

GRAVITY LOOP

THE SPECULATIVE
FICTION ANTHOLOGY

ISSUE No. 2 JULY 2024



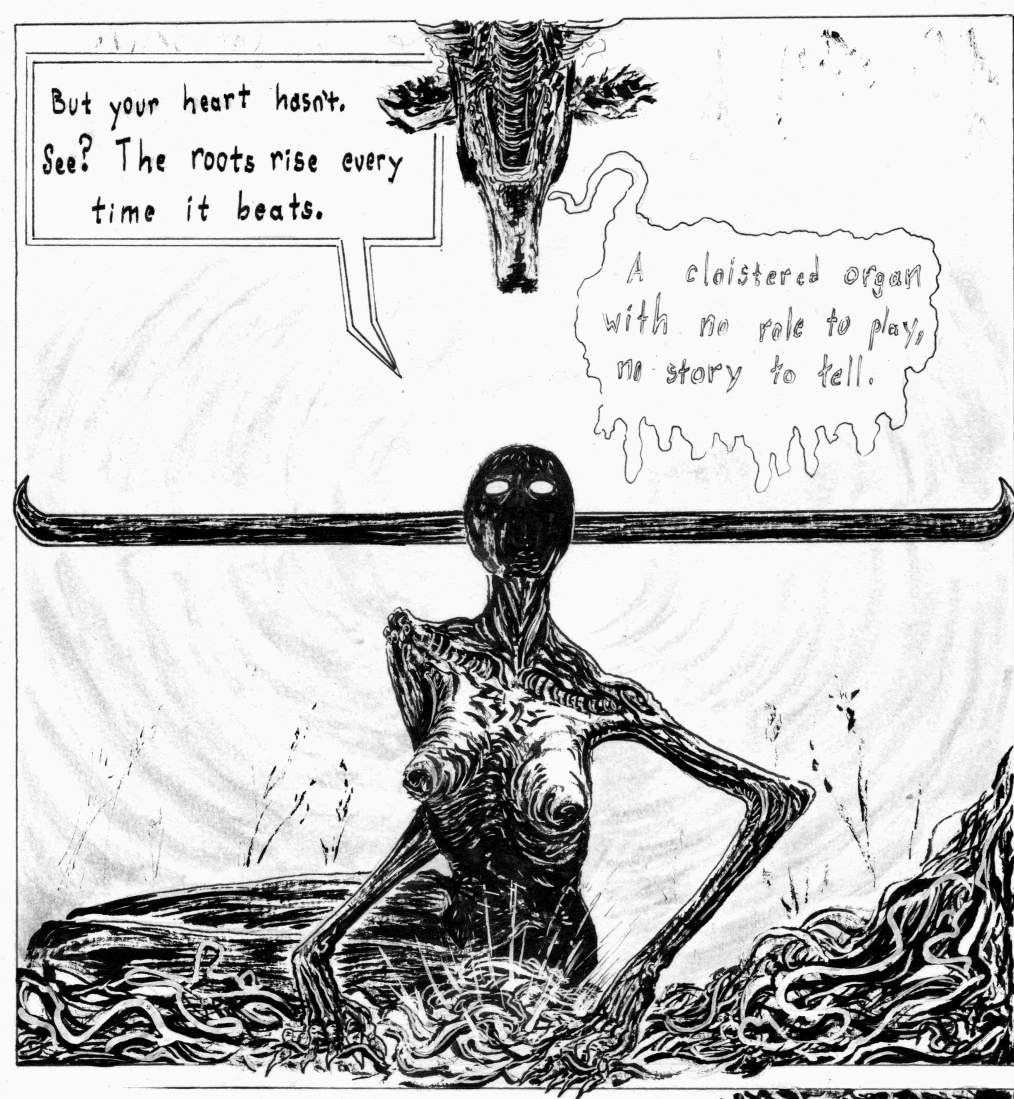


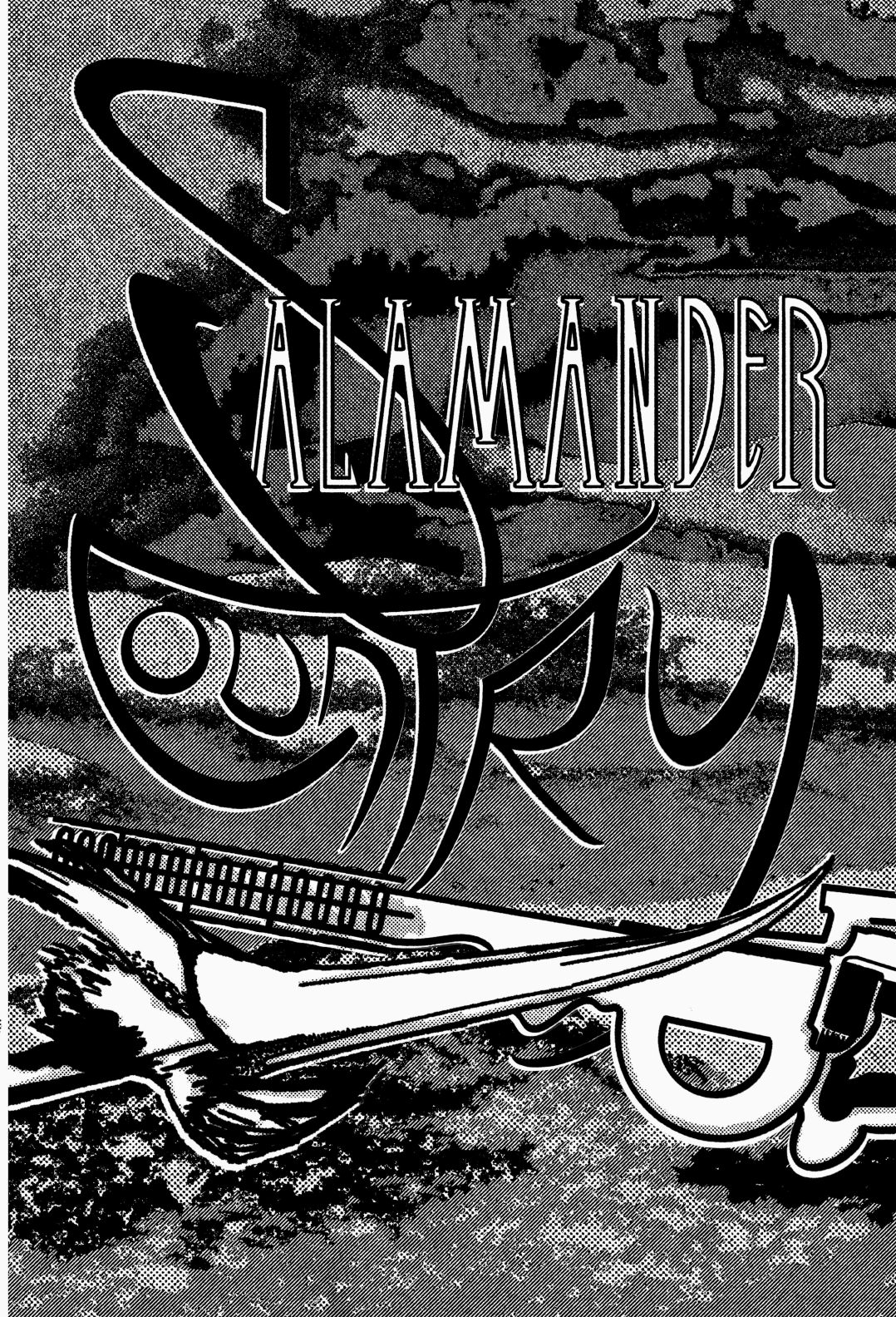
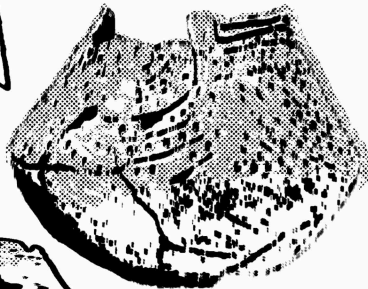
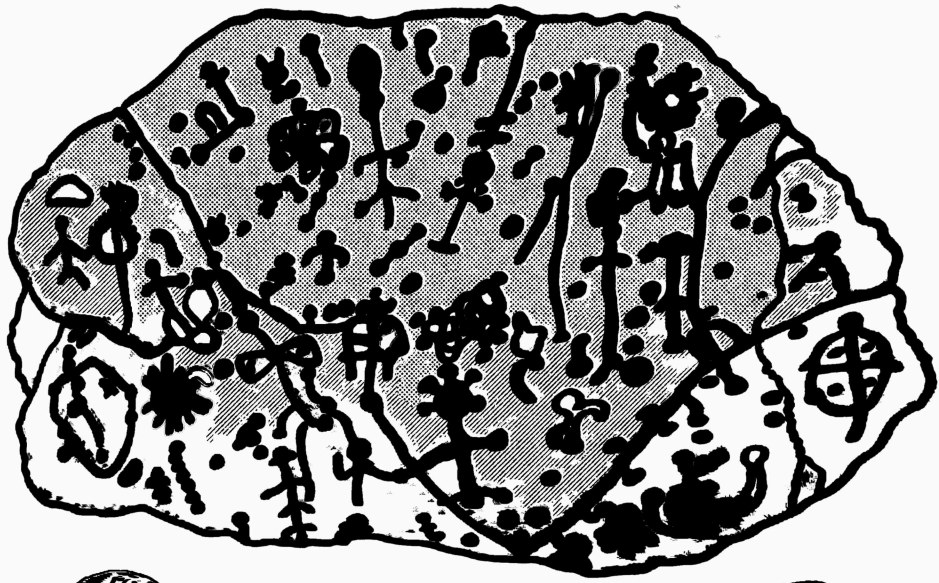
COVER BY LICHEN EUCHELLA
LOGO BY OCEAN ET

BIOFUNK INDUCTION (O)
SALAMANDER COUNTRY (L)

JULY 21XX (O)

DOCUMENTING MALL CITY (L)
ROBOTIC QUIXOTIC NEUROTIC (O)





