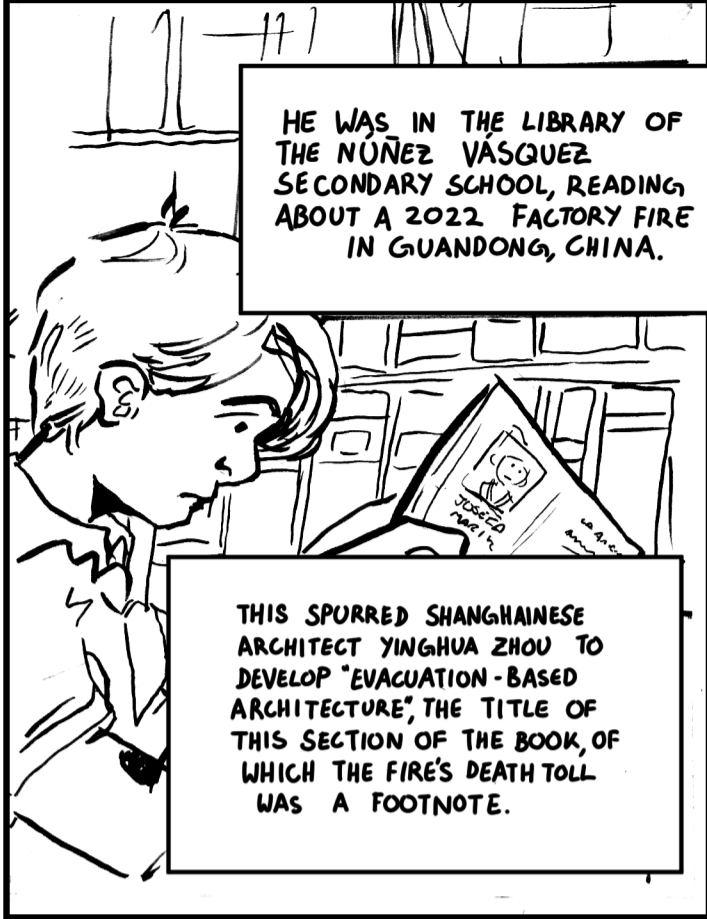


OSCAR RIVAS BÁEZ WAS 14 YEARS OLD WHEN THE EARTHQUAKE HIT.



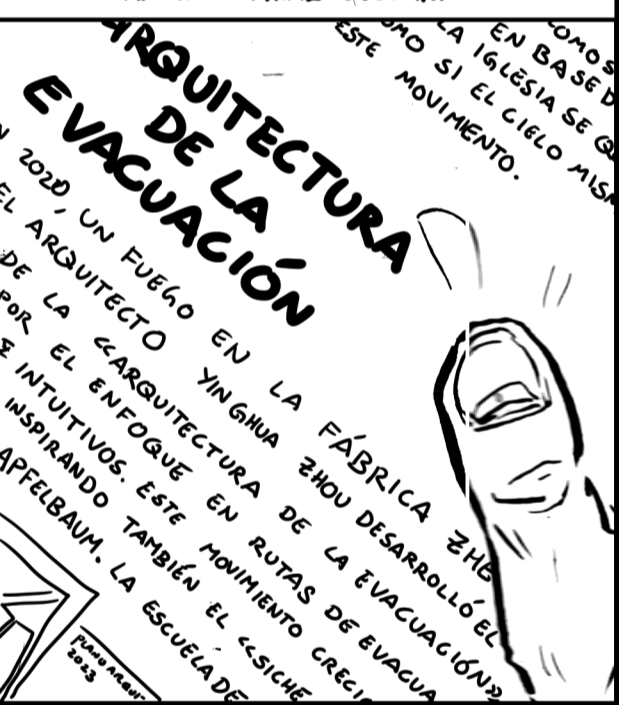
SANTIAGO, SANTIAGO METROPOLITAN REGION, CHILE, OCTOBER 21, 2024

HE WAS IN THE LIBRARY OF THE NUÑEZ VÁSQUEZ SECONDARY SCHOOL, READING ABOUT A 2022 FACTORY FIRE IN GUANDONG, CHINA.

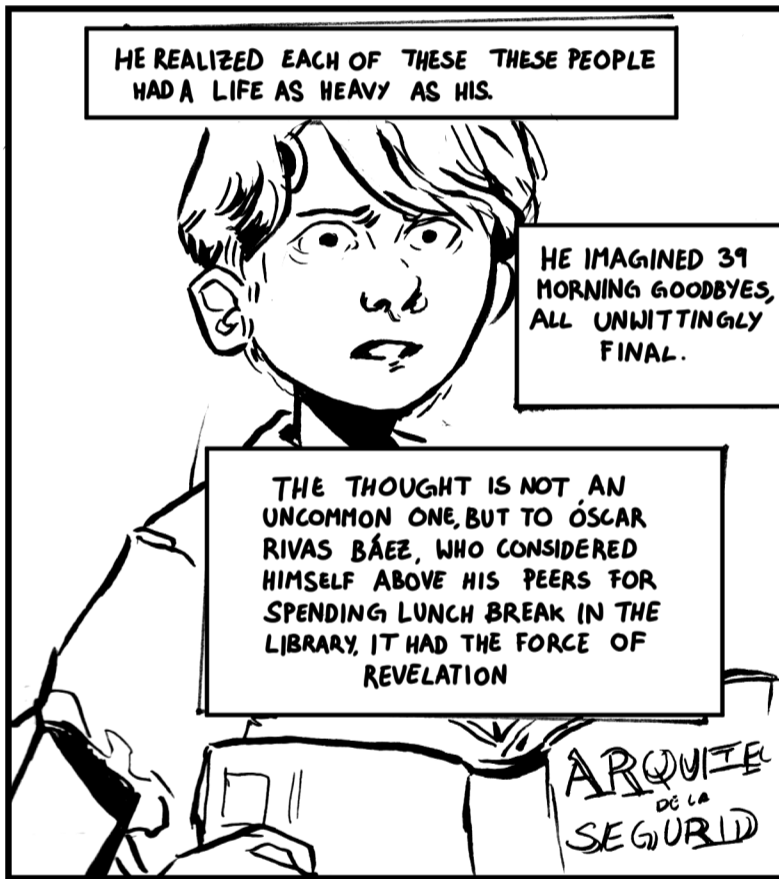


THIS SPURRED SHANGHAISE ARCHITECT YINGHUA ZHOU TO DEVELOP "EVACUATION-BASED ARCHITECTURE", THE TITLE OF THIS SECTION OF THE BOOK, OF WHICH THE FIRE'S DEATH TOLL WAS A FOOTNOTE.

THE NUMBER OF DEATHS WAS 39, AND THIS IS WHAT CAPTURED THE ATTENTION OF ÓSCAR RIVAS BÁEZ, NOT YET CONCERNED WITH THE NUANCES OF SAFE INDUSTRIAL DESIGN.



HE REALIZED EACH OF THESE THESE PEOPLE HAD A LIFE AS HEAVY AS HIS.



HE IMAGINED 39 MORNING GOODBYES, ALL UNWITTINGLY FINAL.

