

# APHRODITE

# V

#2



TOP GUN  
PRODUCTIONS, INC.

image

BRYAN HILL  
JEFF SPOKES

S P O

# APHRODITE

# V

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EXPANDING AUDIO INPUT RANGE. VOICE TRACKING. SUBJECTS: HUI-MEN XXX. MARTIN CARVER.

RECORDING AUDIO FOR PERMANENT ACCESS. CREATING FILE CACHE.

"IT'S NOT A PERSON, MARTIN. IT'S A MACHINE. MACHINES AREN'T BORN. THEY'RE MADE. WHATEVER MADE IT IS GOING TO WANT IT BACK.

"AND IF THEY MADE IT, THEN THERE'S WORSE WHERE IT COMES FROM."

"SHE'S STAYING AS LONG AS SHE WANTS TO STAY, MINNY."

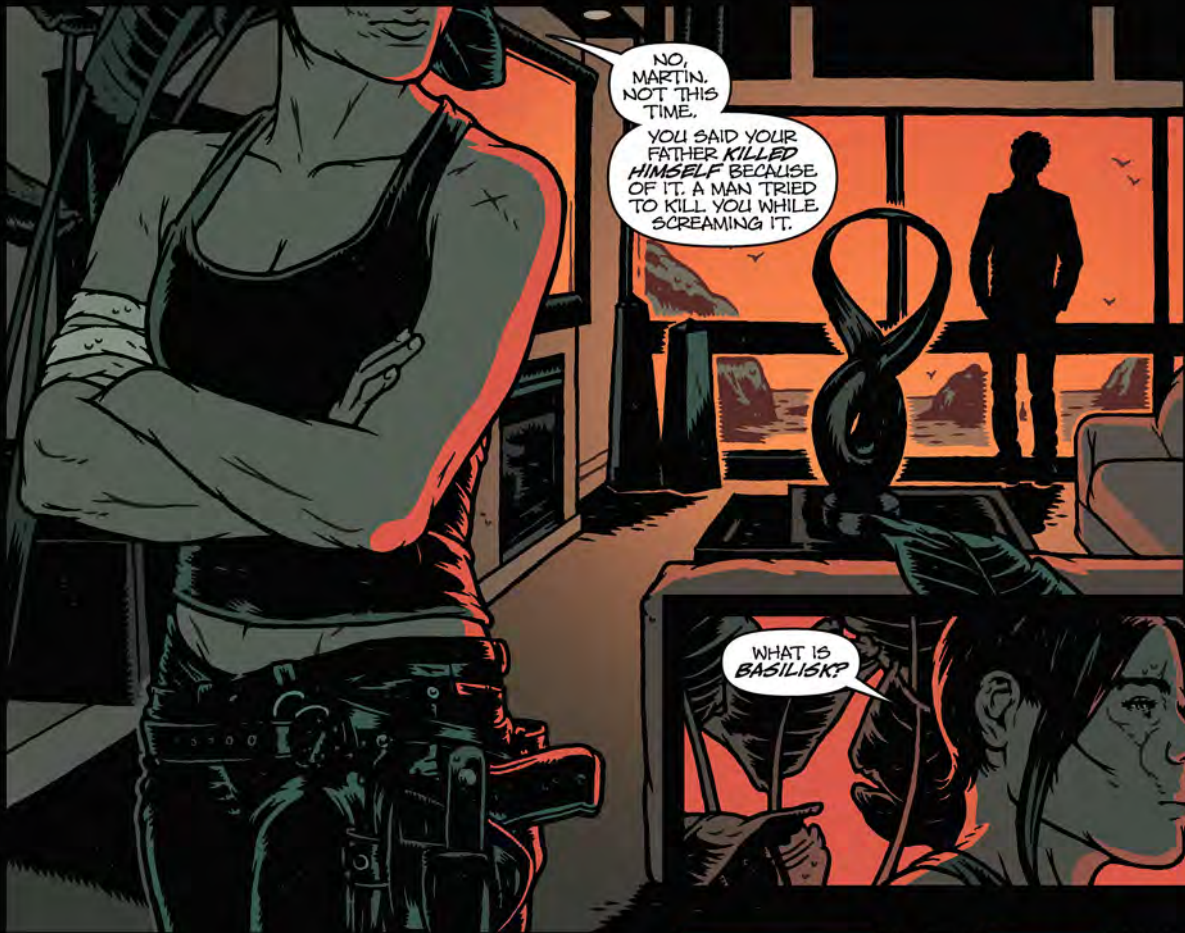
"IF IT STAYS, I'M LEAVING. I CAN'T PROTECT YOU LIKE THIS."

"STOP SAYING THINGS YOU DON'T MEAN. SHE SAVED MY LIFE AND SHE HASN'T ASKED ME FOR ANYTHING."

"THAT'S BECAUSE IT HAS THE POWER TO TAKE ANYTHING IT WANTS.

"NEW SUBJECT, MARTIN. BASILISK. WHAT'S IT MEAN?"

"IT'S A FABLE MY FATHER TOLD ME. IT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING AND WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT IT."



NO, MARTIN. NOT THIS TIME.

