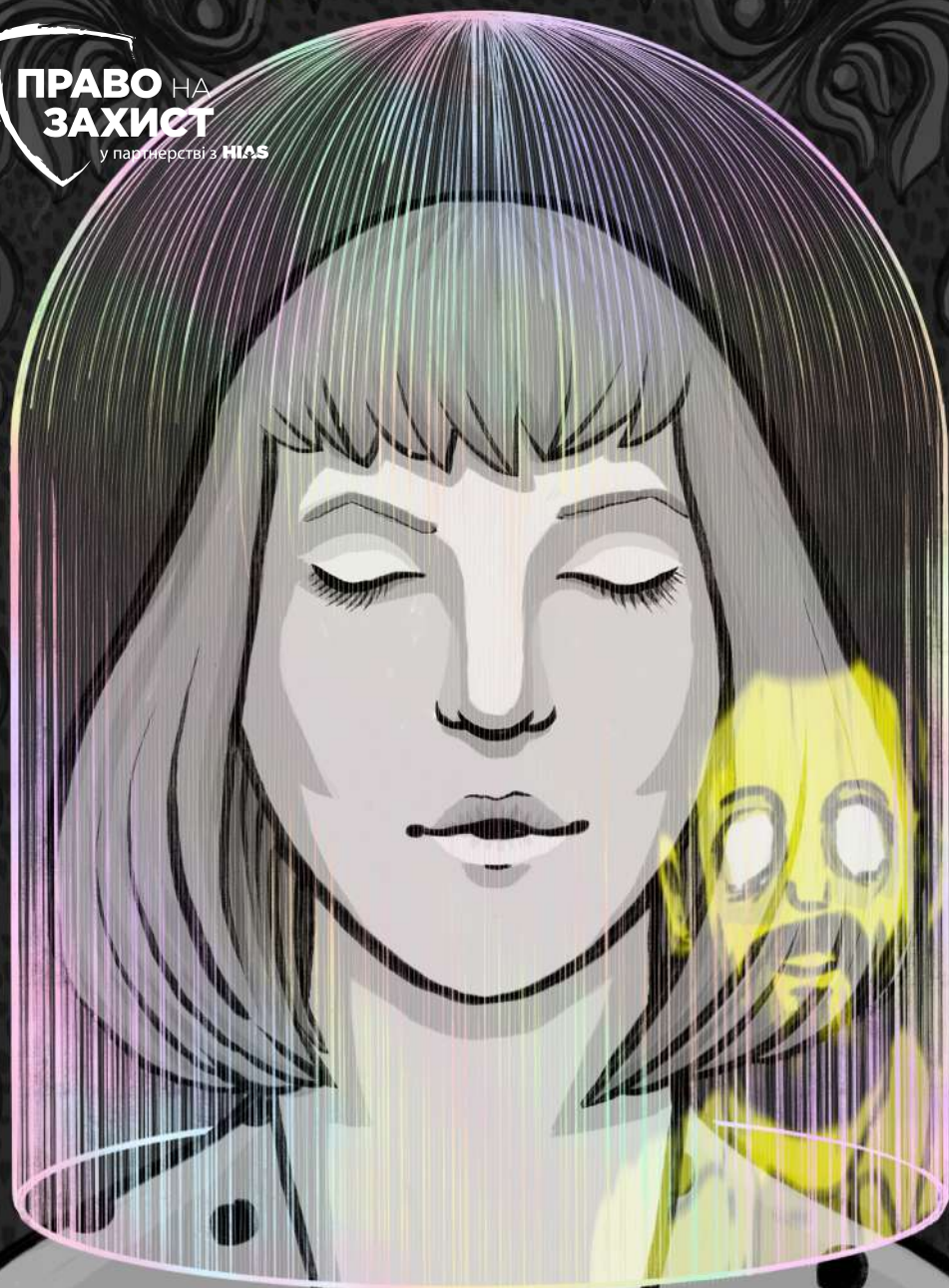


THE C+A+P+S+U+L+E+S

ПРАВО НА
ЗАХИСТ

у партнерстві з HIAS



Svitlana TARATORINA • Anna TARNOVETSKA

THE
C+A+P+S+U+L+E+S

This comic was created by Svitlana Taratorina and Anna Tarnovetskaya within the framework of the project within the framework of the project «Building peace and establishing dialogue in Ukraine», which is implemented by the CF «Right to Defense». The opinions, views and statements expressed in this publication belong exclusively to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of Pravo na Zahyst BF. The comic was created on the basis of real stories of dialogue group participants (people on both sides of the contact line).

This comic is the result of quite complex and emotionally difficult meetings. A meeting of people who, due to various circumstances and events, physically ended up on different sides of the demarcation line/front in Eastern Ukraine. The experience of these people, their vision, assessments of situations and psychological states were formed by direct or indirect stay in the war. During the meetings, these people tried to explain to each other, and quite often only to themselves, what was happening to them, to us, to the reality we all got into. Where am I on this line of events, where would I like to be? Is there a shared space, or is it polarized?

Interview and script by *Svetlana Taratorina*

Illustrations by *Anna Tarnovetska*

Translated from Ukrainian by *Nata Hrytsenko*

Design by *Eliash Strongowski*

Typesetting and lettering by *Kateryna Bazarova*

The Capsules. Svetlana Taratorina. – Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo, 2022. – 36 p.

