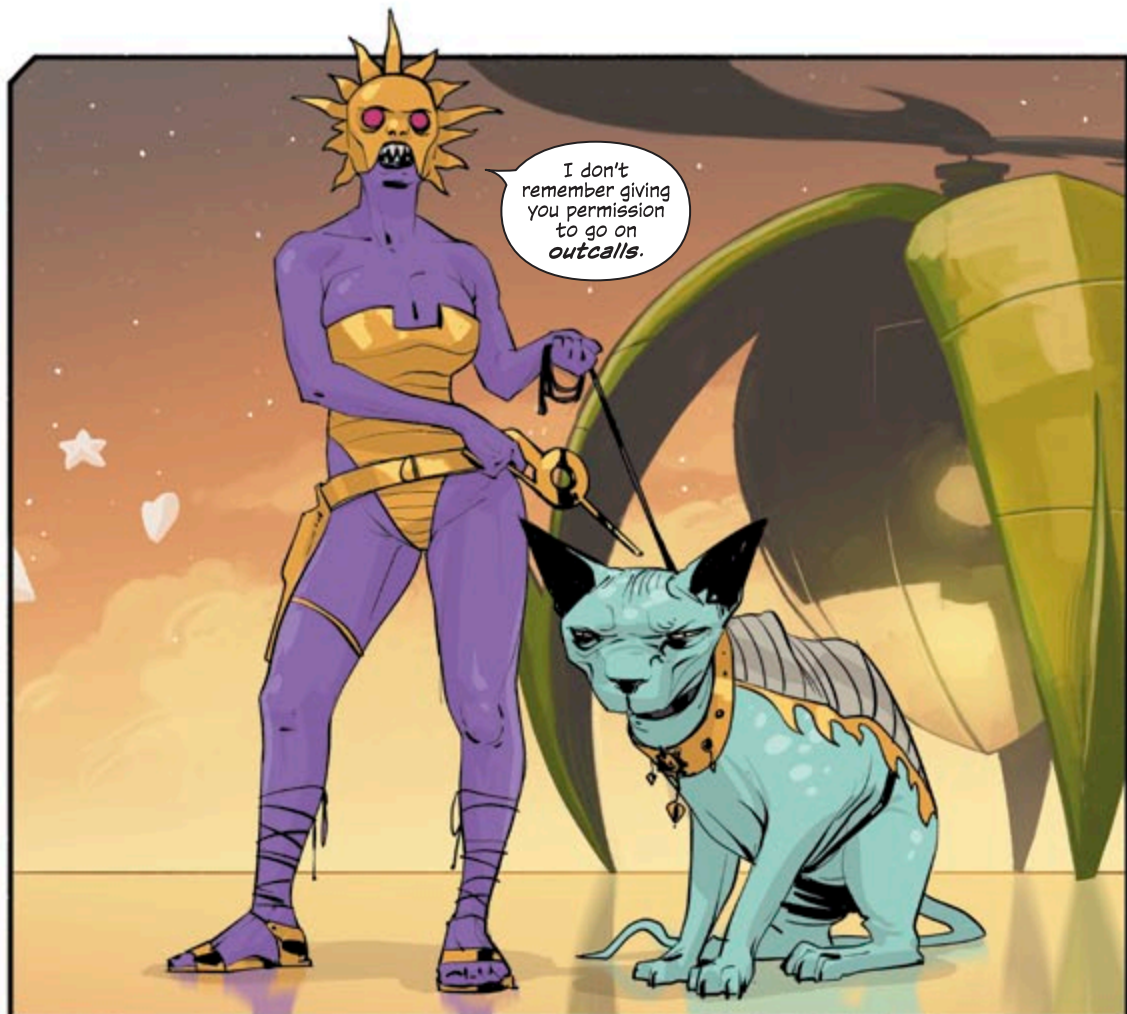
My uncle
had to pay a fine
to get him out,
but we didn't have
enough money, and
since I was too
little to work
the mines...



They said
this job would
just be cleaning,
like a maid.

I woulda
liked that
better. I don't
mind cleaning
so much.

Stop
right there,
Slave Girl!





If I gotta explain the difference, you're too far gone to follow.

All you need to understand is this: the kid comes with me.



I'm letting you leave here alive as a courtesy to your union, but if you think you can just **take** my private property...

CLICK



You pull that trigger, I rip you in half before it gets pulled a second time.

I admire your passion, but every new hire to Sextillion is injected with a **security elixir**.

Removing an employee before the end of her term will cause the potion in her arteries to **harden**. Death is painful and guaranteed.



That true?



MRRN



It's all right, The Will.

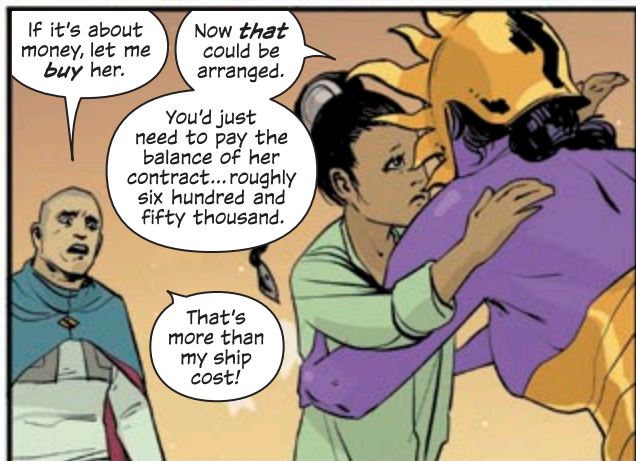
I'll be all right.



No. No, this is **bullshit**. I'll call the constables!

You mean my best customers?

The authorities know what you clearly don't, that Slave Girl would be **dead** if it weren't for us. Here she gets food, shelter, a steady income...



If it's about money, let me **buy** her.

Now **that** could be arranged.

