

# ANOMALY™

Created by

**SKIP BRITTENHAM & BRIAN HABERLIN**

Writers

**SKIP BRITTENHAM  
& BRIAN HABERLIN**

Artists

**BRIAN HABERLIN  
& GEIRROD VAN DYKE**

Letterer & Appendix Content

**FRANCIS TAKENAGA**

Coding Director

**DAVID PENTZ**

Digital Assists

**JAMES HABERLIN  
& DIANA SANSON**

Special thanks to:

**VARUN SONI**

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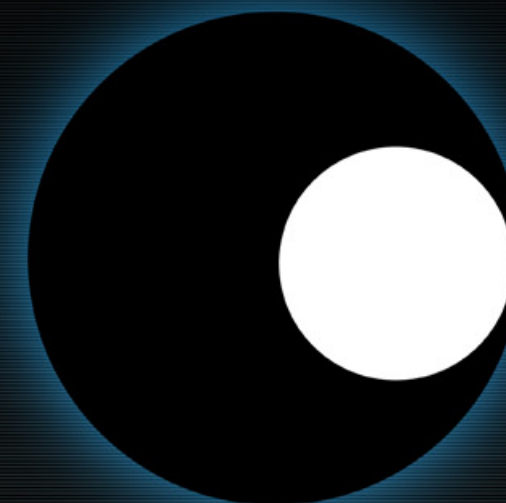
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**SALLY HABERLIN**

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"THANKS TO MY WIFE, WHO INSPIRED ME TO START WRITING, AND MY THREE DAUGHTERS AND SON-IN-LAW WHO SUPPORTED ME ALONG THE WAY. AND TO BETH, WHO FLIES WITHOUT A CAPE."

**SKIP BRITTENHAM**

"TO SALLY, IAN AND MORGAN...MY GREATEST SUPPORT AND EVER WONDERFUL CRITICS. AND TO THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER MILDRED AND BROTHER JAMES WHO ALWAYS ENCOURAGED MY WORK."

**BRIAN HABERLIN**

"TO MY FAMILY PHIL, DIANE AND NIYA.  
AND TO VERONICA."

**GEIRROD VAN DYKE**

PROLOGUE:

IT HAPPENS...  
JUST LIKE IT  
DOES ALMOST  
EVERY NIGHT.



*SESTUS PRIME*. STANDARD  
FIRST CONTACT MISSION  
PER CONGLOMERATE SPECS.



WE WERE THE *BEST*. CONGLOMERATE *ENFORCERS*.

PROVEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN.  
READY FOR *ANYTHING*.



SPECIES F-33-A. INSECTOID SPECIES.  
REPORTEDLY LOW TECHNOLOGY BUT  
CAN BE HIGHLY AGGRESSIVE.

TOTAL POPULATION: *UNKNOWN*.

WE CALLED THEM *CLIKKS*  
BECAUSE OF THE SOUNDS  
THEY MADE.

I'LL NEVER  
FORGET THAT  
SOUND.

NO ONE EVER KNEW  
THEIR REAL NAMES.



BIG SUCKERS. WOULDN'T WANT TO GO HAND-TO-HANDS WITH THEM.



HIGHLY AGGRESSIVE IS WHAT KEPT RUNNING THROUGH MY MIND.

HIGHLY AGGRESSIVE...



I WENT AGAINST PROTOCOL. SAFETIES OFF. IF IT WENT BAD, THEN I WANTED MY MEN PROTECTED.



HUBRIS... JUST PLAIN OL' HUBRIS.

NEXT THING I KNEW A WEAPON DISCHARGED. A GLITCH... TOOK OUT THEIR LEADER.



COULDN'T COMMUNICATE WELL ENOUGH. TO LET THEM KNOW IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

THEY JUST KEPT COMING AT US...

THOUSANDS OF THEM. BUT WE MADE IT OUT BY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH.

MY CONGLOMERATE BOSSES DEEMED THEM TOO HOSTILE FOR PEACEFUL CONTACT. THEY WIPED THEM OFF THE PLANET WITH NEUTRONS. LEFT IT A CLEAN NEW WORLD FOR THEM TO MARK AS THEIR OWN ON SOME BIG MAP OF THE UNIVERSE.

MY FAULT... MY RESPONSIBILITY.

AND I'VE BEEN PAYING FOR IT EVER SINCE.

THE PRESENT:

N- NO!





THAT WAS *YEARS* AGO.

5:30



I WAS AN *ENFORCER*... PRETTY HIGH UP IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS.



WATCH YOUR RAD METER!

NOW I'M A *MENIAL*... PRETTY LOW DOWN IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS.



WE GET THE JOBS THAT ARE TOO DANGEROUS TO RISK A GOOD *DROID* ON.



TO QUOTE A RECENT CONGLOMERATE MAGISTRATE: "WHY WASTE A ROBOT WHEN WE HAVE A SURPLUS OF HUMANS..."

NICE.

REAL NICE.

BUT ALL TOO TRUE.



RADIATION FROM THE OLD SATELLITES WE FIX IS SO HIGH WE HAVE TO WORK IN *ONE HOUR SHIFTS*. I KNOW A GUY WHO WENT FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF.

HE STOPPED TALKING BUT KEPT ON *GLOWING*... IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.



STILL, COULD BE WORSE.

MY OFFICE HAS ONE  
HELL OF A VIEW.

EARTH. 2717.

WE REALLY DID A NUMBER ON THE OLD HOME WORLD.  
MOST OF THE POPULATION LIVES IN ORBIT NOW... OR  
OFF WORLD. IF YOU CAN'T GET OFF WORLD AND HAVE  
TO BE STUCK ON THE PLANET ITSELF IN ONE OF THE  
"TERRARIUM CITIES" THEN YOU'RE EVEN LESS LUCKY  
THAN ME.

AND THESE DAYS I'D SAY  
I'M PRETTY UNLUCKY.



THE CONGLOMERATE... HOW DO THE  
COMMERCIALS PUT IT? OH, YEAH...

"BUILDING A BETTER TOMORROW TODAY."

ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE CONGLOMERATE...  
NO COUNTRIES ANY MORE... NO INDEPENDENT  
PLANETS. *JUST* THE CONGLOMERATE...  
AND THAT'S HOW *THEY* LIKE IT.

MOVE, GET OUT OF ITS WAY OR BE SHOVED ASIDE...  
I WAS SHOVED ASIDE... SO MUCH HUMAN GARBAGE...  
A MENIAL... THE LOWEST OF THE LOW... YEP...

THAT'S ME.



A detailed illustration of a futuristic, dystopian cityscape. The scene is filled with various flying vehicles, including a large, rusted-out truck-like vehicle at the top left, a futuristic motorcycle with a rider in a blue and green suit in the center, and a car-like vehicle at the bottom right. A large, colorful, spherical object with a face-like pattern is suspended in the air. The background shows a dense, multi-layered city with various structures and flying cars. The overall atmosphere is one of a complex, advanced, and somewhat chaotic urban environment.

INTERIOR: ORBITAL CITY 5.  
POPULATION: 97, 856, 000

AND AS THE CONGLOMERATE ADS ALSO  
SAY, WELCOME TO THE *THIRD* GOLDEN  
AGE OF MAN!



NOT REALLY SURE *WHEN* AGES ONE AND TWO HAPPENED, BUT THE LINE STILL SOUNDS GOOD.

ONE GIANT *TIN CAN* IF YOU ASK ME.

PLATFO  
11452-8

LATER...



THE UPPER CITY. HERE THERE IS LIGHT AND SKY, FAKE AS ALL HELL WITH THE OCCASIONAL SPONSORSHIP AD SCROLLING ACROSS IT... BUT STILL BETTER THAN WHERE I LIVE, ABOUT 3000 STORIES DOWN. THE ARTIFICIAL RAYS DON'T MAKE IT THAT FAR.



UP HERE IS THE ONLY PLACE I CAN GET THE STUFF.

I ALMOST LEFT. THINK I GOT ALL DAY TO JUST HANG AROUND?

SORRY... GOT STOPPED. HAD TO SHOW MY DAY PASS MORE THAN ONCE.



LIFE'S A BITCH... YOU GOT THE COIN?

MAYBE... YOU GOT WHAT I NEED?

SURE... SURE THING.



HERE...



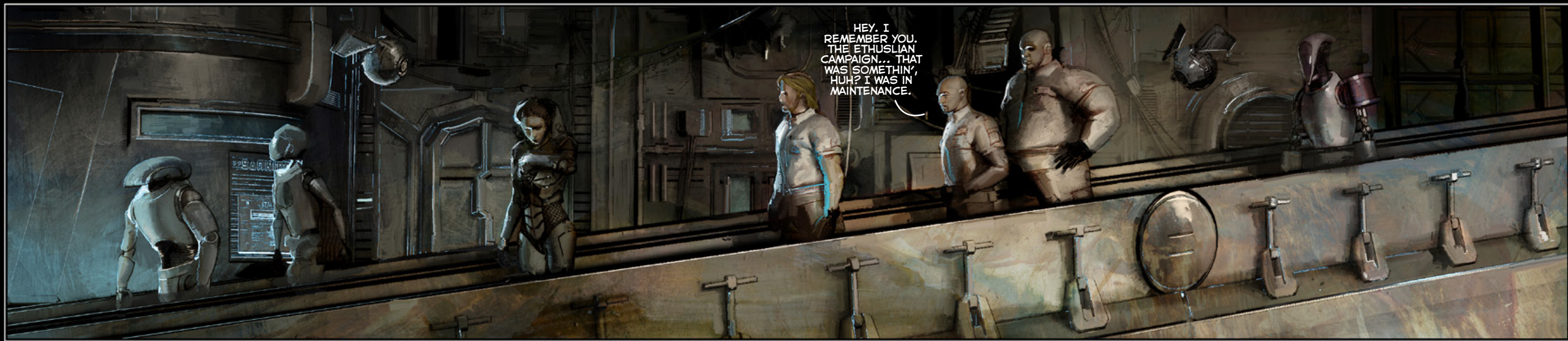
YOU KNOW... IF THIS ISN'T RIGHT... I'LL COME LOOKING FOR YOU... UNDERSTAND?

HEY BROTHER... YOU AIN'T THAT GUY ANYMORE... REMEMBER?

DON'T MATTER... I'D STILL COME.



YEAH, YEAH... AND NICE DOIN' BUSINESS WITH YOU, TOO.



HEY. I REMEMBER YOU. THE ETHUSLIAN CAMPAIGN... THAT WAS SOMETHIN', HUH? I WAS IN MAINTENANCE.



"MAINTENANCE?" HE USED TO CLEAN THE LATRINES.

SHUT-UP! SO... YOU SLUMMIN'?

HEY, MY FRIEND IS TALKING TO YOU...

JUST MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS.



YOU HEAR THAT? THE ENFORCER... I MEAN EX-ENFORCER IS MINDING HIS OWN BUSINESS...

YEAH. WHAT'S THE MATTER? NOT ALL BAD ASS WITHOUT YOUR IMPACT ARMOR?



THAT'S RIGHT... YOU'RE NOTHIN' NOW... JUST LIKE US...

