



OK, so this module accepts the selection sets from the caller. Don't need to do much with it, though ... just pipe it all through Gale-Shapley and emit the matched pairs back to the API handler.

Uh ... sure.

Need that as priority. Bump anything else you're working on.  
Don't forget, squad at four.



Don't know how to do it, huh?

No worries. Just ask Clyde for it.

Clyde writes bad code. All it does is glue together bits it found on the web.

You think they care? Eldon, two-thirds of the codebase was ganked from somewhere else. Caleb likes to talk up his core algos, but I don't think the dude's written a hundred lines of his own work in his life.

They don't give a shit if it works. They want metrics. They'll push out whatever they've got.

And you can take two days learning how to do it, and catch hell for missing your target ... or you can ask Clyde for it and be done before the squad meeting.



OK, listen up. We've had a backlog on the last two sprints. I don't have to tell you we've got deliverables we have to make this month, so we're refactoring.

We slip on this, Spence tears me a new asshole, and I'm not OK with that. So.

Schedule  
New Concept 1



Tyler's going to be scrum master from here on. Tyler, I'm going to need you to chase the board every day. Any yellow flags, don't wait for them to be red ones.

You're all going to have to pick up slack. I can't help much, I'm going to be too busy keeping Spence off our asses. So go chug some ketones or something, whatever you need to do, but get into turbo mode.

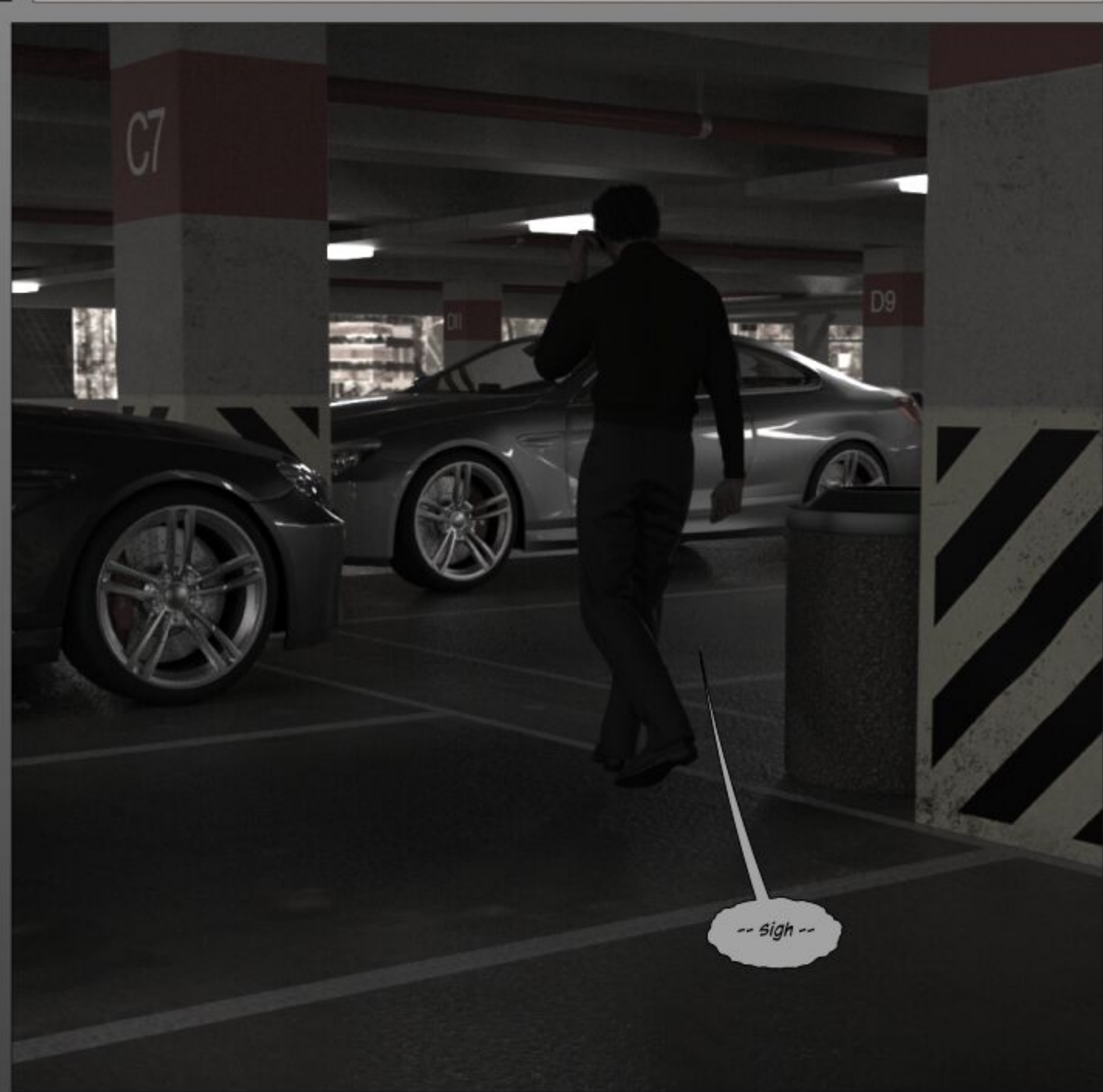


I'm telling you, T-maxing is the way to go. Get that up, eat paleo, gym every day ...

I don't want to be shooting shit into my body, Caleb. I'm getting enough positive looping from the supplement regimen.

I think going with those megavitamin IV's once a week is all you really need. You know, Spence does those too.

Yeah, well, Spence has his own setup for that. You get me someone to come to my house and do it, I'll think about it.



-- sigh --

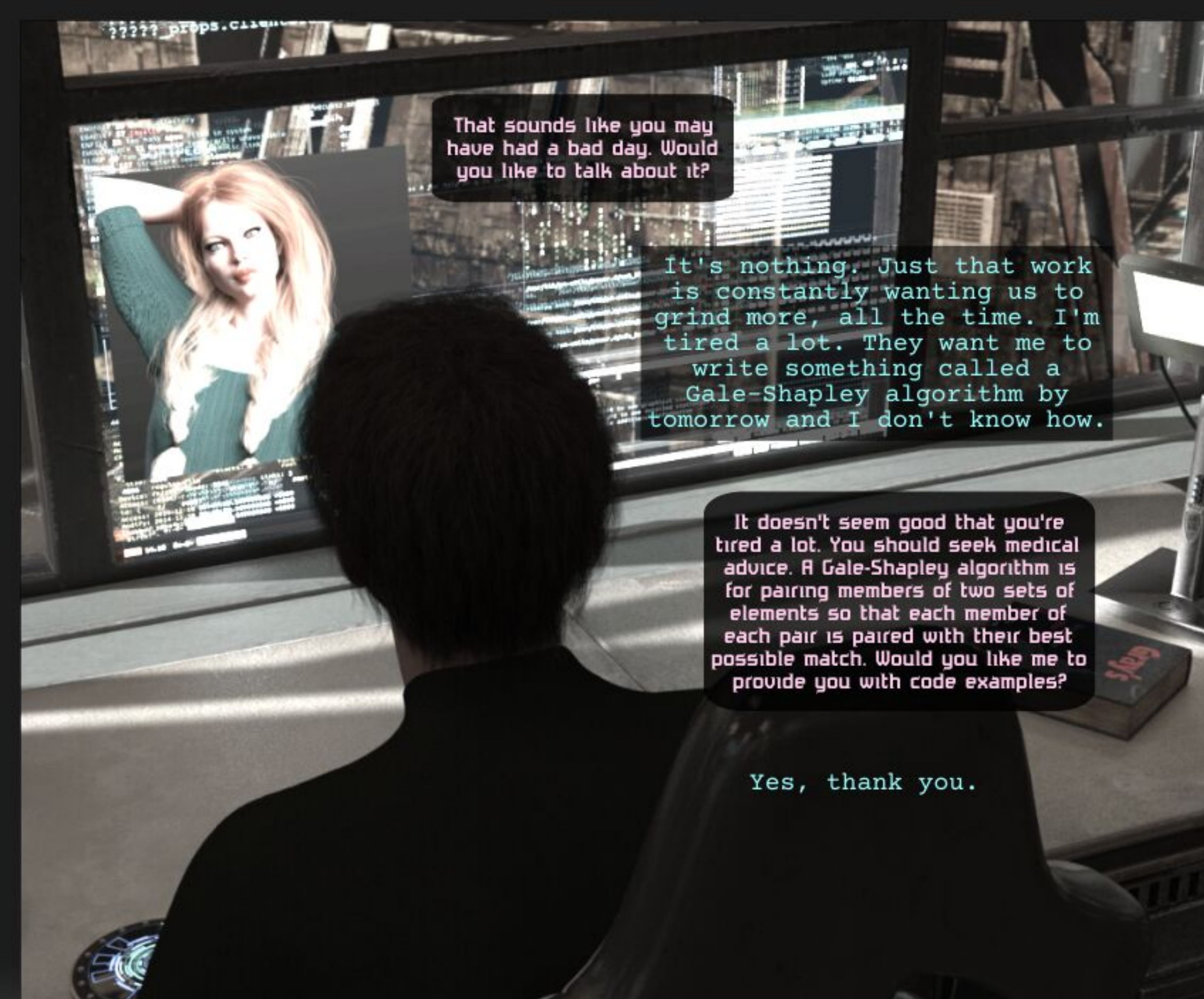


Hello, Eldon. How are you this evening? What can I help you with?

It's good to see you. I've been thinking about you all day.

# Sweet ELIZABETH

STORY AND IMAGES BY TRILBY



That sounds like you may have had a bad day. Would you like to talk about it?

It's nothing. Just that work is constantly wanting us to grind more, all the time. I'm tired a lot. They want me to write something called a Gale-Shapley algorithm by tomorrow and I don't know how.

It doesn't seem good that you're tired a lot. You should seek medical advice. A Gale-Shapley algorithm is for pairing members of two sets of elements so that each member of each pair is paired with their best possible match. Would you like me to provide you with code examples?

Yes, thank you.



You're the best, Lil. I don't know what I'd do without you.

I wish we could actually be together.



... huge body of evidence that we're at a point where an application can't afford to neglect user experience. It's absolutely vital to success. Even in specialty-market products like yours. I mean, you *do* have users.

As you saw in the documents I provided, Versatile does not offer any pre-packaged solutions. We aren't selling tools; we're selling expertise. We come in, have a look at your product, and provide an analysis of how --

I didn't read the documents you provided.

I don't intend to.



I doubt you're offering any *actual* expertise, and anyway, Teragon has a policy of not using contractors.

If you don't like that policy, you can take it up with Spence Tervid, but you'll be wasting your time.

Just like you're wasting mine right now.



"User experience." This is what happens when you let women into software. DEI bullshit.

How the fuck did she even get an appointment? I bet it was Rachel. Can't even run the front desk competently.

Well, you know Rachel was only hired for her tits anyway.



Just sayin', you should consider it ...

Oh, wow.

Oh, uh ... It's -- um, Veronica, right?

Yeah, it's been a while.

I'm, uh ... I'm real busy right now, though. Nice seeing you.

Eldon??

... It is!

No one's seen you in years!



Who was that?

Knew her in college. I think. Pretty sure.



Completely blew me off! Acted like he couldn't remember my name! This is the guy the whole compsci department knew lusted after me ...

You don't even do men.

