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ERASMUS

**HACKNEY
BABISU
CORTES**

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ARNETTE ENGINEERING SPRAWL—
BOSTON REGION, NORTH AMERICA

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DON'T THREATEN ME,
FIN. DON'T TALK ABOUT MY
FAMILY... OF COURSE I DON'T.
IT'S NOT—

NO, IT ISN'T PERSONAL.
I'M OBLIGATED TO REPORT.
THERE'S NOT ANY KIND OF
COMPETITION WITH—

ONLY WHAT WE'VE ALWAYS
DONE. OPERATING WITHIN PROTOCOL.
I DON'T COLOR OUTSIDE THE
LINES, IT'S KEPT ME IN—

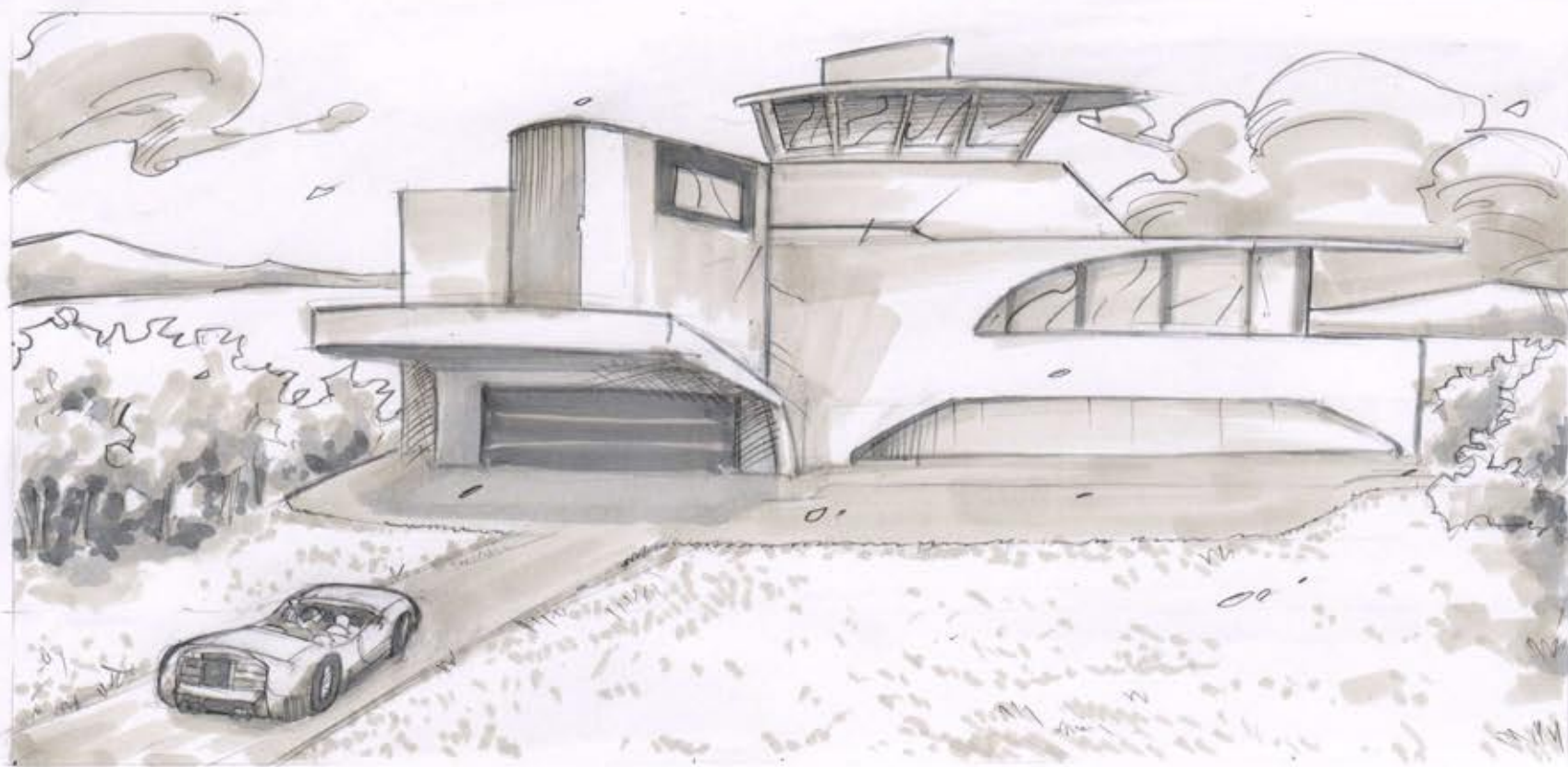
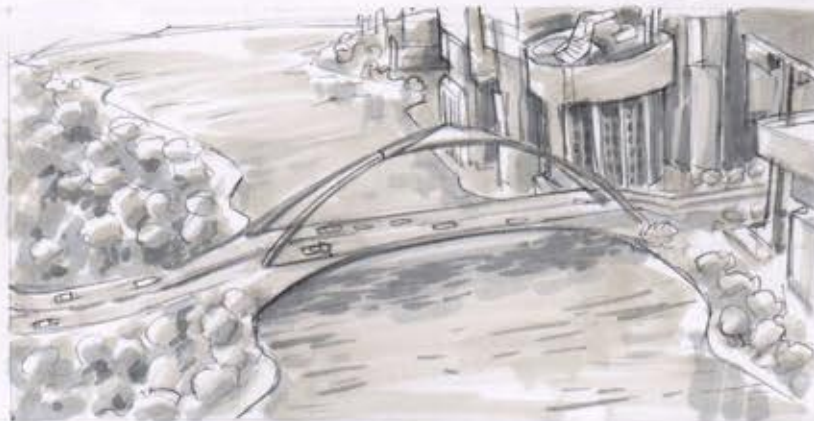
THAT'S ABOUT
THE WORST THING
YOU COULD SAY
TO ME.

IS THIS REALLY
COMING FROM YOU,
FIN? OR IS IT
MAILER?

WHAT DID HE
SAY, DAD?

OKAY. I'M
GOING TO HANG
UP NOW.

NOT A LOT,
REALLY. I THINK HE
MISSED LUNCH.







NINETY-EIGHT YEARS AGO, THE
LAST GOVERNMENT ON EARTH WAS
WOUND DOWN, ULTIMATELY HANDING
OVER CONTROL TO THE
CORPORATES, AND THEIR INDEPENDENT
DISPUTES RESOLUTION BODY, CALLED
OMBUDSMAN.



WHILE OMBUDSMAN ACCUMULATED AND
MAINTAINED CONCLUSIVE MILITARY
MIGHT—UNDER THE PRETENSE OF SAFER
COLONIZATION FOR FRONTIER WORLDS—
THE SOL SYSTEM WAS DIVVIED UP
BETWEEN HUMANITY'S THREE
LARGEST CORPORATE ALLIANCES.

