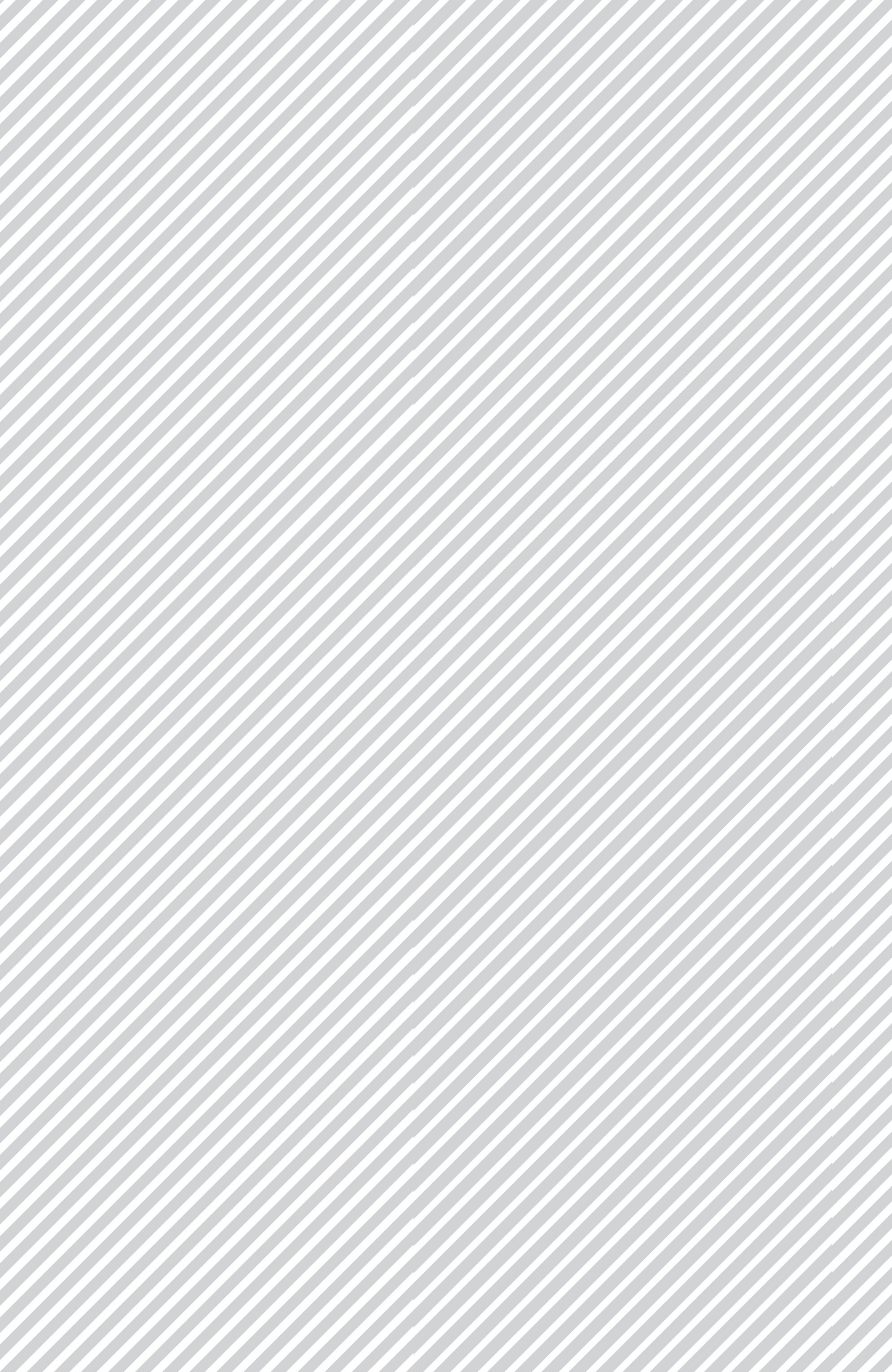


FEAST OF WEST

HICKMAN • DRAGOTTA • MARTIN

EIGHT



EAST^{OF} WEST



JONATHAN HICKMAN
WRITER

NICK DRAGOTTA
ARTIST

FRANK MARTIN
COLORS

RUS WOOTON
LETTERS

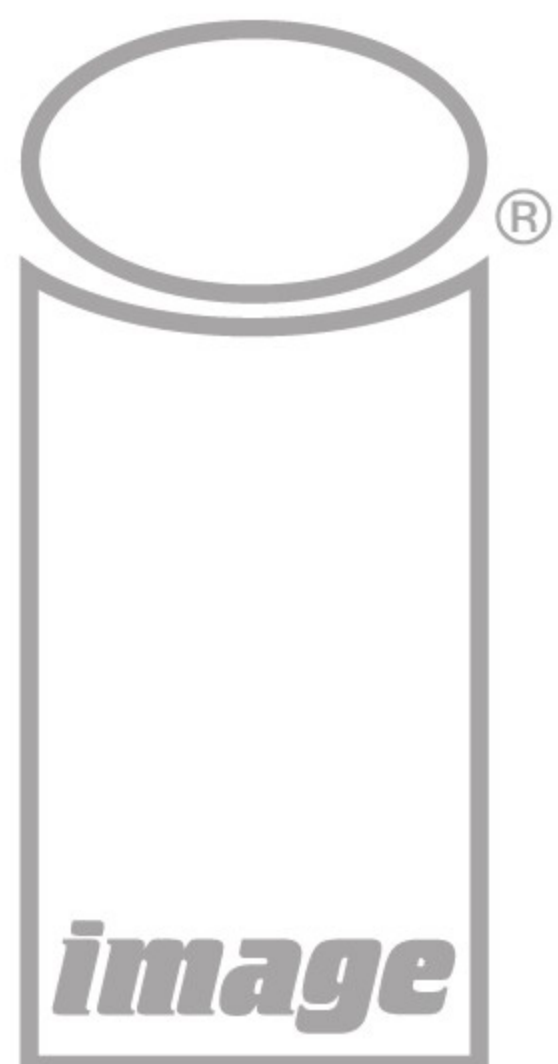


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EAST
OF
WEST



IF YOU CHOOSE, **CHOOSE
NOW.**

OR **SOON** THAT
DECISION WILL BE **TAKEN
FROM YOU.**



The edge of war.

Feel that?
The air is
supercharged
with
violence.

If a decision
needs to be
made...then we
must make it
soon.

I think
we're
running out
of time.

Oh, we definitely
are. The war to
end all wars is
headed towards us
like a freight
train...

I can almost
see it just over
the horizon.
This *should* be
our time, but
we're rudderless
and without
purpose.

*Adrift
on a bloody
sea.*

Speak for
yourself, War.
I don't need
convincing...

I know what
we're supposed
to be doing. *It's
simple*. He's the
real thing...

We need to
find the boy,
Babylon, and
serve him.

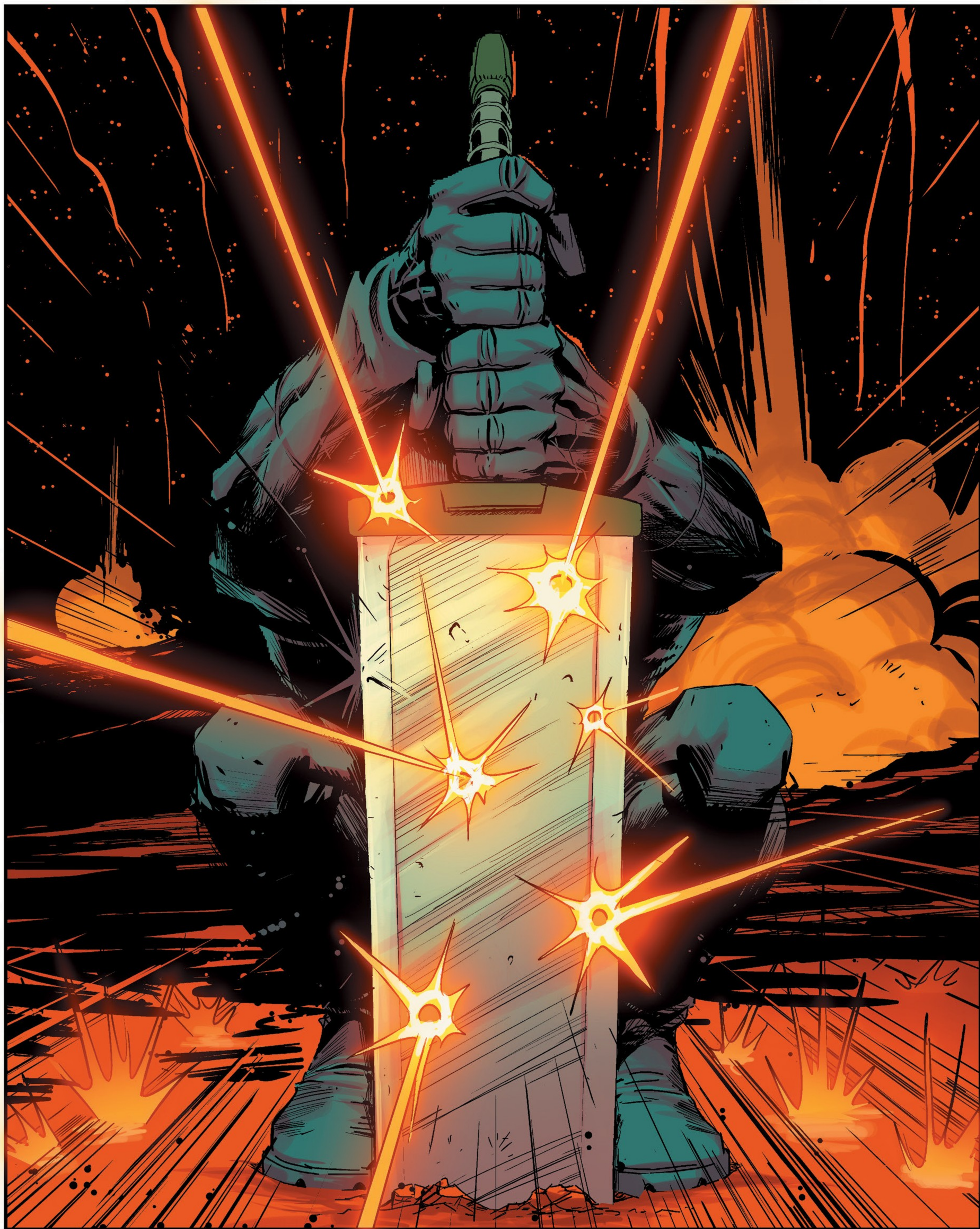
I'm
not so
sure...

I am.

Mankind is
waiting for
him...

And he
is waiting
for us.

TWUMP





Think
you can
hide from
me?



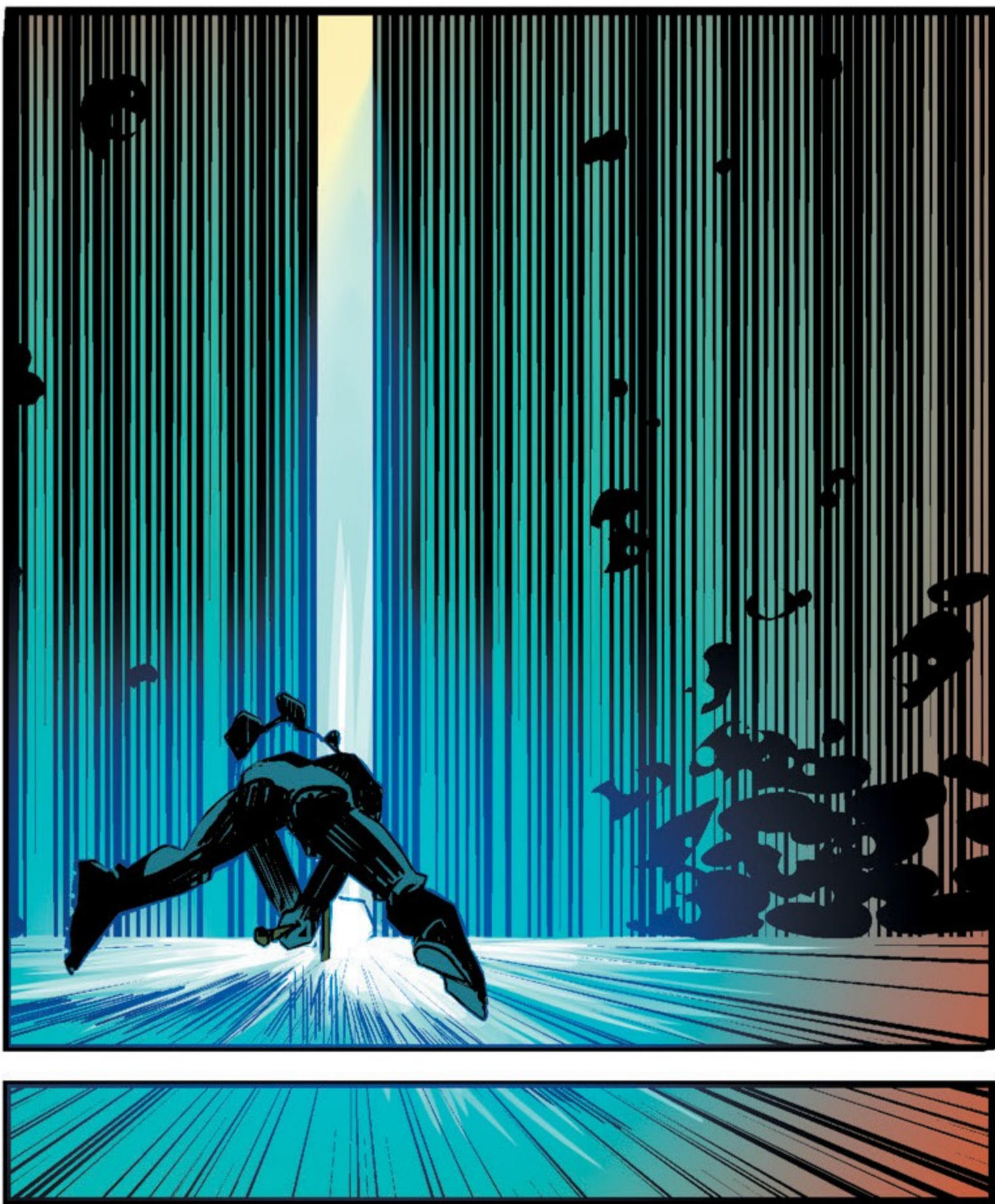
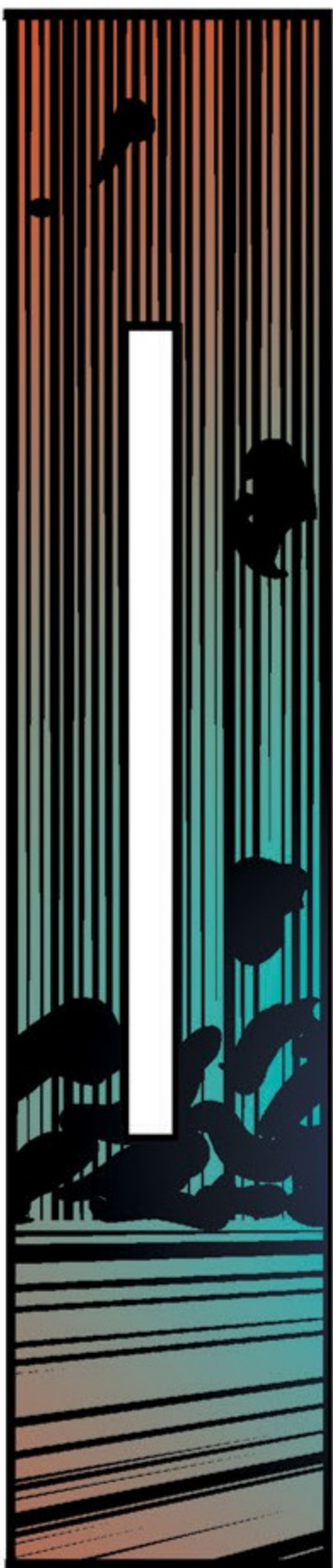
Think any of
you can hide
from what's
coming?

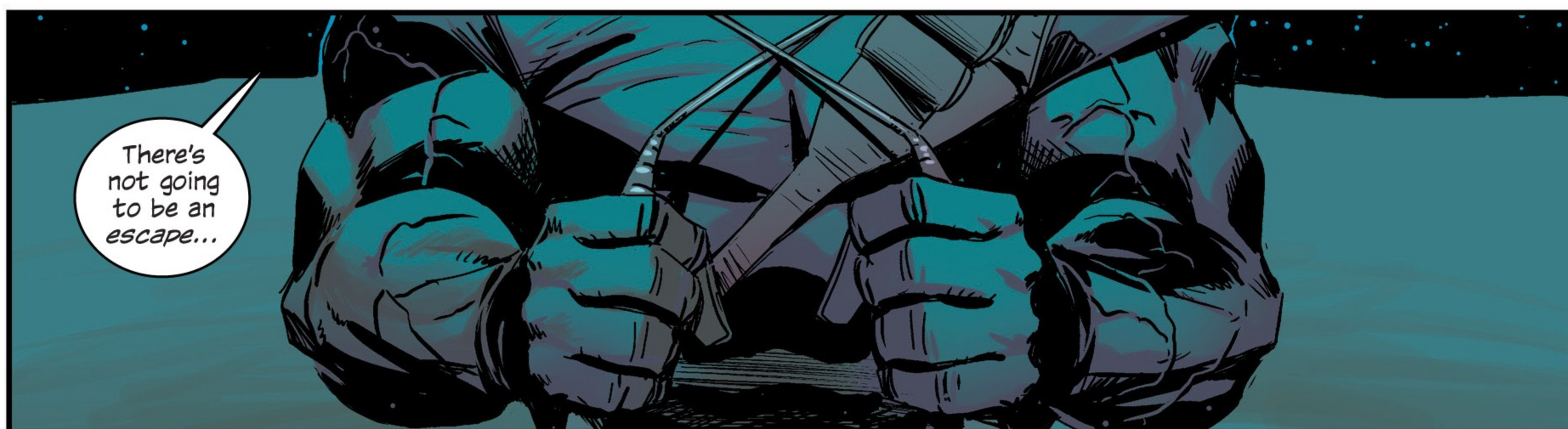


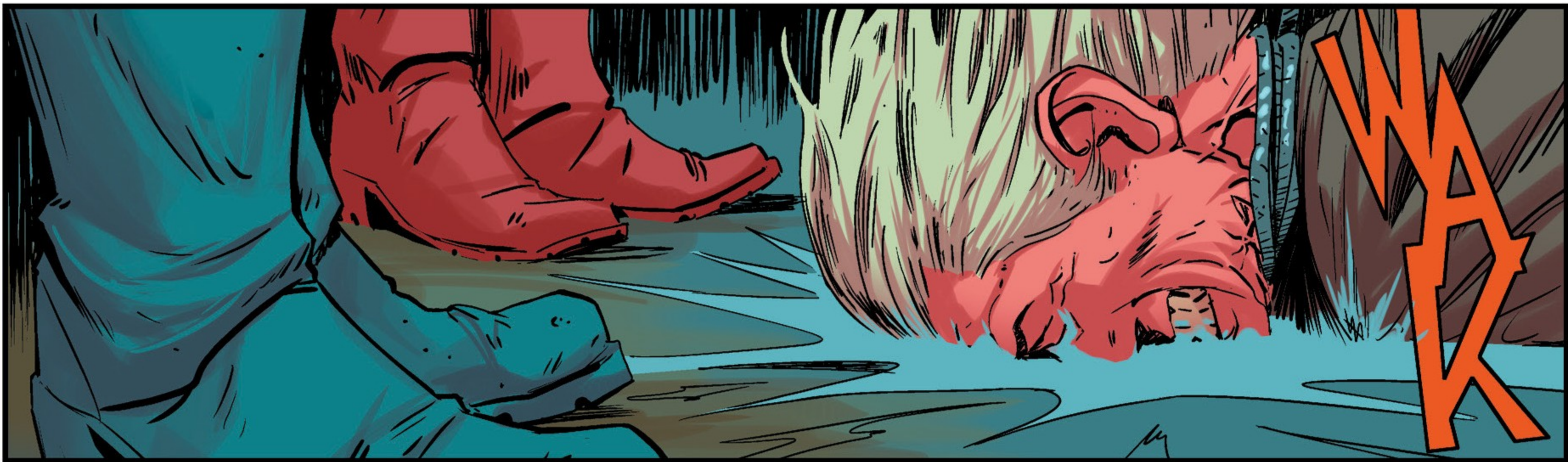
Well...



You
can't!









Please....

Pleeeassse...

Come
now...
None of
that.

We're
done
with all
that.



There won't
be any begging
your way out
of this.

There's no
mercy. No
forgiveness.



We would
tell you to
pray, but it
wouldn't you
any good.



You have
earned what
is coming
to you.

HERE'S WHAT I KNOW TO BE
TRUE:

BEFORE IT ALL COMES
CRASHING DOWN, THE PEOPLE
WILL WAKE UP.

IT WILL JUST BE **TOO LATE** TO
DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.





35



**THIRTY-FIVE:
TEACH A MAN TO
FISH**

I dunno...
it's a tough
call, Dad.

How you
figure that,
son?

Askin' a clever boy like
yourself in what
direction you wanna head
shouldn't get you all
befuddled. After all, it's
only a **choice**. A
preference...

You
wanna go
left or
right?

East or
west?

Well...

You're
implying that I
should just pick one.
Randomly. Like it
doesn't **matter**
because there's no
difference between
the two, and,
uh...

That's
not really
how I was
raised.

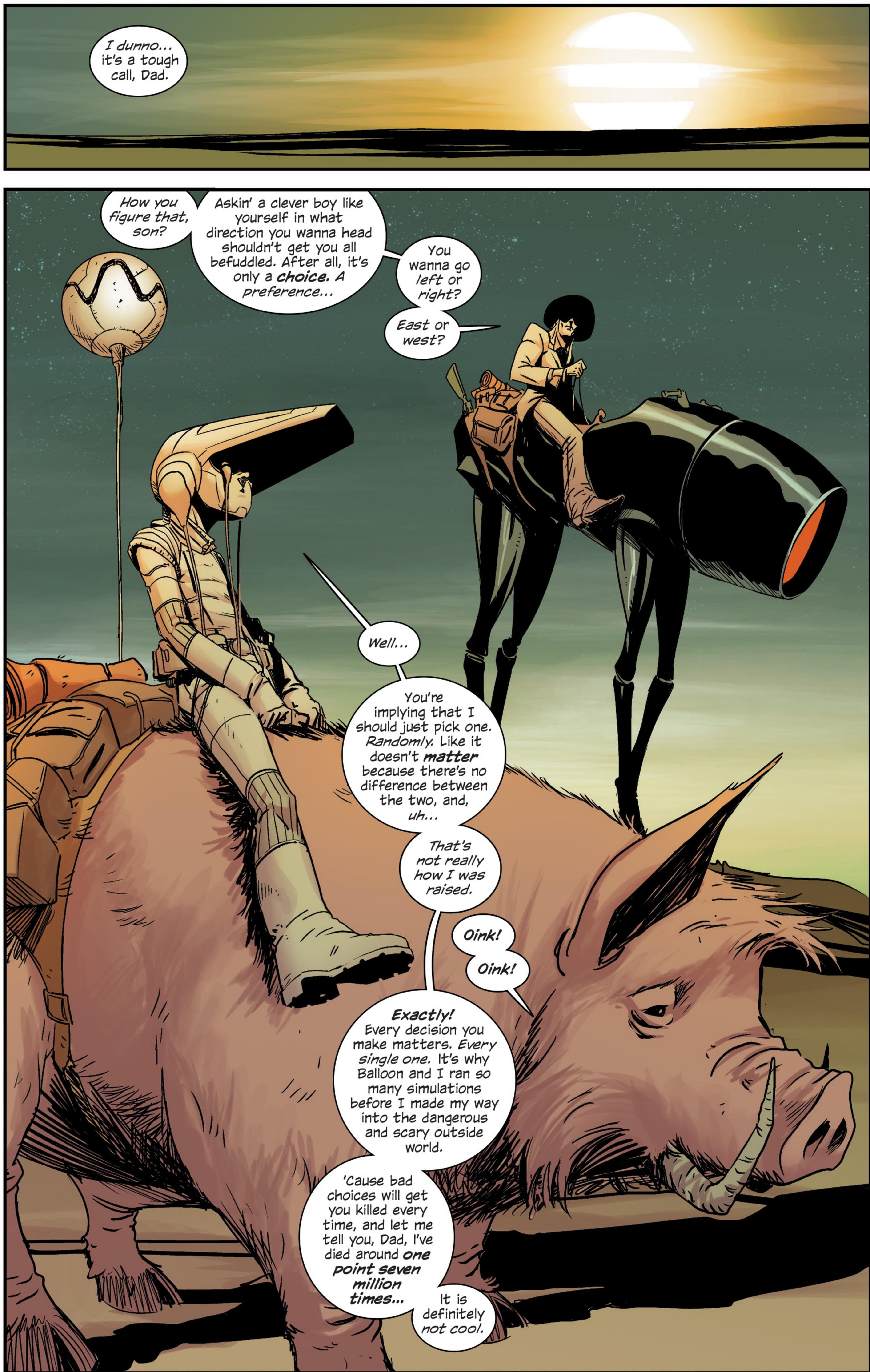
Oink!

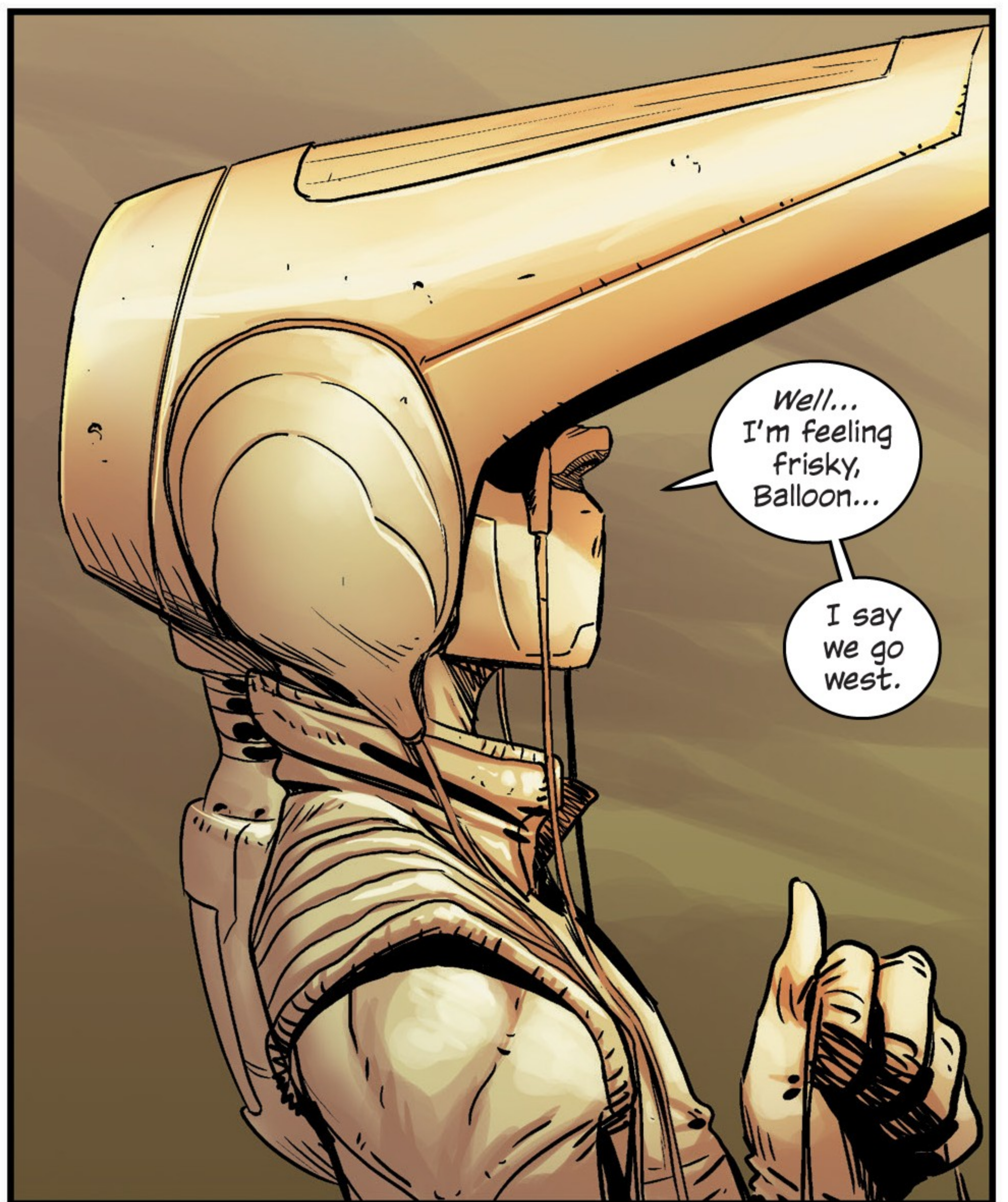
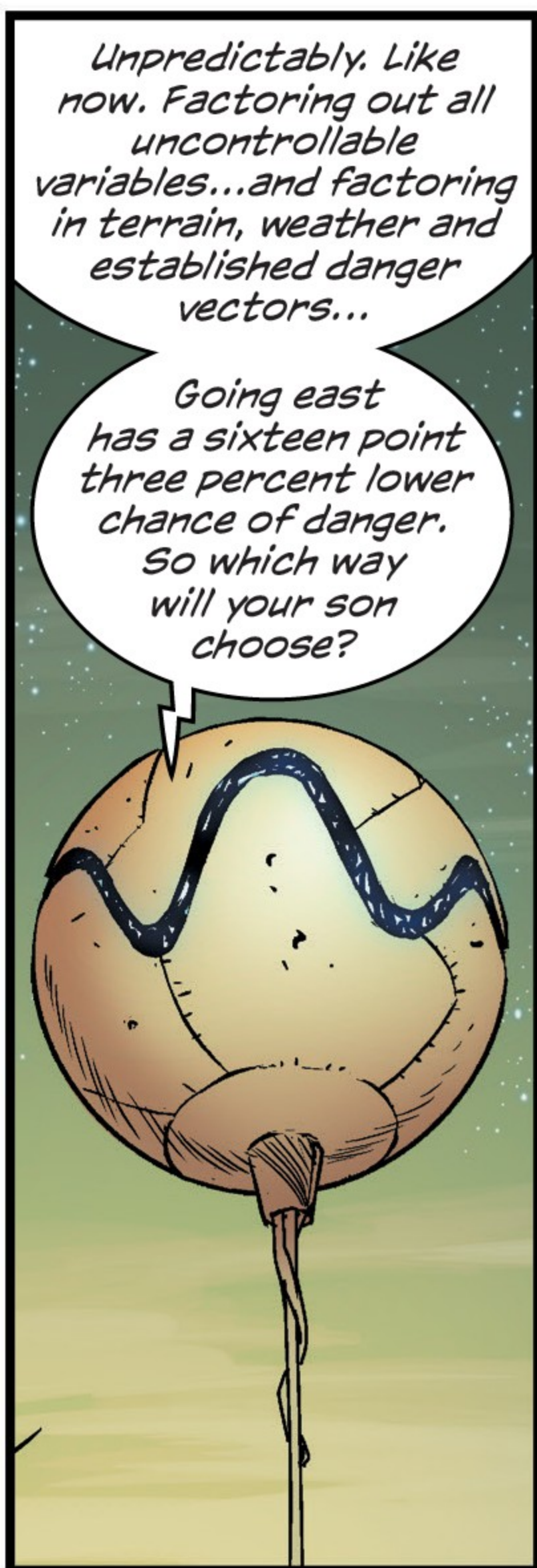
Oink!

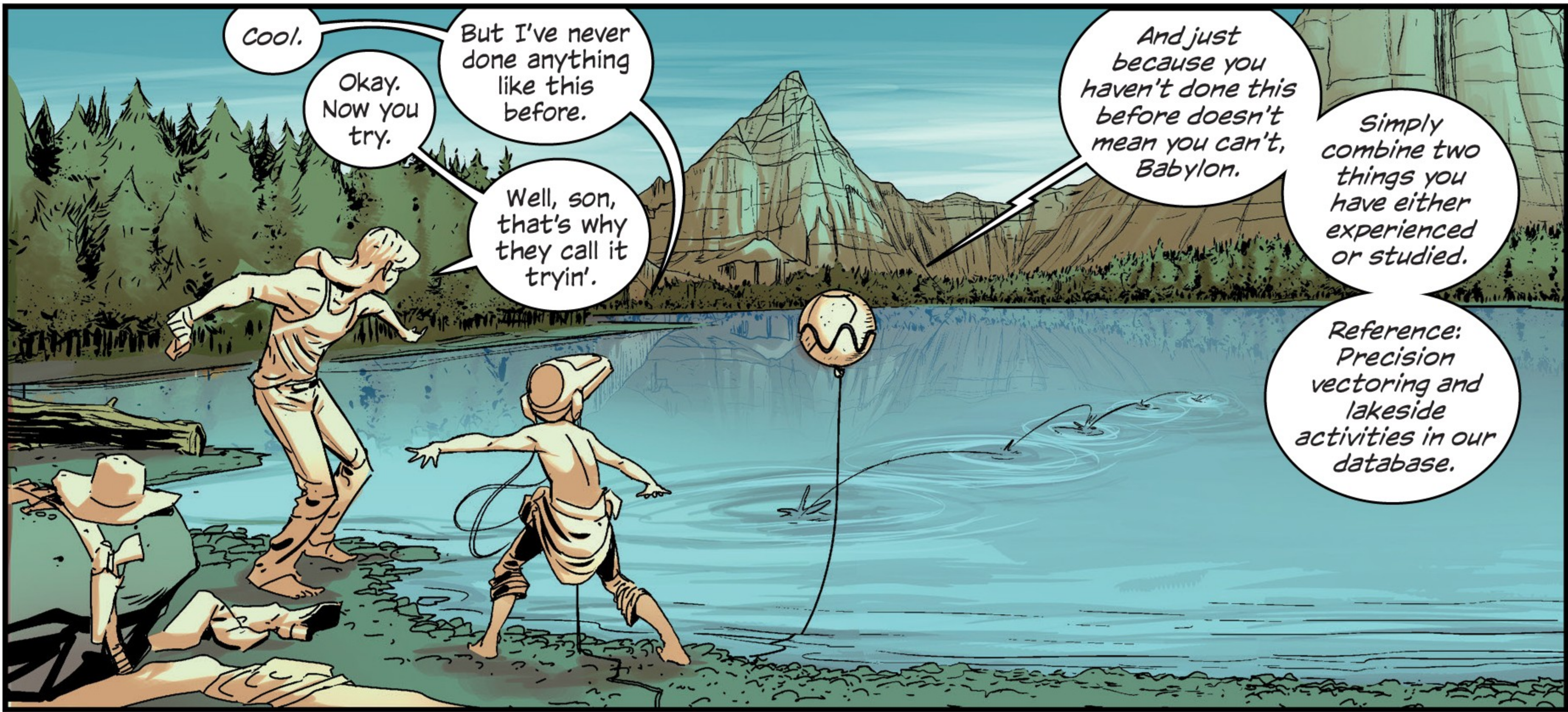
Exactly!
Every decision you
make matters. *Every
single one*. It's why
Balloon and I ran so
many simulations
before I made my way
into the dangerous
and scary outside
world.

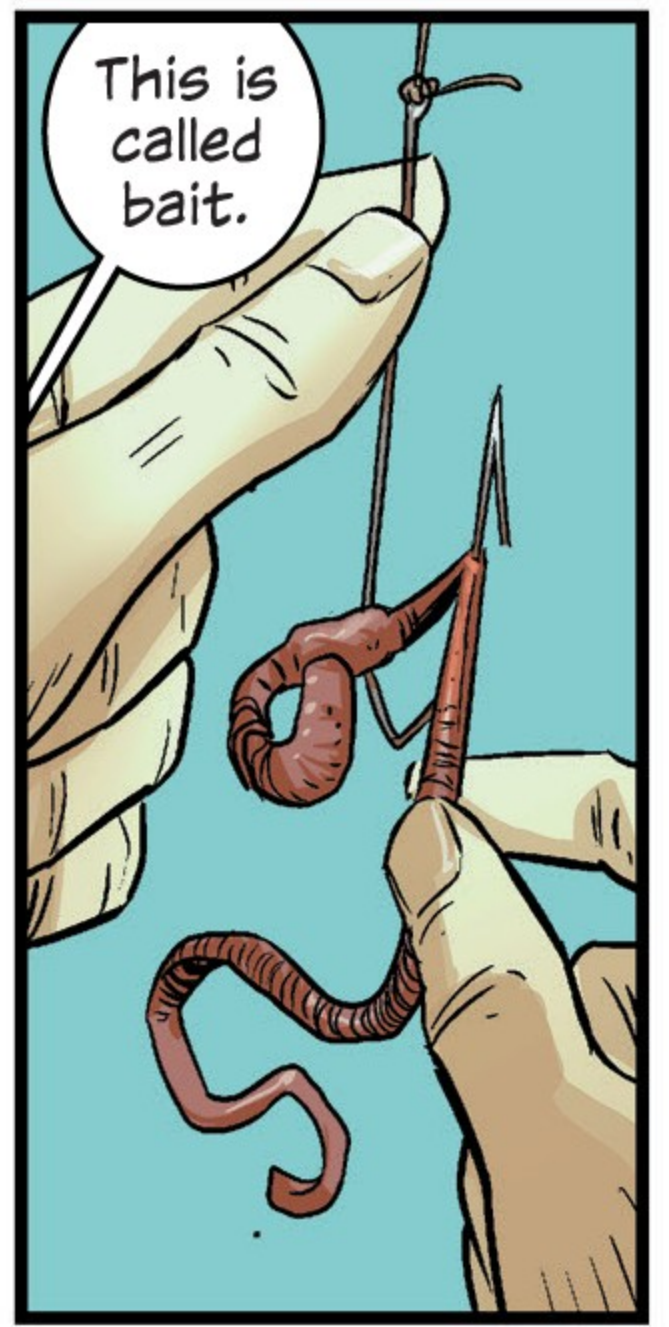
'Cause bad
choices will get
you killed every
time, and let me
tell you, Dad, I've
died around **one
point seven
million
times...**

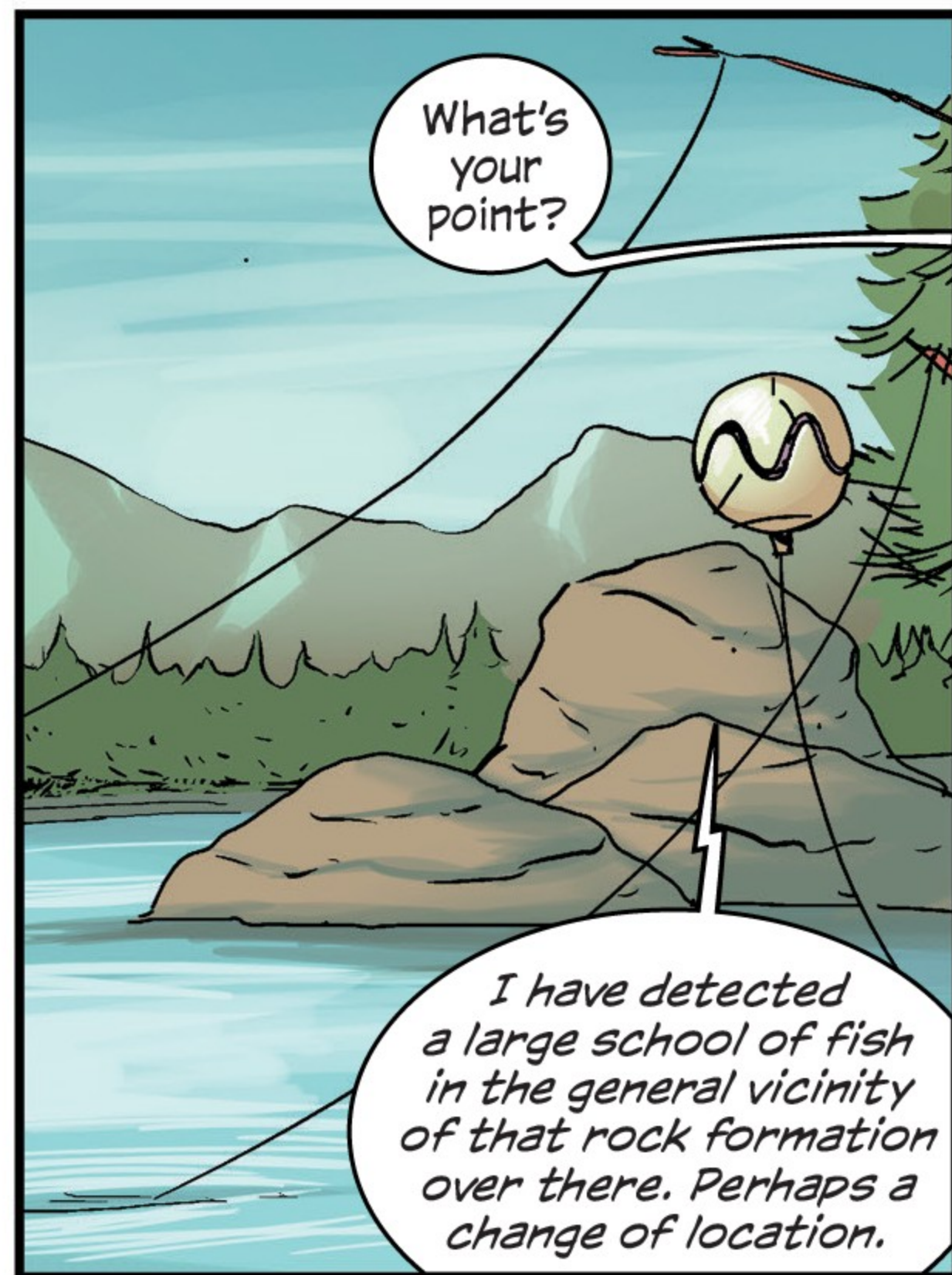
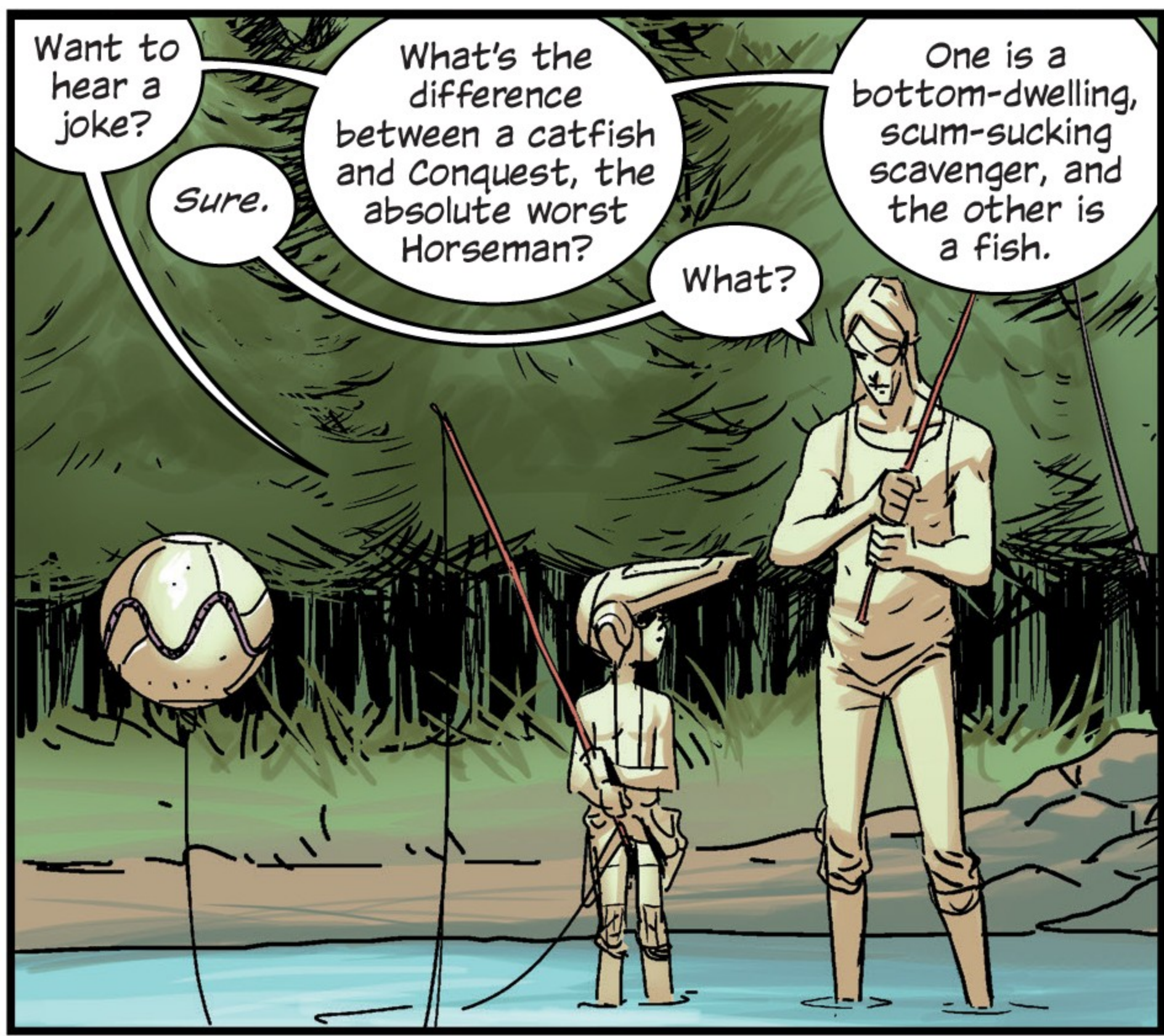
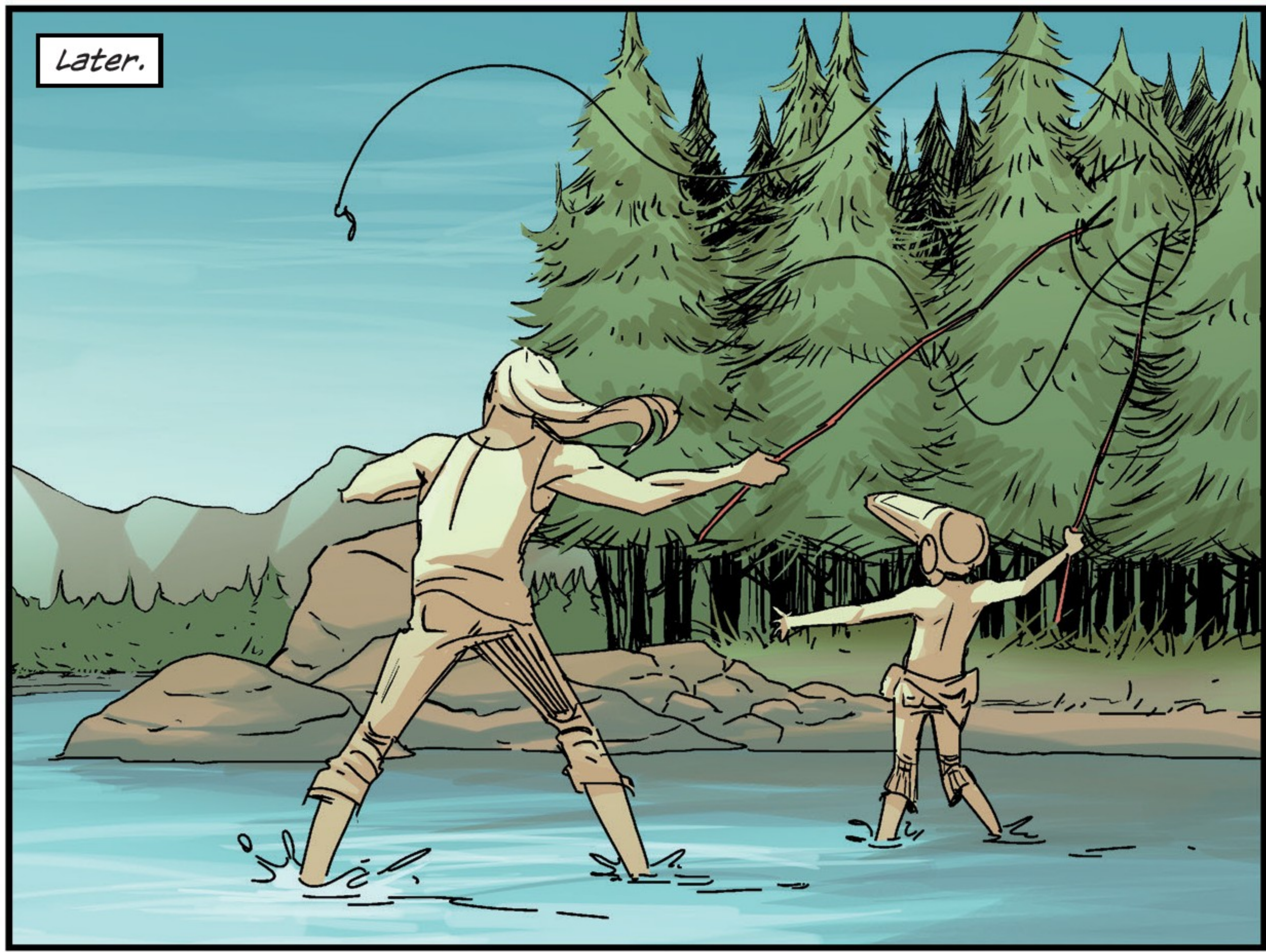
It is
definitely
not cool.