You'd just need to pay the balance of her contract...roughly six hundred and fifty thousand.

That's more than my ship cost!



I've also confiscated the White Card you left with us for incidentals.

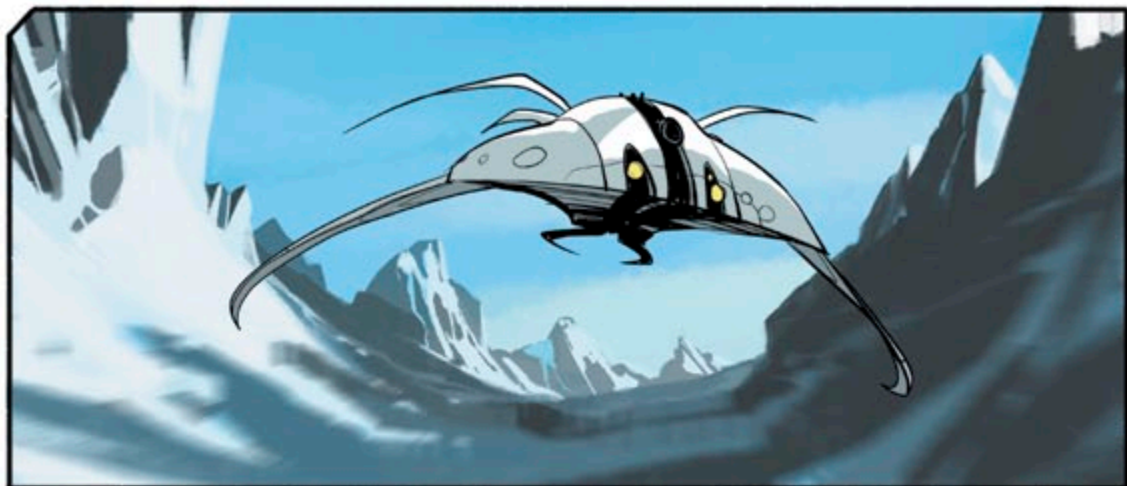
We'll call it even for the damages.



Think.



Think think think.



You're sure we can't be tracked?

Well, I ripped out this thing's Blue Box, so... pretty sure?

But the last time I drove one of these, it was a *simulator*, so my more pressing concern is not steering us into a mountain.



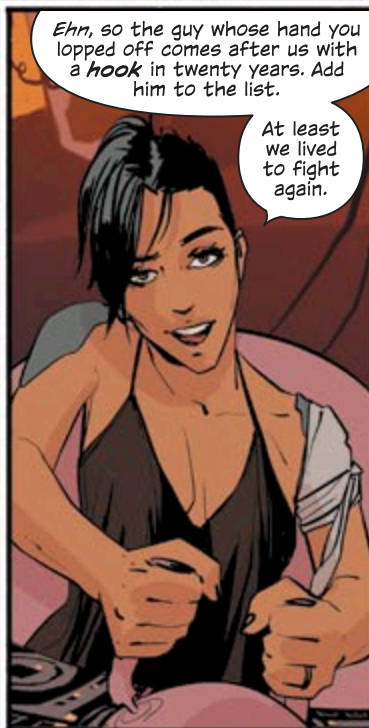
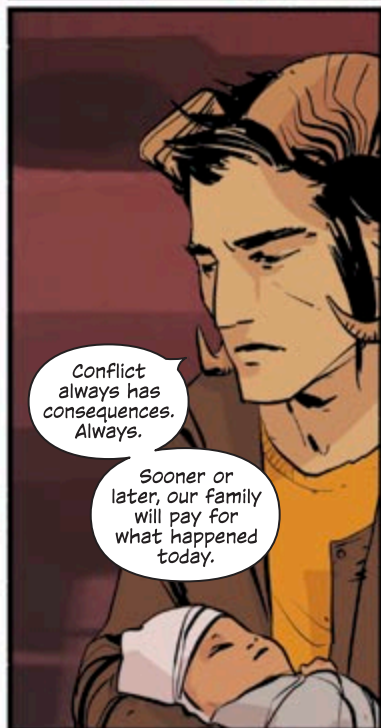
Do you think that binding spell I left on your men will keep them stable until the medics arrive?

They weren't "my" men, Marko, they were trigger-happy assholes who got what was coming to them.

Besides, I stepped in before you could do anything you'd regret.



Then how come it feels like I've just gotten us *cursed*?





Did Hazel just...?



She hasn't made a peep all day, and then... that was definitely a *laugh*, right?

I didn't even know newborns could *do* that.



Well, the spoiled brat's got a lot to be happy about.

We're alive, we've got each other, and the Rocketship Forest is right around the corner.



Face it, today was a good day.



Huh.



That's new.

deet da deet



Stalk here.

It's me.

You still need a partner for that job?



Too late,
I got
a hot lead
on my own,
thanks.

Looks like
my targets just
turned *proactive*,
which is another
word for "about
to get caught."



Stalk, please.
Something came
up, and I need
cash fast.

So? Last
time I reached
out to you, all
you did was
talk shit.

Idiot, I
only said those
things because
I'm still in *love*
with you!



