

SANTA'S WORKSHOP (TINSELTOP'S RESIDENCE)  
SOMETIMES IT'S GOOD TO JUST CHAT AND TELL STORIES AROUND THE FIREPLACE.

... still have a hard time some days with the idea that it's real!

Might as well find out the tooth fairy is real, or the Easter bunny! I mean, these are stories!

Myths, in fact.

You humans love to make up myths. It's really cute. But that doesn't mean there isn't something true behind them.

REVI

NOELLE

TINSELTOP

EYEBLOSS

Though I think you make up a lot of them to sell something.

To get people to come to a church service, or go see a particular movie, or buy a product ... or a watch a television show that wants you to buy products ...

Yeah. Like those old specials they're still hauling out every year ... "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" ... "Frosty the Snowman" ... "The Year Without a Santa Claus" --

That one really happened though.

It did??

Kind of.

Tinseltop's True Tales of Transformation

'Kind of' is being too polite. They changed it a lot.

It was Tinseltop's first job as troubleshooter.

I am not a troubleshooter.

Anyway, they had to clean it up. You couldn't have shown it to kids the way it actually happened.

Ok, now we've got to hear the story.

OK, but it'll take a while.

How long ago was this?

You know we're all really bad at human timekeeping. I mean, we know when Christmas is ... but how many years since something happened ... ugh.

Well, the show was ... in the mid-1970's? I think?

So at least a year before that, then. Somebody had to have enough time to leak some of the details to those people.

You know how the boss does. He gets itchy during the run-up to the big ride and gripes about bad children and ingratitude and change and so on.

That year was the worst any of us had ever seen him.

I tell you, I can't do it!

I just can't make myself. Another year and for what? The world doesn't care who's naughty or nice anymore. No one even notices!

But they'll certainly notice if I don't come. That's what really gets me. I'm obliged to go to the effort every year, yet they don't feel obliged to do a thing about being better people!

What is the point of rewards, then? What is the point of punishments?

Kris ...

That's what needs to happen. I'll sit out this year! No Christmas! Then they might appreciate what they're missing.

Kris.

I don't believe any of that, and I don't think you really do either.

What I do think is you've been pacing around in here fretting too much, and it's eating your brain.

The ride is still weeks away, production's on track, everything's good ... why don't you take a few days off?

Go down below, do something fun for a while. Relax. Clear your head.

-- grumble -- Fine. I'll go.

But I don't expect it'll change my mind about this.

We can discuss that when you get back.





Rain-kissed night, like the tears of an abandoned lover.

Wandering damp and cold along the streets, dodging phantoms. Lost souls all around me.

I try to help them, when I can. That's my job. My name's Bishop. Nick Bishop. I'm a private investigator.

Oooohweee!!



My man, that is a look!

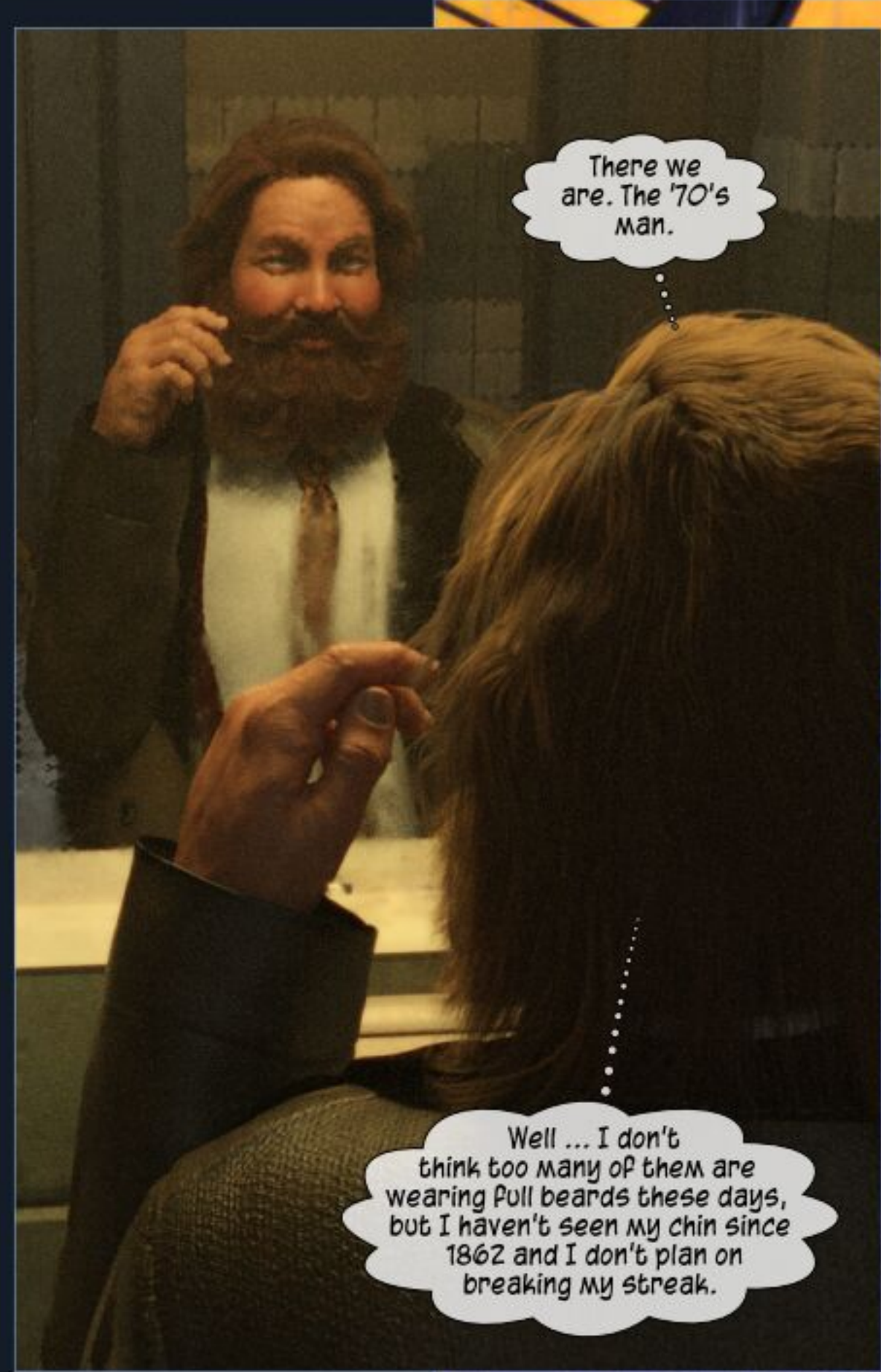
Christmas is coming! You need to go get yourself a gig playing Santa Claus! Easy money!

I ... ah ... I've been told that.



Normally I wouldn't mind, but I'd hate to have somebody wonder why Santa's out carousing ...

Might be nice to have my old hairline back for a little while ... get some color back into it too ...



There we are. The '70's man.

Well ... I don't think too many of them are wearing full beards these days, but I haven't seen my chin since 1862 and I don't plan on breaking my streak.

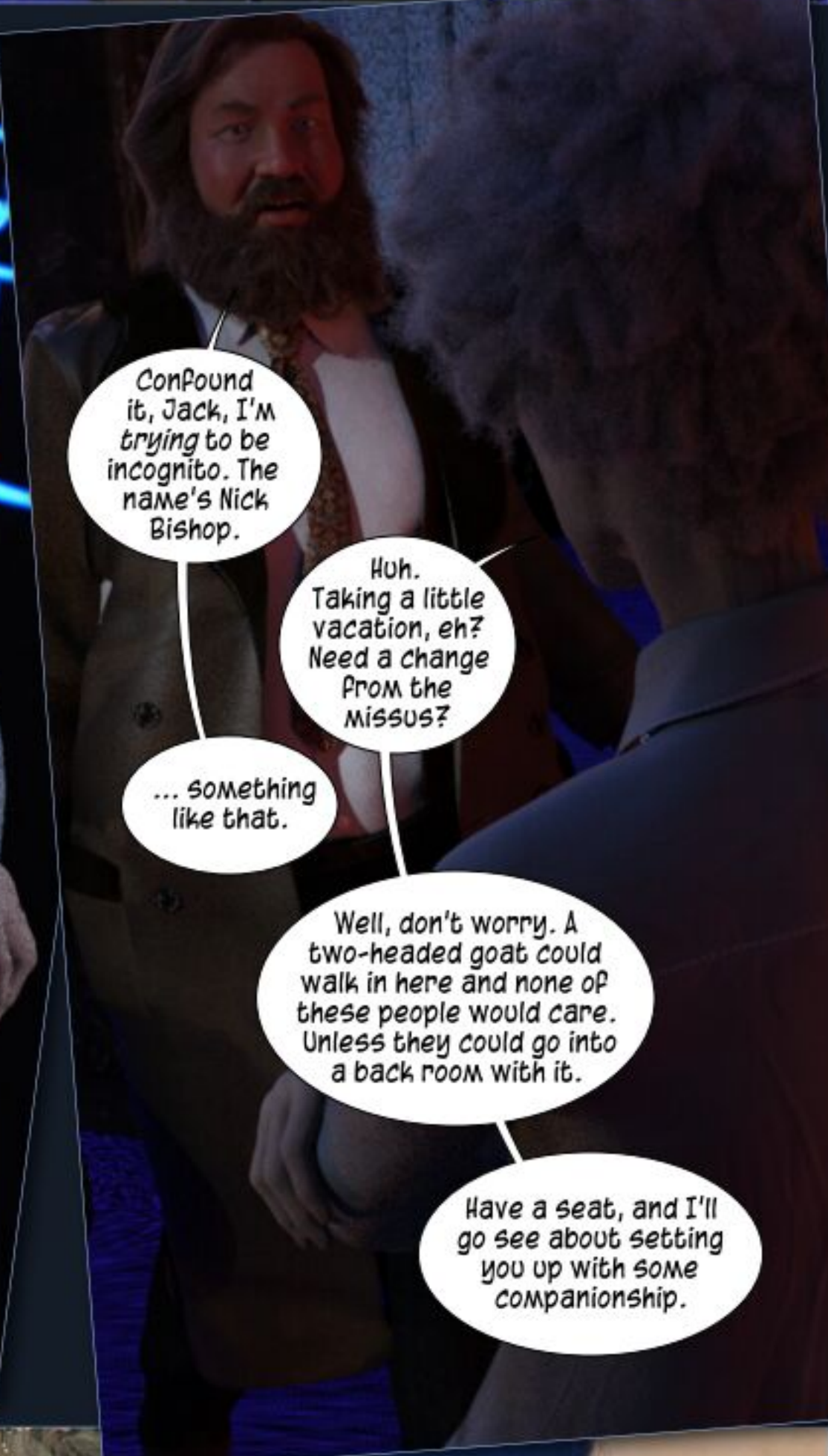


Ever seen him in here before?  
Nope. Looks like a Russian gangster.  
Could just be a Russian diplomat.  
Same thing.

Mr. Kringle! My word.

It's been years. I almost didn't recognize you for a minute there.

But it takes more than a couple of hits of Grecian Formula to fool me. I've known you too long.



Compound it, Jack, I'm trying to be incognito. The name's Nick Bishop.

Huh. Taking a little vacation, eh? Need a change from the missus?

... something like that.

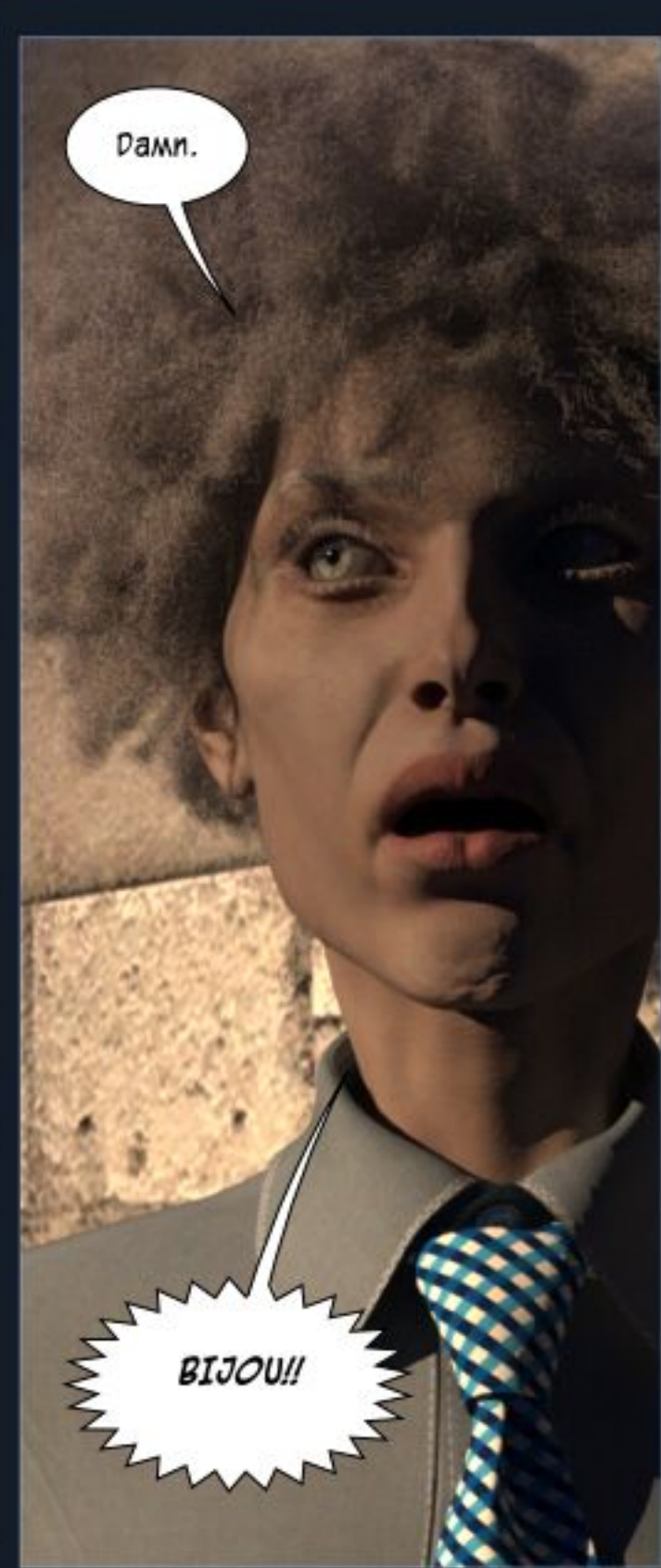
Well, don't worry. A two-headed goat could walk in here and none of these people would care. Unless they could go into a back room with it.

Have a seat, and I'll go see about setting you up with some companionship.