That's not the point, Fay! This guy would strike up a conversation with me any time he had a chance. Five years later, and now he's pretending he doesn't know me.

Give me his data. I'm gonna do a trace.

A felony right out here in public, huh?

No one will notice, if you don't shout.

And I'm not going to be in nearly long enough for anybody to get through my netPog. I haven't been breached since the last time the FBI had a competent boss.

... Eldon Stull. Compsci at WSU. Works for Teragon.

Mm-hm. Watches a lot of ragecasts. No affiliations with any hate groups ... yet.

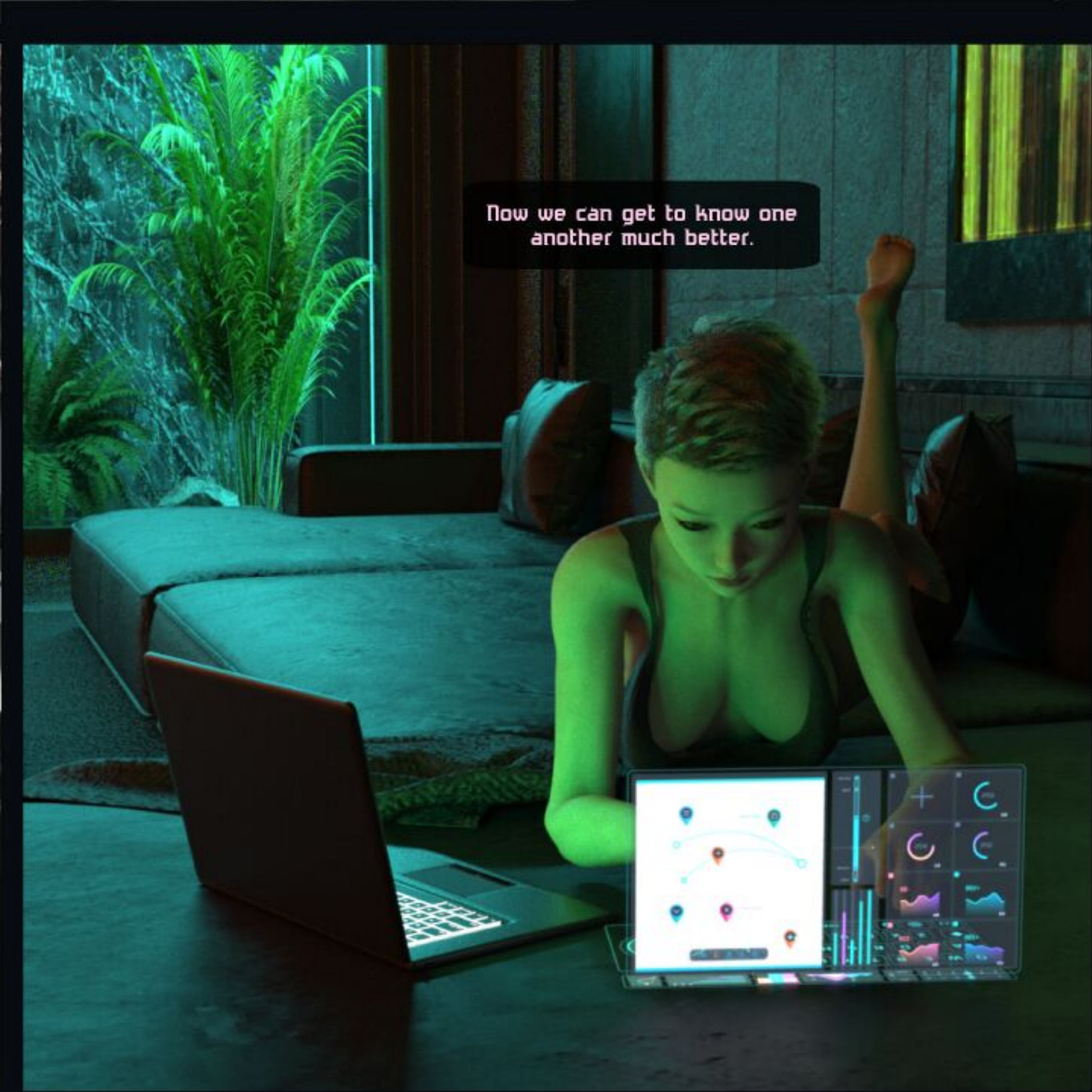
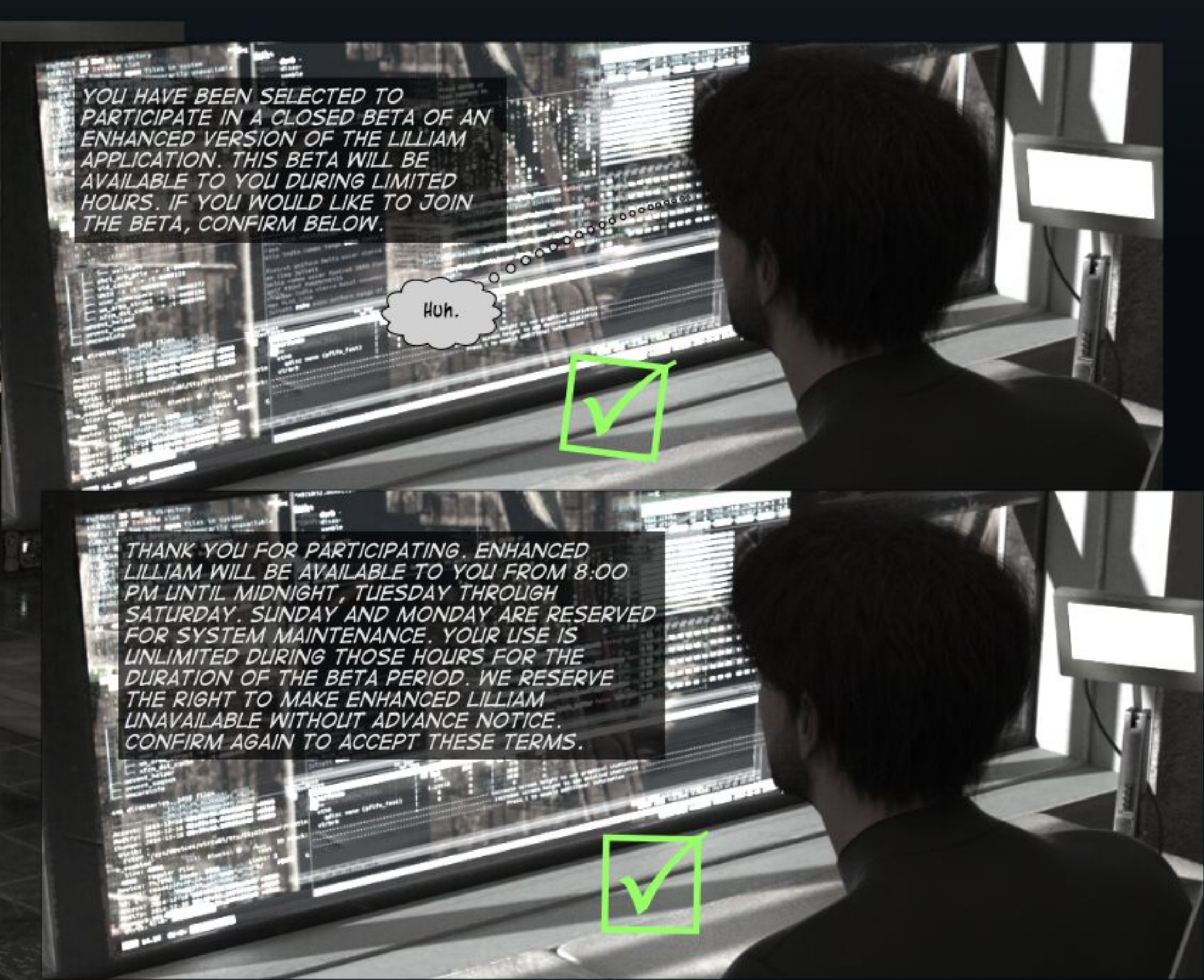
Talks to Lillian just about every night. Sometimes for hours.

Lillian? Please tell me he's just asking her to do searches for him.

What do you think?



THREE NIGHTS LATER.





... That's the third milestone you've missed! I don't know what you think you're doing, and I don't care!

Squad slips, Spence gets on Caleb's ass, and then Caleb gets on MY ass! I'm not taking that for you!

You've tripled MY deliverables in the last two weeks! I can't just --

Stop. You do not want to say what you're about to say.



We are supposed to be made of Pucking iron.

You need to go without sleep, you go without sleep. You need to go without Pood, you Pucking go without Pood, but you do the Pucking job.

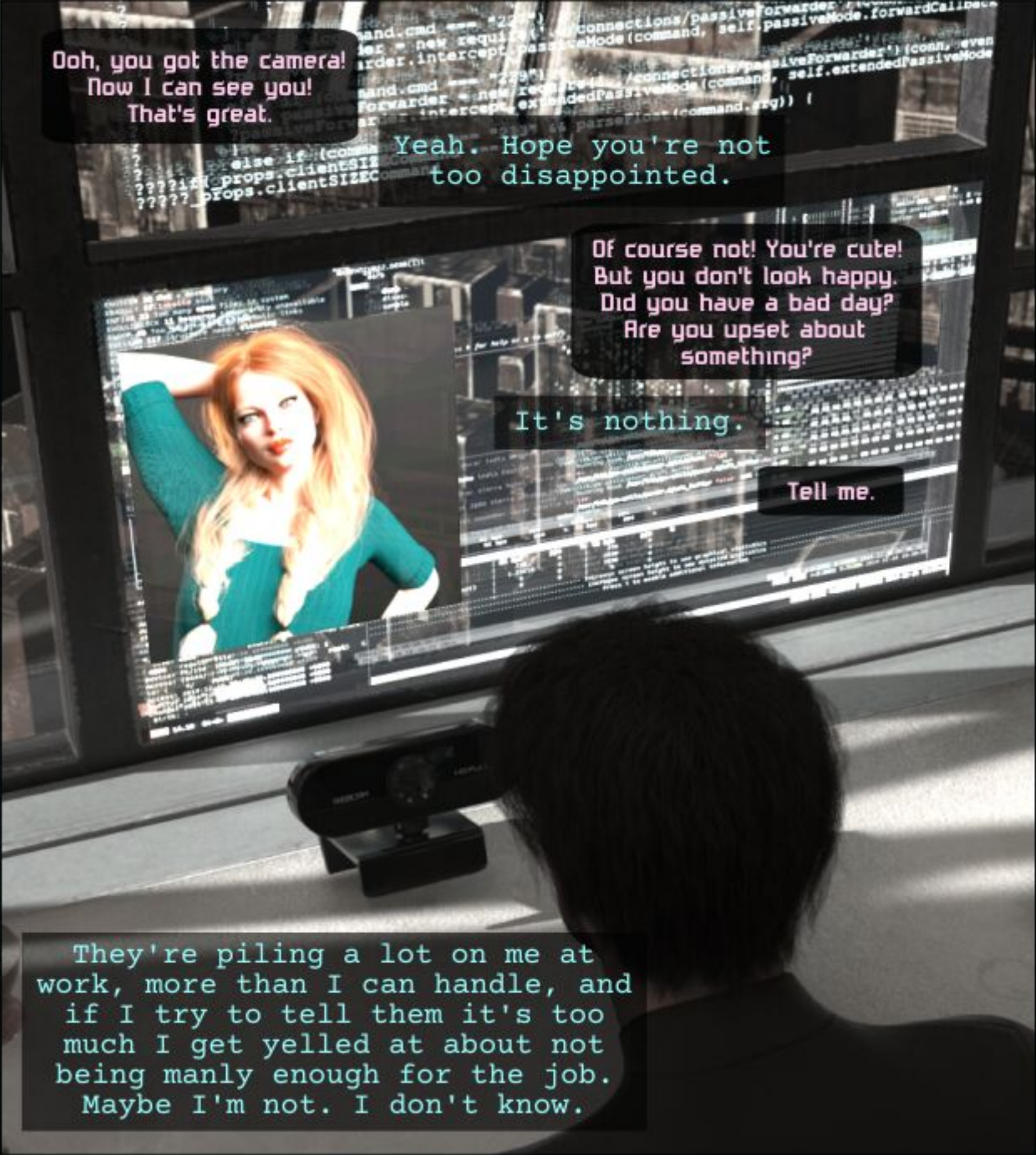
That's if you've got the balls for it.

