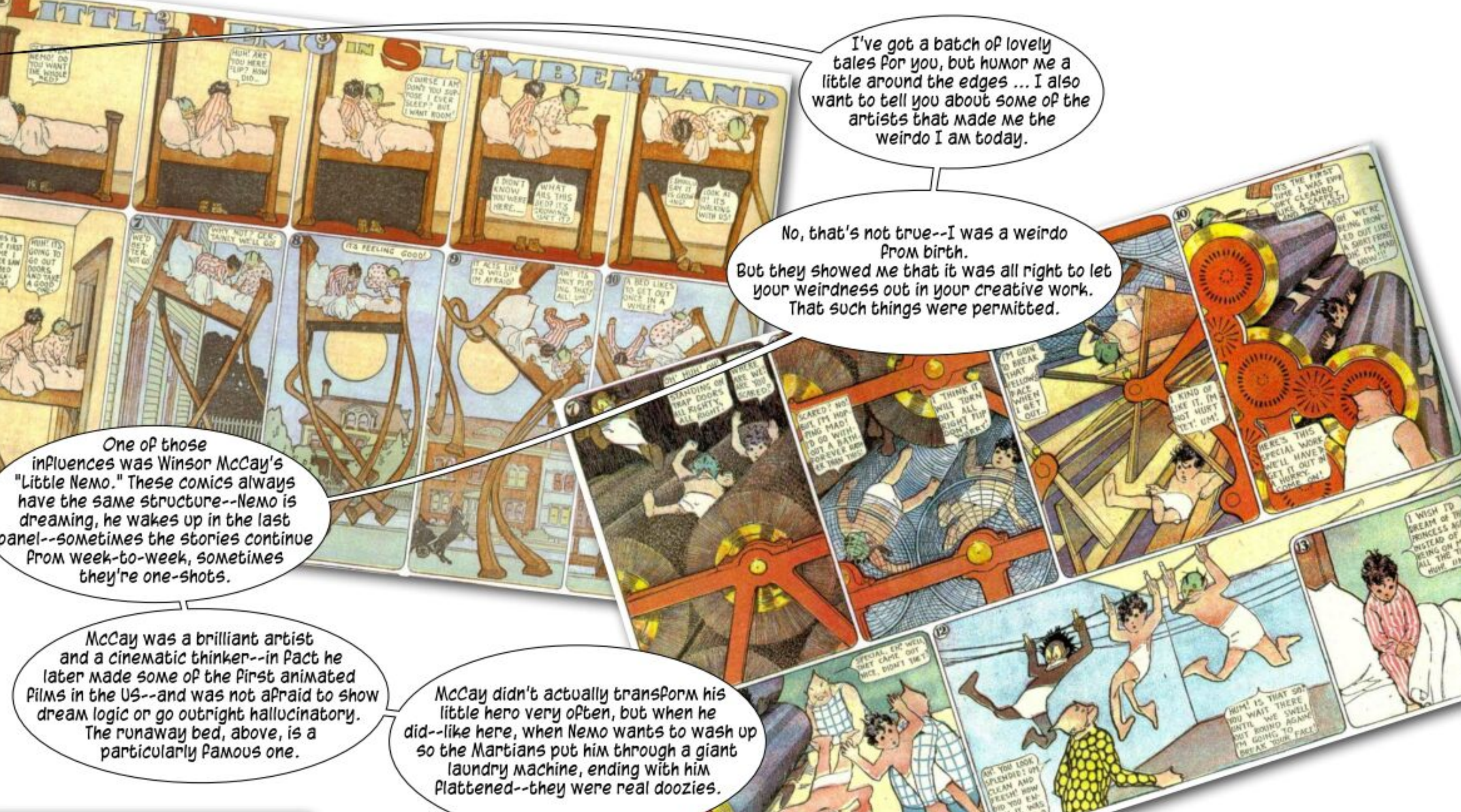


It's that time of year again, Polks! Gosh, it seems like last Hallowe'en was only yesterday!

(Like the suit? A guy named Louis in New Orleans was having a yard sale.)



I've got a batch of lovely tales for you, but humor me a little around the edges ... I also want to tell you about some of the artists that made me the weirdo I am today.

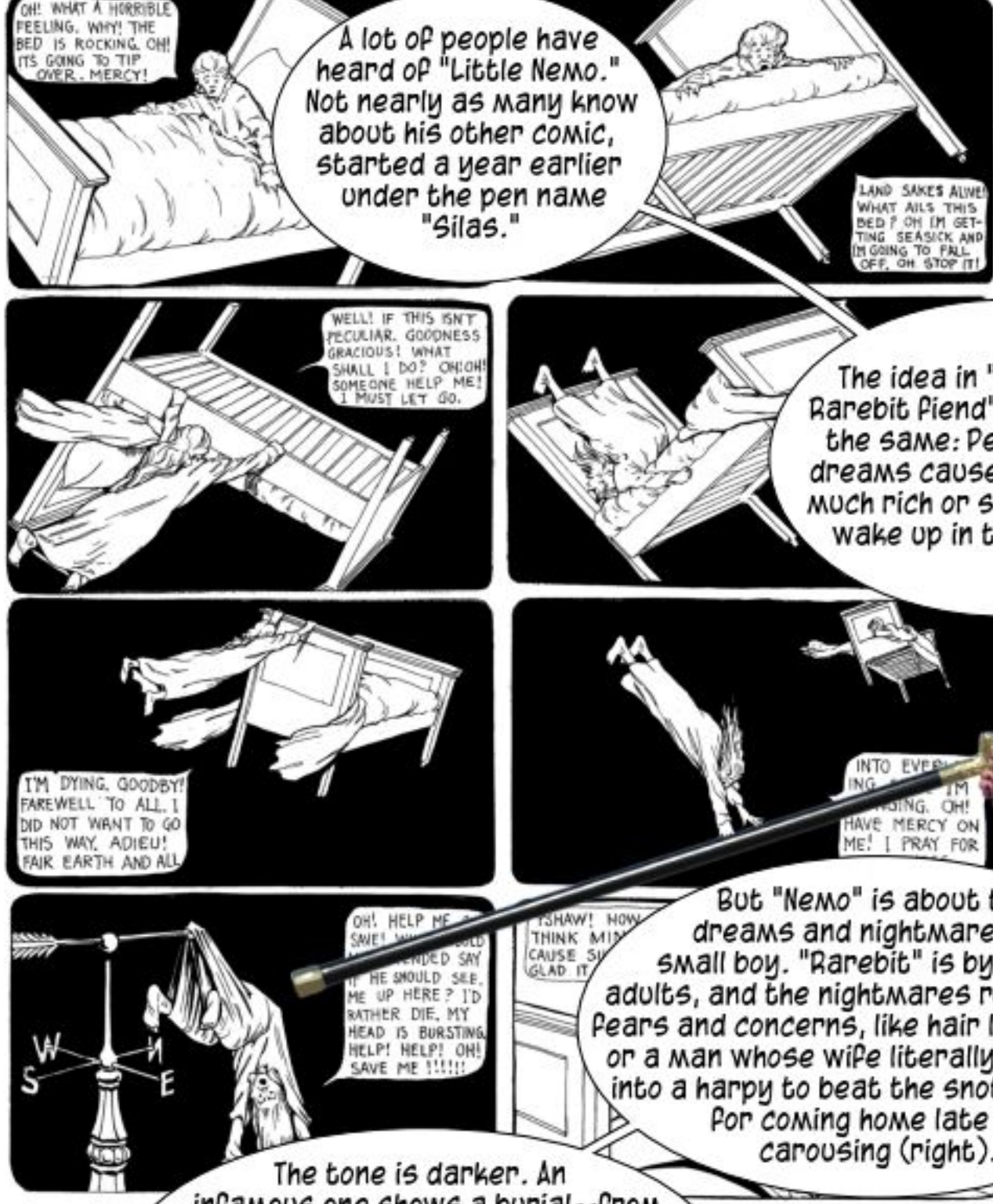
No, that's not true--I was a weirdo from birth. But they showed me that it was all right to let your weirdness out in your creative work. That such things were permitted.

One of those influences was Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo." These comics always have the same structure--Nemo is dreaming, he wakes up in the last panel--sometimes the stories continue from week-to-week, sometimes they're one-shots.

McCay was a brilliant artist and a cinematic thinker--in fact he later made some of the first animated films in the US--and was not afraid to show dream logic or go outright hallucinatory. The runaway bed, above, is a particularly famous one.

McCay didn't actually transform his little hero very often, but when he did--like here, when Nemo wants to wash up so the Martians put him through a giant laundry machine, ending with him flattened--they were real doozies.

**DREAM OF THE RAREBIT FIEND**



OH! WHAT A HORRIBLE FEELING. WHY THE BED IS ROCKING. WHY IT'S GOING TO TIP OVER. MERCY!

A lot of people have heard of "Little Nemo." Not nearly as many know about his other comic, started a year earlier under the pen name "Silas."

The tone is darker. An infamous one shows a burial--from the point of view of the person being buried, looking up a hole as people drop shovels of dirt on him. Even the out-of-control bed (above) is more threatening.

**DREAM OF THE RAREBIT FIEND**



WELL, I NEVER DREAMED OF BEING A PEN AND INK DRAWING OF A SPRING FASHION MODEL, BUT IT SEEMS I AM!

The idea in "Dream of the Rarebit Fiend" is more or less the same: People have bad dreams caused by eating too much rich or strong food. They wake up in the last panel.

But "Nemo" is about the dreams and nightmares of a small boy. "Rarebit" is by and for adults, and the nightmares reflect adult fears and concerns, like hair loss (below), or a man whose wife literally transforms into a harpy to beat the snot out of him for coming home late from carousing (right).

In general, "Rarebit" feels sort of like a rehearsal for "Nemo"--the art is coarser and so is the tone--but McCay also did things here he didn't attempt in "Nemo," like breaking the fourth wall (the man who gets obliterated by the artist's mistakes, above), and far more physical transformations, like the pull-blown age-regression story below right.

I don't think I've ever actually had Welsh rarebit, but I do know that when I was a kid I used to get home with my Hallowe'en candy and immediately scarf down more of it than was good for me. Every year.

I'd crash after the sugar rush, and between all the chocolate (I'd eat all the chocolate first) and the somewhat disgruntled stomach, I would always have the weirdest dreams that night.

So here's five little treats for you (with a few more comments from me in between).

They're tasty, but don't eat them too fast, or, in the spirit of Winsor McCay, you could end up having ...

**DREAM OF THE RAREBIT FIEND**



WELL, I NEVER DREAMED OF BEING A PEN AND INK DRAWING OF A SPRING FASHION MODEL, BUT IT SEEMS I AM!

OH! THE ARTIST HAS MADE A BLUR ON MY KNEET THAT'S TOO BAD HE CAN FIX IT. I SUGGEST!

POW! THERE'S ANOTHER SPEAR ON MY ELBOW. WELL, I PRESUME HE WILL SCRAPE IT OUT. O.K.

SO THAT THE YOUNG SWELLS AND TAILORS MAY KNOW WHAT IS PROPER TO WEAR, THIS SPRING, I'VE DESIGNED...

WELL, I DECLARE! THIS ARTIST SEEMS TO BE QUITE SLOPPY IN HIS WORK. LOOK AT THAT SAUCE!

I WONDER IF I AM TO BE FINISHED OR IF THIS FELLOW JUST MAKING ME A BUSH SKETCH?



CLEAN ME UP SO I WILL BE A FINISHED MODEL!

I AM NOT BEING CAREFUL! I'M BEING CARELESS! YOU'VE RUINED ME!

INTENDS TO COMPLETE ME OR HE SHOULD BE CAREFUL! YOU'VE RUINED ME!

I WONDER IF THIS DESIGNER HAS NOT BEEN DRAWING ME SINCE I WAS A BABY!

OH! WHAT A HORRIBLE FEELING! WHY THE BED IS ROCKING. WHY IT'S GOING TO TIP OVER. MERCY!



OH! HELP ME! I'M DYING. GOODBYE! FAREWELL TO ALL! I DID NOT WANT TO GO THIS WAY. ADIEU! TAKE EARTH AND ALL!

INTO EVERLASTING! HAVE MERCY ON ME! I PRAY FOR YOU!

OH! HELP ME! I'M DYING. GOODBYE! FAREWELL TO ALL! I DID NOT WANT TO GO THIS WAY. ADIEU! TAKE EARTH AND ALL!

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Full moon ... wish I had somebody here to appreciate it with ...

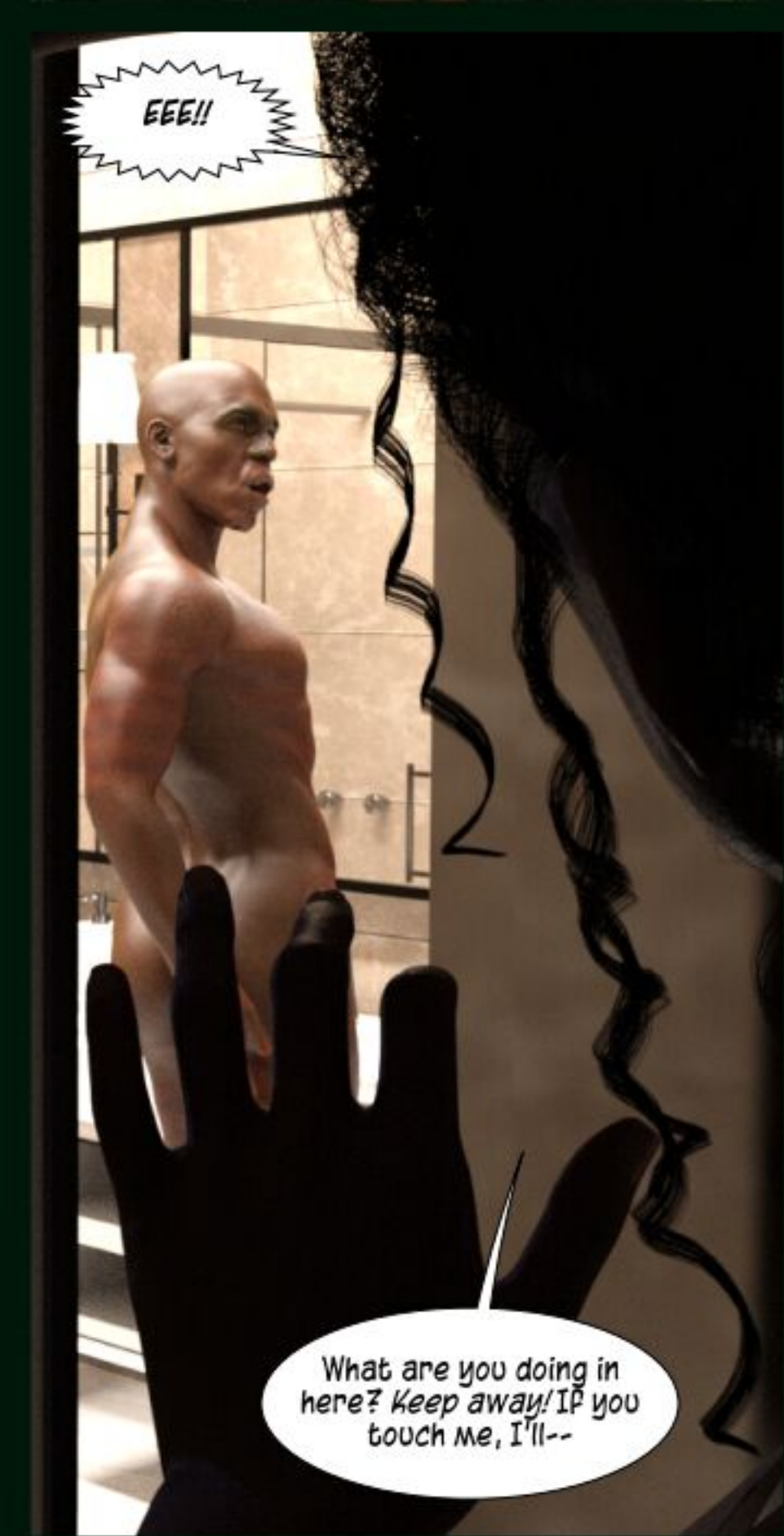
At least the Progs sound happy.

breet  
errrk  
trrr  
errrk



Huh?  
Why is the floor all wet?

story and images by trilby



EEE!!

What are you doing in here? Keep away! If you touch me, I'll--



ehrr?

Uh ...  
You know, you don't really look violent ...

Actually, you look kinda ... lost.  
Are you OK?



You--  
Oh!  
... Uh, hello.

You're not going to kill me, right? I really need to know you're not going to kill me.

Why do you--  
what is it that smells like that?  
It's so--

Oh god  
Oh god ohgod



You had better not be an axe murderer, y'hear?

'Cause I'm about to do something really, really stupid.



You want to do it that way?  
OK ...

Hang on, let me shipt a little ...



Yeah, it's a little tricky ... here, let me help ...  
MMM ... there we go ...







Uh ... good morning.

Not a big believer in clothes, huh?

'Course, I don't think you came in with any ...

I don't keep much food in the house, so it's gonna have to be cereal. Take a seat.



Hang on, I'll get the Milk ... and a spoon ...



Oh ... not going to bother with a spoon, huh?

You're definitely kind of strange.

I wish I could figure out exactly what--



woah! --MMM-- OK ...



TIME FLIES PAST ...

hmm?

Hey! Where are you going? You aren't leaving, are you?



ehrr!

The Moon? What about it?



EEEEEE!