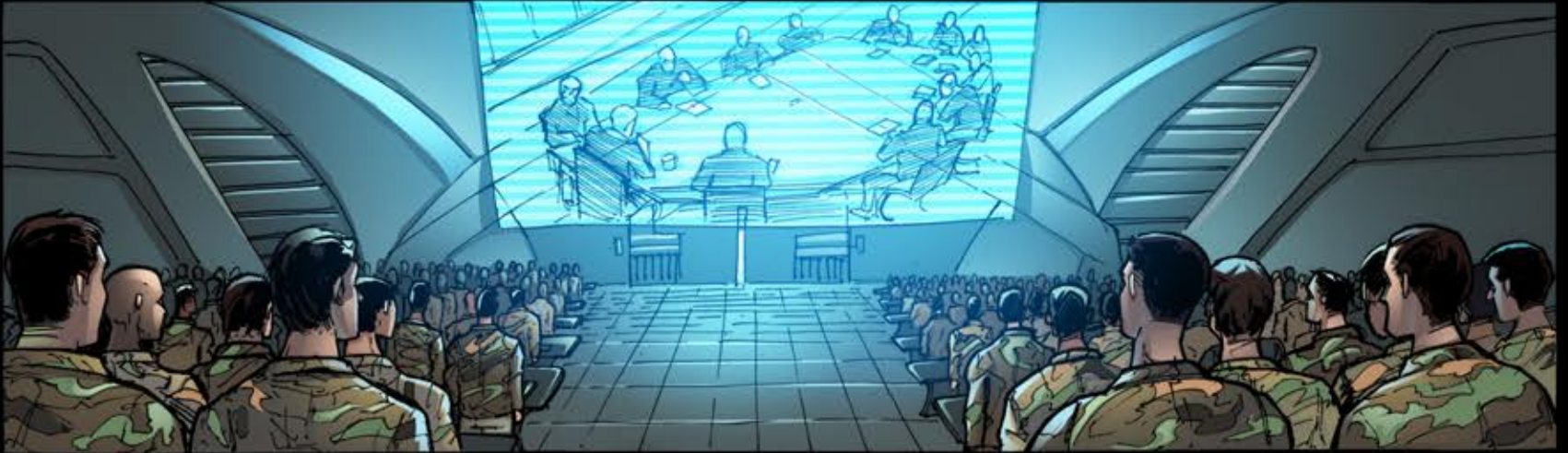
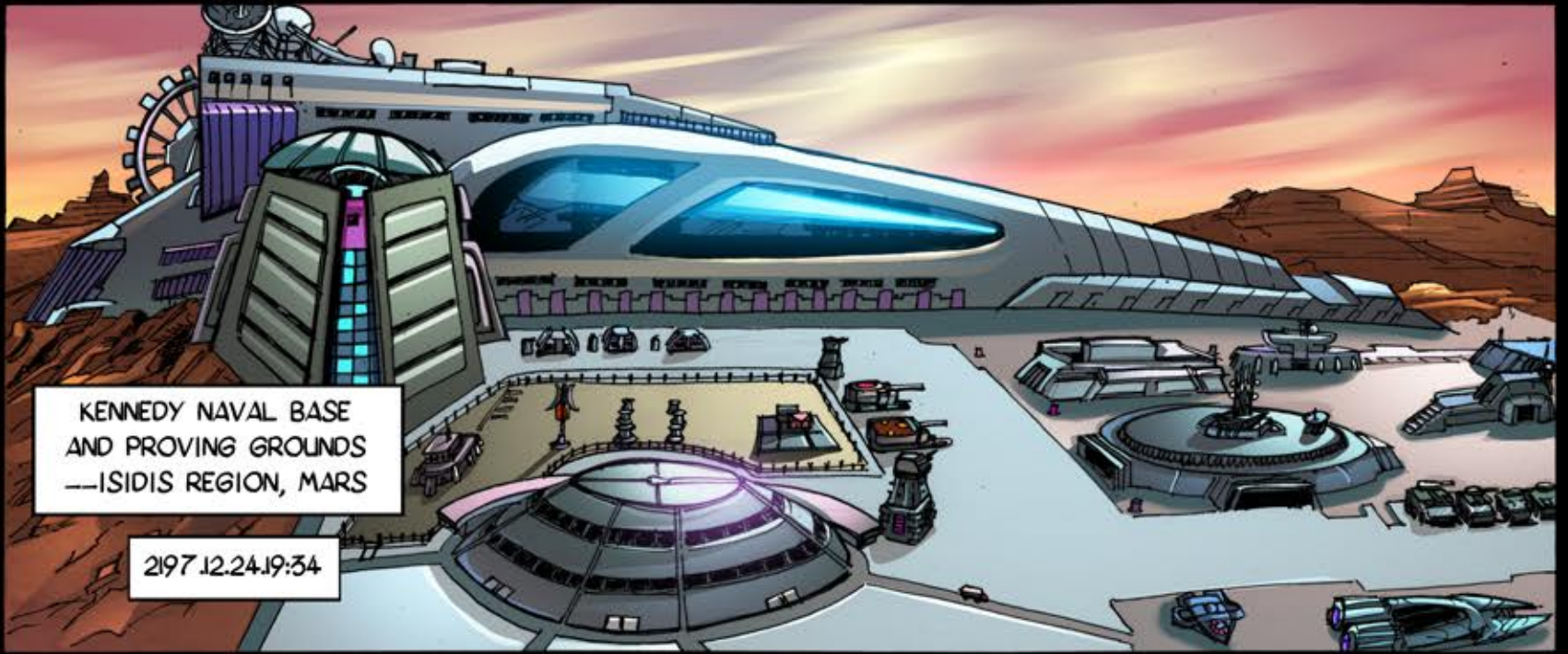


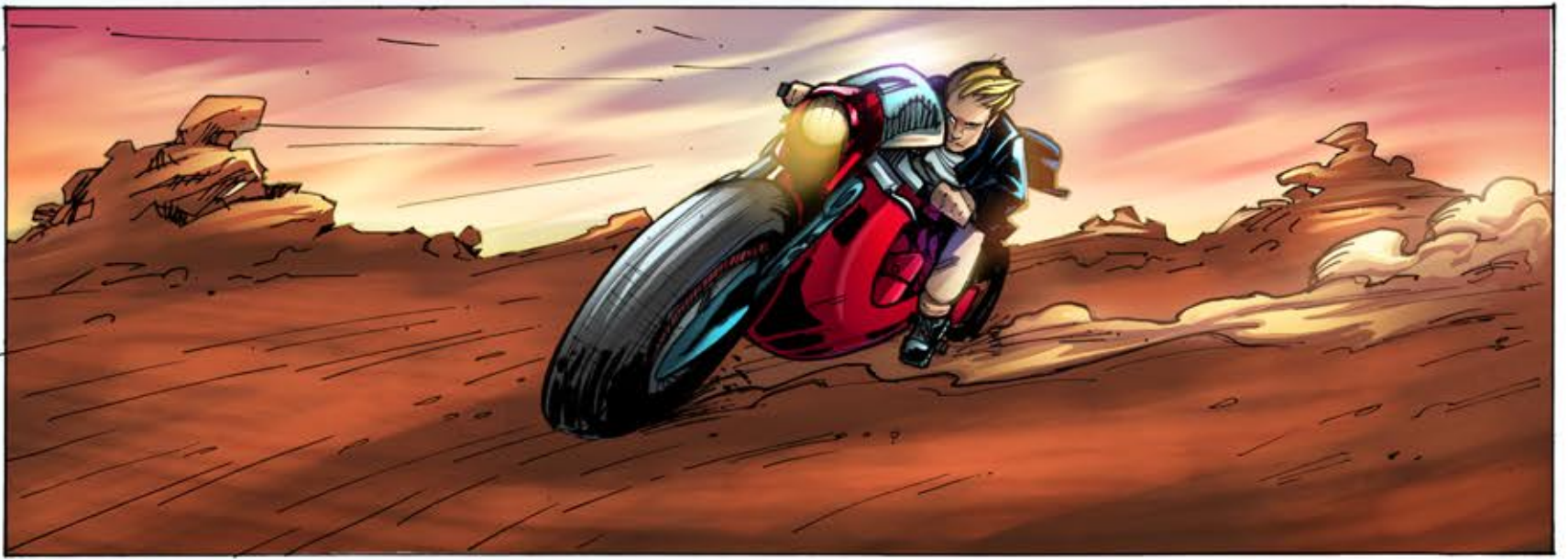
THOSE OUTSIDE OF CORPORATE TERRITORIES
WERE LEFT WITHOUT THE UMBRELLA OF
SUSTAINABLE INCOME, HOUSING, OR SECURITY.
THERE WAS NO LONGER A MECHANISM FOR
ESSENTIAL SERVICES, OUTSIDE OF THAT
WHICH A PARENT COMPANY PROVIDED.
ANY INDIVIDUAL NOT EMPLOYED THROUGH
OFFICIAL CHANNELS, OR INDEPENDENTLY
WEALTHY, FOUND THEMSELVES
SHIT OUT OF LUCK.

