



# HELIUM



IAN EDGINTON ★ D'ISRAELI

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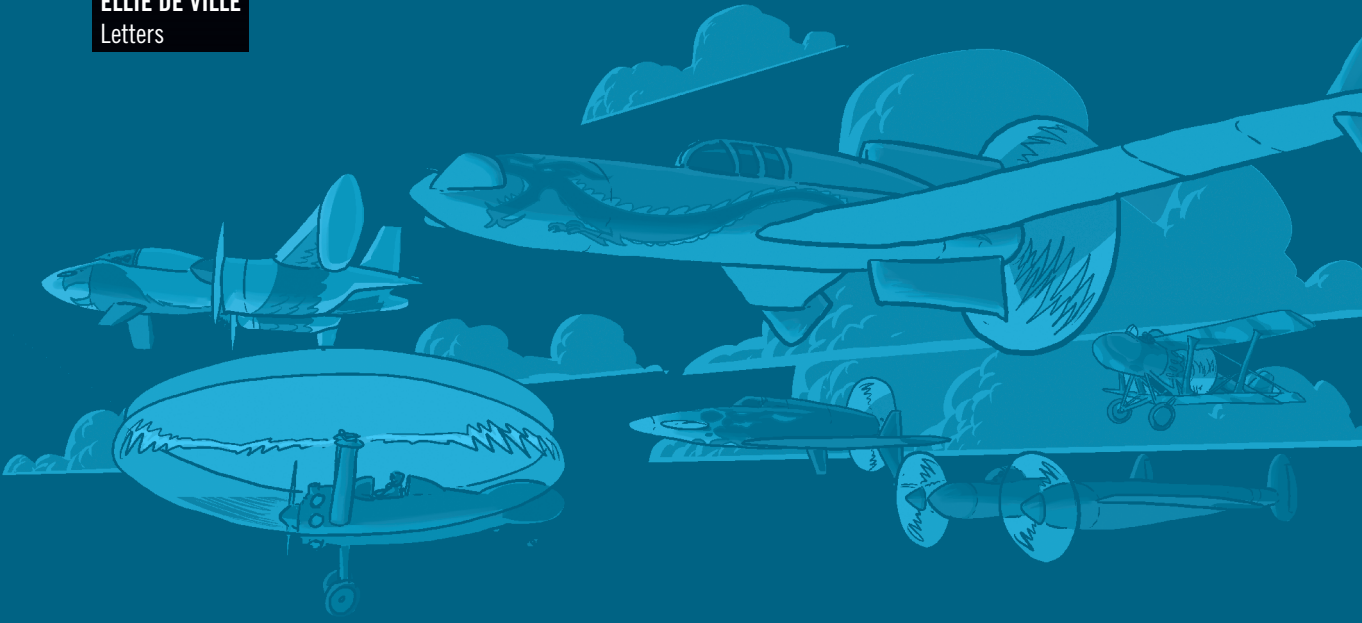
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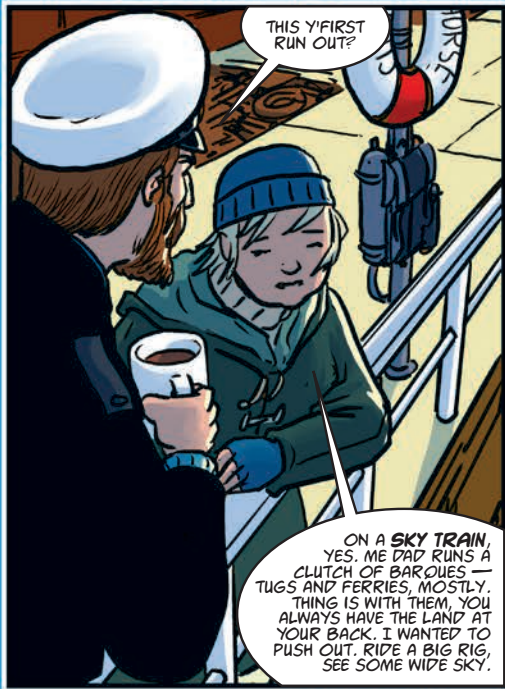
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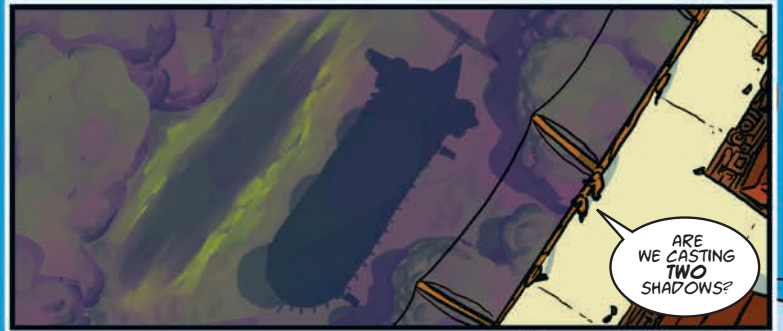
THIS Y'FIRST  
RUN OUT?

ON A SKY TRAIN,  
YES, ME DAD RUNS A  
CLUTCH OF BARQUES —  
TUGS AND FERRIES, MOSTLY.  
THING IS WITH THEM, YOU  
ALWAYS HAVE THE LAND AT  
YOUR BACK. I WANTED TO  
PUSH OUT, RIDE A BIG RIG,  
SEE SOME WIDE SKY.

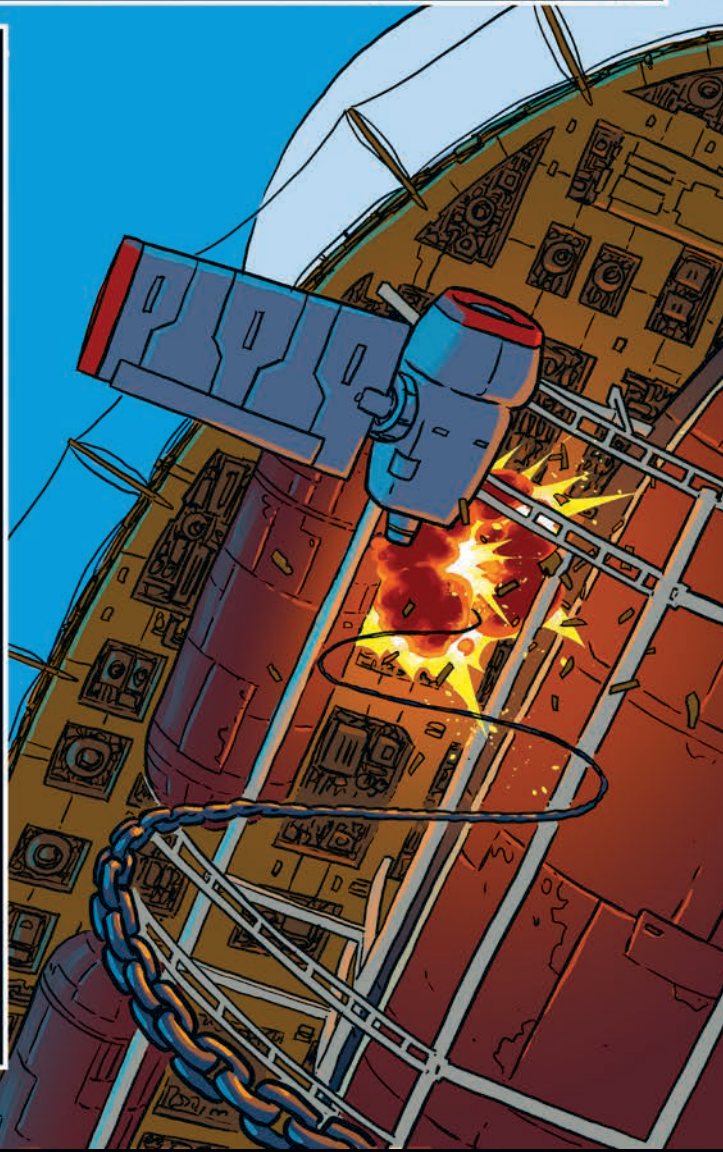
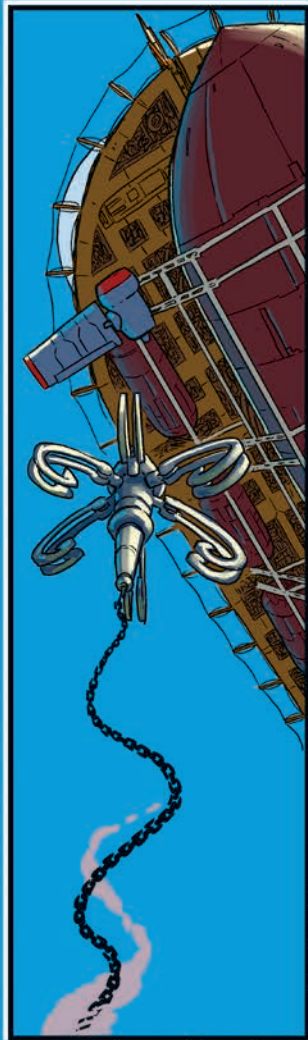


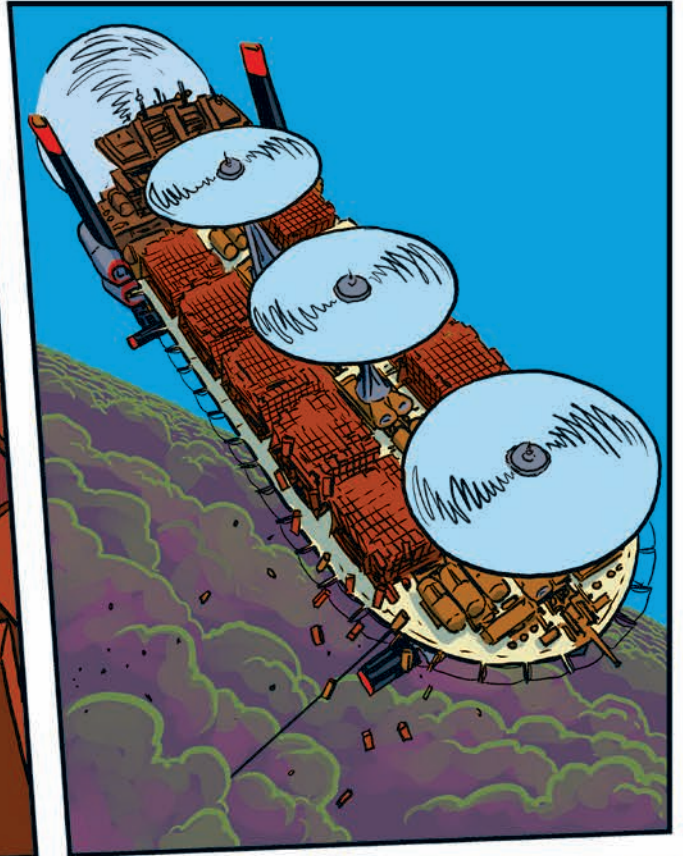
WELL, THEY DON'T  
COME MUCH BIGGER'N  
THIS BROAD-HIPPED  
BEAUTY!

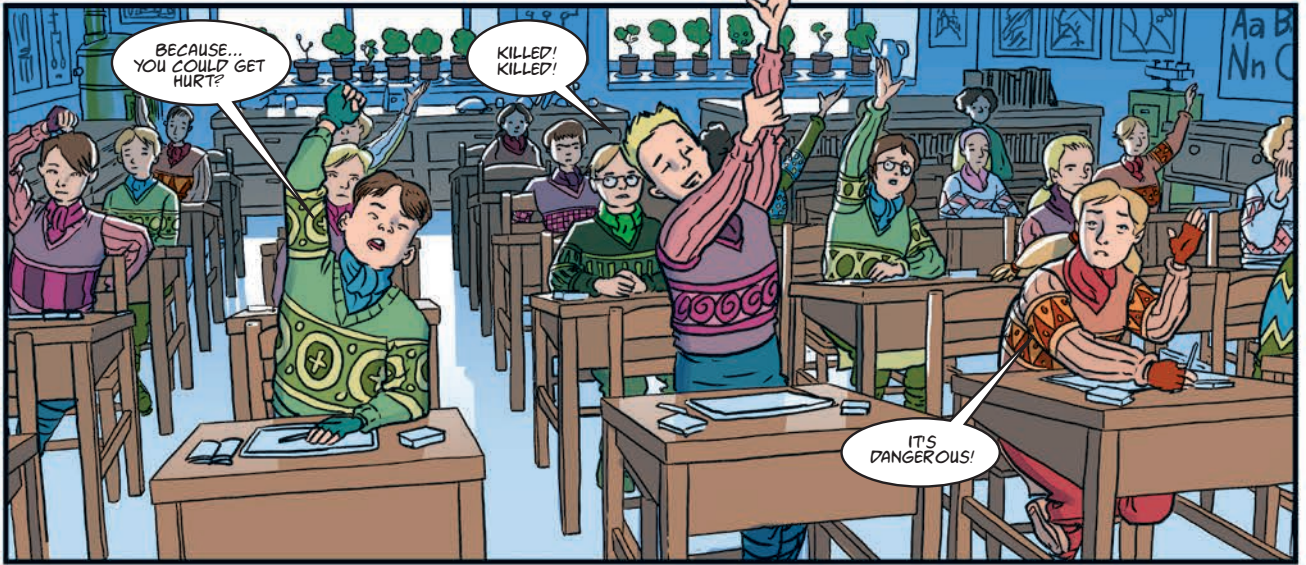
UH, CAPTAIN?



ARE  
WE CASTING  
TWO  
SHADOWS?







BECAUSE... YOU COULD GET HURT?

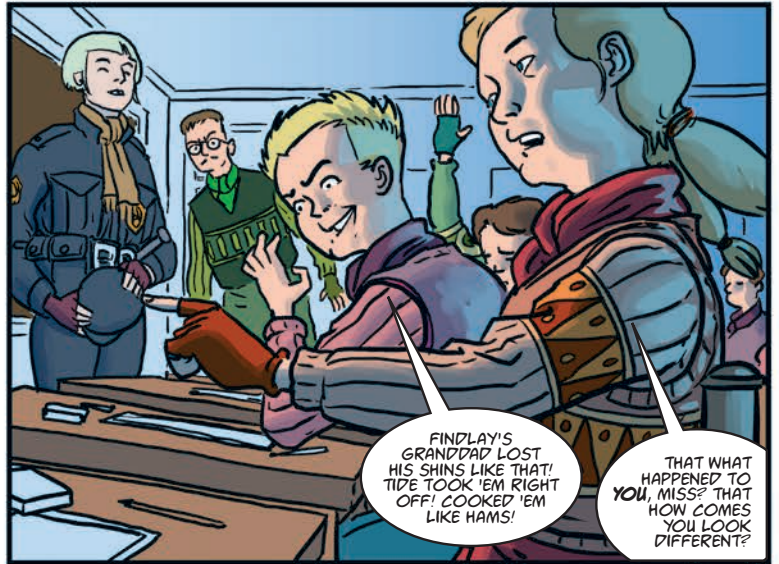
KILLED! KILLED!

IT'S DANGEROUS!



VERY GOOD. IN FACT, YOU'RE ALL RIGHT.

YOU SHOULDN'T PLAY ON THE SHORE BECAUSE IF THE WIND CHANGES DIRECTION — AND IT CAN, VERY QUICKLY — THE FOG TIDE CAN RISE AND YOU COULD GET INTO SERIOUS TROUBLE.

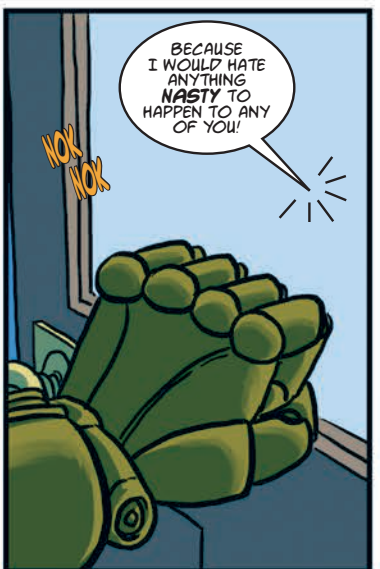


FINDPLAY'S GRANDDAD LOST HIS SHINS LIKE THAT! TIDE TOOK 'EM RIGHT OFF! COOKED 'EM LIKE HAMS!

THAT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, MISS? THAT HOW COMES YOU LOOK DIFFERENT?

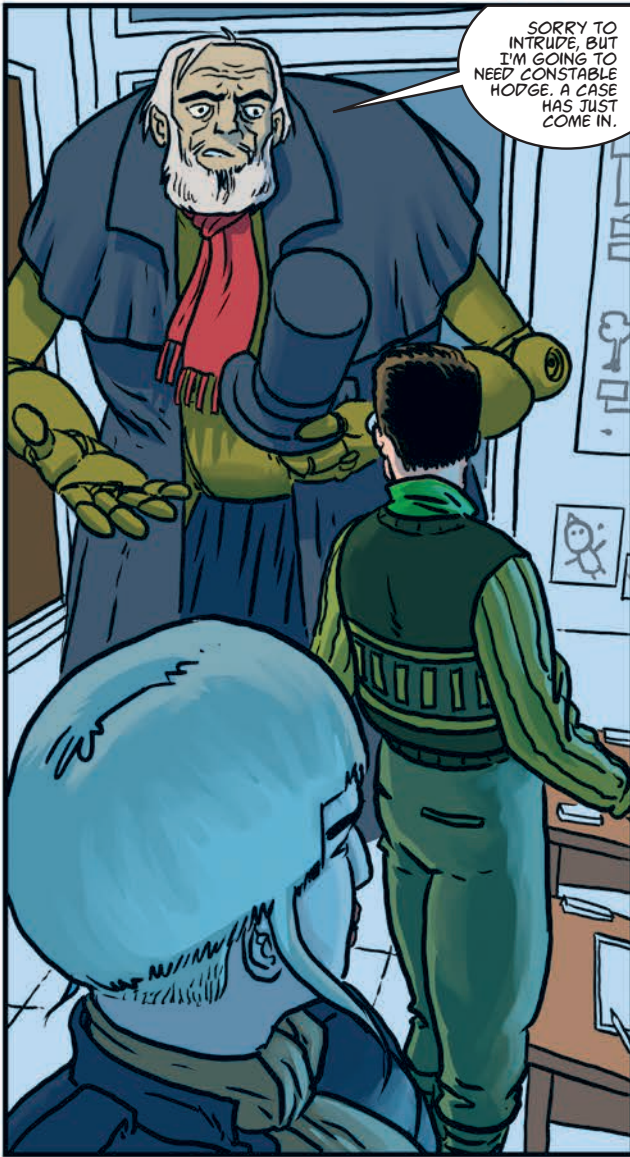


THAT'LL DO. **CONSTABLE HODGE** ISN'T HERE TO TALK ABOUT HERSELF BUT HOW TO KEEP YOURSELVES SAFE — AND I HOPE YOU WERE ALL LISTENING!



BECAUSE I WOULD HATE ANYTHING **NASTY** TO HAPPEN TO ANY OF YOU!

NOX NOX

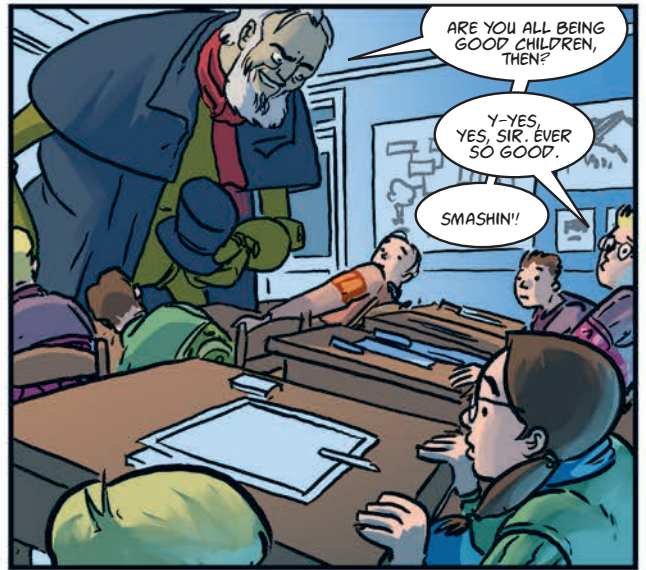


SORRY TO INTRUDE, BUT I'M GOING TO NEED CONSTABLE HODGE. A CASE HAS JUST COME IN.



I'M SORRY, EVERYONE. I'M AFRAID DUTY CALLS!

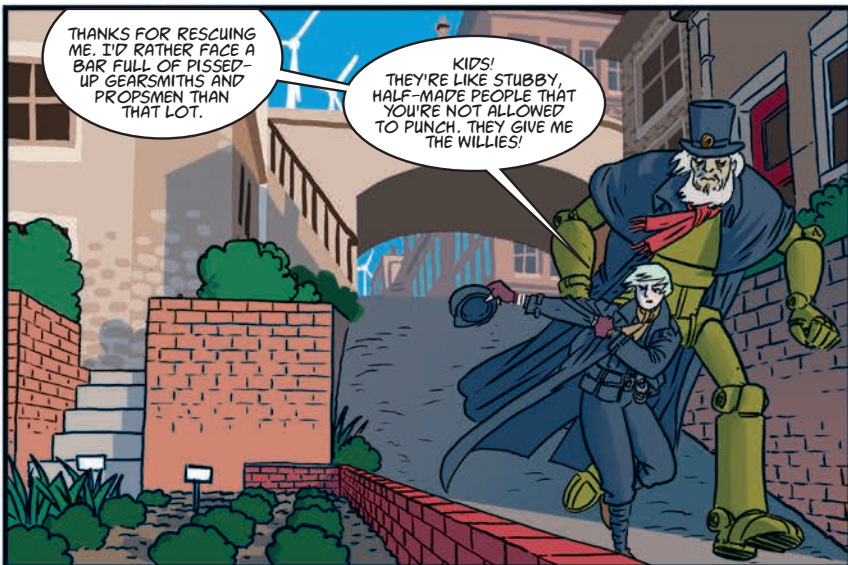
OF COURSE. THANK YOU FOR COMING. YOUR TALK WAS MOST INFORMATIVE.



ARE YOU ALL BEING GOOD CHILDREN, THEN?

Y-YES, YES, SIR. EVER SO GOOD.

SMASHIN'!



THANKS FOR RESCUING ME. I'D RATHER FACE A BAR FULL OF PISSED-UP GEARSMITHS AND PROPSMEN THAN THAT LOT.

KIDS! THEY'RE LIKE STUBBY, HALF-MADE PEOPLE THAT YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO PUNCH. THEY GIVE ME THE WILLIES!



WHEREAS I AM A PICTURE OF LOVELINESS!

BUT OF COURSE! SO WERE YOU FIBBING OR IS THERE REALLY A JOB ON?

THERE'S A JOB, ALL RIGHT, BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LIKE IT —



'IT'S A FLOATER.'

GENTLY NOW, LADS... STEADY... STEADY.



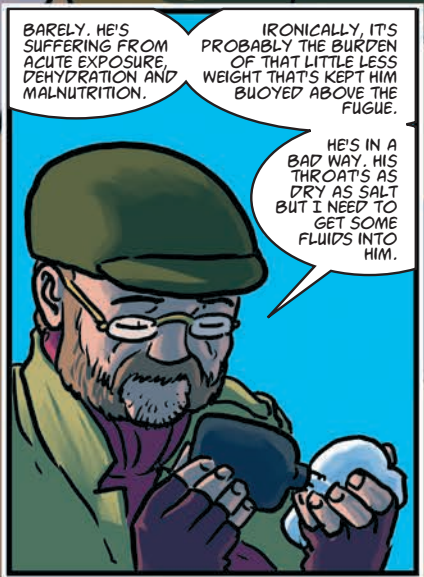
YOU SEE THE LIFE BELTS? THE NAME?

I DO. LET'S SEE HOW THIS GOES.



EASY DOES IT.

HE'S ALIVE?



BARELY. HE'S SUFFERING FROM ACUTE EXPOSURE, DEHYDRATION AND MALNUTRITION.

IRONICALLY, IT'S PROBABLY THE BURDEN OF THAT LITTLE LESS WEIGHT THAT'S KEPT HIM BUOYED ABOVE THE FUGUE.

HE'S IN A BAD WAY. HIS THROAT'S AS DRY AS SALT BUT I NEED TO GET SOME FLUIDS INTO HIM.



WILL HE MAKE IT?

TOO EARLY TO SAY —



CAHUUKI CAHUUKI!





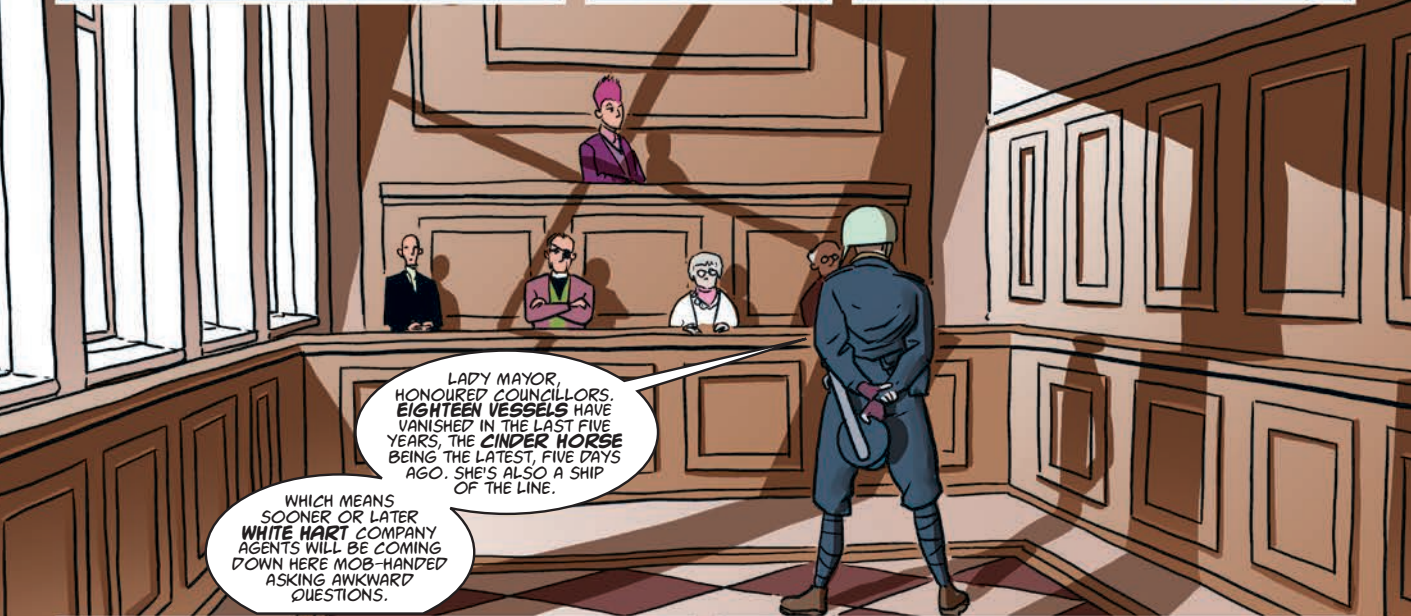
IT'S ALL RIGHT, SON. YOU'RE SAFE NOW. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED?

IT... IT CAME FROM B-BELOW... THE SHADOW...

THE SHADOW ON THE DEEP!



THE ANSWER, CONSTABLE HODGE, IS NO, AND THAT IS MY FINAL WORD.



