

THE LAST DAYS OF THE MARTIAN FRONTIER

MARS LIGHTNING

MARS



YEAR 326
— OF THE —
MARTIAN COLONIES

**THE BEGINNING OF
THE END**

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THE SEEDS OF OUR DESTRUCTION...

AND SOME LIKE, TEEN DRAMA!

Come here you
little weasel!

No running!

Martian Year 326





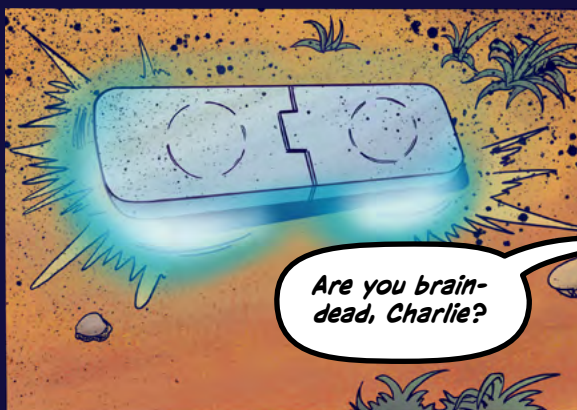
Charlie's lost his whole dang mind!

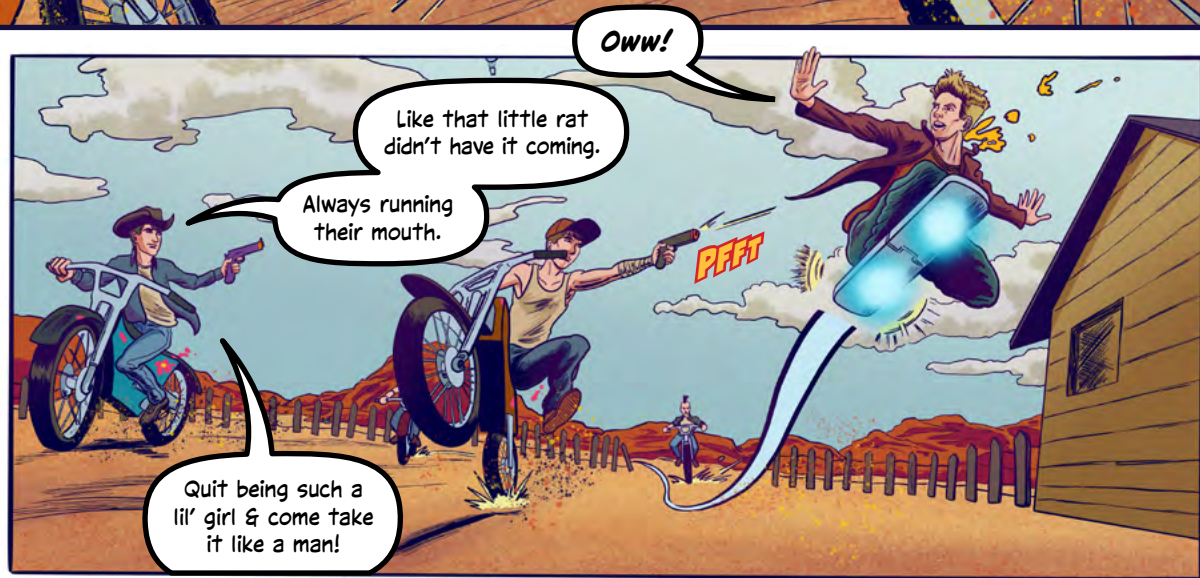
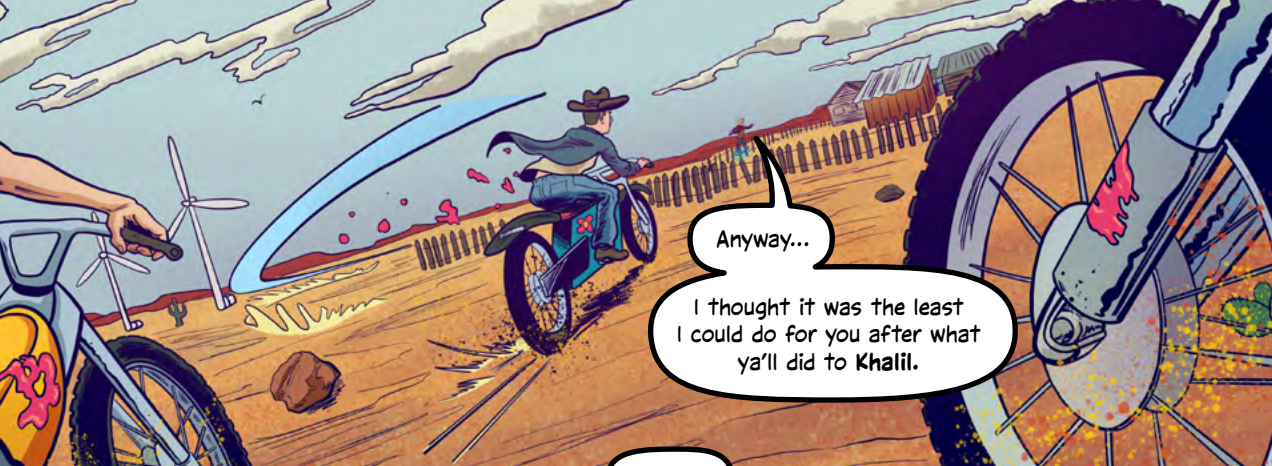


You're dead, Charlie!

Aaaaand that's my cue.

Exit stage right.







and he really *throws* himself into his work.

Dang it, Charlie!

You have to respect his work ethic.



That's one.

Why do ya'll even hang out with that joke? He's got the IQ of a sweaty cucumber.



I know you're at least better than that, Jackie!

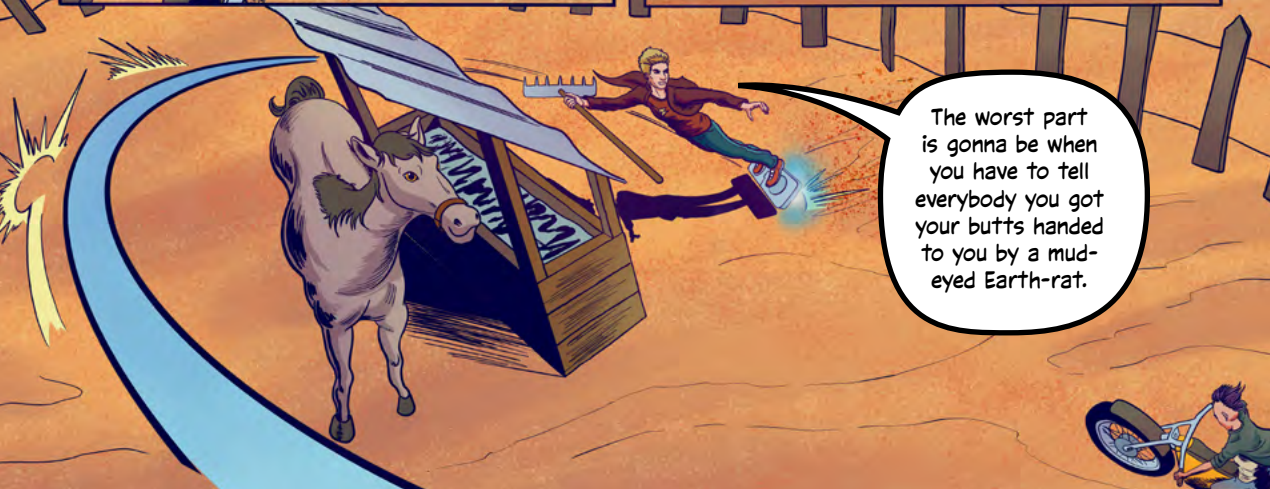
At least he ain't a mud-eyed Earth-rat.



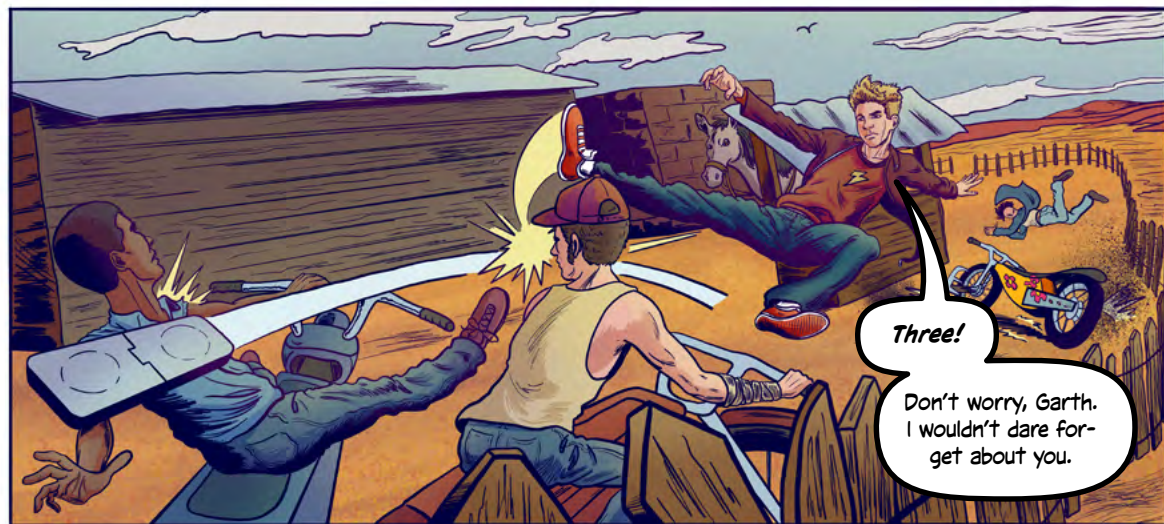
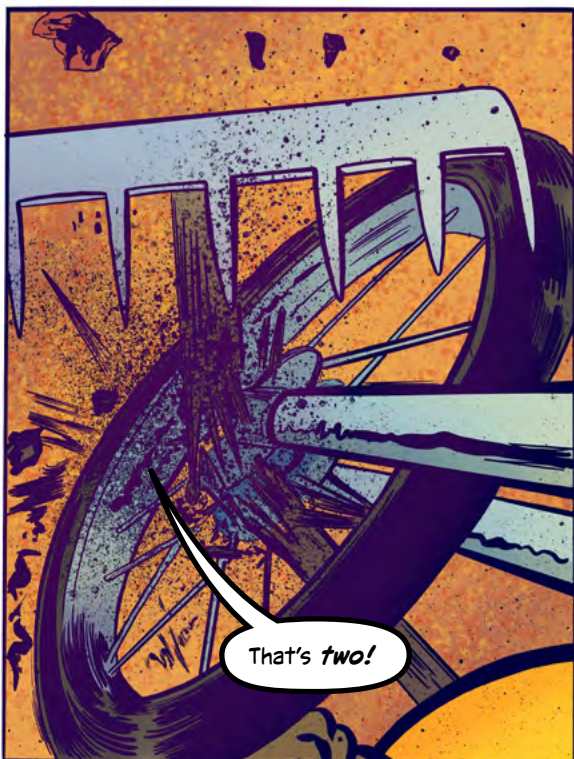
Ouch, that hurts.

I expected better from someone of your poise and pedigree.

You know ya'll sound like bigoted villains out of a dime-store comic?



The worst part is gonna be when you have to tell everybody you got your butts handed to you by a mud-eyed Earth-rat.





Oooooowwww.
I thought that
would hurt less.

Uhhh...



Oops, didn't
see ya there,
Clyde. Poor
little guy's all
tuckered out.

It's hard work
being a *tool*.



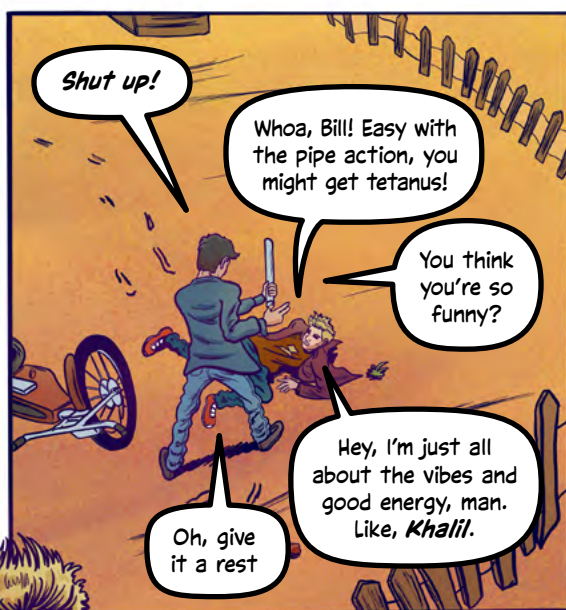
I should take
some pictures to
cheer up, Khalil.

So lets see, that
was Clyde, Jackie,
and Garth. Wait,
where'd I leave...



Ooooffffff, Bill.

I missed you
too, buddy.



Shut up!

Whoa, Bill! Easy with
the pipe action, you
might get tetanus!

You think
you're so
funny?

Hey, I'm just all
about the vibes and
good energy, man.
Like, *Khalil*.

Oh, give
it a rest



We just roughed
him up a bit.



You broke their
freakin' jaw!

Really? Damn...
they shoulda thought
about that before
talkin' to *my* girl.



You mind
stepping a
little closer?

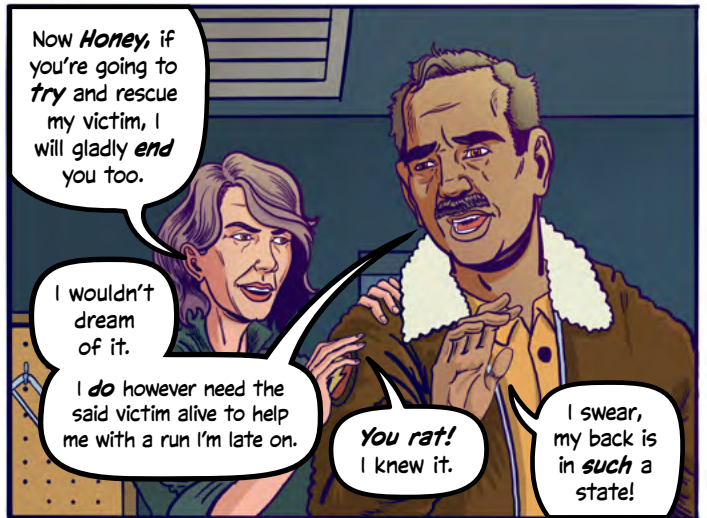










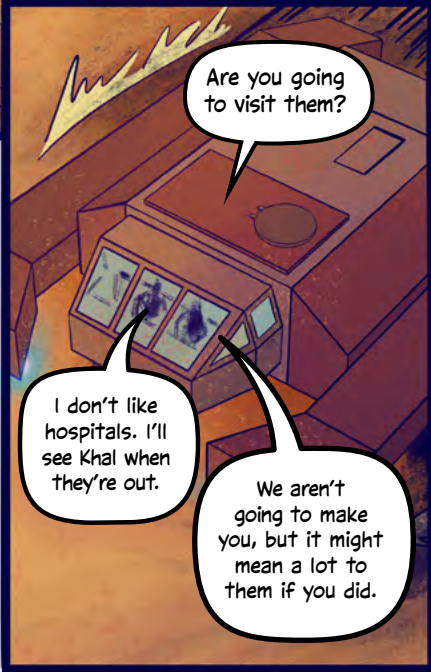






So, I heard about what happened to Khalil yesterday.

I *don't* want to talk about it.



Are you going to visit them?

I don't like hospitals. I'll see Khal when they're out.

We aren't going to make you, but it might mean a lot to them if you did.



It's just a broken jaw.

Anyway, what's the deal with grandma?

She was acting like she was gonna bite someone today.




Hey now, that's your grandmother you're talking about. She deserves respect.



But if she did, it's probably because we both forgot to feed the goat, who *actually* bites.

The thing is, she puts a lot of pressure on *herself* to make sure *you* turn out right. She doesn't want to let your mom down.






Half or not, he's family and that's important. We aren't going to be around forever.

Besides, the rest of his relatives are too old or poor to take care of him, so it falls on us.


Being alone without family can be a terrible thing.

We don't need that spoiled, Earth-rat living with us.




When I was 14, my Aunt Norma died. Her wife couldn't handle it and fell apart.

She became an alcoholic. So their kid Reggie came to stay with us.




I hated that kid. He'd always talk back to my mom, spit in the house, and had a habit of stealing to buy cigarettes.

Anyway, this one time I had a run in with a some nasty prep school kids, and they were beating the snot out of me.

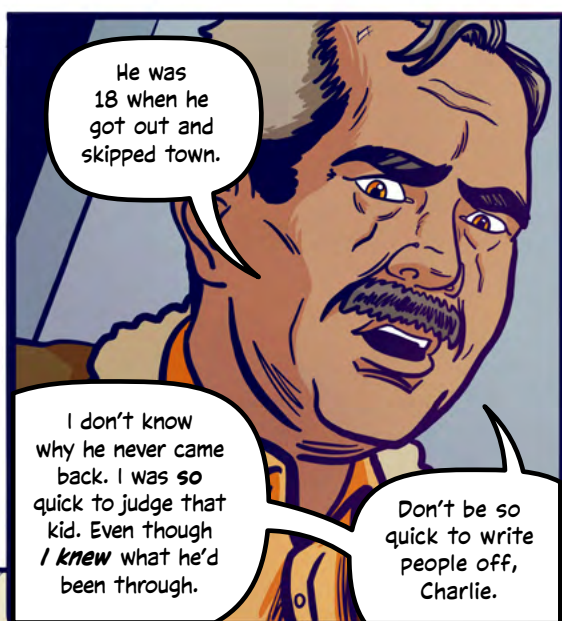


I really thought they were gonna *kill* me. Then, out of nowhere, Reggie came down on them like a holy terror.



I've never seen anybody fight like that. It was kinda scary. He was *so* angry.

I thanked him and he didn't make a big deal out of it. He told me he knew I'd do the same for him.







My little girl was left without a father.



NEVER AGAIN! No more sons, daughters or wives.

We are a frontier people!!

We are trailblazers and we will not be cowed by *fear*.



We will take back *Mars for the Martians!*



So how much is this gonna set me back?

Ouch! It used to be half that.

Oh, not too much. Just 3.5 standard.

I used to have all my hair too. Times change.

You know your grandpa's a crook right, Charlie?

I keep turnin' him in but they keep sendin' him back.



Look, it's been rough. I hear Ed on Jericho is calling it *the blood run*.