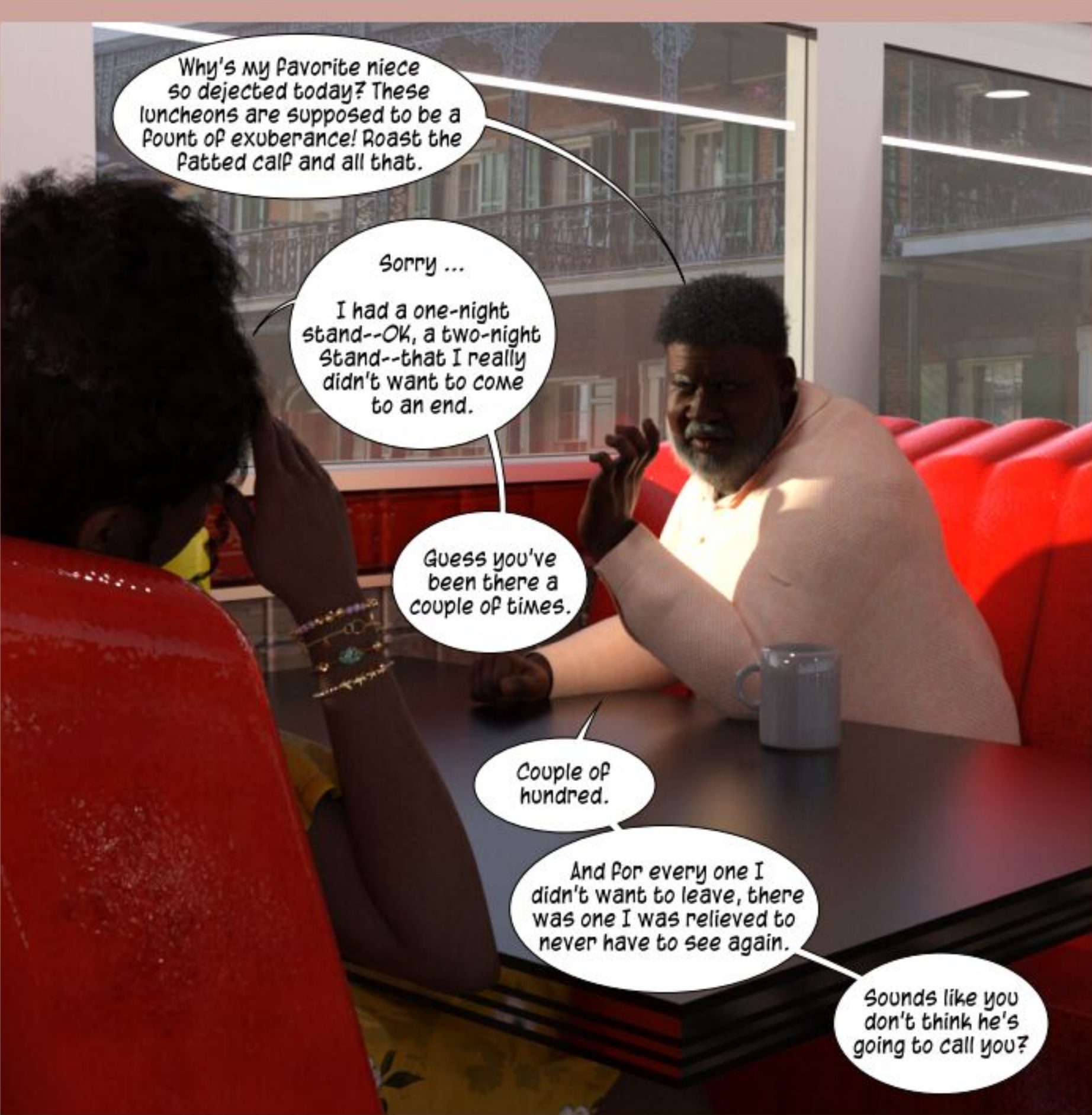


No, wait!

I shouldn't have screamed ... you just caught me by surprise ...

Come back!





Why's my favorite niece so dejected today? These luncheons are supposed to be a Point of exuberance! Roast the Patted calf and all that.

Sorry ...  
I had a one-night stand--OK, a two-night stand--that I really didn't want to come to an end.

Guess you've been there a couple of times.

Couple of hundred.

And for every one I didn't want to leave, there was one I was relieved to never have to see again.

Sounds like you don't think he's going to call you?



It, ah ... I don't think that's likely.

... I guess it's just as well. I couldn't have a conversation with him.

A common problem, I'm afraid.  
There was one once who ... ah, well, I'm sure you don't want the sordid details.

A MONTH LATER.



-- sigh --

I guess it was too much to hope for.



Oh!



THE NEXT NIGHT, AS IT ALWAYS DOES, THE MOON BEGAN TO WANE ...

No, hold on!  
Don't go yet!

Wait!



One more time?  
Please?  
I don't care what you look like ...







Beloved niece, you do realize this establishment is for a certain type of gentleman ...?

Yeah. It's great. None of them give me a hard time. Or even notice I'm here, really.

I'm going to tell you a story you're not going to believe, and I don't want anybody interrupting us unless it's to bring us drinks. Which we will need.



TWO ROUNDS LATER.

Well, for what it's worth, I believe you experienced what you say you did. Not only do I trust you implicitly, you've always been a lousy liar.

But I'm not clear what you expect me to bring to this.

You know all kinds of weird things! I thought maybe you'd have some idea how I could ... you know, get him out of it.

I know anthropology, not witchcraft ... though I grant they're adjacent disciplines.

The classical solution for this particular curse is to kiss him, of course.



I have kissed him. Uh, many times.

... in several places.

Perhaps you need to kiss him while he's Pully a Prog, then. Or perhaps I'm talking out my ass. I don't know.

OK. Do you know somebody you could ask?

Who won't laugh in my face? ... actually, I might. An old Jesuit, of all people, at Loyola. It'll take me a couple of days. Don't do anything Foolish.



LATER THAT NIGHT.

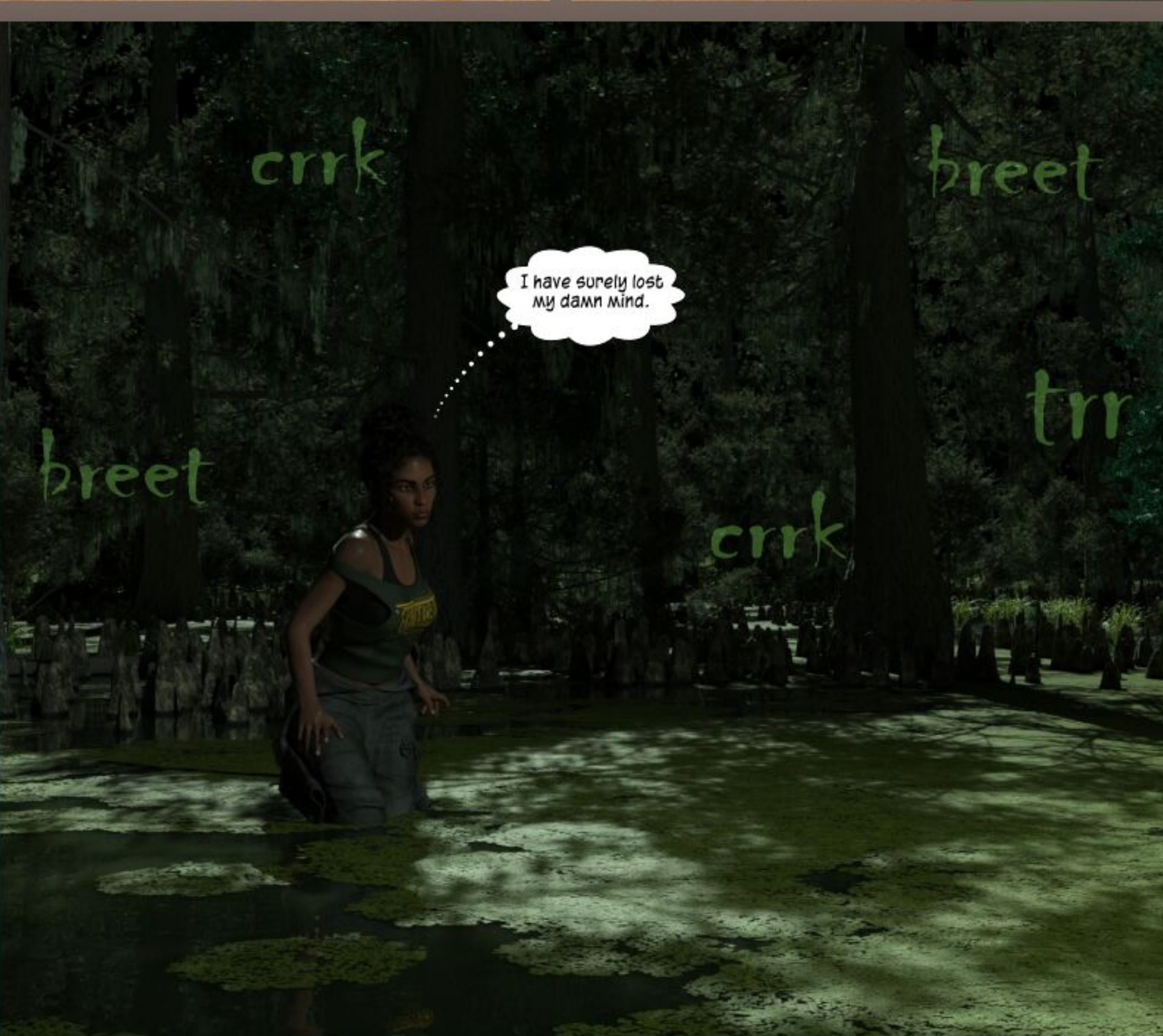
OK, but suppose I do need to kiss him while he's a Prog.

There can't be more than a thousand Progs in this swamp, right?

I mean, it couldn't hurt to just wander a little bit and look ...



I know I had a pair of waders in here somewhere ...



I have surely lost my damn mind.



I surely have lost my damn mind.

Phil told me about this old woman years ago and I didn't believe him. I'm not sure I believe him now. Phil had a lot of faults, but telling the truth wasn't one of them.

Still, in the face of circumstantial evidence ...



What you want, Mister man, eh?

You don't b'long here ...



Ah, pardon, Madame Levoir ...

There is ... rumor is, there's a man in this swamp with a curse on him. La Malédiction ...

Not saying you had anything to do with that ... but perhaps you know something, oui?



You come wrong, Mister man. I don't curse nobody. Ouais! Never curse nobody. Eheheheh ...

There's a man in this swamp who takes the form of a Prog, except when the moon is full. My niece has ... encountered him.



EEHEHEHEHEHE!

You have it back to Pront! Dat no man, non!

Poor cher p'tit Prog ... Come here in the box wit' les bananes ... so Par Prom him home ... no m'mselle Progs of him kind ...

I Peel sorry for him, oui? Once a mont', moon come out, I give him chance to Pind belle Femme ...

'Curse.' Pbah! I don't curse nobody.





This is ridiculous. Tons of frogs, but none of them's right ...

I don't even have to get close ... none of them are those colors. None of them that bright, or with stripes on their legs--

Ooh. Wait a second ... What's that over there?



Hey, little guy! Do you recognize me?

Don't run away, now. I just want to pick you up for a second ...



This may be the dumbest thing I've ever done in my life, but oh well.

Hold real still, now ...

**SNARCH**



uuhhooaaaah??



Are you here?

Sorry to barge in at this hour, but you didn't answer your door, and we need to talk ...



Not here.

Well, at least I didn't interrupt her in bed with somebody.

I hope she's out doing something worthwhile and not Poolish.



-- sigh -- I'll give her a call tomorrow, I suppose ...



You know, they say love is a two-way street ...

I guess "Pinding your true love" looks different depending on who's doing the looking.



Kids learn at a pretty young age where their kinks are. They may never become consciously aware of them (some of them stay oblivious even as adults), but they know when they like something in particular, even if they can't say why.

I liked transformation and control themes, and I was aware of it probably from about age six, which is when I first started reading the Oz books. (I was an advanced reader who got bored with picture books very early.)

As I got a little older, most of my fiction reading settled into the Fantasy and science fiction genres, which had the most chance (for me) of being interesting. Things like Judy Blume's sagas of adolescence didn't do anything for me--I wanted robots and monsters and dragons and witches and so on.

It was a constant disappointment to me that F/SF, which had the potential to do anything (to anyone), without the limits of reality, didn't go into the areas of my kinks more often--even if I didn't know they were kinks yet.

I sometimes wonder if I started writing fiction just to provide for myself the things I couldn't get enough of. One of the earliest real short stories I wrote was about a woman involuntarily being turned into a rag doll. I was in elementary school.

(I was deprived of a few things that might have helped. Neither the Goosebumps nor Animorphs series, which are packed full of control and transformation themes, existed when I was a kid. Nor did some video media, like "Totally Spies," which is notorious for having mind control in nearly every episode.)



In the same way, I was just as disappointed with most F/SF art ... with one exception I'll mention later. Why would a Fantasy artist with ample talent and a transformation scene in the story choose not to illustrate the transformation scene? Too much of a pain to draw?

Boris Vallejo. Talented dude, even if he is basically Frank Frazetta with more Vaseline on the lens. Spends his entire career drawing mostly over-muscled barbarians and over-breasted women in chainmail bikinis. Such a waste.

The one exception is the art he did for the book ENCHANTMENT to accompany erotic stories by his (now ex-wife) Doris. Some of these go interesting places ... more interesting than the stories, to be honest.

This one's my favorite. Lot going on here.



Like everybody starved for their kink does, I often read it into works where it probably wasn't intended. Take Hajime Sorayama, for example.

His endless, nearly-identical chrome robot women do nothing for me--unless I can build a mental story about how they have been transformed and/or controlled. Headphones sending signals are good for that, as are partial transformations, or figures who appear to be reacting to their change, as in the sculpture in the case behind me.

Robots alone can be interesting, but robotization--MMM, now that's the good stuff.





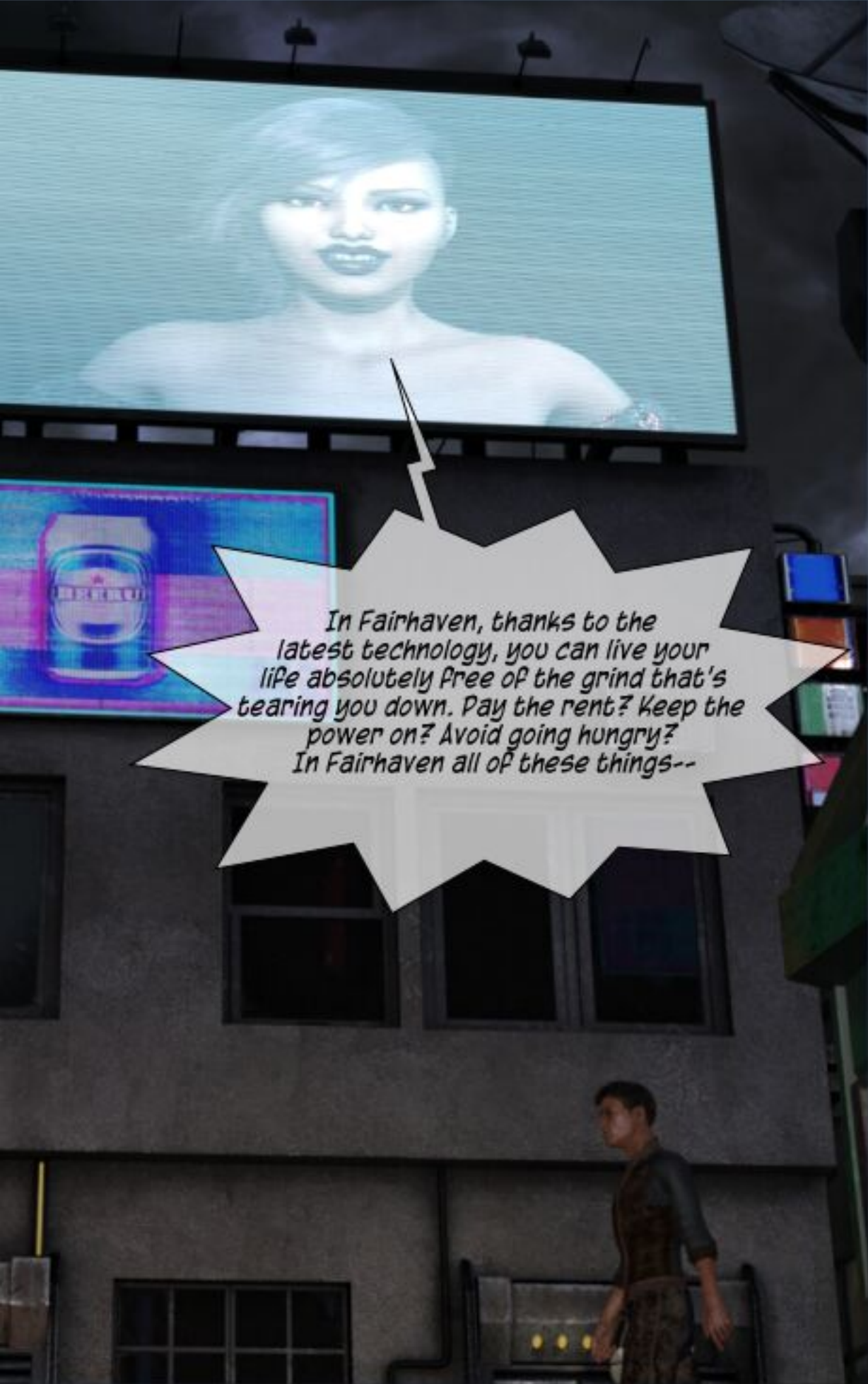


Has life left you feeling useless?  
Hopeless? Helpless?  
Stuck in a dark pattern with no light in sight?  
It's time you considered joining us in Fairhaven.

