

JASON BRUBAKER & RICK REKEDAL

# SWAPES

1



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PICTURES  
PUBLISHING

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**SHAPES #1**

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I'VE NEVER BEEN THIS FAR!

NOBODY'S EVER BEEN THIS FAR, TRIPP.



I THINK THAT'S THE PORTAL TO THE FINAL LEVEL.



IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.  
NO WONDER NOBODY HAS EVER MADE IT.



IF ANYONE CAN DO THIS, IT'S YOU, TRIPP. I'LL COVER YOU-- JUST FORGET ABOUT EVERYONE WATCHING AND FOCUS ON MY VOICE. LET'S TRANSFER ALL OUR POWER TO YOUR SHIELDS AND EVERYTHING ELSE TO MY BLASTER. I'LL SHOOT. YOU JUST DODGE AND CLIMB.



HERE GOES NOTHIN!

IT'S TOO MUCH!

KEEP GOING, TRIPP! YOU'RE ALMOST THERE! I GOT YOU!

WHAT'S THAT?

WHAT'S WHAT?

NOTHING! KEEP FOCUSED.

YOU'RE ALMOST THERE!



THE ROCK ABOVE ME IS STARTING TO CRUMBLE!



YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO JUMP FOR THE PORTAL.

RIGHT BEFORE YOU HIT IT, TRIGGER YOUR TETHER REEL AND IT SHOULD PULL ME THROUGH AS WELL. I'LL KEEP THE VERMIN OFF YOU.



YOU'RE BRILLIANT, ZENO!

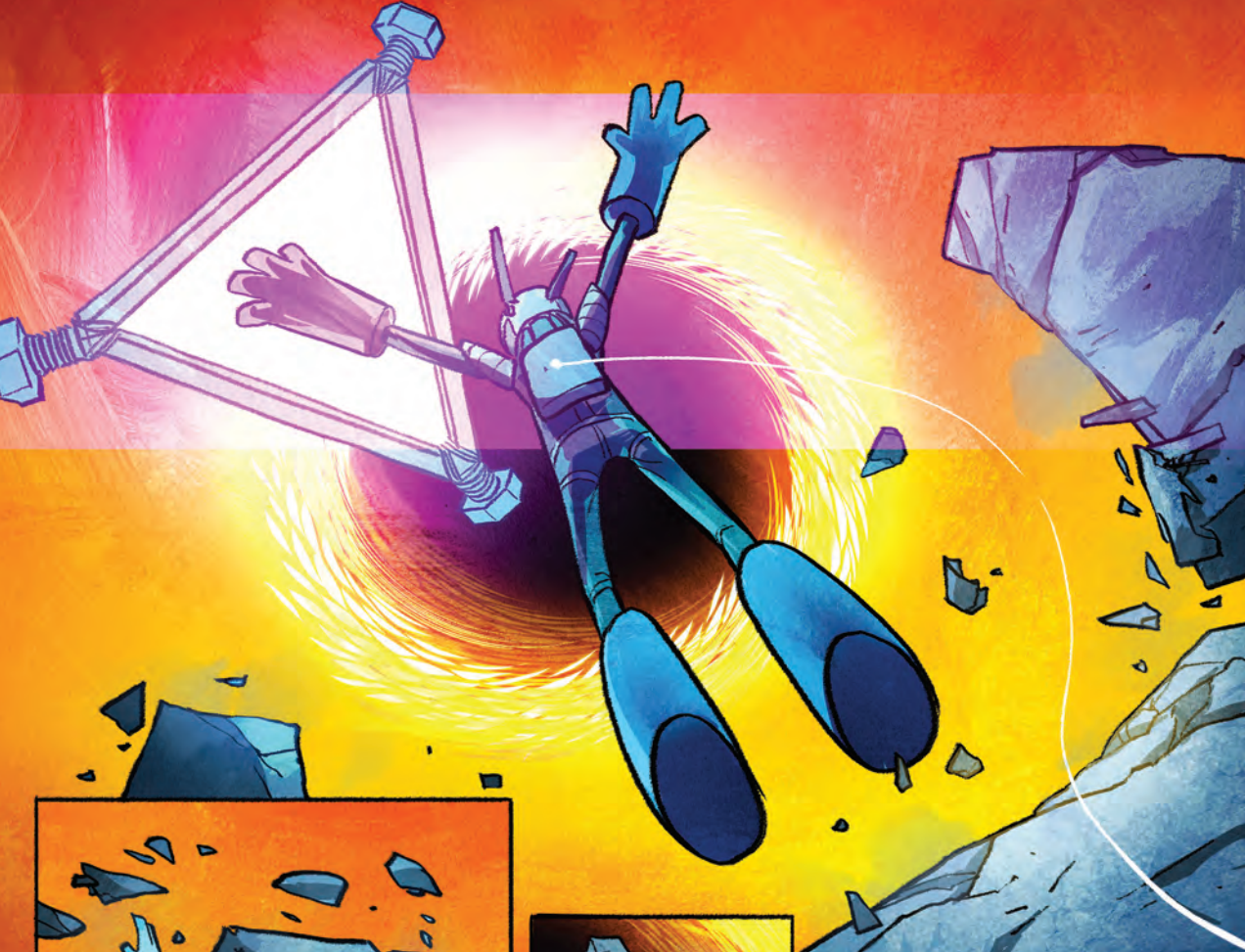
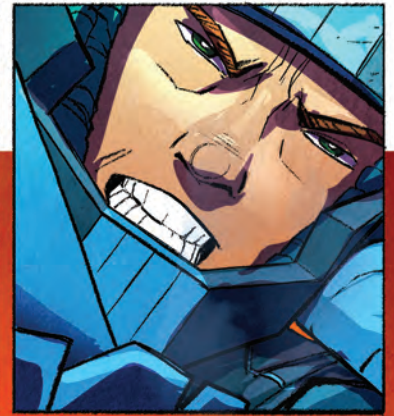
I JUST NEED TO WAIT FOR A CLEAR PATH.

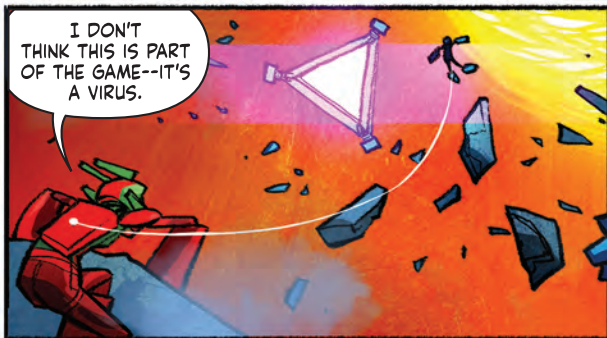


HERE WE GO--

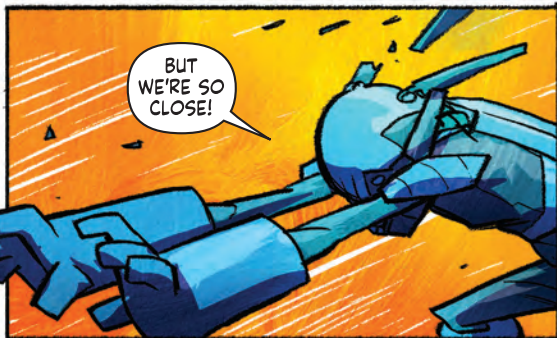
WAIT, WHAT'S THAT THING?

I DON'T KNOW, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO GO NOW!





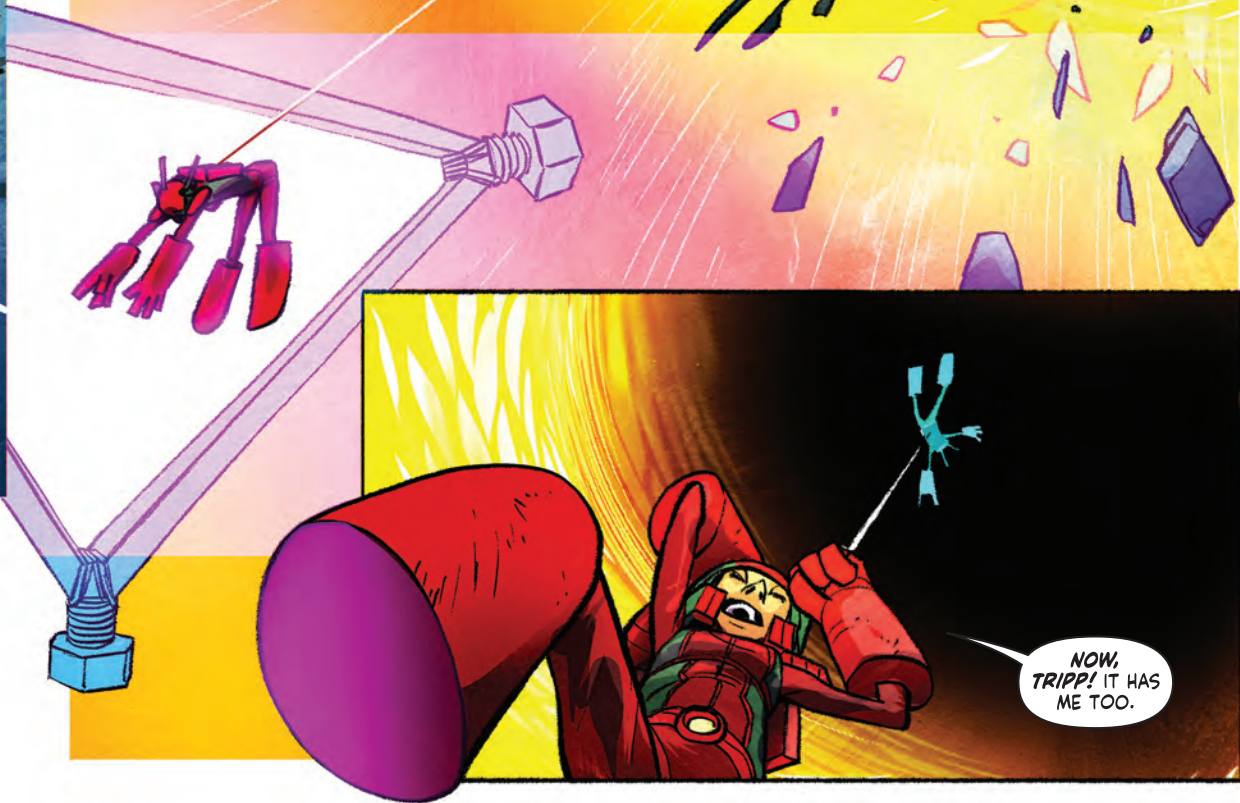
I DON'T  
THINK THIS IS PART  
OF THE GAME--IT'S  
A VIRUS.