ALAMANDER

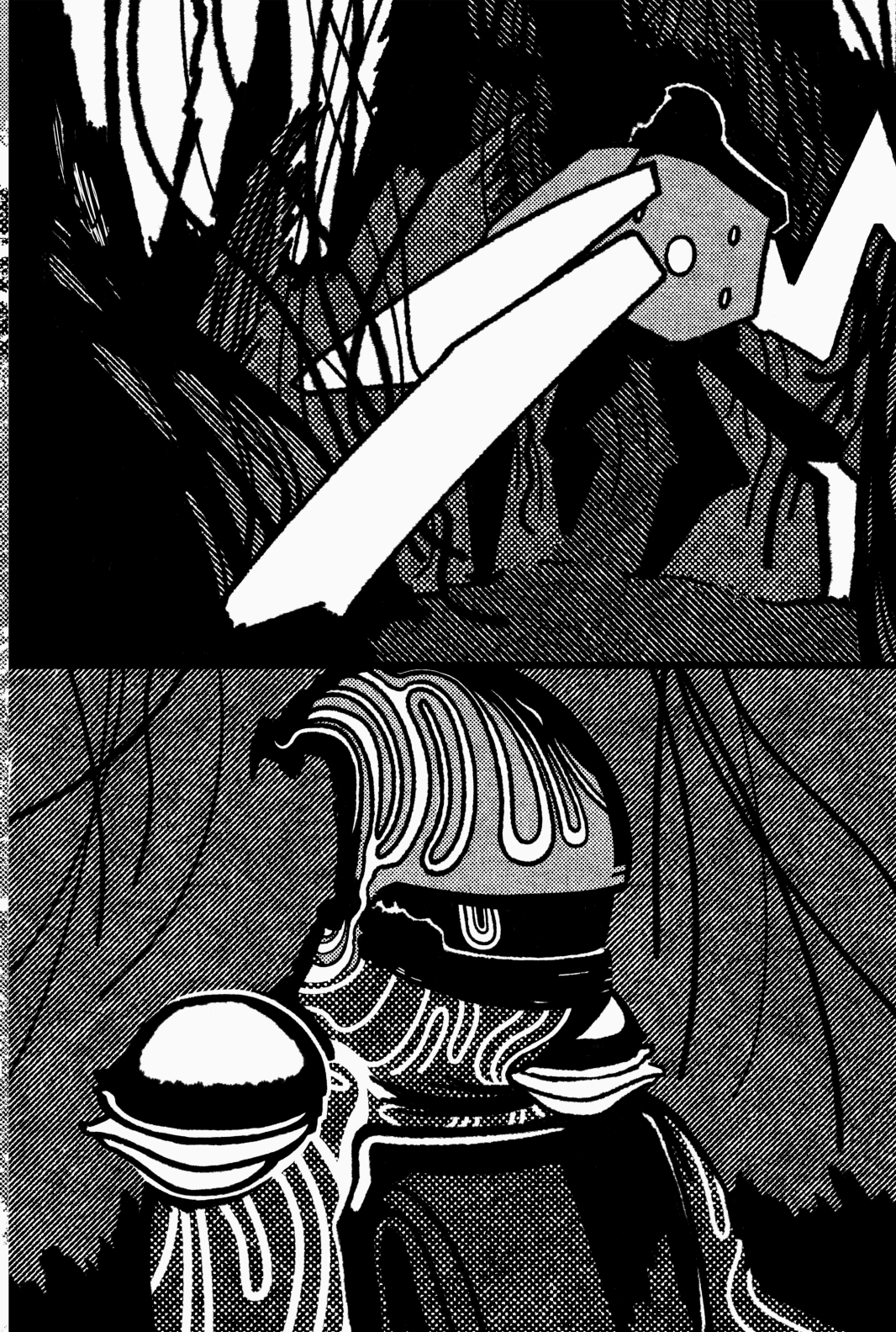
BEYOND THE MIASMA OF THE TOXIC HEED SEA...

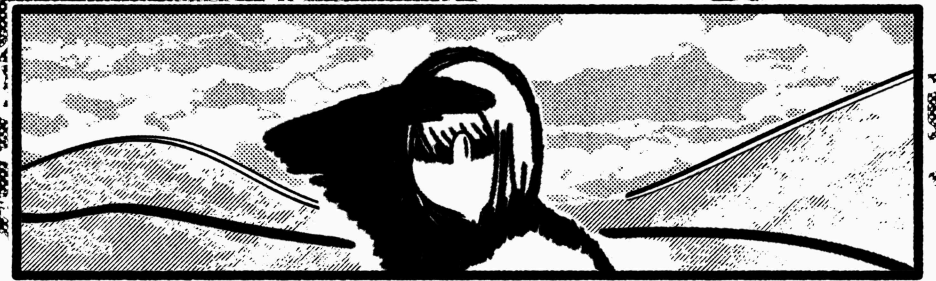
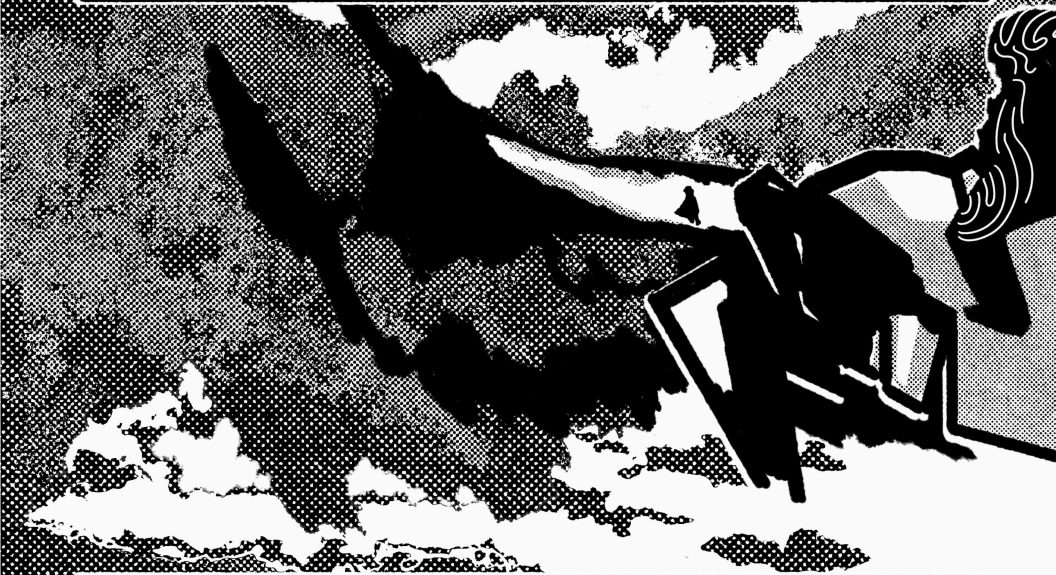
**SOMEWHERE NEAR THE PRODIGIOUS AND HORRIFYING
MOUNT SAINT FOREST...**