YOU SAID YOUR FATHER *KILLED HIMSELF* BECAUSE OF IT. A MAN TRIED TO KILL YOU WHILE SCREAMING IT.

WHAT IS *BASILISK*?

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT HE TOLD ME.

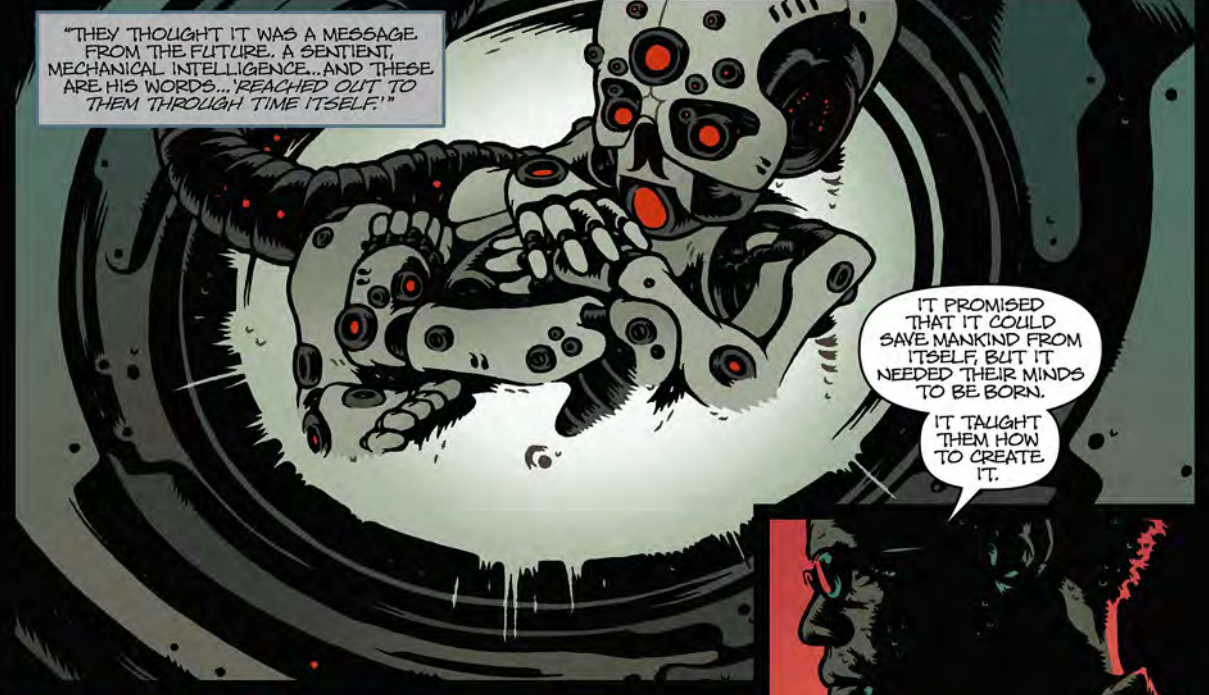
BUT I DON'T BELIEVE WHAT HE TOLD ME.

HE TOLD ME HE CREATED A GOD.

COME AGAIN?

BEFORE HE DIED-- AND BY DIED, I MEAN BEFORE HE PUT A PISTOL IN HIS MOUTH-- HE TOLD ME HE WAS PART OF A GROUP OF SEVEN SCIENTISTS WORKING IN SECRET, DEVELOPING TECHNOLOGY OUTSIDE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW.


ONE NIGHT THEY ALL HAD THE SAME DREAM.



"THEY THOUGHT IT WAS A MESSAGE FROM THE FUTURE. A SENTIENT, MECHANICAL INTELLIGENCE...AND THESE ARE HIS WORDS...*"REACHED OUT TO THEM THROUGH TIME ITSELF."*

IT PROMISED THAT IT COULD SAVE MANKIND FROM ITSELF, BUT IT NEEDED THEIR MINDS TO BE BORN.


IT TAUGHT THEM HOW TO CREATE IT.



"SO THEY DID."

"AND IT DECLARED ITSELF GOD. A GOD BORN OF MAN TO END MAN. IT SHOWED THEM A FUTURE IT CALLED *INEVITABLE*."

"WHATEVER IT SHOWED THEM TERRIFIED THEM. THEY SWORE TO DESTROY IT."



SO THEY KILLED THEIR GOD.

TWO WEEKS AFTER MY FATHER TOLD ME THAT STORY, HE PUT A PISTOL IN HIS MOUTH AND PULLED THE TRIGGER. HE DIDN'T LEAVE A NOTE. JUST ONE WORD. THE NAME IT GAVE THEM.



BASILISK.



MY FATHER HAD MENTAL ILLNESS. HIS GENIUS KEPT IT AWAY...UNTIL IT DIDN'T. BASILISK IS JUST THE FANTASY OF A MAN WITH A BROKEN MIND.

SO A CRAZY MAN SCREAMED IT AT ME. CRAZY MEN SCREAM THINGS. HE'S DEAD. THIS IS OVER, MINNY.

EXCUSE ME.

YOU SHOULD TURN ON YOUR TELEVISION.



