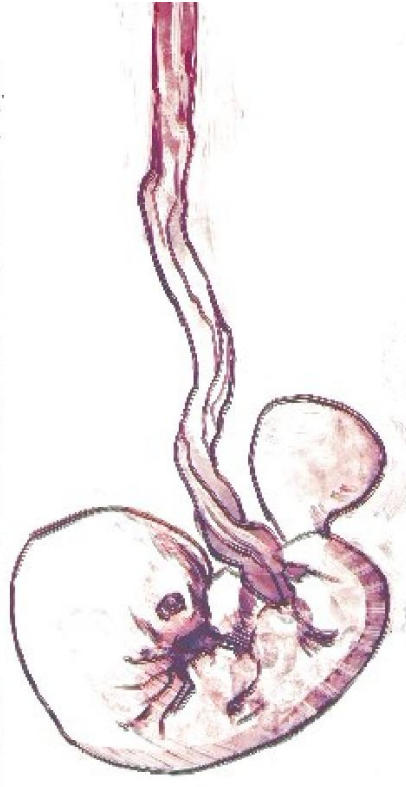


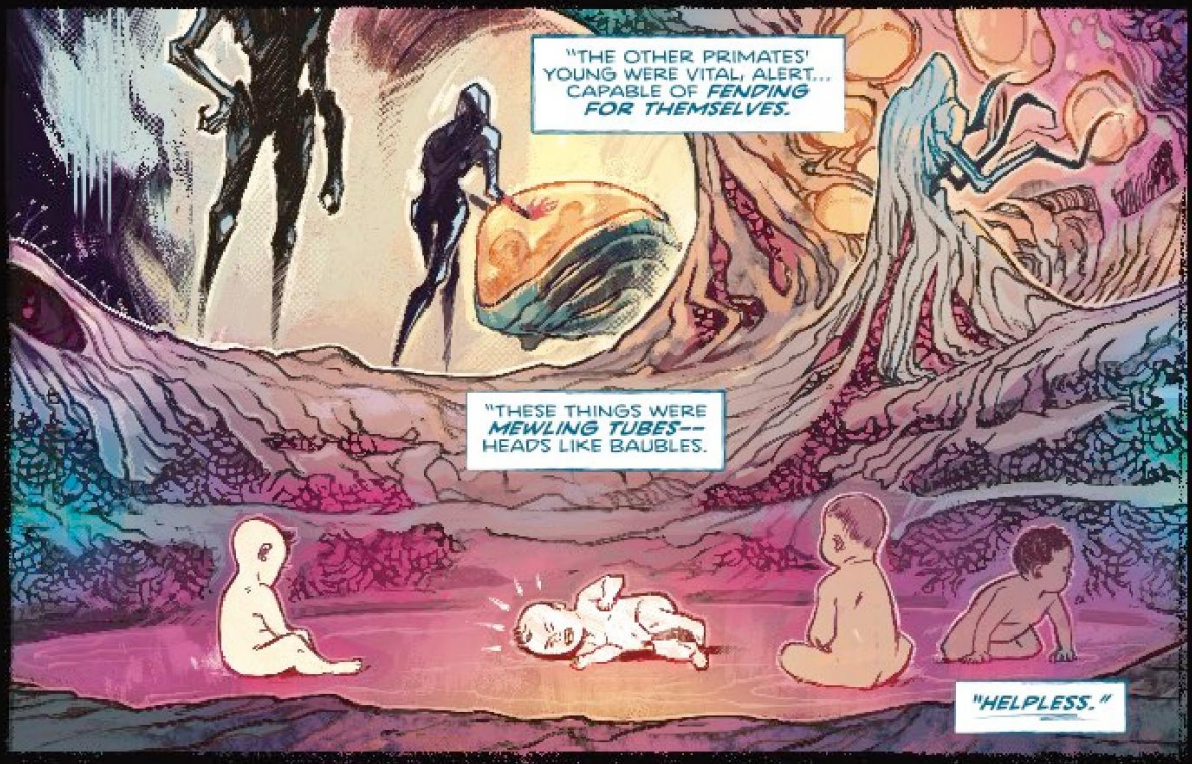
"YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, GENERAL... I AM THE WARDEN OF DYING THINGS."



"THEY WERE ONE DOOMED SPECIES AMONG MANY-- UNREMARKABLE IN EVERY WAY..."



"...OR SO WE THOUGHT."



"THE OTHER PRIMATES' YOUNG WERE VITAL, ALERT... CAPABLE OF FENDING FOR THEMSELVES."

"THESE THINGS WERE MEWLING TUBES-- HEADS LIKE BAUBLES."