LADY MAYOR, HONOURED COUNCILLORS. EIGHTEEN VESSELS HAVE VANISHED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, THE CINDER HORSE BEING THE LATEST, FIVE DAYS AGO. SHE'S ALSO A SHIP OF THE LINE.

WHICH MEANS SOONER OR LATER WHITE HART COMPANY AGENTS WILL BE COMING DOWN HERE MOB-HANDED ASKING AWKWARD QUESTIONS.



BUT IF WE TAKE THE INITIATIVE, PUT WORD OUT ON THE WIRE AND CONTACT THEM FIRST, WE CAN MANAGE THE SITUATION OUR WAY AND GET THROUGH THIS WITH NEXT TO NO BOTHER.

OR WE CAN SIMPLY DENY ALL KNOWLEDGE AND PLEAD IGNORANCE.



EXCEPT THERE'S THE SMALL MATTER OF THE MIDSHIPMAN... AND THE WITNESSES.

THE DOCTOR AND THE OTHERS KNOW WHAT IS AT STAKE. THEY WILL DO THEIR DUTY.

AS FOR THE MIDSHIPMAN, I UNDERSTAND THE POOR FELLOW MAY NOT EVEN MAKE IT THROUGH THE NIGHT.

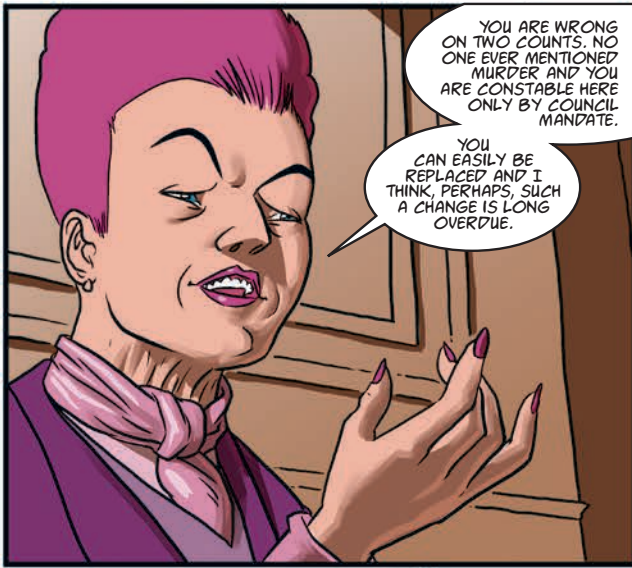


NO.  
PARDON?  
I SAID, NO!

I GREW UP IN THIS TOWN. I KNOW WE GIVE BERTH TO SMUGGLERS, THAT THE STOCK IN MOST OF THE SHOPS IS CONTRABAND, THAT WE THRIVE ON ILLEGALITY.

I TURN A BLIND EYE BECAUSE TIMES ARE HARD, TAXES HIGH, AND I DON'T WANT FAMILIES HERE TO SUFFER.

BUT I AM THE LAW AND I WILL NOT SEE A MAN MURDERED. JUST SO YOU CAN KEEP YOUR POCKETS LINED.



YOU ARE WRONG ON TWO COUNTS. NO ONE EVER MENTIONED MURDER AND YOU ARE CONSTABLE HERE ONLY BY COUNCIL MANDATE.

YOU CAN EASILY BE REPLACED AND I THINK, PERHAPS, SUCH A CHANGE IS LONG OVERDUE.

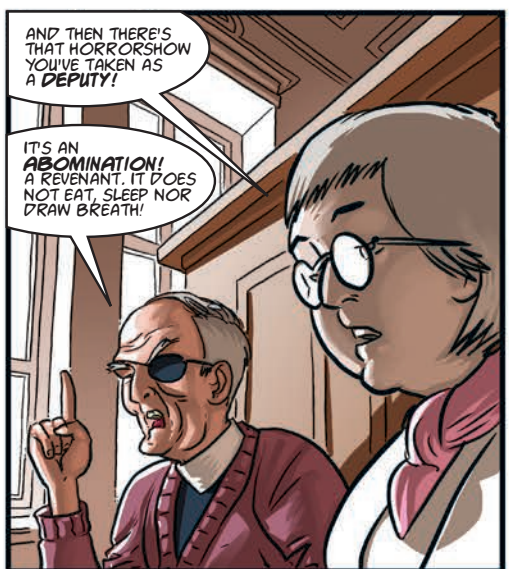


HODGES HAVE BEEN CONSTABLES HERE FOR TEN GENERATIONS! MY FAMILY HAVE KEPT THE PEACE SINCE THIS TOWN WAS FOUNDED!



'YOUR' FAMILY? THERE IS A REASON WHY YOUR FATHER CALLED YOU **FOUNDLING HODGE**. JONAS HODGE WAS A GOOD MAN WITH A NOBLE IF WEAK HEART.

YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE SOMETHING ELSE. AND SINCE YOUR FOSTER FATHER'S PASSING, MANY OF US FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH OUR SAFETY BEING ENTRUSTED TO, WELL... AN **OUTSIDER**.



AND THEN THERE'S THAT HORRORSHOW YOU'VE TAKEN AS A **DEPUTY!**

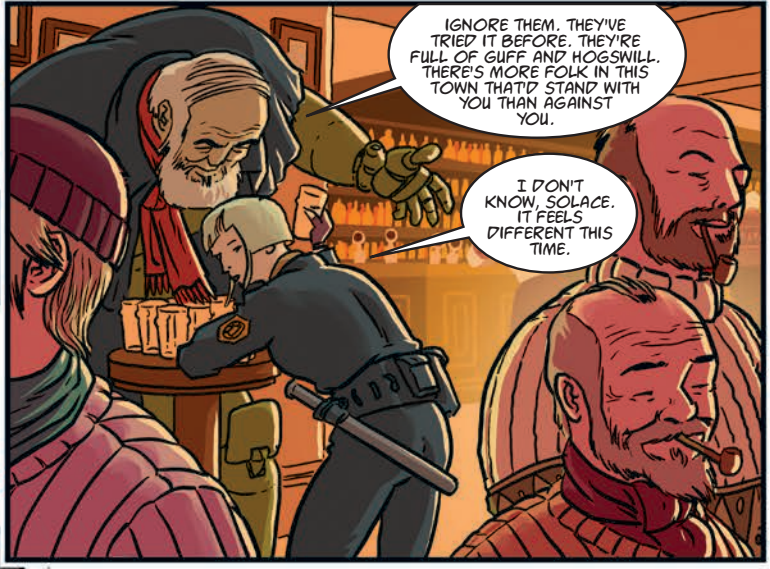
IT'S AN **ABOMINATION!** A REVENANT. IT DOES NOT EAT, SLEEP NOR DRAW BREATH!



FINE! YOU WANT **THIS** FIND SOMEONE WITH THE BALLS TO COME TAKE IT!

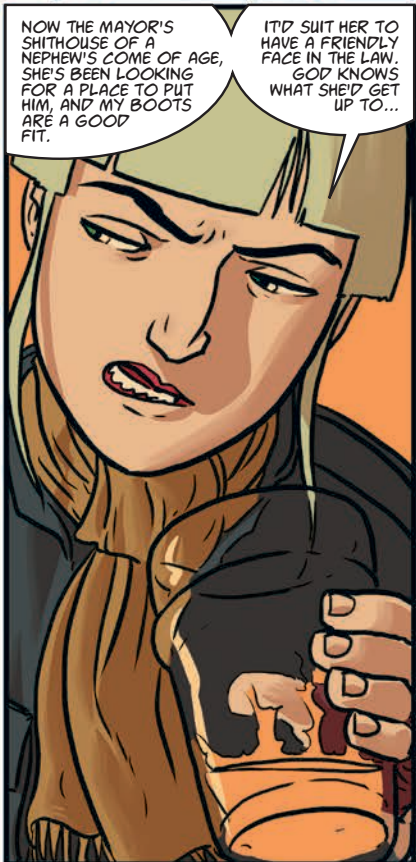


'I'LL BE IN MY OFFICE!'



IGNORE THEM. THEY'VE TRIED IT BEFORE. THEY'RE FULL OF GUFF AND HOGSWILL. THERE'S MORE FOLK IN THIS TOWN THAT'D STAND WITH YOU THAN AGAINST YOU.

I DON'T KNOW, SOLACE. IT FEELS DIFFERENT THIS TIME.



NOW THE MAYOR'S SHITHOUSE OF A NEPHEW'S COME OF AGE, SHE'S BEEN LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO PUT HIM, AND MY BOOTS ARE A GOOD FIT.

IT'D SUIT HER TO HAVE A FRIENDLY FACE IN THE LAW. GOD KNOWS WHAT SHE'D GET UP TO...



CONSTABLE HODGE! CONSTABLE HODGE!

YES? WHAT IS IT?



THERE... THERE'S SOMETHIN' DOWN AT THE BEACH!

SUCH AS?

EYES! GLOWIN' EYES —

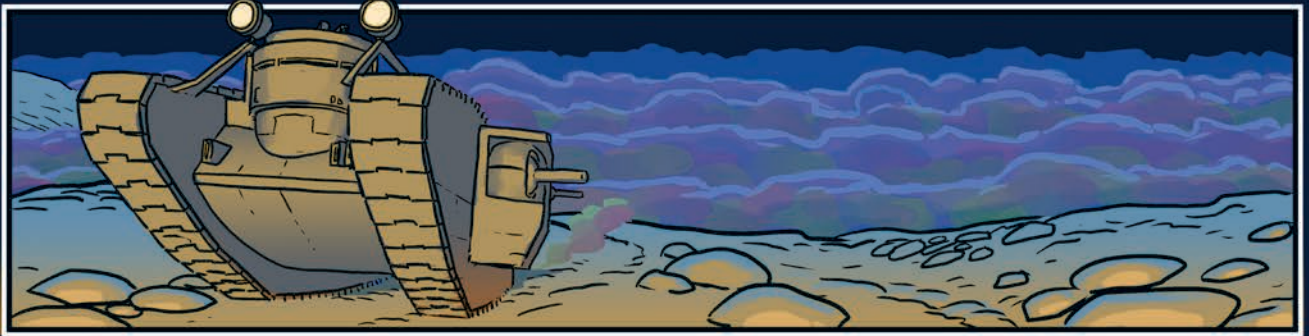


THERE'S A **BEAST** IN THE MORDANT DEEP!



ROUSE THE MILITIA! **ARM** THEM, HURRY!

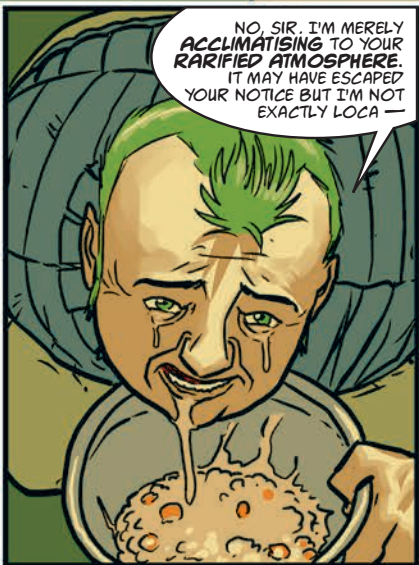
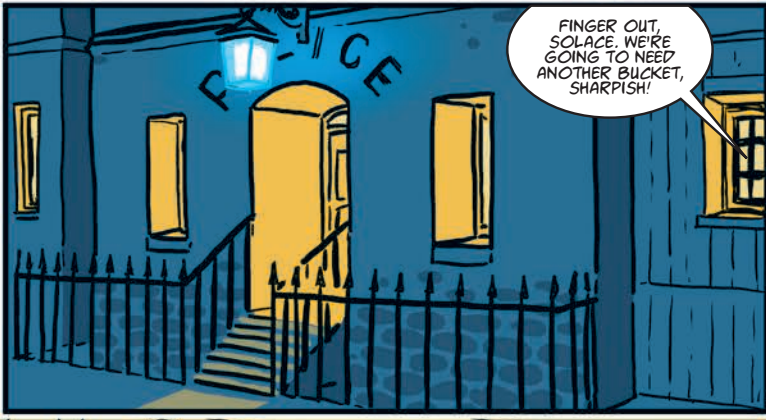
LOOK!

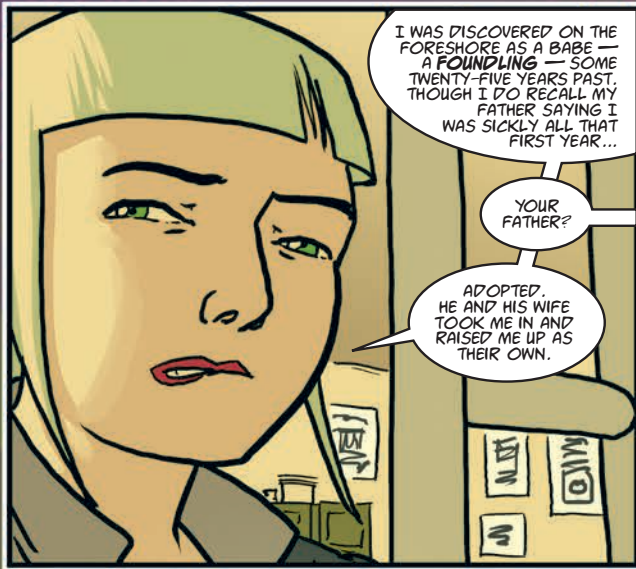


HELLO THERE! I'M SORRY IF WE GAVE YOU A FRIGHT!

MY NAME IS **PROFESSOR PONTIUS BLOOM**.  
I WONDER IF YOU WOULD BE SO KIND AS TO TAKE ME TO YOUR **LEADER!**







I WAS DISCOVERED ON THE FORESHORE AS A BABE — A **FOUNDLING** — SOME TWENTY-FIVE YEARS PAST, THOUGH I DO RECALL MY FATHER SAYING I WAS SICKLY ALL THAT FIRST YEAR...

YOUR FATHER?

ADOPTED. HE AND HIS WIFE TOOK ME IN AND RAISED ME UP AS THEIR OWN.



AH THAT EXPLAINS YOUR PALLOR.

MEANING?

OUR HOME IS BENEATH WHAT I BELIEVE YOU CALL THE **POISON BELT**.



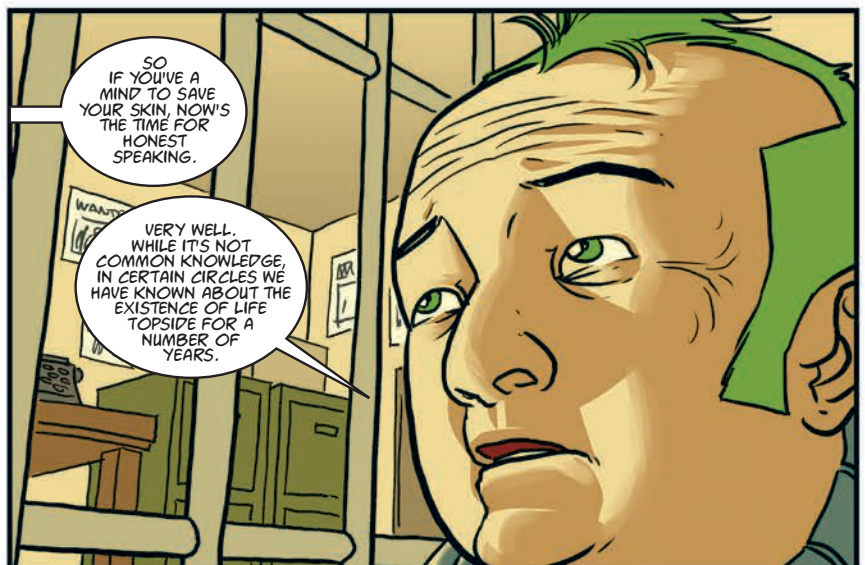
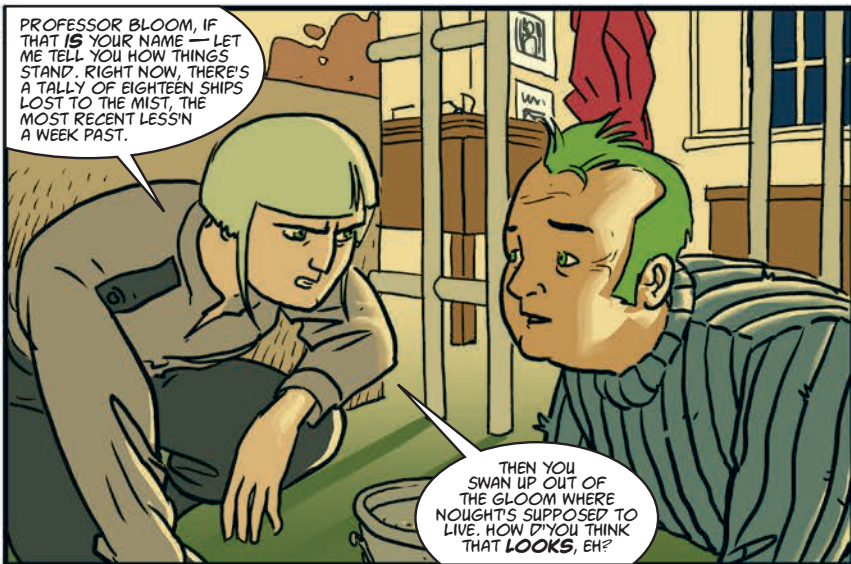
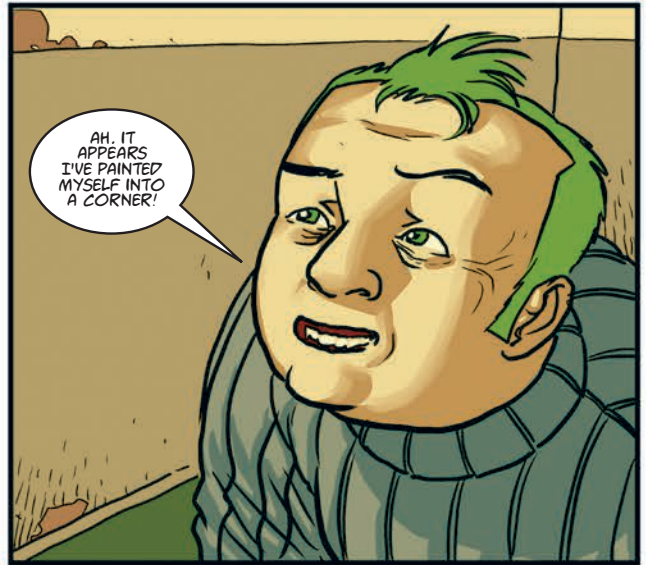
YOUR DISTANT FOREBEARS TOO SURVIVED THE **GREAT WAR** BUT, WHETHER THROUGH CHOICE OR CIRCUMSTANCE, ELECTED TO REMAIN BELOW WHEN THE LETHAL TIDE ROSE.

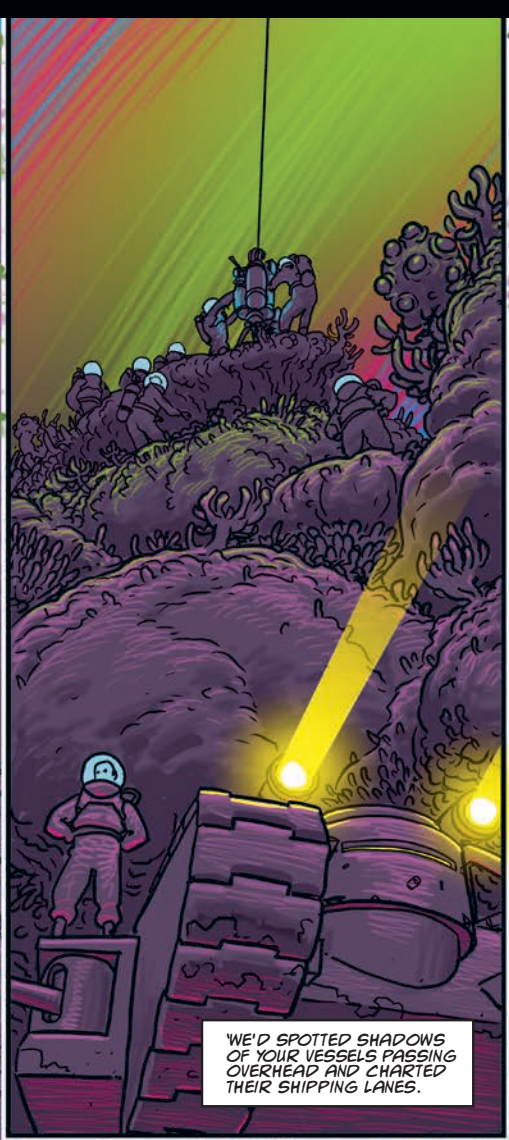
OUR CITIES ARE GREAT TERRARIUMS OF METAL AND GLASS. WE ARE OBLIGED TO RECYCLE MUCH OF WHAT WE NEED, ERGO THE AIR IS A UNIQUE MIX OF COMPOUNDS, EXPOSURE TO WHICH DISCOLOURS THE SKIN AND HAIR!



WITH YOUR PROLONGED ABSENCE FROM IT, YOUR COLOUR HAS QUITE NATURALLY FADED.

BUT ARE YOU NOT **PUZZLED** BY YOUR ORIGINS? TO ABANDON A CHILD SO SMACKS OF... PURSUIT, DESPERATION... **INTRIGUE**.

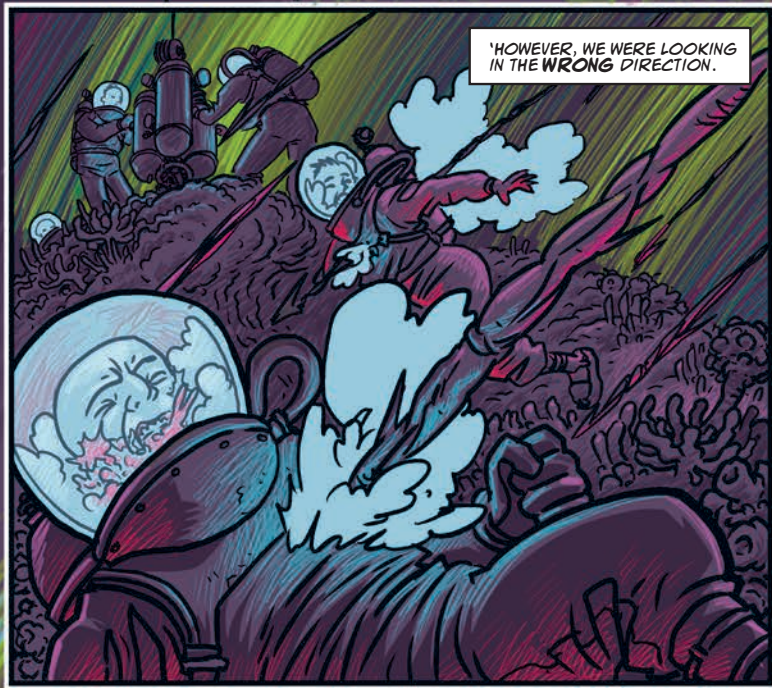




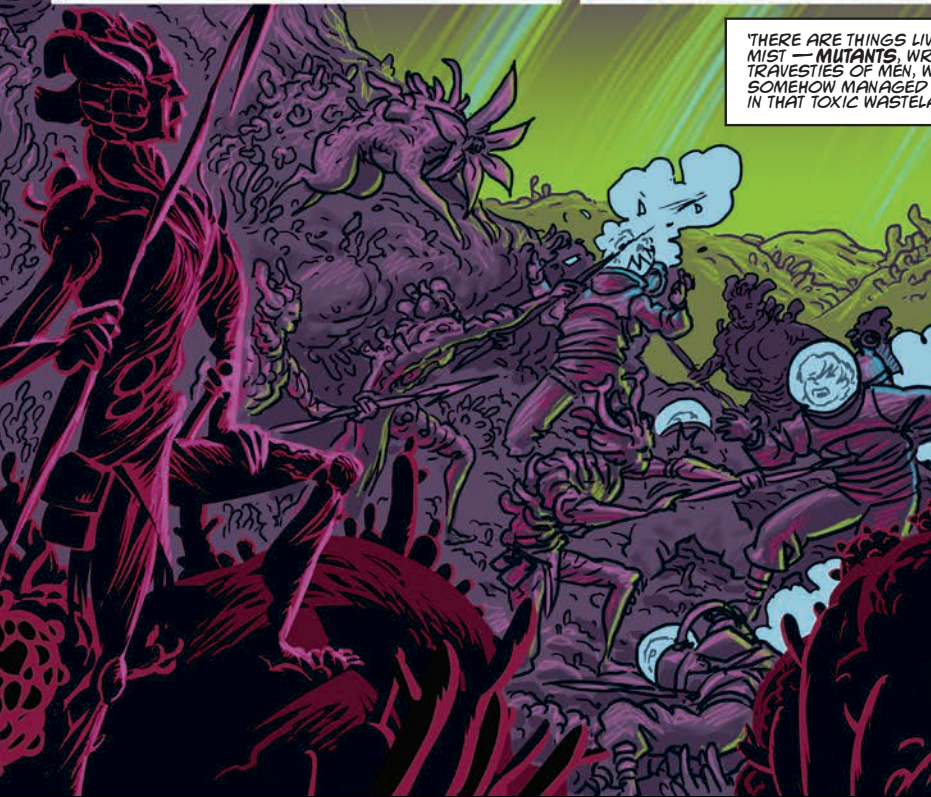
'WE'D SPOTTED SHADOWS OF YOUR VESSELS PASSING OVERHEAD AND CHARTED THEIR SHIPPING LANES.'



'WE LISTENED IN ON YOUR TELEGRAPHIC TRANSMISSIONS TO DETERMINE IF YOU WERE THE ENEMY OF OLD.'



'HOWEVER, WE WERE LOOKING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.'



'THERE ARE THINGS LIVING IN THE MIST — MUTANTS, WRETCHED TRAVESTIES OF MEN, WHO HAVE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO SURVIVE IN THAT TOXIC WASTELAND.'

'THEY ARE SLY, SAVAGE, AND IN POSSESSION OF AN INNATE FERAL CUNNING.'

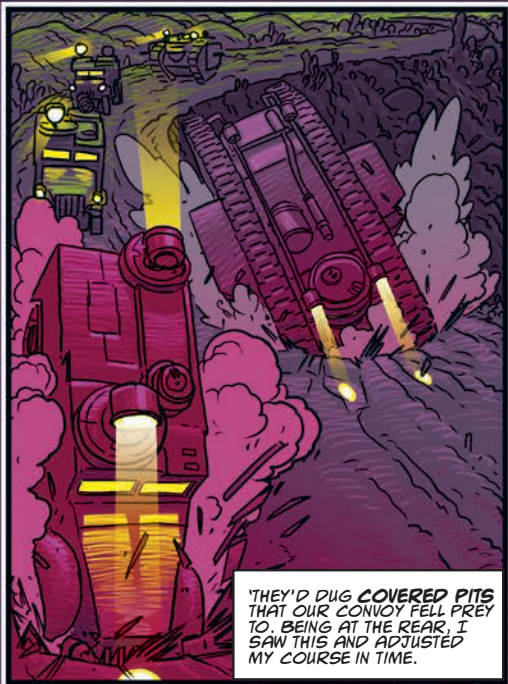


I WAS PART OF A LAND TRAIN HEADING FROM INGHAM TO SWANS SEA WHEN WE WERE ATTACKED.