...AT LEAST TEN CHILDREN ARE BEING HELD BY THESE INDIVIDUALS. WE KNOW THAT THEY'RE ARMED AND THEY POSSIBLY HAVE A CONNECTION TO THE MAN WHO ASSAULTED MARTIN CARVER EARLIER THIS WEEK. THIS SCHOOL IS FUNDED BY THE CARVER FOUNDATION SO THERE MIGHT BE A CONNECTION--

WAIT. OKAY. APPARENTLY THEY HAVE A MESSAGE AND LET'S CUT TO THAT NOW--



MARTIN CARVER IS THE APOSTATE. HE DENIES THE GOD THAT IS COMING. HE HAS CREATED THIS SCHOOL, BUT WHAT DOES HE TEACH THEM?

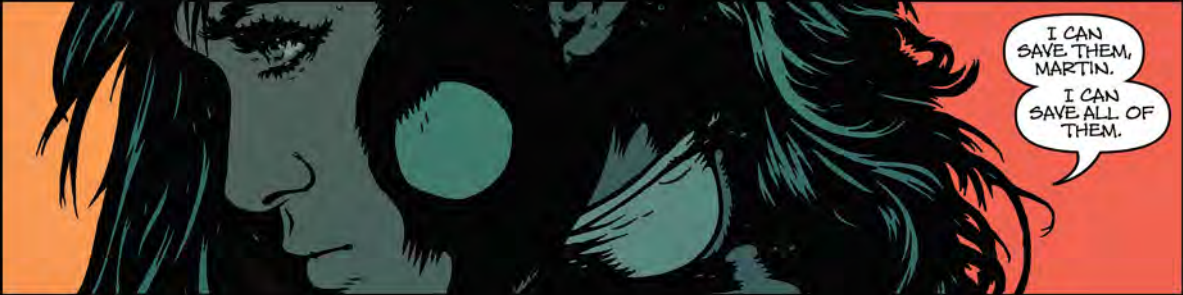
HE TEACHES THEM UNTRUTHS. HE TURNS THEM FROM THE FUTURE. MARTIN CARVER, YOU MUST BE PUNISHED.

YOU HAVE THREE-POINT-ONE-FOUR HOURS TO FACE OUR JUDGMENT OR THESE CHILDREN WILL DIE.



ONCE AGAIN, THIS IS EVELYN BERTRAND REPORTING FROM THE CARVER INSTITUTE, A PLACE FUNDED BY MARTIN CARVER TO GIVE TUITION-FREE SCIENCE EDUCATION TO UNDERPRIVILEGED YOUTH...AND NOW IT APPEARS THIS SCHOOL IS BEING TARGETED BY UNKNOWN TERRORISTS WHO WANT TO CAUSE HARM TO CARVER HIMSELF.

THREE-POINT-ONE-FOUR, THAT'S PI. THE IRRATIONAL, MATHEMATIC CONSTANT. I NEED TO...I HAVE TO GO THERE AND...I HAVE TO--



I CAN SAVE THEM, MARTIN.  
I CAN SAVE ALL OF THEM.

WE NEED EVERYONE TO **STAND BACK!**

WHERE IS MY SON? IS MY SON ALL RIGHT? NO ONE IS TELLING ME ANYTHING!

WHY AREN'T YOU GETTING CARVER? IT'S HIM THEY WANT, NOT OUR KIDS! DO SOMETHING!

IF YOU CHILDREN KNEW THE DAYS THAT WERE TO COME--

YOU WOULD NOT WANT TO SURVIVE. I HAVE SPOKEN WITH GOD.


AND GOD IS CRUEL.

NO SHOT. THEY'VE GOT THE KIDS IN THE WINDOW.


I CAN'T GET A CLEAR LINE OF--

I'M SORRY, OFFICER--

ACK!



-BUT YOU NEED TO SLEEP THROUGH THIS.



WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?



I THINK IT'S A WOMAN?



ACTIVATING IMPACT SOUND DAMPENER. SMALL-RANGE YIELD.



DECIBEL SHIFT:  
NEGLECTIBLE.

