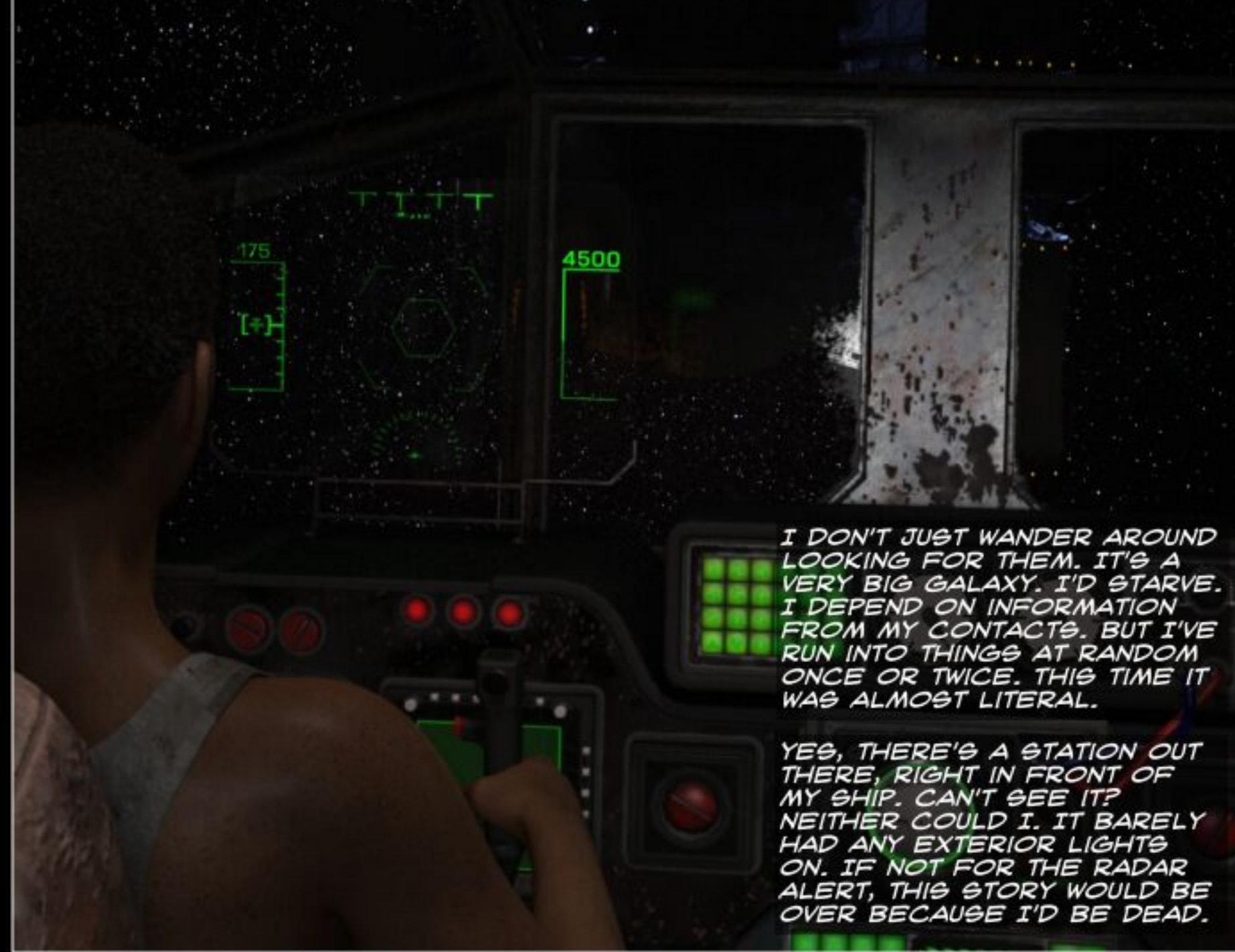


MY NAME IS RANDA AND I'M A
QUIT CLAIM

I FIND DERELICT SHIPS AND STATIONS AND MAKE SURE THEY'RE ACTUALLY DERELICT. IF THEY ARE, I GET PAID.



I DON'T JUST WANDER AROUND LOOKING FOR THEM. IT'S A VERY BIG GALAXY. I'D STARVE. I DEPEND ON INFORMATION FROM MY CONTACTS. BUT I'VE RUN INTO THINGS AT RANDOM ONCE OR TWICE. THIS TIME IT WAS ALMOST LITERAL.

YES, THERE'S A STATION OUT THERE, RIGHT IN FRONT OF MY SHIP. CAN'T SEE IT? NEITHER COULD I. IT BARELY HAD ANY EXTERIOR LIGHTS ON. IF NOT FOR THE RADAR ALERT, THIS STORY WOULD BE OVER BECAUSE I'D BE DEAD.

OF COURSE IT WASN'T REGISTERED, OR I'D HAVE KNOWN IT WAS THERE. THAT MEANT IT HAD PROBABLY BEEN USED FOR SOMETHING ILLEGAL. IF ANYONE HAD RESPONDED TO MY HAILS, I'D HAVE GONE SOMEWHERE ELSE, FAST. BUT NO ONE DID. AND NO LIGHTS--

I HAD TO USE THE FORWARD LANDING LIGHT JUST TO SEE WHAT I WAS APPROACHING.



Even if it is abandoned, I don't think I want to blow my way into that hangar.

Station's a Solaris modular; just about any Plat spot will be sturdy enough to land on.



There we go. Land by that expansion port, latch Bosie down, go EVA, and Pinesse the port as a hatch.

I'm glad the solaris people have such consistent exterior markings.



Emergency lighting. But the gravity's still on. Either someone turned out the lights when they left or the station's starting to run out of power.

No air, either. That gives me about two hours before I have to go back to Bosie and refill.



... What?

Could have sworn I just saw something move over there.



But with no oxygen ... I suppose it could have been someone in a suit ... or a robot ...



Yiiiiii!

THE VOID EATERS
WORDS AND IMAGES BY TRILBY



Damn. Managing to run after a stun shot ...



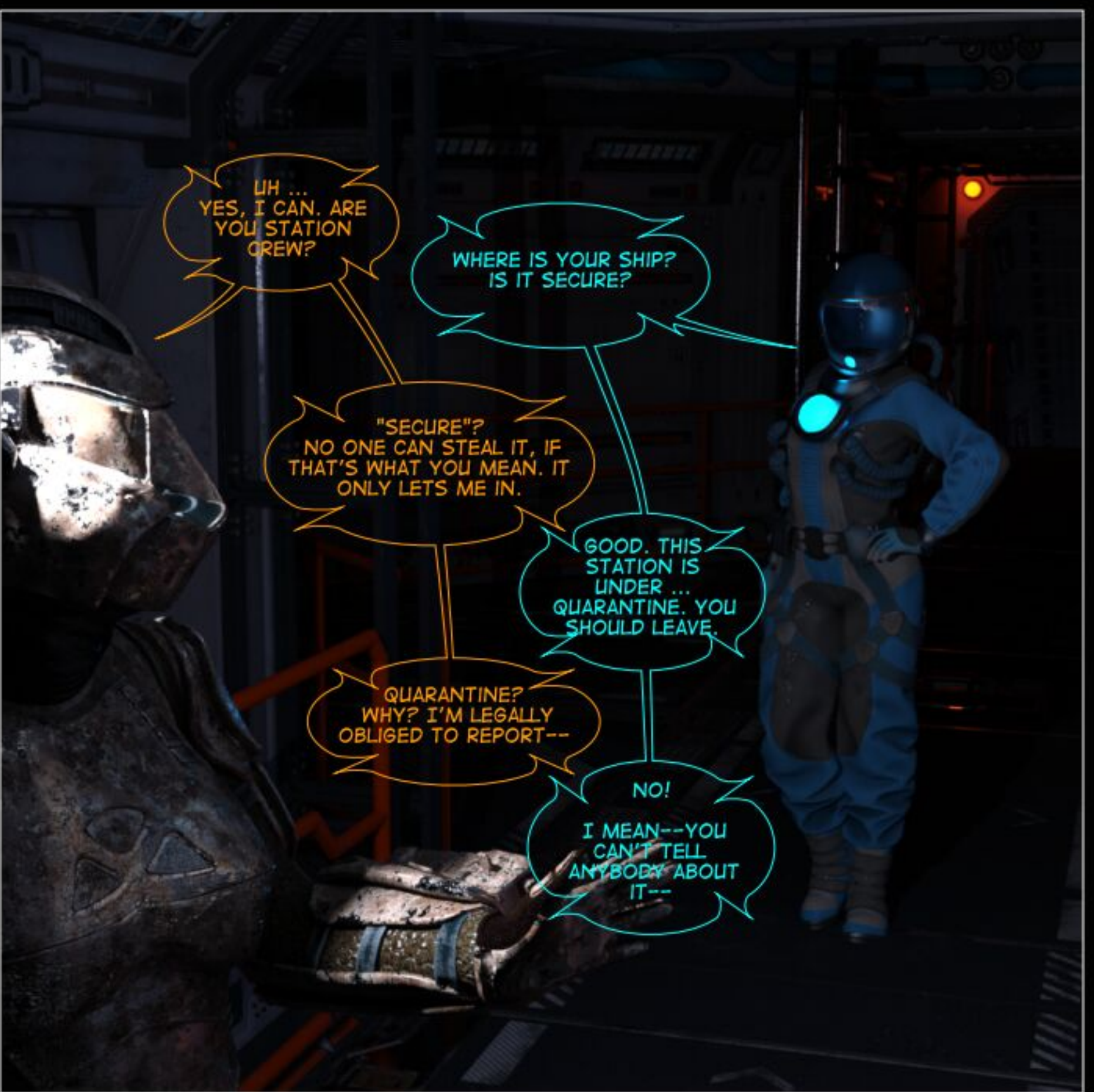
No air means no sound, Randa. Should have turned on suit radar as soon as you got inside.

Guess I didn't really think anybody would be in here.

I don't know whether following her is something I need to do, or the worst idea ever.

Might not matter. She's already off radar. She got out of here fast.

HELLO? CAN YOU HEAR ME?



UH ... YES, I CAN. ARE YOU STATION CREW?

WHERE IS YOUR SHIP? IS IT SECURE?

"SECURE"? NO ONE CAN STEAL IT, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN. IT ONLY LETS ME IN.

GOOD. THIS STATION IS UNDER QUARANTINE. YOU SHOULD LEAVE.