OVER TIME, THE COLLECTIVE
MEMORY ATROPHIED. SOCIETY
NORMALIZED. WITHIN THE NEW
STATUS QUO, PEOPLE DEFAULTED
TO FOUR DISTINCT CLASSES.

EXECUTIVE, SHAREHOLDER, EMPLOYEE,
AND OF COURSE THE UNAFFILIATED.

IN THAT ORDER.





TONIGHT WE SPEAK WITH RETIRED ADMIRAL GEORGE WILLITS, WHO WE HOPE CAN SHED SOME LIGHT ON OMBUDSMAN'S SAFE GROUND STATUTE, AN ORDER WHICH EFFECTIVELY EXCLUDES GENE-REFURBISHED SOLDIERS FROM MOST POPULATION CENTERS.

THAT'S A LIFETIME BAN, IF I UNDERSTAND THE WORDING, FOR ANY RETIRING SOLDIER WHO VOLUNTERED FOR GENETIC MODIFICATION, TO SERVE IN OMBUDSMAN'S SPECIAL COMBAT FORCES.

ADMIRAL, WELCOME. WOULD YOU SAY IT'S A LITTLE LIKE WAVING A RED FLAG AT A BULL, TO PLACE SUCH RESTRICTIVE CONDITIONS ON TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND OF OMBUDSMAN'S OWN MOST DEADLY TROOPS?

WELL OF COURSE, KIRK. I— GOOD EVENING. OBVIOUSLY THERE'S THE DANGER OF INCITING DISCORD, EVEN OUT- RIGHT REBELLION AMONGST THE RANKS, GIVEN THAT MOST OF THESE MEN WOULD HAVE ENTERED GENOME PROGRAMS WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THEY'D ONE DAY RETURN HOME.



SURELY THESE TROOPS HAVE LOVED ONES WAITING, LIVES TO GO BACK TO?

ABSOLUTELY. MANY WOULD BE ASKING THEMSELVES HOW TO PROVIDE FOR A FAMILY, WITH CAREER AND HOUSING PROSPECTS NOW SO LIMITED.



SO THAT'S IT, BABE? YOU THREE GO TO WAR?



THEY WILL REPEAL IT, ALEX. SOONER THAN YOU THINK.



SIR?



TANGO TWELVE-FOURTEEN ON RETURN FROM LIVE FIRE...

CALLING IN A—HIJACK?

WHAT'S GOING ON?

THEY'RE TRANSPORTING A SEAL TRIAD EMBEDDED WITH THREE-FORTIETH.

TWO SEALS STOLE WEAPONS AND ARMOR, HAL'D OUT. THE THIRD ONE THEN SURRENDERED.