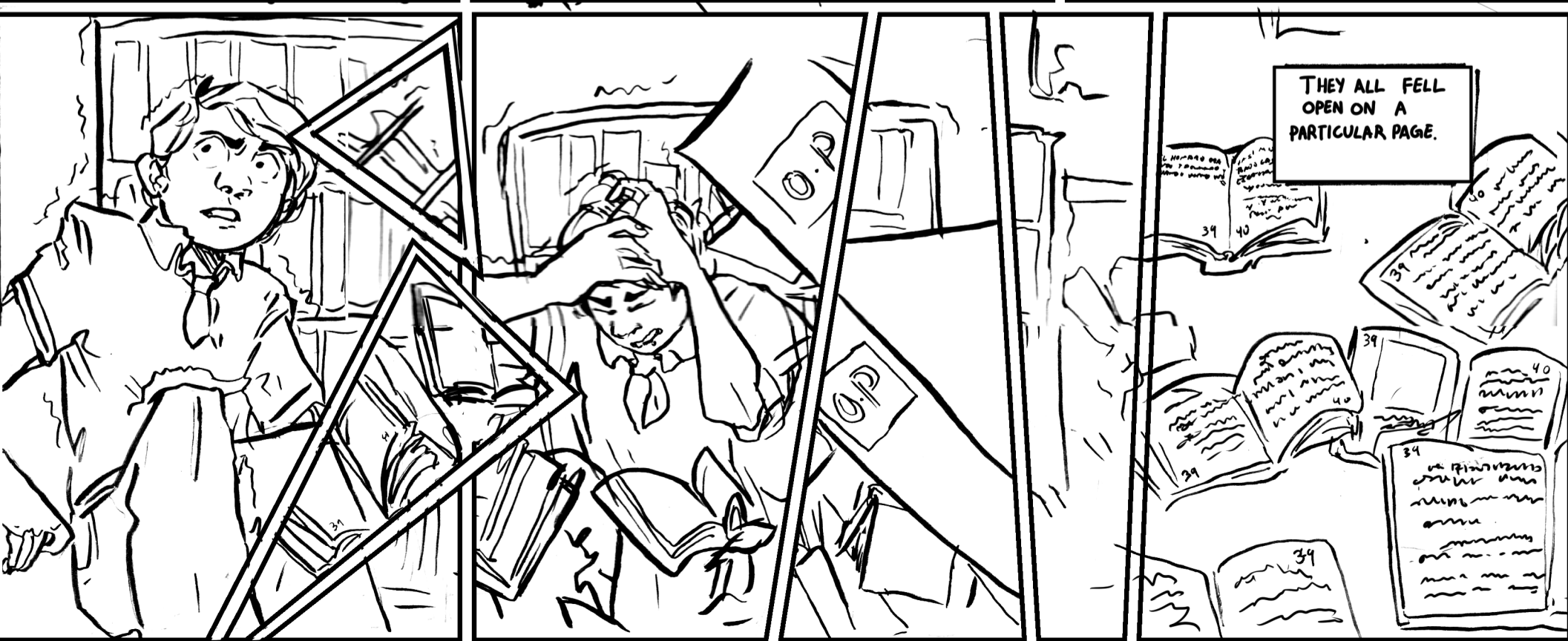
THE THOUGHT IS NOT AN UNCOMMON ONE, BUT TO ÓSCAR RIVAS BÁEZ, WHO CONSIDERED HIMSELF ABOVE HIS PEERS FOR SPENDING LUNCH BREAK IN THE LIBRARY, IT HAD THE FORCE OF REVELATION

ARQUIE DE LA SEGURID

NOT LEAST BECAUSE IT WAS FOLLOWED BY THE EARTH SPLITTING OPEN.



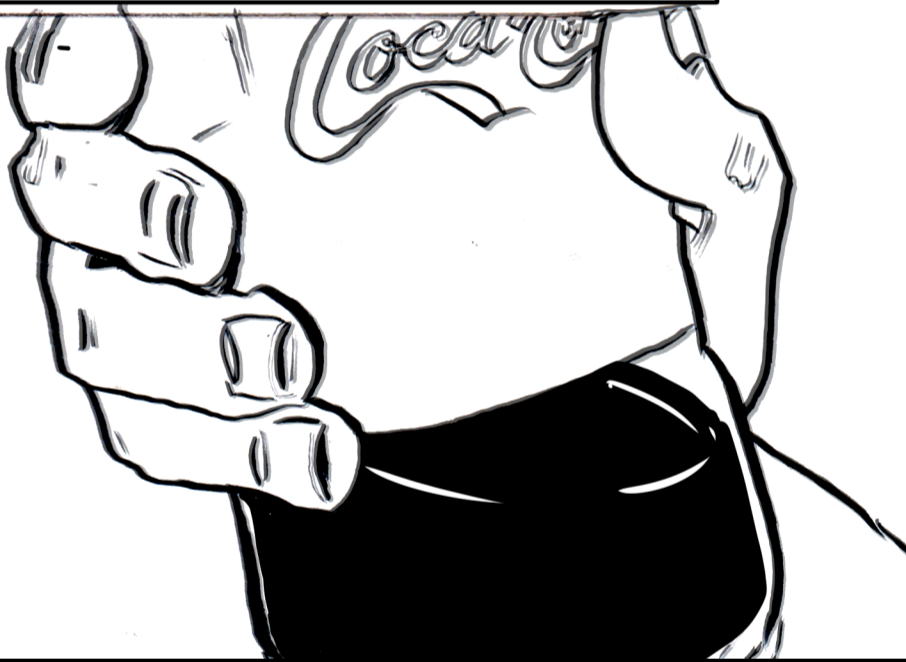
THEY ALL FELL OPEN ON A PARTICULAR PAGE.



33 YEARS LATER, ÓSCAR RIVAS BÁEZ DIED FROM A GUNSHOT WOUND IN SAN PEDRO DE LOS OLIVOS, SONORA, MEXICO.



THE NEXT NIGHT, IN A RUN-DOWN MOTEL A FEW KILOMETERS FROM TUCSON, ARIZONA, JOSÉ ANDRÉS TORO CONTRERAS LAY ON HIS SIDE, READING THE INGREDIENTS LIST ON THE BACK OF HIS COCA-COLA BOTTLE.



HE WAS TRYING TO CONVINCE HIMSELF THAT HE HAD NOT KILLED ÓSCAR, BUT THAT THE MAN HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE.

ACROSS FROM HIM, A NEON CHEF FLIPPED A PIZZA.



THAT'S WHAT HE LIKED, ABOUT THIS COUNTRY, HE DECIDED. IT LIKED TO FILL SPACE.

IN 2047, JOSÉ ANDRÉS TORO CONTRERAS FLED CHILE VIA THE ATACAMA



TEN YEARS LATER, HE HID IN A TOWN IN SONORA A FEW MONTHS.

HE KNEW DESERTS WELL. HE APPRECIATED THEIR MATHEMATICAL BEAUTY.

THEY JUST SET HIM ON EDGE



SAN PEDRO DE LOS OLIVOS,
SONORA, MÉXICO, AUGUST
15, 2057



ÓSCAR! WHAT ARE THE ODDS!
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN? WE HAVEN'T
SEEN EACH OTHER SINCE WHAT,
COLLEGE?