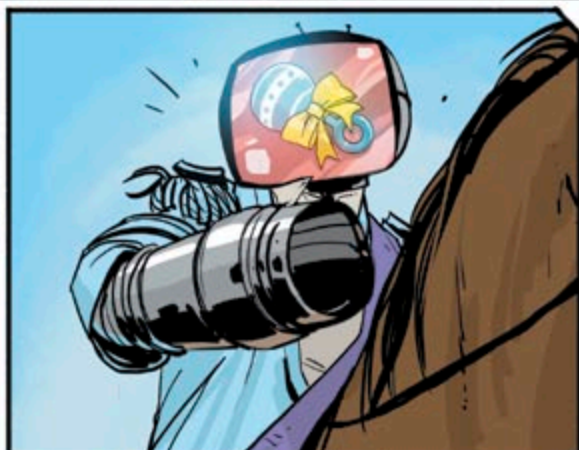
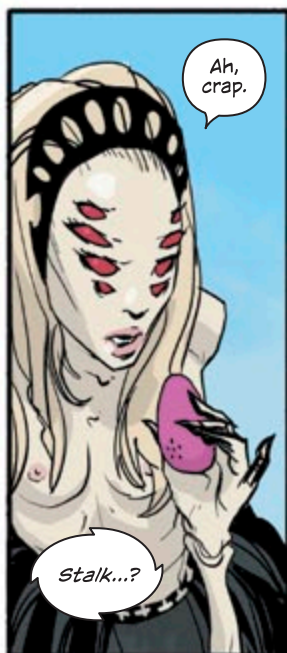
Yeah,
right.

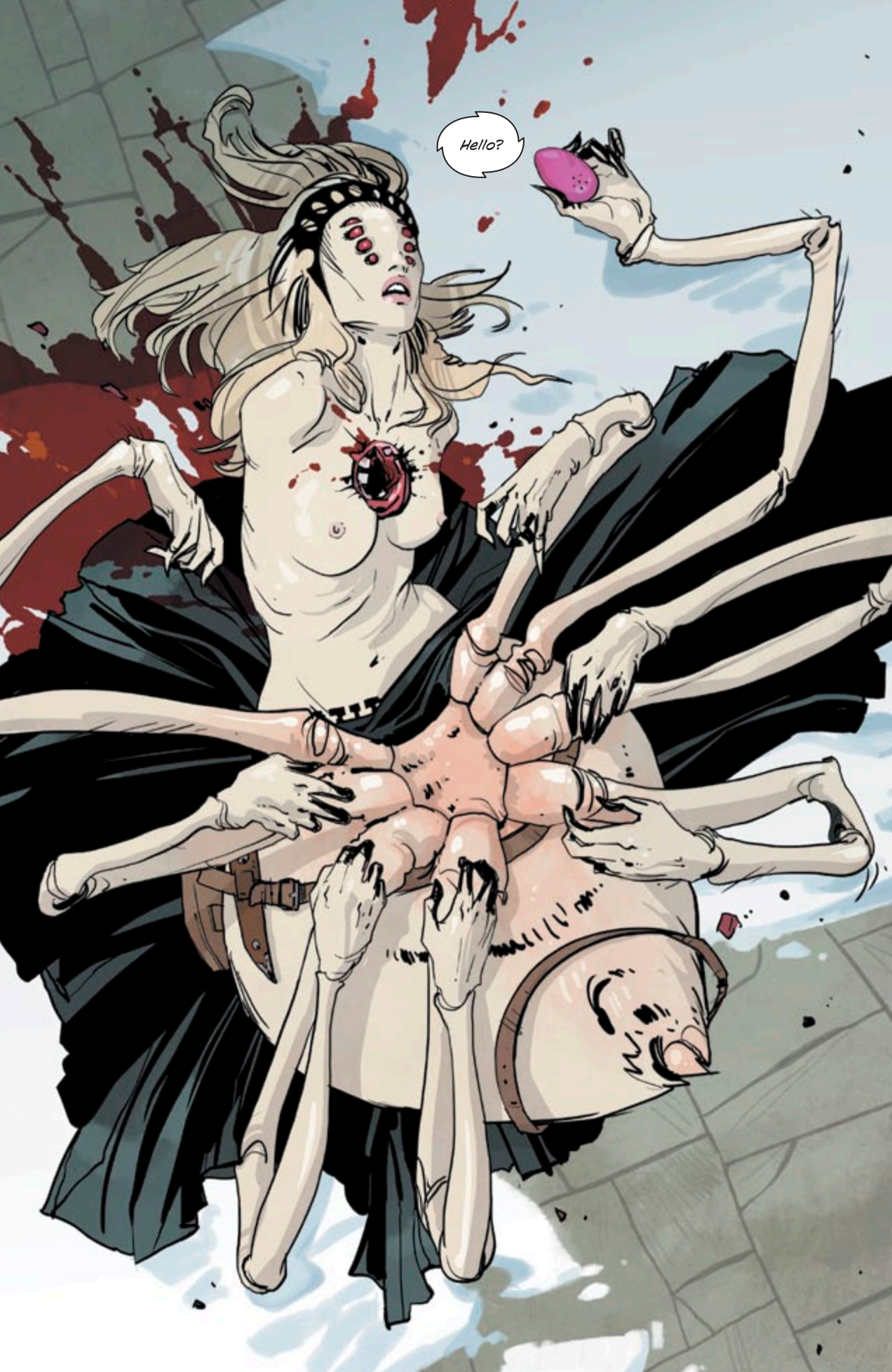
What's the real
story? Somebody
trying to repo
Lying Cat's litter
box?

You
there!



Don't
move a
muscle.





Hello?

end chapter five



CHAPTER
SIX

Once upon a time,
each of us was somebody's kid.

Ow.
Ow ow
Ow.

She's
obsessed
with
my neck
flesh.

I know,
her fingernails
are like little
hypodermics.

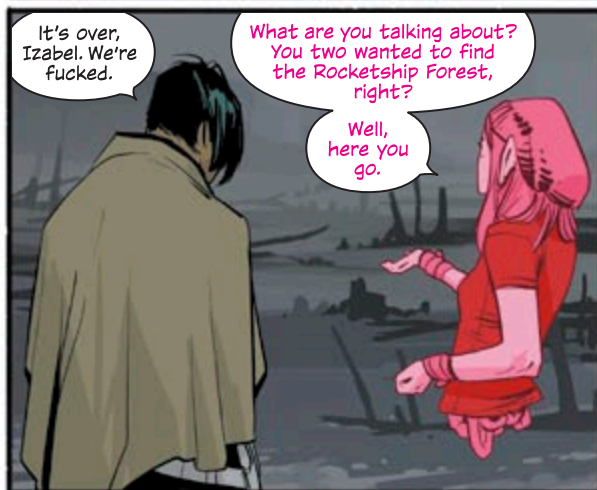






Evening, boss.