QUARANTINE? WHY? I'M LEGALLY OBLIGED TO REPORT--

NO!

I MEAN--YOU CAN'T TELL ANYBODY ABOUT IT--



LOOK, THERE ARE RULES I HAVE TO COMPLY WITH ... I MEAN, THE STATION'S UNREGISTERED, SO NOBODY WOULD KNOW ... BUT YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE ME MORE INFORMATION.

WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU STATION CREW?

MY NAME IS AZURE. MY FATHER, DR. PULLMAN, WAS ONE OF THE PEOPLE WHO RAN THIS STATION. OR IS.

AND WHAT'S THE NATURE OF THIS QUARANTINE? DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH THAT WOMAN I SAW?

... YES? I MEAN, I GUESS SO?

IT WOULD HAVE TO, RIGHT?



YOU'RE NOT SURE.

I CAN'T REMEMBER A LOT OF STUFF. SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ME, I THINK, BUT I CAN'T REMEMBER THAT EITHER.

I HAVE INSTRUCTIONS I KNOW ABOUT, BUT THE REST IS A MESS.

IF YOU WANT INFORMATION, I HAVE SOMETHING MAYBE YOU CAN HELP WITH.

I THINK THERE'S DATA IN THE LAB, BUT DADDY LOCKED OUT THE DOORS BEFORE ... WELL, ANYWAY, I CAN'T OPEN THEM, NEITHER CAN SHE, THOUGH.

"SHE"? WHO'S-- WAIT! --SIGH--



NO ONE ON THIS STATION KNOWS HOW TO BRUTE-FORCE A STANDARD SOLARIS DOOR?

DADDY PROBABLY DID. HE WAS GOOD AT THAT KIND OF THING.

YOU TAKE YOUR MULTITOOL AND UNFASTEN THIS PANEL HERE. BEHIND IT IS A SWITCH. YOU FLIP THAT. THEN YOU SLIDE THAT HANDLE-LOOKING THING BELOW THE PANEL TO THE LEFT, AND THE DOOR COMES OPEN A LITTLE.

THAT GIVES YOU ROOM TO GRAB THE EDGE OF THE DOOR AND --OOF-- PULL IT OPEN. THEY'RE PRETTY HEAVY. THERE.



THAT'S A LOT BETTER THAN MY IDEA. I WAS THINKING YOU COULD SHOOT IT.

NO, THAT JUST FUSES THE PARTS TOGETHER. THEN IT TAKES FOREVER TO MELT A BIG ENOUGH HOLE TO CRAWL THROUGH.



OH ... YEAH, THERE ARE SOME EXPERIMENT LOGS HERE. IS THAT WHAT YOU WERE EXPECTING?

LET ME SEE IF I CAN GET THEM ONSCREEN. THEY'RE TEXT DATA. OLD SCHOOL.

"5 MARCH. AFTER MONTHS OF PREPARATION AND LAB STUDIES, WE ARE FINALLY PERFORMING OUR FIRST TEST ON A HUMAN SUBJECT. DAVID AND I ARE BOTH VERY EXCITED, THOUGH OF COURSE HE DOESN'T SHOW IT."



All right, it's been fifteen minutes since the injections. How do you feel?

Um ... a little dizzy, but not too bad. So I get into the tank now?

Yes, but we'll have to use the crane. You'll notice it's already full, so we can't use the doors. Sorry about that. It takes an hour to fill.

It drains much faster, so we can use the doors to let you out in a half hour. Let me get your oxygen mask.



No adverse signs so far.

And there won't be any. Honestly, David, it's like you think our preliminaries don't count.

We're on the verge of creating humans who don't need oxygen to survive. We're on the verge of changing space habitation forever. Would it kill you to be a little enthusiastic?

When she doesn't reject the anaerobic symbiote, I'll personally lead a cheer. But not before then.

"21 MARCH. WE CAN NO LONGER AVOID ADMITTING IT: THE FIRST TEST IS A FAILURE. THE SYMBIOTE IS TOO AGGRESSIVE. IT'S CAUSING SEVERE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DETERIORATION IN THE SUBJECT."



AAAAA!!!

In huhts! In huhts! Make it stop! In huhts!!



She's going to have to go into a holding room. Probably in restraints. And there's nothing we can use to try to kill off the symbiote that won't kill her too. How did we fuck this up this badly?

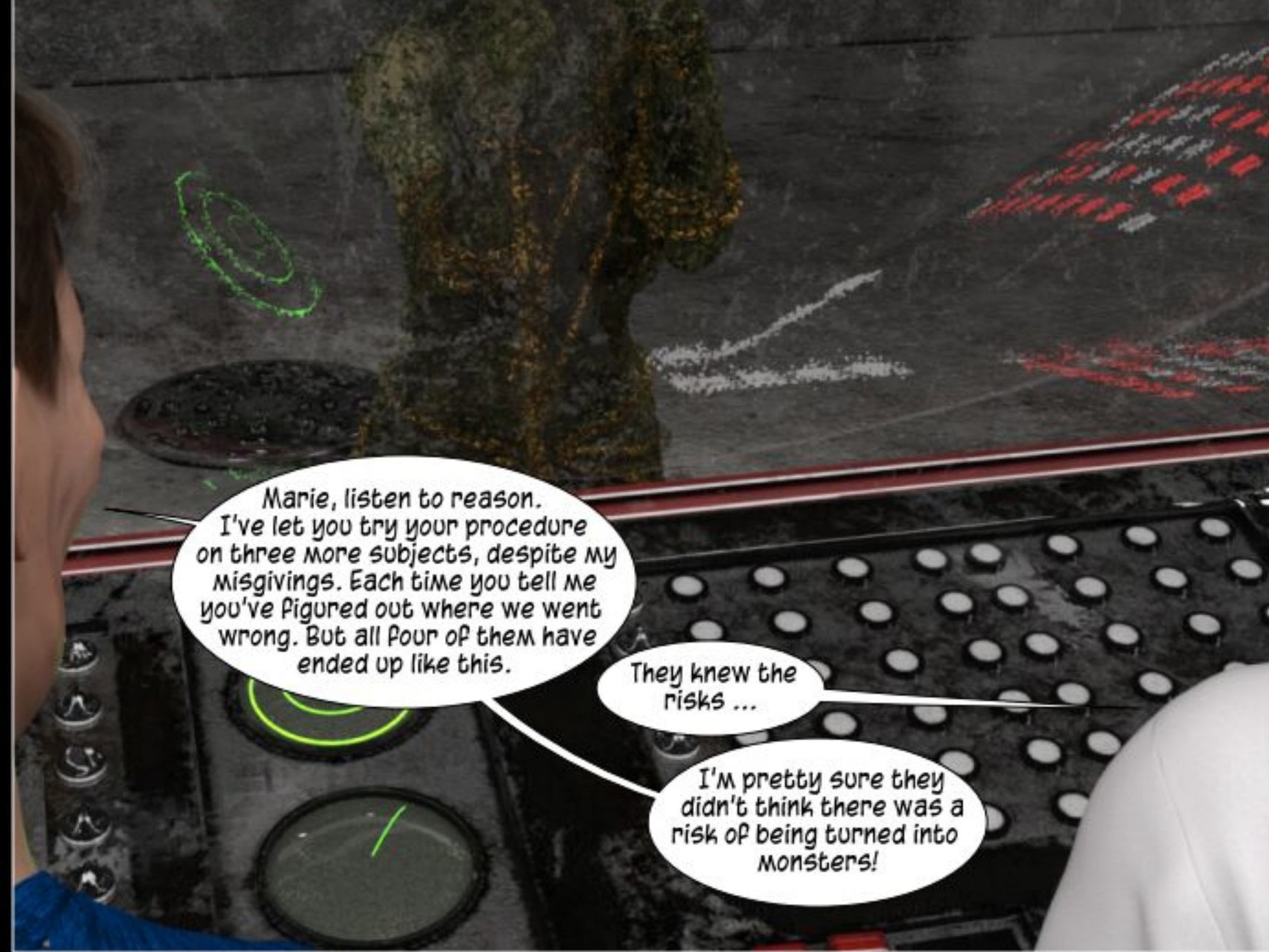
I just don't understand! The symbiote never behaved like this in any of the lab work. Never!

I guess it likes an intact person better than a couple of isolated organs.

in huhts in huhts in huhts in huhts in huhts

LET'S SEE. MORE TESTS ... LOOKS LIKE NONE WENT ANY BETTER ...

"17 MAY. TODAY DAVID INSISTED WE ABANDON THE PROJECT. I OBJECTED, OF COURSE."



Marie, listen to reason. I've let you try your procedure on three more subjects, despite my misgivings. Each time you tell me you've figured out where we went wrong. But all four of them have ended up like this.

They knew the risks ...

I'm pretty sure they didn't think there was a risk of being turned into monsters!



David, I'm sure it's just a matter of a few more adjustments to the initial infusion ... This is far too important to just drop! We've invested a lot of time and money, arranging this secret station, all the lab work ...

Marie. There comes a point when you have to admit you're doing more harm than good.

And I'll remind you that almost all of the money came out of my pocket. As far as I'm concerned, that gives me the right to pull the plug.

You want to go back to the organ tests and Petri dishes, Pine. But no more human subjects. Not unless you can make a case that something has really changed. We can't waste more lives on trial-and-error.

