

THE MIDAS FLESH™

NORTH / PAROLINE / LAMB

#TWO
OF EIGHT



BOOM! BOX



THE MIDAS FLESH™

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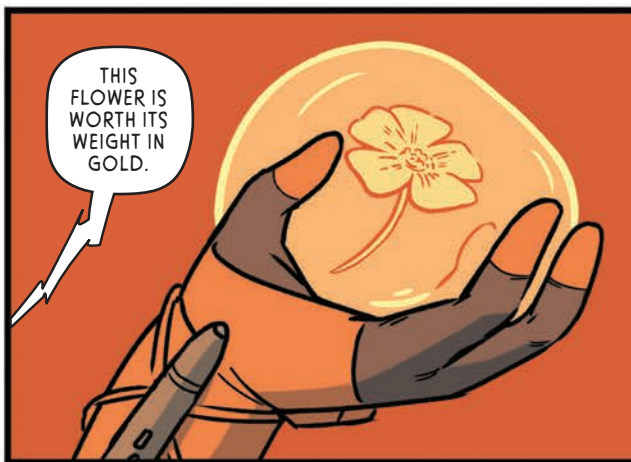
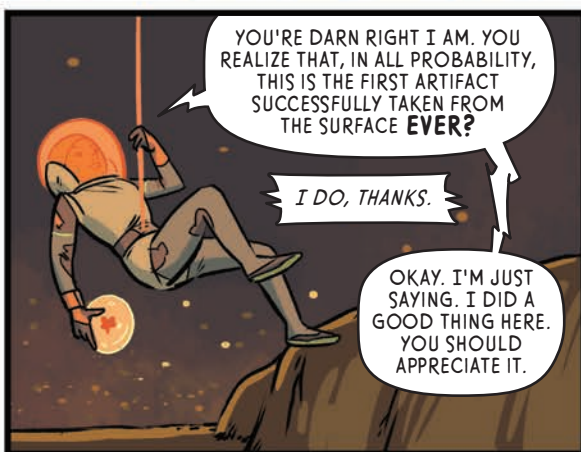
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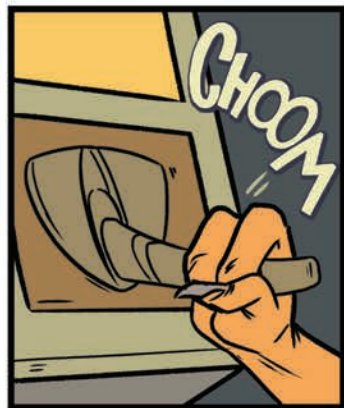
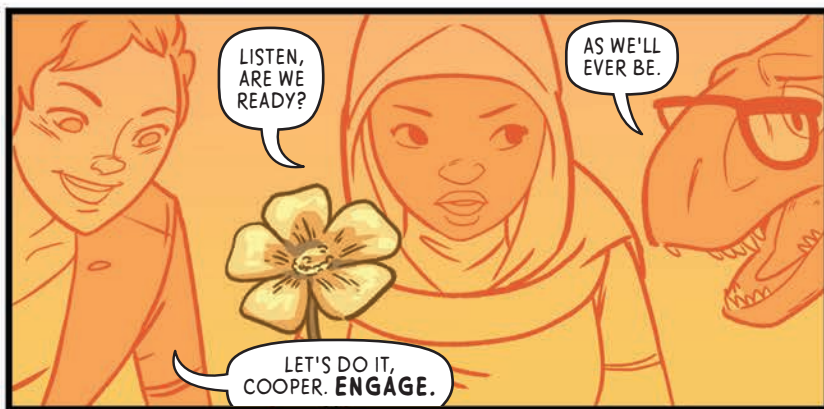