"HELPLESS."

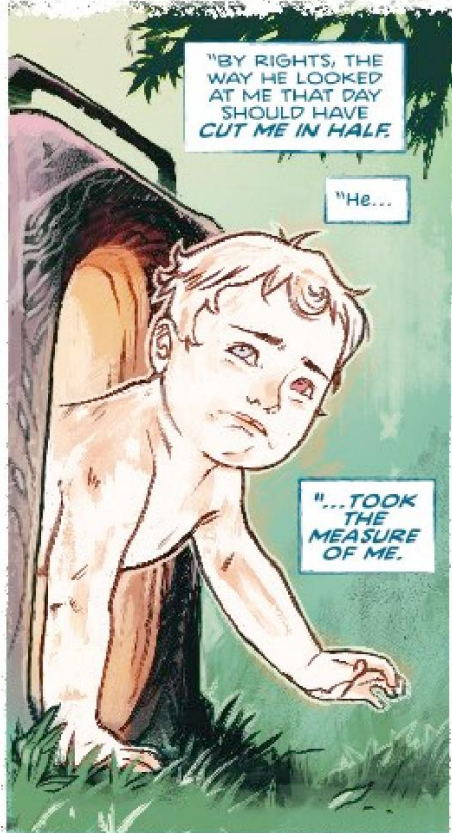


"IT WAS MY IDEA TO RELEASE THEM INTO THE HABITAT BEFORE THEY WERE READY.

"I WAS YOUNG... **AMBITIOUS**. I THOUGHT THEIR DEVELOPMENT MIGHT ACCELERATE IF THEY FACED CERTAIN **SELECTION PRESSURES**.



"HELPLESS WAS THE FIRST. I EVEN RELEASED HIM INTO THE HABITAT MYSELF.



"BY RIGHTS, THE WAY HE LOOKED AT ME THAT DAY SHOULD HAVE **CUT ME IN HALF**.

"He...

"...**TOOK THE MEASURE OF ME.**"



"BUT IT IS **REMARKABLE** WHAT ONE CAN OVERLOOK ONCE **AMBITION** HAS SETTLED IN THE THROAT.



"THEN HELPLESS DID SOMETHING **NO ONE** COULD HAVE PREDICTED. HE BONDED WITH ONE OF THE OTHER PRIMATES-- A FLEA-BITTEN BRUTE WE NAMED '**THUMPER**'.

"THAT **IMPROBABLE CONNECTION** SAVED HIS LIFE."



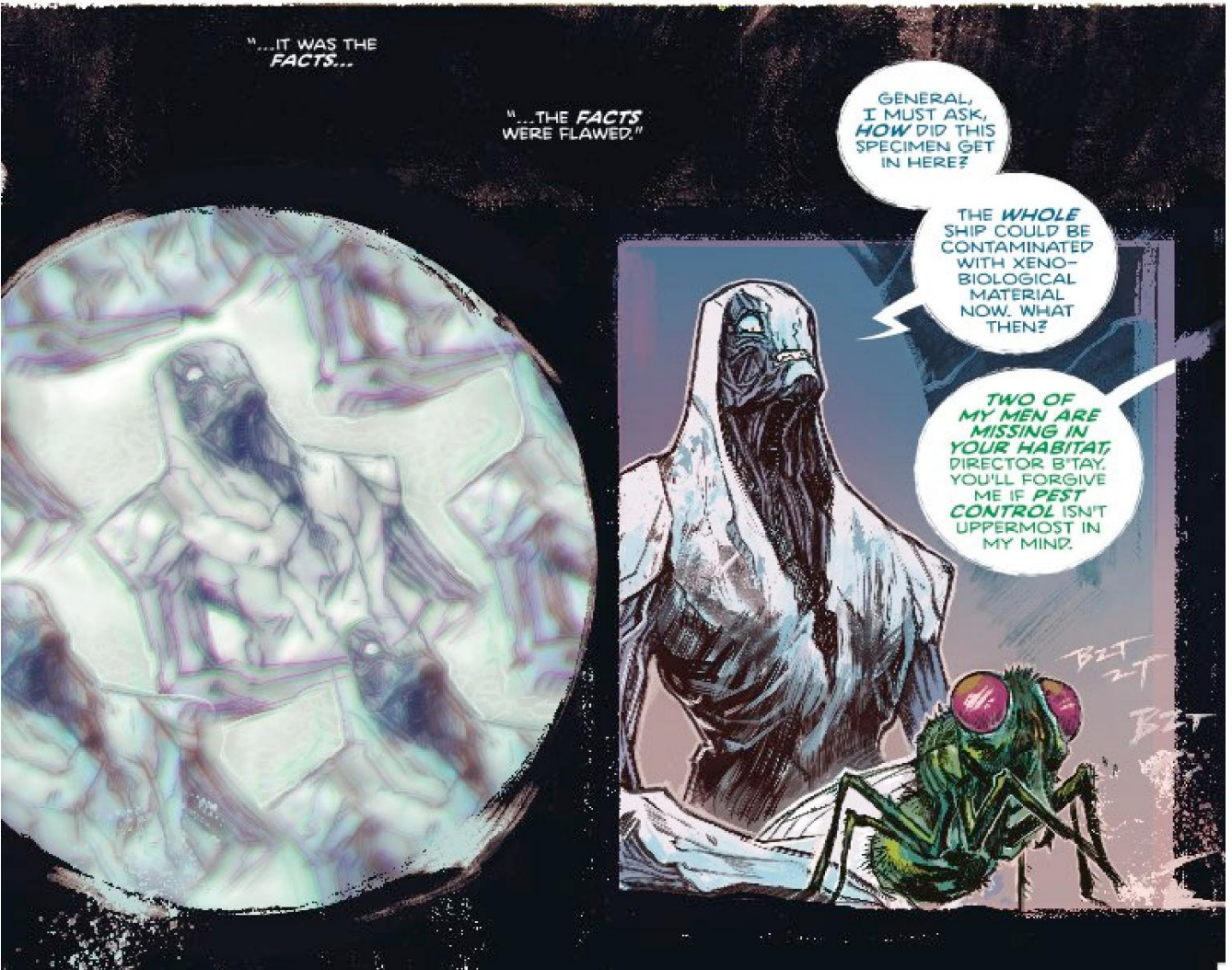
"AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHERS, B'TAY?"

