

ughmh

**BZZZZZ BZZZZZ BZZZZZ**

OK, OK, I'm coming. Keep your shirt on.



Commander Stergis!  
Ah ... good morning?

Sleeping in, Agent D'Aventri?

I don't have a session today, sir.

You do now.

Get yourself together and be in briefing room 5A in a half hour.



I'm sending you on an intervention, Agent.

An ...?

Uh, sir, I assume you're already aware, but I'm an observation agent. I've never done an intervention.

Oh, yes, I know. There's a first time for everything.

I believe you're a good fit for this.

Now, I've already briefed your operator, and they'll give you the rest of it, but here's the crux:



You're both a little too young to have direct memory of Spece Poldan. He was Planetary Chairman two back. Before the one who was before the current one.

We've discovered a potential divergent timeline where he gets assassinated. This would be an extremely high-entropy timeline, were it to be allowed to split. Undesirable.

He's killed at a social event. After some discussion, we've determined the best thing to do is to keep him from attending it. This prevents the assassination and has no consequence on the main line once the divergence is eliminated.

That will be your job: keep him from attending the party. We've determined the best way for you to do that.

... Operator Xiren will provide you with the exact procedure.



OK, Mo, what's the deal? Why me? And what's the part she didn't want to tell me? I definitely heard a buck being passed.

I think she was just embarrassed.

Stergis doesn't get embarrassed.

And why would she be, anyway?

Well ...

The party Poldan can't attend is an important function. He's recent enough that they know a lot about him, and they think there's only one thing that could get him to miss it.

An unexpected sexual liaison.

And Stergis heard about the Christmas party ...



Are you telling me that Stergis picked me because she thinks I'm slutty?

Aw, c'mon, Delta, I don't think it's like that.

She just ... not everybody would be willing to do this, see? She needed someone who probably wouldn't have a problem with it.

... Great.

# TRIOLET

WORDS AND IMAGES BY TRILBY



I'm really not happy about this.

He can't be that unpleasant to go to bed with.

Not that part. I'm not an intervention agent! I just watch things! What if I Puck up?

Interesting choice of phrase.

You know what I mean!

If you mess up, I'll send you back again and we'll fix it. This is the Time Corps, Del. You get do-overs.

And this dress ... it's a lot. Is this really what you want me in?

It's a very fancy party of very rich, very powerful people.

He's gonna think I'm a very fancy hooker.

That might work to your advantage ...



Oh, you think this is all so Punny, why don't you go instead ...

... Good luck, Del.

Hotel Metropole  
Zurich  
20 December 2022 19:27 (Local Time)



Well, there he is ...

No says he's never married and he's usually pretty starved for intimate company ... I think they were trying to say he's horny as hell.

They also say he had zero record of sexual misconduct. He waits for a clear invitation. Hopefully that means if I give him one, that's all it'll take.



Hey there.

Ah ... hello. Have we met?

Not formally. My name's Del. I'm part of the Chicago Protectorate delegation.

A very small part.

I don't think I'm even allowed to talk to you ... but you look like you could use some company. Private company.

I'm ... well, I'm supposed to meet and greet and be available for everybody to complain to while they get drunk.

But ...

Frankly, I like your offer much better.



Do you ... MMM ... do you often decide to seduce random politicians?

Right, of course he's trying to figure out my motivations, he's not dumb ...

No. You're a special case. I just couldn't resist.

I'm flattered, and I don't believe a word of it.



-- ooh! --  
Oh, wow.

Damn, the man -- MMM! -- knows what he's doing ...

Maybe I should try going to bed with older men more often.



OK, that was a lot more fun than I thought it would be.

Didn't expect him to come back for two more rounds either. Man's got stamina.

But he's run out of it now. I don't think I need to babysit him, there's no way he's going back to the party.

Hotel Metropole  
Zurich  
20 December 2022 21:42 (Local Time)



Oh, hell!  
No told me about her. That's Meri Whitker, Poldan's majordomo. And she looks ready to punch something.

She's gotta be up on this floor looking for Poldan. She's probably going to drag him back to the party whether he likes it or not ...

I have to figure out a way to stop her, fast.



Hey, hey! Leave him alone. He's had a hard day.

Whatta you know about it? Who th'hell ... who're you, anyway?

She sounds drunk!

I'm with the Chicago delegation ... My name's --

"Hard day," my ... my ass. I do all the ... stuff, night'n' day for ages setting up this ... Puckin' party, and he blows the whole thing off to go chase some tail?

Oop. I know what'll distract her. But it's really wrong.