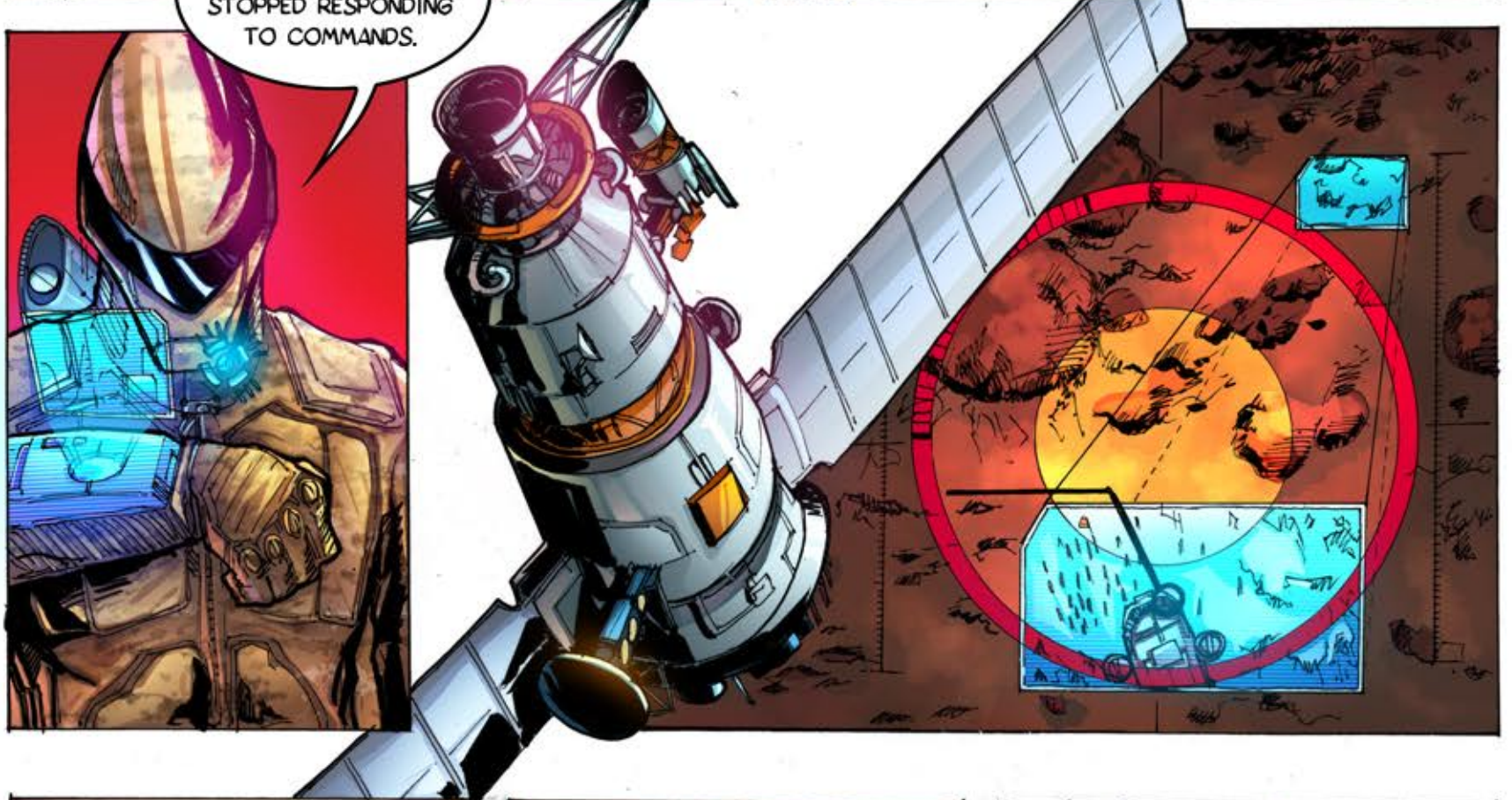


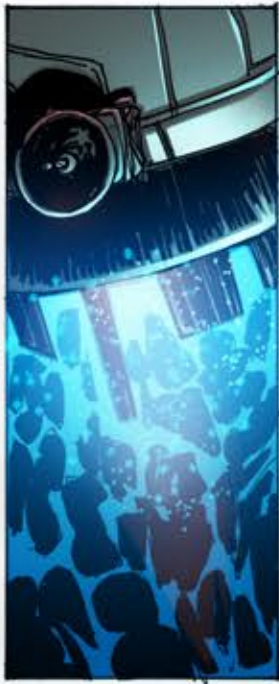
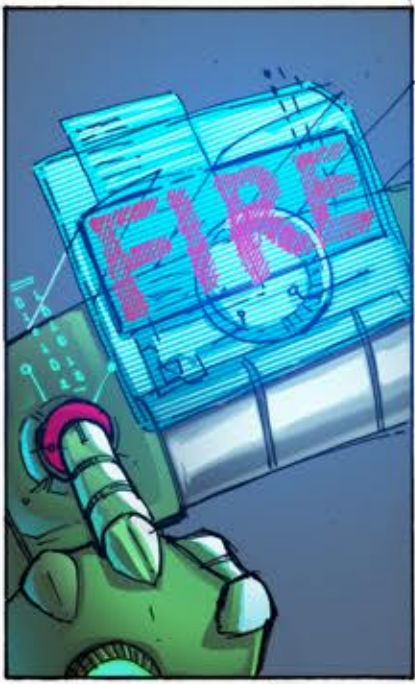
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APPARENTLY OUR
ORBITAL SUPPORT JUST
STOPPED RESPONDING
TO COMMANDS.

ROGER
THAT. THEY'RE
SAYING HOLD
FOR FIVE.







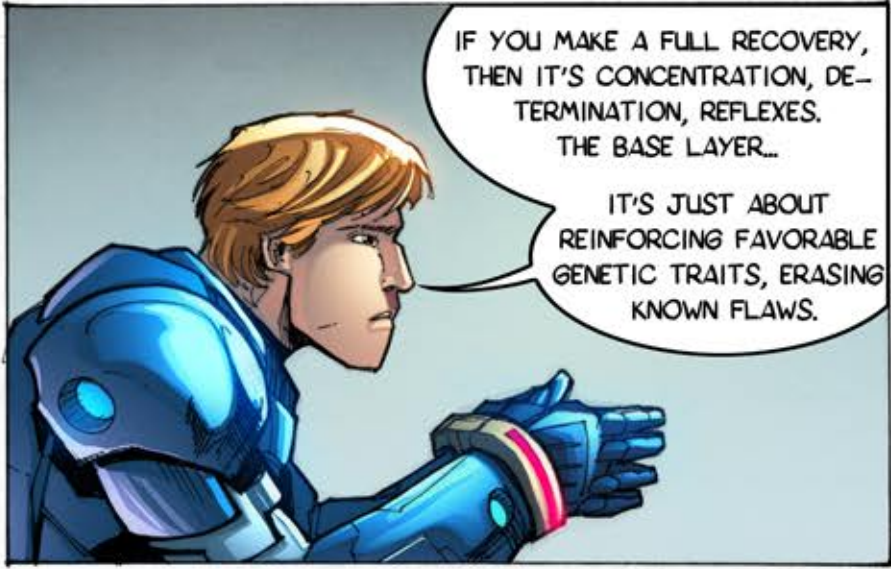


THEY START WITH THE IMMUNE SYSTEM. LOAD YOU UP WITH PRIMER, LIKE A BASIC RNA COCKTAIL OF EVERY KNOWN CONTAGION.



I HAVE SERIOUS DOUBTS THAT IT WORKS LIKE THAT.

SHUT UP, I WANT TO HEAR THIS.



IF YOU MAKE A FULL RECOVERY, THEN IT'S CONCENTRATION, DETERMINATION, REFLEXES. THE BASE LAYER...
IT'S JUST ABOUT REINFORCING FAVORABLE GENETIC TRAITS, ERASING KNOWN FLAWS.



WE HAVE PRETTY MUCH THE SAME FITOUT AS A SEAL THESE DAYS.



REALLY, STEVE? THAT'S WHAT YOU ACTUALLY THINK? OR ARE YOU JUST RUNNING YOUR MOUTH?

INFANTRY GET MUSCLE AND BONE DENSITY. BIOCARB SKILL FOR YOUR OFFICERS. BUT YOU TURDS DON'T HAVE ANY KIND OF CNS REINFORCEMENT.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CATCH A LUNGFULL OF NERVE GAS FOR FUCK SAKE? AH, WHAT ELSE... NO PAIN DAMPING. RIGHT? NO HIGHER WAVELENGTH SENSORY. HEARING? WELL, I SNUCK UP ON THOSE PILOTS TODAY, DIDN'T I?



CLASSY.

THERE'S NIGHT VISION, FOR SCOUTS.

IT LASTS A YEAR.



AND THERE'S THE STICKING POINT—
AT THE END OF A TOUR, YOU TWO
GENIUSES HAVE THE OPTION OF
PURSUING A CAREER ON ANY
WORLD. THEY TAG YOU
AS MODIFIED...

RESTRICT YOUR
WORKING WITH CHILDREN OR
DWARVES? WITH US, THERE'S
BILLIONS INVESTED, AND TOO
MUCH POWER ROAMING AROUND
OUTSIDE CHAIN OF COMMAND.
A MULTI-FACETED, MAN-
SIZED LIABILITY.

TIMES IT BY TEN-THOUSAND.
THEY'LL WRAP IT IN THE CLOTH OF
PUBLIC SAFETY, BUT WHAT THEY'RE MOST
AFRAID OF IS THAT WE MIGHT AGREE
TO BAND TOGETHER AND
OPPOSE THEM.

