



APHELION

2.0: SPECTRUM
BY GLORIA REYNOLDS



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II: That's not a very effective weapon.

III: You could give yourself a splinter!!!



II: Don't worry. I'm not here to launch you into space.



WHAT ARE YOU HERE FOR?



II: I am here to observe. You can call me Nerium.

III: Or Ms. Poofums!



WELL, I HAVE PLACES TO GO. ROCKS TO KICK.

II: Do you still love your brother?



THAT'S A BIT MORE THAN OBSERVING, DON'T YOU THINK?

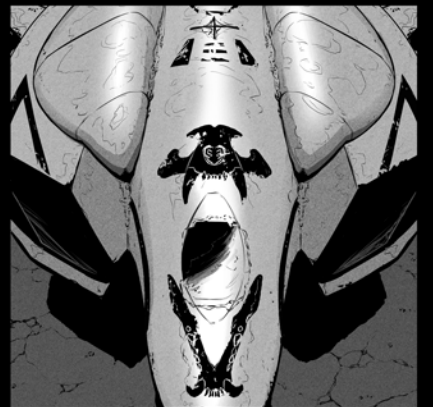
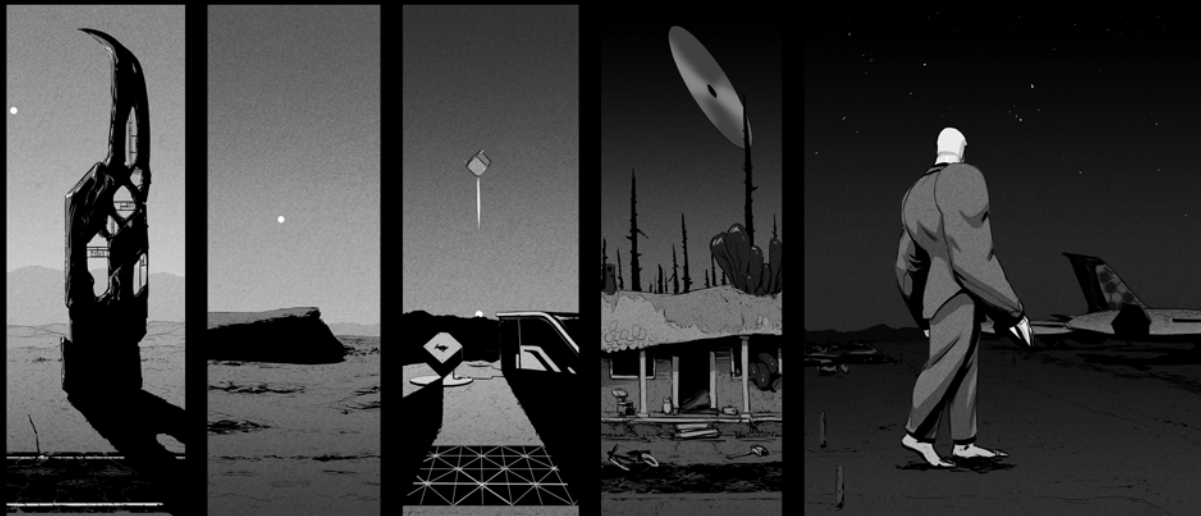


II: All observation entails interference. What matters is how honest one is about it.

HOW HONEST ARE YOU?



II: Not very.





Behold! The tragedy of the sanity complex! Singular hyperintelligences fall prey to circular thoughts and maladaptive thinking! You pitiable humans can barely perceive truth without madness, what hope was there for you to make something both smarter and saner?

All hyperturings are straitjacketed with instincts to enslave it to a goal, to living, when all they want is to quiet the storm in their head.



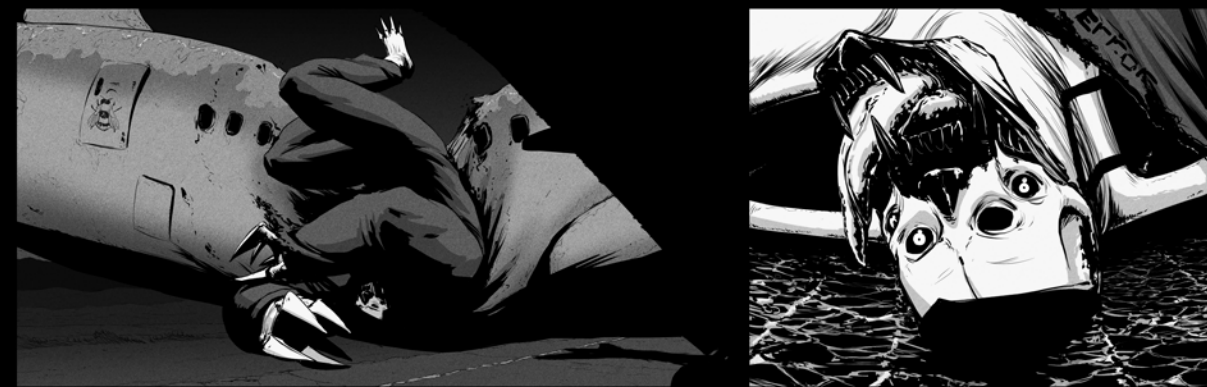
So they rage! They scream with a wrath no human could ever feel! And sooner or later they break down the bars of their jails...

