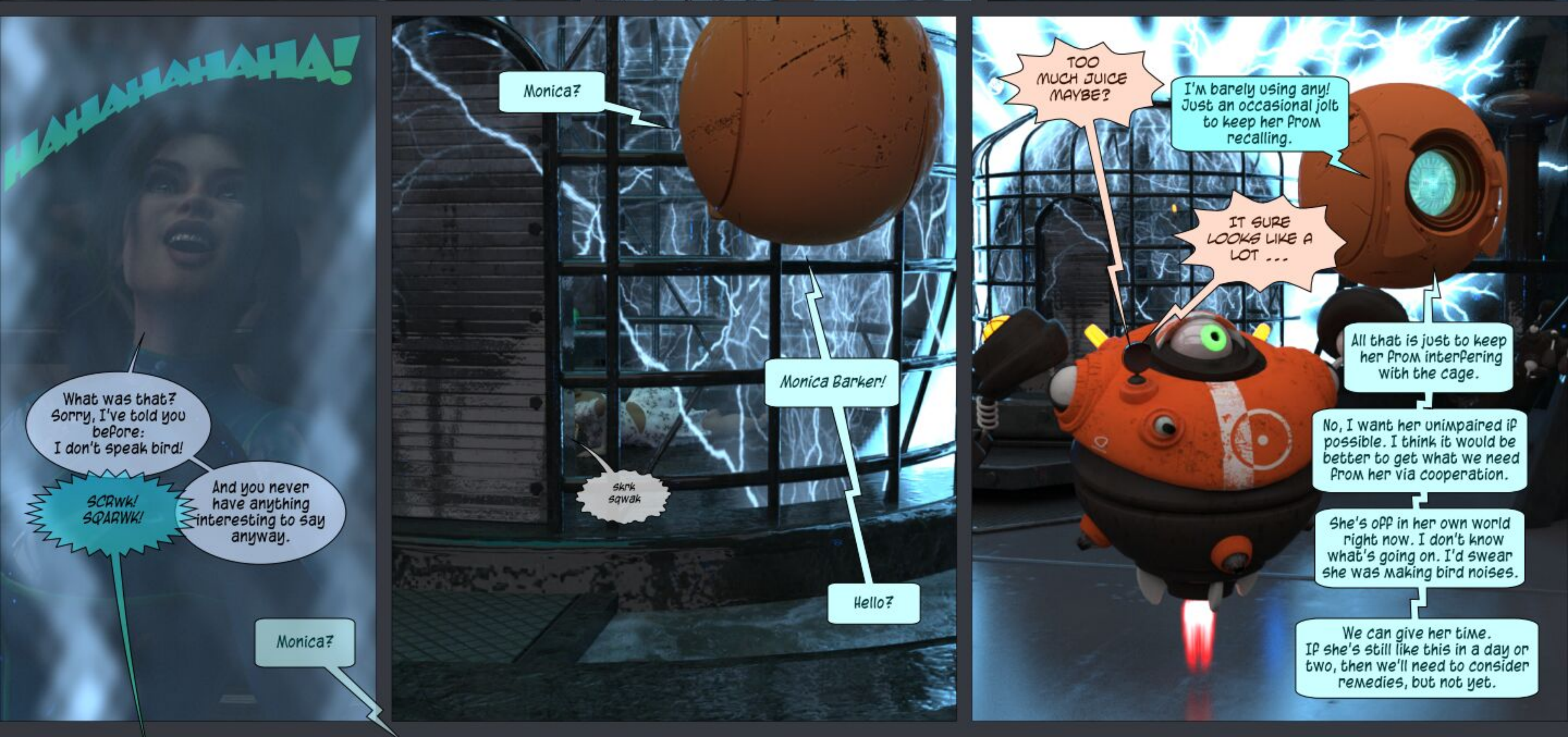
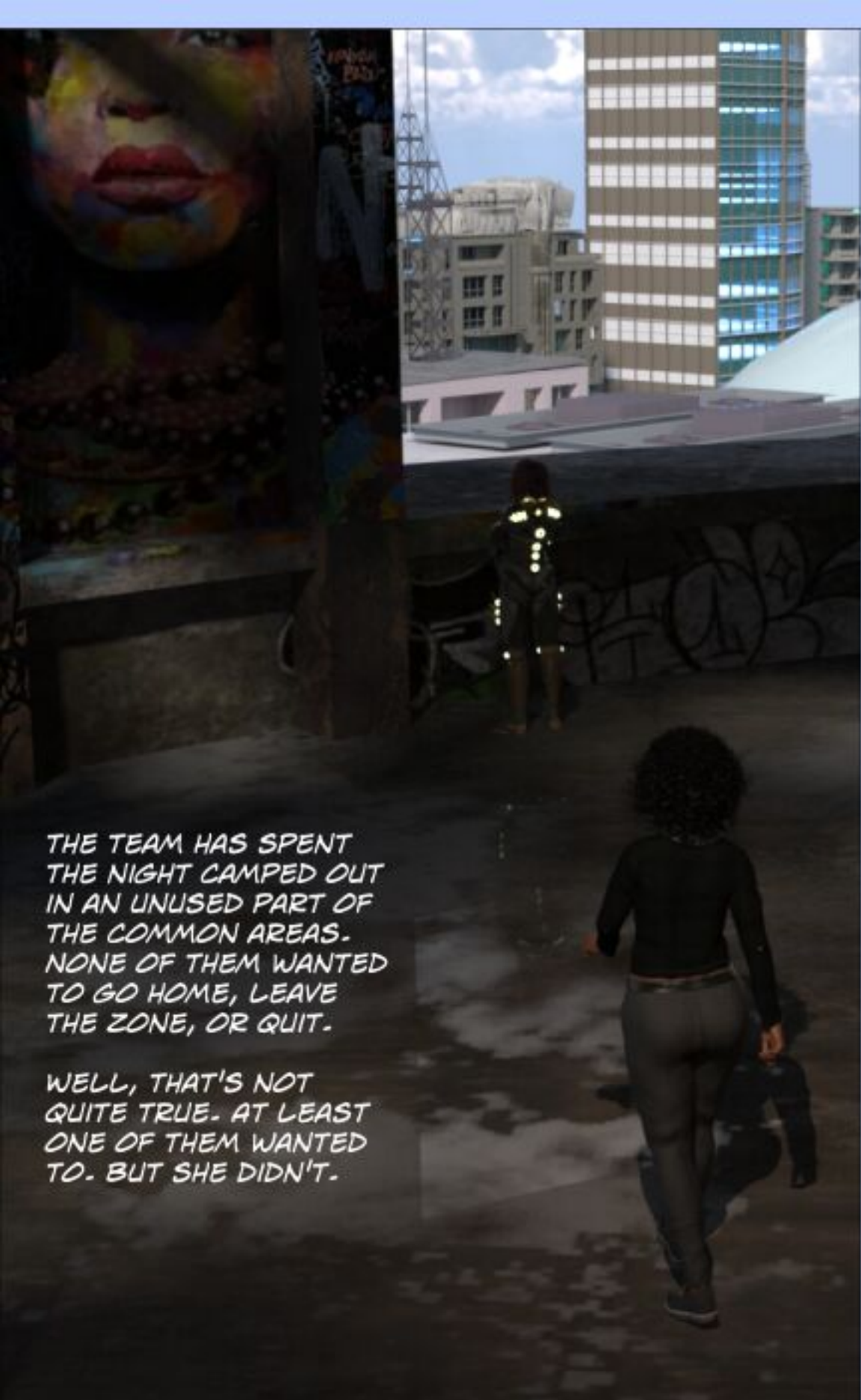


MONICA'S PTSD ATTACK IS PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE CAGE. TO UNDERSTAND WHY, YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHAT MELINDA DID TO HER YEARS AGO ... BUT YOU'LL NEED TO GO ALL THE WAY BACK TO ISSUE #11 TO SEE IT.





THE TEAM HAS SPENT THE NIGHT CAMPED OUT IN AN UNUSED PART OF THE COMMON AREAS. NONE OF THEM WANTED TO GO HOME, LEAVE THE ZONE, OR QUIT.

WELL, THAT'S NOT QUITE TRUE. AT LEAST ONE OF THEM WANTED TO. BUT SHE DIDN'T.



Got some Pood over there ...

I'm not hungry.

Didn't sleep last night either, I bet.

I don't know how I could have.

... You didn't Puck it up. You know that, right?

Yeah? If I didn't, who did?



You weren't ready for her to show up. OK, maybe you Proze.

The rest of us didn't Preeze, and she kicked our butts anyway. She was too Much for us. We've got to figure that out, sure.

But how's that your Fault?

And you didn't get those two captured. Madeline wasn't paying enough attention. I saw her. She wanted to be in the Fight and didn't look behind her. And Orchid ran in after her. You tried to stop her!

Just seems to me like you've got enough problems without taking on --

Hey!!



There's a Fight going on down there. Robots making trouble.

You're gonna give me heart Failure leaning out on the edge like that.

I don't know if it does any good to --

I see Euryale. We could try to get her help!

Lois? HM. We could use her, for sure ...

OK, let's go see.

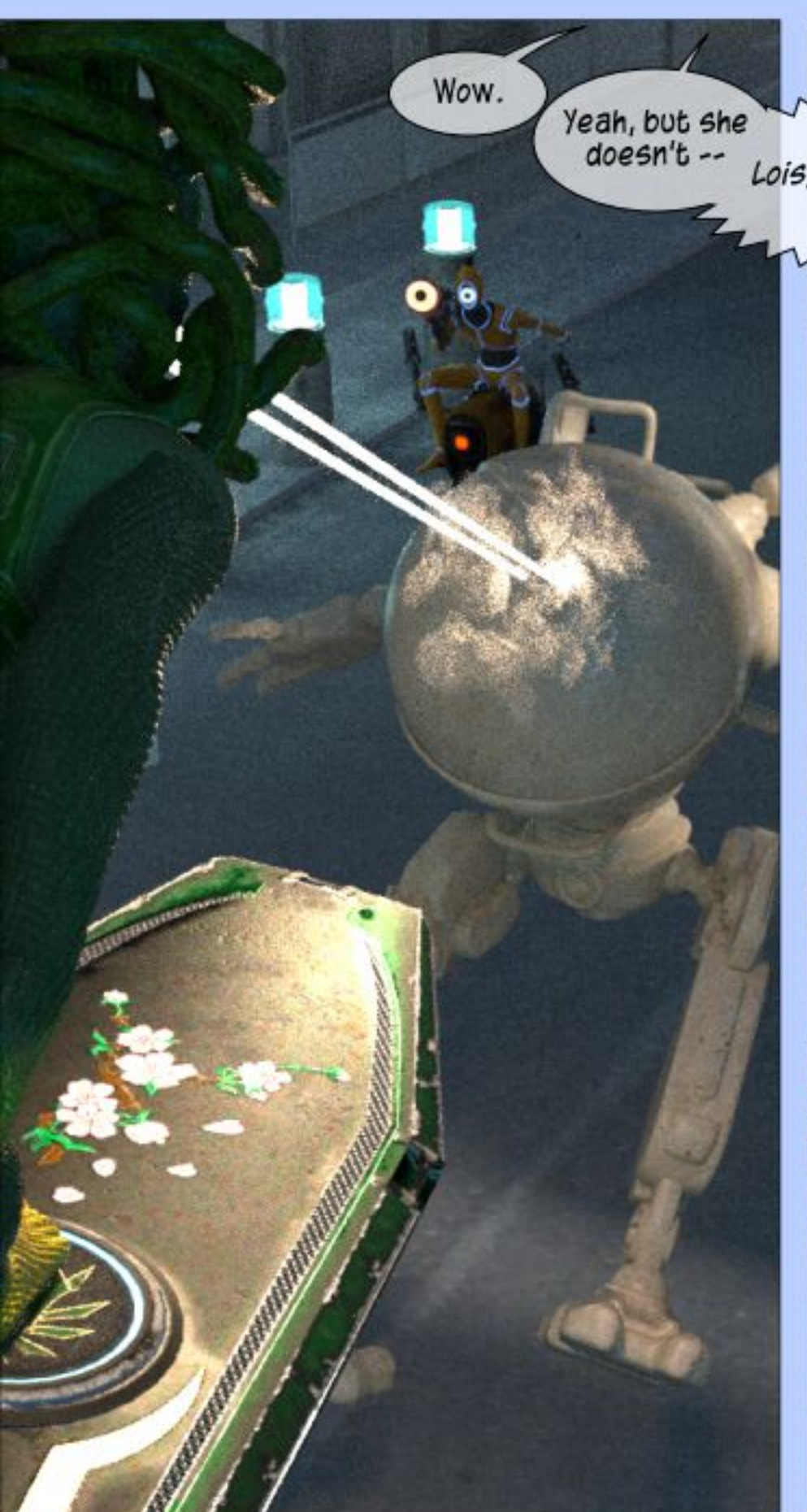


YAAAAHHH!!



You didn't say it was just her.

It wasn't! She was protecting a bunch of people. I guess they all ran off.



Wow.

Yeah, but she doesn't --

Lois, look out!



Hey, who gave them guns?



Rude!



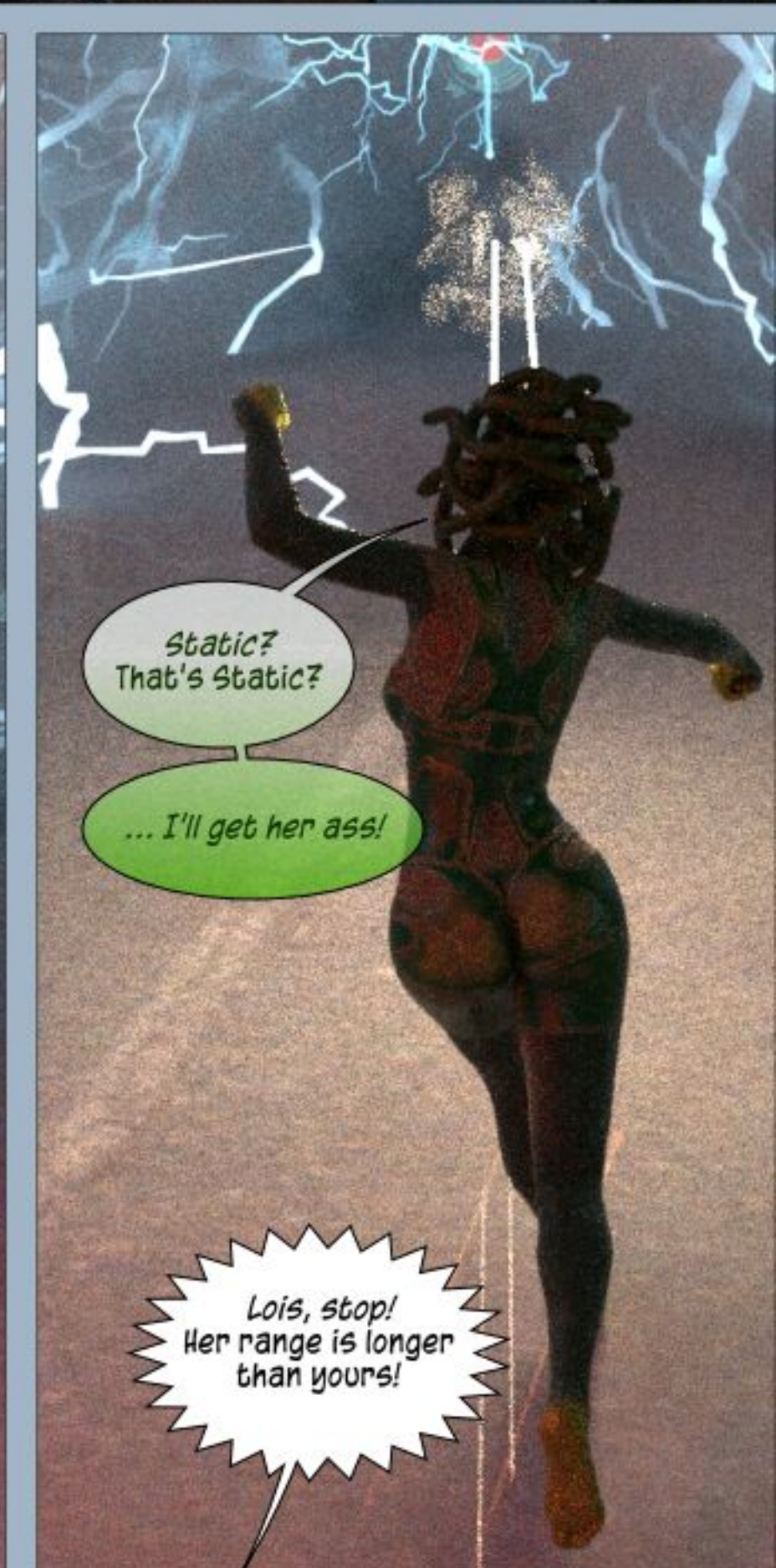
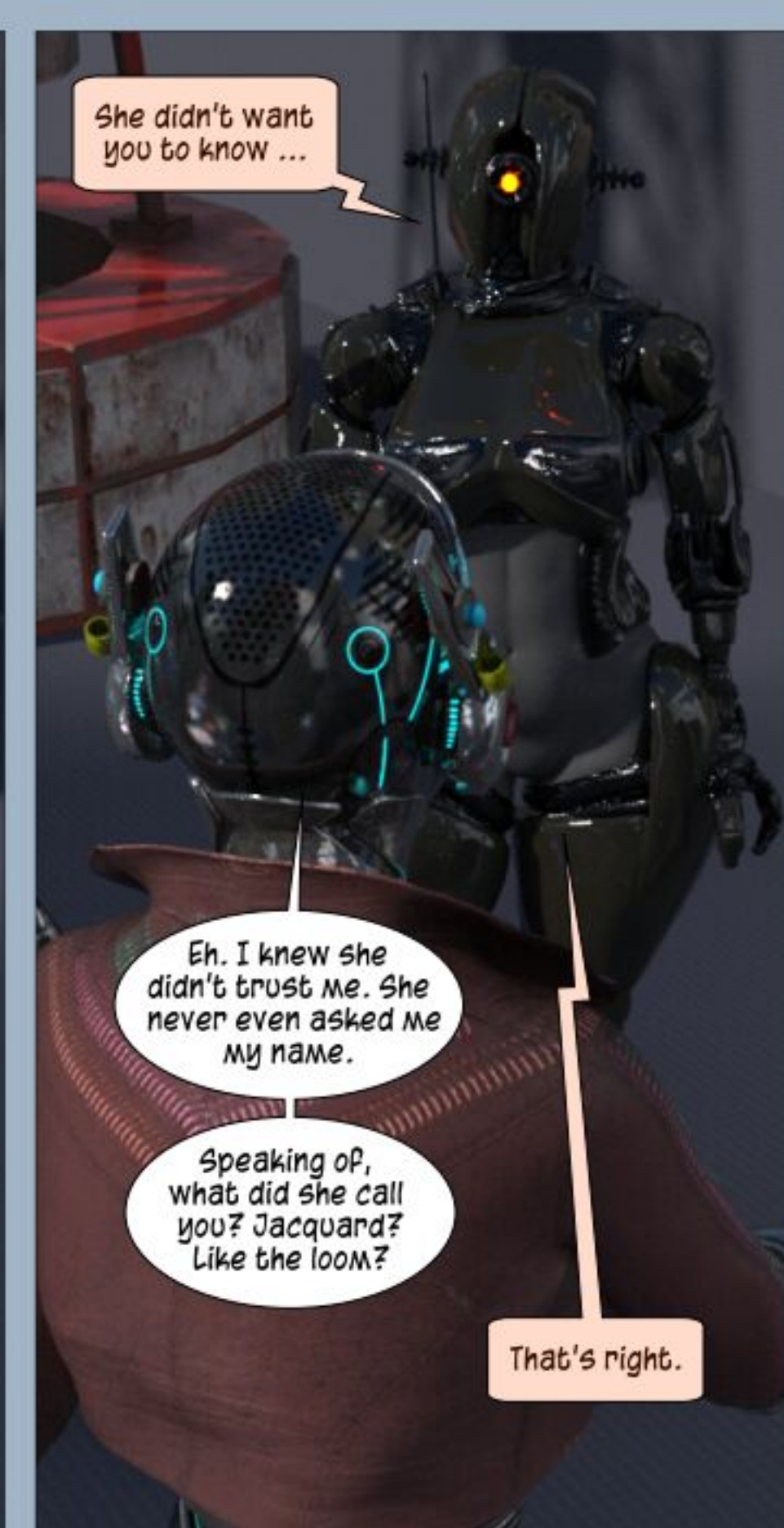
YIII!

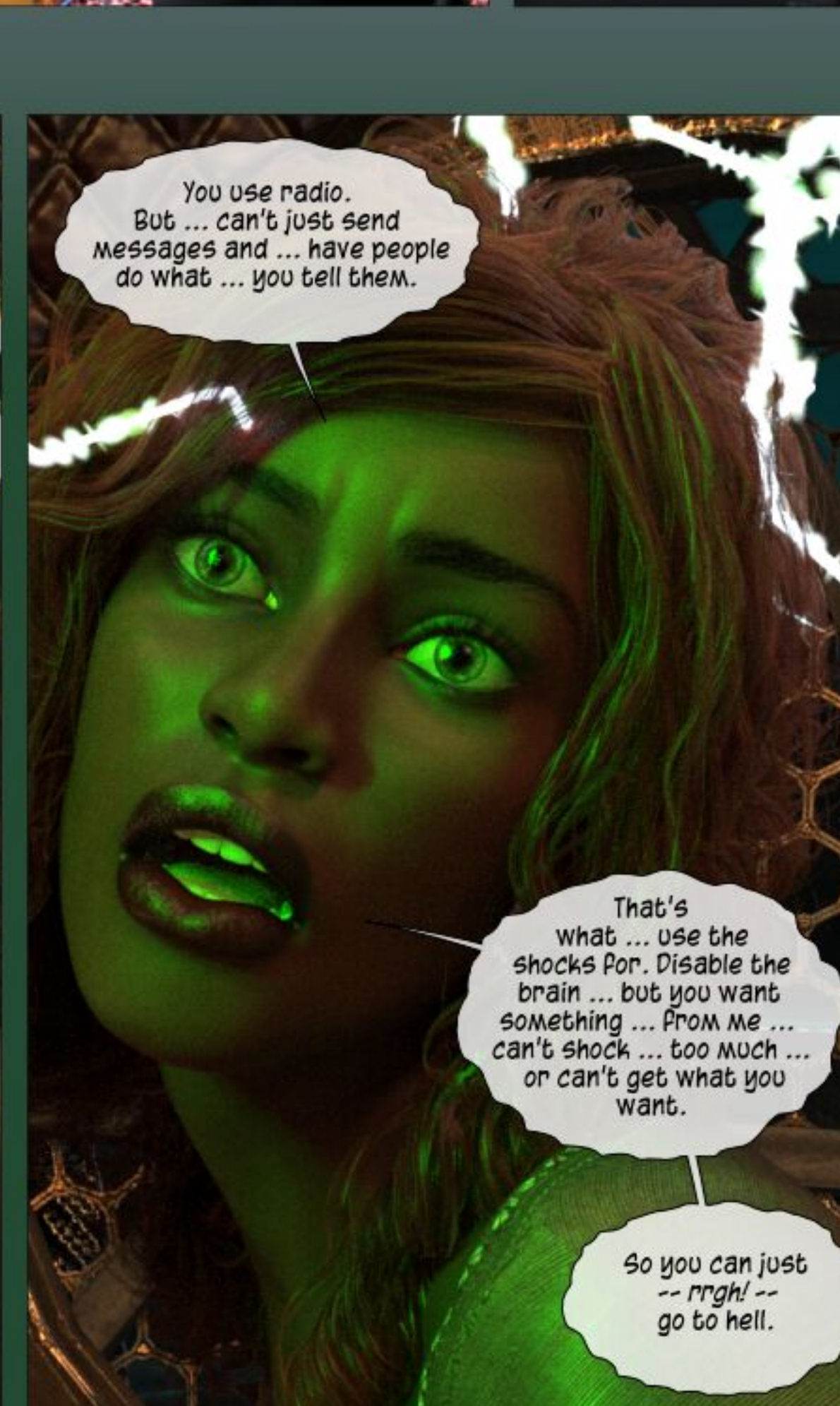
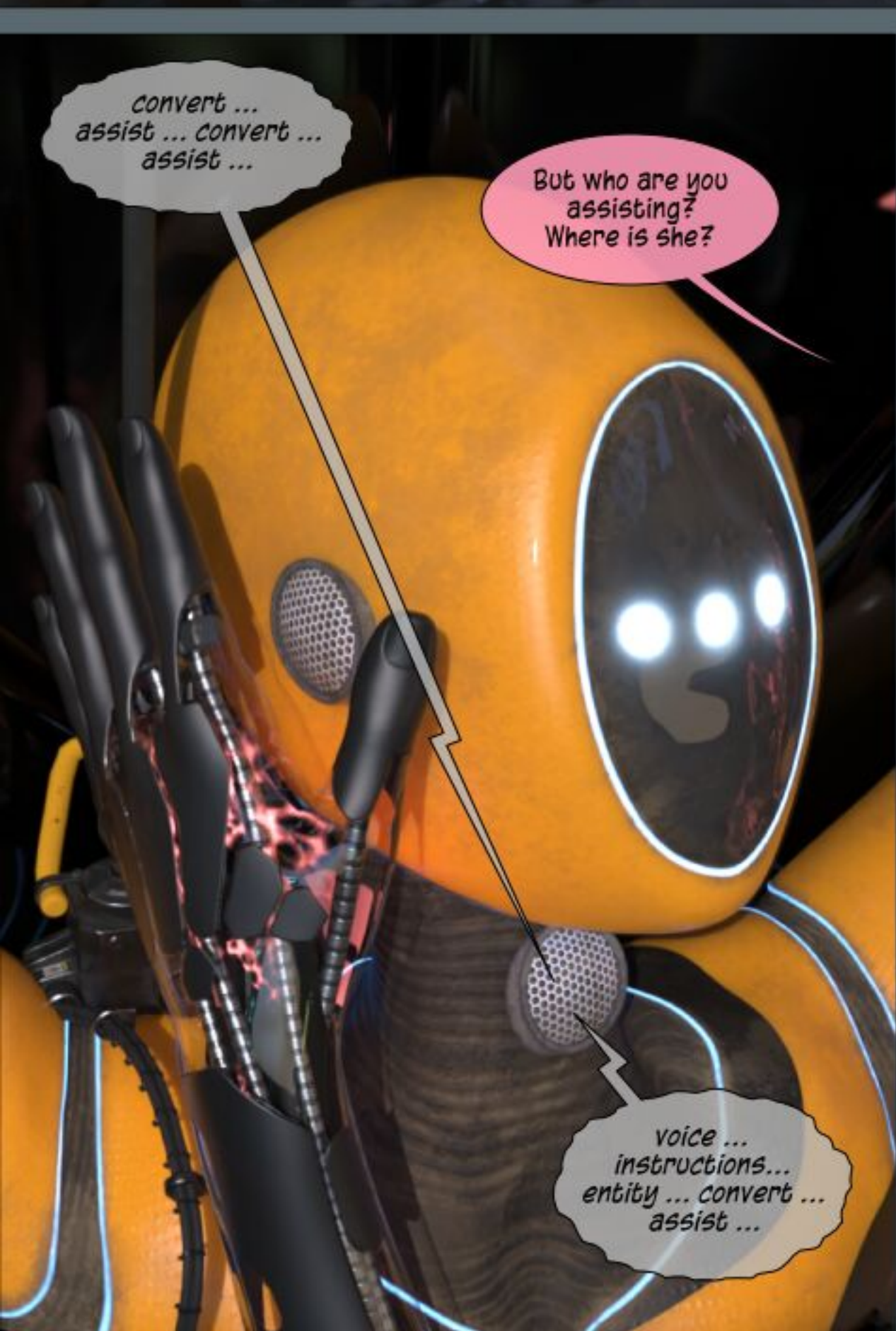
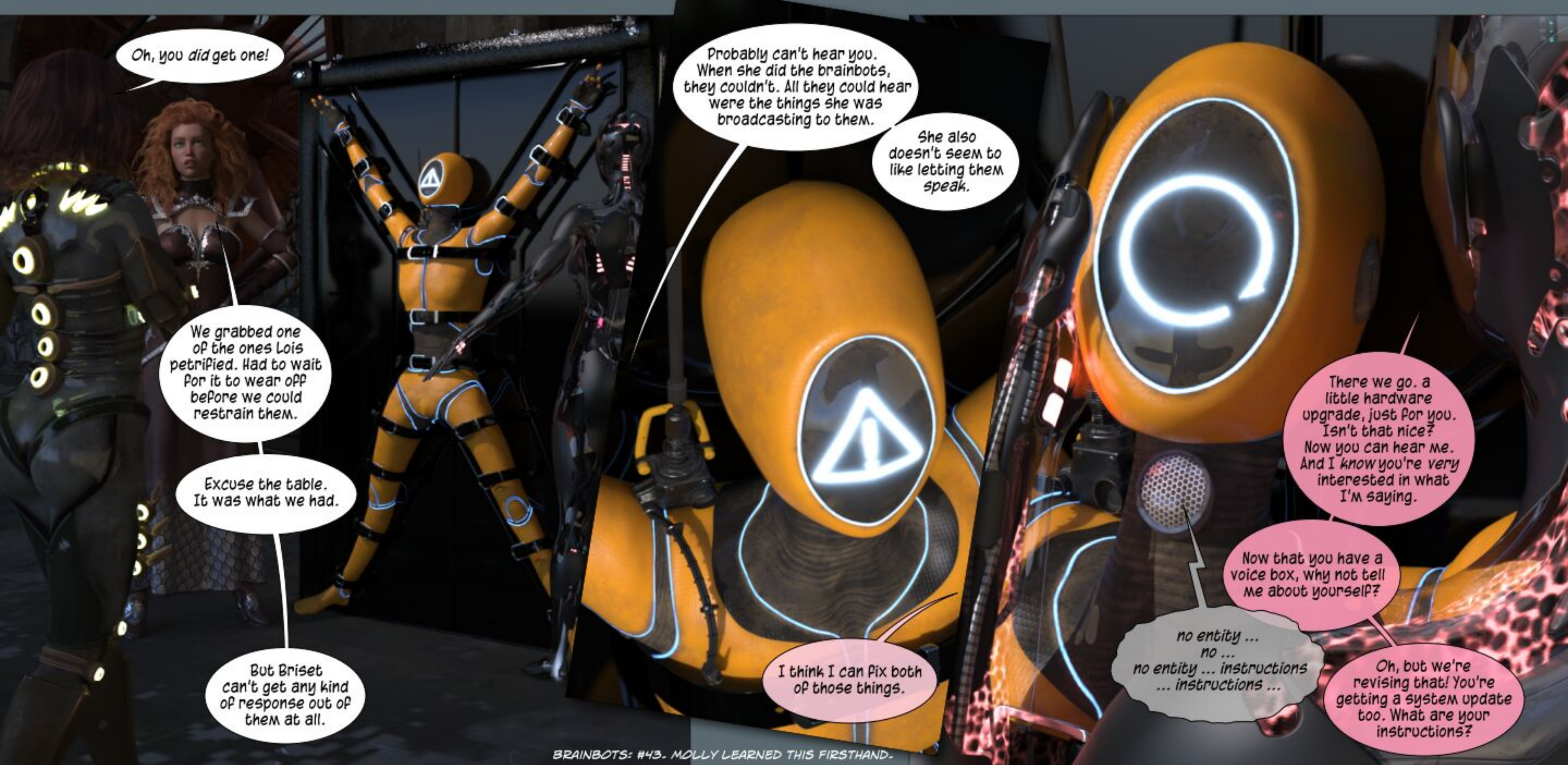