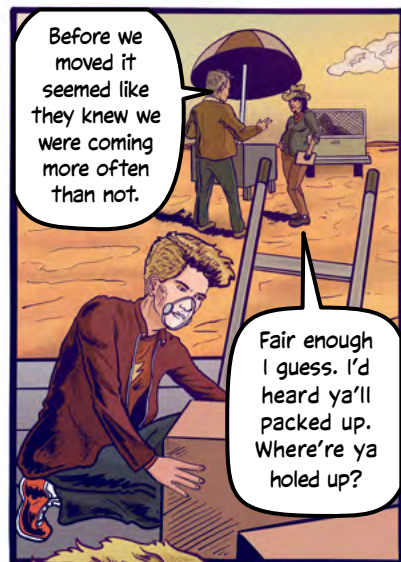
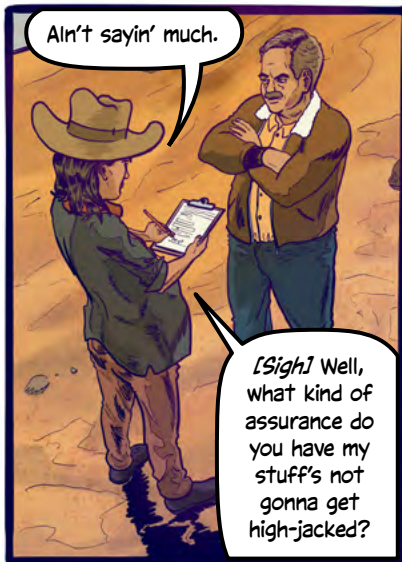
Nobody calls it that.



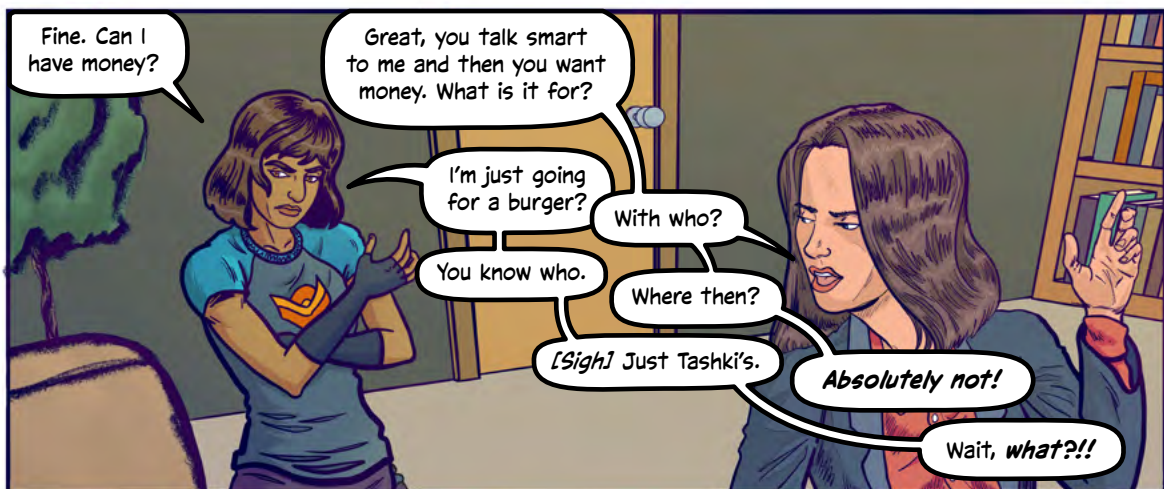
That's a bit dramatic.

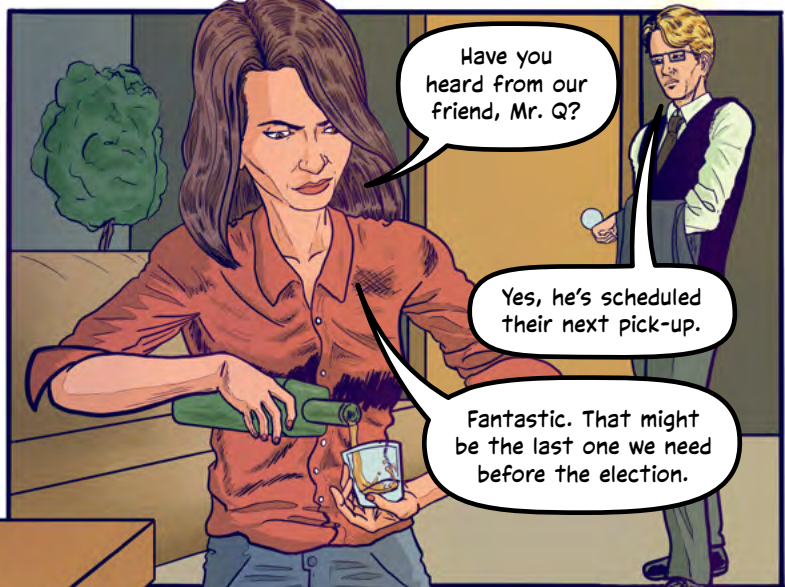
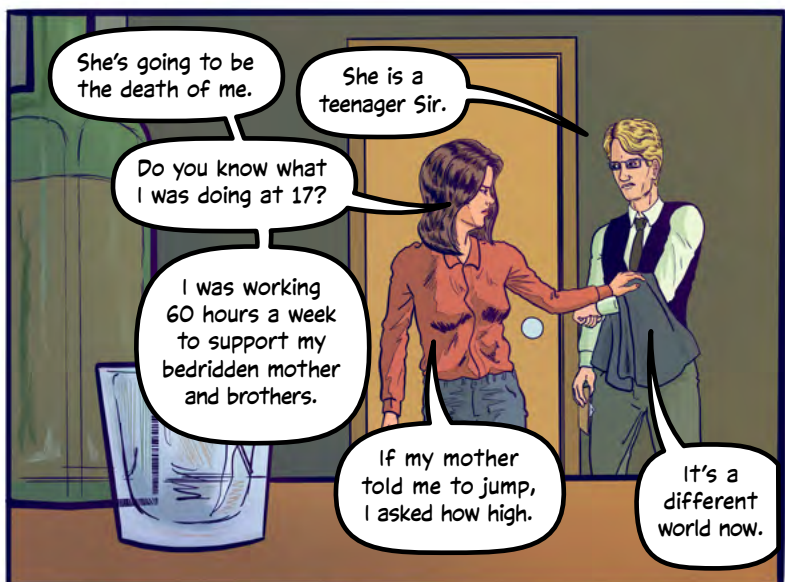
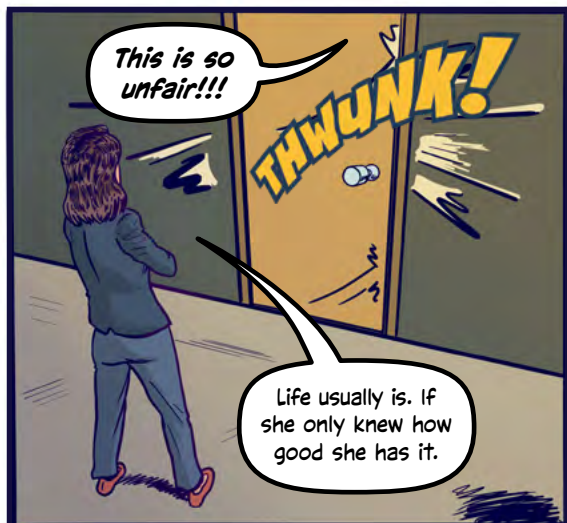
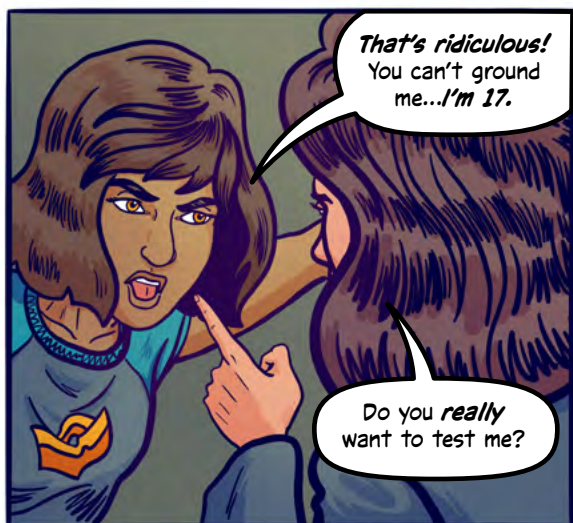
Ha! Poor Ed's whole life is a bit dramatic.

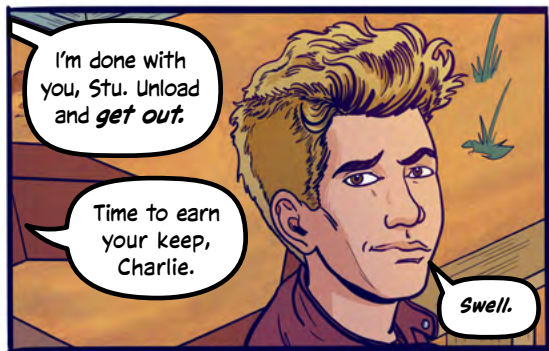
Either way, we're still the cheapest truckers around.

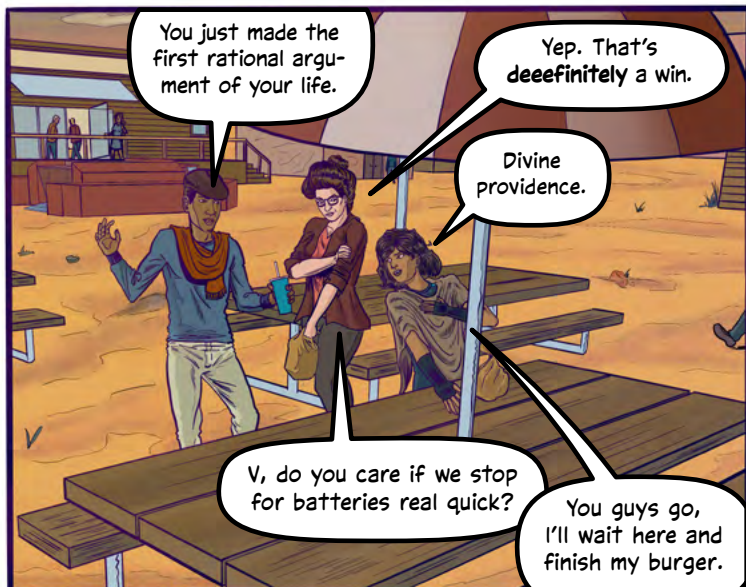
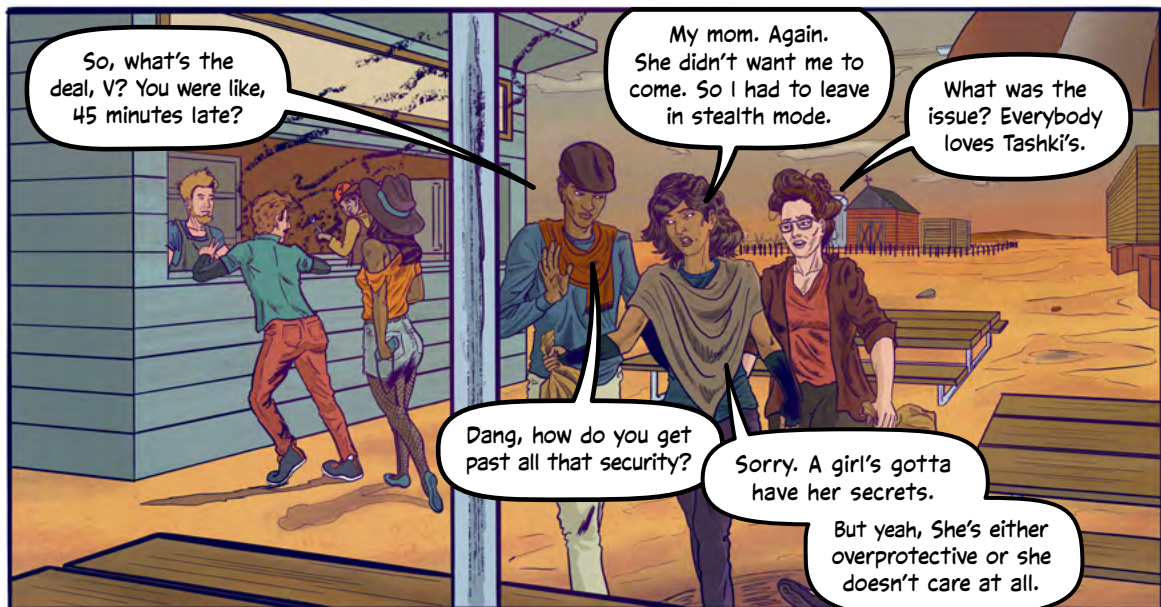


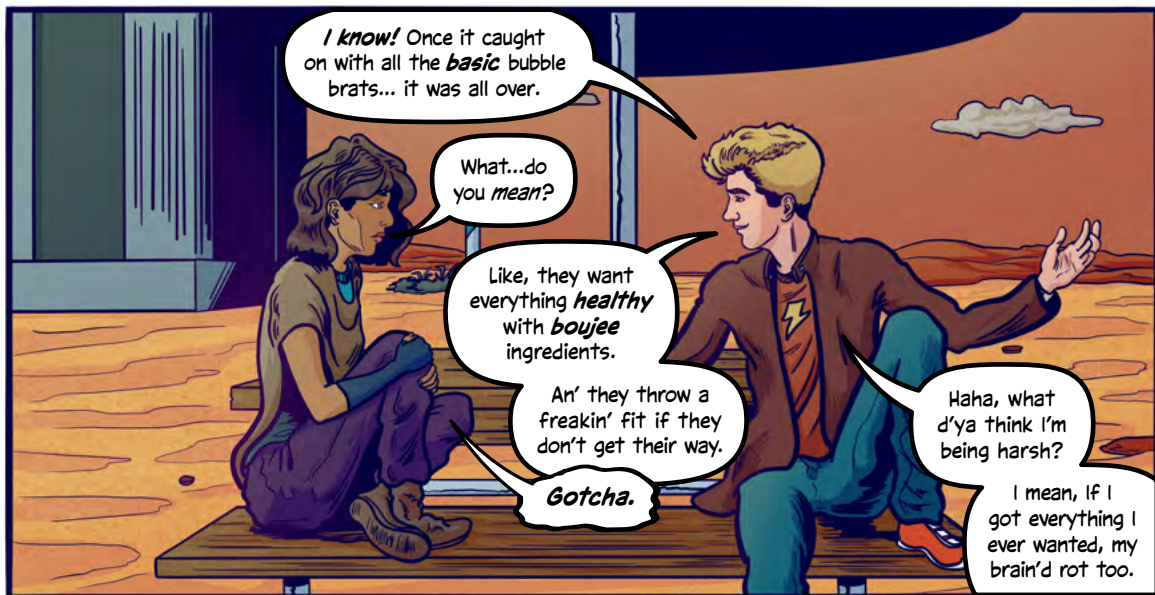
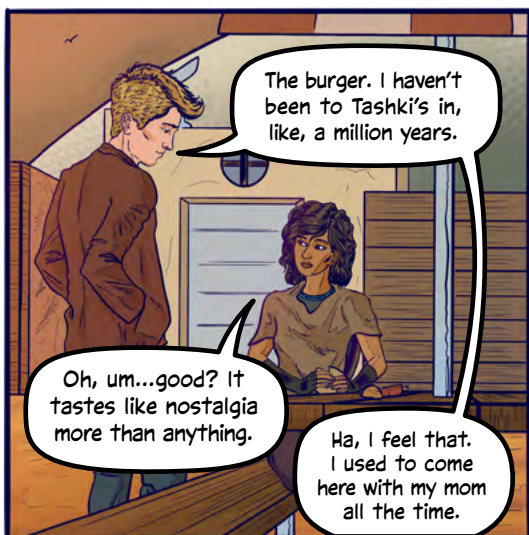
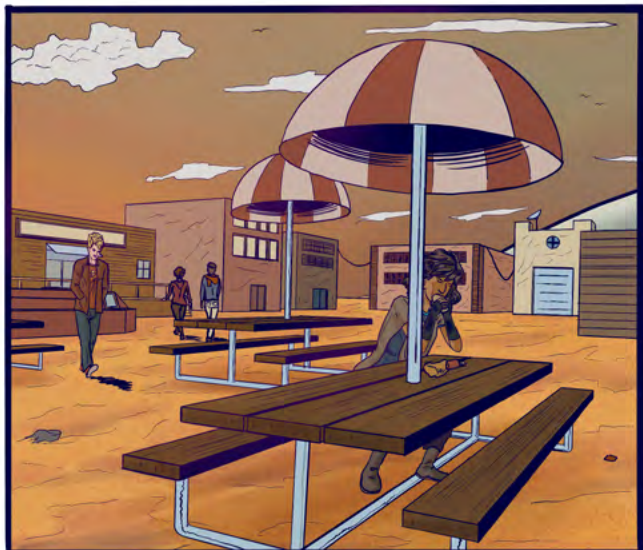




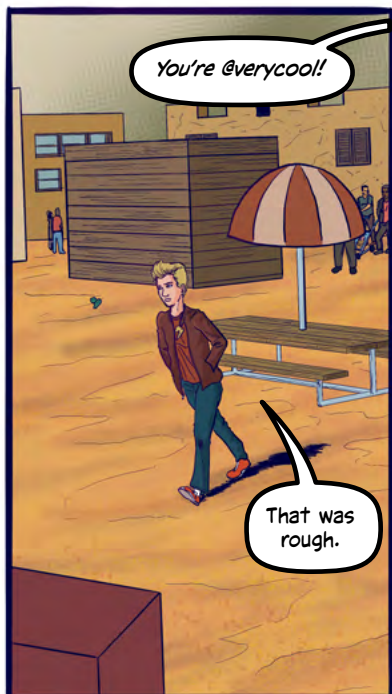
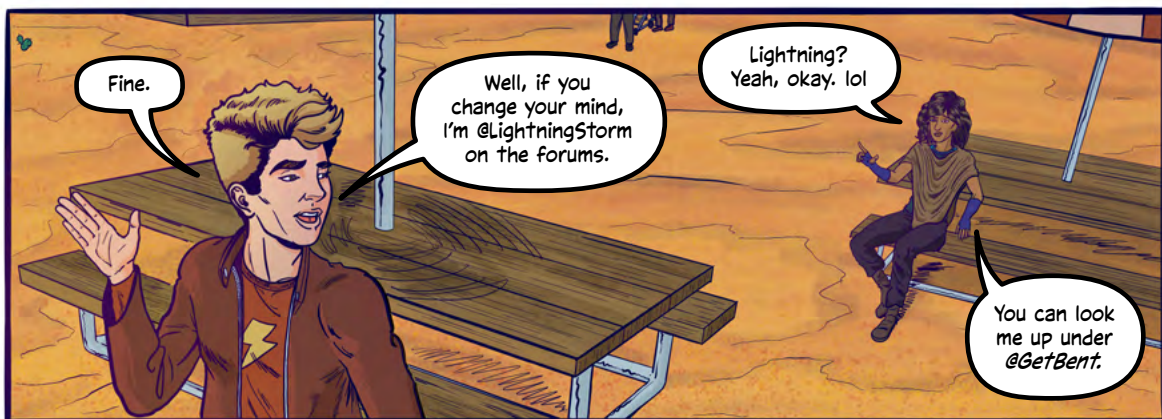
















Oh...