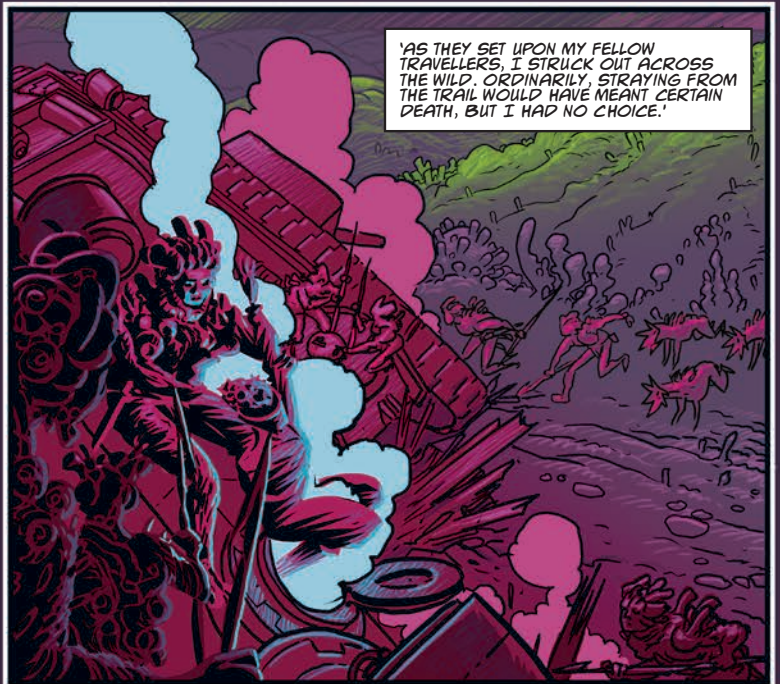
THOSE IRONCLADS LOOK TOUGH NUTS T'CRACK.

INDEED, BUT AS I SAID, THEY'RE CLEVER.





'THEY'D DUG COVERED PITS THAT OUR CONVOY FELL PREY TO. BEING AT THE REAR, I SAW THIS AND ADJUSTED MY COURSE IN TIME.



'AS THEY SET UPON MY FELLOW TRAVELLERS, I STRUCK OUT ACROSS THE WILD. ORDINARILY, STRAYING FROM THE TRAIL WOULD HAVE MEANT CERTAIN DEATH, BUT I HAD NO CHOICE.'



I KNEW THEY'D COME AFTER ME EVENTUALLY, SO I RISKED ALL AND BEACHED MYSELF UPON YOUR SHORE AND YOUR MERCY.

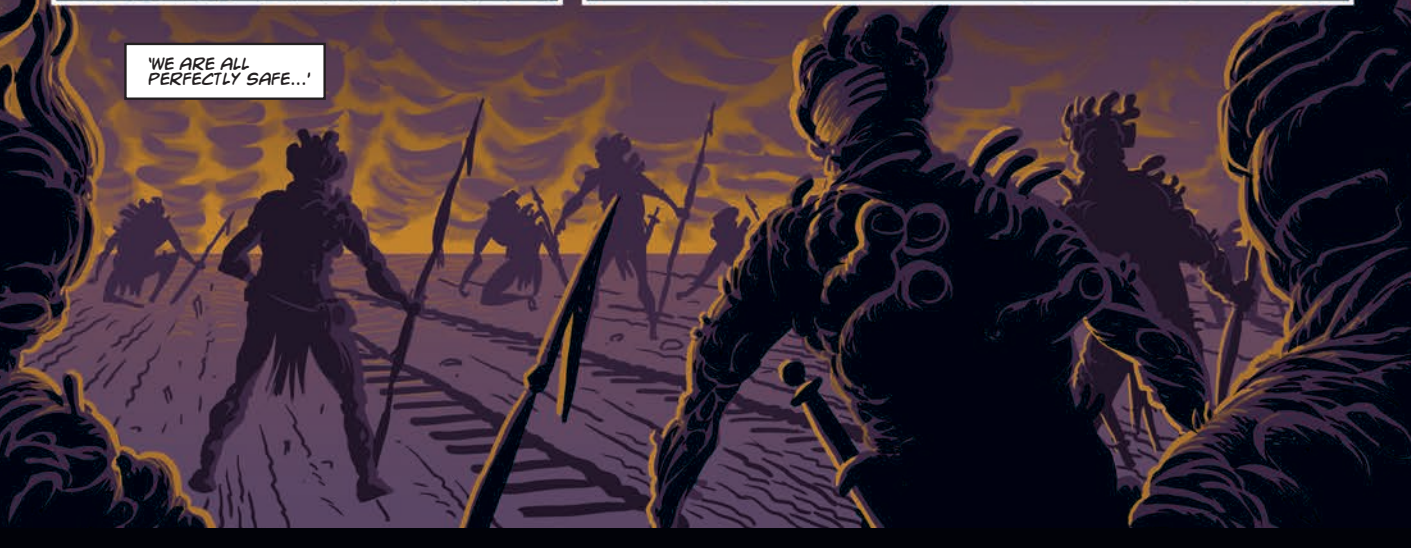
WAIT... SO YOU'VE LED THEM HERE?

PLEASE, REST ASSURED. EVEN IF THEY DID FOLLOW, THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR.



'JUST AS WE CANNOT SURVIVE BELOW THE MIST UNAIDED, SO THEY CANNOT ABOVE IT.'

'WE ARE ALL PERFECTLY SAFE...'



'LORD MAYOR!'



LORD MAYOR, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU!

I'VE A BUSY DAY, CONSTABLE. YOU WILL HAVE TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH MY CLERK, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.



MARGARET, IT'S URGENT.



WELL THEN, IT WOULD SEEM THAT **SYNCHRONICITY** IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY, FOR I HAVE SOMETHING I WISH TO DISCUSS WITH YOU ALSO.



BUT NOT ON THE STAIRS LIKE SCULLERY MAIDS, HM?

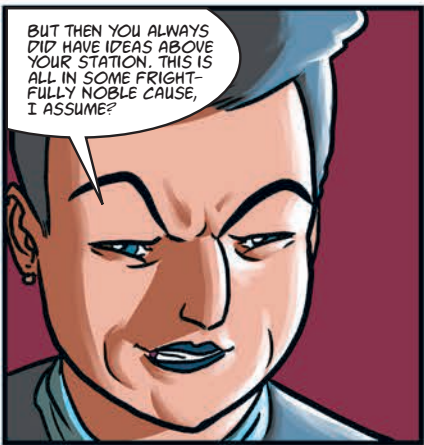


'I SUSPECT THIS IS SOMETHING BEST KEPT BEHIND CLOSED DOORS...'

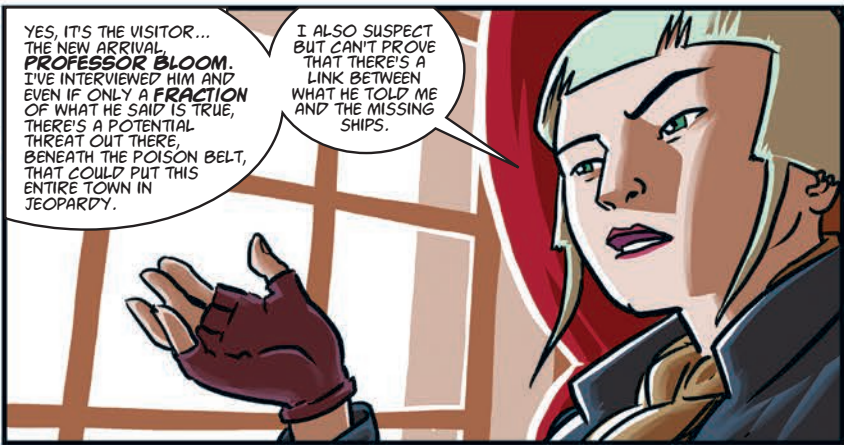
NOW, WHAT IS IT THAT TROUBLES YOU TODAY, CONSTABLE?

WE MUST CONTACT COMMONWEALTH COMMAND IMMEDIATELY.

IS THAT SO? FIRST THE WHITE HART LINE AND NOW THE COMMONWEALTH ITSELF! YOU DO LIKE TO RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE GREAT AND THE GOOD.



BUT THEN YOU ALWAYS DID HAVE IDEAS ABOVE YOUR STATION. THIS IS ALL IN SOME FRIGHTFULLY NOBLE CAUSE, I ASSUME?



YES, IT'S THE VISITOR... THE NEW ARRIVAL, **PROFESSOR BLOOM**. I'VE INTERVIEWED HIM AND EVEN IF ONLY A FRACTION OF WHAT HE SAID IS TRUE, THERE'S A POTENTIAL THREAT OUT THERE, BENEATH THE POISON BELT, THAT COULD PUT THIS ENTIRE TOWN IN JEOPARDY.

I ALSO SUSPECT BUT CAN'T PROVE THAT THERE'S A LINK BETWEEN WHAT HE TOLD ME AND THE MISSING SHIPS.



THING IS, I DON'T HAVE THE **RESOURCES** TO HANDLE SOMETHING LIKE THIS. I'M JUST A LOCAL COPPER.

I AM SO GLAD YOU SAID THAT. IT TAKES A RARE INDIVIDUAL TO ADMIT TO THEIR WEAKNESSES.



WHICH IS WHY I AM **DISMISSING** YOU FROM YOUR OFFICE FORTHWITH AND REASSIGNING THE ROLE OF STEWARD CONSTABLE TO SOMEONE MORE... CAPABLE.

WHAT?





AS I SAID THE OTHER DAY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH A **NON-LOCAL** LIKE YOURSELF HOLDING SUCH A POWERFUL POSITION IN OUR COMMUNITY... TO SAY NOTHING OF THAT **MONSTROSITY** YOU TOOK AS A DEPUTY.

AND NOW THIS 'FOREIGNER' WASHES UP ON OUR SHORES... ONE WITH WHOM, IT MUST BE SAID, YOU SHARE A STRIKING **VIRIDIAN** SIMILARITY. WELL, IT UNNERVES PEOPLE. THEY DON'T KNOW WHOM TO **TRUST**.



LOOK, THIS IS ALL HORSESHIT AND WE BOTH KNOW IT. GIVE MY JOB TO YOUR NEPHEW OR WHOEVER THE HELL YOU WANT, BUT FOR GOD'S SAKE, MARGARET, CONTACT THE COMMONWEALTH!

THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON, I CAN FEEL IT. NEITHER OF US CAN STAND THE SIGHT OF THE OTHER BUT ONE THING WE HAVE IN COMMON IS HOW WE FEEL ABOUT THIS TOWN. WE WANT TO KEEP IT **SAFE**. DO IT FOR **THEM**, PLEASE!



I'LL BE SURE TO PASS YOUR CONCERNS ALONG TO YOUR REPLACEMENT.

NOW IF YOU DON'T MIND, I **AM** RATHER BUSY AND I IMAGINE YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF PACKING TO DO...



'... NOT TO MENTION FINDING ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION.'

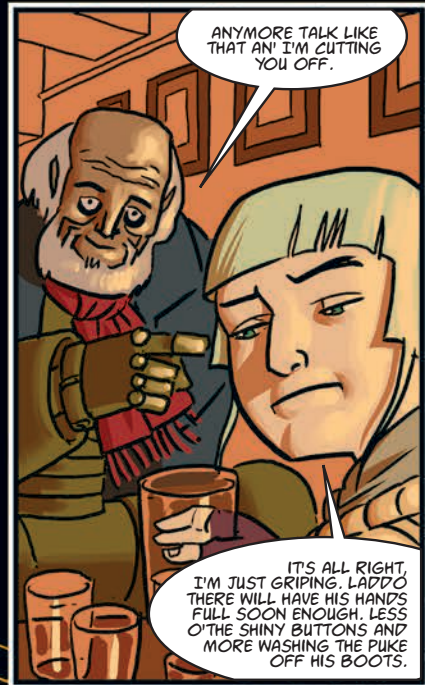


LOOK AT HIM! THE LITTLE PRICK-TURD! LET'S SEE HOW HE DEALS WITH A SHITLOAD OF BOOZED-UP BARGEES COME KICKIN' OUT TIME!



GO EASY ON THE LAD. HE CAN'T HELP HIS BLOOD.

WAY I'M FEELIN', I'D LIKE TO LET OUT SOME O'THE REDZ THAT'S IN HIM!



ANYMORE TALK LIKE THAT AN' I'M CUTTING YOU OFF.

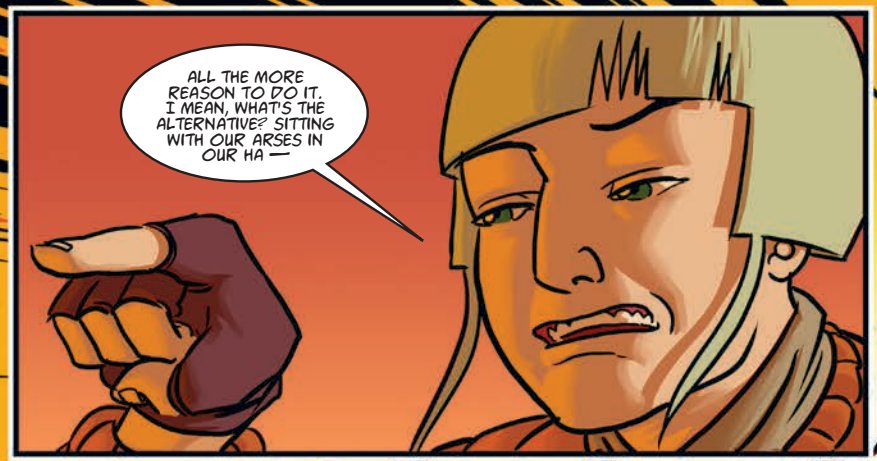
IT'S ALL RIGHT, I'M JUST GRIPING. LADD'O THERE WILL HAVE HIS HANDS FULL SOON ENOUGH. LESS O'THE SHINY BUTTONS AND MORE WASHING THE PUKE OFF HIS BOOTS.



SO WHAT'S TO BE DONE, THEN? WHAT'S OUR NEXT PLAY?

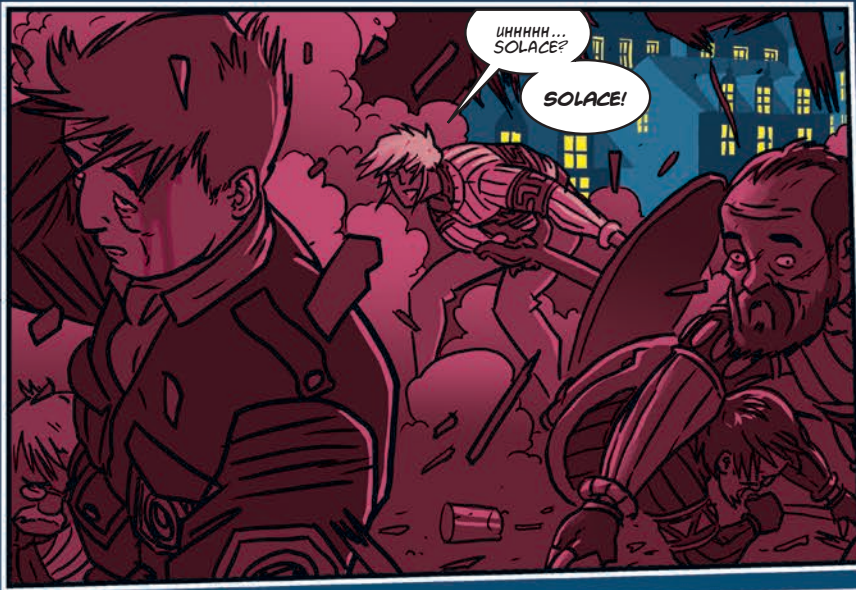
I THOUGHT I MIGHT NIP UP TELEGRAPH HILL FLASH OLD NATHAN DUCK MY TITS AND GET HIM TO PUT A WORD OUT ON THE WIRE TO THE COMMONWEALTH.

THAT'LL PISS IN THE MAYOR'S POCKET SOMETHIN' ROYAL!



ALL THE MORE REASON TO DO IT. I MEAN, WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE? SITTING WITH OUR ARSES IN OUR HA —





UHNNH...  
SOLACE?  
SOLACE!



I'M  
HERE! I'M  
GOOD!



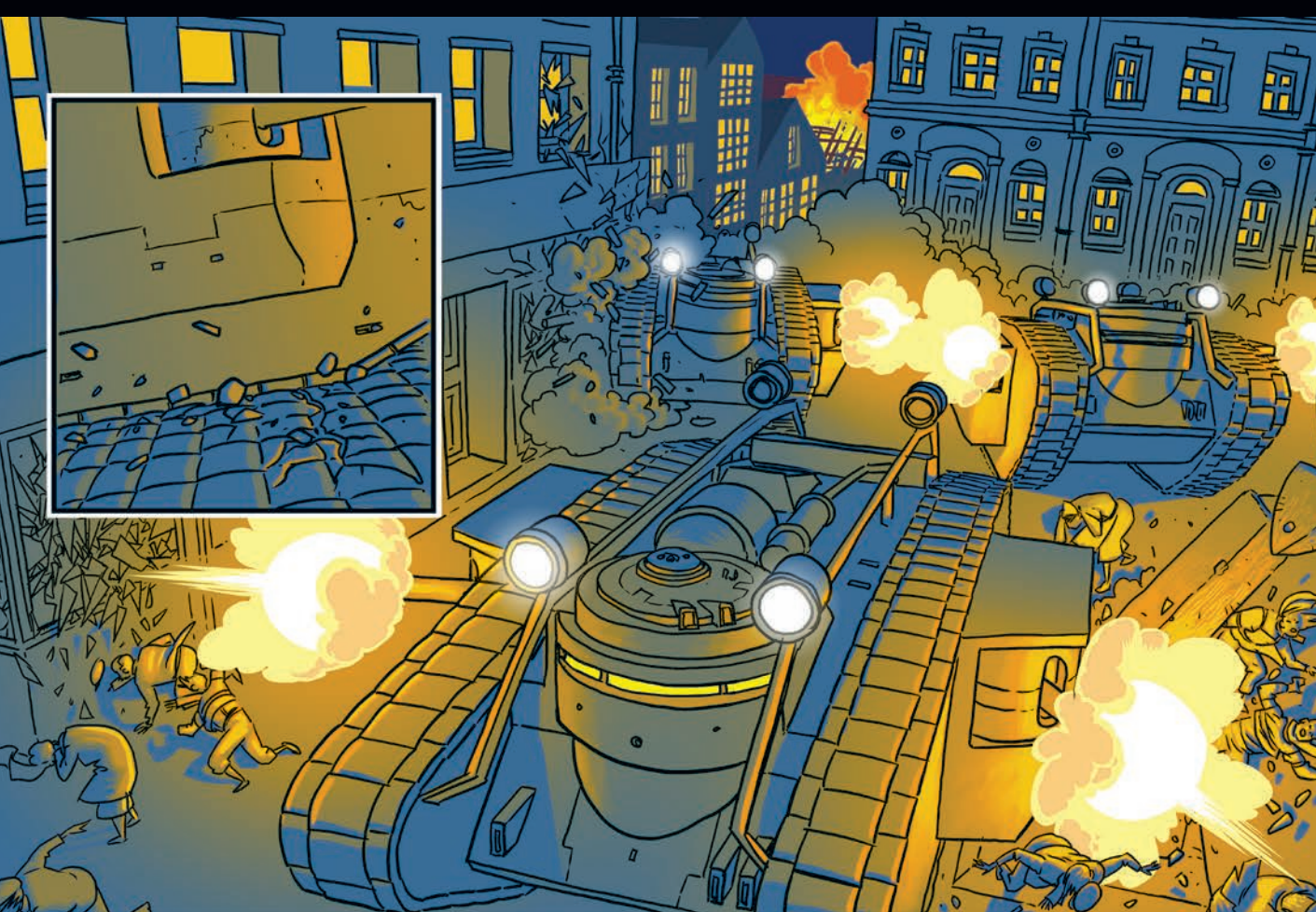
WHAT  
IN BLAZIN'  
BUGGERY IS  
GOIN' ON?

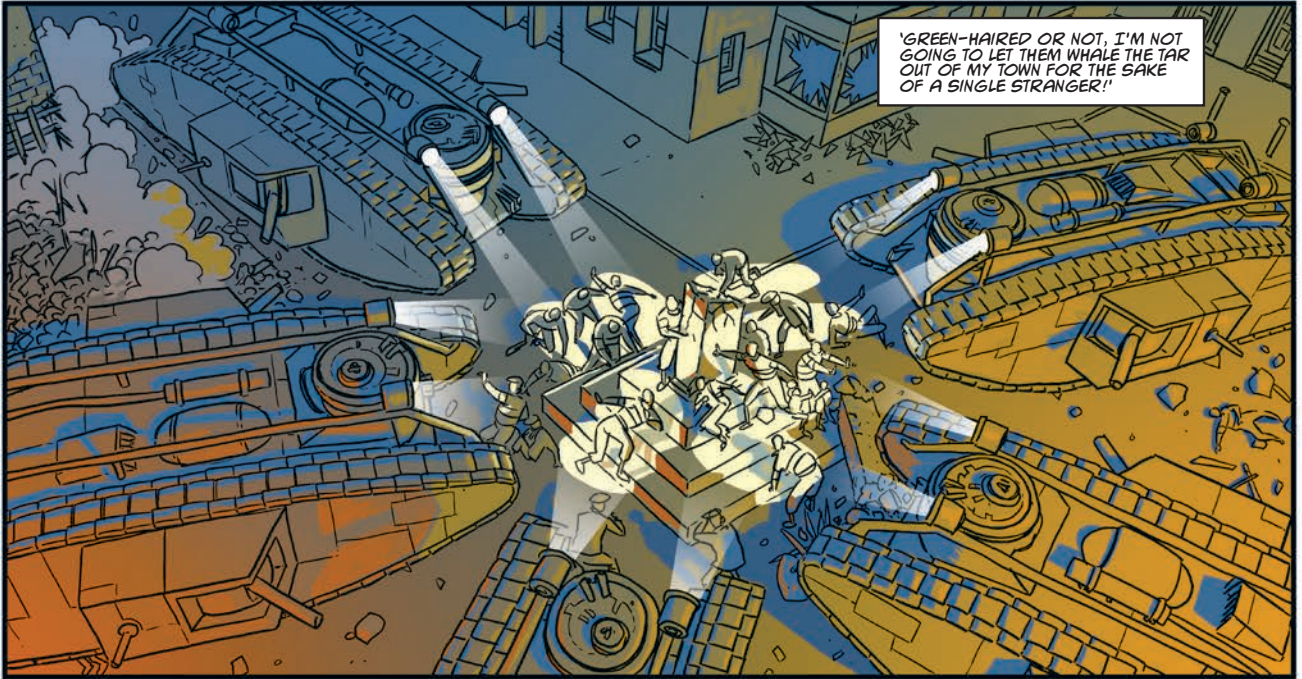


REMEMBER  
ME SAYING  
THAT THERE WAS  
TROUBLE  
COMING?

'LOOKS LIKE IT'S ARRIVED!'







'GREEN-HAIRED OR NOT, I'M NOT GOING TO LET THEM WHALE THE TAR OUT OF MY TOWN FOR THE SAKE OF A SINGLE STRANGER!'



WHERE IS HE?'





**BAM BAM BAM**

W-WHO IS IT?



FOUNDLING HODGE!



WHAT DO YOU WANT?



FOR YOU TO GET YOUR ARSE OUT HERE! AS STEWARD CONSTABLE YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR MARSHALLING THE MILITIA IN DEFENCE OF THE TOWN!



I... I CAN'T! I'VE GOT A GYPPY TUMMY AND... AND A BAD LEG! YES, I'M LIMPING SOMETHING AWFUL!



THEN GIVE ME BLOOM. I'LL HAND HIM OVER AND MAYBE THEY'LL BE ON THEIR WAY.



WHAT DID SHE JUST SAY?



JAGO, I KNOW YOU'RE SCARED. IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S A SCARY SITUATION. BUT WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING, AND RIGHT NOW!



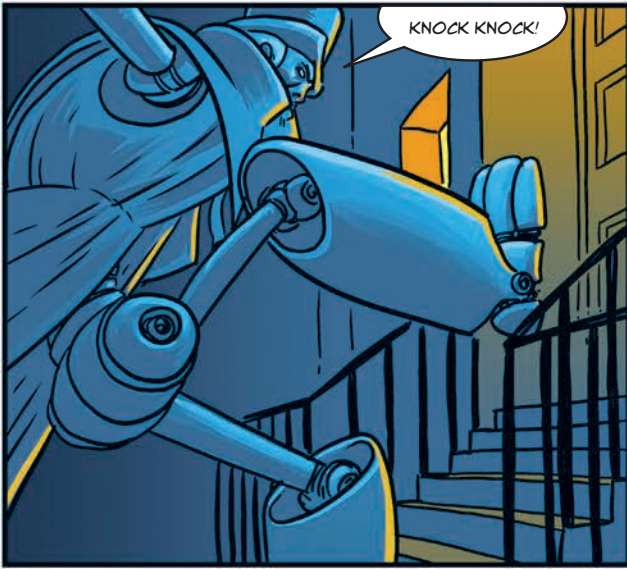
I... I DON'T KNOW. I'D NEED TO CHECK WITH AUNTIE MARGARET...

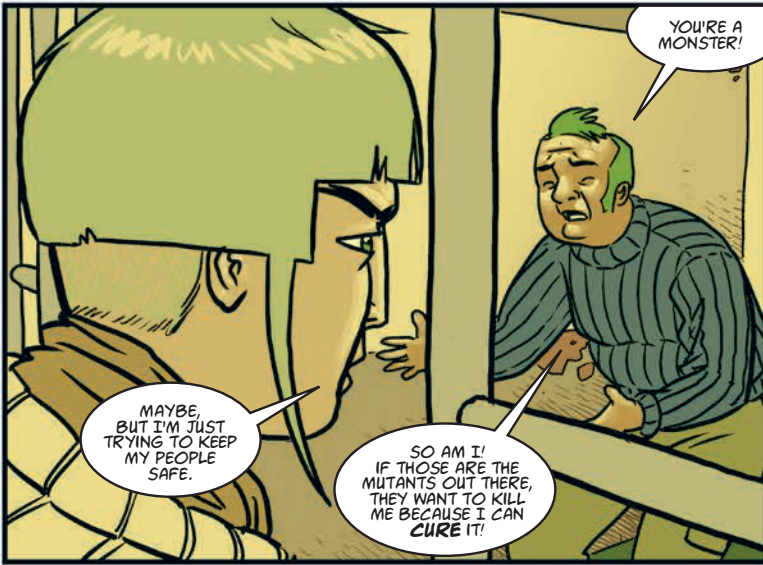


OH, FOR FU—

SOL BOOT IT!

IT'D BE MY PLEASURE!





YOU'RE A MONSTER!

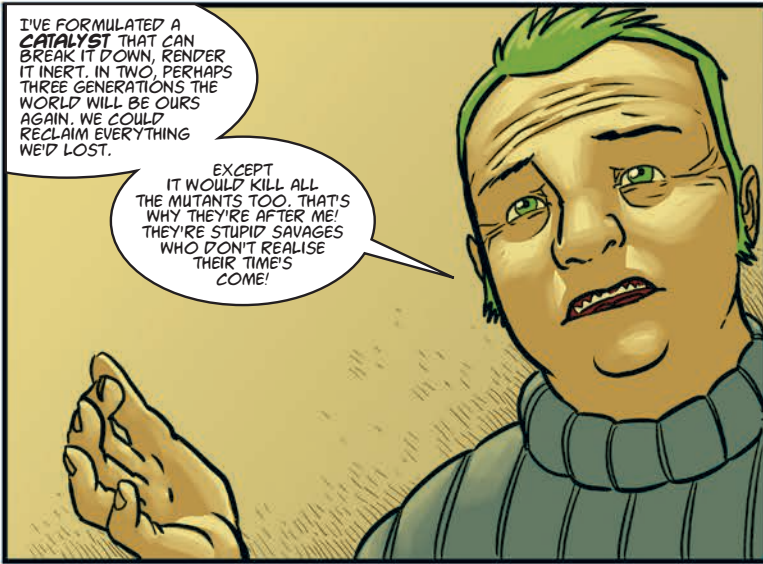
MAYBE, BUT I'M JUST TRYING TO KEEP MY PEOPLE SAFE.

