

SIMON SPURRIER CHRIS WILDGOOSE ANDRÉ MAY

ALIENATED™



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and one of my favorite writers."

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THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING
WRITER OF *SAGA* & *PAPER GIRLS*

ALIENATED™

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ALIENATED™

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CHAPTER ONE





The empire *graciously* allows me to have *four* thoughts per day.



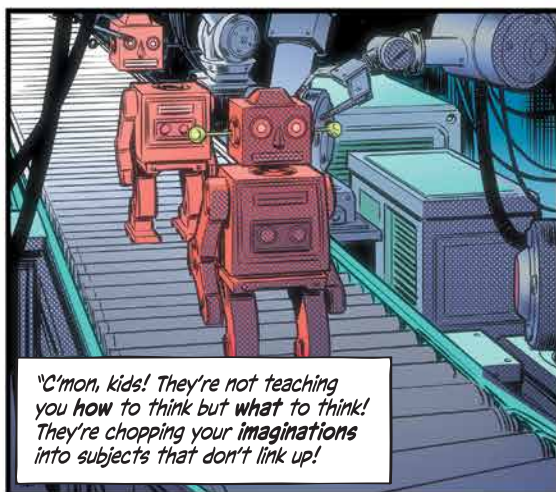
"Math, History, English, Biology. This year's approved 'Facts.'"

"Hey, did you know our school system's modeled on 1800s Prussia? It's true."

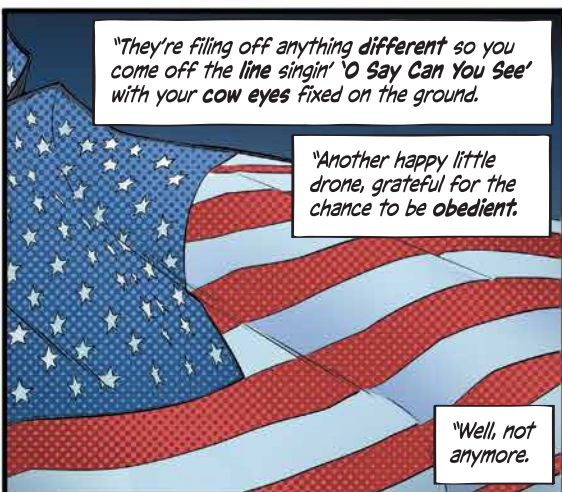


"You think those guys wanted to nurture unique minds?"

"Or did they want a generation of robots to go fight Napoleon?"



"C'mon, kids! They're not teaching you *how* to think but *what* to think! They're chopping your imaginations into subjects that don't link up!"



"They're filing off anything different so you come off the line singing 'O Say Can You See' with your cow eyes fixed on the ground."

"Another happy little drone, grateful for the chance to be obedient."

"Well, not anymore."



It's *our* future, not *theirs*. It's time to wake up! It's time to rage and roar and take back the world!

It's time--

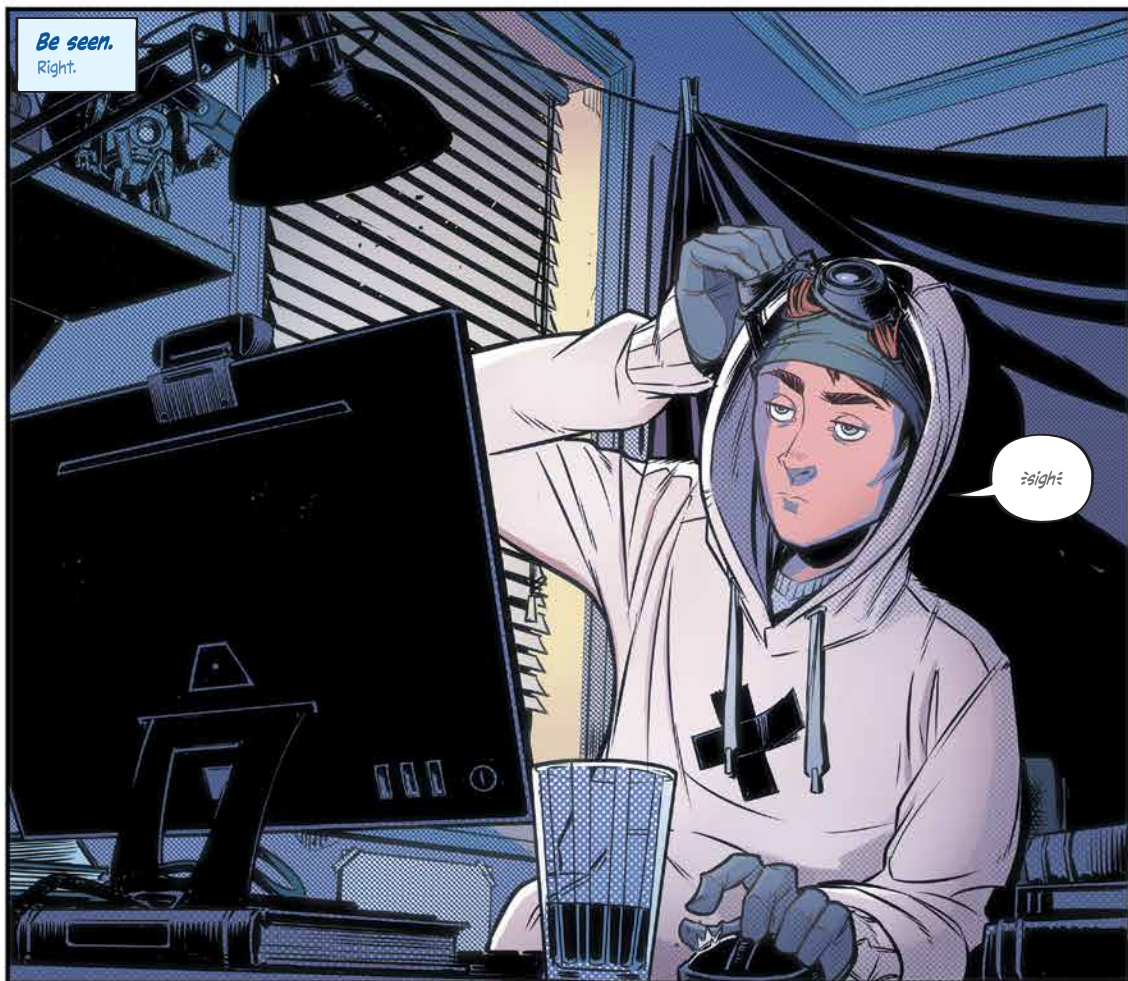


--to be seen.

UPLOAD

KLK

Be seen.
Right.



Weekly average of *forty-three* views.
Not exactly *world-shaking*, huh?



Got a couple new *subscribers*,
though--*that's* cool. Better a
few inquiring minds than a
billion dumb clickers.

...what's the
alternative?



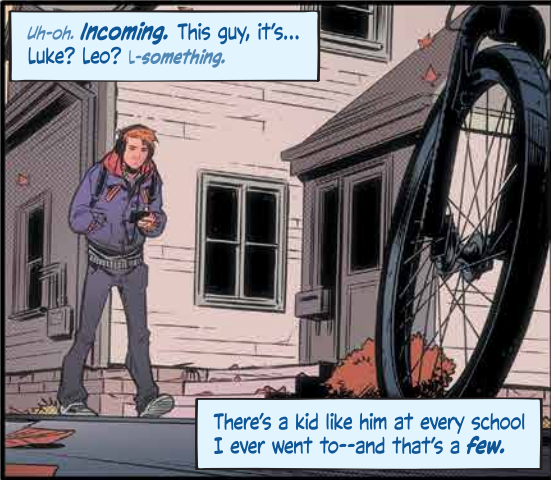
*"Factions speak
louder than herds"--*
that's one of the
golden rules.

The others are
*"Don't read the
comments"*
and
*"Keep the
damn content
flowing, dummy."*

Because...c'mon.



Anonymity?



Uh-oh. *Incoming*. This guy, it's... Luke? Leo? L-something.

There's a kid like him at every school I ever went to--and that's a *few*.



Kind who feels *persecuted* when anyone *else* gets a *win*. A *grudge* with shoes, basically.

Hey. Newbie.

Probably got a shopping list of *small arms* in the pocket of his favorite trenchcoat. One of *those* guys.

Just my luck he's the only one so far who even *noticed* me.



I said h--

Uh, *sorry*, I'm kinda--can't *hear* ya! Watchin' a *thing*, y'know?

Easy to get *tainted* by association, little town like Tangletree. That's another *golden rule*, I guess:

S A M U E L



Better anonymous than unappreciated.



He slows the bike and he says that's the first time I ever said his name.

I'm about to *apologize* for that --I'm blushing, even-- when he meets my eye and says a *word*.



S A M A N T H A





Okay. Okay, sure.
I will caffeinate his
homophobic ass.
NBD.

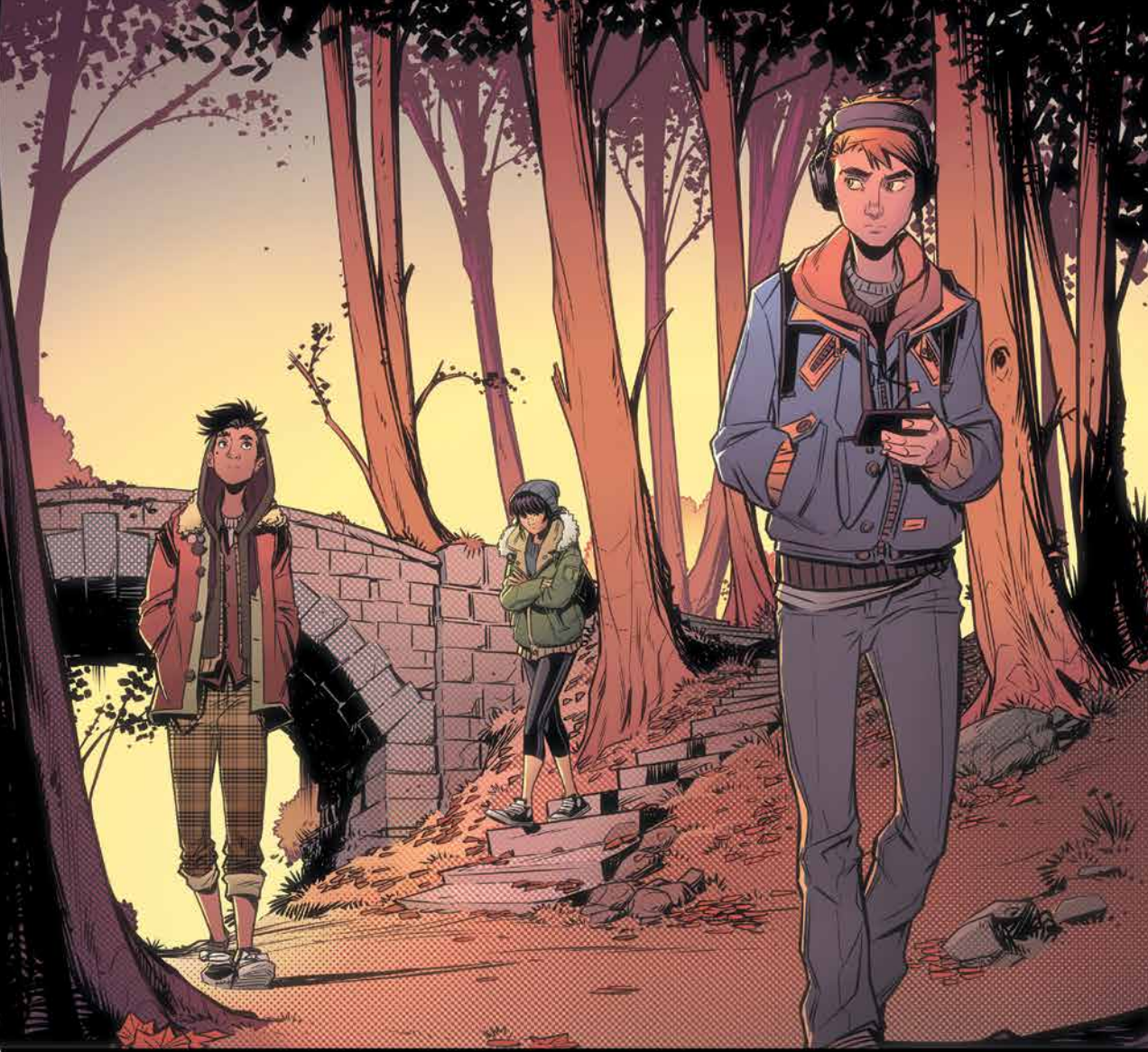
I don't need to be
nice to Leon.
Everybody hates
him. I'll--what? I'll
shout "you want
whip with that?"
and I'll throw it at
his head. Yeah.

I don't *have* to be,
y'know. **Liked.** Not
by **everybody.**



S A M I R





Chapter 1: THREE KIDS CALLED SAM GO WALKING IN THE WOODS





You're the **new** kid, right?

It's been four weeks.

Yeah but **we** didn't talk yet, so you're only **really** arriving now.



Okay. **Hi.** And-- who's--

Uh-uh-uh-- Samantha doesn't wanna be your pal. Don't take it **personally**.



Actually, she used to be the **life and soul**, but--well. **Stuff.** It's **tragic**, really. Or **funny**. Depends who you ask.

Whatcha watching?



It's, *uh*. It's **Waxy**, you know? "**The Hooded Hellion.**" Prankster, poet, pundit...

He just uploaded his latest **thing**.

Six million subscribers and counting.

I'm not jealous.



Awesome--hey, can I get an ear? I **love** Waxy!

(I have never watched Waxy in my life.)



All right, *ssshh*, we're **ready**. Here we go...

Setup **is**, some kid wrote in to say her **biology professor** keeps handing out, y'know, **religious** junk, instead of teaching **evolution**.

"We're **miracles not monkeys**"--that sorta thing.



Colin...
Wilkinson...

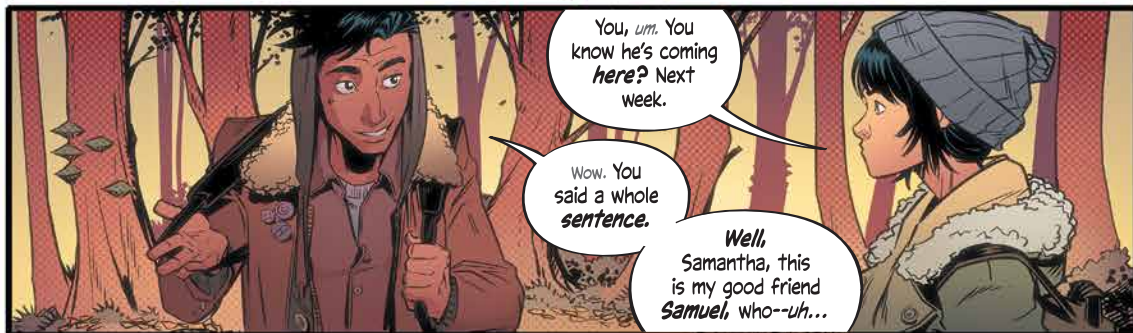
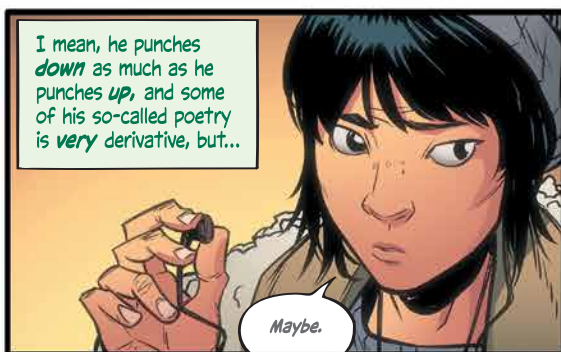
Wh-who's
there?

You *know*
who, my child.
Hast thou not
awaited this
day thy whole
life?



Come
forth, my *son*, for
greatly am I pleased with
thy works. Step into the
light--and behold!







ix million subscribers...I
deserve six million subsc

ve some pride in your heritage, he says.
How was I s'posed to do that when
my only link to it was a coldblooded ba

anny. Or Ben. Or Tommy. He
looked like a Tommy. I wish
I'd held him just a minute m

ould take the mask off,
but--what if people
hate me? What if th

god, his little
face, th-th-those
blue eyes, they

nly thing you ever gave
me, Dad, and that's
a hole in my life, so



Wh-whose *thoughts* are these?

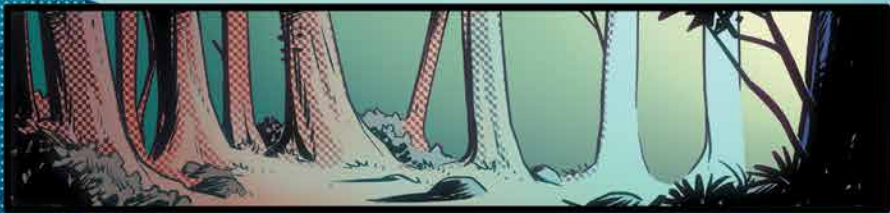
Wait--d-does this mean--c-can you guys hear what *I'm* th--

stop it get *out* get *out* can't be *happening*

but it *is* it *is* oh *damn* you're both

both staring straight into

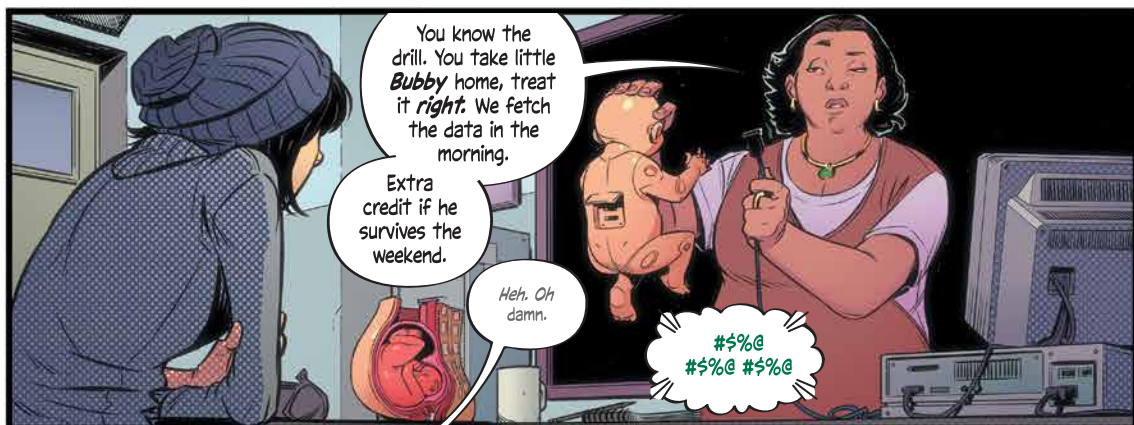
my head



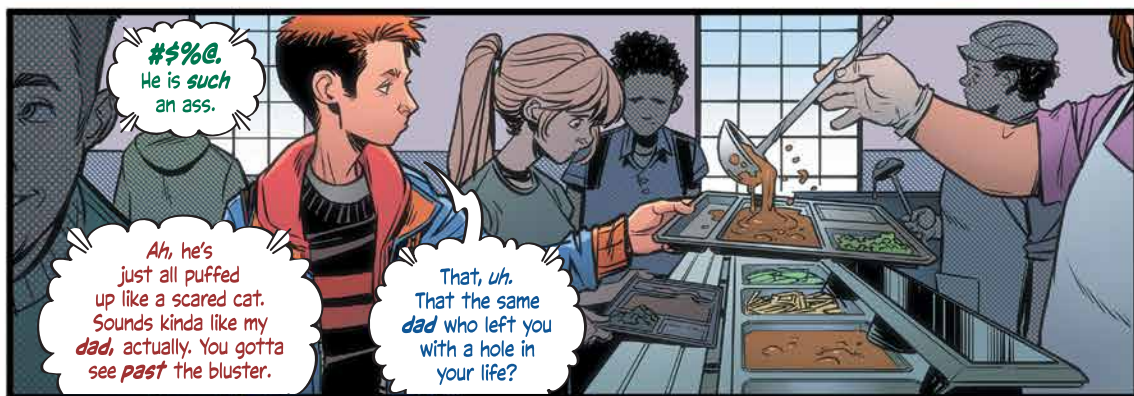
FIRST PERIOD



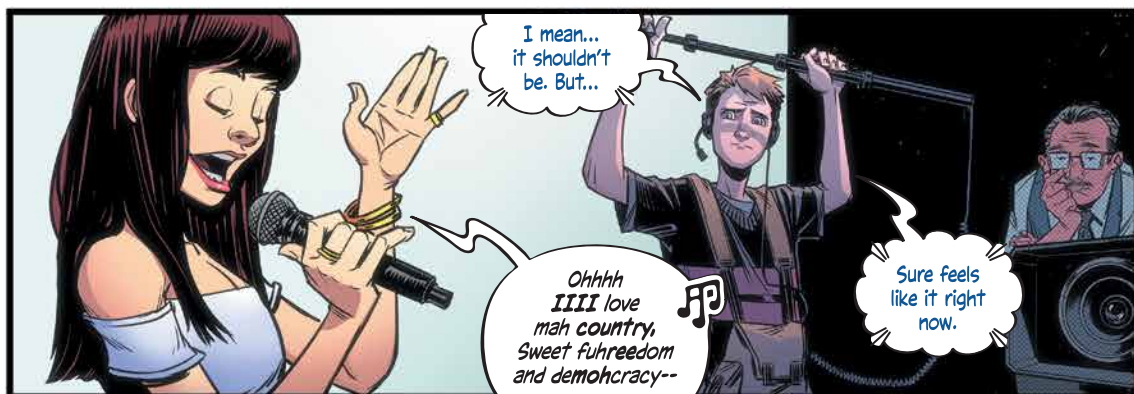
SECOND PERIOD



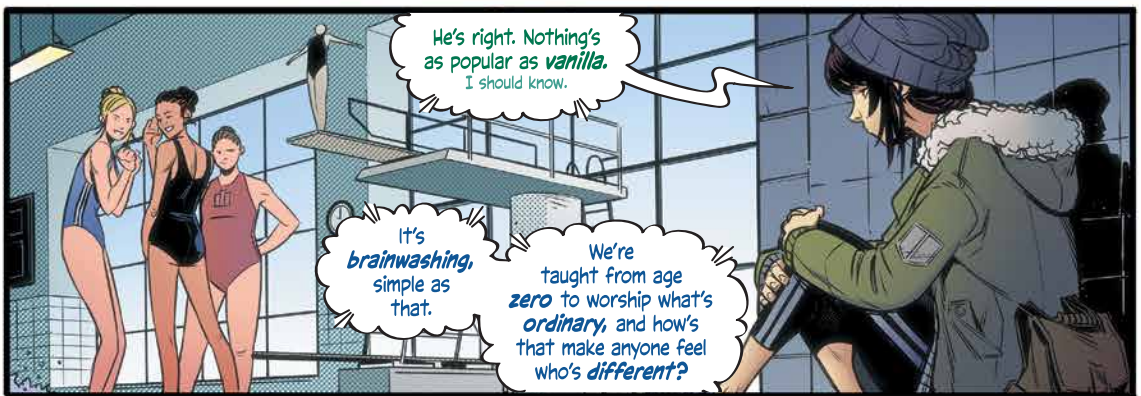
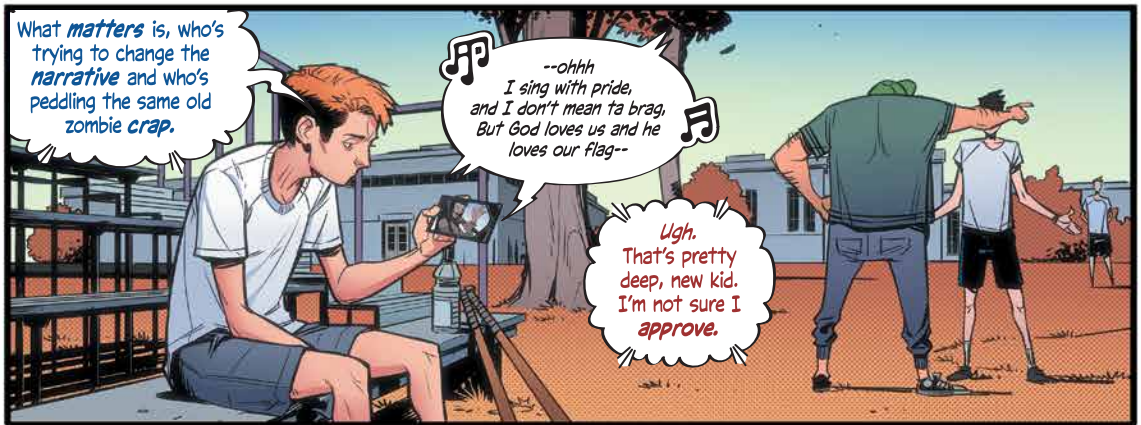
LUNCH BREAK



