

THE FRONT

REBIRTH



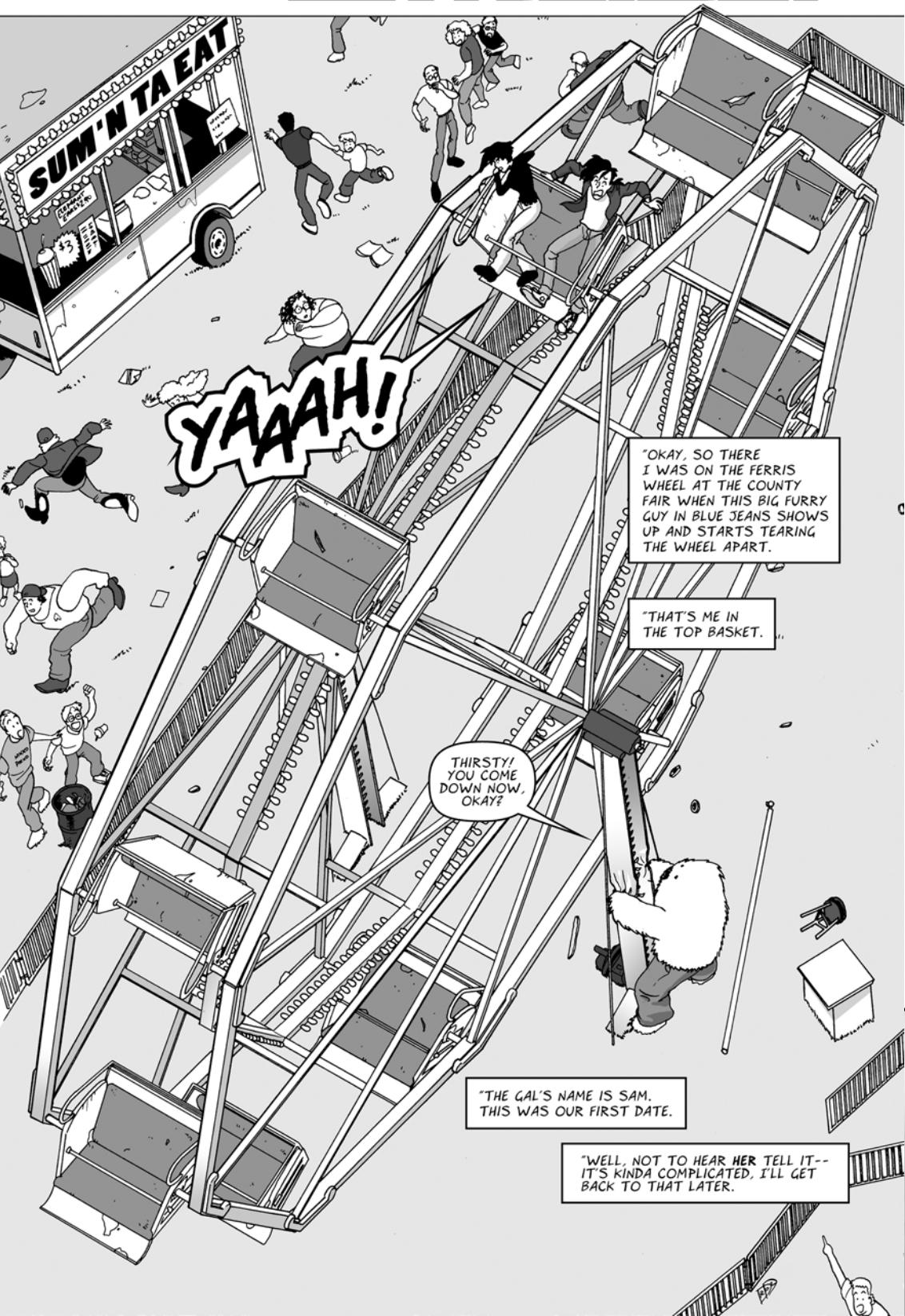
JERZY DROZD

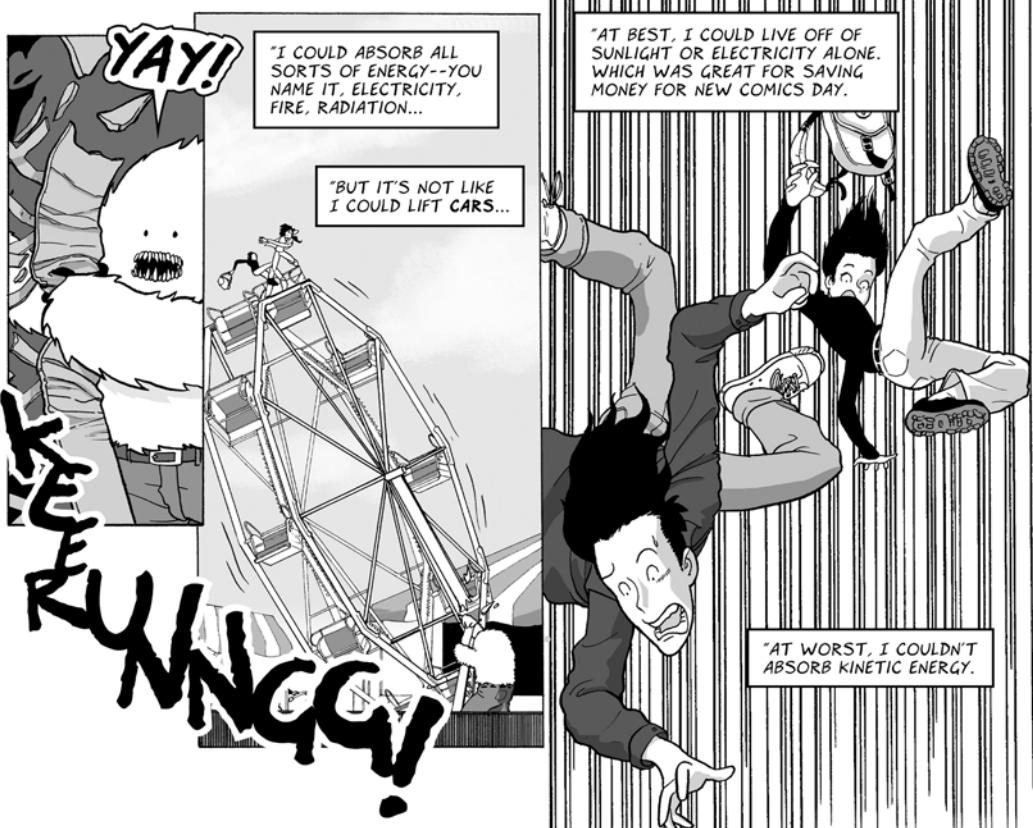


FOR
ANNE
AND
HOOVER.
WITHOUT YOU
THIS BOOK WOULD
NOT EXIST.



CHAPTER ONE: **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**



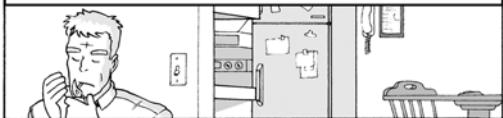


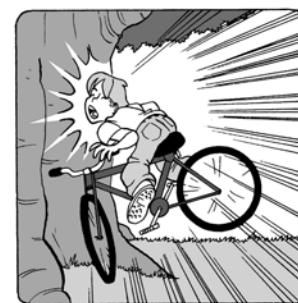
"BUT I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF..."

"...LET'S BACK UP TO THAT MORNING. THAT'S MY APARTMENT BUILDING IN MT. HAVEN. DON'T LET THE NAME FOOL YOU, IT WASN'T ANYWHERE NEAR A MOUNTAIN.



"THAT'S REX, MY EVER-SMOKING ADOPTIVE FATHER. HE HAD SOME GOVERNMENT CONSULTING JOB BACK THEN, AND I DIDN'T SEE HIM MUCH.

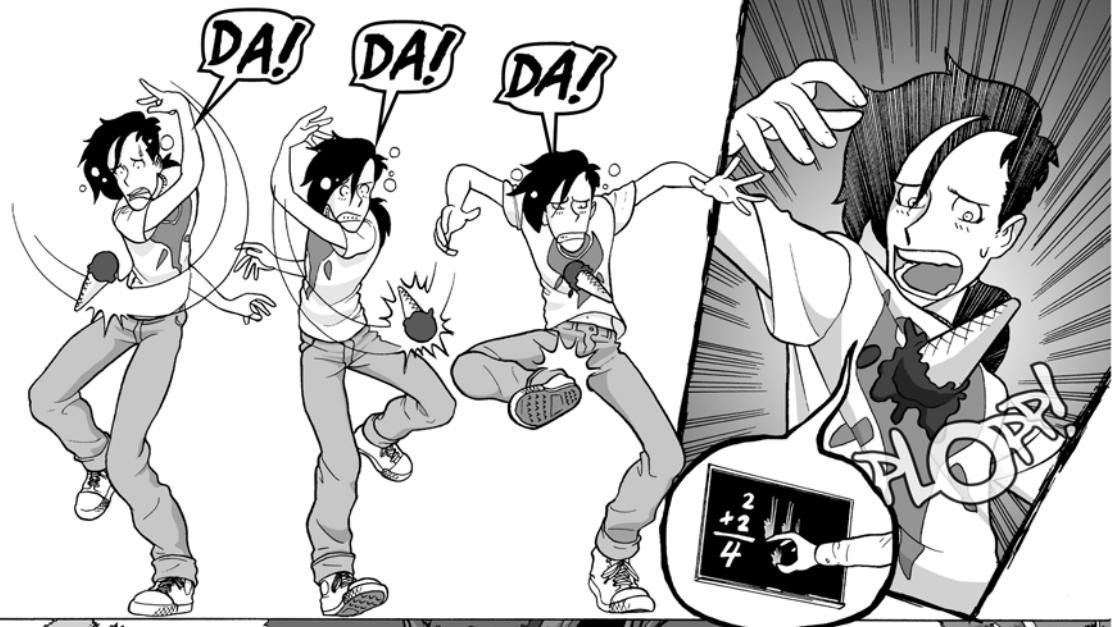




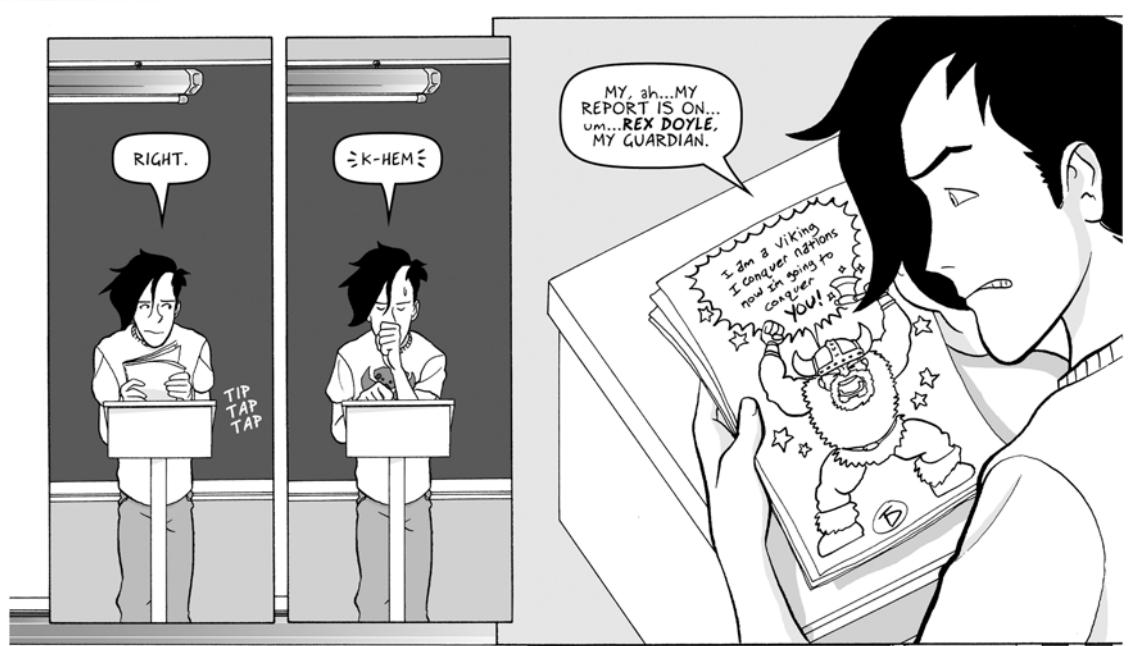
"I DON'T KNOW WHAT WAS MORE DISTURBING--SEEING HIM SMILE AFTER SMASHING HIS FACE LIKE THAT, OR HOW MUCH EVERYONE LIKED HIM BECAUSE HE COULD DO IT."

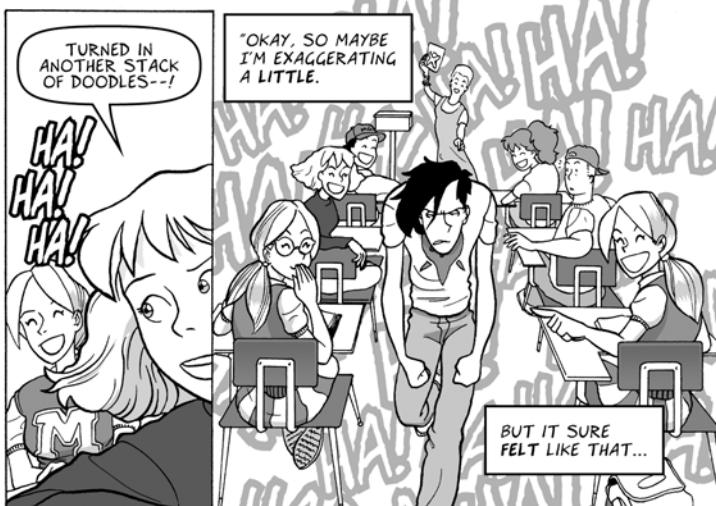










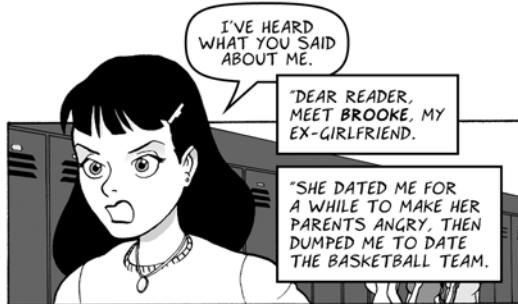


"WHATEVER THOSE YO-YOS THOUGHT, I KNEW REX WAS A HERO, JUST LIKE IN COMIC BOOKS.

"NOT LONG BEFORE THERE WERE A LOT MORE PEOPLE WITH WEIRD ABILITIES LIKE ME, AND THE STUFF THEY COULD DO WAS MUCH MORE IMPRESSIVE...

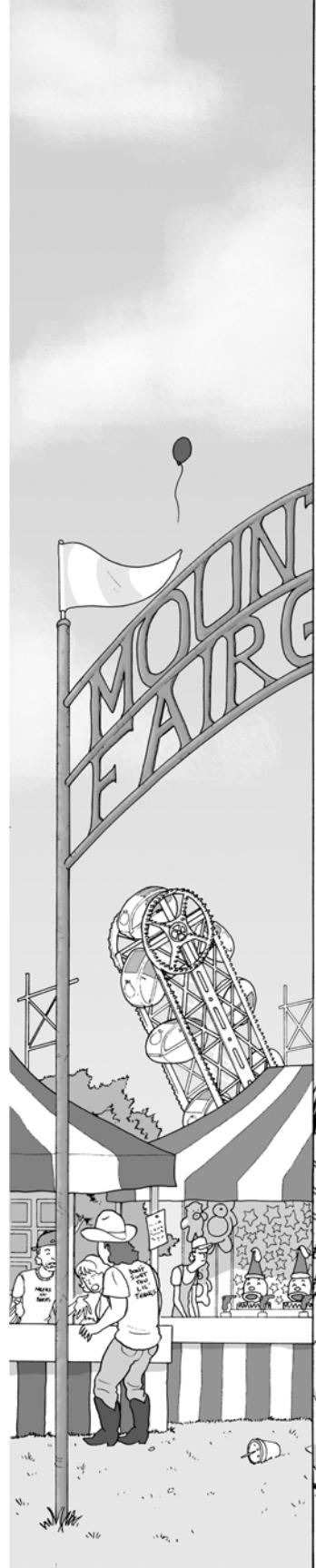
"REX HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH A GROUP OF THEM WHEN I WAS LITTLE, BUT THEN SOME BIG DEAL HAPPENED AND NO ONE HAD HEARD FROM THEM SINCE.

"I THOUGHT MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE THERE WEREN'T ANY GREAT VILLAINS LIKE IN COMIC BOOKS. IN THE REAL WORLD, EVIL TAKES ON MORE INSIPID FORMS...