BUT  
WE'RE SO  
CLOSE!



WE'VE  
GOTTA UNPLUG  
NOW!



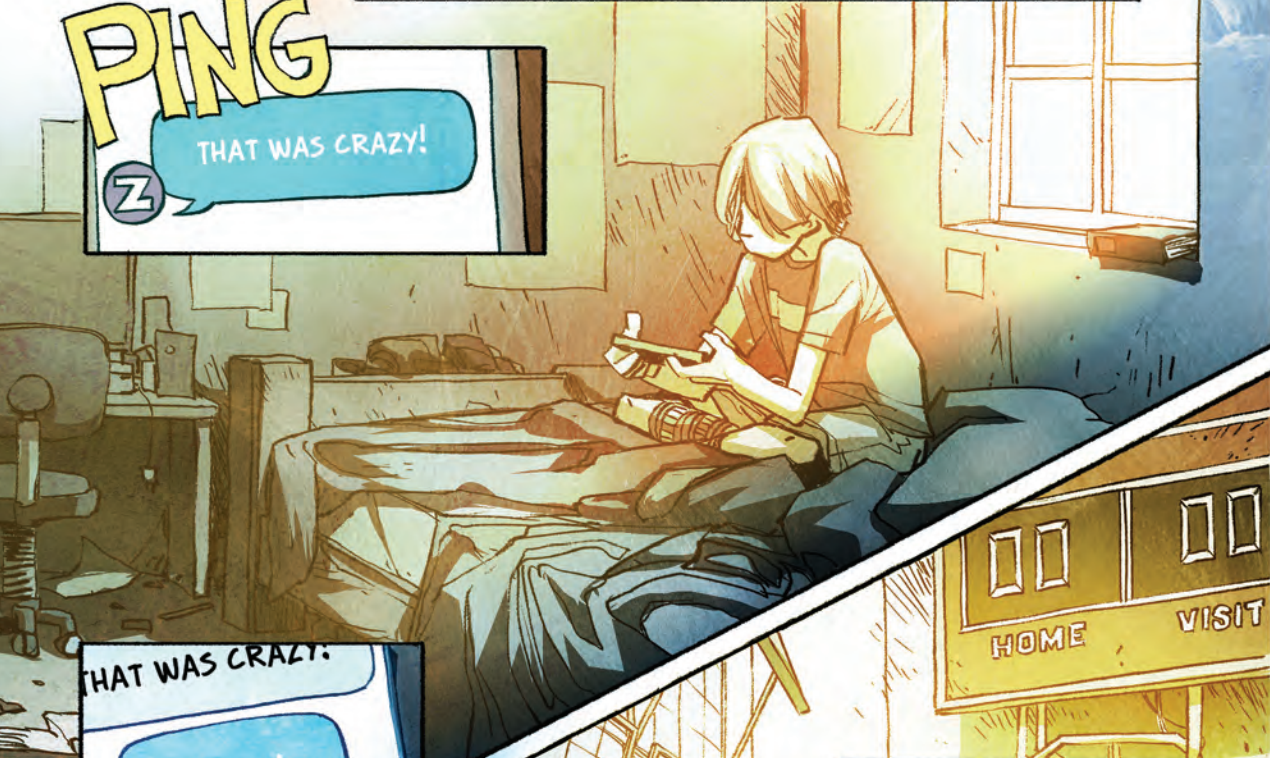
NOW,  
TRIPP! IT HAS  
ME TOO.



PING

THAT WAS CRAZY!

Z



THAT WAS CRAZY.

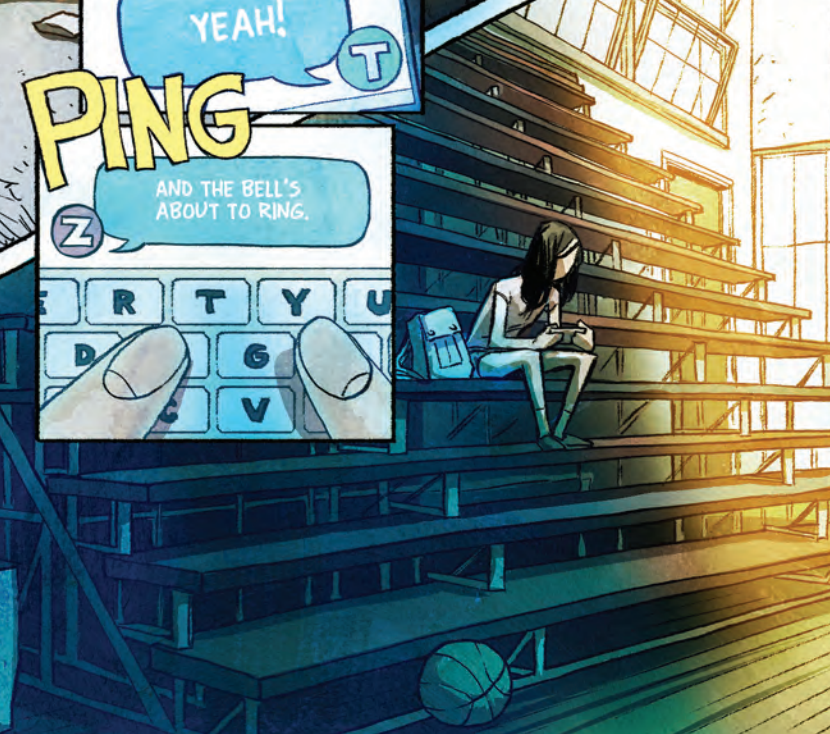
YEAH!

T

PING

AND THE BELL'S ABOUT TO RING.

Z

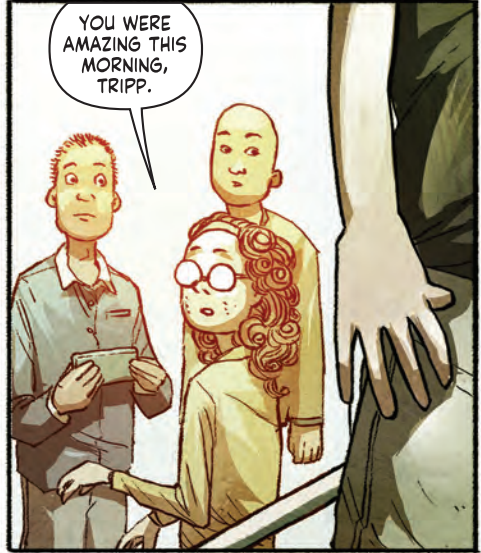
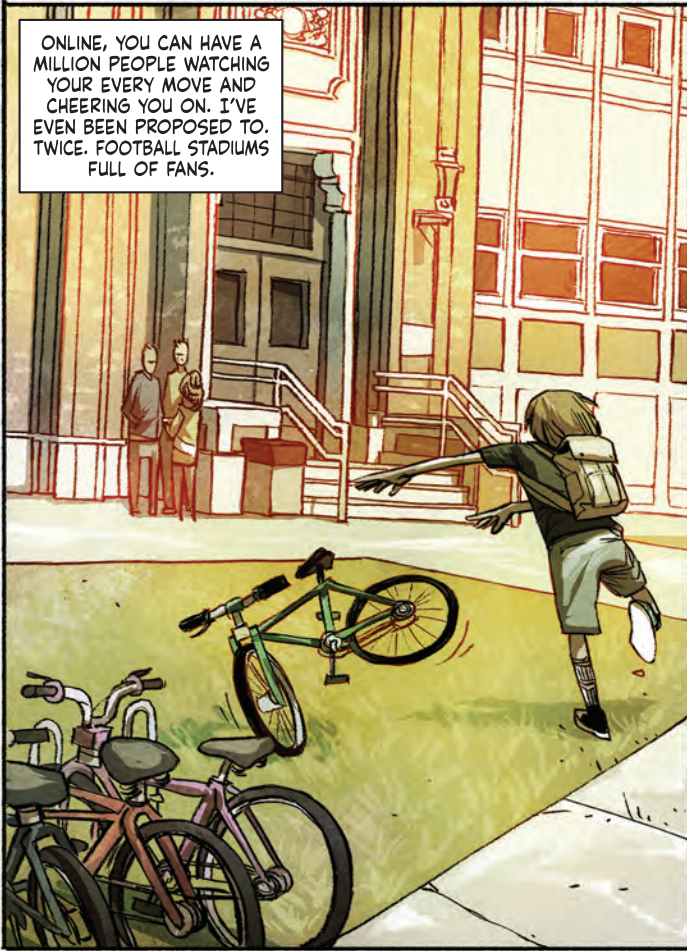


BETTER GET HERE FAST.





ONLINE, YOU CAN HAVE A MILLION PEOPLE WATCHING YOUR EVERY MOVE AND CHEERING YOU ON. I'VE EVEN BEEN PROPOSED TO. TWICE. FOOTBALL STADIUMS FULL OF FANS.



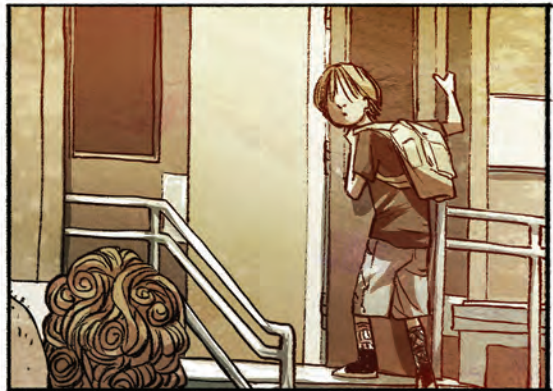
YOU WERE AMAZING THIS MORNING, TRIPP.