In reality, a man and a woman from different regions of Ukraine are looking for ways to understand each other, overcoming stereotypes and learning to hear each other. In a dream, Darkness took over part of the country, built a Wall and put capsules on the inhabitants of its half so that they believed that there were monsters on the other side. Over time, people began to think the same way in the territory without Darkness. How can we prevent the Darkness from taking away our ability to see each other? How to hear someone who is near and at the same time already a stranger? How to destroy the Wall? The heroes of the eerie, true and at the same time metaphorical comic «The Capsules» seek answers to these questions.

The story is based on real stories of residents of controlled and non-controlled territories of Ukraine.

August 2019. The dialogue, session one.



All started talking at once.





WE'RE HERE TO SHARE OUR STORIES AND EXPERIENCES. TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION MORE WIDELY, TO FIND OR RECALL SOME COMMON GROUND.



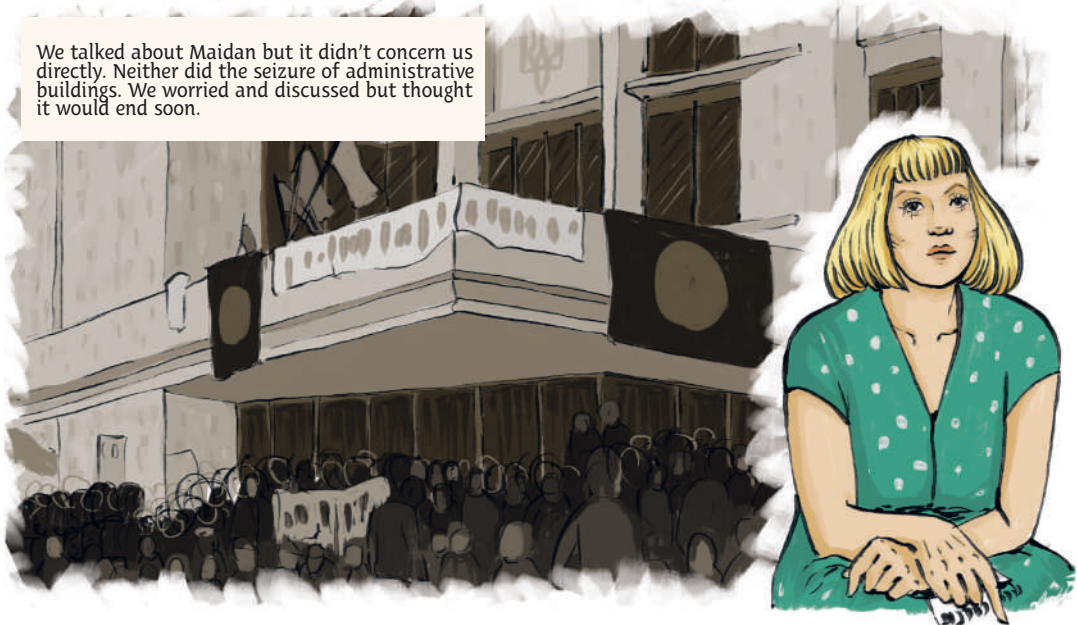
WHO WANTS TO TELL US WHY ARE YOU HERE TODAY?

I'M FROM DONETSK. LIVED THERE MY WHOLE LIFE, WORKED AT THE SCHOOL. GOT INTO THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD WHEN THE WAR BEGAN.

AND HOW DID IT START FOR YOU?

'Why are you here' is the hardest question.

We talked about Maidan but it didn't concern us directly. Neither did the seizure of administrative buildings. We worried and discussed but thought it would end soon.



I was ready for my vacation in August 2014.



I went home but the road was blocked by the armed military. I found out people died less than a mile from me.



And then the nightmare began.



Darkness began to cover my country.



Later something emerged and split the country.
Darkness called it the Wall.

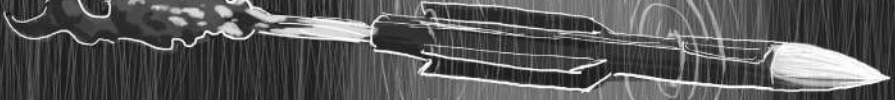


IS IT
IMPENETRABLE?



ONLY BOMBS
ARE ABLE TO COME
THROUGH.

Darkness said the other side of the country attacked us. Our own people.



DARKNESS IS RIGHT. THEY ATTACKED US.

WE HAVE TO LEAVE THE CITY!

BUT WHY WOULD THEY FIGHT US, NOT THE DARKNESS?

WE NEED TO RESIST THE DARKNESS.

I couldn't comprehend what's going on. I thought we just have to be patient and everything would be fine. But it only got worse.

Many have left.



YOU CAN LEAVE TOO. THEY SAY THERE'S NO DARKNESS THERE.



But how can I leave? My home is here, my old parents too. I wouldn't abandon them. And is there really no Darkness behind the wall?



With the Maidan. I've just moved to Kyiv from Odesa, got a new job, worked in two shifts and then attended the protests. I could barely keep up with the events after February 18th.



We've just mourned those fallen on the Maidan...



When Crimea got occupied.



And then the war began.

I didn't know what to do, how to make myself useful.



CAN YOU HELP?
A LOT OF DISPLACED
PEOPLE TO
ACCOMMODATE.

DISPLACED?
FROM THE ANNEXED
TERRITORIES? ARE YOU
SURE WE CAN TRUST
THEM?

NO IDEA.
YOU'LL SEE FOR
YOURSELF.

For me 2014 was a never-ending nightmare.