"YOU KNOW PERFECTLY WELL WHAT HAPPENED."

"...ALL OF THEM?"



"DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT. THE THEORY WAS *SOUND*..."



"...IT WAS THE *FACTS*..."

"...THE *FACTS* WERE FLAWED."

GENERAL, I MUST ASK, *HOW* DID THIS SPECIMEN GET IN HERE?

THE *WHOLE* SHIP COULD BE CONTAMINATED WITH XENO-BIOLOGICAL MATERIAL NOW. WHAT THEN?

TWO OF MY MEN ARE MISSING IN YOUR HABITAT, DIRECTOR B'TAY, YOU'LL FORGIVE ME IF *PEST CONTROL* ISN'T UPPERMOST IN MY MIND.

B'TAY  
B'TAY



PERHAPS IT **SHOULD** HAVE BEEN WHEN YOU SENT YOUR MEN IN THERE **WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE.**

**SANCTIMONY? REALLY?**

YOU WITHHELD INFORMATION ABOUT A SPECIMEN THAT COULD **TURN THE TIDE OF WAR IN OUR FAVOR.**

**HELPLESS IS DEAD, GENERAL. HE IS OF NO USE TO YOU.**



THEN WHERE'S THE **BODY?** IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO WASTE CARRION.

I SENT B'LEW AND B'RBR'S IN TO LOOK FOR BLUNT INSTRUMENTS—**TEETH AND CLAWS.** YOUR **DAUGHTER** HELPED US, ACTUALLY.



