

OCEAN ISLAND

SOUTH PACIFIC

C.C.P.-CONTROLLED WATERS - MAY 7, 2080





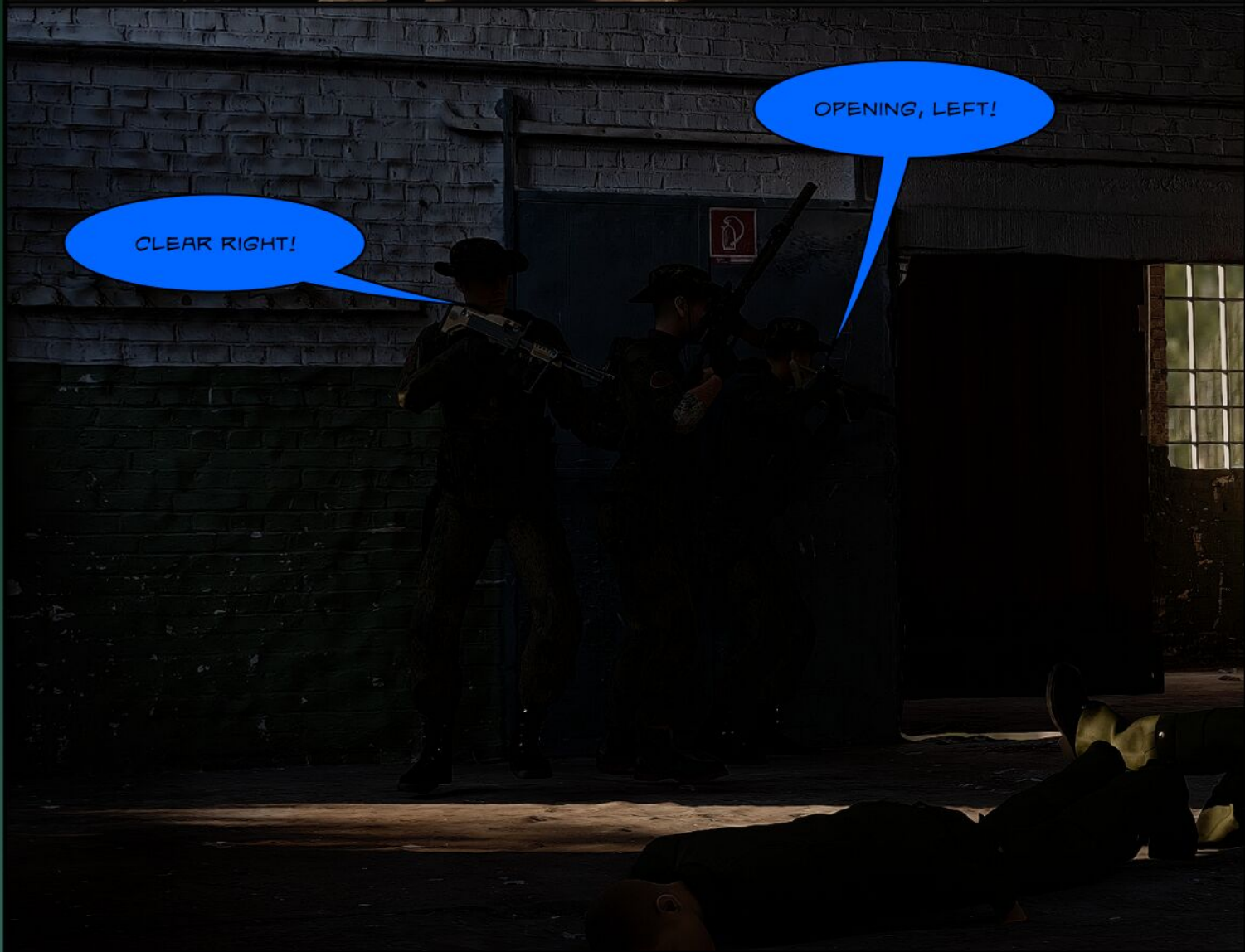
ONE, THIS IS FOUR.
TWO TANGOS IN THE
TARGET BUILDING. NO
SHOT.



PROBABLY OFF
GETTING DRUNK... THAT'S
WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING.
BACK ON THE SHIP, THROWING
BACK A FEW IN THE CREW
LOUNGE.

