

**BLACK HELIX CAMP.
NEW COLUMBIA.
SIX YEARS AGO.**

SIR,
WE'VE LOST
ANOTHER INFANTRY
UNIT. NORTH STAR
CAMP. THEY KILLED
EVERYONE,
SIR!

GOD-
DAMN IT.

IS GRIMSHAW
STILL
HOLDING?

YES,
GENERAL
BARRON, BUT IT'S
ONLY A MATTER OF
DAYS--

THEN
WE PUSH WEST.
FLANK THEM.

SIR,
WE DON'T HAVE
ENOUGH SUPPLIES
FOR THAT KIND OF
MOVEMENT--

SHUT UP,
COLONEL. I NEED
TO THINK.

BUT,
SIR--

BZZZT--

scraak

GOOD
TIDINGS,
GENERAL.

CIVILIANS
AREN'T
ALLOWED IN
HERE!

I AM AN
EMISSARY...

...FROM
THE RED
KING.

HE
SENDS THIS
GIFT.

KEEP
HER
SAFE.

SHE
IS THE
KEY.

CHAPTER TWO: MINNOW

ONIDA. NOW.

NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT. I DON'T WORK OUTSIDE ONIDA. I DON'T SMUGGLE PEOPLE--ESPECIALLY KIDS! AND I DON'T FUCK WITH POLITICS.

LISTEN, THIRTEEN--

AND HOW LONG WERE YOU WATCHING THOSE CULT FREAKS, JUST WAITING TO STEP IN AT THE MOST DRAMATIC MOMENT? AM I SUPPOSED TO OWE YOU ONE NOW? I DON'T NEED SAVING, AKAN!

...ARE YOU FINISHED?

...I DUNNO. MAYBE.

TEE, I DIDN'T BRING THE WAR TO ONIDA...

SHE DID.

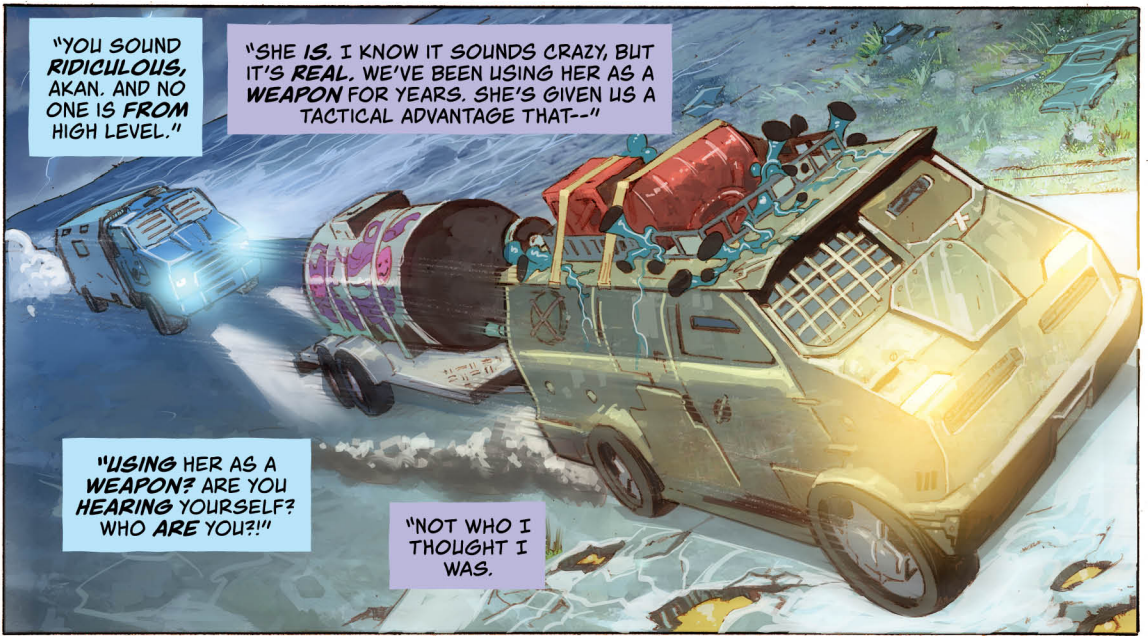




MINNOW HAS POWERS NO ONE CAN EXPLAIN. SHE CAN FIND AND OPEN OLD MILITARY DOORS AND CRATES JUST BY APPROACHING THEM. SHE JUST FEELS IT.

