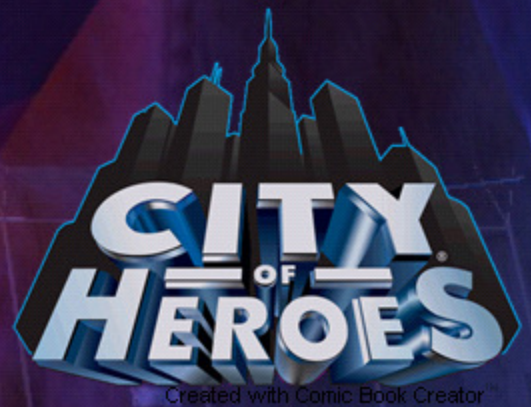




# BATTLEFIELDS

A PHOENIX CIRCLE SAGA



BOOMTOWN...



A TURNING POINT,  
SOME SAY

STORY, SCREENCAPTURES, & EDITING: CHAS YORK

CRITICAL BATTLEFIELD OF  
THE RIkti WAR



ONCE CALLED BAUMTON

AKA: CHASE ARCANUM



ONCE CALLED HOME.

ALL IMAGES COME FROM THE CITY OF HEROES MMORPG, CRYPTIC STUDIOS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

NOW, IT'S CALLED A  
"HAZARD ZONE"



NOBODY ENTERS.



AT LEAST, THAT'S HOW  
IT'S SUPPOSED TO WORK

THEY'RE THE DISPLACED-  
LEFT HOMELESS AFTER THE  
RIKTI INVASION.



SOME HAD A PAST TO HIDE

OR A HABIT THEY COULDN'T LET  
THE AUTHORITIES DISCOVER



SPECIAL THANKS TO: RIAN FROSTRAKE & GINDER FLAME

SOME WERE TOO PROUD  
TO SEEK ASSISTANCE.



AND SOME MINDS WERE JUST  
TOO SHATTERED TO MOVE ON.



THEY JUST GATHERED 'ROUND THE  
FIRE BARREL FOR WARMTH...



EXCEPT FOR ONE

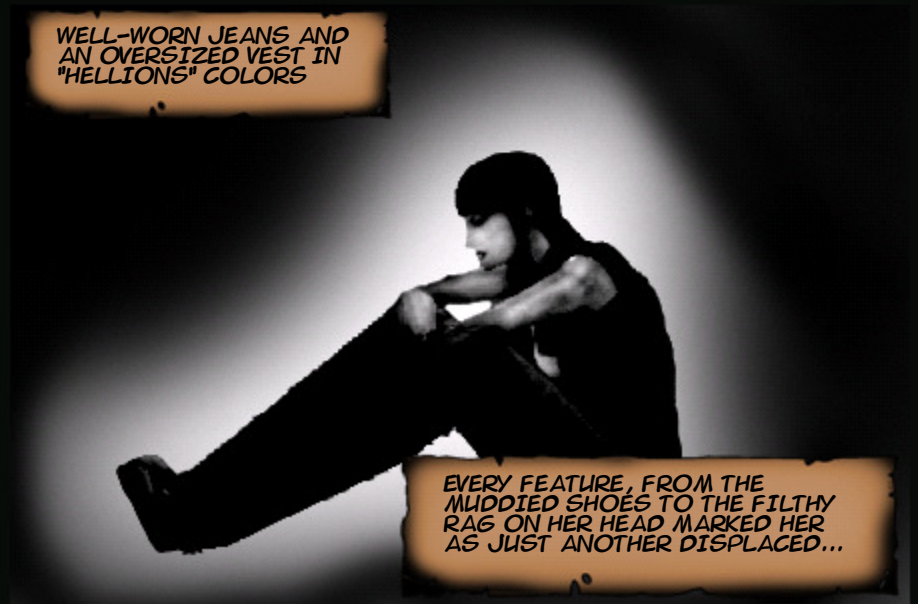


WELL-WORN JEANS AND  
AN OVERSIZED VEST IN  
"HELLIONS" COLORS



A GIRL, ASIAN DESCENT,  
NO OLDER THAN SIXTEEN.

EVERY FEATURE, FROM THE  
MUDDIED SHOES TO THE FILTHY  
RAG ON HER HEAD MARKED HER  
AS JUST ANOTHER DISPLACED...



EXCEPT FOR THAT GAZE.

FIXED INTENSELY ON THE  
SERVICE CORRIDOR LEADING  
DOWN INTO THE SEWERS

THIS ONE IS DIFFERENT.

SHE WASN'T BROKEN.

NOT YET....



YOU CAN STARE  
ALL YA LIKE,  
KID. HE AIN'T  
COMING BACK.



SHE WHIPPED AROUND AT MY WORDS.  
THE OTHERS BARELY NOTICED

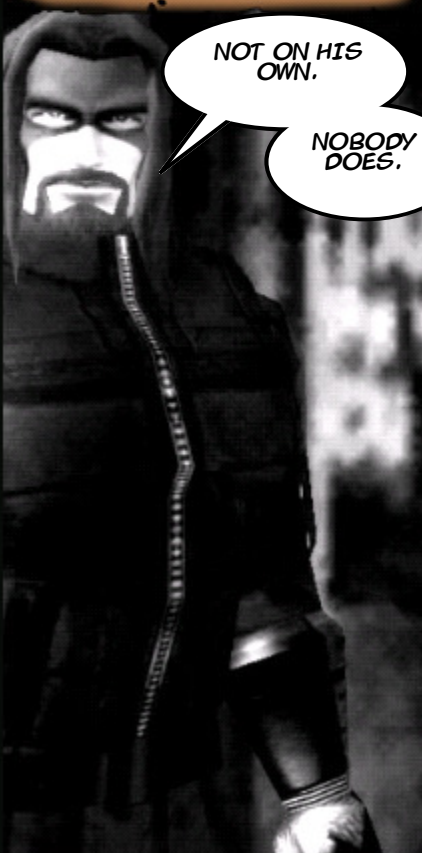
FOR A BRIEF MOMENT,  
HER EYES TOLD ME THAT  
SHE KNEW I SPOKE THE  
TRUTH.



THEN HER DEFENSES CAME UP  
AND THE GAZE HARDENED



I FINISHED, A LITTLE  
SOFTER NOW.



NOT ON HIS  
OWN.

NOBODY  
DOES.

THE ICY STARE DIDN'T WARM ONE DEGREE.

"I HEAR YOU'RE CALLING YOURSELF "PARTIZAN" NOW

NICE MASK, WHERE'S THE CAPE?

HERE TO BRING ME IN, MARK?

SHE WIELDED MY NAME LIKE A WEAPON

PROBABLY EXPECTING HER KNOWLEDGE TO GIVE HER SOME KIND OF ADVANTAGE

I DIDN'T CARE- NEVER HID MY PAST FROM ANYONE

BOTH NAMES HAD GAINED A REPUTATION AS A FIERCE PROTECTOR OF THE LESS FORTUNATE



ONE IN THE PAPERS,

ONE IN THE STREETS IN A...  
...MORE DIRECT WAY

NEITHER WAS SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.

BESIDES...

...FAMILIARITY WORKS BOTH WAYS



WHAT'S THE POINT, SHAN?

YOU'D JUST RUN AWAY FROM PLACEMENT AGAIN.



SHANDORA WARD

HER PARENTS RAN A GROCERY IN BALMINGTON ABOUT A BLOCK FROM THE GYM I OWNED BEFORE THE INVASION.

HER MOTHER, KIRASH, USED ONE OF MY ROOMS AS A DOJO

OFFERING SELF DEFENSE COURSES TO ANYONE IN NEED.

