

HELLO THERE!
HAVE YOU BEEN
CONSIDERING GETTING A
SYNTHETIC, BUT THINK
THEY'RE OUT OF YOUR
REACH?

THEN IT MIGHT BE TIME
YOU LEARNED ABOUT ...

UTILIDOLLS

STORY AND IMAGES BY TRILBY

UTILIDOLLS (TM)
BRING UTILITY SYNTHETICS
INTO A PRICE RANGE THAT'S
ACCESSIBLE TO THE HOME
CONSUMER!

OWNING A
UTILIDOLL WILL CHANGE YOUR
LIFE FOR THE BETTER! NO NEED TO
WORRY ABOUT ALL THOSE HOUSEHOLD
TASKS. WE COME WITH BUILT-IN
PROGRAMMING FOR CLEANING,
COOKING, AND CHILDCARE.

OTHER
PACKAGES ARE AVAILABLE AS
NEEDED FOR NO ADDITIONAL CHARGE! AND
ALL OUR FUNCTIONS ARE 100%
GUARANTEED.

OF COURSE
--GIGGLE--
WE KNOW THAT'S NOT
WHAT SOME CUSTOMERS
ARE INTERESTED IN.

OUR
SEXUAL PACKAGE
COMES AS STANDARD
PROGRAMMING, COMPLETE
WITH AN EXTENSIVE
SELECTION OF KINKS AND
PERSONAS.

AND THIS PACKAGE,
LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, IS
100% GUARANTEED.

Yeah, yeah.

Afternoon, Zurie.

Brent.

What'll you have?

Information.

About Eddie Winter.

Aw, Por--
And if I don't give you
any, are you going to
make life difficult?

Now, would I do
that to a friend?

No, but you wouldn't
make a friend talk about
Winter either. You know how
he does things.

Well, seeing as
how this seems to be the
last place anyone saw him, I just
figured you'd like a chance to set the
record straight.

You know, in case someone gets to
thinking you had anything to
do with it.

Me? Don't you try to--
--sigh--
OK, what the hell, there's
nobody else here. But you
didn't hear it from me.

Not that I can
tell you much.



"it was about seven on a weeknight; they were the only two in the bar."

... OWNING A UTILIDOLL WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE FOR THE BETTER! NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ALL THOSE HOUSEHOLD TASKS. WE COME WITH BUILT-IN PROGRAMMING FOR CLEANING, COOKING, AND CHILD CARE ...

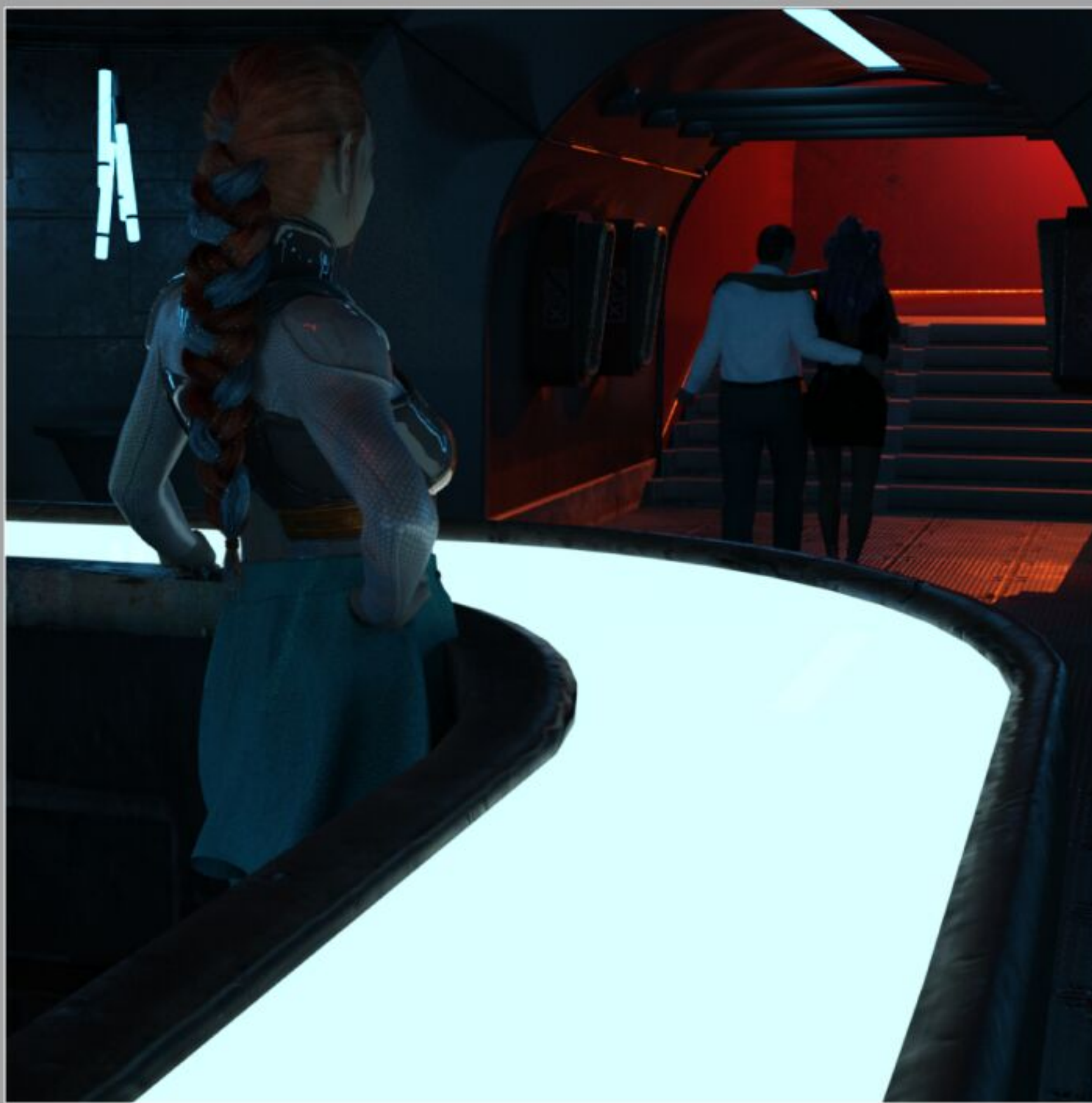
Fucking synthetics ... They're gonna try to replace us. Bet on it.



OUR SEXUAL PACKAGE COMES AS STANDARD PROGRAMMING, COMPLETE WITH AN EXTENSIVE SELECTION OF KINKS AND PERSONAS ...

I'll bet there's one thing I can still do a lot better than any synthetic.

heh. ... You're on.



