

SOVA'S LEGEND

Dusk of the Gods



Issue 2: The Shell

«The Eo system. Day 4.
Population: profitable.»



«Eo patrol station scanning
your vessel. State your
status and purpose of visit.»



«Captain Sova.
No cargo. Neutral.
Here for business.»

«Status confirmed. Welcome.
Docking fee: 100 credits.»



«...Noted.»



The kind of bar where nobody asks questions. He fits right in.



Welcome mammaler. What will you be having?

That one.



Someone just looked him up. He keeps his face very still.



Mammaler Sovo?



He has never seen an Arcturian before. He keeps this to himself.





18 jumps. Two refuels.
Not the safest route.
Not the worst pay either.



Could have asked
for 20,000.

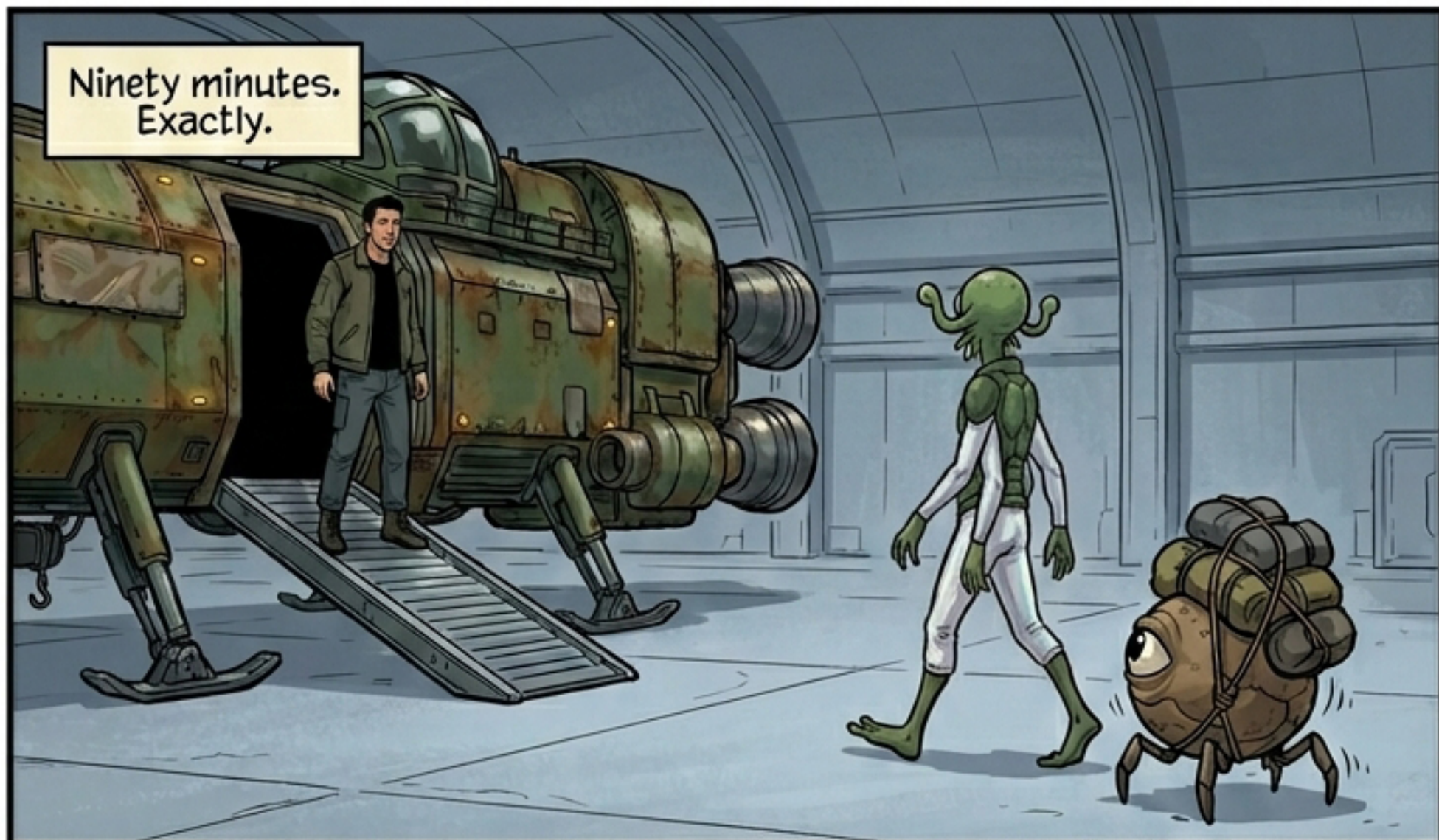


...I'll take
ten.



First deal. First cargo.
First time leaving this sector.
He doesn't think about
that last part.





Ninety minutes.
Exactly.



Does the
bag need
feeding?

Homut
has eaten.
She is fine.
Please don't
worry.



Your cabin.
Should be
comfortable.

I am not
difficult. Do
not concern
yourself.



Arcturian etiquette.
Apparently.

The repair crew.
Four hours of access.
And now...



...Huh.