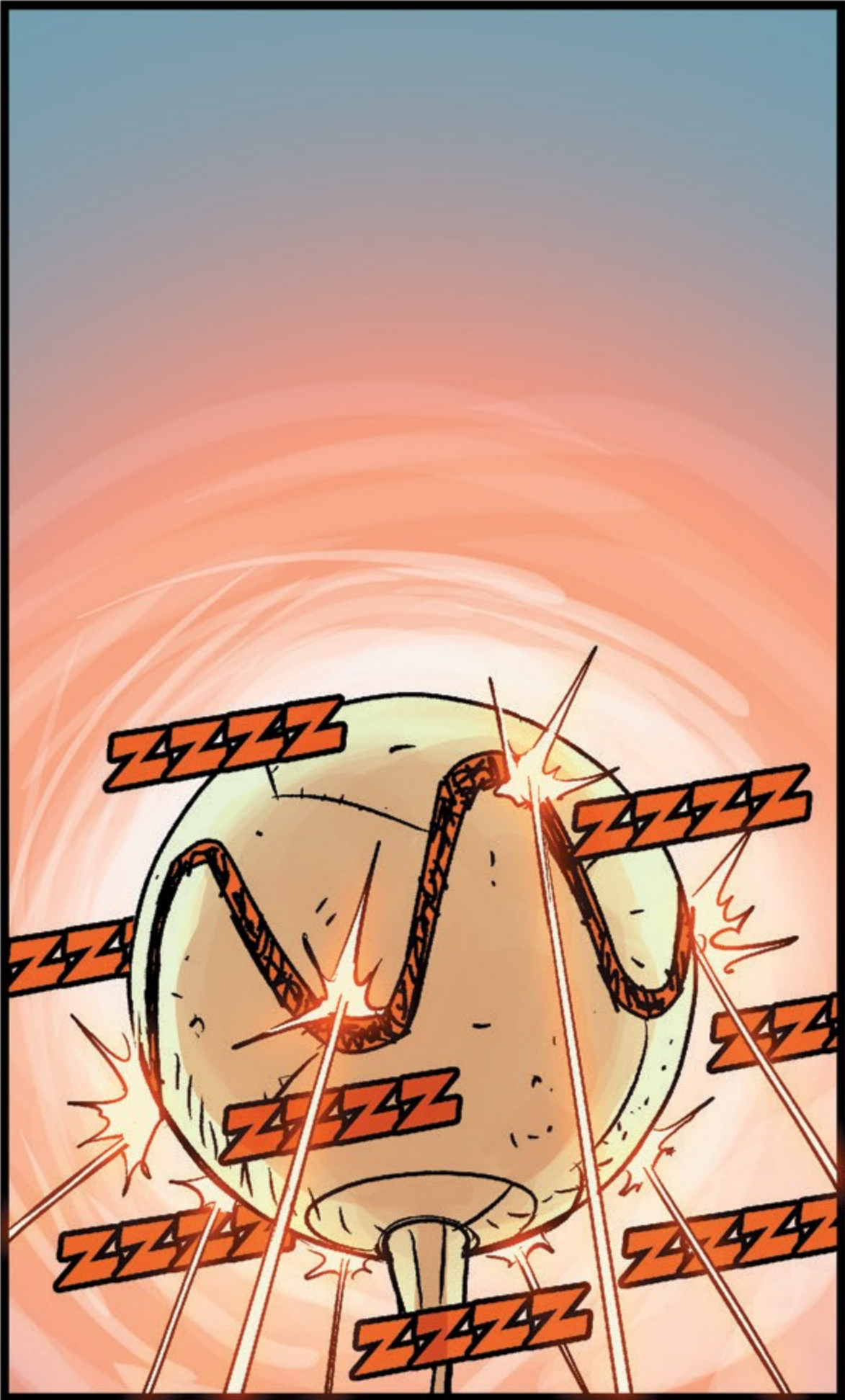


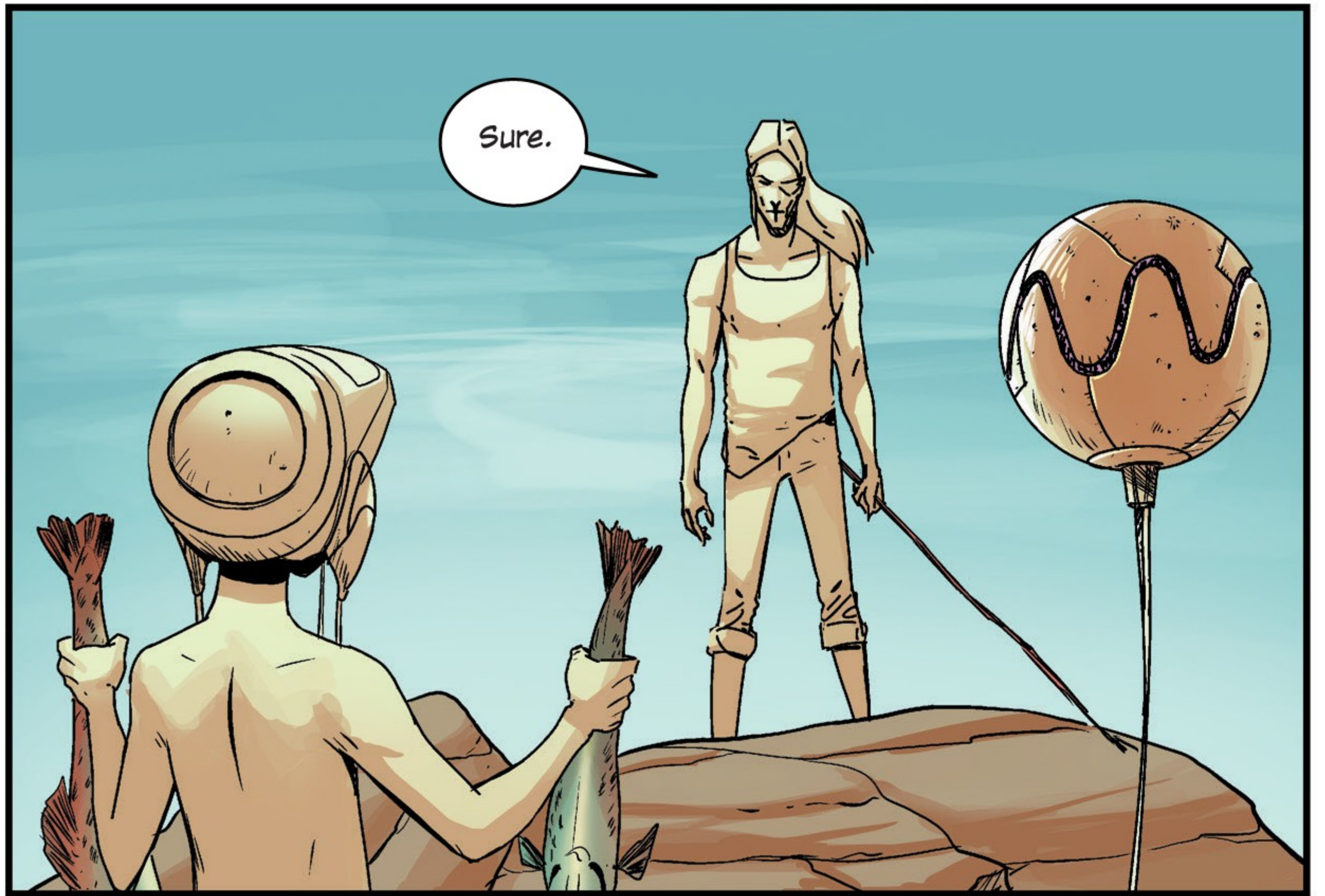
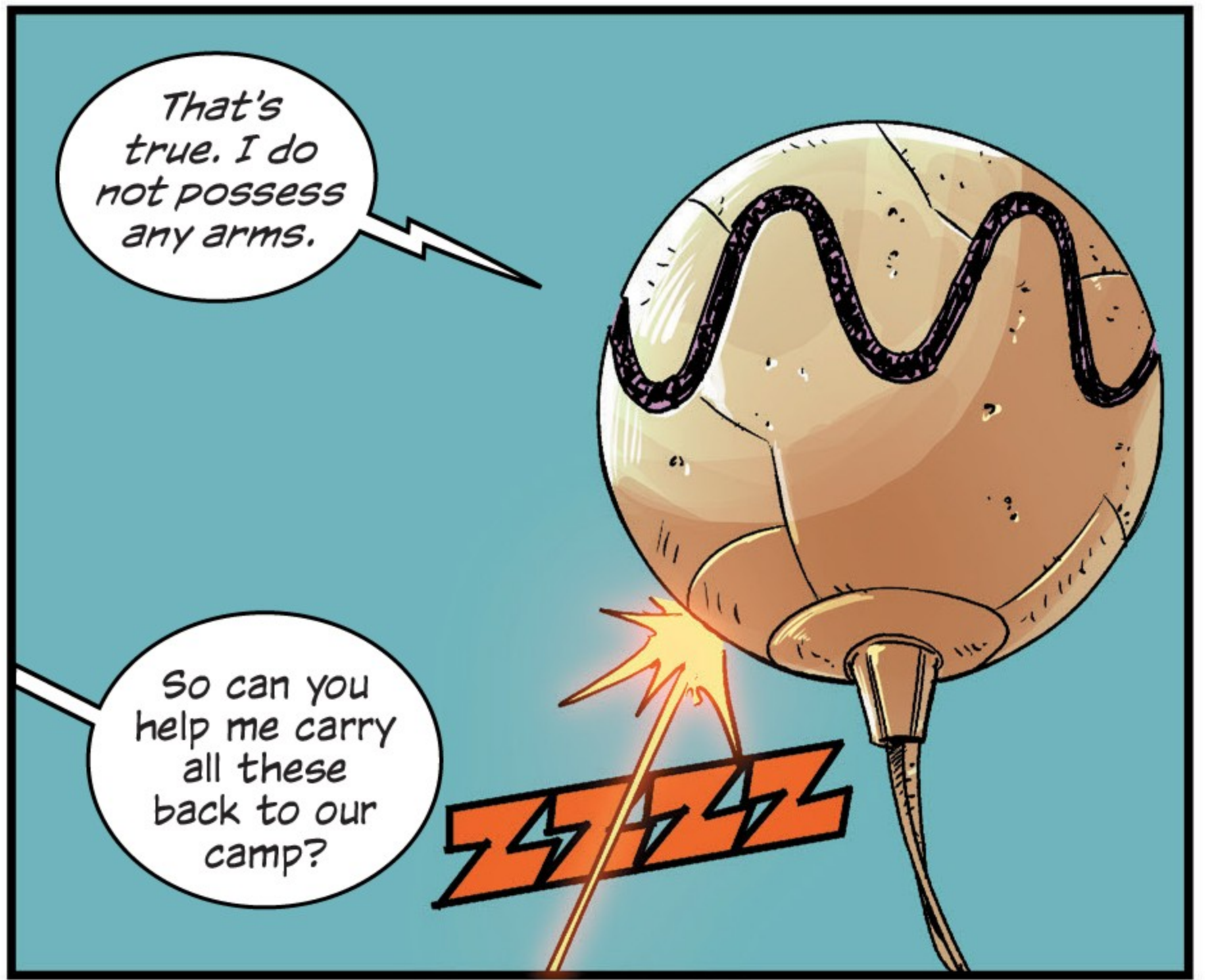
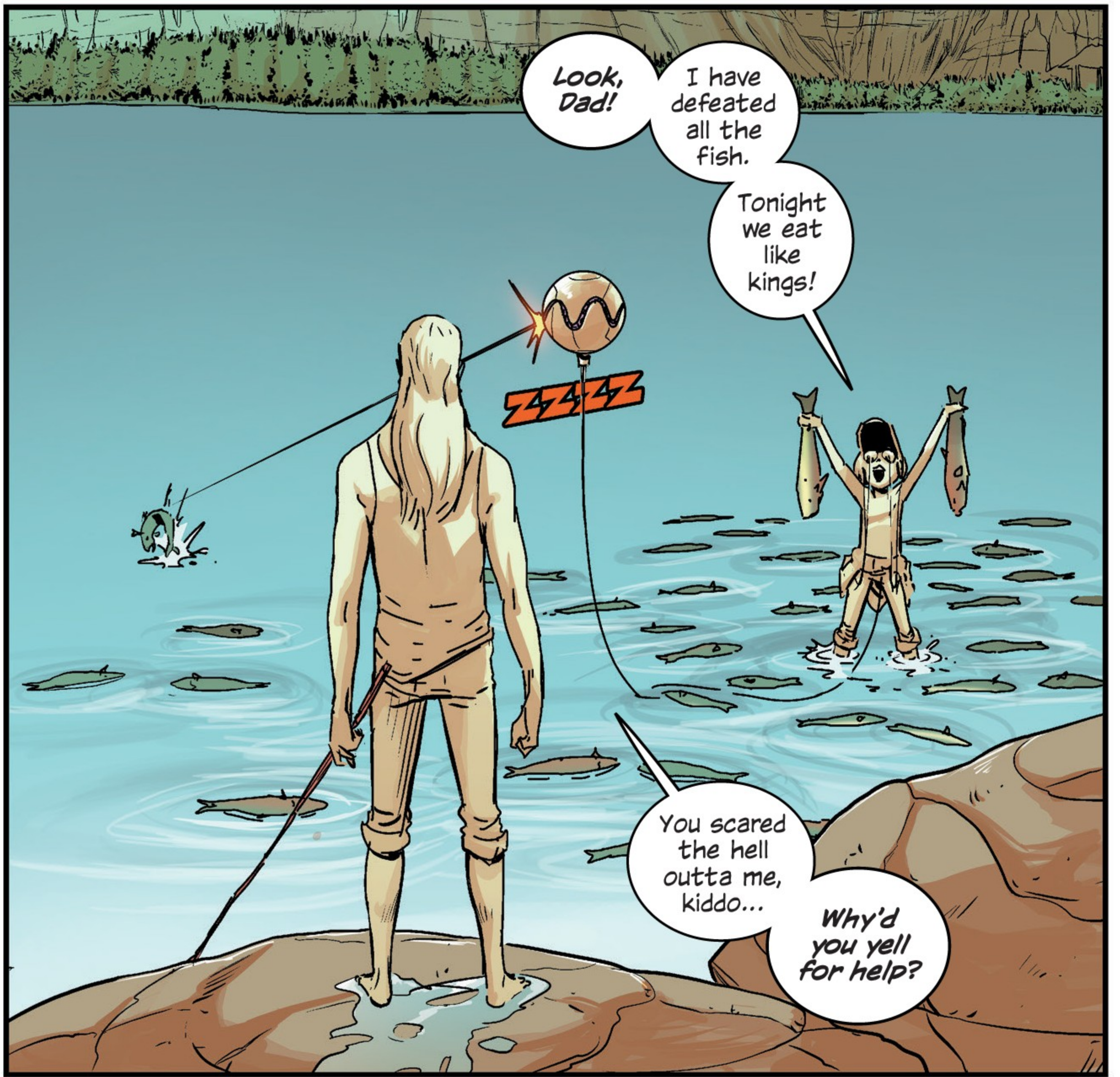












Two weeks pass.

Whoa.
Where are
we?

This, Babylon, is a
monument to the
impermanence of
man.

Some people
believe that this
place was swallowed
after a great flood
tore through this
dry and dusty
land.

That when the
waters receded,
only the buildings
remained...as its
citizens had been
washed away.

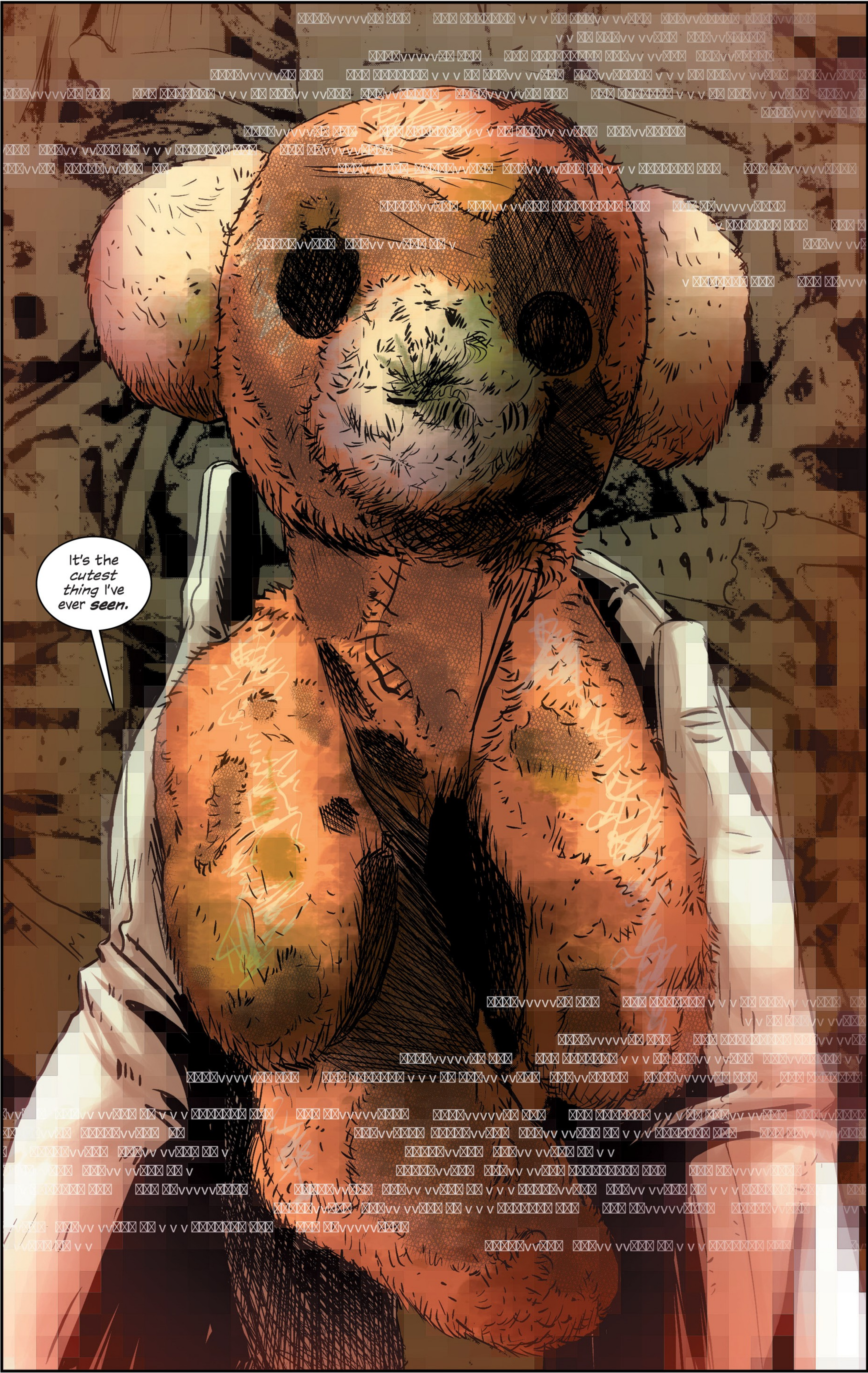
Some people
believe it was
lost long before
that. That fallow
land left only a
waste of bones
behind.

Some
say it was
a plague.

And some
say the people
had incurred the
wrath of some
long-forgotten
god.

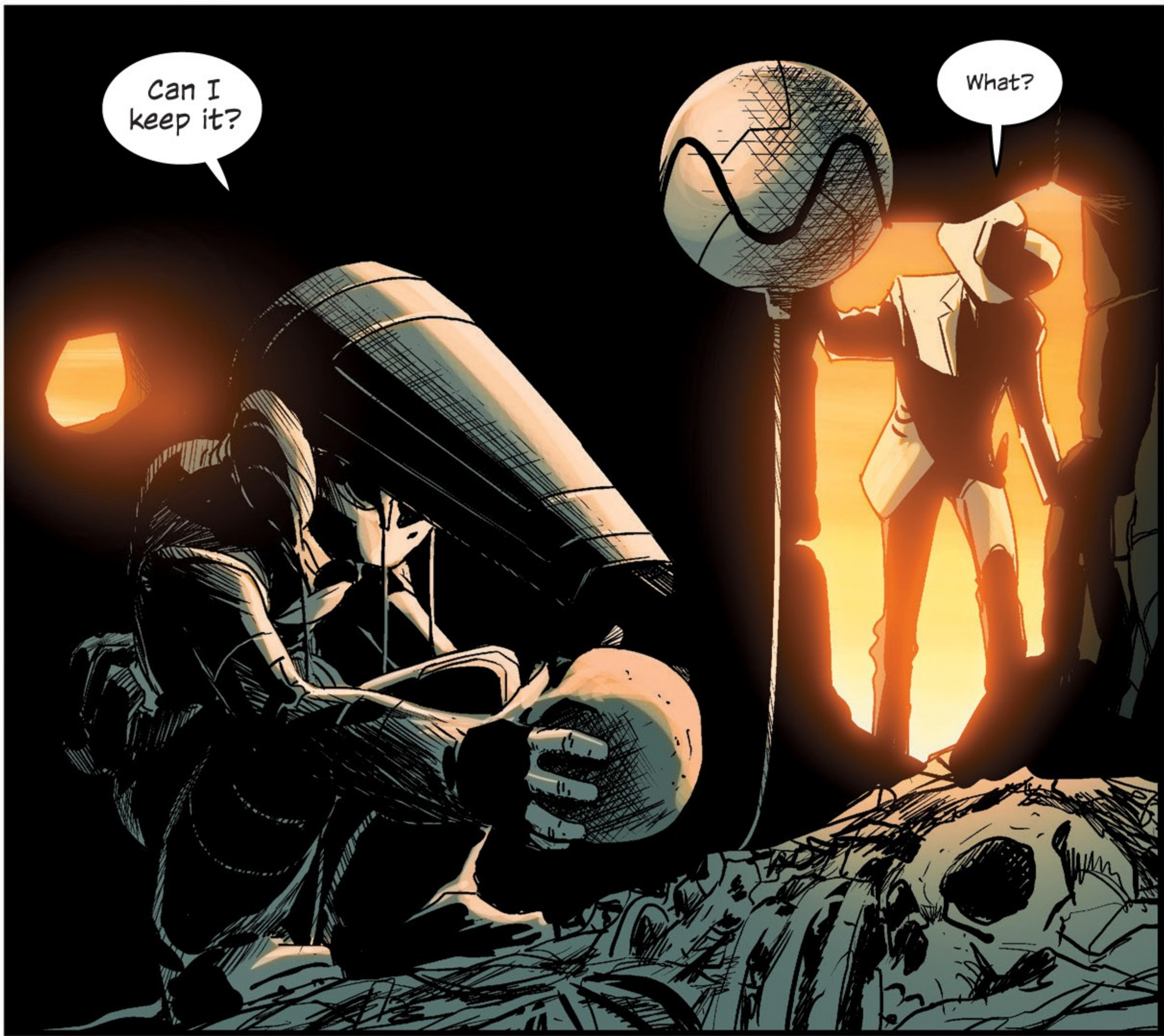
But all
of that is
wrong.







I just love it...



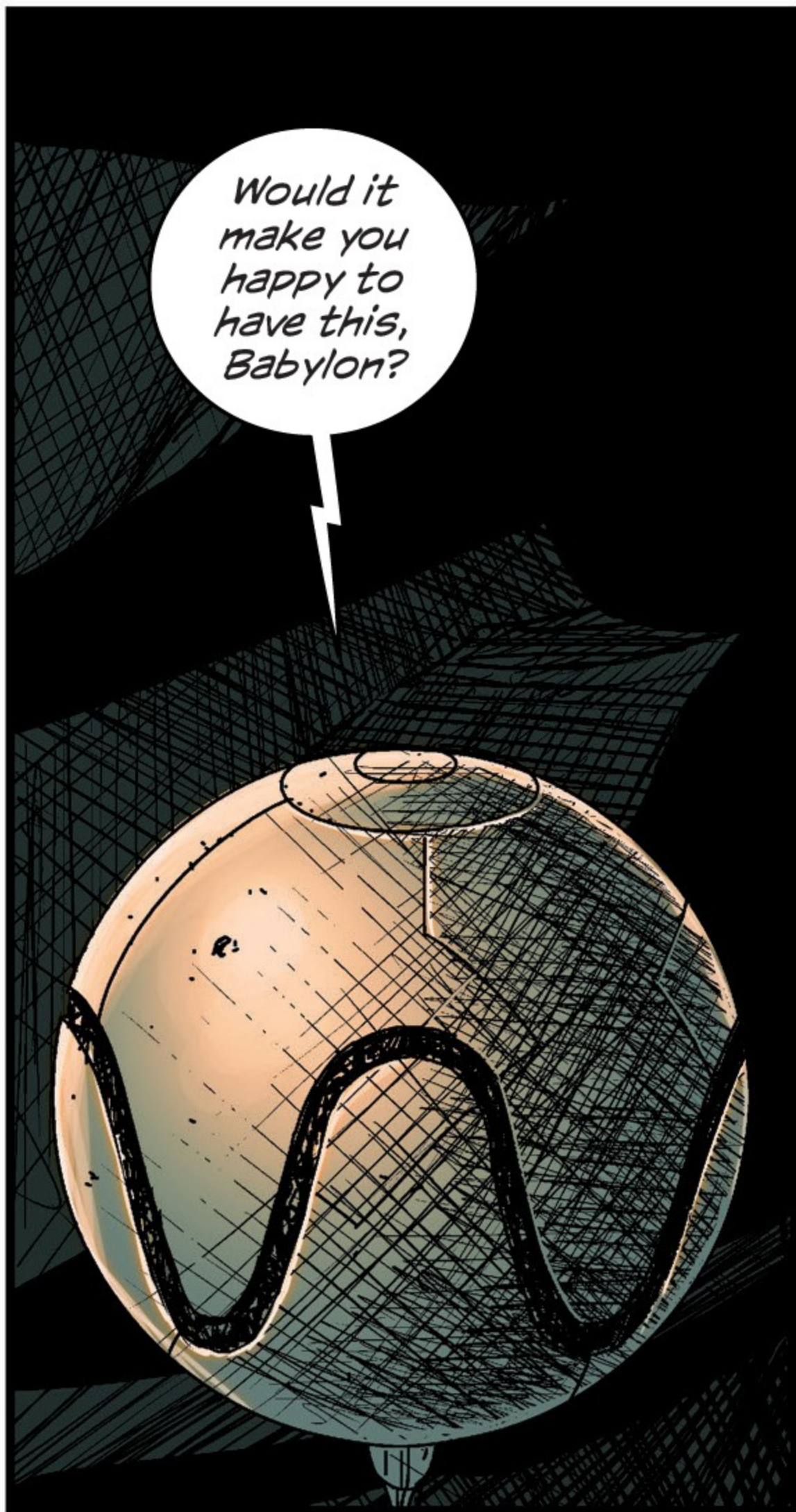
Can I keep it?

What?



You know, can I have it...for myself?

Of course I'd have to give it a name...but I'm pretty good at that.



Would it make you happy to have this, Babylon?



Oh, yes, yes it would.

So can I keep it, Dad?



Can I?

Later that night.



So...

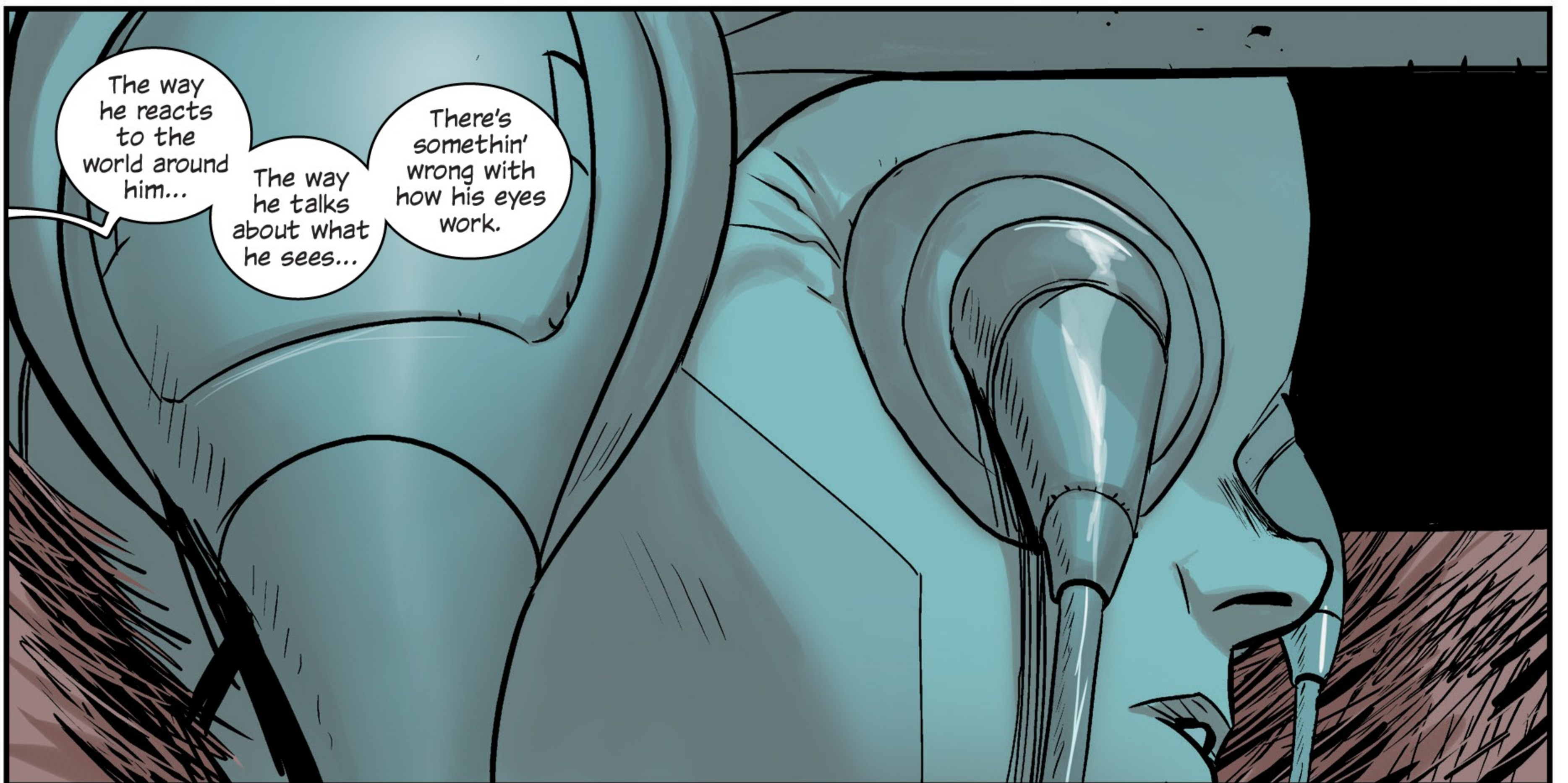
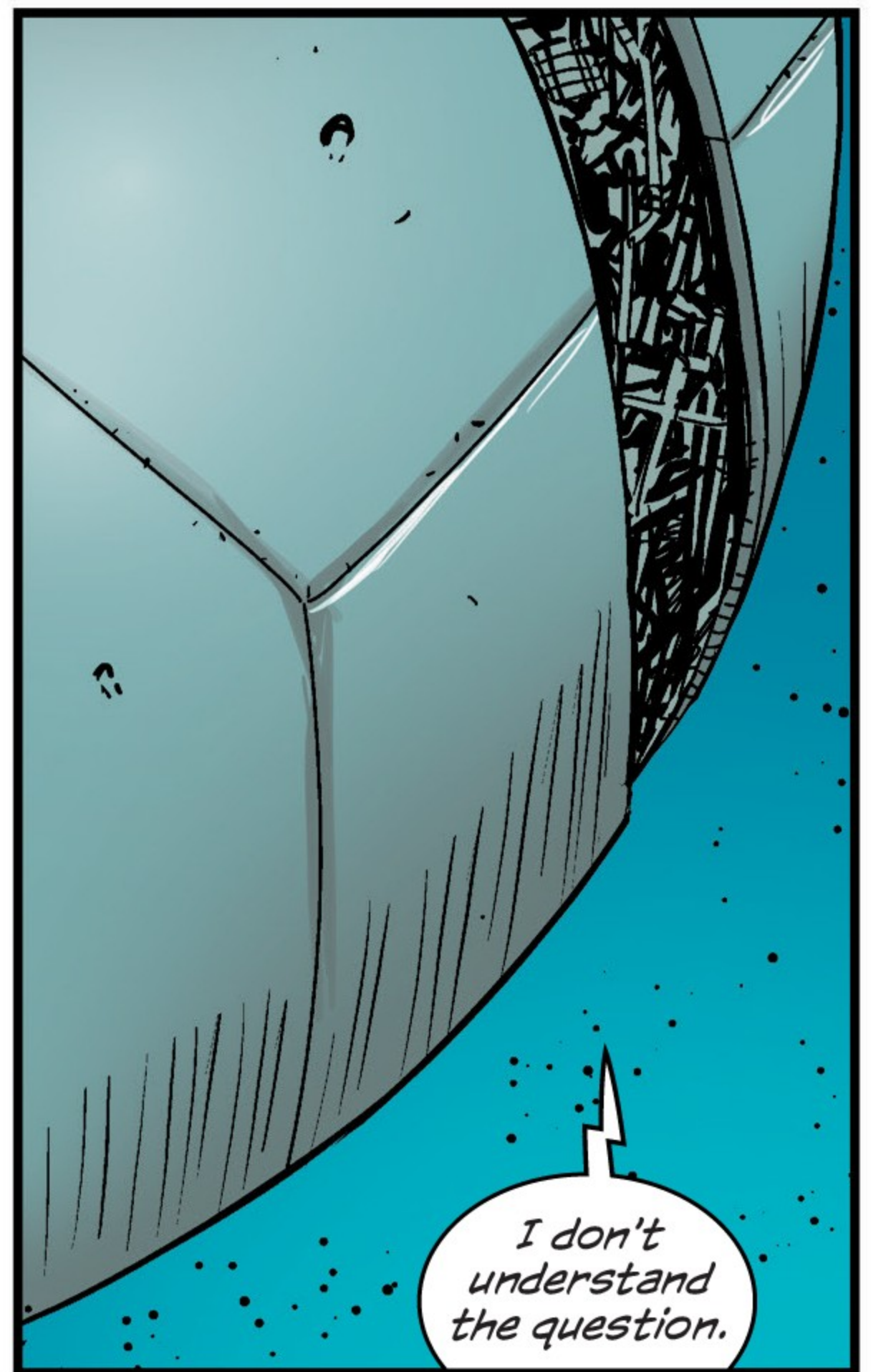
Is he really asleep?

And?

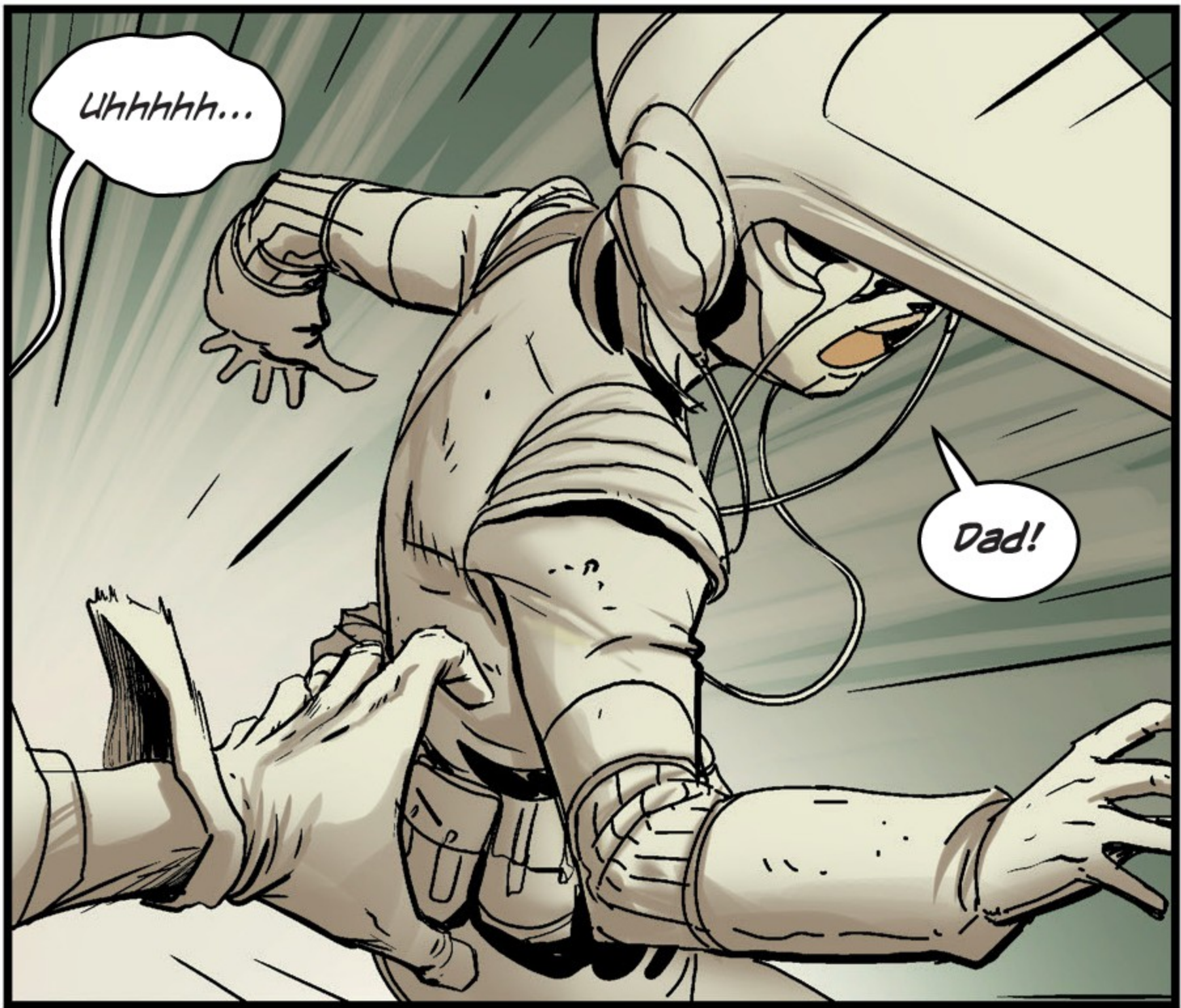
A comic book panel showing a character from behind, looking up at a large, spherical, metallic object floating in a dark blue space filled with stars. The object has a wavy, dark band around its middle. A speech bubble from the character says, "Yes. He is asleep."