WHAT DO YOU WANT?!
WHY YOU CHASING ME?!



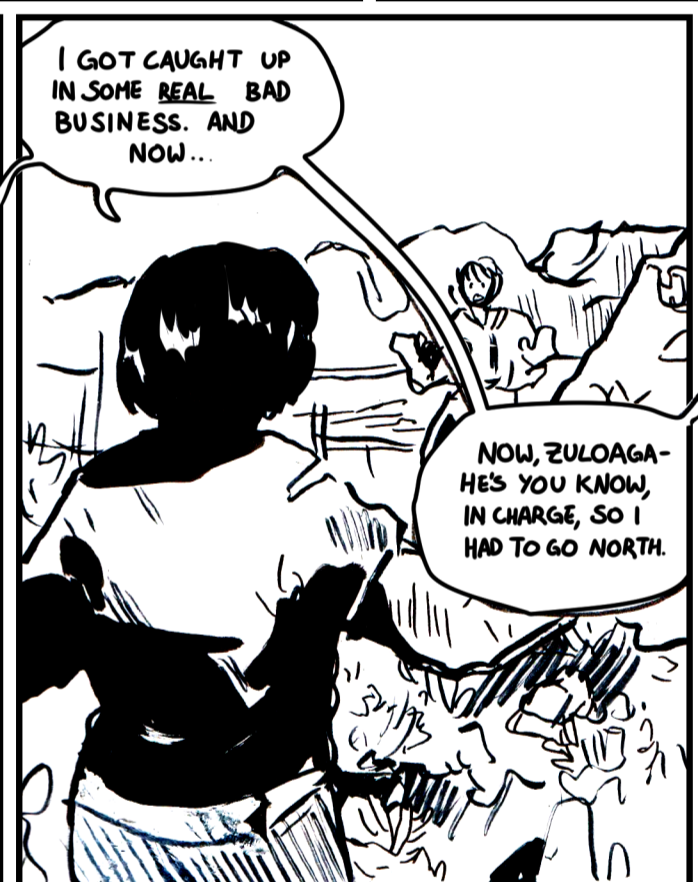
I JUST FIND IT FUNNY,
ÓSCAR, THAT YOU LOOK
SO HEALTHY GIVEN YOU
WORKED AT THE PLANT.

I-- WHAT ARE
YOU DOING IN
SONORA, I--



ÓSCAR, AFTER
YOU LEFT
SANTIAGO,

WELL, I HAD
NOTHING TO
DO, SO... I
JOINED THE--
WELL, YOU
KNOW.



I GOT CAUGHT UP
IN SOME REAL BAD
BUSINESS. AND
NOW...

NOW, ZULOAGA--
HE'S YOU KNOW,
IN CHARGE, SO I
HAD TO GO NORTH.



MARIÁN--
MARÍA ÁNGELA--
SHE USED TO SAY
THIS GUY PINOCHET,
AGAIN.

AND I'D TELL
HER YOU WEREN'T
ALIVE--

YOU--
YOU ESCAPED
THIS FAR
NORTH?!



I'M GOING
TO TUCSON

LEGAL AND ALL--
REFUGEE VISA, CAN
YOU IMAGINE?

WHY-- NOT COLOMBIA,
PERÚ, HELL, EVEN BRAZIL--

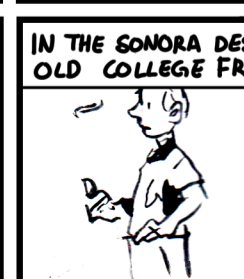
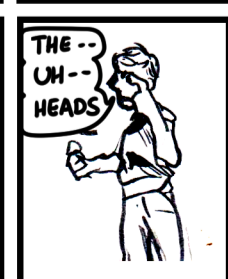
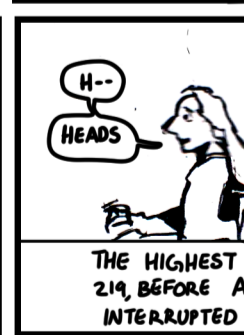
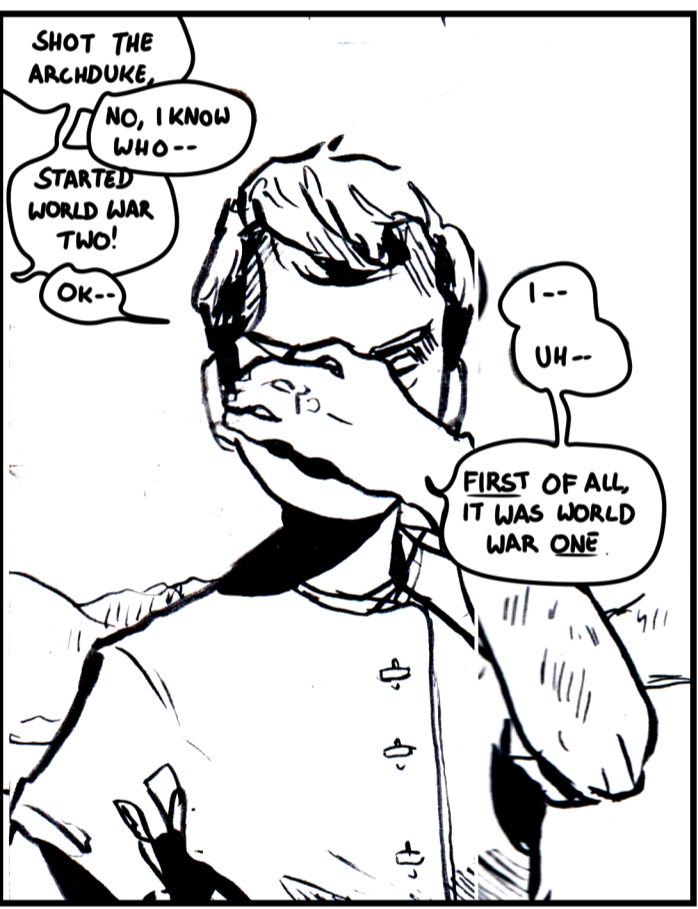
THERE'S STILL
ZULOGISTA GROUPS
ALL OVER THE SOUTH,
LOOKING PEOPLE
LIKE ME.

THAT'S WHAT HE LIKES
AND THIS CONCEPT
HE EMPLOYED IN ORDER
TO GAIN SPACE



YOU HAD TO CROSS
A TOWN OF 200 PEOPLE
TO GET TO TUCSON?!

LIKE I SAID...
WHAT ARE THE
ODDS?





ARE--ARE YOU GOING TO TRY TO CROSS THE BORDER WITH THAT? BEC-- BECAUSE, HA, HA--

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SHOW WITH THAT STUPID FUCKING TRICK?!



YOU ASKED ME WHY I'M ALIVE. TH-- THERE'S SOMETHING IN ME.

AND THAT SOMETHING IS-- IT'S SAVED ME FROM WHAT, LEUKEMIA?

THAT-- THAT SORT OF THING DEPENDS ON CHANGE MUTATIONS, THE KEY WORD HERE BEING--

THE RADIATION DIDN'T KILL ANYONE.



I THOUGHT YOU'D DIED IN THE EXPLOSION.

EITHER IN THE EXPLOSION, OR LATER, WHEN THINGS GOT BAD.