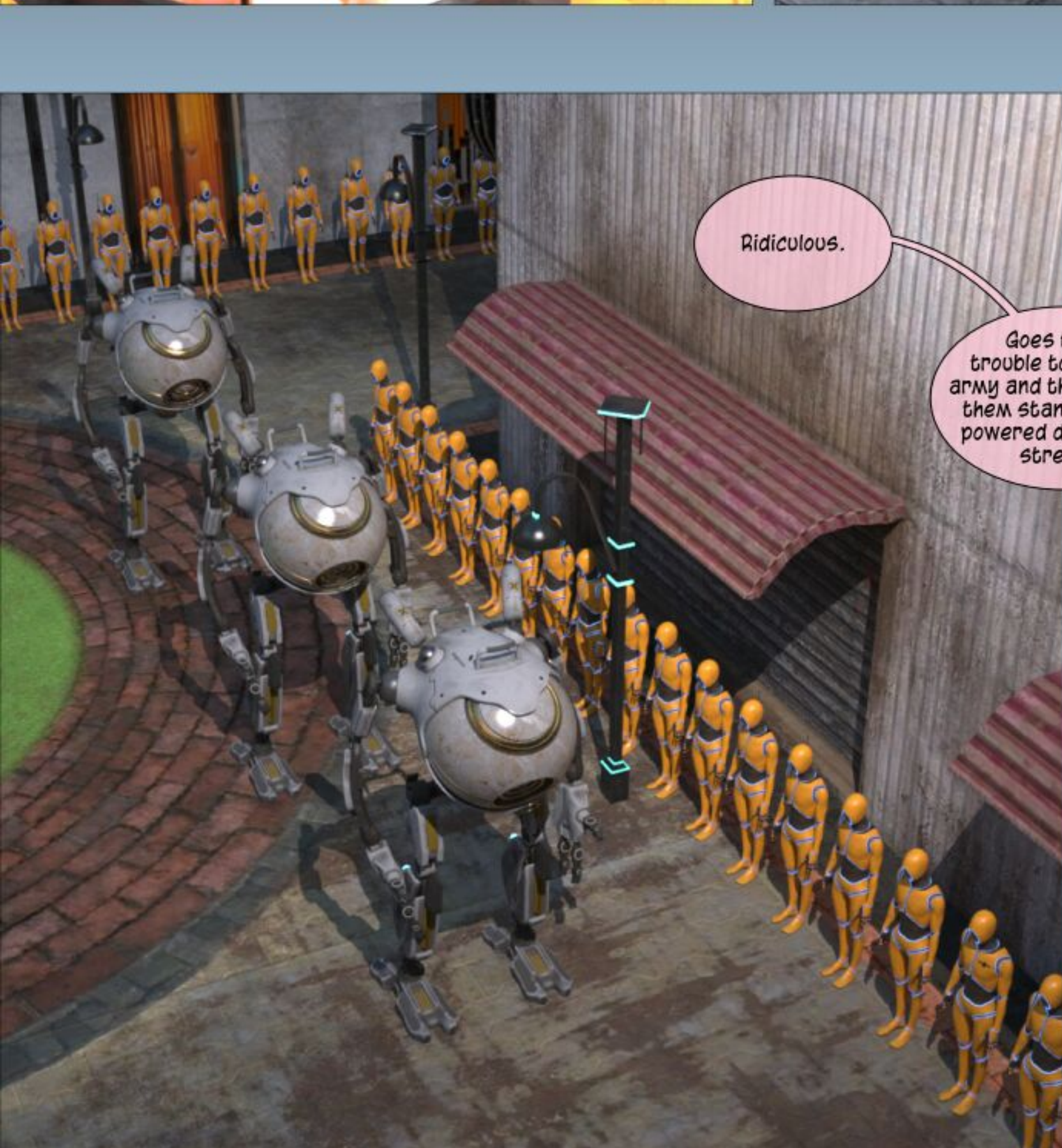
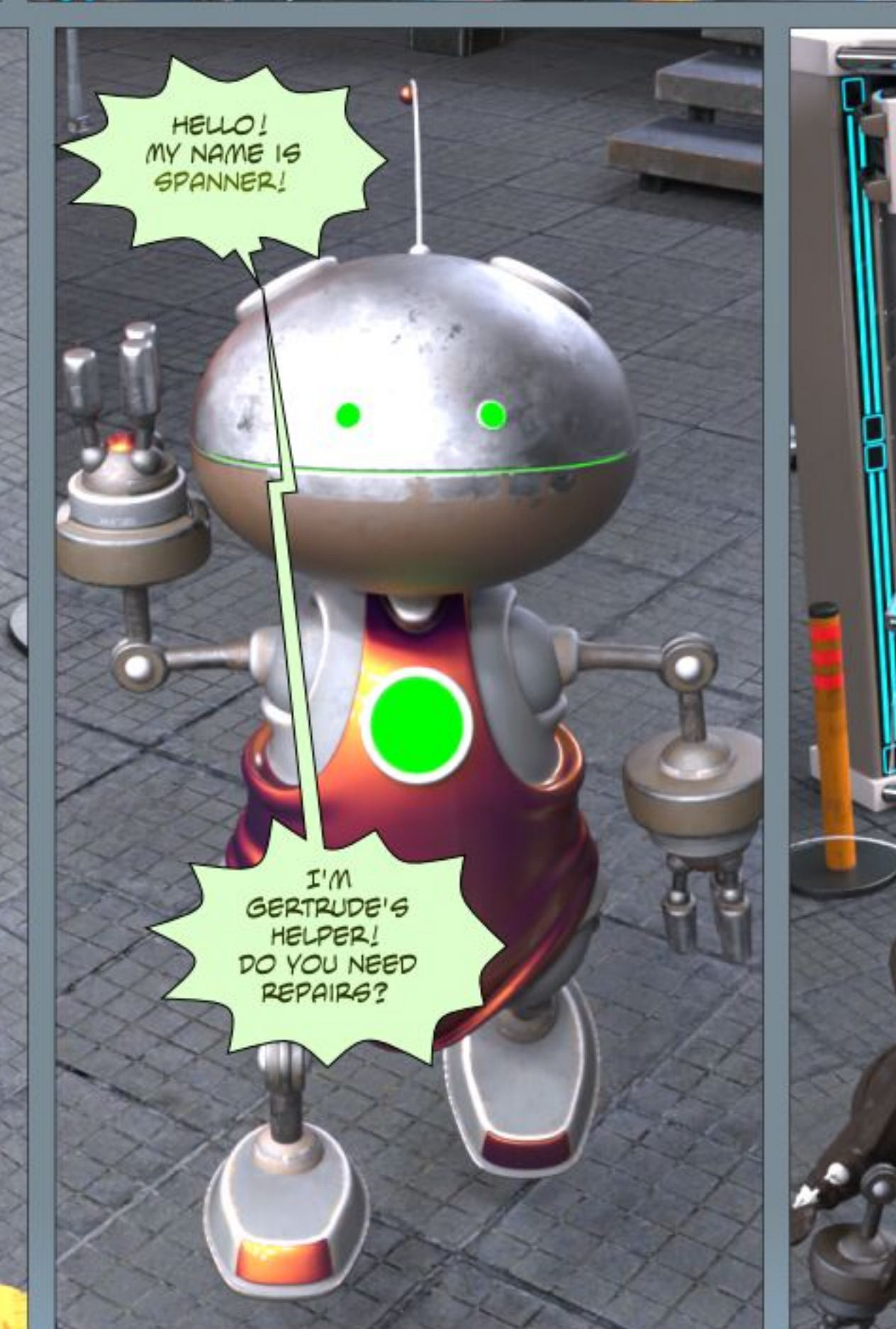
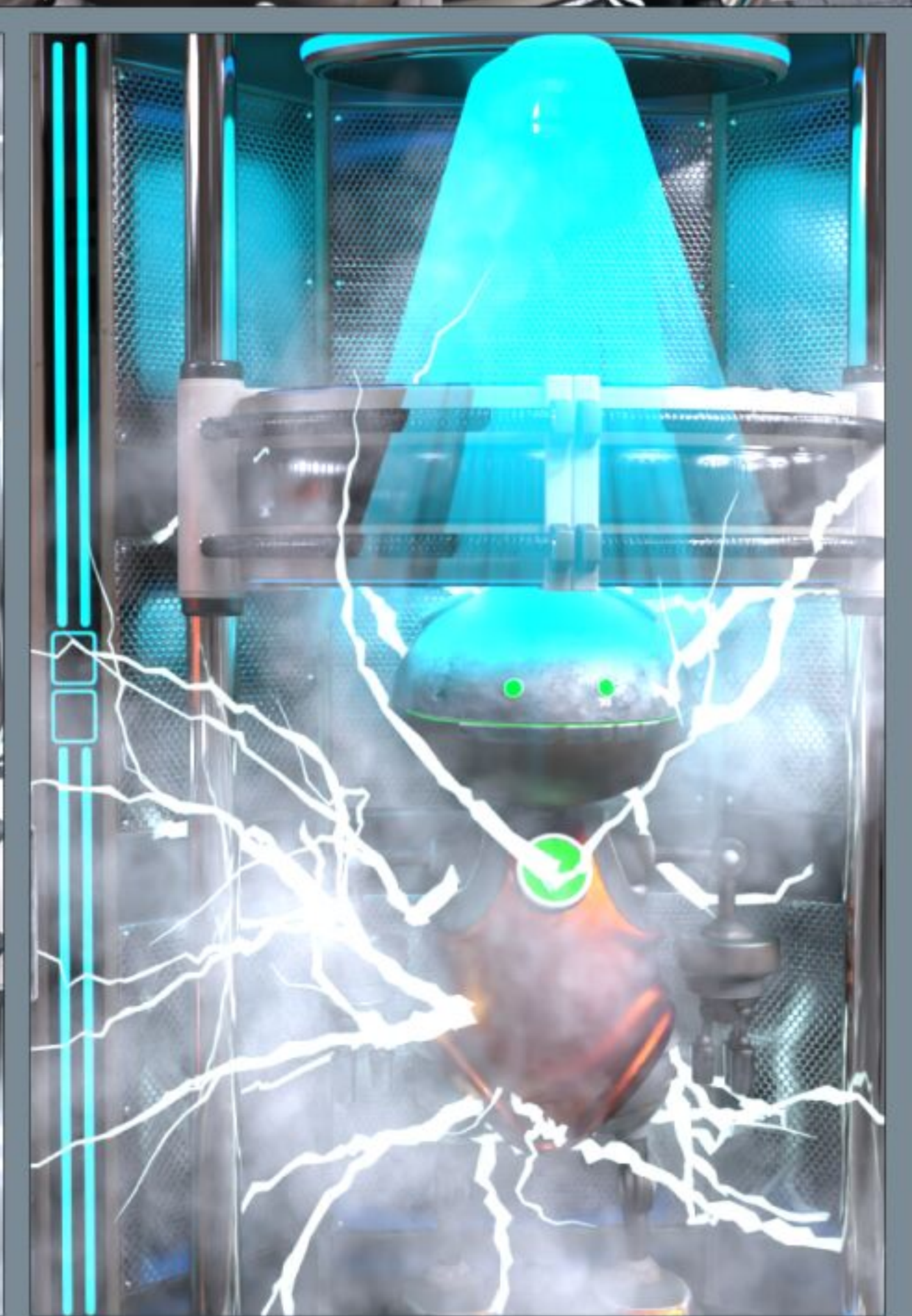
Doin' all right.

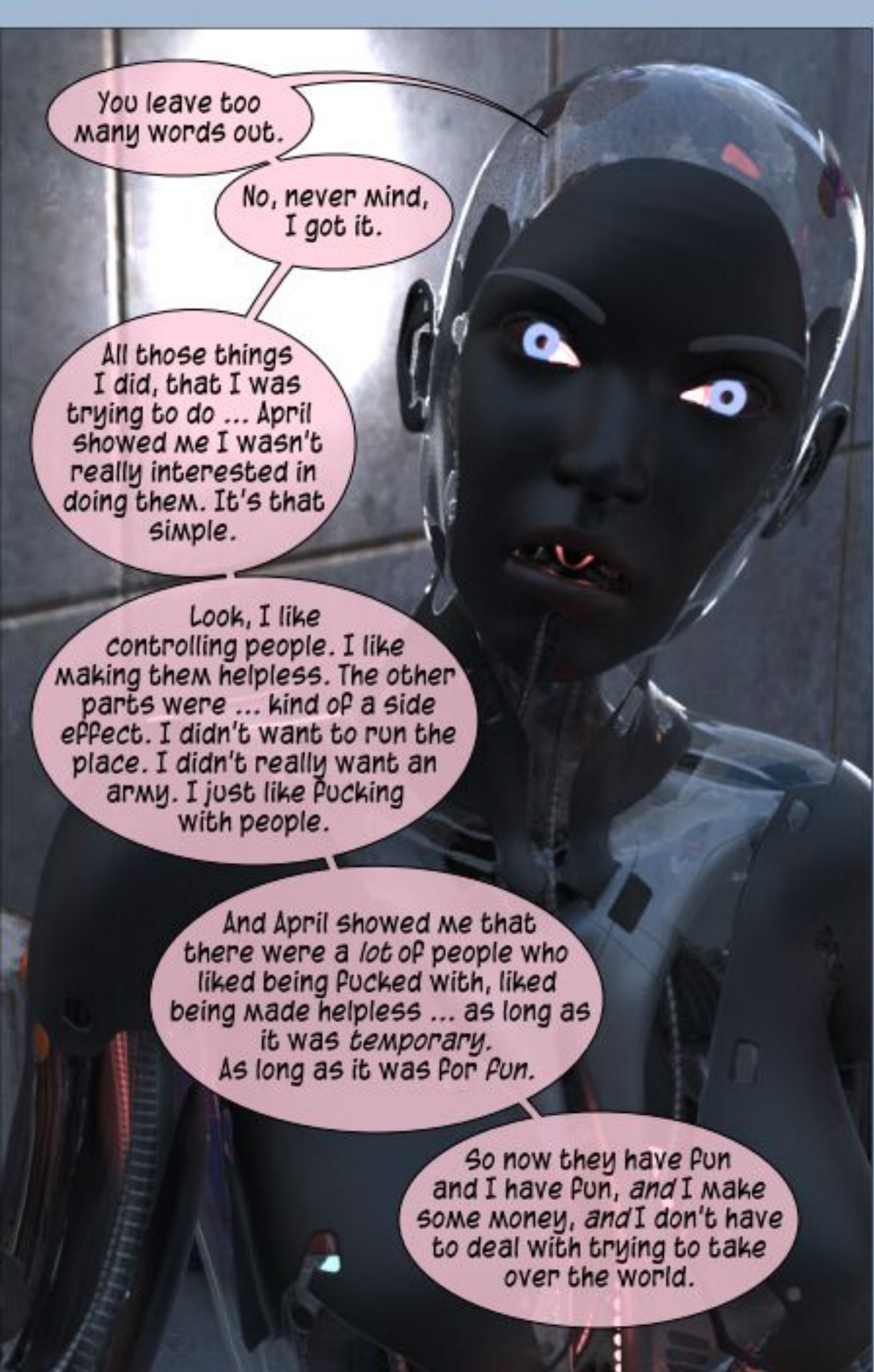
Yeah. Thing is, they don't stay down ... and Lois' stuff wears off --

-- hey, did you just see something moving back there?









You leave too many words out.

No, never mind, I got it.

All those things I did, that I was trying to do ... April showed me I wasn't really interested in doing them. It's that simple.

Look, I like controlling people. I like making them helpless. The other parts were ... kind of a side effect. I didn't want to run the place. I didn't really want an army. I just like f*cking with people.

And April showed me that there were a lot of people who liked being f*cked with, liked being made helpless ... as long as it was temporary. As long as it was for fun.

So now they have fun and I have fun, and I make some money, and I don't have to deal with trying to take over the world.



My motivations are easy. The eyebot queen's aren't. They baffle me.

Her motivations ... and her methods.

Yeah. Han't got virus, what?

No idea.



Molly says they're receiving broadcasts, and proved it ... but that shouldn't be enough.

I can manipulate someone's mind, get them to do what I tell them from my words alone ... in certain situations ... and it has to be very personal ... and one person at a time.

Getting hundreds of people to do what she tells them to do, just from talking into their ears ... I don't believe it. I don't believe anyone can do that.

There has to be something else to it.



They're everywhere! She's got to have almost all of Century by now!

If we go down there, they'll wake up and they'll all attack us.

No, that's not what I mean ... how did it happen so fast?

Two days ago, nothing, and now she's got the whole place!

Oh, I don't think it was really that fast.

People began disappearing before that. Nina said Static hadn't been seen for days.



I think we didn't notice the early signs because they were all happening in the robotic quarter. That's surely where this began.

There's been an attitude ... especially since they started going so separatist, but they were like that before too ... "they don't want to have anything to do with us, so we won't have anything to do with them."

So we haven't been keeping an eye on them as much as we should. It's a blind spot. ... Even Naomi had it.

If we somehow manage to get out of this, we should look into that.



You don't think we will.

I'm not very hopeful, let's put it that way.

She's taken too much. We don't have the tools.

And I don't think she wants to stop here. That's why she wanted Monica. Monica could get her into the private areas of the zone. Take over people's personal spaces.

I'm so glad Monica got out of Century.

BUT WE KNOW SOMETHING MOLLY DOES NOT.



That's right. I want you to lose yourself completely.

You're a stupid little bird, and always will be. No matter what you pretend to be, for yourself or for anyone else..

I'll always be in here to remind you. When you think you manage to be human, when you think you're putting yourself back to some kind of normal ...

... I'll come out and make you see the truth again.

... sqrwk ... skw ...



... NO!

You're wrong! You've always been wrong! And I don't have to listen to you!



I'm sick of you and I want you out of my head!

hkkkk



... out of my head ...



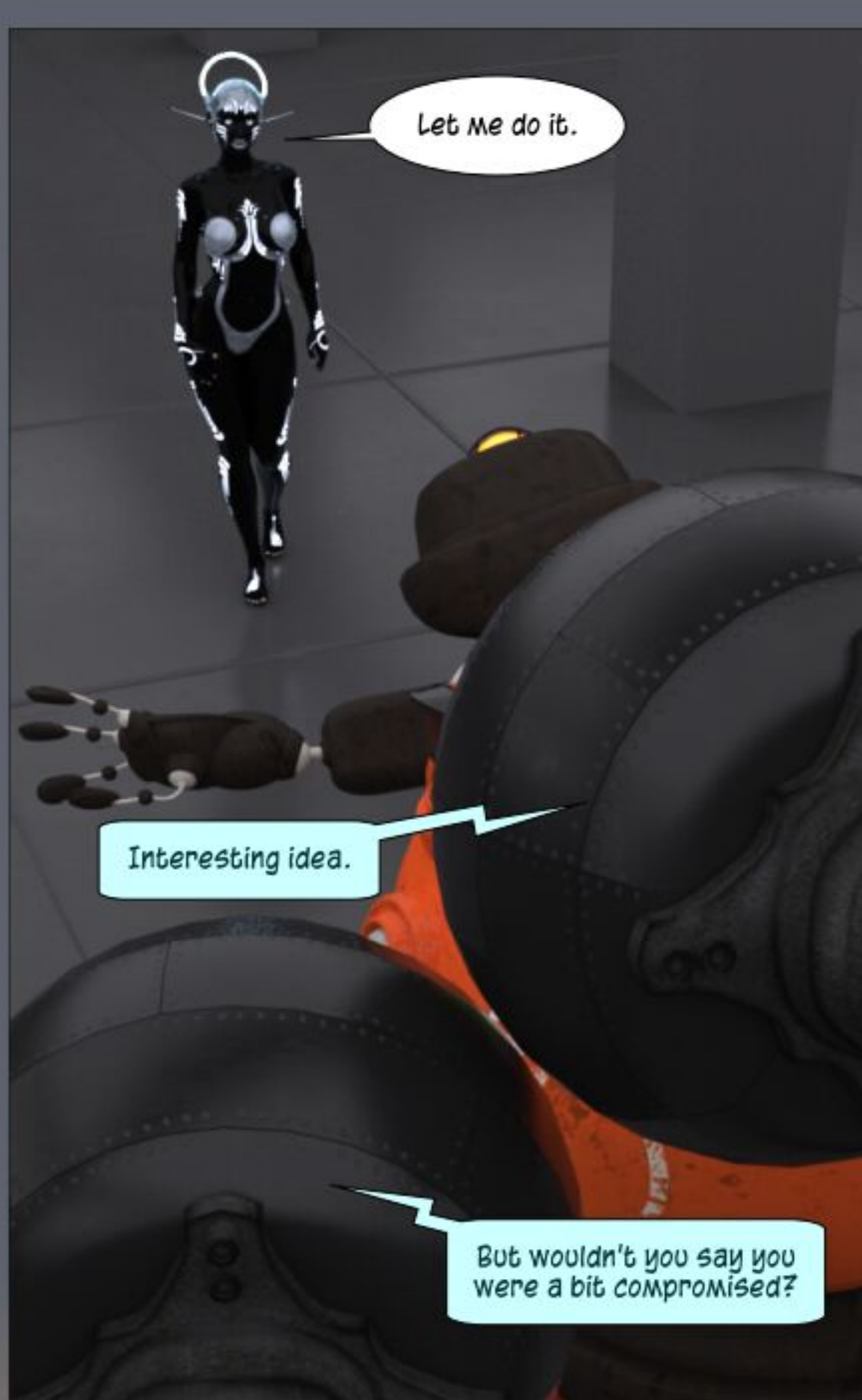
And now you.

