



STRIDER

VOLUME 1

A STRIDER STORYGROUNDS PRODUCTION

ESCAPE FROM UNTERRA



Dear Readers,

This is not just any AI generated comic book - **Unterra Vol. 1** is a collaborative work produced as the result of our recent Strider Storygrounds experiment. This project was made possible by the contributions of 18 talented participants who worked together to bring a unique storyworld to life.

Throughout the experiment, participants engaged in quests and challenges, submitting pieces of writing and AI-generated art that were woven together to create a dynamic and engaging narrative. The storyworld was brought to life by the collective creativity and imagination of all participants, resulting in a truly collaborative project that showcases the power of storytelling and the possibilities of technology.

The comic book you have before you is a testament to the hard work and dedication of everyone involved in the project. From the initial concept to the final product, each participant played a critical role in bringing this story to life. We are proud of what we have accomplished together and excited to share this unique and imaginative world with you.

Thank you for joining us on this journey and for supporting our mission to explore the possibilities of next-generation storytelling. We hope you enjoy reading the comic book as much as we enjoyed creating it.

Please feel free to join our community on Discord and take part in the next Strider Storygrounds:

<https://discord.gg/A4arGGgPDy>

See you there!

- The Strider Team





ESCAPE FROM UNTERRA

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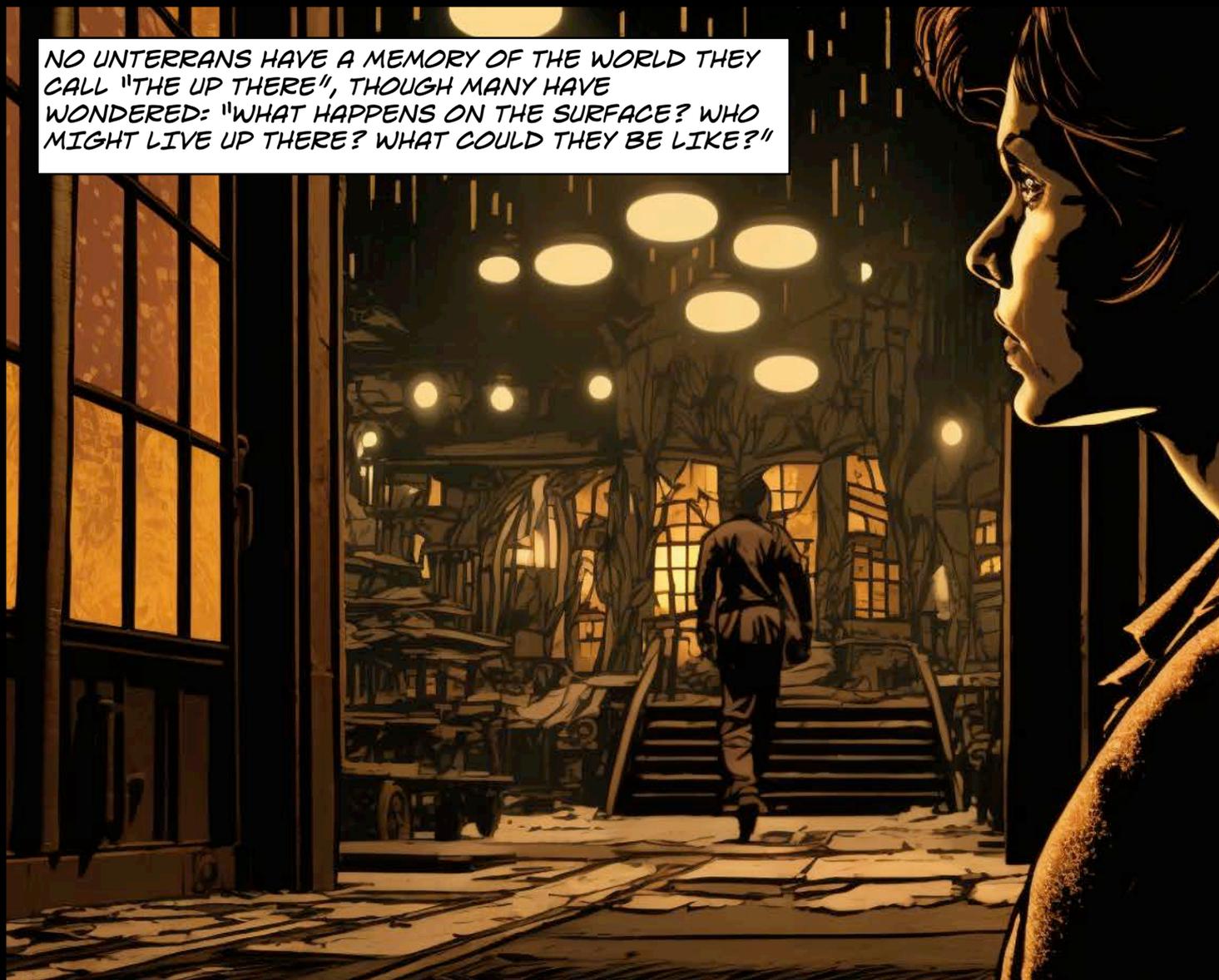
WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF UNTERRA.

UNTERRA IS A SUBTERRANEAN REALM...