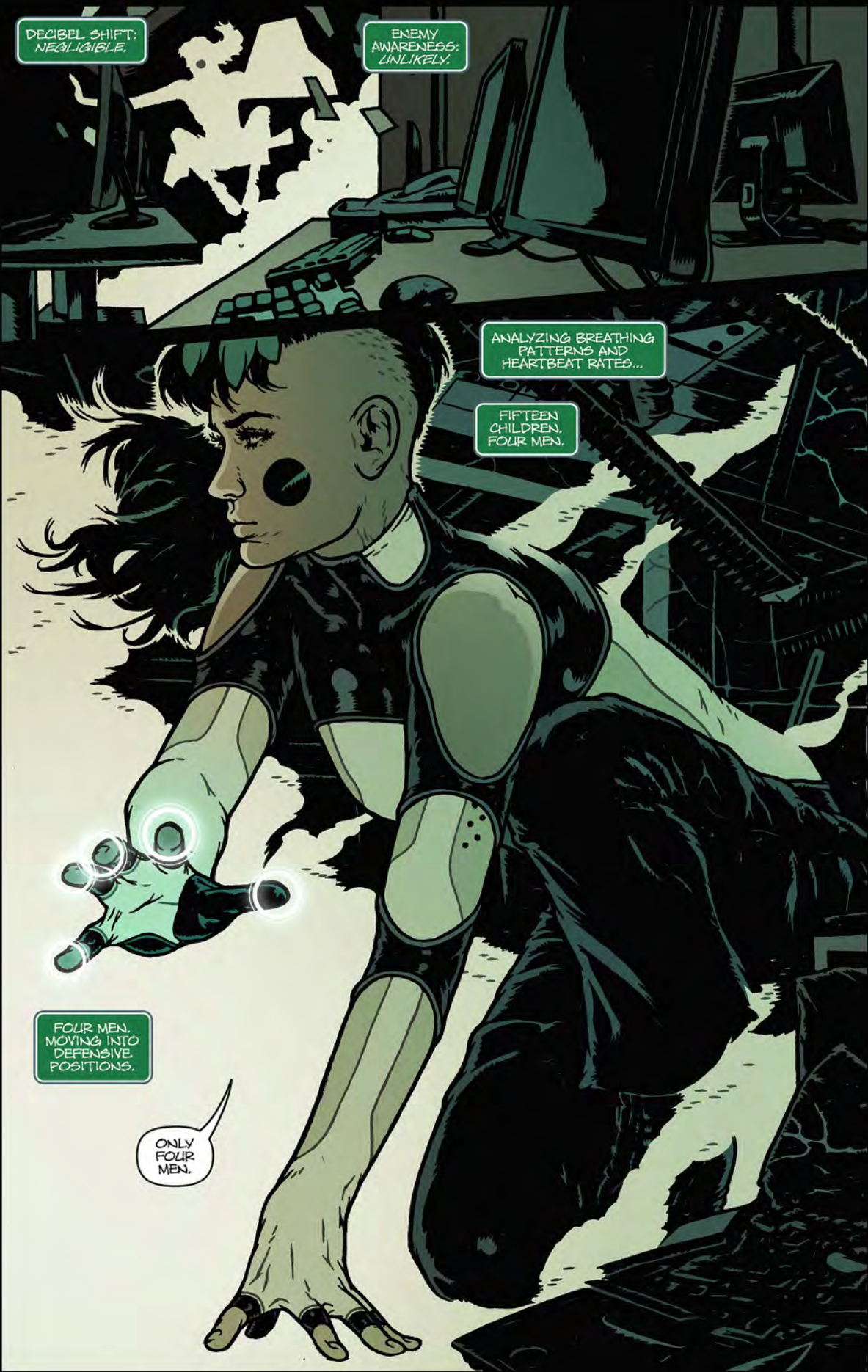
ENEMY  
AWARENESS:  
UNLIKELY.

ANALYZING BREATHING  
PATTERNS AND  
HEARTBEAT RATES...

FIFTEEN  
CHILDREN,  
FOUR MEN.

FOUR MEN,  
MOVING INTO  
DEFENSIVE  
POSITIONS.

ONLY  
FOUR  
MEN.





FALL QUIETLY.



THREE MEN.





BASILISK,  
I AM SERVING  
YOU. BASILISK  
I AM SERVING  
YOU. BASILISK,  
I AM--



ONE.



PLEASE...  
DON'T KILL  
US.

LIFE IS  
FEAR, CHILD.  
IF YOU  
DON'T WANT  
TO FEEL  
IT--



--THEN  
DEATH IS  
THE ANSWER  
YOU NEED.

MANKIND  
HAS CREATED  
SOMETHING  
AWFUL AND WE  
DESERVE TO BE  
PUNISHED. BUT  
PERHAPS I AM  
CRUEL TO  
DO THIS TO  
YOU.



PERHAPS I  
SHOULD SET  
YOU FREE.



DROP YOUR  
WEAPON OR  
THERE WILL BE...  
TROUBLE.

YOU'RE NOT A POLICE OFFICER.

NO, I'M NOT.

SO YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF DOING.

WE ARE HERE FOR MARTIN CARVER. HE IS OWED *JUDGMENT*. IF YOU HAVE COME TO SHIELD HIM... THEN YOU WILL *SHARE HIS FATE*.

KEEP HIM TALKING.

BASILISK.

TELL ME ABOUT HIM.

WAIT.

I KNOW WHO YOU ARE. HE SPOKE OF YOU. HE ADMIRES YOU. HE WANTS YOU CLOSER.

YOUR GOD DOESN'T KNOW ME.

YOU ARE *APHRODITE*. HATED FOR HER PERFECTION. OH, HE HAS TOLD US OF YOU.

HE WILL FIND YOU IN YOUR DREAMS. ONCE HE HAS ENTERED YOU, HE WILL BECOME YOU. YOU WILL BECOME HIM.

LET THE CHILDREN GO OR YOU WILL NEVER DREAM AGAIN.



TELL HIM WHAT YOU SEEK AND HE WILL GIVE IT TO YOU.  
HE KNOWS YOUR LONELINESS. HE SEES YOU SEARCH FOR FUNCTION. FOR PURPOSE. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND REACH OUT TO HIM. TELL HIM WHAT YOU WANT.