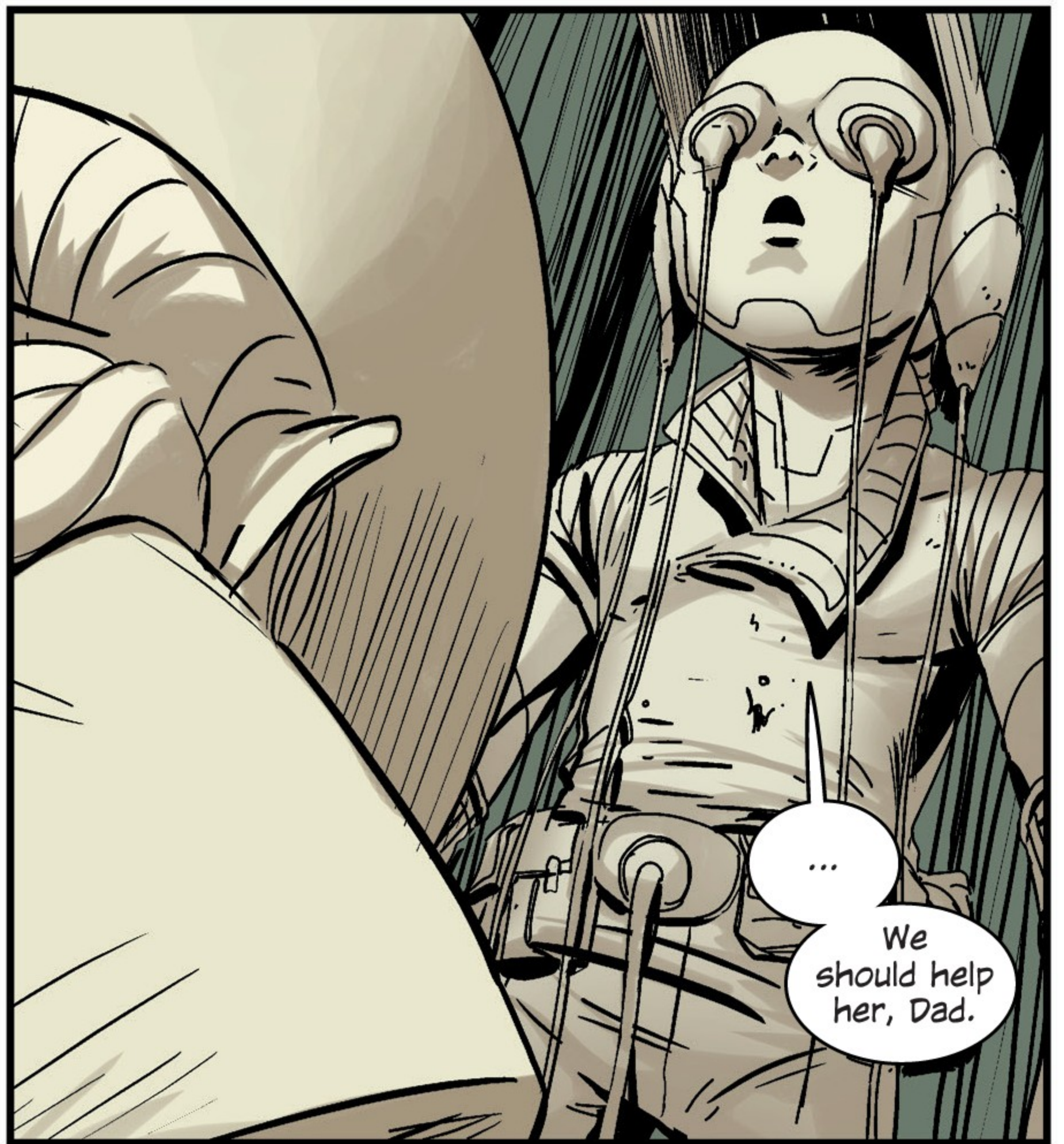
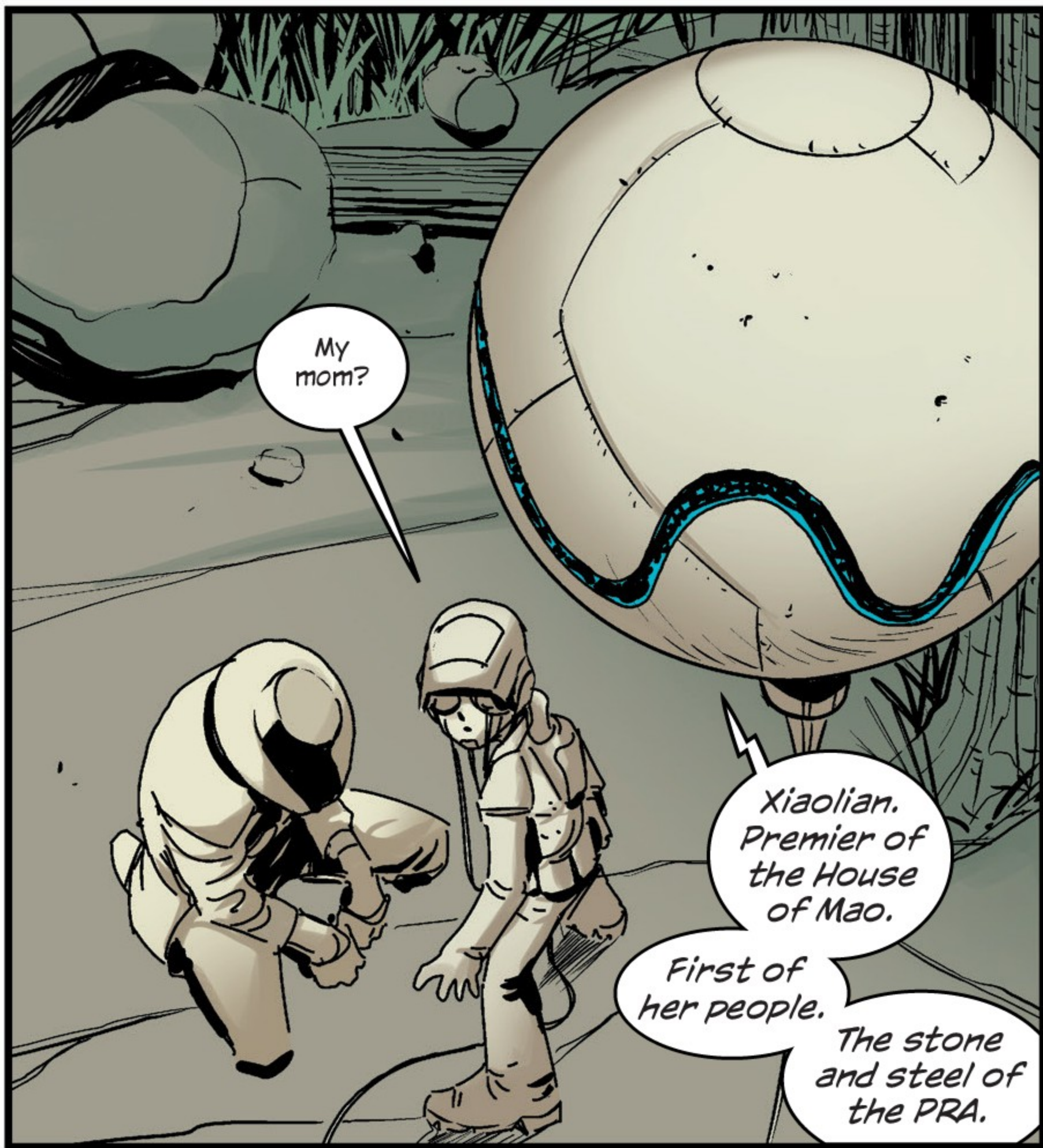


So he won't hear us talkin'?..









It's time
for you to
see what
your old man
is *made of*.







There.
The White
Tower.

The seat
of the
collapsing
Union.

Tell me
what you
know of
it.



She burns.

The people have risen up and pulled down their leaders, and now -- without any semblance of order or societal structure -- chaos has gripped the city.

As ordered, we have completed a cursory drone reconnaissance.

There are power outages. Shortages of food. And what little hold the rebels have on the city, they are losing quickly.

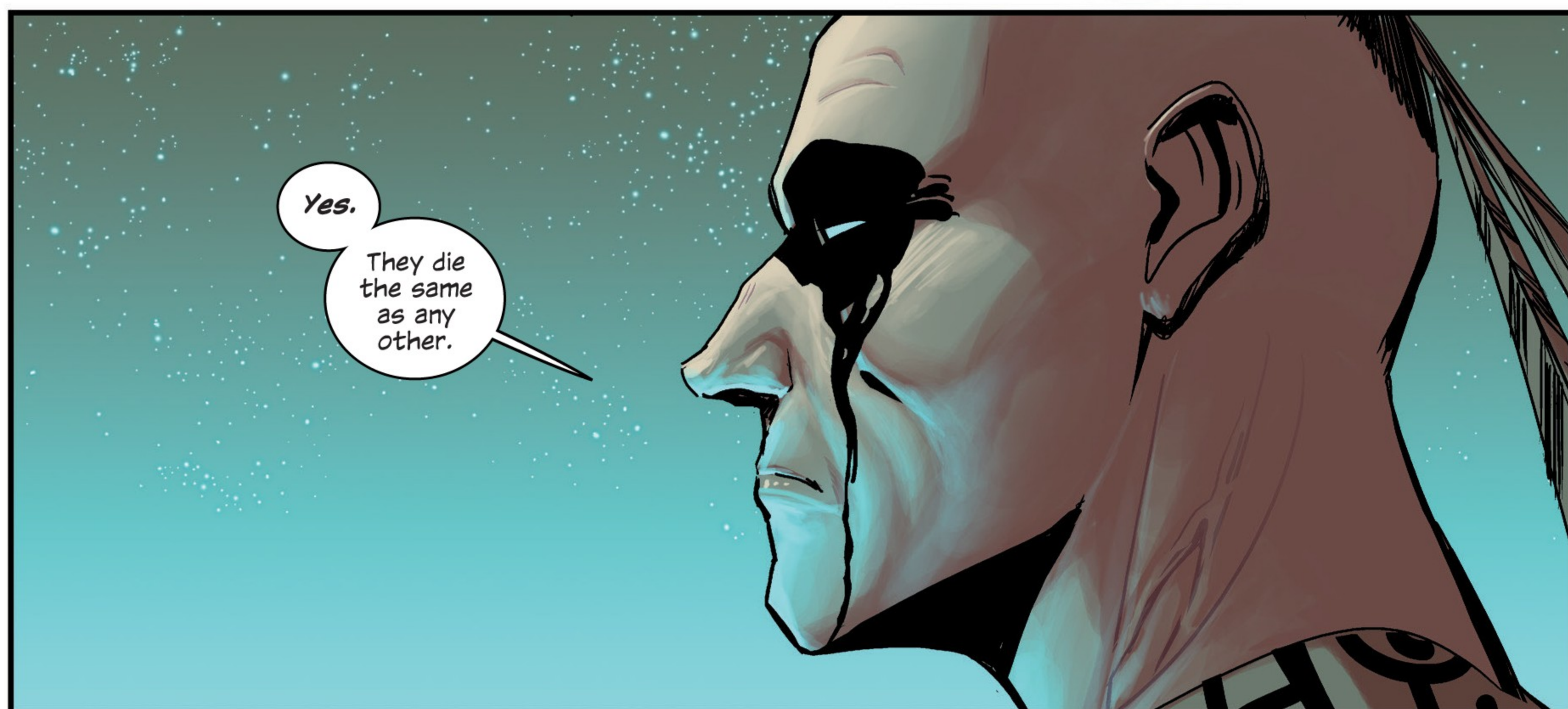


If you wish it, the Union is ours.

They cannot stand against us. They will fall.

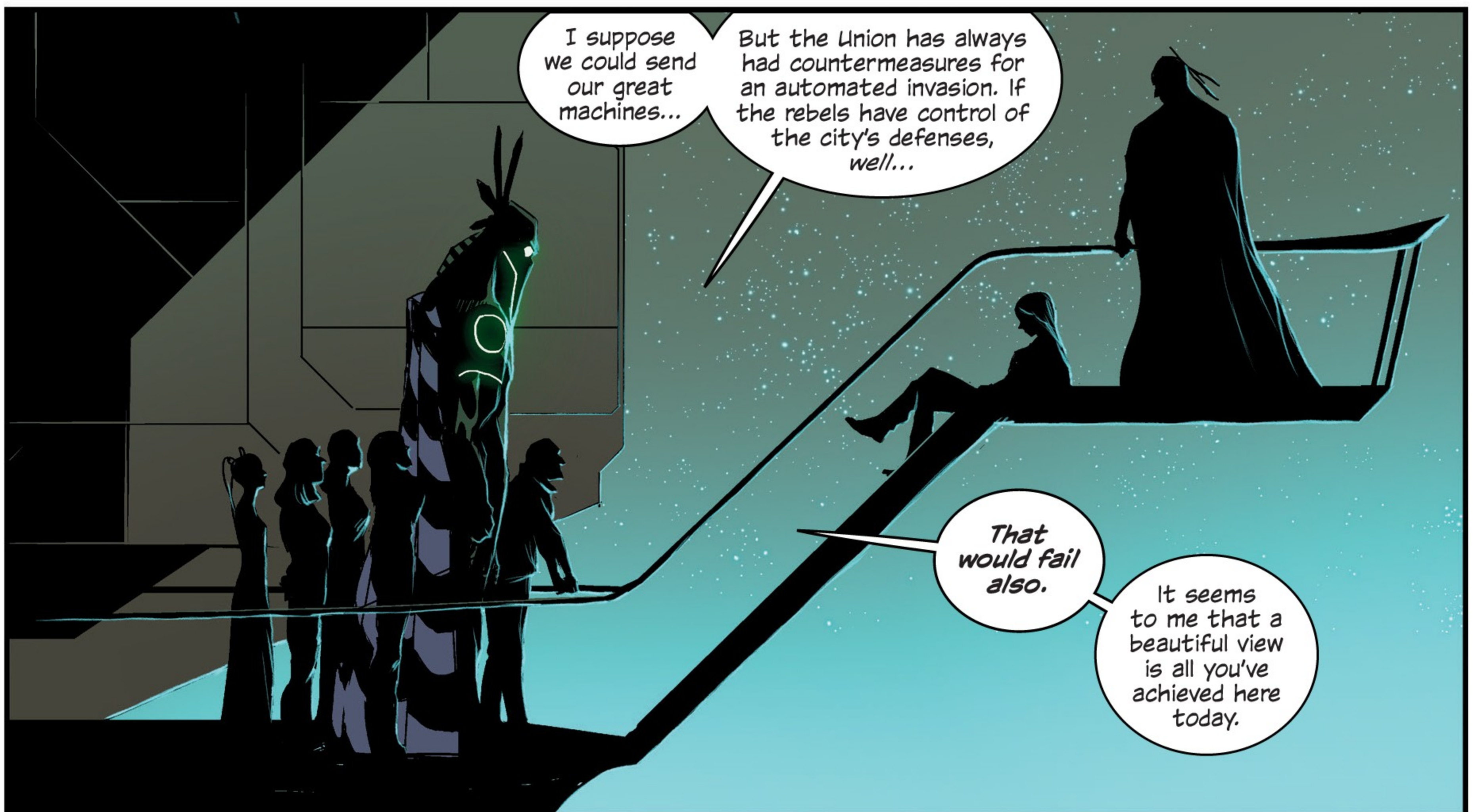
Will they now?

You know what they say about cornered animals, don't you?



Yes.

They die the same as any other.



When I was a boy, I marveled at the things my father could do.

The forgotten ways of our people...

The hidden arts...

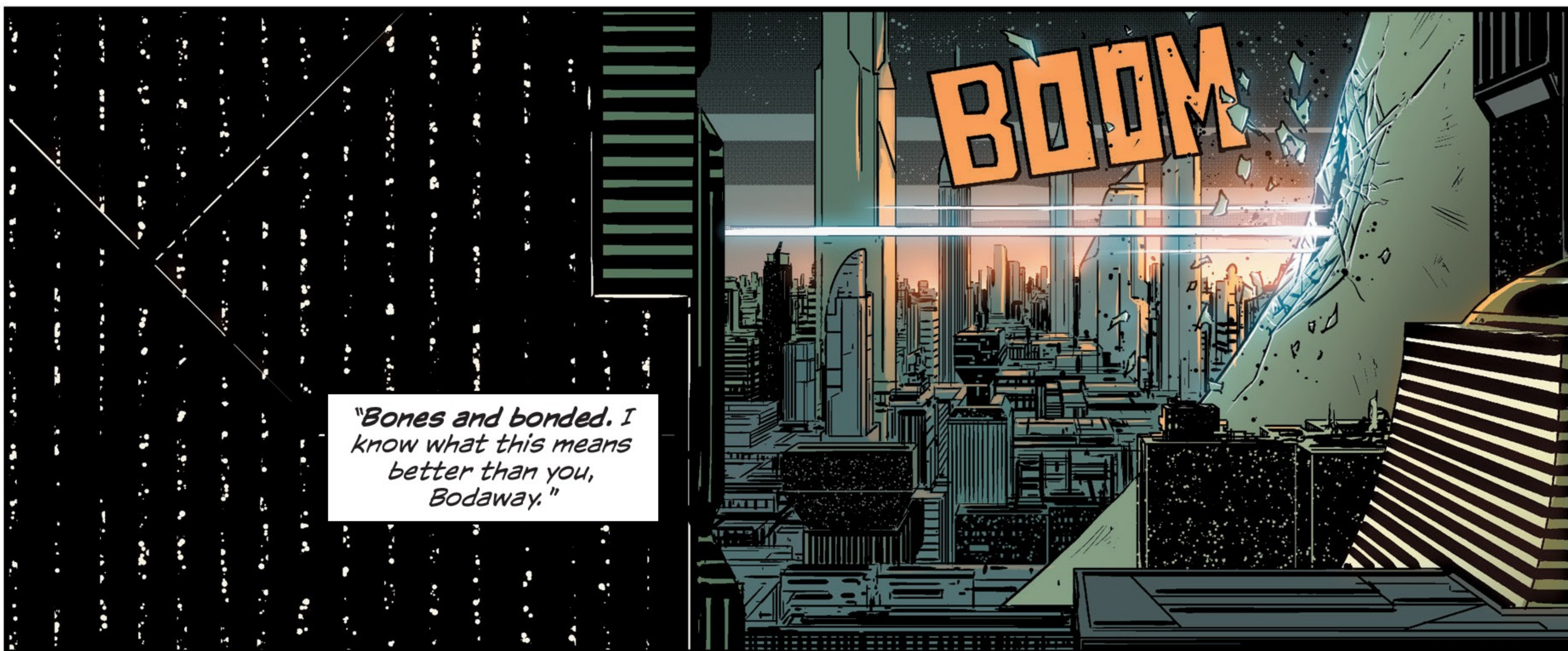
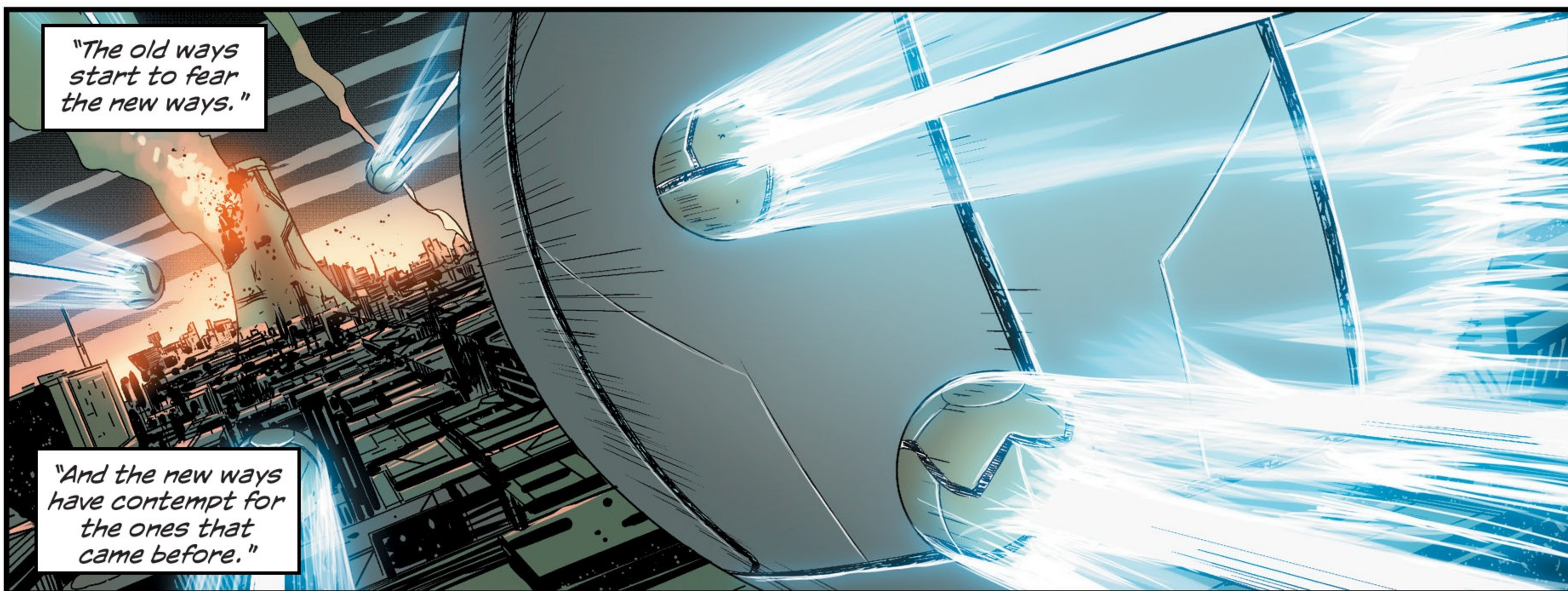
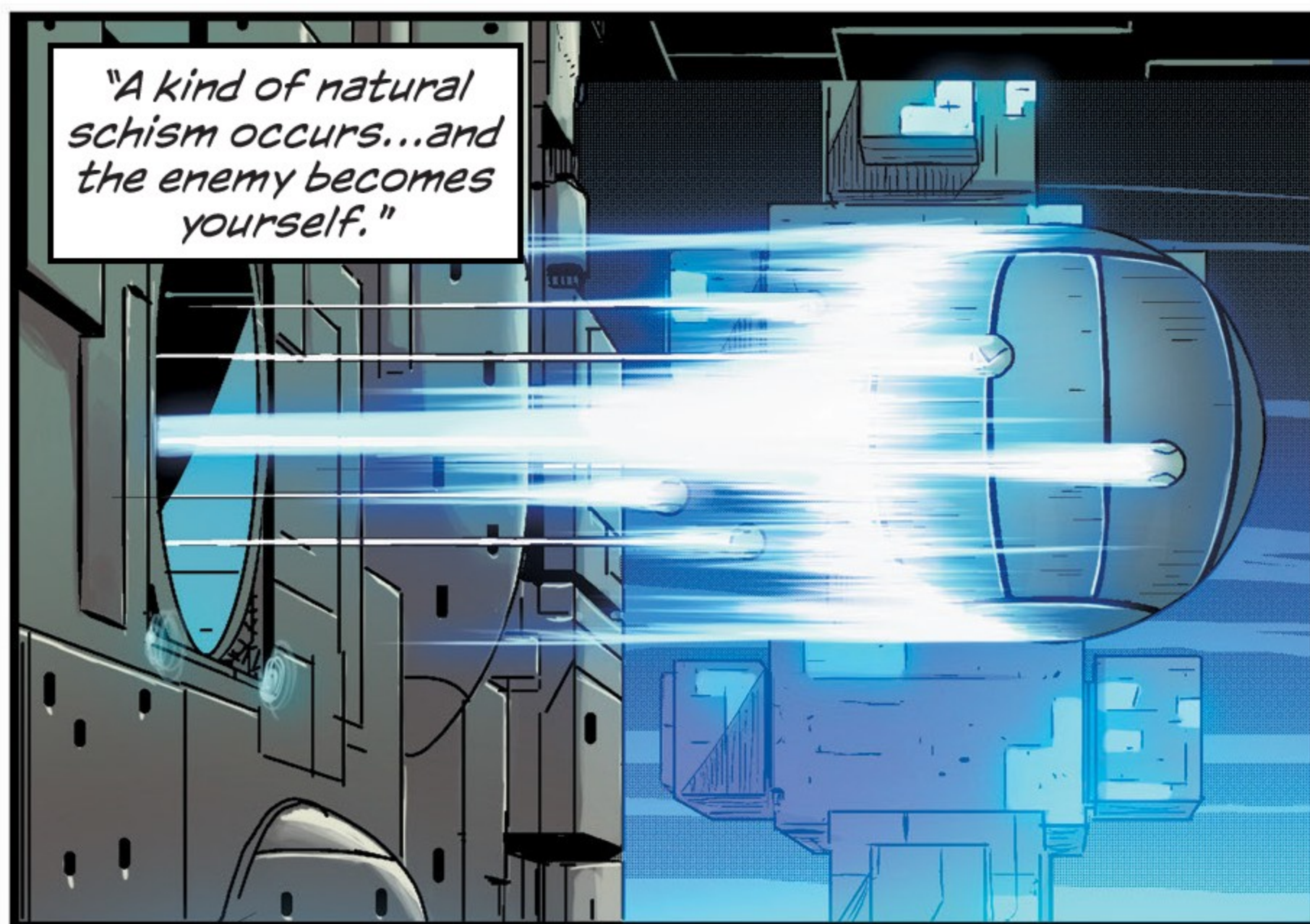
The lost magic...

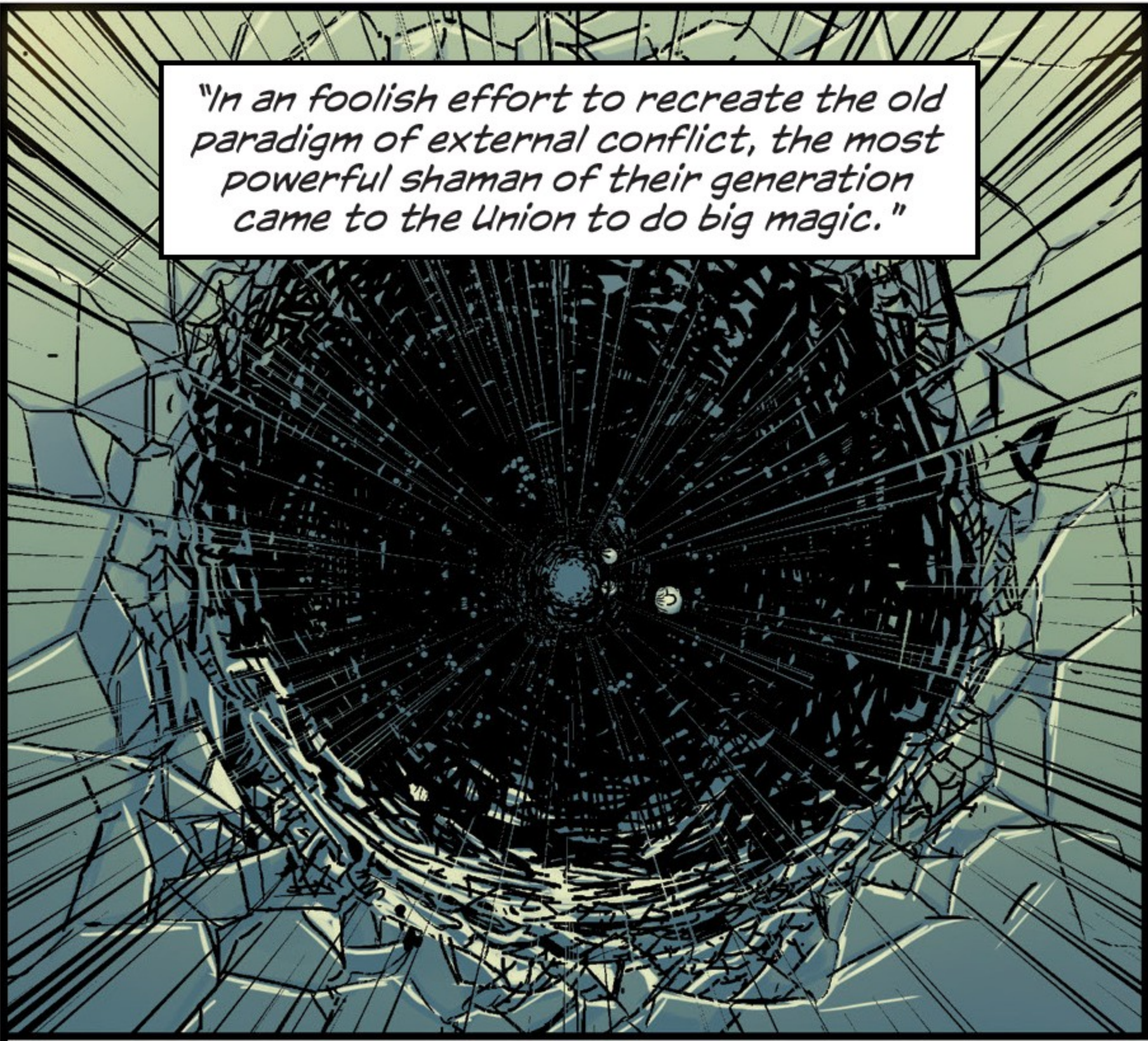
Of course, because I was a child -- and because *they were so wondrous* -- I also marveled at the things our people had dreamed and built...

What I could not understand was why our people *rejected* one and *embraced* the other...

So he explained it to me:







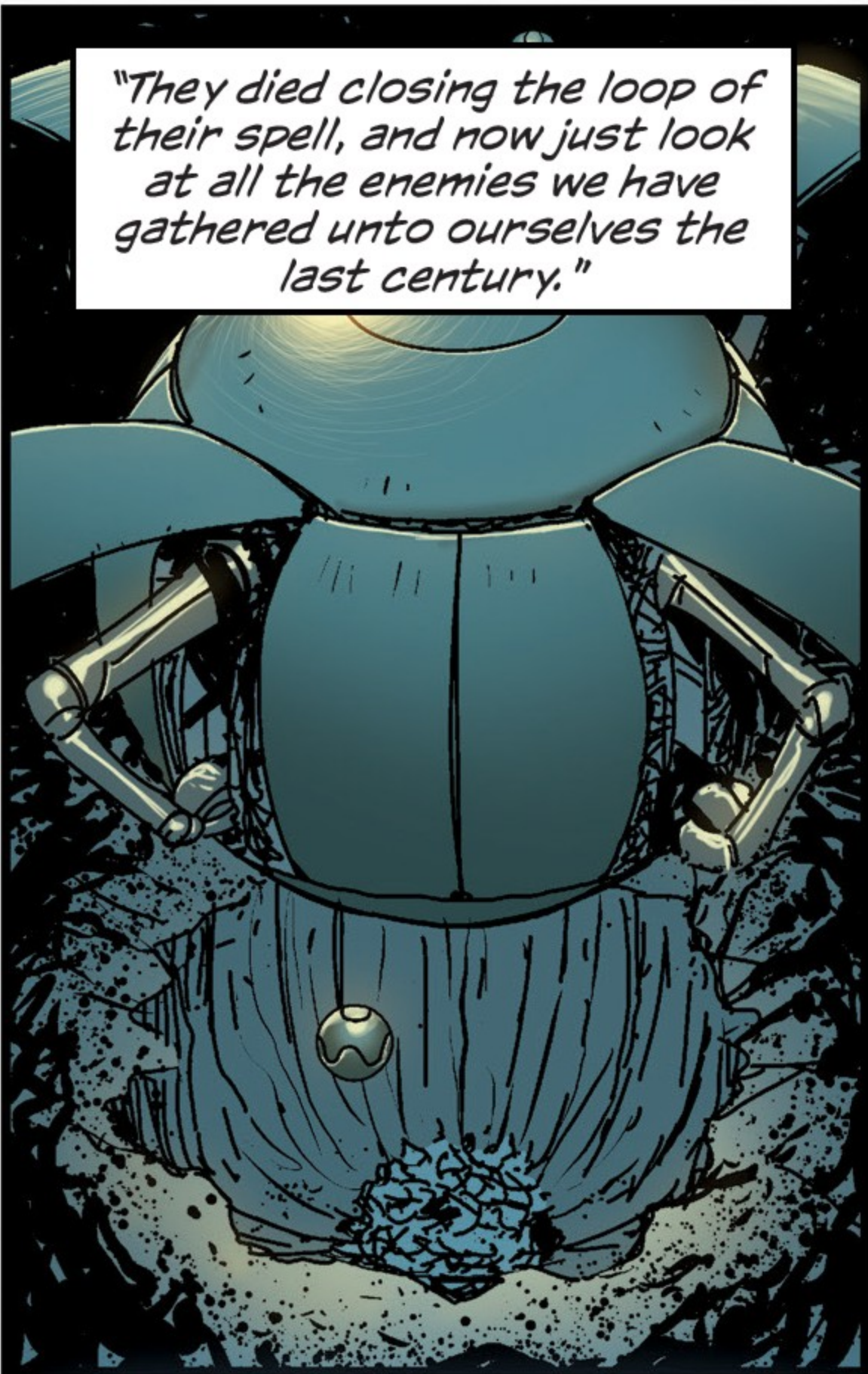
"In an foolish effort to recreate the old paradigm of external conflict, the most powerful shaman of their generation came to the Union to do big magic."



"They would make the capital unwelcome to our kind, so that the Union could flourish unfettered."



"And they succeeded."



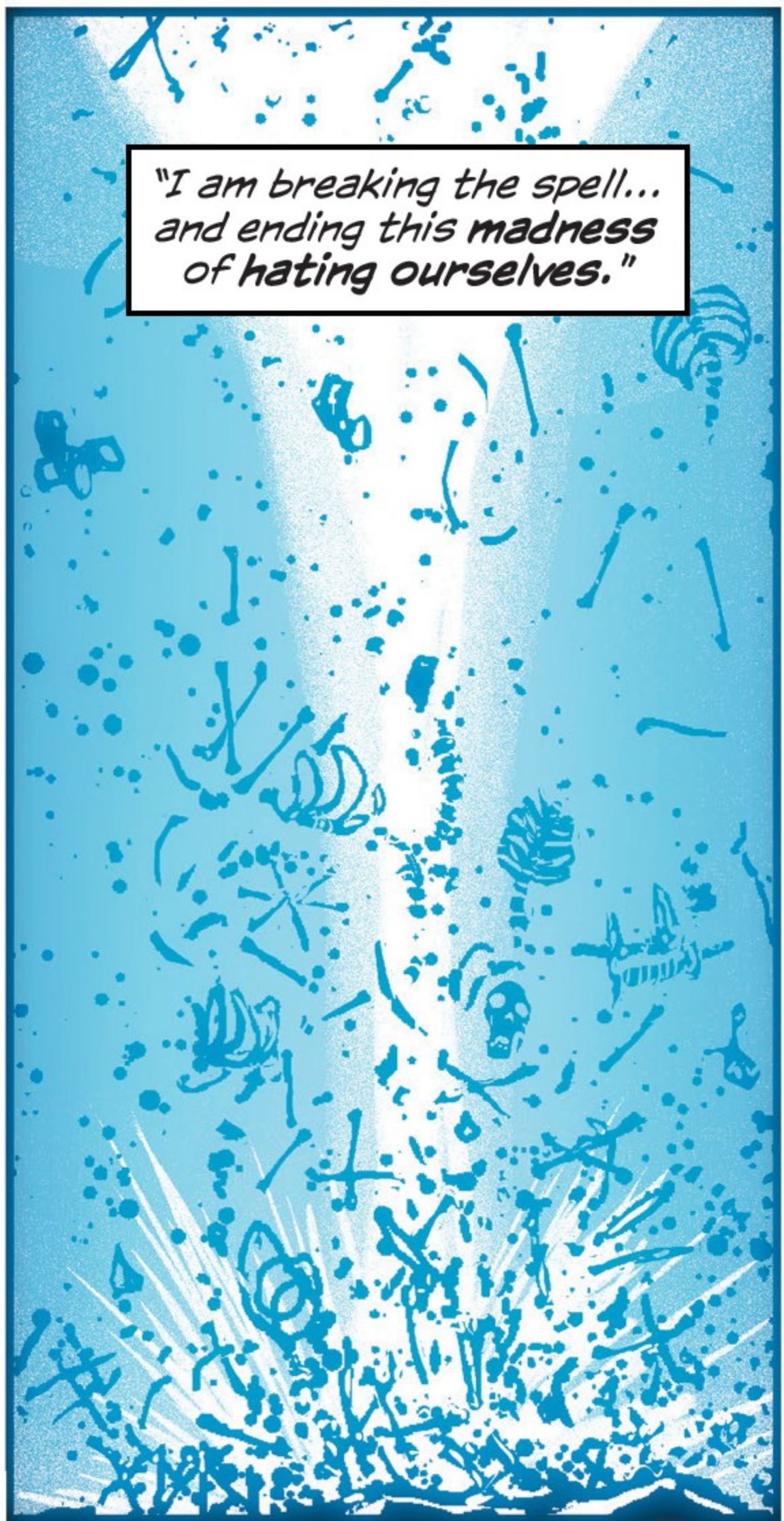
"They died closing the loop of their spell, and now just look at all the enemies we have gathered unto ourselves the last century."



"Just look at how we have withered under the weight of all our progress."

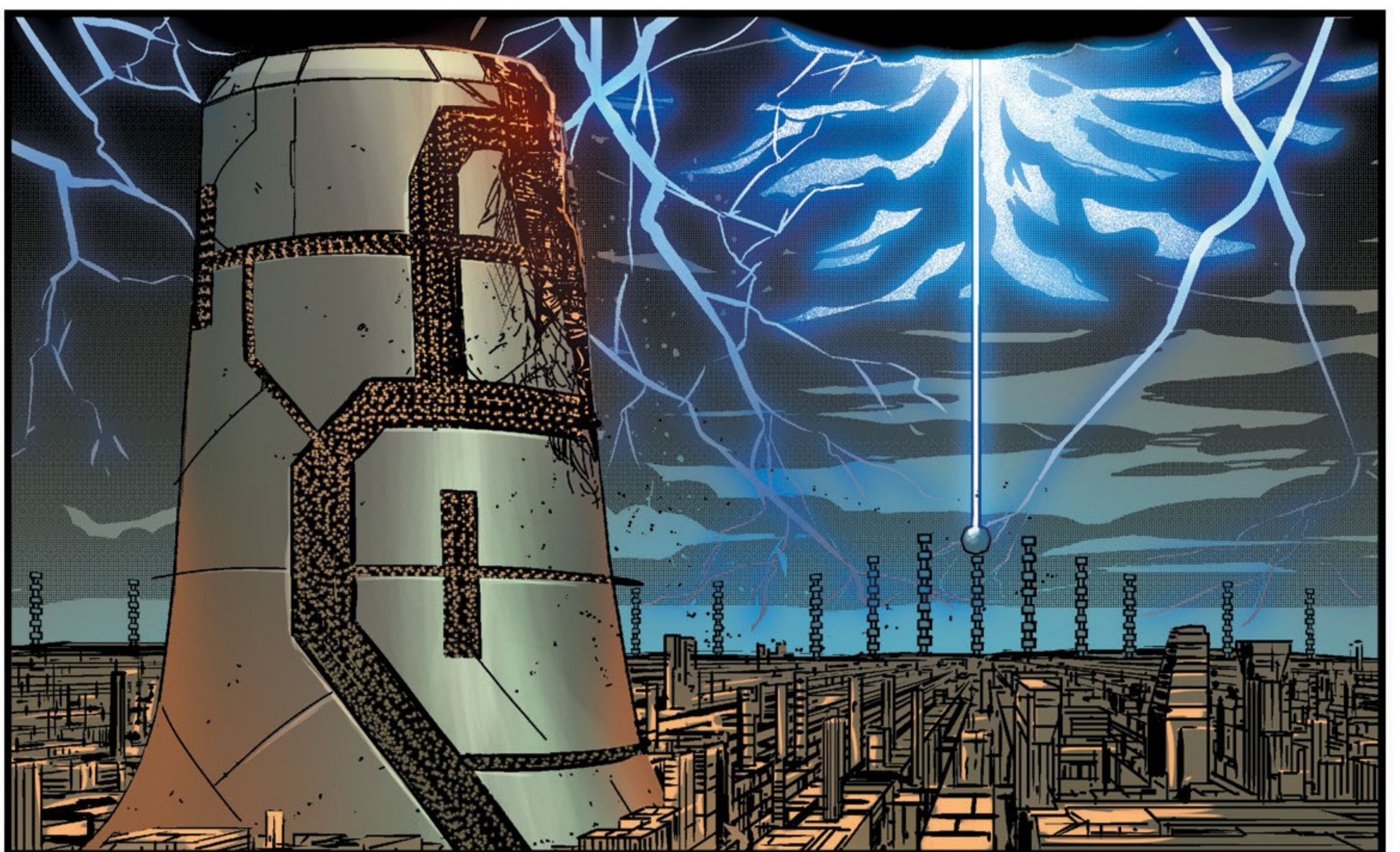


"I am bringing our lost brothers and sisters home."



"I am breaking the spell... and ending this madness of hating ourselves."







36

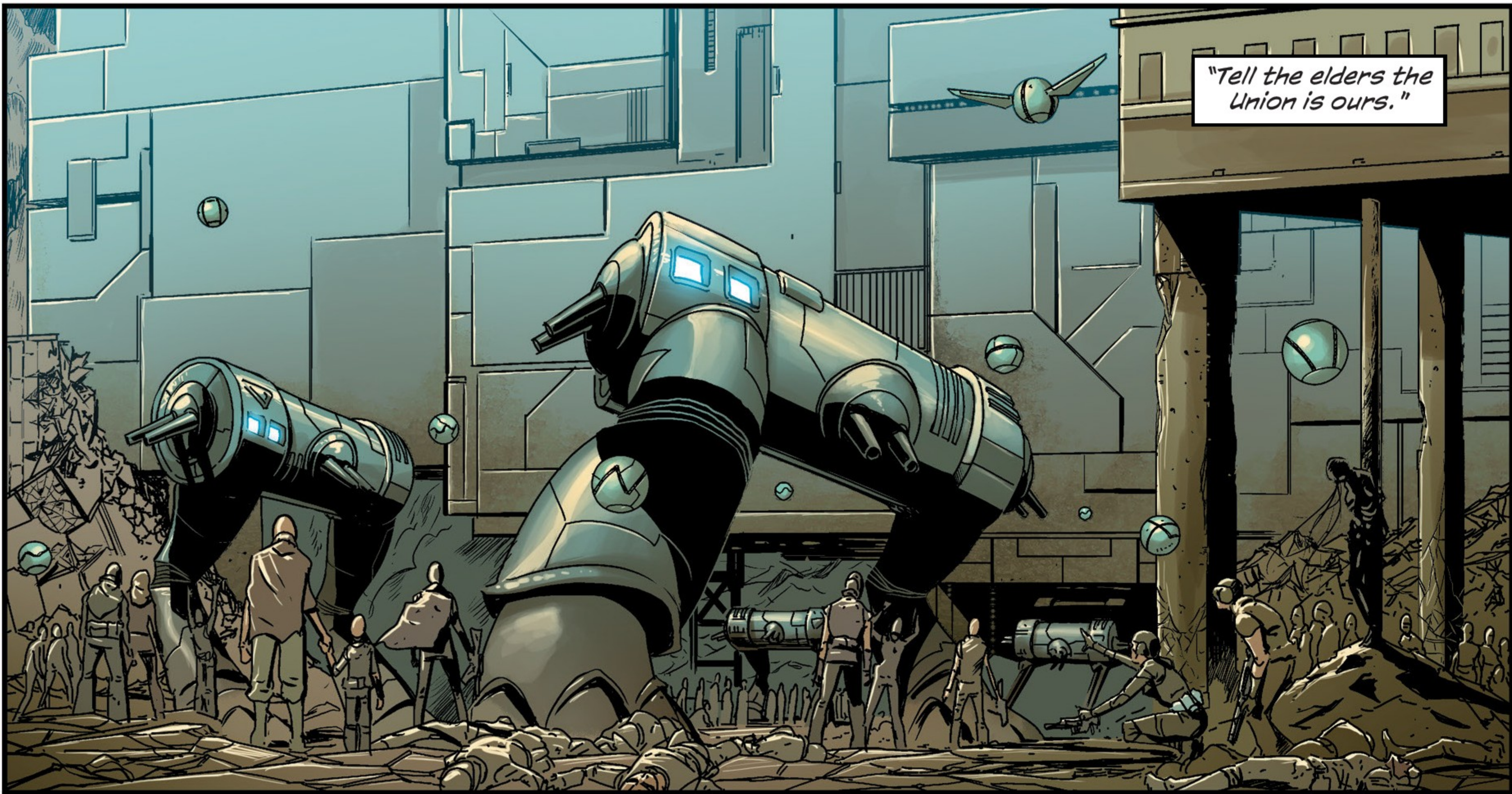
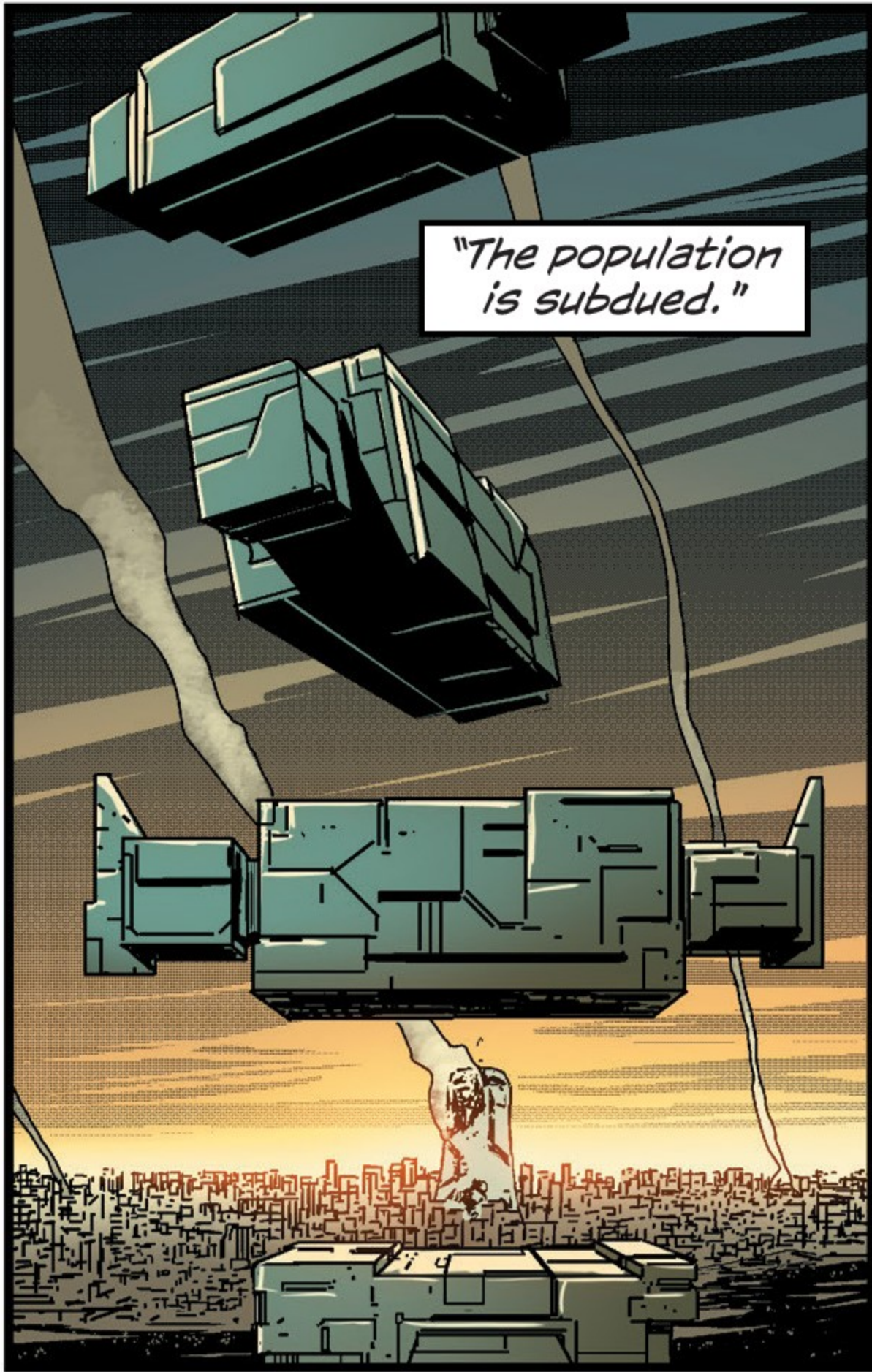


