

INFINITE DARK

ISSUE 3



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INFINITE DARK

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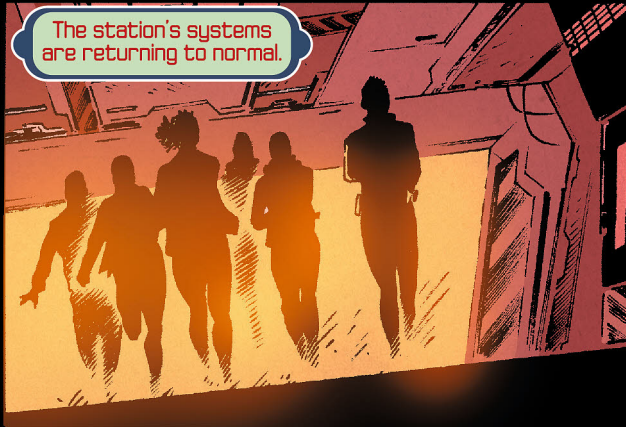
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Please remain calm...



Everything is under control.



The station's systems are returning to normal.



Everything will be ALL RIGHT.

I'M NOT SURE THAT IT WILL.

SM1TH, I DON'T KNOW WHAT SYSTEMS YOU DO AND DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO RIGHT NOW, BUT I NEED YOU TO SEND A MESSAGE TO LYNN.



TELL HER...

"EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART."

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON? WE'RE IN AN EMERGENCY POWER UPCYCLE, WHY DOES MEDICAL HAVE NO ENERGY AT ALL? WHY IS ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL AT FULL POWER?

Director Tenant, I...I believe the Orpheus' code has been COMPROMISED. Dramatically.

But I don't know if we have days, director.

PEOPLE ARE DYING.

AND NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE A REAL ANSWER AS TO WHY.

BUT WE HAVE TO STOP THIS, SOMEHOW. CAN YOU PATCH IN THE REST OF THE BOARD?

The breach in the Dark Sector from a few days ago...that was just the beginning. Whatever our rogue technologists did under my nose, they've been working on for a great while.

Director Chalos, I'm able to patch you in to Director Tenant.

OH MY GOD.

GIVE ME AN ACTUAL SITREP. WHAT IS GOING ON?

Some sectors of the station have been shut down completely, others are overpowered-- IT'S CHAOS, and I can't monitor all of it.

I can repair the station's core code, make everything right as rain, but it will take time. Days, probably. And access to full systems and stationwide power.

IT'S SO MUCH WORSE THAN WE THOUGHT.

DEVA WAS RIGHT.



WE WERE ALL *WRONG*.
ABOUT ALL OF THIS.

THIS WAS NEVER
ABOUT A MURDER.
OR ALVIN SCHEIDT.

IT MIGHT NOT
EVEN BE ABOUT
KIRIN TAL-SHI.

IT'S ABOUT THE
END, ISN'T IT?

THE END
OF *US*.



SMITH?

I'm here,
director.
Director Tenant
and Director
Chalos would
very much
like to --

NOT NOW. I
KNOW POWER IS
SCREWED, BUT
WHAT CAN YOU
DO FOR ME?

Not much, I'm
afraid. Half the
station's systems
are dead, others
are running at
full capacity and
causing
irreparable
damage.



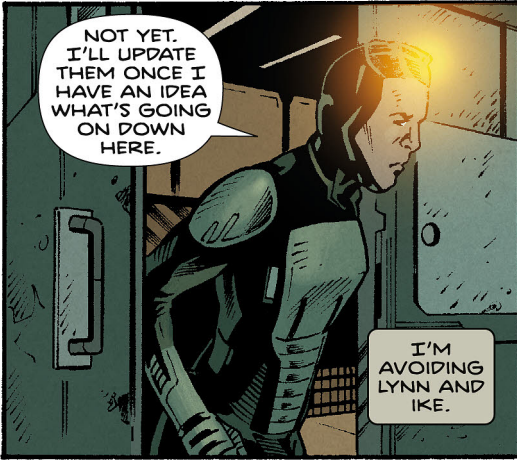
I suppose if you needed an
isolated single machine,
I could restore limited
functionality to it.



SOMETHING
LIKE... *THIS?*

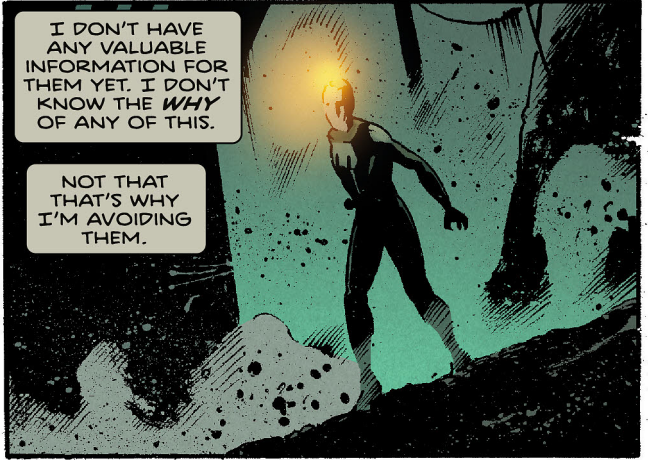
That's the furthest I can do, I'm afraid. Sector to sector travel is manageable, but any of the in-sector trams won't be usable until we have full power restored.

Now may I PLEASE patch you in with the other directors?



NOT YET. I'LL UPDATE THEM ONCE I HAVE AN IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN HERE.

I'M AVOIDING LYNN AND IKE.



I DON'T HAVE ANY VALUABLE INFORMATION FOR THEM YET. I DON'T KNOW THE *WHY* OF ANY OF THIS.

NOT THAT THAT'S WHY I'M AVOIDING THEM.



THE STATION IS *FALLING APART*--

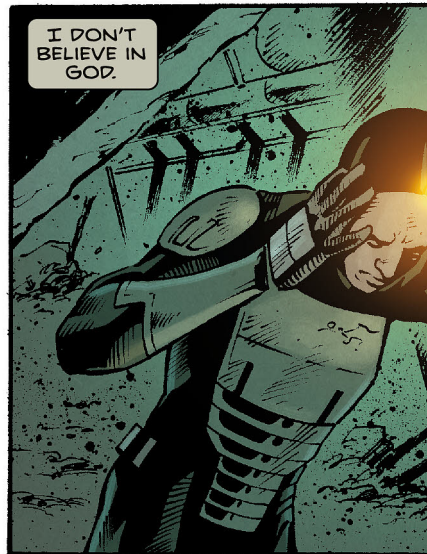


AND SO AM I.



OH GOD, PLEASE.

I DON'T KNOW WHY I SAID THAT.

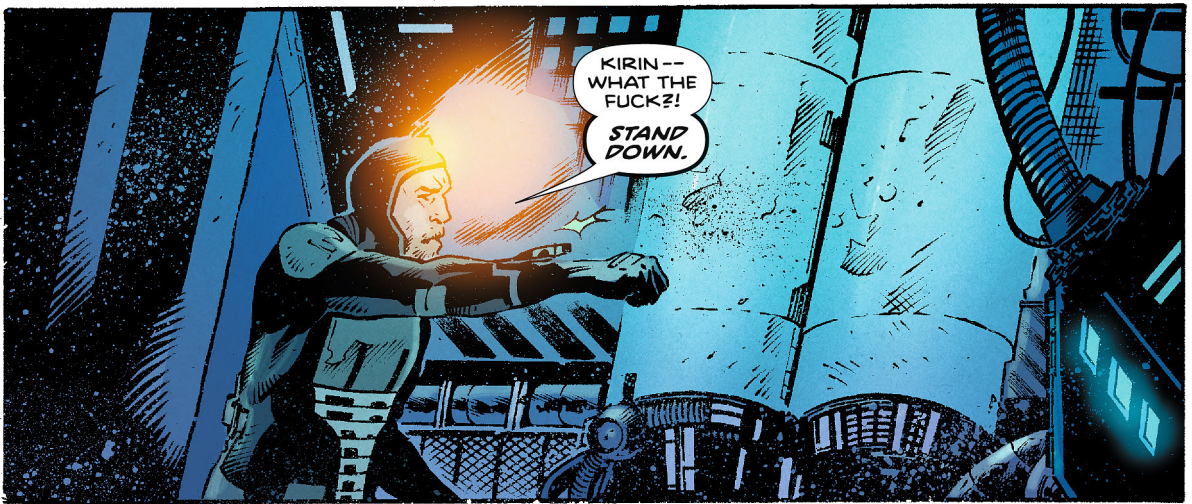


I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD.



