




"NOTHING
SCARES ME
ANYMORE.

"MY WORST
NIGHTMARE
HAS ALREADY
HAPPENED.




"I'D BE DEVOURD
BY IT *EVERY*
NIGHT, SMOTHERED
IN MY MEMORY.

"STRANDED ON *KINGS
HIGHWAY*, BURIED
IN THE BELLY OF THAT
WOEFUL WRECK.



"MOTHER'S SKULL SMASHED
INTO THE STEERING WHEEL. HER
THIN, HAZEL HAIR PLASTERED
OVER THE SPEEDOMETER.

"OR WERE THEY PAINTED
ON THE DASH SCREEN? NEXT
TO HER EMBEDDED TEETH.



"SOMETIMES I
WONDER IF MY
LIFE IS JUST A
HALF-REMEMBERED
DAYDREAM FROM
HER DYING BRAIN.



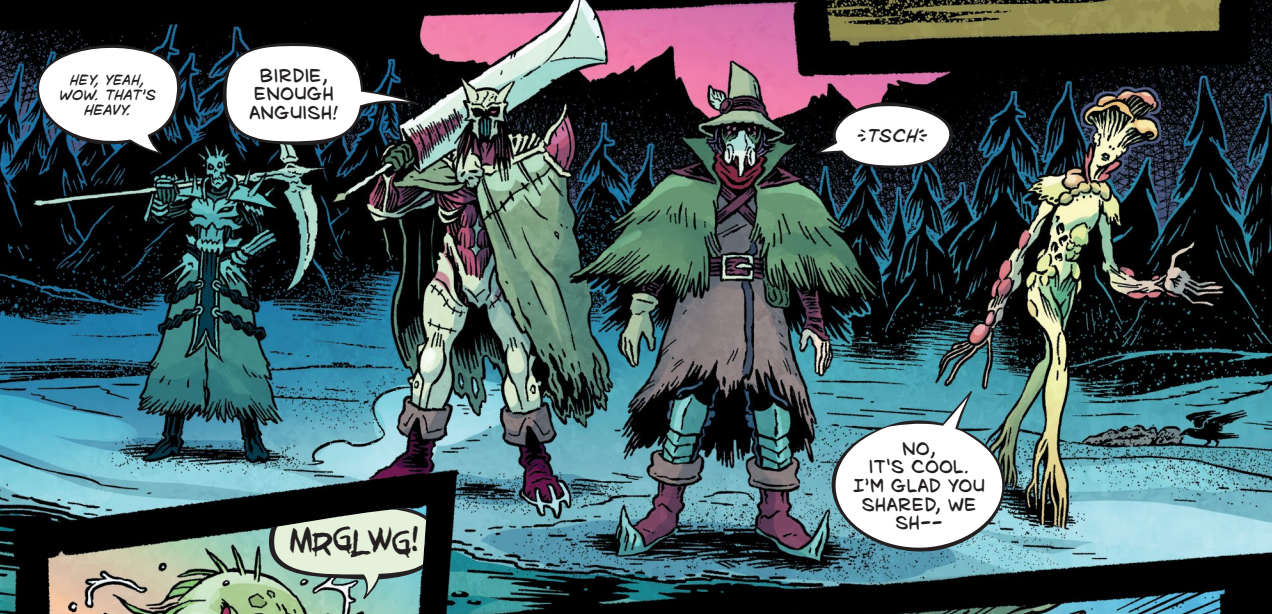
"AND I THINK...DID
SHE CREATE THIS
STORY FOR *ME*?"



I KNOW THAT'S SUPER FUCKED UP.



BUT YOU ASKED, WILSON!

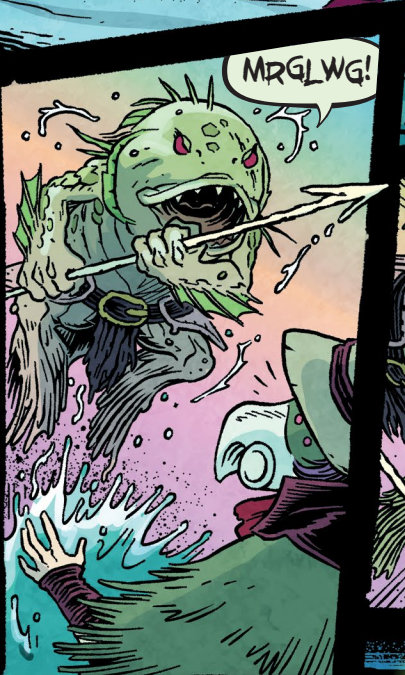


HEY, YEAH, WOW, THAT'S HEAVY.

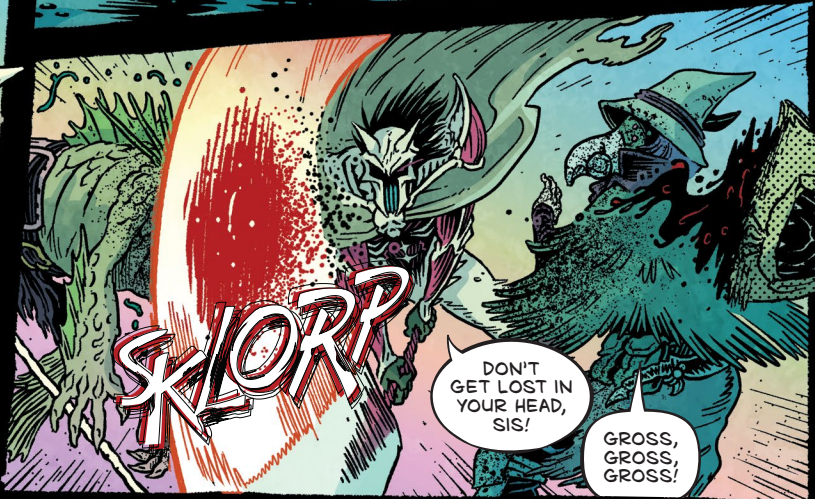
BIRDIE, ENOUGH ANGUISH!

≈TSCH≈

NO, IT'S COOL. I'M GLAD YOU SHARED, WE SH--



MRQLWG!



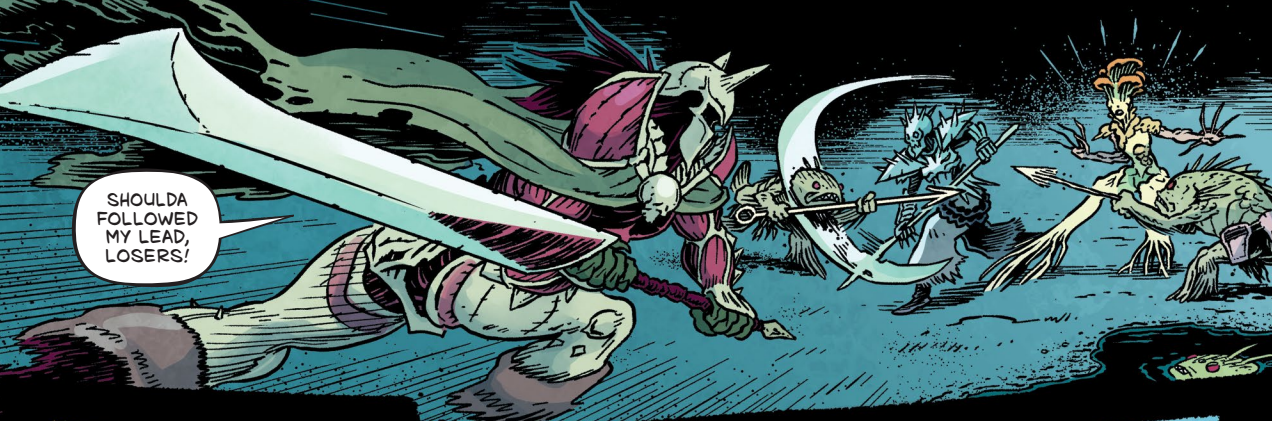
DON'T GET LOST IN YOUR HEAD, SIS!

GROSS, GROSS, GROSS!



WE'RE SURROUNDED!

WE COULD REALLY USE A TANK!



SHOULDA FOLLOWED MY LEAD, LOSERS!

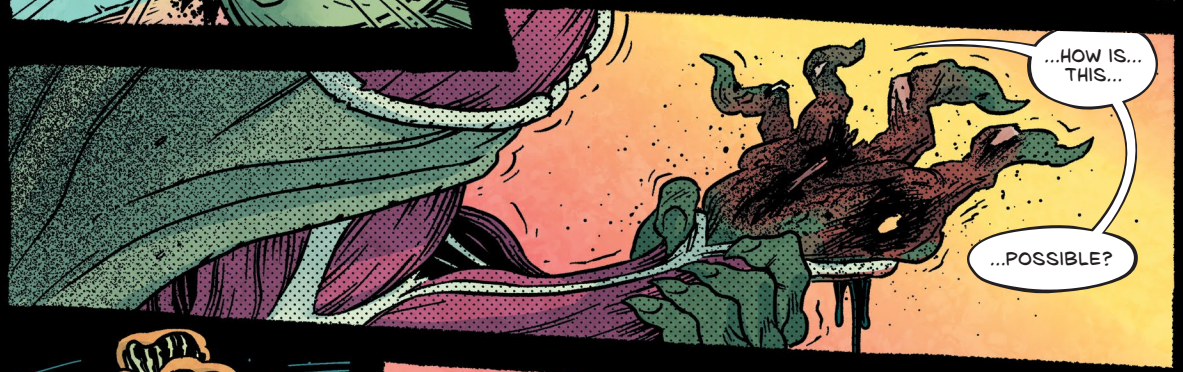


CHOMP



OW, WHAT THE FUCK?!