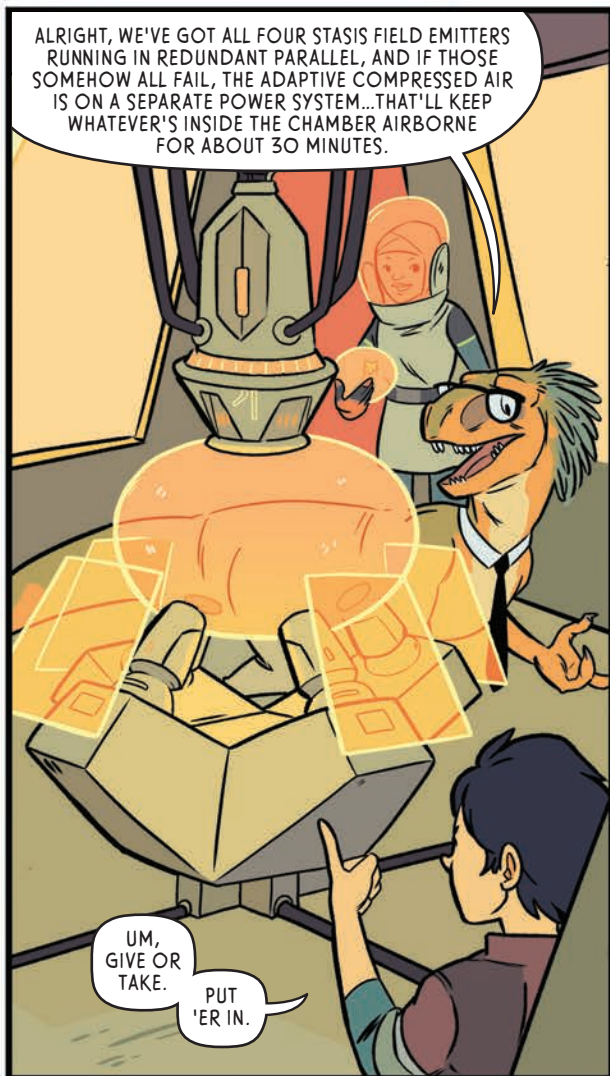
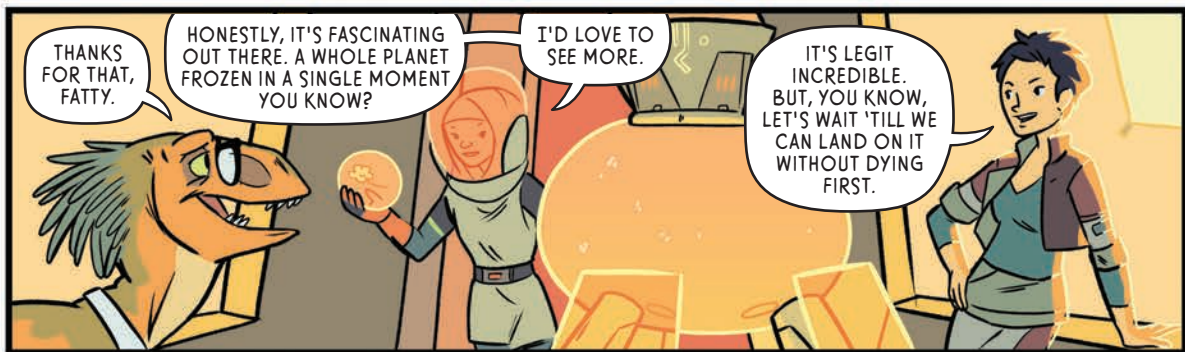
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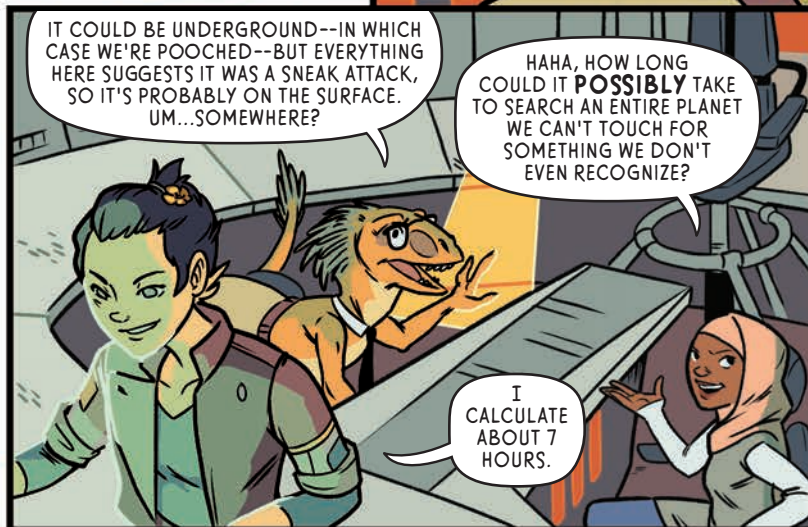
OKAY, WE KNOW ANYTHING THAT TOUCHES THIS PLANET--OR ANYTHING ON IT--SOMEHOW GETS TURNED TO GOLD. AND WE KNOW IF WE REMOVE SOMETHING FROM THE PLANET, IT LOSES THAT POWER.



THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT WE SUSPECT: THAT A **WEAPON** WAS DEPLOYED HERE, AND IT'S **STILL OPERATING**.

RIGHT, IT'S LIKE ELECTRICITY RULES. TOUCH SOMETHING ELECTRIC OR SOMETHING TOUCHING SOMETHING ELECTRIC, YOU GET SHOCKED.

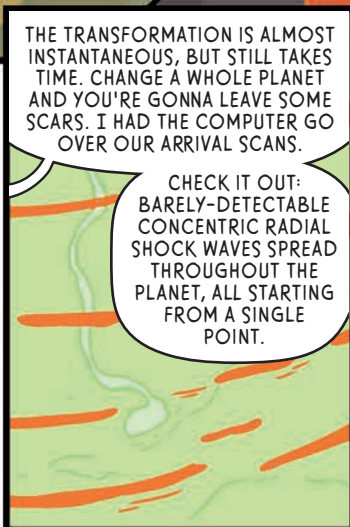
SO WHERE'S THE GENERATOR?



IT COULD BE UNDERGROUND--IN WHICH CASE WE'RE POOCHED--BUT EVERYTHING HERE SUGGESTS IT WAS A SNEAK ATTACK, SO IT'S PROBABLY ON THE SURFACE. UM...SOMEWHERE?

HAHA, HOW LONG COULD IT **POSSIBLY** TAKE TO SEARCH AN ENTIRE PLANET WE CAN'T TOUCH FOR SOMETHING WE DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE?

I CALCULATE ABOUT 7 HOURS.



THE TRANSFORMATION IS ALMOST INSTANTANEOUS, BUT STILL TAKES TIME. CHANGE A WHOLE PLANET AND YOU'RE GONNA LEAVE SOME SCARS. I HAD THE COMPUTER GO OVER OUR ARRIVAL SCANS.

CHECK IT OUT: BARELY-DETECTABLE CONCENTRIC RADIAL SHOCK WAVES SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE PLANET, ALL STARTING FROM A SINGLE POINT.



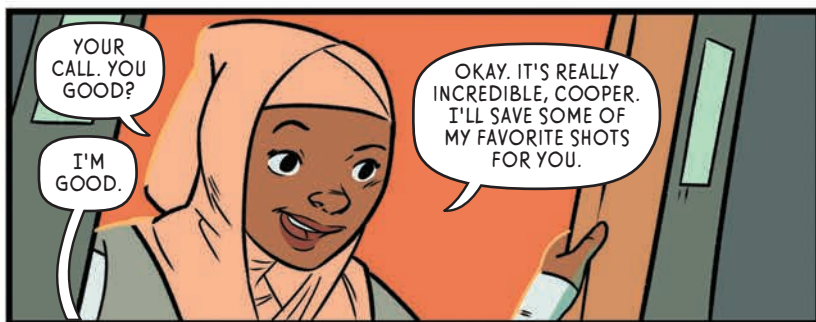
THERE'S OUR WEAPON, GUYS. FASTEST NEAR-SURFACE SPEED IS TWO THOUSAND KPH AND I DON'T WANNA GO HIGHER AND ENCOUNTER THOSE SATELLITES AGAIN.