OH, YOU SAW?



YEAH.





LIVING UP TO YOUR NAME, LOSER.

YOU COULD SAY THAT AGAIN.



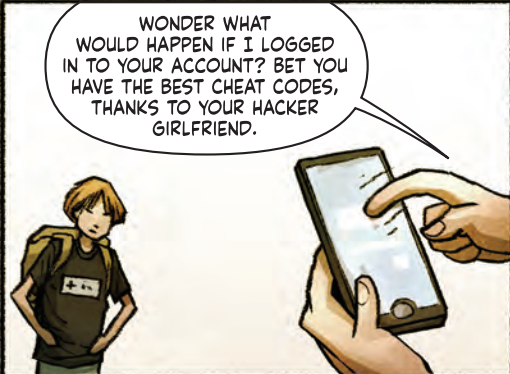
SAVE THE WORLD IN A GAME...



...BUT I CAN'T MAKE IT PAST THIS JERK IN REAL LIFE.



THANKS FOR THE PHONE, SUCKER.



WONDER WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I LOGGED IN TO YOUR ACCOUNT? BET YOU HAVE THE BEST CHEAT CODES, THANKS TO YOUR HACKER GIRLFRIEND.

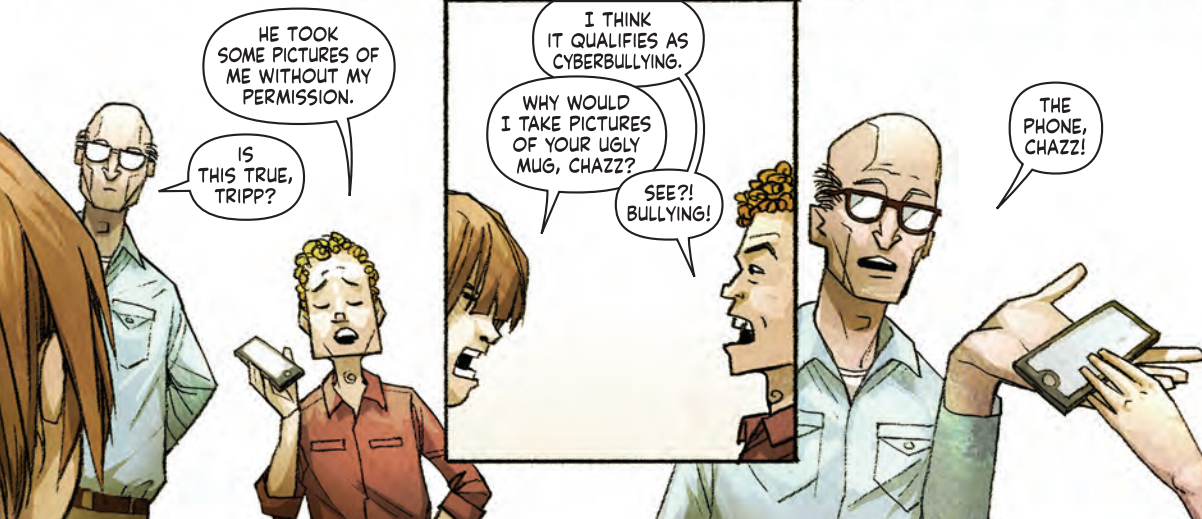


SHE'S NOT MY GIRLFRIEND! NOW GIVE ME MY PHONE!



YOU KNOW THE RULES ABOUT PHONES IN SCHOOL.

SORRY, MR. POMMEL.



HE TOOK SOME PICTURES OF ME WITHOUT MY PERMISSION.

IS THIS TRUE, TRIPP?

I THINK IT QUALIFIES AS CYBERBULLYING.

WHY WOULD I TAKE PICTURES OF YOUR UGLY MUG, CHAZZ?

SEE?! BULLYING!

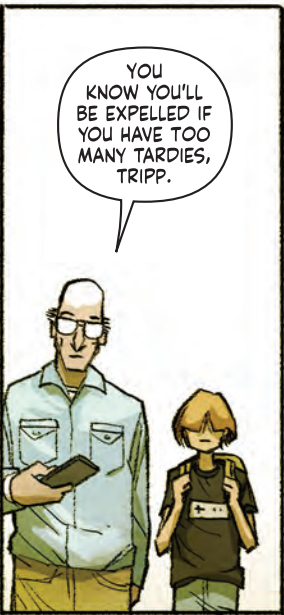
THE PHONE, CHAZZ!



NOW LET'S SEE THIS INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE.



UH, SORRY SIR, GOTTA GO PRESENT MY EXTRA CREDIT ON ETHICS. THE BELL ALREADY RANG, RIGHT?



YOU KNOW YOU'LL BE EXPELLED IF YOU HAVE TOO MANY TARDIES, TRIPP.



SORRY, SIR. MY MOM FORGOT TO PACK MY LUNCH, SO WE HAD TO GO BACK TO GET IT.



YOU DO REALIZE WHEN YOU'RE STREAMING, IT RUINS YOUR ALIBI, DON'T YOU?

UH. THAT MUST HAVE BEEN CHAZZ. HE HAD MY PHONE, REMEMBER, AND...



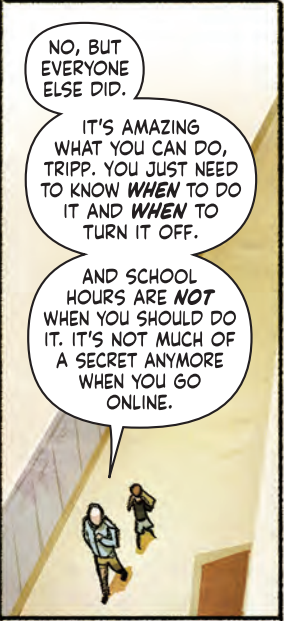
...AND EVERYONE KNOWS THAT CHAZZ CHEATS.

UH...



PRETTY IMPRESSIVE PLAYING THIS MORNING, BY THE WAY.

YOU SAW IT?



NO, BUT EVERYONE ELSE DID.

IT'S AMAZING WHAT YOU CAN DO, TRIPP. YOU JUST NEED TO KNOW *WHEN* TO DO IT AND *WHEN* TO TURN IT OFF.

AND SCHOOL HOURS ARE *NOT* WHEN YOU SHOULD DO IT. IT'S NOT MUCH OF A SECRET ANYMORE WHEN YOU GO ONLINE.



I WON'T PLAY ANYMORE DURING SCHOOL HOURS, MR. POMMEL.



I KNOW YOU WON'T...

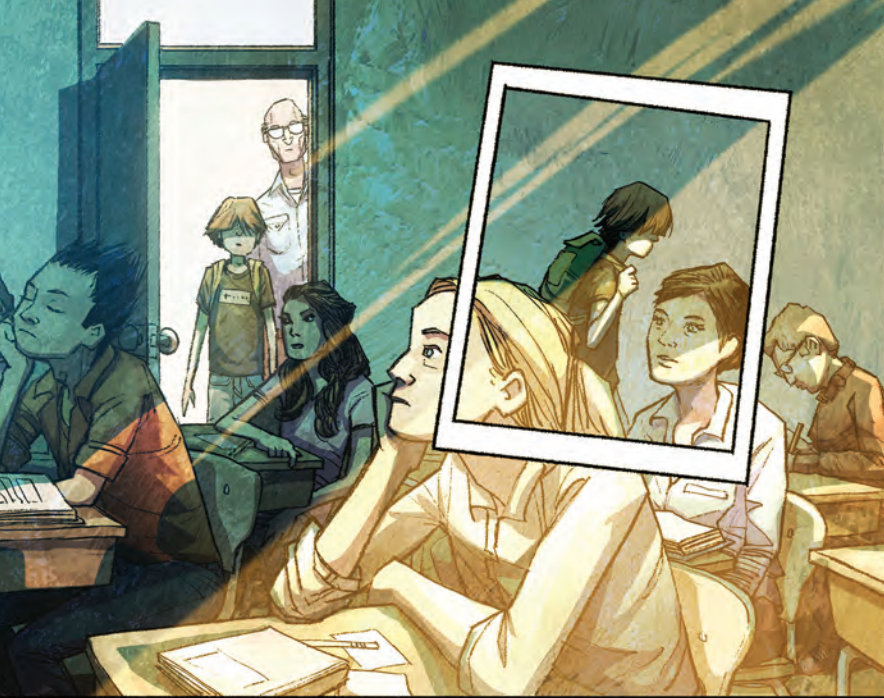


...AT LEAST FOR TODAY, BECAUSE I'M KEEPING YOUR PHONE UNTIL SCHOOL IS OUT.



BUT IT'S MY BIRTHDAY TODAY!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TRIPP.

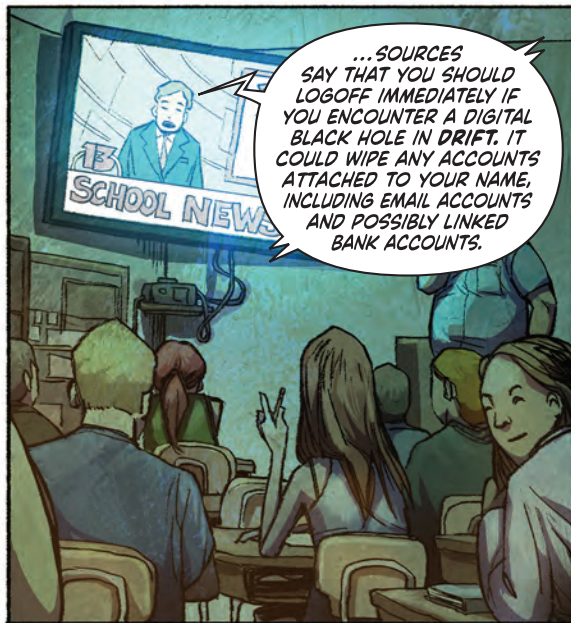


YOU ALMOST GOT HACKED, DUDE!