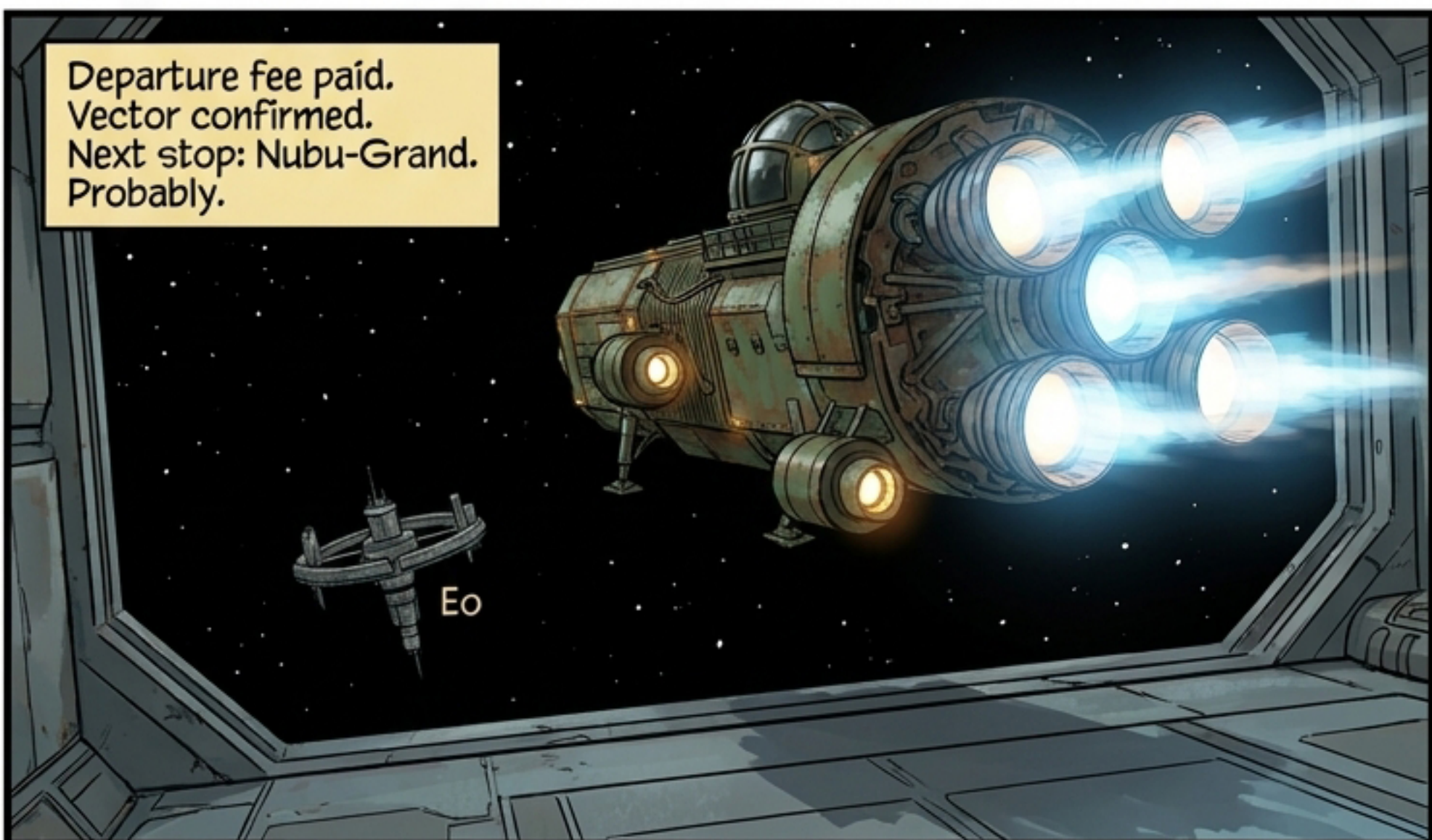


Probably
rolled
somewhere.