A.N.A. BLUNKERS? OUR BEST SCAVENGERS CAN'T GET INTO THOSE THINGS.

I KNOW. BUT SHE CAN. SHE'S SPECIAL.



"YOU SOUND RIDICULOUS, AKA. AND NO ONE IS FROM HIGH LEVEL."

"SHE IS. I KNOW IT SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT IT'S REAL. WE'VE BEEN USING HER AS A WEAPON FOR YEARS. SHE'S GIVEN US A TACTICAL ADVANTAGE THAT--"

"USING HER AS A WEAPON? ARE YOU HEARING YOURSELF? WHO ARE YOU?!"

"NOT WHO I THOUGHT I WAS."



THAT'S WHY I TOOK HER FROM BLACK HELIX. WE WERE LOSING THE WAR, BUT WHEN MINNOW SHOWED UP GENERAL BARRON EXPLOITED HER GIFT TO LAY SIEGE TO THE NORTH. INNOCENT PEOPLE ARE DYING.

I THOUGHT WE WERE FREEDOM FIGHTERS, BUT WE'VE BECOME TERRORISTS.

SO YOU DEFECTED.

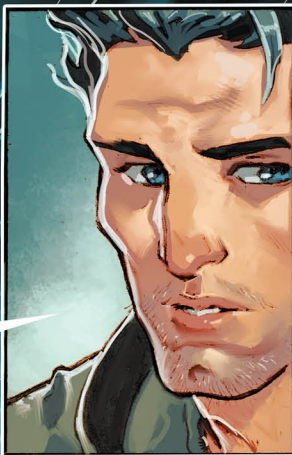


ONE LITTLE BOY THINKS HE KNOWS HOW TO MOVE THE ARMY MEN AROUND BETTER THAN THE OTHER, AND NOW YOU WANT A WOMAN TO CLEAN UP THE MESS. ISN'T THAT JUST PERFECT?

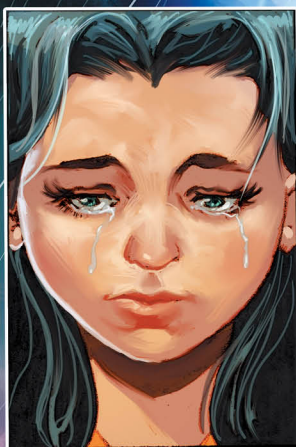
I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR STUPID WAR, KAY.

YOU SHOULD. BARRON WILL DESTROY ANYTHING IN HIS PATH TO GET WHAT HE WANTS, BUT HE **CAN'T** DO IT WITHOUT MINNOW. RETURN HER HOME TO HIGH LEVEL AND BLACK HELIX HAS **NO** REASON TO BE IN ONIDA.

MINNOW'S BEEN A PAWN OF WAR HER WHOLE LIFE, BUT A GROWING NUMBER OF US BELIEVE SHE WAS SENT NOT AS A **WEAPON**, BUT AS A **TEST OF FAITH**. SHE MUST **ASCEND**, BACK TO HER HOME. SHE'S THE KEY TO **PEACE**.



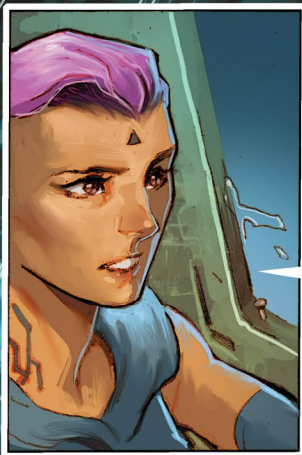
"THAT'S THE **DUMBEST** THING I'VE EVER HEARD. WHAT **HAPPENED** TO YOU?!"