OK, Delta. Bite your lip and do it for the timeline.



What are you doin'? Get out of my way. I got a job --

He's asleep. And he doesn't want to go. And seeing that crowd I don't blame him.

And what am I s'posed to do? Go down and tell everybody the Puckin' Chairman's not coming to his own Puckin' party?

No, I think you should blow them off too. Let 'em wonder. He's the Chairman, what are they gonna do?

-- giggle --  
OK, sure, but --

I think you should get to have some fun.

Whattaya mean ...? I ...

Oooh!

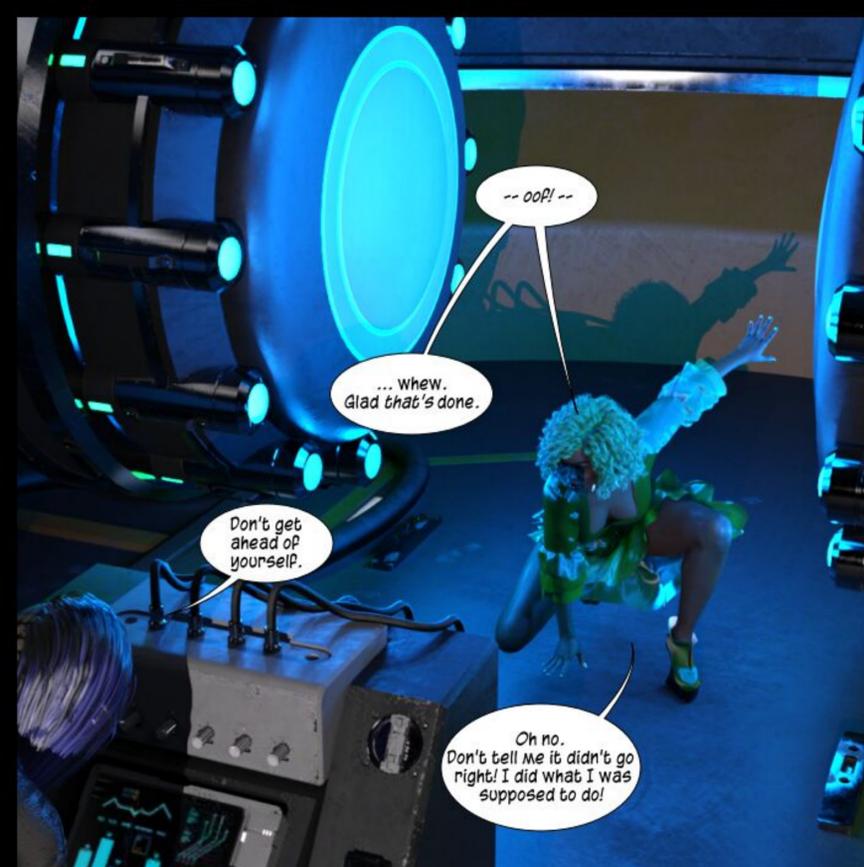
What floor's your room?



Aaaaah!  
Oh --giggle--  
-- hic --  
Don' ... Don't stop ...

--UUH! --  
If she ... keeps teasing me with her hand like that ... I might not be able to finish her off ...

If she's like this drunk, I wonder what she does sober?



-- oof! --

... Whew. Glad that's done.

Don't get ahead of yourself.

Oh no. Don't tell me it didn't go right! I did what I was supposed to do!



Whitker is collaborating with the consortium that wants Poldan dead. She cues the killer -- a guy named Hart Imak -- where to find Poldan that night for an unobserved kill.

You could have told me that.

Didn't know. No one paid much attention to Whitker. I only realized it while trying to figure out why the line's still fucked up.

After you leave, Whitker goes and tells Imak that Poldan's asleep in his room, and Imak goes and kills him there.

OK, so I go knock Whitker out before she can talk to him --

Nope. He's waiting for instructions from her, but if she doesn't show up, he'll try for the kill anyway. Someone has to convince him not to try that night. If he doesn't do it that night, it looks like the line resolves anyway.

I want you to go down to the body shop. I sent them a template. They're waiting for you.



Whoa! If you're thinking --

Impersonation is tier two intervention training. I haven't even had tier one! I'm already way out of my depth ... not to mention, Stergis will kill us if she finds out.

Stergis will kill us if we don't fix this. You know the rules: Clean up your own mess.

I didn't make this mess! My operator gave me a bad briefing!!

Sure, you can blame it on me if it makes you feel better.

She'll still kill us both though.

