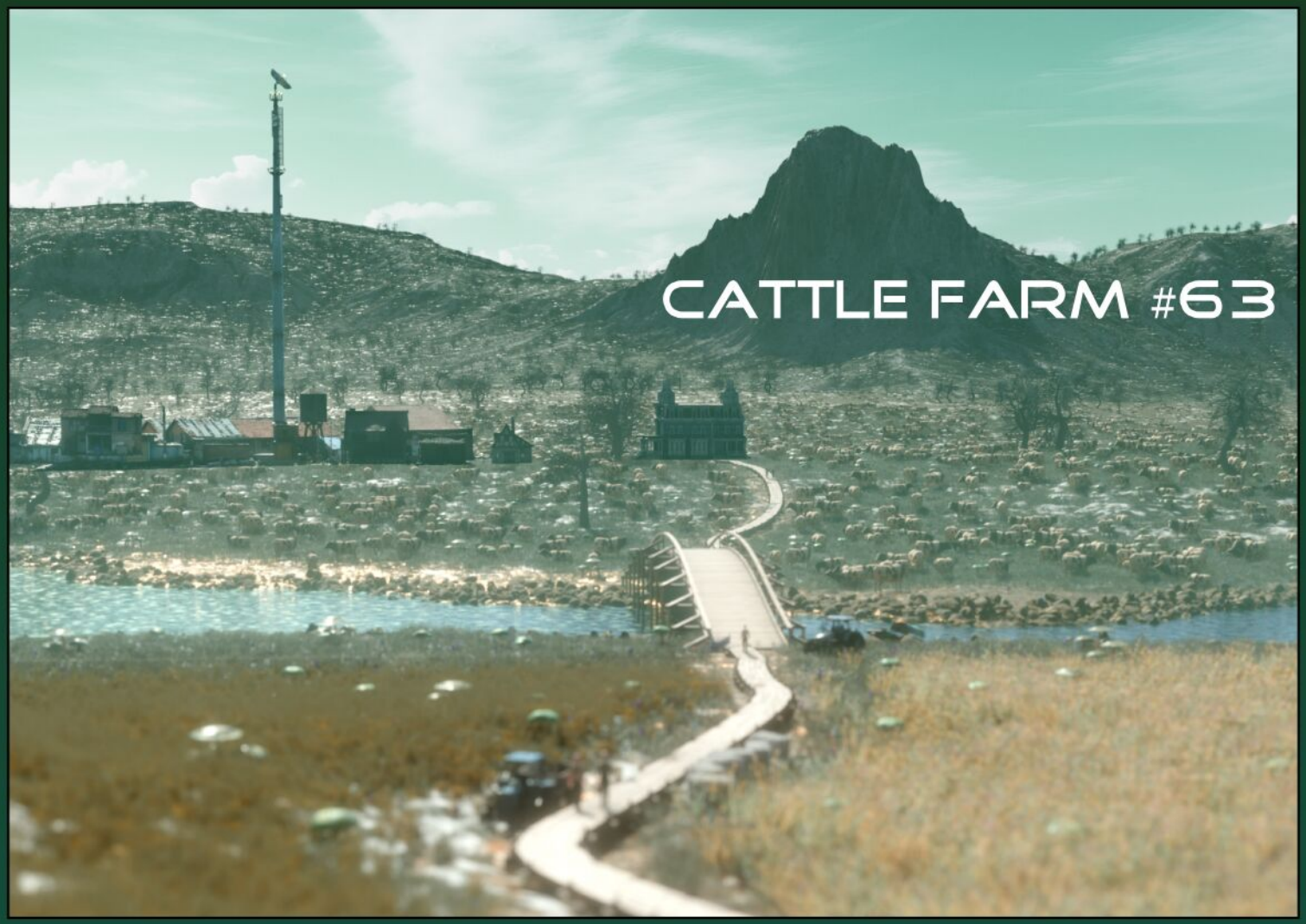

BROAN'IS.
FARM COLONY.
17,500 LIGHT-YEARS
FROM EARTH


CATTLE FARM #63



AFTER SIX HARD MONTHS, THE CREW HAD REACHED THE FINAL DAY OF THEIR ROTATION.



AS THE WORKDAY ENDED, THEY SORTED THE FINEST CUTS FROM THE DAY'S SLAUGHTER FOR A SEPARATE SHIPMENT.


HOW STANDS OUR FINAL TALLY?
THREE PERCENT BEYOND OUR QUOTA. A WORTHY FINISH!
THEN OUR LABORS END IN TRIUMPH! ARE YOU READY TO LEAVE THIS WRETCHED ROCK?
MORE THAN READY.
THESE FINAL HOURS HAVE OUTLASTED THE ENTIRE SEASON.
BETTER STILL, OUR RELIEF IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE. THEY ARRIVE WITHIN MINUTES. WASH UP, AND LET US BID FAREWELL TO THIS STENCH!


WELCOME NEWS!
A SENTIMENT WE SHARE.
WHERE HAS VA'DON WANDERED?
I GRANTED HIM THIS FINAL DAY. HE HAS EARNED HIS REST.
THEN I SHALL FIND HIM.
ALLOW ME. I HAVE HAD MY FILL OF THIS AIR.
WHOOSH! TARGET ACQUIRED! MISSILE AWAY!
WOOOOOSHHH!
BOOOM!


FWOOOSH!
OH!
COOL!






WELCOME! YOUR ARRIVAL IS MOST TIMELY.


YUP!
IS... IS YOUR COMPANY ONLY FIVE STRONG?
THAT CANNOT BE RIGHT.
AND WHY SHOULD THAT TROUBLE YOU?
WE WERE PROMISED THIRTY. FIVE CANNOT RELIEVE THIS CREW!


YEAH... GONNA SHOOT HIM! GONNA GET HIM!


WE ARE SIX. FOR OUR PURPOSE, THAT IS MORE THAN SUFFICIENT.
KRI'DALL. BEGIN.
YEAHH!!!!


BZZT!


AARGH!
THUD!
BZZT!
BZZT!
BZZT!


AHH!
BZZT! BZZT! BZZT!
YOU THREE WILL TAKE THE RADIO HOUSE. WE SHALL CLAIM THE MAIN HOUSE.
UNDERSTOOD.


AT LAST, OUR HOUR HAS COME.
INDEED!
LONG OVERDUE.


HAHAHAHA!!! YEAH! YEAH! DIEEE!!
BZZT! BZZT!
BZZT! BZZT! BZZT!


CRASH!
THEY'RE SHOOTING!
RUN! TO THE LIFT DEPOT! DO NOT STOP!

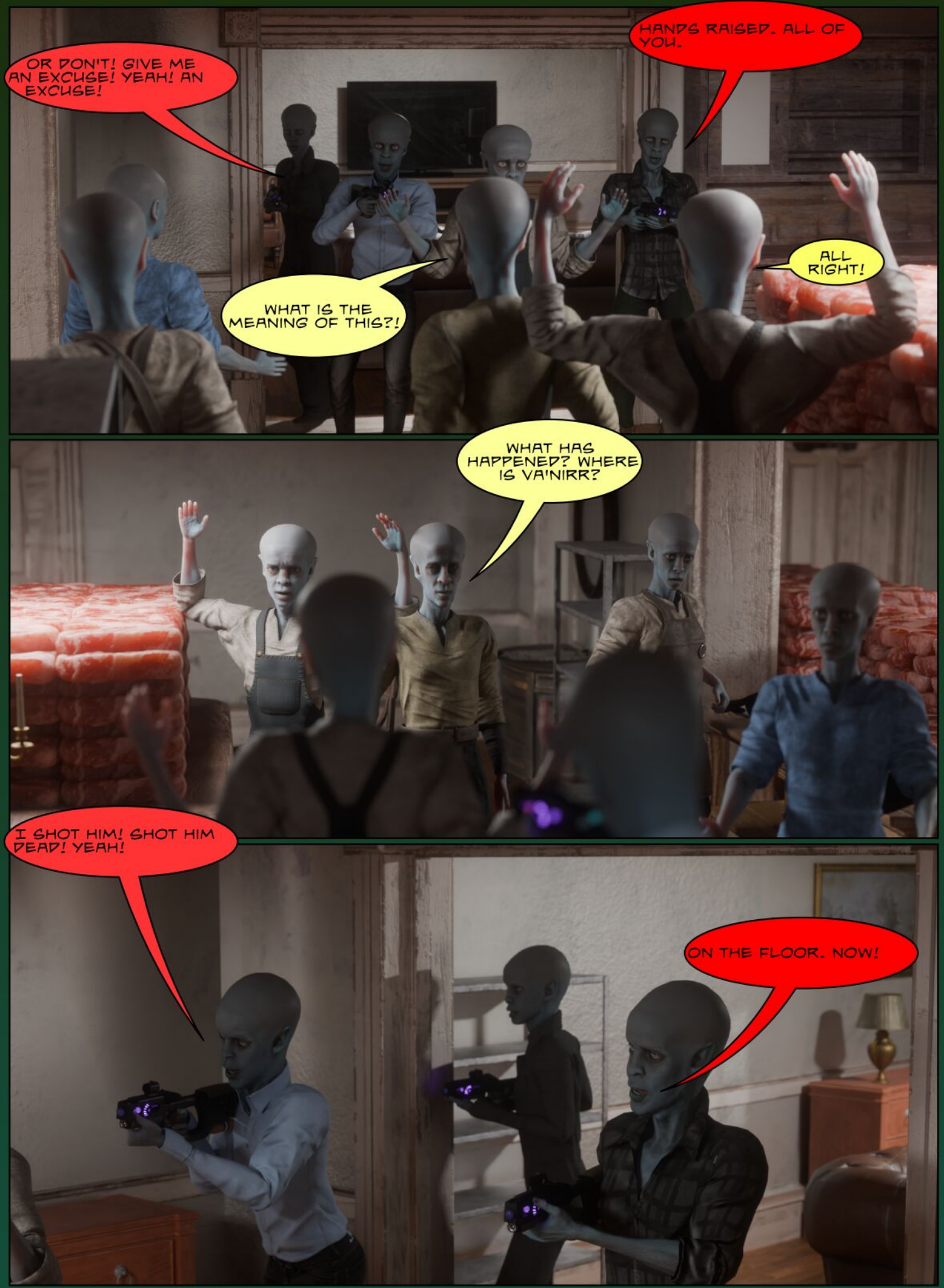

AHHHHH!




THE LITTLE ONE GOT AWAY!
PATIENCE. WE SHALL FIND HIM LATER. SATISFIED?
FIND HIM LATER! YEAH!


HAHA! FREEEZE!!!
WHAT IS THIS?!
WHERE IS THE REST OF YOUR COMPANY? TAKE US TO THEM!


YEAH! MAKE A MOVE! YEAH! I DARE YOU! HAHAHA!
OK! PLEASE DON'T SHOOT!
OBEY, AND YOU WILL COME TO NO HARM!

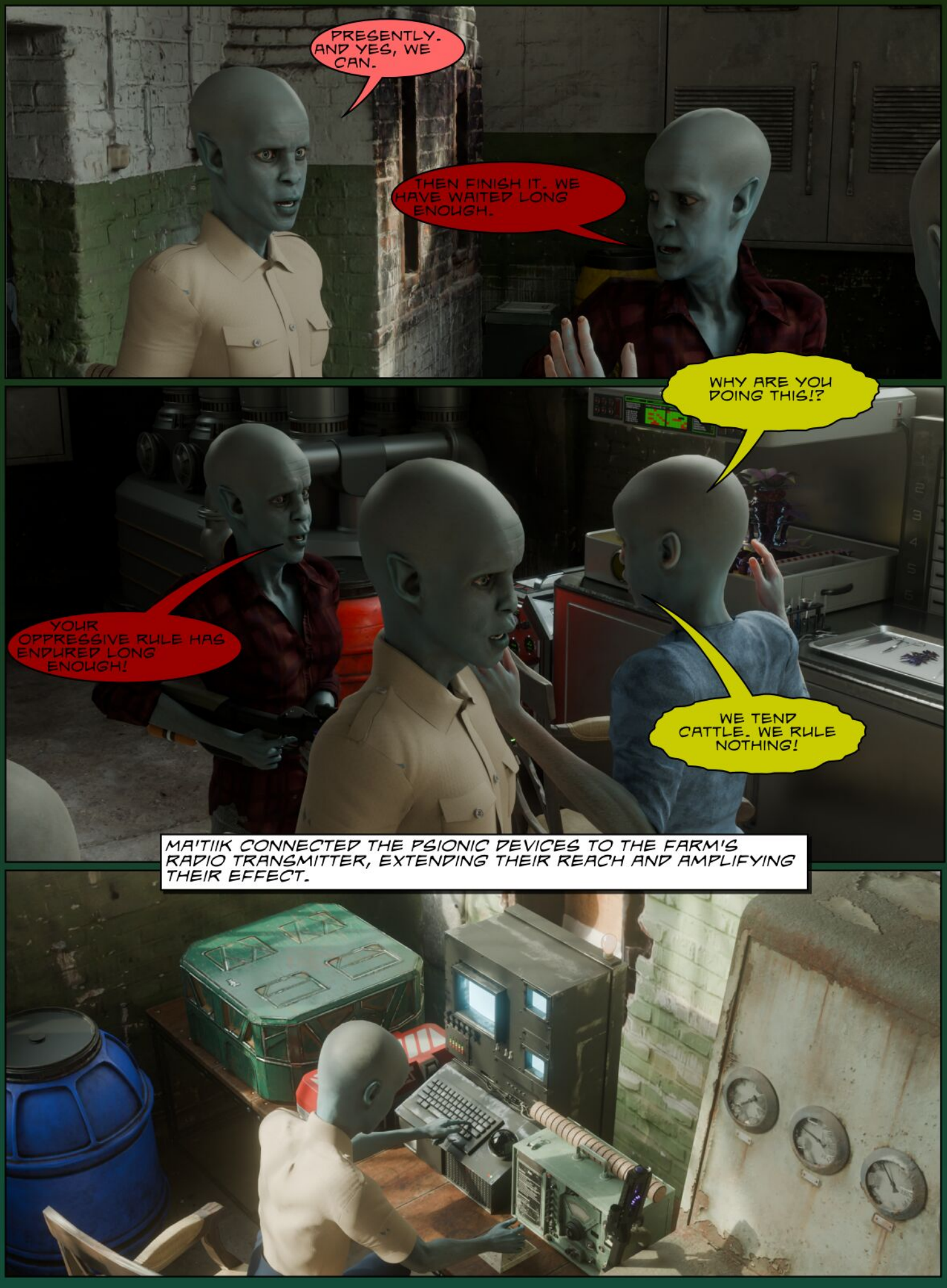

HANDS RAISED. ALL OF YOU.
OR DON'T! GIVE ME AN EXCUSE! YEAH! AN EXCUSE!
ALL RIGHT!
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!
WHAT HAS HAPPENED? WHERE IS VA'NIRR?
I SHOT HIM! SHOT HIM DEAD! YEAH!
ON THE FLOOR. NOW!

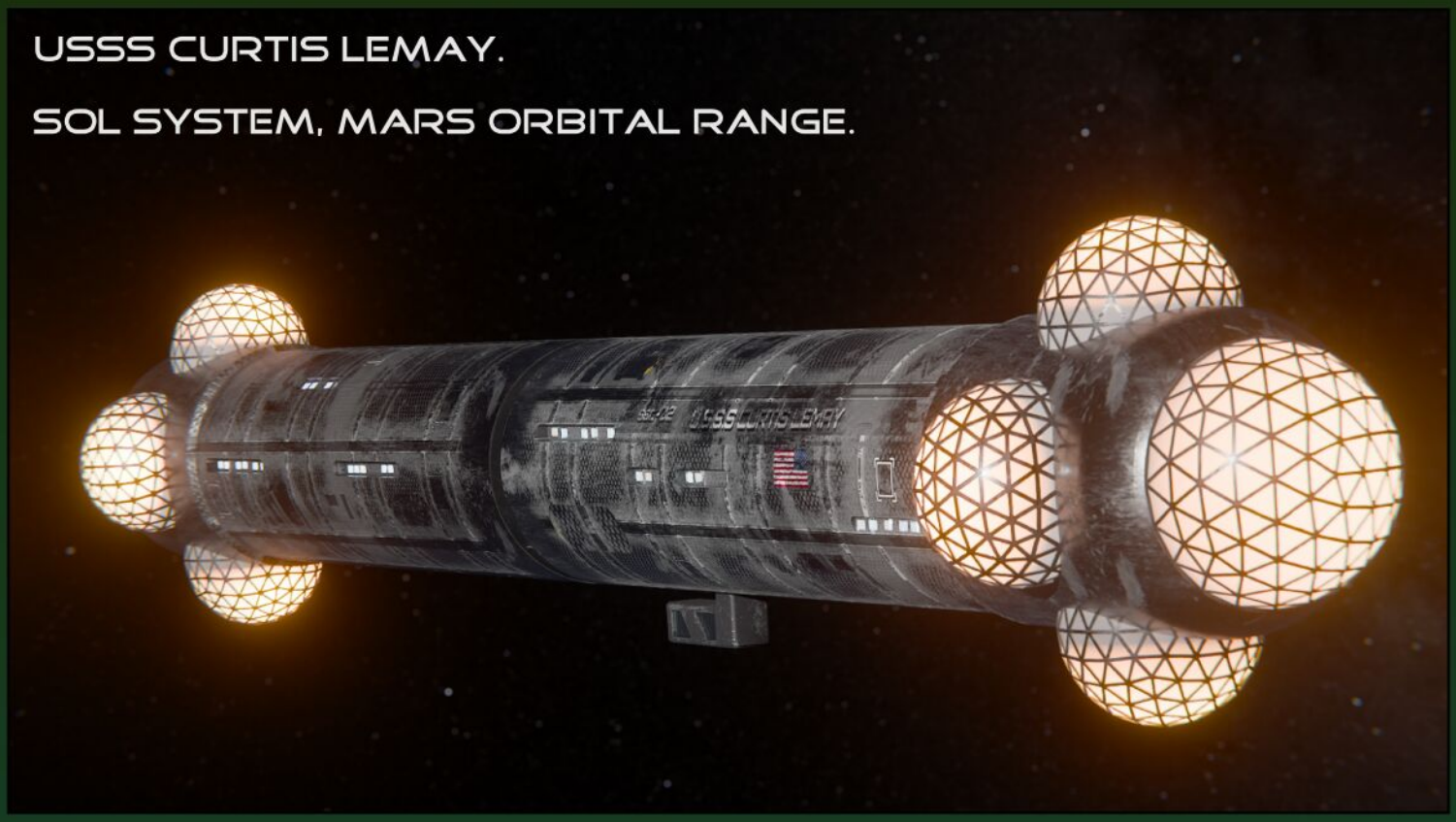

THIS IS THE PLACE. LET US MAKE SWIFT WORK OF IT.
IF THEY RESIST AT ALL, SHOOT THEM!
WITH PLEASURE..
OH MY... WHAT IS HAPPENING?!
OHH! WHAT THE!?
RAISE YOUR HANDS. BOTH OF YOU!
ATTEMPT NO RESISTANCE, AND YOU SHALL REMAIN UNHARMED!
WH-WHAT IS THIS!?

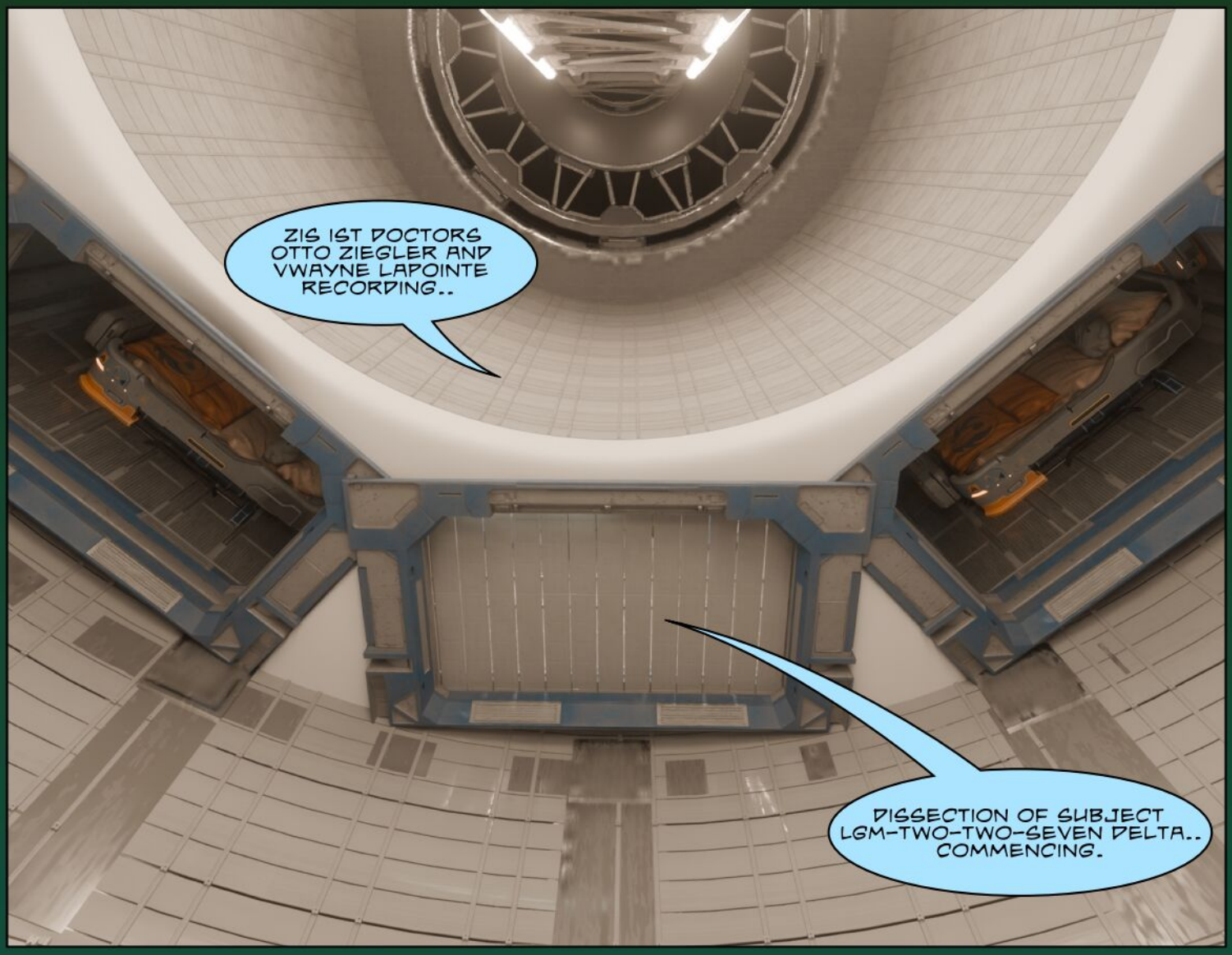

THIS IS JUSTICE! NOW BE SILENT!
UNLESS YOU WOULD PREFER A PLASMA BOLT THROUGH YOUR FACE.

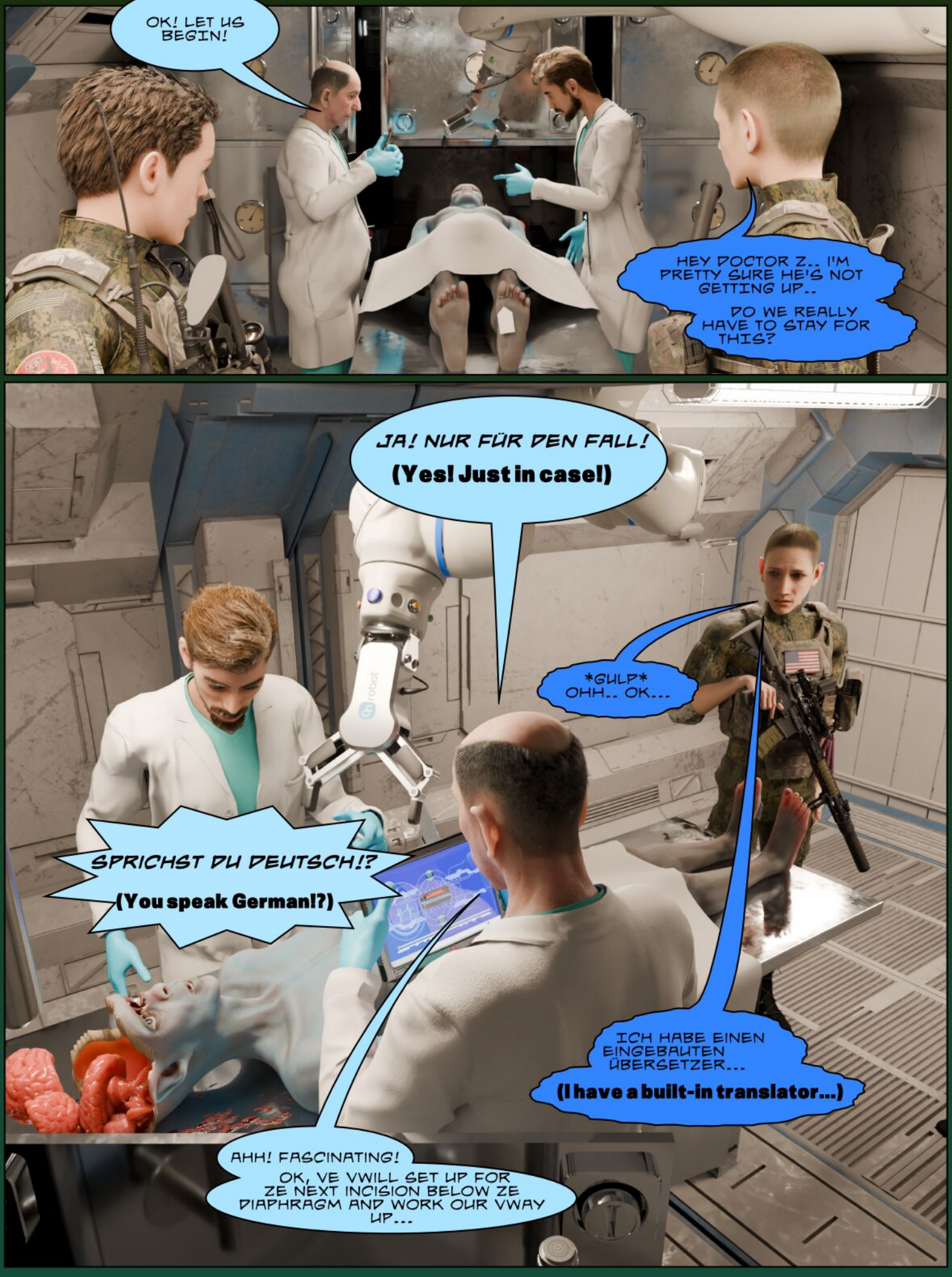

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
BRINGING AN END TO YOUR TYRANNY!