THAT ACTUALLY HURT!

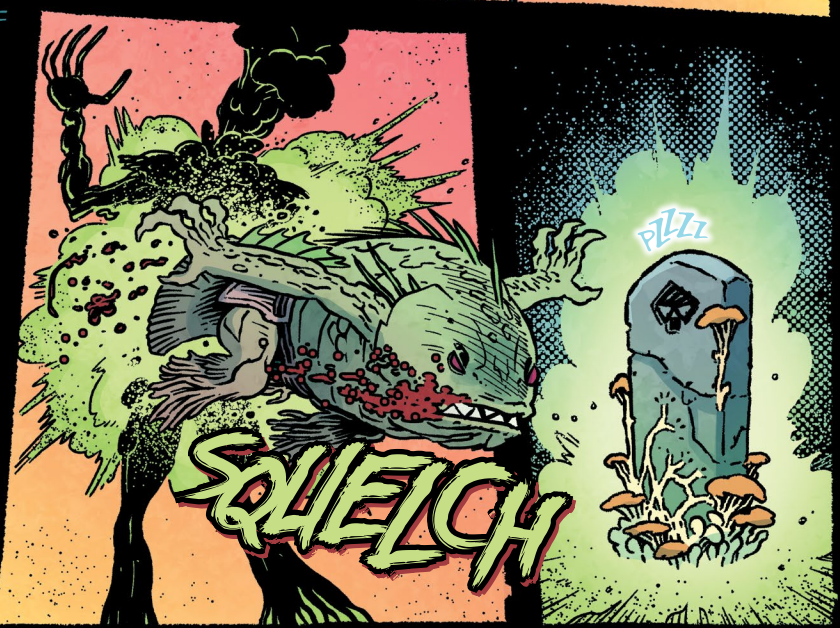


...HOW IS... THIS...

...POSSIBLE?

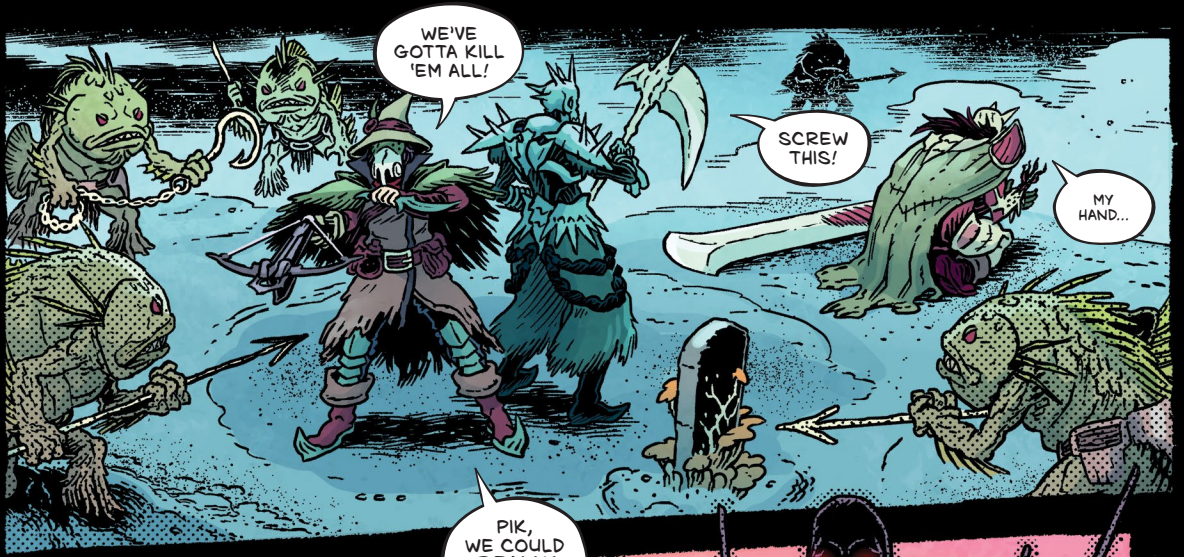


CHOMP



SQUELCH

PLZZ

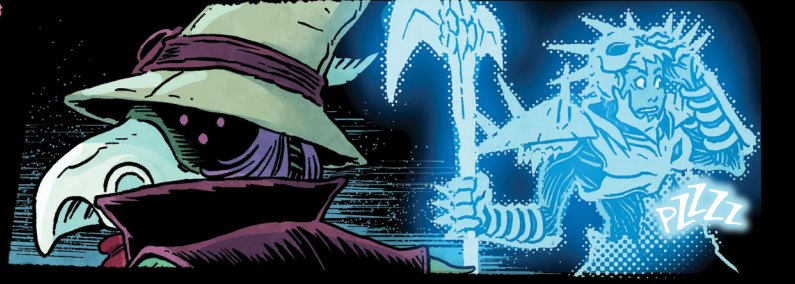


WE'VE GOTTA KILL 'EM ALL!

SCREW THIS!

MY HAND...

PIK, WE COULD REALLY USE YOUR HELP!



HE TOOK MY THUMB...

OH MY GOD, DID WILSON D/C? WHAT A WIMP!



WHAT? WHO? HURRY UP AND HELP ME!

SHING

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING



TORONTO, CANADA



...but I never remember dying.

NOW



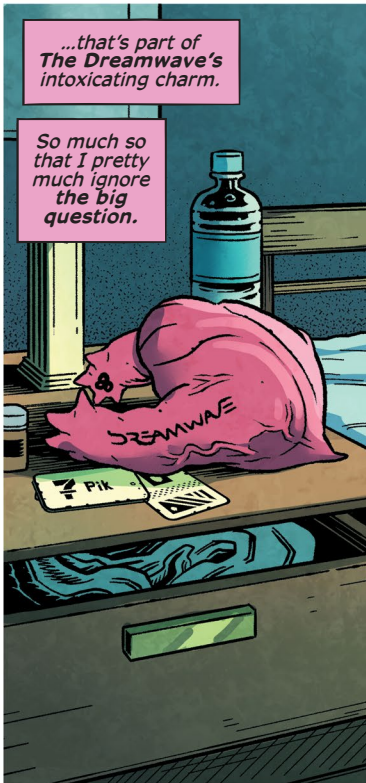
The last thing I see is a black void.



The words "YOU DIED" appear in blood red.

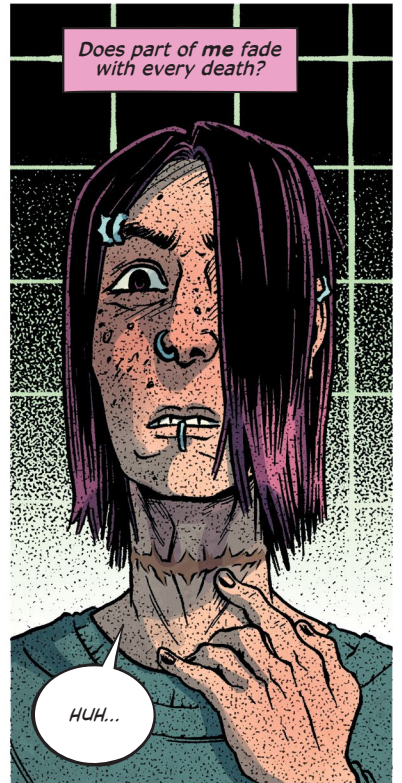


And no matter how we go...we always wake up in bed...