"YOU'VE LIVED IN ONIDA YOUR WHOLE LIFE. YOU HAVE **NO IDEA** THE THINGS I'VE SEEN. THINGS THAT MADE ME BELIEVE THE OLD STORIES, OF **CHOSEN ONES** ASCENDING TO HIGH LEVEL DURING THE DISRUPTION AND MIGRATION.

"MINNOW IS OF THE **CHOSEN ONES**, AND IF SHE **ASCENDS**, THE WAR WILL **END**."





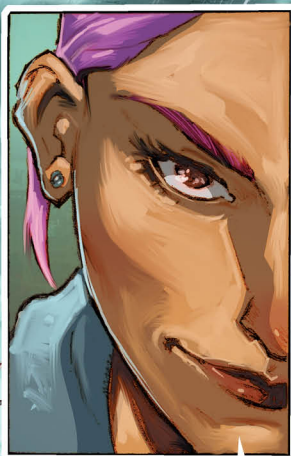
THEY'RE JUST **MYTHS**, KAY! OLD BEDTIME FABLES. I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT BRAINWASHED INTO BELIEVING THEM, BUT THIS IS **ALL** A WHOLE LOT OF **NOT MY PROBLEM**.

"I **KNOW** YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT ANY OF THIS. BUT I ALSO KNOW YOU'LL GET THE JOB DONE. SO HERE'S SOMETHING YOU WILL CARE ABOUT: **A HUNDRED THOUSAND**.

"ENOUGH MONEY TO GET YOU OUT OF SMUGGLING BEFORE YOU GET CAUGHT--**AGAIN**. ENOUGH TO KEEP YOU COMFORTABLE, FOCUS ON YOUR ROBOTICS, WHATEVER YOU WANT."

"...HIGH LEVEL...**NO**. IT'S NOT WORTH IT. I CAN FIGURE **MY OWN SHIT** OUT."

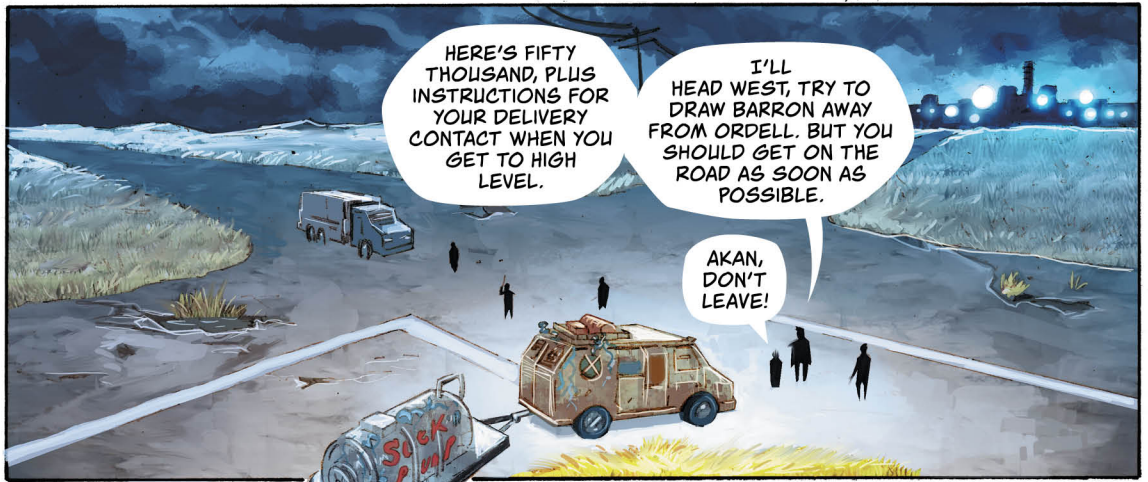
"FIFTY UP FRONT, FIFTY ON DELIVERY."



I TOLD YOU, IT'S NOT...

...ACTUALLY...
OKAY. I'LL DO IT.