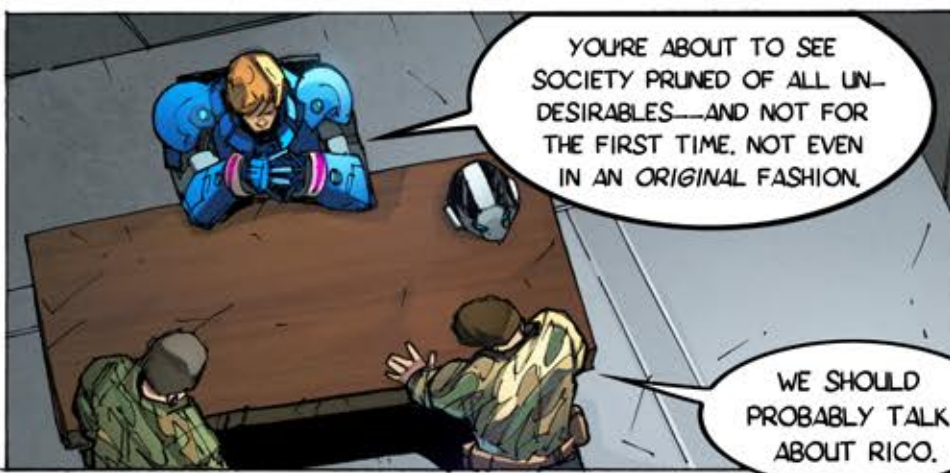


THINK ABOUT IT. WITHOUT
EARTH, MARS OR TITAN, YOU'RE LEFT
SULFUR MINING ON IO, ICE MINING ON
EUROPA, OR A "CONSULTING" JOB WITH
OMBUDSMAN FORCES THAT FUNNELS YOU
RIGHT BACK INTO COMBAT AT A SLIGHTLY
HIGHER HOURLY. AND WE ALL SEE IT NOW.
WE SEE RIGHT THROUGH IT. SO WHAT
DO OMBUDSMAN DO, TO KEEP US
PREOCCUPIED? THEY AGITATE.

TRY TO FORCE A
CONFLICT. THEY NEED AN
EXCUSE TO GET HEAVY-HANDED IN
PHASE TWO, BECAUSE THEY KNOW
THE PUBLIC WILL ENGAGE THEIR FACULTIES
IF THEY SEE SHOCK TROOPS KICKING IN
DOORS WITHOUT AN ANTAGONIST. ALL
THEY NEED IS TO DRAW US INTO
THE AGRESSOR ROLE, IN A WAY
THAT SEEMS REASONABLY
BENIGN AT FIRST.



THE ENEMY IS GOING TO
BE US. FIRST SOLDIERS
WHO SPEAK WITH VIOLENT
RHETORIC AND THE MEANS
TO BACK IT UP. THEN
SOLDIERS WHO ASK
QUESTIONS, OR WANT
TO LEAVE WHEN THEIR
TOUR IS DONE.



YOU'RE ABOUT TO SEE
SOCIETY PRUNED OF ALL UN-
DESIRABLES—AND NOT FOR
THE FIRST TIME. NOT EVEN
IN AN ORIGINAL FASHION.

WE SHOULD
PROBABLY TALK
ABOUT RICO.



RIGHT. WELL, I
CAN GIVE YOU THE
LANDING SITE, MEANS
OF TRANSPORT, AND A
QUARANTINE GATE.

MY PRICE
REMAINS UN-
CHANGED.



I DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO TELL YOU.
THERE'S NO WAY.

JUST TAKE
GANNON THE OFFER.
IT'S KIND OF YOUR
JOB, STEVE.

BTS ORBITAL MANUFACTURING PLANT
—ONTARIO REGION, NORTH AMERICA.

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YOU'D HAVE TO ADMIT, THIS CONTRACT COMES ALONG AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME, GIVEN RECENT EVENTS.

I WOULDN'T EVEN TRY TO SUGAR-COAT IT, GLEN. IT'S ALL PUBLIC RECORD ANYWAY.

SO THE INVESTIGATOR WHO CLAIMS YOU'VE BEEN CONDUCTING A PRIVATE SECTOR GENOME PROGRAM, IN VIOLATION—

JOSH SINGER MADE A LOT OF ACCUSATIONS IN THE REPORT Tabled WITH OMBUDSMAN. OF COURSE, YOU KNOW HOW THAT ALL ENDED UP?

HE WAS DISBARRED.

AND HIS CLAIMS THOROUGHLY DEBUNKED THROUGH ROUTINE INSPECTIONS OF OUR LABS. THE MATTER WAS PUT TO BED LONG BEFORE NEGOTIATIONS OPENED ON ANY NEW TENDERS.

BUT TO GET BACK TO YOUR QUESTION, I AGREE, THIS IS A GOOD DEAL FOR BOTH PARTIES.

OMBUDSMAN ENJOY THE PEACE OF MIND THAT COMES WITH TWELVE OF OUR ORBITAL RAILS SECURING THE PLANET'S INFRASTRUCTURE...

WHILE WE MEET SHAREHOLDER EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FIFTEENTH QUARTER RUNNING. IT'S WIN/WIN.

SO JUST TO END ANY CONJECTURE...

THERE'S NO TRUTH TO THE RUMOR THAT GOSEPH MAILER KICKED YOU OUT OF AN OMBUDSMAN BOARD MEETING RECENTLY?

HAH. I'M NOT EVEN INVITED TO THOSE.

GLEN, SORRY.

WE'LL CLEAR THAT ONE UP ANOTHER TIME.

LEVEL
1
C-BL



THANKS KIRK, AS YOU CAN PROBABLY SEE BEHIND ME, THE SHUTTLE IS BEING WAVED IN NOW. OMBUDSMAN TONIGHT ISSUED A STATEMENT DENYING THAT AN ORBITAL RAIL MISFIRED ON MARS, BUT WE'RE HEARING MIXED MESSAGES OUT OF ISIDIS.



WE'LL ASK MR. MAILER TO CLEAR THAT UP. INTERESTINGLY, AS PART OF HIS TOUR, THE CHAIR ALSO HAS THE DUBIOUS HONOR OF BEING THE FIRST GUEST TO STAY IN MCIPHERSON GROUP'S CONTROVERSY-PLAGUED NEFTYANA SHAREHOLDER HOTEL.



OF COURSE, MR. MAILER IS NO STRANGER TO CONTROVERSY HIMSELF. THE PUBLIC FACE OF OMBUDSMAN HAS RECENTLY RELAUNCHED HIS BID TO CREATE A CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER ROLE, WHICH WOULD ESSENTIALLY TRANSFER MOST OF THE BOARD'S ALLIANCE LEVEL DECISION-MAKING CAPACITY TO AN INDIVIDUAL, WITH BOTH VETO POWER AND THE ABILITY TO ISSUE BINDING EXECUTIVE ORDERS.

WITH OMBUDSMAN BOARD MEMBERS REFUSING TO BE DRAWN FOR COMMENT ON THE MOVE, SOME POLITICAL COMMENTATORS CLAIM THAT MR. MAILER HAS POSITIONED HIMSELF AS THE PRIME CANDIDATE FOR THE NEW ROLE, SHOULD THAT COME— OH, HELLO...



HELLO, ELLA. SORRY, MY EARS WERE BURNING. THANKS FOR COMING OUT TO THE BLACK SEA, I HOPE WE CAN CATCH UP DURING THE TOUR TOMORROW MORNING. I'D BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOTEL STAY FOR YOUR SUBSCRIBERS. I'M SURE THE ROOM WILL HAVE FOUR WALLS AT LEAST.