You think you're going to keep me in here? You think you can control me that easily?

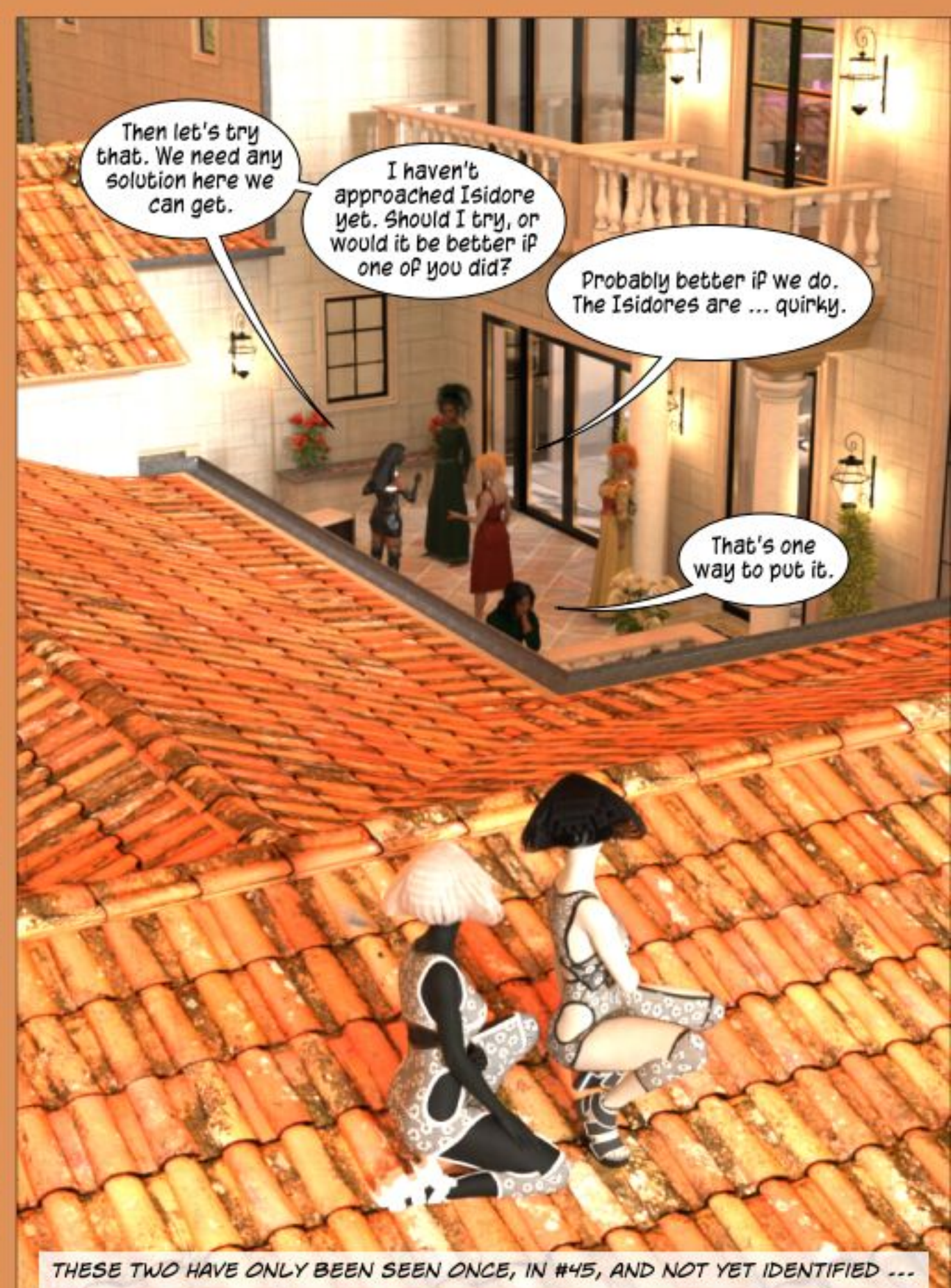
I own this cage. I own this door. I own this whole damned zone.

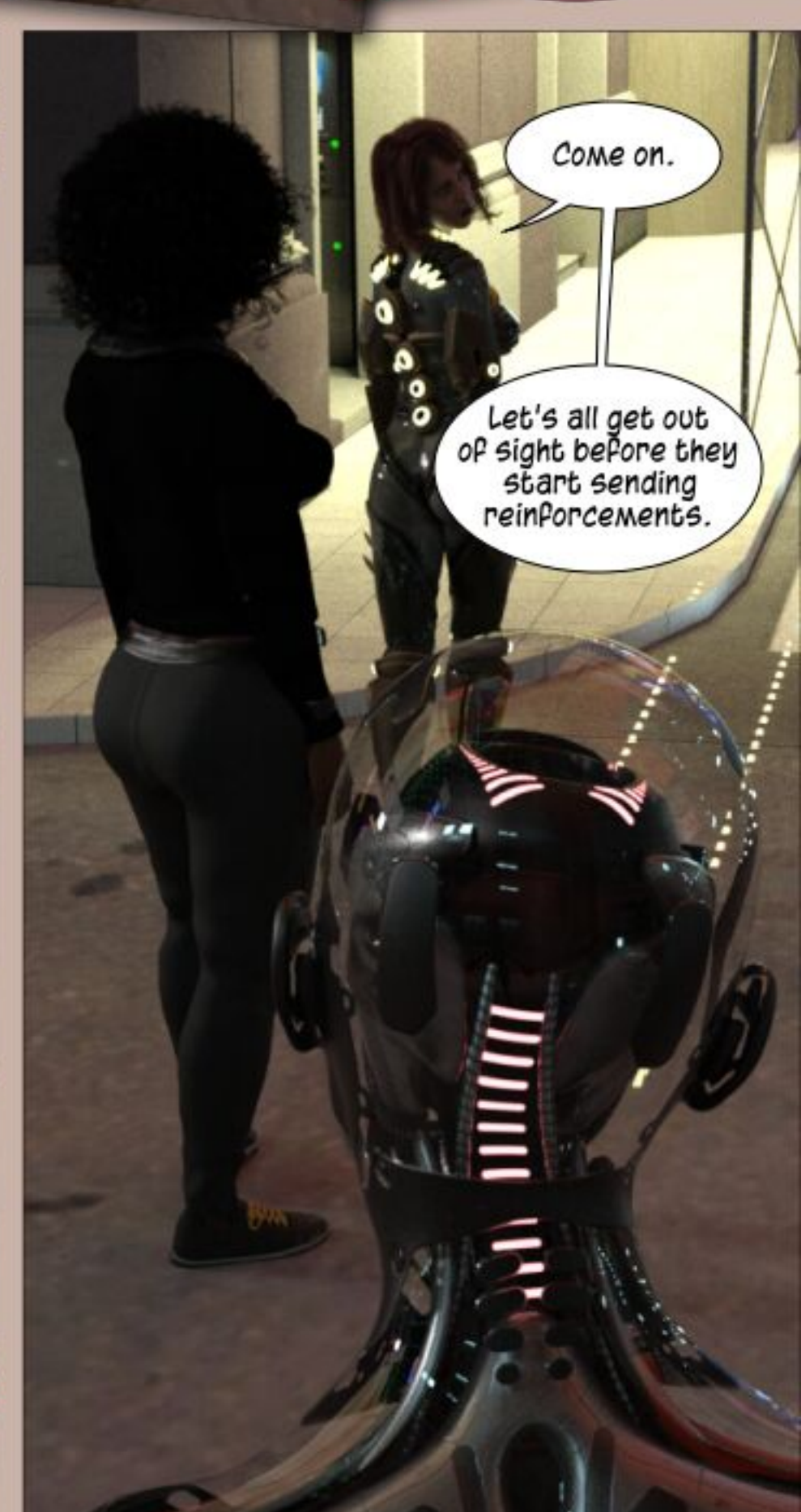
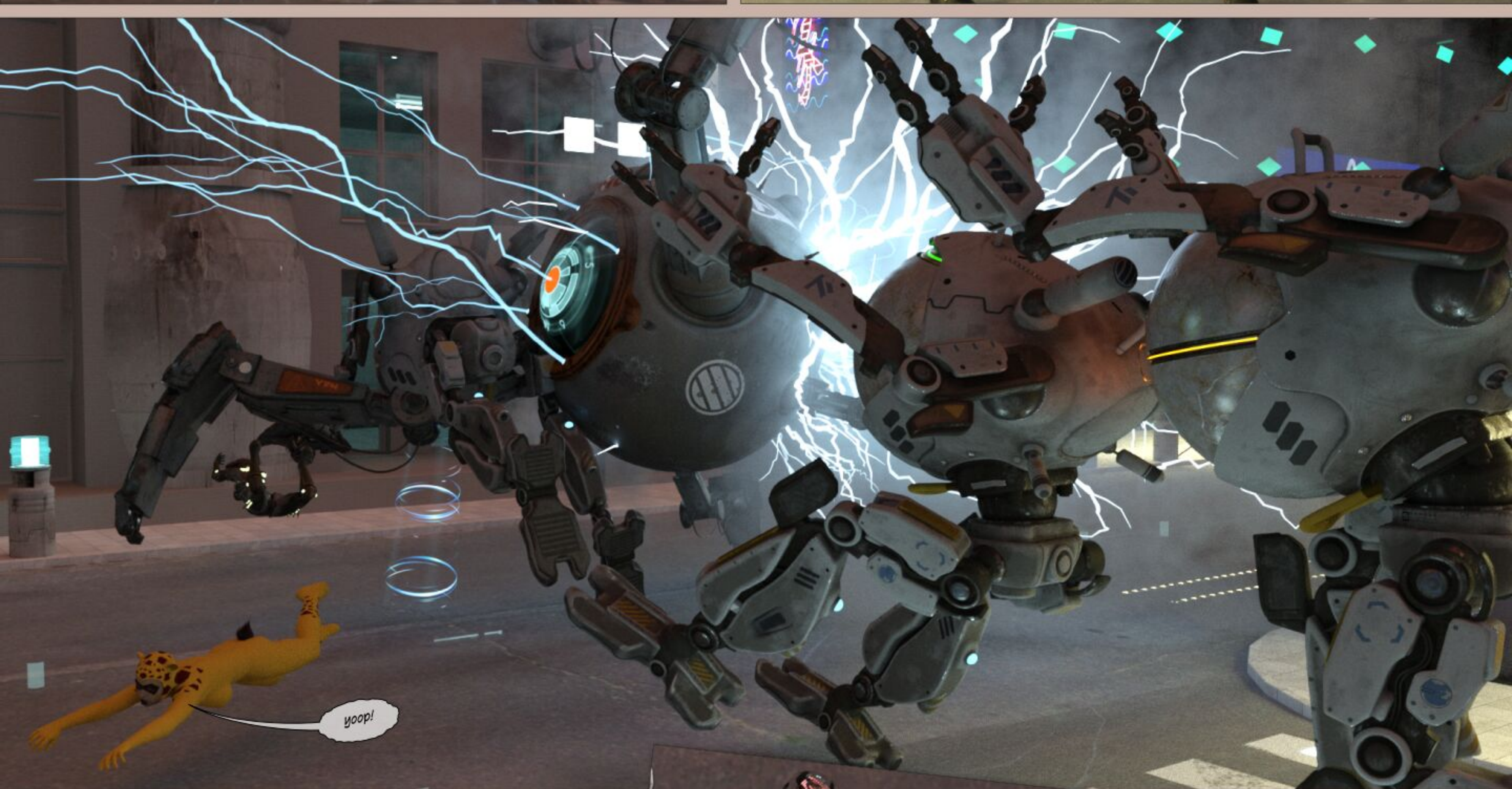


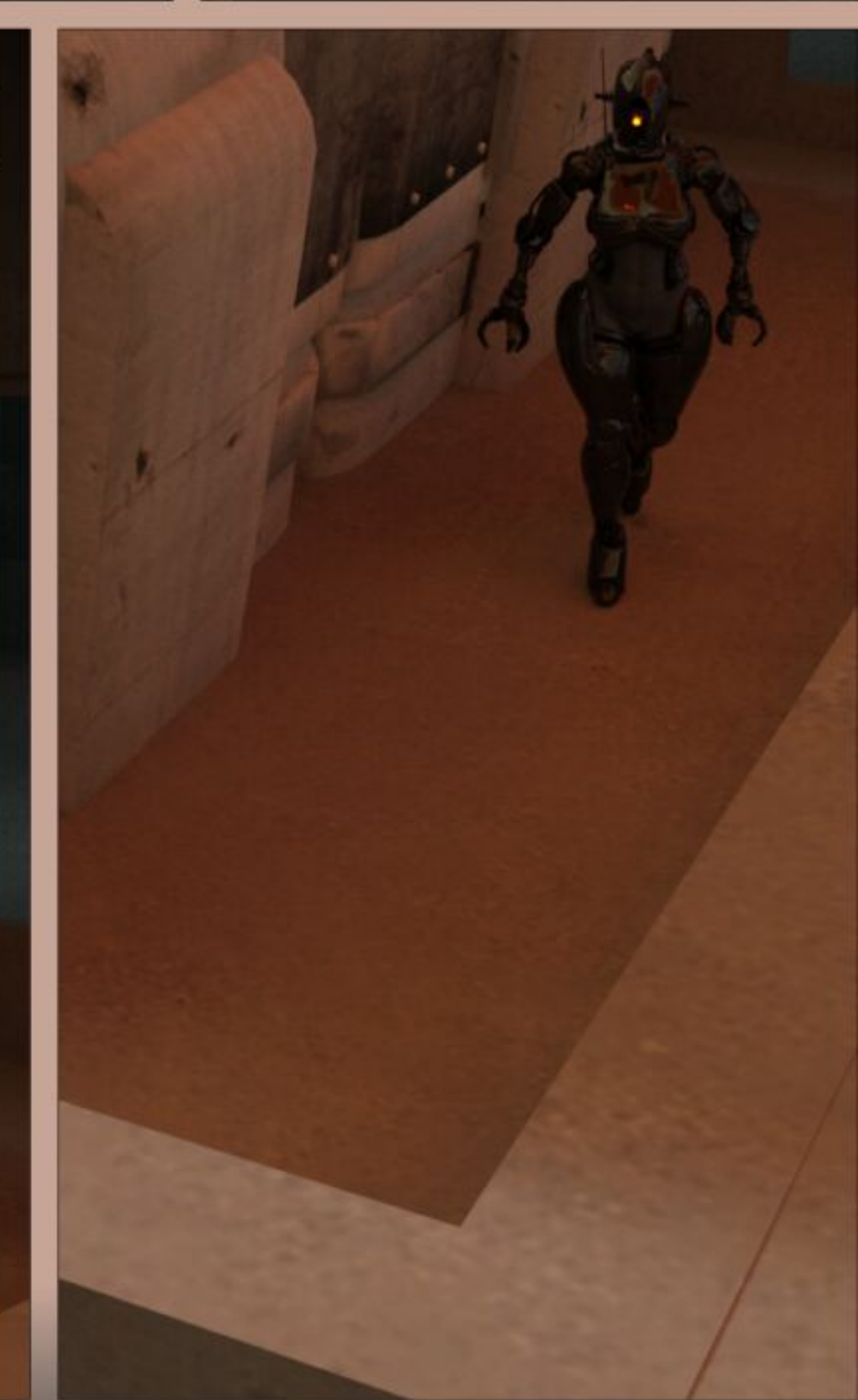
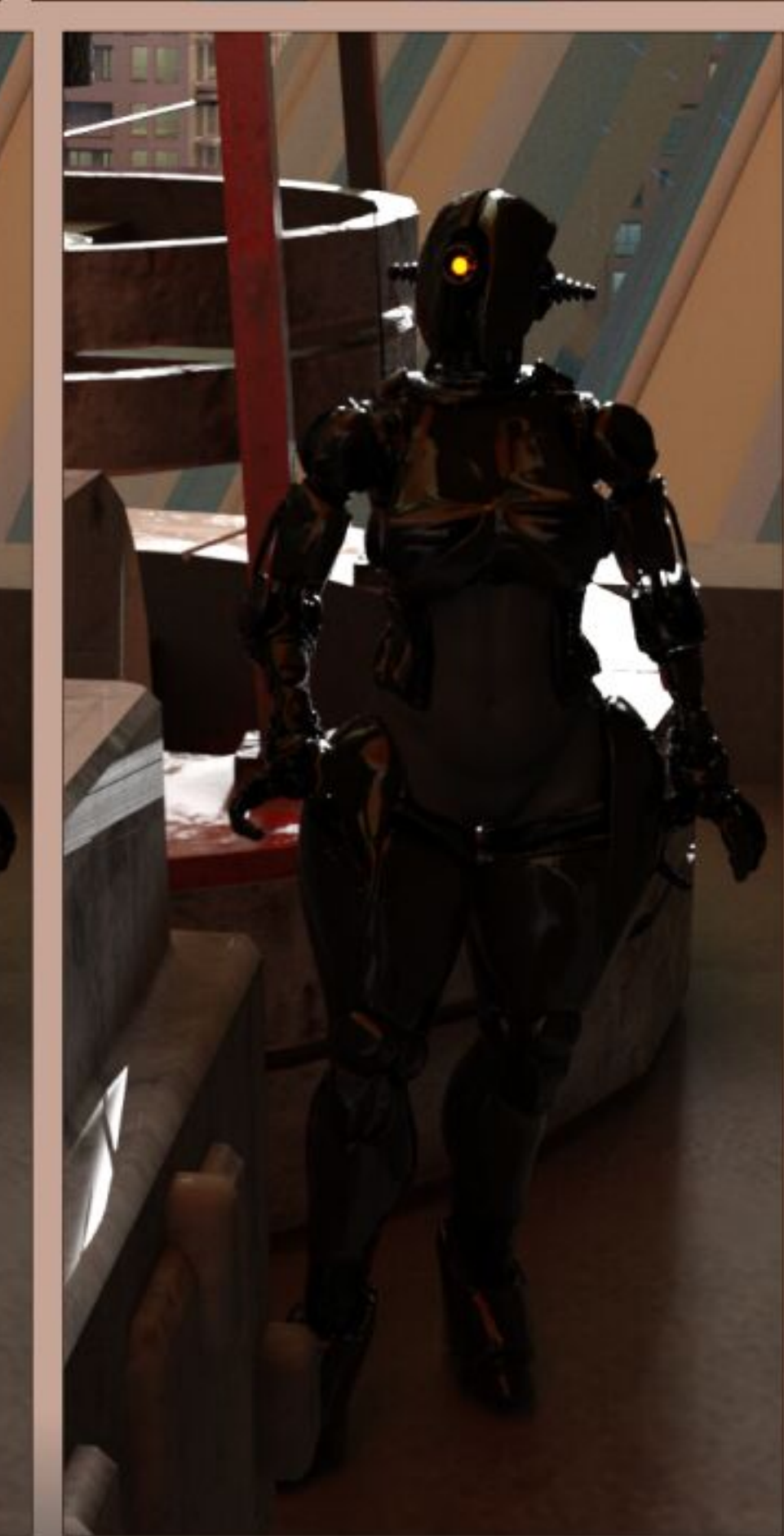
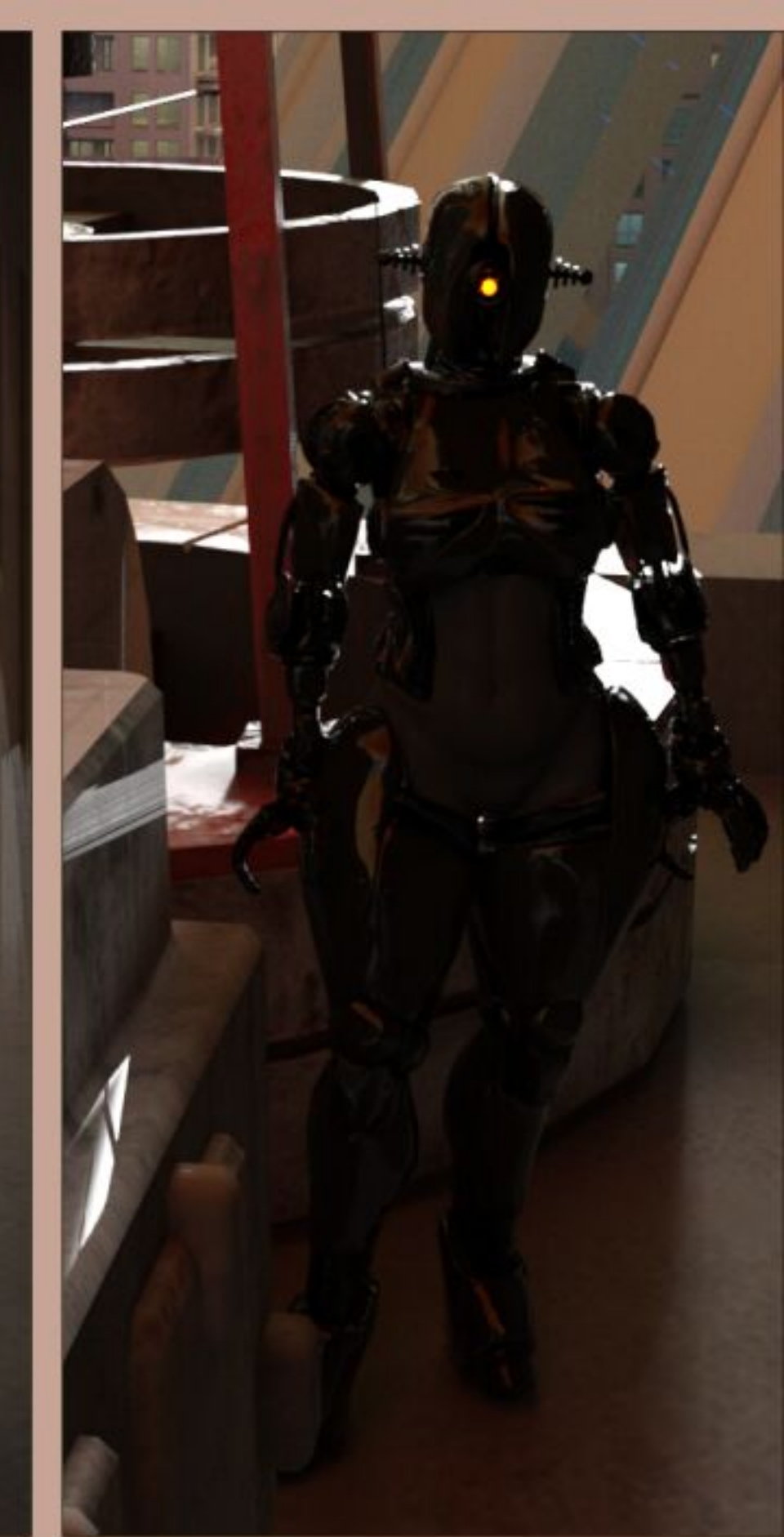
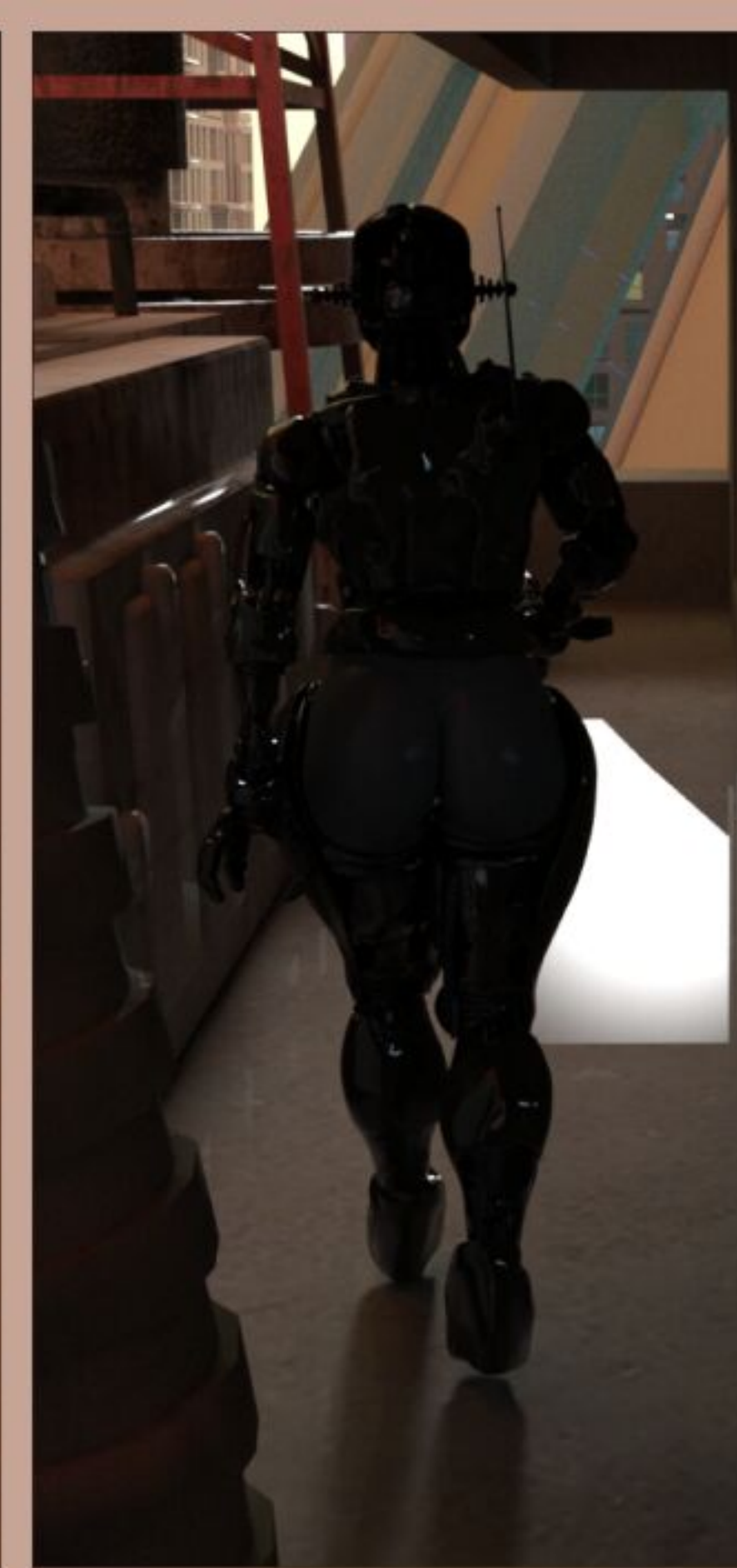
It's past time you learned what that means.