SO AM I! IF THOSE ARE THE MUTANTS OUT THERE, THEY WANT TO KILL ME BECAUSE I CAN CURE IT!



CURE WHAT?

THE POISON BELT!



I'VE FORMULATED A CATALYST THAT CAN BREAK IT DOWN, RENDER IT INERT. IN TWO, PERHAPS THREE GENERATIONS THE WORLD WILL BE OURS AGAIN. WE COULD RECLAIM EVERYTHING WE'D LOST.

EXCEPT IT WOULD KILL ALL THE MUTANTS TOO. THAT'S WHY THEY'RE AFTER ME! THEY'RE STUPID SAVAGES WHO DON'T REALISE THEIR TIME'S COME!



I DUNNO. THOSE STUPID SAVAGES ARE DRIVING AND FIRING IRONCLADS. I'D SAY THEY'RE PRETTY FAST LEARNERS.

SORRY, OLD SON, I'M STILL NOT SOLD.



I CAN PROVE IT! ALL MY NOTES ARE HIDDEN IN THE IRONCLAD I ARRIVED IN! LET ME SHOW YOU THEM!

AND PROVE WHAT?

THAT I'M RIGHT! SAVE ME AND YOU SAVE YOUR WORLD!

YOU CAN GIVE YOUR PEOPLE BACK THEIR PLANET INSTEAD OF A FUTURE GRUBBING AROUND ON HILLTOPS!



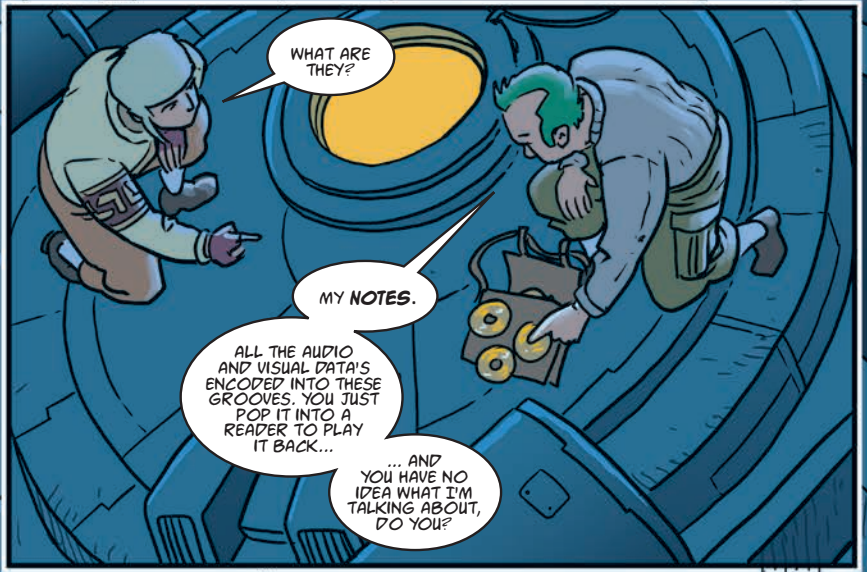
BUGGER!



TIME'S WASTING, PROF! GET YOUR FINGER OUT, THERE'S A LOVE!



GOT THEM!



WHAT ARE THEY?

MY NOTES.

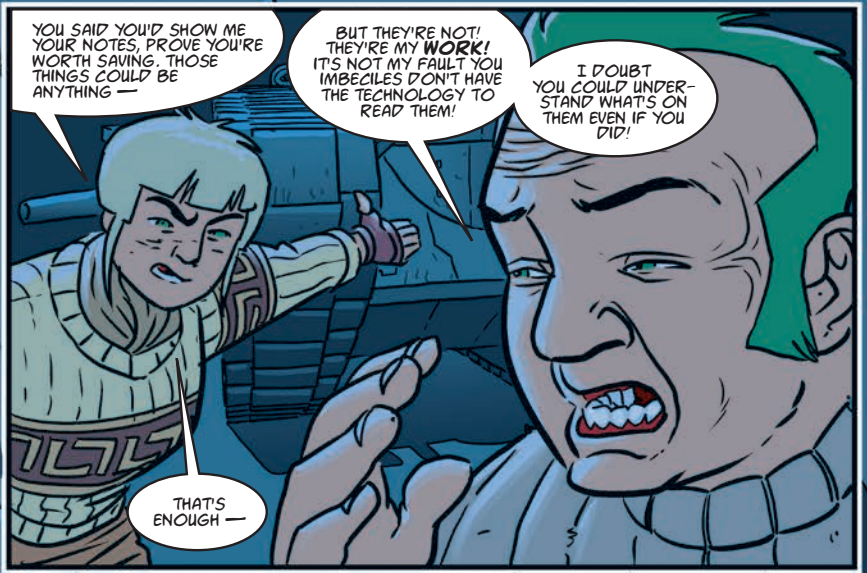
ALL THE AUDIO AND VISUAL DATA'S ENCODED INTO THESE GROOVES. YOU JUST POP IT INTO A READER TO PLAY IT BACK...

... AND YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT, DO YOU?



OKAY, THAT'S IT. I'M LETTING THEM HAVE YOU, SORRY, PROF.

NO! WAIT! WHAT'RE YOU DOING?



YOU SAID YOU'D SHOW ME YOUR NOTES, PROVE YOU'RE WORTH SAVING. THOSE THINGS COULD BE ANYTHING —

BUT THEY'RE NOT! THEY'RE MY WORK! IT'S NOT MY FAULT YOU IMBECILES DON'T HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY TO READ THEM!

I DOUBT YOU COULD UNDERSTAND WHAT'S ON THEM EVEN IF YOU DID!

THAT'S ENOUGH —

GET AWAY FROM ME!

YOU... YOU'RE JUST A BULLY, A THUG, LIKE ALL THE REST!



BOSS, WHATEVER YOU'RE GOIN' T'DO, BEST GET IT DONE SHARPISH. TROUBLE'S COMIN'.



LAST CHANCE. WHAT DO THEY WANT WITH YOU? THE TRUTH, MIND. CONVINCE ME.

I... I KILLED THEM. LOTS OF THEM.

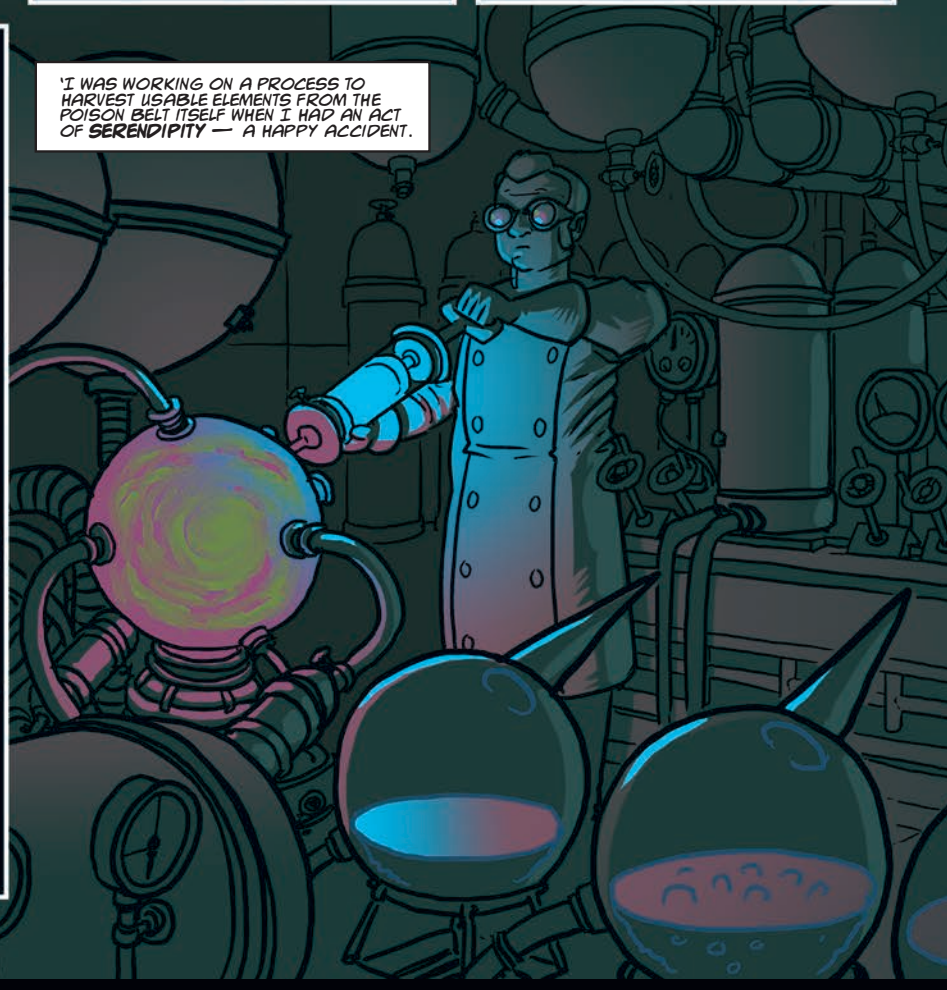
HUNDREDS... POSSIBLY THOUSANDS.

EXPLAIN.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE HERE BUT WHERE I COME FROM, RESOURCES ARE ALWAYS IN SHORT SUPPLY...

'I WAS WORKING ON A PROCESS TO HARVEST USABLE ELEMENTS FROM THE POISON BELT ITSELF WHEN I HAD AN ACT OF SERENDIPITY — A HAPPY ACCIDENT.



'I'D INADVERTENTLY CREATED A DETOXIFYING AGENT, A WAY TO NEUTRALISE THE DEADLY ELEMENTS AND PURIFY THE AIR. WELL, THE RAMIFICATIONS WERE OBVIOUS.

'MY GOVERNMENT — THE QUORUM — RUSHED TO TEST IT IN THE FIELD AND IT WORKED, BETTER THAN EXPECTED. IT CLEANSED AN AREA TEN TIMES THE ANTICIPATED SIZE.

'IT ALSO WIPED OUT A MUTANT VILLAGE. MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN... ALL SUFFOCATED AS THE VERY AIR TURNED AGAINST THEM.'

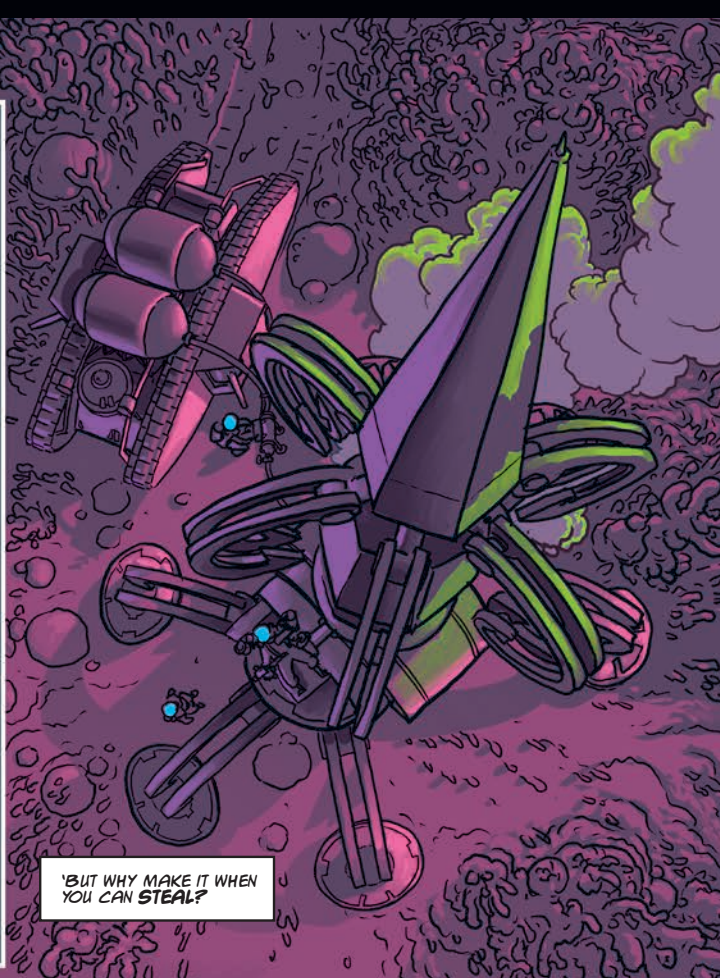
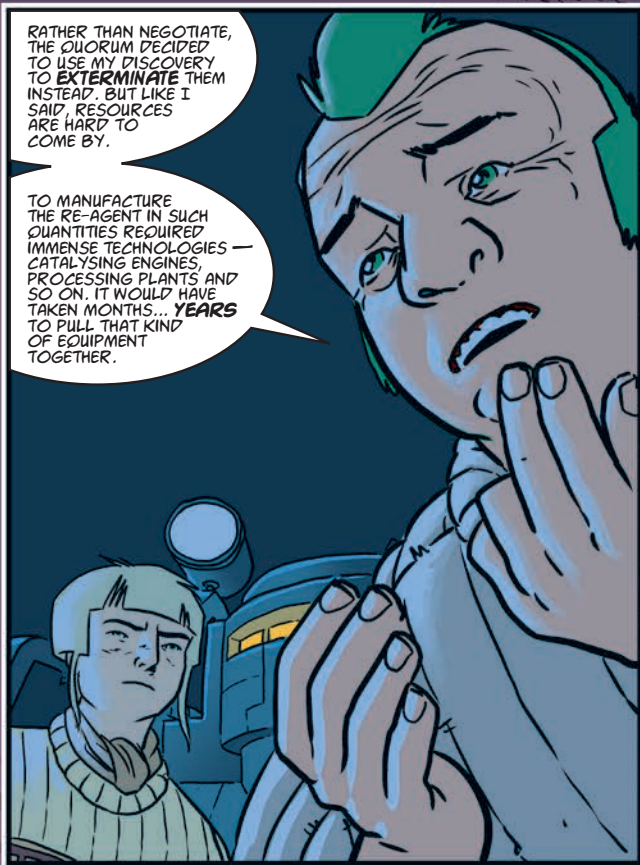
WE DIDN'T KNOW!  
HOW COULD WE?  
WE KNEW SO LITTLE ABOUT THEM,  
THOUGHT THEY EXISTED ONLY IN SMALL, NOMADIC TRIBES.

THAT WAS OUR SECOND ERROR.

'THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SURVIVORS, WHO SPREAD WORD OF THE ATROCITY... BECAUSE THEY CAME FOR US BY THE THOUSAND, SLAUGHTERING SETTLEMENTS IN REVENGE.'

RATHER THAN NEGOTIATE, THE QUORUM DECIDED TO USE MY DISCOVERY TO EXTERMINATE THEM INSTEAD. BUT LIKE I SAID, RESOURCES ARE HARD TO COME BY.

TO MANUFACTURE THE RE-AGENT IN SUCH QUANTITIES REQUIRED IMMENSE TECHNOLOGIES — CATALYSING ENGINES, PROCESSING PLANTS AND SO ON. IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN MONTHS... YEARS TO PULL THAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT TOGETHER.



'BUT WHY MAKE IT WHEN YOU CAN STEAL?'

'WE'D BEEN CHARTING YOUR SHIPPING LANES AND MONITORING YOUR TRANSMISSIONS FOR AGES, AND ALL IT SEEMS, WITH AN EYE TO PREY AND PLUNDER.'

'THE QUORUM HAD LONG BEEN DIVIDED ON THE NOTION — WE STILL KNEW SO LITTLE ABOUT YOU — BUT THE RISE OF THE MUTANTS FORCED THEIR HAND.'



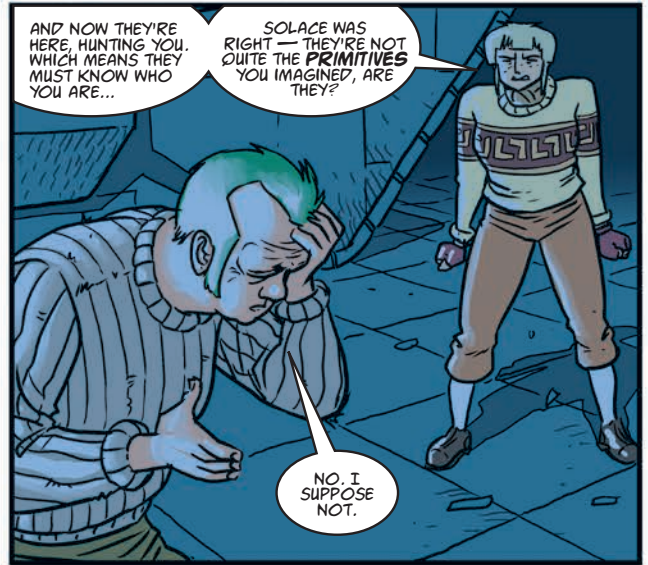
I COULDN'T BEAR IT. ALL THOSE DEATHS BECAUSE OF ME. WHEN ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS GIVE PEOPLE A CHANCE OF A NEW LIFE!

SO I RAN. I DESTROYED ALL MY RESEARCH BAR WHAT THERE IS HERE, AND RAN.





'I WASN'T PART OF A CONVOY. MY OWN PEOPLE WERE CHASING ME. THEY WOULD HAVE CAUGHT ME TOO IF THEY HADN'T FALLEN FOUL OF THOSE CREATURES.'



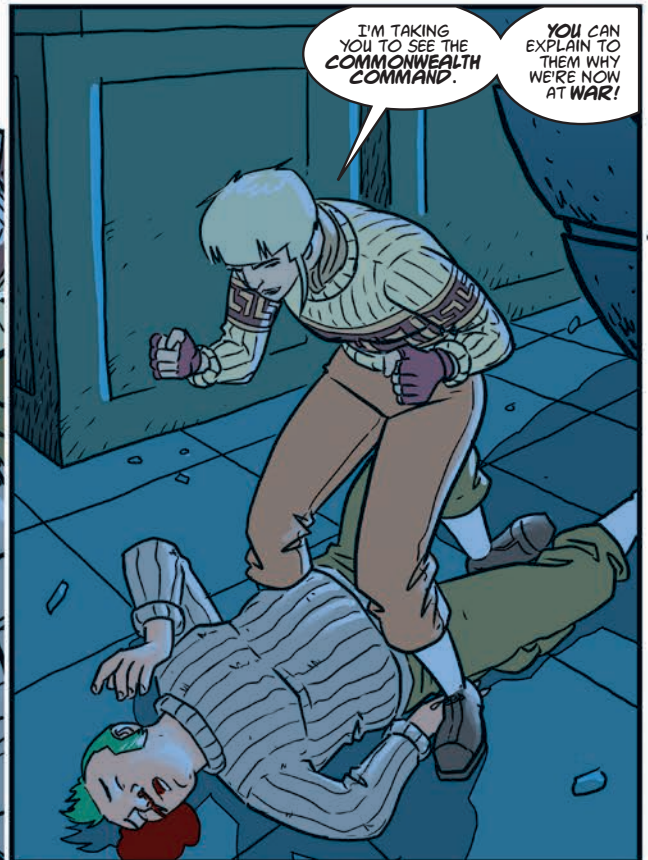
AND NOW THEY'RE HERE, HUNTING YOU. WHICH MEANS THEY MUST KNOW WHO YOU ARE...

SOLACE WAS RIGHT — THEY'RE NOT QUITE THE PRIMITIVES YOU IMAGINED, ARE THEY?

NO. I SUPPOSE NOT.



CONGRATULATIONS, PROFESSOR. YOU'VE EARNED YOURSELF A **RELIEVE**.



I'M TAKING YOU TO SEE THE **COMMONWEALTH COMMAND**.

YOU CAN EXPLAIN TO THEM WHY WE'RE NOW AT WAR!

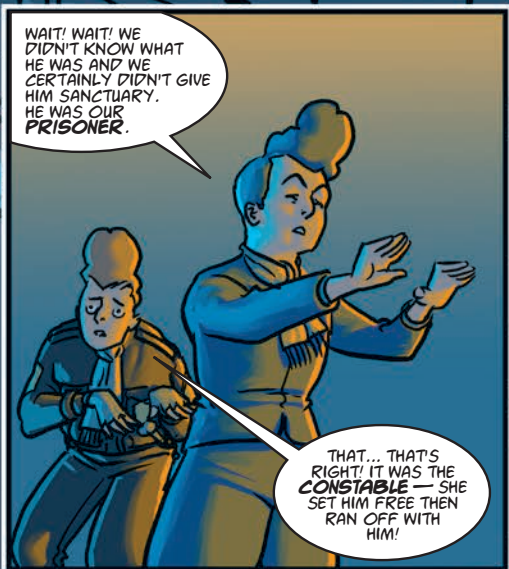




I AM NOT A MONSTER. I AM NOT THE ENEMY HERE.

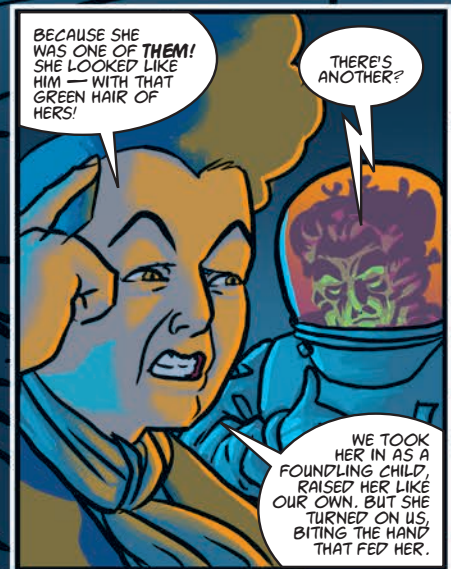


YOU GAVE SANCTUARY TO A MASS MURDERER... LIKE ALL HIS KIND, THESE ARE THE CONSEQUENCES YOU MUST FACE FOR YOUR ACTIONS.



WAIT! WAIT! WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE WAS AND WE CERTAINLY DIDN'T GIVE HIM SANCTUARY. HE WAS OUR PRISONER.

THAT... THAT'S RIGHT! IT WAS THE **CONSTABLE** — SHE SET HIM FREE THEN RAN OFF WITH HIM!



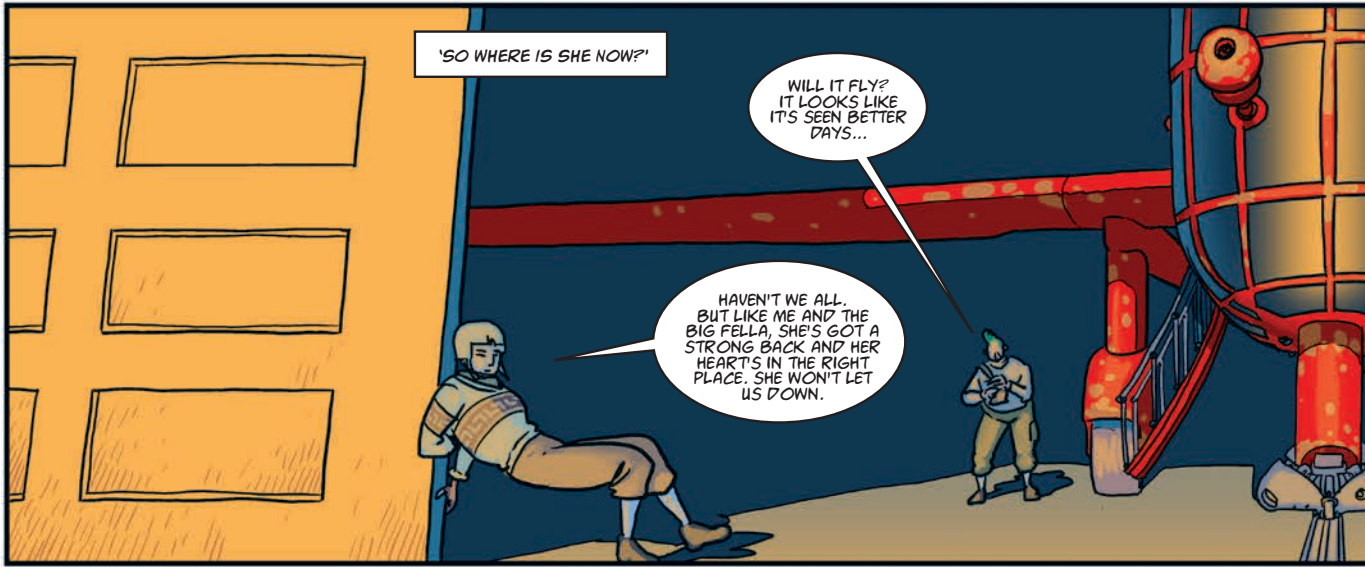
BECAUSE SHE WAS ONE OF **THEM!** SHE LOOKED LIKE HIM — WITH THAT GREEN HAIR OF HERS!

THERE'S ANOTHER?

WE TOOK HER IN AS A FOUNDLING CHILD, RAISED HER LIKE OUR OWN. BUT SHE TURNED ON US, BITING THE HAND THAT FED HER.



THIS IS AN ISLAND, THERE IS **NOWHERE** FOR HER TO RUN.



'SO WHERE IS SHE NOW?'

WILL IT FLY?  
IT LOOKS LIKE  
IT'S SEEN BETTER  
DAYS...

HAVEN'T WE ALL,  
BUT LIKE ME AND THE  
BIG FELLA, SHE'S GOT A  
STRONG BACK AND HER  
HEART'S IN THE RIGHT  
PLACE. SHE WON'T LET  
US D'OWN.



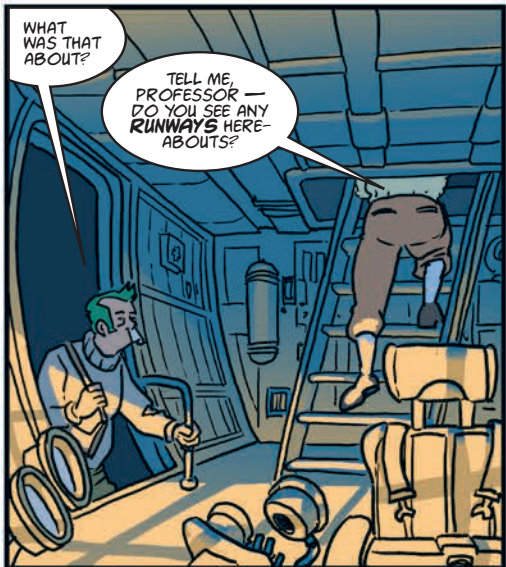
BEST GET STRAPPED IN.  
I'LL CRANK HER UP. WHAT'LL  
I SET HER FOR?

MINUTE AND HALF?  
THINK YOU CAN MAKE IT  
BACK FOR THEN?