HERE'S FIFTY THOUSAND, PLUS INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR DELIVERY CONTACT WHEN YOU GET TO HIGH LEVEL.

I'LL HEAD WEST, TRY TO DRAW BARRON AWAY FROM ORDELL. BUT YOU SHOULD GET ON THE ROAD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

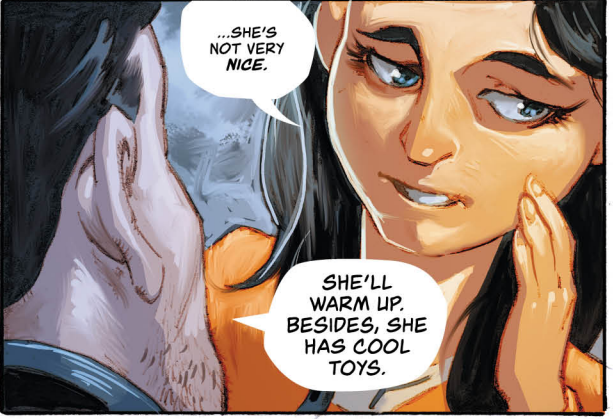
AKAN, DON'T LEAVE!

HEY, IT'S GONNA BE OKAY.

LOOK AT ME. I PROMISED I'D GET YOU HOME, RIGHT?

...YEAH.

I'D DO IT MYSELF IF I COULD. BUT YOU CAN **TRUST** THIRTEEN. SHE'S **VERY** CLEVER, SHE WON'T LET **ANYTHING** BAD HAPPEN TO YOU. I **PROMISE**.



...SHE'S NOT VERY NICE.

SHE'LL WARM UP. BESIDES, SHE HAS COOL TOYS.



I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU, TEE. WHAT YOU'RE DOING FOR US IS SO IMPORTANT. YOU COULD END THE--

GOOD-BYE, AKAN. AND FROM NOW ON, STAY THE **FUCK** OUT OF MY LIFE.

NICE SEEING YOU, TOO, THIRTEEN.



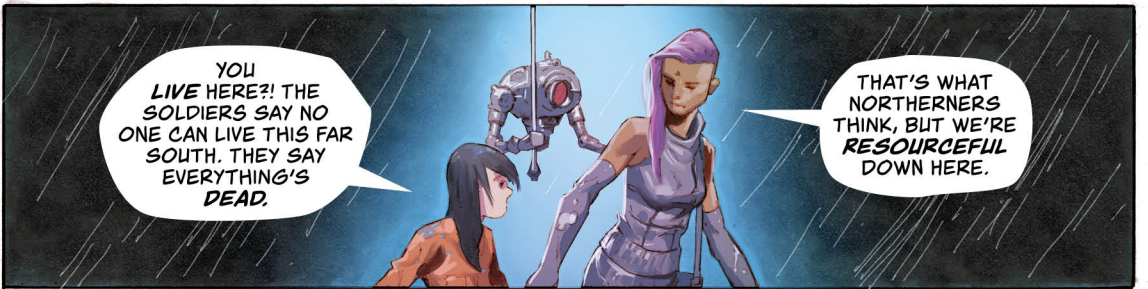
WE'LL STAY
HERE A COUPLE
NIGHTS WHILE I
PREP FOR THE
TRIP.

WOW, IT'S SO
COLORFUL!



WHAT
IS THIS
PLACE?

PEOPLE IN
THE OLD WORLD
CAME HERE FOR
RITUALS OF JOY.
WE'VE TURNED IT
INTO A HOME.