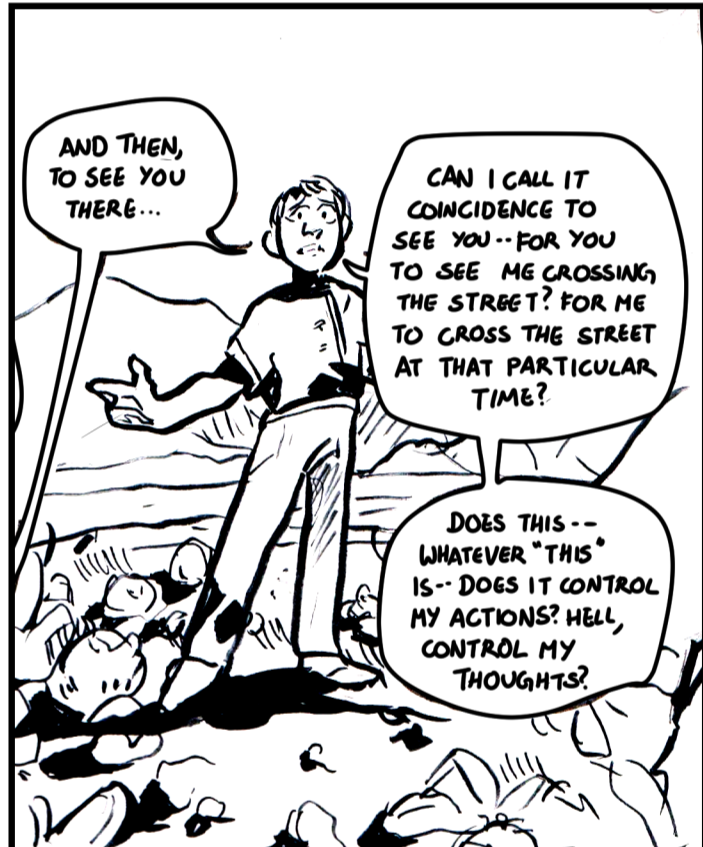
IN EITHER CASE, YOUR RIDICULOUS MAGIC SHOW--

TORO. YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE DEPTH OF THIS THING.

FOR-- FROM 20...45 TO 53-ISH, I-- EVERY TIME I NEEDED MONEY, I'D GO TO A DIFFERENT CASINO.

HIT JACKPOT IMMEDIATELY.

COUNTLESS TIMES I DID THAT, NEVER COMING OUT AT A LOSS.



AND THEN, TO SEE YOU THERE...

CAN I CALL IT COINCIDENCE TO SEE YOU-- FOR YOU TO SEE ME CROSSING THE STREET? FOR ME TO CROSS THE STREET AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME?

DOES THIS -- WHATEVER "THIS" IS-- DOES IT CONTROL MY ACTIONS? HELL, CONTROL MY THOUGHTS?



THE HAPPIEST I'VE BEEN IN THE LAST DECADE IS, I FOUND A TAROT SHOP IN HERMOSILLO. DIDN'T KNOW TAROT.

AND I COULD BE SURPRISED AGAIN. LET MYSELF NOT KNOW THINGS, RIGHT? BUT, WELL-- I DID START TO DISCERN THEIR MEANING.

AT THIS POINT, JOSÉ ANDRÉS TORO-CONTRERAS STOPPED PAYING ATTENTION



SOMETHING IN THE WAY OSCAR SPOKE AROSE DEEP REVULSION. HE TRIED TO FIGURE OUT WHY.

IN 2046, HE WAS IN LEOPOLDO BRAUN GENERAL HOSPITAL. MARÍA ÁNGELA LLOSA GARZA LAY IN BED IN THE CANDLELIGHT.

SHE WAS RECOVERING FROM A CHEMICAL ATTACK BY AN HERNANDISTA GROUP.

CANDLELIGHT, BECAUSE THE HOSPITAL HAD TO RESERVE POWER FOR THE VENTILATORS.



DON'T GO YET.

I WASN'T GOING ANYWHERE. I WAS JUST STRETCHING.

I SHOULD HEAD OUT SOON, THOUGH. GETTING DARK.

IT'S SAFER AT NIGHT

NO,, MARIAN.

ALSO, I THINK YOUR DOCTOR'S A FASCIST.



SHE HAD THIS WEIRD BRACELET--SAID "2 PETER 3" AND SOME OTHER SHIT.

IT'S AN ORDEN DE SAN JUAN THING, NOT A ZULOGISTA THING.

I THOUGHT THOSE GUYS WERE DONE.



SHE ASKED IF I HAD MY FIRST COMMUNION

ISN'T YOUR NAME ON YOUR CHART?

WHAT KINDA PARENTS DOES SHE THINK YOU HAD?

AHEH--



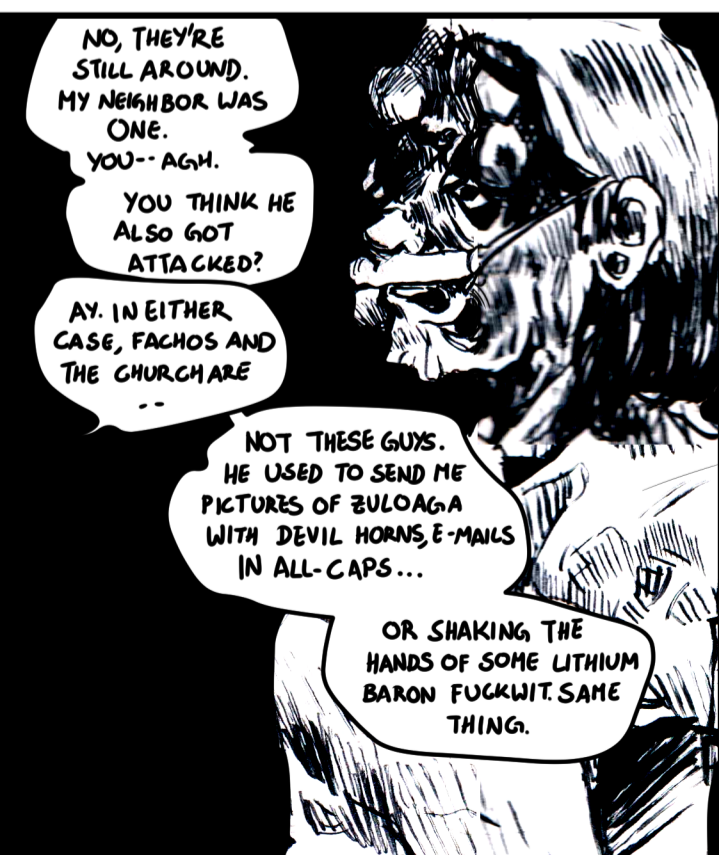
OWW, FUCK.

DON'T BE FUNNY.

FUCK.

SORRY.

ANYWAY, SHE'S NOT FACHO.



NO, THEY'RE STILL AROUND. MY NEIGHBOR WAS ONE. YOU-- AGH.

YOU THINK HE ALSO GOT ATTACKED?