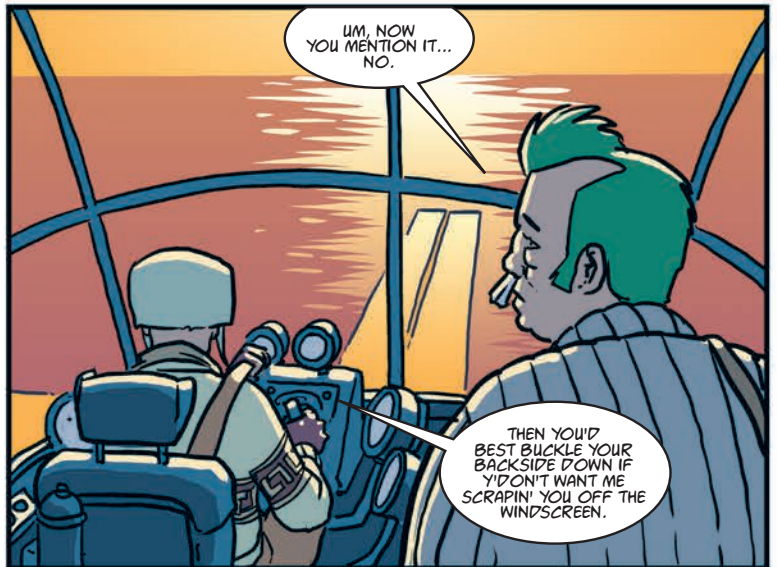
I'LL BLOODY  
WELL 'AVE TO,  
WON'T I? 'ELSE  
IT'LL BE ME  
ARSE IN THE  
BREEZE.

GOOD LAD.



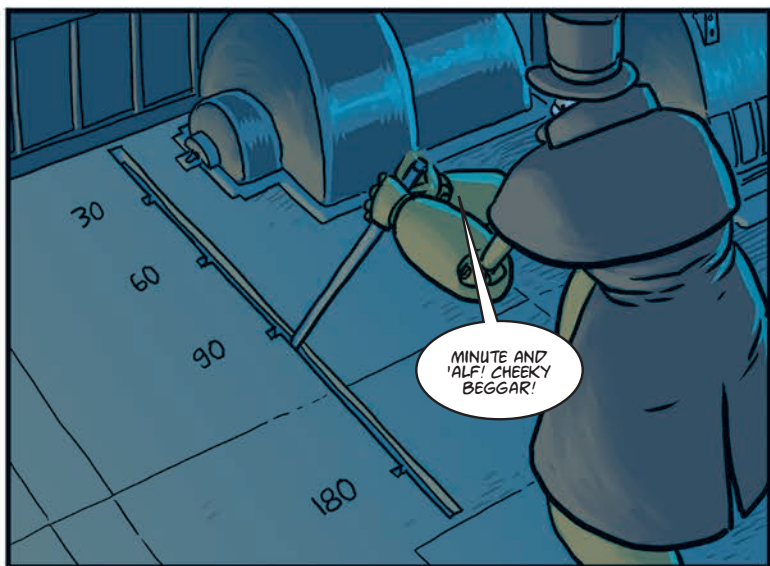
WHAT  
WAS THAT  
ABOUT?

TELL ME,  
PROFESSOR —  
DO YOU SEE ANY  
**RUNWAYS** HERE-  
ABOUTS?

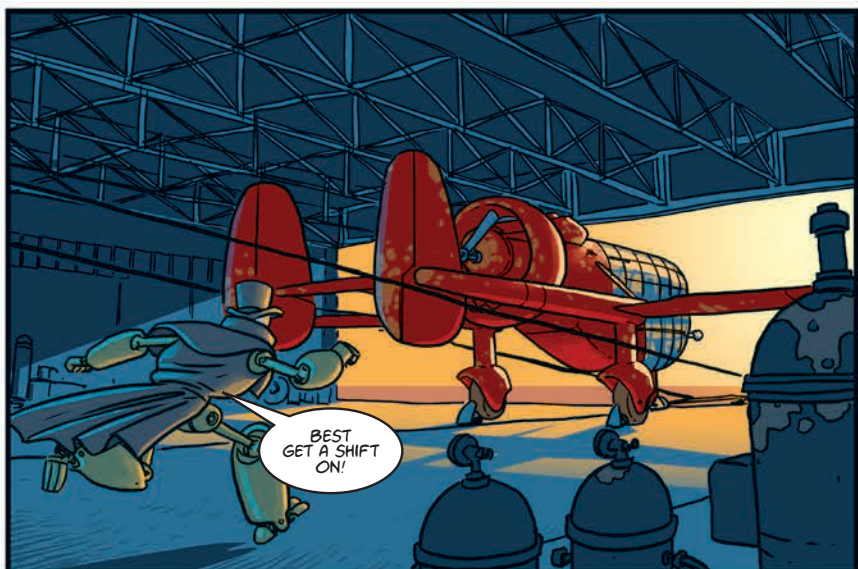
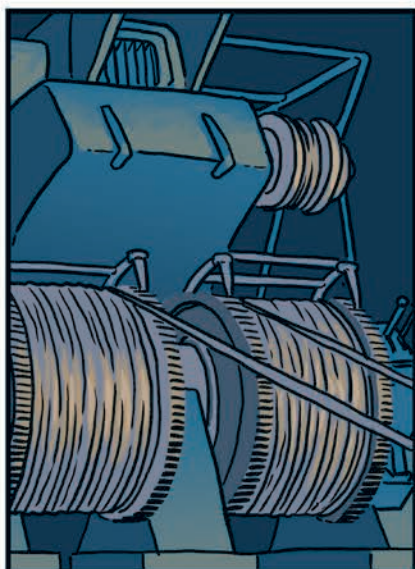
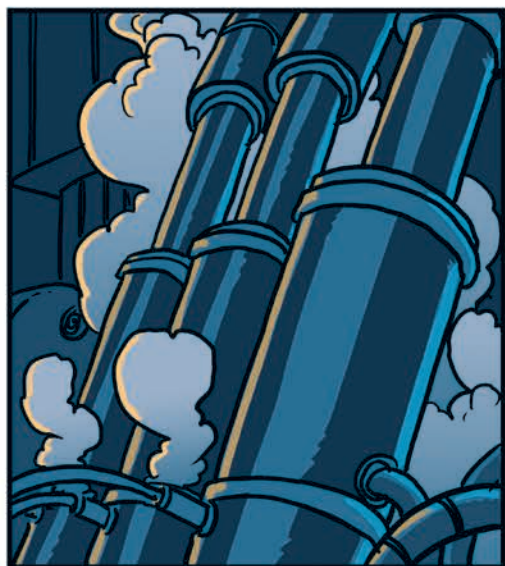


UM, NOW  
YOU MENTION IT...  
NO.

THEN YOU'D  
BEST BUCKLE YOUR  
BACKSIDE DOWN IF  
Y'DON'T WANT ME  
SCRAPIN' YOU OFF THE  
WINDSCREEN.



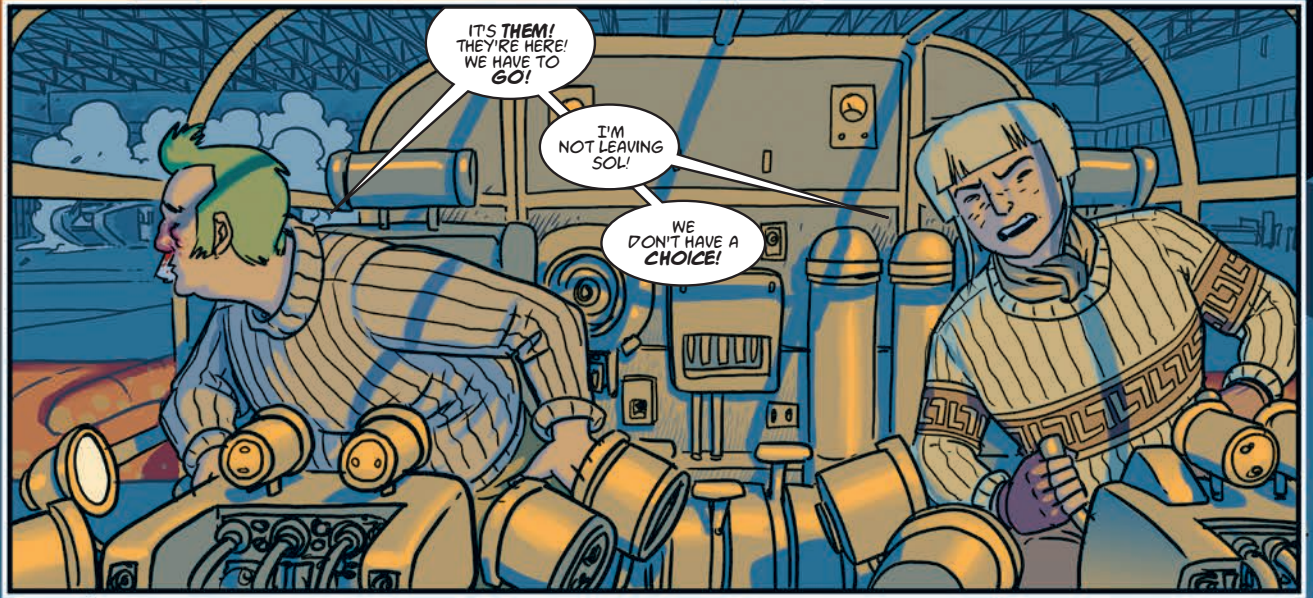
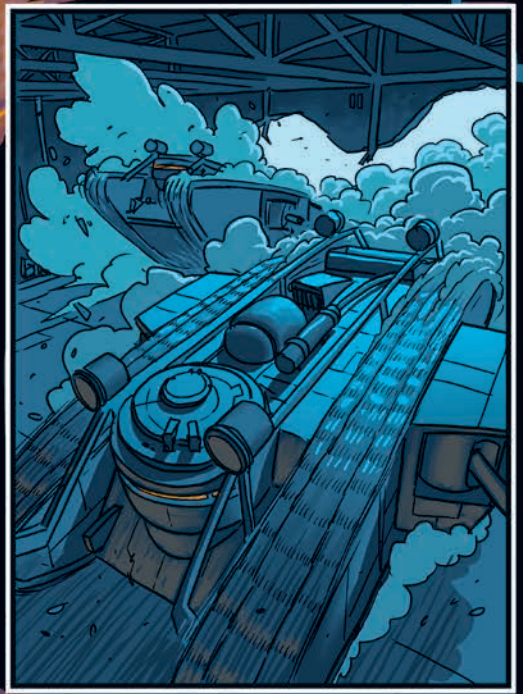
MINUTE AND 'ALF' CHEEKY BEGGAR!



BEST GET A SHIFT ON!



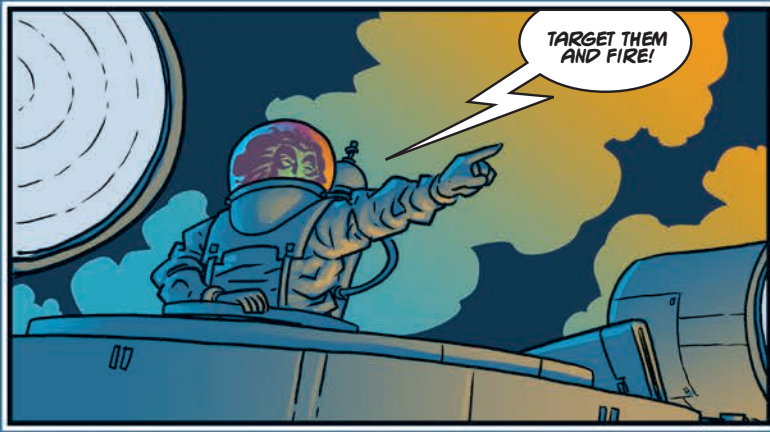
NUH!



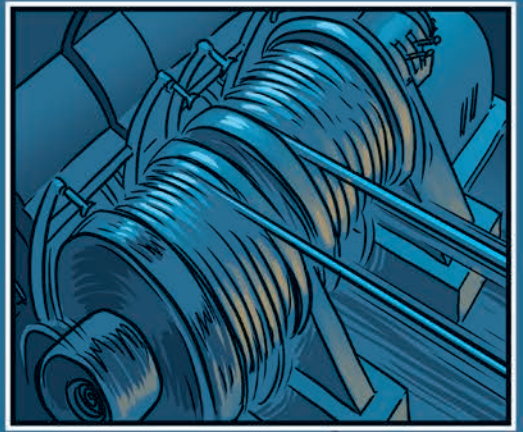
IT'S THEM!  
THEY'RE HERE!  
WE HAVE TO  
GO!

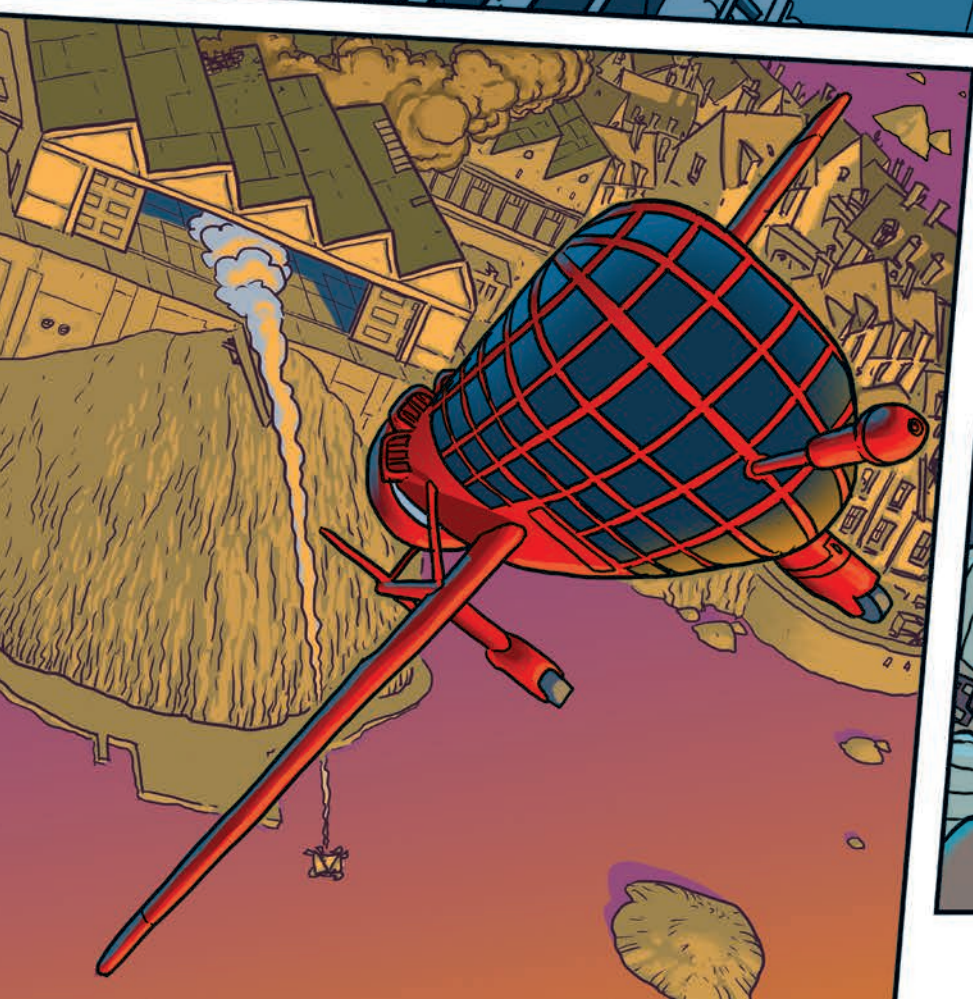
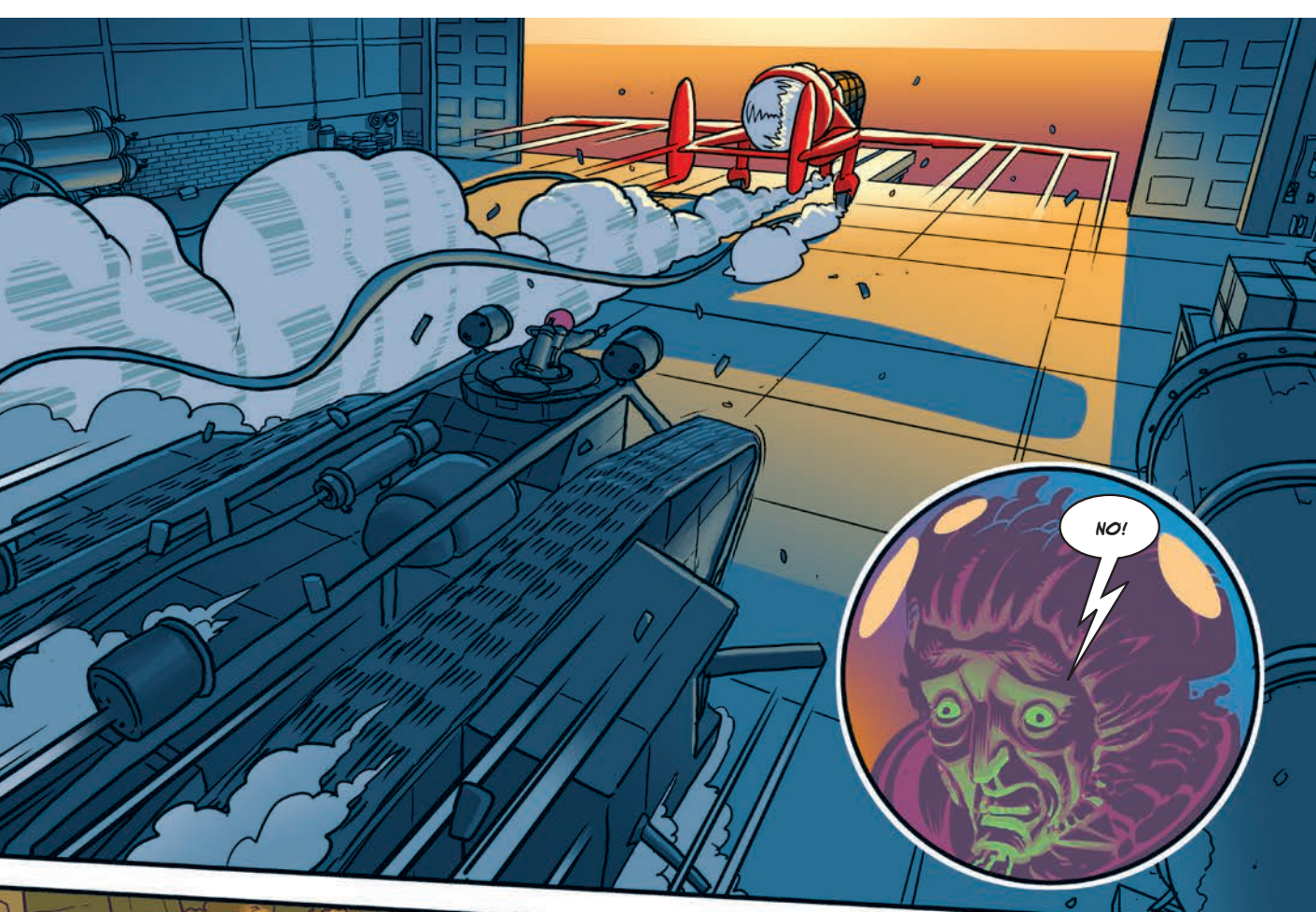
I'M  
NOT LEAVING  
SOL!

WE  
DON'T HAVE A  
CHOICE!



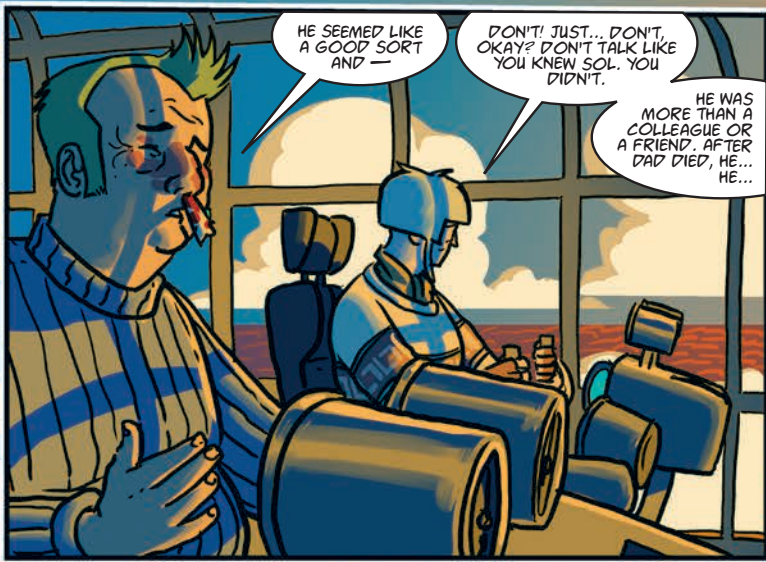
TARGET THEM  
AND FIRE!







I'M SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS, CONSTABLE. I TRULY AM.



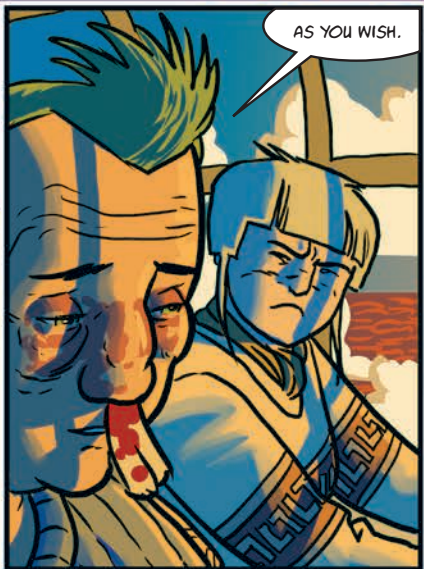
HE SEEMED LIKE A GOOD SORT AND —

DON'T! JUST... DON'T, OKAY? DON'T TALK LIKE YOU KNEW SOL. YOU DIDN'T.

HE WAS MORE THAN A COLLEAGUE OR A FRIEND. AFTER DAD DIED, HE... HE...



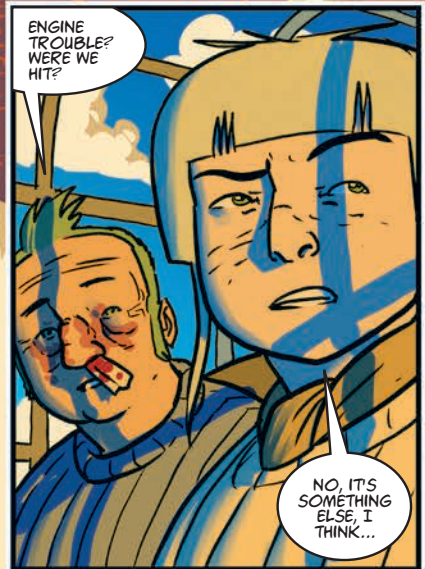
LOOK, JUST SHUT UP UNTIL I SAY OTHERWISE, OKAY?



AS YOU WISH.

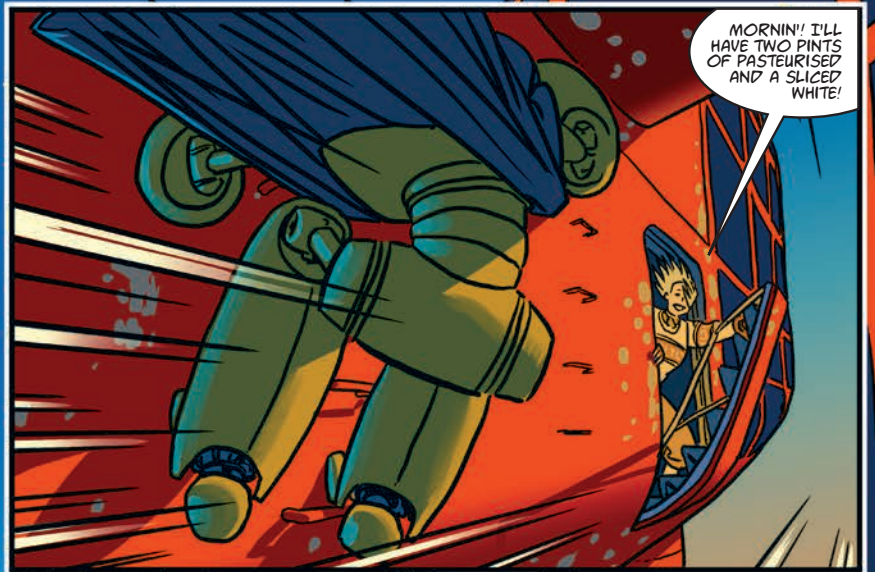
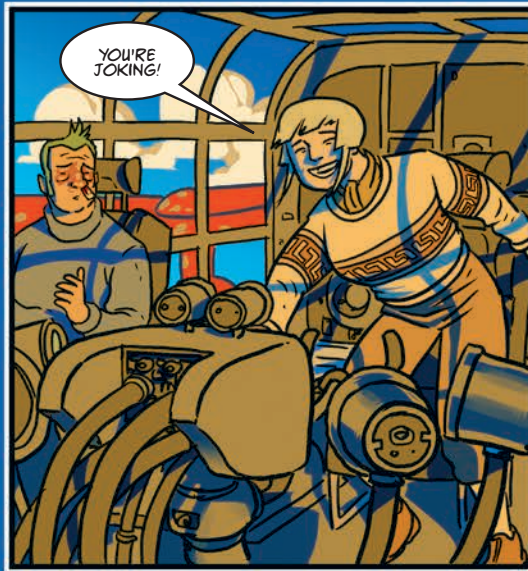


TONK  
TONK  
TONK



ENGINE TROUBLE? WERE WE HIT?

NO, IT'S SOMETHING ELSE, I THINK...



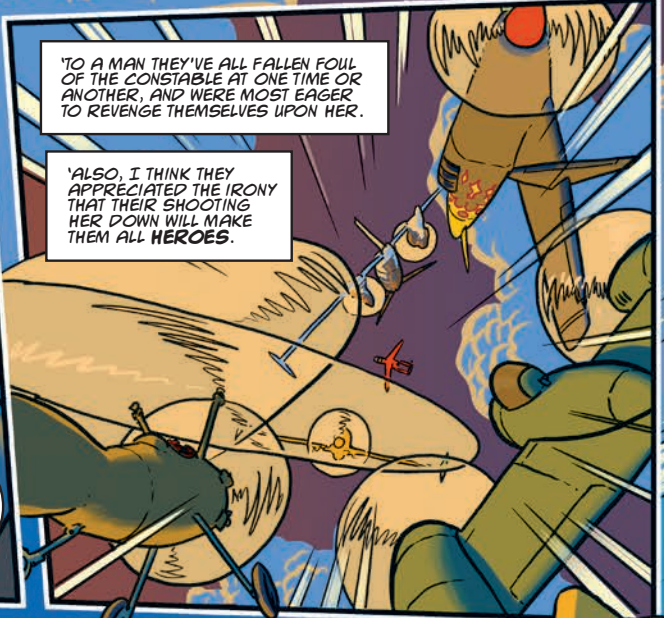
'... BUGGERS HAVE SET THE DOGS ON US!'



CAN THEY BE TRUSTED?



OF COURSE NOT, THEY'RE PIRATES. AIR SCUM, BUT THEY'LL DO THE JOB, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.



TO A MAN THEY'VE ALL FALLEN FOUL OF THE CONSTABLE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, AND WERE MOST EAGER TO REVENGE THEMSELVES UPON HER.