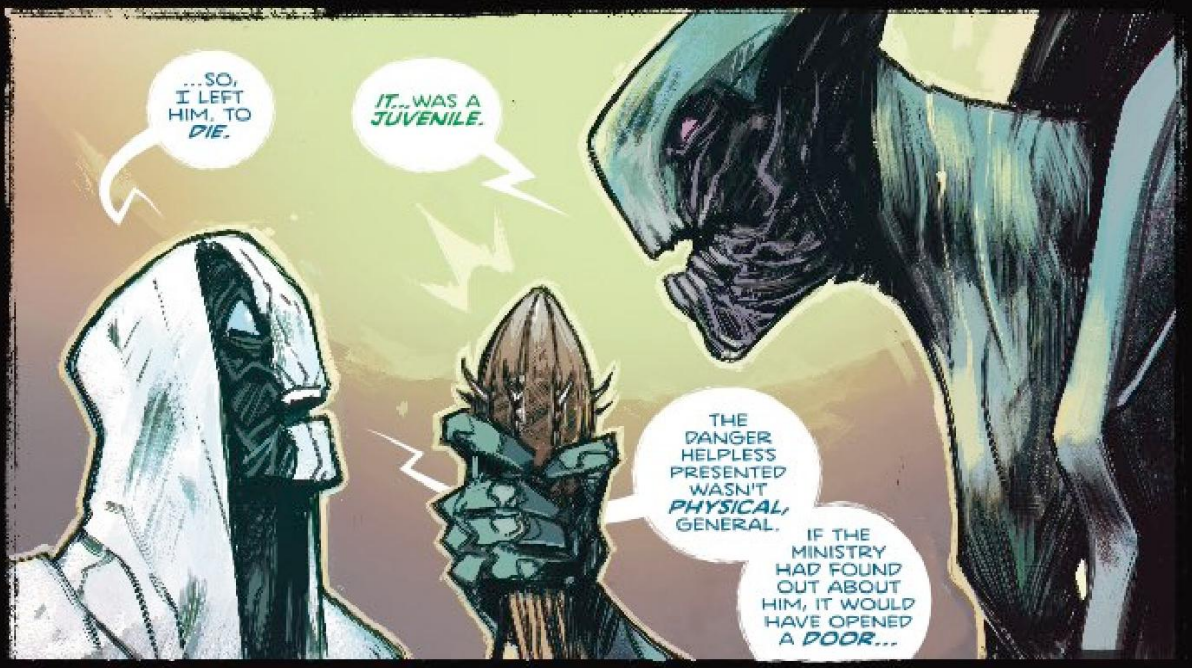
B'RBR'S FOUND **THIS** DAUBED ON THE WALL OF THE CAVE, RIGHT BEFORE HE AND B'LEW **DISAPPEARED.**

He remembered my eyes.



"I—I TOOK THUMPER FROM HIM, YOU SEE—FOR OUR **EXPERIMENTS.** MINISTRY'S ORDERS.

"KNOWING WHAT HE WAS—WHAT HE **MEANT**—I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN **HELPLESS** INSTEAD, BUT HE **FRIGHTENED ME...**"

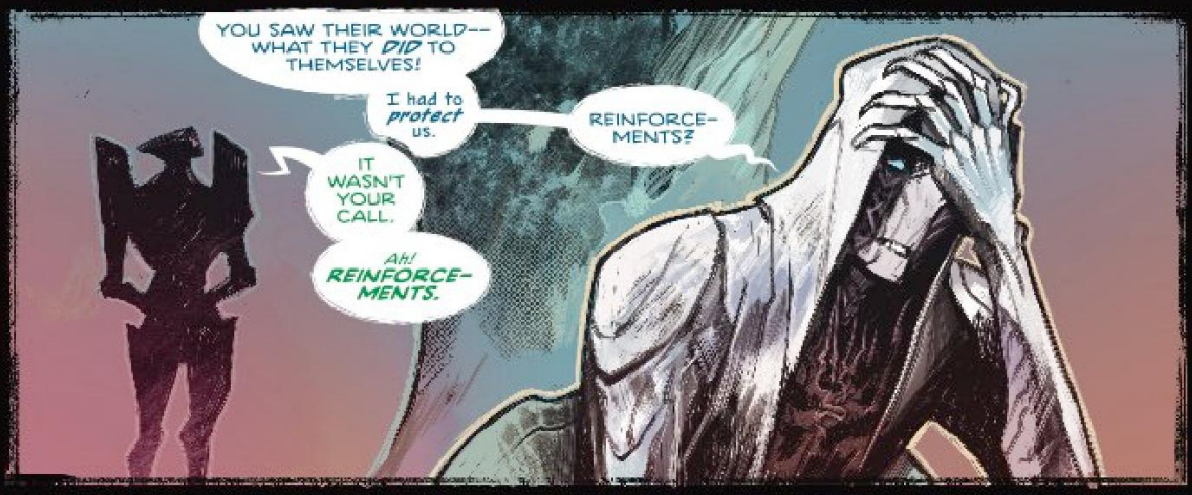


...SO, I LEFT HIM, TO DIE.

IT... WAS A JUVENILE.

THE DANGER HELPLESS PRESENTED WASN'T PHYSICAL, GENERAL.

IF THE MINISTRY HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT HIM, IT WOULD HAVE OPENED A POOR...



YOU SAW THEIR WORLD-- WHAT THEY DID TO THEMSELVES!

I had to protect us.

REINFORCEMENTS?

IT WASN'T YOUR CALL.

AH! REINFORCEMENTS.



"I'M GOING INTO THE HABITAT, B'TAY-- TO GET MY MEN AND SOME ANSWERS.

"AND YOU'RE GOING TO COME WITH ME."

"I'VE TOLD YOU EVERYTHING, GENERAL."