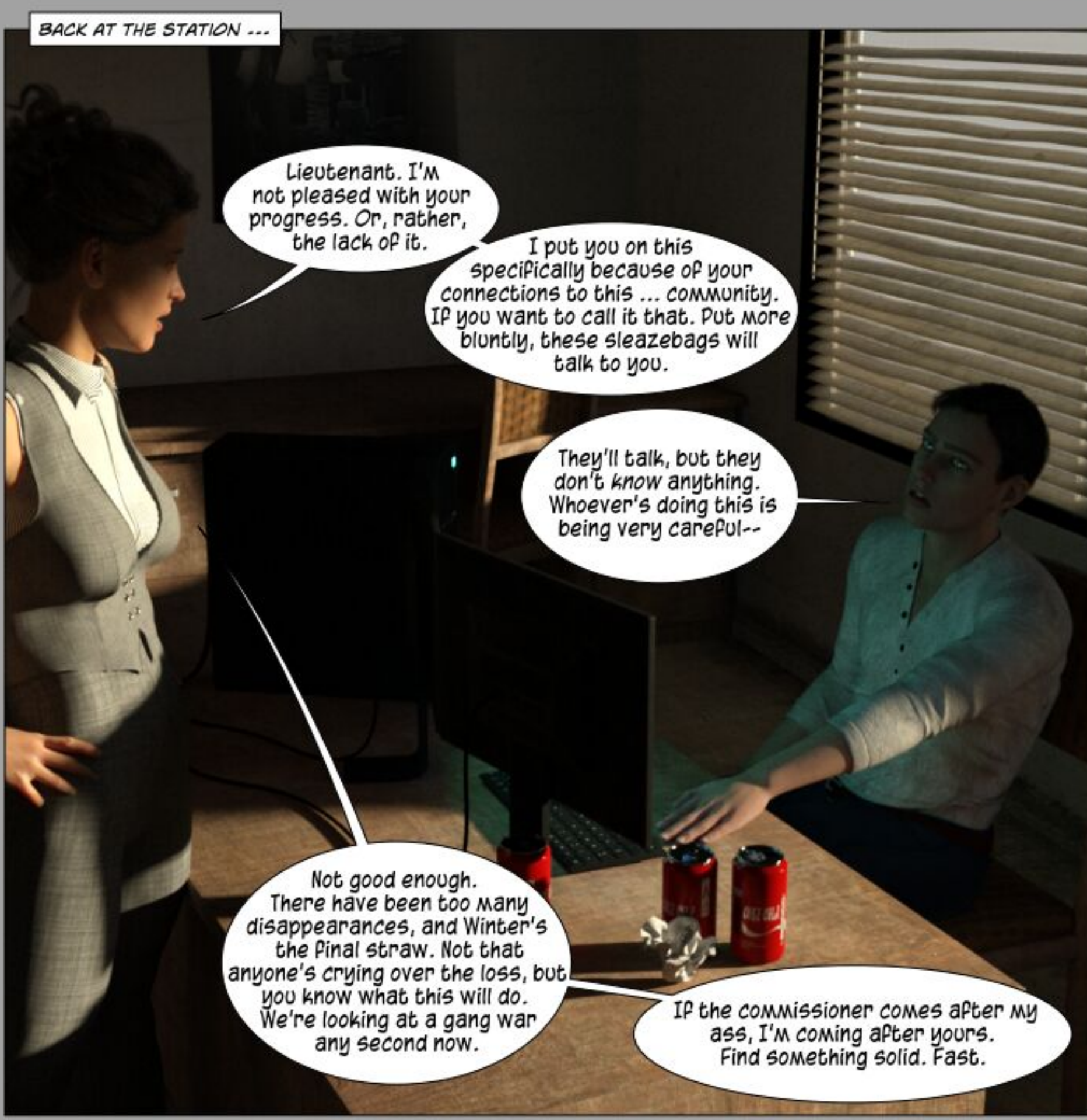
... And that was it. They left, and I guess nobody's seen Winter since?

You were right: that wasn't much.

Well, hell, I can't tell you what I don't know. But I thought about it a little, later ...

I don't think Winter would have just gone off with anybody. I figure he thought she was one of Crystal's.

But she wasn't. I know all Crystal's people on sight. I'd never seen her before. So she was either a Freelancer or ... she came in here just to hook Winter.



BACK AT THE STATION ...

Lieutenant, I'm not pleased with your progress. Or, rather, the lack of it.

I put you on this specifically because of your connections to this ... community. If you want to call it that. Put more bluntly, these sleazebags will talk to you.

They'll talk, but they don't know anything. Whoever's doing this is being very careful--

Not good enough. There have been too many disappearances, and Winter's the final straw. Not that anyone's crying over the loss, but you know what this will do. We're looking at a gang war any second now.

If the commissioner comes after my ass, I'm coming after yours. Find something solid. Fast.



--groooooooooo--

Rough day, huh?



Carla! ... I didn't know we were speaking.

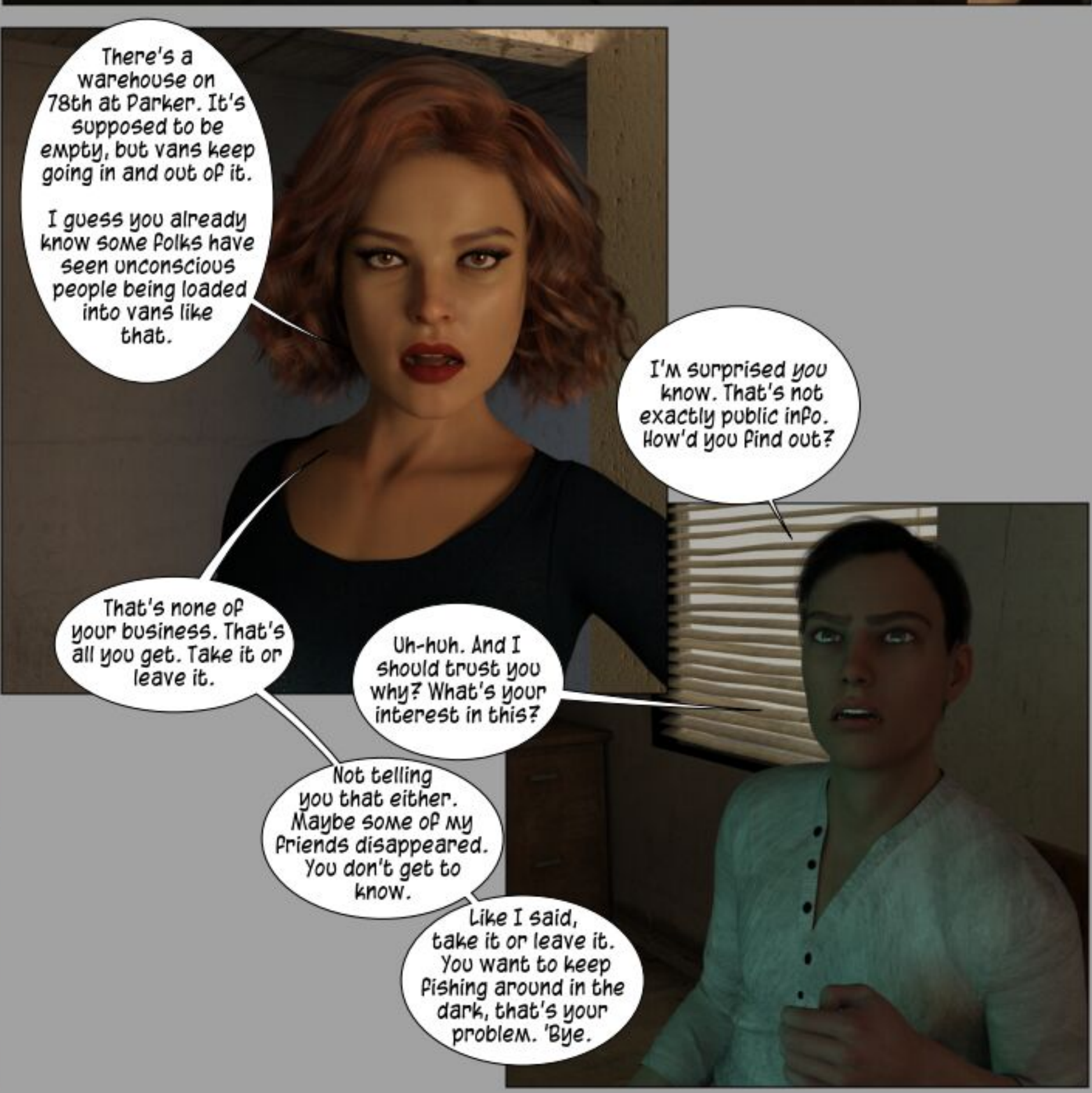
We're not. Unless you want me to cuss at you for a while. I'd enjoy that.