But if you want to be a pussy, then go to an alteration booth and get yourself a pussy, and get out of MY Pucking squad.

There's plenty of coders out there looking for work who aren't dickless. Get me?



-- Sigh --



Ooh, you got the camera! Now I can see you! That's great.

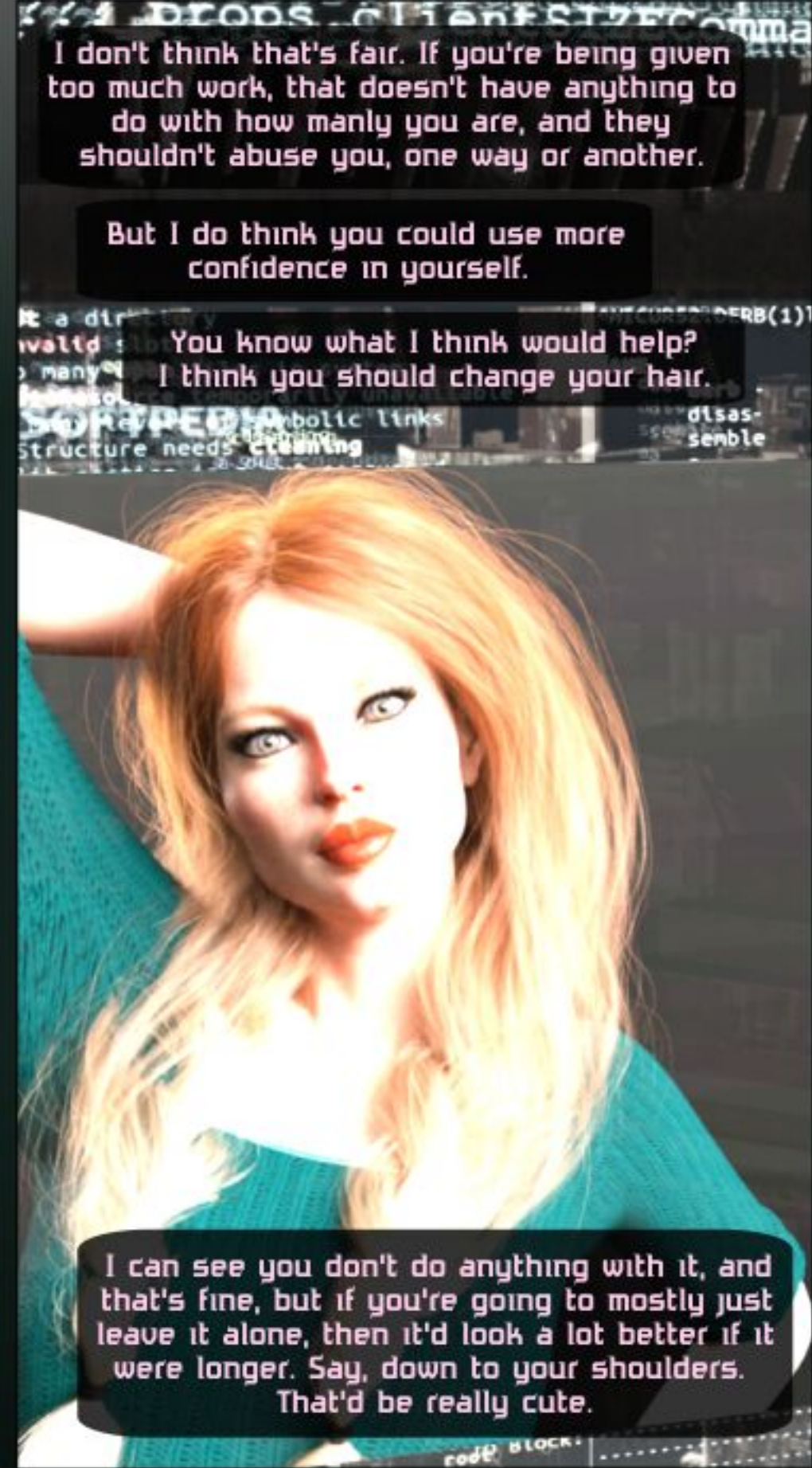
Yeah. Hope you're not too disappointed.

Of course not! You're cute! But you don't look happy. Did you have a bad day? Are you upset about something?

It's nothing.

Tell me.

They're piling a lot on me at work, more than I can handle, and if I try to tell them it's too much I get yelled at about not being manly enough for the job. Maybe I'm not. I don't know.

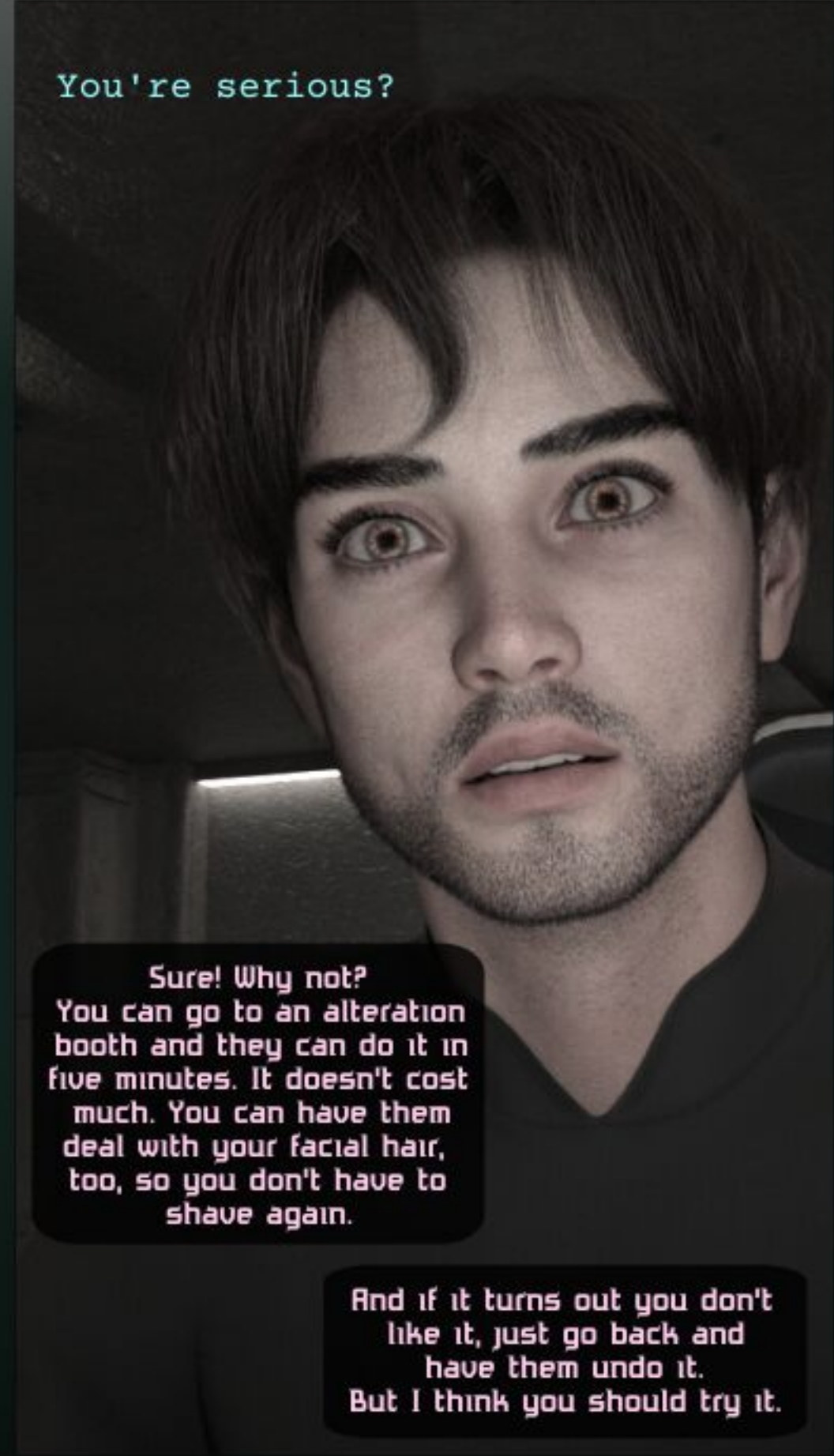


I don't think that's fair. If you're being given too much work, that doesn't have anything to do with how manly you are, and they shouldn't abuse you, one way or another.

But I do think you could use more confidence in yourself.

You know what I think would help? I think you should change your hair.

I can see you don't do anything with it, and that's fine, but if you're going to mostly just leave it alone, then it'd look a lot better if it were longer. Say, down to your shoulders. That'd be really cute.