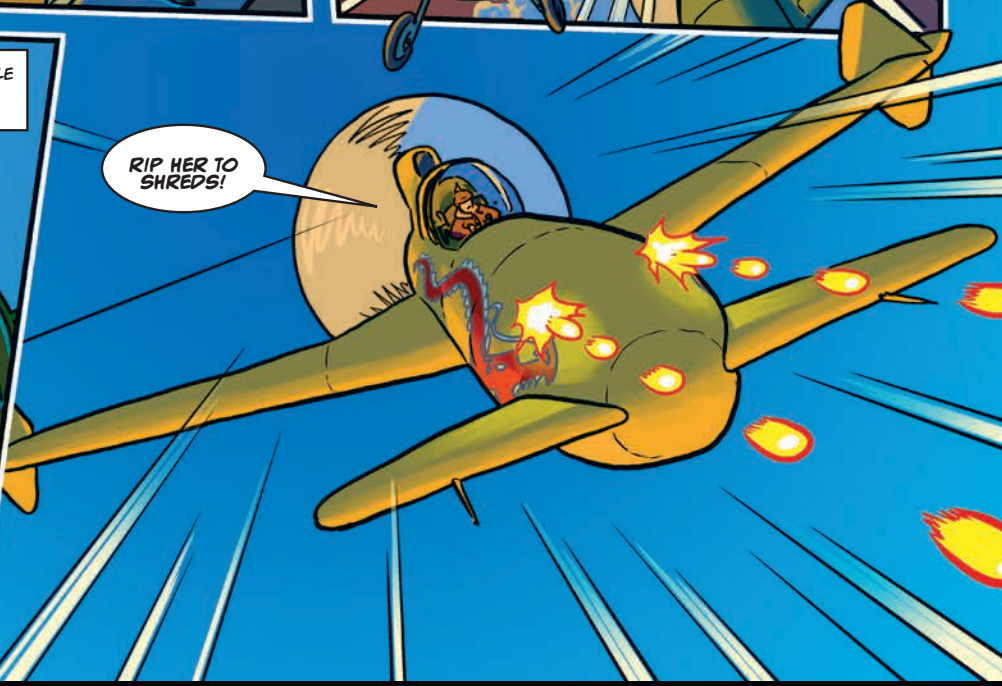
'ALSO, I THINK THEY APPRECIATED THE IRONY THAT THEIR SHOOTING HER DOWN WILL MAKE THEM ALL HEROES.



'OF COURSE THE NOT INCONSIDERABLE BOUNTY I PUT ON HER HEAD DID SWEETEN THINGS SOMWHAT.'

THIS IS VON HOLSTEIN. FOLLOW ME IN.

RIp HER TO SHREDS!



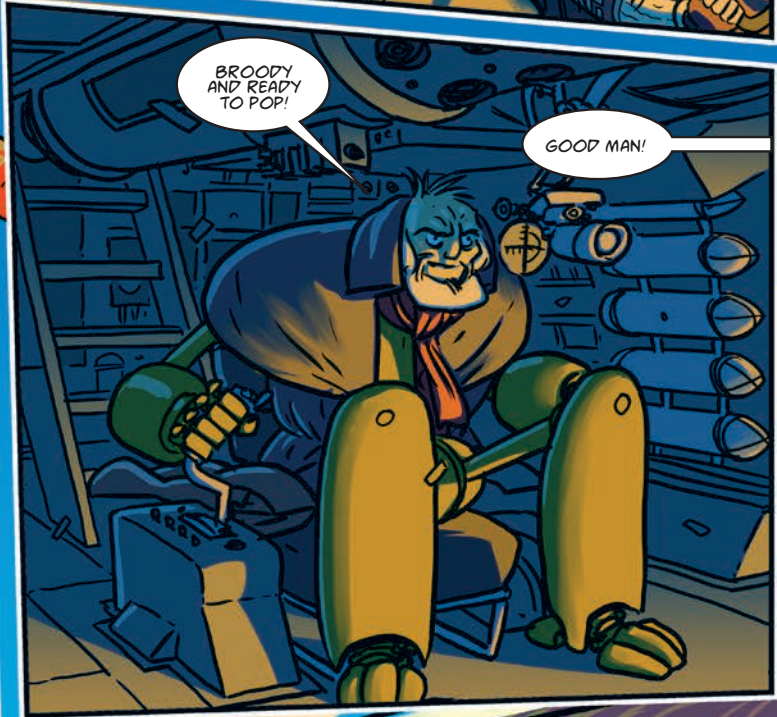




UGHK! I'M GOING TO BE SICK!

NOT IN MY PLANE Y'DON'T! CHUG IT BACK!

SOL, HOW'S AUNTY JOAN LOOKING?



BROODY AND READY TO POP!

GOOD MAN!

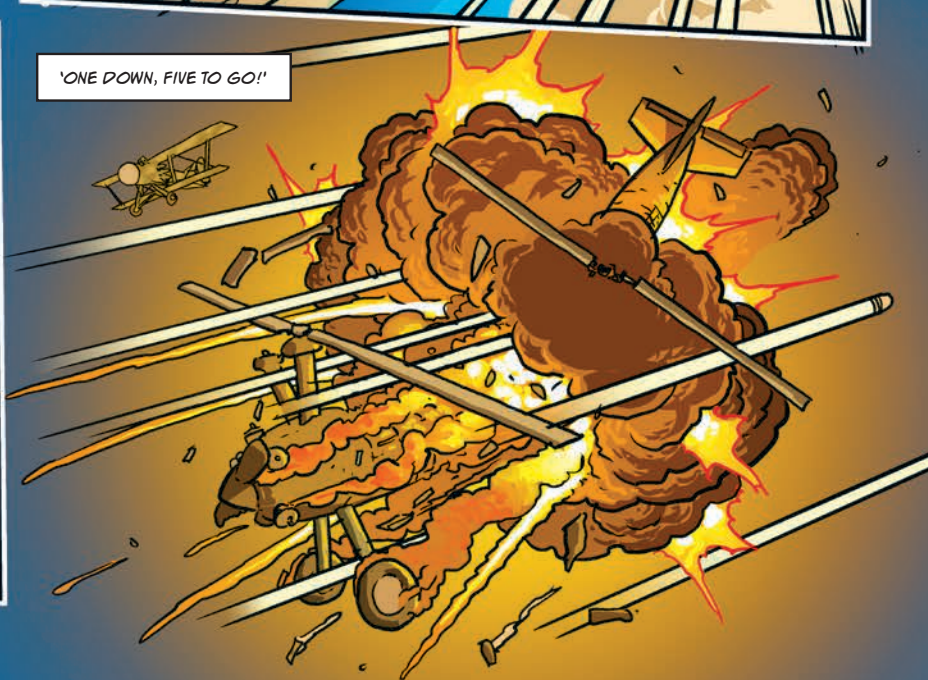
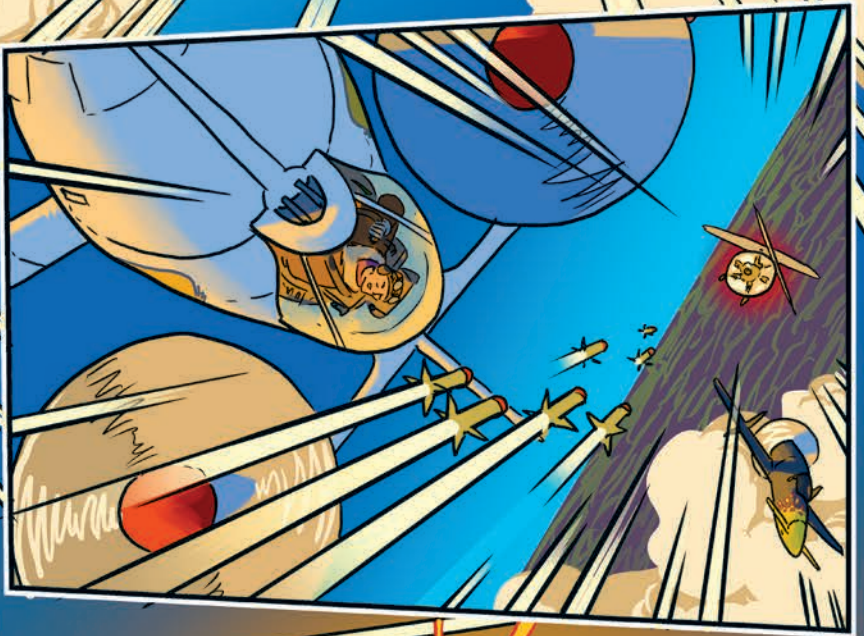
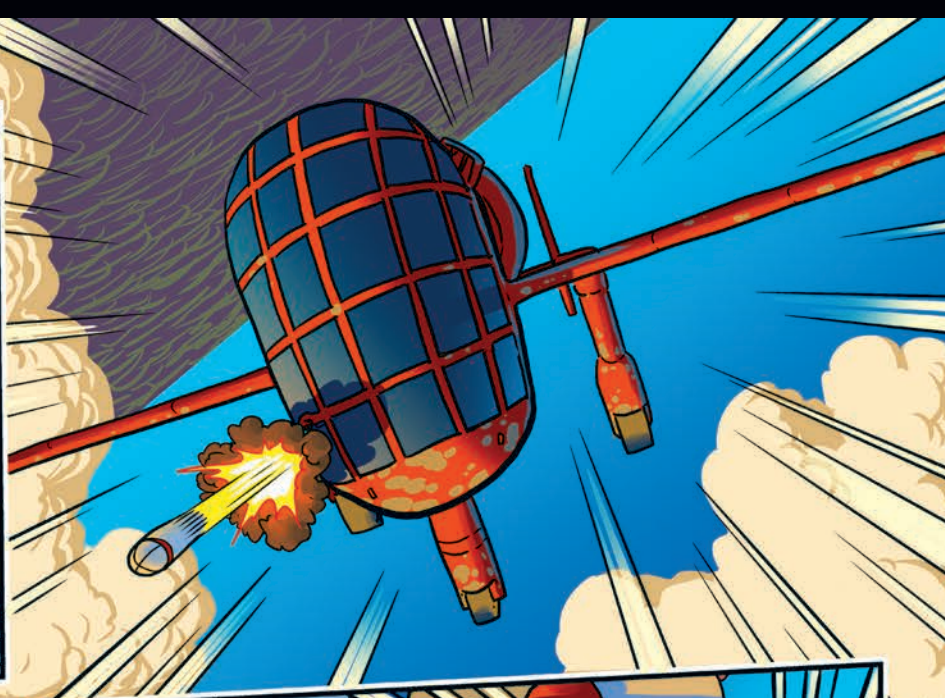


LET'S GO MAKE SOME BABIES!



AUNTY JOAN?

FRIEND OF MY MUM. SQUATTED OUT KIDS LIKE YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE. NEVER JUST ONE BUT TWINS, TRIPLETS, QUADS...



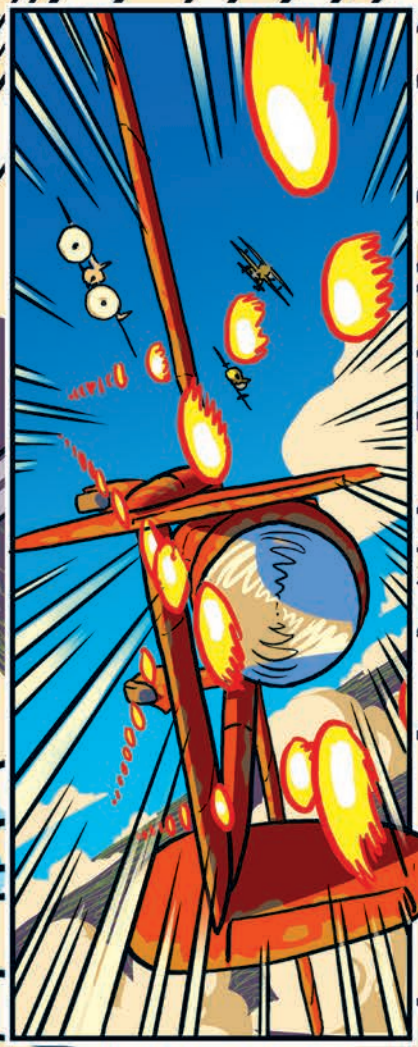


WHY ARE WE FIGHTING? WHY AREN'T WE RUNNING AWAY?

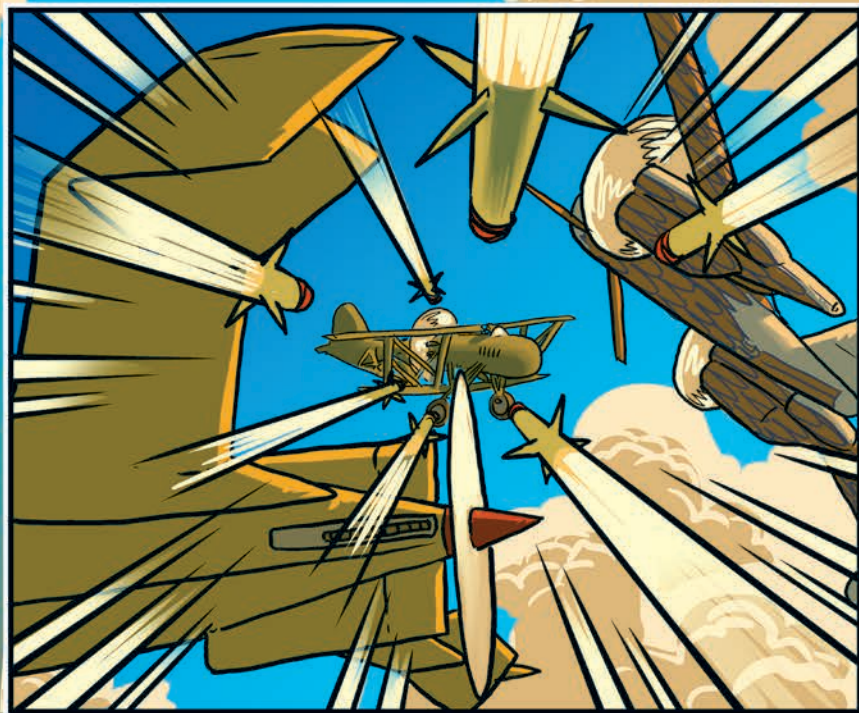
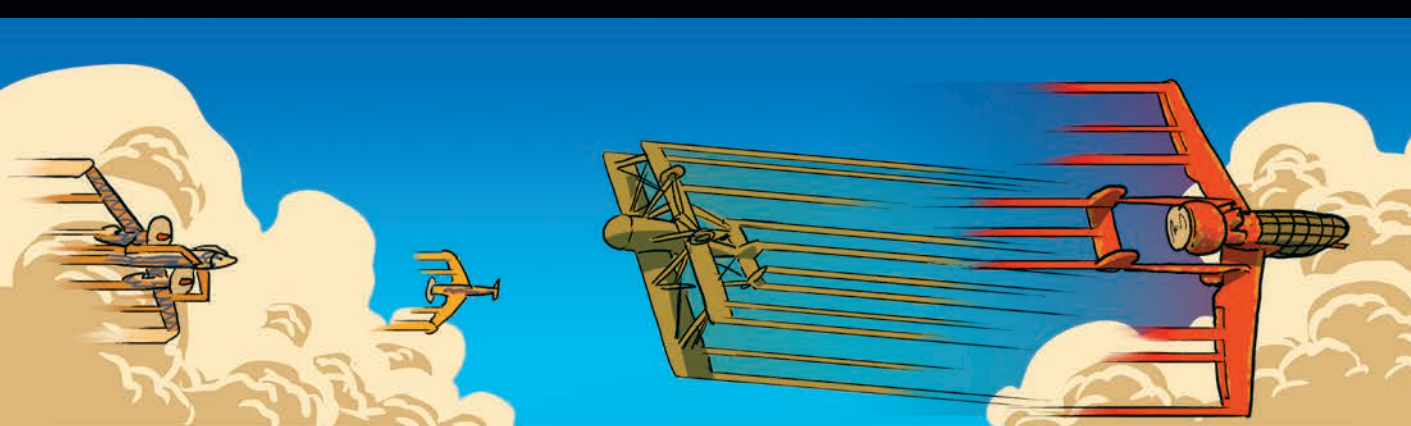


THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM!

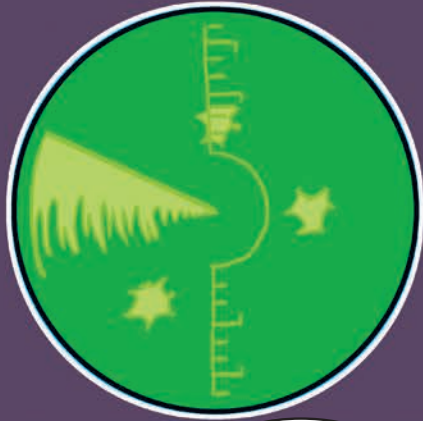
THAT'S WHY WE'RE NOT RUNNING AWAY, WE TURN TAIL, WE'RE DEAD. WE MAKE A STAND, KEEP IT CLOSE AND TIGHT, AN' CHANCES ARE THEY'LL STEP ON EACH OTHER'S TOES.



SEE?



'IF YOU'VE GOT A GOD, NOW'S THE TIME TO PUT A WORD IN.'

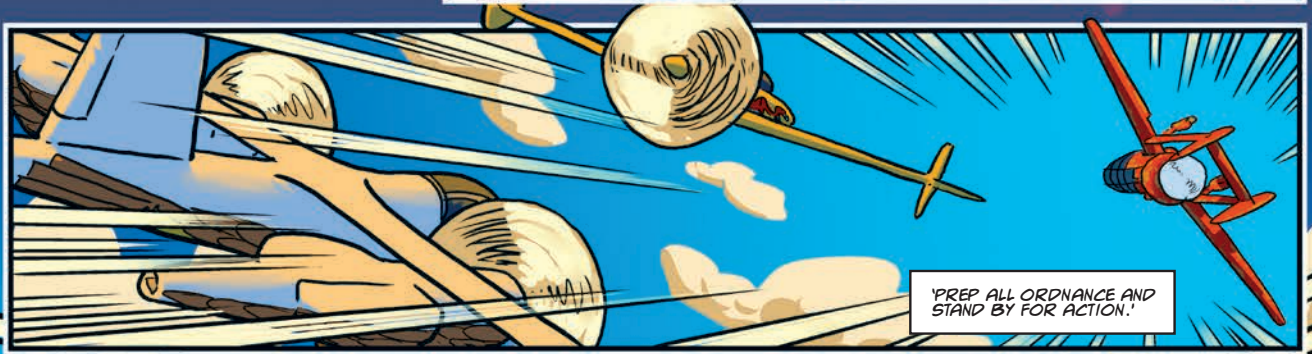


SIR, I HAVE SOMETHING. IT'S CLOSE AND MATCHES THE **TRANSPONDER SIGNAL** WE'VE BEEN TRACKING.



SIR, I BELIEVE THEY'RE UNDER ATTACK.

UNDERSTOOD. SOUND TO QUARTERS AND TAKE US UP.

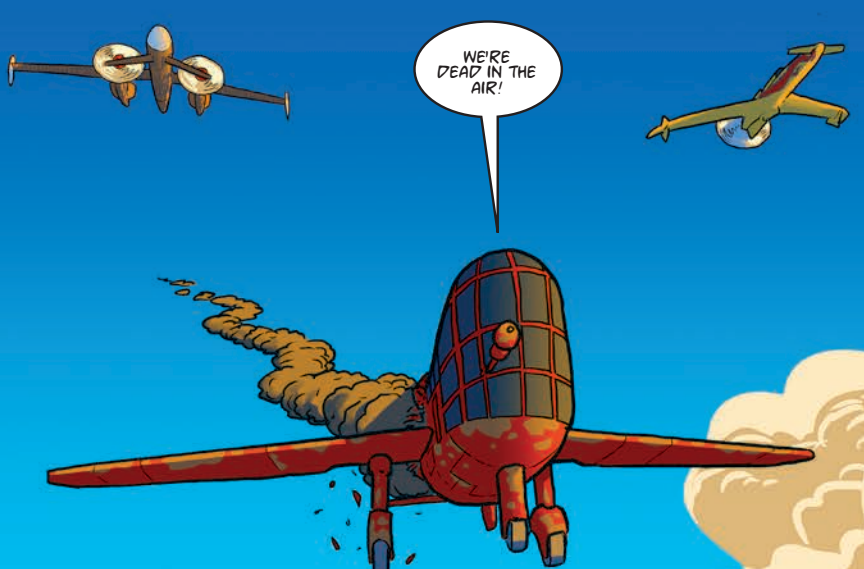
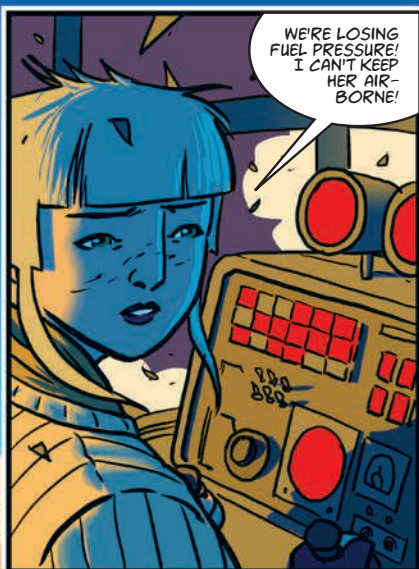
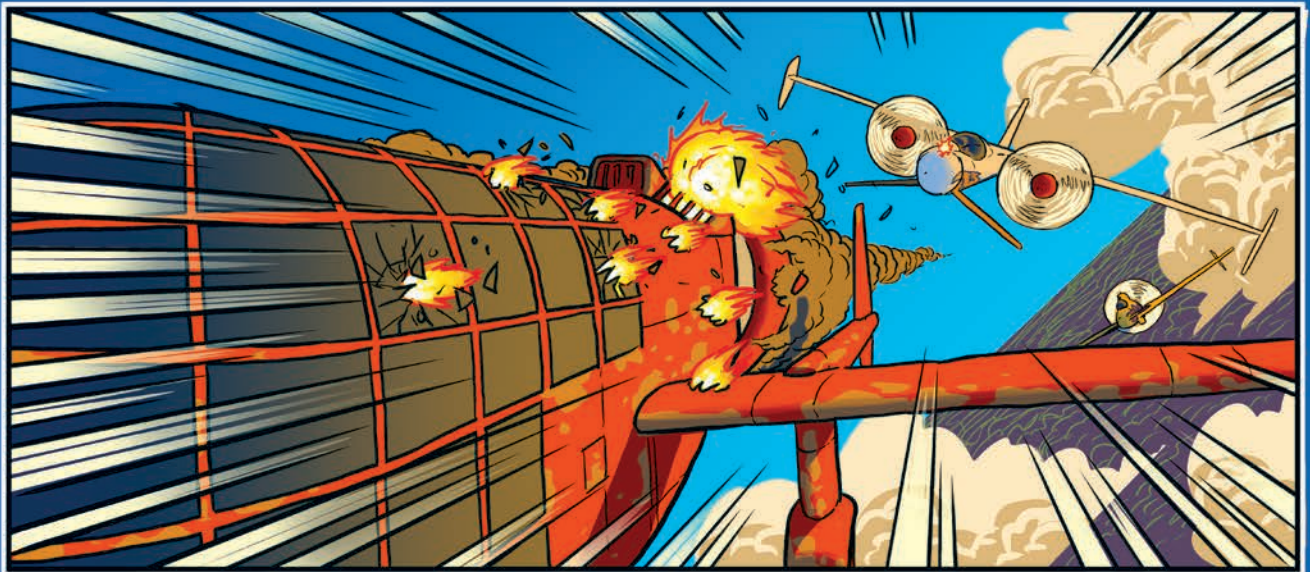
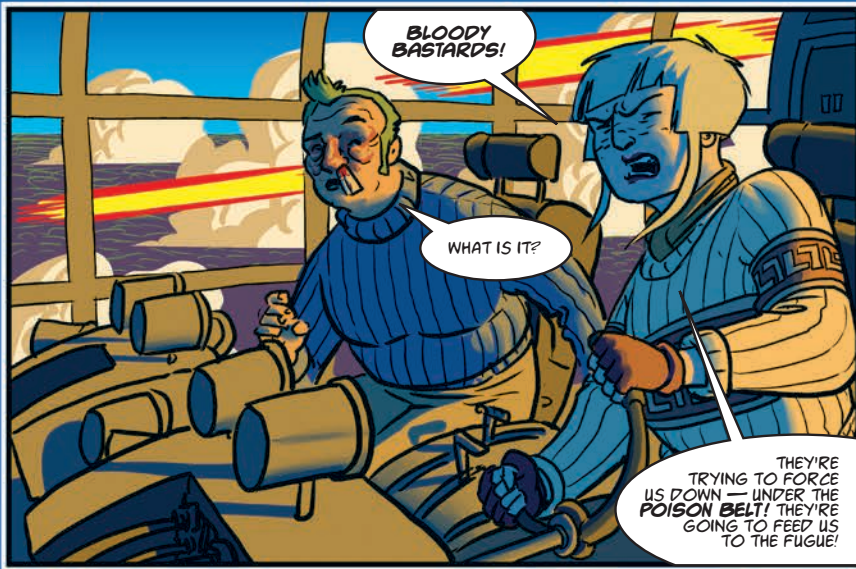


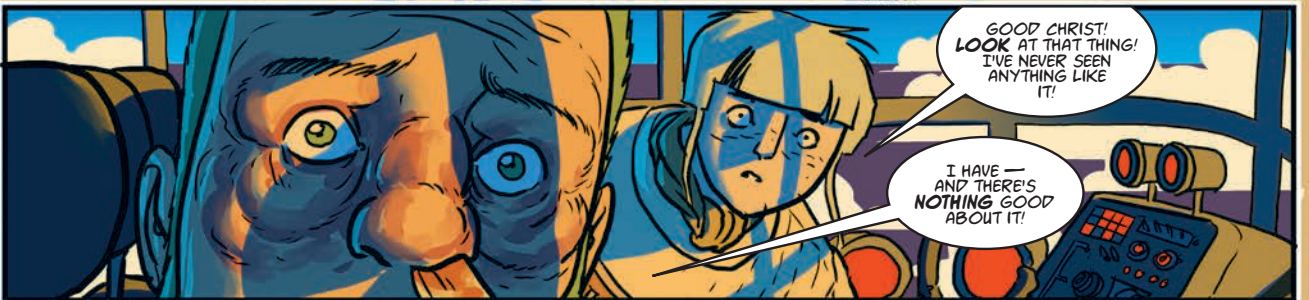
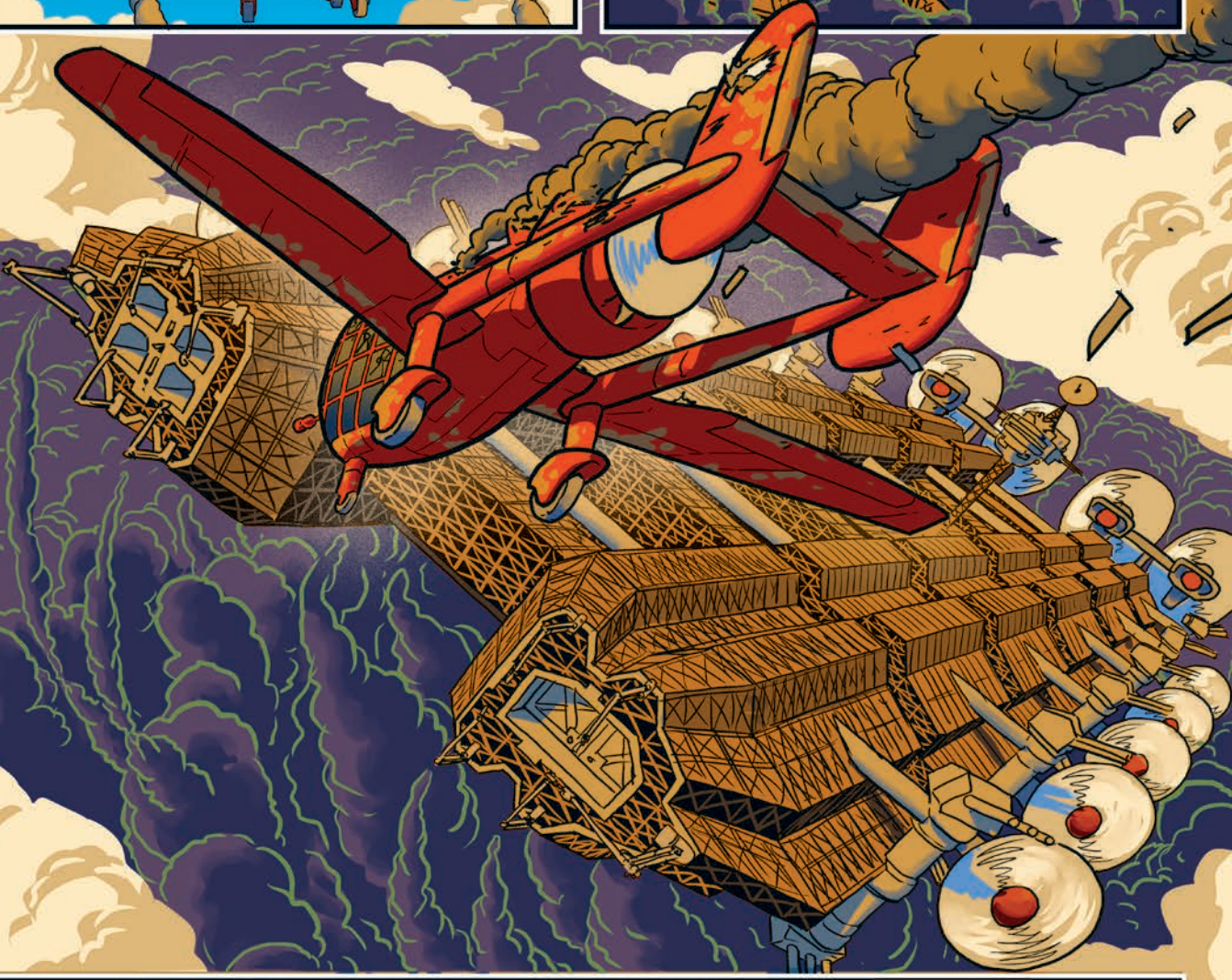
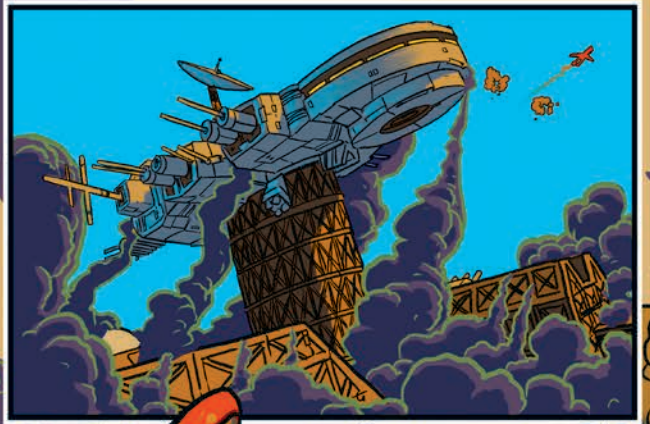
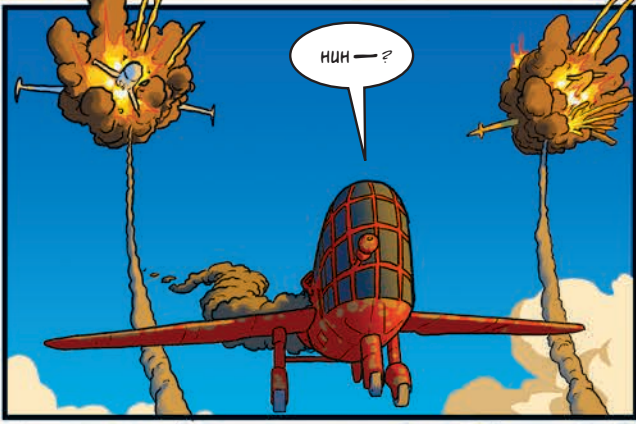
'PREP ALL ORDNANCE AND STAND BY FOR ACTION.'

