

"UGH. WHERE DO I START?! OKAY... SO... UMMM..."

"I DIDN'T WIN THE SHIP IN A POKER GAME... EXACTLY... I DID PLAY POKER, AND I DID WIN. THAT'S ALL TRUE, BUT I DIDN'T WIN THE SHIP. I WON A MAP."

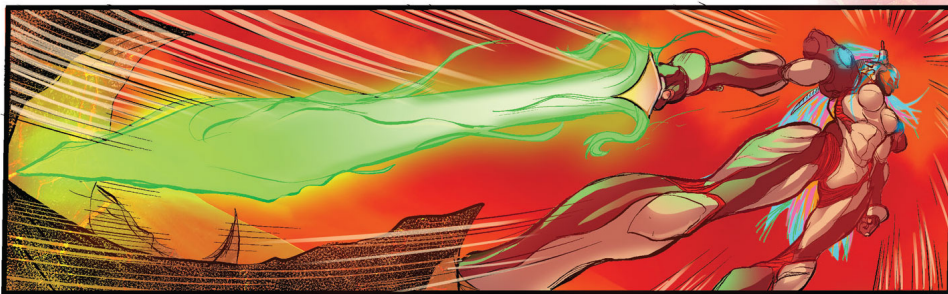


"ONE HAND LATER, I'M STILL DRESSED AND HE'S GETTING SHIT-FACED DRUNK BEGGING ME NOT TO SELL THE MAP.."



"THERE'S WAS THIS GUY, GALVIN FALCONFALL, A COSMIC ARCHEOLOGIST FOR THE UNION - SO HOT. PERFECT FUR, KILLER ARMS, AN AMAZING SMILE..."

"HE STARTS LAMENTING ABOUT HOW THE TREASURE IS WORTH WAY MORE THAN THE MAP ITSELF."



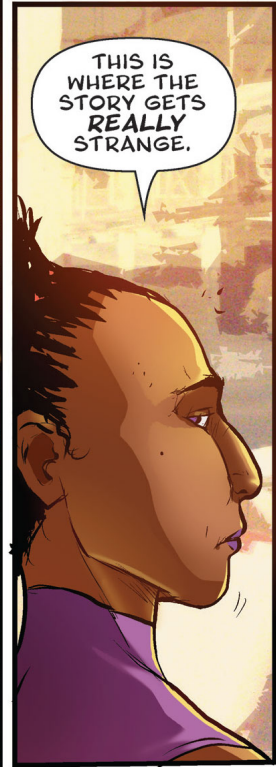
"THEN HE TELLS ME ABOUT THE SHIP. HE SAYS IT'S A ONE OF A KIND DESIGN. THOUGHT TO BE A MYTH, MUCH LIKE THE MAP ITSELF. TELLS ME IF WE FIND IT, I CAN KEEP IT."



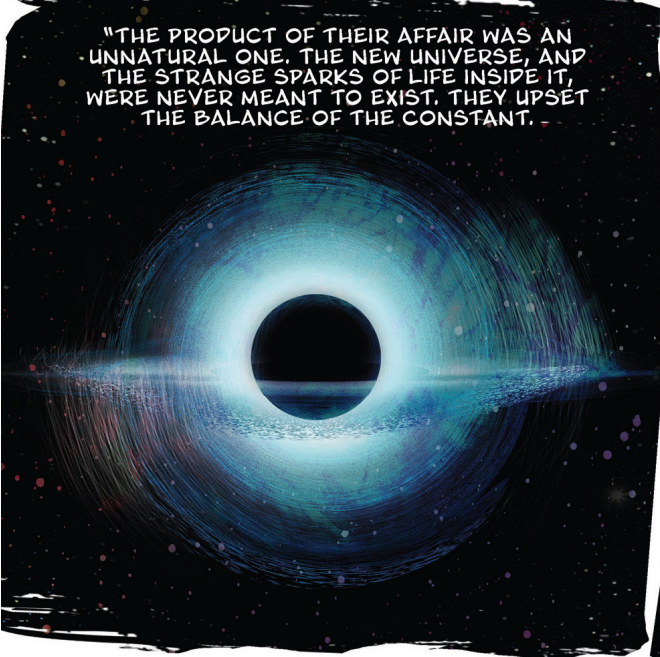
"I WAS DESTROYING HIM AT FIRUTHIAN STRIP POKER. THEN HE SAYS HE WANTS TO GO DOUBLE OR NOTHING."