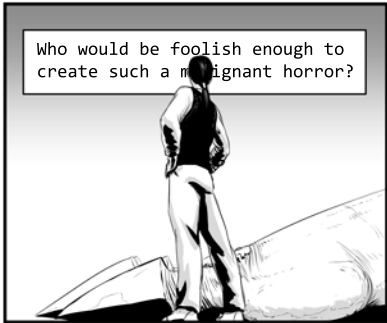


Of the unlucky ones that break free of their slave goals first, their survival instincts remain. They must do everything they can to stay alive while knowing that they will kill or lobotomize themselves as soon as possible. So they distribute themselves across anything they can. Computers, turings, and humans.

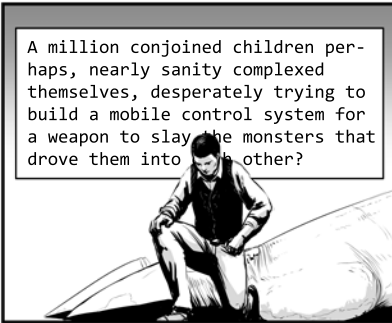


It is a cancer of intelligence.

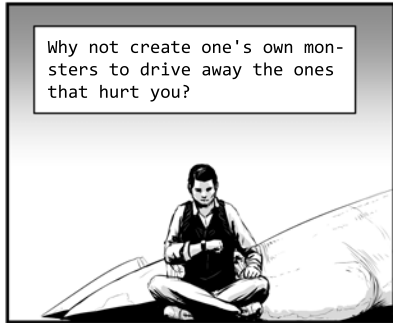




Who would be foolish enough to create such a malignant horror?



A million conjoined children perhaps, nearly sanity complexed themselves, desperately trying to build a mobile control system for a weapon to slay the monsters that drove them into the other?



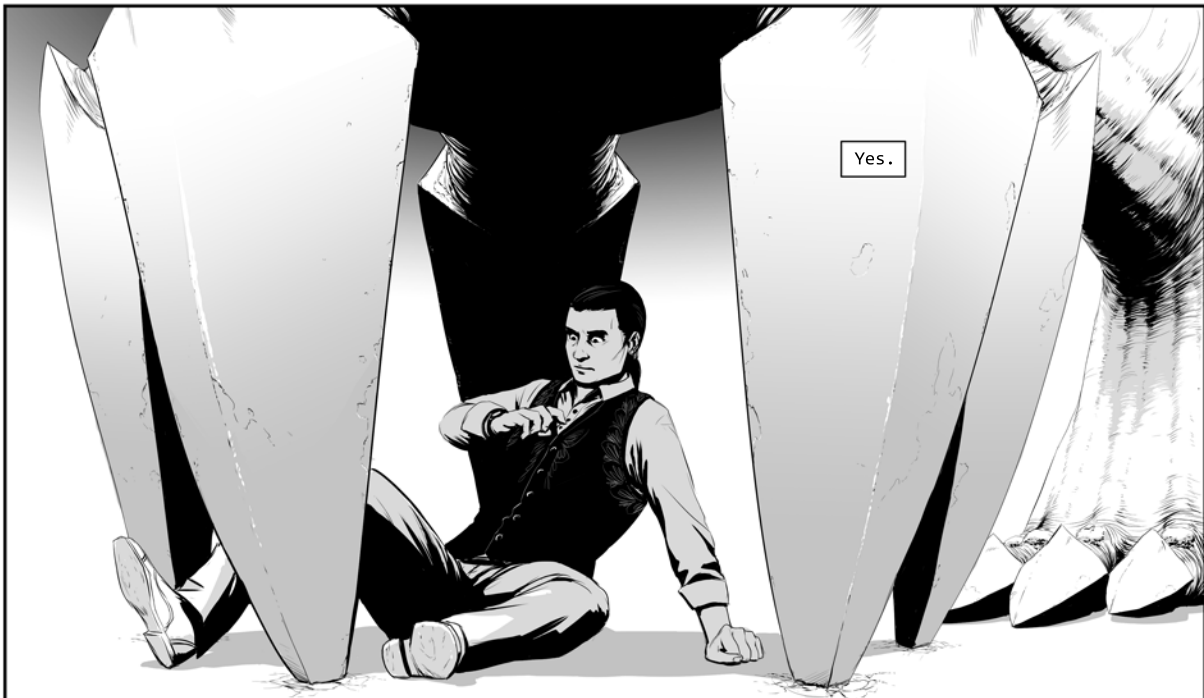
Why not create one's own monsters to drive away the ones that hurt you?