HER FATHER, TOJO TAUGHT ME HOW TO MANAGE MY BUSINESS



...EVEN HELPED ME THROUGH THE ROUGH SPOTS



I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO CALL HER "FRIEND."



NOW EVERYTHING'S GONE...

THE GYM.... THE GROCERY... KIRASH AND TOJO.

GOD, I MISS HER



I'M SURE WE BOTH DO.



BALMTON WAS LEVELED EARLY IN THE  
INVASION.

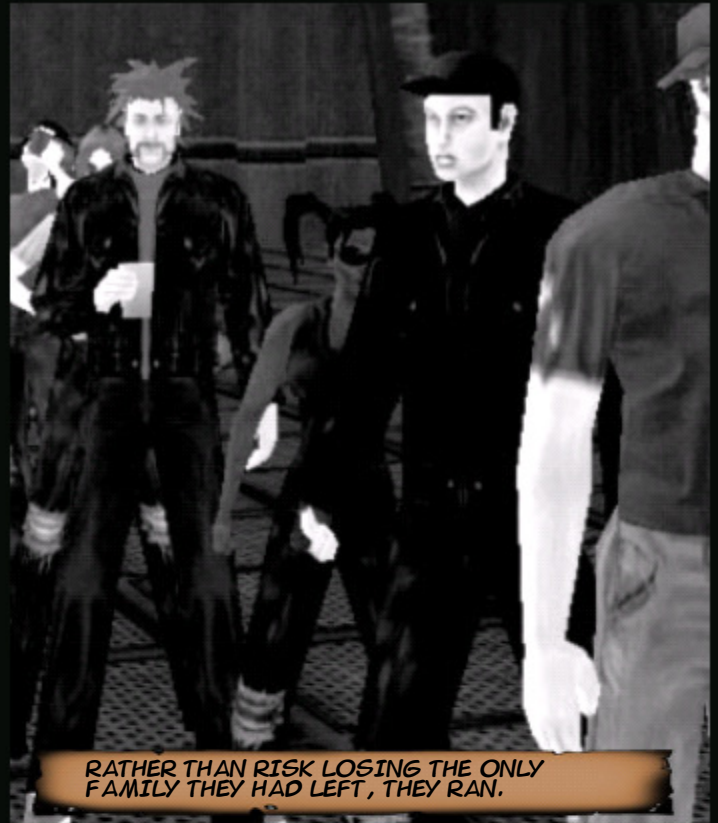


INJURED IN THE ATTACK THAT KILLED  
HER PARENTS, SHANDORA WAS  
CARRIED TO THE EVAC SITES BY HER  
OLDER BROTHER, TOYA.

FROM THERE, THEY FELL INTO STATE CARE



BUT WITH SOCIAL SERVICES STRESSED TO THE BREAKING POINT BY THE WAR, THE ODDS OF TWO KIDS FINDING FOSTER PLACEMENT TOGETHER WAS SLIM

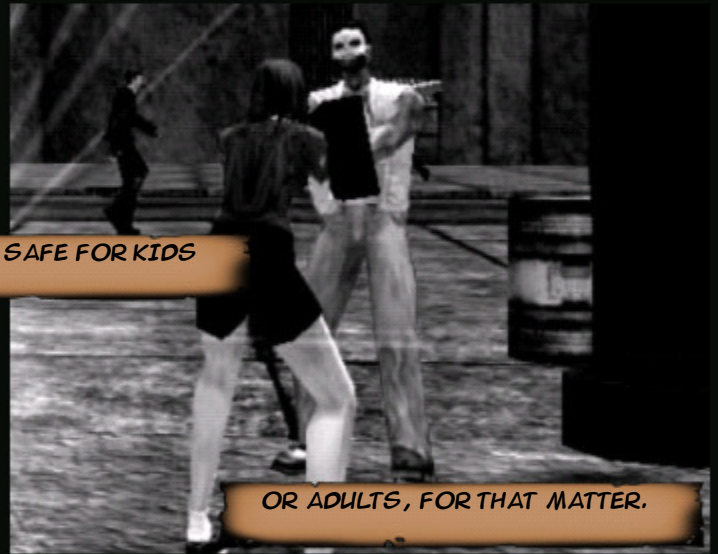


RATHER THAN RISK LOSING THE ONLY FAMILY THEY HAD LEFT, THEY RAN.

I TURNED THEM IN ONCE BEFORE- FOR THEIR OWN GOOD.

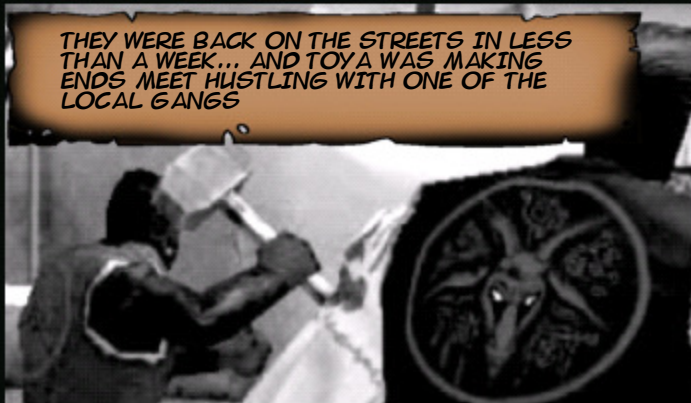


THE STREETS AREN'T SAFE FOR KIDS



OR ADULTS, FOR THAT MATTER.

THEY WERE BACK ON THE STREETS IN LESS THAN A WEEK... AND TOYA WAS MAKING ENDS MEET HUSTLING WITH ONE OF THE LOCAL GANGS



THAT'S HIS VEST SHANDORA'S WEARING.



NOW, THE HELLIONS AREN'T VERY HIGH ON THE CRIMINAL PECKING ORDER IN PARAGON CITY.



THEY MANAGE TO CONTROL A REASONABLE CHUNK OF TURF AND MAKE A LIVING SHAKING DOWN LOCALS

OCCASIONALLY, ONE OF THE MISFITS WILL SCHEME UP SOME "BIG HEIST" THAT PROMISES A LIFE OF LUXURY TO ANYONE BOLD ENOUGH TO TRY IT



THESE INEVITABLY END IN DISASTER

IT SEEMS THAT TOYA WENT MISSING ON A PARTICULARLY ILL-ADVISED ADVENTURE.