# VIDEODRONES

WORDS AND IMAGES BY TRILBY

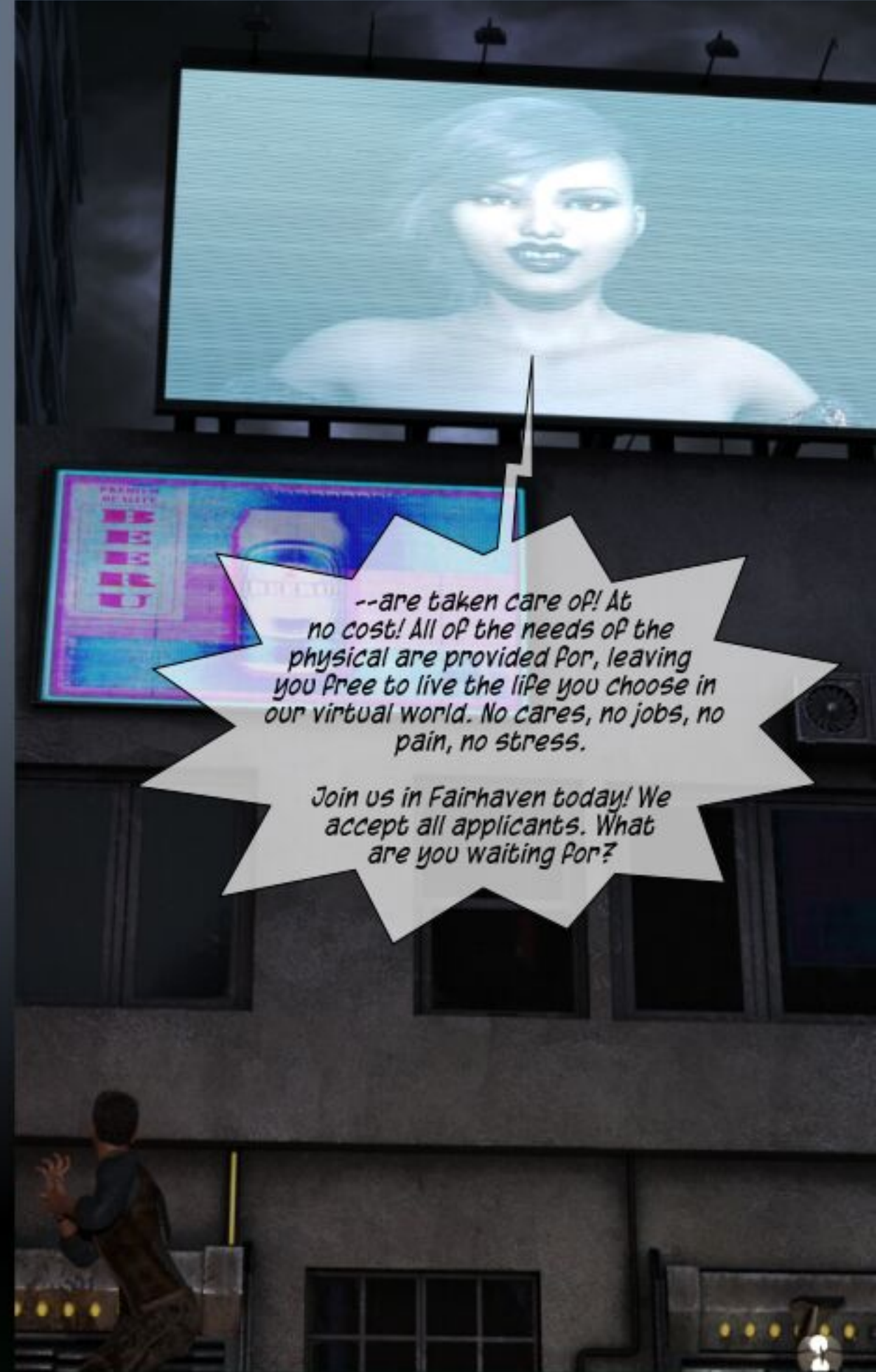
TITLE WITH APOLOGIES TO DAVID CRONENBERG



In Fairhaven, thanks to the latest technology, you can live your life absolutely free of the grind that's tearing you down. Pay the rent? Keep the power on? Avoid going hungry? In Fairhaven all of these things--



Hello, Tom.  
Do you ever think about me?



--are taken care of! At no cost! All of the needs of the physical are provided for, leaving you free to live the life you choose in our virtual world. No cares, no jobs, no pain, no stress.  
Join us in Fairhaven today! We accept all applicants. What are you waiting for?



Valerie ... I'm sorry, yeah, I know, I promised we'd do something ...

Look, they're running me into the ground at work ... I just don't have the energy tonight. Yeah. I'm really sorry. I think I'm just going to go crash.



You can't escape it, you know.  
You never could.

It's coming for you. I'm coming for you.

Whether you know it or not.

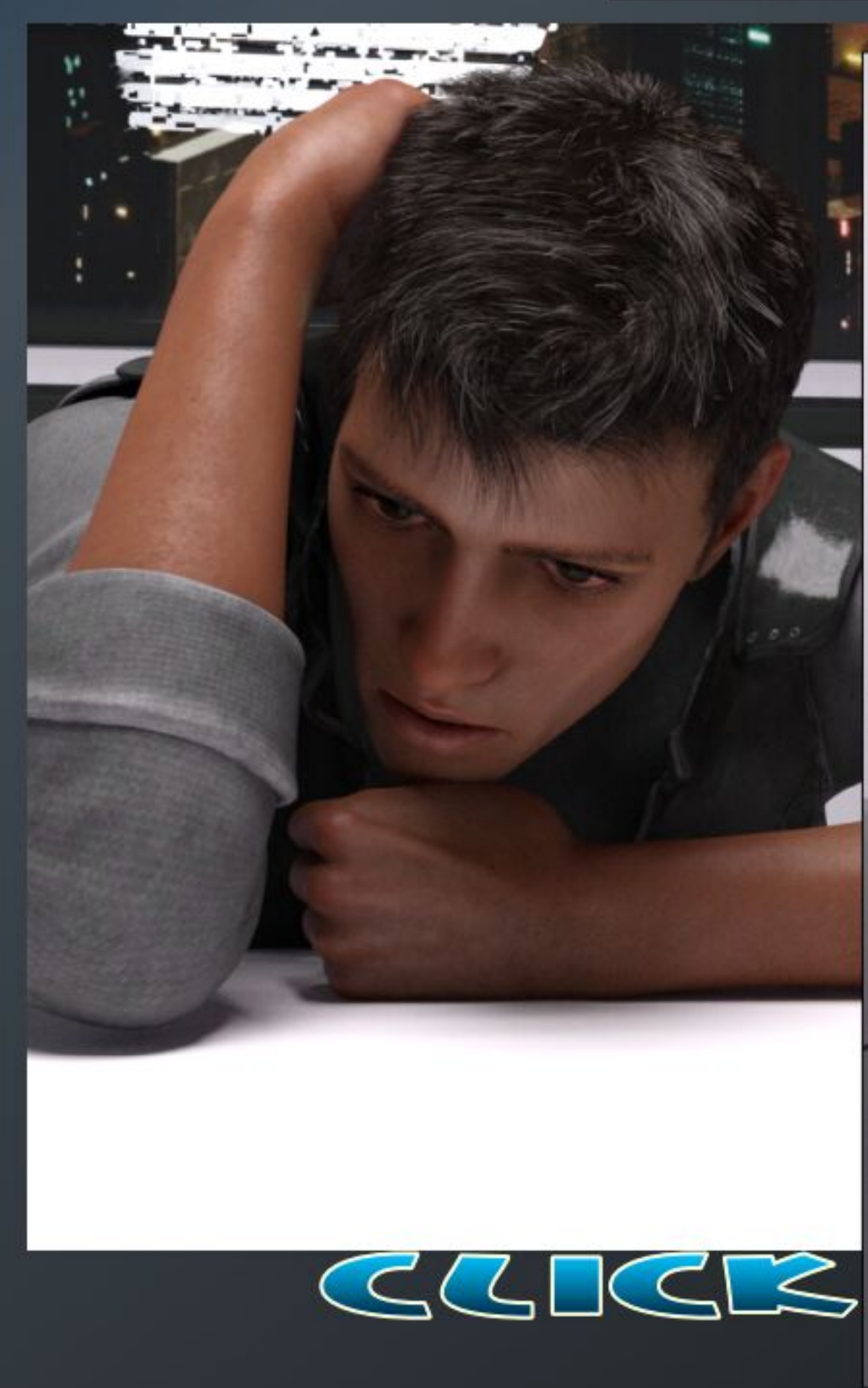


Can barely see straight ... If I don't get some good sleep real soon ...

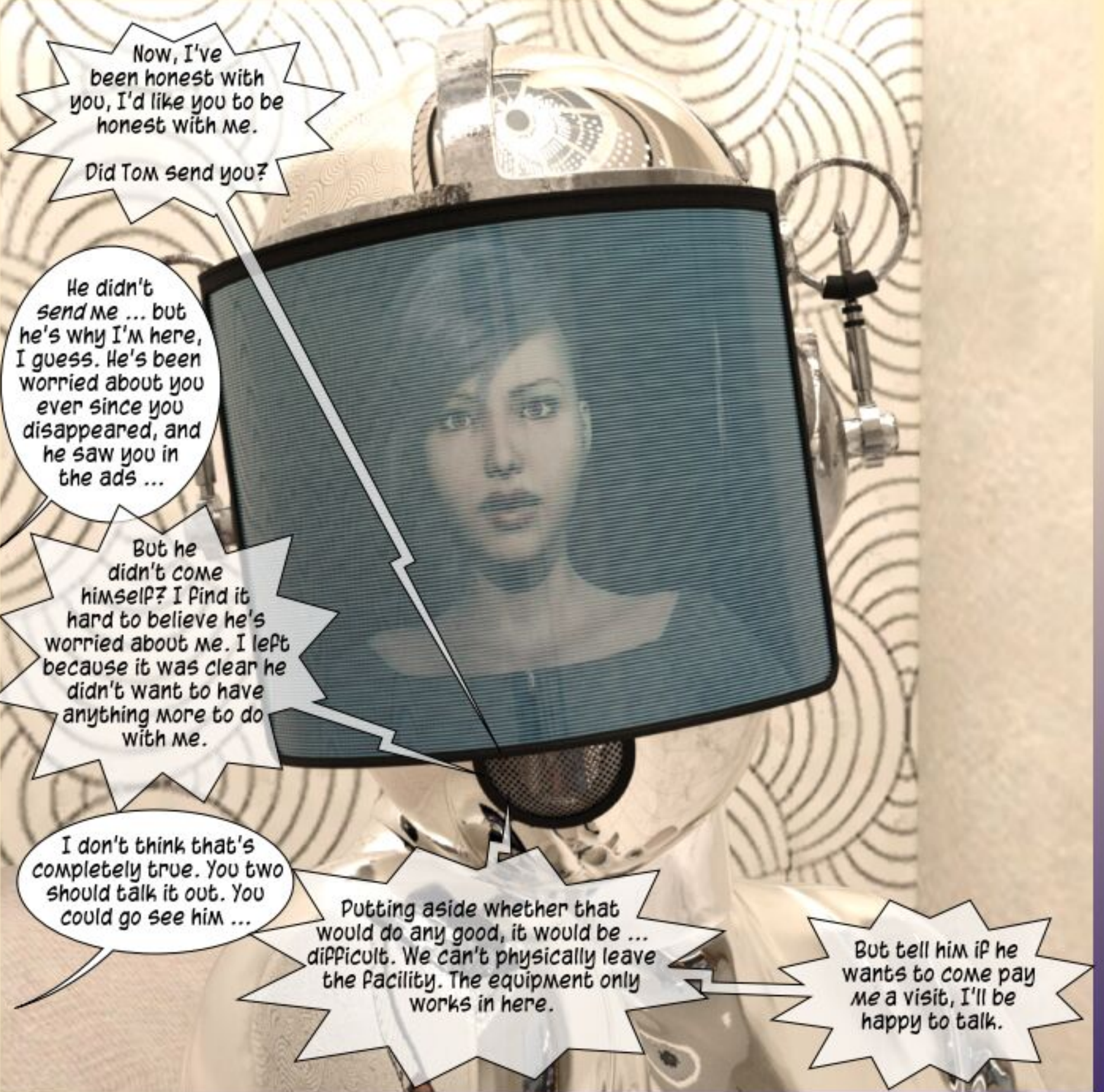
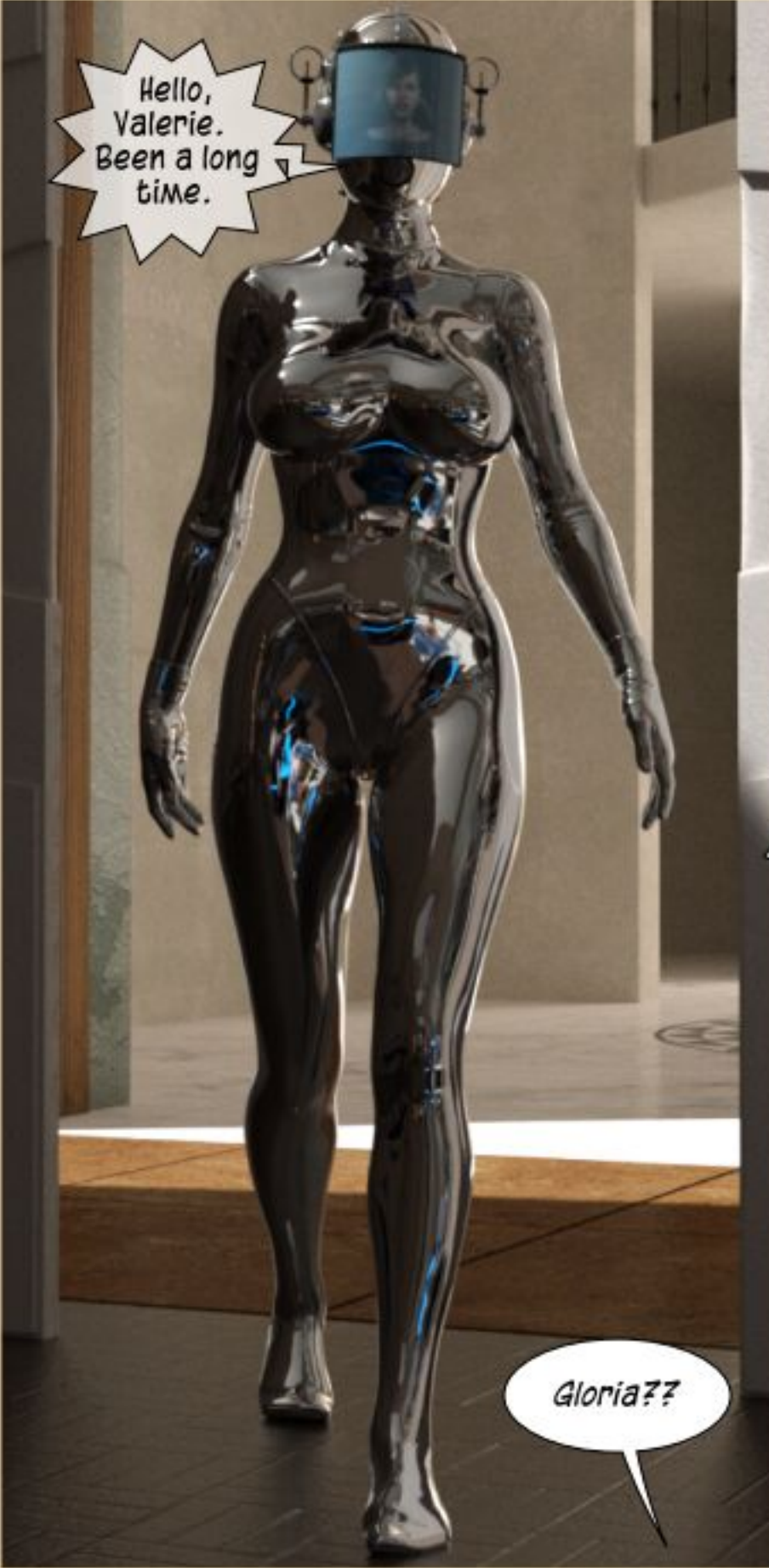
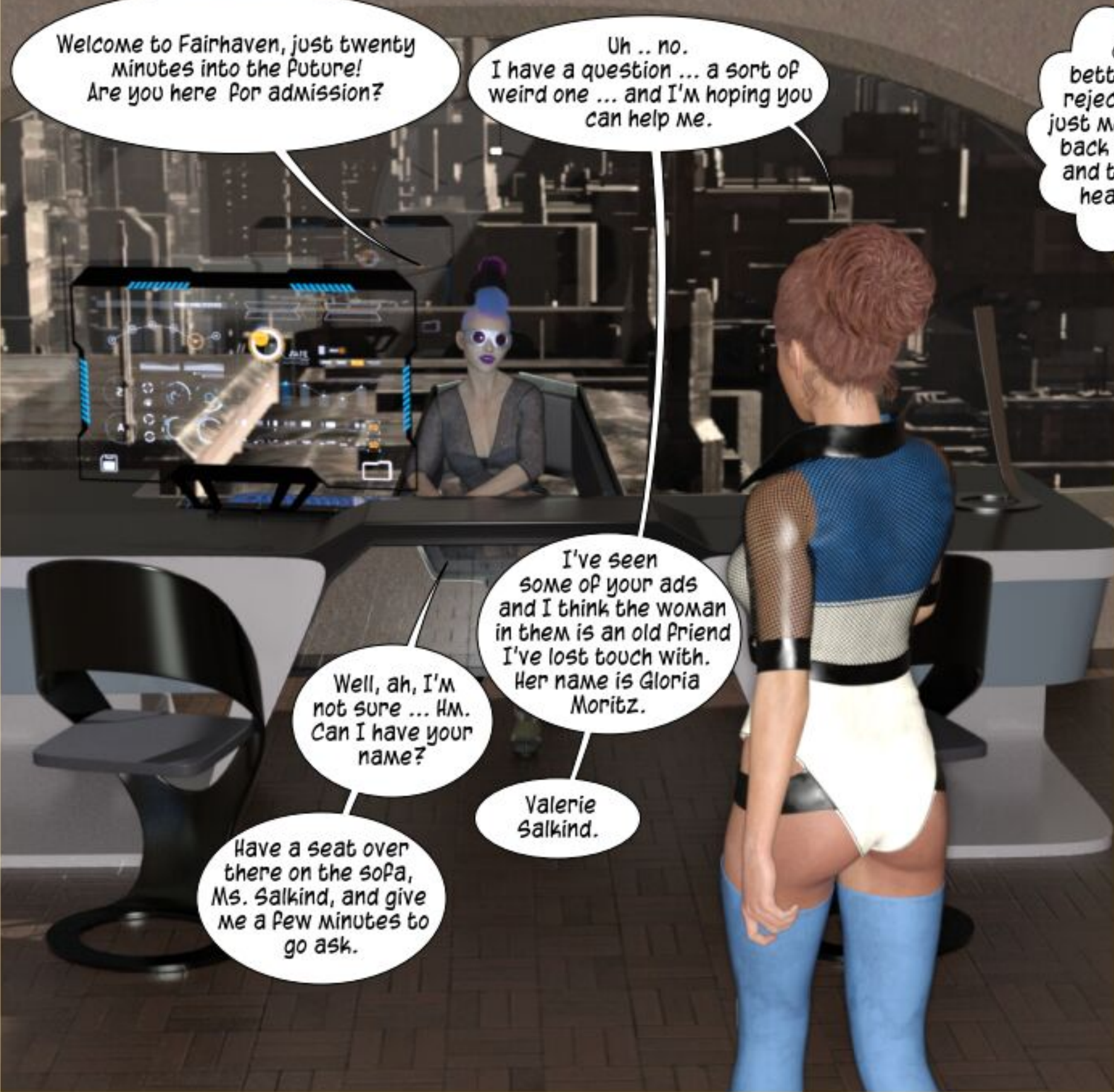