-- sigh -- I'll be back in about an hour.



I feel naked in this dress. You can see right through it. And they didn't give me any underwear.

She wasn't wearing any. You didn't notice when you took her clothes off??

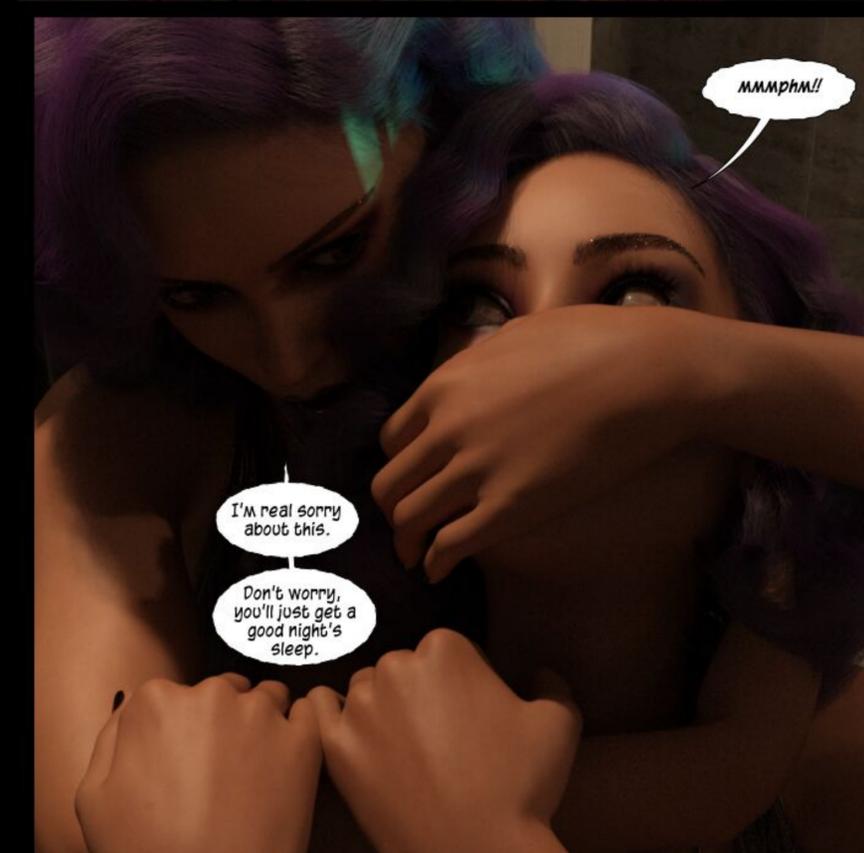
And these heels are ridiculous --

Del, I know that griping about minor things is how you deal with nervousness, but I'm cued up. Go get into position.

You shouldn't have much trouble Pooling Imak, he doesn't know Whitker very well. Avoid anyone who does. You'll be fine.



Hotel Metropole  
Zurich  
20 December 2022 21:19 (Local Time)



mmmphm!

I'm real sorry about this.

Don't worry, you'll just get a good night's sleep.



OK. Now the real Meri's out; I just need to go to Imak's room and keep him out of trouble somehow ...

No, wait.

Oh, hell. That's not right ...

Meri was getting dressed for the party! She hadn't left her room yet! It's too soon!

... ohhh. Oh no.

Where am I right now? Am I still in the room with Poldan? How long was I in there?

... I have to go check.



Hell. And of course she's seen me.

It's later than I thought. Meri never went to the party! I used up that time dragging her under her bed. And she never had time to ... get drunk ...

... So that's how it has to go.

No, when I get out of this, I'm going to strangle you.



Hey, hey! Leave him alone. He's had a hard day.

How do people sound when they're drunk? How do I sound when I'm drunk? Urgh ...

Whatta you know about it? Who th'hell ... who're you, anyway?

I'm with the Chicago delegation ... My name's --

"Hard day," my ... My ass. I do all the ... stuPP, night'n' day Por ages setting up this ... Puckin' party, and he blows the whole thing oPP to go chase some tail?

I hope that was close enough to what Meri said last time ... I mean, what I said last time ... Hell, was it Meri or me last time?



What are you doin'? Get out of my way. I got a job --

He's asleep. And he doesn't want to go. And seeing that crowd I don't blame him.

And what am I s'posed to do? Go down and tell everybody the Puckin' Chairman's not coming to his own Puckin' party?

Don't make it too hard, don't make it too easy ...

No, I think you should blow them oPP too. Let 'em wonder. He's the Chairman, what are they gonna do?