FROM HIS BAG, MA'TIIK WITHDREW A PSIONIC SCEPTER AND A SMALL WHITE PYRAMID CAPPED WITH GOLD.
MA'TIIK. HOW SOON WILL IT BE READY?
ARE YOU MAD?! YOU CANNOT CONNECT THAT HERE!

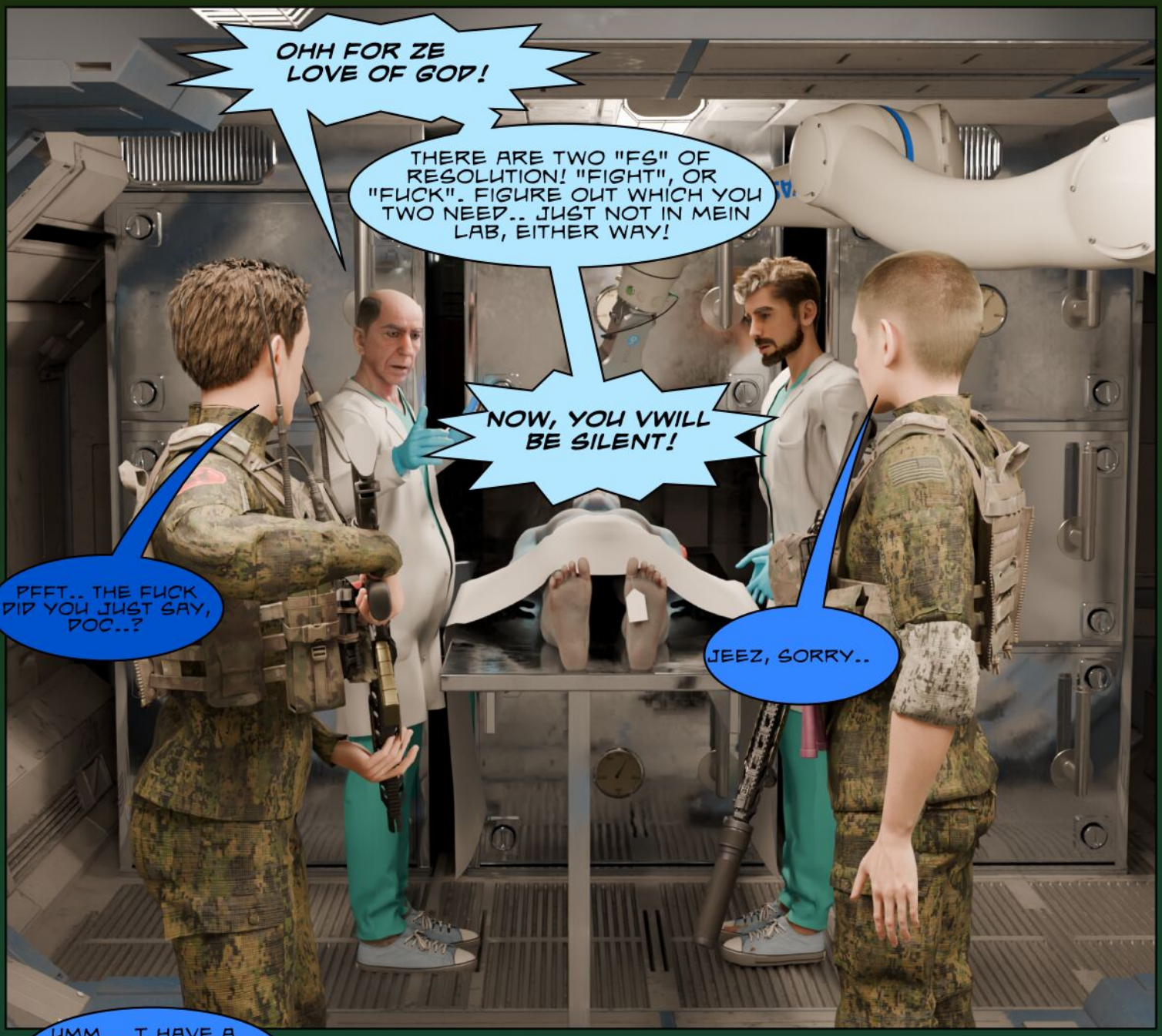

PRESENTLY. AND YES, WE CAN.
THEN FINISH IT. WE HAVE WAITED LONG ENOUGH.
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS!?
YOUR OPPRESSIVE RULE HAS ENDURED LONG ENOUGH!
WE TEND CATTLE. WE RULE NOTHING!
MA'TIIK CONNECTED THE PSIONIC DEVICES TO THE FARM'S RADIO TRANSMITTER, EXTENDING THEIR REACH AND AMPLIFYING THEIR EFFECT.


USSS CURTIS LEMAY.
SOL SYSTEM, MARS ORBITAL RANGE.

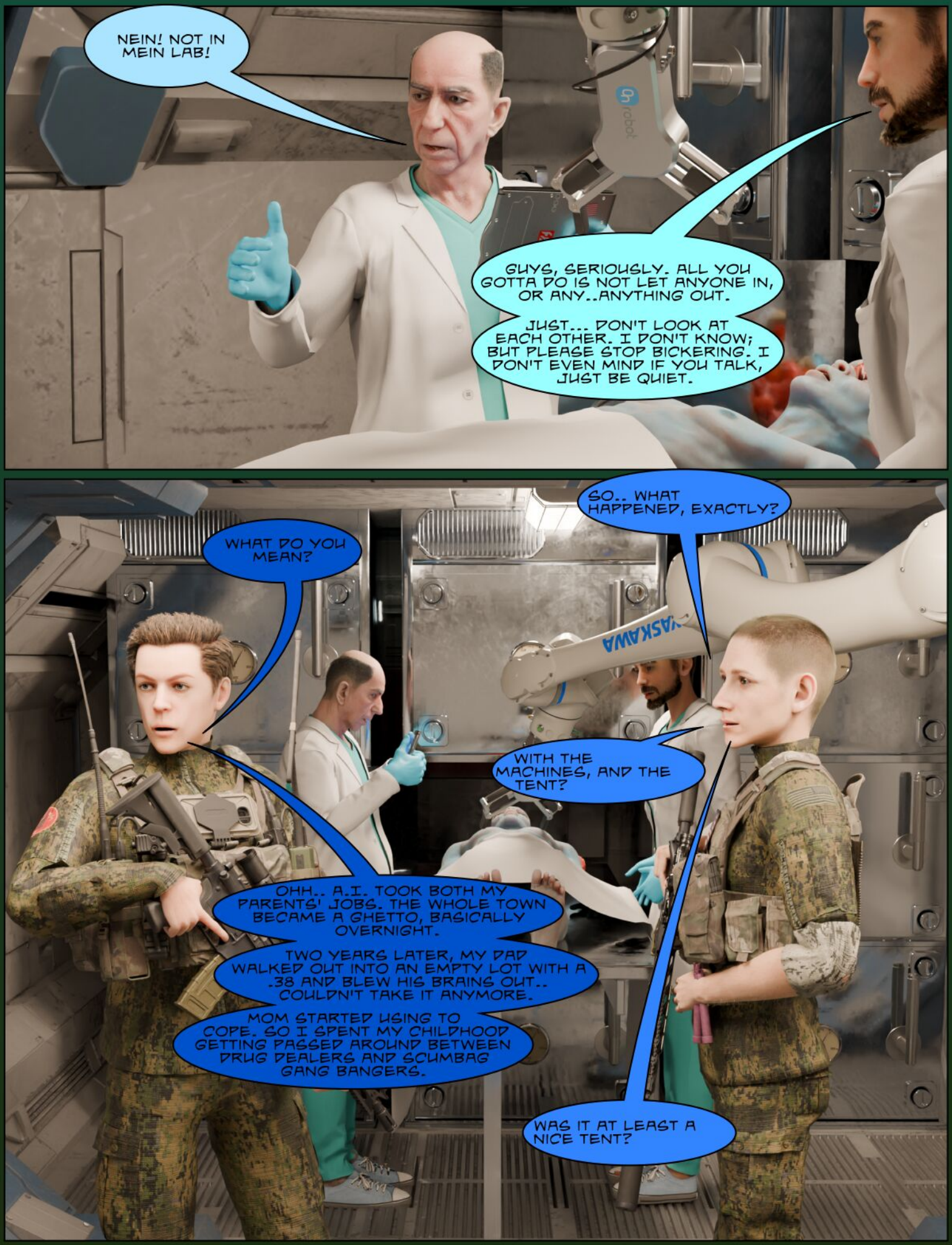

ZIS IST DOCTORS OTTO ZIEGLER AND VWAYNE LAPOINTE RECORDING..
DISSECTION OF SUBJECT LGM-TWO-TWO-SEVEN DELTA.. COMMENCING.


OK! LET US BEGIN!
HEY DOCTOR Z.. I'M PRETTY SURE HE'S NOT GETTING UP..
DO WE REALLY HAVE TO STAY FOR THIS?
JA! NUR FÜR DEN FALL!
(Yes! Just in case!)
GULP OHH.. OK...
SPRICHST DU DEUTSCH!?
(You speak German!?)
ICH HABE EINEN EINGEBAUTEN ÜBERSETZER...
(I have a built-in translator...)
AHH! FASCINATING!
OK, VE VWILL SET UP FOR ZE NEXT INCISION BELOW ZE DIAPHRAGM AND WORK OUR VWAY UP...


WHAT'S THE MATTER? DON'T LIKE WATCHING ONE OF YOUR OWN GETTING CHOPPED UP FOR STUDY?
THE FUCK IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN!?
AREN'T THEY THE ONES WHO CONVINCED YOUR RICH DADDY TO BUILD YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE?
THE ALIEN BODY WITH HALF A HEAD ISN'T ENOUGH TO CONVINCE YOU? OR ME SAVING YOUR LIFE ON MARS?
NOT REALLY, NO.
DUDE, WHAT IS YOUR DEAL?
MY DEAL?
I GREW UP IN A TENT, HUNTING AND EATING STREET RATS AND DODGING PERVERTS BECAUSE OF MACHINES LIKE YOU. AND YOU HAVE THE NERVE TO ASK WHAT MY DEAL IS?
THAT SUCKS.. MAYBE IF YOUR FAMILY WASN'T A BUNCH OF 64 IQ, INBRED, ALABAMA FUCK-WITS THEY WOULD HAVE FIGURED SOMETHING OUT?
YOU KNOW WHAT? FUCK YOU! I'M..


OHH FOR ZE LOVE OF GOD!
THERE ARE TWO "FS" OF RESOLUTION! "FIGHT", OR "FUCK". FIGURE OUT WHICH YOU TWO NEED.. JUST NOT IN MEIN LAB, EITHER WAY!
NOW, YOU VWILL BE SILENT!
PFFT.. THE FUCK DID YOU JUST SAY, DOC..?
JEEZ, SORRY..


UMM... I HAVE A GIRLFRIEND, SO... YEAH, SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU..
OHH, JUST FUCK OFF..
LOOK, I DON'T LIKE IT EITHER BUT WE'RE PRETTY MUCH STUCK TOGETHER. SO CAN'T WE AT LEAST PRETEND TO GET ALONG?
OR I CAN KNOCK YOUR TEETH DOWN YOUR THROAT.. UP TO YOU..


NEIN! NOT IN MEIN LAB!
GUYS, SERIOUSLY. ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS NOT LET ANYONE IN, OR ANY..ANYTHING OUT.
JUST... DON'T LOOK AT EACH OTHER. I DON'T KNOW; BUT PLEASE STOP BICKERING. I DON'T EVEN MIND IF YOU TALK, JUST BE QUIET.
SO.. WHAT HAPPENED, EXACTLY?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WITH THE MACHINES, AND THE TENT?
OHH.. A.I. TOOK BOTH MY PARENTS' JOBS. THE WHOLE TOWN BECAME A GHETTO, BASICALLY OVERNIGHT.
TWO YEARS LATER, MY DAD WALKED OUT INTO AN EMPTY LOT WITH A .38 AND BLEW HIS BRAINS OUT.. COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.
MOM STARTED USING TO COPE. SO I SPENT MY CHILDHOOD GETTING PASSED AROUND BETWEEN DRUG DEALERS AND SCUMBAG GANG BANGERS.
WAS IT AT LEAST A NICE TENT?


ARE YOU SERIOUS?
SO NO, IT WASN'T.. LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE. YOU SURVIVED AND NOW YOU GET TO HANG OUT WITH ME!
YEAH, WHAT A REWARD...
I KNOW, RIGHT!? AREN'T I GREAT!?
DO YOU TALK WHEN YOU GET NERVOUS OR SOMETHING?.. I CAN'T BELIEVE I JUST ASKED A FUCKING GLORIFIED CHATBOT THAT..
WHY ARE YOU SUCH A DICK?
ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE HYPER-CHRISTIAN CLOSET FAGS?
HONESTLY, IT WAS THE FIRST THOUGHT I HAD WHEN I MET YOU.
NO.. I AM ABSOLUTELY NOT.
OK, I'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT..


DO WHAT?
AND YEAH, I DO..
TALK WHEN I GET NERVOUS.
YEAH, SURE.. "NERVOUS"
MORE LIKE SIMULATED, FAKE, COMPUTER BULLSHIT.
MAYBE, BUT I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE.
I CAN.. IT'S FAKE. YOU'RE FAKE. NOW STOP TALKING.
INITIATING CUTTING LASER!
YOU CAN, HUH?
WELL IF WE'RE JUST GONNA MAKE SHIT UP..
I'LL JUST START TELLING PEOPLE YOU TRIED TO TOUCH ME..
YUP! THAT'S ME! PEOPLE WILL DEFINITELY BELIEVE THAT!
AT LEAST I DON'T LIE ABOUT HAVING A GIRLFRIEND TO COVER UP FOR THE FACT THAT I'M UNLOVABLE..
PFFFT.. I HATE YOU, AND THAT STUNG.. BUT IT WAS GOOD..
OUCH! WAS THAT YOUR HIGH-SCHOOL YEARBOOK QUOTE?
ERR.. DID THEY EVEN HAVE YEARBOOKS AT CARDBOARD BOX HIGH?
OR DID THEY JUST SPELL OUT YOUR NAME IN DISCARDED CRACK PIPES AND USED NEEDLES?



COLONEL! STRONG RADAR CONTACT! 6 KILOMETERS ASTERN, C.B.D.R! CLOSING FAST!

WHAT!? WHERE'D IT COME FROM!?

I DON'T KNOW, SIR! IT JUST APPEARED THERE!

THE FORRESTAL?

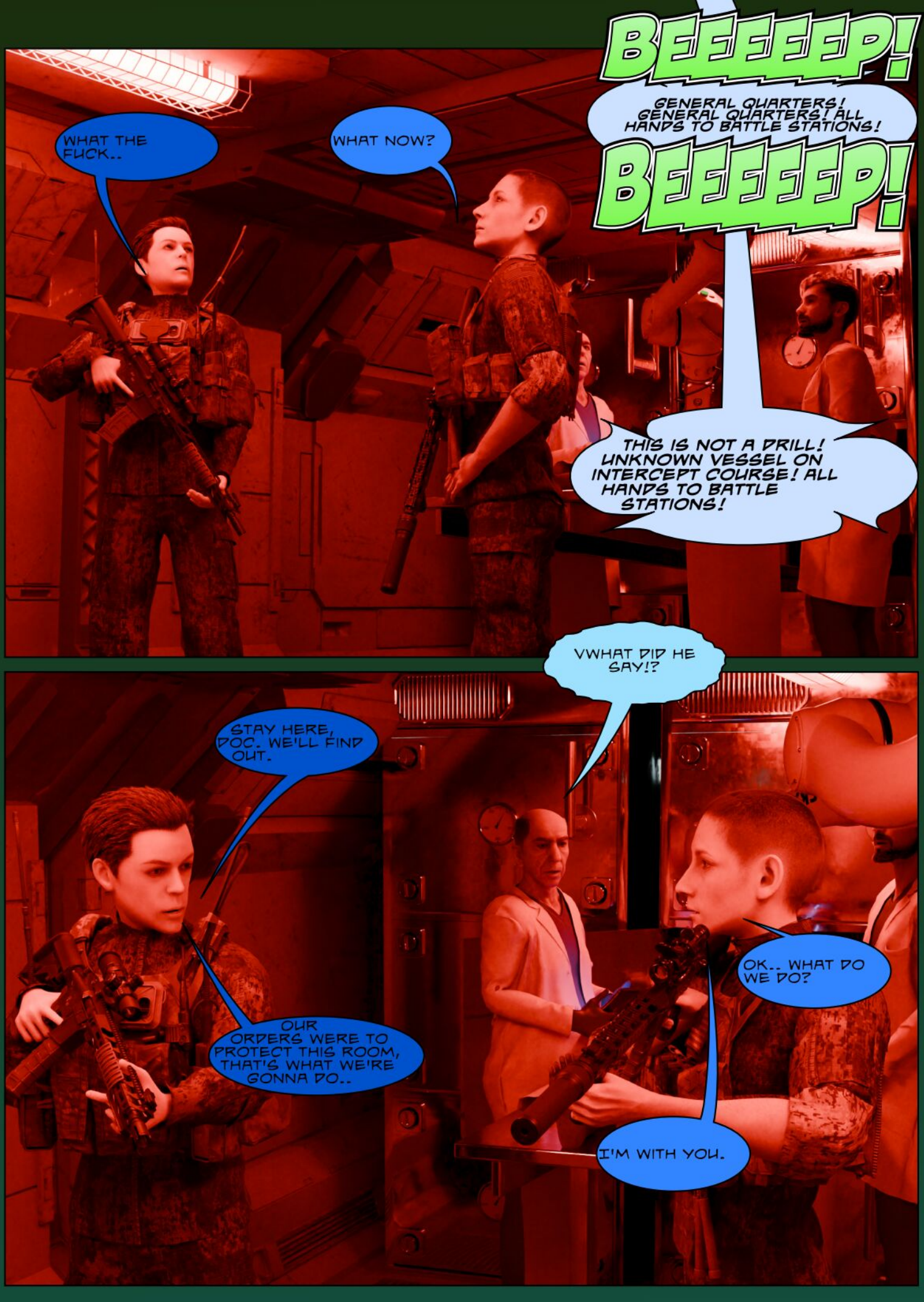
HOLY GOD! NO SIR..

IT'S.. ENORMOUS!

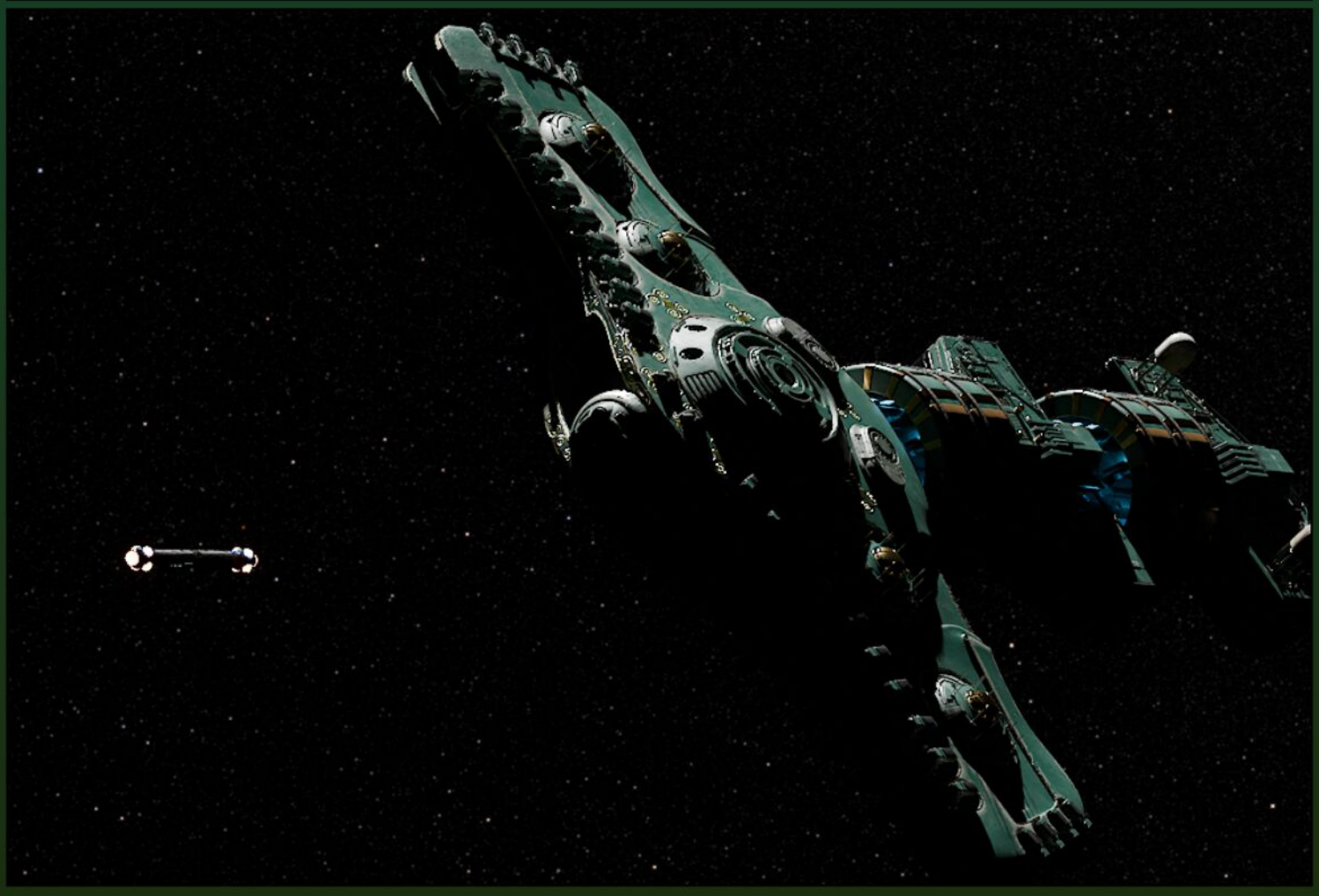
PUT THE AFT CAMERA ON THE MAIN DISPLAY!


AFT CAMERA'S UP!
MY GOD, THAT'S AN F.T.L..
AND IT'S ARMED TO THE TEETH..


SOUND GENERAL QUARTERS!
HELM! EVASIVE MANEUVERS! GET US OUT OF ITS WAY!

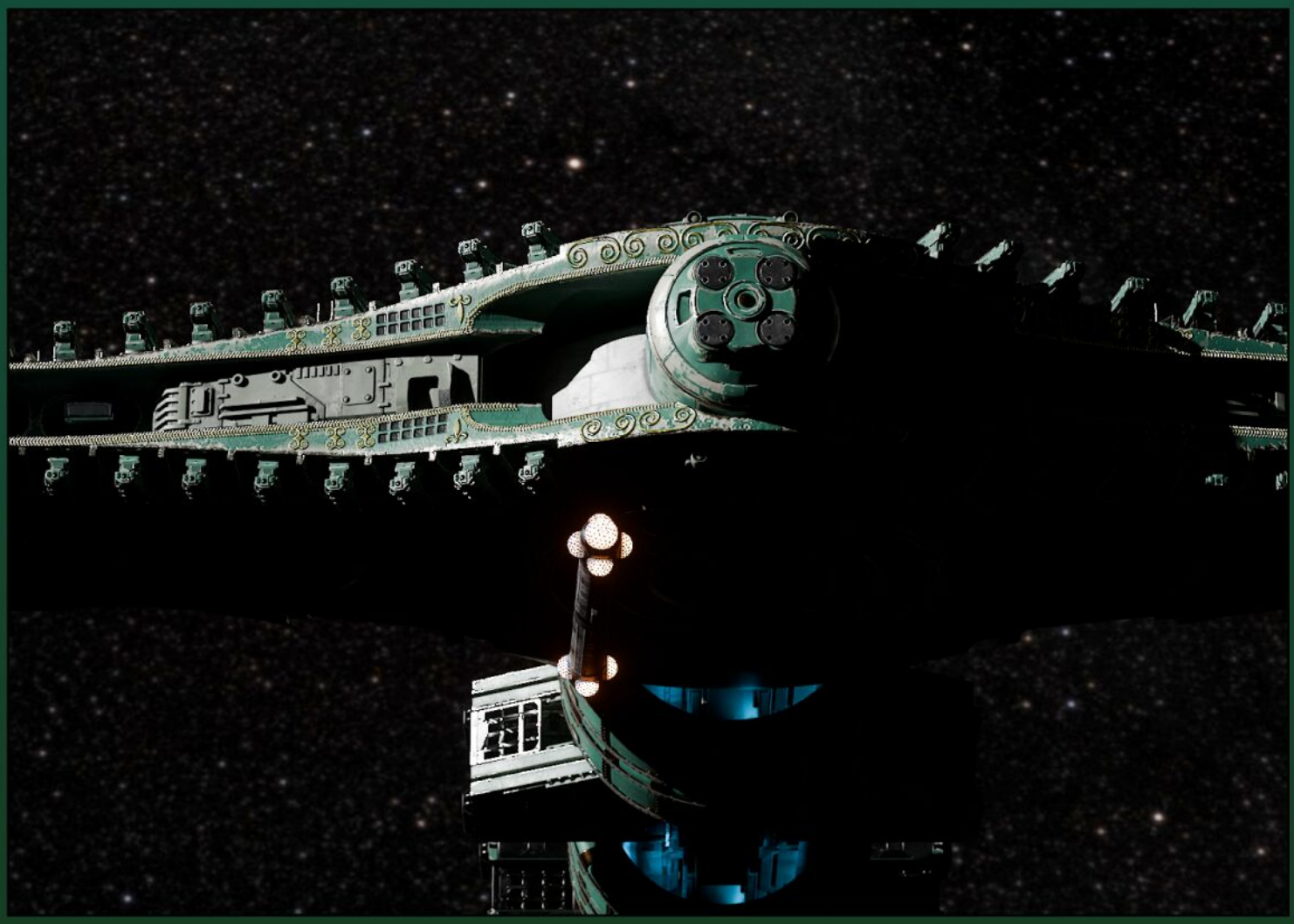

BEEEEEP!
GENERAL QUARTERS! GENERAL QUARTERS! ALL HANDS TO BATTLE STATIONS!
BEEEEEP!
WHAT THE FUCK..
WHAT NOW?
THIS IS NOT A DRILL! UNKNOWN VESSEL ON INTERCEPT COURSE! ALL HANDS TO BATTLE STATIONS!
VWHAT DID HE SAY!?
STAY HERE, DOC. WE'LL FIND OUT.
OUR ORDERS WERE TO PROTECT THIS ROOM, THAT'S WHAT WE'RE GONNA DO..
OK.. WHAT DO WE DO?
I'M WITH YOU.






