

SLEEPER SQUAD

Dr. Chapman.

I know you've researched me enough to know my first name.

I like the outfit.

I went through a lot to get here. And I'm not sure we're on that Friendly a basis ... Zoe.

Now, tell me how this all happened and what the hell you were thinking, and then I'll decide whether I'm going to break your neck.



You don't think I did this on purpose, do you?

The first time I met you, you gave me a speech about how Sleep was making people's brains rot. Remember?*

I think it's pretty plausible that you might want to take the whole place apart.

* SLEEPER SQUAD #2 -T



I don't want to shut it down! I'm just trying to make people a little more ... aware.

You let Bliss keep operating*, as long as there were constraints ... that's the same sort of principle we should use for Sleep.

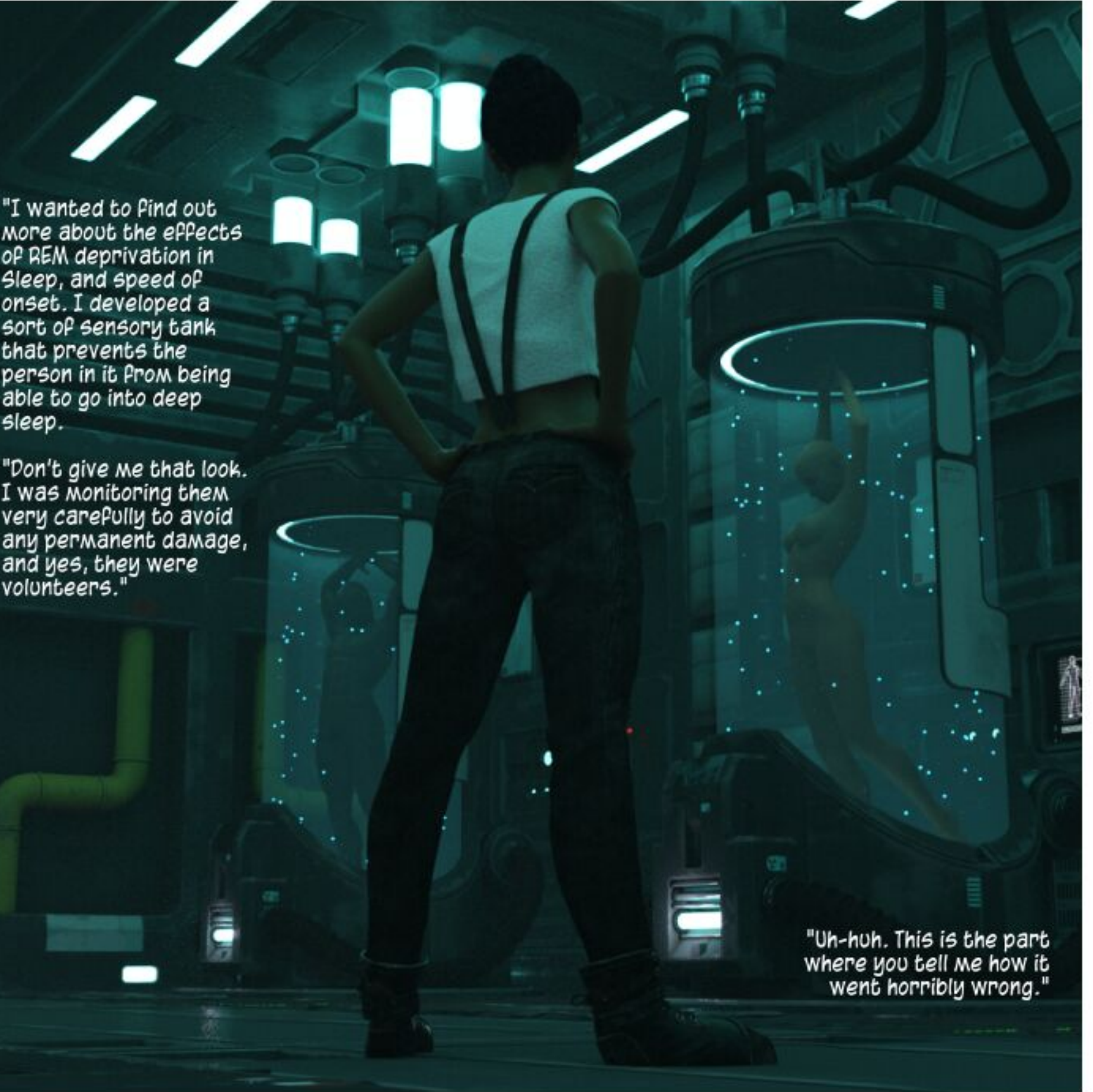
I'd love to know how you even found out I was involved in the Bliss thing, but never mind. So, what, you think people's Sleep time should be regulated? Mandated amount of time Awake?

Maybe just a mandated amount of time asleep. With a small S.

Have you ever thought about why we still need to sleep, even in this environment? It's because Sleep isn't actually like deep sleep to our brains. It's a semi-awake state, like guided dreaming.

We need true dreams--REM sleep--or our brains eventually suffer for the lack of it. And without some of the physical cues to tell them they need it, a lot of people in Sleep ... don't get enough sleep.

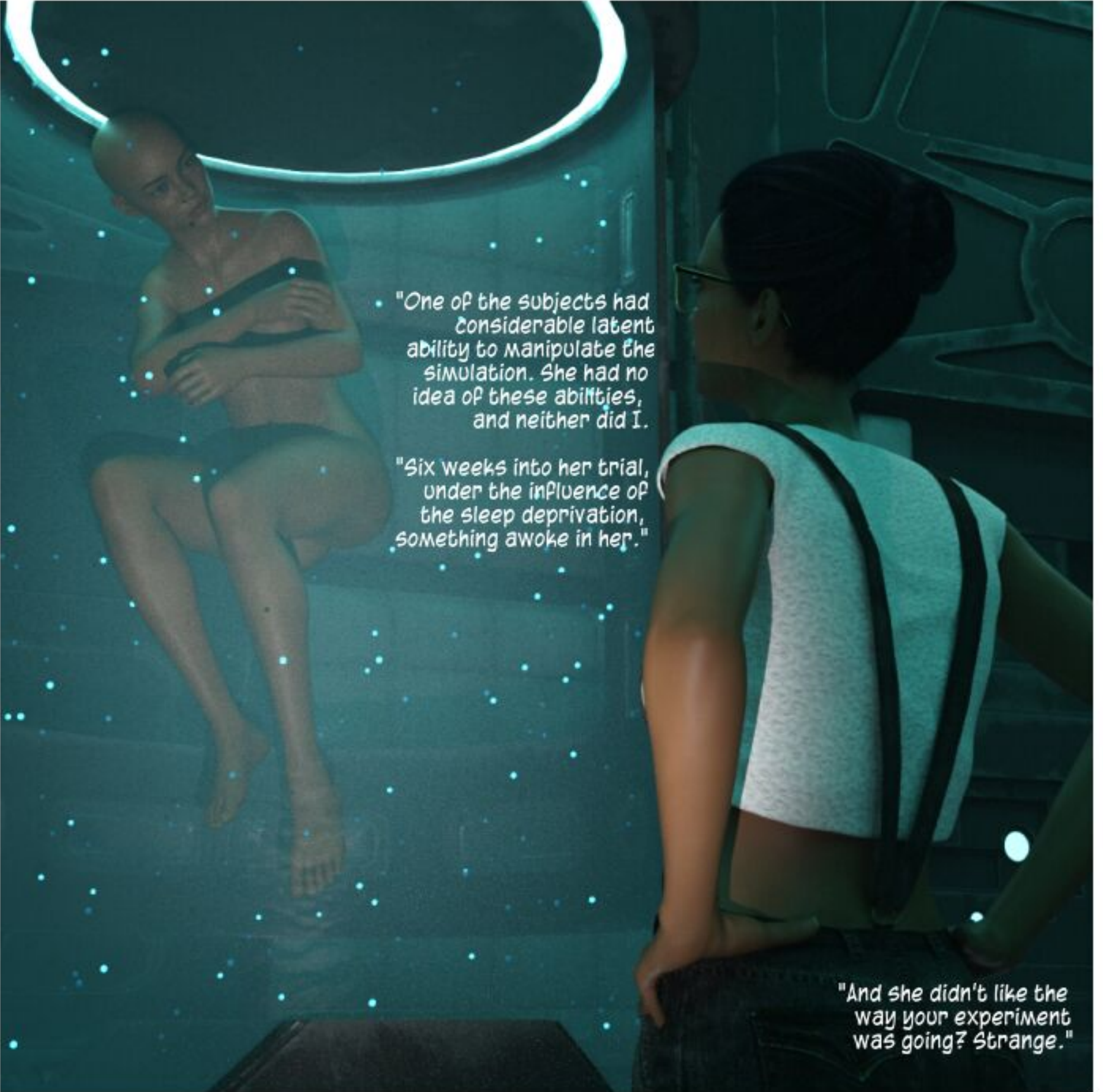
* SS #12 -T



"I wanted to find out more about the effects of REM deprivation in Sleep, and speed of onset. I developed a sort of sensory tank that prevents the person in it from being able to go into deep sleep.

"Don't give me that look. I was monitoring them very carefully to avoid any permanent damage, and yes, they were volunteers."

"Uh-huh. This is the part where you tell me how it went horribly wrong."



"One of the subjects had considerable latent ability to manipulate the simulation. She had no idea of these abilities, and neither did I.

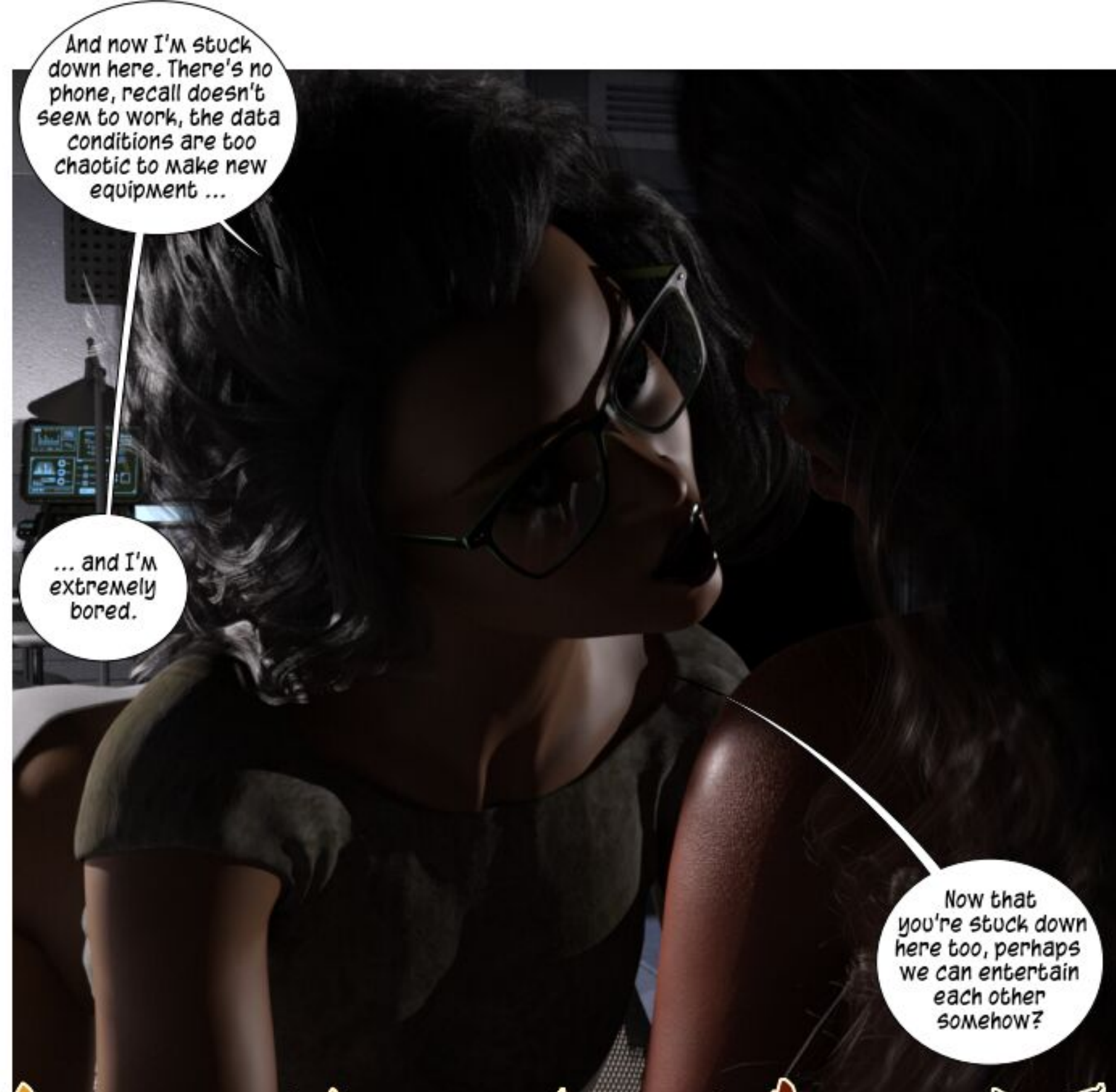
"Six weeks into her trial, under the influence of the sleep deprivation, something awoke in her."