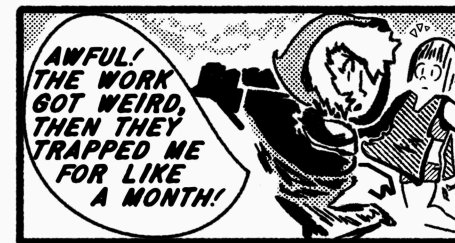
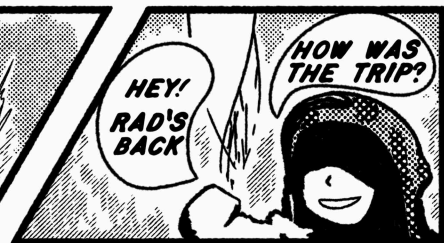
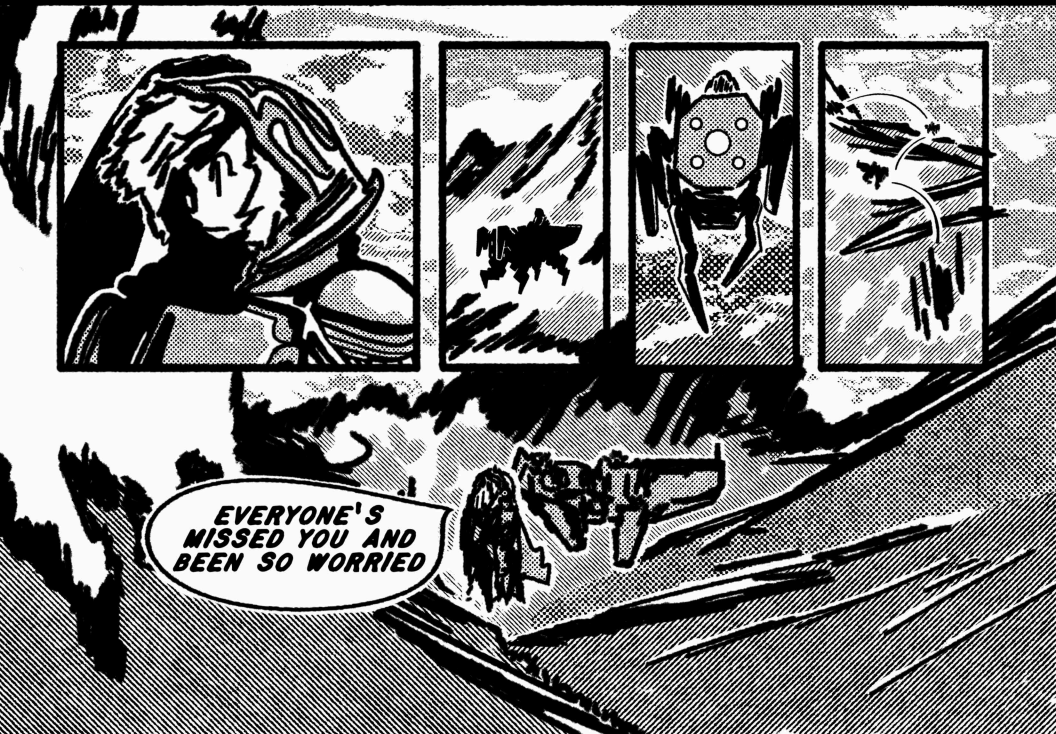
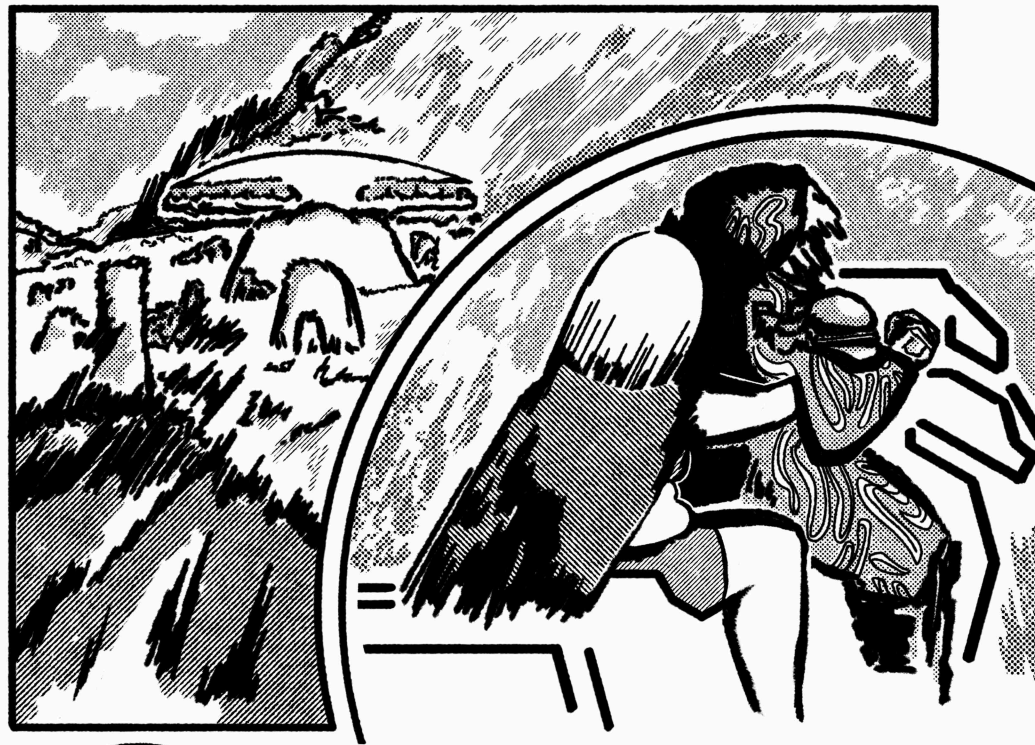
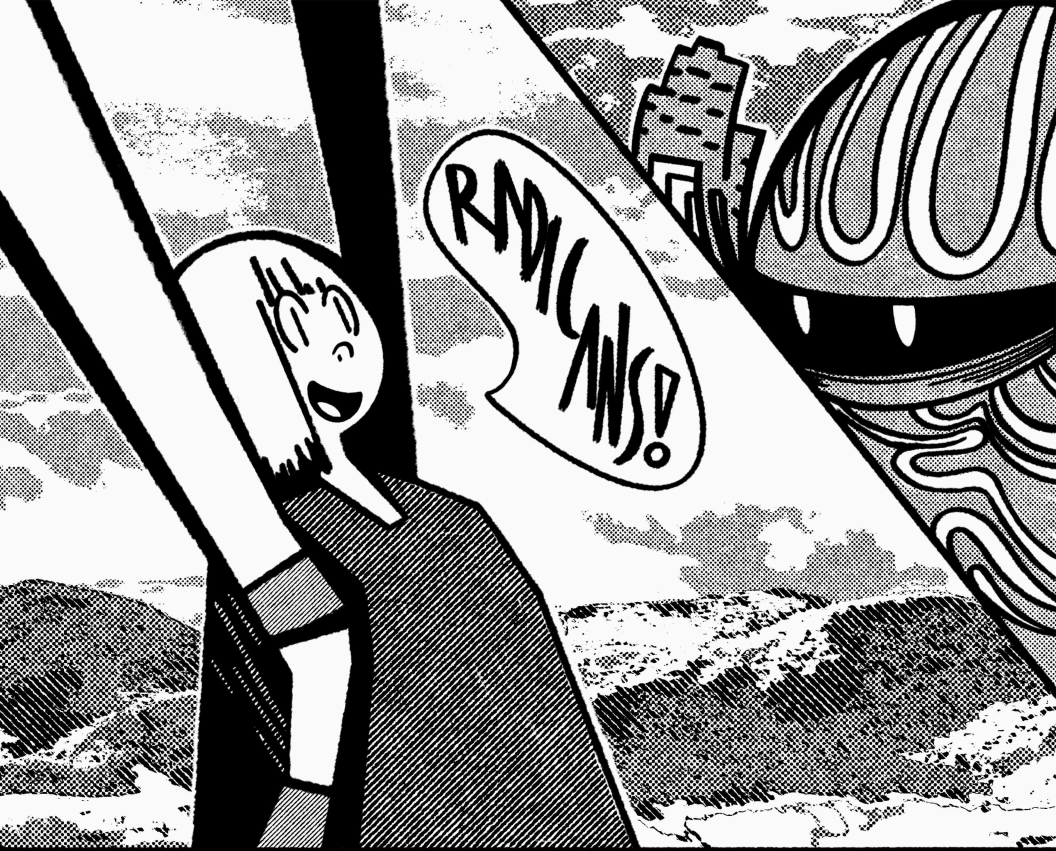
**SALAMANDER COUNTRY EKES OUT A LIVING THAT
RESTORES WHAT IT TOUCHES...**

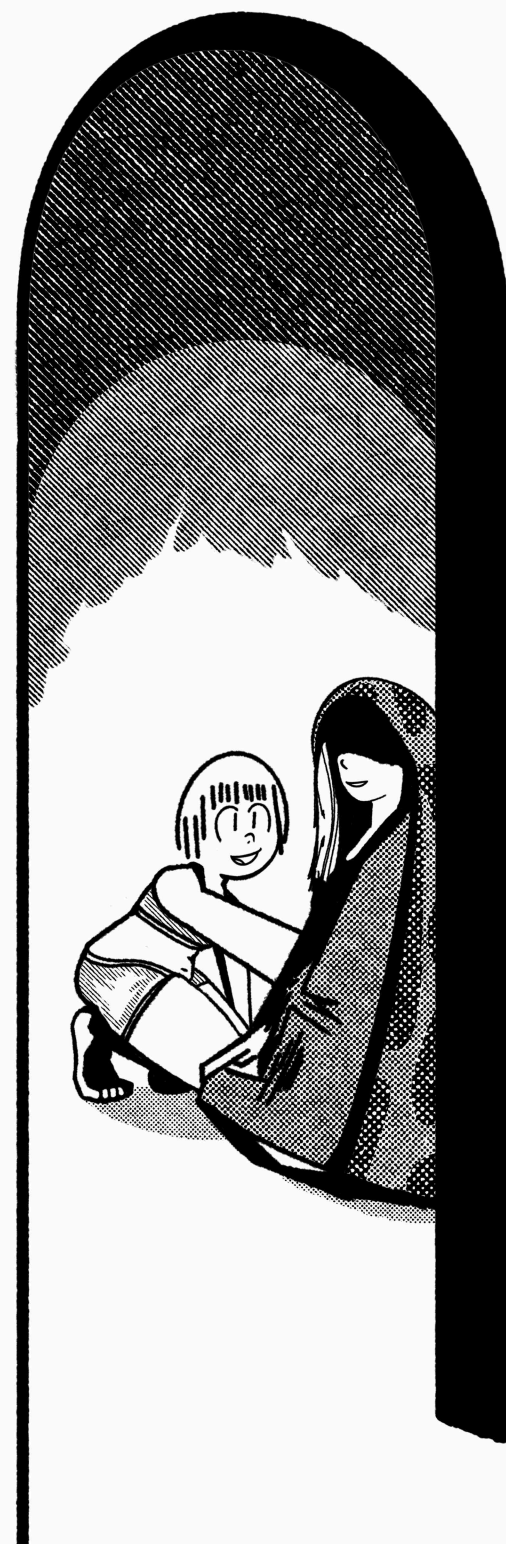


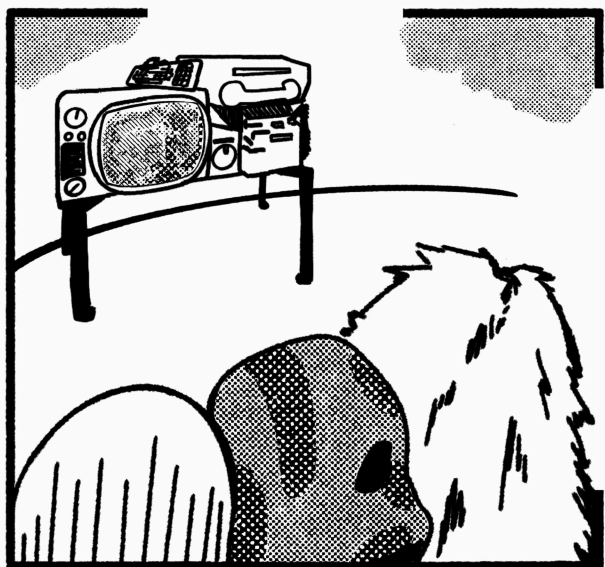
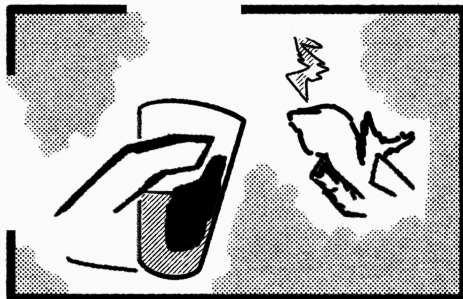
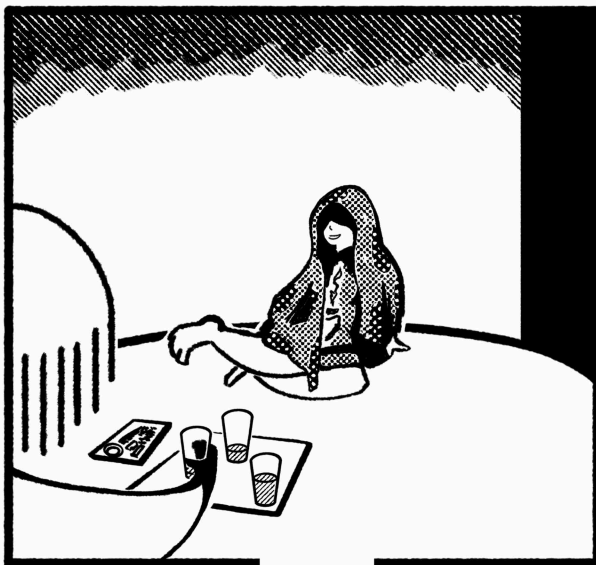
**I
- ENTRAPMENT -**











OK,
I THINK I'M
READY TO TALK
ABOUT WHERE I
WAS THE LAST
FEW
MONTHS.