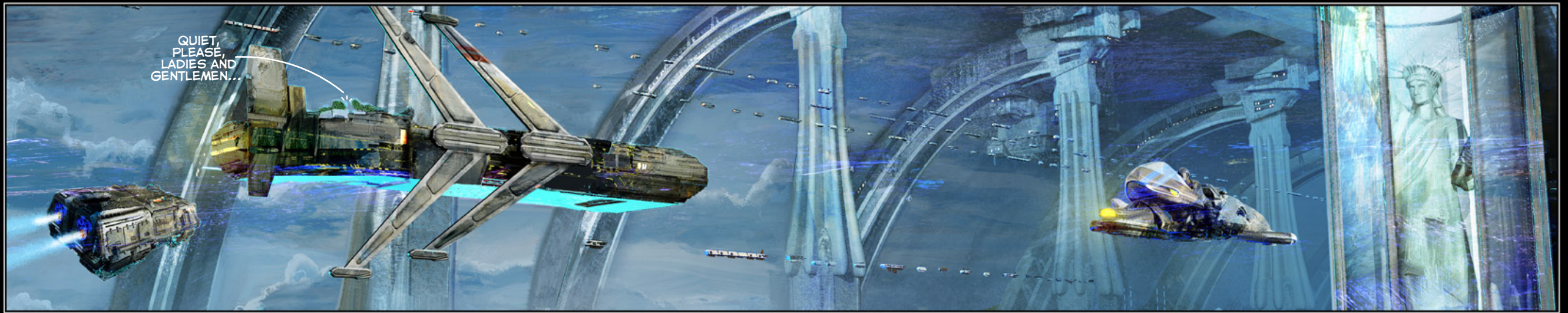


"The single greatest performing stock mankind has ever known..."

YOU ARE A PART OF THE GLORIOUS THIRD AGE!

REMEMBER THAT!

How much do you own?



QUIET,  
PLEASE,  
LADIES AND  
GENTLEMEN...



AND  
THANK YOU ALL  
FOR COMING. ALLOW  
ME TO INTRODUCE,  
SAMANTHA.

WITHOUT  
HER TIRELESS  
EFFORTS TO BRING TO  
THE LIGHT OF DAY, THE  
CONGLOMERATE'S  
CURRENT *Savage* APPROACH  
TO INTERSPECIES RELATIONS,  
OUR, WELL, I GUESS YOU'D  
CALL IT A *MOVEMENT*... WOULD  
NOT BE GATHERING THE  
ATTENTION THAT IT  
SO RIGHTLY  
DESERVES.

THANK  
YOU,  
JASSON.



HELLO...  
AND THANK YOU  
JASSON FOR THE KIND  
INTRODUCTION. WE ARE  
THE ELITE. ALL OF US  
HERE TODAY ARE *LEVEL  
ONE SHAREHOLDERS*.  
WE HAVE WHATEVER  
WE NEED OR PRETTY  
MUCH WANT IN LIFE...  
*WHAT WILL BE OUR  
LEGACY?*

FOR EXAMPLE, TAKE THE NURBAI... A PEACEFUL RACE IN A NEARBY SYSTEM... FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR OWN PLANET BY THE CONGLOMERATE...

OF COURSE, THEIR WORLD JUST HAPPENED TO HAVE RICH MINERAL RESOURCES... RESOURCES THAT WERE QUICKLY SURFACE-MINED, RENDERING THEIR HOME AN UNLIVABLE ROCK.

ACCORDING TO TONNI, THERE ARE DOZENS OF OTHER SPECIES THAT HAVE BEEN FORCEFULLY RELOCATED FROM THEIR NATIVE WORLDS. OH, THEY MAKE UP SOME EXCUSE...

...BUT WE HAVE DOCUMENTED THEM ALL AS FALSEHOODS. INNOCENT LIVES LOST AND DISRUPTED, ALL IN THE NAME OF PROFITS!

I SAY THE CONGLOMERATE COULD BE... NO... SHOULD BE... NO, MUST BE THE BRIGHT SHINING STAR OF ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE UNIVERSE...

IF WE VOTE WITH OUR SHARES, WE CAN CHANGE THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE!

SHE'S GOOD, ISN'T SHE?

INDEED... I THINK I'M INSPIRED ENOUGH TO BRING THIS UP WITH THE PLANETARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. I THINK WE CAN FINALLY AFFECT SOME REAL CHANGE!

IDIOTS.

I THINK THIS IS ALL WE NEED.

YES, I BELIEVE IT IS.



BEEP  
BEEP  
BEEP

WELCOME  
HOME, JON.



HI,  
JON!



THINK  
FAST!



SOMEONE  
TOSSED A PERFECTLY  
GOOD HOLO VID...  
LOOKS LIKE A  
"CAPTAIN NOVA"  
EPISODE.

ALRIGHT!



THANKS!  
HEY,  
WHAT ARE BIG  
BROTHERS FOR,  
ANYWAY?



HOW'S SHE DOING?

NOT SO GOOD.

WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?



THEY DON'T LIKE MENIALS WITHOUT WORK PERMITS TOPSIDE...

MUST HAVE GOTTEN STOPPED AND SCANNED A DOZEN TIMES.

I'M SORRY.

DID YOU GET IT?



RIGHT HERE!

MOM... JON'S HERE.



HEY... HOW ARE YOU DOING?

YOU KNOW ME... HEALTHY AS A HORSE.



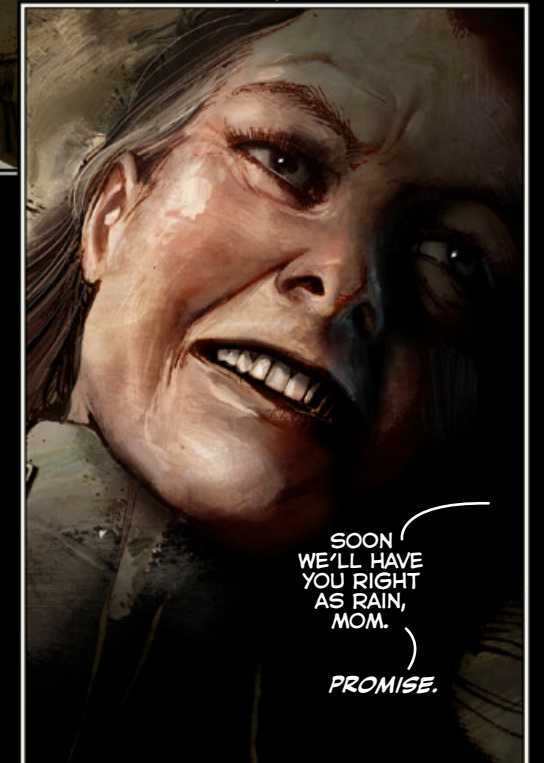
LIKE YOU'VE EVER EVEN SEEN A REAL HORSE.