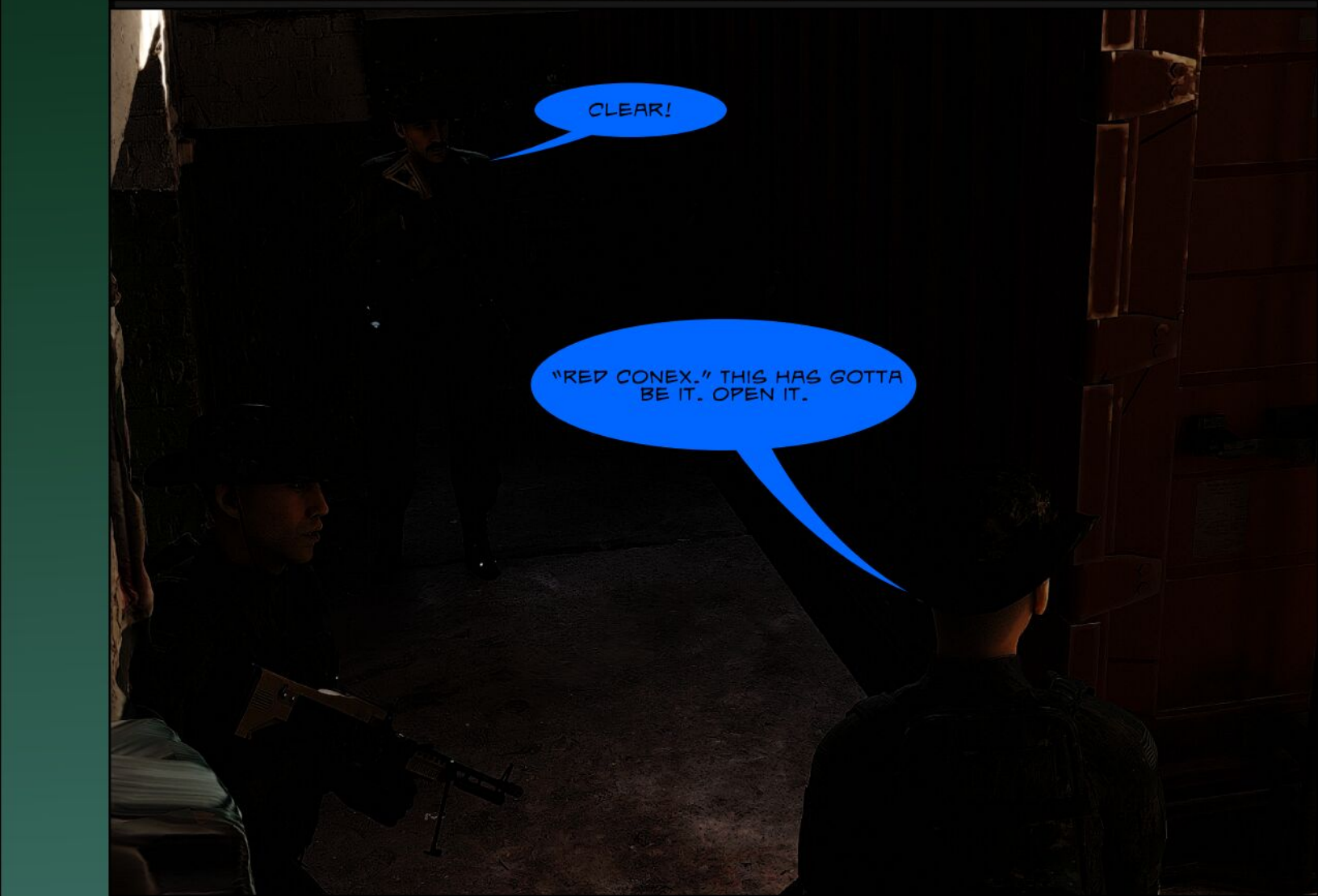
THERE WERE
SUPPOSED TO BE SIX...
WHERE ARE THE OTHER
FOUR?

NO ARGUMENT HERE,
BRO.





MOVE!



CLEAR!

"RED CONEX." THIS HAS GOTTA
BE IT. OPEN IT.

THUNK!

CLEAR!

ON IT!

THAT LOOKS ABOUT RIGHT.
GET THE PLASTIC OFF TO
VERIFYQUICK.



TOC, BUTCHER ONE. JACKPOT.
PREP EXFIL AND ROLL Q.R.F.

TRY EIGHT... I'M THINKING THE
SAME WAY THEY GOT IT IN.

THIS THING'S GOTTA WEIGH
6,000 POUNDS, BOSS! HOW
ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GET THIS
OUT OF HERE!?

FOUR, FIVE. COLLAPSE TO
TARGET BUILDING. EXFIL EN
ROUTE.



FOUR COPIES, COLLAPSING.

FUCKIN' A, JIMMY, WE
MIGHT BE HOME IN TIME FOR
HAPPY HOUR!

DON'T JINX IT... BUT IT KINDA
LOOKS THAT WAY, DOESN'T IT?
YOU'RE BUYIN', RIGHT?

FUCK THAT, FIVE. LOWEST GUY
ON THE TOTEM POLE BUYS!

LOOK, MAN, I'LL BUY, BUT I
GOT A CAR PAYMENT... YOU
GUYS GOTTA BE CAREFUL.

OH, WELL NOW WE'RE ALL
GOING TOP SHELF.

GOOD... I GUESS I'LL HAVE
TO FIND A PLACE TO HIDE MY
CAR...









CAMP LEJEUNE,
NORTH CAROLINA
MARSOF ADVANCED SNIPER COURSE

LANCE CORPORAL
KINCAID, YOU'RE ACCUSED OF
CHEATING DURING THE STALK
EXERCISE BY GOING OUTSIDE
DESIGNATED AREAS AND
IMPERSONATING A SERGEANT
MAJOR.

THIS IS A CLEAR VIOLATION
OF ARTICLE 106 OF THE
U.C.M.J. DO YOU CARE TO
EXPLAIN YOURSELF?

3 MONTHS LATER

SIR, I SIMPLY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF A
PREVIOUSLY UNDISCOVERED LOOPHOLE. THE
ROUTE I TOOK WAS IN FACT WITHIN EXERCISE
PARAMETERS AS THEY'RE WRITTEN, SIR!

THE POINT WAS TO COMPLETE THE STALK
WITHOUT BEING DETECTED. YOU USED SOMEONE
ELSE'S RANK TO GET PAST THE OBSERVERS. WHAT
LOOPHOLE DO YOU THINK YOU EXPLOITED,
MARINE?



SIR, IF YOU READ THE COURSE MATERIAL, IT SAYS CAMOUFLAGE, NOT GHILLIE SUIT. I INTERPRETED WEARING THE WRONG UNIFORM AND SHOWING UP ON THE STAGE BEHIND THE OBSERVERS TO BE A SUPERIOR MEANS OF CAMOUFLAGE AND THUS A MEANS OF INFILTRATION, SIR!

EVEN IF THAT IS THE CASE, YOU KNEW VERY WELL WHAT YOU WERE DOING. YOU'RE A SMART-ASS, LANCE CORPORAL. YOU VIOLATED THE SPIRIT OF THE EXERCISE AT THE VERY, VERY LEAST...

YES, SIR.



IF IT WERE UP TO ME, YOU WOULDN'T JUST BE OUT OF MARSOC. YOU'D BE FACING A COURT-MARTIAL AND A BAD-CONDUCT DISCHARGE... YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY THINK YOU'RE THE FIRST PERSON TO TRY AND PULL A STUNT LIKE THAT, CAN YOU?

SIR, AT THE TIME, I GENUINELY THOUGHT IT WAS CLEVER. I SEE NOW THAT WAS POOR JUDGMENT ON MY PART, SIR.

WELL, IT
WASN'T. IT WAS
INCREDIBLY STUPID AND SHOWED
EXTREMELY POOR JUDGMENT ON YOUR
PART. AND THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME
WE'VE HAD ISSUES WITH YOU. THAT'S
ALL I'VE GOT TO SAY, AND IT'S
THE LAST STRAW.