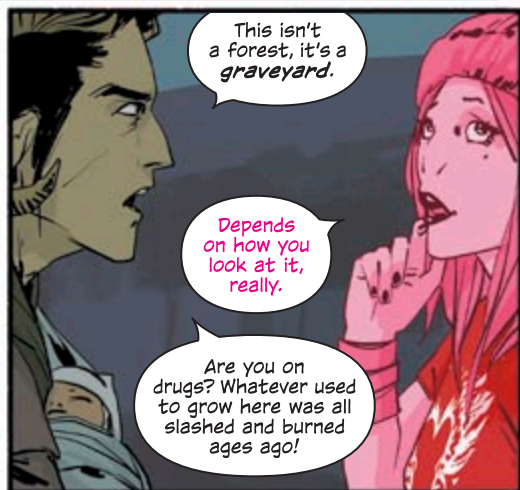
What I miss?



It's over, Izabel. We're fucked.

What are you talking about? You two wanted to find the Rocketship Forest, right?

Well, here you go.



This isn't a forest, it's a graveyard.

Depends on how you look at it, really.

Are you on drugs? Whatever used to grow here was all slashed and burned ages ago!



Shit, you lifers believe everything you see.

Us floaty types are masters of *misdirection*, remember? You really think we wouldn't hide a few saplings?



Your girl has no idea how lucky she is.

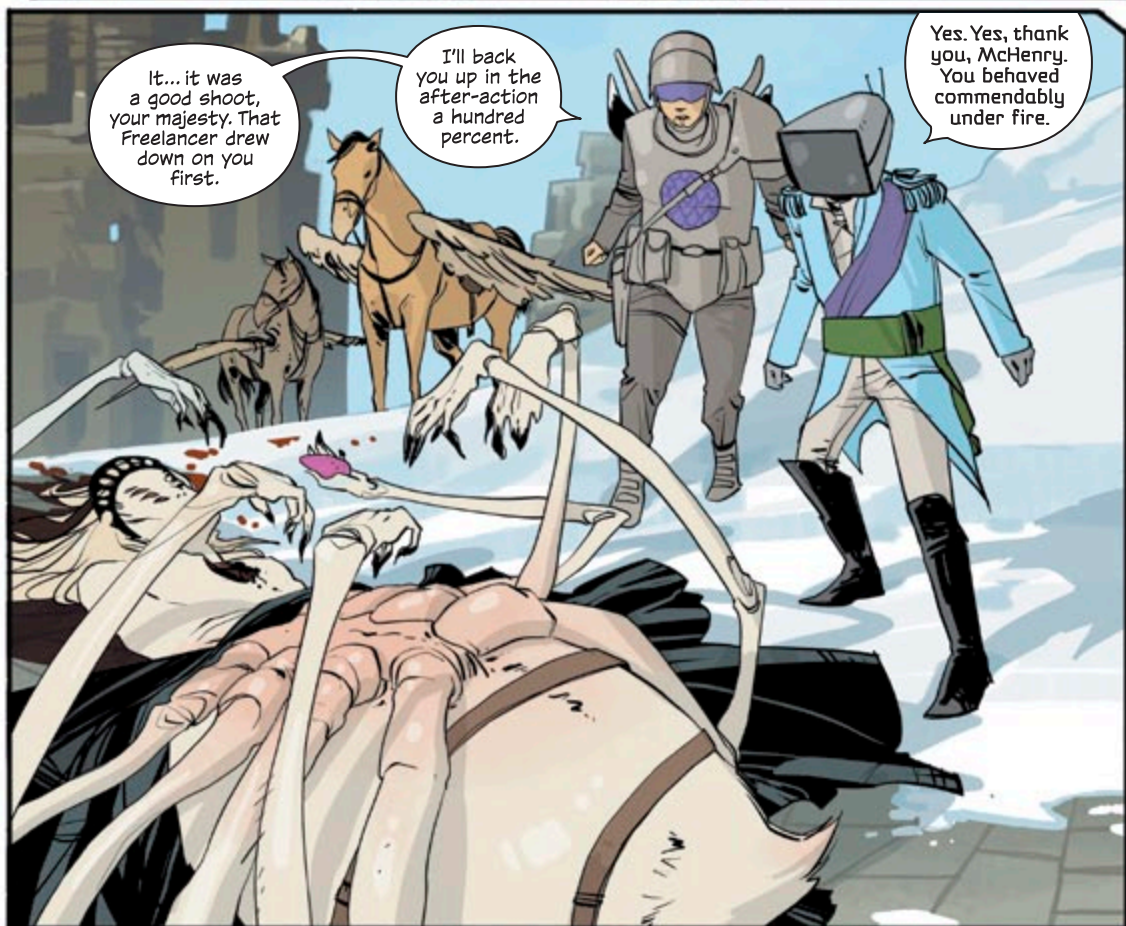




I woulda
killed for a
treehouse
when I was
a kid.



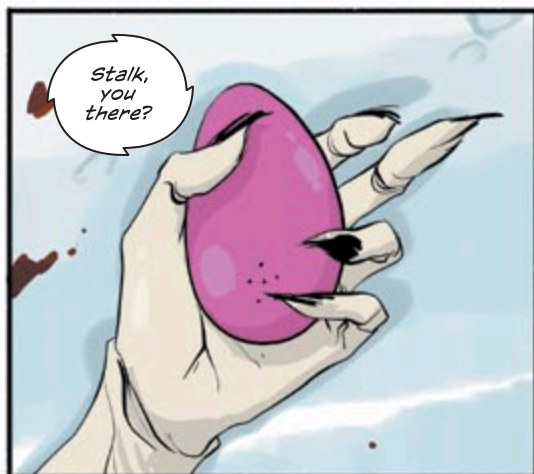
Bloody
fucking blood
fuck.