AY. IN EITHER CASE, FACHOS AND THE CHURCH ARE --

NOT THESE GUYS. HE USED TO SEND ME PICTURES OF ZULOAGA WITH DEVIL HORNS, E-MAILS IN ALL-CAPS...

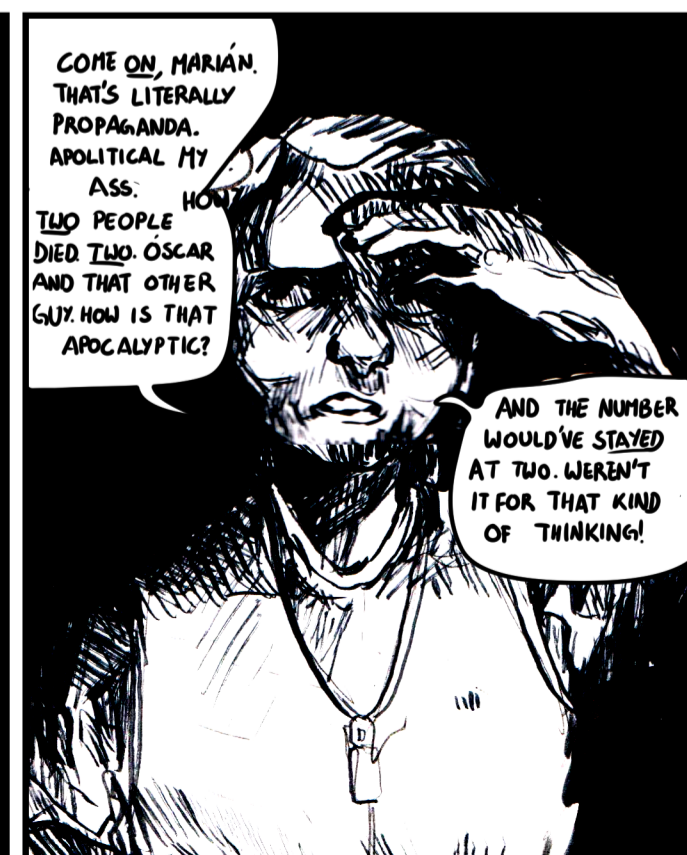
OR SHAKING THE HANDS OF SOME LITHIUM BARON FUCKWIT. SAME THING.



THEY DON'T GET TOO INVOLVED WITH POLITICS BEYOND THE SUPERFICIAL. KIN-- KINGDOM OF GOD.

THEY JUST THINK IT'S THE END TIMES, IS ALL.

HONESTLY? ID-- FUCKING BUY IT.



COME ON, MARIÁN. THAT'S LITERALLY PROPAGANDA. APOLITICAL MY ASS.

HOW? TWO PEOPLE DIED. TWO. OSCAR AND THAT OTHER GUY. HOW IS THAT APOCALYPTIC?

AND THE NUMBER WOULD'VE STAYED AT TWO. WEREN'T IT FOR THAT KIND OF THINKING!



A WHIRR, AND ALL THE LIGHTS WERE ON AGAIN.



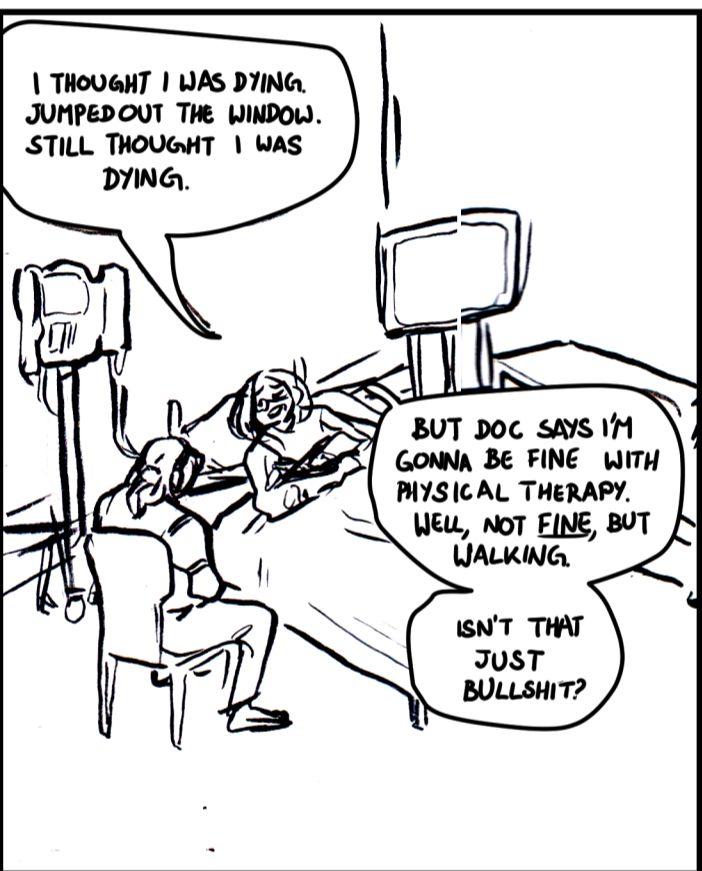
SORRY.
I KNOW YOU ALREADY KNOW ALL THIS!
JUST--

I THINK IT WAS MY LANDLORD



MAYBE I'M BEING PARANOID, BUT HE ALWAYS GAVE ME A WEIRD VIBE.

IT JUST MAKES SENSE.



I THOUGHT I WAS DYING. JUMPED OUT THE WINDOW. STILL THOUGHT I WAS DYING.

BUT DOC SAYS I'M GONNA BE FINE WITH PHYSICAL THERAPY. WELL, NOT FINE, BUT WALKING.

ISN'T THAT JUST BULLSHIT?



GOD, TORO. I KNOW I'M TRYING TO BE-- BRING SOME LEVITY, BUT--

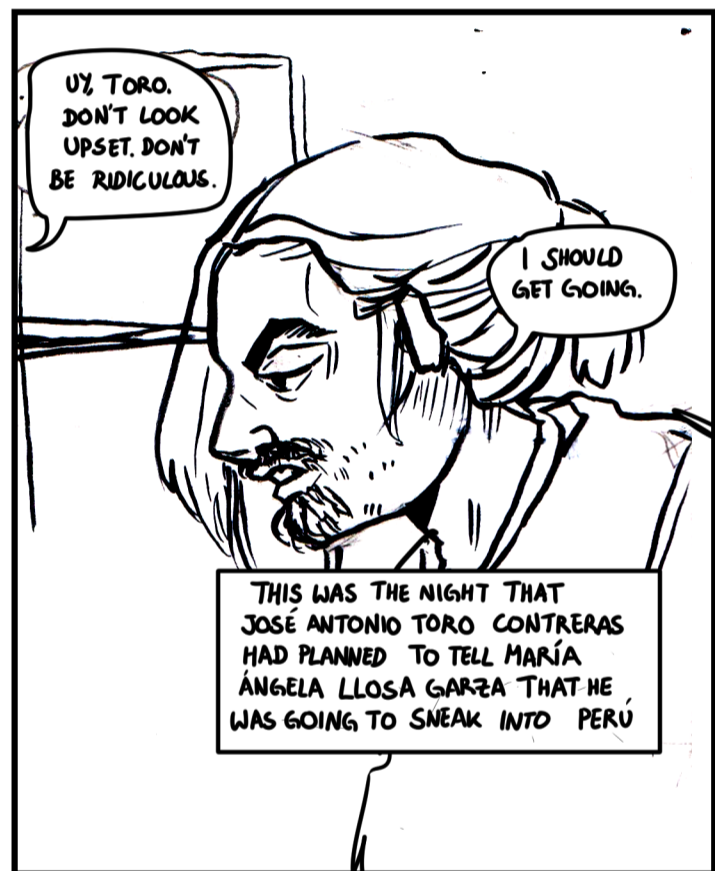
I'VE NEVER BEEN MORE PISSED OFF IN MY FUCK--

YEAH.

