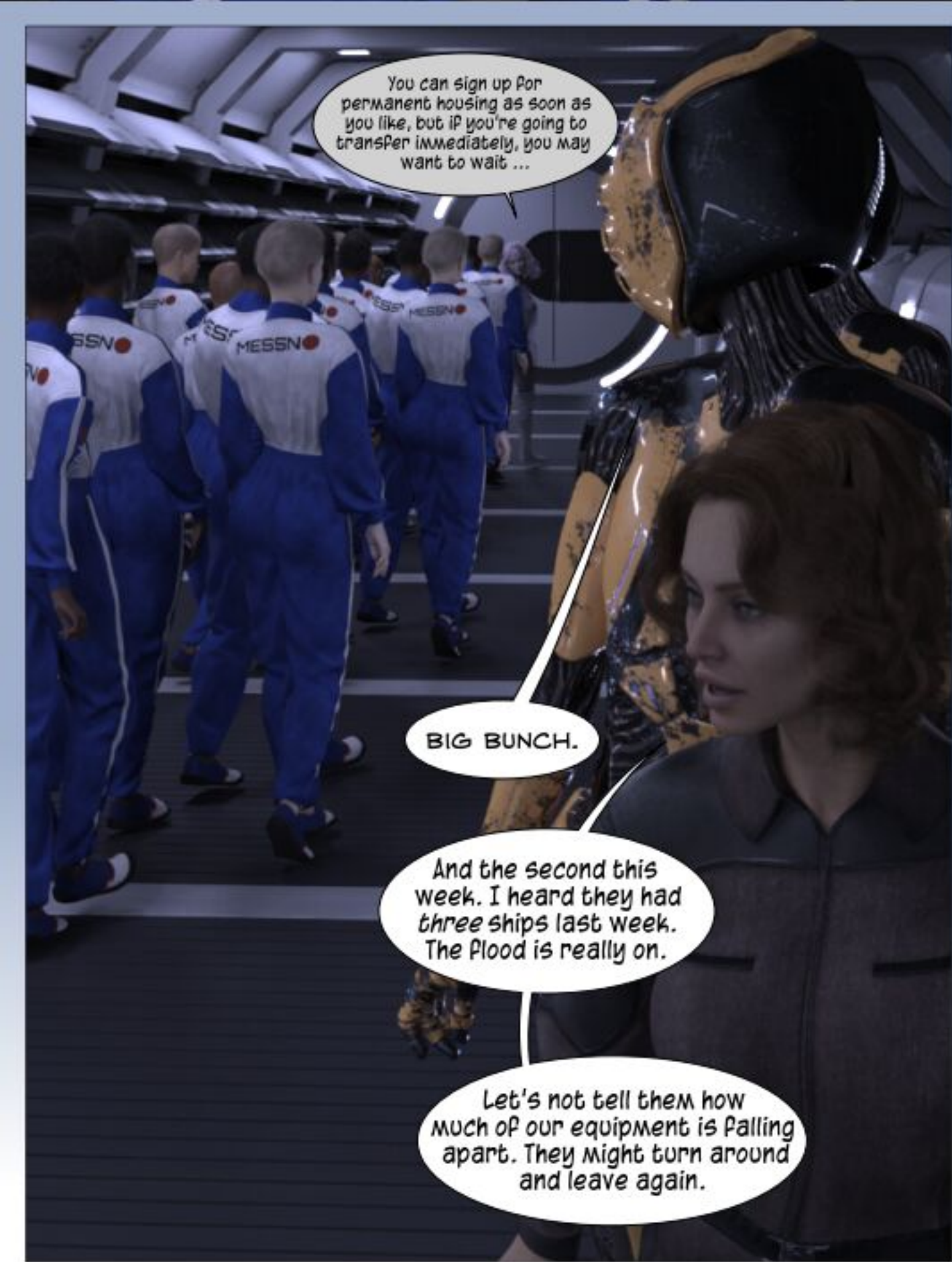




Now I'll show you to your temporary quarters.



You can sign up for permanent housing as soon as you like, but if you're going to transfer immediately, you may want to wait ...

BIG BUNCH.

And the second this week. I heard they had three ships last week. The Flood is really on.

Let's not tell them how much of our equipment is falling apart. They might turn around and leave again.



You know, if this happens one more time, we're going out with a crane and hauling it in, and we're going to take the thing completely apart. I want it solved. I'm not interested in putting on a damned coldsuit every two days.

IF YOU'D TRANSFER, YOU COULD GO OUT WITHOUT ONE.



You say that every time.

YOU GRIPE ABOUT IT EVERY TIME.

You know why I don't. I just undressed in front of both of you and you didn't even notice.

WE NOTICED. WE JUST DIDN'T CARE.

My point.



OK. Once more with Peeling. 500 Meters. Aim for the antenna.

WE KNOW.

That was for me, Bis.



They tell me they decided to locate on this plateau because the ring of mountains keeps the bad weather out. I don't think it worked.

SURE IT DID. JUST IMAGINE HOW MUCH WORSE IT IS BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS.



ANYWAY, THIS SEEMS ABOUT NORMAL ... WHICH MEANS WE CAN RULE OUT THE FAILURES BEING WEATHER-RELATED.

I'd already pretty much ruled that out. They're built to handle it.

HEY, WHAT'S THAT UP AHEAD?



JUST SOME EXPOSED ICE.

I'M NOT SO SURE.

Me neither. There's something about the shape ...



That's not ice.

MOSTLY IS, NOW. FROZEN SOLID. WHAT WAS HE DOING OUT HERE?



I don't think I know him. Or if I do, he's not recognizable like this. You?

NO.

NO. BUT WHAT HE'S WEARING ...

Yeah, I noticed.

I guess we carry him in. I'm not sure where to bring him. Medical?

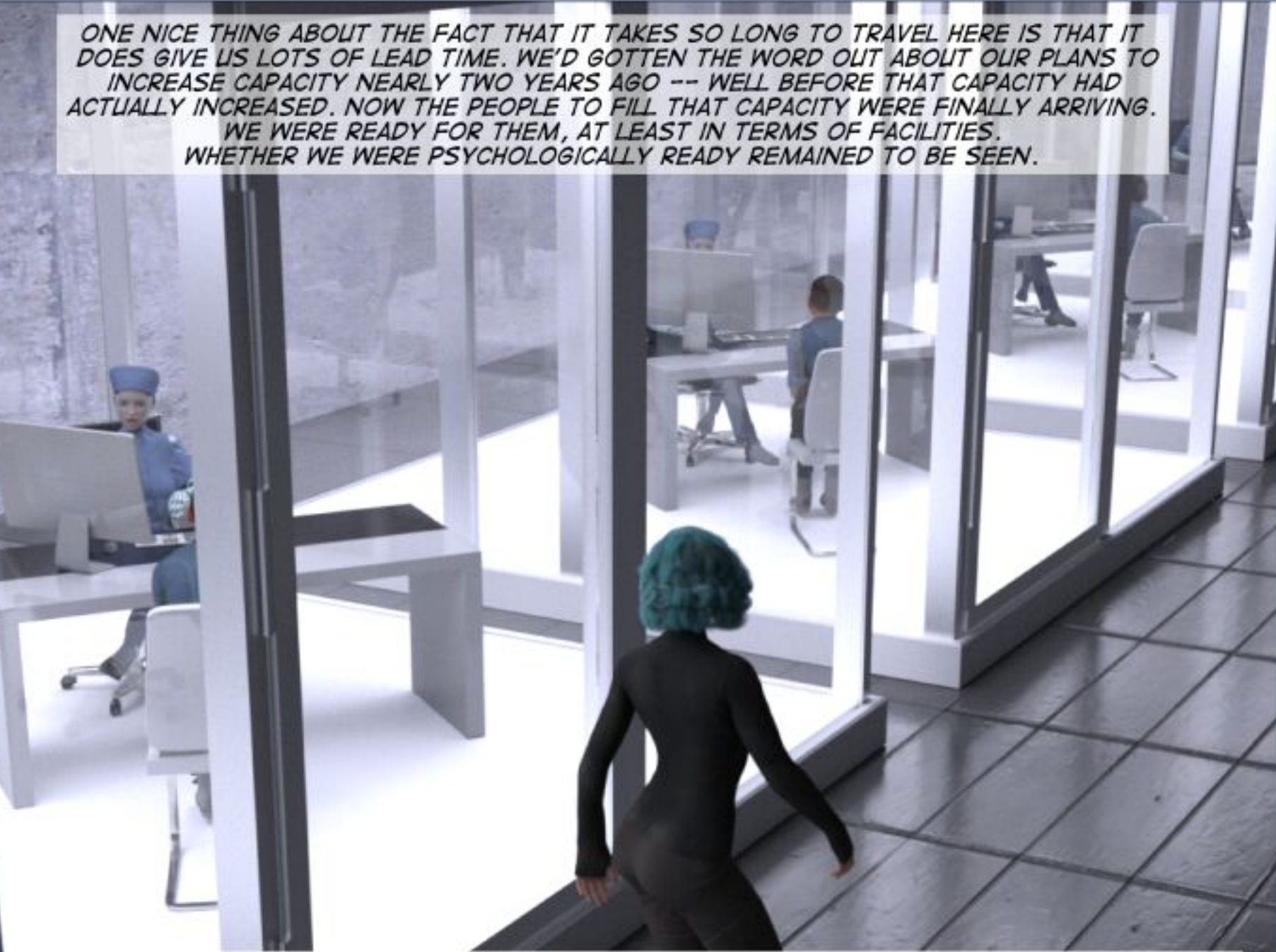
I THINK SO.

EXPOSED TO DEATH

STORY AND IMAGES BY TRILBY



ONE NICE THING ABOUT THE FACT THAT IT TAKES SO LONG TO TRAVEL HERE IS THAT IT DOES GIVE US LOTS OF LEAD TIME. WE'D GOTTEN THE WORD OUT ABOUT OUR PLANS TO INCREASE CAPACITY NEARLY TWO YEARS AGO --- WELL BEFORE THAT CAPACITY HAD ACTUALLY INCREASED. NOW THE PEOPLE TO FILL THAT CAPACITY WERE FINALLY ARRIVING. WE WERE READY FOR THEM, AT LEAST IN TERMS OF FACILITIES. WHETHER WE WERE PSYCHOLOGICALLY READY REMAINED TO BE SEEN.



ZUSY-Q, WHO HANDLES ALL THE TRANSFERS AND RUNS MEDICAL, ISN'T USUALLY SOMEONE TO AVOID THE FACTS, BUT SHE FEELS VERY PROPRIETARY ABOUT HER JOB. IT TOOK IRENE DAY'S ARRIVAL TO CONVINCE HER THERE WAS NO WAY MEDICAL WAS GOING TO BE ABLE TO KEEP FUNCTIONING WITHOUT HIRING AND TRAINING A LOT MORE PEOPLE.

IRENE NOT ONLY INSISTED ON A ROUND-THE-CLOCK MEDICAL STAFF, BUT POINTED OUT THAT ZUSY-Q COULDN'T KEEP DOING ALL THE INTAKE INTERVIEWS FOR TRANSFERS HERSELF. THAT IN FACT SHE SHOULDN'T BE DOING ANY OF THEM; SHE'D BE NEEDED FULL-TIME TO ACTUALLY DO THE TRANSFERS, SOMETHING ONLY SHE AND IRENE ARE CAPABLE OF.

AMAZINGLY, ZUSY-Q LISTENED ... THOUGH SHE DID INSIST THAT THE INTERVIEWERS ALL BE ROBOTS. SHE SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT AT THAT STAGE FOR THE INTERVIEWEE TO BE TALKING TO SOMEONE WHO HAD ALREADY TRANSFERRED.



Sorry to disturb you when it's so busy ...

Actually, I'm very nearly idle at the moment. The interviews are under control, and we're not backlogged on isolations.

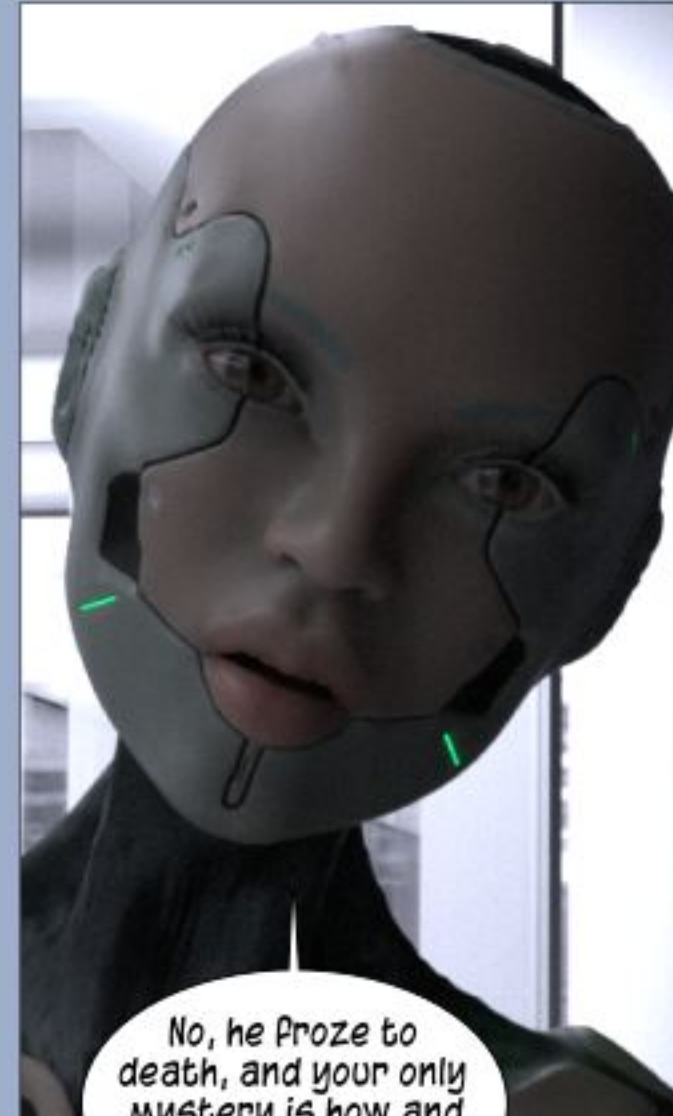
In a couple of days Irene and I will both have to do nothing but build Frames nonstop for weeks, so you should get me while you can.

You're here to see the body?

If you think there's a reason for me to. Was there any evidence of ...

Misadventure? None.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN WORKING OUT; ZUSY-Q WAS IN A SURPRISINGLY GOOD MOOD.



No, he froze to death, and your only mystery is how and why he was out there.

But I'd like you to have a look anyway. There's an issue with identification.



He looks more, uh, normal than I expected. Except for all the black patches ...

That's necrosis. Dead tissue. If he'd frozen all at once and quickly he'd look perfectly preserved, but he didn't. His hands and feet are worst because they were exposed extremities.

Based on his condition I'd say he was mobile for an unexpectedly long time, either wandering around, or trying to find shelter.

The problem is, only a few people can open the main surface doors, and they all know each other on sight. The surface team who brought him in say he's not any of theirs.



They don't all know each other. There's another set of people who have surface access that the maintenance crews have nothing to do with.

We have a few people who drive out to check and maintain the sentinel stations. That's almost all they do. The maintenance crews know they exist -- they share the truck pool -- but may never have seen any of them.

Could you hold his hair out of his face so I can get a clear image?



Simon Pollis.

Two minutes. Amazing.

Not so much. There are only four drivers right now and two of them are M's.

Even so. I worry what will happen if you ever lose Ms. Bantam and her mental encyclopedia of faces.

She claims it's all in her database, but yes, I don't like to think about that.

I wonder sometimes if Gloria realizes just how much she keeps this place running.




Sorry about that. Urgent need from my boss.

So, what can I do for you, Ms. Zigler? You may want to wait to locate a job or permanent housing --

No, I know. I ... haven't thought about any of that yet.

They told me you were the person to come to if I needed to find someone. They said you had records of everybody.

You mean you're trying to find someone who's already here?



Is that unusual?

I can't recall that it's ever happened. No one makes the trip out here just to look for someone.

And because of that, we don't have any established policy. What if they don't want to be found?

If it turns out she doesn't want to be found ... I promise you, whatever I decide to do, I won't bother her again after that.

Hm. Well, let me look her up, and then I can figure out what to do. What's her name?

Elizabeth Cornish.