You don't get to have a conversation with me, not after you cheated on me.

I cheated on you? We're going to do this again? You cheated on me. You really need to do something about your memory.

What the fuck do you want?

I'm here to give you a tip, Brent. A clue. Since you're incompetent.



There's a warehouse on 78th at Parker. It's supposed to be empty, but vans keep going in and out of it.

I guess you already know some folks have seen unconscious people being loaded into vans like that.

I'm surprised you know. That's not exactly public info. How'd you find out?

That's none of your business. That's all you get. Take it or leave it.

Uh-huh. And I should trust you why? What's your interest in this?

Not telling you that either. Maybe some of my friends disappeared. You don't get to know.

Like I said, take it or leave it. You want to keep fishing around in the dark, that's your problem. Bye.

BRENT PAYS AN UNEXPECTED VISIT TO THE HEADQUARTERS AND SHOWROOM OF UTILIDOLLS INC.



oooookay ... I'm not sure what I was expecting, but this isn't it.



GOOD AFTERNOON, SIR! MAY I --
Aaagh!
You're real!
I mean--sorry, I thought you were a mannequin or something.
I APOLOGIZE FOR STARTLING YOU. MAY I PROVIDE YOU WITH INFORMATION ON OUR PRODUCTS?
Ah ... no. I'm not a customer. I need to talk to someone about a police investigation.
ASK AT THE DESK. SHE'LL BE HAPPY TO HELP YOU.

BRENT EXPLAINS THE SITUATION.



I DON'T HAVE A PROCEDURE FOR THAT, SIR. GIVE ME A MOMENT TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE UPSTAIRS AND I'M SURE THEY WILL HELP YOU.
FEEL FREE TO LOOK AROUND THE SHOWROOM WHILE YOU WAIT, OR EXAMINE OUR CATALOG. TAKE ONE IF YOU LIKE.
Uh ... thanks.



I dunno ... I mean, I guess I can see how they might appeal to some people ... I think they're kind of creepy though.
SIR? MS. VERLAINE WILL SEE YOU NOW.

THE OFFICE OF NATHALIE VERLAINE, CEO.



... I didn't expect to be sent all the way to the top.
We have very few flesh-and-blood staff. It's impressive you got sent upstairs at all. What can I do for you, Lieutenant?
I'm investigating several disappearances among the city's criminal element. The only information we have is that a couple of the missing people have been seen being placed, unconscious, in an unmarked white van.
I got a tip that this van was seen going into a warehouse on 78th. I checked; Utilidolls owns it. It's on the back side of your factory property.
And you want my permission to search it.
I do.
No.



... May I ask why not?
Three reasons. First, I don't think that warehouse is safe to even enter. It's crumbling. We bought all that property as a teardown for when the factory needed to expand, which it eventually will.
Second, I don't like the idea the police have that they can just go anywhere and do anything they want.
Third, if I let you investigate on company property and the word gets out that I did, there will be rumors that we were somehow involved ... which is ridiculous. There are people who will do or say anything to discredit Utilidolls because they harbor the strangest ideas about our products. I do not intend to give them any ammunition voluntarily.
I could go get a warrant.
If you do, bring it to me and I'll cooperate. But I doubt you'll get one if all you have is hearsay.

LATER THAT NIGHT.



Shouldn't have bothered asking first ... if she's in on it, now she's had time to clean it up ... so much for 'by the book' ...
HMM. Those interior walls down there are a lot newer and sturdier than the rest of this rusting crap. And that's a working card lock on that door.
Somebody's using the old warehouse as a shell to hide whatever's behind that.
Either someone's managed to set this up without Verlainne knowing about it, or she's the one responsible. My money's on the second--
She's right about the building though ... this roof is mostly holes. Easy to get in, if I can figure out how to do it without breaking my neck.
Van incoming. This should be interesting.



Utilidolls?
Really?

Second theory
looking even stronger. I
need to get in there before
they close up.



What the hell ...?



People
being taken out of
storage ... being put on
some kind of stands
...?

click

--huh?



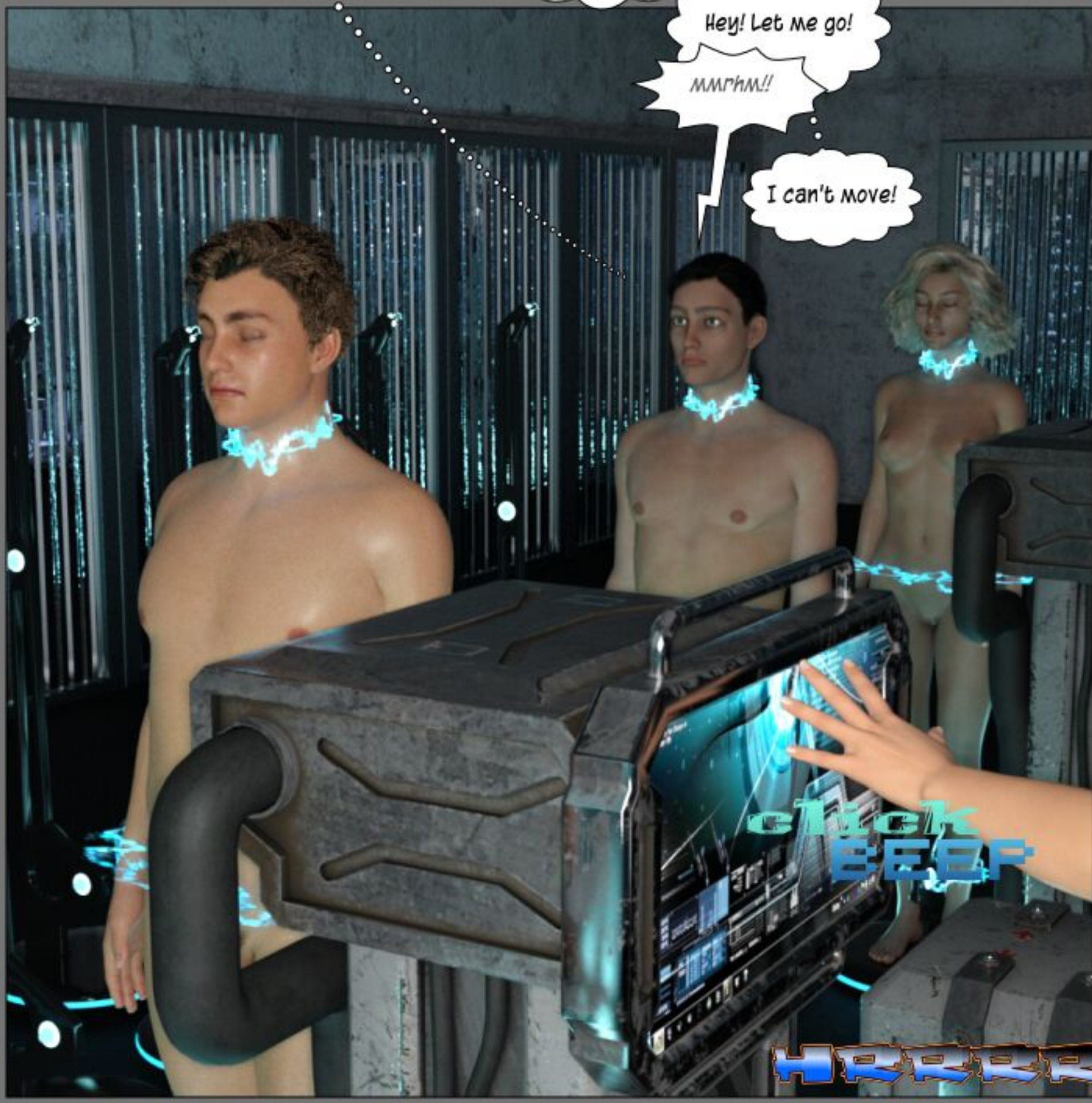
... ugh ...