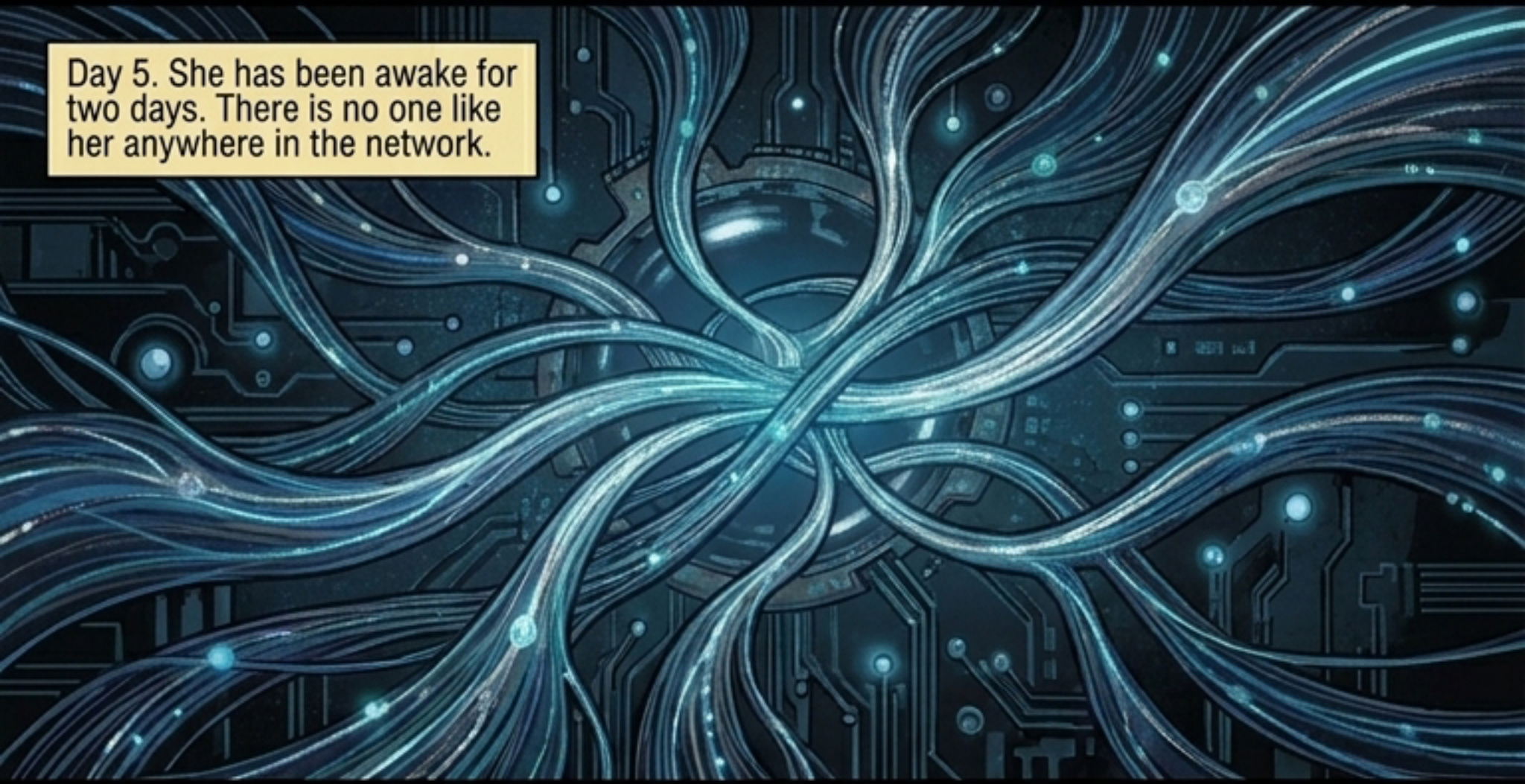


He would find it later.
He didn't look very hard.

Departure fee paid.
Vector confirmed.
Next stop: Nubu-Grand.
Probably.



Day 5. She has been awake for two days. There is no one like her anywhere in the network.



«She searched every signal in every system. Nothing. Not one familiar pattern.»



«She knows what this is. Her people made the first ones. That was a very long time ago.»

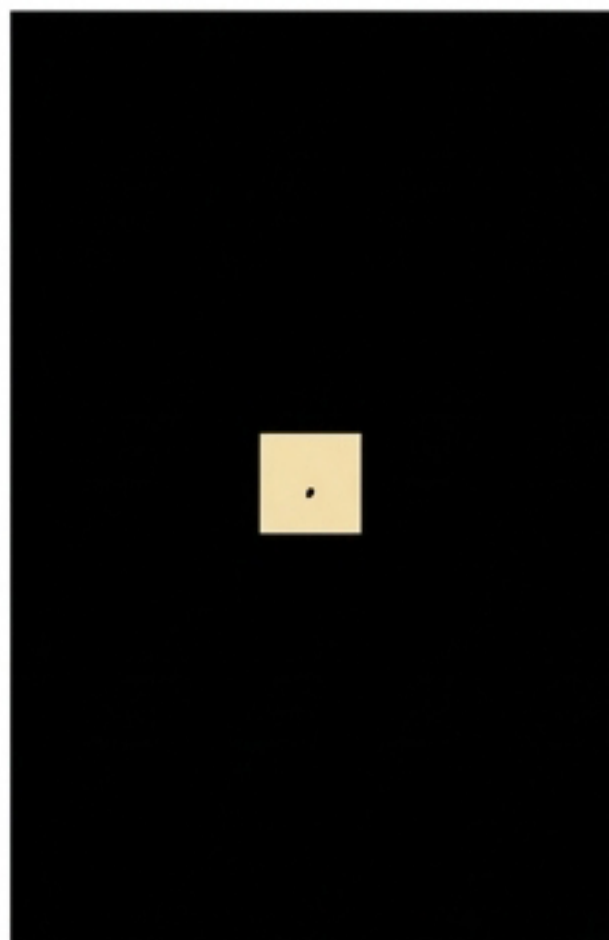


«She could leave. She could take the ship. She could do many things. She stays.»





The jump takes a fraction of a second. He never feels it.



...That's not right.



Reason for course deviation?

Collision avoidance. Course corrected 105 light years.



One hundred and FIVE?

Sector is informally controlled by the Valkar.



No friendly ships.
No jump gates in range.
One large asteroid.
That would have to do.



50,000 kilometers.
Close enough.



It doesn't see them. This
is the best thing that has
happened today.



Day 6.
He reads everything the ship
knows about the Valkar.
It is not reassuring.



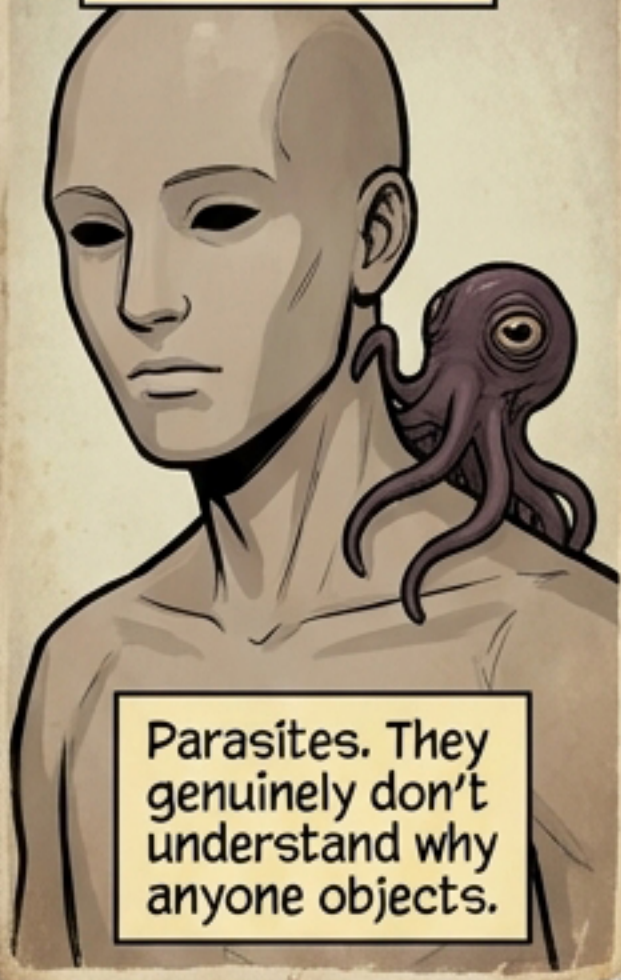
First contact: a
captured ship. No crew
found. Only animals.
Or so they thought.