WHEN I'M BETTER WE'LL ALL GO TO STATION FOUR. THEY HAVE A GREAT ZOO THERE.

IT'S A DATE. HERE, YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE TWO EVERY THREE HOURS... MEL, I'LL PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF THAT. 'KAY?

TWO EVERY THREE HOURS...

GOT IT!



SOON WE'LL HAVE YOU RIGHT AS RAIN, MOM.

PROMISE.



MEANWHILE, JUST OUTSIDE JON'S APARTMENT--

YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND THEM ON THE LOWER LEVELS.

YOU'D BETTER OR YOU'RE BUYING TONIGHT.

HEY, I GOT A GOOD FEELING ABOUT THIS SECTION.



I'M BETTING ON THIS ONE...

ANYTHING?

DAMN IT. NO. JUST SOME FAMILY...



REMEMBER I LIKE THAT ORION ALE--

YEAH... I'M NOT BUYING THAT TOP SHELF CRAP... IF I LOSE YOU'LL DRINK WHAT I DRINK.

AH, HERE WE GO.



THAT'S BETTER.

JUST MY LUCK.



ALRIGHT, YOU KNOW THE DRILL.

BUT OF COURSE.



Swipe

click

SECURITY OVERRIDE.



CEASE ALL ACTIVITY!

NO! WE HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING. THERE MUST BE SOME MISTAKE!



WE'VE HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE.

AGAINST THE WALL YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT THESE PERVERTS MIGHT BE HIDING... GO JUICE OR A LITTLE SARILLIAM G.



NO... I--

JUST KEEP THAT PRETTY LITTLE MOUTH QUIET...



MATING PERMIT?

YES... OF COURSE...



I HAVE IT RIGHT HERE... SOMEWHERE...



SEE? HERE IT IS... WE'D NEVER BREAK THE LAW, OFFICER. NEVER.

HMMM...



I TOLD YOU. JUST A MISTAKE... OOF!



SORRY... MUST HAVE SLIPPED THERE. LET'S SEE.

BLEEP

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?

NEXT TIME SHOW ME THIS FIRST THING... AVOID ANY TROUBLES...



YOU TWO, FEEL FREE TO CONTINUE.

OH, AND HOPE WE DIDN'T RUIN THE MOOD.



"RUIN THE MOOD"-- YOU KILL ME!

I DON'T THINK THERE'LL BE MUCH ACTION GOING ON IN *THERE* TONIGHT...

DID YOU SEE THE LOOK ON HIS FACE! I THOUGHT HIS EYES WERE GOING TO FALL OUT!

!?!

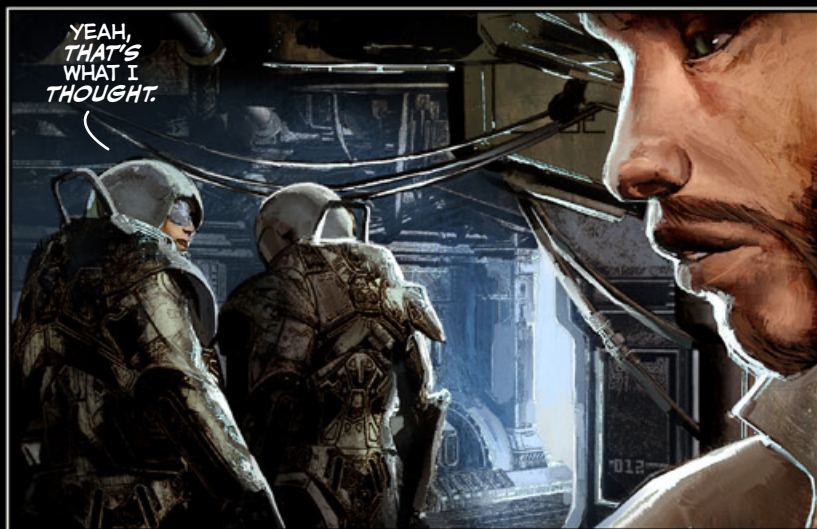


YOU GOT A PROBLEM?

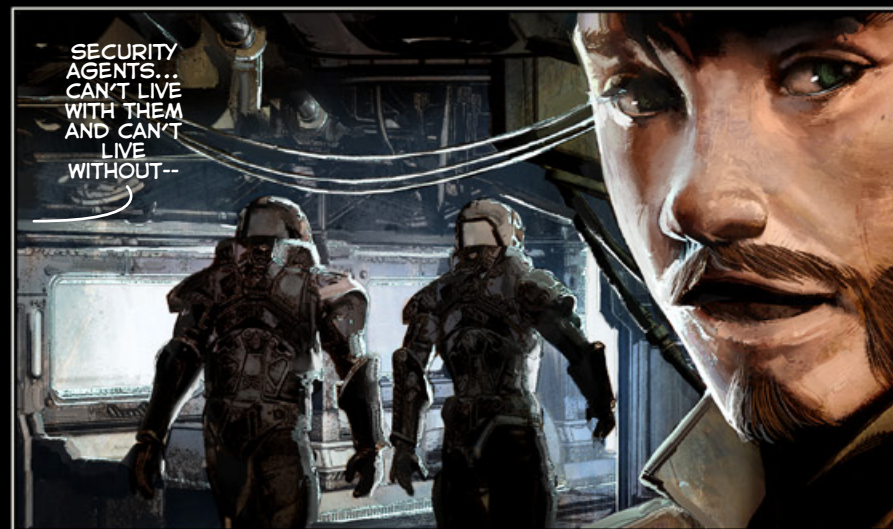
I SAID, YOU GOT A PROBLEM?

NO...

HEARD SOME NOISE. JUST CHECKING. UH... NO PROBLEM.



YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.



SECURITY AGENTS... CAN'T LIVE WITH THEM AND CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT--



NO... ON SECOND THOUGHT, I GUESS WE PROBABLY COULD LIVE WITHOUT THEM.

ROBERT?



LONG TIME, JON. AREN'T YOU GOING TO INVITE AN OLD SQUAD BUDDY IN?