INTERLUDE









Oh, look, there she is -- the Fearless leader.

What a laugh.

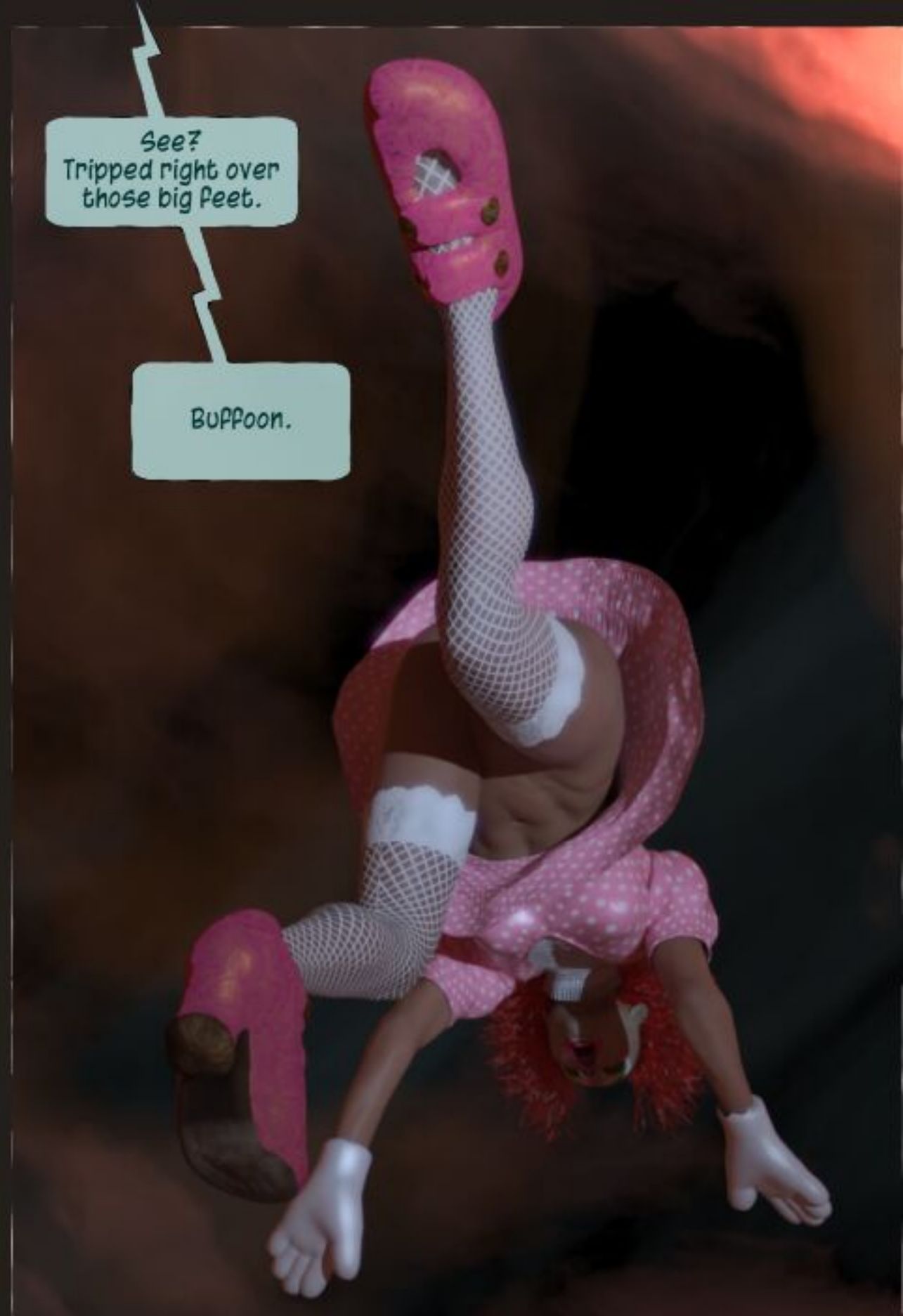
Why aren't you laughing?



You can run, but you can't hide!

... Actually, you can't even run.

Just as incompetent at that as at everything else.



See? Tripped right over those big Feet.

BuPpoon.



It's a little insulting, actually.

You're the valiant leader of the resistance? You're the best anyone could do?

One begins to Peel like one is not being taken seriously.



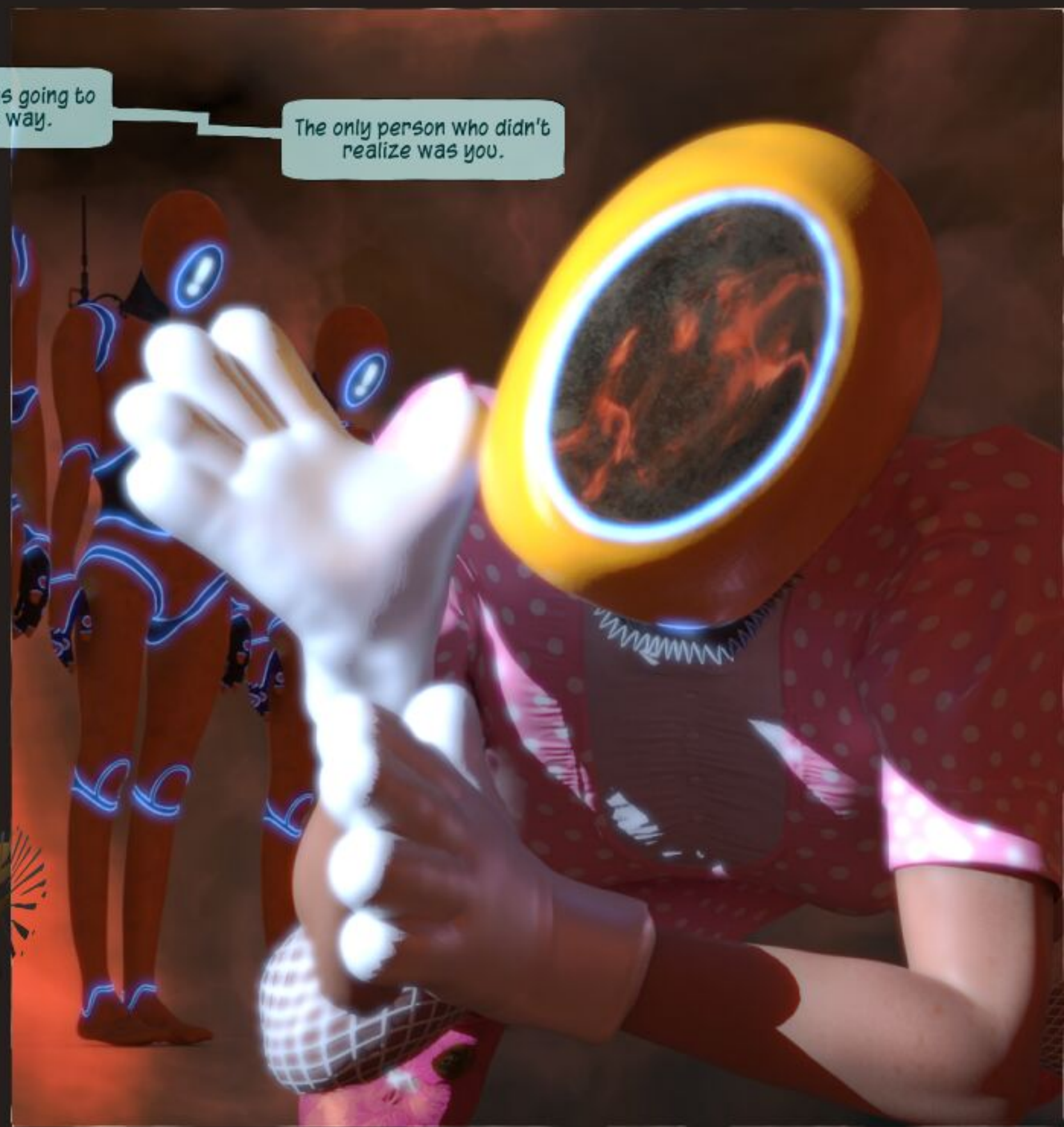
All your Friends ... imagine what they could have done, how far they could have gotten, if they'd had someone competent to lead them.

Look at them now. Such a waste.



It's time for you to join them, you know.

It was always going to end that way.



The only person who didn't realize was you.



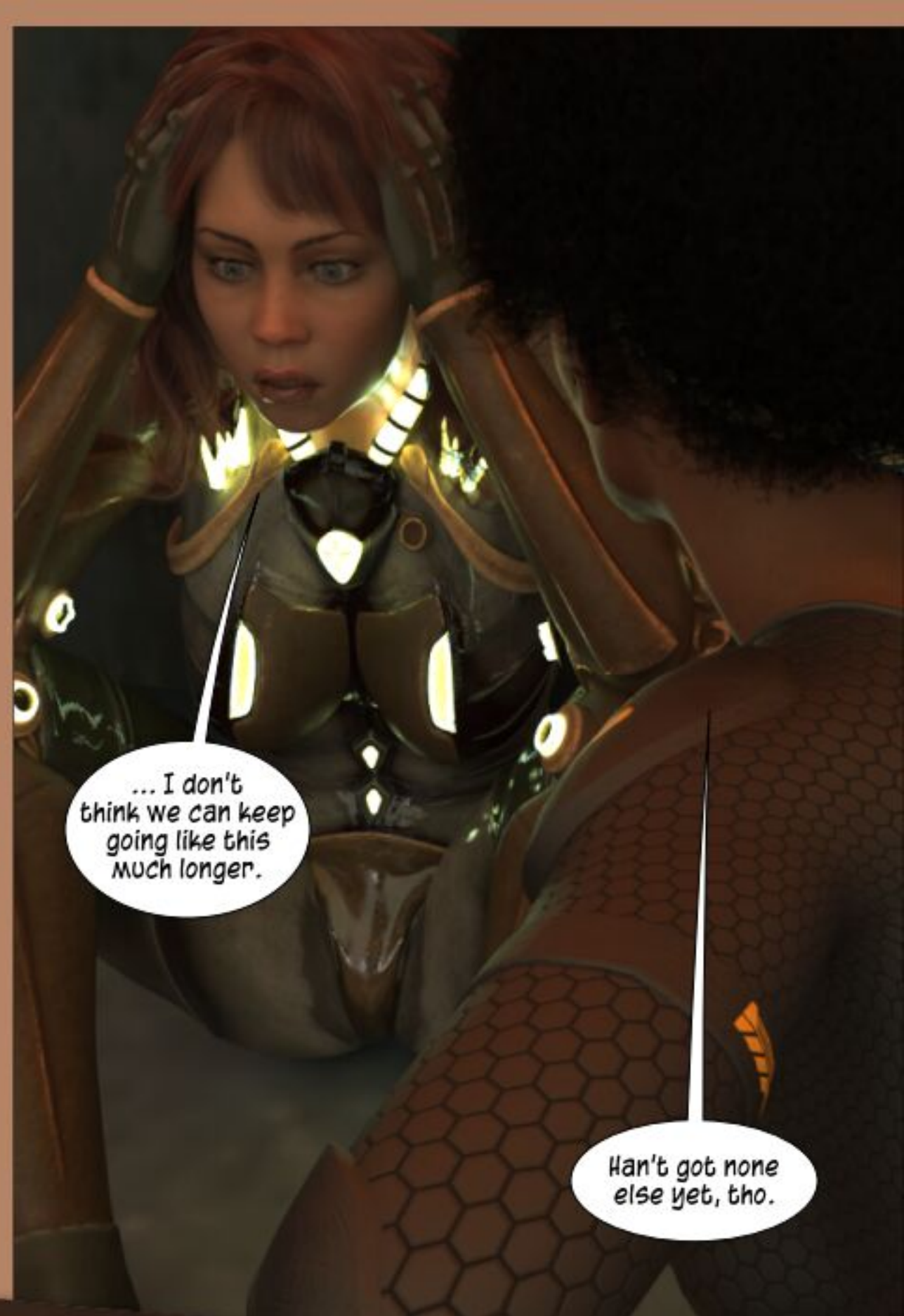
But don't Peel bad!

I have a new position in mind for you.

You'll still get to be the leader!



It's the part you were born to play.



IF YOU ARE DETERMINED (OR BORED), YOU CAN FIND THREADBARE IN THE SKY IN TWO PANELS IN #53.



Threadbare and I came into this zone because we'd gotten some reports about use of some tech we're interested in. We didn't expect to find all this.

We wouldn't usually get involved, but it seems like you've got a real problem here. I mean, I assume you don't want a mind-controlled robot army taking over the place.

Whoever's doing this is using radio to control them. We haven't figured out all of it. There's a piece missing. Do any of you know what radio is?

I knew it was some kind of transmission ...

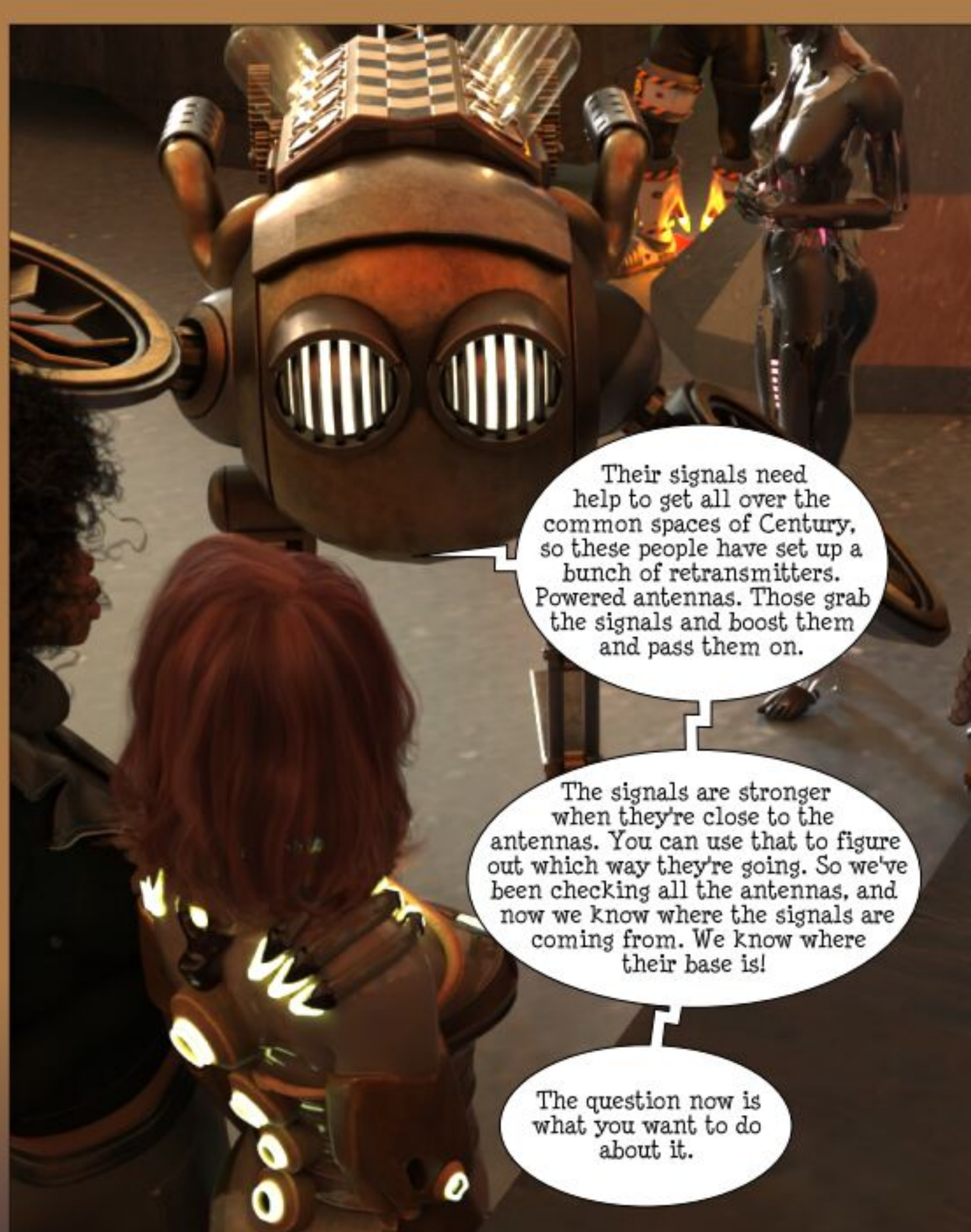


Yeah, I know radio. When I was a teenager, there was some, for a while. Played old music. Somebody told me they were up on top of a building somewhere.

Oh -- you can use it for things besides music?

Absolutely. You can send and receive all kinds of things.

But you can't control people with it. You can send them a "hey, do this" message -- we've listened in on those -- but you can't just make them do it. We don't know how that part works. Yet.



Their signals need help to get all over the common spaces of Century, so these people have set up a bunch of retransmitters. Powered antennas. Those grab the signals and boost them and pass them on.

The signals are stronger when they're close to the antennas. You can use that to figure out which way they're going. So we've been checking all the antennas, and now we know where the signals are coming from. We know where their base is!

The question now is what you want to do about it.



How long do you imagine you can do this? I'm just curious.



I have eyes and ears everywhere in this facility, Monica.

All it takes is one sound. One tip of one toe caught on one camera. One mistake.



I'm going to find you sooner or later, and I will get what I want.

Why prolong this chase?



... and once again it's "OK, Molly, what's the plan?"

I don't know how to explain to everybody that I am the absolute worst person to be in charge of this stupid --

Uh ... hello?



Damn it, this is supposed to be a secret hideout.

On a roof in the robotic quarter?

The flying ones are the only ones who can get up here, and they figure they control this area, so they don't bother patrolling. Who are you?

That's ...
... OK, that's surprisingly sound.

My name's Mint.



You know you've been going about this the wrong way. Ground fights aren't going to do it.

If you lose one person in a fight and they lose Piety, it's still a win for them.

Yeah, I know. Thanks a lot for reminding me.

Well ... if you want to do it the right way, I have what you need.



So you and them both show up and offer to help within like ten minutes of each other?

I mean, OK, even if you're both legit, where've you been?

Thank you! What she said.

I don't know anything about these people. It's taken me a while to alter all the transmitters, and there was no point coming to find you before that was done.

It's taken us this long to triangulate the source of the transmissions!



Triangulate --?

You've been wasting time on that?

Everybody knows where she is. You can see it from here!

Have any of you even bothered to talk to any robotics during any of this? Have you bothered to set foot in the robotic quarter before now?

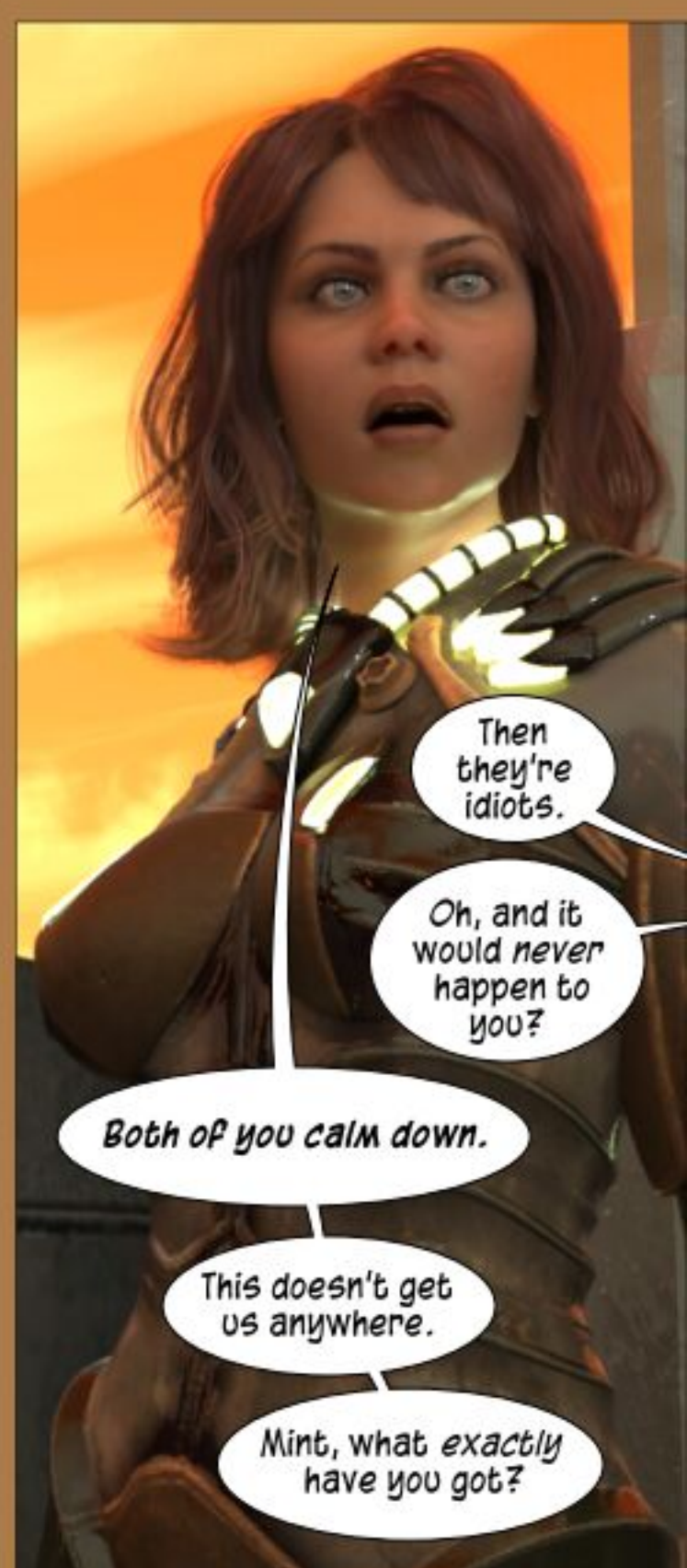


Why would we do that when all the robotics were happy to roll over and join the parade?

Kate ...

That's not true!

OK, some of them wanted to throw everybody else out of Century. Yes. But they got suckered. All of them got suckered. No matter what they thought they wanted.



Then they're idiots.
Oh, and it would never happen to you?

Both of you calm down.

This doesn't get us anywhere.

Mint, what exactly have you got?



OK. What she's doing with the signals is very sophisticated. MicroFrequencies. Some things she sends to all units. Some things are sent only to a single unit.

One of the signals she sends everyone isn't really a message. It's a wave that triggers periodic small electrical shocks that the robot bodies are all equipped to deliver. The shocks distract their brains. They keep getting interrupted when they try to think for themselves, so they just accept her instructions instead.

Ooh! Very clever. And nasty.

I've rigged all of her transmitters. I can make them all stop working. All at once. Then she can't broadcast any signals to any of them, including the disruption wave, and she loses all her street troops at the same time.



That's great, and will definitely change the odds ...

... but we're still going to need better resources. I just don't think we have the strength to change in.

I agree, especially since there's still a little unsolved problem ...

But, uh, do we have any better resources?



I know someone who can probably help us.

I haven't wanted to go to her because I'm not sure of her loyalties, but I think we're past that now and we're going to have to risk it.



OK, I'm suddenly a lot less worried about her loyalties.

No kidding.

It might not be safe for us to go into that field either ...

I'll try it first. I'll just go in a little. If I fall over, you should be able to pull me out.



AZU!

Open up! We need your help!

IF YOU'RE NEW HERE -- YOU POOR CONFUSED THING -- AZU IS THE "QUARTERMASTER" FOR MANY OF CENTURY'S SUPERHEROES AND SUPERVILLAINS.



April?

Thanks. It's important. Would you turn off your field for a second? We've got robotics with us.

I'm not letting any robotics in here.

They're on our side, AZU!

There are no robotics on "our side." Not right now.

You're wrong!



... So you're at the point where you're going to raid her base, and only just now coming to me?

Only when you need help? Didn't occur to you, "Hey, let's go check on AZU, she might be in trouble?"

Do you realize they've been trying to break in here for a week?



We didn't even realize how much it was happening until two days ago.

And, AZU, honestly, how were we to know that you'd be on their enemies list? I mean, you've always had a policy of providing services to everyone, no matter how much ...

WHAT??



And coming from you! You see your friend Briset there? She's the reason I'm on their enemies list to begin with.

Ix never did believe me when I told her I didn't have any information on Briset's virus.

And when I told her I was in no way going to help this eyebot woman with her conquest, she told me I had a target on my back from then on.

I didn't expect Ix to understand the difference between "I equip heroes and villains alike" and "I support the Fascist takeover of Century," because she's never been very bright, but I certainly would have expected you to!

... All right. Fine.

Let's go one-by-one and I'll see what I can do.

* IN #49.



I'm fine with just my duplicates, thanks.

Body armor? Weapons?

They'd only get in my way.



I equipped both of you. How's that doing? Any changes?

S'good.

Not unless you can give me better protection for my hands.



Dalliers, hm? I don't imagine there's much I can do for you.

Probably not. Threadbare is staying as she is and loading some weapons. I have a heavy maintenance suit I'm going to pull up.

I wouldn't mind having a chat with you some time, though.