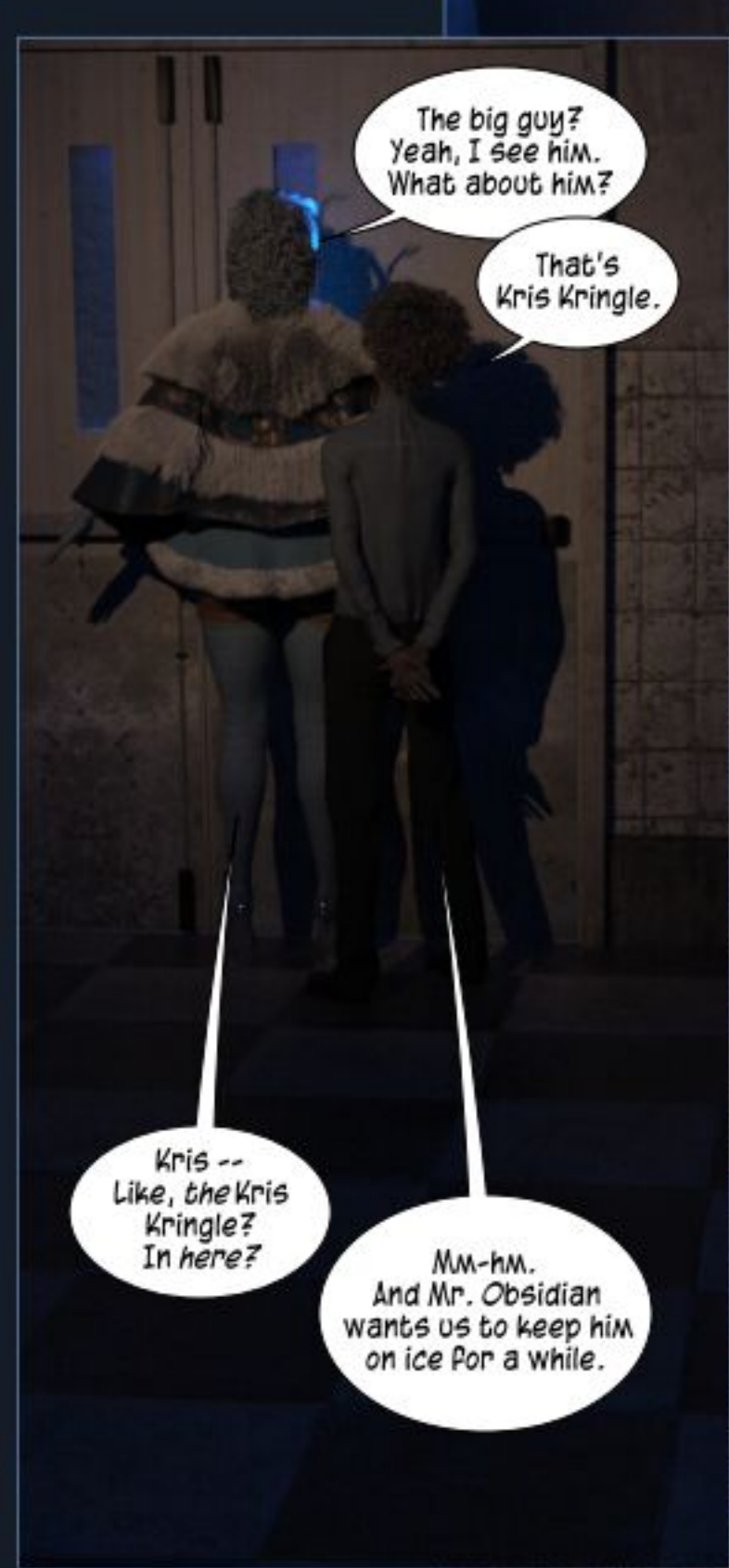
... not going to believe who just walked in, after I don't know how long.  
That's right. The toymaker himself. You said you wanted to know if he ever showed up --

-- you're serious?  
Yes, yes, you're always serious, I know ... well, I can do it, but --  
-- yes, sir. Of course.



Damn.

BIJOU!!



The big guy? Yeah, I see him. What about him?

That's Kris Kringle.

Kris -- Like, the Kris Kringle? In here?

Mw-hm. And Mr. Obsidian wants us to keep him on ice for a while.



Are you nuts? That's a really big -- I mean, you know that's not gonna turn out good.

-- sigh -- Yeah. But do you want to say no to Mr. O?

Jack, I don't even know if the knockout perfume will work on somebody like him! He's, y'know ... he might just shake it off --

No, no, it'll work. Trust me. We just have to catch him when his guard's down. A vulnerable moment.





OK. I'll go tell Nora. She's best at that kind of thing.

Wait!

You can't tell her anything! You probably shouldn't even tell her who he is.

Jack ...

He knows who's naughty and who's nice! If she's in on it, he'll know as soon as he's in a room with her, and he'll bail.

OK, but how the hell am I gonna set her up without telling her what I'm doing?

I'm sure you can come up with something.



Jack ... sometimes you ask for too much.



So, Mr. ah, Bishop ...

... this is Nora. Sorry for the wait.

You two enjoy yourselves, now.



Hang on! First off, how do you know about all that? And second, you're telling me the boss just fell for it? Didn't even get suspicious?

I'm improvising some of this, I admit. I wasn't there. I got some of it later -- we'll get to that -- but also I've gotten where I know how the boss thinks, pretty well. So I can guess.

Frost was an old friend. We'll get to that too. So the boss thought that was a safe place. He got backstabbed.

But even if that hadn't been the situation -- you've been here a while now, you know he's got some weaknesses ...

Let me tell you what Mrs. C told me, when I got sucked into this.



... so you made him go down there so he'd get out of everybody's hair?

I suggested he go down. Nobody makes Kris do anything.

You have to lead him to ideas, sometimes. Though he usually sees and admits when it's a good idea.

I figured a few days schtupping bimbos would distract him and improve his mood.



Mrs. C!!

Oh, you're not shocked. If he hasn't tried to proposition you, you've surely heard stories from some of the others.

Kris gets restless and he has a very active libido. Far more than me. I don't resent it.



I do wish he wouldn't have sex with the staff, but I haven't wanted to have that fight ...

Well, to be fair, I haven't heard that anybody wasn't OK with it. We're all, uh, full of libido too.

Yes, that's one reason I haven't. I don't think he'd go where he truly wasn't wanted.

It's still inappropriate, though.

And right now, frankly, none of us need the distraction. Kris is just about the only person here who isn't hugely busy, which is why he's been so pretful.

Better to send him below to work that off with someone else.



OK, so what's the problem, then?

The problem is he's been down there for two weeks. I expected him to stay a few days. Time's starting to get short.

I need you to go down and tell him to get his ass back up here.

Me? But I --

He'll fire me!

No, he won't. He's only ever fired one person in my recollection, and that was an extreme case, and even then, Kris made sure of a gentle landing. He's a good man. Cranky, yes, but good.

And if he knows I sent you ... if he's cranky with anyone about it, it'll be me.



There's got to be someone better for it. I've barely ever been down there!

You, for example ...

You know I can't. I have to keep this place running. We're on deadline.

You've been down there more than a lot of us have. Some have never been down. You're not scared of it.

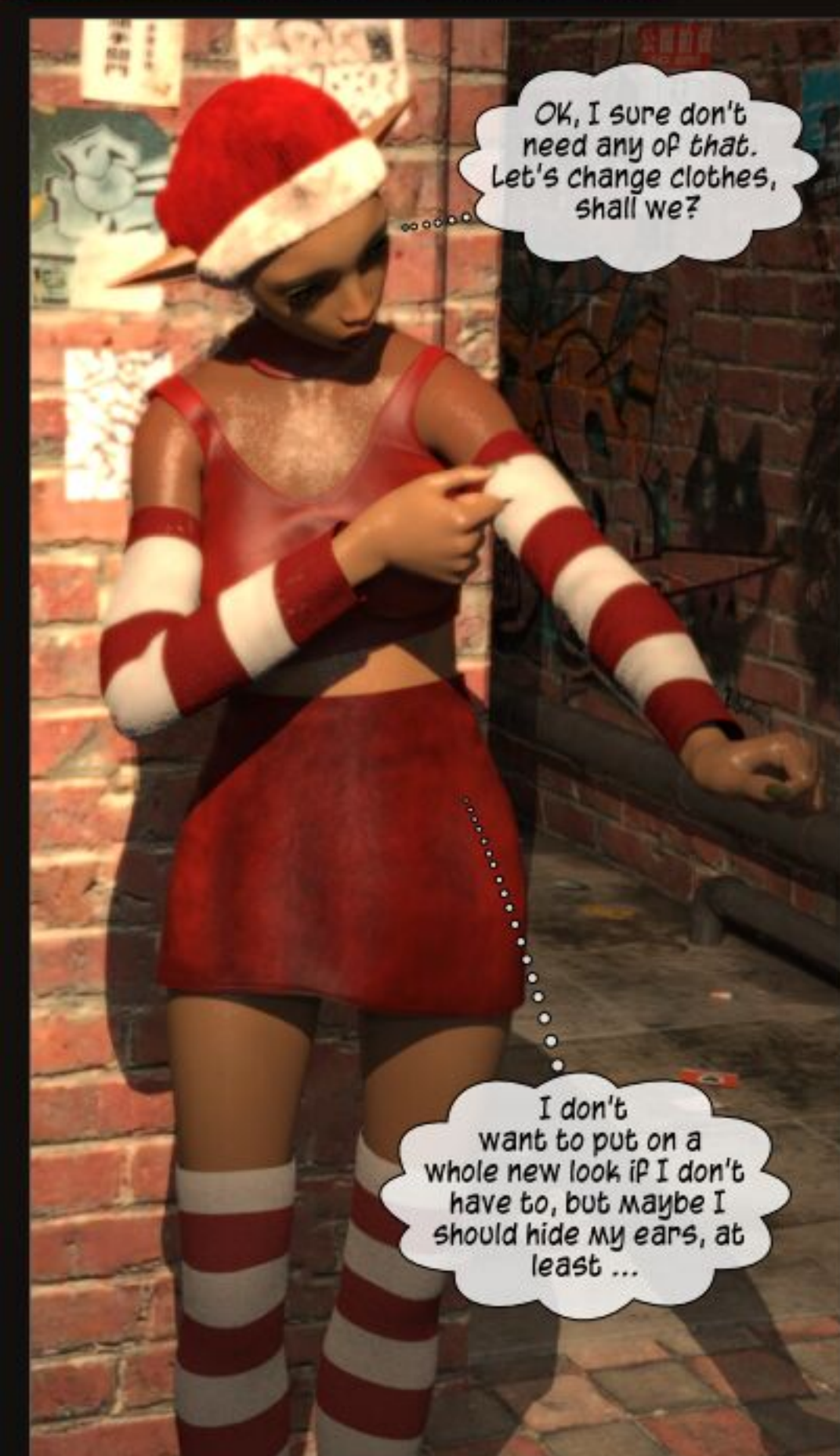
And what you're doing right now, I can get someone to fill in for, as opposed to the ones who are heavy into production.

And you have a talent for appearance changes, which you might need.

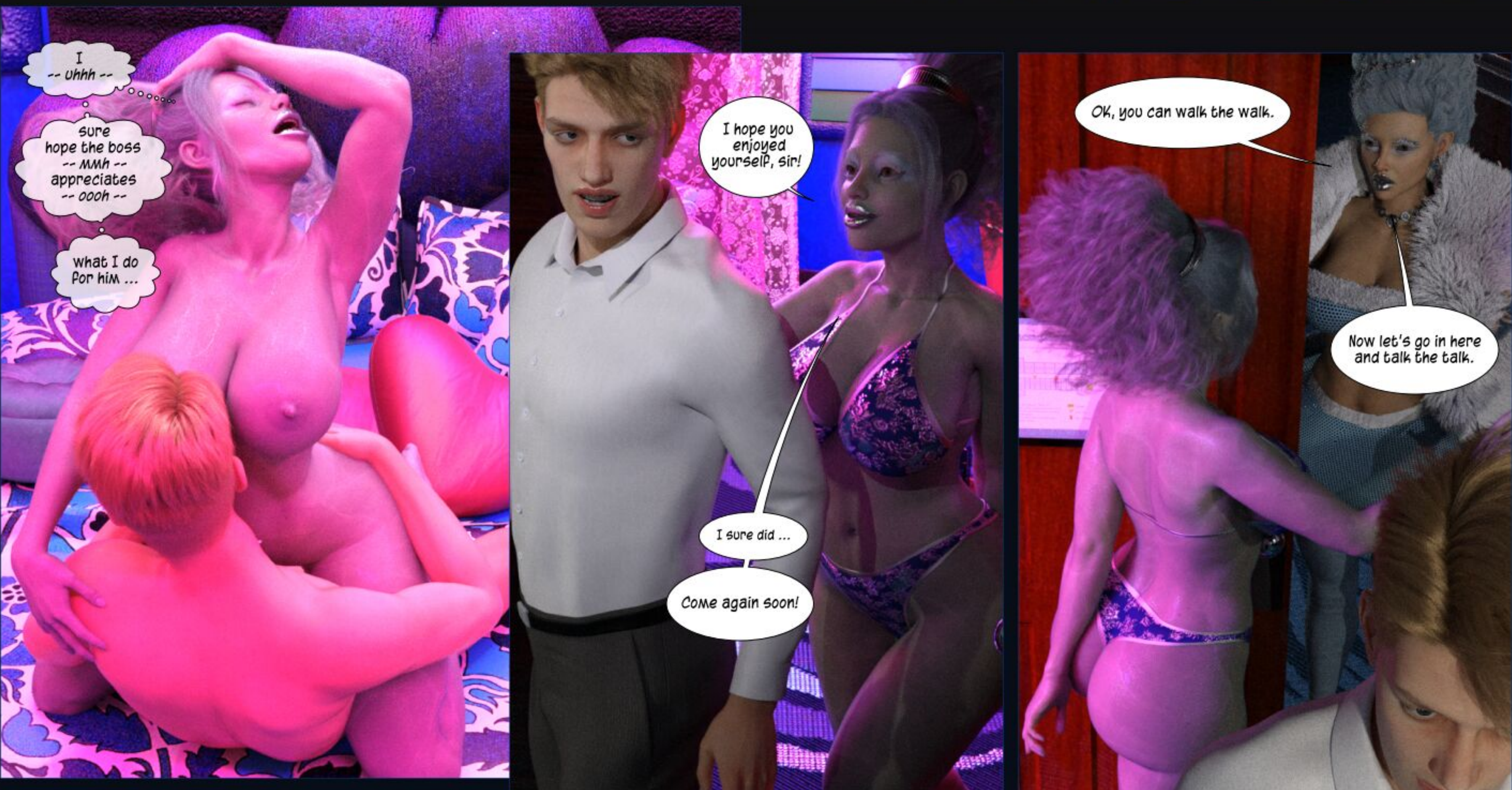
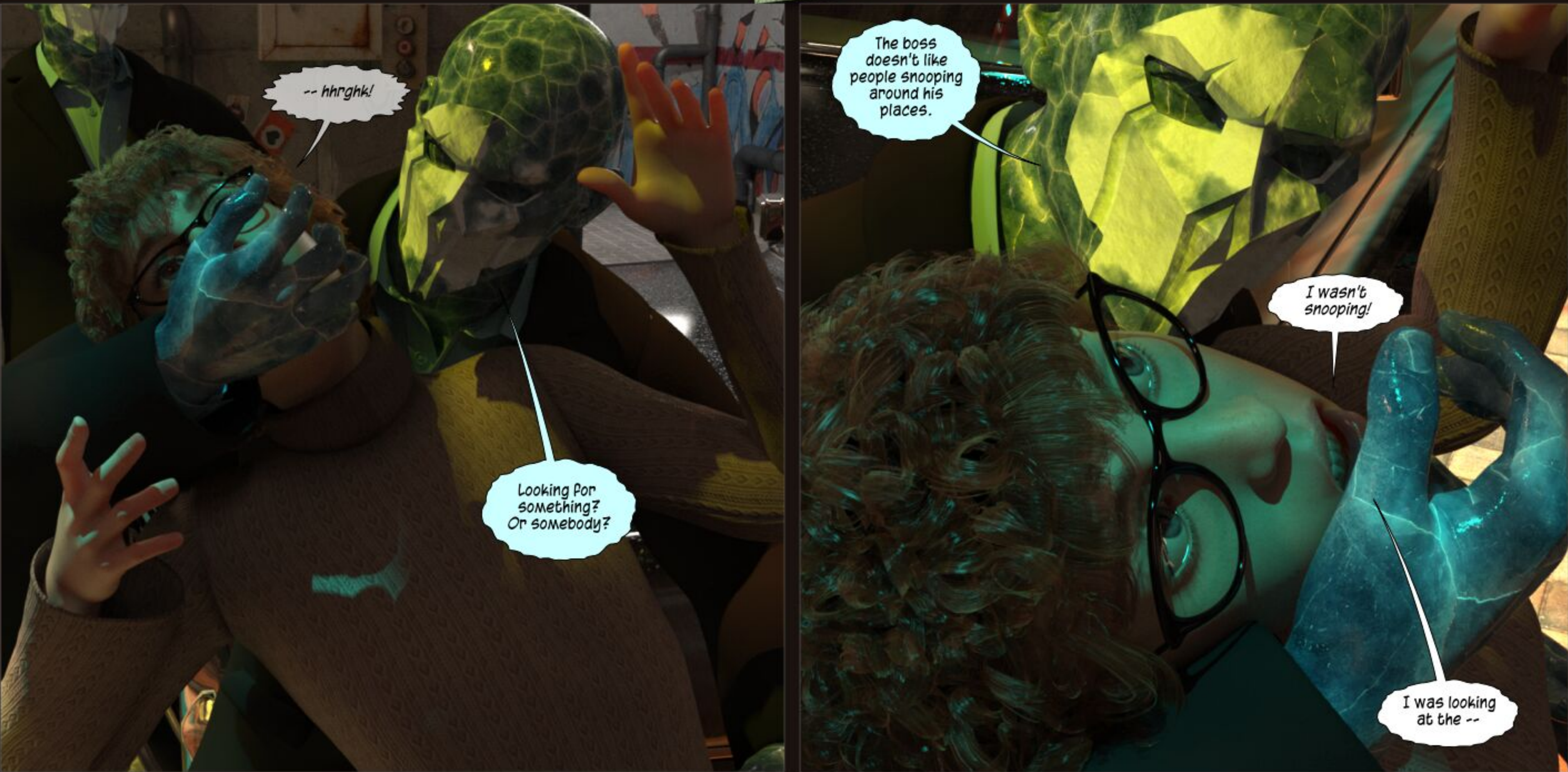
I -- Well, all right. I'll give it a try.