As time went on, the Darkness thickened. There were less people. Some of them moved out and some hid. Others were taken by the Darkness, swallowed or devoured.



We've learned to deal with the Darkness next door, trying to move on, finding the bright side in simple relationships. We bought groceries, went to schools and universities, and did our jobs. Some went to dances or formed an amateur theatre, others brought cosiness to their homes. And I still wondered what's happening behind the wall.

I kept looking for answers. Did the rest of the country really forget us? But all I found were dreadful calls from the Darkness not to seek contacts with the other side.



YOU'RE GOING WITH US.



LOOK! YOU WERE SO CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT'S THERE.



Darkness said people behind the wall were infected and turned into monsters.



WE'VE KINDLY LEFT A PASSAGE. WE'RE NOT HOLDING ANYONE. YOU CAN LEAVE.



WE'RE BUILDING A TOWER TO PROTECT THE WALL FROM MONSTERS.



But I was afraid. Fear deprives one of freedom.





WE ARE CITIZENS OF THIS COUNTRY, JUST LIKE YOU. IT'S NOT OUR FAULT DARKNESS CAME TO US.

MOM, WHERE ARE WE GOING TO LIVE?

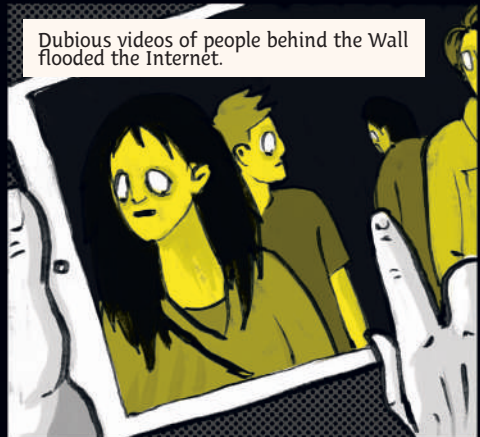
The more I talked with the displaced, the more I wished to know what's really happening behind the Wall.



THEY ARE ALL INFECTED THERE.

I'D KEEP AN EYE ON THOSE WHO MOVED, TOO.

There were rumours in our part of the country.



Dubious videos of people behind the Wall flooded the Internet.



Meet the people living behind the Wall. 862-202-22-18

SO THEY'RE NOT DISPLACED, THEY'RE LIVING BEHIND THE WALL NOW, RIGHT?

Seeking information on those I found something unexpected.



THEY ARE. SEE YOU.

They called themselves Group D and promised to answer my questions.



DO YOU THINK
THOSE ARE REAL
MONSTERS?

WHATEVER
THE DARKNESS
SAYS, I DON'T
BELIEVE IT.

ENOUGH.
WE'RE NOT
TALKING ABOUT
THAT.



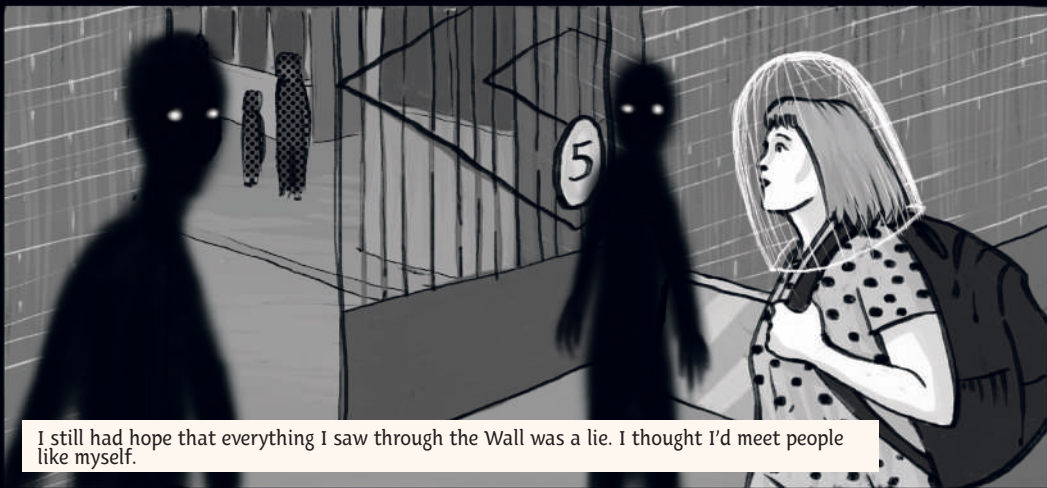
DARKNESS
AGAIN?



YOU CAN GO BEHIND
THE WALL. PEOPLE LEAVE
AND COME BACK SAFELY.
D HOSTS THE MEETINGS.
HE'LL MEET YOU ON
THE OTHER SIDE.



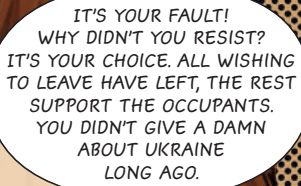
Darkness ordered to keep the «capsule» no matter what.



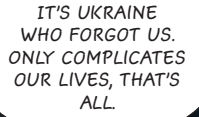
I still had hope that everything I saw through the Wall was a lie. I thought I'd meet people like myself.



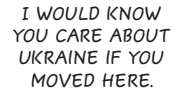
I was wrong. It was scary. For the first time I realized I had no idea who D was.