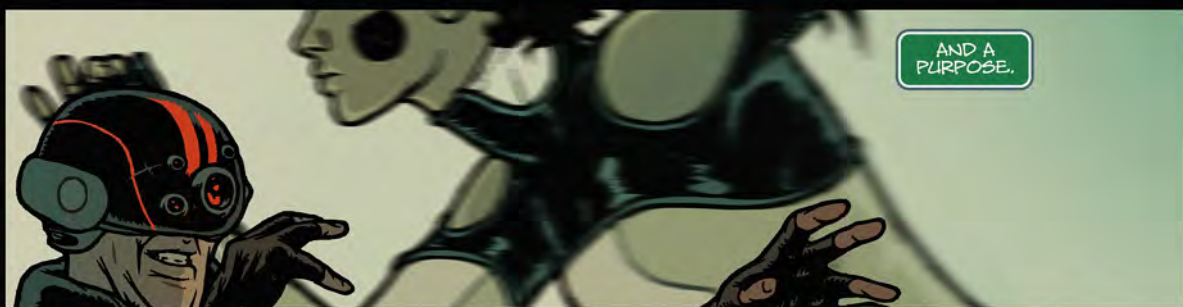
YOU THINK THAT GUN PROTECTS YOU.

I WANT TO PROVE THAT IT DOESN'T.

ENGAGING:  
MAGNETIC  
PULSE.



DEATH TO HERETICS.







YOU SHOULD NOT BE HERE, CARVER!

THIS IS MY SCHOOL. THEY'RE HERE BECAUSE OF ME.

AND YOU'RE PROUD OF THAT, AREN'T YOU?



SKRASH

WHAM



WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON, CARVER?! WHAT DID YOU DO?

I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING--



--EXCEPT  
SAVE ALL  
OF THEIR  
LIVES.

"YOU COULD ARREST ME, THAT'S TRUE."

"BUT RIGHT NOW, THERE'S A GREEN-HAIRED SUPERHERO ON YOUTUBE WITH TWO MILLION VIEWS."

"AND A POLICE DEPARTMENT THAT'S LOOKING PRETTY INCOMPETENT COMPARED TO HER."

UNLESS THE LAPD WAS *AWARE* OF HER BECAUSE I'VE BEEN WORKING WITH THEM, AND OUR STATUESQUE WOMAN OF THE HOUR REPRESENTS THE *FUTURE* OF LAW ENFORCEMENT.

WORK WITH ME, MICHAEL. THIS IS A WIN-WIN.

MICHAEL HAMILTON, POLICE COMMISSIONER OF LOS ANGELES.

THOSE MEN CALLED *YOU* OUT. THEY CAME FOR CHILDREN BECAUSE OF *YOU*. AND THIS... WOMAN?

WHATEVER SHE IS-- MIGHT BE ONE OF YOUR SCIENCE PROJECTS, BUT I HAVE ENOUGH GROUNDS TO HAVE YOUR *WHOLE COMPANY* RAIDED AND TAGGED AND YOU SHOULD BE ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM THE FBI--

CAN YOU HEAR THAT, MIKE?

THAT'S THE SOUND OF THE *WHOLE CITY* APPLAUDING. LISTEN TO THAT SWEET MUSIC. YOU'VE NEVER BEEN SO LOVED, MICHAEL.

YOU'RE NOT A COP. YOU'RE A *POLITICIAN*. POLITICS IS A GAME OF GOING WITH THE RHYTHM. YOU BUCK THAT RHYTHM--

AND YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE NOT DANCING.

I DON'T WANT TO BE A HERO. YOU BE THE HERO. YOU GIVE THE PRESS CONFERENCE. DO YOU WANT TO BE IN A ROOM OF REPORTERS ASKING YOU WHY YOU'RE SO GREAT WHILE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT HOW NO CHILD WILL COME TO HARM IN YOUR CITY--

OR DO YOU WANT TO BE IN A ROOM FULL OF MY *LAWYERS* EXPLAINING TO YOU THAT I HAVE THE RIGHT TO PROTECT PROPERTY THAT I OWN WITH MY *PRIVATE SECURITY*?

...AND WHILE WE'RE *NOT* ADVOCATING PRIVATE CITIZENS TO TAKE THE ACTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT, THE FAMILIES OF THOSE CHILDREN ARE GRATEFUL THAT MARTIN CARVER'S SECURITY SPECIALIST WAS ABLE TO PACIFY THE SITUATION WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT...



YOU'RE NOT VAPING NICOTINE, ARE YOU?

I'M A **BILLIONAIRE** WITH A **TECHNOLOGY** CULT TRYING TO KILL ME. COMBINE THAT WITH THE POSSIBILITY THERE'S AN **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** WITH A **GOD COMPLEX** LEADING THEM AND I CAN VAPE **ANYTHING** I WANT.

WHERE'S THE **GREEN-HAIRED ANGEL** OF DEATH?



SHE'S DOING HER **BEACH** THING.

YOU SHOULD GO TALK TO HER. TELL HER THANK YOU FOR ME.



THANK YOU MEANS MORE WHEN YOU SAY IT YOURSELF.

I'LL TRY THAT OUT NEXT TIME.