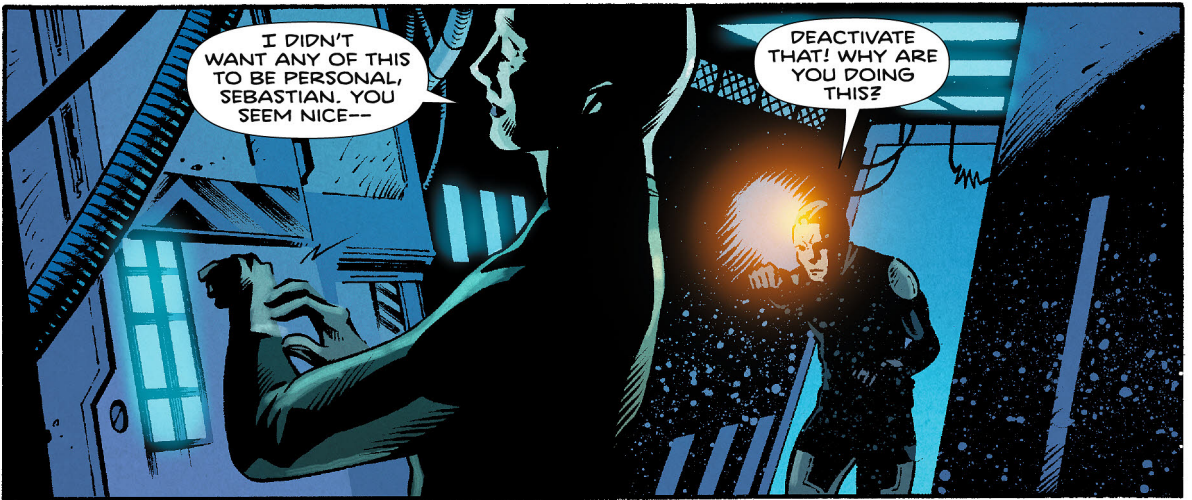
WHAT'S GOING ON, KIRINZ!

WHAT IS THIS?



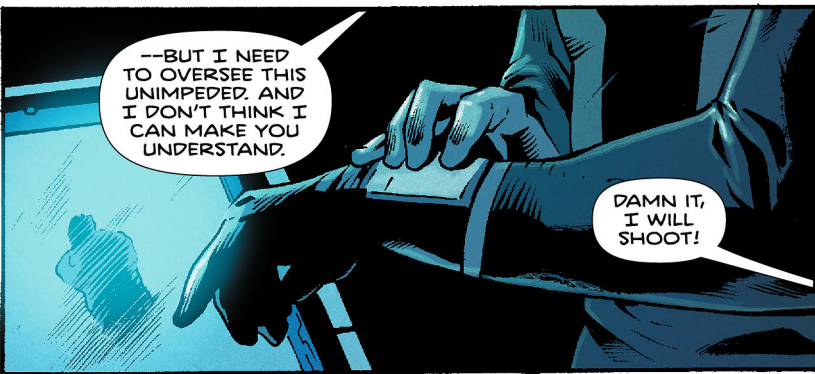
KIRIN--
WHAT THE
FUCK?!

**STAND
DOWN.**



I DIDN'T
WANT ANY OF THIS
TO BE PERSONAL,
SEBASTIAN. YOU
SEEM NICE--

DEACTIVATE
THAT! WHY ARE
YOU DOING
THIS?



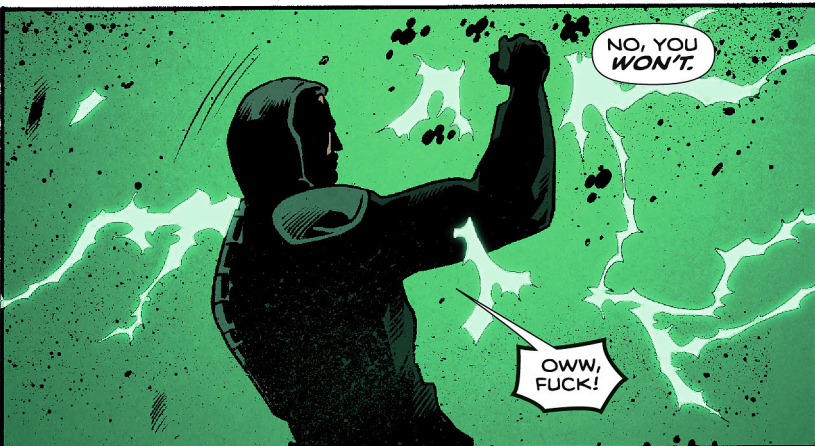
--BUT I NEED
TO OVERSEE THIS
UNIMPEDED, AND
I DON'T THINK I
CAN MAKE YOU
UNDERSTAND.

DAMN IT,
I WILL
SHOOT!



LEAVE, SEBASTIAN--
GO FIND YOUR
COMRADES AND FRIENDS
AND DIRECTOR KARRELL.
GATHER THEM
TOGETHER. **COMFORT**
EACH OTHER.

DON'T
FOLLOW
ME.



NO, YOU
WON'T.

OWW,
FUCK!



FOR A COP, YOU'RE NOT SO GOOD AT FOLLOWING ORDERS.



WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS? WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?



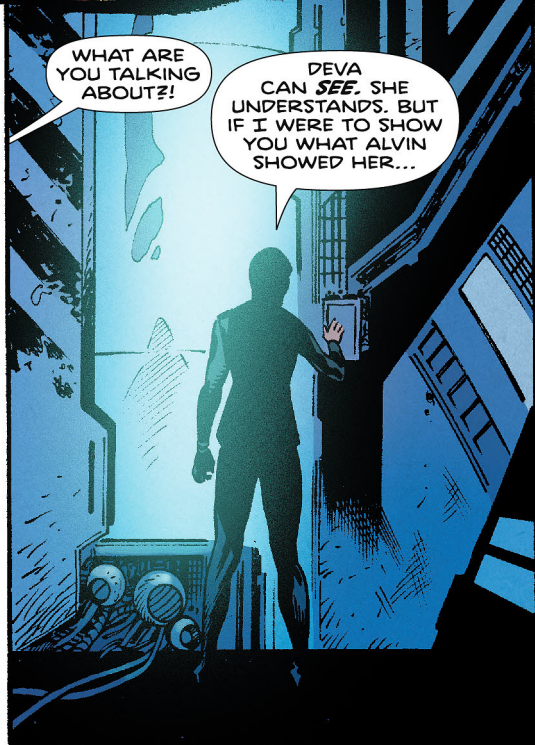
"YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND."



I GET IT FINE. I FIGURE ALVIN GETS SOME *FUNNY IDEAS* IN HIS HEAD. SOME SHIT ABOUT ALIENS, MAYBE. HE DRAGS YOU INTO IT, HIS ASSISTANT. HE SNAPS, MURDER-SUICIDE, AND NOW YOU'RE HERE...WHAT?

CARRYING ON HIS WORK? SIGNALING TO THE MOTHER-SHIP?

YOU HAVE NO IDEA. UNLIKE DIRECTOR KARRELL.



WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

DEVA CAN *SEE*. SHE UNDERSTANDS. BUT IF I WERE TO SHOW YOU WHAT ALVIN SHOWED HER...



I THINK YOU'D JUST *GO MAD* LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.



DEVA IS...SHE'S NOT...

SHE GOT EXPOSED TO THE BLACK. SHE'S JUST NOT THINKING CLEARLY.

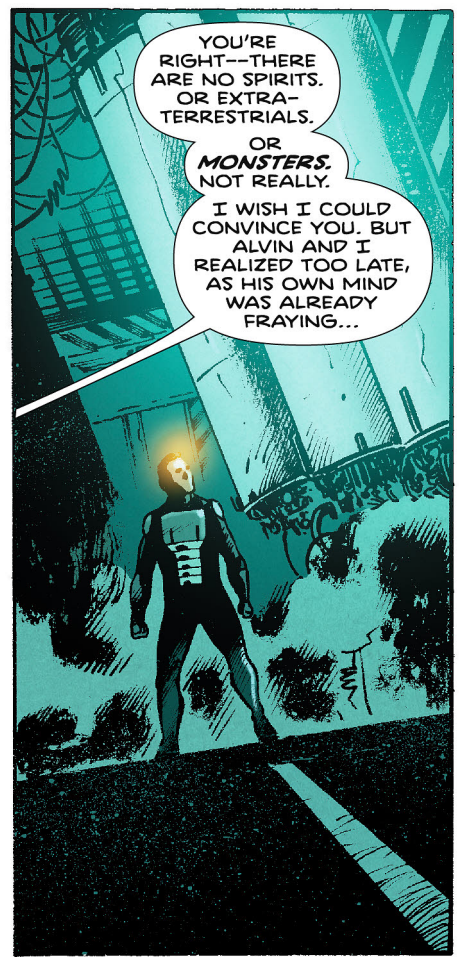
THERE'S NOTHING OUT THERE.