Have you considered Fairhaven?  
Have you considered  
Have you considered  
Have you considered  
Have you considered  
Have you considered  
Have you considered

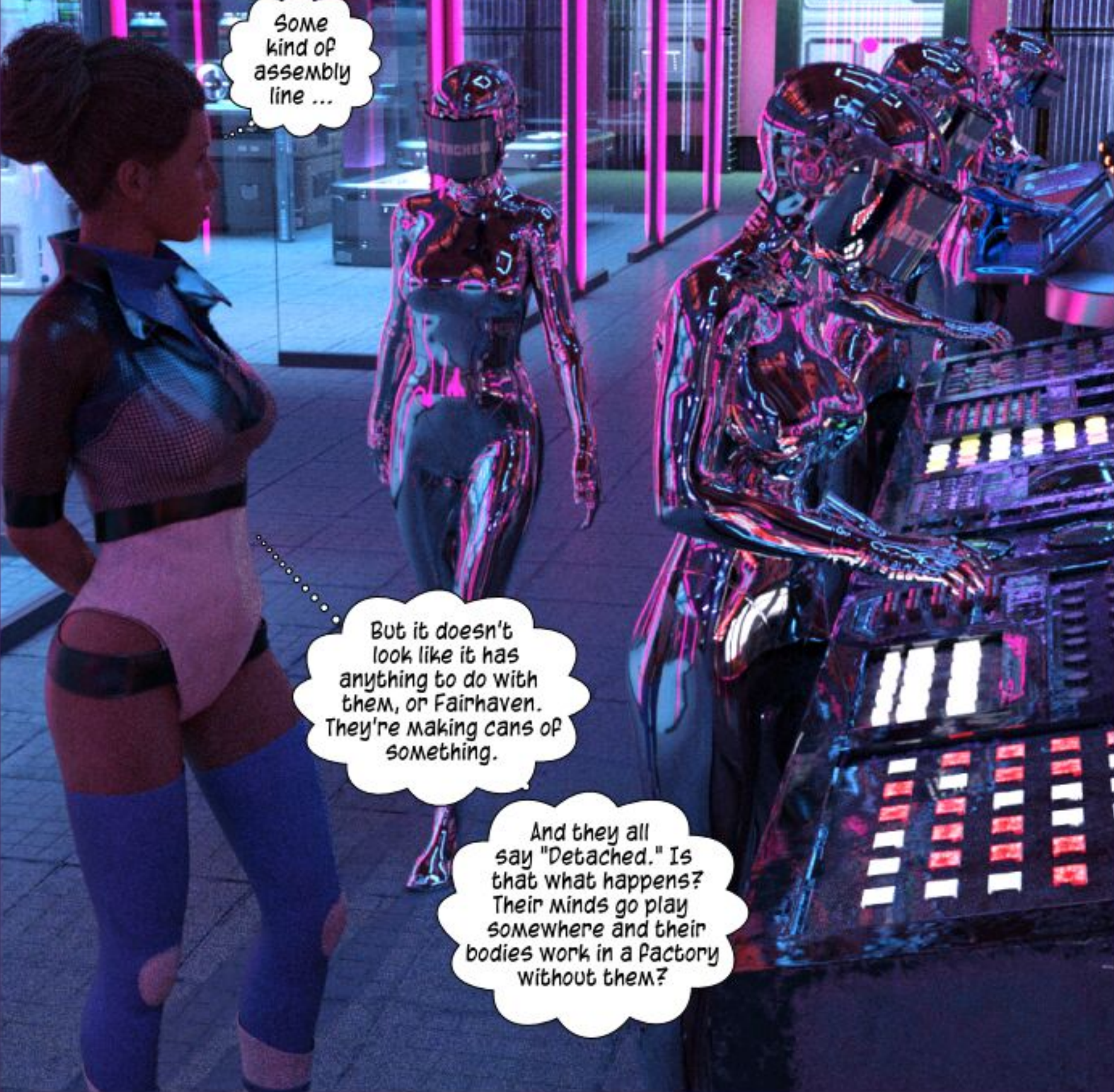












Some kind of assembly line ...

But it doesn't look like it has anything to do with them, or Fairhaven. They're making cans of something.

And they all say "Detached." Is that what happens? Their minds go play somewhere and their bodies work in a factory without them?



You know, I was hoping you'd be stupid enough to wander back here.

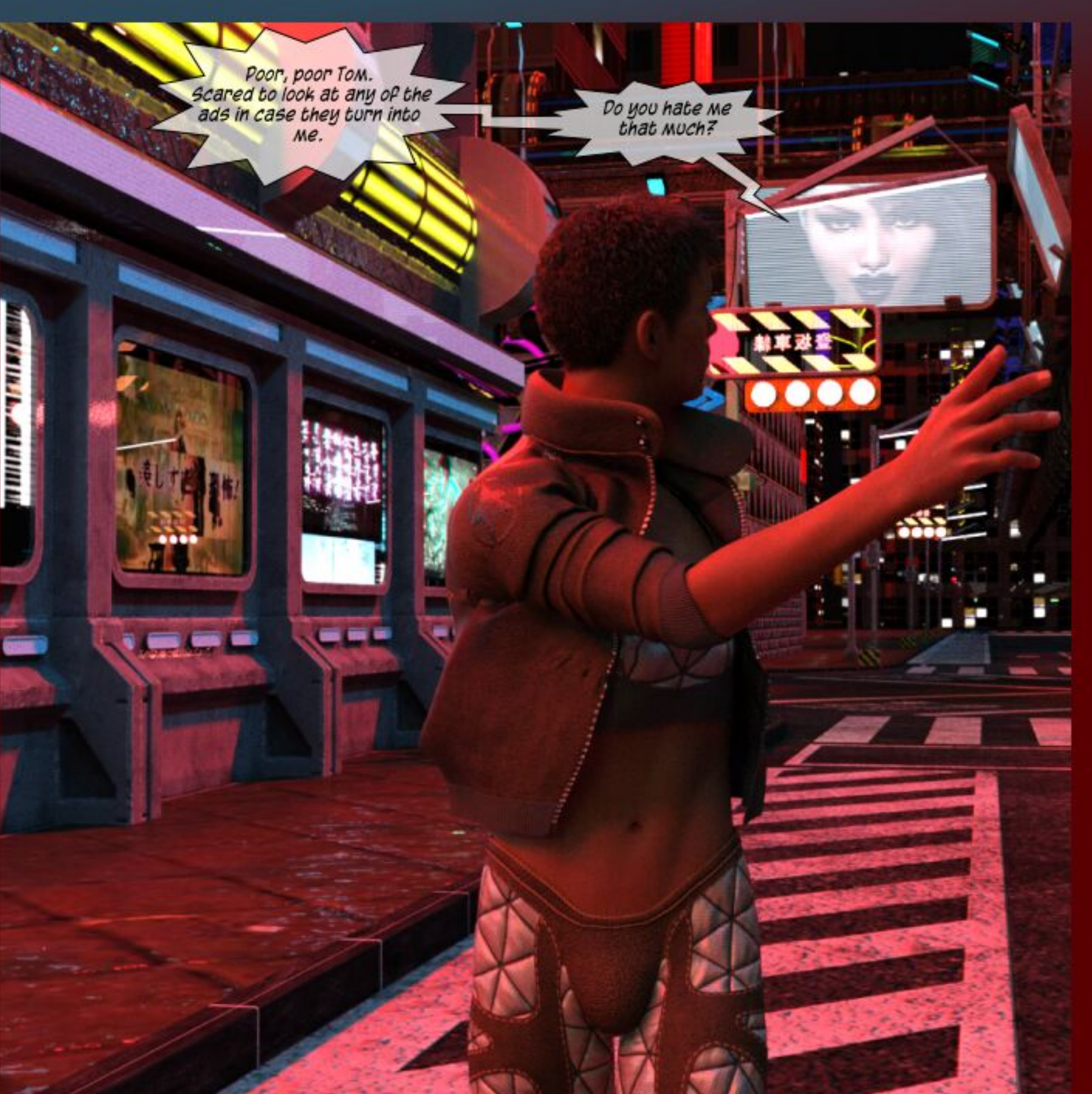


Hey! Let go!

Oh, stop squirming. You were going to end up joining us as soon as you came into the Facility, whether you knew it or not. You've just made it happen a lot faster.



Relax, Valerie. Honestly, you're going to love it. Trust me.



Poor, poor Tom. Scared to look at any of the ads in case they turn into me.

Do you hate me that much?



Look who I have, Tom.

You'd better come and get her, hadn't you?

Tom, no! Don't do it! That's what she wants!

You'd better hurry, too, before I teach her to like it here.

Tom, don't listen to--

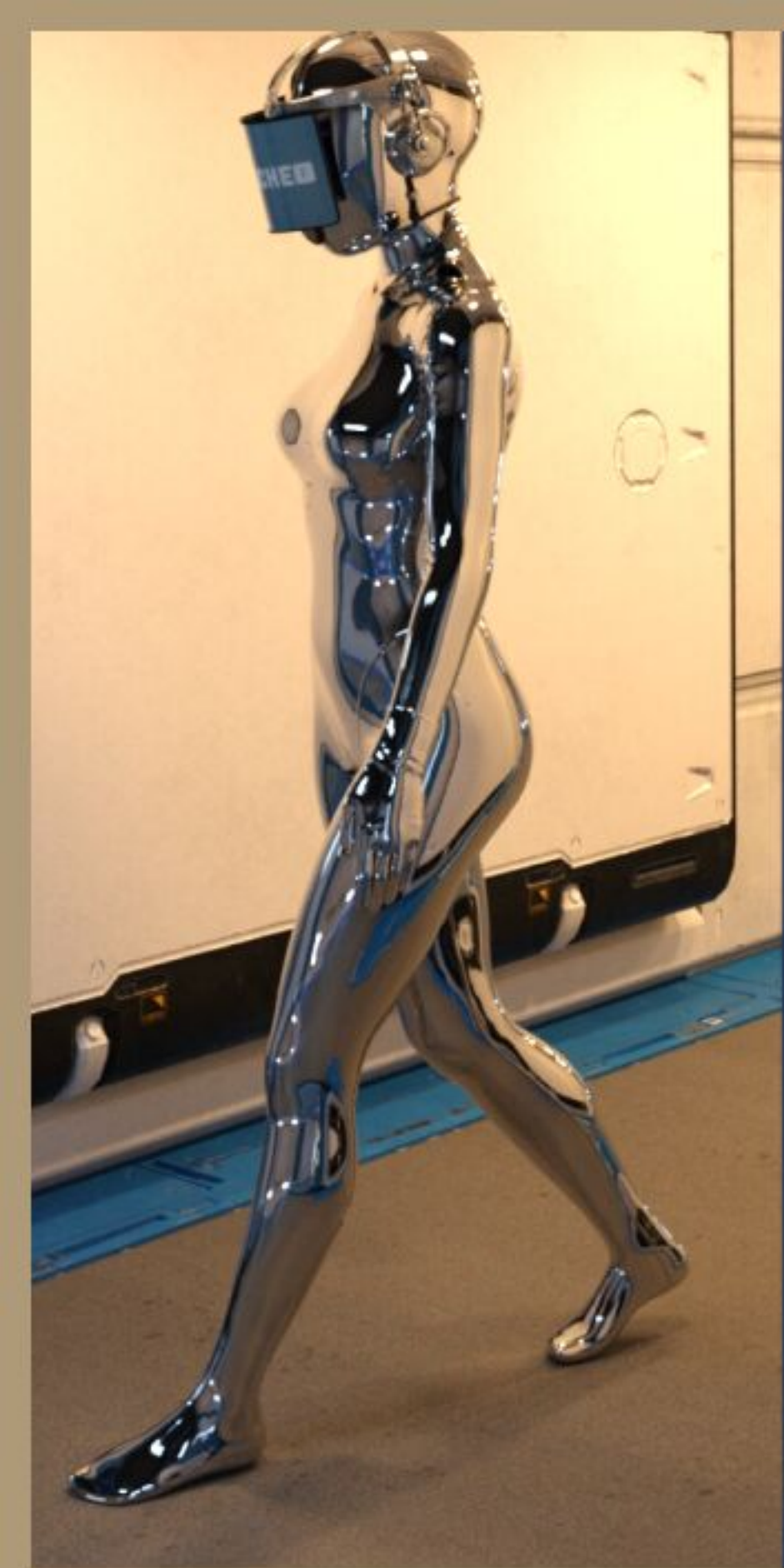
--MMph!--

--MMW!--



HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA





It's hilarious that you go to all that trouble to avoid them. They're detached. They can't see anything.

Why not?

Meanwhile, I have cameras everywhere and I've been watching you since you entered.

Then stop watching me! Come out and talk to me Face-to-Face!

Sneaking in ... such an interesting thing to do.

I didn't expect to ever see you again, Tom. What happened? Did you see my Face on a screen somewhere and decide you missed me a lot more than you wanted to admit?



Gloria? My god.

What you do to yourself is your business, but you better not have done anything to Valerie.

Where is she?

Valerie?

You're here about her? Oh, Tom, I'm disappointed. I really thought you--

Tom??

It is you!

Tom, help! They use our bodies for hire work and keep us trapped! They work on our minds, try to rewrite us ... it's so hard to break out ...