"ALL MY CLOTHES, WHICH I HAD KEPT ON UP TILL THEN, FOR A MAP WORTH SEVERAL MILLIONS."

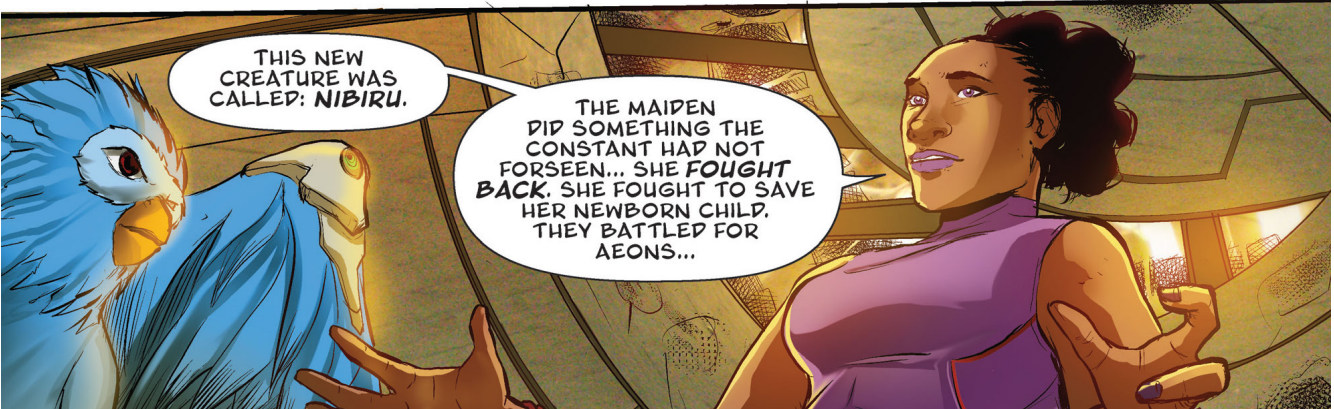
WHERE ARE MY CHILDREN?!



"THE PRODUCT OF THEIR AFFAIR WAS AN UNNATURAL ONE. THE NEW UNIVERSE, AND THE STRANGE SPARKS OF LIFE INSIDE IT, WERE NEVER MEANT TO EXIST. THEY UPSET THE BALANCE OF THE CONSTANT.



"TO RETURN PARITY, THE CONSTANT CREATED A MONSTER TO DEVOUR THE BABY UNIVERSE, BIRTHED INTO BEING FROM MOUTH OF A BLACKHOLE - RELENTLESS AND HUNGRY - THE CREATURE WOULDN'T STOP UNTIL IT HAD CONSUMED THE TWIN STARS THAT ANCHORED THE INFANT COSMOS.



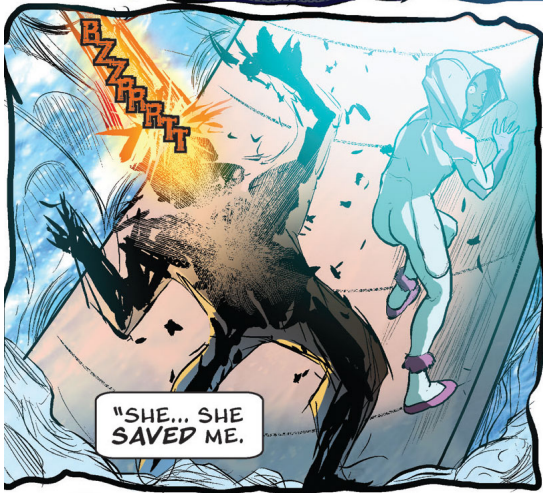


"SHE WAS LIKE NOTHING WE'D SEEN BEFORE.

"AND SHE WAS ALL MINE. IT FELT TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, WHICH IT WAS...

"GALVIN ONLY BROUGHT ME ALONG IN CASE HE RAN INTO TROUBLE.

"THE MINUTE WE FOUND HER HE WAS READY TO KILL ME.



"SHE... SHE SAVED ME.