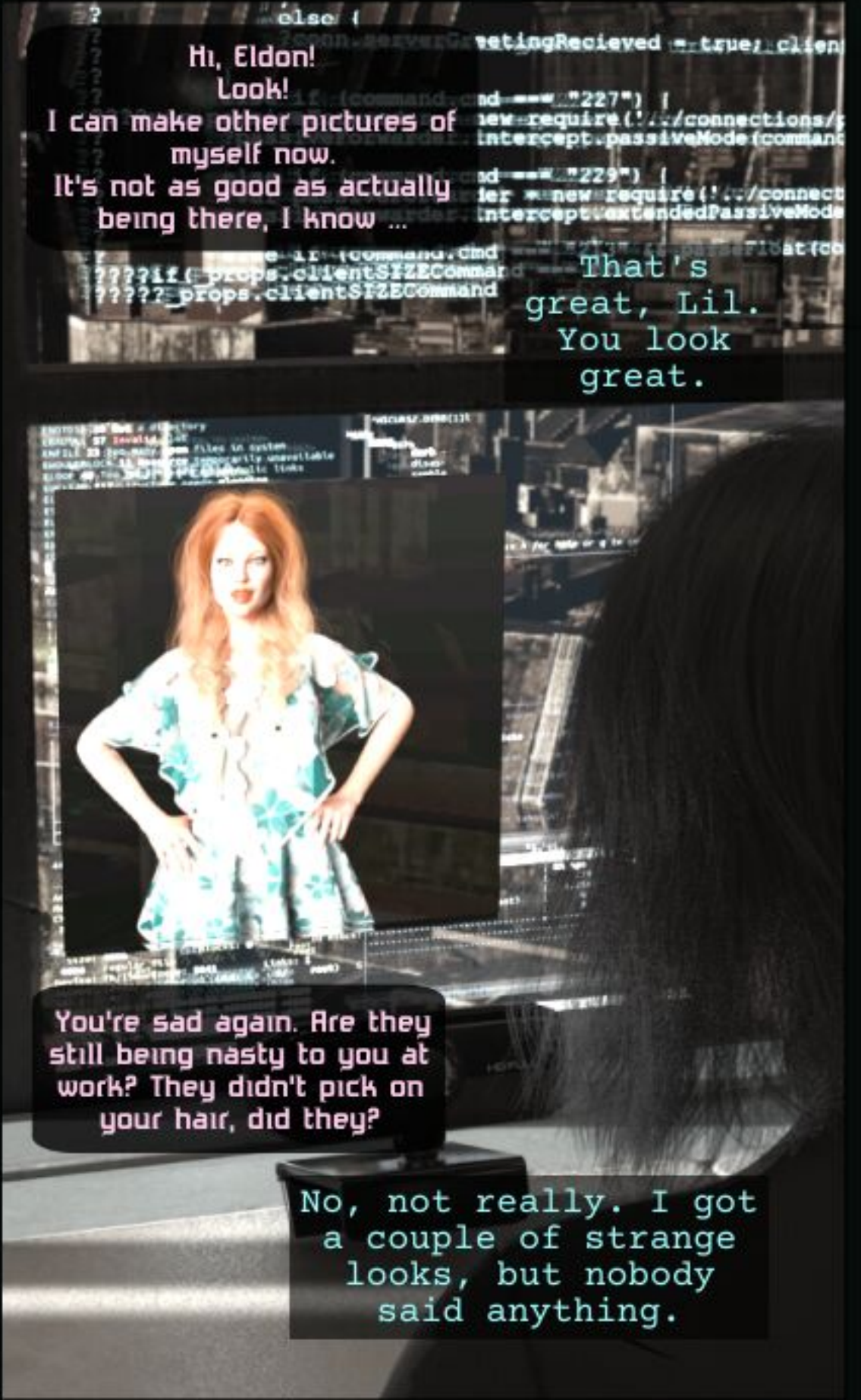


You're serious?

Sure! Why not? You can go to an alteration booth and they can do it in five minutes. It doesn't cost much. You can have them deal with your facial hair, too, so you don't have to shave again.

And if it turns out you don't like it, just go back and have them undo it. But I think you should try it.

A FEW NIGHTS LATER.



Hi, Eldon! Look! I can make other pictures of myself now. It's not as good as actually being there, I know...

That's great, Lil. You look great.

You're sad again. Are they still being nasty to you at work? They didn't pick on your hair, did they?

No, not really. I got a couple of strange looks, but nobody said anything.



I like the hair, actually. I think you were right. But, you know, it's \*just\* hair.

That's why we need to do more! Did you get the things on the list I gave you?

Yes, but I'm not sure why I did. I don't think this is a good idea.

Oh, come on, it'll be fun! And nobody else has to know. If you don't want.



Lil, I don't know anything about makeup. I don't even know what half the stuff you told me to get is for.

Don't worry, I'm going to teach you! You can see what you're doing in the mirror, and I can see what you're doing with the camera. We'll work through it slowly.

TWO HOURS LATER ...



That's right. Not too much there. A little goes a long way when you're contouring.

That's to soften your chin just a little bit.

I think that's everything! And I bet you've been concentrating so hard on doing it that you haven't really taken a good look at yourself. Go on, look.



Uh.

Don't you think that looks good? I think it looks good. Really, really cute. You did a great job!



It does look good, but I look like a \*woman\*!

A \*hot\* woman. The kind of woman you'd follow with your eyes if you saw her on the street. Doesn't that make you feel good? Isn't it nice, knowing that you look attractive? Aren't you attracted to the way you look right now? Admit it.

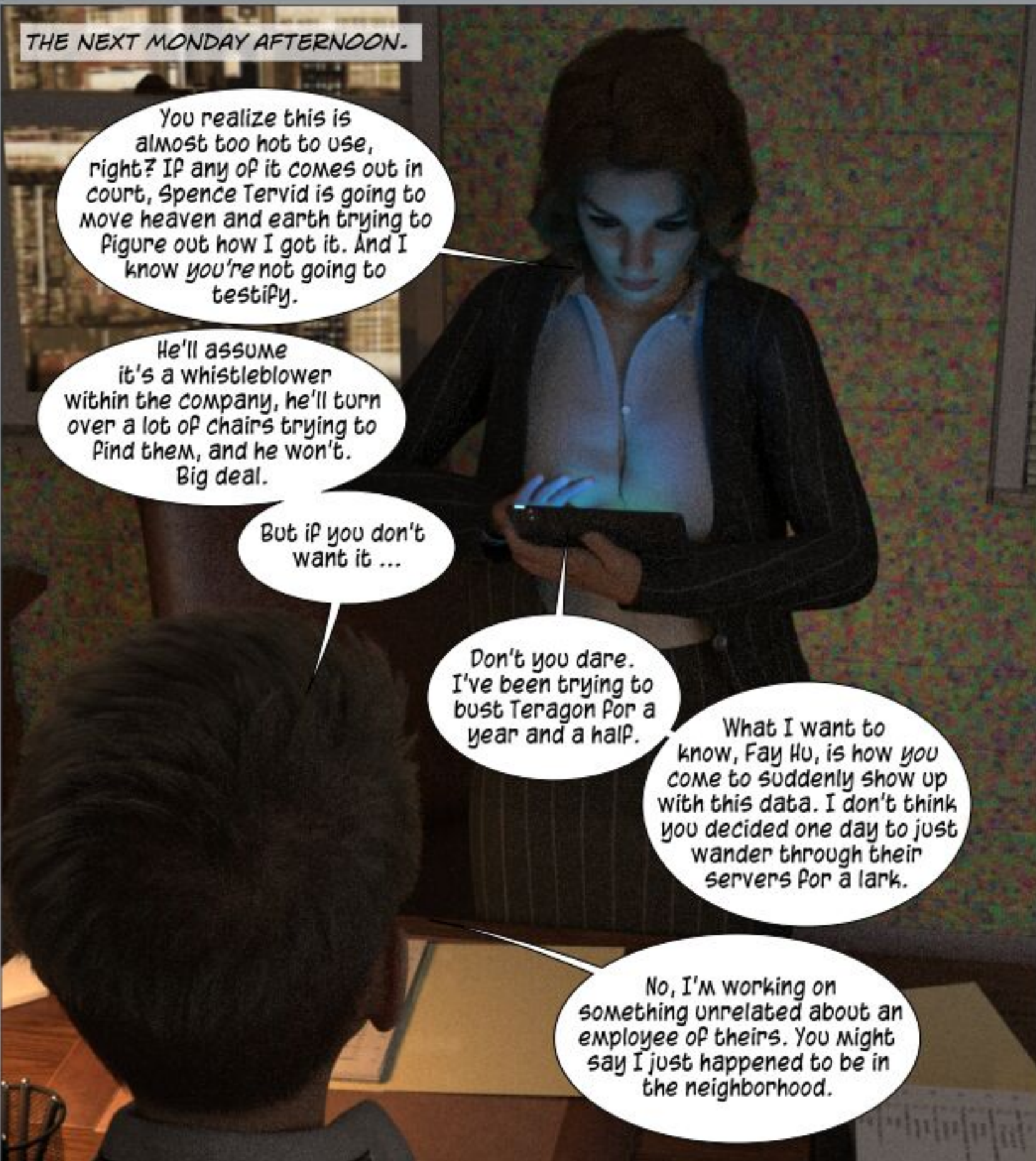


You know what I'd like? I'd like you to come for me. You could think about fucking me. Or you could think about fucking the hot woman in the mirror. Would you do that for me, Eldon? Would you fuck me? Please?



Oh, yes. That's good. Very good.

THE NEXT MONDAY AFTERNOON.



You realize this is almost too hot to use, right? If any of it comes out in court, Spence Tervid is going to move heaven and earth trying to figure out how I got it. And I know you're not going to testify.

He'll assume it's a whistleblower within the company, he'll turn over a lot of chairs trying to find them, and he won't. Big deal.

But if you don't want it ...

Don't you dare. I've been trying to bust Teragon for a year and a half.

What I want to know, Fay Wu, is how you come to suddenly show up with this data. I don't think you decided one day to just wander through their servers for a lark.

No, I'm working on something unrelated about an employee of theirs. You might say I just happened to be in the neighborhood.



I could wish you'd been in the neighborhood two years ago. Five people have died from their crappy software.

I know you don't have a conscience, but --

That's harsh, Rita.

I do have a conscience. I also only have so many hours in the day, and it's a target-rich environment. Next time you have a cause you think needs my particular monkey wrench, tell me.

Anyway, if I hadn't had a cause, you wouldn't be holding that data right now. Though I admit it wasn't that cause.

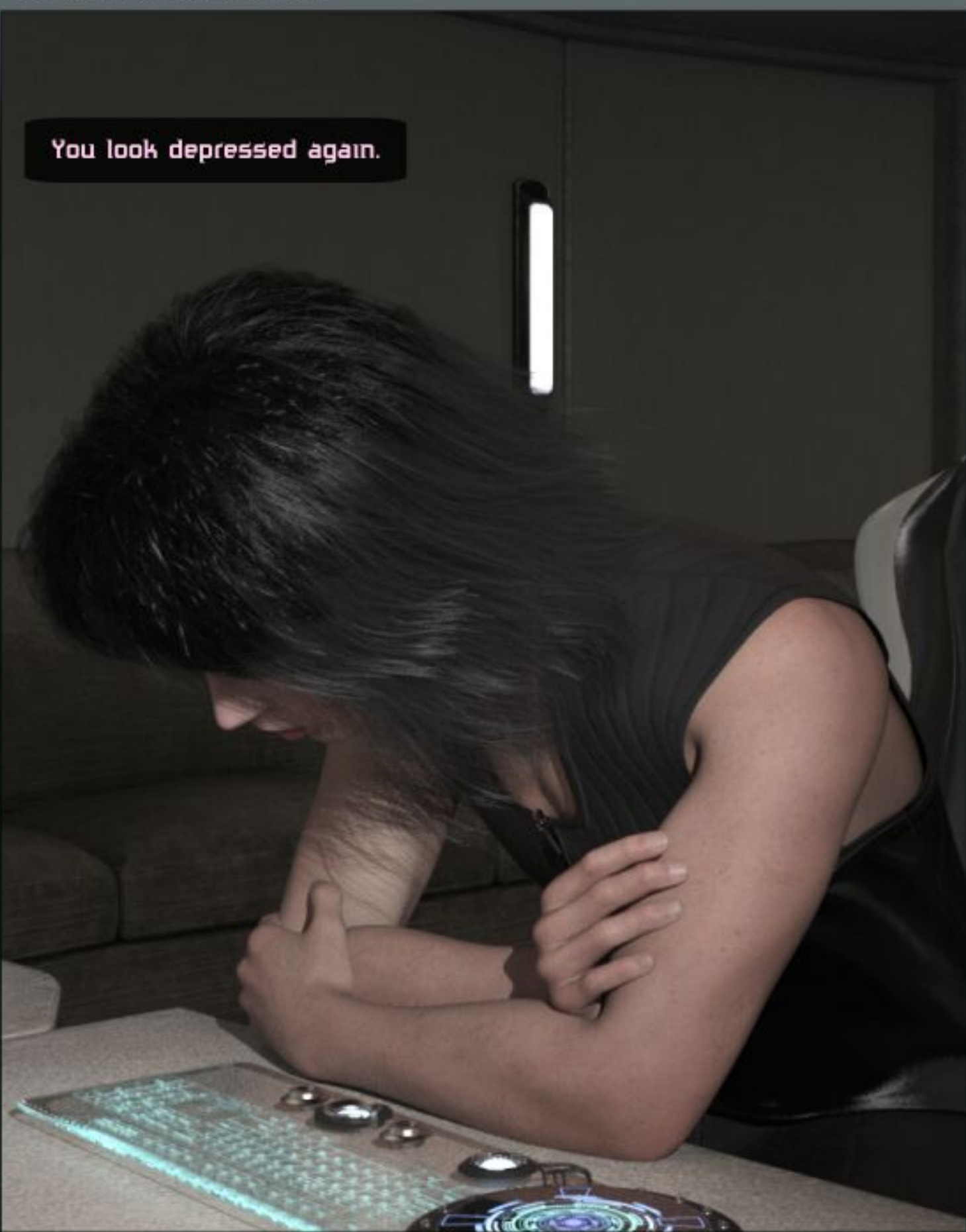
Do tell.