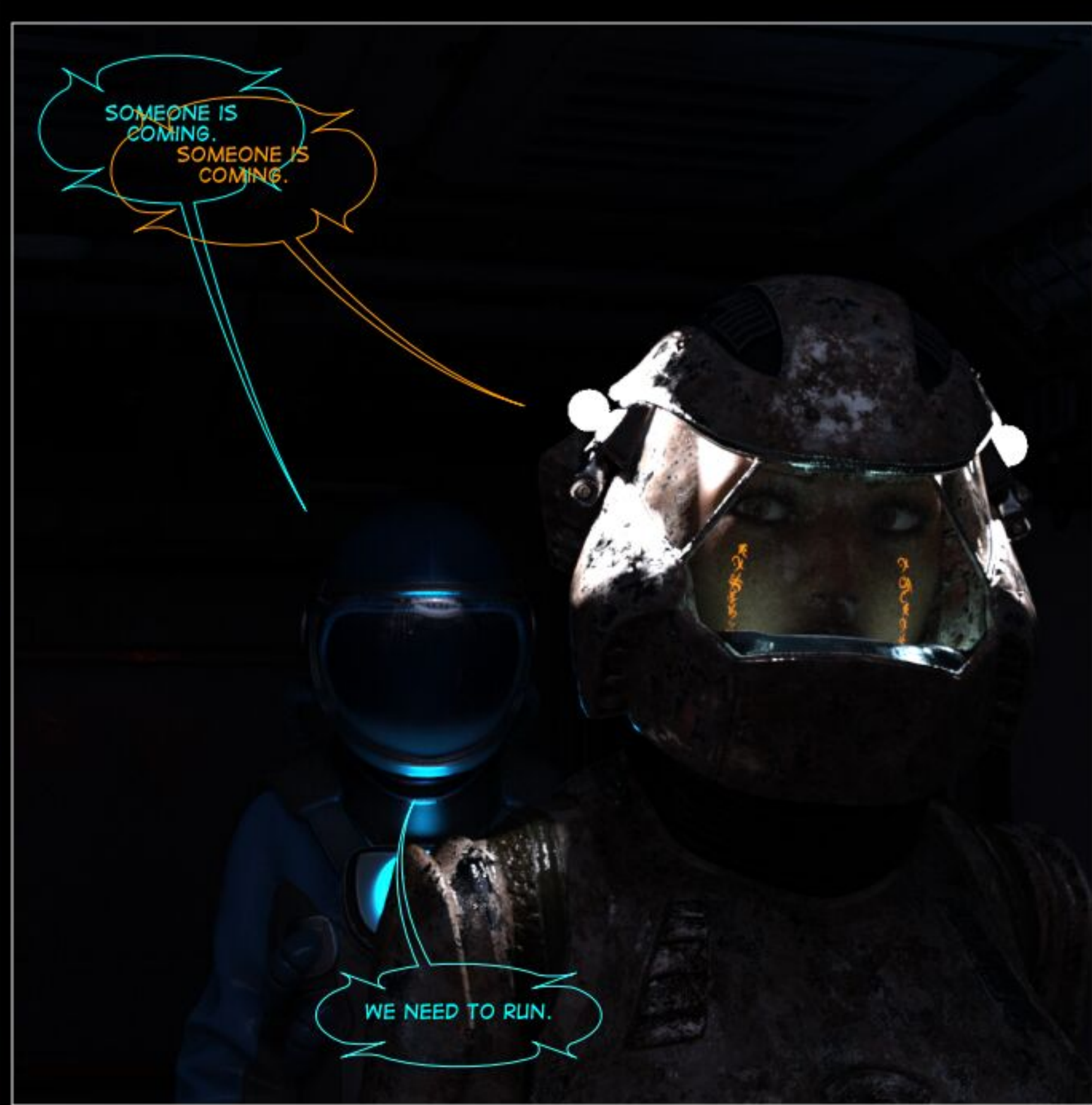


SO "DAVID" IS YOUR FATHER?

... YES, DR. PULLMAN.

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMAN KEEPING THE LOGS? "MARIE"?

DR. SPANDAU? WELL, SHE'S THE---

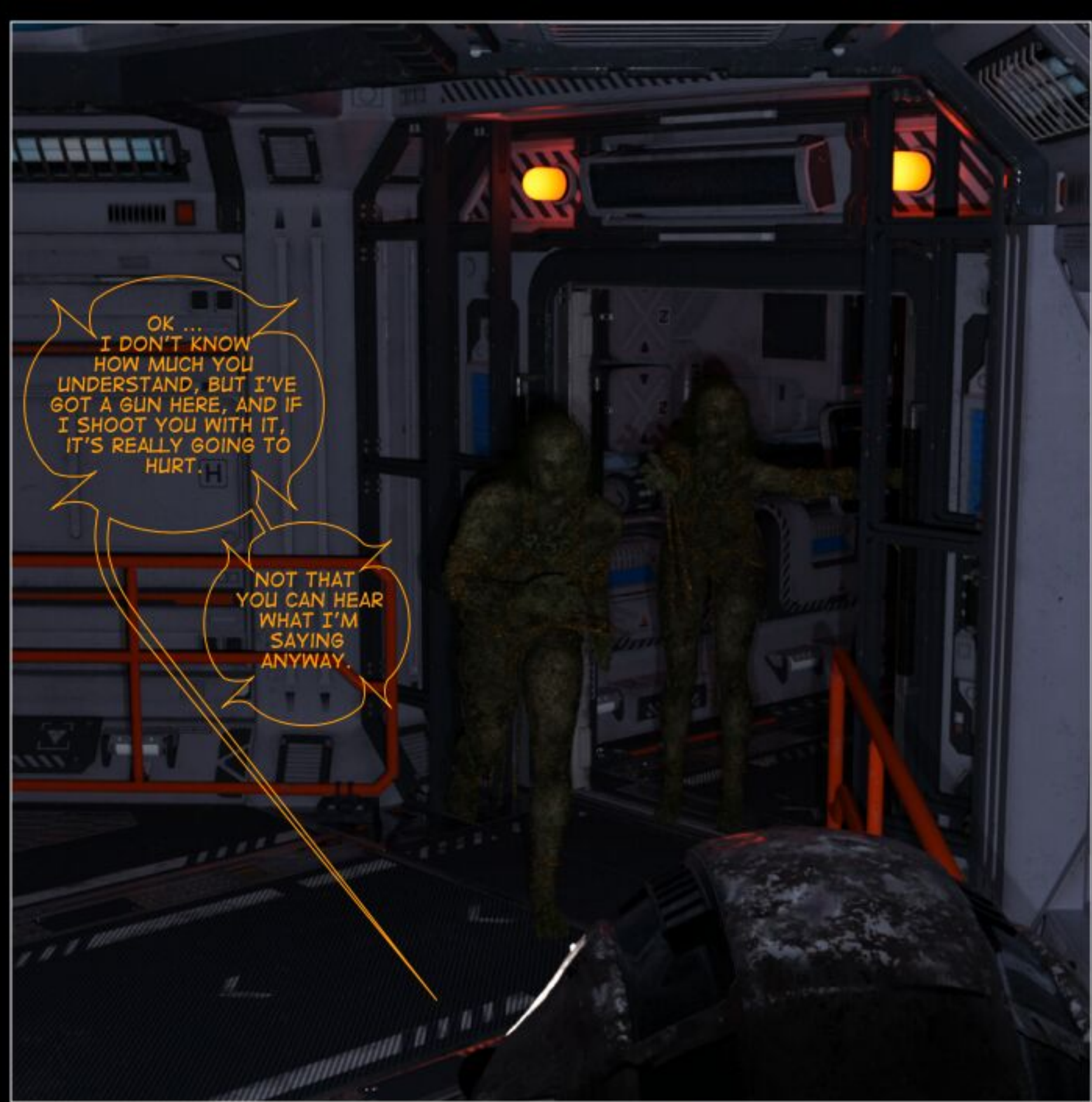


SOMEONE IS COMING. SOMEONE IS COMING.

WE NEED TO RUN.



HEY, WAIT! ... DAMN IT.



OK... I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH YOU UNDERSTAND, BUT I'VE GOT A GUN HERE, AND IF I SHOOT YOU WITH IT, IT'S REALLY GOING TO HURT.

NOT THAT YOU CAN HEAR WHAT I'M SAYING ANYWAY.



BUT I CAN, THOUGH I'VE HAD TO RIG THIS HEADSET FOR THROAT PICKUP, SO I MIGHT SOUND A LITTLE DISTORTED.

GOOD THING I DECIDED TO BELIEVE SYL REALLY WAS TRYING TO TELL ME WHAT IT SEEMED SHE WAS.

WE NEED EMERGENCY EVACUATION. THERE ARE TEN OF US. CAN YOUR SHIP HANDLE THAT?

UH... NO, IT CAN'T. I GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO GO GET YOU SOME HELP.



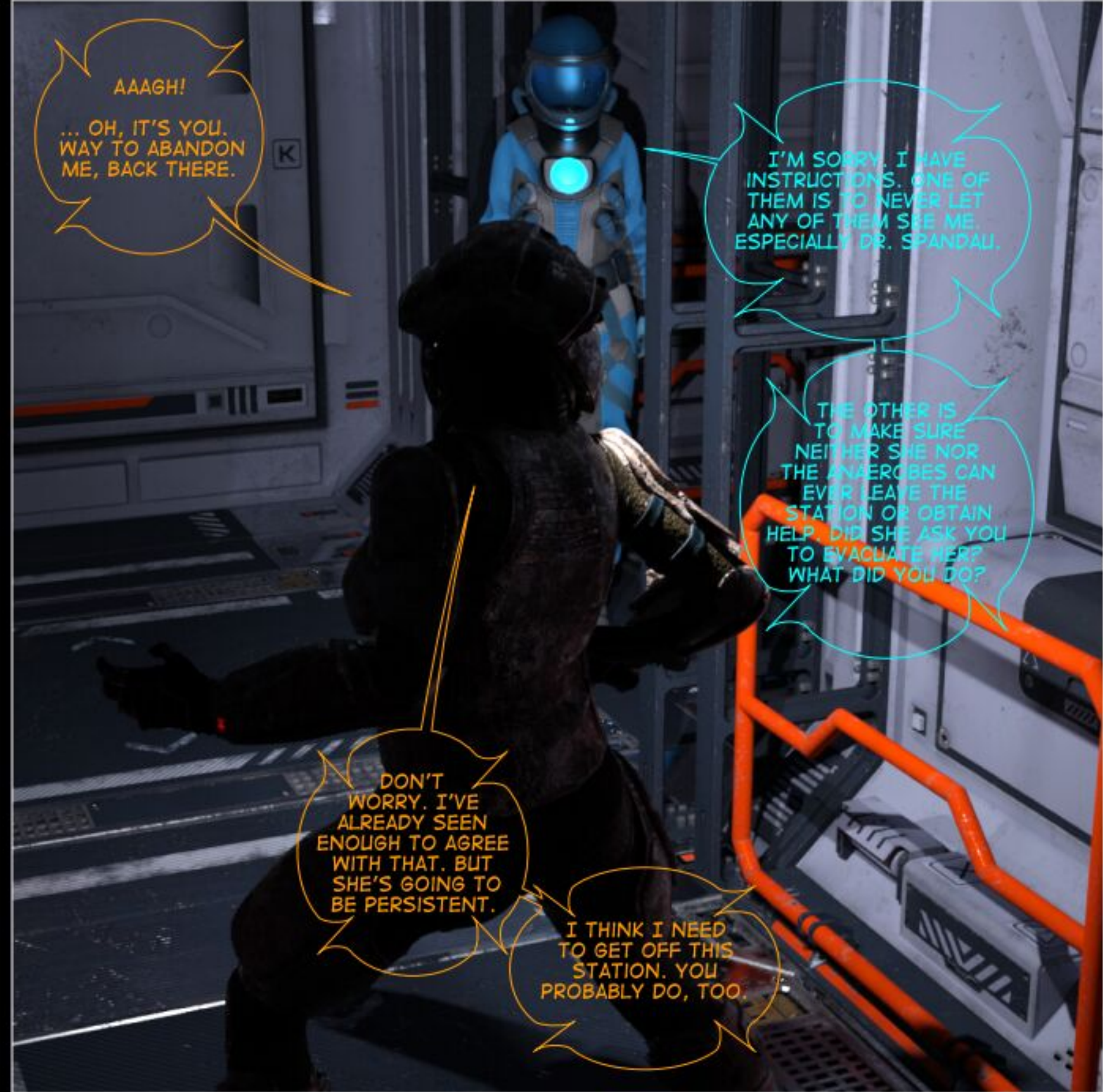
OR... I CAN JUST LET DON AND SYL TEAR YOU INTO LITTLE PIECES, AND TAKE YOUR SHIP MYSELF!