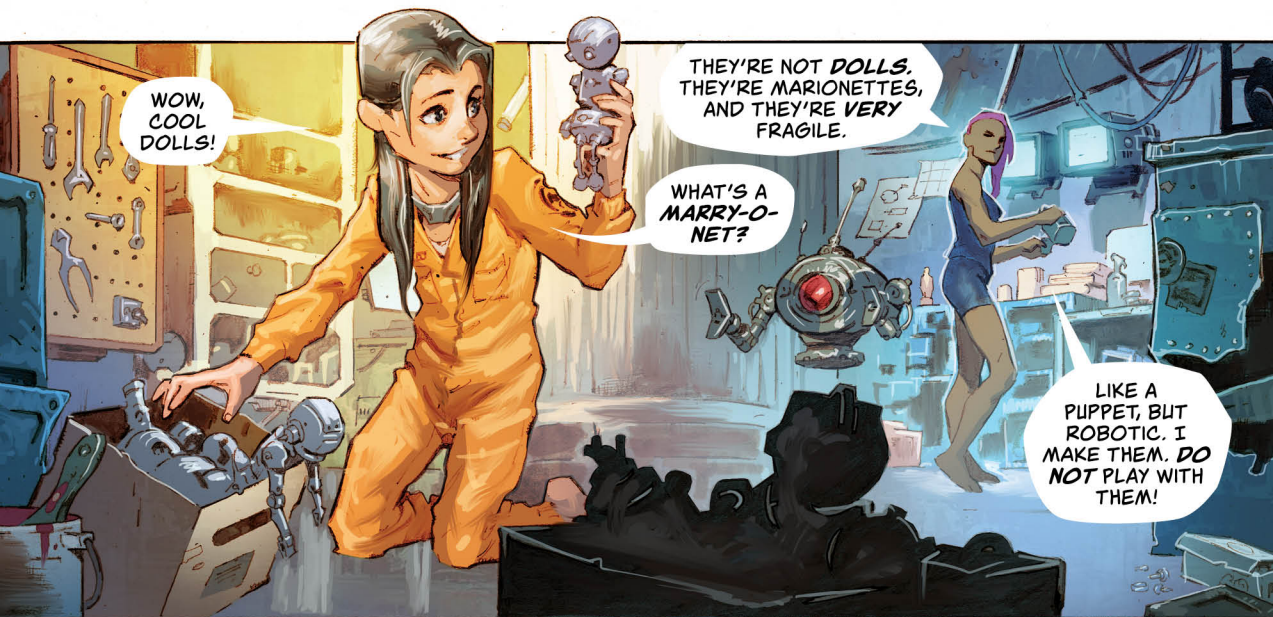
YOU
LIVE HERE?! THE
SOLDIERS SAY NO
ONE CAN LIVE THIS
FAR SOUTH. THEY SAY
EVERYTHING'S
DEAD.

THAT'S WHAT
NORTHERNERS
THINK, BUT WE'RE
RESOURCEFUL
DOWN HERE.



THIS IS A
REALLY WEIRD
HOUSE.

≡SIGH≡ JUST...
DON'T TOUCH
ANYTHING.



WOW, COOL DOLLS!

THEY'RE NOT *DOLLS*. THEY'RE MARIONETTES, AND THEY'RE *VERY* FRAGILE.

WHAT'S A MARRY-O-NET?

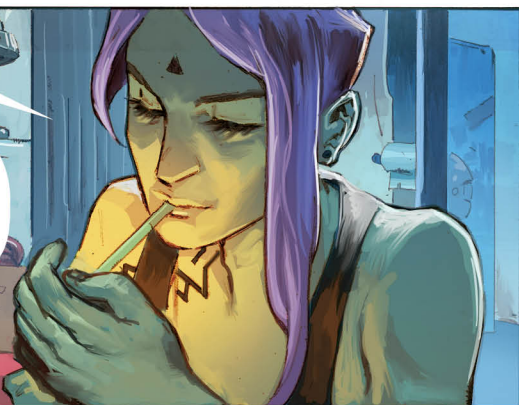
LIKE A PUPPET, BUT ROBOTIC. I MAKE THEM. *DO NOT* PLAY WITH THEM!



SO YOU'RE FROM HIGH LEVEL, HUH? WHAT'S IT LIKE?

I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH. BUT IT WAS HAPPY. THERE WAS A TALKING MOUSE, AND SPARKLE PONIES, AND PRINCESSES!

...RRRIIIIGHT.



OKAY, TAKE THE JUMPSUIT OFF AND SIT HERE. WE NEED TO MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE A "BOY."