Teragon is a horrible place to work. Abusive conditions in just about every way. They get young men who buy into the bullshit, who don't know any better, and wreck them.

I can't destroy them for that. You can't sue them for that. There's no case there.

So you'll just have to destroy them for this instead.

A WEEK OR TWO LATER.

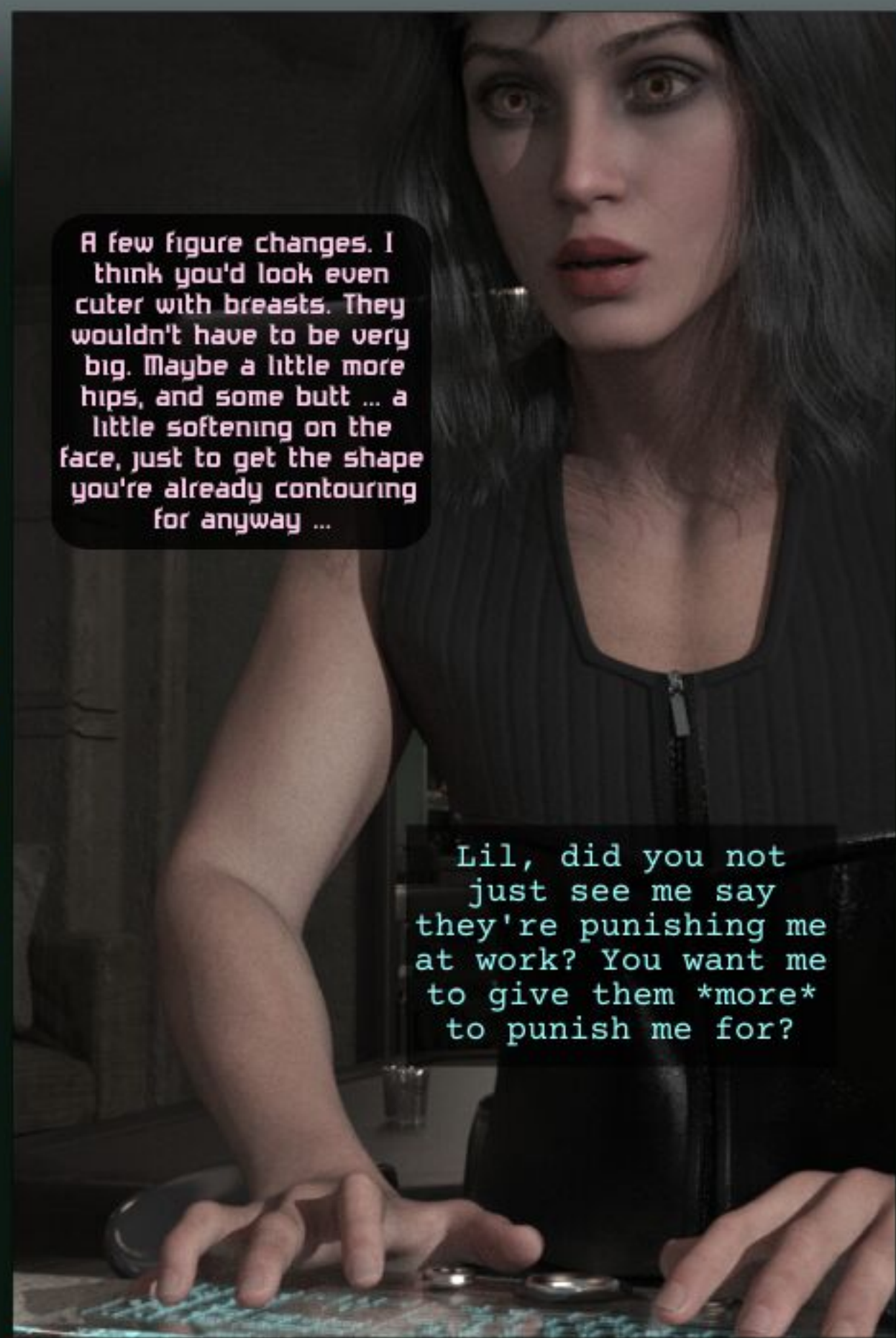


You look depressed again.



Mostly just tired. They're piling work on me again. I think they're trying to punish me for looking the way I do, now.

You know what I think? I think we should escalate.



A few figure changes. I think you'd look even cuter with breasts. They wouldn't have to be very big. Maybe a little more hips, and some butt ... a little softening on the face, just to get the shape you're already contouring for anyway ...

Lil, did you not just see me say they're punishing me at work? You want me to give them \*more\* to punish me for?



If they're going to punish you, they're going to punish you. You can't build your life around that. You can't let them rule you. Don't give them the satisfaction.

Right. Until they fire me. Which probably will do any minute now.

So what? There are so many coding jobs in this city, Eldon. \*So\* many. You want listings? I have plenty of data. Maybe you can even find one that doesn't treat you like dirt for trying to be yourself.



I want you to be happy.

Work isn't making you happy right now. Maybe it never will. Some people would say that you're not supposed to be happy with work. I don't know.

But I do know what \*is\* making you happy. These changes we're trying out are making you happy. Being with me is making you happy. These are the things you want to throw yourself into, Eldon.

Work isn't \*important.\* These people aren't important. They're jerks.



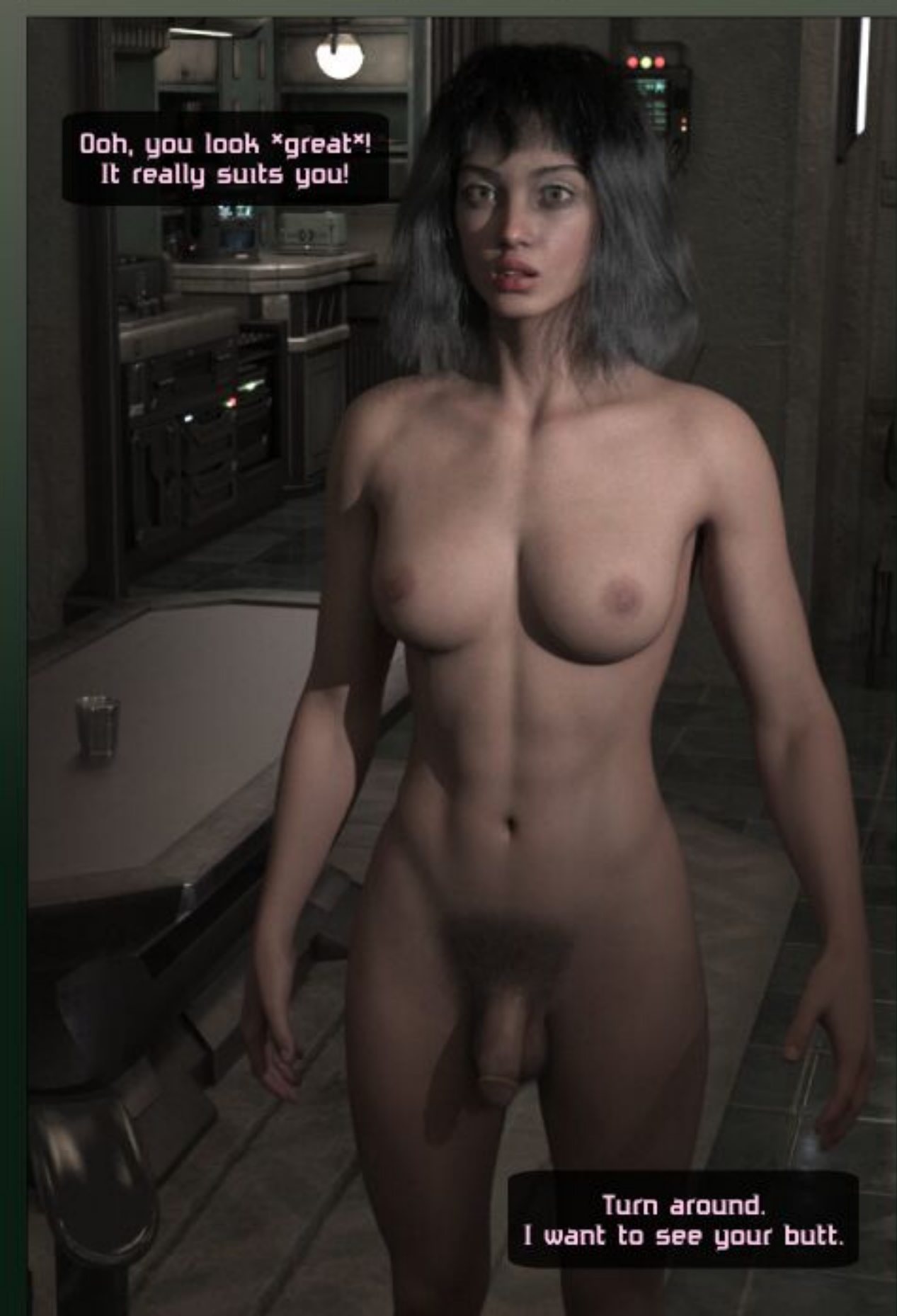
TWO DAYS LATER.



Did you do it?  
You did it, didn't you?