Crap.





What the heck happened? Are you two okay?

Yeah, we're okay. Charlie just got a little banged up.

But what happened? The report was all over the place.



Pirates hit the battery shack guns a'blazing. It was weird.

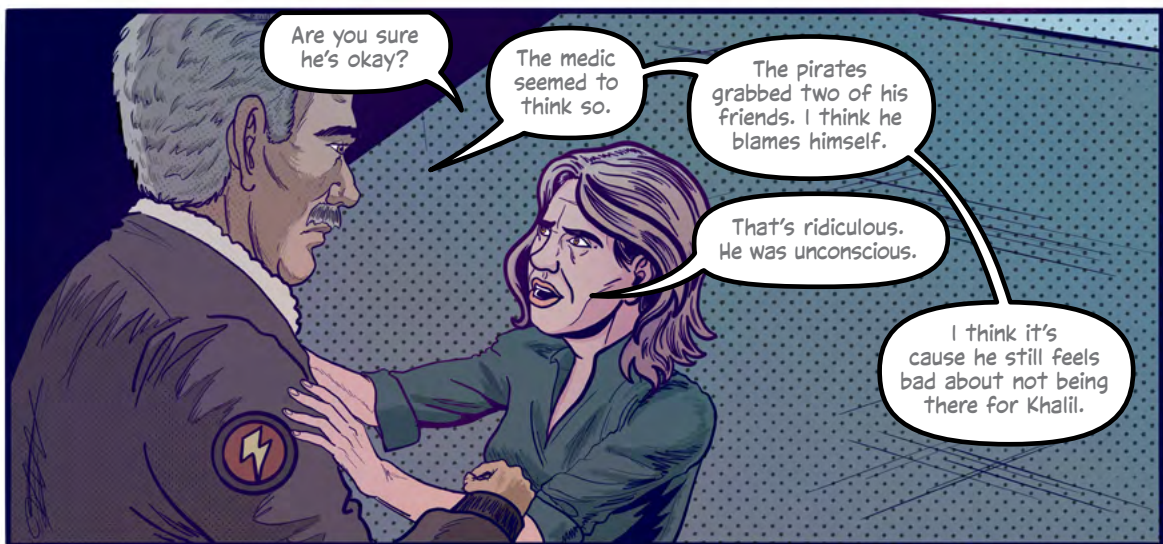
Yeah, they don't usually hit brick and mortars.



A canon hit near Charlie and he blacked out for a bit.

Is that why he's all quiet?

It's not a big deal. I'm fine.



Are you sure he's okay?

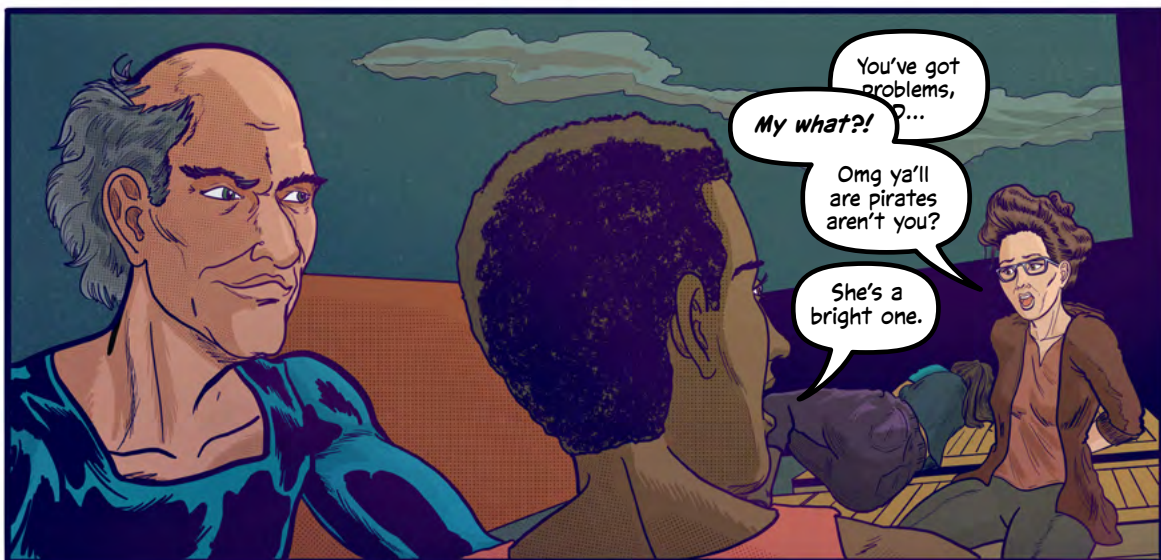
The medic seemed to think so.

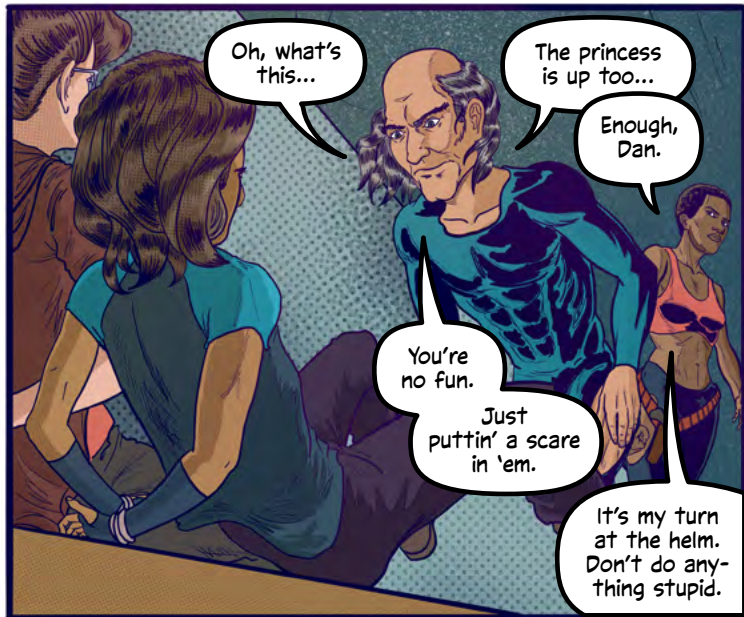
The pirates grabbed two of his friends. I think he blames himself.

That's ridiculous. He was unconscious.

I think it's cause he still feels bad about not being there for Khalil.













Don't be so pleased with yourself, love.



Your friend is a week's walk from anywhere with water.

You just gave her a death sentence.



It's better than hearing you talk.

Hahaha, you've got spunk, kid.

I'd give you the offer to join up, but you're a bubble kid ain't ya?



You're sitting cozy with things the way they are.

As long as you've got yours that's all that matters.

Whatever.

Exactly.



Now, can anyone tell me why nobody tied her legs up before?

3 Days Later

A pleasure doing business with you, Stuart. Just *don't lose* any of my llamas next time.

Those llamas had a death wish.

Sure thing, buddy.

Anyway, we got a few more coming on the third, along with a couple of filters.

Sounds good.

So, where to now, Pop?

I've gotta craving for something fried if we're passing the outpost.

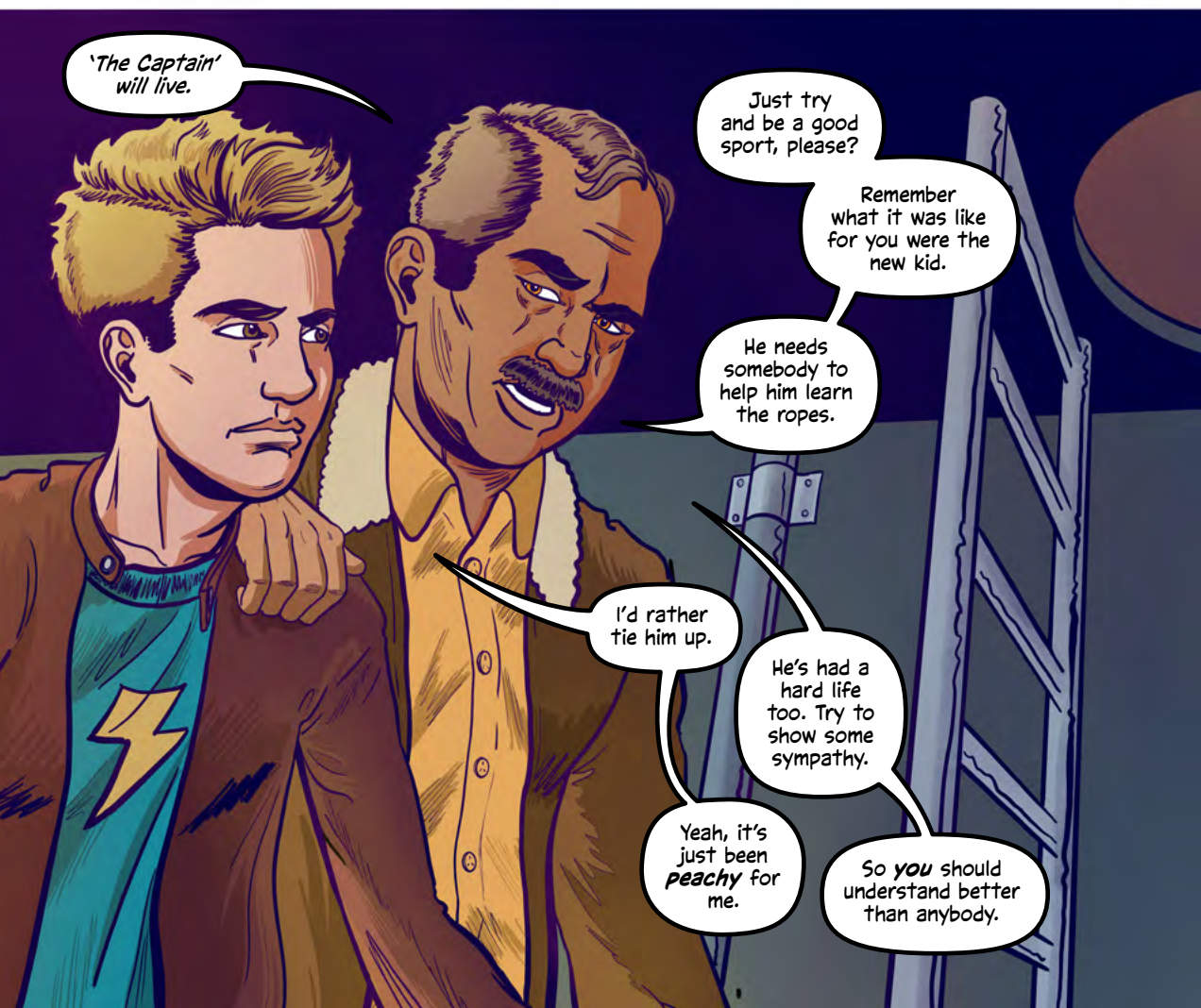
I uh, also wanna see if there's been any news on the pirate thing.

Maybe next time, Pal.

We aren't going out that way cause it's the 30th.

And what is that supposed to mean to me...?

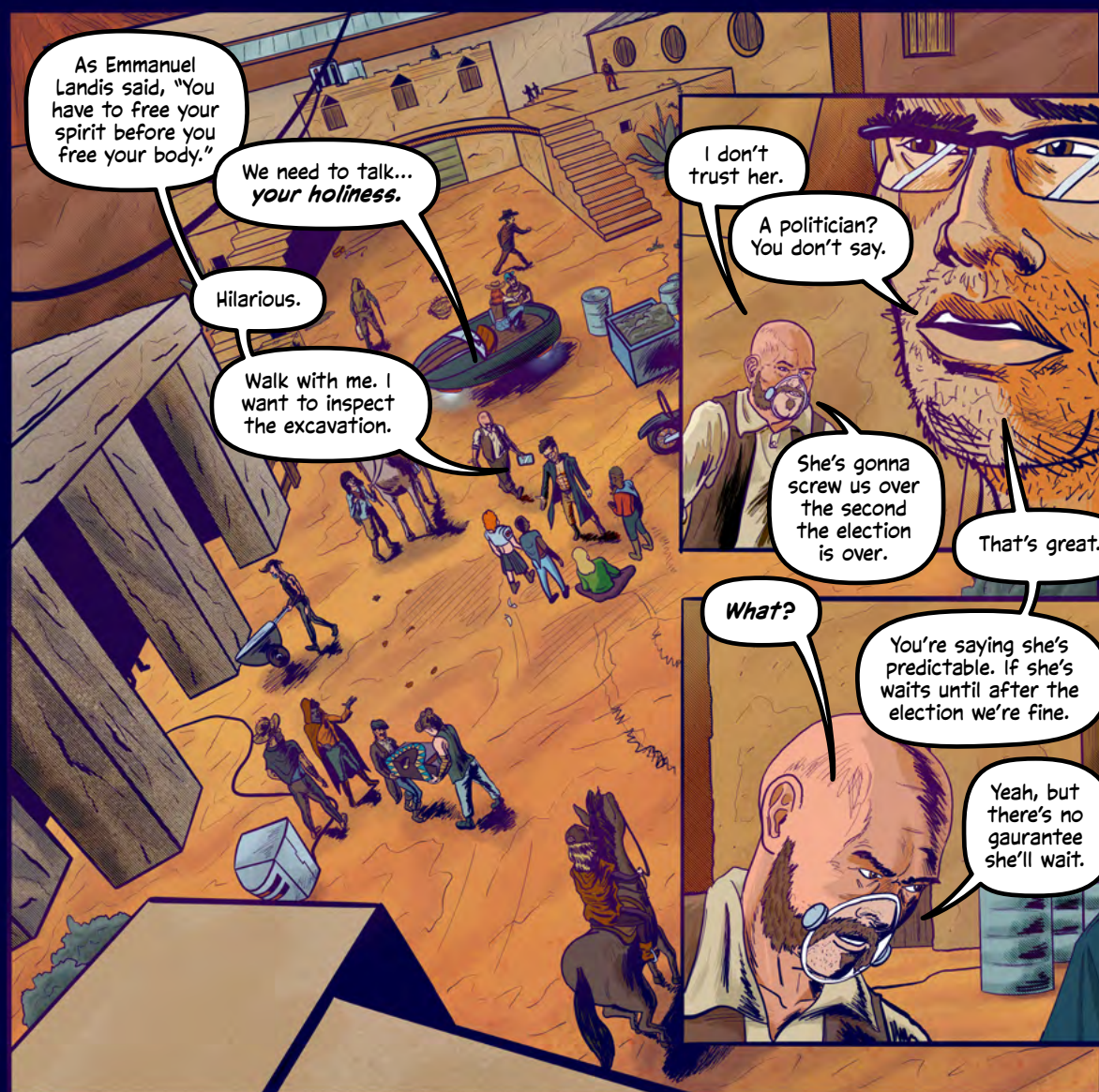
Come on, Charlie. You know today is when we pick up Alej.

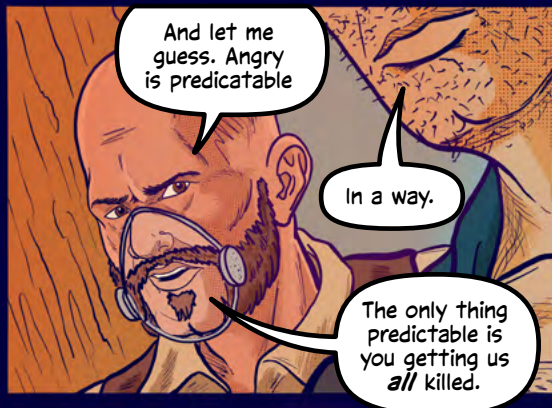






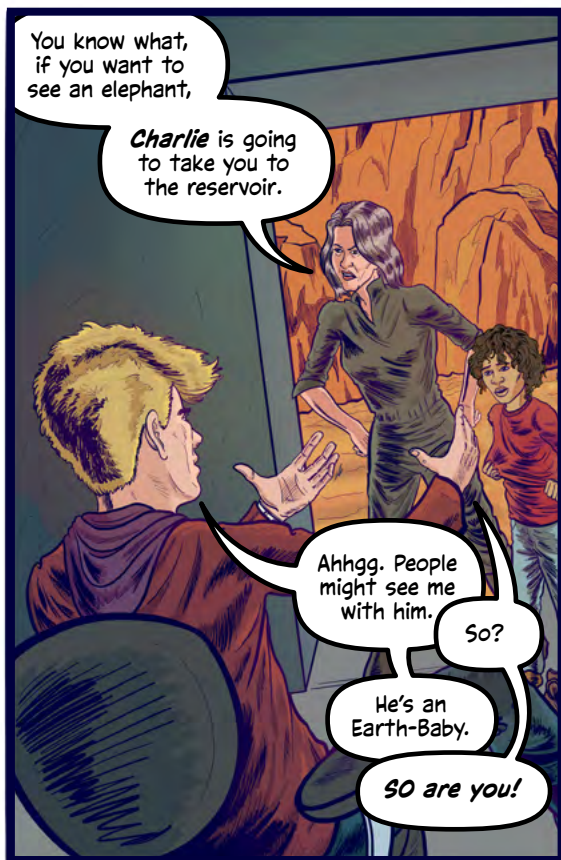
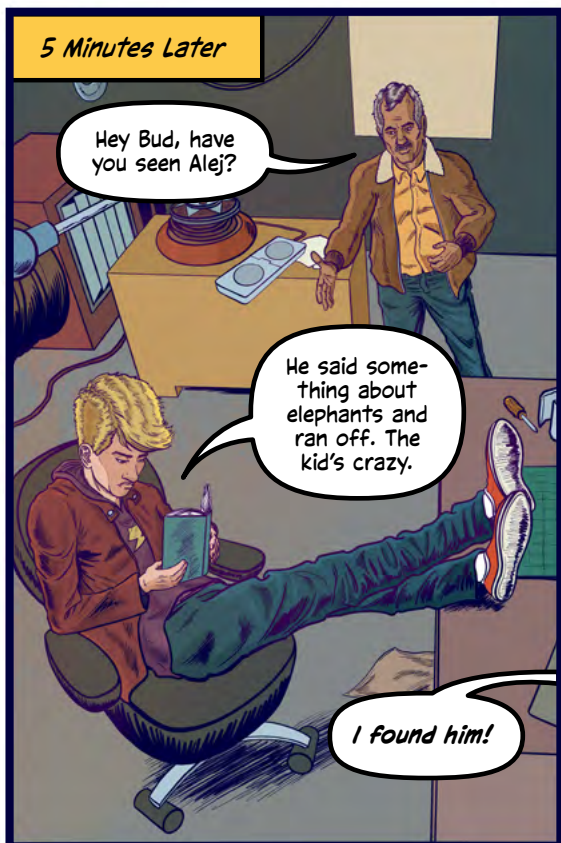














Now that that's settled I need Charlie to go on a run with me.