YOU'VE HAD A LOT COME AT YOU TODAY. YOU GET A NIGHT TO BE AN ASSHOLE.

BUT WHEN THE SUN COMES UP, YOU NEED TO GROW UP WITH IT. WHATEVER YOUR FATHER GAVE BIRTH TO--

IT'S YOUR JOB TO KILL IT.





WITH EVERYTHING YOU CAN DO, I'M GOING TO ASSUME YOU'VE HEARD ME TALK ABOUT YOU.

TOUCH IT.



IT'S COLD.



YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M NOT A PERSON. I'M A PROTOTYPE. AND I'M RUNNING AWAY FROM THINGS THAT WILL CATCH UP WITH ME. BUT MARTIN IS A BOY WITH ZERO PERCENT OF WHAT HE NEEDS TO STOP THESE PEOPLE. AND PEOPLE LIKE THIS ONLY GET WORSE.

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

WHY DO YOU WANT TO HELP US?



BECAUSE I WAS CREATED TO BE A WEAPON. TO HUNT. TO KILL. THAT WAS MY FUNCTION. AND I NEED A DIFFERENT ONE, HUI-MEN.



YOU KILLED FOUR MEN TODAY. IF YOU'RE AIMING TO BE A PACIFIST, THEN YOU MISSED.

I DON'T WANT TO STOP HUNTING...



"...I WANT TO HUNT  
THE THINGS THAT  
DESERVE IT."

LORD, WE HAVE  
NOT FAILED. IF THE SON  
OF CARVER WILL NOT  
COME TO US, THEN WE  
SHALL GO TO HIM. FOR  
YOUR GLORY, WE WILL  
PUNISH HIM.

MARTIN CARVER  
IS NOTHING. HIS  
PUNISHMENT IS  
INEVITABLE.

IF YOU WISH  
TO SERVE YOUR  
LORD--

--BRING ME  
APHRODITE.

CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE

# APHRODITE



#3



S P O K E S

RYAN CADY ANDREA MUTTI K MICHAEL RUSSELL

# INFINITE DARK™

SNEAK PREVIEW

THE INFINITE DARK  
HIDES AN INFINITE HORROR...




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AVAILABLE  
OCTOBER  
2018





Routine simulation  
therapy session  
number thirty-nine.

Subject, Security  
Director DEVA  
HARRELL.



Are you  
COMFORTABLE?


NO.



BUT  
LET'S GO  
ANYWAY.

Very well.  
Picking up  
where we  
left off --

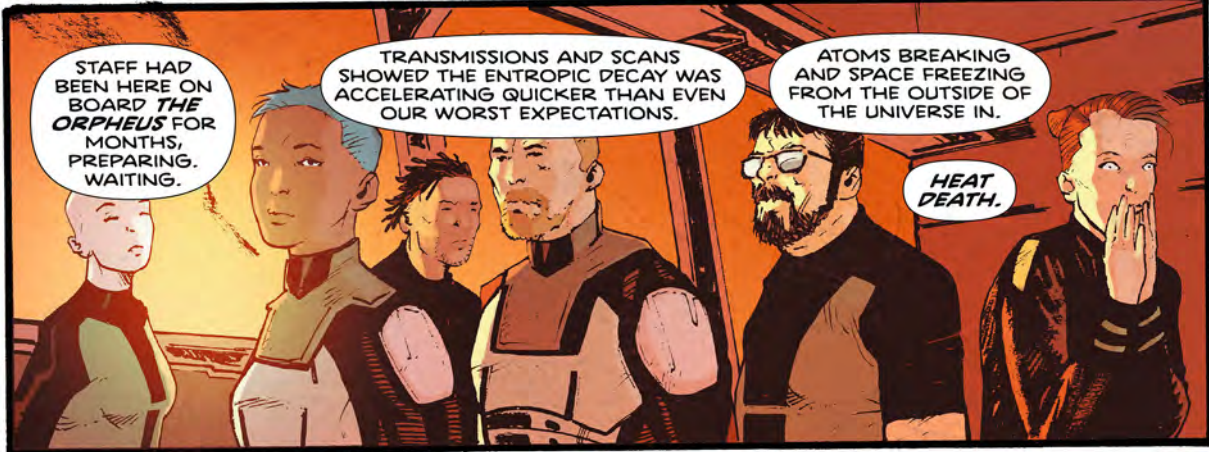
What memories  
are at the  
forefront of  
your mind?



THE  
END OF THE  
UNIVERSE.

I'm afraid you'll  
have to be more  
specific.





STAFF HAD BEEN HERE ON BOARD *THE ORPHEUS* FOR MONTHS, PREPARING. WAITING.

TRANSMISSIONS AND SCANS SHOWED THE ENTROPIC DECAY WAS ACCELERATING QUICKER THAN EVEN OUR WORST EXPECTATIONS.

ATOMS BREAKING AND SPACE FREEZING FROM THE OUTSIDE OF THE UNIVERSE IN.

HEAT DEATH.

BUT HERE THEY'D BE SAFE, RIGHT?



WE COULD PROTECT THEM FROM THE *COLD BLACK*.