"And she didn't like the way your experiment was going? Strange."



"Sarcasm is a juvenile response. I wasn't torturing her, you know. She could have asked for the experiment to end at any time. But ... paranoia and short temper are two known effects of REM deprivation. Not really a good mental state for a manipulator, you'll agree.

"Anyway, the next thing I knew, the lab was physically fragmenting around me. The control room is all that's left of it."



And now I'm stuck down here. There's no phone, recall doesn't seem to work, the data conditions are too chaotic to make new equipment ...

... and I'm extremely bored.

Now that you're stuck down here too, perhaps we can entertain each other somehow?

SLEEPLESS PART THREE

RAPID EYE MOVEMENT

WORDS AND IMAGES BY TRILBY

#16

EMERGENCY MEETING IN THE BARKER BOARDROOM. PAULINE AND MONICA ARE NOT PRESENT.



... I'm telling you, it's the only thing that'll work. We can't waste any more time Pishing around for other ideas! This thing is going to eat all of A4 soon!

Brendan, there are people in there! If we just wipe and regenerate those parts, we don't know what it'll do to their brains!

There are already people inside the discontinuity trying to repair the problem--

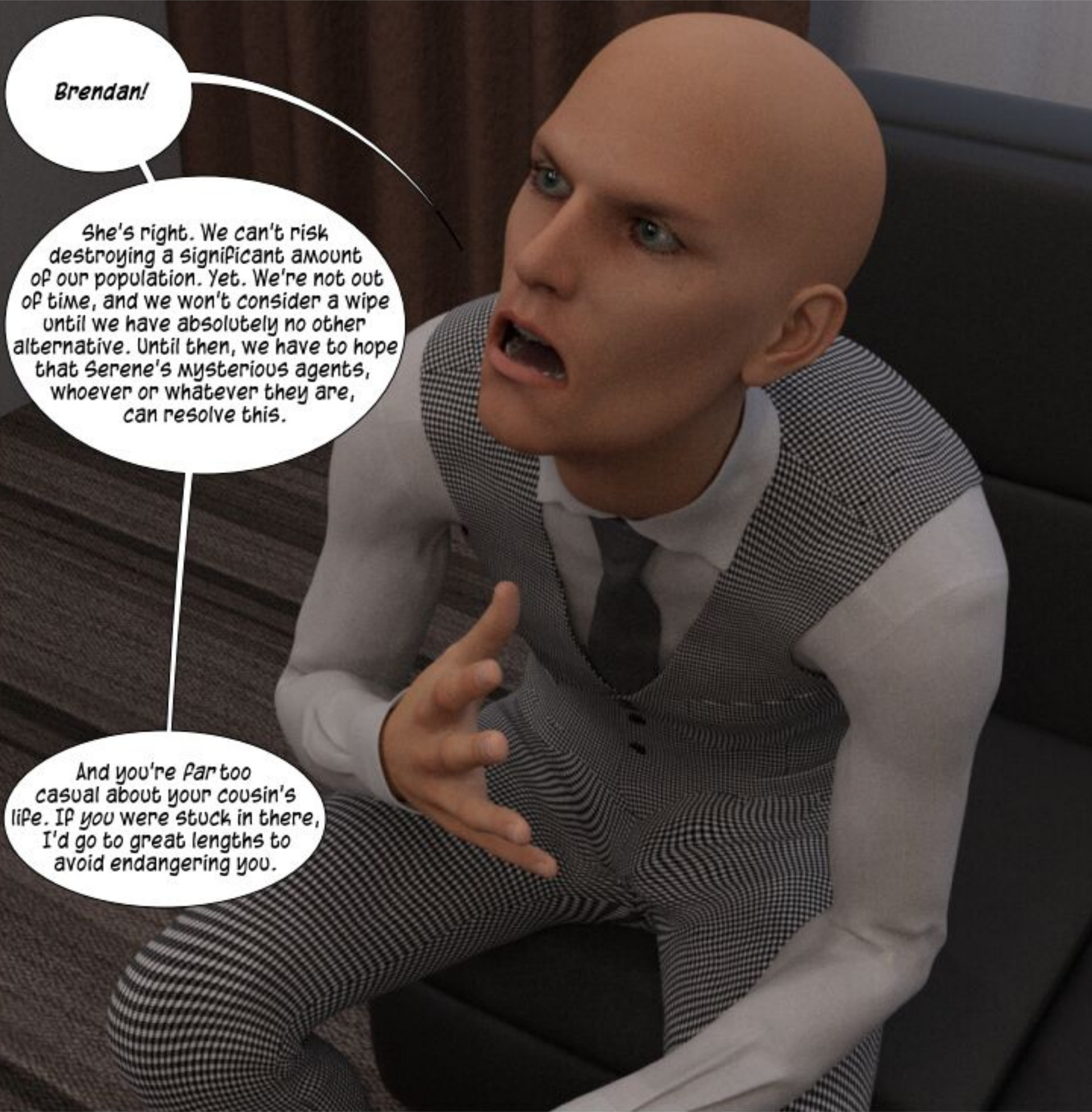
--and they've run out of time. We can't wait any longer for them to get their shit together!



You know, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised at your complete lack of compassion or concern for the regular Polk, but I'd like to remind you that Pauline is also stuck in there.



And that should make a difference? This isn't about compassion, Serene, this is about saving some part of A4 while it can still be saved. Compassion for the people in there won't mean a damned thing if--



Brendan!

She's right. We can't risk destroying a significant amount of our population. Yet. We're not out of time, and we won't consider a wipe until we have absolutely no other alternative. Until then, we have to hope that Serene's mysterious agents, whoever or whatever they are, can resolve this.

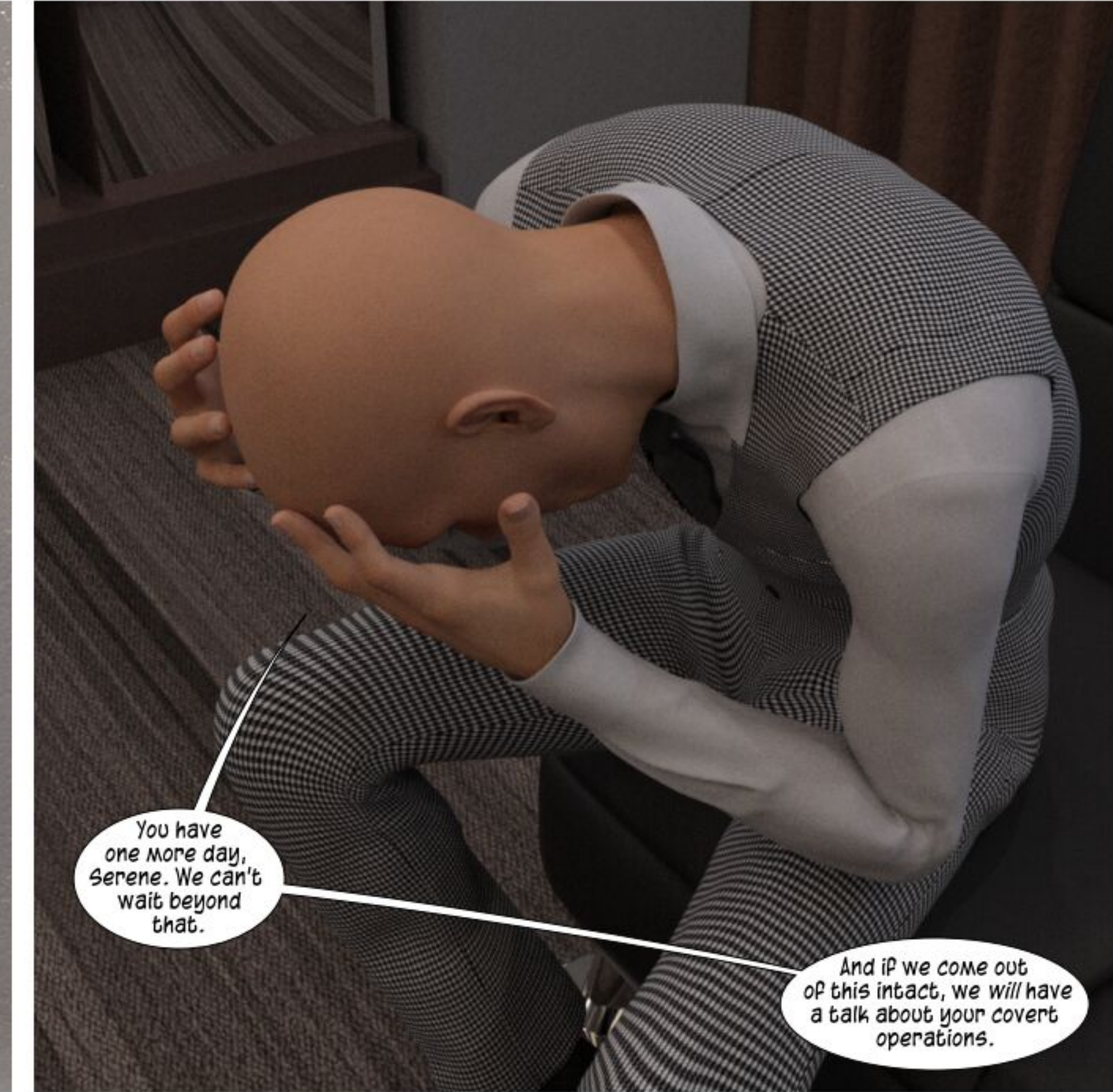
And you're far too casual about your cousin's life. If you were stuck in there, I'd go to great lengths to avoid endangering you.



Like hell you would.



... Josiah, I'm sorry.



You have one more day, Serene. We can't wait beyond that.

And if we come out of this intact, we will have a talk about your covert operations.



You know, you can get back up there any time you want.



The last time we saw each other, I didn't tell you directly, because you needed to figure it out for yourself. But I don't think you have, and now it's become vital.

You have extremely powerful manipulation abilities. I knew it when you managed to get out of the rat test just by deciding that you could go through the wall.*

You normally don't strike me as the kind of person who'd leave something in yourself unexamined, and you're certainly not unperceptive, so I don't know why you haven't seen this on your own.

* SS #2 -T



I've known for a while.

You have? But--

What really got me thinking about it was when I was able to levitate to save myself falling from the Aerie.*

And even when I wasn't thinking clearly because I was a troll, I managed to make a ladder and a bridge for myself.

* SS #9 -T



You could have told me that two hours ago.

Then we wouldn't have had sex. Why didn't you tell me the truth about myself two hours ago?

... same reason.



