



I think we can make it through a night without Serille.

Nothing bad, I hope?

No, no. She just has some things to do outside the Souk.

So you're in charge.

No way! I stick to the street operations. Anora is senior for the house crew. She knows what to do.



Hooray, the back halls. I have been dying to take this mask off.

There's nothing pressing for me in here or out on the street, so I'm at liberty. I can't remember the last time I had a whole night to myself.

Does that mean you want to be alone? 'Cause I don't have anything tonight either, and I was going to ask if you wanted to play.



Can I take you up on that some other night? I was really thinking of going out and wandering around.

That doesn't sound any different from what you normally do.

It is, though. Being off-duty makes a difference.

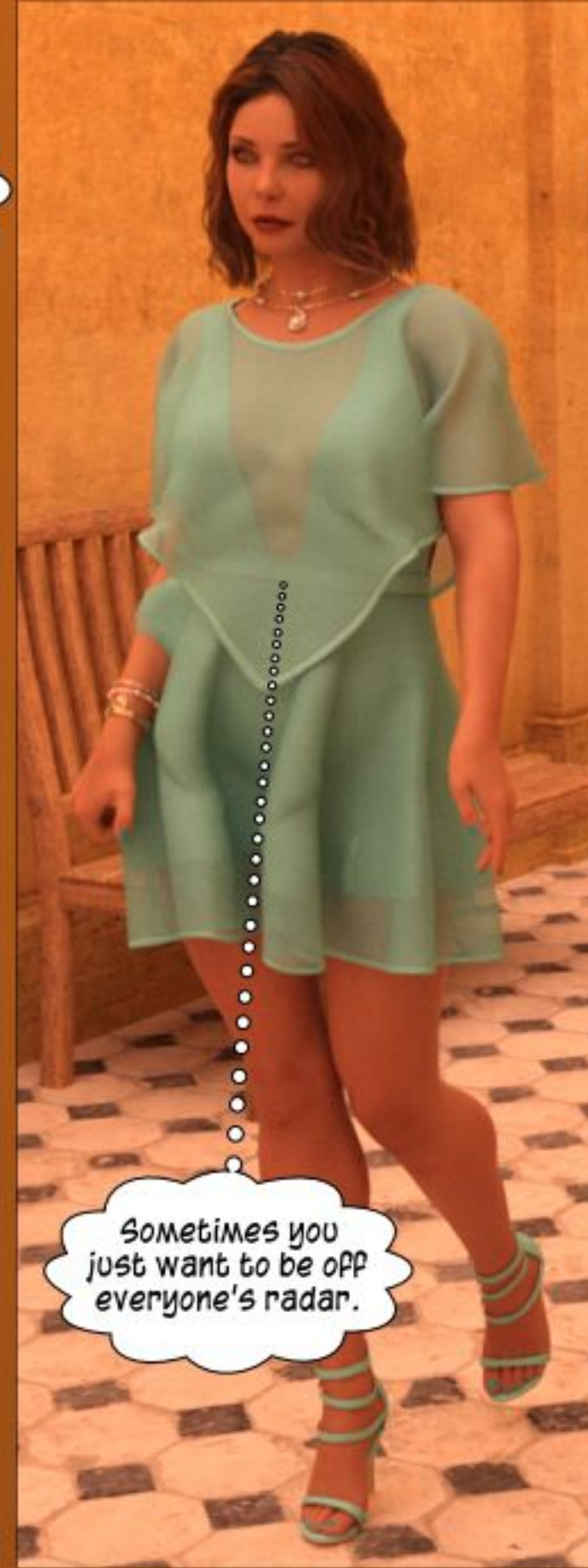
I mean, when I go out on the job, I'm not doing what I want to do.

Yeah, I see what you mean. Some other night, then. Have fun!



Even if I don't actually know what I do want to do.

I think mostly I just need some time with my thoughts ... I love this place, but sometimes you can't get quiet or privacy ...



Sometimes you just want to be off everyone's radar.



Oops, wait ...

There.



THIS IS EMILY. LONG-TERM READERS HAVE SEEN HER A FEW TIMES BEFORE, BUT MAY BE EXCUSED FOR FORGETTING. EMILY PREFERS IT THAT WAY.

SHE MAY BE THE MOST WELL-KNOWN FIGURE ON THE STREETS OF THE SOUK, AND AS KEEPER OF THE PEACE IS DEFINITELY THE MOST FEARED ... AND YET, VERY FEW OUTSIDE THE DAUGHTERS' COMPLEX KNOW HER NAME, AND EVEN FEWER KNOW HER FACE.

THIS SUITS HER PURPOSES ESPECIALLY WELL THIS EVENING.

# NIGHT BY FTRILBY

WORDS AND IMAGES BY FTRILBY



OK, what?

Huh?

You keep looking at me like something's wrong or something's funny. Maybe both.

It's just ... I remember on one of our first things, you got a little shook because the outfits we were wearing were too revealing.\*

Now here you are with a bare belly and a slit skirt.

These clothes are comfortable. Also, it's a club. You're the one who always wants me to dress for the role.

It's not that kind of club. People go to get fried. No one notices what anybody's wearing.

And that isn't my point.



Look, last year when you decided to change it up ...

I didn't ask, and I certainly don't have a say over what you wear or how you look.

If this is what you want, I'm thrilled. Really. And it looks good on you. But I'm not used to it yet, not even after months.

You could have asked.

It didn't feel like you wanted me to. Still doesn't.

Aren't we supposed to be able to ask each other nosy things?

What's the point of being friends if you can't get up in each other's business?

Ha!

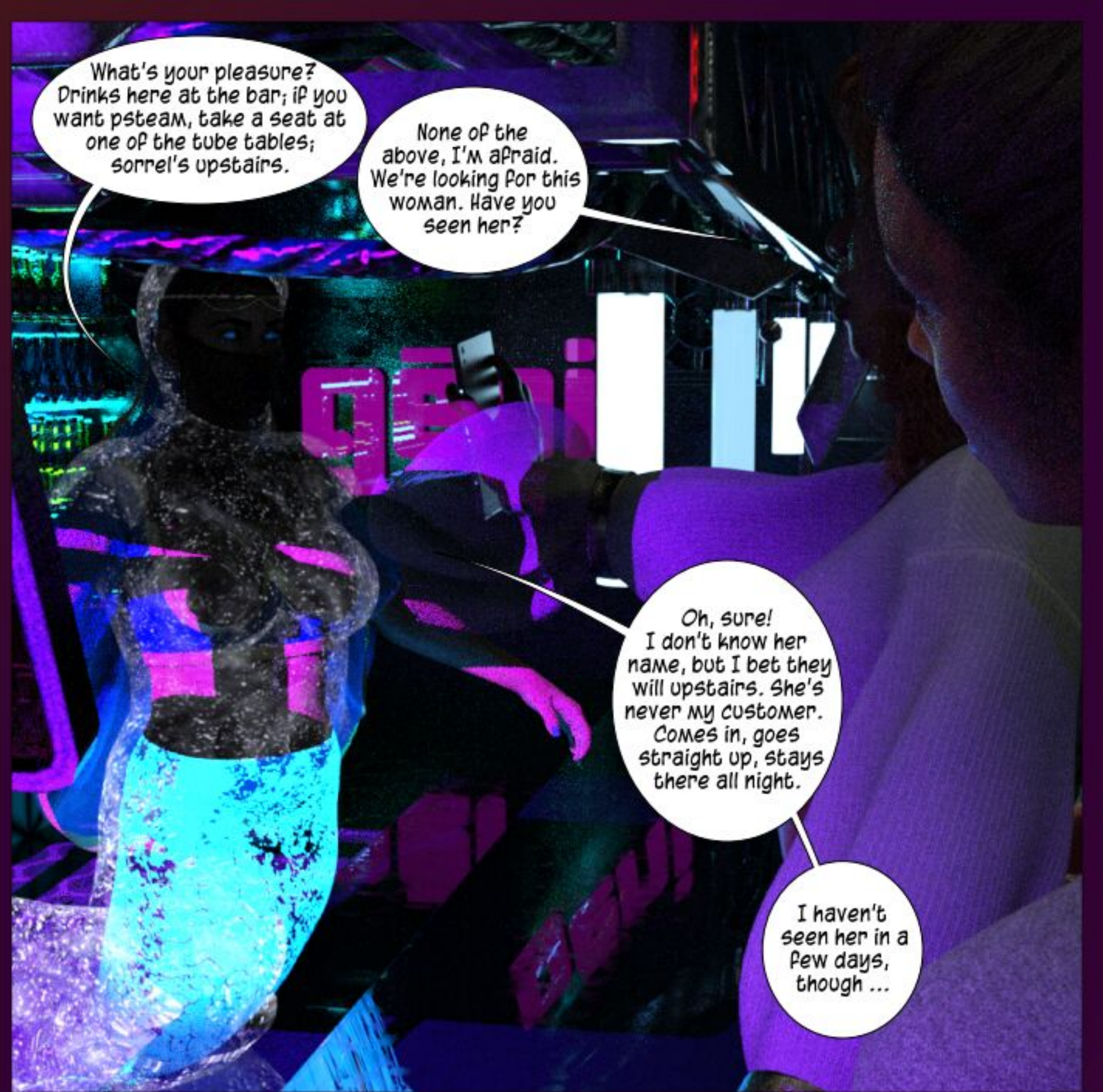
It's not all that, anyway. You're going to be disappointed.

I'll explain later. This probably isn't a good time.

\* SS #4, IF YOU'RE DYING TO KNOW. -T



I'm not sure what we're getting into here, and I'd rather concentrate on that.



What's your pleasure? Drinks here at the bar; if you want psteam, take a seat at one of the tube tables; sorrel's upstairs.

None of the above, I'm afraid. We're looking for this woman. Have you seen her?

Oh, sure! I don't know her name, but I bet they will upstairs. She's never my customer. Comes in, goes straight up, stays there all night.

I haven't seen her in a few days, though ...



I wonder if people had as many ways to mess with their heads before sleep.

Probably more. And with worse side effects. At least people don't die from this stuff like they do from synth.

You're not having any?

I'm just not in that kind of mood. I think I'm going to go upstairs.

If you take sorrel, you won't come out in time for the party ...

Yeah. I don't want to go to the party. Tell Lurie I couldn't make it.



Hello! Are you two together?



Uh ... not in the way I think you mean.

Why do you ask?