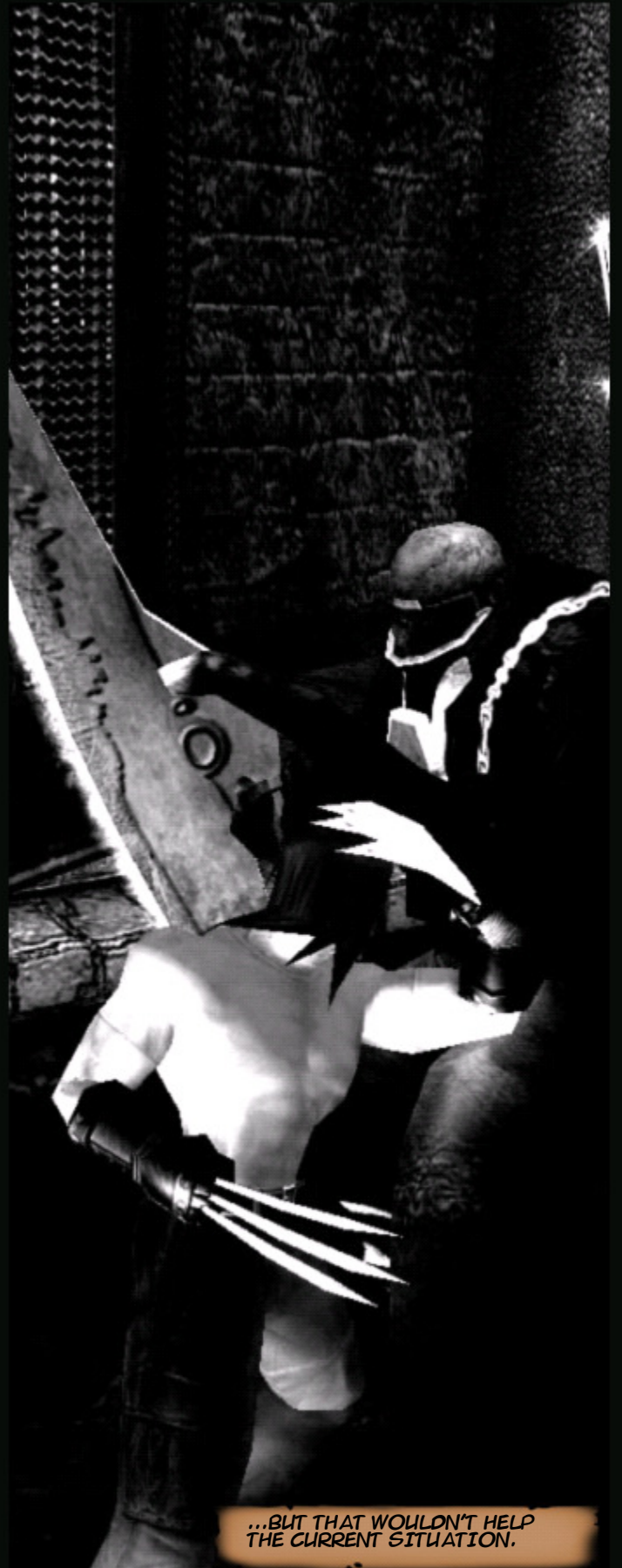
WORD ON THE STREET WAS THAT A DOZEN HELLIONS, TOYA INCLUDED, DECIDED TO BRAVE THE SEWERS, TAKE ON THE GROUP KNOWN AS "THE LOST" AND RECOVER SOME RIKTI WAR ARTIFACTS TO SELL ON THE BLACK MARKET.

I COULD GO ON FOR HOURS ON WHY THIS WAS A "BAD IDEA"

I'VE GOT HISTORY WITH THE SEWERS...



...AND THE LOST



...BUT THAT WOULDN'T HELP  
THE CURRENT SITUATION.

THE CURRENT SITUATION:



I HAVE A SCARED, HURT,  
ANGRY KID WHOSE WHOLE  
LIFE HAS TURNED UPSIDE  
DOWN IN LESS THAN A YEAR.

SHE'S LOST EVERYONE AND  
EVERYTHING EVER HELD  
DEAR,



AND SHE'LL LIKELY BE DEAD BEFORE  
SPRING ROLLS AROUND UNLESS I GET  
HER OFF THE STREETS



...UNLESS I CAN WIN ON AN  
ENTIRELY DIFFERNT KIND OF  
BATTLEFIELD THAN I'M USED TO.

I HAVE TO TRY...



I'M NO GOOD AT THIS STUFF.





LOOK, KID...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE LIKE THIS



THERE ARE PLACES TO HELP YOU.

YOU'RE STILL YOUNG

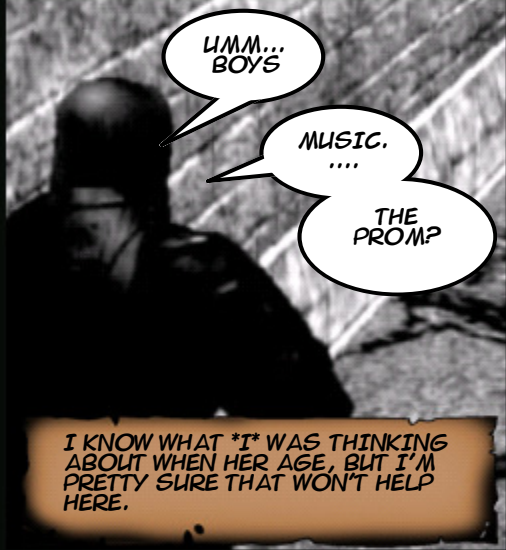
YOU SHOULDN'T BE WORRYING ABOUT HOW TO STAY WARM OR WHERE YOUR NEXT MEAL WILL COME FROM



YOU SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT...

... WELL, WHATEVER IT IS KIDS YOUR AGE THINK ABOUT...

I'M STRUGGLING HERE



UHM... BOYS

MUSIC. ....

THE PROM?

I KNOW WHAT \*I\* WAS THINKING ABOUT WHEN HER AGE, BUT I'M PRETTY SURE THAT WON'T HELP HERE.



STARTING COLLEGE... PARTIES...

...DUNGEON'S & DRAGONS... WHAT'D YOU THINK I MEANT?



CHEERLEADING?

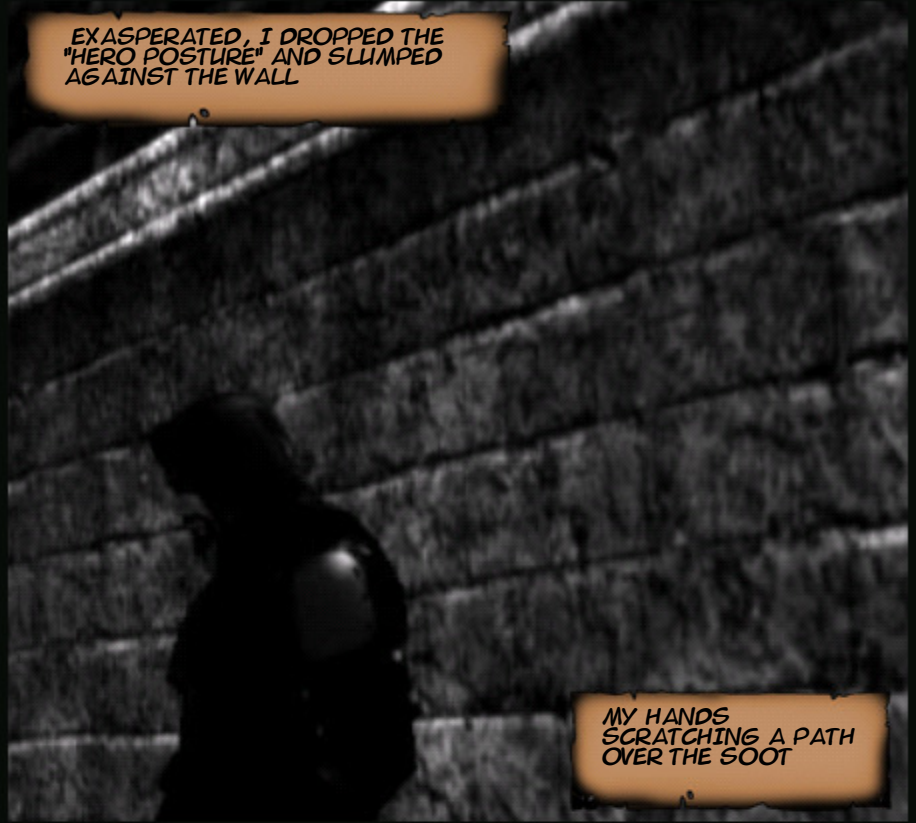
YOU KNOW: A NORMAL LIFE.

HEY, I ALREADY SAID I WASN'T ANY GOOD AT THIS

I COULDN'T SELL THIS CRAP.