Good! Take Vixen. And remember, the clock's ticking.













Our customers can't tell our staff apart -- that's kind of the point -- but I sure as hell can. And I don't know who you are.

You get some points for the follow-through. That buys you just enough time to tell me who you are and what you're doing here before I toss you out on your ass.

And don't try to sell me that you're one of my people. I can pick that apart in a hot second. I bet you don't even know my name.

Your name's Bijou.

Well, that's what you go by. Your real name's Brigid Sigmayer, but you haven't used that first name in a long time.

You like your job, and you try to run a good place, but your boss Mr. Frost makes both of those things harder a lot of the time.



But I admit I only know all that because I'm a Christmas elf. My name's Tinseltop. And I'm looking for my boss.

His name's Kris Kringle. You may have heard of him.

I'm now sure he disappeared in here, and I don't believe a word Frost says about it. You might have had something to do with it, but only because Frost made you.

Wait, there's two of you?



I don't understand what you mean.

When he realized you were looking, Jack called Mr. Obsidian to come deal with you.

I knew that part. Didn't know who he was talking to, though. Who's Obsidian?

I wish I knew. All I know is Jack's scared to death of him and lets him act like he owns the place. For all I know maybe he does.

Obsidian sent a couple of goons and they picked up some woman outside. That was just a few minutes ago.

They thought that was me! They picked up some innocent because they thought it was me! I've got to go fix it!

Where would they be taking her? I bet you know. I think you know a lot more than you let on.



I can't tell you that! I'm not even supposed to know it!

As it is, if Jack finds out about any of this conversation he'll pitch a fit --

Bijou. You're a good person. I know you're a good person. I can tell these things.

What if they try to beat this woman? What if they kill her? You want that on your hands?

You know, if you and Frost are holding the boss against his will, then when I get him out of it -- and I will -- he's going to be pissed.

This might be a good time for you to prove that one of you has a conscience, is what I'm saying.



Yeah! Read her!

I was kind of mean there. But, y'know, here was this mess, and it was my fault, so I had to fix it ... I didn't have a lot of patience for her just then.

I wouldn't call that 'mean.' You just told her the facts.

Well, she wasn't a bad person. She was a good person in a bad place. I try not to get annoyed with good people. Even when they're annoying.

Anyway, it worked.



"She sent me to this big office building. It was full of twisting halls and unmarked doors, and I didn't have any idea how or where to start looking."

And if someone sees me, I'm in trouble ...

I'd disguise myself, but just now I don't know what I'd disguise myself as ...

... why is it cold in here all of a sudden?



Are those humans?

How can they stand it? I don't get cold easily, and just being near them makes me shiver.

I don't think I want to play one of them ...

Oh! Oh, wow.



Won't be long. I just need to go make my rounds.

On the other hand, I may be running out of options.



OK, let's see ...

Need it to not just look right ... has to actually be cold, or someone will wonder why not ...

"This was when I figured out that Mrs. C hadn't been completely honest with me. She'd made a comment about my being good at disguises, but it hadn't occurred to me until then that she said it because she thought I'd probably have to use them."

"I realized then that when she talked to me, she was already pretty sure there was some kind of trouble. She didn't think the boss had lost track of time, or decided he didn't want to do the ride so bad that he wasn't coming back. He wouldn't really do that, and she knew it."

"See? First job as troubleshooter. Like I said."

"I am not a troubleshooter, Eyebass."



Lucky for me, once again, it's hard to tell them apart under all that ...

If I keep moving and keep my head down, this should be good enough --



-- oh, boy.



Better hurry, or you'll miss the ceremony.

Whew!





Huh!  
At least there's no question where they're all going, because they're all going there.

I'm just not sure whether it's a good idea for me to go.  
If this ceremony turns into "spot the intruder," it'll be bad.

Other hand, if I'm the only one of the ice people who's not there, that stands out even more.



I do appreciate that this many of you were able to attend.

I believe it's important for us to be a community.

... I think I'll stay way in the back.



Part of that community is being present at important occasions.

Such as when someone joins us.

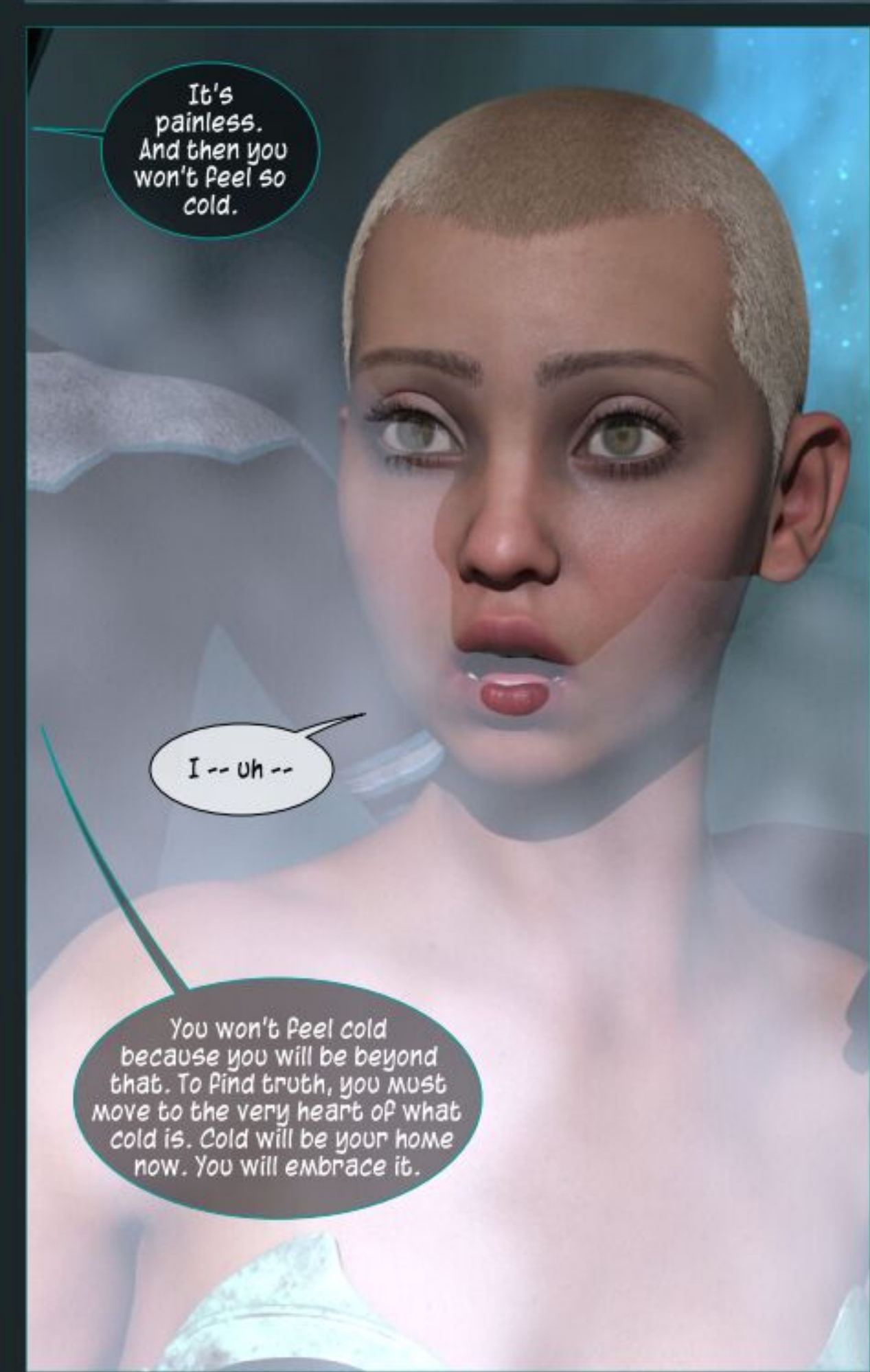
Anita is ready for the rite of admission. Please give her your acceptance and support.



I -- I'm n-n-not sure about t-this --

Now, I thought we were past that. I explained your options very clearly.

That warrant is still outstanding. You can belong to us, or you can belong to the police.



It's painless. And then you won't feel so cold.

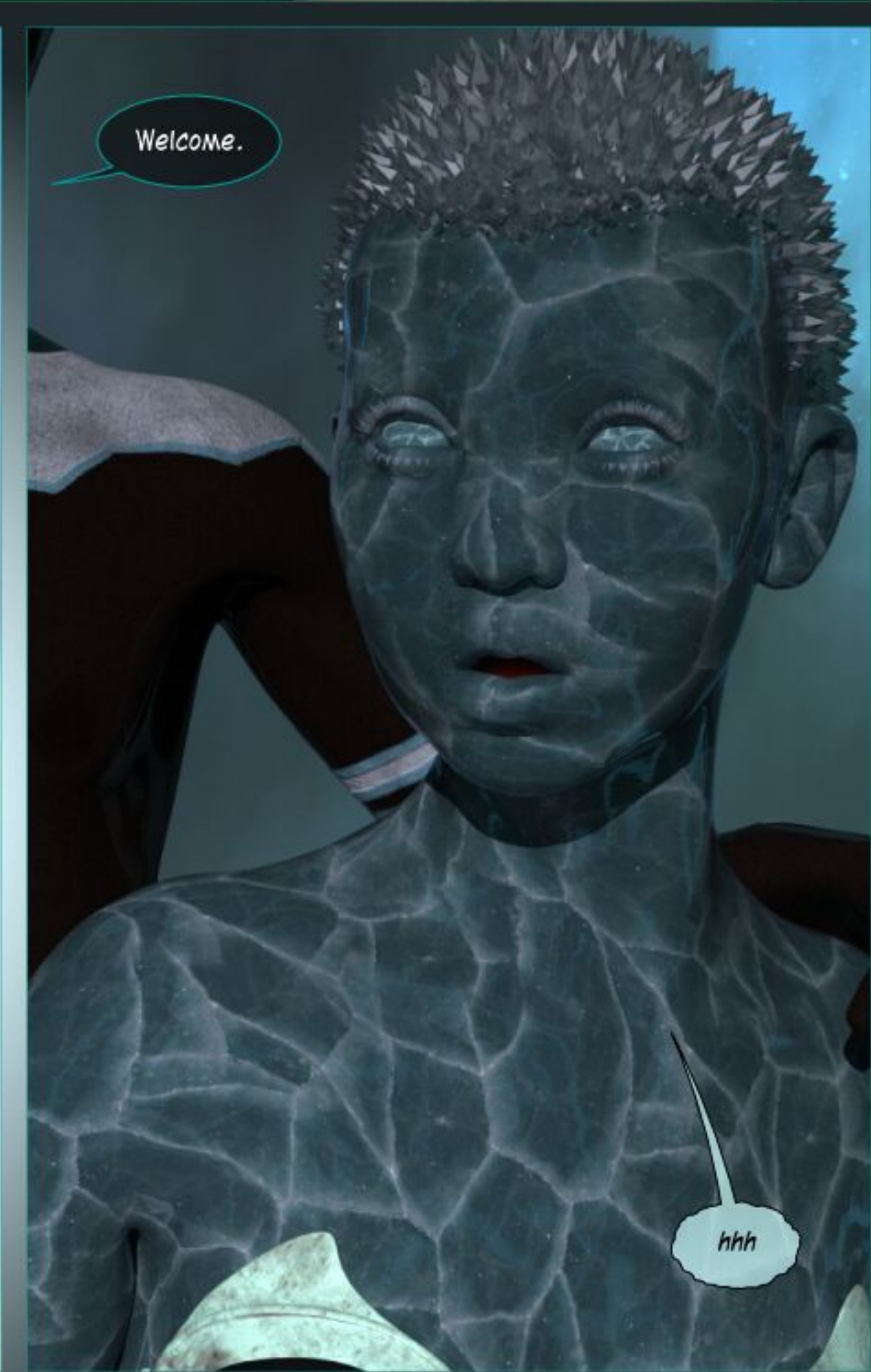
I -- uh --

You won't feel cold because you will be beyond that. To find truth, you must move to the very heart of what cold is. Cold will be your home now. You will embrace it.



To be my instrument, your heart must be ice.

uhhhh



Welcome.

hhh



Go be among your own. They will show you our ways.

They will teach you how to conceal yourself when you walk among outsiders, and how to --

Boss?

Chill, there's a ceremony going on here, or did you notice?

And you're done with it, aren't you? Your package is waiting.

-- Sigh --  
The rite is concluded. Thank you all again for attending. Return to your other lives, until we can meet again.



Honestly, Chill. Don't you know presentation is everything?

Yeah, well, someone told me this was important.

That was interesting ... and disturbing ... but not very helpful.

Following these two, though ... that seems promising.

If that's not Mr. Obsidian, I'll eat a Christmas stocking.





In here?

I wasn't sure how long she'd be sitting and I didn't want to risk leaving her in the icebox.

And if you tried to question her in there she'd be shivering too hard to answer you.



Hmm ... can't just walk in without knowing the layout ...

... wonder if that other door has anything useful ... maybe I can listen through a wall or something ...



All right. Take off the gag.

Yaaahh!

... Oh, no, wait ... looks like they can't see me. One-way glass. Whew.

Studio setup ... I guess they like to record their conferences sometimes.

Or something less innocent, but let's not go there. This whole place makes me itch.



You are with the Claus. What is his part in this? Is he helping my brother or merely trying to interfere?

The Claus? What?

I don't know who you think I am, but I don't --

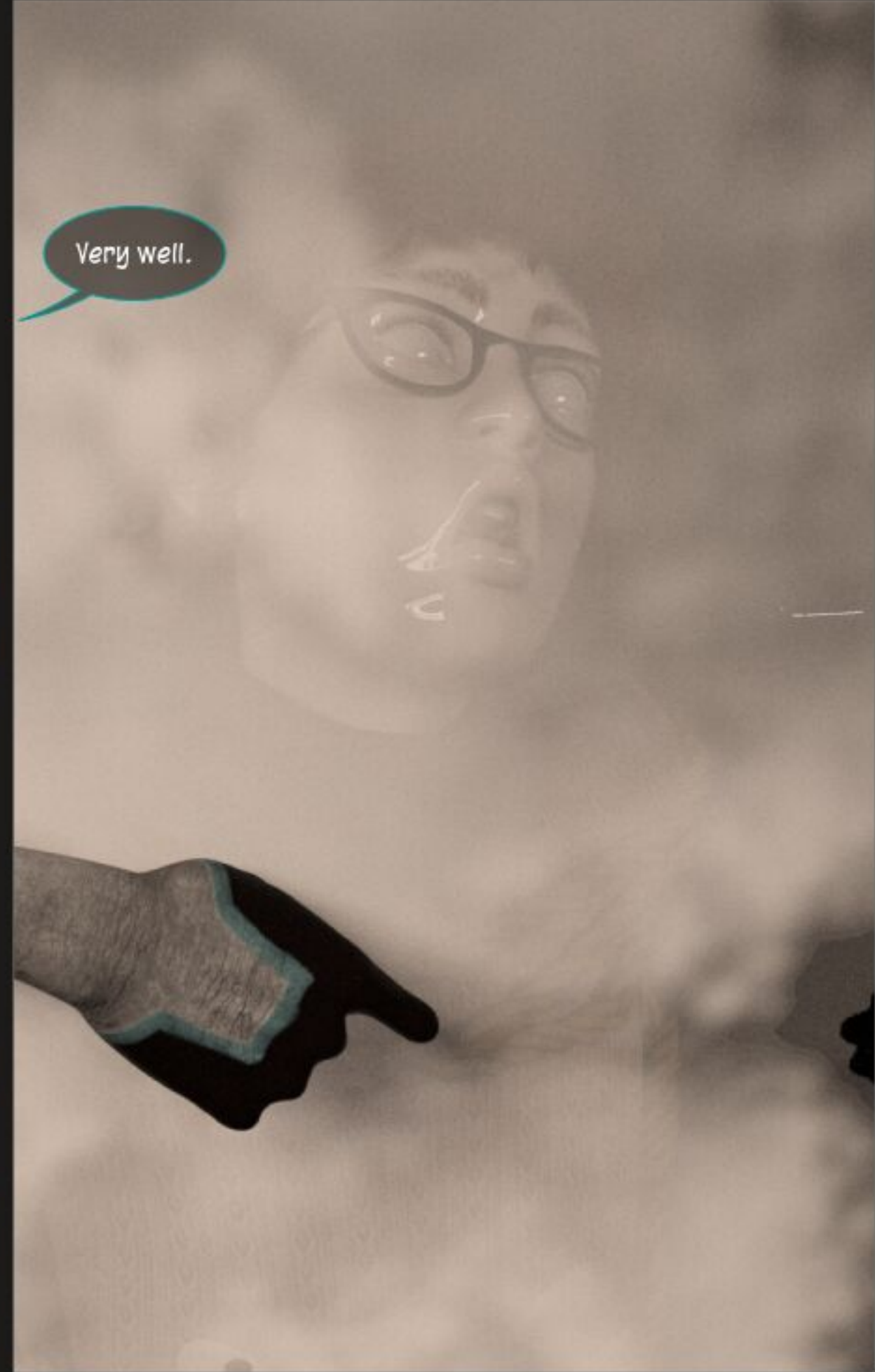


Don't play with me!