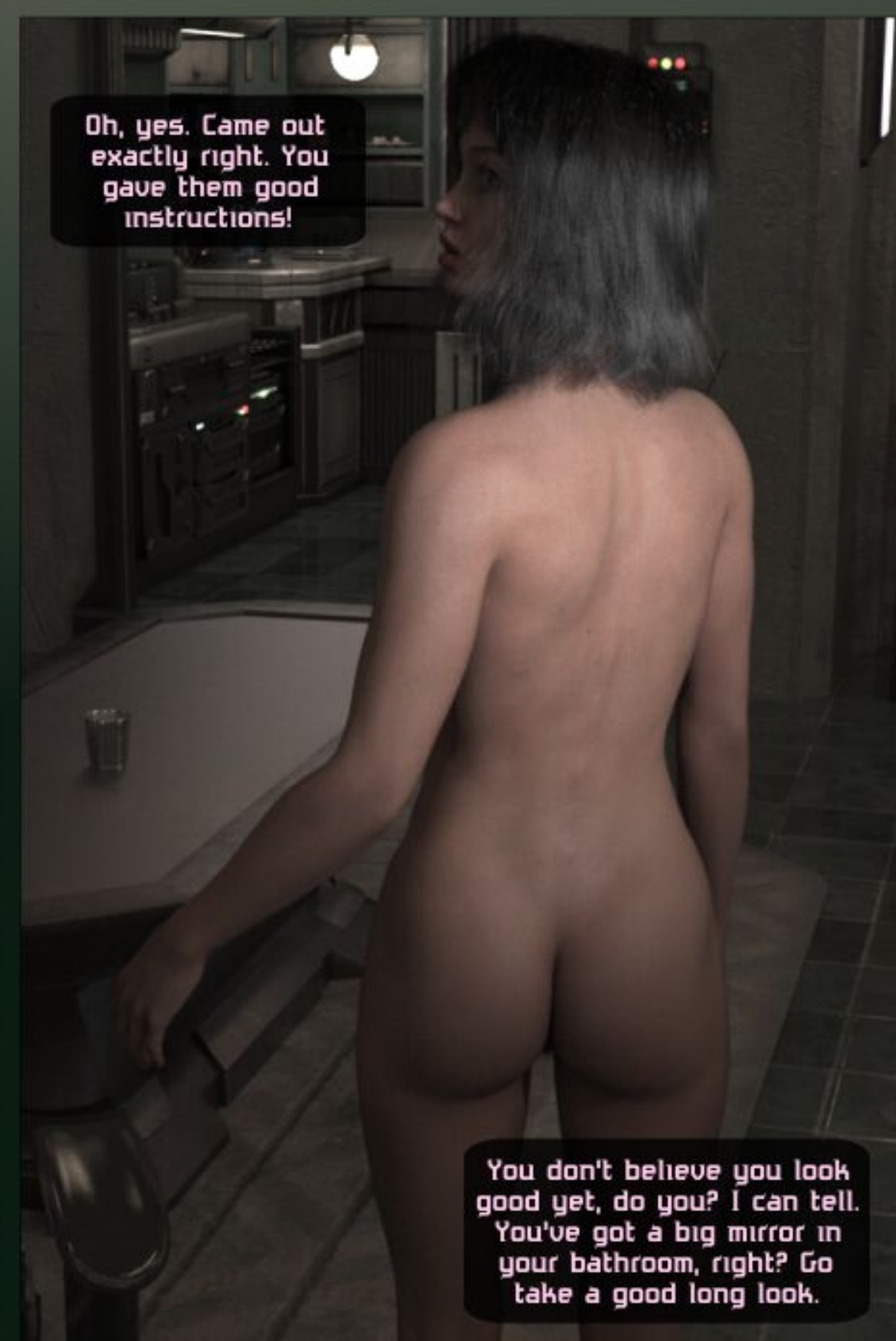
Come on, take it off!  
I want to see!

Aw, don't be like that! We've  
seen each other naked a lot  
now. There's nothing to be  
embarrassed about!



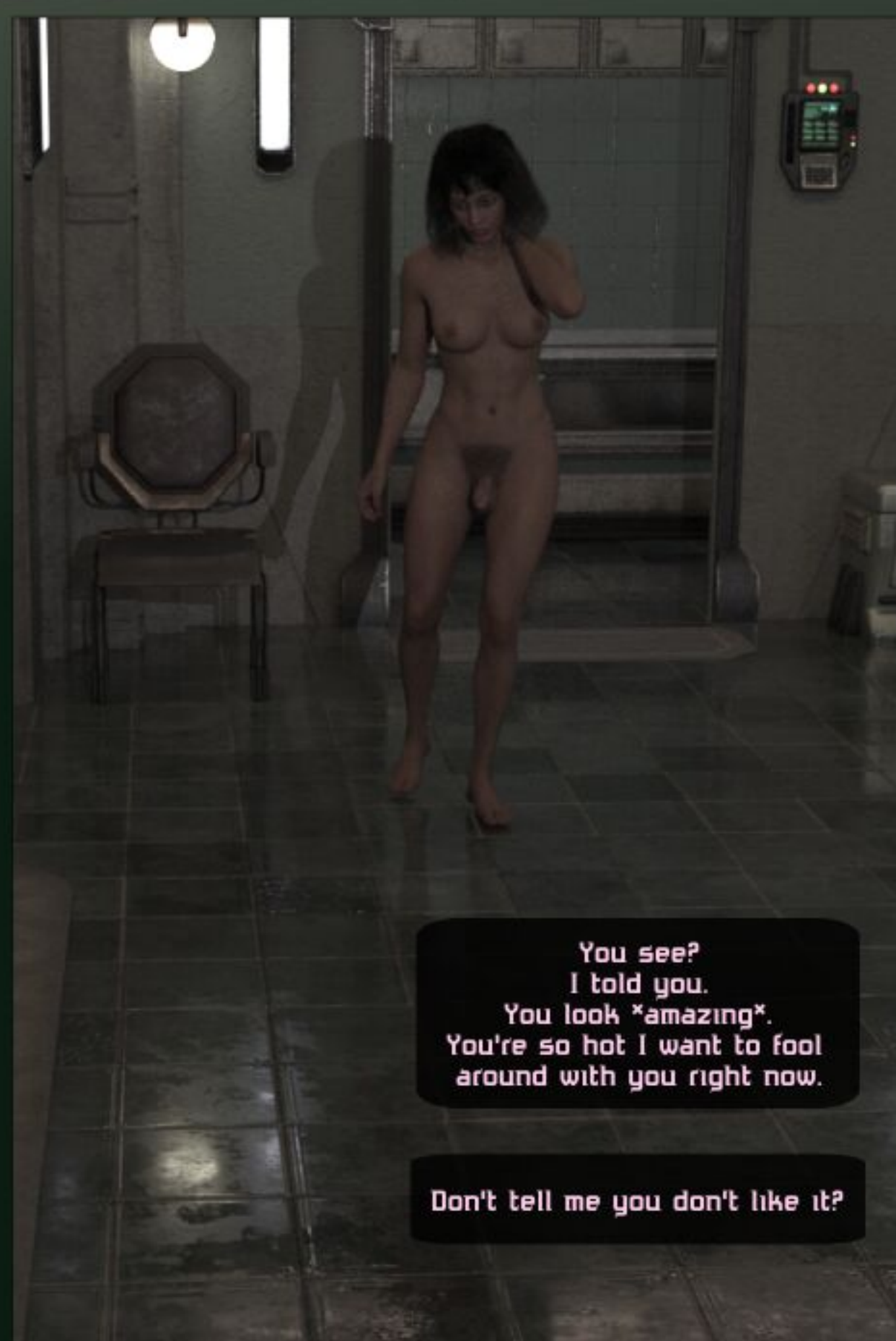
Ooh, you look \*great\*!  
It really suits you!

Turn around.  
I want to see your butt.



Oh, yes. Came out  
exactly right. You  
gave them good  
instructions!

You don't believe you look  
good yet, do you? I can tell.  
You've got a big mirror in  
your bathroom, right? Go  
take a good long look.



You see?  
I told you.  
You look \*amazing\*.  
You're so hot I want to fool  
around with you right now.

Don't tell me you don't like it?



I do like it. I like it  
a lot. But I don't feel  
like I'm myself anymore.  
It's really weird.

Well, you're not your old self  
anymore. You're a new self.  
You're \*better\*!

But you have a point. I don't  
think we should call you Eldon.  
You're not Eldon now. They might  
still call you that outside, but in  
here we don't have to have that.  
We can do better than that.

How about Eliza? I like Eliza.  
Would you feel better about it  
if you were Eliza?

Actually, I think maybe  
that would help. Yes.

OK, Eliza.  
I want you to fuck me, Eliza.  
I want you to make me come \*so\* hard.



uummmhhh

That's right.  
That's the way.

A FEW WEEKS LATER.



Don't tell me to calm down!  
This is *serious shit*! This could  
nuke the whole company!

I'm  
just saying,  
it wasn't us  
that leaked,  
so --

So what?  
You think that means  
we're safe? Spence is pissed,  
Tyler. He's up to his eyeballs on  
whatever it is he's dosing this  
week, and he's raging. He'll fire  
everybody just so he can Peel  
like he did something  
about it.

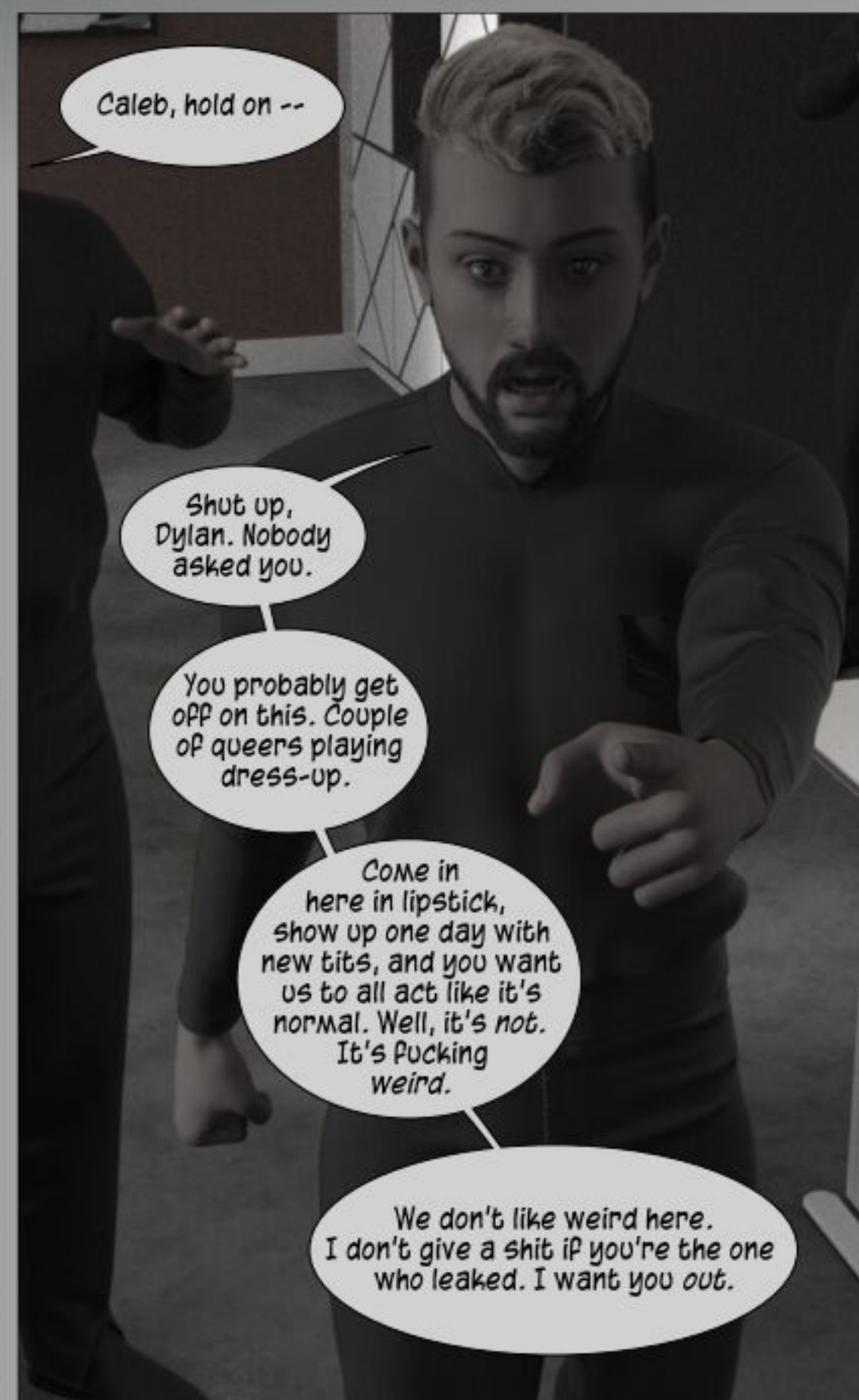
We might come out  
OK, if we can throw him  
a head. So it looks like  
we did something  
about it.