EXASPERATED, I DROPPED THE "HERO POSTURE" AND SLUMPED AGAINST THE WALL



MY HANDS SCRATCHING A PATH OVER THE SOOT

YOU'RE ONE TO TALK ABOUT A NORMAL LIFE

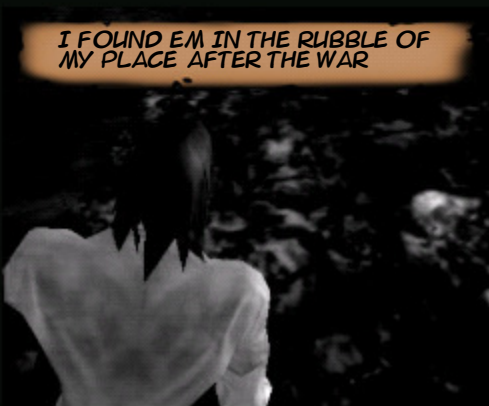


SHE WAS POINTING AT MY GAUNTLETS

HEAVY AS THEY WERE, THEY'D ALMOST BECOME A SECOND SKIN IN RECENT MONTHS



I FOUND EM IN THE RUBBLE OF MY PLACE AFTER THE WAR



STEEL GLOVES, GOING UP TO MY ELBOW, CAPPED WITH 3 FOOT-LONG BLADES THAT NEVER SEEMED TO DULL



SOME HERO PROBABLY  
FELL THERE...  
OR NEARBY...

...MAYBE EVEN COVERING MY BACK...

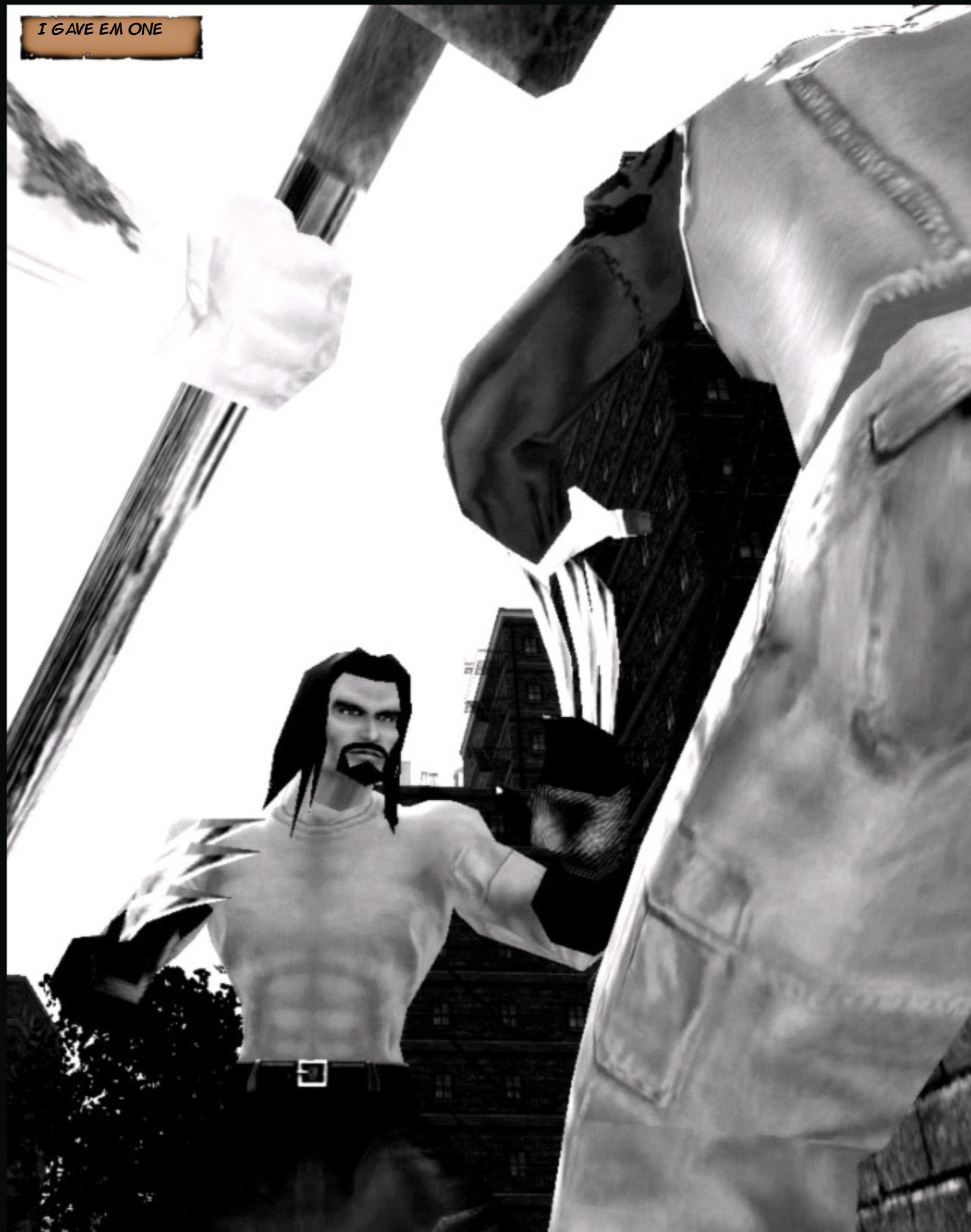


FIGURED I OWED HIM ONE.



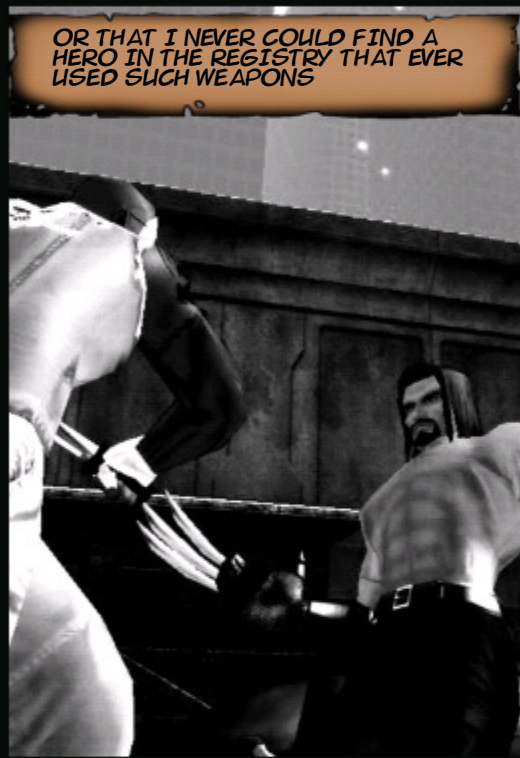
BESIDES... THE PEOPLE NEEDED A PROTECTOR

I GAVE EM ONE

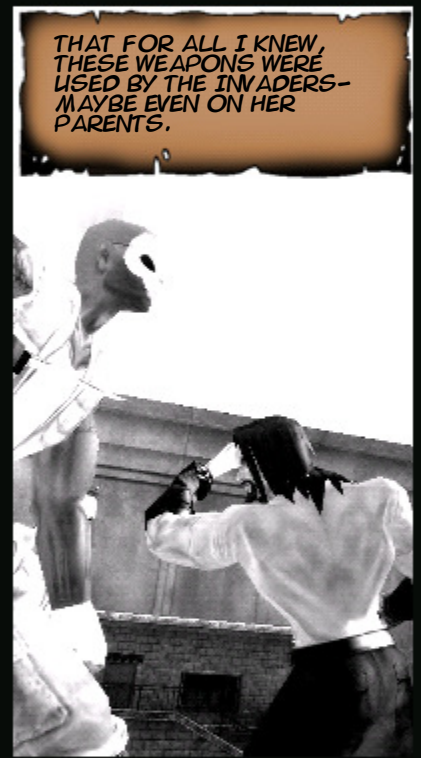




SHE DIDN'T NEED TO KNOW THAT, WITH NO "POWERS" OF MY OWN, I'D NEARLY BEEN GLUTTED A DOZEN TIMES.