Can I come?

The more the merrier.



Uh, no!

It's too dangerous for a little kid.



Charlie's right.

I am?

I don't even like Charlie going.

It's not that dangerous. We've been *picked* before and been fine.

What's *picked*?



We usually outrun them anyway.

You got lucky and we can't afford to dump cargo.



Besides, we're just moving toiletries

Even pirates gotta wipe.



The Kid just doesn't wanna be left out.

Come on, Gran! Please?

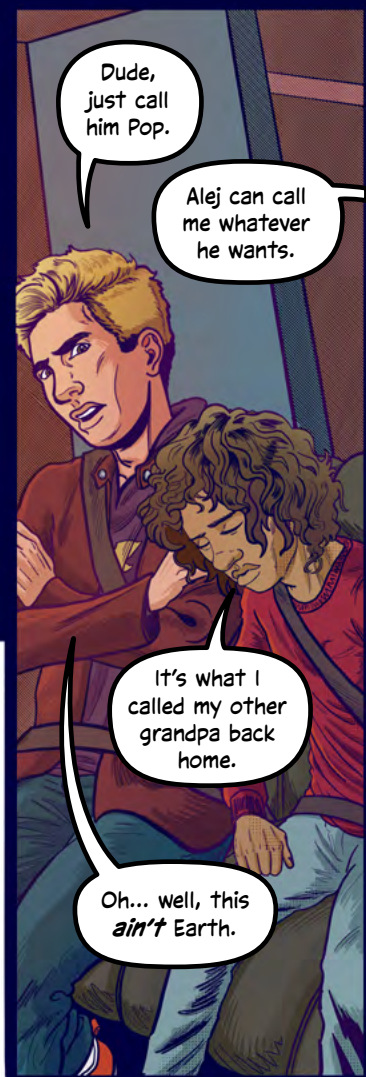
Ya always make me the villain.

I'm gonna scalp you if they get hurt.



Where're we going gramps?

Ew...what? No. Who says gramps?



Dude, just call him Pop.

Alej can call me whatever he wants.

It's what I called my other grandpa back home.

Oh... well, this *ain't* Earth.



Alej, do you know where we're going?

No...

Just out past Curiosity Ridge.

It's named after a bot the east founders sent here ages ago lookin' for water and signs of life.

Did they find any?

Oh yeah, they found some huge aquafers.

No, I mean life!



Nothing cool.

Just a bunch'a germs and crusty old fishbones.





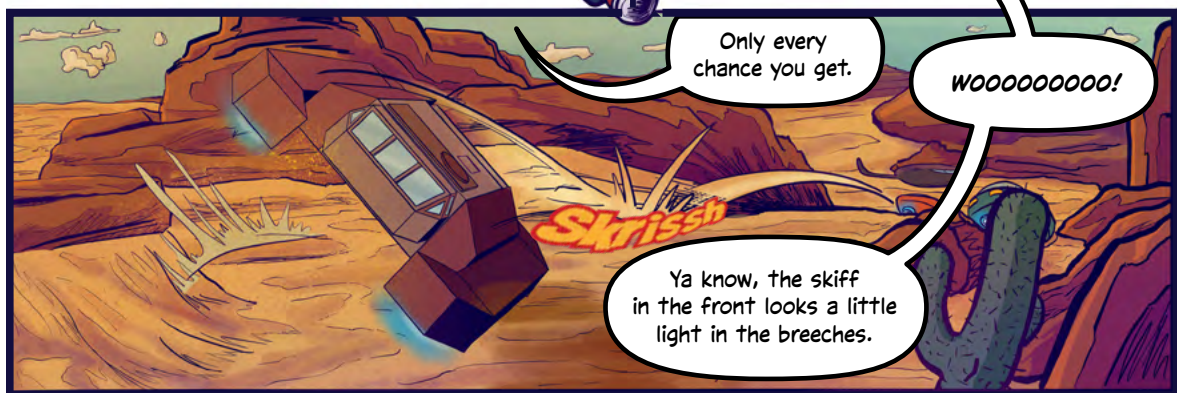




Can you maybe fly'er a bit more "evasivey?"

Kid, I practically invented "evasivey." Strap in.

I ever tell you 'bout the time I saved my whole platoon at the battle of Dartmoth Creek



Only every chance you get.

WOOOOOOOOOO!

Ya know, the skiff in the front looks a little light in the breeches.



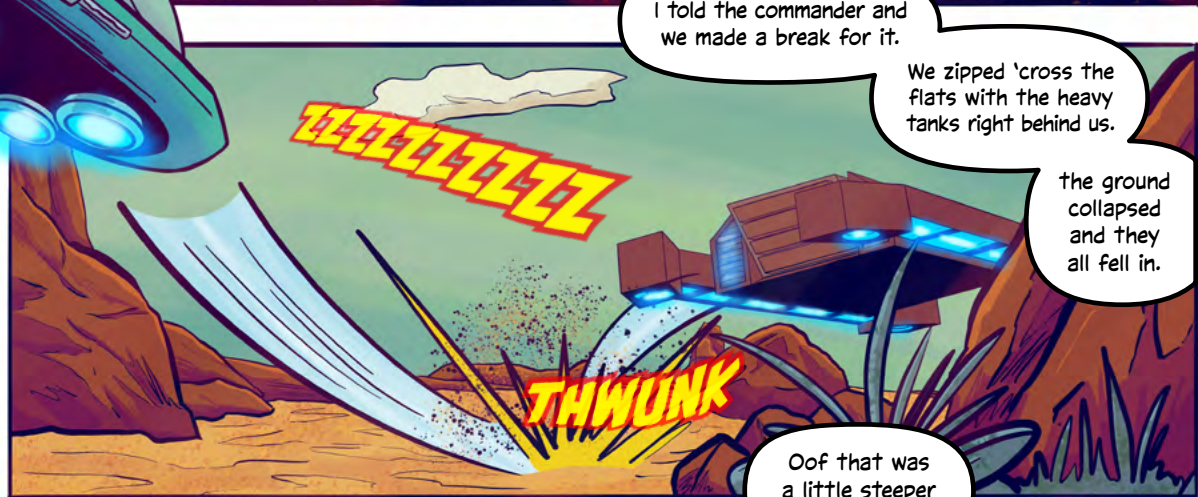
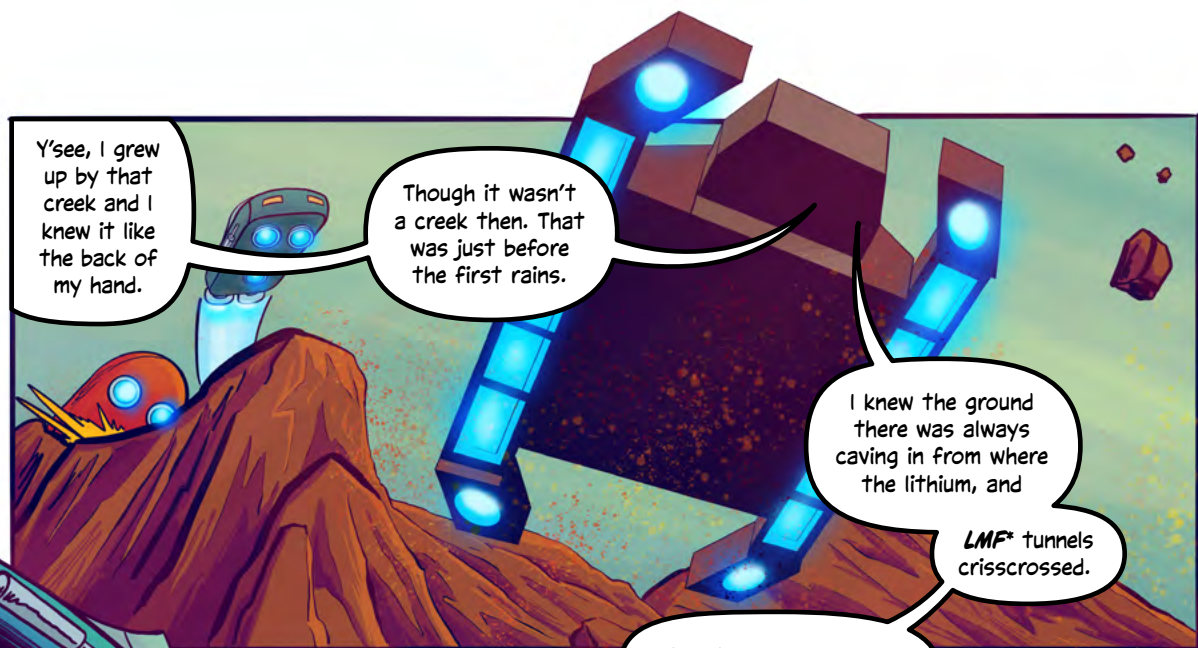
Lets see how they handle a lil' drop off.

So there we were, in our light skiffs, surrounded by tanks.

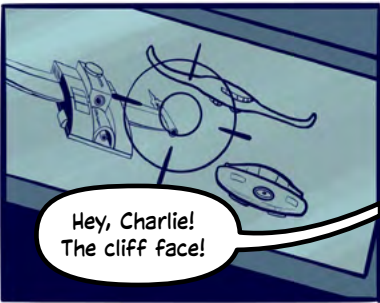


Our commander was about to surrender when it hit me.

Those tanks weighed more than twice as much as we did.





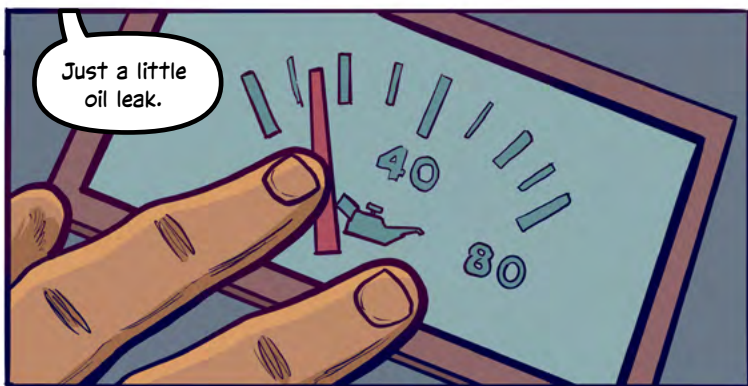




That was a *bad* sound, right?



It's fine, she's all bark.



Just a little oil leak.



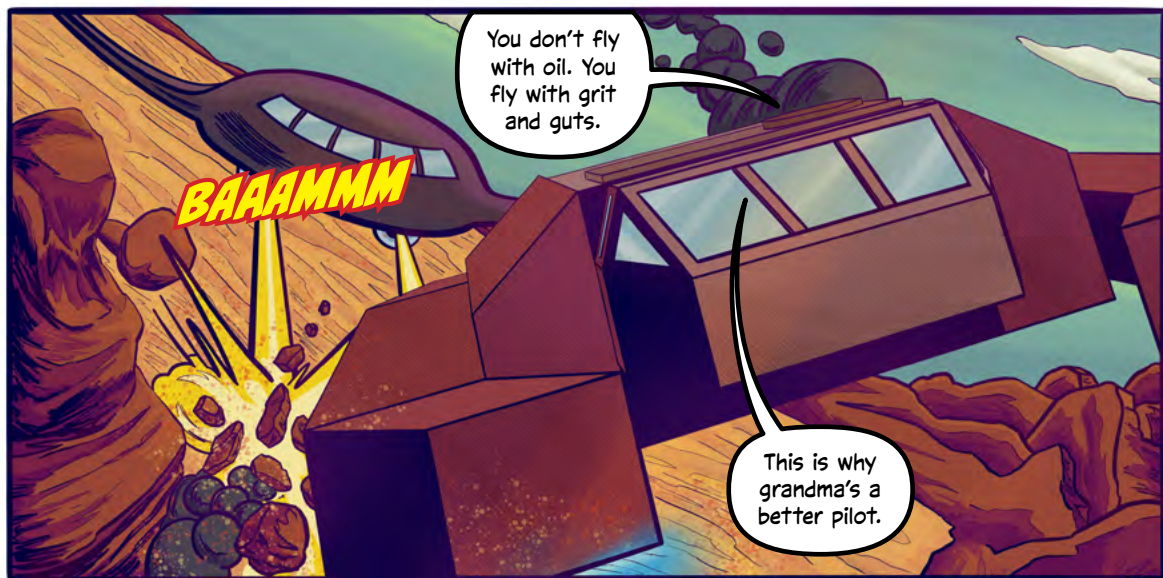
Okay, just a *big* oil leak.



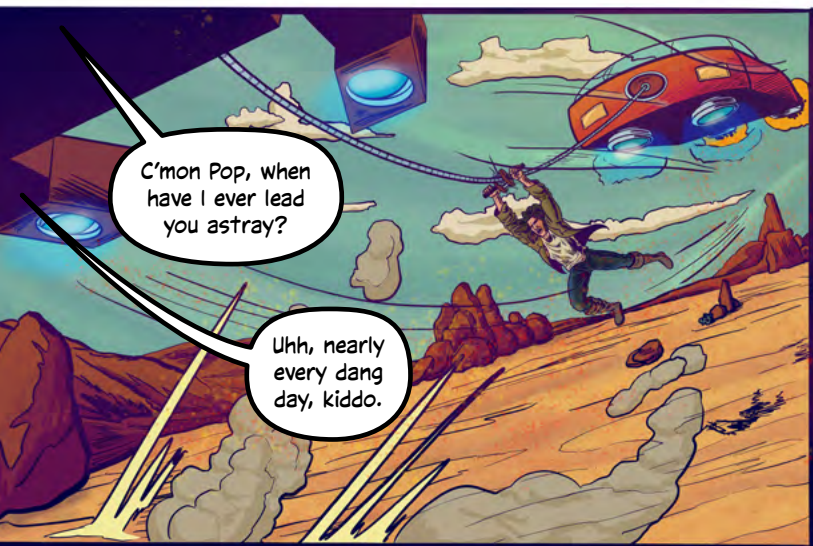
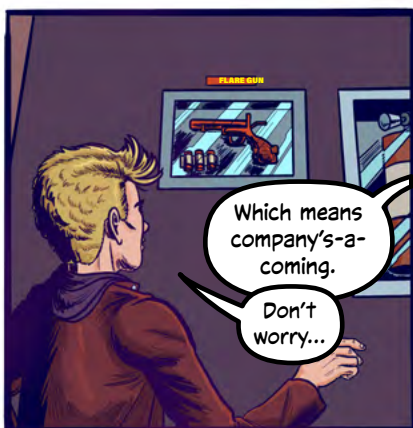
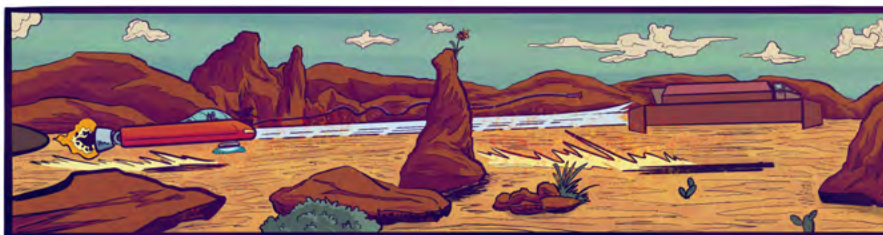
She's still flying. *For now.*

Don't we need oil?

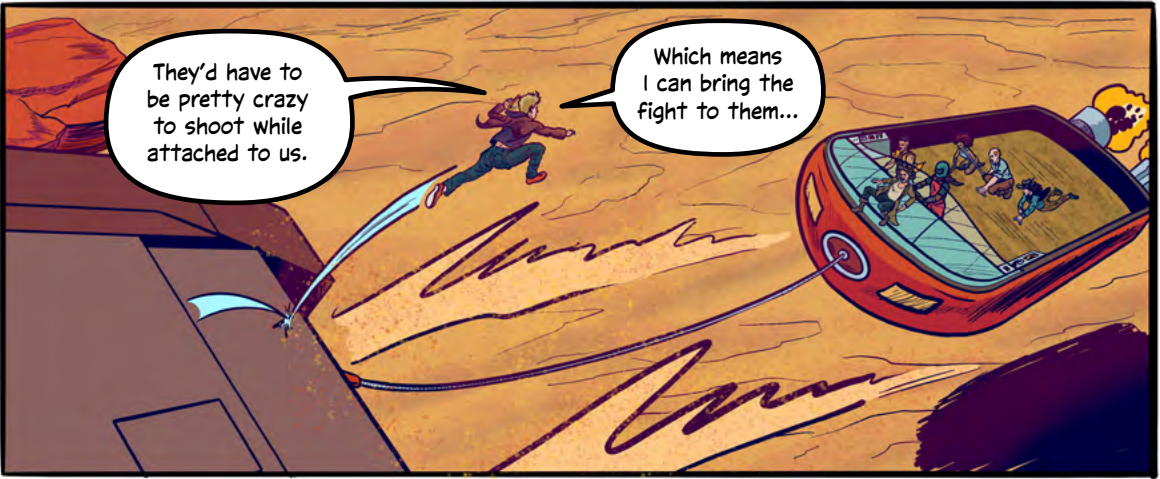
Oil's overrated. Oil's for suckers.



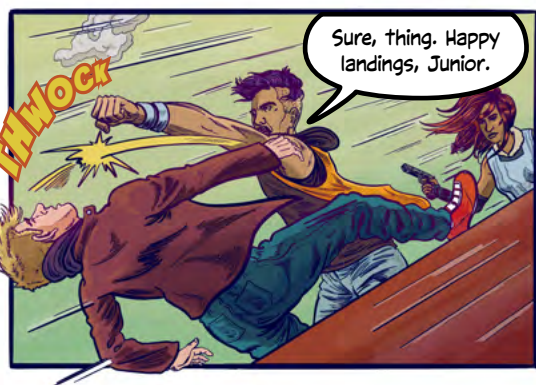
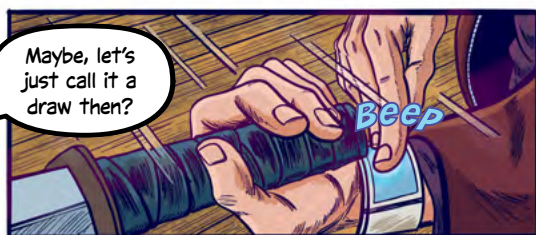










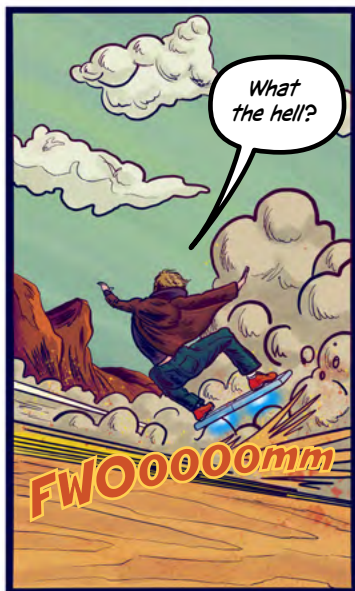






Now we gotta loop around and go back for him.