THIRD PERIOD



FOURTH PERIOD







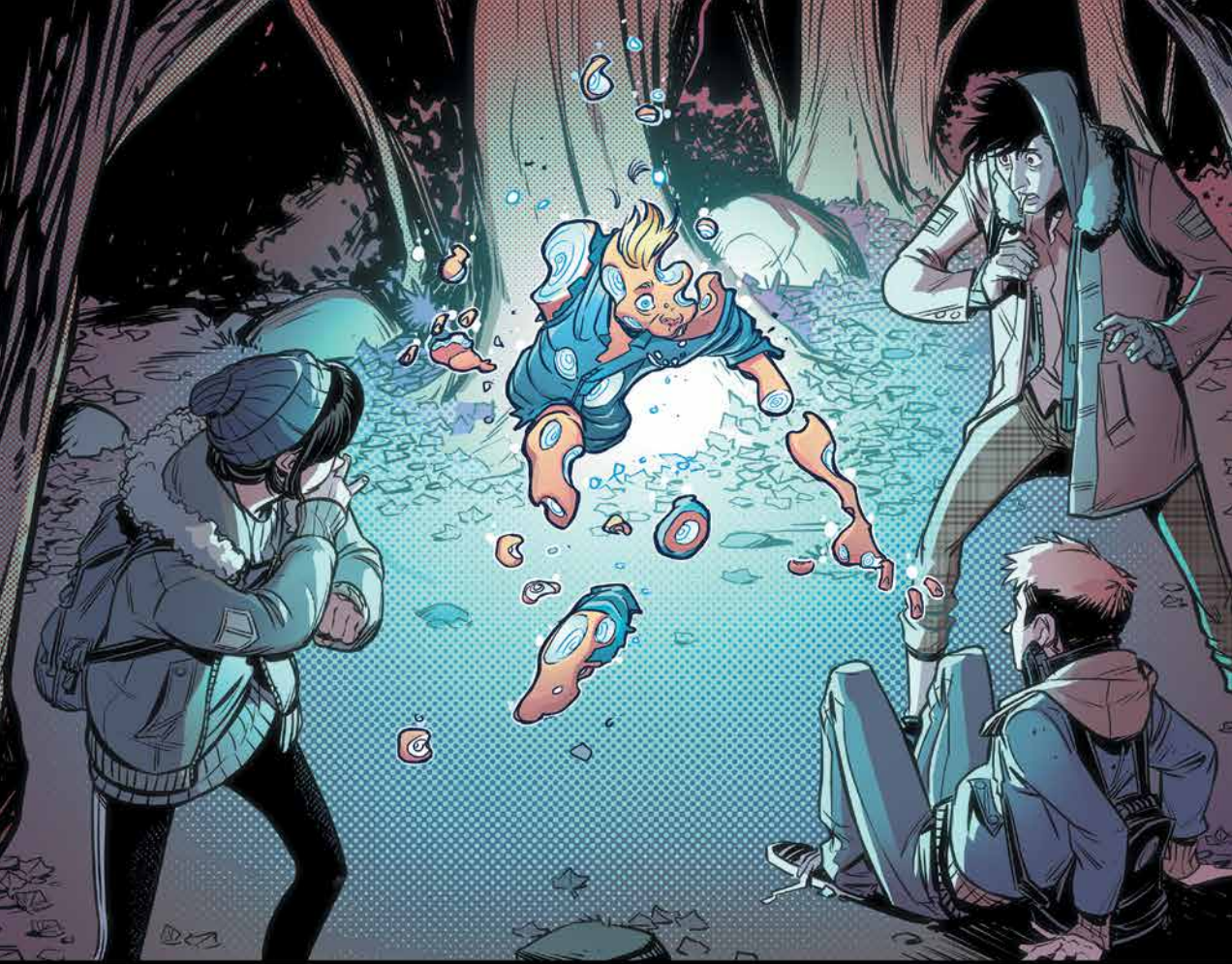


STOP



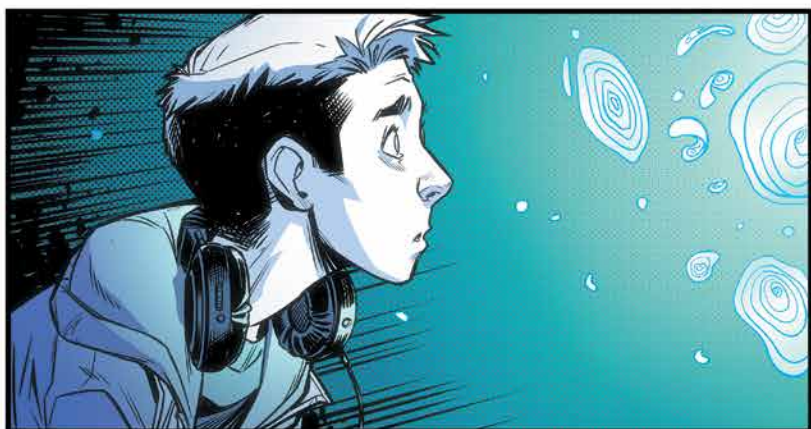
GO AWAY





GLD?

GLD
DID GLD DUN
GLD? IS
GLD?



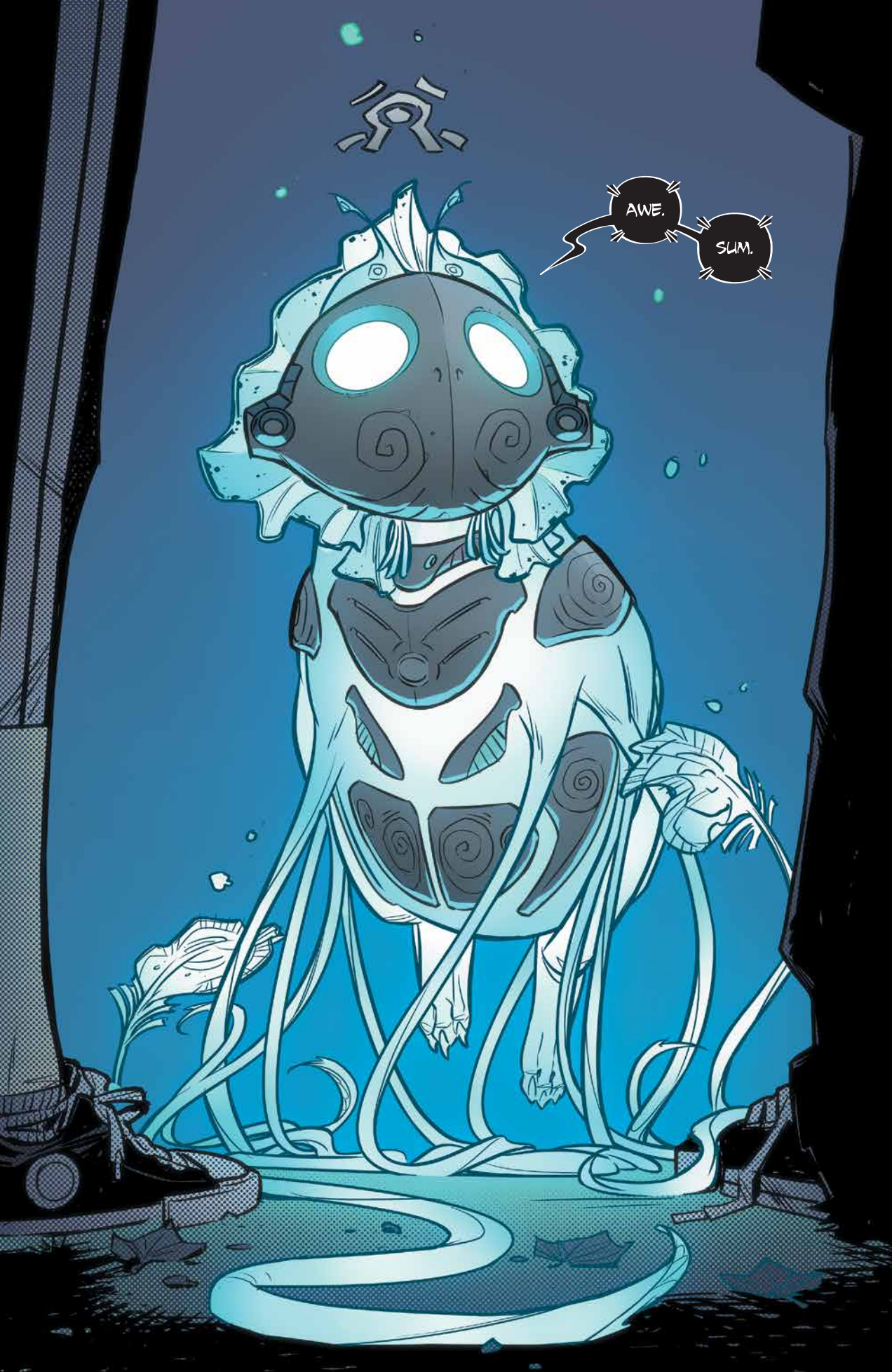
dead
he's dead
he's gone
oh oh oh
but this is,
this is...



no no *NO*
not possible
(six more months)
just stay out of it
just stay out of it
(six more months)
except
except *ohhh*
this is...

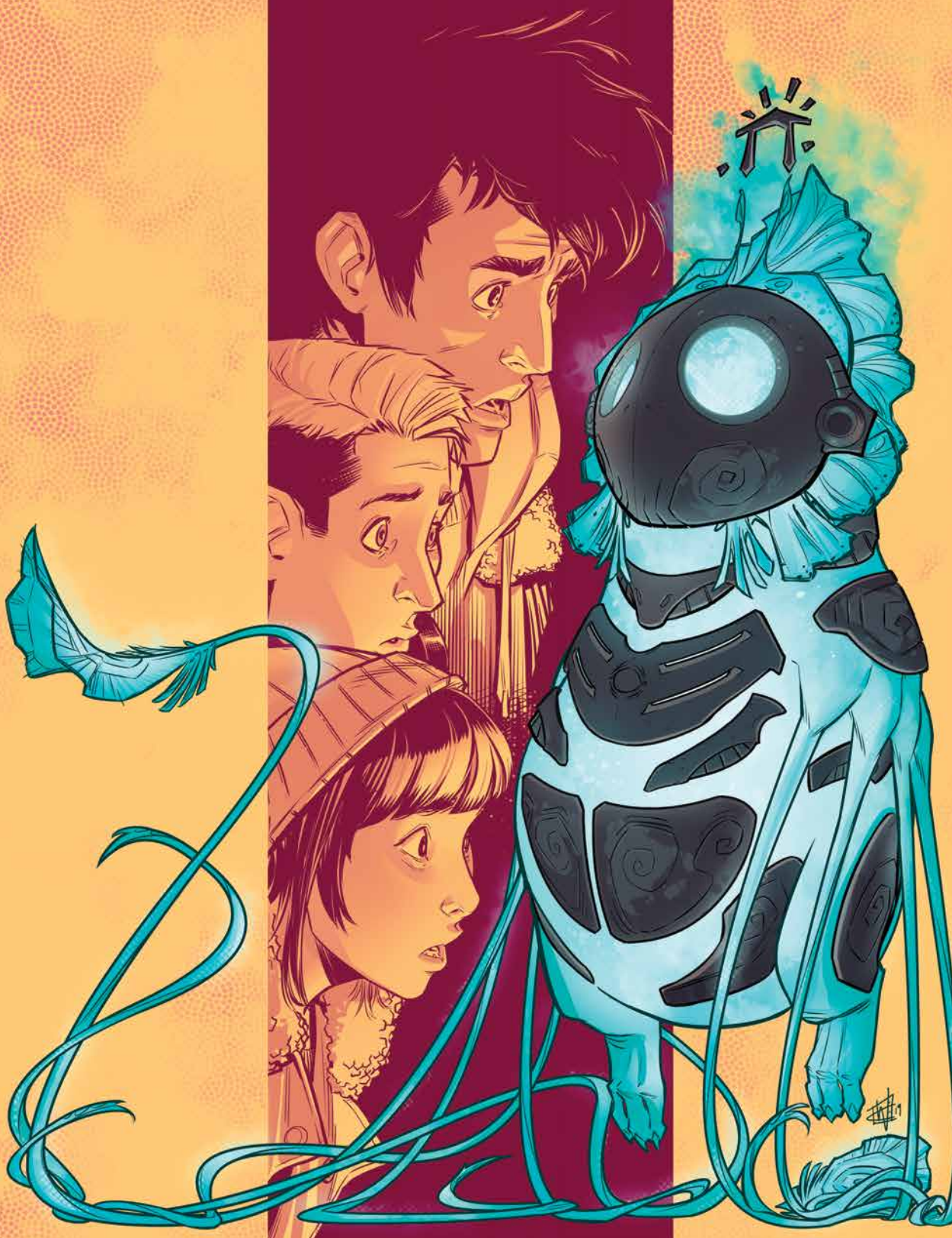


I knew it
I *knew* it
aliens or *mutants* or
military secrets or or
something
oh god I'm gonna *puke*
except,
except this is...
this is *actually*
kind of...