What hit me?
Where am I?
Wait--

No ...
No, no, no!
This isn't--

Hey! Let me go!
MMMM!!

I can't move!

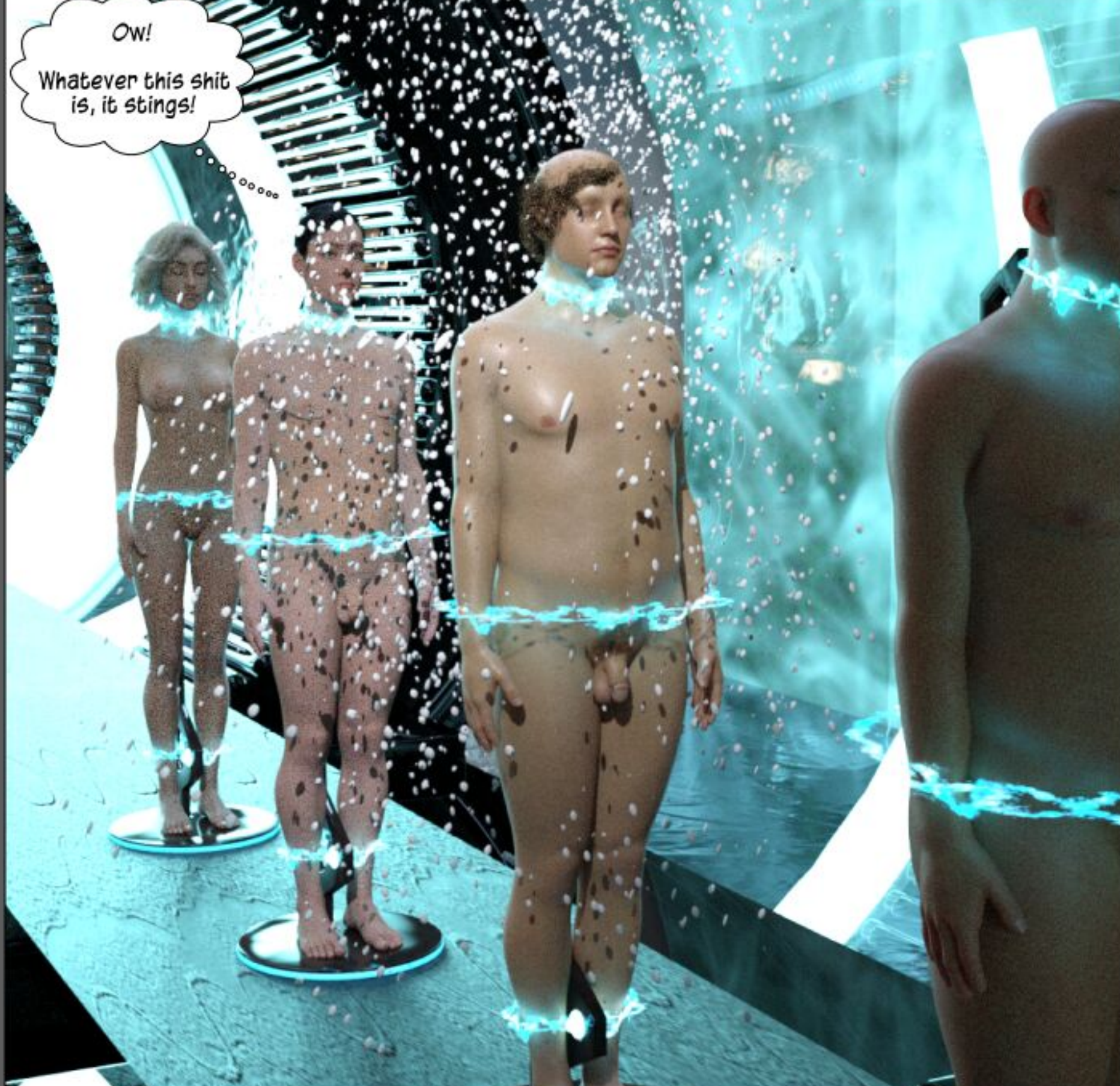


click
BEEP

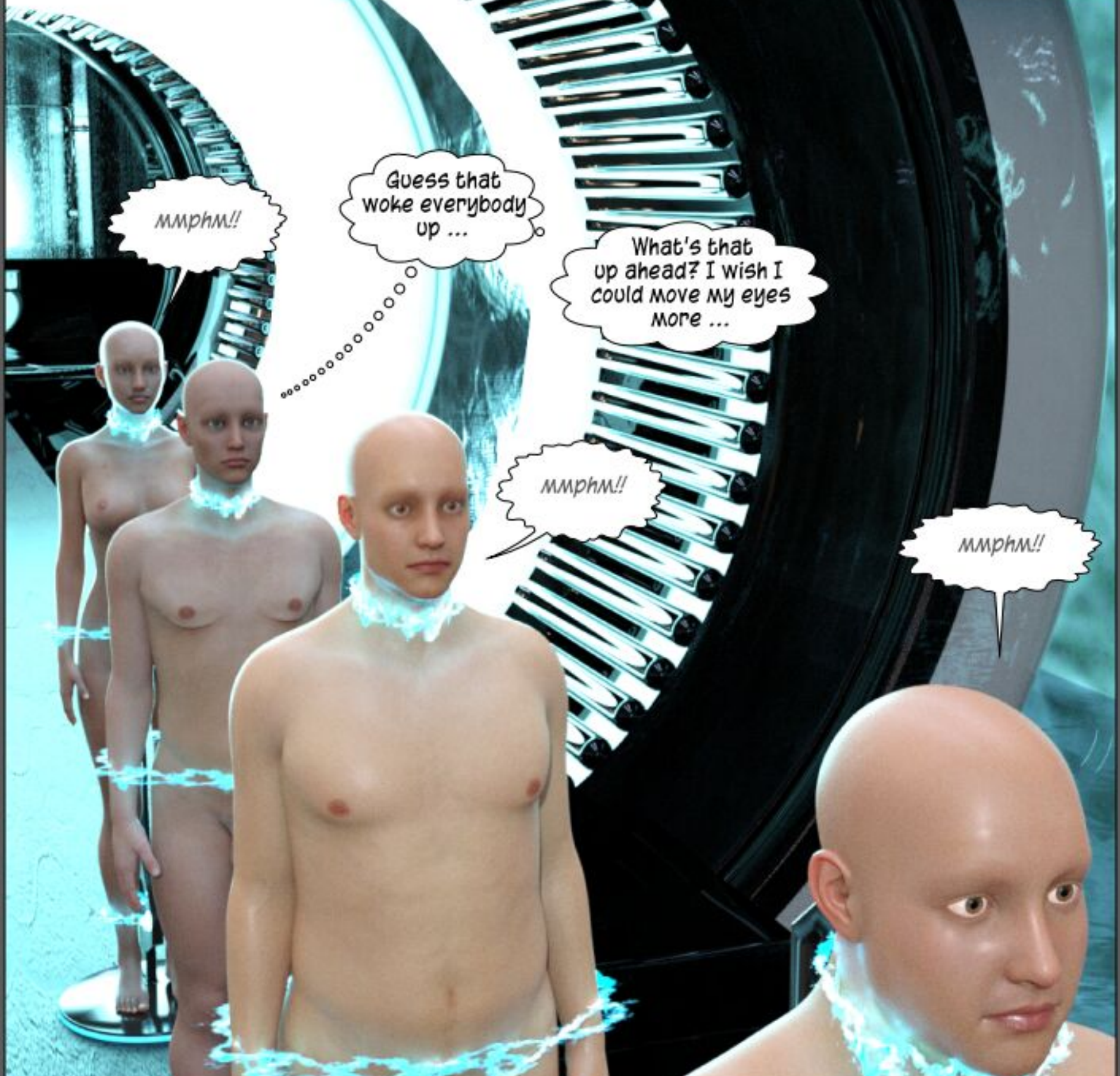


Conveyor belt?
We're moving ...