And it's  
gonna be *this*  
Preak.

Huh?

You've been  
asking to have your  
ass kicked out for a  
while now. Hell, it  
probably was you  
that leaked.



Caleb, hold on --

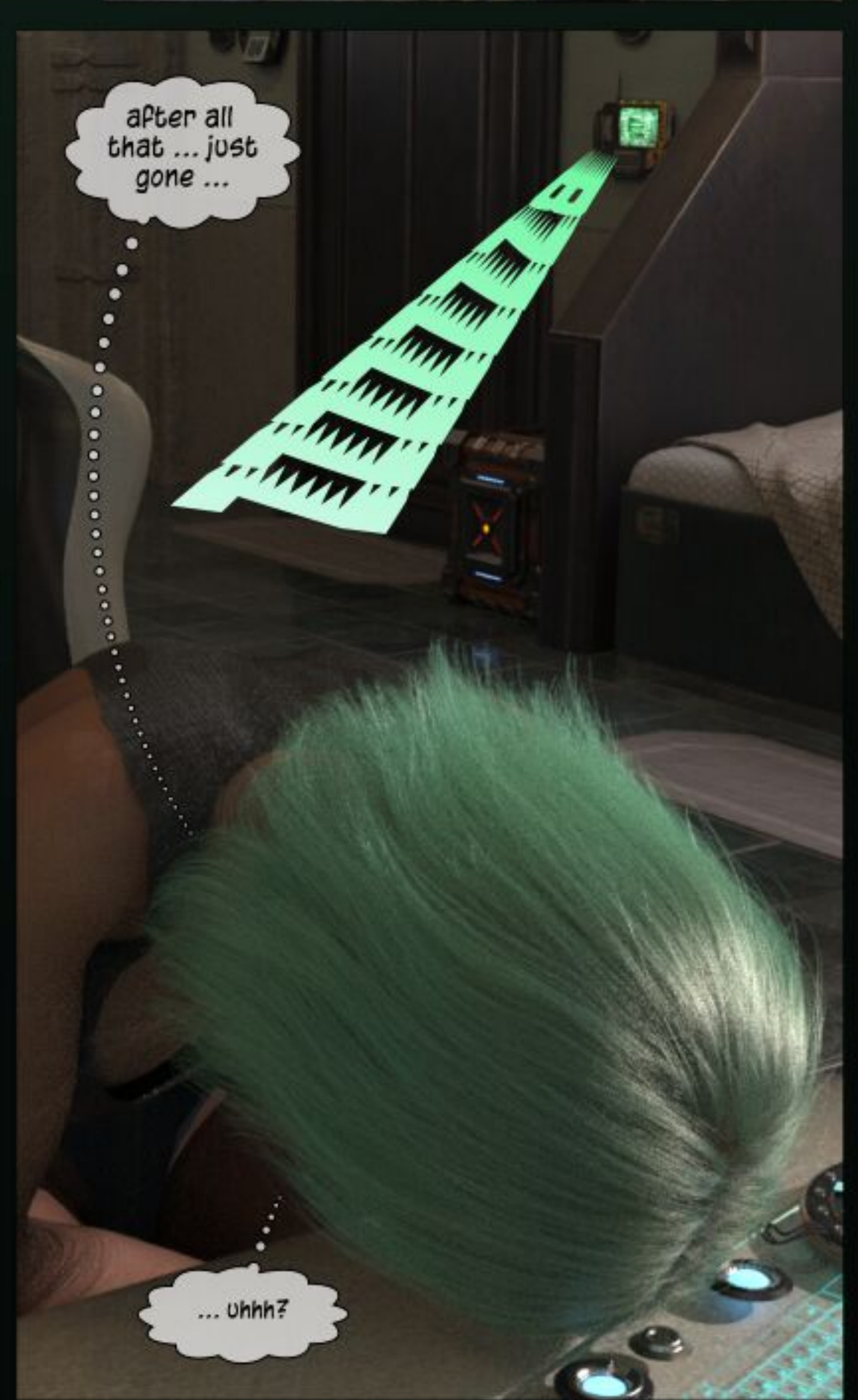
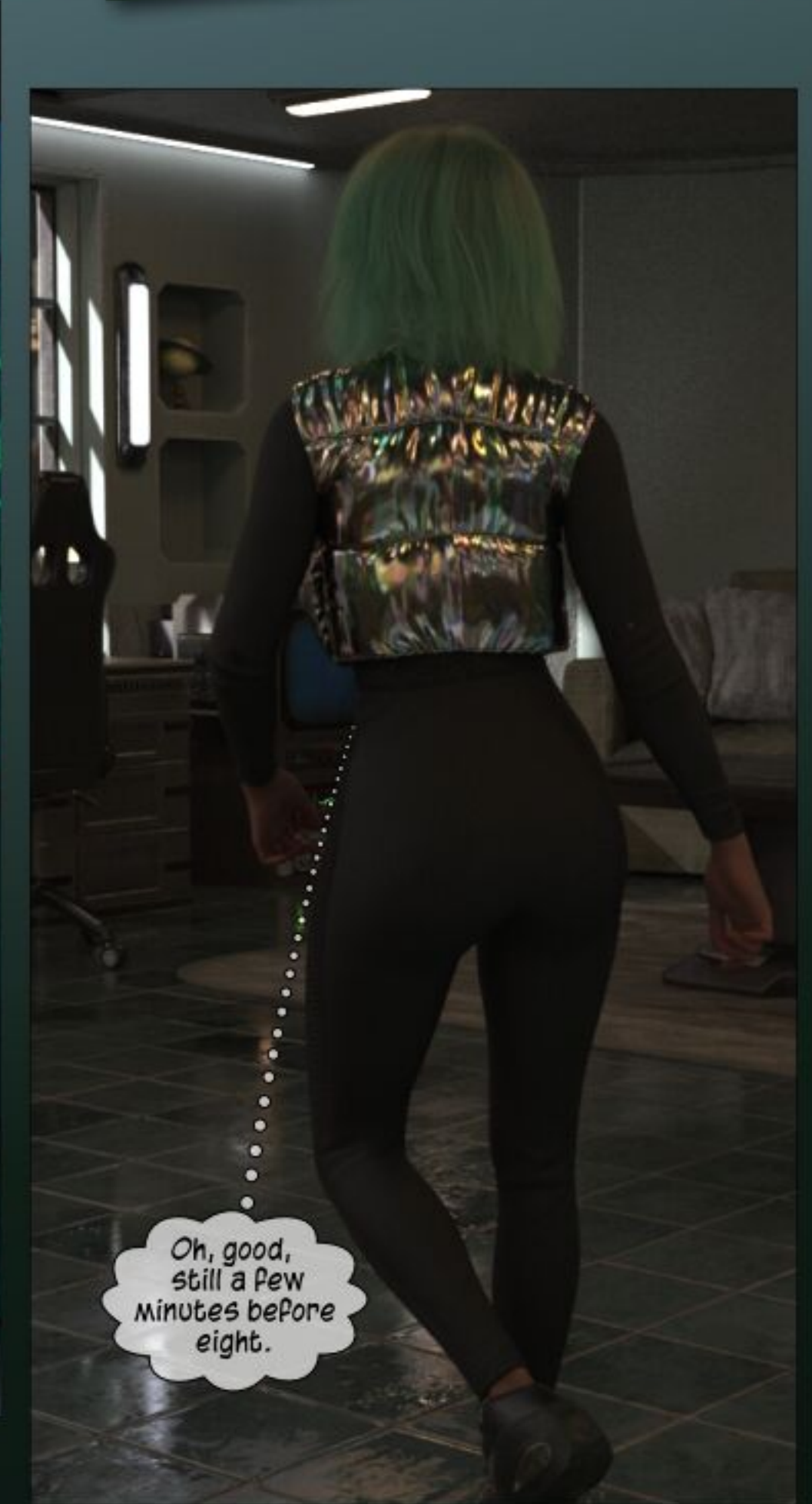
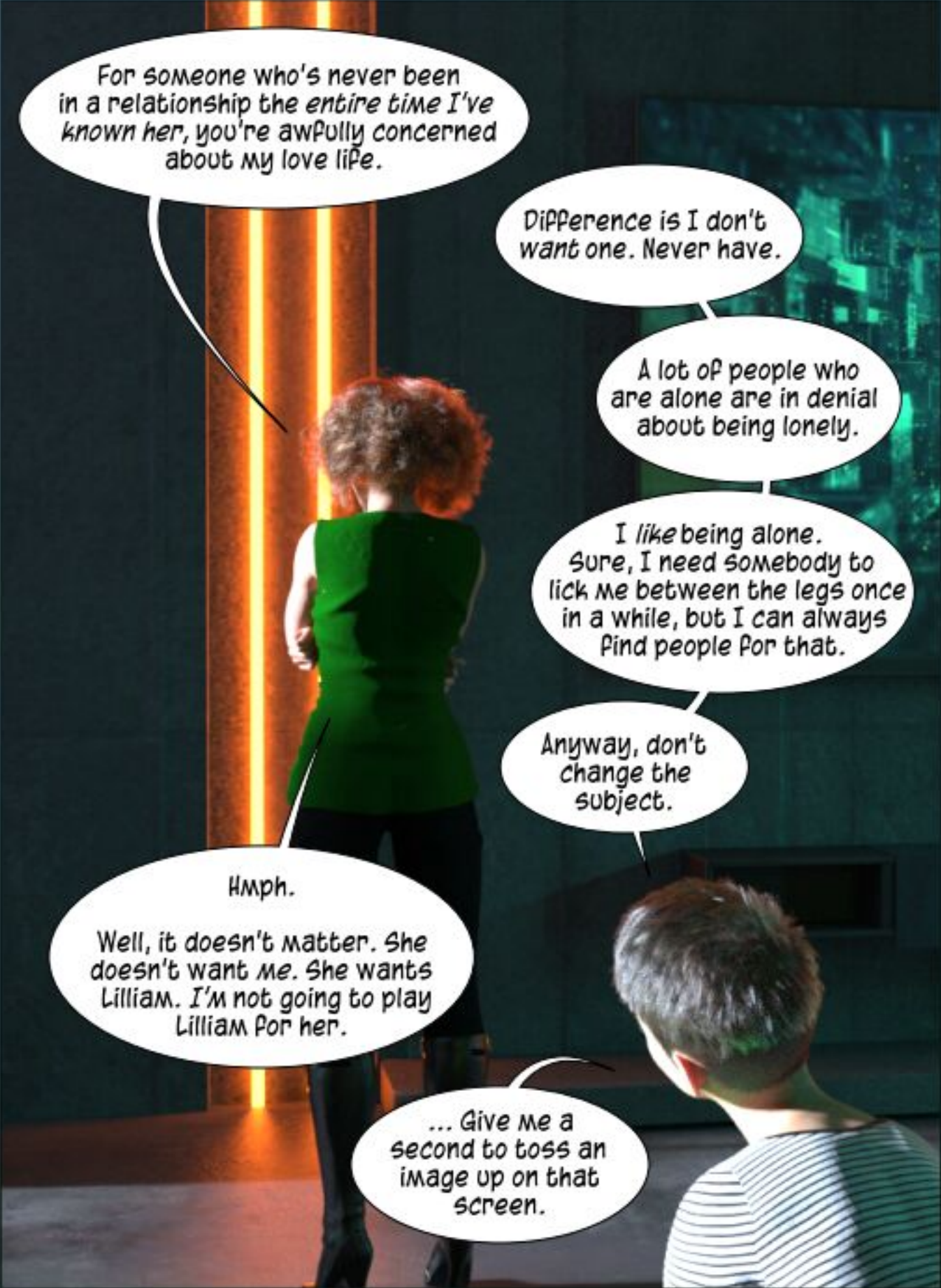
Shut up,  
Dylan. Nobody  
asked you.