The two of us only really do well commando-style --

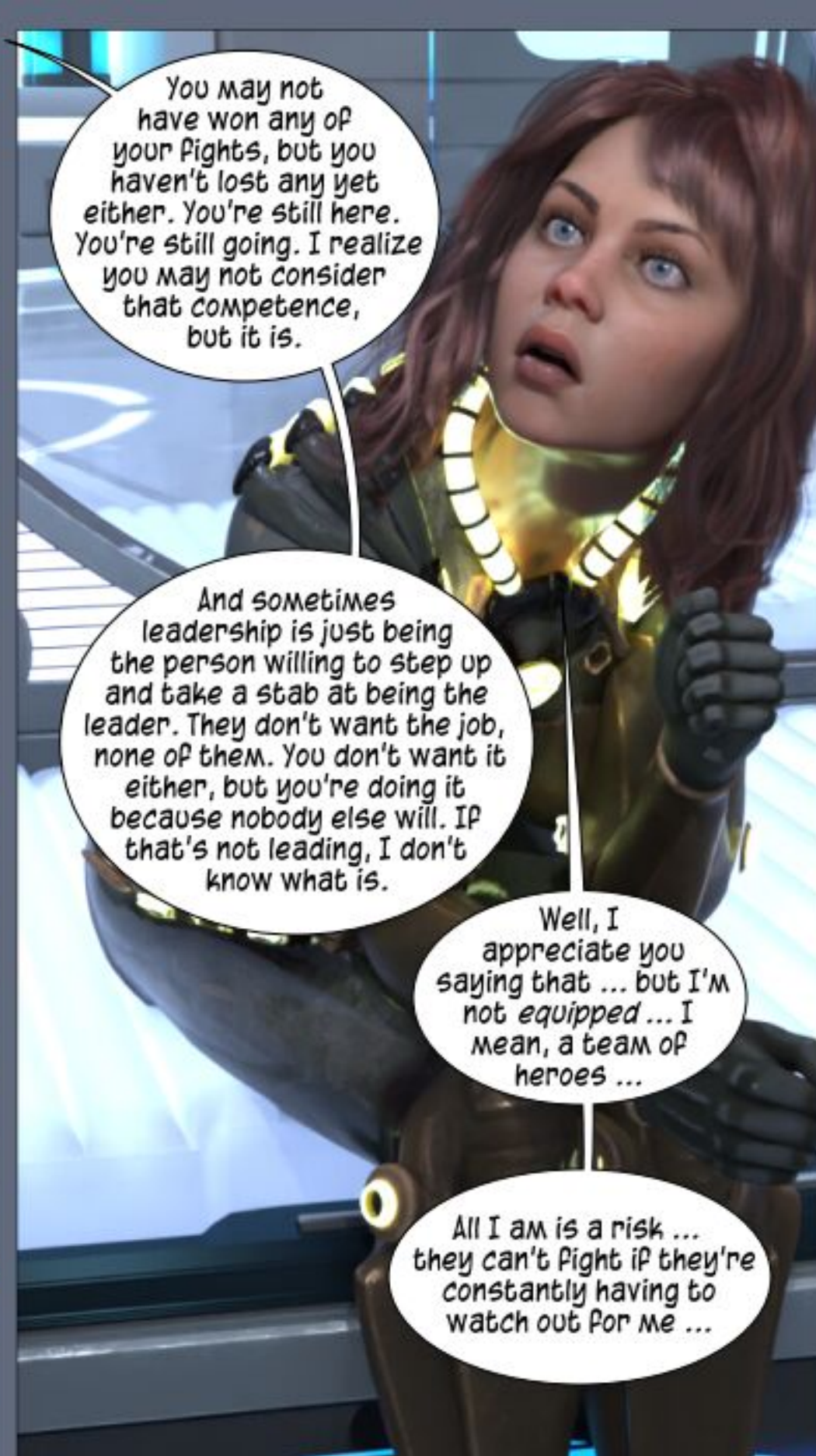
Sneak around and cut throats. I'm not surprised.

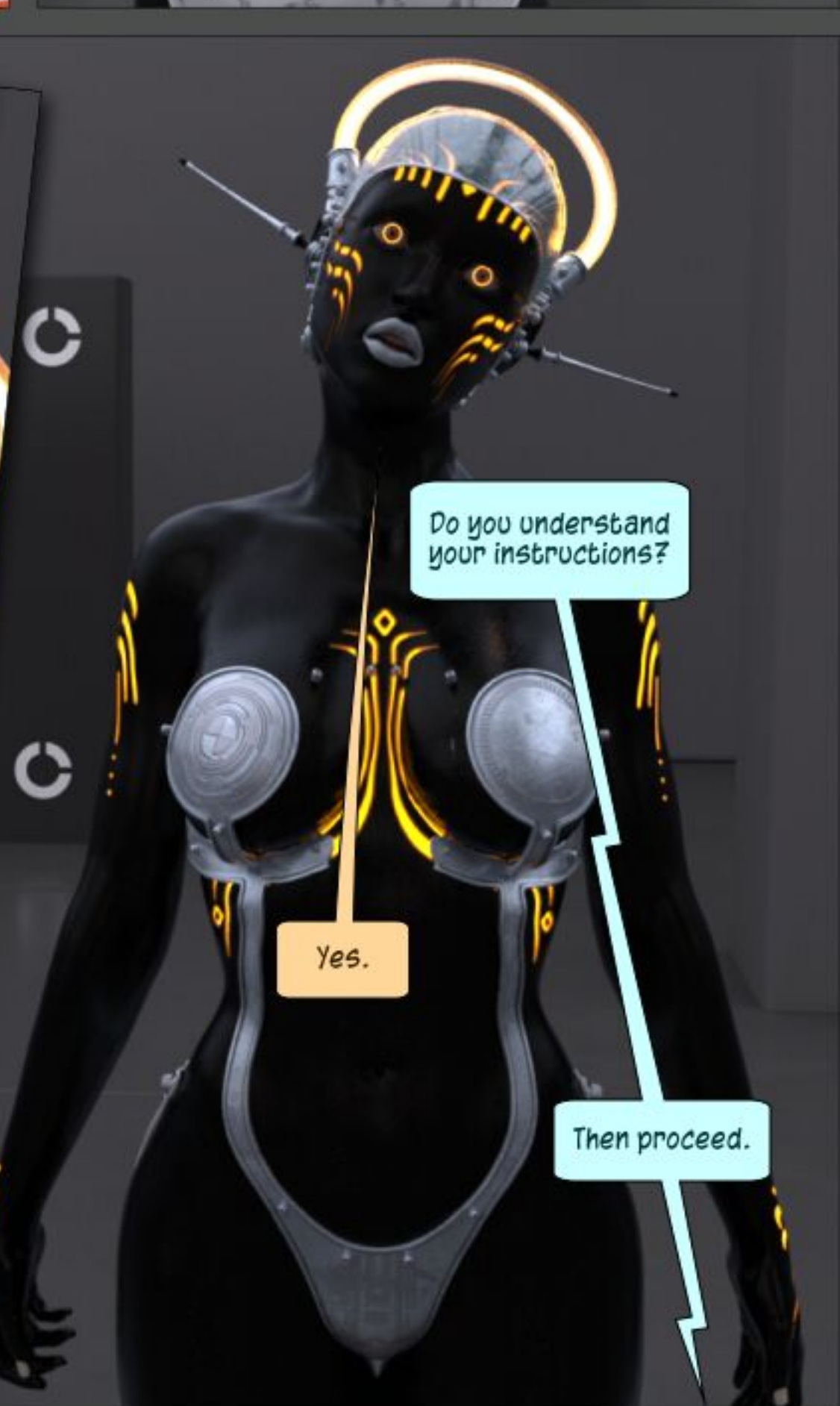
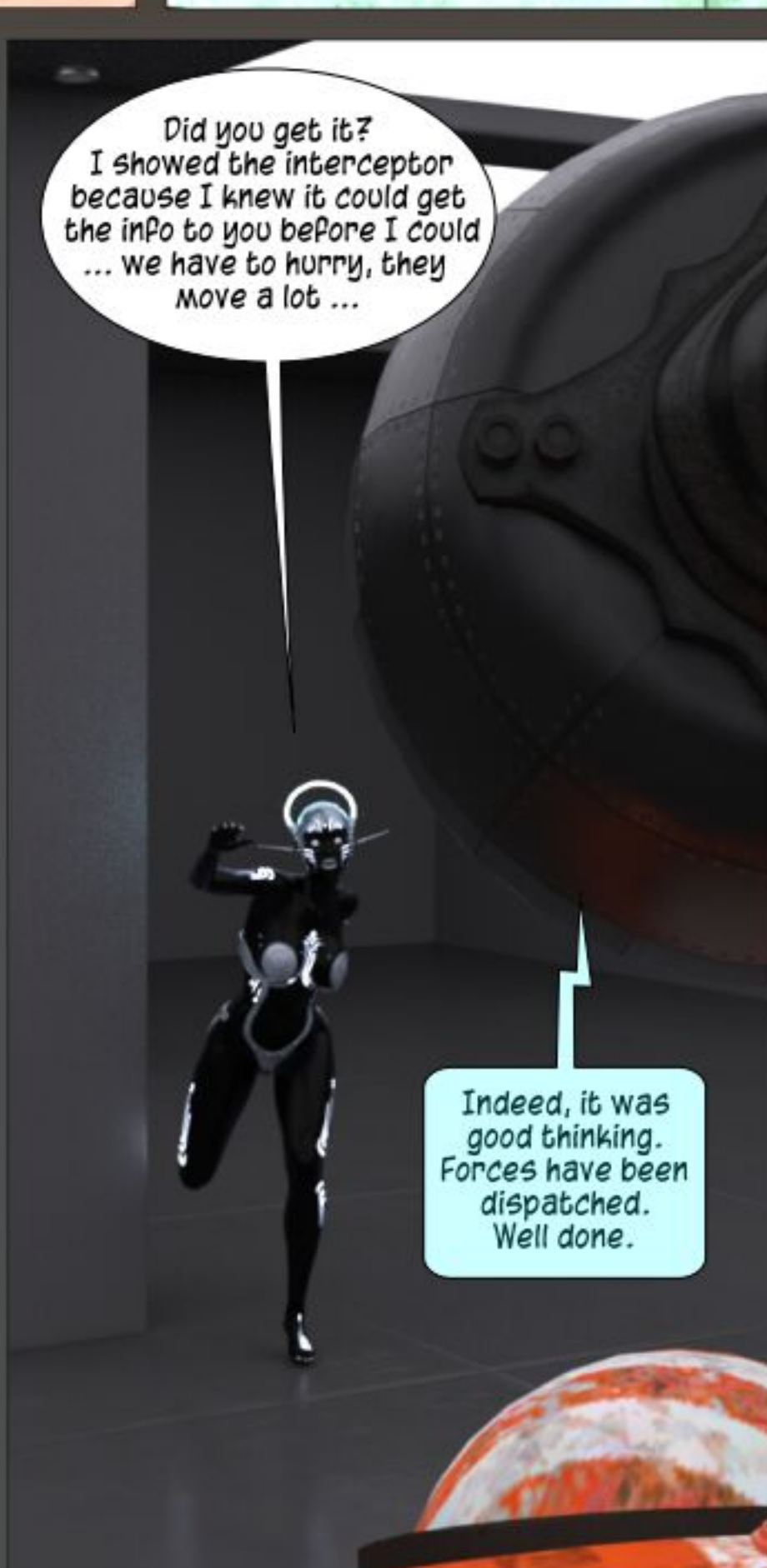
-- and we already have the kit for that. We've also got a couple of guns the team confiscated. We'll carry those.



Well, this all makes my job much simpler.

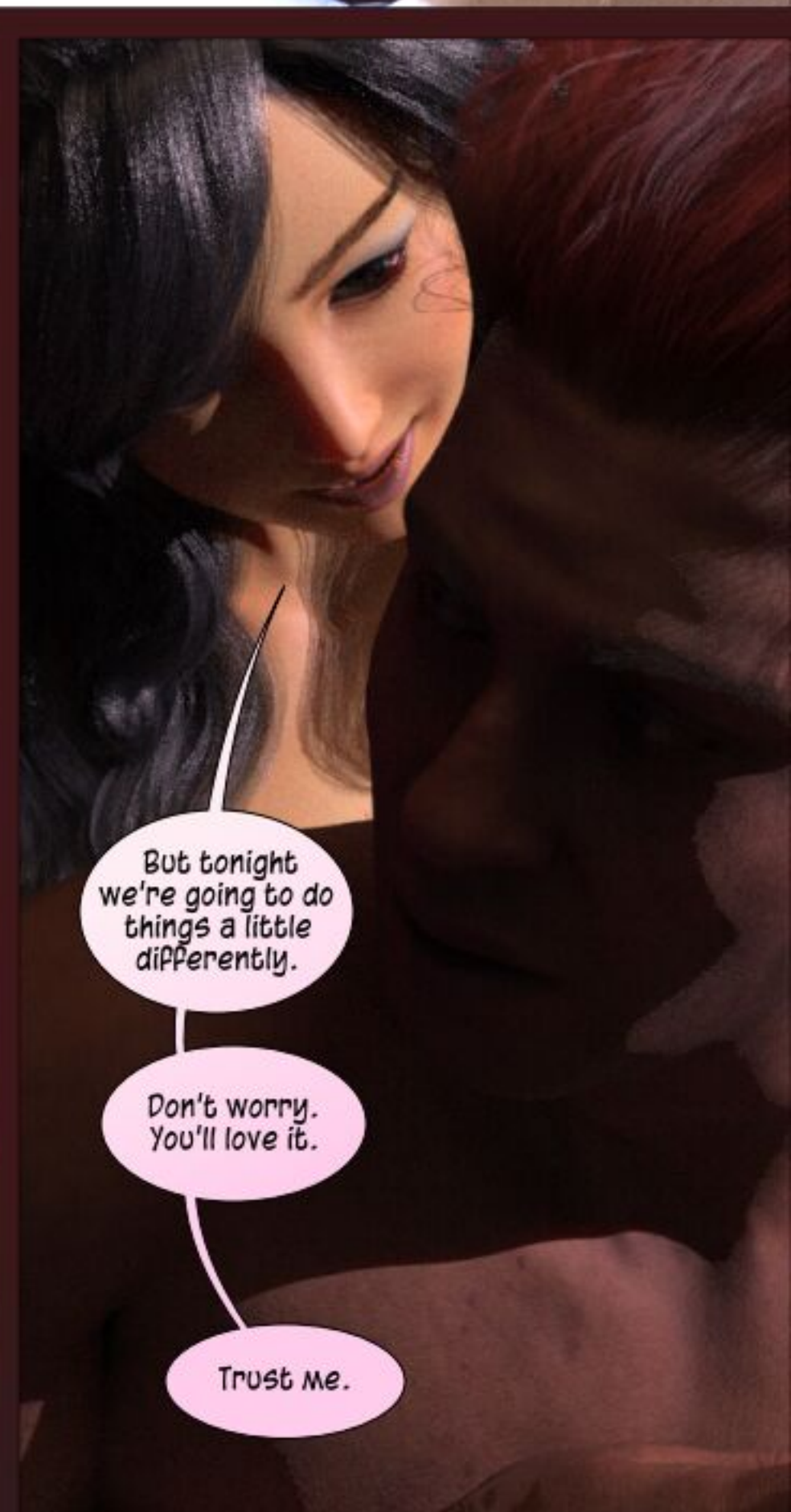
-- sigh --





INTERLUDE

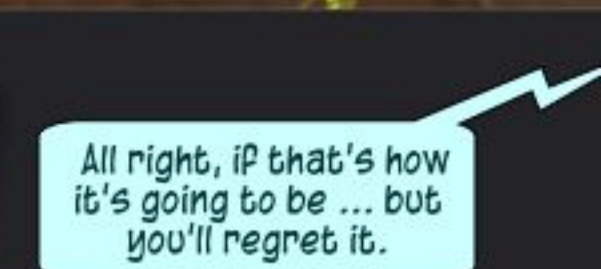
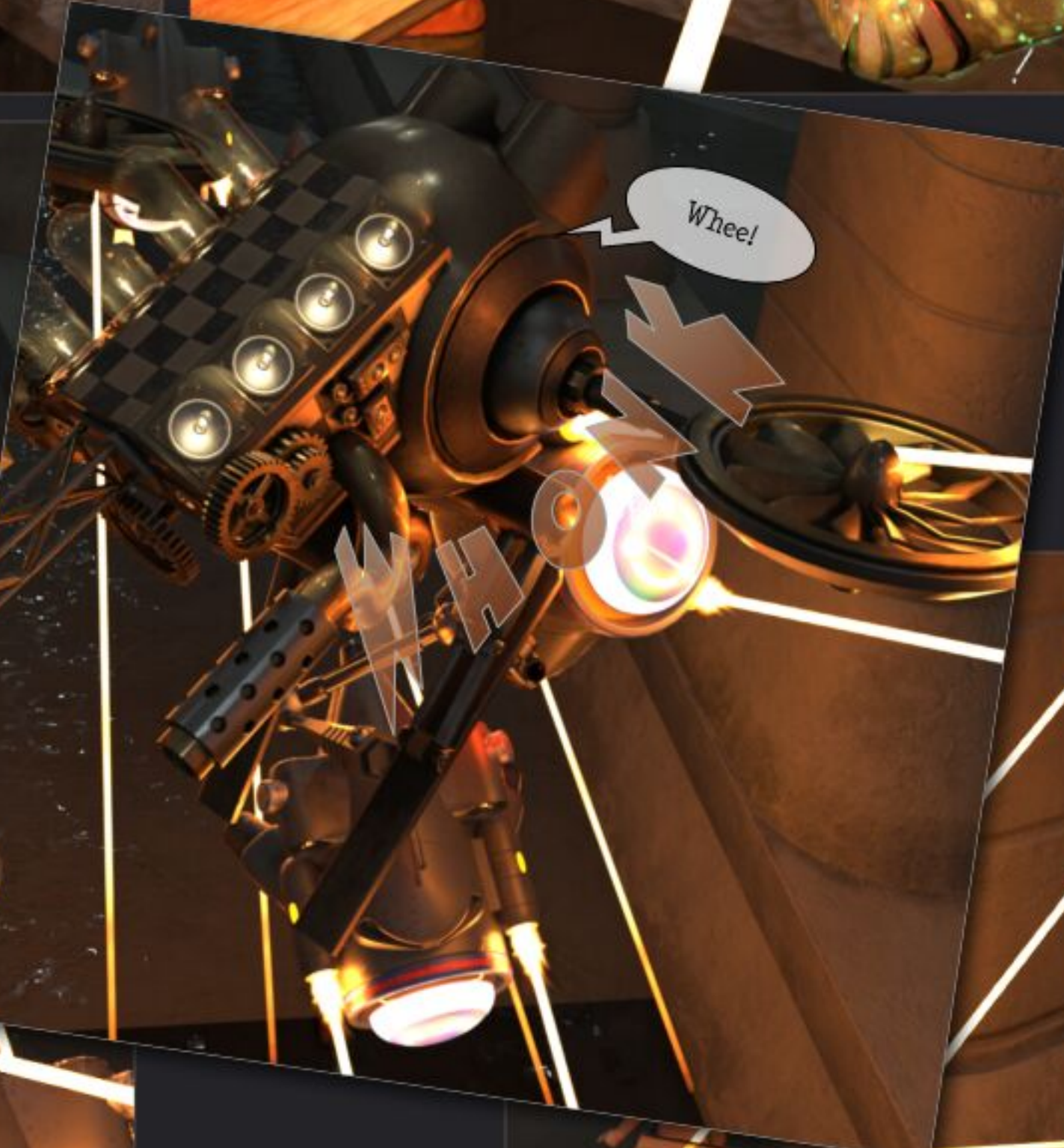
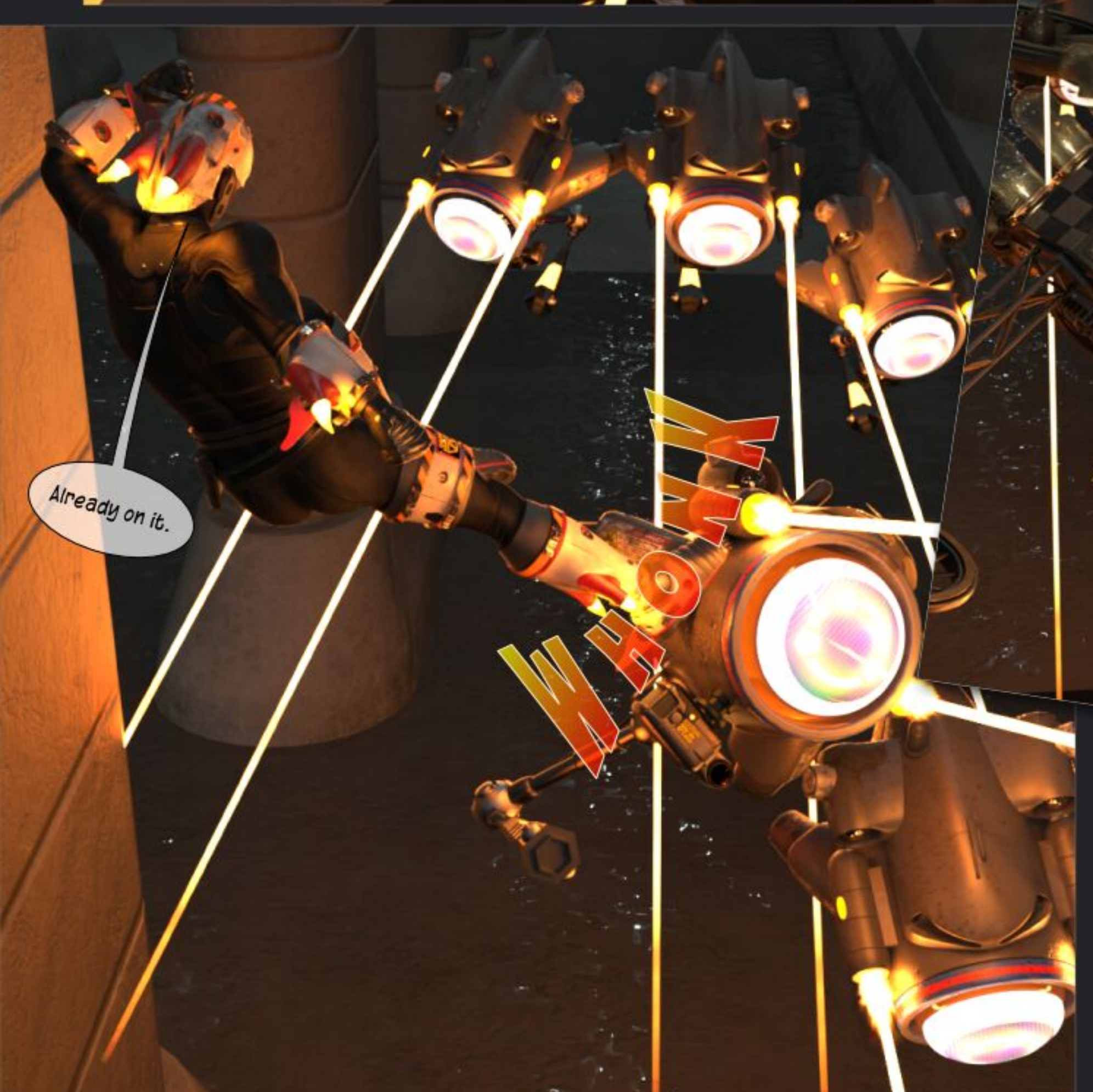




AND WE RETURN TO CENTURY FOR THE THRILLING CONCLUSION.









Oh, wow, they actually work!



Three of us knocking them out of the air ... the others doing well on the ground ...

Don't want to jinx it, but I think we've just about got this.



Hey! We've got a --

uh ...

I don't know what it is. But it's big.



My gun's not doing a thing!

Beeswax, be careful!



Quicksand. It's got to be her. Why else would something like that have a sandstorm around it?

Stay out of its path! We'll get around behind it and we'll all give it everything we have!

AAAAA!



Ok, but it's faster than it --



wauuuggh!

BEESWAX!



I warned you.

This one is so dumb I had to let her keep her name. She just doesn't respond to anything else.

But she doesn't need a brain for this.

Blast them, Nina!



YEAARRH!

I'm losing duplicates!

Fabian! Can you kick Nina over?



Little busy!

This thing can outrun all of us! Somebody's going to get squished any second!



Fabian, look!

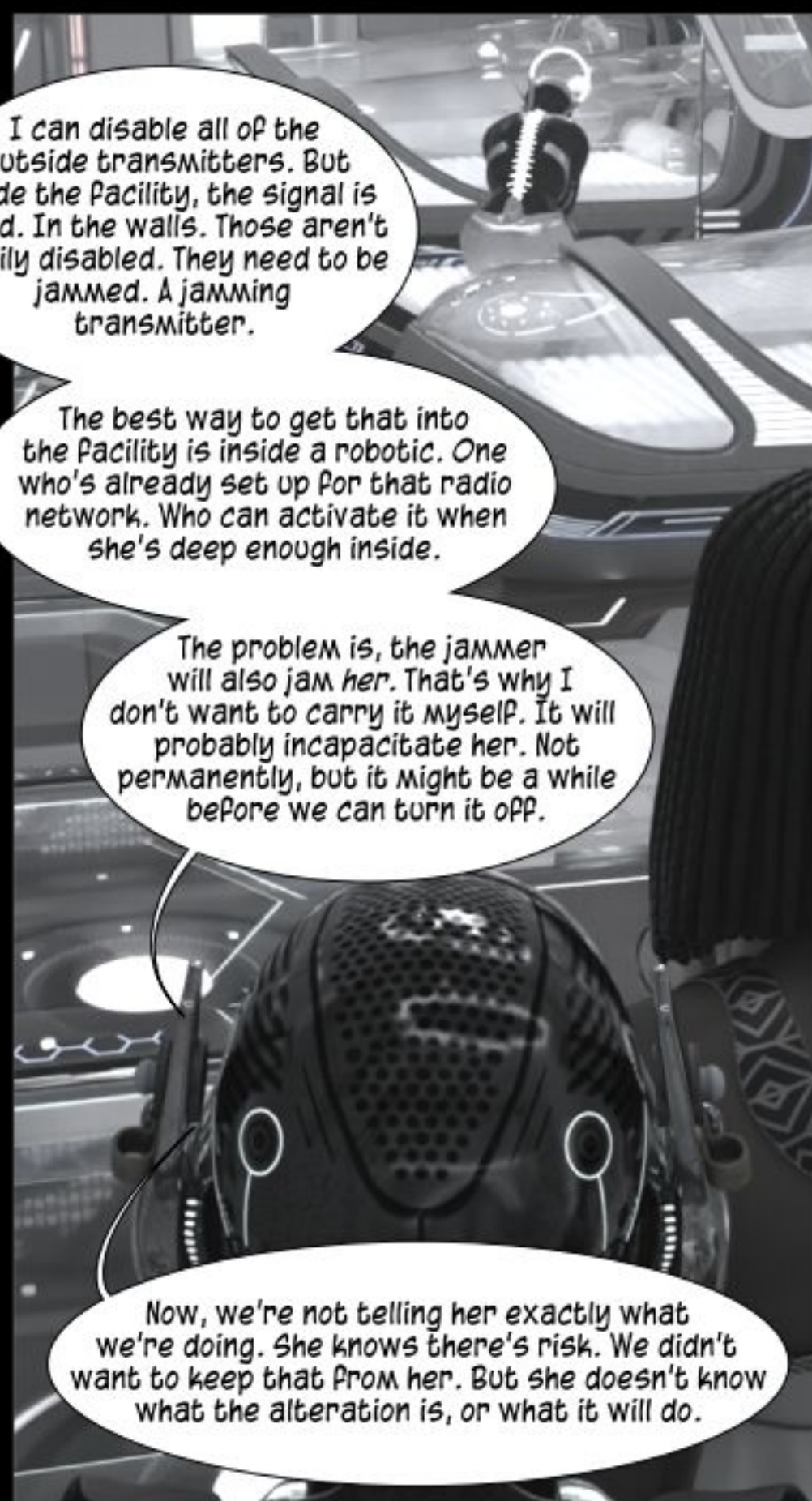
I see her.