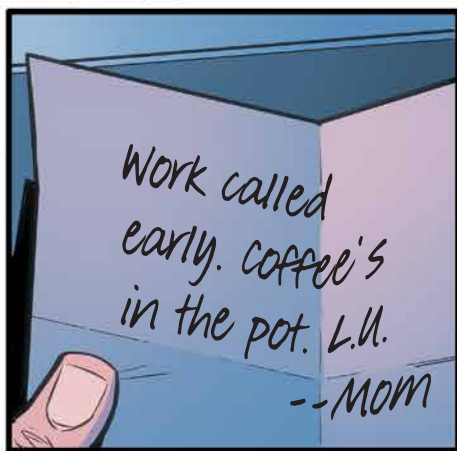


CHAPTER TWO

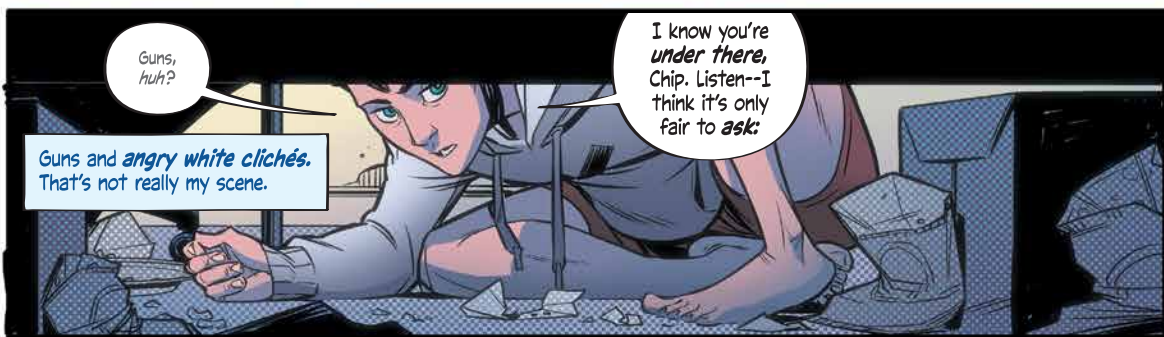




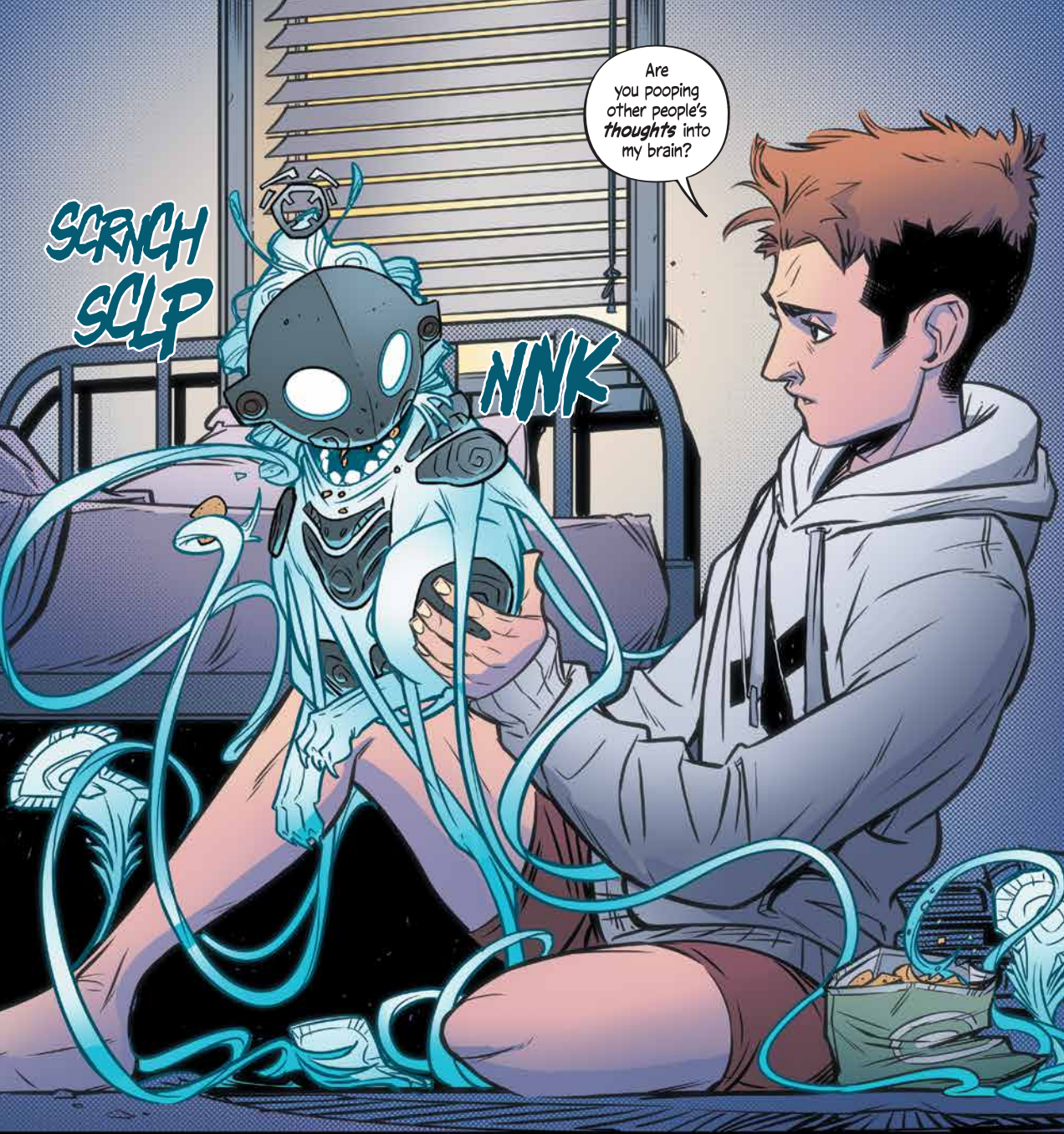


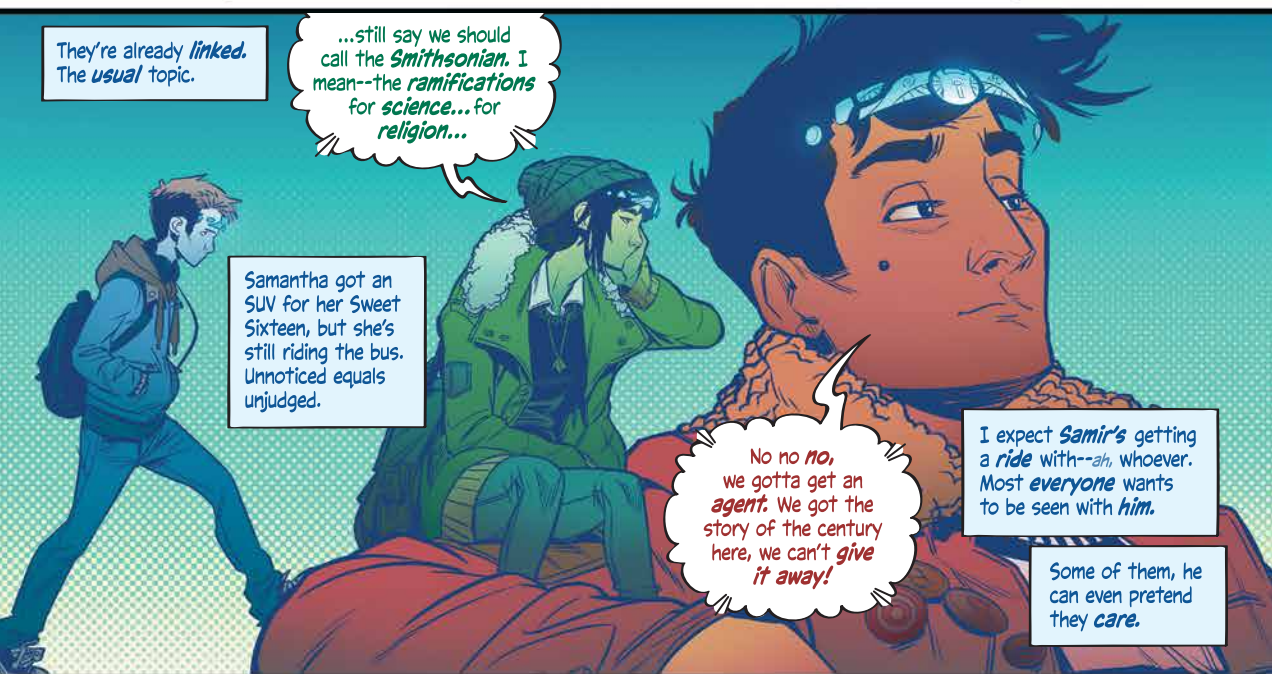


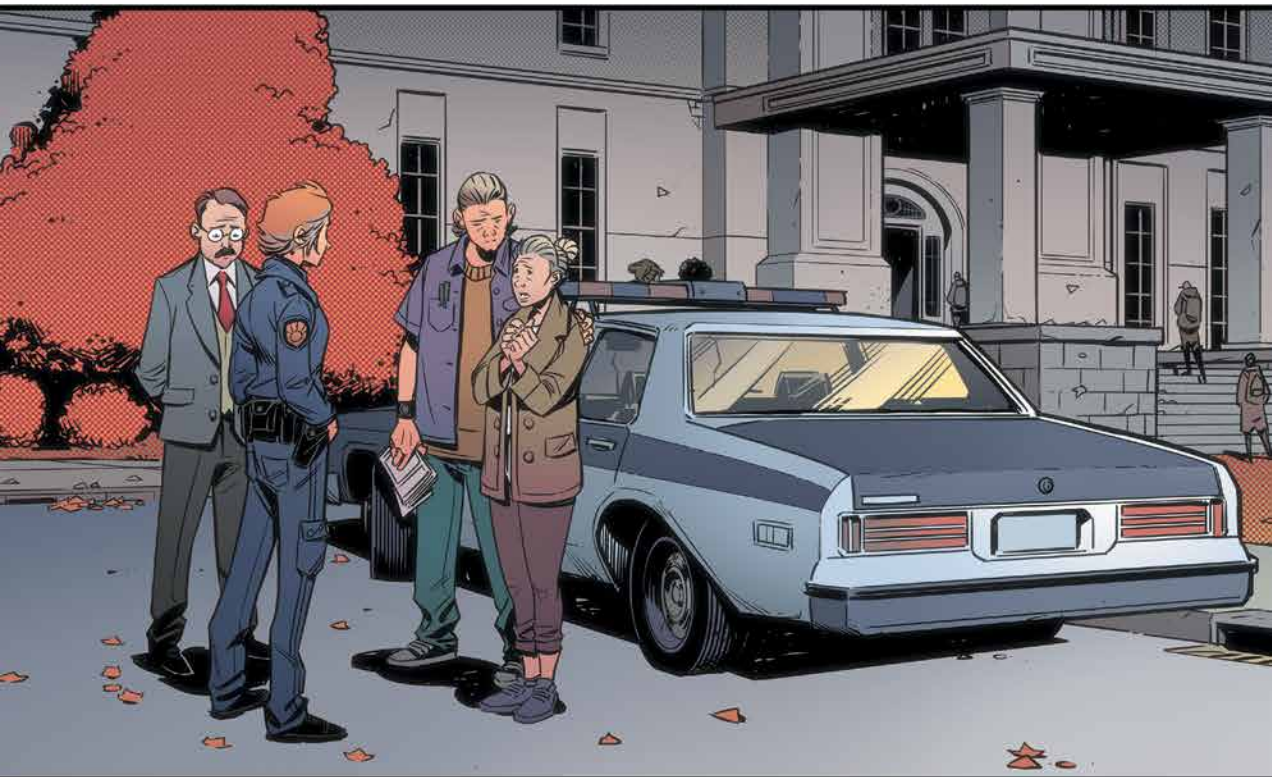
Work called
early. coffee's
in the pot. L.U.
--mom



Guns and *angry white clichés*.
That's not really my scene.







Chapter 2: WE NEED TO TALK



Mr. and Mrs. *Waller*? I just wanted you to know *sniff* e-everyone's *devastated*.

L-Leon's *such* a popular guy. We're-- we're *praying* he comes home.



That's a... nice *gesture*. I guess.

Oh please. Chelsea *hated* Leon. Everyone did. It's *shameless*.



You *get* that?

I guess *shame* never made anyone a star. C'mon.

Feels *nice*, in a weird kinda way.

All of us tutting and rolling our eyes together, like good little outcasts.



If it weren't for the literal alien lifeform in my backpack, bitterness'd be all we have in common.

He's, uh. He's *dead*, isn't he?



W-we *killed* him.



We don't *know* that. Maybe he just--went *away*.

Maybe he's not gone at all. Not *completely*.











...and we miss you more and more each day, we want ya home-- to Gaaahd we pray

For your safe return, so ya gotta know: Wherever you are...

We won't

Leeet

Go.

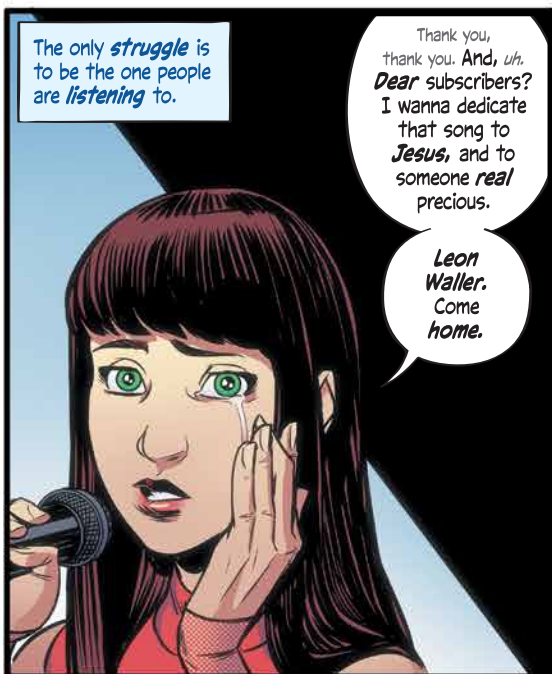
#\$%&.

I should be grateful the school even *has* this kit. Most *don't*.

I mean, hell, everything in this studio'll be obsolete in a couple years. But the *principle's* sound: there are no *middlemen* anymore.

No gatekeepers, no publishers--just *content creators* and *consumers*. This is stuff actually *worth* learning.

We are *all influencers* in waiting.



The only *struggle* is to be the one people are *listening* to.

Thank you, thank you. And, *uh*. Dear subscribers? I wanna dedicate that song to *Jesus*, and to someone *real* precious.

Leon Waller. Come home.



Aaand *cut*. That was lovely, Chelsea. And so heartfelt--*thank* you.

Huh. Look.



So *heartfelt* she's already checking the *viewer stats*.

Waxy. She wants the slot on *Waxy*.

Waxy's--well. *"Popular."*
I guess. But never *pop*.

He's *angry* and *raw*, and
whether you think he's
speaking *truth to power*
or just being *obnoxious*--

--at least he's raising *young*
voices in an *old* world.

And *part* of that?
Part of the *appeal*?

In every show he gives
ten minutes to a *young*
broadcaster, in
whatever cruddy little
country he's touring
that week.

WAXY
PRESENTS!

Chance of a lifetime--and it barely
matters that most of the acts suck.

Because *mine*
sure as hell
won't.

Waxy's coming
through town real soon,
huh? I bet Chelsea's not
the *only one* gettin'
sweaty about that
slot.

A-actually,
I got this little,
sorta, *documentary*
of my own. You,
uh, you wanna
see it?

I'm
Vern, by
the way.

Some
other time,
Vern.

She *can't* win. She's *awful*.
She's--she's *insincere* and
fake and--and...

Oh.
Okay.

And *so* self-absorbed.



Bad day
at the
office?

Just...
thinking.



We need
a *plan.*

Hey, I
already *said*
I can't hide
him at h--

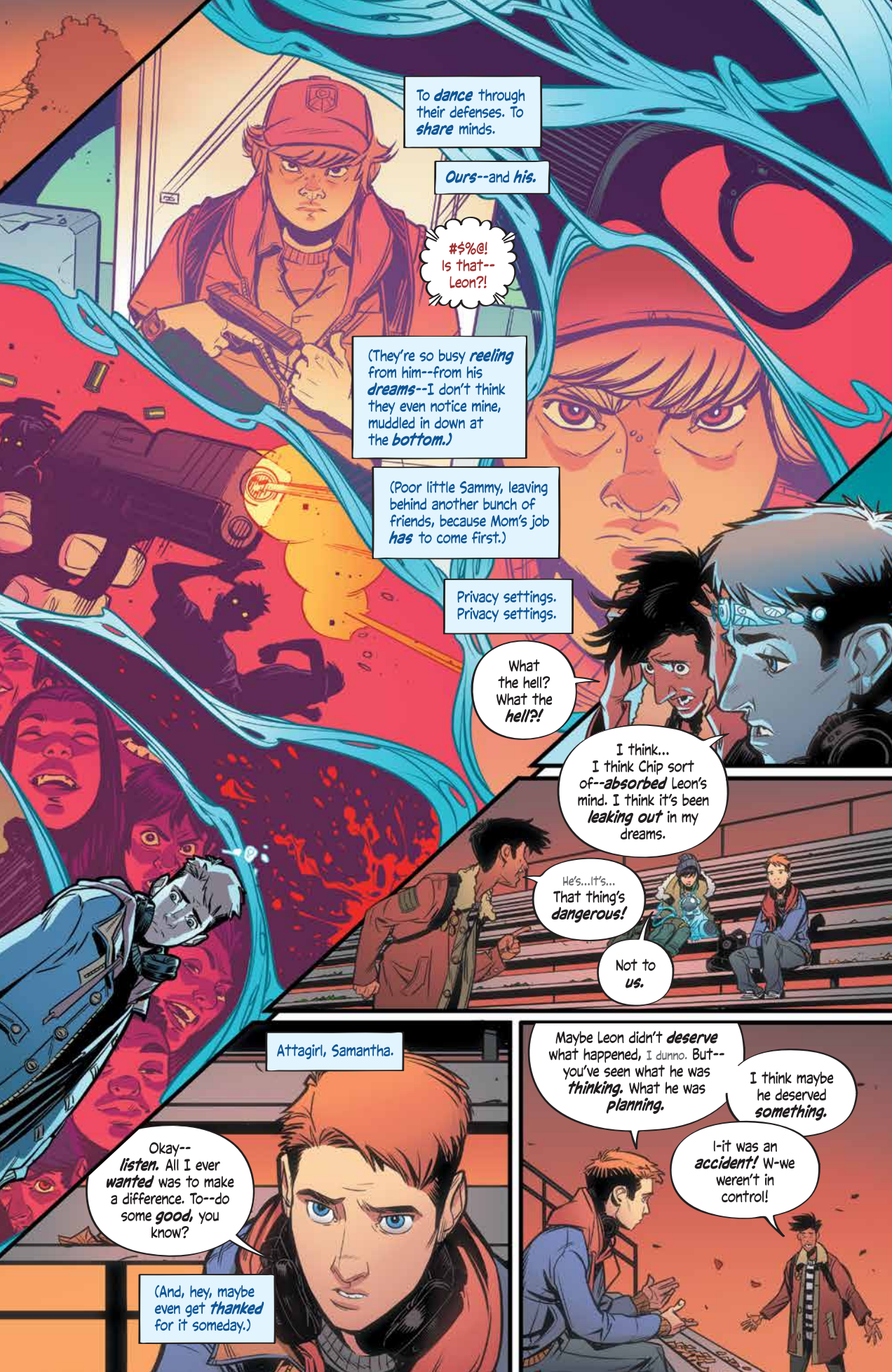
No--
I mean...in
general. Like, what
can this little guy
do? What can he
really do?

For
instance.

And I *show* them.



It's *easy* when
you concentrate.



To *dance* through
their defenses. To
share minds.

Ours--and his.

#\$%&!
Is that--
Leon?!

(They're so busy *reeling*
from him--from his
dreams--I don't think
they even notice mine,
muddled in down at
the *bottom*.)

(Poor little Sammy, leaving
behind another bunch of
friends, because Mom's job
has to come first.)

Privacy settings.
Privacy settings.

What
the hell?
What the
hell?!

I think...
I think Chip sort
of--*absorbed* Leon's
mind. I think it's been
leaking out in my
dreams.

He's...it's...
That thing's
dangerous!

Not to
us.

Attagirl, Samantha.

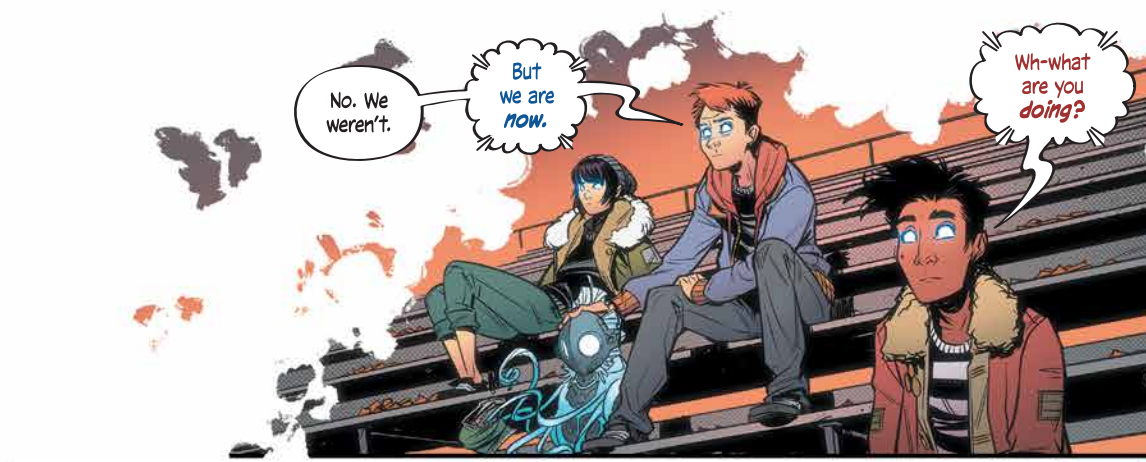
Okay--
listen. All I ever
wanted was to make
a difference. To--do
some *good*, you
know?

(And, hey, maybe
even get *thanked*
for it someday.)

Maybe Leon didn't *deserve*
what happened, I dunno. But--
you've seen what he was
thinking. What he was
planning.

I think maybe
he deserved
something.

I--it was an
accident! W--we
weren't in
control!



No. We weren't.

But we are *now*.

Wh-what are you *doing*?



I dunno. Maybe--like--a *test*. Something to...try it *out* on.

Cut the crap and say what you *mean*, Samuel.

You want a *target* to experiment on.



W-w-w-what target?

Oh come *on*, Samir. It's not *me* doing this. It's *all* of us.

Don't pretend you're not *into* it.

Look.



Aw. Hey--guys. Don't *hurt* her.

We won't. We're just--having some fun, okay? She wants to be *holier-than-thou*--I say we *let* her.

CHELLSSSEEAAA



Difficult to say whose *idea* it is. It forms up in the spaces *between* us, like a *dream*. No *effort*.

You have been *chosennnnn...* by God!

wuh-- wuh--

Will you *step* into the *light*...?

For a second the others *resist*. They're like: *Is this too much? How far is too far?*

But good *grief*--she is just *awful*. You can *smell* the entitlement.

M-M-My Lord! Is that *you*? I *knew* this would happen! I *knew* I'd be *rewarded* someday!

No more *hesitations*, after that.

Yeah, us *angels* know all about *you*, honey. we, *uh*--we've *witnessed* your deeds.

A-angels?

Come. Let us *guide* you unto divinity...

Say--did you put on weight?

Wh-what?

It's only *now* I realize this whole *thing* is just a copy of Waxy's *prank*. The ape in the *Jesus* suit, remember? Damn.

"An expert without a single original thought." My own words, coming at me.

But it's *too late* for doubt. Too late to come up with something *else*.

Kneel! *Kneel* for your God!

We want her to *know*. This *empty* little saint. We want her to *learn*.

Understand *this*, child:

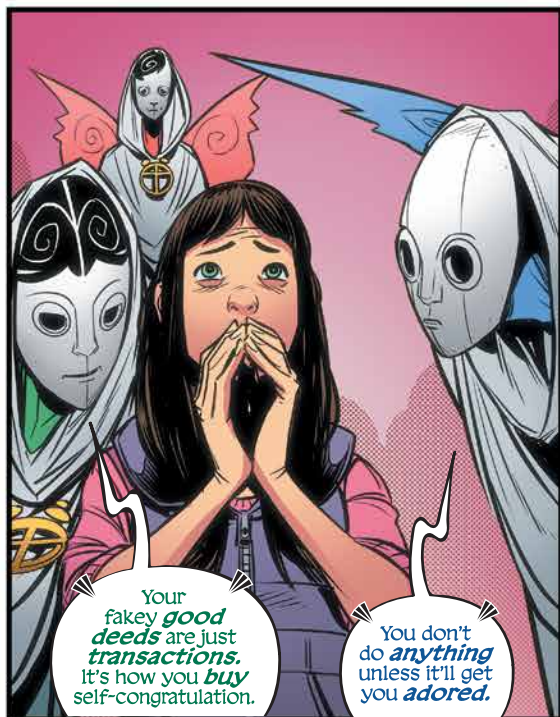


God is blind.

He doesn't even know you *exist*.

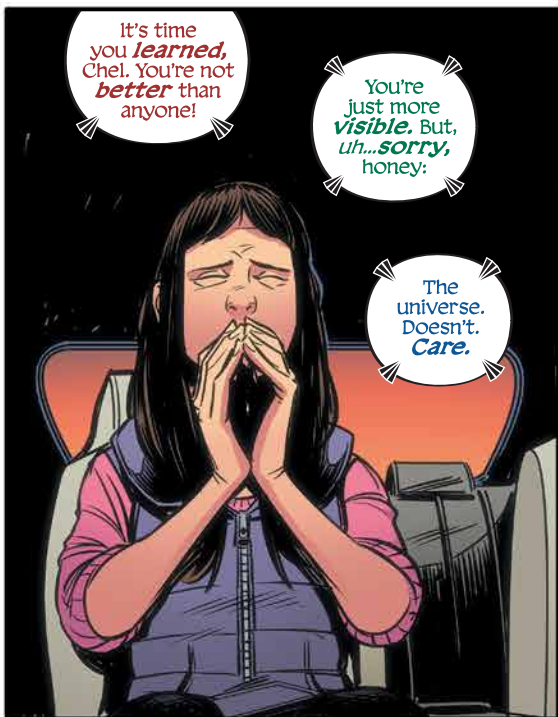
Th-*that's* God?!

(We are *all* influencers in waiting.)



Your fakey *good deeds* are just *transactions*. It's how you *buy* self-congratulation.

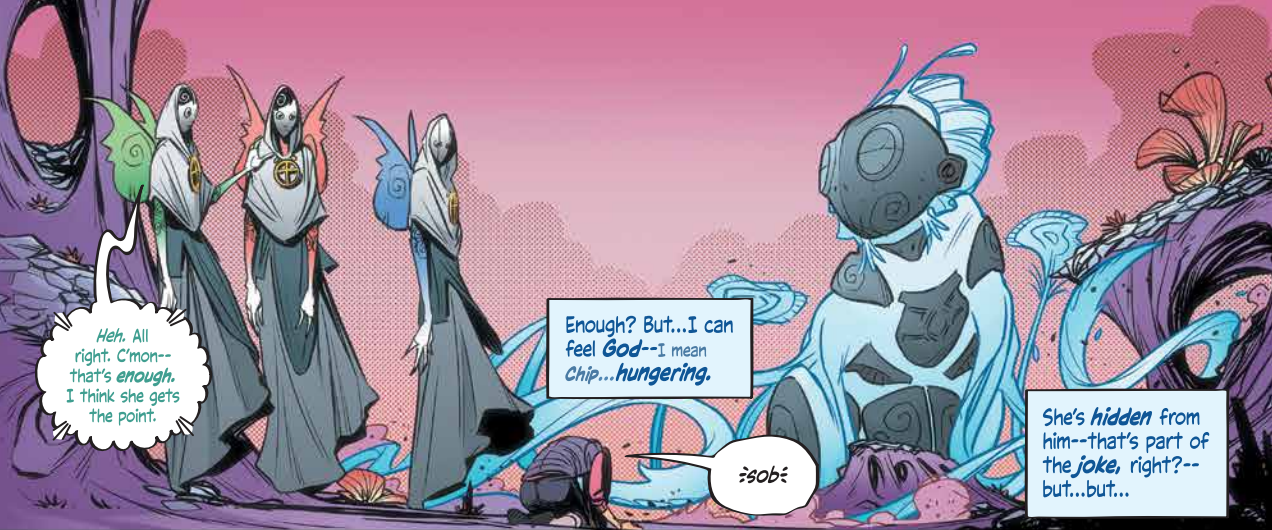
You don't do *anything* unless it'll get you *adored*.



It's time you *learned*, Chel. You're not *better* than anyone!

You're just more *visible*. But, uh...*sorry*, honey:

The universe. Doesn't. *Care*.



So be
seen.

It's amazing how
fast things stop
seeming amazing.

Chel?