-- giggle --  
OK, sure, but --

I think you should get to have some Pon.

Whattaya mean ...? I ...

Ooooh!

What floor's your room?



Aaaaahh!  
Oh --giggle--

-- hic --

Don' ... Don't stop ...

She's really -- uh -- I'm really ... Oh, this is confusing ...

I guess most people don't get a chance to find out ... uhhh! ... whether they're any good at it ... at least, not this way ...

If she keeps going like that

-- aah! --

I might not be able to finish her oPP ...



Left as soon as she thought I was asleep. At least I knew that would happen.

Thank goodness the knockout stuPP they gave me is strong. Imagine if the real Meri had crawled out from under the bed while that was going on.

I think I'd better wear this again. It should look like I've been at the party.



About time. Where do I go?

Damn it, I don't know what she calls him.

It's oPP Por tonight. No location that's suitable.

What? But you told us the party was going to be the opportunity ... too many people to spot the delivery ...

Too many to make the delivery at all, it turns out. He's surrounded by a mob everywhere he goes tonight.

Besides, if this plays out the way I think it's going to have to, "half-naked" works in my favor.



We'll have to figure out a new approach.

They're not going to like this.

No, they won't. I wonder, would they care if you got caught?

You could try it anyway, and get caught, and see what they do ...

... or ...

... We could find another approach later, not get caught, and figure out something interesting to do with the rest of the night.



We're, ah, not supposed to associate this closely ...

I won't tell if you don't.

Mmm, you've got a nice cock ...

... just gonna see if I can get it to stand up Por me ...



Aaaaahh!  
Oh, yeah!

Gotta say, as interventions go, seems like there are a lot worse things I could be doing ...



Damn it, Mo, you knew! You knew and you did it on purpose!

Did what on purpose?

You put me in at a time when I'd have to have sex with myself, to close the loop!

No, I put you in at the last workable time when Whitker was still in her room, so you could replace her. What were you going to do? Ambush her in a hallway?

... um.

Though I admit I did know that would result in you having doubled sex. Sorry about that. They tell me it does happen sometimes.

-- sigh --  
At least tell me we're done with this now.

Ah ... negative.



What? Why??

Don't yell. It doesn't help anything.

This time it's definitely not our fault. The line resolves, but there's a ripple.

The consortium gets pretty pissy when Imak doesn't take the shot that night. They find him the next day and kill him. Poldan, who's already sick of the job, learns of the assassination attempt and decides to quit. His giving up the Chairman job prematurely creates the same degenerate timeline as if he'd been shot.

And before you say "OK, get Imak to skip town" ... I checked. If he does that, the consortium kills Whitker, figuring it was her fault Imak didn't deliver. Poldan learns about the attempt because of that; same outcome.



So we need the kill to not happen, and we need Poldan to stay unaware it was ever going to happen, and probably the best way to do that is if Imak and Whitker both clear out?

Exactly.

Uh, got any ideas?

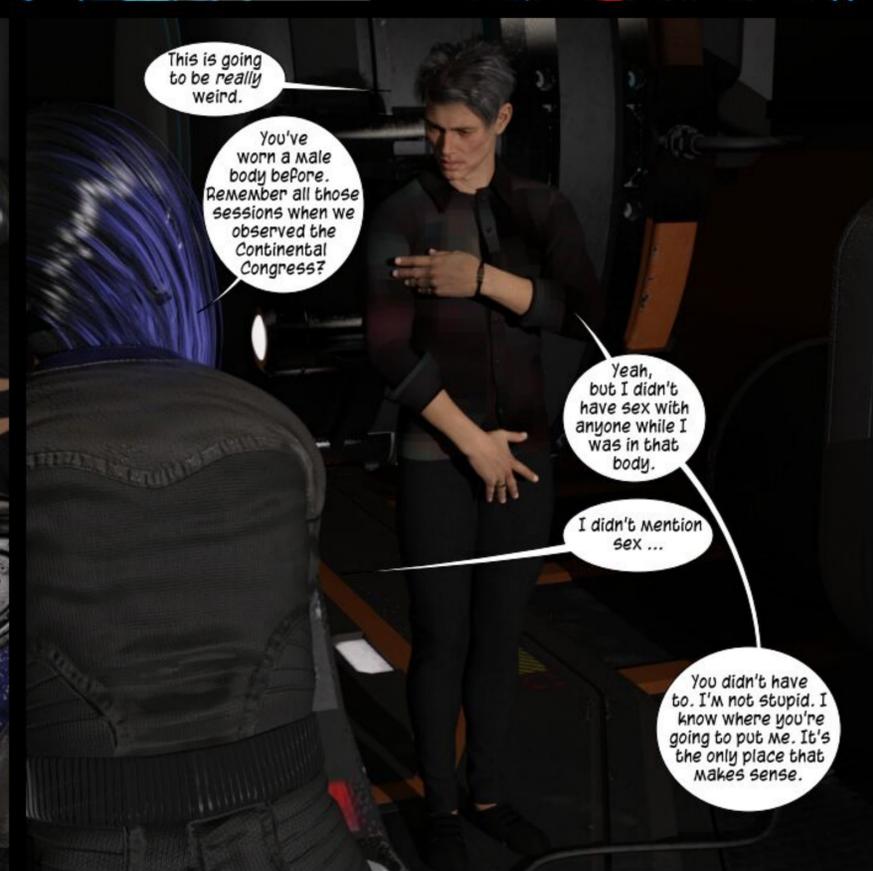
I do.