I know the Claus is strong, but he will not underestimate me! The old ways still have power! The time is very near and I won't permit him to interfere!

Listen ... I'm sorry to let you down, honest ... especially since I think you might kind of need some therapy or something ...

... but I don't have *any* idea what you're talking about. Really.

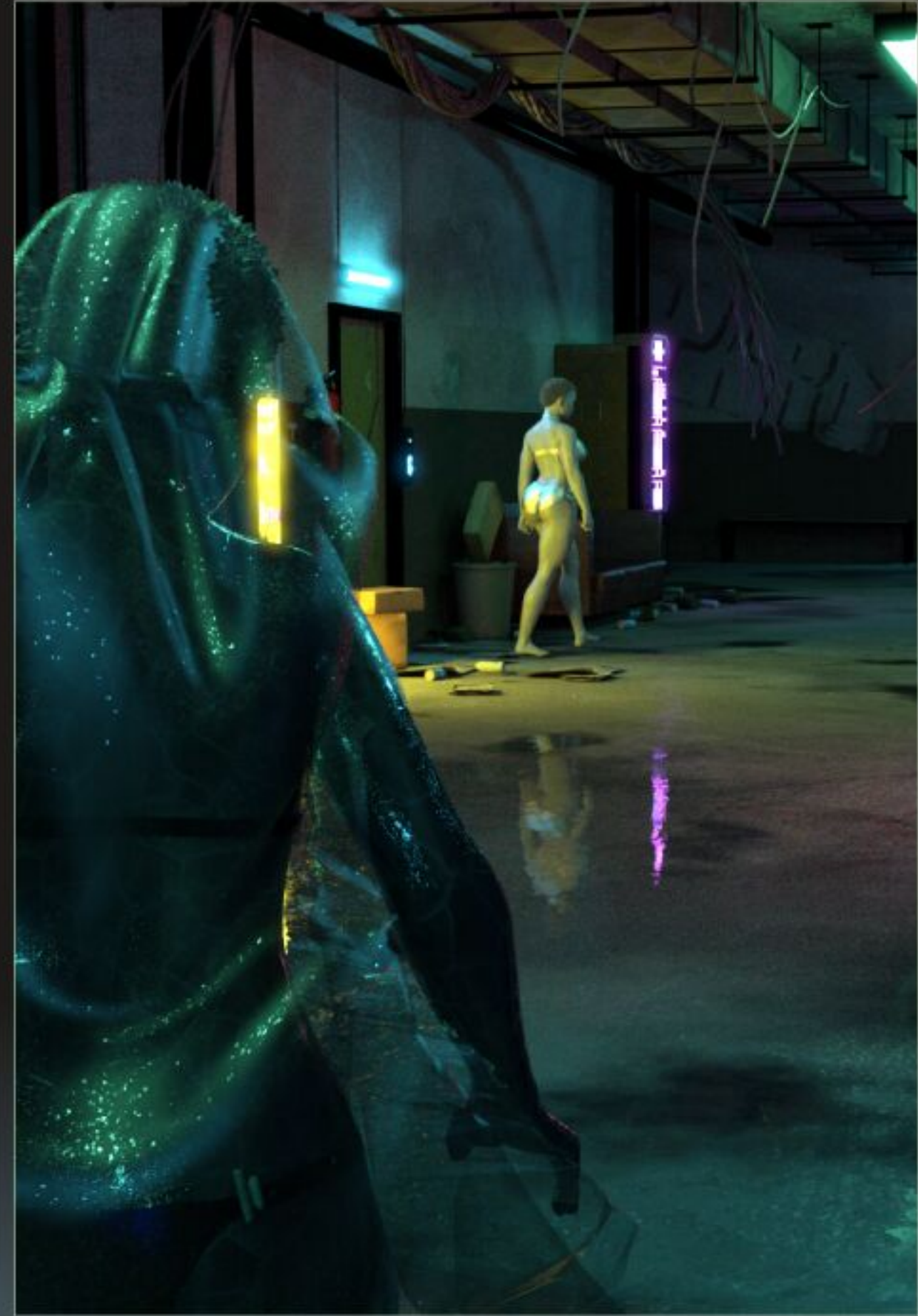


Very well.



Put her on ice. I'll decide what to do with her later. Perhaps she'll become a follower.

Oh no.



ooorh.

And I thought the rest of this place was chilly ...



Taking off the ropes didn't help. She's frozen solid in that position.

I need to thaw her somehow. I know one way that'll probably work ...

Can't do it like this, though. I'm so icy right now I'd probably just make it worse.





-- oof --  
Sorry that wasn't more graceful, but you're kinda heavy.

OK, here goes ...



c-c-c-c-cold ...

... I know.  
Let's get out of here.



I think I'm thawed? I can feel my fingers again now ...

Shh! Hold on.

There's someone around the corner.



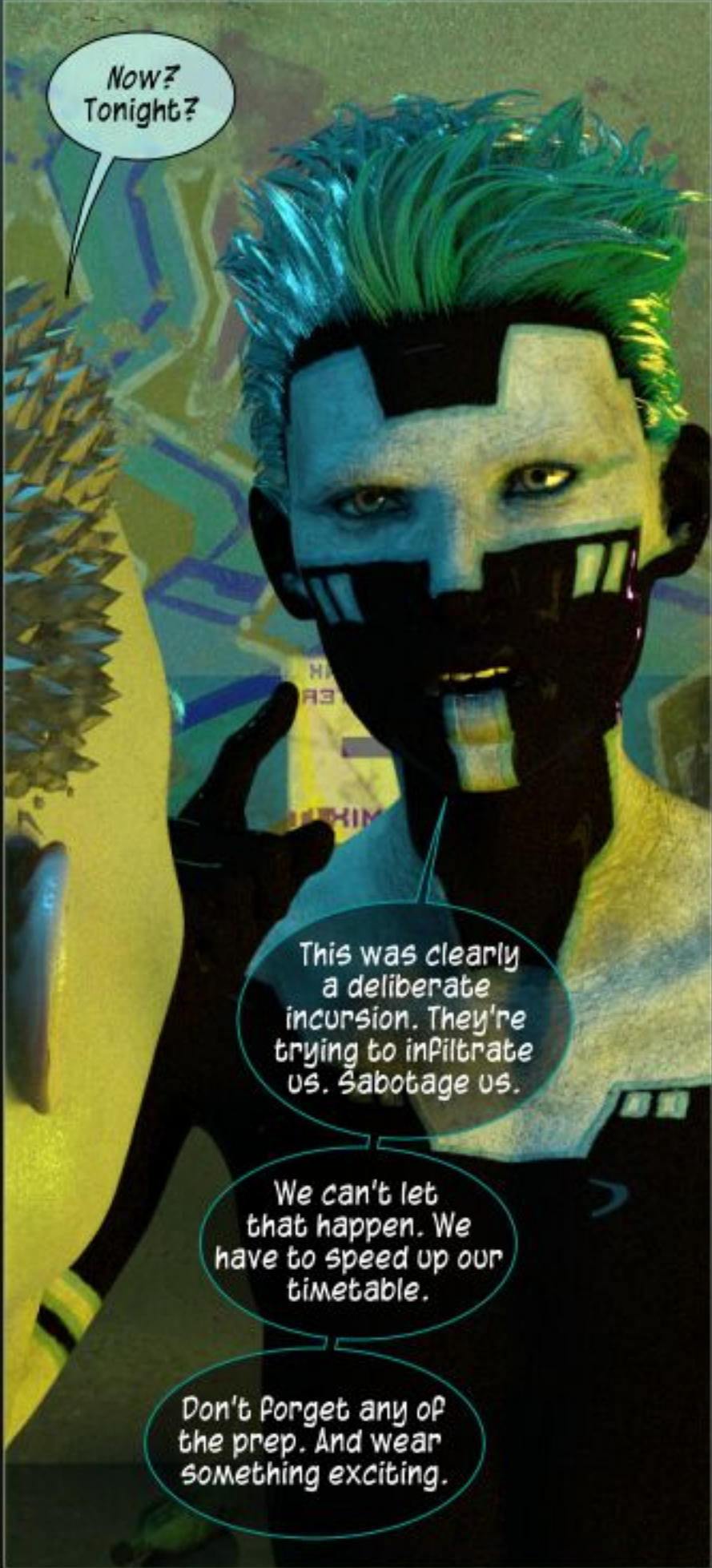
I wasn't gone ten minutes!

Either she thawed herself or someone came to get her. I need to sweep the whole place before --

No.

I'll arrange the sweep, though I doubt it'll do much good. I have a different job for you.

It's time for Operation Snowman.



Now? Tonight?

This was clearly a deliberate incursion. They're trying to infiltrate us. Sabotage us.

We can't let that happen. We have to speed up our timetable.

Don't forget any of the prep. And wear something exciting.



Got that covered, don't worry.

He'll start drooling when he sees me.



Come on! We've got to follow her!

But I don't even --

I know, but this can't wait. Hurry!

We need to get you out of here anyway. I'll explain when you're safe.



The Nakua estate. It's on Van Dusen Road, on Long Island. I'll give you directions when we're out there.

Long Island? It's gonna cost you extra.

You'll get it. And a big tip.



oof ... I've got to get back to Vixen and follow her.

You'll be all right. I don't think they'll cause you any more trouble.

You don't think?



Iggy ...

That woman is about to go do something horrible that's my fault. All of this is my fault. If I hadn't been trying to find my boss, they wouldn't have grabbed you, and they wouldn't have decided they needed to go do whatever they're about to do ...

I have to fix it, and that means I have to get to her before she does it, whatever it is ... and Vixen's a block away and it's going to be hard enough to follow that taxi as it is, and I don't have time to make it worse by standing here talking about it!



Why do you need to follow the taxi? I know you heard where she told him to go. You were close enough, and you've got good ears. You heard them talking around the corner, inside. I couldn't make it out.

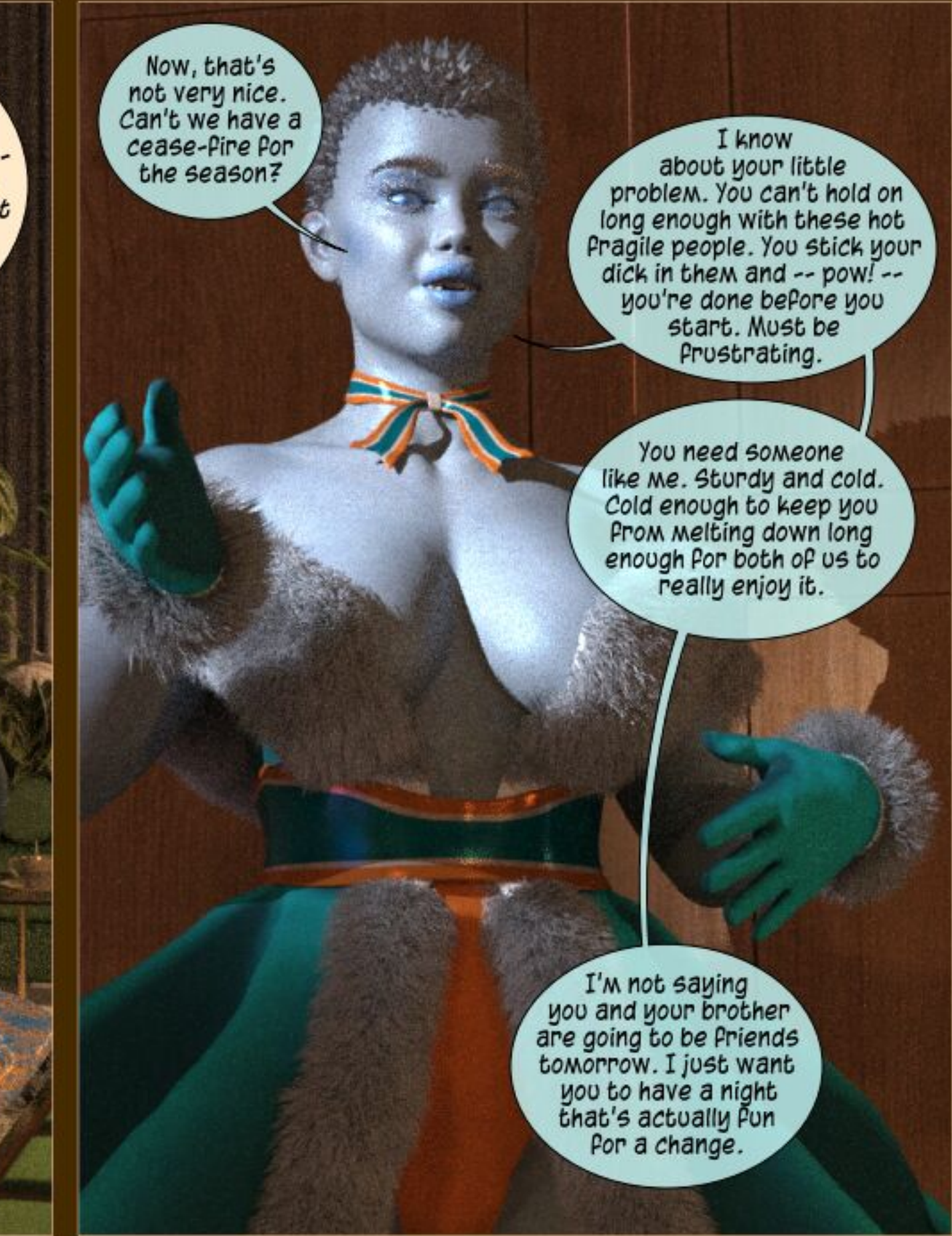
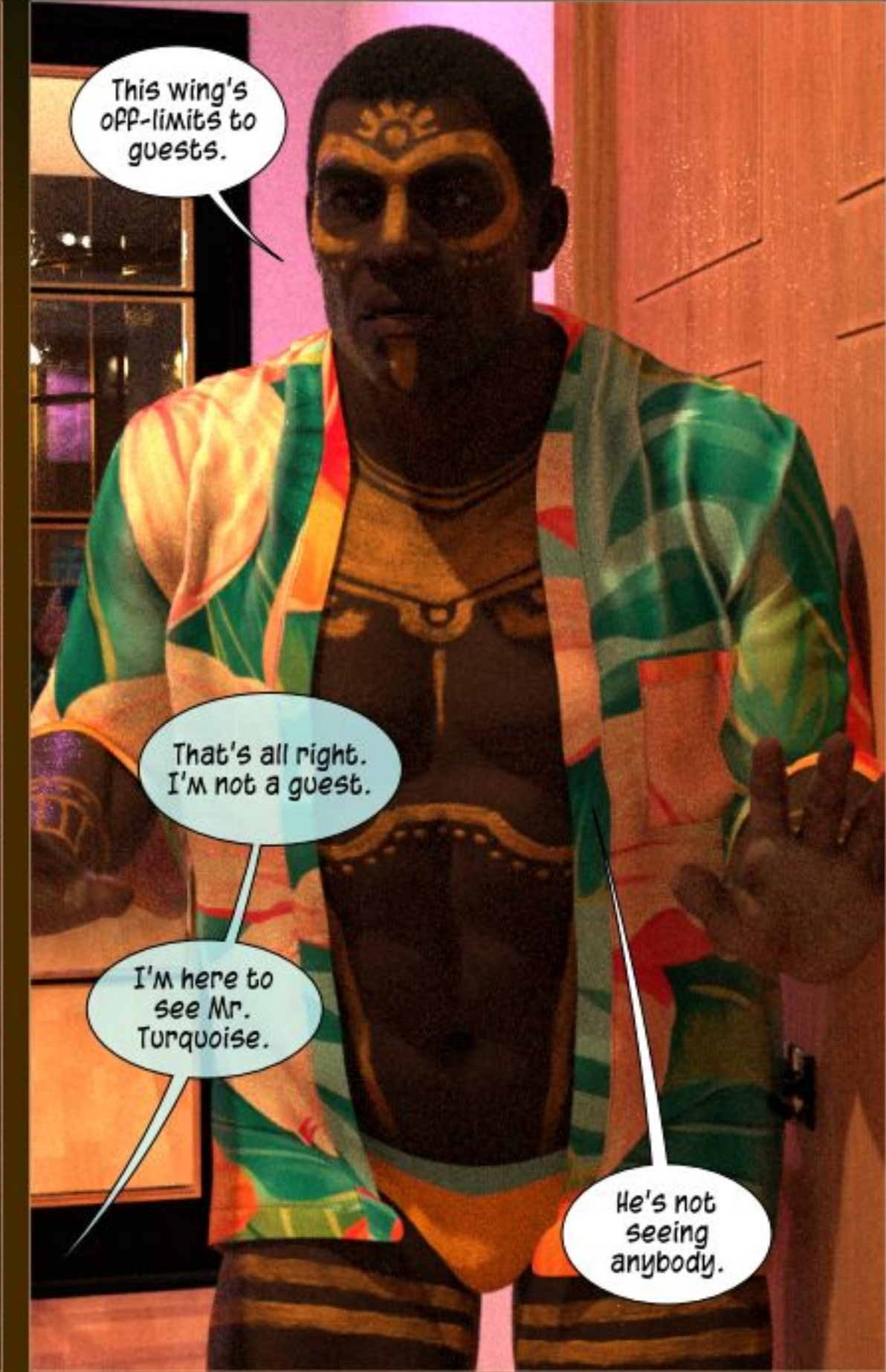
I don't know where that is! I don't spend a lot of time here, OK? I don't know my way around this city at all.

