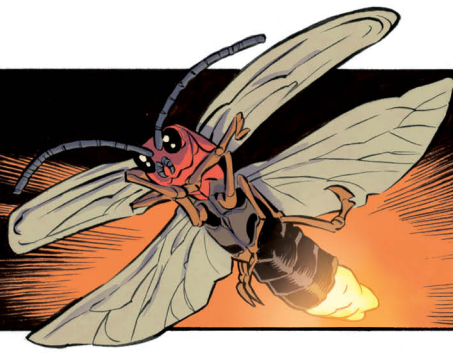


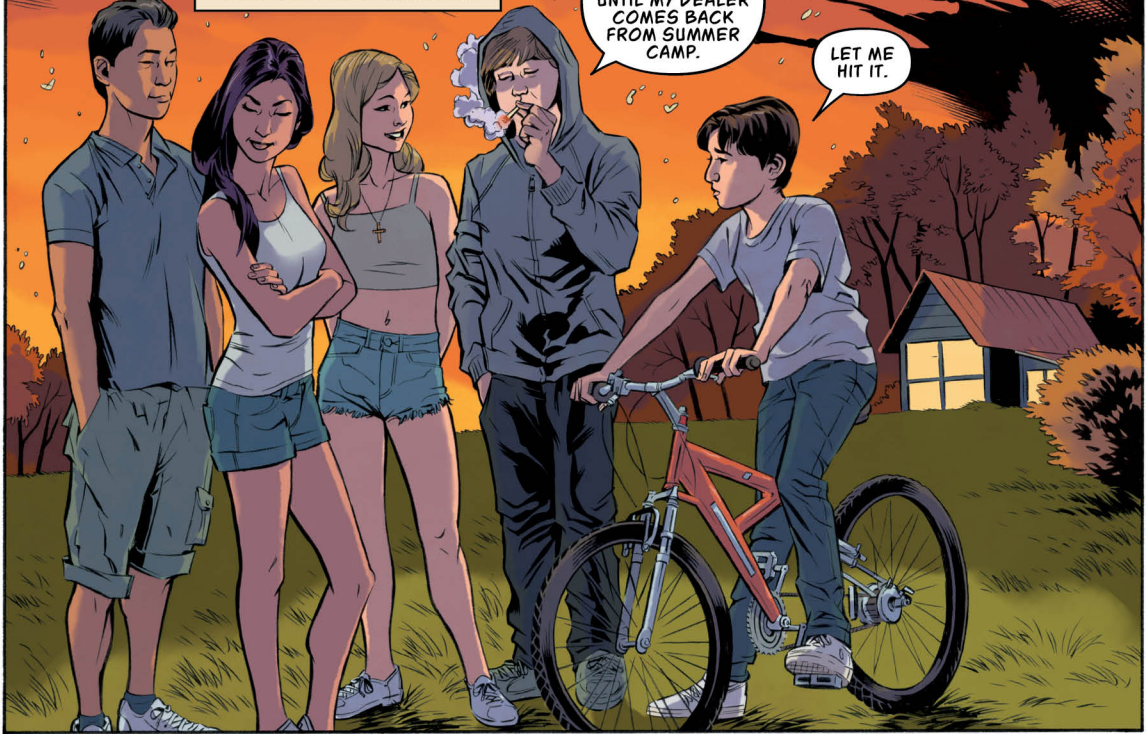
IT WAS A LATE SUMMER EVENING IN **CANNON CITY, MINNESOTA**. THE CHARGE IN THE AIR TRANSITIONED FROM THE ENERGY OF FREEDOM TO THE ANXIETY OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR'S ARRIVAL.



CAMERON CALLE WAS FOURTEEN YEARS OLD, HIMSELF CAUGHT IN A TRANSITION, THIS ONE FROM CHILD TO ADULT.

THIS IS THE LAST OF MY BATCH UNTIL MY DEALER COMES BACK FROM SUMMER CAMP.

LET ME HIT IT.



TOO OLD TO CATCH FROGS AND FIREFLIES WITH THE YOUNG BOYS, BUT TOO YOUNG TO AIMLESSLY CRUISE **GRAND AVENUE** IN SEARCH OF MYTHICAL "OUT OF TOWNER GIRLS" WITH THE HIGH SCHOOLERS.