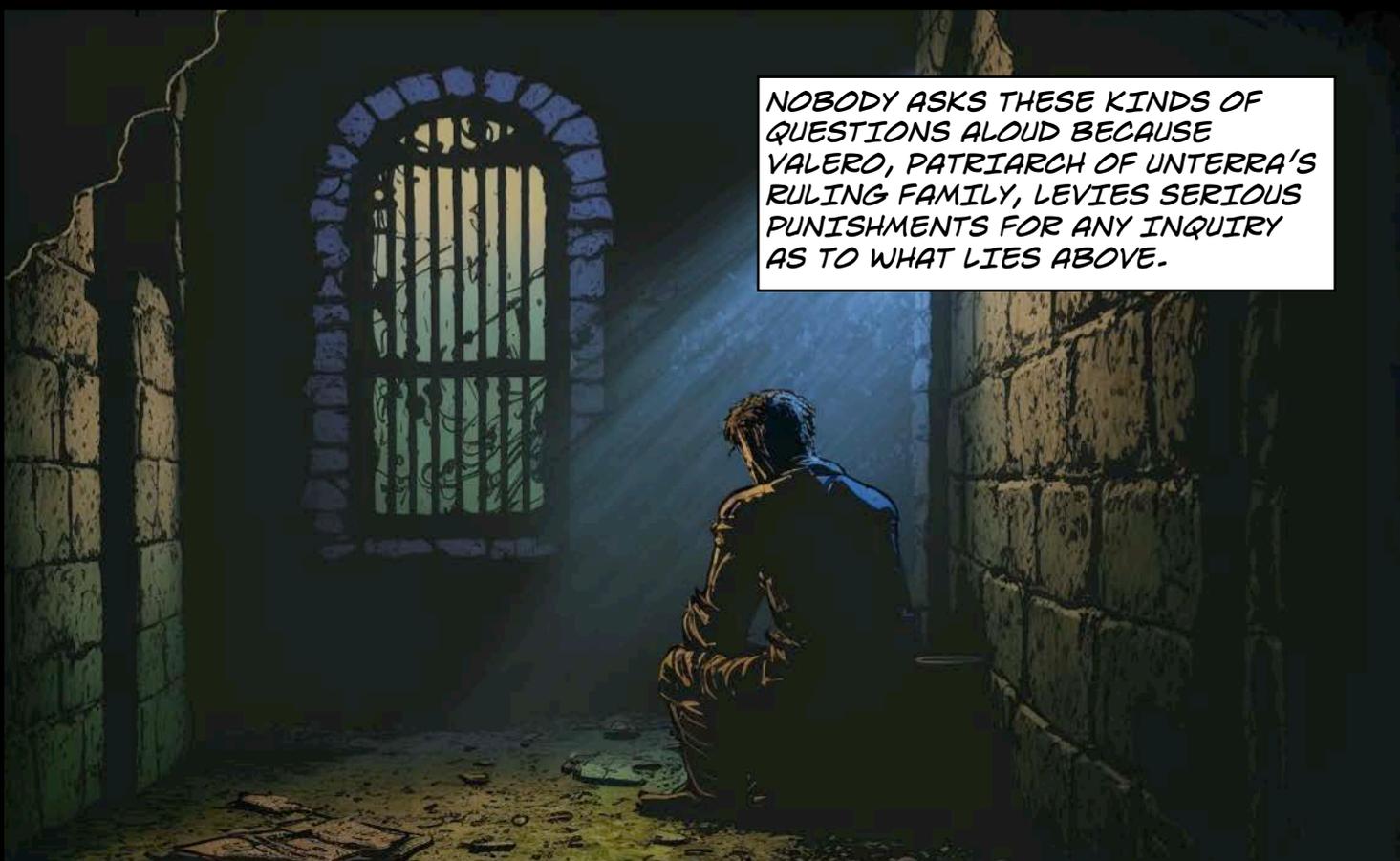
...THAT'S HOME TO HARDY, HARD
WORKING PEOPLE.

THESE UNTERRANS, ARE A
SELF-SUFFICIENT LOT,
HARVESTING THEIR OWN
WATER, LIGHT AND FOOD.

NO UNTERRANS HAVE A MEMORY OF THE WORLD THEY CALL "THE UP THERE", THOUGH MANY HAVE WONDERED: "WHAT HAPPENS ON THE SURFACE? WHO MIGHT LIVE UP THERE? WHAT COULD THEY BE LIKE?"



NOBODY ASKS THESE KINDS OF QUESTIONS ALOUD BECAUSE VALERO, PATRIARCH OF UNTERRA'S RULING FAMILY, LEVIES SERIOUS PUNISHMENTS FOR ANY INQUIRY AS TO WHAT LIES ABOVE.



AS WE MEET THE UNTERRANS,
THEY'RE DEALING WITH AN
UNPRECEDENTED CALAMITY - A HE
WATER SUPPLY WHICH COMES FROM
"UP THERE" HAS BECOME SPOILED
AND IS INFECTING THE MINDS OF
THE PEOPLE...



...DRIVING SOME TO MADNESS.

VALERO AND HIS BUREAUCRATES DENY THIS TROUBLE, AS THEY HAVE ACCESS TO AN ENORMOUS SPACE STOCKPILE OF CLEAN WATER RESERVES.



UNBEKNOWNST TO HIM, A HERO IS EMERGING IN THIS WORLD IN ITS TIME OF NEED.

YOUNG REEFA IS ABOUT TO CELEBRATE HER 14TH BIRTHDAY.



SHE AND HER OLDER BROTHER RUFUS LIVE WITH THEIR PARENTS, WHO ARE HARDWORKING WORM FARMERS.

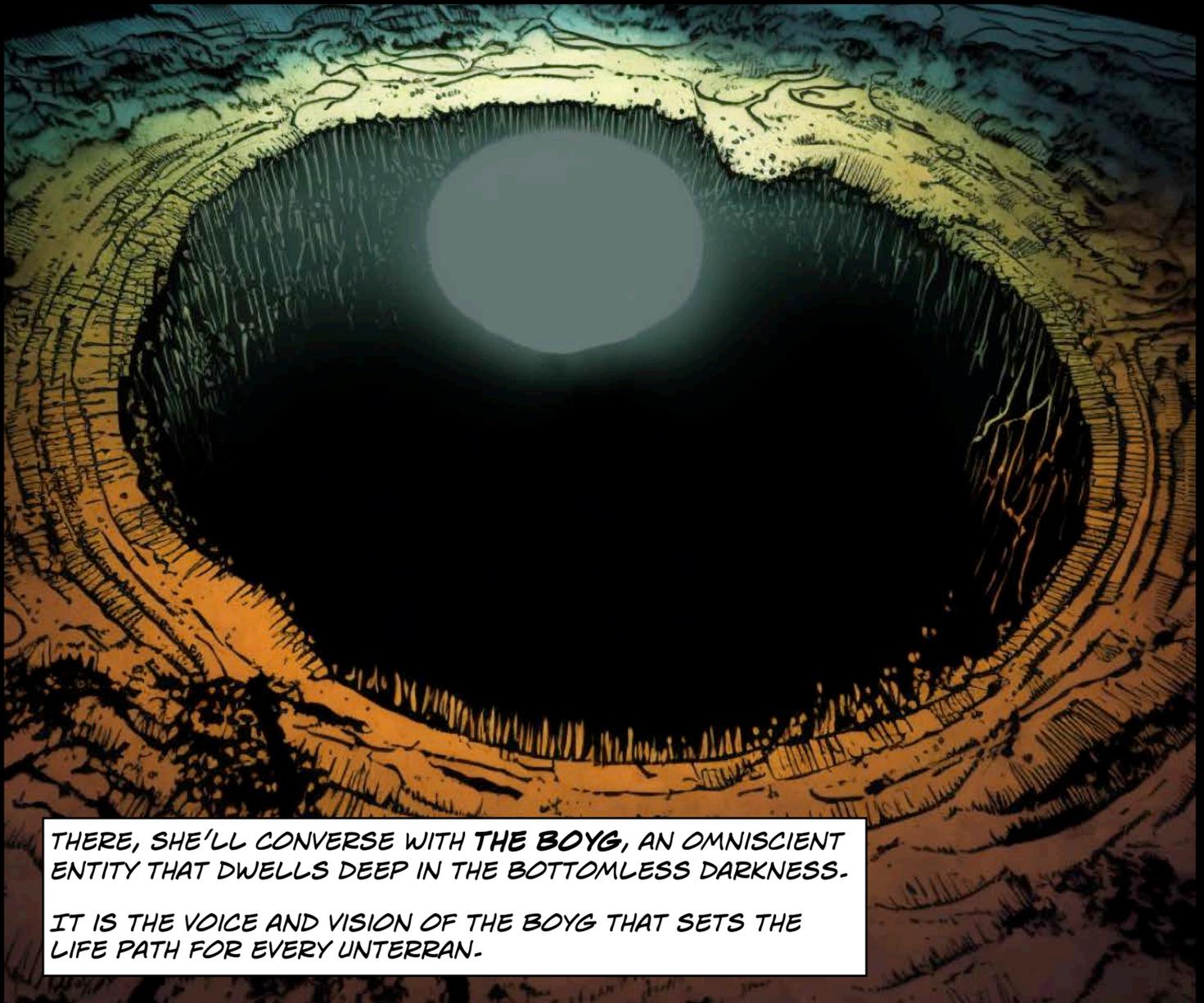
LIKE MOST UNTERRANS, THEY LIVE A HUMBLE LIFE IN THE AGRARIAN DISTRICT.



TOMORROW, ON REEFA'S BIRTHDAY, SHE WILL PARTICIPATE IN AN UNTERRAN COMING-OF-AGE RITUAL.



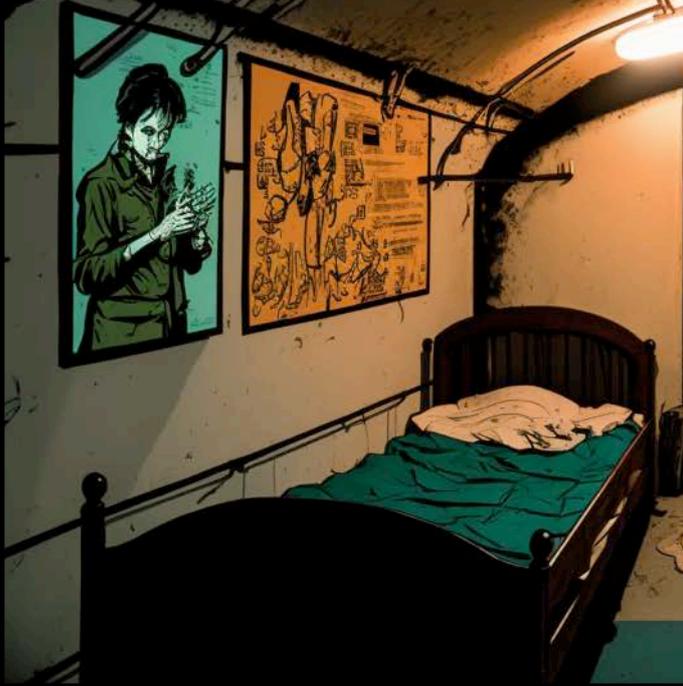
SHE WILL TAKE THE SACRED CANAL AND VISIT THE GREAT ABYSS.



THERE, SHE'LL CONVERSE WITH THE BOYG, AN OMNISCIENT ENTITY THAT DWELLS DEEP IN THE BOTTOMLESS DARKNESS.

IT IS THE VOICE AND VISION OF THE BOYG THAT SETS THE LIFE PATH FOR EVERY UNTERRAN.

THOUGH IT'S LATE AT NIGHT, HER BED IS EMPTY. SHE CAN'T SLEEP.



SHE'S KEEPING BUSY IN THE FAMILY'S LIVING QUARTERS, TRYING TO QUIET HER MIND AND NOT WAKE ANYBODY ELSE UP IN THE SMALL HOME.



REEFA'S RESTLESS AND PACING AROUND THE HOUSE.



TAP TAP TAP

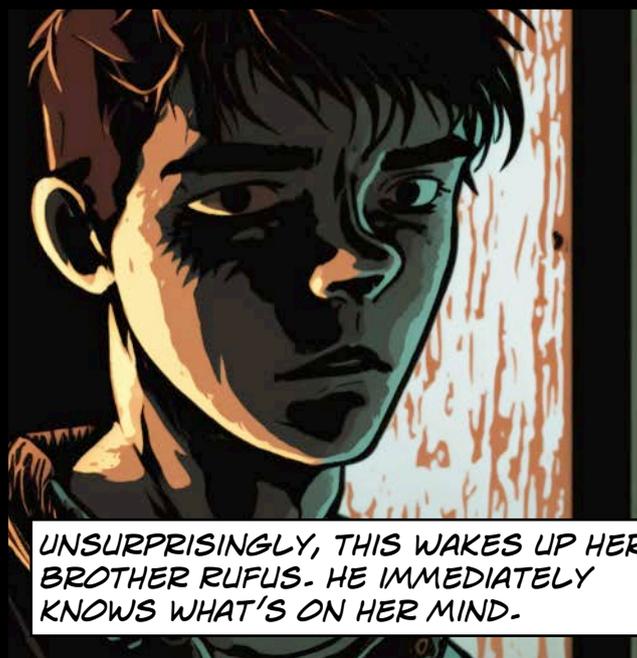


UNFORTUNATELY, THE FAMILY PET FLUNGO THE MOLE-MONKEY, GETS UNDERFOOT.