I should just abandon this... get back to Bosie and get the hell out. I mean, the station's obviously not derelict.

Just need to find a way to make sure none of them follow me to the port, or that could go really badly.

Not being lost would also help.



AAAGH!
... OH, IT'S YOU. WAY TO ABANDON ME, BACK THERE.

I'M SORRY. I HAVE INSTRUCTIONS. ONE OF THEM IS TO NEVER LET ANY OF THEM SEE ME, ESPECIALLY DR. SPANPAU.

THE OTHER IS TO MAKE SURE NEITHER SHE NOR THE AMERGES CAN EVER LEAVE THE STATION OR OBTAIN HELP. DID SHE ASK YOU TO EVACUATE HER? WHAT DID YOU DO?

DON'T WORRY. I'VE ALREADY SEEN ENOUGH TO AGREE WITH THAT. BUT SHE'S GOING TO BE PERSISTENT.

I THINK I NEED TO GET OFF THIS STATION. YOU PROBABLY DO, TOO.



DID YOUR FATHER GIVE YOU THOSE INSTRUCTIONS? YOU SOUNDED A LITTLE UNCLEAR ON WHETHER HE WAS IN PAST TENSE.

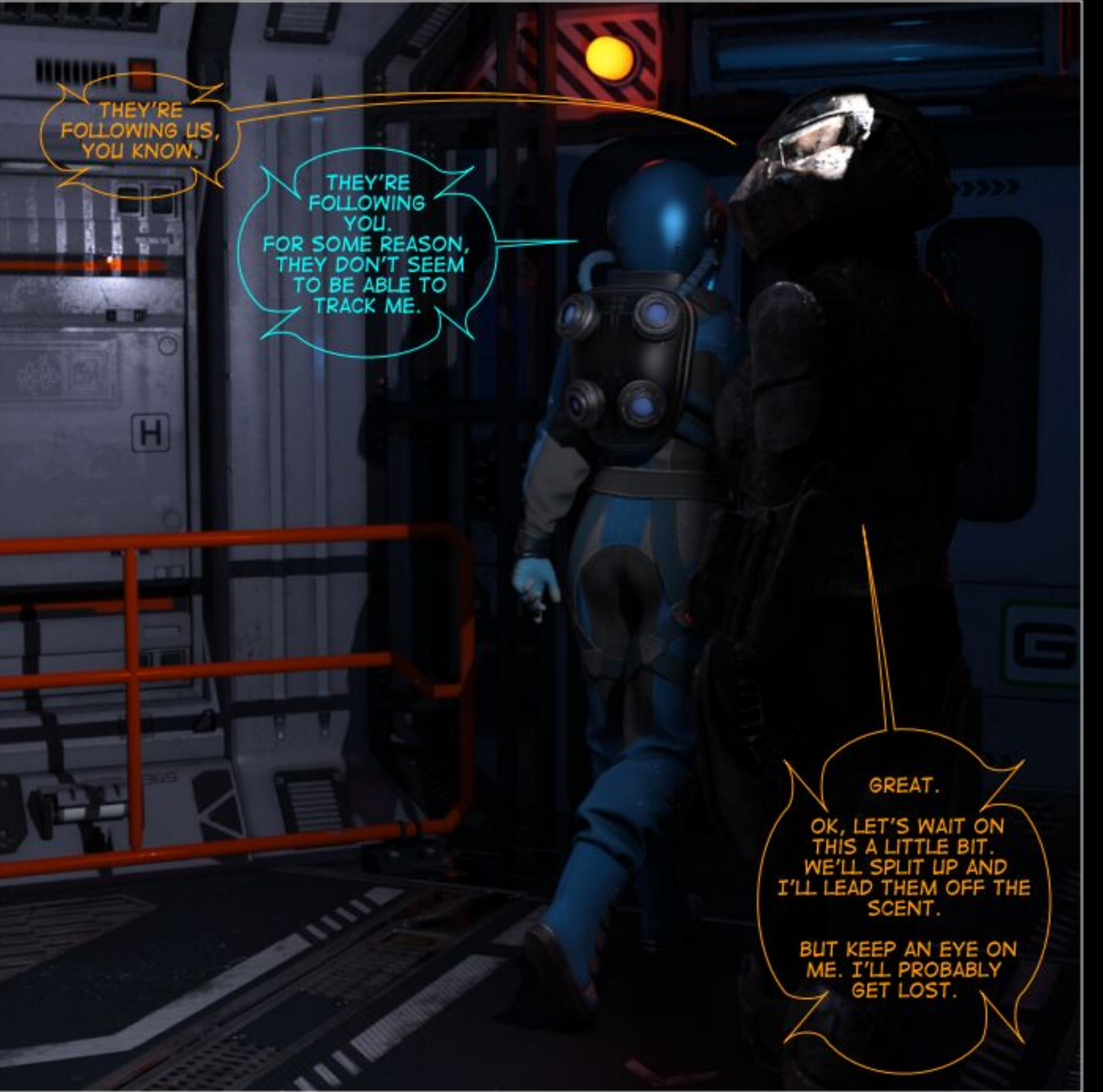
I...
... IT WOULD BE FOOLISH OF ME TO BELIEVE HE'S STILL ALIVE, THOUGH I WANT TO.

BUT YOU DON'T ACTUALLY KNOW?

HE LOCKED OUT THREE SETS OF DOORS: THE HANGAR, THE LABS, AND HIS QUARTERS--WITH HIM INSIDE. THAT WAS AFTER HE DESTROYED ALL OUR COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT.

BUT HIS QUARTERS HAVE WHAT YOU CALLED STANDARD SOLARIS DOORS ...

RIGHT. LET'S GO.



THEY'RE FOLLOWING US, YOU KNOW!

THEY'RE FOLLOWING YOU. FOR SOME REASON, THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO TRACK ME.

GREAT.
OK, LET'S WAIT ON THIS A LITTLE BIT. WE'LL SPLIT UP AND I'LL LEAD THEM OFF THE SCENT.
BUT KEEP AN EYE ON ME. I'LL PROBABLY GET LOST.



These must be the holding rooms from the lab logs. ... They're all empty now ... guess that makes sense, if the patients have the run of the place.



Maintenance hatch? Sure, I'll crawl in a conduit for a while if it makes me harder to follow.



Whoa! Someone has built a secret lab back here in the ductwork.

No points for guessing who, I don't think.



Very fancy computer. Let's see if I can get anything enlightening from it.

"11 JUNE. DAVID HAS A POINT; THE ONLY SUBJECT I CAN ETHICALLY EXPERIMENT ON NOW IS MYSELF. IF I USE SOME OF THE CHEMOTHERAPY TOXINS TO SELECTIVELY CURB THE SPREAD OF THE SYMBIOTE, THAT MIGHT SOLVE THE PROBLEM."



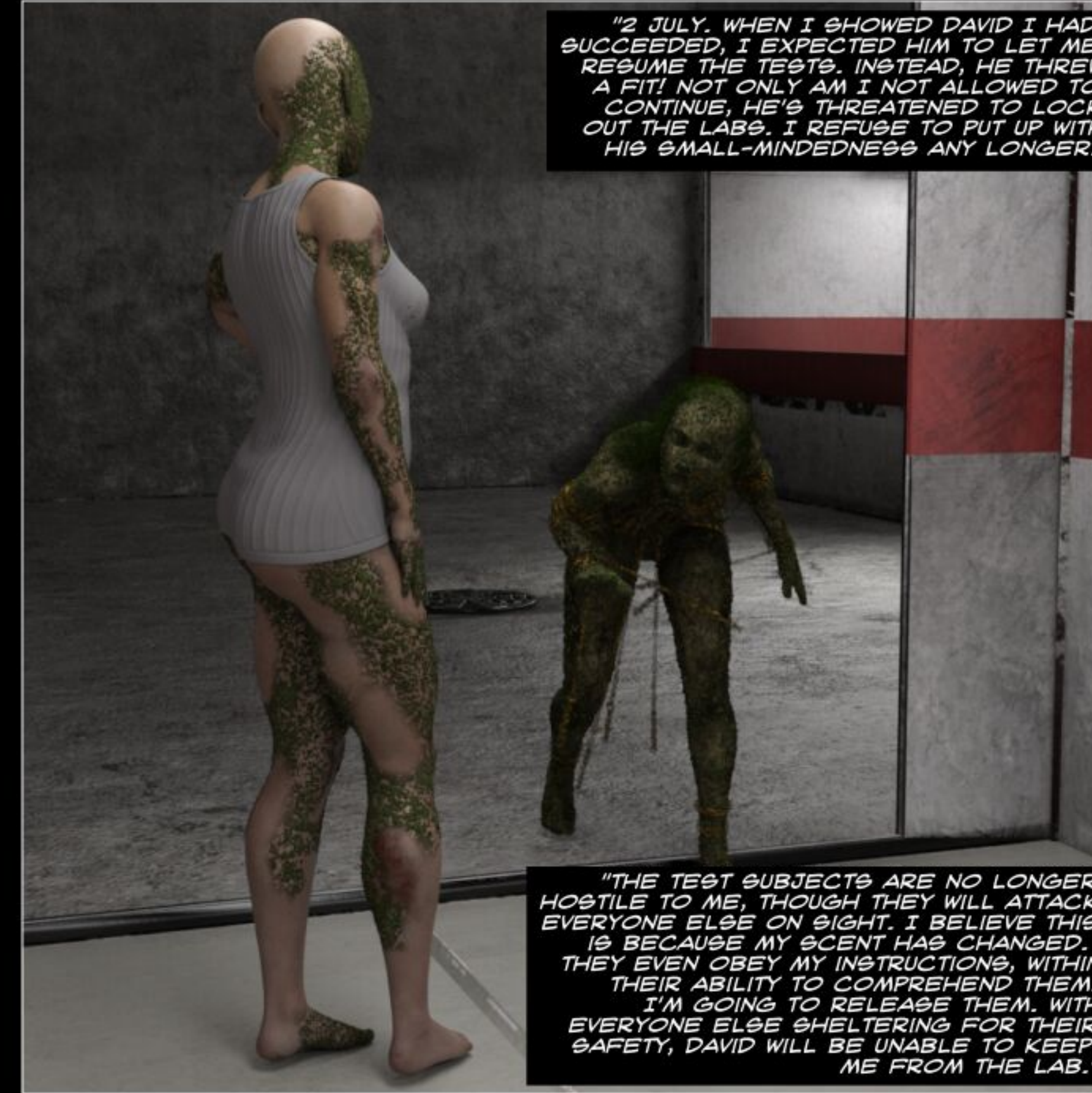
"THIS IS GOING TO BE EXTREMELY UNPLEASANT. HOWEVER, I'M COMMITTED; I GAVE MYSELF THE SYMBIOTE TREATMENT THIS MORNING. NOW I HAVE LIMITED TIME TO ACT."