...CONVENTIONALLY SPEAKING, ANYWAY.

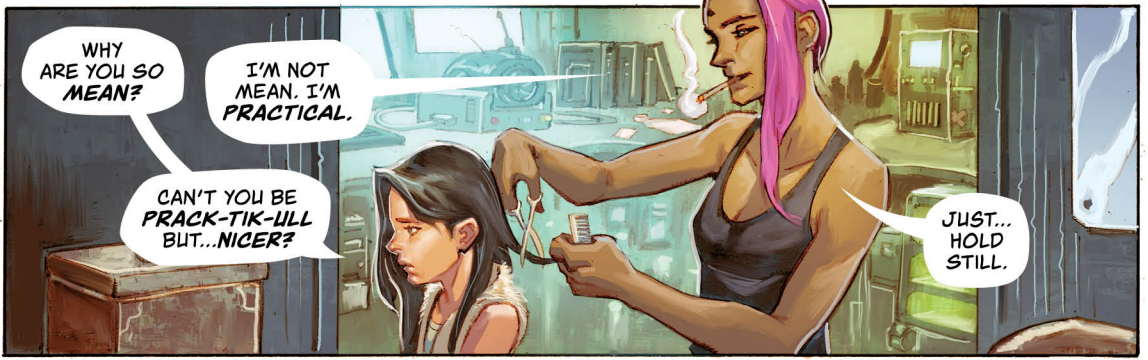
A BOY? WHY?



BECAUSE THEY'RE *LOOKING* FOR A GIRL. BESIDES, TRAFFICKERS ROAM THE OUTLANDS, AND LITTLE GIRLS ARE MORE VALUABLE. CUTTING YOUR HAIR WILL KEEP YOU SAFER.

BUT I LIKE MY HAIR!

YOUR HAIR WILL GROW BACK, YOUR LIFE WON'T. NOW HOLD STILL.

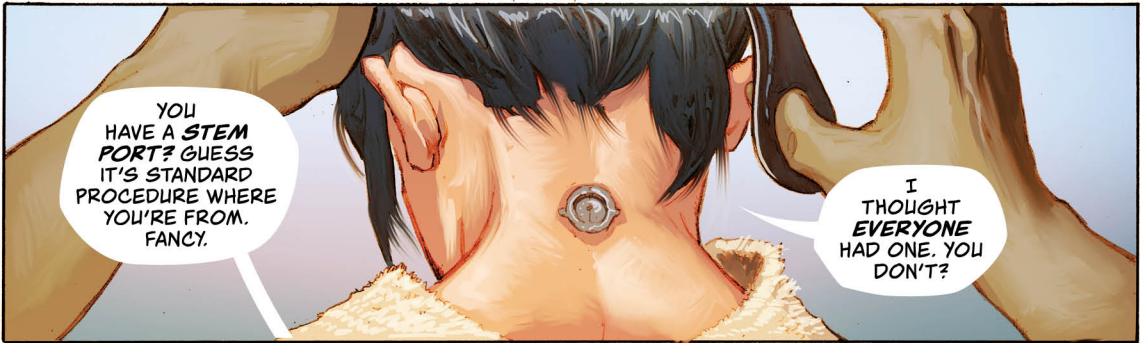


WHY ARE YOU SO MEAN?

I'M NOT MEAN. I'M PRACTICAL.