Look, I'm not avoiding the information ... well, what I mean is, I'm not avoiding admitting it, but I don't particularly want to use it. I don't want to be a manipulator.

But you could do anything! Think of how you could change this place! You could fix it ...

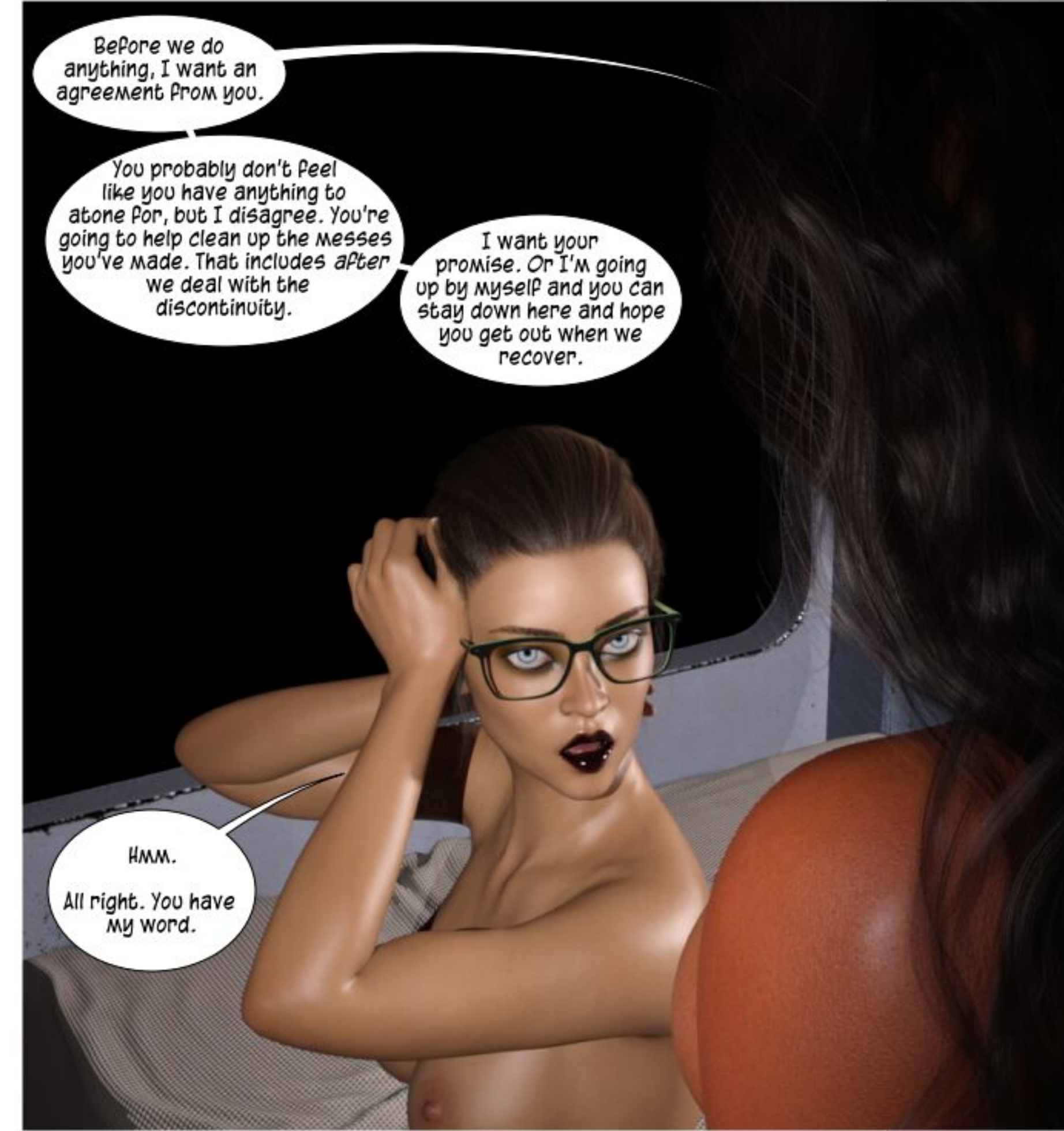
Mm-hm. You probably have ten thousand ideas of what you'd do with the ability. And you'd charge in, and it'd go sour on you again. I don't think I trust myself not to fuck it up either.



Anyway, I don't have a lot of control over it. I have to be really focused, or want it badly, or something.

Which is probably for the best.

I think I'll keep these stockings on, they're cute. But the shoes have got to go, I've almost tripped over the toes twice.



Before we do anything, I want an agreement from you.

You probably don't feel like you have anything to atone for, but I disagree. You're going to help clean up the messes you've made. That includes after we deal with the discontinuity.

I want your promise. Or I'm going up by myself and you can stay down here and hope you get out when we recover.

Hmm. All right. You have my word.



I should warn you, I don't think I can levitate both of us, so we're going to have a long, long ladder to climb.

MEANWHILE ...
AFTER RUBY RAN OFF TO PURSUE OUR MYSTERIOUS ANTAGONIST, LEYNA COULDN'T QUITE GET HERSELF EXTRICATED FROM THE FIELD OF COMBAT.



-- Yipe! --

I don't think they can actually do anything to me, but sooner or later one's going to connect and knock me off the edge. And I'm getting tired of dodging.

Let's try a different approach.



AIIEEYAAA!!

o//>--!!



Uh ...

w//<--

... is happening?

Stick close. I'll try to keep you safe.

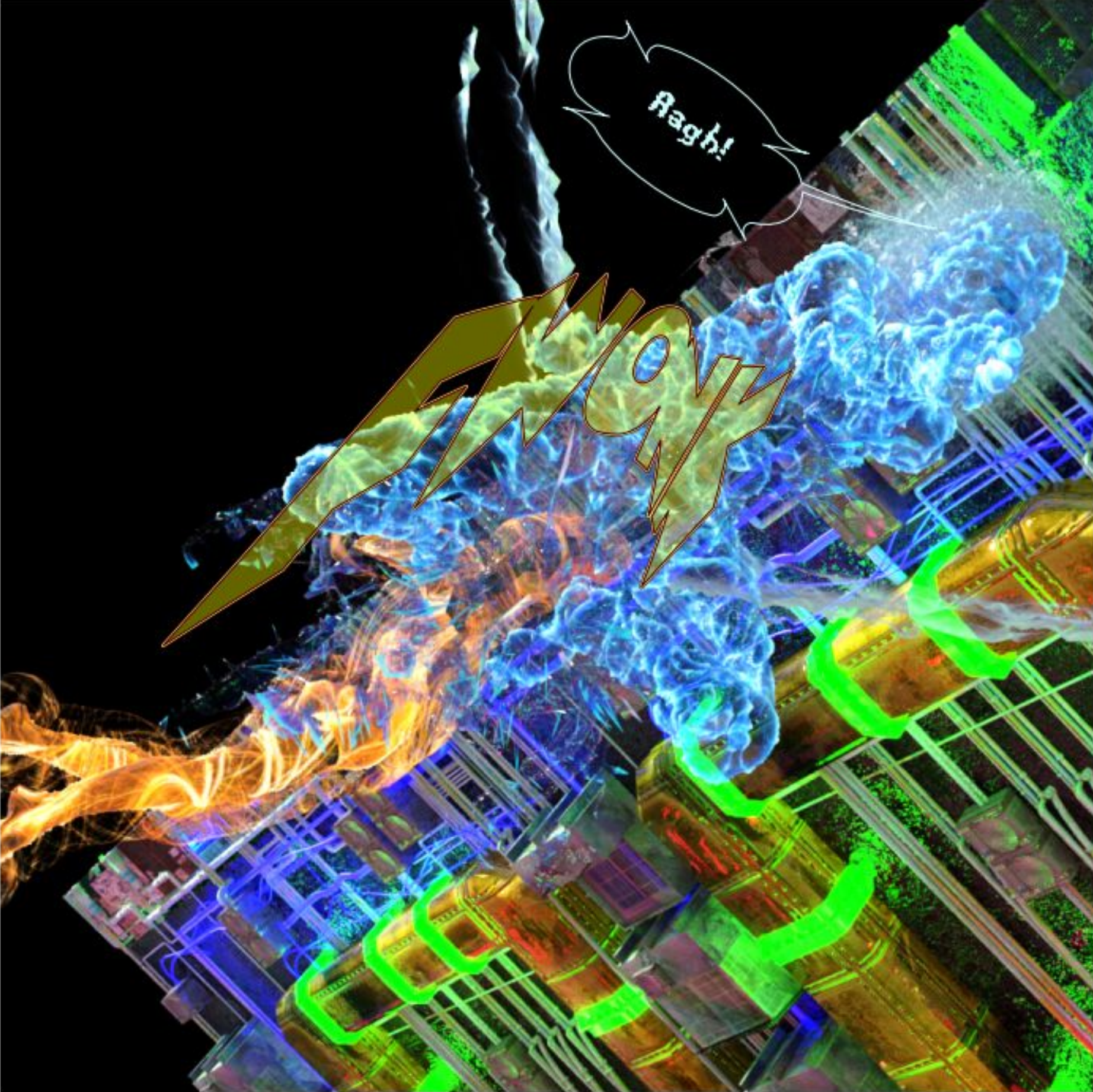
You probably want to take off those shoes. The ground's doing all kinds of things, and if you fall off I can't help you.



Nooo!

Fee!

Get down!
She's going to try to grab you!



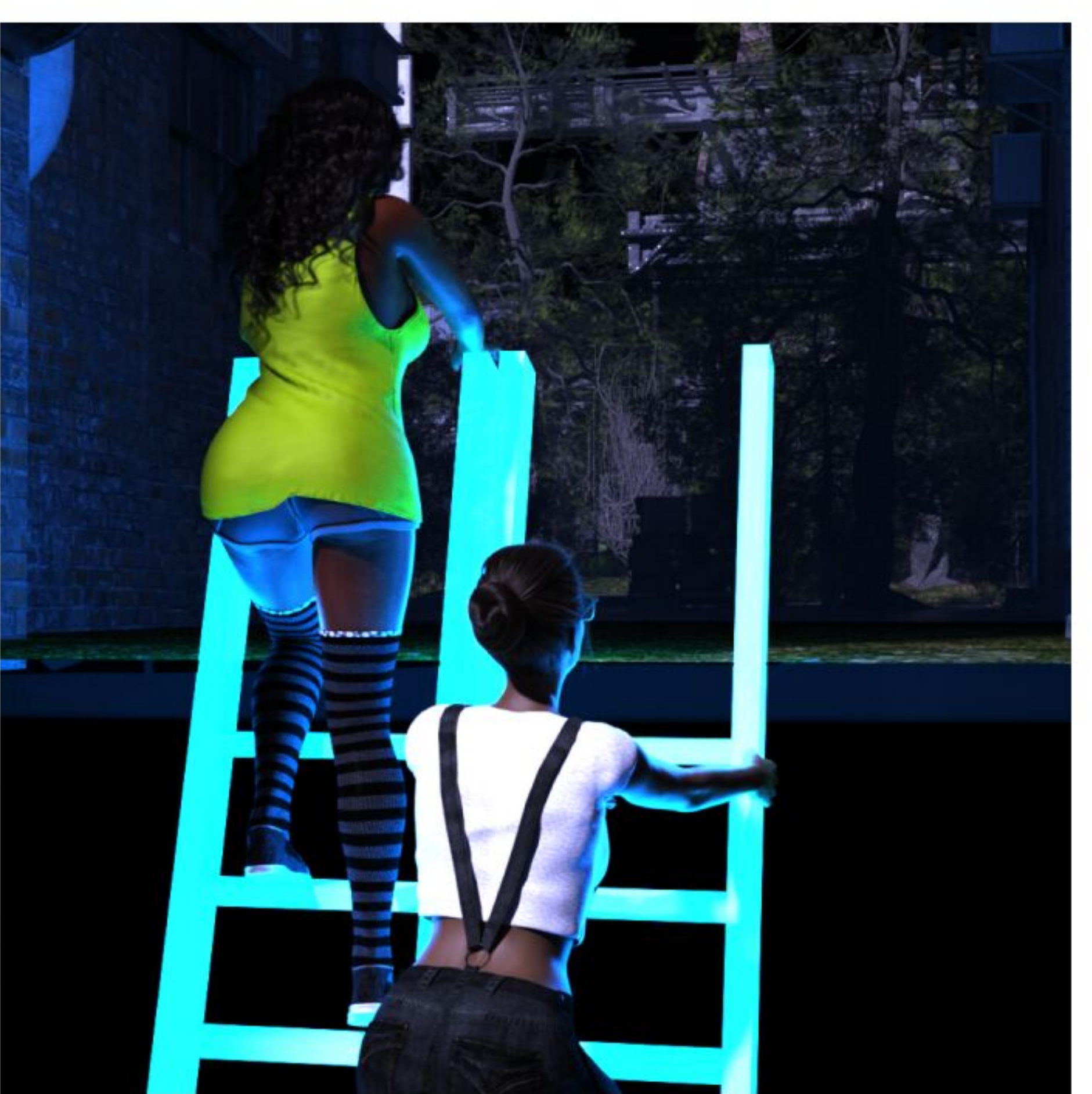
Raght!