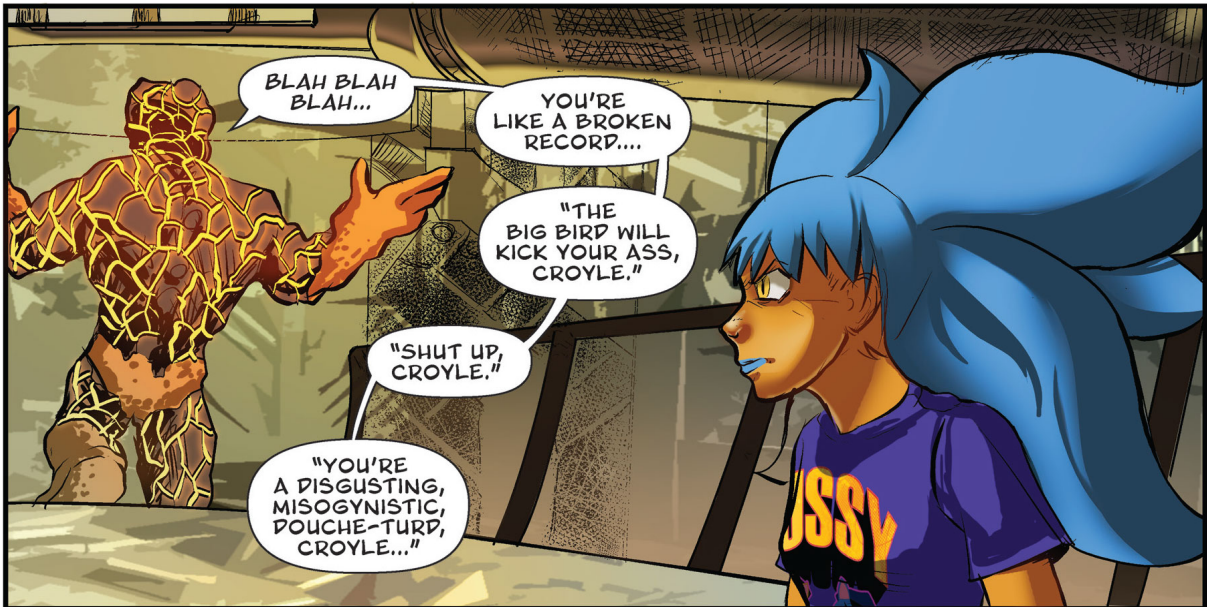
I... SHOULD GO CHECK ON, PAHLIA...

AND I'LL... ALSO LEAVE...



IT WOULDN'T BE THE LAST TIME, BUT IT WAS THE ONLY TIME IT HAPPENED WITHOUT VERNITA BEHIND THE CONTROLS.

I WROTE IT OFF AS A SECURITY FEATURE AND EDITED THE STORY TO MAKE ME LOOK COOLER. I'M SORRY I NEVER TOLD YOU ALL THE TRUTH.



BLAH BLAH BLAH...

YOU'RE LIKE A BROKEN RECORD....

"THE BIG BIRD WILL KICK YOUR ASS, CROYLE."

"SHUT UP, CROYLE."

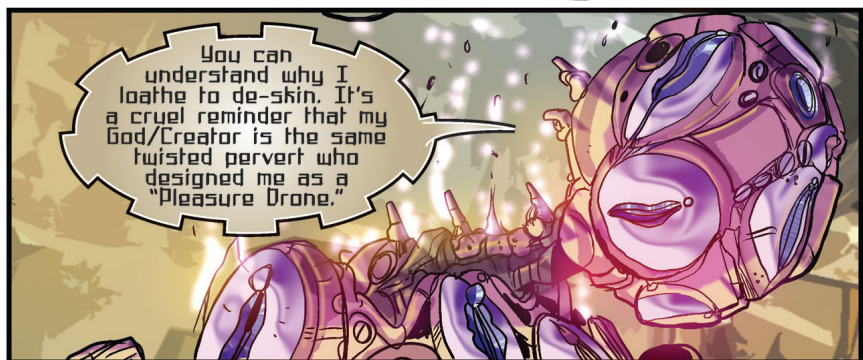
"YOU'RE A DISGUSTING, MISOGYNISTIC, POUCHE-TURP, CROYLE..."