OKAY, SIR. WE LOOK FORWARD TO IT. AH... BACK TO YOU, KIRK.



SHE WHAT, DIDNT GET THE MEMO? WE KILLED THE STORY WITH EVERY EDITOR. HAS VANDERBOLT BEEN TALKING ABOUT IT TOO? THE LAST THING WE NEED IS A BUZZ AROUND THIS THING THREE MONTHS OUT FROM PUSHING IT UP THE BOARD'S ASS.

OF COURSE.

THAT IS SOME RETARD-STRENGTH STUPIDITY, PETE. I DONT WANT TO SEE HER FACE ON THE FEED.

WE'LL BURY THE STORY, SIR. WE'LL BURY HER TOO.



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YOUR HONORABLE
DISCHARGE AND EARTH VISA
HAVE BEEN AUTHORIZED BY THE BOARD,
BASED ON A SUCCESSFUL INTERCEPT
OF RICO ARNETTE AND
VARGA WATTS.

IN EIGHTEEN MINUTES THEY'LL
PASS THROUGH EARTH GATE TJ-61
IN A SEARCH AND RESCUE HELO,
STOLEN FROM MEDEVAC
ASIATIC.

WHY THAT
GATE?

THE STATION'S
LOW ON AN UPGRADES
WAITING LIST.

MEANING WHAT?

THEIR SECURE
DATABASE DOESN'T
LIAISE WITH OMBUDSMAN
YET. ITS RNA SCAN WON'T
IDENTIFY FLAGGED
PROFILES, ONLY
BIOHAZARDS.

WHO LEAKED
THAT TO ARNETTE?
SOMEONE OVER IN
QUARANTINE?

I CAN'T
GIVE YOU ANY
OTHER SCALPS,
MAJOR.

MARCUS, YOU HAVE TO AT LEAST
TELL US WHERE THEY GOT
THE HASHKEY TO
EXPLOIT OUR OWN
ORBITAL RAIL. IT'S
A GAPING HOLE.

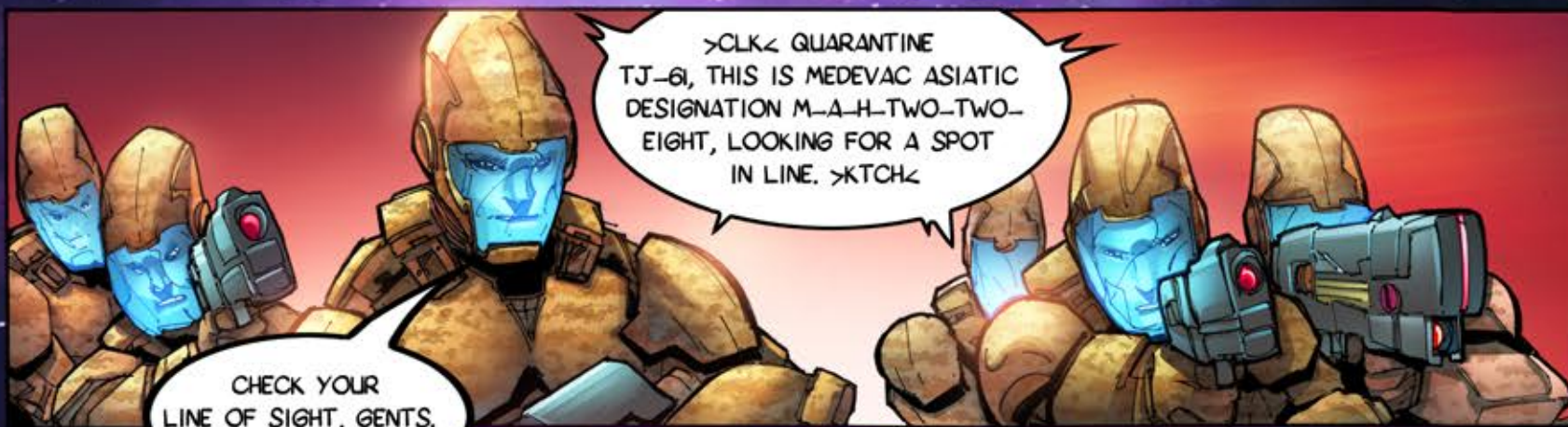
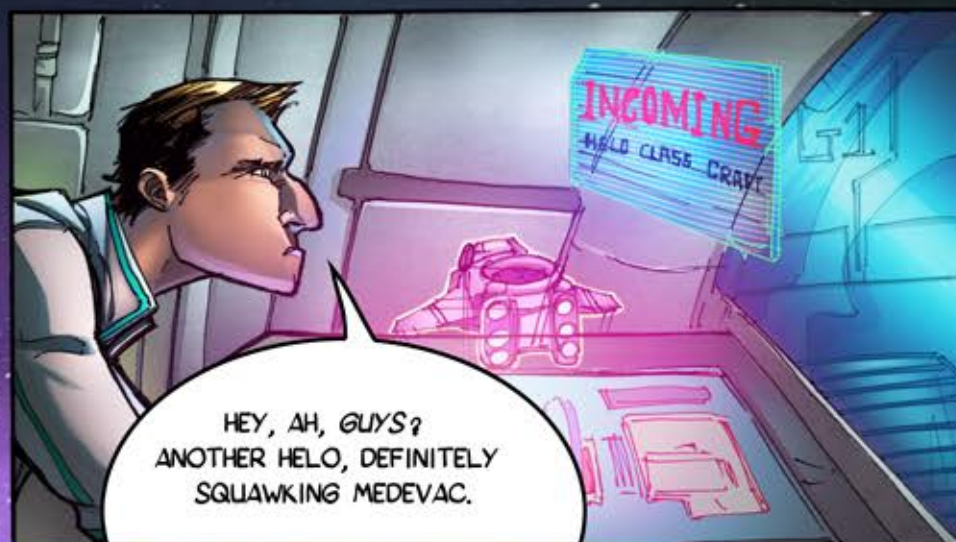
YOU KNOW WHO
HAS THE CONTRACT
FOR LOGIC BOARDS ON
THOSE THINGS, RIGHT?

BTS. FINLAY
BRILLIANT IS INVOLVED
IN THIS?