HMMMMN.



NO. MAID'S DAY OFF... YOU KNOW.

S'OKAY... LET'S GO SOMEWHERE THEN.

I'VE GOT GOOD NEWS, BROTHER.

CONGLOMERATE INTERPLANETARY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING: TOPIC: INTEGRATING NEW WORLDS.

IN SESSION...

MY FRIENDS, WE NOW HAVE A **UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY** TO REEXAMINE OUR CURRENT POLICIES AND TO TAKE BACK THE MORAL HIGH GROUND WE HAVE **LOST**.

TO DO SO, IT IS MANDATORY THAT WE **ELIMINATE** ENFORCER FIRST CONTACT TEAMS. THEIR USE INEVITABLY LEADS TO **VIOLENCE** AND **DISASTROUS** TAKEOVERS FOR THE RESIDENT SENTIENT SPECIES OF NEW PLANETS—HUMANOID OR OTHERWISE.

BY MERELY ASSIGNING FIRST CONTACT MISSIONS THAT ARE TRAINED IN ALIEN CULTURES AND NEGOTIATION RATHER THAN ENFORCER ARMIES WE CAN ELIMINATE MUCH OF THE **NEEDLESS** DESTRUCTION.

SOMETIMES A CORPORATION SHOULD DEMONSTRATE **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY** AND, FOR A TIME, IGNORE THE PURSUIT OF IMMEDIATE PROFITS.

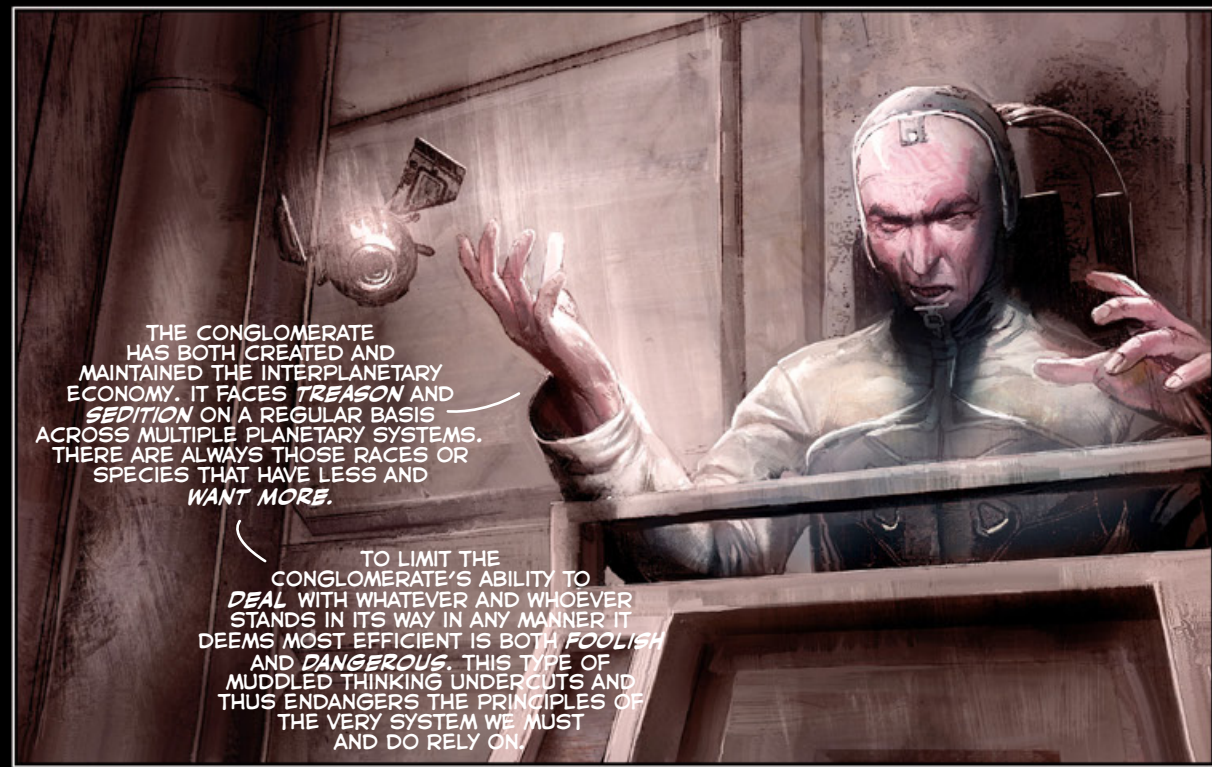
I AM SURE IF WE DO SO THE CONGLOMERATE WILL MAKE EVEN MORE **PROFITS** IN THE LONG TERM.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

RESPONSE FROM LEVEL ONE DARRAL 8958-69362 REPRESENTING CONGLOMERATE COMMUNICATIONS CORP.