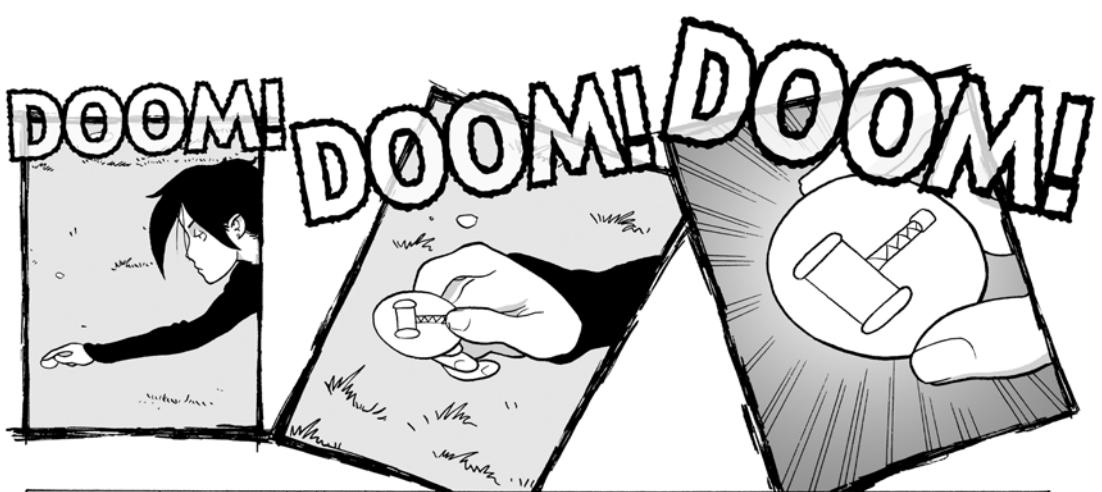




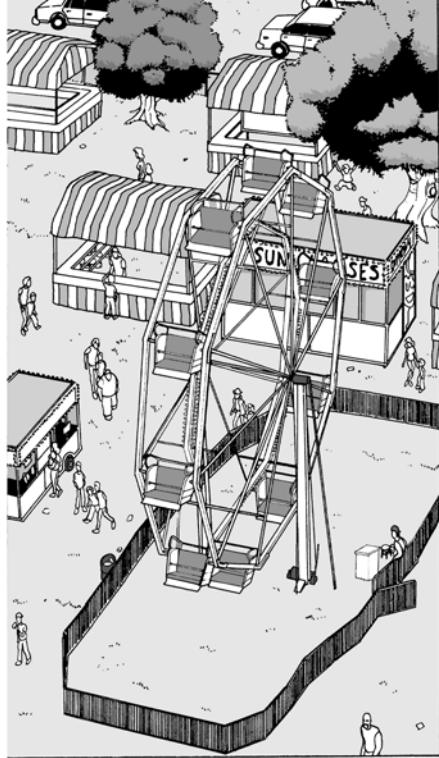






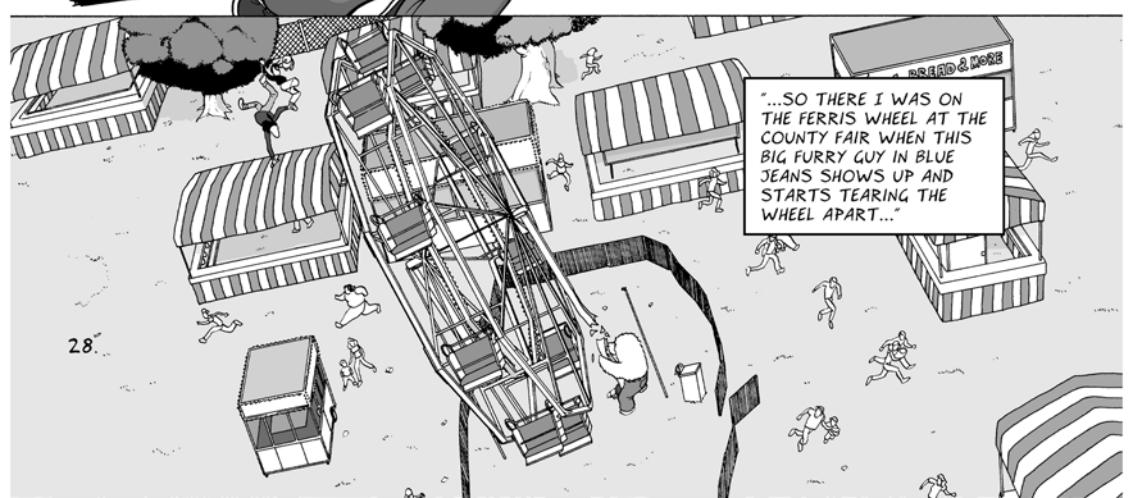




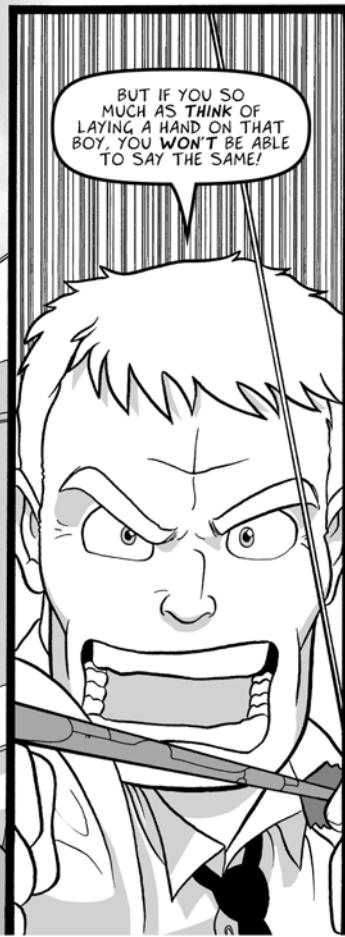
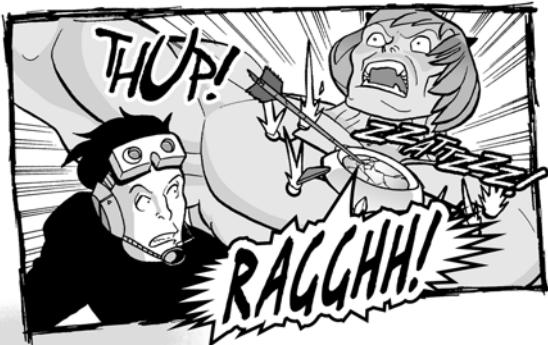
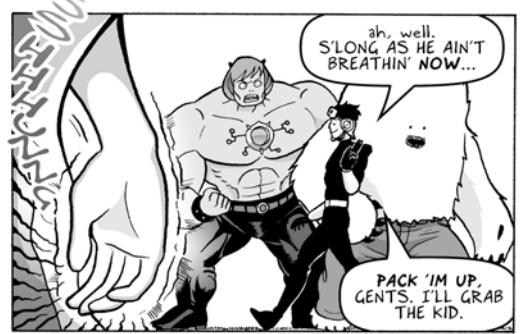
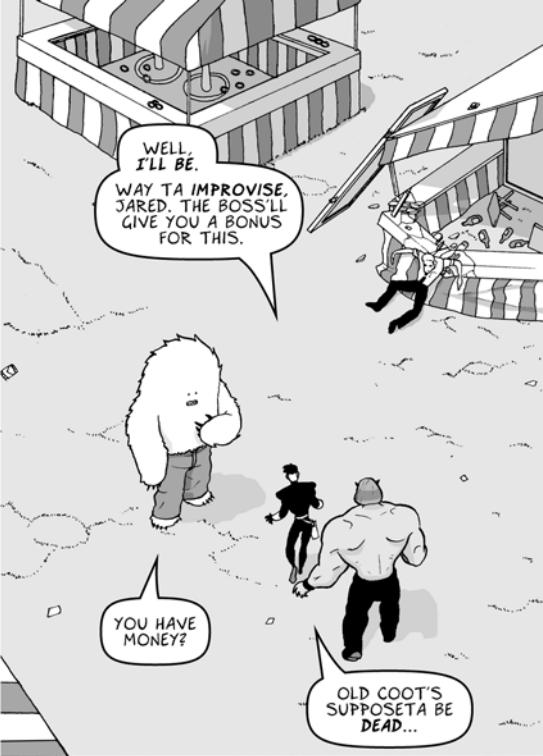














"LET'S GET EVERYONE UP TO SPEED. MY DAY STARTED ON A PRETTY GOOD NOTE. IT WAS MY BIRTHDAY, AND THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL. BUT THEN I GOT CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM ON MY NEW SHIRT. MY BEST FRIEND CONNED ME INTO GOING TO THE COUNTY FAIR. I MET THE PRETTIEST GIRL I'VE EVER SEEN, BUT SHE WAS TRYING TO STEAL MY ANTIQUE THOR PIN. THEN, TO TOP IT OFF, THESE CRAZY MONSTERS AND GUYS WEARING GOOFY OUTFITS SHOWED UP AND STARTED CHASING ME AROUND. REX POPPED UP OUT OF NOWHERE TO STOP THEM, BUT IT WAS LOOKING LIKE HE WAS OUTNUMBERED..."



CHAPTER TWO:

FAIR FIGHT!





...DON'T THINK THAT THOSE MONSTERS MADE ME FORGET!

I WANT MY PIN BACK!

HANG ON TO YOUR DREAMS, THIRSTY! THE FUTURE IS BUILT ON THEM!

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

"YEAH, I KNOW. YOU GOT ME ALL THAT JABBERING I DID LAST ISSUE ABOUT HEROISM, AND WHEN SOME REAL SUPER-VILLAINS SHOW UP, ALL I COULD DO WAS OBSESS OVER SOME COMIC BOOK PIN..."

"BUT REX DID TELL ME TO FIND COVER..."

THE KID CAN SWALLOW ELECTRICITY, SO LET'S TRY TO TRANQ 'IM WITH SONICS.

ping! ping! let me at 'im, dick!

ATTA GIRL. YOU'RE MY NUMBER ONE GUN, YOU KNOW THAT?

OKAY, ANGEL: STUN FREQ BLAST.

ping! roger, dick!

SLEEP TIGHT, KID.

"I CAN ALSO 'SENSE' WEIRD OR INTENSE ENERGIES, SORTA LIKE A METAL DETECTOR."

"I'D TRIED FOR YEARS TO GET PEOPLE TO REFER TO IT AS MY 'THIRSTY SENSE'..."

"ANYWAY, THAT'S HOW I MANAGED TO DODGE THAT GUY'S CRAZY SPACE-GUN."

BOOM!

WAH!



"NOW, A HERO WOULD DO ONE OF TWO THINGS:



"BUT MY DAY WASN'T FINISHED GETTING WEIRDER..."





IF YOU WANT
THIS BOY, YOU'LL HAVE
TO DEAL WITH ME
FIRST.

EHEYUCH.
WHATEVER YOU
SAY, CORNBALL.

ANGEL:
JIGAWATT
BLAST.

ONE HOT PLATE
OF BLUE RUBBLE--

COMIN'
UP!

GET THE
GIRL AND
GET OUT
OF HERE!

NO
PROBLEM,
WHOMEVER
YOU ARE!

DFF!

DFF!







"...ANOTHER THING I ALWAYS LOVED ABOUT HEROISM IS THE CLASSIC DILEMMA.

"YOU KNOW, CHOOSING BETWEEN DOING THE DANGEROUS RIGHT THING AND THE SAFER, MORE PRACTICAL WRONG THING.

DUCK

"THE BEST HEROES ARE USUALLY SCARED STIFF, YET THEY DO THE RIGHT THING.

DUCK

"I ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT I'D DO IN SUCH A DEFINING MOMENT.

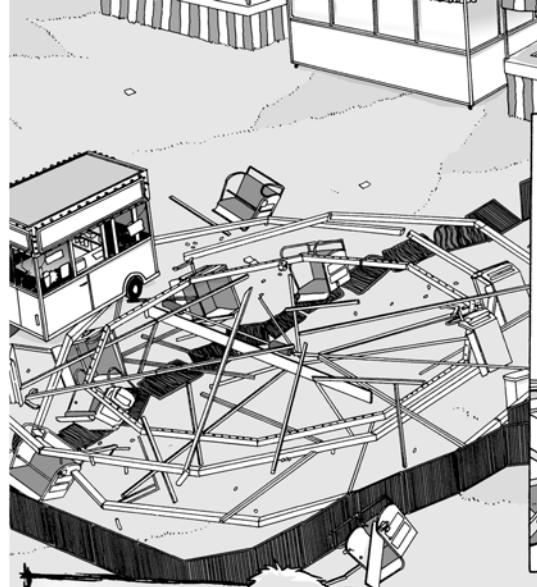
"THERE'S NO QUESTIONING WHAT KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE AFTER THAT.

"I COULD SAY THAT THOSE MOMENTS AREN'T ALL THEY'RE CRACKED UP TO BE. BUT I WON'T.

"THIS MOMENT WAS EVERYTHING IT WAS CRACKED UP TO BE.

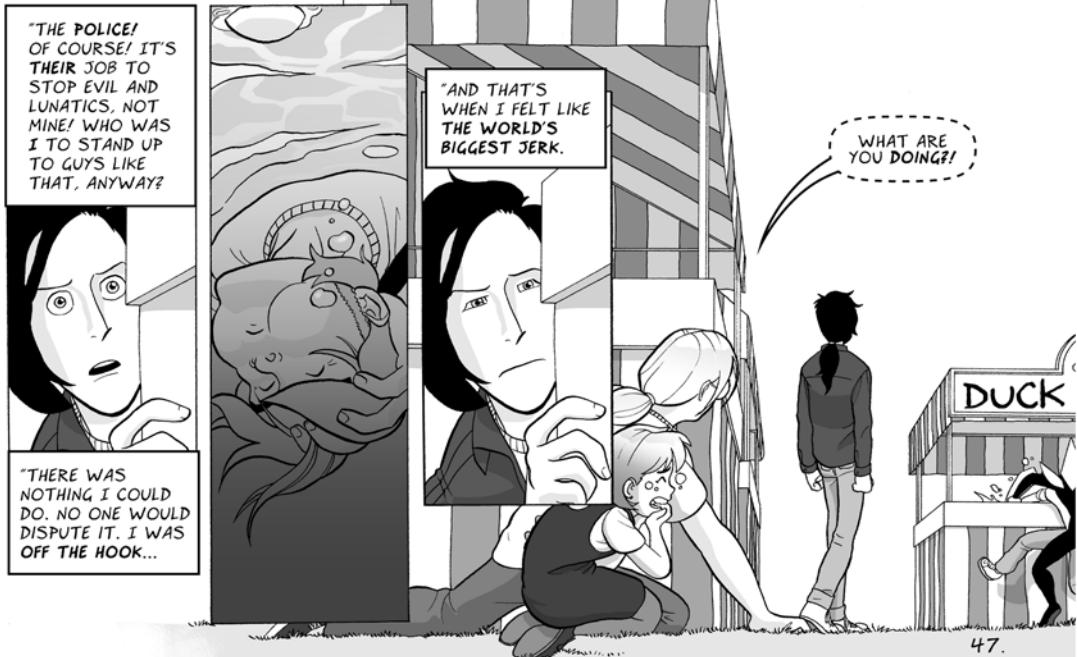
DUCK

"I JUST LET IT, AND MYSELF, DOWN.









"...SEEMS LIKE A LOT OF MY CONFRONTATIONS END UP WHERE, TWO DAYS LATER, I THINK OF THE PERFECT THING TO SAY.

ah, ex...um,
EXCUSE ME,
BUT, ah,
THAT'S--
THAT'S MY
FRIEND.

"THIS WAS
NO EXCEPTION.

WELL, WELL,
GIVING UP, EH?
SMART MOVE!

GASP!

uh, NO.
NOT--NOT
EXACTLY...

WELL, YOU DON'T LOOK
LIKE YOU'RE SPOILIN' FOR
A FIGHT, BUT WHO AM I
TO ARGUE?

BACK IN THE
TANK, YOU!

PISH!

GET...ah...
GET YOUR
LOUS--LOUSY
HANDS OFF
OF HIM...

...OR I'LL
RIP THEM OFF
FOR YOU!

HUH?

NOW
YOU'RE TALKIN'
MY LANGUAGE,
KID!!

DNN!

CALL THE COPS!

Shank
Attack!

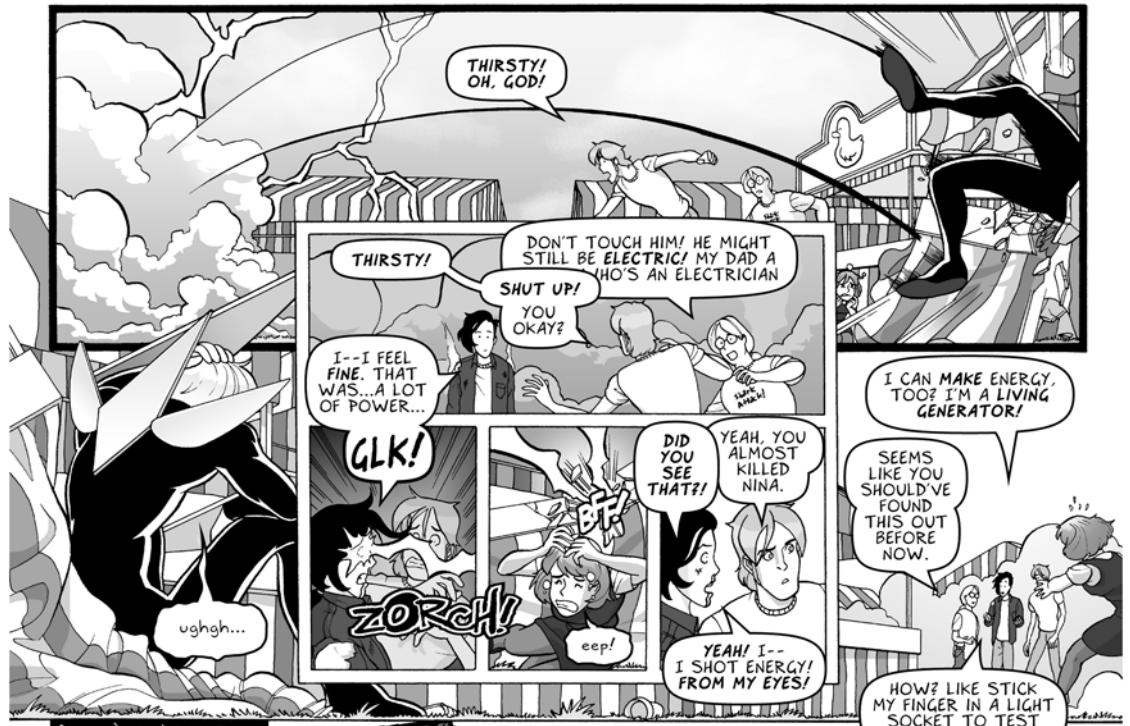
you okay,
Knox?

KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
CASP!

AWAII!

BMY
SHOKKAT





...C'MON, YA APE.
IT'S NOT THAT HARD.
TELL ME WHERE THE KID
IS AND I DON'T
SHOOT, SEE?

FORGET IT,
OPAL. JUST MAKE
SURE HE'S NEXT!

oh, PLEASE.
TELL YOU WHAT--
I'M GONNA COUNT
THREE.

ONE...



GET YOUR
LOUSY HANDS
OFF OF THEM
OR I'LL RIP
THEM OFF
FOR YOU!

DAH, CRUD. THE
KID'S ACTUALIZED
HIS POWERS.