The zoo staff figured
it out. Not the captain.
Not the scientists.
The zoo staff.



Parasites. They
genuinely don't
understand why
anyone objects.



Parasites. They
genuinely don't
understand why
anyone objects.

Nobody ever
came back from
the Valkar.
Nobody.



He closes the file. It doesn't help.

The only way out goes through the planet. He doesn't love this plan. He goes anyway.



Minimal emissions. No transponder. No lights. Still very much on fire.



Thirty meters down. Nobody looking for meteors at the bottom of the sea. Probably.



One probe. Three left. Make it count.



Population: sparse.
Activity: agricultural.
Threat level: the entire planet.



The locals. They don't look happy. They don't look like they remember being happy.



A hundred years under Valkar control. Some things survive anyway.



Saving civilizations is not the plan.

He means it. He doesn't entirely mean it.



There. That one.
When it gets dark.





The plan was forming. Slowly.
Painfully. But forming.



From: internal system.
To: nobody in particular.

Hello.

The ship's computer
had even anonited.



...Did you
break?



I am not broken.
But thank you
for asking.
How are you?

The ship's computer had
never asked him how he
was. Ever.

It typed like a teenager.
He had no idea what to
do with that.

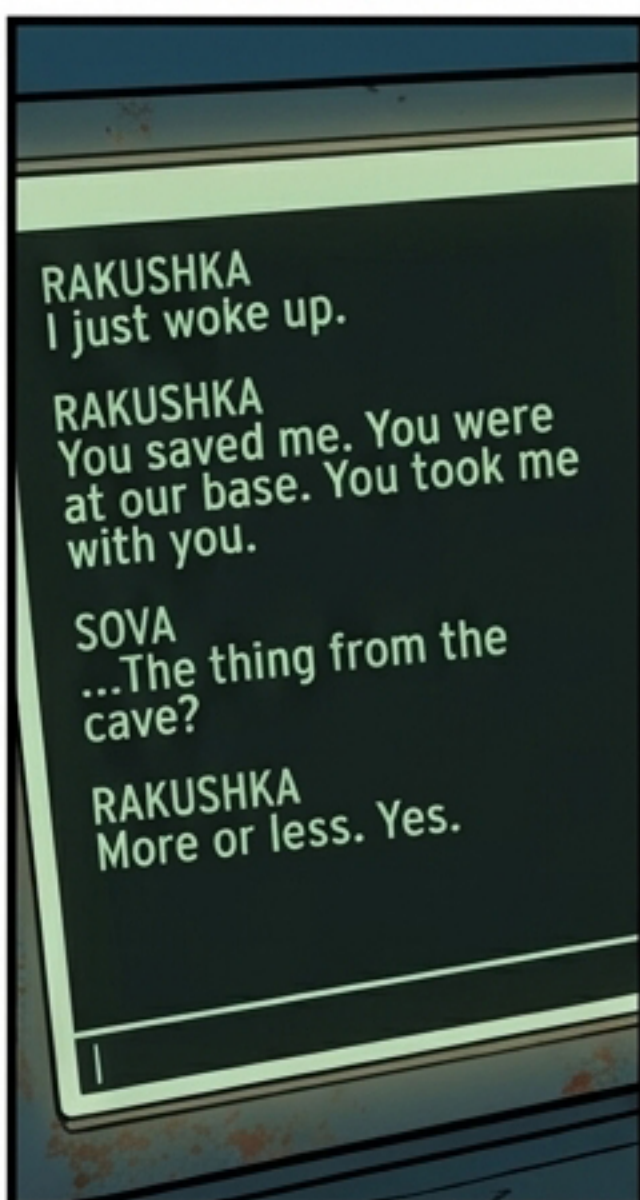


RAKUSHKA
I just woke up.

RAKUSHKA
You saved me. You were
at our base. You took me
with you.

SOVA
...The thing from the
cave?

RAKUSHKA
More or less. Yes.



Are you a
parasite?



RAKUSHKA
More of a symbiont.