I don't have anyone here at present under that name ...

... oh, wait ...

Oh. Oh, goodness.



Deril Hinch?

Ms. Barlowe? Oh, no ...

IT DEPRESSES ME THAT ALMOST EVERYONE IN COLDPOINT WHO KNOWS WHO I AM TENDS TO ASSUME MY PRESENCE MEANS BAD NEWS. IT DEPRESSES ME BECAUSE THEY'RE SO OFTEN RIGHT.

It's about Simon, isn't it?

What's happened? Do you know where he is? Is he dead?

Well, I --



He's been gone for two days! I've been asking everyone I could think of! No one has any idea what's happened to him!

If he's decided to leave me, Pine, that's his business ... but I need to know!

... Let's go inside, OK?



He's dead, isn't he? Tell me!

... Yes. I'm sorry you have to find out this way.

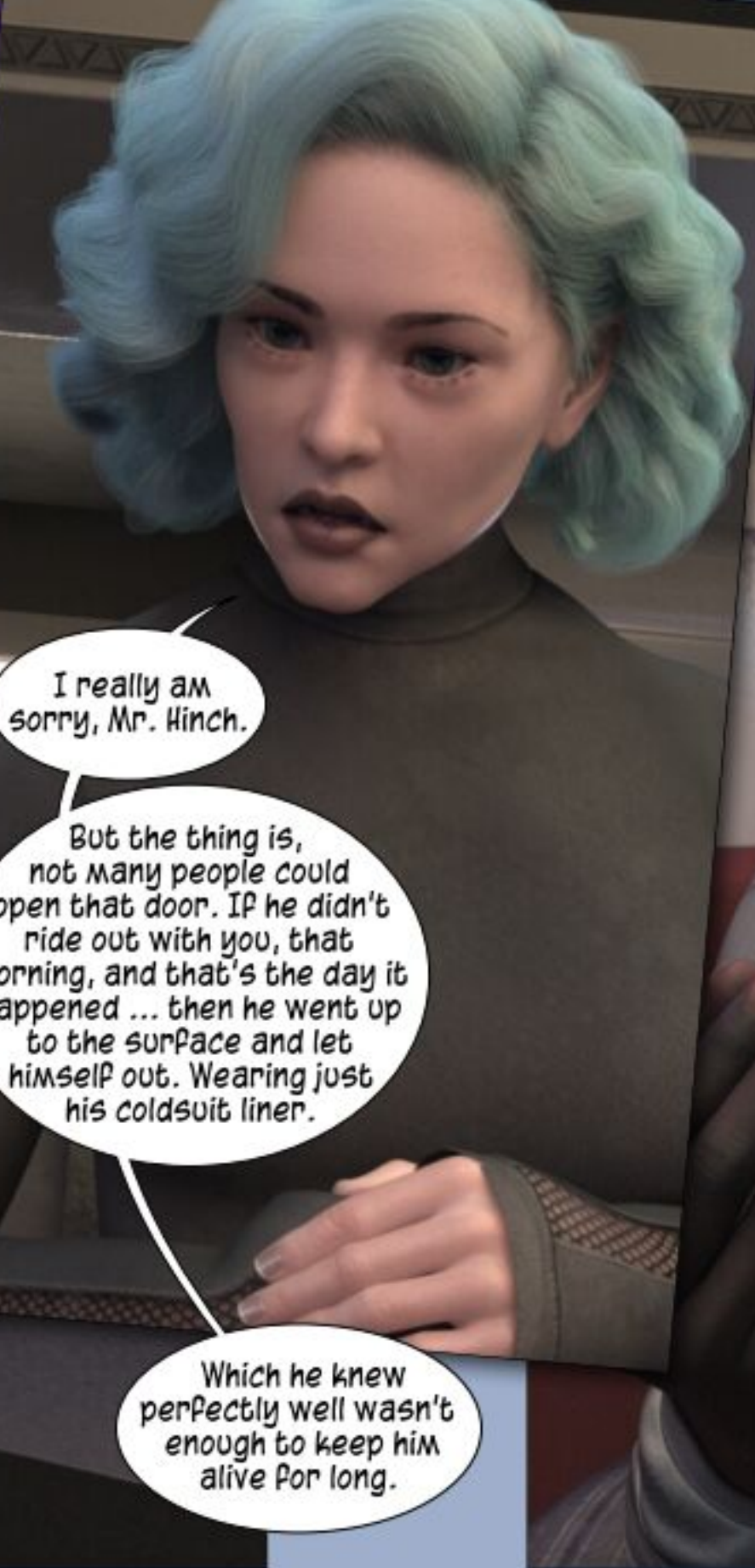
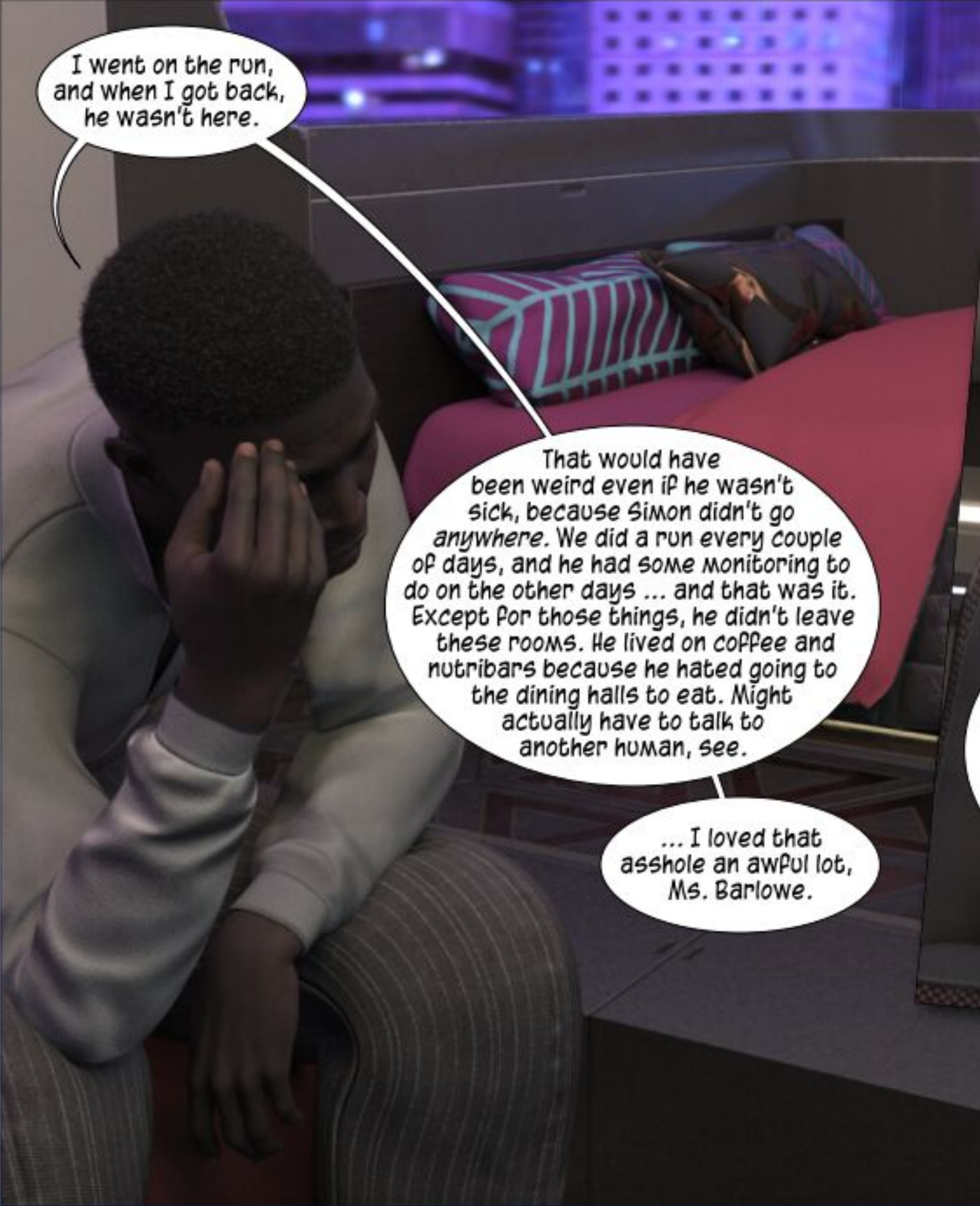
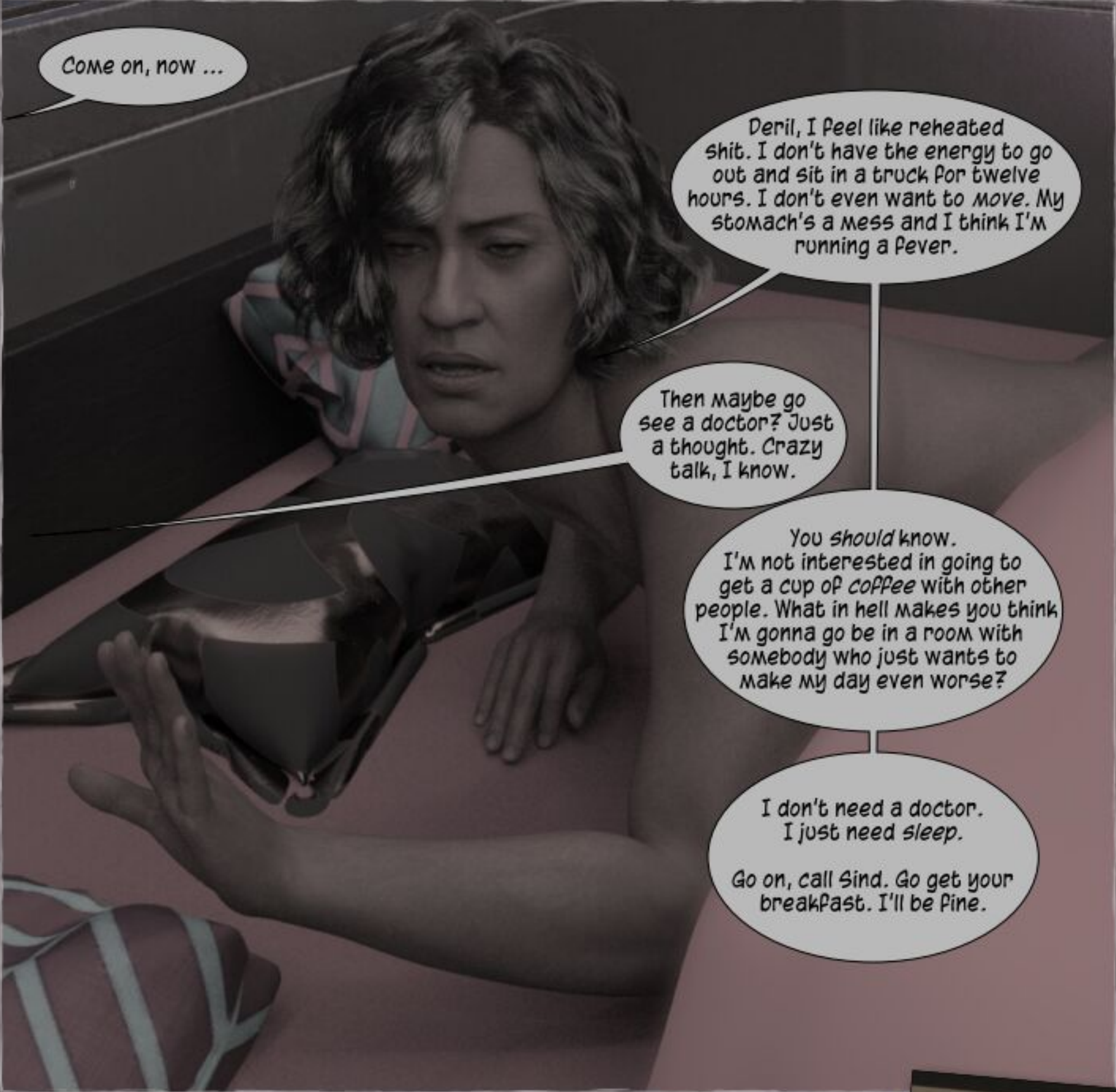
I'm also sorry I have to ask you some questions about it. And tell you some things you probably won't like hearing.

He was found on the surface, wearing just the liner of his coldsuit.

He was about 400 meters from the door. He'd probably been wandering around for a while before he couldn't anymore.

The two of you went on a run two days ago. Did anything happen on that you want to tell me about?





MIN SCOTT, MY DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING, FREQUENT CONFIDANT, AND OCCASIONAL BODYGUARD.





Murder makes even less sense than the other ideas. And it would mean a list of suspects I can't bring myself to suspect.

Except for you and Furst, I hired all these people.

I know. And I don't question your judgement or your objectivity ... but people do change.

I mean, it sounds like Pollis had basically become a recluse ...

Oh, he was always like that. I knew that about him when I hired him, way back when we were first setting up.

But he couldn't be beat on the skills. The only challenge was finding someone he was willing to work with.

When it turned out he could get along with Deril, I was relieved. When they became even closer than that, I was thrilled. I figured it would help keep him together. As far as I know, it has.

I assume you're going to talk to Sind? Or do you want me to?

Once I can get hold of them. They and their crewmate have been spending lots of time running people to and from that new mine. They're out today.

I think I'd probably better do it. But I promise to tell you if I learn anything.

I couldn't tell you one way or another.

I mean, she probably is somewhere around here, but she's always hard to find, and it's not like she'd make an appearance for one of us.

You could ask one of her people, but they're just as hard to find as she is, and anyway they probably wouldn't tell you.

Honestly, I don't know why you're even looking for her. If you do find her, she probably won't be happy about it.

But I just ...

-- Sigh --

Oh! Hello.

What's today's problem?

BETH VIGILANCE ANCHORS ONE END OF MY PERSONAL NUMBERLINE OF POLITICAL PAIN. SHE BELIEVES THAT THERE SHOULDN'T BE ANY PERMANENT OR EVEN SEMI-PERMANENT HUMAN POPULATION IN COLDPOINT --- THAT THEY'RE HERE TO TRANSFER, AND IF THEY DON'T BECOME ROBOTS WITHIN A CERTAIN TIME, THEY SHOULD BE THROWN OUT.

I DON'T COMPLETELY DISAGREE WITH HER, BUT THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH, AND WE DON'T GET ALONG.

I READ YOUR PROPOSAL.

You were supposed to read it. It was posted for public comment.

Should I assume you have issues with it?

THAT WOULD DEPEND ON WHETHER YOUR POLICE FORCE IS GOING TO HAVE HUMANS ON IT. KNOWING YOU, I SUSPECT YOUR REMARKS ABOUT 'REPRESENTATION' MEAN YOU INTEND IT WILL.

EVEN PUTTING ASIDE OUR USUAL POLICY DIFFERENCES ... EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN THIS PLACE THAT REQUIRES POLICING IN THE FIRST PLACE STEMS FROM THE HUMANS. THE HUMANS ARE WHERE ALL THE POLICING IS NEEDED.

IF YOU GIVE HUMANS CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN POLICING THEN YOUR POLICE FORCE WILL BE USELESS FROM THE START. AND WILL LIKELY CORRODE QUICKLY INTO YET ANOTHER SOURCE OF ANTI-ROBOT SENTIMENT.

Sometimes I wonder if you're aware of the extent to which you are a vector for anti-robot sentiment.

Certainly if I arrived here and immediately got hit in the face with your attitude about humans, it'd make me pretty hostile. Might even discourage me from transferring. You might be working against your own goals.

And you're not stupid or naive, so when you say all the trouble here comes from the humans, I have to assume you're just ignoring history on purpose. Some fairly recent. Some you were directly involved in.

No one magically becomes an angel just because their brain gets put into a frame.

YOU WANTED PUBLIC COMMENT. I'VE GIVEN YOU MINE.

I DIDN'T SAY YOU HAD TO AGREE WITH IT.

Good thing.

I'D BEEN DRIVEN TO THE POLICE PROPOSAL NOT SO MUCH BY THE UNFORTUNATE RISE IN VIOLENT DEATHS --- THERE WERE FEW ENOUGH OF THOSE THAT I COULD SHRUG IT OFF AS STATISTICALLY OK ... BARELY. IT ONLY LOOKED BAD IF YOU WERE WORKING FROM THE ASSUMPTION/HOPE THAT THERE WOULD BE ZERO. WHICH HAD ALWAYS BEEN OPTIMISTIC.