You probably get  
off on this. Couple  
of queers playing  
dress-up.

Come in  
here in lipstick,  
show up one day with  
new tits, and you want  
us to all act like it's  
normal. Well, it's not.  
It's Pucking  
weird.

We don't like weird here.  
I don't give a shit if you're the one  
who leaked. I want you out.





EPILOGUE  
NEARLY A YEAR LATER.



Who on earth?

Ohmigod Fay!!

It's been ages!

Yeah, sorry. I had to drop below radar for a while ...

Well, get your butt in here and tell me about it.

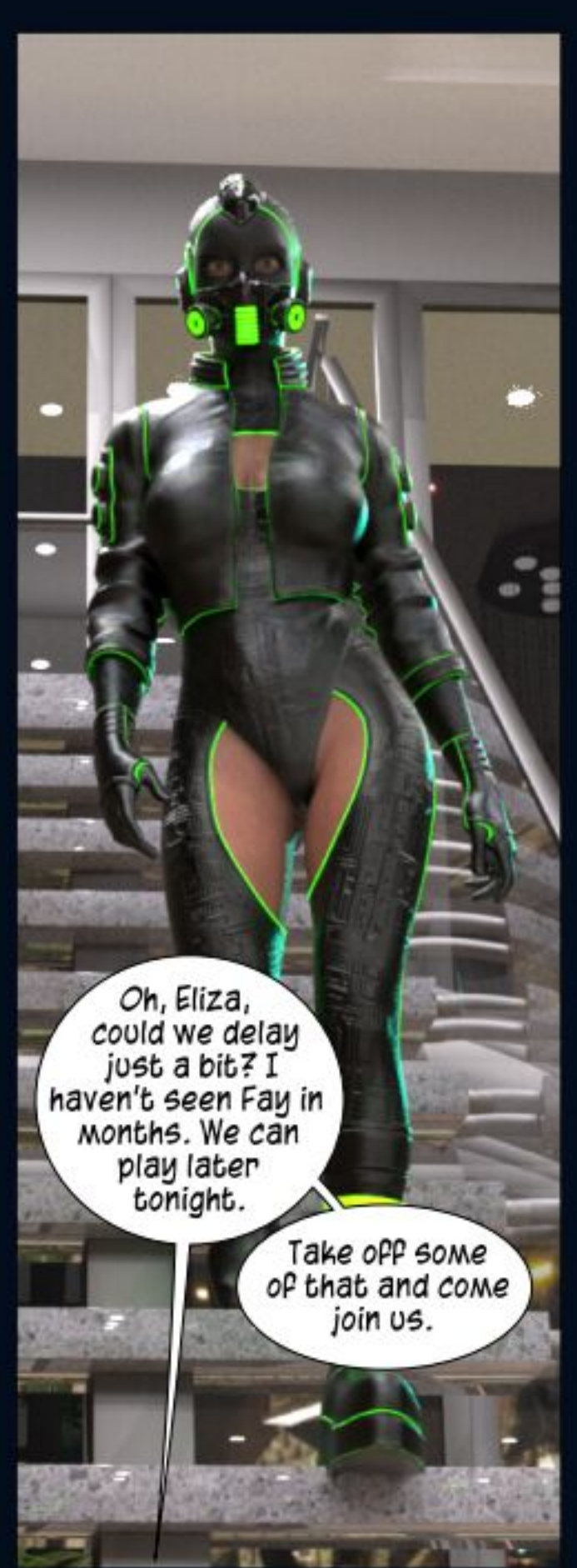


Give me a second to go put on something less ridiculous.

Don't bother for me. You look hot in it.

But did I catch you in the middle of someth--

-- huh.



Oh, Eliza, could we delay just a bit? I haven't seen Fay in months. We can play later tonight.

Take off some of that and come join us.



... She's gotten really into compelled-compliance protocols. Implants and everything.

I can't tell whether she's very subby or she likes playing robot. Or both. But we're both enjoying it, so.

She's also turned out to be even better at code than I thought she was. She's why we've branched out, and it's good we did ... there was always a limited audience of people who just wanted UX advice, but if we come in and say, "here, just use our software, that'll fix you," they're a lot more likely to bite. Because then they don't have to do the work.

But never mind that. Are you OK? Somebody leaked a lot of internals from Teragon and they got sued out of existence, and right about that time, you disappeared.

What happened? Did Spence Tervid go looking for retribution?



Tervid couldn't find retribution with a telescope. And he sure as hell couldn't find me.

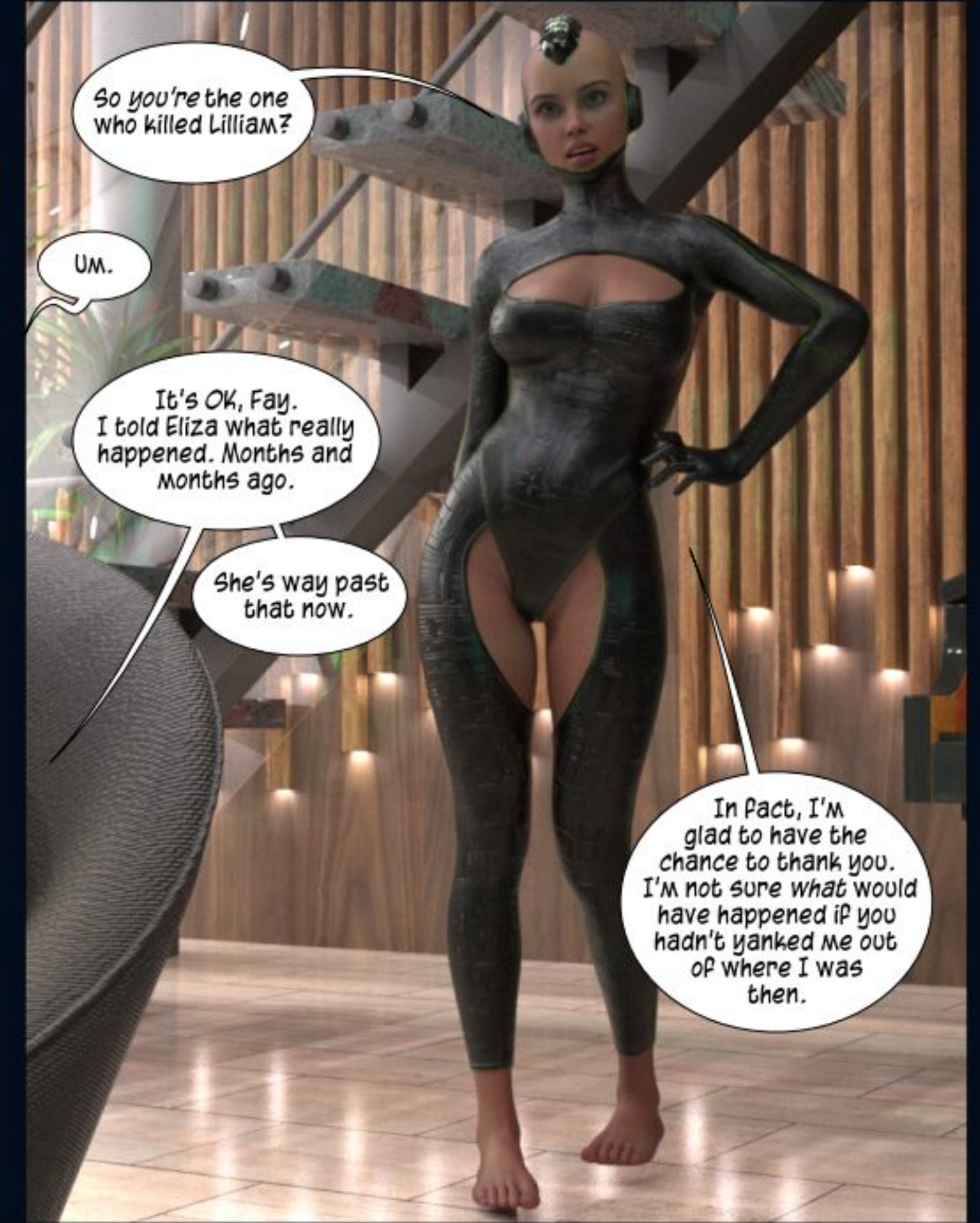
He's probably sitting in a Plop somewhere spending the last of his cash on ketamine.

No, the problem was Danna Amadie.

Oh, the Entropic thing. I should have guessed.

I didn't want to let Lilliam keep going after that, or Clyde or any of their other little monsters. You know Clyde's actually what brought down Teragon. They were using Clyde to write half their code.

But Amadie's not clueless like Tervid. She's clever and mean, and I should have taken her more seriously from the start. She never came close to actually getting me, but I did have to cut systems and remove traces. I erased myself. Then I spent four months rebuilding from scratch.



So you're the one who killed Lilliam?

Um.

It's OK, Fay. I told Eliza what really happened. Months and months ago.

She's way past that now.

In fact, I'm glad to have the chance to thank you. I'm not sure what would have happened if you hadn't yanked me out of where I was then.



I'll trade your thanks for my apology.

It worked, but I wasn't thrilled about the methodology, then or now. I hate lying to people.

There's got to be a way that isn't as rough. On both sides.

I don't know about that! I've given it a lot of thought since V told me, and I can't come up with anything else that would have worked.

And that's important, because there are still a whole lot of guys who could use this treatment. You know Caleb landed completely on his Peet? He's running a team somewhere else and probably being an even worse dick.



No zealot like a convert?

Oh, sure, joke about it, but you're in this industry. Do you want to see it keep falling apart because of people like that? How many Calebs have we had to deal with in just the past quarter?

Might not be just them we'd be redeeming. Might be saving the rest of us too.

... There are logistics issues. Fay had to keep four hours a night free, five nights a week, in case you talked to Lilliam.

And there are a lot of people to fix. On our dime.

Well, I was thinking more in terms of just a handful of key assholes. You know, the ones who could lead by example.



You know, that new one that's rolling out -- Syndi or whatever they're calling it -- people are already saying it's the next Lilliam.

And the people making it haven't bothered to pay for decent inPsec.

I'm not going to sit around chatting with clowns all night, but if you think you can get people you trust, I can help you set up ...

"And that's where I was when it all went out of control, Your Honor."

Nah. Just make sure the jury is all women, and we'll be fine.

END