It... it was
a good shoot,
your majesty. That
Freelancer drew
down on you
first.

I'll back
you up in the
after-action
a hundred
percent.

Yes. Yes, thank
you, McHenry.
You behaved
commendably
under fire.

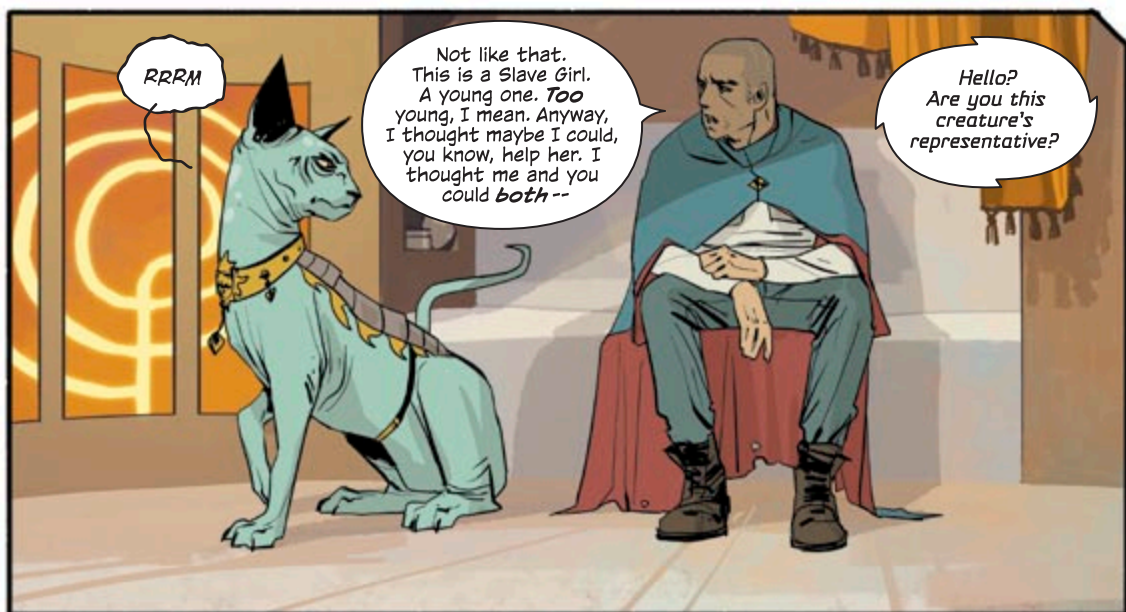


Stalk,
you
there?



I know
you're pissed,
but hear me
out.

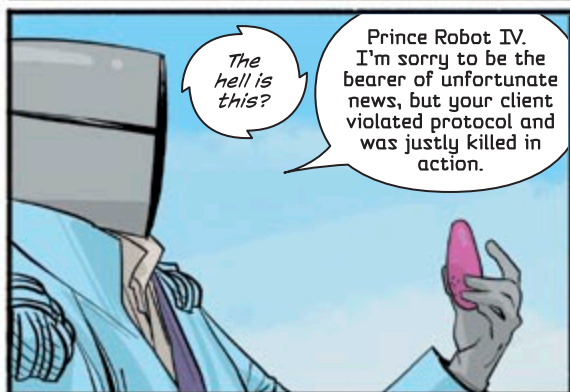
I need
your help with
a girl.



RRRM

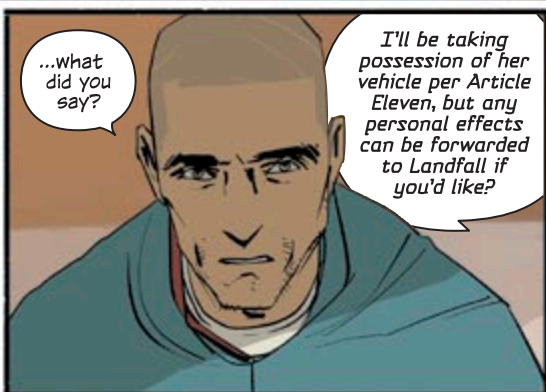
Not like that.
This is a Slave Girl.
A young one. *Too*
young, I mean. Anyway,
I thought maybe I could,
you know, help her. I
thought me and you
could *both*--

Hello?
Are you this
creature's
representative?



The
hell is
this?

Prince Robot IV.
I'm sorry to be the
bearer of unfortunate
news, but your client
violated protocol and
was justly killed in
action.



...what
did you
say?

I'll be taking
possession of her
vehicle per Article
Eleven, but any
personal effects
can be forwarded
to Landfall if
you'd like?



Listen to
my voice,
boy.

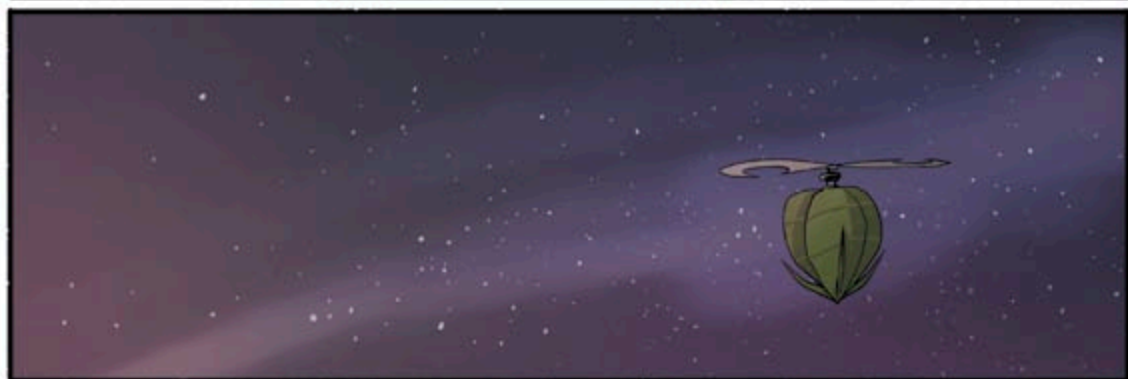
I aim to
murder you...right
after I murder
everything you
ever loved.