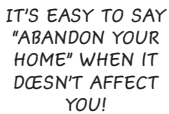
IT'S YOUR FAULT!
WHY DIDN'T YOU RESIST?
IT'S YOUR CHOICE. ALL WISHING
TO LEAVE HAVE LEFT, THE REST
SUPPORT THE OCCUPANTS.
YOU DIDN'T GIVE A DAMN
ABOUT UKRAINE
LONG AGO.



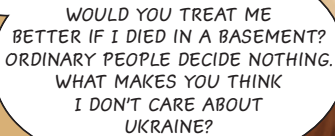
IT'S UKRAINE
WHO FORGOT US.
ONLY COMPLICATES
OUR LIVES, THAT'S
ALL.



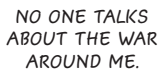
I WOULD KNOW
YOU CARE ABOUT
UKRAINE IF YOU
MOVED HERE.



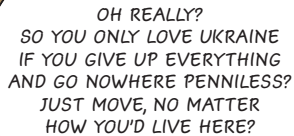
IT'S EASY TO SAY
"ABANDON YOUR
HOME" WHEN IT
DIDN'T AFFECT
YOU!



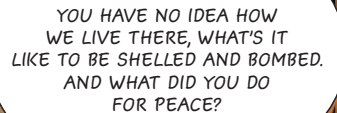
WOULD YOU TREAT ME
BETTER IF I DIED IN A BASEMENT?
ORDINARY PEOPLE DECIDE NOTHING.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK
I DON'T CARE ABOUT
UKRAINE?




NO ONE TALKS
ABOUT THE WAR
AROUND ME.




OH REALLY?
SO YOU ONLY LOVE UKRAINE
IF YOU GIVE UP EVERYTHING
AND GO NOWHERE PENNILESS?
JUST MOVE, NO MATTER
HOW YOU'D LIVE HERE?




YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW
WE LIVE THERE, WHAT'S IT
LIKE TO BE SHELLED AND BOMBED.
AND WHAT DID YOU DO
FOR PEACE?




DO YOU EVER
THINK ABOUT US?
ABOUT OUR LIFE
THERE?




IT'S YOUR FAULT
THE DARKNESS CAME.
YOU'VE NEVER LOVED
OUR REGION.



I'VE BEEN HELPING
DISPLACED PEOPLE FOR
SIX YEARS, WORKING ON
RECONCILIATION.




YOU'RE ALL
INFECTED BY THE
DARKNESS.




WORKING TOO
BAD THEN IF YOU
STILL HAVEN'T
RECONCILE
ANYONE.



LOOK AT
YOURSELVES.
YOU ARE THE
MONSTERS
HERE.



YOUR SIDE IS
SHELLING JUST LIKE
OUR SIDE.



YOU CANNOT
FORCE US TO BE
LIKE YOU.

ARE YOU STILL
SHELLED?

DO YOU CARE
ABOUT US?

WE CANNOT GET
WHAT YOU WANT, WHY
DO YOU STAY THERE WITH
THE DARKNESS.

WE WANT
TO PROTECT
OURSELVES FROM
THE DARKNESS.

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT ANYMORE. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND US.

I GUESS WE ALL NEED TO CALM DOWN. LET'S TAKE A BREAK.

We're nothing alike.
No common ground at all.

SLAM!

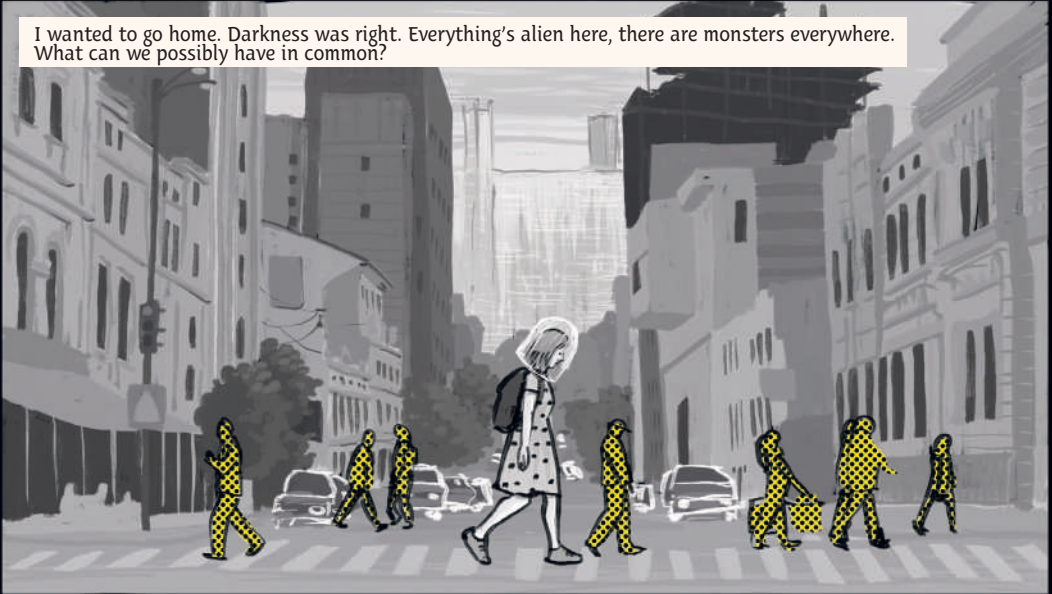
TRY TO UNDERSTAND HER EXPERIENCE. MAYBE YOU'LL HEAR HER THEN. THERE'RE ALWAYS TWO SIDES IN A DIALOGUE.