If he's still even in one piece.





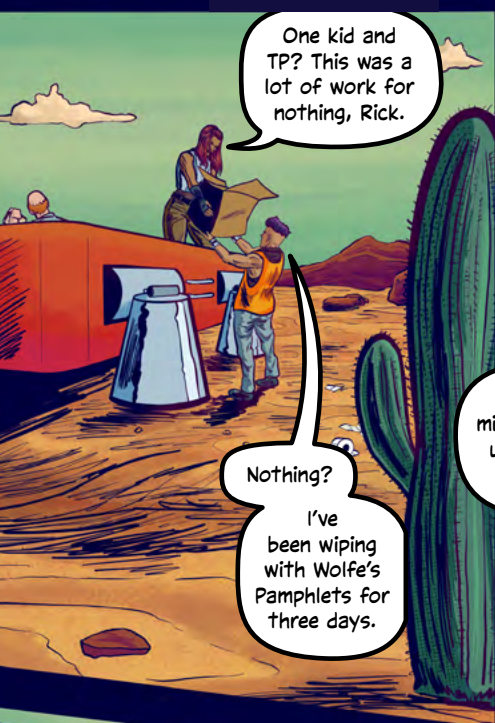
Dang, Pop
are you—

I'm fine.



They've got,
Alejandro!

I'm on it!



One kid and
TP? This was a
lot of work for
nothing, Rick.

Nothing?

I've
been wiping
with Wolfe's
Pamphlets for
three days.

Plus, the
mines are eating
up everybody
we've got.



Yeah, well I'm
also not crazy
about grabbing
kids or the
mining.



They'll be
fine. Hard work's
good for 'em.

Aiden says
They're makin'
a better future
for themselves.
They just don't
know it yet.

Remember the
good ol' days when
we just robbed
rich people?

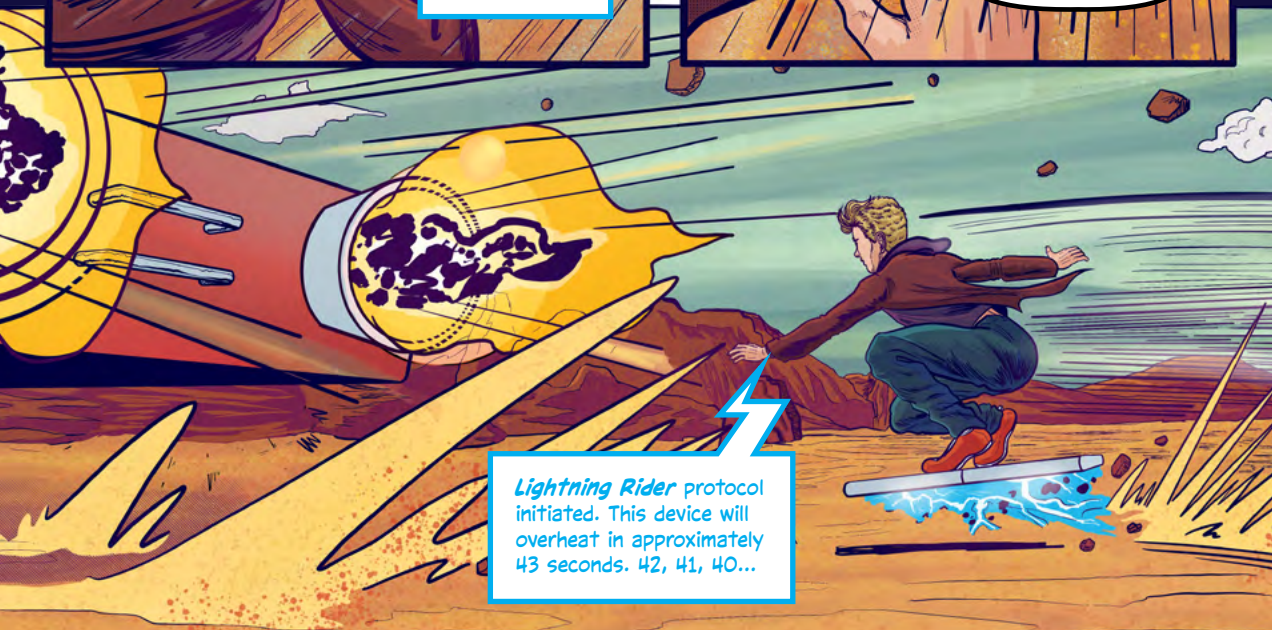
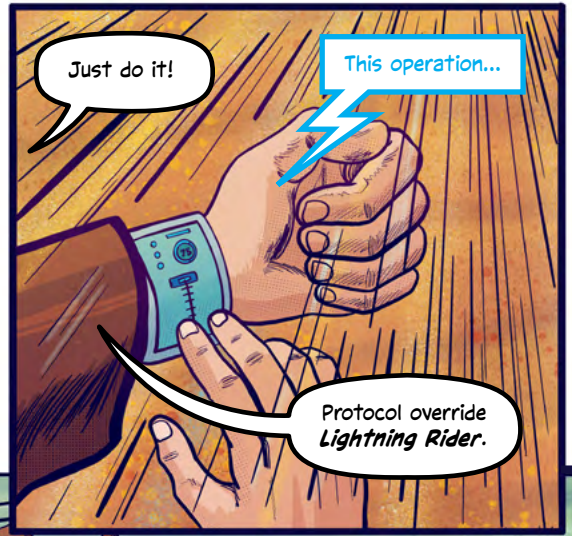
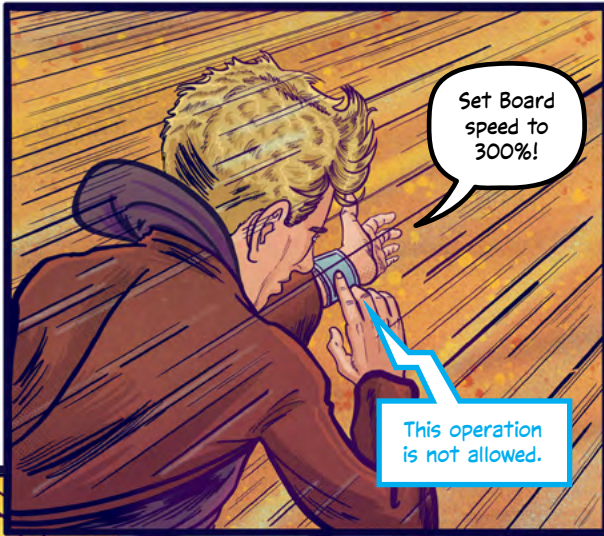


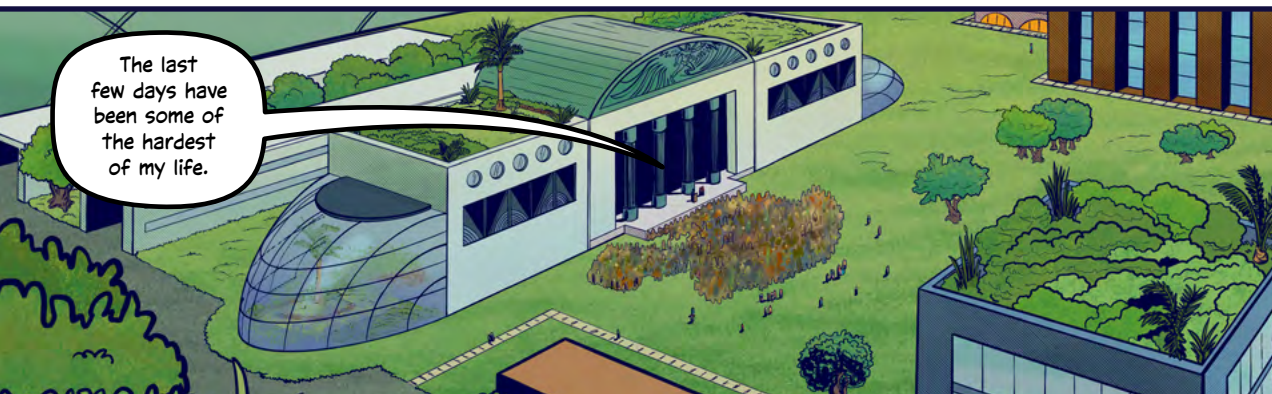
Yeah... I hear ya.
Maybe you're right.

What do you
think's really down
in those mines?

I have a
theory, but loose
lips sink ships,
right?

I can't let
it end like
this. I was
so rotten
to him.





The last few days have been some of the hardest of my life.



...

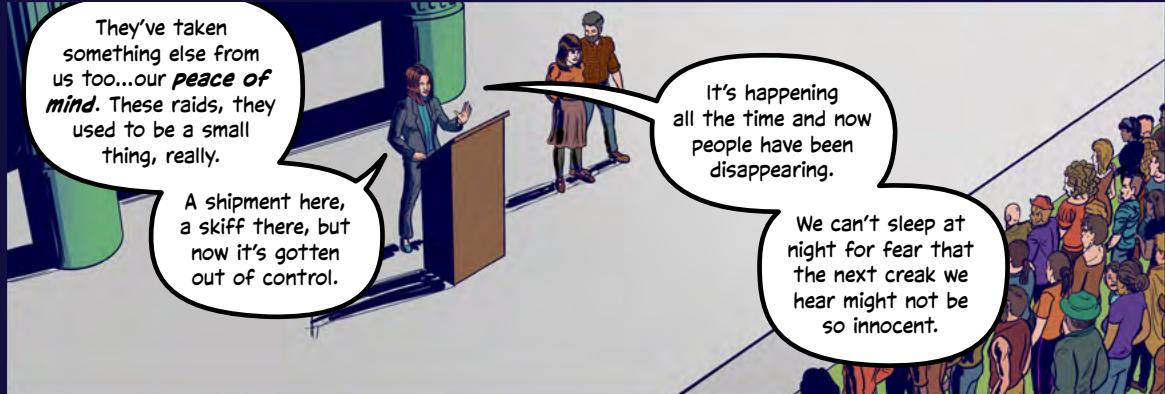


As you all know, they took my little girl.



They took her friend Jenny from her parents, John and Casey.

They are here with us tonight in solidarity.

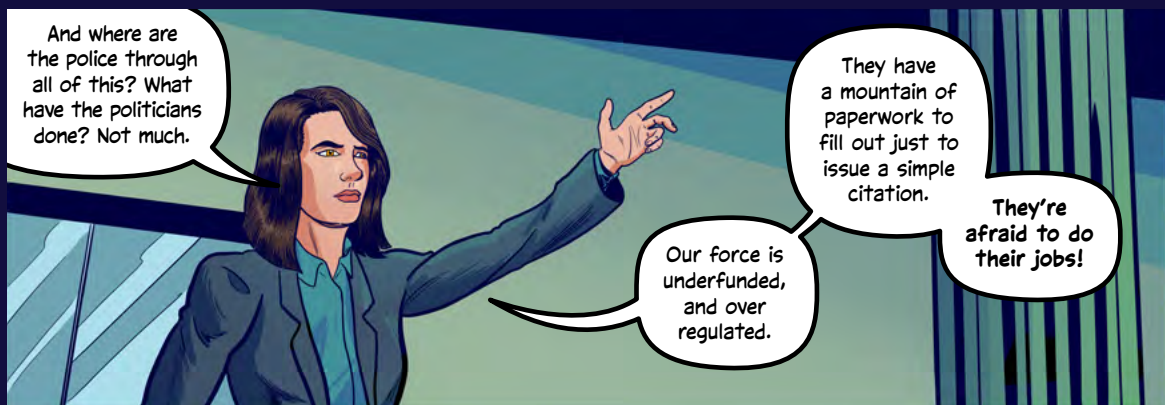


They've taken something else from us too...our *peace of mind*. These raids, they used to be a small thing, really.

A shipment here, a skiff there, but now it's gotten out of control.

It's happening all the time and now people have been disappearing.

We can't sleep at night for fear that the next creak we hear might not be so innocent.



And where are the police through all of this? What have the politicians done? Not much.

Our force is underfunded, and over regulated.

They have a mountain of paperwork to fill out just to issue a simple citation.

They're afraid to do their jobs!



When you live in a society with no military, you need a strong police force.

Both to enforce the law and as a defense against threats outside our borders.



The politicians we have are *weak* and *fail* to understand this.



They're more concerned about lining their pockets with back door deals and avoiding lawsuits.

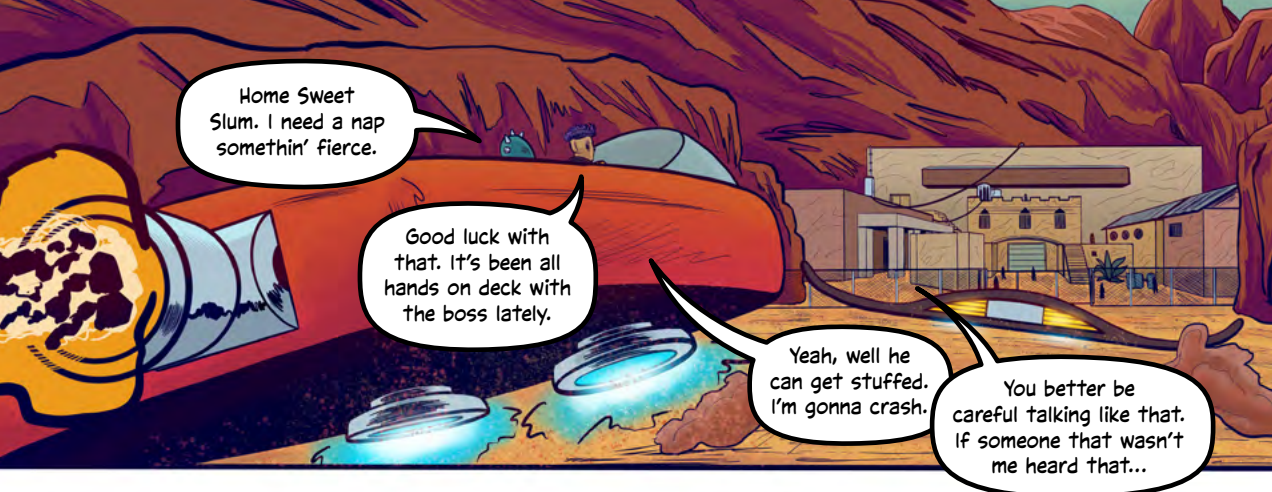


These are things I'd hoped to change, but as I'm sure you all understand, my daughter is my first priority now.

So, until I have my little girl back in my arms, I'm suspending my campaign.

For now, my security company *DelCon* will be partnering with the police to make sure we get our kids back.

Thank you, and God bless all of the southern colonies.

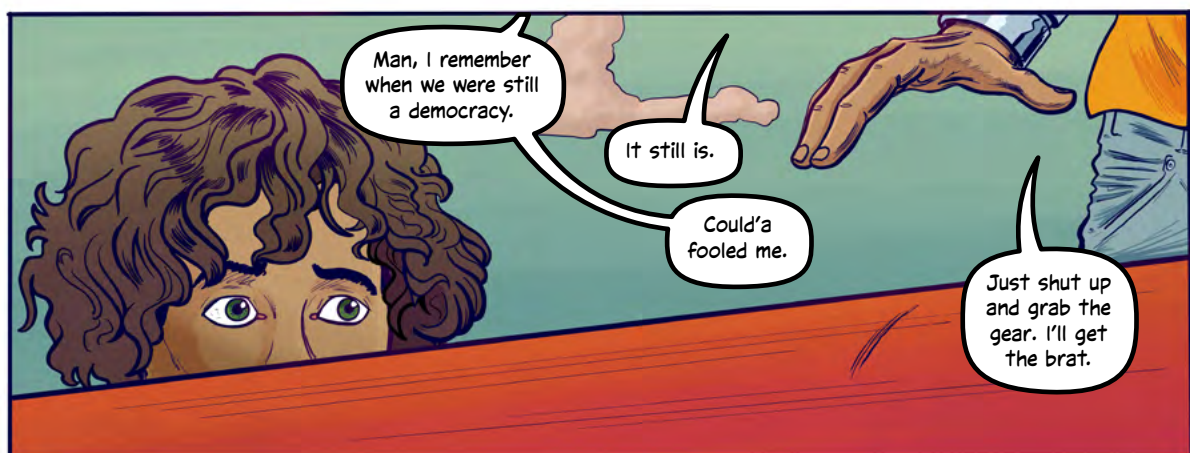


Home Sweet Slum. I need a nap somethin' fierce.

Good luck with that. It's been all hands on deck with the boss lately.

Yeah, well he can get stuffed. I'm gonna crash.

You better be careful talking like that. If someone that wasn't me heard that...



Man, I remember when we were still a democracy.

It still is.

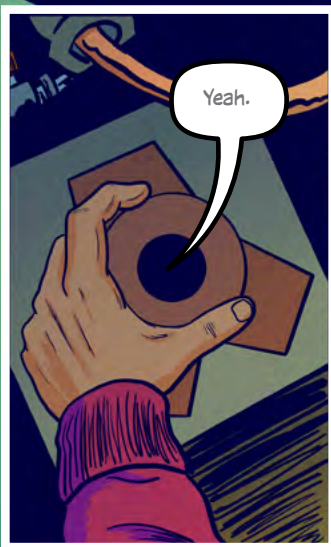
Could'a fooled me.

Just shut up and grab the gear. I'll get the brat.



C'mon, get with it, kid.







and yeah,
Charlie's my brother.
I just came to Mars
to live with him
last week.

Oh, that sucks...
I mean this is a pretty
lousy way to start
your life here.

Tell me
about it.



How are you
getting on with
your brother
so far?

I don't
really think he
likes me.

Sorry to
hear that. I'm
sure he'll come
around.



So, what
sector are
ya'll livin' in?

Oh, we're
not in the sectors.
We're just outside
the city limits.

Why are
you way out
there?

Isn't
the UV too
high?

Yeah, but
we live under-
ground, so
it's okay.

That
makes sense,
I guess.



I got it!

That's
great!

Now there's
only like 50
more. Haha.



What kind of
mines do they
have here?