Call
ended.

Good
lord.

Psychotics,
the lot
of them.





So we're taking our infant child to outer space.

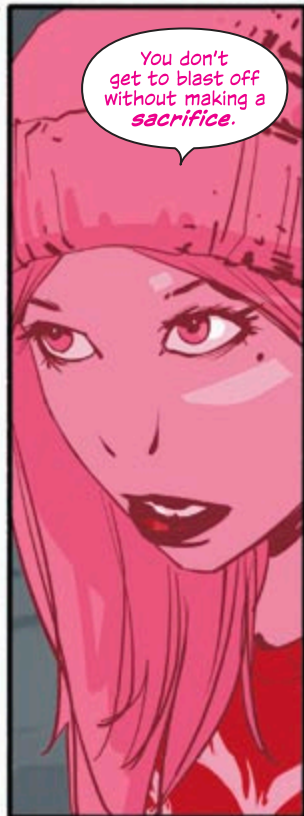
In something made of wood.



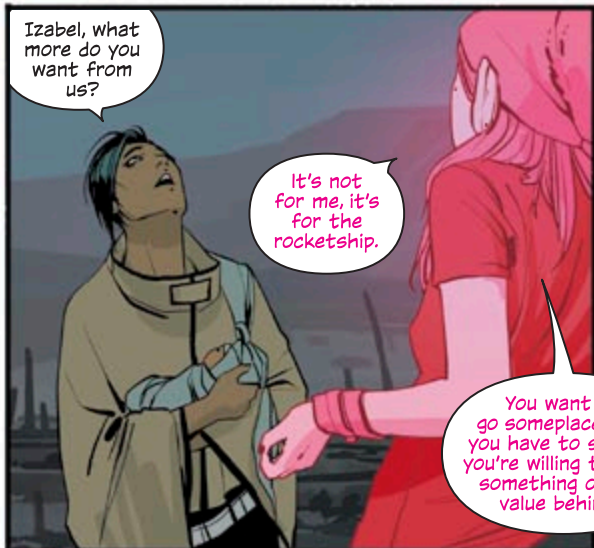
Don't judge, dear. Some of the greatest ships in Wreath's armada use lumber, makes them almost completely invisible to modern instruments.

Come on, let's check out her insides.

Whoa, not so fast, horndog.



You don't get to blast off without making a sacrifice.



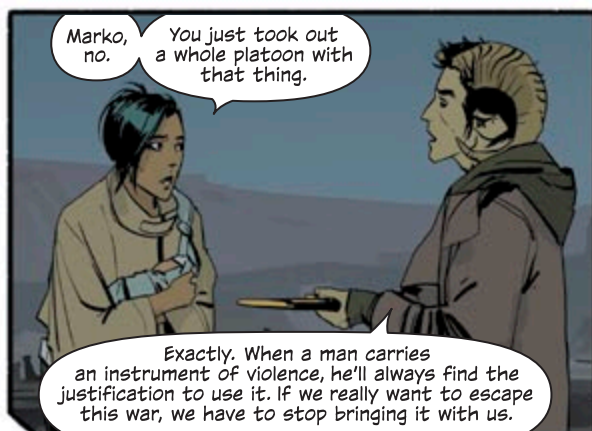
Izabel, what more do you want from us?

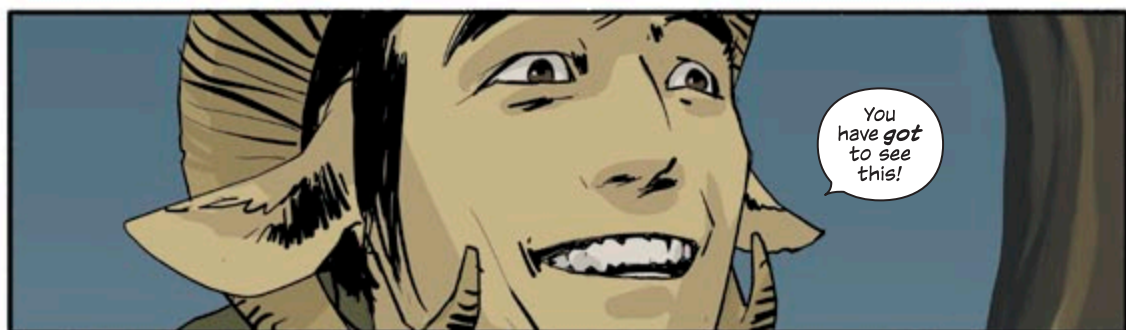
It's not for me, it's for the rocketship.