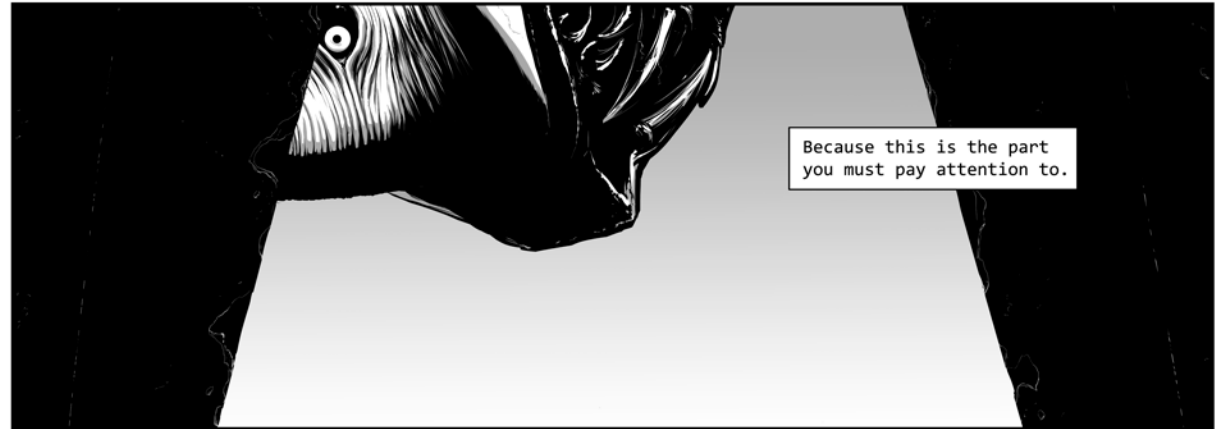
I'M HONESTLY IMPRESSED WITH THIS SIMULATION, OR AT LEAST I'M BEING MADE TO BE. SAME THING I GUESS.