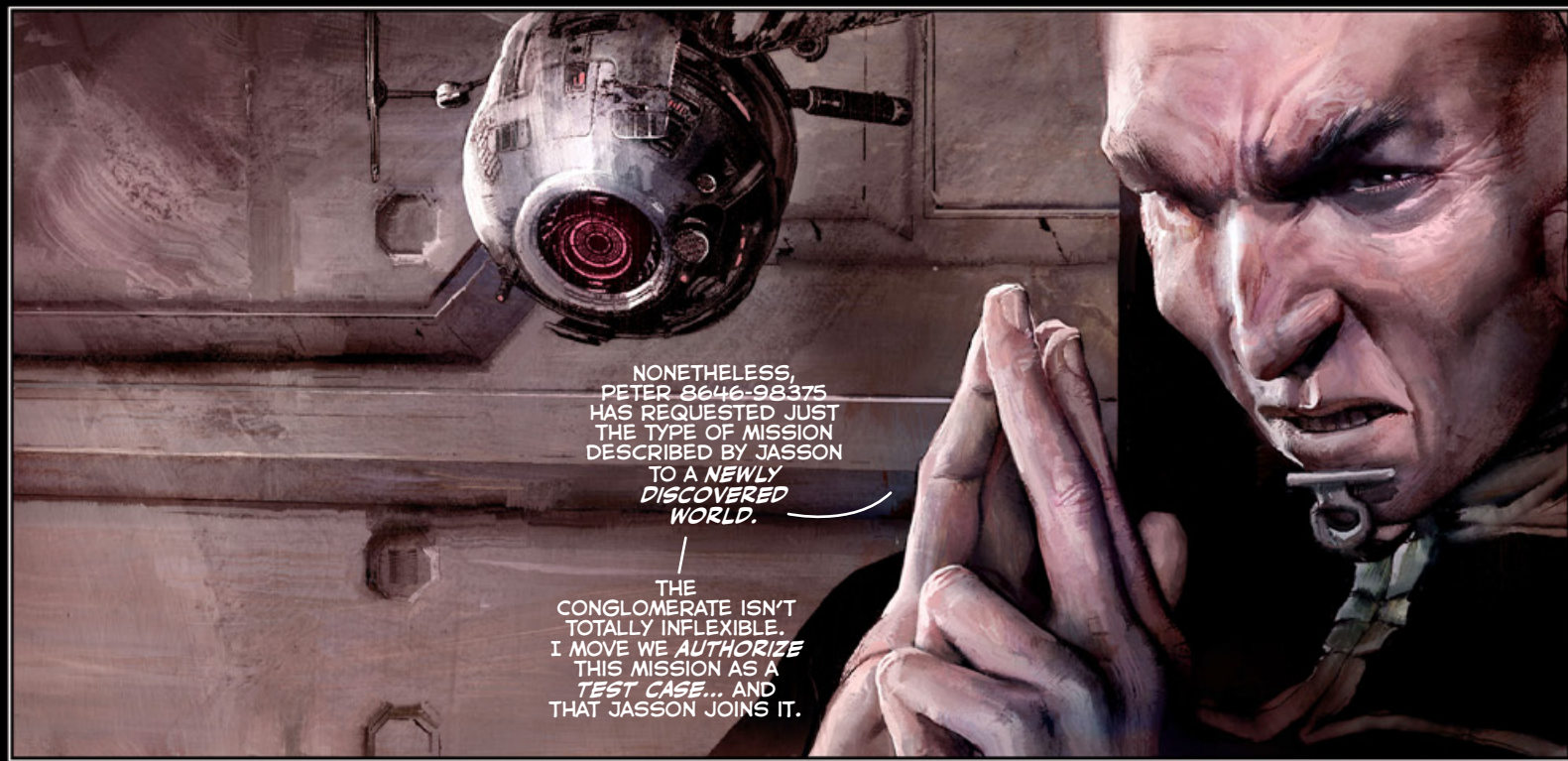
IF I MAY... LEARNED COLLEAGUES. I'M AFRAID JASSON 187-3271-5312 COULD NOT BE MORE, WELL... **WRONG**... TO BE PERFECTLY BLUNT. WE MUST NEVER FORGET THE CORPORATIONS IN THE CONGLOMERATE EXIST TO MAKE PROFITS FOR OUR SHAREHOLDERS **NOW**. NOT IN SOME **WHIMSICAL** FUTURE.

THE PLANETARY SYSTEMS ARE SECURE AND SAFE SOLELY BECAUSE THE GREAT CORPORATIONS JOINED TOGETHER AND IN THEIR WISDOM FORMED THE CONGLOMERATE.



THE CONGLOMERATE HAS BOTH CREATED AND MAINTAINED THE INTERPLANETARY ECONOMY. IT FACES *TREASON* AND *SEDITION* ON A REGULAR BASIS ACROSS MULTIPLE PLANETARY SYSTEMS. THERE ARE ALWAYS THOSE RACES OR SPECIES THAT HAVE LESS AND *WANT MORE*.

TO LIMIT THE CONGLOMERATE'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH WHATEVER AND WHOEVER STANDS IN ITS WAY IN ANY MANNER IT DEEMS MOST EFFICIENT IS BOTH *FOOLISH* AND *DANGEROUS*. THIS TYPE OF MUDDLED THINKING UNDERCUTS AND THUS ENDANGERS THE PRINCIPLES OF THE VERY SYSTEM WE MUST AND DO RELY ON.