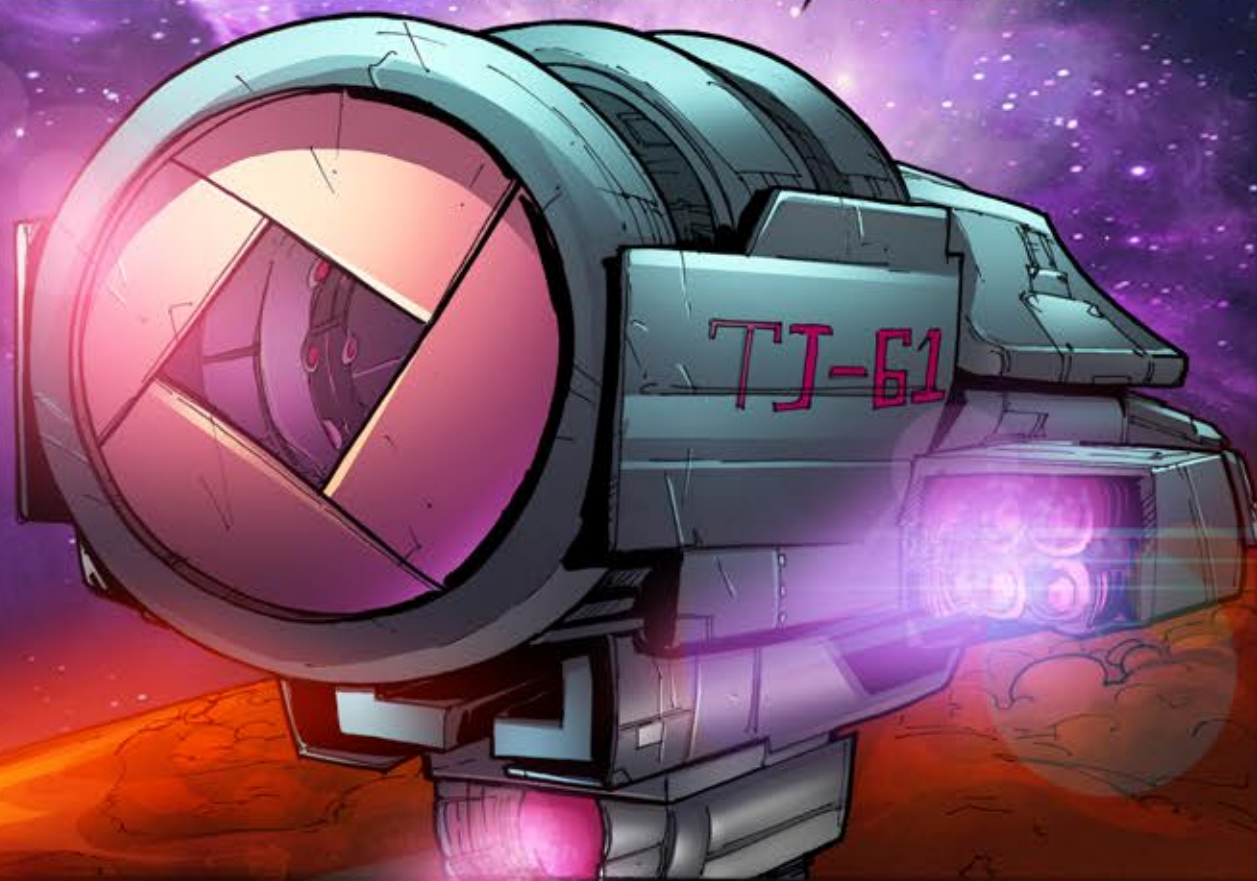
I DON'T KNOW.
IS HE?

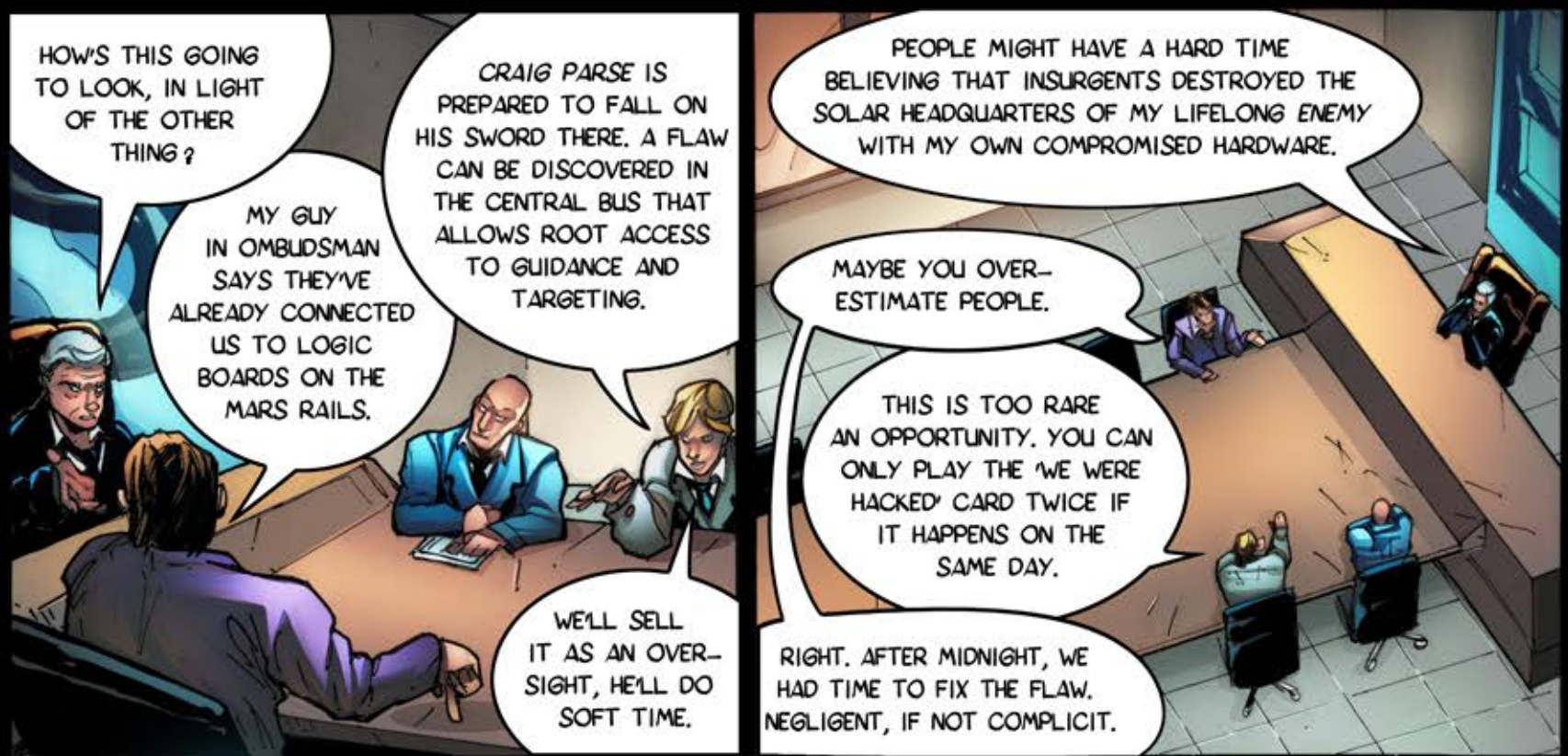
QUARANTINE GATE TJ-61 IN NEAR-EARTH
ORBIT ABOVE CONTINENTAL EUROPE
—EARTH SOVEREIGN SPACE.

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YOU'RE UP,
TWO-TWO-EIGHT.
DOOR'S OPEN.