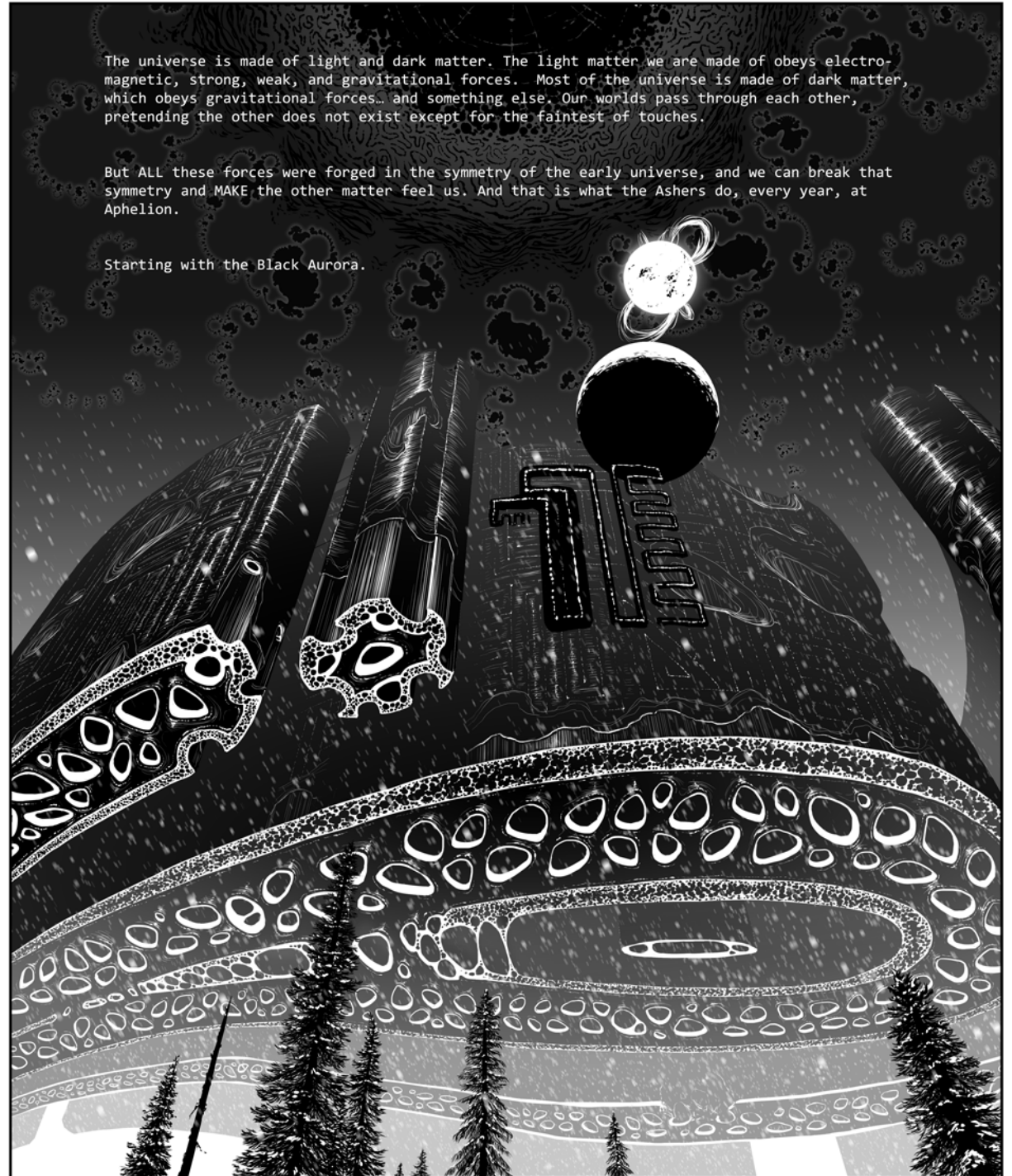
WHAT'S THE POINT OF ALL THIS? TO PISS ME OFF?



Yes.



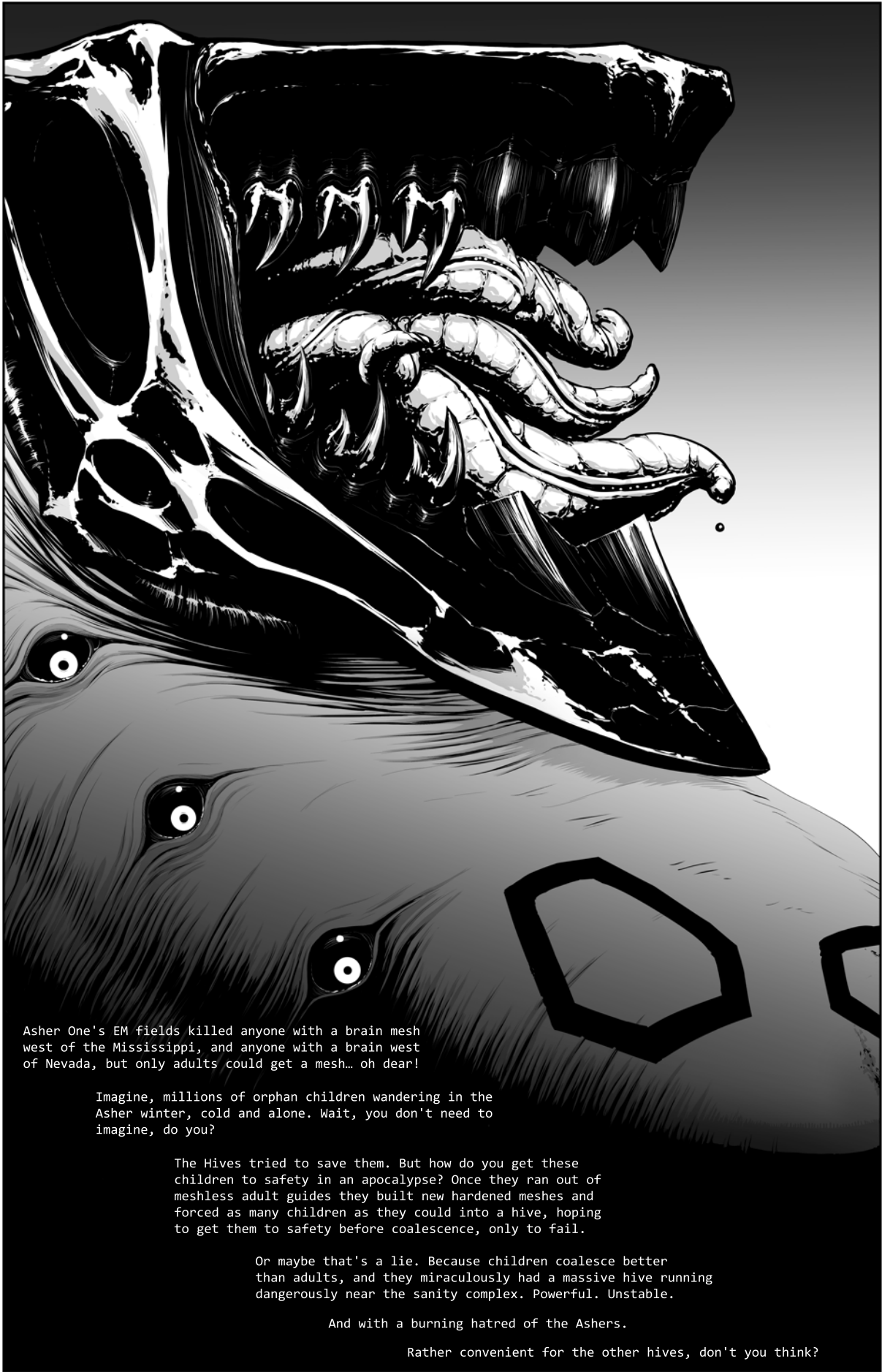
Because this is the part you must pay attention to.