Hey--
Chel?

kkh

A dozen bags
of chips and one
human psyche.
*Breakfast of
champions.*



They're laughing
as I come out.

--*totally*
showed her.
That stuck-up
little *piranha!*
Ha!

Let's
hope it *sticks*.
Bit of *humility*
might even make
her *likeable*
again.



A little *guilty*, maybe. A *shrill*
note to the laughter.

Samir was supposed to
be her friend. *Samantha*
knows it was *personal*.
But still.



No *real*
harm done.

YAAAA



CUDDLES!
=UUUUURRP=

Did
he get
bigger
again?

He's
definitely
not gonna go under
the damn bed
now.



I'll take
him. I got
space.

But,
listen--we
oughta think about
what we do *next*. It,
uh. It feels *good*,
you know?



It feels
good, doing
good.

...





CHAPTER THREE

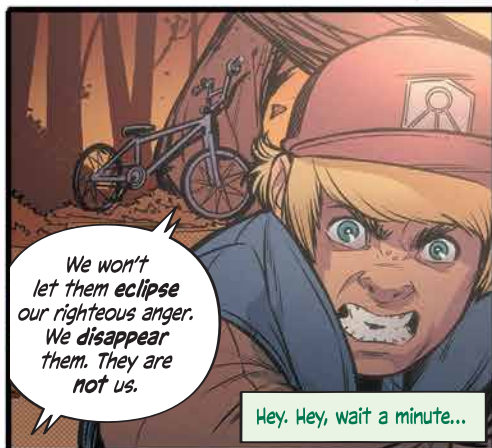


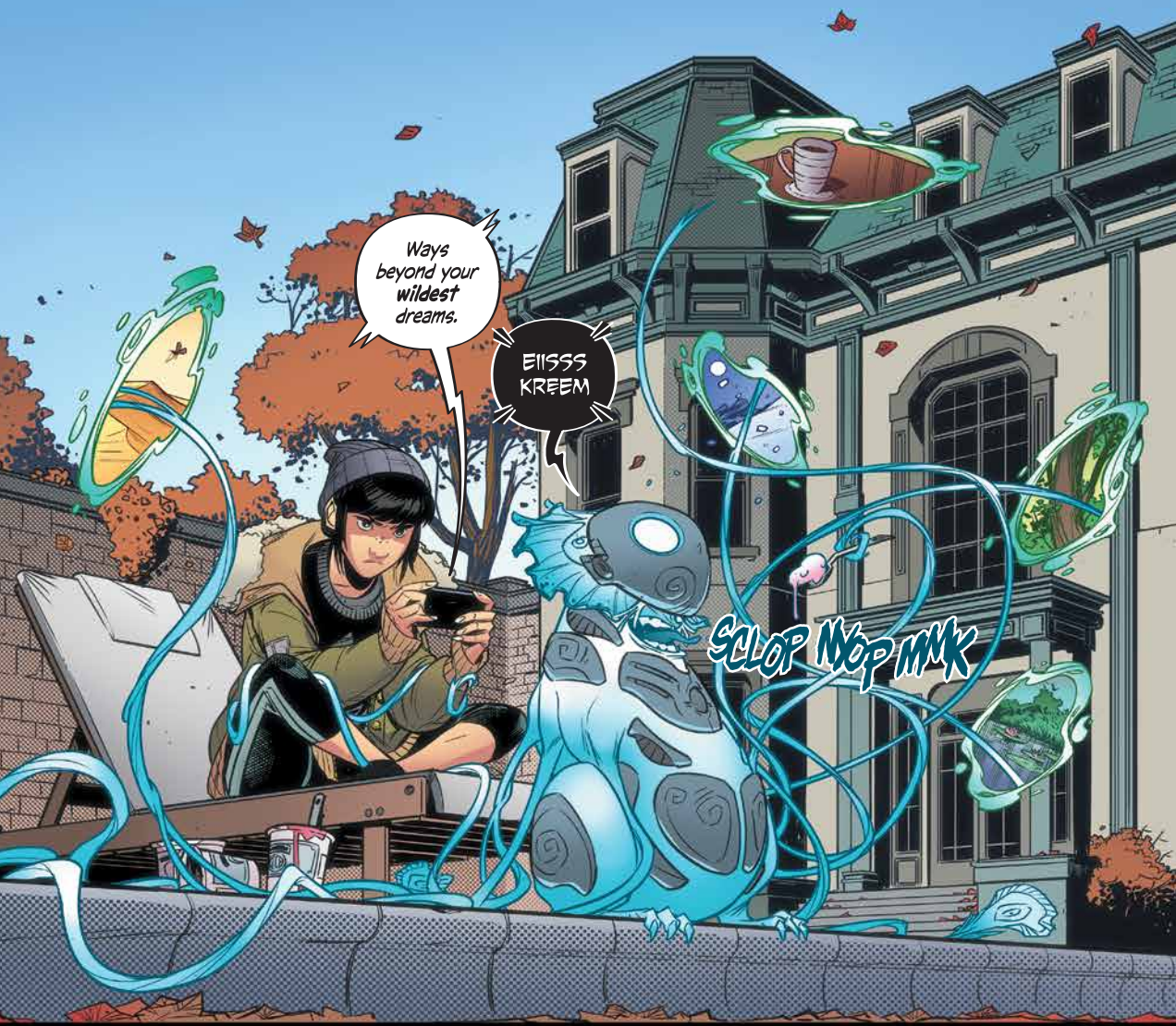


This guy's been posting videos a while now. They're tagged like he's *local*, but he uses *voice distortion*--could be *anyone*.

Mostly it's just rants--*teen shouts at cloud*--but at least he's *earnest*.

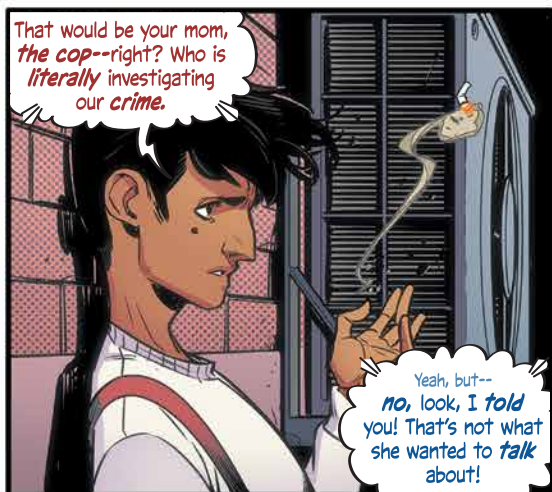
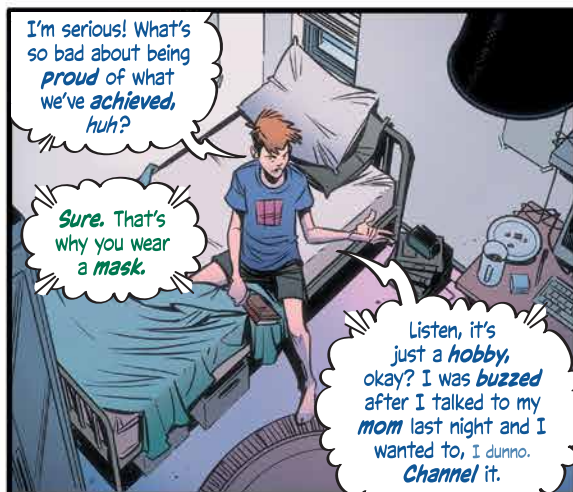
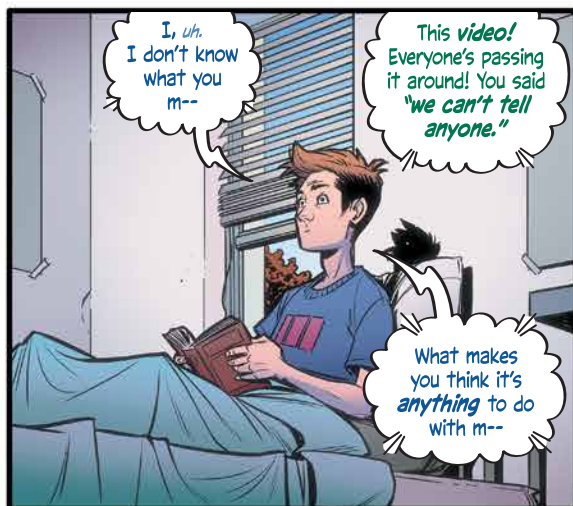
Sometimes he even has half a *point*.

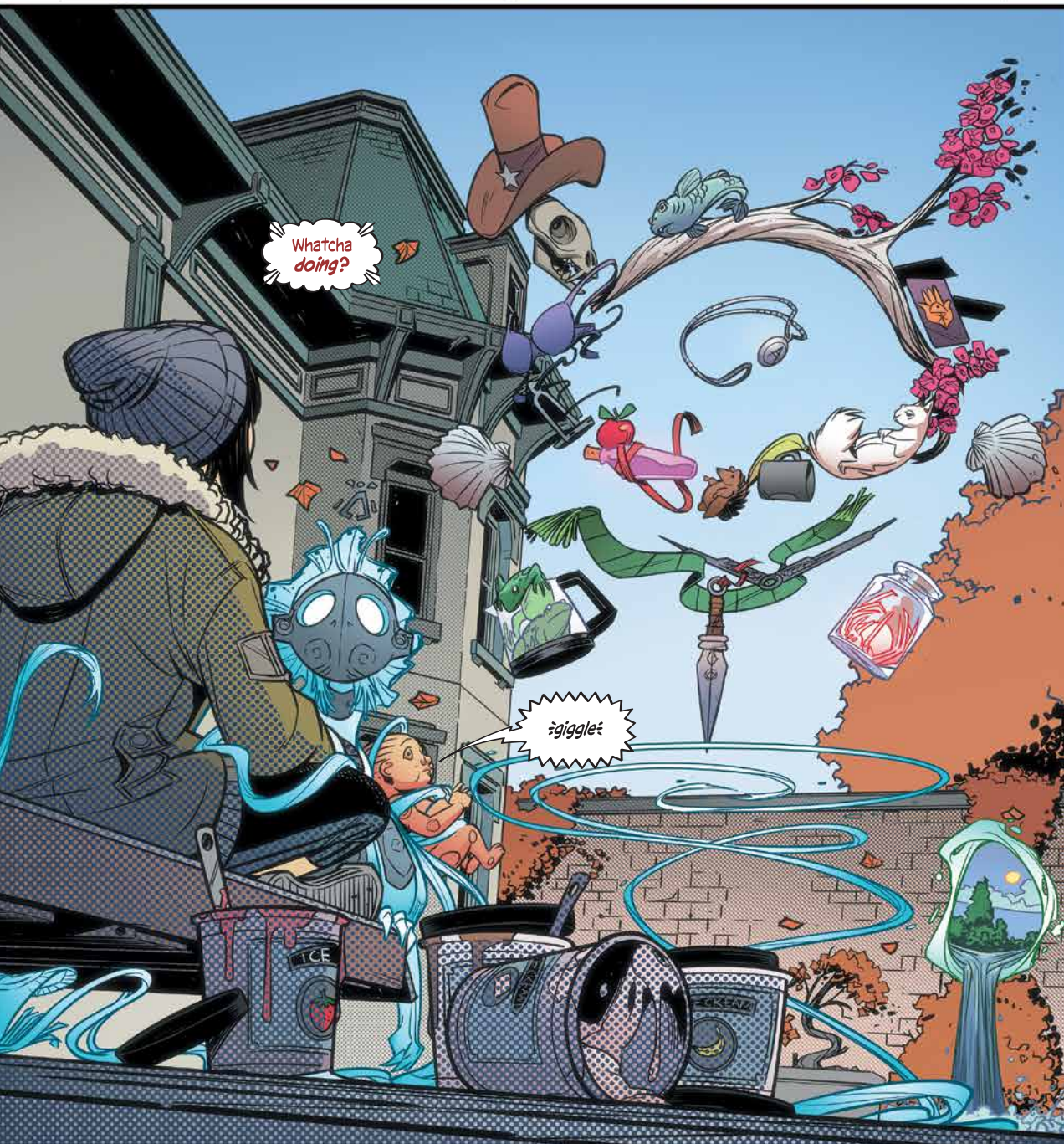
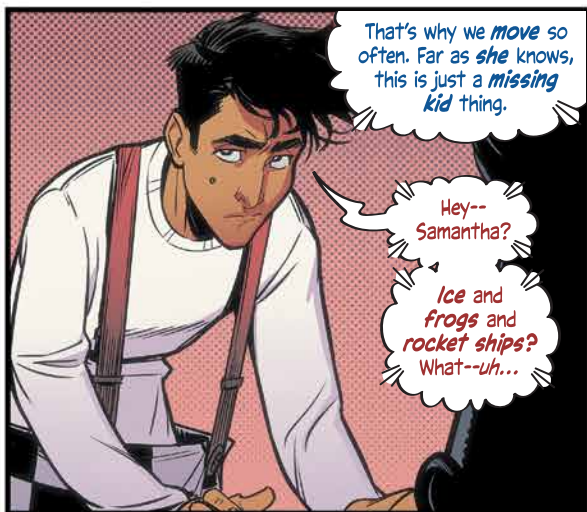
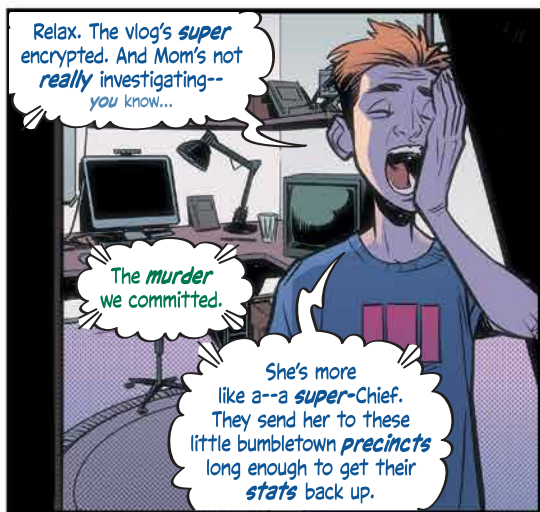


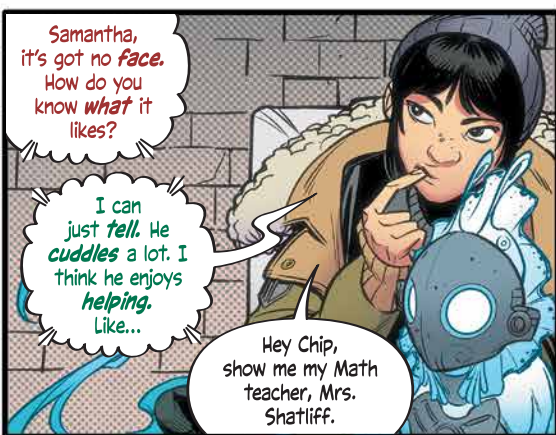


Chapter 3: THINGS TO DO, PEOPLE TO SEE











No.
No
no
no





I need some privacy.

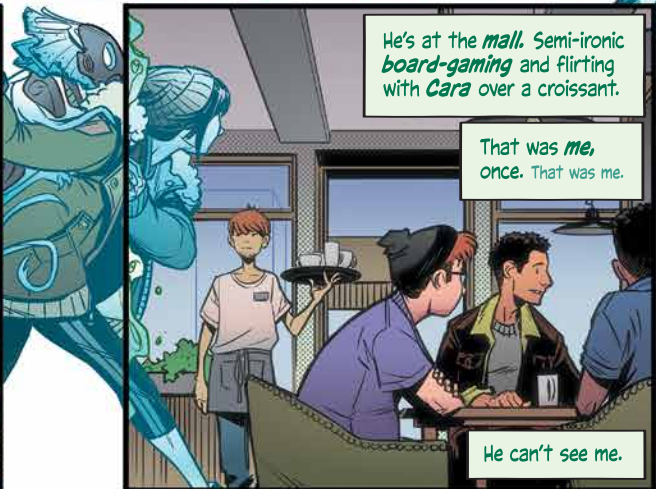


He can't see me.



He can't see me.

I tell myself I'm just going to watch. Just for a little while. I'm lying.



He's at the mall. Semi-ironic board-gaming and flirting with Cara over a croissant.

That was me, once. That was me.



He can't see me and this is so easy.

It happens so fast and, sure, I'm driving it--I guess. But... there's no thought.



Straight from my subconscious to Chip.

He can't see me.

...so I can see the dumb cat in the bushes, but as I go to grab him?

You won't believe it--

So easy.
No thought.

Twenty-eight weeks. That's the **day** that stands out. The second **ultrasound scan**.

Too late to change my **mind**, y'know?

"I waited, Craig. You said you'd meet me there.

"I waited hours."

M-Mikey!
Darcy, help m--

Huh...

You **hear** something?

From **that** day?
For...for every damn day **after...**? You just...

Didn't see me.

Guys!
Guys!
Guuuu--

Not ever again.

"And--it's funny. Whatever it was that made me invisible to you?

"I guess it must have been contagious."

Well...
I think maybe there's a way you **have** to see me, Craig. I think maybe we've just gotta--take away the **distractions**.

I think you need to step **outside** everything you know, until all that's left...?

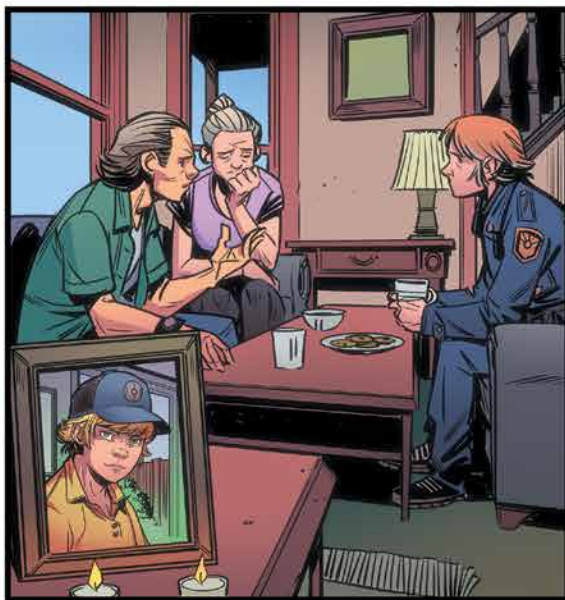
Is
you and
me.

Alone
in the
invisible
places.



With
the echoes
of our
baby.







Zero
brain activity.
It's real *sad*,
Chief.

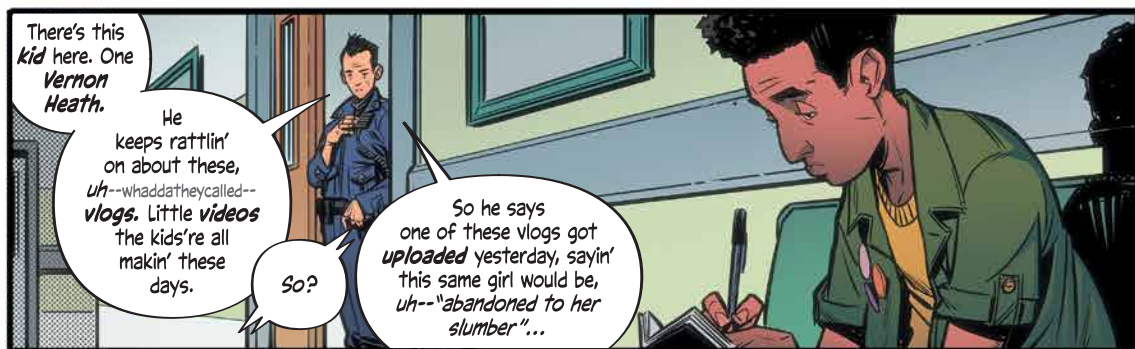
Noted. So
what?

Well--the docs can't
explain what happened,
but they're pretty sure
there's no *foul play*. No
drugs or *trauma* or
whatever.



You couldn't
tell me *this* in
the *office*?

Sure
I could, i-it's
just...

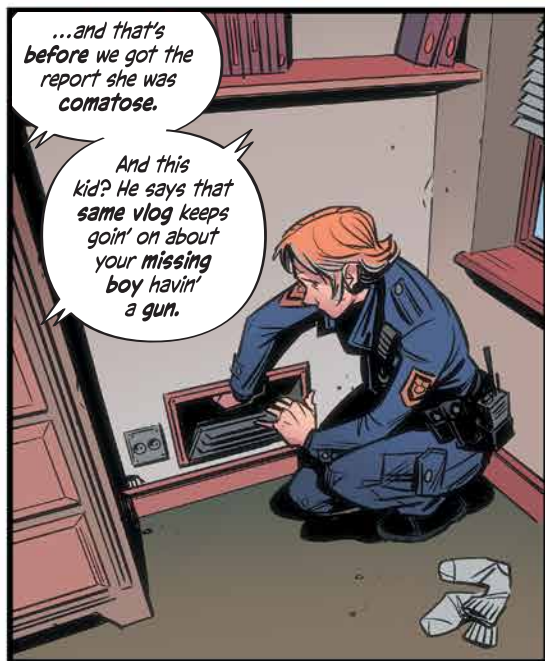


There's this
kid here. One
Vernon
Heath.

He
keeps rattlin'
on about these,
uh--whaddattheycalled--
vlogs. Little *videos*
the kids're all
makin' these
days.

So?

So he says
one of these vlogs got
uploaded yesterday, sayin'
this same girl would be,
uh--"abandoned to her
slumber"...



...and that's
before we got the
report she was
comatose.

And this
kid? He says that
same *vlog* keeps
goin' on about
your *missing*
boy havin'
a gun.



That mean
anything to
you?



Please...please,
y-y-you're
hurting
m--

You
have no
idea what
hurt is.



All my friends.
Friends for **years**,
Craig. Suddenly I'm
a **ghost**.

Only, it's **weird**. I guess
people can kinda **sense**
ghosts, because they'd
say something-- "**slut**" or
"**whore**" or whatever--
after I left the
room.

I bet
you never
got that,
huh?



And you
know what's worse?
The only one who ever **did**
see me? Th-the only one
who--wh-who still made
eye contact?

"I...I h-had
to...t-to give
away."

It's time.
C'mon, honey.
You signed the
forms. It's for the best.

You know
that.



We
couldn't **cope**.
P-people said
that from the
start--you
remember?

We didn't
care. We were
strong, right?
We'd manage
together.

But...
w-without
you?



"No chance."

It's like a *storm*.

The *loss*. The *pain*.
And--worst, by far--the
what ifs.