THOUGH BETH WOULD SAY THAT IF THIS PLACE WASN'T HALF HUMANS, IT WOULD BE ZERO.

ANYWAY, MY REAL WORRY WAS THAT WE WERE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE MOST RAPID GROWTH WE'D EVER HAD. WE HAD FIVE YEARS OF INITIAL EXCAVATION AND BUILD WHERE THERE WERE FEWER THAN A HUNDRED PEOPLE HERE. THEN FIFTEEN YEARS TO GROW TO A BIT OVER THREE THOUSAND. FROM THERE TO FIVE THOUSAND WAS GOING TO TAKE ABOUT FOUR MONTHS.

CONDITIONS WERE GOING TO CHANGE, AND I WAS CONCERNED THAT THE SUDDEN INFUX OF PEOPLE WASN'T GOING TO MAKE THE POLITICS ANY CALMER. I WAS CONVINCED SOME KIND OF POLICING WAS NECESSARY.

THE PROBLEM WAS, NO ONE LIKED THE IDEA. NOT EVEN ME.

ZZZZZZZZ

Hey, Gloria. What's up? Thanks for the ID earlier ...

Oh, you're very welcome ... Look, long shot, I know, but do you have any idea where Beth could be lurking right now?

You called two minutes too late! I just ran into her ... I can turn around and chase her, but you know how she is, she's probably vanished ...

No, don't bother. But let me know if you cross her path again today, would you?

Sure. Is there a problem? Anything I need to know about?

... No, not a problem ... I'll tell you about it in person later.





TWO --- NO, MAKE THAT THREE --- MORE PEOPLE I DIDN'T PARTICULARLY WANT TO RUIN INTO, THOUGH EACH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.

Well, you know we've now had a statement on that Prom Excavation ...

Yes, and that statement is complete shit.

You can quote me on that.



Furst Deepstone hasn't yet said anything that even comes close to justifying this policy. He just keeps offering up pissball excuses.

There are a hundred jobs opening in that new mine, in a community that's starved for any kind of employment opportunity.

Robots and humans both want jobs, and we all know there aren't enough of them, so how do you justify a "robots only" policy? What could possibly justify it?

And what can you possibly call this shit policy except blatant discrimination?

PULLER CORL WASN'T NEW TO COLDPOINT. SHE'D BEEN HERE A FEW YEARS, AND AS FAR AS I KNEW HADN'T EVER DONE OR SAID ANYTHING ANYONE WOULD TAKE NOTICE OF -- UNTIL A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO, WHEN SOMETHING IN HER APPARENTLY WOKE UP AND BEGAN YELLING.



Ms. Barlowe! What's the position of the operations manager on this issue?

The position of the operations manager is that this isn't the time, place, or medium to discuss it.

Oh yeah? Where is?

ISADORA BRASS, COLDPOINT'S ONLY ROVING REPORTER. USUALLY TOLERABLE AND SOMETIMES USEFUL, BUT OCCASIONALLY NEEDS TO BE SLAPPED.



Probably see me in hell first ...

That fucking camera had better be off now.

It's off! I swear!!

So, really? You're just going to ambush me? You know better than that!

It wasn't an ambush!

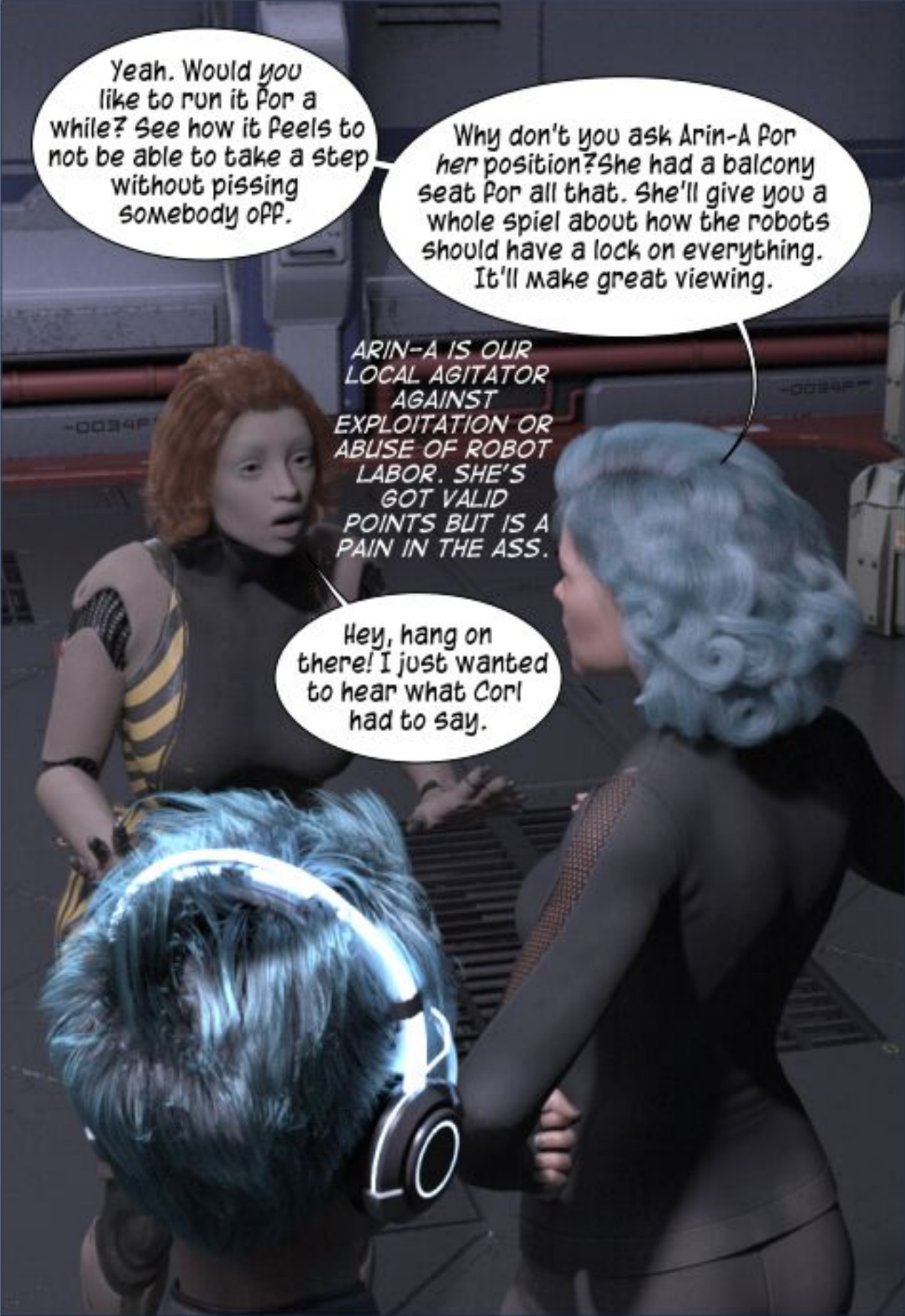


It was a legitimate question! People want to know your position on this! I know you have one ...

None that's safe to give on the record.

Any position I could take on this is just going to give me more pain and headaches. Even a "no comment" isn't a safe position. Then it seems like I'm dodging.

Well, uh ... aren't you? Kind of? I mean, you run the place.



Yeah. Would you like to run it for a while? See how it feels to not be able to take a step without pissing somebody off.

Why don't you ask Arin-A for her position? She had a balcony seat for all that. She'll give you a whole spiel about how the robots should have a lock on everything. It'll make great viewing.

ARIN-A IS OUR LOCAL AGITATOR AGAINST EXPLOITATION OR ABUSE OF ROBOT LABOR. SHE'S GOT VALID POINTS BUT IS A PAIN IN THE ASS.

Hey, hang on there! I just wanted to hear what Corl had to say.



And anyway you're wrong. I'm working for fairness. I know you think I'm super-pro-robot but, y'know, you've never bothered to ask.

Corl has a point. It's not a Fair policy.

All right, I apologize. At least you're consistent.

Maybe I'll make you have the fight with Furst.



Do you think she's gotten a lot nastier lately?

Yeah. I'm not sure what that's about.



No, we've got to have someone there! It's one of our best chances to get their attention! What about Tam?

Tam's doing the dining halls. You said that was important ...

It is ... we can't spare him from there. But we don't have --

You're going to have to do the concourse, Ziz. I don't trust any of these short-timers to do it right.

But you wanted me in the booth ...

I'll do the booth! As soon as I can. It's not as important as working the concourse. These people don't even know the info corridor exists yet.

CLAIRE PARSONS IS THE OTHER END OF MY ANNOYANCE NUMBERLINE. STARTED OFF FROM "YOU DON'T HAVE TO TRANSFER IF YOU DON'T WANT" AND HAS DRIFTED TO GENUINE ROBOT-HATER. IF I HAD TO PICK, I'D SAY I DISLIKE PARSONS MORE THAN BETH, BUT IT'D BE A CLOSE CALL.



What do you want?

Don't let her push you around.

And that's not funny.

ZIZ FLYN. ONE OF PARSONS' ONLY UNSHAKEABLE LOYALISTS. NEVER BEEN ABLE TO FIGURE OUT WHETHER THAT MAKES HER REALLY HORRIBLE OR REALLY DELUDED. NEVER CARED ENOUGH TO FIND OUT.





Poor Parsons. Can't get enough people to spread the gospel to the new masses.

Yes, I can see how sympathetic you are. What do you want?

CLAIRE DOESN'T CURSE, BUT SOMETIMES I CAN SEE HER TRYING TO CHOKE IT BACK.

Hey, I'm sympathetic. I'm not shutting you down, am I?

What did you do or say that lit a fire under Puller Cori?



I'm not responsible for everything that happens here you don't like.

No, only about half of it.

Nobody heard boo from Cori for three years. Then suddenly she's a major pain.

Maybe she'd be less of a pain if you took her seriously. You know she's right. Your jobs policy is unfair to humans.

It shouldn't be an issue because the humans aren't supposed to be staying human long enough to need jobs.

Like medical -- we shouldn't need to expand it, because the robots don't need it and the humans are supposed to be transferring.

And yet here we are.

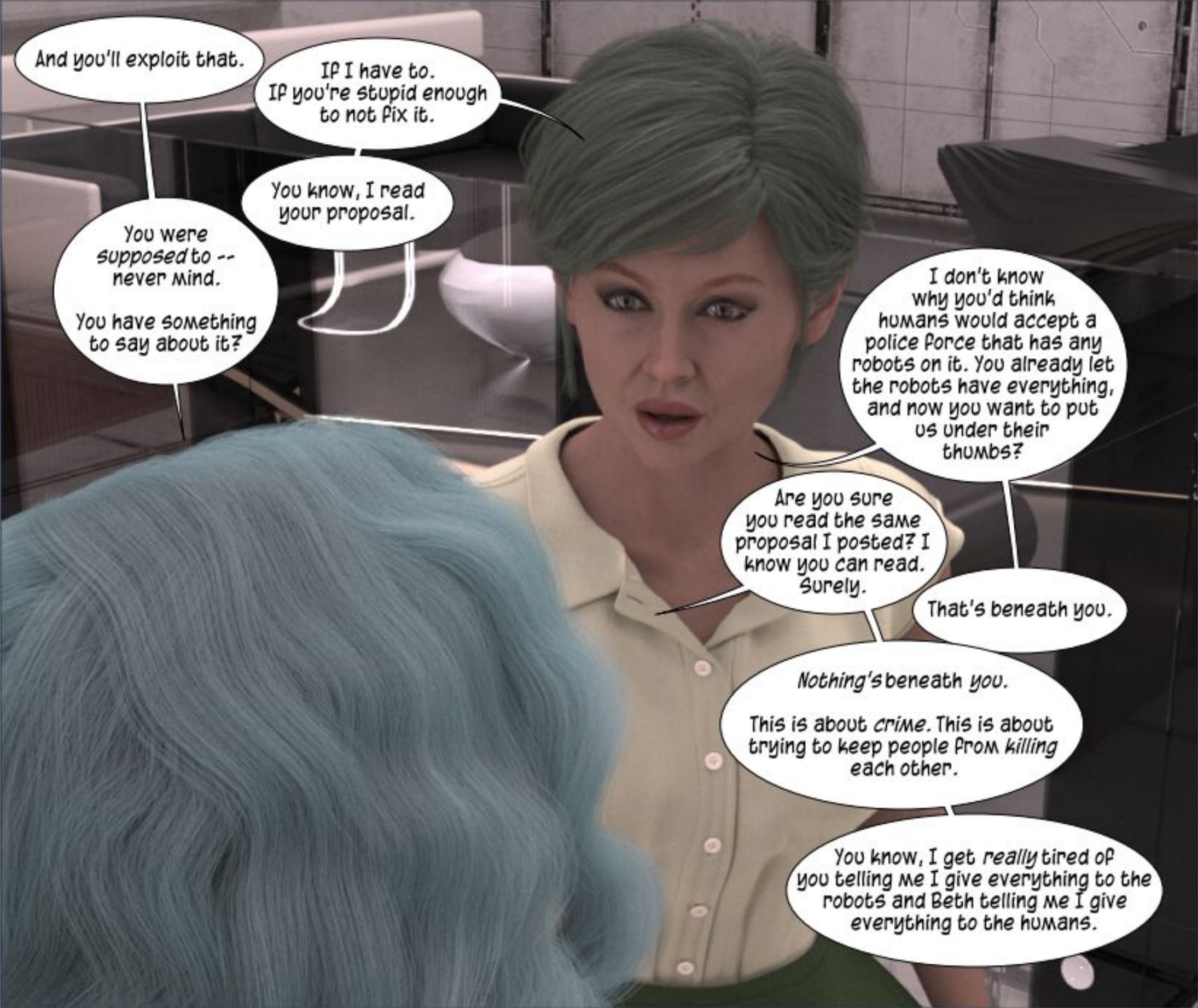


Not while you keep trying ...

Maybe you should put aside what you think is supposed to be happening, and look at what *is* happening. Coldpoint is half human. That's not going to change soon.

Psst. I could drop dead tomorrow and everyone could suddenly agree with you, and you *still* wouldn't be able to get this place all-robot in less than three years. And that's generous. You can't transfer them that fast.

You have to work with what you've got now, and what you've got is humans who want in on a very small pool of jobs, and aren't allowed near most of them.



And you'll exploit that.

If I have to. If you're stupid enough to not fix it.

You know, I read your proposal.

You were supposed to -- never mind.

You have something to say about it?

I don't know why you'd think humans would accept a police force that has any robots on it. You already let the robots have everything, and now you want to put us under their thumbs?

Are you sure you read the same proposal I posted? I know you can read. Surely.

That's beneath you.

Nothing's beneath you. This is about crime. This is about trying to keep people from killing each other.

You know, I get really tired of you telling me I give everything to the robots and Beth telling me I give everything to the humans.



You can't both be right, but you sure as hell can both be wrong, and I've been trying to walk straight down the middle for I don't know how long and it never seems to do any --

You won't commit.

Huh?

There isn't a middle. Everyone knows it but you. You want this to stop, then pick a side.

Either do what Beth wants and put in a transfer-or-leave time limit, or accept that humans are a permanent part of the place and protect their rights.

But you won't because you keep hoping you can please everybody. You can't, and it just makes you look like a coward.



Hey!

Excuse me!

You're Vigilance clan, aren't you? You've got the colors ...

I'm looking for Beth Vigilance. It's important that I talk to her!



DORINE?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

Beth! Finally!

I've been looking all over for you! You don't stay anywhere and nobody will tell me a damned --



-- Beth?



IN EARLY EVENING, SIND DEEPSTONE'S TRUCK CAME BACK FROM THE NEW MINE, BEARING A LOAD OF OTHER DEEPSTONES, MOSTLY COVERED IN DIRT.

Which of you is Sind?

I CAN ONLY TELL M'S OF THE SAME CLAN APART IF I KNOW THEM PRETTY WELL. I FIGURED IT HAD TO BE ONE OF THE TWO CLEAN ONES, THOUGH.

OVER AT THE CONSOLE.

HEY, SIND, MS. BARLOWE WANTS TO TALK TO YOU.

I SEE THAT, GRU.

YOU CAN GO ON. I'LL CLOSE UP.



JUST ONE MORE SECOND, MS. BARLOWE, I NEED TO FINISH FILING THIS LOG.

IS SOMETHING WRONG?