I think this may be the Pragment I started out on ... but there's something about it that looks different ...

Different how?

I'm not sure ... there's something sort of blurry about it, almost like--



Yeow!

Like it's not solid! I think the Pragment is disappearing!

Oop -- glad I only put one foot through it ..

You'd just fly back up.

Yeah, but we should still get off here in a hurry.



I see another Fragment up there.
I think.

I'm right behind you. Watch your step. I don't trust any of this now.



The gap up here is small enough to take a bridge easily.

Hmm. Gorillas?

Oh, you poor things.

Come on! You can cross too!



... You mean I was one of those things?

That's right. Be careful, now, the Pooting's getting worse and worse and if you fall off, I can't help you.



Restoring them one by one is not the answer we need.

I know, but at least that way I can Peel like I'm doing something.

I Peel kind of dirty now. Like I need a shower.

Right? I still Peel like my skin is all sticky.



I'm sure this is still the epicenter, but the way Ruby used closed off behind her ... there's no point moving to another Fragment if whatever I need is here, but I can't get to it. Unless you've found anything from the air.

Nothing good. All of the fragments are ... changing. They're drifting faster. Colliding. And I think some of them may be disintegrating.

Hmm. And meanwhile this one's sliding apart every which way. If this section tilts much more we're all going over the edge.

Something is happening, but I don't know what it is and I don't know what to be prepared for.



By the way, you haven't asked me to restore you. You don't want to be back to whoever you were before?



Raaaar!!



No, I just think right now we can't afford to lose my abilities.

... Pair.



I don't think I've ever seen anything like this in A4.

Probably a private space that got sucked in. All kinds of strange things in those.

At least it's solid.

Mmm. That may not last.



You have a theory.

She'd want to rearrange this place to suit her mind. It's basically the inside of her head. Thing is, she wouldn't have had the focus. She's probably unable to concentrate on anything for too long.

But one thing she could do is consolidate and prune ... get rid of anything that doesn't fit, clear the--

What?

I thought I saw something move. In the water.



uurh ...

uurh ...

uurh ...



I'm assuming we don't want to let these things get hold of us.

Yeah, I'm assuming that too.

Back off!!



I'm a psychologist, not a street fighter.

Well, try.

Also, the Pragment is starting to fade out.



That might actually be better!!!!!!--!



Gotcha!

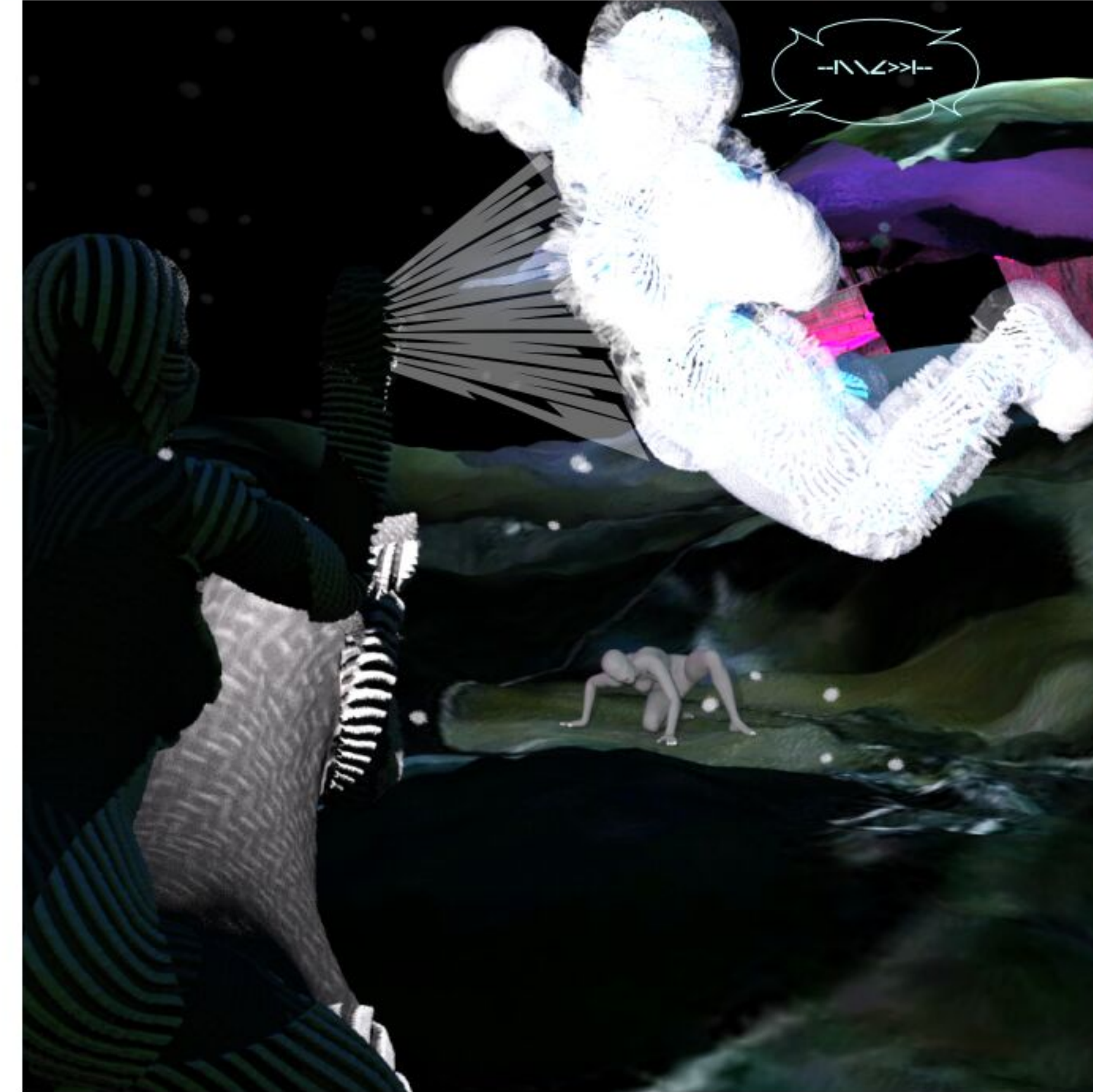
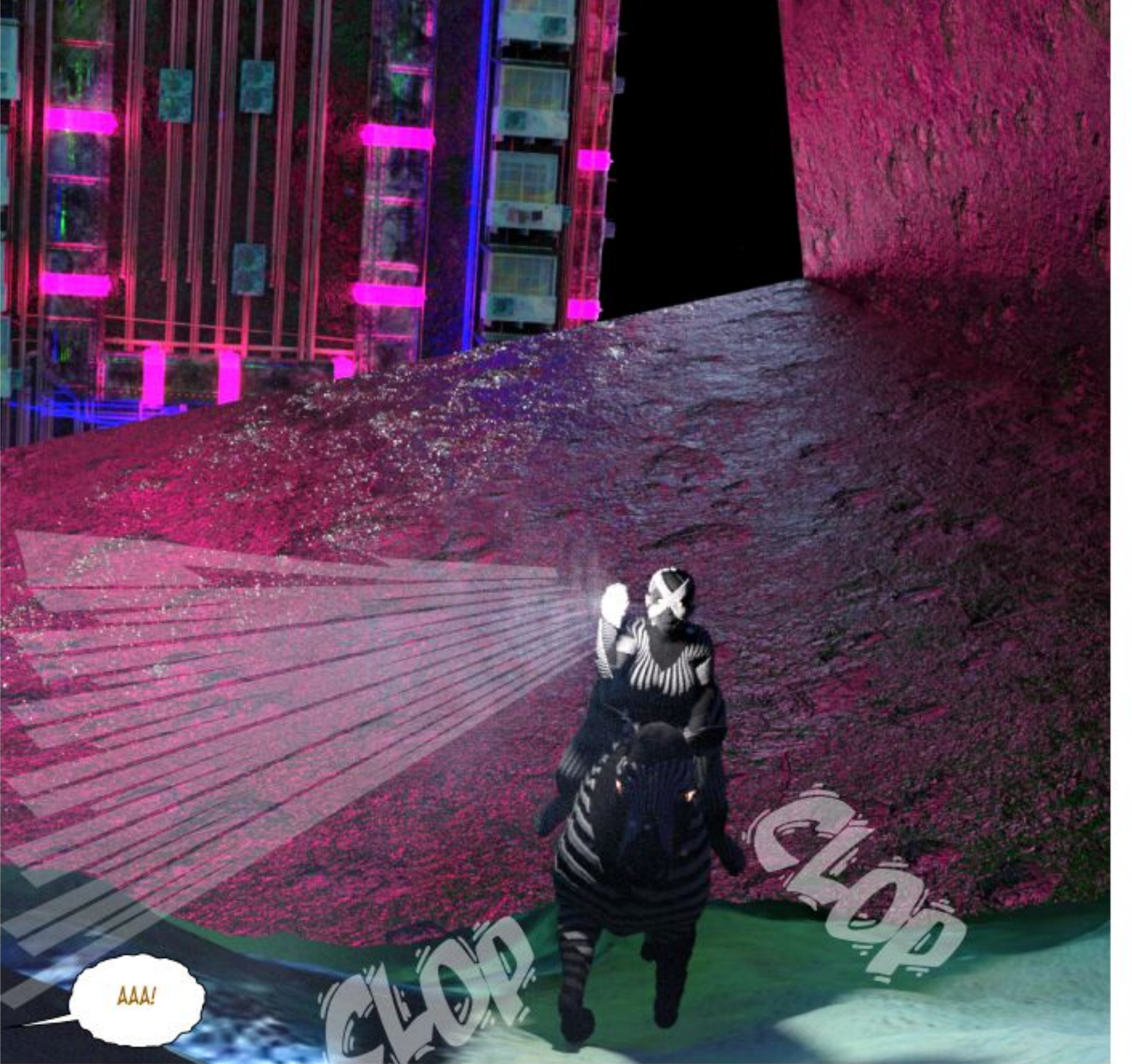


I thought you couldn't lift us both.

I'm not lifting. I'm just steering. I see some things over there I recognize.

If I do this right, we'll land very near where we need to be.

MEANWHILE ...



Sorry about the landing.

I'll live. Some butt notwithstanding.

I just Pizzled out all of a sudden. I don't think I could do any of the big manipulation we were talking about in here even if I wanted to. It's too--

Chaotic.

Yeah. It's like nothing stands still. Even when you do manage to do something, it may not stay put.

Like my bridge at the end of this platform over here. Which I hope is still there. Though I can probably remake it if--



you THINK you'RE going to COME back and not BE anY fun YOU think that doN'T you you think you'll MAKE EVERYthing no fun WELL you WON't there's a SURPRISE

Oh, god.

What is that?

Trouble.