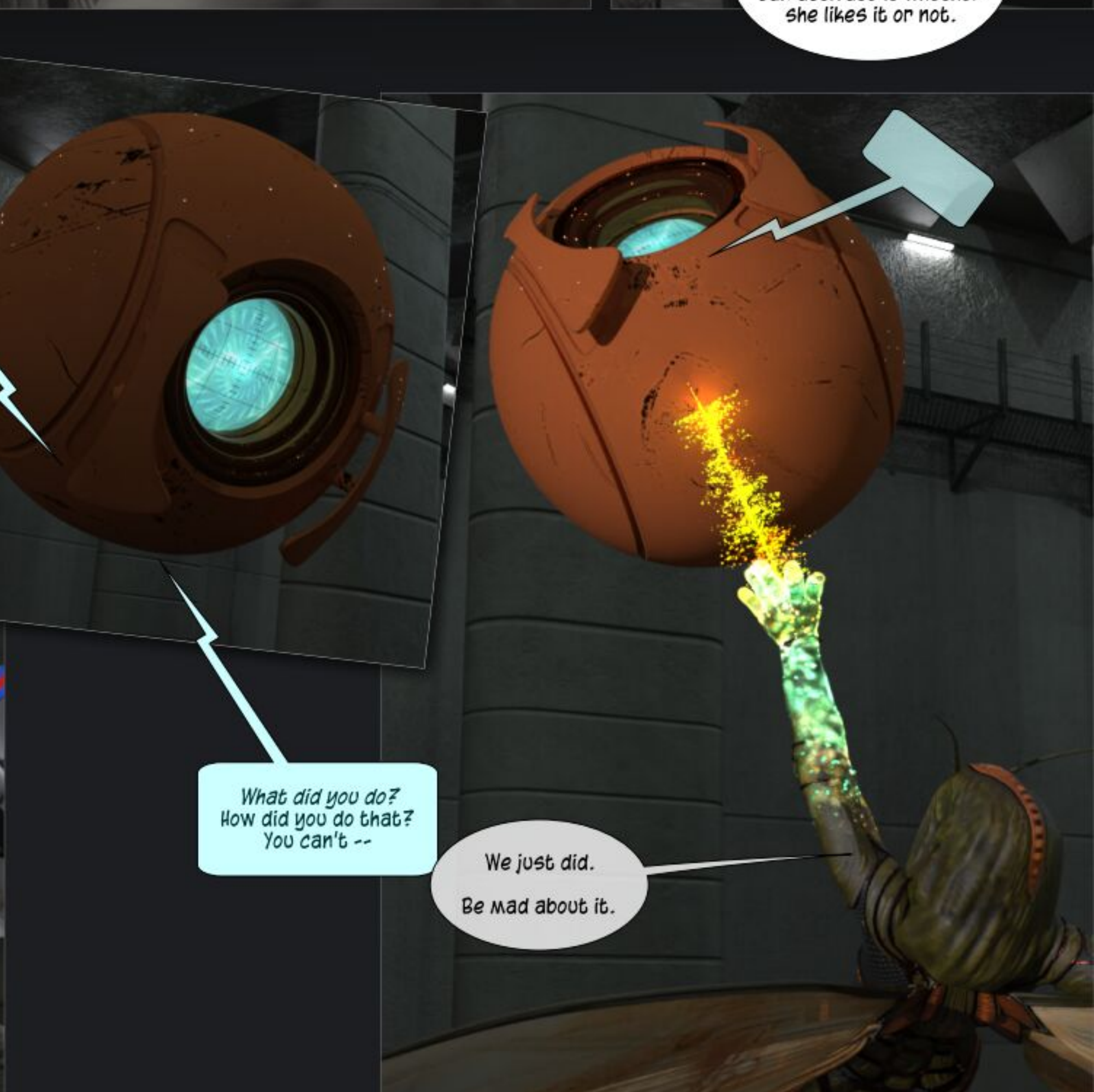
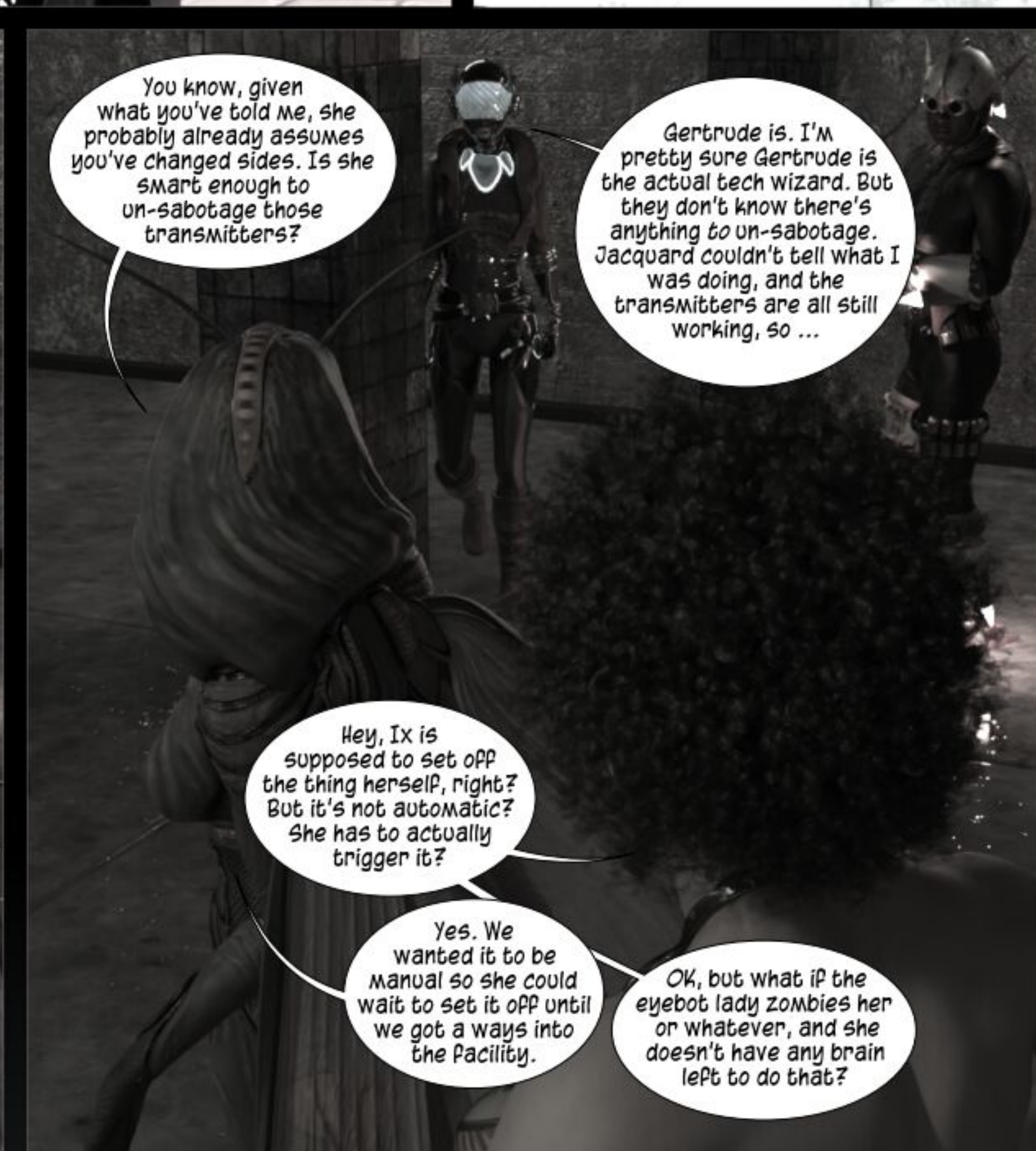
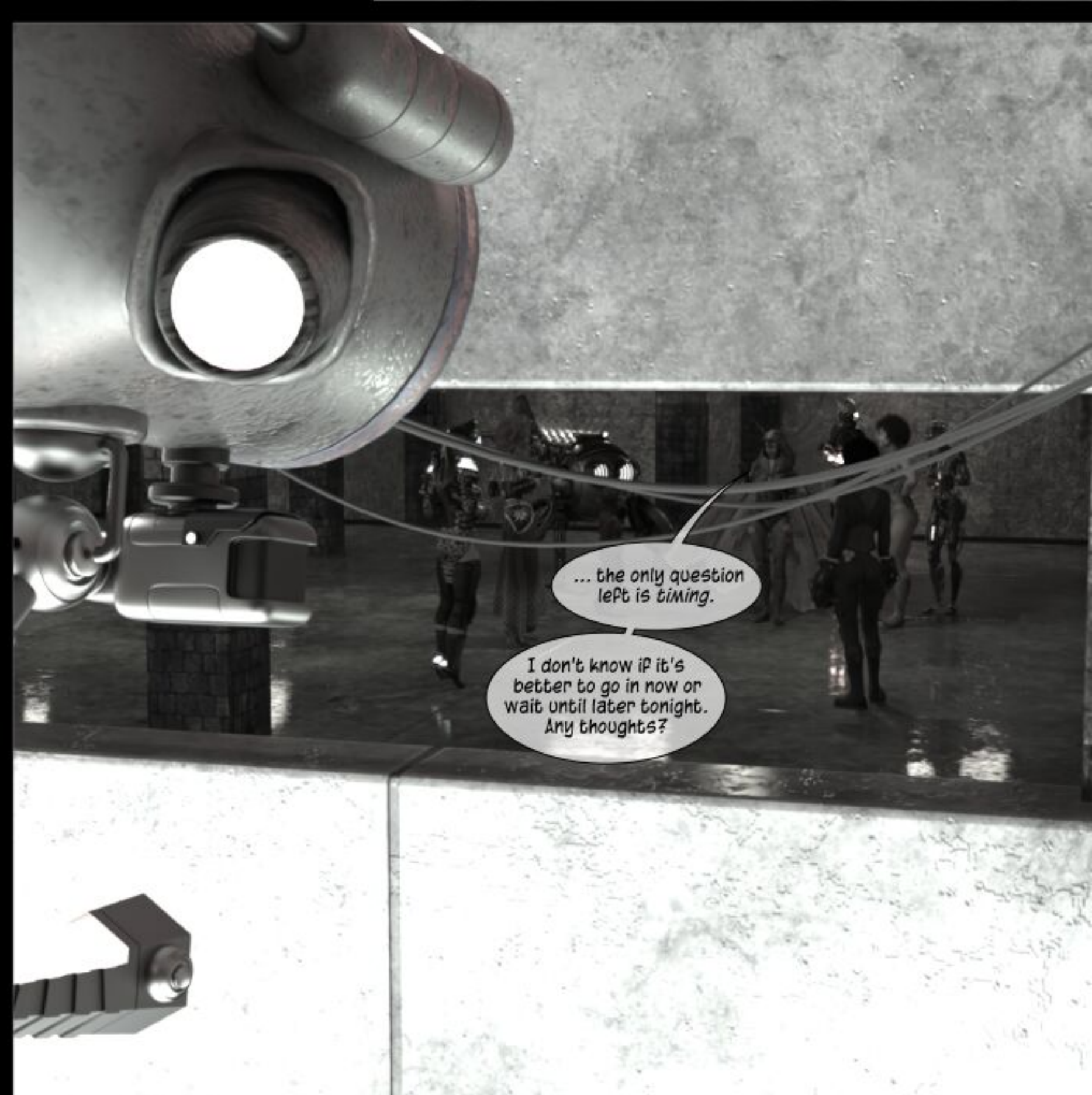
Can you get me any closer?

Just need a little more ... I'm almost in range ...

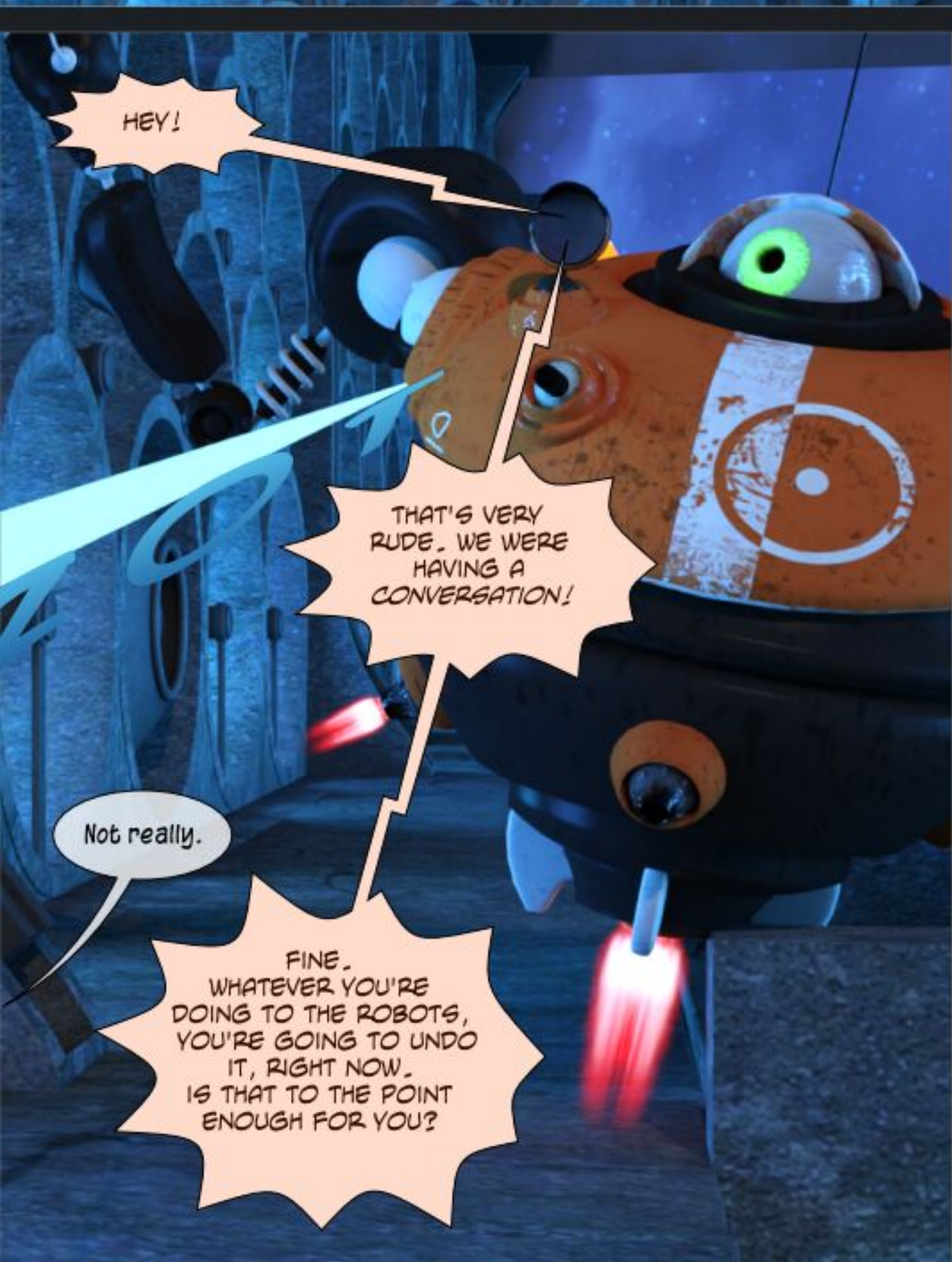
There!













I'm just not sure about this outfit.

I know she put kickers in the heels, but the shoes are hard to run around in ...

... and I can barely do anything else with my hands with these claws on ...



Waaaaugh! Where'd you come from?



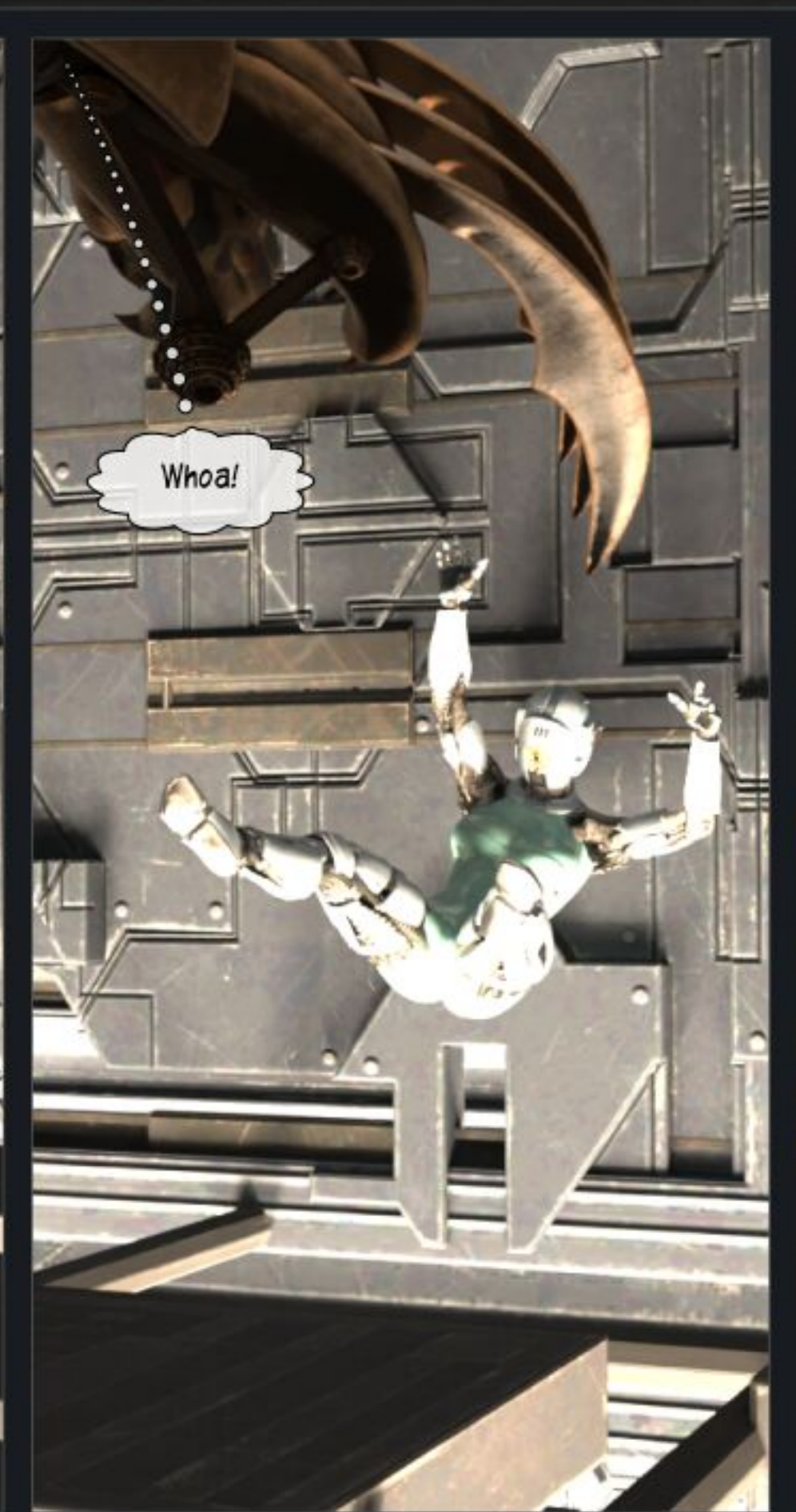
You're the pathetic one, right?

No abilities, no weapons, no armor ...

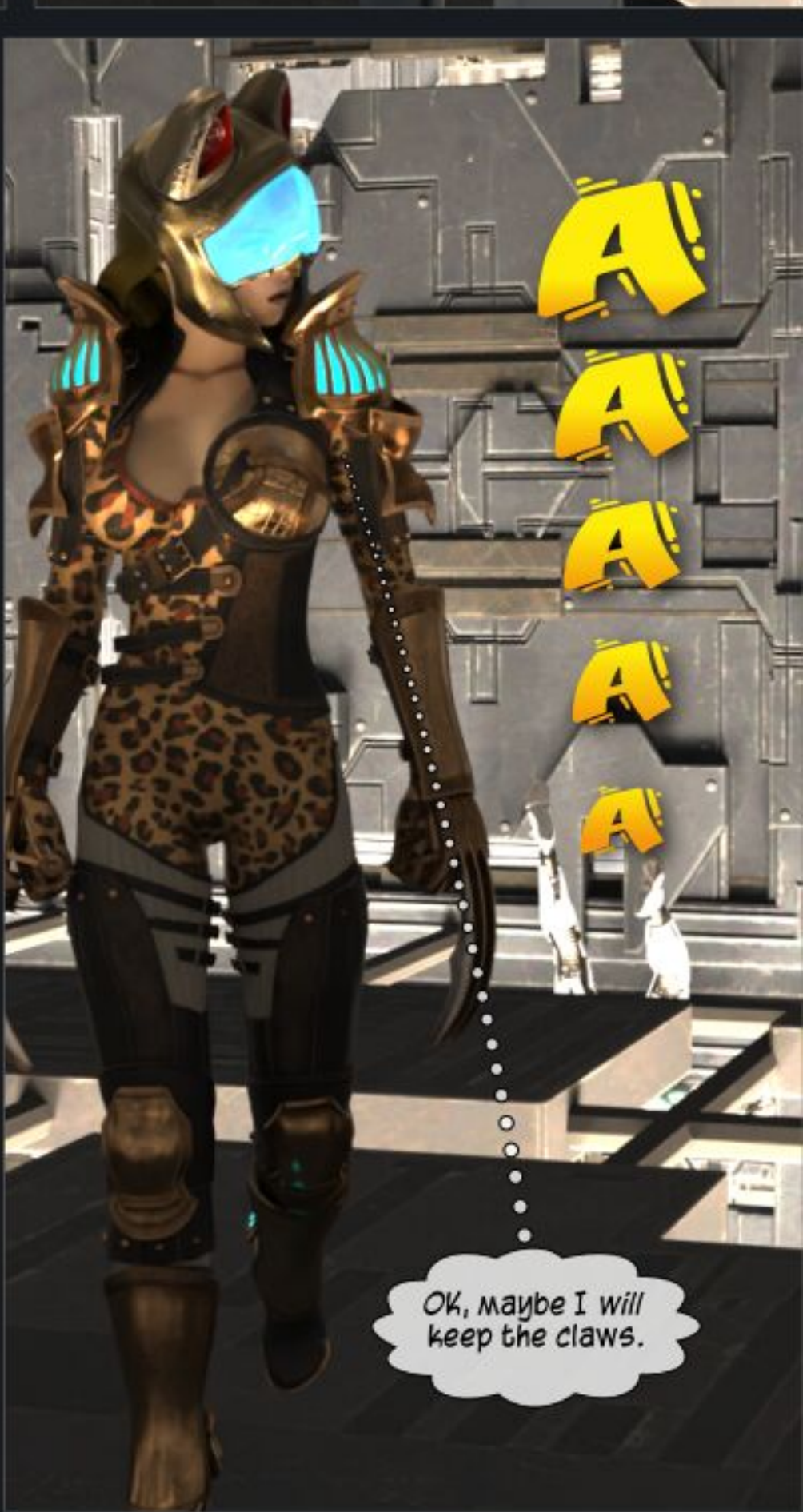
I'll try not to damage you too permanently.



hrkh

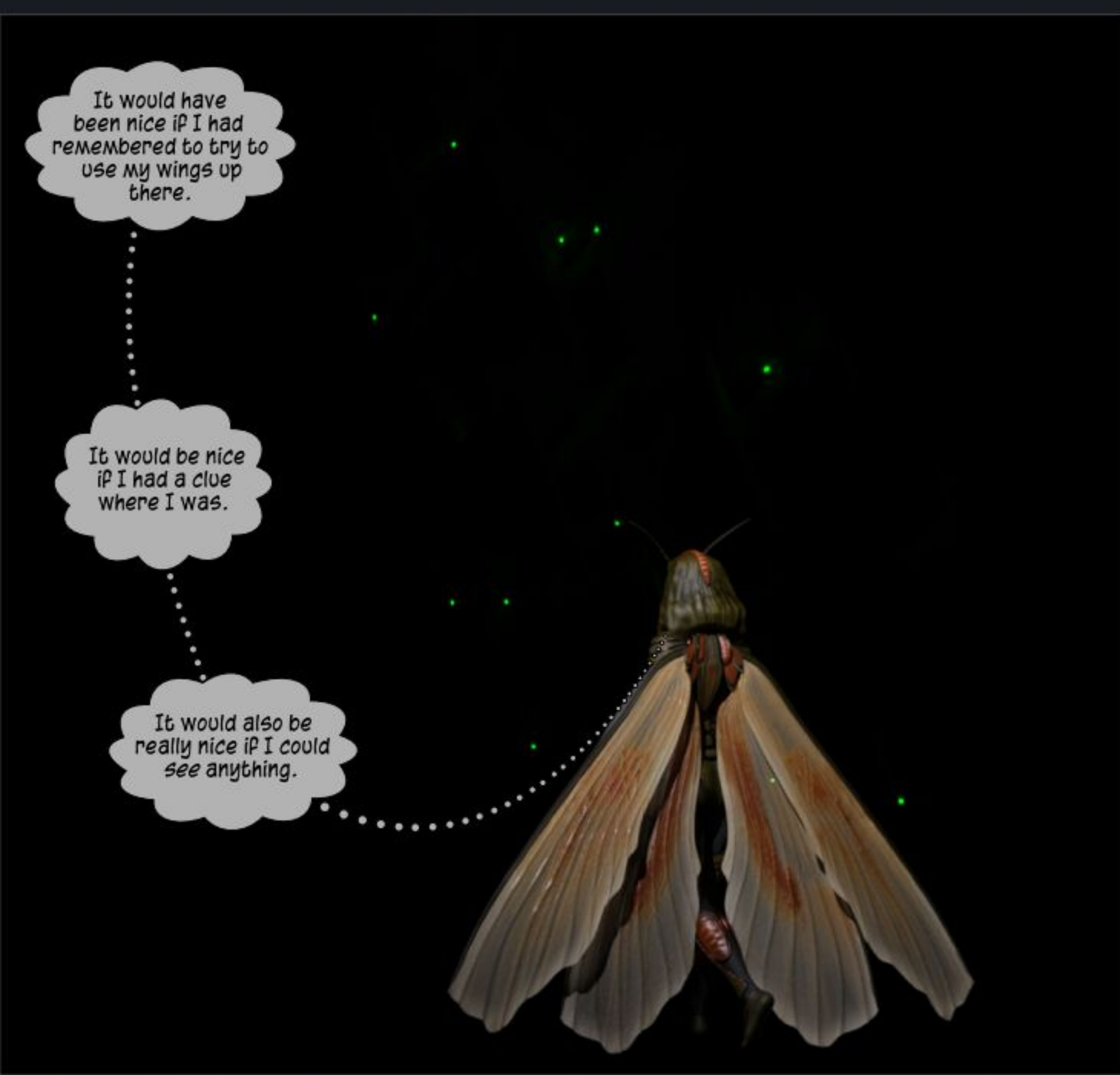


Whoa!