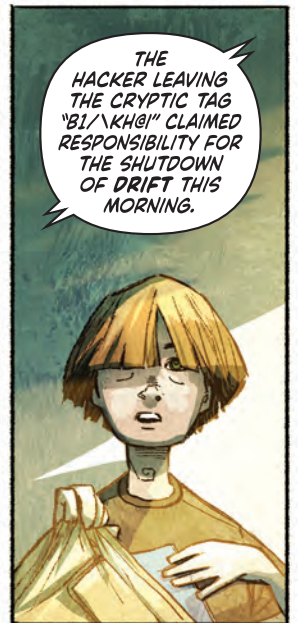


WHAT?

THE NEWS.



...SOURCES SAY THAT YOU SHOULD LOGOFF IMMEDIATELY IF YOU ENCOUNTER A DIGITAL BLACK HOLE IN DRIFT. IT COULD WIPE ANY ACCOUNTS ATTACHED TO YOUR NAME, INCLUDING EMAIL ACCOUNTS AND POSSIBLY BANK ACCOUNTS.

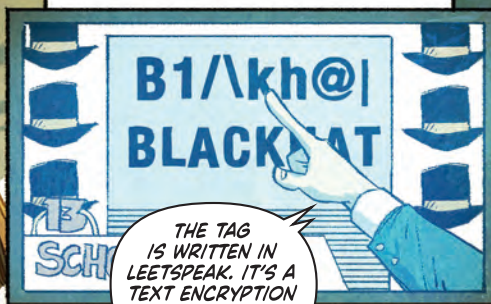


THE HACKER LEAVING THE CRYPTIC TAG 'B1/\KH@' CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SHUTDOWN OF DRIFT THIS MORNING.

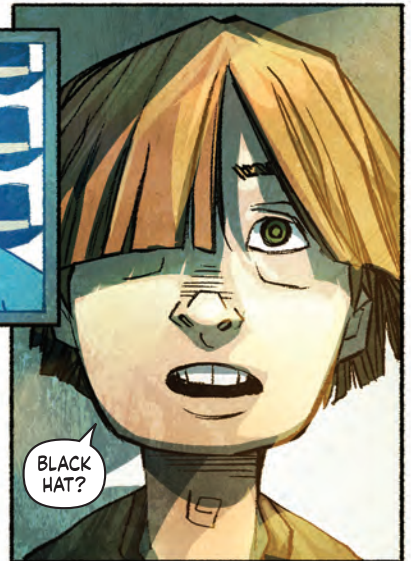


IF YOU WOULD'VE BEEN SUCKED IN, HE WOULD'VE OWNED YOU.

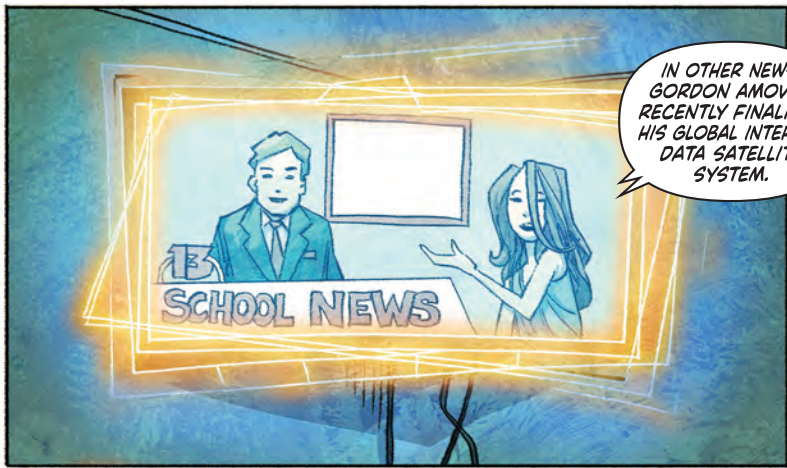
A HACKER?



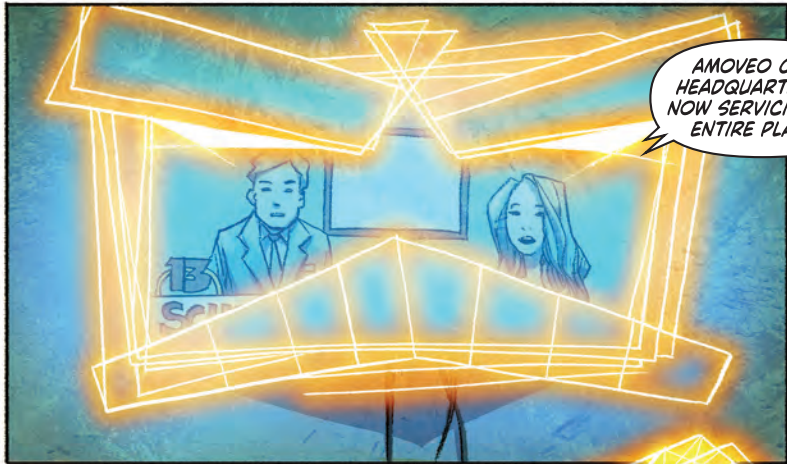
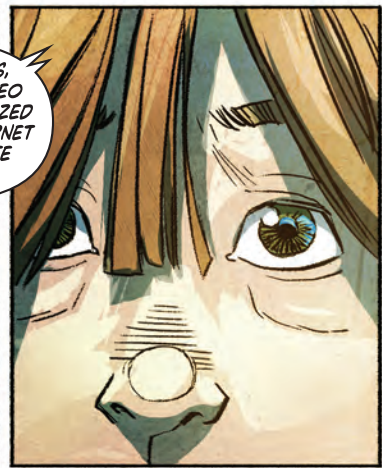
THE TAG IS WRITTEN IN LEETSPEAK. IT'S A TEXT ENCRYPTION OF THE WORDS "BLACK HAT."



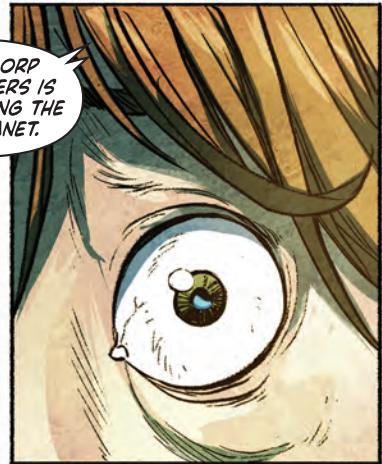
BLACK HAT?



IN OTHER NEWS, GORDON AMOVEO RECENTLY FINALIZED HIS GLOBAL INTERNET DATA SATELLITE SYSTEM.



AMOVEO CORP HEADQUARTERS IS NOW SERVICING THE ENTIRE PLANET.



AAAH!

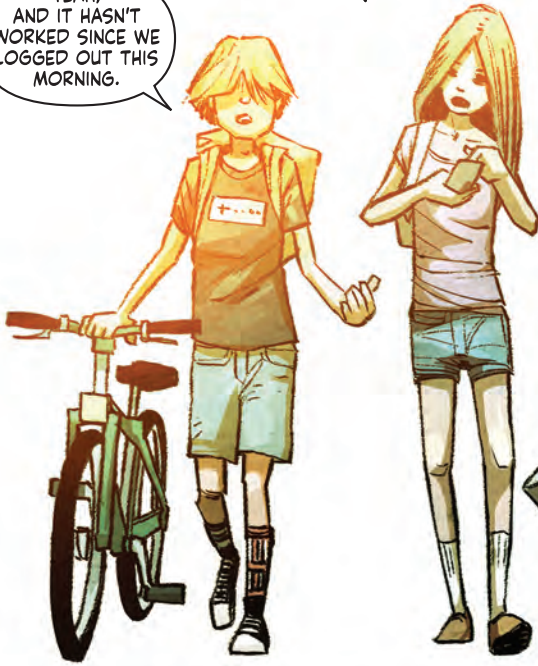


WHAT'S WRONG, TRIPP?

NOTHING!

IT MUST BE THE UPDATE. OR MAYBE YOU GOT HACKED AFTER ALL. YOU DID GET PRETTY CLOSE TO THAT BLACK HOLE.

YEAH, AND IT HASN'T WORKED SINCE WE LOGGED OUT THIS MORNING.



CAN I TAKE IT HOME?

I NEED MY COMPUTER TO SEE IF IT'S BEEN COMPROMISED.



DO IT AT MY PLACE. DID YOU ASK YOUR MOM ABOUT TONIGHT?



SHE DOESN'T WANT ME HANGING OUT WITHOUT YOUR MOM THERE.

SHE'LL BE THERE EVENTUALLY.



TRIPP, I CAN'T. YOU KNOW HOW WEIRD MY DAD GETS.



BUT IT'S MY STINKIN' BIRTHDAY! TURNING THIRTEEN SUCKS! ALL WE'RE GONNA DO IS PLAY DRIFT AND EAT CAKE.



SORRY, TRIPP. I JUST CAN'T. BUT I'LL JOIN YOU ONLINE ONCE I GET MY HOMEWORK DONE.

OK, AS A PRESENT I'M TAKING YOUR PHONE.

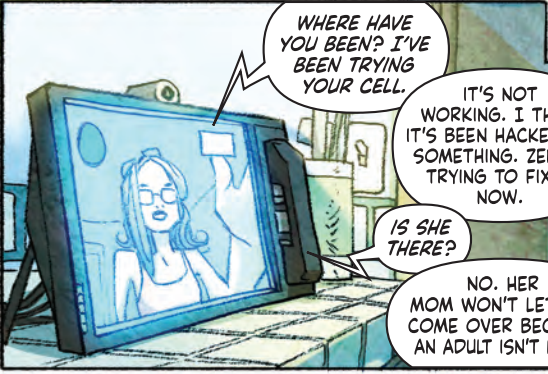
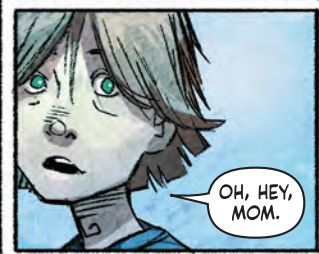
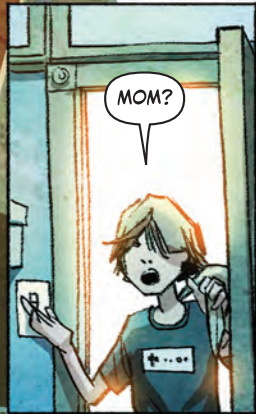


I'LL HACK BACK INTO YOUR ACCOUNT IF I HAVE TO. WE'RE PASSING THAT LEVEL TONIGHT!