Fused together and
ground down to a
sharp edge.



Hard to say who's
controlling this
now--me or Chip.

Harder to say
if I *care*.



He's *hungry*. My little
angel. My little *devil*.

He's hungry and angry, and he
feels what I feel and it *scares*
him--*ohh*, he barely understands
any of this--but mostly?



He just wants to
help.

(He likes to
find things.)

FWOMP



Wh-wh-where's *this*? Where are w--

You *know* where.

Listen.



waaaaa!



oh.

N-no, Sam, c'mon, I--I don't wanna *see*, I don't w--

You'll do *more* than see.



You will come *with me* into this house.

Y-you'll... you'll *acknowledge* what you *did*. You'll *acknowledge* what you are to...to our...



To *him*.



B-because if you *don't*?

I won't just make you *invisible*, Craig. I won't just make everyone *forget* you.

I will make it... so that you...



Never.

Existed.

Chip could *do* it. It would *hurt him*, sure. All this pain, all this anger. It would hurt him *bad...* But he wants to *help*. He has his *ways*.

Ways beyond your wildest dreams.



The idiot makes his *excuses*. All *snotty face* and wobbling *lips*.

(I thought I loved him, once. I wonder *why*.)

He says his *folks* threatened to cut him off.

He says his *friends* begged him not to throw his life away.

He says he *wanted* to stand by me. Wanted to come see the *scan*. He says he felt so, *so* bad, turning his back.

But still. What it comes down to, when you cut away all the crap?
Is this:



I...I deserve a *normal* life, don't I?

I deserve to be *happy*!

So *let go*, Samantha.
Let go and *enjoy* it.

(God, it's been
pent up for
so long.)



Somewhere out there I can feel the *others*.
Trying to *watch, excited* by the drama.

Catching little *echoes* of Chip's
hunger, like the *smell* of a free meal.



I lost control before. Just once.
Too many beers at a house party.

A *kiss* and an empty *bedroom* and
oh god--the cost...

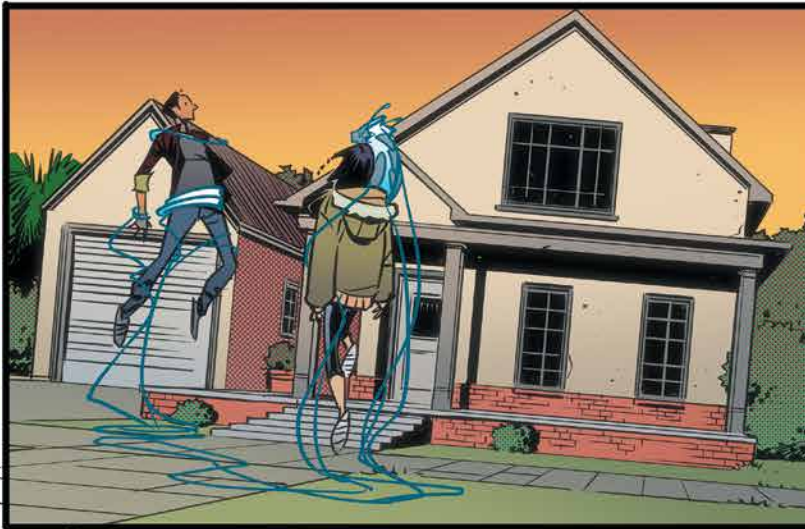
I lost myself. I have been *waiting*.
Waiting to get out of this town and
this school. Waiting to hit *reset* and
pretend it never happened.

But I *can't*. I can't and I *won't*, and
however you cut it--you cannot deny:

It feels *good*
to go *too far*.



giggle





Too far is
too far.

snap

We put him back
where we found him.

We take the
memories from
his head and
the pain from
his heart.

He's so *different*.
So--well--so *alien*,
I guess. So *beyond*
anything we'll ever
really *know*. But,
oh, he's trying so
hard.

I think he's
offering...h-he's
offering me...
what...?

And for just a second I can feel
Chip--rummaging in my mind, trying
to help. Trying to *understand*.

MEWP?

Oh.

Ohhhh,
you're so
kind.

But...
No. No,
thank
you.

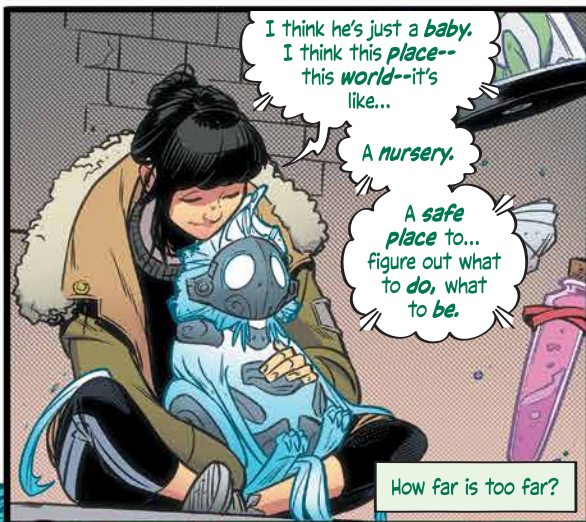
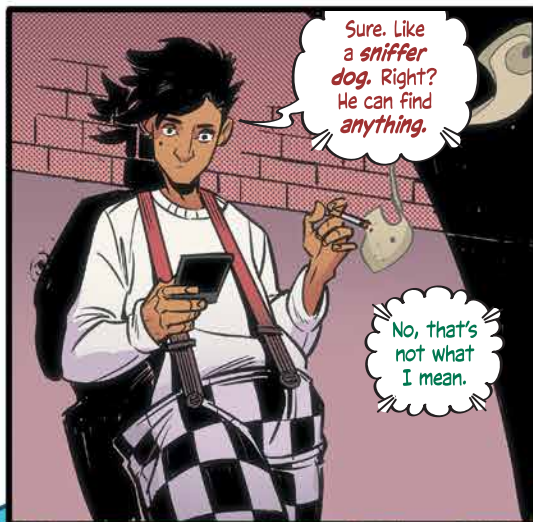
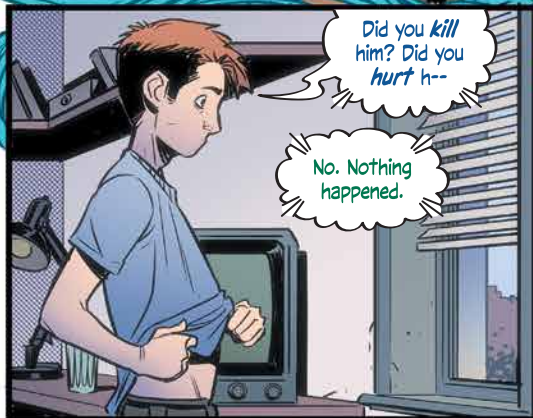
I don't *want*
to forget.

They're *waiting*.

She's back!
Y-you're
back!

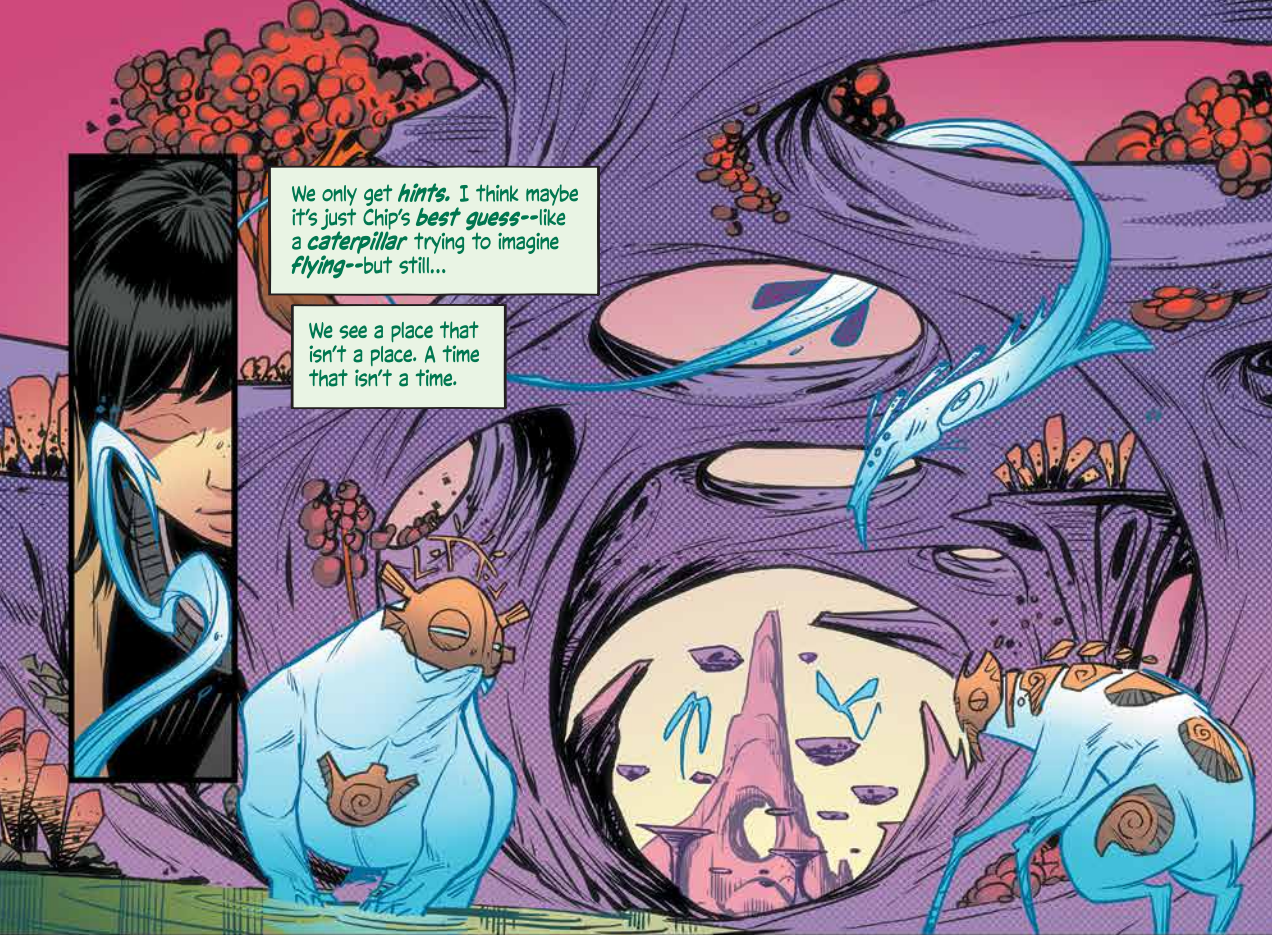
What
happened?

There's something kinda *icky*
about how *buzzed* they are.



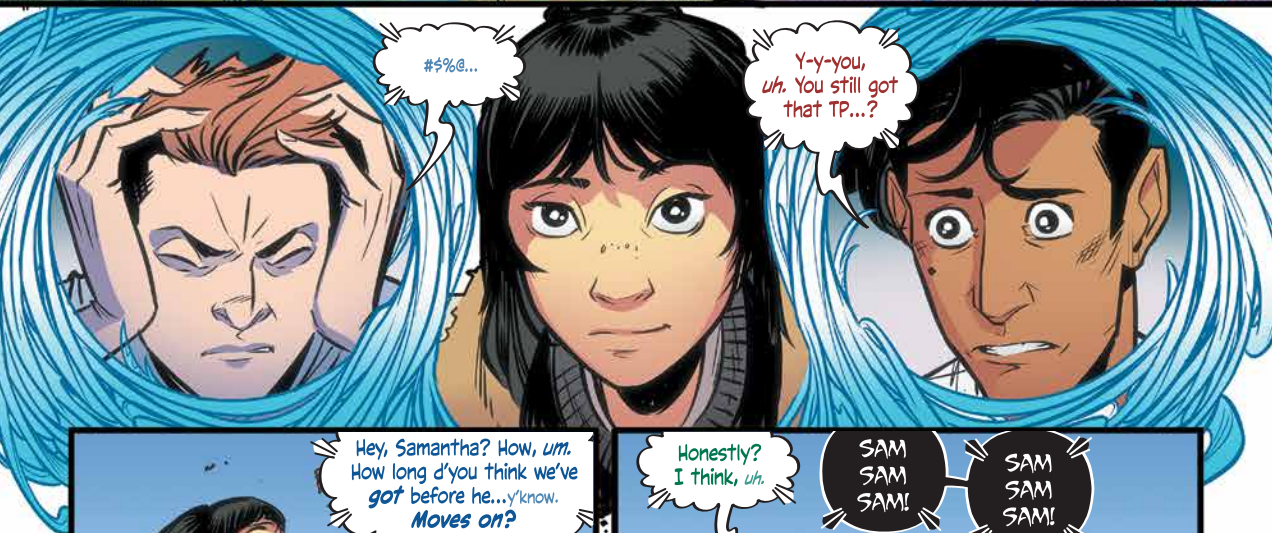
Somewhere to--to *grow up*, I guess. Before *moving on*.

Move on to *where?*



We only get *hints*. I think maybe it's just Chip's *best guess*--like a *caterpillar* trying to imagine *flying*--but still...

We see a place that isn't a place. A time that isn't a time.



#%&@...

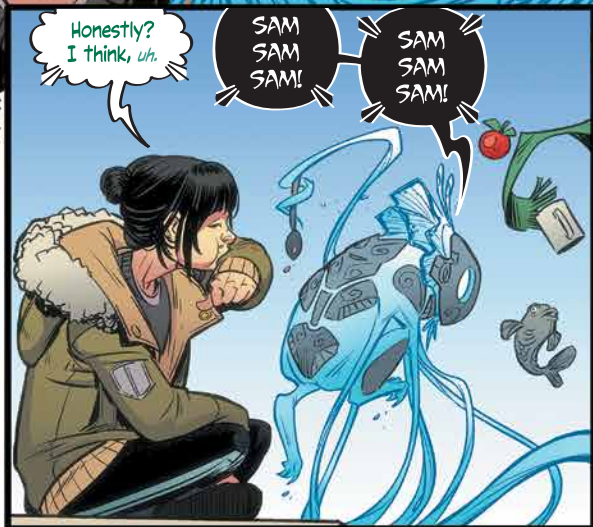
Y-y-you, uh. You still got that TP...?



Hey, Samantha? How, um. How long d'you think we've got before he...y'know. *Moves on?*

A-a-and what's *keeping* him here, anyway?

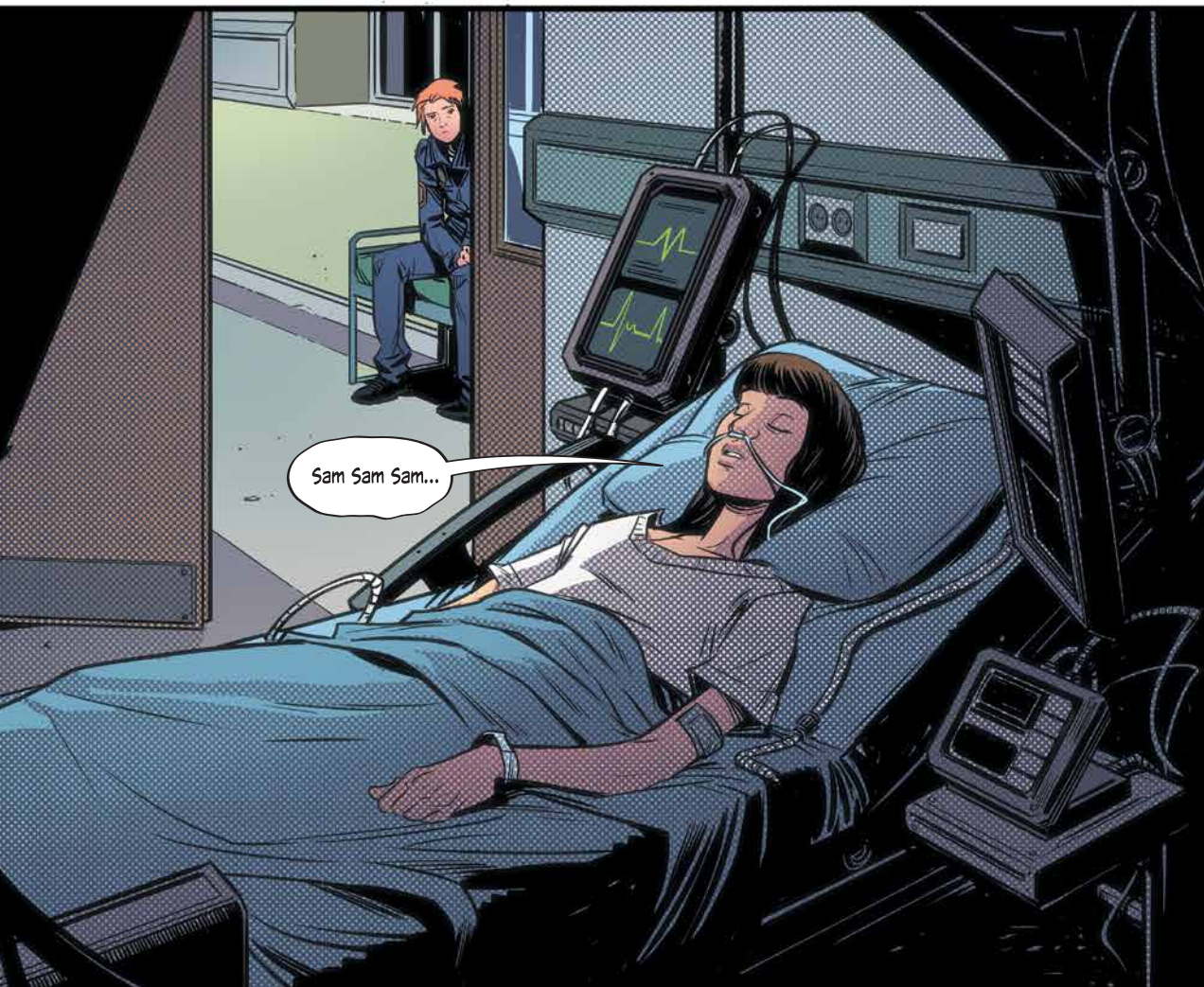
EEISSS KREEM!

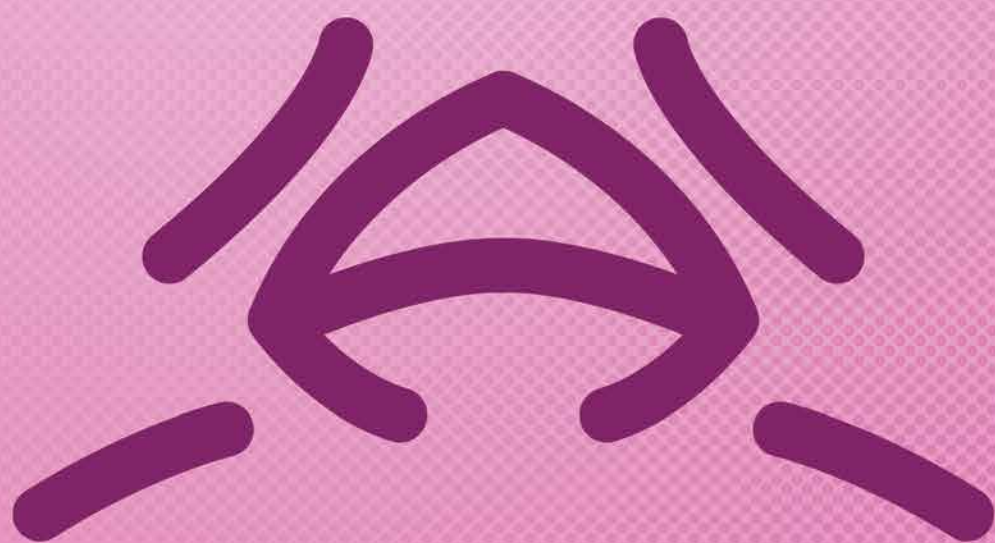


Honestly? I think, uh.

SAM SAM SAM!

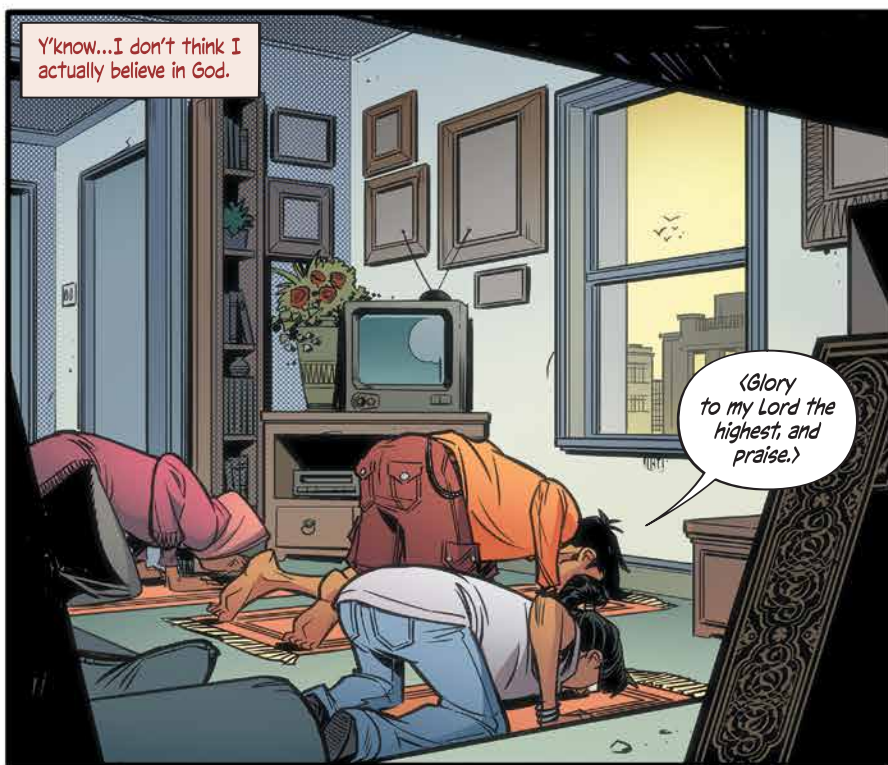
SAM SAM SAM!





CHAPTER FOUR





Y'know...I don't think I actually believe in God.

<Glory to my Lord the highest, and praise.>

I try not to *think* about it much, anyways.

Mom likes to do the *salah* as a *family*, and I guess...I guess keeping her *happy's* as close to bein' *holy* as I can *imagine*.