It'll be a pretty tricky brief, but I think it'll work.

OK.

You'll have to go to the body shop again.

... oh.



This is going to be really weird.

You've worn a male body before. Remember all those sessions when we observed the Continental Congress?

Yeah, but I didn't have sex with anyone while I was in that body.

I didn't mention sex ...

You didn't have to. I'm not stupid. I know where you're going to put me. It's the only place that makes sense.

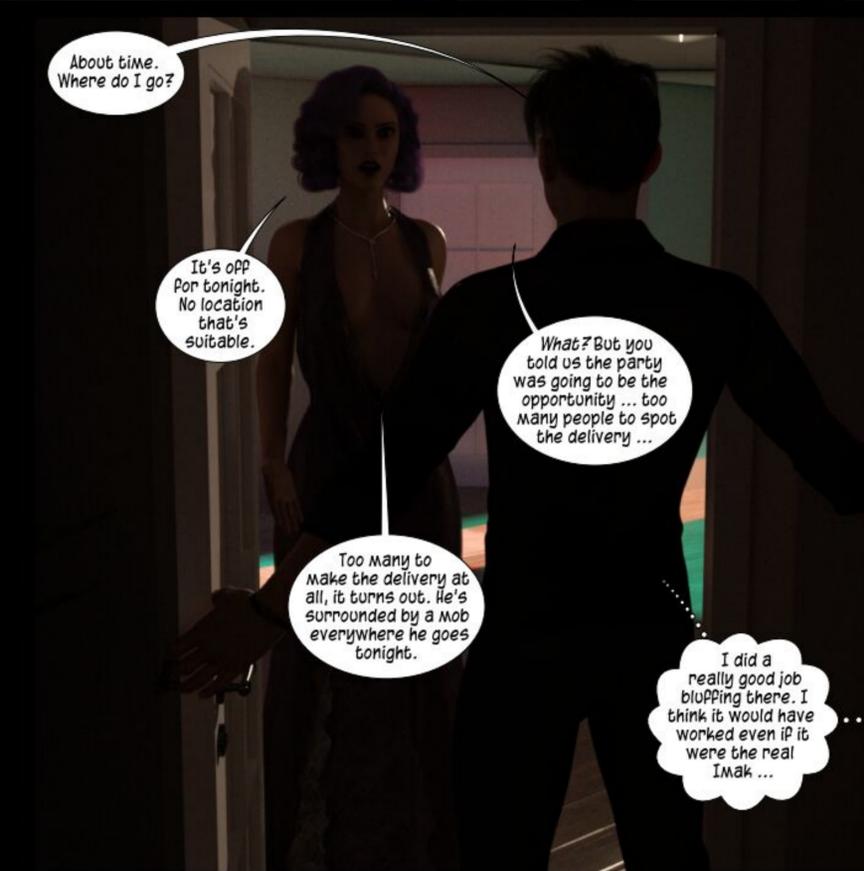


I don't like doing it this way, but Imak knows how to fight and I don't.



OK, big guy -- oof -- let's get you under the bed.

If I'm right about how Mo timed it, "Meri" is going to be knocking on your door any minute now.