Some Polks want to do it together. See those rooms back there? I'm not sure why, you don't experience the same things and it'd be kind of hard to pool around, but ...

Actually, we'd just like to ask you some questions.

Sure! Let me deal with this customer first.



Hello again! Would you like leaves or juice?

Oh, uh, let's try the juice this time.



Here you go! Freshly squeezed.

This hits a lot faster than eating the leaves. I'll get you a bottle.



Ohhh ... that's, uh ...

Told you.

Ready?



Huh.



She's actually in the bottle now? That's some serious algorithmic work.

Isn't that neat?

OK, but why put her in a bottle? Not just for the theme, I hope ...

You haven't tried sorrel, have you? It makes you see weird stuff. People get caught up in what they're seeing. Try to walk around, do things while they're on it ...

This way she gets a space to herself where she can't get into trouble. She'll be on it for about six hours, then she'll fall asleep, and one of us will let her out tomorrow morning. It's easier than providing a room for everybody.



What did you want to ask me?

We're looking for this woman. Word is she's a regular here.

Oh ... Why do you want to know? I mean, I can't just--

It's all right. We're acting on behalf of Serene Barker, and you can check that. Zinnia here hasn't been seen for four days. We're trying to find her.

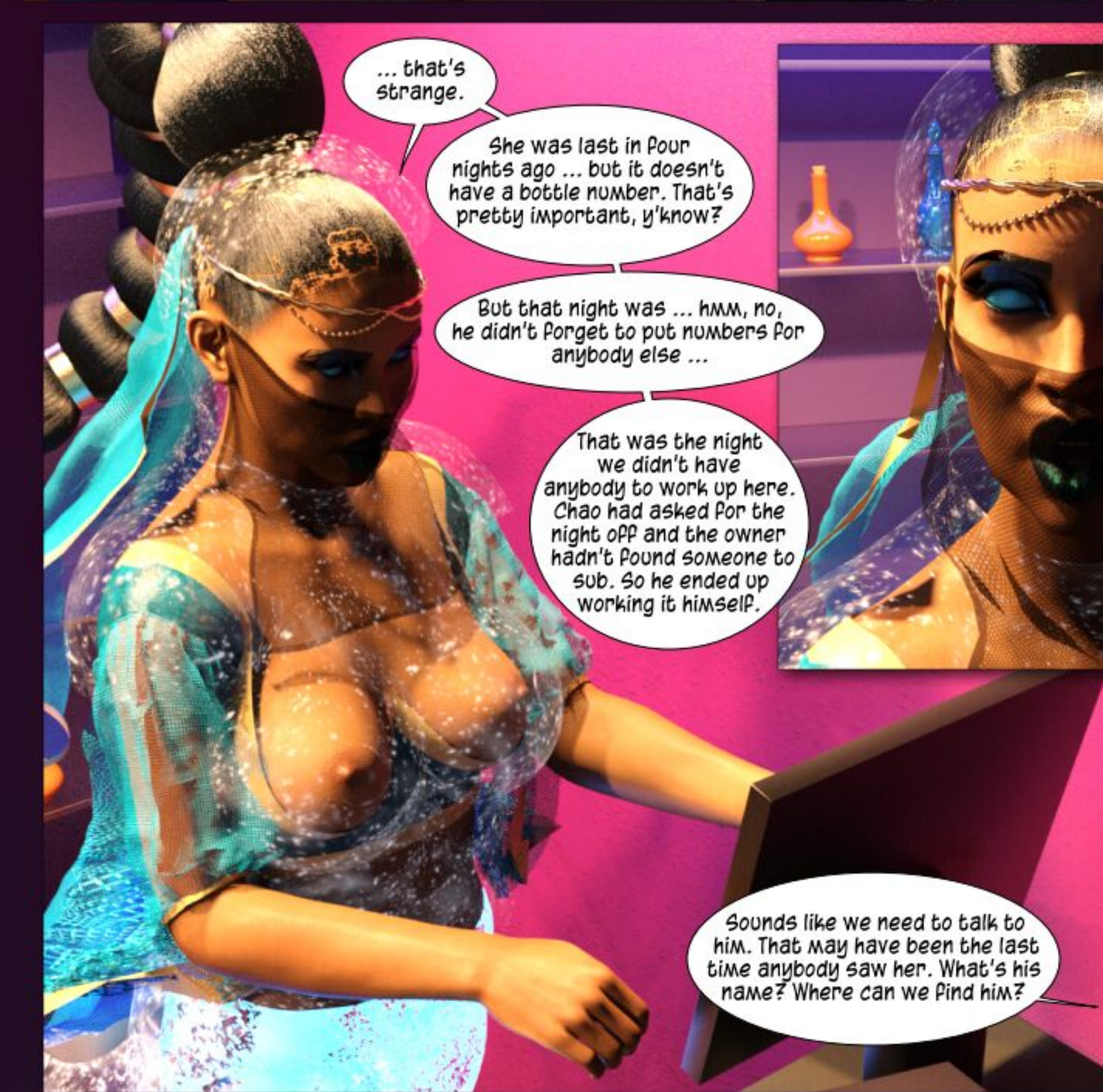
Apparently this is one of the few places where she spent a lot of time.

That's for sure. She was in here most nights.

She hasn't come in tonight--though it's real early, that was my first customer just then.

Come to think of it, I've been on the last two nights and I haven't seen her.

Serene Barker, huh? Let me check the records.



... that's strange.

She was last in four nights ago ... but it doesn't have a bottle number. That's pretty important, y'know?

But that night was ... hmm, no, he didn't forget to put numbers for anybody else ...

That was the night we didn't have anybody to work up here. Chao had asked for the night off and the owner hadn't found someone to sub. So he ended up working it himself.

Sounds like we need to talk to him. That may have been the last time anybody saw her. What's his name? Where can we find him?



His name's Slipshear, but I don't know where he goes when he's not here. He doesn't tell us stuff like that.

You can hang around and see if he comes in, but sometimes we don't see him for days.

This is why I hate trying to do anything in the Souk.

Would you work for someone you couldn't find in an emergency?

I wouldn't work for anybody.

Heh. No, you wouldn't, would you?



I'm not sure we can do anything else right now without knowing where--

If you're looking for Slipshear, he also runs a crafting shop on Needle Street.

Uh ... thanks.



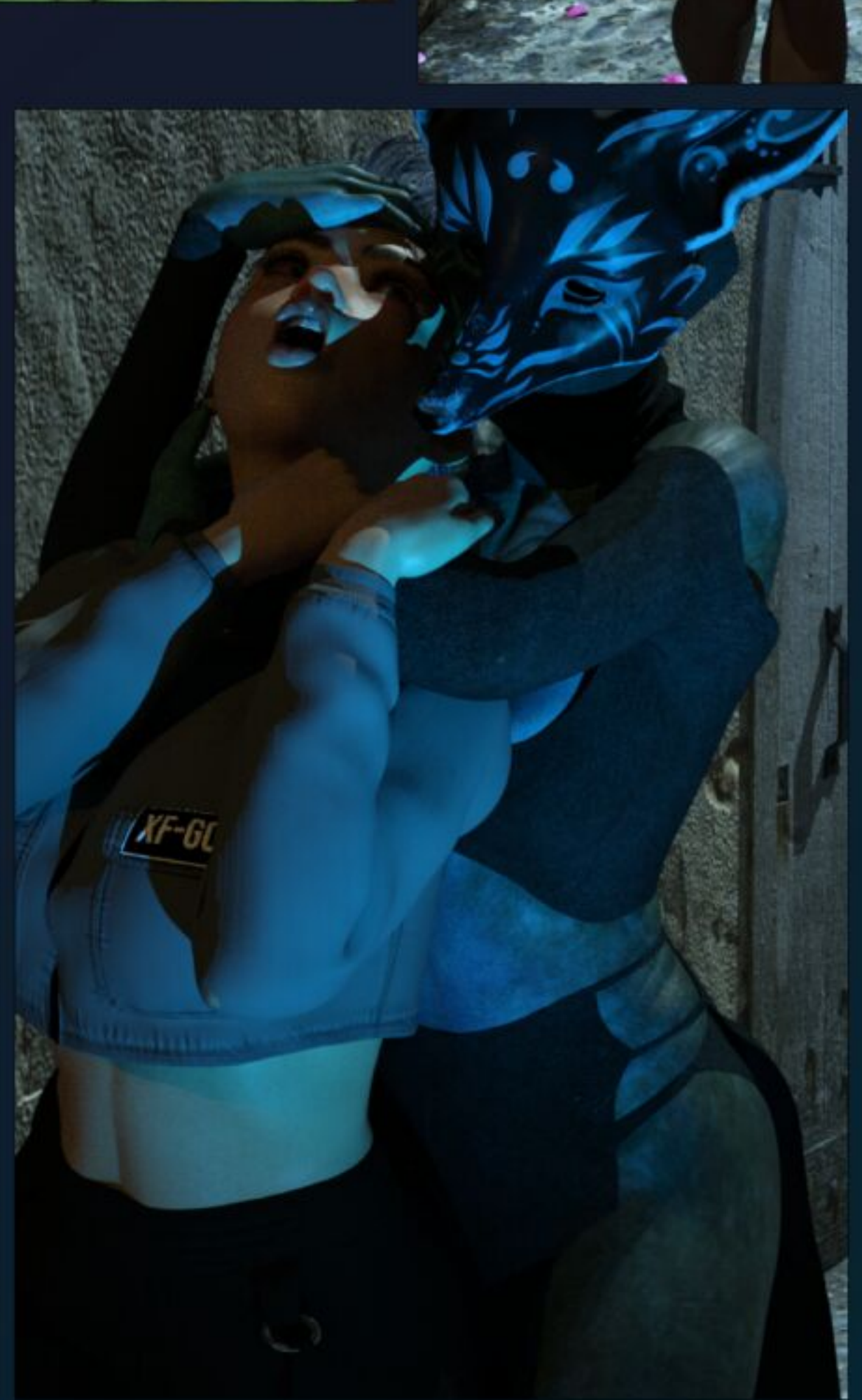
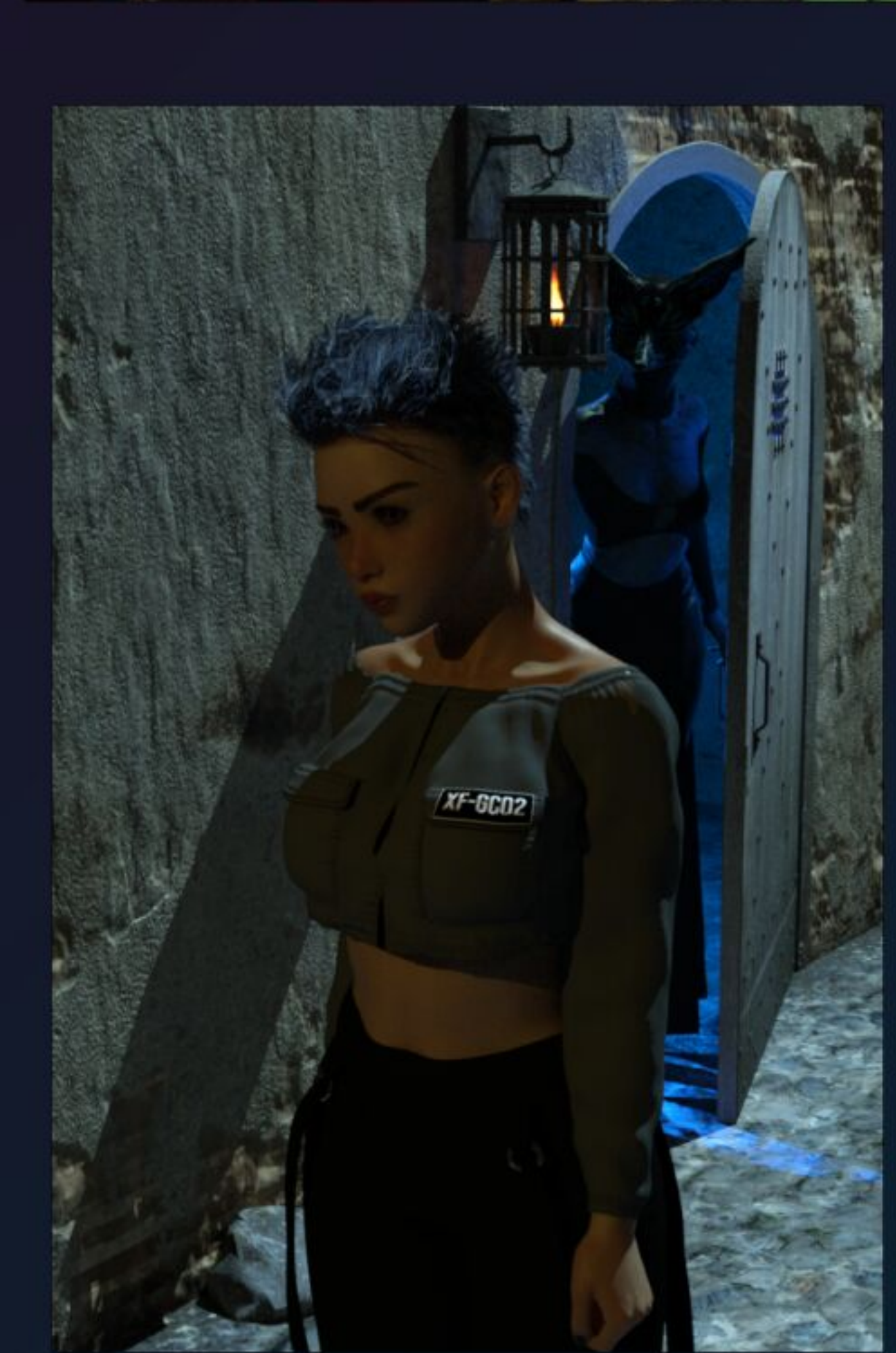
Come on! It's going to be a lot of fun.