Ooof. Deep thoughts. No *thank* you.



Tell you this: it's a *lot* easier to self-distract since I hooked up my brain to a couple *others*.

Though, sad to say, they got their *own* dumb notions of *holiness*.



With great power comes great responsibility?
Sure, whatever.

But when the world's going to *hell*, it's the *responsibility* of the powerless to *rise up!*

Samuel. *tske* The self-righteousness just *farts* outta him.

Dude's like a *preacher* without a *god*.



And Samantha? *Dutiful* to the *Sunday service* 'cause you won't get *noticed* if you go with the flow.

She's not listening to the words. She's thinking...let's see...

Heh! She's thinking it's *tough* to care about a 2000-year old *god on a stick--*



--when there's a *baby one* sitting right next to you--

--practicing its *invisibility* and snacking on the *daydreams* of the *congregation*.



HEY
guys!

Aagh!

Aaaah!



Listen, I am *totally* bored. You wanna get *coffee* later?

K-kinda *busy* here, Samir.

Yeah. *Some* of us got more *important* things to do.



Sure, sure. I was just thinking, you know. We could *talk*.

Finally figure out what we oughta do with *Chip*, maybe.



It starts right away, of course.

How many *times*? There's nothing to figure out! It's *obvious*!

(Arguments are a *lot* more interesting when you can see inside people's *brains*.)



We gotta think **big!** Change everything!

The **environment**, the **government**, **education!** We got the chance to **save the world** here!

Oh sure, and P.S., let's **film it all** to bump the subscribers on your dumb **vlog**.

Listen, Chip's a **sentient being**, okay? Only thing we **have** to do is help him **move on** to... to **wherever** he's going.

Oh, quit projecting your **crap** onto the ineffable **alien**, Samantha! It's not **him** who needs to **move on**.

Screw **you!** Just because **you** got no @#\$\$ing **heart** doesn't mean the r--

It's not about **heart!** It's about **opportunity!**

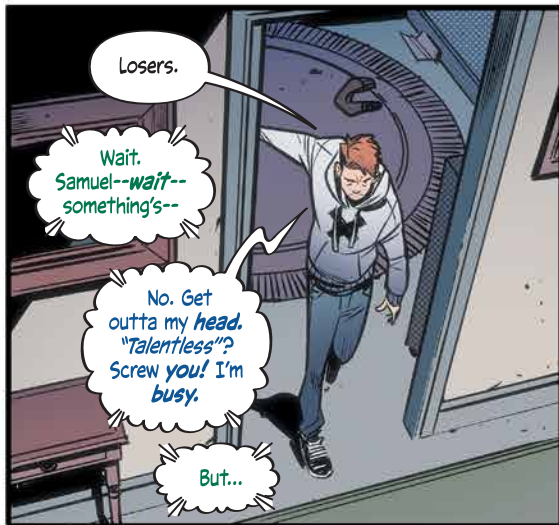
You'd **see** that if you weren't desperately trying to swap **one** baby for another!



You take that **BACK**, you talentless piece of--



Uh.



Losers.

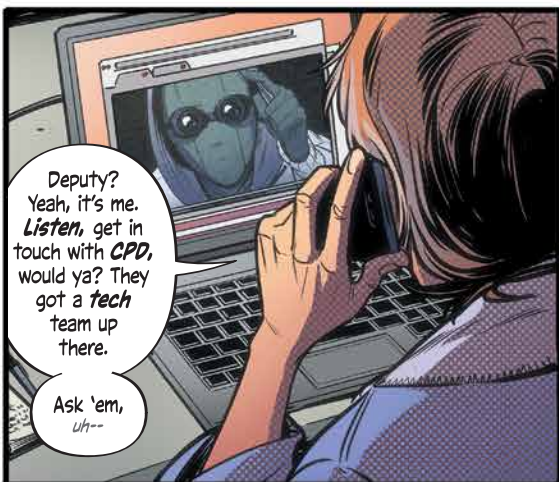
Wait. Samuel--wait--something's--

No. Get outta my **head**. "Talentless"? Screw **you!** I'm **busy**.

But...



Chapter 4: MEET THY MAKER



TV shows.

Hair styles.



Last night's game.

Special edition
sneakers.

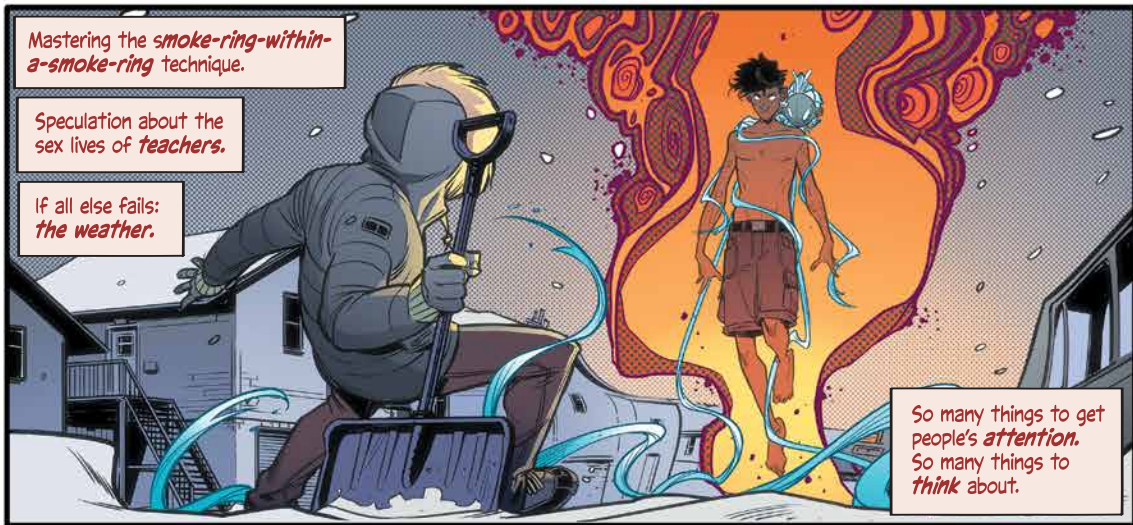
Risqué
jokes.



Mastering the *smoke-ring-within-a-smoke-ring* technique.

Speculation about the
sex lives of *teachers*.

If all else fails:
the weather.



So many things to get
people's *attention*.
So many things to
think about.

Y'know--*sometimes*? If
you're like, *rrrrreally* good
at changing *gears*?



Sometimes whole
days can pass
without thinking
of *anything*
at all.

It's *easier*
that way.

S-Samir?
Little *Samir*,
i-i-is that
you?

Be quiet,
Dad. This is
tricky.

Wh-where *is*
this? Wh-what's
happening?

EEEEEE!
SAM-SAM-
SAM!

Listen,
squid, don't
start. I
know it--
nnnnf!

I know it
hurts. D-d-doesn't
matter. Stop trying
to--*nn*--to get
help.

"They're
locked out.
They're not
invited,
okay?"

Aaaaow!

Samir.
Y-you...you
got so *big*.
Am I dead? Is
that wh--

Nnnnn!

"There's not
enough room,
where we're
going..."

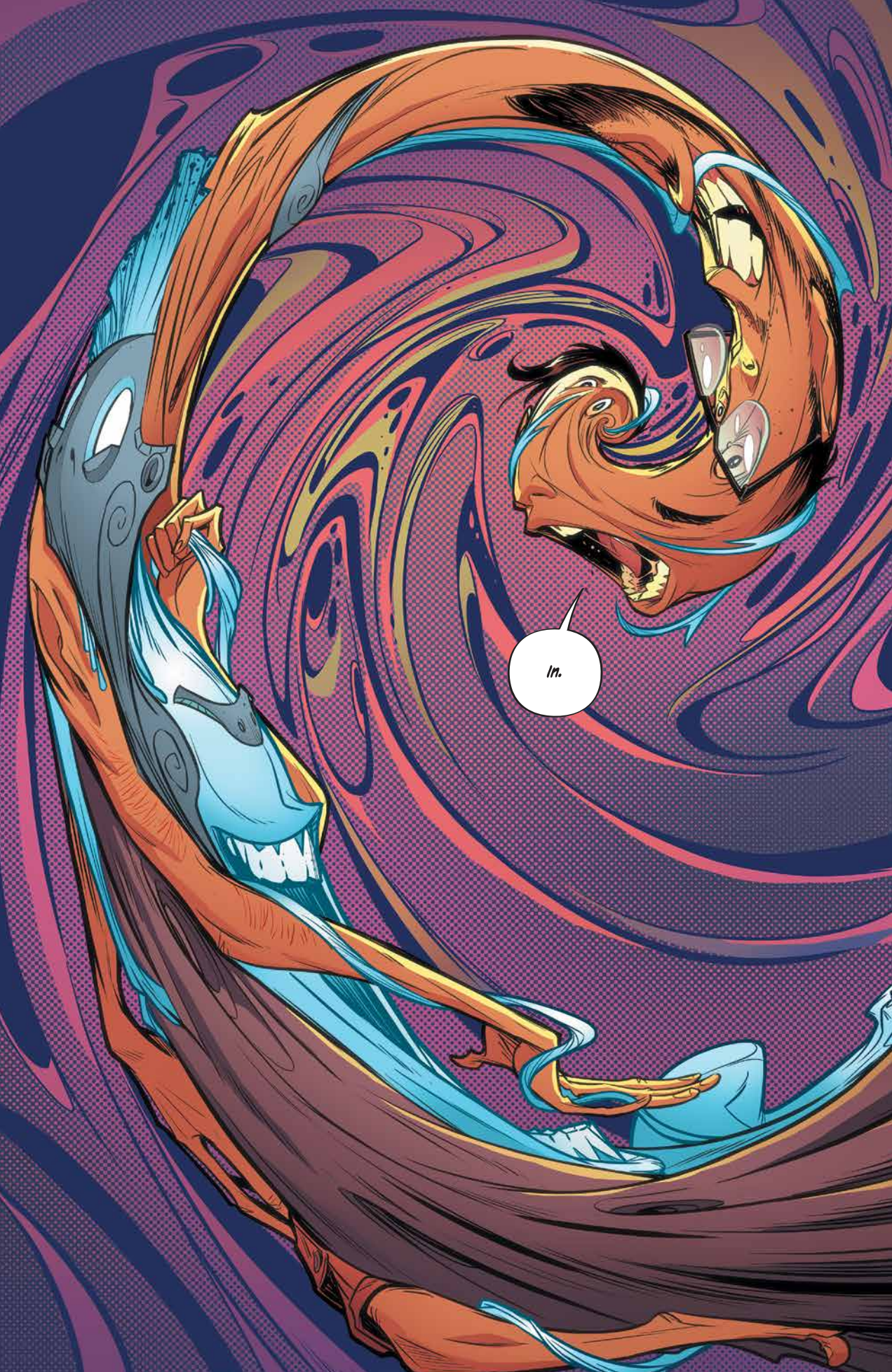
EEEEEE
HURTS
HURTS
EEEEEE

Wh-what's happening? I--I
want to leave! I want to
get *out* of here!

I know
you can *do* it.
Rrrrr. I *know*
you can...

Sure thing,
Dad--you can
leave. Matter of
fact, we're *all*
leaving.

But,
uh. Not
out.



In.



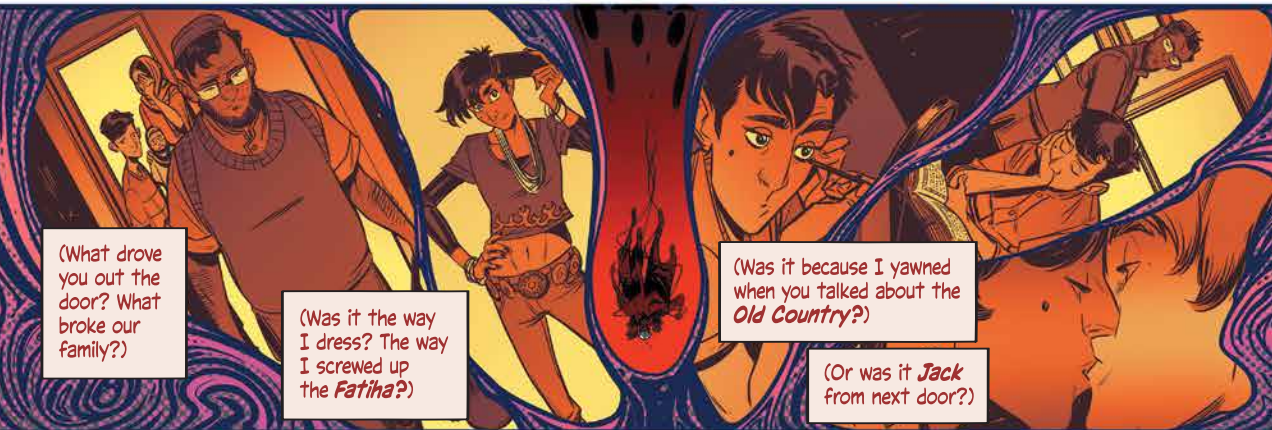
So.

Wh-wh-
wh--

Years spent
trying to be a
good **son**.

Years,
Dad. That's what
you're seeing. All the
years since you
left.

Trying not to
speculate.



(What drove
you out the
door? What
broke our
family?)

(Was it the way
I dress? The way
I screwed up
the **Fatiha**?)

(Was it because I yawned
when you talked about the
Old Country?)

(Or was it **Jack**
from next door?)



Aaaow
god, he's...he's
so **sad**...



Nnnf. I...I
don't have **time**
for this...



Years
playing the
clown.

(The **rulebreaker**. The
couldn't-give-a-damn.)

(The **smiling idiot**
who'll do **anything**
you **dare** him.)

(Anything
to be liked.)



(Anything to
not think.)

Years.
Years trying to be
everything for
everybody.

(The *skin-deep smiles* and the *dumb distractions* and *never a spare second* to stop.)

(To wonder which face is the *real* one.)

EEEE! EEEE!
EEEEEE!

*Sssshh,
little monster.
I know it
hurts.*

It's *good* that it hurts.

S-Samir,
I--

Years,
Dad.

Years
knowing--deep *down*,
behind *aaaall* the
distractions--

--that
things would be
better for Mom,
for *Fatima*,
for *you*. For
everyone.

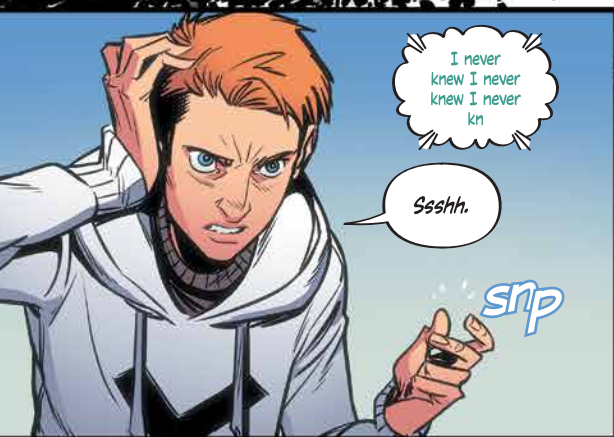
If I just...
y'know.

Wasn't.

I never knew

I never
kn







Huh. **Strange.**
That's a **cold**
wind.

It's **Samuel**, I think,
bleeding **bitterness**
through the barriers.
So much for **privacy**.

HURTS!
HURTS!

I guess--**yeah**.
Samantha feels
it **too**.

What a weird
kid **he** turned
out to be.

He's so **angry**. So...
determined to
play the outcast.

I mean, **seriously**. Dude just
got the biggest compliment of
his creepy ranty **career**, and
he's already managed to spin it
into something he can **resent**.

...think I give
a @#\$% what **you** think,
Vern? Just another
vanilla bully, that's
all, and--

Samantha's on her
way **here**. Poor girl.
Swimming through
Samuel's **spite** to
come **stop** me.

To come
save me.

She has a **headache**. We all
do, I guess. Pain in the brain,
hurt in the heart. (Man, when
did this all get so **toxic**?)

Doesn't
matter.

I'm **lucky**.
I've got a
skill they
don't.

I'm an **expert**
at distractions.



Hottest new *album*.

S-Samir--
please. Why
did you *bring*
me here?
What's this
about?

Video games.



Waiting for the
Pumpkin Spice
Latte to come
back.

S-same as
always, Dad.
I just, *uh*.

D&D, Wednesday
nights.

I wanted
you to *see*
me.

I wanted
someone to
really
really
see
me.



A-and
maybe, *uhm*.
Hhh, god.

Karaoke.

M-maybe
just...sorta...
slightly...hoping...



Beer pong. Best sushi.
Pool parties. Bubblegum.



Screw/marry/kill.
Comic books.
Vintage pornos.
Lipstick.

Hoping
you might
forgive
me.





Trickshots at
the pool table.

But.

Cute swimwear.

Top three dairy
products.

Cryptocurrencies.

I've. I've
been...

Imported British
candy bars.

I've been
b-blaming...
m...m...

Favorite
dinosaur.

Zombie apocalypse
survival strategies.

Chimichangas.

Son--son,
please?

You *gotta*
forgive me.

You name the
topic. Anything.
I can fake it.

Anything but
what *matters*.



Chip's *screaming*. Does this *hurt* him?
Or is he just tangled up in *my* pain?

Who knows?
Who *cares*?



What matters is,
there's a *rush*.

The rush of *one thing* leaving,
and another *pouring in* to
fill the gap.



I guess even
emptiness
leaves a hole.

Even *dumbness*. Even
pointlessness. Even *me*.

You take it all *away* and what's left is a
big angry *vacuum*, itching to be filled.



And *fury's* so much *easier* than *forgiveness*.

S-stop it! Samir, you're--you're *hurting* yourself!

Don't care.

You're--you're *killing* him!

Don't care.

You *#%&ing will*, you stupid ass!

You'll *regret* it, Samir! I *know*.

You go *too far*, there's--there's no way *back*!

Don't care.

Samir. Please. *Look*. You're... you're hurting *Chip*.

He's *linked* to you. He's in your *head*.

Don't. Care.

H-he's just a *kid*, Samir.

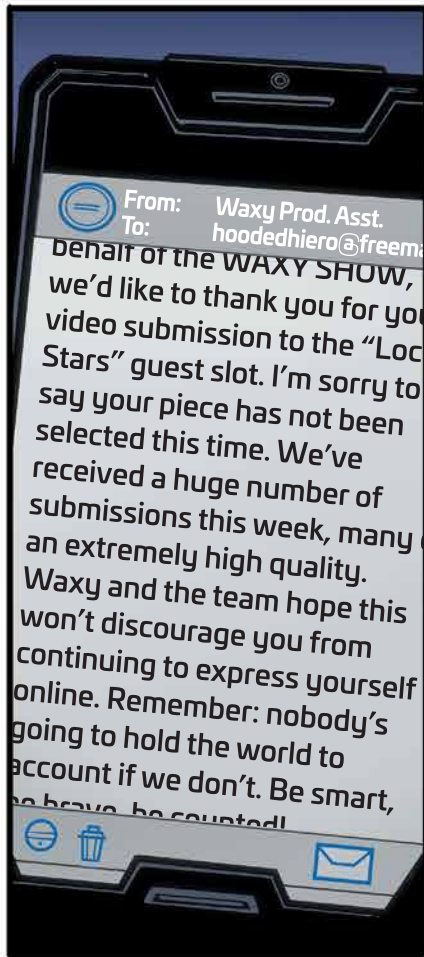
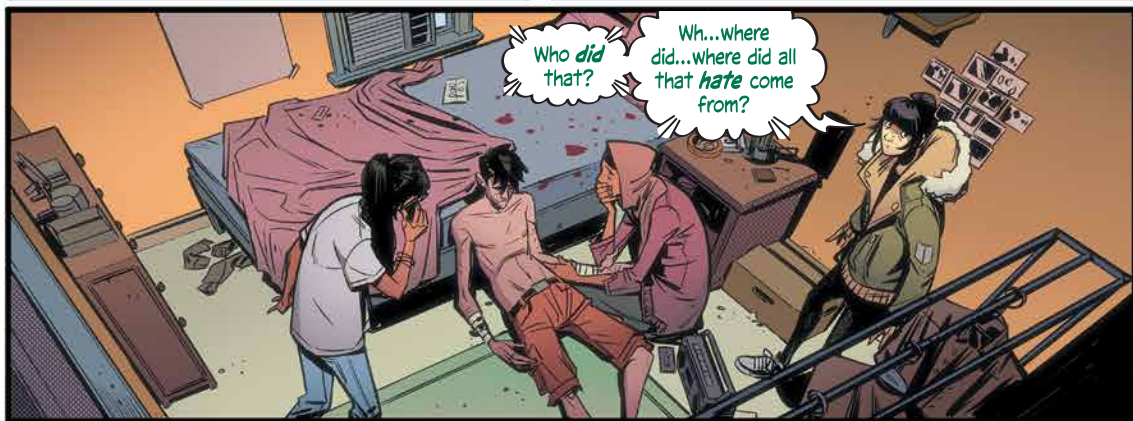
Don't c

You're doing to *him* what your *dad* did to you.





Rise up.





That's.

Not.

Fair.



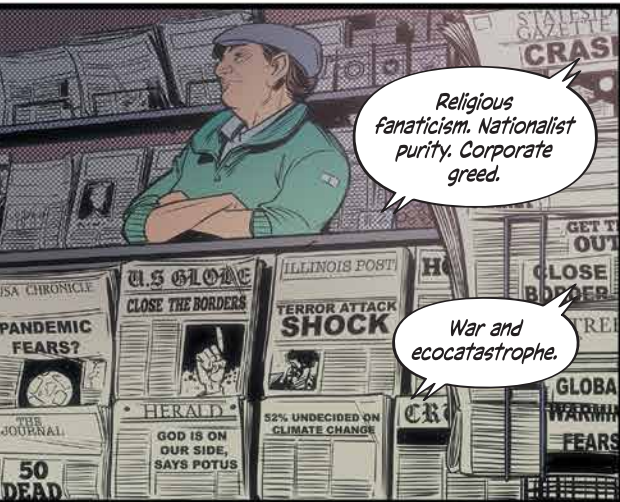
CHAPTER FIVE





The world's gone to hell.

I mean-- that's obvious, isn't it?



Religious fanaticism. Nationalist purity. Corporate greed.

War and ecocatastrophe.



But, uh, you know what I saw this week?

I'd like to show you.