YOU'RE DROPPED FROM THE
COURSE. I'M FORWARDING THIS UP
YOUR CHAIN OF COMMAND. GET YOUR
SHIT AND GET OUT.



A... AYE, SIR.



MONTHS OF HARD WORK, AND ONE STUPID, IMPULSIVE DECISION MIGHT HAVE COST HIM EVERYTHING. THE THOUGHT FINALLY HIT C.J., AND HE BROKE DOWN.



C.J. MADE HIS WAY TO THE CLOSEST BATHROOM AND LOCKED HIMSELF IN THE FIRST STALL. THERE HE DID HIS VERY BEST TO CRY SILENTLY.



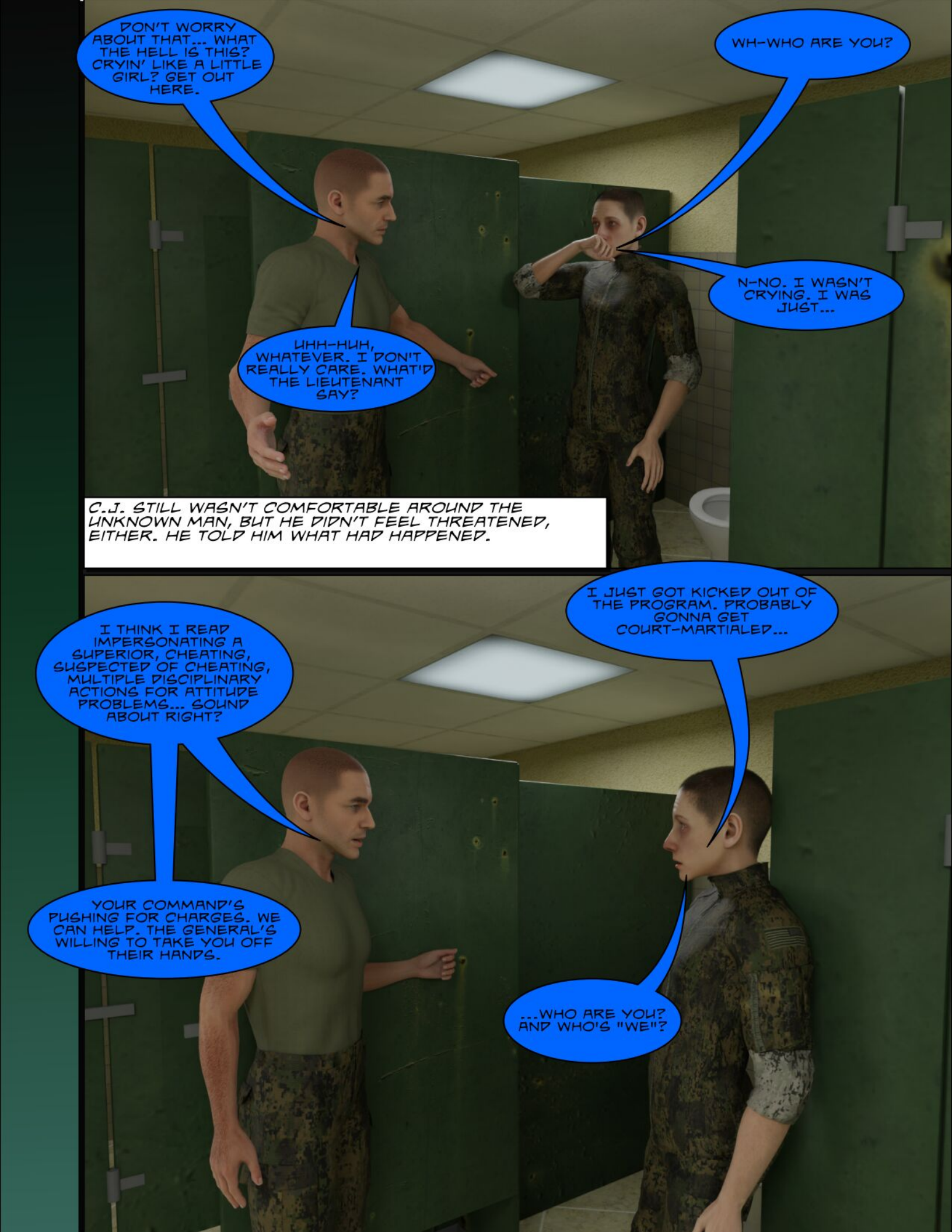
HE SAT THERE FOR SEVERAL MINUTES AS THE REALIZATION THAT HIS MARINE CORPS CAREER WAS LIKELY OVER HIT HIM.

KNOCK!
KNOCK!

HEARING SOMEONE ENTER THE BATHROOM, C.J. SNIFFED AND TRIED TO STAY QUIET. THEN CAME A KNOCK, AND THE STALL DOOR FLEW OPEN. A LARGE MARINE STOOD ON THE OTHER SIDE, HIS STRANGE DEemeanOR IMMEDIATELY CATCHING C.J. OFF GUARD.



C.J.'S MIND RACED. THE MAN HAD ASKED HIM TO COME OUT RATHER THAN ORDERING HIM, LEAVING C.J. UNSURE WHETHER HE WAS ABOUT TO BE ARRESTED OR SIMPLY ESCORTED OUT.



DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT... WHAT THE HELL IS THIS? CRYIN' LIKE A LITTLE GIRL? GET OUT HERE.

WH-WHO ARE YOU?

UHH-HUH, WHATEVER. I DON'T REALLY CARE. WHAT'D THE LIEUTENANT SAY?

N-NO. I WASN'T CRYING. I WAS JUST...