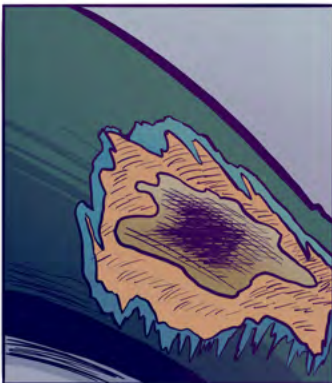
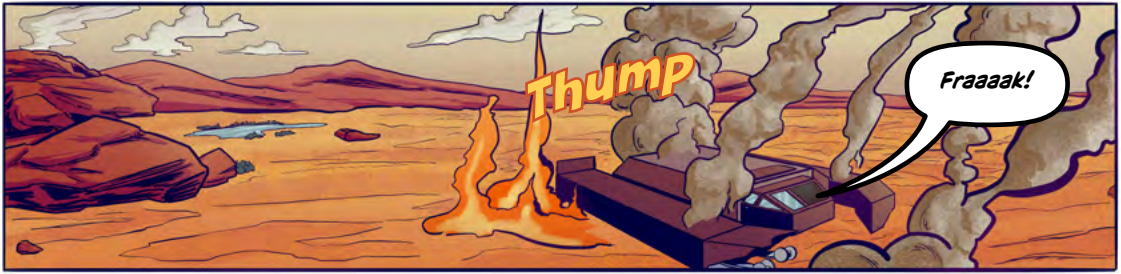
What?

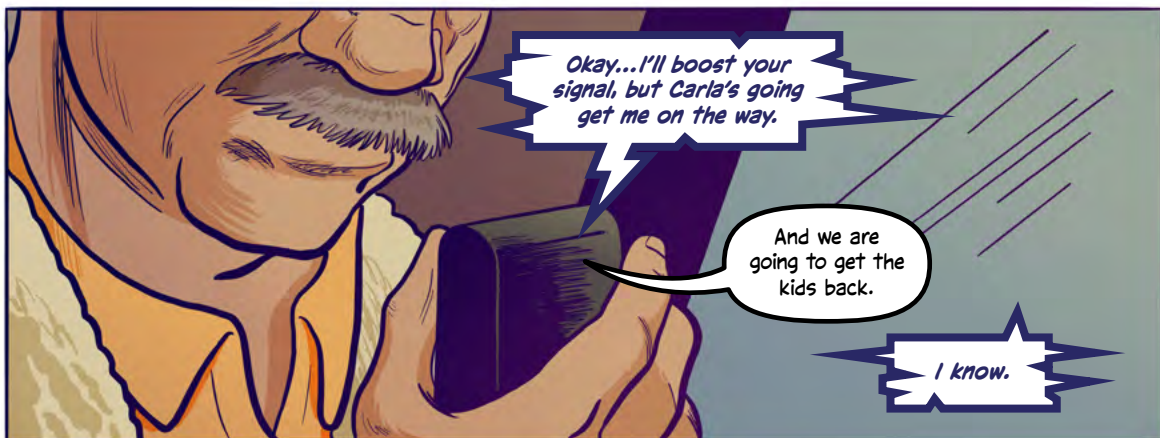
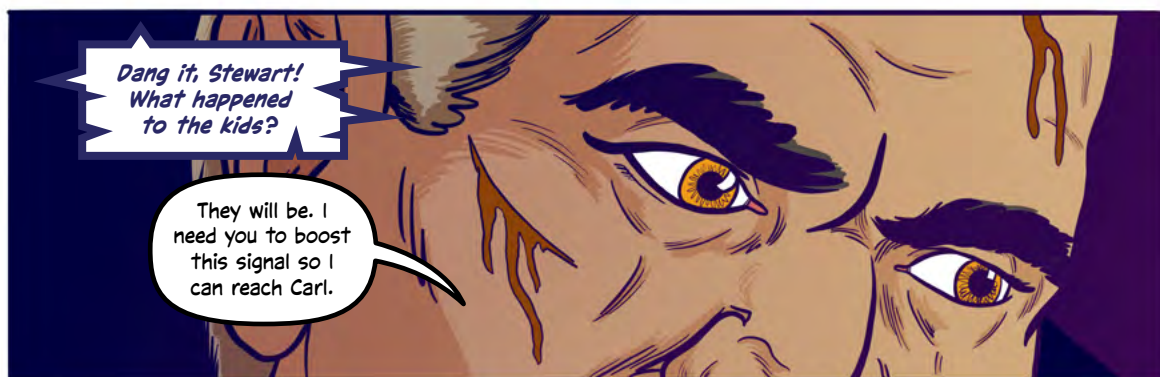


He said if
I didn't do a good
job he'd send me
to the mines.

I'm not
sure it's real.
Like, maybe
it's just a
threat.

WORK!







Mayor Carter, what do you have to say about the polls showing Wolfe gaining on you?



I'd say that it's a result of a campaign of misinformation and empty platitudes.

I know we've had a rise in crime related to raiders, but that's why this election is so important.

We have to elect a stronger city council. My hands have been tied by limited funding.

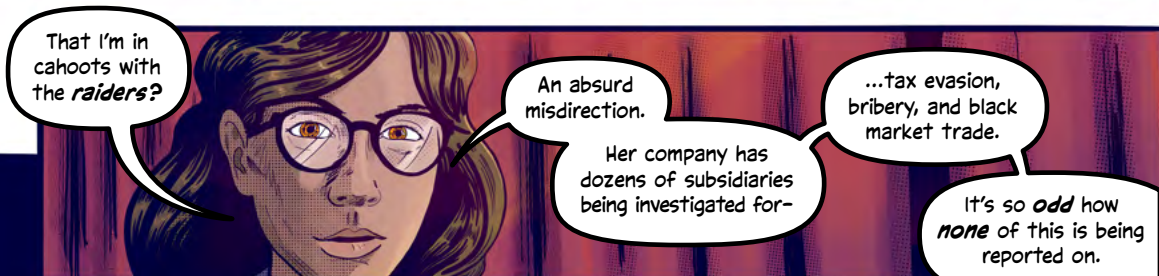
Which has been their strategy to unseat me.



I have faith that when the time comes, the people will vote for substance over flash and pomp.



Mayor, what do you have to say about Wolfe's allegations?



That I'm in cahoots with the *raiders*?

An absurd misdirection.

Her company has dozens of subsidiaries being investigated for-

...tax evasion, bribery, and black market trade.

It's so *odd* how *none* of this is being reported on.



So you deny the charges?

Yes...I think that's all the questions I'm taking for today. Thank you for your time.



I can't *believe* I'm losing to this guy.

I can. She owns a third of the news outlets.

You aren't doing yourself any favors out there. If you'd just play the game a little bit you could *crush* her.

Don't whine that the media is going easy on him.

It makes you look weak. Even if it is. You have to go big and be bold.

Tell the people what they want to hear.

These are people's lives we're talking about, it's not a game.

People deserve realistic expectations and to be treated like adults.

I should be judged by my work.

How did you ever even get elected in the first place?

By being qualified.

We're doomed. She's going to *rip* us to shreds.

Riiing...

Riiing...

Riiing...

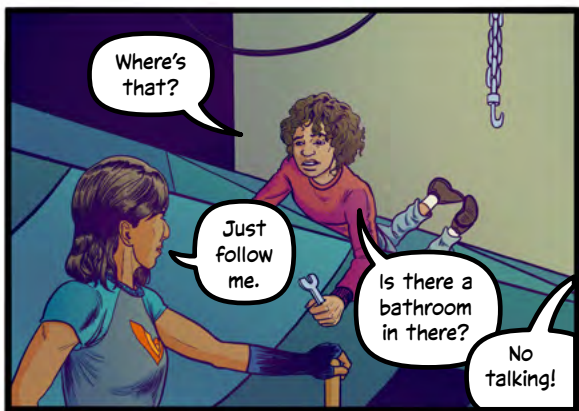
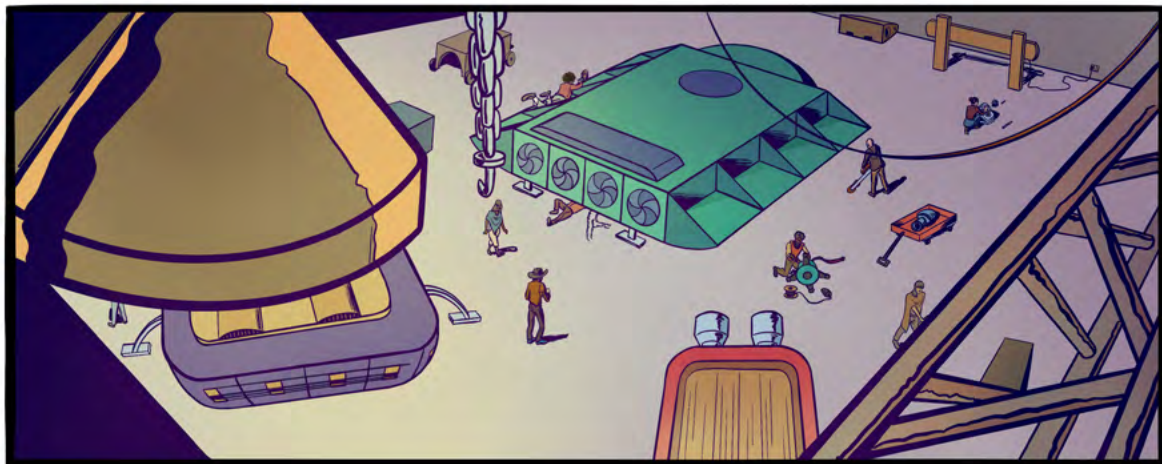
What now?

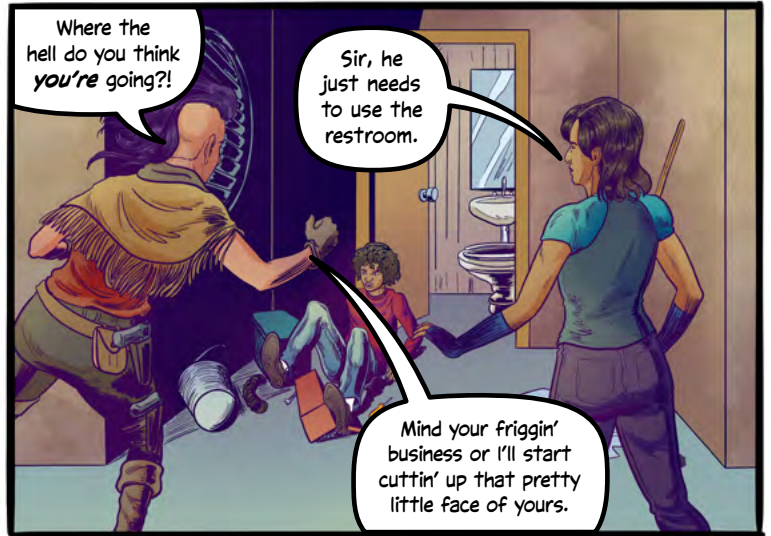
Hello. Really? Oh boy, okay.

We've uh, got a visitor.

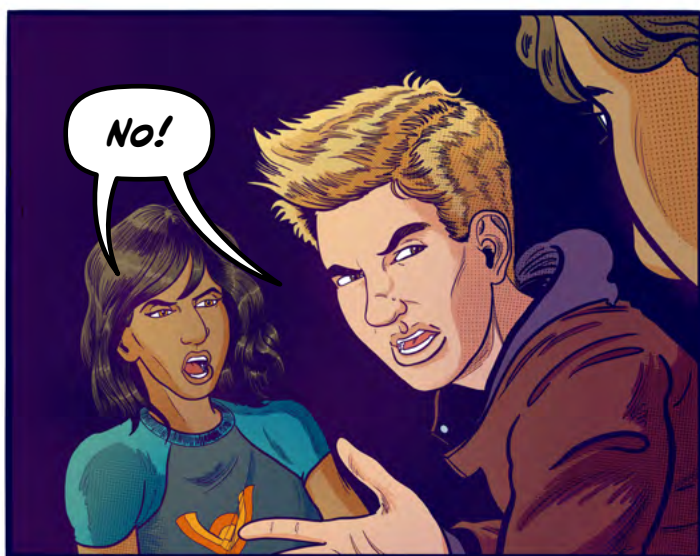
Who?

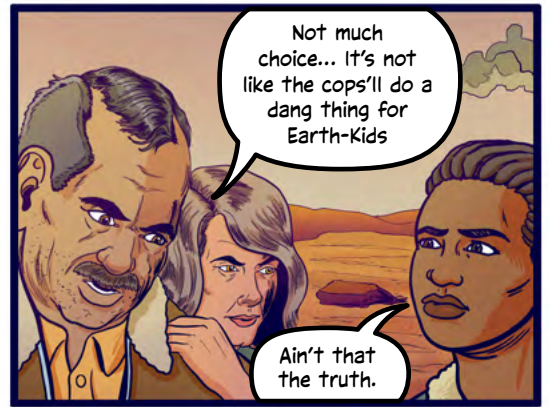
It's *Wolfe*. She says she needs our help.

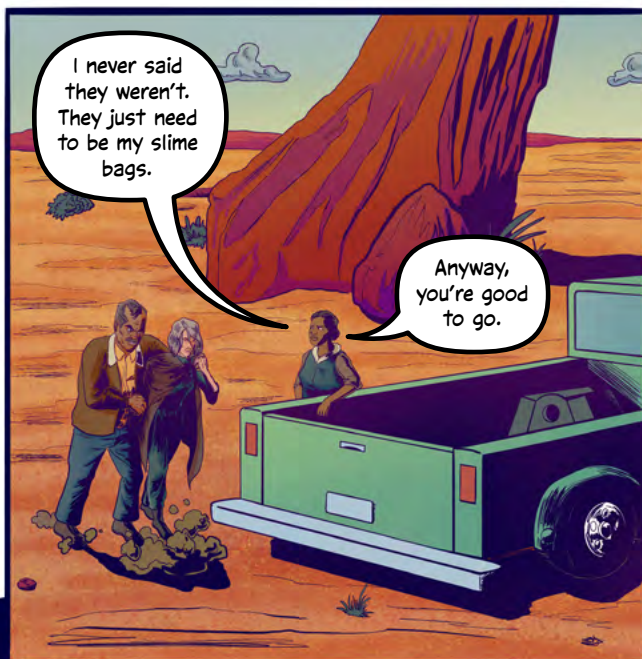






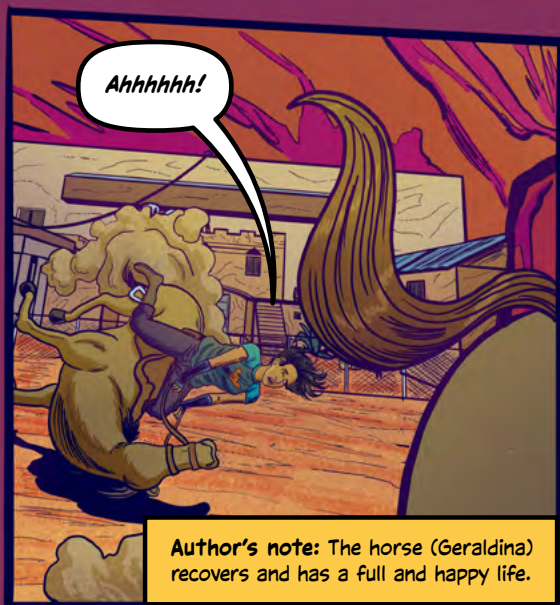
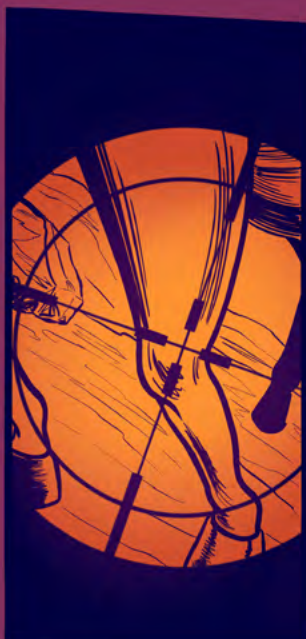






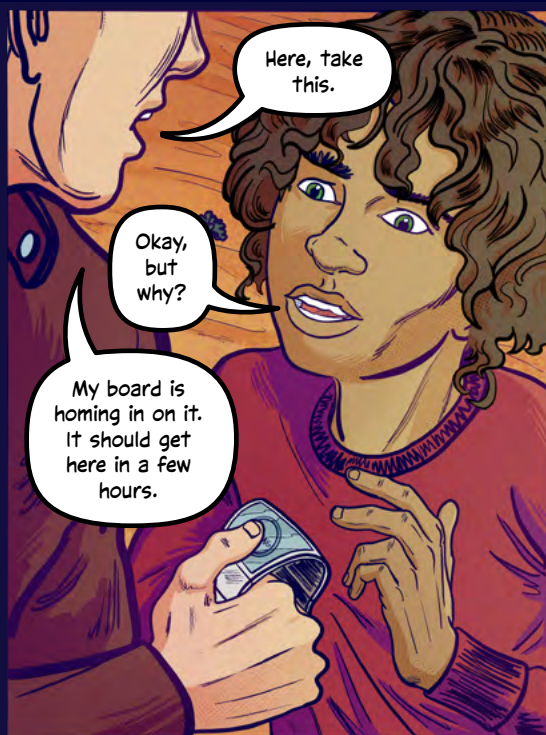








Bullocks!!!



Here, take this.

Okay, but why?

My board is homing in on it. It should get here in a few hours.



Head to the dunes on foot.

When it gets here, ride as far as you can so Pop can pick up the signal.



What about you?!

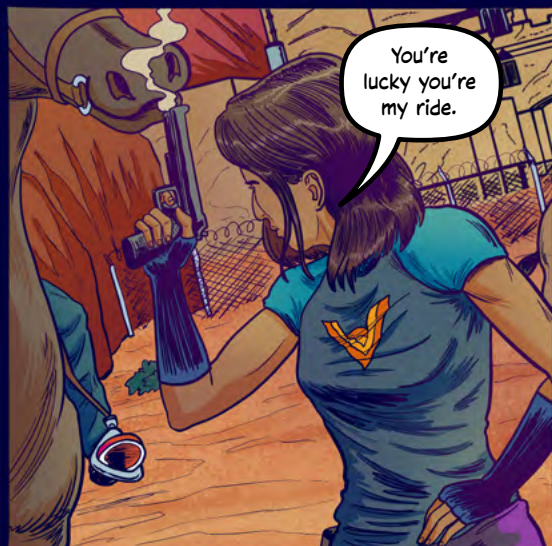
I'm getting V. If we don't make it...


Keep going and **don't** look back.

And you doubted *myyyy* equestrian skills?

Ugh.

I'd rather stay under the horse.



A comic book page with four panels. The top panel shows a man and a woman riding a brown horse through a desert. The man is in the driver's seat, and the woman is behind him. They are both looking forward. The horse is galloping, and there are large clouds of dust behind it. The text 'Gallop Gallop' is written in a stylized font. The second panel is a close-up of the man and woman's faces. The man is looking slightly to the side, and the woman is looking forward with a concerned expression. The third panel shows the man and woman on the horse, which is now stopped. A hand holding a gun is visible in the foreground, pointing at them. The man and woman look startled. The bottom panel shows the man and woman lying on the ground, apparently unconscious or dead. The horse is also lying on the ground. In the background, there are several small boats or rafts on the water, and some people are visible inside them. The overall tone is one of a failed escape plan.