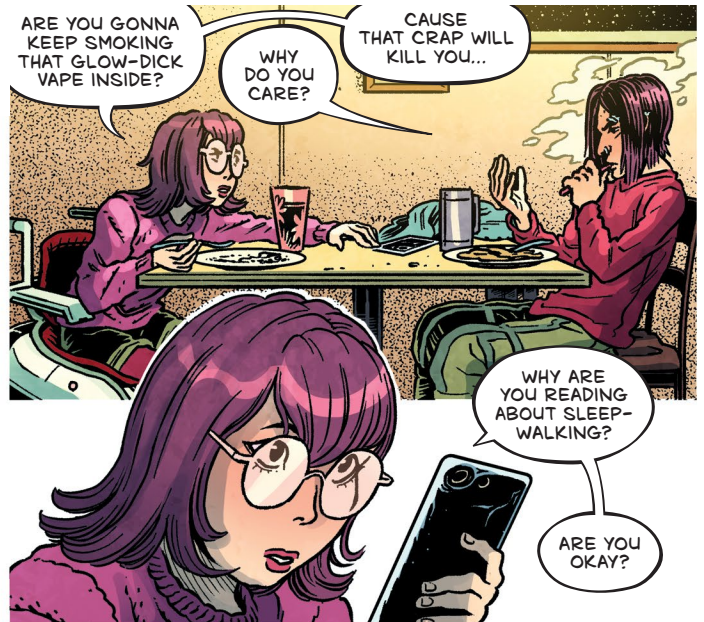
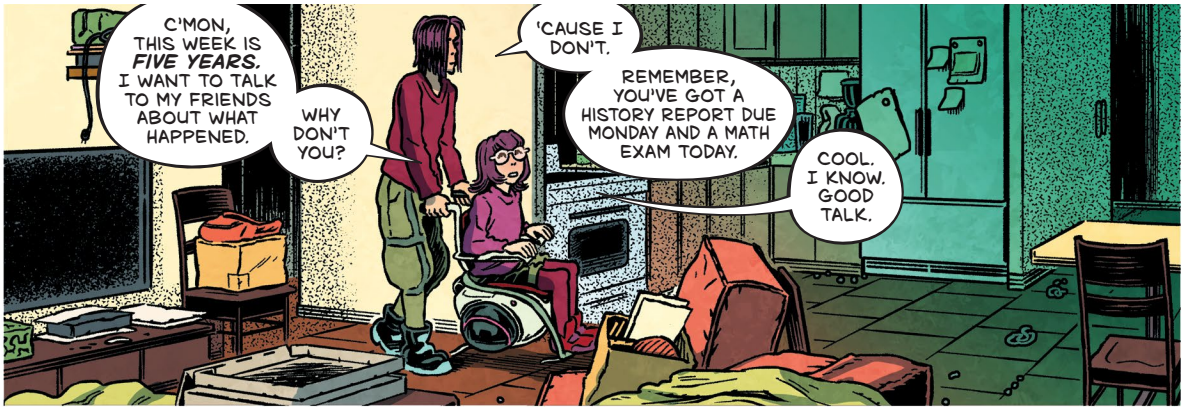
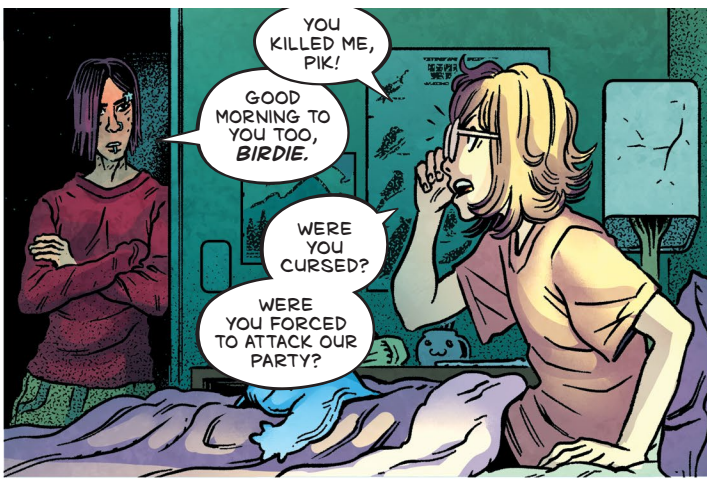
...that's part of *The Dreamwave's* intoxicating charm.

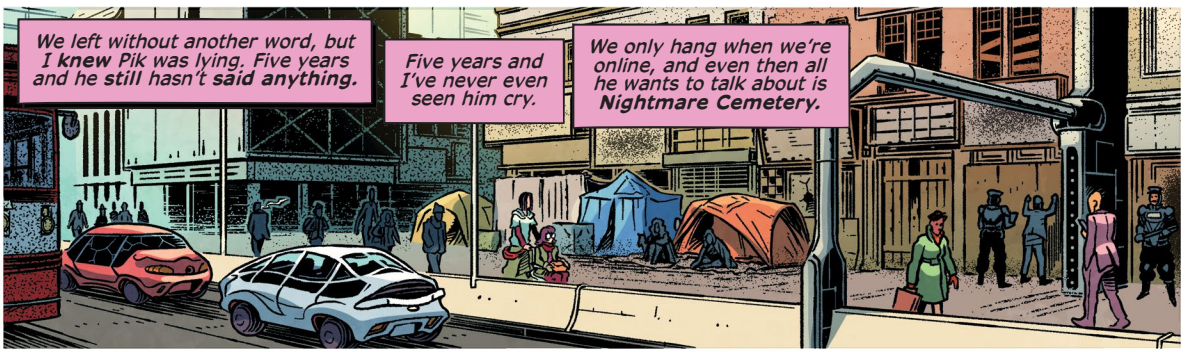
So much so that I pretty much ignore the big question.



Does part of me fade with every death?

HUH...





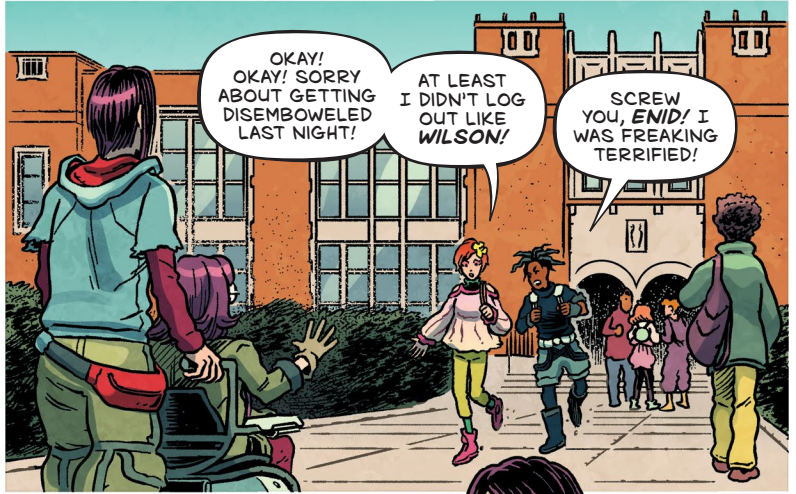
We left without another word, but I knew Pik was lying. Five years and he still hasn't said anything.

Five years and I've never even seen him cry.

We only hang when we're online, and even then all he wants to talk about is Nightmare Cemetery.



Why can't he talk about what happened to us?



OKAY! OKAY! SORRY ABOUT GETTING DISEMBOWELED LAST NIGHT!

AT LEAST I DIDN'T LOG OUT LIKE WILSON!

SCREW YOU, ENID! I WAS FREAKING TERRIFIED!



WHAT SCARED YOU SO BAD?

THE KING OF SLEEP WAS EATING PIK'S HAND...

YOU'RE REALLY GOING TO BLAME PIK?

THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN!



I SERIOUSLY SAW HIM!

YOU REALLY DON'T BELIEVE ME?



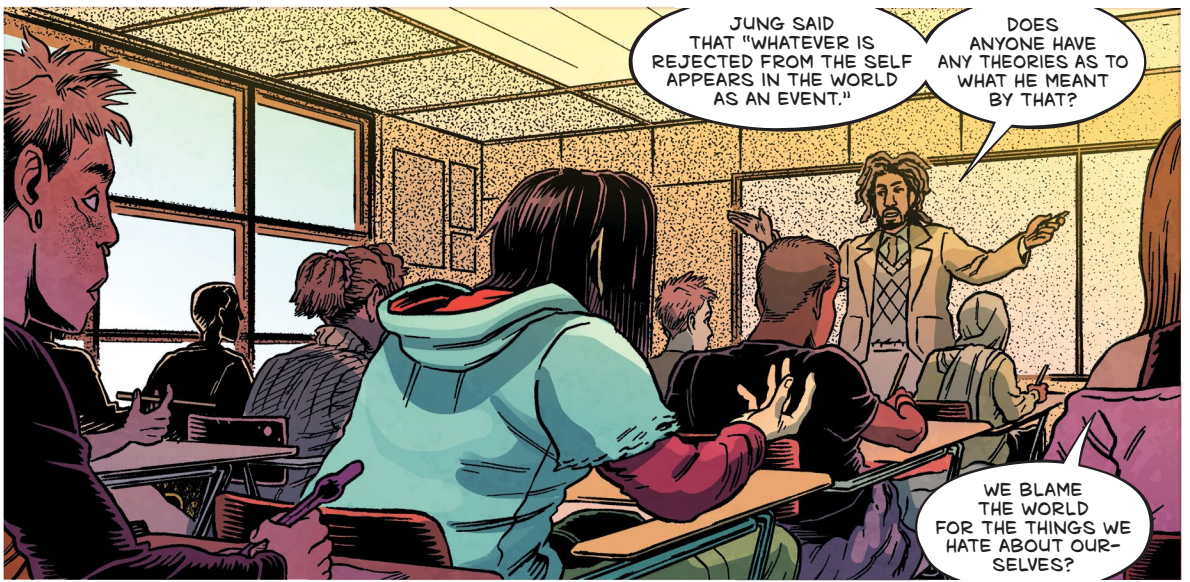
BRINGGGGG



WE'RE GOING BACK TONIGHT. BEST WEAR A DIAPER IF YOU'RE GONNA BE A BABY!

COME ON! I KNOW WHAT I SAW!

SORRY, BUD, YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT.



JUNG SAID THAT "WHATEVER IS REJECTED FROM THE SELF APPEARS IN THE WORLD AS AN EVENT."

DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY THEORIES AS TO WHAT HE MEANT BY THAT?

WE BLAME THE WORLD FOR THE THINGS WE HATE ABOUT OURSELVES?



YOU STILL DOWN FOR THE CARPENTER MARATHON AT THE REVUE NEXT WEEKEND?



WHA... WHAT?



HEY PIK, IT'S ME, LAIRD. YOU GOOD?

UH...

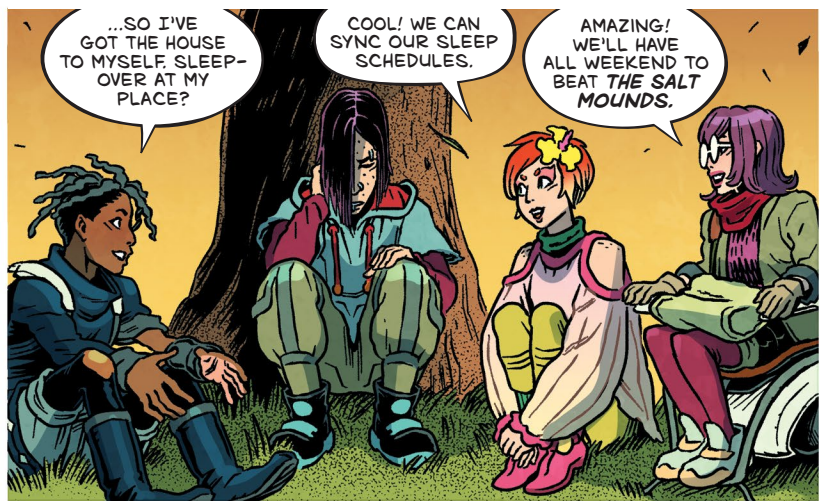


MRGLW GLWLG!

AHHH!



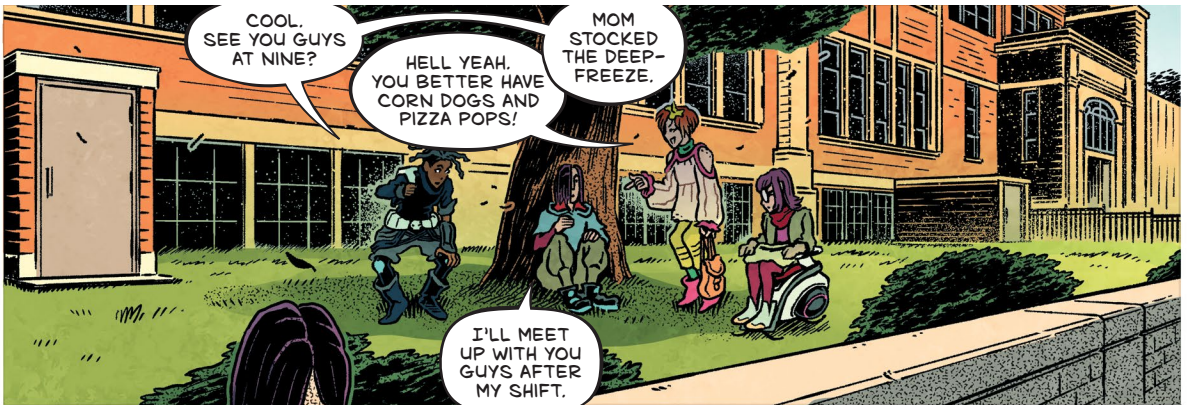
YEAH, MY PARENTS ARE GONE ALL WEEK...



...SO I'VE GOT THE HOUSE TO MYSELF. SLEEP-OVER AT MY PLACE?

COOL! WE CAN SYNC OUR SLEEP SCHEDULES.

AMAZING! WE'LL HAVE ALL WEEKEND TO BEAT THE SALT MOUNDS.



COOL. SEE YOU GUYS AT NINE?

HELL YEAH. YOU BETTER HAVE CORN DOGS AND PIZZA POPS!

MOM STOCKED THE DEEP-FREEZE.

I'LL MEET UP WITH YOU GUYS AFTER MY SHIFT.



DUDE, YOU'RE REALLY SWEATING. YOU DON'T SEEM OKAY.

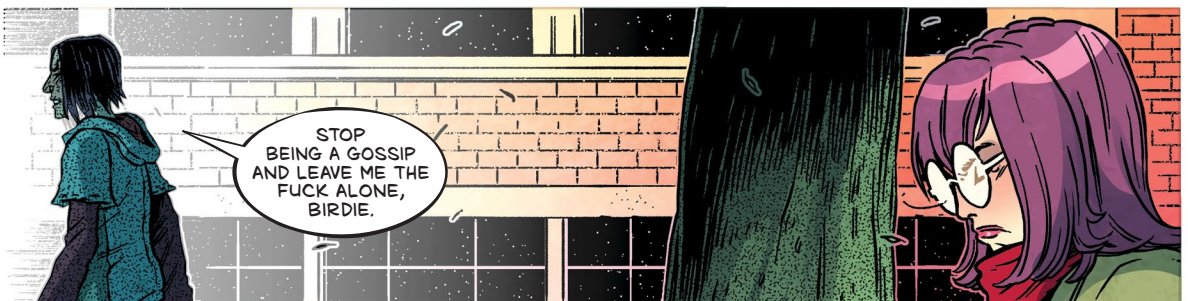
IT'S JUST... ALLERGIES.

YOU'RE NOT COMING HOME BEFORE WORK?



NO SENSE. I'VE GOT SHIT TO DO.

C'MON. LET'S GET POUTINE. YOU CAN TELL ME WHAT'S UP OVER SOME GREASY CURDS.



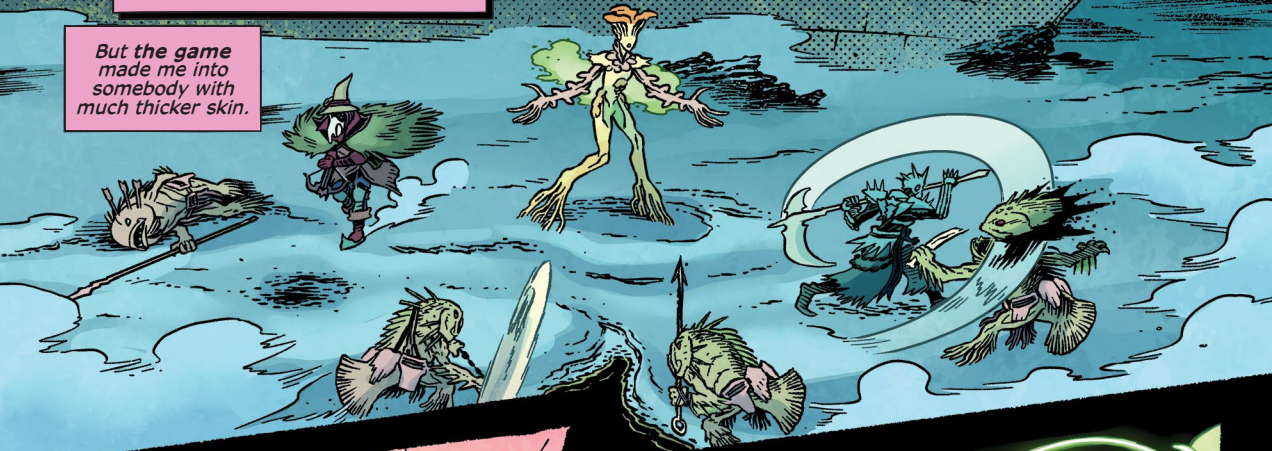
STOP BEING A GOSSIP AND LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE, BIRDIE.

NIGHTMARE CEMETERY

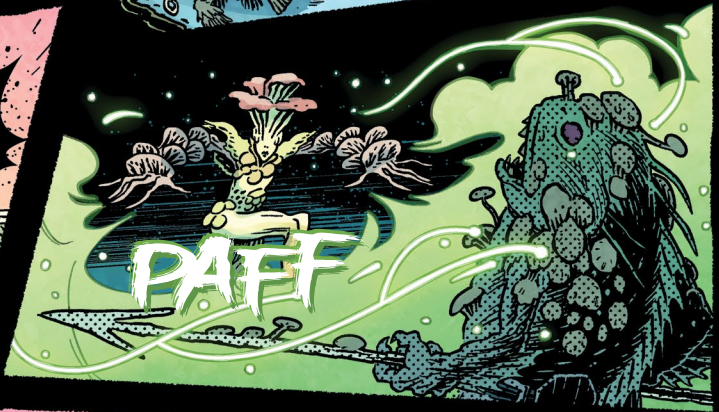
LEVEL 1 - THE SALT MOUNDS

His words still hung over me as we logged in that night. They hurt, they stung, they peeled back my skin.

But the game made me into somebody with much thicker skin.



Somebody who didn't care about petty sibling bullshit.