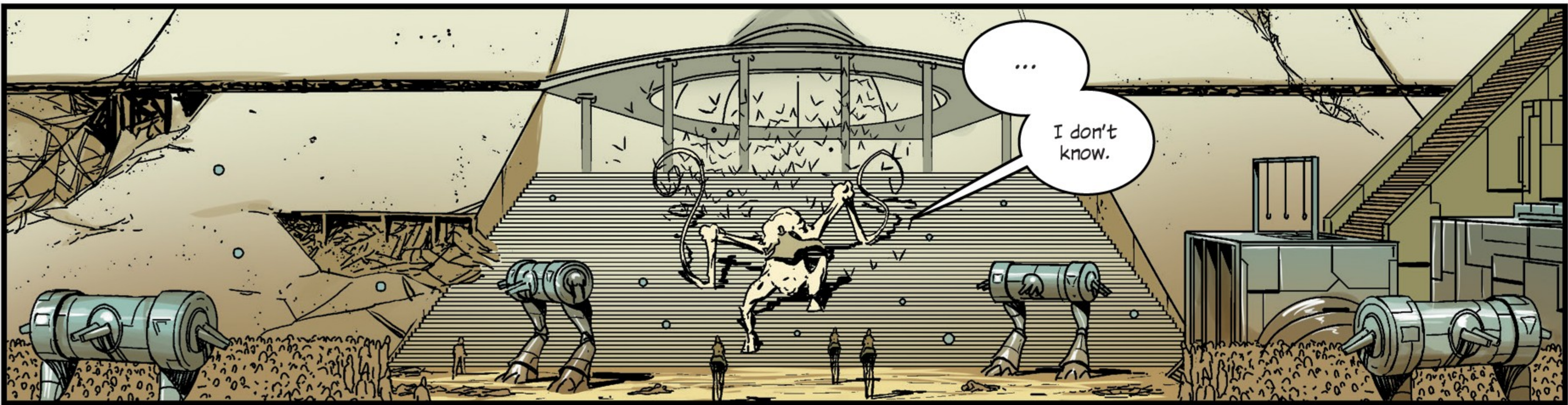
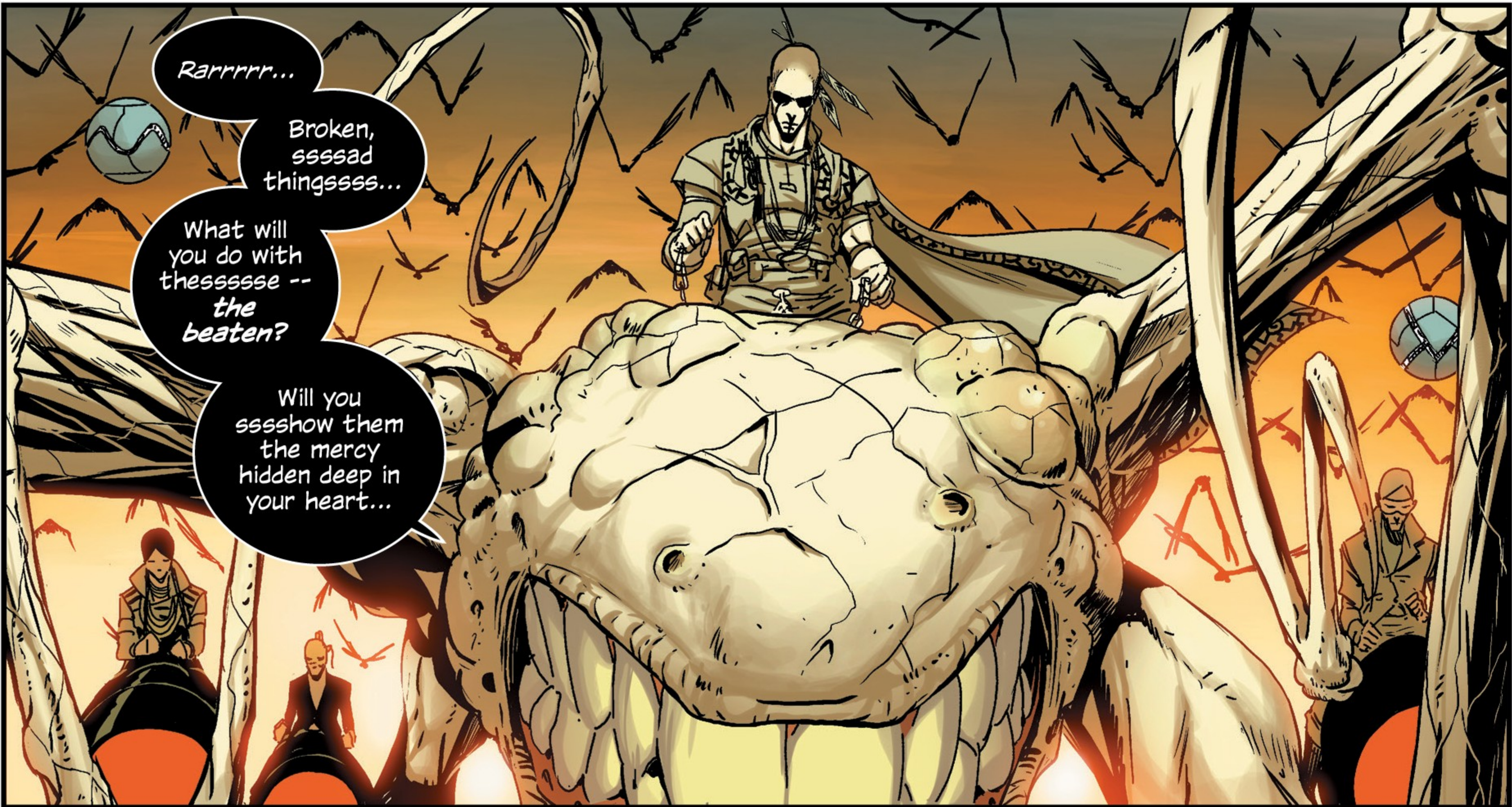
**THIRTY-SIX:
THIS IS REAL
REVOLUTION**

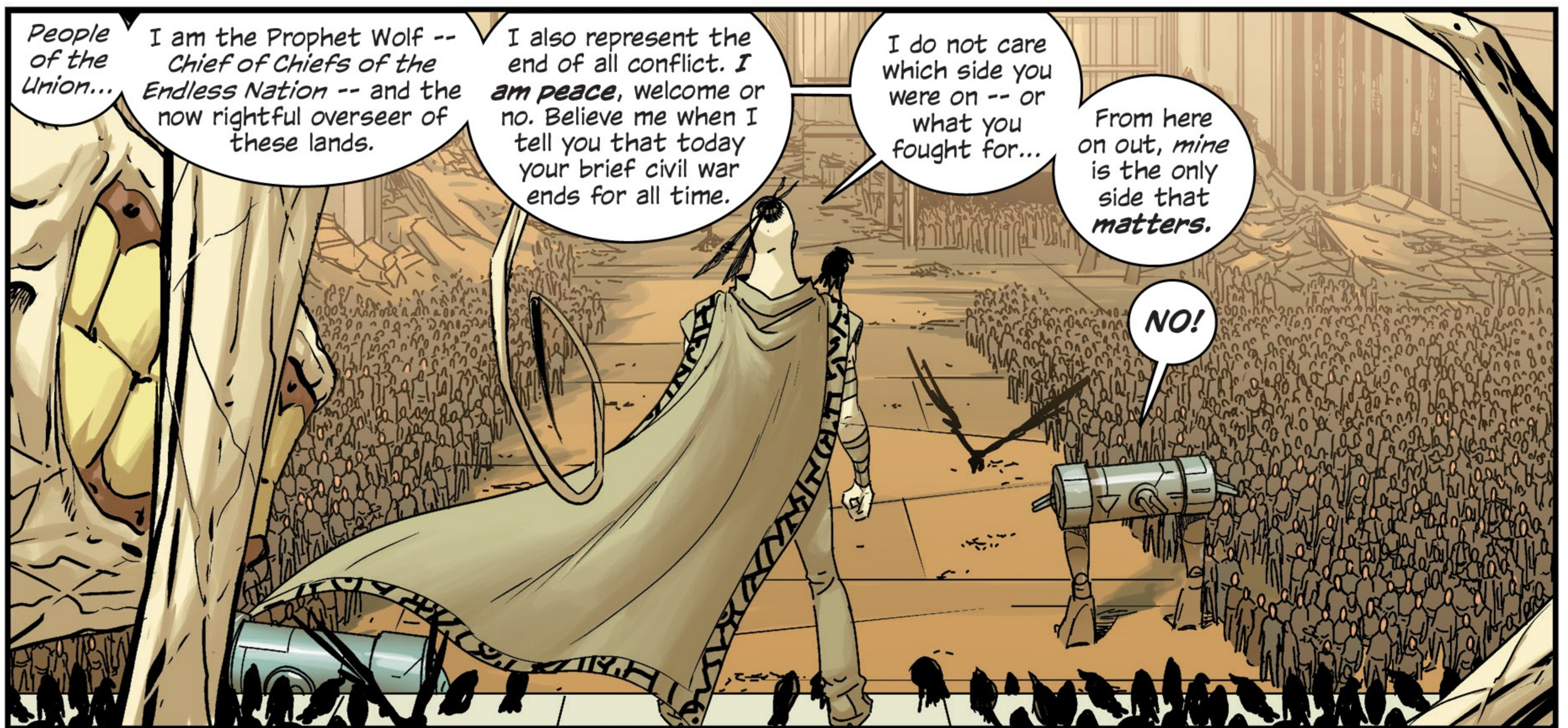
YOUR **END** WILL BE THE
SAME AS **THEIRS**.

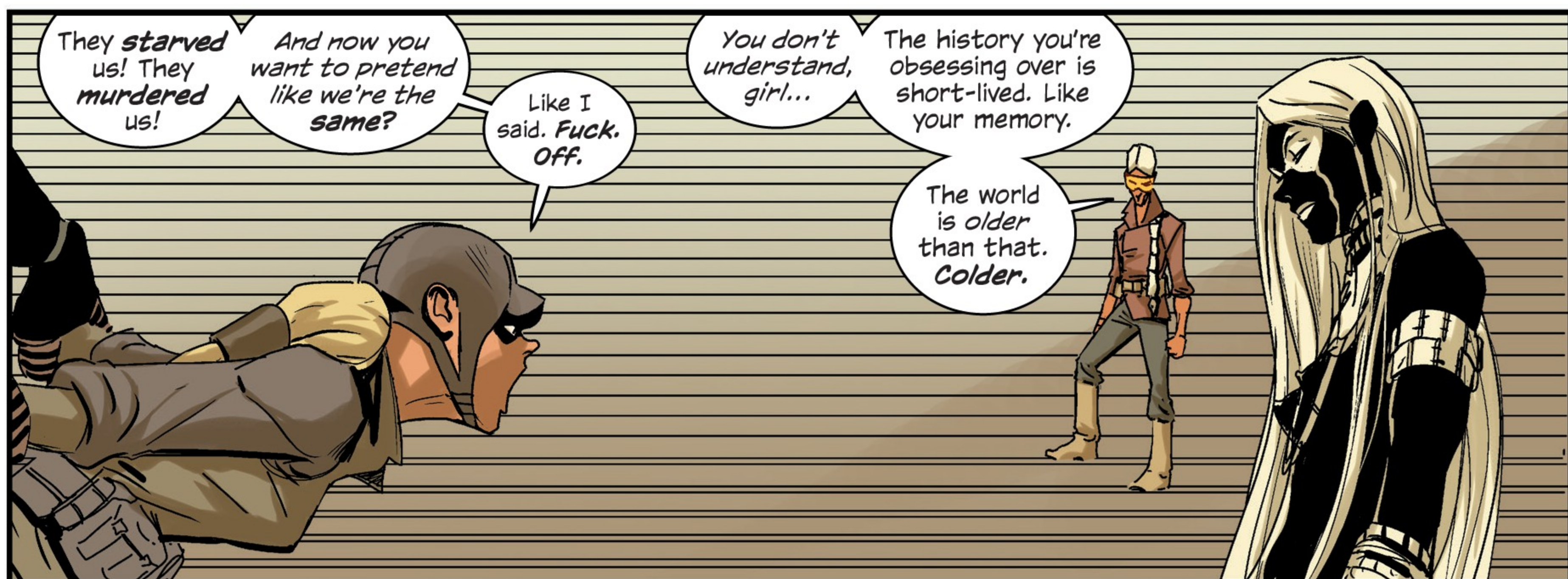
THERE IS **NOTHING**
SPECIAL ABOUT **YOU**.













I will never fucking kneel.



Good for you.

Dying as you lived is a *just* end...



"But an end nonetheless."

~Sob!~



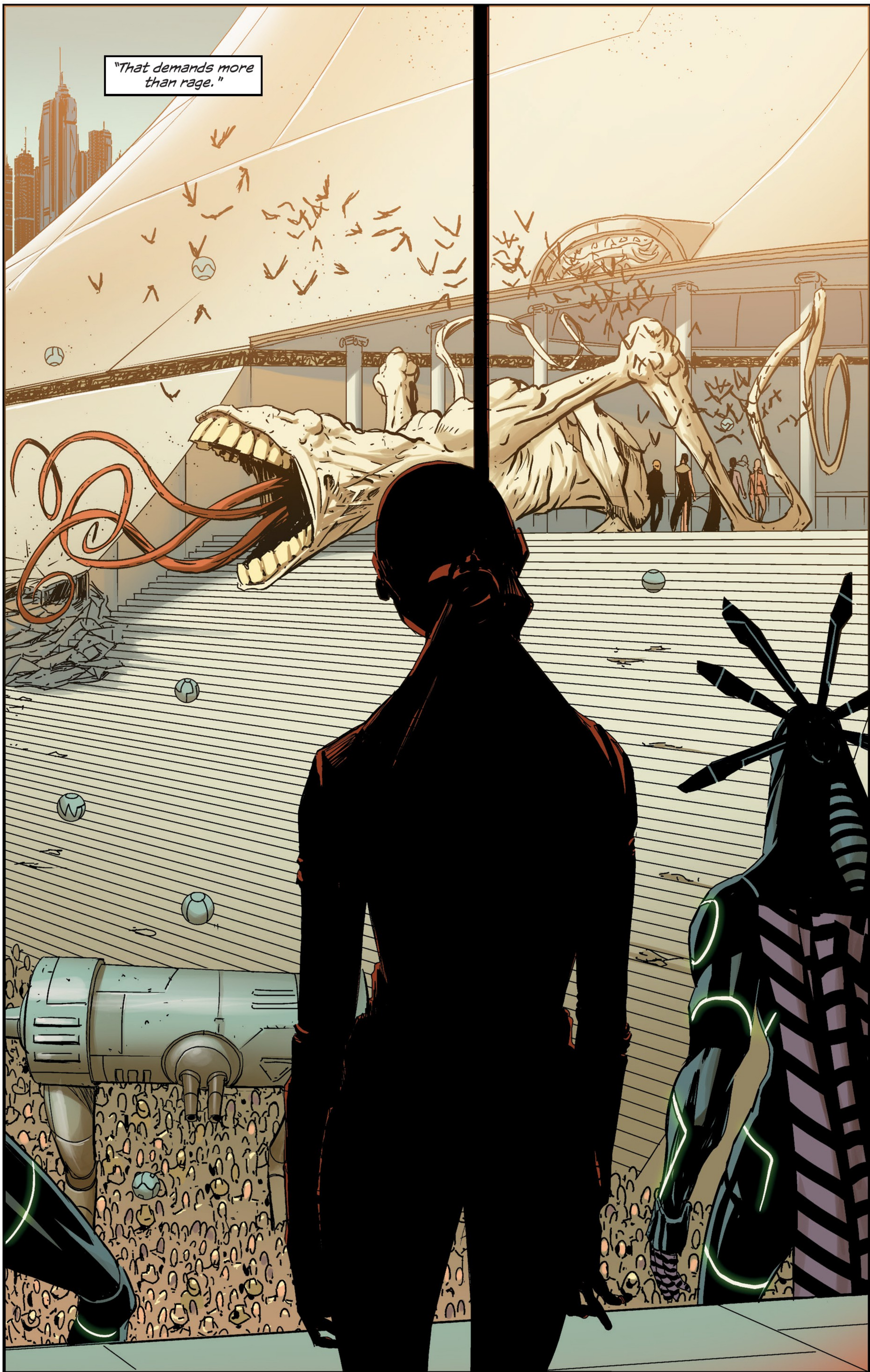
"Let this be a lesson."



"Tearing something down is easy."

"Holding on to it... building something better..."

"That demands more
than rage."

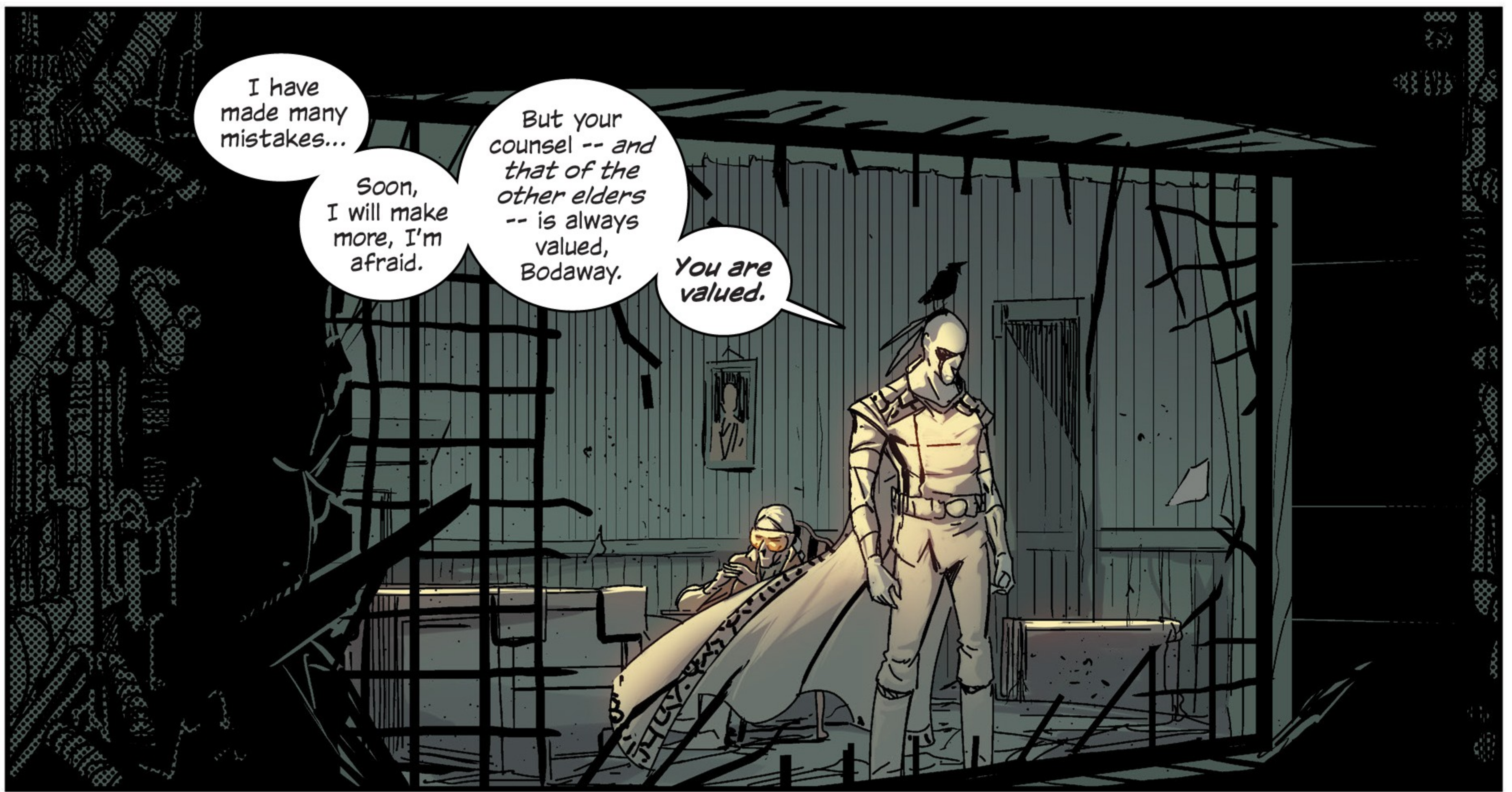


WE HAVE **TAKEN** ALL
THAT YOU **HAVE**.

WE WILL **ERASE** ALL
THAT YOU **WERE**.







I have made many mistakes...

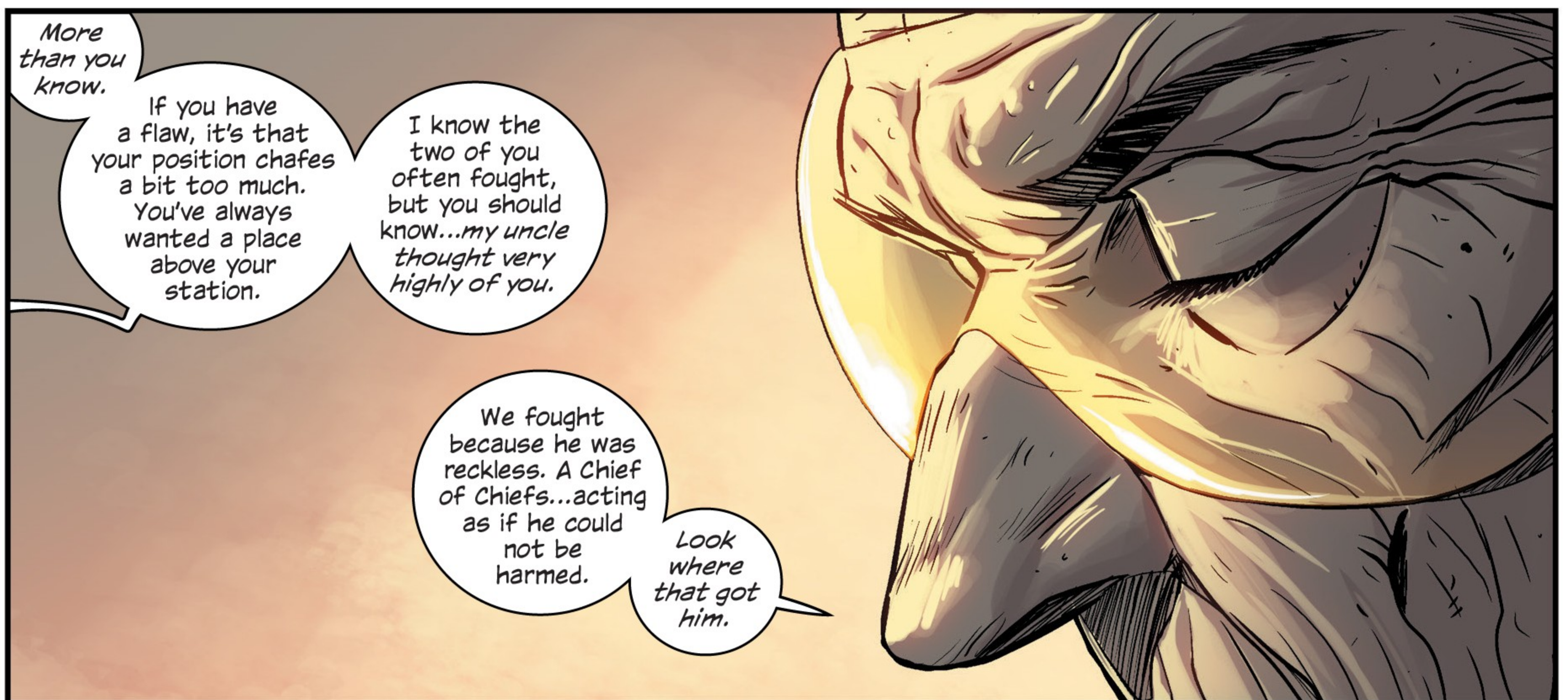
Soon, I will make more, I'm afraid.

But your counsel -- and that of the other elders -- is always valued, Bodaway.

You are valued.



Am I?



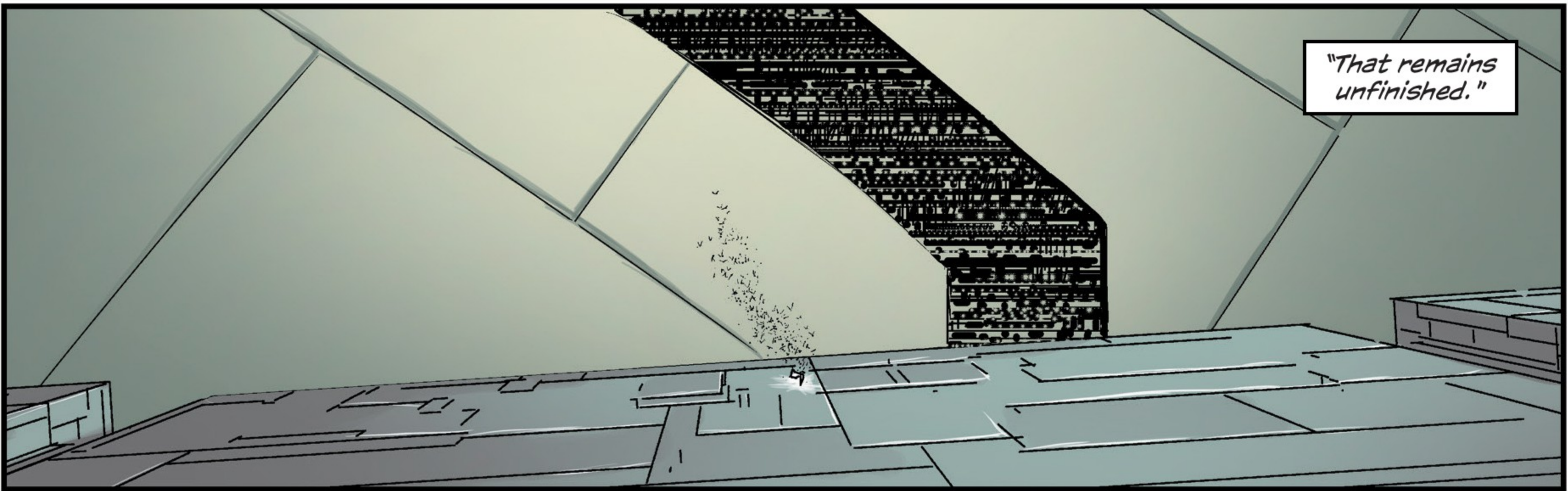
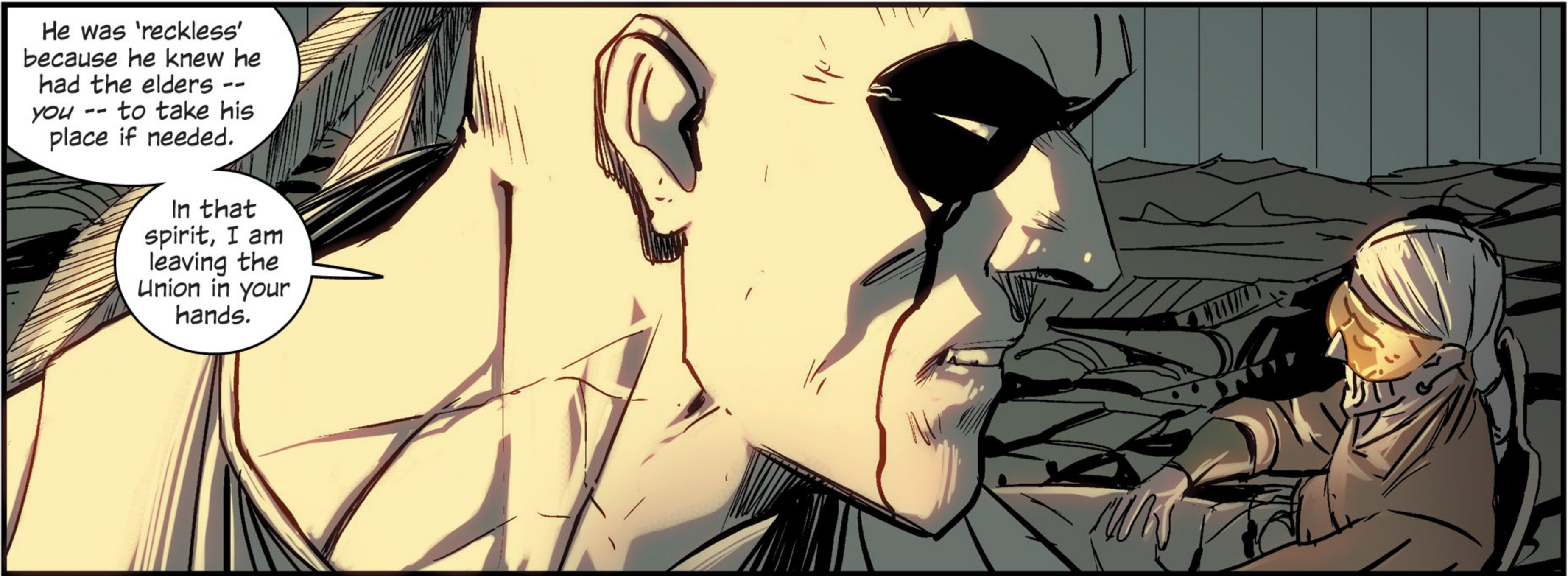
More than you know.

If you have a flaw, it's that your position chafes a bit too much. You've always wanted a place above your station.

I know the two of you often fought, but you should know...my uncle thought very highly of you.

We fought because he was reckless. A Chief of Chiefs...acting as if he could not be harmed.

Look where that got him.



The Atlas.



I gotta say...

I love what they've done with the place.



Makes me thirsty...

See if you can find what you need.





Monkeys...

Monkeys...



Dead monkeys as far as the eye can see.



I'll drink to that.

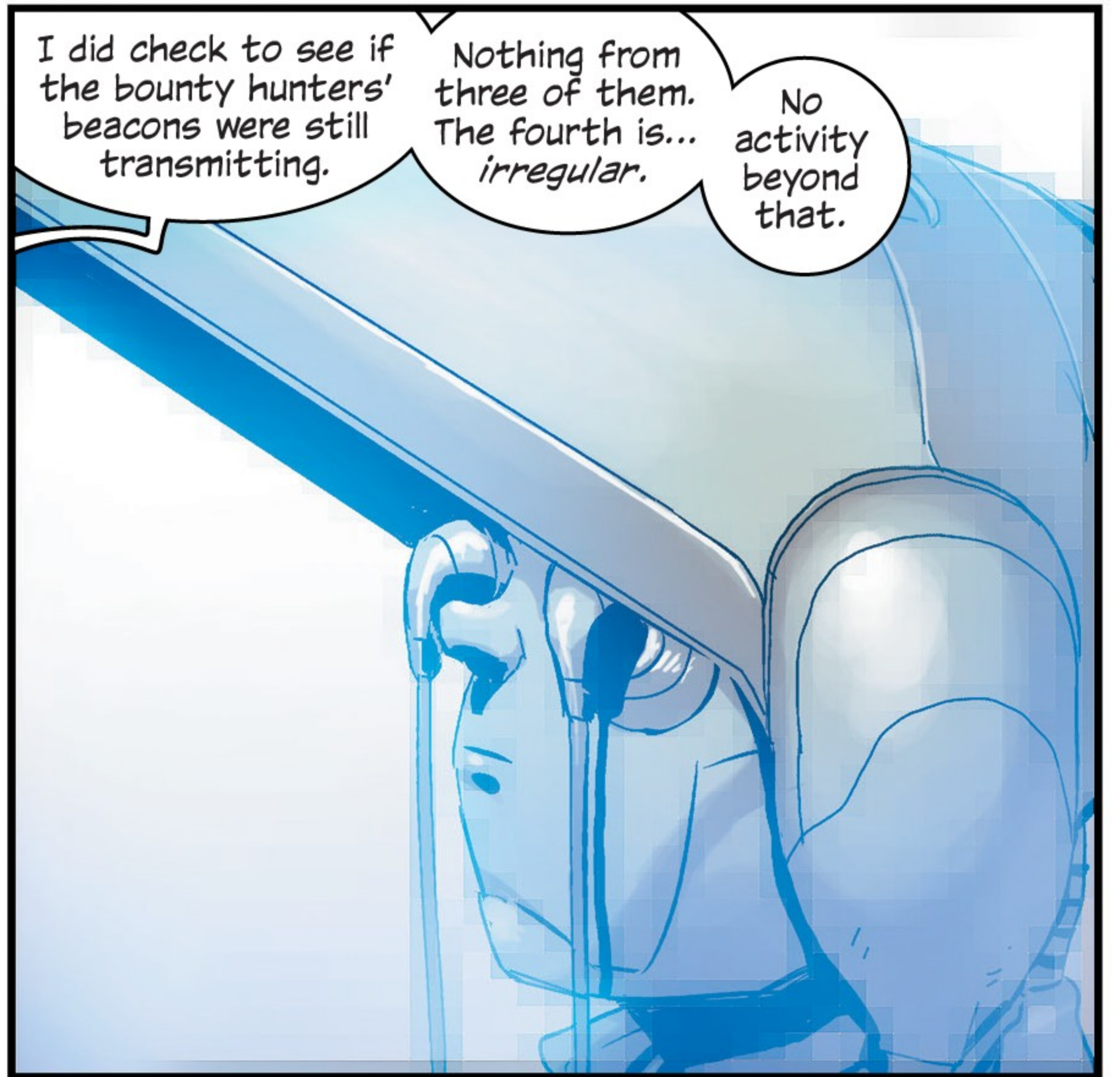
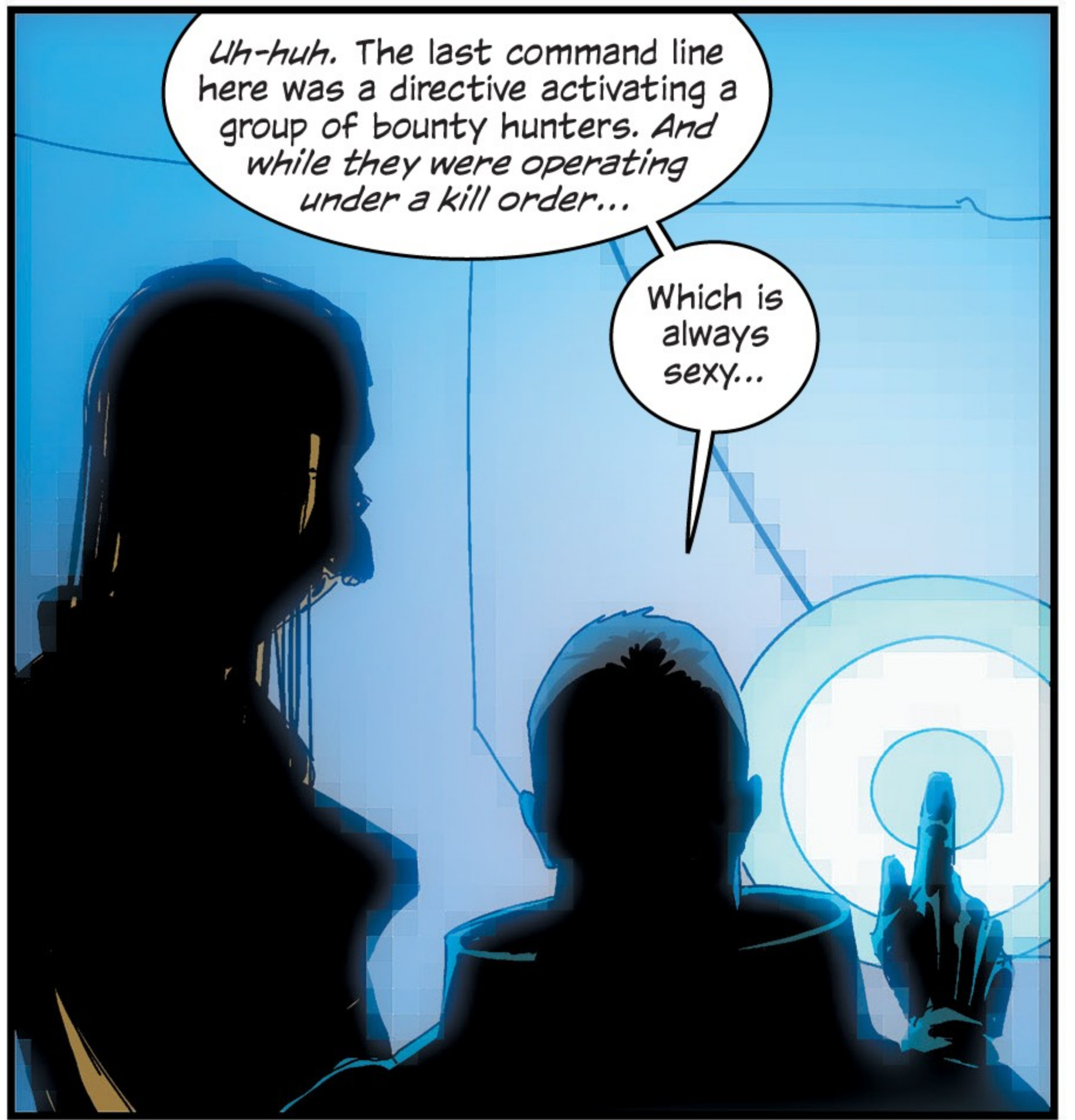


Hrrrrnnn.

BE DOOP!



I think I have something.



How much longer?

*Hooowww
muuuuch
looongerrr?*

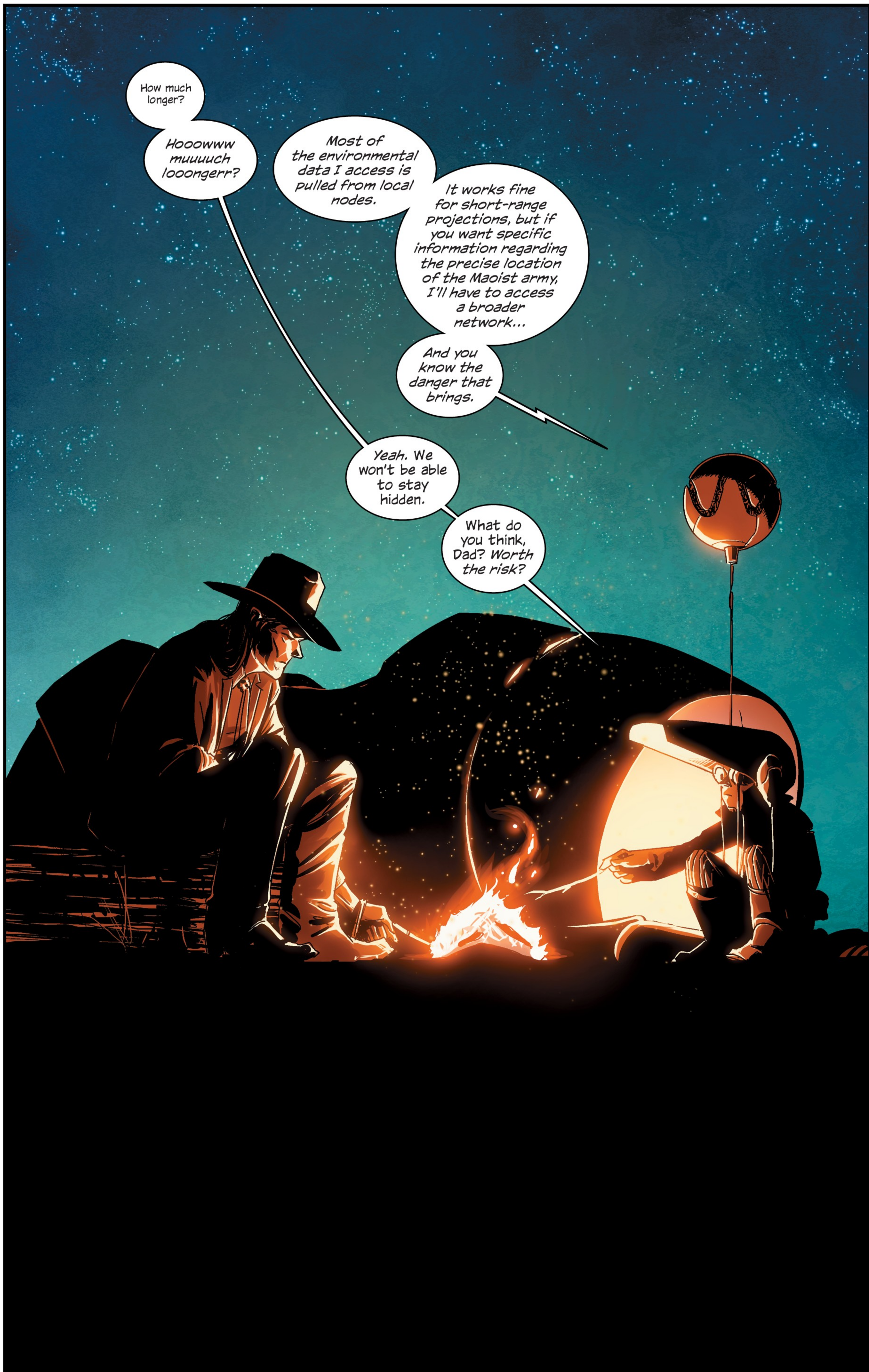
*Most of
the environmental
data I access is
pulled from local
nodes.*

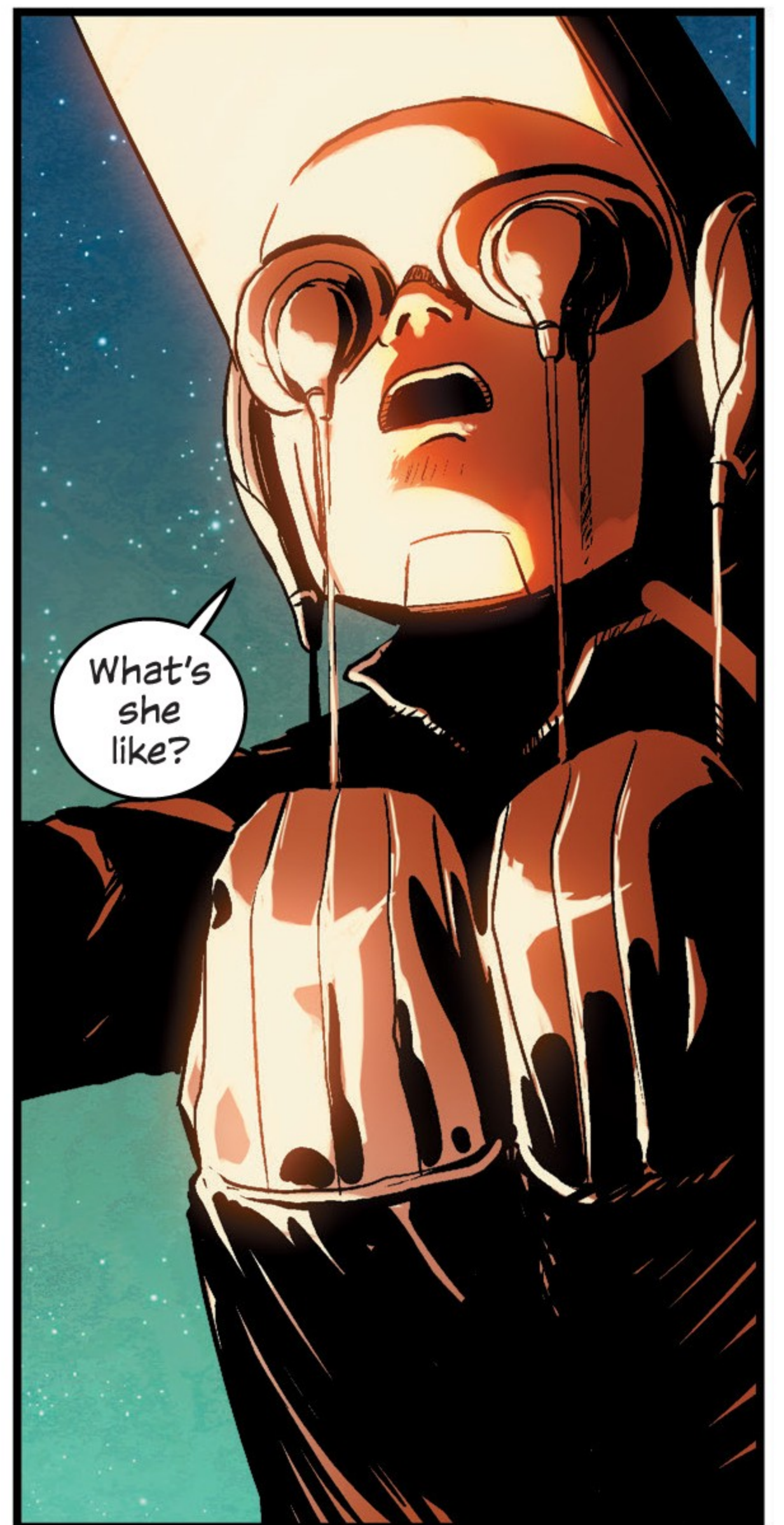
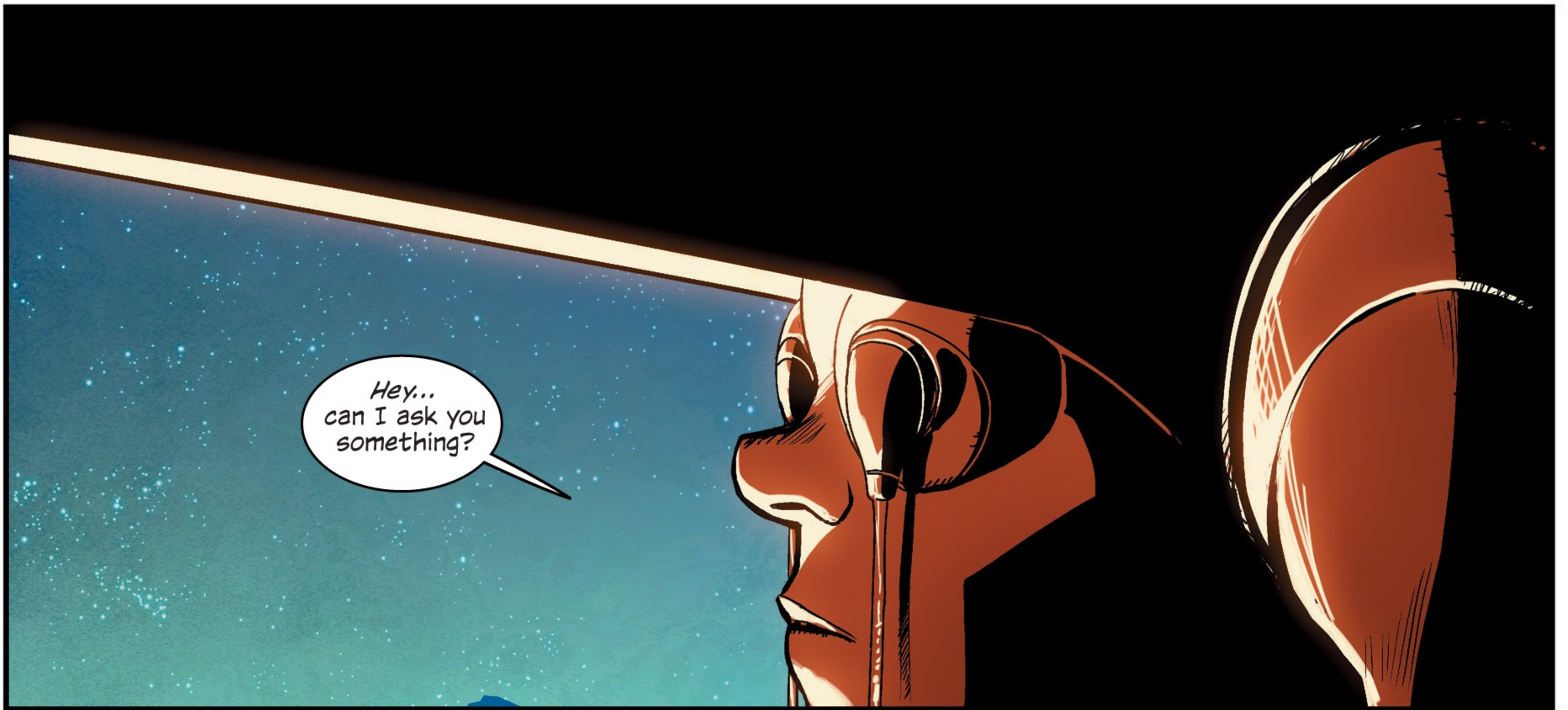
*It works fine
for short-range
projections, but if
you want specific
information regarding
the precise location
of the Maoist army,
I'll have to access
a broader
network...*