These are the trolls you were telling me about?

Uh ... no. These are ... further along, maybe?

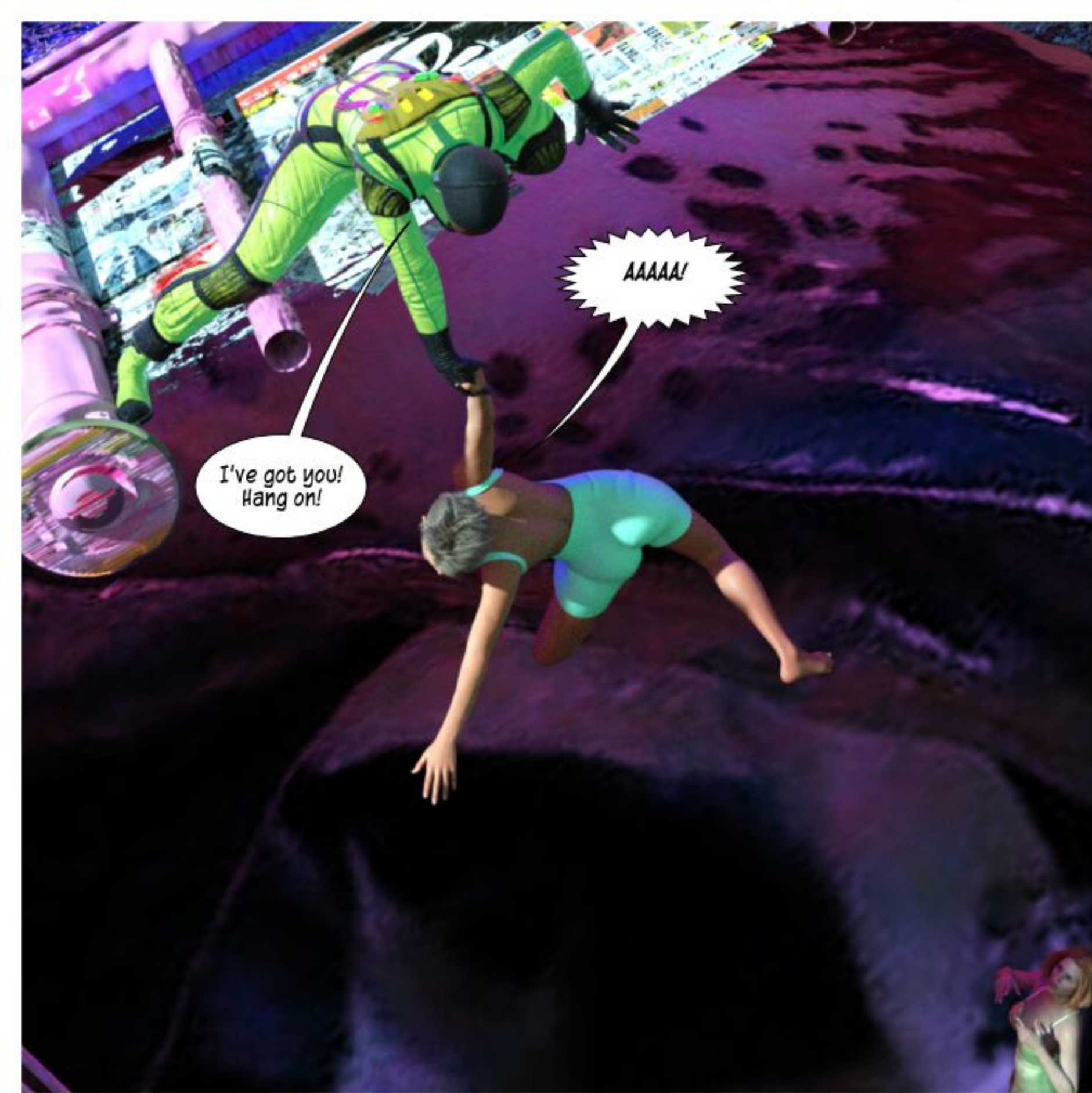
They're a lot bigger.

Plan of attack?



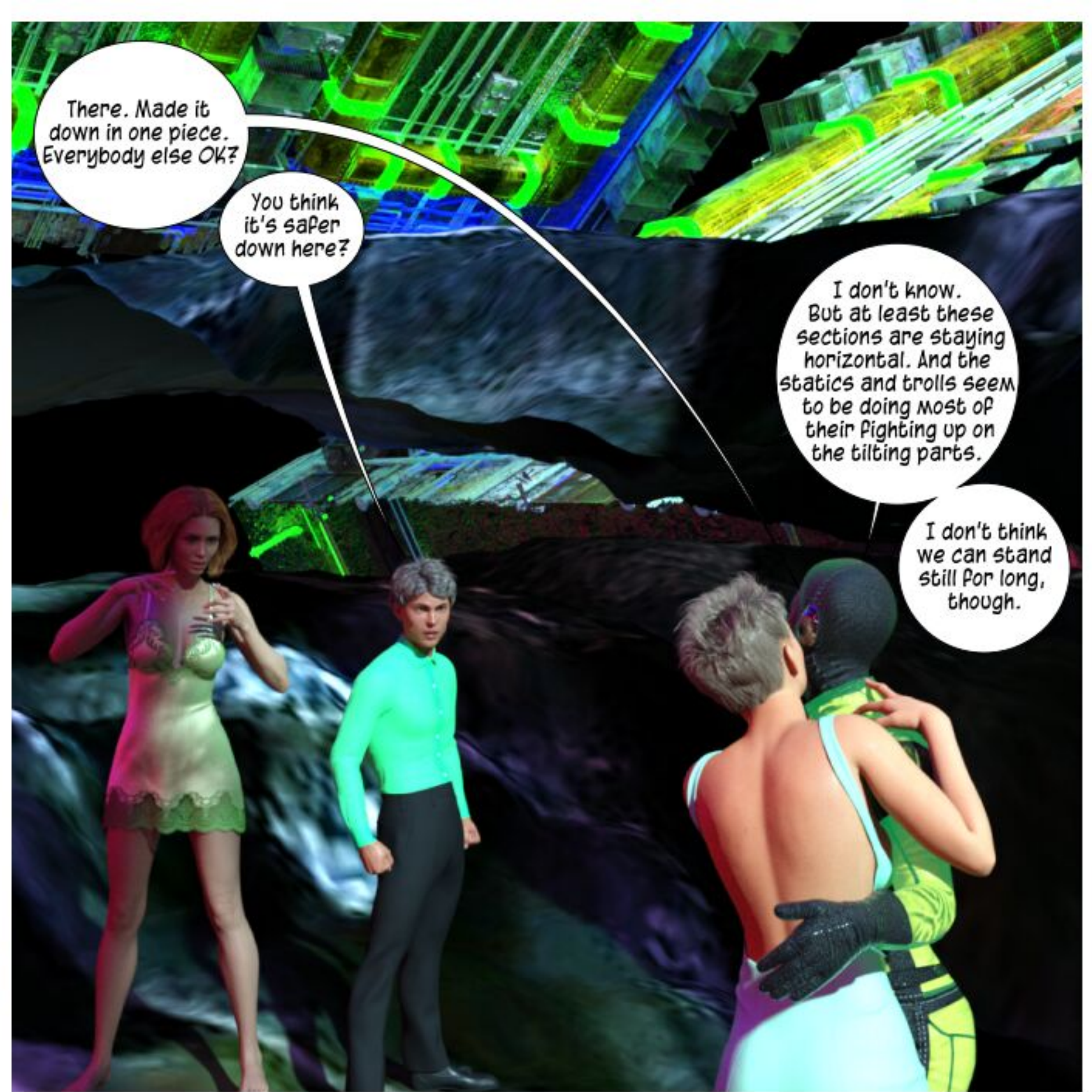
Run like hell.

I should have guessed.



I've got you! Hang on!

AAAAA!



There. Made it down in one piece. Everybody else OK?

You think it's safer down here?

I don't know. But at least these sections are staying horizontal. And the statics and trolls seem to be doing most of their fighting up on the tilting parts.

I don't think we can stand still for long, though.



Look!

Are those ... gorillas?

No. They're people who got changed. Like you did.

Can you fix them?

I doubt they'll let me. They'll probably run away if we approach them.

Strange. This isn't their kind of place. Why are they coming in here?



Because they don't have anywhere else to go. All of the other fragments are disappearing. Quickly. Anybody who can is probably headed here. Even the floaters are coming in, and they don't need to care.

Something big is happening. I wish we knew what.

... I sure hope Ruby is OK.



Did I hear my name?

Sorry it took us a while to get back up. I'm glad you're OK.

And you've got a squad!

I, uh, know you remember Dr. Chapman.



You!

Are you responsible for all of this?

Yes.

... Indirectly.

She had an experiment get out of hand. She's going to help fix it--



So I'm up here, trying to figure out what the hell I can do and wondering if you're dead after you have OPP with no warning, and it turns out you're OPP playing around with the person you should have been locking in a box somewhere?

Why on earth would we trust her? Why would you even bother? I'm trying to fix this--What do you think you're doing?

Leyna, she's not the person doing all this! She's just as stuck --



It's happening!

Aaa!

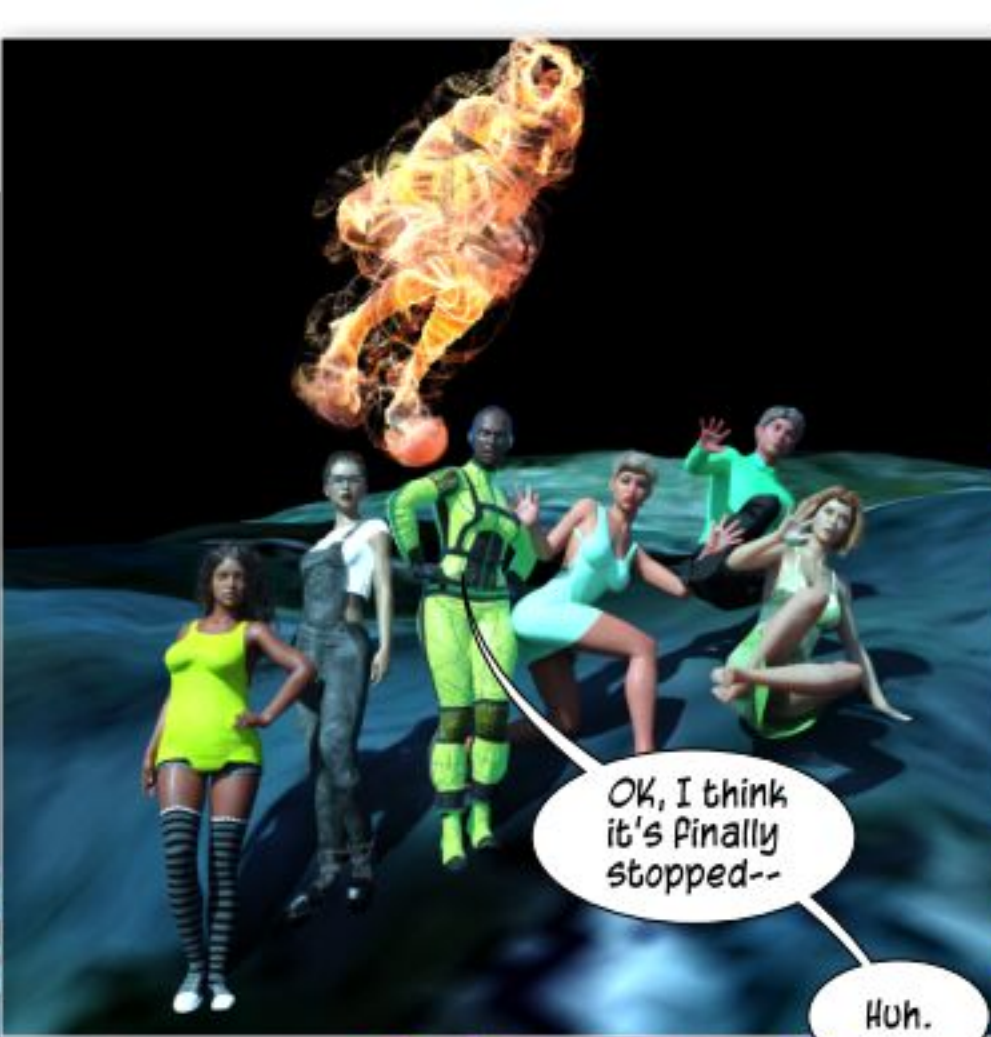
Yipe!