SHE SHOULD HEAR ME AS WELL.

HERE, VISIT THIS PLACE. I HOPE ANASTASIA WILL BE THERE TOO.



I wanted to go home. Darkness was right. Everything's alien here, there are monsters everywhere. What can we possibly have in common?



IS ANYTHING WRONG?
DO YOU NEED HELP?
DRINK SOME WATER.
UNFAMILIAR CITY MAY
BE CONFUSING.



She offered me help. So the monsters can feel. Or is it a trick to deceive me?

D gave me this address. He said I'll find answers there.

SUCH A STRANGE EXHIBITION.
SEEMS LIKE THAT ARTIST
LOOKED INTO MY SOUL. STILL
CANNOT UNDERSTAND
WHAT I SAW.

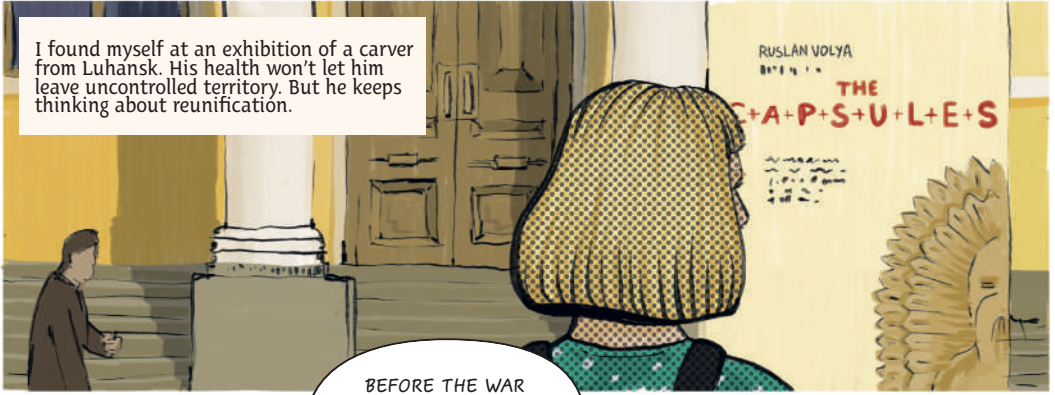
YEAH,
IT'S NOT FAR.
I'VE BEEN THERE.
IMPRESSIVE.

DO YOU KNOW
WHERE IT IS?
HOW DO I GET
THERE?



I was amazed by the monster woman's words. How can you not understand what you see? Didn't we all see the same? My curiosity has overcome mistrust.

I found myself at an exhibition of a carver from Luhansk. His health won't let him leave uncontrolled territory. But he keeps thinking about reunification.



BEFORE THE WAR
RUSLAN VOLYA STUDIED
AND RECREATED WOODEN
RELIEFS FROM FRENCH
GALLEONS.


SINCE THE BEGINNING
OF THE CONFLICT HE FOCUSED
ON UKRAINIAN HOUSEHOLD
ICONS.
IT'S A STORY OF A MAN WHO
DĒSN'T LOSE FAITH DESPITE HIS
DISABILITY AND KEEPS HEALING
AND CONNECTING OUR ISOLATED
POLARISED CAPSULES.



Original icons couldn't be moved through the checkpoint so photocopies were exhibited.




How could it be? How could the artist know the way "capsules" created by the Darkness work?



THE ARTIST ASSUMES WE ALL WEAR THE CAPSULES WITHOUT KNOWING IT. IT'S A METAPHOR FOR OUR TIMES.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN?



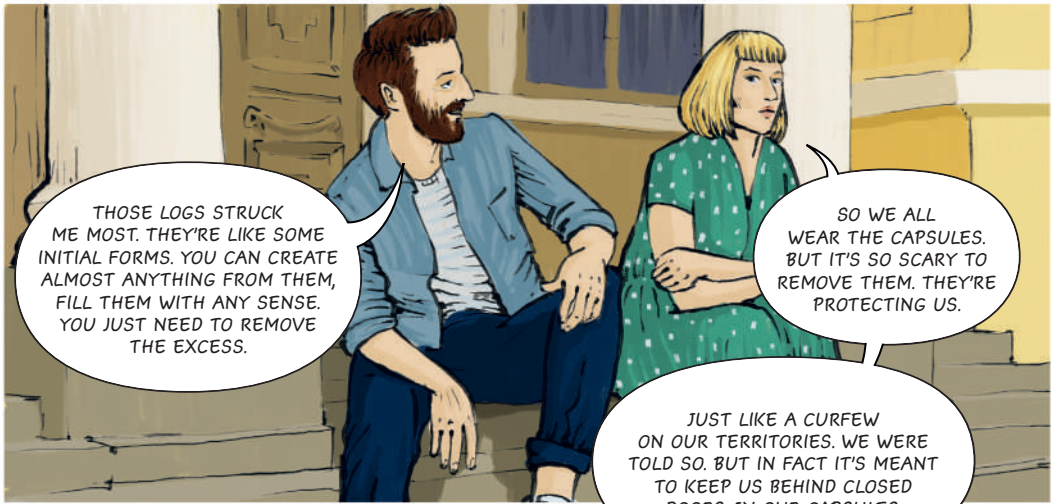
BUT I AM WEARING THE «CAPSULE».