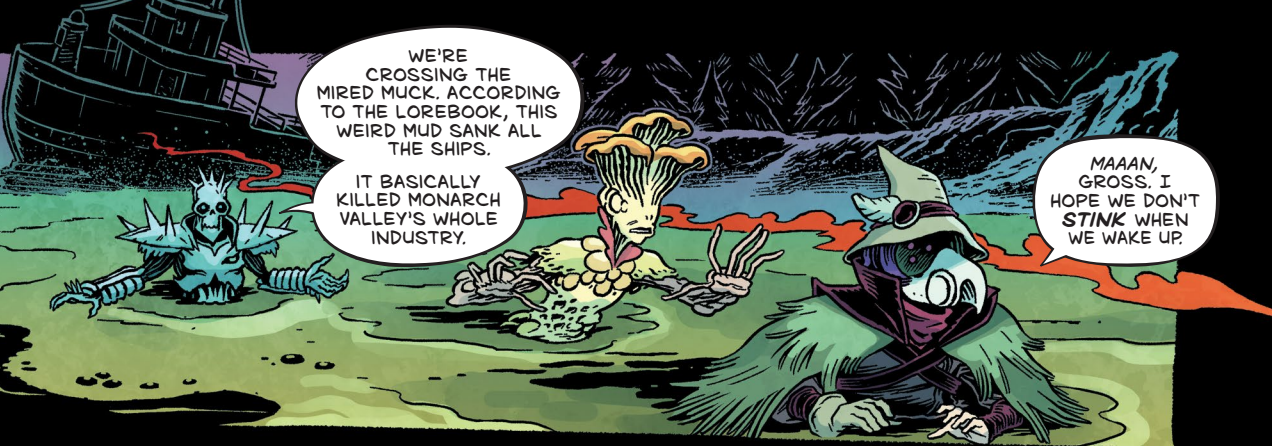


But which one was really me?

THE BLOOD TRAIL IS MOVING UP AND OVER THE SIDE OF THE DERELICT BOAT.

MAYBE WE SHOULD FOLLOW IT?





WE'RE CROSSING THE MIRED MUCK. ACCORDING TO THE LOREBOOK, THIS WEIRD MUD SANK ALL THE SHIPS.

IT BASICALLY KILLED MONARCH VALLEY'S WHOLE INDUSTRY.

MAAAN, GROSS. I HOPE WE DON'T STINK WHEN WE WAKE UP.



O, HELLO, PLEASE... OVER HERE!

LOOK, AN NPC. HE'S GOT A QUEST.



RATHER CHILLY HERE, AIN'T IT? IT'S THEM FISHERMEN. THEY'RE A BITTER LOT. I WAS MAKING MY WAY THROUGH THE MOUNDS WHEN I WAS ACCOSTED BY THEIR OARSMAN.

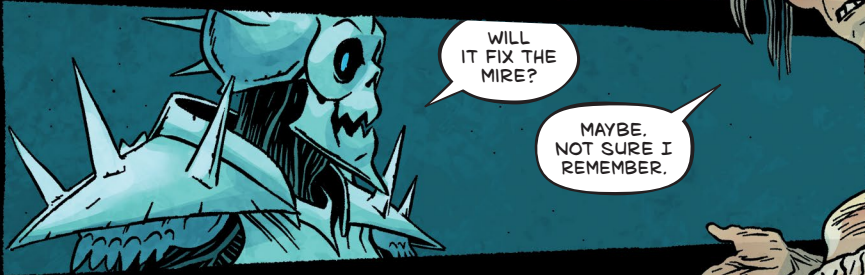
TOWERING BASTARD COVERED IN BRINE.

HE'S THE BLOODY SWINE THAT POLLUTES THIS PLACE.



YOU WANT US TO KILL HIM?

I'M... NOT SURE. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO?



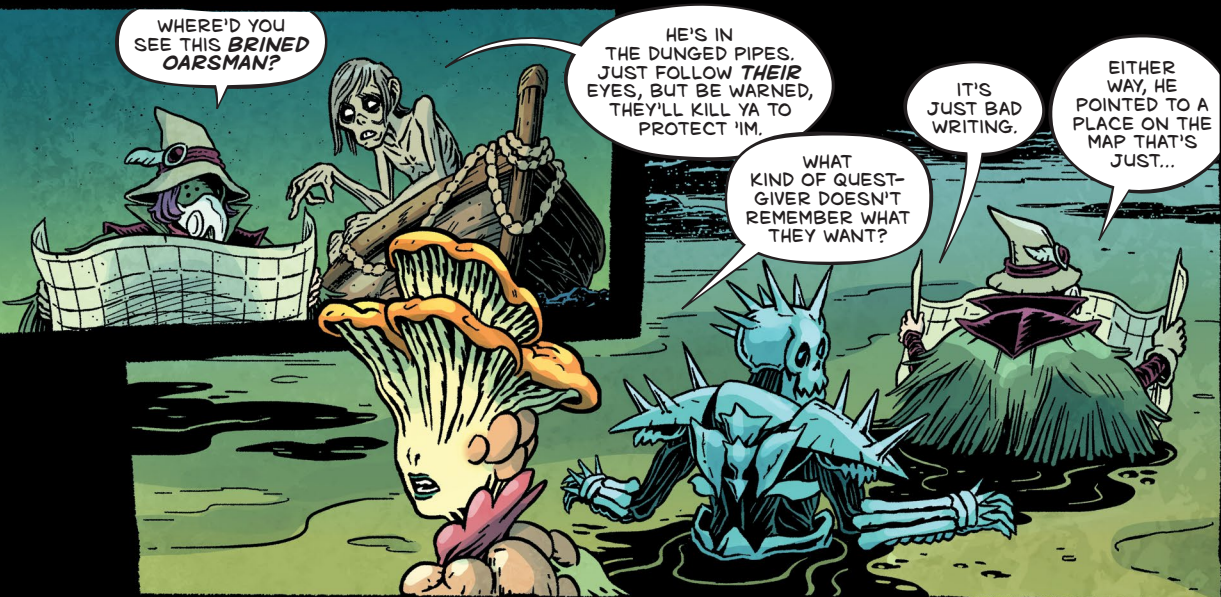
WILL IT FIX THE MIRE?

MAYBE. NOT SURE I REMEMBER.



YOU DON'T REMEMBER YOUR OWN QUEST?

I SIMPLY RECALL SLEEPIN' ON THE BOBBIN' WAVES AND WAKIN' UP HERE.



WHERE'D YOU SEE THIS **BRINED OARSMAN**?

HE'S IN THE **DUNGED PIPES**. JUST FOLLOW **THEIR EYES**, BUT BE WARNED, THEY'LL KILL YA TO PROTECT 'IM.

IT'S JUST BAD WRITING.

EITHER WAY, HE POINTED TO A PLACE ON THE MAP THAT'S JUST...

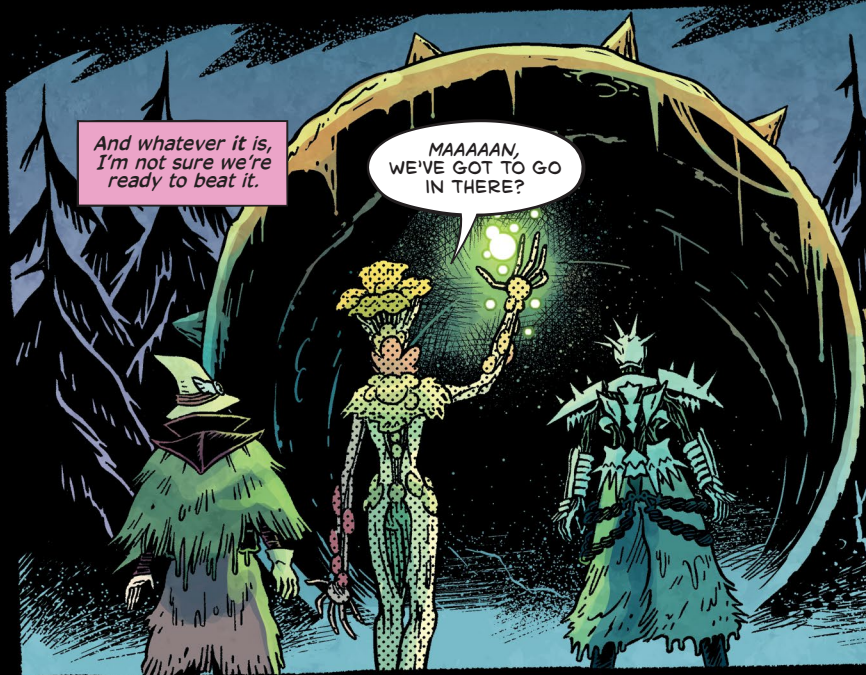
WHAT KIND OF QUEST-GIVER DOESN'T REMEMBER WHAT THEY WANT?



...OVER THERE.



Suddenly I'm filled with dread, like we're moving toward something... malignant.



And whatever it is, I'm not sure we're ready to beat it.

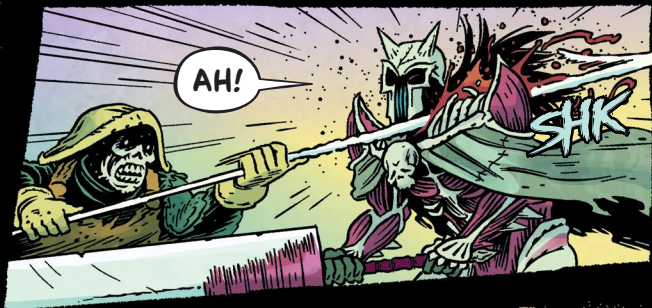
MAAAAAAN, WE'VE GOT TO GO IN THERE?