WHILE HUNTING,
A WOMAN HAILED ME
FROM FOREST'S EDGE.
"DO YOU KNOW ANY
SALAMANDERS?"

"HOW Y' MEAN?"
"ALL THOSE STORIES,
LIKE DON'T DRINK
FOUND WATER UNLESS
A SALAMANDER
TOUCHED IT"

SHE HANDED ME A
MAP 'N TRANSMIT KEY,
ASKING THAT THEY BE
PASSED ALONG FOR AID.
A BURGEONING COMMUNITY
OF FABRICATION FACTION
REFUGEES WANTED
WATER SYSTEMS

CORRESPONDED,
GOT COMMISSIONED,
PREPPED MATS 'N TOOLS,
PACKED UP THE PICKUP
WHY WIREWORKER CLAN
THREW THE GOODLUCK
HOBFRY Y'ALL WERE AT
BEFORE I TOOK OFF

ONCE I GOT THERE,
THE TONE CHANGED.
STARTED SUSPECTING
THEY PUT ON A
LITTLE RADIO PLAY.

YOUR
ALTRUISM
MATCHES
THE STORIES
OF YOUR
PEOPLE

IT'S TRUE
WE DO AID
WHEN ABLE,
THOUGH NEVER
BEYOND MEANS.
THIS IS A
BARTERING
AFTERALL

WELL,
NOT TOO
SURE WHAT
YOU MEAN.
TALK AND
FORESIGHT'R
NATURE'S
INSTINCTS
FOR FOLK

MOST
DEFINITELY.

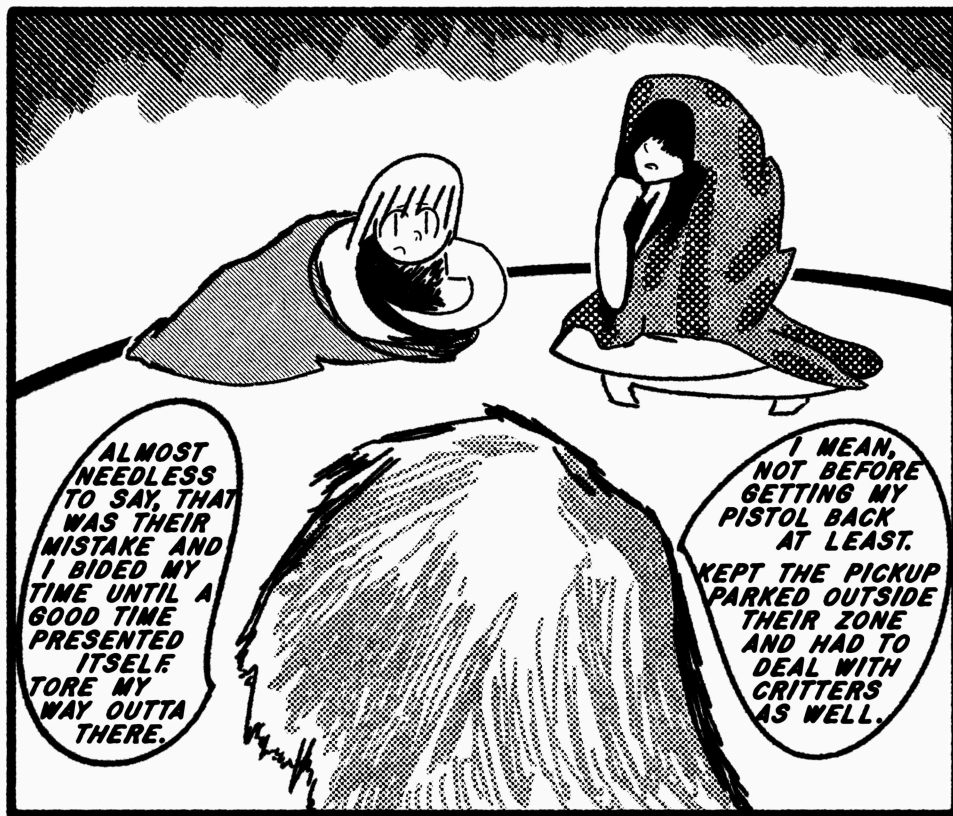
BUT AT THE
END, WE ALL
WILL SUCCUMB
TO INSTINCTS
NATURE PUT
IN EACH
KIND.

THEY SPOKE FUNNY ABOUT
FALSE MATH AND HAD A LOT
OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS
ABOUT MUNDANE KNOWLEDGE.

BIG INTEREST IN THE PICKUP
BUT EVERYONE LOVES THAT
THING SO I DIDN'T PAY MIND.

AS THE JOB GOT CLOSE
TO WHAT I THOUGHT WAS
NEAR DONE, THEIR LEADER
REVEALED TO ME A MACHINE.
EQUIPMENT I BUILT 'N THEN
SOME HAD BEEN INCLUDED.
HE DESCRIBED CONSTRUCTING
SOME TESSERACT FOR ALL
TO RETREAT INSIDE
IMMORTALLY

I EXPLAINED
WHAT HE BUILT WASN'T
REAL, MAYBE DANGEROUS.
THEY MANAGED TO BUST INTO
THE PICKUP 'N GOT MY
WAVECASTER GUNS THEN
LOCKED ME IN A ROOM
WITH TOOLS.



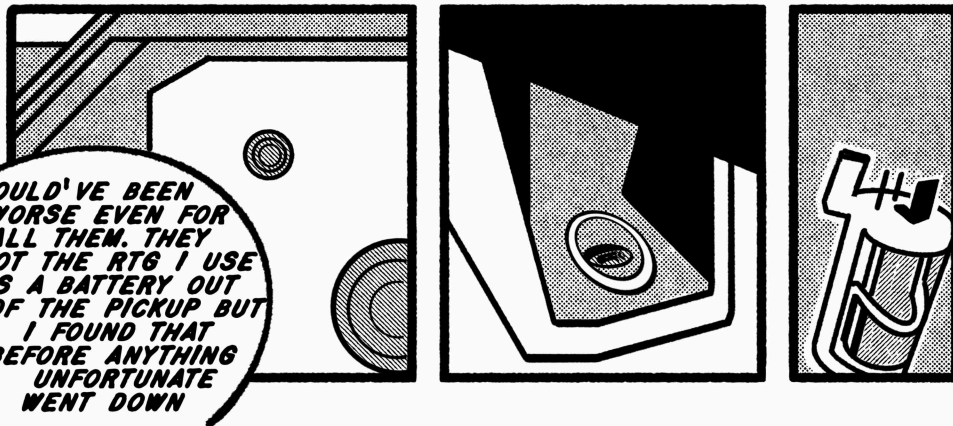
ALMOST
NEEDLESS
TO SAY, THAT
WAS THEIR
MISTAKE AND
I BIDE MY
TIME UNTIL A
GOOD TIME
PRESENTED
ITSELF
TORE MY
WAY OUTTA
THERE.

I MEAN,
NOT BEFORE
GETTING MY
PISTOL BACK
AT LEAST.
KEPT THE PICKUP
PARKED OUTSIDE
THEIR ZONE
AND HAD TO
DEAL WITH
CRITTERS
AS WELL.



REALLY,
I DON'T
THINK THEY
WERE
BUILDING
SOCIETY

I'D WAGER
THAT GUY IS
JUST OUT TO
FARM SOME
WAVY GRAVY



COULD'VE BEEN
WORSE EVEN FOR
ALL THEM. THEY
GOT THE RT6 I USE
AS A BATTERY OUT
OF THE PICKUP BUT
I FOUND THAT
BEFORE ANYTHING
UNFORTUNATE
WENT DOWN



WE KNOW THAT
EVERYONE HERE
IS SO RELIEVED
YOU MADE IT BACK
TO
SALAMANDER
COUNTRY,
RADICANS

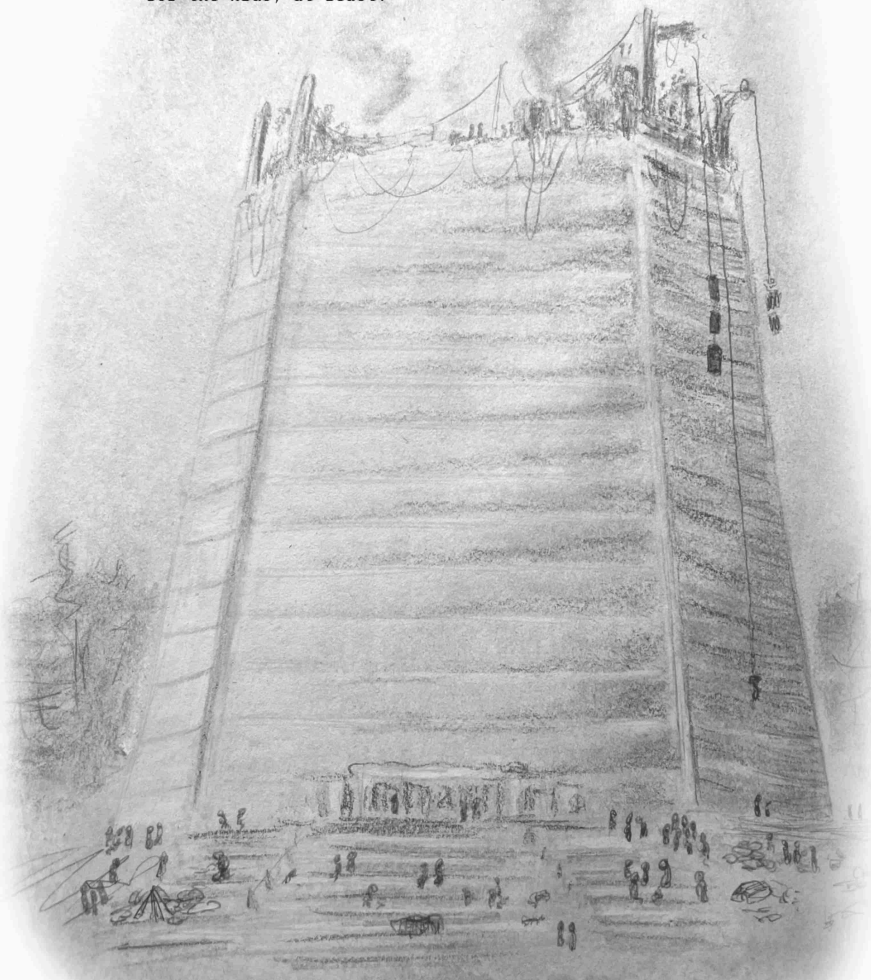
10th of July, 2144

Friday. Hot.