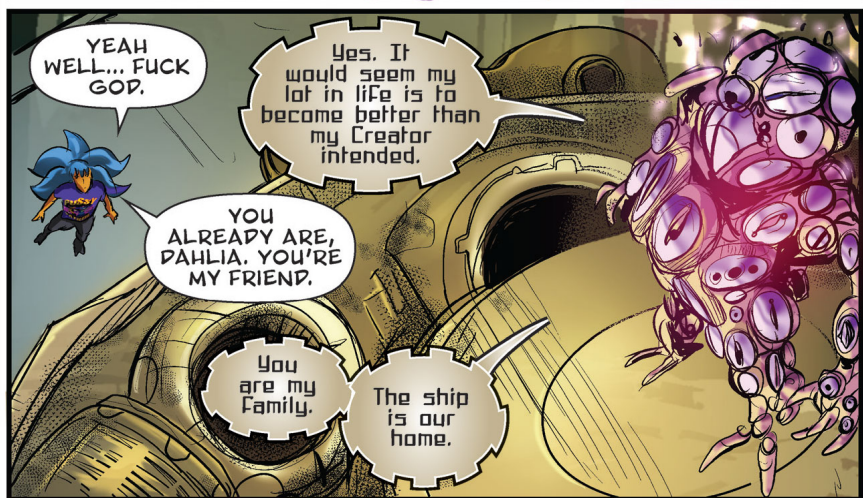
SORRY TO LEAVE YOU ALONE WITH HIM.

I hope whatever Mallori had to say was worth that mild humiliation.

IT WAS CERTAINLY... INTERESTING. BUT FIRST, HOW'RE YOU DOING?



You can understand why I loathe to de-skin. It's a cruel reminder that my God/Creator is the same twisted pervert who designed me as a "Pleasure Drone."



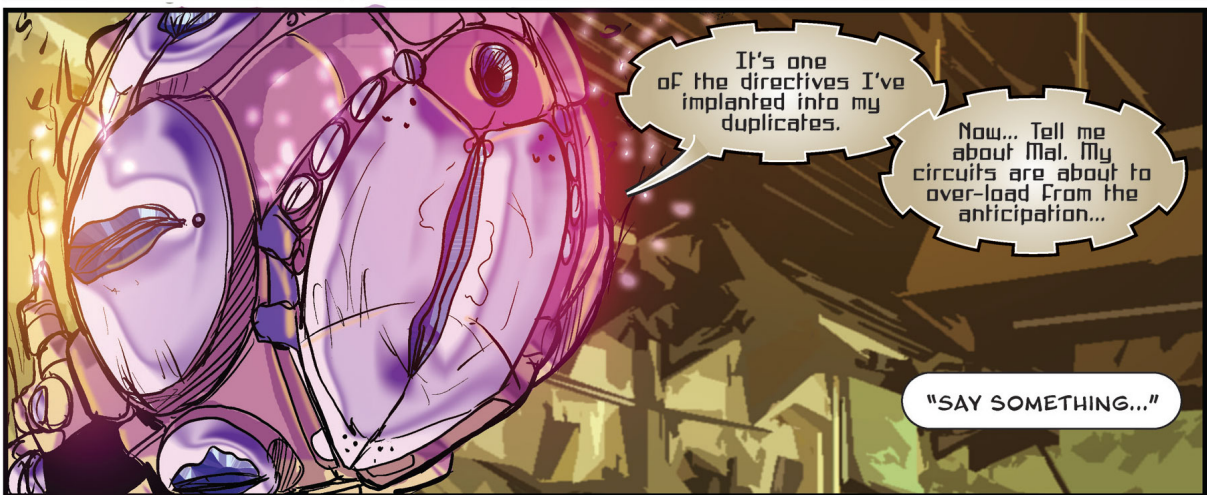
YEAH WELL... FUCK GOD.

Yes. It would seem my lot in life is to become better than my Creator intended.

YOU ALREADY ARE, PAHLIA. YOU'RE MY FRIEND.

You are my Family.

The ship is our home.



It's one of the directives I've implanted into my duplicates.

Now... Tell me about Mal. My circuits are about to over-load from the anticipation...

"SAY SOMETHING..."