I UNDERSTAND THAT THE PROSPECT OF SOMETHING FROM OUTSIDE *FRIGHTENS* YOU. IT FRIGHTENS ME, TOO.

THE FIRST TIME I WAS EXPOSED TO THE ENTITY, I--

WHAT FUCKING ENTITY?! THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS MONSTERS OR GHOSTS OR ALIENS!



YOU'RE RIGHT--THERE ARE NO SPIRITS. OR EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS.

OR *MONSTERS*. NOT REALLY.

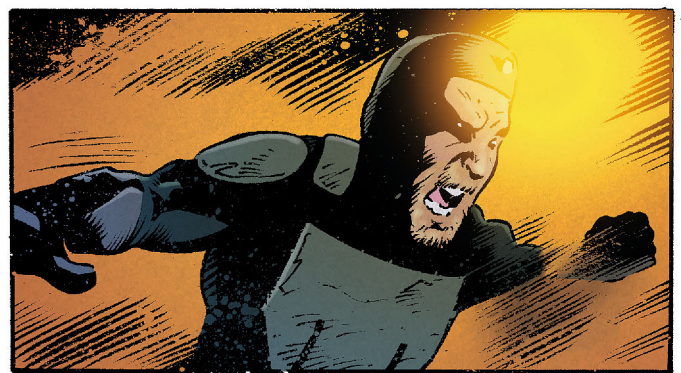
I WISH I COULD CONVINCE YOU. BUT ALVIN AND I REALIZED TOO LATE, AS HIS OWN MIND WAS ALREADY FRAYING...



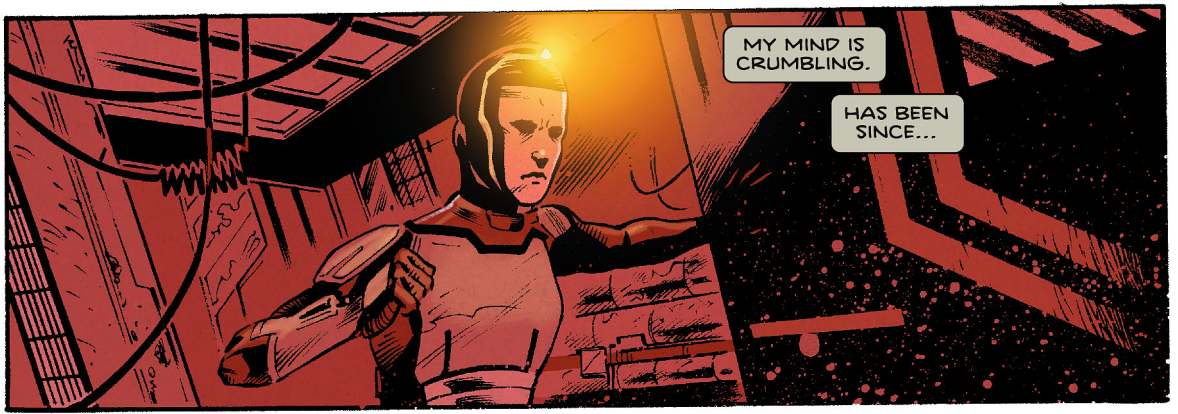
YOU CAN'T FORCE EVERYONE TO UNDERSTAND. SOME PEOPLE JUST CAN'T GET IT. THAT'S WHAT ALVIN FIGURED OUT WHEN HE TRIED TO SHOW JALIL EVANSON.

AFTER THE MURDER, HE WROTE ME A MESSAGE THAT ONLY I COULD READ, IN A WAY THAT SMITH COULD NEVER DECODE.

A *REGRETTABLE* SOLUTION THAT WE HAD DISCUSSED, BUT HOPED NEVER TO ENACT. BUT...



HERE WE ARE.



MY MIND IS CRUMBLING.

HAS BEEN SINCE...

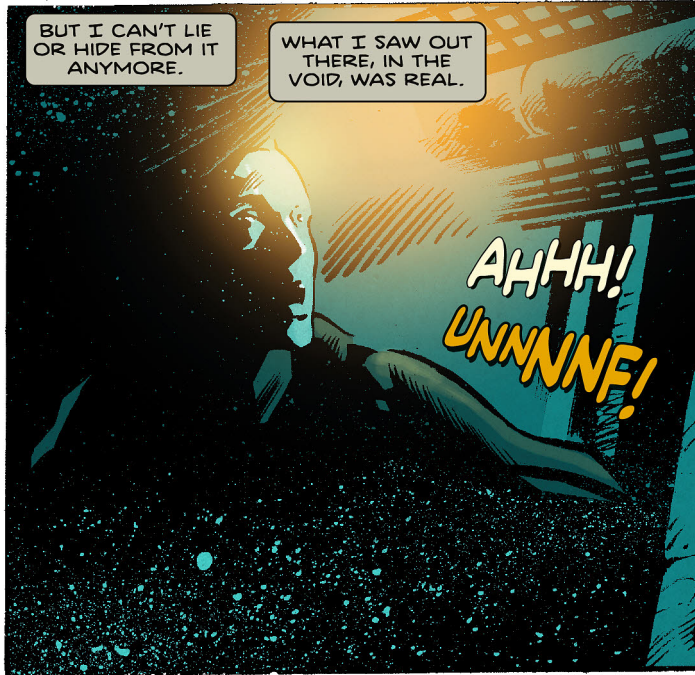


SINCE I SAW.



HALLUCINATIONS. PARANOIA. THAT FEELING OF FALLING APART.

I'VE BEEN PRETENDING THAT THE EFFECT WAS THE CAUSE.



BUT I CAN'T LIE OR HIDE FROM IT ANYMORE.

WHAT I SAW OUT THERE, IN THE VOID, WAS REAL.

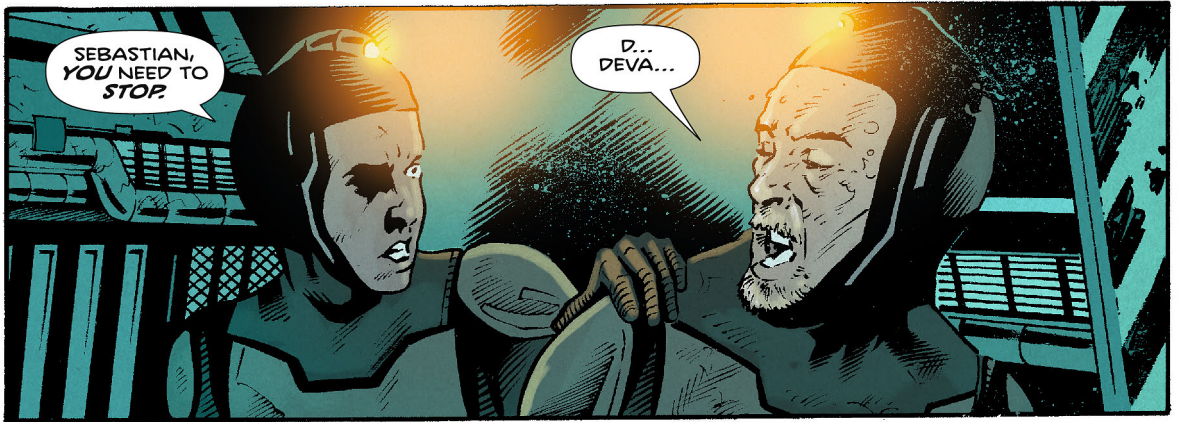
AHHH!
UNNNNF!



SEBASTIAN!

STAND DOWN!

STOP IT!
STOP IT!
STOP IT!



SEBASTIAN,
YOU NEED TO
STOP.

D...
DEVA...



DIRECTOR
KARRELL.

GOOD
TO SEE
YOU.



DON'T.
FUCKING.
MOVE.
EITHER
OF YOU.