Whoa!

I think I'm gonna be sick.

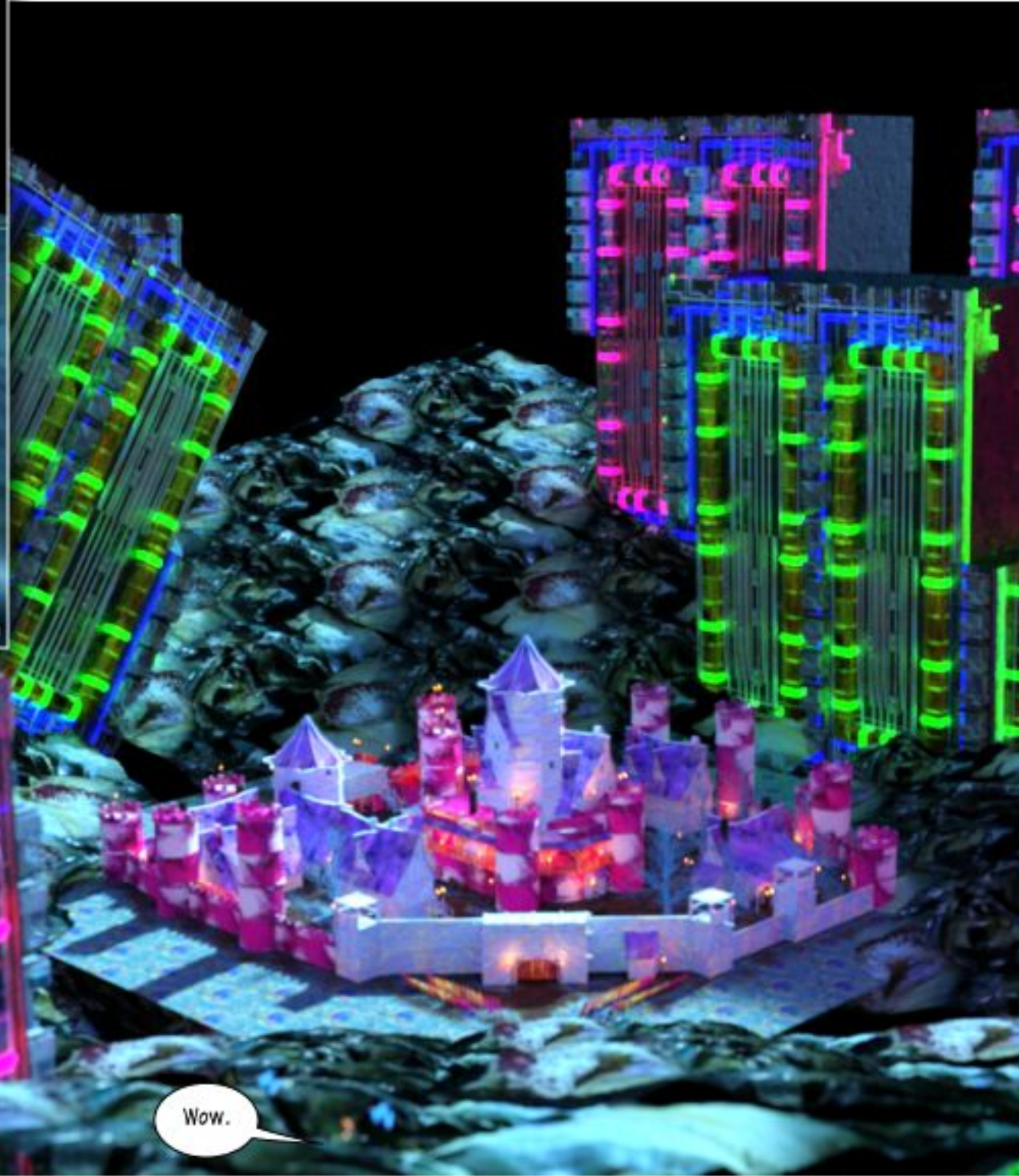
So much for "this part will stay horizontal."

Everybody grab onto something!



OK, I think it's finally stopped--

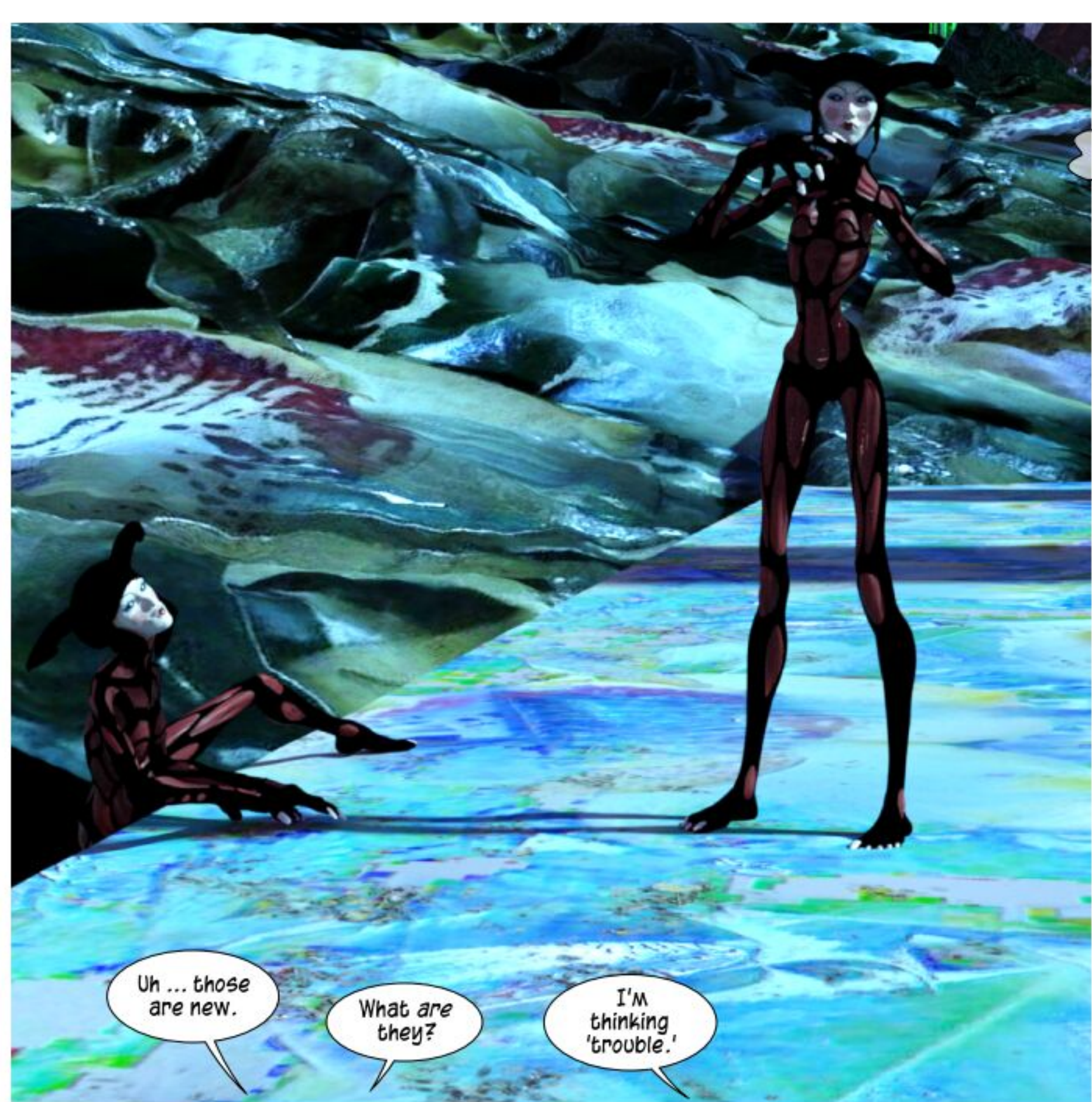
Huh.



Wow.



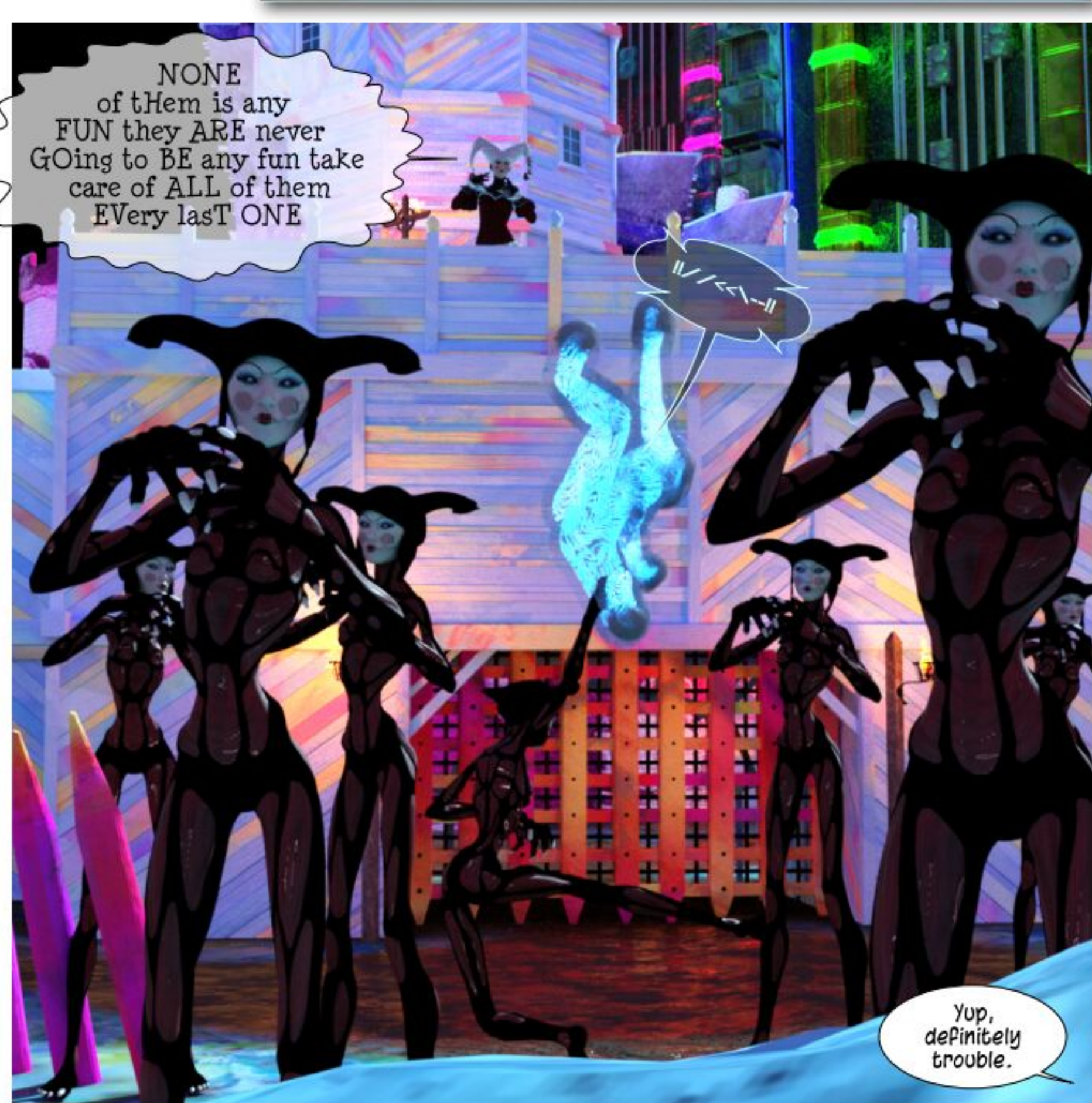
Well, I guess now we know where we're going.



