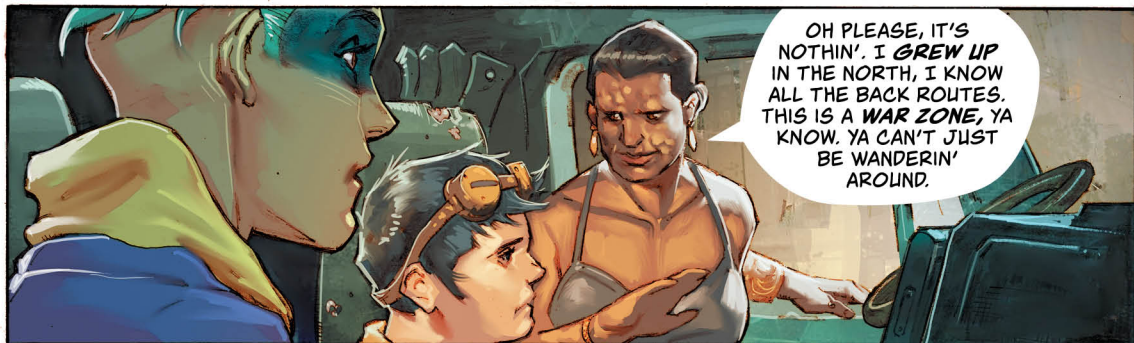


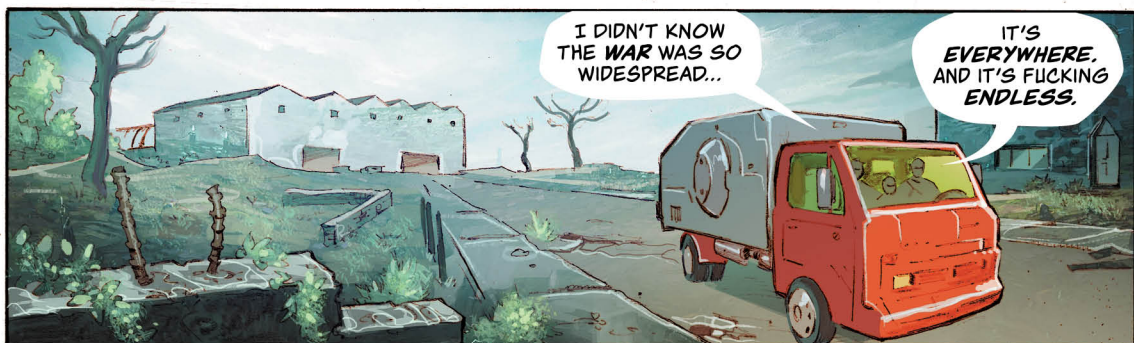
HAVEN, NEW REPUBLIC. 80 KM SOUTHEAST OF HIGH LEVEL.

THIS IS THE NORTH END OF THE TUNNEL. WE'LL TAKE A TRUCK FROM HERE.

VAL, YOU DON'T HAVE TO COME WITH US, YOU'VE ALREADY DONE SO MUCH.



OH PLEASE, IT'S NOTHIN'. I **GREW UP** IN THE NORTH, I KNOW ALL THE BACK ROUTES. THIS IS A **WAR ZONE**, YA KNOW. YA CAN'T JUST BE WANDERIN' AROUND.



I DIDN'T KNOW THE WAR WAS SO WIDESPREAD...

IT'S **EVERYWHERE**. AND IT'S **FUCKING ENDLESS**.



FUCK!

CENTURIES OF DEATH, AND FOR **WHAT?** WHAT'S THE **POINT?** I DOUBT THE **GENERALS** EVEN KNOW ANYMORE.



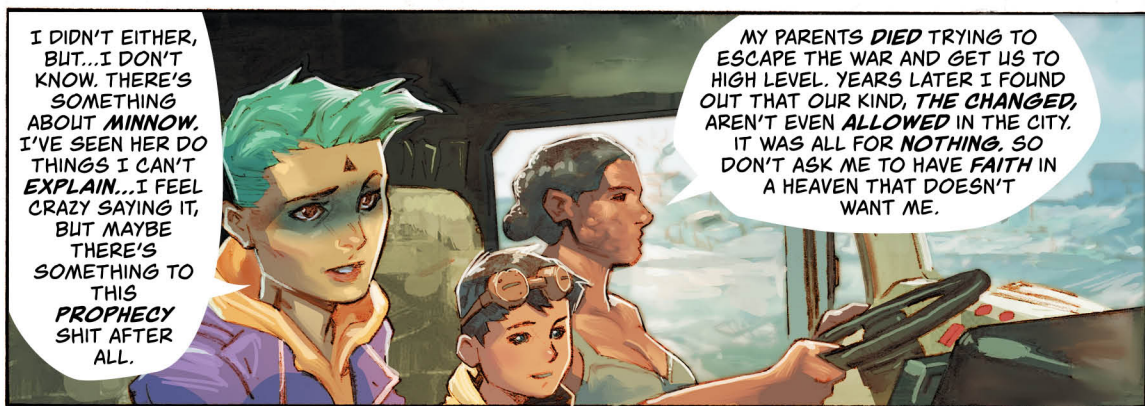
HOW DOES PLEASURE ISLAND STAY OUT OF IT?