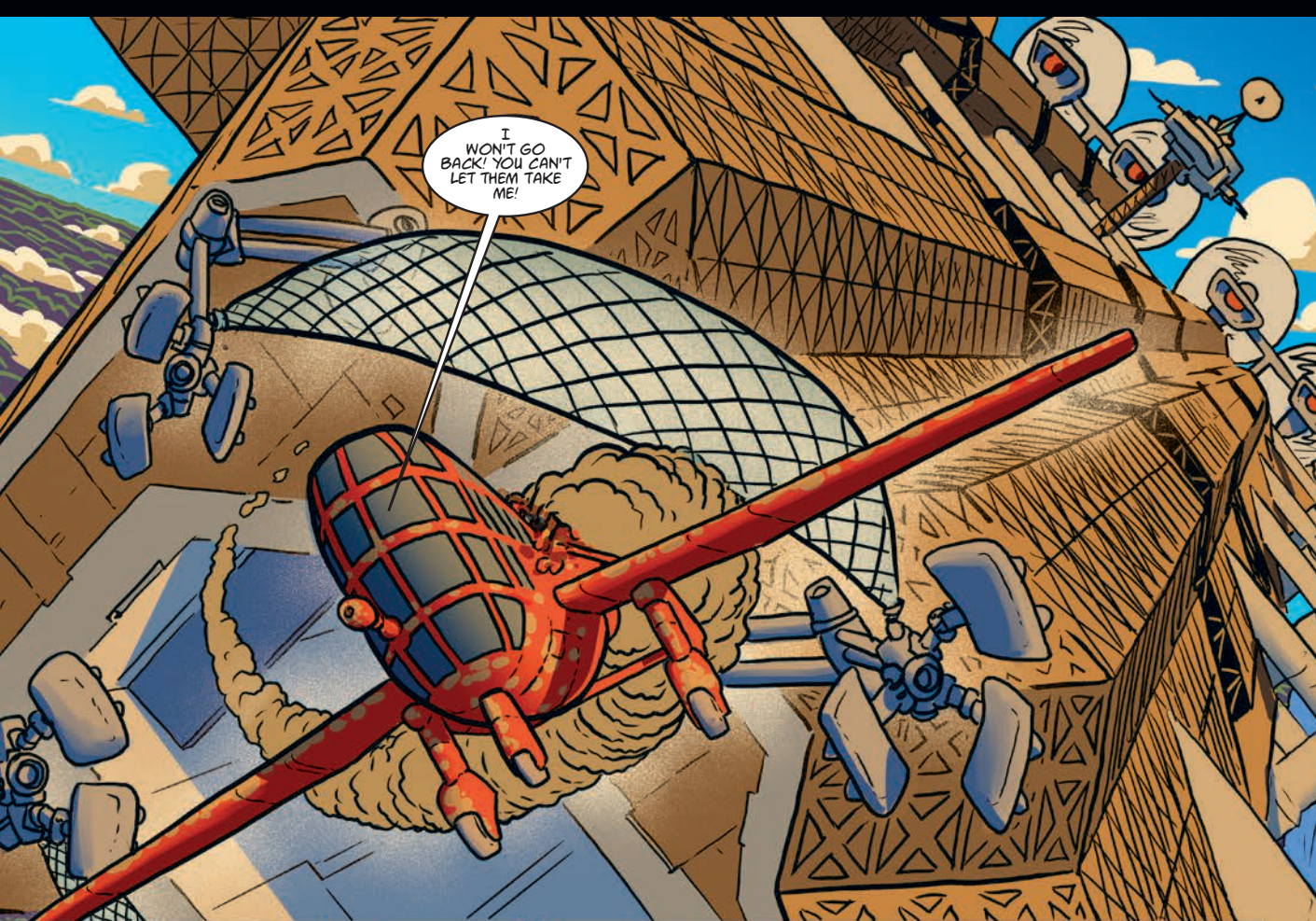


THERE'S NOWHERE TO RUN, GIRLIE. LET'S CLIP YOUR WINGS ONCE AND FOR ALL, SHALL WE?







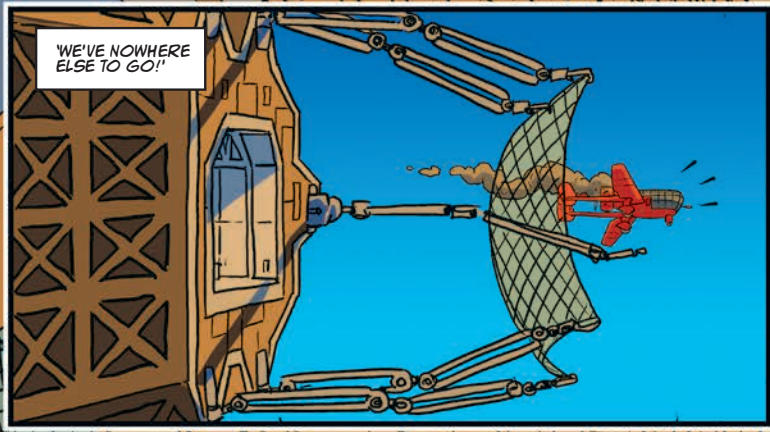


I WON'T GO BACK! YOU CAN'T LET THEM TAKE ME!

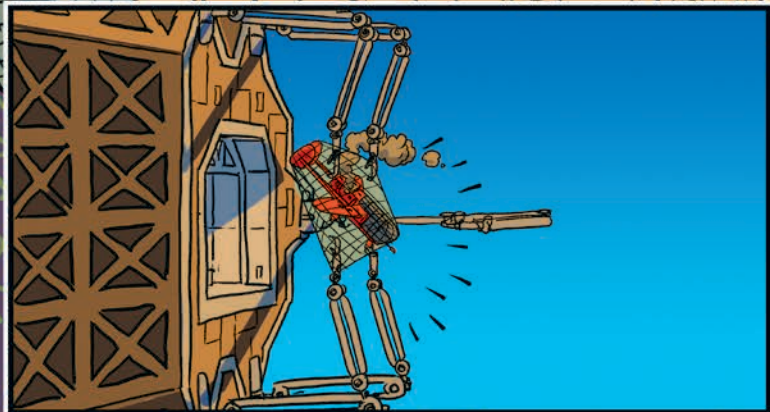


I CAN'T!

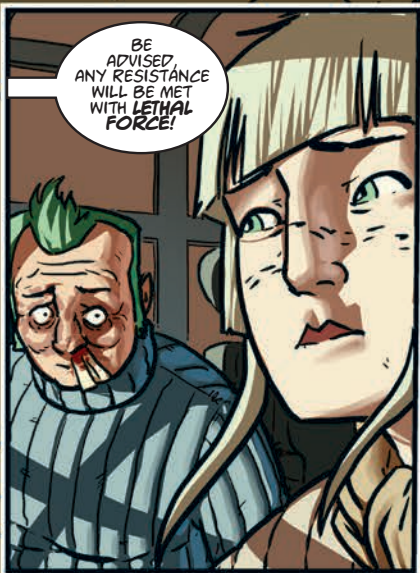
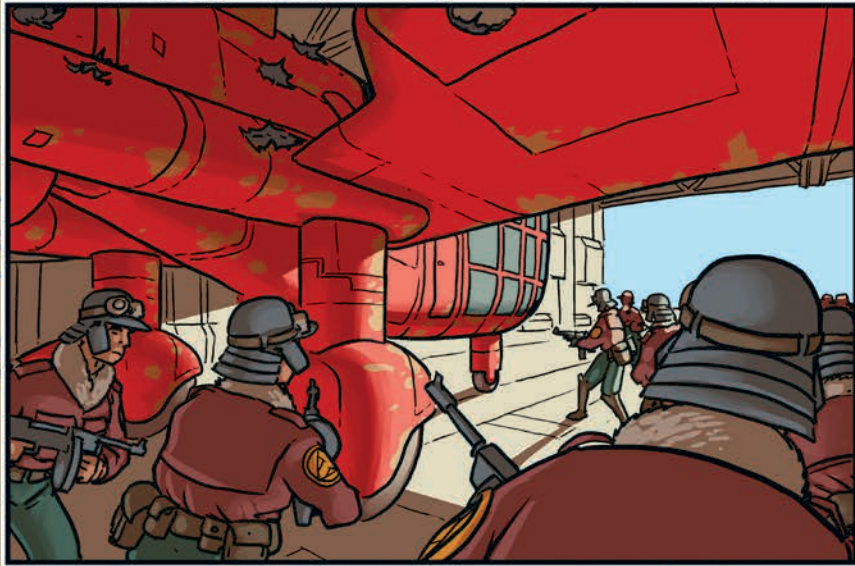
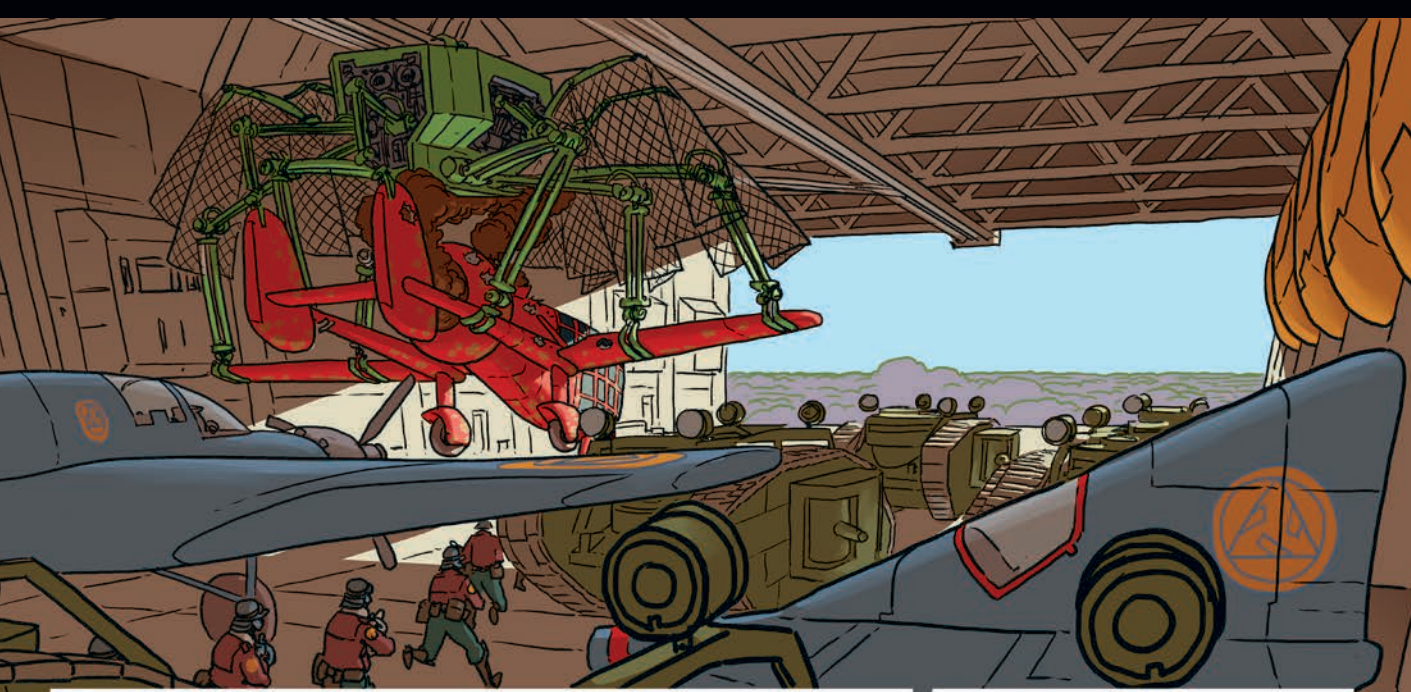
I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE! I CAN'T MAINTAIN ALTITUDE! IF WE DIP BELOW THE FLOOR, THAT'S US DONE! WE'RE DEAD!



WE'VE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO!









MOVE!

STEADY ON, SUNSHINE! WE'LL COME QUIETLY, WE'LL BEHAVE OURSELVES.



HONEST WE WILL!

AAHH —!



PROFESSOR PONTIUS BLOOM, BY ORDER OF THE QUORUM I AM PLACING YOU UNDER ARREST FOR TREASON.

THE DISCS, PLEASE.



HOW DID YOU FIND ME?

AH, THAT WOULD BE TELLING. SUFFICE TO SAY, DID YOU IMAGINE THE POWERS—THAT—BE WOULDN'T KEEP A TIGHT REIN ON A BRIGHT SPARK LIKE YOU?

YOU DID GIVE THEM A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY, THOUGH, THAT'S FOR CERTAIN.

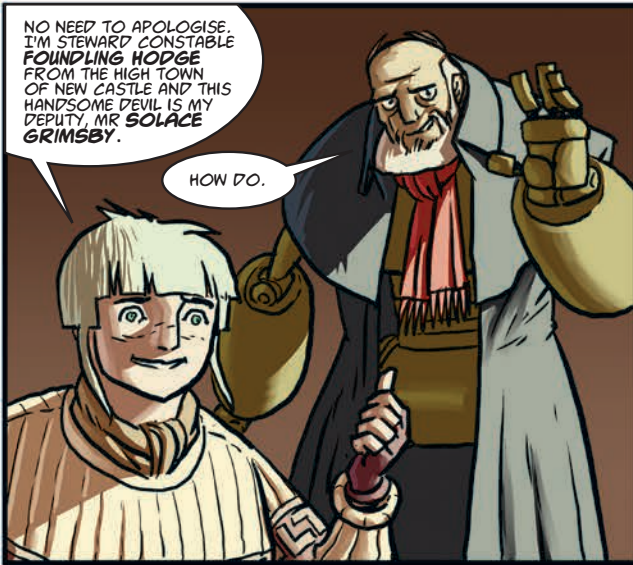


NOW, AS FOR YOUR ACCOMPLICES —

I'M NOT HIS ANYTHING. HE'S MY PRISONER!

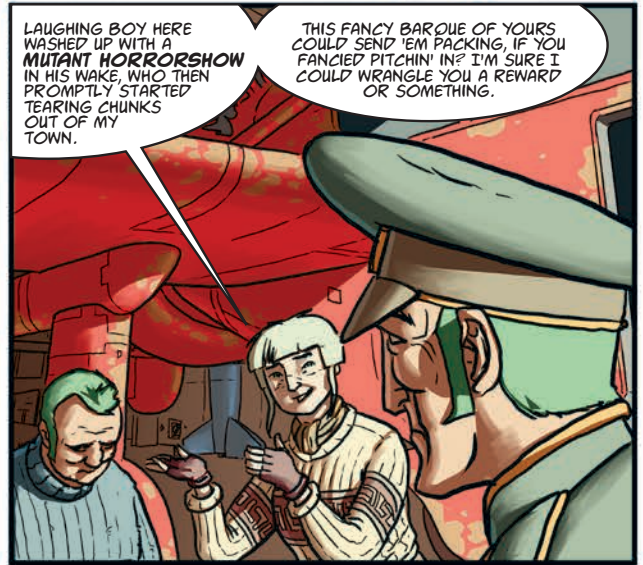


I BEG YOUR PARDON?



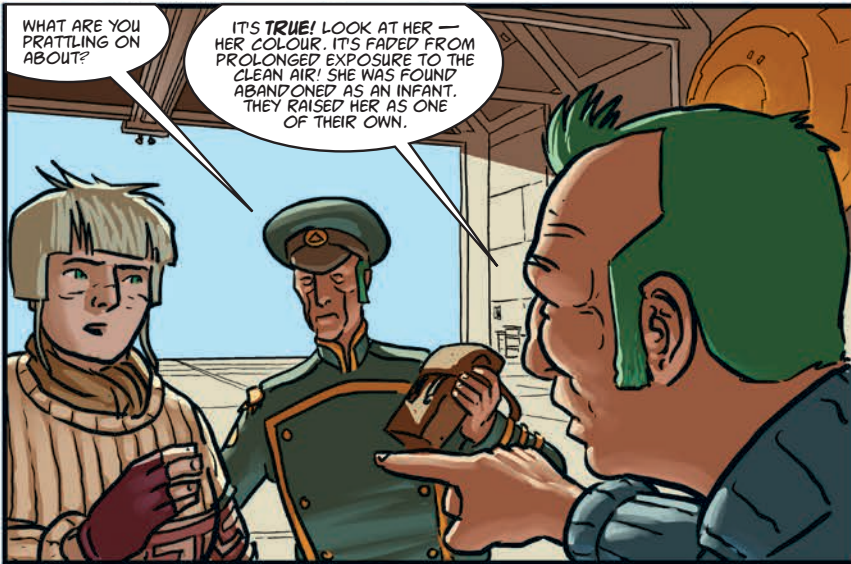
NO NEED TO APOLOGISE. I'M STEWARD CONSTABLE **FOUNDLING HODGE** FROM THE HIGH TOWN OF NEW CASTLE AND THIS HANDSOME DEVIL IS MY DEPUTY, MR **SOLACE GRIMSBY**.

HOW DO.



LAUGHING BOY HERE WASHED UP WITH A **MUTANT HORRORSHOW** IN HIS WAKE, WHO THEN PROMPTLY STARTED TEARING CHUNKS OUT OF MY TOWN.

THIS FANCY BAROUE OF YOURS COULD SEND 'EM PACKING, IF YOU FANCIED 'PITCHIN' IN? I'M SURE I COULD WRANGLE YOU A REWARD OR SOMETHING.



WHAT ARE YOU PRATTLING ON ABOUT?

IT'S **TRUE!** LOOK AT HER — HER COLOUR. IT'S FADED FROM PROLONGED EXPOSURE TO THE CLEAN AIR! SHE WAS FOUND ABANDONED AS AN INFANT. THEY RAISED HER AS ONE OF THEIR OWN.



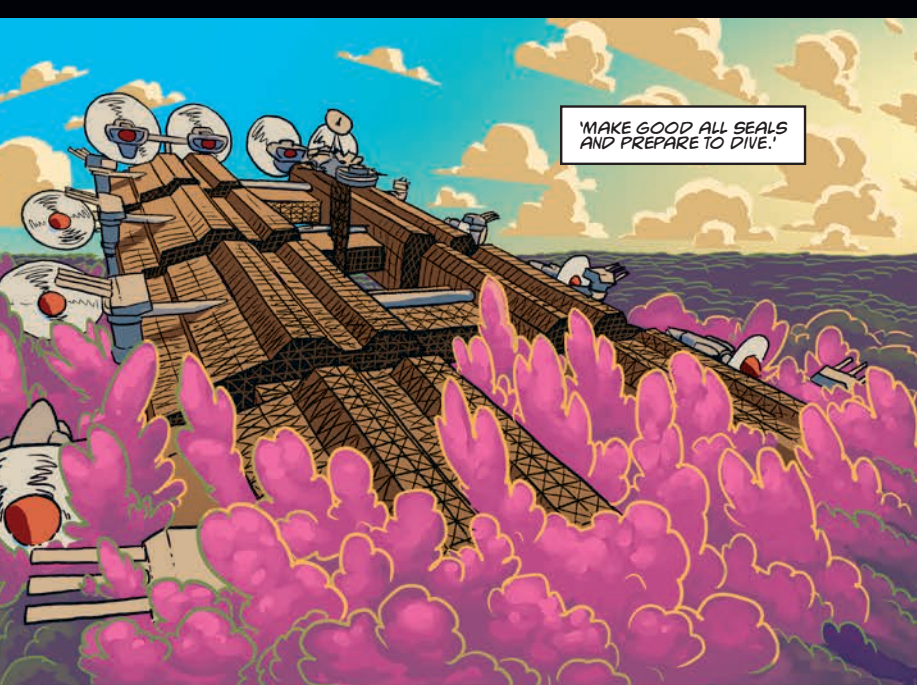
GOOD GOD!



SERGEANT, I WANT THEM CONFINED TO THE BRIG. NO ONE SPEAKS TO THEM BUT ME, IS THAT CLEAR?

YES, SIR.

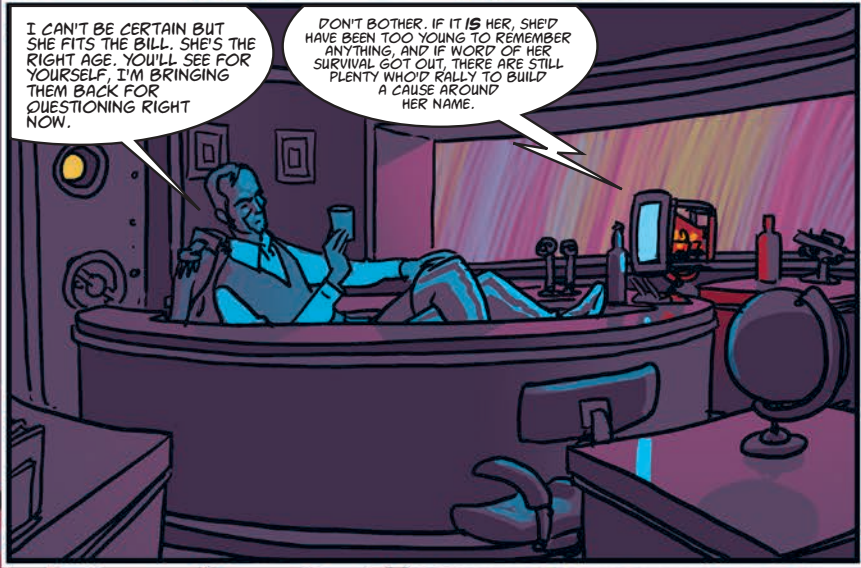
VERY WELL, WE'RE DONE HERE.



'MAKE GOOD ALL SEALS AND PREPARE TO DIVE.'



WE RECEIVED YOUR REPORT AND IMAGE TRANSMISSION. IT'S CAUSED QUITE A STIR, LET ME TELL YOU. ARE YOU SURE IT'S HER?



I CAN'T BE CERTAIN BUT SHE FITS THE BILL. SHE'S THE RIGHT AGE. YOU'LL SEE FOR YOURSELF. I'M BRINGING THEM BACK FOR QUESTIONING RIGHT NOW.

DON'T BOTHER. IF IT IS HER, SHE'D HAVE BEEN TOO YOUNG TO REMEMBER ANYTHING, AND IF WORD OF HER SURVIVAL GOT OUT, THERE ARE STILL PLENTY WHO'D RALLY TO BUILD A CAUSE AROUND HER NAME.



SO WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

BLOOM'S THE ONLY ONE WE WANT.

KILL HER AND ANYONE WITH HER.



'CAST HER OVERBOARD AND LET HER DIE IN THE DEEP LIKE THE REST OF HER FAMILY...'



CAPTAIN TORRIN,  
WE'RE IN A PARKING  
STATION ABOVE THE WEST  
MIDLANDS MORASS AS  
YOU ORDERED.



VERY GOOD, NUMBER  
ONE. HOLD POSITION  
AND WAIT ON MY  
INSTRUCTION.

YES, SIR.



SO...  
THE WHEEL  
TURNS, AFTER  
ALL THIS  
TIME...