OK, but ... I do.





MEANWHILE ...







It's a party?

I'm not good with parties.

Well, you don't have to go in with me ...

I think I'll do better in there than out here. With my luck, he has guards.

You're going to kind of stand out, though. Even more than me.

I can fix that.



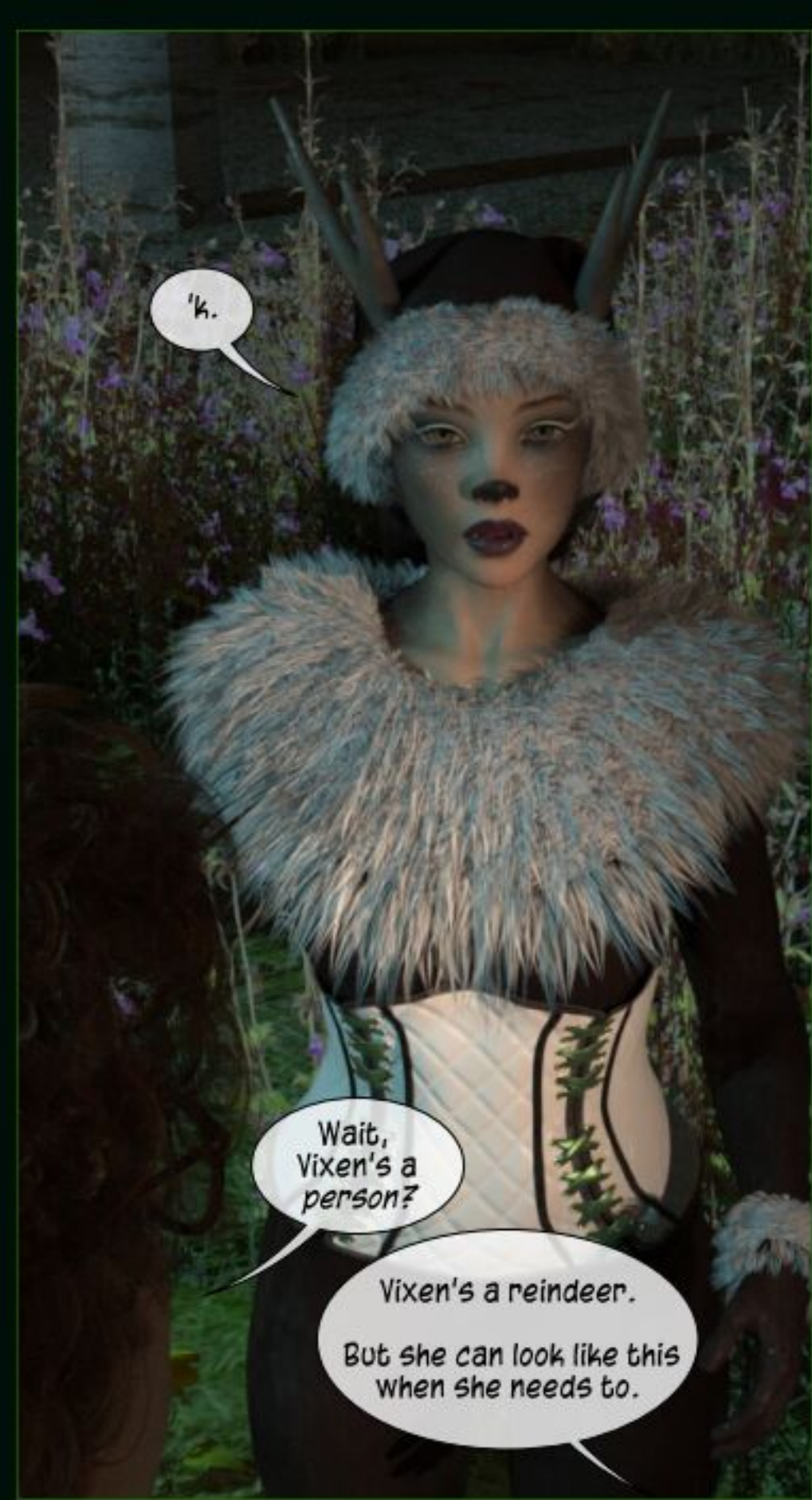
What about Vixen?

She'll be fine. No one sees her unless she wants them to.

I saw her. That's how I got into this mess.

Huh! Then I guess she wanted you to.

Still, you have a point. Vix, it might be better if you came in with us.



'k.

Wait, Vixen's a person?

Vixen's a reindeer. But she can look like this when she needs to.



I think all I need is a more human skin and the ears ...

Kinda nice to lose the glitter for a while, actually.

That's, uh ... that's pretty revealing ...

Then you're really not going to like what I'm putting you in.



You're right, I don't like it.

I don't have the figure for this!

And anyway, we're still going to stand out. The people in there aren't dressed like this. And they're all wearing the same colors.

I noticed. But it's probably more dangerous to dress like them. They're clearly a club; if we pretend we're in the club, someone's going to catch us out, and it'll be bad.

Better to just be crashing the party, I think.

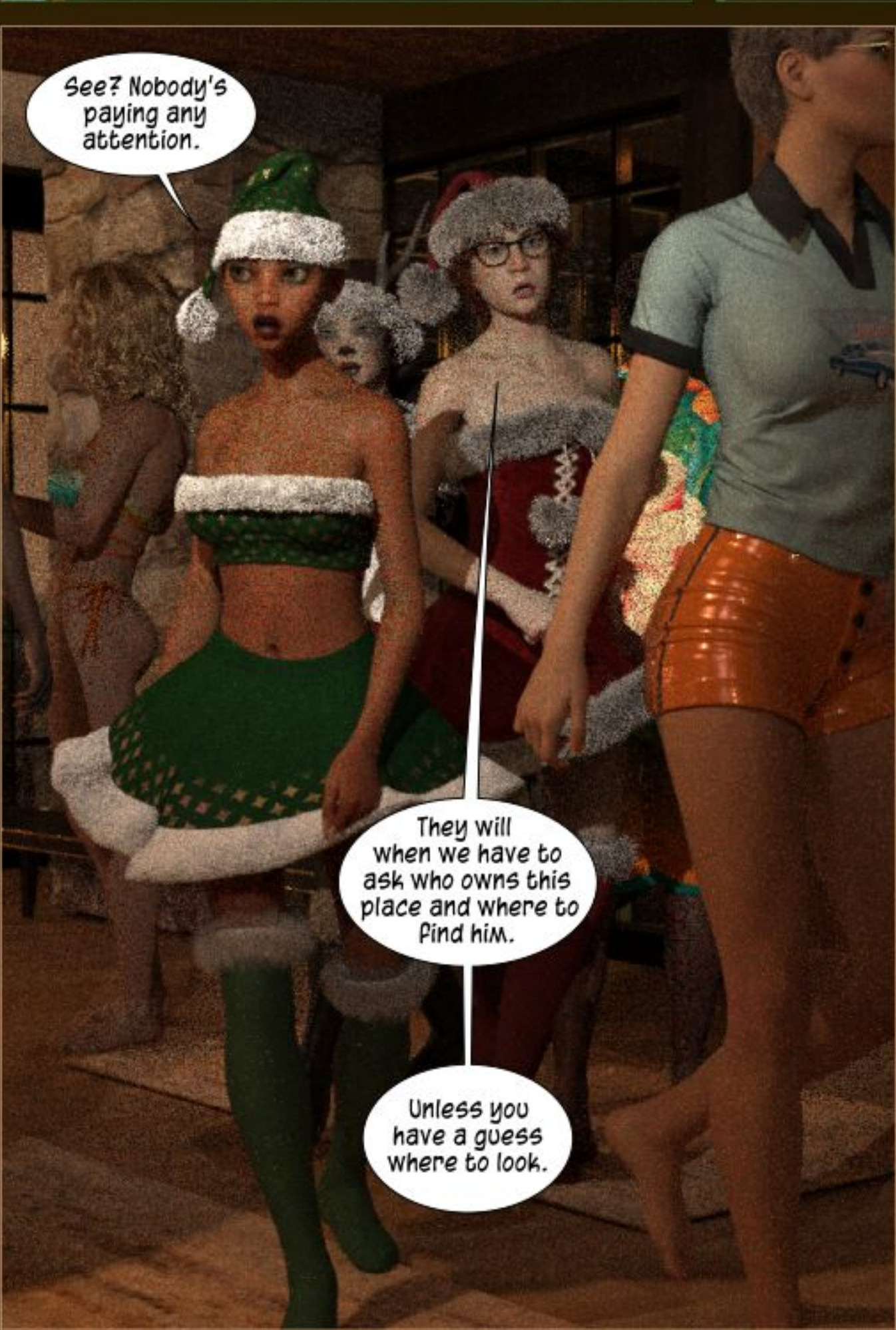


Don't worry about Vixen. Like I said, nobody notices her unless she wants. It's her superpower.

But we do need to keep an eye on her.

She's a genius for a reindeer. She's very dumb for a person.

That might not be a problem in this crowd.



See? Nobody's paying any attention.

They will when we have to ask who owns this place and where to find him.

Unless you have a guess where to look.



I think we should start with the part that's got a side of beef blocking it off.

Oh, boy.



Nobody gets in to see Mr. Turquoise.

He's busy and he doesn't want to be disturbed.

But we just need to talk to him for a minute! It's important --

Nobody. For any reason.



We're going to have to get beef boy out of the way. Mr. Turquoise is clearly who she's after, so she's probably in there with him now, doing who knows what. We can't wait.

We need to distract the big dude, but the problem is, I can't do it, I'm the one who needs to go in and intervene, and Iggy, I don't think you should ... maybe we can convince one of these people to --

Me.



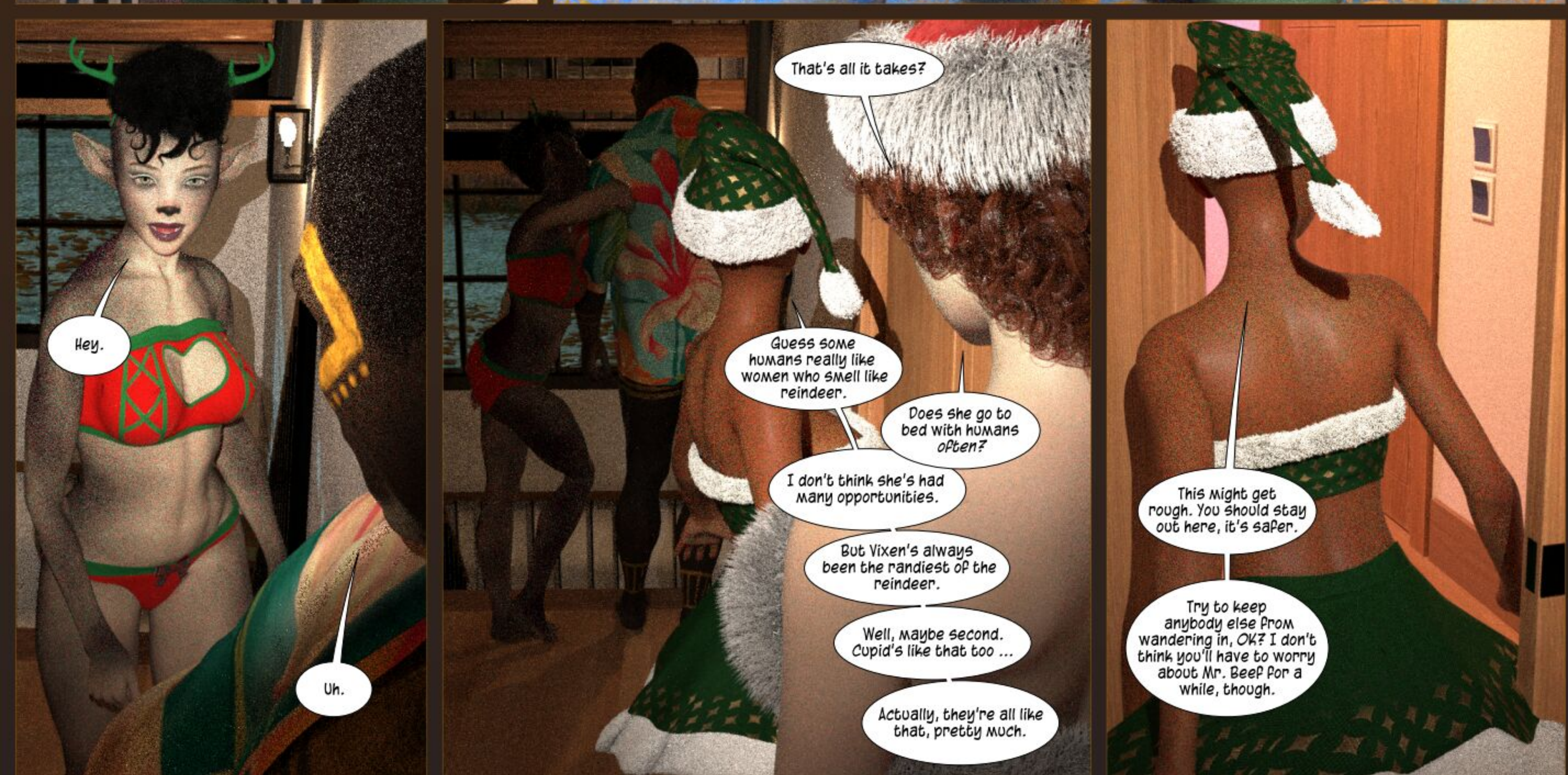
You're sure?

Fun!

Well, possibly.

OK, go ahead. But be careful.









Heeeeyy!

It's the spirit of Christmas! You know, that door does just fine without you holding it up.

I'm, uh ... I'm waiting for a friend ...

Ooh. Is she in there with Mr. Turquoise? 'Cause that could be a while.



You know, we don't care if you crash the party ...

... but you gotta participate! Get into it, y'know?



OK, ladies! Fresh batch, comin' around! Get it while you can!

Oh, yeah!

Perfect timing.



Guess I'd better ...