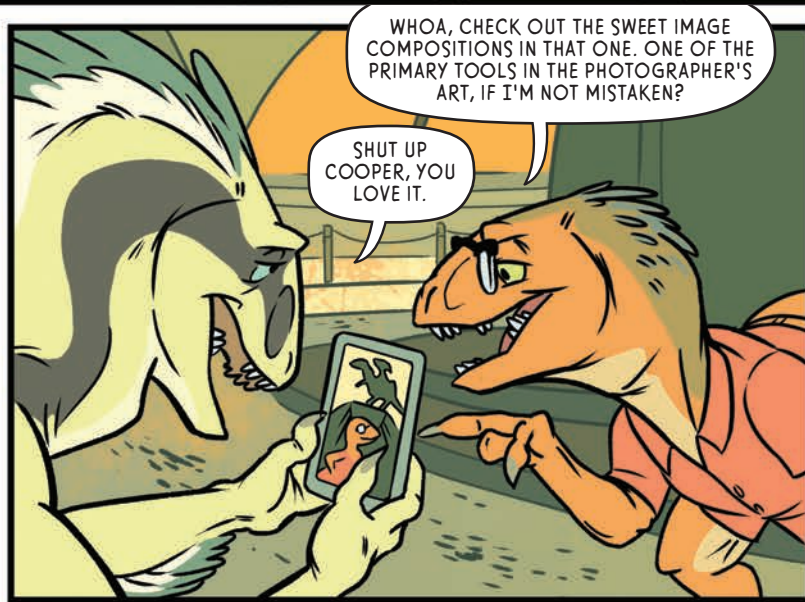
14 THOUSAND KILLOCKS AWAY, THEREFORE, SEVEN HOURS, THEREFORE **CAPTAIN JOEY ON HER FIRST MISSION SOLVES THE FRIGGIN' PROBLEMS**, CAN I GET A WHAT WHAT?

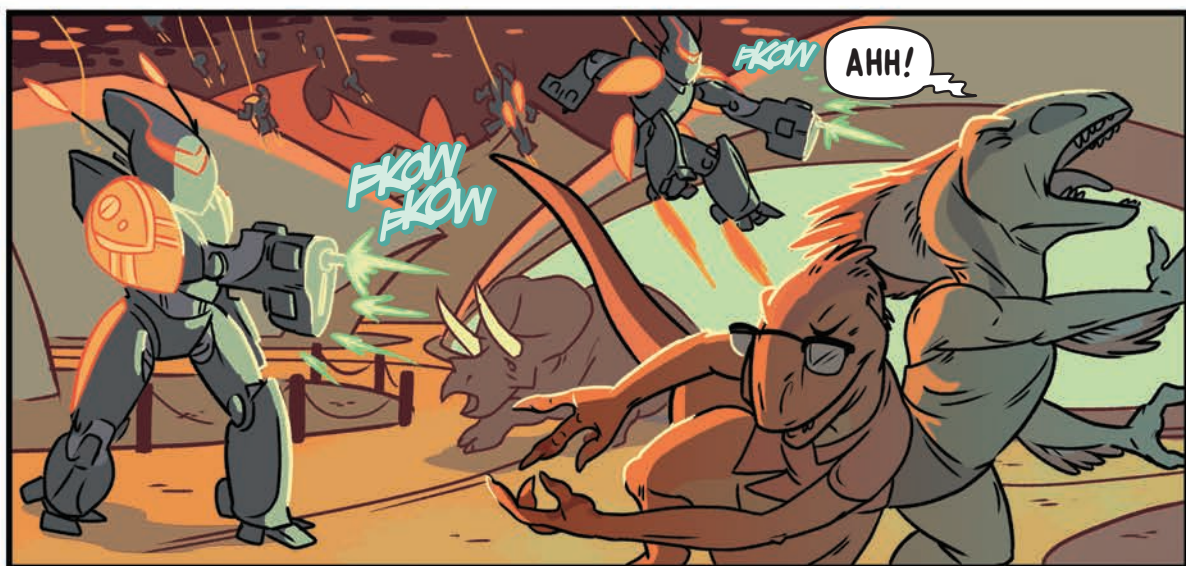


FINE. WHAT WHAT.