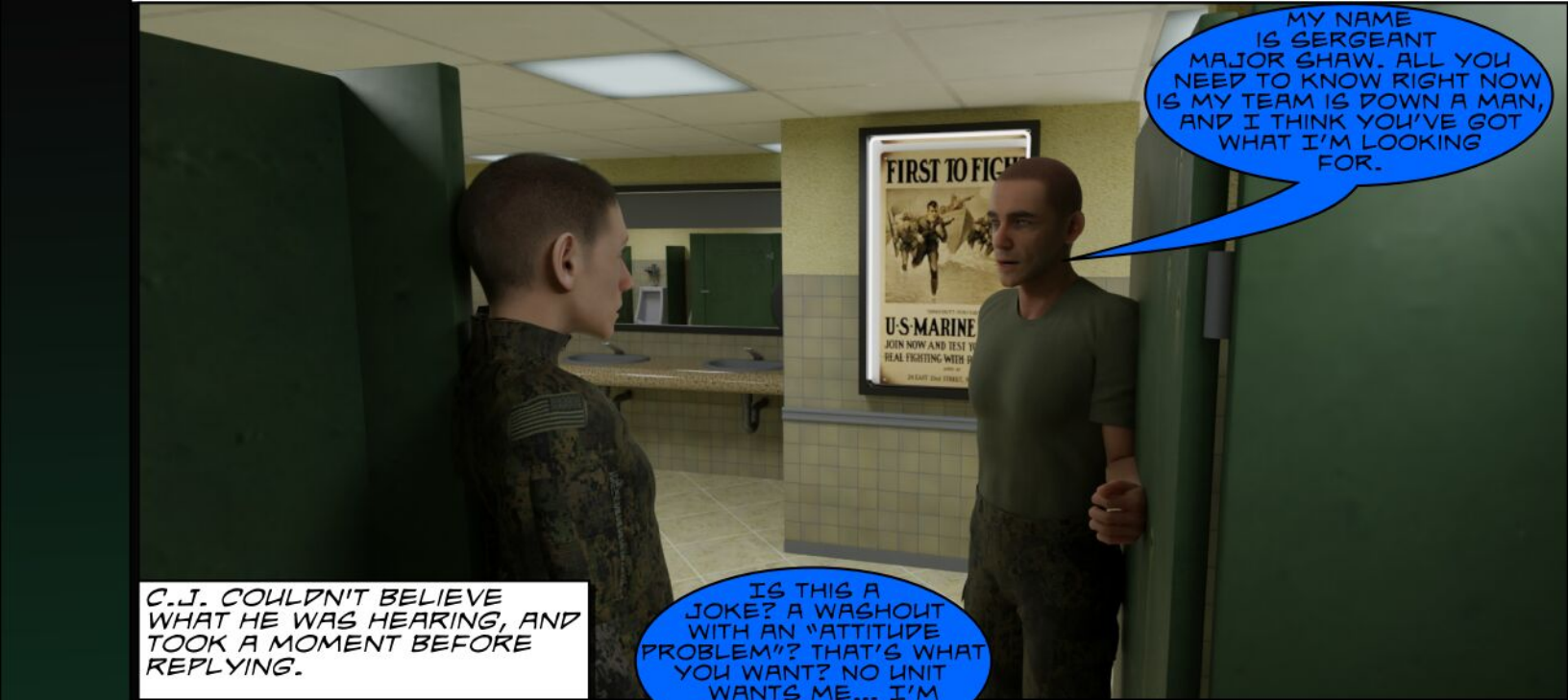
C.J. STILL WASN'T COMFORTABLE AROUND THE UNKNOWN MAN, BUT HE DIDN'T FEEL THREATENED, EITHER. HE TOLD HIM WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

I THINK I READ IMPERSONATING A SUPERIOR, CHEATING, SUSPECTED OF CHEATING, MULTIPLE DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS FOR ATTITUDE PROBLEMS... SOUND ABOUT RIGHT?

I JUST GOT KICKED OUT OF THE PROGRAM. PROBABLY GONNA GET COURT-MARTIALED...

YOUR COMMAND'S PUSHING FOR CHARGES. WE CAN HELP. THE GENERAL'S WILLING TO TAKE YOU OFF THEIR HANDS.

...WHO ARE YOU? AND WHO'S "WE"?



MY NAME
IS SERGEANT
MAJOR SHAW. ALL YOU
NEED TO KNOW RIGHT NOW
IS MY TEAM IS DOWN A MAN,
AND I THINK YOU'VE GOT
WHAT I'M LOOKING
FOR.

C.J. COULDN'T BELIEVE
WHAT HE WAS HEARING, AND
TOOK A MOMENT BEFORE
REPLYING.

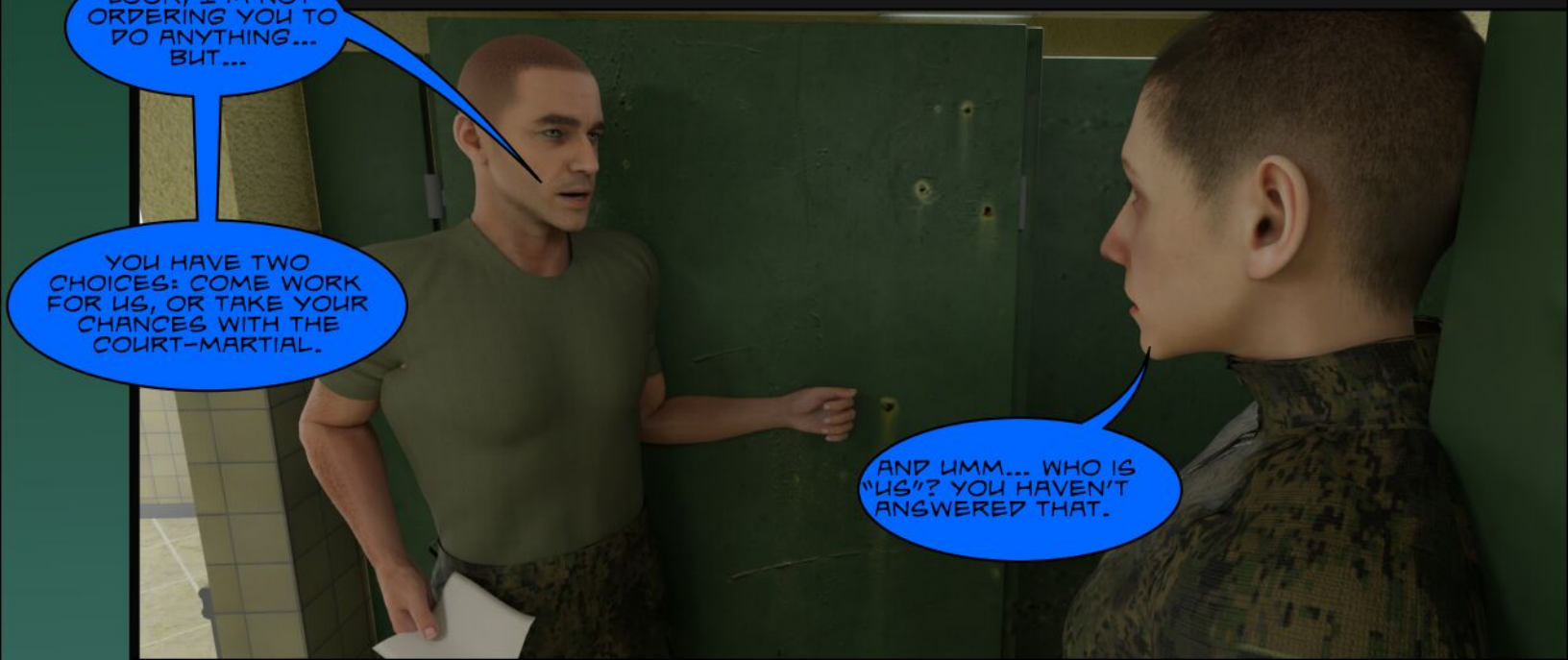
IS THIS A
JOKE? A WASHOUT
WITH AN "ATTITUDE
PROBLEM"? THAT'S WHAT
YOU WANT? NO UNIT
WANTS ME... I'M
BASICALLY DONE
HERE.