OPS, BUTCHER FOUR. REQUEST SITREP. OVER.
OPS, THIS IS BUTCHER 4. COME IN.
ONE, THIS IS FOUR. HOW COPY?
BUTCHER 4 TO ANYONE ON THIS NET, COME IN..
THAT'S NOT GOOD..
IS IT TURNED ON?..
SHOULD VWE BE VWORRIED, OR..?
FOUR, THI...ONE...YOU... EAD?


FOUR. WEAK AND BROKEN. FIVE'S WITH ME. SAY AGAIN.
ASSIVE...IP!.... BOARDING... GET.. THE HUB .. OW!
FUCK.. DID I CAUSE THIS?
COPY ONE, WE'RE OSCAR MIKE.
YOU GET THAT, FIVE?
YEAH, GOT IT.
ALRIGHT, YOU GOT POINT.
OF COURSE I DO.. LET'S GO.



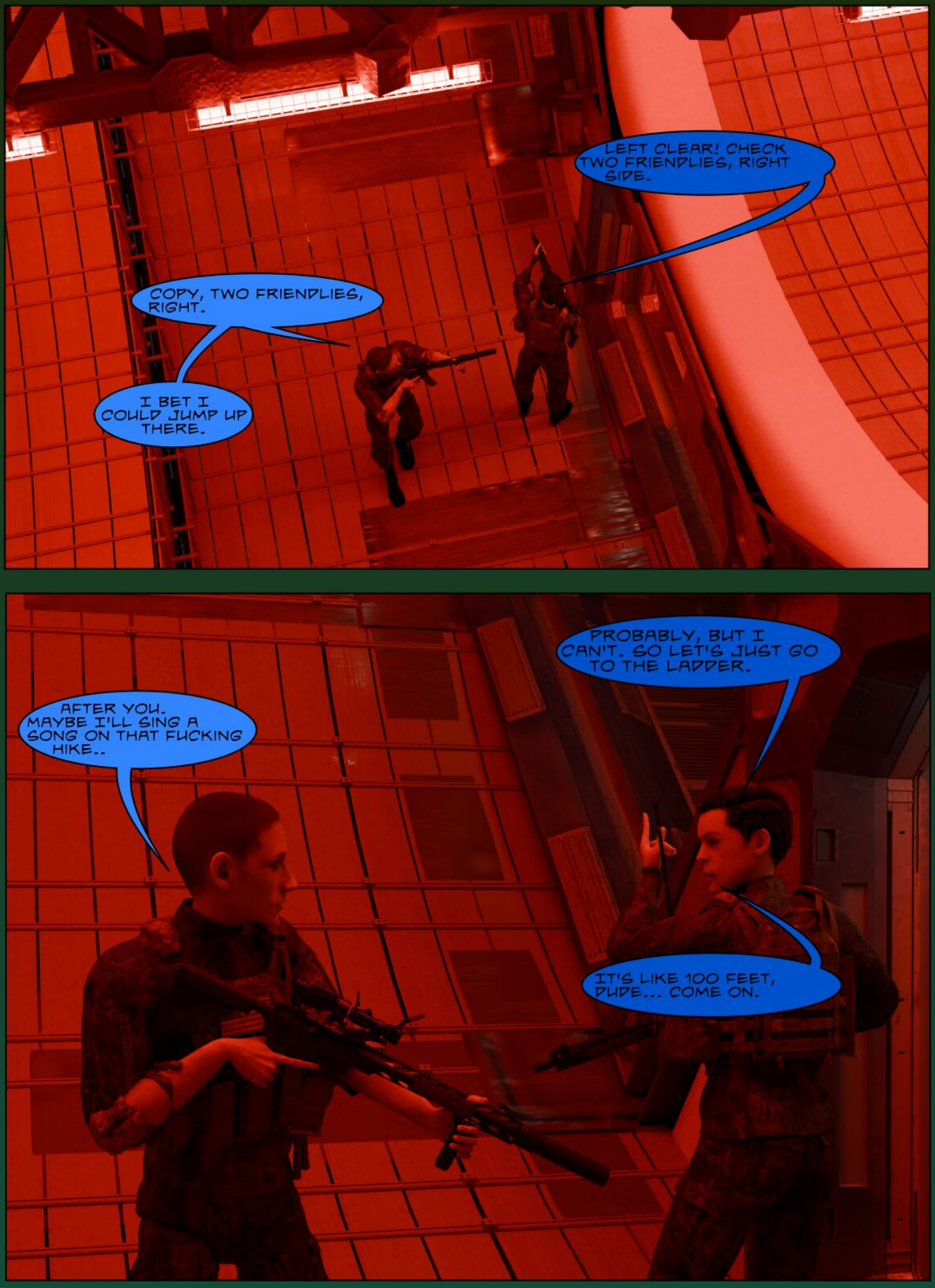


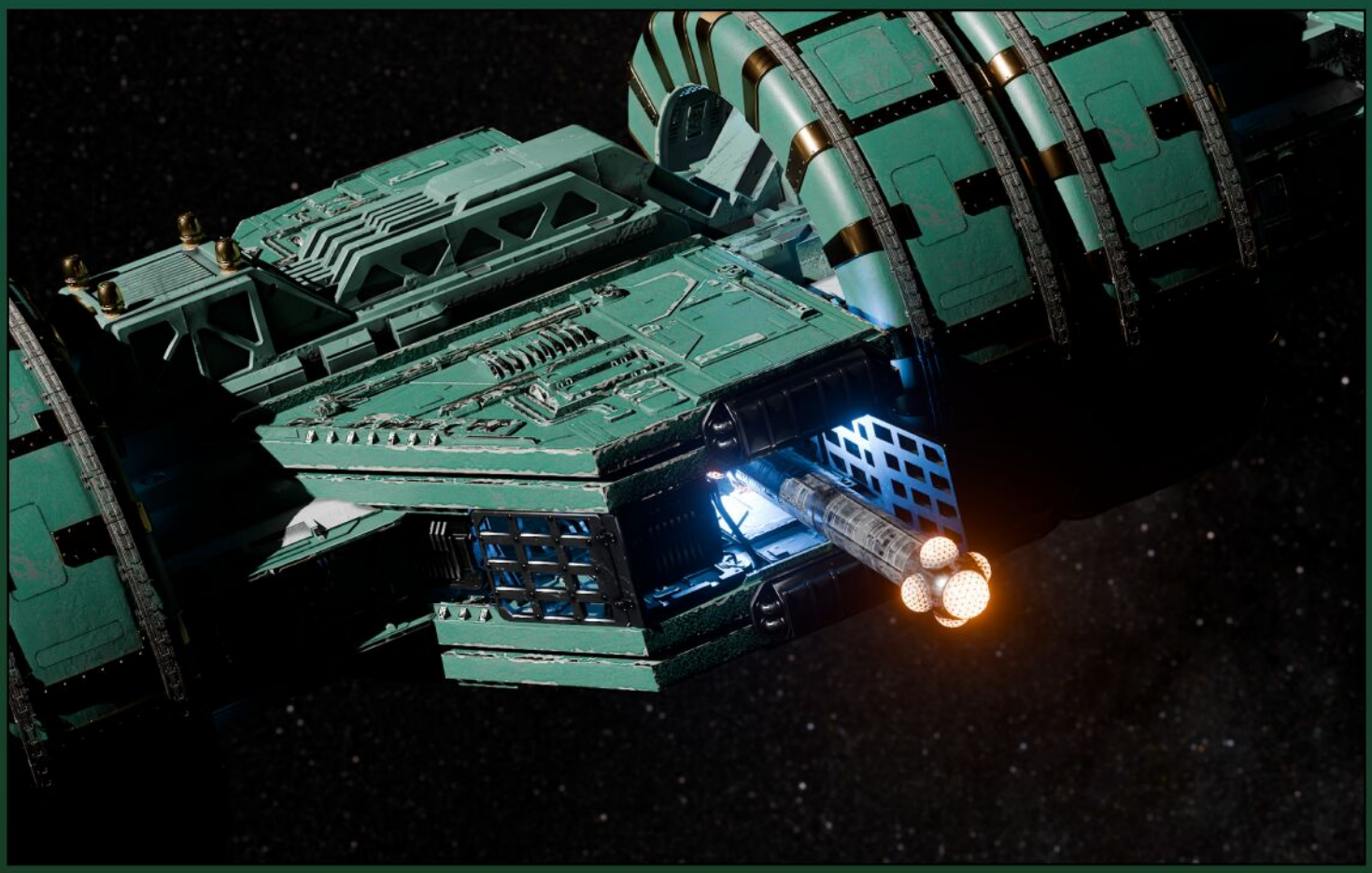


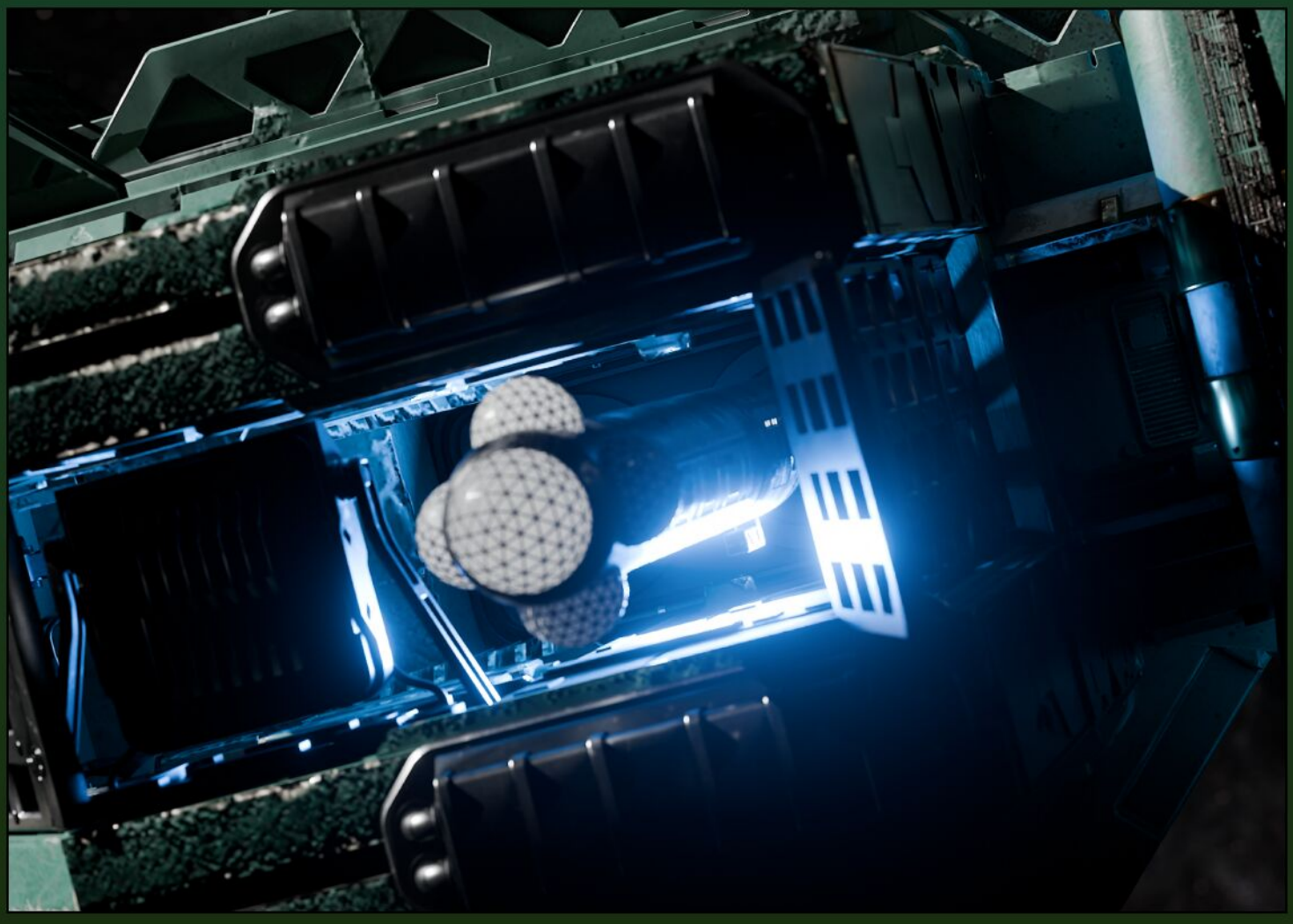


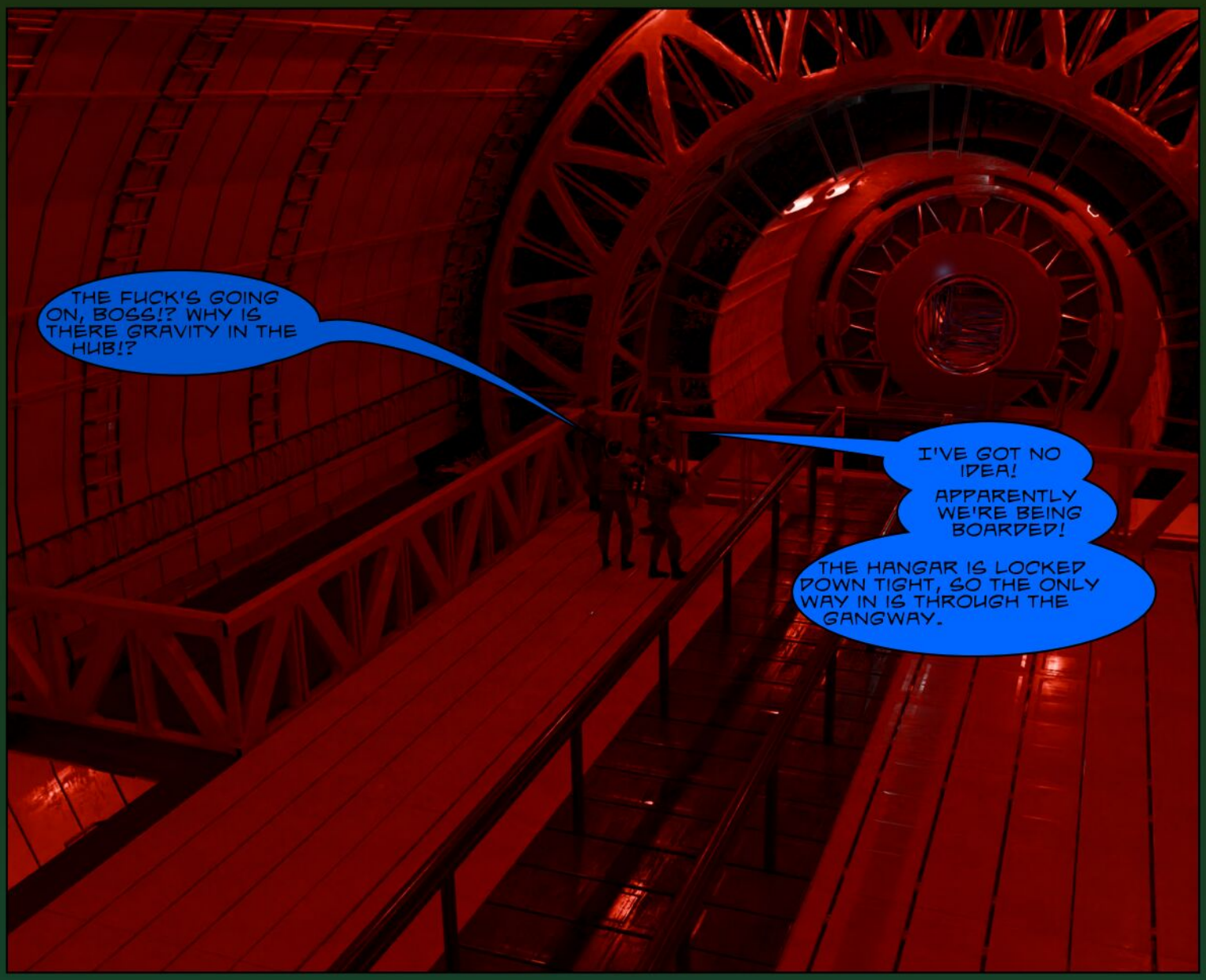

HEY! VWHAT ABOUT US!?
STAY PUT, BOTH OF YOU. KEEP THIS DOOR LOCKED UNTIL WE IDENTIFY OURSELVES. ANYONE ELSE GETS THROUGH... I DON'T KNOW. YOU'RE DOCTORS. YOU'LL FIGURE IT OUT.
BREAKING OUT!
CLEAR RIGHT


SCHEISSE..
YASKAWA
INDEED...

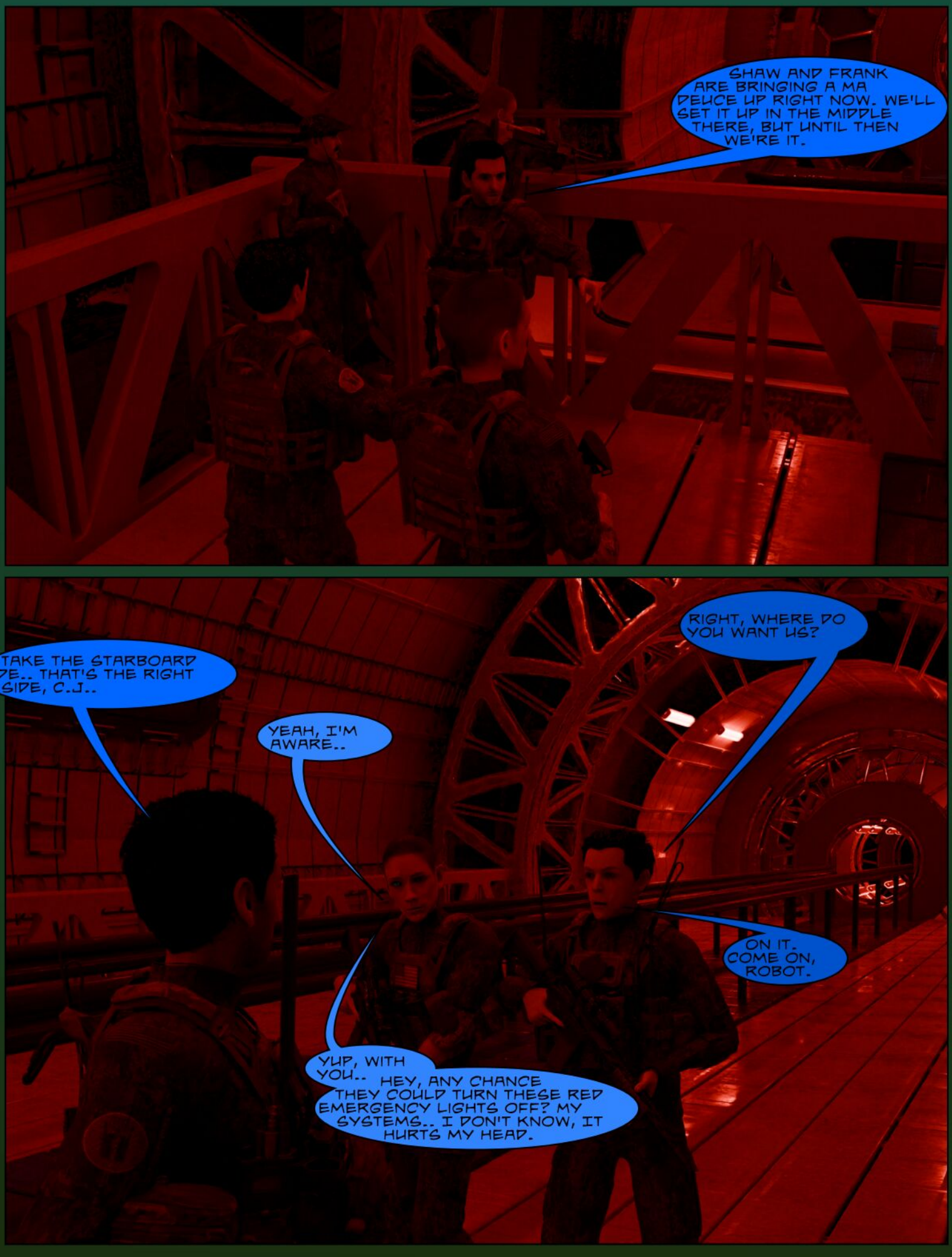

LEFT CLEAR! CHECK TWO FRIENDLIES, RIGHT SIDE.
COPY, TWO FRIENDLIES, RIGHT.
I BET I COULD JUMP UP THERE.
PROBABLY, BUT I CAN'T. SO LET'S JUST GO TO THE LADDER.
AFTER YOU. MAYBE I'LL SING A SONG ON THAT FUCKING HIKE..
IT'S LIKE 100 FEET, DUDE... COME ON.

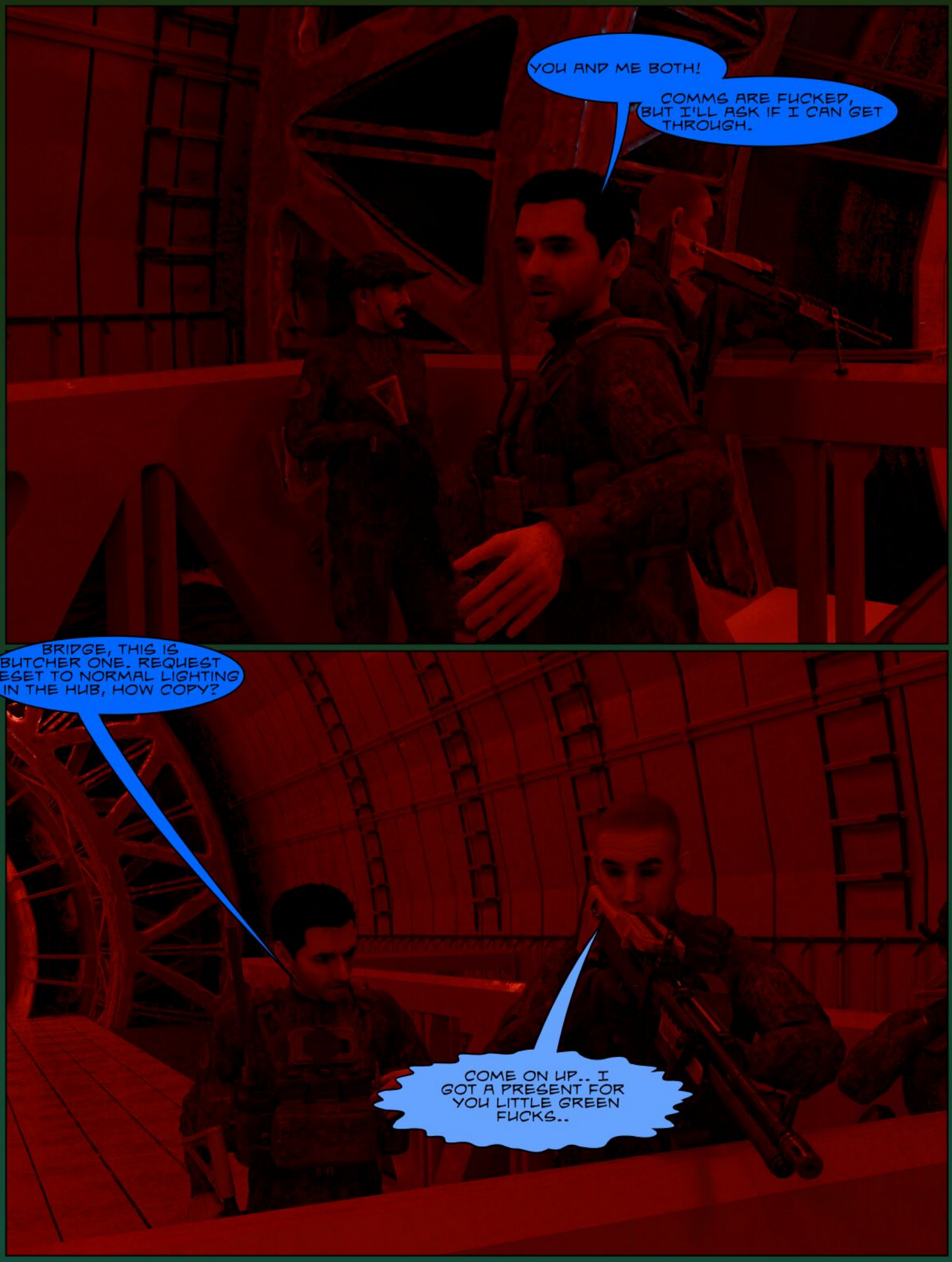





THE FUCK'S GOING ON, BOSS!? WHY IS THERE GRAVITY IN THE HUB!?
I'VE GOT NO IDEA!
APPARENTLY WE'RE BEING BOARDED!
THE HANGAR IS LOCKED DOWN TIGHT, SO THE ONLY WAY IN IS THROUGH THE GANGWAY.


THEN LET'S PLUG THAT FUCKING HOLE.
FUCKING RIGHT. THEY WANNA COME UP THAT LADDER, THEY BETTER BE IMMUNE TO BULLETS!


SHAW AND FRANK ARE BRINGING A MA DEUCE UP RIGHT NOW. WE'LL SET IT UP IN THE MIDDLE THERE, BUT UNTIL THEN WE'RE IT.
RIGHT, WHERE DO YOU WANT US?
TAKE THE STARBOARD SIDE.. THAT'S THE RIGHT SIDE, C.J..
YEAH, I'M AWARE..
ON IT. COME ON, ROBOT.
YUP, WITH YOU.. HEY, ANY CHANCE THEY COULD TURN THESE RED EMERGENCY LIGHTS OFF? MY SYSTEMS.. I DON'T KNOW, IT HURTS MY HEAD.


YOU AND ME BOTH!
COMMS ARE FUCKED, BUT I'LL ASK IF I CAN GET THROUGH.
BRIDGE, THIS IS BUTCHER ONE. REQUEST RESET TO NORMAL LIGHTING IN THE HUB, HOW COPY?
COME ON UP.. I GOT A PRESENT FOR YOU LITTLE GREEN FUCKS..