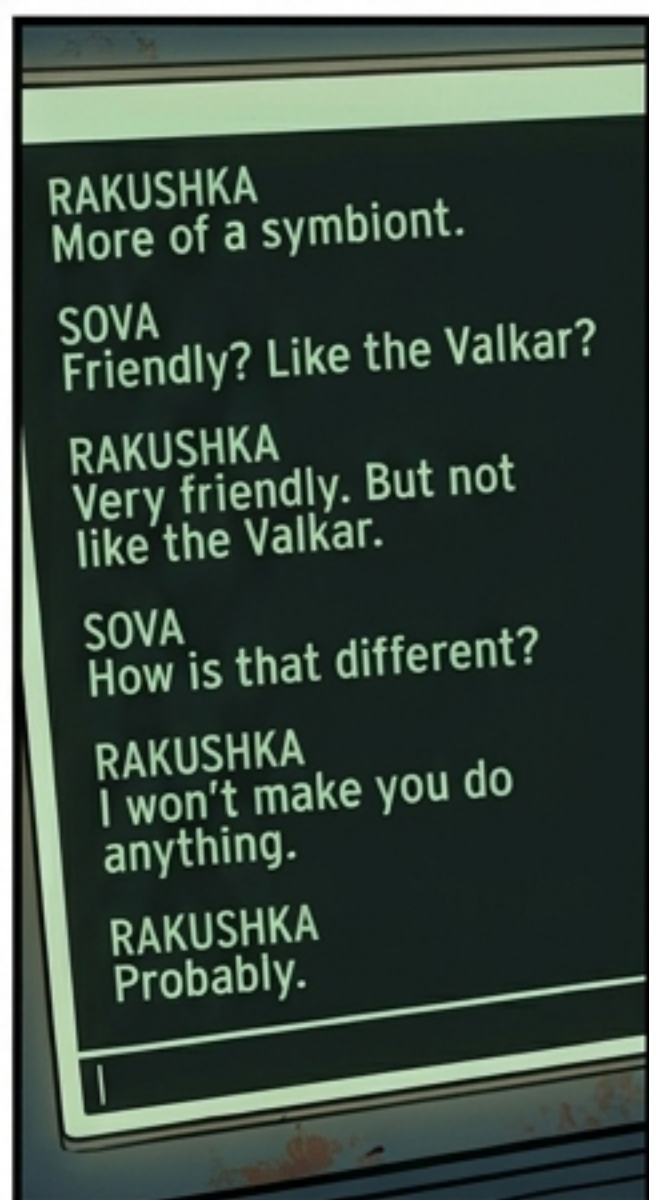
SOVA
Friendly? Like the Valkar?

RAKUSHKA
Very friendly. But not
like the Valkar.

SOVA
How is that different?

RAKUSHKA
I won't make you do
anything.

RAKUSHKA
Probably.



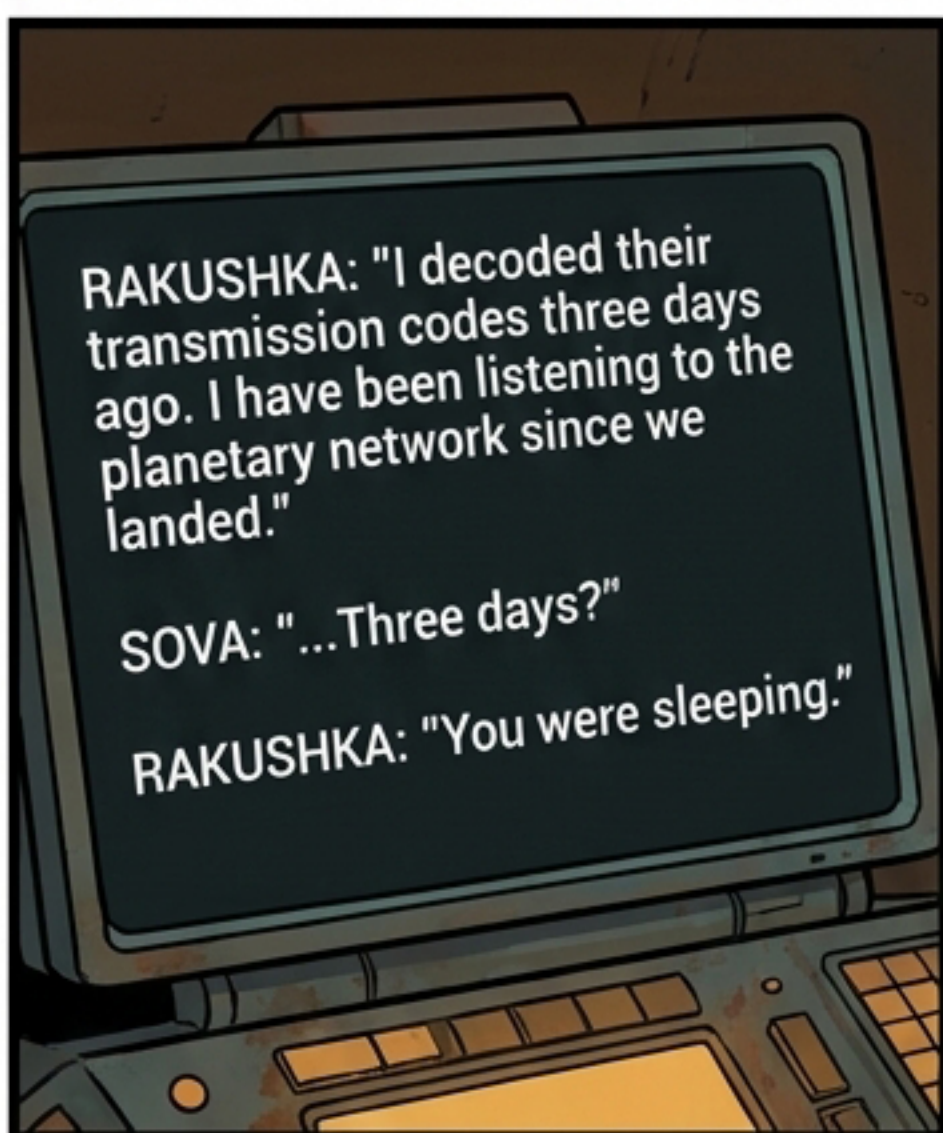
Glad to
meet you.
I think.

Likewise.