Okay, so we had a few hiccups.

But I think we've got enough distance on them to make it.

Gallop Gallop

It's crazy they have an operation this big.

Uh, Charlie.

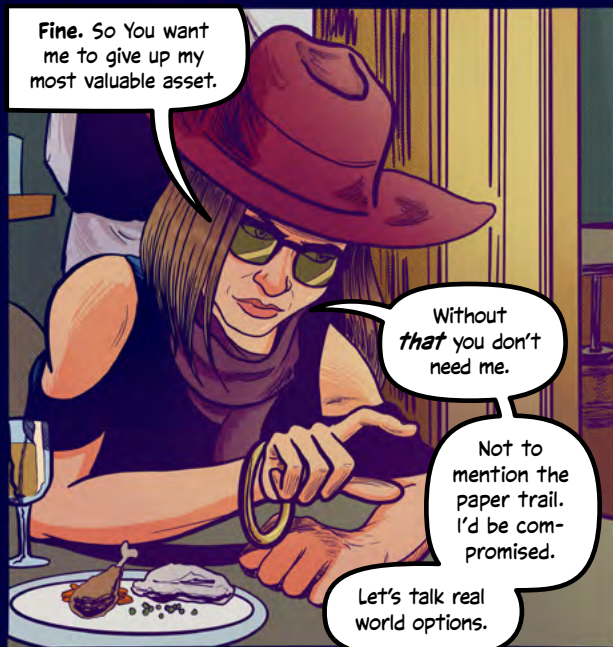
You would think someone would have noticed.

Yeah?

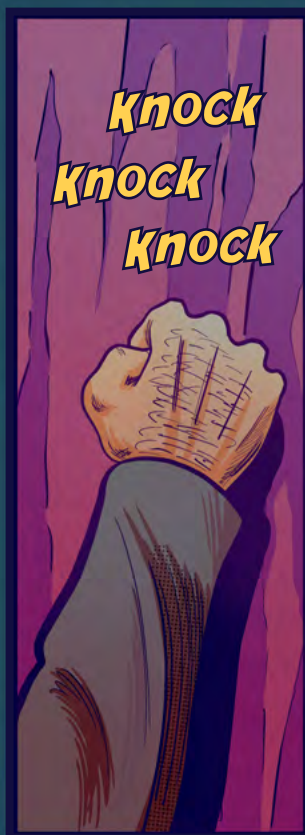
Oh...cripes.

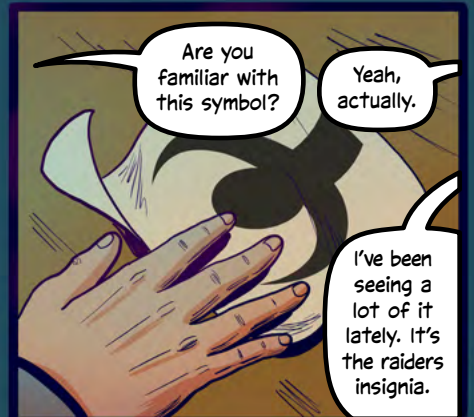
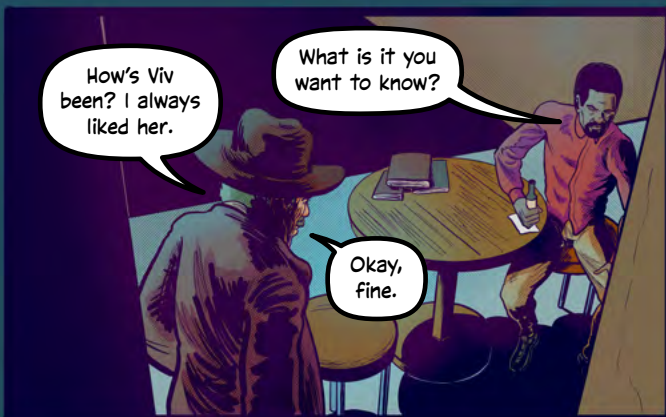
Okay, fine. Maybe this wasn't the greatest escape plan after all.













When did they start wearing patches?

They're ragtag, not a military outfit.

It's a lot weirder than you think.

What?

They're a cult now.



It's... part of why I, "retired."

In the old days it was just us smugglers and some gangs.

This, Aiden guy is something else.



He's been linking all the different groups of outcasts together.

I'm talking across colonies. It's crazy



Okay, but how does that amount to a cult?

People get fanatical about this guy. He tells a good story. Heck, a lot of the people they kidnap end up joining the cause. It's wild.

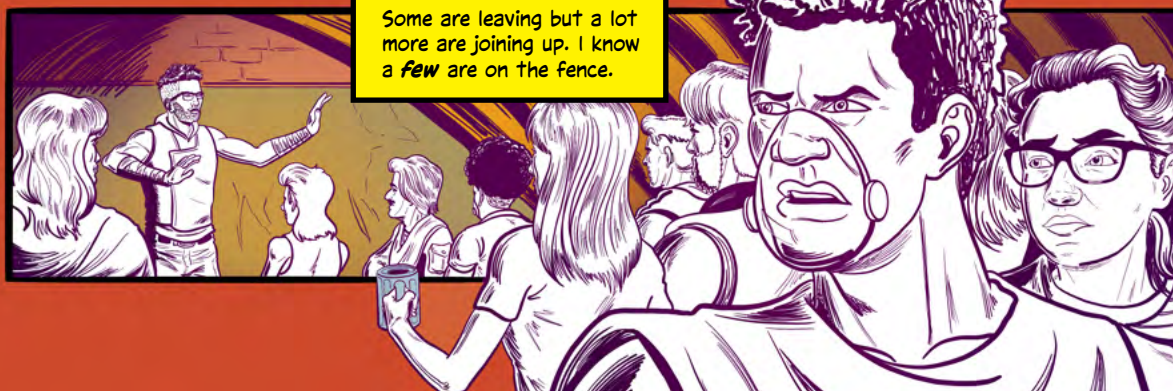
What's the cause?



Revolution. I don't know what kind he's selling but people are buying.

It was getting harder to do work with anybody that wasn't tied up in it.

I can't believe the raider types are going along with it.



Some are leaving but a lot more are joining up. I know a **few** are on the fence.



But the people that do want out... where are they gonna go?

They haven't known any other kinda life.



Do you know where they are?

Do they have a main base or anything?



...



Look man, I'd love to help but I can't have this leading back to me.

Viv's health ain't great and she doesn't have anybody else.

These are my kids, Bobby. My little girl's babies. I can't lose them too.

I'm sorry, Stu.



No, sorry *ain't* gonna cut it!

You should know better than anyone I don't squeal.

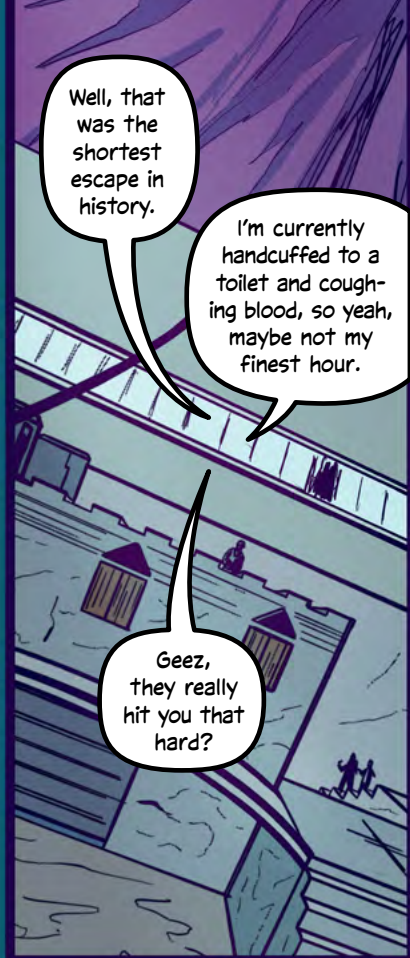
One of my boys has a beacon. I just need to get within 20 miles of 'em.



[Sigh]

Fine. As long as you know I'm doing it for Violet.

She'd get a kick out of that.



Well, that was the shortest escape in history.

I'm currently handcuffed to a toilet and coughing blood, so yeah, maybe not my finest hour.

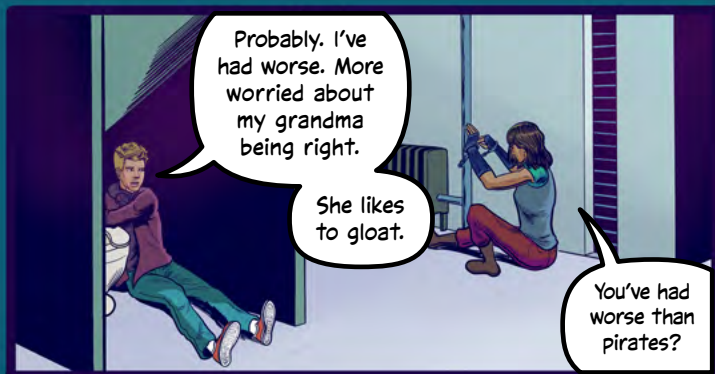
Geez, they really hit you that hard?



I mean, yes...

but that probably has more to do with not using my [cough] breather.

Are you gonna be okay?



Probably. I've had worse. More worried about my grandma being right.

She likes to gloat.

You've had worse than pirates?



I...yeah, actually.

Where did you learn to fight like that?

You mean for a bubble girl?

Oh, come on! I'm never gonna live that down am I?

Nope.

My mom used to take me shooting.

A photo op thing.

Plus a couple hand-to-hand classes. Those *were* fun.



I... only learned to fight because I had to.

I got my best friend hurt or worse cause I thought I could just wing it.

I should... probably apologize for being so hard on you. You're not the only one who tried a hairbrained escape plan.

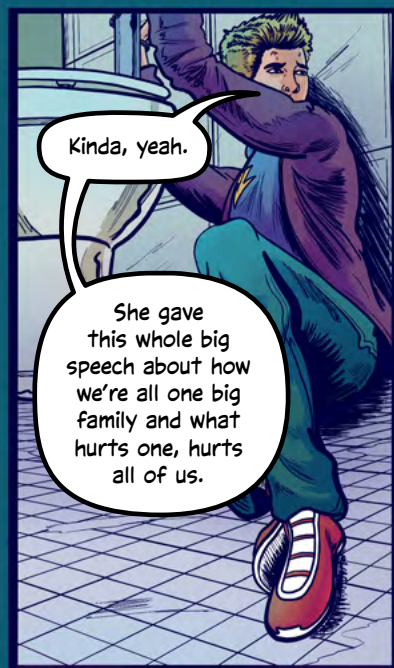
Now she's out there somewhere and I have no idea if she's okay.



I'm sorry too.
You were right. I just
went for it. I didn't
slow down to think
things through.

You know,
there's been a
whole media circus
over you getting
kidnapped?

Yep, and I'm
sure my mom's
milking it for
everything it's
worth.

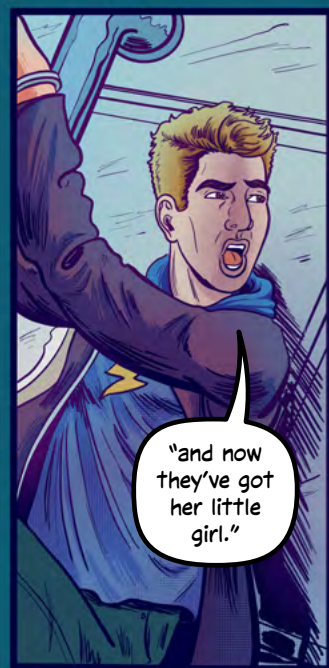


Kinda, yeah.

She gave
this whole big
speech about how
we're all one big
family and what
hurts one, hurts
all of us.



Then she really
hammed it up
with a tearful
rendition of how
they ganked her
husband,



"and now
they've got
her little
girl."



Shoot,
Sorry.



...I know.
I mean, I
get it. My
mom died.

Ah, another
member
of the dead
parent's
club.

Yeah, I
guess so.



How did it happen?

Earth. She was there too long.

Her heart couldn't take it. She was full Martian. Unlike me.

Why didn't she just leave?



Alejandro.

He... we're both halfies.

He didn't win the lottery on the Martian adaptations.

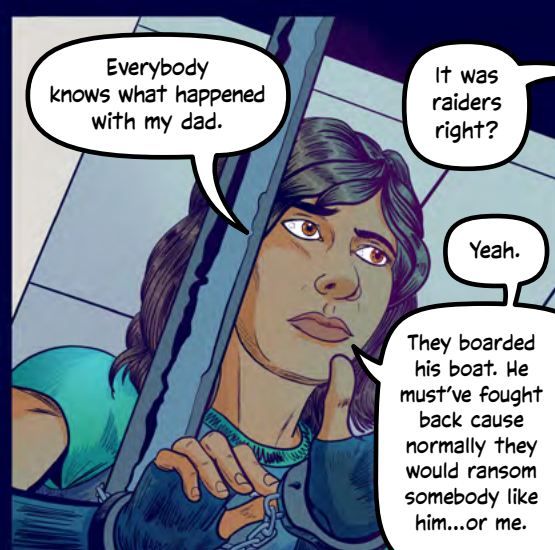
He was sick and she took him there until he was old enough to tough it out here.



Had to leave me here cause we didn't have the money.

I never saw her again.

That's... pretty awful, I'm sorry.



Everybody knows what happened with my dad.

It was raiders right?

Yeah.

They boarded his boat. He must've fought back cause normally they would ransom somebody like him...or me.



Geez.

That must make this whole thing pretty triggering?

I'm trying not to think about it.

Fair.

We've both been through the mill, huh?

Squeek



I guess I should give you a pass on being such a tool.

And I'll give you a pass on being a, "boneheaded bubble girl."



Hey, I was wondering... why don't you get along with, Alej?

He seems like such a sweet kid.



Yeah.

Maybe he is. He was just always so bratty to my mom.

He didn't appreciate what she was sacrificing.



I mean, how old was he?

I know, I know. He was only, like, 4.

She just deserved better.



Click click

I'm sure she did but so did he. You gotta get over that crap.

You can't hold a grudge against an 8 year old for what he did at 4.



When you put it that way *I do* sound like a tool.

Oh, absolutely.



What? How'd you get out?!

But you're not alone.

My mom runs a security company, man.

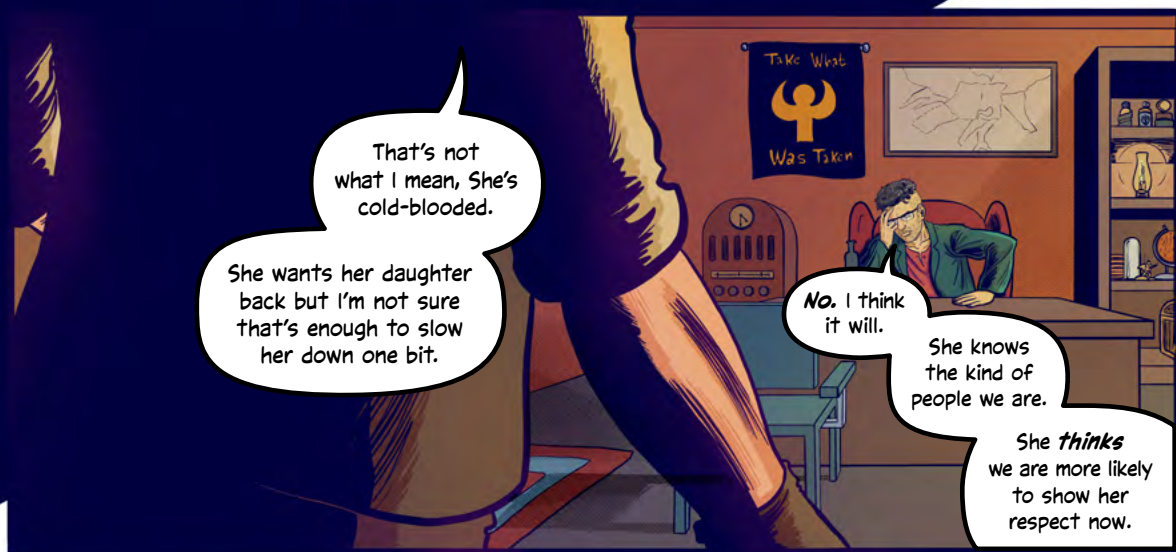
They literally make *these* cuffs.

I've been picking their locks to sneak out since I was 11.



So I gave her two days. Either she'll crack or at least buy us a little more time. But I'm not sure...

I know, it'll be tight.



That's not what I mean, She's cold-blooded.

She wants her daughter back but I'm not sure that's enough to slow her down one bit.

No. I think it will.

She knows the kind of people we are.

She *thinks* we are more likely to show her respect now.



We just have to stay the course.

Look, you said angry is predictable, right?

What about devastated?



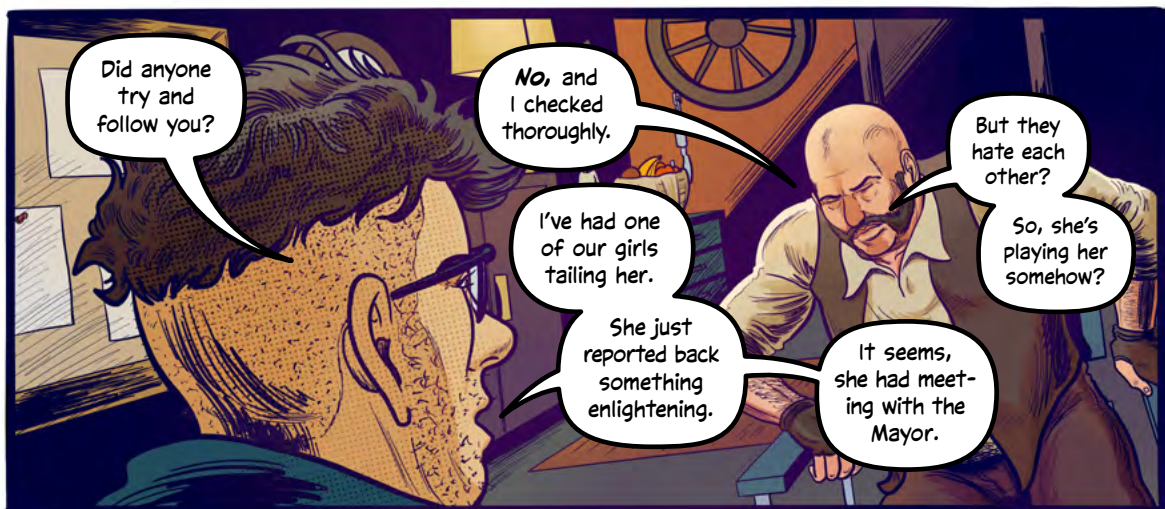
Just knock off the girl. She'll be reeling.

It'll cause trouble, sure.