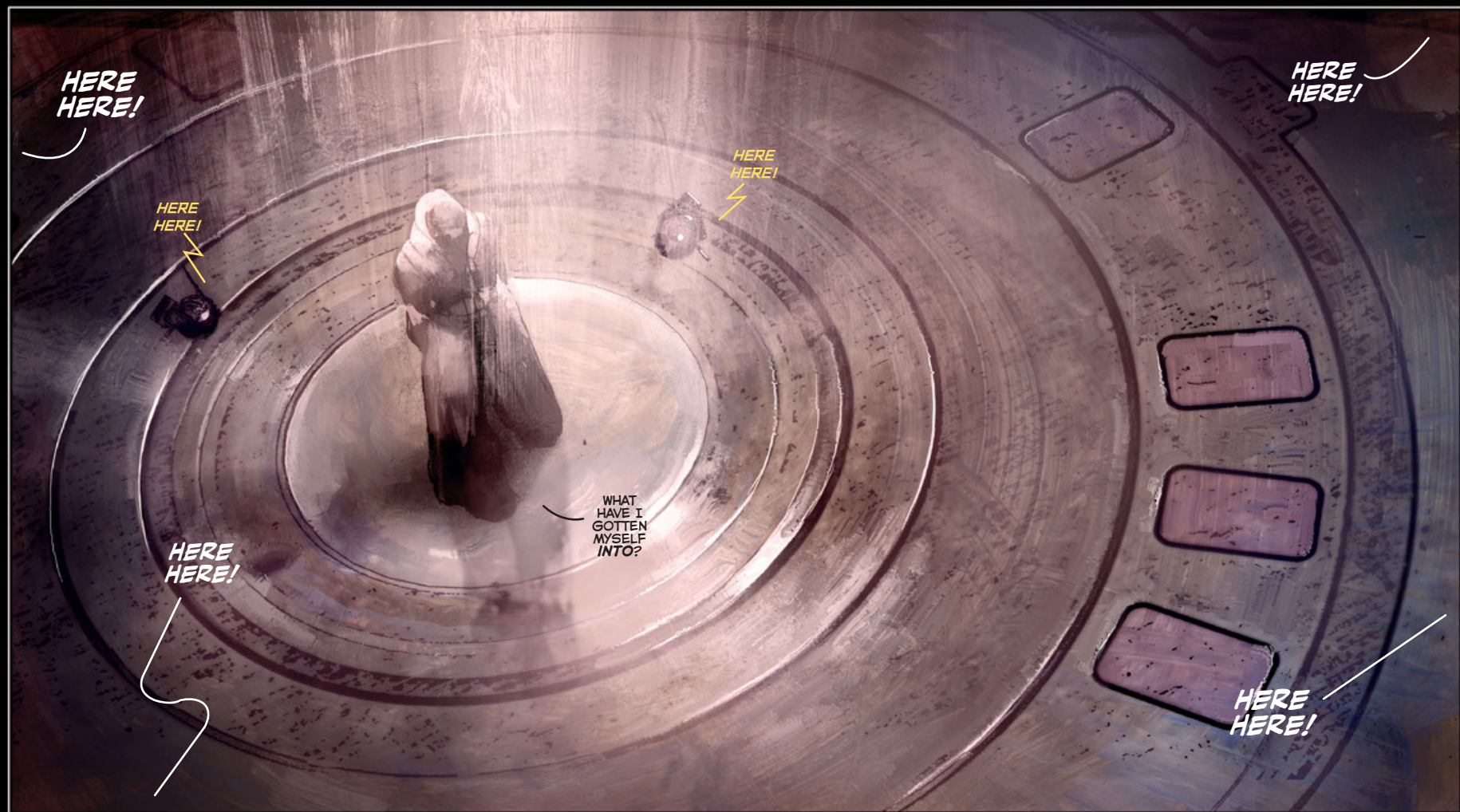


NONETHELESS, PETER 8646-98375 HAS REQUESTED JUST THE TYPE OF MISSION DESCRIBED BY JASSON TO A *NEWLY DISCOVERED WORLD*.

THE CONGLOMERATE ISN'T TOTALLY INFLEXIBLE. I MOVE WE *AUTHORIZE* THIS MISSION AS A *TEST CASE...* AND THAT JASSON JOINS IT.



AN OPPORTUNITY TO *PROVE* YOUR THEORIES.



HERE HERE!

HERE HERE!

HERE HERE!

HERE HERE!

HERE HERE!

HERE HERE!

WHAT HAVE I GOTTEN MYSELF INTO?



WELL, THAT WENT WELL.



WHAT ARE YOU SO HAPPY ABOUT?



YOU'RE ALWAYS LURKING ABOUT, AREN'T YOU?

IT'S MY JOB.

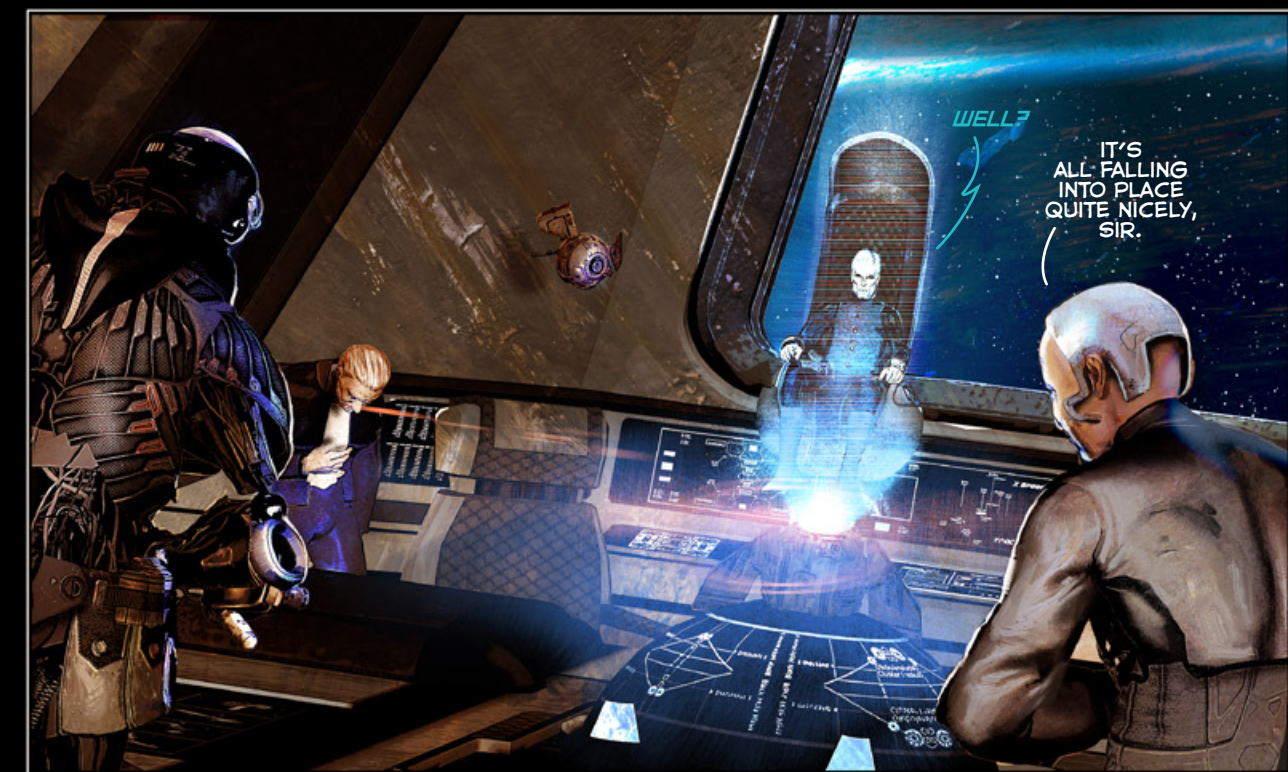
DON'T REMIND ME.



AH, PETER... SO GOOD OF YOU TO JOIN US.



QUINN?



WELL?

IT'S ALL FALLING INTO PLACE QUITE NICELY, SIR.



HMM.

QUINN? YOU DON'T AGREE?

I AM, MY USUAL SELF...  
...CONSERVATIVELY SUSPICIOUS. I CAN THINK OF HUNDREDS OF WAYS THIS CAN GO WRONG.

AND, I HAVE SET IT ALL UP TO GO RIGHT.



QUINN...



DARRAL HAS MY FAITH.



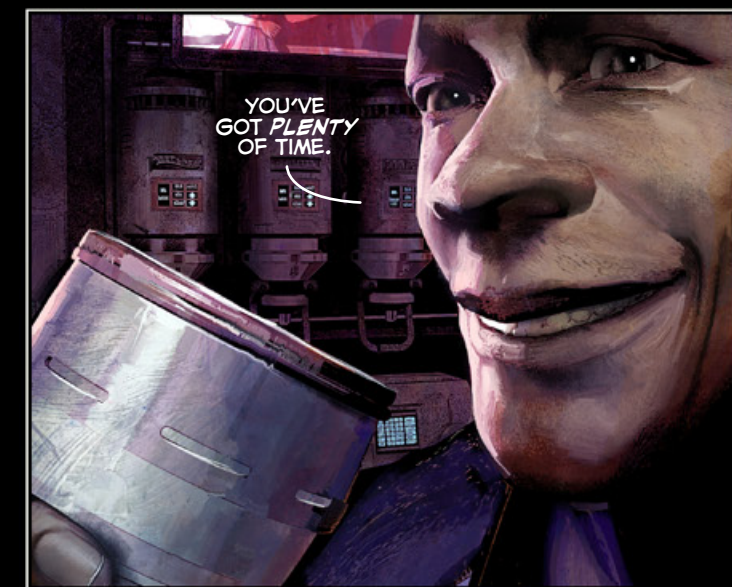
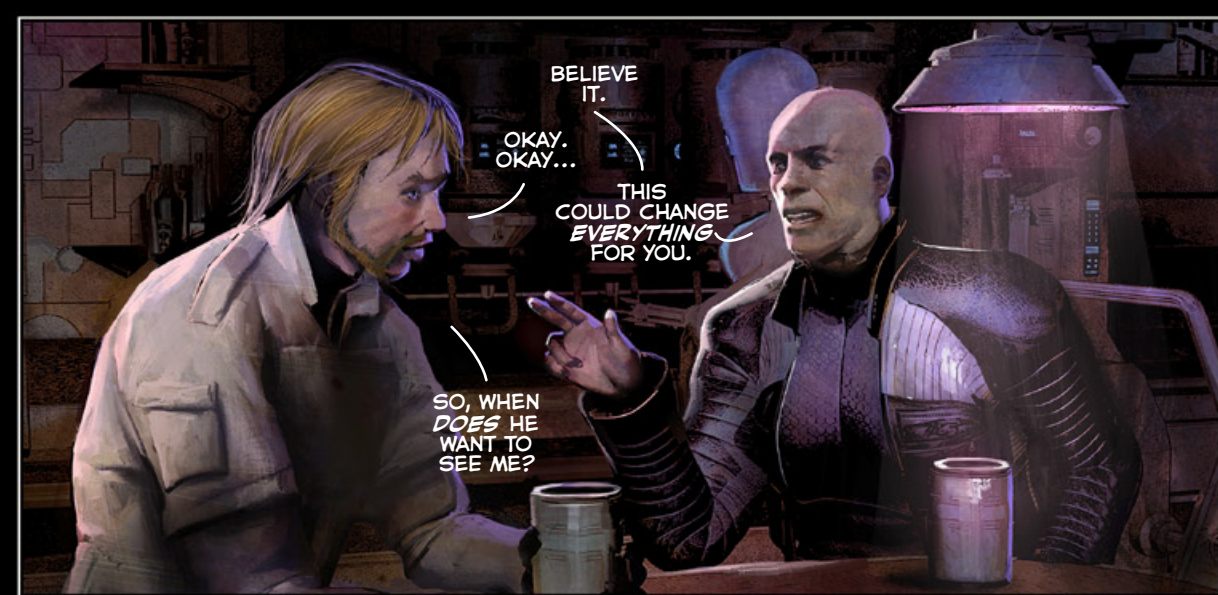
BUT...  
IF MY  
FAITH  
SHOULD  
HAPPEN TO BE  
MISPLACED...



UNDERSTOOD.









UPPER CITY MANAGEMENT LEVEL...



WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MENIAL?

I-- I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT...

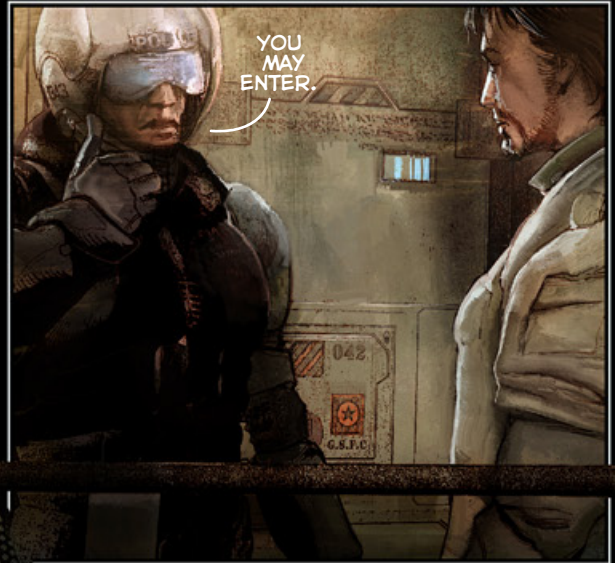


HM... WAIT HERE.



YOUR 1:15 IS HERE, SIR.

YES, SIR... RIGHT AWAY.



YOU MAY ENTER.



MTC.S.00.093

TIME CODE: 11 35:08