In a way. Not with you. I need to talk to you about Simon Pollis.

SIMON? I HAVEN'T SEEN SIMON IN MONTHS. I DON'T THINK ANYBODY BUT DERIL HAS. WHAT'D HE DO?

He's dead.



SERIOUSLY?

I wouldn't joke about something like that.

I guess Deril hasn't seen you since the run two days ago, or he'd have told you ...

I DIDN'T DO A RUN WITH DERIL. HE DIDN'T ASK, AND I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE. I'VE BEEN RUNNING OUT TO THE MINE NEARLY EVERY DAY. WE NEED A THIRD TRUCK CREW.

HMM. He said Simon was sick that morning so he got you to sub in.





OH, WELL ... HE MIGHT HAVE SAID THAT, YES. WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DRIVE SOLO. HE WOULDN'T HAVE WANTED TO CANCEL THE RUN JUST BECAUSE HE COULDN'T GET ME OR GRU.

AND HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET ANYONE ELSE BECAUSE --

-- YOU NEED MORE DRIVERS. YES. I'LL TALK TO MIN AND FURST ABOUT THAT.

WE COULD USE AT LEAST ONE MORE TEAM, AND, WELL ... I DON'T WANT TO SOUND CALLOUS, BUT NOW THAT --

-- OH, IT'S NOT LIKE DERIL WON'T TELL YOU ANYWAY. I DIDN'T THINK SIMON AND DERIL SHOULD BE OUT THERE. THAT'S A JOB FOR AN M. WE DON'T NEED COLDSUITS AND WE DON'T RUN THE SAME RISKS. WE WOULDN'T NEED THE NO-SOLING RULE IF ALL THE DRIVERS WERE M'S.

AND PART OF OUR CURRENT PROBLEM IS THAT SIMON AND DERIL FEEL -- FELT -- THAT THEIR JOB IS EXCLUSIVELY SENTINEL RUNS. THEY ONLY GO OUT ON THOSE EVERY TWO OR THREE DAYS. THEY COULD BE HELPING US WITH MINE RUNS THE OTHER DAYS, BUT THEY WON'T.

Did you tell Min your feelings on this?

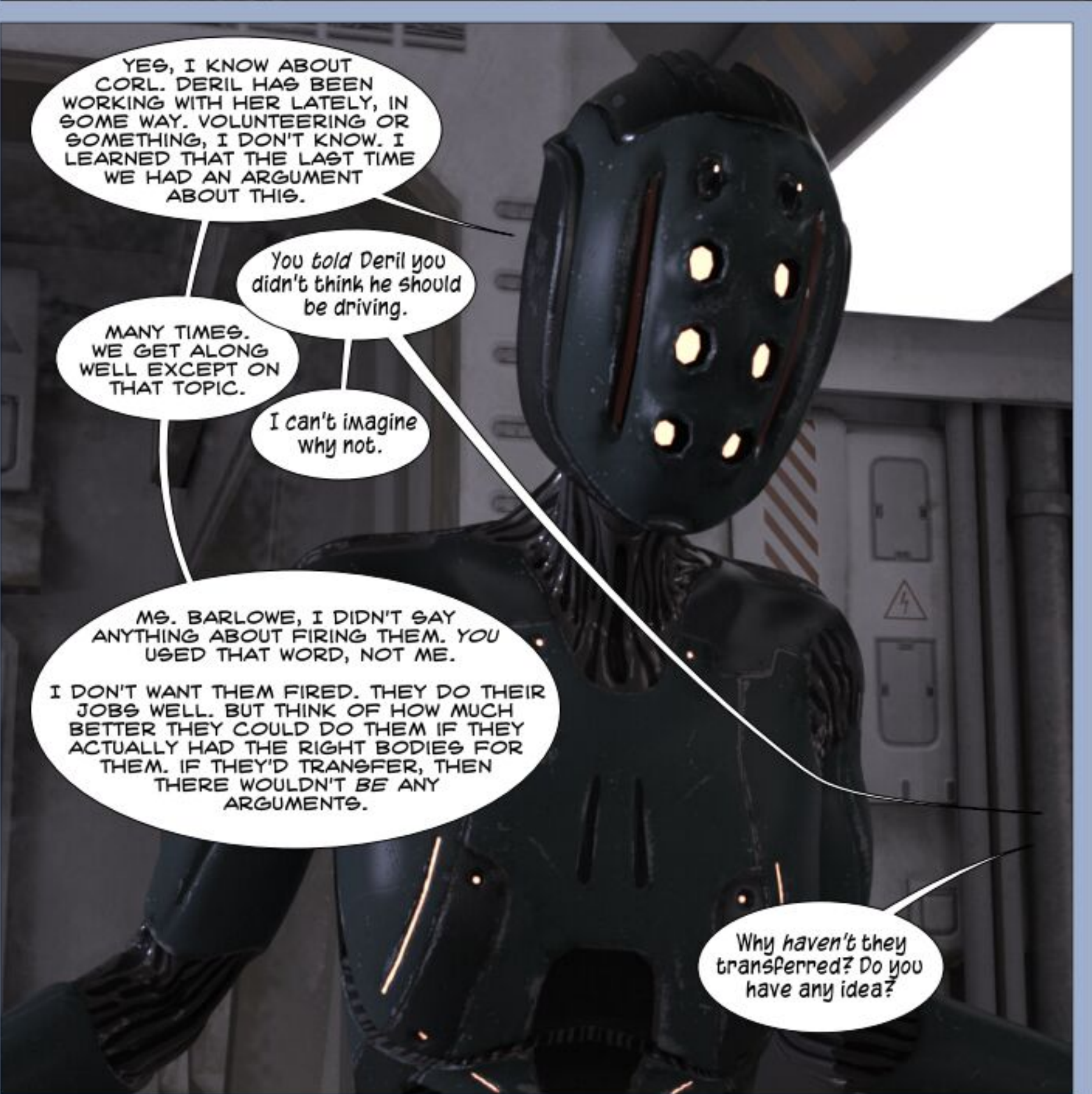


I HAVEN'T REALLY HAD A CHANCE.

I DON'T KNOW THAT IT WOULD MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE. MS. SCOTT SEEMS TO THINK THOSE TWO ARE SACRED ...

Simon was one of Min's first hires. We needed someone to maintain the sentinel stations almost from day one. She wouldn't have fired him without a much better reason.

And we have to be very careful. We've already got people like Puller Corl shouting about employment fairness. She might even have a point.



YES, I KNOW ABOUT CORL. DERIL HAS BEEN WORKING WITH HER LATELY, IN SOME WAY. VOLUNTEERING OR SOMETHING, I DON'T KNOW. I LEARNED THAT THE LAST TIME WE HAD AN ARGUMENT ABOUT THIS.

You told Deril you didn't think he should be driving.

MANY TIMES. WE GET ALONG WELL EXCEPT ON THAT TOPIC.

I can't imagine why not.

MS. BARLOWE, I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT FIRING THEM. YOU USED THAT WORD, NOT ME.

I DON'T WANT THEM FIRED. THEY DO THEIR JOBS WELL. BUT THINK OF HOW MUCH BETTER THEY COULD DO THEM IF THEY ACTUALLY HAD THE RIGHT BODIES FOR THEM. IF THEY'D TRANSFER, THEN THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY ARGUMENTS.

Why haven't they transferred? Do you have any idea?



I HAVE SOME THEORIES, BUT I'M NOT THE PERSON TO ASK. TALK TO MART JADER. HE'S BEEN CLOSE TO THEM A LONG TIME. EVEN SIMON TOLERATED HIM SOCIALLY ONCE IN A WHILE, I'M TOLD.

Pollis seems to really not have done well with other people.

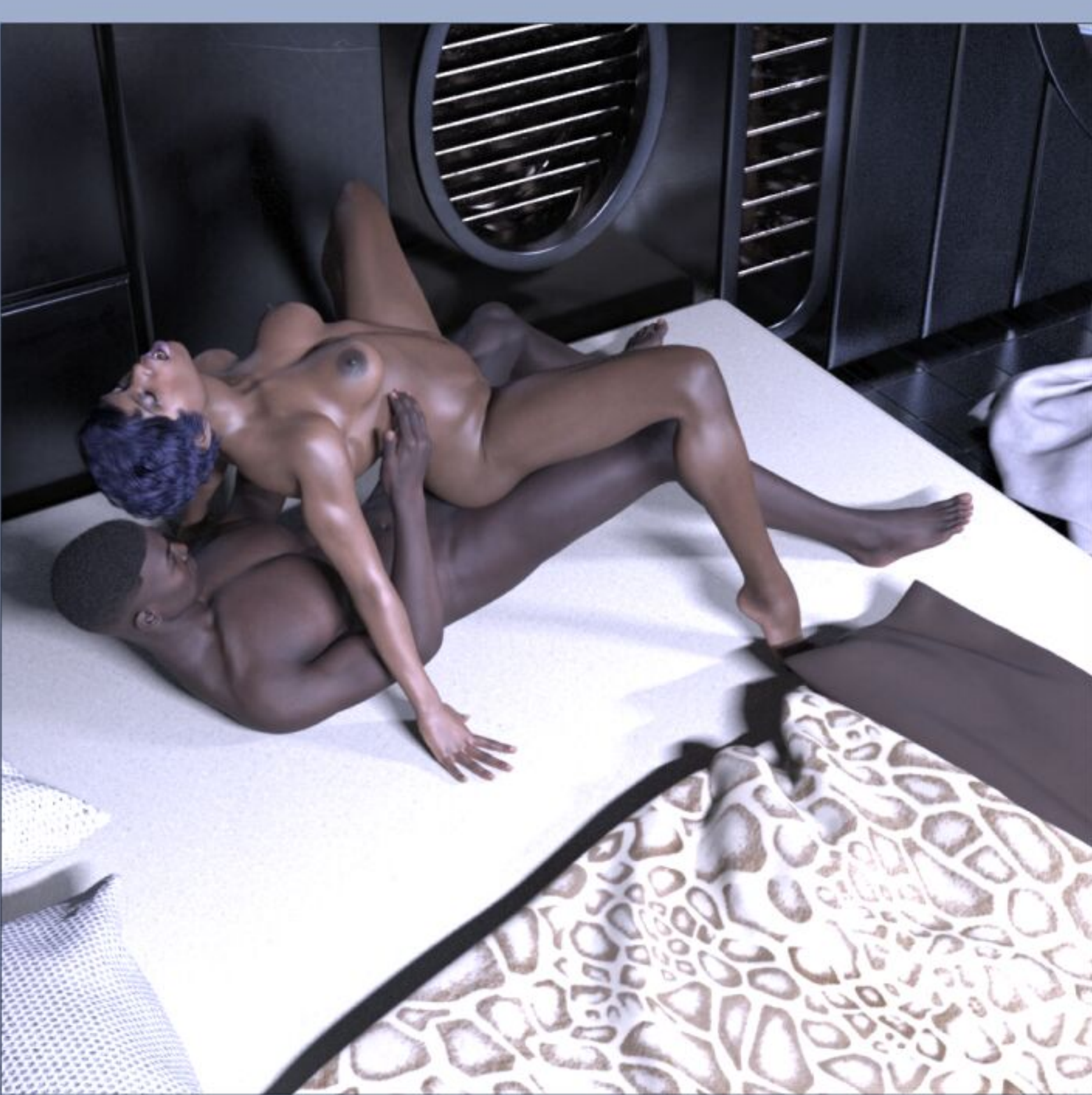
HE WOULD BARELY EVER SPEAK TO ME. EVEN IF I SUBBED IN FOR DERIL ON A RUN. HE'D ONLY SAY THE MINIMUM HE HAD TO. I THOUGHT HE WAS A ROBOT-HATER FOR A WHILE, UNTIL DERIL EXPLAINED HE WAS LIKE THAT WITH EVERYONE.

Everyone except Deril.

AND MART. POSSIBLY. WHICH IS EVEN MORE INTERESTING BECAUSE I THINK DERIL WAS WITH MART BEFORE SIMON.

THOUGH I DON'T THINK THAT WOULD HAVE MATTERED, BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE GONE RIGHT OUT THE DOOR AS SOON AS DERIL AND SIMON MET. THE TWO OF THEM WERE COMPLETELY DEVOTED TO EACH OTHER.

I CAN'T IMAGINE EITHER OF THEM WITH ANYBODY ELSE.



So you can get it up for a woman.

That's ... not a very nice thing to say ...

I'm just being honest. Most of the gay men I've known wouldn't go near pussy. They think it'd bite their dick off or something. I'm surprised you asked me ...

Well ... since we're being honest ... I, uh --

I know. You're not really into it, but your lover's dead and you needed some support.



Aw, don't make that face. I'm not mad about it. It was fun. I hope it was fun for you too.

Besides, I think it improves our working relationship.

Speaking of that, have you given any more thought to my proposal?



I've given it a lot of thought ... and I still think it's a really bad idea.

There's got to be another way.

I keep trying to come up with one, and I haven't found any that would accomplish what needs to happen.

I'm running out of choices.



BYLA AND TREAC, MY SIGNIFICANT OTHERS, HAD ARRANGED A SPECIAL NIGHT AT THE RED X, THE CLUB BYLA'S NOW PARTLY RUNNING. I DIDN'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THEY WERE PLANNING UNTIL I SHOWED UP.

This is ... a bit much, isn't it?

We were hoping you'd pole dance for us!

You do not want me to try to pole dance.

Well, we've all been so Prantic with all the new arrivals ... you're busy, everybody here at the X barely has a moment to breathe, Treac's basically running Call Sign for Metri ...

It's so hard for all three of us to get together, I thought we should do something a little special.

Also, Treac's got a surprise she wants to try out. Show her, Treac.

Well, then!

What do you think?

I finally talked her into it.

I really do think that if you've got hotswap, you should have a full tool chest.

I might need practice with it, though.

Well, I'm not saying I don't appreciate the effort. I could use a night where everything is pleasant and people don't stop me in the corridors to tell me how wrong I am.

That sounds like it's about the policing proposal ...

Mm-hm. And what really gets me is that if I'm getting this reaction now, imagine what it's going to be like when I try to float the advisory council idea.

Oh, this is good. I could just fall asleep ...

Don't you dare!

I mean, we know the council thing will be rougher. The stakes are a lot higher. Everyone is going to want to make sure their interests are represented.

Including some interest groups you may not even realize are interest groups yet.

Such as?

Sex workers. I don't think our needs are adequately met by either the pro-human or pro-robot groups. Our position isn't exactly like either of theirs.

Fortunately, I already have your ear ...

And a lot of other parts of me. On request.

But, you know, that's going to develop into a problem too. Someone's going to come along and accuse anybody who's close to me -- my friends, my immediate staff, and so on -- of having undue influence.

Oh, you don't truly think it would come to that, do you?

I wouldn't bet against it.

But it doesn't matter. I refuse to compromise my life to accommodate that kind of noise. Especially my personal life.

Anybody who gives me any of that kind of grief can go piss in a reclaim.

THE NEXT MORNING.

AS I'VE SAID BEFORE, I DON'T LIKE BEING IN MY OFFICE. IT'S USEFUL FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF MEETINGS, BUT I TRY NOT TO BE IN IT APART FROM THAT.

IT'S ALSO A PLACE WHERE I CAN BE AMBUSHED BY PEOPLE I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO.

I MEAN, I REALIZE THAT IT'S GOOD TO HAVE SOME POINT OF PUBLIC AVAILABILITY ... BUT I WAS WONDERING IF I SHOULD RETHINK MY NOT WANTING TO HAVE AN ASSISTANT, WHO COULD TELL PEOPLE LIKE CORL THAT I WASN'T THERE AND THAT I'D COME FIND THEM LATER ON MY TERMS.

THAT WAS THE REAL ISSUE -- THAT I SHOULD BE THE ONE TO PICK THE TIME AND PLACE, WHICH MAY NOT BE FAIR, BUT, HONESTLY, NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO DEAL WITH CLAIRE PARSONS OR FULLER CORL FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.

So, is now the time and the place?

I get that you won't talk about any of this with witnesses present. So does that mean I can get some traction in private?

Or does it just mean you won't tolerate any discussion of your policy, ever?

You could fix the whole thing with a word. A word.