No, it's going to be an orgy.

I'm tired of it. That's all anybody in that bunch does for "fun."

I mean, sex is great, but ...

I'm going home. I might go to bed early. I don't want to have sex with anybody for a while.





Aaaigh!

Let's Puck.



Don't you want to? I do.

uhh?

C'mon.

It'll be Fun.

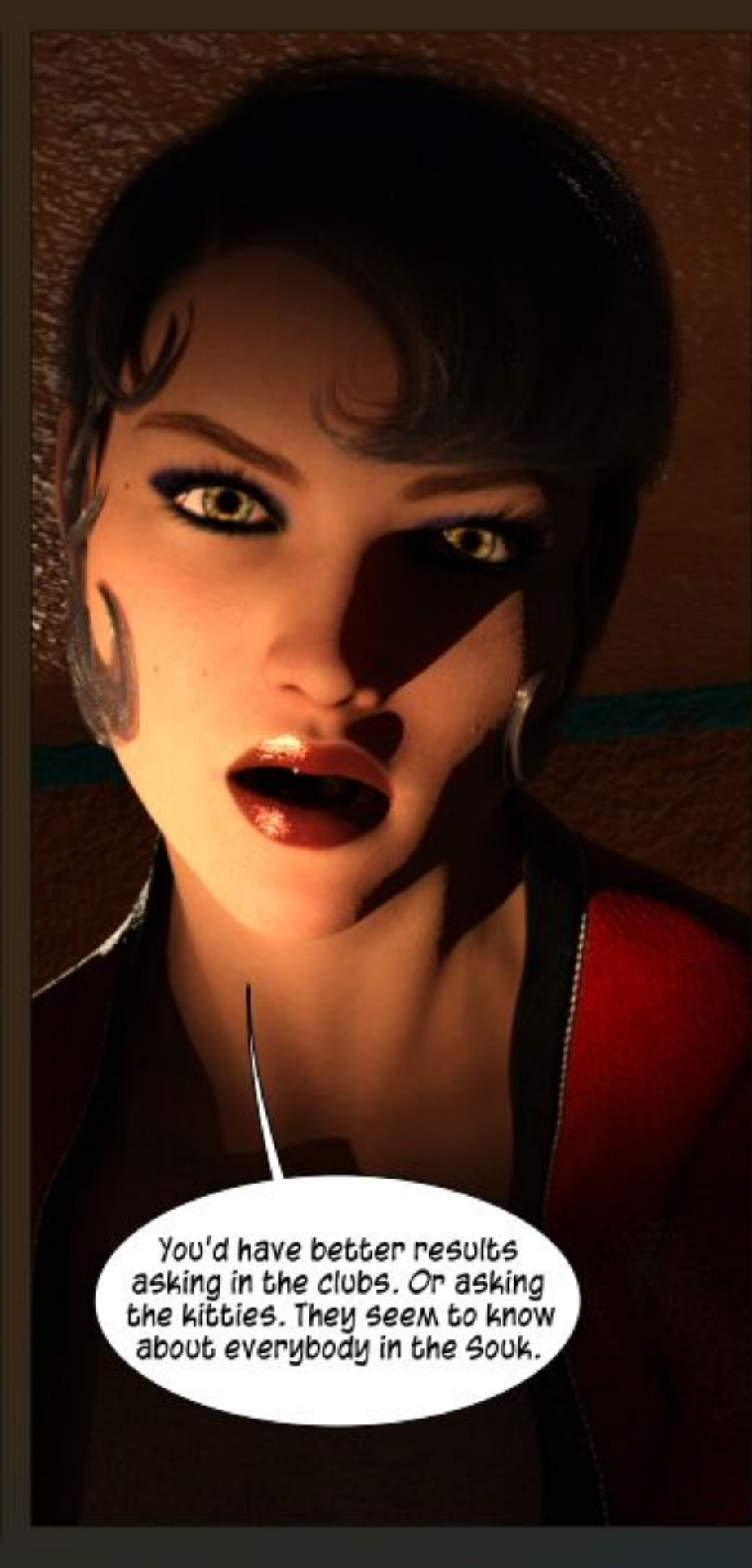


... No, I haven't.

And I would certainly remember seeing someone like that. I mean, no offense, but there aren't a lot of people your height wandering around here.

Why ask me in particular?

I'm not asking you in particular. You're the fourth crafter I've tried so far.

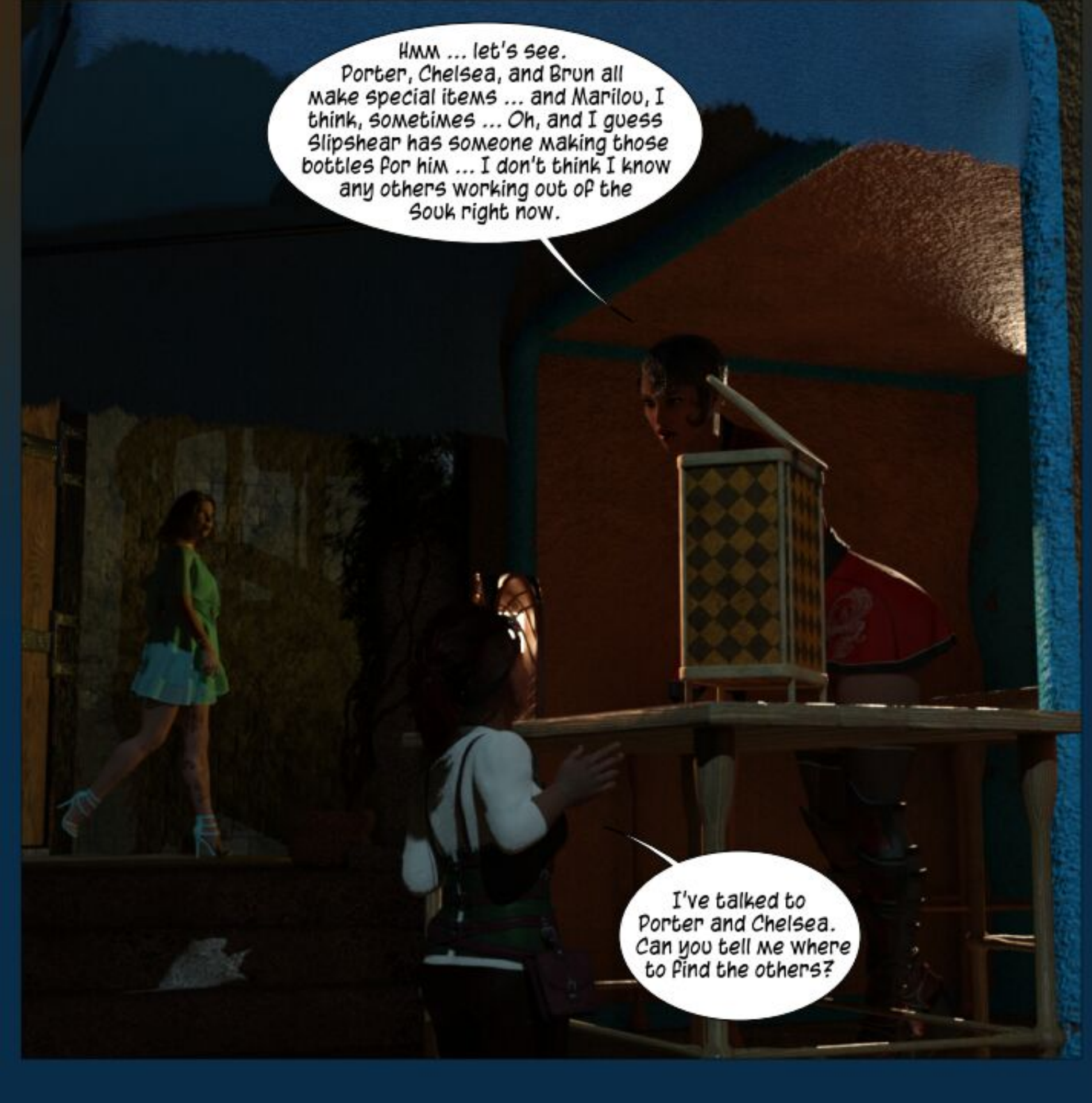


You'd have better results asking in the clubs. Or asking the kitties. They seem to know about everybody in the Souk.