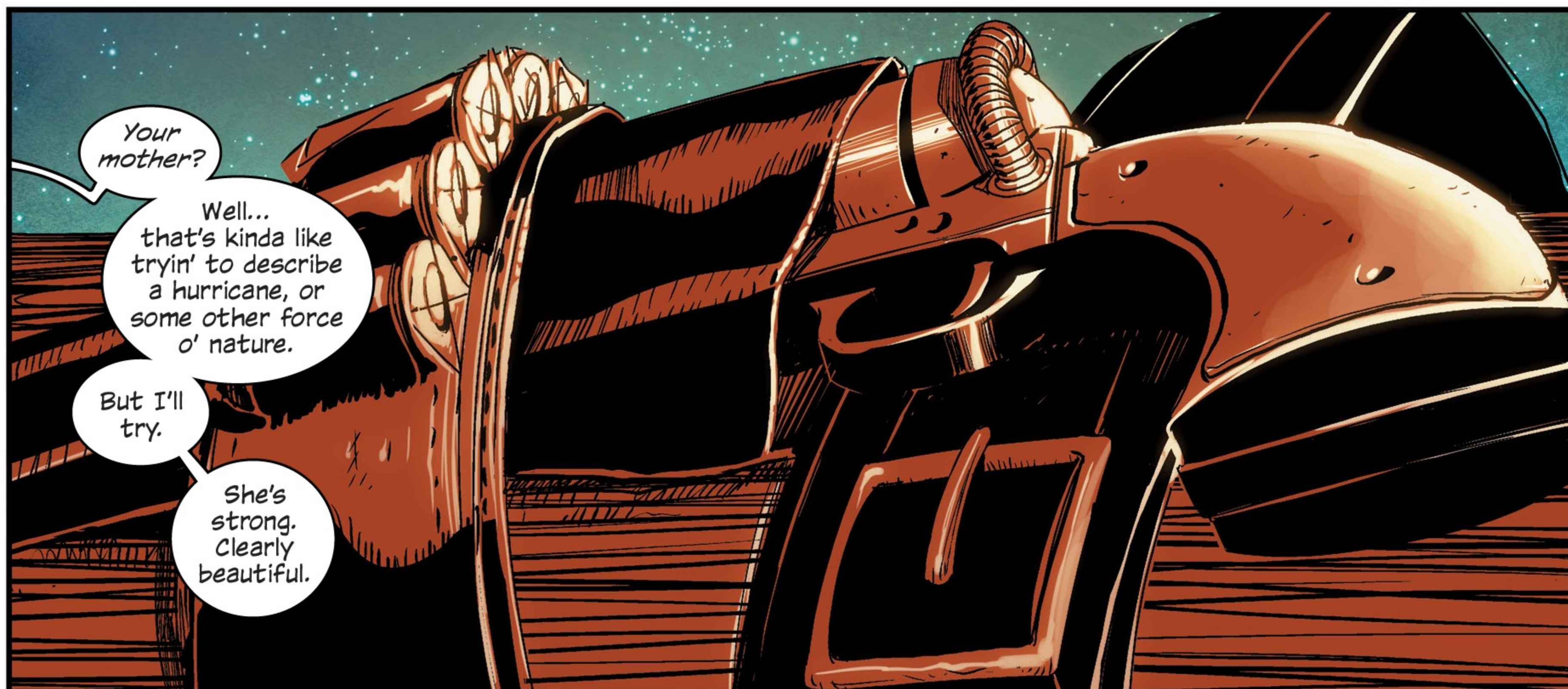
*And you
know the
danger that
brings.*

*Yeah. We
won't be able
to stay
hidden.*

*What do
you think,
Dad? Worth
the risk?*





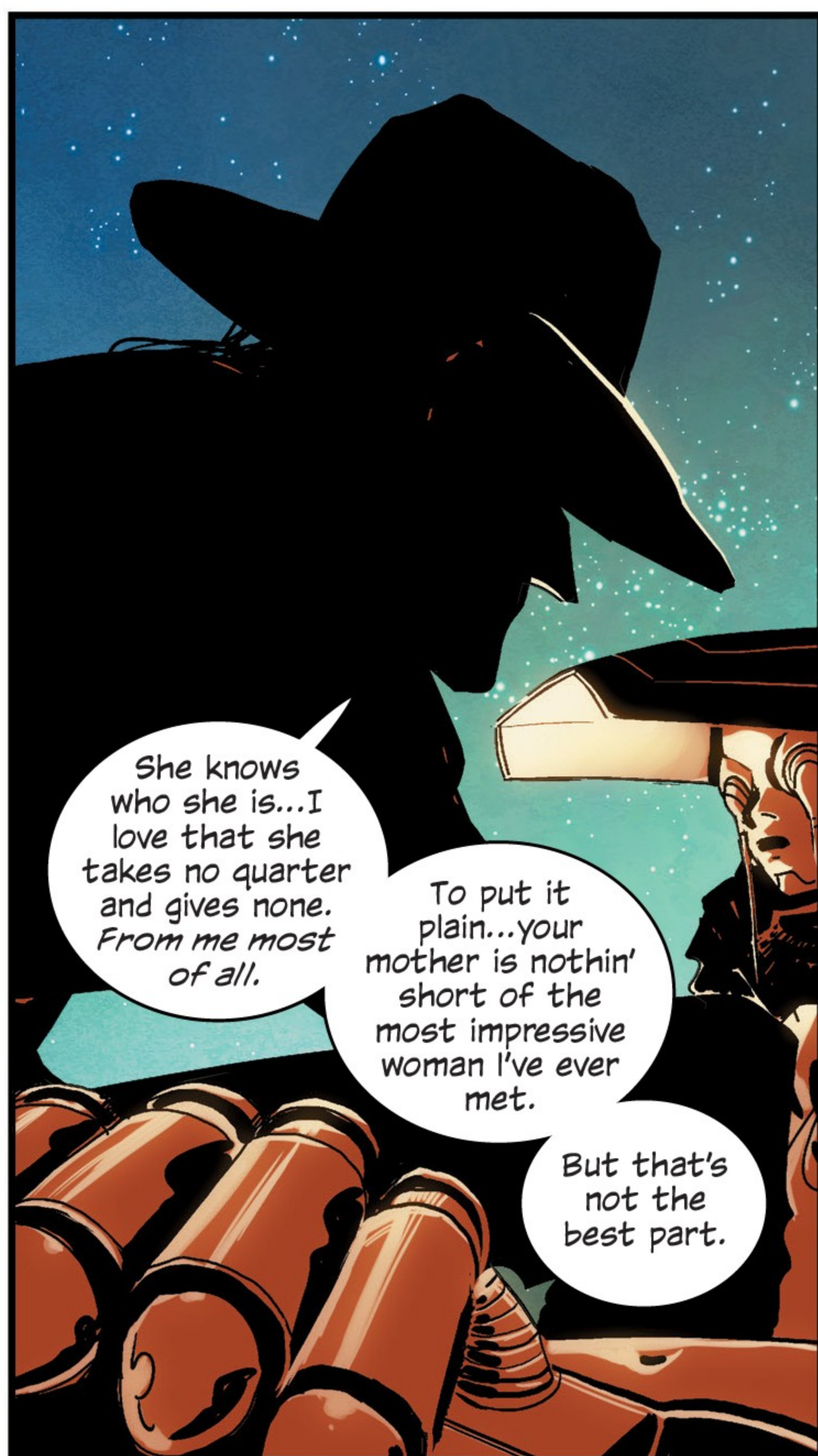


Your mother?

Well... that's kinda like tryin' to describe a hurricane, or some other force o' nature.

But I'll try.

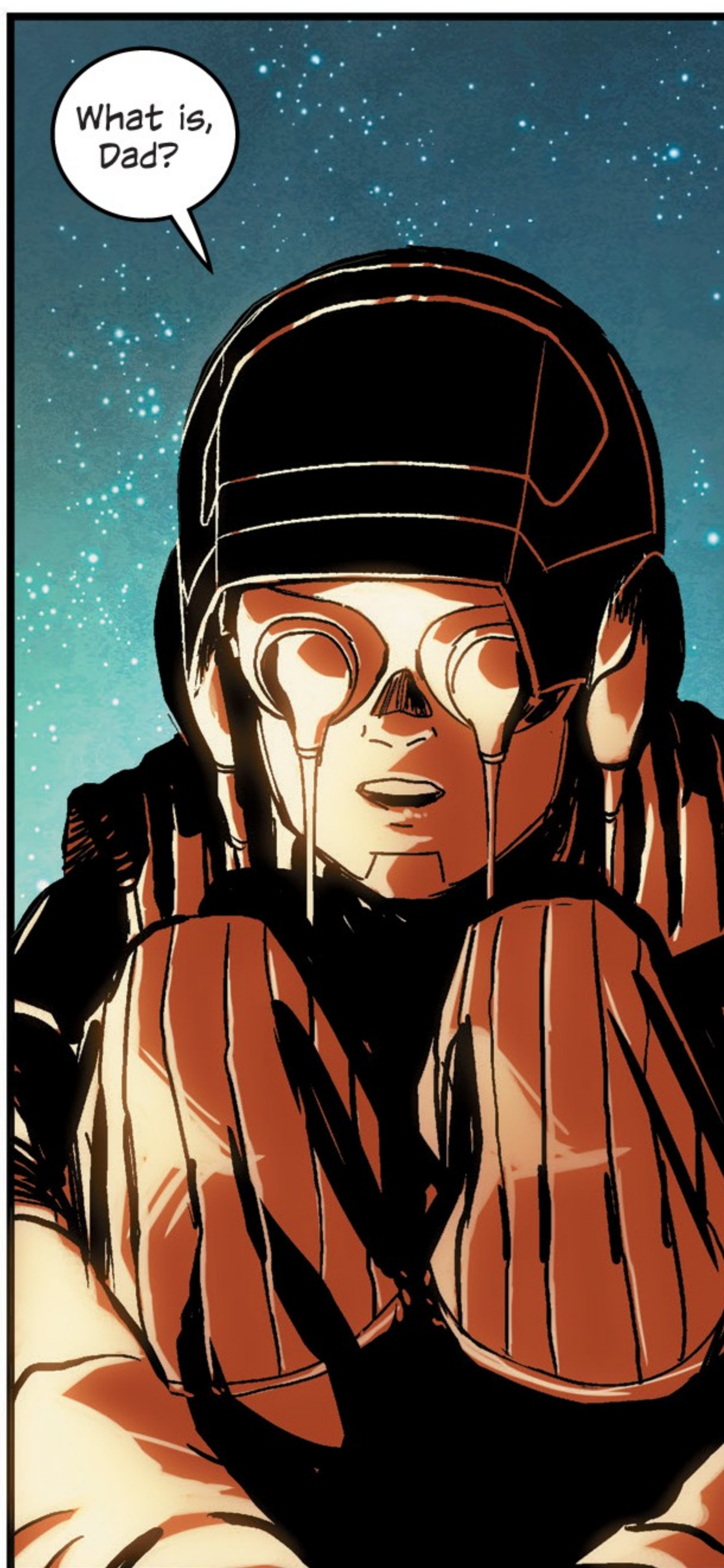
She's strong. Clearly beautiful.



She knows who she is...I love that she takes no quarter and gives none. From me most of all.

To put it plain...your mother is nothin' short of the most impressive woman I've ever met.

But that's not the best part.



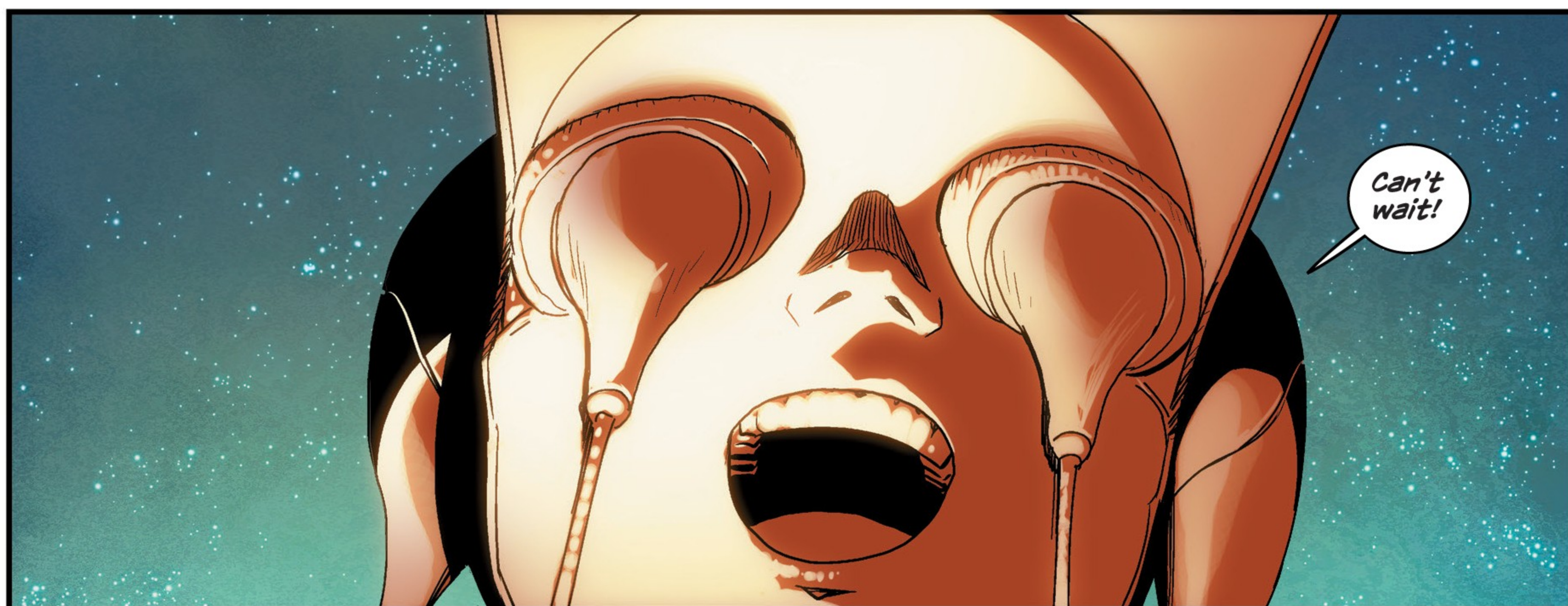
What is, Dad?



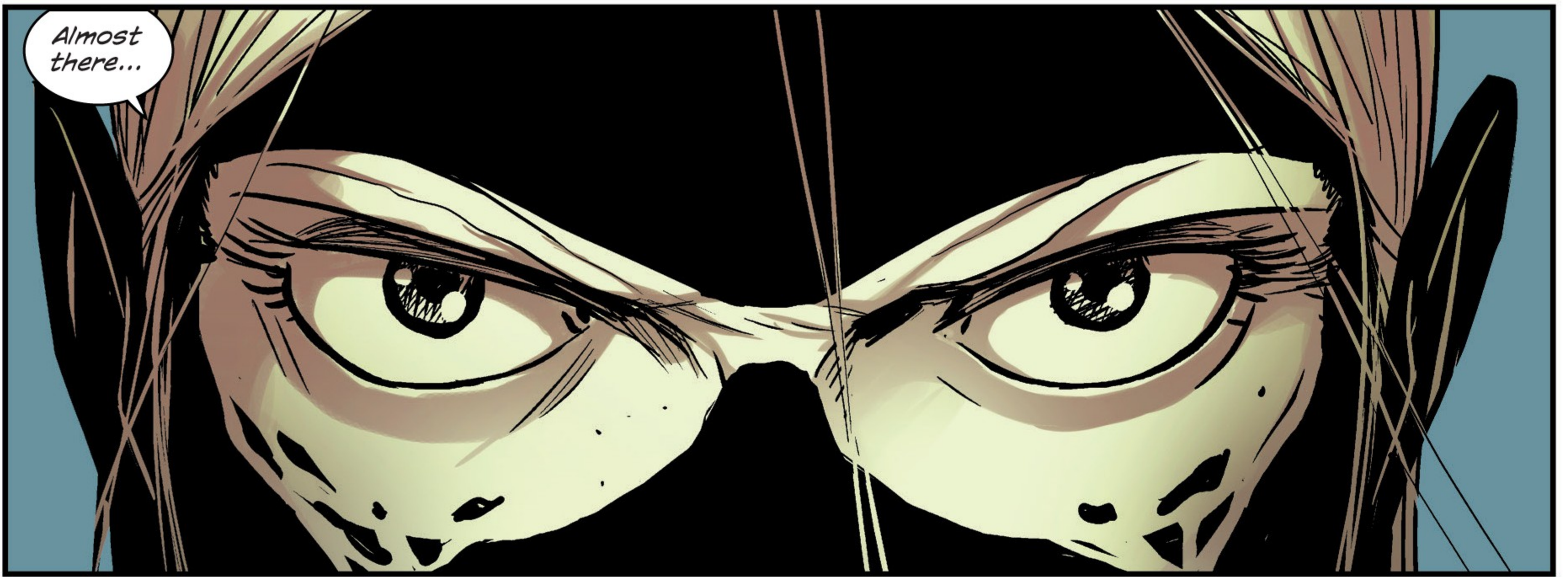
For the first time ever, someone made me not wanna be a monster. And now, I get to do somethin' for her.

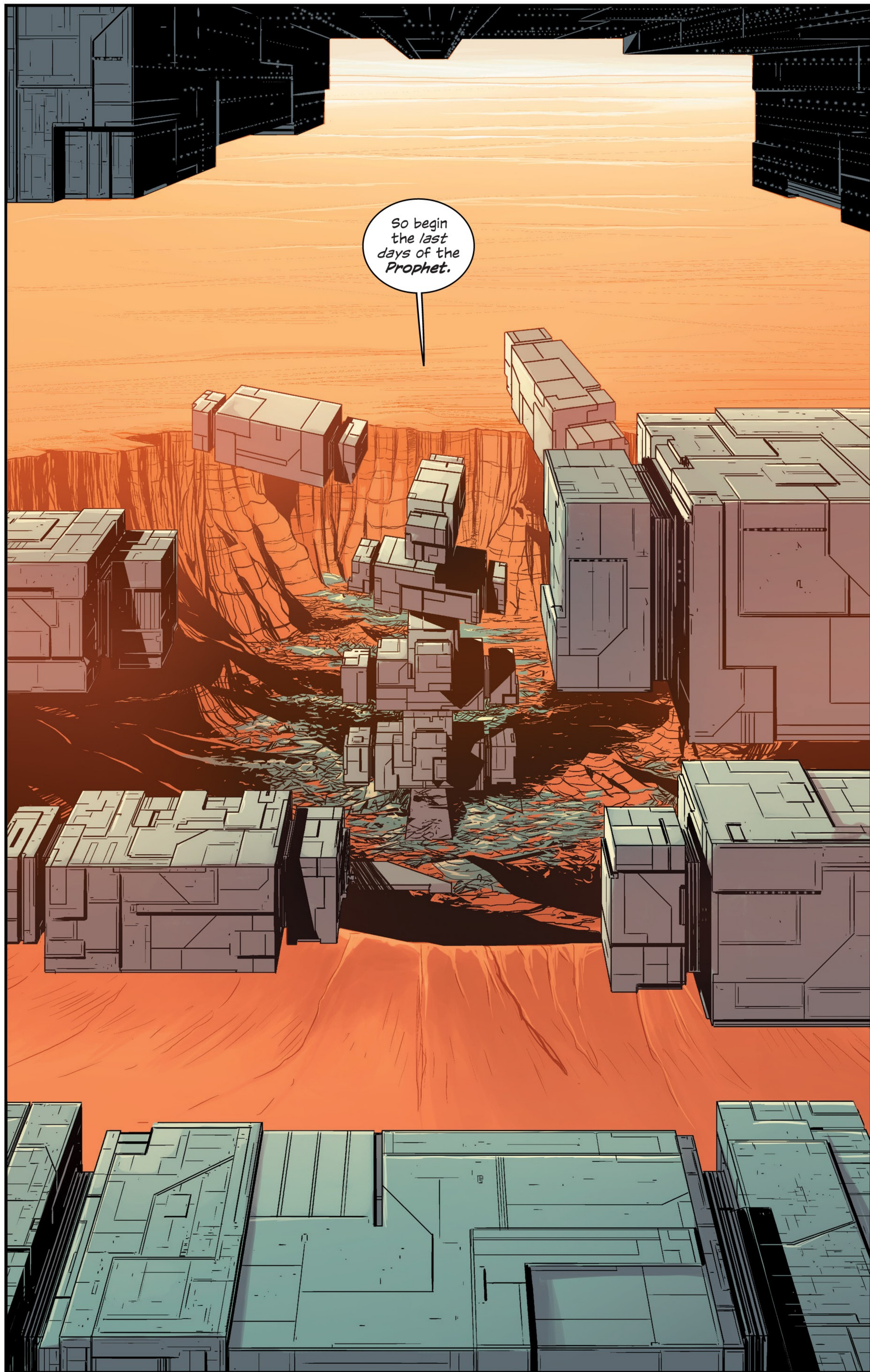
Bring you home.

How's that sound, kiddo?



Can't wait!



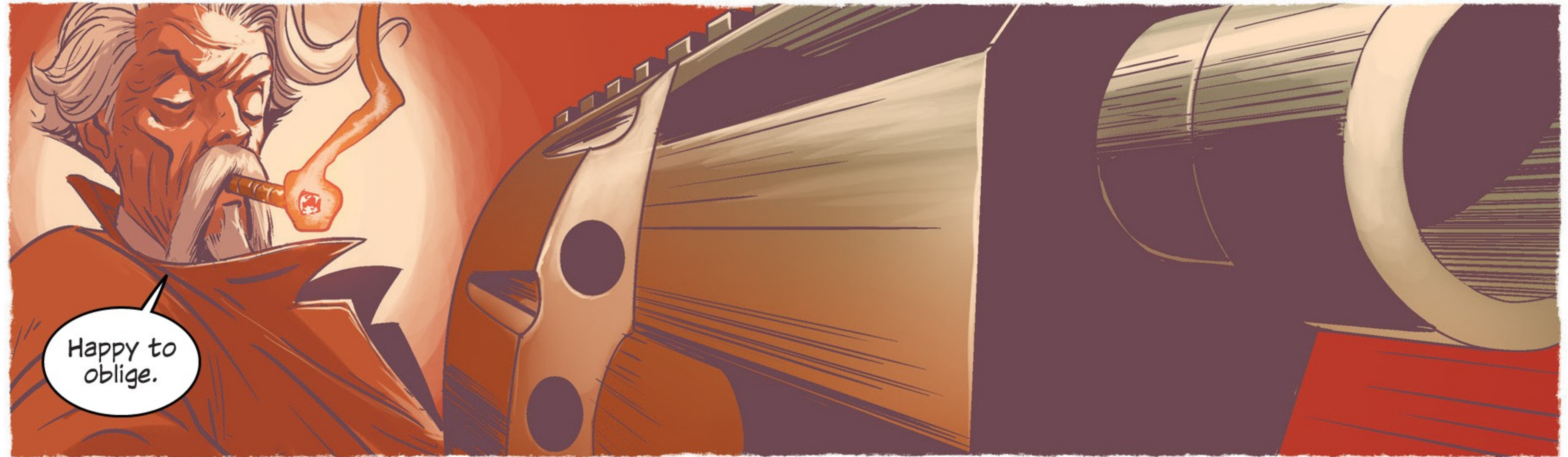
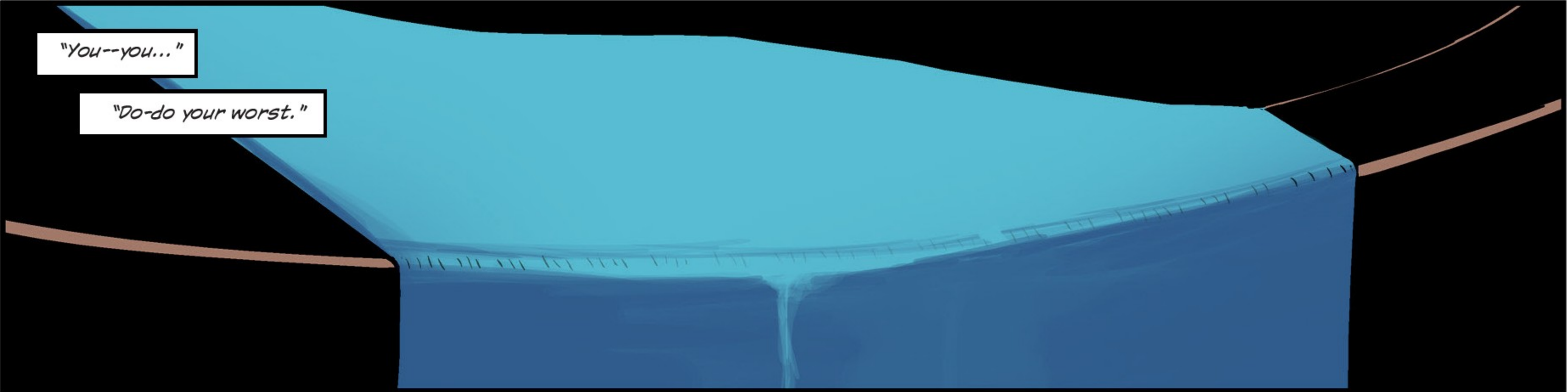
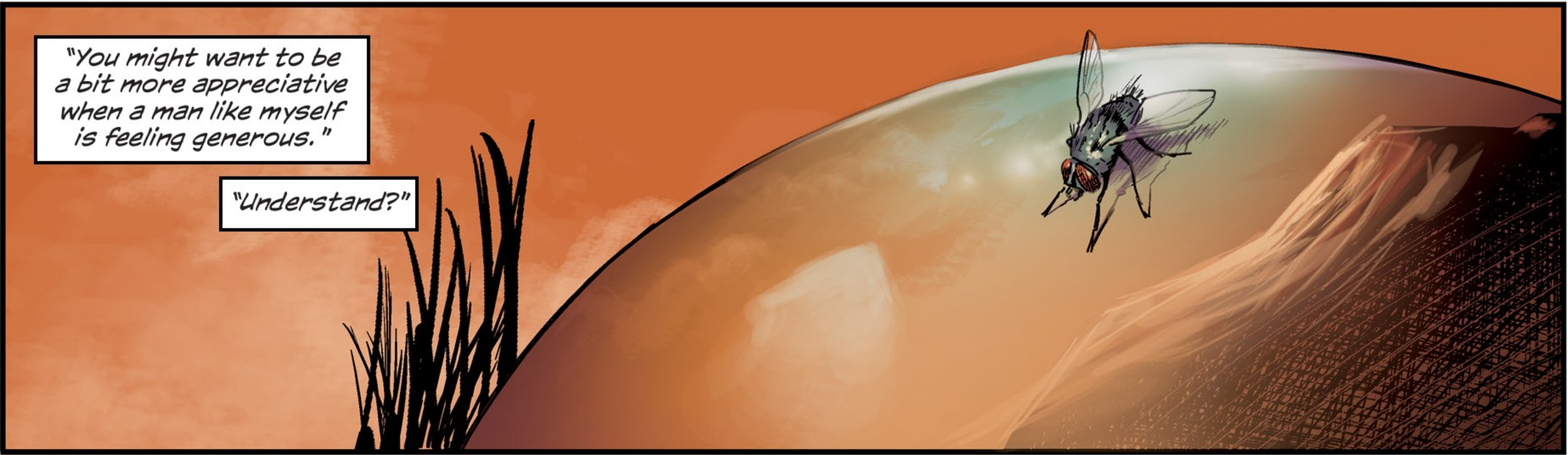


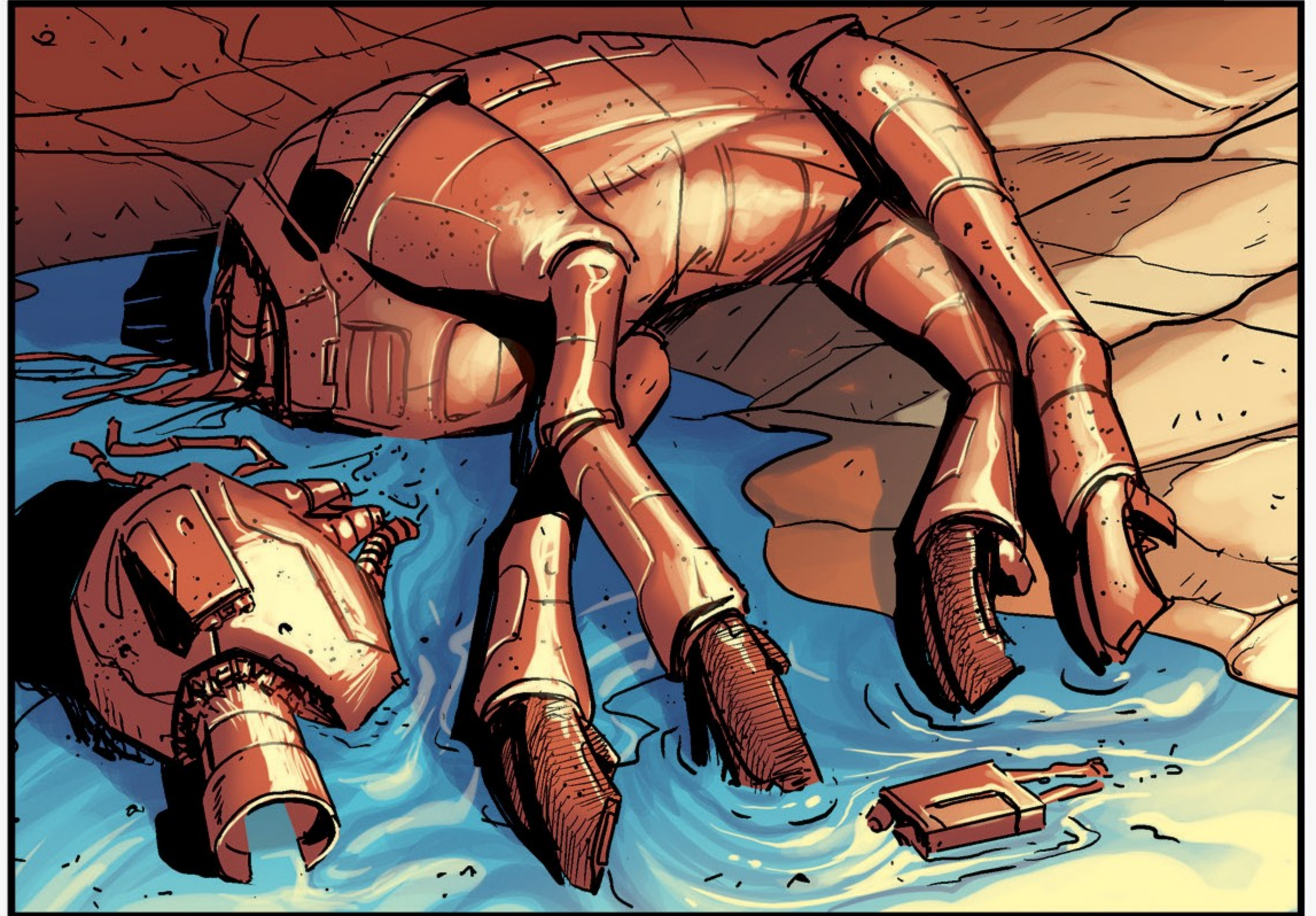
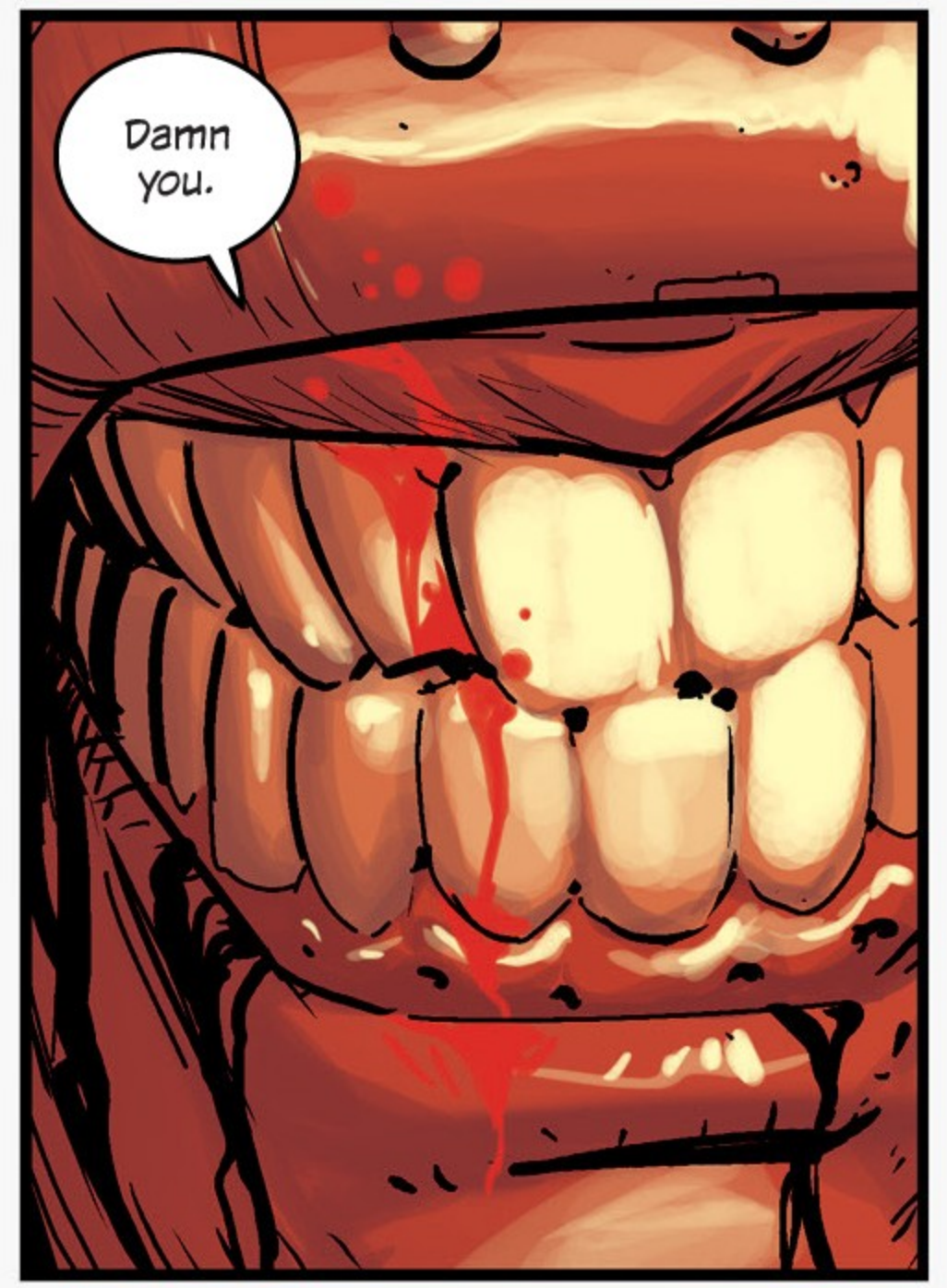
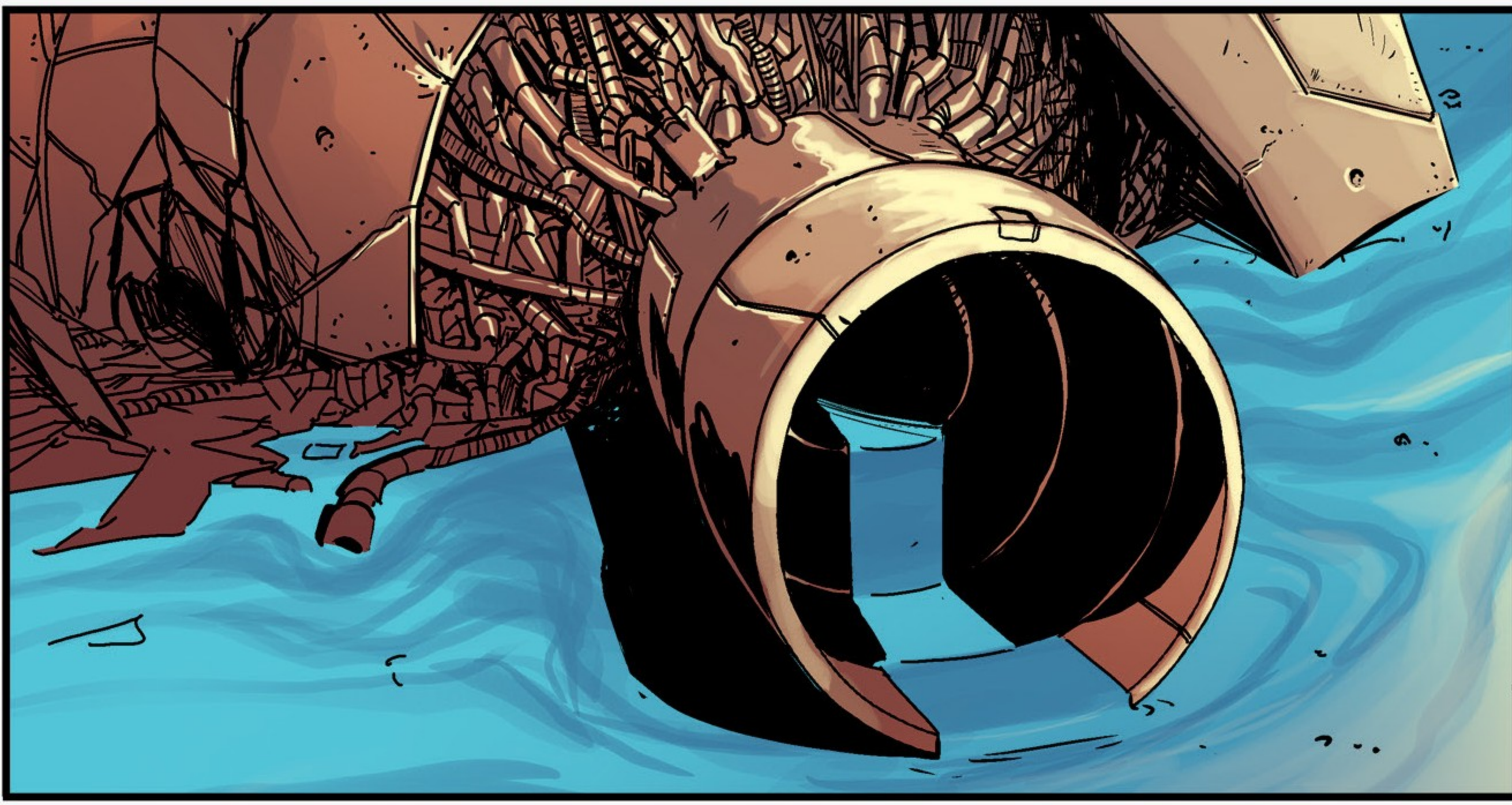
So begin
the last
days of the
Prophet.





"Next time..."

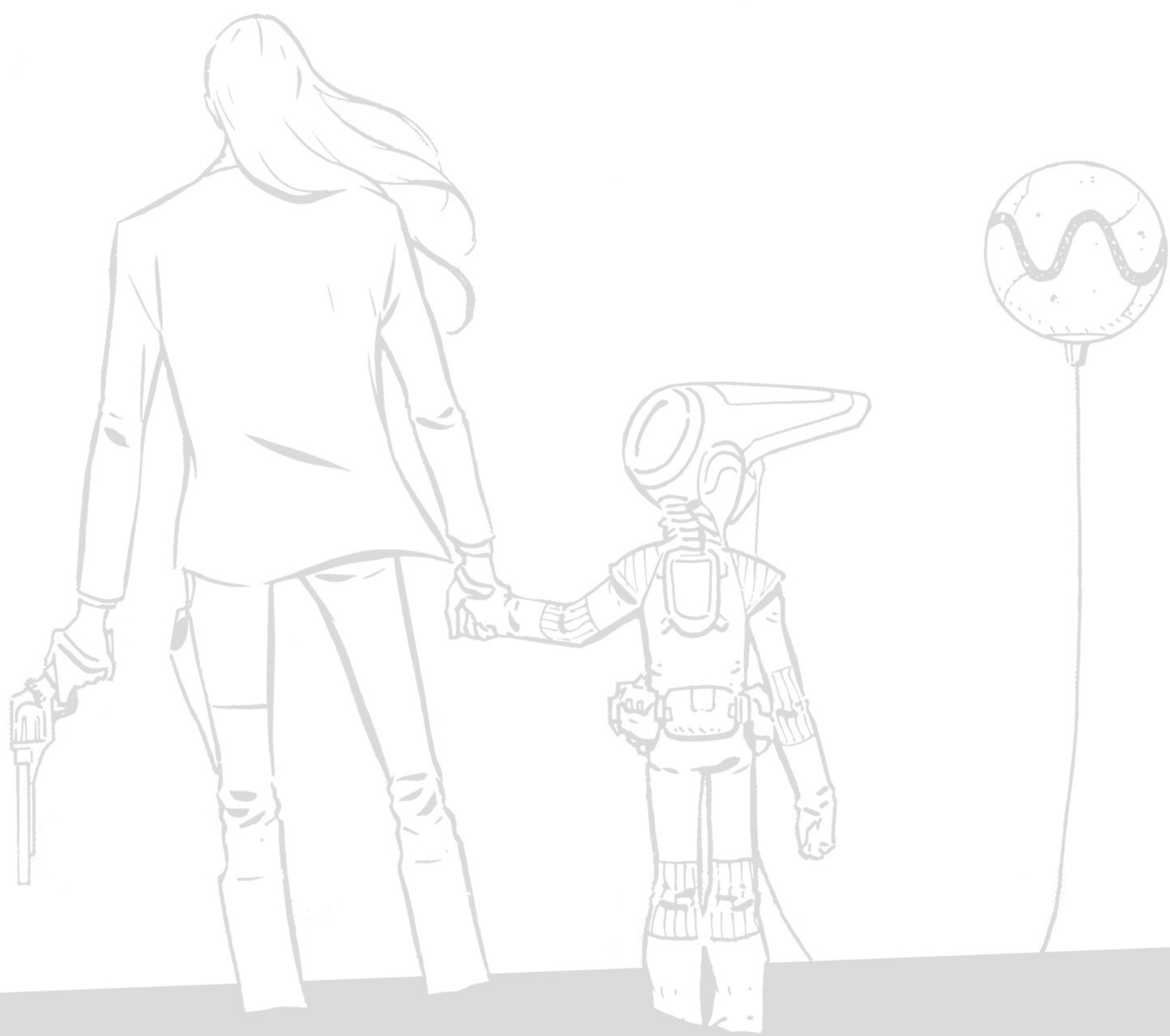






I ASKED FOR **MERCY**,
I SETTLED FOR **JUSTICE**,
NOW ALL THAT REMAINS IS
REVENGE.