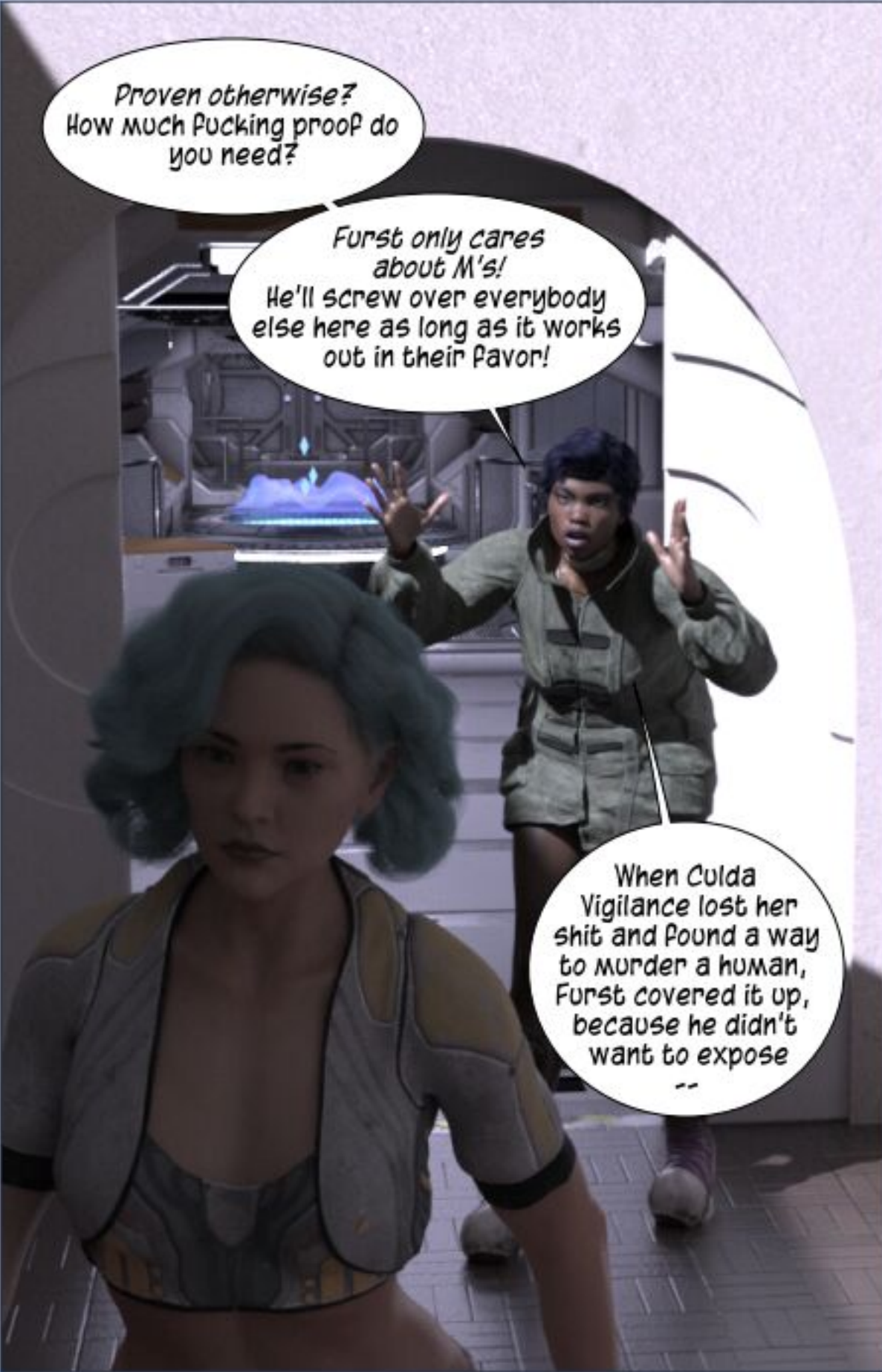
Except that if I did, I'd be stepping on someone else's feet. I'm not a dictator. My directors should be allowed the stability of knowing I won't just undo their decisions at a whim.

If you don't like the jobs policy in the mines, you need to take it up with Excavation.

You think I haven't? First won't budge! He won't even listen to me!

Then I have to assume he feels he has good reason. Until proven otherwise.





Proven otherwise?  
How much Pucking proof do  
you need?

Furst only cares  
about M's!  
He'll screw over everybody  
else here as long as it works  
out in their favor!

When Cuda  
Vigilance lost her  
shit and Pound a way  
to murder a human,  
Furst covered it up,  
because he didn't  
want to expose  
--



Stop right there.

First, Cuda was  
going after other  
robots. Ones she felt  
were traitorous. Yes, she  
arranged the death of a  
human, and I don't excuse  
that, but for her that  
was just a means to  
her real end.

Second,  
when Furst  
realized an M was  
behind those crimes, he  
just about tore the entire  
community of M's apart  
trying to find out who. He's  
still got some M's who  
are mad at him  
about it.

Get your facts right.

Or, if you can't do that, then don't  
shoot off your mouth about  
something you obviously know  
nothing about.

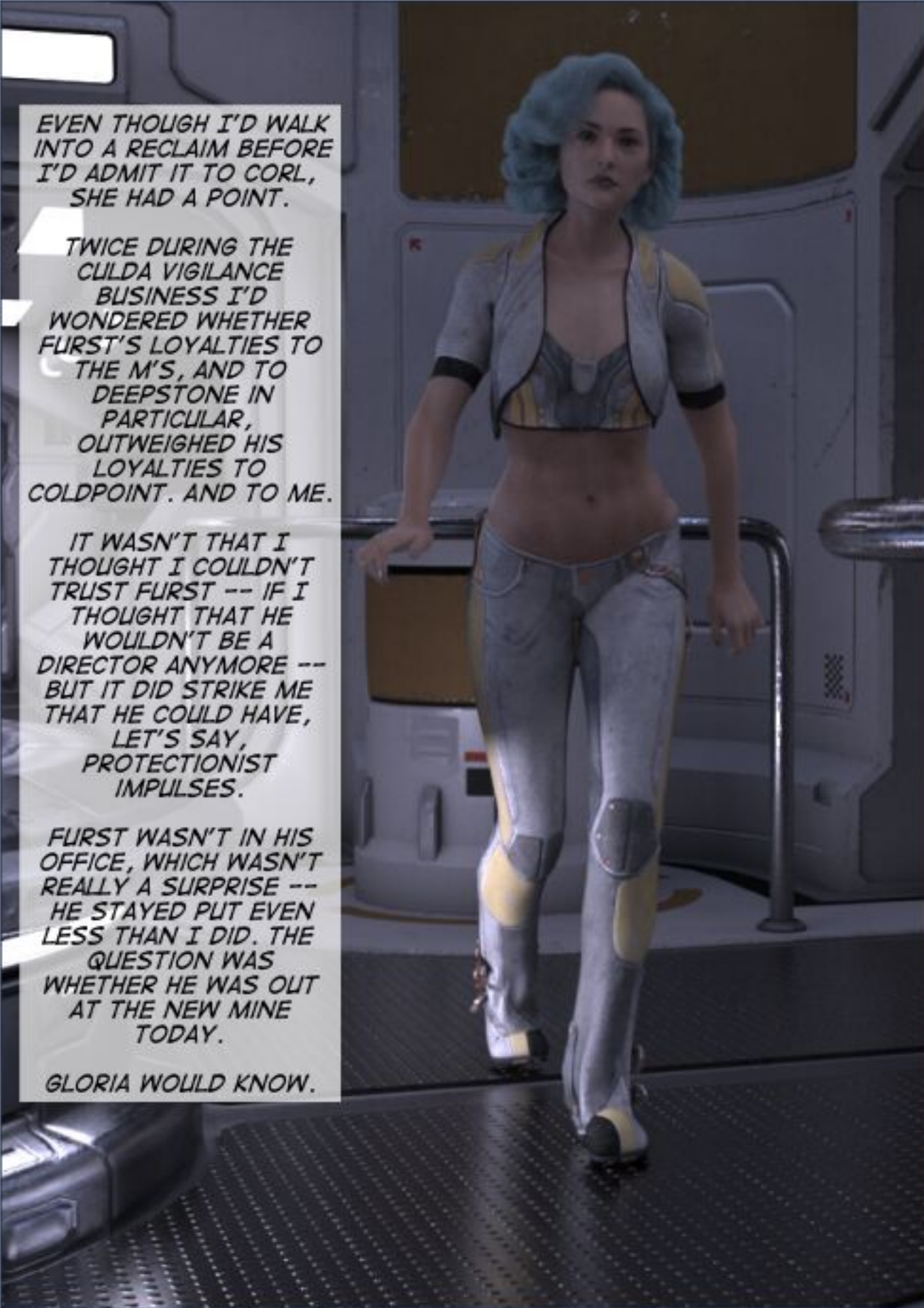
THESE EVENTS ARE IN "FRAMED FOR DEATH."



I can see I'm not going to  
get anything from you.  
Fine.

But sooner or later  
you're going to have to  
realize he's a problem and  
do something about him.

Unless  
you're waiting  
for someone else  
to do it for you.  
Which might  
happen.



EVEN THOUGH I'D WALK  
INTO A RECLAIM BEFORE  
I'D ADMIT IT TO CORL,  
SHE HAD A POINT.

TWICE DURING THE  
CULDA VIGILANCE  
BUSINESS I'D  
WONDERED WHETHER  
FURST'S LOYALTIES TO  
THE M'S, AND TO  
DEEPTONE IN  
PARTICULAR,  
OUTWEIGHED HIS  
LOYALTIES TO  
COLDPOINT. AND TO ME.

IT WASN'T THAT I  
THOUGHT I COULDN'T  
TRUST FURST -- IF I  
THOUGHT THAT HE  
WOULDN'T BE A  
DIRECTOR ANYMORE --  
BUT IT DID STRIKE ME  
THAT HE COULD HAVE,  
LET'S SAY,  
PROTECTIONIST  
IMPULSES.

FURST WASN'T IN HIS  
OFFICE, WHICH WASN'T  
REALLY A SURPRISE --  
HE STAYED PUT EVEN  
LESS THAN I DID. THE  
QUESTION WAS  
WHETHER HE WAS OUT  
AT THE NEW MINE  
TODAY.

GLORIA WOULD KNOW.



The thing is, Ms. Zigler, I'm  
not sure how I can explain this  
without running into ... ah ... it's  
complicated, you see ...

Gloria, do you  
know it --

-- oh, I'm sorry.  
I'll come back later.

Wait a second, Wendy.

Actually, I could use  
your help here. You have  
more leeway about  
disclosure than I do.



This is Dorine  
Zigler. Just arrived.  
She came to Coldpoint to  
look for someone named  
Elizabeth Cornish.

I didn't have a  
record for that name,  
so I checked against  
listings from the original  
Manifests. Names  
upon arrival.

I hadn't found her  
because, less than a  
month after her  
transfer, she started  
the Vigilance clan.

Oh.



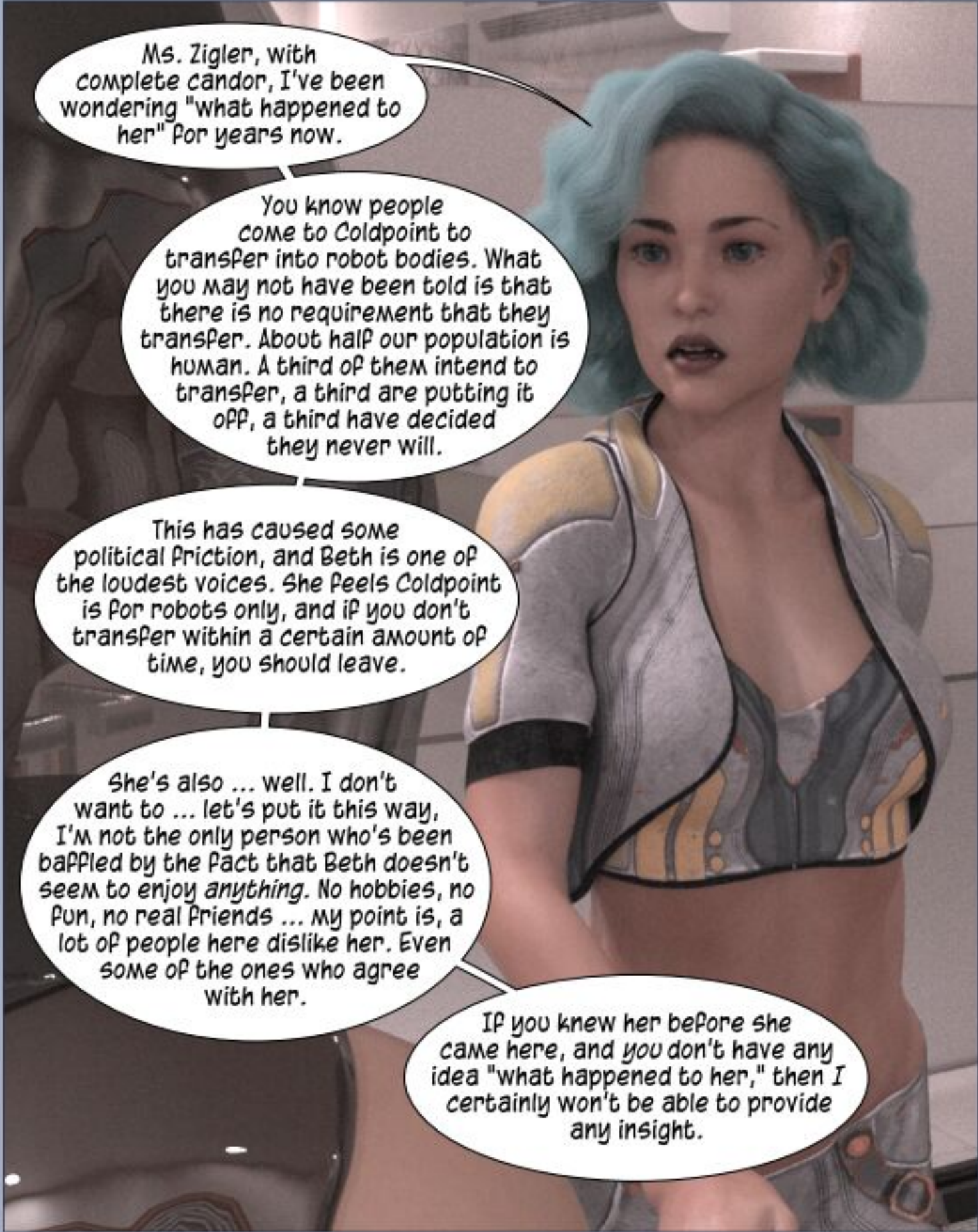
This is Wendy  
Barlowe.  
The operations manager.  
You can trust her.

I'm just  
trying to  
understand, Ms.  
Barlowe.

Everybody  
I've approached  
about Beth has  
acted very  
strangely.

And when I  
finally found her,  
she walked away  
and wouldn't talk  
to me at all.

What is it?  
What happened to her?



Ms. Zigler, with  
complete candor, I've been  
wondering "what happened to  
her" for years now.

You know people  
come to Coldpoint to  
transfer into robot bodies. What  
you may not have been told is that  
there is no requirement that they  
transfer. About half our population is  
human. A third of them intend to  
transfer, a third are putting it  
off, a third have decided  
they never will.

This has caused some  
political friction, and Beth is one of  
the loudest voices. She feels Coldpoint  
is for robots only, and if you don't  
transfer within a certain amount of  
time, you should leave.

She's also ... well. I don't  
want to ... let's put it this way,  
I'm not the only person who's been  
baffled by the fact that Beth doesn't  
seem to enjoy anything. No hobbies, no  
fun, no real friends ... my point is, a  
lot of people here dislike her. Even  
some of the ones who agree  
with her.

If you knew her before she  
came here, and you don't have any  
idea "what happened to her," then I  
certainly won't be able to provide  
any insight.



Well, I'm going to  
find out.

I'm not going to  
turn around and go all  
the way back without  
getting some  
answers.