She wouldn't have gone to a club. And the kitties might not have noticed her.

We Dalliers make things. Threadbare came to the Souk because she was trying to learn the technique to make a special item. I don't know what it was, exactly. Something that *does* something, like your drop boxes. It wouldn't just be a carpet or a lamp.



Hmm ... let's see. Porter, Chelsea, and Brun all make special items ... and Marilou, I think, sometimes ... Oh, and I guess Slipshear has someone making those bottles for him ... I don't think I know any others working out of the Souk right now.

I've talked to Porter and Chelsea. Can you tell me where to find the others?



But you can't just go! There are people who are going to be here later who want to see you!

Dona, I'm sorry. You didn't tell me you wanted me to stay here for hours. I've got four other places I have to go tonight. As it is I'm not sure how I'm going to fit it all in.



... If I only stay at Harold's long enough to say hello to everyone, and then I immediately run to the Arkwright thing, I should have enough time after that to--



...





Uhhmmmm ...

Your turn!

I'm ready.

And so's she.



Another round of applause for our volunteer!

CLAPCLAPCLAP



So are you going to invite her to join the team?

"The team"?

It's a team! I mean, OK, some of the people on it are off in other blocks and we don't see them much, but ...

I'm not sure it's a team. I think it's more like "you plus whoever you can talk into doing stuff."

Give her time. You don't realize how long it takes to get used to sleep. She probably hasn't even set up a private space yet.

But, yeah, I'll probably try. When she's ready.

I see a lot of me in Jex. Which means I know she won't be able to just sit somewhere in Serenity. She's going to get bored fast, and want something interesting to do.

Hmm.

That's the "I have something I'm not sure I should bring up" hmm.

Are you bored?

Sometimes. More than I like.

So, ah, why have you been trying to avoid doing ...

... well, anything?



And shouldn't we have hit Needle St by now?

Yeah. We're officially lost.

It wasn't hard to get lost in the Souk before the parts started moving around.

They tell me doubling back doesn't help.

I'm not doing private scenarios because no one wants anything interesting.

I'm months ahead on scripting passives.

The other kind of work ... well, tell you what. When I figure out why I'm avoiding it, you'll be the first to know. OK?



I really need to go talk to GeoPP.

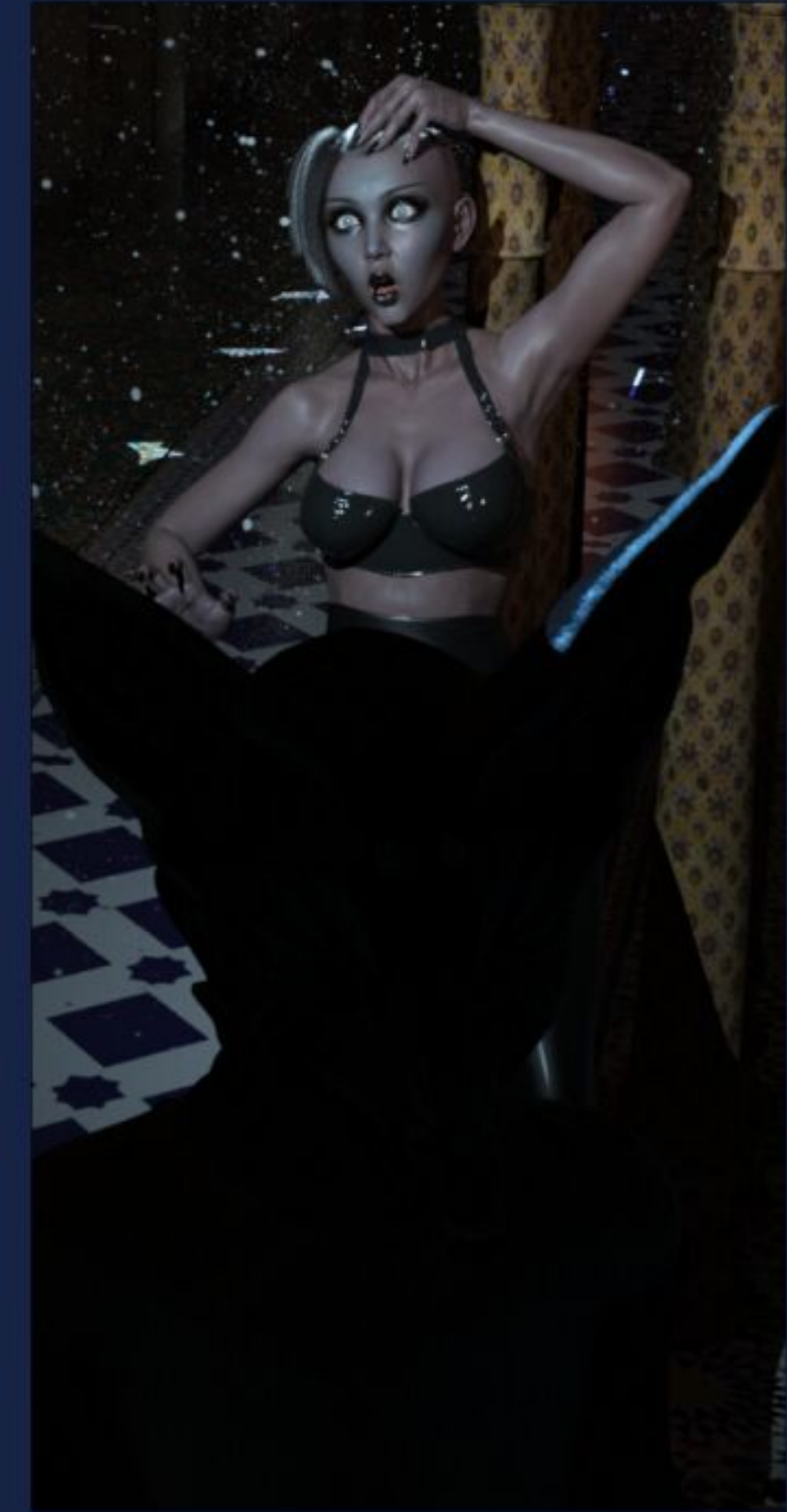
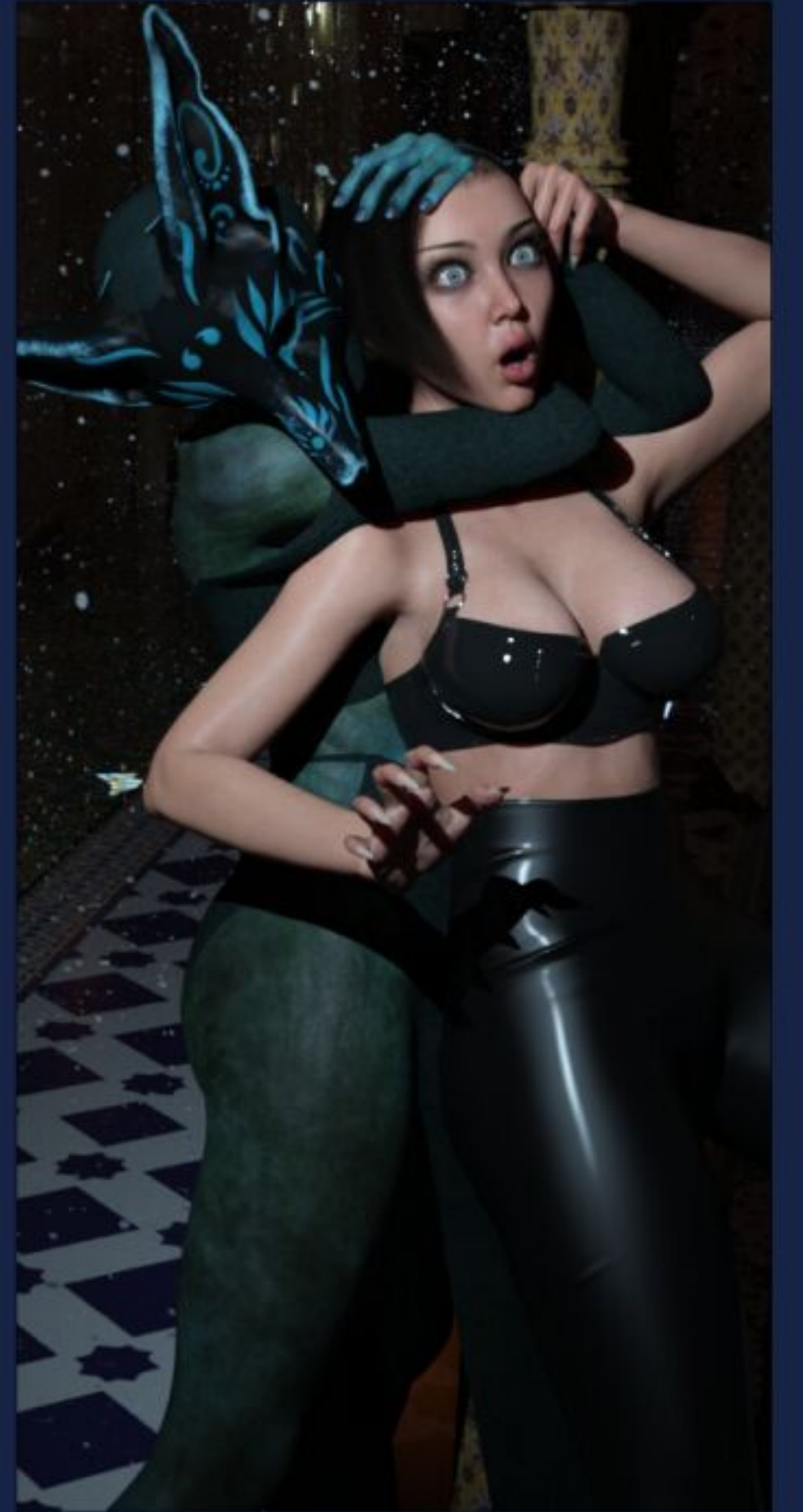
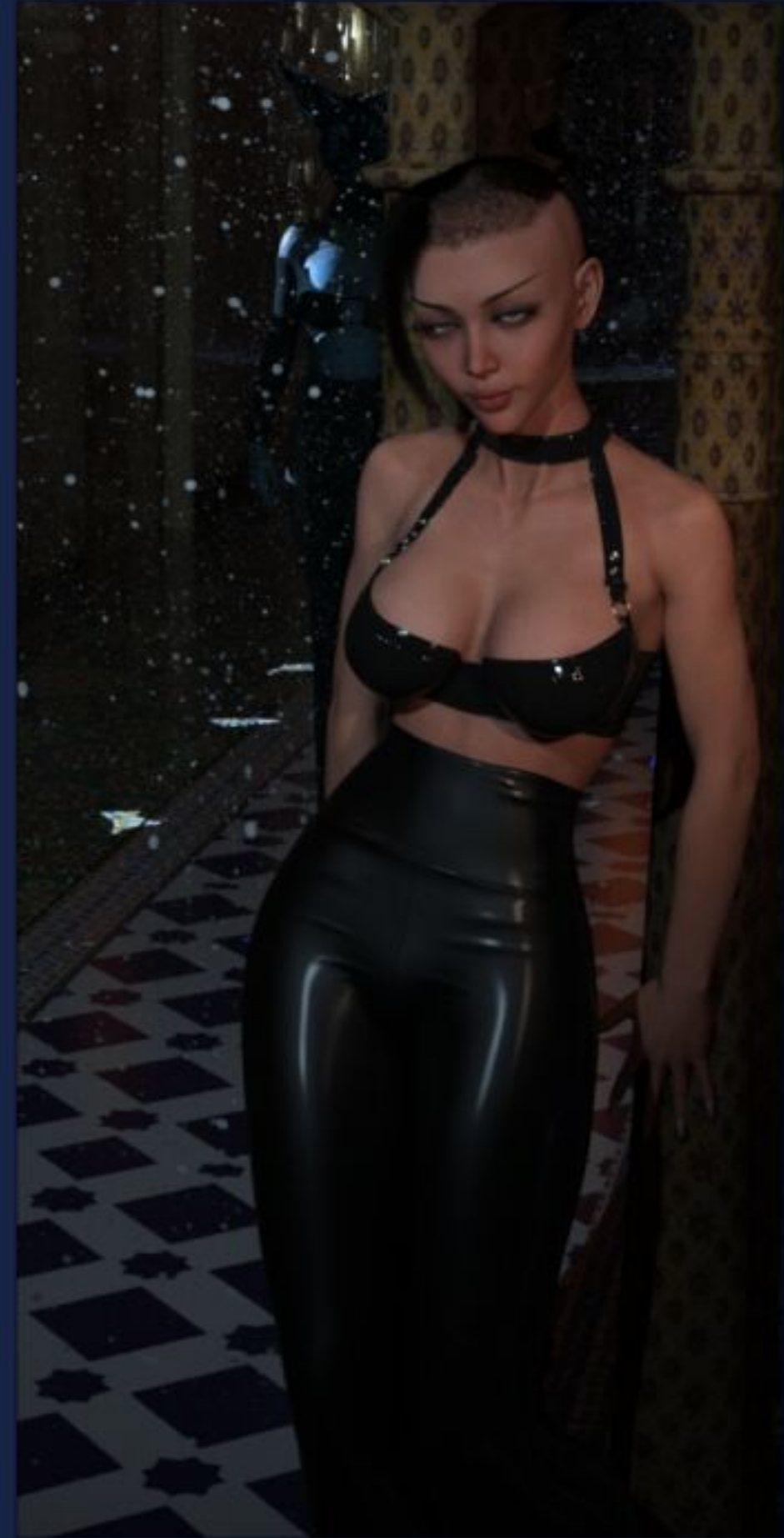
Aw.