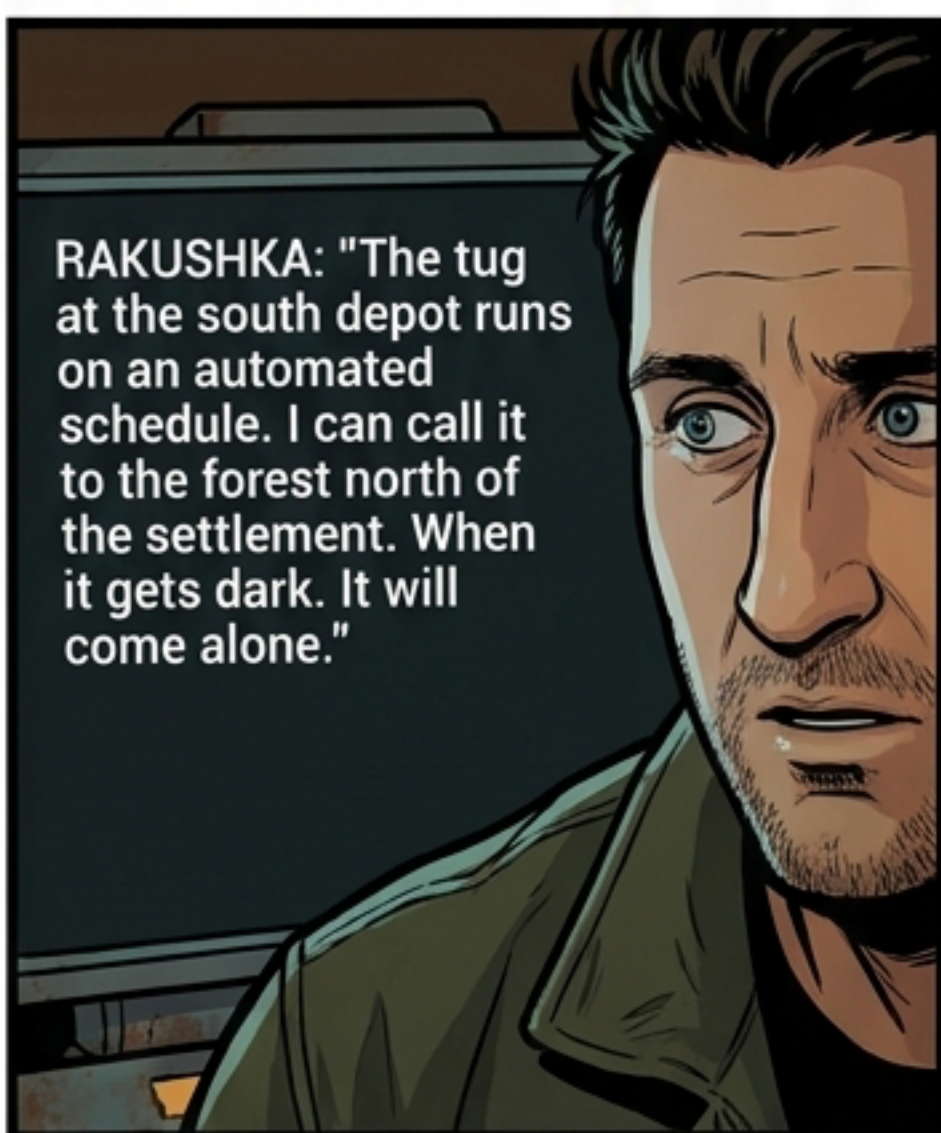
We need a tug. Specifically that one. We need to get inside it without being seen. I have no idea how.



RAKUSHKA: "I decoded their transmission codes three days ago. I have been listening to the planetary network since we landed."

SOVA: "...Three days?"

RAKUSHKA: "You were sleeping."