"13 JUNE. THE PAIN IS CONSTANT. I CAN'T KEEP ANY FOOD IN MY STOMACH AND THERE'S BLOOD IN MY VOMIT. I AM BARELY MANAGING TO TYPE THIS. EVEN STANDING UPRIGHT FOR MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES IS HARD. I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH MORE OF THIS I CAN ENDURE."



uuurgh ...
-- retch --

"STILL, I REMAIN LUCID, AND HAVE NOT SEEN THE SORT OF UNCONTROLLED SYMBIOTE GROWTH AS IN THE OTHER EXPERIMENTS. I MUST CONTINUE WITH THE PROGRAM AND TRUST I AM NOT COMMITTING SLOW SUICIDE."



"2 JULY. WHEN I SHOWED DAVID I HAD SUCCEEDED, I EXPECTED HIM TO LET ME RESUME THE TESTS. INSTEAD, HE THREW A FIT! NOT ONLY AM I NOT ALLOWED TO CONTINUE, HE'S THREATENED TO LOCK OUT THE LABS. I REFUSE TO PUT UP WITH HIS SMALL-MINDEDNESS ANY LONGER."

"THE TEST SUBJECTS ARE NO LONGER HOSTILE TO ME, THOUGH THEY WILL ATTACK EVERYONE ELSE ON SIGHT. I BELIEVE THIS IS BECAUSE MY SCENT HAS CHANGED. THEY EVEN OBEY MY INSTRUCTIONS, WITHIN THEIR ABILITY TO COMPREHEND THEM. I'M GOING TO RELEASE THEM. WITH EVERYONE ELSE SHELTERING FOR THEIR SAFETY, DAVID WILL BE UNABLE TO KEEP ME FROM THE LAB."



"20 AUGUST. I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING WRONG! I'VE APPLIED THE REVISED TECHNIQUE, WITH THE CHEMOTHERAPY, YET NONE OF THE NEW SUBJECTS ARE HAVING THE SAME SUCCESS I DID. IF THERE'S SOMETHING PECULIAR ABOUT MY CASE, I CAN'T IDENTIFY WHAT."

"WORSE, AT THIS POINT I'VE RUN OUT OF SUBJECTS. ALL SIX OF OUR TEST VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN USED, AND THE THREE STATION CREW, WHOM I CONVINCED TO VOLUNTEER. THE ONLY UNALTERED HUMANS LEFT ON THE STATION ARE DAVID AND HIS STUPID DAUGHTER, AND THEY'VE BOTH LOCKED THEMSELVES IN THEIR ROOMS."



"5 SEPTEMBER."

"DAVID HAS BEEN SNEAKING AROUND THE STATION, SABOTAGING IT! HE'S DONE SOMETHING TO THE DOORS IN THE LAB; THEY WON'T OPEN. HE'S LOCKED ME OUT OF THE HANGAR! I CAN'T GET TO THE SHIP!"

"I WAS DESPERATE ENOUGH TO CONSIDER BREAKING RADIO SILENCE AND FACING THE CONSEQUENCES FOR BEING AN UNREGISTERED STATION ... BUT HE'S ALSO DONE SOMETHING TO THE COMMS EQUIPMENT. I CAN'T LEAVE AND I CAN'T SIGNAL ANYONE!"

"I'M GOING TO MAKE THAT BASTARD SUFFER FOR THIS."

Well, well. Seems to me like Pullman wasn't overreacting. I wonder if Azure knows about any of this.

I've waited out long enough. I should go find her while I've still got plenty of air ...

Oh. Oops.



READING PRIVATE INFORMATION? STILL, IT SAVES ME A LOT OF EXPLAINING.

I THINK WE STARTED ON THE WRONG FOOT. I LOST MY TEMPER. I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED FORCE WOULDN'T WORK.