A
A
A
A
A

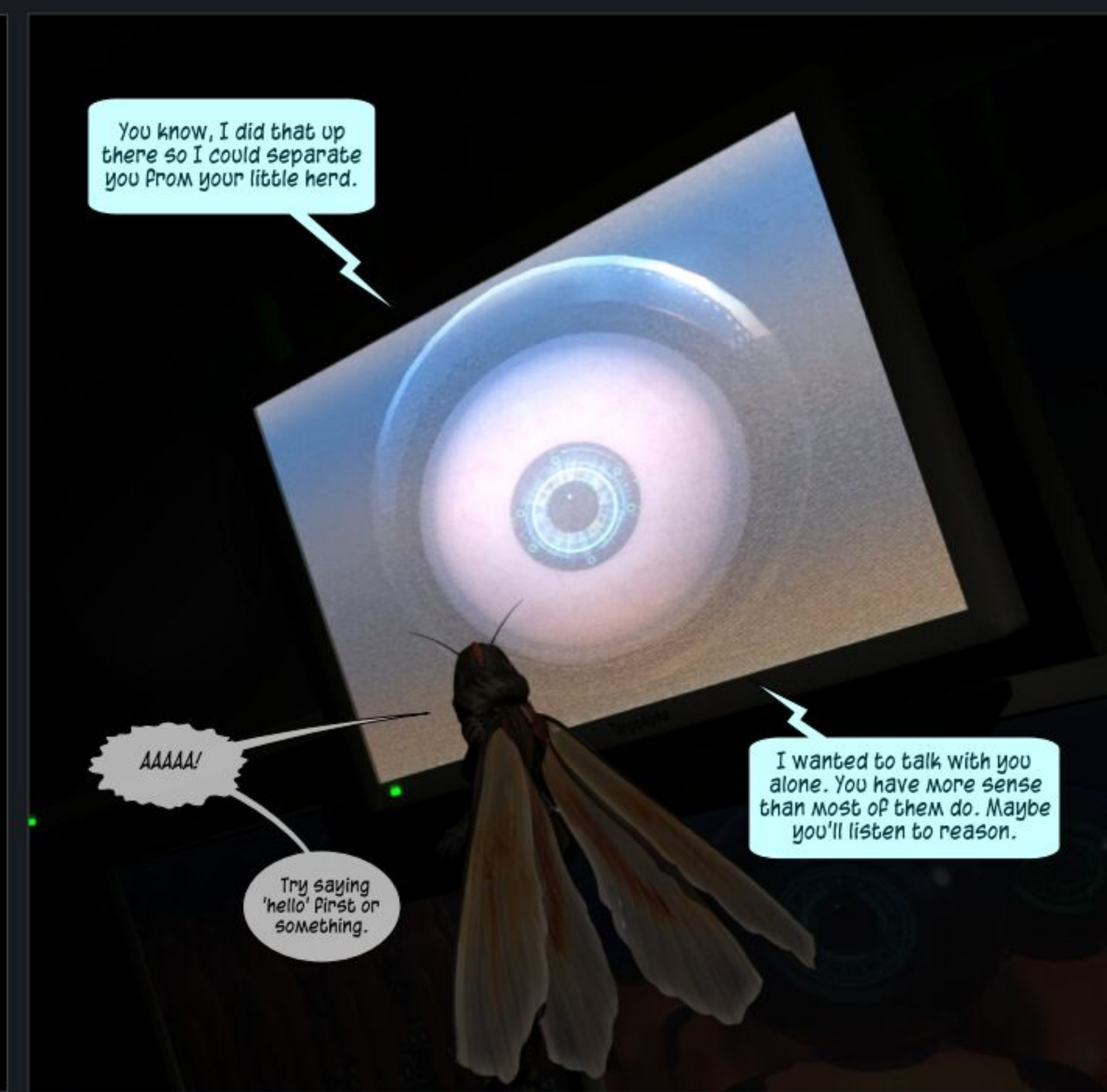
OK, maybe I will keep the claws.



It would have been nice if I had remembered to try to use my wings up there.

It would be nice if I had a clue where I was.

It would also be really nice if I could see anything.

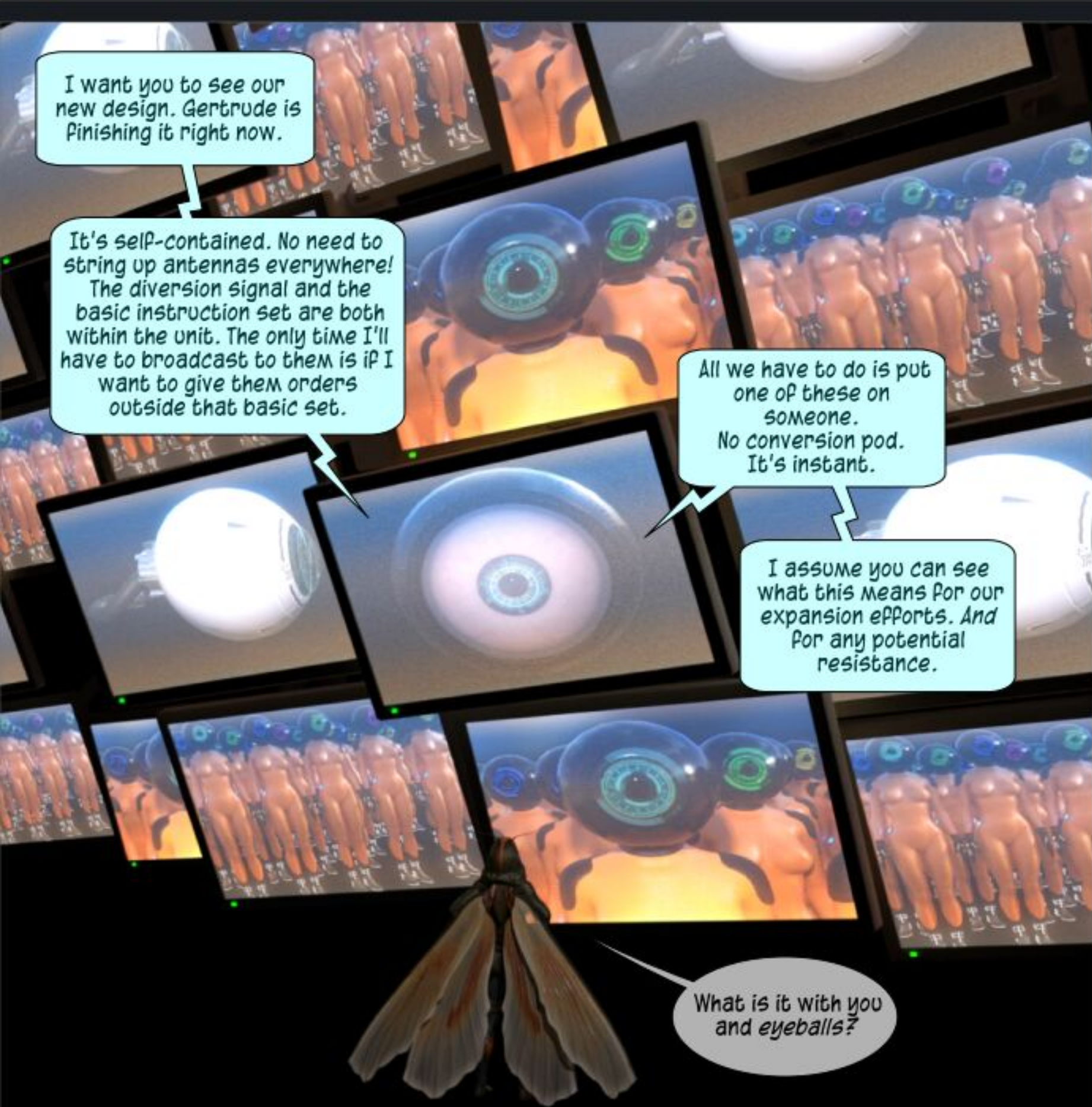


You know, I did that up there so I could separate you from your little herd.

AAAAA!

Try saying 'hello' first or something.

I wanted to talk with you alone. You have more sense than most of them do. Maybe you'll listen to reason.



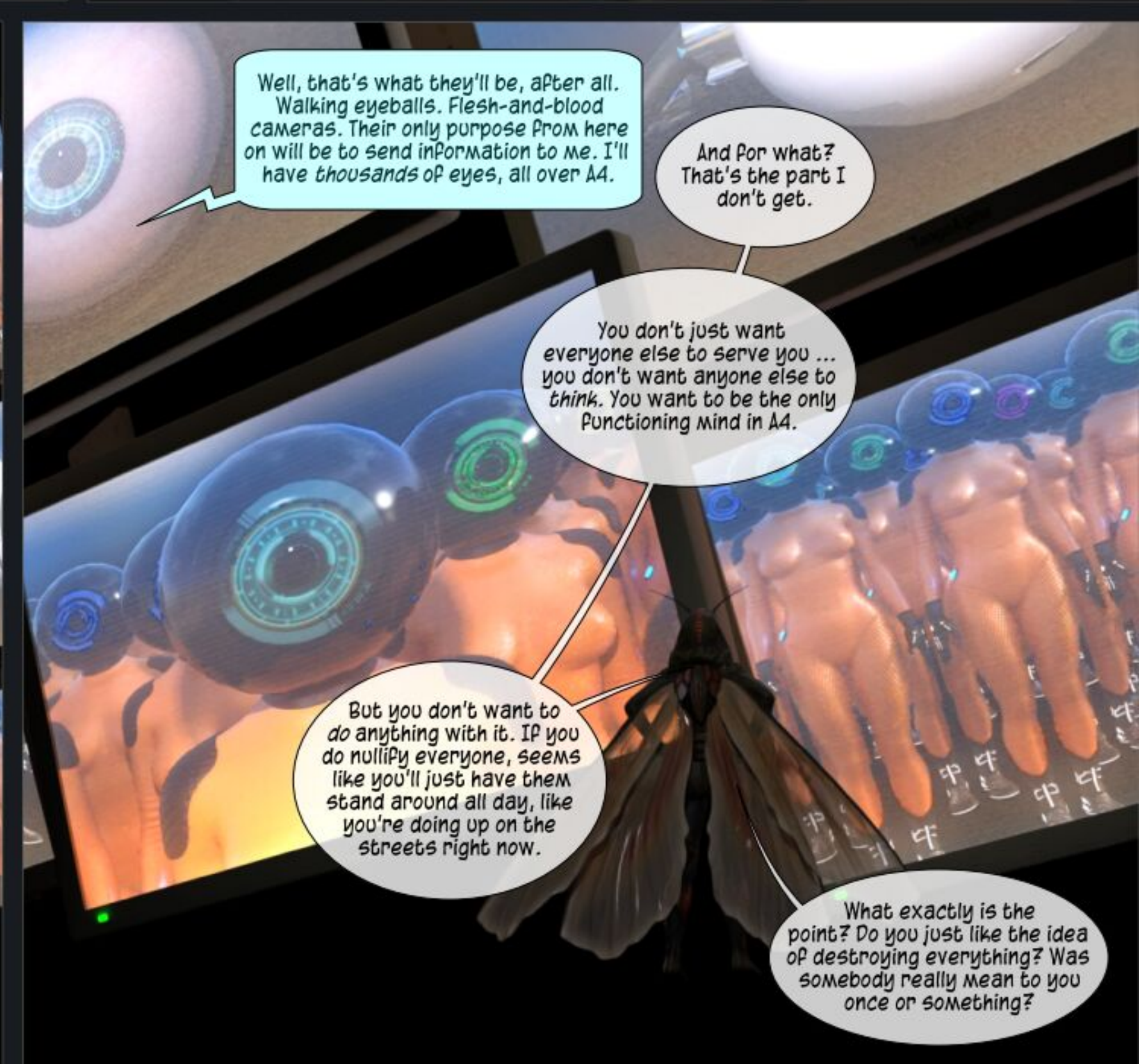
I want you to see our new design. Gertrude is finishing it right now.

It's self-contained. No need to string up antennas everywhere! The diversion signal and the basic instruction set are both within the unit. The only time I'll have to broadcast to them is if I want to give them orders outside that basic set.

All we have to do is put one of these on someone. No conversion pod. It's instant.

I assume you can see what this means for our expansion efforts. And for any potential resistance.

What is it with you and eyeballs?



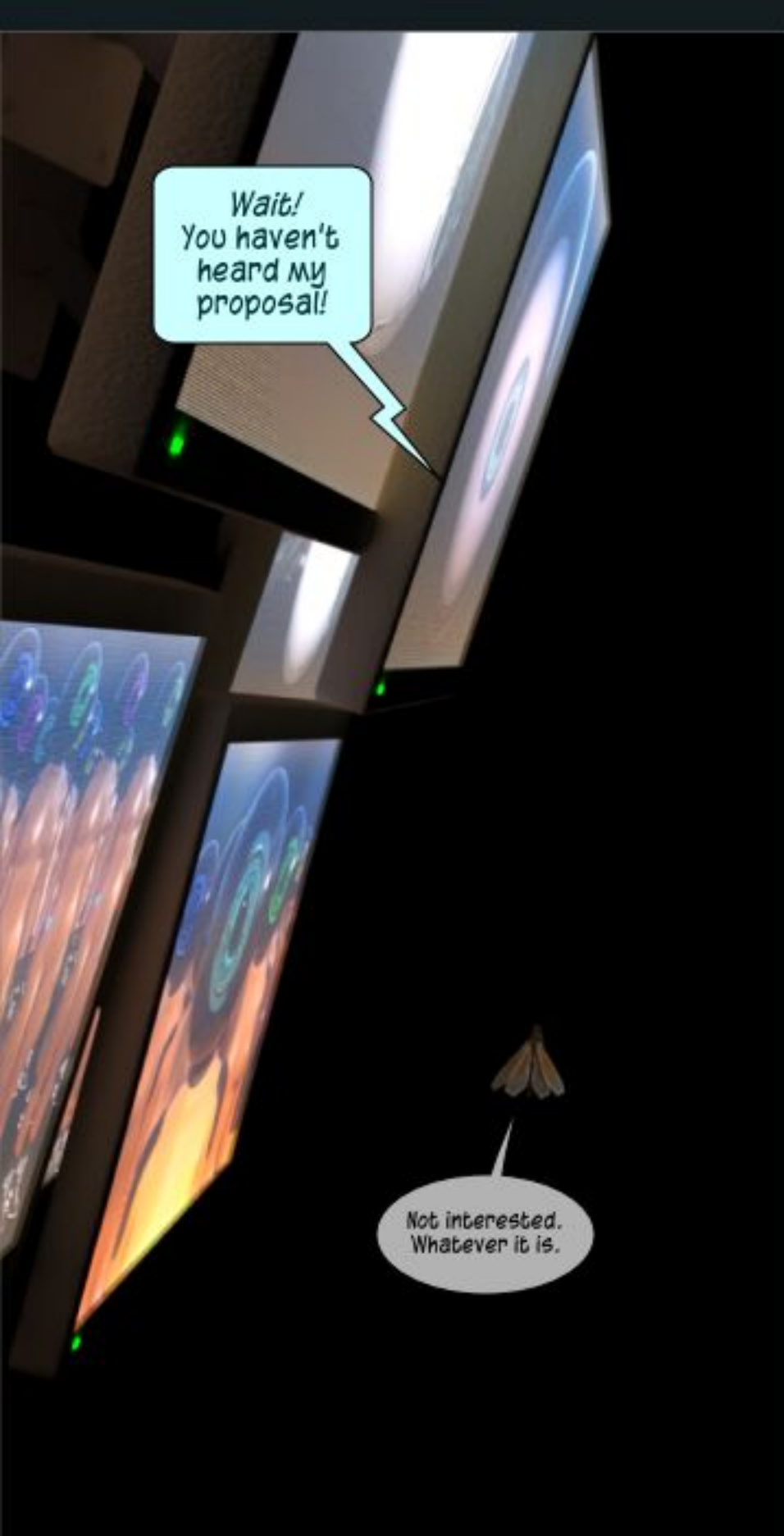
Well, that's what they'll be, after all. Walking eyeballs. Flesh-and-blood cameras. Their only purpose from here on will be to send information to me. I'll have thousands of eyes, all over A4.

And for what? That's the part I don't get.

You don't just want everyone else to serve you ... you don't want anyone else to think. You want to be the only functioning mind in A4.

But you don't want to do anything with it. If you do nullify everyone, seems like you'll just have them stand around all day, like you're doing up on the streets right now.

What exactly is the point? Do you just like the idea of destroying everything? Was somebody really mean to you once or something?



Wait!
You haven't
heard my
proposal!

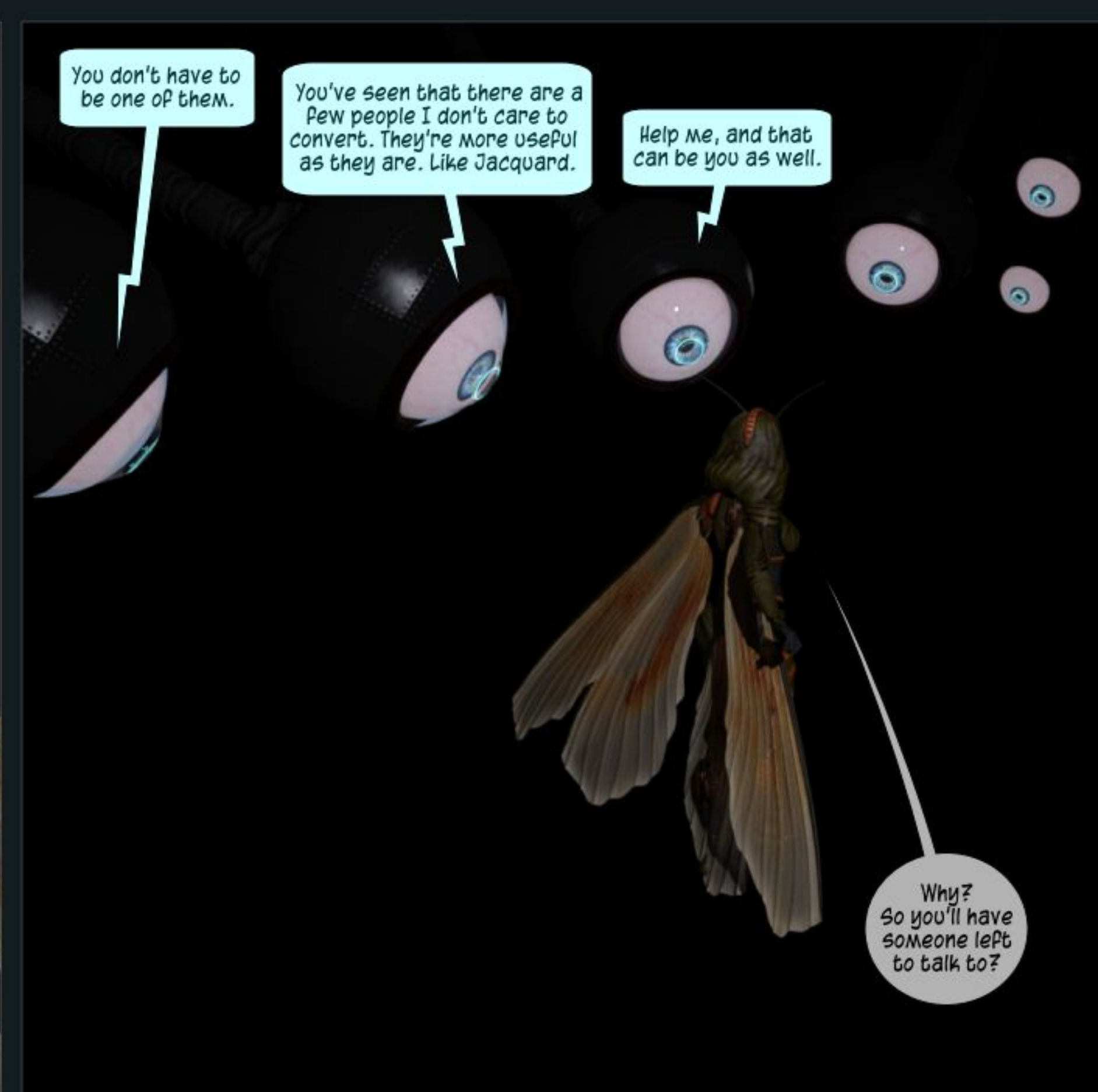
Not interested.
Whatever it is.



You can't just
walk away from
me in here.

YAAAAH!

I really wish you
wouldn't do that.



You don't have to
be one of them.

You've seen that there are a
few people I don't care to
convert. They're more useful
as they are. Like Jacquard.

Help me, and that
can be you as well.

Why?
So you'll have
someone left
to talk to?



KXPXVZ

I'm tired of you,
you know that?
Really tired.

You don't get
consolation. If you win,
you're going to sit in the
world you've made all by
yourself and I hope you
hate it to death.



That was
uncalled for.

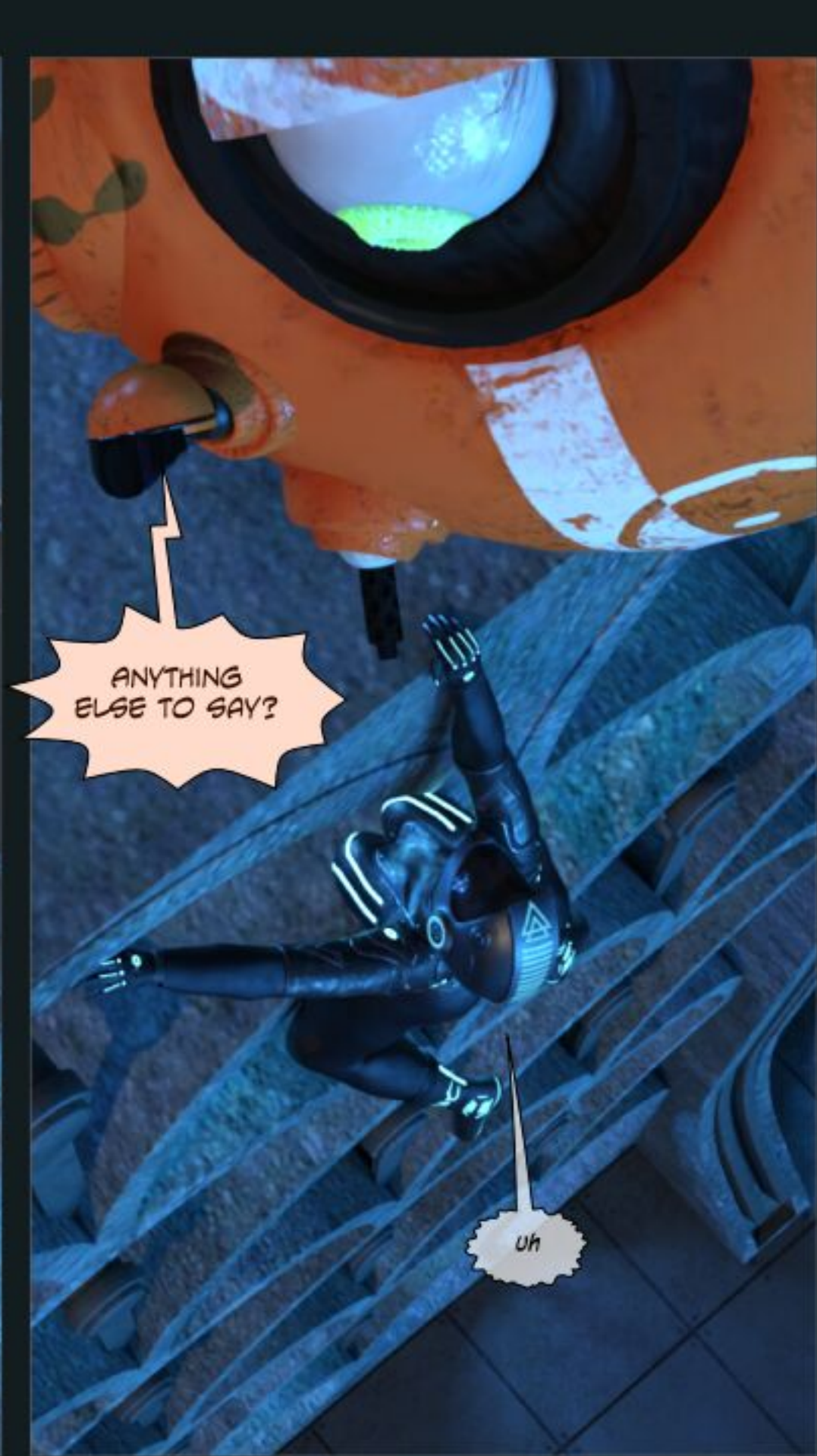
Disagree.