D YOU THINK I'LL DIE OF A BLOOD INFECTION? WHAT, SEPSIS?

DON'T... DON'T JOKE-- THERE'S ANTIBIOTICS.

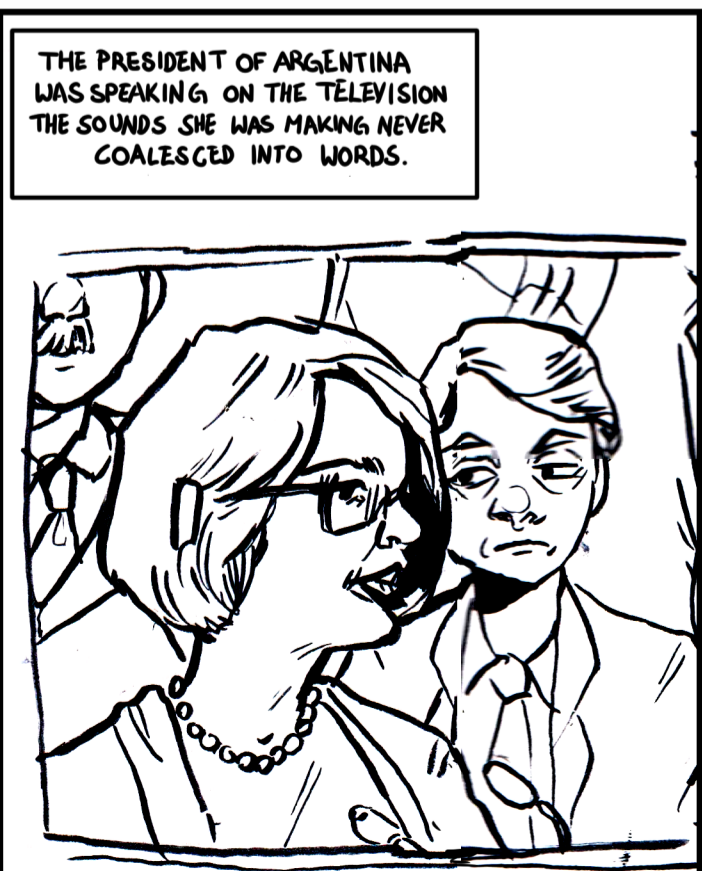
IN THIS HOSPITAL?!



U, TORO. DON'T LOOK UPSET. DON'T BE RIDICULOUS.

I SHOULD GET GOING.

THIS WAS THE NIGHT THAT JOSÉ ANTONIO TORO CONTRERAS HAD PLANNED TO TELL MARÍA ÁNGELA LLOSA GARZA THAT HE WAS GOING TO SNEAK INTO PERÚ



THE PRESIDENT OF ARGENTINA WAS SPEAKING ON THE TELEVISION THE SOUNDS SHE WAS MAKING NEVER COALESCED INTO WORDS.

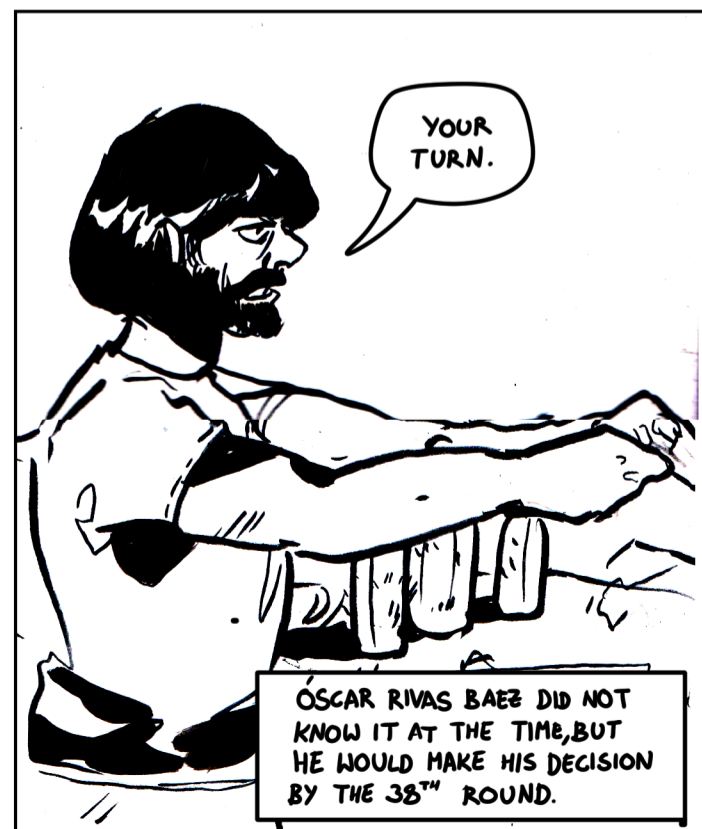
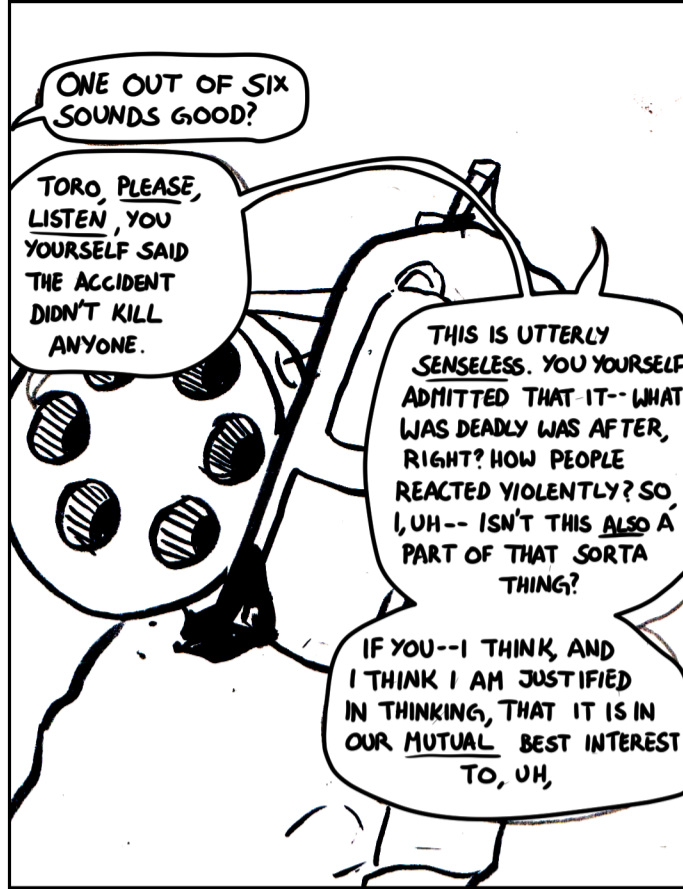


THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG WITH HER FACE, THE WAY IT MOVED, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN LEATHER AND RUBBER.