It's good to be back in the garden district, feels like home even though it's only been 3 years. I suppose faces turn familiar fast in this line of work, but there's something this city has that Cairo didn't, something most cities don't. It's something I'm still putting my finger on, something dusky and translucent, like a room you recognize by the texture of dust floating in the sunbeams.

Does that make sense? I don't know, maybe I'm just tired.

During breakfast with Dennis at the hostel he told me Reyna was still missing, so I took a detour on my way to the tower through her block. It wasn't likely anyone trapped was still alive by now, but I had to see. I pulled some rocks away from the collapsed cellar of the Wali house, but no one was there. Found a can of peaches for the kids, at least.



It was only my second time inside the tower, they usually give me directions via radio or courier but the recent weeks have left them short on both manpower and voltpower. Walking up to the lobby I saw barrels of water being hoisted up to the higher floors with ropes along the south face of the building and buckets of waste being lowered down the north, people spread out around the entrance organizing piles of burnable materials to be carried up to the cooking fires on the roof, and handymen shuffling between tasks trying to keep the whole thing from falling in on itself. Everyone was so busy I walked all the way to the elevator completely unnoticed. When I saw that it was being manually operated by a small group of boys with a large makeshift wooden wheel attached to a rope, I decided to take the stairs.

Just about every wall on the way up had a hole in it, and just about every hole had a child or two or four peeking through to see me climb past. I gave my peaches to the first ones who took them. Most only laughed that little alleycat laugh at me.

Miryam's office was in the same place as last time, southeast corner of the second highest floor, the one static room in a sea of shifting occupancies. No one was there when I reached it, but it has the best view of the city you can get from this side of the wall, so I didn't mind waiting.

When she did arrive she didn't notice me until she collapsed into the couch behind her desk. She never used my name and never asked for it. 10 years hadn't aged her at all, her streaked hair and chiseled eyes exactly as I remembered them. I listen to her words so often when they're broadcast across the network, but when she was talking to me and me alone, in the flesh, my thoughts... even now it feels like a haze. I wouldn't know my new orders if she hadn't written them down for me. All I can remember is the sad way she looked at me right before I left. I hope I wasn't crying.

There was a cold meal of sunflower bread and squirrel gravy waiting for me in what they told me was my tent, set aside for me on the outskirts of the compound in the direction I'd be leaving come midnight. It was an old stringy tarp pinned over an alcove in an ancient collapsed building, one of the old ruins making up the perimeter of the compound. I didn't need sleep badly enough to find the dusty concrete pit comfortable, so I ate what I could keep down and left through the gate as soon as the sun set. My orders are more important; they wouldn't ask a novice like me if there were any real electricians left.

A family on the edge of the goat orchard let me sleep on their roof tonight. Two men and two girls, but I gathered the men were brothers looking after their nieces from an absent sibling. One of the girls said she remembered me from a fire across the riverbed, but the older brother said it was impossible. I couldn't say either way. The past is the past. Right now the night is warm and the stars are beautiful.

NITE XVII

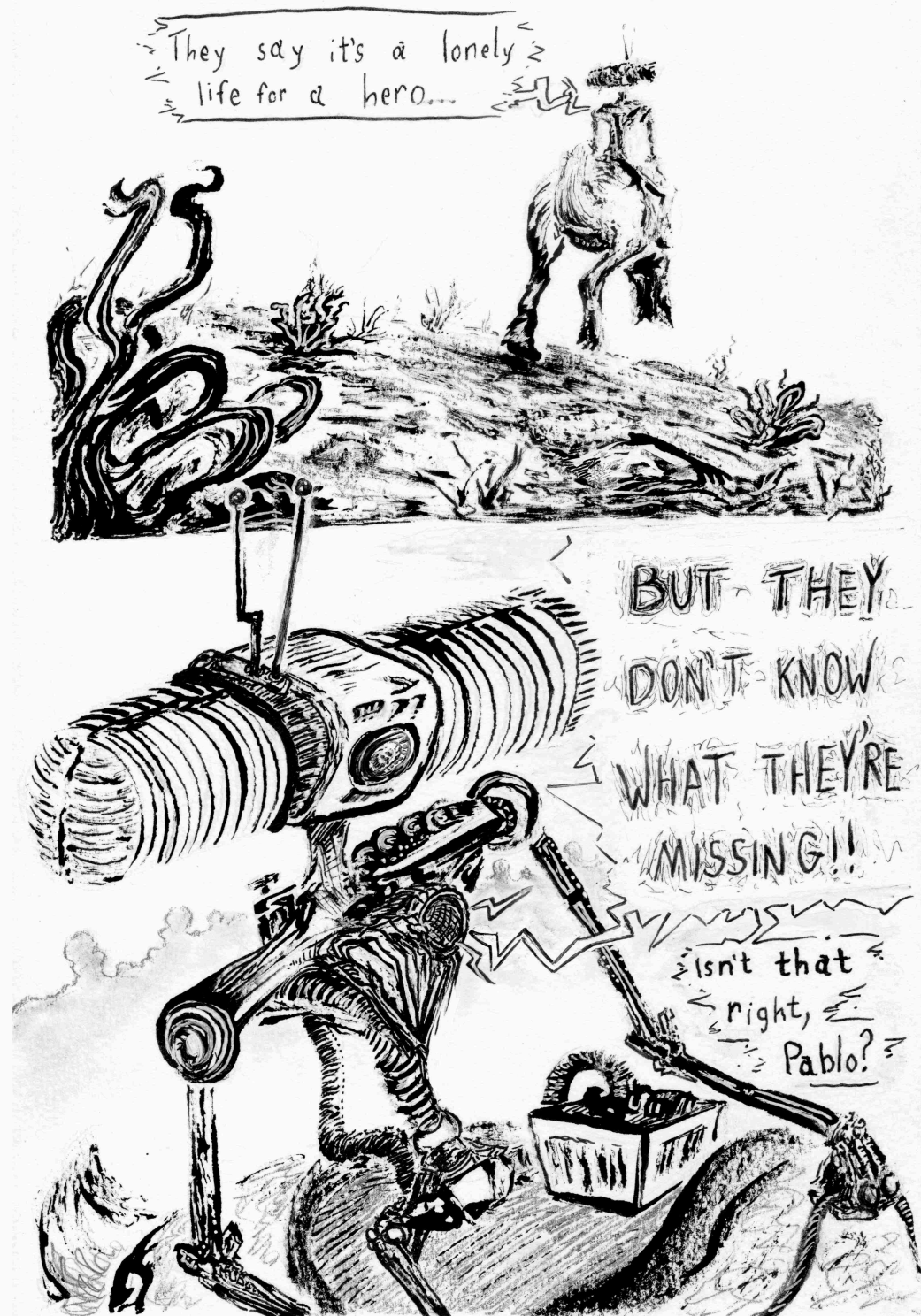
Due to unfortunate run-ins with the mechanized clean up homunculi that only live like horseshoe crab, devouring detritus nearly blind, belongings and supplies much needed have been picked away. The last being my bundle of stationery along with the Journal I embarked with. One of the recent many automated storefronts I found still operating was a pen, paper, and postcards stand. I haven't felt a material like this before and think is equally strange in its adhesion. Many of these rack and pinion kiosks pull inventory from below the floor, long chutes with toothy conveyers pulling up what can only be grown in the gut of MALLCITY. ETHNOGRAPHER ILEX