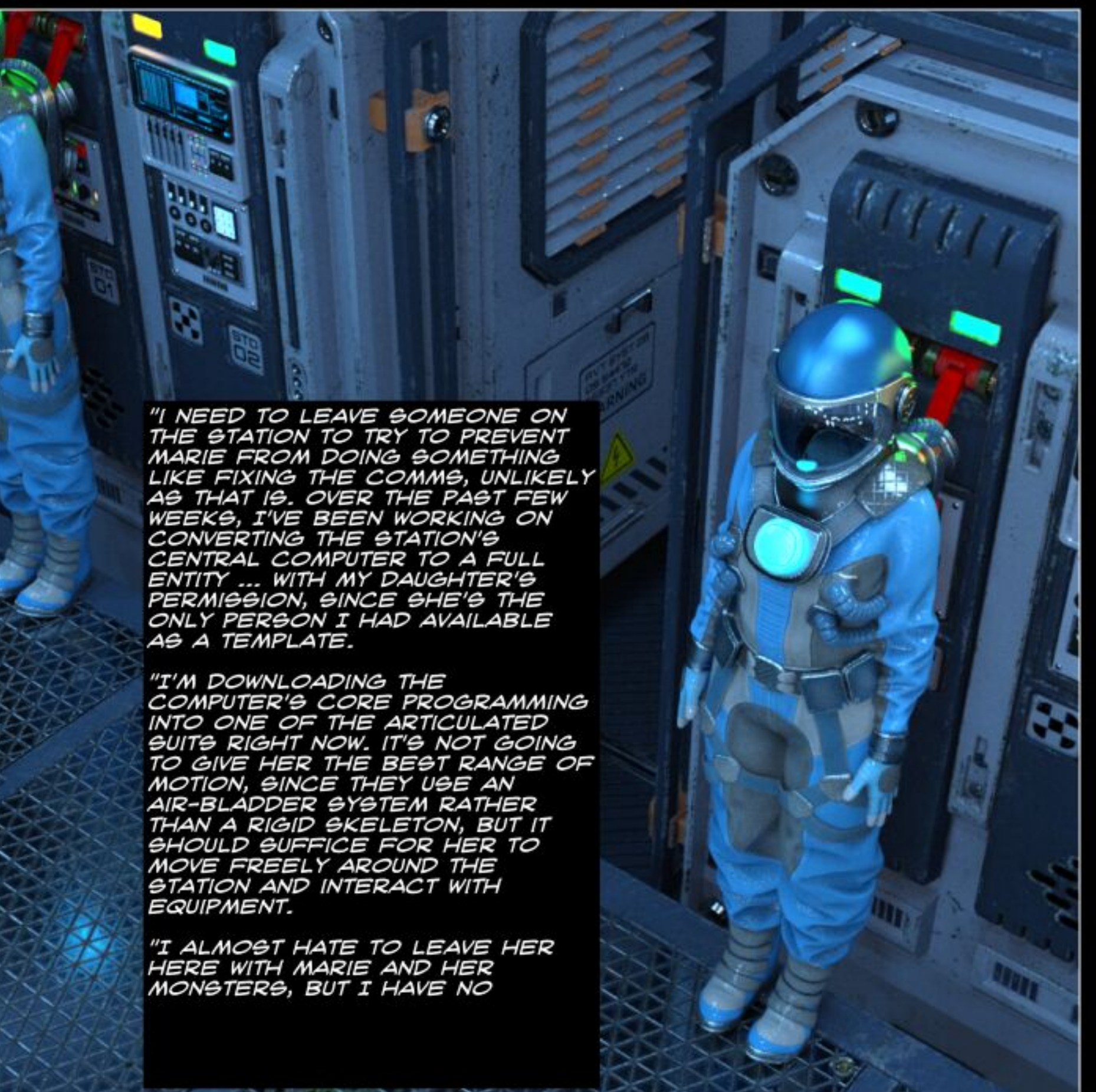
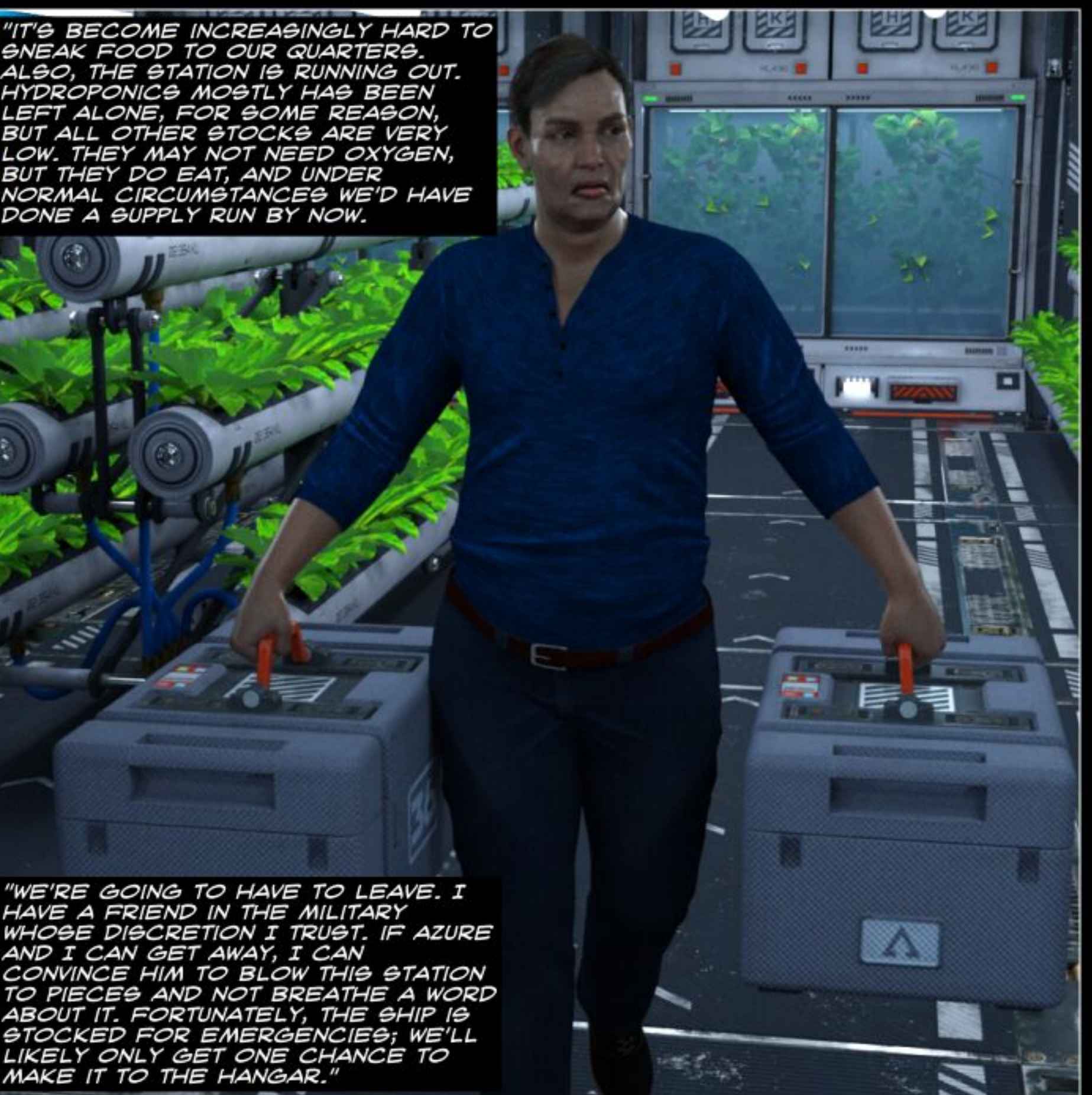
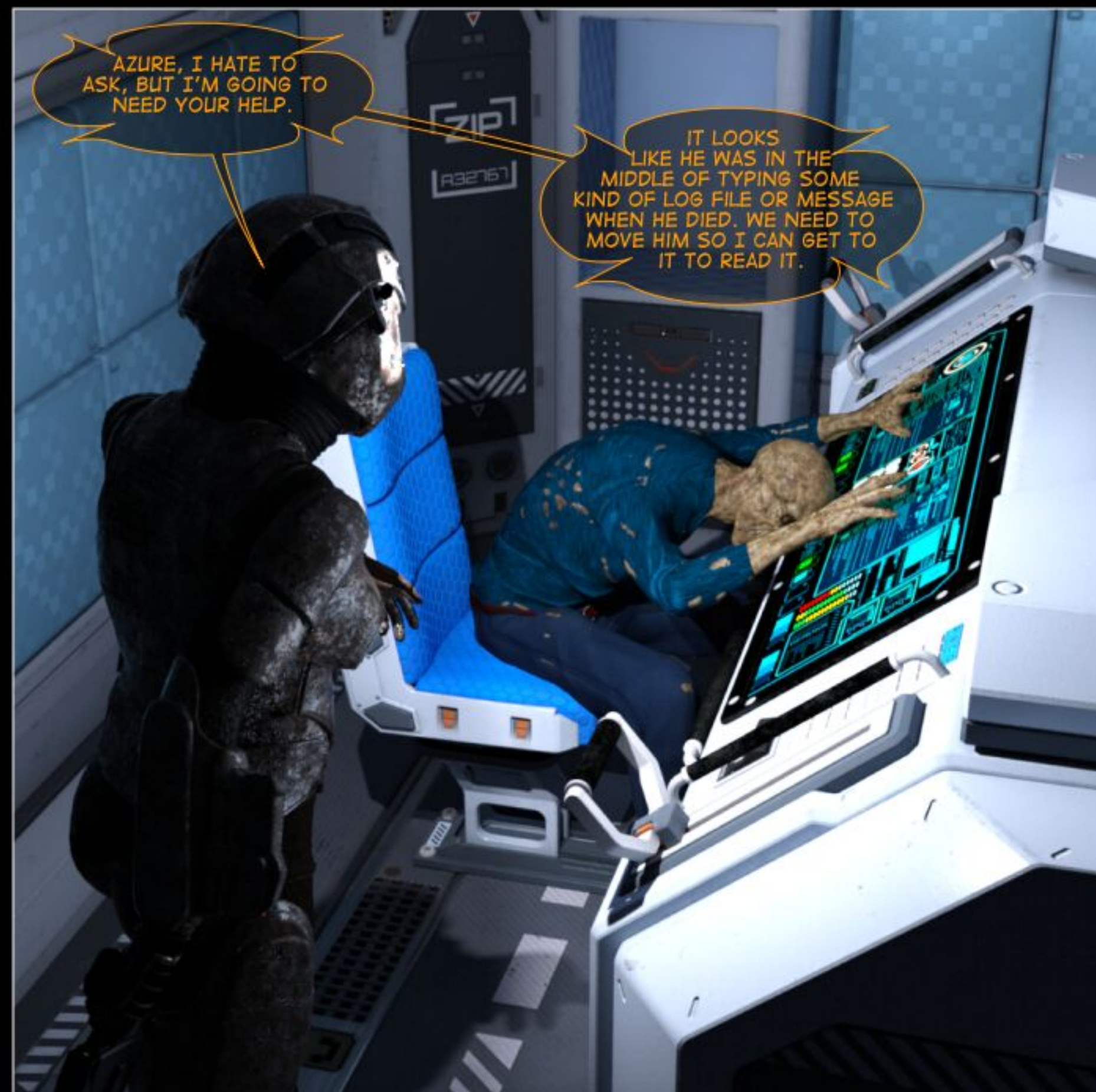
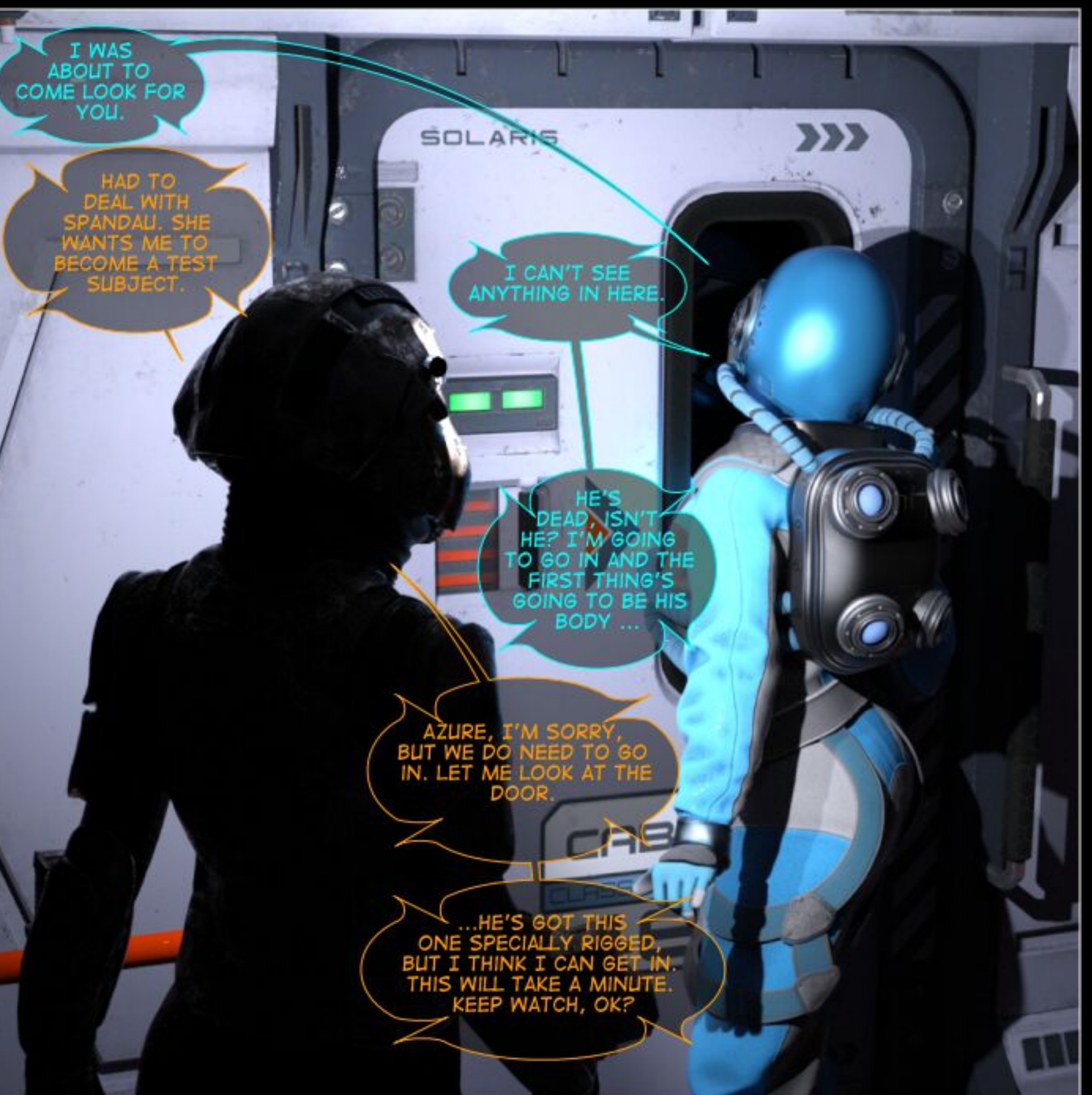
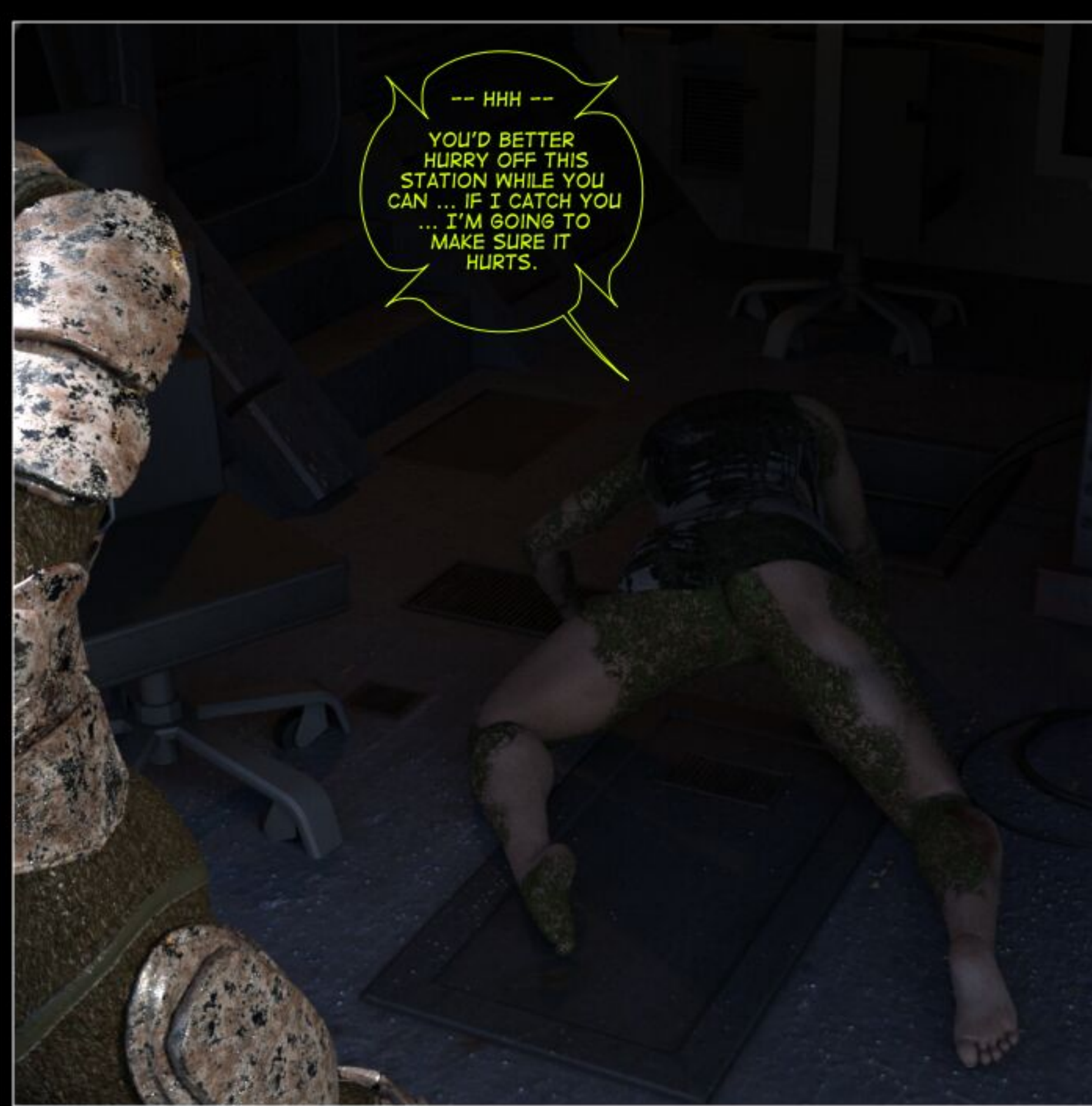
WHAT ABOUT OPPORTUNITY? DOES THAT APPEAL? YOU REALIZE WE'RE THE FUTURE, DON'T YOU? HUMANS WITHOUT OXYGEN. HUMANS WHO LOVE THE VOID.