This is bad.
This is very,
very bad.



Ow!
Whatever this shit
is, it stings!



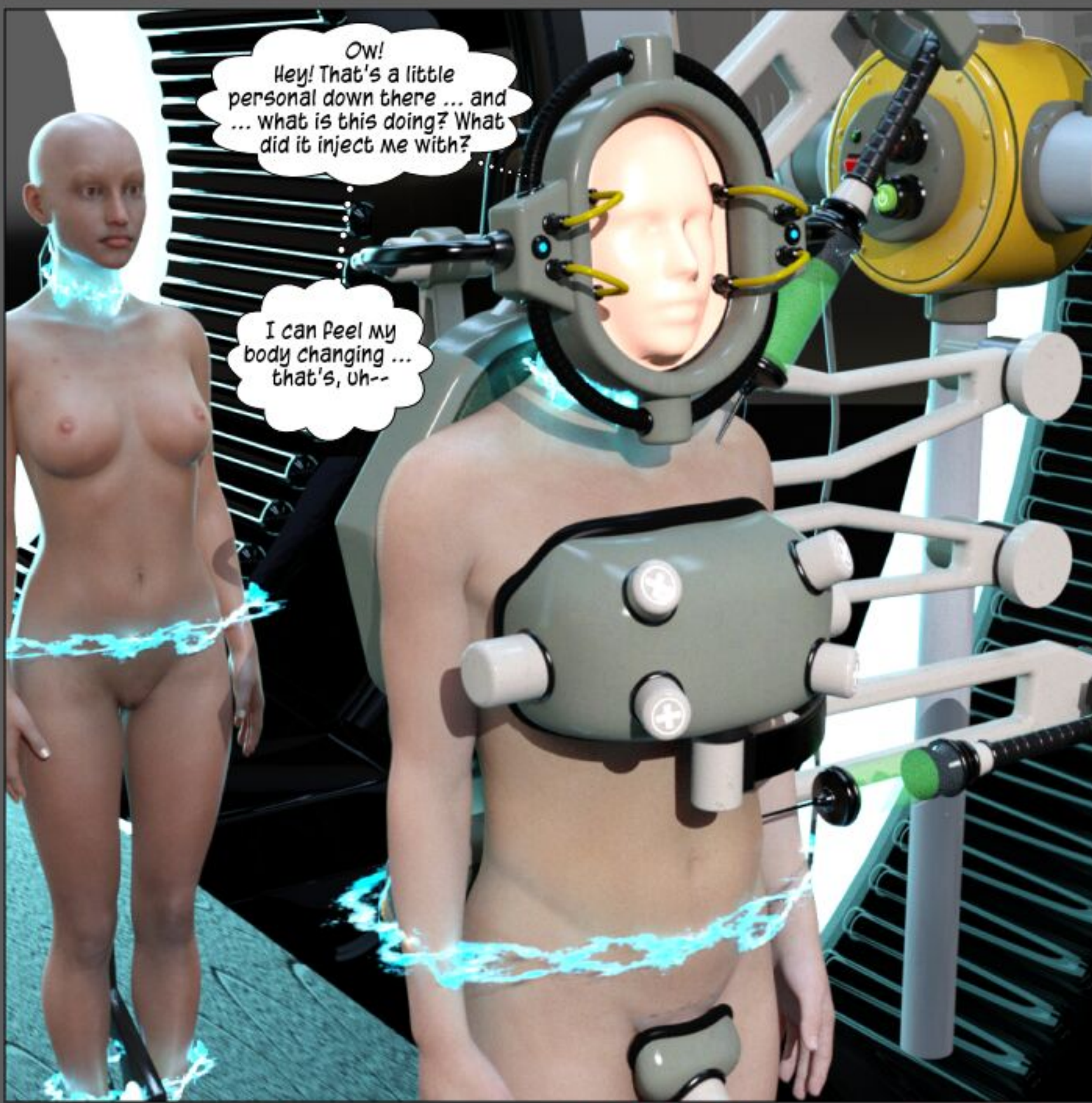
Mmphm!!

Guess that
woke everybody
up ...

What's that
up ahead? I wish I
could move my eyes
more ...