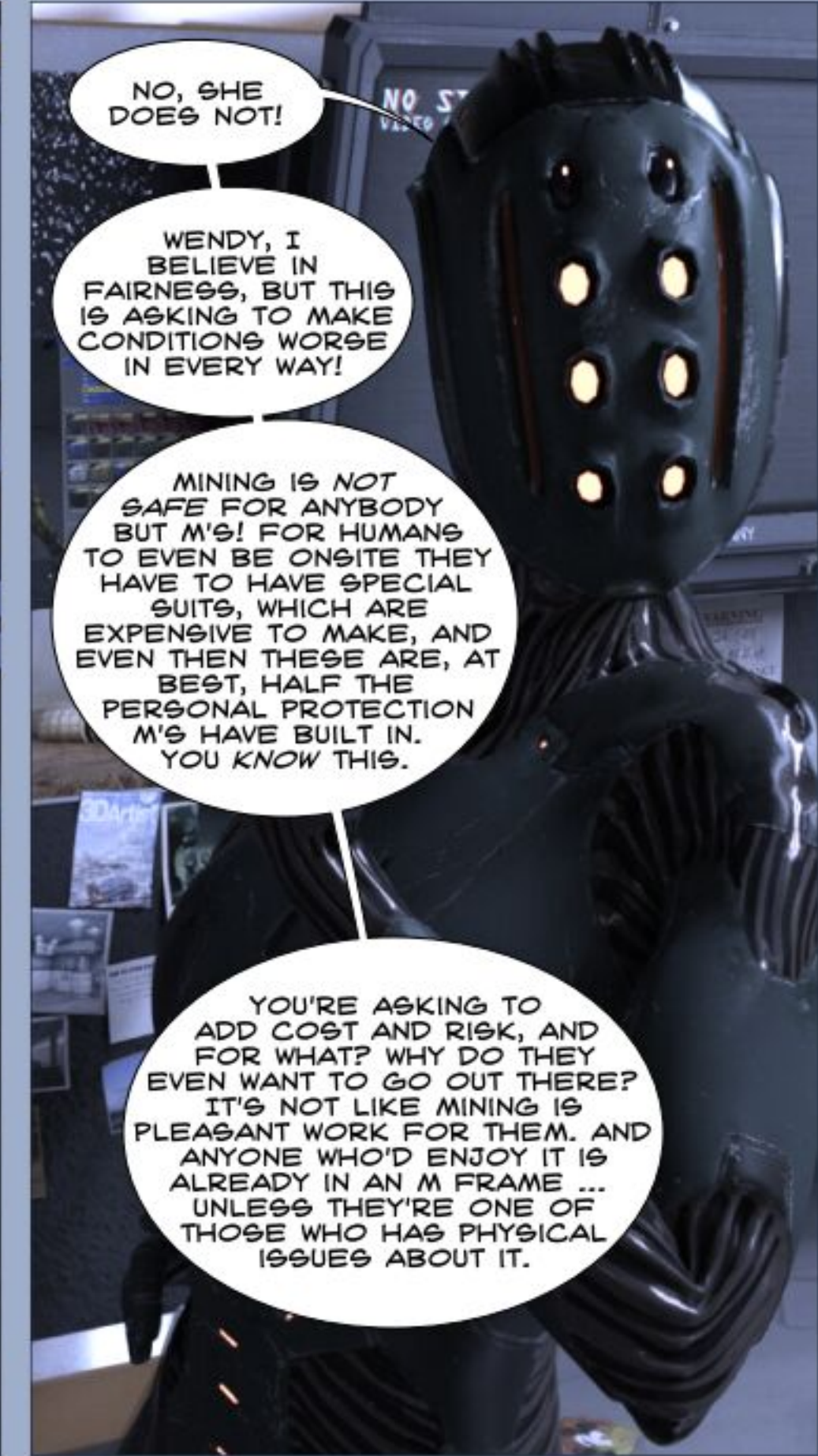


"Go all the way back?"  
Someone's got money to burn.

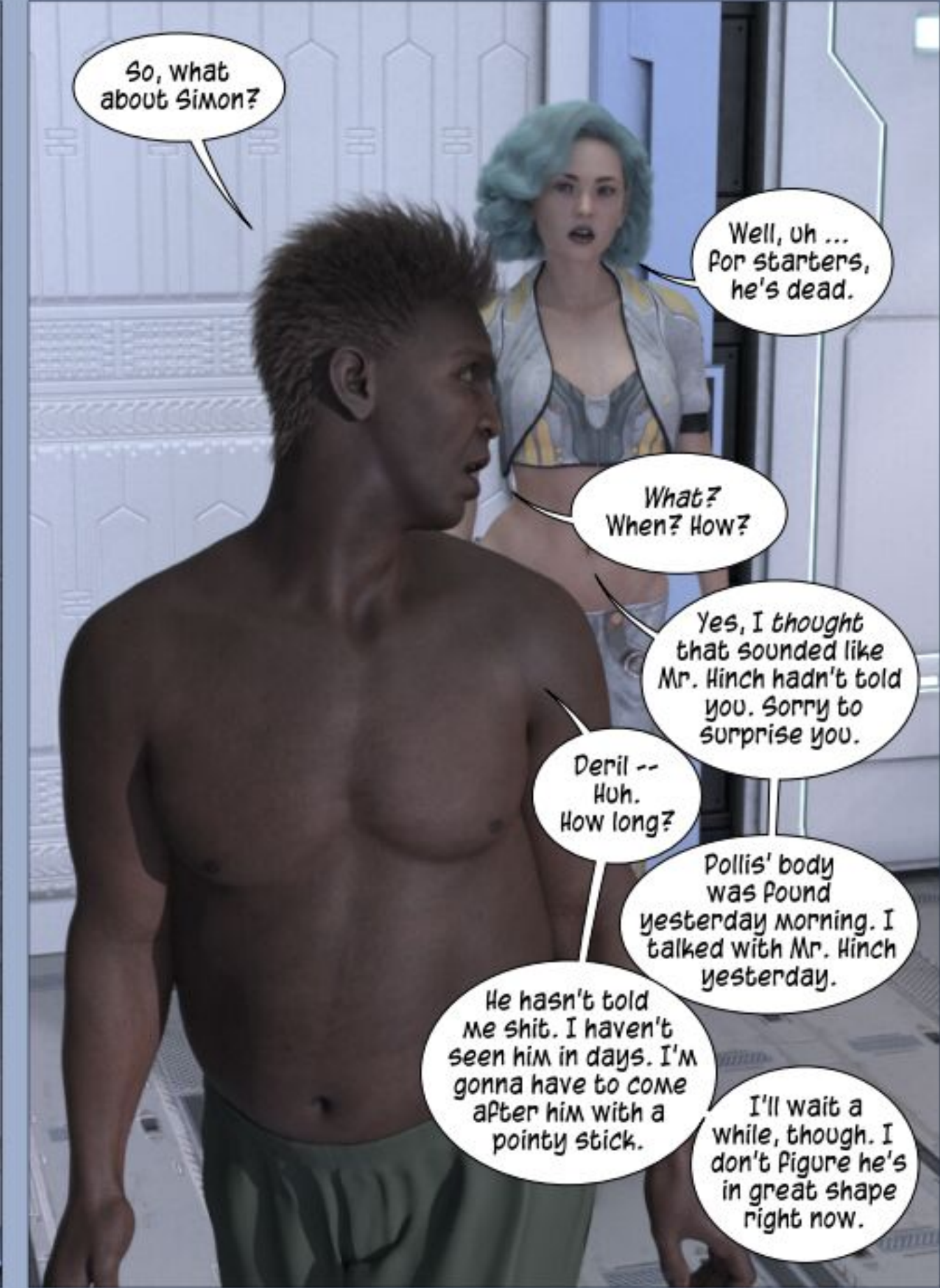
Oh, Wendy, you  
have no idea.

I've been dying for the  
chance to tell you about  
some of this ...





FURST HAD SAID SOMETHING IN THERE WHICH SET SOME WHEELS TURNING IN MY BRAIN, AND I DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO GO AHEAD WITH A VISIT THAT I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE MADE LATER THAT DAY ANYWAY.







That doesn't sound like a very healthy relationship.

It wasn't. We were worried about both of them.

Yes.

No!

C'mon, Kize. He wasn't unhappy!

He had what he wanted. He wasn't depressed about his life. He liked the way he lived.

How worried? I ask because we have to consider all the possibilities. For example, could Simon have killed himself?

And he didn't give a shit what Deril did or didn't do because he knew Deril was solid. Deril could have swung with half of Coldpoint and Simon wouldn't have cared, because he knew it was only ever him for real.



Just out of curiosity, do you have any idea why the two of them never transferred?

Oh, sure. Same reason as us.

All the robots are women.

But look at them. They've still got a female shape. Why would you make a sexless robot and then give them those curves?

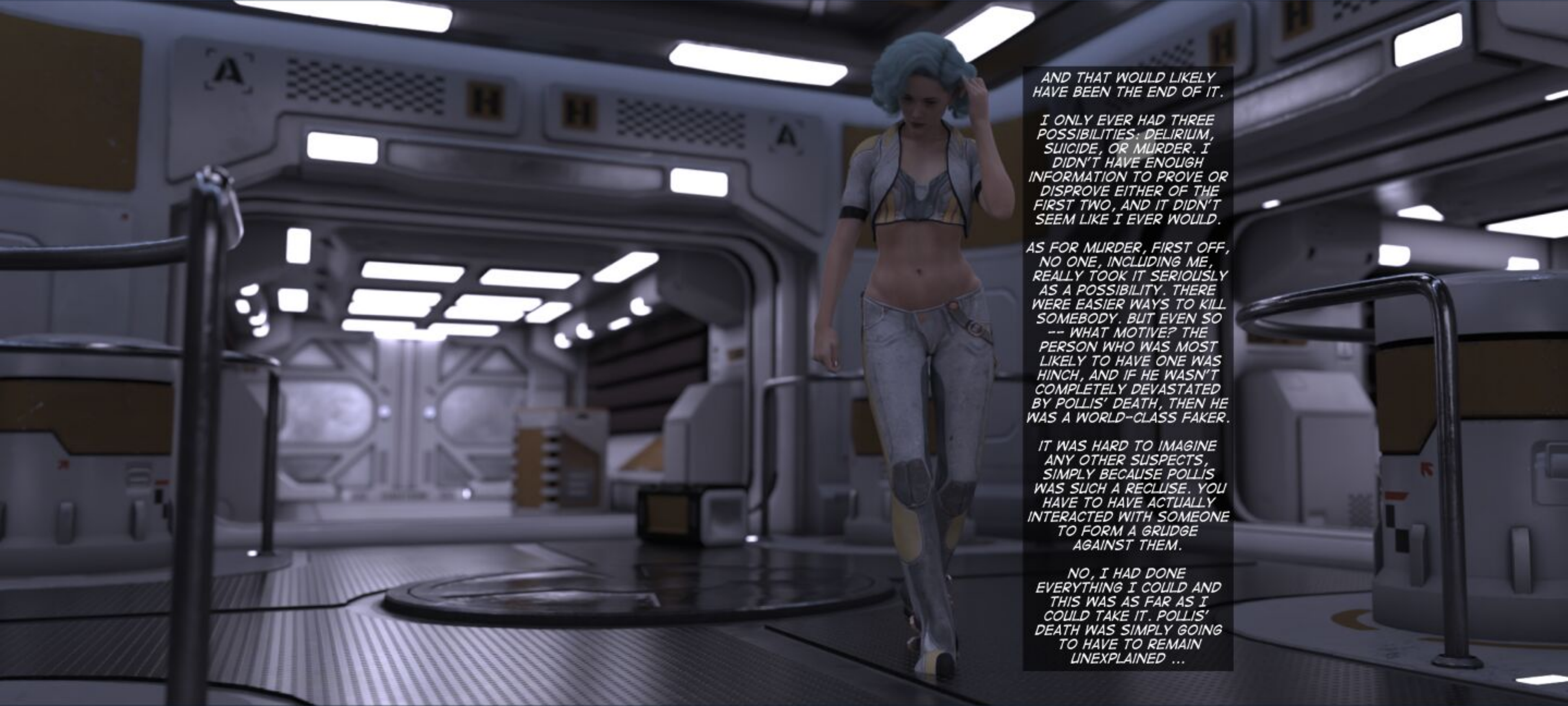
And the other models -- I know the L's and that new kind can get a penis if they want it, and I hear that D's even get one sometimes, but that's really not the big part of it.

Well, it can be a big part.

Not what I mean, you doob.

Look, we know what we want. And we know what the people who want us want. We want them to still be attracted to us. We want to still be attracted to them. Maybe if you're an M it doesn't matter, since they hate sex, but we like sex.

Hmm. And the big push was for them to become M's -- which was never going to work out, if you're right.



AND THAT WOULD LIKELY HAVE BEEN THE END OF IT.

I ONLY EVER HAD THREE POSSIBILITIES: DELIRIUM, SUICIDE, OR MURDER. I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION TO PROVE OR DISPROVE EITHER OF THE FIRST TWO, AND IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE I EVER WOULD.

AS FOR MURDER, FIRST OFF, NO ONE, INCLUDING ME, REALLY TOOK IT SERIOUSLY AS A POSSIBILITY. THERE WERE EASIER WAYS TO KILL SOMEBODY. BUT EVEN SO -- WHAT MOTIVE? THE PERSON WHO WAS MOST LIKELY TO HAVE ONE WAS HINCH, AND IF HE WASN'T COMPLETELY DEVASTATED BY POLLIS' DEATH, THEN HE WAS A WORLD-CLASS FAKER.

IT WAS HARD TO IMAGINE ANY OTHER SUSPECTS SIMPLY BECAUSE POLLIS WAS SUCH A RECLUSE. YOU HAVE TO HAVE ACTUALLY INTERACTED WITH SOMEONE TO FORM A GRUDGE AGAINST THEM.

NO, I HAD DONE EVERYTHING I COULD AND THIS WAS AS FAR AS I COULD TAKE IT. POLLIS' DEATH WAS SIMPLY GOING TO HAVE TO REMAIN UNEXPLAINED ...

... EXCEPT, MEANWHILE, OTHER THINGS WERE HAPPENING.



Puller! Answer your damned door.

You asked me to come, remember?

You better not be blowing me off ...



Puller?

... Are you even in here?



Oh.



Beth!

I know it's you. Someone told me they just saw you going down here.

Damn it, we are going to talk!



WHY CAN'T YOU JUST LEAVE ME ALONE?

I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU! I CAME OUT HERE TO GET AWAY FROM YOU!



I ...

... I don't believe that.

OF COURSE YOU DON'T. YOU NEVER HAD ANY DOUBTS, DID YOU? NOT ONCE.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, DORINE? DID YOU COME ALL THIS WAY JUST SO I COULD TELL YOU SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR?





No.

I'm not doing well. I don't know how long I have. Maybe another two years. Or three. It takes so long to come out here, I knew I couldn't wait.

I came out for the truth, Beth. Before I die.

And I think you owe it to me.



I DON'T OWE ANYBODY ANYTHING.