DARKNESS MADE ME PUT IT ON BEFORE MOVING THROUGH THE WALL TOLD ME IT WOULD PROTECT ME FROM INFECTION. FROM TURNING INTO A MONSTER LIKE YOU.

NO, YOU'RE WRONG. I SEE A MONSTER. AND I AM JUST AN ORDINARY PERSON. WE ALL ARE BEHIND THE WALL THERE ARE PEOPLE THERE! AND DARKNESS..

BUT YOU ARE THE MONSTER, AND ALL WHO YOU CAME WITH AS WELL.

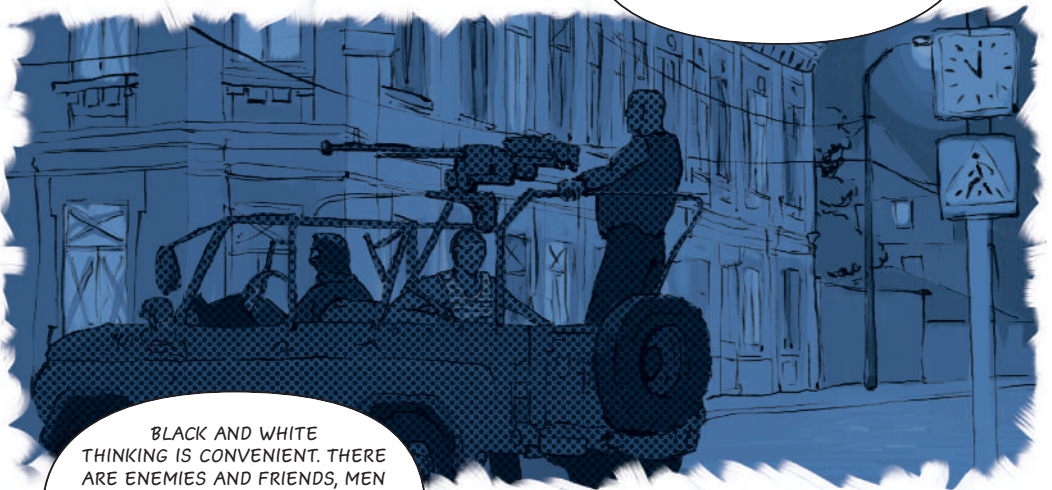
I THINK I SEE THE PROBLEM. LET'S GO OUTSIDE.



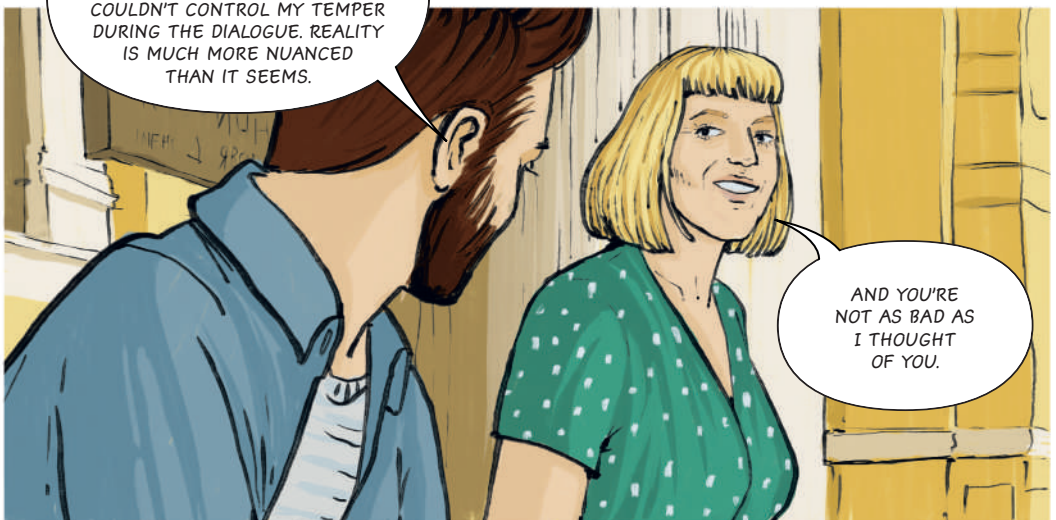
THOSE LOGS STRUCK ME MOST. THEY'RE LIKE SOME INITIAL FORMS. YOU CAN CREATE ALMOST ANYTHING FROM THEM, FILL THEM WITH ANY SENSE. YOU JUST NEED TO REMOVE THE EXCESS.

SO WE ALL WEAR THE CAPSULES. BUT IT'S SO SCARY TO REMOVE THEM. THEY'RE PROTECTING US.

JUST LIKE A CURFEW ON OUR TERRITORIES. WE WERE TOLD SO. BUT IN FACT IT'S MEANT TO KEEP US BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. IN OUR CAPSULES.



BLACK AND WHITE THINKING IS CONVENIENT. THERE ARE ENEMIES AND FRIENDS, MEN AND MONSTERS. I'M SORRY I COULDN'T CONTROL MY TEMPER DURING THE DIALOGUE. REALITY IS MUCH MORE NUANCED THAN IT SEEMS.



AND YOU'RE NOT AS BAD AS I THOUGHT OF YOU.



I GUESS I'M WEARING
A CAPSULE TOO THOUGH
I CANNOT SEE IT.
AND OTHERS WEAR
THEM TOO.

BUT YOU WEREN'T
FORCED TO PUT IT
ON, WERE YOU?