OH CRUD...



I GOT YOU, SIS!



AH!



END, WE NEED A HEAL!

I'M FINE.

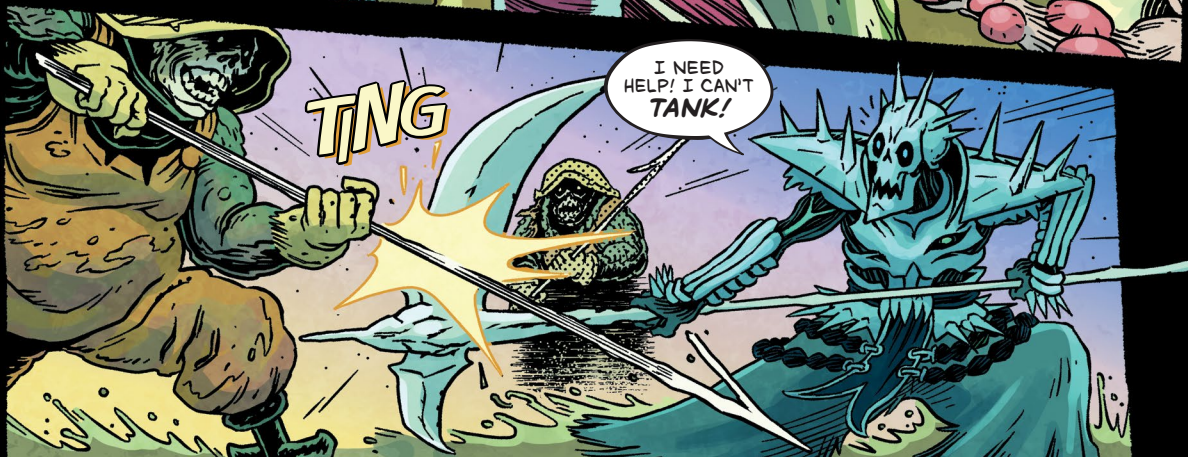
FINE MEANS YOU'RE NOT FINE.



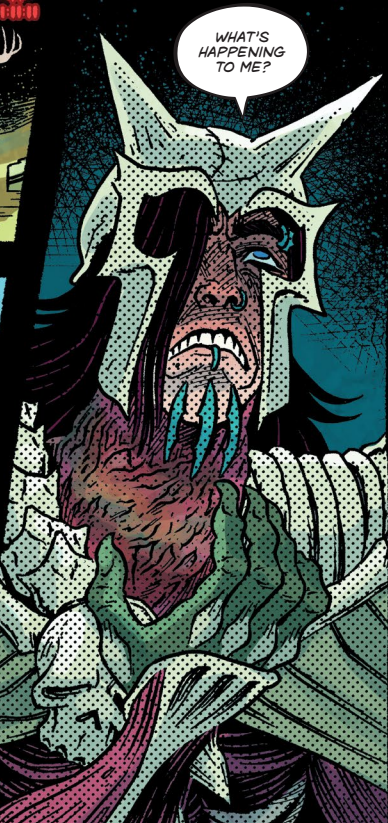
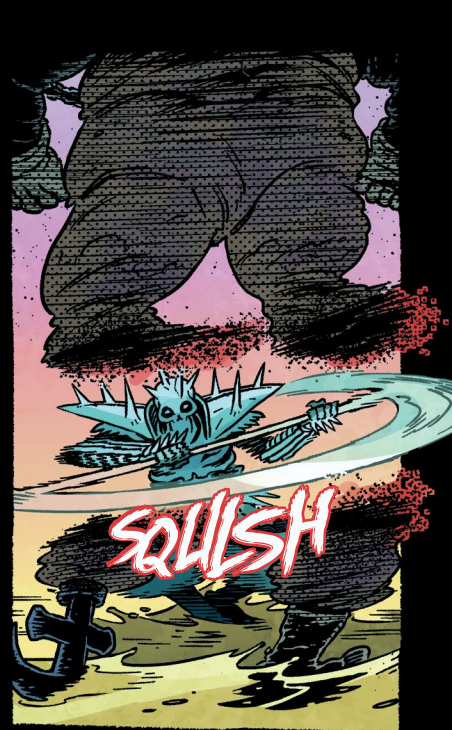
YOU'RE SUPER LATE. YOU DIDN'T RETURN MY TEXTS. WHERE'D YOU GO AFTER WORK?

NOWHERE. I WAS BUSY. CAN WE JUST PLAY THE--

YOU'RE LYING.

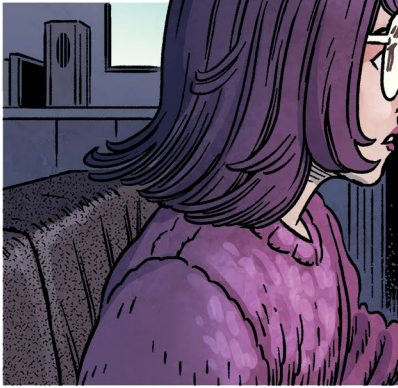


I NEED HELP! I CAN'T TANK!





HE'S GOING TO SLEEP ALL DAY...



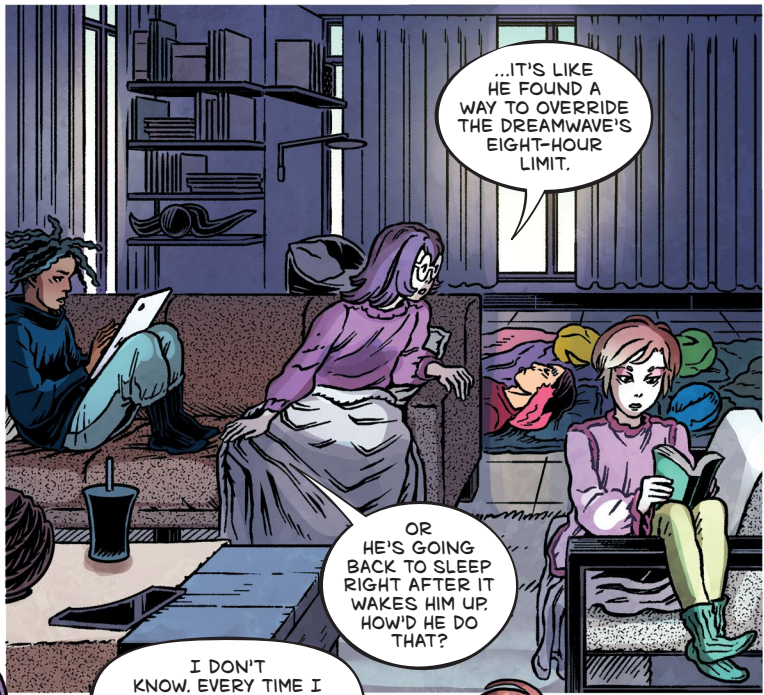
I DON'T KNOW. EVERY TIME I ASK HIM TO *OPEN UP*, HE SHUTS DOWN. HE SEEMS LIKE A *DIFFERENT PERSON* LATELY.



EVER SINCE THE *ACCIDENT*, HE'S BEEN FORCED TO PLAY PARENT. HE'S HAD A JOB SINCE HE WAS *OUR* AGE.

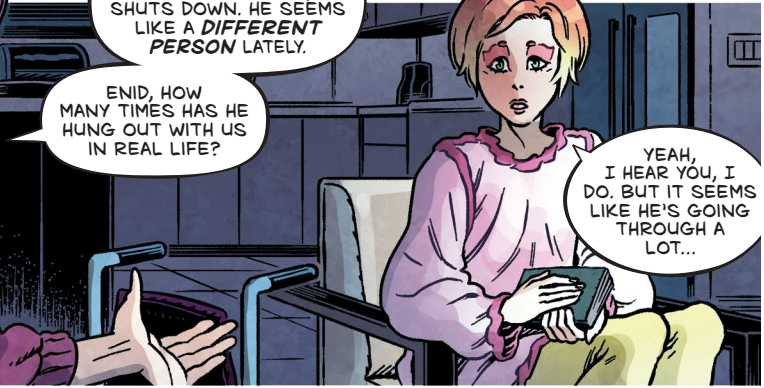
I GET HIS ANGER, YOU KNOW?

RESPONSIBILITIES SUCK. ALL I WANT IS TO MOVE TO THE COUNTRY AND DISAPPEAR INTO A BIG GARDEN.



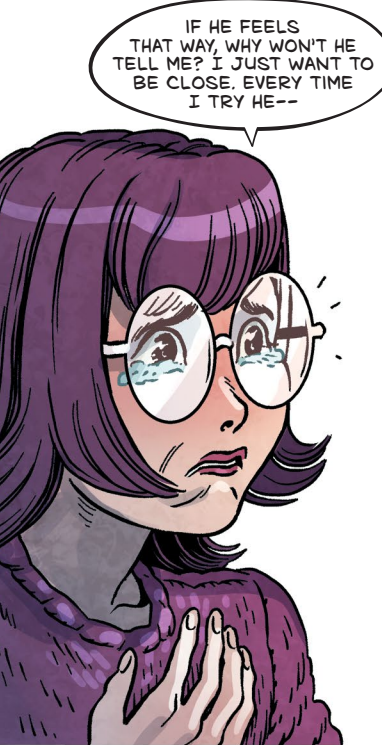
...IT'S LIKE HE FOUND A WAY TO OVERRIDE THE DREAMWAVE'S EIGHT-HOUR LIMIT.