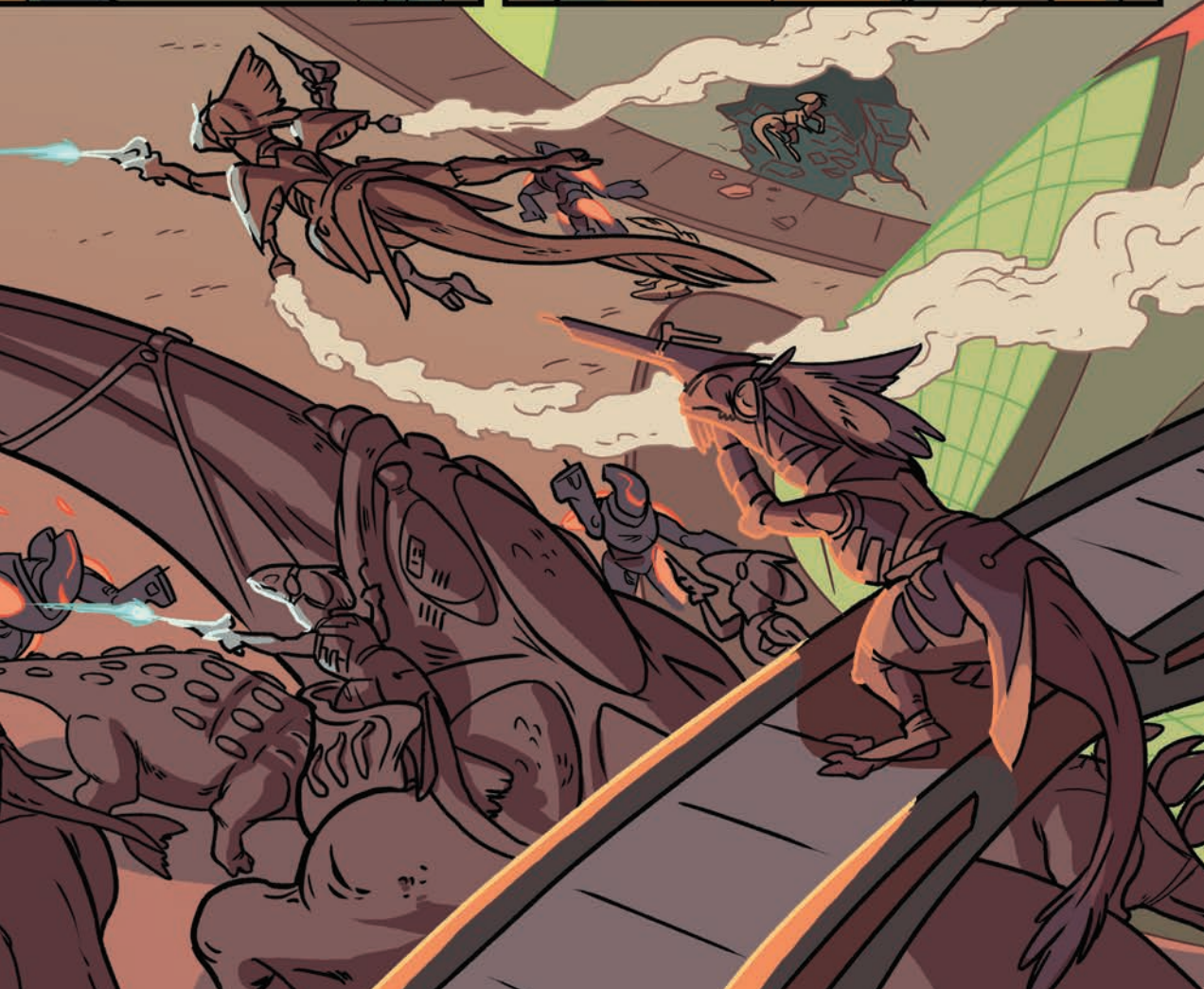
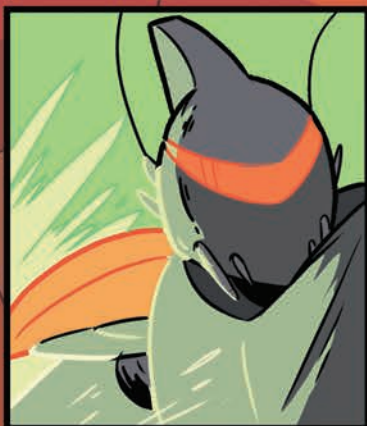
WHAT WHAT WHAT WHAT.

