THEY JUST DON'T
SEE WHAT WE DO, NOT
YET.

LOOK, I'M NOT
ORDERING YOU TO
DO ANYTHING...
BUT...

YOU HAVE TWO
CHOICES: COME WORK
FOR US, OR TAKE YOUR
CHANCES WITH THE
COURT-MARTIAL.



AND UMM... WHO IS
"US"? YOU HAVEN'T
ANSWERED THAT.



HERE. THESE ARE ORDERS SIGNED BY BRIGADIER GENERAL PETER RICHARDSON, 1ST MARINE DIVISION.

IF YOU SHOW UP AT THE ADDRESS STATED BY 0800 TOMORROW, THEN CONSIDER YOURSELF REASSIGNED. IF NOT, GOOD LUCK WITH THE HEARINGS.

HMM... OK...?



OF COURSE! IF YOU SHOW UP. BUT IF YOU DO, YOU'VE MADE YOUR CHOICE. IF YOU THINK A COURT-MARTIAL IS BAD, WELL...

YOU'RE NOT EVEN GONNA TELL ME WHAT THIS TEAM IS? WHAT THEY DO?

ALRIGHT... I'LL... THINK ABOUT IT.

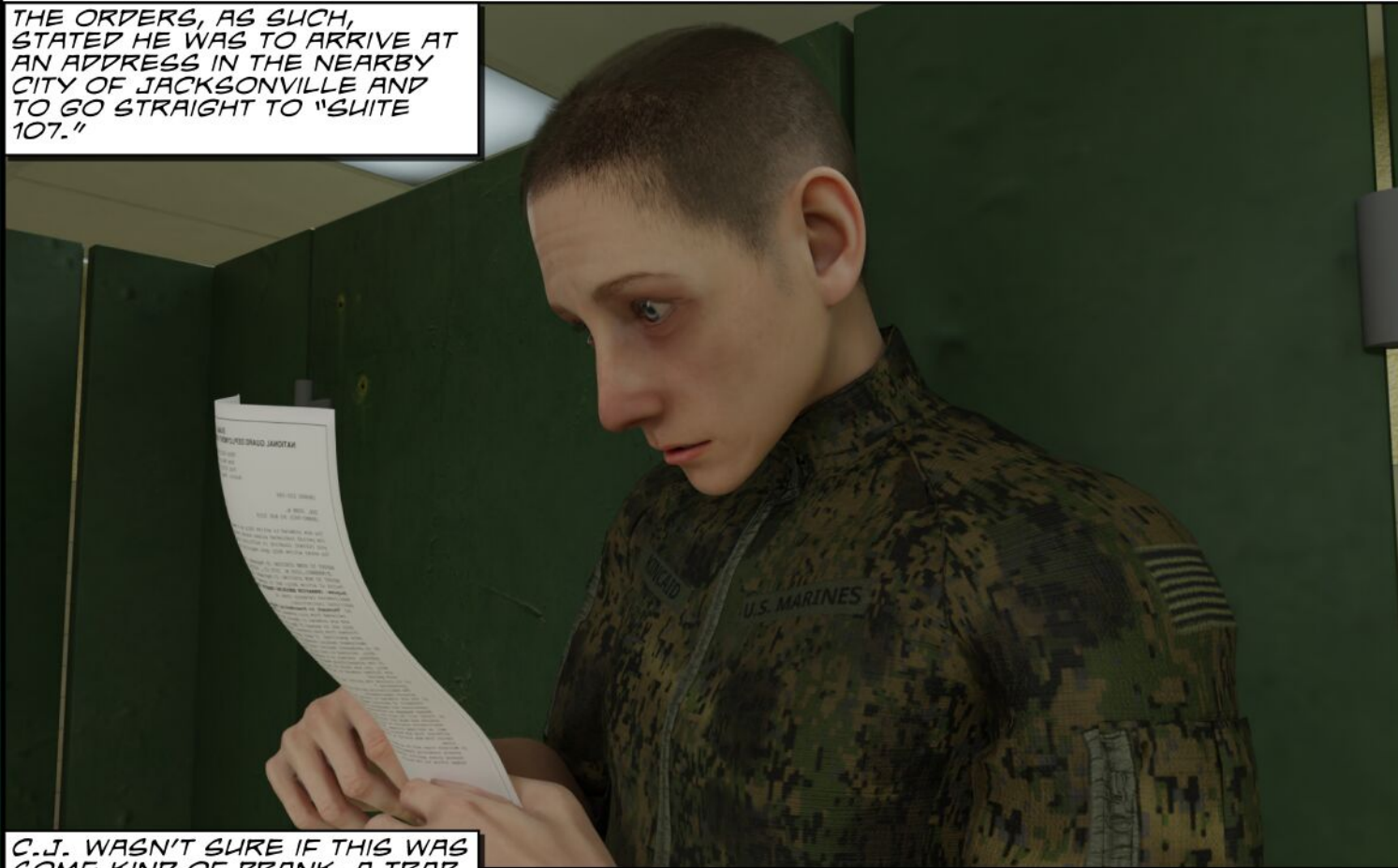


I'M SURE YOU WILL... SQUARE YOURSELF AWAY BEFORE YOU LEAVE. I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO THINK I DID SOMETHING TO YOU.