IT WAS ENOUGH TO BE HERE, IN THIS TWILIGHT LIMBO, DOING SOMETHING THAT SHOWED HE NO LONGER WORRIED MUCH ABOUT WHAT HIS PARENTS WANTED.



PFFT.

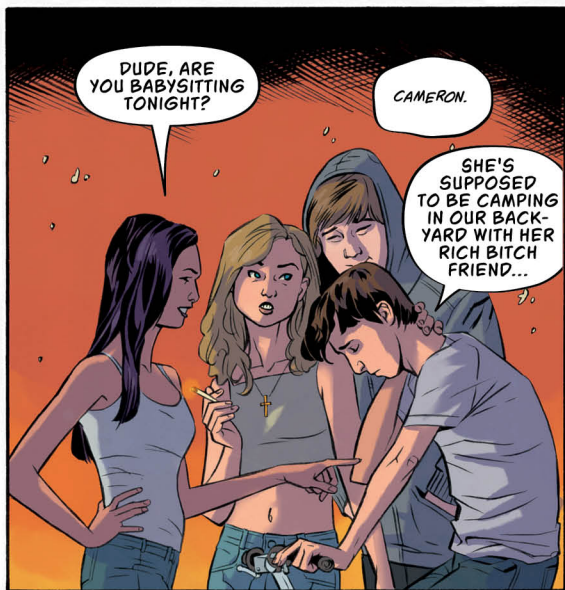
ENOUGH TO BE AWAY FROM HIS LITTLE SISTER, BRINKE, ALWAYS CLINGING TO HIS ARM, TRYING TO DRAG HIM BACK INTO PREPUBESCENCE.



HNGHF
=KOFF?

SNKK.

CAMERON.



DUDE, ARE YOU BABYSITTING TONIGHT?

CAMERON.

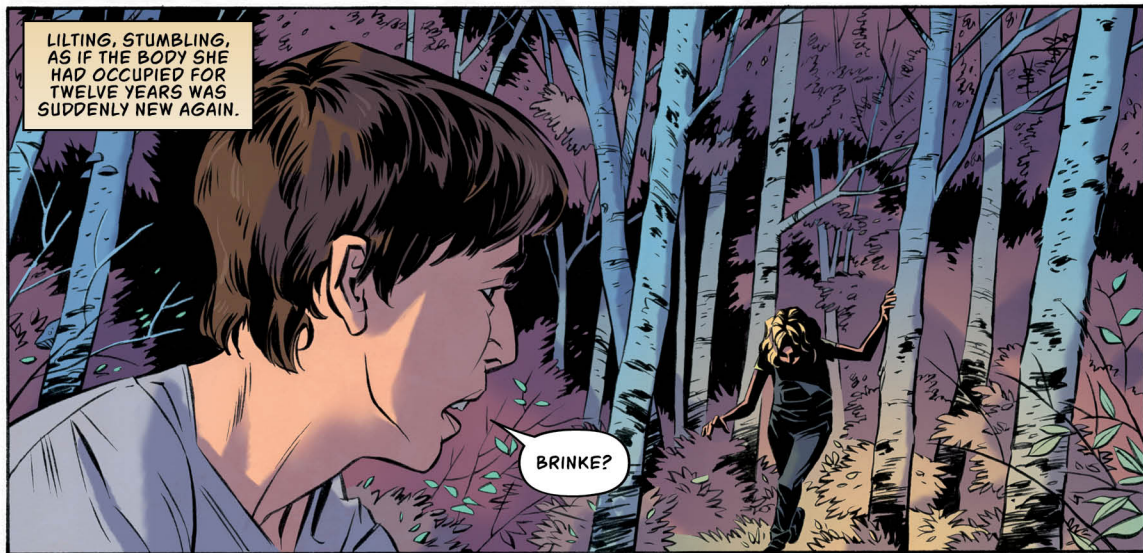
SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE CAMPING IN OUR BACKYARD WITH HER RICH BITCH FRIEND...



FUCK OFF, BRINKE--

CAMERON.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY SHE MOVED JOLTED CAMERON OUT OF HIS POSTURING.



LITING, STUMBLING, AS IF THE BODY SHE HAD OCCUPIED FOR TWELVE YEARS WAS SUDDENLY NEW AGAIN.

BRINKE?