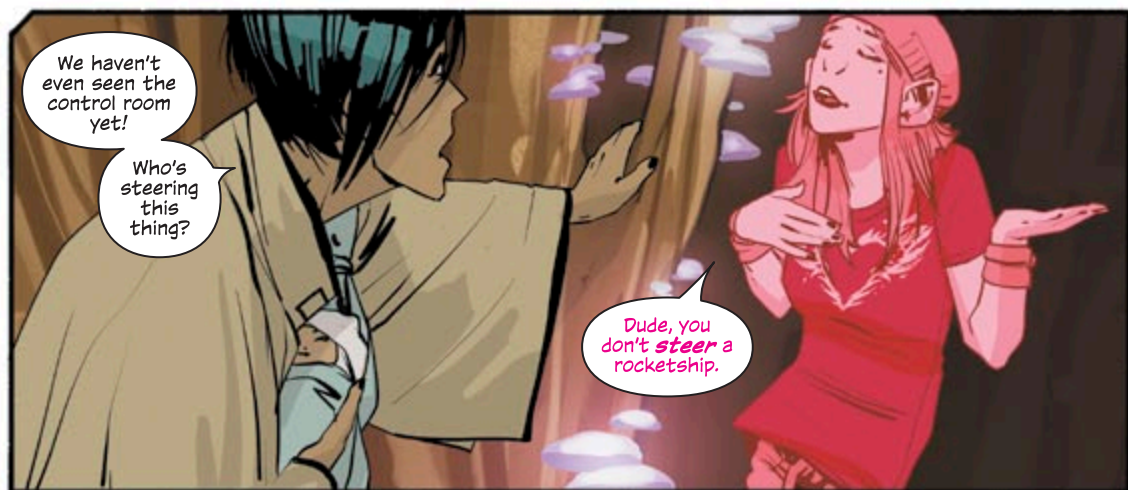
You want to go someplace new, you have to show it you're willing to leave something of real value behind.

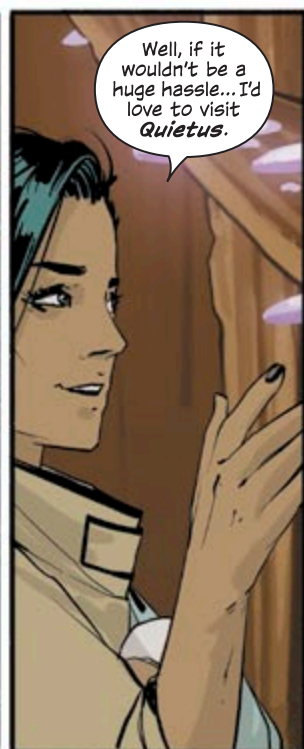


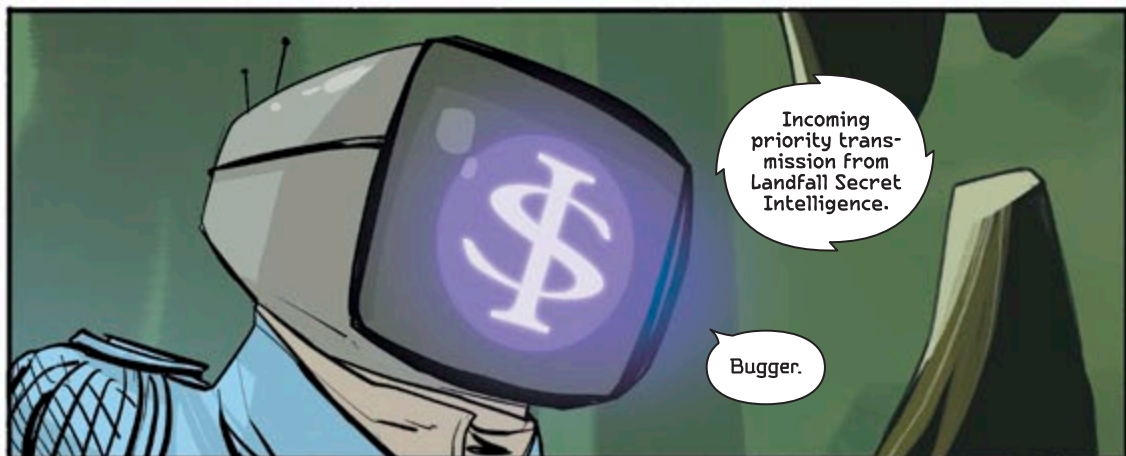
Then I offer up this.

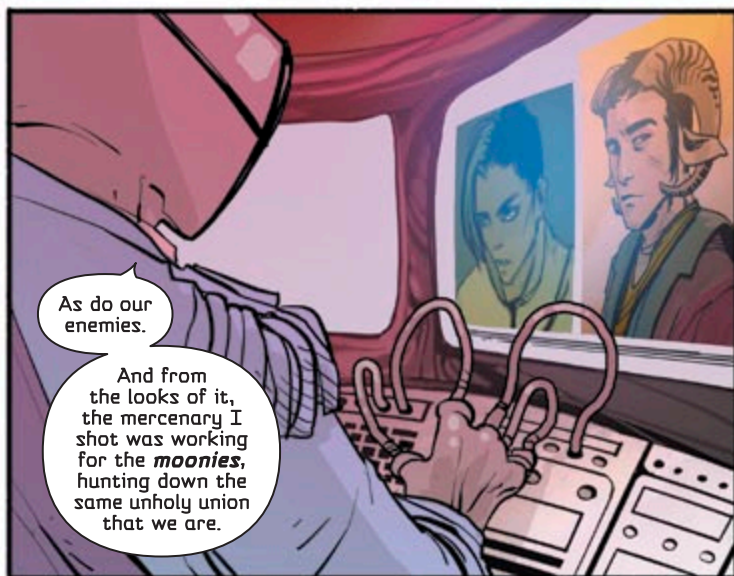
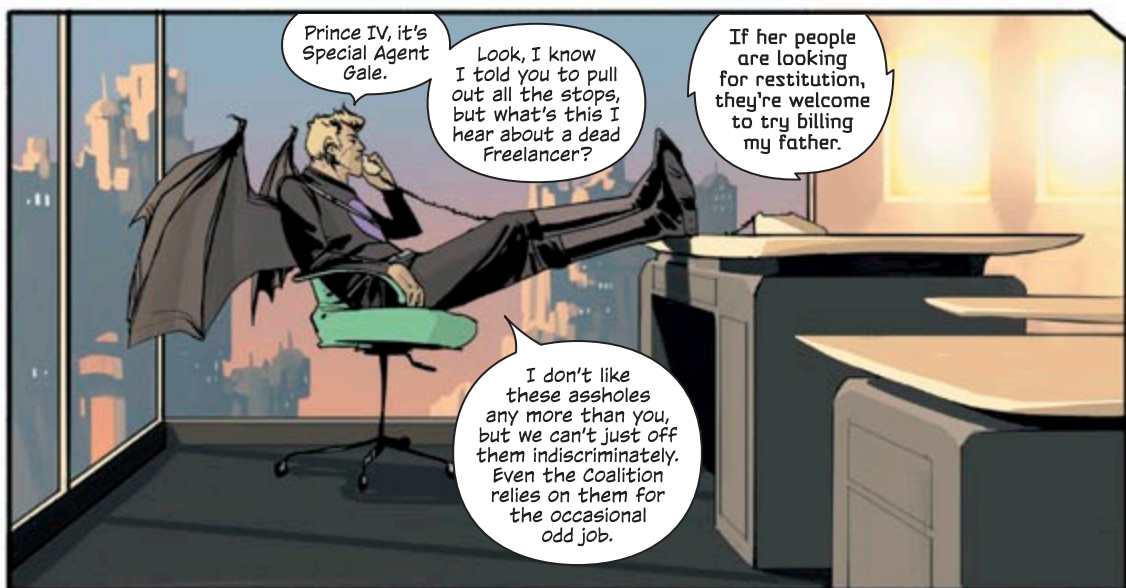