HMM... OK...

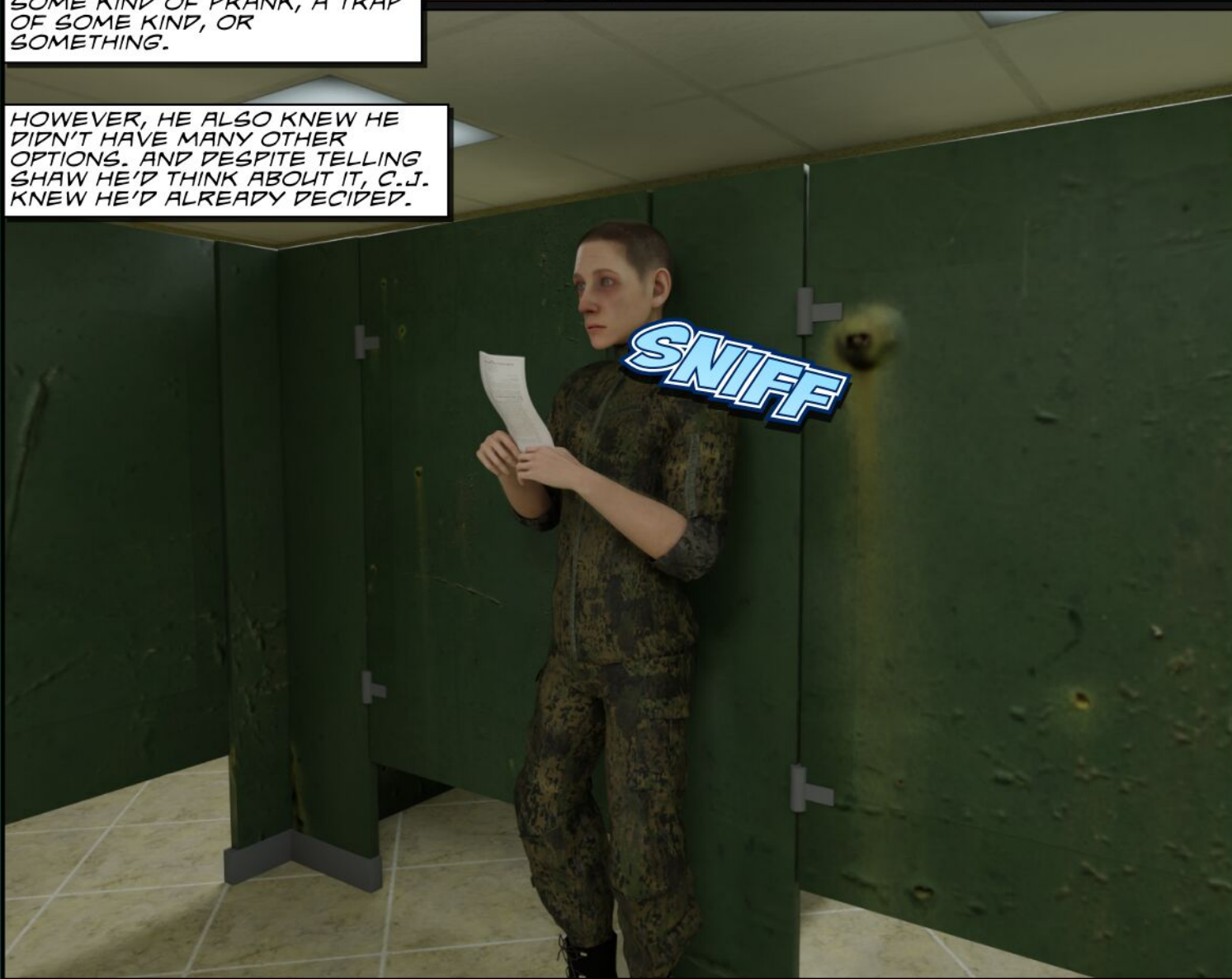
AS SERGEANT MAJOR SHAW WALKED OUT OF THE BATHROOM, C.J. STOOD, SOMEWHAT STUNNED, STARING AT THE UNUSUAL ORDERS.

THE ORDERS, AS SUCH, STATED HE WAS TO ARRIVE AT AN ADDRESS IN THE NEARBY CITY OF JACKSONVILLE AND TO GO STRAIGHT TO "SUITE 107."



C.J. WASN'T SURE IF THIS WAS SOME KIND OF PRANK, A TRAP OF SOME KIND, OR SOMETHING.

HOWEVER, HE ALSO KNEW HE DIDN'T HAVE MANY OTHER OPTIONS. AND DESPITE TELLING SHAW HE'D THINK ABOUT IT, C.J. KNEW HE'D ALREADY DECIDED.



THE NEXT MORNING
07:45

C.J. ARRIVED AT THE LOCATION
THE NEXT MORNING AND FOUND
IT TO BE AN OLD HOTEL, WHICH
HE FOUND UNSETTLING.