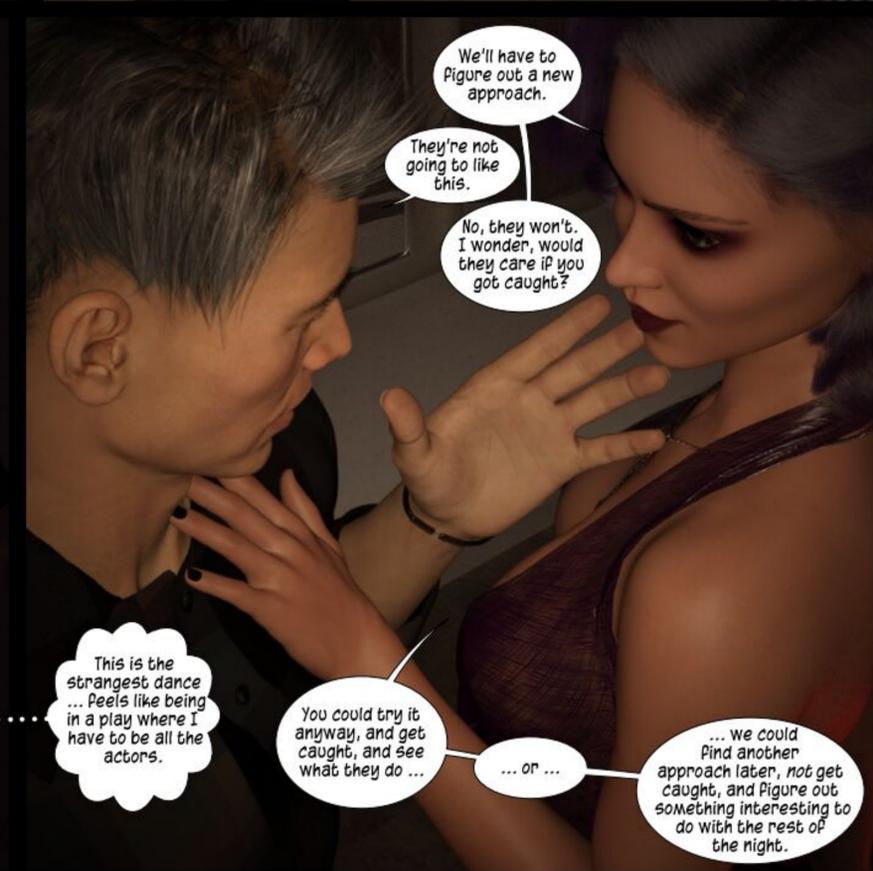
About time. Where do I go?

It's off for tonight. No location that's suitable.

What? But you told us the party was going to be the opportunity ... too many people to spot the delivery ...

Too many to make the delivery at all, it turns out. He's surrounded by a mob everywhere he goes tonight.

I did a really good job bluffing there. I think it would have worked even if it were the real Imak ...



We'll have to figure out a new approach.

They're not going to like this.

No, they won't. I wonder, would they care if you got caught?

You could try it anyway, and get caught, and see what they do ...

... or ...

... We could find another approach later, not get caught, and figure out something interesting to do with the rest of the night.



We're, ah, not supposed to associate this closely ...

Oh ... wow ... I ... OK, that's a new experience ...

I won't tell if you don't.

MMM, you've got a nice cock ...

... just gonna see if I can get it to stand up for me ...



Aaaahh!!  
Oh, yeah!

I -- uh -- I might have to, uh, experiment with this some other time ... When I'm not trying to fix a timeline ...

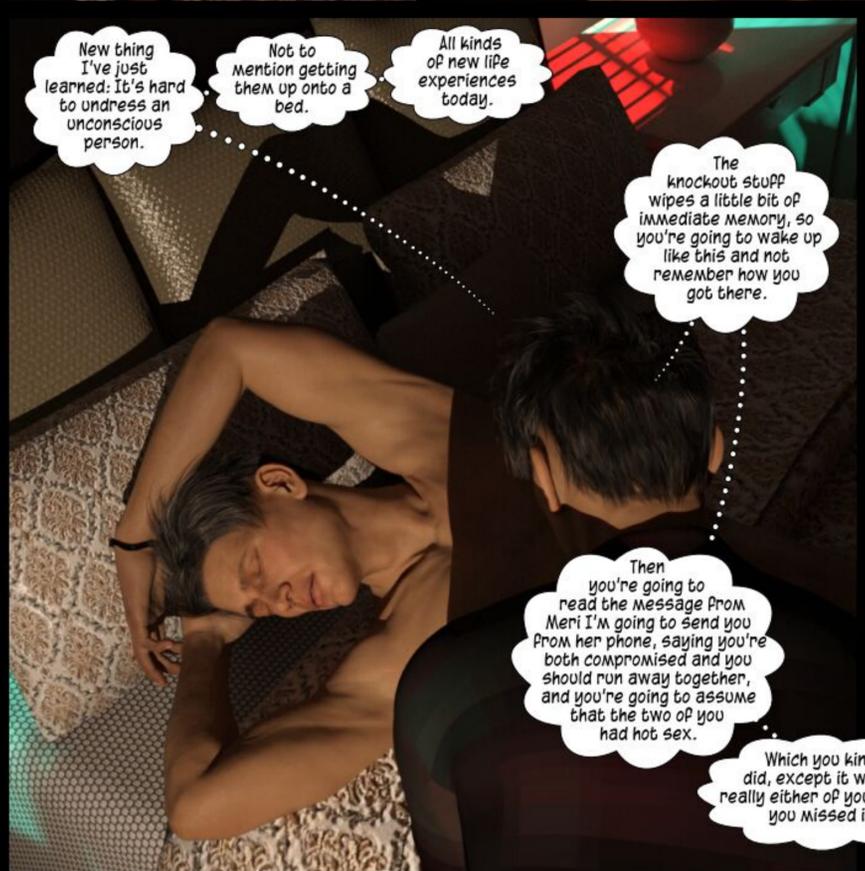
Though I think I'm enjoying it more as Meri ...