Well, that's why we came by here ...

Look, it'll just take a second. Then we can go to my place and do this all night if you want.

Mmm. I want.

... I'll be right back.



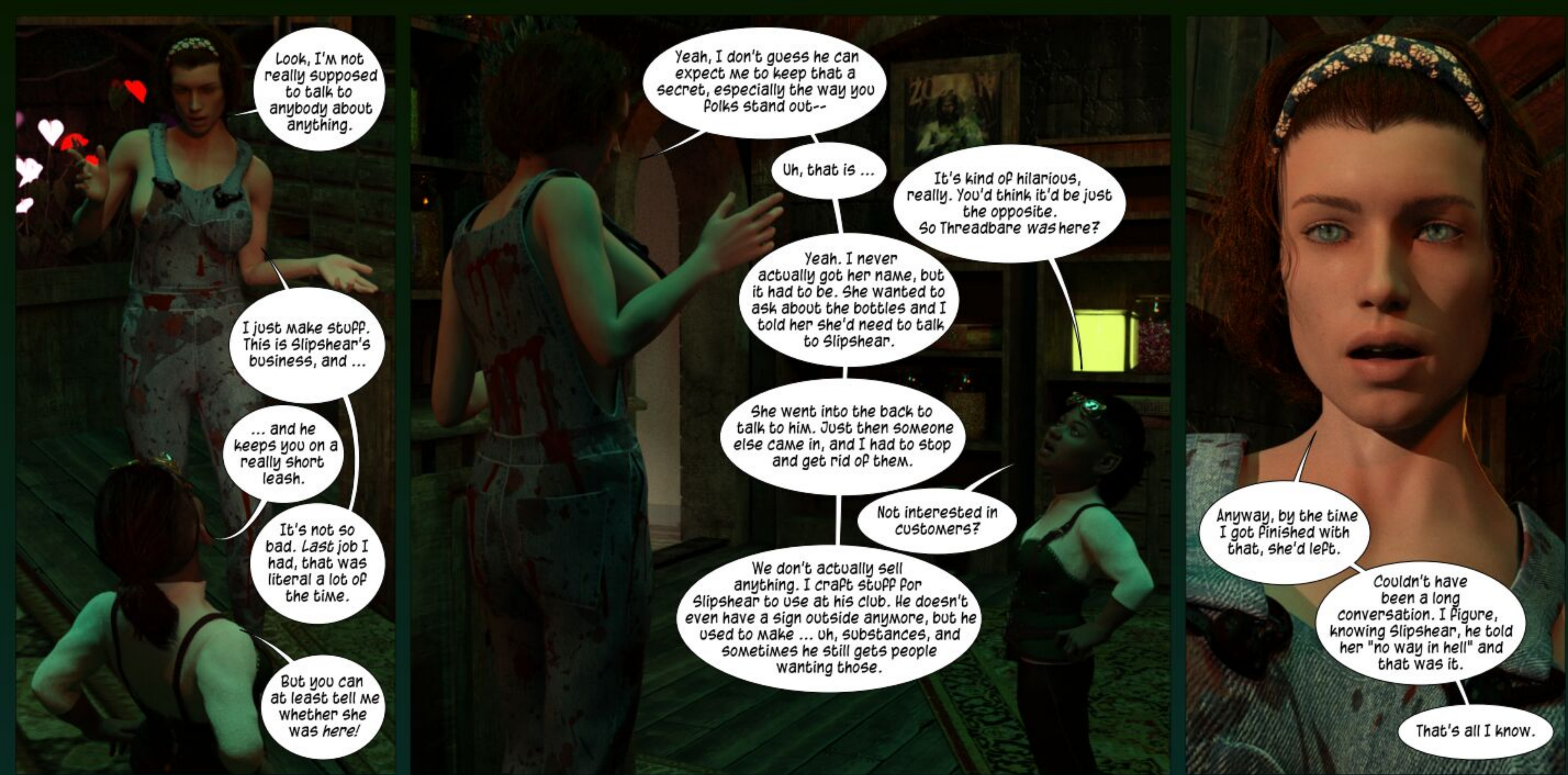
OK, all sorted out!

We going to my place now?



Your place? Are you kidding? What makes you think I'd ever go home with a loser like you?

Get out of my sight!



Look, I'm not really supposed to talk to anybody about anything.

Yeah, I don't guess he can expect me to keep that a secret, especially the way you Polks stand out--

Uh, that is ...

It's kind of hilarious, really. You'd think it'd be just the opposite. So Threadbare was here?

Yeah. I never actually got her name, but it had to be. She wanted to ask about the bottles and I told her she'd need to talk to Slipshear.

She went into the back to talk to him. Just then someone else came in, and I had to stop and get rid of them.

Not interested in customers?

We don't actually sell anything. I craft stuff for Slipshear to use at his club. He doesn't even have a sign outside anymore, but he used to make ... uh, substances, and sometimes he still gets people wanting those.

I just make stuff. This is Slipshear's business, and ...

... and he keeps you on a really short leash.

It's not so bad. Last job I had, that was literal a lot of the time.

But you can at least tell me whether she was here!

Anyway, by the time I got finished with that, she'd left.

Couldn't have been a long conversation. I figure, knowing Slipshear, he told her "no way in hell" and that was it.

That's all I know.



Jook, we can't grab somebody else so soon! The last one was only a few days ago--

And we haven't heard a word from Scholz about it. Just like the one before that. I'm telling you, Prat, he's pissed off at us.

Do you have any idea what happens to people who make him mad? You've seen what that witch of his can do ... we've got to get him more subjects. It's our only chance.