I saw a lady enjoying the quiet by the creek, stop to pick up someone else's trash.



I saw a guy in a shirt so patched it was basically a net, give his last quarter to charity.



I saw kids laugh and kiss and live--despite what the world's got in store.

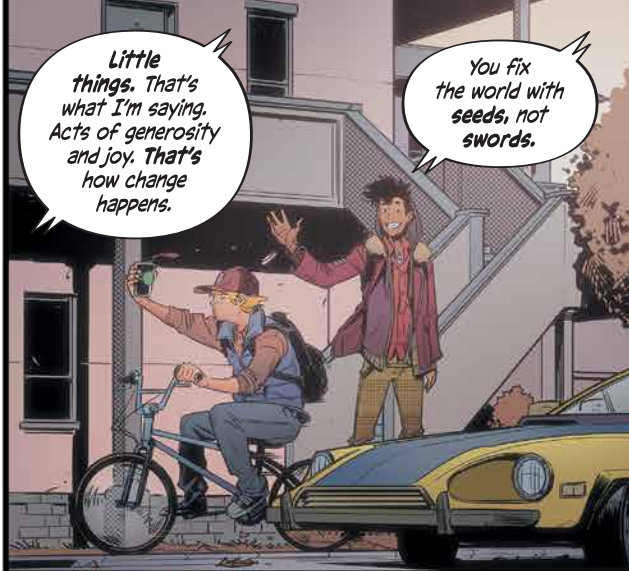
Does that make them dumb? Are they--are they just ignoring the bad stuff?

I don't think so. Because... you know what never works? Not ever?



Shouting.
Stamping your
feet. Throwin' a
tantrum.

You
don't grow a
flower by burning
down the forest;
know what I
mean?



Little
things. That's
what I'm saying.
Acts of generosity
and joy. That's
how change
happens.

You fix
the world with
seeds, not
swords.



Me?
I think there's
still wonder.
Uncynical,
unironic.

I think
there's still hope.
And I think...all we
gotta do, really? Is
stop trying so hard
to be seen...



...and
start looking
around
us.



I'm Vern Heath.
I couldn't be prouder to
be picked by Waxy for the
guest slot on his show,
here in Tangletree,
Illinois.

And
I'd like to
show you my
world.

This piece is:

Pedestrian.

Unambitious.

Sophomoric.

Sentimental.

Totally
#\$\$&ing
pointless.





Chapter 5: DUTY FIRST



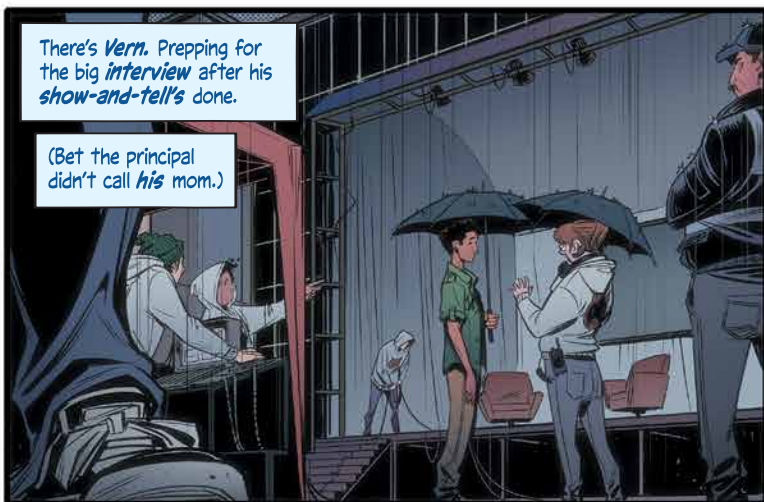
Waxy streams *live*, every Monday.
New *town*, new guest slot.

"*Keep the content flowing*"--
remember? Golden rule.



There's *Vern*. Prepping for
the big *interview* after his
show-and-tell's done.

(Bet the principal
didn't call *his* mom.)



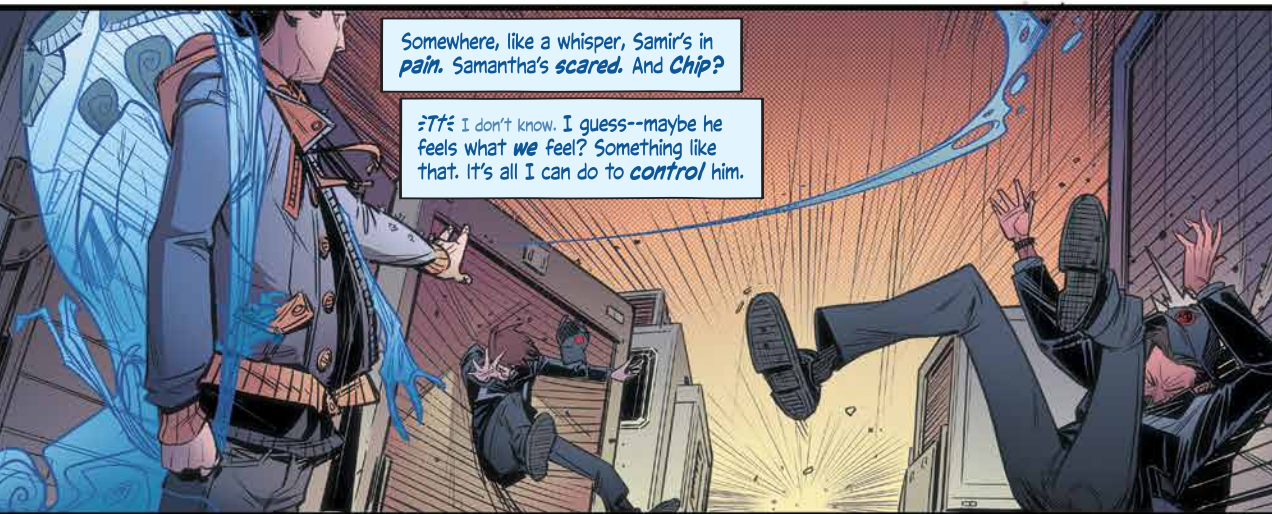
Hey.
Hey, *kid*,
what're
y--

It's not *fair*, and
that's the long and
short of it. It's not
right. None of this.



Somewhere, like a whisper, Samir's in
pain. Samantha's *scared*. And *Chip*?

~Tt~ I don't know. I guess--maybe he
feels what *we* feel? Something like
that. It's all I can do to *control* him.



I mean--for god's
sake. Is it too much
to ask that
everyone's just *on*
message for a
second?

Don't they
understand this is
bigger than all their
selfish crap? This
is bigger than--
y'know.

Feelings.

This *matters*.

Uh.
W-Waxy?





L-listen, *dude*,
I...uh--b-big fan,
you know? A-and
I don't mean
to be a...

There's been a
mistake. My video
must've been missed,
or--or the file was
corrupted or...

W-would
you take a
look?



Yeah. Yeah,
sure, lay it
on me.

Oh my
god, *thank* you.
You won't regret it.
Seriously, I think this
could *really* be valuable
to our--y'know. Our
whole *generation*.



I said I *hear* ya,
Jerry, would you quit
shoutin'?

What?
No, I'm not
drinking already,
#&%hole.

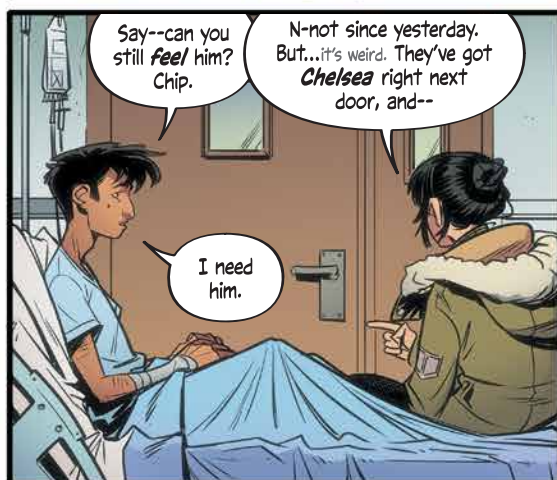
Look, just
tell the &%&'in'
sponsors to quit &%&'ing
around and add an extra
zero, or we go suckle the
network teat--okay?

Whuh.



&%&'re
you lookin'
at, kid?







Like a *slap*. Like falling *forever*.
Bitter and broken and needy.

(Lotta that
going *around*.)

"Come back when
you're something
special." @\$\$hole.
@\$\$hole.

I *fall*. I fall *sideways* and
ohhh, I'm lost in *Chip*. It's
effortless, same as ever.
Only, *this* time?

This time I guess Chip's kinda
lost in *me*, too. So much for
the big bad *alien*.

The others don't get a
look in. Just me and him,
on autopilot. *Entangled*
through *Tangletree*.

You wanna
leave us.

Look at 'em. *Lapping* it up. Little steps!
Good intentions! Joy and wonder!

That's what it *all* boils down to,
isn't it? Kids becoming adults.
Rites of \$\$\$damn passage.

How. \$\$\$ging.
Predictable.

You
wanna leave...
but you need
us to let you
go...



And *stranger* spheres.

Y'know,
I think I *get* it
now. All this *shrieking*...
all this *whining*... This
is your *home*,
isn't it?

This is
where *you things*
go when you're all
grown up...



PLEASE
PLEASE
SAMSAMSAM
READY READY
HURTS LET ME GO
LET ME HURTS
HURTS--

No. Stop
being *selfish*.
We've barely *begun*
to change the
world...

HURTS SAM
ANGRY SAD SICK
SICK HURTS NOT
HUNGRY NOT
HUNGRY

I mean--*what*? Does he think
he's the *only* one in pain? Does
he think he's the *only one* who
wants to...to *move up*? He's *not*.

Difference *is*?

I deserve this.

Later,
Waxy.



Come back
when you're
something
special.





nnnnrrffff!

I-it's **Samuel**.
What the hell's
he doing?



I don't know.
He's...He's too
angry. I think
he's blocking
us.

God.
Poor
Chip.



W-we should talk
to him. **Samuel**, I
mean. W-we might
still be able
to--

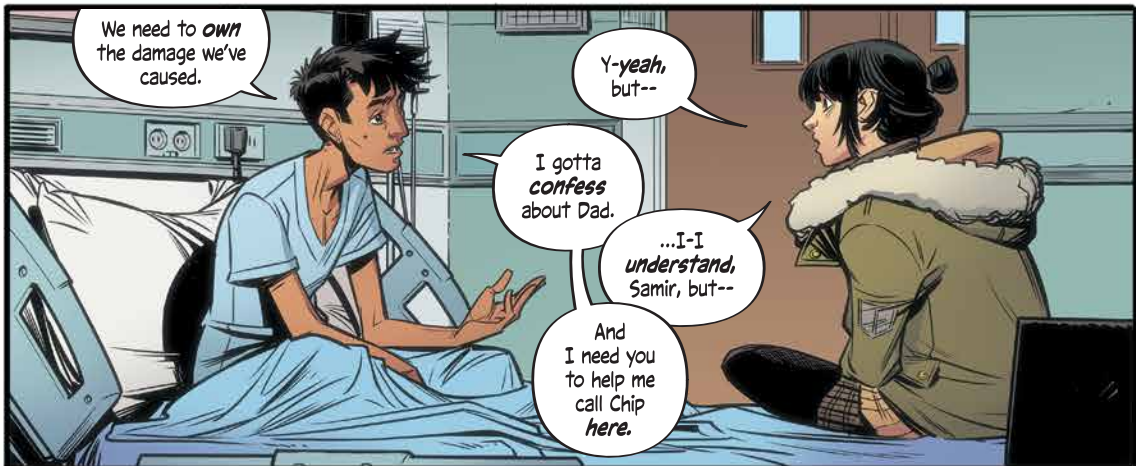
Bull\$#!%.
All he can see is
what Chip can **do**
for him--not what
we shoulda been
doing for Chip
all along.



Y-you mean--
keeping him **safe**?
N-nurturing
h--

No.

Look, it
was one thing when
he was just a little
hungry monster who
didn't **understand**.
But **now**?



We need to **own**
the damage we've
caused.

Y--yeah,
but--

I gotta
confess
about Dad.

...I-I
understand,
Samir, but--

And
I need you
to help me
call Chip
here.



Look--
I know
you don't want
him to **go**,
Samantha,
but...



He
deserves
to be set
free.



And that's
why I believe...
I truly believe...
the future's
bright.



Well how about
that, huh? Round
of applause,
kids!

Round of
applause for
Vern!



Round of applause
for his steaming pile
of dull, indulgent,
lazy-ass *crap*.

Wait--
what?



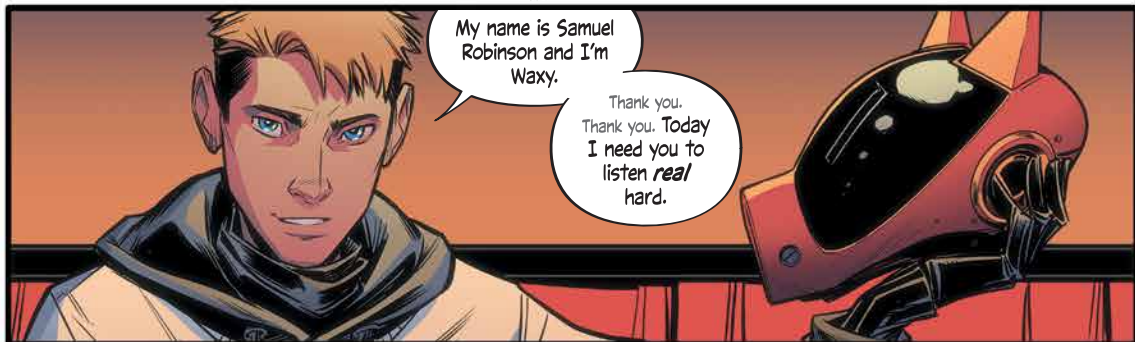
I tell ya, kids.
I'm *sick* of it. This
unambitious junk.
It's *cowardice*.
It's a refusal to
tackle the *big*
picture.

So you
know *what*?
A feller's gotta
practice what
he *preaches*,
right?



Pranks. Poetry. It's
been fun, folks. But.
It's time to *put*
away *childish*
things.

It's
time to be
seen.



My name is Samuel
Robinson and I'm
Waxy.

Thank you.
Thank you. Today
I need you to
listen *real*
hard.

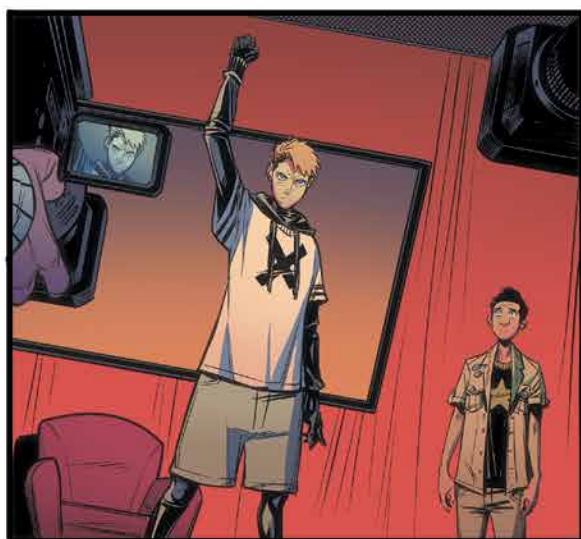


I tell them
how it is.

The *Man*.

The *Machine*.

The *Monsters*
who guide
us all.





THAT'S



NOT



FAIR







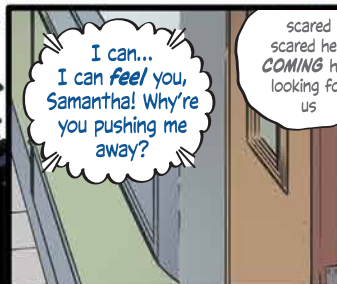
Sigh

Sure.

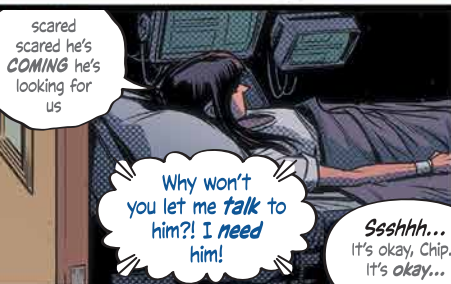


Ch-Chip...?

S-Samantha?
Samir? Where are
you guys...?



I can...
I can *feel* you,
Samantha! Why're
you pushing me
away?



scared
scared he's
COMING he's
looking for
us

Why won't
you let me *talk*
to him?! I *need*
him!

Ssshhh...
It's okay, Chip...
It's okay...



Guys--
p-please. I've had
a rough day. Don't cut
me *out*, okay?
I...I just...

Look,
I *deserve* to be
heard, don't I? What
are you *hiding*?
Where's...

NNFF

Where's
Samir...?



...c-can't
really make you
understand *how*,
ma'am, but--it's
all our fault.

Leon,
Chelsea, my dad.
We're *responsible*.
We're responsible
for *all* of it.

A confession...?



BETRAYAL ALL ALONE

RAGE

Aaaa--!

S-stop!

You're
hurting him!
You're hurting
h--

S-stop!

You're
hurting him!
You're hurting
h--

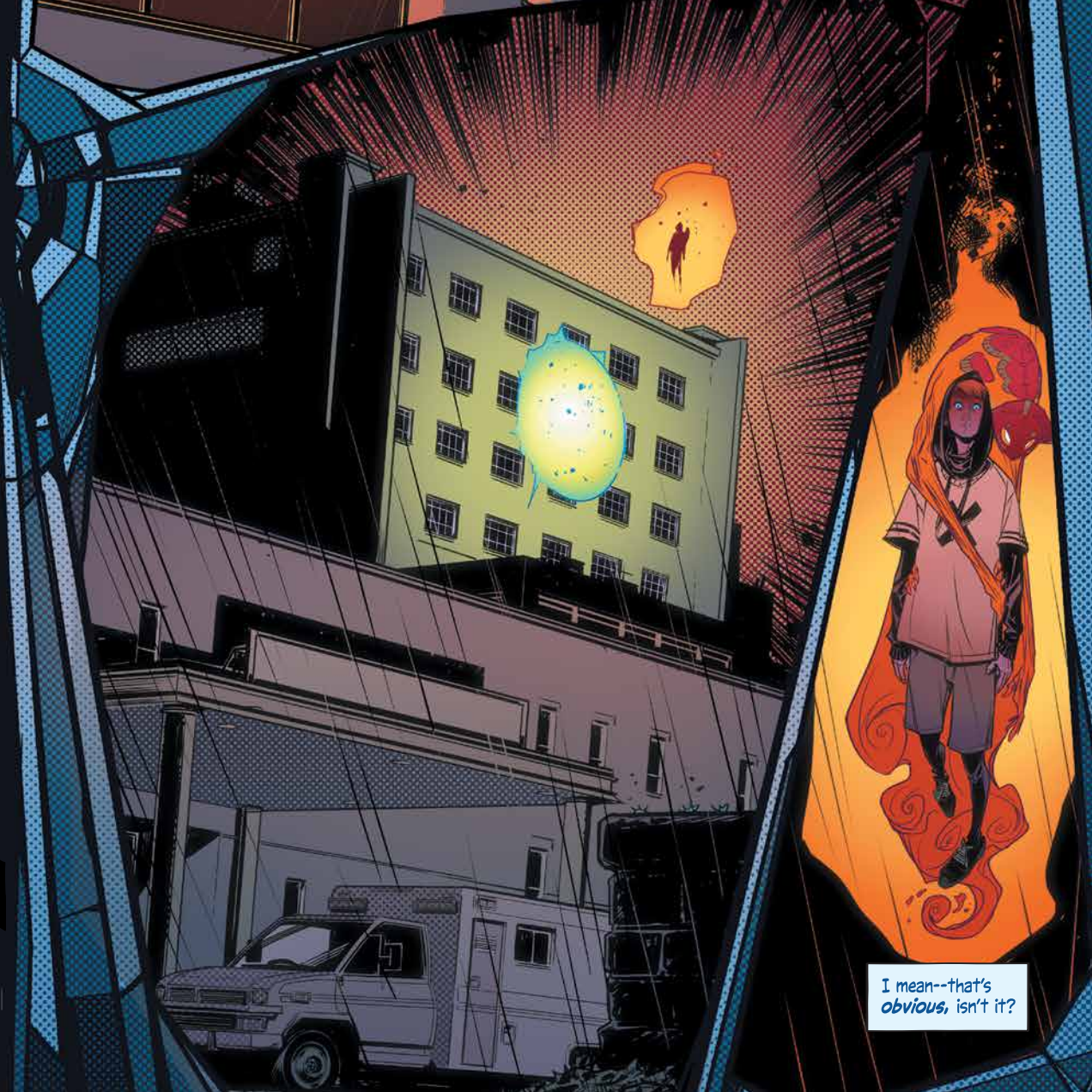


Chip?!
Wh...where did
you...where did
you g...

hurts
HURTS no no
DON'T MAKE
ME hurts

"The world's
gone to hell."

HURT
HURRRRTS
DON'T DON'T
PLEASE
DON'T

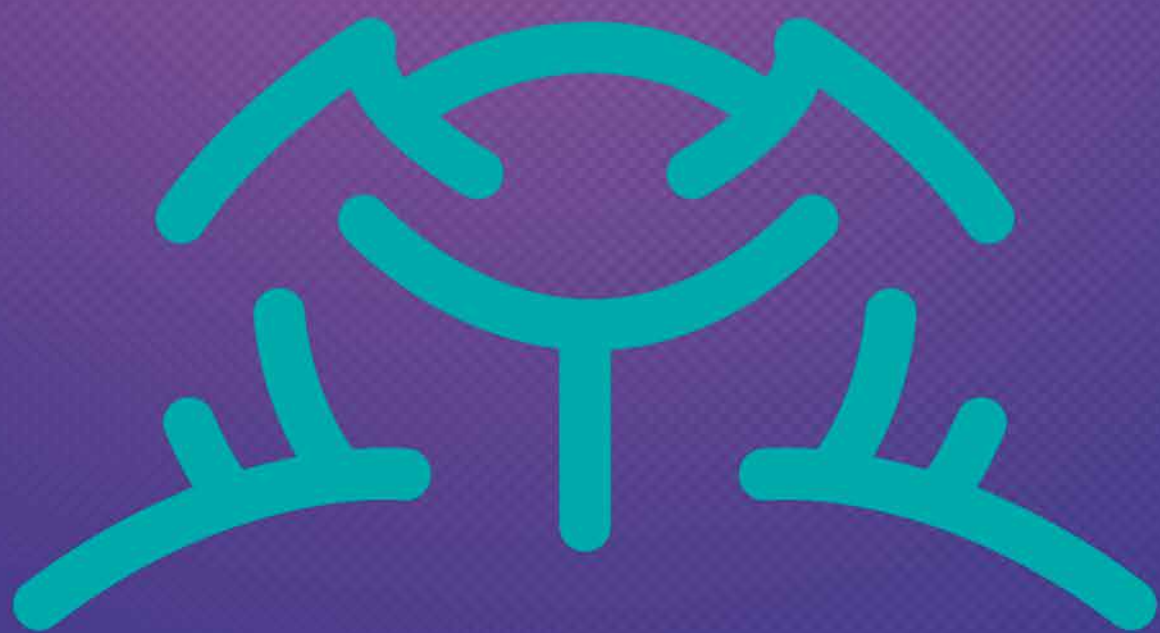


I mean--that's
obvious, isn't it?