NO, I WASN'T. I THINK IT
HAS APPEARED ON ITS OWN,
JUST LIKE THIS WALL. IT DOESN'T
PROTECT US, JUST DISTORTS OUR
VISION. «THE CAPSULES»
DO THE SAME.

BUT WE'VE
BUILT THE TOWERS
OURSELVES.

WE HAVE.
ON BOTH
SIDES.



He tried to remove the «capsule» then. It was horrible. I was sure Darkness would come any moment and punish him for impudence.



THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO, BUT I'M GLAD TO KNOW YOU'RE NOT A MONSTER. SOMETIMES OUR OWN EYES DECEIVE US.



SEE, WE'RE NOT SO DIFFERENT. WE HAVE SOME COMMON GROUND.

SHUT BY «THE CAPSULE» ESPECIALLY.

LIKE WHAT?



WELL, I LOVE MY PARENTS AND MY CITY. EVEN DARKNESS CAN'T CHANGE THAT.



TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CITY. HAS DARKNESS CHANGED IT GREATLY?

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING IN COMMON?

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT IT WAS LIKE BEFORE AND WHAT IT SURELY WOULD BE AFTER. AND YOU'LL TELL ME ABOUT YOURS.

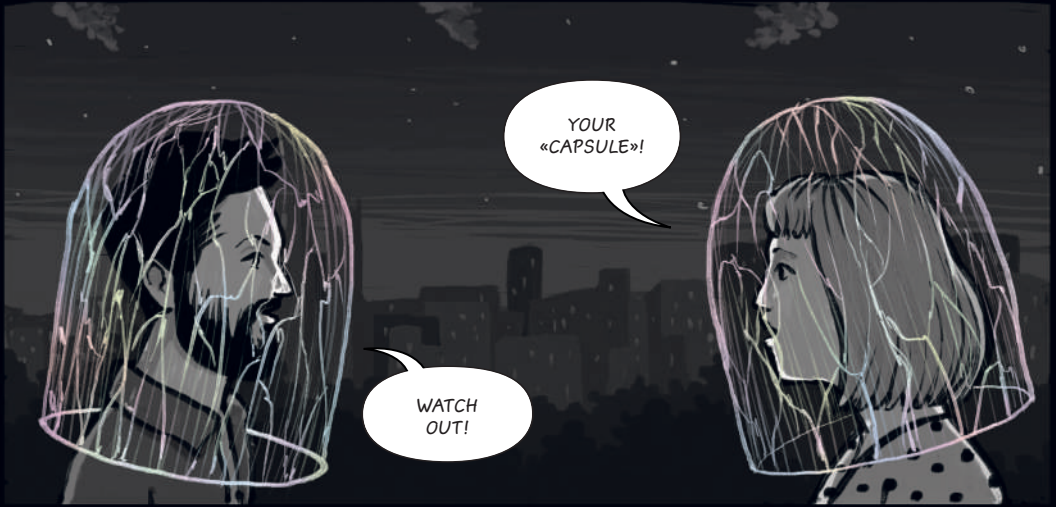
YEAH.





AND DONETSK ACCORDING TO THE LEGENDS WAS BUILT BY ZAPOROZHIAN COSSACKS AND LATER BY JOHN HUGHES FROM WALES. I'VE NEVER EVEN LEFT IT BEFORE THE WAR-





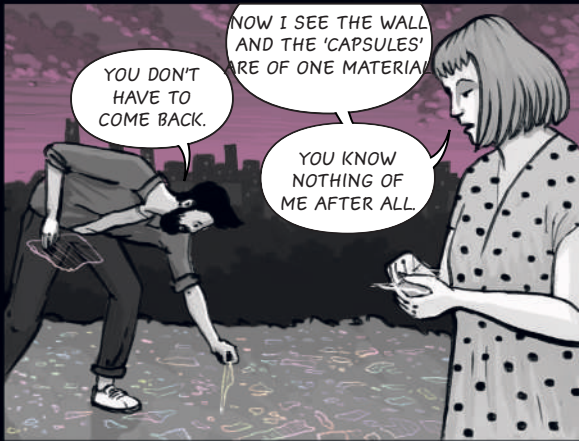
YOUR «CAPSULE»!

WATCH OUT!



SO THE 'CAPSULES' CAN BE REMOVED. YOU MUST TELL ABOUT IT BEHIND THE WALL.

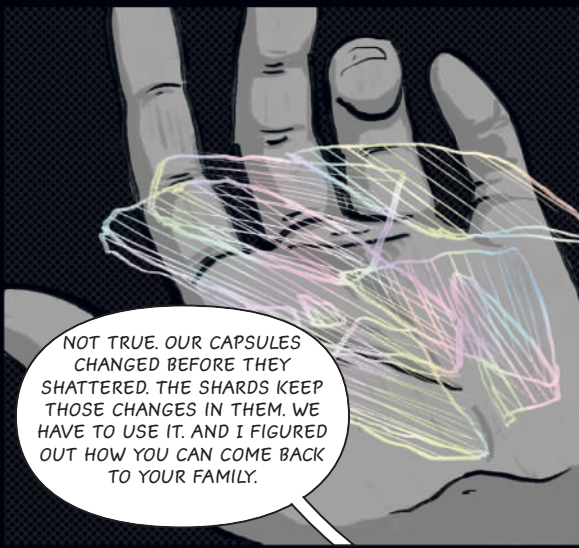
NO, YOU DON'T GET IT. DARKNESS WOULD NOTICE I HAVE NO «CAPSULE» AND IT WOULD BE OVER.