YOU MAY REMEMBER JOOK AND PRAT FROM LAST ISSUE, WHEN THEY KIDNAPPED JEX AND THREW HER (LITERALLY) INTO THE SCHOLZ HOLDINGS.



And I think I see an opportunity.



Is she on sorrel like the last one was?

They shouldn't oughta let people walk the streets like that.



Jook!  
This is a bad idea ...

It's a great idea. She's not in any condition to fight back.

Come on! I don't want to lose her.



Somebody is gonna see us!

We're not going to grab her where anyone can see us, idiot.



I swear, we've been back at the same spot three times now ...

Leyna!  
Stop!!



Aaauah!!

I gotcha.



So that's what one of those holes looks like.

Doesn't look like anything.

I don't know how people can still live here.

Maybe they like the excitement.

Nobody needs that much excitement.



FUCK ME!  
YEAAAA!!

More!  
MORE!

That is not a  
performance.

Everybody!  
I want EVERYBODY!!  
Need the whole  
WORLD to Fuck Me!

I need to go  
stop it, but not  
looking like this ...

Damn it, I was  
hoping to avoid  
putting the mask  
on tonight.



You know, I don't  
think she's in her right  
Mind. Even if she sounds  
like she's having fun ...  
something about it  
Peel's off.

I trust your  
judgement 100%  
in these things. You going  
to break it up?

I'm going to Peel  
guilty if I don't.



AAAAHHH!  
OOOOHH!  
YES!

The usual  
Method?

I stick  
with what  
works.

!

What the P...

Oh my god!



Hm!  
Given that reaction, I  
think you did the right  
thing.

I guess.  
I don't Peel great  
about it.

I think it  
was a good  
call. I was just  
trying to figure  
out what to do,  
myself.

Did you two find  
Slipshear all right?

... actually, no.

We've been  
wandering in circles  
ever since we saw  
you, I think.

That section has been  
really jittery lately, I  
don't know why.

Try going down  
Tailor's Way. It  
doesn't ever seem to  
move much.

You should be  
able to get directly  
to Needle Street  
from there.

IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING: NO, RUBY AND LEYNA HAVE NO IDEA WHO EMILY IS. IF THEY'VE EVER SEEN HER, IT'S ONLY BEEN WHEN SHE'S MASKED. EMILY KNOWS WHO RUBY AND LEYNA ARE BY REPUTATION, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SHE'S EVER SEEN THEM, AND MAY NOT MAKE THE CONNECTION. -T





Missing person, eh? Well, I doubt I can tell you anything, but I'll try.

Give me just a moment, though, would you? I was in the middle of some work in the back and I need to cover it so it doesn't dry out.

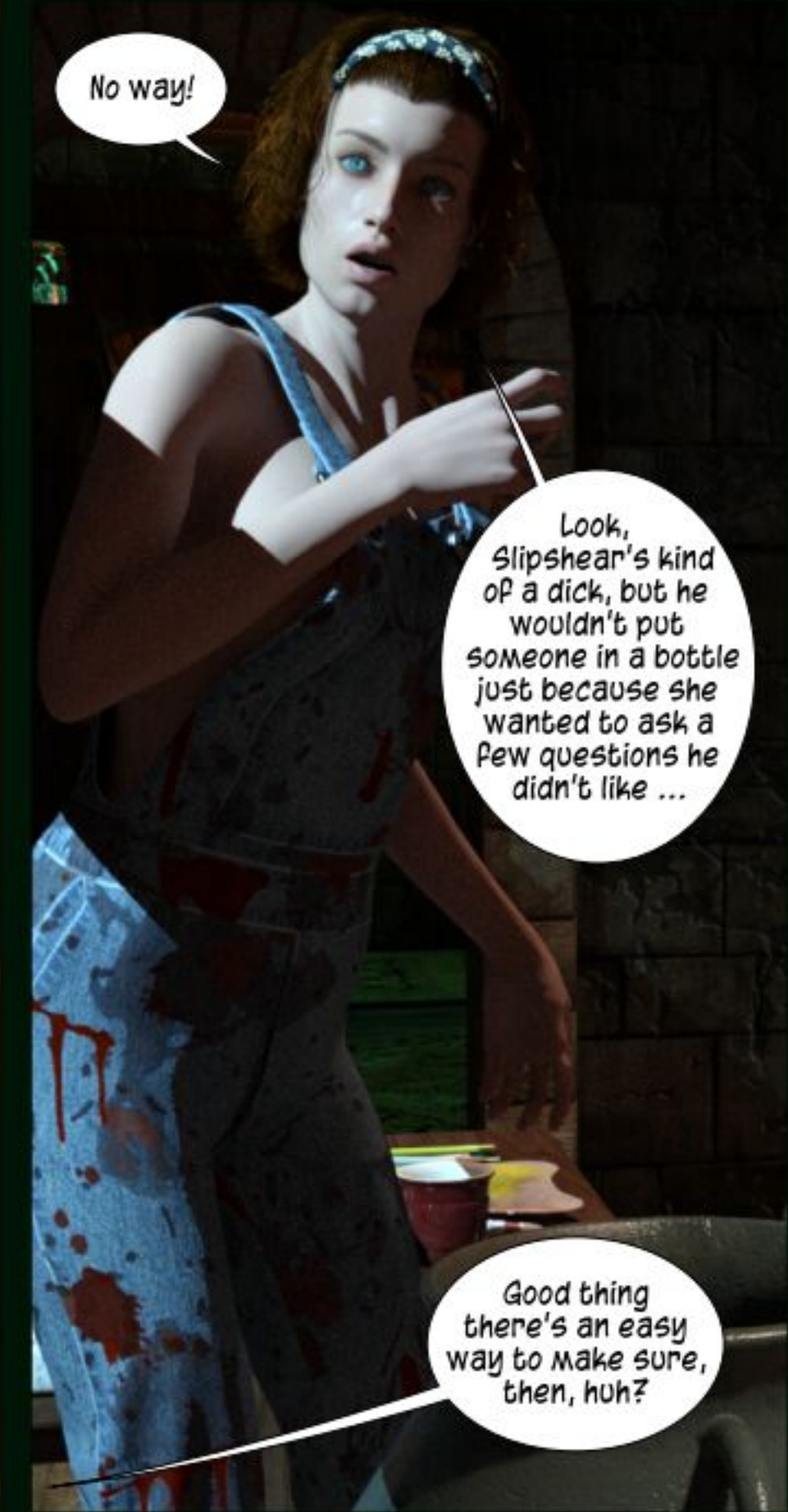
You know he's going to run out the back door, right?

He's never touched clay in his life. All that stuPP back there is mine.

Wait!



Hey! What are you doing? You're not supposed to be in here.



She didn't leave.

Sorry?

No way!

Look, Slipshear's kind of a dick, but he wouldn't put someone in a bottle just because she wanted to ask a few questions he didn't like ...

Threadbare never left here after talking to Slipshear.

You said you made stuPP for him to use at his club. I asked at his club. They told me what the bottles do.

I think she's in one of them.

Good thing there's an easy way to make sure, then, huh?

-- sigh --

Well, it wouldn't be any of the ones you were looking at.

Those will all go to the club in the next few days. The ones up on this shelf he doesn't think are pretty enough for the club. They stay here and gather dust.

Hmm, although ...



There's someone in this one.

How can you tell?

Weights more than it should.



Beeswax, you didn't have to come look for me!

I was trying to disassemble the algorithm! I'd have recalled when I had enough--

You've been gone for three days!

Really? Wow. Easy to lose track of time in one of those, I guess.



You might not have had much luck with disassembly anyway.

I make the bottles. And I'm an intuitive crafter, not an algorithmic one.

That's why I can't tell you the secret. There isn't one. I just do it.

Look, you two had better both go. Slipshear's going to be in a horrible mood when he gets back as it is.

Yeah, it wasn't going well. Didn't want to parse. How'd you know?





Oh, wait. Here's somebody we might ask.

She ... doesn't look very reliable.

la la la la la la la

Prissy didn't do it! Whatever it is, Prissy didn't do it!

Relax. I didn't say you did anything. I just want you to look at a picture.

This woman. Have you seen her, Prissy? Maybe walking around looking really confused?

No ... yeth! Prithy saw her! She wath the one the nathty men got!

Nasty Men? Who are the nasty men, Prissy?

They grab people and take them to a plathe. Then the people don't come out ever. Prithy doethn't like the nathty men. Prithy hideth from them.

No, she's probably not, based on what I've heard.

But she also wanders the Souk at all hours and sees a lot of things.

Prissy! Wait just a second!

IF YOU'RE NEW HERE, YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING ABOUT PRISSY. IT WOULD TAKE TOO LONG TO EXPLAIN; HER STORY BEGINS WAY BACK IN #6 AND SHE WAS LAST SEEN IN #28. BUT SUFFICE TO SAY, HER HEAD'S BEEN MESSED WITH AN AWFUL LOT. -T

Prissy ... can you show us the place the nasty men go?



Jook, c'mon!

All right, let's get this thing fired up ...

We've got to let her go!

It's too much! The cats are gonna catch on! They'll come after us! You know nobody ever saw Terry again after--

Uuh  
UUUUUH  
Uuh  
UUUHH?  
UUHHH  
UUUH

Jook, you're not listening!

Would you shut the fuck up about the cats?