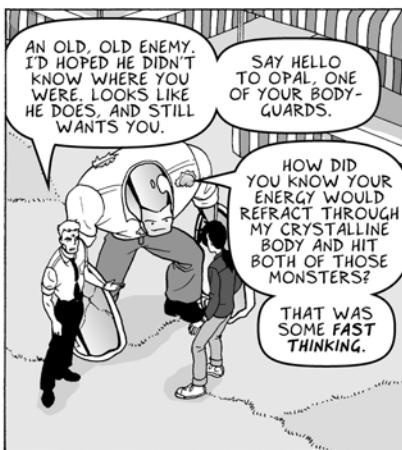
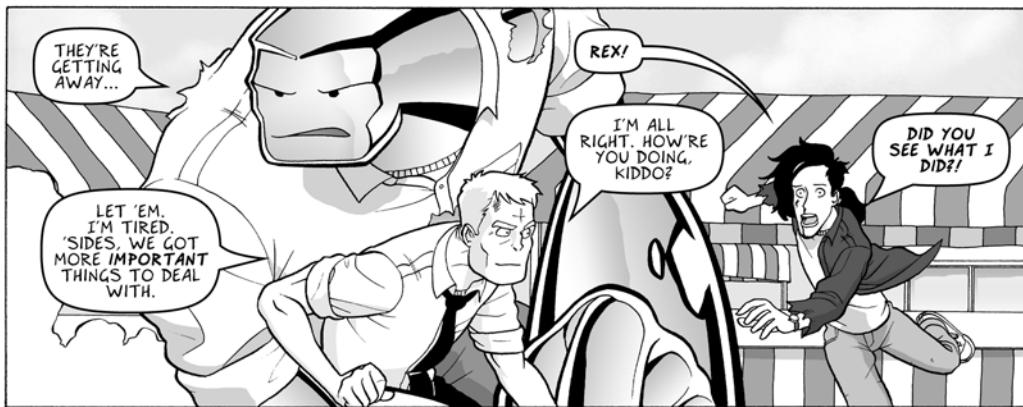
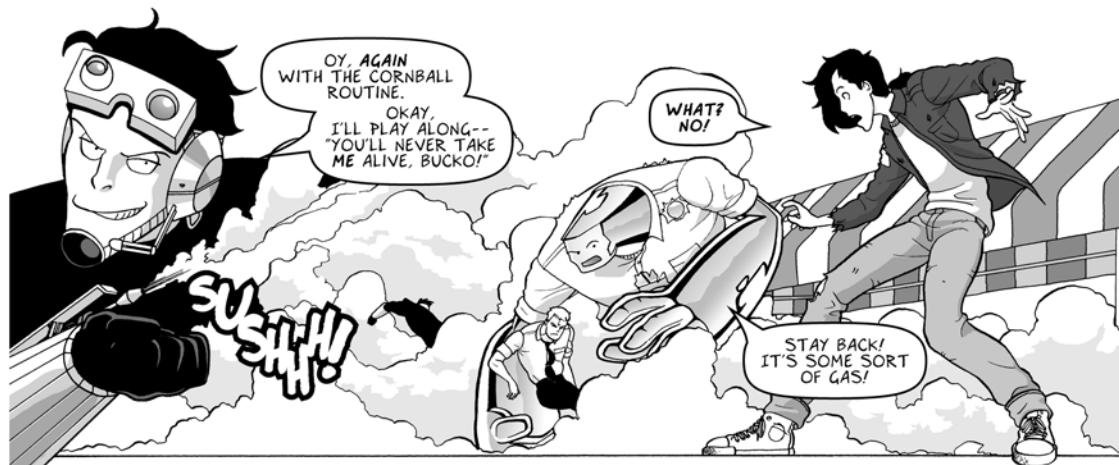
THE BOSS'S
GONNA HAVE ME
WITH HIS BACON
AND EGGS...

WAKE UP,
MORON! WE GOTTA
GET OUTTA HERE!

"YEAH, I KNOW.
I CAME UP WITH
BETTER LINES LATER.
I WAS A ROOKIE,
CUT ME SOME SLACK."

•DUH•

YOU'RE
NOT
GOING
ANYWHERE.



I'D PLANNED ON LAYING ALL THIS ON YOU TONIGHT. TURNS OUT THAT, AS PARANORMALS GO, YOU BOYS ARE PRETTY UNIQUE.

SO UNIQUE, IN FACT, THAT THE ENEMY I MENTIONED IS GOING TO HUNT YOU DOWN WHEREVER YOU ARE. SEE, YOU FIGURE INTO HIS PLAN.

WHAT ENEMY? YOU MEAN THAT NUT WITH THE FUTURE-GUN?

THOSE GUYS WERE JUST CRONIES. IF THE ENEMY EVER SHOWS HIMSELF, YOU'LL KNOW IT.

BUT HOW DO I FIGURE INTO HIS PLAN?

I THOUGHT I KNEW UNTIL TODAY. IF HE'S TRYING TO GET YOU NOW IT MEANS HE'S MOVED UP HIS SCHEME BY THREE YEARS.

I'M NOT SURE WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US.

BUT C'MON HOME AN' GET CLEANED UP. I'LL TELL YOU ALL ABOUT IT.

dude...lookit the big guy...

ALL ABOUT WHAT?

HEY, KNOX! YOU OKAY?

PEACHY, GOT YOU A PRESENT FOR SAVING MY LIFE.

A PRESENT?

YOUR THOR PIN. I FOUND IT ON THE GROUND JUST BEFORE THOSE FREAKS ATTACKED.

IT WAS RIGHT WHERE YOU WERE STANDING BEFORE YOU BOLTED OFF IN A PANIC TO FIND IT.

then...this was her pin...

HEY, WHO'S THE BIG BLUE GUY?

what's his problem, honey bunny?

ah, NOTHIN' MAKES HIM HAPPY...

EPILOGUE

SOMEPLACE ELSE...

CHUNQ!

AND THEY RETURN,
THE MOST PUSSANT
TETRAD OF VILLAINY
MINTAGE CAN
PROCURE!

JARED, THE
ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN,
AN INEXPUGNABLE
ADVERSARY!

ME LIKE
SNOWMEN.

THE IRASCIBLE
BIO-ENGINEERED
JUGGERNAUT,
APPLY (YET
CURIOUSLY)
CODE-NAMED
ORANGE GUY!

RAGH!

TORPEDO BLACK,
A PERNICIOUS ANTHRO-
POMORPHIC ROCKET,
IMPOSSIBLE TO IMPEDE
ONCE HE HAS FLOUNCED
SKYWARD!

HUH?

THEN THERE IS
THE COPING STONE
OF MY QUARTERNION
OF EVIL: DICK, PAST
MASTER OF GIZMONETRY
AND MAHATMA OF
MERCENARIES!

BETTER
BELIEVE IT.

SO, MY
UNEXAMPLED UNDERLINGS,
YOU MIGHT EXCOGITATE
WHY I EXPRESS
STUPEFACTION...

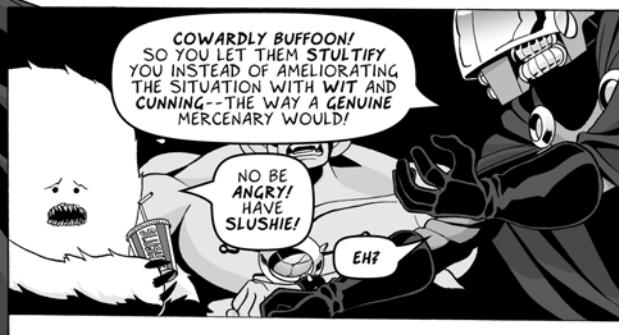
WHEN SAID
QUARTET IS
SENT RUNNING
HOME TO
MAMA...

BY A
GIDDYHEADED,
FRECKLE-FACED,
HOBBLEDEHOY!



YOU
WERE APPOINTED
FUGLEMAN FOR THIS
INITIATIVE. AS SUCH, ANY
NONFEASANCE RESTS
ON YOUR HEAD.

**NOW SPEAK,
FOOL!**







MY LORD. I GIVE YOU MY UNEQUIVOCAL ASSURANCES THAT THE NEXT ENDEAVOR WILL BE THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE MOST FIENDISH PULCHRITUDE--

I THINK NOT.

I WILL DEVISE THE NEXT STAGE OF OUR PLAN.

A MORE... DEMORALIZING APPROACH IS CALLED FOR.

AN ANXIOUS FOE IS MORE LIKELY TO MAKE MISTAKES. LET US INCREASE THE BOW USER'S TENSION BY LOWERING OUR AMBITIONS.

REPORT TO ME IN ONE HOUR FOR A FULL BRIEFING.

OH... AND GENERAL?

MY LORD?



DO CLEAN UP THAT MESS.
I BEG YOUR PARDON?
THAT WILL BE ALL.



#@*%!!



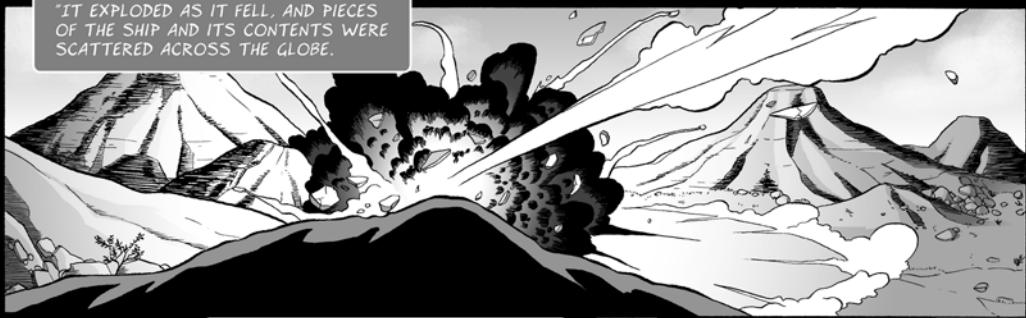
"LONG AGO, AN ALIEN VESSEL ENTERED OUR SOLAR SYSTEM. IT WAS DAMAGED FROM DISTANT BATTLES, AND CRASHED ON EARTH..."



CHAPTER THREE:

SENTINELS

"IT EXPLODED AS IT FELL, AND PIECES OF THE SHIP AND ITS CONTENTS WERE SCATTERED ACROSS THE GLOBE."



"PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD SOON DISCOVERED THE DEBRIS."



"BOTH CONSCIOUSLY AND INTUITIVELY THEY FIGURED OUT MANY THINGS ABOUT THE METALLIC FRAGMENTS."

"THE SMARTEST OF THEM FOUND THE METAL HAD STRANGE PROPERTIES."



"FOLKS WHO KEPT IT GREW STRONGER, WISER, AND LIVED A LOT LONGER."



"THIS UNNATURAL WISDOM MADE THEM AWARE OF A LOT OF THINGS UNKNOWN TO MANKIND BEFORE, INCLUDING THE NATURE OF THE METAL ITSELF. THEY LEARNED IT WAS THE REMNANTS OF A CRUEL RACE OF TWISTED METALLIC BEINGS FROM D...

"OH, GROSS! YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT, REX?"



...I MEAN, CARRYING AROUND DEAD ALIEN BODY PARTS?
MAN, THAT'S CREEPY.

NNN.
GIBSON--

LET REX FINISH--

TELL ME IT WAS ONLY PARTS OF THE SHIP, AND I'LL BE OKAY WITH IT, YOU KNOW?

OTHERWISE--BLECCHH!

GIBSON, PLEASE. SAVE THE QUESTIONS FOR WHEN REX IS DONE.

sigh
THANK YOU.

THE METAL BONDED TO ORGANIC LIFE FORMS, AND LIVED ON THROUGH THEIR SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP.

THE ONES WHO CARRIED THE METAL FOUND OUT IT HAD A CORRUPTING NATURE--IT EVENTUALLY POISONED THE MINDS OF THOSE WHO USED IT. BUT THROUGH THEIR NEWLY ACQUIRED WISDOM, THEY DISCOVERED A WAY DRIVE OUT THE EVIL INFLUENCES IN THE METAL WITH THEIR WILLS...

"THEY CLEANSED THE FRAGMENTS AND RESHAPED THEM INTO TALISMANS. THE PURIFICATION OF THE METAL UNLOCKED ITS POTENTIAL.

"BUT NOT ALL OF THE METAL USERS COULD GET RID OF THE EVIL IN THE METAL. OR MAYBE THEY WERE EVIL TO BEGIN WITH...

"THE USERS DISCOVERED NEW ABILITIES TO CURE SICKNESS AND MEND WOUNDS. THEY COULD ALSO SHARE THEIR WISDOM BY COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER METAL USERS, REGARDLESS OF DISTANCE OR LANGUAGE.

"THESE FIRST METAL USERS WERE CALLED THE HEALERS.

"OVER TIME, USERS WHO HAD RESHAPED THEIR METAL INTO WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION BEGAN TO APPEAR.



"THE HEALERS SOON LEARNED OF THIS. THROUGH THEIR COMMUNION WITH THE METAL, THEY DISCUSSED WHETHER THEY SHOULD INTERFERE AND TRY TO PURIFY THE METAL OF THE WEAPONS USERS."

"SOME OF THEM FELT IT WAS THEIR DUTY TO STOP THEM, WHILE OTHERS VOTED TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE."



"THEN THE OLDEST AND WISEST OF THEM, WHO HAD A SPECIAL KNACK FOR DECODING THE METAL'S SECRETS, TOLD THEM SOMETHING LIKE A PROPHECY."

"THE SHIP'S ARRIVAL HAD DRAWN EARTH INTO THE CONFLICTS FROM WHICH IT CAME. SHE MENTIONED A THING CALLED THE GREAT ORDERING AND ITS PENDING FINAL ACT, THE THIRD DESCENSION."

"AT THAT TIME A NEW RACE OF MEN WOULD COME, AND ONLY THROUGH THEM COULD THE METAL BE CLEANSED."



"FOR MOST OF THE HEALERS, THIS WAS ENOUGH TO SETTLE THE ISSUE."



"BUT SOME OF THEM WERE PROUD AND RIGHTEOUS. THEY WENT SECRETLY TO FIND THE WEAPONS USERS AND PUT A STOP TO THEIR EVIL."



"TURNED OUT THAT WAS A BAD MOVE. YOU SEE, THE WEAPONS USERS DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE HEALERS, OR EVEN ABOUT EACH OTHER."



"THE MAVERICK HEALERS WERE KILLED. THEIR METAL WAS CORRUPTED, AND THEIR SECRETS WERE REVEALED."



"SO A RUTHLESS AND CUNNING WEAPONS USER, WHO HAD SHAPED HIS METAL INTO TWO SWORDS, ALSO LEARNED THE ART OF FINDING OTHER USERS OVER GREAT DISTANCES. WITH HIS STRONG AND TWISTED WILL HE GATHERED THEM TO HIMSELF."



"UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP THEY SET OUT TO KILL THE REMAINING HEALERS, AND A GREAT WAR WAS FOUGHT..."

"IT AIN'T A WAR YOU CAN LOOK UP IN THE HISTORY BOOKS."

"THE FIGHTING WAS MOSTLY DONE THROUGH THE COMMUNION ALL OF THE USERS SHARED WITH THE METAL."

"IT WAS A RISKY BUSINESS FOR THE WEAPONS USERS. THOUGH THE HEALERS COULDN'T PUT UP MUCH OF A FIGHT IN THE REAL WORLD, IN THAT OTHER PLACE THEIR WILLS WERE STRONG, AND COULD BE USED AS A SORT OF DEFENSE."

"BUT THE SWORD USER WAS A GAMBLING MAN. AND HIS MIND WASN'T EXACTLY A MIDDLEWEIGHT."

"THE HEALERS AND THEIR WISDOM WERE WIPE FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH."

"WITH THEM OUT OF THE WAY, THE SWORD USER GOT TO THINKING ABOUT HOW HIS STRENGTH AND LONGEVITY WOULD MAKE HIM A PERFECT CANDIDATE FOR GLOBAL TYRANT."

"AND HOW THAT'S USUALLY A ONE-MAN POSITION..."

"HE SECRETLY BEGAN TO KILL HIS FORMER COMRADES, AND WITH THE DESTRUCTION OR ACQUISITION OF THEIR METAL HIS STRENGTH AND MALICE KEPT GROWING."

"BUT ONE OF THE WEAPONS USERS GOT WISE TO THIS PLOT..."



"LONG LIFE GAVE THE SPEAR USER PLENTY OF TIME FOR REFLECTION, AND UNLIKE THE OTHERS, HE HAD RESERVATIONS ABOUT WHAT THEY'D DONE. HE THOUGHT HIS IMPULSES TO DESTROY WERE ALL HIS OWN, BUT THAT WAS BEFORE HE MET THE HEALERS DURING THE WAR.

"OVER TIME, HE BEGAN TO RESENT THE IDEA THAT THE METAL WAS SOMEHOW INFLUENCING HIS DECISIONS. HE BELIEVED HE HAD THE POWER TO CHOOSE.

"THE SWORD USER'S BETRAYAL BROUGHT THIS REVELATION TO A HEAD.



"WHEN HIS OLD BOSS CAME FOR HIM, THE SPEAR USER WAS READY...

"...AND THE SWORD USER WAS BEATEN.

"THE SPEAR USER FOUND HE NOW HAD THE STRENGTH TO RESIST THE EVIL INFLUENCES OF THE METAL, AND WOULDN'T STOOP TO KILLING HIS ENEMY.



"THIS CHANGE GAVE HIM NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE METAL'S NATURE. HE KNEW THAT UNLESS THE METAL WAS CLEANSED, THEY'D ALL END UP LIKE THE SWORD USER, OR WORSE.



"UNFORTUNATELY, THE ART OF PURIFYING THE METAL DIED WITH THE HEALERS.

"AND THE SWORD USER WASN'T ABOUT TO STICK AROUND 'TIL A NEW WAY WAS FOUND...

"THE SPEAR USER KNEW BETTER THAN TO THINK IT WAS ALL OVER."



"HE WENT TO THE REMAINING WEAPONS USERS AND TOLD THEM EVERYTHING HE'D LEARNED. MANY OF THEM DECIDED TO JOIN FORCES AGAINST THEIR OLD MASTER."



"BUT SOME OF THEM WERE STILL HUNG UP ON THEIR OWN AMBITIONS OF POWER..."

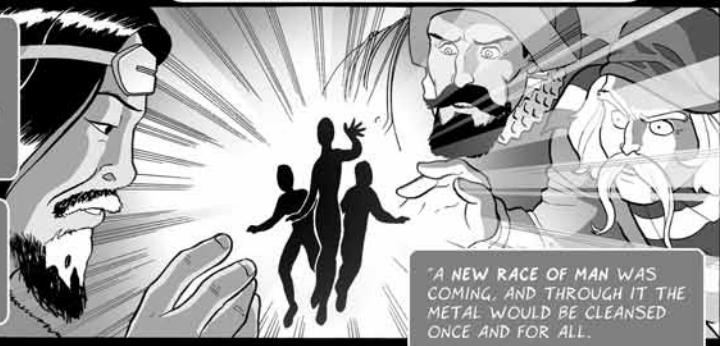


"...AND, WITHOUT THE REST OF THE WEAPONS USERS' HELP, THEY WERE EASY TARGETS FOR THE SWORD USER."

"THE SWORD USER DROPPED OUT OF SIGHT AFTER THAT. THE ALLIED WEAPONS USERS HUNTED HIGH AND LOW FOR HIM, BUT WERE OUT OF LUCK."

"UNITED, THE WEAPONS USERS ONLY GREW IN WISDOM AND POWER. THEY STILL COULDN'T PURIFY THE METAL, BUT THE SPEAR USER TAUGHT THEM HOW TO KEEP THE EVIL INFLUENCES UNDER CONTROL."

"THEY BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE CONFLICT THAT SENT THE ALIEN METAL TO EARTH, AND THE PROPHECY OF THE HEALERS REVEALED ITSELF TO THEM."



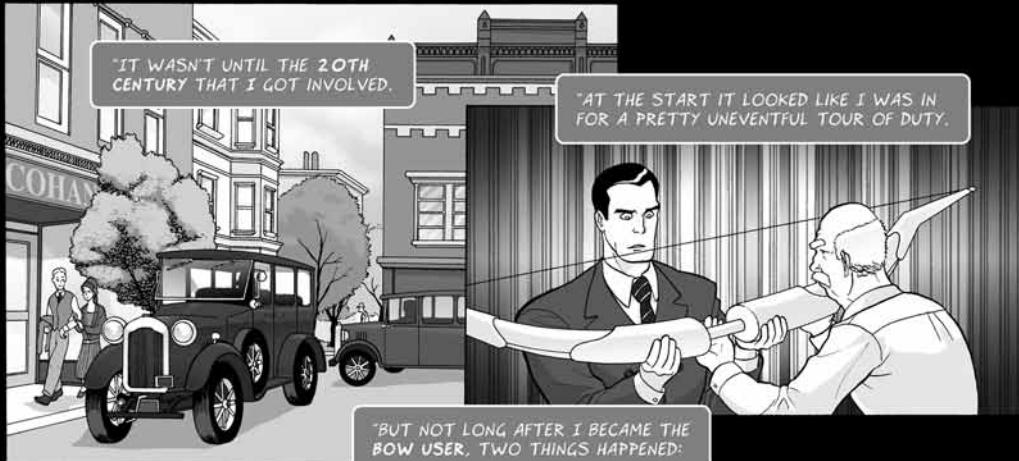
"A NEW RACE OF MAN WAS COMING, AND THROUGH IT THE METAL WOULD BE CLEANSED ONCE AND FOR ALL."

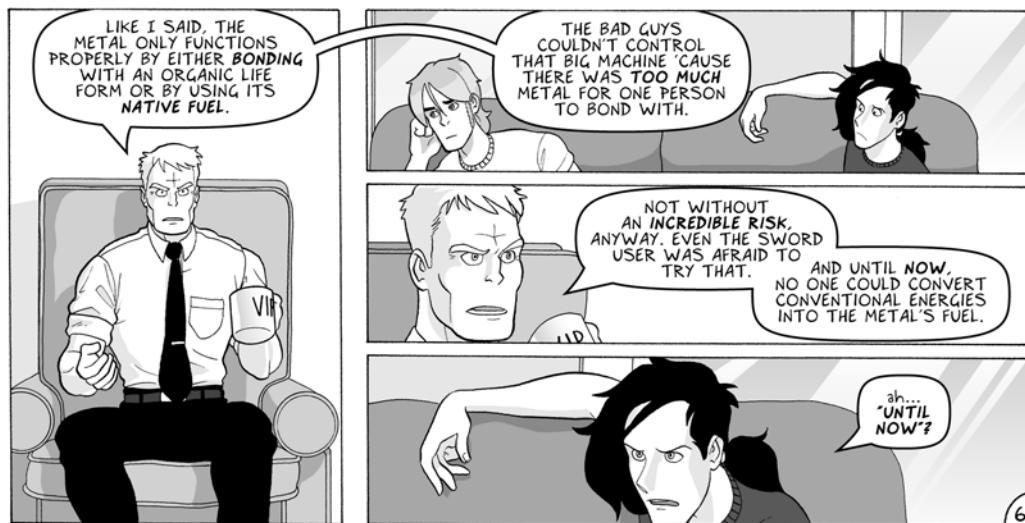
"THEY VOWED TO KEEP AN EYE OPEN FOR THESE NEW PEOPLE, AND TO PROTECT THEM FROM THE SWORD USER, IN CASE HE EVER FOUND OUT ABOUT THE PROPHECY."

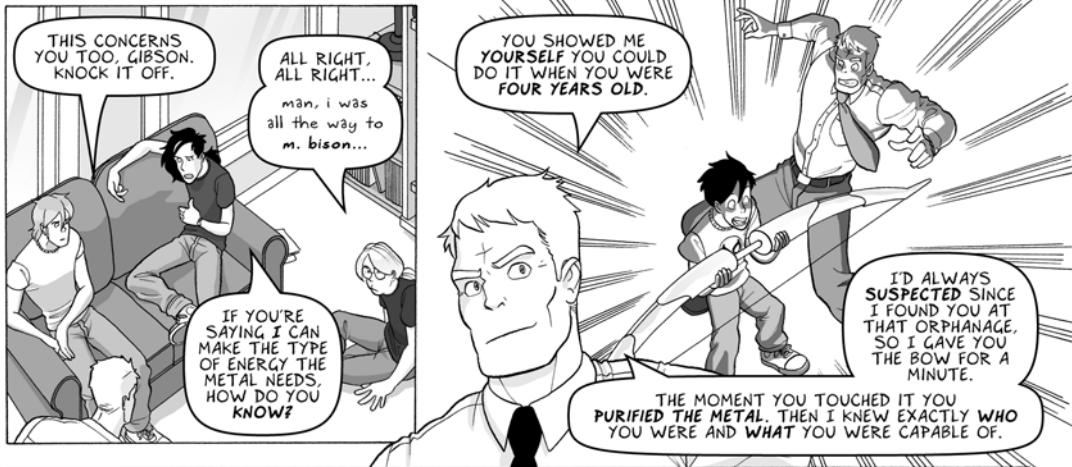
"TIME WENT ON. SLOW AS THEIR AGING WAS, THEY COULDN'T HELP BUT EVENTUALLY GROW OLD."

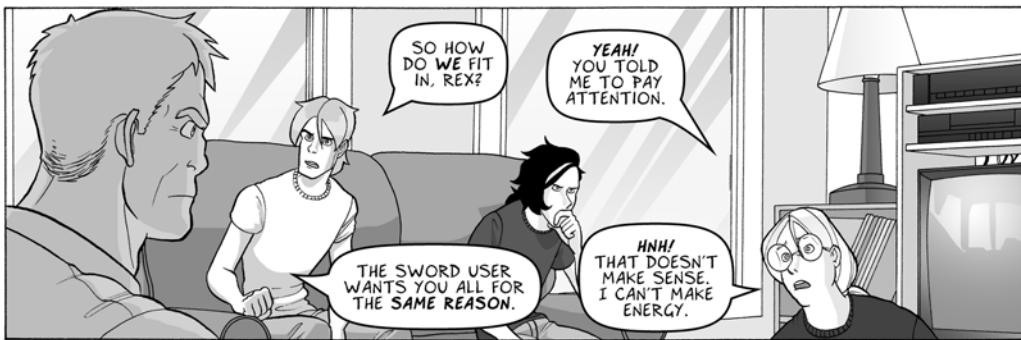
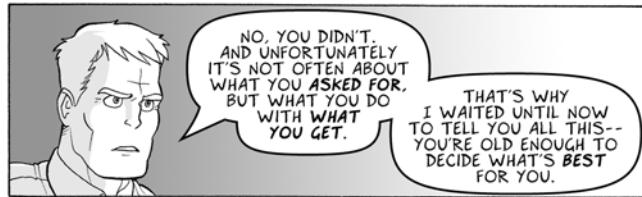


"THEY SOUGHT OUT SUCCESSORS TO THEIR METAL AND THEIR TASK. IN THIS WAY THE VIGIL OF THE WEAPONS USERS PASSED THROUGH THE CENTURIES."



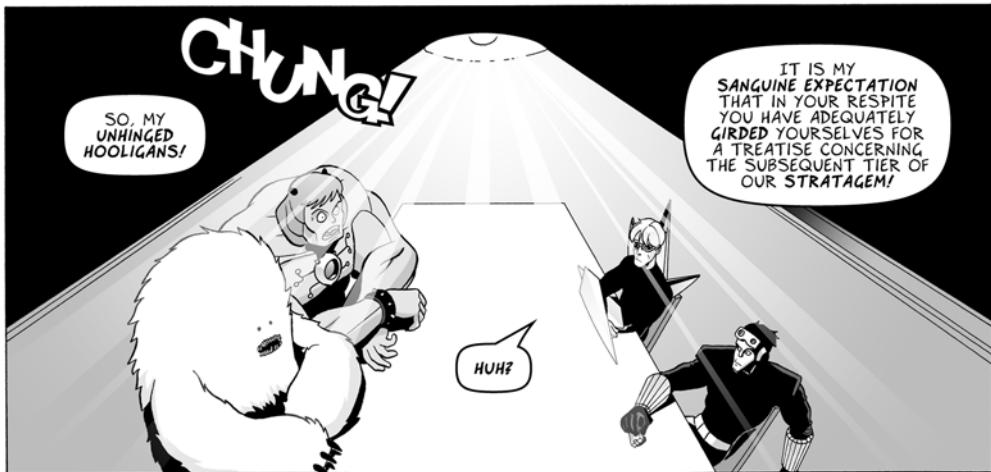


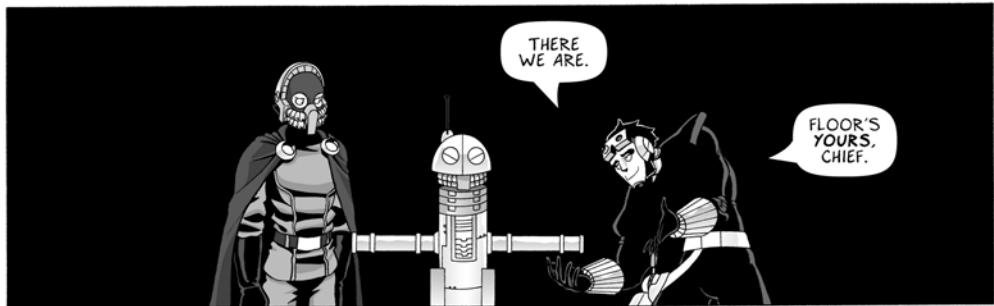






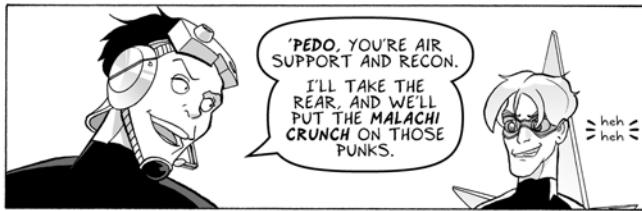
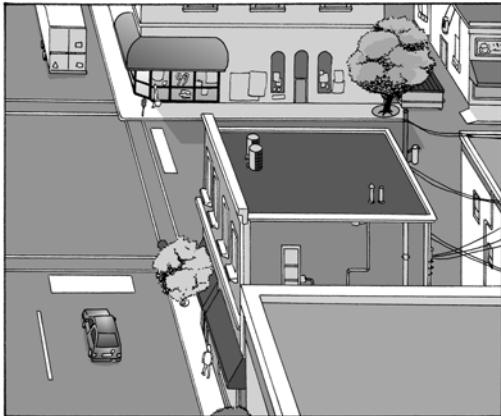
SOMEPLACE ELSE...

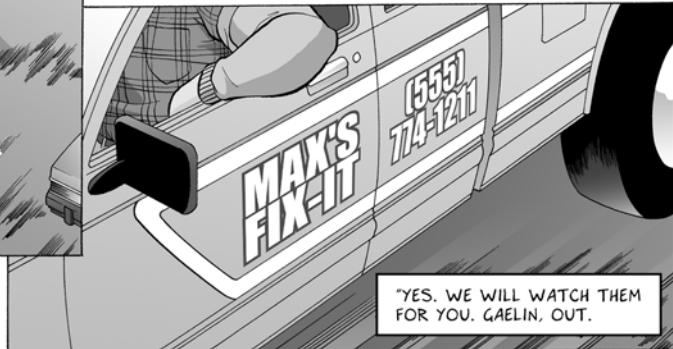
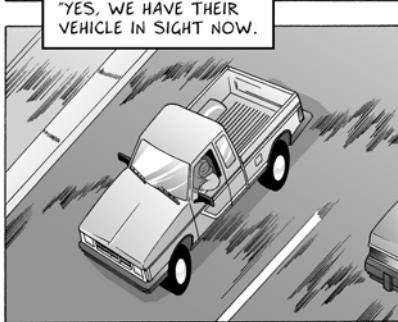














SO, DO YOU WANT
McTASTY BURGER OR
McTACO BOY?

I DON'T CARE.
McTASTY BURGER.

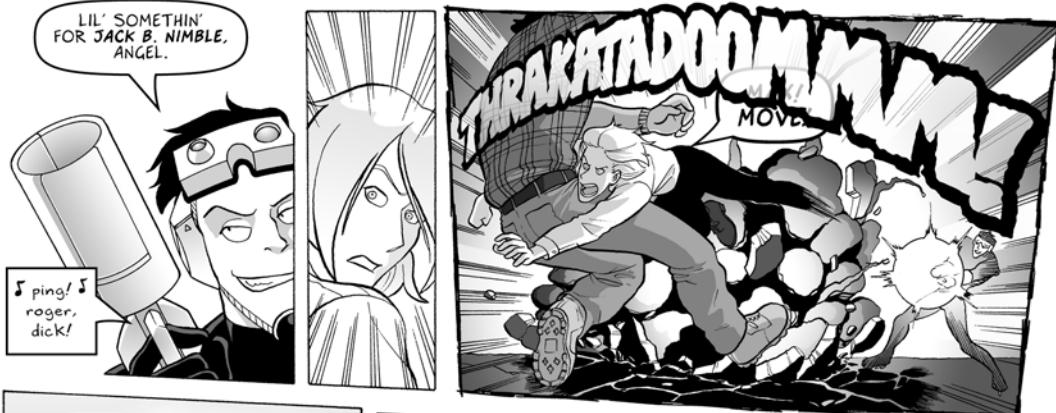
BLOOMNG!

McTASTY
BURGER
IT IS.

YOU OKAY,
GAEIN?

STAY ALERT.
THERE MAY BE MORE
OF THEM.

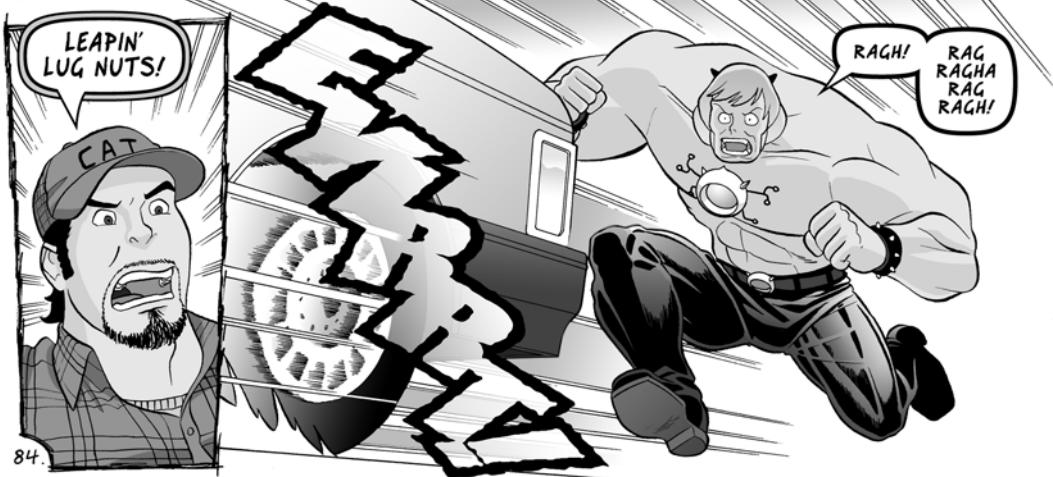
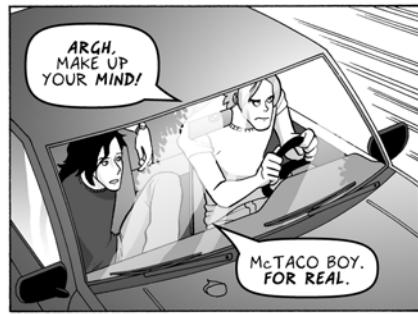


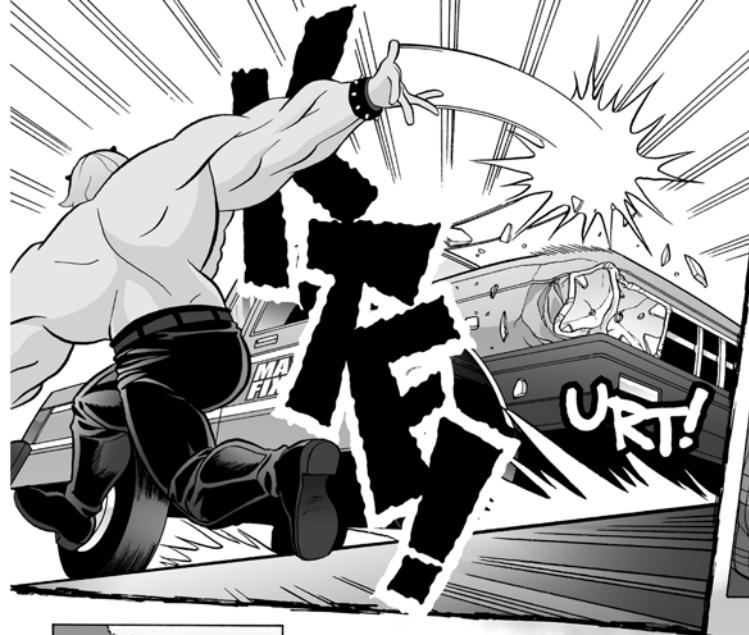




RAGH!







YEAH, AH RECKON
AH KNOW WHO YOU
ARE, AN WHAT YER AFTER.
WELL, FERGET IT!

BACK HOME WE
GOT A NAME FER FELLAS
WHAT HASSLE FOLKS
SMALLER'N THEM--
BULLIES!

AN' MAH PAPPY
USED TA SAY, AIN'T
BUT ONE WAY TO
DEAL WITH A BULLY:





...WHAT COMES ON THE ENCHILADAS?

HOT SAUCE, ONIONS...

WHAT ABOUT THE CALIENTE BURRITOS? THEY HOT OR WHAT?

MAN, IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE THIS MUCH TROUBLE, JUST GO. INSIDE.

I'M NOT GOING IN THERE.

'D be a hecKuva lot easier if you did...

LOOK, I'M ORDERING. OKAY?

I NEED THREE QUESADILLAS...

YOU DON'T NEED THEM, YOU WANT THEM.

"I KNOW IT'S BEEN SAID BEFORE, BUT I HATE THE DRIVE-THRU.

"WHEN DEALING WITH AN ESTABLISHMENT OPERATED PRIMARILY BY TEENAGERS, YOU WANT EVERY ASSURANCE THEY'RE NOT GOING TO SPIT IN YOUR FOOD.

SIX SOFT NO TOMATOES, CHEESE, OR LETTUCE...

"IF YOU GO INSIDE YOU CAN KEEP AN EYE ON THEM.

...TOSTADAS-- NO, THREE...

UM...FOUR CARNE-CARNE BURRITOS...

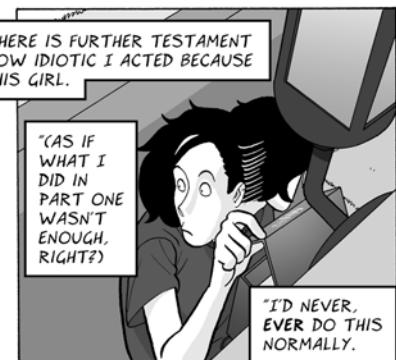
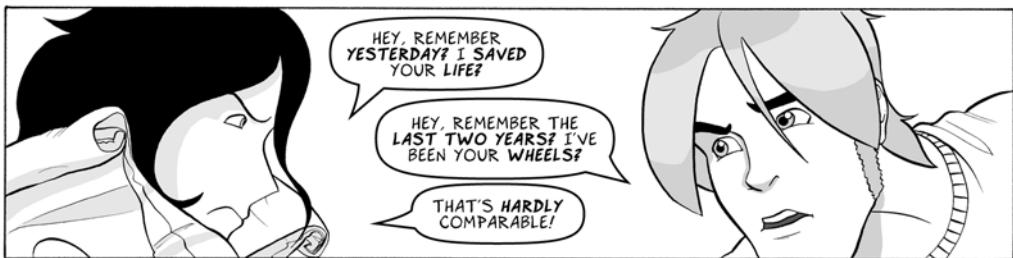
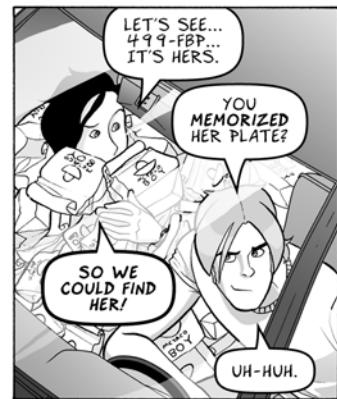
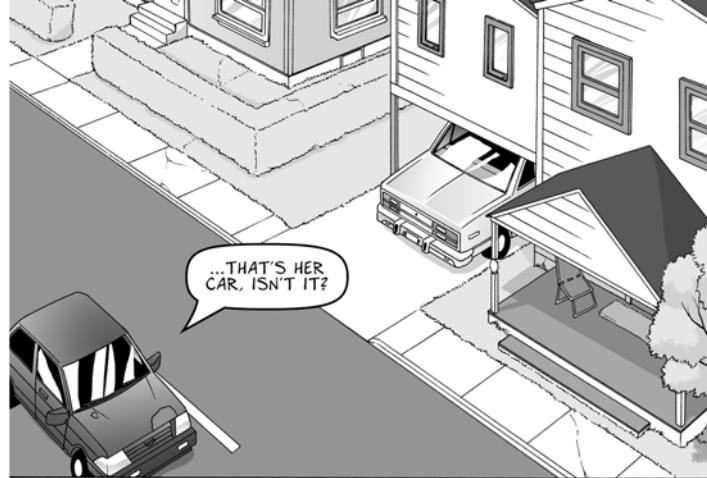
A NACHOS McGRANDE...

THREE LARGE SODAS...

YUMMY YUMMY!















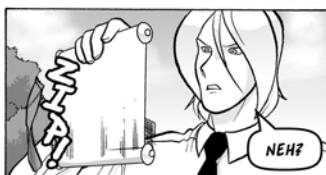


I CAME HERE TO SEE IF YOUD MAKE GOOD ON A PROMISE.

WE VOWED TO PROTECT THE KIDS.

















OH, GREAT
HAPPINESS!

WE HAVE PICKED
THE BOW USER'S POCKET
AND PROCURED THE METAL
MUTER! THOSE BEEF-HEADED
HEROES HAVE CRUMPLED
LIKE SO MANY WET
BROWN BAGS!

MOMENTS
SUCH AS THIS
ARE WHAT MAKE A
CAREER IN VILLAINY
A WORTHWHILE
ENDEAVOR!

CHAPTER FOUR:

TRICKY-CON





I AM A
REASONABLE
MAN.

BUT I HAVE BEEN
WORKING TOWARDS
THIS DAY FOR
SOME TIME.

YOUR COMEDIC
BICKERING IS NOT ONLY
AN EMBARRASSMENT
TO YOUR PROFESSION;
IT IS A THREAT TO
MY GOALS.

AS HIRED MERCENARIES,
THE CONSEQUENCE OF FAILURE
HAS MERELY BEEN LOSS
OF YOUR SALARY.

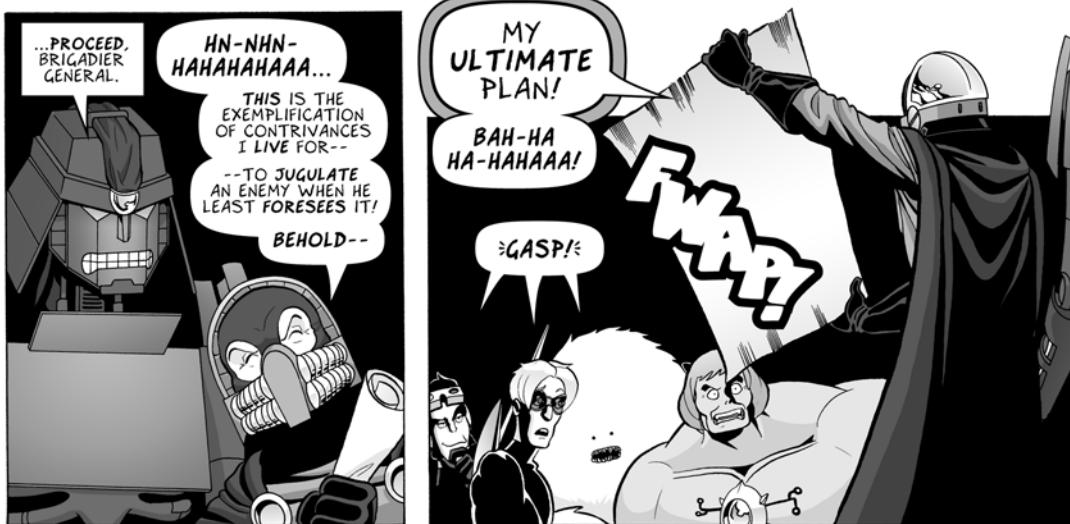
THAT
WILL NOW
CHANGE.

IN THIS CRITICAL
HOUR, THE REWARD FOR
FAILURE WILL BE MY...
UNMITIGATED WRATH.

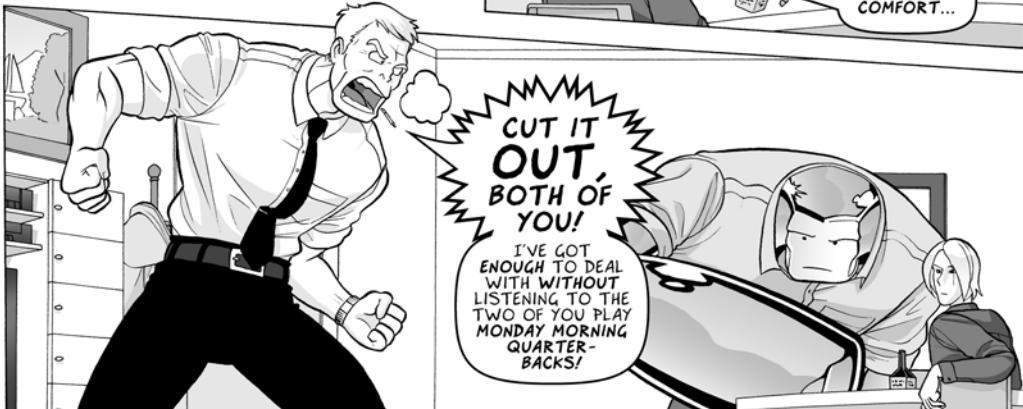
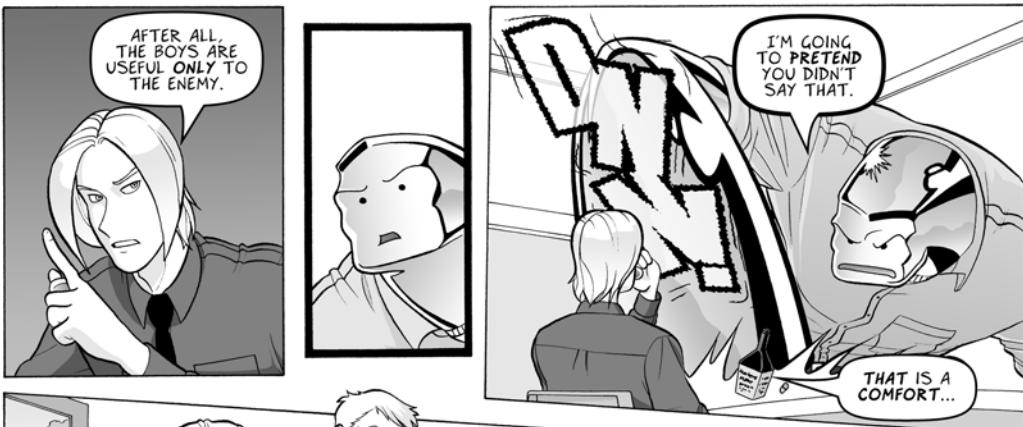
YEAH, THAT'S GREAT.
HEY BOSS, WHO'S THE
BIG-MOUTH WITH
THE TIKI MASK?

ER--
I DO NOT FIND YOUR
CAVALIER ATTITUDE...
AMUSING, DICK.

IT IS A RATHER
UNWELCOME
COUNTERPOINT
TO THE STRENGTHS
OF MY PLANS.





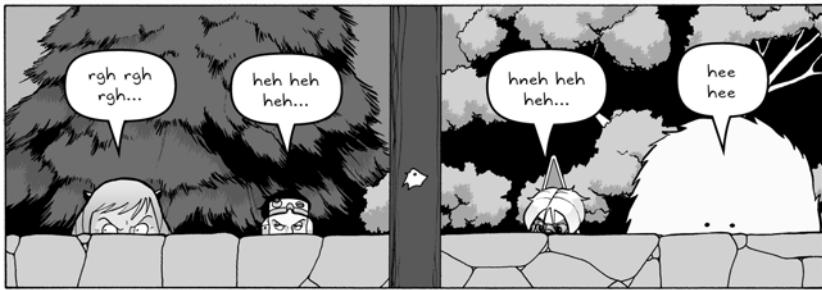
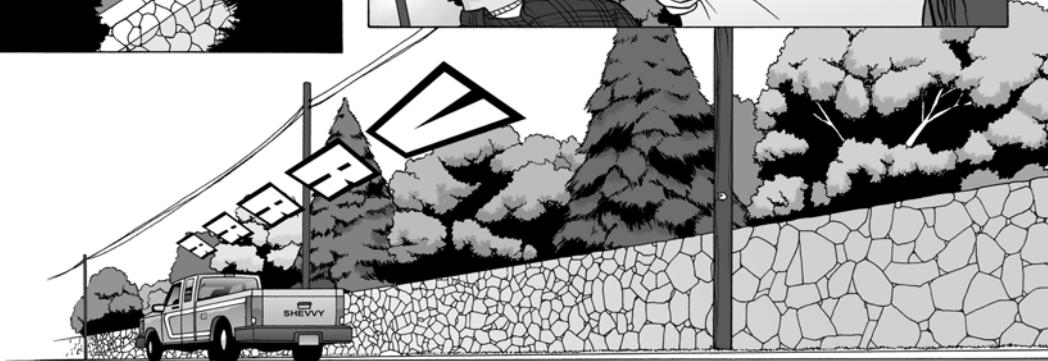


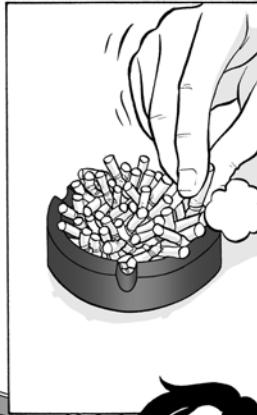




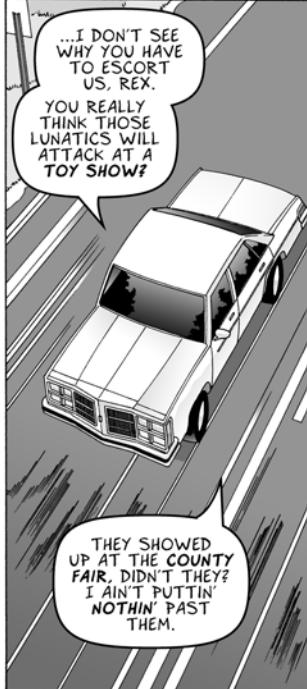
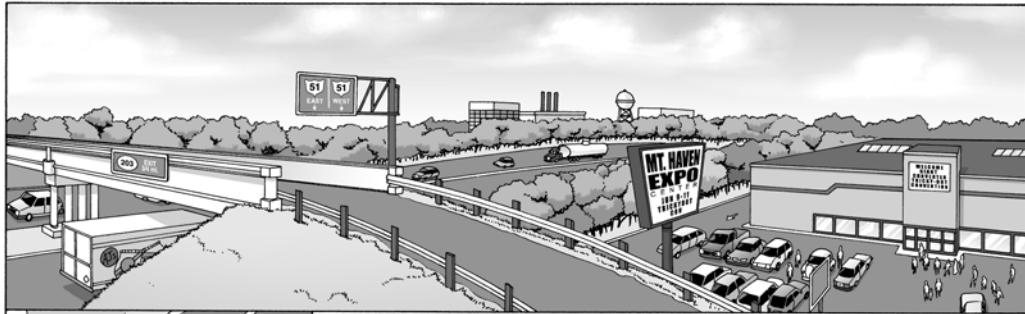
NOW!













REALLY? YOU THINK A ROOM FILLED WITH UNHYGIENIC MEN WHO HAVE YET TO OUTGROW CHILDHOOD FIXATIONS SOUNDS LIKE ENTERTAINMENT?



GIANT CONVERTER TRICKY-BOT





BUT ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS THAT THERE WERE TWO GUYS WITH HER THIS TIME, NEITHER OF WHICH WERE THAT CREEP SHE LIVED WITH.

WHAT KIND OF GAL WAS THIS, ANYWAY?



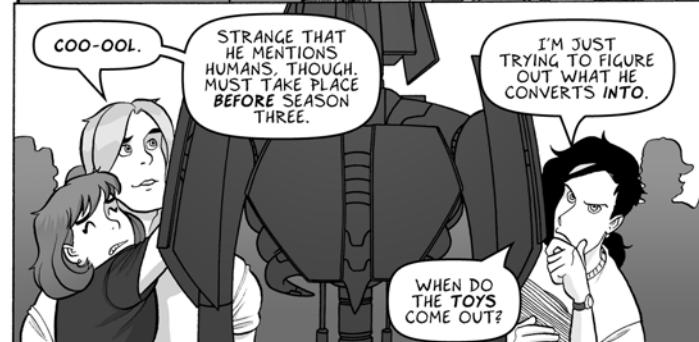
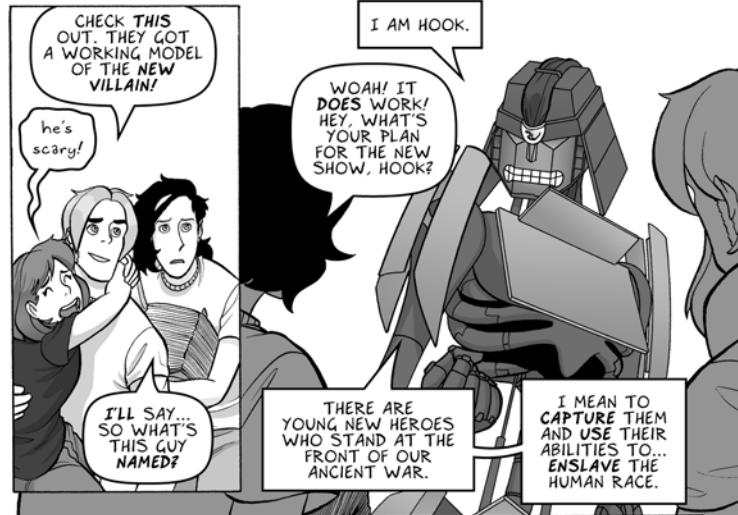
I WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR RETURNING MY PIN.

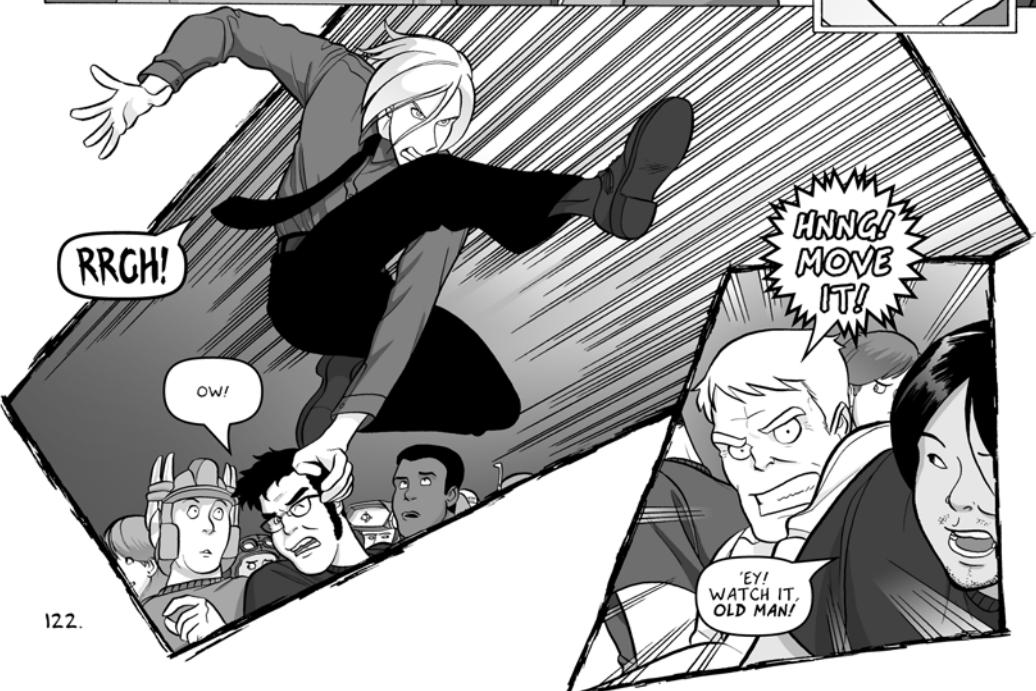
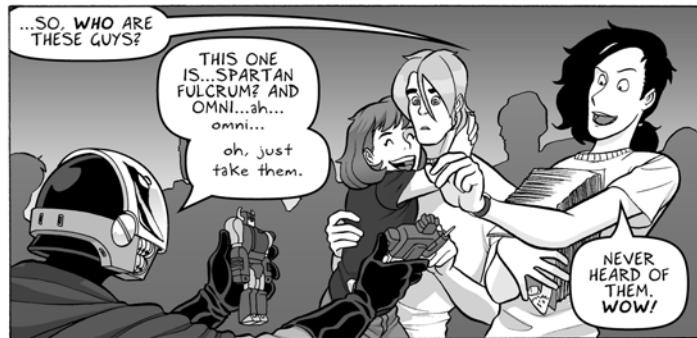
SHE SOUNDED EARNEST. BUT I WAS ONLY 18, AND NOT ABOUT TO BREAK CHARACTER.



















COWARD!

HAH!

GREETINGS, YOUNG ONE. IT HAS BEEN SOME TIME.

BETTER PART OF SEVEN YEARS. YOU GOT UGLIER.

AH, HOW...PREDICTABLE. I REALLY MUST THANK YOU FOR GATHERING THE CHILDREN INTO ONE PLACE FOR ME. QUITE CONVENIENT.

FOR ALL THE GOOD IT'LL DO YOU. THAT JUNK HEAP OF YOURS IS STILL THREE YEARS AWAY.

YOU KNOW I'LL GET THE KIDS BACK BEFORE THEN, SO WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

PLEASE, PATIENCE. MY DEAR BOW USER. YOU WILL UNDERSTAND SOON ENOUGH...

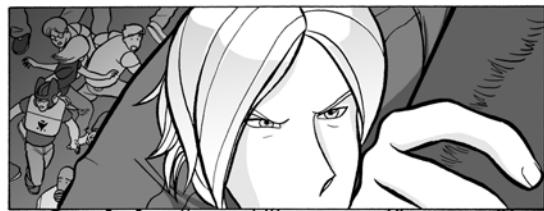
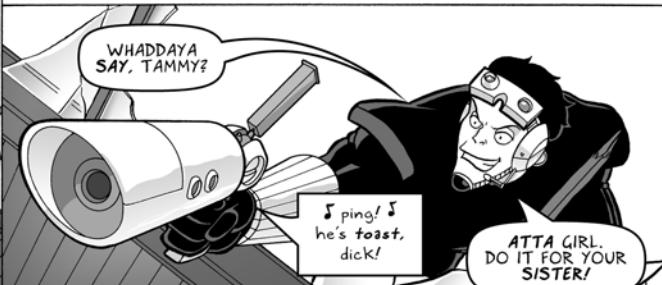
KEEP YOUR THREATS, YOU DEPRAVED MARIONETTE!

...ONCE I HAVE ABSORBED YOU AND YOUR PATHETIC BAND OF GERIATRIC METAL USERS!

THUP!

PLANG!

TUT-TUT, DOYLE. YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO CHALLENGE ME...

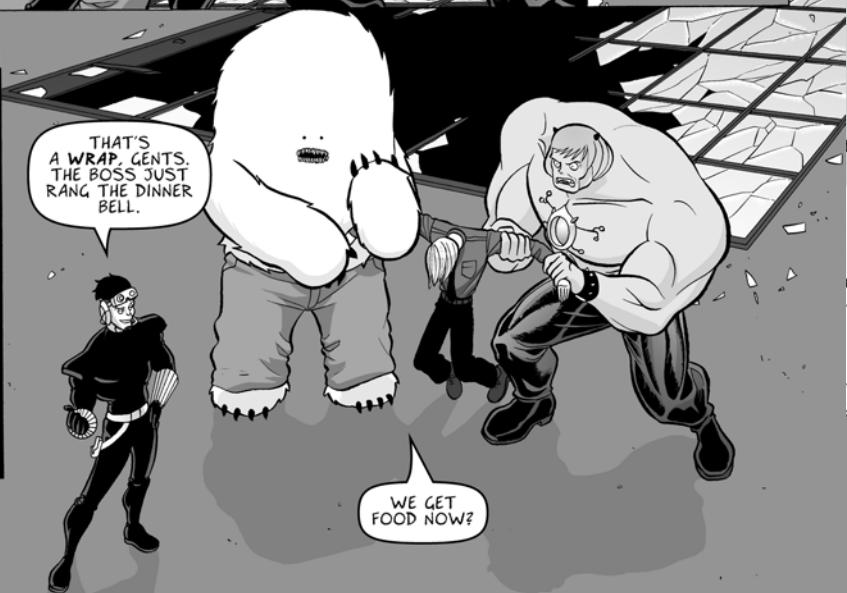














...WOW!

WOULDJA
JUST LOOK AT
ALL THE PANICKING
SCI-FI GEEKS!



WONDER
HOW MANY
I'LL GET.

MAN,
I LOVE THIS
JOB!

WELC
GIAN
TRICK
CONV







5 ping! 5
WE HAVE
REACHED 707
CRESCENT STREET.

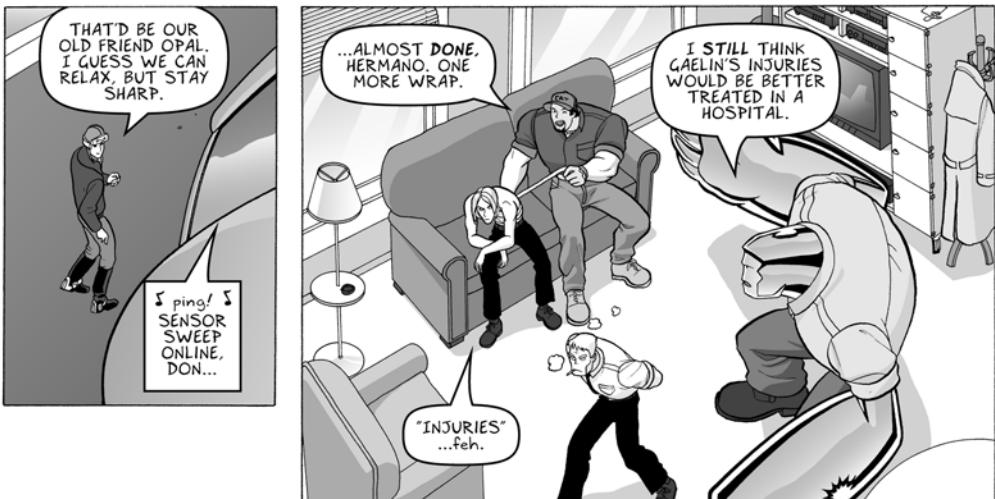
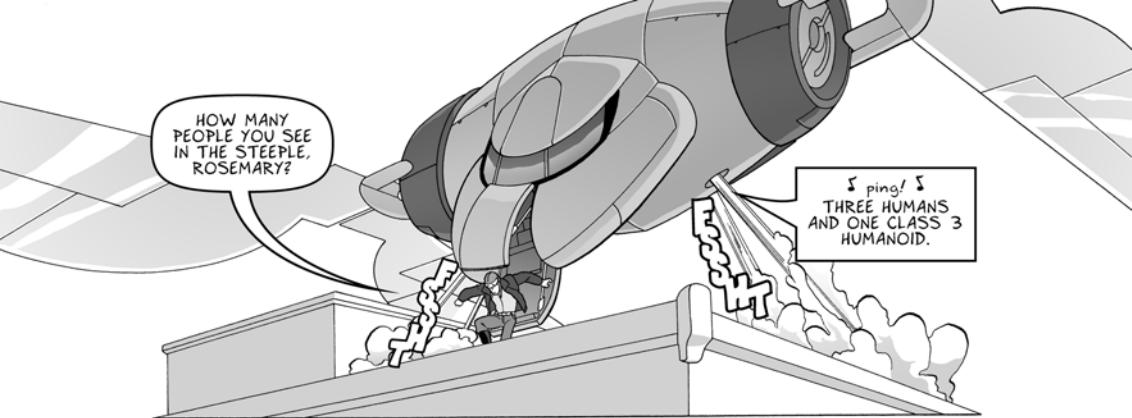
PANKY'S

RIGHT ON
TARGET, ROSEMARY.
SWING IN TIGHT
OVER THE ROOF.
REAL VELVETY.

5 ping! 5
CAN DO,
DON.

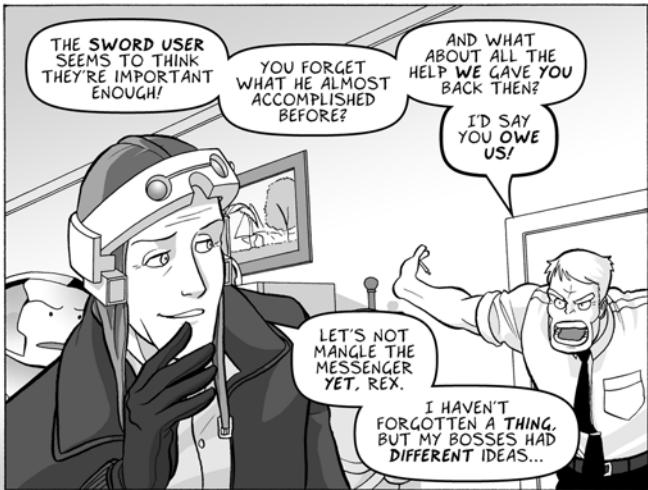
CHAPTER FIVE:

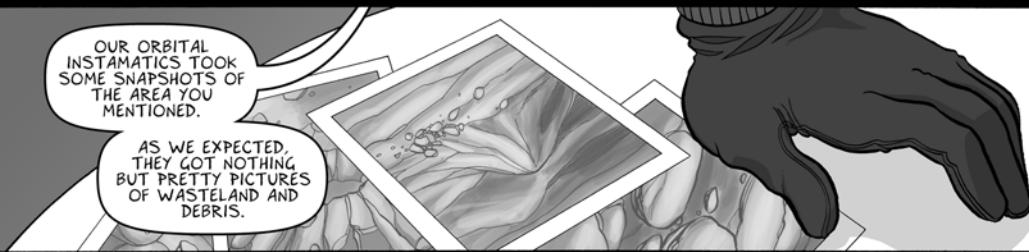
TWO MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT













"I FOUND OUT THE SWORD USER WAS STILL INSIDE THEIR HIDEOUT. SO I WENT AFTER HIM, LEAVING THE DESTRUCTION TO THE HEROES OUTSIDE."

"TURNED OUT HE PLAYED HIS ALLY FOR A SAP. THE SWORD USER KNEW THE ALIEN METAL WOULD CONSUME THE SCIENTIST'S MIND."



"LIKE AN IDIOT, I TRIED TO REASON WITH HIM."

"I ARGUED THAT NO MIND, NOT EVEN ONE AS TWISTED AND POTENT AS HIS, COULD CONTROL SO MUCH OF THE METAL."

"THE SCIENTIST'S MIND WAS UNRAVELLING. THE WHOLE AREA BECAME A MESS OF EXPLOSIONS."



"SO I GAVE UP ON TRYING TO HEAL THE SWORD USER AND STARTED TO FINISH HIM OFF."

"I COULD SEE WHY HE WANTED A NEW BODY."

"ALL THAT POWER, AND HE STILL COULDN'T STOP HIS DETERIORATION."

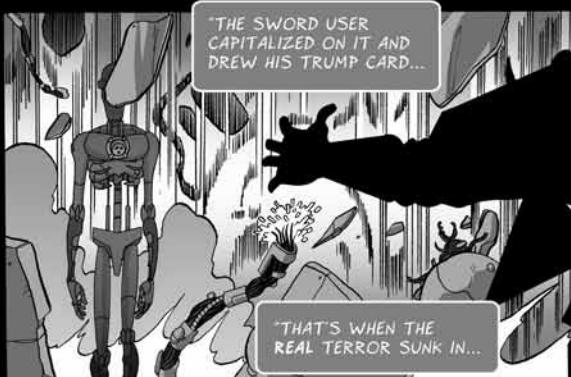
"HE WAS WEAKENING WITH EVERY BLOW. I THOUGHT IT WAS FINALLY THE END."



"THEN, TWICE THE FOOL, I HESITATED BEFORE DEALING THE KILLING STROKE..."

"THE SWORD USER CAPITALIZED ON IT AND DREW HIS TRUMP CARD..."

"THAT'S WHEN THE REAL TERROR SUNK IN..."





"I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS POSSIBLE, BUT HE TRANSFERRED HIMSELF INTO A MACHINE MADE FROM THE FABRICATED METAL."

"IT WAS THEN THAT THE BIG MACHINE SHOT ITSELF INTO SPACE..."



"WHEN THE RESCUE TEAMS DUG ME OUT, IT WAS APPARENT THAT THE HIDEOUT WAS DESTROYED..."



"BUT I STILL KEPT HOPE THAT HIS THREAT WAS ENDED. HIS ALLIES WERE DEAD OR CAPTURED. HIS ROBOT WAS GONE."



I THOUGHT THAT IN THE WORST CASE SCENARIO HE'D COME OUT OF HIDING. ONCE THE BIG ROBOT WAS WITHIN GRABBING DISTANCE.

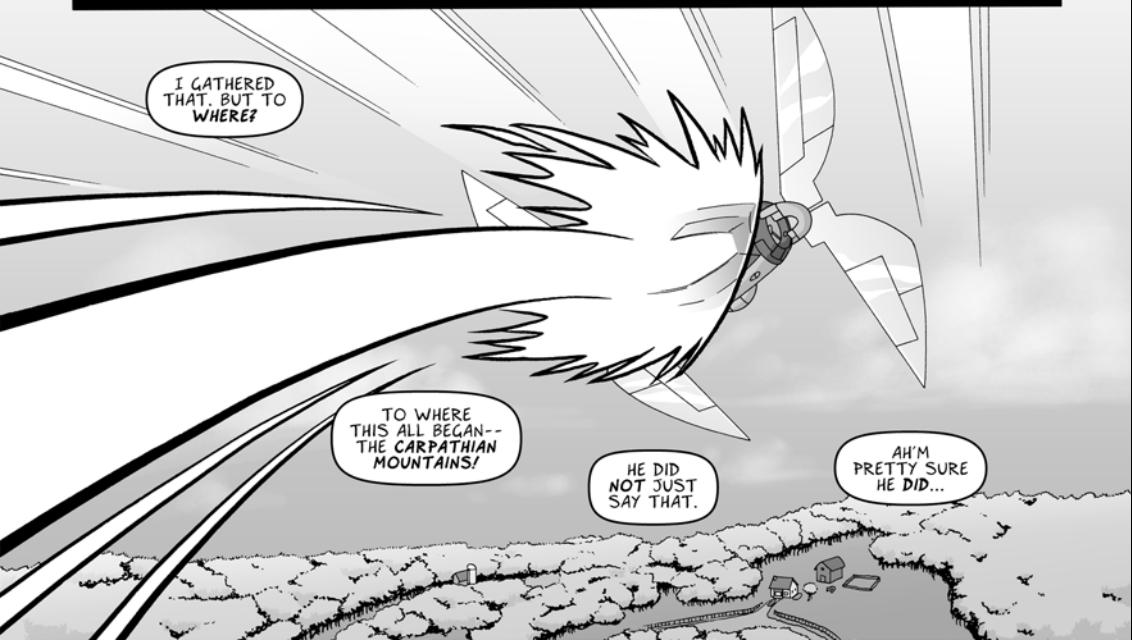
BUT NOW IT SEEMS SO OBVIOUS I CAN'T BELIEVE IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME-- THAT ROBOT WAS TOO BIG AND TOO QUICKLY CONSTRUCTED FOR ONE METAL MUTER TO FABRICATE.

NO, THE SWORD USER HAD TO HAVE A LARGER SOURCE TO DRAW FROM.





...EVERYTHING
ALL RIGHT BACK
THERE?



I GATHERED THAT. BUT TO WHERE?

TO WHERE
THIS ALL BEGAN--
THE CARPATHIAN
MOUNTAINS!

HE DID
NOT JUST
SAY THAT.

AH'M
PRETTY SURE
HE DID...

"SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, WHENEVER I GOT SICK I'D HAVE THE SAME DREAM.

"IT STARTS IN PITCH DARKNESS. THERE'S THIS LITTLE LIGHT AND A NOISE LIKE THE EMERGENCY BROADCAST SYSTEM.

"THEN I HEAR A VOICE. IT'S REX. HE'S SAYING MEAN THINGS TO ME IN A LOW TONE.

"NEXT THING I KNOW I'M RUNNING. REX MUST BE FOLLOWING ME, 'CAUSE I CAN STILL HEAR HIM.



"I SEE A DOOR IN THE DARKNESS. I MAKE FOR IT.

"THE FLOOR IS COVERED WITH DIRTY, STINKY WOOL.

"NEXT THING I KNOW I'M IN THE CHAIR.

"REX SHOWS UP. HE'S A GIANT HEAD, AND HE'S HOLDING A BIG JAR.

NEVER EVER
REALLY LIKE
YOU STUPID
KID

"I LOOK IN AND SEE A HIGH CHAIR IN A KITCHEN.

"THE AIR IS THICK WITH WET WOOL SMELL. I CAN'T BREATHE RIGHT.

BUT
I DON'T
WANT TO
EA--
GLMF!

EAT
IT!

WAIT--
WAIT! WHAT'S
THE JAR SAY?
I CAN'T
READ IT!

"THEN, FOR WHATEVER REASON, I SEE OUR APARTMENT JUST SITTING ON A BLACK FIELD.

"I HAVE THE SENSATION OF FALLING.

"THEN I HEAR REX SCREAM, BUT IT'S A SCREAM OF ANGER.

AAAAAA

"AND THE APARTMENT BLOWS UP...

"SO WHEN I WOKE UP I THOUGHT, LIKE THE OTHER TIMES BEFORE, THAT REX WOULD BE THERE WITH A BOWL OF SOUP AND THAT WORRIED LOOK ON HIS FACE..."









CHUNK!

WELCOME ABOARD
BULDUNDA, FALLEN
TROOP CARRIER OF THE
ANCIENT PENITENT
FLEET!

YOU ARE SUCH
A TREMENDOUS
VOTARY OF SCIENCE
FICTION STORIES--

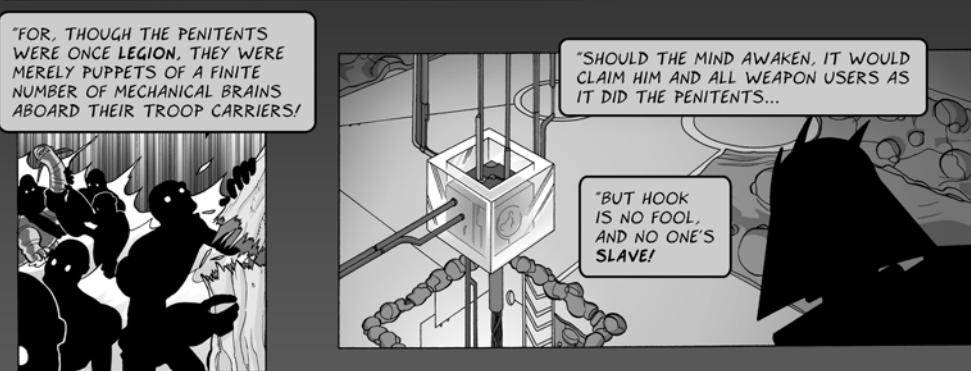
THEREFORE
I AM CERTAIN THE
MAGNITUDE OF YOUR
SITUATION IS NOT
LOST ON YOU!

BUT--THIS SHIP
WAS DESTROYED!
REX TOLD ME SO!

SO IT WAS
BELIEVED! BUT
YOUR ADOPTIVE
FATHER IS NOT
OMNISCIENT...

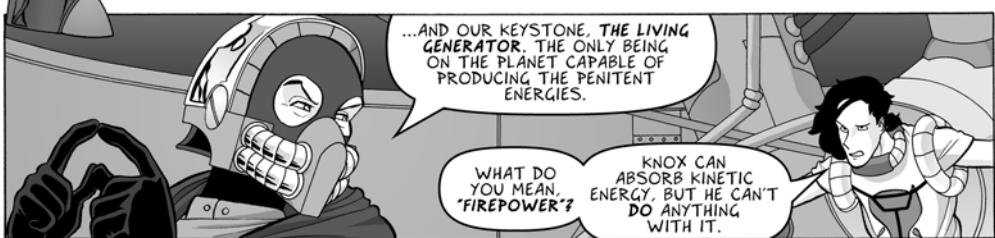
THE PENITENTS
CONSTRUCTED THEIR CRAFT
WELL! THOUGH MUCH OF THE
SHIP WAS SCATTERED OVER THE
GLOBE AS IT FELL TO EARTH, THE
FRAME AND MOST OF THE HULL
REMAINED INTACT!

IT LAY HIDDEN
IN THESE MOUNTAINS
FOR MILLENNIA!



"BUT HOOK IS NO FOOL, AND NO ONE'S SLAVE!"







RAGH!

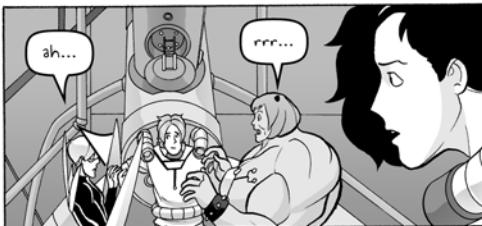


PLAM!

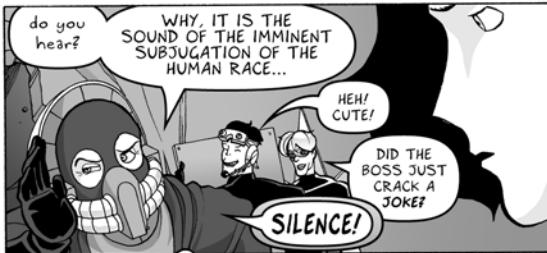
KNOX!





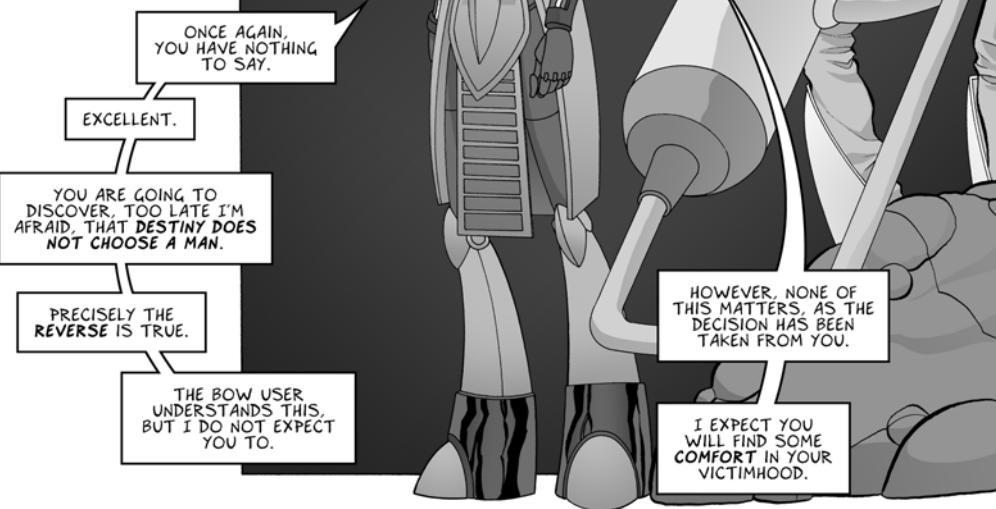


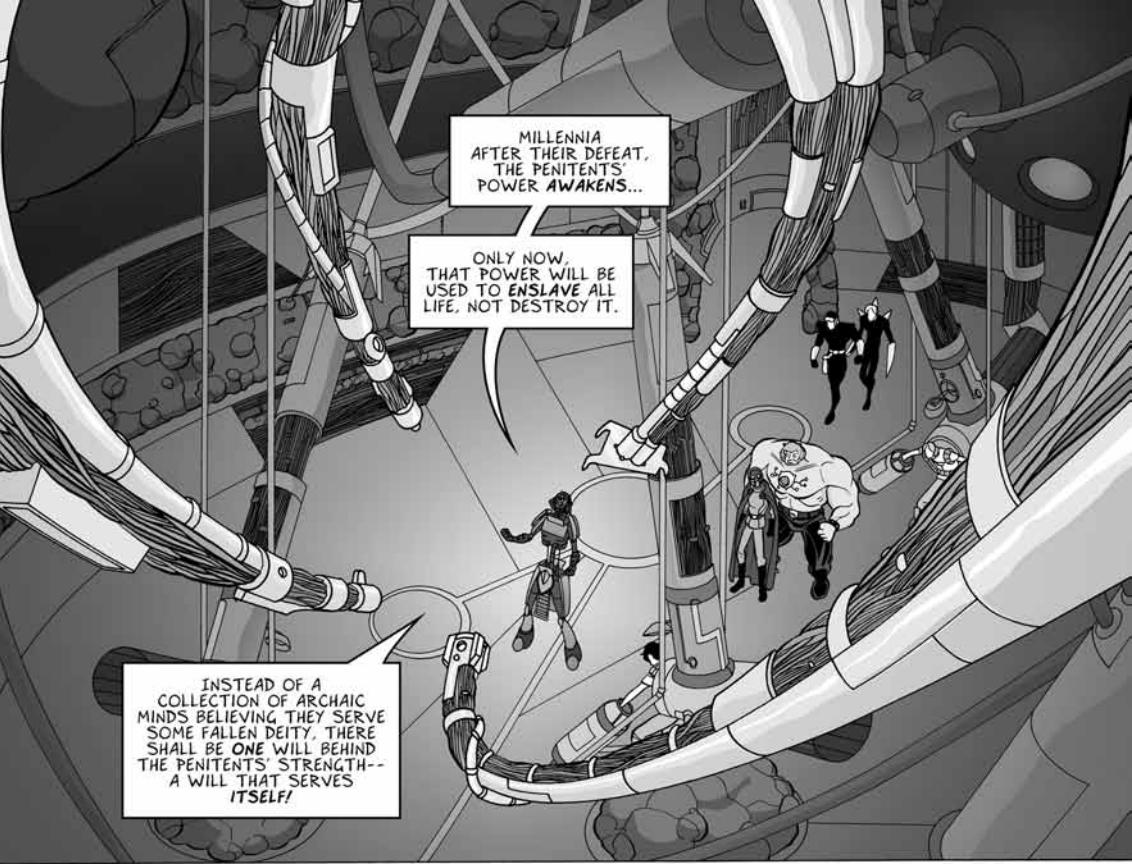






JUST AS I THOUGHT. IN YOUR TERROR YOU SEEK TO HIDE BEHIND WORDS UTTERED BY MEN LONG DEAD. AS IF BY BEING 'CHOSEN' BY SOME MYSTICAL ELITE YOU ARE ABSOLVED OF THINKING OF A WAY TO STOP ME.





MILLENNIA
AFTER THEIR DEFEAT,
THE PENITENTS'
POWER AWAKENS...

ONLY NOW
THAT POWER WILL BE
USED TO ENSLAVE ALL
LIFE, NOT DESTROY IT.

INSTEAD OF A
COLLECTION OF ARCHAIC
MINDS BELIEVING THEY SERVE
SOME FALLEN DEITY, THERE
SHALL BE ONE WILL BEHIND
THE PENITENTS' STRENGTH--
A WILL THAT SERVES
ITSELF!

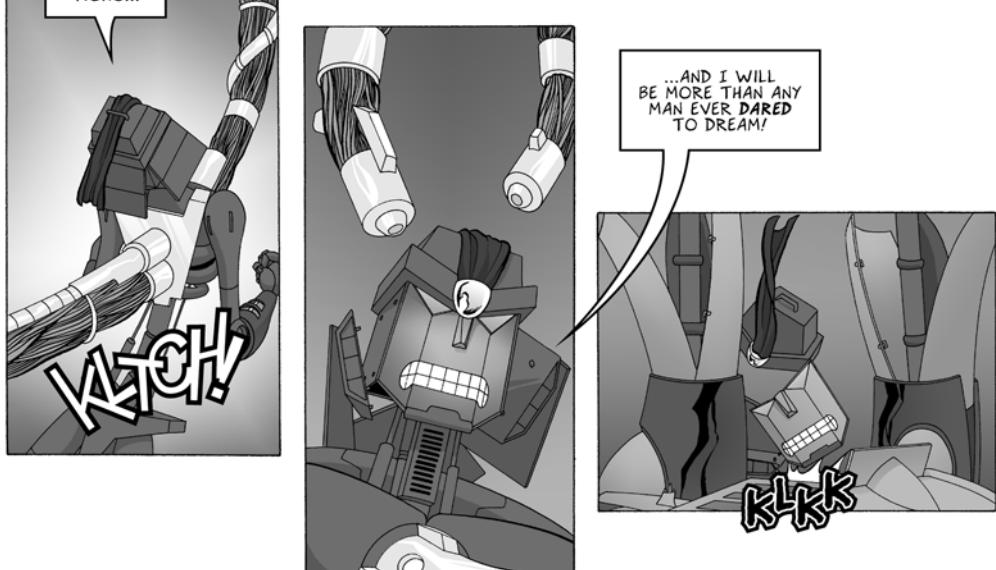


INSTEAD OF A
HORDE OF MINDLESS
SERVANTS ACTING ON
BEHALF OF THE MINDS,
THE MIND ITSELF SHALL
BE THE WEAPON.

AND I WILL
BE THAT MIND!
I WILL BE THE
PENITENTS REBORN
AS THEY COULD
AND SHOULD HAVE
BEEN!

EVEN THE HEALERS,
FOR ALL THEIR ASSUMED
WISDOM, COULD NOT FORESEE
THIS! THEY DID NOT SUSPECT
THE SHIP'S EXISTENCE!

AND THE VIGILANCE OF
THE TRAITOROUS WEAPONS
USERS WAS FOR NOTHING!
THEIR CHAMPION IS BUT A
CHILD, AND IN MY GRASP!





IT IS DONE!

I AM FULLY
INTEGRATED
WITH EVERY
SYSTEM!

I AM
THE
PENITENT
MIND!

AND NOW
TO COMPLETE
MY VICTORY!

ALL SYSTEMS
ONLINE!



ACTIVATE
MAIN VISUAL.

BREEF!

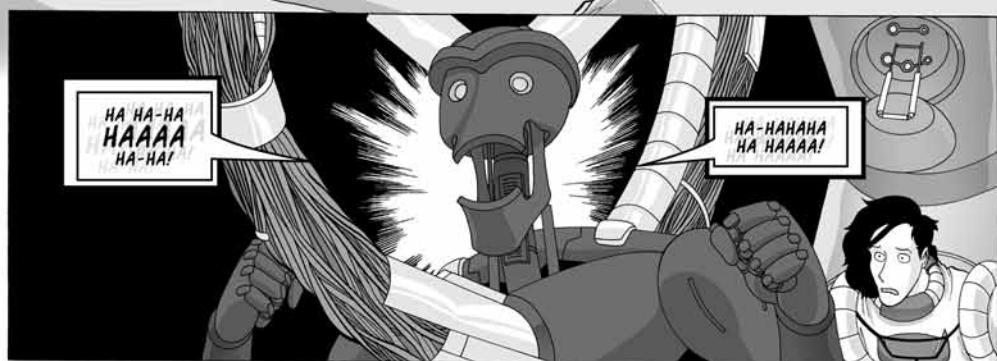
WORRY NOT.
MY LOYAL MERCENARIES.
I PROMISED YOU MORE
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
DESTRUCTION, AND ONE
HAS PRESENTED ITSELF!

AND NOW THAT I AM
FULLY FUNCTIONAL, IT
IS TIME TO RECALL THE
FIRST OF MY OLD
SOLDIERS...

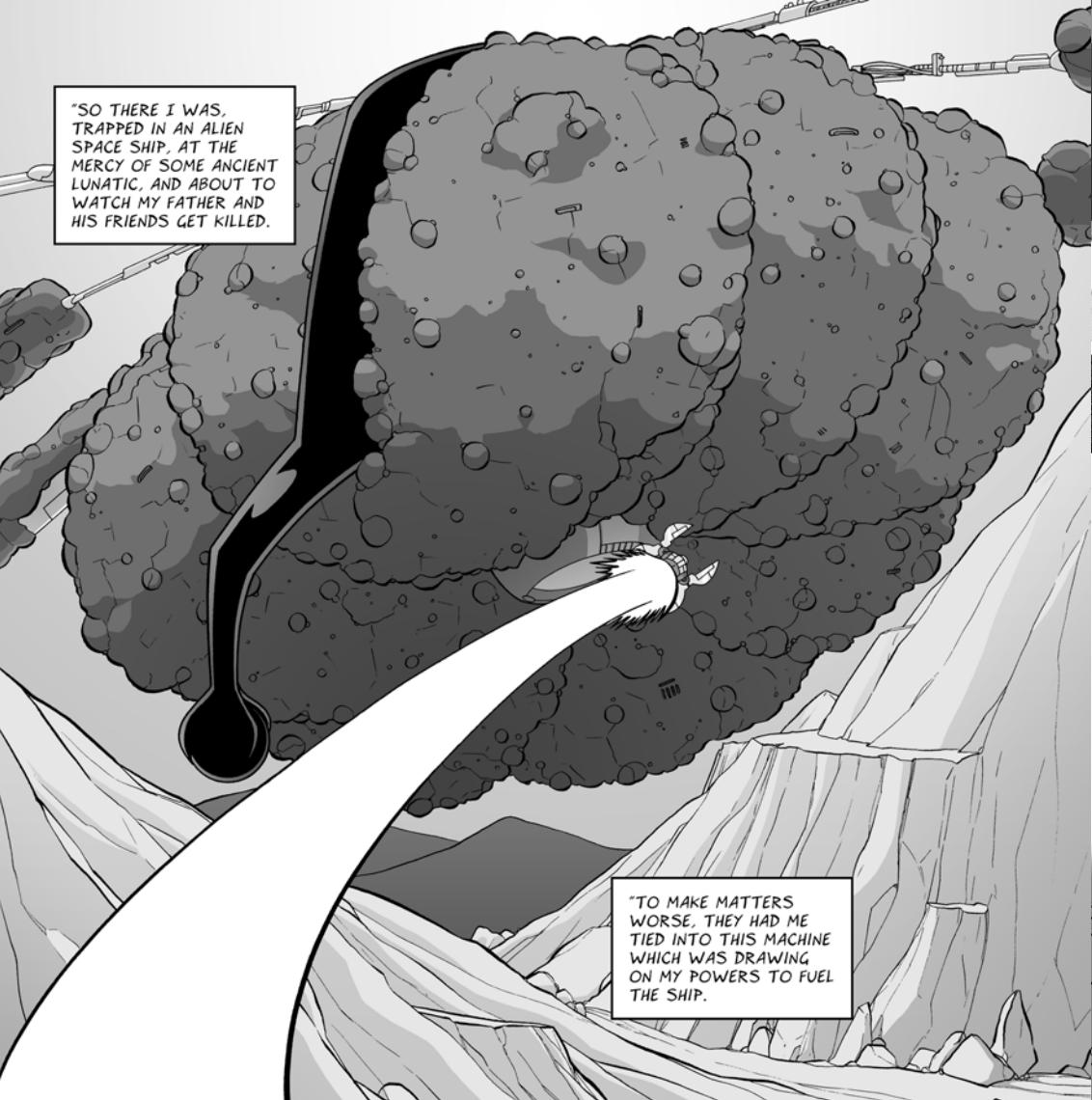
I DO NOT
SEE ANYTHING.

WE'RE ALMOST
ON TOP OF THE
COORDINATES OUR
SPY-GUYS GAVE ME.
STAY FROSTY,
GAELIN.









"SO THERE I WAS, TRAPPED IN AN ALIEN SPACE SHIP, AT THE MERCY OF SOME ANCIENT LUNATIC, AND ABOUT TO WATCH MY FATHER AND HIS FRIENDS GET KILLED.

"TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THEY HAD ME TIED INTO THIS MACHINE WHICH WAS DRAWING ON MY POWERS TO FUEL THE SHIP.



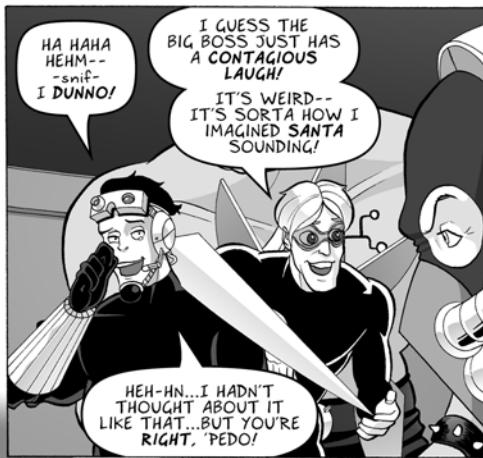
"SO NOT ONLY WAS REX ABOUT TO GET BLOWN UP; IT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN WITH MY HELP.