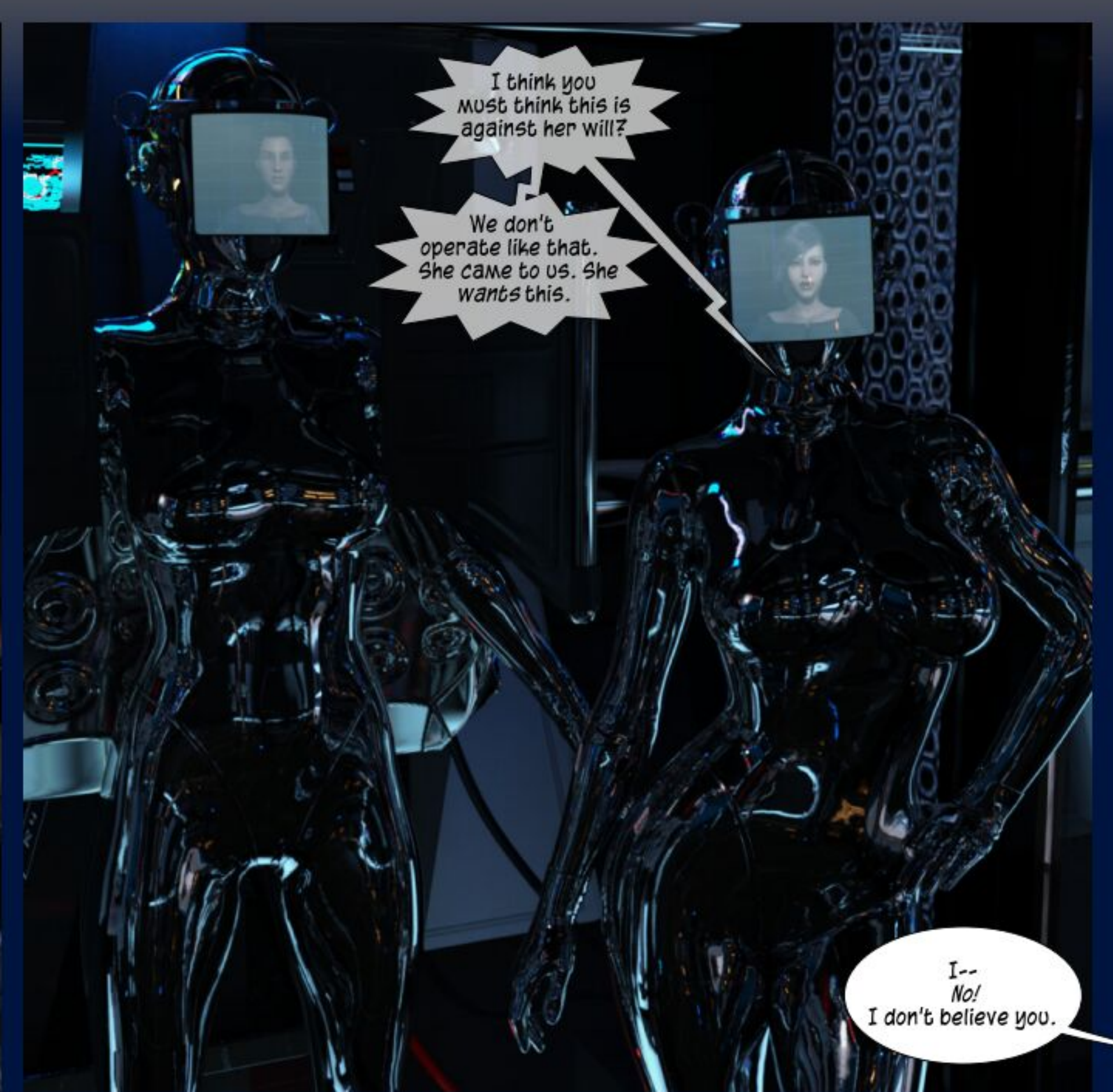
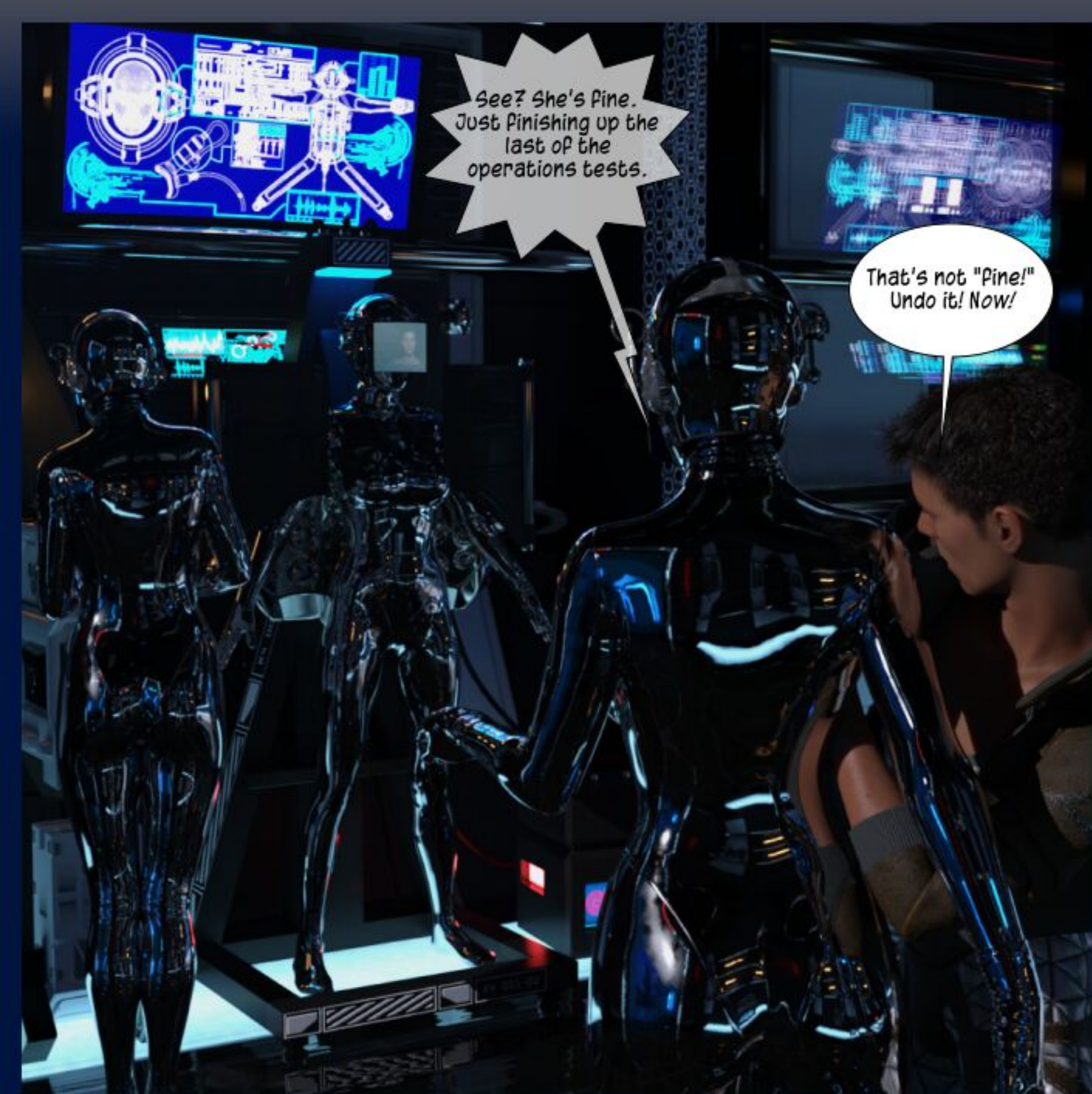
You've got to get me out of here!

Sure ... but we need to get Valerie out too.

I know where she is ... I can take you there ... but we have to hurry!

No, don't worry about them ... they don't see or hear anything ... it's the cameras! They're watching everything!

Come on. Valerie hasn't been here very long. I'm sure she's all right.



See? She's Pine. Just finishing up the last of the operations tests.

That's not "Pine!" Undo it! Now!

I think you must think this is against her will?

We don't operate like that. She came to us. She wants this.

I-- No! I don't believe you.



All right, let's ask.

Unit, are your tests complete?

Yes.

Good. Would you go into Pull connect for me, please? We'd like to ask you a question.

Sure.

Now that you're all tested and complete, are you still happy with your decision? Everything Peel OK?

Oh, yes! This is the best choice I ever made. I'm really looking forward to my new life. I--

Tom! Tom, get out! She's lying to you! It's a trap to get you in here ...

Damn.

--DZZX--

No, don't take it away! No! Tom!!

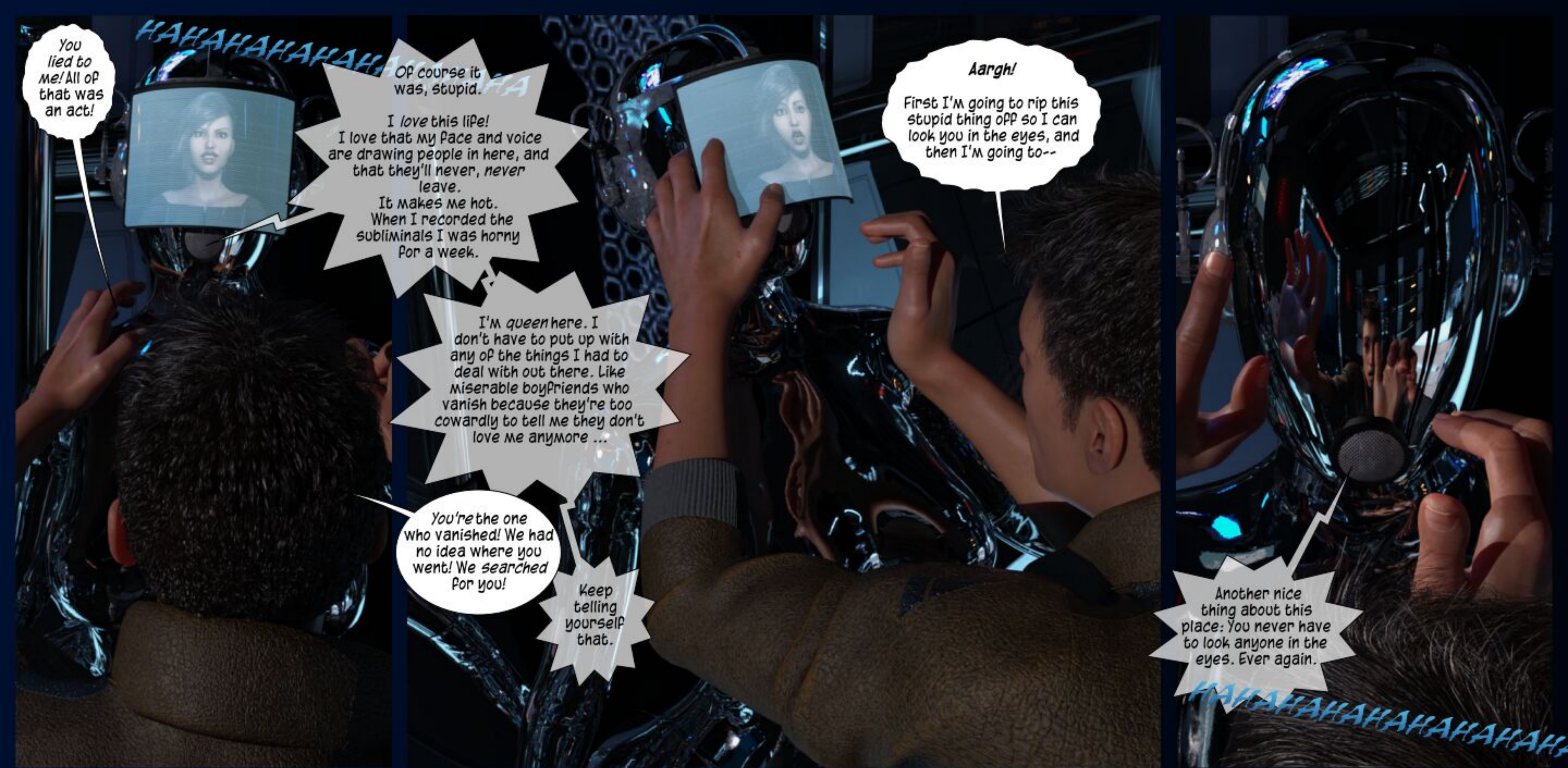
I didn't think Little Miss Wallpaper had it in her.

Detach her.

Oh, well.

It's not like it's going to make any difference.





You lied to me! All of that was an act!

Of course it was, stupid.

I love this life! I love that my face and voice are drawing people in here, and that they'll never, never leave. It makes me hot. When I recorded the subliminals I was horny for a week.

I'm queen here. I don't have to put up with any of the things I had to deal with out there. Like miserable boyfriends who vanish because they're too cowardly to tell me they don't love me anymore ...

You're the one who vanished! We had no idea where you went! We searched for you!

Keep telling yourself that.

Aargh!  
First I'm going to rip this stupid thing off so I can look you in the eyes, and then I'm going to--

Another nice thing about this place: You never have to look anyone in the eyes. Ever again.



Did you really come here just to find her, Tom? That little mouse?

You prefer her over me? You're such a disappointment. Even when I think you can't hurt me anymore, you find a way.

I just can't believe it. Are you sure it was just about her? You didn't want to see me again even a little bit?

Maybe it was the subliminals. They tell me the effects on someone who already knows you are ... strange. Have you been dreaming of me, Tom? Have I been in your hallucinations?



Really, I'm doing you a favor. This has got to be better than whatever wretched life you have these days.

Let me go! Let go!!



Is he done?

Finishing now.

Unit, are your tests complete?

Yes.

Good.

Detach.



Tom?



Oh, Tom, I'm so sorry ...

Tom, I ... I need you. Badly. Like, right now ...

Can we?



Oh, yes ... Oh, god ...

Aaaaaahhhhhh!!



I mean, I'm not sure you'd want to call it a happy ending ...

But at least they're together ...



Gradually I was able to find some resources for adult-audience graphic novels (not necessarily erotic). The American ones didn't do much for me; they suffered from the Marvel/DC driven visual style that's given American comic book illustration tunnel vision for ninety years. There were some exceptions--like Marvel's great, doomed *Epic* magazine, which was like *Heavy Metal* but actually had good stories.

European stuff had more interesting art, to me, and was willing to go into kinkland a bit more often ... but was sometimes spoiled by other factors. There was even more misogyny in European works than in US stuff, which is why you don't see a clip from any of Milo Manara's work here (despite "Click!" for example, being a mind-control story through and through).

But there was one big exception. Vittorio Giardino's collection of shorts "Little Ego" not only went into wild territory I loved, and was a direct homage to "Little Nemo" (the back cover of the most recent edition, right, makes this explicit), but it was good-spirited. Ego is enjoying her weird dreams.

Wonder why I bought this little number...

I'll never wear it, it's too revealing!

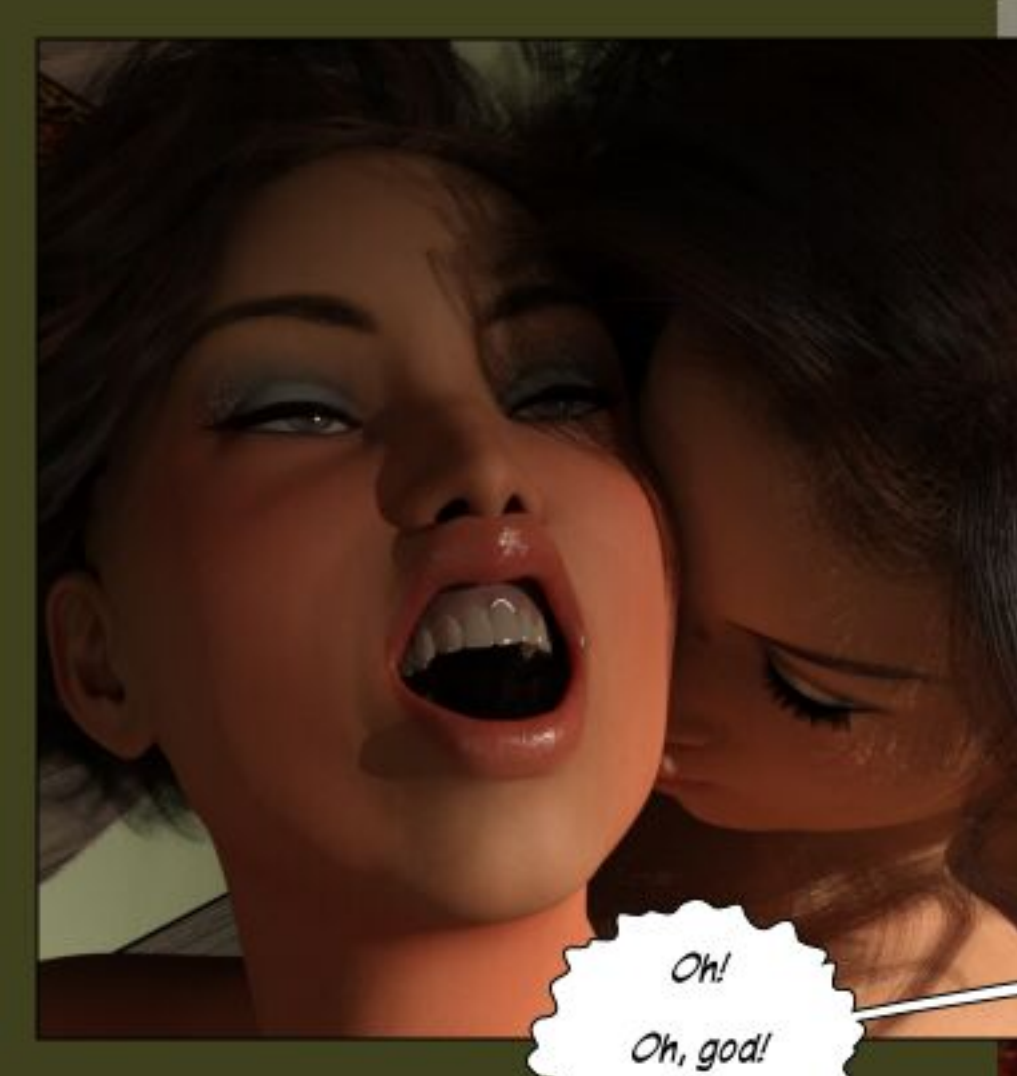
They're kinda cute though!

I'm not in the habit of doing direct "remakes" of other people's ideas ... but in this case I couldn't resist making an exception. I'm not saying this is my absolute favorite story in "Little Ego," but it's right up there.

My version has a different ending. The ending to all the stories in "Little Ego" is the same as in "Little Nemo": she wakes up. Spoilers!







Oh!  
Oh, god!  
Oh!!



Echo?

What's with all the noise?  
Are you OK--

... oh.

Girl!