OR HE'S GOING BACK TO SLEEP RIGHT AFTER IT WAKES HIM UP. HOW'D HE DO THAT?



ENID, HOW MANY TIMES HAS HE HUNG OUT WITH US IN REAL LIFE?

YEAH, I HEAR YOU, I DO. BUT IT SEEMS LIKE HE'S GOING THROUGH A LOT...

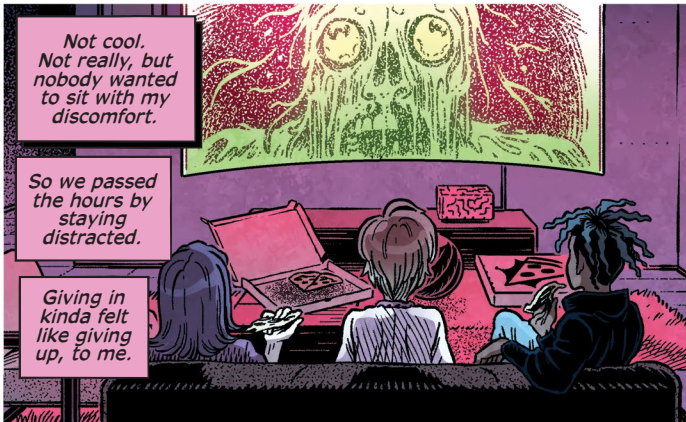
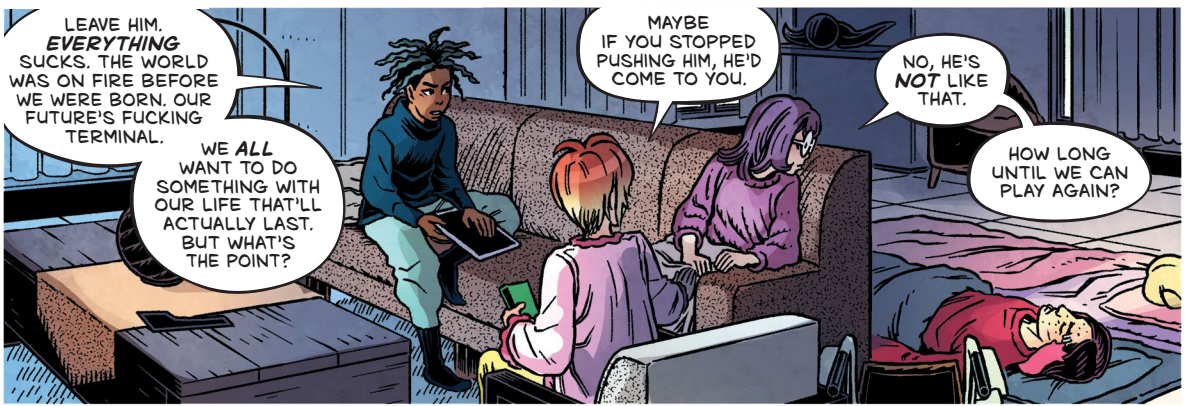


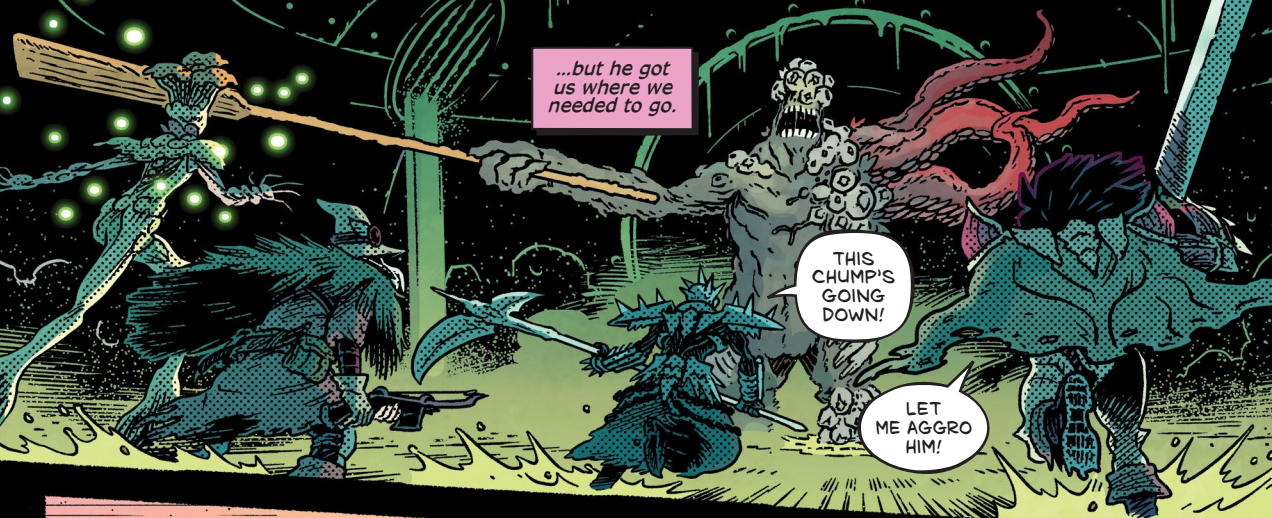
IF HE FEELS THAT WAY, WHY WON'T HE TELL ME? I JUST WANT TO BE CLOSE. EVERY TIME I TRY HE--



HE SHOWED UP TO PLAY WITH US.

THAT'S WORTH *SOMETHING*, ISN'T IT?





...but he got us where we needed to go.

THIS CHUMP'S GOING DOWN!

LET ME AGGRO HIM!



TWAK

BIRDIE, FOCUS YOUR ARROWS ON HIS HEAD!



SLSH



GOT IT! THANKS, BRO!

SHK

SHK



=HGK=



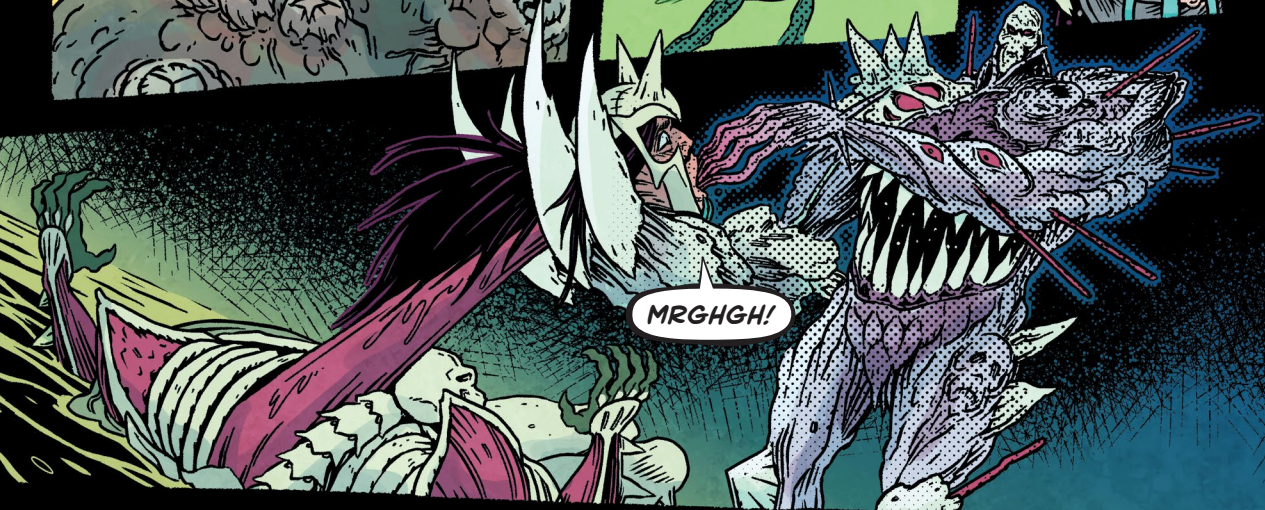
WHAUD



HEY, LEAVE HIM ALONE!



SUCK SPORES, ASSHOLE!



MRGHH!



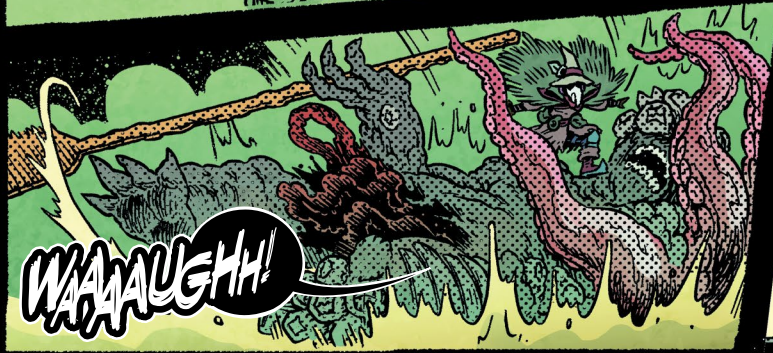
LET'S GOOOO!