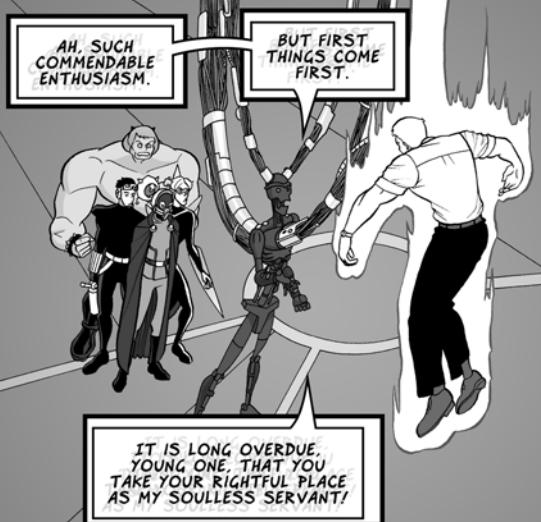
"AND FOR SOME REASON, INSTEAD OF CHEWING ON THESE FACTS, ALL MY BRAIN COULD DO WAS RECITE THE FIRST FEW LINES OF KAFKA'S 'THE TRIAL' OVER AND OVER.

"WHY I SHOULD BE THINKING OF BOOKS AT THAT PARTICULAR MOMENT IS A MYSTERY TO ME-- IT'S NOT LIKE I WAS CRAZY ABOUT LIT CLASS OR ANYTHING...

CHAPTER SIX:

DREAMS BURN DOWN

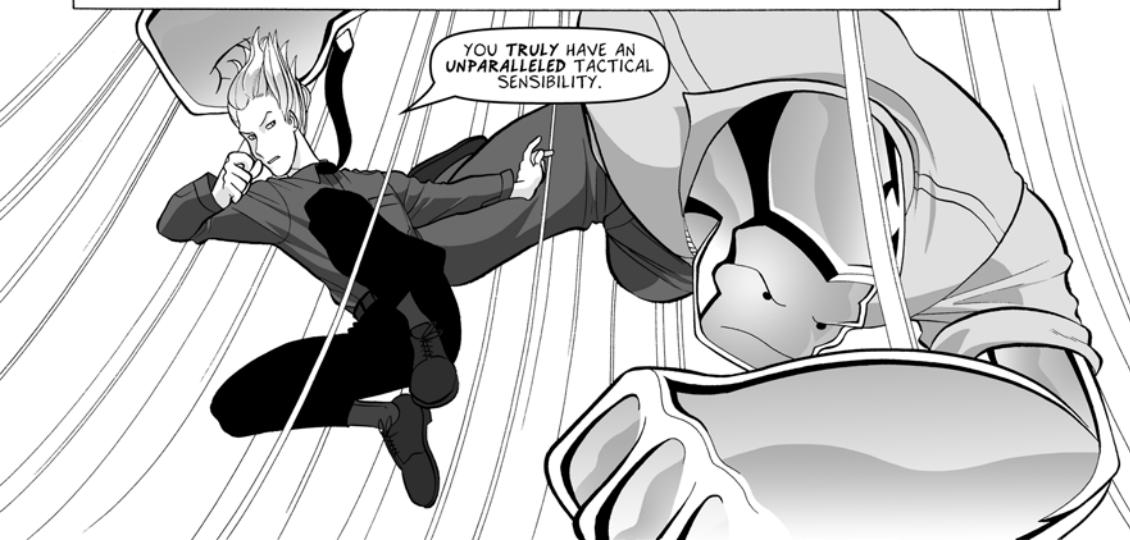






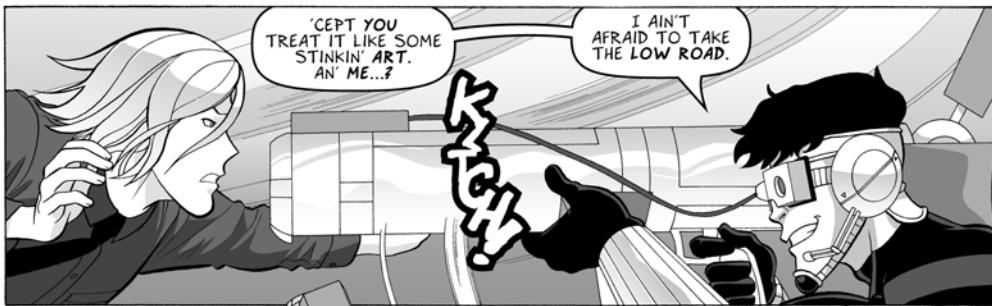














ROSEMARY--
CAN YOU DRAW
ENOUGH POWER FOR
AN EMERGENCY
LANDING?

AH RECKON THAT
MEANS IT'S TIME TO
SKEDADDLE. SORRY
'BOUT YOUR FRIEND.

SUPPRESS
THE SYMPATHIES,
MAX.

ROSEMARY--
UPLOAD YOUR
CORE AI INTO
MY HELMET...

hneh
heh
heh
heh...

LET'S GO, DON!
FRENCH-FRIED HEROES
DON'T OFTEN SAVE
THE DAY!

JUST A FEW
MORE SECONDS.
WE'LL MAKE IT.
STAY FROSTY.

S ping! S
NEGATIVE, DON.
ENGINES ARE
OFFLINE. FUEL
CELL IGNITION
IS IMMINENT.

IT WAS NICE
KNOWING YOU...

COME
ON, CRASH
ALREADY!

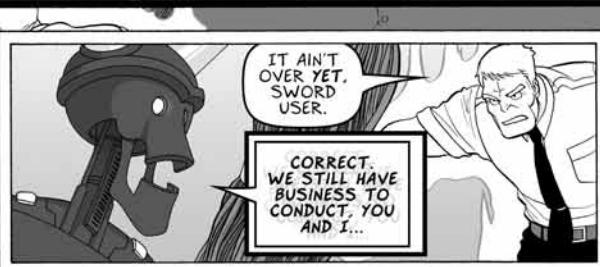
WHAT WAS
THAT?

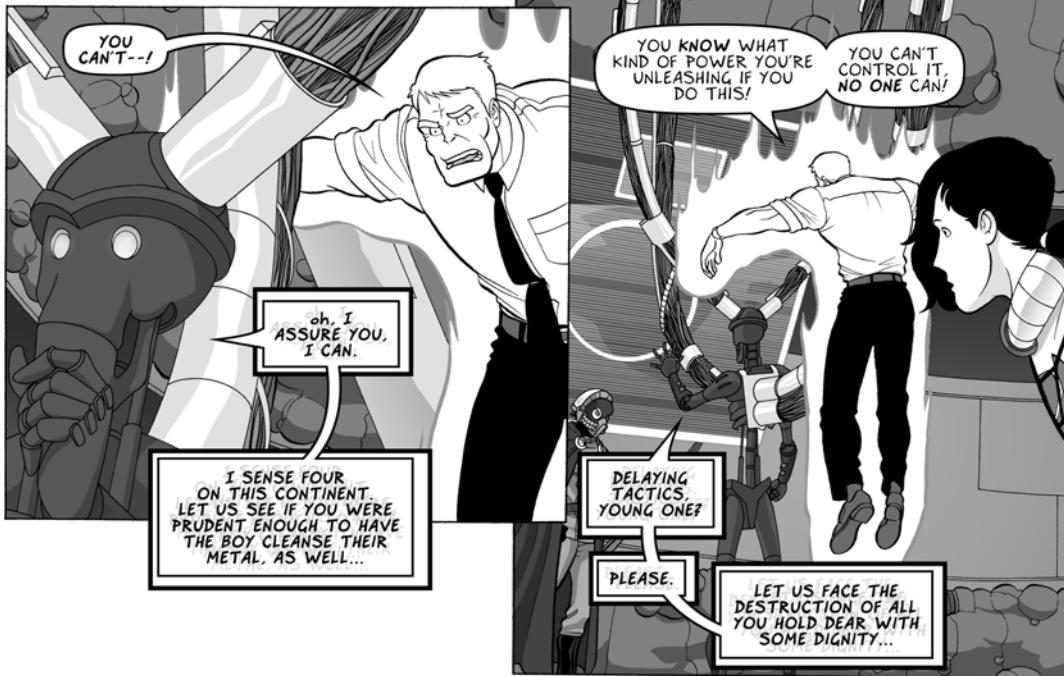
THAT FLYIN'
CRACKERHEAD'S
JUST CHAMPIN'
AT THE BIT TO
SEE US GO
DOWN.

DO
WHATCHA
GOTTA
DO--
AH'LL
PUT THIS
COLT BACK IN
HIS CORRAL.

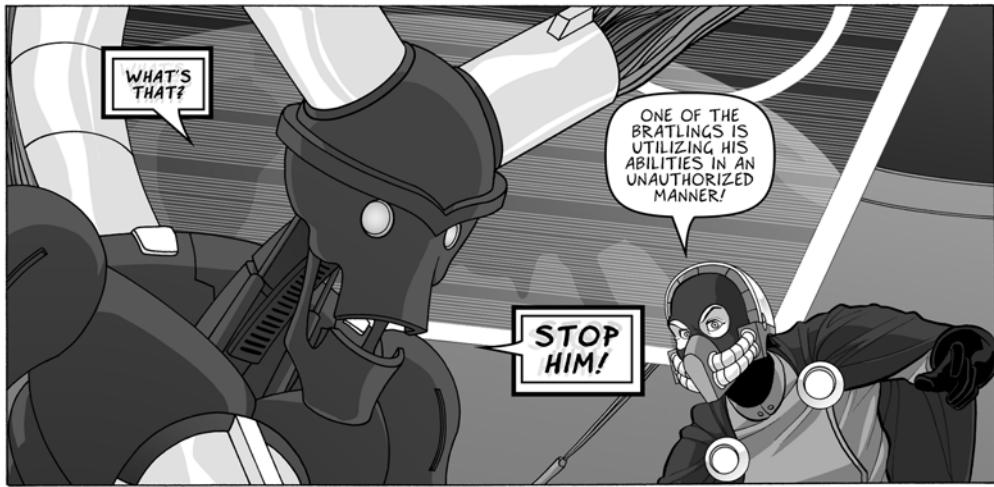
R
E
X





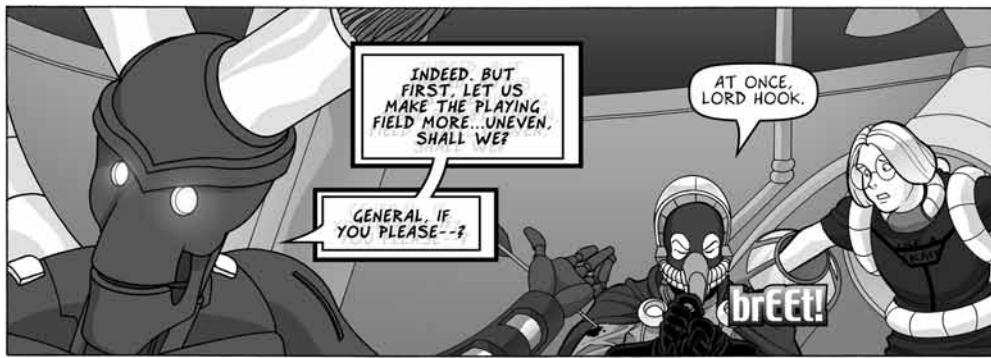








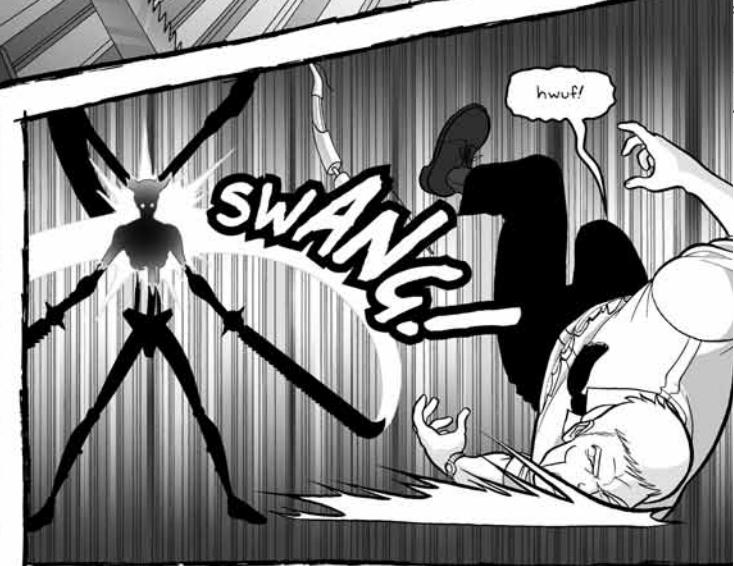
I BELIEVE WE
HAVE SOME BUSINESS
TO CONDUCT. YOU
AND I...











WOULDJA
JUST LOOK AT THIS?
LIKE TERMITES
THEY ARE!

ME NO
SEE YUCKY
BUGS.

GOOD
THING I BRUNG MY
INDUSTRIAL-SIZED
CAN OF PESTICIDE.

ORANGE
GUY?

RAGH?

SQUASH
'EM.

UGH!

:UHN!:;

LET ME
FALL, OPAL.
THE BOYS--

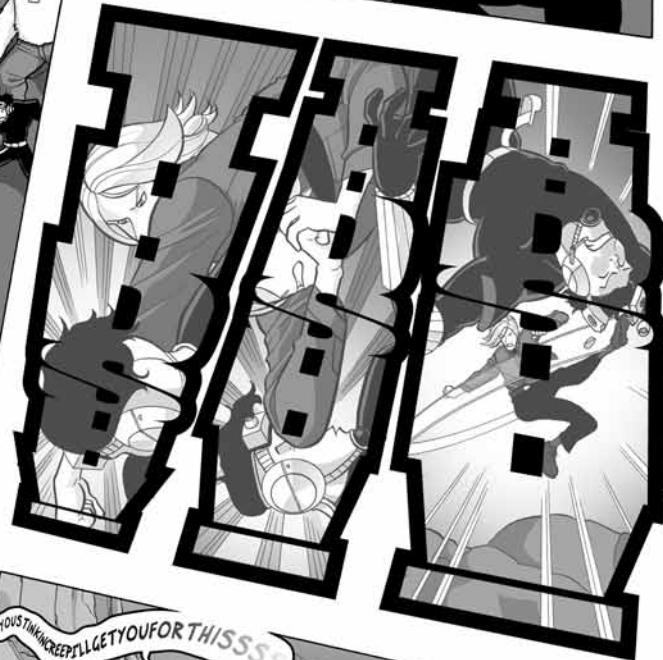
:UHN!:;

SURPRISINGLY
HONORABLE NOTION,
GAELIN. BUT I'VE A

THOOM
THOOM
THOOM

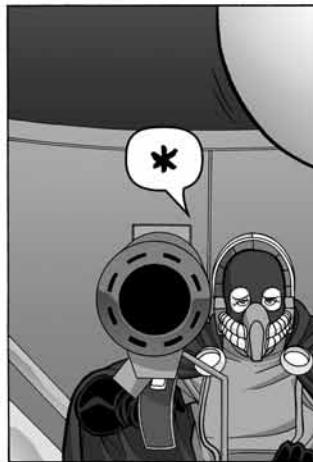
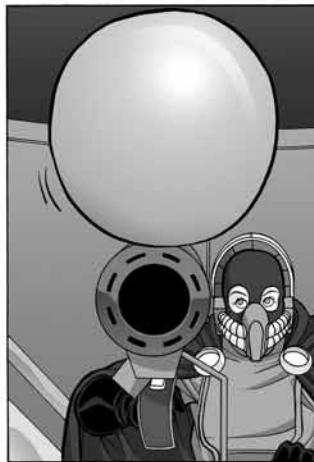
-- PLAN.

I CAN ONLY
HOPE IT IS AS
GOOD AS THE
LAST ONE.

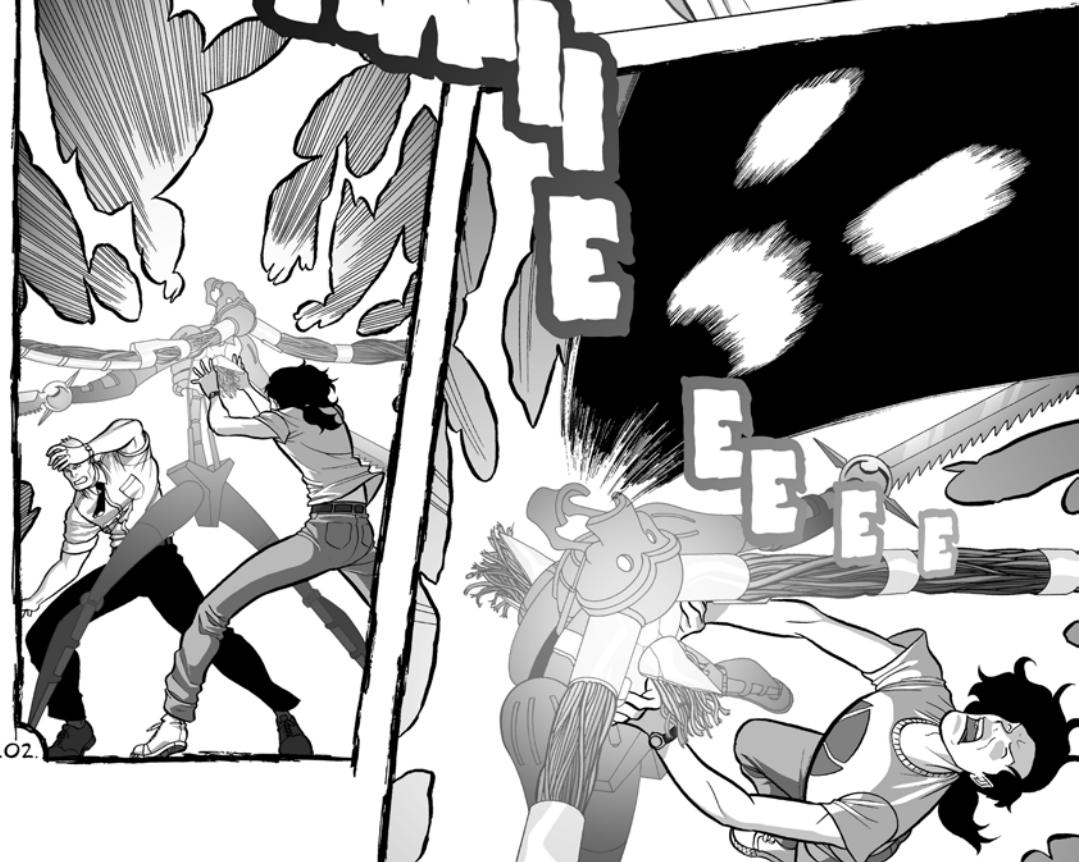














KRUM



DOOFFFF!!











THABOOM









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(REALLY ENJOYED IT)
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