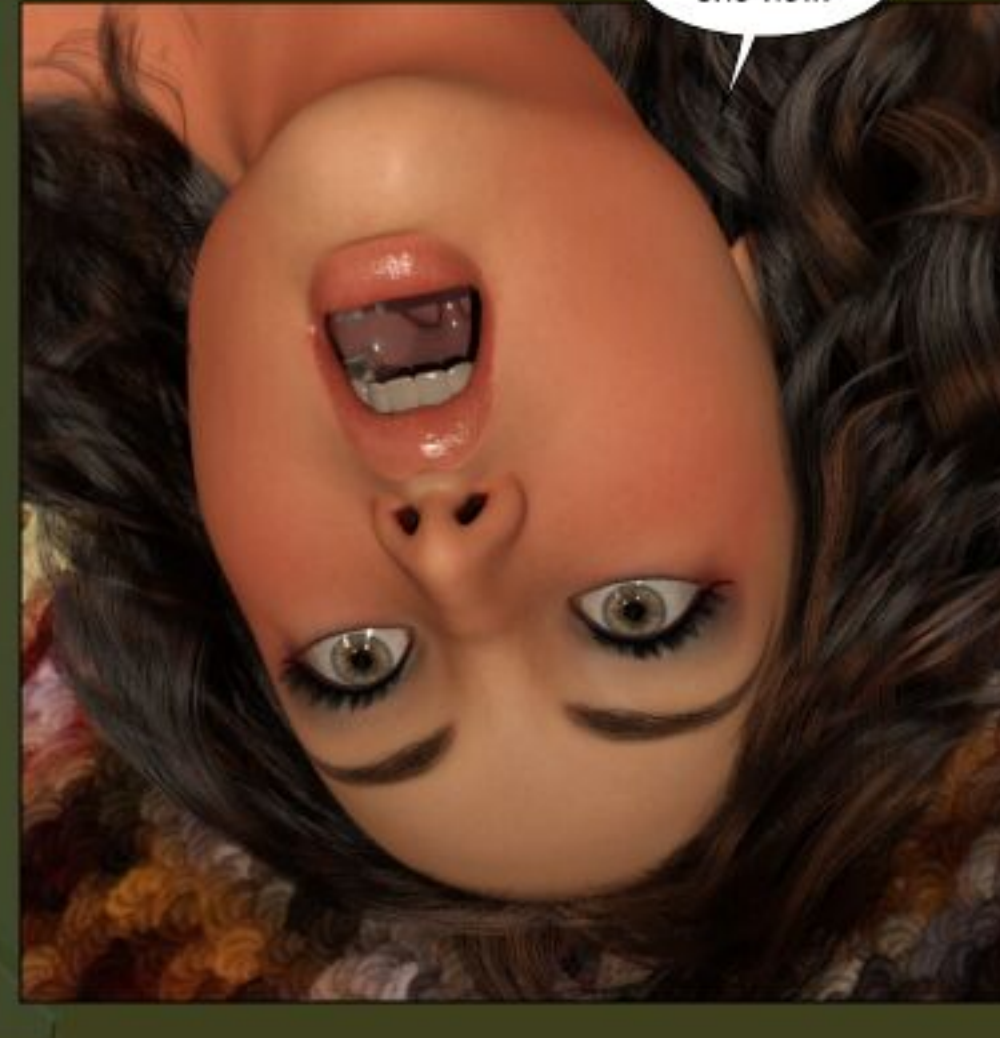
In the middle of the floor? With all the curtains open?



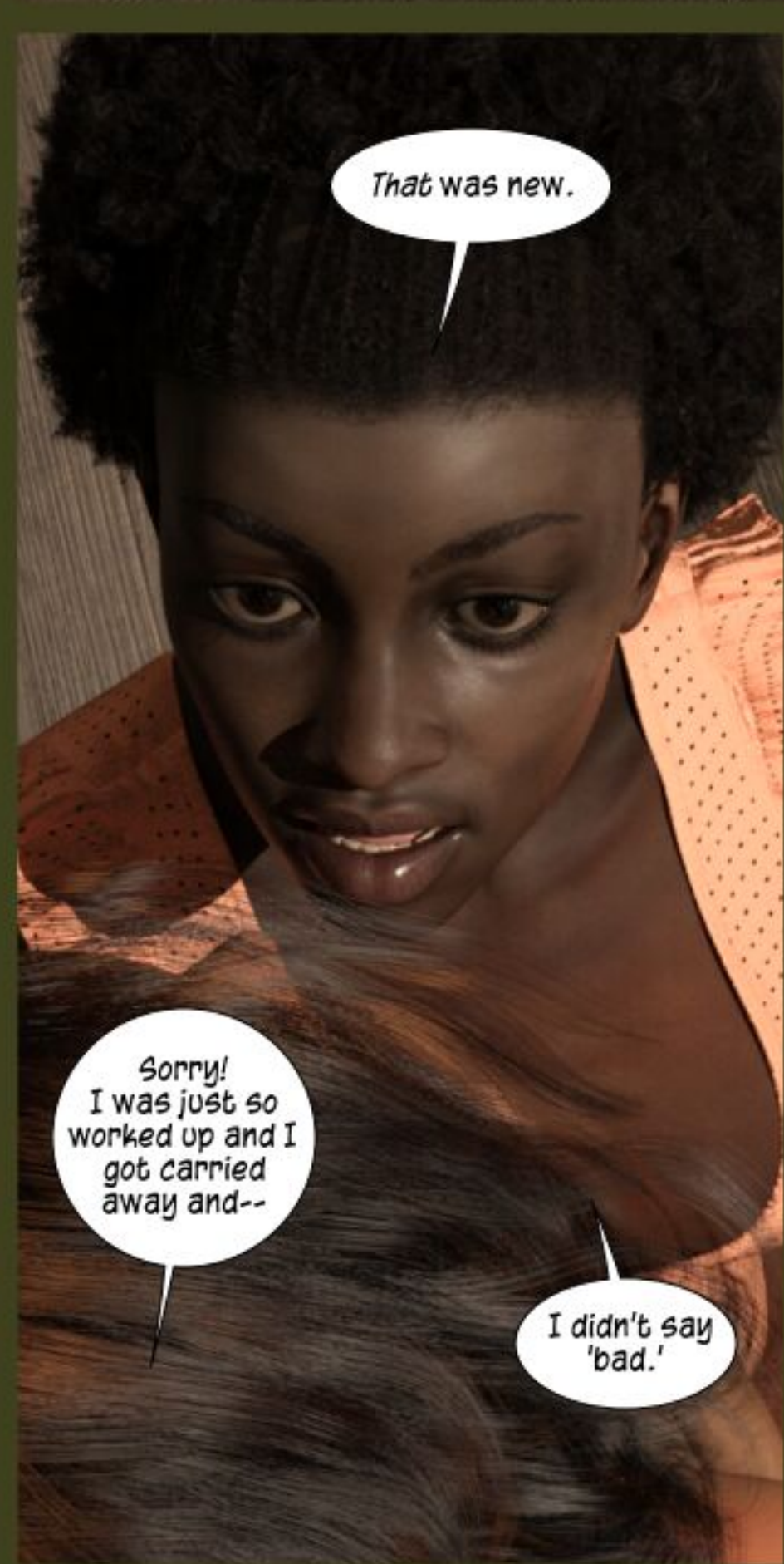
But there was ... there were these ... it was ...

I wasn't ... Uh ...

Oh, what the hell.



Whaahhhhhh!



That was new.

Sorry! I was just so worked up and I got carried away and--

I didn't say 'bad.'



Oh! Well, then ...

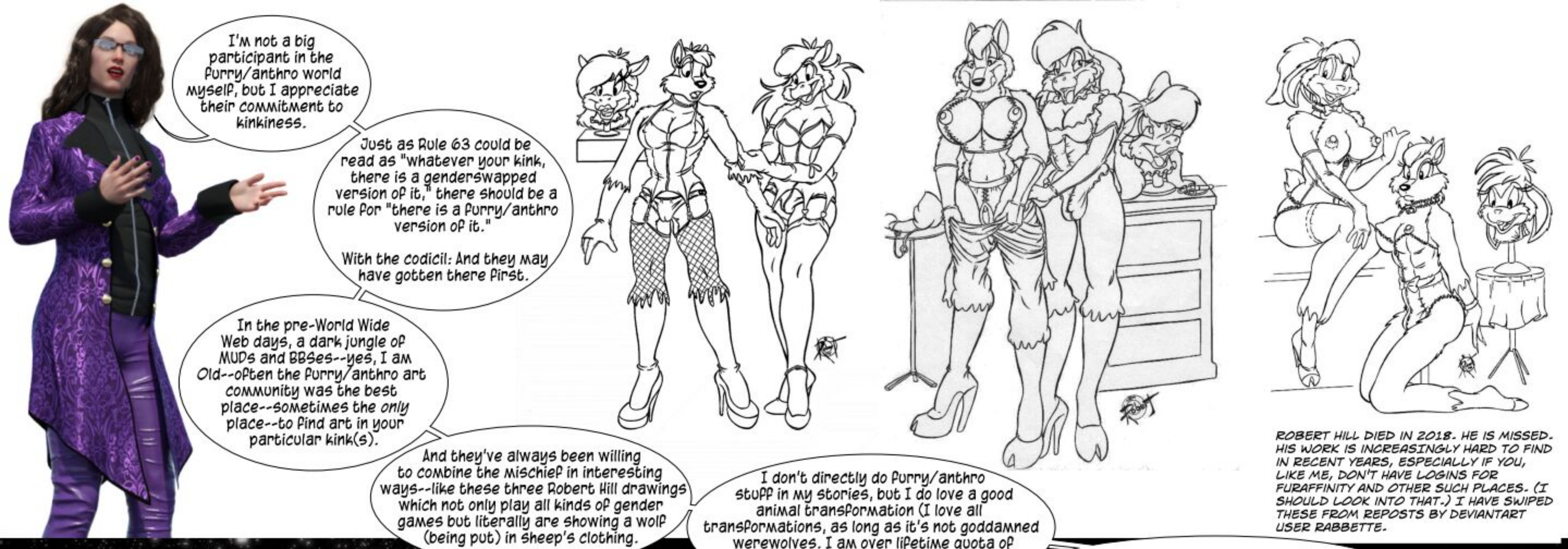
... there's something over here you're really going to want to see.

You know what's even better than a really good smutty dream?

Sharing it with somebody else.







I'm not a big participant in the furry/anthro world myself, but I appreciate their commitment to kinkiness.

Just as Rule 63 could be read as "whatever your kink, there is a genderswapped version of it," there should be a rule for "there is a furry/anthro version of it."

With the codicil: And they may have gotten there first.

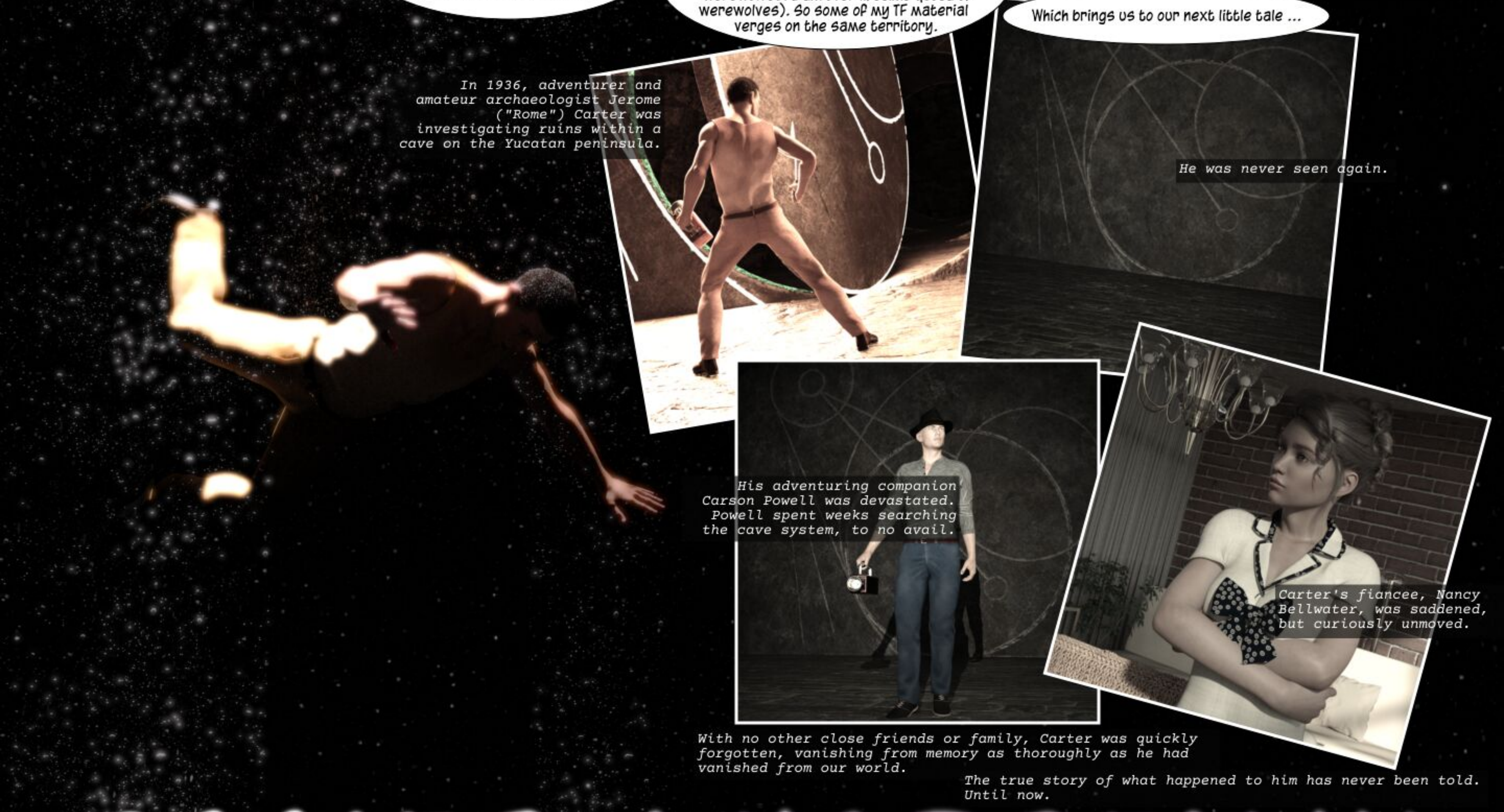
In the pre-World Wide Web days, a dark jungle of MUDs and BBSes--yes, I am old--often the furry/anthro art community was the best place--sometimes the only place--to find art in your particular kink(s).

And they've always been willing to combine the mischief in interesting ways--like these three Robert Hill drawings which not only play all kinds of gender games but literally are showing a wolf (being put) in sheep's clothing.

I don't directly do furry/anthro stuff in my stories, but I do love a good animal transformation (I love all transformations, as long as it's not goddamned werewolves. I am over lifetime quota of werewolves). So some of my TF material verges on the same territory.

Which brings us to our next little tale ...

ROBERT HILL DIED IN 2018. HE IS MISSED. HIS WORK IS INCREASINGLY HARD TO FIND IN RECENT YEARS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU, LIKE ME, DON'T HAVE LOGINS FOR FURAFFINITY AND OTHER SUCH PLACES. (I SHOULD LOOK INTO THAT.) I HAVE SWIPED THESE FROM REPOSTS BY DEVIANTART USER RABBETTE.



In 1936, adventurer and amateur archaeologist Jerome ("Rome") Carter was investigating ruins within a cave on the Yucatan peninsula.

He was never seen again.

His adventuring companion Carson Powell was devastated. Powell spent weeks searching the cave system, to no avail.

Carter's fiancée, Nancy Bellwater, was saddened, but curiously unmoved.

With no other close friends or family, Carter was quickly forgotten, vanishing from memory as thoroughly as he had vanished from our world.

The true story of what happened to him has never been told. Until now.

# COMES A HORSEMAN

story and images by Trilby



uggggghhh

What happened? Some sort of portal ... I was falling ...

I'm outdoors ... jungle ... was I transported outside of the caves somehow?

I feel strange ... everything is different ...

I can feel my scar, but the shape of my face is ... my vision's off ...

My feet! What's wrong with my feet?

God in heaven!

What's happened to me? I'm ... what am I?



-- giggle --

Now wait just a minute ... I'm not ...

uuhhh?





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לֵב הָאֵלֶּיךָ  
וְהַיָּמִינִי  
שֶׁבִּינְךָ לֵב  
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Hey there.  
It's all right,  
they're gone.  
Barn's shut for  
the night.

Come on, stand  
up. I've got some  
salve for your  
back. It'll help.

My name is Tarn.  
What are you called?





You speak English!

MMMM ...

I know.

You do?

I don't know where you're from. But your coat is different from any runner I've ever known--you don't have fur in the same places-- and you speak with an accent I've never heard.

It's hard to get used to fur everyone, though.

I think the princess will treat you well. Unlike her mother. But her mother isn't supposed to interfere. The rule seems to be that each of them must train their own mount.

She's a princess? How do you know?

Oh, I call her that because her mother seems to be the leader of the stealers--their people--at least the ones in this place.

See? Better. It's also good for some muscles. She worked you a long time today.

What's your name?

Rome.

Tarn, I'm ... I'm not from here. I don't know where I am, or how I got here. I've been thrust into something that is very strange to me.

What's "English?" I speak the same language as you.

It's the only language we runners have, as far as I know.

"Runners"? But I'm not ... I don't think I am ...

MANY DAYS PASS. WITH TARN'S HELP AND ADVICE, ROME PROGRESSES QUICKLY THROUGH THE PRINCESS' TRAINING.



Uh, Tarn ... what is she doing?

Brushing your tail. They like to do that. Sometimes they'll try to wash you, too.

It's a good sign, though. Like her working you without the bridle today.

I can wash myself!

It means she thinks you've settled in and aren't going to bolt or try to hurt her.

The bridle's just for training--they won't ride with one on--so she probably plans to try that soon.

I don't think I like that.

The idea of being ridden?

No, the idea that now I'm ... tame enough ...



I remember when I was first taken. The red plain, our home--I miss it. I miss my friends. But we are, all in all, not treated badly here. That makes it hard to rebel.

I think it would be easier for you if we were in the big barns with the others. We'd be less alone. I have no idea why the princess is using this little barn just for you.

Anyway, they have more magic than just the damned brides. If you bolted, and they caught you, who knows what they'd do to you. Maybe leave the bridle on you until you had no brain left.

Tarn ... if this barn is just for me, why are you here? I mean, I'm glad you are ...

Well, you are, though, aren't you? Are you going to try to bolt?

No ... I don't think so. But I'm not an animal! I should resent being treated like one ...

Neither are any of the rest of us. There are probably a hundred runners over in the main barns, and all of them had to make their peace with this.

My rider and the princess are very close. She is helping the princess train you. And they will ride together, when the time comes.

But also ... I think they know you need someone.

You have a really good body, you know.

So you were pulled away from the main barns to keep me company?