WAIT... WHERE'S PIK?

WE DID IT!

WEIRD, MY PING IS INSANE.



WAAUGHH!

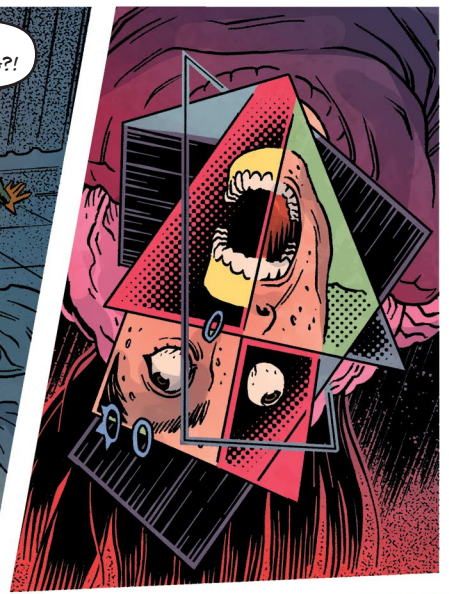
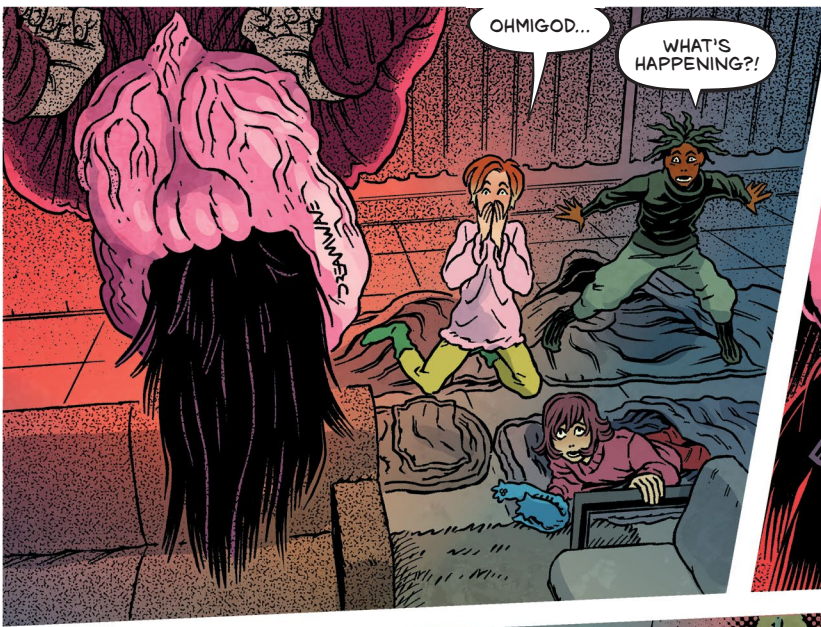


I...I'M GETTING BOOTED.



HGRGH...

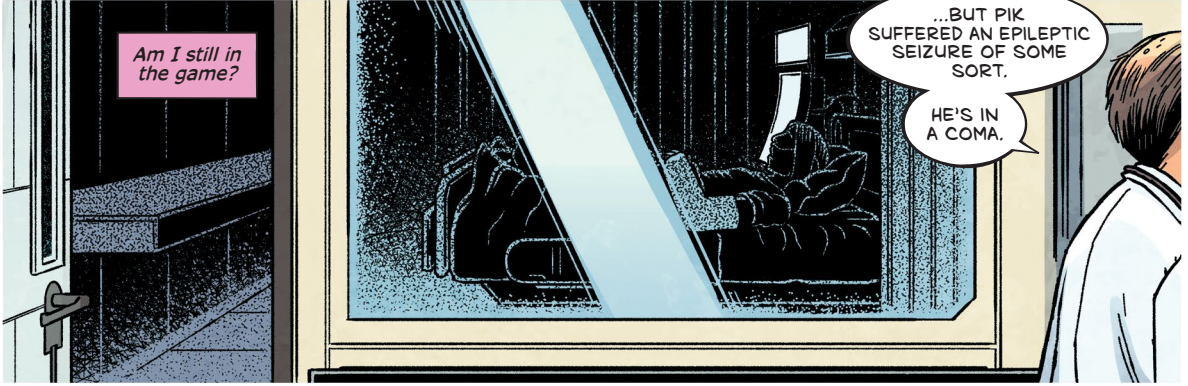






This has to be a nightmare.

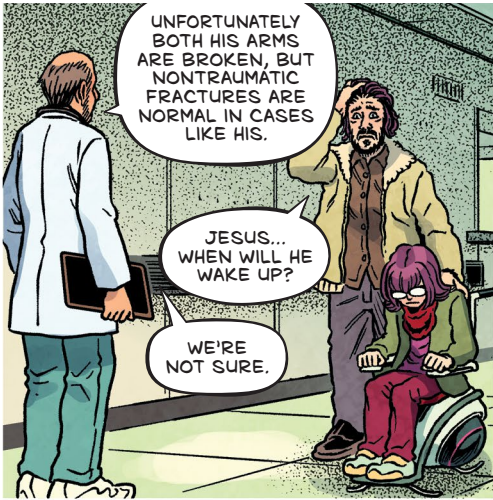
MR. CUTTER, WE'RE NOT SURE HOW IT HAPPENED JUST YET...



Am I still in the game?

...BUT PIK SUFFERED AN EPILEPTIC SEIZURE OF SOME SORT.

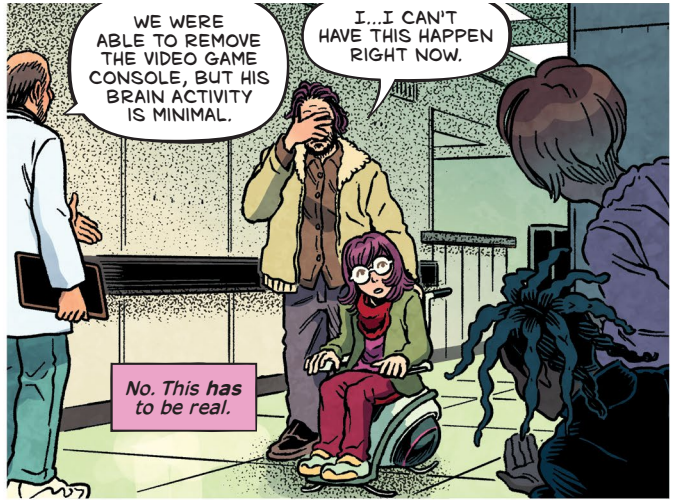
HE'S IN A COMA.



UNFORTUNATELY BOTH HIS ARMS ARE BROKEN, BUT NONTRAUMATIC FRACTURES ARE NORMAL IN CASES LIKE HIS.

JESUS... WHEN WILL HE WAKE UP?

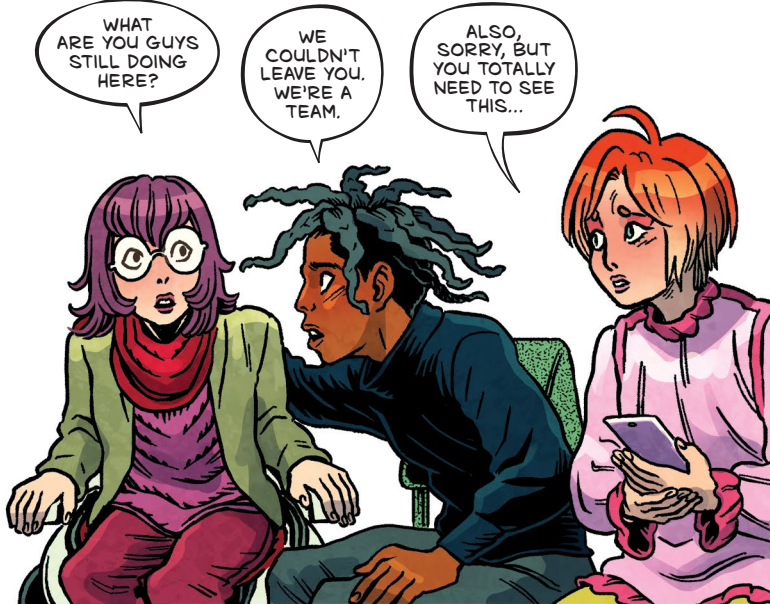
WE'RE NOT SURE.



WE WERE ABLE TO REMOVE THE VIDEO GAME CONSOLE, BUT HIS BRAIN ACTIVITY IS MINIMAL.

I...I CAN'T HAVE THIS HAPPEN RIGHT NOW.

No. This has to be real.



WHAT ARE YOU GUYS STILL DOING HERE?

WE COULDN'T LEAVE YOU. WE'RE A TEAM.

ALSO, SORRY, BUT YOU TOTALLY NEED TO SEE THIS...



PIK'S STILL IN THE GAME?

TO BE CONTINUED