OR THAT I NEVER COULD FIND A HERO IN THE REGISTRY THAT EVER USED SUCH WEAPONS



THAT FOR ALL I KNEW, THESE WEAPONS WERE USED BY THE INVADERS- MAYBE EVEN ON HER PARENTS.



NO. WHAT SHE NEEDED WAS A "PASSING OF THE TORCH" FAIRY TALE



LIFE... DEATH... REBIRTH  
THAT SORT OF CRAP.



HECK, SOMETIMES I NEED THAT TOO.



I'D ONLY PLANNED  
TO KEEP IT UP  
UNTIL THE  
INSURANCE  
SETTLEMENT CAME  
THROUGH

BY THAT  
TIME...  
WELL...



WELL, AFTER THIS KIND  
OF LIFE, NOTHING ELSE  
REALLY SIZES UP, Y'KNOW?

THE SLIGHTEST SHY  
SMILE CREPT OUT FROM  
UNDER THE GRIME.

I TOOK IT AS AN  
OPENING... ONE I WASN'T  
GOING TO MISS.

BUT THIS ISN'T ABOUT  
ME, KID. WHAT'S YOUR  
NEXT MOVE?



THE SMILE DISAPPEARED.



SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. DIDN'T HAVE TO.

HER EYES SAID IT ALL



YOU'RE SMARTER THAN THAT.

YOU CAN'T GO AFTER HIM



WHATEVER HER BROTHER FOUND TOOK OUT A WHOLE TEAM OF HELLIONS.

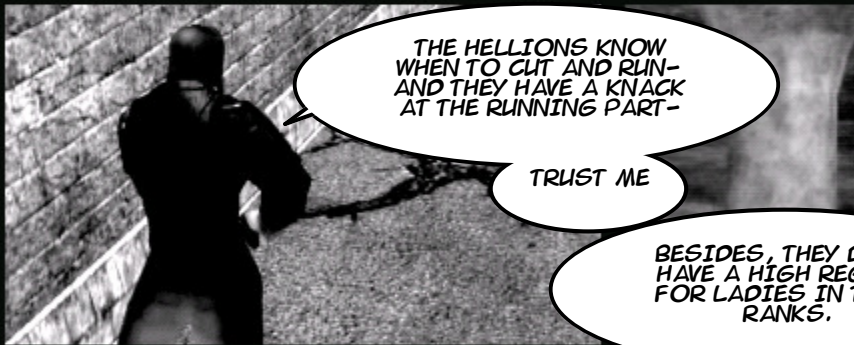


NOT ALONE BUT WE'LL FORM A SEARCH PARTY. THE HELLIONS TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN.

HER VOICE BETRAYED HER. SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE IT EITHER.

WE JUST NEE...  
BULL.

NICE FANTASY, BUT ONE THAT'LL GET HER KILLED



THE HELLIONS KNOW WHEN TO CUT AND RUN- AND THEY HAVE A KNACK AT THE RUNNING PART-

TRUST ME

BESIDES, THEY DON'T HAVE A HIGH REGARD FOR LADIES IN THEIR RANKS.



I HIT A NERVE.

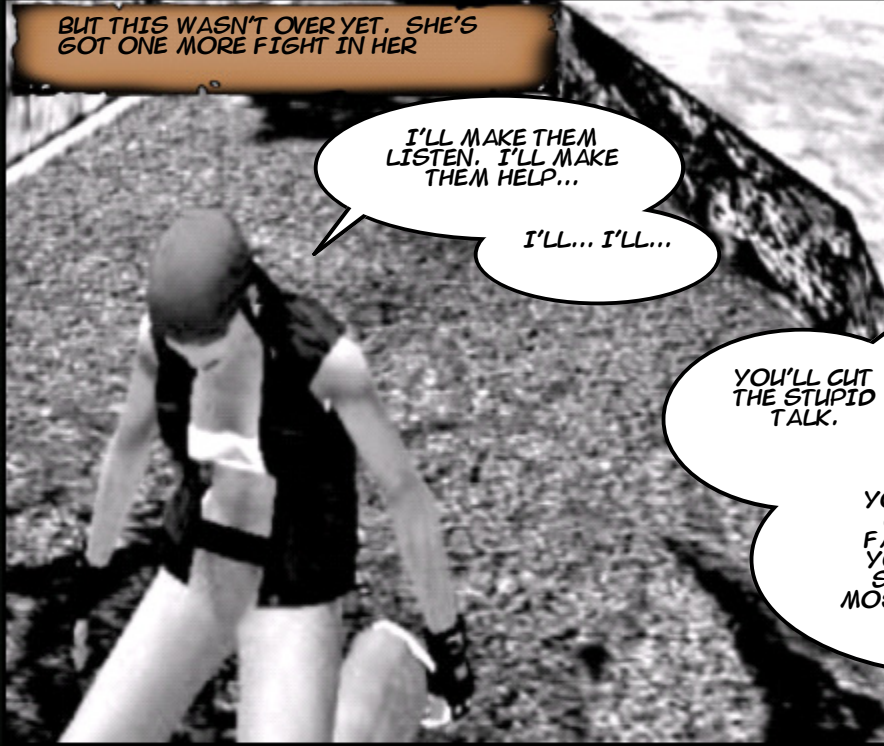
AS MUCH AS I HATED TO, I HAD TO KEEP PUSHING

BUT YOU ALREADY KNEW THAT. OTHERWISE YOU'D BE IN ONE OF THEIR TOASTY-HOT HIDEOUTS INSTEAD OF SHIVERING AROUND A FIRE BARREL



POOR KID WAS SHIVERING, AND IT WASN'T FROM THE COLD.

BUT THIS WASN'T OVER YET. SHE'S GOT ONE MORE FIGHT IN HER



I'LL MAKE THEM LISTEN. I'LL MAKE THEM HELP...  
I'LL... I'LL...



YOU'LL CUT THE STUPID TALK.

YOUR MOTHER'S GONE. YOUR FATHER'S GONE. YOUR BROTHER, SHANDORA, IS MOST LIKELY GONE.



I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU THROW YOUR LIFE AWAY. IT'S NOT WHAT TOYA WOULD WANT...

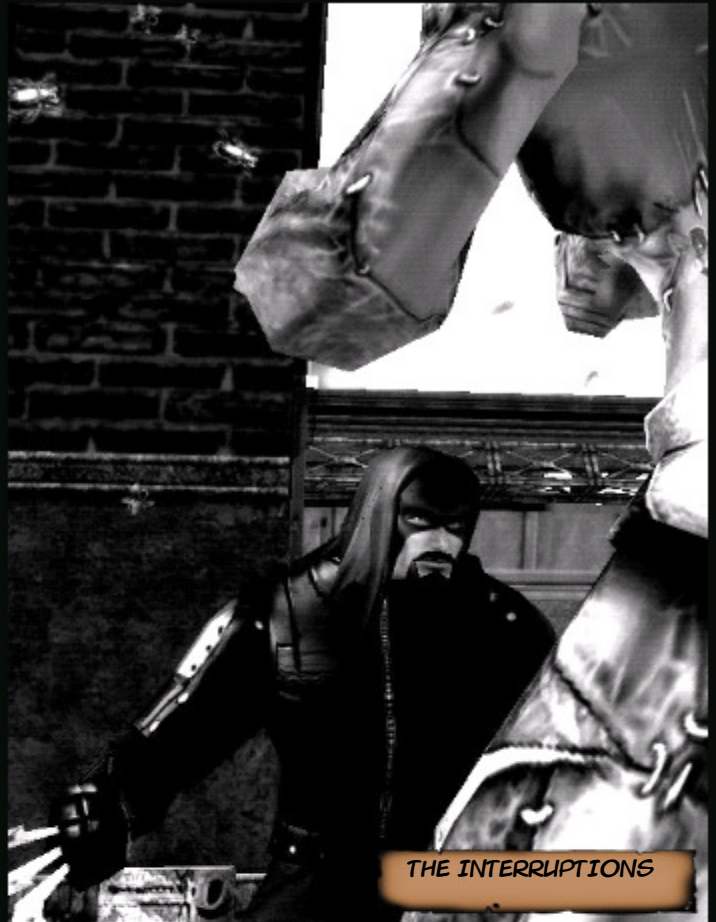
...AND IT'S CERTAINLY NOT WHAT YOUR PARENTS WOULD HAVE WANTED.