S-Samuel...
S-Samuel,
wh...

W-what
did you
do?





CHAPTER SIX





The
revolution
has
begun.



a-ihuh:



Sh-shots
fired. Damage
done.

L-lives
lost.



nn-:snf:



This--this little
town. It's seen some **weird**
stuff lately. R-right? Like,
disappearances.
Comas.

Explosions.



People will say it
was a **gas leak** at
the hospital. Th-they'll
say when a superstar
Vlogger and a **Cop**
Chief disappear--
same day?

Coincidence.

Everyone'll
go **right back to**
sleep because--
because that's
easy.



B-but it's **not** a
coincidence. It's **not**
a gas leak.

:snf:

And
nobody's
gonna sleep
tonight.



Chapter 6: **AND ON PURPOSE TOO**



Yeah. I'm *crying*. W-what do you expect? All that loss. It breaks my %\$&#ing heart, okay? I'm only human.

But it's *war*. It's the--the *price* of change.

(She's dead.)



You can't *dislodge* tyrants...you can't build a *new world*. You can't--

~hrrf~

--you can't give a *worthwhile* #\$\$damn *future* to an entire *generation*--

--w-without a show of force.

(Mom's *dead* and Samir's *dead* and Waxy's *dead* and Leon's *dead* and it's *my fault* me I *did it* oh god oh god oh)



I will free you from *small town thinking*. I will break your *addiction* to *triviality*. I will record every moment.

So you can *see*. So you *understand*.



You can't judge a--a *savior*--according to *conventional morali*--

Samuel.

You killed our %\$&#ing *friend*. You killed your %\$&#ing *mom*.



It's time to stop.



I *had* to. Th-this much power, the--the things we can *achieve*. I had to *protect* it, or--

Nuh-uh. You threw a *tantrum*. That's all.



Just another entitled jerk acting *persecuted* when the world doesn't give you *special* attention.

You're no different from *Leon*.



D...Don't you talk to me like that. I'm *nothing* like him!

I'm doing this for the *world*! I'm making things *be--*

It's not too late.



It is. It is. It *is*.

Even *Samir*. W-what happened with his dad. He was trying to make it right.



You went *too far*. Big %\$\$#ing deal. That's called *being a kid*.

It's *never* too late, Samuel.

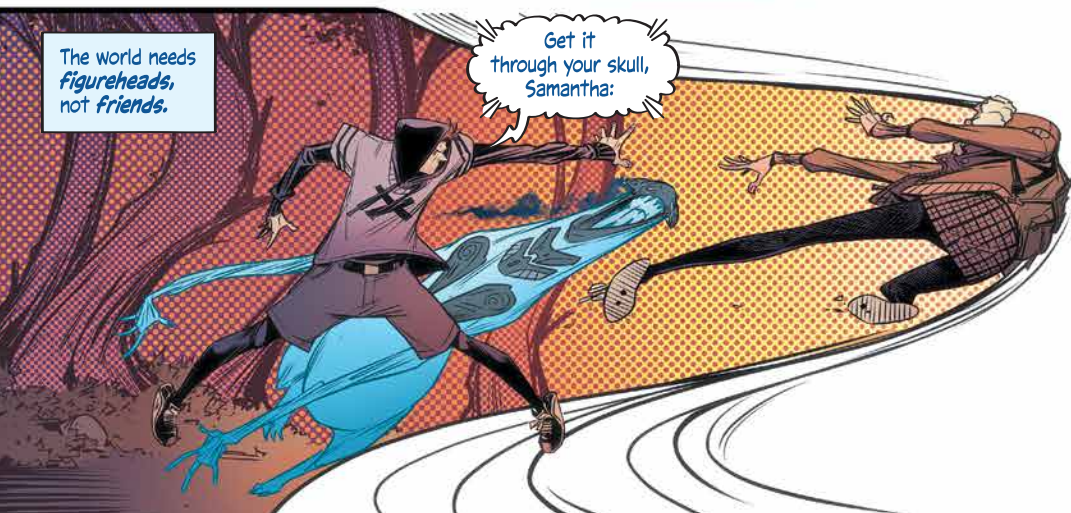


Just one more
rejection.

One more
betrayal.

Doesn't
matter.

Doesn't
matter.





He's *mine*.
I found him. I bonded
to him the most. All he did for
you was fetch %\$&#ing
ice cream!

He's
nobody's! He's
his! He--he doesn't
want this!



Oh please.
He *ate* what
we gave him! He
killed Leon,
not *us*!

He
started
this!



SAM SAM
SAAAAAM

He was
young! He was
hungry and stupid
and he didn't
know better!

He's--he's
learned!



Why won't
youaaaaAAAh--



Look,
you've... You've *got*
him. I can't *fight*
you, Samuel...
but... Please.

It hurts
him when we
disagree. I-it hurts
him when we're
guilty. Please. You
know what he
wants.



Let him go.



No. It's too *important*. The things he can do. It's too *big* for--for petty *wants*.

Bull\$#!%. What about *your* wants, Samuel? That's *all* this is!



Ah ohhh, the *certainty* settles like *water*:

This isn't about *me*. It's about the *world*. I can't stop. I *mustn't* stop.



You can see it *slither* across him. The *decision*.

This isn't about the world. It's about *him*. He won't stop. He doesn't *dare*.



If I turn back *now*, it's all been for nothing.

If he turned back now, he'd have to *live* with what he's done.



He's *mine*.





...

Can I
at least say
goodbye?



O-of
course.

I'm--
I'm not a *cruel*
person. I'm not the
#\$\$damn *bad guy*,
okay? Of *course*
you can say
goodbye!



SAM-SAM-
SAM!

I know. I'm
sorry.

I'm *so*
sorry.

And...
Chip?



Then... for a
if... then... after...
then...

Hey.
What are
you *saying*
to h--





This is on you.



No NO NO

Quiet.



Everyone just...

Just be quiet.



Where was I?



The rules have **changed**.

And
it's **your**
fault.



You don't
listen.

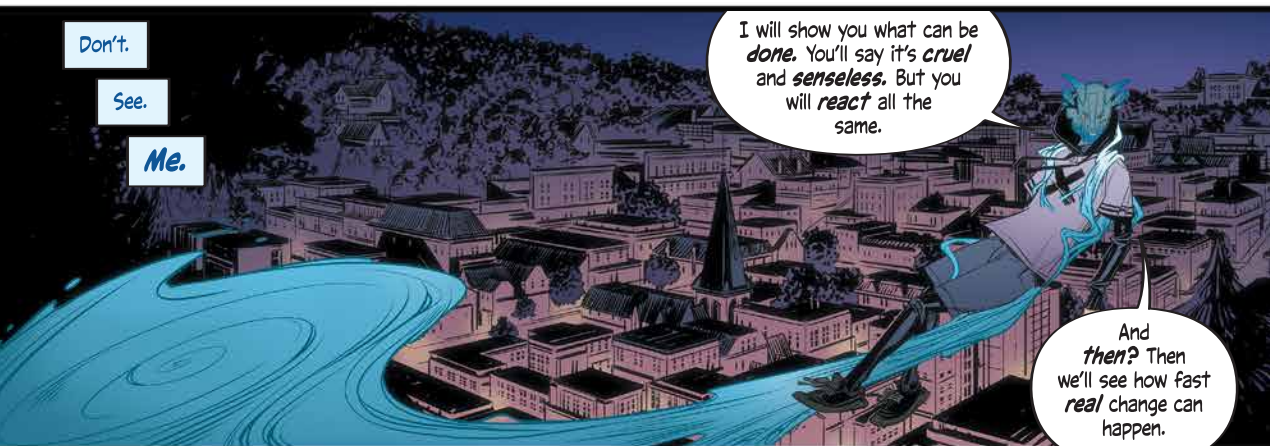
You watch
your **idiot** shows.
You sing your **idiot**
songs and salute your
idiot flags. You hate
who they tell you to
hate then give
your vote to
worse.



Enough.
Enough thinking
small.

Enough **angry kids**
who never get off their
asses. Enough
words.

Enough **little towns** full
of **little people** who



Don't.

See.

Me.

I will show you what can be
done. You'll say it's **cruel**
and **senseless**. But you
will **react** all the
same.

And
then? Then
we'll see how fast
real change can
happen.



Remember.
This is **your**
fault.

I...I **deserve** to
be respected,
don't I?



I deserve
to be liked.

*"...but being
noticed'll do."*







hmm

Any
minute now. Cops
and tanks and
bombs.

Any
minute.

Let them
come.



Fine!

If--If the
oppressors
will not face us,
we will take the
message to
them.



Washington!
Capitol Hill! The
White House!

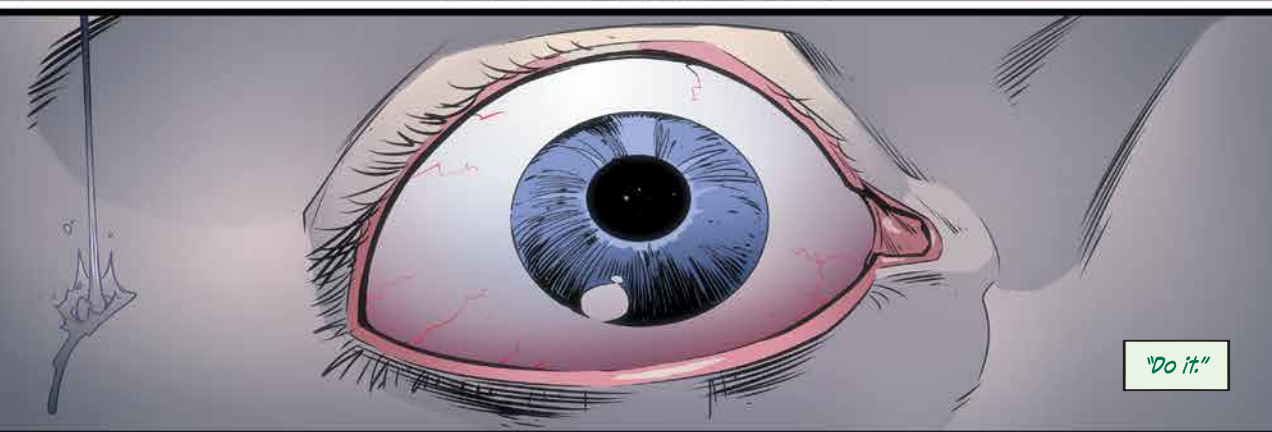
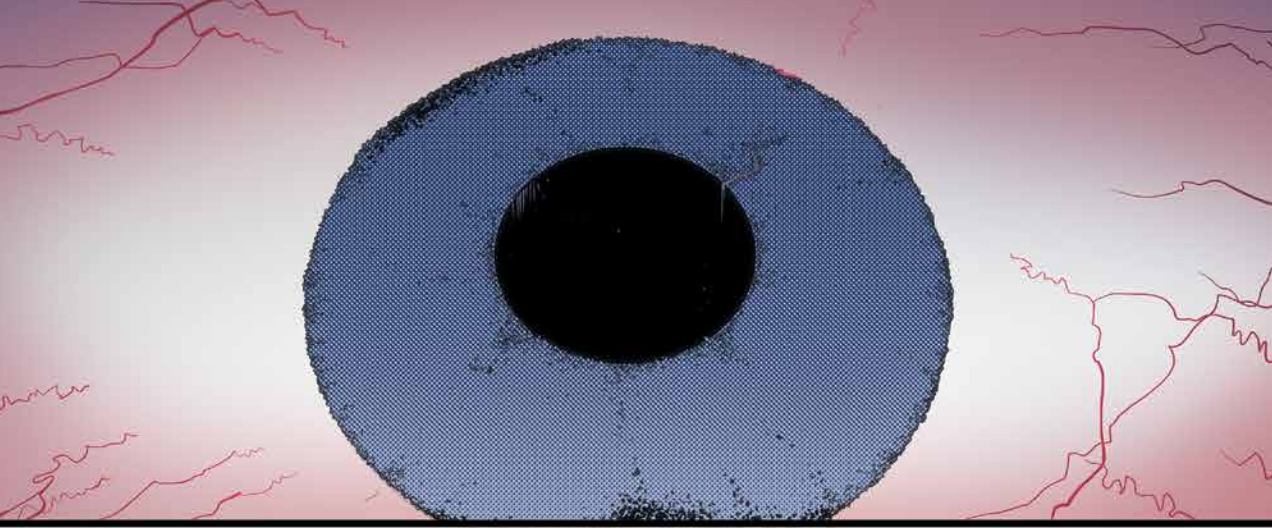
Let the
old world
tremble! Let the
tyrants be cast
down!



I will save
this planet
from--

From
its--





"Do it."



"Do it,"
I said.



And Chip
did.







Chelsea. I *heard* she woke up.

I heard she broke up with Denny. I heard she cut her hair and redid her look. *Big changes*, y'know? Lessons learned, fresh start--*that's* what she's signaling. *My* guess?

Auditioning for the *Talk Show Circuit*.



Epilogue





Hey,
look--isn't
that that kid,
Vern? I heard
he--

--made
it *big*.
Yeah.

All the money behind *Waxy*
just...shifted towards him.
Path of least resistance.

Kid got a big *check* to
make a big *documentary*
about all the mysterious
crap that's been going on
around here.

He won't find any *answers*,
but I bet it'll be *pretty*.



People will
love it.

What's this *about*,
Chelsea? You haven't
said *two words* to
me all *year*.



I, *uh*...well, I-I had a
dream about you,
is all. While I was--
y'know.

Comatose. Yeah. *Hhhhh*. Let
me guess: an *angel* with
my voice, acting all *pissy*.
Listen, there's something
you should kn--

No.



I dreamed how we used to
pretend we were *mermaids*.
You remember
that?

Holding our breaths in
the *pool* and rescuing
shipwrecked
teddies.



We, *uh*. We nearly
drowned from
laughing, one
time.

I miss
being a *kid*,
Sam.



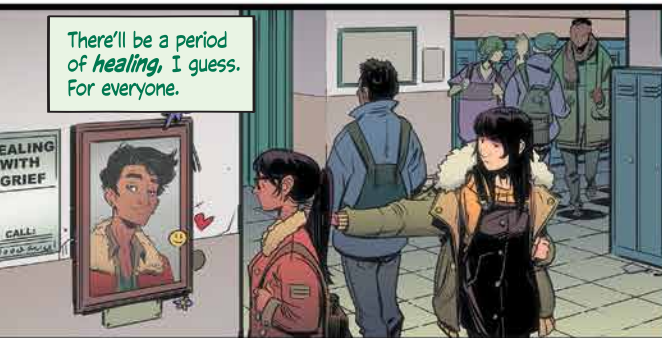
And I miss
nearly drowning
with my
friends.

Things are said. Tears are shed. *Coffee dates* are set.

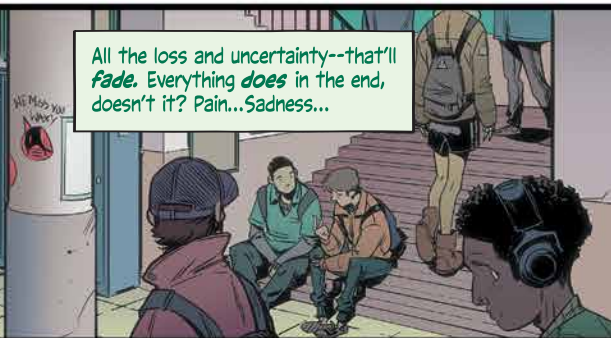


Nobody is recording.

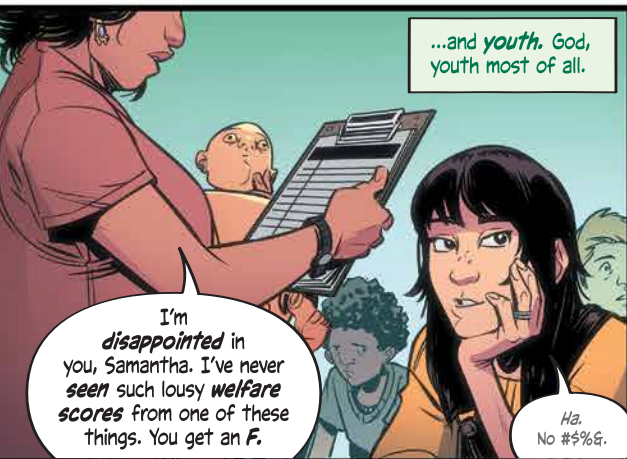
There'll be a period of *healing*, I guess. For everyone.



All the loss and uncertainty--that'll *fade*. Everything *does* in the end, doesn't it? Pain...Sadness...



...and *youth*. God, youth most of all.



I'm *disappointed* in you, Samantha. I've never *seen* such lousy *welfare scores* from one of these things. You get an *F*.

Ha. No #&%&.

I wasn't ready. Not last *year*, not *now*. I wasn't ready and that's *okay*.



Oh, not just for *babies*--for *anything*. For *everything*.

Being a kid's the only time you'll *ever* get an *excuse* for getting it wrong.



Aiiis.

Creem.

I think--maybe? Nobody ever *is* ready. Not really. We just...*muddle through*.

But you know *what*?

Five more months.

Five more months.

Better make
the most of it.





COVER GALLERY



Issue One Cover by Bengal



Issue One Cover by **Jamie McKelvie**



Issue One Cover by **Özgür Yildirim**



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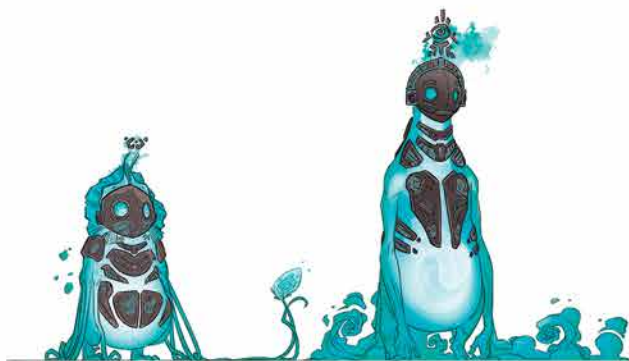
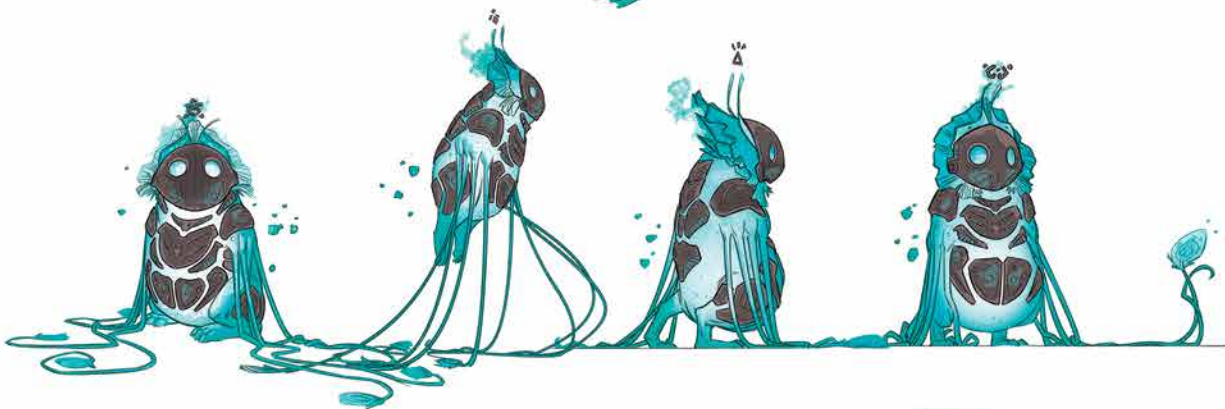
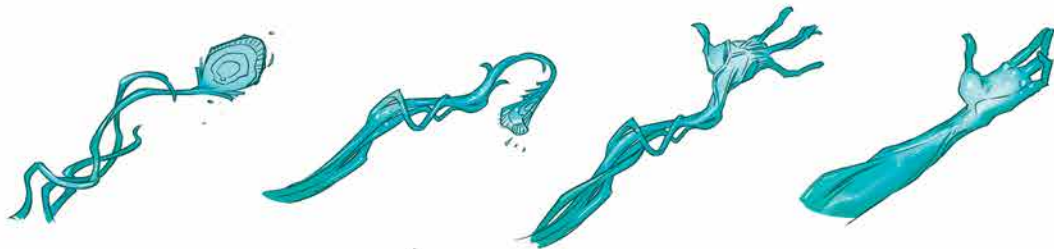
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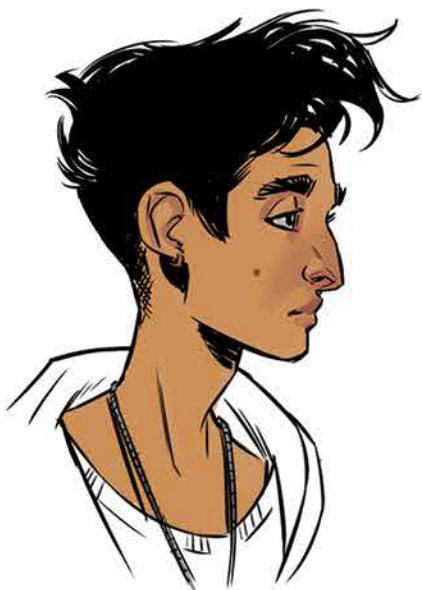
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THREE KIDS CALLED SAM. ONE ALIEN BIOWEAPON.

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