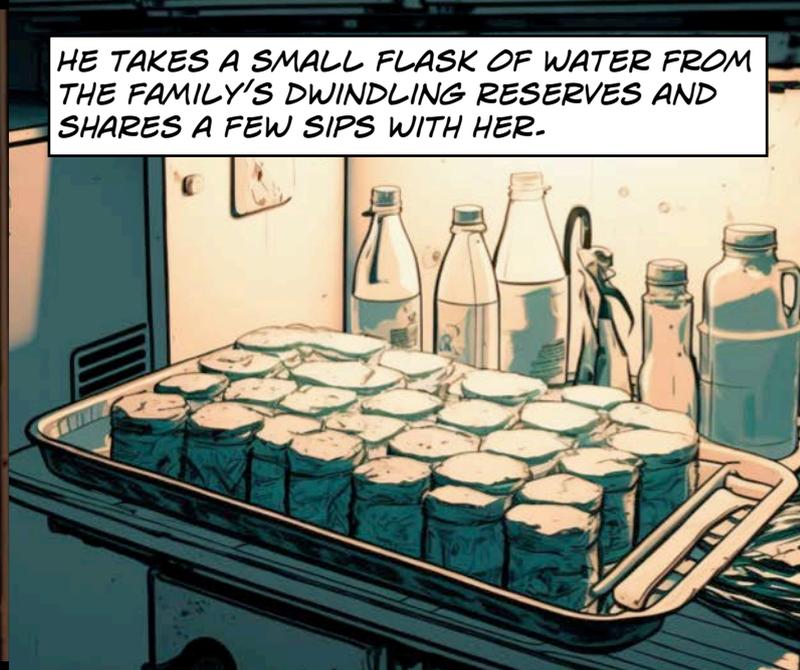
THIS SENDS REEFA CAREENING.



AND SOME DISHES CRASHING.



UNSURPRISINGLY, THIS WAKES UP HER BROTHER RUFUS. HE IMMEDIATELY KNOWS WHAT'S ON HER MIND.



HE TAKES A SMALL FLASK OF WATER FROM THE FAMILY'S DWINDLING RESERVES AND SHARES A FEW SIPS WITH HER.



HEY REEF?

YES?

WHY DON'T WE SKIP OUTTA HERE AND GO YOU-KNOW-WHERE? YOU KNOW, YOUR HAPPY PLACE.



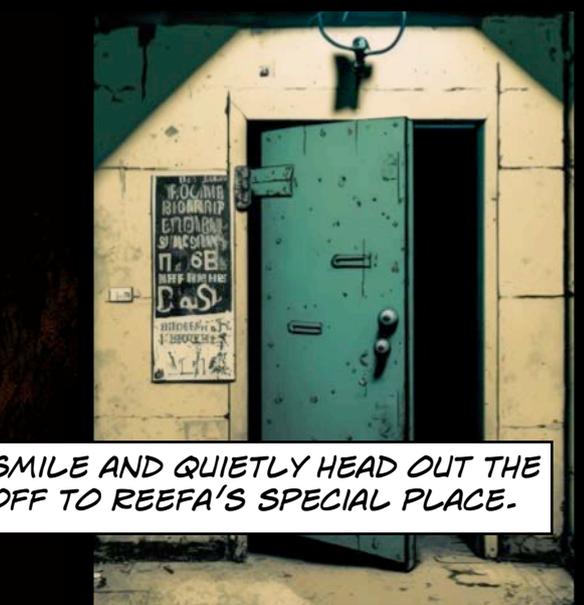
"AREN'T YOU WORRIED THAT IT'S AFTER CURFEW? YOU KNOW VALERO'S GUARD WILL BE OUT."



"NAH, I CAN GET US THERE AND BACK EASY-PEASY. THE BOYD DIDN'T PICK ME TO BE A MOLE RIDER FOR NOTHIN''"

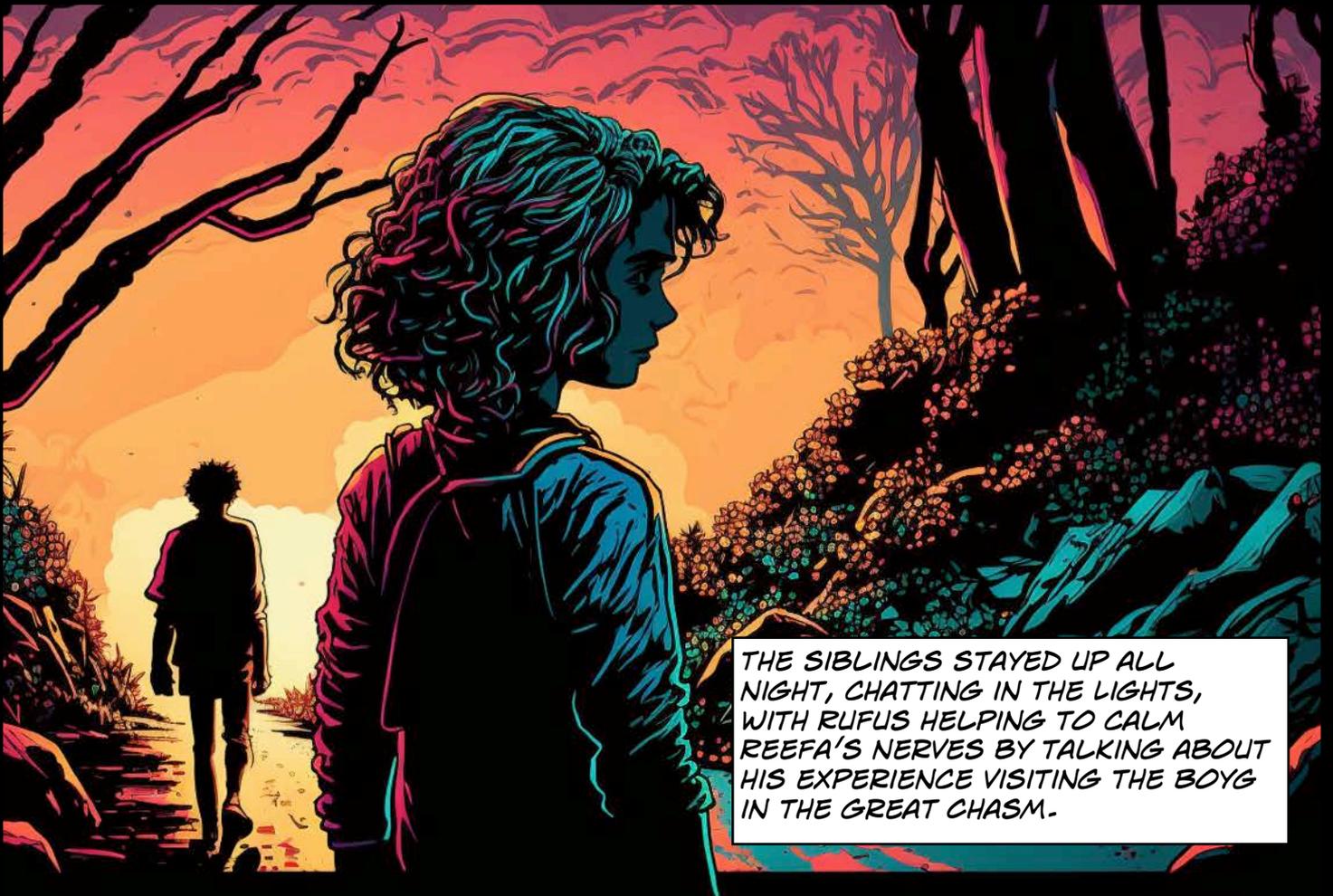


REEFA GRINS AND SHOOTS HER RIDICULOUS BROTHER SOME SIDE EYE.