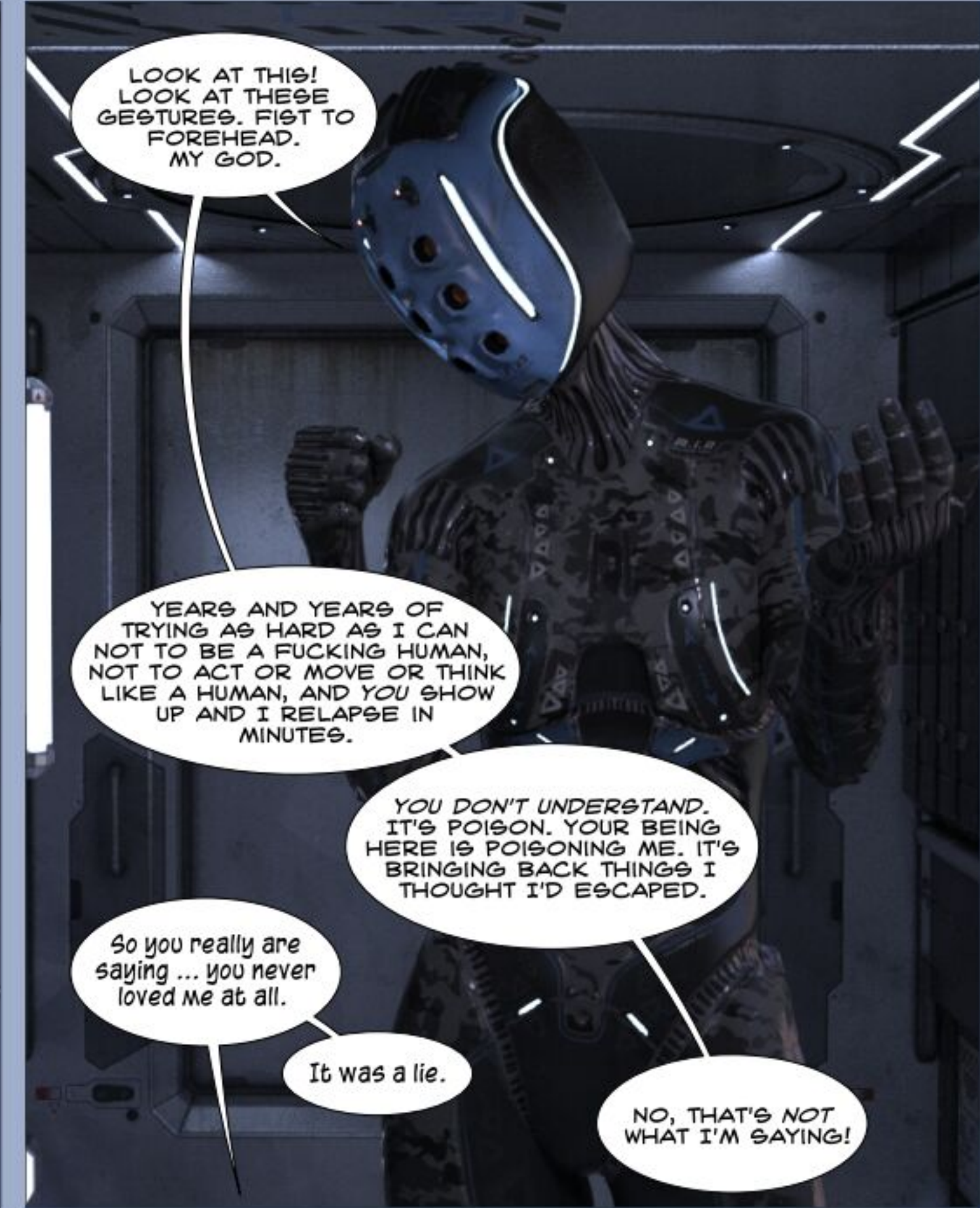
I MAKE IT A POINT NEVER TO OWE ANYBODY ANYTHING.

You walked out on two lives, Beth. Yours and mine. You destroyed so much of me when you did ... My trust, my joy ...

Yeah? Well, you did. Whether you wanted to or not.

I let you go, Beth. I didn't try to follow you. I left you alone for years. But now I'm going to die and you are going to do this one very small thing for me before I do.

I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT YOU. IT WASN'T ABOUT YOU.



LOOK AT THIS! LOOK AT THESE GESTURES. FIST TO FOREHEAD. MY GOD.

YEARS AND YEARS OF TRYING AS HARD AS I CAN NOT TO BE A FUCKING HUMAN, NOT TO ACT OR MOVE OR THINK LIKE A HUMAN, AND YOU SHOW UP AND I RELAPSE IN MINUTES.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. IT'S POISON. YOUR BEING HERE IS POISONING ME. IT'S BRINGING BACK THINGS I THOUGHT I'D ESCAPED.

So you really are saying ... you never loved me at all.

It was a lie.

NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M SAYING!



WHAT HAPPENED IS I WOKE UP ONE MORNING AND REALIZED THAT NONE OF IT MEANT A THING. ALL THE PLEASURES, THE LOVE ... IT WAS NEVER GOING TO MAKE ME HAPPY.

IT WASN'T YOU. IT WAS ME. I REALIZED I WAS WORTHLESS. I WAS A FAILURE AT EXISTENCE. I WASN'T DOING IT RIGHT. I DIDN'T KNOW HOW.

THERE WAS NEVER GOING TO BE ANY HOPE FOR ME AS A HUMAN. THE ONLY THING LEFT TO TRY WAS NOT BEING HUMAN. GIVING IT ALL UP. BECOMING SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT ANY OF THAT. SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T NEED TO BE HAPPY.

... you had one bad night and decided to walk out on your entire life. Including me.

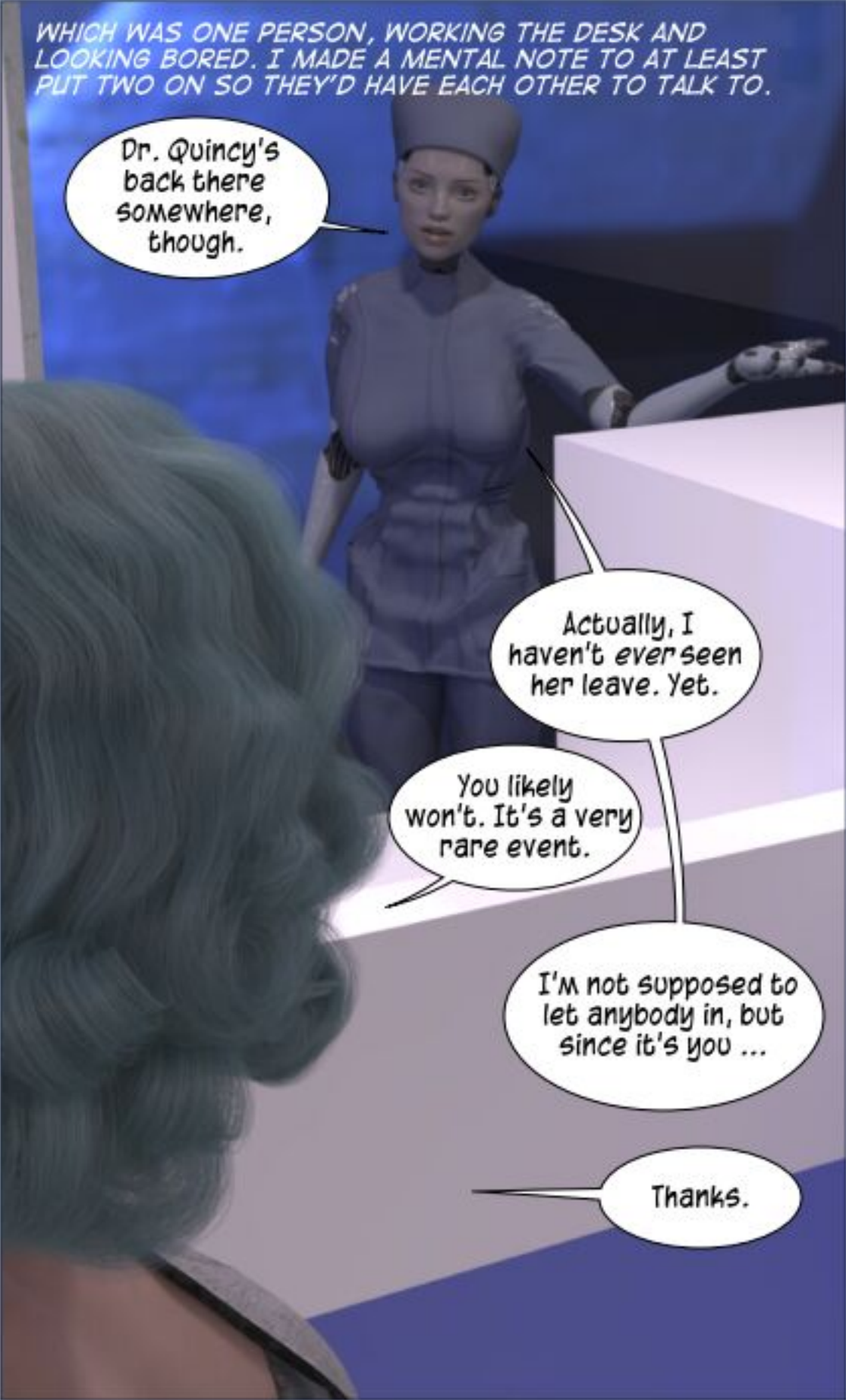
I DIDN'T LIKE THAT PART. I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT YOU. BUT I ALSO KNEW YOU DESERVED BETTER THAN ME.



I NEVER EXPECTED YOU WOULD --

DORINE, WAIT!

I'D HAD OTHER THINGS TO DO AND DIDN'T GET THE WORD ABOUT CORL UNTIL SEVERAL HOURS LATER. WHEN I GOT TO MEDICAL, INTERVIEWS WERE OVER FOR THE DAY AND ONLY THE NEWLY-INSTITUTED NIGHT STAFF WAS THERE.



Dr. Quincy's back there somewhere, though.

Actually, I haven't ever seen her leave. Yet.

You likely won't. It's a very rare event.

I'm not supposed to let anybody in, but since it's you ...

Thanks.



... hello?

Anyone home?



Oop.



I'm really embarrassed. Especially since that's the second time I've done that today.

Don't be. If we'd been concerned about that we'd have locked the lab first.

Let me guess -- you want to know about Corl's death?

If there's anything to know. I didn't get the details.

There aren't many. She hit her head on the corner of a shelf in her room, hard enough for a lethal skull fracture.

There was a small rug under her, crumpled, like it had been partly kicked away. That, plus her body position, imply she slipped on that and fell forward onto the shelf.



They'd planned for Arin-A to come to her room to talk to her about something or other, and she didn't answer the door. Arin-A tried it, found it wasn't locked, and found her.

Bad timing ... she may have died only a few minutes before that. Though even getting her here immediately wouldn't have helped, I don't think.

Bad timing ... or very good.

And what's that mean?

What do you have to do to slip a rug out from under you just from walking across it?



Do you have reason to suspect Pool play?

None whatsoever.

They're not all murders, Wendy!





You know, I was just about to go to sleep.

I'm sorry. I needed to ask you something that my brain wouldn't let wait.

You're ...?

Hm.

Well, what is it?

Yesterday we talked about Puller Cori coming out of nowhere, and I felt like you kind of blew me off.

That's what's eating you? None of the other things?



She asked me for advice a couple of times. So? Even if I had put her up to it, it's a valid viewpoint! I know you make it a point to hate everything I say, but ...

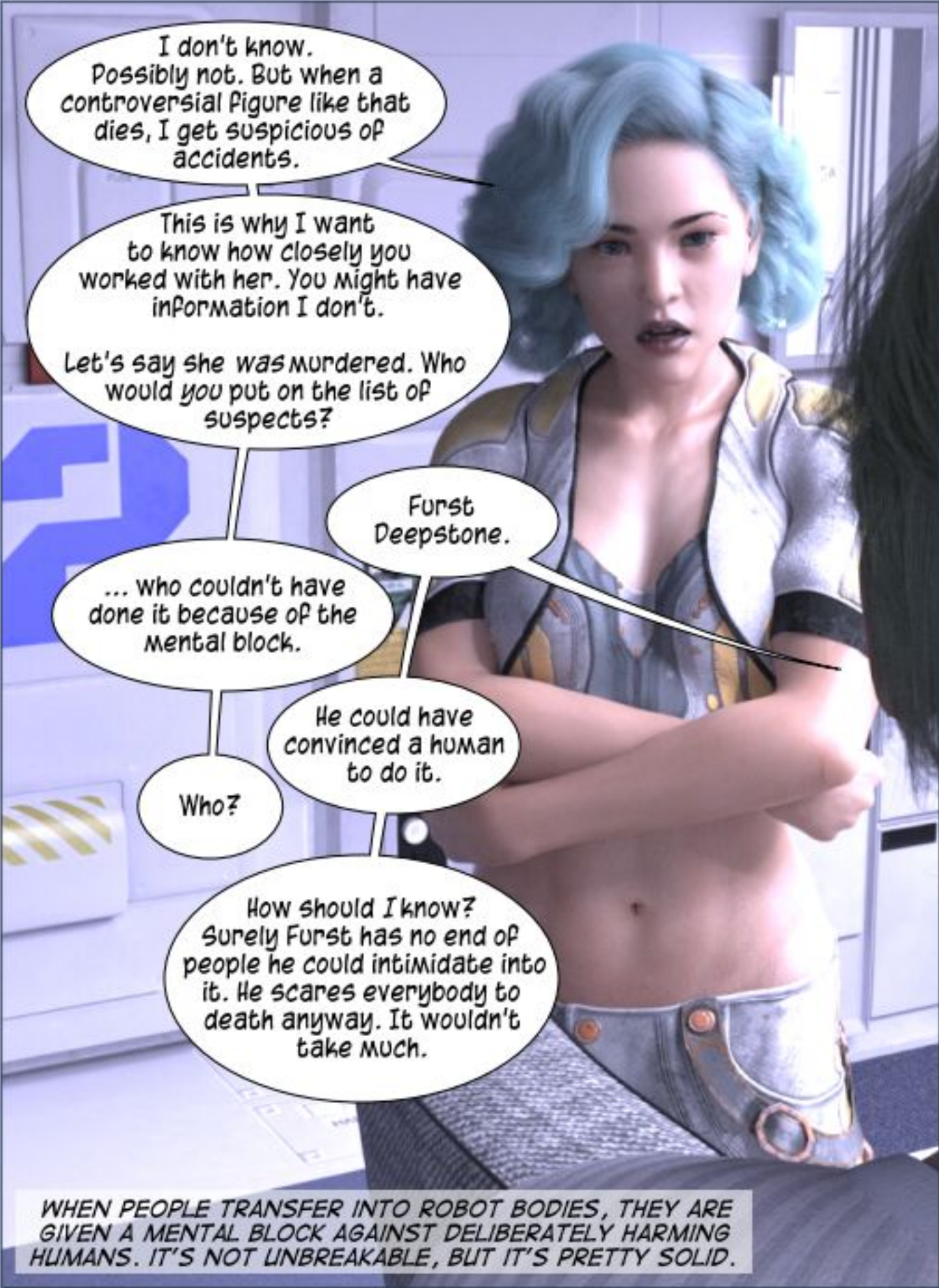
Why do you care about Cori? Speaking of coming out of nowhere. You've ignored her for months.

Yesterday I was just curious. Today she's dead.

Dead?

Yes, and officially you don't know that yet, so keep quiet.

Was she ... you think she was murdered?



I don't know. Possibly not. But when a controversial figure like that dies, I get suspicious of accidents.

This is why I want to know how closely you worked with her. You might have information I don't.

Let's say she was murdered. Who would you put on the list of suspects?

Furst Deepstone.

... who couldn't have done it because of the mental block.

He could have convinced a human to do it.

Who?

How should I know? Surely Furst has no end of people he could intimidate into it. He scares everybody to death anyway. It wouldn't take much.

WHEN PEOPLE TRANSFER INTO ROBOT BODIES, THEY ARE GIVEN A MENTAL BLOCK AGAINST DELIBERATELY HARMING HUMANS. IT'S NOT UNBREAKABLE, BUT IT'S PRETTY SOLID.



He scares you to death. I don't think he has quite that effect on everyone else.

And, come to that, I've never understood why he affects you that way.

Because he's dangerous! He has no emotional attachments of any kind!

You can't trust him to have any loyalties at all! He could do anything!

That's not true. He has loyalties. He's proved it.

Anyway, people say you don't have any emotional connections to anything. Does that make you dangerous?

What about Beth? We all think Beth's a block of ice. She'd be the first to admit it, probably. But you're not intimidated by her.

Beth has a cause, though. She lives for that cause. I know how to deal with people like that. She has weaknesses I can use.



Yeah, I guess being a zealot does give you a lot of exploitable blind spots, doesn't it?

Sorry to have disturbed you, Parsons. Have a good night.



What you're supposed to do, when you have an emotional crisis, you're supposed to talk to the people who love you and tell them about it and get their support.

That's what relationships are about.

You're not supposed to throw out your whole life and run away somewhere and not even tell anybody what happened.

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW.

THAT'S WHAT I WAS TRYING TO EXPLAIN. IT JUST -- IT WASN'T THERE. IT WAS A VOID.

I WASN'T SURE WHAT I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE FEELING, BUT I WAS SURE I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE FEELING SOMETHING.



Do you even realize you're lying? Does it count as lying if you're lying to yourself?

We were together for years. Do you think I'd have stayed with you if you were some kind of emotional black hole?

Do you think I'd have spent my time and energy being in love with someone if I thought I wasn't getting any love back?

I don't know what really scared you off, and now I'm pretty sure you don't either, which means neither of us is ever going to find out.



WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?

Why do you care?

You don't care about anything, remember?



I'll go back to Meridian, I guess. That'll kill a year.

There's nothing I want to do after that, so I'll probably just sit there and wait.

You don't have to worry. You'll never hear from me again.



DON'T GO.