IT FILLED HIM WITH A SENSE OF DISGUST,



ALL THE LITTLE PATHETIC MOVEMENTS



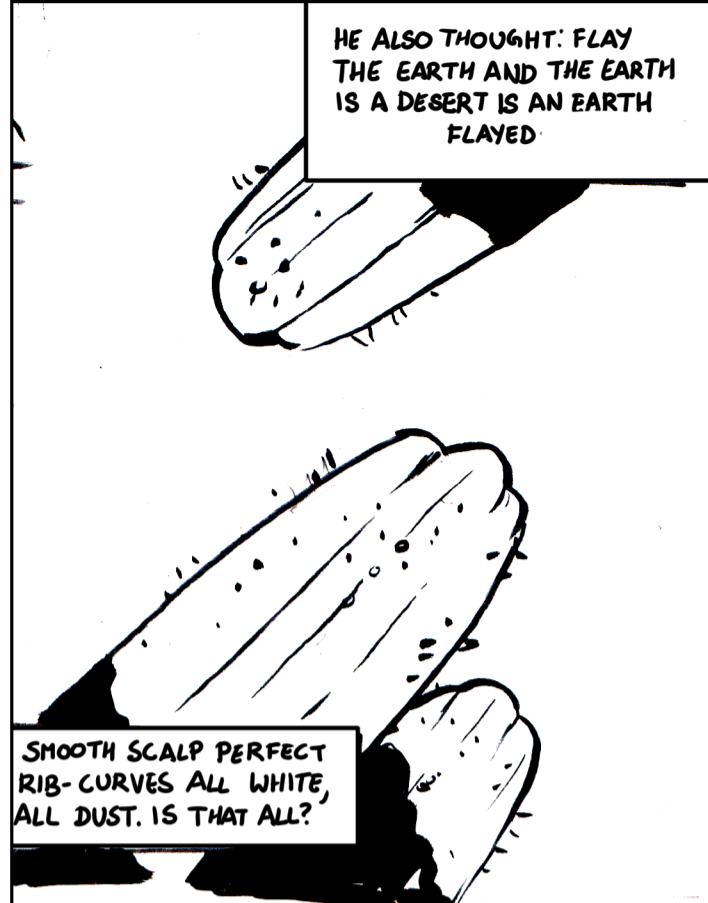
THE BULLET HIT IN SUCH A WAY THAT OSCAR RIVAS BAEZ DID NOT IMMEDIATELY LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS.



THIS, HE THOUGHT, WAS NOT PARTICULARLY LUCKY.

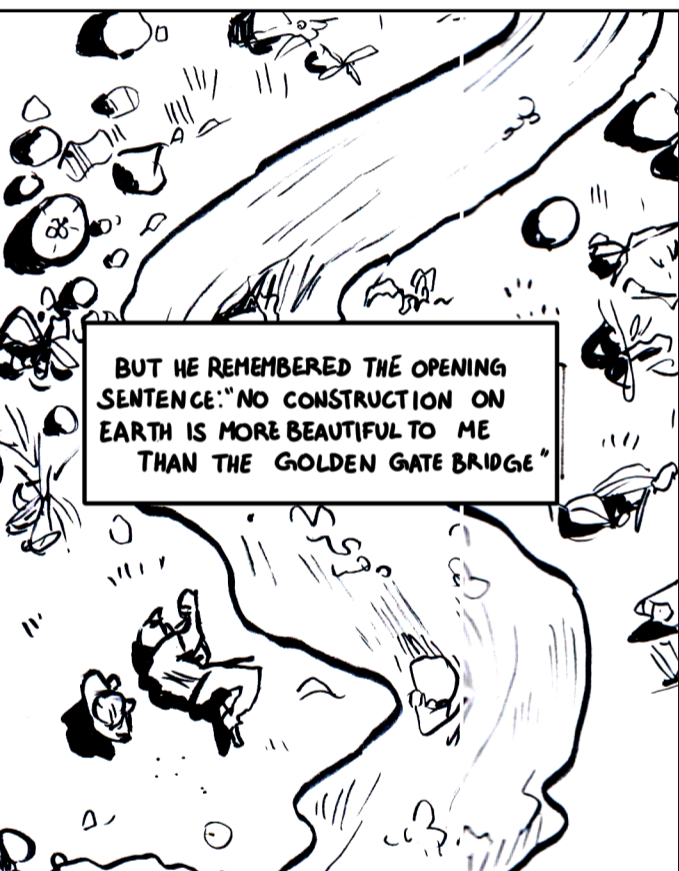


HE ALSO THOUGHT OF A BOOK HE HAD READ IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF SAFETY: PRISONS, BRIDGES, FORTRESSES, ROLLERCOASTERS. HE COULD NOT REMEMBER THE TITLE.

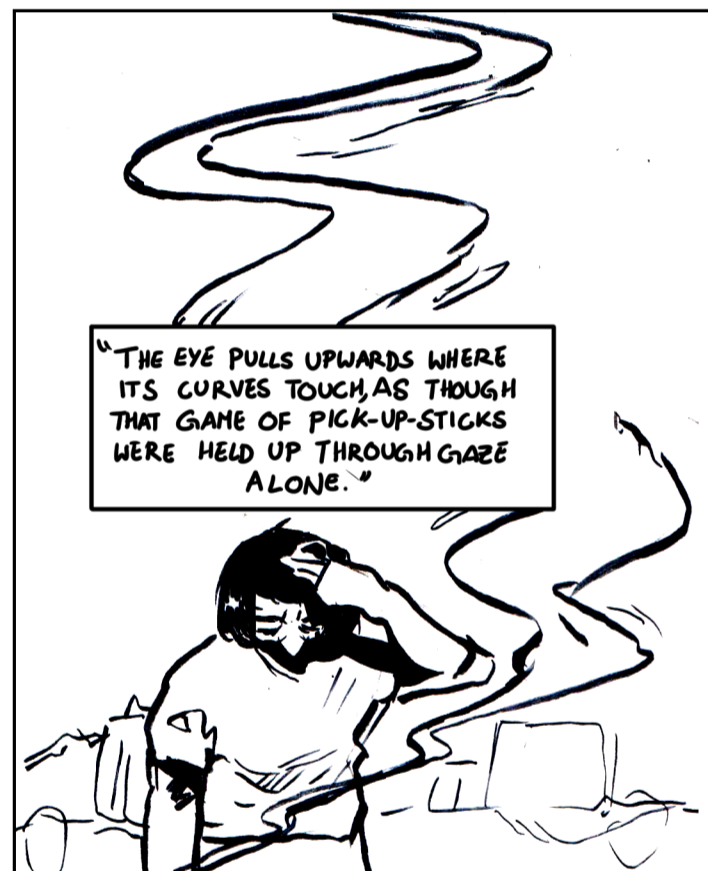
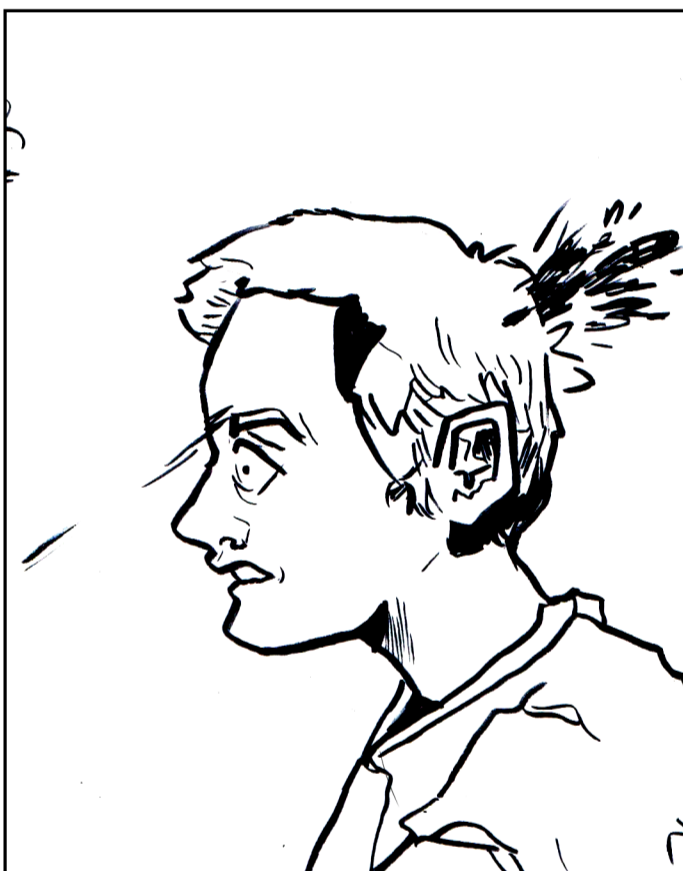