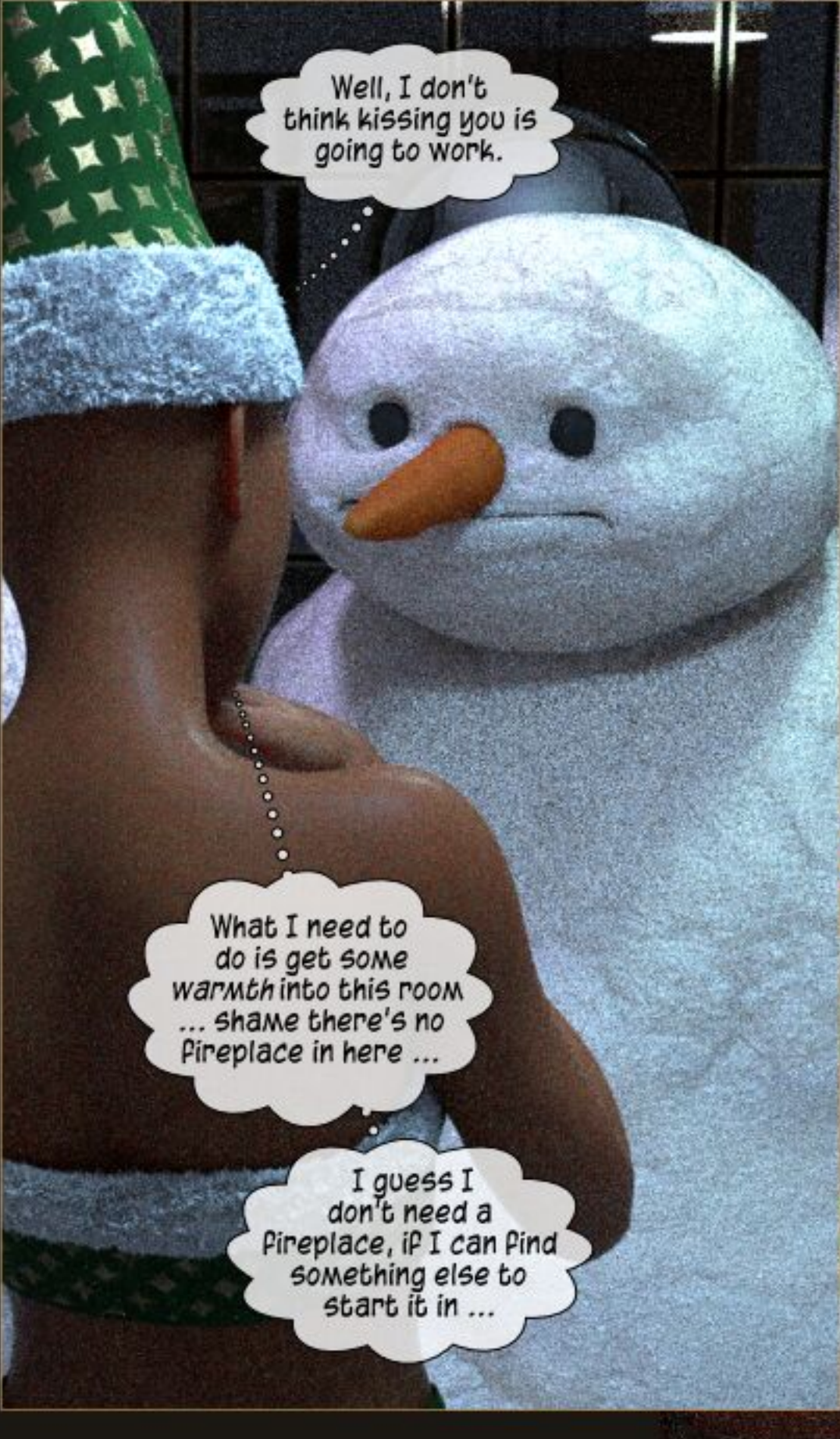
UUuhhh?



I think she likes it!

Let's go see if there's a space open in the bunkroom.

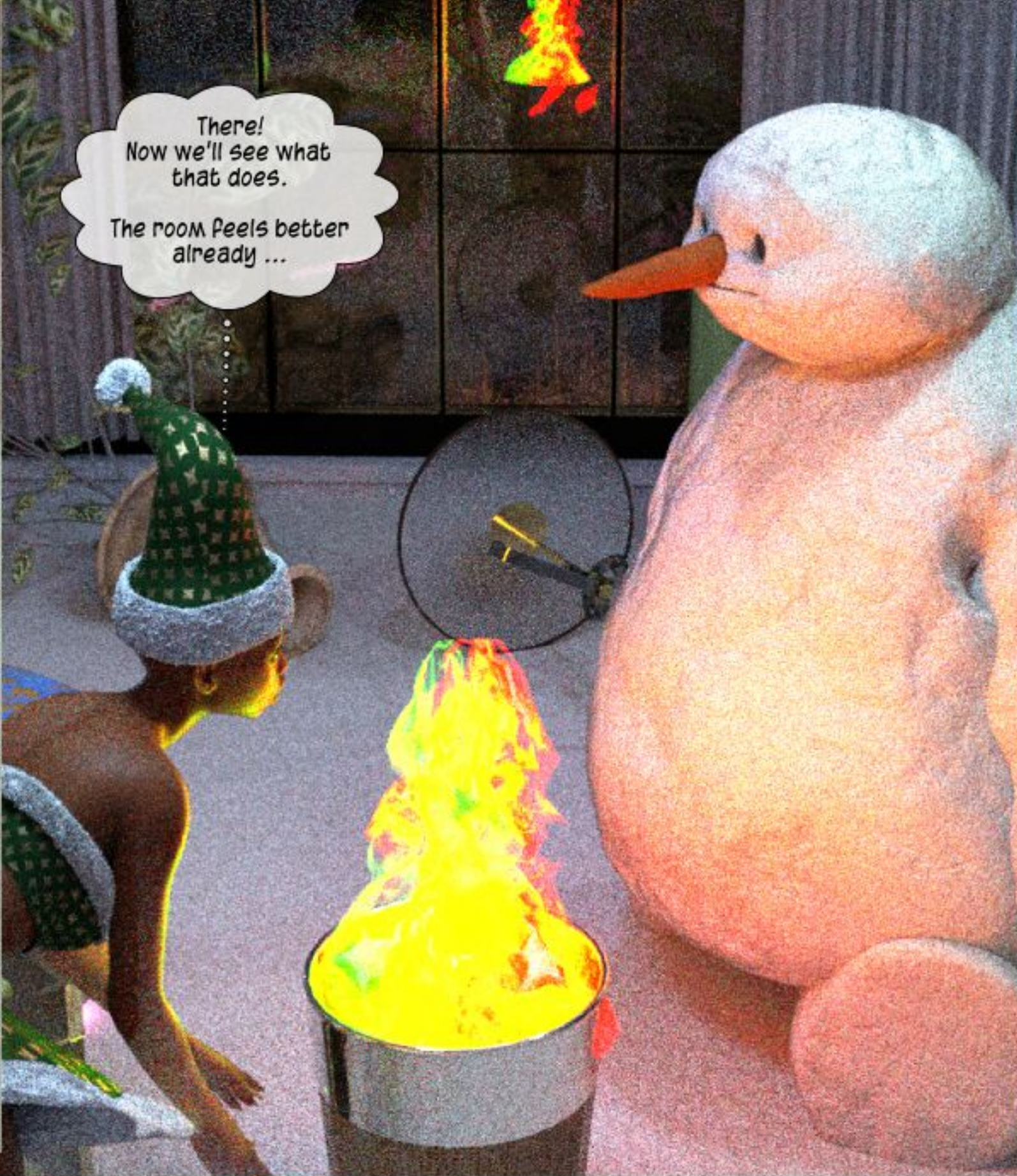
-- giggle --



Well, I don't think kissing you is going to work.

What I need to do is get some warmth into this room ... Shame there's no fireplace in here ...

I guess I don't need a fireplace, if I can find something else to start it in ...



There! Now we'll see what that does. The room feels better already ...



hrkgh

That's promising.



I won't stand for it!

... You're welcome?

He thinks he can just send somebody into my house to banjax me and not suffer any consequences? He's got a big surprise coming!



Everybody!

All my people! Gather to me!



The time has come!

We can wait no longer! We're going to bring our truth to the world tonight!

We're mobilizing!!

Damn, that man is equipped.





Hey, hang on a minute with that!

And certain Palse gods will come to regret what they've done and said --



Are you with us?

Well, ah ... no. Not really.

I mean, I wasn't going to let you stay Frozen --

And for that I give you my mercy.

But now you should leave.



We'll reassemble at the arranged place.

There will definitely be a hot time in the city tonight!

Everyone drive carefully. The expressway's an apront to the gods.



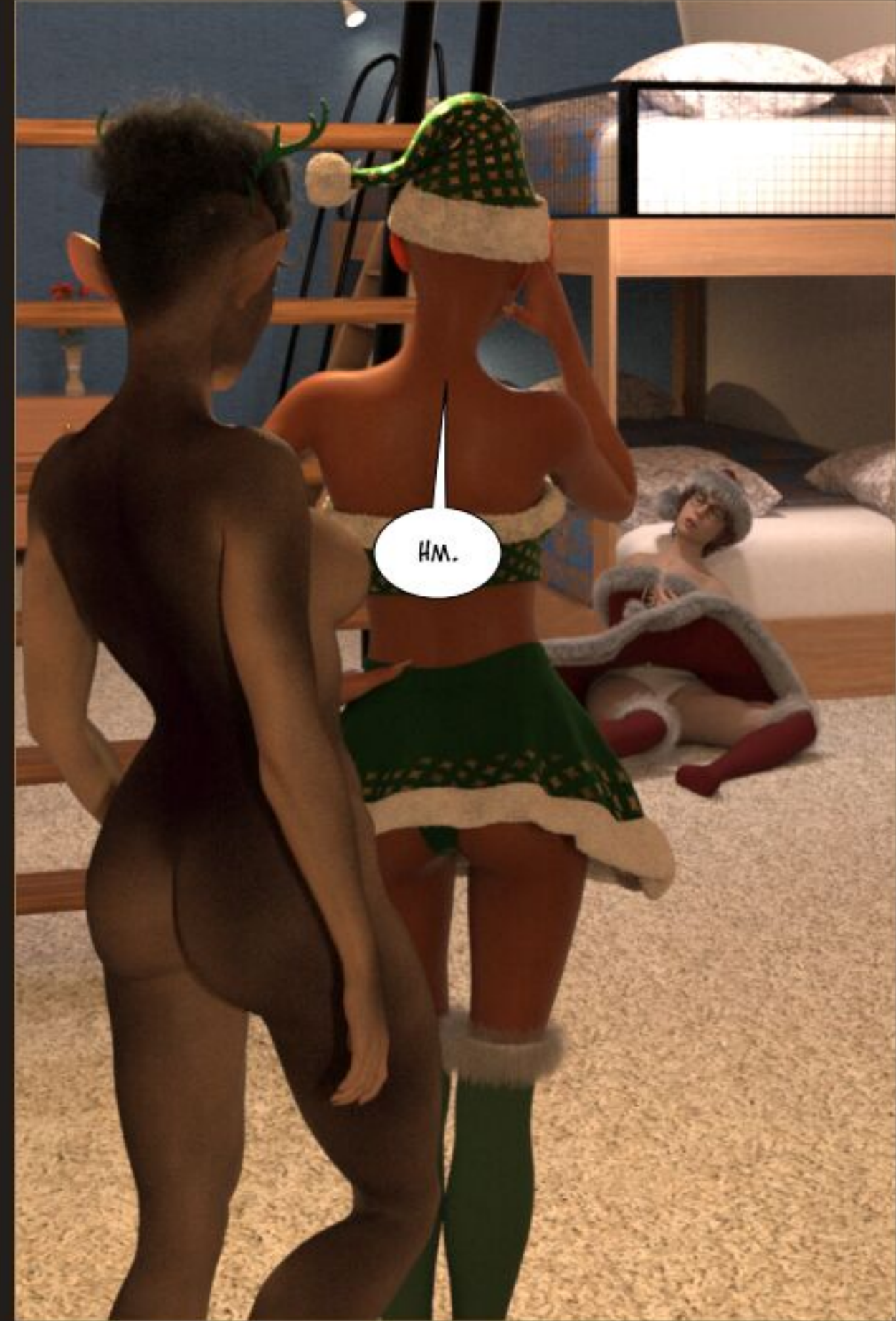
This just gets better and better.

Did you at least get a chance to have a good time before he summoned the troops?

No.

Sorry to hear it.

And where did Iggy get to? She wasn't in that crowd. Let's check the house.



Hm.



... if they give you some ... orange stuff ...

... don't drink it.



I have no idea what to do next, Vix. Turquoise sounds like he's declaring war, and they're both a lot more powerful than me ...

Home.

I can't just run back to the workshop and hide! I've got to fix this! Somehow.

No! Help.

Ohhh. I get you.



I feel really bad about dragging her down here to fix my mess ...

On the other hand, with the boss still out of the picture, she might be the only one we've got who can fix it ...

... OK. But you'll have to go by yourself. I need to keep an eye on this.

Take it slow, all right? No extra risks. The situation won't get out of control that fast.

And I'd like you to take the two of us back into the city first. I'm going to need to find a place where I can get a little rest, and Iggy needs to go home.

No way. Not going ... till over ...



Sobered up now?

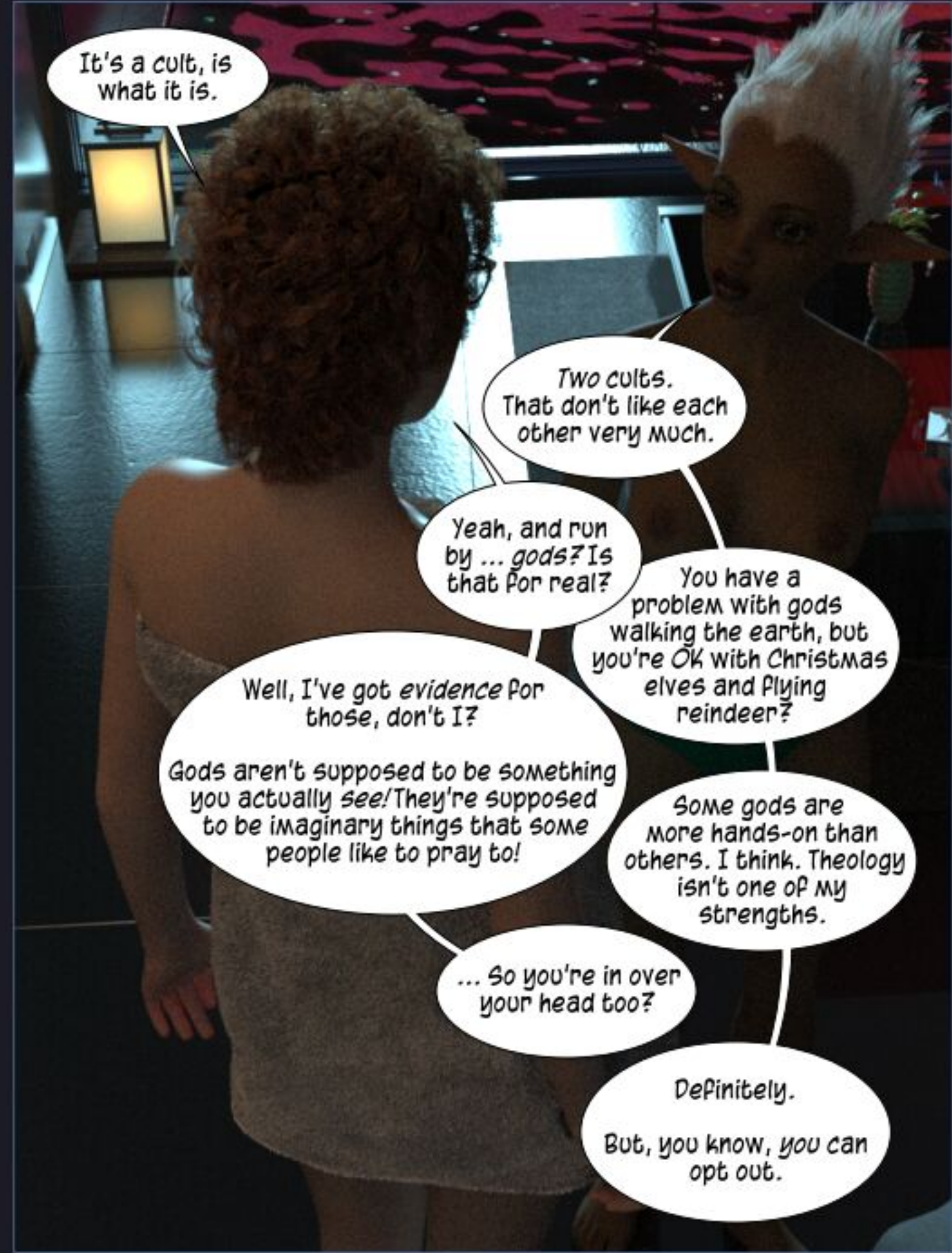
I don't know if I was exactly drunk. I've been drunk. It didn't feel like that.

It sure was something, though.

You know, if they'd had time to do anything with me -- if they hadn't been interrupted ...

... they'd have probably gotten control of me completely. I'd be off with them doing whatever it is they're doing right now.