THEY BOTH SMILE AND QUIETLY HEAD OUT THE BACK WAY, OFF TO REEFA'S SPECIAL PLACE.

THE SPECIAL PLACE IS WHAT REEFA AND HER BROTHER REFER TO AS "THE LIGHTS" (AS TO BE CONSPICUOUS IF ANY STRAY EARS MAY BE PRESENT). AN UNDERGROUND FOREST WITH BIOLUMINESCENT PLANTS AND A SMALL BROOK OF WATER RUNNING THROUGH IT.



THE SIBLINGS STAYED UP ALL NIGHT, CHATTING IN THE LIGHTS, WITH RUFUS HELPING TO CALM REEFA'S NERVES BY TALKING ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE VISITING THE BOYS IN THE GREAT CHASM.



THE NEXT MORNING, RUFUS JOINED HIS SISTER AND TOOK A BOAT THROUGH THE SACRED CANAL.



THEY ARRIVED AT THE GREAT CHASM, WHERE SHE SHOWED HER PAPERS TO THE GUARDS.



THEN SHE ENTERED THE CHAMBER OF THE BOY.



REEFA WAS SUPER NERVOUS, BUT SHE STEPPED FORWARD AND HEARD THE BOY FROM DEEP WITHIN THE BOTTOMLESS PIT. IN A DEEP GUTTURAL BELLOW, THE BOYS SPOKE, "COME FORTH, REEFA, AND INHALE MY MIST."

COME FORTH REEFA, AND INHALE MY MIST.



SHE INHALES AND ENTERS A FUGUE STATE. THEN SHE HAS A VISION OF HER FUTURE...BUT IT'S NOT IN UNTERRAN SOCIETY.

INSTEAD SHE SEES A PLACE UNLIKE ANYTHING IN HER WILDEST IMAGINATION. AND IT INCLUDES AN ENDLESS SKY! COULD THIS BE...THE UP THERE?



REEFA SNAPS OUT OF THE FUGUE STATE. RUFUS IS VERY CONCERNED, SHE LOOKS CONFUSED, MOVED AND EXCITED, BUT ALSO WIDE-EYED AND WEAK IN A WAY HE DIDN'T EXPECT.

WHAT DID YOU SEE?!

SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN!



REEFA TELLS RUFUS
WHAT SHE SAW...

THE UP THERE!
A SPRAWLING CITY
CLOAKED IN A PINK MIST.



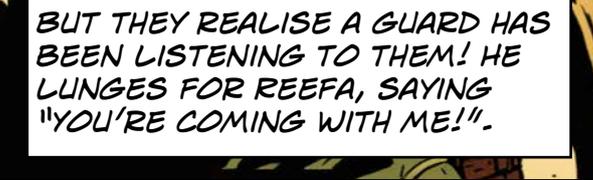
FROM THE EDGE OF A FOREST CLEARING,
REEFA LOOKS OUT ON A HARSH LANDSCAPE
THAT SEPARATES HER FROM A SPRAWLING
CITY CLOAKED IN A PINK MIST.

SHE CAN SEE NO END TO THE CITY
BUT THE AIR FEELS DRY, THE SUN
CASTS A WARM HUE TO ALL IT
TOUCHES, AND THE SOUNDS OF
CREATURES LIKE NOTHING SHE'S
EVER HEARD BUILD IN INTENSITY IN
THE WOODS BEHIND HER.

FROZEN WITH ASTONISHMENT, REEFA REACHES UP TO THE LIGHT BATHING HER HAND,
SOMETHING SHE COULD HAVE NEVER PREPARED FOR.



RUFUS INTERCEDES TO PROTECT HIS SISTER. IN THE BRIEF MELEE A GUARD ACCIDENTALLY GETS KNOCKED INTO THE GREAT CHASM.



BUT THEY REALISE A GUARD HAS BEEN LISTENING TO THEM! HE LUNGES FOR REEFA, SAYING "YOU'RE COMING WITH ME!".



RUFUS KNOWS THIS IS BAD. HE YELLS TO HIS SISTER BEFORE HE'S OVERWHELMED BY GUARDS.

RUN, REEFA, RUN!
FIND A WAY TO THE UP THERE!



REEFA RUNS TOWARD THE UNCHARTED DEEP AND DOES NOT STOP FOR MILES.

A large, segmented worm with two glowing blue eyes is positioned in a dark, rocky cave. The worm's body is thick and covered in horizontal ridges. The cave walls are made of rough, uneven rock. In the background, a bright light source, possibly an opening in the cave, illuminates the scene.

SHE SNEAKS PAST A GIANT WORM.

A young girl with curly brown hair and a blue t-shirt is running through a narrow, rocky tunnel. She has a look of fear and urgency on her face. The tunnel walls are made of rough, uneven rock. The lighting is dim, with a bright light source at the end of the tunnel.

AND TRAVEL THROUGH
ANCIENT AQUEDUCT TUNNELS.

A person is running away from the viewer towards a bright light at the end of a long, narrow tunnel. The tunnel walls are made of rough, uneven rock. The lighting is dim, with a bright light source at the end of the tunnel.

UNTIL FINALLY SHE SEES
LIGHT AND HEAD
TOWARDS IT. AS SHE
GETS CLOSER SHE HEARS
A STRANGE CHITTERING.



ON THE OTHER END OF THE TUNNEL, SHE FINDS AN UNDERGROUND CITY CARVED INTO THE ROCK. THIS IS FAR FROM UNTERRA, BUT IT'S NOT THE UP THERE, EITHER.



SHE NOTICES ITS CITIZENS---THEY LOOK CIVIL AND CULTURED, BUT THEY ARE INSECTOIDS--BUG-LIKE HUMANOIDS. THE LUCOSI!



AS REEFA'S TAKING IT ALL IN, A LUCOSSI APPROACHES HER AND MAKES A CLICKING SOUND, AS IF TO CALL ITS COMRADES.

WHEN IT DOES, OTHER WINGED LUCOSSI SWOOP DOWN FROM ABOVE, GRAB REEFA AND FLY OFF WITH HER!