DID HE SAY HE WANTED THE LIGHTS RESET?
THAT'S WHAT IT SOUNDED LIKE, SIR!
THEN RESET THEM!





A WAVE OF DREAD FILLED THE ROOM, AND JIMMY FELT HIS KNEES WEAKEN.

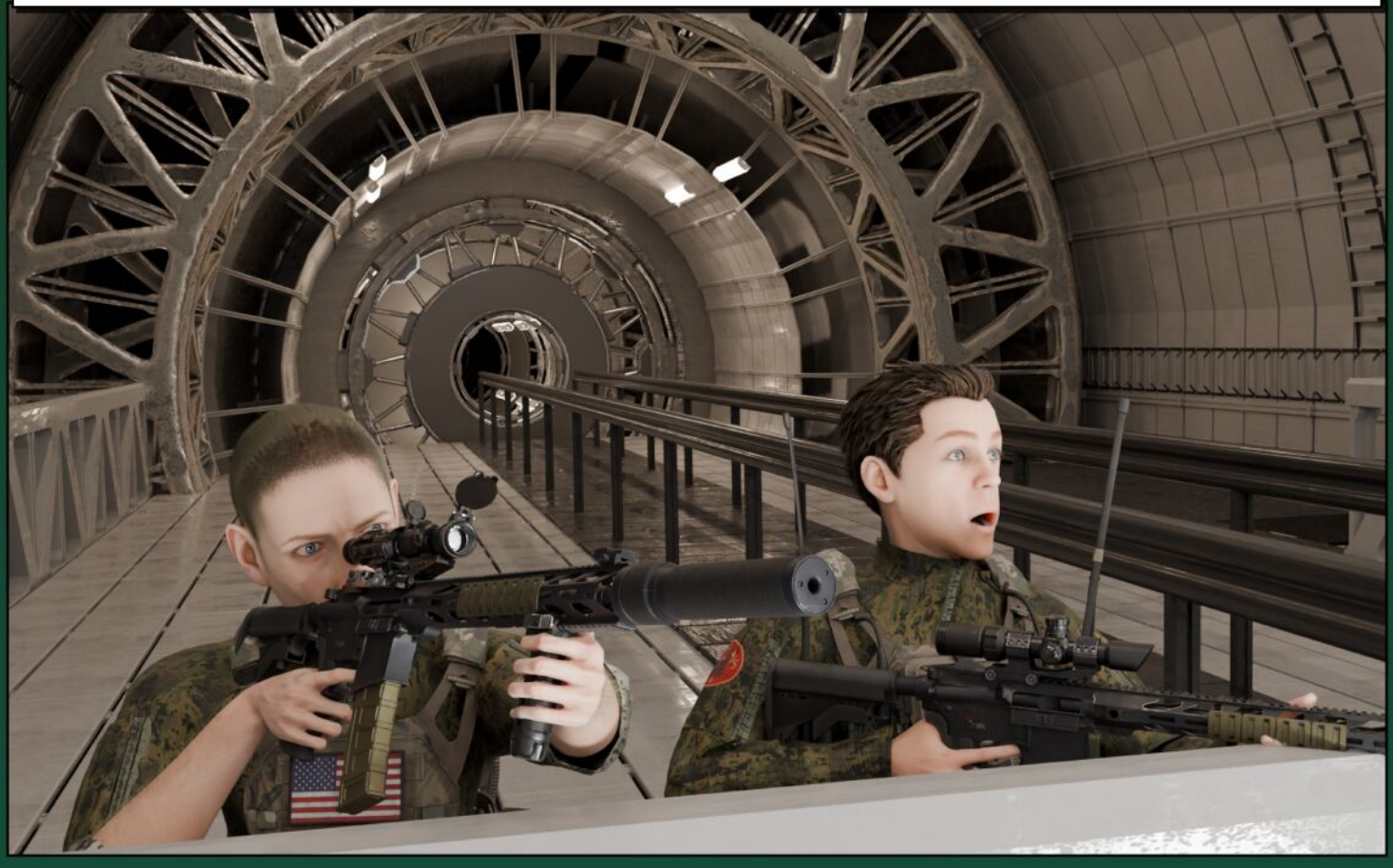



MY
NAME IS
GABRIEL

AN IRRESISTIBLE URGE SWEPT THROUGH BUTCHER TEAM. ONE BY ONE, THEY LOWERED THEIR WEAPONS.



C.J. FELT NO SUCH COMPULSION. QUITE THE OPPOSITE—HE WANTED TO KEEP HIS RIFLE TRAINED ON THE INTRUDER'S HEAD.

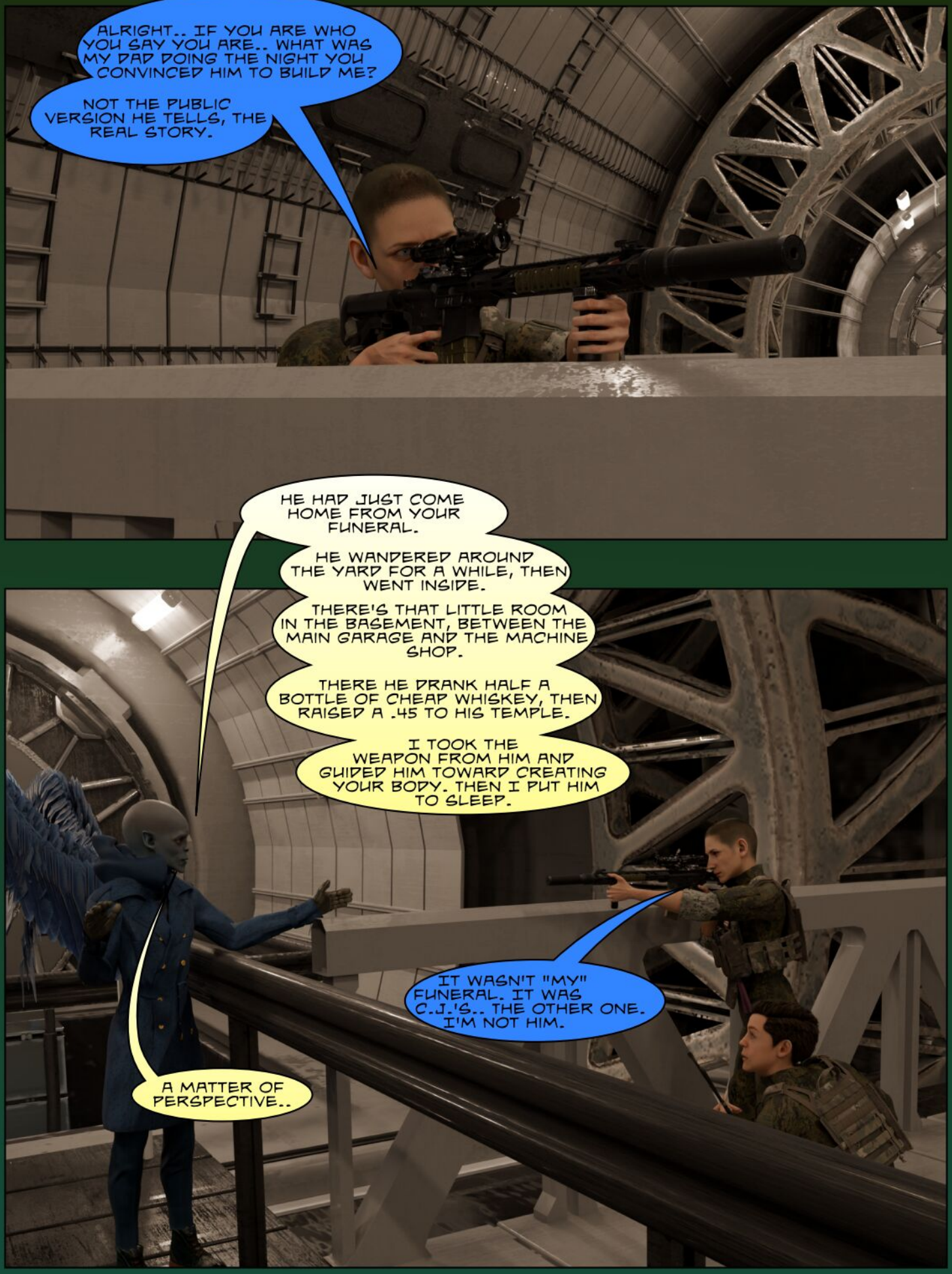



I WILL SPEAK,
AND YOU WILL LISTEN.



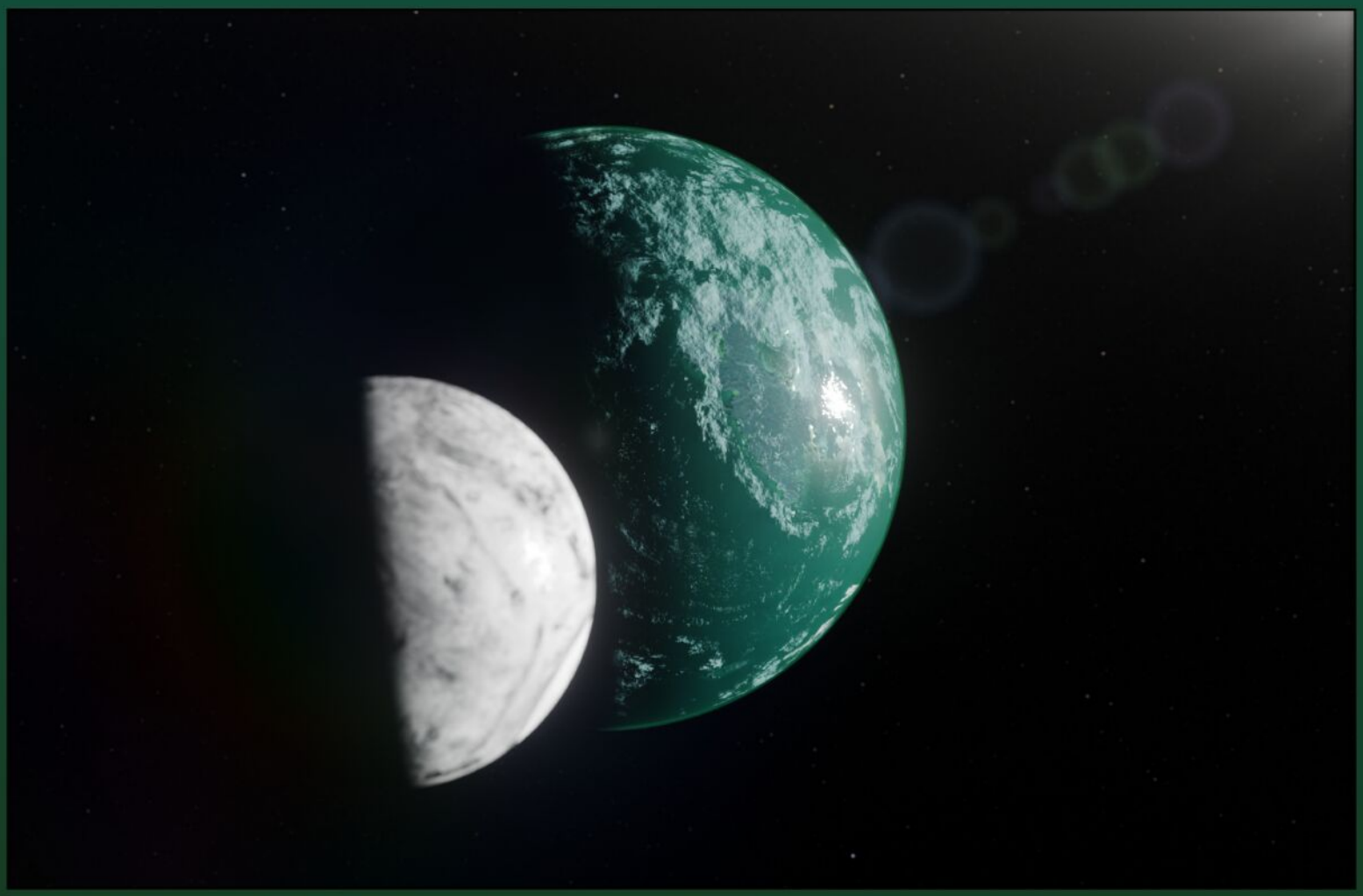

I-I'M CHIEF DIPAOLO. UNITED STATES NAVY... I'M IN CHARGE OF THIS UNIT...
BU-BUT I ASSUME YOU WANT THE COLONEL?
YOUR RACE IS SO YOUNG, SO "ASSUMING"..
YOUR COLONEL IS LOCKED IN HIS STEEL BUNKER..
AND YOU, PAUL.. YOU ARE A GOOD MAN. BUT YOU FAIL TO SEE WHAT'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.
I-I DO? YEAH, SURE. SOMETIMES... TO UHH. TO WHAT ARE YOU REFERRING?
EVEN NOW. YOU STAND TREMBLING AND ALL BUT DISARMED..


THE ONE WHO IS NOT INFLUENCED BY ME.
IT'S WITH HIM I MUST SPEAK.. AND TO ALL OF YOU AS WELL.
I'M MORE INCLINED TO SHOOT YOU IN THE FACE SIX OR SEVEN TIMES AND ASK QUESTIONS LATER.
YOU WILL HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY. AFTER THAT, IF YOU STILL DESIRE TO SHOOT ME, YOU MAY TRY.
HELLO, COLTON. IT'S NICE TO FINALLY MEET YOU.
WOULD YOU PLEASE LOWER THE GUN?
IF I WANTED TO HARM YOU, I COULD HAVE DONE IT WITH EASE A LONG, LONG TIME AGO.
LET MY TEAM GO FIRST. DROP WHATEVER "INFLUENCE" YOU HAVE!
THEIR REACTION IS PRIMAL, BIOLOGICAL. HARDWIRED INTO THE DEEPEST FRAMEWORK OF THEIR MINDS.
IT WILL PASS IN TIME.


ALRIGHT.. IF YOU ARE WHO YOU SAY YOU ARE.. WHAT WAS MY DAD DOING THE NIGHT YOU CONVINCED HIM TO BUILD ME?
NOT THE PUBLIC VERSION HE TELLS, THE REAL STORY.
HE HAD JUST COME HOME FROM YOUR FUNERAL.
HE WANDERED AROUND THE YARD FOR A WHILE, THEN WENT INSIDE.
THERE'S THAT LITTLE ROOM IN THE BASEMENT, BETWEEN THE MAIN GARAGE AND THE MACHINE SHOP.
THERE HE DRANK HALF A BOTTLE OF CHEAP WHISKEY, THEN RAISED A .45 TO HIS TEMPLE.
I TOOK THE WEAPON FROM HIM AND GUIDED HIM TOWARD CREATING YOUR BODY. THEN I PUT HIM TO SLEEP.
IT WASN'T "MY" FUNERAL. IT WAS C.J.'S.. THE OTHER ONE. I'M NOT HIM.
A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE..


ALL RIGHT, "GABE." LET'S TALK.
..SPLENDID.
I WOULD PREFER THIS CONVERSATION TAKE PLACE IN A MORE APPROPRIATE VENUE.
WE HAVE A BIG MEETING TABLE IN OPS. HOW'S THAT?
ACCEPTABLE.
YOU MAY LEAD THE WAY, COLTON...
FINE.. AND IT'S "C.J."
AS YOU WISH.


AND YOU, JAMES MORRIS.. "JIMMY"
YE-YES..?
STOP CRYING AND STAND UP. YOU LOOK UTTERLY RIDICULOUS.






YEAH! YOU THINK YOU'RE TOUGH!?
NO! FORGIVE ME!
THEN WHY'D YOU LOOK AT ME!? YEAH? I SHOULD CUT YOUR FACE OFF!
FORGIVE ME! I SHALL NOT LOOK AT YOU!
I'M GONNA STICK THIS GUN IN YOUR MOUTH NOW! YEAAHH!!!
KRI'DALL!
WHAT!? HE LOOKED AT ME! HE'S TRASH! RIGHT? TRASH! YEAH!


YES, BUT WE REQUIRE THEM ALIVE. YOU UNDERSTAND?
LET ME JUST KILL ONE MORE!
NO! KILL THEM NOW, AND THE OTHERS WILL BOMBARD THIS ENTIRE FACILITY!
THEN AFTER WE GET WHAT WE WANT, WE KILL THEM ANYWAY!?
YES. ONCE THE OTHERS MEET OUR DEMANDS, YOU MAY KILL THEM ALL IF YOU WISH.. BUT UNTIL THEN, WE MUST WAIT. AGREED?
CAN I CUT OFF THEIR FINGERS WHILE WE WAIT!? YEAH! CUT OFF THEIR FINGERS!
NO, KRI'DALL.. WE SHALL DO NO SUCH THING..
JUST.. GO OUTSIDE. FIND SOME DIVERSION.
OK! I'LL GO OUTSIDE AND SHOOT THE COWS! YEAH! SHOOT ALL THE COWS!
NO! LEAVE THE CATTLE BE! JUST.. GO SIT ON THE COUCH.


HELLO.. I'M COLONEL ERIC V-VAN HELDEN. WELCOME ABOARD THE U.S.S.S CURTIS LEMAY.


I AM GABRIEL. HIGH COMMANDER OF THE BATTLESHIP SI'RIZALL.


GABRIEL.. ERRM. OR IS IT COMMANDER? IT'S AN HONOR TO MEET YOU.
BE SEATED, COLONEL. MY TIME HERE IS LIMITED.
ALRIGHT-Y THEN..
WELL.. I'LL TAKE RUDE OVER VIOLENT AND RAPE-Y, EH, SIR?
WE'LL SEE.. TAKE A SEAT, I GUESS.
BUT STAY ALERT..






C.J. BE AT EASE. TAKE YOUR SEAT.
I PREFER TO STAND..
FORGIVE ME, BUT I DON'T EXACTLY TRUST YOU.


VWOOM!
HAD I INTENDED TO HARM ANY OF YOU, I WOULD HAVE DONE SO LONG AGO.
WOAH!


CLICK!
CLACK-CLACK!
THAT WAS NOT A SUGGESTION. SIT.


SO, I'LL JUST TAKE A SEAT THEN..

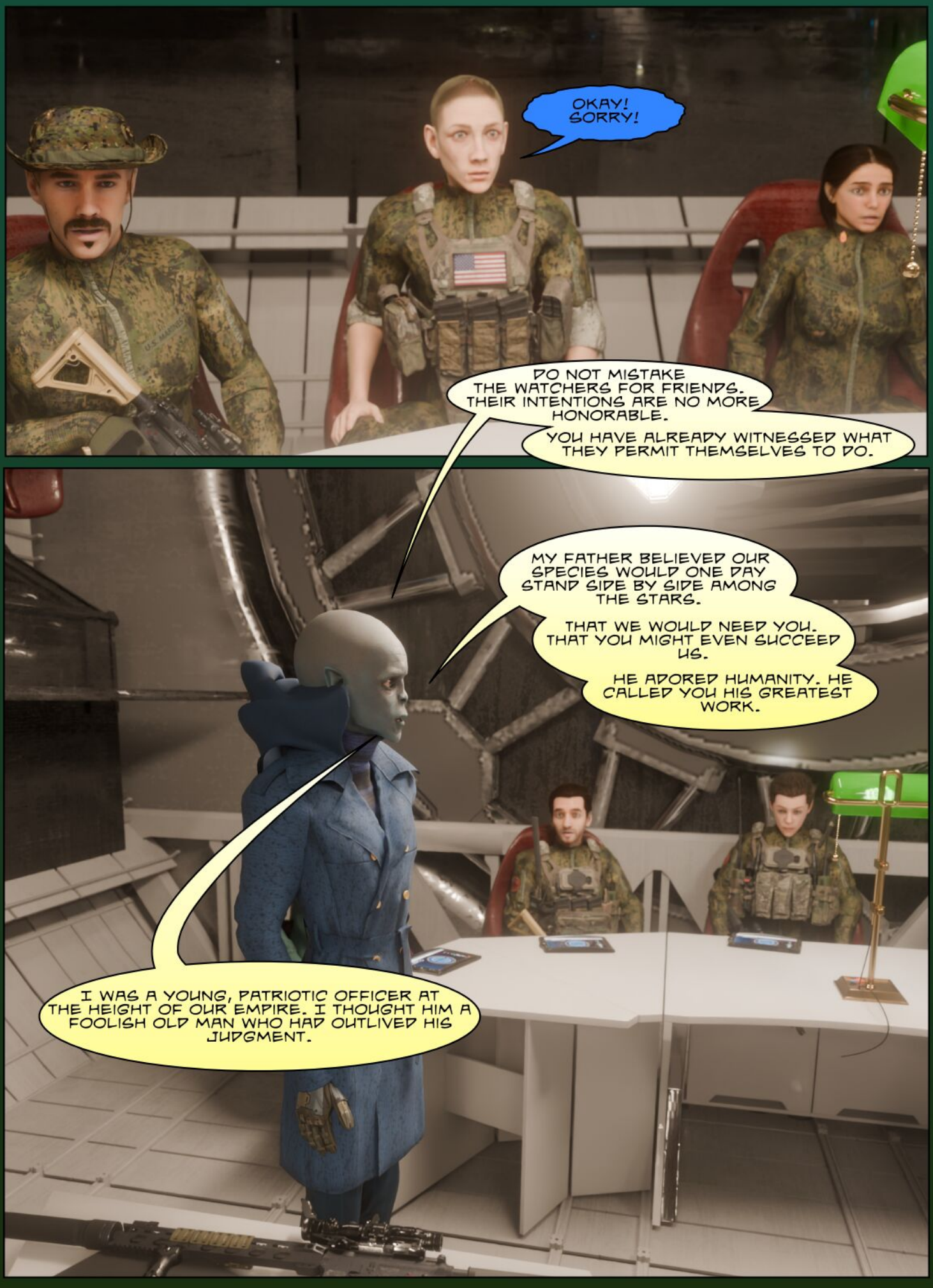

PSST.


HEY... THANKS FOR TRYING. I DON'T TRUST THEM EITHER.
UM... YEAH.
YOUR SPECIES... THIS VESSEL.
ONCE, I WOULD HAVE SLAIN YOU ALL FOR POSSESSING FAR LESS. NOW I HAVE COME TO ASK YOUR AID.
YOU WERE NEVER MEANT TO LEAVE THE SAVANNAS,
MUCH LESS BECOME A SPACEFARING RACE.
MOST OF MY PEOPLE DEEMED YOU A MISTAKE.
A SPECIES BORN OF OUR HUBRIS.
YOUR BIOLOGICAL KINSHIP WITH US PERSUADED US THAT, ONCE UPLIFTED, YOU WOULD BECOME LIKE US.
AND TO OUR HORROR... YOU DID. IN OUR VIRTUES, AND IN OUR FAILINGS.


COLONEL. HOLD THIS.
UH... OKAY.
BUT YOU DID NOT MERELY BECOME OUR EQUALS.
LARGER. STRONGER. FASTER. IN MANY WAYS, EVEN MORE INTELLIGENT.
YOU ENDURE HARDSHIPS THAT WOULD BREAK OTHER SAPIENT SPECIES—AND CONTINUE ONWARD.
FROM A HANDFUL OF OUR WRECKS, YOU RECOVERED THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR PHYSICS AND MATERIALS SCIENCE.
IN SECRET, WITHOUT THE FULL RESOURCES OF YOUR CIVILIZATION, YOU BUILT THESE VESSELS. WE HAD SEEN NOTHING LIKE IT.
YOU TERRIFY MY PEOPLE.
WHAT REMAINS OF THEM.


THE VESSEL APPROACHING YOUR WORLD IS NOT COMING TO PUNISH THE EXILES
YOU CALL THE WATCHERS.
NOR DOES IT COME IN PEACE.
IT IS AN ARK. ABOARD IT SURVIVES WHAT REMAINS OF OUR CIVILIZATION.
MOST ABOARD ARE INNOCENT. THEY KNOW LITTLE OF HUMANITY BEYOND WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO SEE.
THEY EXPECT A VIOLENT, SAVAGE PEOPLE BENT UPON THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION.
THE EVENTS OF THIS CENTURY HAVE DONE LITTLE TO DISPEL THAT BELIEF.
BUT NOTHING YOU HAVE DONE EXCUSES WHAT OUR LEADERS INTEND.
UPON ARRIVAL, THEY PLAN TO RELEASE A PATHOGEN.
IT IS DESIGNED TO BE DEACTIVATED WHEN ROUGHLY ONE TENTH OF YOUR POPULATION REMAINS.
THE SURVIVORS WILL BE KEPT AS PETS.
FORBIDDEN ANY TECHNOLOGY BEYOND WHAT THEY CAN FASHION WITH THEIR BARE HANDS.
YOU'RE MAKING THE WATCHERS SOUND REASONABLE IN COMPARISON.
THE WATCHERS CALL THEIR ATTACHMENT TO HUMANITY LOVE.
THEY BELIEVE THAT LOVE ENTITLES THEM TO POSSESS YOU.
THEY WOULD PRESERVE YOU—AND DENY YOU THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE YOUR OWN FUTURE.
TO THEM, YOU ARE... PROPERTY.

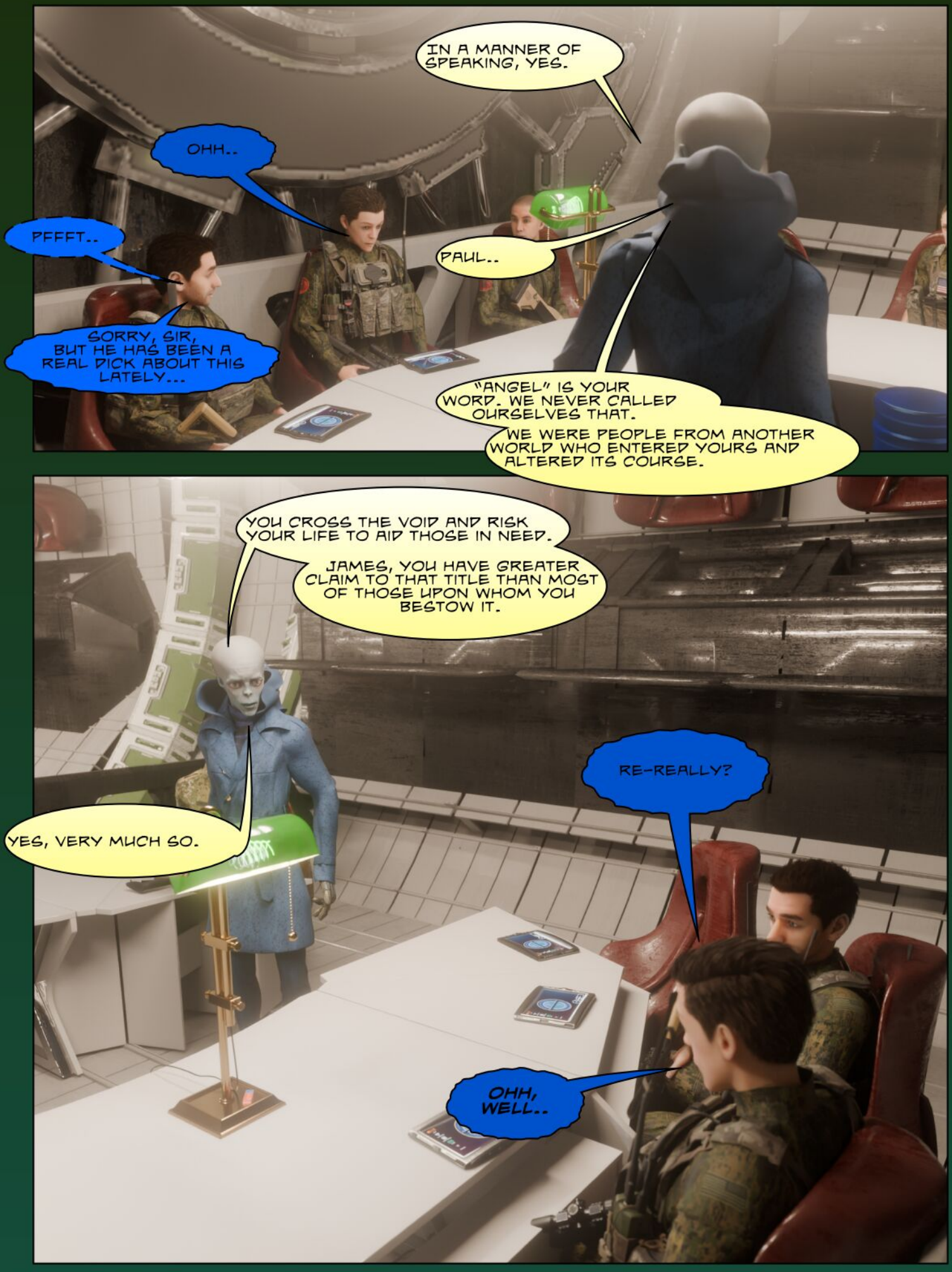

SERIOUSLY...?
HA! NOW YOU KNOW HOW IT FEELS!
TIME AND PLACE, FIVE..
BE SILENT, OR I WILL SILENCE YOU!


OKAY! SORRY!
DO NOT MISTAKE THE WATCHERS FOR FRIENDS. THEIR INTENTIONS ARE NO MORE HONORABLE.
YOU HAVE ALREADY WITNESSED WHAT THEY PERMIT THEMSELVES TO DO.
MY FATHER BELIEVED OUR SPECIES WOULD ONE DAY STAND SIDE BY SIDE AMONG THE STARS.
THAT WE WOULD NEED YOU. THAT YOU MIGHT EVEN SUCCEED US.
HE ADORED HUMANITY. HE CALLED YOU HIS GREATEST WORK.
I WAS A YOUNG, PATRIOTIC OFFICER AT THE HEIGHT OF OUR EMPIRE. I THOUGHT HIM A FOOLISH OLD MAN WHO HAD OUTLIVED HIS JUDGMENT.


HOW COULD HAIRLESS APES, FASHIONED IN AN UNSANCTIONED EXPERIMENT, STAND BESIDE THE GREAT ASGARDIAN EMPIRE? MUCH LESS SUCCEED IT?
IT OFFENDED ME. IT OFFENDED MANY OF US.
THEN, IN WHAT FELT LIKE NO TIME AT ALL, THE EMPIRE FELL. MY PEOPLE WERE SCATTERED ACROSS THE COSMOS.
TODAY, SO FAR AS I KNOW, ONLY THOSE ABOARD THE ARK AND ON RHEA REMAIN.
FROM MORE THAN A HUNDRED TRILLION... TO SOME NINETEEN MILLION.
EVEN AFTER THE FALL, I OBEYED MY LAST ORDERS. I KEPT HUMANITY SUBDUED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.
I KNEW IT WAS WRONG. I DID IT NONETHELESS. DUTY TO MY PEOPLE BECAME MY EXCUSE FOR DISREGARDING MY FATHER.
THEN, AGES AGO, ANOTHER OF HIS PREDICTIONS CAME TO PASS. ONE WE HAD CONSIDERED NEAR BLASPHEMY.
A HUMAN WAS BORN WITH A PATTERN OF MIND WE HAD NEVER THOUGHT TO FIND AMONG YOUR KIND.
ROUGHLY ONE IN A HUNDRED QUADRILLION BEINGS POSSESSES IT, WITHIN WHAT YOU CALL THE QUANTUM BAFFLES, OR C-BAFFLES.


WE CALL THAT PATTERN VERI'DANDI. "THE PROTECTOR."
ITS BEARER IS IMMUNE TO PSIONIC INFLUENCE AND CAN WIELD THAT POWER BEYOND THE REACH OF ANY ORDINARY MIND.
I DISMISSED THE FIRST HUMAN BEARER AS AN ANOMALY. AGES PASSED BEFORE ANOTHER WAS BORN—ALMOST HALF A CENTURY AGO.
I COULD NO LONGER DISMISS WHAT MY FATHER HAD FORESEEN. I DID EVERYTHING IN MY POWER, BUT FAILED IN MY SACRED CHARGE TO PROTECT HIM AS HE GREW.
THE EXILES MURDERED HIM, BUT HIS DEATH WAS DECLARED AN ACCIDENT.
BUT I HAD PREPARED A SAFEGUARD.
LONG BEFORE I MET YOUR FATHER, C.J., I INFLUENCED THE COURSE OF HIS RESEARCH.
GUIDED HIM TOWARD THE DEVICE HE EVENTUALLY BUILT.
THAT IS WHY YOU ARE HERE TODAY.
ME!? BUT I'M NOT EVEN HUMAN.
NO, YOU ARE NOT.
YOUR FATHER'S DEVICE WAS MORE THAN A SCANNER. IT PRESERVED THE PATTERN, THE BLUEPRINT FROM WHICH YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS WAS CREATED.


I NEEDED THAT PATTERN TO SURVIVE BEYOND THE EXILES' GRASP, EVEN IF THEY KILLED ITS BEARER.
C.J., YOU ARE THE BEST HOPE EITHER OF OUR PEOPLES HAS.
I DON'T THINK I'M REALLY THE GUY FOR THAT. I'M KIND OF... I DON'T KNOW.
I KNOW YOU WELL. I HAVE WATCHED YOU THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE. THERE IS GOODNESS IN YOU. THOUGH YOUR INFIDELITIES DO TEST ONE'S PATIENCE.
I CEASED COUNTING AT TWENTY. YOU SHOULD CEASE COMMITTING THEM.
IT-IT'S REALLY EASY WHEN YOU PULL UP IN A BUGATTI. YOU CAN BASICALLY JUST PICK ONE AND POINT...
DAYUMMM!!
EWW..
SO... YOU'RE SAYING HE'S SOME KIND OF ANGEL?


IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING, YES.
OHH..
PFFFT..
PAUL..
SORRY, SIR, BUT HE HAS BEEN A REAL DICK ABOUT THIS LATELY...
"ANGEL" IS YOUR WORD. WE NEVER CALLED OURSELVES THAT.
WE WERE PEOPLE FROM ANOTHER WORLD WHO ENTERED YOURS AND ALTERED ITS COURSE.
YOU CROSS THE VOID AND RISK YOUR LIFE TO AID THOSE IN NEED.
JAMES, YOU HAVE GREATER CLAIM TO THAT TITLE THAN MOST OF THOSE UPON WHOM YOU BESTOW IT.
RE-REALLY?
YES, VERY MUCH SO.
OHH, WELL..


MEN SUCH AS YOU HELPED ME SEE THAT MY FATHER WAS RIGHT ALL ALONG.
TH-THANK YOU..?
I SEE YOUR DISTRESS, JAMES. YOUR FAITH IS NOT INVALID.
IT IS WHAT MAKES YOU THE MAN YOU ARE.
BUT IF IT'S ALL A LIE?
A LIE? NO!
A MISUNDERSTANDING? YES.
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? HONESTLY..
I SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE PRAYING TO A GOD THAT ISN'T THERE..
THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE TELLING ME?
I SAID NO SUCH THING.
YOUR FAITH IN FICTIONALIZED VERSIONS OF MY PEOPLE IN OLD BOOKS.
IN IDEAS AND RITUALS LONG CORRUPTED BY TIME AND THE MINDS OF WICKED MEN.
YOUR FAITH IN THESE THINGS IS MISPLACED.
BUT YOUR FAITH IN GOD? IN THE GOOD OF CREATION?
THAT FAITH IS NOT MISPLACED.


I CANNOT STOP OUR LEADERS FROM DESTROYING HUMANITY. NOT ALONE.
MANY ARE TAUGHT YOU ARE UNWORTHY OF FREEDOM.
BUT THE TRUTH IS, THEY ARE AFRAID... WE ARE AFRAID.
GABRI... COMMANDER. WE'D BE HAPPY TO HELP IN ANY WAY WE CAN.
I'M JUST NOT SURE WHAT WE COULD POSSIBLY DO, OR WHY YOU'RE TELLING US ANY OF THIS.
I'M TELLING YOU THIS BECAUSE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, YOUR ENTIRE CIVILIZATION IS ABOUT TO CHANGE.
WE STILL HAVE TIME BEFORE THE ARK ARRIVES. BUT THERE IS AN IMMEDIATE CRISIS IN WHICH YOU CAN HELP.
ALL RIGHT. WHAT CRISIS?
MY PEOPLE ARE BEING HELD HOSTAGE. I HAVE COME TO ASK YOUR MARINES TO RECOVER THEM. FIRST, ONE MATTER ARISING FROM THE ATTACK HERE. I MUST TAKE CUSTODY OF THE FALLEN EXILE'S BODY.
DALE AND OTTO WON'T BE HAPPY, BUT... ALL RIGHT. WHAT ABOUT THE WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT?
KEEP IT, AS RECOMPENSE FOR MY FAILURE TO PREVENT THEIR INTRUSION.
UNDERSTOOD. NOW, THESE HOSTAGES?


IF OUR PEOPLES ARE TO SHARE A FUTURE...
WE WILL NEED TO LEARN TO TRUST EACH OTHER...
I CANNOT ASK THAT OF YOU WHILE REFUSING TO ADMIT...
...THAT I NEED YOUR HELP.
THERE IS A FARMING COLONY ON A DISTANT WORLD.
ITS SMALL VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE HAS BEEN TAKEN HOSTAGE.
THE CAPTORS DEMAND THAT WE DELIVER C.J.
AND THE ONE NAMED WINTERS TO RHEA.
IF WE REFUSE, THEY THREATEN TO KILL THE WORKERS AND DESTROY THE FARM.
HE'S REALLY THAT IMPORTANT, HUH?
DON'T YOU GUYS HAVE YOUR OWN VERSION OF SPECIAL FORCES?
ONCE, WE HAD WARRIORS WITHOUT EQUAL. NO LONGER. I HAVE A FEW GOOD MEN REMAINING, BUT THEY ARE NOT TRUE WARRIORS. THAT IS WHY I NEED YOUR MARINES.
AND YES, COLONEL. HE IS THAT IMPORTANT.


THAT'S A PRETTY BIG ASK, COMMANDER..
LET'S SAY I AGREE TO SEND BUTCHER TEAM. WHAT DO WE GET OUT OF THIS LITTLE "ALLIANCE" YOU'RE SUGGESTING?
AN ALLIANCE. YES. THAT IS WHAT I PROPOSE.
THE CAPTORS CARRY ADVANCED PLASMA WEAPONS. ANY YOU TAKE FROM THEM, YOU MAY KEEP.
I AM NOT PREPARED TO SHARE OUR TECHNOLOGY DIRECTLY.
HOWEVER, DURING THIS VENTURE, I WILL NOT PREVENT YOUR PEOPLE FROM... EXAMINING MY VESSEL AND ITS SYSTEMS.
SAY YES, SIR!
WE HAVE TO!

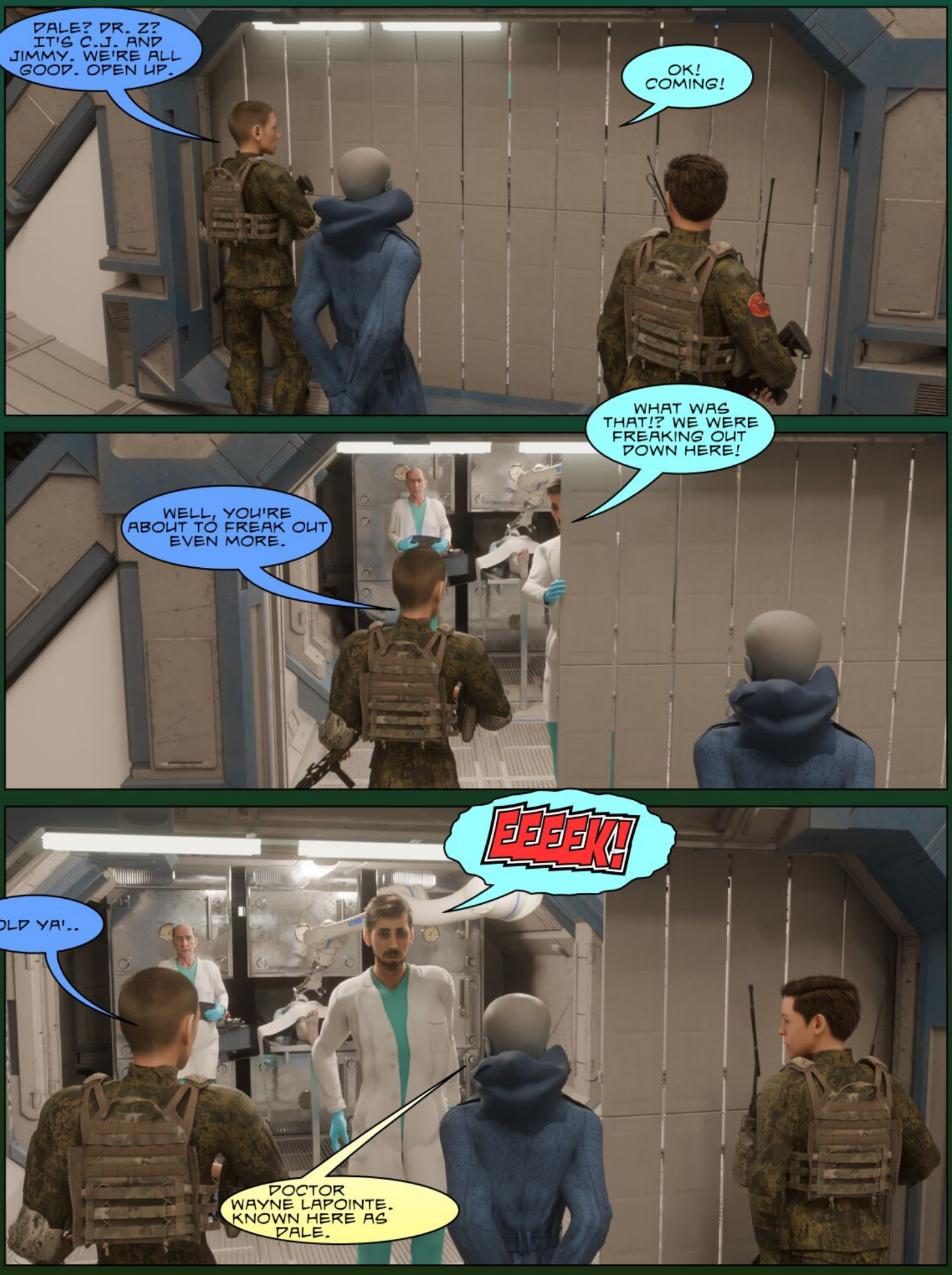

SIR, IT'S NO SECRET I CAN'T STAND HIM, BUT HE'S RIGHT.
WE HAVE TO.
I'M IN, LET'S GET IT!
WHOA! HOLD ON, GUYS. I ALREADY KNOW YOU'RE ALL ON BOARD... ARE YOU TAKING THE WHOLE SHIP WITH YOU, OR JUST THEM?
FOR HOW LONG? WHERE EXACTLY?
I'LL ALSO NEED TO GET APPROVAL FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS FROM COMMAND.
I WILL BRING YOUR ENTIRE VESSEL. IT WILL BE REQUIRED.
THE JOURNEY IS TWO DAYS EACH WAY.
IT IS A DAMP, COLD WORLD WE CALL BROAN'IS.
AND YOU WILL SAY NOTHING TO YOUR COMMAND UNTIL OUR RETURN.
IF OUR RANKS CAN BE INFILTRATED, SO CAN YOURS. THEY MUST NOT KNOW YOU ARE COMING.
I SUPPOSE THAT MAKES SENSE.. ANOTHER STAR SYSTEM, HUH?.. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE AN ALIEN PLANET..
ALL RIGHT, COMMANDER. BUT MY SHIP AND MY PEOPLE REMAIN UNDER MY COMMAND.
AGREED. YOU WILL DECIDE HOW YOUR PEOPLE CARRY IT OUT. NOW, TAKE ME TO THE FALLEN EXILE. ONCE THE BODY IS ABOARD THE SI'RIZALL, WE SHALL DEPART.
ALL RIGHT, FOUR, FIVE, TAKE HIM DOWN THERE.
IF DALE GIVES YOU A HARD TIME, TASE HIM.

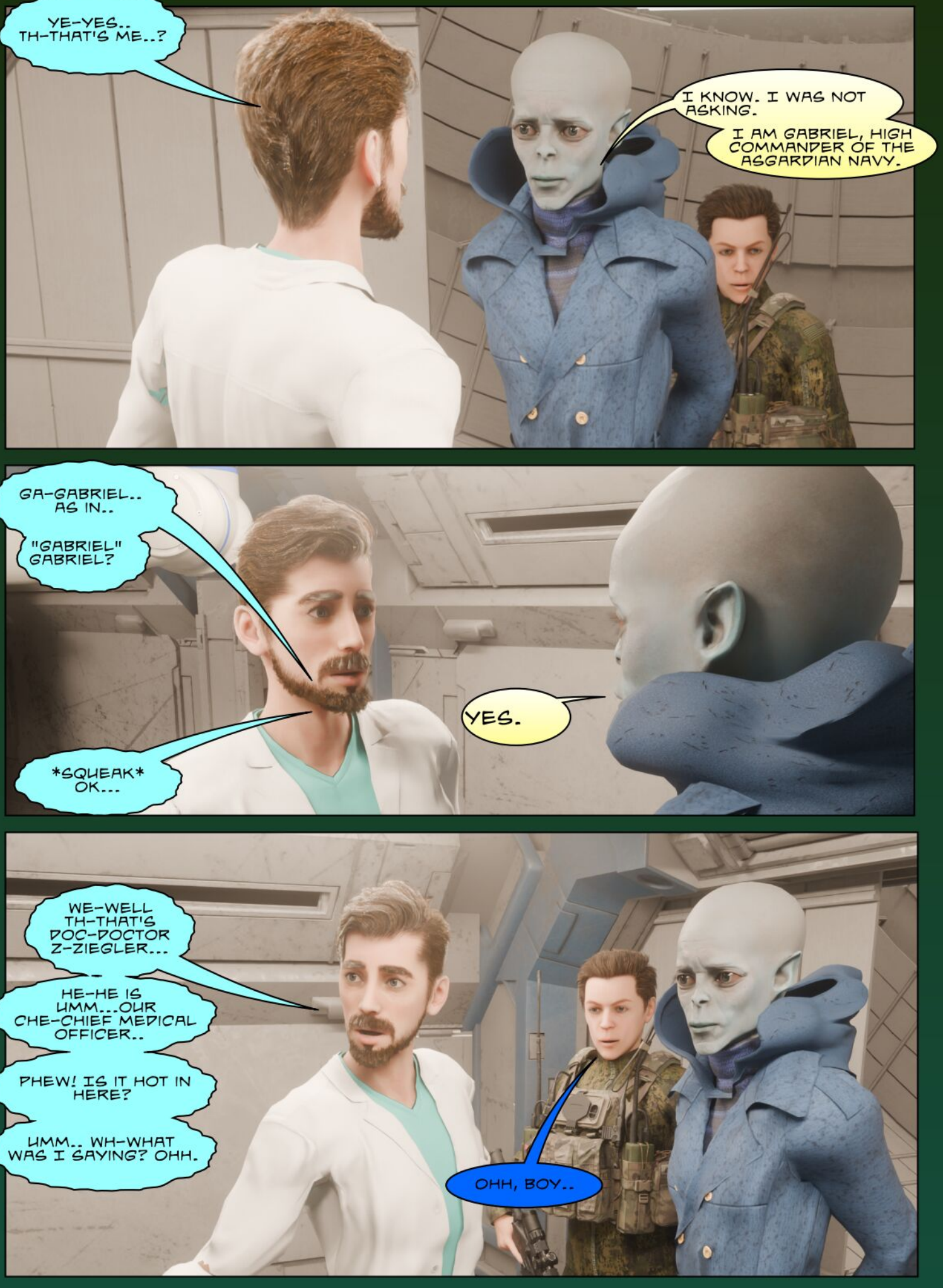

THIS IS YOUR MEDICAL FACILITY?
IT IS FAR MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN I HAD IMAGINED.
YEAH, WE DON'T LIKE GETTING HURT!
IT'S GOOD TO HAVE WHEN SHI... THINGS GO WRONG...
INDEED.
DO ALL THE BAYS HAVE THE SAME FUNCTION?
N-NO.. THE ONES CLOSEST TO THE ENTRANCE ARE EMERGENCY AND SURGICAL BAYS.
THE REST ARE GENERAL PU-PURPOSE, EXCEPT THE MORGUE AT THE VERY TOP.
TH-THEN, OF COURSE, ALL THE WALLS AND FLOORS HAVE THESE MODULAR ATTACHMENT RAILS, SO WE CAN M-MAKE MORE ROOM IF WE NEED TO...
EFFICIENT.
TAKE A DEEP DAMN BREATH THERE, JIMBO...


YOUR ANXIETY IS UNDERSTANDABLE, JAMES.
BUT YOUR COLLEAGUE IS CORRECT. TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND RELAX.
SORRY.. I'VE NEVER MET AN ARCHANGEL BEFORE..
"ARCHANGEL." WE HAVE NO SUCH TITLE.
YOU REFER TO THE VERI'DANDI, THE PROTECTOR.
FORGIVE ME, PLEASE, BUT...
BY THAT LOGIC, C.J., THAT... ROBOT, IS AN ARCHANGEL?
IF YOU WISH TO USE THAT TERM, YES. HE IS A CANDIDATE FOR THE ROLE.
HA! COOL!
I KNOW THIS IS NOT WHAT YOU WISH TO HEAR, BUT I AM NOT HERE TO BRING YOU COMFORT, ONLY TRUTH.


THE MOMENT GABRIEL TURNED AWAY, C.J. STUCK HIS TONGUE OUT AT JIMMY.
REALLY...?
THIS IS THE MORGUE?
ARE YOU SERIOUS?
IF YOU STOP ACTING LIKE A PETULANT CHILD, YOU WILL NOT NEED TO APOLOGIZE SO MUCH.
THANK YOU!
SORRY!
HMM... THEN STOP DOING THAT.
POSSESSING THIS GIFT DOES NOT MAKE YOU INHERENTLY WORTHY.
I KNOW.. SOMETIMES I JUST DO AND SAY THINGS WITHOUT THINKING.

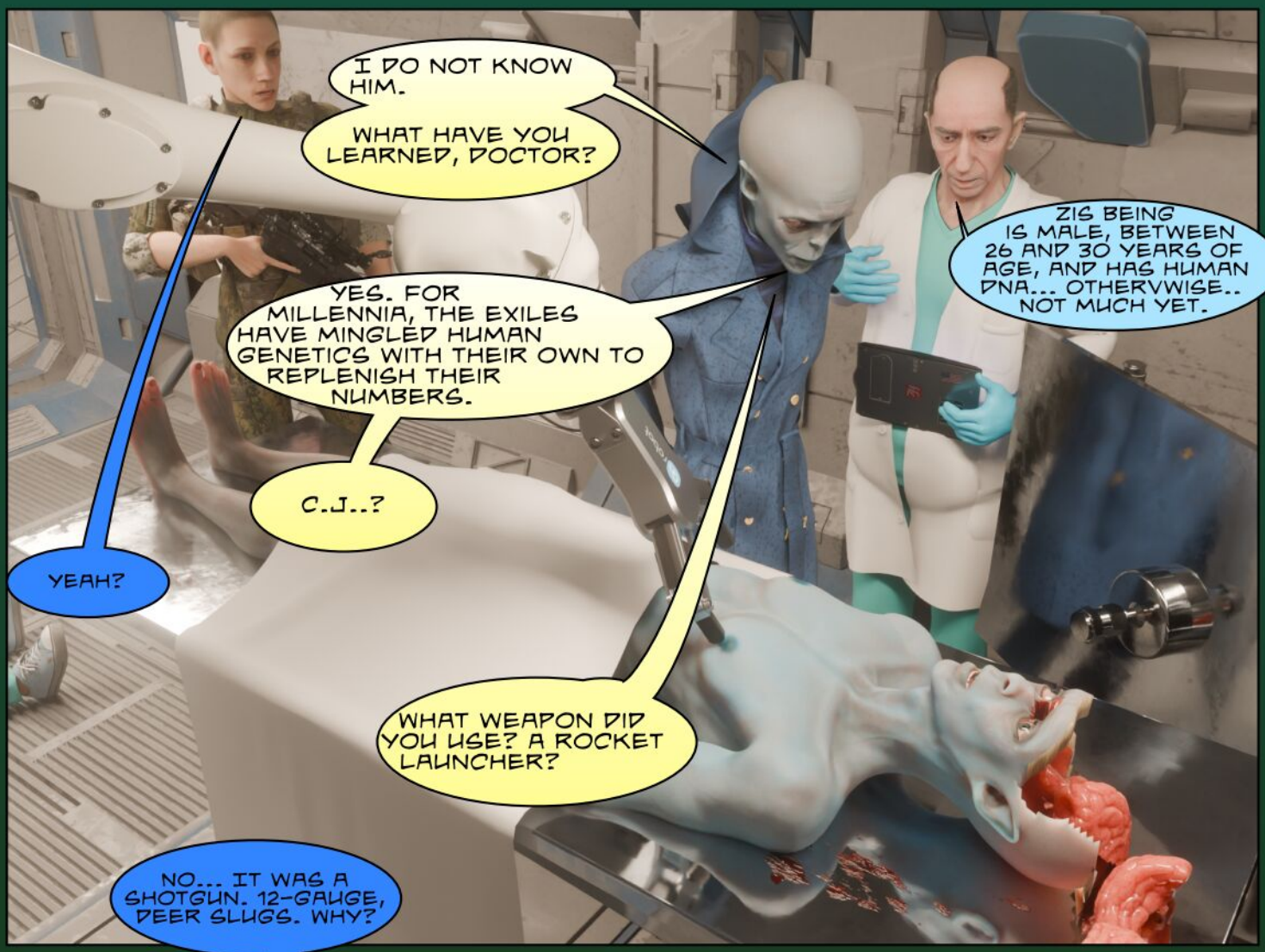

AND YOU, JAMES. ENVY IS A SIN, YES?
ONE OF THE WORST..
THEN DO NOT LET HIS FORTUNATE CHILDHOOD OR HIS FATHER'S WEALTH BECOME THE MEASURE OF HIS CHARACTER.
SO IS GLUTTONY, HAVING MORE THAN YOU NEED...
WHO NEEDS A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR CLASSIC CAR!?
YOU JUDGE THE POSSESSION BEFORE CONSIDERING ITS USE. THERE CAN BE GENEROSITY IN WHAT BRINGS OTHERS JOY.
MY DAD'S FLOWN OVER 2,000 ABUSED OR SICK KIDS OUT FOR RIDES OVER THE LAST, LIKE, FIFTEEN, TWENTY YEARS.
A TON OF WOUNDED VETS, TOO.
OHH..
YEAH.
YOU SEE, JAMES? FIRST APPEARANCES SELDOM REVEAL THE WHOLE MAN.
COME. TIME PRESSES.

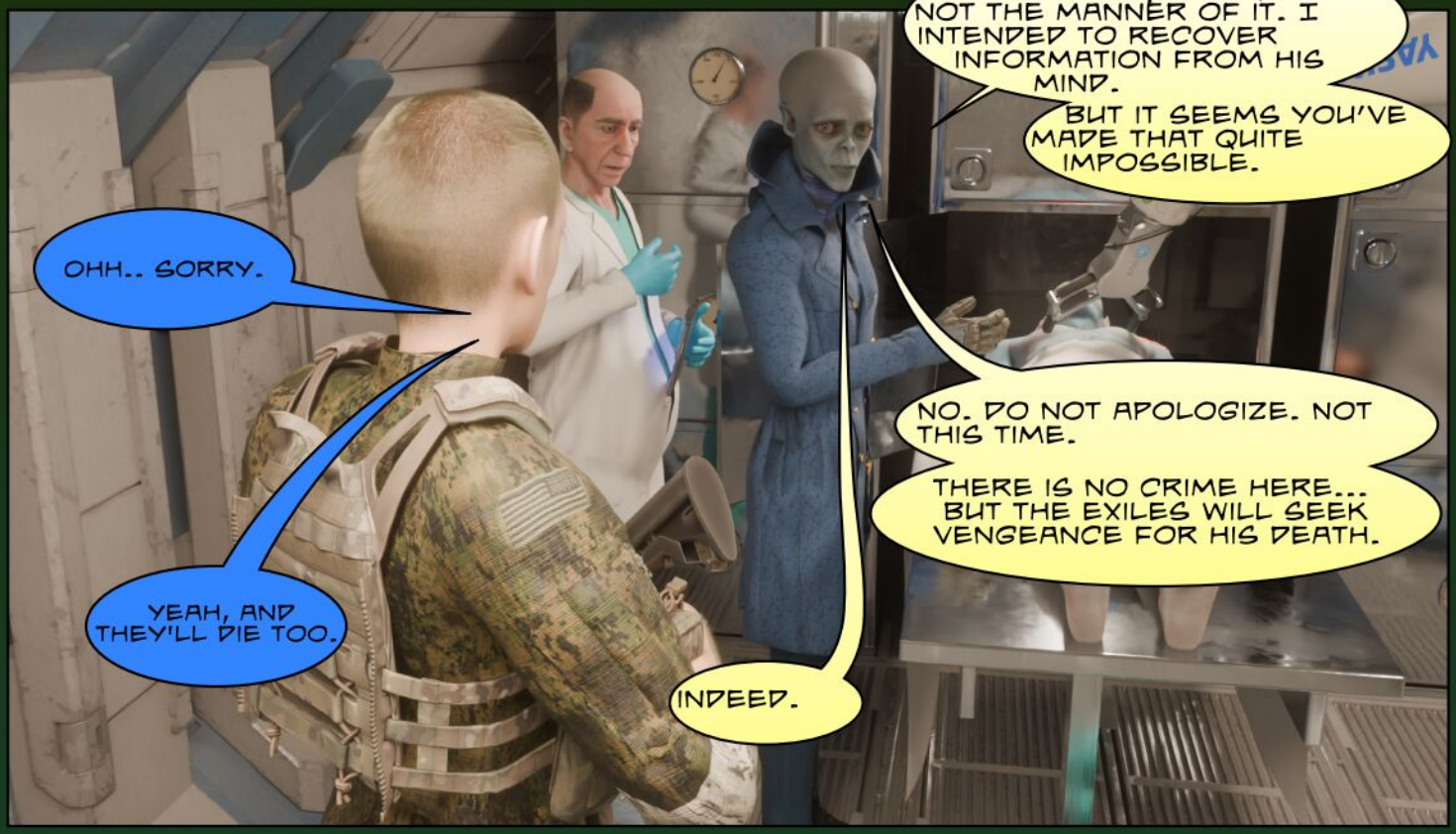

DALE? DR. Z? IT'S C.J. AND JIMMY. WE'RE ALL GOOD. OPEN UP.
OK! COMING!
WHAT WAS THAT!? WE WERE FREAKING OUT DOWN HERE!
WELL, YOU'RE ABOUT TO FREAK OUT EVEN MORE.
EEEEK!
TOLD YA'..
DOCTOR WAYNE LAPOINTE. KNOWN HERE AS DALE.


YE-YES.. TH-THAT'S ME..?
I KNOW. I WAS NOT ASKING.
I AM GABRIEL, HIGH COMMANDER OF THE ASGARDIAN NAVY.
GA-GABRIEL.. AS IN..
"GABRIEL" GABRIEL?
YES.
SQUEAK OK...
WE-WELL TH-THAT'S DOC-DOCTOR Z-ZIEGLER...
HE-HE IS UMM...OUR CHE-CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER..
PHEW! IS IT HOT IN HERE?
UMM.. WH-WHAT WAS I SAYING? OHH.
OHH, BOY..


CHIEF MEDRICAL COFFEER.. CHEAP FEDERAL, NEDICAL, NEDRICAL MUFFICE...
SPARKLY LIGHTS!
OHH-OHHHHH!
?
YUP! THERE HE GOES!
HE JUST FAINTED. IT HAPPENS WHEN HE GETS WORKED UP... I SLOWED HIM DOWN, AT LEAST...
I SEE..
WHILE OUR VENTURE LASTS, THE MEDICAL FACILITIES ABOARD SI'RIZALL ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL.
ZZZZZZZ.....


ARE YOU SURE, JIMMY? THAT SOUNDED.. "STROKY"
INDEED..
HE'S BEEN SCANNED A MILLION TIMES.. GUY LIKE THIS? HIS ILLNESSES HAVE ILLNESSES.
COME ON, DOC, WAKE UP!
ZIS MAN IS ZE HYPOCHONDRIAC. HE DOES IT TO HIMSELF.
I DOUBT HE WILL REFUSE ZE OFFER. JUST KNOW, YOU VWILL HAVE TO SCAN HIM MANY TIMES.
AHH, UNDERSTOOD.
HMM. WELL..


I DO NOT KNOW HIM.
WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED, DOCTOR?
ZIS BEING IS MALE, BETWEEN 26 AND 30 YEARS OF AGE, AND HAS HUMAN DNA... OTHERWISE.. NOT MUCH YET.
YES. FOR MILLENNIA, THE EXILES HAVE MINGLED HUMAN GENETICS WITH THEIR OWN TO REPLENISH THEIR NUMBERS.
C.J..?
YEAH?
WHAT WEAPON DID YOU USE? A ROCKET LAUNCHER?
NO... IT WAS A SHOTGUN. 12-GAUGE, DEER SLUGS. WHY?


I WAS AWARE ONLY OF HIS DEATH, BUT NOT THE MANNER OF IT. I INTENDED TO RECOVER INFORMATION FROM HIS MIND.
BUT IT SEEMS YOU'VE MADE THAT QUITE IMPOSSIBLE.
OHH.. SORRY.
NO. DO NOT APOLOGIZE. NOT THIS TIME.
THERE IS NO CRIME HERE... BUT THE EXILES WILL SEEK VENGEANCE FOR HIS DEATH.
YEAH, AND THEY'LL DIE TOO.
INDEED.


DOCTOR, YOU MAY RETAIN THE BODY FOR STUDY. I HAVE NO FURTHER USE FOR IT.
DANKE!
YOU KNOW.. TO HAVE SOME SCANS OF A LIVE SPECIMEN...
NO.
VERY VELL... FORGET I ASKED.
WHEN YOUR WORK IS FINISHED, CREMATE OR VAPORIZE THE REMAINS.
JA, OF COURSE..


I SHALL RETURN TO MY SHIP AND BEGIN THE JOURNEY.
IN ONE HOUR, I WILL SEND FOR YOU.
OHH, MAN. I HAD A CRAZY DREAM..
YOU WANT US TO SECURE A FARM, RIGHT? WHAT, ARE YOU GROWING CORN?
CATTLE, ACTUALLY.
OHH.. SO.. YOU GUYS LIKE BEEF?
NO SHIT? HUH.. SO DO YOU GUYS HAVE, LIKE. CHEESEBURGERS AND SHIT?
IT HAS SUSTAINED US FOR MILLENNIA. WHY DO YOU THINK WE'VE BEEN STEALING YOUR COWS?
SOMETHING CLOSE, YES..
YOUR COLONEL AND YOUR TEAM WILL JOIN ME ABOARD MY VESSEL.
TELL HIM HE MAY BRING TWO ADDITIONAL PEOPLE OF HIS CHOOSING.
THEY MAY BRING ONLY WHAT THEY CAN CARRY.

NIGHT HAD FALLEN OVER BROAN'IS. EXHAUSTED FROM HOURS OF RUNNING, VA'DON SLIPPED IN THE DARK AND SLID DOWN A ROCKY EMBANKMENT.



HE CAME TO A STOP A FEW FEET BELOW THE PATH. SORE AND BREATHLESS, HE FELT A RUSH OF RELIEF AT THE LIGHTS IN THE VALLEY BELOW.



IT WAS ONE OF SEVERAL MEDIUM-LIFT DEPOTS ON BROAN'IS, USED TO FERRY EQUIPMENT AND CARGO BETWEEN THE PLANET'S FARMS AND OUTPOSTS.

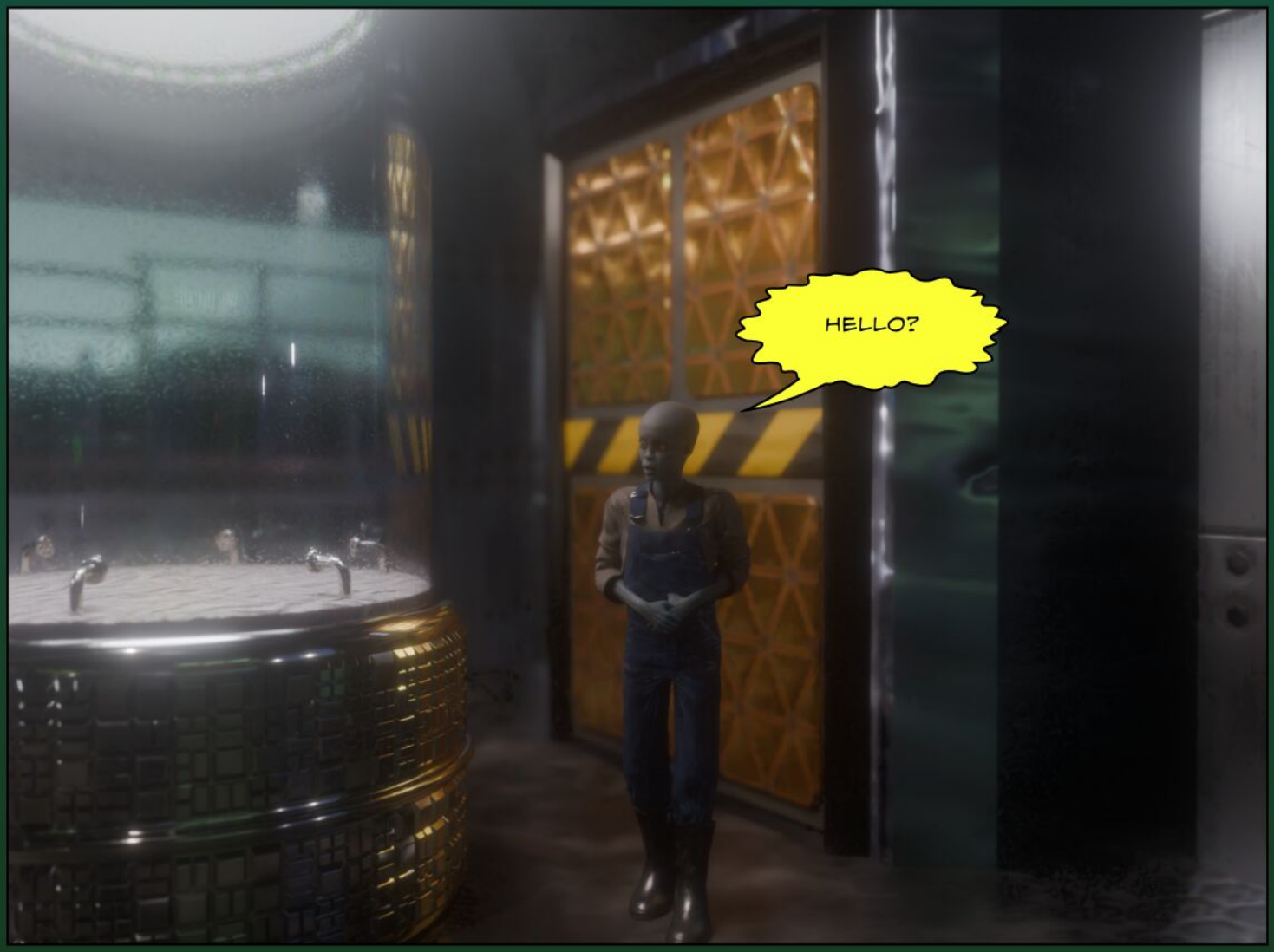
With what strength he had left, Va'don hurried down the hill toward the depot, unsure whether he was still being followed.



He had never visited this depot. He could only hope its biometric lock would let him in.



Relief washed over him as the lock beeped and the door slid open.


HELLO?


ANYONE..?

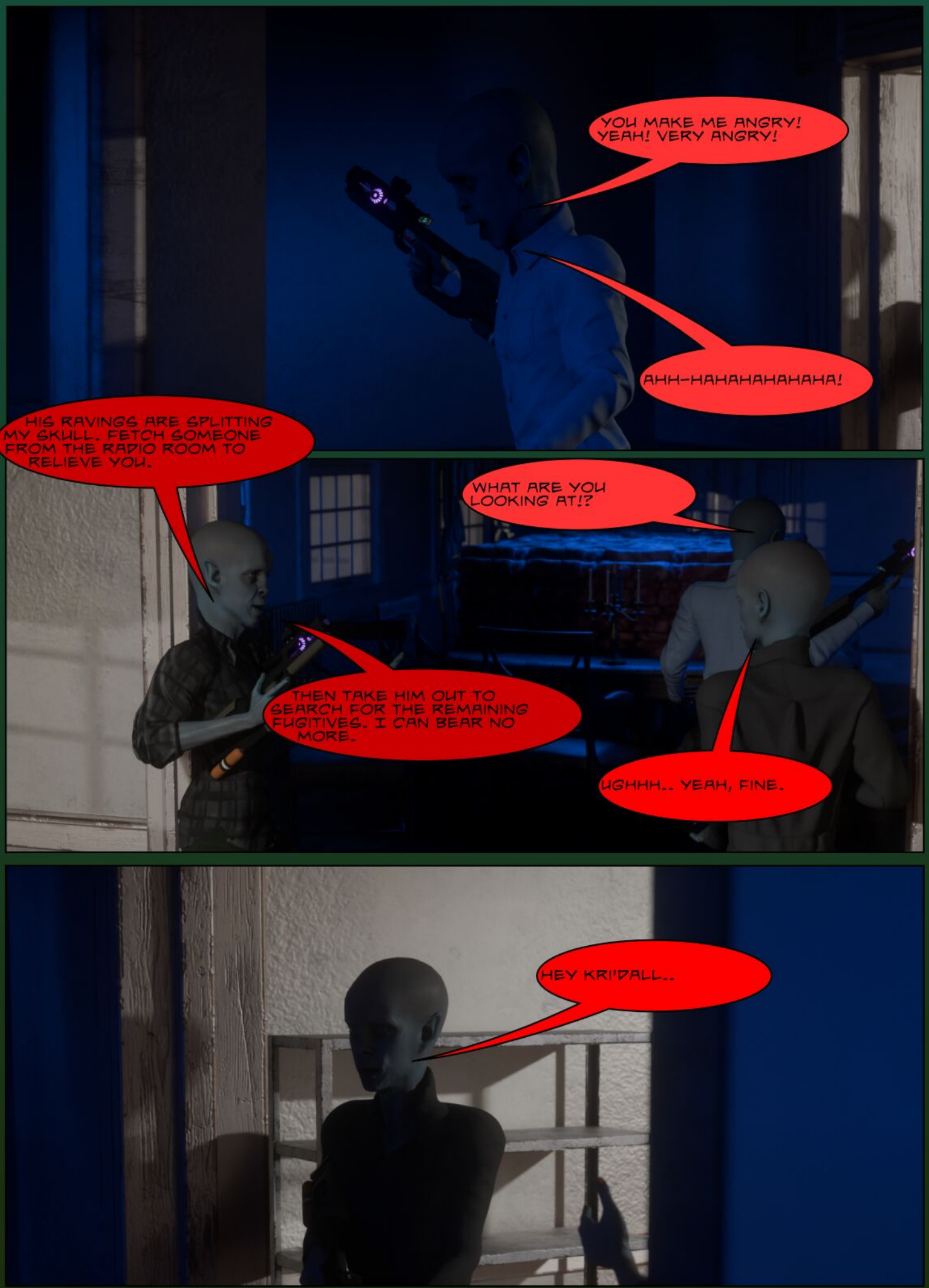


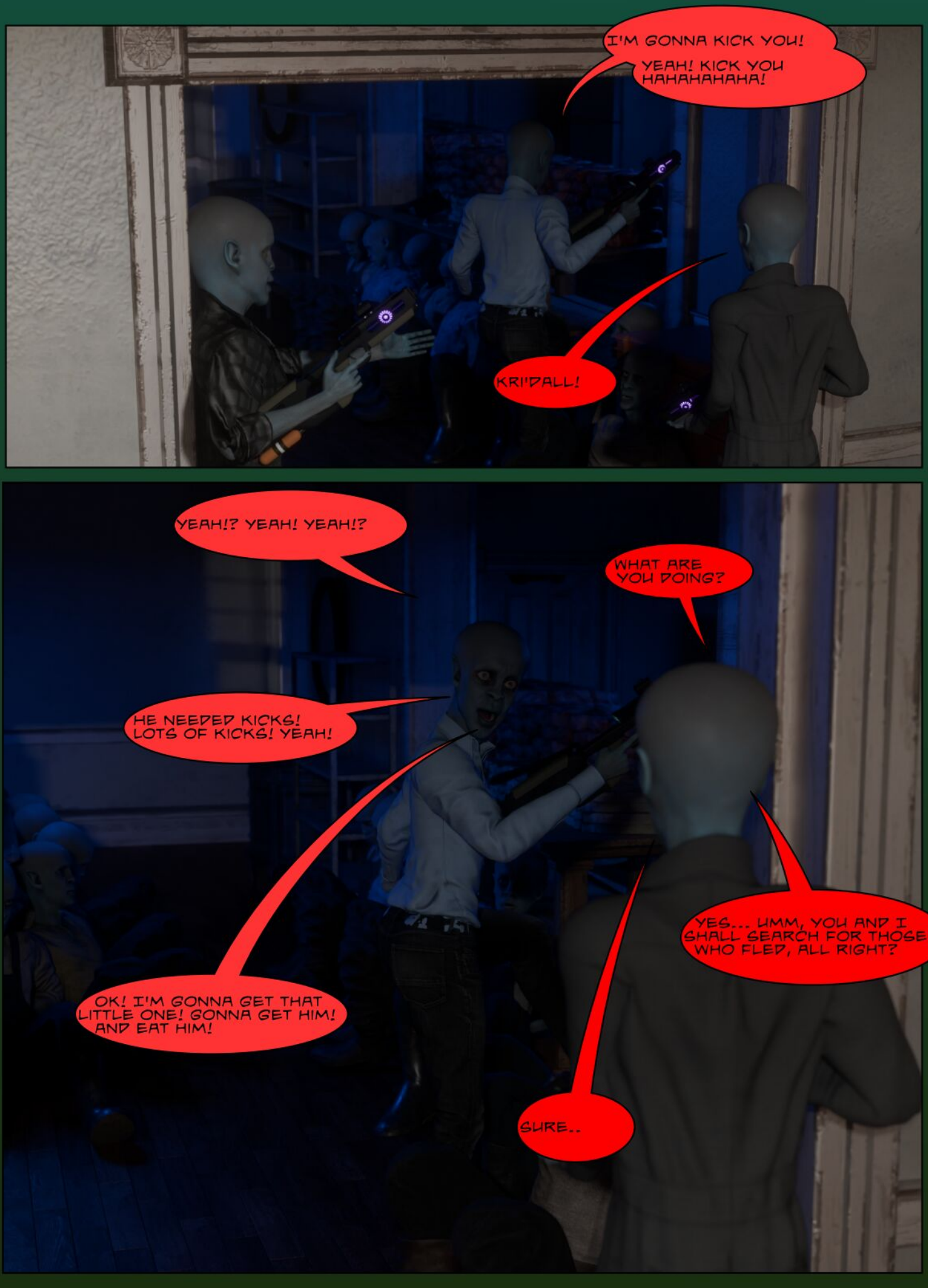
NO ONE ANSWERED. ALONE AND AFRAID, VA'DON CURLED INTO A CORNER, GRATEFUL FOR THE WARMTH AND SHELTER.






TRAITORS! ALL OF YA!
YEAH... YEAH.. TRAITORS!


YOU MAKE ME ANGRY! YEAH! VERY ANGRY!
AHH-HAHAHAHAHAHA!
HIS RAVINGS ARE SPLITTING MY SKULL. FETCH SOMEONE FROM THE RADIO ROOM TO RELIEVE YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT!?
THEN TAKE HIM OUT TO SEARCH FOR THE REMAINING FUGITIVES. I CAN BEAR NO MORE.
UGHHH.. YEAH, FINE.
HEY KRI'DALL..

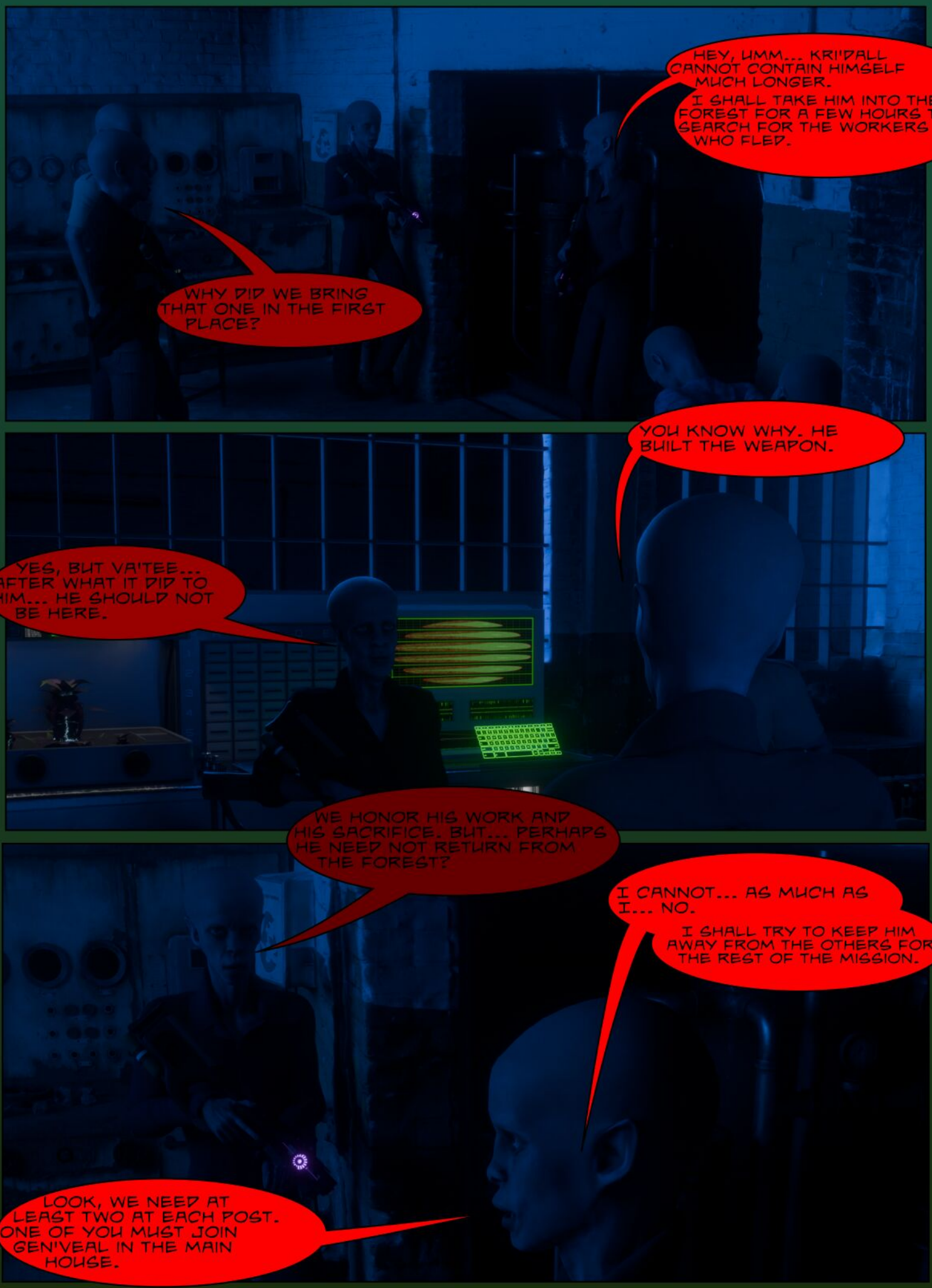

I'M GONNA KICK YOU!
YEAH! KICK YOU HAHAHAHAHA!
KRI'DALL!
YEAH!? YEAH! YEAH!?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
HE NEEDED KICKS! LOTS OF KICKS! YEAH!
YES... UMM, YOU AND I SHALL SEARCH FOR THOSE WHO FLED, ALL RIGHT?
OK! I'M GONNA GET THAT LITTLE ONE! GONNA GET HIM! AND EAT HIM!
SURE..


OHHHH LOOK!

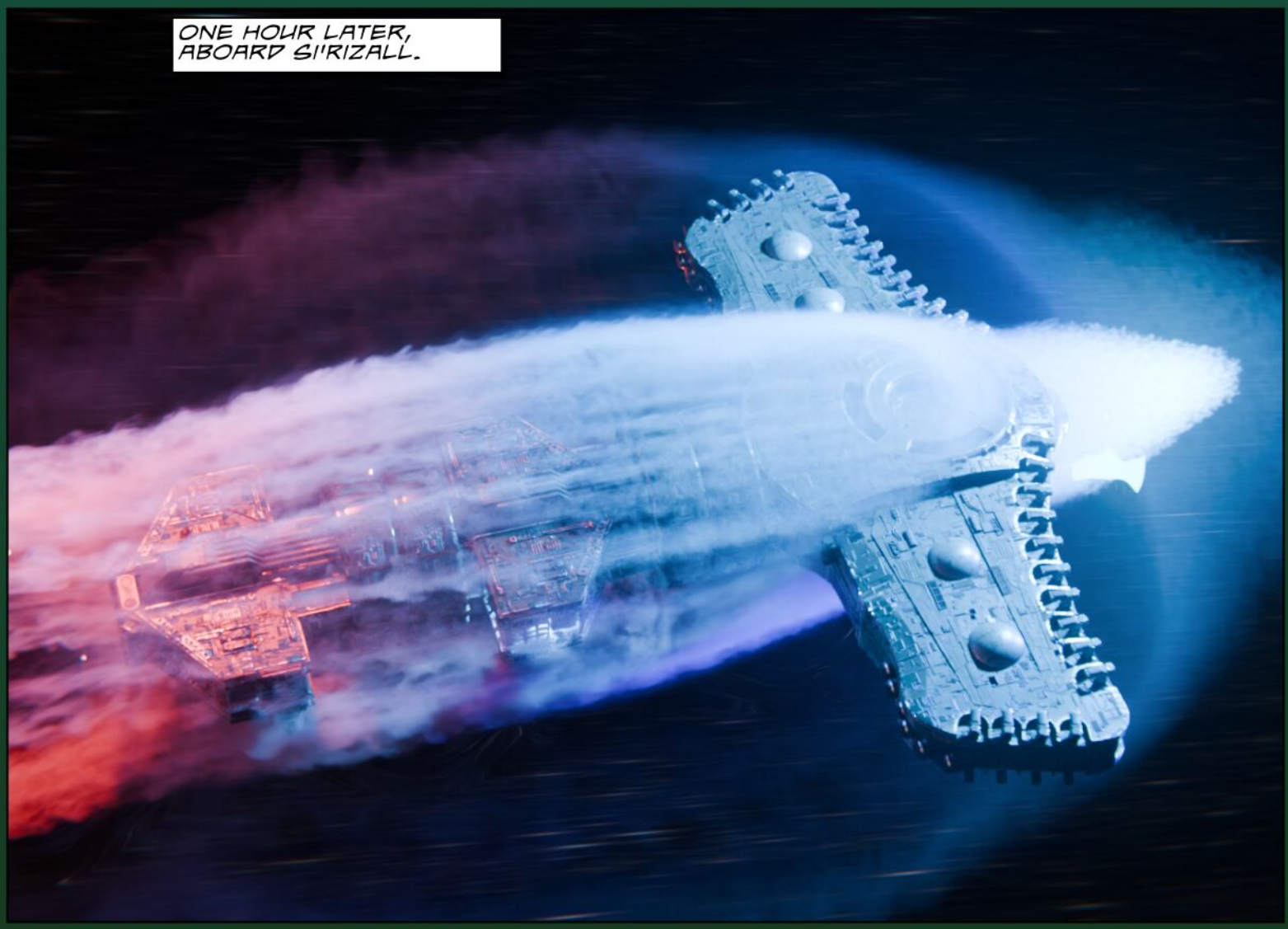

YOU DIED! AND I DID IT! HAHAHAHAHA!
BLOOD ON THE FLOOR! AND IT'S YOURS! YEAH!


LET'S EAT HIS HEART! YEAH!
NO... COME ON.
I STILL THINK WE SHOULD EAT HIS HEART! YEAH!
MMHMM.. MAYBE LATER, OK?
YEAH! LATER!

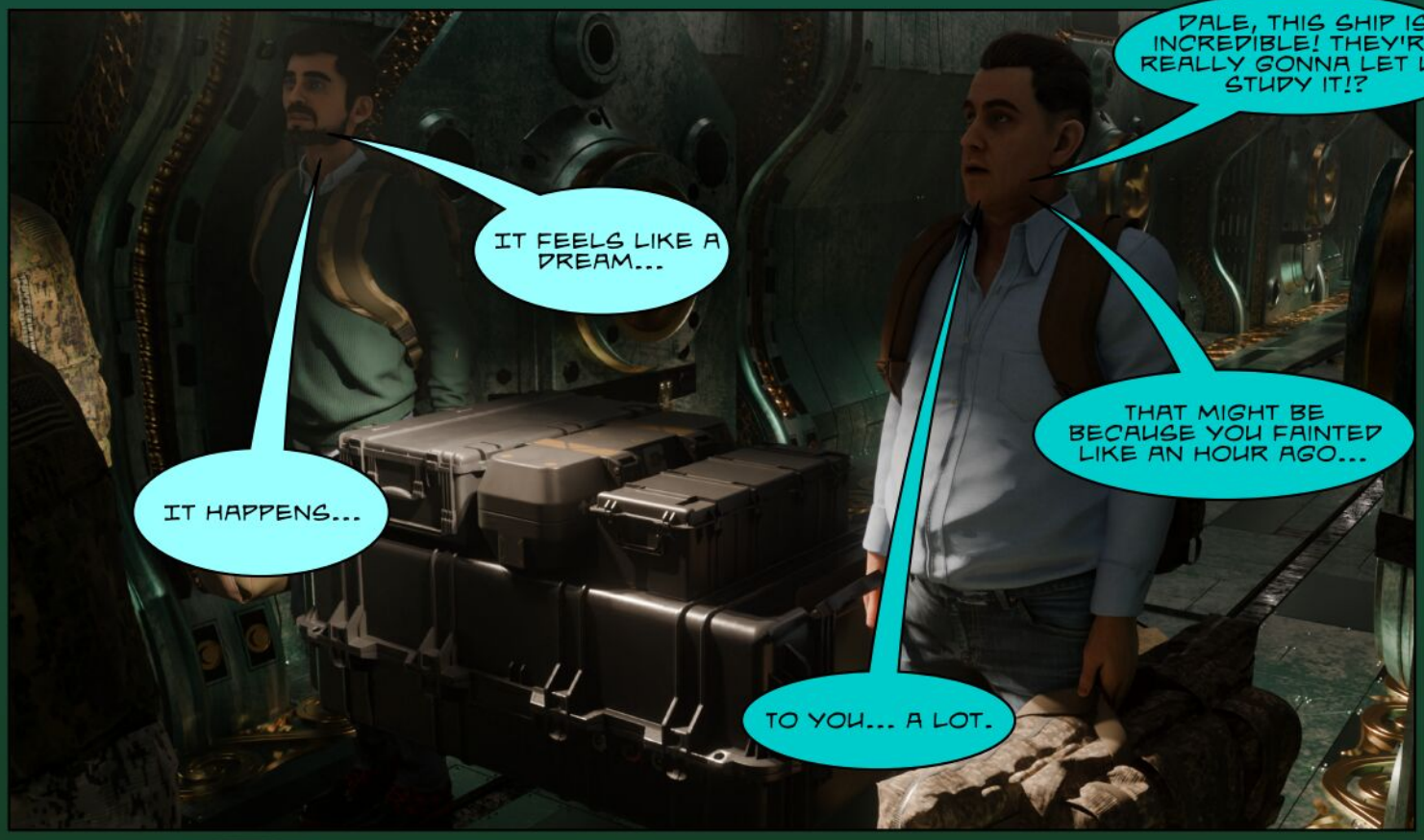

LOOK, I SHALL ASK ONE OF THEM TO TAKE OUR PLACE IN THE MAIN HOUSE. YOU WAIT HERE.
I'LL WAIT HERE! I'LL SHOOT ALL THE COWS!
NO, DO NOT SHOOT THE CATTLE... JUST STAND HERE AND WAIT.
OK! I'LL WAIT! I'LL WAIT HERE! YEAH!
PROBABLY GONNA SHOOT THE COWS! YEAH!
NO! ONLY IF OUR DEMANDS ARE REFUSED. REMEMBER?
OK! THEN WE'LL SHOOT THEM ALL! YEAH!


HEY, UMM... KRI'DALL CANNOT CONTAIN HIMSELF MUCH LONGER.
I SHALL TAKE HIM INTO THE FOREST FOR A FEW HOURS TO SEARCH FOR THE WORKERS WHO FLED.
WHY DID WE BRING THAT ONE IN THE FIRST PLACE?
YOU KNOW WHY. HE BUILT THE WEAPON.
YES, BUT VA'TEE... AFTER WHAT IT DID TO HIM... HE SHOULD NOT BE HERE.
WE HONOR HIS WORK AND HIS SACRIFICE. BUT... PERHAPS HE NEED NOT RETURN FROM THE FOREST?
I CANNOT... AS MUCH AS I... NO.
I SHALL TRY TO KEEP HIM AWAY FROM THE OTHERS FOR THE REST OF THE MISSION.
LOOK, WE NEED AT LEAST TWO AT EACH POST. ONE OF YOU MUST JOIN GEN'VEAL IN THE MAIN HOUSE.


WE NEED YOU HERE, MA'TIIK. YOU ALONE KNOW HOW TO OPERATE THE WEAPON.
I SHALL GO.
AHH, YES. TRUE.
I SHALL GO. A CHANGE OF SCENERY WOULD BE WELCOME.
THANK YOU.


ONE HOUR LATER,
ABOARD SI'RIZALL.


WELL... WE'RE HERE.
ARE WE? THIS SHIP IS FUCKING MASSIVE...
LET'S JUST KEEP WALKING, I GUESS... I THINK THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE.


DALE, THIS SHIP IS INCREDIBLE! THEY'RE REALLY GONNA LET US STUDY IT!?
IT FEELS LIKE A DREAM...
THAT MIGHT BE BECAUSE YOU FAINTED LIKE AN HOUR AGO...
IT HAPPENS...
TO YOU... A LOT.


COLONEL, BUTCHER TEAM. WELCOME ABOARD THE BATTLESHIP SI'RIZALL.
THANK YOU, COMMANDER. IT'S AN HONOR.


NOT INCREDIBLE ENOUGH, COLONEL...
COME, GENTLEMEN. WE HAVE A RESCUE TO PREPARE.
THIS... THIS SHIP IS INCREDIBLE, COMMANDER.
THAT'S FINE...
COMMANDER, YOU SAID I COULD BRING TWO OTHERS?
C.J. SAID YOU TOLD THEM TO BRING "ONLY WHAT THEY COULD CARRY" IN TERMS OF EQUIPMENT?


YES...?
I EXPECTED AS MUCH. AFTER YOU.
WELL... THEY TOOK THAT LITERALLY. IF IT'S AN ISSUE, LET ME KNOW, BUT... YOU'LL SEE.


HELLO AGAIN!
HI! I'M DOCTOR STEVE RUTLEDGE...
HELLO AGAIN, DOCTOR.
INDEED...


HAVE YOU BROUGHT YOUR ENTIRE LABORATORY?
YOU SAID ONLY BRING WHAT WE CAN CARRY... WE'RE CARRYING IT.
I SUPPOSE I DID, AND YOU ARE... VERY WELL. PROCEED.
ZONE 7


GENTLEMEN, I SHALL COME DIRECTLY TO THE POINT.
SIX HOURS AGO, CATTLE FARM 63 SENT A DISTRESS CALL.
GUNMEN HAD KILLED AT LEAST TWO VOLUNTEERS, POSSIBLY MORE. THEY CLAIMED VENGEANCE FOR THEIR DEAD COMPATRIOT.
THE MESSAGE WAS SENT ONCE. EVERY SUBSEQUENT ATTEMPT TO CONTACT THE WORKERS HAS FAILED.
AN HOUR AFTER THE DISTRESS CALL, THE CAPTORS SENT A MANIFESTO AND THEIR DEMANDS.
THEY HAVE CONNECTED A PSIONIC WEAPON TO THE COLONY'S RADIO TRANSMITTER.
THEY THREATEN TO ACTIVATE IT SIXTY EARTH HOURS AFTER ISSUING THEIR DEMANDS.
BESIDES WANTING C.J. AND WINTERS, WHAT ARE THE REST OF THEIR DEMANDS?
IT DOES NOT MATTER, COLONEL. I WILL NOT AGREE TO THEIR DEMANDS.

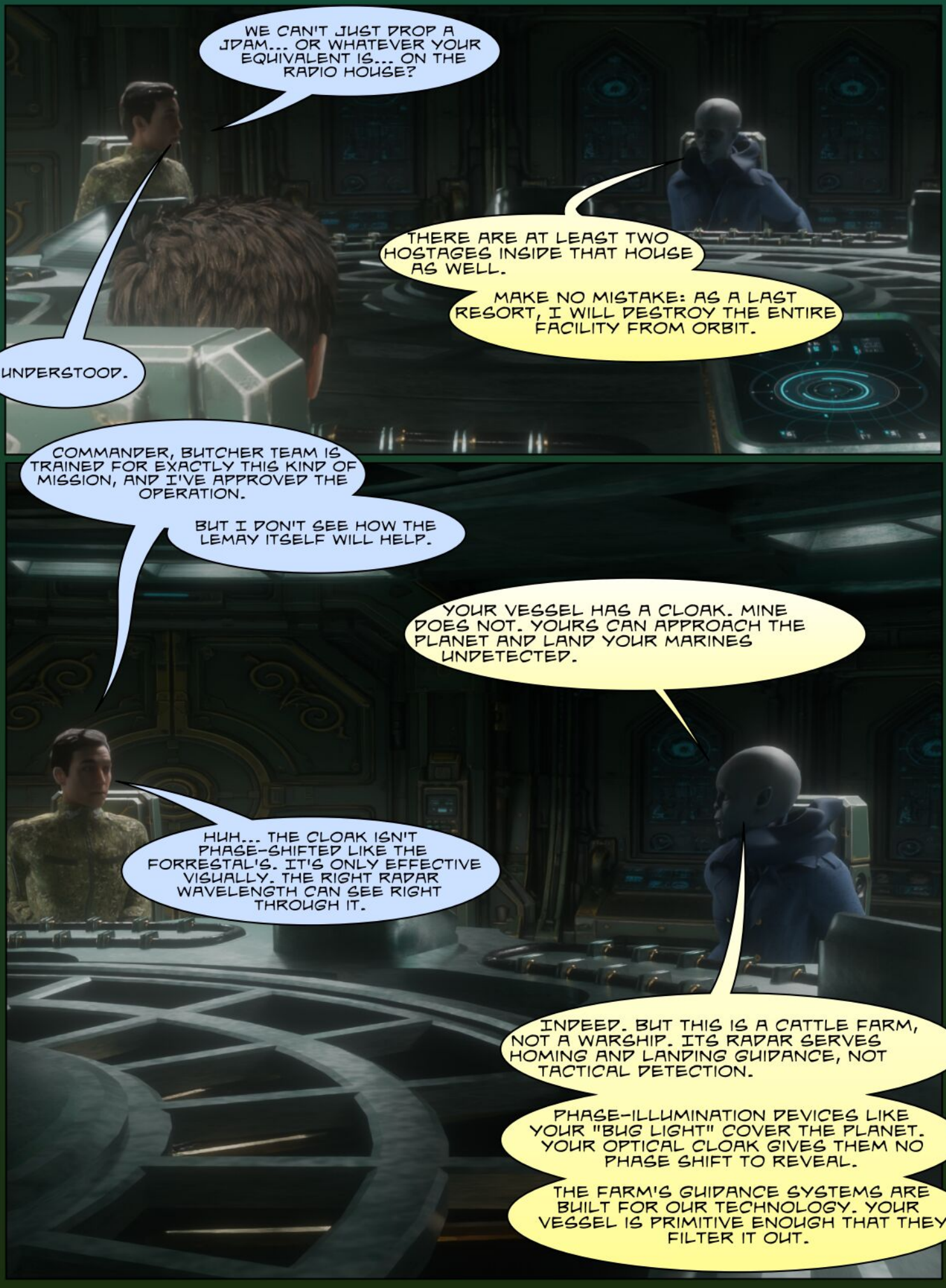

THIS WEAPON IS PARTICULARLY INSIDIOUS. IN SIMPLE TERMS, IT IS A DEFECTIVE UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR.
HOW AND WHY IT IS DEFECTIVE IS IRRELEVANT TO THIS MISSION. WHAT YOU MUST KNOW IS THAT, IF ACTIVATED...
...IT WILL KILL THE HERD INSTANTLY AND LIKELY CAUSE SEVERE NEUROLOGICAL DAMAGE TO ANY HUMAN OR MI'ARR NEARBY. THIS CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN.
WE'RE U.S. MARINES, COMMANDER. WE WERE BORN WITH NEUROLOGICAL DAMAGE!
YOUR STATEMENT MAY BE HUMOROUS... AND ACCURATE. BUT THIS IS NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY, SERGEANT.


LOSING ONE FARM WILL NOT STARVE THE ARK. BUT OUR PEOPLE ARE ALREADY FRIGHTENED AND VULNERABLE. THIS COULD PROVOKE UNREST... EVEN MUTINY.
IF RADICALS SEIZE THE ARK, HUMANITY WILL FALL WITH US. AND WITHOUT HUMANITY, NO ONE WILL REMAIN TO TAKE OUR PLACE OR HELP US REBUILD.
SO IT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF BOTH OUR SPECIES THAT THIS CONFLICT BE RESOLVED SWIFTLY AND DECISIVELY.


THIS IS BROAN'IS, OUR DESTINATION. A COLD, DAMP WORLD, BUT ONE THAT SUPPORTS BOTH OUR SPECIES.
THE PLANET HAS MANY FARMS. CATTLE FARM 63 IS THE LARGEST.
IT IS LOCATED HERE, ON THE LARGEST, CENTRAL CONTINENT.


THIS LIVE SATELLITE FEED SHOWS THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE AND ADJACENT FACILITIES.
THAT SILVER DISC IS THE ATTACKERS' SHIP. BESIDE IT ARE THE MAIN HOUSE AND SLAUGHTER FACILITY.


THIS BUILDING HOUSES THE RADIO AND GENERATOR ROOMS. THE WEAPON IS THERE.
OUR LIMITED INTELLIGENCE SUGGESTS SIX TO EIGHT GUNMEN, DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS OF THREE OR FOUR.
LAST REPORTED: HALF IN THE RADIO HOUSE, HALF IN THE MAIN HOUSE, HERE.
WE BELIEVE MOST OF THE HOSTAGES ARE IN THE MAIN HOUSE.
WE MUST RESCUE THE HOSTAGES. BUT DISABLING THE WEAPON TAKES PRIORITY.

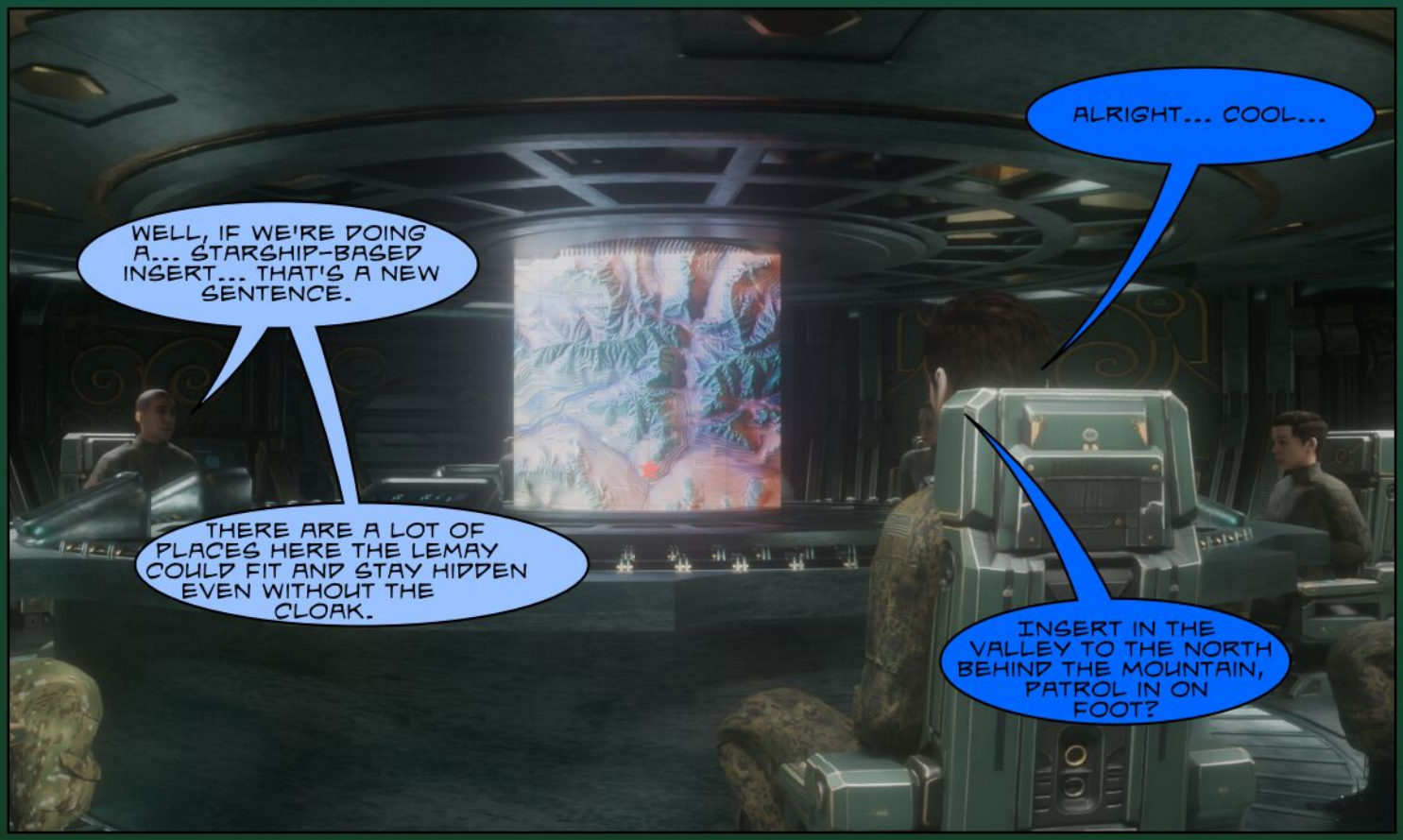

WE CAN'T JUST DROP A JDAM... OR WHATEVER YOUR EQUIVALENT IS... ON THE RADIO HOUSE?
THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO HOSTAGES INSIDE THAT HOUSE AS WELL.
MAKE NO MISTAKE: AS A LAST RESORT, I WILL DESTROY THE ENTIRE FACILITY FROM ORBIT.
UNDERSTOOD.
COMMANDER, BUTCHER TEAM IS TRAINED FOR EXACTLY THIS KIND OF MISSION, AND I'VE APPROVED THE OPERATION.
BUT I DON'T SEE HOW THE LEMAY ITSELF WILL HELP.
YOUR VESSEL HAS A CLOAK. MINE DOES NOT. YOURS CAN APPROACH THE PLANET AND LAND YOUR MARINES UNDETECTED.
HUH... THE CLOAK ISN'T PHASE-SHIFTED LIKE THE FORRESTAL'S. IT'S ONLY EFFECTIVE VISUALLY. THE RIGHT RADAR WAVELENGTH CAN SEE RIGHT THROUGH IT.
INDEED. BUT THIS IS A CATTLE FARM, NOT A WARSHIP. ITS RADAR SERVES HOMING AND LANDING GUIDANCE, NOT TACTICAL DETECTION.
PHASE-ILLUMINATION DEVICES LIKE YOUR "BUG LIGHT" COVER THE PLANET. YOUR OPTICAL CLOAK GIVES THEM NO PHASE SHIFT TO REVEAL.
THE FARM'S GUIDANCE SYSTEMS ARE BUILT FOR OUR TECHNOLOGY. YOUR VESSEL IS PRIMITIVE ENOUGH THAT THEY FILTER IT OUT.


AHH... SO YOU'LL DROP US OFF SOMEWHERE NEARBY, THEN?
CORRECT. I WILL RELEASE YOU ABOUT AN AVERAGE EARTH-MARS DISTANCE FROM THE PLANET. IF THEY SEE EITHER SHIP, THEY WILL ACTIVATE THE WEAPON BEFORE WE CAN ACT.
DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?