That's kind of scary.



It's a cult, is what it is.

Two cults. That don't like each other very much.

Yeah, and run by ... gods? Is that for real?

Well, I've got evidence for those, don't I? Gods aren't supposed to be something you actually see! They're supposed to be imaginary things that some people like to pray to!

You have a problem with gods walking the earth, but you're OK with Christmas elves and flying reindeer?

Some gods are more hands-on than others. I think. Theology isn't one of my strengths.

... So you're in over your head too?

Definitely. But, you know, you can opt out.



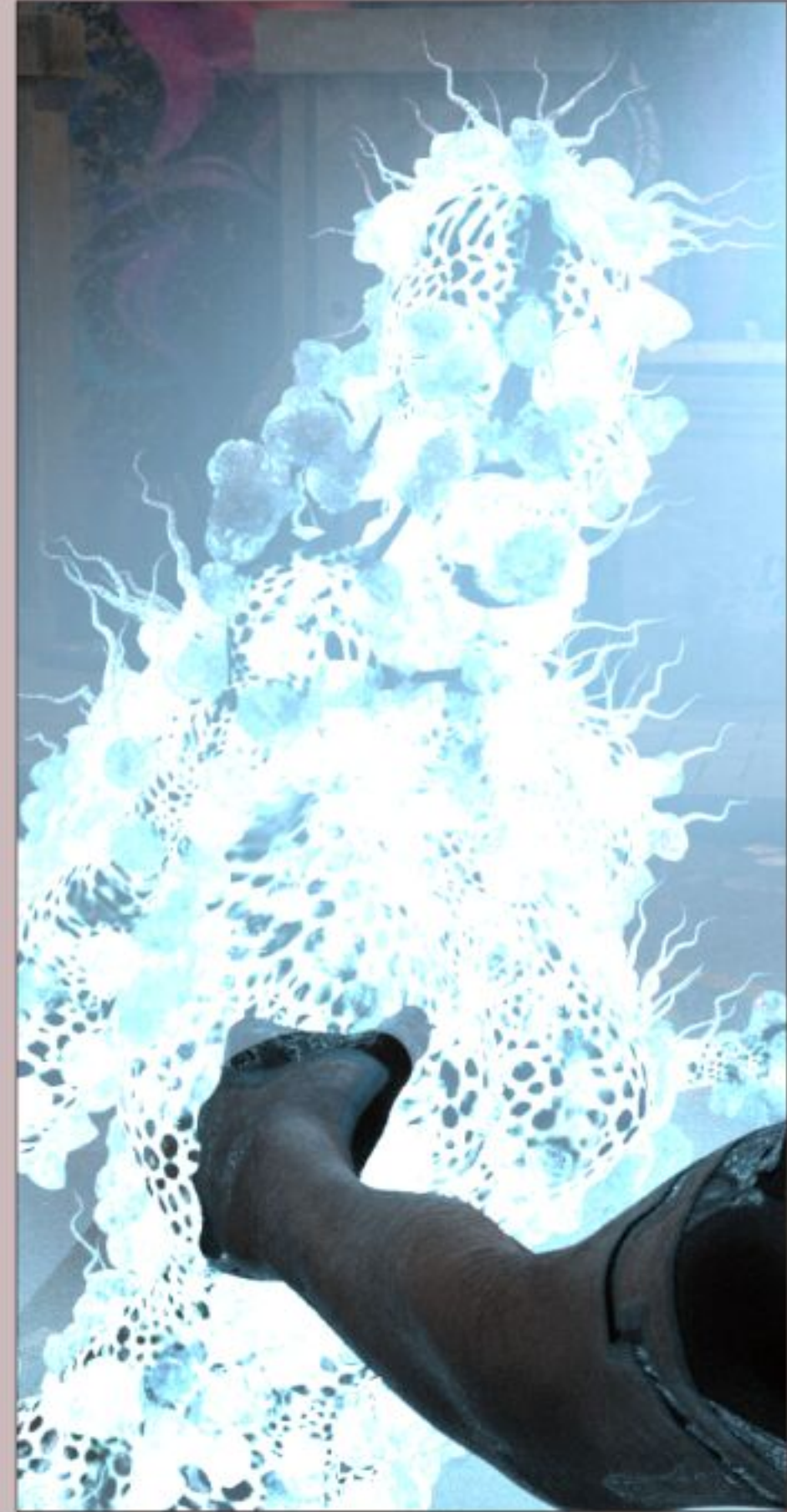
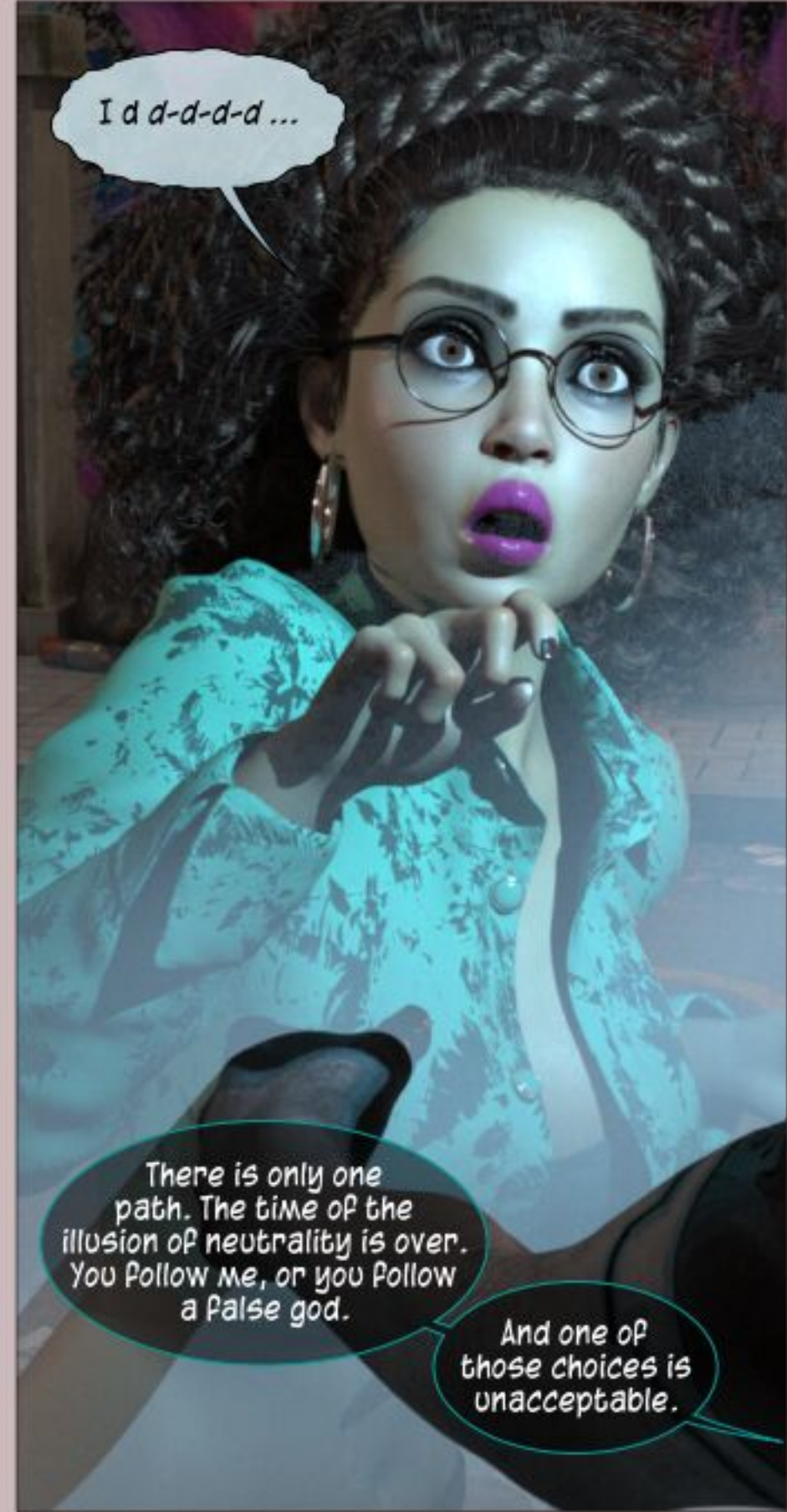
I don't have a very exciting life.

I don't have many friends, and the ones I do ... kind of treat me like I'm invisible, a lot of the time. I don't really leave an impression on anybody, I guess.

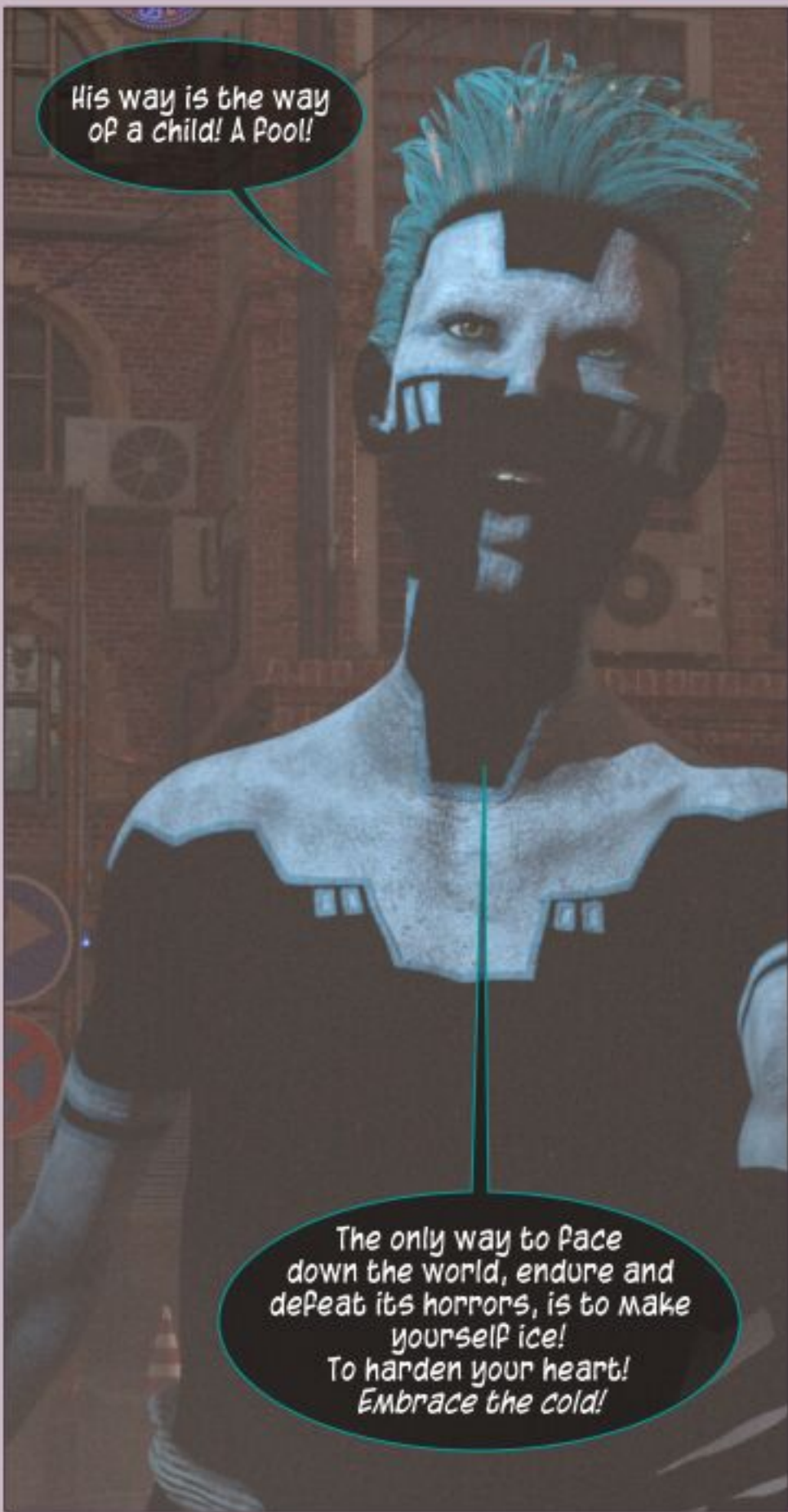
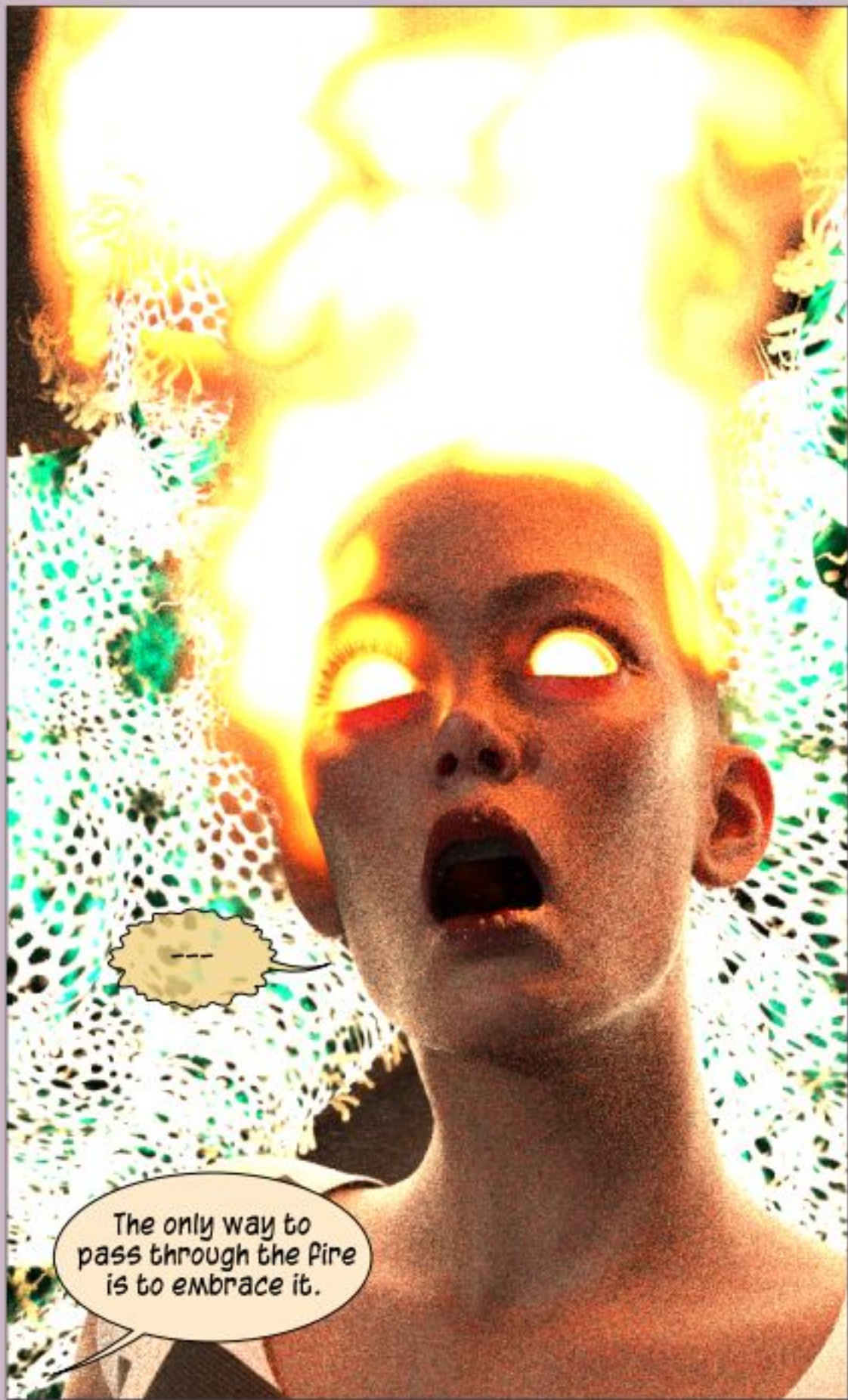
Not even myself.

This is probably the most interesting thing that's ever happened to me.













You know, the boss ... is what he is, and we elves mostly just like to make stuff and don't pay much attention to anything else ... sometimes she's the only person at the workshop who's got her head together.

So there's really a Mrs. Claus.

Oh, yes, very much. We couldn't do without her.



Do you know why she didn't try to stop me from coming?

Could be a lot of reasons. Maybe she knew nothing she'd say could keep you from seeing how this comes out.

Well, that's true.

Or maybe she knows you're important in some way to whatever's going to happen. She knows a lot of things, and doesn't always tell us. The boss does that too. You just kind of have to go with it.