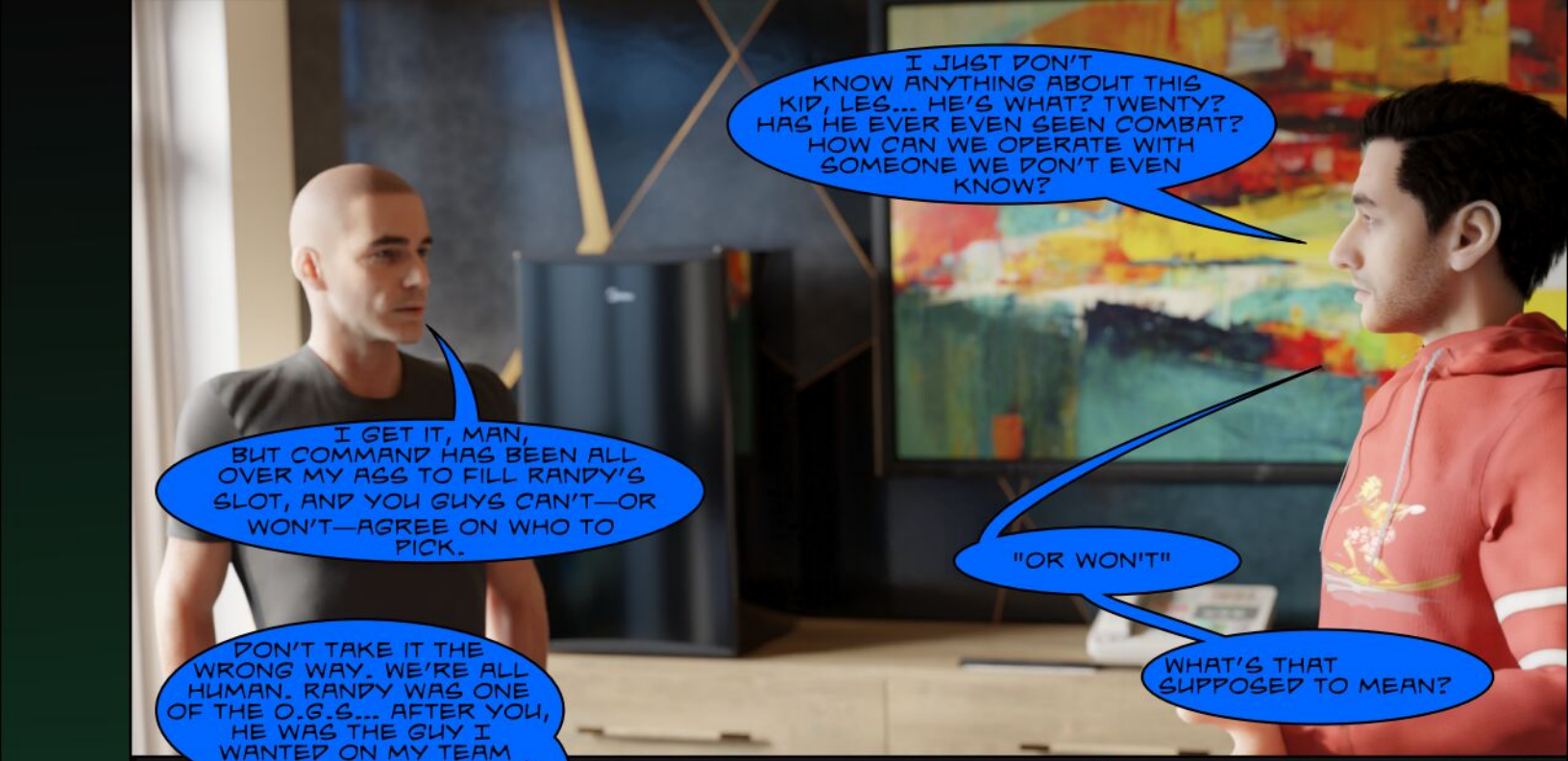
THIS IS KINDA
CREEPY...

THE IMAGE OF WALKING INTO A
HOTEL ROOM WITH A NAKED MAN
ON THE BED SHOT INTO C.J.'S
MIND, AND HE SHUDDERED.

THIS
BETTER BE
SOME SPOOKY
BLACK OPS STUFF
AND NOT BE SOME
GAY SHIT. I DON'T
NEED ANOTHER
CHARGE...

HAD HE MADE ANOTHER MISTAKE? MAYBE HE SHOULD HAVE ACCEPTED HIS FATE. MAYBE
COMING HERE WAS ANOTHER TEST—AND HE'D ALREADY FAILED IT.

FUCK IT... LET'S
GET IT OVER
WITH.



I JUST DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS KID, LES... HE'S WHAT? TWENTY? HAS HE EVER EVEN SEEN COMBAT? HOW CAN WE OPERATE WITH SOMEONE WE DON'T EVEN KNOW?

I GET IT, MAN, BUT COMMAND HAS BEEN ALL OVER MY ASS TO FILL RANDY'S SLOT, AND YOU GUYS CAN'T—OR WON'T—AGREE ON WHO TO PICK.

"OR WON'T"

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

DON'T TAKE IT THE WRONG WAY. WE'RE ALL HUMAN. RANDY WAS ONE OF THE O.G.S... AFTER YOU, HE WAS THE GUY I WANTED ON MY TEAM THE MOST...

WE ALL... YEAH, YOU KNOW... IT FUCKING SUCKS BUT WE'VE STILL GOT A JOB TO DO.

YEAH, IT'S MY FAULT, NOT THEIRS. I SHOULD HAVE JUST MADE A CHOICE FOR THE WHOLE TEAM TWO MONTHS AGO, BUT...

...BUT LIKE YOU SAID, FUCKIN' SUCKS. SOMEONE ELSE IN HIS PLACE... MAKES IT WORSE. MAKES IT REAL, I GUESS...

ANYWAY... I READ THIS KID'S FILE. HE'S AN ABSOLUTE TRAIN WRECK.

"HARD TO WORK WITH" WAS HIGHLIGHTED... IN BOLD LETTERS. BRIGHT RED, BOLD LETTERS. I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THAT BEFORE...

YEAH, HE IS
DIFFERENT... BUT I'VE BEEN
FOLLOWING HIM SINCE HE STARTED
I.T.C. TECHNICALLY SPEAKING, HE'S
VERY GOOD. EVERYTHING
ELSE...

WELL, WE'LL SEE. I THINK
HE'S JUST NOT BEING CHALLENGED
ENOUGH, AND AS A RESULT, HE'S
BORED.

HE ACTUALLY
REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER
TROUBLED YOUNG CORPSMAN I ONCE
MET... I THINK HIS NAME WAS
"PAUL."

EITHER WAY, I HAVE A
GUT FEELING THAT LETTING HIM
GET TOSSED IS THE WRONG CHOICE.
YOU'LL SEE... OR MAYBE I'M WRONG.
I HAD TO MAKE A CHOICE, SO I
MADE ONE.