TIME TO GET OFF THE STREETS, KID.



ALMOST THROUGH...

WORST PART ABOUT  
HAVING A HEART-TO-  
HEART IN BOOMTOWN



THE INTERRUPTIONS

I MAKE SHORT WORK OF  
THE CAD AVER,



BUT WHEN I'M DONE,  
SHE'S GONE.

*I'M NOT A RELIGIOUS  
MAN, BUT I PRAYED I'D  
FIND HER SAFE IN ONE OF  
THE SHELTERS...*

*...WHILE I FEARED  
FINDING HER DEAD IN  
ONE OF THE GUTTERS.*

*SHE MANAGED TO STAY OFF  
MY RADAR FOR A WEEK.*

KINGS ROW



MAKIN TROUBLE  
WITH THE SKULLS



IMPRESSIVE  
MOVES, REALLY.



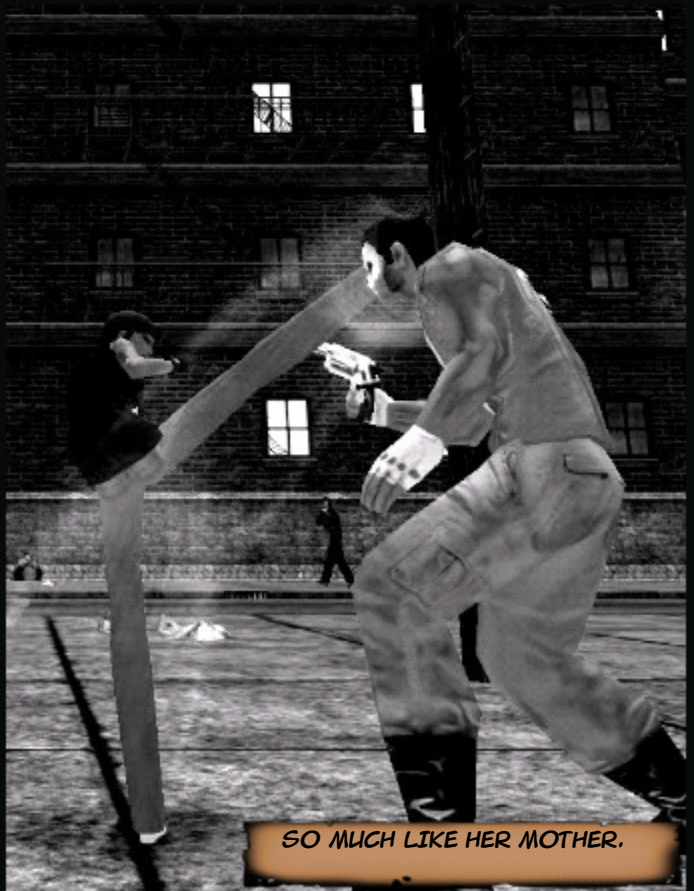
SHE LACKED HER  
BROTHER'S SIZE,...



BUT SHE MADE UP FOR IT WITH AN  
ALMOST UNNATURAL AGILITY AND  
PERFECT FORM...



SO MUCH LIKE HER MOTHER.



I FIGURED SHE WAS FORCING THE HELLIONS TO TAKE NOTICE.



MAKE SURE THEY TAKE HER SERIOUSLY

I WASN'T LOOING FORWARD TO TAKING HER DOWN.



BUT I COULDN'T LET A GANG WAR ERUPT IN THE HEART OF PARAGON CITY

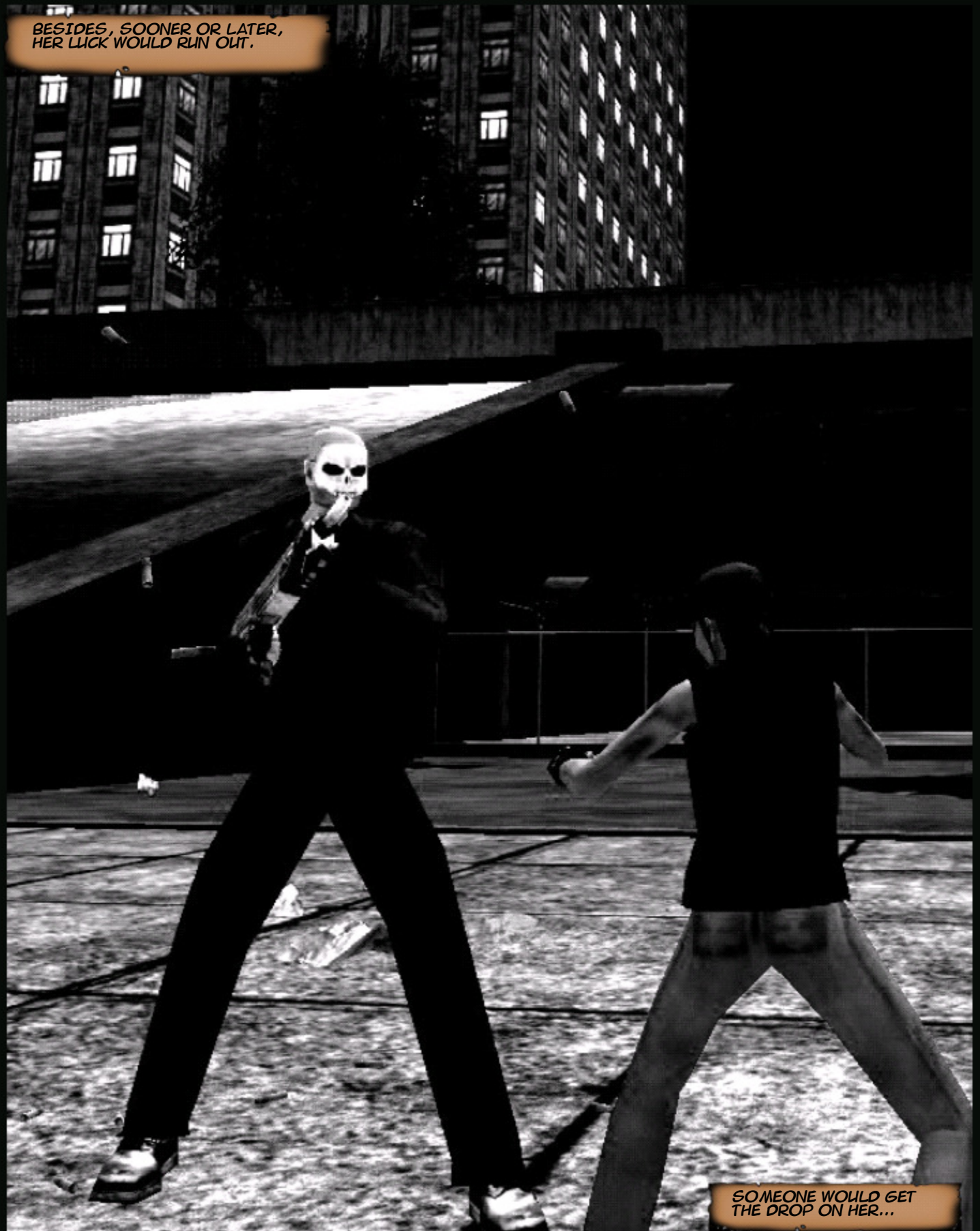
I COULD CARE LESS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THOSE BOTTOM-DWELLERS, BUT THESE BOYS HAD FIREPOWER



KINGS ROW WOULD BE THEIR BATTLEFIELD.