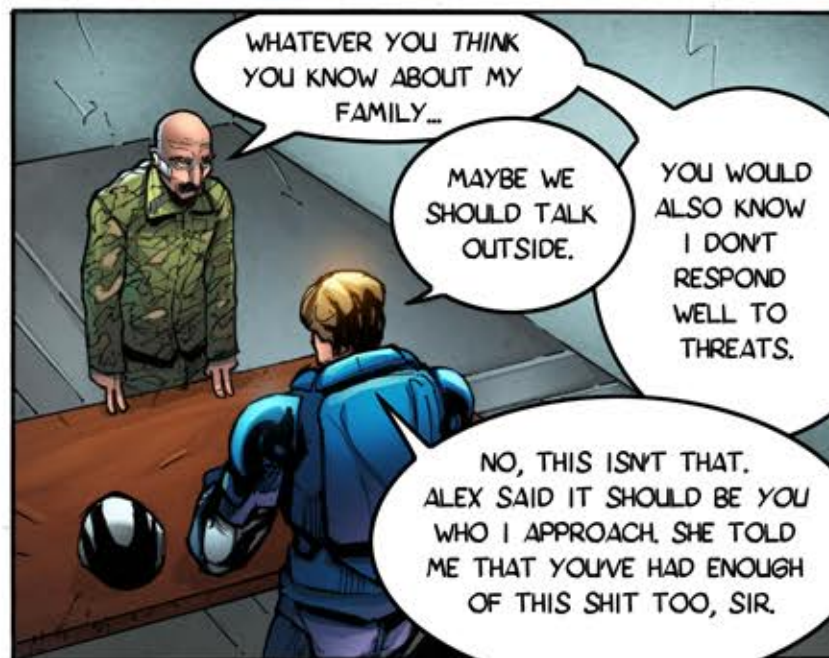




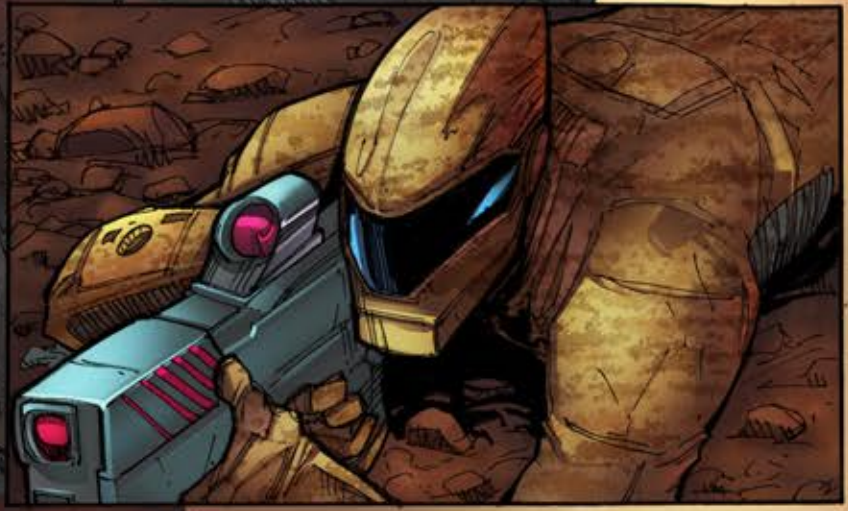


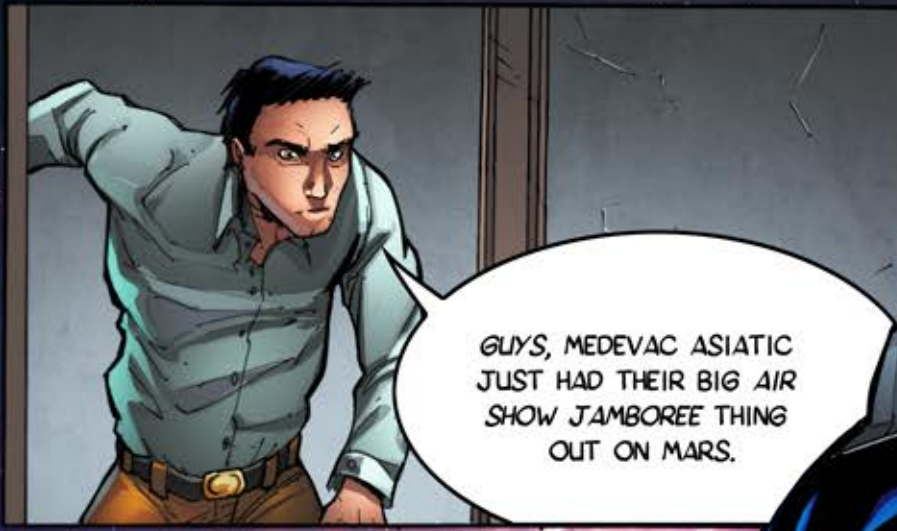












GUYS, MEDEVAC ASIATIC
JUST HAD THEIR BIG AIR
SHOW JAMBOREE THING
OUT ON MARS.



THEY'RE TELLING
ME THE THREAT...

HAS BEEN
REASSESSED,
BASED ON
FRESH INTEL.

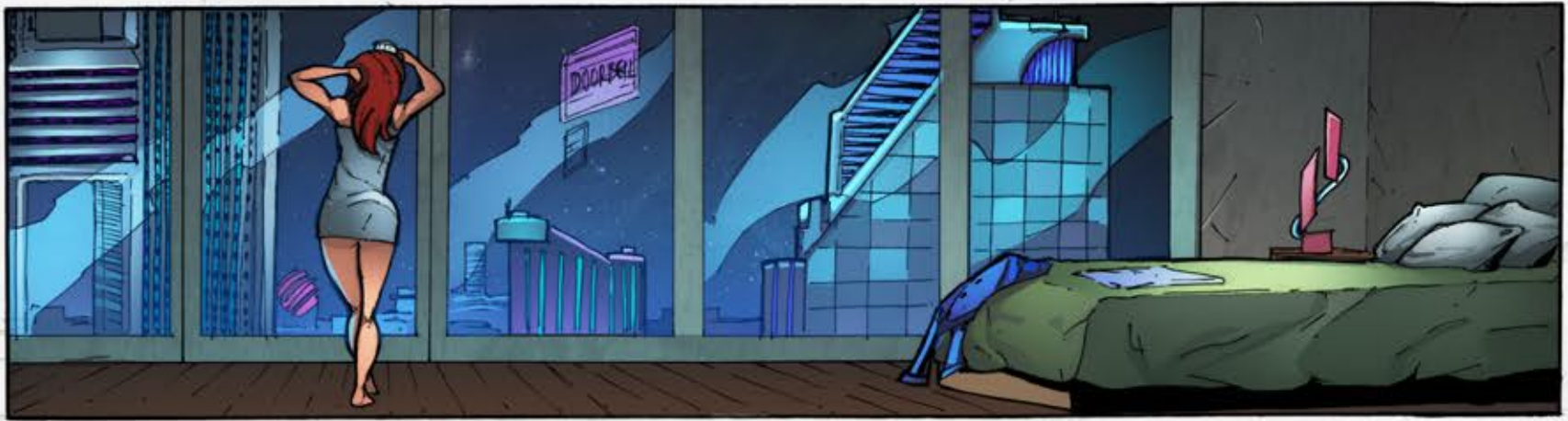
WELL, OKAY.



"TELL YOUR OPS, ANYTHING
MEDEVAC GOES STRAIGHT
THROUGH QUARANTINE UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE."



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**TO BE
CONTINUED...**