REEFA'S TERRIFIED! THEY FLY HER ACROSS THE CITY AND INTO A LARGE, CAVERNOUS ROOM.



AND DROP HER!



SHE FALLS HUNDREDS OF FEET AND LANDS ON A GOOEY, LIVING PILE OF SLIME.



BUT IT TRANSFORMS INTO AN ODDLY COMFORTABLE SORT OF INSECT PILLOW.



JUST AS REEFA CALMS DOWN, SHE LOOKS UP AND SEES THAT ACROSS FROM HER IS A LARGE FEMALE LUCOSI WHO SITS ON A THRONE.

AMAZINGLY, SHE CAN HEAR THIS BEING'S THOUGHTS! SHE'S COMMUNICATING TELEPATHICALLY.

WHY DO YOU BREAK THE PEACE THAT HAS EXISTED FOR OVER 500 YEARS?

I AM QUEEN BEATRICE OF THE LUCOSI! WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE, UNTERRAN?



UM, WHAT PEACE?

REEFA STARTS TO SPEAK, BUT REALIZES SHE CAN JUST THINK.



LOOKING AT THE MONUMENT, BEATRICE EXPLAINS THAT 500 YEARS AGO, A PEOPLE CALLED THE TERRANS FLED FROM "THE UP THERE" TO THE UNDERGROUND WHERE THE LUCOSI HAD LIVED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

THE TERRANS WANTED THEIR RESOURCES AND A YEARS-LONG WAR BROKE OUT, DISRUPTING NEARBY CIVILISATIONS, INCLUDING THE MOTH QUEEN AND HER COLONY, WHO JOINED THE FIGHT AGAINST THE TERRANS.

DURING A BATTLE, THE MOTH QUEEN WAS TAKEN PRISONER AND THE TERRANS DISCOVERED HER LARVAE WERE A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SOURCE.

THE MOTH QUEEN AND HER PEOPLE WERE NEVER SEEN AGAIN, BUT THE TERRANS SUDDENLY HAD LIVESTOCK TO FARM.

NO LONGER INTERESTED IN THE WAR, A TREATY WAS ESTABLISHED, WITH ALL PARTIES ACCEPTING THE LOSS OF THE MOTH PEOPLE AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE.

TERRANS WERE BANNED FROM LUCOSI LAND AND A MEMORIAL WAS BUILT TO HONOR WHAT THE MOTH QUEEN UNWILLINGLY GAVE.

AS ONE MIGHT IMAGINE, REEFA WAS GREATLY HUMBLLED BY AND DISTRESSED THIS HISTORY LESSON.



SHE QUICKLY FILLS BEATRICE IN ON EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO HER.



HER BROTHER.



THE TAINTED WATER.



THE CITY UNDER PINK MIST.



AND VALERO, UNTERRA'S STRONGMAN RULER.



BEATRICE EXPLAINS THAT SHE KNOWS OF VALERO AND HIS FAMILY'S DARK HISTORY.



I NEED TO GET TO "THE UP THERE"! IS THERE A WAY?!

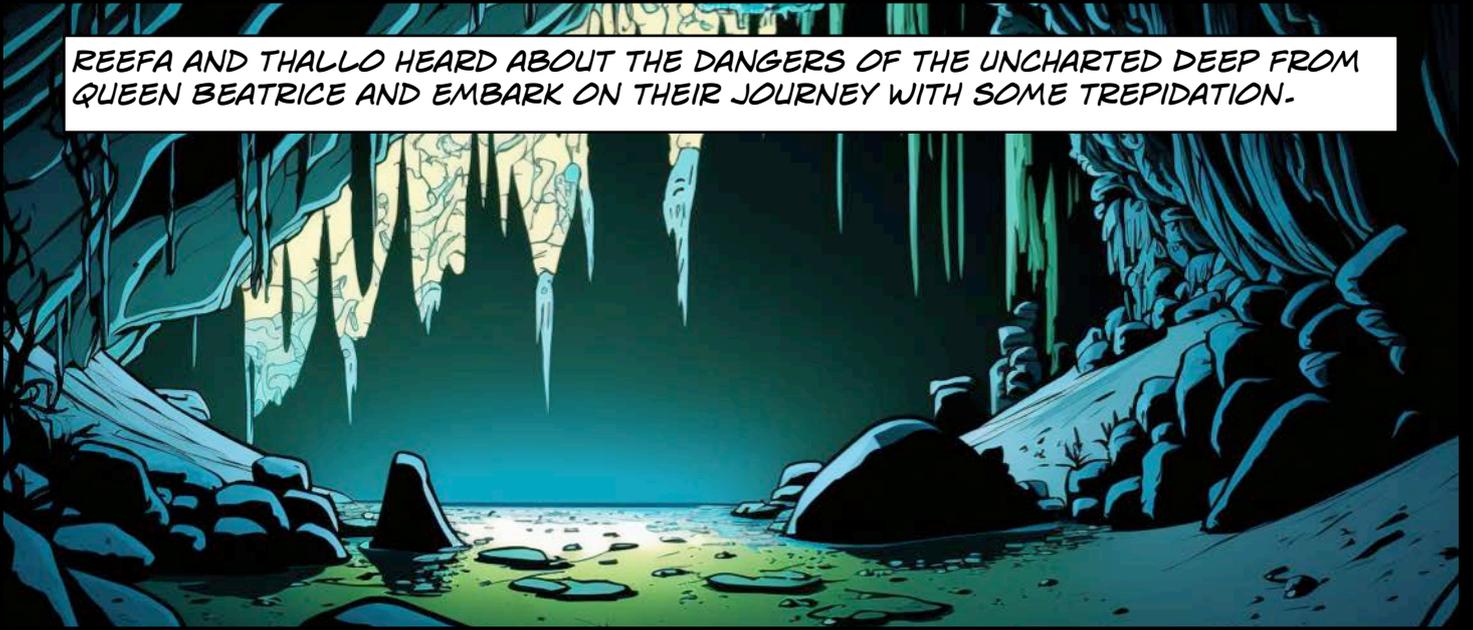
"OH, THERE'S A WAY," BEATRICE TELLS HER. "AND IT WAS CREATED BY YOUR ANCESTORS. FAR, FAR BELOW IN THE UNCHARTED DEEP THERE ARE LAVA GEYSERS.

"AND ONYX PODS YOU CAN USE TO RIDE UP TO THE SURFACE ON THOSE FIERY BURSTS."

"IT IS DANGEROUS, BUT THE WAY THERE IS EVEN MORE TREACHEROUS. THALLO, MY PROTECTOR WILL ACCOMPANY YOU."