Uh ... those are new.

What are they?

I'm thinking 'trouble.'



NONE of them is any FUN they ARE never GOing to BE any fun take care of ALL of them EVERY last ONE

W/ / < > //

Yup, dePinitely trouble.



Well, they don't have any death rays or anything. You think Fire will push them back?

We'll find out.

No, no-- Bad troll! Bad!

... I need to learn how to do that.



Here they come!

RAAAIEEE!

--Whoa!

Hey!



You won't join us, and you keep others from joining us.

I've had enough of you.

Aaaaaaa!



Everyone must join us! It's the only way!

Uh ... no?



BOOM!

RAGH!

WAAAA
WAAAA



Nice kick.

Thanks for the lift!

ooOoo!

Thanks. Nice fire.



Ugh ...

No! My mount! Where's my mount?



Flew off. Probably glad to be rid of you.

Now listen to me. You're going to help us get to that castle and not make any more trouble. We're the answer, not your little army. Those things have caught half of them already.

Do you understand? You can help us, or you can find out what happens when they catch you. How fast are you on foot?

I'll ... I'll help.



OK, here we go.

They're not actually tough, but don't let them grab you. If they get a hold, they'll try to convert you.

Right. Everybody keep an eye out. If someone's having problems, help pry them loose.



Now, follow all the way through ... you want your weight behind it ... Good!

BAP



Now what do we do about the gate?

I can try to burn it ...

Let me mess with it. I think I can keep it intact, so these clowns can't come in after us.



OK! Quick, before they catch on!

That's a good trick!

Yeah ... but this is as good as it gets, in here.



Shouldn't there be, y'know, something horrible waiting for us in here?

Agreed.

Yeah. Some guards, at least.

Let me take a look.



If there's anyone in here at all, they're not out in the open.

HMM.

Let's stick close together. And be alert.



Uh-oh.

Leyna? I think I found what happened to the guards.

... Oh, hell.

Everybody! Get close right now!

... Wait, where's Chapman?



What I don't understand is the colors. What part of her mindset is producing this need to --?

Zoe!!

Chapman! Look out!



Bitch!

Ruby, what--



Gaaaahh!



I'm gonna punch you until you can't see straight--

Ruby. Ruby. Hang on.



What? No ... don't --



... What's-- Huh? Leyna? Where's the barn? What are you doing here?

Doreen? ... Shit.

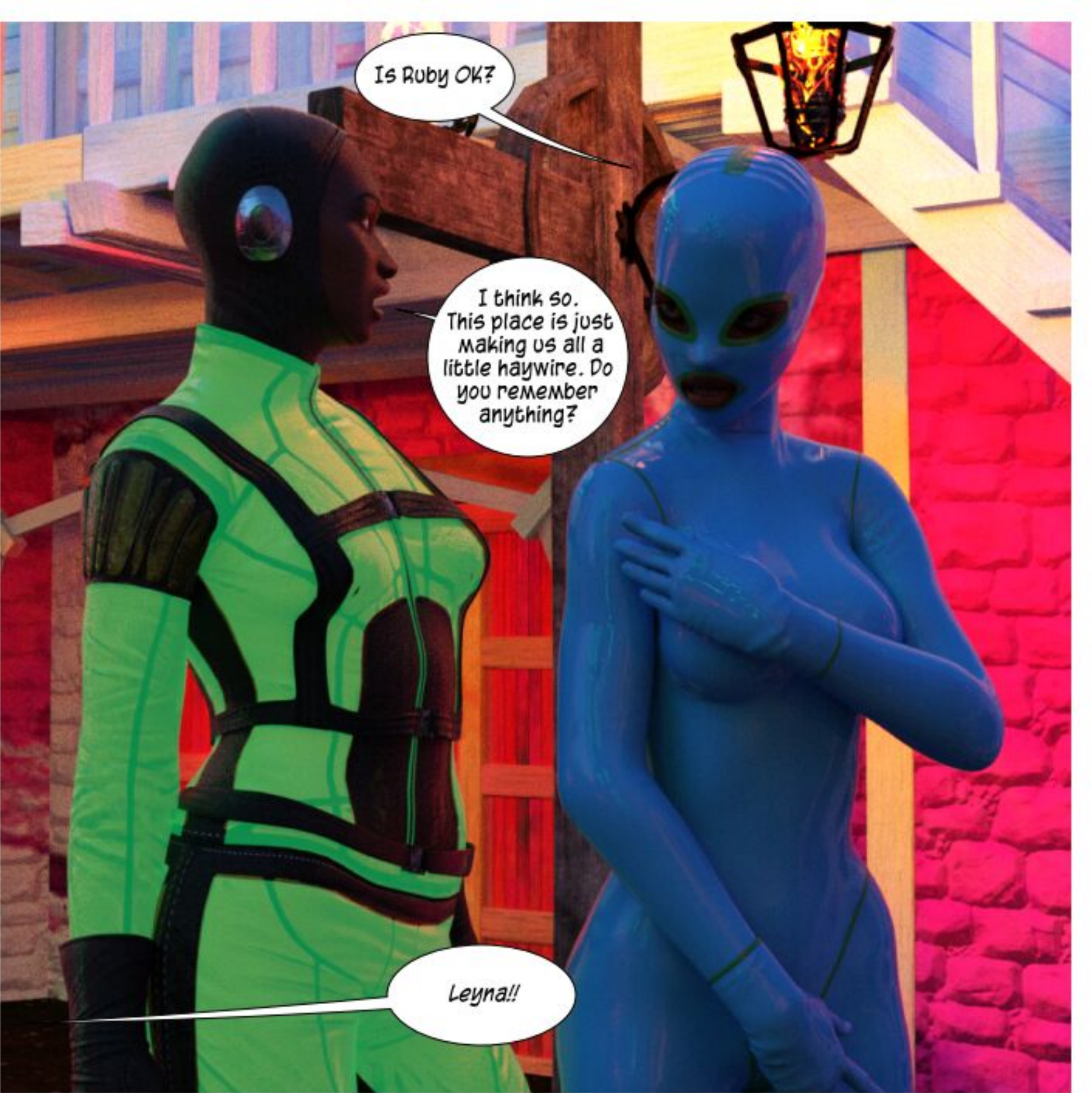


The horse! Where did the horse go?

Ran off.
It has to be somewhere in here, though. Should I look for it?

... No.
We probably wouldn't be able to take care of her until we resolve this.

But keep an eye out for her, OK?



Is Ruby OK?

I think so. This place is just making us all a little haywire. Do you remember anything?

Leyna!!



Fix her.

Wouldn't it be better to ... leave her like that, at least until we--

I'm going to pretend you didn't say that. I wouldn't leave my worst enemy like this.

Ruby, she caused this!

She made a mistake. She's trying to help clean it up. We may need her help to clean it up.

Fix her.



I don't even know if I can ... I haven't tried this on a null yet ...

Yeah!

Uuuh?

... I'm not sure what just happened, and I don't think I want anyone to tell me.



OK, This looks like the only door to the inner keep ... We're going to need to go in very carefully ...

Actually ... can we talk about that a second?



Look, we appreciate your getting us this far ... but you and your friend seem like you can shake off anything this place tries to do. The rest of us are way out of our league.

If we went in there with you, you'd be spending half your time trying to protect us. We think it's better if we stay out here.



How about you?

I don't think my abilities are going to suit the situation. I'm going to stay out here and try to keep everyone safe. This is a nice defensible area ... if it stays in this form.

Doreen?

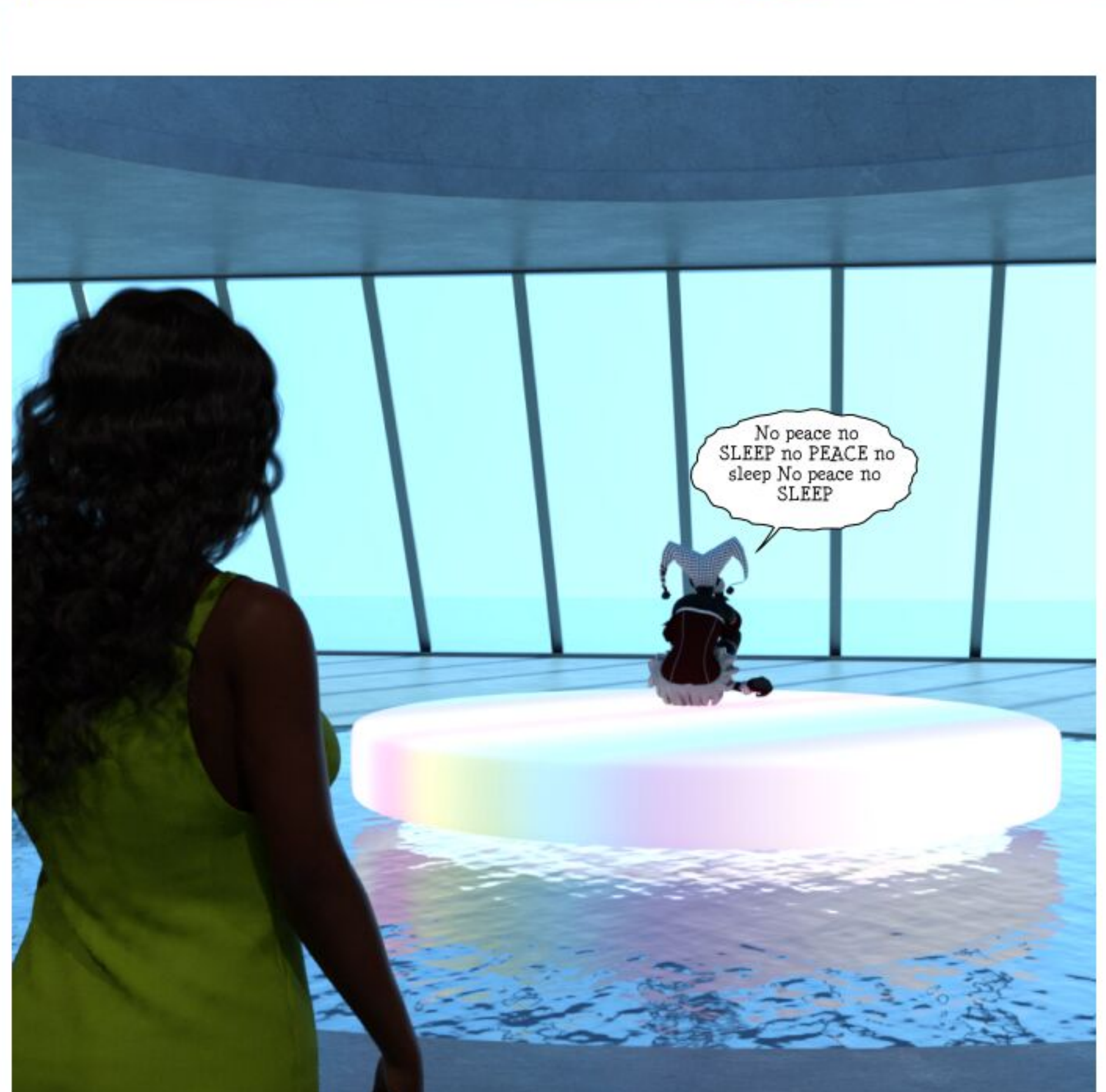
Uh ... I don't even understand what the hell is going on. I guess you're going in there to fight something horrible?

I don't think I'd be good for much.



I suppose you're coming in.

Wouldn't miss it for the world.





oh yes THAT's a GOOD present Do you KNOW what she DID do YOU have ANY idea

i'M going to MAKE her inTO the MOST FUN thing EVER it will be THE BEST



Oh, god.