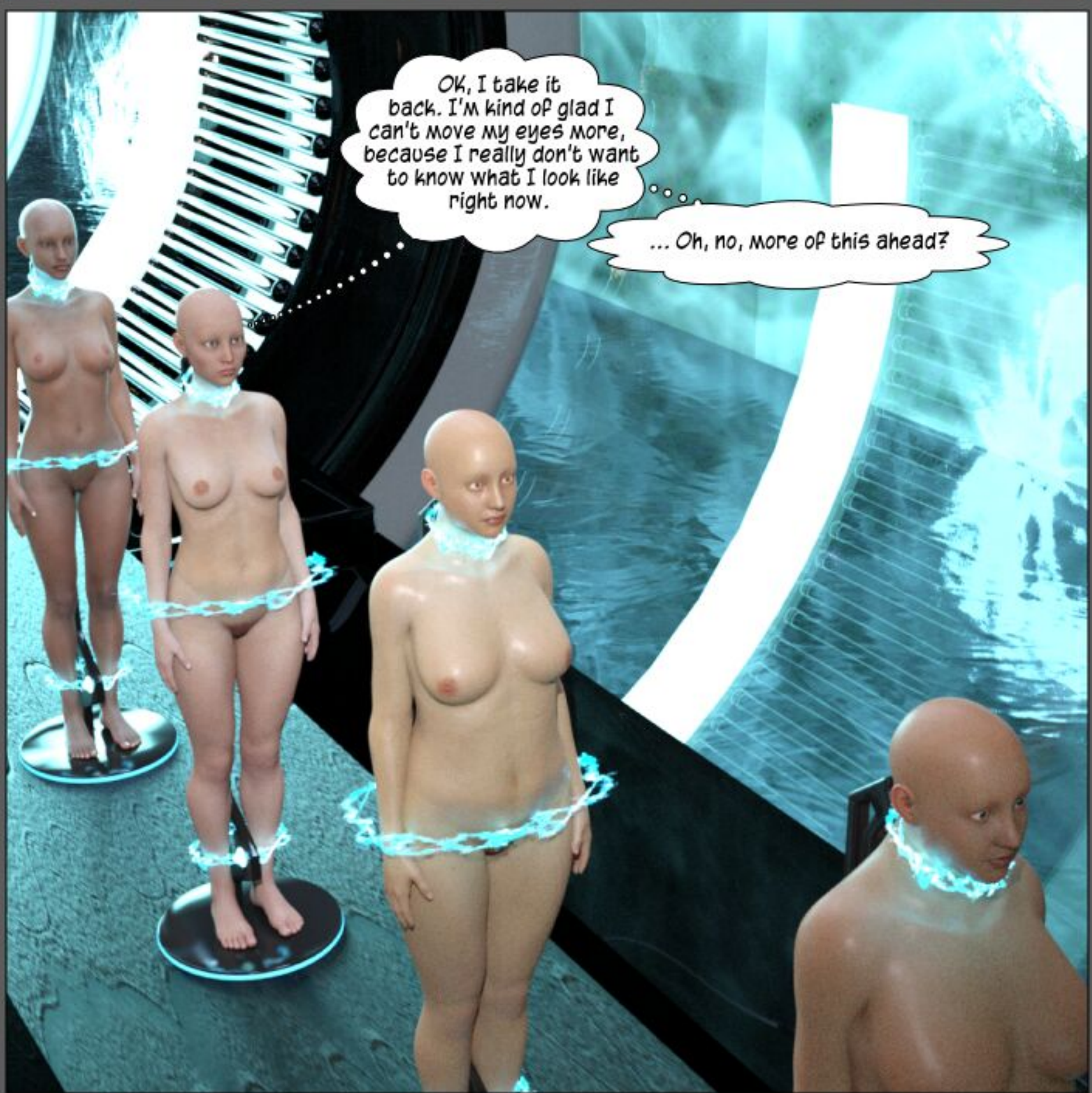
Mmphm!!

Mmphm!!



Ow!
Hey! That's a little
personal down there ... and
... what is this doing? What
did it inject me with?

I can Peel my
body changing ...
that's, uh--



OK, I take it
back. I'm kind of glad I
can't move my eyes more,
because I really don't want
to know what I look like
right now.

... Oh, no, more of this ahead?



aaaaagh!

What
are you
doing? Ripping
out my organs?
Haven't you
changed me
enough?

And what
are all these
things you're
poking into my
head?



Oh god.
Oh god oh god.

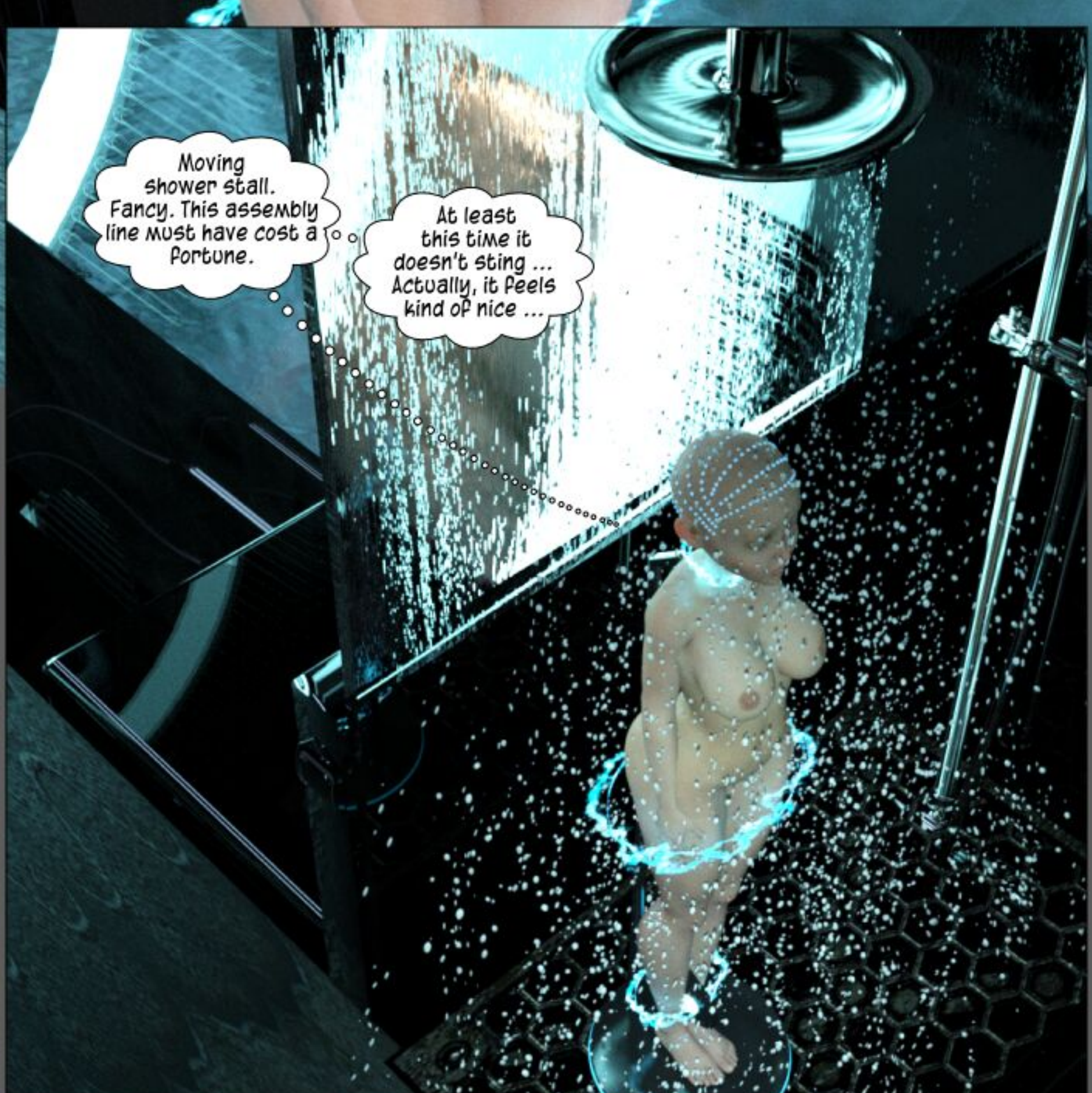
I didn't want
to believe that was
what was happening.
I'm still not sure I
believe it.

When I get
out of here, there is
going to be a lot of hell to
pay. Starting with
Verlaine. Synthetics,
my ass.



--oof--

Guess I'm
changing tracks
now. Shoved off like
a piece of ...
merchandise ...



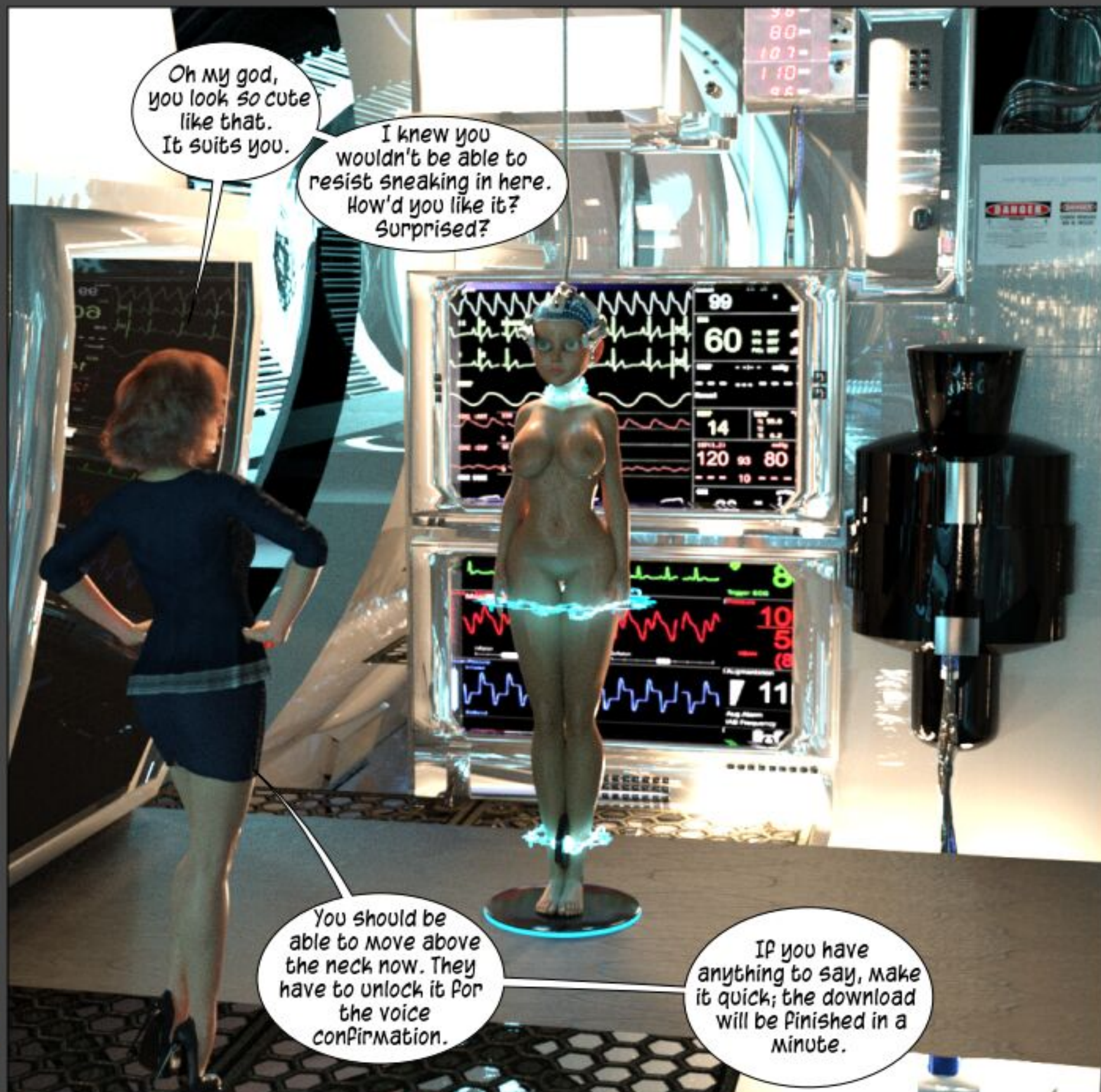
Moving
shower stall.
Fancy. This assembly
line must have cost a
fortune.

At least
this time it
doesn't sting ...
Actually, it peels
kind of nice ...



What now?

aaah!