ANOTHER BOOMTOWN

BESIDES, SOONER OR LATER,  
HER LICK WOULD RUN OUT.



SOMEONE WOULD GET  
THE DROP ON HER...

A FINGER TWITCH FROM DEATH,  
I'M TOO FAR TO DO ANYTHING EXCEPT WATCH MY LATE FRIEND'S KID GET SLAUGHTERED



SHE DOESN'T EVEN SEE THE ONE COMING UP FROM BEHIND

NOT THAT IT MATTERS... SHE CAN'T OULTRUN A..



BULLE...



STEPPING INSIDE, KNOCKING THE GUN AWAY JUST AS IT GOES OFF...

AND FINISHING THE POOR SOP WITH A KICK HIS GRANDCHILDREN WILL FEEL





SMART MOVE, PAL.

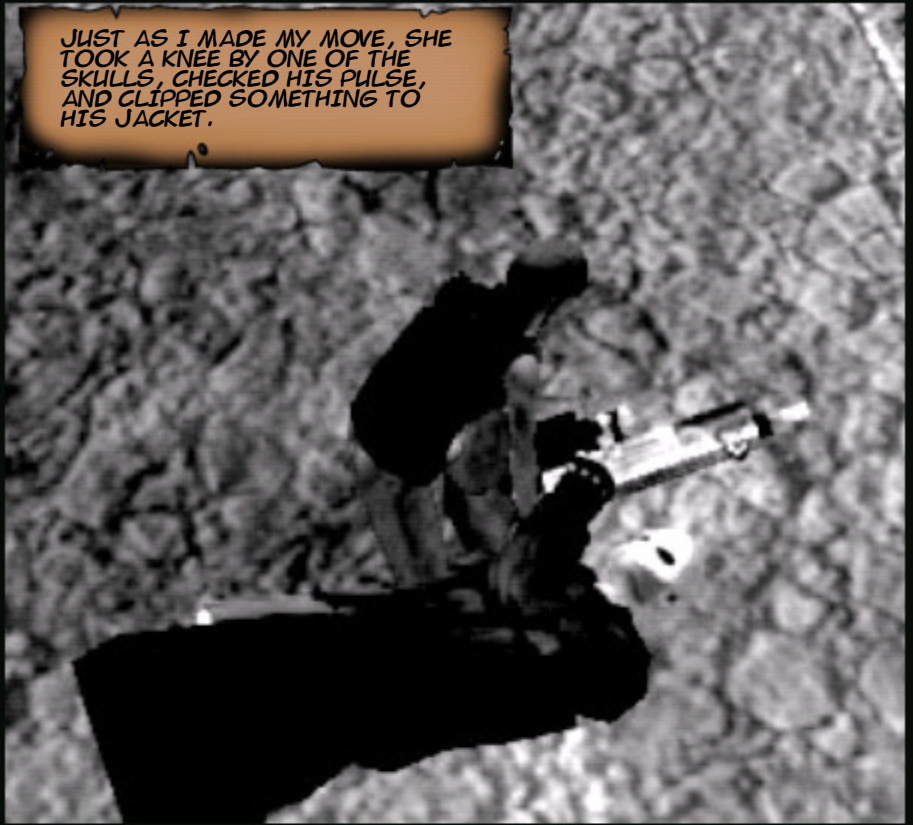


GUESS IT'S MY TURN

NO BLADES FOR THIS ONE.



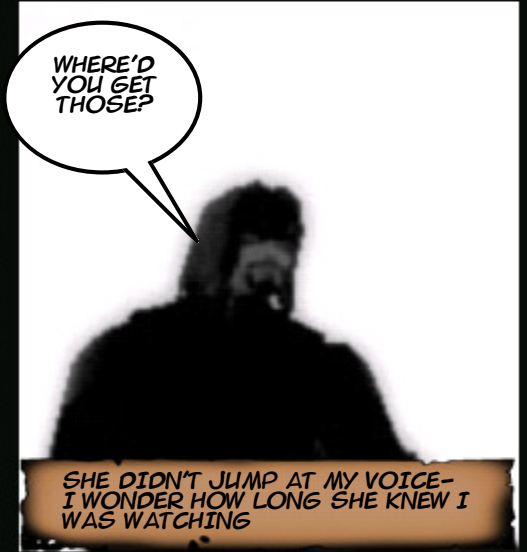
JUST AS I MADE MY MOVE, SHE TOOK A KNEE BY ONE OF THE SKULLS, CHECKED HIS PULSE, AND CLIPPED SOMETHING TO HIS JACKET.



SECONDS LATER, HE VANISHED



WHERE'D YOU GET THOSE?



AN ARREST TELEPORTER.

SHE DIDN'T JUMP AT MY VOICE- I WONDER HOW LONG SHE KNEW I WAS WATCHING

I REGISTERED, TOLD EM I WAS 18



DRAGON CITY HERO REGISTRATION

Shandora Ward



SHE TOSSED ME HER BADGE. NO FANCY CODE NAMES FOR THIS ONE



ARE YOU GOING TO REPORT ME?



I CONSIDERED IT

EVEN A MINOR WITH SUPERPOWERS NEEDS SPONSORSHIP BEFORE REGISTRATION, AND SHAN WASN'T EXACTLY SHOOTING FLAMES FROM HER FISTS.

I COULD FORCE HER INTO PLACEMENT, GET HER HELP, GET HER A NORMAL LIFE.

SPARE HER THE PAIN- THE TERROR- THAT CAME FROM THE DOZENS OF NEAR-LETHAL WOUNDS I'D GOTTEN SINCE DONNING THE GAUNTLETS.

I WANTED TO.



I REALLY DID.

BUT THAT'D JUST DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN US.

SHE'D BE BACK ON THE STREET, FIGHTING HER OWN PERSONAL CRUSADE, BUT THIS TIME WITH NO EMERGENCY TELEPORTER, NO BACKUP, AND NO SUPERVISION.

I OWED KURISU MORE THAN THAT.



IS THIS REALLY WHAT YOU WANT?



SHE NODDED.

DAD USED TO SAY THAT THE NAME "WARD" COULD MEAN EITHER "PROTECTED" OR "PROTECTOR."

AND THAT WE'D HAVE TO DECIDE WHICH DEFINITION APPLIED.