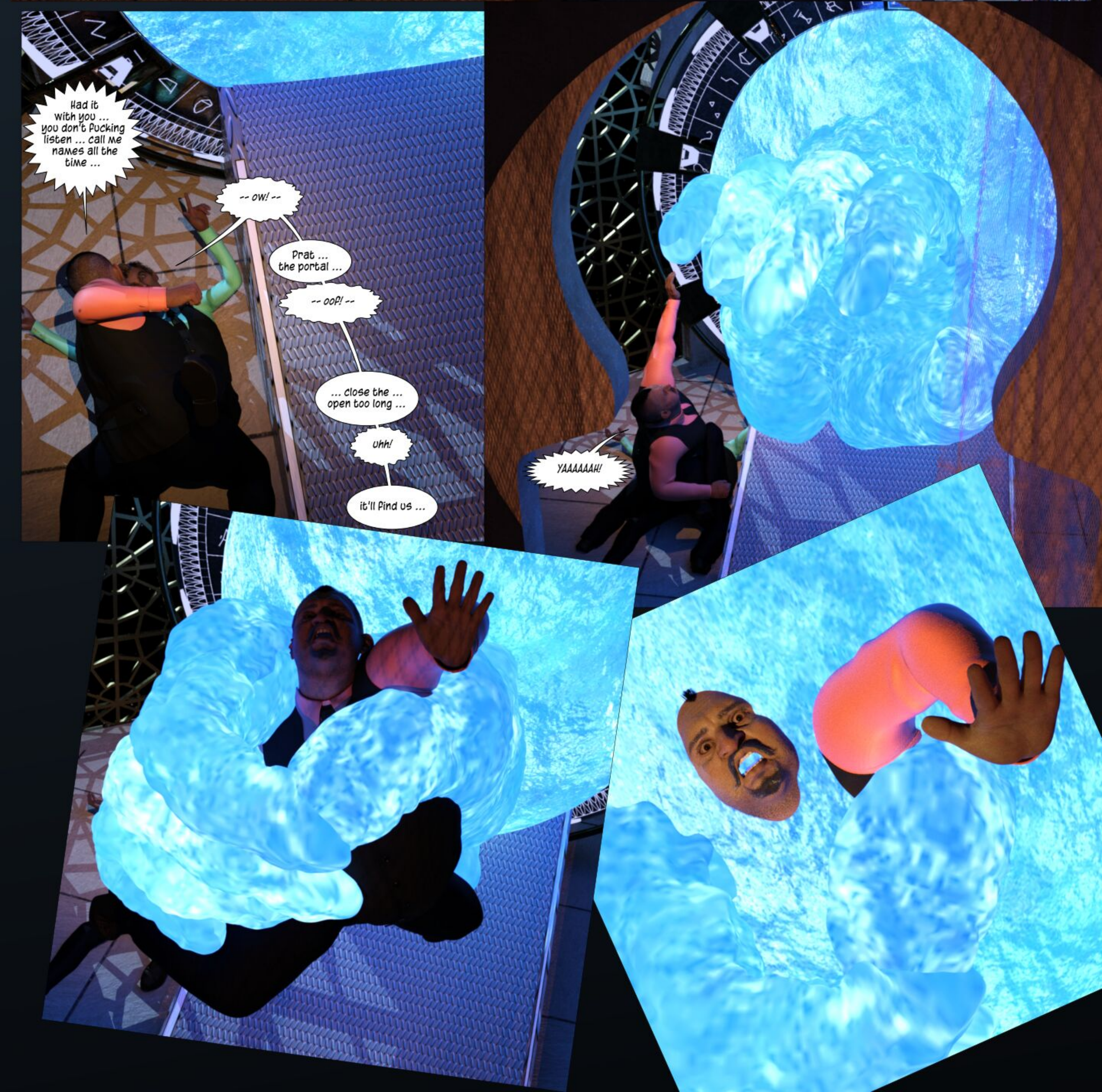
You're worried about something that's not going to happen, while I'm trying to keep Scholz off our asses!

Get some Pucking priorities, idiot!

AAAYARGH!

unk

Stop calling me an idiot!



Had it with you ... you don't Pucking listen ... call me names all the time ...

-- OW! --

Prat ... the portal ...

-- OOP! --

... close the ... open too long ...

Uhh!

it'll find us ...

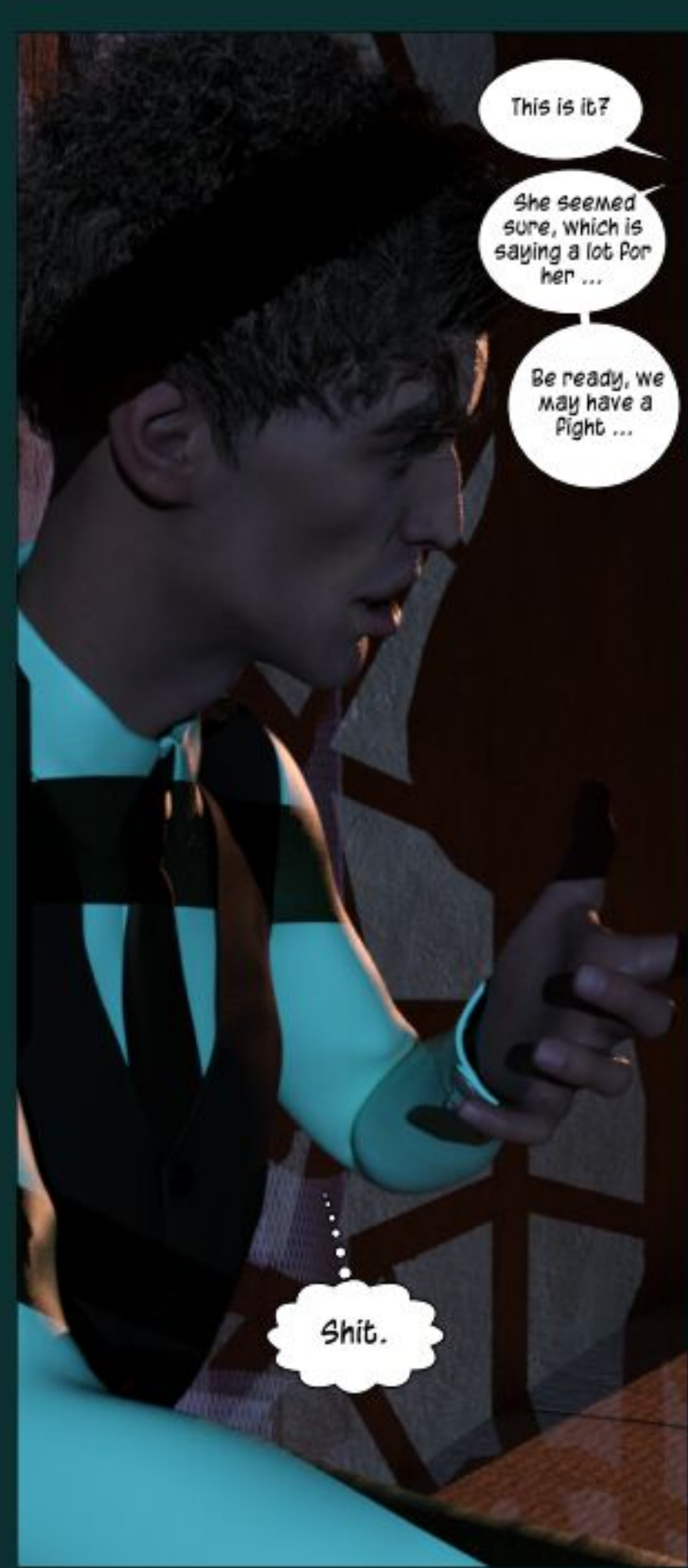
YAAAAAAH!



Damn it, Prat ...

Idiot.

Uuhh Uhhhhh Uuh



This is it?

She seemed sure, which is saying a lot for her ...

Be ready, we may have a fight ...

Shit.



Gonna have to scrap that location and start over ... or maybe not ...

There has to be some place I can hide from Scholz ...

Think about that later. Right now, run like hell--



Did you just hear a scream?

Maybe it was one of the assholes who did this falling in a hole.

Uuhh Uh Uhhhhh Uhh

Help me get her out of this stupp.



That's not Zinnia.

Uh?

Nope. She's not even herself.

Let me see if I can dispel it without needing to slap her silly ...



Uh?

Who are you? Where is this? What happened?

Well, we--



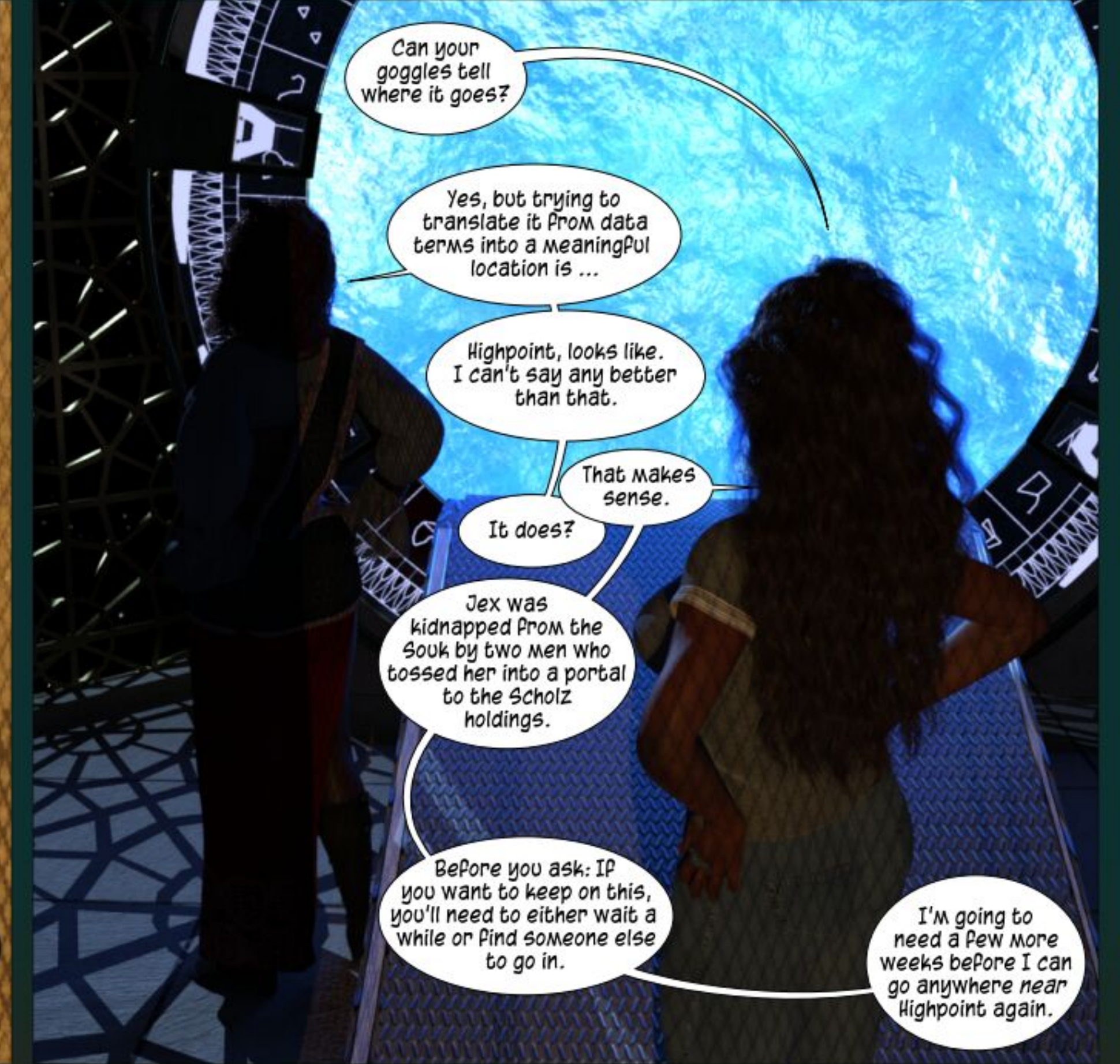
Oh no! I'm so late! I've missed like three things! They're going to think I blew them off!