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!





WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I'VE BEEN TRYING YOUR CELL.

IT'S NOT WORKING. I THINK IT'S BEEN HACKED OR SOMETHING. ZENO'S TRYING TO FIX IT NOW.

IS SHE THERE?

NO. HER MOM WON'T LET HER COME OVER BECAUSE AN ADULT ISN'T HERE.



SORRY, SWEETIE. I DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE CALLED IN TODAY, BUT I PROMISE, WE'LL PLAN A PARTY TO MAKE UP FOR IT.

OKAY, MOM.



MAKE SURE TO OPEN YOUR PRESENTS--THEY'RE ON THE COUNTER. THE SMALL ONE IS SOMETHING THAT YOUR DAD WANTED YOU TO HAVE.



SERIOUSLY? THIS IS FROM DAD? WHAT IS IT?

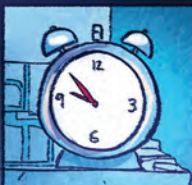
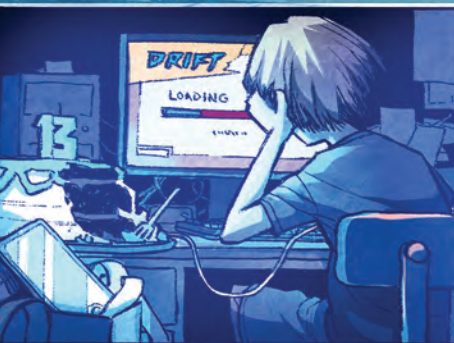
I DON'T KNOW.



HE WAS STILL TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT WAS, BUT HE PLANNED TO GIVE IT TO YOU WHEN YOU BECAME A TEENAGER.



9:35 P.M.



NOT AGAIN. WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?



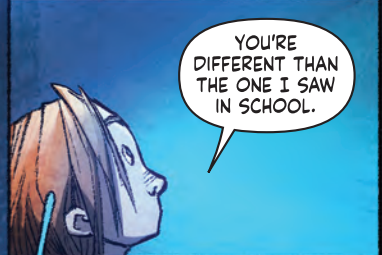




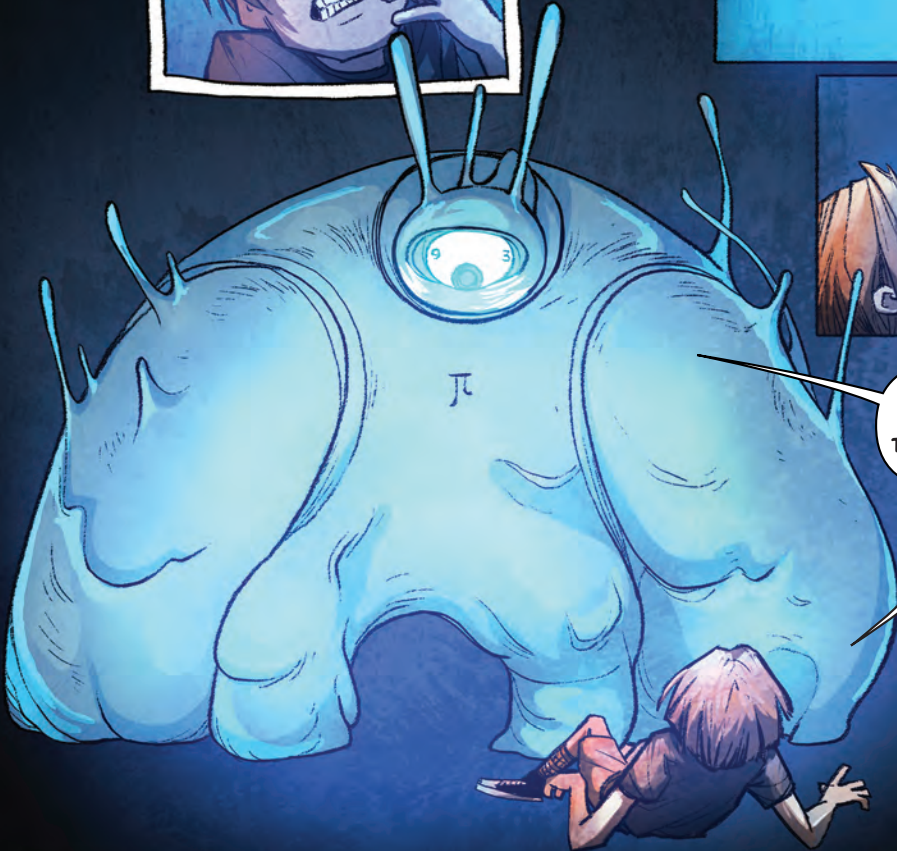
AM I DREAMING?



PERHAPS. SOMETIMES DREAMS ARE THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE A CONNECTION.



YOU'RE DIFFERENT THAN THE ONE I SAW IN SCHOOL.



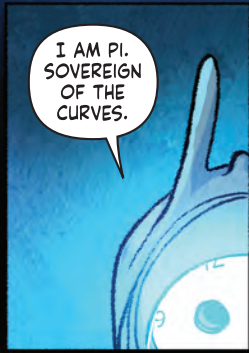
AH, YES. NUMBERS. HE HAS BEEN IMPATIENTLY TRYING TO CONTACT YOU FIRST.

NUMBERS? IT'S NAMED NUMBERS?

YES, THE SOVEREIGN OF THE EDGE ARMY. MUCH TOO HARSH AND DIRECT IF YOU ASK ME. A SMOOTH INTRODUCTION REQUIRES A LITTLE MORE FLEXIBILITY.



INTRODUCTION FOR WHAT?



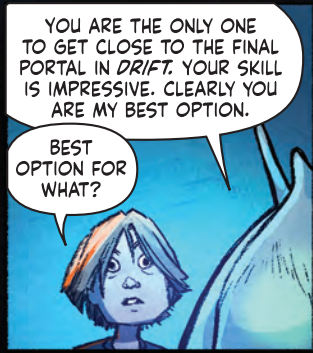
I AM PI. SOVEREIGN OF THE CURVES.



PIE? I HAD TOO MUCH CAKE...

I HAVE COME TO RECRUIT YOU.

WAY TOO MUCH CAKE!



YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE TO GET CLOSE TO THE FINAL PORTAL IN DRIFT. YOUR SKILL IS IMPRESSIVE. CLEARLY YOU ARE MY BEST OPTION.

BEST OPTION FOR WHAT?



FLEX OFF, PI.

AAAH!

TIME IS RUNNING OUT AND YOU ARE HAVING A FLUFFY CONVERSATION WITH THE KID!

THE KID IS MINE, NUMBERS! I MADE CONTACT FIRST. YOU'RE ALWAYS CUTTING IN.

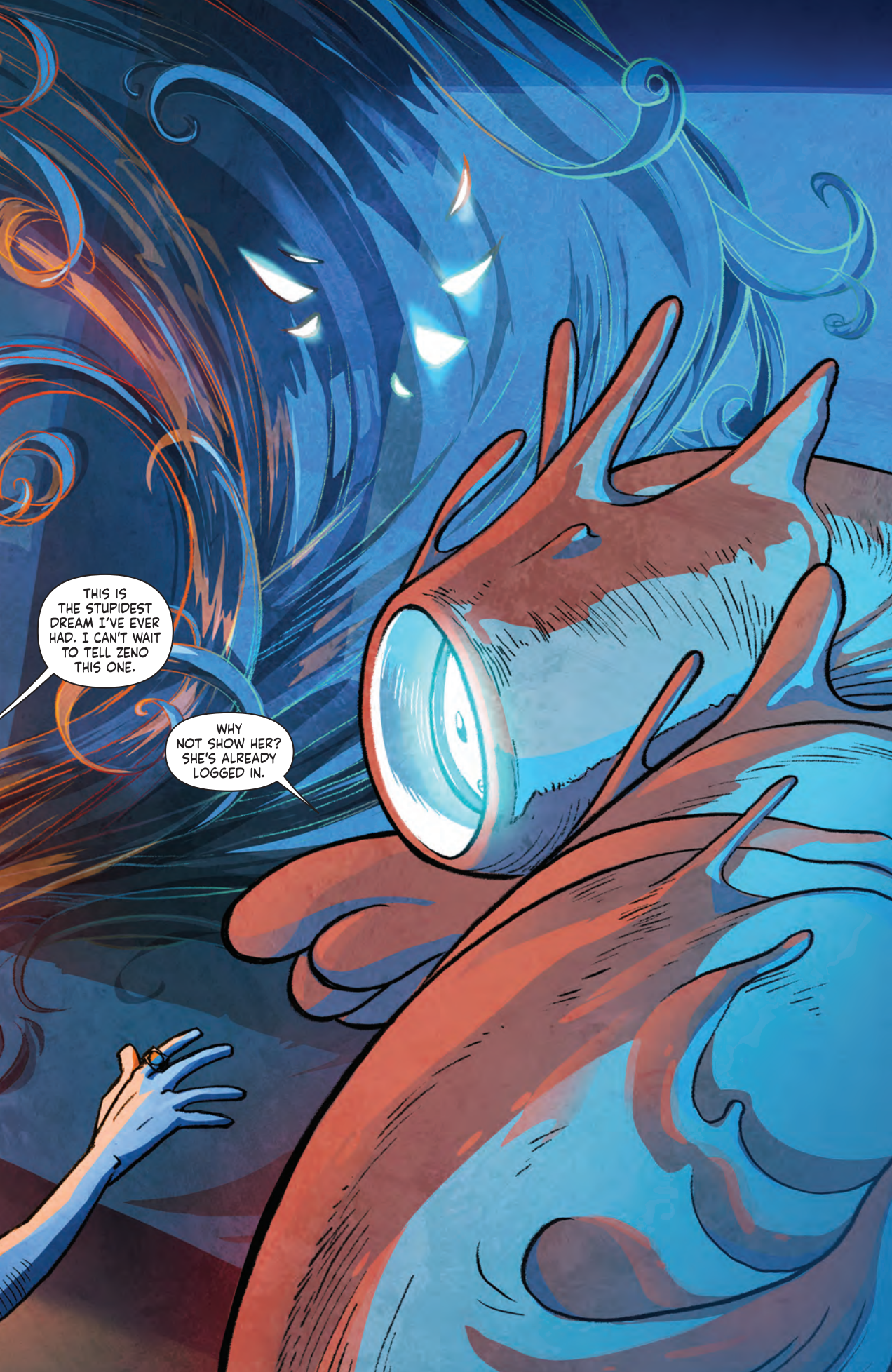
ALL THEY DO IS FIGHT. BUT WITH ME, IT WILL BE A BREEZE.