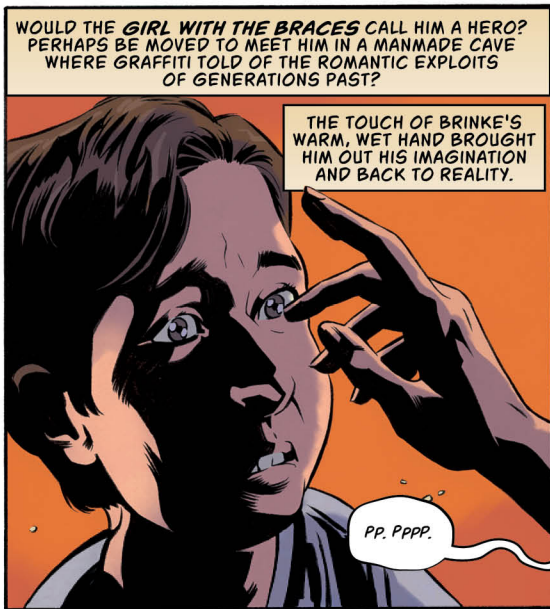


OH FUCK.

PUH. PPP.

AS HE RAN, A FLOOD OF THOUGHTS WENT THROUGH CAMERON'S MIND, ALL OF WHICH WOULD LATER MAKE HIM ASHAMED.

WOULD HE HAVE A CHANCE TO USE THE CPR TECHNIQUES HE'D BEEN TAUGHT AT THE POOL EARLIER IN THE SUMMER? WOULD HE LOOK COOL? COMMANDING?



WOULD THE GIRL WITH THE BRACES CALL HIM A HERO? PERHAPS BE MOVED TO MEET HIM IN A MANMADE CAVE WHERE GRAFFITI TOLD OF THE ROMANTIC EXPLOITS OF GENERATIONS PAST?

THE TOUCH OF BRINKE'S WARM, WET HAND BROUGHT HIM OUT HIS IMAGINATION AND BACK TO REALITY.

PP. PPPP.



IT WAS A LATE SUMMER EVENING WHEN THE GIRL EMERGED FROM THE WOODS...

HER SMALL SOFT BODY STABBED SEVENTEEN TIMES WITH A FILLET KNIFE.

THE TWILIGHT LIMBO WAS SUDDENLY SILENT, SAVE FOR TWO WORDS.

POLLY PEACHPIT.

IMAGINARY FIENDS

THE CAT'S PAW PART 1

WRITER TIM SEELEY ARTIST STEPHEN MOLNAR COLORIST QUINTON WINTER

LETTERER CARLOS M. MANGUAL COVER RICHARD PACE

ASSOCIATE EDITOR AMEDEO TURTURRO EDITOR MOLLY MAHAN GROUP EDITOR JAMIE S. RICH



MS. LI. HAVE A SEAT.

WHO? I THOUGHT--



IT WAS YOUR PARENTS?

MY...MY GRANDPA.

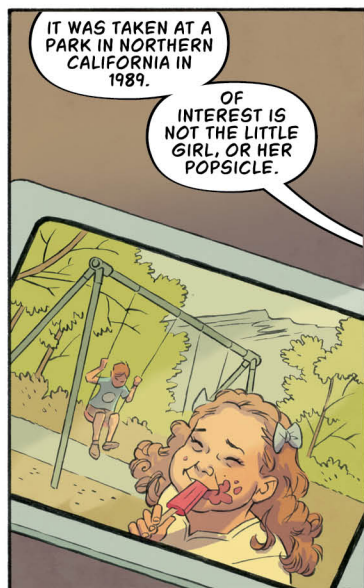
YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED I AM NEITHER OLD NOR ASIAN.

PLEASE PICK UP THE DEVICE ON THE TABLE, MS. LI. PRESS PLAY.



WHAT? A... MOVIE?

IT'S AN OLD HOME VIDEO. OLDER THAN YOU. I BELIEVE IT EVEN PLAYED ON ONE OF THOSE *AMERICA'S FUNNIEST SHOWS*.



IT WAS TAKEN AT A PARK IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA IN 1989.

OF INTEREST IS NOT THE LITTLE GIRL, OR HER POPSICLE.



I NEED YOU TO WATCH THE VIDEO AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE AT THE FIFTEEN-SECOND MARK. IMMEDIATELY AFTER SHE DROPS THE POPSICLE, AND THEN PICKS IT BACK UP.