Ooh. I'm ... not sure how I feel about that.



Central America? South America?

Mexico, I think. But somewhere pretty far south. Here, let me deal with your coat.

You two will need to be especially vigilant. There are things around here that'd like to have you for lunch.

Keep out of sight until we come back out.



Now, this is important. The woman we're about to see is a Fertility goddess ... but their tradition is different. Life and death are indivisible for them, and they can be violent and cruel.

I think that means "be extra polite."

Very much so. Or she might rip your heart out. And eat it.



I, uh ...

... I didn't know snakes came that big.

If they were aggressive, they'd be acting very differently right now.

But let's go around them. Just in case.



AAAAAA!



Did you understand any of that?

"Only believers past this point. Anybody else will be sorry."

... loosely translated.

Oh, well, that's great.

Doesn't apply to us.

It doesn't?



Well, you believe in her, don't you?

How could I not?

There you have it.



Uhh ... I know what you're thinking.

Not saying a word.









בנני צפופי גחפני,  
בנני צפופי גחפני ...  
אחפני ח חפניאני חפניאני



Stand  
your ground!  
Don't let him Preeze  
your heart! Fire is  
More --  
-- uh.

Keep  
up the  
attack! Don't  
let them  
intimidate you!  
They can't melt  
your --  
-- what?



What kind of trick is  
this? You think you're going  
to stop me destroying you  
by pulling me away --

You couldn't  
destroy me in your  
wildest dreams. And  
don't try to tell me  
this wasn't your  
trick --

-- wait.



Oh no.

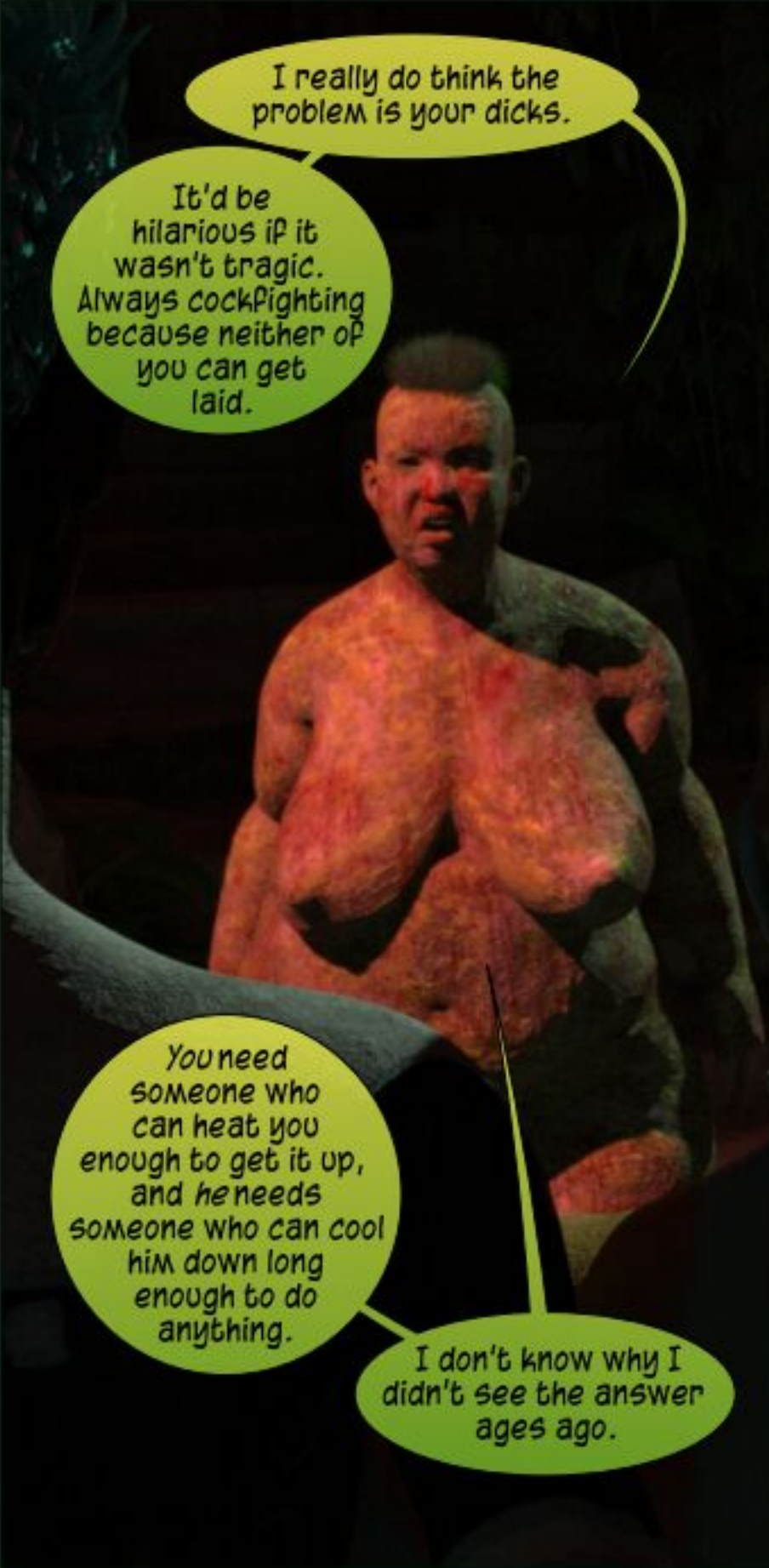
Mother!  
This is not a  
good time.

When would be a good  
time? After you finished  
trashing a city?



You know, the  
era of wrathful  
gods is over. People  
don't respond well to  
intimidation anymore.  
But you two are so  
busy trying to  
outpiss each other  
that you haven't  
noticed.

Who cares  
what they  
respond to?  
They have to do  
what we tell  
them. That's  
the whole  
point!



I really do think the  
problem is your dicks.

It'd be  
hilarious if it  
wasn't tragic.  
Always cockfighting  
because neither of  
you can get  
laid.

You need  
someone who  
can heat you  
enough to get it up,  
and hereeds  
someone who can cool  
him down long  
enough to do  
anything.

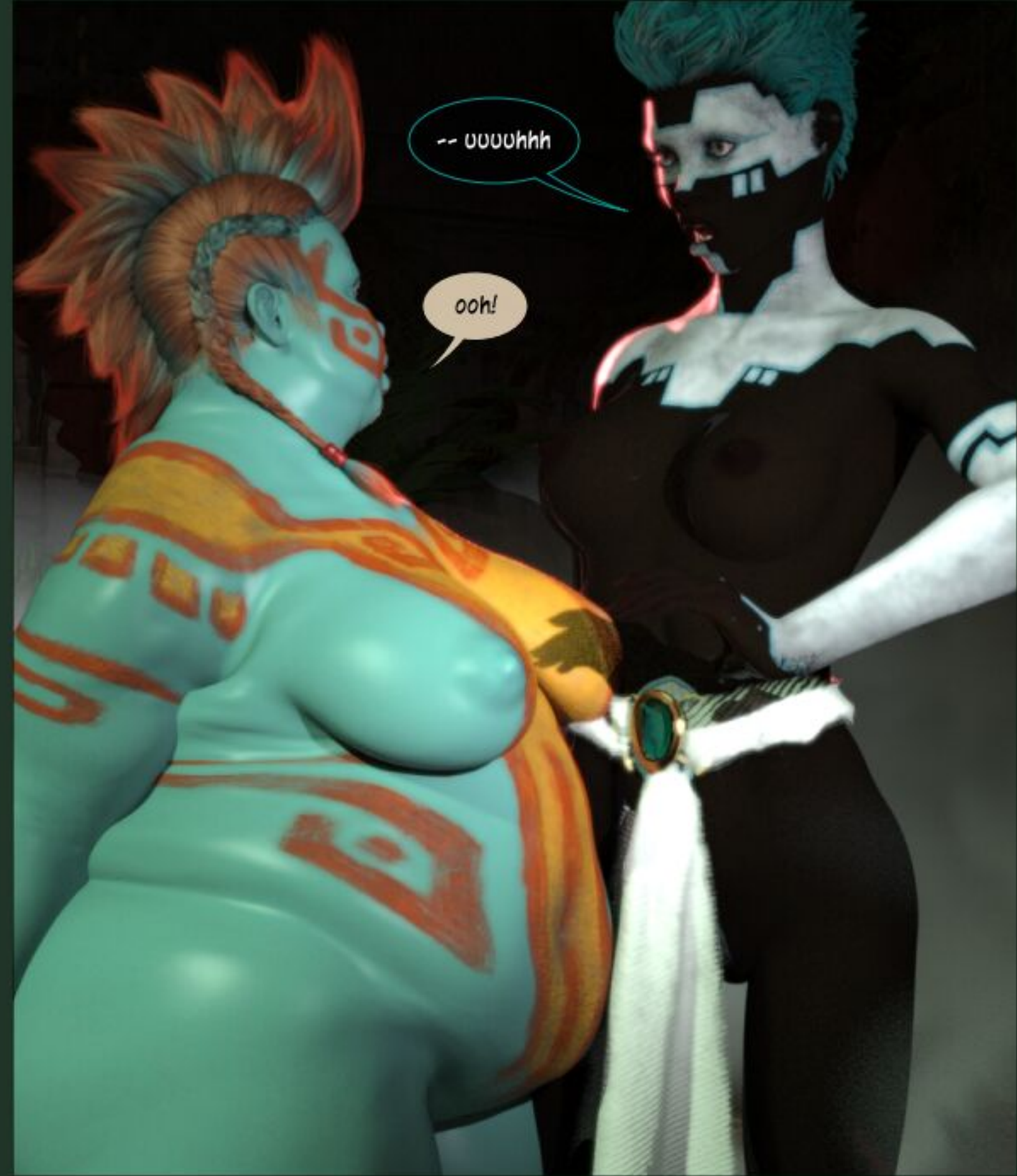
I don't know why I  
didn't see the answer  
ages ago.



Not sure why I ever had any  
boys in the first place, really.

Wuh!

You think this is  
Punny? You think it's  
going to make any  
difference at --



-- uuuuhhh

ooh!



HGHMM!  
LINGHHH!

MMHHH!  
OOO!

Aren't they,  
uh, siblings?

Half-siblings.  
Their fathers were a  
pain in the ass too.

Gods don't play  
by those rules  
anyway.



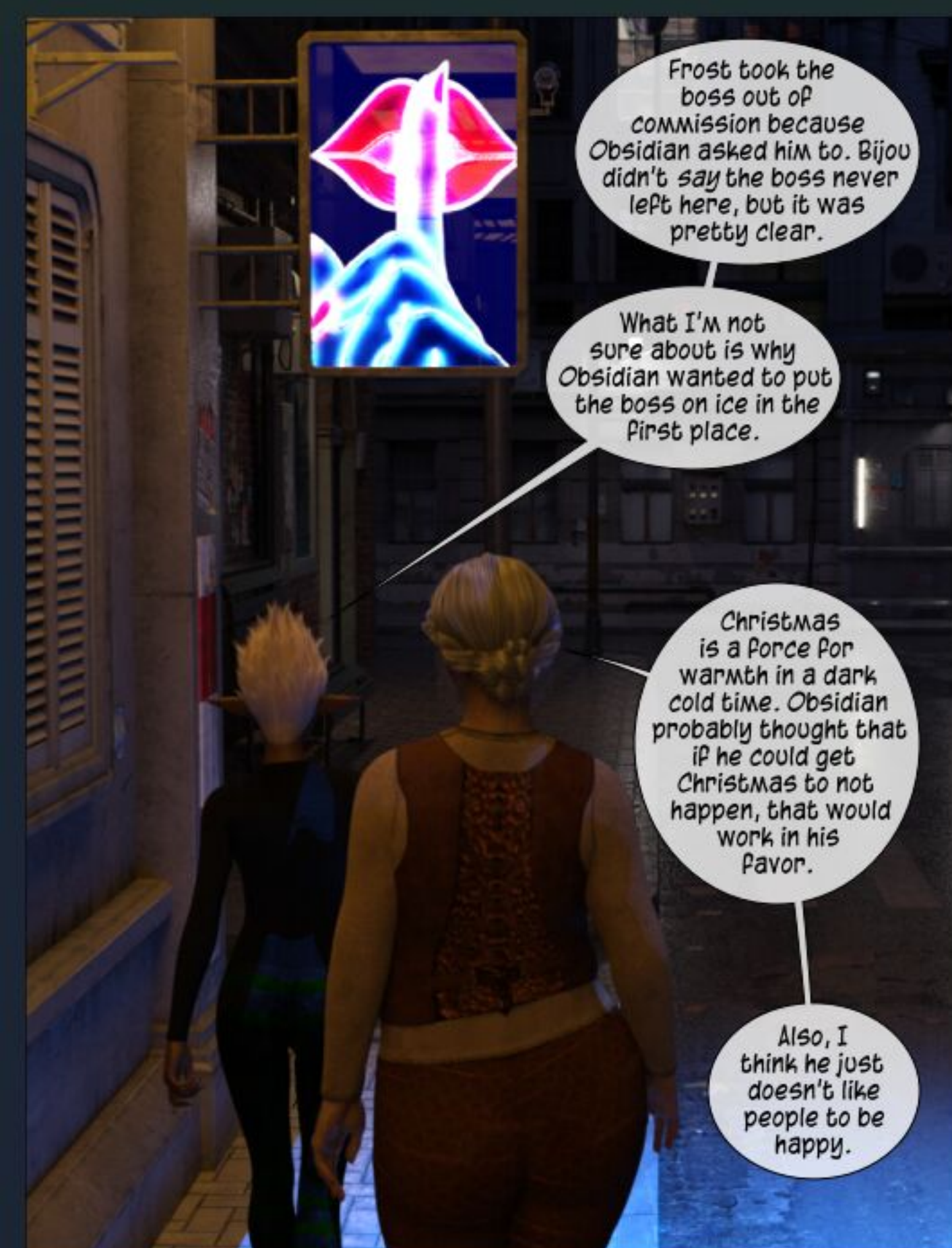
With them  
occupied, all their  
mischief should be  
undone now.

Thank you. I  
really do  
appreciate it.

Thanks for  
everything,  
Tinseltop.

You take care of  
yourself, OK?









Jack, even though I enjoyed that little vacation more than you might think ... I'm still very disappointed.

I trusted you.

Yeah, well, maybe you shouldn't have.

You kicked me out after all those years, with no warning, straight to the curb, not even so much as an apology ...

You expect loyalty after that?



I did apologize. And I warned you well in advance that we were moving to an era where I couldn't use you anymore.

Several times. I think you didn't want to hear it.

And when I dismissed you, I made sure you had something down here ... I wanted you to land on your feet ...

So you set me up in this shitty club?

Hey!!

Shut up, Bijou, no one asked you.

I hate this place and everyone in it! I hate having to smile at these assholes and treat them like gentlemen while they crawl into a back room to get their rocks off! That's your idea of a soft landing?



No one was forcing you to stay here. You're clever and capable. And the company you've been keeping ...

He didn't give me any choice!

Again, there were things you could have done. You could have come to me for help. There comes a time when you have to take some responsibility for yourself.

And now you leave me the responsibility of figuring out what sort of penance is appropriate.



Hmm?  
Oh. Yes. That's good.



Wait, no!

I think you should work the other side of the house for a while.

Personally, I found it an interesting and enlightening experience.

Bijou, the club is yours now.



For real?

Merry Christmas. You're the one who loves this place and cares about it, so you should be the one running it.

Treat everybody well.



Don't dawdle here, Tinseltop. There's still a lot to do. Got to get ready for the big ride!

And not a moment too soon.

no ...

I'll be right behind you.



He could still make my life difficult ...

I don't think it'll be a problem. I know how the boss works. Her mindset will flip over pretty fast.

She'll settle in before you know it. I know you'll be kind to her, and you try to make conditions here good for everyone, so she'll probably get so she likes it.



Who knows? By the time the boss remembers to come check on her, she may even decide she doesn't want to change back.



Did that happen? I mean, did she decide to stay like that?

You know, I don't think the boss has checked on her again yet. You know how time is here.

I also don't know whether the snake mother ever changed her sons back. But we haven't seen any trouble from them.

What about Iggy?

Oh, I do know about Iggy. I checked on her. A few years later, I guess?



"She hadn't stayed in the jungle for long. After she learned her job, she went back to the city. When I checked on her, she'd managed to accumulate a small but very devoted group of true believers."



"I don't know that she's ever managed to expand much beyond that, but she clearly enjoys her work, and that's good enough for me."

Merry Christmas to all from Trilby and Tinseltop!