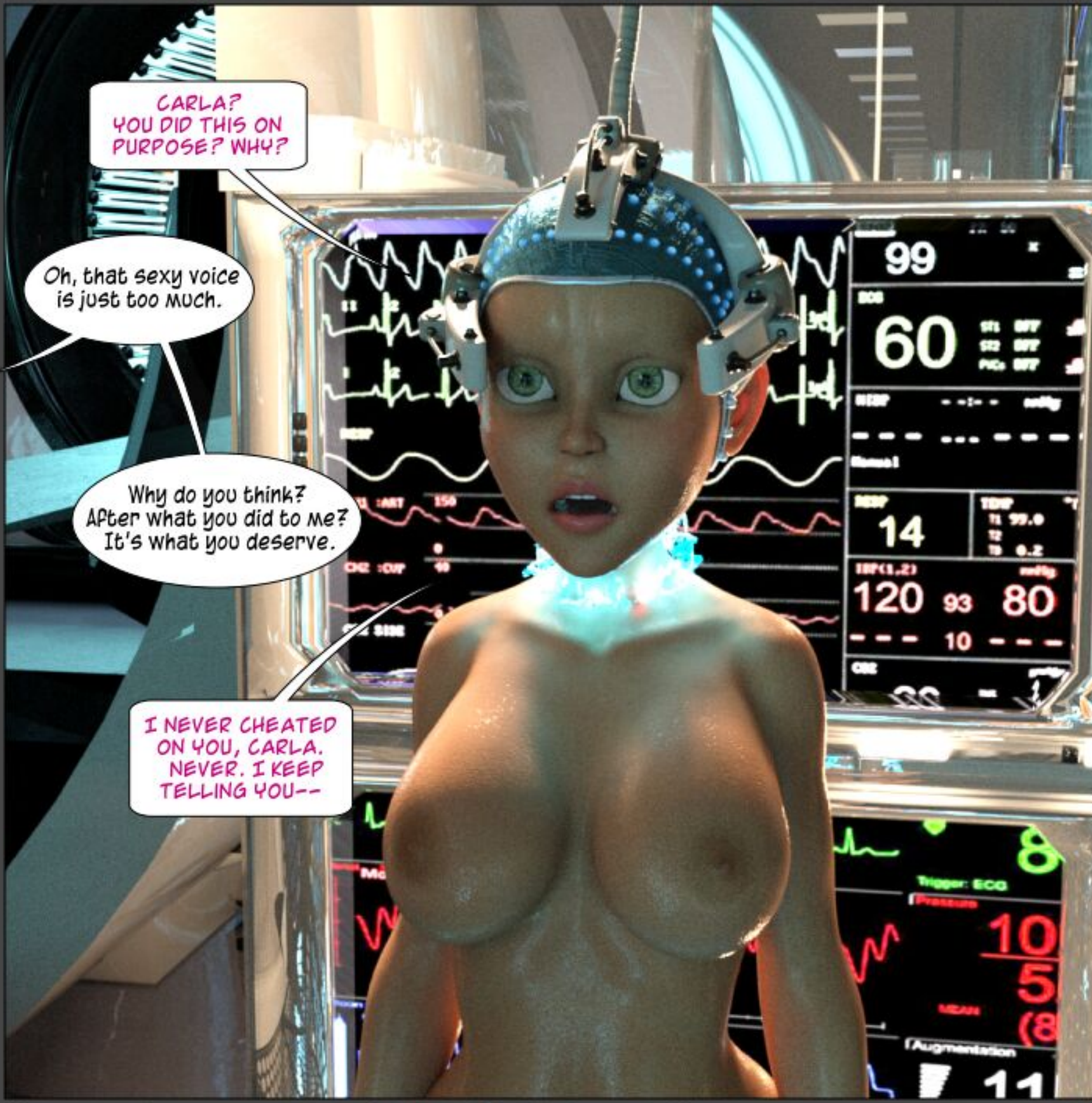


Oh my god, you look so cute like that. It suits you.

I knew you wouldn't be able to resist sneaking in here. How'd you like it? Surprised?

You should be able to move above the neck now. They have to unlock it for the voice confirmation.

If you have anything to say, make it quick; the download will be finished in a minute.

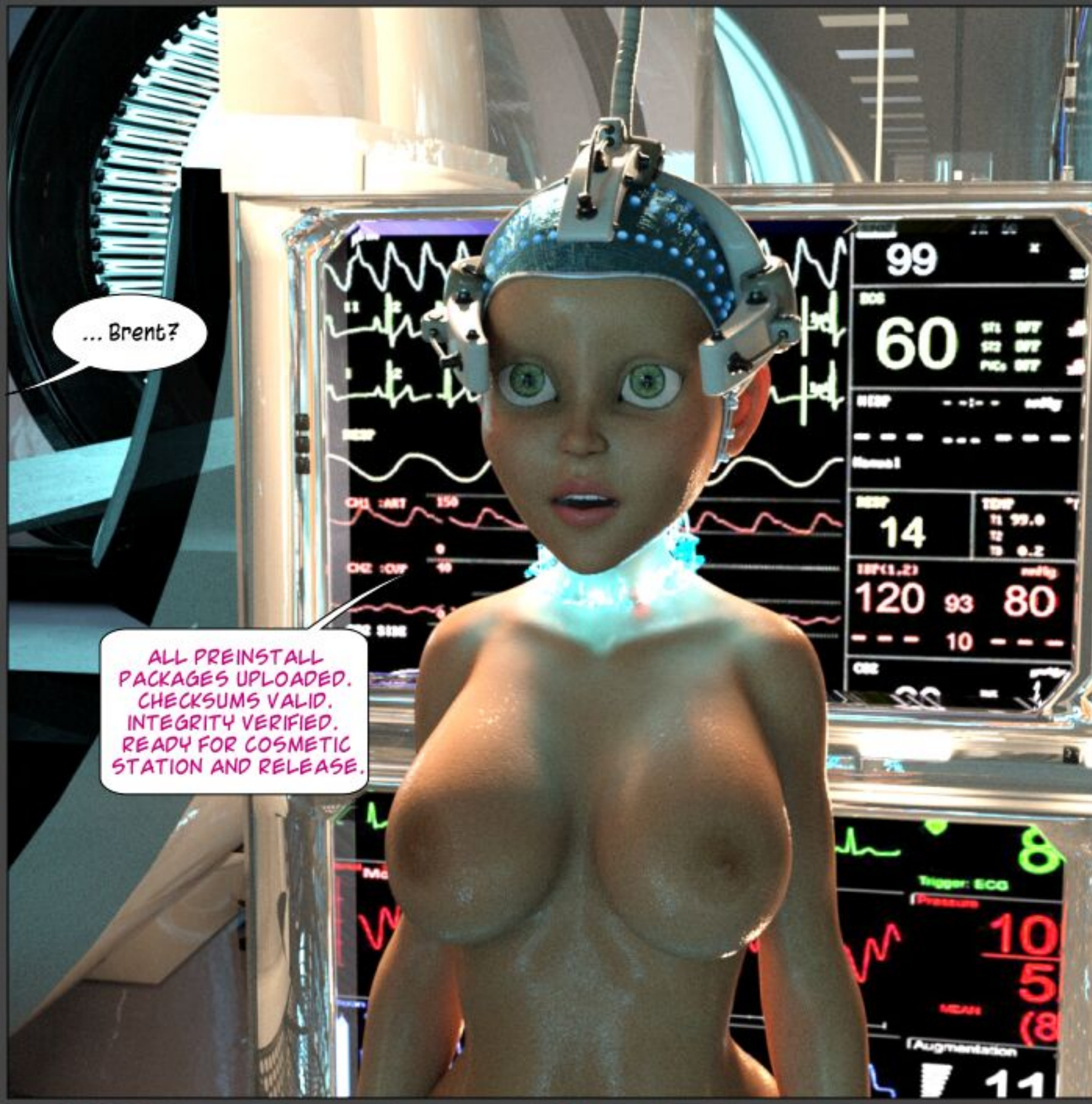


CARLA? YOU DID THIS ON PURPOSE? WHY?

Oh, that sexy voice is just too much.

Why do you think? After what you did to me? It's what you deserve.

I NEVER CHEATED ON YOU, CARLA. NEVER. I KEEP TELLING YOU--



... Brent?

ALL PREINSTALL PACKAGES UPLOADED. CHECKSUMS VALID. INTEGRITY VERIFIED. READY FOR COSMETIC STATION AND RELEASE.



... I never cheated on you either, Brent.



Hell.

Starting to feel like you've made some bad decisions?



Because you certainly have.

I wouldn't really mind your ignoring the normal recruitment criteria out of spite. We all have our moments like that.

But you revealed information we need very much to keep secret. What if he shared your little tip with others on the Force before he got here?

And what on earth made you think it was a good idea to disappear the detective investigating the disappearances? Did it occur to you even for a second to consider how that will increase scrutiny?

You've made a huge mess.

Nathalie, I--



No.

I can't trust you anymore, Carla.

I'm sorry.

SIX MONTHS LATER.



... It may take us a while to fill an order that size. We only manufacture them in batches of three or four at present. Demand is steady but slow.

You realize you're going to face a lot of bias, running that sort of business with an entirely synthetic staff.

Well, I figure for every one that doesn't want a synthetic in their bed, there's two that'll be happy because they figure it's more ethical than hiring humans to do it. People get all worked up.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. You still haven't sold me that your synthetics can even do the job right.



We're getting to that. Julie, is Mr. Spencer's demonstration ready?

YES, MA'AM. ALCOVE ONE.



Oops--they seem to have started without you.

Brenda and Carla always operate as a team, and they're very fond of each other.

Ladies! You're here to give a demonstration for Mr. Spencer, remember.

Enjoy yourself, Mr. Spencer. Take as long as you like. Just let Julie know when you're done.



Hello there-- Oh! Well, you two are certainly enthusiastic ...

Hang on, give me a second to--

Ahh! Damn ... that's ... that's definitely something.

Are you like this all the time?

- END -