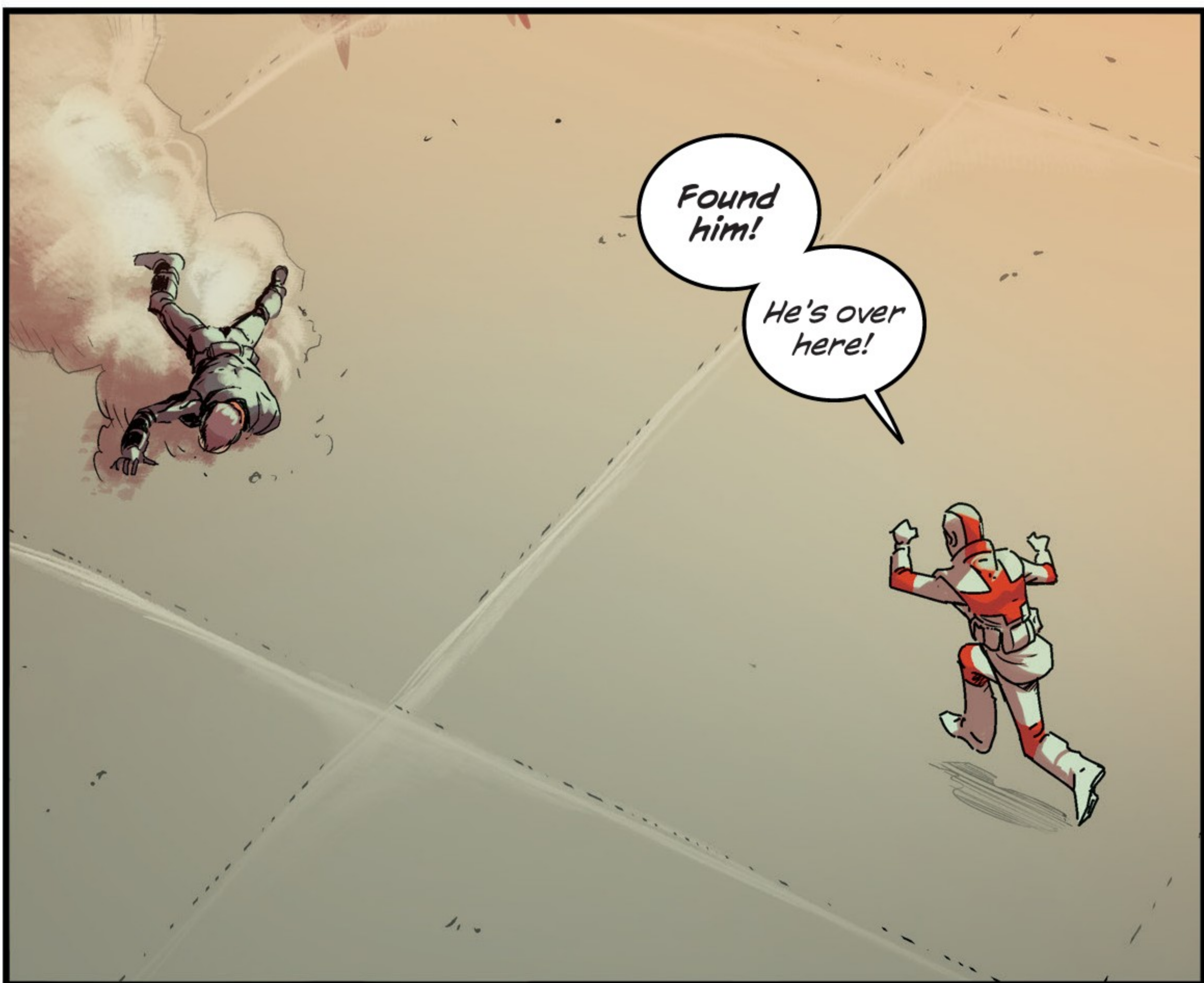
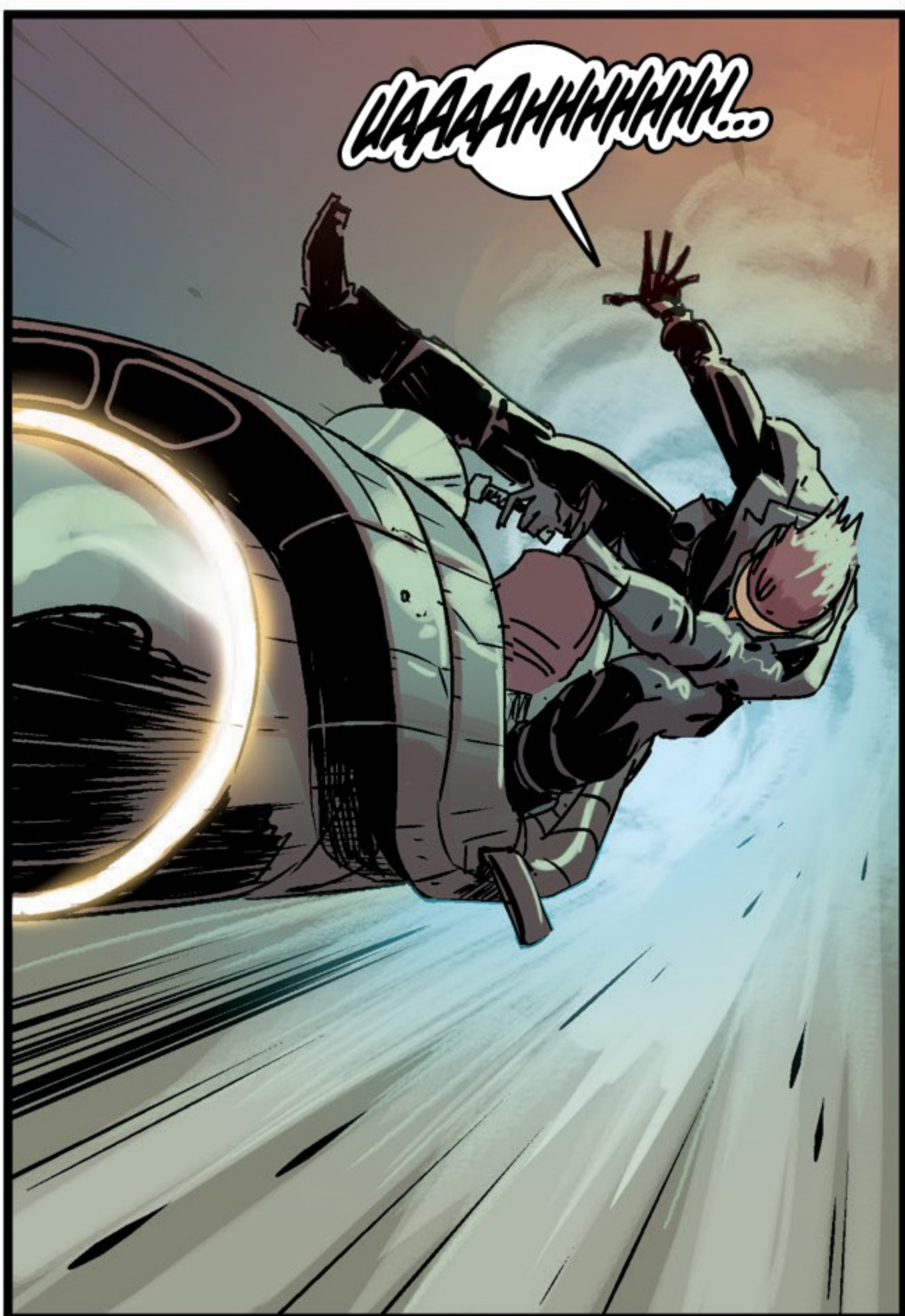
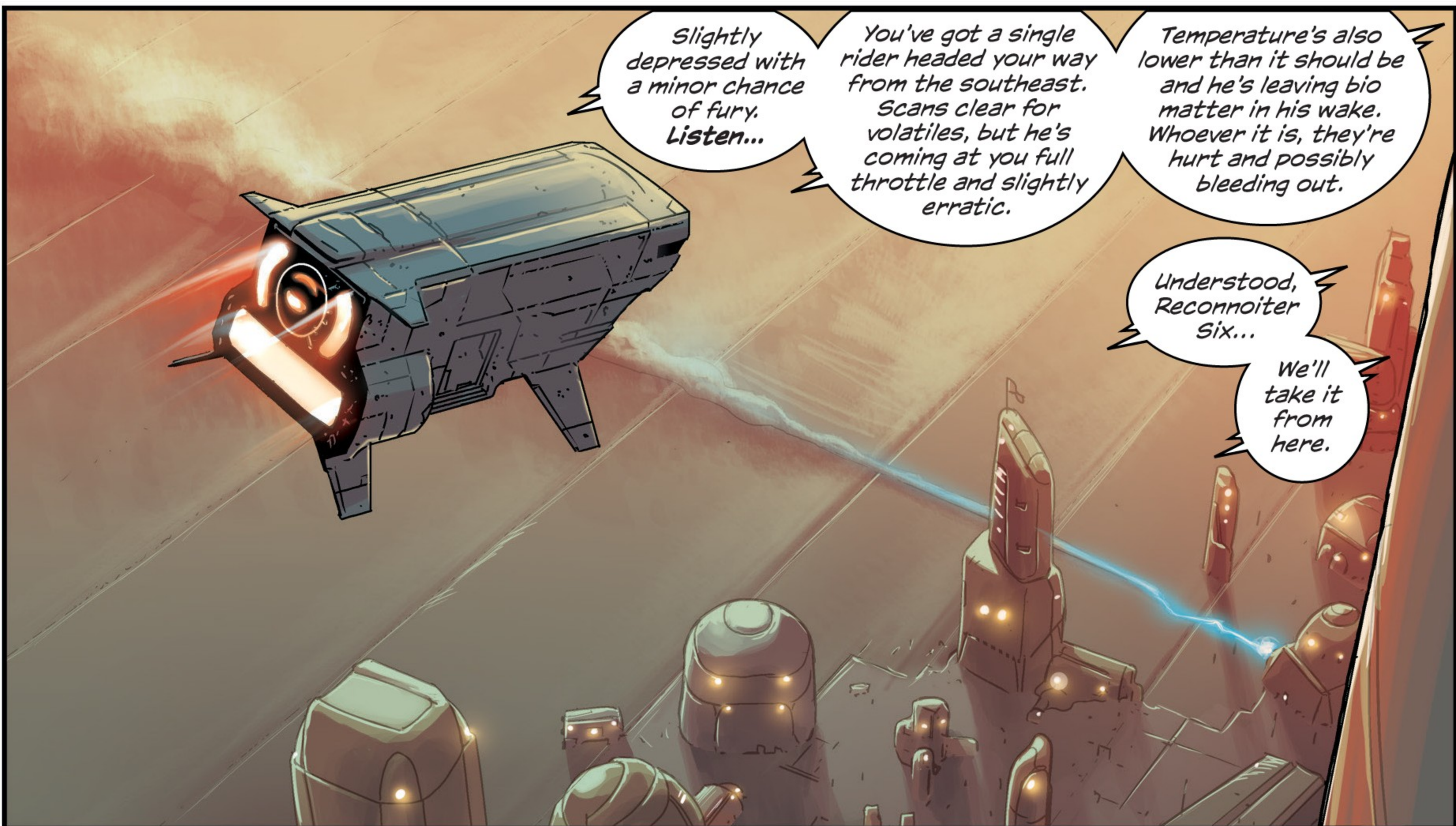
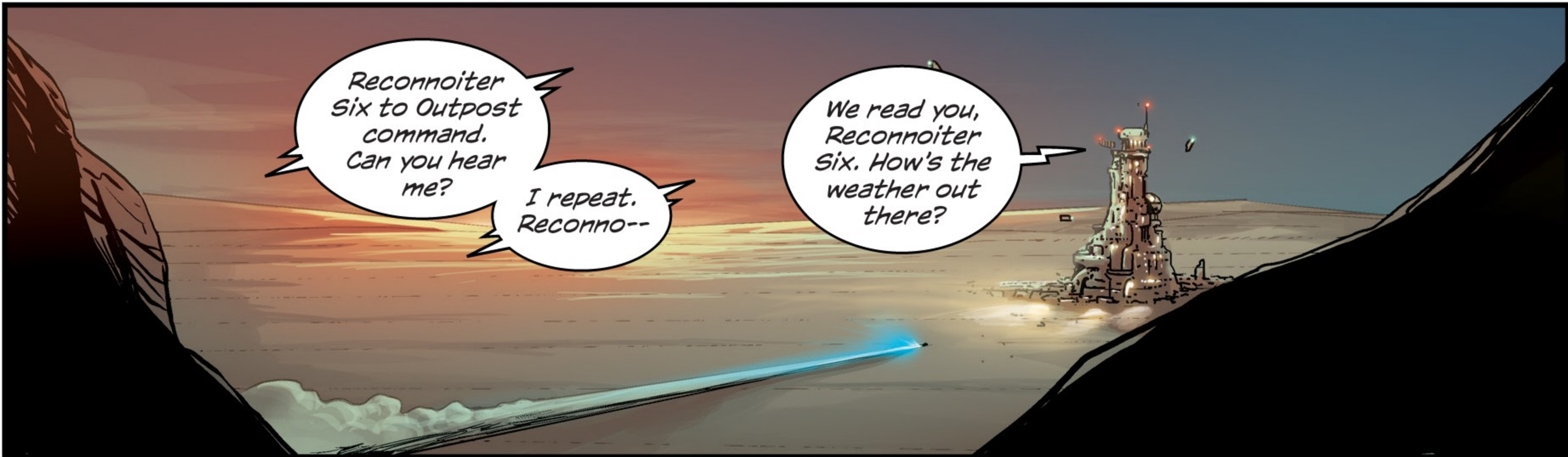
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**THIRTY-SEVEN:
THE HUNT IS ON**

IF I AM NOT **VENGEANCE**,
THEN I AM **NOTHING**.







Hey, mister... are you...

Christ!



Get a gurney out here! **Now!**



O.R.'s being prepped...

How bad is --

It's bad. **Terminal.**



I don't know how he even made it here...

Looks like three gunshot wounds. Only one exit.

We need his blood type.

On it!

Blood pressure in incredibly low, and I think's he's going to lose the leg...



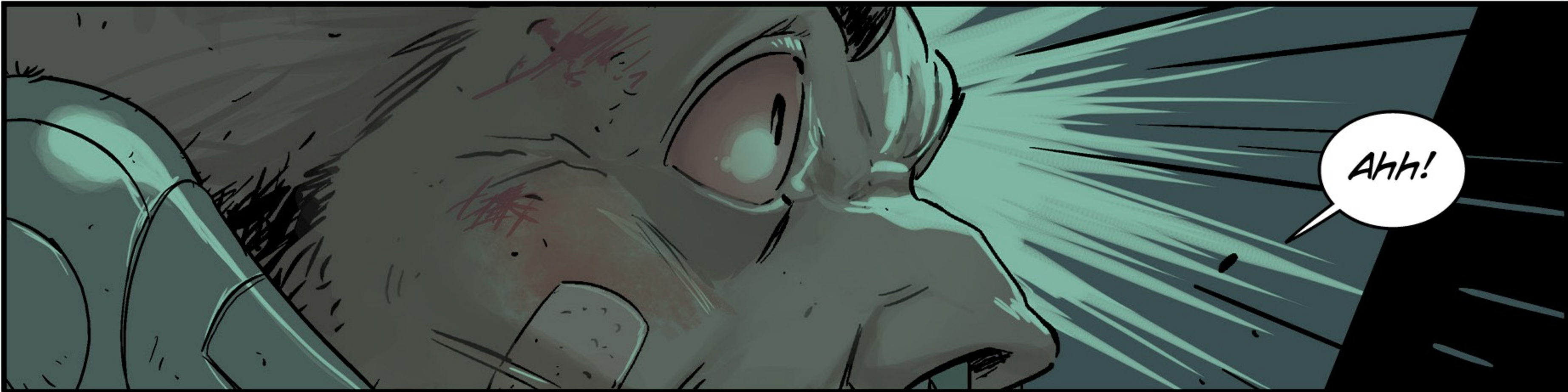
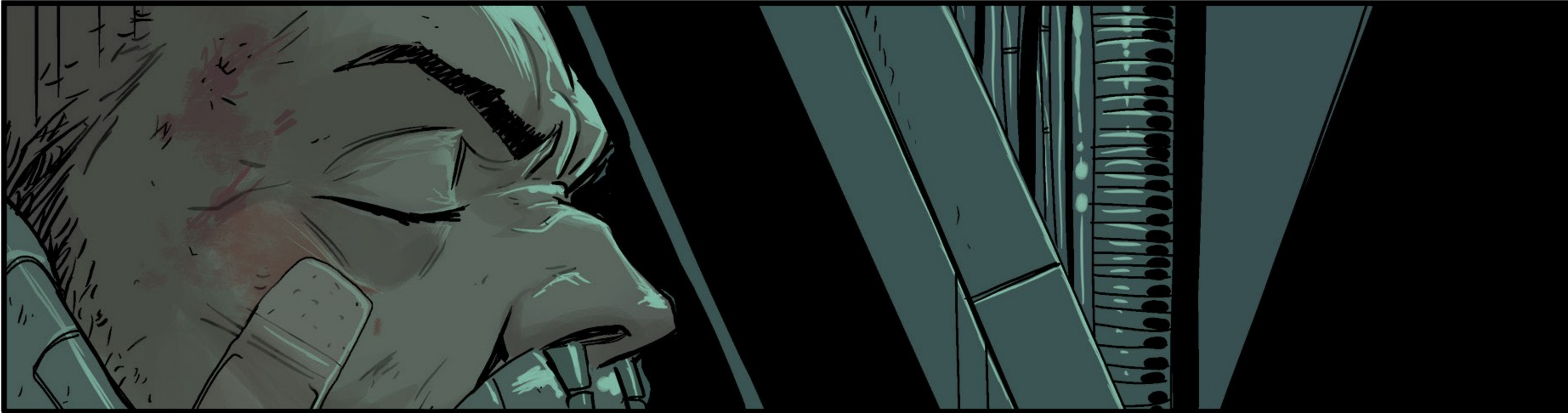
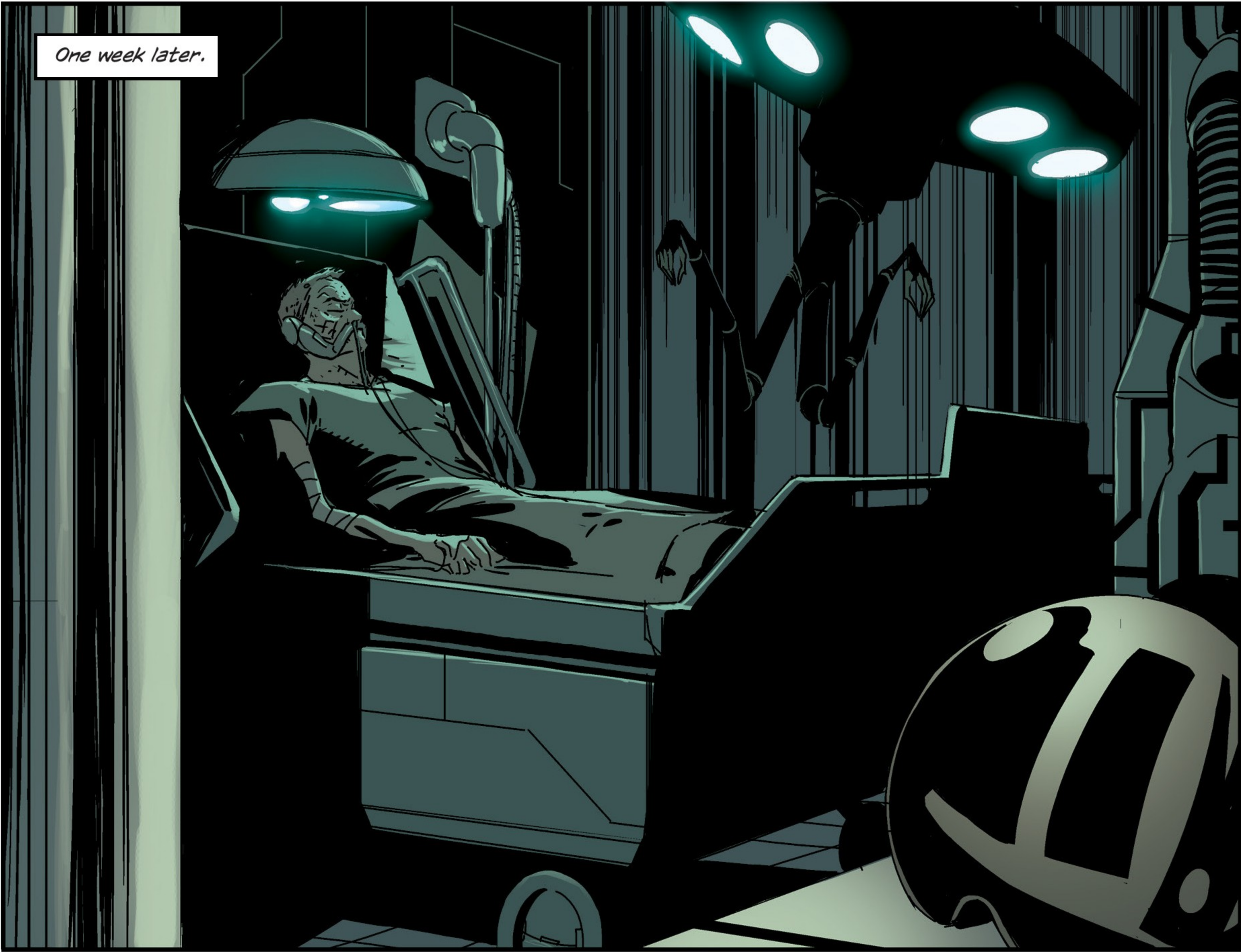
My God...

What the hell happened to this guy?

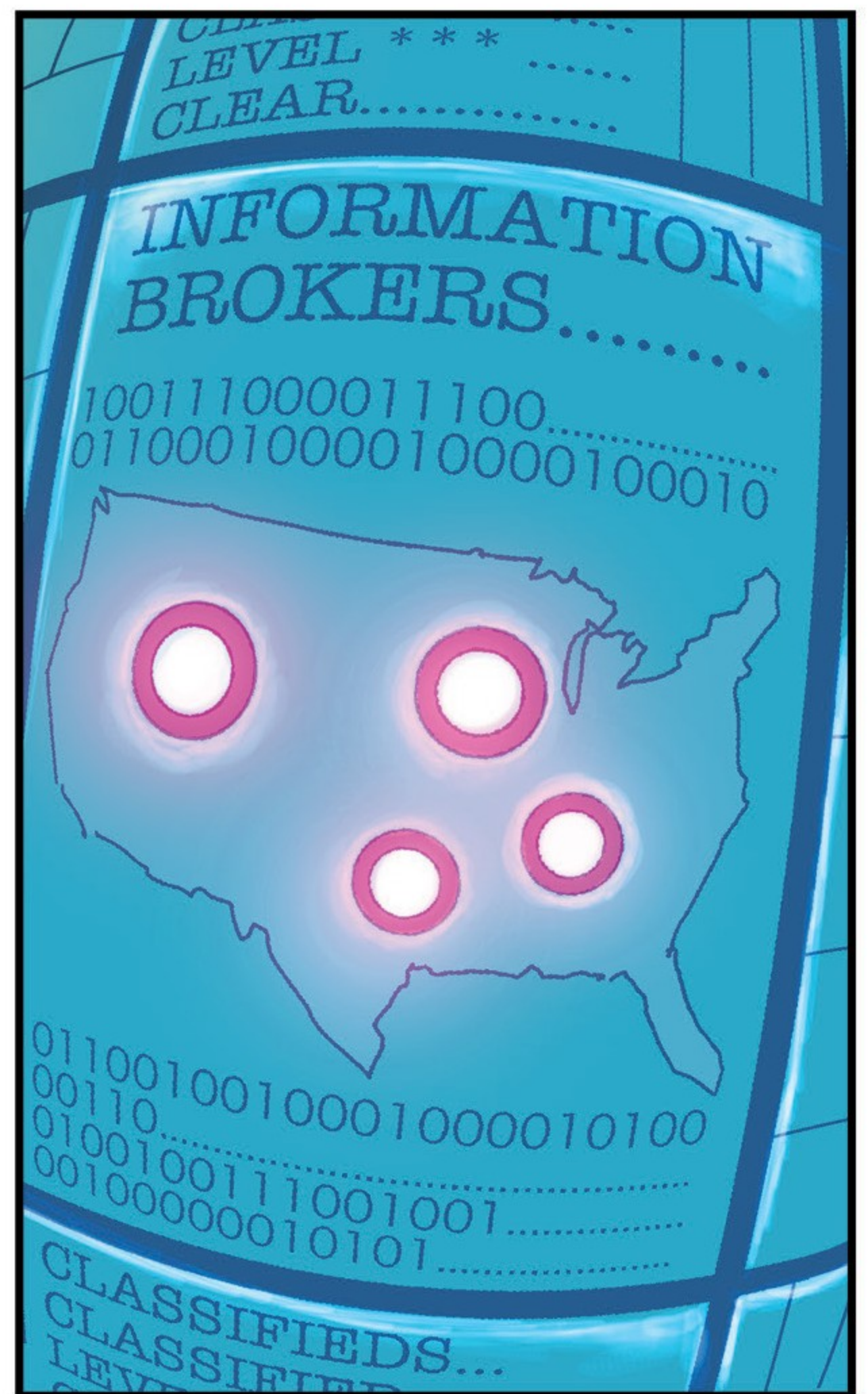
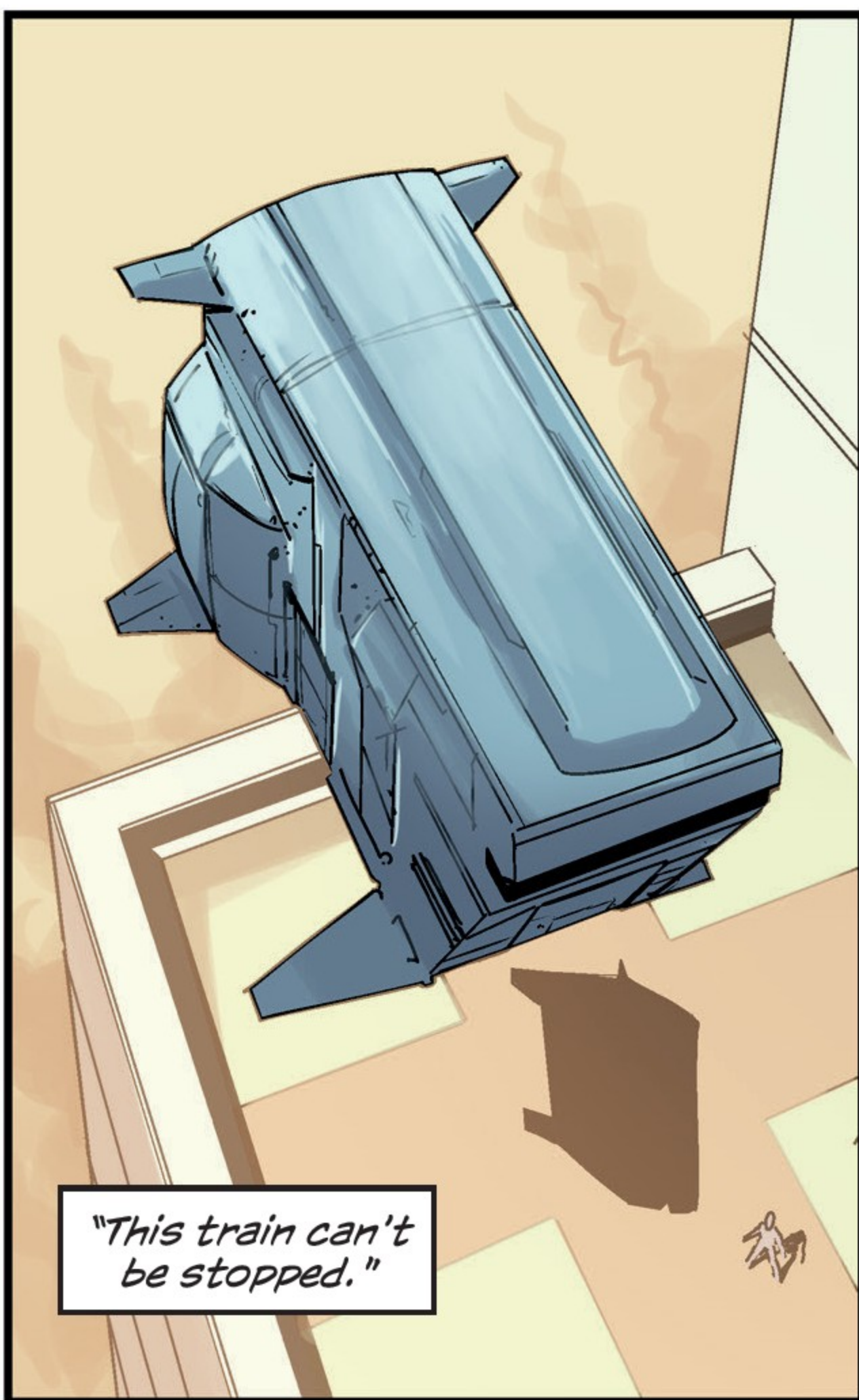


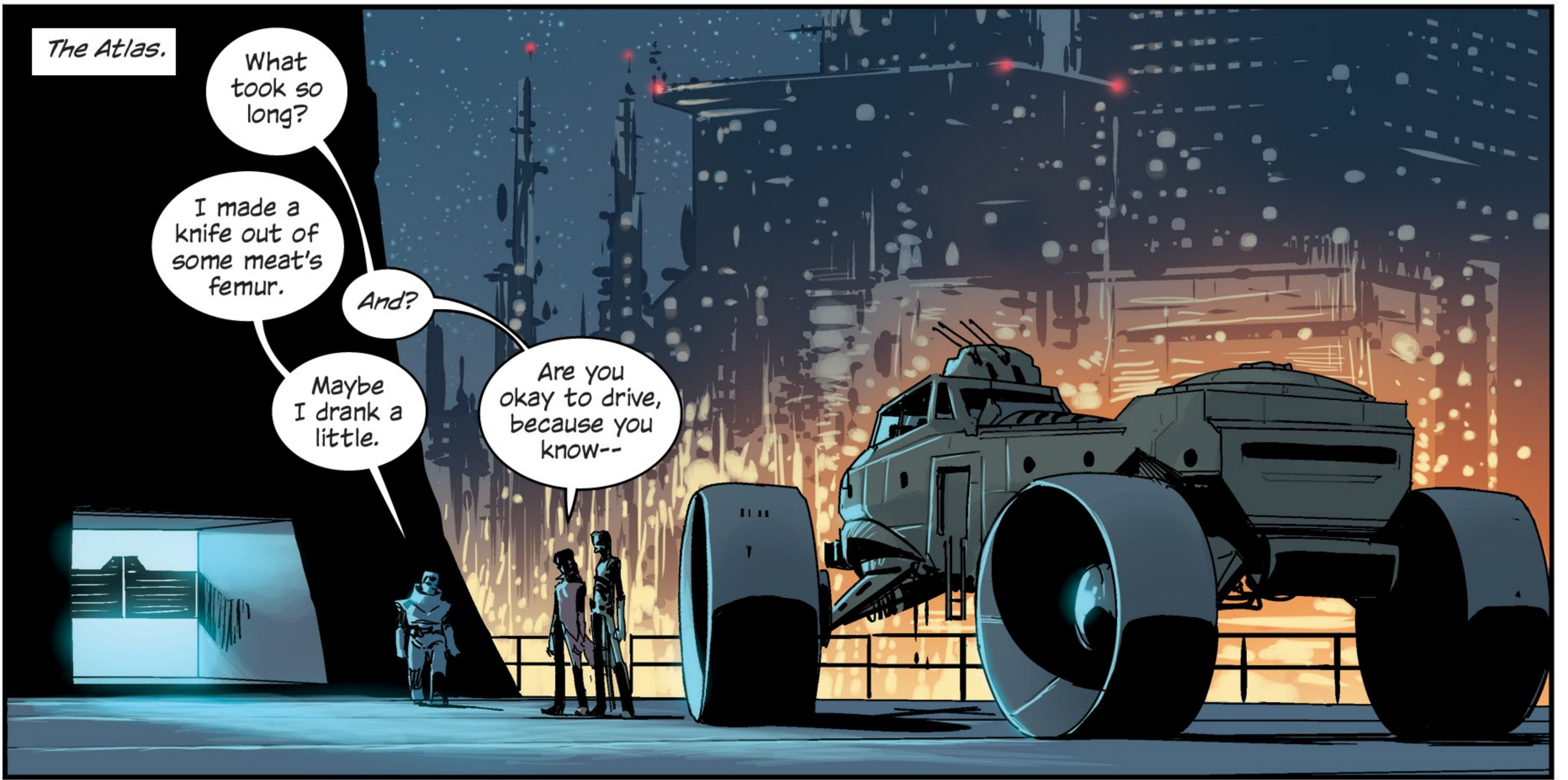
Hrrnnnnnn.

Sons of bitches killed my dog.









The Atlas.

What took so long?

I made a knife out of some meat's femur.

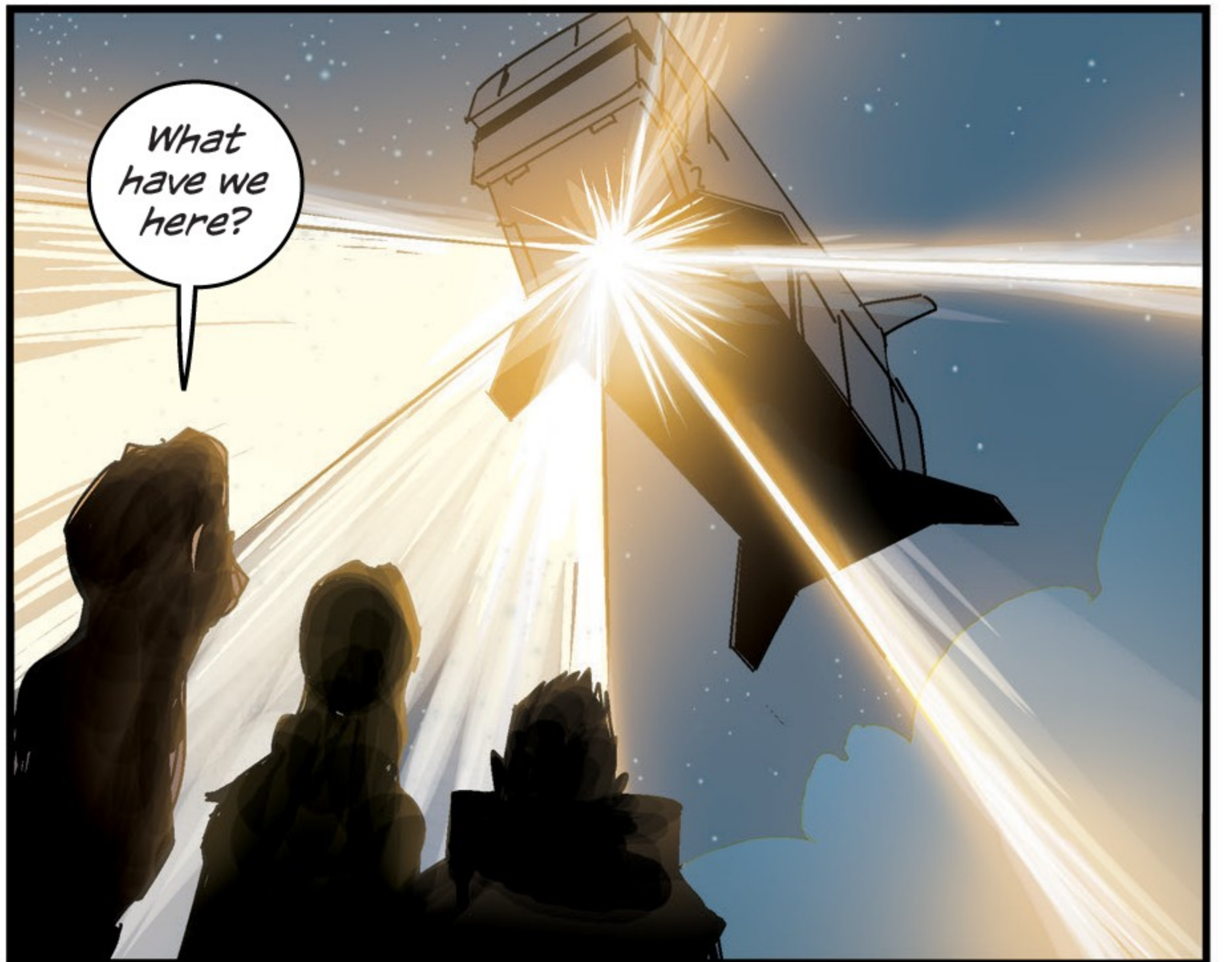
And?

Maybe I drank a little.

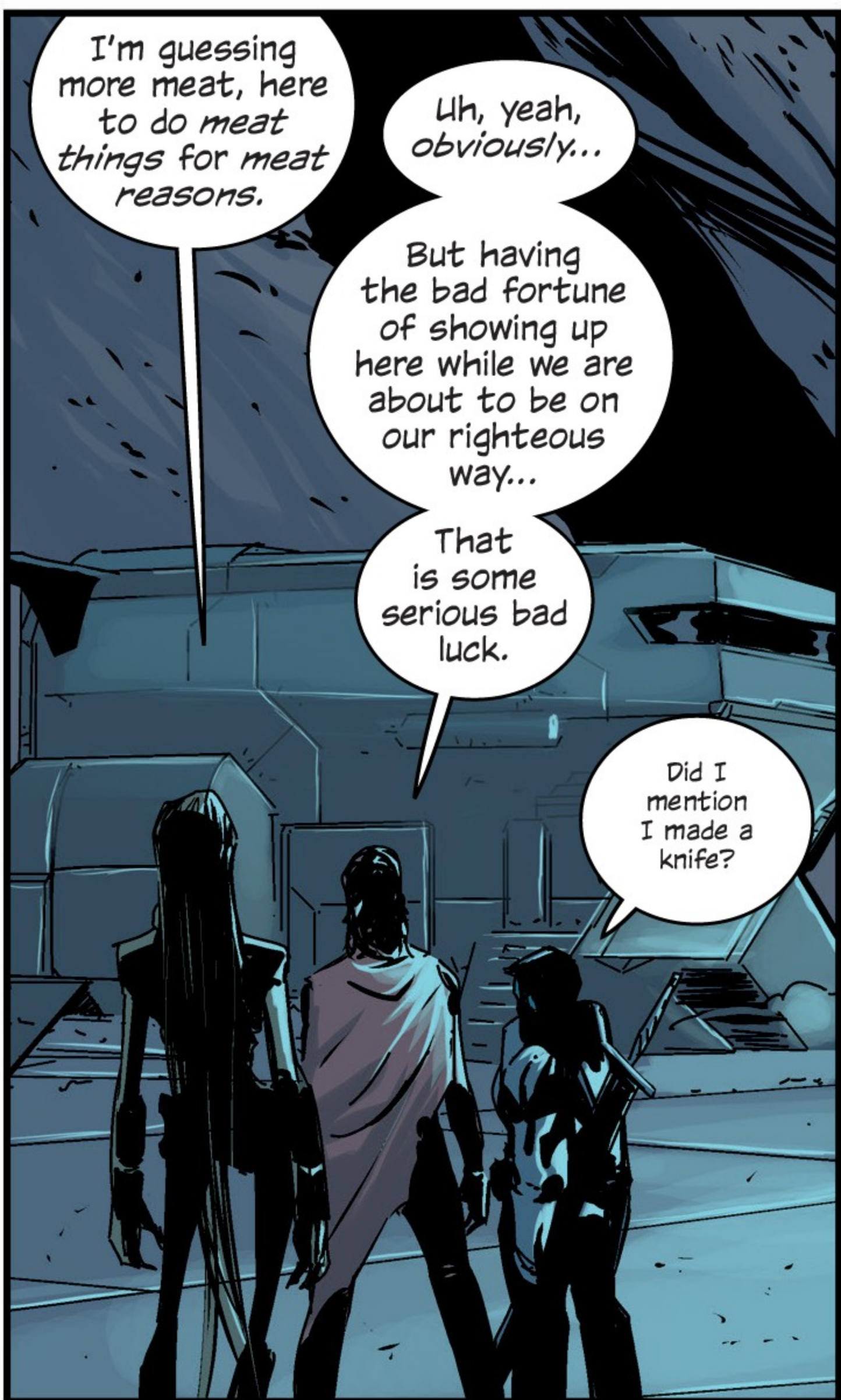
Are you okay to drive, because you know--



Huh?



What have we here?



I'm guessing more meat, here to do meat things for meat reasons.

Uh, yeah, obviously...

But having the bad fortune of showing up here while we are about to be on our righteous way...

That is some serious bad luck.

Did I mention I made a knife?



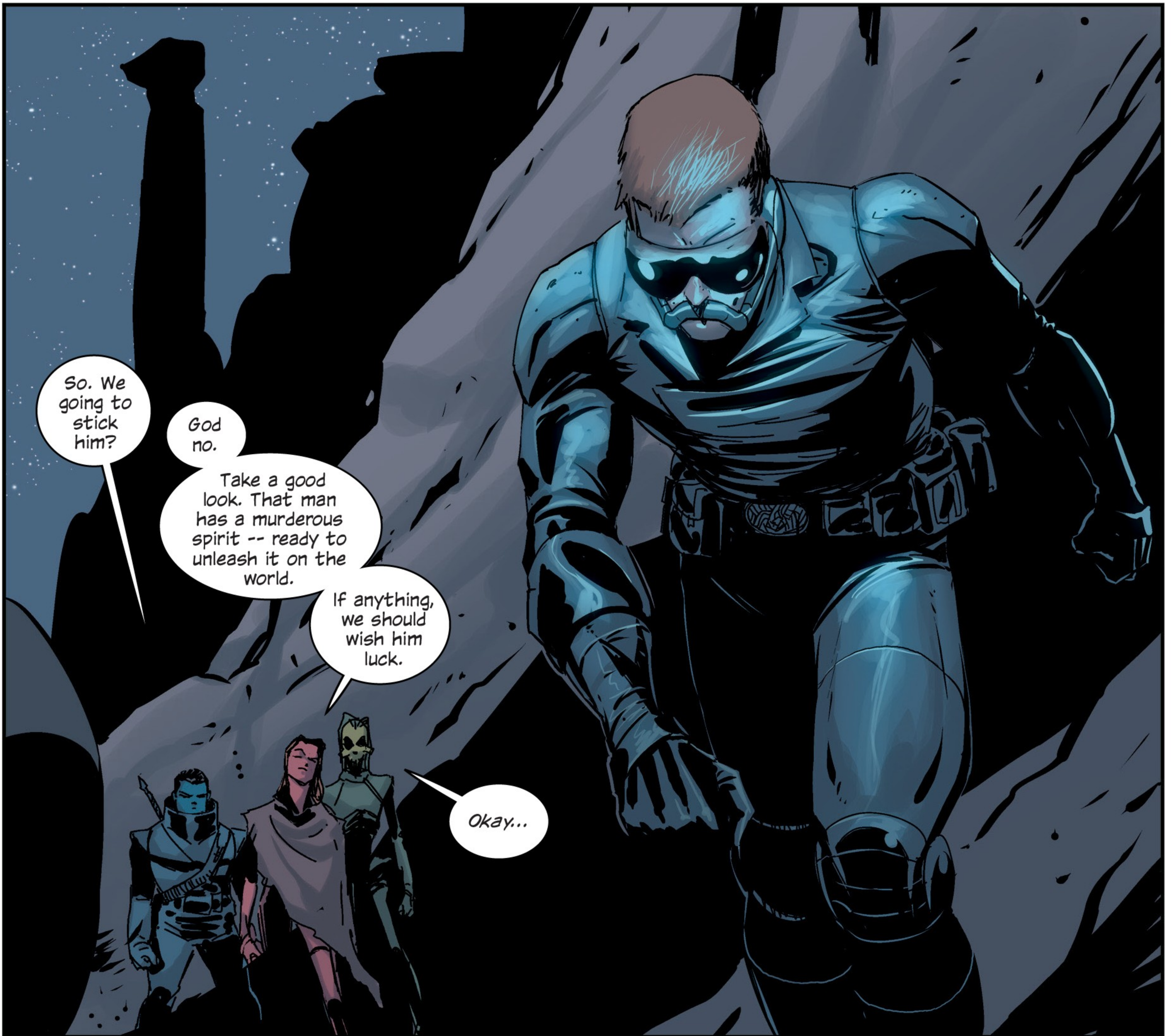
?



I'm looking for information brokerage called the Atlas...

Is this it?

Do we look like fucking tour guides?





"Good luck
with your
murders."