I'M READY.

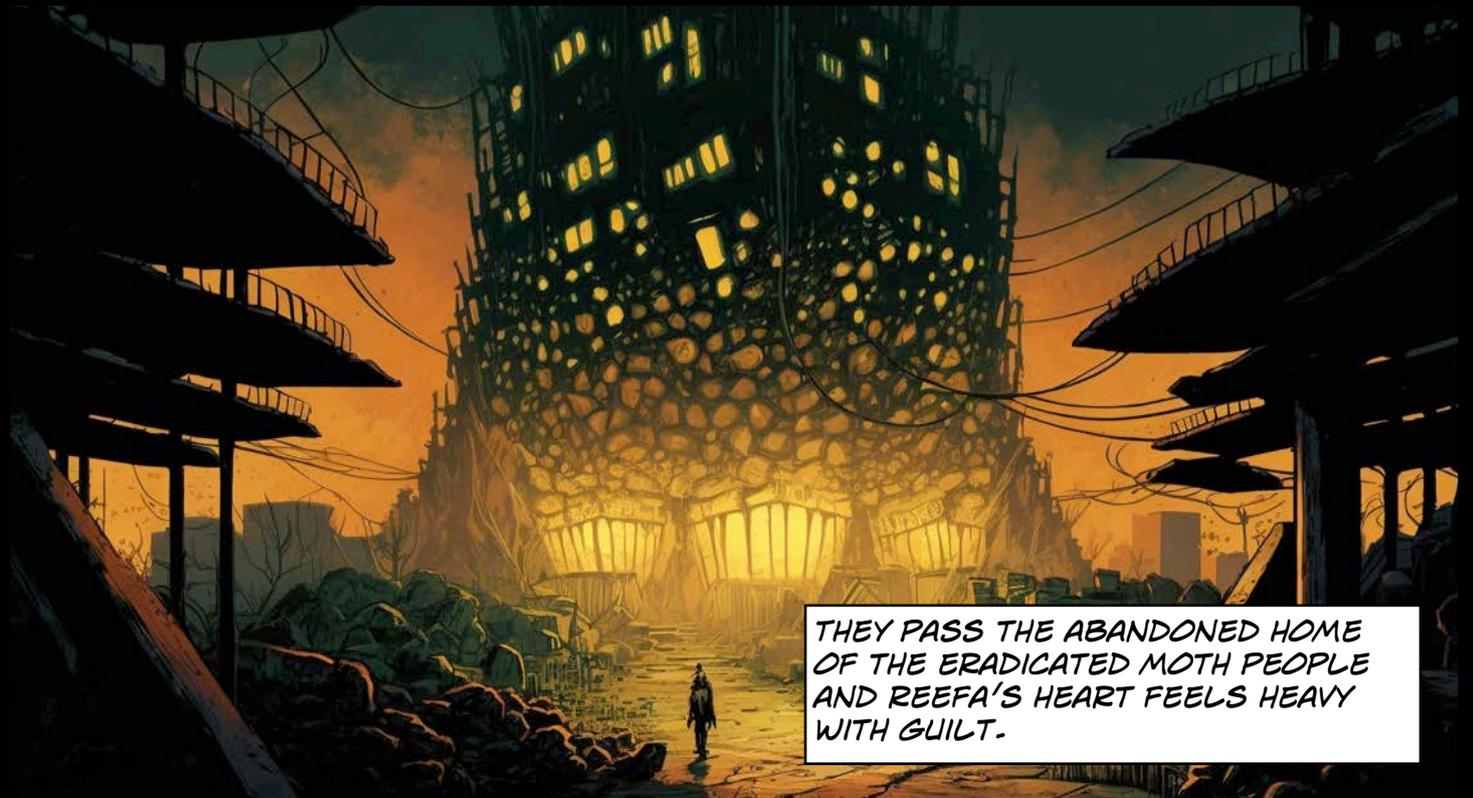
REEFA AND THALLO HEARD ABOUT THE DANGERS OF THE UNCHARTED DEEP FROM QUEEN BEATRICE AND EMBARK ON THEIR JOURNEY WITH SOME TREPIDATION.



THEY CAREFULLY CROSS A CAVERN OF ICE WHERE HORRIFYING, BIOLUMINESCENT BEASTS SWIM UNDERFOOT.



THEY PASS THE ABANDONED HOME OF THE ERADICATED MOTH PEOPLE AND REEFA'S HEART FEELS HEAVY WITH GUILT.





THALLO CARRIES REEFA AS SHE SLEEPS. SHE DREAMS OF THE PINK CITY AND STATUE OF A HUMAN WITH A SWORD AND SHIELD. THE WEAPONS CALL TO HER.



SHE WAKES AND SEES AN EXPRESSION OF FEAR ON THALLO'S INSECT-FACE.



THALLO IS STARING AT ONE OF THE GREAT TERRORS OF THE UNCHARTED DEEP, THE QUESADACTYL, A GIANT PREHISTORIC FLYING CREATURE WITH A TASTE FOR HUMAN BLOOD.

YEARS OF UNDERGROUND CAPTIVITY HAVE DESTROYED HIS VISION, BUT HIS SENSE OF SMELL AND INCREDIBLE HUNGER ARE VERY MUCH INTACT.

REEFA AND THALLO WERE CORNERED, AND AT THE MERCY OF THE VICIOUS QUESADACTYL. BUT THALLO WAS PREPARED! HE REACHED INTO HIS SACK.

REEFA THOUGHT HE WAS GOING FOR A WEAPON, BUT INSTEAD HE PULLED OUT AN INCREDIBLY STINKY WORM AND MOLE MEAT STEW AND TOSSED IT AWAY FROM THEM AND TOWARD THE QUESADACTYL.



THE QUESADACTYL SNIFFED IN THE AIR AND PUTTERED AWAY TOWARD THE MEAL.



THALLO TOLD REEFA TO GET ON HIS BACK, THEN EXTENDED HIS INSECT WINGS AND FLEW HER QUICKLY AWAY. THEY FLEW DIRECTLY IN A PITCH BLACK CAVE FILLED WITH RED EYES.