YOU COULD BE ONE OF US. I'VE REALIZED WHAT WAS GOING WRONG. I JUST NEED ONE MORE SUBJECT.

NOT INTERESTED.

YOU'RE JUST LIKE DAVID! YOU WON'T ACCEPT REALITY.

WHAT IF I DON'T GIVE YOU A CHOICE?

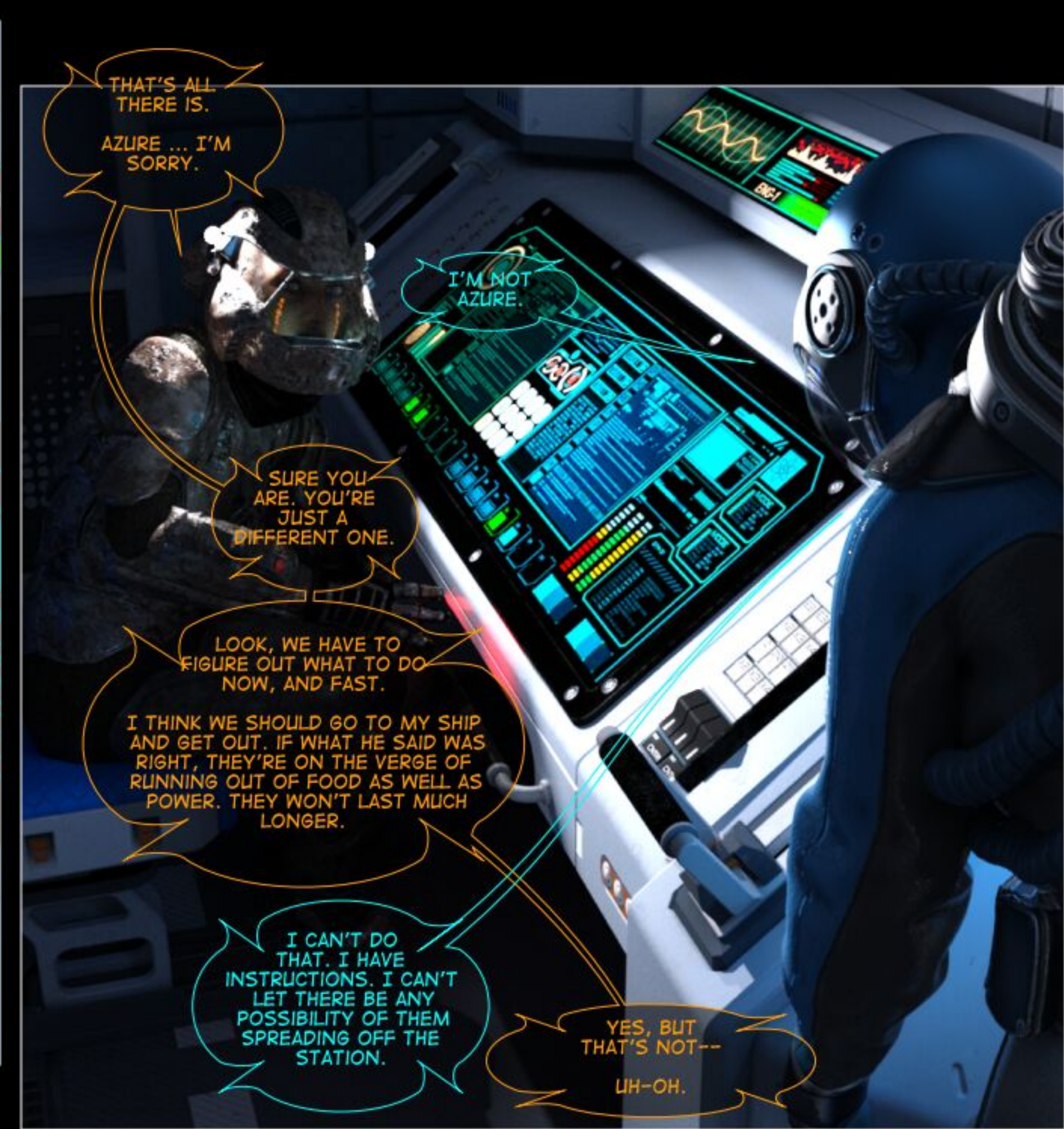




Oh, god.

Azure! Put on an emergency mask! Quick!

SHE'S VENTING THE ATMOSPHERE
SHE'S VENTING THE WHOLE STATION!"



THAT'S ALL THERE IS.
AZURE ... I'M SORRY.

I'M NOT AZURE.

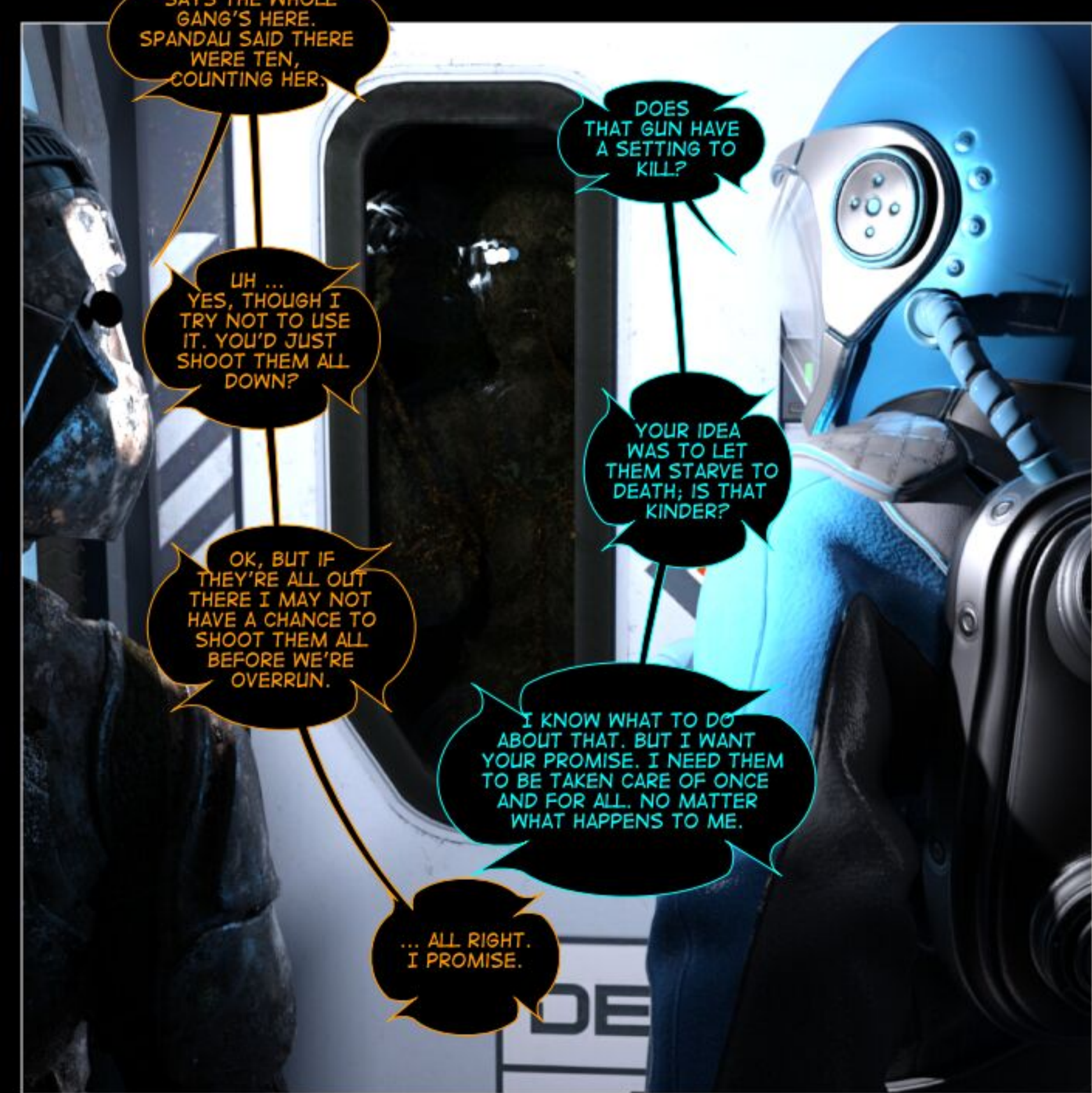
SURE YOU ARE. YOU'RE JUST A DIFFERENT ONE.