WHO SAID THAT?

I AM ZEPHYR, THE SOVEREIGN OF THE BREATH ARMY.

THIS IS RIDICULOUS. COME WITH ME, KID. YOU PROBABLY ONLY HAVE MINUTES BEFORE A NEW VIRUS TAKES OUT THE FINAL PORTAL.

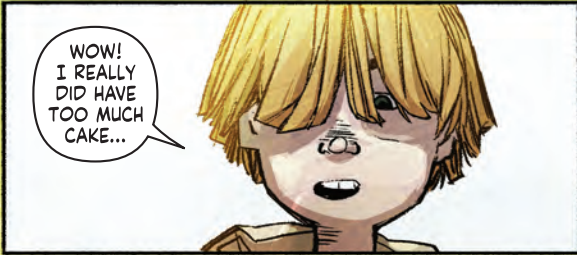
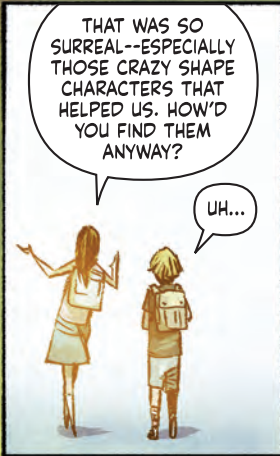
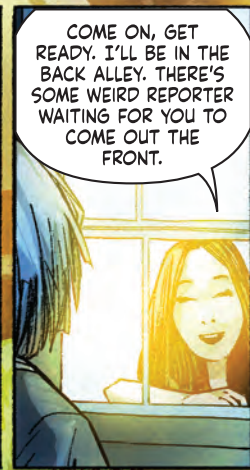
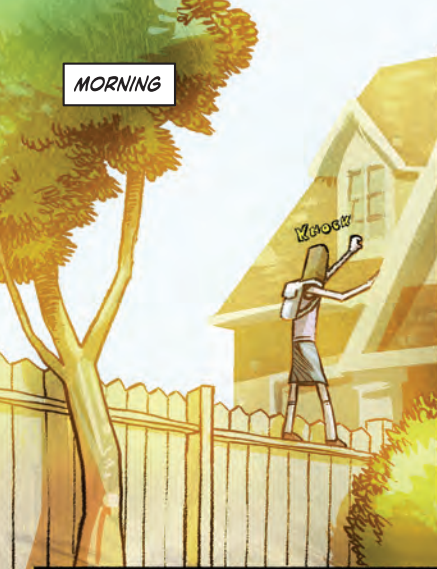


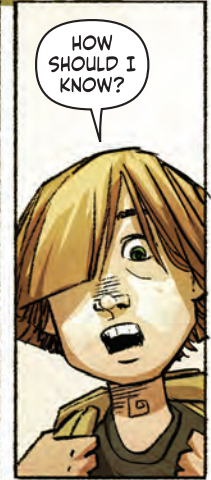


THIS IS THE STUPIDEST DREAM I'VE EVER HAD. I CAN'T WAIT TO TELL ZENO THIS ONE.

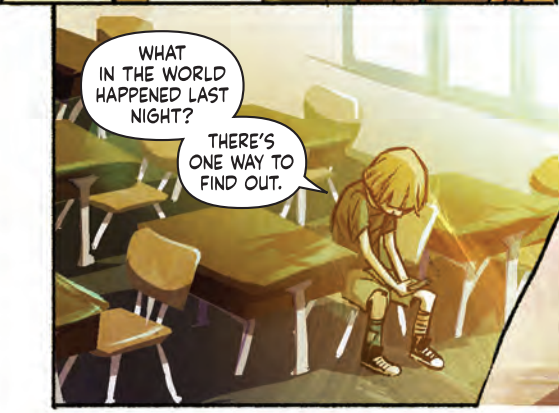
WHY NOT SHOW HER? SHE'S ALREADY LOGGED IN.

MORNING



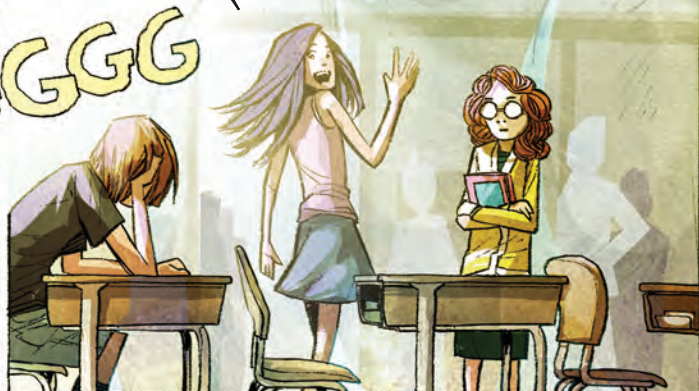
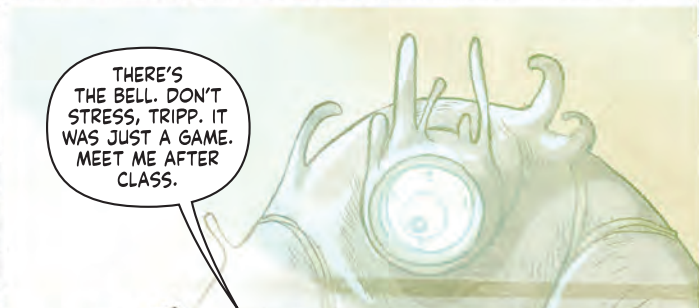
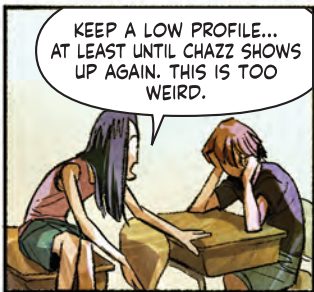
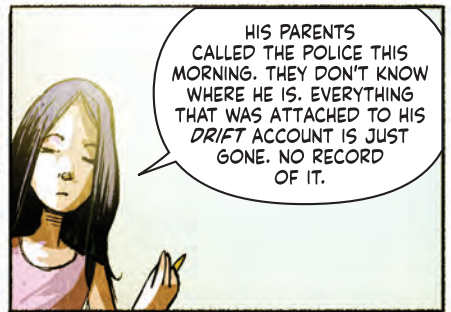
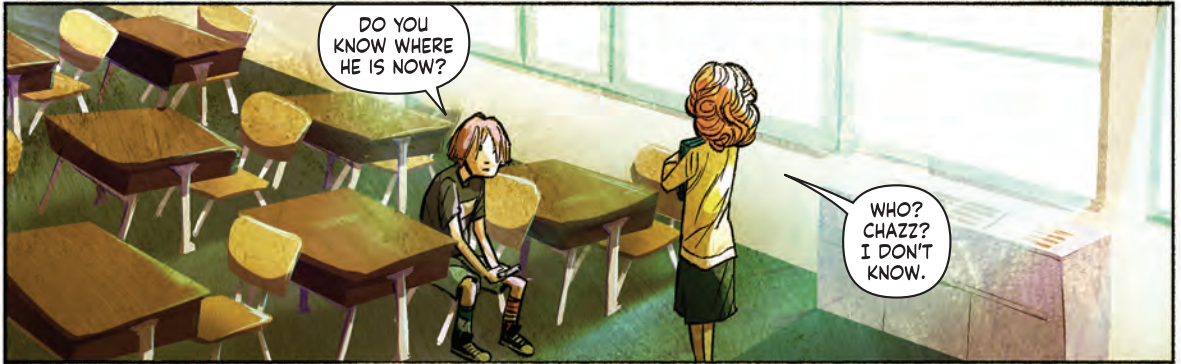
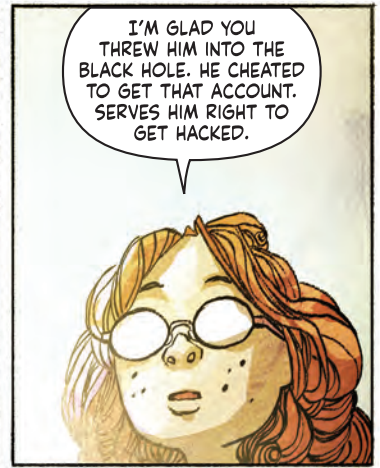


YOU'RE GONNA PAY, TRIPP!



THERE'S ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.







THIRTY MINUTES LATER...

THERE IS NO TIME TO BE SITTING HERE!

PATIENCE! THE BOY HAS TO MAKE THE TRANSITION AT HIS OWN PACE. WITH ME.

HE IS UNSTABLE. HE IS ONLY CHASING THE WIND.

HE NEEDS TO ACT NOW. IF WE ARE TO FIND THE JAGGEDS, THEN HE NEEDS TO GET BACK INTO THE GAME.

YOU ARE NOT FLEXIBLE ENOUGH, NUMBERS. THAT IS YOUR PROBLEM.