DEVA...
BOSS... I'M
SORRY, I
JUST --


WHAT THE
FUCK IS
GOING
ON?

THAT'S WHAT I'M
TRYING TO FIGURE
OUT. SM1TH?


Director, I've been trying to maintain a connection to the rest of station to keep you updated, but back here in the DARK SECTOR, without full power, I won't be able to open comms.

I GUESS A
CONFERENCE
CALL
WAS TOO MUCH TO
HOPE FOR. CAN YOU
GIVE US AN UPDATE,
AT LEAST?

Certainly.



"Everything is falling apart."



I'M GLAD YOU'RE WITH US, DIRECTOR KARRELL. IT'S FITTING THAT YOU'D BE BACK HERE, WHERE IT ALL BEGAN FOR YOU.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN FOR ALL OF US.



WHERE THE ENTITY FIRST MADE CONTACT.



SHUT UP. IT'S OVER.

NOW THAT DEVA'S HERE, WE'RE GOING TO SORT THIS ALL OUT.

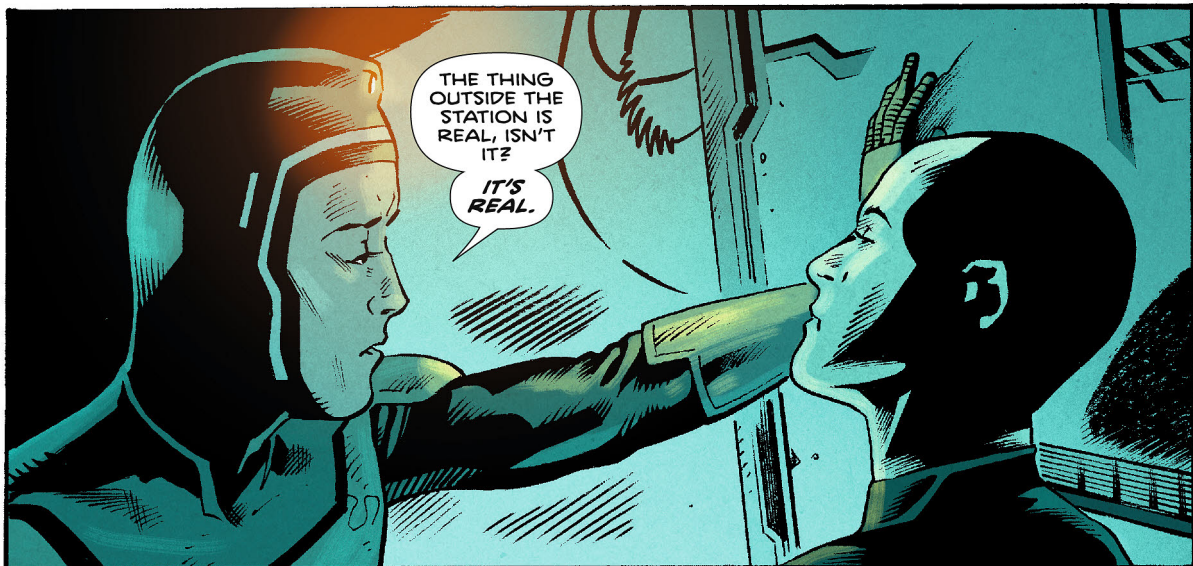
NO "ENTITY," NO "SEEING"—NO MORE COLLAPSE, NO MORE MURDERS.

IT'S ALL OVER.



I'M SORRY, SEBASTIAN, BUT YOU'RE WRONG.

IT'S NOT OVER.



THE THING
OUTSIDE THE
STATION IS
REAL, ISN'T
IT?

IT'S
REAL.



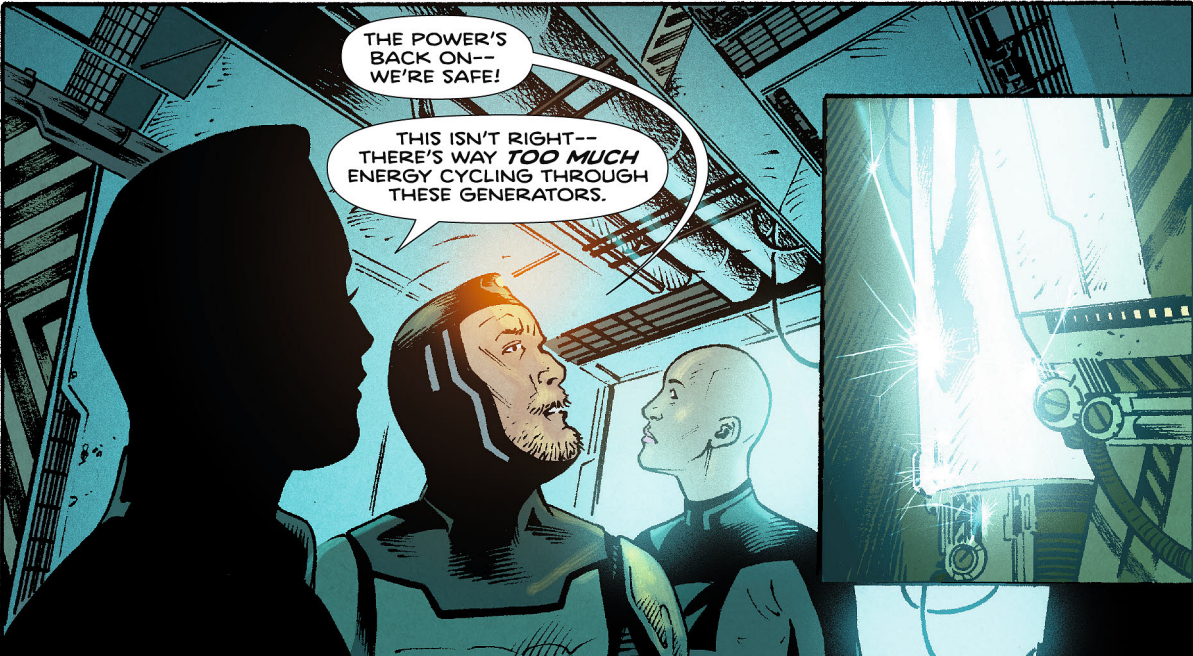
WHAT THE
FUCK ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?



EVER SINCE I CHASED ALVIN OUT
INTO THE BLACK, I'VE BEEN SEEING
THINGS. FEELING THINGS. I
THOUGHT I WAS GOING CRAZY.
BUT I'M NOT, AM I?

THERE'S A *THING*
IN THE VOID OUTSIDE, AND IT...
IT'S CONTACTING US. IT'S THE
REASON YOU AND ALVIN
DID WHAT YOU DID,
ISN'T IT?

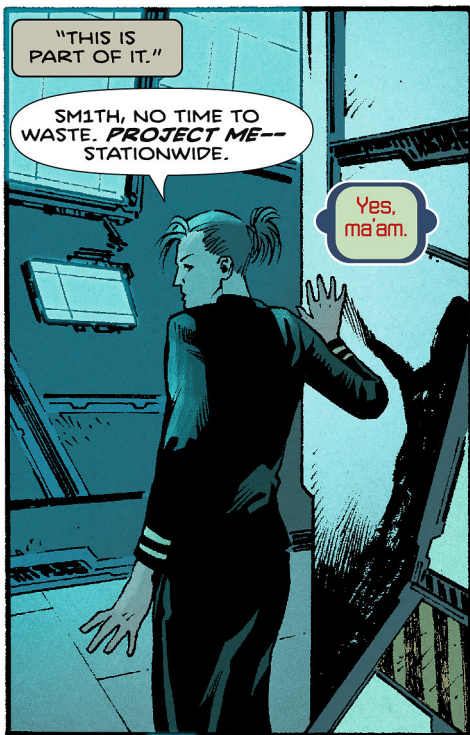
YES.



THE POWER'S
BACK ON--
WE'RE SAFE!

THIS ISN'T RIGHT--
THERE'S WAY *TOO MUCH*
ENERGY CYCLING THROUGH
THESE GENERATORS.





"THIS IS PART OF IT."

SMITH, NO TIME TO WASTE. **PROJECT ME--** STATIONWIDE.

Yes, ma'am.



THIS IS YOUR DIRECTOR OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT, LYNN TENANT. I KNOW THAT THE LAST FEW DAYS HAVE BEEN VERY, VERY TRYING. BUT ALL OF THAT IS **BEHIND US** NOW.