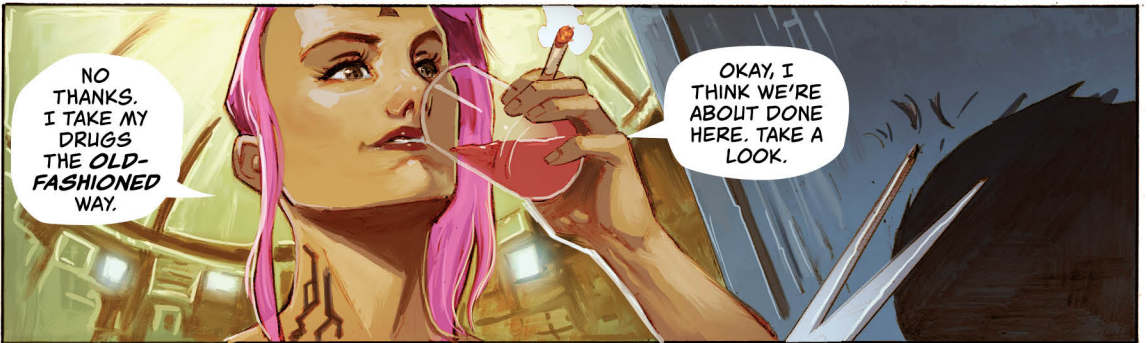
CAN'T YOU BE PRACK-TIK-ULL BUT...NICER?

JUST... HOLD STILL.



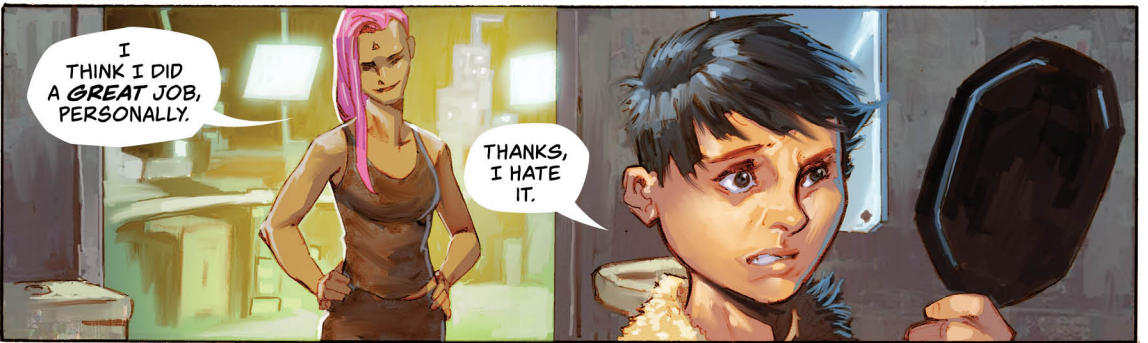
YOU HAVE A STEM PORT? GUESS IT'S STANDARD PROCEDURE WHERE YOU'RE FROM. FANCY.

I THOUGHT EVERYONE HAD ONE. YOU DON'T?



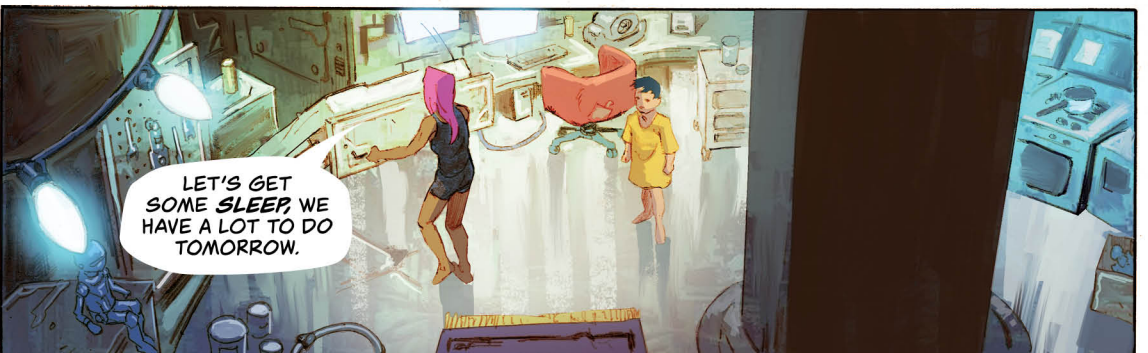
NO THANKS. I TAKE MY DRUGS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY.

OKAY, I THINK WE'RE ABOUT DONE HERE. TAKE A LOOK.



I THINK I DID A GREAT JOB, PERSONALLY.

THANKS, I HATE IT.



LET'S GET SOME SLEEP, WE HAVE A LOT TO DO TOMORROW.