WANNA TALK ABOUT
WRONG CHOICES AND SHIT I'D
CARE NOT TO SEE? WHAT THE
FUCK IS UP WITH THAT
PAINTING?

YEAH... I NOTICED
THAT TOO. I DIDN'T KNOW
"GAY PASTEL HORROR" WAS A
POPULAR GENRE FOR
HOTELS...



07:58... PUNCTUAL, AT
LEAST...

**KNOCK!
KNOCK!**

WHEN THE DOOR OPENED, C.J. NOTICED NEITHER MAN WAS IN UNIFORM, WHICH MADE HIM EVEN MORE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE ENTIRE SITUATION AS DISTURBING THOUGHTS AND SCENARIOS RAN THROUGH HIS HEAD.



UMMM... HELLO?

I HAD A FEELING YOU'D
SHOW UP. COME IN AND
CLOSE THE DOOR.

CAMMIES? TO A CIVILIAN
HOTEL?



UHM... LOOK, IF THIS IS ONE OF THOSE "SCREW THAT GUY ON CAMERA AND IT GOES AWAY" KINDS OF THINGS... I'LL JUST TAKE THE COURT-MARTIAL...

THIS COMMENT FROM C.J. MADE SGTMAJ SHAW SNORT SLIGHTLY WITH LAUGHTER.

HMMPH... DESPITE THE FACT THE CHIEF HERE IS DRESSED LIKE AN OFF-DUTY PORN STAR, I CAN ASSURE YOU IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT.

OHH PFFFTT...

WHAT'S BAD IS I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...

RIGHT... SORRY... IT'S JUST, THIS WHOLE SITUATION IS REALLY STRANGE.

UNDERSTOOD. THIS IS CHIEF PAUL DI PAULO. YOUR NEW TEAM LEADER. WE CALL HIM POC.

OHH, UHH... HI... I'M LANCE CORPORAL COLTON KINCAID... EVERYONE JUST CALLS ME "C.J." THOUGH.

WELL, "C.J".. SHIT'S ABOUT TO GET A LOT STRANGER.



MY WHOLE
EXISTENCE IS
STRANGE, CHIEF...

ANYWAY, I'M
HERE. SO WHAT'S
THE DEAL?



IN TIME, SON.
FIRST WE HAVE TO
SEARCH YOU FOR
BUGS...

I'M A WALKING
BUG, SERGEANT
MAJOR...

WE'RE WELL AWARE
OF WHAT YOU ARE. THAT'S
NOT WHAT WE MEAN. DON'T
WORRY, IT'S QUICK AND
NON-INVASIVE... AND DROP
THE FORMALITIES. THIS ISN'T
THAT KIND OF UNIT.

RIGHT, WELL, I
PROMISE YOU I'M
NOT BUGGED... I'D
KNOW IT IF I
WERE.

YOU'D THINK THAT...



ALL I GOTTA DO IS RUN
THIS LIGHT OVER YOU. ALL
YOU GOTTA DO IS STAND
THERE. IT WON'T HURT.

JUST PUT YOUR
HELMET DOWN AND
STICK YOUR ARMS OUT
TO YOUR SIDES.

YOU KNOW I CAN DETECT
CLOAKED AND PHASE-SHIFTED
SNIFFERS, RIGHT? IN FACT, IF YOU
CRACK THAT THING OPEN, YOU'LL FIND
A STARLITE LOGO ON THE INSIDE...
THERE AREN'T ANY ON ME.

YEAH, YEAH, YOU'RE
SMARTER THAN EVERYONE
ELSE AND KNOW
EVERYTHING. WE DON'T
WANT TO HEAR IT.

NOT
SMARTER
NECESSARILY, JUST
FASTER, AND I DON'T
FORGET. ANYTHING.
EVER.

WHILE THAT IS
VERY LIKELY TRUE—AND
MAYBE EVEN A BIG PART OF MY
DECISION TO PICK YOU—THIS "I'M
BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE"
ATTITUDE STAYS IN THIS ROOM.
UNDERSTOOD?

GOOD, TURN
AROUND.

UNDERSTOOD.

WHILE
WE'RE STILL IN
THIS ROOM..
"SHOCKER! I WAS
RIGHT AGAIN!"

ALRIGHT, YOU'RE
CLEAR.

IN BOLD, HUH? WAS IT
ALSO UNDERLINED IN RED? I'D
EXPECT AT LEAST THREE
LINES.

WELL, I CAN SEE WHY
"HARD TO WORK WITH" IS IN
BOLD IN YOUR FILE.



WITH THAT, SGTMAJ SHAW AND PAUL TURNED AROUND AND WALKED TOWARDS THE WINDOW. WITHOUT SAYING A WORD, THE SGTMAJ STEPPED CLEAN THROUGH THE CURTAIN AS IF IT WASN'T EVEN THERE.





NO FUCKING WAY...

C.J. STOOD MOTIONLESS FOR A FEW MOMENTS AS HE WATCHED THE TWO MEN VANISH STRAIGHT THROUGH THE CURTAIN.



HEY, WAIT! WHAT DO I DO!?

APPROACHING CAUTIOUSLY, C.J. STUCK HIS ARM THROUGH THE CURTAIN. THERE WAS A SLIGHT SENSATION OF STATIC, BUT OTHERWISE HE FELT NOTHING AT ALL.



WOAH!! COOL!

PASSING THROUGH THE STRANGE, STATIC BARRIER, C.J. FOUND HIMSELF IN A METAL TUNNEL WITH WINDOWS ON EITHER SIDE, WITH BOTH PAUL AND SHAW WAITING FOR HIM.

THERE YOU ARE.

WHA... WHAT IS...
WHERE?...

WE WERE
STARTING TO
THINK YOU
BITCHED OUT.

TAKE A LOOK.

SGTMAJ SHAW SAID, GESTURING OUT THE WINDOWS.

HOLY MOTHER
OF...

C.J. WAS LEFT LITERALLY SPEECHLESS AT THE SIGHT OF
THE MASSIVE, FLOATING STRUCTURE HE HAD JUST
ENTERED.

I... UHH... I
MEAN... WHAT?



TO BE CONTINUED.