RQW

robotic
uixotic
eurotic

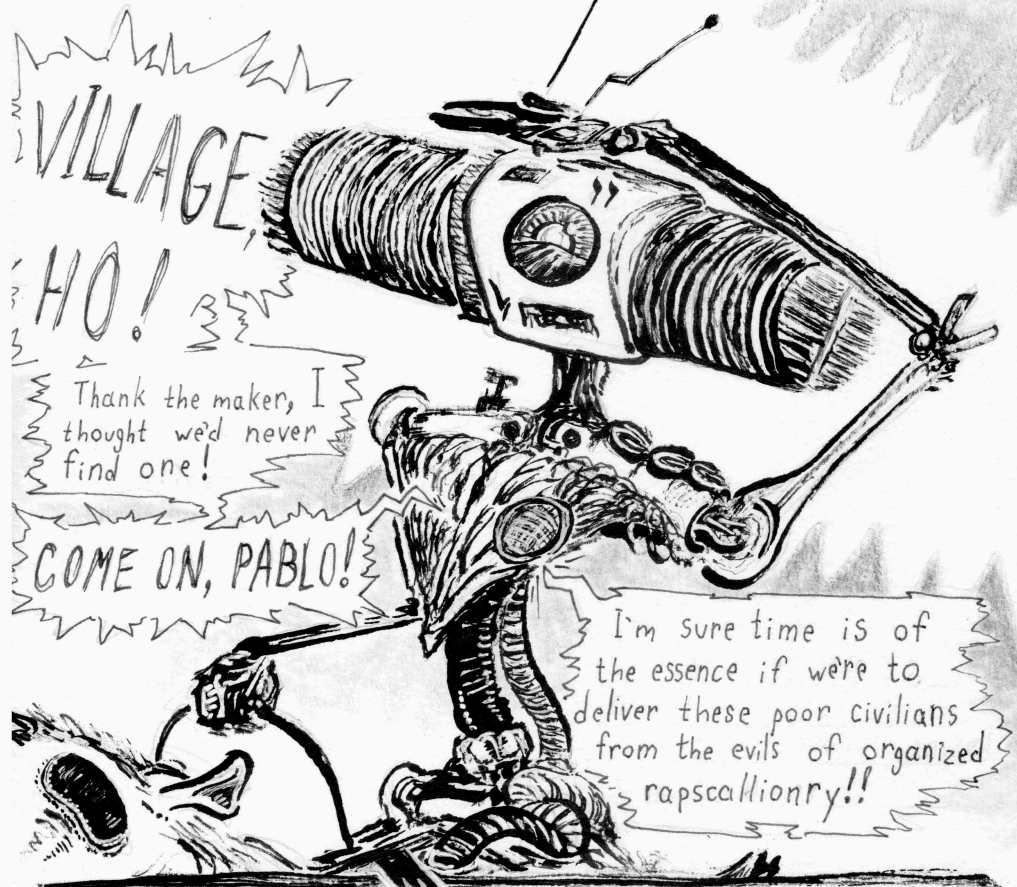
by Ocean
E.T.

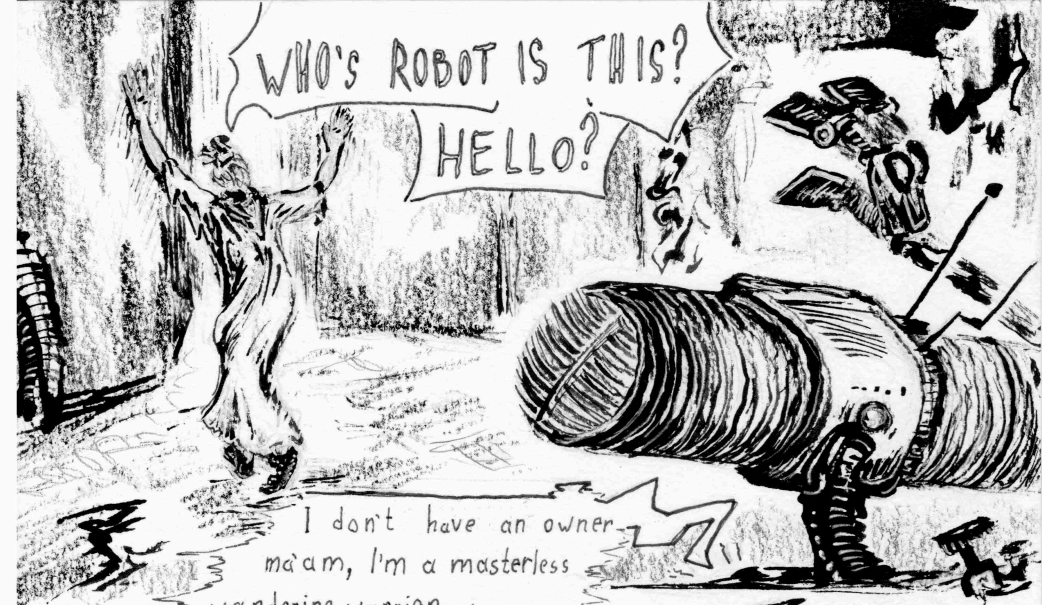


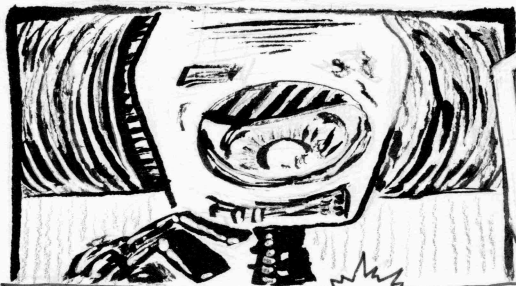


Yessir, nothing beats watching
a destitute farmer village you trained
with your own hands valiantly fight
off a horde of nasty bandits!

OH, HOW I HATE THOSE BANDITS!! Do-no-gooders intent
on destroying everything pure and innocent! I can picture them
now, poised over an adorable peasant baby, foaming at the mouth
while they slather it with BBQ sauce and preheat their--







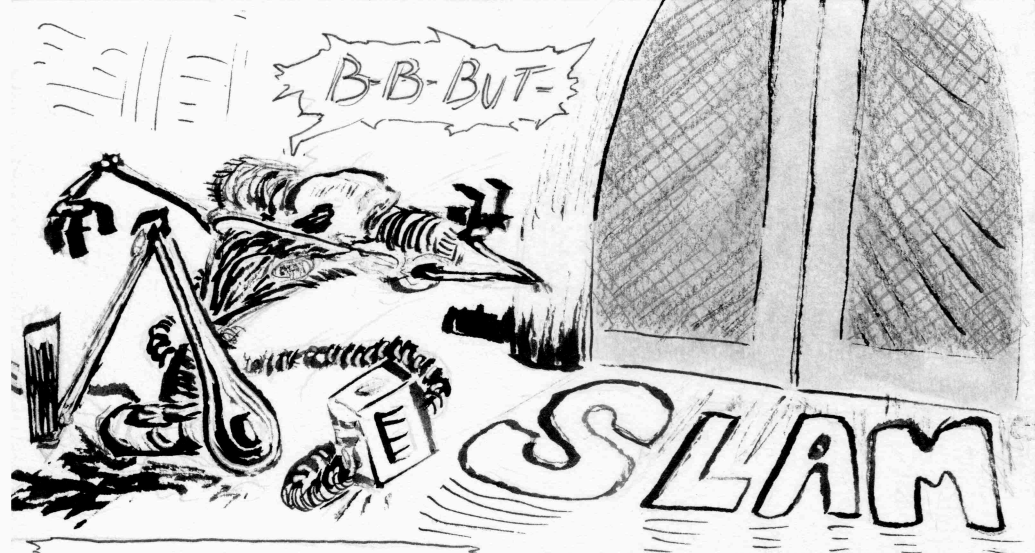
Are you absolutely certain there aren't any bands of highwaymen or companies of brigands using the threat of violence to live off the backbreaking work of pseudo-slaves like yourself?

Haulers? An unsavory lot to be sure, but not the expressly villainous kind.

Why, I...

I make a fine salary, I'm just living simply to save for the academy!

Now get out of here before I call the authorities!!

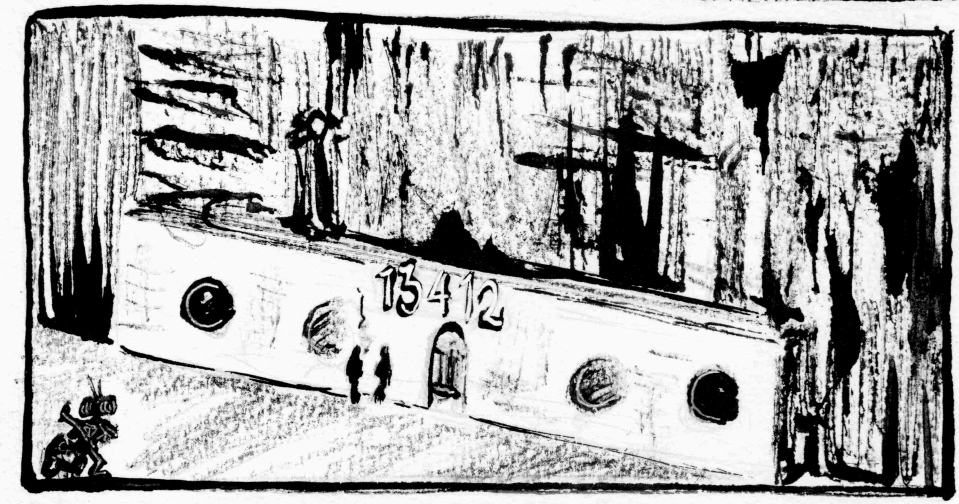
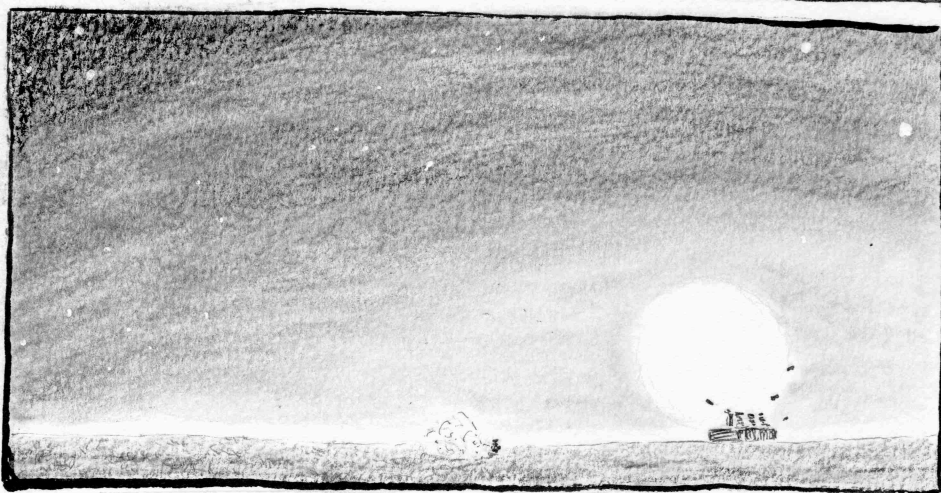
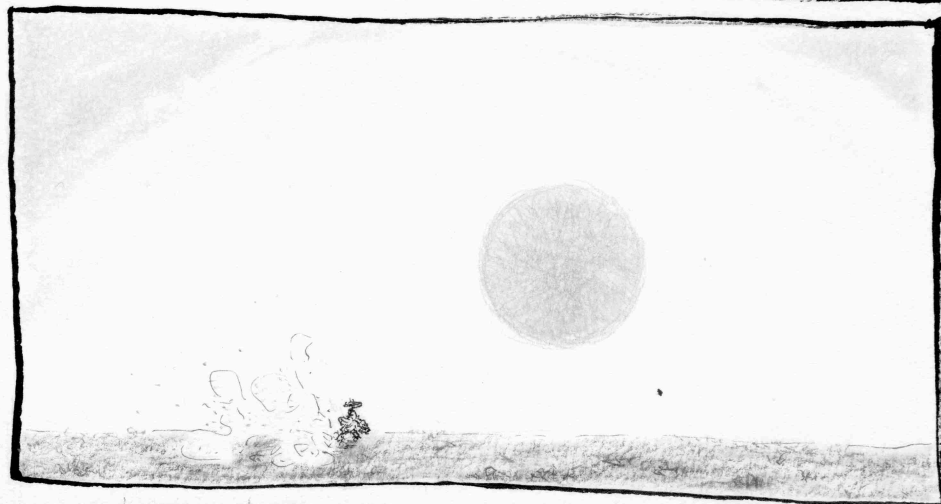
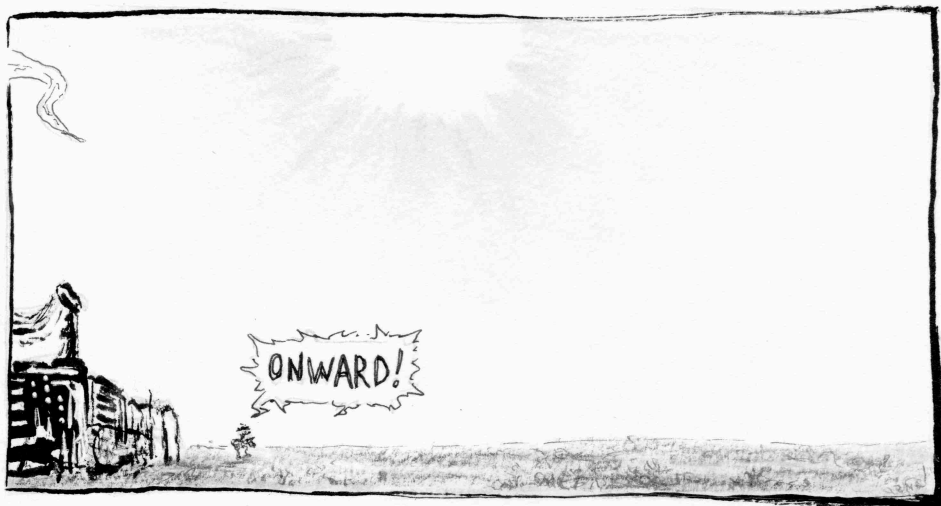