And there I go. Out to signal Por pickup, only to be told I have to go right back in again.

--sigh--  
Well, at least the sex was good.

OK. Time to set this up.



New thing I've just learned: It's hard to undress an unconscious person.

Not to mention getting them up onto a bed.

All kinds of new life experiences today.

The knockout stuff wipes a little bit of immediate memory, so you're going to wake up like this and not remember how you got there.

Then you're going to read the message from Meri I'm going to send you from her phone, saying you're both compromised and you should run away together, and you're going to assume that the two of you had hot sex.

Which you kinda did, except it wasn't really either of you. Sorry you missed it!



And Meri, who's asleep in her room right now, is going to read the message I just sent her from your phone saying the same thing.

I wish I were as confident as Mo is that this will work.

"They just have to both leave. Once they do, they really are compromised, and they won't dare go back even if they realize they've been had."

I don't know, maybe the two of you will actually hit it off. It seems kind of like you deserve each other.



And that had better finally be the last of this.

... Except you don't look happy. What went wrong?



I don't know!!

All of a sudden, there's a variant timeline that wasn't there before, and I don't see how we could possibly have split it, but we must have.

Poldan doesn't even make it to the party in that timeline! He's never in the hotel at all.

OK, great! If he doesn't show up, then he can't get assassinated. I mean, it wastes our work, but ...

It strands our work, Del. It means that you didn't sleep with him, and that means none of the rest of what you did happened. Except that it did, so it's floating around as fragmentation. And with that fragmentation not resolved, the degenerate line where he gets shot is still there.

So we've accomplished nothing and left a mess. Stergis really is going to kill us.

There's got to be something we overlooked. Probably something obvious ...



Ohhhh!  
Oh, shit.

You're absolutely right, Del. We missed something stupid obvious.

OK, the good news is, it's an easy fix, and this time I'm sure it reconciles the timeline once and for all.

... what's the bad news?

I have to send you to the body shop one more time.



Hotel Metropol  
Zurich  
20 December 2022 19:21 (Local Time)

If Mo did this right, I only have a minute or two to be in the right place.

I wanted to cut it as close as possible because there's no way I can impersonate Poldan. If I have to have a conversation with anybody, I'm Pucked.

Well, anybody but myself. I don't know any better.

Spec! There you are!

... Hell.



There I am. Trying real hard not to look nervous or freaked out.

Hate to tell you this, past me, but it gets a lot weirder from here.

I think we should be taking a more proactive stance on China's policy demands ... They're just trying to see what they can get away with ...

And I have no idea who this guy is or what he's talking about.

Ah ... it's something to consider.

But, you know, this isn't really the night to talk shop. This is a party!

And I do have to go say hello to some other people. I'm sure I'll run into you later. We'll have a drink ...



Hey there.

Ah ... hello. Have we met?

Is it weird if I think I look sexy as hell in that dress?

Not formally. My name's Del. I'm part of the Chicago Protectorate delegation.

A very small part.

I don't think I'm even allowed to talk to you ... but you look like you could use some company. Private company.

I'm ... well, I'm supposed to meet and greet and be available for everybody to complain to while they get drunk.

But ...

Frankly, I like your offer much better.



Oh, wait, I was a little skeptical here, wasn't I?