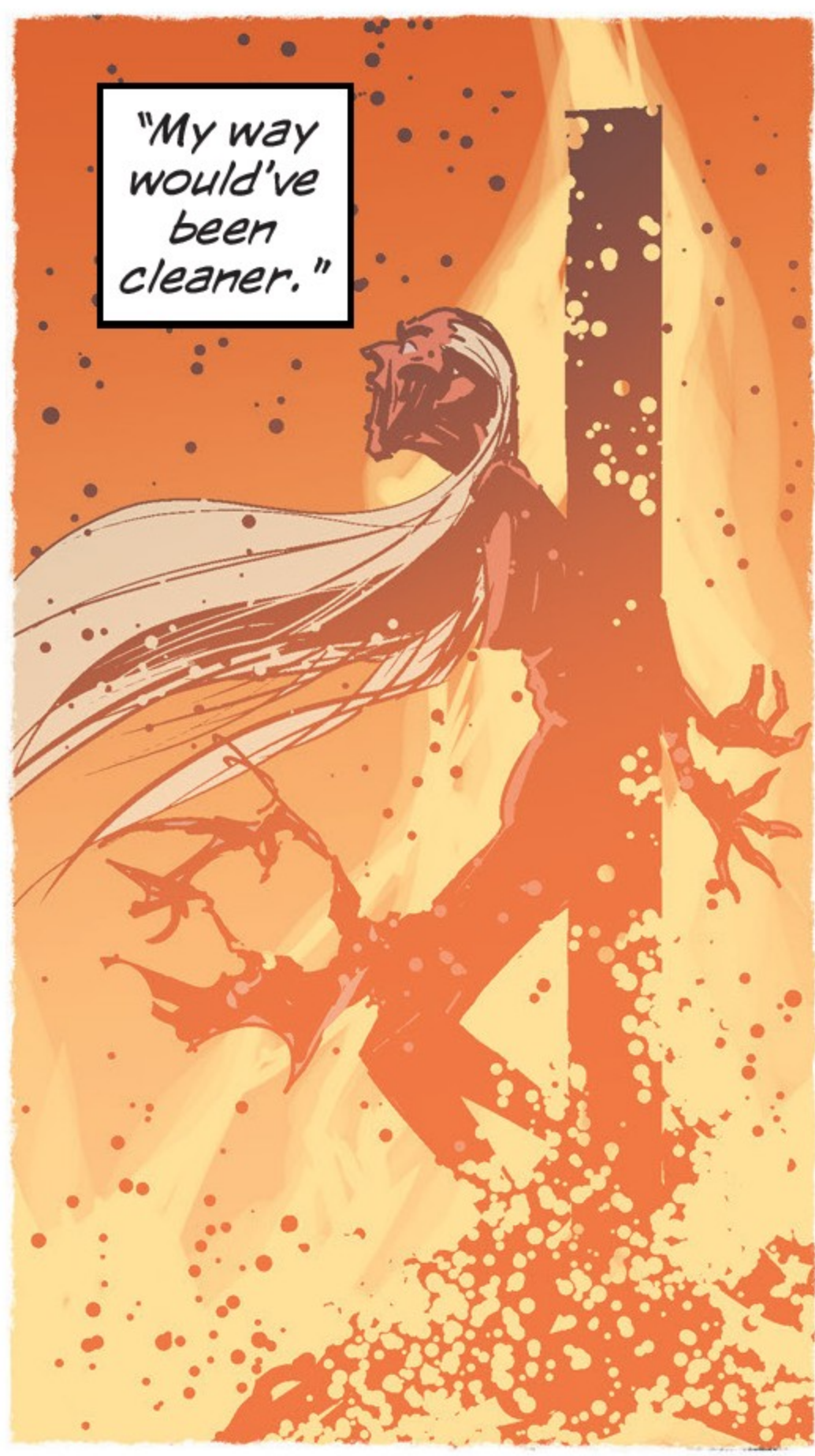
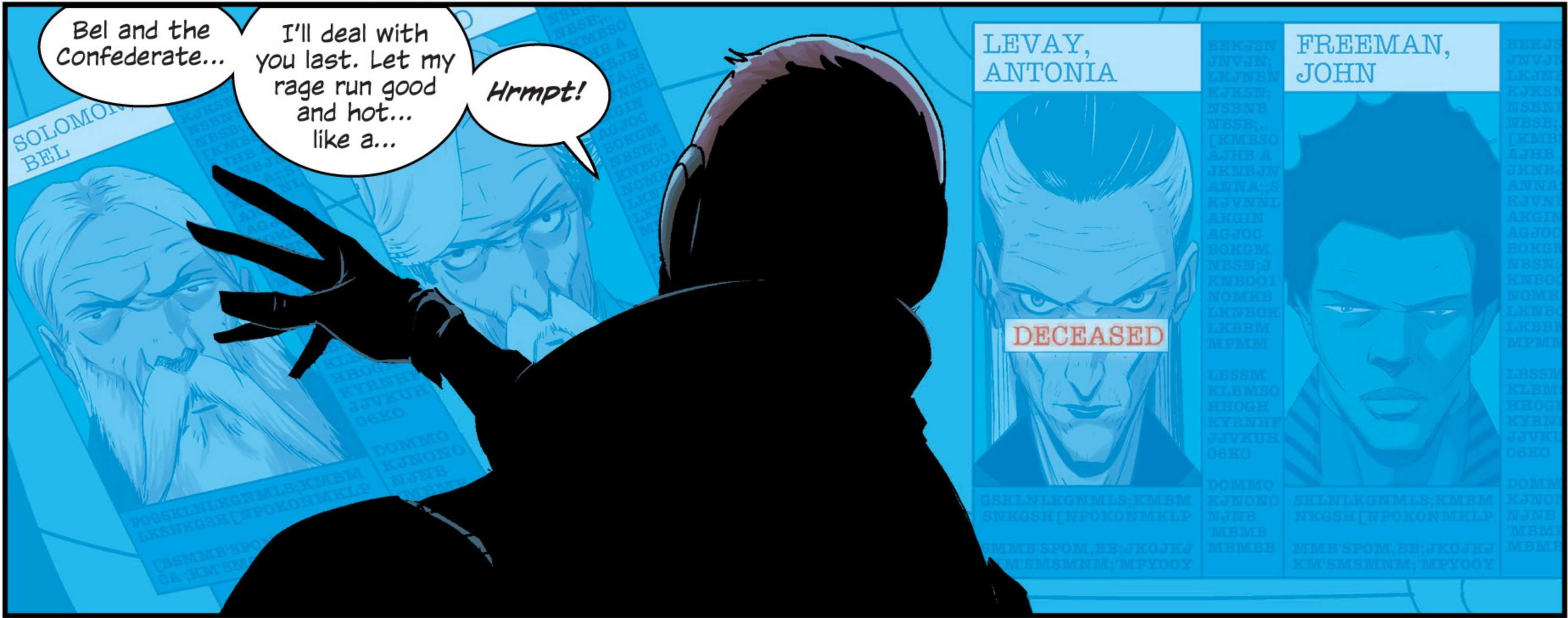
Well...

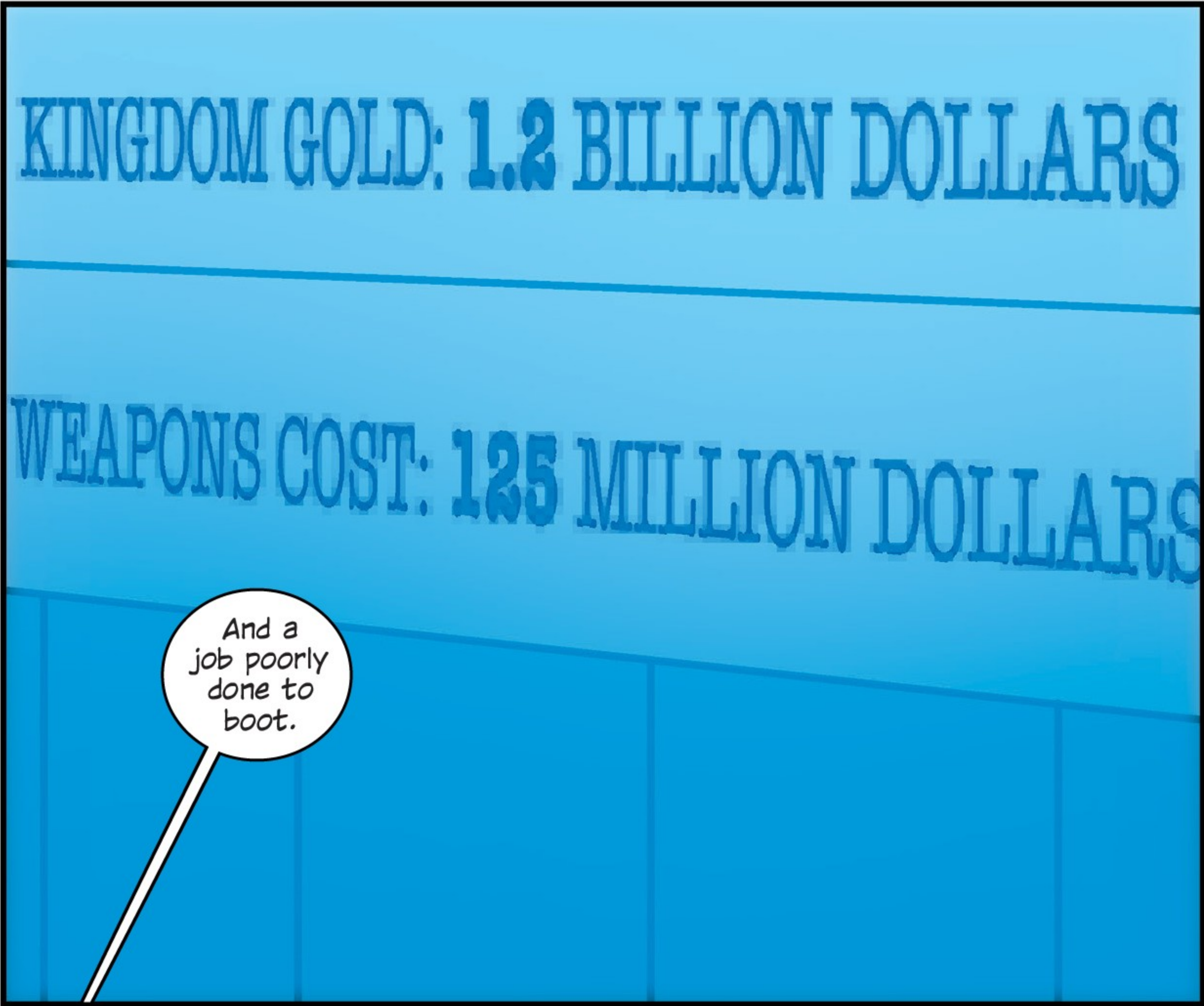
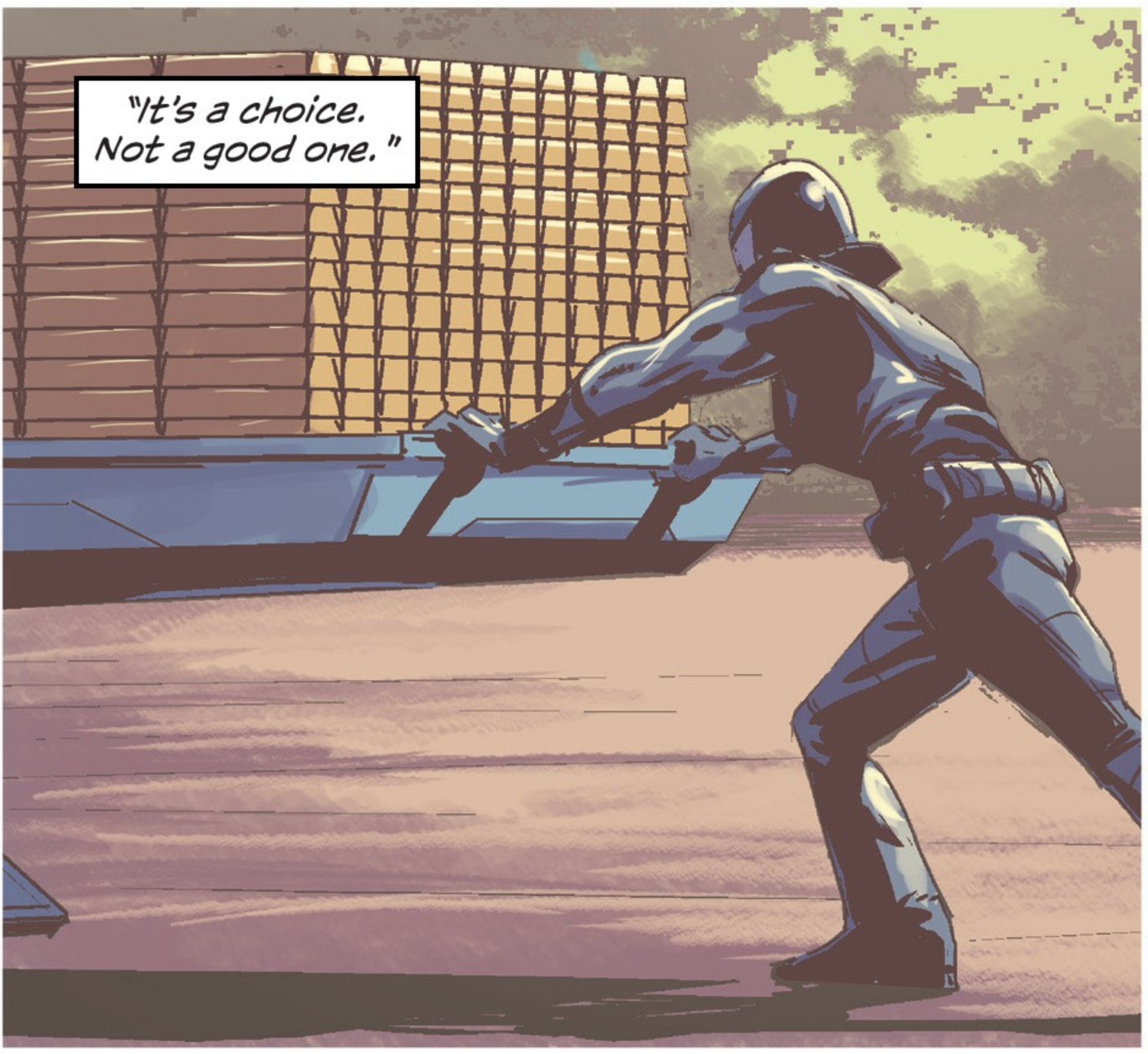
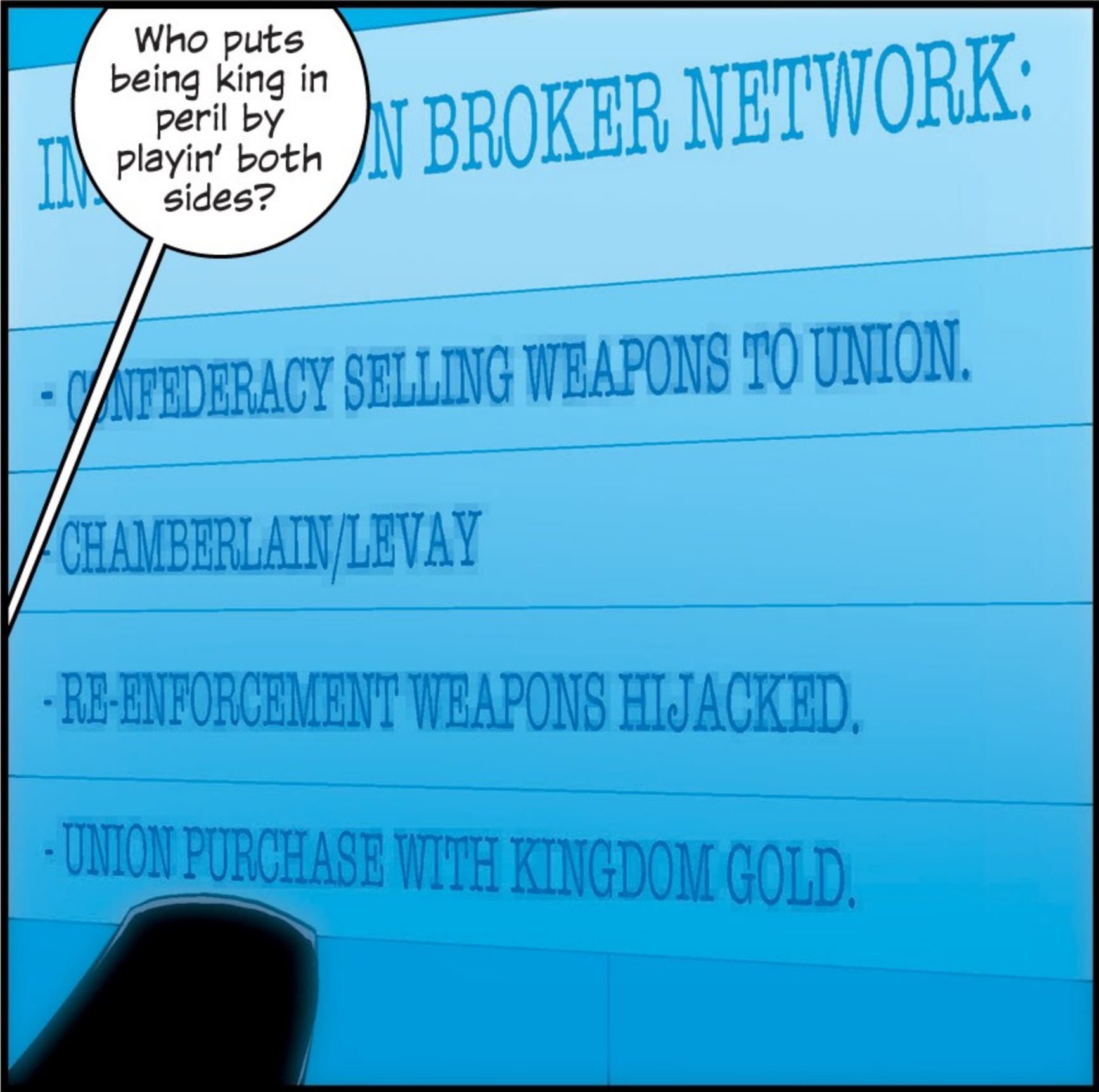
Well...



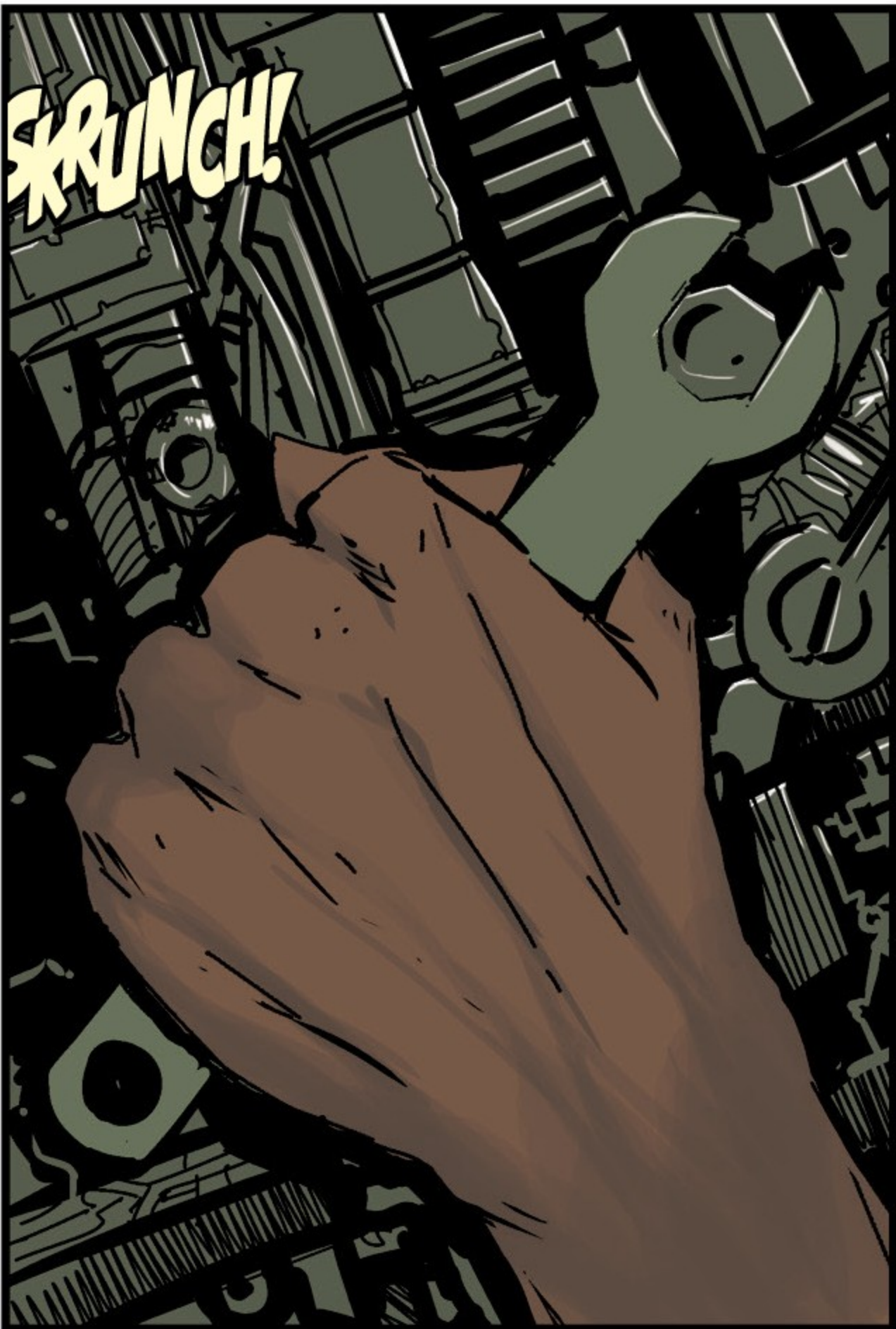
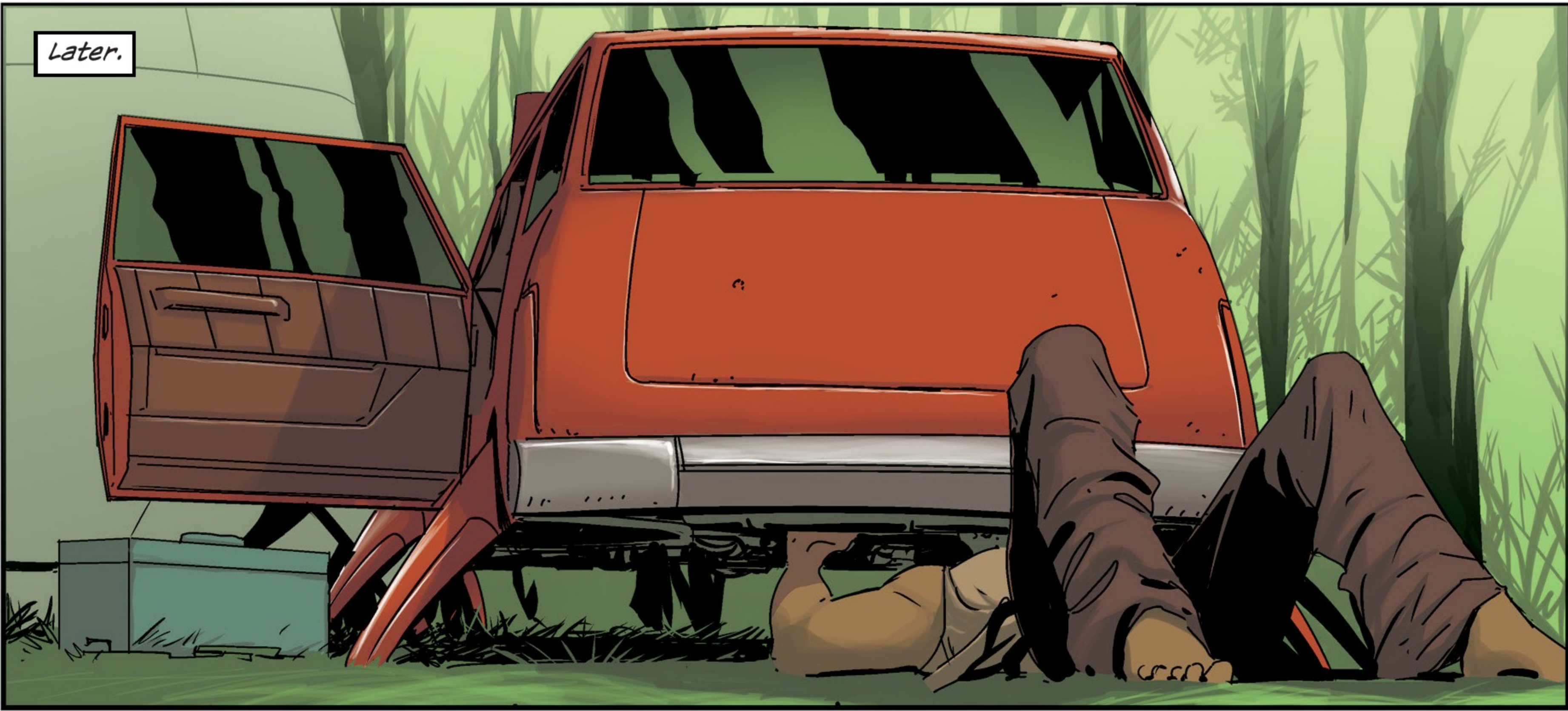
Found
it.













Okay.
Enough!

If you're trying to
sneak up on me, you
should've started
making less noise
two minutes
ago.



Easy,
girl.

I've watchin' you for
twenty...if I had bad
intentions, you'd know
it by now.

Why
are you
here?

I
followed
the
gold.



You hear
that?

This gimpy old
man just asked
me to shoot
him.

Any
reason why I
shouldn't?



Maybe. He and I have met before.
He was with Bel Solomon at the
last conclave before the walls
came tumbling down.

You
here for
us? For
me?



I'm huntin'
Chosen.



Oh.

Come
on in.



Later.

...so, to put down the rebellion she had been ordered to suppress, Antonia needed the money to buy weapons, so she called the Prince...



Who raided the royal coffers against -- it's safe to assume -- his father's wishes. To help his fellow *Chosen*.

Unfortunately for them, we're working for the other side, so I did some raiding of my own.

Is that so?



Uh-huh. I feel terrible about it.

Can't sleep at night.

So why'd you quit the great game?



'Cause I gotta' say, seems out of character for the kinda people the sport usually attracts.



There's a thing we did. I was good at.

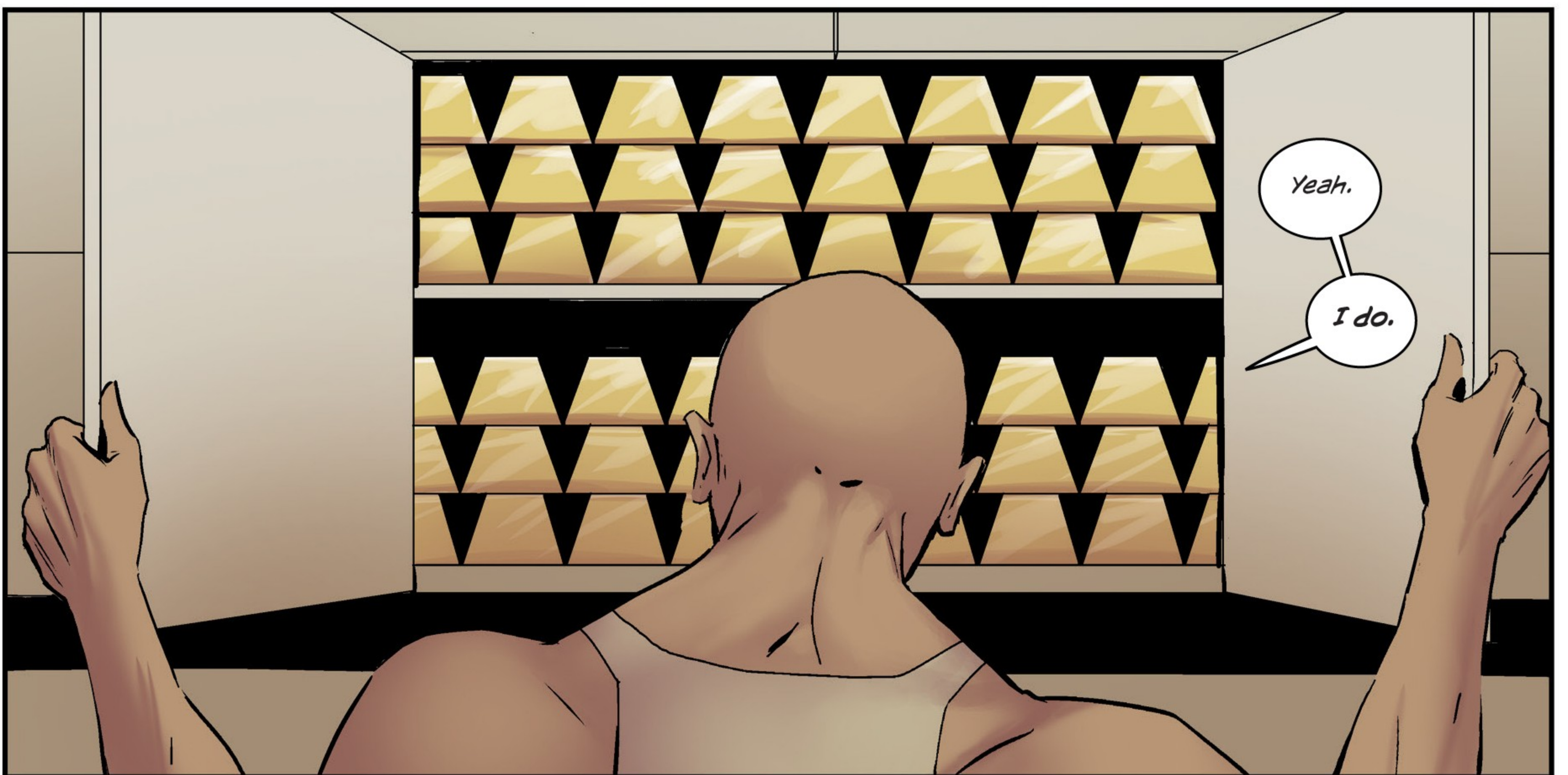
Pit one group of people against another. Each side fanatically believing what they're saying and completely in denial about what other people are.

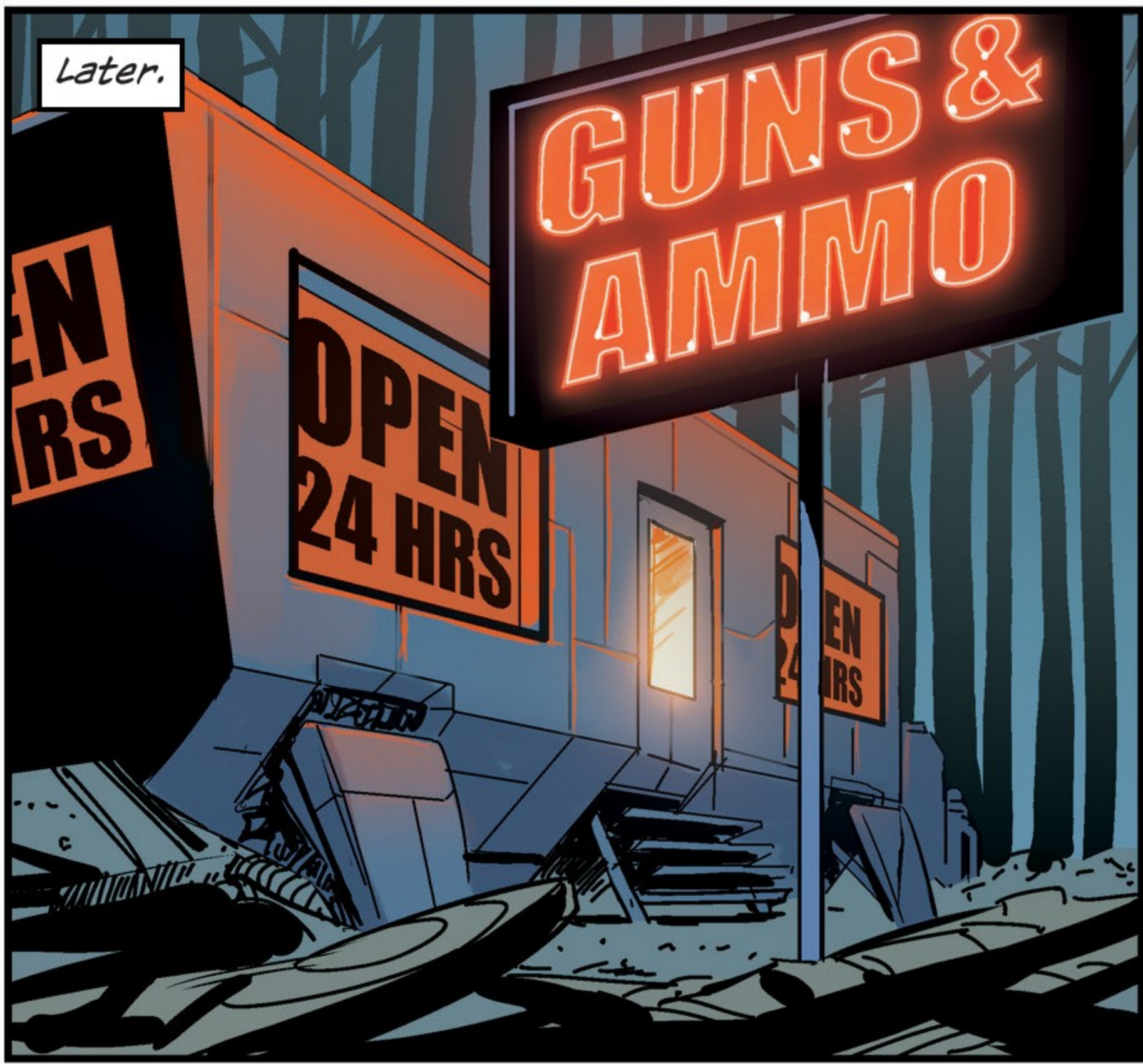


How do you win that kind of argument? How do you reason with that kind of person?

You don't. You can't.

You just sit back and watch them eat each other. And the whole time both are just ignorant of what you're really doing.



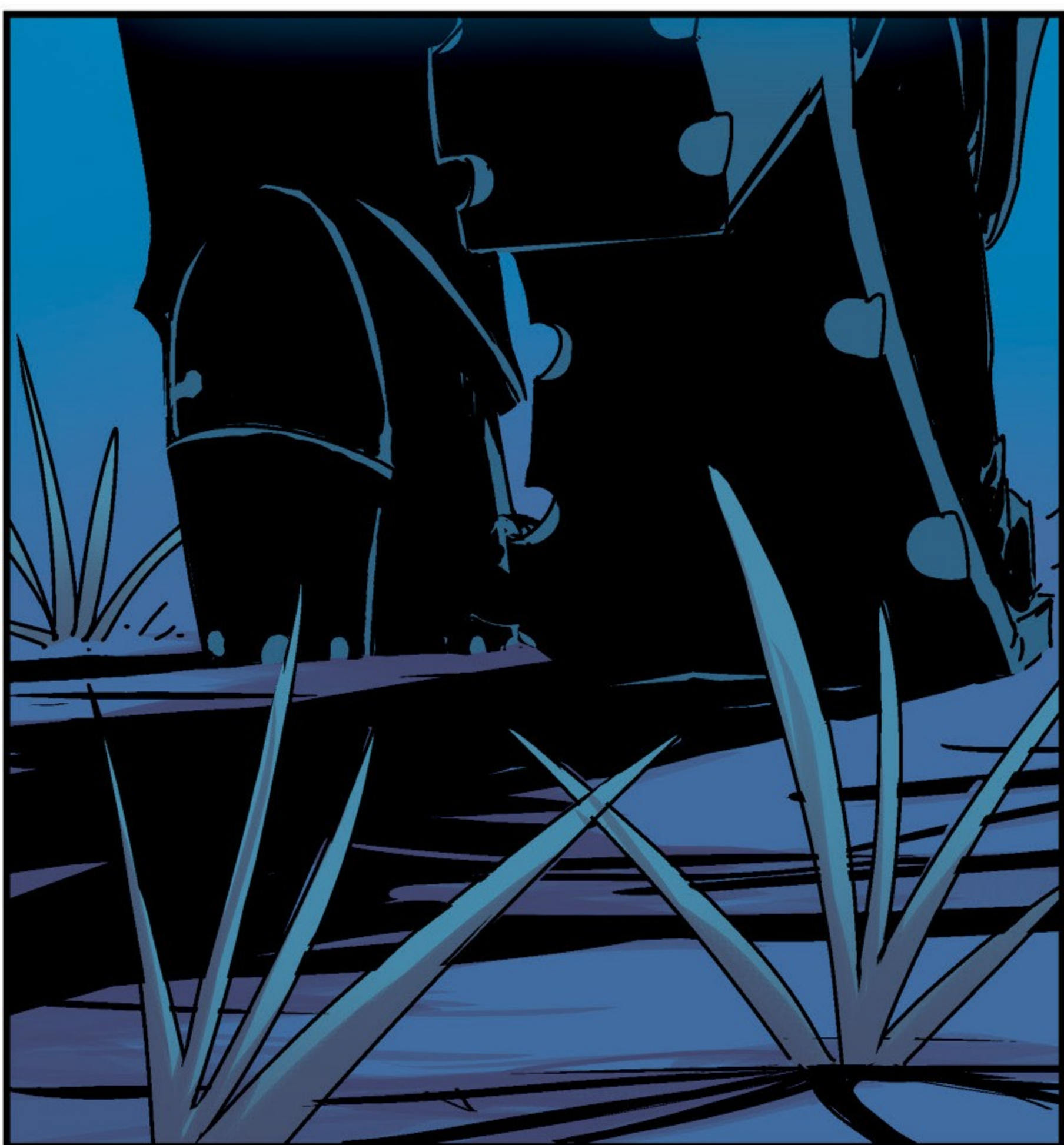


Later.

CH-
CHHUNNK!

CH-
CHHUNNK!

CH-CHHUNNK!
CH-CHHUNNK!
CH-
CHHUNNK!



"One last time."





The Kingdom of New Orleans.

The Royal District.

*Gotta
tell you...*

*I'm
not much for
chitchat, so if
you're wantin' to
talk this out,
I dunno...*

*I really
can't see
things goin'
that way.*





Old man...
do you seriously
think anyone here
is interested in
stimulating
conversation?



Yeah.
I do.



'Cause I've spent
years starin' down
bad men with
death in their eyes
who wanted nothin'
more than to see
me *buried* and
gone.

To think I don't
know the difference
between *that* and a
buncha well-dressed,
soft boys playin'
hard at bein' **hard**
is an insult to
everything
I am.



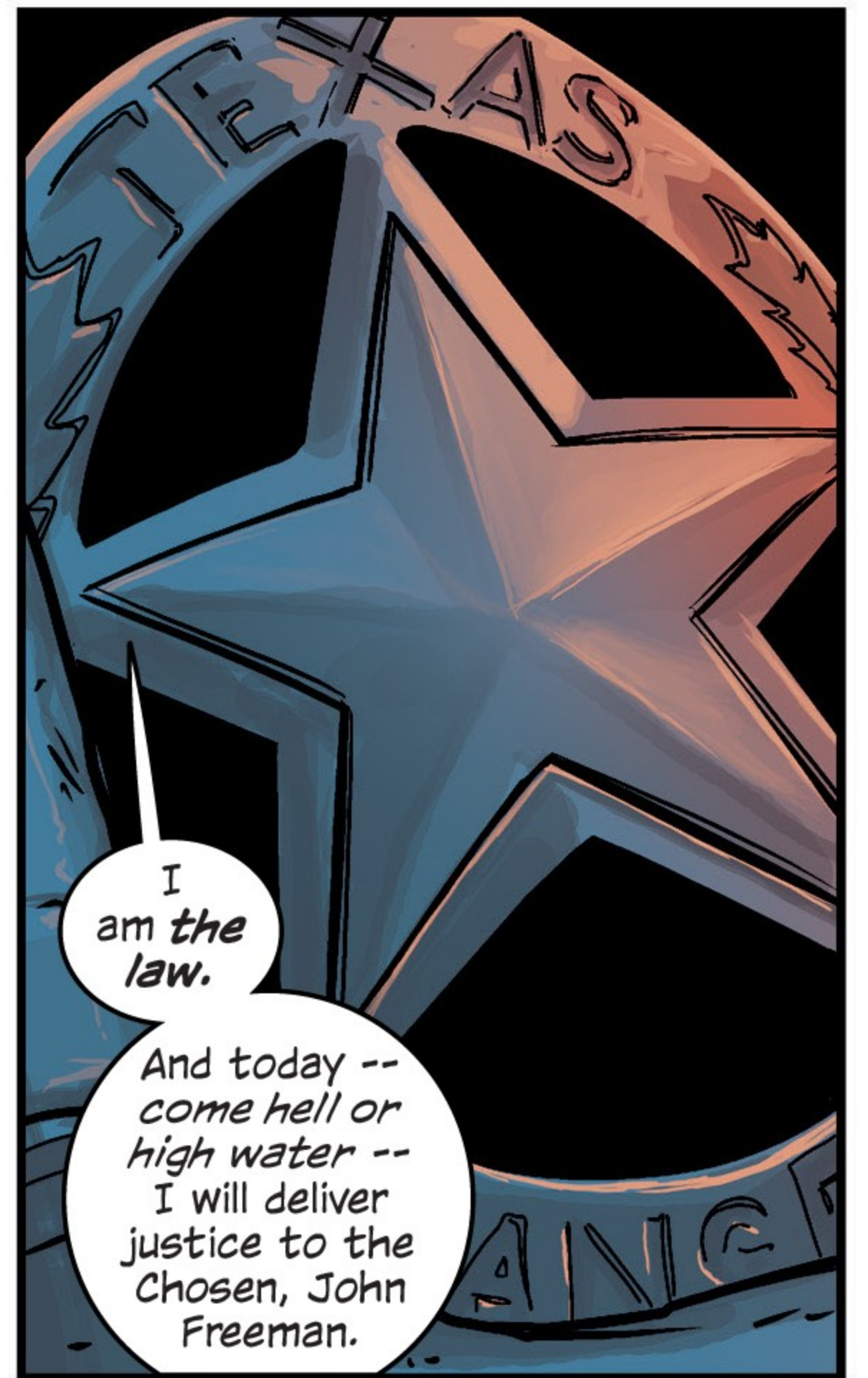
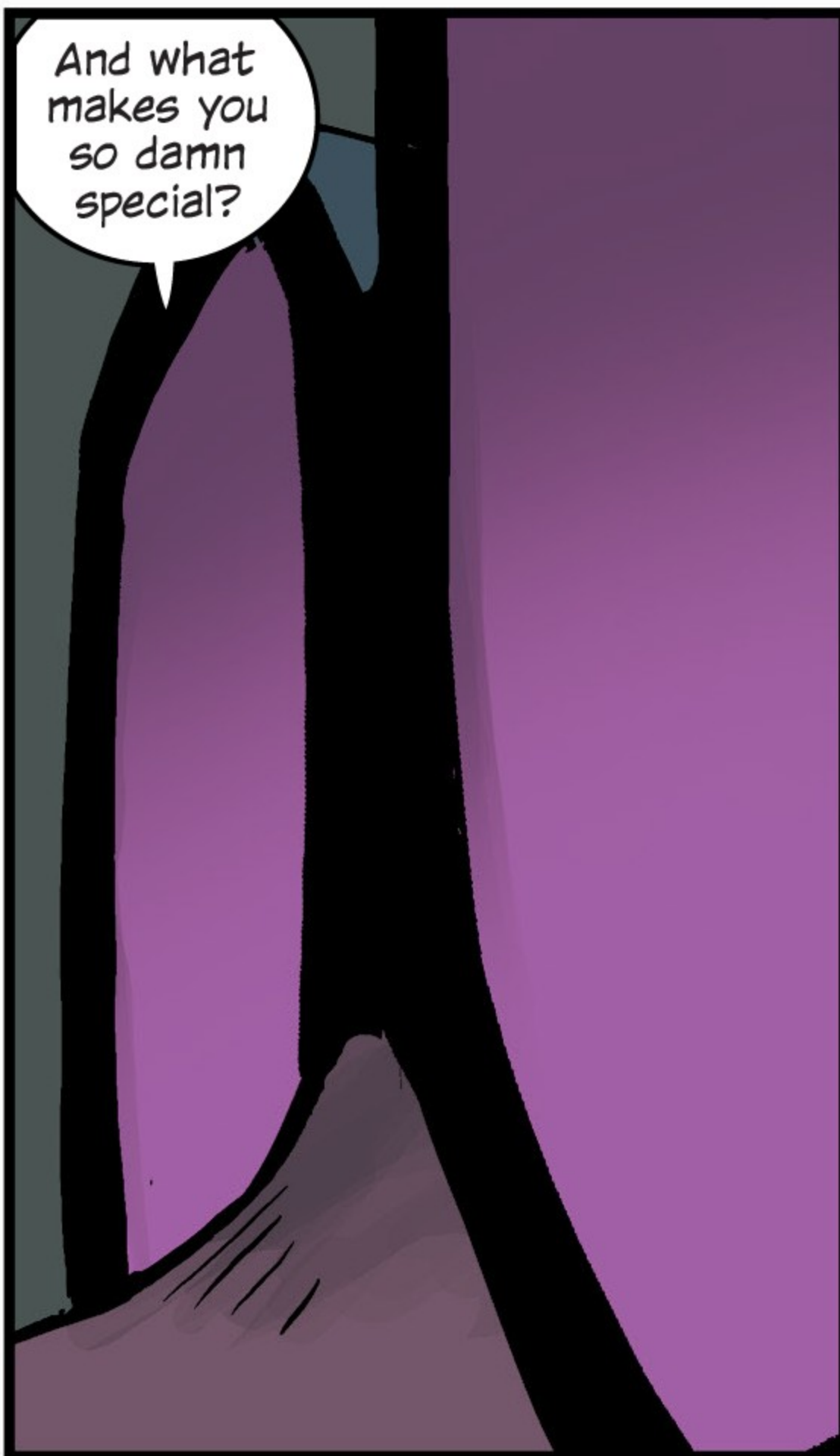
Heh. All
right. I'll
bite, you
crusty
bastard...

Who are
you? And
what do you
want?



Well, today I'm that
bad man...the one with
death in his eyes, and
the best weapons
money can buy...

And I
want nothin'
more than
to watch
someone
bleed out.



HE **STOLE** WHAT WAS
YOURS AND GAVE IT TO YOUR
ENEMY.







HOW CAN YOU CALL
THIS **MAN** YOUR **SON**?