LOOKS LIKE THE BUILDING WAS LITERALLY MADE OF STONE BEFORE IT WAS MADE INTO GOLD. THAT'S A FAIR SIGHT THICKER THAN THE WALLS WE WERE EXPECTING. I HATE TO SAY IT, JOEY, BUT BURNING THROUGH THIS IS GONNA TAKE A WHILE. LIKE, WEEKS.





YOU DIDN'T
TELL ME?

I WANTED IT TO BE A
SURPRISE. SO LISTEN, HERE'S
THE PLAN: WE CAN'T GO IN
FROM THE BOTTOM, BUT WE
CAN COME IN FROM THE TOP.
CHECK IT, I MADE A REALLY
AWESOME VISUAL AID.

WE USE THE LASER TO
MELT THROUGH THE GOLD,
SEPARATING THE ROOF FROM
THE BUILDING. GOLD REFLECTS
MOST OF THE I.R. LIGHT
THAT HITS IT: EIGHTY-FIVE
PERCENT, RIGHT?

SO WE JUST
MAKE SURE WE AVOID
BEING HIT BY OUR
OWN REFLECTIONS
AND TAKE OUR TIME.
IT'LL WORK.

AND ONCE THE
ROOF IS RESTING ON A
LAYER OF LIQUID GOLD,
WE FIRE PROJECTILES AT IT
TO SLIDE IT RIGHT OFF. HEY
PRESTO: THE INTERIOR'S
EXPOSED, AND WE'RE
SET.

...THAT...ACTUALLY
SOUNDS
PLAUSIBLE.

IT'LL TAKE A
WHILE THOUGH.
WE'RE STILL LOOKING
AT A DAY, MAYBE
MORE.



NO WORRIES.
WE'VE GOT THE
PROVISIONS, THE
POWER, AND
NOBODY ELSE
KNOWS WE'RE
HERE.



WE'VE GOT
ALL THE TIME
IN THE
WORLD.



GENTLEMEN. THIS
WAS RECORDED
TWO HOURS AGO.

ELEVEN HOURS BEFORE THAT, WE RECEIVED AN ALARM FROM AN AUTOMATED SYSTEM SO OLD WE COULDN'T UNDERSTAND IT AT FIRST.

TOOK US SIX HOURS JUST TO DECODE WHAT THE ALERT WAS ABOUT--OBSOLETE PROTOCOL WITHOUT ANY EXTANT DOCUMENTATION--AND SEVERAL MORE TO VERIFY WHAT IT WAS SAYING. THAT LED US TO SOME FORGOTTEN AND ENCRYPTED ARCHIVES, WHERE WE HAD TO BREAK INTO OUR OWN DAMN FILES.

WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO BRIEFED ON ARE THE FRUITS OF THAT EFFORT. I REMIND YOU THIS COMMUNICATION IS CLASSIFIED.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO--RECORDS ARE INCOMPLETE SO WE CAN'T NAIL IT DOWN ANY FURTHER--ONE OF OUR PROBES REPORTED A PLANET MADE, INCREDIBLY, OF WHAT APPEARED TO BE GOLD. **SOLID GOLD.** IT SIGNALLLED THAT IT WAS GOING TO ATTEMPT A LANDING.

THAT WAS THE LAST WE HEARD. SHORTLY THEREAFTER THE FEDERATION BRASS OF THE TIME SENT A MANNED SHIP TO FOLLOW UP.

THEY NEVER MADE IT OUT THE DOOR.

THAT GOT OUR ATTENTION. THIS TIME THE FEDERATION SENT FIVE MORE SHIPS WITH EXPLICIT ORDERS: TEST IT, OBSERVE IT, REPORT BACK. NO LANDINGS TO BE ATTEMPTED.

THESE SHIPS DISCOVERED FOUR THINGS. ONE: THE PLANET WAS AS IT APPEARED: SOLID GOLD. TWO: THE PLANET HAD BEEN UNREMARKABLE UNTIL THIS TRANSFORMATION TOOK PLACE, WHICH APPEARED TO HAVE CAUGHT THE WORLD OFF-GUARD.