And if this were just a fact-finding expedition, maybe I'd give two shits. But it's not.

So if you want to be home in time for a certain *joyous occasion*, you'd better make goddamn sure your targets never get off Cleave alive, understood?



Threaten all you want, it doesn't change the fact that your lovebirds have likely already flown the coop.

If I was able to secure passage off this world, I have no doubt Alana and her brood did, as well. They could be literally anywhere in the...



Prince?
You still online?


D. OSWALD HURST is the Louper-nominated author of over forty novels. He resides on Quietus.



Where the hell did you go?



So yeah, this is where I grew up →



Most of my childhood was spent
clinging to the feathers of a
dulled arrow blindly fired across
a starless night.

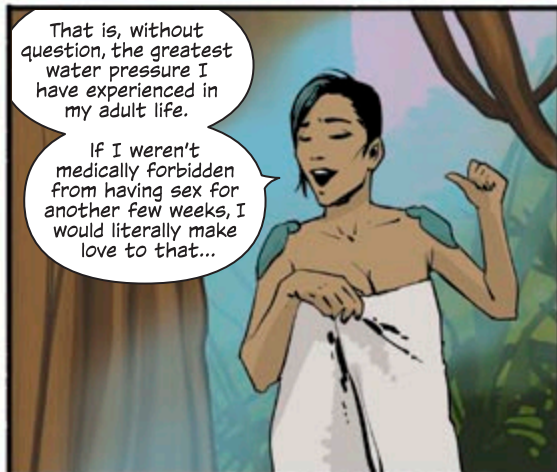


It was
heaven.

Say
goodbye,
sweet
girl.

That little
dot is where
you came into
our lives.

For a while,
anyway.





What?!

I thought
you said these
ships were
undetectable!

They are!
There's no
way anyone
could...



No.

My
sword.



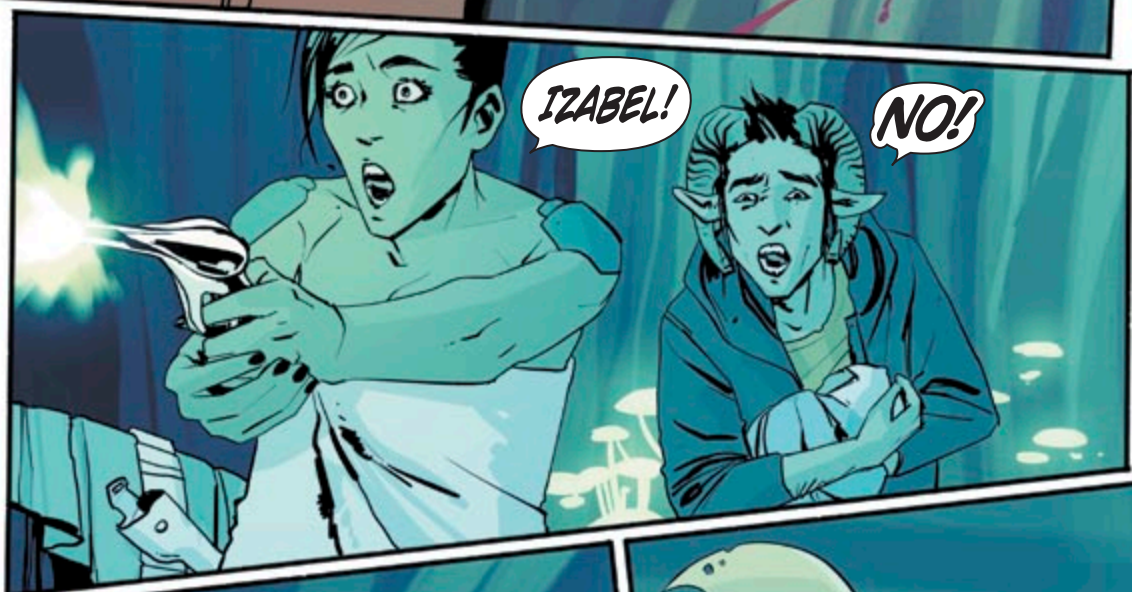
What'd
you do this
time?!

Breaking the
blade must have
summoned her.
She's probably using
its hilt to follow us.
God, she's going
to **kill** me.

Who? Is this
that *Gwendolyn*
bitch? Marko, if
your ex wants her
stupid rings back,
just--



KIE
ESTAS MIA
KNABO!





*Paêjo,
né!*

*Ne
doloris
šin!*



Marko?



*Êu
tio vere
vi?*



*What
the fuck
is going
on?!*

*Tiu
estas mia
edzino!*

*Tio
estas mia
bebo!*

And then my grandparents came to live with us.

Oh.