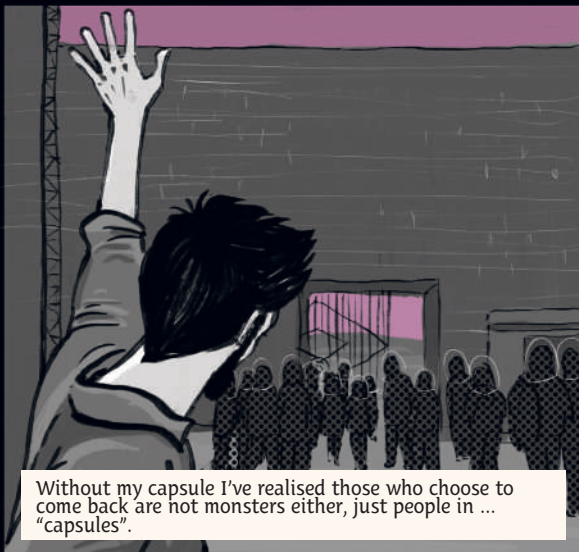
YOU DON'T HAVE TO COME BACK.

NOW I SEE THE WALL AND THE 'CAPSULES' ARE OF ONE MATERIAL.

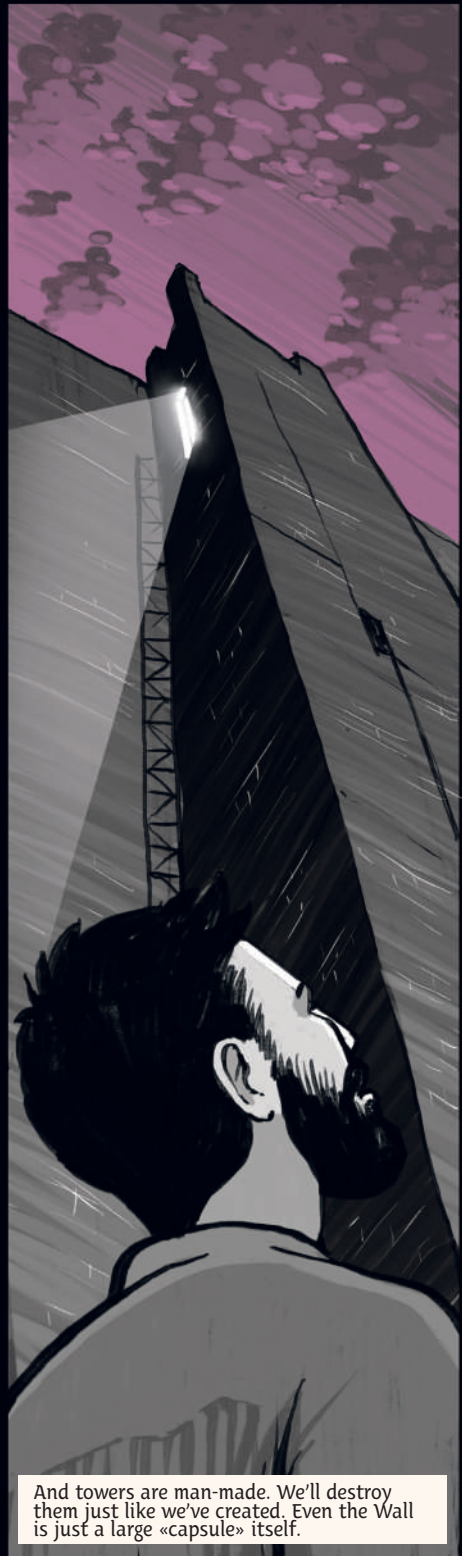
YOU KNOW NOTHING OF ME AFTER ALL.




NOT TRUE. OUR CAPSULES CHANGED BEFORE THEY SHATTERED. THE SHARDS KEEP THOSE CHANGES IN THEM. WE HAVE TO USE IT. AND I FIGURED OUT HOW YOU CAN COME BACK TO YOUR FAMILY.




Without my capsule I've realised those who choose to come back are not monsters either, just people in ... "capsules".



And towers are man-made. We'll destroy them just like we've created. Even the Wall is just a large «capsule» itself.




WE HAVE TO GIVE OUT
THE SHARDS TO OTHERS.
MAYBE THEIR CAPSULES
WOULD SHATTER TOO.
AND THE WHOLE WALL
AS WELL.




WHEN DID YOU PUT
THEM ON? YOU DIDN'T
HAVE THEM WHEN
I LEFT.



WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?



IS THERE
SOMETHING ON
OUR HEADS?



THE «CAPSULES».
I'LL TELL YOU AT HOME
AND SHOW HOW TO
REMOVE THEM.



WE'VE PLANNED THE DIALOGUES IN ELEVEN UKRAINIAN CITIES, TO SHOW HOW DIFFERENT WE ARE AND SIMILAR AT THE SAME TIME. WE CAN EXPAND THE GEOGRAPHY IF NECESSARY.



I'M GLAD YOU CALLED. JUST HAD A MEETING ABOUT FUTURE DIALOGUES. WE'RE WAITING FOR YOU. HOW ARE YOU?

I WANT YOU TO TALK TO SOMEONE SPECIAL. HOLD ON A LITTLE. I'M VISITING RUSLAN VOLYA. DO YOU REMEMBER?

YES, "THE CAPSULES" EXHIBITION. WOW, CAN'T WAIT FOR IT!