HE ALSO THOUGHT: FLAY THE EARTH AND THE EARTH IS A DESERT IS AN EARTH FLAYED

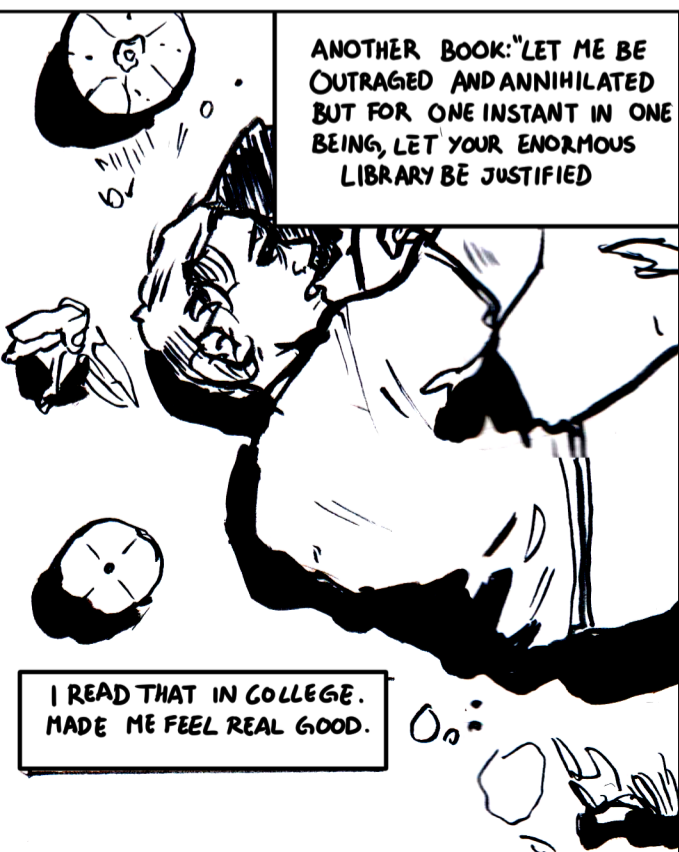
SMOOTH SCALP PERFECT RIB-CURVES ALL WHITE, ALL DUST. IS THAT ALL?



BUT HE REMEMBERED THE OPENING SENTENCE: "NO CONSTRUCTION ON EARTH IS MORE BEAUTIFUL TO ME THAN THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE"

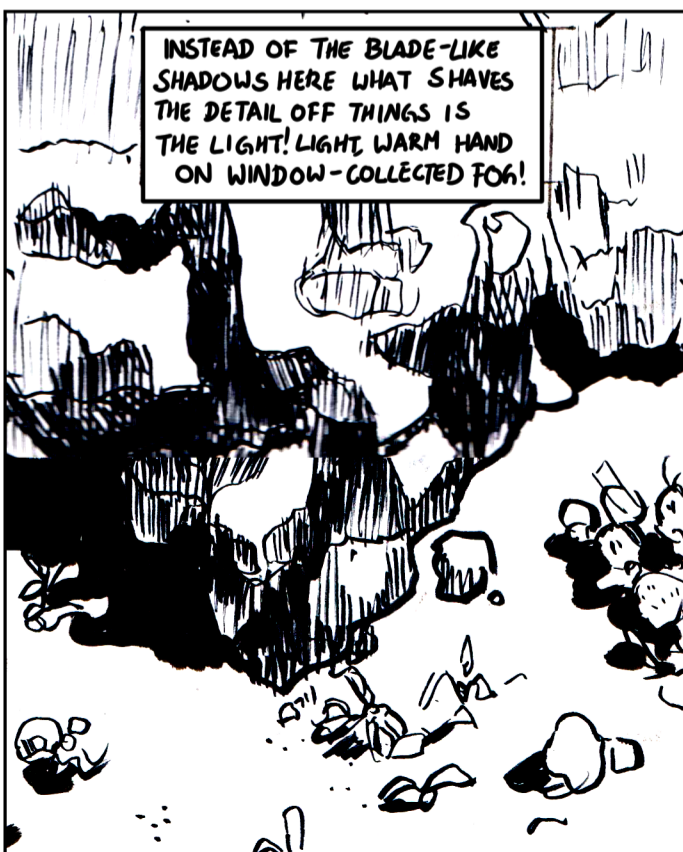


"THE EYE PULLS UPWARDS WHERE ITS CURVES TOUCH, AS THOUGH THAT GAME OF PICK-UP-STICKS WERE HELD UP THROUGH GAZE ALONE."



ANOTHER BOOK: "LET ME BE OUTRAGED AND ANNIHILATED BUT FOR ONE INSTANT IN ONE BEING, LET YOUR ENORMOUS LIBRARY BE JUSTIFIED"

I READ THAT IN COLLEGE. MADE ME FEEL REAL GOOD.



INSTEAD OF THE BLADE-LIKE SHADOWS HERE WHAT SHAVES THE DETAIL OFF THINGS IS THE LIGHT! LIGHT WARM HAND ON WINDOW-COLLECTED FOG!



AND EVEN THE NIGHT FALLS CORPSE-HEAVY NO HYPNAGOGIC TWILIGHT NO WHITE NOISE DREAMS

GOD I USED TO BE SUCH AN IDIOT