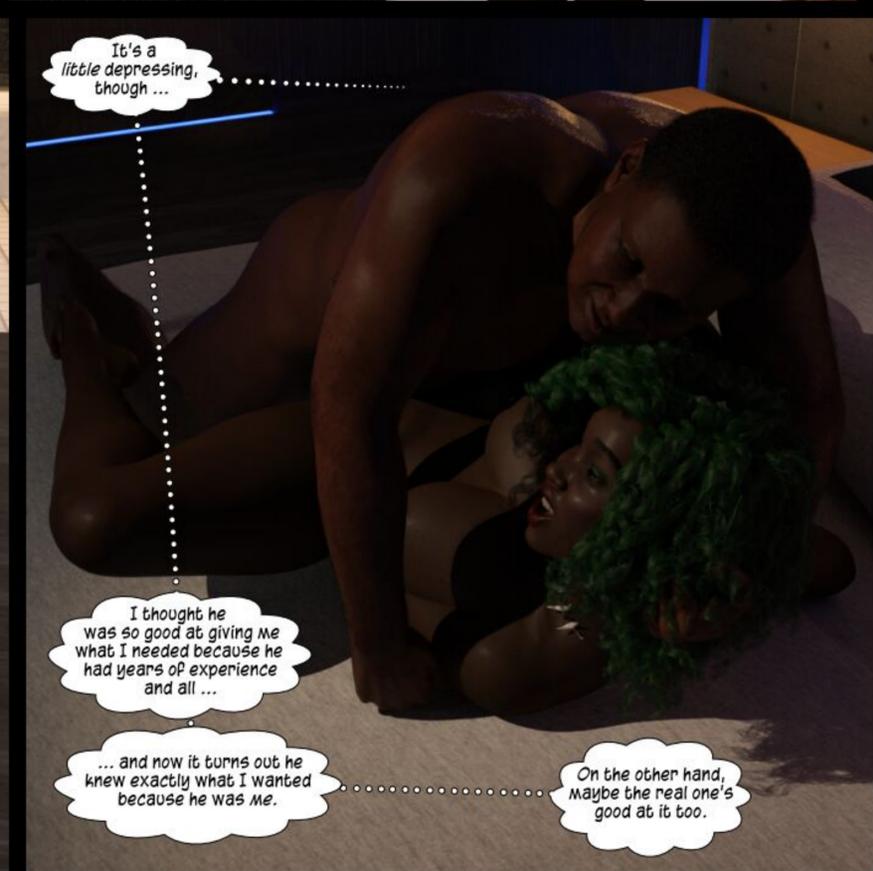
Do you ... mmm ... do you often decide to seduce random politicians?

No. You're a special case. I just couldn't resist.

I'm flattered, and I don't believe a word of it.

Damn, I'm getting hard ... I don't know ... this is probably going to leave me with new kinks or something. "She had sex with herself and now she's all perverted."

Well, more perverted.



It's a little depressing, though ...

I thought he was so good at giving me what I needed because he had years of experience and all ...

... and now it turns out he knew exactly what I wanted because he was me.

On the other hand, maybe the real one's good at it too.



If you don't tell me everything's resolved, I'm quitting.

Relax. It's all good ... you closed the loop and the timeline's nice and clean now.

Where are you going?

Body shop. Being in this body makes me feel guilty for some reason.

Find me in an hour.



We will never speak of this adventure again.

C'mon, Del. You didn't have to do anything super-unpleasant, and we got it all sorted out ...

Oh, sure. And all it took was me having sex with myself three times.

What a convoluted mess.

Convoluted? No, no.

It's not convoluted until you find yourself running to hide in a closet so you don't encounter yourself running down the hall to avoid being seen by your third self.

That happened on my second intervention, by the way.



Commander. I did notice that you were monitoring us.

I'd have been disappointed if you hadn't, Operator.

I'm detaching you both from regular sessions for a while so you can get intervention training. Full training. All tiers.

Uh ... Commander, with all respect, I really do prefer observation.

I realize that, Agent. Frankly, we don't do that many interventions. You'll still have plenty of observation sessions.

But interventions are important enough that if we have an agent with ... special expertise ... then we can't afford to not use her should that expertise become necessary.

Duty calls, and all that.



So now it's an "expertise." I'm going to hear about this forever, aren't I?

Hey, it's a skill set. Would you rather be Grippin? Her expertise is waste analysis. Every time she goes into a session she comes back covered in sewage.

I guess.

But I swear, no, if this station wasn't timeline-excluded, I'd go back and tell myself not to attend that Christmas party.

No, you wouldn't.

-- heh --

... No, I wouldn't.

END