THAT'S
ENOUGH!

I HAVE TO GO
FIX THINGS! I
CAN'T WASTE ANY
MORE TIME ON
YOU!

AAAAA!



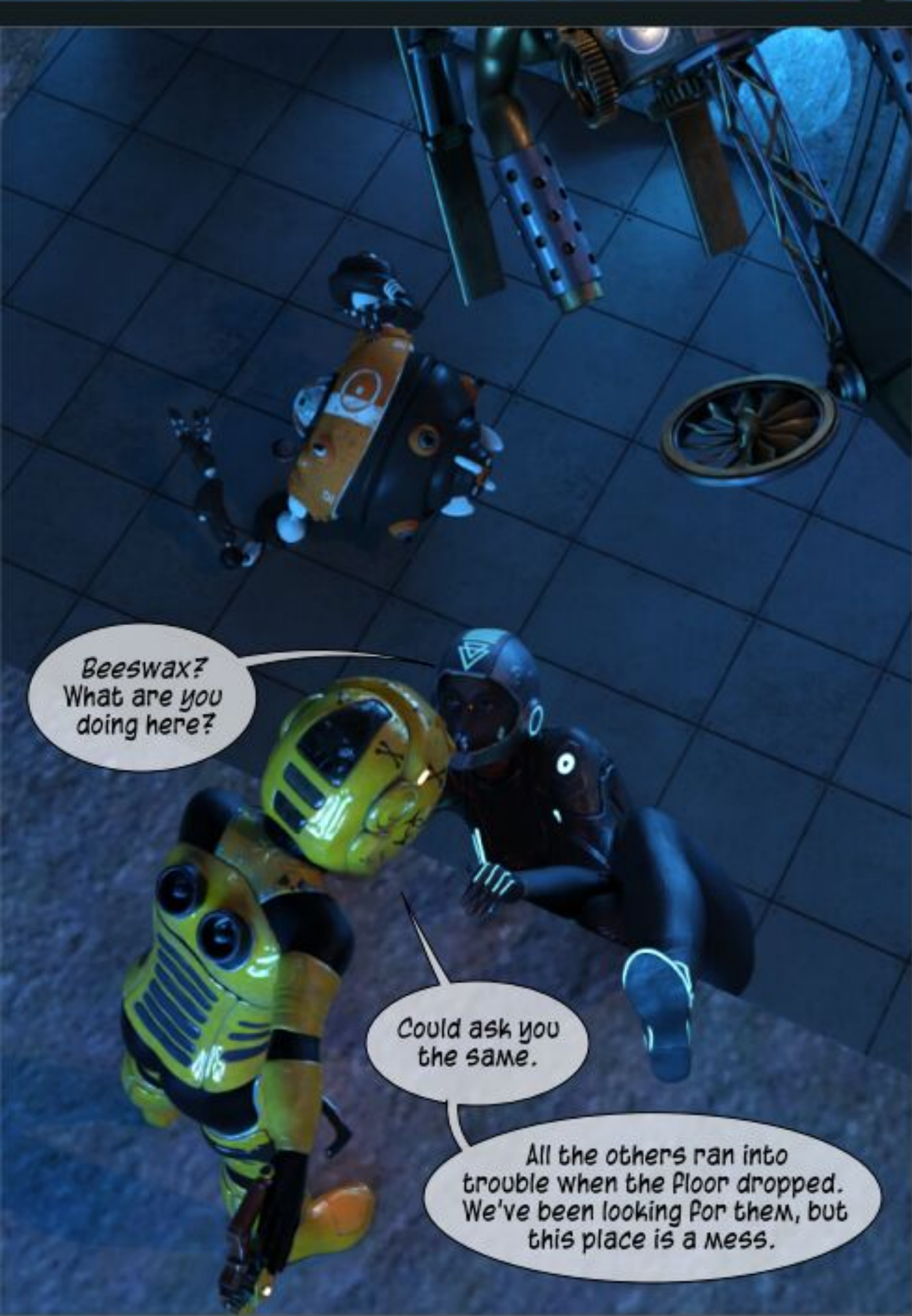
ANYTHING
ELSE TO SAY?

uh



Charge !!

AAAAA!



Beeswax?
What are you
doing here?

Could ask you
the same.

All the others ran into
trouble when the floor dropped.
We've been looking for them, but
this place is a mess.



Others?
Who's with you?

Oh, a
bunch.
We've mostly
got all the
robots shut
down, now we're
just trying to
find the
boss.

Hey, Leyna!
It's Threadbare.

Are these all
power cells?



They sure are.
She works strictly practical -- you
know, when she makes a gadget, it has to
actually have the right wiring and so on. I
figure these are the power supply for
the whole place.

The problem is, I
can't think of a way to
destroy them all --

-- without a
really big
explosion.

Exactly.

Maybe we should go
find the rest of your
group first, and then
figure out options.

I'm pretty sure
Monica Barker is
wandering around
here too.



Maybe I should have played along, at least until she could show me the way out of this place.

I could try flying, but I don't know that would work any better.

Hey! Molly!



Fabian! Do you know where anybody else is?

Probably right around us.

This place is weird. It's got rooms and halls, but if you're not in one of those, you can't see them. I don't think it's really that big, it just seems like that out here in the dark.

Anyway, I can't find anybody. I was lucky I saw you.



Well, that answers my question about whether it'd be better to try flying.

I guess we walk until we run into a wall, or until she finds us and tries to fry our brains ...

... did you just hear something?

I thought I heard someone over there. Someone talking.



Monica, don't do this.

You don't get to call me "Monica."

And you don't have anything to say to me that'll keep me from shutting you down.



You know there's no way I'm going to let you do that.

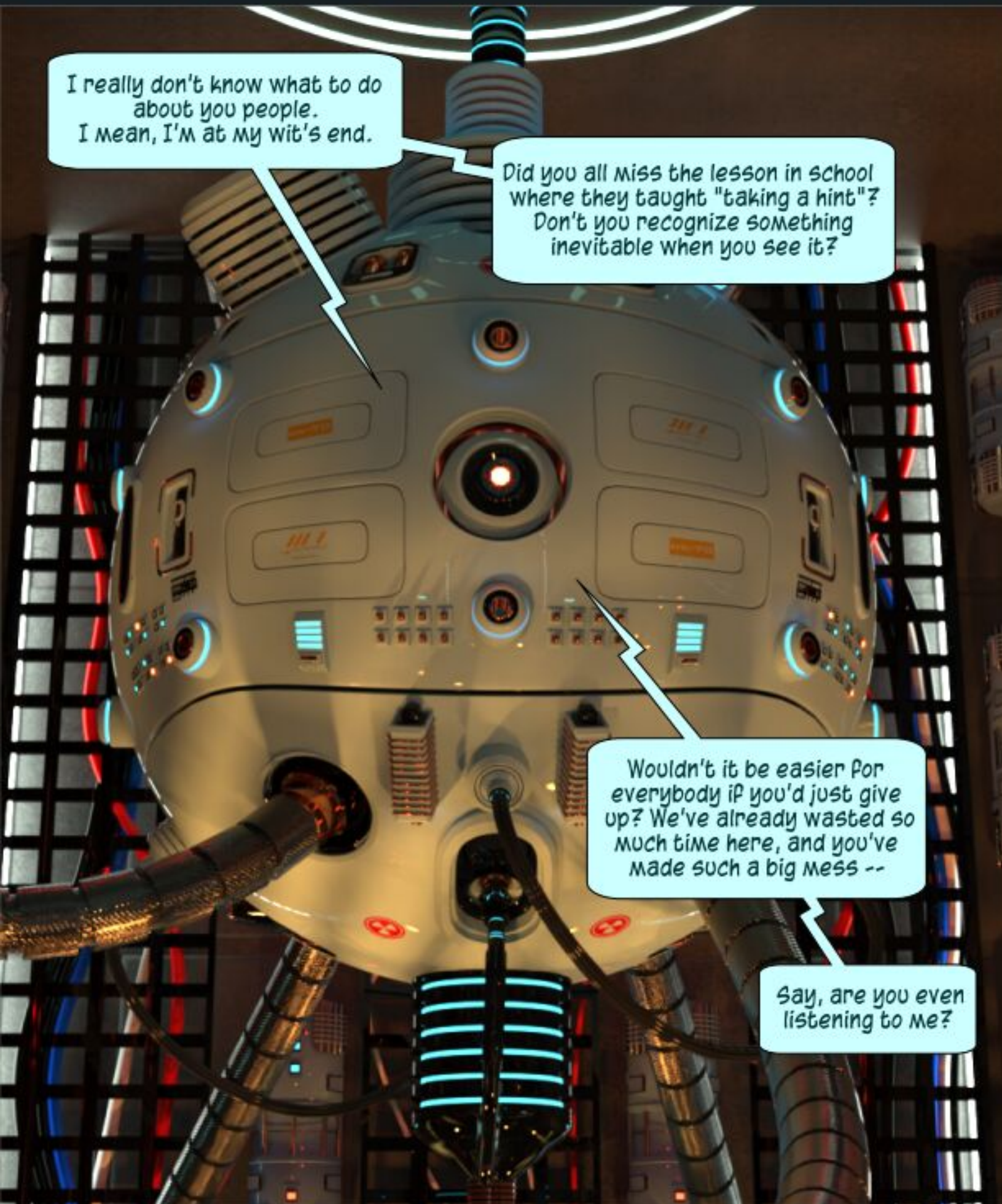
Yeah? Stop me.

Monica! Behind you!



ROCKET KICK!!

Hey!



I really don't know what to do about you people. I mean, I'm at my wit's end.

Did you all miss the lesson in school where they taught "taking a hint"? Don't you recognize something inevitable when you see it?

Wouldn't it be easier for everybody if you'd just give up? We've already wasted so much time here, and you've made such a big mess --

Say, are you even listening to me?



Fabian! I owe you again. Uh ... excuse the outfit. It's a long story.

No, it's ... ah ... it's good.

Monica, what are you doing here? I thought you'd left the zone.

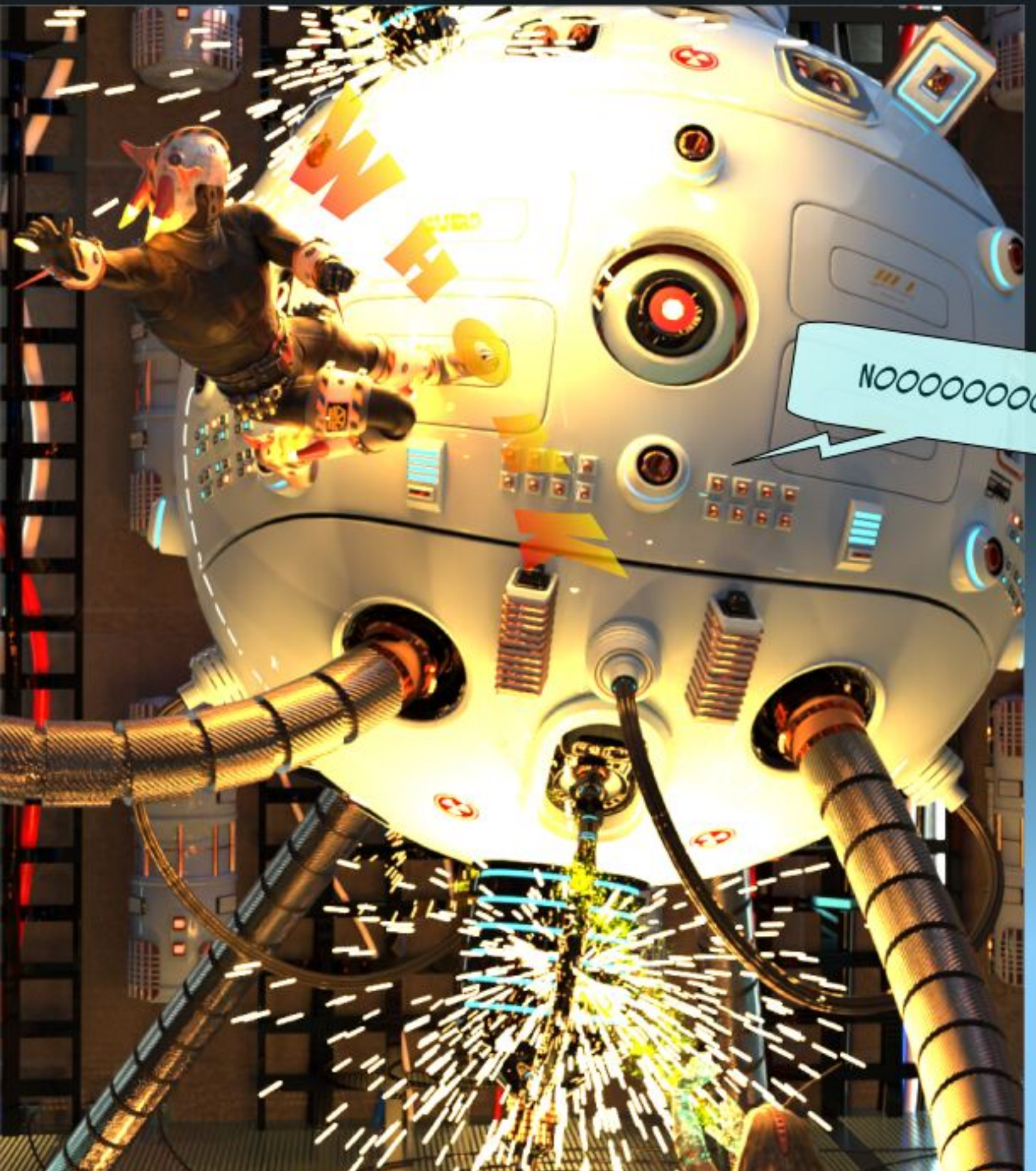
That's also a long story. I'll have to explain later.



So this is it, huh? The actual villainous lair of the actual villain?

Yep. I've been trying to shut it down by disconnecting things, but I think mass destruction would be a lot faster.

Oh, we can definitely do that.



Noooooooooooooooooooo





"AND THEN EVERYTHING RETURNED TO NORMAL.."

WELL, NO. IF WE SAID THAT, YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE US, AND YOU'D BE RIGHT NOT TO.

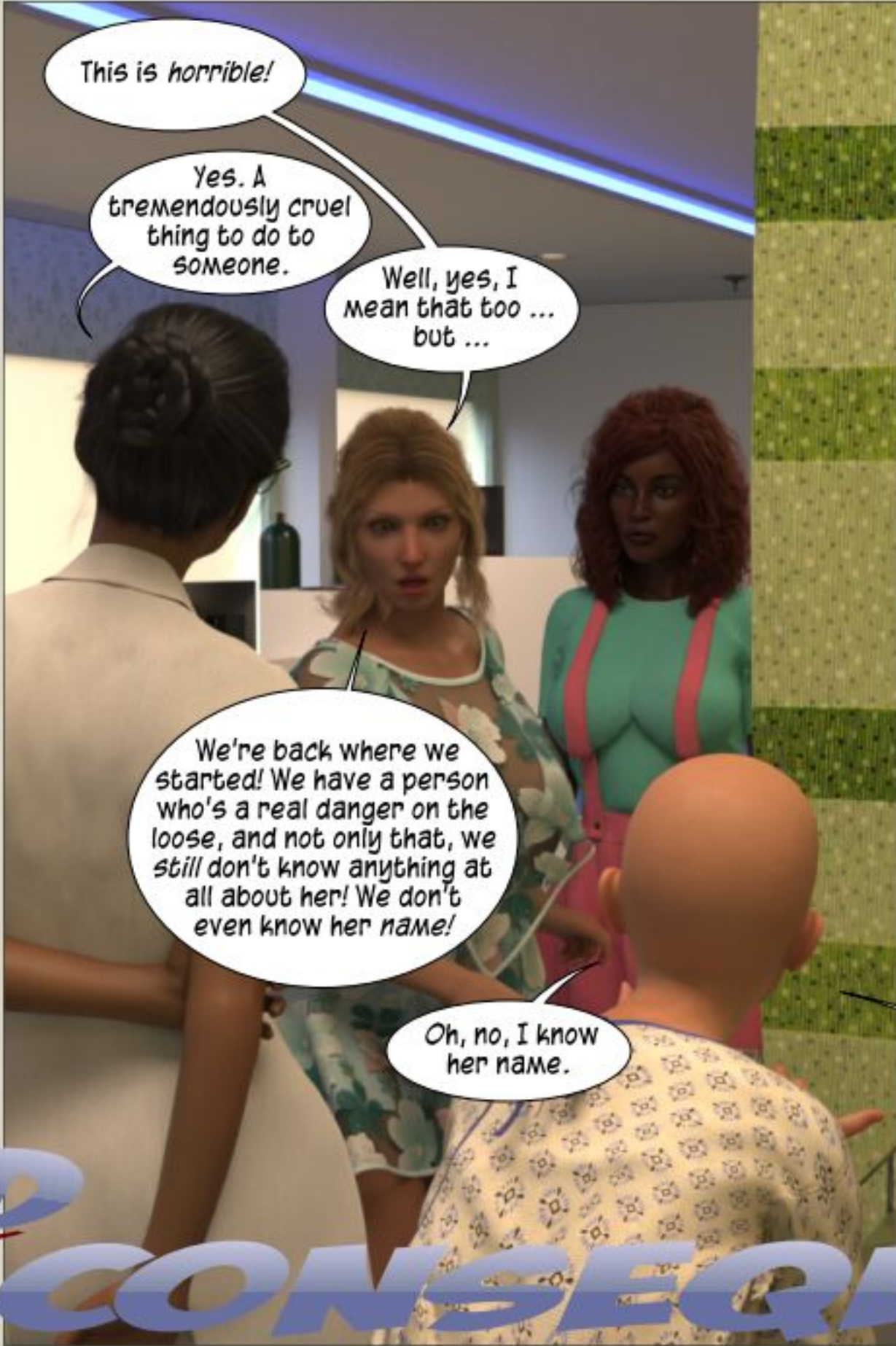
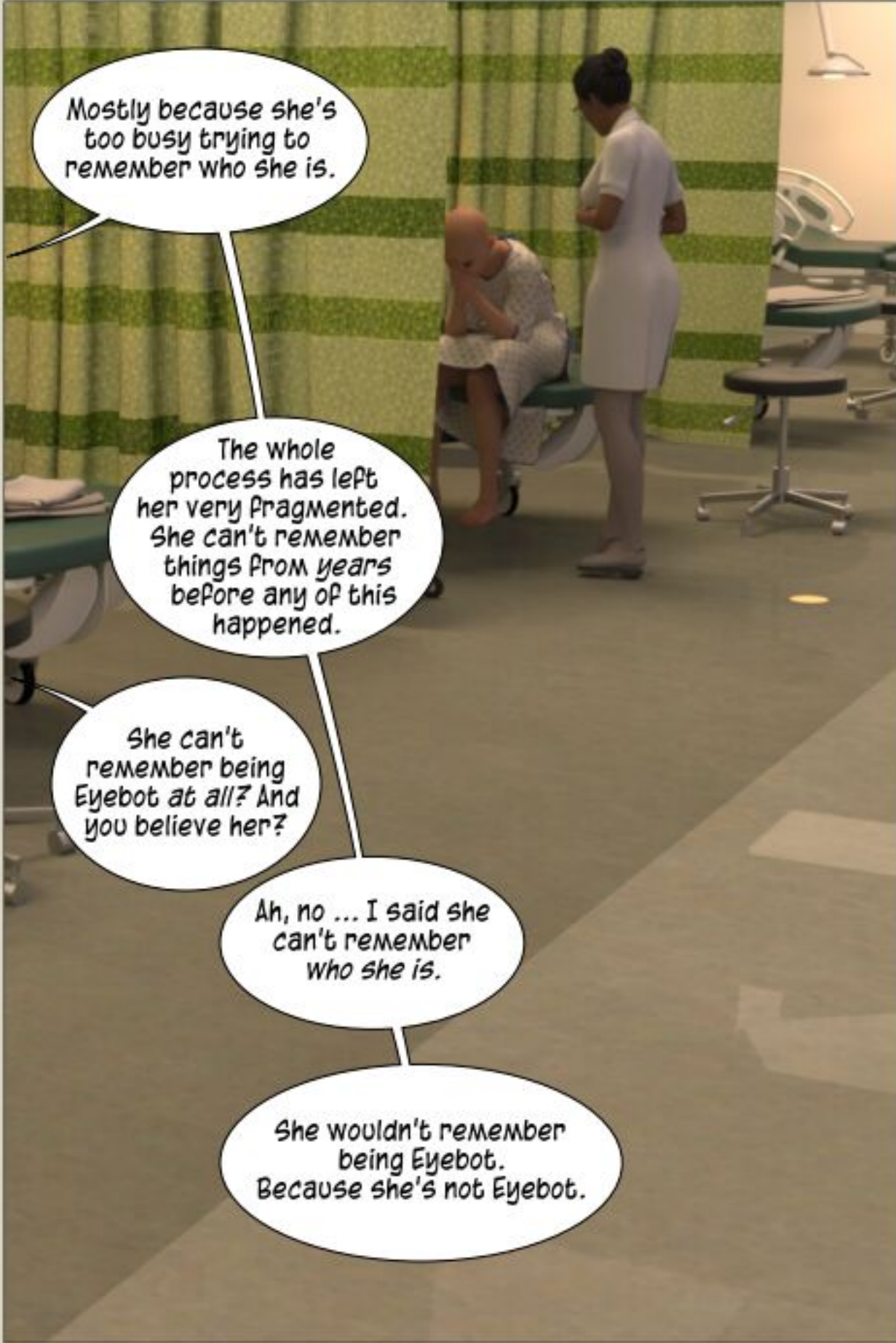
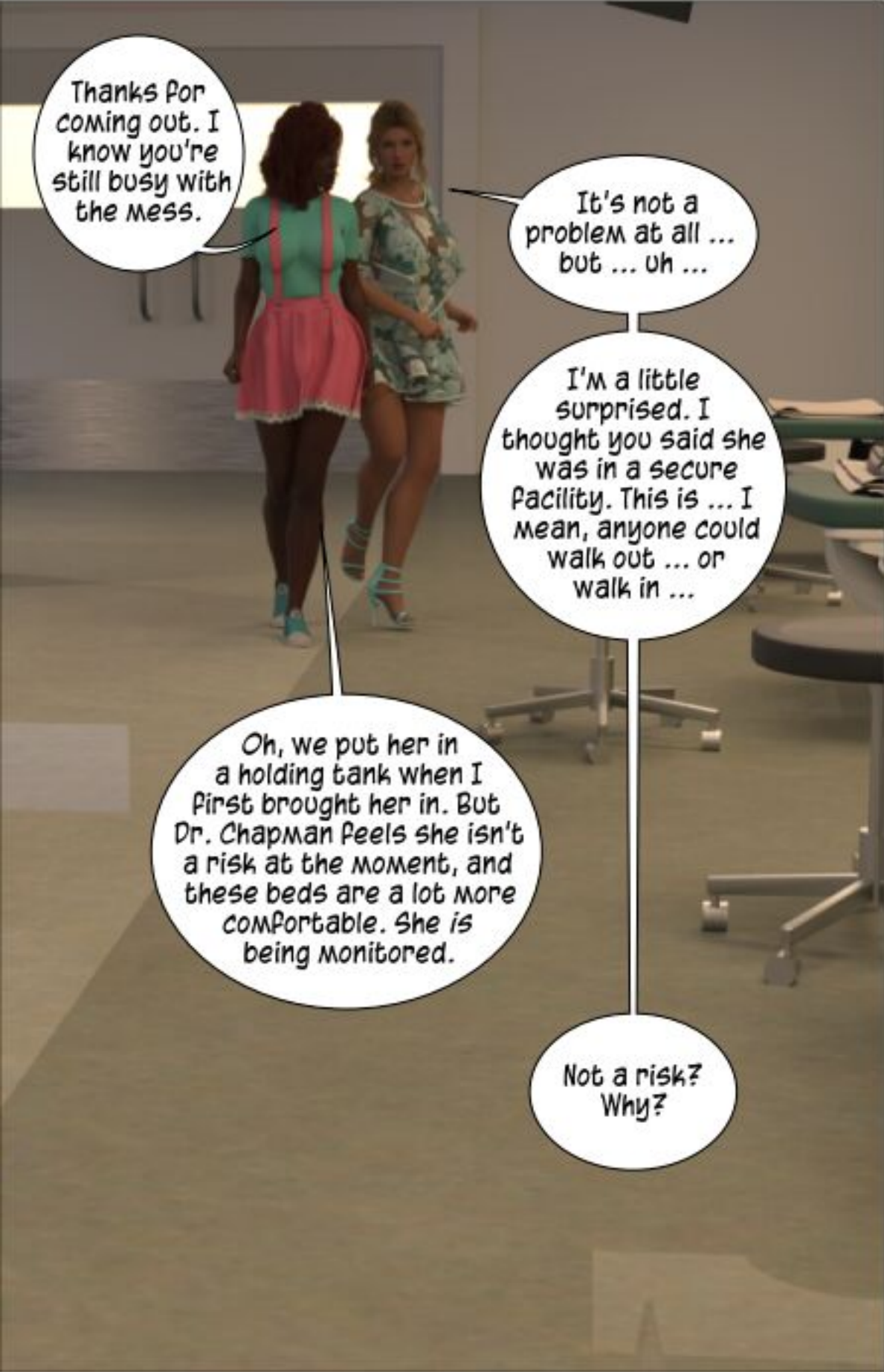
(AND WHAT DOES "NORMAL" MEAN IN CENTURY, ANYWAY?)

NO ONE IN THIS STORY COMES OUT OF IT EXACTLY THE SAME WAY THEY CAME IN. BUT IT WILL TAKE US A WHILE TO SEE ALL THE REPERCUSSIONS.

THERE ARE, HOWEVER, TWO THINGS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO TEND TO RIGHT AWAY.



AND TWO MORE DAYS AFTER THAT ...



NEXT: **TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES**