



#4

\$2.99 US

\$3.75 CAN

THE STARCASTER CHRONICLES



BUCKLEY ■ CORREIA



APHELION, STARCALL GRZZ-41: YOU'LL BE CLEARED FOR BAY FOURTEEN AS SOON AS THE OMNI PRISEA FINISHES HER OFFLOAD.



'BOUT ANOTHER HOUR, THEN. UNLESS ANOTHER HAULER SHOWS UP AND WE GET BUMPED. AGAIN.

KEEP ME POSTED. I NEED A DRINK.



ADMIRING YOUR ORGANS?



TRYING NOT TO LOOK AT THEM. IT'S... DIFFICULT TO SEE MYSELF THIS WAY.

HOW'S THAT VALVE SEAL HOLDING UP?

WELL ENOUGH NOW. YOUR EAR?



BETTER THAN MY EGO. THIS WAS MY PRETTY SIDE.



AT THE OUTPOST, YOU... CAME BACK FOR ME.

OH... I WAS ACTUALLY JUST TRYING TO FIND THE BATHROOM.



SERIOUSLY, THOUGH. WHY RISK IT?
YOU OWED ME NOTHING.

ESPECIALLY
NOT AFTER I JUDGED
YOU SO HARSHLY.

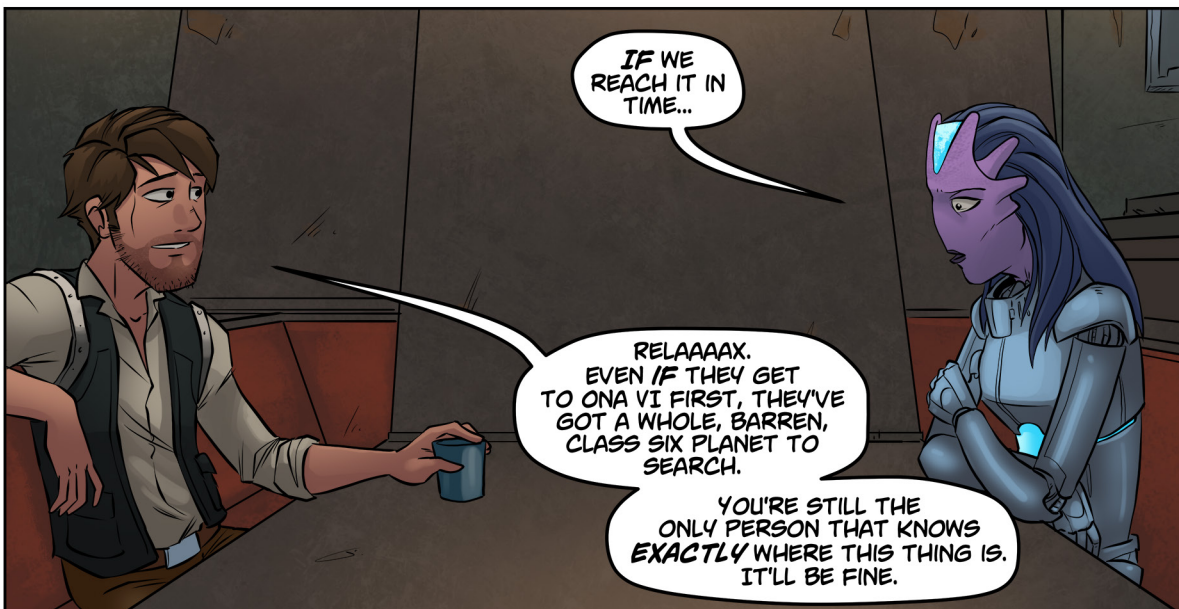


YOU CALLED
IT LIKE YOU SAW
IT...



LOOK, I JUST...
NO ONE DESERVES WHAT
THEY WOULD DO TO YOU... **DID**
DO TO YOU. THAT'S ALL.

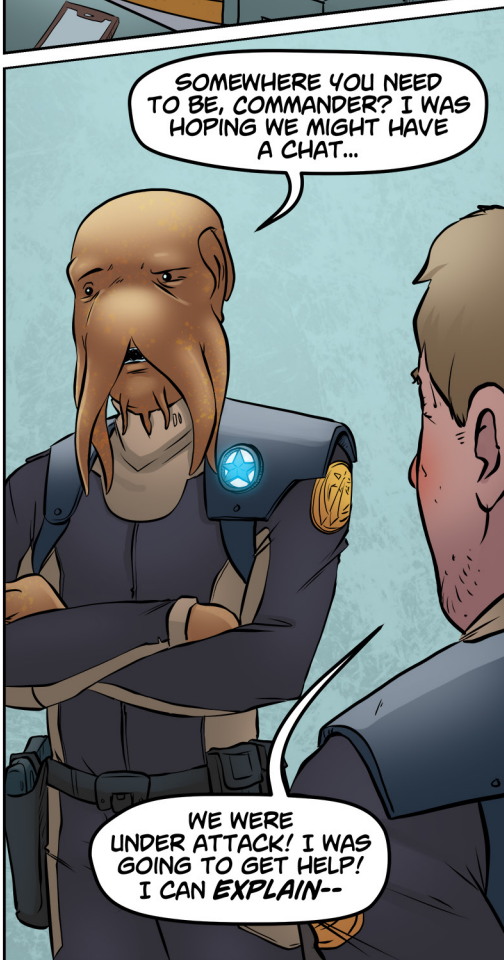
BESIDES, HELPING
LOCATE A LOST STARCASTER?
I'LL DRINK FREE ON THAT
STORY FOR **YEARS**.

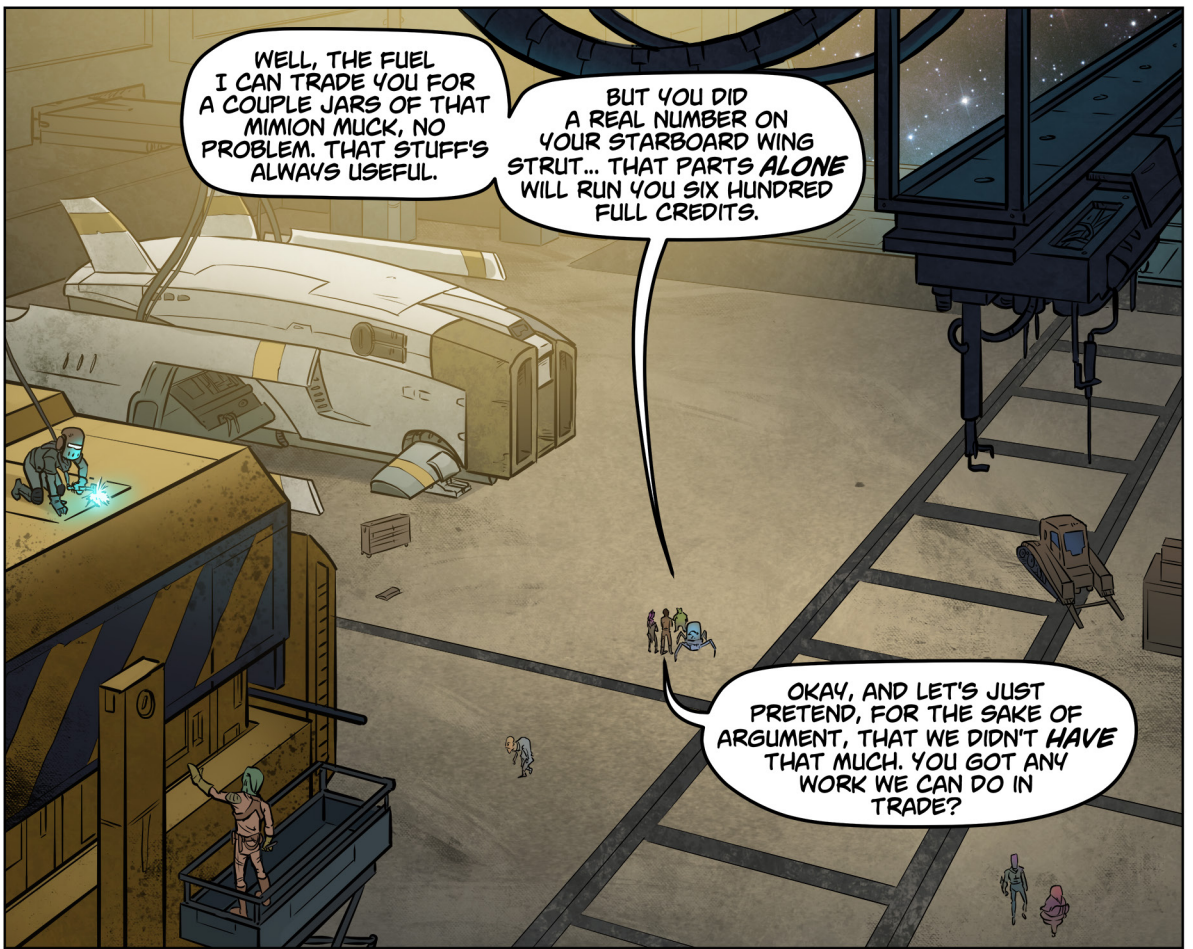


IF WE
REACH IT IN
TIME...

RELAAAAX.
EVEN IF THEY GET
TO ONA VI FIRST, THEY'VE
GOT A WHOLE, BARREN,
CLASS SIX PLANET TO
SEARCH.

YOU'RE STILL THE
ONLY PERSON THAT KNOWS
EXACTLY WHERE THIS THING IS.
IT'LL BE FINE.





WELL, THE FUEL I CAN TRADE YOU FOR A COUPLE JARS OF THAT MIMION MUCK, NO PROBLEM. THAT STUFF'S ALWAYS USEFUL.

BUT YOU DID A REAL NUMBER ON YOUR STARBOARD WING STRUT... THAT PARTS *ALONE* WILL RUN YOU SIX HUNDRED FULL CREDITS.

OKAY, AND LET'S JUST PRETEND, FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT, THAT WE DIDN'T *HAVE* THAT MUCH. YOU GOT ANY WORK WE CAN DO IN TRADE?



ME? NAH. IF YOU COULD DO THE WORK I NEED DONE, YOU'D BE FIXING THE WING YOURSELF.

THOUGH...

WHAT?



WELL, SSISSIMAS DOWN IN THERMAL MAINTENANCE HAS BEEN KNOWN TO DEAL WITH... "EXTRACURRICULAR EMPLOYMENT."

MIGHT BE THEY HAVE SOMETHING FOR YA... IF YOU CAN STOMACH IT.



HRM.



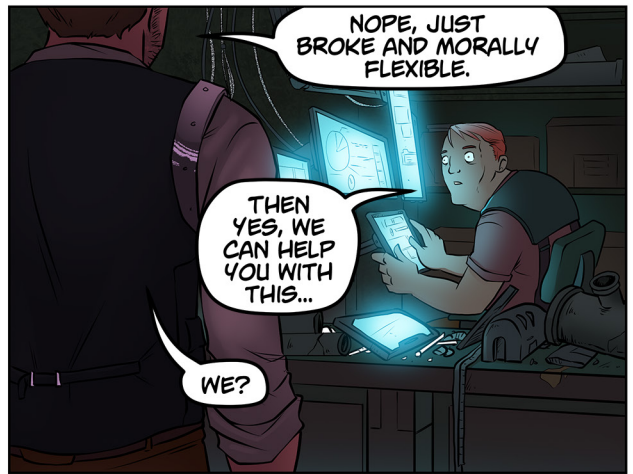
UH, HELLO?
MR. SISISISISSSS?

SSISSIMIAS.
WHAT BRINGS YOU...
TO THE DOWN
BELOW?



LOOKING TO MAKE A LITTLE
EXTRA SPENDING MONEY,
HEARD YOU MAY BE THE
ONE TO TALK TO.

YOU ARE
WITH AUTHORITIES?



NOPE, JUST
BROKE AND MORALLY
FLEXIBLE.

THEN
YES, WE
CAN HELP
YOU WITH
THIS...

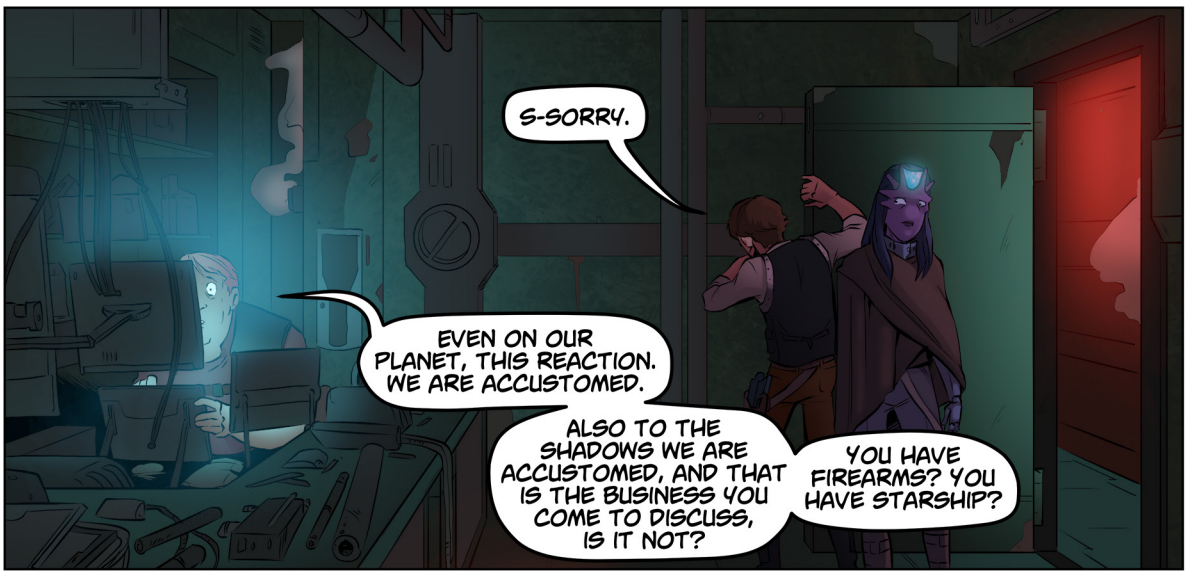
WE?



THE NEST
IS SINGULAR, BUT
SSISSIMIAS IS
WE.



HEARK!



S-SORRY.

EVEN ON OUR PLANET, THIS REACTION. WE ARE ACCUSTOMED.

ALSO TO THE SHADOWS WE ARE ACCUSTOMED, AND THAT IS THE BUSINESS YOU COME TO DISCUSS, IS IT NOT?

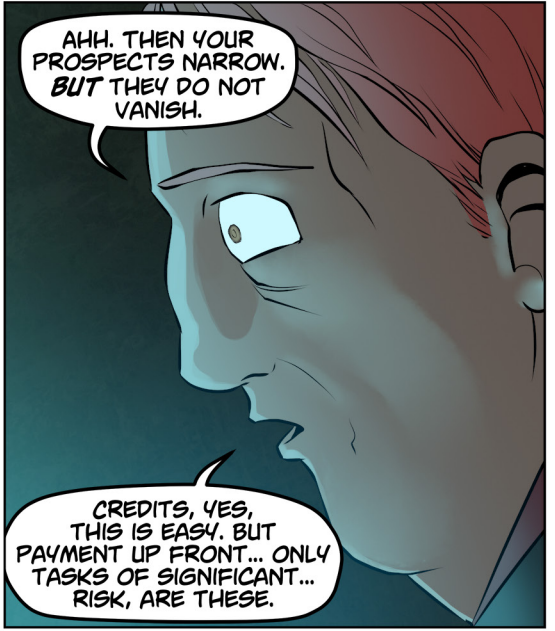
YOU HAVE FIREARMS? YOU HAVE STARSHIP?



ALL OF THE ABOVE. WELL, TECHNICALLY.

THE SHIP-- I NEED WORK THAT PAYS IN ADVANCE.

AT LEAST 800 CREDITS.



AHH. THEN YOUR PROSPECTS NARROW. BUT THEY DO NOT VANISH.

CREDITS, YES, THIS IS EASY. BUT PAYMENT UP FRONT... ONLY TASKS OF SIGNIFICANT... RISK, ARE THESE.



I CAN HANDLE RISK. JUST TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW.



MOST IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO KNOW IS THAT YOU LOOK UPON THE FACE OF THE LAST ONE THAT ATTEMPTED TO SWINDLE SSISSIMIAS.

THE REST IS DETAILS.

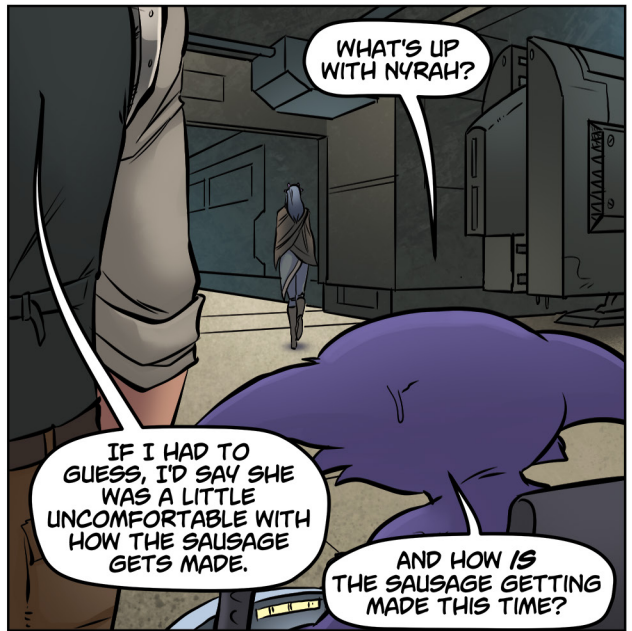


THREE JARS, AS AGREED. TRY NOT TO MELT YOURSELF.



SO, MAKE A NEW FRIEND?

I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.



WHAT'S UP WITH NYRAH?

IF I HAD TO GUESS, I'D SAY SHE WAS A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH HOW THE SAUSAGE GETS MADE.

AND HOW IS THE SAUSAGE GETTING MADE THIS TIME?



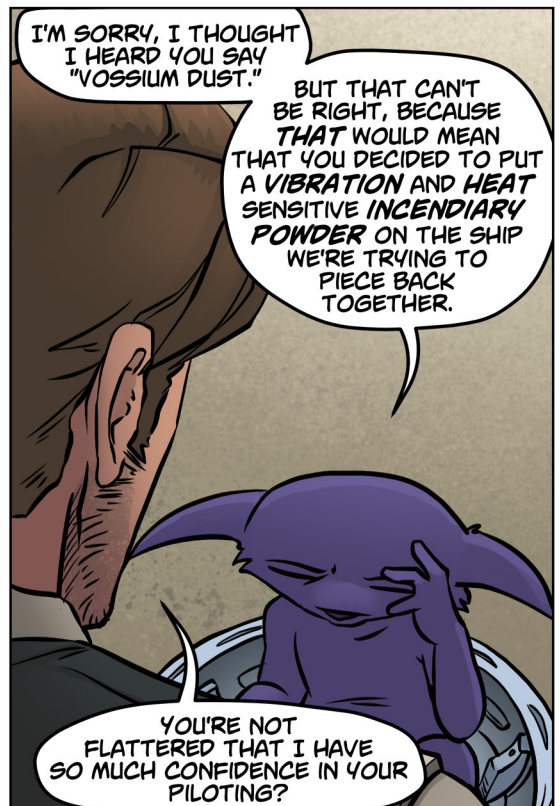
JUST A SIMPLE POINT A-TO-B.

SOME BARRELS.

CARRYING?

CAN WE SKIP THE PART WHERE I DRAG THIS OUT OF YOU?

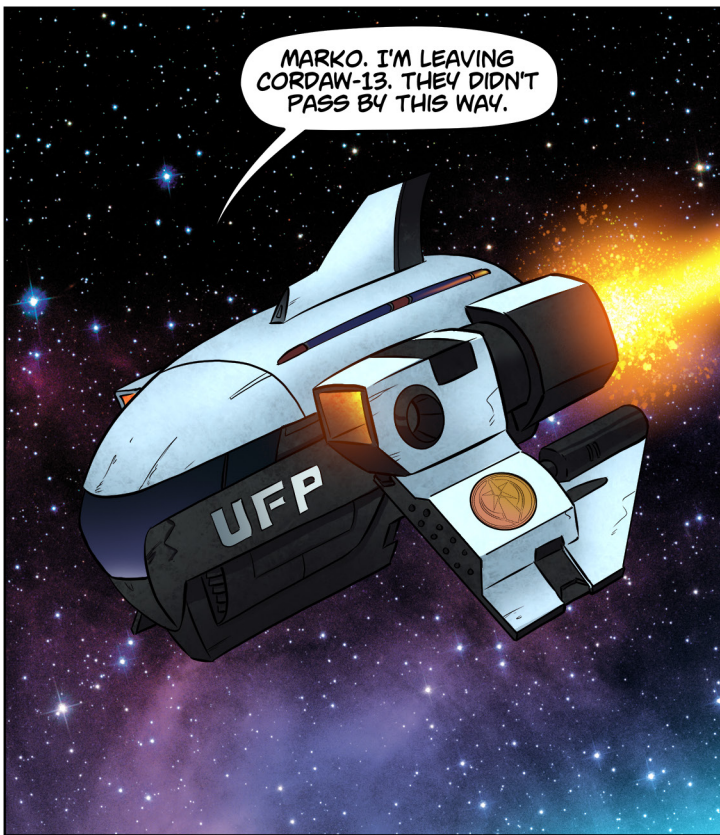
VOSSIUM DUST.



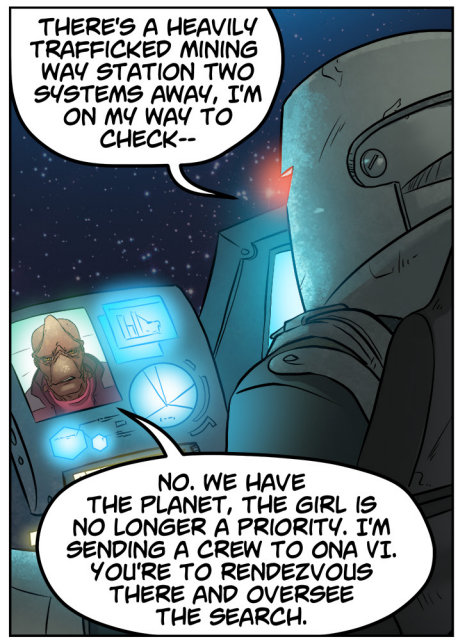
I'M SORRY, I THOUGHT I HEARD YOU SAY "VOSSIUM DUST."

BUT THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT, BECAUSE THAT WOULD MEAN THAT YOU DECIDED TO PUT A VIBRATION AND HEAT SENSITIVE INCENDIARY POWDER ON THE SHIP WE'RE TRYING TO PIECE BACK TOGETHER.

YOU'RE NOT FLATTERED THAT I HAVE SO MUCH CONFIDENCE IN YOUR PILOTING?

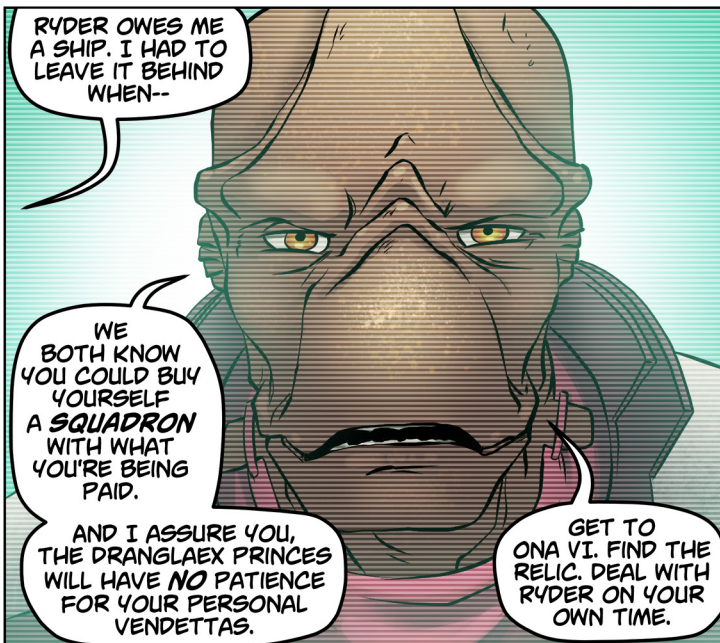


MARKO. I'M LEAVING CORDAW-13. THEY DIDN'T PASS BY THIS WAY.



THERE'S A HEAVILY TRAFFICKED MINING WAY STATION TWO SYSTEMS AWAY, I'M ON MY WAY TO CHECK--

NO. WE HAVE THE PLANET, THE GIRL IS NO LONGER A PRIORITY. I'M SENDING A CREW TO ONA VI. YOU'RE TO RENDEZVOUS THERE AND OVERSEE THE SEARCH.

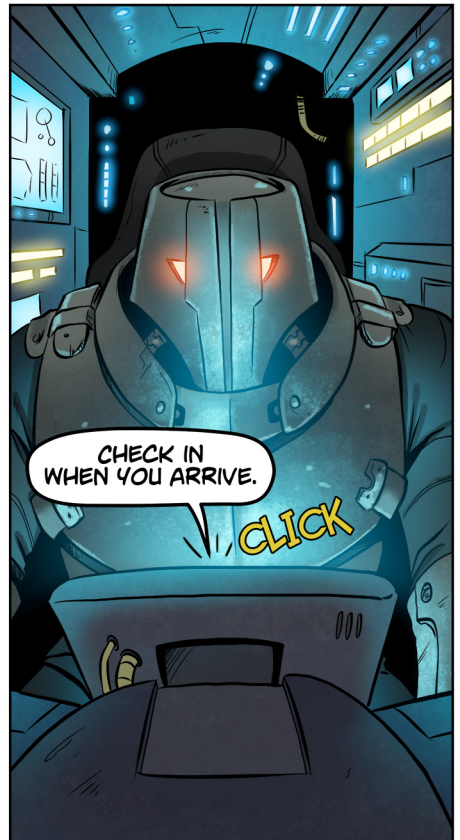


RYDER OWES ME A SHIP. I HAD TO LEAVE IT BEHIND WHEN--

WE BOTH KNOW YOU COULD BUY YOURSELF A SQUADRON WITH WHAT YOU'RE BEING PAID.

AND I ASSURE YOU, THE DRANGLAEX PRINCES WILL HAVE **NO** PATIENCE FOR YOUR PERSONAL VENDETTAS.

GET TO ONA VI. FIND THE RELIC. DEAL WITH RYDER ON YOUR OWN TIME.



CHECK IN WHEN YOU ARRIVE.

CLICK



KRSH!



TWELVE.
A CUP OF THIS STUFF
COULD PROBABLY SPLIT
THIS SHIP IN HALF, AND WE
HAVE **TWELVE**
BARRELS.

GO BIG
OR GO HOME.
I CAN FILL THE WHOLE
COMPARTMENT WITH
X-FOAM. SHOULD KEEP
THEM PRETTY SNUG.

OF COURSE,
IF YOU STILL FEEL
LIKE YOU COULD HAVE
GOTTEN US A BETTER
ARRANGEMENT, I'D BE
HAPPY TO GIVE YOU
DIRECTIONS DOWN TO
THERMAL MAINT--



SEVEN SUNS,
NO.

I HAVE NEVER
CROSSED PATHS WITH
ONE OF THOSE NECRO
PUPPETEERS, AND THAT'S
A STREAK I'D LIKE TO
MAINTAIN.

I'M GONNA
GET STARTED ON
PREP SO WE CAN
LEAVE AS SOON AS
THEY FINISH UP WITH
THE WING. LET'S GET
THIS OVER WITH.



KNOCK KNOCK.
READING ANYTHING
INTERESTING?

JUST... CATCHING
UP ON SOME OF WHAT
I MISSED THE LAST
CENTURY.



THE *RYANE JASTER* SERIES.
IT'S ABOUT THIS SECRET SCHOOL
FOR YOUNG MECHLOCKS. THE
BOOKS ARE *TECHNICALLY* FOR
KIDS, BUT I LOVE 'EM.

SO... YOU
ALRIGHT? COULDN'T
HELP BUT NOTICE YOU GOT
A BIT SQUIRRELY THIS MORNING.
NOT THAT I CAN BLAME YOU.
THAT GUY'S FACE... *YECH*, RIGHT?



I'M NOT NAIVE...
WE *HAVE* TO REACH THE
STARCASTER. I *KNOW* THE
SITUATION WE'RE IN, I *KNOW*
OUR OPTIONS ARE
LIMITED.

BUT I'VE BEEN
VAHK RA SINCE I WAS
A YOUNGLING. I DEDICATED
MY LIFE TO *DEFENDING*
OUR PEOPLE.

THREATS OF VIOLENCE,
SMUGGLING WEAPONS TO
CRIMINALS... THIS WORLD YOU
OPERATE IN MAKES WHAT'S
LEFT OF MY SKIN CRAWL.

IT SEEMS STUPID
TO LET IT BOTHER ME,
WITH WHAT'S AT STAKE,
I KNOW...

IT'S NOT
STUPID.

THE DAY YOU WAKE
UP AND IT NO LONGER
BOTHERS YOU... *THAT'S*
WHEN YOU WORRY.

FOURTEEN HOURS LATER.

OROS II.

SCUTTLE, FREE PORT
ON THE IDAENDRIC COAST.

YOU'RE
LETTING THEM
INSPECT THE
SHIP?

THEY HAVE TO
CHECK FOR AND DOCUMENT
ALL IMPORTED GOODS...
IT'S THE LAW.

RELAX. EVEN
I HAVEN'T FOUND
ALL OF THE HIDDEN
COMPARTMENTS IN
THAT OLD BOAT.

NOW, WHATTYA
SAY WE GO FIND US
SOME LOWLIFE CRIMINAL
TYPES?





THE MISSION IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO BEAR... AS IS THE PATH IT LEADS ME ON.

FAIR ENOUGH. TRY TO KEEP TRACK OF ALL YOUR FINGERS.

SOMEONE LOOKING FOR US.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR...?

THE SUN DEVILS WILL REACH OUT TO US HERE, AND WE'LL ARRANGE SOMEWHERE PRIVATE FOR DELIVERY.

SOUNDS SIMPLE.

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED HOW QUICKLY IT CAN GET COMPLICATED.

I'LL GRAB SOME DRINKS. FIND US A TABLE OUT OF THE WAY.



YEAH... I'M FAIRLY CERTAIN THIS "ALCOHOL" IS JUST WATERED-DOWN HULL DEGREASER.

WELL--

AND YET YOU WENT BACK FOR SECONDS.

WHEN THE BOSS TOLD ME TO LOOK FOR A CREW WITH A MIMION, I THOUGHT HE WAS FULL OF SHIT.



COORDINATES TO A SMALL ISLAND JUST OFF THE COAST. THERE'S A CLEARING. PLENTY OF ROOM, IF YOUR PILOTING IS WORTH TWO CHIPS.

WE'LL BE FINE.

GOOD. WE'RE ANXIOUS TO--



...START BLOWING STUFF UP?



I'D HATE TO THINK WE WERE STARTIN' OFF ON THE **WRONG FOOT** HERE, DARLIN'.

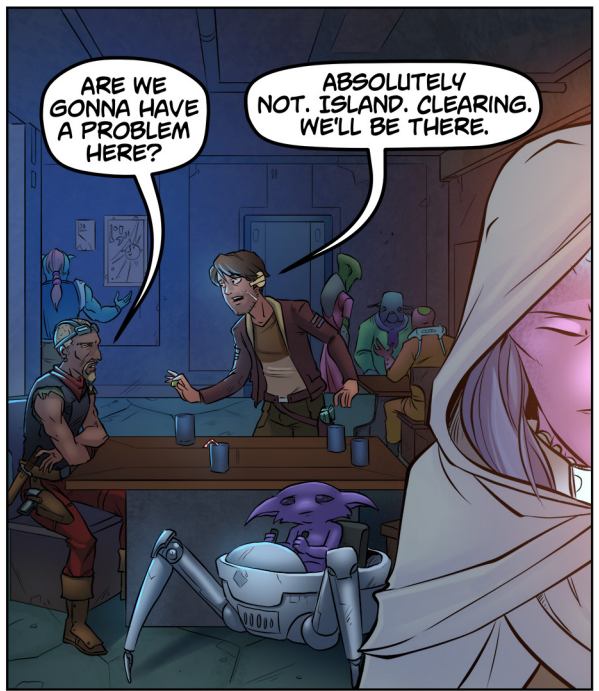
YOU'RE TOO BEAUTIFUL FOR US TO BE... NOT FRIENDS.

Y'KNOW, I RECKON I'VE SEEN A LOT, BUT I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN YOUR LIKE. WHERE DOES ONE **GET** SUCH A LOVELY SHADE OF SKIN AS THAT?



UH, SHE'S--

JUST A HALFBREED.
THE SKIN IS FROM MIXED PARENTAGE.
EXCUSE ME.



ARE WE GONNA HAVE A PROBLEM HERE?

ABSOLUTELY NOT. ISLAND. CLEARING. WE'LL BE THERE.



HEY! WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

A MISTAKE. I'M SORRY, MY THOUGHTS JUST...

IT DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT, I SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THERE.



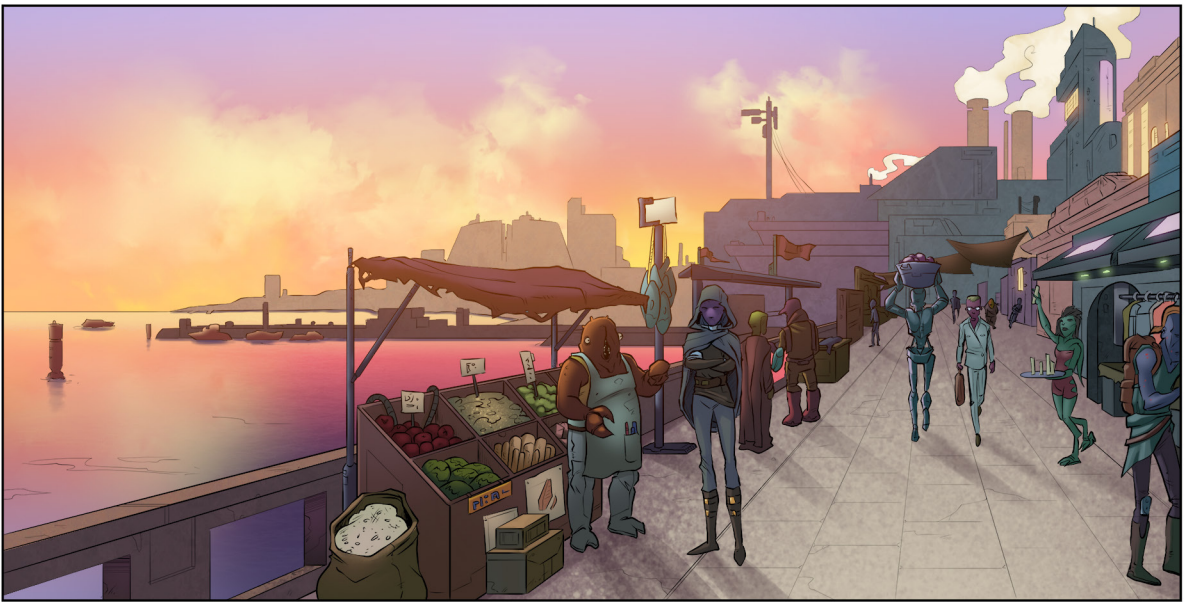
I'LL MAKE MY OWN WAY BACK TO THE SHIP. I NEED TO CLEAR MY HEAD.



I DON'T LOVE THE IDEA OF HER WANDERING THE CITY ALONE.

SHE WON'T BE. I'LL FOLLOW HER. CAN YOU--

YUP. STAY ON COMMS, WE'LL BE READY TO GO WHEN YOU GET BACK.



WE HAVE DEPARTURE CLEARANCE. ETA?

HARD TO SAY. IF SHE'S HEADING BACK TO THE SHIP, SHE'S TAKING THE SCENIC ROUTE.

WE'RE DOWN BY THE HARBOR NOW.

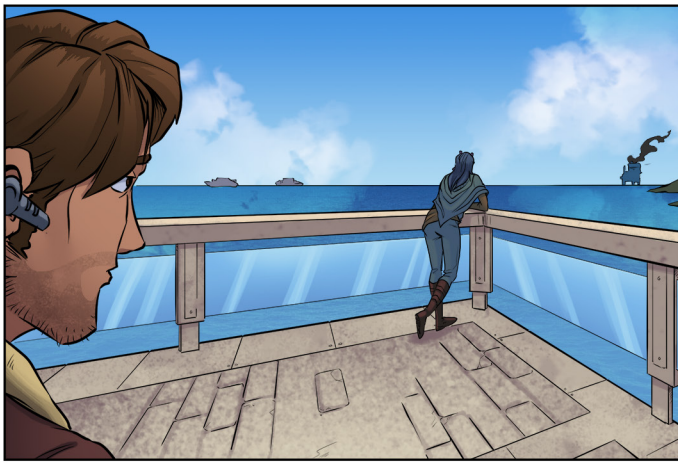
WHAT? WHY?

"CLICK." THERE, I'VE TURNED ON MY MIND READER, I'LL HAVE THAT ANSWER FOR YOU IN A SECOND.

CUTE...

SHE KEEPS STOPPING TO TALK TO PEOPLE. SHOPKEEPS, DOCK WORKERS...

WELL LET'S KEEP AN EYE ON THE TIME. THE SUN DEVILS PROBABLY DON'T NEED ANY MORE REASON TO BE LEERY OF US.





FASCINATING. YOU LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY DAY.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'RE AS HEARTLESS AS YOU LIKE TO ACT.

YOU DIDN'T *HAVE* TO COME BACK FOR ME, AND YOU DIDN'T *HAVE* TO AGREE TO HELP ME.

I DON'T *KNOW* WHAT THE SUN DEVILS WILL USE THAT EXPLOSIVE FOR, BUT I'M CERTAIN IT WILL MAKE PEOPLE'S LIVES WORSE.



THE GALAXY IS TOO BIG TO GO AROUND TRYING TO *FIX* EVERYTHING, NYRAH.

WE CAN'T HELP EVERYONE, SO DON'T BOTHER HELPING ANYONE? *THAT'S* YOUR REASONING? WE HAVE A CHOICE--



WHAT CHOICE?! WE NEEDED THIS DEAL TO FIX THE SHIP--

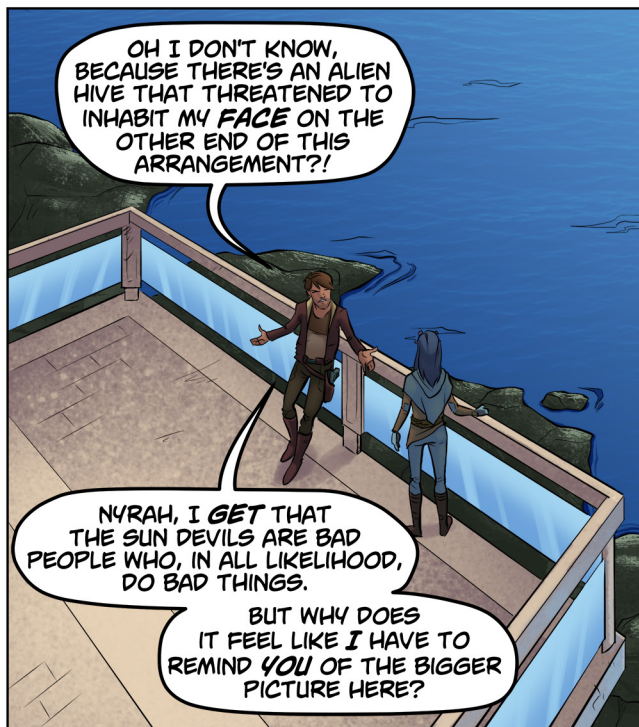


WHICH WE NOW *HAVE!*

SUDDENLY YOU'RE THE MOST LOYAL SMUGGLER IN THE GALAXY? THOSE "FLEXIBLE MORALS" YOU TOUTED HAVE GONE RIGID?

SAY THE CARGO WAS LOST OR DESTROYED. WE CAN PAY BACK THE ADVANCE LATER!

I'VE WATCHED YOU LIE AND SCAM WITH EASE SINCE THE MOMENT WE MET, SO WHY NOT DO SO *NOW*, WHEN YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING GOOD?



OH I DON'T KNOW, BECAUSE THERE'S AN ALIEN HIVE THAT THREATENED TO INHABIT MY *FACE* ON THE OTHER END OF THIS ARRANGEMENT?!

NYRAH, I *GET* THAT THE SUN DEVILS ARE BAD PEOPLE WHO, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, DO BAD THINGS.

BUT WHY DOES IT FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO REMIND *YOU* OF THE BIGGER PICTURE HERE?




BECAUSE DRISTIM **DIED** TO KEEP THE STARCASTER PROTECTED.

BUT HE **LIVED** TO PROTECT OUR **PEOPLE**, NOT ONLY FROM FOREIGN THREATS, BUT FROM LOCAL GANGS **JUST LIKE THIS ONE**.

WE SWORE AN OATH, CORT. AN OATH THAT HE UPHHELD TO THE END.

AND I CAN'T STOP HEARING THE... **DISAPPROVAL** IN HIS VOICE AT THE THOUGHT OF ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTING TO THE SORT OF CHAOS THOSE LIKE THE SUN DEVILS BRING TO THE GALAXY.



YOU'RE RIGHT, GETTING TO THE STARCASTER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVERYTHING ELSE.

BUT DOING THAT, NO MATTER HOW MANY LIVES IT SAVES, DOES NOT JUSTIFY LEAVING DESTRUCTION IN OUR WAKE.

IT'S YOUR SHIP, CORT. IT'S YOUR CALL.

I BELIEVE THAT IF WE DELIVER THE EXPLOSIVES TO THESE PEOPLE, WE ARE DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW THEY USE THEM.

I KNOW YOU'RE CAPABLE OF LIVING WITH THAT.

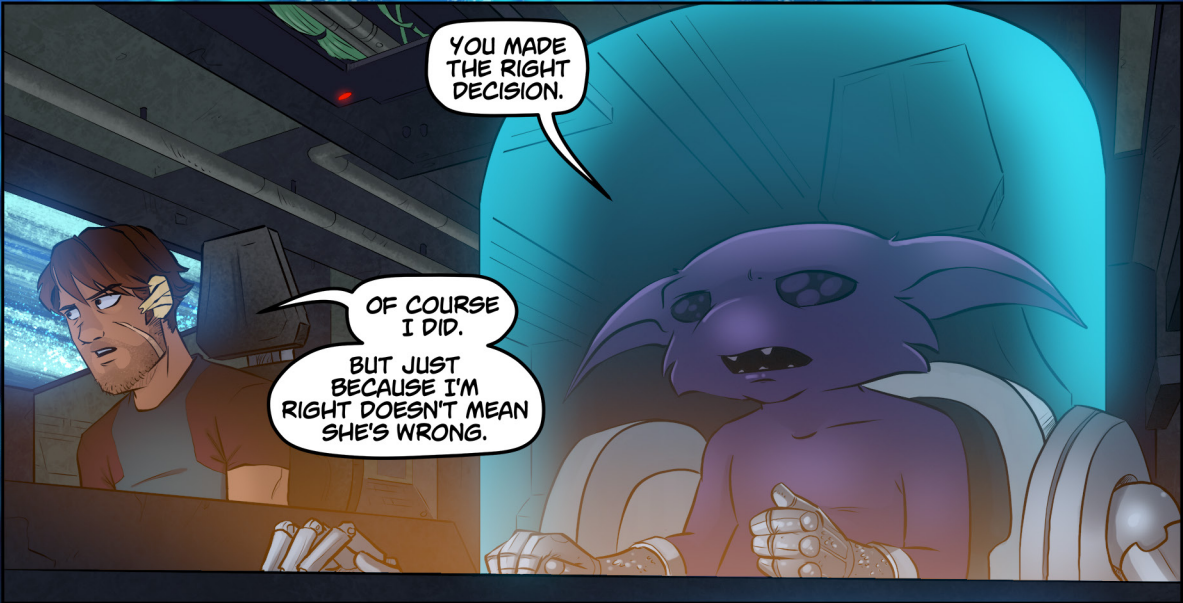
BUT CAN YOU LOOK ME IN THE EYES AND TELL ME THAT YOU **WANT TO?**







STOP
TWISTING YOURSELF
UP OVER THIS,
CORT.



YOU MADE
THE RIGHT
DECISION.

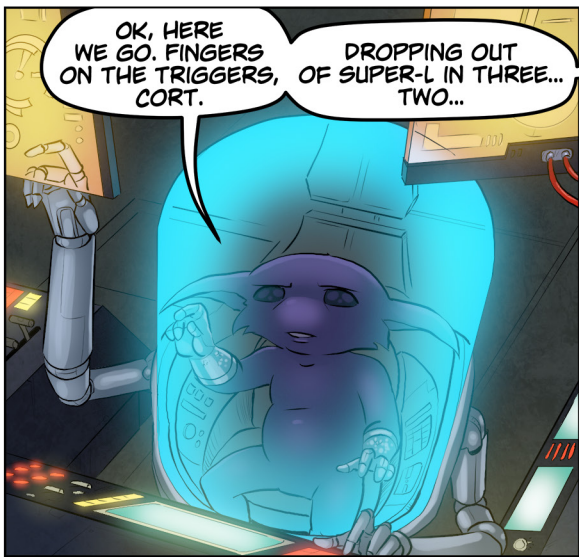
OF COURSE
I DID.

BUT JUST
BECAUSE I'M
RIGHT DOESN'T MEAN
SHE'S WRONG.



WELL, I HOPE HELPING HER
RETRIEVE THE STARCASTER FILLS
YOUR 'GOOD GUY' QUOTA FOR AT LEAST
THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, SO
THAT WE CAN GET BACK
TO BUSINESS.

ME TOO.



OK, HERE WE GO. FINGERS ON THE TRIGGERS, OF SUPER-1 IN THREE... TWO...



ONE.



NO MASSIVE SYNDICATE FLEET. THAT'S A RELIEF.

UNLESS THEY'RE ALREADY ON THE SURFACE...

EVER THE OPTIMIST.



WE'VE ARRIVED?

AH, SHE EMERGES.

WELCOME BACK TO ONA VI.

IT'S A PRETTY BIG ROCK, THOUGH, SO... NOW WOULD BE THE TIME TO TELL US WHERE **EXACTLY** YOU PARKED THIS STAR-SUCKING, GALACTIC-CONFLICT-GENERATING, ANCIENT **SUPER WEAPON** OF YOURS.

TO BE CONTINUED...