AND FOUR: THERE WAS NO WAY TO CONTROL THAT INTERACTION.

THREE: ANY CONTACT WITH THE PLANET WOULD TURN THAT CONTACTING ENTITY, WHETHER ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, OR MINERAL, INTO GOLD ITSELF.

THE FEDERATION HAD STUMBLING UPON A WORLD LEFT PERMANENTLY UNINHABITABLE BY AN UNKNOWN WEAPON--LIKELY AN EXTREMELY STABLE POLYMORPH. IT OUTCLASSED OUR TECHNOLOGY IN EVERY WAY. WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO BEGIN PULLING OFF SOMETHING LIKE THIS. HELL, WE **STILL** DON'T.

BUT SOMEONE OUT THERE DID, AND THEY'D ALREADY DEPLOYED IT AT LEAST ONCE. MAYBE THEY'D LEFT OUR GALAXY AND MAYBE THEY'D STUCK AROUND, BUT THERE WAS NO REASON TO ASSUME THEY WEREN'T HOSTILE.

WE NEEDED TO BE STRONGER.

AND WE **BECAME** STRONGER. BUT IN THE BEGINNING, WHEN THE FEDERATION DETERMINED WE COULDN'T CONTROL, DUPLICATE--OR EVEN LOCATE--THE WEAPON, WE DID THE NEXT BEST THING. WE ENSURED THAT NOBODY ELSE COULD EITHER. **WE ERASED THE PLANET.**

WE COVERED THE PLANET IN LAYERS OF SELF-SUSTAINING SATELLITES, INVISIBLE AT LONG RANGE. WE MADE THE PLANET AS UNREMARKABLE AS POSSIBLE, AND THEN WE ERASED IT. ONE SYSTEM OUT OF BILLIONS: NOBODY WOULD NOTICE.

NOBODY DID. THOSE WHO COULD'VE HAD ALREADY BEEN EXECUTED.

THE FEW WHO SURVIVED--THOSE WHO GAVE THE EXECUTION ORDER--UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED THAT THEIR NON-DISCLOSURE WAS UNDER PAIN OF DEATH FOR THEMSELVES, THE FAMILIES, AND WHOEVER THEY CONTACTED. AND WHEN THOSE GENERALS DIED...

...THE SECRET WAS FORGOTTEN. WE'D ERASED IT TOO WELL. THE AUTOMATIC SYSTEMS AROUND THE PLANET RAN THEMSELVES WITHOUT INCIDENT UNTIL YESTERDAY, WHEN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN CENTURIES, THEY WERE ENCOUNTERED. THEY WERE ENGAGED.

AND THEY WERE **BREACHED.**

AS YOU CAN SEE, THE SHIP THAT MADE IT INSIDE CAME PREPARED WITH SOME VERY NEW AND VERY EXPENSIVE STASIS TECHNOLOGY. WE DON'T KNOW FROM WHERE YET. WE WERE DUE TO ROLL IT OUT TO MAJORITY OF THE FLEET NEXT YEAR.

THEY'VE BEEN USING IT TO REMOVE MATTER FROM THE SURFACE.

THAT SHIP, AND THOSE IN IT, ARE CURRENTLY THE GREATEST THREAT TO THE FEDERATION. BESIDES THEM, WE FOUR ARE THE ONLY LIVING SOULS WHO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE AND POTENTIAL OF THIS PLANET.

YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN OUR FASTEST SHIPS: GO CLEAN THIS MESS UP.

FEDERATION CONTROL OUT.

blip

blip blip

SLUGGO, NOQUE: YOU GUYS BELIEVE THIS? HOW WOULD ANYONE PULL OFF A TRICK LIKE THAT?

MAYBE IT'S A TECHNOLOGY SO ADVANCED IT'S, YOU KNOW--MAGIC.

MAYBE IT'S A TECH SO ADVANCED IT'S **IMPOSSIBLE**. HEY FRANCES, YOU FIGURE THEY'RE SENDING THREE OF US FOR INSURANCE?