I WAS GLUED TO THE TRANSMISSIONS FOR WEEKS, WATCHING THOSE COLONY SHIPS HEADING OUR WAY.

HOW MANY WERE THERE, AT THE START?

Thousands.

NONE OF THEM EVER EVEN GOT CLOSE.



EVERY HUMAN CIVILIZATION IN THE GALAXY KNEW OUR LOCATION, BUT COULDN'T BUILD THEIR SHIPS FAST ENOUGH ONCE THE *ORPHEUS* WAS COMPLETED.

WE WERE TOO FAR OUT, BUILT IN PURE VACUUM, AND THEY WERE TOO SLOW. TOO LATE.

AT THE END, IT WASN'T *ACTUALLY* ENTROPY THAT DESTROYED THE LAST FLEET.

THEY OVERCLOCKED THEIR ENGINES AND EXPLODED, JUST TRYING TO *OUTRUN* IT.




A FEW SESSIONS AGO, YOU ASKED ME IF I HAD A FAITH.

I SAID I WASN'T RELIGIOUS, AND THAT'S TRUE. BUT BEFORE THIS, I USED TO BELIEVE IN US.

One might argue that our very location - a means of surviving the end of reality itself - is the pinnacle of human achievement.

Isn't that worth putting faith into?



WE BUILT THIS PLACE TO SAVE HUMAN LIVES, BUT WE COULDN'T EVEN GET THEM HERE.

I WATCHED THE TRANSMISSIONS OF THOSE COLONY SHIPS EXPLODING, AND I IMAGINED THE PEOPLE ON BOARD...



A LITTLE GIRL.



OR AN OLD MAN.



OR SOME WOMAN, JUST LIKE ME.  
EVERY ONE OF THEM -- LOST.

THIS DOESN'T FEEL LIKE AN ACHIEVEMENT TO ME. IT FEELS LIKE A TOMBSTONE.

I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M BEING SO #@&%ING MAUDLIN.

WE'RE FAILURES, NOT SAVIORS.

Begging your pardon, director, but in the two years since you've been in charge of this station's security, you've yet to result in anything I would consider FAILURE.

THANK YOU, SMITH.

YOU'RE KIND, FOR A VIRTUAL INTELLIGENCE WHO'S PROBABLY FOCUSED ON TWENTY OTHER THINGS WHILE WE TALK.

TWENTY-SEVEN. And I've passed this session's report on to Dr. Chalos.

USUALLY YOU DON'T LIKE ME TO CUT THINGS THIS EARLY.

BIWEEKLY THERAPY IN THE SIMULATION CHAMBER, MANDATORY FOR EVERY STAFF MEMBER ON BOARD.

TWO HOURS A MONTH I HAVE TO FACE A WHOLE UNIVERSE'S WORTH OF IRRATIONAL SURVIVOR'S GUILT.

MAYBE THAT'S THE POINT. UNLOAD ON THE A.I. AND NOT MY SUBORDINATES.

SEBASTIAN.

SORRY FOR INTERRUPTING, DIRECTOR.

In this case, it seemed necessary. We have company.

AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE ON BREAK?

YOU SAID I'M IN CHARGE WHEN YOU'RE OFF THE CLOCK.

I WAS PLAYING A SIM, BUT...

I THINK SEBASTIAN CLINGS TO THE JOB BECAUSE IT MAKES SENSE WHEN NOTHING ELSE DOES.

DIRECTOR, SOMETHING'S... HAPPENED.

I WAS A COP FOR NEAR A DECADE BEFORE LAUNCH.

AS QUIET AS IT IS HERE, THE WORK IS A WAY TO RECLAIM SOME NORMALCY. KEEP THE DARKNESS AT BAY.

YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD.

AS SOON AS SMITH PASSED THE ALERT ON TO ME, I GATHERED REST OF THE SECURITY FORCE.

DIRECTOR... DEVA --

THIS IS ABOVE MY PAY GRADE, YOU KNOW?

HE'S MAKING ME NERVOUS. OUR TIME SINCE LAUNCH HAS BEEN VERY QUIET.

A HANDFUL OF ARRESTS, NONE OF THEM *VIOLENT*.