BEHIND THE BOY ON THE SWING. **JESSE HINDT**.

I--WHAT? I DON'T--



THIS IS A TEST, MS. LI.

YEAH? IS IT THE KIND OF TEST WHERE IF I SAY ONE THING I'M *CRAZY* AND IF I SAY THE OTHER I'M *EVIL*? BEEN THERE, DONE THAT.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU ARE SUICIDAL.



I DON'T BELIEVE YOU ARE SCHIZOPHRENIC OR HAVE OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER. I DON'T BELIEVE YOU ARE CRAZY OR EVIL. NOT EVEN YOUR ONLY "FRIEND," **ALICE PRIETO**, BELIEVES THAT.

TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.



I--IT'S A SEA MONSTER.
WEARING A COWBOY HAT.
ON A TRICYCLE.



YES. WE CALL HIM **MARSHAL LOCH**. HIS REAL NAME IS **GERALD FLAPPYFINS**.



TO MOST PEOPLE, IT'S JUST ANOTHER VIDEO WITH A YOUNGSTER GLEEFULLY EATING DIRT. THEY DON'T SEE THE MARSHAL.



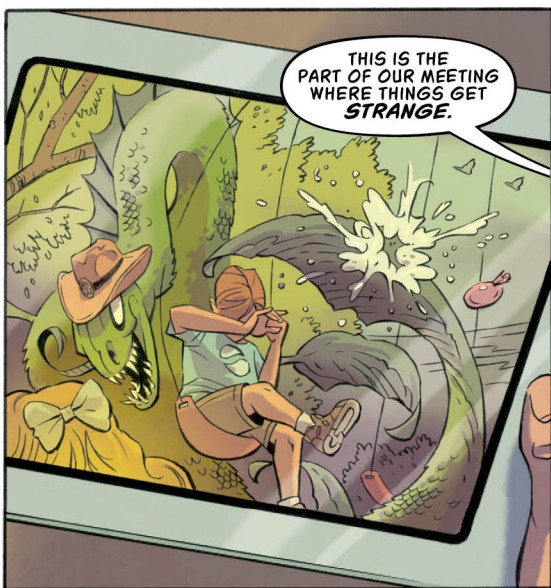
I DON'T SEE HIM.
AND I TAKE GREAT PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT I SEE EVERYTHING.



MY NAME IS **SPECIAL AGENT VIRGIL CROCKETT**, FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION. **IMP DIVISION**.
IMP?



YES, MS. LI. I NEED YOU TO KNOW THAT WHAT I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU IS NOT A DREAM OR A DRUG-INDUCED HALLUCINATION. YOU ARE NOT MISHEARING ME.



THIS IS THE PART OF OUR MEETING WHERE THINGS GET **STRANGE**.

THERE IS ANOTHER WORLD BEYOND OURS WHERE SPECTRAL ALIEN ENTITIES ROAM.

SOMETIMES, SOMEHOW, THEY BREACH THE BARRIERS AND COME HERE. THESE *INTERDIMENSIONAL MENTAL PARASITES* HAVE BEEN DOING THIS FOR CENTURIES. WE THINK WE'VE FOUND EVIDENCE OF THEM IN ANCIENT EGYPT.

IN THIS WORLD, THEIR SUSTENANCE COMES FROM THE HUMAN MIND. THEY FEED ON ATTENTION, AFFECTION, *LOYALTY*.



TO ENSURE MEALS, THEY BOND WITH AN IMPRESSIONABLE, PLASTIC MIND, MOST OFTEN THE YOUNG OR MENTALLY ILL.

THE HOST PROVIDES A NAME AND A NARRATIVE AND THE IMP SOAKS IT UP LIKE RAYS OF THE SUN.



MOST ARE IMMATERIAL AND HARMLESS, PROVIDING NOTHING BUT COMPANIONSHIP. A CONFIDANTE IN A LONELY WORLD.

THEY FADE AWAY AND DIE WHEN THE HOST AGES OUT OF INTEREST IN THEM, LIKE THEY WERE NEVER THERE AT ALL.



BUT SOME--THE HUNGRIEST OF THEM--REMAIN. THEY GROW STRONGER. THEY START TO BE ABLE TO AFFECT THE PHYSICAL WORLD.