"THE MURDER WASN'T EVEN REALLY THE BEGINNING."



SMITH IS WORKING ON REPAIRING ANY DAMAGE TO THE STATION, AND MAKING SURE THAT SOMETHING LIKE THIS **NEVER** HAPPENS AGAIN.

"AND THE BLACKOUT WAS PROBABLY JUST A DISTRACTION."



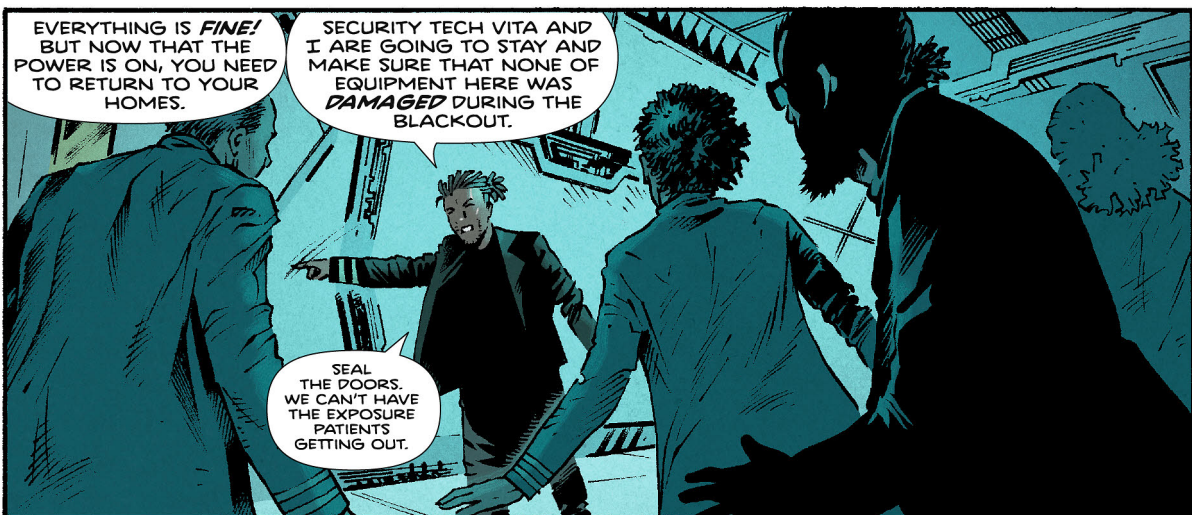
I PROMISE THAT THE WRECKAGE ISN'T AS BAD AS IT SEEMS. WE MAY HAVE LOST LIVES, OUR HOME MAY BE DAMAGED, BUT WE WILL RECOVER FROM THIS.

"WHATEVER ALVIN AND KIRIN PLANNED, WE HAVEN'T ESCAPED OR RECOVERED FROM IT."



WE ARE **SAFE** NOW.

"WE'RE NOT SAFE."



EVERYTHING IS *FINE!* BUT NOW THAT THE POWER IS ON, YOU NEED TO RETURN TO YOUR HOMES.

SECURITY TECH VITA AND I ARE GOING TO STAY AND MAKE SURE THAT NONE OF EQUIPMENT HERE WAS *DAMAGED* DURING THE BLACKOUT.

SEAL THE DOORS. WE CAN'T HAVE THE EXPOSURE PATIENTS GETTING OUT.



I CAN'T BELIEVE I WAS SO STUPID. SO BLIND. I THOUGHT WE WERE SAFE...

AND OF COURSE I CAN'T GET BACK IN TOUCH WITH LYNN BECAUSE SHE'S IN THE MIDDLE OF A FUCKING *MANIFESTO!*



AND IF *DEVA* WAS...

DEVA...

OH MY DEAR GOD. OH NO. OH NO. OH NO.



SMITH, I NEED YOU TO GET A MESSAGE TO DEVA. IT'S IMPORTANT. TELL HER I WAS *WRONG* --

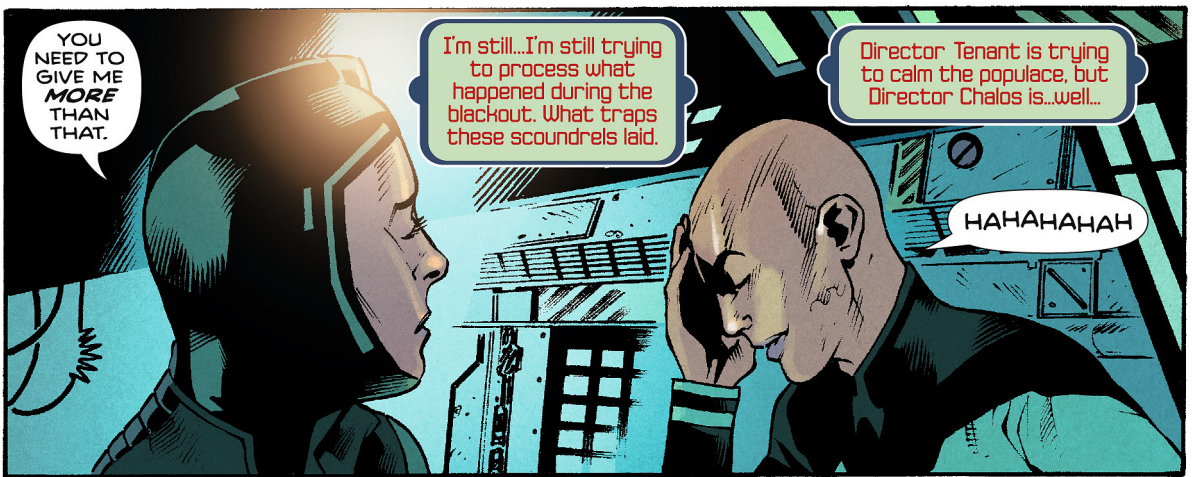
UHH, DIRECTOR CHALOSZ?



OUTSIDE -- IN THE BLACK -- I --



I WAS SO WRONG...

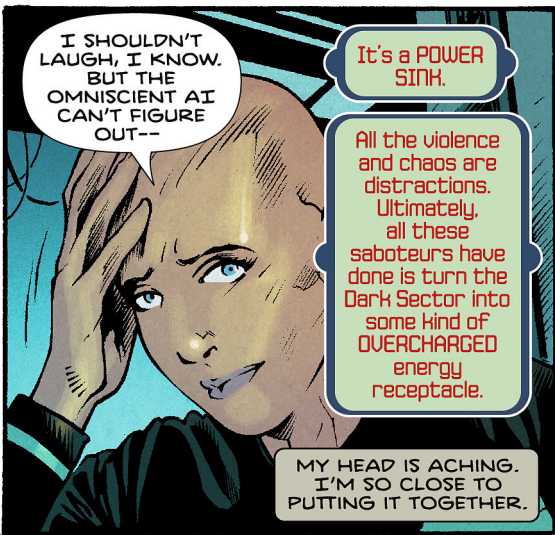


YOU NEED TO GIVE ME MORE THAN THAT.

I'm still...I'm still trying to process what happened during the blackout. What traps these scoundrels laid.

Director Tenant is trying to calm the populace, but Director Chalos is...well...

HAHAHAHAH



I SHOULDN'T LAUGH, I KNOW. BUT THE OMNISCIENT AI CAN'T FIGURE OUT--

It's a **POWER SINK**.

All the violence and chaos are distractions. Ultimately, all these saboteurs have done is turn the Dark Sector into some kind of **OVERCHARGED** energy receptacle.

MY HEAD IS ACHING. I'M SO CLOSE TO PUTTING IT TOGETHER.



I just don't understand--

WHY? IT'S THE WHY THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. THE WHY OF ANY OF THIS.

I'M STILL HALLUCINATING. I CAN'T PROCESS. I JUST HAVE TO **ASK**.



YOU'VE MET *IT*. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?

I DON'T...IT. I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. WHAT DOES IT **WANT** FROM YOU? FROM US?

DIMLY, MY COP BRAIN TRIES TO PIECE TOGETHER THE MORE CONCRETE MOTIVES--WHAT DOES DRAWING EXTRA POWER TO THE DARK SECTOR ACCOMPLISH?



THIS IS **CRAZY**, BOSS. YOU'VE GOT TO STOP.

ARREST THEM, AND BE DONE WITH IT.

WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK IT YOURSELF?

THERE'S A MONSTER LURKING OUTSIDE THE STATION, FORCING PEOPLE TO COMMIT MURDERS AND CYBER-VANDALISM.