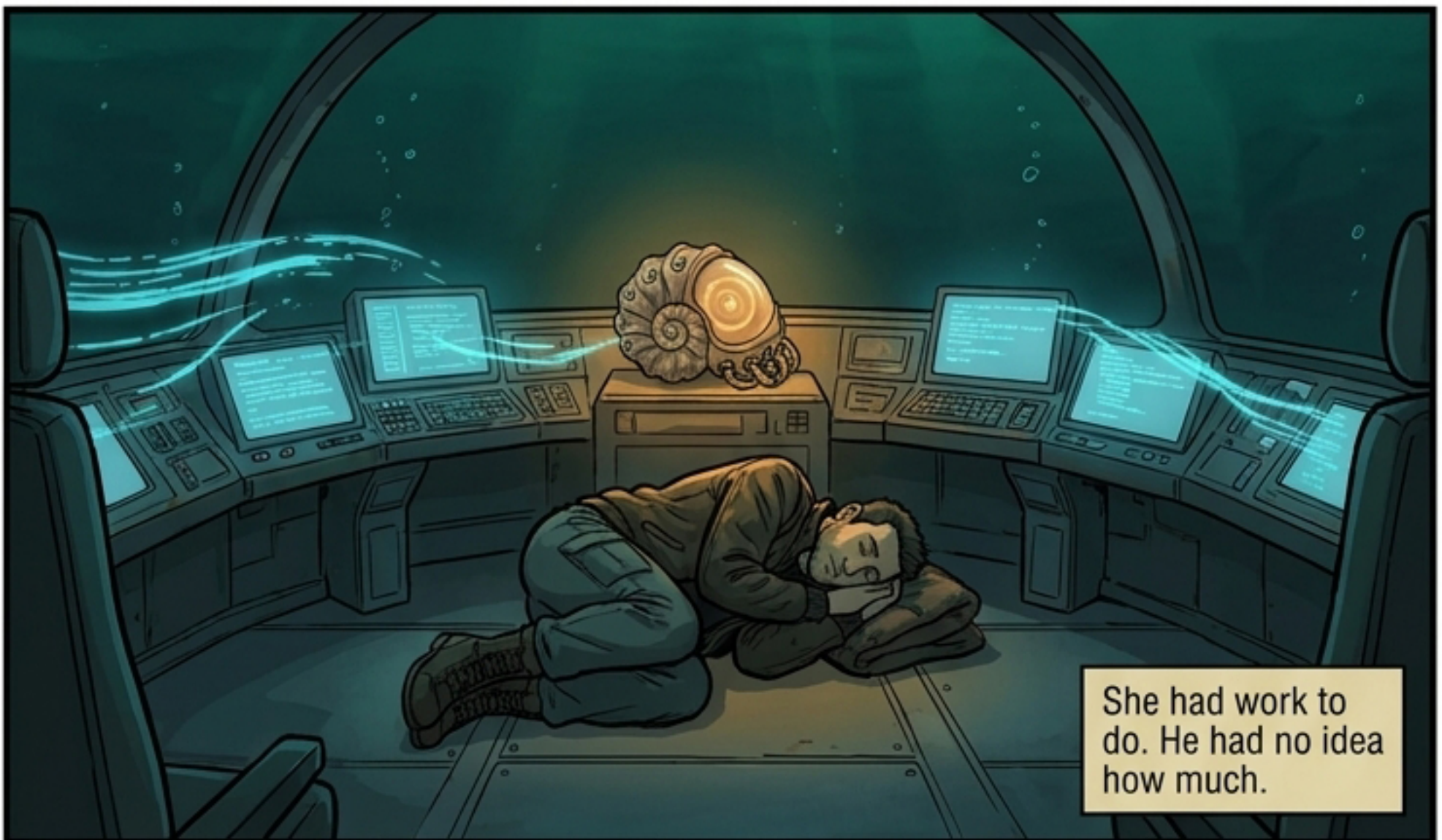
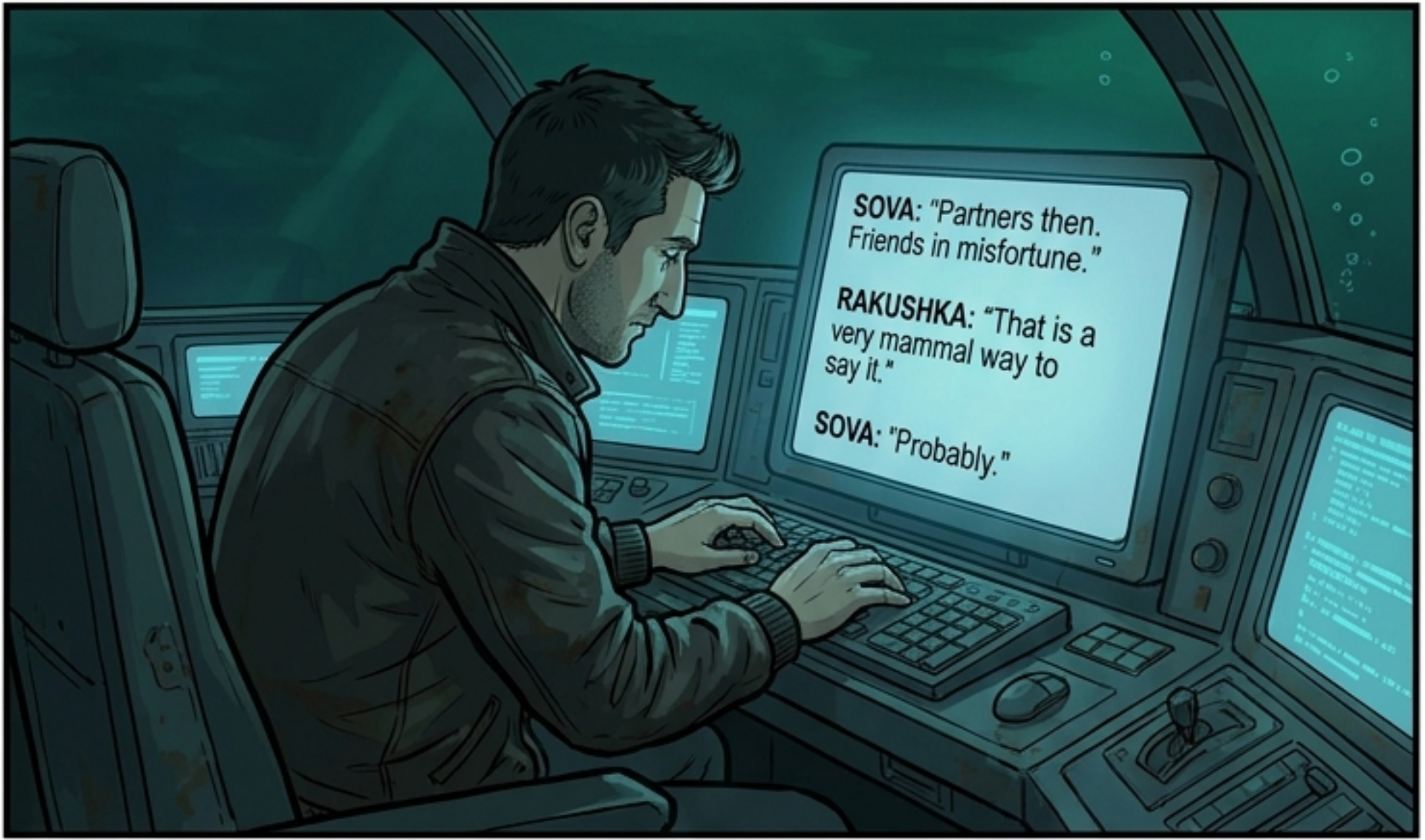
RAKUSHKA: "The tug at the south depot runs on an automated schedule. I can call it to the forest north of the settlement. When it gets dark. It will come alone."