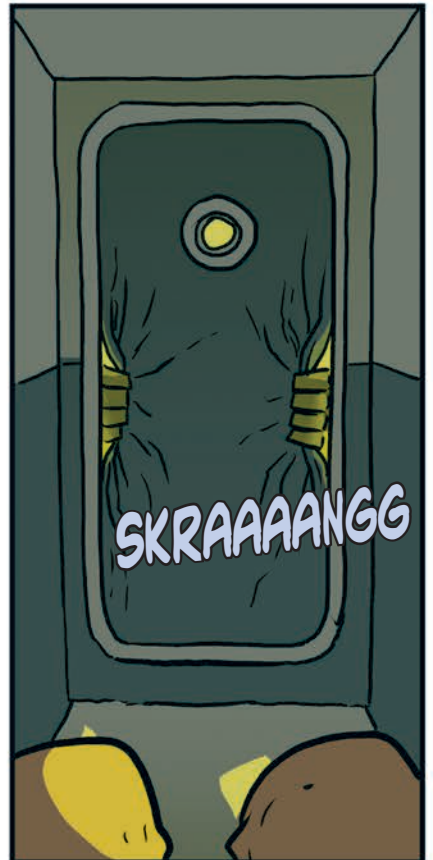
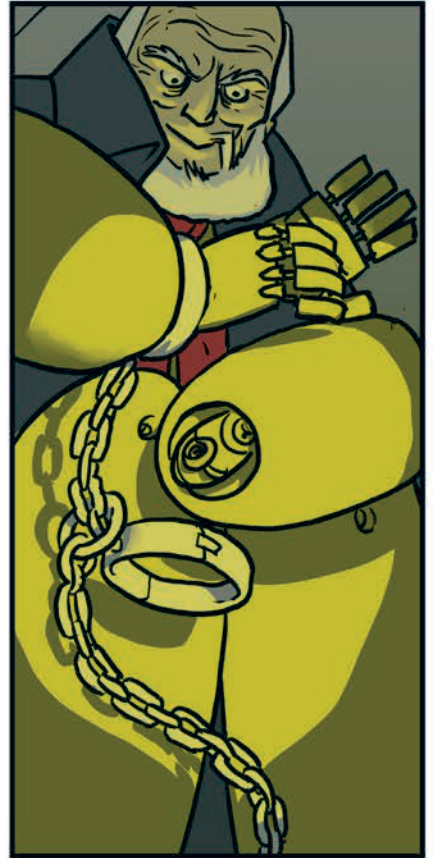
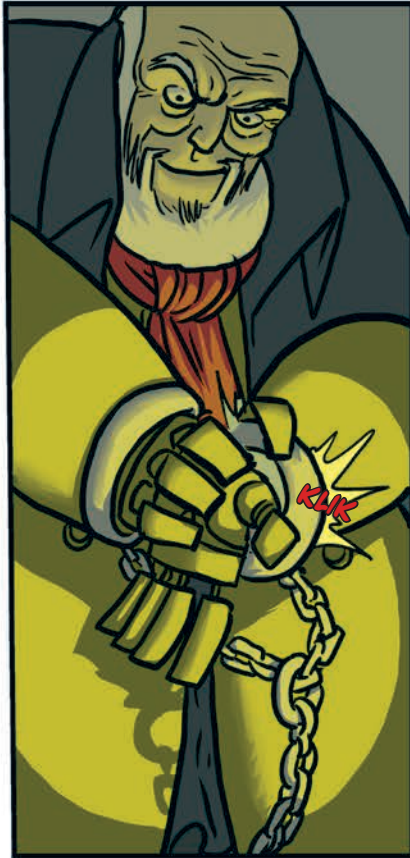
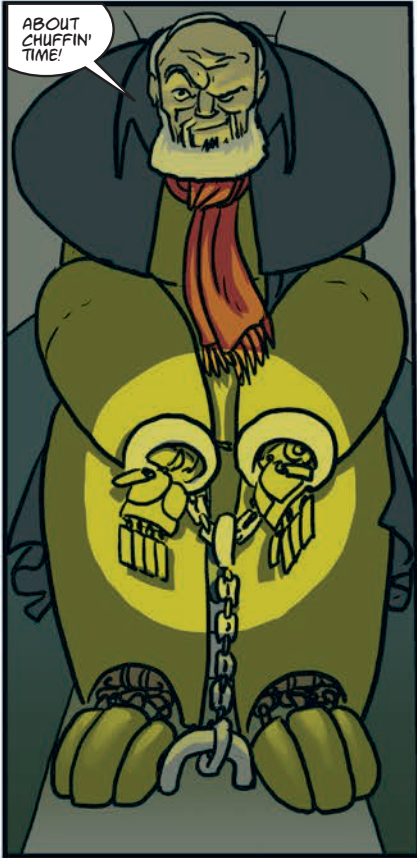


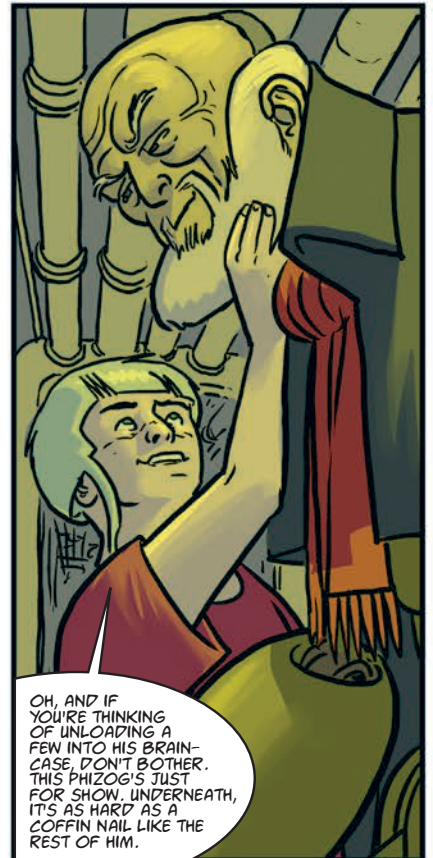
'... AND A CHANCE TO  
PUT THINGS RIGHT.'

OKAY,  
I THINK WE'VE  
TWIDDLED OUR  
THUMBS LONG  
ENOUGH.



WAKY-  
WAKY!







I'M NOT HERE TO KILL YOU. I'M HERE TO **SAVE** YOU.

YOU WHAT NOW?



YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHO YOU **ARE**, DO YOU? MY GOD, YOU LOOK SO MUCH LIKE YOUR MOTHER IT'S UNCANNY. I DON'T KNOW WHY I DIDN'T SEE IT BEFORE.

YOU'RE SAYING YOU **KNEW** MY MOTHER?

I WISH I HAD TIME TO EXPLAIN. THERE'S SO MUCH TO TELL BUT WHEN I SAW YOU I HAD TO CALL IT IN. IF I HADN'T, OTHERS WOULD'VE. SOMEONE ELSE WOULD HAVE NOTICED THE RESEMBLANCE.



FOLLOW THIS CORRIDOR TO THE END, GO DOWN TWO DECKS TO THE AUXILIARY HANGER. IF YOU'RE QUICK YOU CAN TAKE A SHIP BEFORE ANYONE NOTICES.

I DON'T GET ANY OF THIS...



YOUR FAMILY — YOUR FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHERS AND SISTERS — WERE MURDERED NOT BY MARAUDERS AS EVERYONE HAS BEEN TOLD BUT BY ASSASSINS IN DISGUISE.

THEY WERE AGENTS OF WHAT WAS TO BECOME THE **QUORUM**. IT WAS NOTHING LESS THAN A **COUP**.



YOU WERE NEVER FOUND. WORD WAS THAT YOU WERE KILLED BUT ONE OF THE CREW MUST HAVE SPIRITED YOU AWAY.



BEFORE SHE WAS TAKEN, YOUR MOTHER TOLD ME TO KEEP **THIS** SAFE. IT BELONGS TO YOU NOW. THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE BUT NO LOCK I CAN SEE.





YOUR PARENTS WERE GOOD PEOPLE, FAIR AND DECENT. DESPITE THEIR STATUS THEY ENDEAVOURED TO RAISE UP EVEN THE LOWEST OF US. THEY SAW US ALL AS **EQUALS** AND THAT MADE THEM MANY ENEMIES.

I'M ASHAMED TO SAY AFTER SHE GAVE THAT TO ME, I RAN AND HID. I BURNT MY UNIFORM, CHANGED MY NAME, DENIED I EVER KNEW THEM. I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE LIKE THEM.



SO WHY DID YOU HOLD ON TO THIS?

IT WAS THE LITTLE SHRED OF HONOUR I HAD LEFT. WITHOUT IT, I WOULD HAVE BEEN TRULY LOST.

YOU SHOULD GO NOW. THE QUORUM HAVE EYES EVERYWHERE.

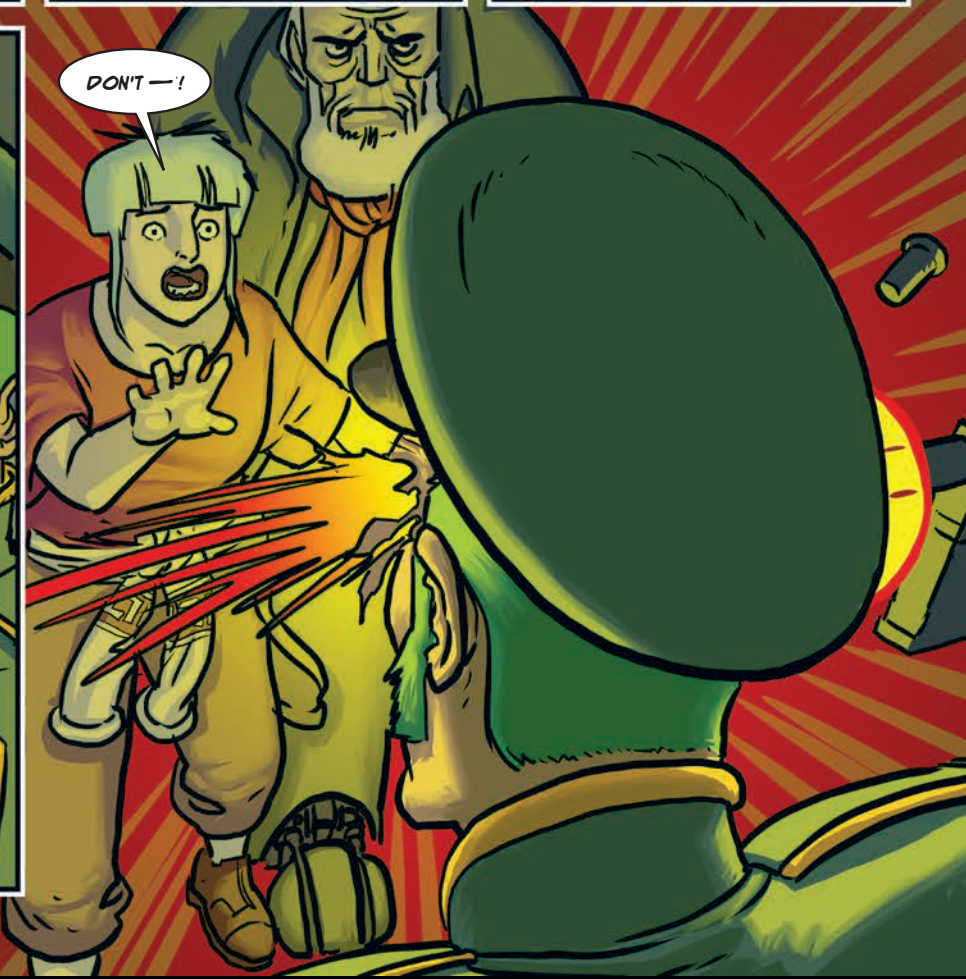


WHAT ABOUT YOU? THEY'LL WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO US.

OH, UNDOUBTEDLY. THEY'LL TRY TO WRING THE TRUTH FROM MY BONES, BUT DON'T WORRY.



DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES.



DON'T—!







UHHH...

'COME ON —'

AROOGA  
AROOGA  
AROOGA



— THE JIG'S UP!



MA'AM, IT'S THE BRIG!

GET AN ARMED DETACHMENT DOWN THERE ON THE DOUBLE!



'SEAL OFF THAT SECTION, SEE THAT NO ONE GETS OUT — AND FIND THE CAPTAIN!'

LOOKS LIKE HE WAS RIGHT.



WE'RE SPOILT FOR CHOICE.

CAN YOU FLY ONE OF THESE?

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.



OH MY GOD!



MA'AM, THE PRISONERS HAVE ESCAPED AND THEY'VE... THEY'VE KILLED THE CAPTAIN.

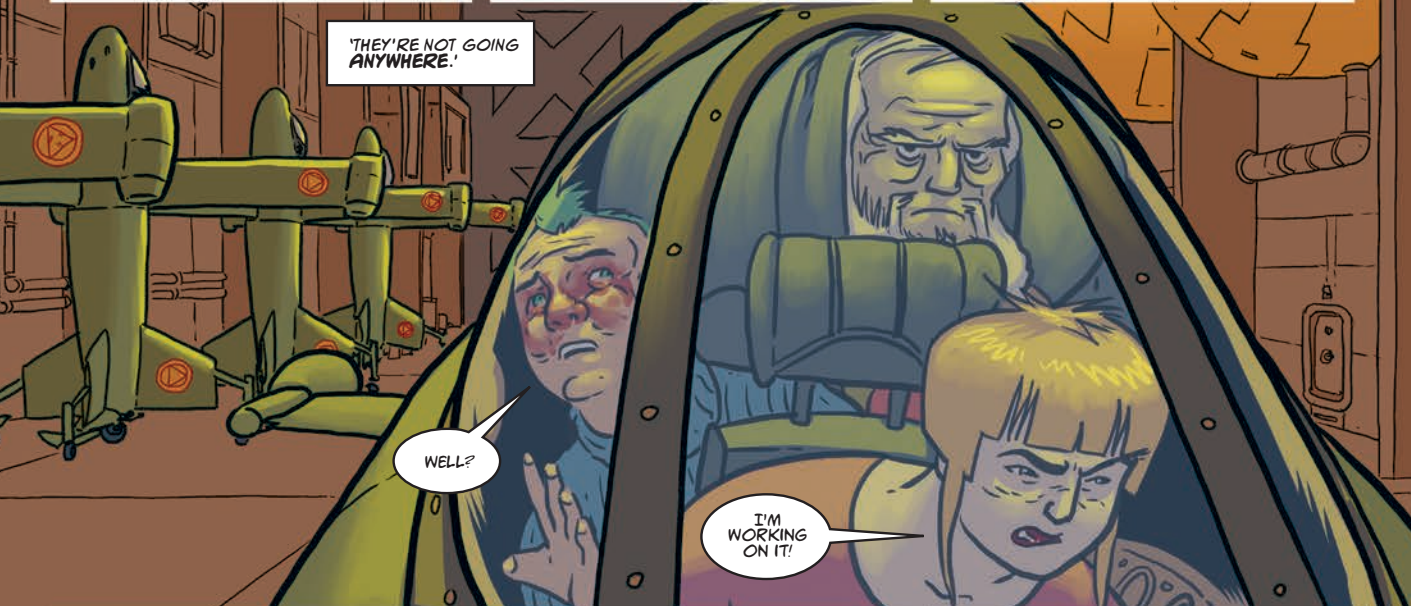
YES, MA'AM.

UNDERSTOOD. FIND THEM. I WANT THEM **ALIVE** FOR NOW, IS THAT CLEAR?



MA'AM, I'M READING AN UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS TO THE AUXILIARY HANGER DECK!

LOCK IT DOWN.



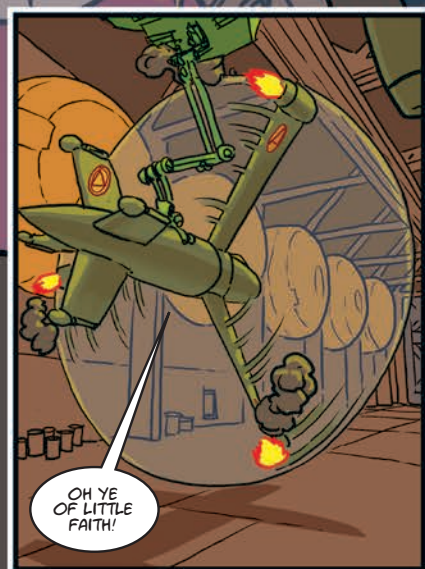
THEY'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE!

WELL?

I'M WORKING ON IT!



MIGHT I SUGGEST YOU WORK A LITTLE FASTER?



OH YE OF LITTLE FAITH!





WELL, THERE'S GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS.



WHAT'S THE GOOD NEWS?

I THINK WE'RE IN THE CLEAR. WE'VE SHOWN THEM A CLEAN SET OF HEELS.



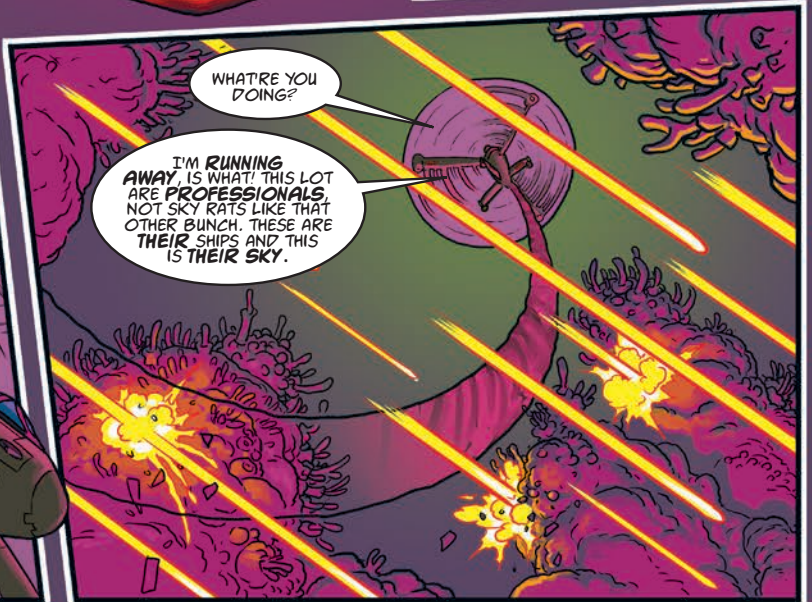
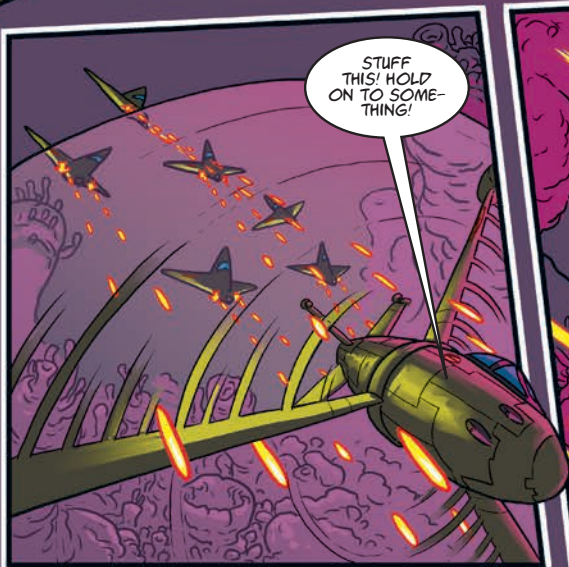
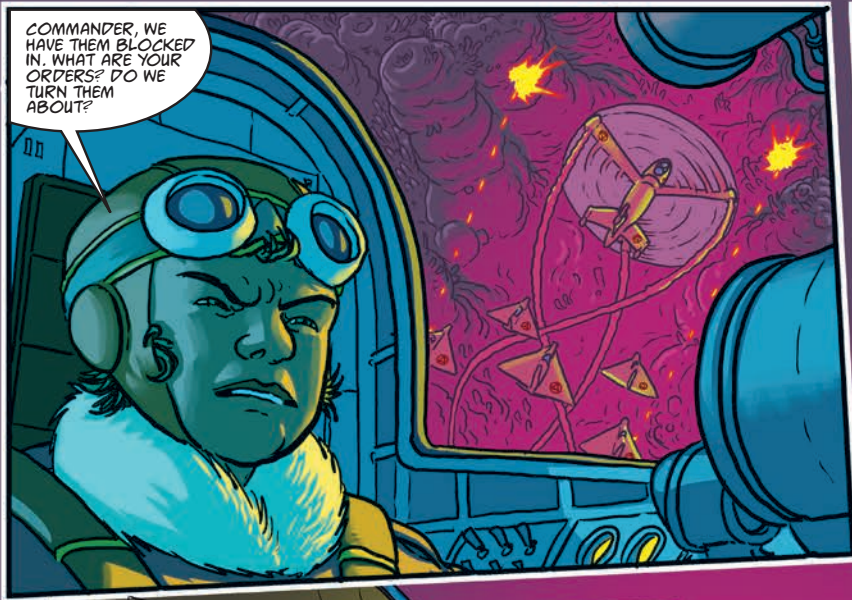
AND THE BAD NEWS?



AAAAHHH!

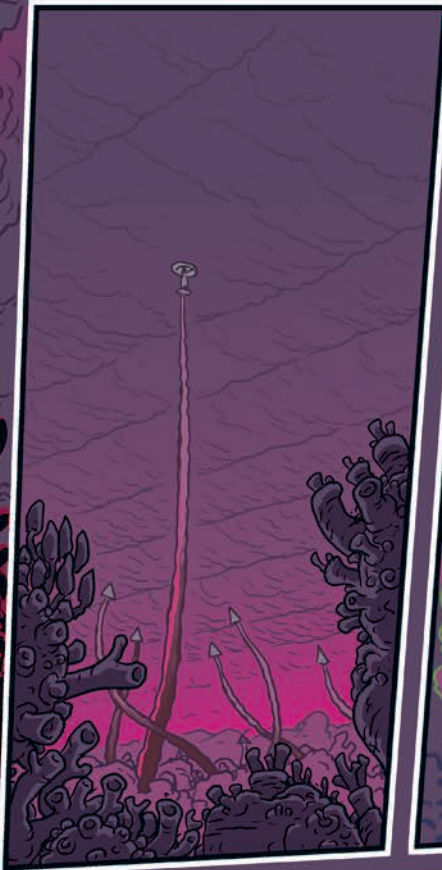


I WAS LYING ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS!





ONLY  
THING WE CAN  
DO IS TAKE AWAY  
THEIR HOME  
ADVANTAGE!



YES!



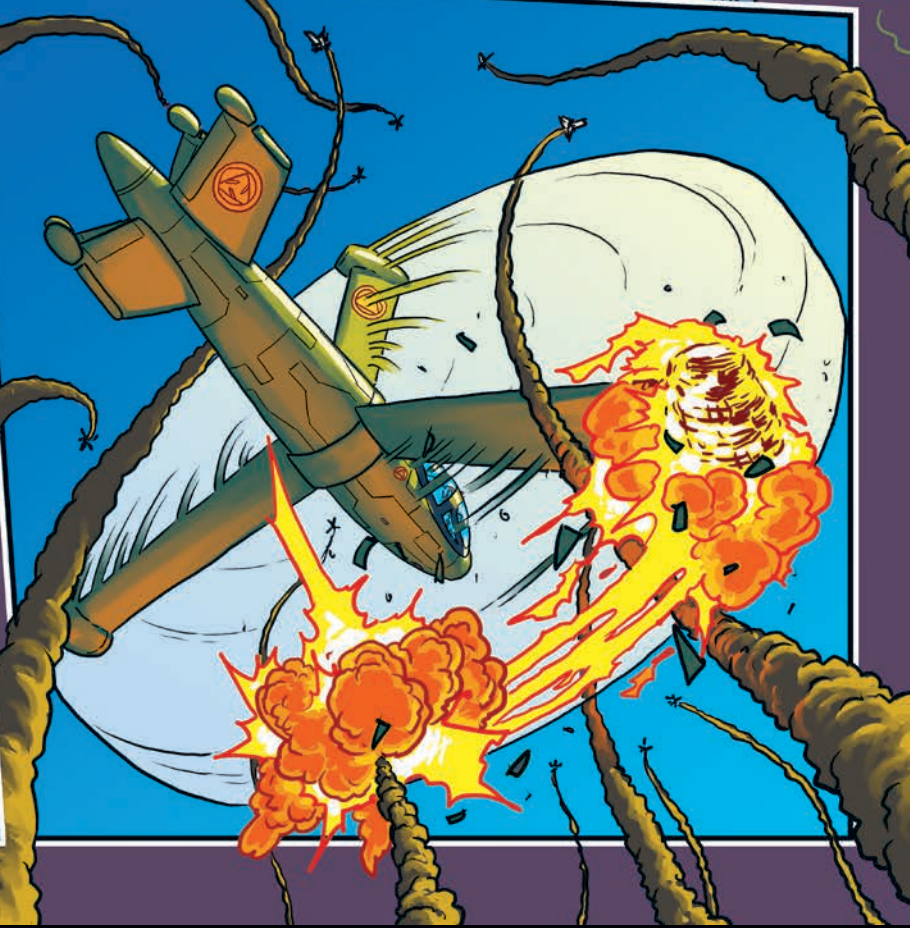
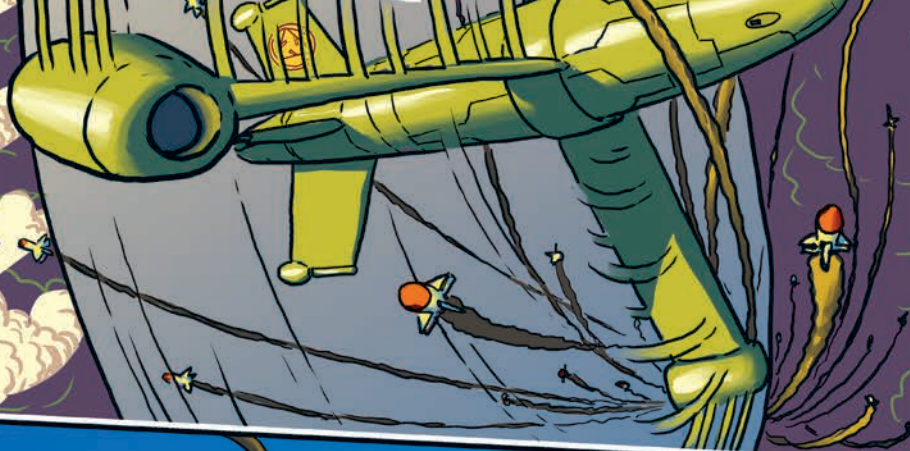
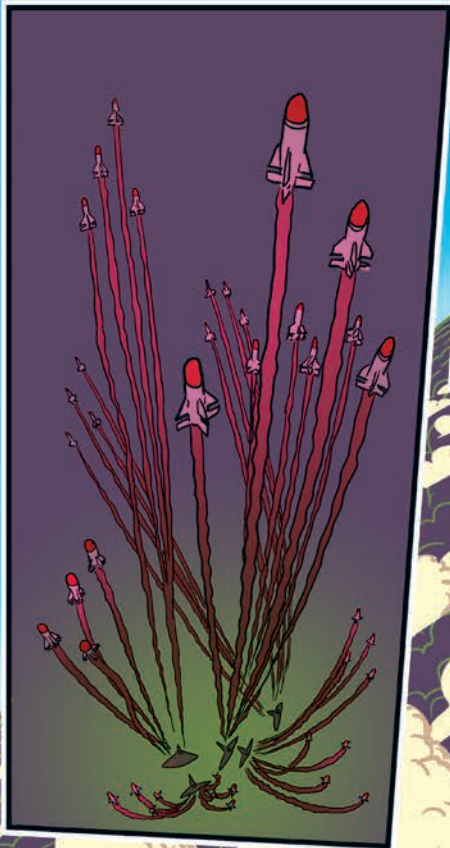
NICE TRY.  
WON'T WORK.

ALL  
SHIPS, DEPLOY  
MISSILES.



FIRE WHEN  
READY! FULL  
SPREAD!







I CAN'T HOLD IT!



RED LEADER TO BALLEROPHON. IT'S DONE. IT'S A KILL.



THEY'RE GONE!