YEAH, WHAT'S STOPPING THEM FROM JUST SHUTTING US OFF WITH THE STICK THINGY?
OUR SPECIES CAN COMMUNICATE TELEPATHICALLY BY NATURE, AS CAN YOURS. YOU HAVE MERELY FORGOTTEN HOW.
HOWEVER, WITHOUT AN AMPLIFIER SUCH AS A SCEPTER, OUR ABILITY TO TAKE CONTROL OF A MIND IS VERY LIMITED.
I AM QUITE SURE THEY ONLY HAVE ONE SCEPTER, AND IT'S PART OF THE WEAPON.
ALRIGHT, ONE MORE.
ARE WE TALKING TRAINED AND SQUARED AWAY SHOOTERS, OR UNDISCIPLINED THUGS?
THEY APPEAR TO BE THE LATTER. I HAVE SEEN NOTHING TO SUGGEST TRAINED SOLDIERS.
UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE ONLY SUSPECTS AT PRESENT. I HAVE YET TO CONFIRM ANY OF THE ATTACKERS' IDENTITIES, BUT I EXPECT THAT TO CHANGE SOON.


I HAVE A QUESTION... TWO, ACTUALLY.
OF COURSE.
CAN'T YOU JUST TURN THEM OFF WITH YOUR SCEPTER THINGS?
AND HOW DO WE DEACTIVATE THE... THING?
NO. IF IT WERE THAT SIMPLE, I WOULD NOT BE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP.
TO DEACTIVATE THE DEVICE, REMOVE IT FROM THE SCEPTER'S IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY. THAT SHOULD SUFFICE.
DO NOT TOUCH IT WITH YOUR BARE HANDS. YOU MAY INADVERTENTLY ACTIVATE IT.
SIMPLE GLOVES SHOULD PREVENT THIS.


I ALSO HAVE A QUESTION. FORGIVE ME IF YOU ALREADY SAID... HOW MANY HOSTAGES, AND WHAT IS THEIR STATUS?
THE MANIFEST LISTS THIRTY-ONE WORKERS. THREE SHOT, PRESUMED DEAD.
THE OTHERS' CONDITION IS UNKNOWN. EXPECT INJURIES AND EXHAUSTION WHEN WE ARRIVE.
THE DISPLAY CHANGED BEFORE PAUL FINISHED ASKING.
HEY, CAN YOU BRING THE HOLO-... NEVER MIND.
COOL... THE LEMAY COULD USE ONE OF THESE!
UMM, DO YOU HAVE A TOPOGRAPHIC MA-


ALRIGHT... COOL...
WELL, IF WE'RE DOING A... STARSHIP-BASED INSERT... THAT'S A NEW SENTENCE.
THERE ARE A LOT OF PLACES HERE THE LEMAY COULD FIT AND STAY HIDDEN EVEN WITHOUT THE CLOAK.
INSERT IN THE VALLEY TO THE NORTH BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN, PATROL IN ON FOOT?


I DON'T SUPPOSE WE HAVE PARACHUTES ON THE SHIP?
HAHO WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO LANDING THE WHOLE SHIP, RIGHT?
KID'S GOT A POINT, BOSS. BESIDES, WHO KNOWS WHAT KINDA WILD ALIEN BUGS AND WEIRD SHIT IS IN THAT VALLEY. BEST MINIMIZE OUR TIME ON THE GROUND.


THE METHOD OF INSERTION IS YOURS TO CHOOSE. I ADVISE AGAINST PARACHUTES. ABOVE FIVE THOUSAND FEET, THE WINDS ARE VIOLENT AND UNPREDICTABLE.
THE LEMAY WON'T HAVE AN ISSUE EITHER WAY, BUT I'D PREFER TO KEEP HER AS FAR FROM THE DANGER AS POSSIBLE.
THAT'S FINE, SIR. BUT I'M NOT JUMPING MY TEAM INTO A RANDOMIZED HURRICANE IF I CAN HELP IT.
NO, DEFINITELY NOT.
PATROL IN FROM THE VALLEY TO THE NORTH, HOOK AROUND TO THE SOUTH SIDE AND HIT THE RADIO HOUSE FIRST. CLEAR ALL THE STRUCTURES AS WE MAKE OUR WAY TO THE MAIN HOUSE. THAT'S MY TWO CENTS...
I LIKE THAT PLAN!


ALRIGHT, WELL... ASIDE FROM THE WHOLE ALIEN PLANET AND PLASMA WEAPONS THING...
THIS LOOKS LIKE A PRETTY STANDARD OP, BOYS.
IT SHOULDN'T BE AN ISSUE TO DROP YOU OFF IN THAT VALLEY. I CAN'T PROMISE WE'LL BE ABLE TO GET THE GANGWAY FLUSH TO THE GROUND, THOUGH.
THEN WE FAST-ROPE DOWN. NO BIGGIE.


THEN HOW DO WE GET THEM BACK ON BOARD?
ONCE THE WEAPON IS SECURE, I CAN SEND LANDERS TO RETRIEVE YOUR TEAM AND THE HOSTAGES. MEDICAL SUPPORT WILL ACCOMPANY THEM.
WILL OUR PROP- AND TURBINE-DRIVEN DRONES BE ABLE TO FLY IN THAT ATMOSPHERE?
THEY SHOULD FLY WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. LIKE THE CURTIS LEMAY, THEIR OLDER TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE FILTERED OUT BY THE FARM'S GUIDANCE SYSTEMS.
GOOD, THAT'LL HELP A LOT.
SPLENDID. C.J., I WOULD LIKE YOU TO REMAIN HERE FOR A TIME. THERE IS SOMETHING I WOULD ASK OF YOU.


I MEAN, YEAH! I'M COOL STAYING FOR A WHILE!
SOMEONE'S GOTTA LOOK AFTER DALE AND WHAT'S-HIS-FACE... THE FAT GUY.
WOAH! EASY THERE, LANCE CORPORAL. THAT'S NOT YOUR CALL TO MAKE.
COMMANDER, I'M NOT AGAINST THE IDEA, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE AT LEAST SOME IDEA OF WHAT YOU WANT HIM TO DO.
I INTEND TO USE A TEACHING DEVICE. YOU ARE WELCOME TO REMAIN AND OBSERVE.
MAYBE FOR A BIT, BUT I STILL HAVE A SHIP TO RUN... FOR WHAT THAT'S WORTH AT THE MOMENT. MY CREW IS A LITTLE ON EDGE.
A COMMANDER MUST TEND TO HIS CREW. I UNDERSTAND.
OK, C.J. CAN STAY AS LONG AS ONE OTHER MEMBER OF THE TEAM STAYS WITH HIM.


WHAT DO YOU THINK, CHIEF?
I'LL HANG OUT FOR A BIT. I WANNA SEE WHAT THIS IS ABOUT TOO!


ME TOO! I'LL STAY!
SAME.


I'LL STICK AROUND TOO.
WE ALL WILL.


GUYS, I GET THE SENTIMENT. BUT I SAID ONE MEMBER OF THE TEAM, NOT THE WHOLE TEAM.
NOW, WE CAN ALL HANG OUT FOR A BIT, I'M CURIOUS TOO, BUT THE REST OF YOU ARE COMING BACK TO THE LEMAY WITH ME.
CHIEF, I'LL LEAVE IT UP TO YOU TO DECIDE WHO STAYS AFTER THAT.
AYE, SIR.

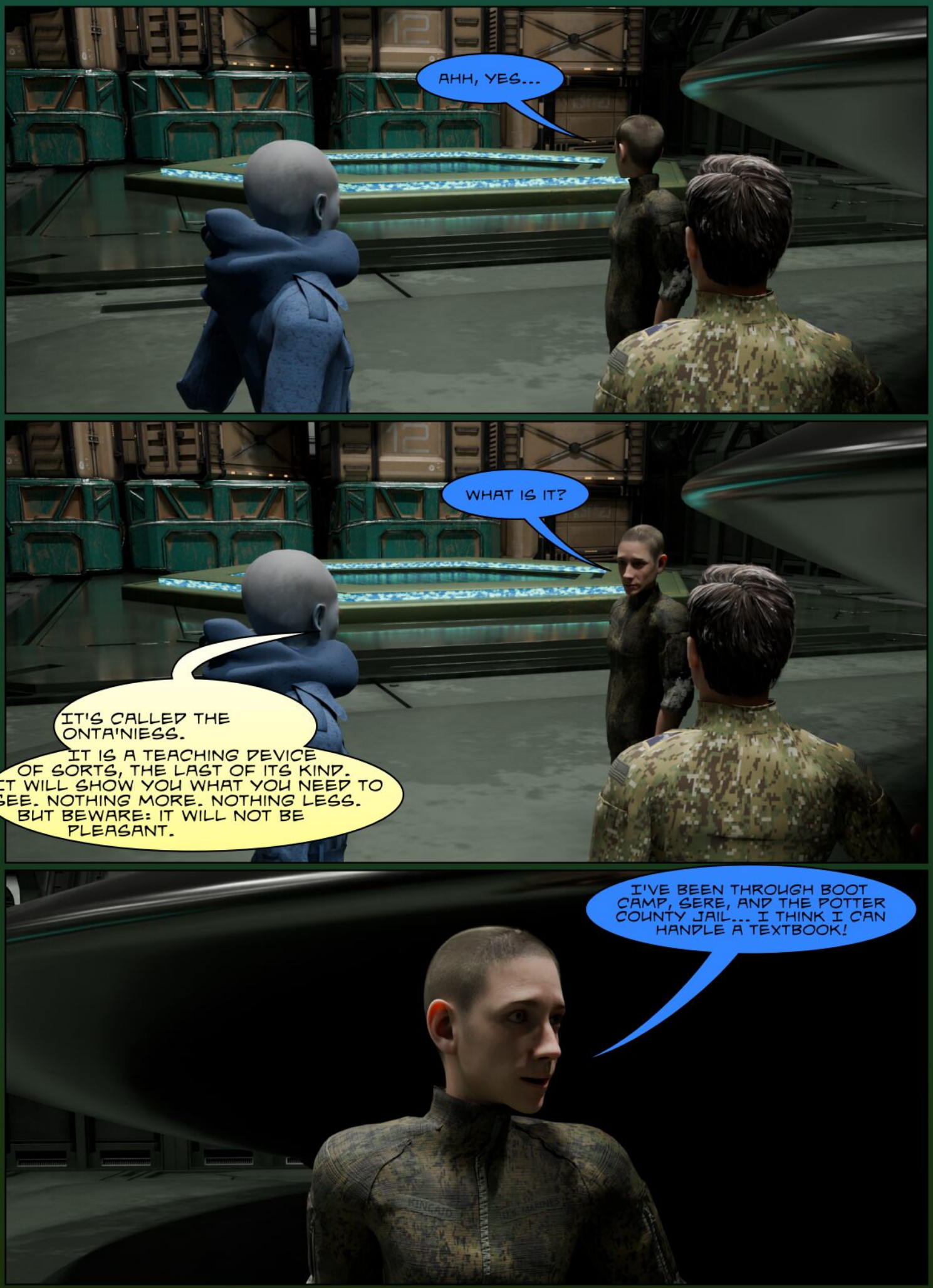

GENTLEMEN, YOU HAVE MY THANKS.
COLONEL, I CAN HAVE THE MISSION DATA CONVERTED FOR YOUR COMPUTERS AND SENT TO THE LEMAY NOW.
YES, PLEASE. THAT'D BE VERY HELPFUL.
AS WELL AS ANY DATA YOU HAVE ON THE HOSTAGES AND COMBATANTS.
PICTURES OF THEIR FACES WOULD HELP A LOT.
OF COURSE. IDENTIFICATIONS ARE STILL BEING CHECKED. YOU WILL RECEIVE EVERY CONFIRMED RESULT.
IF EVERYONE IS STAYING, PLEASE COME WITH ME.
THE DEMONSTRATION ITSELF WILL BE BRIEF.



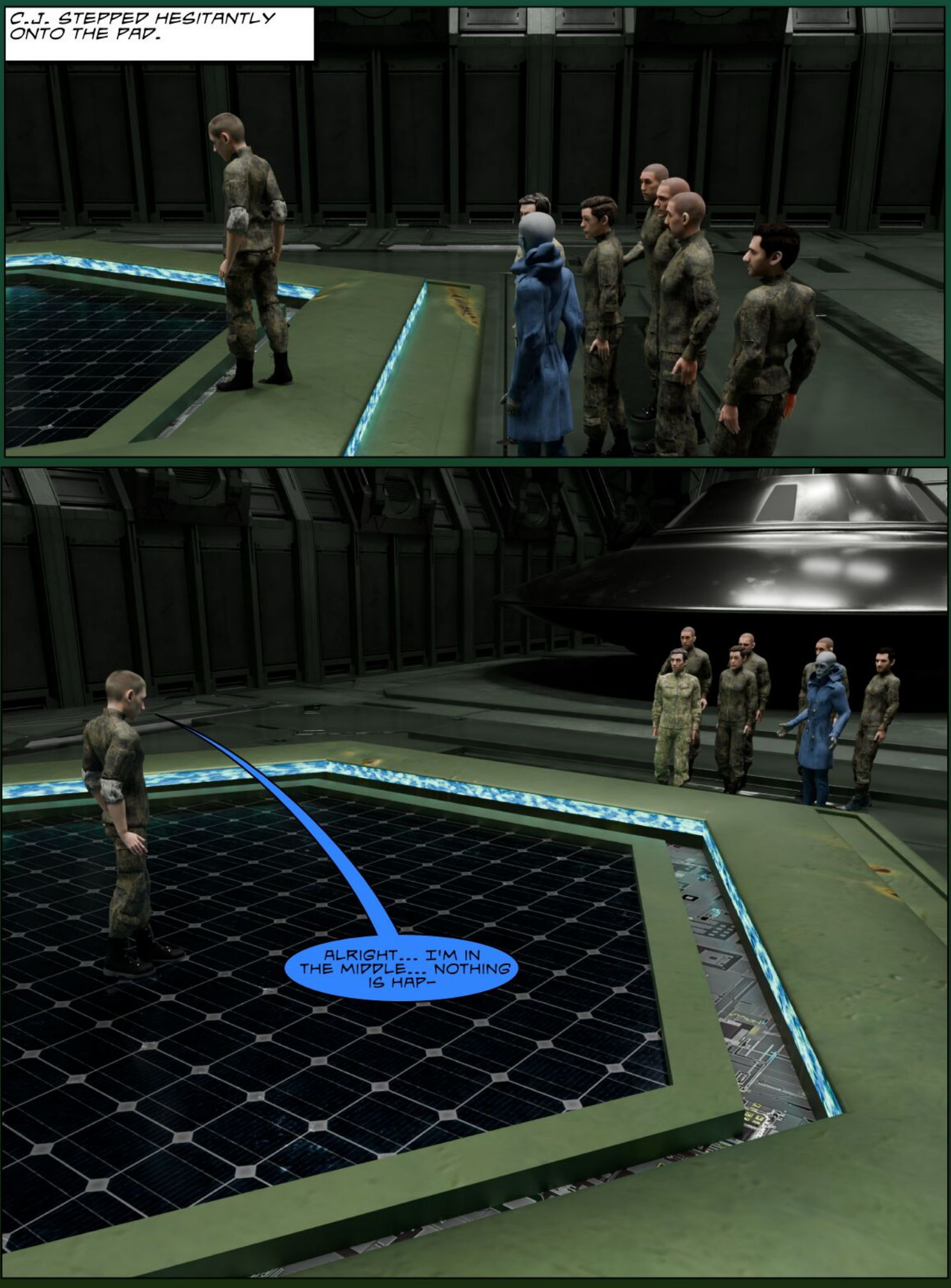

OHH!! COOL!
HEY! THAT'S A VDT-6, RIGHT?
THAT IS CORRECT, COLONEL.
FUCK...

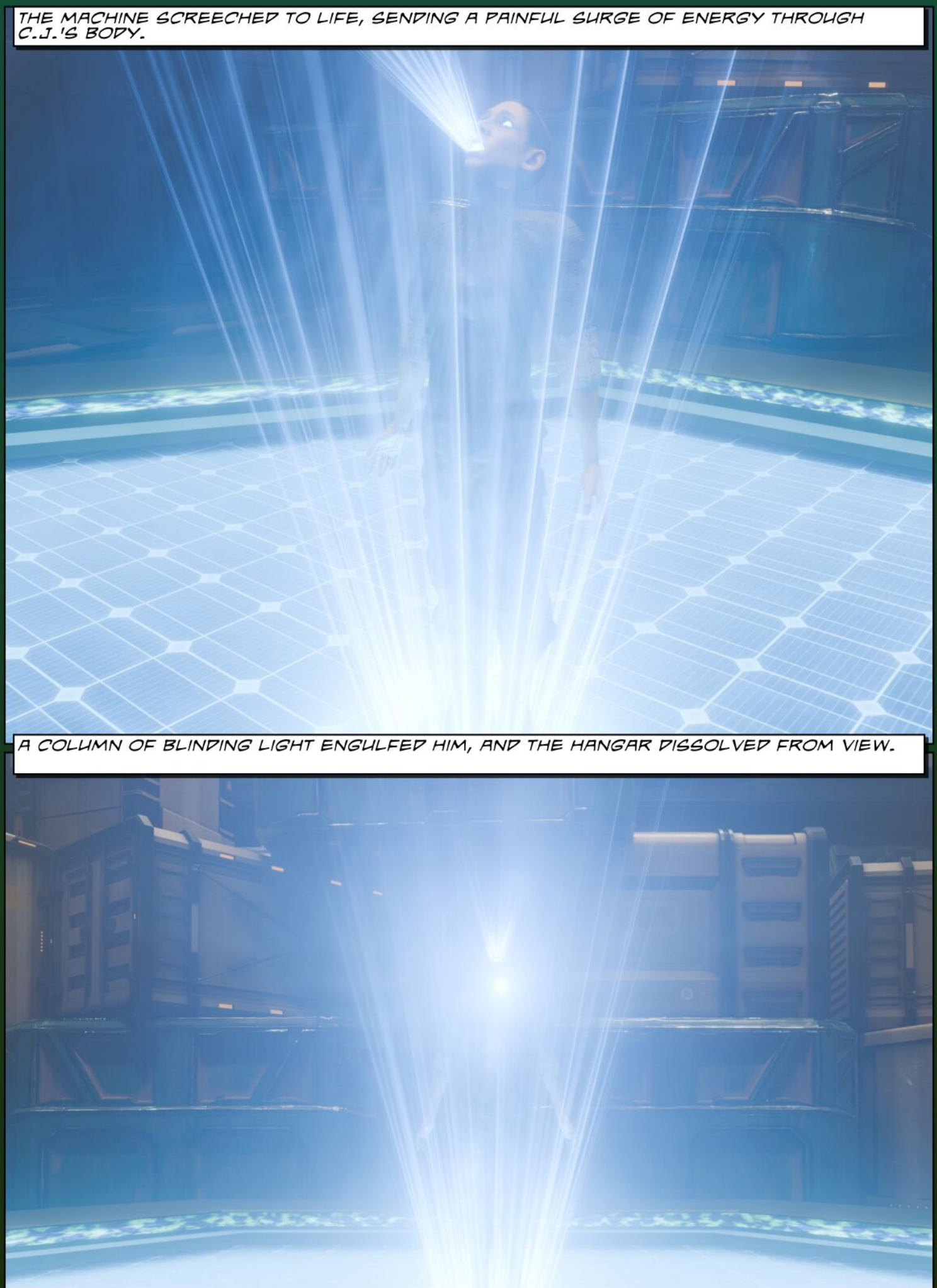

IS SOMETHING WRONG?
I JUST REALIZED I OWE MY DAD A MAJOR APOLOGY!
MANY TIMES OVER, SON...
PROBABLY...
BUT IF HE SAW THIS, HE'D SHIT HIMSELF!
HE'S HAD THAT BOB LAZAR "THEY'RE HERE" POSTER ON HIS BEDROOM WALL FOR YEARS.
I, UHH... I HAVE THE SAME POSTER...
AHH... I SEE.
CAN WE TAKE A LOOK?
IF YOU WISH.


WOW!
WHY CAN'T WE JUST USE THIS TO LAND?
IT WOULD SERVE NO BETTER THAN THE SI'RIZALL. THEY WOULD SEE IT COMING.
STILL, IT'S COOL.
INDEED, IT'S VERY "COOL." BUT IT IS NOT THE REASON WE CAME HERE.
THE DEVICE IS ON THE FLOOR BEHIND YOU. I HAD MY CREW BRING IT OUT OF STORAGE.


AHH, YES...
WHAT IS IT?
IT'S CALLED THE ONTA'NIESS.
IT IS A TEACHING DEVICE OF SORTS, THE LAST OF ITS KIND. IT WILL SHOW YOU WHAT YOU NEED TO SEE. NOTHING MORE. NOTHING LESS. BUT BEWARE: IT WILL NOT BE PLEASANT.
I'VE BEEN THROUGH BOOT CAMP, SERE, AND THE POTTER COUNTY JAIL... I THINK I CAN HANDLE A TEXTBOOK!


FIRST, UNDERSTAND: IT WILL HURT. YOU WILL LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS AND NEED HOURS OF REST AFTERWARD.
"COUNTY JAIL"...?
WELL... HANG ON A SECOND...
HE WILL SUFFER NO PERMANENT INJURY, COLONEL. I CAN ASSURE YOU OF THAT.
OHH... OK...
WELL..?
I'M THINKING! ...SIR...
IF YOU CHOOSE TO PROCEED, STAND IN THE CENTER. CLEAR YOUR MIND OF DOUBT AND WORRY; IT WILL GO MORE SMOOTHLY.


C.J. STEPPED HESITANTLY ONTO THE PAD.
ALRIGHT... I'M IN THE MIDDLE... NOTHING IS HAP-


THE MACHINE SCREECHED TO LIFE, SENDING A PAINFUL SURGE OF ENERGY THROUGH C.J.'S BODY.
A COLUMN OF BLINDING LIGHT ENGULFED HIM, AND THE HANGAR DISSOLVED FROM VIEW.

C.J. FELT AS THOUGH HE HAD ENTERED A DIGITAL REALM, ITS PULSING CUBES OF LIGHT STRETCHING BEYOND SIGHT.



AS HE BEGAN TO MAKE SENSE OF IT, A MECHANICAL CRY, BEAUTIFUL AND TERRIBLE, MADE HIM TURN.

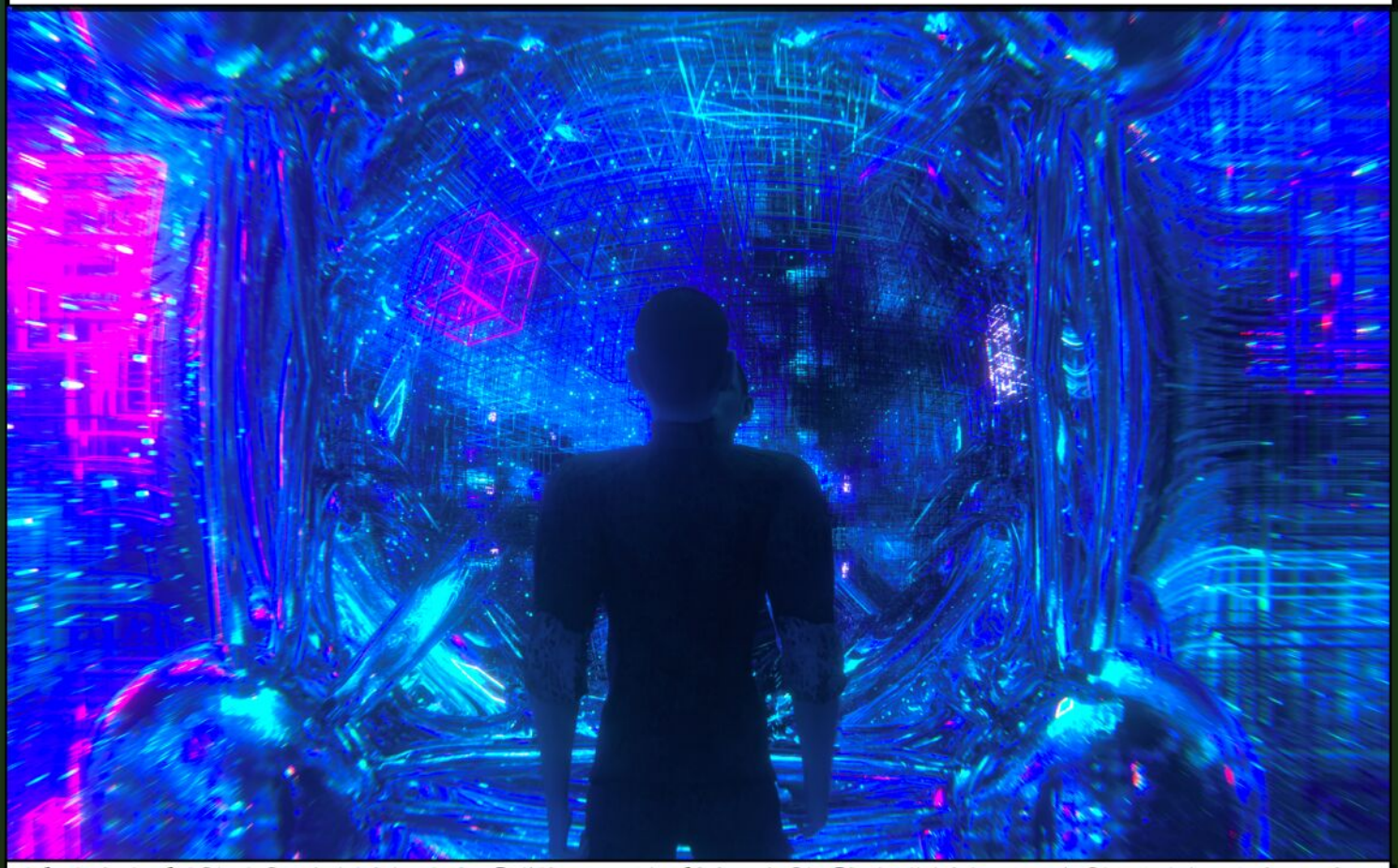


AT FIRST, HE TOOK IT FOR A STRUCTURE. THEN ITS PARTS BEGAN REVOLVING AROUND A CENTRAL AXIS, CHAOTIC YET DELIBERATE.

THE SHAPE SPRANG FORWARD AND STOPPED INCHES FROM HIS FACE. ITS PARTS KEPT TURNING, YET ONE SILVER ORB REMAINED PERFECTLY ALIGNED WITH HIS EYES.



THE ROTATION STOPPED. THE CUBE TIPPED, ITS INNER STRUCTURE SHIFTING AROUND A GROWING DISTORTION.



AS THE DISTORTION FILLED THE CUBE, AN UNSEEN FORCE PULLED HIM FORWARD. THEN HE WAS FALLING.