THERE that is SUPER fun

hee hee hee hee hee hee

hee hee hee hee hee hee

hee hee hee hee hee hee

so YOU've deCided you WANT to be FUN after ALL come oVer and TELL me about IT



hee hee hee hee hee hee

I just decided that as long as I was going to be here, it would be the Most Fun to be with you. Having Fun with you.

Do you do you MEAN that



No, not really.

aaAUGH



no you WON'T don't you TOUCH me i KNOW what you'RE trying to DO you'RE horrible i'M going to PUT you someWHERE you'll NEVER get out OF

oop!

-- gak --



AaaAAH no not my HAT you'RE



you SEE now YOU see what SHE made me NO sleep no SLEEP and NOW this is WHAT i AM

-- kkggh --



nooo DON'T no



...!



Ruby?

Can you maybe explain to me, in very small words, exactly what the hell is going on?

... Yeah.

Well, I can try. It might take a while.

But first we need to get Pauline out of that. I don't know what she's going to think when she finds out she's been an animal for days.

A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER.



... she remembers all of it, not that she has all that much to remember. She was a cow and then she was a horse and she enjoyed the hell out of all of it. Which is a relief, because I was worried I'd pissed off a Barker, y'know?

We seem to have come out of this a lot luckier than we probably deserved, all round. Everybody got put back where they'd been, undamaged. There's probably going to be some mental anguish to untangle, of course.

Well, everybody but the instigator. Whose name I still don't know.

Me neither. Chapman didn't get around to telling me. So she's in the brain ward now?

Yes ... and speaking of that, and Chapman ...

BZZZZZZ

Hmm. Nice timing.



You look surprised.

She is. She was about to bet me that you wouldn't show.



The thing is, I'm not going to hide that I want change. But I've realized that doing it the way I have been is going to cause more damage than good.

I think we have common interests, and I'd like to work with you on finding them ... but before I can do that, I know I'm going to have to earn your trust.

You've got an awful lot of ground to make up, then.

I'm aware.

Mmm. Which is why I have something in mind.

I'd like you to come take a trip with us. I have something I want to show you.



I haven't been awake in I don't know how long--

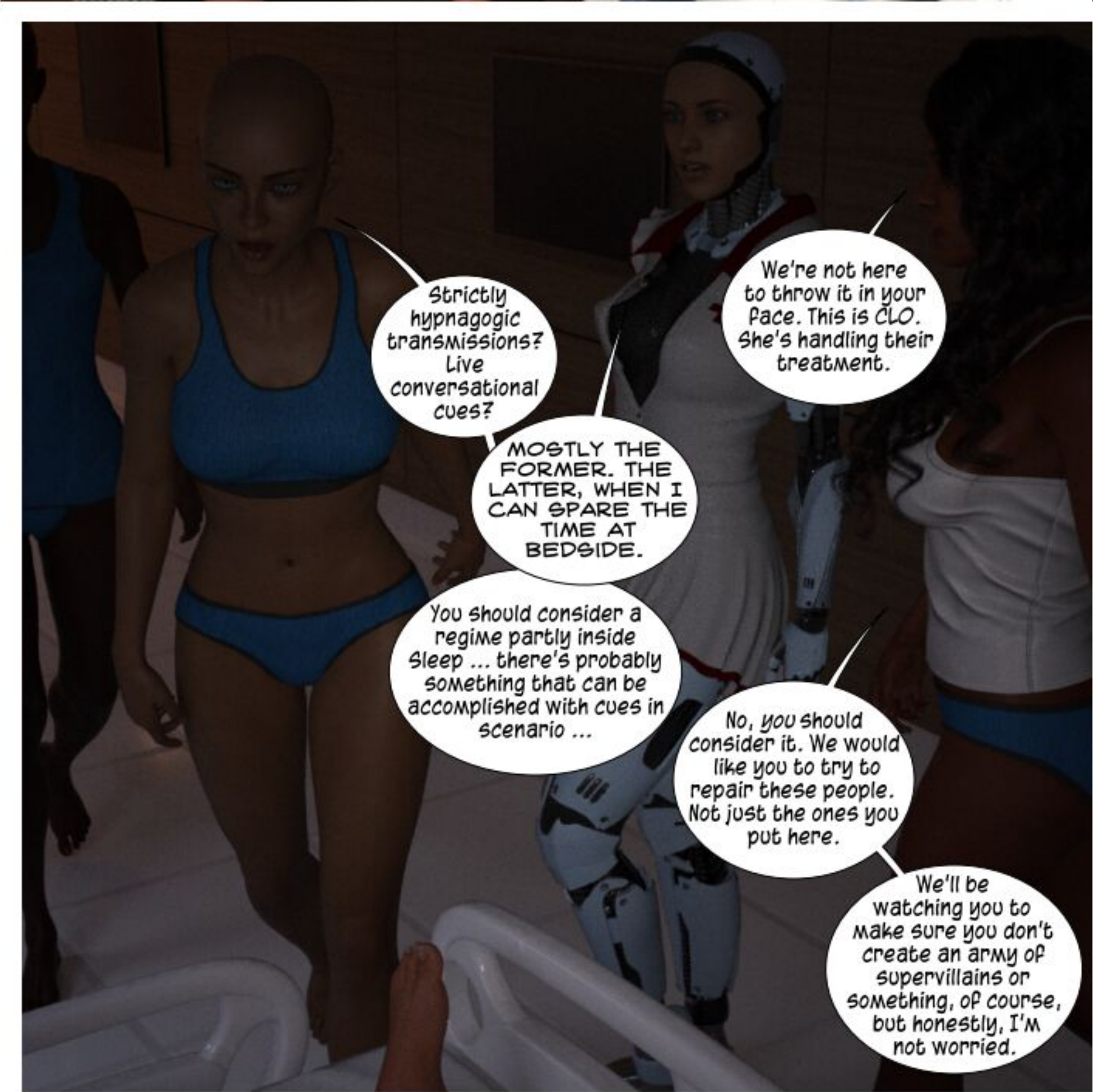
What is this? A coma ward?

Sort of.

It's a facility for people whose mental state has been altered so heavily in sleep that they can't recover from the alterations when awakened.

For example, down here are some people who never recovered from being turned into lab rats for too long.

... Ouch.



Strictly hypnagogic transmissions? Live conversational cues?

MOSTLY THE FORMER. THE LATTER, WHEN I CAN SPARE THE TIME AT BEDSIDE.

You should consider a regime partly inside sleep ... there's probably something that can be accomplished with cues in scenario ...

No, you should consider it. We would like you to try to repair these people. Not just the ones you put here.

We'll be watching you to make sure you don't create an army of supervillains or something, of course, but honestly, I'm not worried.

We're not here to throw it in your face. This is CLO. She's handling their treatment.



Hmm. Penance, eh? Well, I suppose it's apropos.

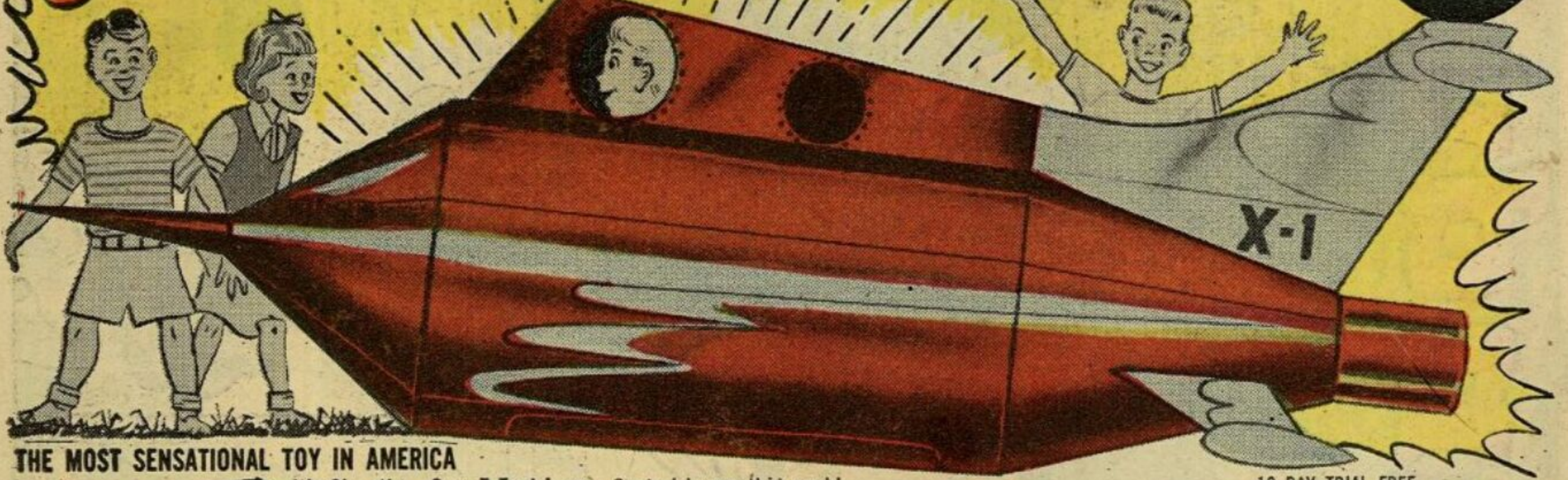
And it's an interesting challenge.

... I'll do it.

EXCELLENT! I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU.

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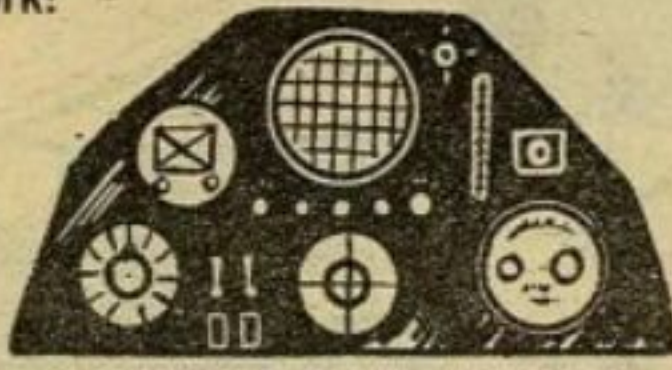
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- I enclose \$4.98 plus 63¢ postage and handling charge for my Space Ship. Same Money Back Guarantee.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____

BUILD YOUR OWN REAL—

ELECTRIC ENGINE

ONLY 89¢



Comes ready for quick assembly with easy to follow instructions

- * EDUCATIONAL!
- * INSTRUCTIVE!
- * SCIENTIFIC!
- * USEFUL!

NOW—You too can be the first on your block to MAKE and OWN this amazing

ELECTRIC ENGINE YES—this MAGNETIC MOTOR actually speeds up to 4000 revolutions per minute and will operate small cars, boats and other models. It's so much fun—so easy to make! It will delight and fascinate you hour after hour. Your parents and your teachers will love it—your friends will envy you—and it's absolutely safe!

MAKES A GREAT SCHOOL SCIENCE PROJECT!

SEND FOR YOUR ELECTRIC ENGINE TODAY!

MAIL TODAY ENGINES - DEPT. 129
BOX 397 ROCKVILLE CENTRE, N.Y.

RUSH ME (CHECK THE QUANTITY YOU WISH)

1 ENGINE ONLY 89¢ PLUS 11¢ POSTAGE & HANDLING TOTAL \$1.00

3 ENGINES ONLY \$2.59 PLUS 21¢ POSTAGE & HANDLING TOTAL \$2.80

6 ENGINES ONLY \$4.99 PLUS 31¢ POSTAGE & HANDLING TOTAL \$5.30

Please PRINT Information Below

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

CANADIAN AND FOREIGN ADD 25¢ PER ENGINE INT'L. MONEY ORDER
LARGER QUANTITIES QUOTED UPON REQUEST



Excuse me ...

I need to speak to the woman who runs this club?

The person at the door told me I should ask you about it.



She's away for a while.

I'm managing the business in her absence.

What can I do for you?