THEY PROBABLY JUST WANT US TO KEEP EACH OTHER HONEST.

MAINTAIN RADIO SILENCE. RUSS OUT!

YES SIR!

SECRETARY CLAUDE. GET ME CAPTAIN JACKS.

I WANT THE TITANIC.



OH MY GOSH HAS ANYONE NOTICED HOW THIS IS EXTREMELY BORING?

OH MY GOSH HAS ANYONE NOTICED THAT BECAUSE I CAN BARELY STAND IT??



I LITERALLY CAN'T STAND IT. I'M SERIOUS, IT IS LITERALLY BEYOND MY ABILITY TO WITHSTAND. I AM DEAD NOW.

I WAS ALIVE HOURS AGO WHEN THIS STARTED BUT NOW I AM A DEAD BODY.

I'LL BE IN MY ROOM IN CASE ANYTHING EXCITING HAPPENS. MAYBE I WILL BE ALIVE SOON.

I CAN ONLY HOPE THE METAL WALLS OF MY BUNK WILL REVIVE ME WITH THEIR COMPARATIVELY-INTERESTING WAYS.



SHE COULD'VE JUST ASKED TO GO ON BREAK.

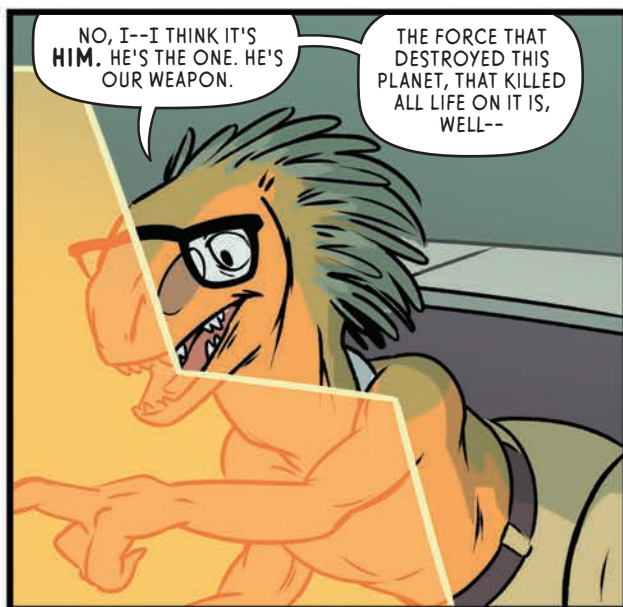
PRETTY SURE SHE JUST DID.

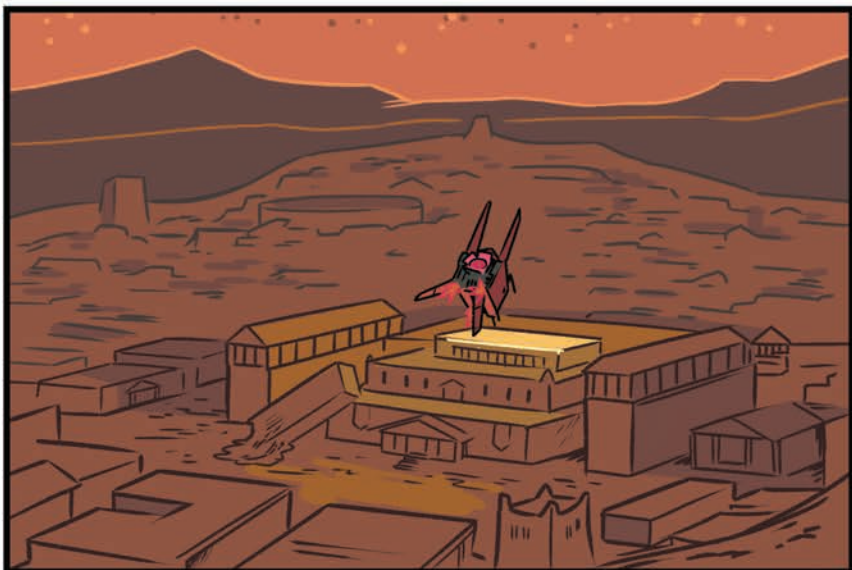












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NEXT MONTH!