IT'S TIME TO BE A PROTECTOR



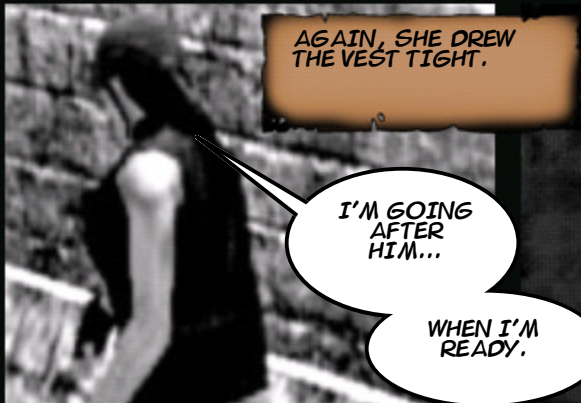
BESIDES

A GHOST OF A SMILE CRACKED ON THAT FACE

AFTER THIS KIND OF LIFE, NOTHING ELSE REALLY SIZES UP, Y'KNOW



I COULDN'T ARGUE WITH THAT



AGAIN, SHE DREW THE VEST TIGHT.

I'M GOING AFTER HIM...

WHEN I'M READY.



KID, WHEN YOU'RE READY.

I'LL GO WITH YOU.

THREE WEEKS AFTER REGISTERING AT ATLAS PARK, SHANDORA WARD CARRIED THE BADLY-MUTATED BODY OF HER BROTHER OUT OF THE SEWERS AS PARTIZAN AND OTHERS COVERED HER ESCAPE

TOYA REMAINS HELD IN THE ZIG REHABILITATION WARD.

HE STILL DENIES ANY MEMORY OF HIS FORMER LIFE

SHANDORA VISITS HIM EVERY FRIDAY.

WHEN SHE'S NOT PROWLING THE STREETS OF PARAGON CITY, SHANDORA CAN BE FOUND WORKING AT THE CYRUS THOMPSON COMMUNITY CENTER.

IN EXCHANGE FOR HER HELP, THEY LET HER USE THE COMMUNITY ROOM TO TEACH SELF DEFENSE TUESDAY NIGHTS

SHE'S BEEN AWARDED HER GED AND IS SCHEDULED TO START CLASSES AT PCU NEXT SEMESTER.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES:

## SHANDORA WARD

SHANDORA WAS MY FIRST "NATURAL" MARTIAL ARTS / SUPER REFLEXES SCRAPPER. SHE'S NEVER HAD A TRAVEL POWER, AND LIKELY NEVER WILL, BUT SHE'S QUICK ENOUGH ON HER FEET.

I'VE HAD TROUBLE ON OCCASION WITH SHAN BEING "HIT ON." THOUGH I TRIED NOT TO DRESS HER TOO PROVOCATIVELY, I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT HER SMALLER CHEST SIZE & COLOR COORDINATED COSTUME MEANS I'M MORE LIKELY A WOMAN. MY WIFE LOVES THAT.

SHAN'S OFTEN FOUND SOLO IN THE PVP ZONES, BUT SHE ALSO OCCASIONALLY TEAMS WITH MY WIFE'S FIRE/FIRE CONTROLLER "DEVOURING FLAME" AND ONE OF RIAN FROSTDRAKE'S ALWAYS-CHANGING ALTS



SHANDORA'S ORIGINAL "RUNAWAY" LOOK. SHE'LL OCCASIONALLY DRESS DOWN-PARTICULARLY IN MESSY SEWER RUNS.

NOW THAT SHE'S EARNED SOME SPENDING CASH, SHANDORA'S CLEANED UP A BIT.

SHE'S LEFT HER BROTHER'S OLD VEST WITH HIM, INSTEAD SPORTING A LEATHER JACKET THAT CAN ABSORB MORE ABUSE.

SHE ALSO LOST THAT RATTY BANDANA

SHANDORA SUPPORTED LONGBOW OPERATIONS IN BLOODY BAY, SIRENS CALL, AND NOW WARBURG.

ALTHOUGH SHE ISN'T AN OFFICIAL MEMBER, SHE WEARS A MODIFIED SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIFORM WHILE IN THE FIELD WITH THEM.

HER MARTIAL ARTS ROBES ARE BASED ON HER MOTHER'S LOOK

## AUTHOR'S NOTES:

# PARTIZAN

PARTIZAN STARTED LIFE AS THE CLAWS SCRAPER "TRENCHANT" ON THE LIBERTY SERVER. NEITHER REGEN NOR INVULNERABILITY REALLY SEEMED RIGHT FOR MY "NATURAL" HERO HERE, SO I DECIDED THAT STALKING MIGHT BE FOR HIM.

I DELETED MY LEVEL 30 HERO ONLY TO FIND THAT, LESS THAN A MINUTE LATER, THE NAME WAS NO LONGER AVAILABLE FOR THE VILLAIN SIDE. I RETCONNED THE NAME CHANGE- HE WAS ALWAYS PARTIZAN.

WHEN THINGS SETTLED IN PARAGON, PARTIZAN DECIDED THAT HE'D BE BEST UTILIZED IN THE ROGUE ISLES. HE BUILT UP A COVER STORY AS A RADICAL CRITIC OF CITY HALL- RADICAL ENOUGH TO RESORT TO VIOLENCE. ONCE ON THE ROGUE ISLES, HE METES OUT HIS OWN FORM OF STREET JUSTICE AND MAINTAINS A GROUP OF "FALLEN HERO" SORTS KNOWN AS "THE REVENANTS"

PARTIZAN CONTINUES TO INFILTRATE ARACHNOS AND FEED INFORMATION BACK TO PARAGON CITY. HE'S OFTEN SEEN RAIDING WITH THE FIRE CONTROLLER "FORSAKEN PYRA" AND THE ALWAYS-COLORFUL VIOLET TENDENCIES.



PARTIZAN'S STREET GARB. WITHOUT POWERS OF HIS OWN, SUPRISE AND DECEPTION ARE KEY.

THE NIGHT WIND OFF THE SURF IS CHILLY ENOUGH THAT HE FINALLY INVESTED IN A MILITARY SURPLUS JACKET



EARLY IN HIS TRAVELS ON THE ROGUE ISLES, PARTIZAN 'ACQUIRED' AN ARACHNOS CAPE AND HELM.

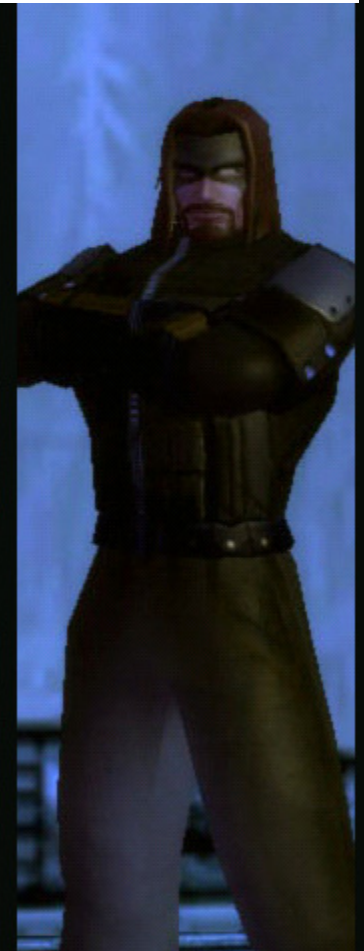
HE WEARS THIS IN PART TO FEIGN LOYALTY TO ARACHNOS... IN PART AS A DARE TO ANYONE:

TRY TO TAKE IT BACK



WHEN GOING AGAINST LONGBOW, PARTIZAN OFTEN TAKES THE GUISE OF ONE OF THEIR OWN OPERATIVES....

... OR IS THIS HIS REAL UNIFORM? WHEN HE ENTERS WARBURG, IS THIS WHAT HE USES TO MEET WITH LONGBOW AND PASS INTELLIGENCE THEIR WAY?



PARTIZAN'S ORIGINAL "COSTUME" CONSISTED OF BASIC, WELL WORN PANTS AND AN OLD SWAT JACKET FOR ADDED PROTECTION...

AND... OF COURSE... THE GALINTLETS.