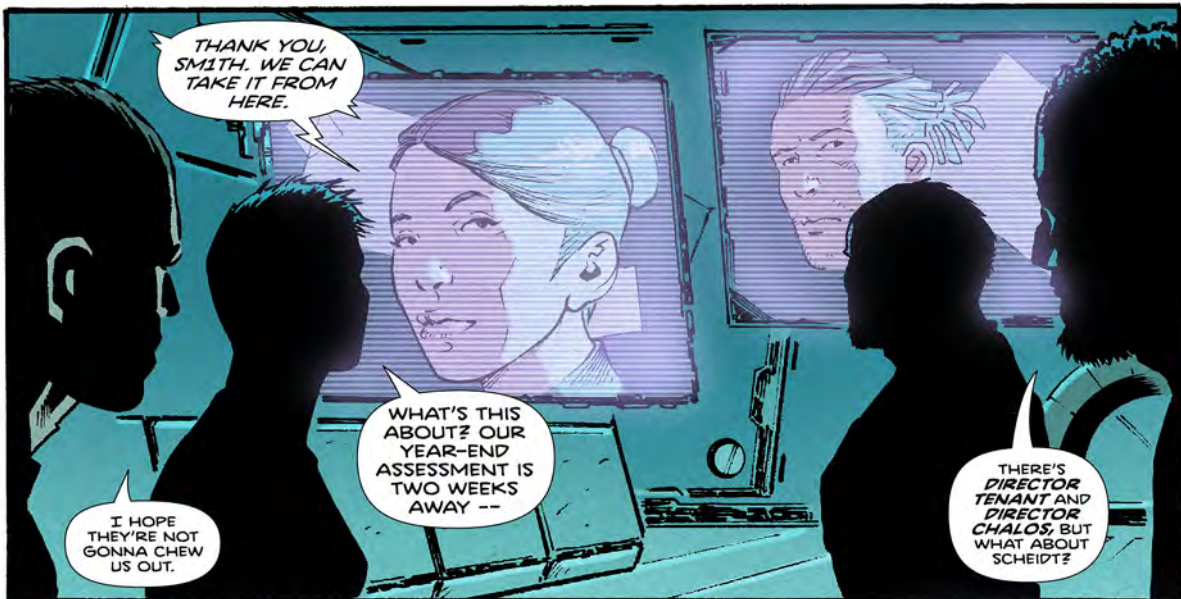
It's one of the other twenty-six things I was focused on during your therapy, Director Harrel.

WILL SOMEONE TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

The board of directors will explain everything.

They need to speak with you right away.



THANK YOU, SMITH. WE CAN TAKE IT FROM HERE.

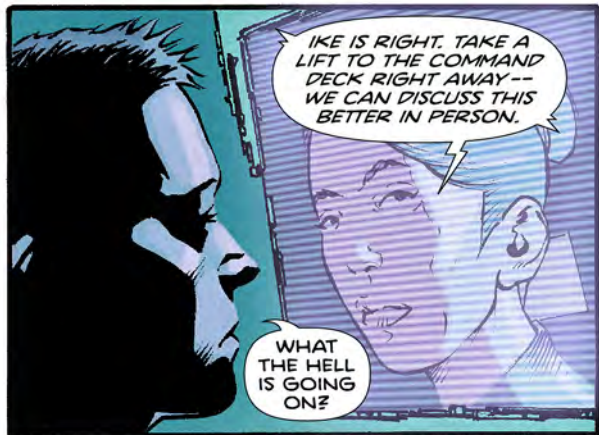
I HOPE THEY'RE NOT GONNA CHEW US OUT.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? OUR YEAR-END ASSESSMENT IS TWO WEEKS AWAY --

THERE'S DIRECTOR TENANT AND DIRECTOR CHALOS. BUT WHAT ABOUT SCHEIDT?



DIRECTOR TENANT, AH, PERHAPS IT'D BE BEST IF THIS WASN'T DONE IN THE MIDDLE OF A LOCKER ROOM.



IKE IS RIGHT. TAKE A LIFT TO THE COMMAND DECK RIGHT AWAY -- WE CAN DISCUSS THIS BETTER IN PERSON.

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?



DEVA, THIS ISN'T TIME FOR ANOTHER SPIRITED DEBATE. THIS IS... THIS IS DIFFERENT.

AND MAYBE YOU OUGHT TO SEND A TEAM TO OUT TO HOUSING SECTOR SEVEN. APARTMENT 19.



19? THAT'S... SEBASTIAN, TAKE A SQUAD. I'LL GRAB A LIFT.

CONTINUED IN INFINITE DARK #1, AVAILABLE OCTOBER 2018

Writer **CAITLIN KITTREDGE** (*THROWAWAYS*, *Coffin Hill*) and artist **ROBERTA INGRANATA** introduce an all new

# WITCHBLADE

"I dug the hell out of this first issue and am excited to see where this series goes. I guess I'm a WITCHBLADE fan now."

—**NERDIST**

"They have captured and injected a world of emotion into these pages, bringing this property out of the 90s and into the modern times."

—**COMICOSITY**

"Sharp, powerful and cutting urban fantasy."

—**MONKEYS FIGHTING ROBOTS**

"There's enough of the original mythos present that longtime readers can find their way around, but this new beginning is also accessible... this is exactly what the series needed to move forward."

—**COMICON.COM**

"Buy! Does an excellent job creating a story that is intriguing and allows readers to ease into the legend of the Witchblade... the future is bright for the franchise."

—**ROGUES PORTAL**

"Every panel has a sense of urgency to its composition and the splash of bright colors is restrained until a bloody explosion is shown with a vibrancy for emphasis. It's a very post-*Jessica Jones* comic, but the juxtaposition of the trauma-centric themes with the urban fantasy setting make this a comic with a lot of potential."

—**NEWSARAMA**

"Ingranata and Valenza's art is stellar. They've set this story in a very realistic New York City, that's also the setting of a horror movie. The deep shadows, the strange angles, all contribute to a story that's more ghost story than the supernatural superhero of the previous volume of WITCHBLADE."

—**COMICBUZZ**

**VOLUME ONE IS NOW  
AVAILABLE IN TRADE PAPERBACK**



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