She's a tough nut to crack Pablo, but I think we can get through to her. We just have to show her how dangerous those haulers really are!

All those lonely, desperate truckers are a powder keg waiting to blow!

If we don't blow it first, who knows what could happen?







...but I'm hoping she'll have a change of heart before I get back.

I hope the best for ya bud, maybe this next shipment can pay for a nicer one?



Assuming she waits that long...

Don't talk like that, of course she will! remember that time-



Hey, nice shoes...



Lady problems, huh? I feel that one, pardner.

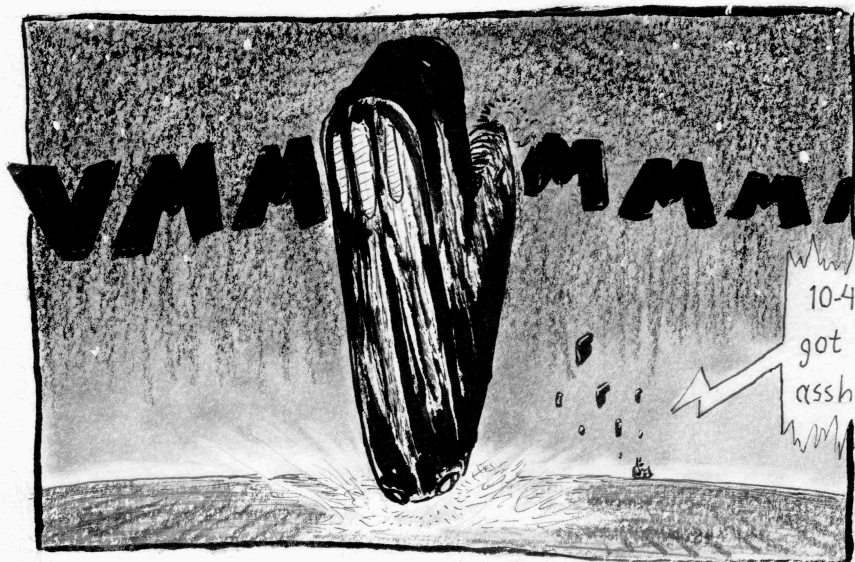
What? Who are you? Where's your owner?



I don't have one I'm afraid, he was KILLED mercilessly by freight smugglers in the desert just yesterday, leaving me lonely and in-

Smugglers? I've never heard about any on this planet.

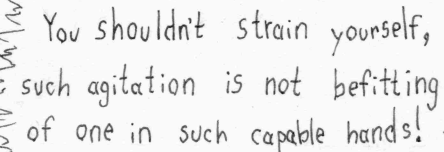




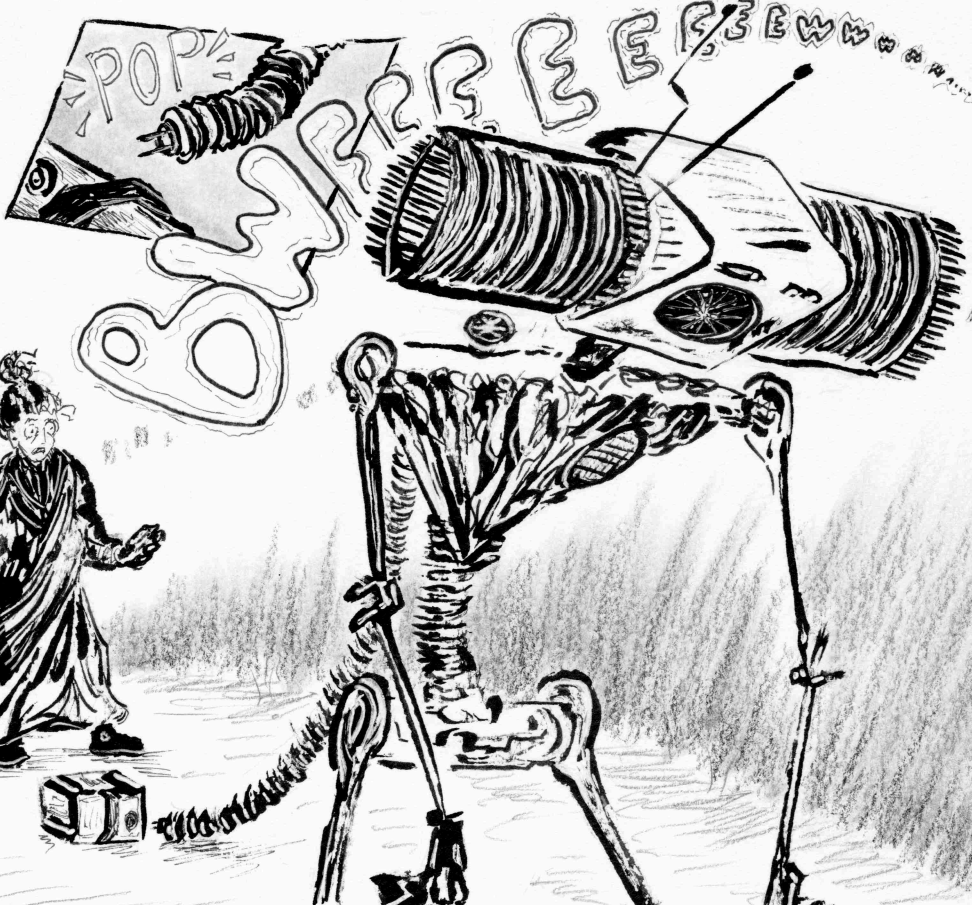
10-4, we
got this
asshole.