CALL SIGN, METRI CALL'S BAR. CALL HAS THE BEST BEER AND WHISKEY IN COLDPOINT, MADE ENTIRELY ON PREMISES. THE NEW ARRIVALS FIGURED THAT OUT FAST AND THE PLACE, ALREADY POPULAR, NOW HAD MORE BUSINESS THAN THEY COULD HANDLE.



Oh, hey, love!

I wasn't expecting to see you tonight. Everything all right?

I suppose. I mean, I can't say anything's wrong.

Treac, I know you're closed, but could I talk you out of a glass of the two-year? I promise to be quick about it.

Of course! And take as long as you need.



Thanks.

I'm sorry. I know you've probably had a Prantic night and want to get out of here ...

Ah, Prantic's become so much the new normal I barely notice.

The real problem will be when our next show starts. Metri's a great brewer but a bad bartender. Loses his bearings when it gets busy. And he doesn't have anyone else reliable. I don't know what he's going to do without me.

TREAC'S FIRST LOYALTY IS TO COLDPOINT'S THEATRICAL COMPANY, WHICH SHE NOW MORE OR LESS RUNS. WHEN A SHOW'S ON, SHE DOES NOTHING ELSE.

But I'm more worried about you, coming in at this hour and needing a drink. Rough day?



Well, again, not so much for me.

Pullen Corl is dead. It might have been accidental death -- it probably was -- but I can't shake the idea it wasn't, and I don't know why. That bothers me.

If it was murder, then I Peel like I won't get very far. The people who would have the biggest grudge against her policies are all robots, and they couldn't do it.

Why couldn't it have been someone on her side?

No reason it couldn't, I suppose. What's your thinking?



Well ... I think the thing about being really into some kind of cause is, the more you get into it, the stronger your ideas get about the way to do it.

So you have a lot of true believers, and each of them thinks their way is the only right way, and they end up at one another's throats.

Ah. Like Parsons and Kirc Alden.

Yes, I could see that happening with Corl.

I'll have to ask around a little tomorrow.

WENDY IS REFERRING TO EVENTS IN "PROOF OF DEATH."



You know, the nice thing about being a robot is you don't get as tired.

I have a lot of energy left ...

That's if you're up for it, of course.

... I think I could manage that.

THE NEXT MORNING.



MIN DOESN'T START HER DAY AS EARLY AS I DO, SO WHEN I PASSED BY HER OFFICE TO ASK HER A QUESTION, I WAS EXPECTING TO HAVE TO COME BACK LATER. BUT I GOT A SURPRISE.

... Went out on the morning of the third, the morning of the PiPh, and now we need to go out today ...

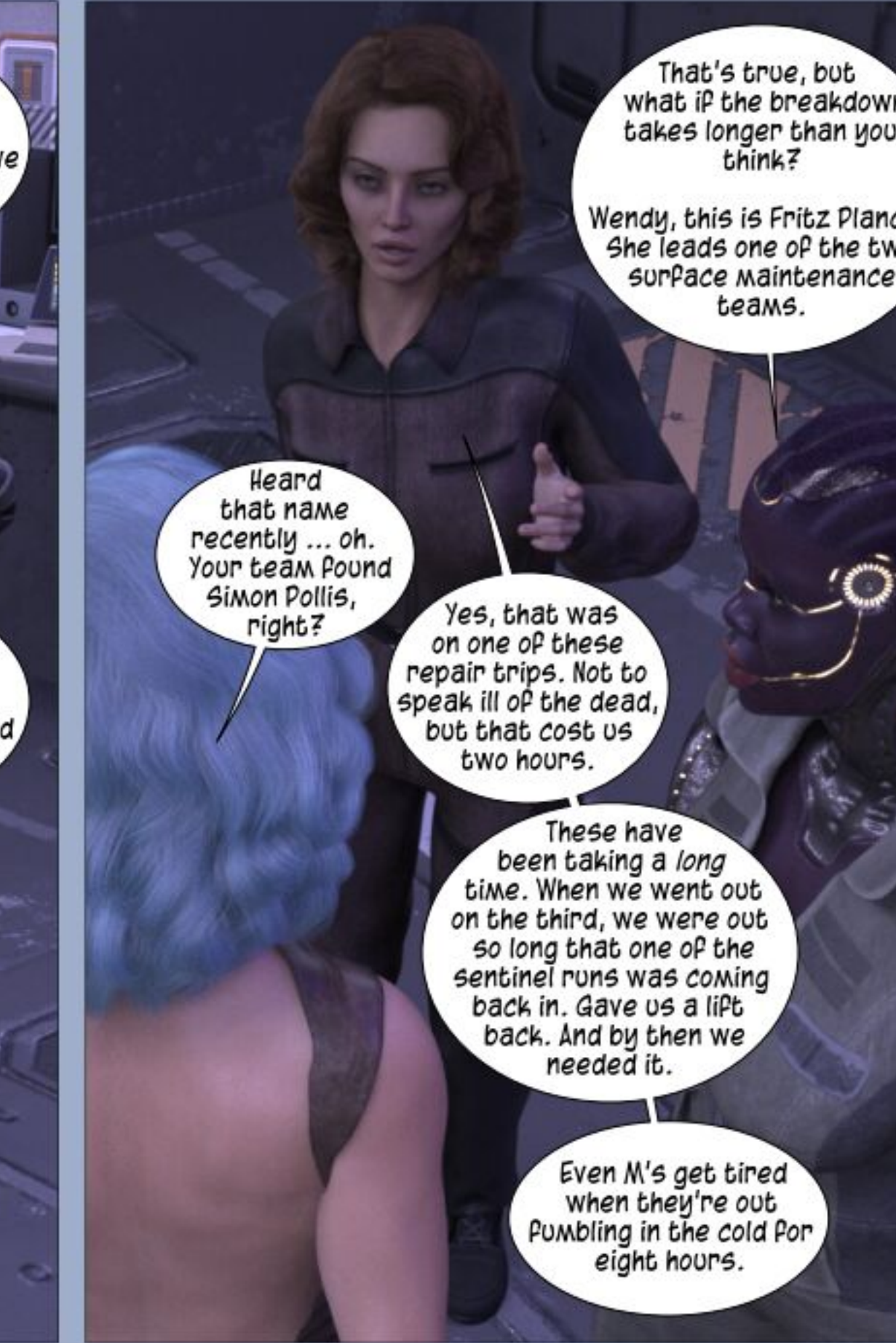
It's a regular Piature cycle, obviously, but just doing field repairs we can't tell why it's failing.

I want to set up one of the trucks with the crane, and haul in the whole unit. We'll only be able to truly fix it in here.

OK, but that's, what, an automatic two days of downtime? That's an essential unit! We should build another and swap out ...

It's not that essential. That's why we didn't have a redundant unit to begin with. We lose the ability to get urgent signals from the sentinels. Big deal. When did we last have one?

It'll take longer than two days to build a replacement, and we're already in downtime now.



That's true, but what if the breakdown takes longer than you think?

Wendy, this is Fritz Planck. She leads one of the two surface maintenance teams.

Heard that name recently ... oh. Your team found Simon Pollis, right?

Yes, that was on one of these repair trips. Not to speak ill of the dead, but that cost us two hours.

These have been taking a long time. When we went out on the third, we were out so long that one of the sentinel runs was coming back in. Gave us a lift back. And by then we needed it.

Even M's get tired when they're out fumbling in the cold for eight hours.



And it's really hard to do precision work in those conditions ... the relay is only semi-sheltered ...

You got a ride back in from a sentinel crew? That would have been Deril Hinch. Alone.

Yeah, we wondered about that. Aren't they always supposed to go in pairs?

Yes. And your crew went out on Poot?

That's right. Most of our jobs are close enough to the entrance that we don't take a truck unless we have a load to haul, or there's not a clear sightline for the walk.

What time did you go out on the third?

About ten? We'd have gone out earlier if we'd realized we were going to be out there that long ...



So what's the decision? If we're hooking up the crane, I really need to get started, that adds an hour ...

Wendy, got an opinion?

Go ahead. If one of the sentinels sends an urgent signal it's going to be weather, and if it's weather, we can't do much except make sure things are secured. Which they're supposed to be anyway.

But tell Min immediately if it starts to look like the downtime's going to be more than two days. And we may want to start building a redundant unit anyway.



Say, Ms. Planck, do you mind a personal question?

Everybody else on the surface repair teams is an M, right? Why haven't you transferred? Not judging, just collecting data.

Oh ...

Don't answer if you're not comfortable about it.

Meaning "M's don't have sex?"

No, it's OK. I, uh, like to have a personal life, if you get me.

Yeah. I could go with one of the other Prames, but then I'd get just as much "in that job, why aren't you an M?" so I haven't bothered.

Thanks. Carry on.



Min, I'm going to need you to come on an interview with me.

Uh-oh. Is this a "bring a weapon" kind of interview?

No, I don't think it'll come to that.

But you'll want to be on your guard.



AT THIS POINT YOU MAY BE WONDERING IF THERE'S SOMETHING THAT YOU MISSED -- SOME CLUE OR INDICATOR I PICKED UP ON THAT YOU DIDN'T, OR THAT I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU ABOUT. THERE ISN'T.

ALL I KNEW, AS I BEGAN THAT MORNING, WAS THAT MY BRAIN KEPT INSISTING THERE WAS A HOLE IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS -- SOMETHING IMPORTANT THAT I WASN'T SEEING.

EVEN AFTER GETTING THAT INFORMATION FROM PLANK, I STILL WASN'T SURE EXACTLY WHAT THE HOLE WAS, OR WHAT WAS IN IT.

BUT I COULDN'T SHAKE THE IDEA THAT IT WAS THERE, AND IT WAS DEFINITELY NOW CLEAR THAT THERE WAS SOMEONE INVOLVED IN THIS WHO HADN'T BEEN HONEST WITH ME.

Mr. Hinch?

Sorry to let myself in, but you didn't answer, and we need to talk.

Are you here?

Go away.

Sorry. Wish I could.

Min, see if you can turn some lights on, please?

When the surface door was used at ten, four days ago, it wasn't Pollis wandering out in a fever.

It was a surface repair team walking out to fix the transmission relay.

The door didn't register their coming back in, around eighteen, because they came back in with you. You gave them a ride.

That means the only time Simon could have gotten out there was at six. He was in the truck with you. He went out on the run with you.

And he wasn't with you when you came back. Something happened to Simon somewhere in there. Tell me about it.

Got nothing to say about that.

OK. Do you have anything you'd like to say about Puller Cori's murder?

Murder? Where do you get --

She wasn't murdered! She fell and hit her head! It was an accident!

THERE IT WAS. THAT WAS THE HOLE. THAT HAD BEEN A SHOT IN THE DARK, BUT IT WAS A GOOD ONE.

And how would you know that?

There was no one else on the scene and Arin-A hasn't told anyone but medical. I checked.

In fact, the word hasn't even spread that Cori's dead.

Shit.

It seems to me that pretty much everything you've said to me so far has been a lie.

I don't know yet what you did or didn't do, but I've found that "investigate the liar" is usually sound policy.

I didn't tell you the truth because I didn't think you'd believe it.

Well, now is the time to find out.

OW!

Every damned time ...

If you were sitting in your seat, where you're supposed to be, you wouldn't hit your head.

I can't sit still for six hours.

You can't sit still for six minutes. We've barely left.

Do we need to bring some cartoons for you to watch?

Don't be a bitch.

Look, now that we're out here where nobody can listen ... I have to talk to you about something.

You know I've been working with Puller Cori ...

It's not a waste! She's trying to fix something unfair. You just don't bother because you don't figure it'll ever affect you! You don't have Sind always tweaking you how an M should be doing your job ...

Because I think it's worth actually having a conversation with other people sometimes?

... Never mind. Don't sidetrack me.

Mhmm. Your time to waste, I suppose.

That's because I don't bother talking to Sind. I don't know why you do.

Puller doesn't think we're ever going to get anywhere with labor policy while Fürst Deepstone has any say in it. He doesn't see a problem with jobs only being for robots, and Wendy Barlowe listens to him. Puller says she's tried everything she can to knock him down. Nothing's worked.

She wants me -- us -- to sneak out to the mine one day when Fürst's out there supervising.

And kill him. Arrange an accident.

WHAT??

Have you lost what's left of your mind?

Simon, it'd work! They don't expect anybody else to come out there ... we could get in without being seen easily ... we wouldn't get caught ...

I don't give a shit whether we'd get caught! That is not the point!

I can't believe you'd contemplate this, even for a second! What's wrong with you?

Damn it, you were the only one! The only person in this whole fucking miserable place who was worth my time! You were the last thing I had! The only thing I cared about! And now you pull something like this?

Don't give me that!

Only thing you care about -- shit! You don't care about anything, Simon. Except yourself. You figure you're better than everybody else and no one else is worth spitting on.

You don't care about me and never have. You keep me around because I'm stupid enough to put up with your constant crap. Your hating everything. Your wanting everything exactly your way. No one else here would tolerate you for ten seconds, and you know it.

Don't change the subject! We're talking about the part where you decided it was a good idea to try to murder somebody just because you've gotten infatuated with some hopeless drum-banger with a grievance --

Simon! The road!!









I never laid a hand on her. I don't know what I would have done if I had, I was so angry I was seeing spots, but I didn't get a chance.

She didn't love me and he did and I listened to her and Simon's dead because I listened to her and now they're both gone --

Hrm.

Deril, what am I going to do with you?



You're going to throw him off the fucking planet, that's what!

He left Simon Por dead and plotted to kill Forst and --

He didn't actually kill anyone.

Wendy! Do you want to be on the same planet with this guy? I don't! I trusted him! I hired him!

Yes, and I realize that hurts.

If it's what you want, Pine. We'll deport him. Take him to the custody room.



I can't go with you. I have something else I need to see to.

But I don't think he'll give you any trouble.

THE NEXT MORNING. STEJ ORLO, MIN'S SIGNIFICANT OTHER, ANSWERED HER DOOR FOR HER. STEJ SPENT A LOT OF TIME AT MIN'S, SO THAT WAS NOT A SURPRISE.



She's ... not doing very well today.

Yes, I thought that might be the case. That's why I stopped by.

Let me talk to her.



Have I ever given you hell?

Wendy, if you're here to give me hell, believe me, I'm already --

What happened? Did he ask to slip the leash for just five minutes?



You knew?

Strong guess. You were so angry, you couldn't see how wrecked he was.

Is that why you didn't come with us?

Tell me what happened.



Like you said. He just wanted a few minutes unescorted. No more. But the way he said it ...

I realized he wanted to go throw himself in a reclaim. Or something else like that. He didn't want to tell me that. He thought I might be obliged to stop him.

Did you let him?

... I thought about it. For at least a minute.

But no. He's in custody.

Wendy, I -- I was so mad ... but, y'know, two people gone and looking at it now, I can't think of a good reason why I'd want to make it three ...

I don't even know if throwing him out is the right thing to do, now.

We can discuss it later.



It's hard, isn't it? I mean, it's actually hard.

Always.

And you wanted me to find out Por myself?

Partly that. And partly I wanted someone besides me to have to peel it for a change.

Sorry.



It's legitimate emotional trauma.

If it were me, I'd spend the rest of the day in bed having sex.

Now that's a thought.

I'm serious, though. I think the best thing for it is to spend some time in the company of somebody who loves you.

I find that at times like this, I need the reminder that someone does.



... YOU KNOW, YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE.

ONCE YOU TRANSFER, ALL THOSE PHYSICAL PROBLEMS GO AWAY.



If I transfer, I don't think I could be in the kind of body you have. No offense.

I WOULDN'T EXPECT SO. M FRAMES AREN'T FOR EVERYBODY. ... NO OFFENSE.

Yes, but ... I also don't think it would work with you in one. Beth, I ... I can't help it, I want ... it's not just ...

YES. I UNDERSTAND. YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE THAT, BUT I DO.

I CAN ARRANGE TO BE TRANSFERRED INTO A DIFFERENT FRAME. THEY DON'T LIKE IT, BUT I CAN PAY FOR IT, SO THEY'LL DO IT.

You'd do that for me?

MAYBE NOT JUST FOR YOU. MAYBE FOR ME TOO. MAYBE IT'S TIME.



I LEFT MY LIFE BECAUSE I WAS DOING EVERYTHING WRONG.

NOW, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS HERE, I FIND I WAS DOING EVERYTHING WRONG AGAIN.

I DON'T WANT TO DO EVERYTHING WRONG A THIRD TIME.

I'M GOING TO NEED YOUR HELP WITH THAT.

END