FINE. I CAN ACCEPT THAT.

BUT WHAT THE **FUCK** IS IT TRYING TO DO?



IT WANTS US TO **UNDERSTAND.**

THAT'S WHAT ALVIN SAID. THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN SAYING. UNDERSTAND WHAT? HELP ME, KIRIN.

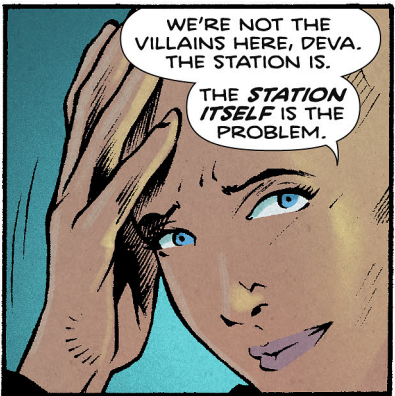


UNDERSTAND WHY THE ORPHEUS HAS TO BE **DESTROYED.**

UNDERSTAND WHY WE ALL HAVE TO **DIE.**



SO YOU'RE MURDERERS, PLAIN AND SIMPLE.

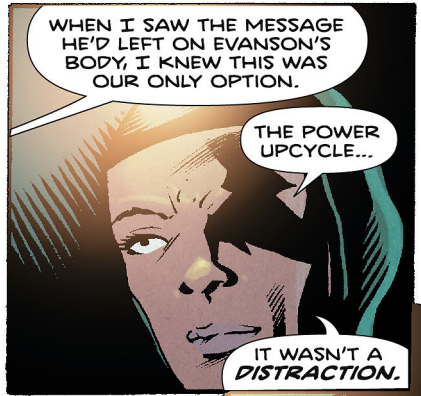


WE'RE NOT THE VILLAINS HERE, DEVA. THE STATION IS.

THE **STATION ITSELF** IS THE PROBLEM.



ALVIN AND I WORKED IN THE DARK SECTOR IN SECRET FOR MONTHS. A DOZEN PLANS, A DOZEN CONTINGENCIES.



WHEN I SAW THE MESSAGE HE'D LEFT ON EVANSON'S BODY, I KNEW THIS WAS OUR ONLY OPTION.

THE POWER UP-CYCLE...

IT WASN'T A **DISTRACTION.**



ALVIN AND I DON'T WANT THIS BLOOD ON OUR HANDS... BUT IT'S FOR THE GREATER GOOD.

THE DARK SECTOR IS GOING TO SUCK ALL THE POWER FROM THE REST OF THE STATION AND **VENT IT.**

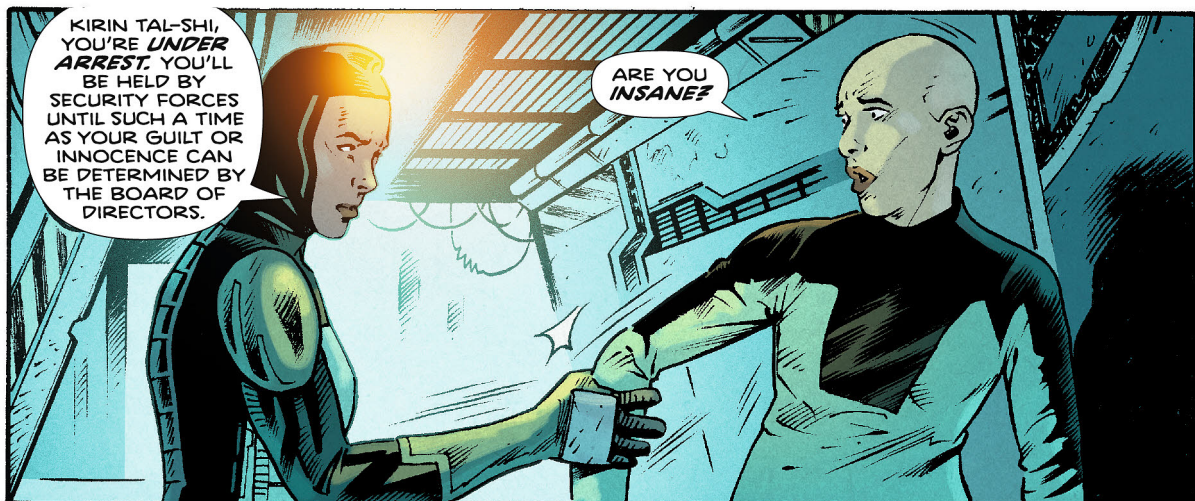


THE PSEUDOREALITY FIELD WILL **COLLAPSE**, AND ENTROPY WILL CLAIM THE LAST REMNANT OF OUR OLD UNIVERSE.

IT'S OVER.



LIKE HELL IT IS.



KIRIN TAL-SHI, YOU'RE **UNDER ARREST**. YOU'LL BE HELD BY SECURITY FORCES UNTIL SUCH A TIME AS YOUR GUILT OR INNOCENCE CAN BE DETERMINED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

ARE YOU **INSANE?**



DO YOU TRUST ME, SEBASTIAN?

ALWAYS, BOSS.

THEN TAKE THIS ONE WITH YOU. USE SMITH'S HELP TO GET EVERYONE ON THE ORPHEUS INTO THE **AFT CENTRAL SECTORS**. LOCK IT DOWN.



COORDINATE WITH LYNN AND IKE. KEEP OUR PEOPLE **SAFE**.

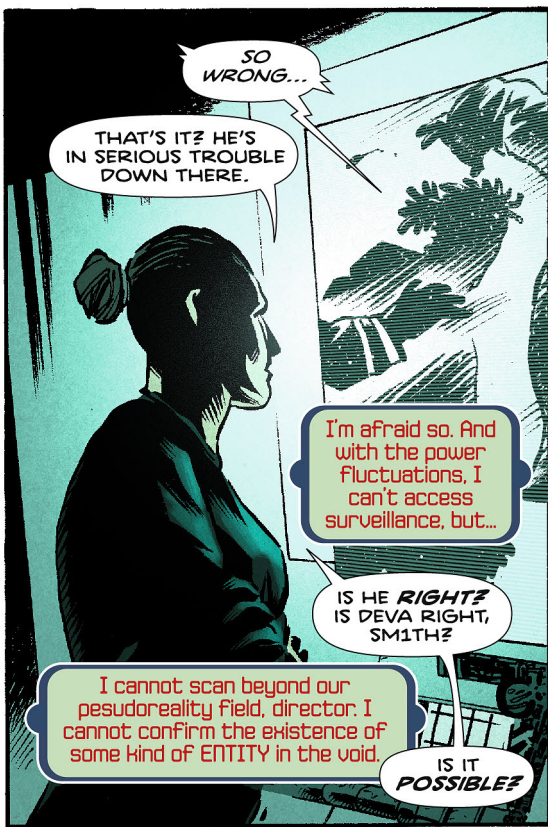


DIRECTOR KARRELL, IN A MATTER OF HOURS, THE ORPHEUS WILL CRUMBLE. I'M SORRY, BUT IT HAS TO BE THIS WAY. I'M TELLING YOU, IT'S OVER.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?



WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO GET ALL OF US TO DO--TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND. TO TRY AND **SEE**.



SO WRONG...

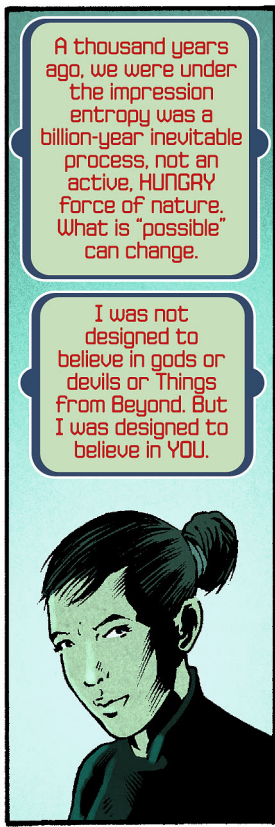
THAT'S IT? HE'S IN SERIOUS TROUBLE DOWN THERE.

I'm afraid so. And with the power fluctuations, I can't access surveillance, but...

IS HE RIGHT? IS DEVA RIGHT, SM1TH?