Tarn, I'm sorry. I had no idea. I wouldn't have asked that--

I ... oh.

How is that regarded? On this world.

Who knows what the stealers think?

And when the barn's closed, it doesn't matter.

You have nothing to apologize for. And it's no hardship.



A FEW MORE DAYS PASS.



What new mischief is this?

We're going riding!

ΣΔΓ 70M' 70M' 70M' 70M'

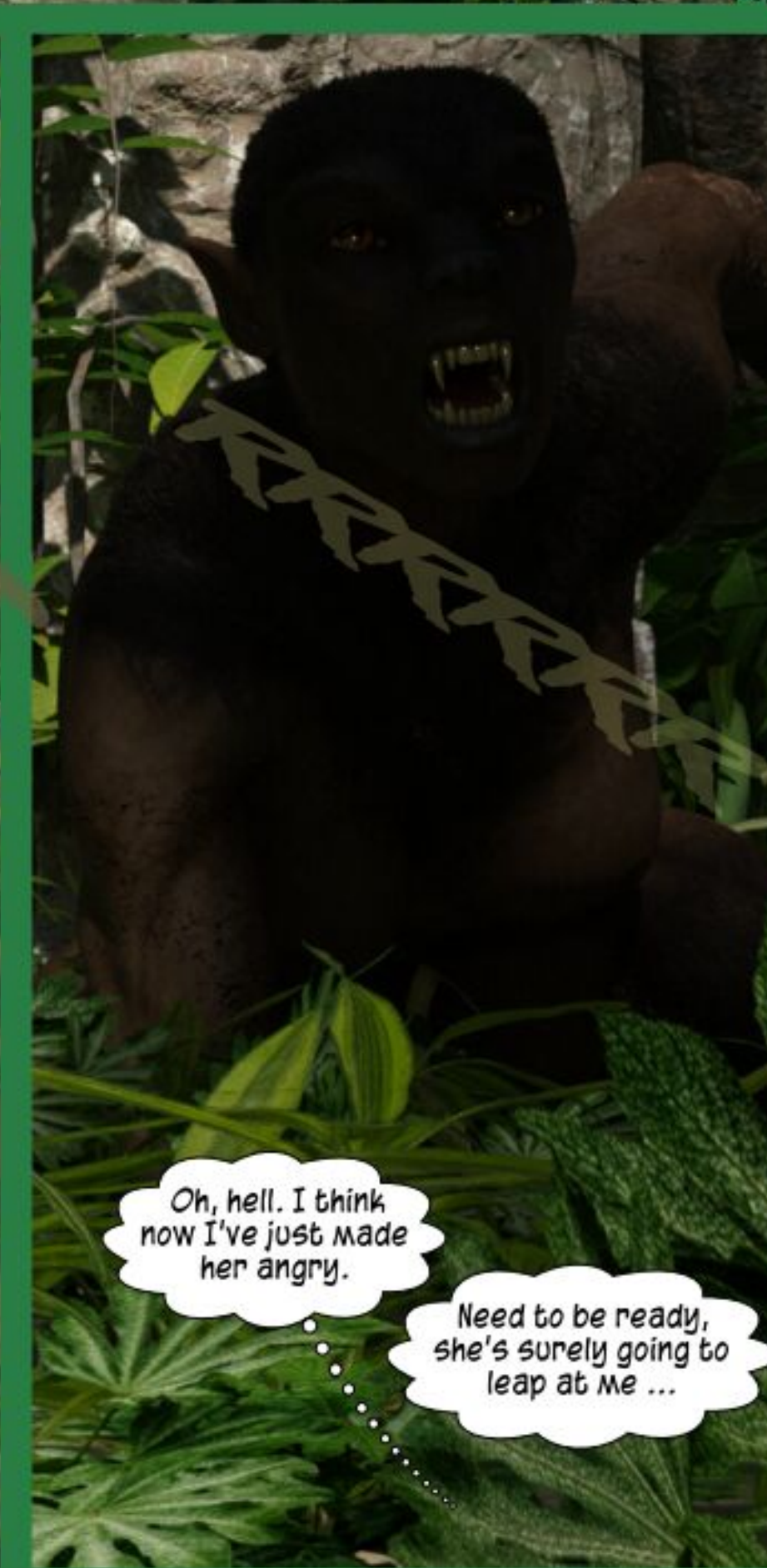
It's a good idea, actually. It keeps things from ... Plapping around.







SOME DAYS LATER, THE PRINCESS IS ATTEMPTING A SOLO RIDE ... POSSIBLY A LITTLE DEEPER INTO THE JUNGLE THAN IS ADVISABLE.







וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ  
וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ  
וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ

Did it work? Can you understand me? Can I understand you?

Seems so. Did you just enable yourself to speak my language, or am I now speaking yours?

You are intelligent! Orla said you horses were smarter than we thought, but she says things sometimes just to mess with me ... but when you fought off the stalker with that stick today ... and you're always making noises at each other like you're actually talking ...

Of course we're intelligent. And we're not horses. We're people. Tarn calls our kind "runners."

Who's Tarn? Oh! Orla's mount. Of course, you would have your own names ...

Oh, this is horrible! How have we done this for so long? How could we have not known? To use you like this ... I'm so sorry! I had no idea ... ah ...

What is your name?



Rome. What have you been calling me?

I ... ah ... I don't think I should say.

Rome ... I can't keep you against your will. If you want to go, I'll arrange for you to go.

... May I have some time to think about it?

Of course. I need to go consider all this as well. We'll talk tomorrow.

And by the way, my name is Elti.

JUST AFTER DAWN THE NEXT MORNING.



Oh, don't get up. It's very early yet. My daughter won't be here for hours.

You also needn't play dumb. I know you understand me. I've known how to speak your horrible language for years.

My daughter thinks of the world in terms of what it should be, not what it is. One day the world will teach her, by force, and it will hurt.

Harboring bad ideas won't help it hurt less when it happens. I try to teach her, but she clings to these foolish things.

She doesn't understand that it doesn't matter a bit whether you're intelligent. You are animals because that is what we say you are. Because that is what you need to be.



I am going to cure her of this particular bad idea, though, right now.



וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ  
וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ  
וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ

נְעִימָה  
וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ  
וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ  
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וְיָמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ

There! Are you all right? Can you understand me?

That was ... worse than the bridle. I couldn't understand anything, or remember how to talk ... I couldn't move my hands ...

This is my mother's doing. She heard me teaching Orla your language last night ...

She did it to my mount too! I don't care if she's the queen, she had no business!

Rome, you have to leave. You and Tarn both. She's known all along your people are intelligent, but she doesn't care. She won't let you alone now ...

We'll take you through the ruins of the old city. That way we won't be noticed. On the Par side of those is a clear route to the red plain.









You both did very well. We covered more ground than I'd expected. Tomorrow we'll be at the mountains within a few hours. Then we just have to get over those to reach the red plain.

Tarn ... will your people ... accept us?

I don't see why not, as long as you're not trying to capture them and haul them away to be mounts.

About that.

I don't know whether Rome broke the spell before my mother could block our magic abilities, or whether she didn't think it was necessary to do that ... but either way, she made a big mistake.

The next time any of them come to steal, if either of us is around, they're going to get an unpleasant surprise.

Who knows? Once we get situated, maybe we can get together a group to go back. Free the other mounts. Start something new. Something better.

What about you, Rome? Want to be part of a rebellion? If you want to go look for a way back to your world, we'll understand.

Ah ... no. No, this is home now.

Besides, I've never been part of a rebellion before. Sounds like fun.

And that is the story of how Rome Carter left one world forever, and--with his friends--became a hero of another.



P.S. They lived happily ever after.



Sometimes when you write a story like this you realize you actually created a whole universe when you didn't intend to. This is an occupational hazard.

I can't definitely promise we'll ever visit this weird little world of nomadic horse-people and semi-arboreal kitsune people again ... but it does seem like there are more stories lurking in there, so who knows?



When I was a nerdy teenager (this was before becoming a nerdy adult, you understand), I had my role-playing game period, as I believe all nerdfolk are required to have.

The difference is, I was already kinky by then, and that meant I was kind of a failure as a DM because none of my peers really understood why my dungeons were just excuses for transformations and other bizarre goings-on. It was a miracle I didn't put explicit sex scenes in there too.

So D&D never really took off for me, but that period did introduce me to *Dragon* magazine, which had comics and spot illustrations that--while they still gave in to the Barbarian in Chainmail Bikini Syndrome a bit too much for my taste--seemed willing to at least dip a toe into more interesting territory sometimes.

One of the biggest toe-dippers was a fellow named Phil Foglio. Now, if you're under a certain age and you know him for anything it's probably *Girl Genius*, but he was doing "What's New?" in *Dragon* ages before that. And somewhere in between, he did a series of stories called *XXXenophile*. (Sample on left.)

*XXXenophile*, and other Foglio material, is probably the biggest direct inspiration for some of my shorts. Foglio's stories are always good-natured ... they're fun. I can't always do that--I love horror and its tropes too much, and I have a dark, dark sense of humor. But I always bear his work in mind. He's the exception to the rule about F/5F art that I referred to earlier.

Our last story is not inspired by Phil Foglio. I just wanted to make sure I mentioned him.

It is inspired by *Dragon*, though--sort of.

Back in the day, a very unusual guy named Tom Wham designed and drew two very unusual games, both of which first appeared in *Dragon*. (The other is called "Snit's Revenge.")

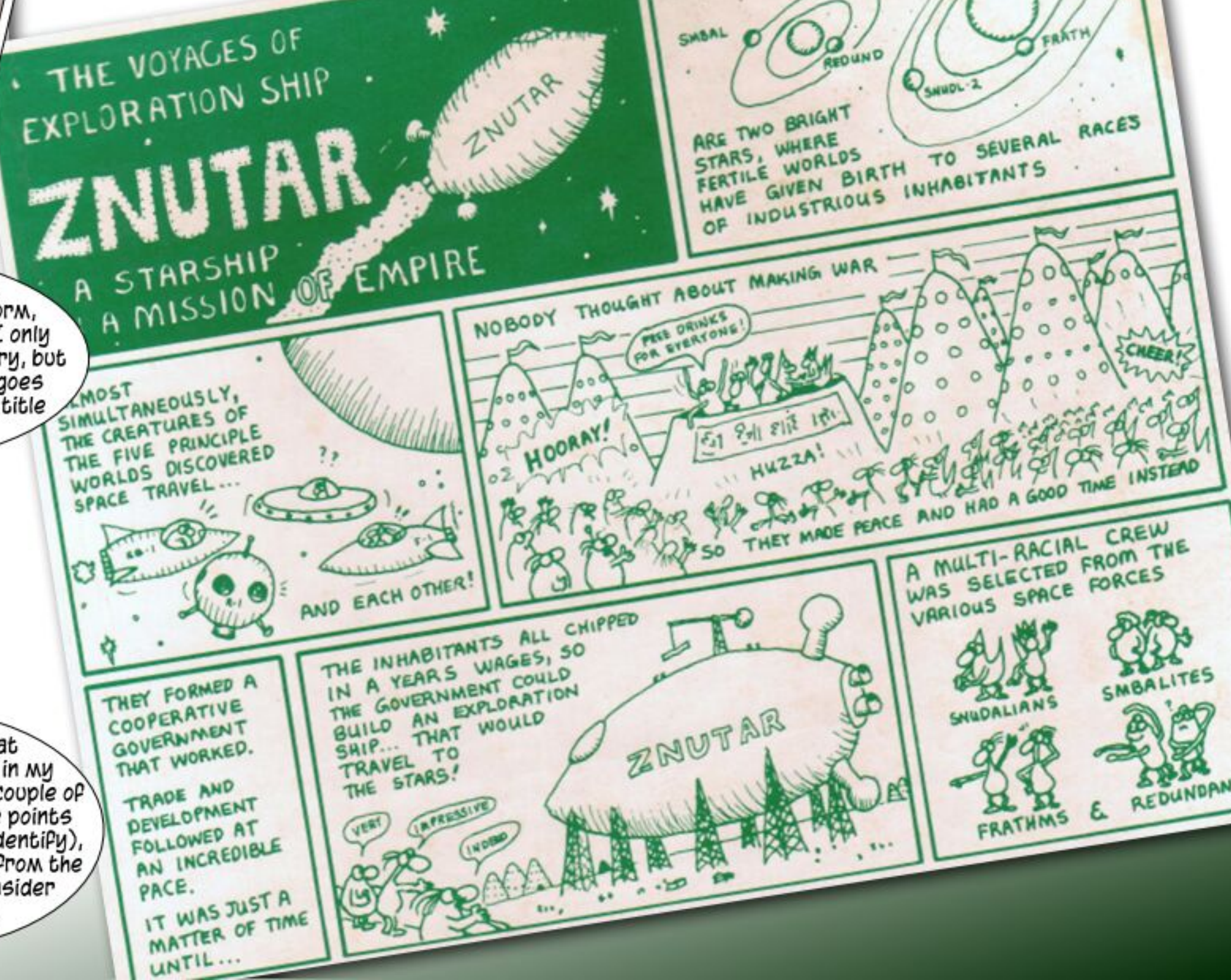
TSR WAS THE COMPANY THAT MADE D&D BEFORE THEY WERE BOUGHT BY WIZARDS OF THE COAST, BEFORE THEY WERE BOUGHT BY HASBRO. I LOATHE THE CORPORATE UNIVERSE WITH THE PASSION OF A THOUSAND BURNING SUNS.



Each of these games has part of the rules in cartoon form, telling our story so far. Here I only show you the first bit of the story, but you can probably guess what goes wrong on the *Znutar* from the title of the game.

The title is the only part of the game that I'm stealing here, so don't go blaming Tom Wham for my plot. (Tom's still with us as of 2022, age 78, and can probably still chase me down and thump me if he decides to.)

One dark night, that title careened around in my head and collided with a couple of other cultural reference points (that you may be able to identify), and this story emerged from the smoking wreckage. Consider yourself warned.



THE VOYAGES OF EXPLORATION SHIP ZNUTAR  
A STARSHIP OF EMPIRE  
A MISSION OF EMPIRE

SOMEWHERE OUT THERE...  
SABAL  
FRATH  
ARE TWO BRIGHT STARS, WHERE FERTILE WORLDS HAVE GIVEN BIRTH TO SEVERAL RACES OF INDUSTRIOUS INHABITANTS

MOST SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE CREATURES OF THE FIVE PRINCIPLE WORLDS DISCOVERED SPACE TRAVEL...  
AND EACH OTHER!

NOBODY THOUGHT ABOUT MAKING WAR  
SO THEY MADE PEACE AND HAD A GOOD TIME INSTEAD

THEY FORMED A COOPERATIVE GOVERNMENT THAT WORKED.  
TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWED AT AN INCREDIBLE PACE.  
IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL...

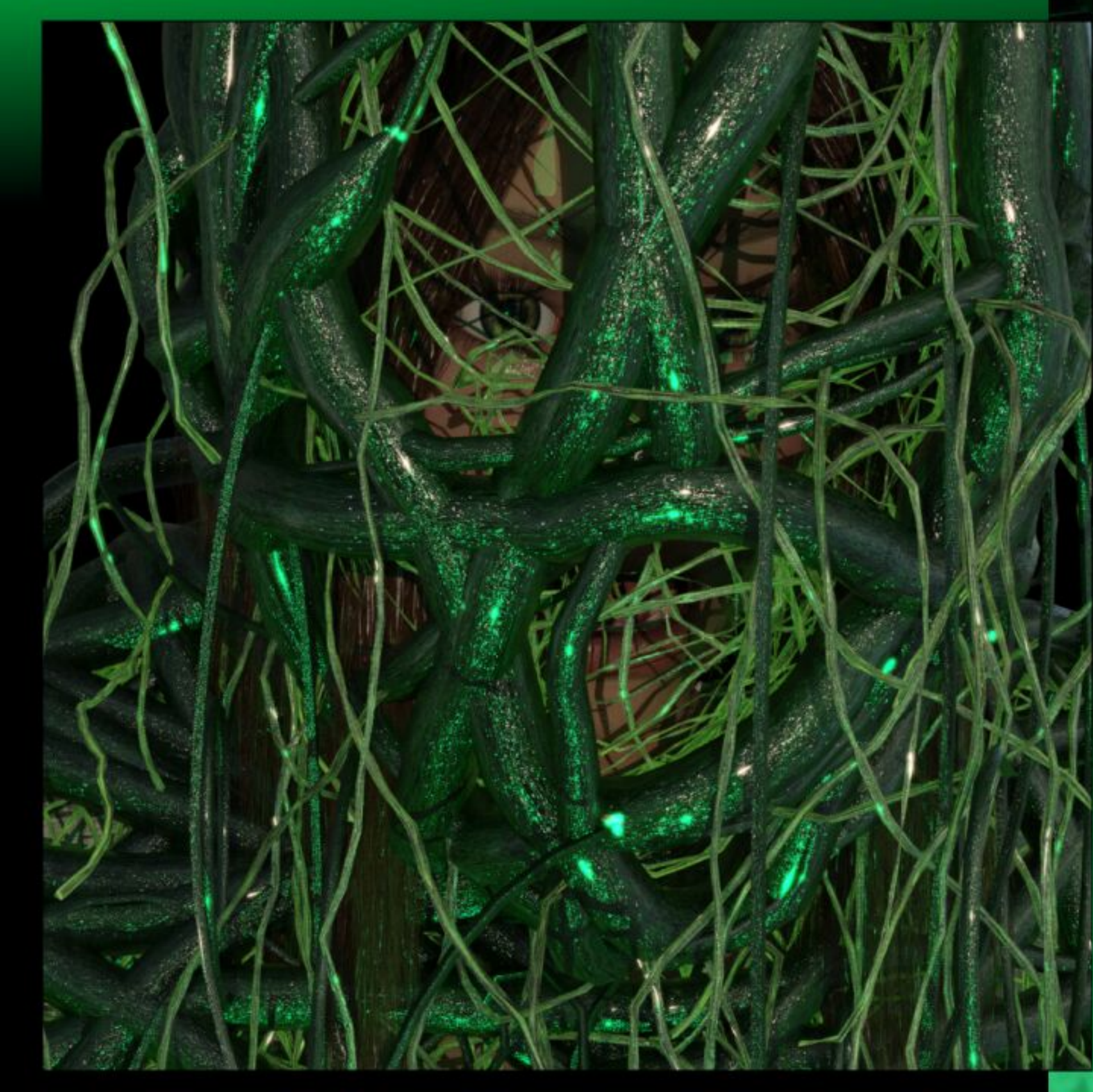
THE INHABITANTS ALL CHIPPED IN A YEAR'S WAGES, SO THE GOVERNMENT COULD BUILD AN EXPLORATION SHIP... THAT WOULD TRAVEL TO THE STARS!  
YES!  
IMPRESSIVE!  
I HOPE!