Um ...

You're welcome!

Forget it, she doesn't know anything anyway.

And it wasn't going to be Zinnia--I'm thinking they tossed Zinnia in this portal the night they grabbed her.



Can your goggles tell where it goes?

Yes, but trying to translate it from data terms into a meaningful location is ...

Highpoint, looks like. I can't say any better than that.

That makes sense.

It does?

Jex was kidnapped from the Souk by two men who tossed her into a portal to the Scholz holdings.

Before you ask: If you want to keep on this, you'll need to either wait a while or find someone else to go in.

I'm going to need a few more weeks before I can go anywhere near Highpoint again.



Colleen.

We need to have a talk.

Yeah, we sure do.

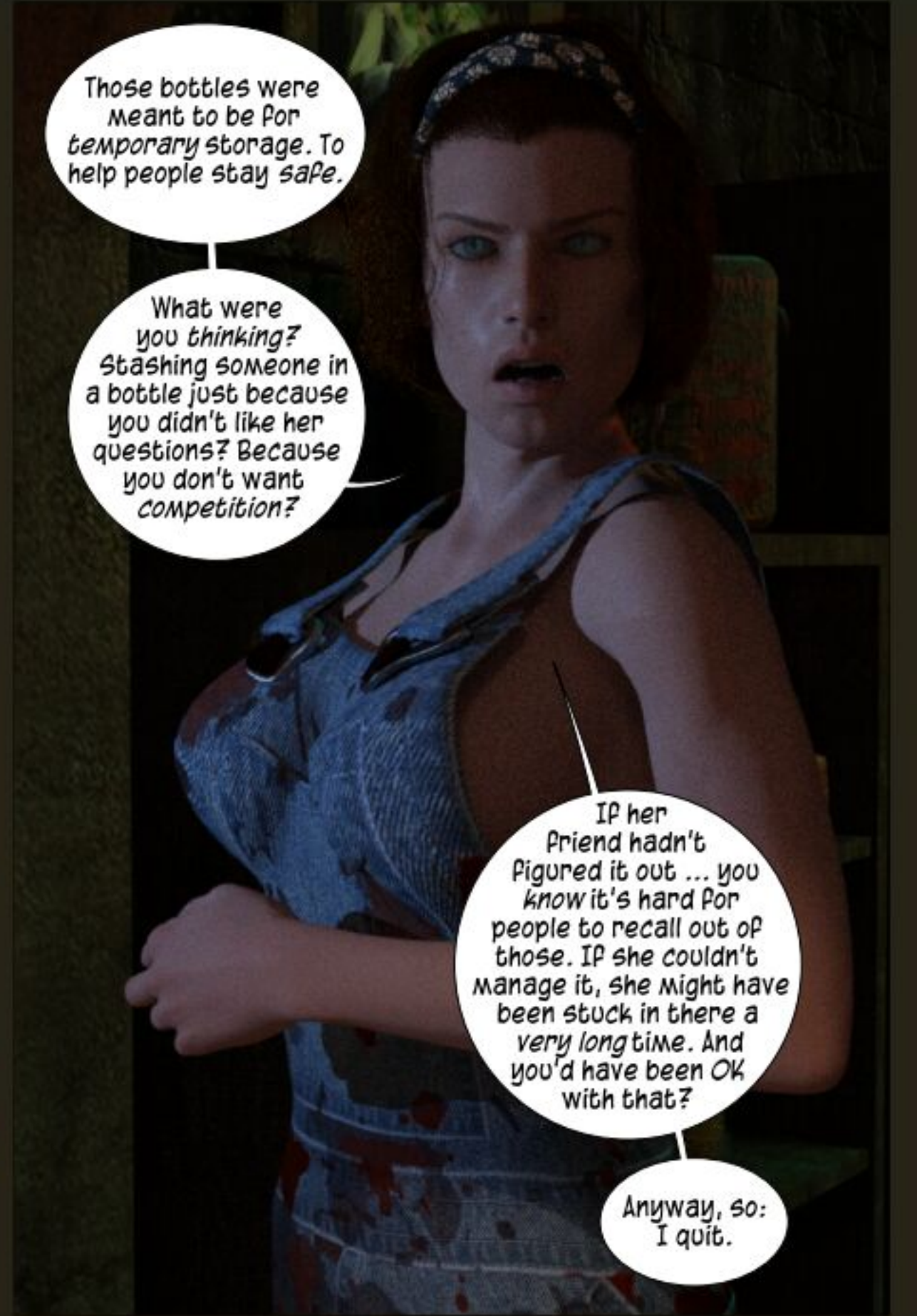


Those bottles were meant to be for temporary storage. To help people stay safe.

What were you thinking? Stashing someone in a bottle just because you didn't like her questions? Because you don't want competition?

If her friend hadn't figured it out ... you know it's hard for people to recall out of those. If she couldn't manage it, she might have been stuck in there a very long time. And you'd have been OK with that?

Anyway, so: I quit.





You can't quit!  
We have a contract--

Your behavior just broke  
that. Want me to go tell the  
kitties what you did?

Actually, I thought you'd  
say something like that, so I  
made a special bottle while  
you were out.

Just for you.

Don't!



NO!!!



I made this one  
extra-hard to  
recall Prom.

That should keep  
you busy while I  
clear out.

Have fun.

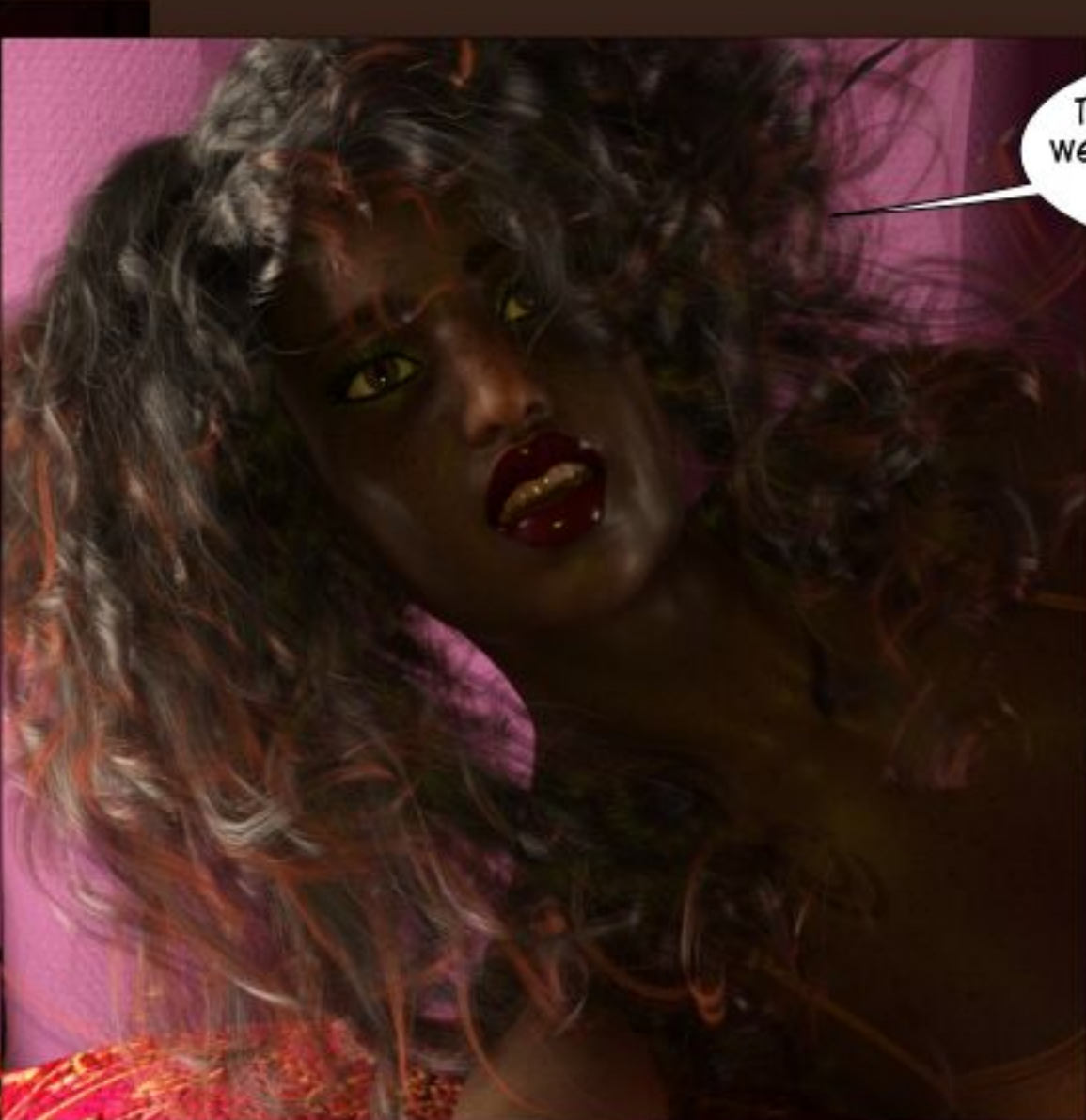


Hey.

Hey.

Everything go OK?  
I wasn't sure you'd be  
back tonight.

No trouble at all.  
Took less time than I  
expected.



They told me you  
were out wandering  
around?

What's that  
you've got  
there?

Hmm?  
Oh. Just a  
loose end.



I'll deal  
with it  
later.



See anything  
interesting while you were  
out there? Excitement?  
Adventure?

'Fraid not!  
Business as usual.



You know.  
Just another  
night in the  
Souk.

NEXT: INTO THE WOODS!