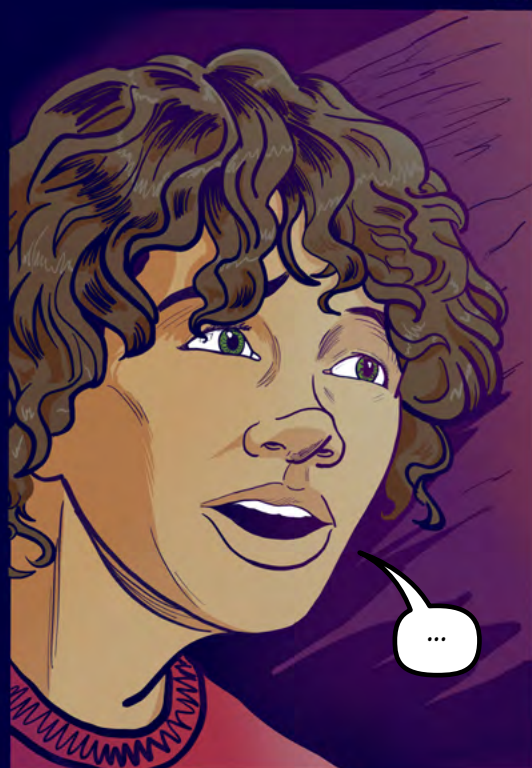
But it'll mess up her head and buy us a few days.

No. While we have her she has to be careful.

Careful takes time. That's the play.











Let's *try* not to screw it up this time.

Well, Dang. I was really looking forward to being pummelled again.



They won't be as gentle with us the second time.



Wait, I hear something.

I'm getting real tired of babysitting all the time.

No one cares what *you* think, Jeff.

Are you going to tell me this is what you signed up for?

Aiden's frackin' crazy.

We're wasting a lot of money and manpower playing in the dirt.

You better hope he don't catch you talking crap.



Just shut up and play the game.



What do you think they're on about?

I have no idea.

But we've got the advantage of surprise.

If you take the right one, I can knock the crates over on them and...



Umm, why do you still always think you're in charge?

Also, that's a stupid plan.



I didn't *even* finish the plan!

Look, there's *no* other way out of here.

I could already tell.

Why is your solution always to jump in head first?

Take *two* seconds to think!



Because we don't have time to debate things in committee.

Sometimes you just have to act.

This is why you got your head bashed in last time.

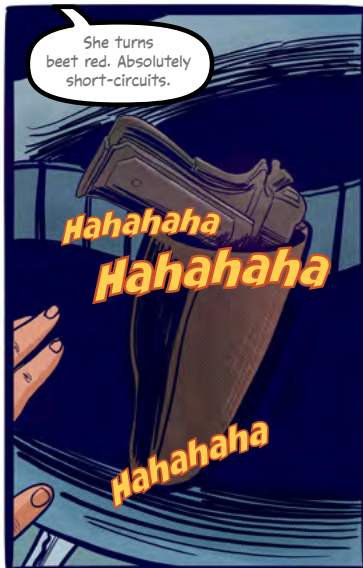
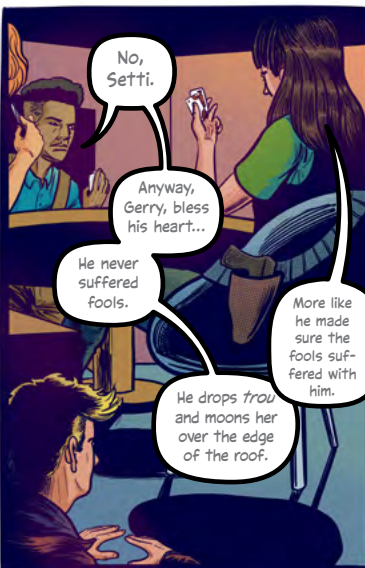
No, that was because I went back to save you!



Are you seriously saying that was *my* fault?!

No, I...I don't even know why we're fighting.

I'm sorry.





That could've gone better.

Get him!!!



Run, run, run, run!



THWACK!

Ahhh!

I'm getting a lot of traction out of brooms today.

This teamwork thing *is* growing on me.

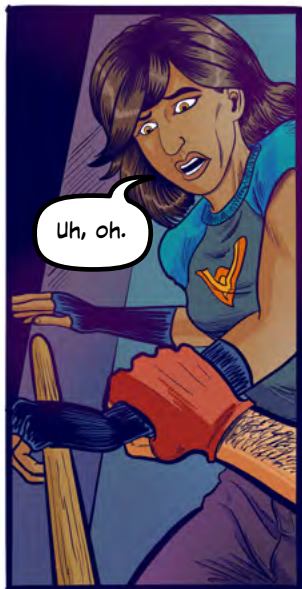


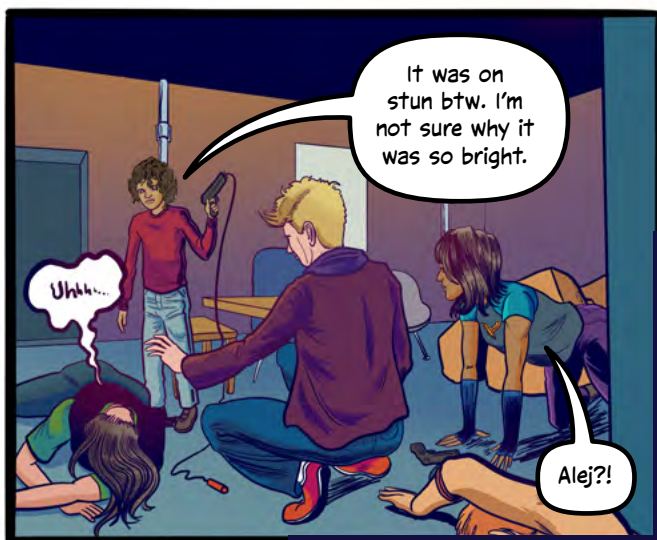
Can't argue with results.

Heeeeghhh!

Although, I don't think Jeff here is a fan of our work.

Thomp

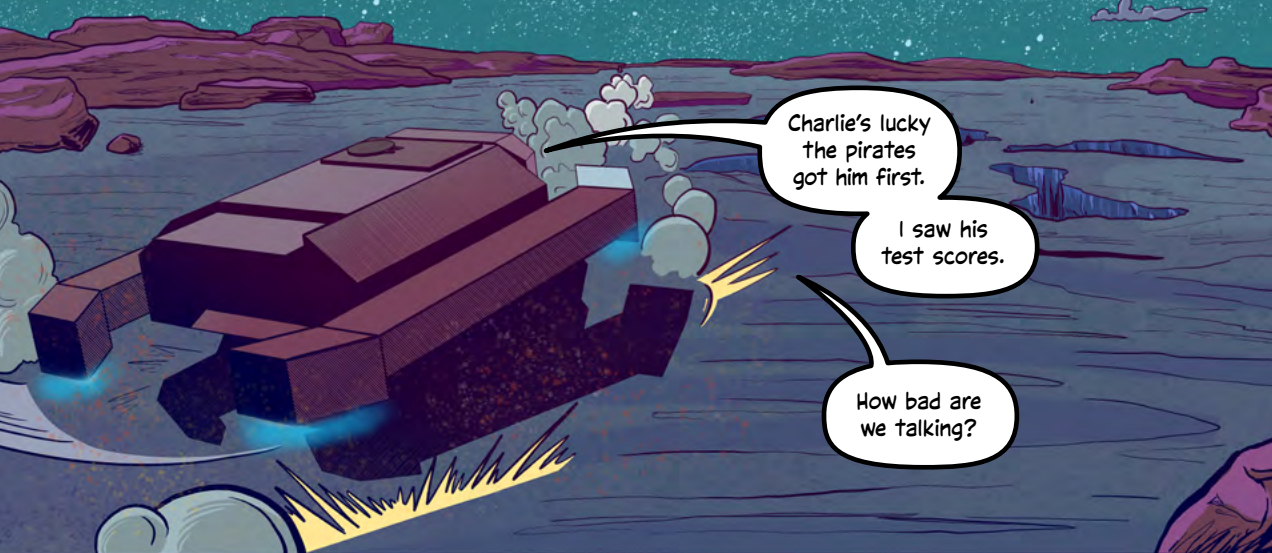












Charlie's lucky
the pirates
got him first.

I saw his
test scores.

How bad are
we talking?



Let's just say
I'm gonna shove
his scout's honor
up his butt.

Are you sure
this is where
Bobby said he
saw them?

Absolutely.
I thought we'd
at least get a
blip by now.



What's
that?



It's a
person. They
look tall enough,
it could be
Charlie!











We're out of time!

Take the gun. They won't shoot me.

Oh, I am not climbing down that.

Are you sure?

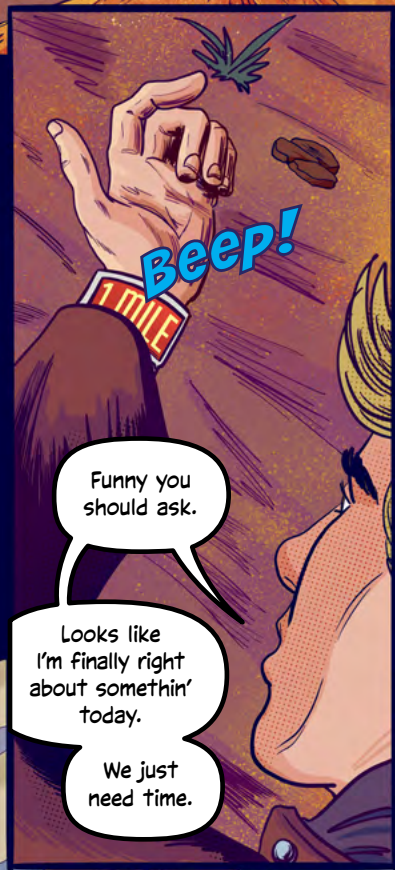
No!

VZZSHHH



It's gonna be okay, Alejandro. Whatever happens just stay behind me.

We're totally screwed aren't we.



Beep!

Funny you should ask.

Looks like I'm finally right about somethin' today.

We just need time.



I am *out* of patience with these brats

Grab the girl and shoot the others.

This could be going better.

But that gives me a terrible idea.





She's
crazier
than me.

I like
that.

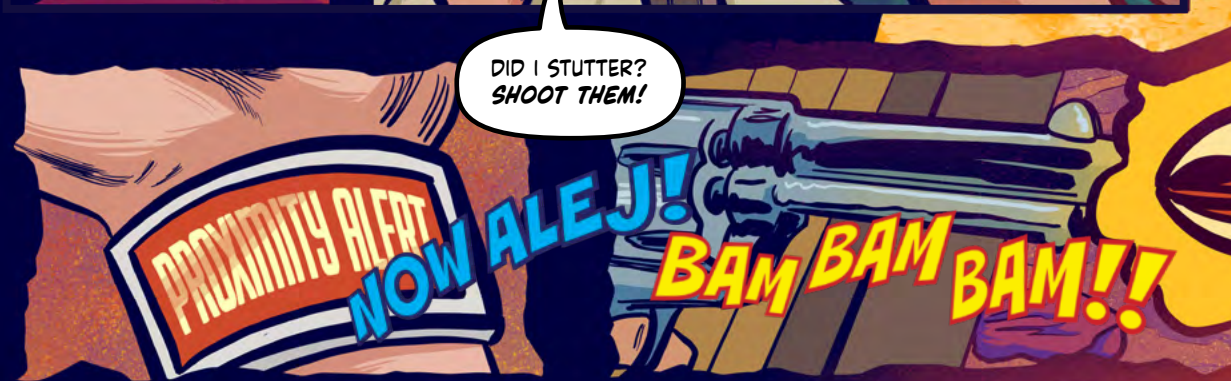
Get ready
to hop on
my back.



These kids and their
bloody drama. The
heck with Aiden.

He's wrong any-
way. Just shoot
these morons.

Uh, are you sure
about that boss?
They're just kids.



DID I STUTTER?
SHOOT THEM!



OUR RIDE'S HERE
IT'S GO TIME!

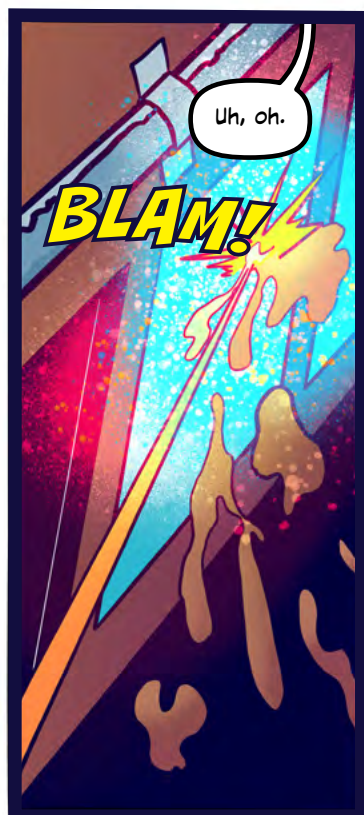
We can
make it.

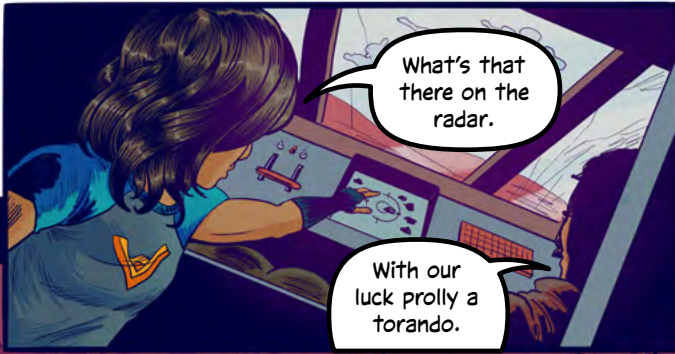
We just
gotta jump.

Say *what*
now?

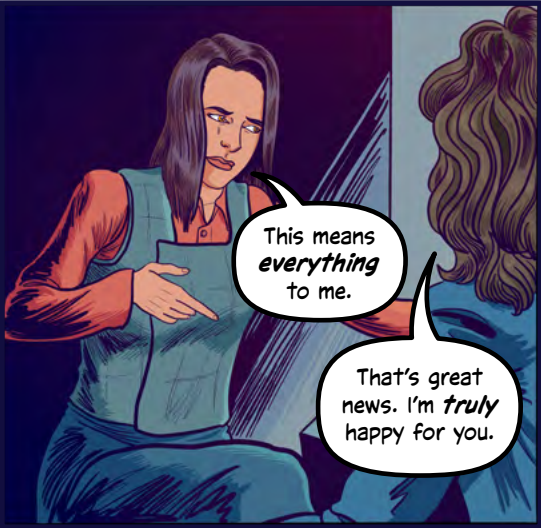




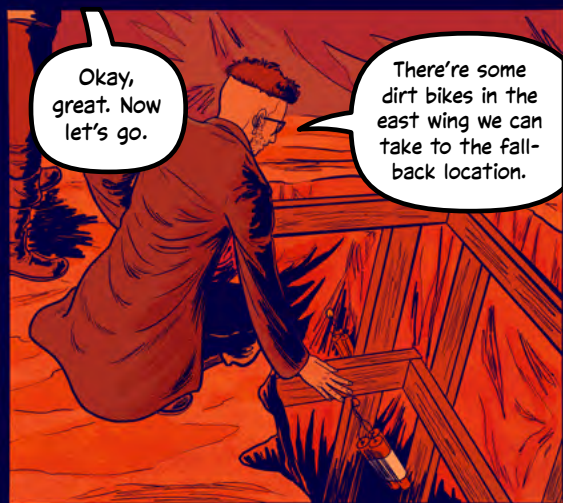




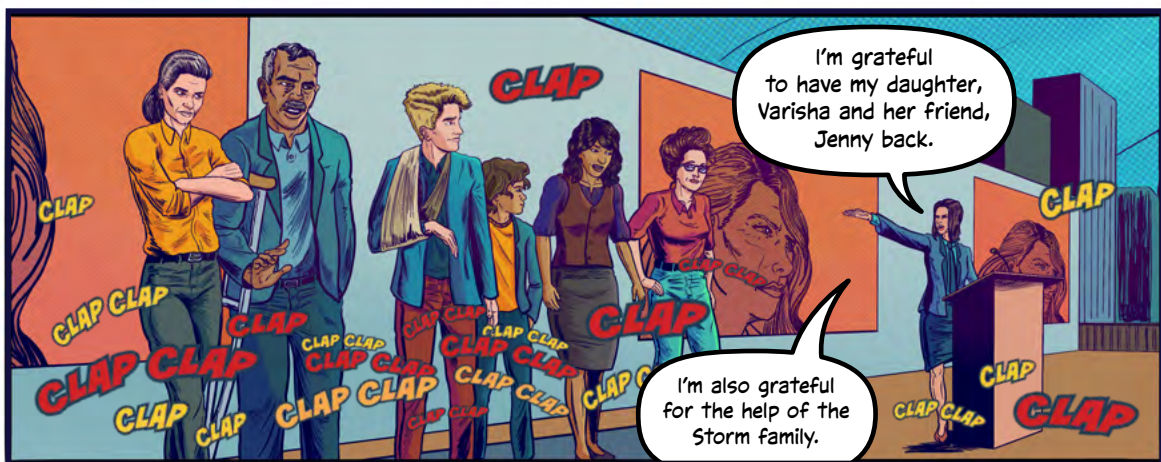


















You're going to have a hard time being tough on crime and still keeping the pirates happy.

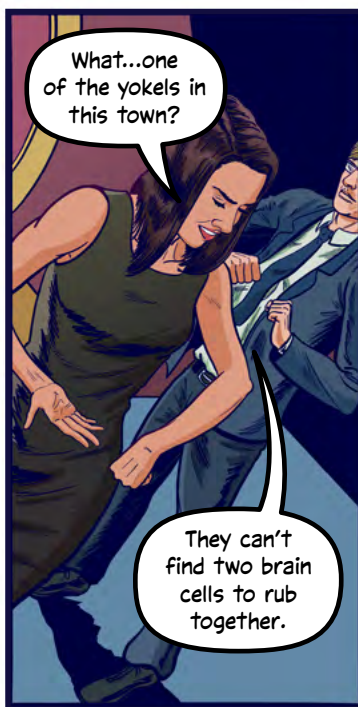
I said I'd be tough on crime in *our* city.

With access to **ALL** the trade routes...



and colony-wide security clearance, I'm about to have a lot of friends.

Aren't you worried someone will put it together.



What...one of the yokels in this town?

They can't find two brain cells to rub together.



Carter was a threat but she's eating out of my hand now.

I'm offering her a powerless role in my cabinet to keep her occupied.

I mean, in the interest of bipartisanship.



Your, uh, **acting** has been top notch.

I could **steal** every last cent from under their noses as long as I keep them **afraid** of pirates and foreigners.

And I'm just getting started.

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**ANARCHY
IN THE HILLS**

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