I CANNOT BE FLEXIBLE AND YOU KNOW IT.

**BZZZZZZ**



The police are here looking for you.

Where they at now?

Heading to your room. Meet me at the spot. This is getting scary.



CAN I GO TO THE BATHROOM?



APPARENTLY, CHAZZ'S MOM IS FREAKING OUT NOW. IT'S LIKE HE DISAPPEARED INTO THIN AIR WHEN HE WAS PLAYING THE GAME. THE POLICE WANT TO KNOW IF YOU HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.



I'M SEEING THINGS, ZENO.



WHAT KIND OF THINGS?



THE SHAPES FROM THE GAME LAST NIGHT. IT'S LIKE THEY'RE COMING ALIVE EVERYWHERE I LOOK.



I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL A DREAM LAST NIGHT, BUT EVERYTHING WAS REAL. I CAN'T ACCESS MY *DRIFT* ACCOUNT ANYMORE BUT SOMEHOW *DRIFT* HAS BEEN MANIFESTING ITSELF TO ME...TRYING TO GET ME BACK INTO THE GAME.

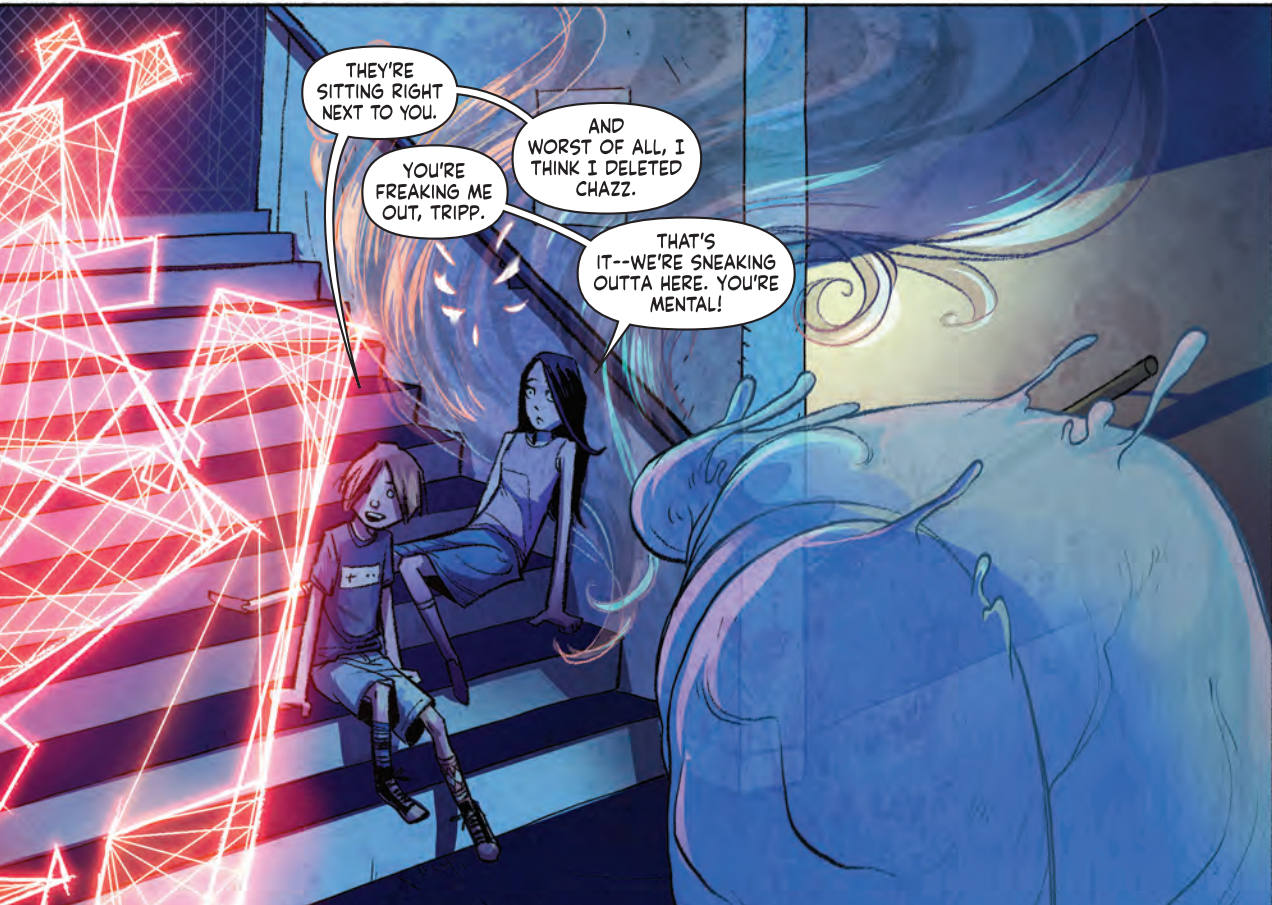


ARE YOU SEEING ANYTHING NOW?



YOU KNOW PI, NUMBERS, AND ZEPHYR FROM LAST NIGHT?

YEAH?



THEY'RE SITTING RIGHT NEXT TO YOU.

YOU'RE FREAKING ME OUT, TRIPP.

AND WORST OF ALL, I THINK I DELETED CHAZZ.

THAT'S IT--WE'RE SNEAKING OUTTA HERE. YOU'RE MENTAL!



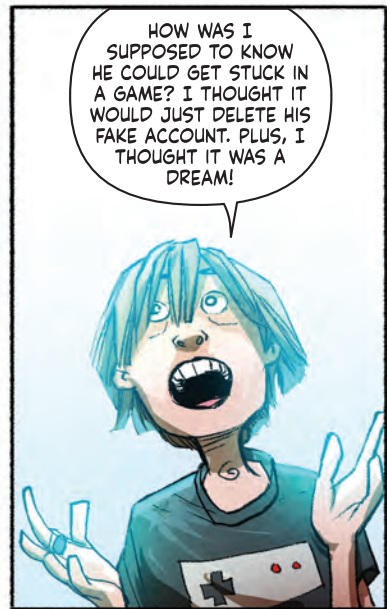


ZENO'S HOUSE

WHERE DO YOU THINK AN IDIOT BULLY WOULD HIDE?



ISN'T IT OBVIOUS THAT HE'S TRAPPED IN THE GAME? YOU THREW HIM INTO A BLACK HOLE VIRUS.

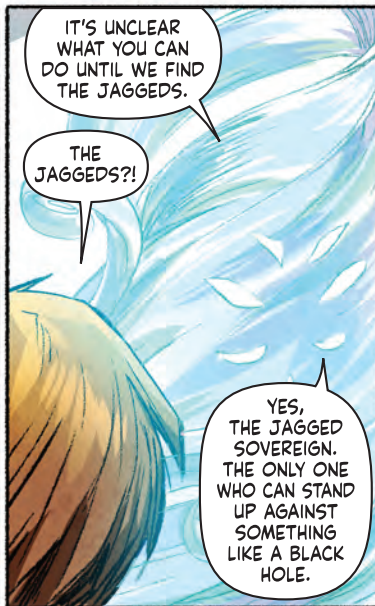


HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW HE COULD GET STUCK IN A GAME? I THOUGHT IT WOULD JUST DELETE HIS FAKE ACCOUNT. PLUS, I THOUGHT IT WAS A DREAM!



ARE YOU TALKING TO THEM?

YEAH, PI SAYS CHAZZ IS TRAPPED IN THE GAME. THIS WHOLE THING IS CRAZY. HOW CAN WE GET HIM OUT?



IT'S UNCLEAR WHAT YOU CAN DO UNTIL WE FIND THE JAGGEDS.

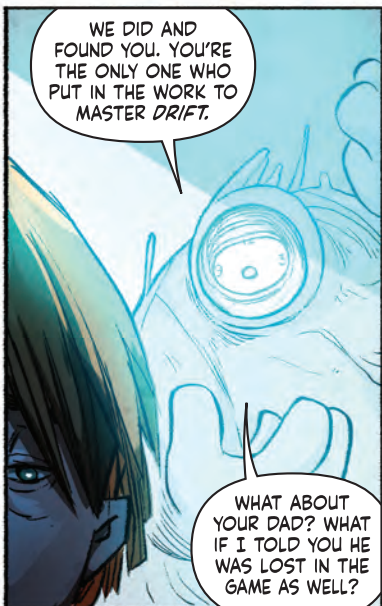
THE JAGGEDS?!

YES, THE JAGGED SOVEREIGN. THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STAND UP AGAINST SOMETHING LIKE A BLACK HOLE.



UNTIL THEN, WE'RE JUST HOLDING OFF THE INEVITABLE.

WHY DO YOU KEEP LOOKING AT ME? YOU'RE THE SOVEREIGNS! YOU NEED TO DO SOMETHING!



WE DID AND FOUND YOU. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO PUT IN THE WORK TO MASTER DRIFT.

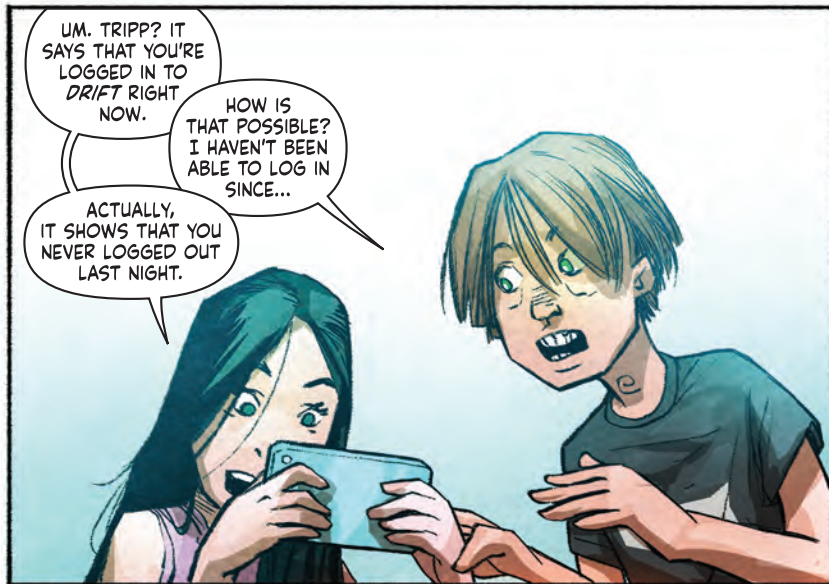
WHAT ABOUT YOUR DAD? WHAT IF I TOLD YOU HE WAS LOST IN THE GAME AS WELL?