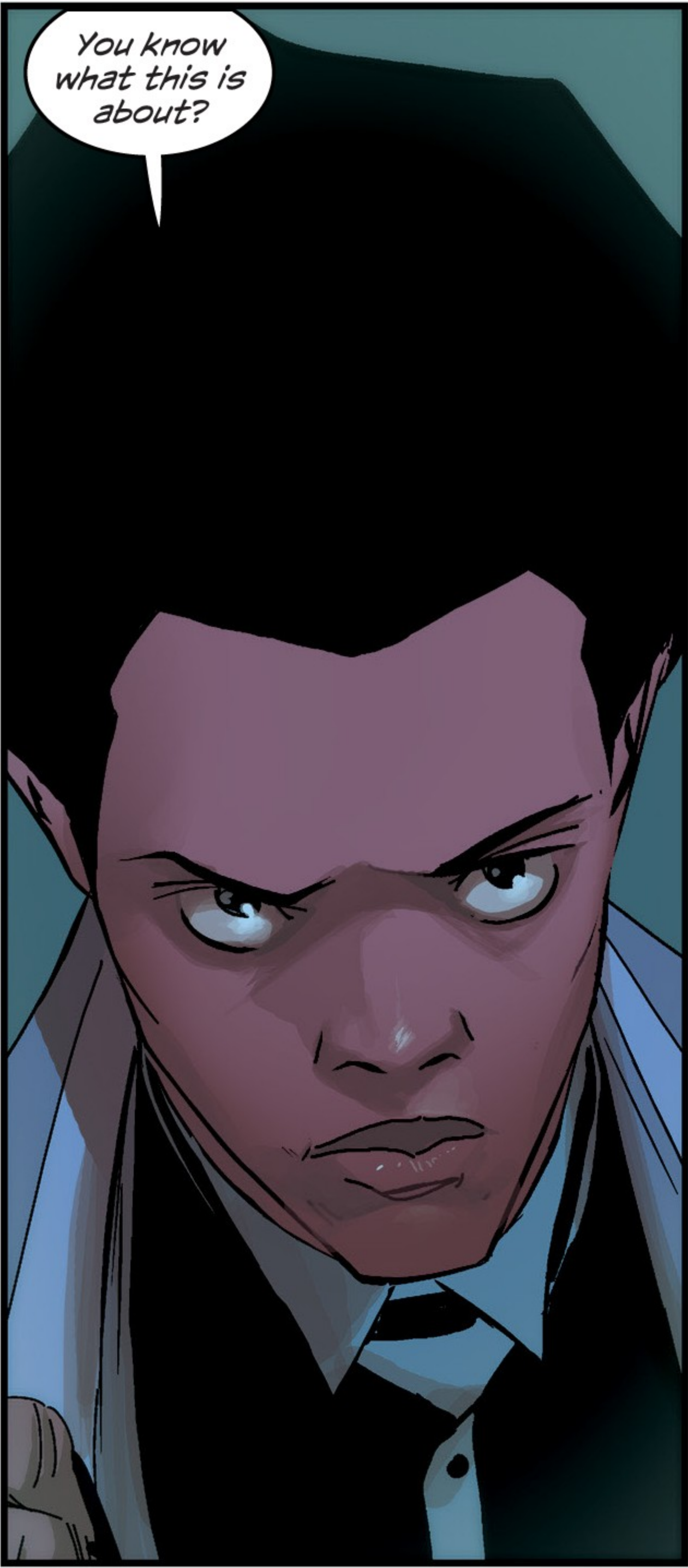
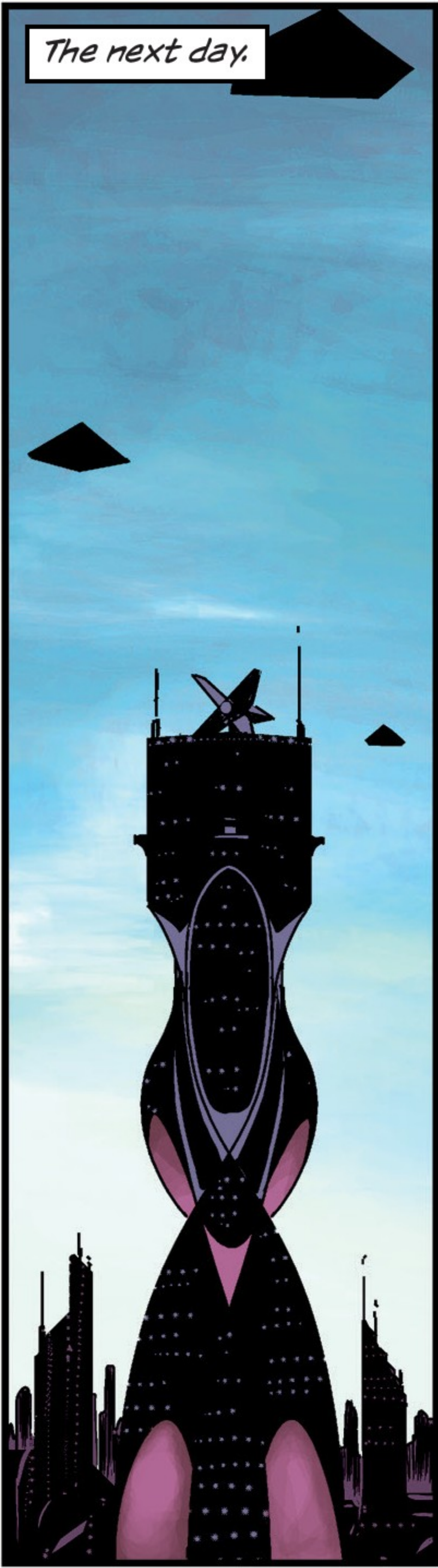


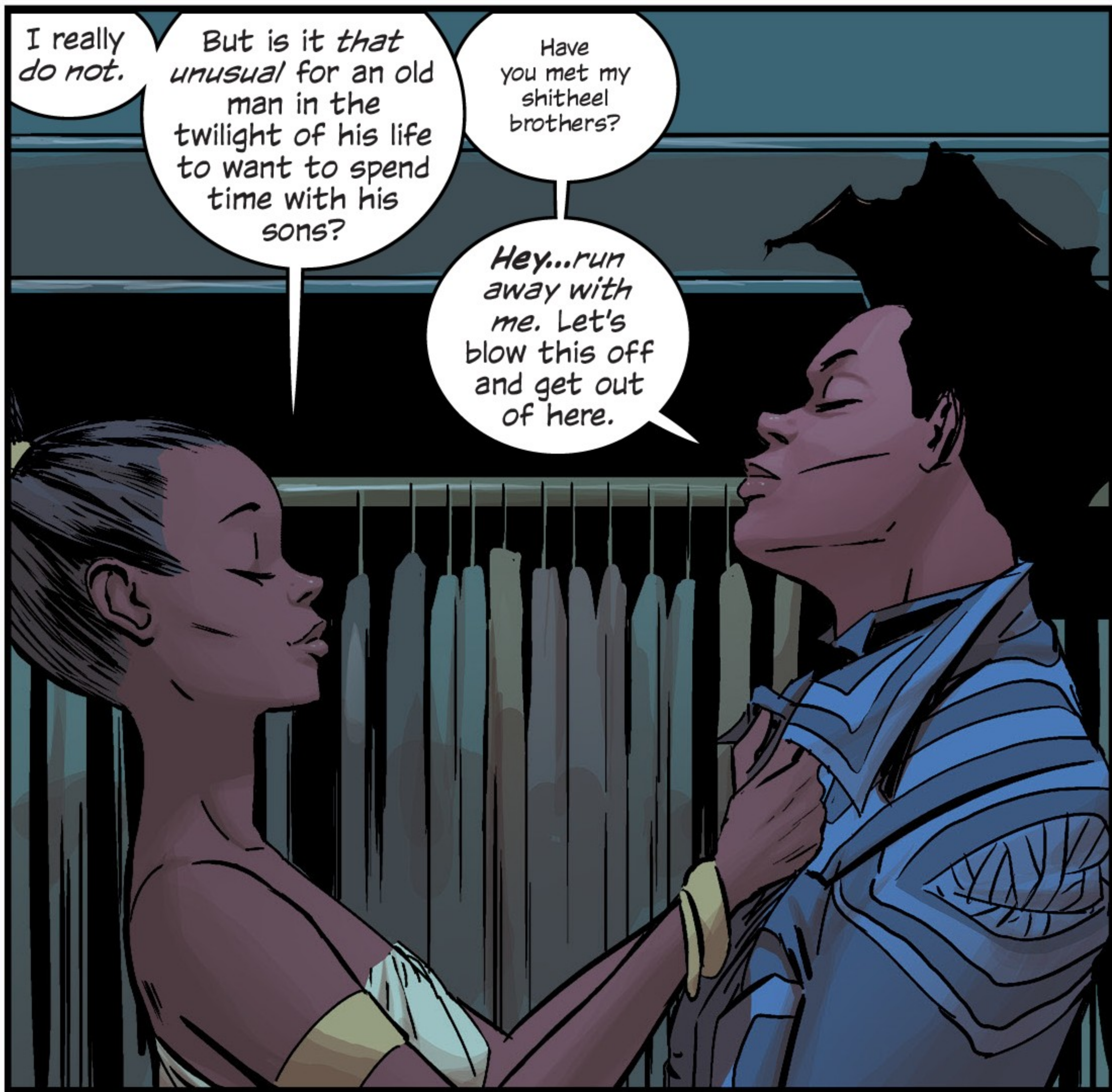


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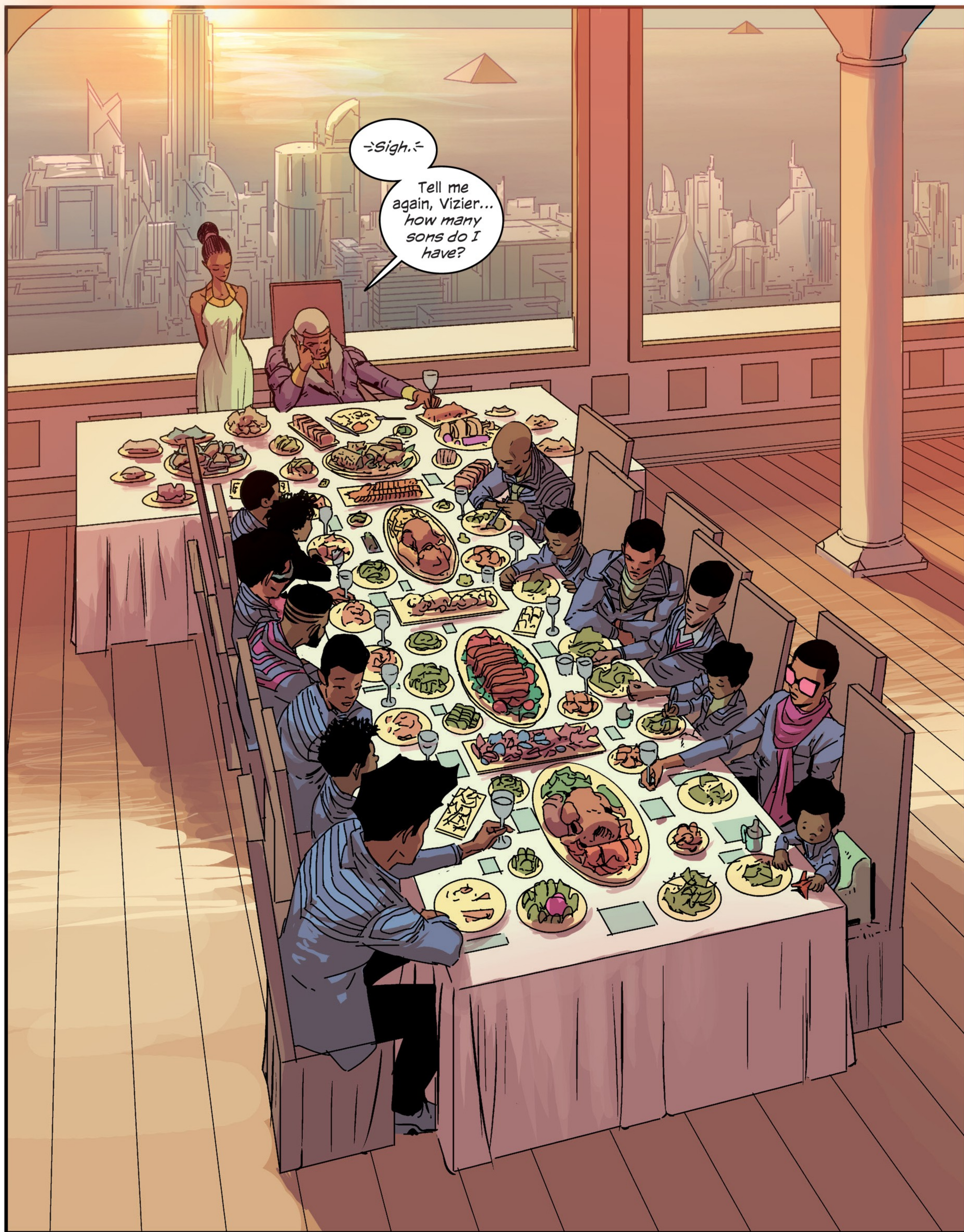


**THIRTY-EIGHT:
THE ONCE AND
FUTURE KING**





The Royal Palace.







A toast. To the Kingdom! Which will stand forever and ever...

Long may the king reign and *something something whatever... let's drink!*



Juuuice!



Did you hear the news about Mao's army? They're crossing the plains and are expected to meet resistance soon.

There's going to be a war. *It's inevitable.*



I wouldn't worry too much about her or her army of simple folk.

I doubt they're prepared for the realities of what's waiting for them.



Is that so?

And how would you know that, brother?



Are you privy to some secret knowledge?

He *doesn't* know anything special...



Nothing of any weight. No one of any consequence.



All of you get out.

Except you, John.

Stay.

What's wrong, Father?

I have allowed you
your indiscretions --
*as all princes deserve
their day in the sun*
-- but the time has
come to put that
aside.

You need
to make a
decision,
son.





I thought
you said this
was just
dinner?



I thought
it was.

I don't--



She has
nothing to
do with this,
John.

You're
talking to
me alone.
The king...



*Your
king.*

And I'm asking
you to put away --
for once and for all
time -- this
infatuation you have
with your religion...your
Message, whatever you
call that...*nonsense.*



It's not
nonsense.
It's real.

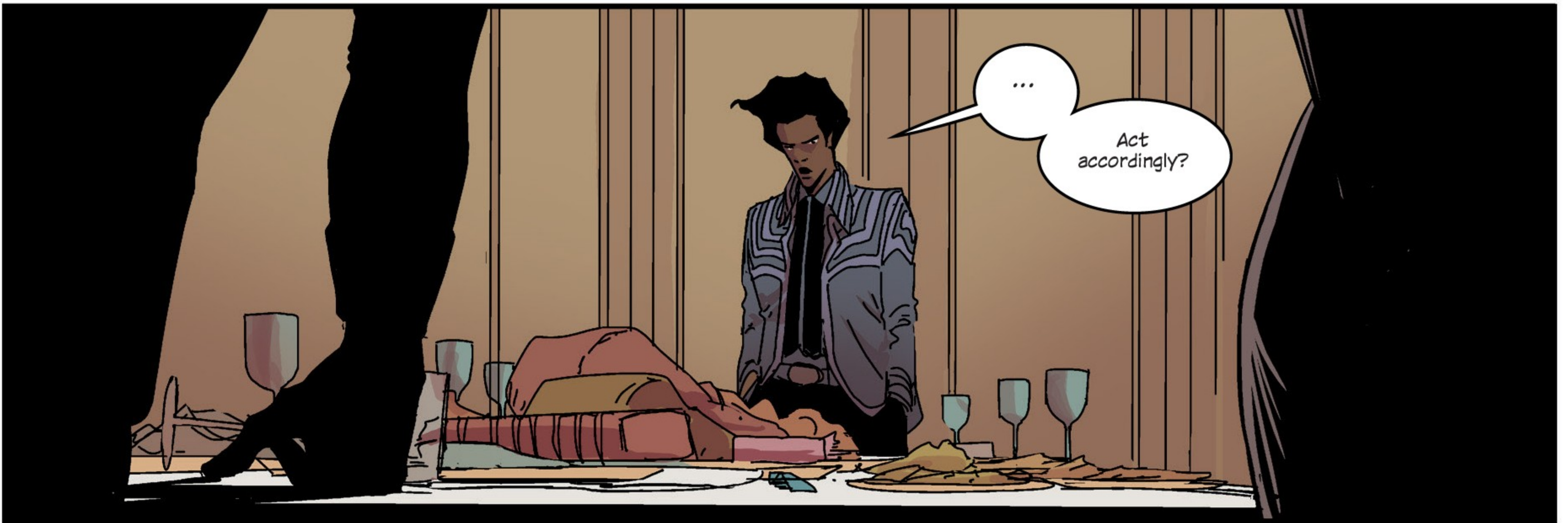
It's what
I *believe.*



*I am real.
Believe in
me, boy!*

There is
war in the air
and it is fueled by
fanatics and true
believers of all
stripes. Including
your own.

You will put
this aside for
me. Because I
am your king and
you will *obey.*



Later.

Yeah?

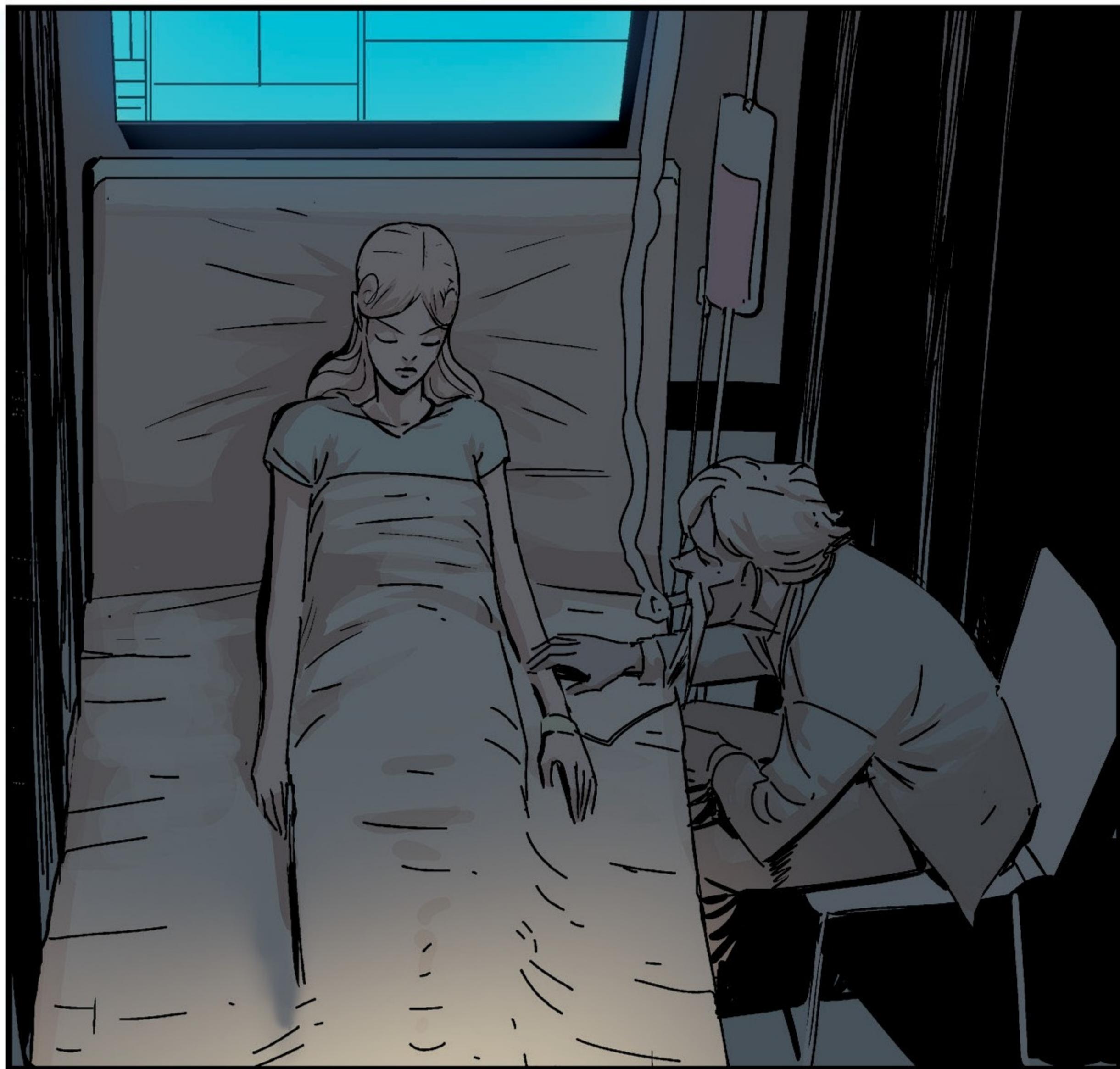
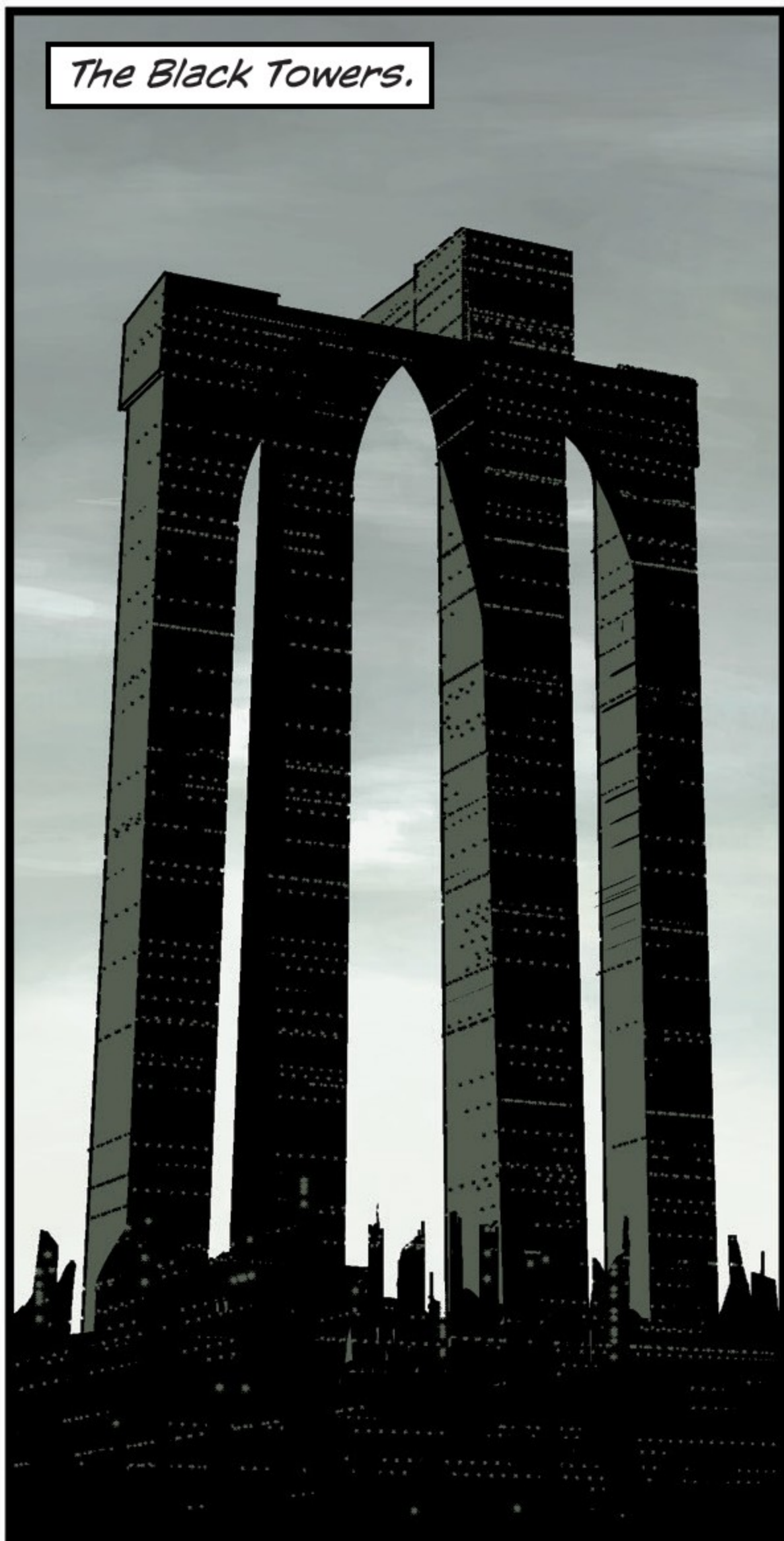


I want
to talk to
you...

About
justice.



The Black Towers.



PSSHT!



Mister President,
here's the
prisoner you
requested.

Prisoner?
No, no...



Take a good look at the man standing there before you. That is *the* Bel Solomon. *The great man of Texas*. A goddamned *titan* if the world has ever seen one.

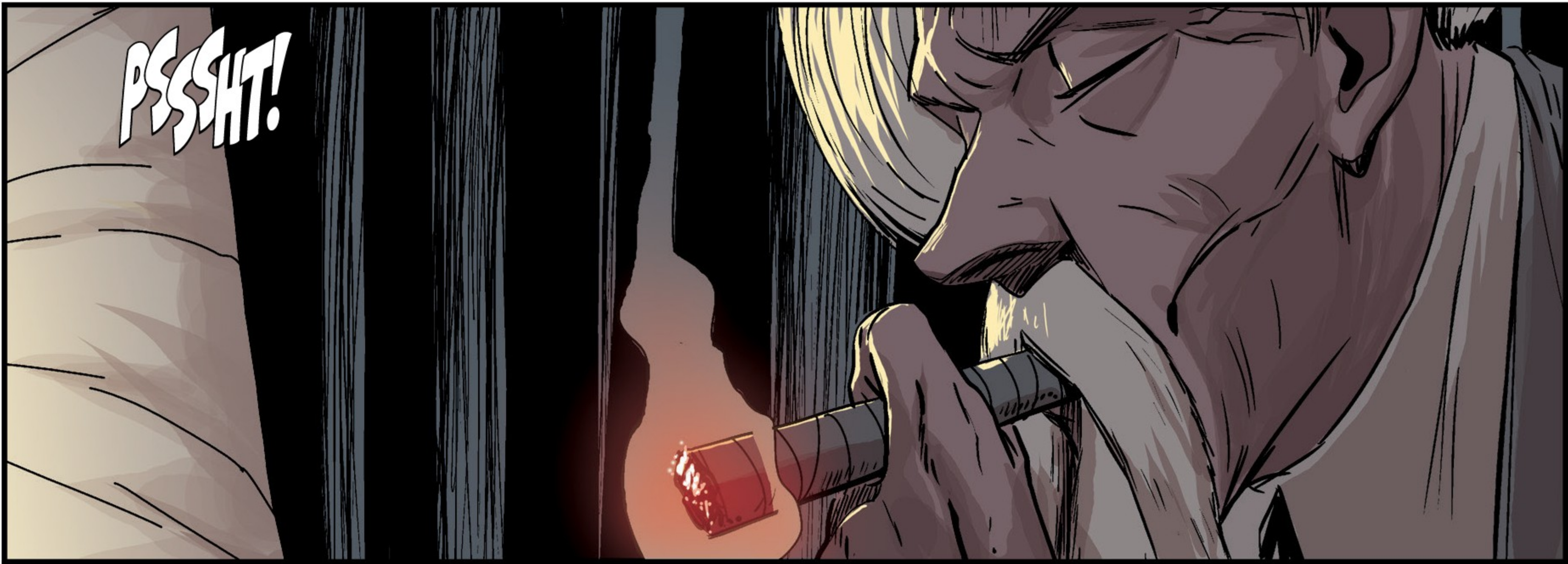
Go to hell, Archibald.



See? Such familiarity. You boys can leave now.

For there is no danger here...only *mutual respect* and *undying admiration*.

Isn't that right, old friend?



PSSHT!



Constance has been in a coma since the day you joined us here, Bel.

She just lays there -- like some kind of frail angel beyond the restorative powers of man. It seems her well-being rests entirely in the hands of some higher power.



Well, I'm
sorry about
that. *I*
truly am.

But if
you *truly*
cared...maybe
you should have
left her out of
all this.



You knew what you
were doing...and
you knew how bad
it could get before
you got what you
wanted...

*But all that
mattered was
you becoming
president.*



You think
I did all
this for
that?

My god,
man...we've spent
decades in the
company of one
another and it's like
you barely even
know me. This
doesn't stop at a
presidency...

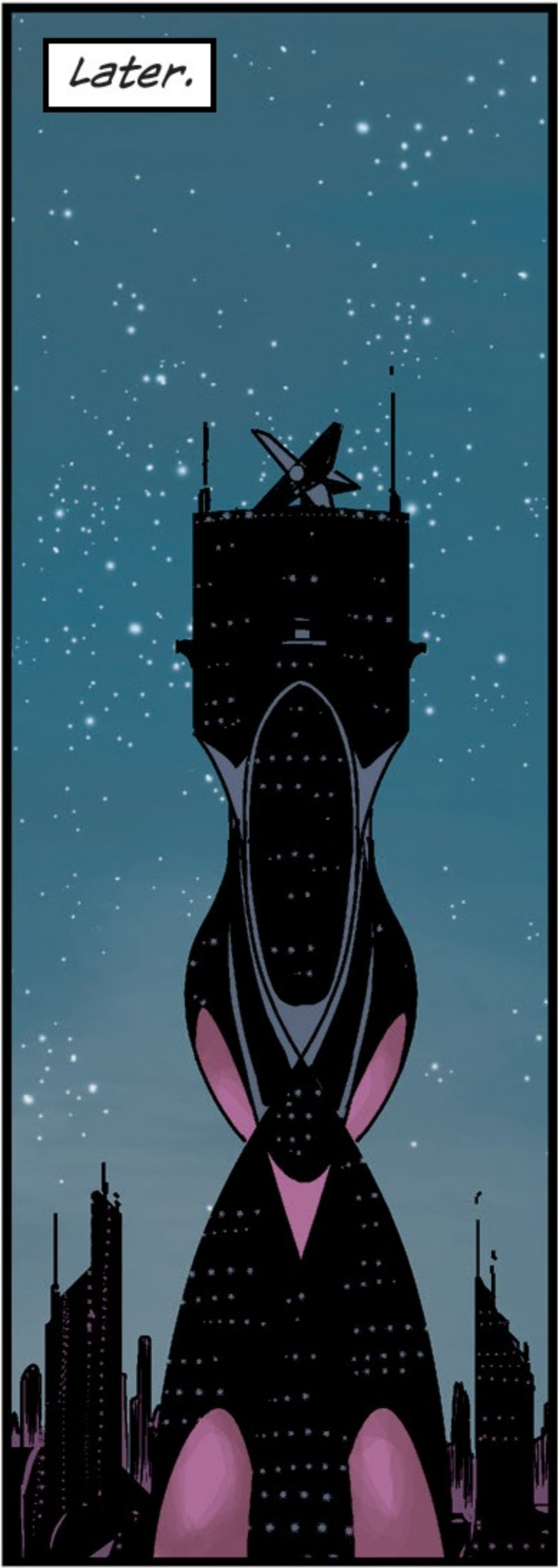
*I'm just
getting
started,
Bel...*

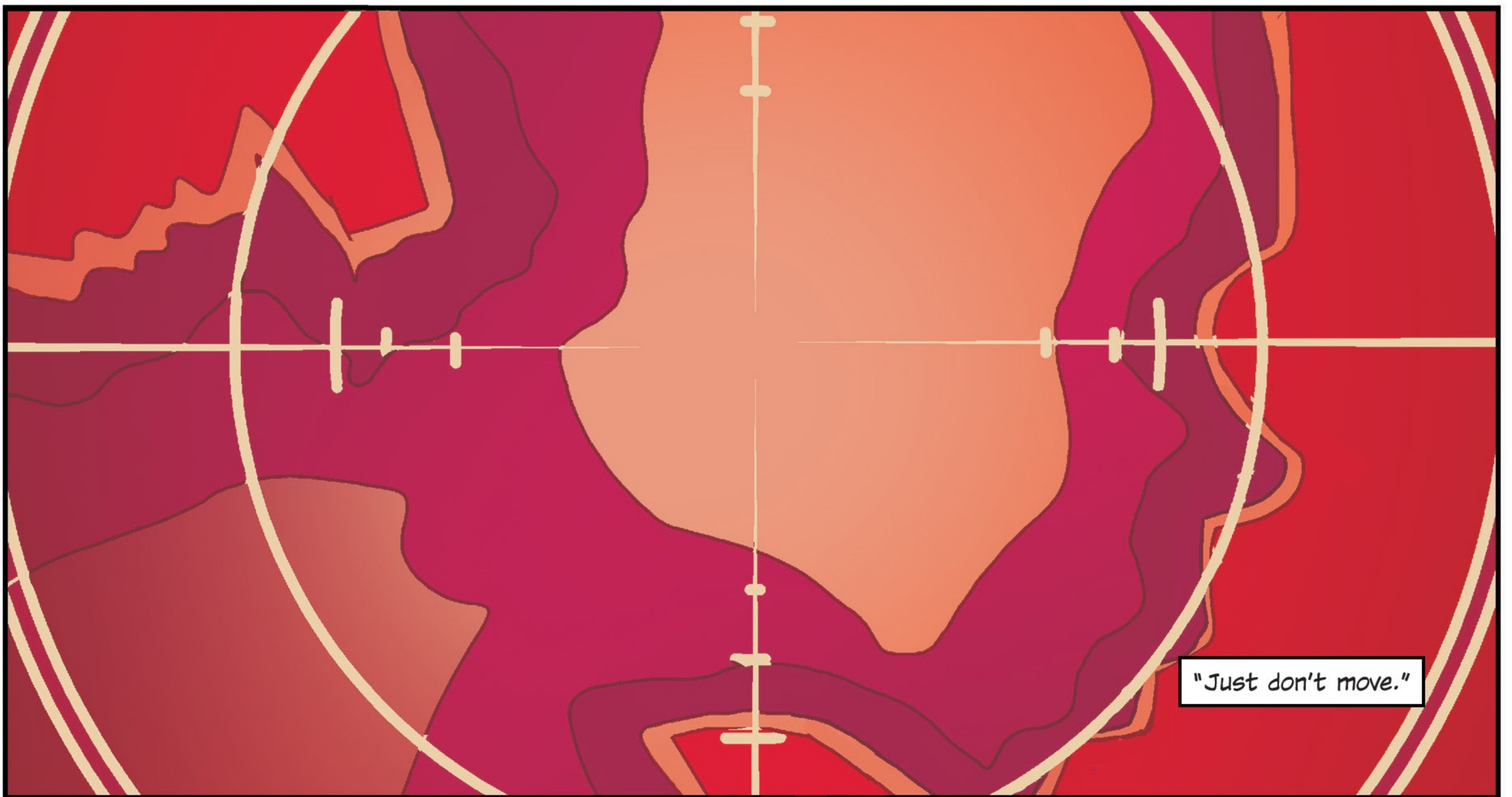


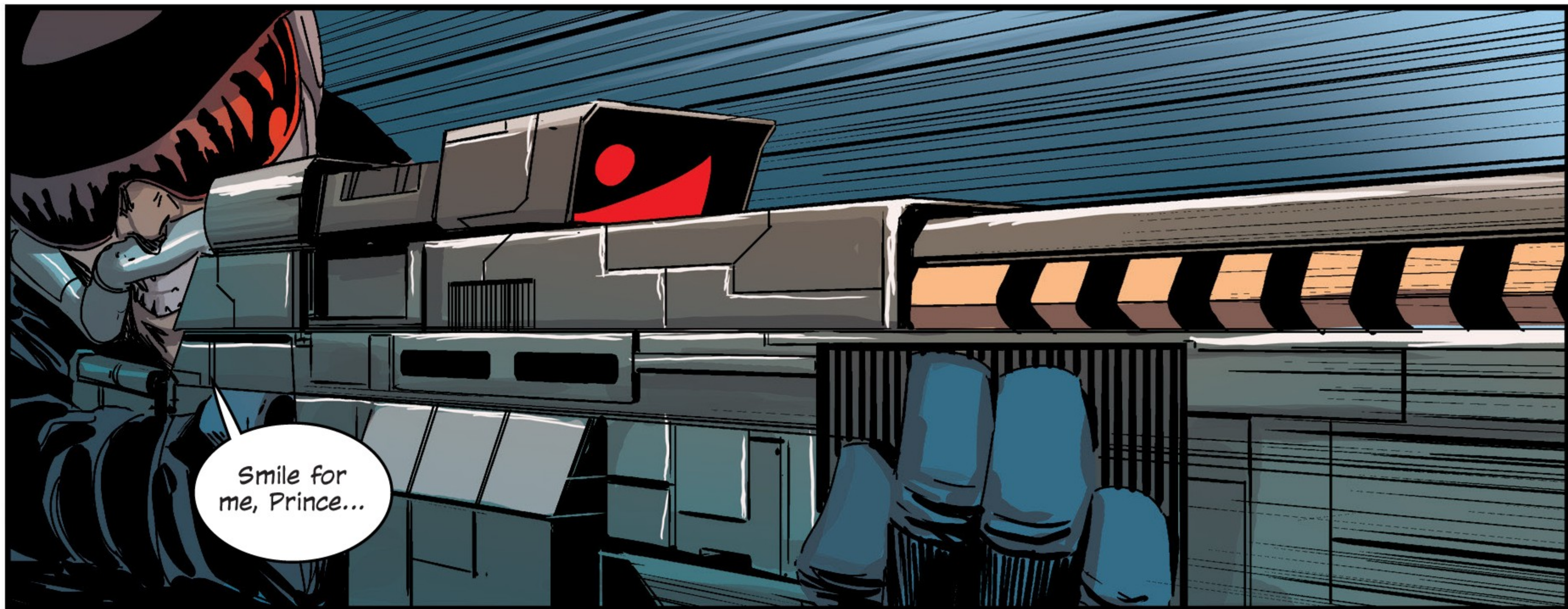
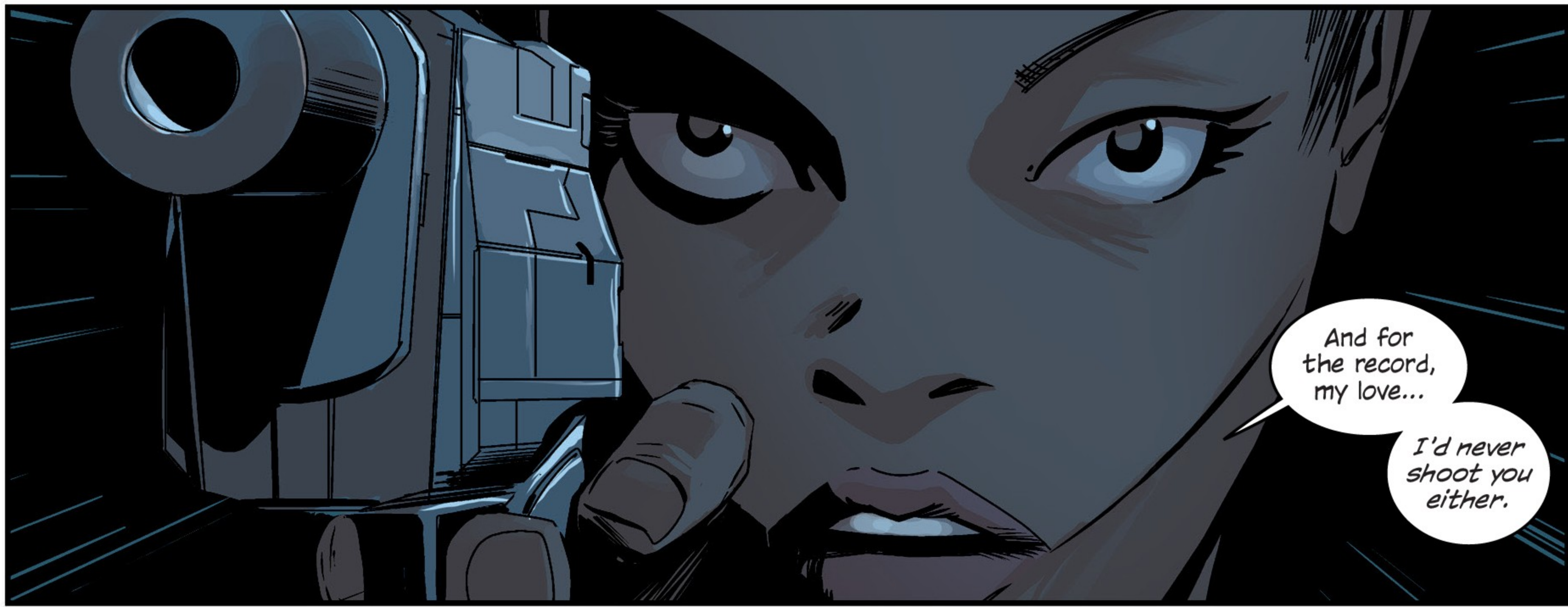
And I will lay
down the lives
of all I hold
dear to win.

*Just you
watch...*

I have
something
special planned
for this world.
*Something
special
indeed.*









There.

And now
only two
more to
go.



Vizier?



Yes,
my
King?



Tell
me...

How
many
sons do I
have?



*Thirteen,
my King...*

Thirteen.





ALL MEN TELL **LIES**.
THESE ARE A **FEW** OF
THEM.



Jonathan Hickman is the visionary talent behind such works as the Eisner-nominated **NIGHTLY NEWS**, **THE MANHATTAN PROJECTS** and **PAX ROMANA**. He also plies his trade at MARVEL working on books like **FANTASTIC FOUR** and **THE AVENGERS**.

His twin brother, Marc, was just named the PGA caddie of the year.

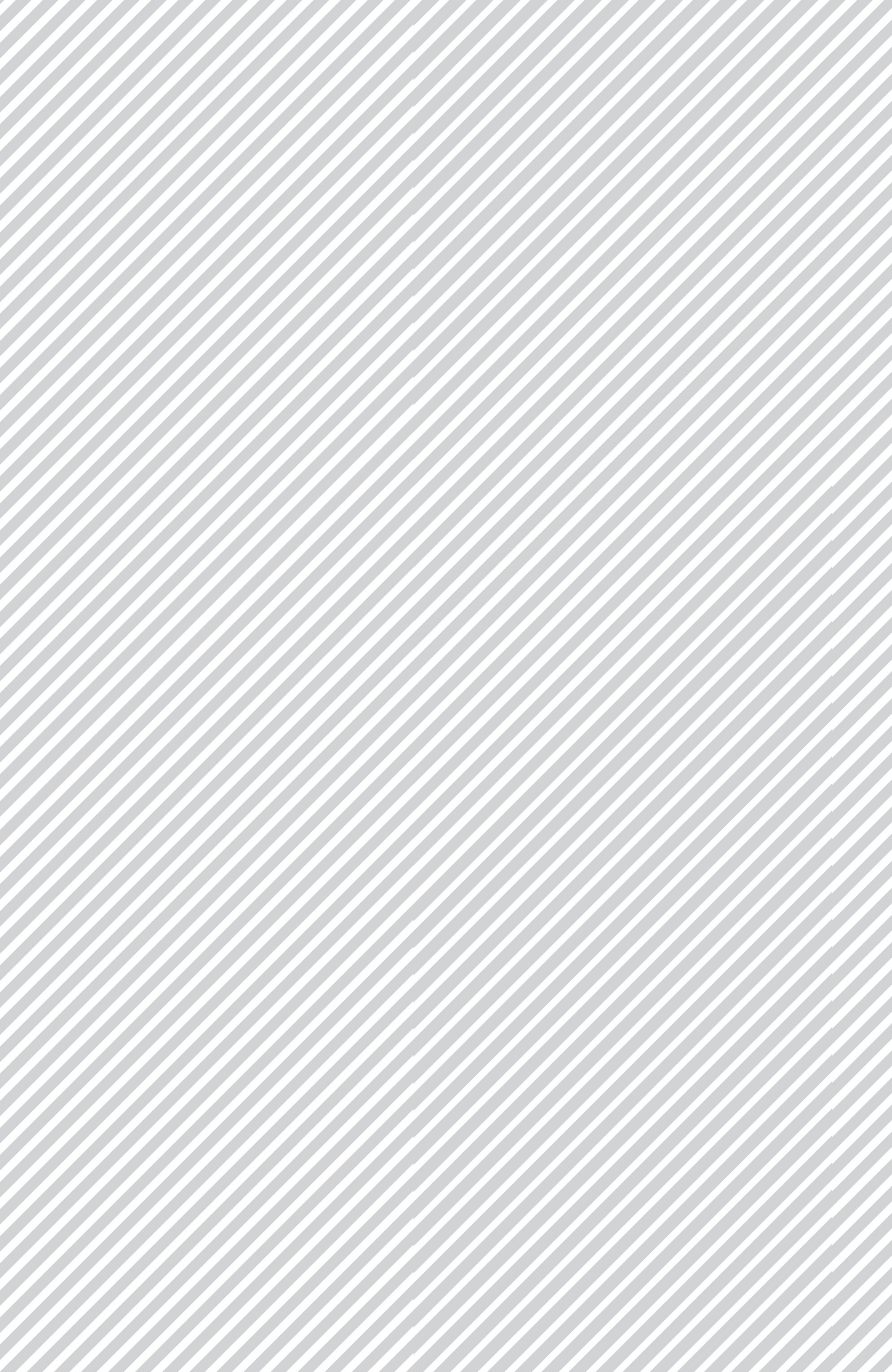
Jonathan lives in South Carolina except when he doesn't.

You can visit his website: ***www.pronea.com***, or email him at: ***jonathan@pronea.com***.

.

Nick Dragotta's career began at Marvel Comics working on titles as varied as **X-STATIX**, **THE AGE OF THE SENTRY**, **X-MEN: FIRST CLASS**, **CAPTAIN AMERICA: FOREVER ALLIES** and **VENGEANCE**.

In addition, Nick is the co-creator of **HOWTOONS**, a comic series teaching kids how to build things and explore the world around them. **EAST OF WEST** is Nick's first creator-owned project at Image.



WE WOULD TELL YOU TO
PRAY, BUT IT WOULDN'T
DO ANY GOOD.

YOU HAVE EARNED WHAT
IS COMING TO YOU.



RATED **T+** / TEEN PLUS
SCIENCE FICTION / DYSTOPIAN