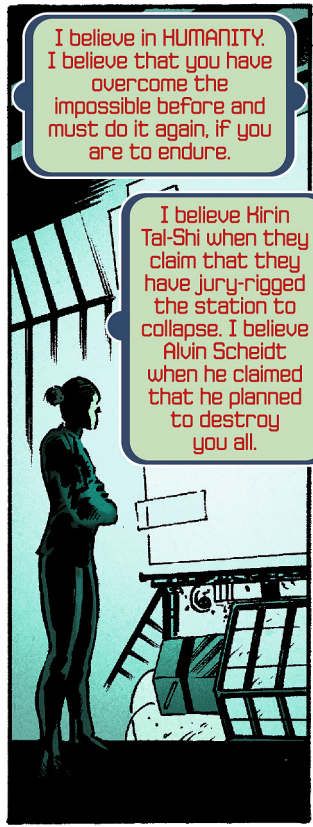
I cannot scan beyond our pseudoreality field, director. I cannot confirm the existence of some kind of ENTITY in the void.

IS IT POSSIBLE?



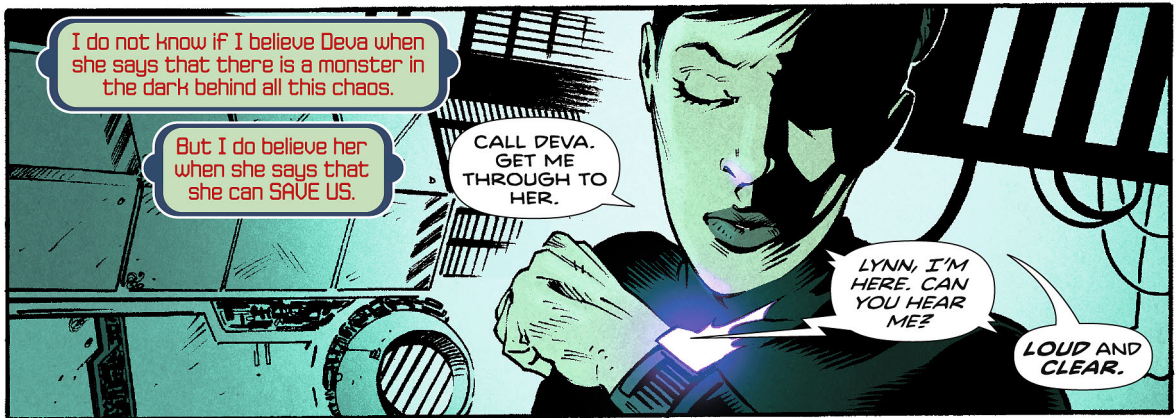
A thousand years ago, we were under the impression entropy was a billion-year inevitable process, not an active, HUNGRY force of nature. What is "possible" can change.

I was not designed to believe in gods or devils or Things from Beyond. But I was designed to believe in YOU.



I believe in HUMANITY. I believe that you have overcome the impossible before and must do it again, if you are to endure.

I believe Kirin Tal-Shi when they claim that they have jury-rigged the station to collapse. I believe Alvin Scheidt when he claimed that he planned to destroy you all.



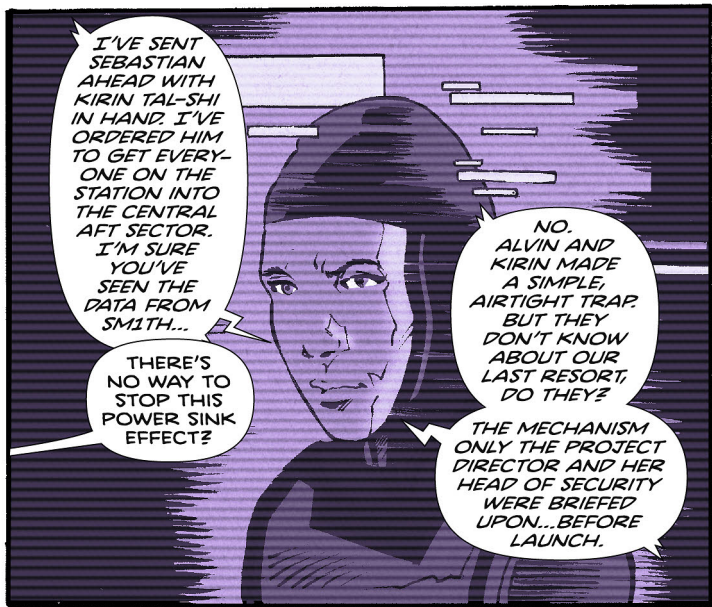
I do not know if I believe Deva when she says that there is a monster in the dark behind all this chaos.

But I do believe her when she says that she can SAVE US.

CALL DEVA. GET ME THROUGH TO HER.

LYNN, I'M HERE. CAN YOU HEAR ME?

LOUD AND CLEAR.



I'VE SENT SEBASTIAN AHEAD WITH KIRIN TAL-SHI IN HAND. I'VE ORDERED HIM TO GET EVERYONE ON THE STATION INTO THE CENTRAL AFT SECTOR. I'M SURE YOU'VE SEEN THE DATA FROM SMITH...

THERE'S NO WAY TO STOP THIS POWER SINK EFFECT?

NO. ALVIN AND KIRIN MADE A SIMPLE, AIRTIGHT TRAP. BUT THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT OUR LAST RESORT, DO THEY?

THE MECHANISM ONLY THE PROJECT DIRECTOR AND HER HEAD OF SECURITY WERE BRIEFED UPON...BEFORE LAUNCH.



THE HONEYBEE PROTOCOL.

YES.



THERE'S A REASON NO ONE ELSE KNOWS ABOUT IT. HONEYBEE IS PURELY THEORETICAL.

I KNOW.

IS THIS REALLY HAPPENING?!



YES.

GOD HELP US ALL.



SMITH, I'LL NEED YOUR ASSISTANCE.

Of course, Director.

LYNN... I... THANK YOU.

DEVA, WHEN WILL WE SEE YOU UP HERE?!



I DON'T KNOW IF YOU WILL. I KNOW WE FOUGHT-- I WAS HARD TO WORK WITH, I KNOW, BUT I'LL MISS YOU.

WHAT DO YOU--

YOU TOO, SMITH. I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TRANSMIT TO ME MUCH LONGER.

I will brief you shortly, Director Tenant.



PLEASE, WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING... COME BACK TO US.



Good luck, Deva Harrell.

It's been an honor serving you.



ALL
RIGHT.

LET'S
TALK.

TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE

INFINITE DARK

ISSUE 4





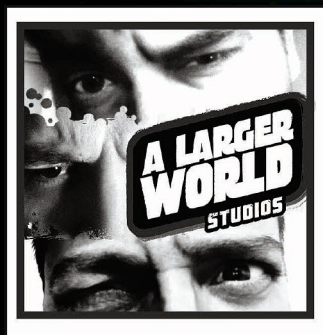
RYAN CADY is a writer of comics and horror fiction based in Southern California. A graduate of the DC Comics Talent Development Workshop, he has written for such properties as *WARFRAME*, *THE MAGDALENA* and *The Punisher*, as well as a number of original short stories and creator-owned features. To this day, his early reviews of terrible fast food products for the OC Weekly remain his greatest creative triumph.



ANDREA MUTTI is an Italian artist who has worked in the comic book world for 25 years. He studied at the Comics School in Brescia and has worked with such US publishers as Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, Vertigo, IDW, BOOM! Studios, Dynamite, Stela, Adaptive and many more European publishers like Glenat, Casterman, Soleil, Dargaud and Titan. He lives in Italy and you can learn more about his career at his website www.andrearedmutti.com.



K. MICHAEL RUSSELL has been working as a comic book color artist since 2011. His credits include Image series *GLITTERBOMB* with *WAYWARD & Thunderbolts* writer Jim Zub, *HACK/SLASH*, *Judge Dredd* and the Eisner and Harvey-nominated *In the Dark: A Horror Anthology*. He launched an online comic book coloring course in 2014 at ColoringComics.com and maintains a YouTube channel dedicated to coloring tutorials. He lives on the coast in Long Beach, Mississippi, with his wife of sixteen years, Tina. They have two cats. One is a jerk. [@kmichaelrussell](https://twitter.com/kmichaelrussell)



TROY PETERI, Dave Lanphear and Joshua Cozine are collectively known as A Larger World Studios. They've lettered everything from *The Avengers*, *Iron Man*, *Wolverine*, *Amazing Spider-Man* and *X-Men* to more recent titles such as *WITCHBLADE*, *CYBERFORCE*, and *Batman/Wonder Woman: The Brave & The Bold*. They can be reached at studio@alargerworld.com for your lettering and design needs. (Hooray, commerce!)