A MULTI-RACIAL CREW WAS SELECTED FROM THE VARIOUS SPACE FORCES  
SHUDALIANS  
SMBALITES  
FRATHMS & REDUNDANS













# WEEKS LATER



Whoa! That wasn't here last time we were in these woods ...

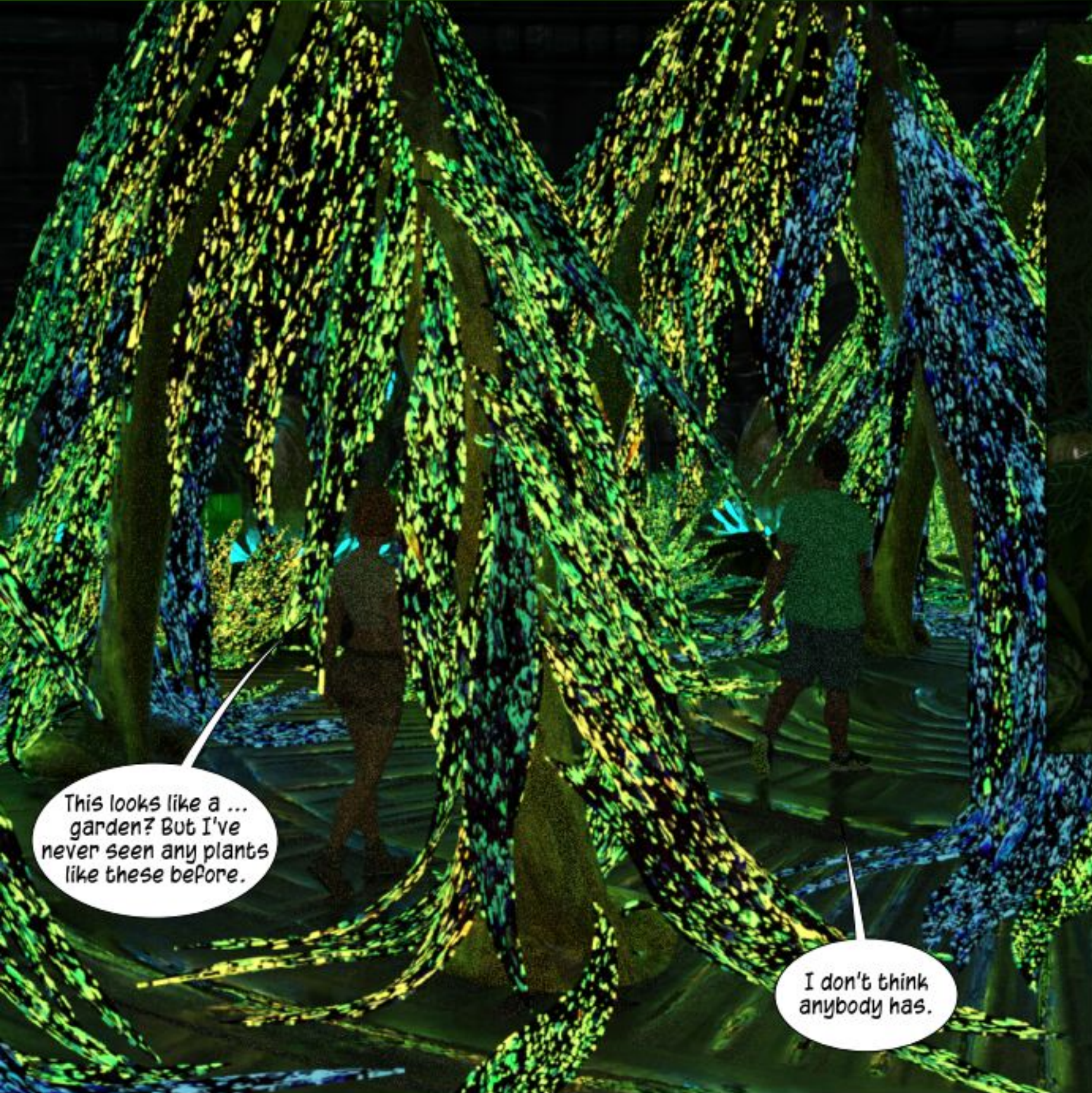
Let's go take a look.



Fred, I don't think this is a good idea. This is the weirdest-looking cave I've ever seen ...

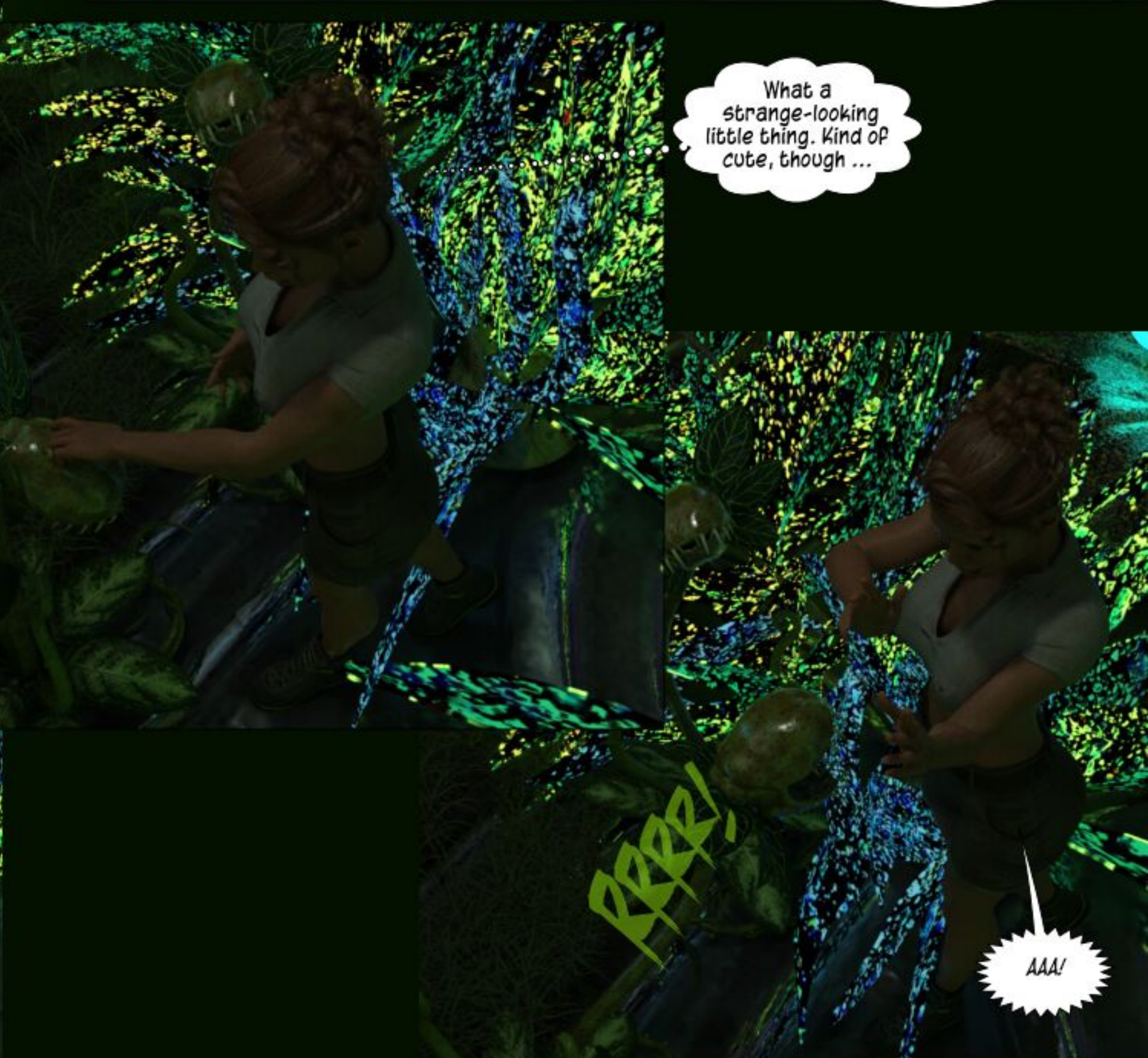
I don't even think this is a cave. I don't know what it is.

Just a little more, OK? Nothing's looked dangerous yet.



This looks like a ... garden? But I've never seen any plants like these before.

I don't think anybody has.



What a strange-looking little thing. Kind of cute, though ...

**RRRR!**

**AAA!**



Fred, what are you doing? It's not safe! One of the little ones just tried to bite me! Get out of there!



Seriously? I was just trying to figure out what kind of plant it was. It looks almost like a Flytrap, but--

**Fred! Look out!!**



**FRED!!**







Uh ... hello?

Are you ... is this place yours?

Because, ah, one of your plants just kind of ate my boyfriend.



Oh, it's so good to finally get someone. I've had everything set up and waiting for weeks ...

Come here. I'm so glad to see you! I want to embrace you ...

Uh ... boyfriend? Eaten?

Maybe let's not?

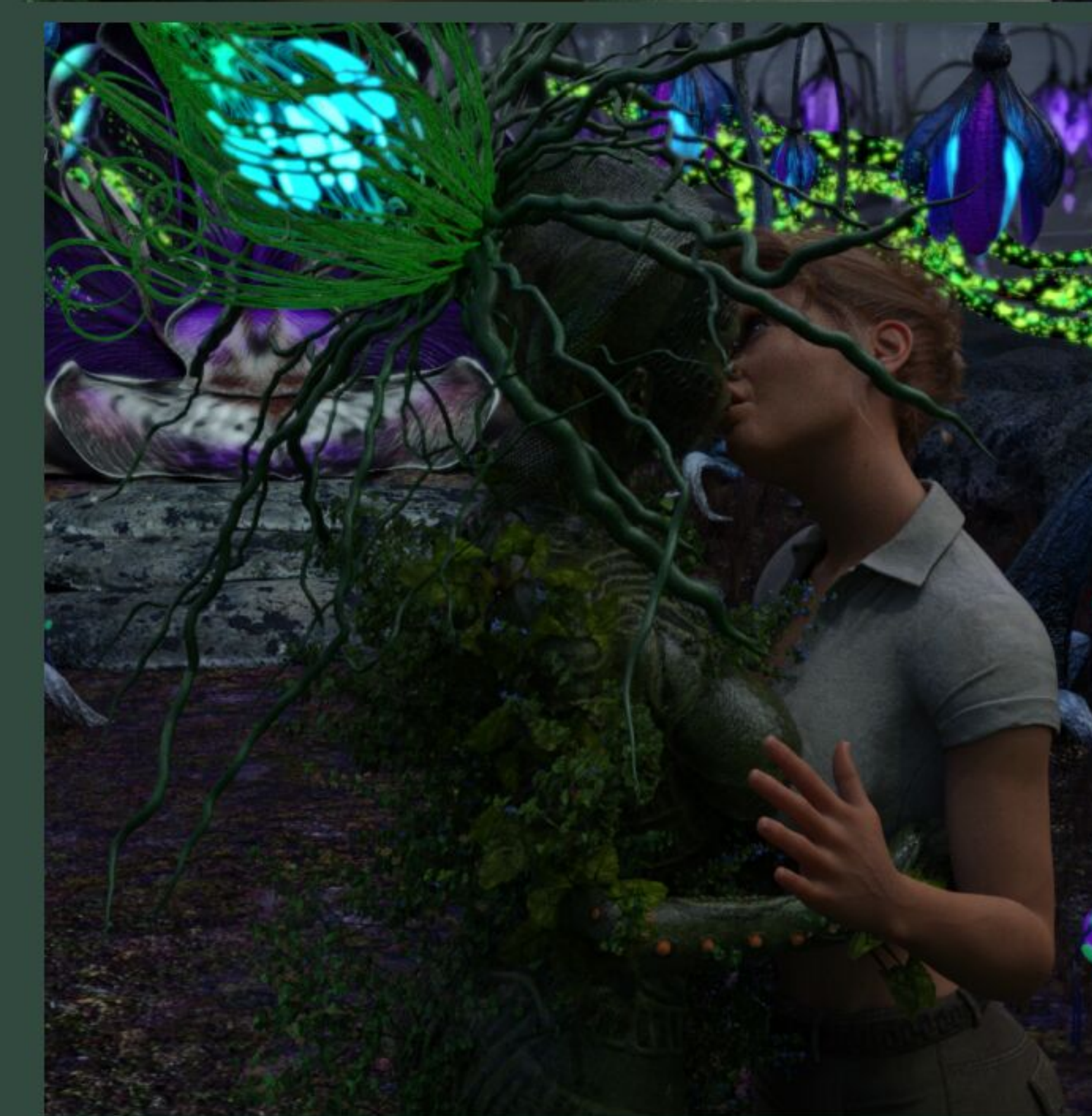


WUSSSSSSHH.

But I--  
**kaff**



Uhhrrrr

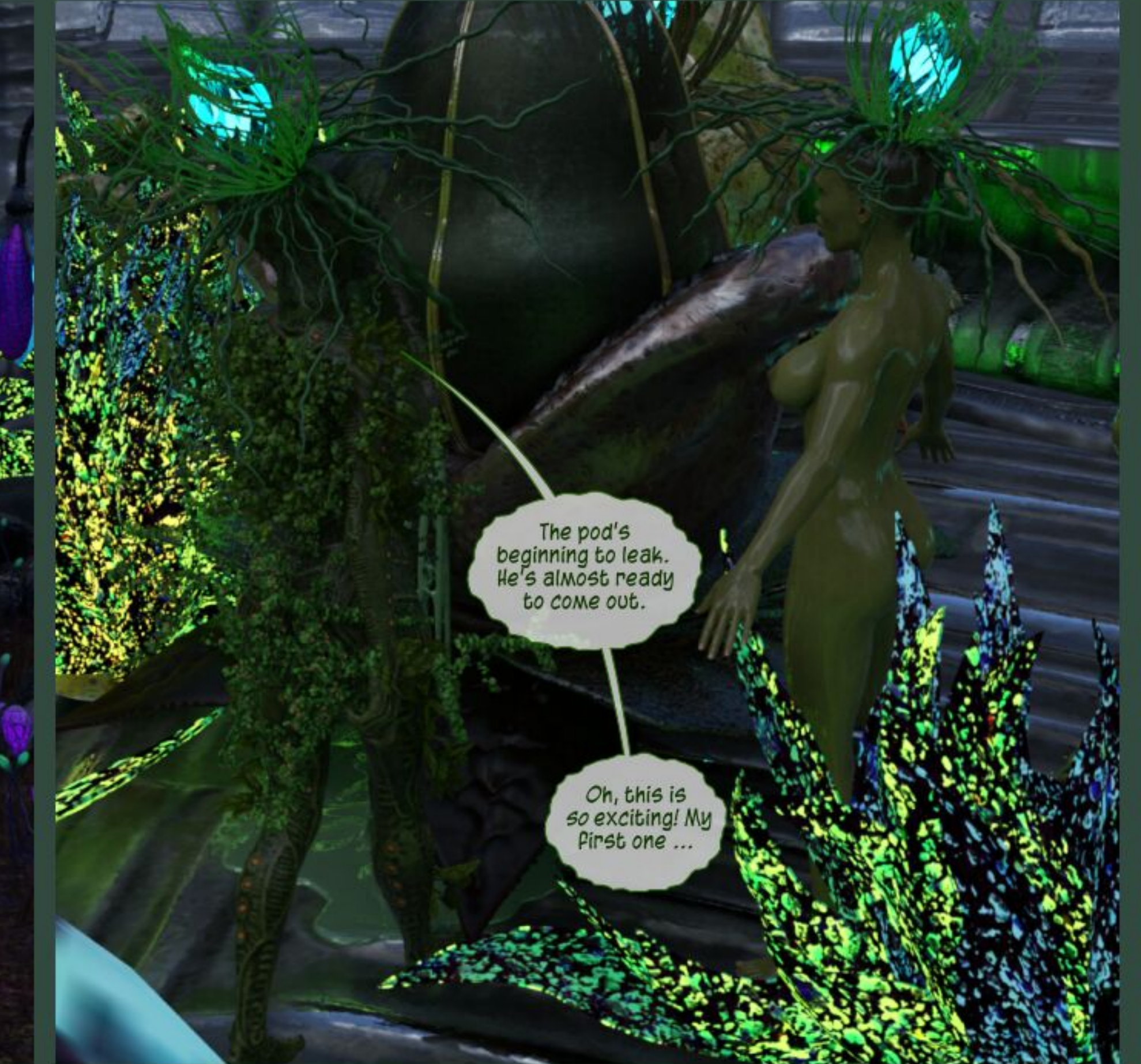


### QUITE A FEW HOURS LATER



That was fun.  
Now let's go check on that boyfriend you used to have.

... boy ... friend ...?



The pod's beginning to leak. He's almost ready to come out.

Oh, this is so exciting! My first one ...