LOOK, WE HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO NOW, AND FAST.

I THINK WE SHOULD GO TO MY SHIP AND GET OUT. IF WHAT HE SAID WAS RIGHT, THEY'RE ON THE VERGE OF RUNNING OUT OF FOOD AS WELL AS POWER. THEY WON'T LAST MUCH LONGER.

I CAN'T DO THAT. I HAVE INSTRUCTIONS. I CAN'T LET THERE BE ANY POSSIBILITY OF THEM SPREADING OFF THE STATION.

YES, BUT THAT'S NOT--
UH-OH.



RADAR SAYS THE WHOLE GANG'S HERE. SPANDAU SAID THERE WERE TEN, COUNTING HER.

DOES THAT GUN HAVE A SETTING TO KILL?

UH ... YES, THOUGH I TRY NOT TO USE IT. YOU'D JUST SHOOT THEM ALL DOWN?

YOUR IDEA WAS TO LET THEM STARVE TO DEATH; IS THAT KINDER?

OK, BUT IF THEY'RE ALL OUT THERE I MAY NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO SHOOT THEM ALL BEFORE WE'RE OVERRUN.

I KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT THAT. BUT I WANT YOUR PROMISE. I NEED THEM TO BE TAKEN CARE OF ONCE AND FOR ALL. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO ME.

... ALL RIGHT. I PROMISE.



DR. SPANDAU!
WHY DID YOU KILL MY FATHER?



... AZURE?

YOU'RE ALIVE? YOU HAD A SUIT IN THERE?

YOU'RE NOT AS STUPID AS I THOUGHT.

I KILLED YOUR FATHER BECAUSE HE WAS BLOCKING MY WAY. BECAUSE HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT I AM THE FUTURE.

I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND EITHER.



SO I'M JUST GOING TO HAVE TO RIP THAT SUIT OFF YOU!



I'M GOING TO ENJOY WATCHING YOU CHOKE AND DIE--

-- WHAT?



NO, NO! THIS IS A TRICK! THE OTHER ONE--WHERE'S THE OTHER--

NO!!!



YOU KILLED THEM!
YOU KILLED THEM ALL!
THOSE WERE MY CHILDREN!

I WONDER HOW
THEY'D FEEL ABOUT YOU
CALLING THEM THAT ... IF
YOU'D LEFT THEM ENOUGH
OF THEIR BRAINS TO
UNDERSTAND IT.

SCIENCE
REQUIRES
SACRIFICE! YOU
DON'T UNDERSTAND
EITHER! THIS IS--

--THE FUTURE,
YES, I GOT THAT, BUT
THE FUTURE NEEDED TO
QUIT WHILE IT WAS BEHIND.
DR. PULLMAN WAS RIGHT,
AND YOU KNOW IT.

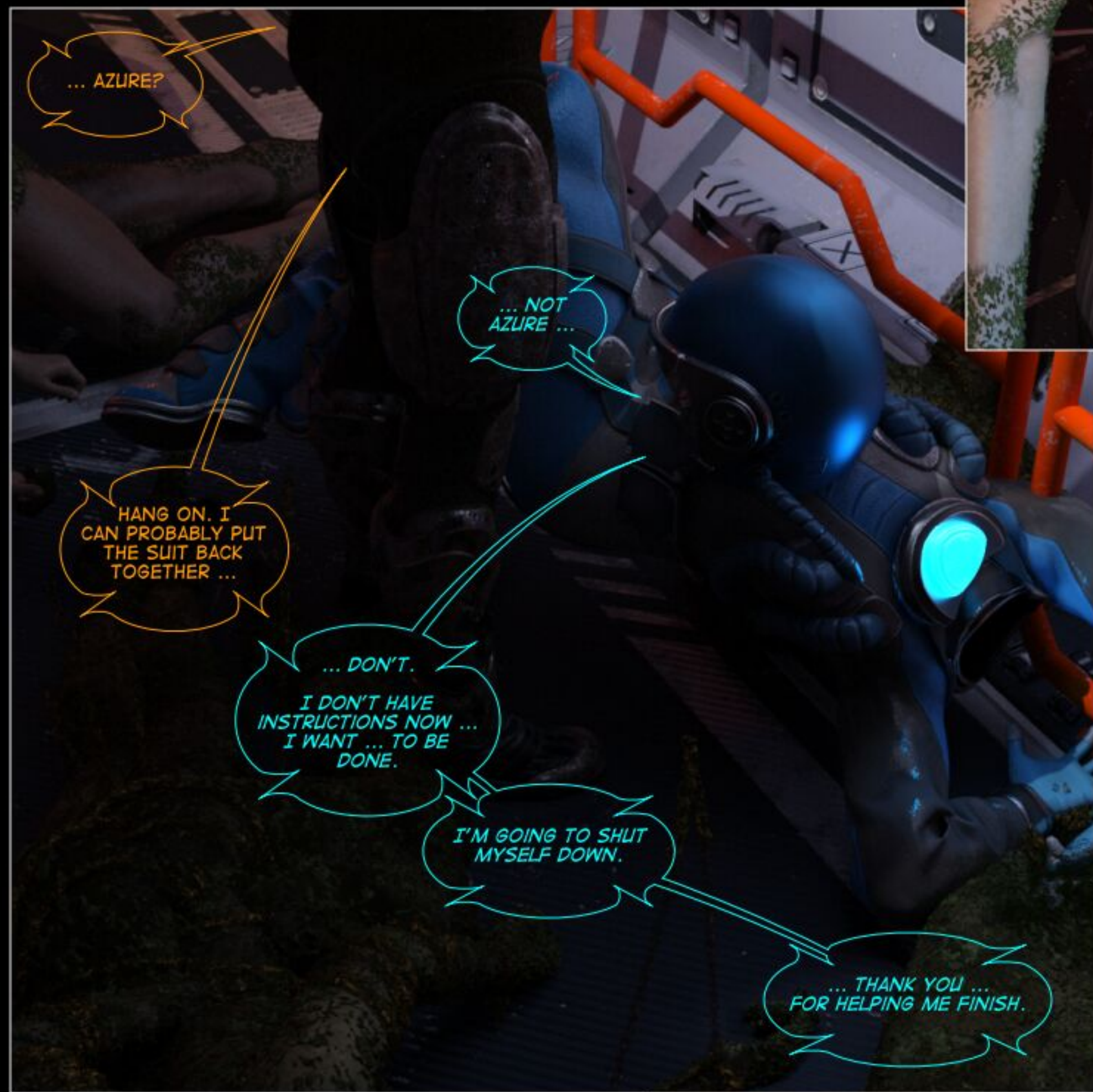
HE WAS
BLIND! AND
WEAK. HE DIDN'T
HAVE THE STOMACH
FOR PROGRESS. HE
WOULD NEVER HAVE
LOVED THE VOID.

ARE YOU GOING
TO KILL ME NOW? I
IMAGINE YOU ARE.
YOU'VE ALREADY
MURDERED THEM.
WHAT'S ONE MORE?

SORRY, ONLY ONE OF US
IS A MURDERER. YOU, WHEN
YOU VENTED ALL THE AIR OUT OF
THE STATION. THAT WAS NO
EXPERIMENT. YOU KNEW YOU
WERE KILLING TWO PEOPLE.



THIS ISN'T MURDER.
THIS IS JUSTICE.



... AZURE?

... NOT
AZURE ...

HANG ON. I
CAN PROBABLY PUT
THE SUIT BACK
TOGETHER ...

... DON'T.
I DON'T HAVE
INSTRUCTIONS NOW ...
I WANT ... TO BE
DONE.

I'M GOING TO SHUT
MYSELF DOWN.

... THANK YOU ...
FOR HELPING ME FINISH.

I DIDN'T REPORT THE STATION. I HAD
RIGHT OF SALVAGE, NOW THAT
EVERYONE ON IT WAS DEAD, AND NOT
REPORTING IT COST ME WHATEVER I
MIGHT HAVE MADE FROM THAT ... BUT IT
JUST DIDN'T SEEM LIKE SOMETHING I
WANTED TO DO. I DON'T KNOW WHY.

IT'S A VERY BIG GALAXY, AND THE ODDS
OF ANYONE ELSE FINDING IT BY
ACCIDENT LIKE I DID ARE VERY SMALL.
IT'S JUST DRIFTING OUT THERE IN THE
DARK SOMEWHERE. EVEN I DON'T KNOW
WHERE IT IS NOW. IT WASN'T IN A STABLE
ORBIT. I'D LIKE IT IF NO ONE EVER
FOUND IT AGAIN.

- END -