THEY **BANKROLL** IT! THE ROOM PAYS **BOTH** ARMIES A **FORTUNE** TO KEEP THE CITY NEUTRAL. SO...EVEN MY JOB FUNDS THE WAR MACHINE.



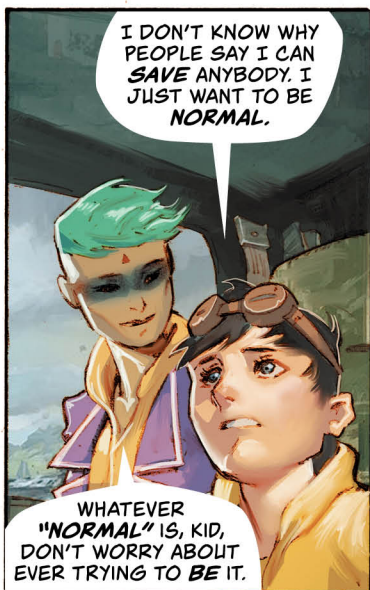
I
WONDER HOW IT ALL
STARTED...I NEVER FOUND
ANY BOOKS ABOUT THE
GREAT DISRUPTION. IT'S LIKE
HISTORY JUST **STOPPED**. LIKE
AN ASTEROID HIT OR
SOMETHING.

WASN'T NO
ASTEROID. WHATEVER HAPPENED,
YOU CAN SURE AS HELL BET WE DID IT TO
OURSELVES. AND NO OFFENSE, MIN, BUT I DON'T
THINK YOU OR **ANYBODY** IS GONNA MAGICALLY
FIX IT. I DON'T BELIEVE IN **SAVIORS**.



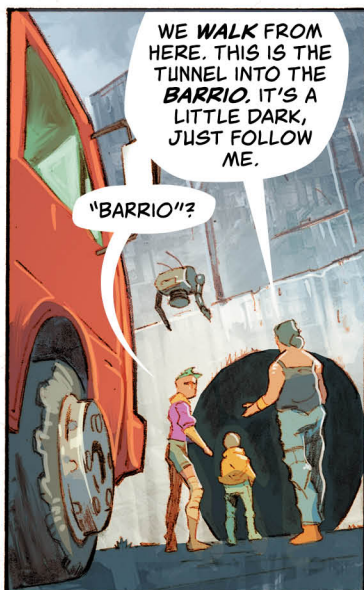
I DIDN'T EITHER,
BUT...I DON'T
KNOW. THERE'S
SOMETHING
ABOUT **MINNOW**.
I'VE SEEN HER DO
THINGS I CAN'T
EXPLAIN...I FEEL
CRAZY SAYING IT,
BUT MAYBE
THERE'S
SOMETHING TO
THIS
PROPHECY
SHIT AFTER
ALL.

MY PARENTS **DIED** TRYING TO
ESCAPE THE WAR AND GET US TO
HIGH LEVEL. YEARS LATER I FOUND
OUT THAT OUR KIND, **THE CHANGED**,
AREN'T EVEN **ALLOWED** IN THE CITY.
IT WAS ALL FOR **NOTHING**. SO
DON'T ASK ME TO HAVE **FAITH** IN
A HEAVEN THAT DOESN'T
WANT ME.



I DON'T KNOW WHY
PEOPLE SAY I CAN
SAVE ANYBODY. I
JUST WANT TO BE
NORMAL.

WHATEVER
"NORMAL" IS, KID,
DON'T WORRY ABOUT
EVER TRYING TO **BE** IT.



WE **WALK** FROM
HERE. THIS IS THE
TUNNEL INTO THE
BARRIO. IT'S A
LITTLE DARK,
JUST FOLLOW
ME.

"**BARRIO**"?



THE **SLUMS** OUTSIDE HIGH
LEVEL. ACCORDING TO YOUR
COORDINATES, THAT'S WHERE
YOUR **CONTACT** IS.

IT'S
ALSO WHERE I
GREW UP. GET
READY...



HOLY
SHIT. IS
THAT...?

IT'S...
IT'S REALLY
REAL...

THAT'S
HIGH
LEVEL!

"REAL." TRY
STARIN' UP AT THAT
FUCKIN' THING YOUR
WHOLE LIFE BUT BEING
TOLD YOU CAN'T GO TO
IT, AND THEN TELL ME
WHAT "REAL" IS.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOW LEVEL