MY DAD? WHAT DOES MY DAD HAVE TO DO WITH ANYTHING?



IF YOU CAN FIND CHAZZ, YOU WILL MOST LIKELY ALSO FIND YOUR DAD. BUT WE NEED THE JAGGEDS FIRST! YOU NEED TO GET INTO THE GAME, KID!



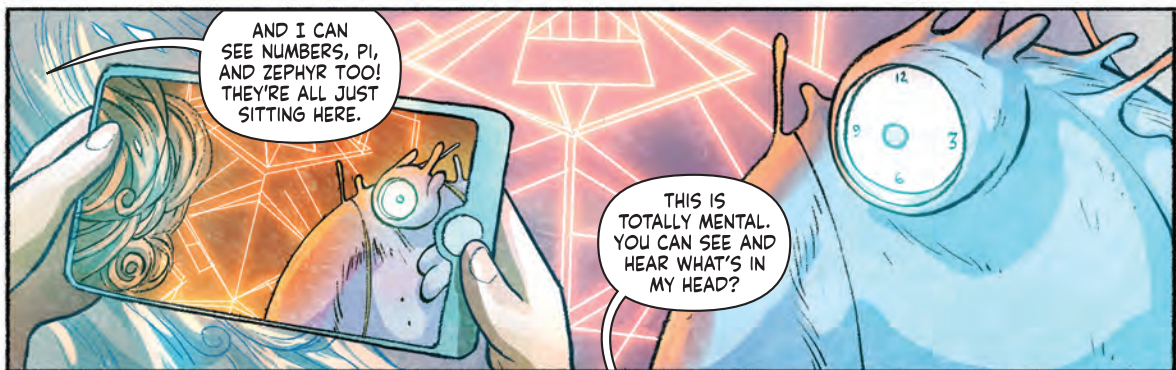
UM. TRIPP? IT SAYS THAT YOU'RE LOGGED IN TO DRIFT RIGHT NOW.

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO LOG IN SINCE...

ACTUALLY, IT SHOWS THAT YOU NEVER LOGGED OUT LAST NIGHT.

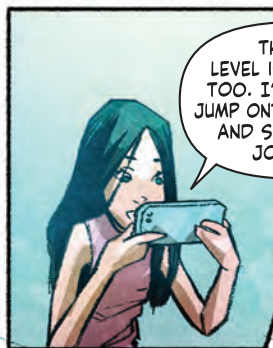


HOLY *MATRIX!* I CAN HEAR YOU THROUGH MY PHONE WHEN I'M LOGGED INTO DRIFT.



AND I CAN SEE NUMBERS, PI, AND ZEPHYR TOO! THEY'RE ALL JUST SITTING HERE.

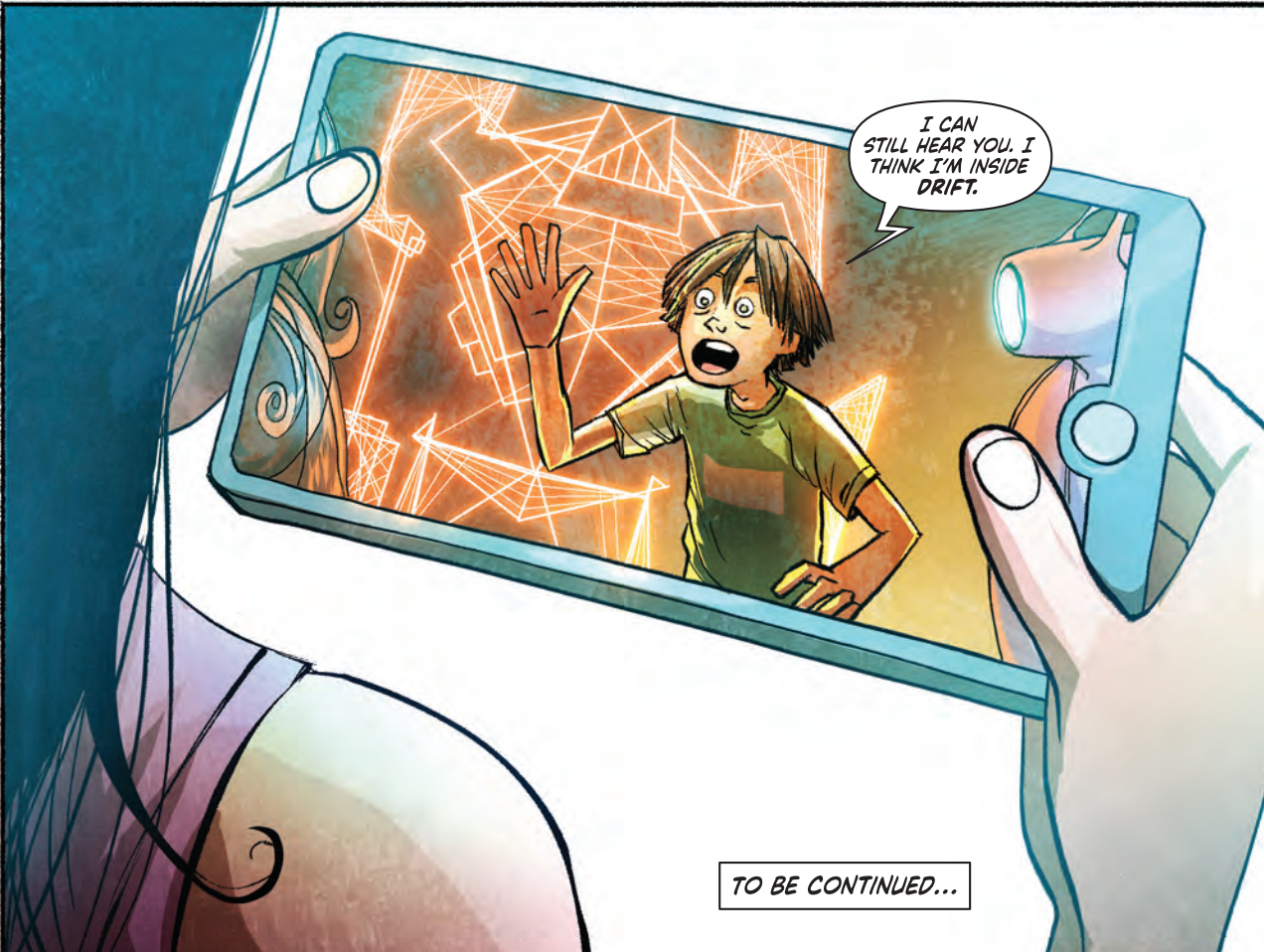
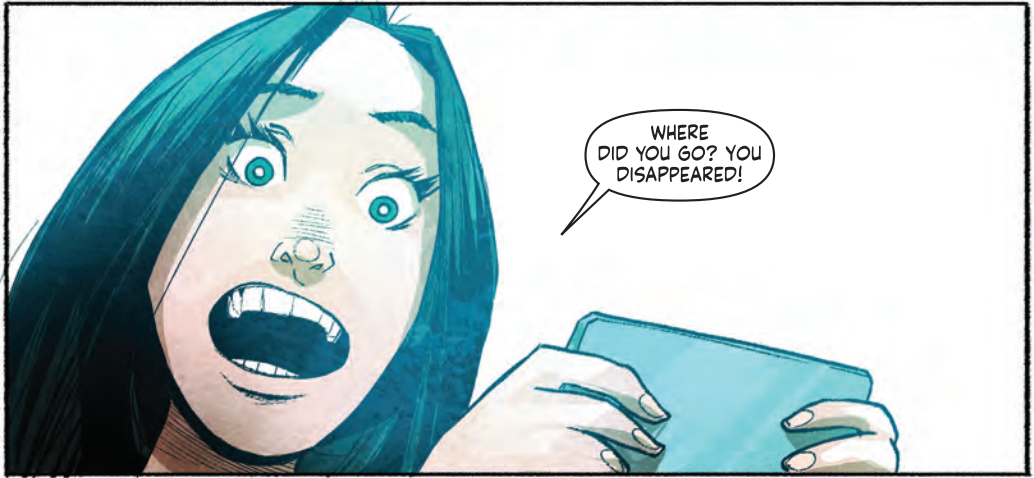
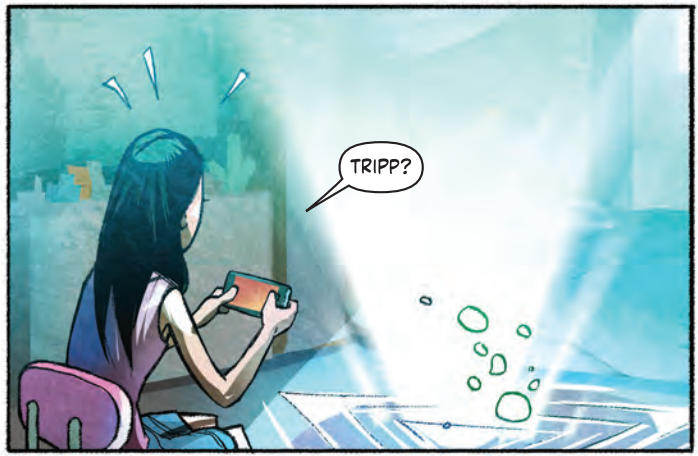
THIS IS TOTALLY MENTAL. YOU CAN SEE AND HEAR WHAT'S IN MY HEAD?



THE NEW LEVEL IS UNLOCKED TOO. I'M GOING TO JUMP ONTO THE SERVER AND SEE IF I CAN JOIN YOU.



# ZROOP



TO BE CONTINUED...