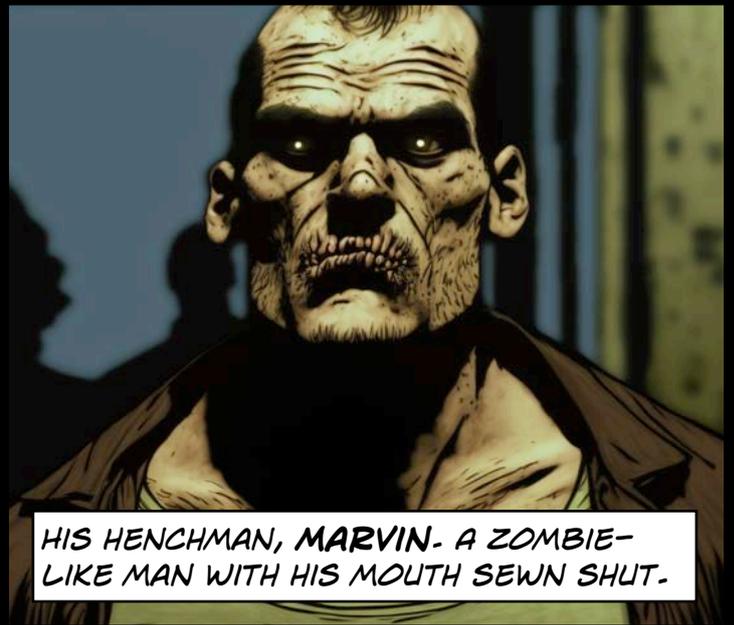
SUDDENLY THEY HEARD A NOISE. IT SOUNDED LIKE A HUMAN SCREAMING. THE VOICE WAS FAMILIAR TO REEFA.

THEY FOLLOWED THE NOISE AND SAW A LIGHT. IT LED THEM TO A SMALL CHAMBER.

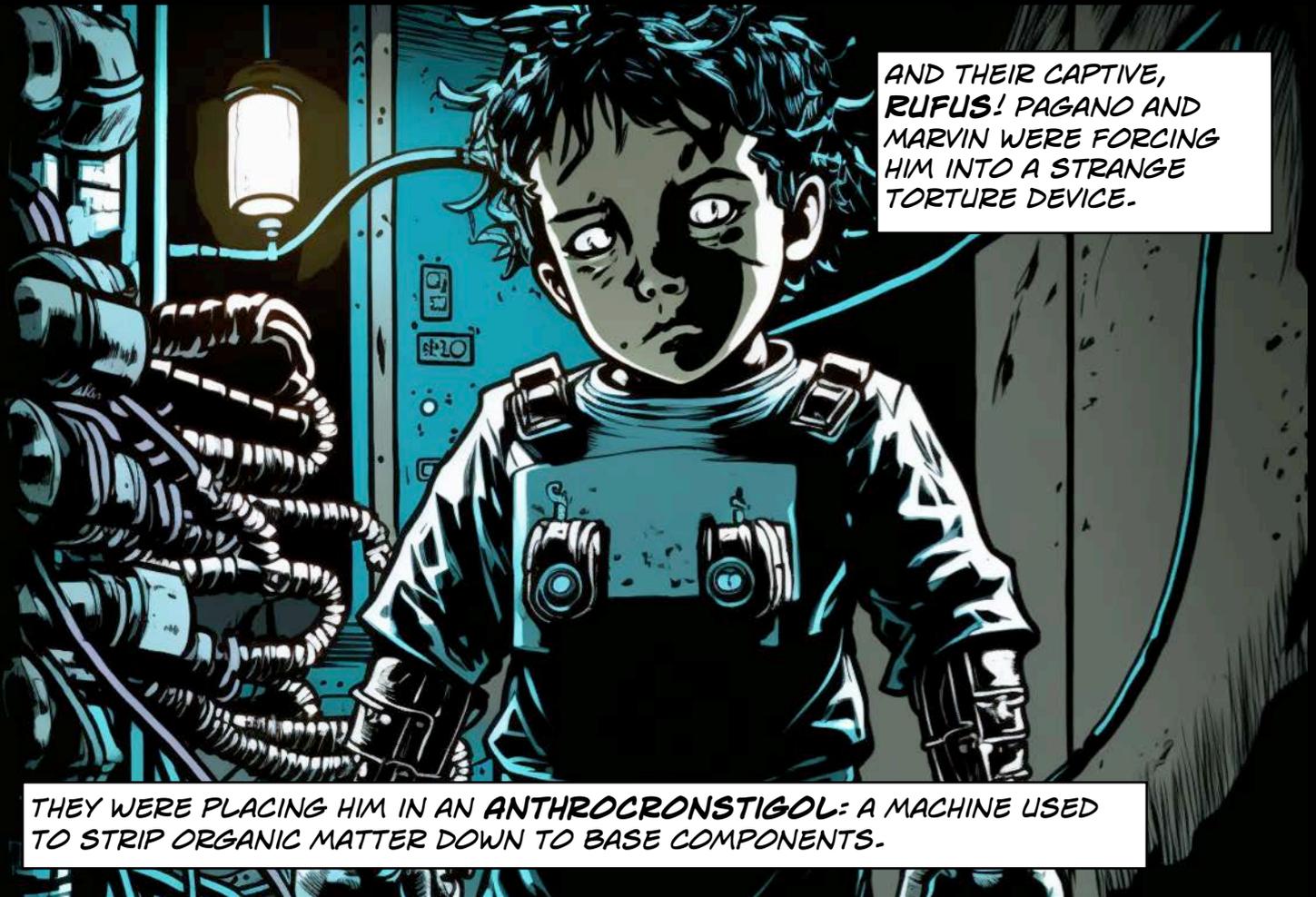
REEFA PEEKED AROUND THE CORNER.



SHE SAW LURK PAGANO, VALERO'S MINISTER OF SECURITY.



HIS HENCHMAN, MARVIN- A ZOMBIE-LIKE MAN WITH HIS MOUTH SEWN SHUT.



AND THEIR CAPTIVE, RUFUS! PAGANO AND MARVIN WERE FORCING HIM INTO A STRANGE TORTURE DEVICE.

THEY WERE PLACING HIM IN AN ANTHROCRONSTIGOL: A MACHINE USED TO STRIP ORGANIC MATTER DOWN TO BASE COMPONENTS.

IN AN UNDERGROUND WORLD WHERE RESOURCES ARE SCARCE, EVERYTHING MUST BE HARVESTED. THIS MACHINE ISN'T DESIGNED FOR HUMAN APPLICATION BUT IS BEING USED TO PULL WATER, PLASMA AND OTHER NUTRIENTS FROM RUFUS' BODY.

VALERO AND HIS RULING ELITES THRIVE ON THE CONSUMPTION OF THESE PRECIOUS RESOURCES.

CAN REEFA SAVE HER BROTHER IN TIME?
TO BE CONTINUED...