DISPATCHES FROM THE VOID

GUEST COLUMNISTS

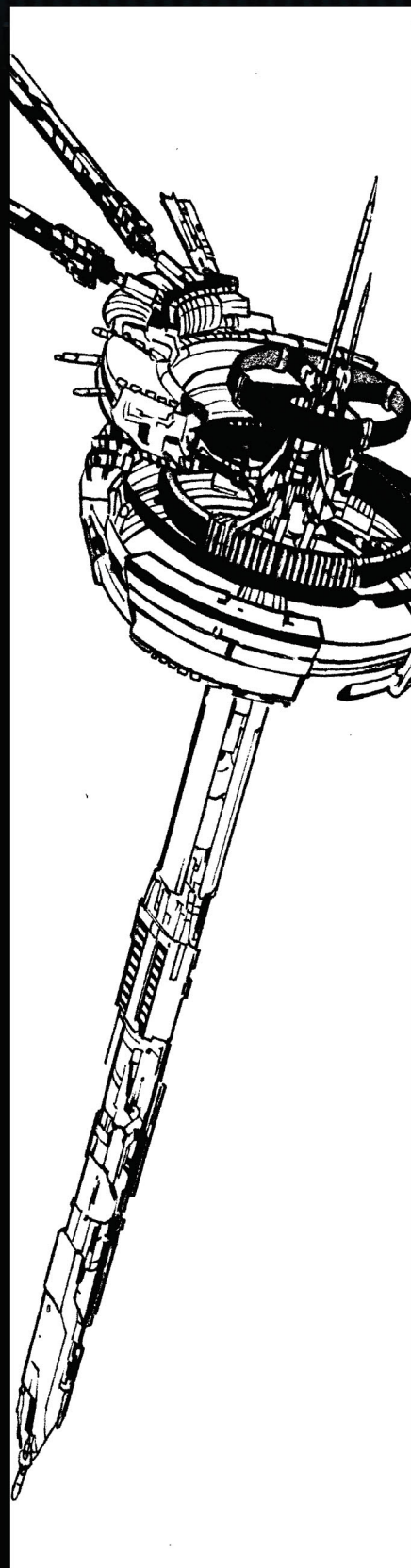
I always tell folks that *Alien* is my favorite movie, but that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is my favorite horror movie. It's not that I don't think *Alien* is a horror movie (it is) or that I don't find it frightening on its own terms (I do), but that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* possesses one quality *Alien* never will: the It Could Happen to You! factor. My chances of coming face-to-Leatherface with a cannibal clan are low—I live in Queens—but the odds of me ever qualifying for space travel are infinitesimally smaller. I'm claustrophobic, I have poor eyesight, and a flair for vegan baking is not a skill that translates well to living aboard the International Space Station.

Even supernatural horror movies possess more of the It Could Happen to You! factor than the average sci-fi terror tale. I've woken up in the middle of the night, noticed an oddly shaped shadow in the corner, and briefly convinced myself that I, of all the billions of humans to have walked the Earth, was about to experience the very first real ghost attack. It's an utterly irrational thought, but unless NASA pays your bills, it's much closer to the realm of reality than worrying about getting stranded on an interstellar cargo freighter with an acid-blooded extraterrestrial.

For the vast, vast majority of human beings, terra firma is where we were born, and terra firma is where we will die. And that's where the scary part comes in:

What if we had to leave?

In *Infinite Dark*, the story opens after the heat death of the universe, as a small band of humans persist in the nothingness. In the months since Ryan sent me the first issue, it's hit many of us that making it to the end of the universe is an optimistic fantasy. A highly publicized climate study posited that we have just over a decade to come together and address climate change on a scale the world has never seen—during an era in which several of the most crucial countries in the battle are led by far-right hyper-capitalists who would chop down the last tree in existence if they could use it to print another dollar.



One of my greatest anxieties isn't just death, but knowing that it's coming and that I can't stop it. Learning that certain ecological doom isn't just inevitable, but will make its presence known during my lifetime, is like receiving a terminal medical diagnosis on an almost incomprehensible scale. I'm depressed for my own future, sure, but now I look at my friends' new babies and wonder if they'll be *Mad Max* characters in 40 years—or if conditions will destabilize so massively that we suffocate or roast in one massive die-off.

When I watch *Alien* or *Event Horizon* or read something like *INFINITE DARK*, a quiet little part of me knows I'm witnessing a danger that I'll never experience in real life. But with each new sobering article I read about coral extinctions, collapsing ice shelves, and political decisions that further endanger our fragile ecosystem, being firmly planted here on Earth feels less like a safety blanket and more like a guillotine sliding closer to the nape of my neck. I shouldn't be envious of the crews of *The Nostromo* or *The Orpheus*, but outer space is starting to look like an escape hatch just out of reach. It's cold and dark and dangerous out there, sure, but—all things considered—I wouldn't mind the option.



STEVE FOXE is the author of many licensed children's books and a few really cool comics he can't talk about just yet. He is the editor for *Paste Magazine's* comic section and lives in Queens, where he tweets about comics, horror movies, gay stuff, and his boyfriend's dog at @steve_foxe.



During my annual October horror movie binge, I tried to watch a classic—*American Werewolf in London*. I watch it a few times a year, but this time I had to turn it off before the legendary transformation scene was complete. My skin was crawling, my arms were covered in goosebumps, and I was sweating...but not because I was afraid. Because I knew what it felt like. Every pop of David's vertebra, every grinding crunch of his distorting limbs, reminded me of my own shapeshifting experience.

You see, just over a year ago, I gave birth to my son. With all the changes of new parenthood, the most unexpected was how it altered my relationship to horror movies, particularly body horror. It no longer feels like exciting escapism but like a vivid documentary of some of the most bizarre moments of my life.

When I see a character contorting and writhing with the labors of their mutations, I think about the end of my first trimester when my body was flooded with the hormone, Relaxin. This hormone made my joints begin to spread, my pelvic ligaments stretch, upped my volume of blood by 50%, and increased elasticity in my connective tissue—basically, it expanded my body's capacity to hold a 14-week old parasite, reshaping my physical structure to accommodate its growth. And it hurt. My back ached as my spine shifted its curvature and I was often out of breath. Panting, bloated with blood, anatomy twisting into a new shape...sound familiar?

No good werewolf is complete without sprouting hair, and that phase of my transformation came with the second trimester. A bounty of estrogen made my curls grow in thicker, longer—and not just on my head. I was shaving my legs every single day, waxing my upper lip once a week, using some of my rapidly depleting energy to prevent myself from going full *The Howling*. And then the bleeding gums started. Sure, I had that stereotypical pregnancy glow, but no one noticed once they saw my red, oozing smile. Not that I was smiling much, since right around this time the hungers arrived.



The cravings were insatiable. I dreamt of devouring rare steaks, pounds of crispy bacon, waterfalls of gravy...but thanks to my son's placement, his kicking limbs dislodged most of what I ate, causing me to throw up a few times a day. So, I had to stick to soft, low acid foods with tons of heartburn medication. To compensate for my primal longings, my body made me crave ice. And then I had an uncontrollable desire to chew on sponges. It sounds crazy in the abstract but when you think about it, it was as close to bones and flesh as I could get. Shredding sponges with my teeth and crunching shards of ice was pure ecstasy, and though it did nothing for my nutritional needs, it was a balm for my hormonal demands. Whenever I see a movie where a poor shifting creature runs to the fridge to make a meat-shake, I can't help but empathize, for I know what it means to have unnatural needs. Except mine were described as "magical" and "the beauty of nature" where theirs are more accurately labeled as horror.

The last phase of my transformation was during the delivery of my baby. At this point, my body had bled, swollen, expanded, and nurtured an enormous child for me to expel. With the help of an epidural and two days of labor, I did just that—and then for the first time in almost a year, I was alone in my body. The absence of the second skeleton inside of me was magical and devastating, much like I imagine the come down is the morning after a werewolf's first full moon. To have such power only to have it evaporate in one gush of fluids, one last howl of pain, was the hollowness I've ever felt. The emotional and physical exertion of pregnancy, labor, and delivery resulted in absolute joy upon seeing my beautiful son's face—and a lingering trauma about the changes I experienced.

So, while I may still love horror, I can't watch it the same way I once did...because I lived it. And in my franchise? The survivors never look back.



CASEY GILLY is a comics writer, horror fan, and mother. The first two prepared her for the third.

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AWAKENING
VOLUME ONE

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