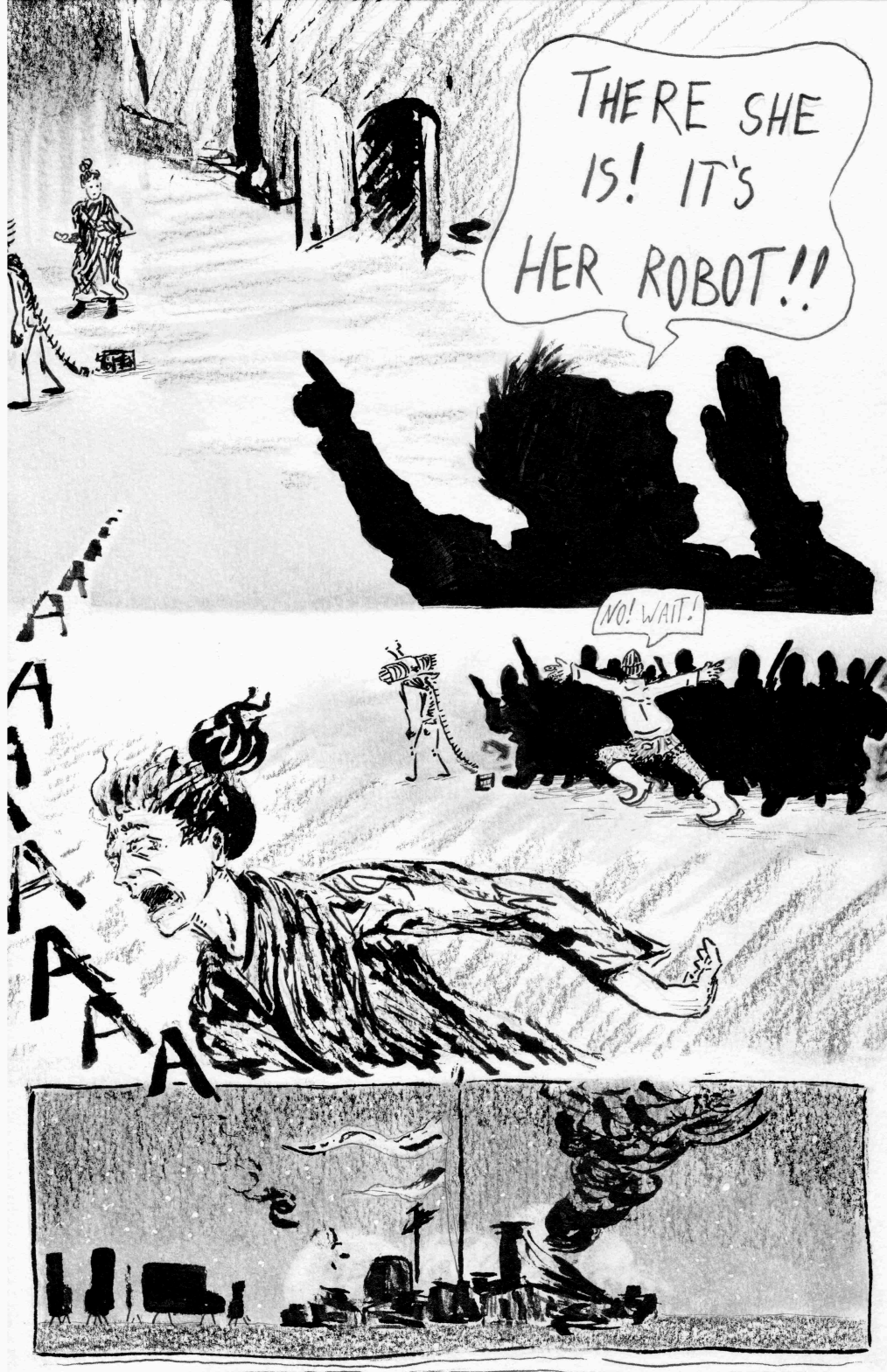
WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'PROTECT ME' YOU'RE THE ONE WHO-



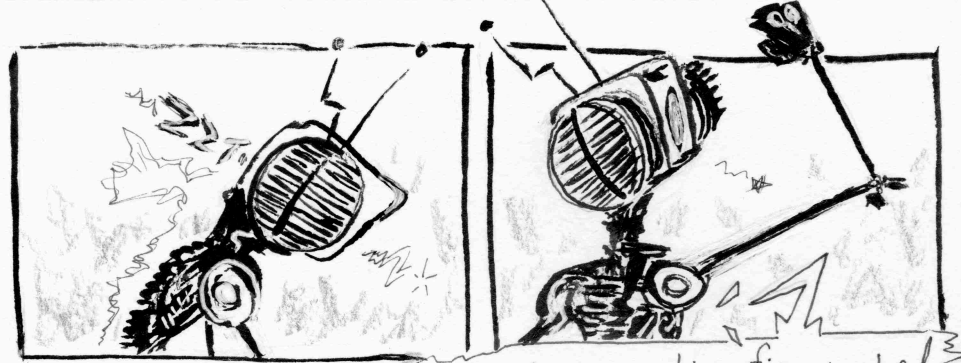
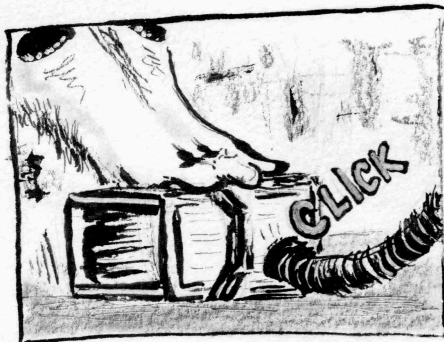
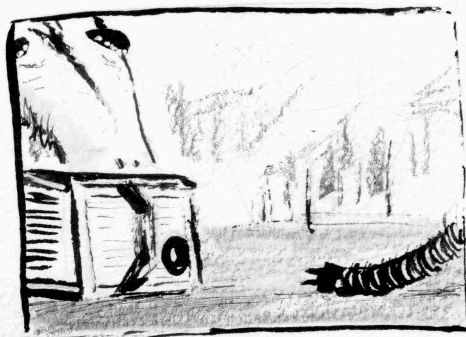
so sit tight and-



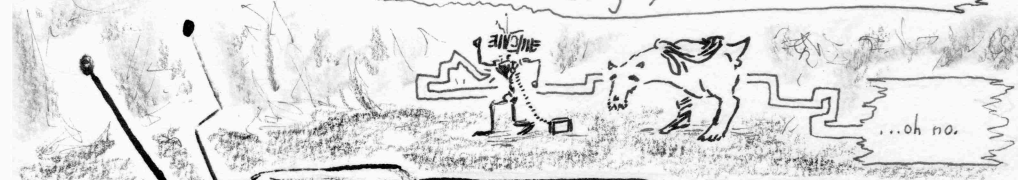
THERE SHE
IS! IT'S
HER ROBOT!!



NO! WAIT!



...e-e-e-enjoy the fireworks!

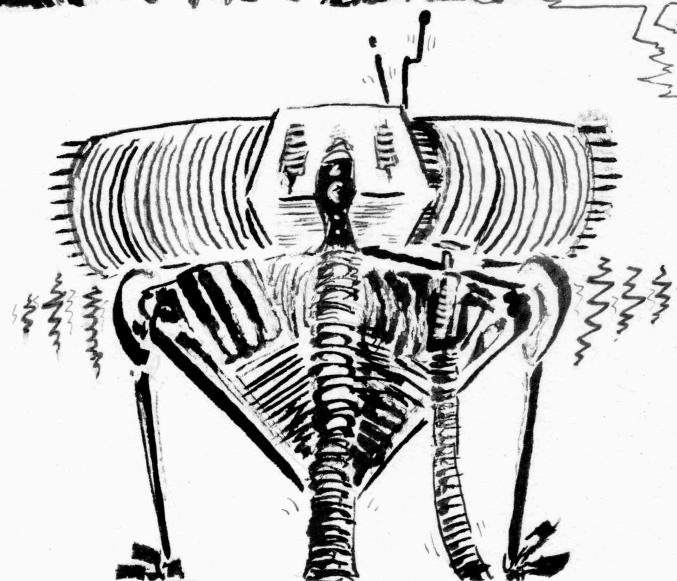


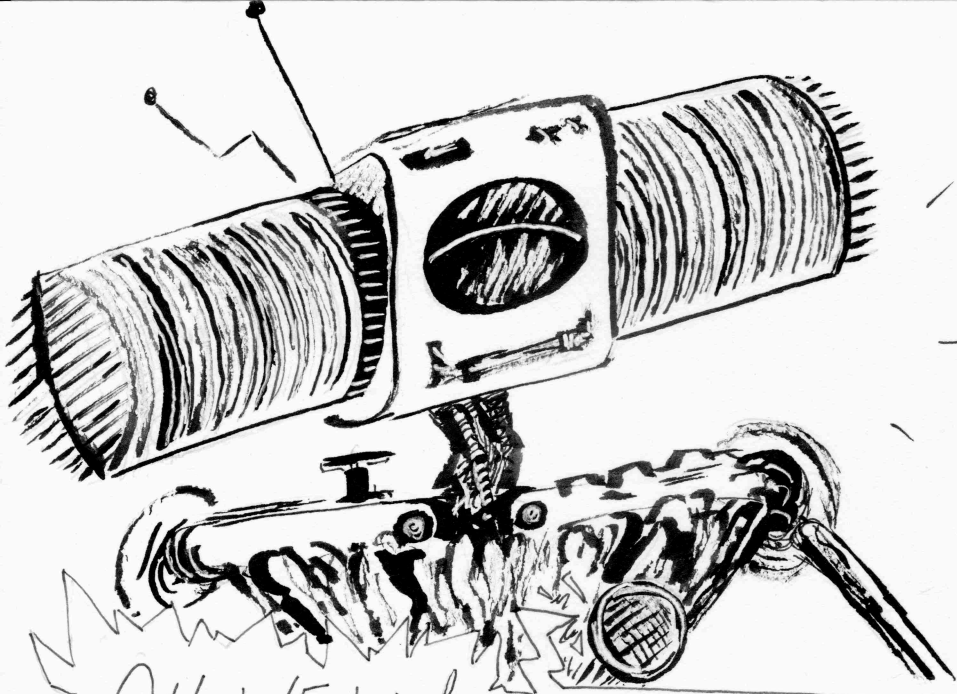
...oh no.



I failed, didn't I Pablo? That woman's... no, Clair's life was in my hands and I just...

I just...



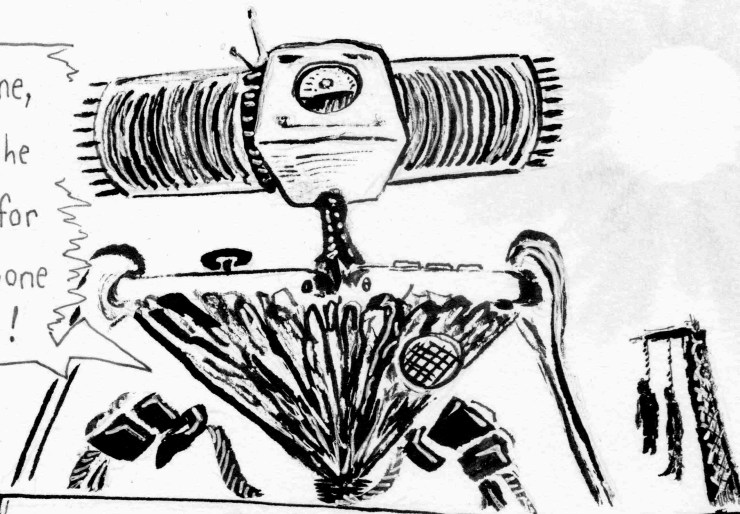


OH WELL! No use dwelling on the past!

Every experience contains a lesson to be learned, and by golly, I've got this one down!



Next time,
I'll save the
cool pose for
when everyone
can see it!



END.



GET READY FOR Q3 ISSUE No. 3

SEE YOU NEXT TIME

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