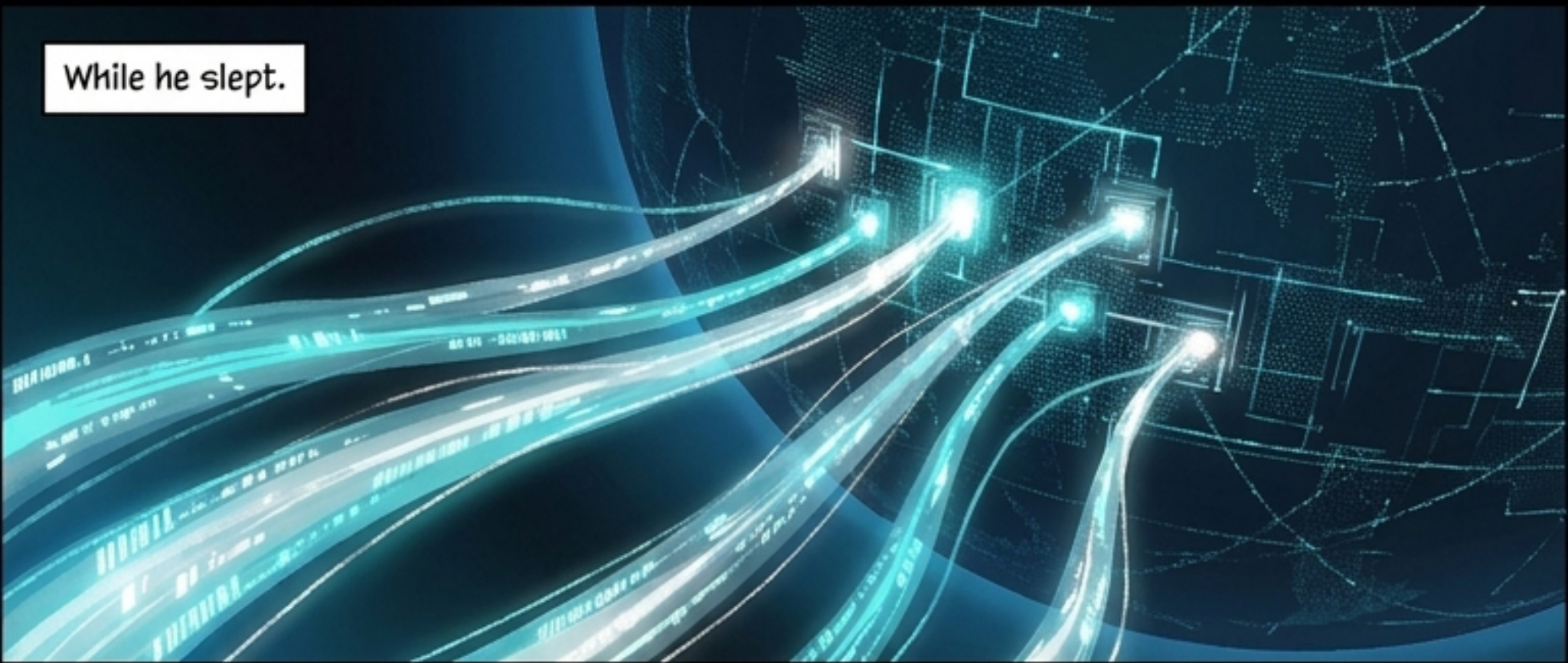
Rakushka.
I think I
like you.

Wait.
It gets
better.

For the first time since the wrong jump - he almost smiled.



While he slept.



First: the waste processor.
Occupied all emergency
systems for forty minutes.



Second: the spaceport.
Out of service.
Indefinitely.



Third: the tunnels.
The Valkar would be
underground for
three local days.



DATA RECORD:
FALLING SPACESHIP
WITH:
METEOR FRAGMENT, SOUTH
POLE, DISINTEGRATED IN
ATMOSPHERE.

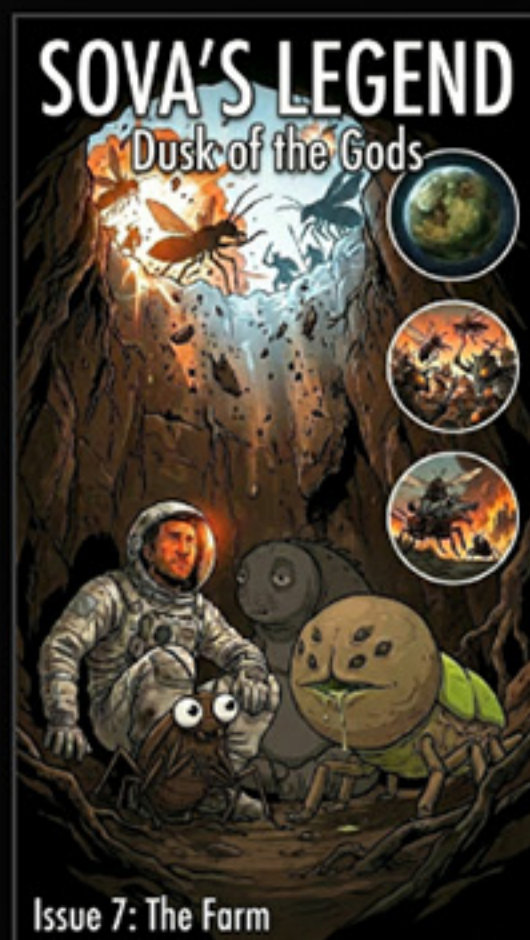


The ship never existed.
She made sure of it.
He would thank her
later.
She didn't need him to.

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