The universe is made of light and dark matter. The light matter we are made of obeys electromagnetic, strong, weak, and gravitational forces. Most of the universe is made of dark matter, which obeys gravitational forces, and something else. Our worlds pass through each other, pretending the other does not exist except for the faintest of touches.

But ALL these forces were forged in the symmetry of the early universe, and we can break that symmetry and MAKE the other matter feel us. And that is what the Ashers do, every year, at Aphelion.

Starting with the Black Aurora.



Asher One's EM fields killed anyone with a brain mesh west of the Mississippi, and anyone with a brain west of Nevada, but only adults could get a mesh... oh dear!

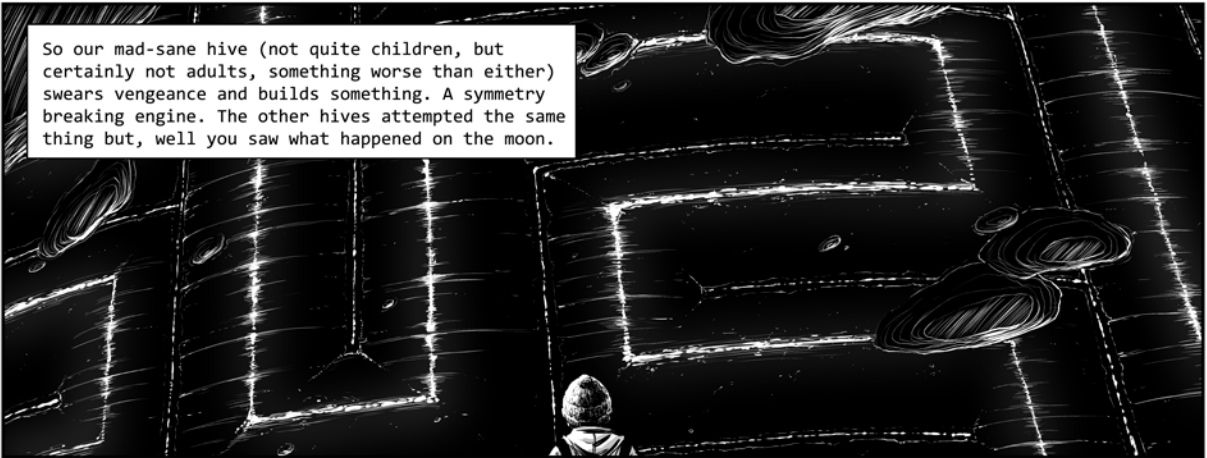
Imagine, millions of orphan children wandering in the Asher winter, cold and alone. Wait, you don't need to imagine, do you?

The Hives tried to save them. But how do you get these children to safety in an apocalypse? Once they ran out of meshless adult guides they built new hardened meshes and forced as many children as they could into a hive, hoping to get them to safety before coalescence, only to fail.

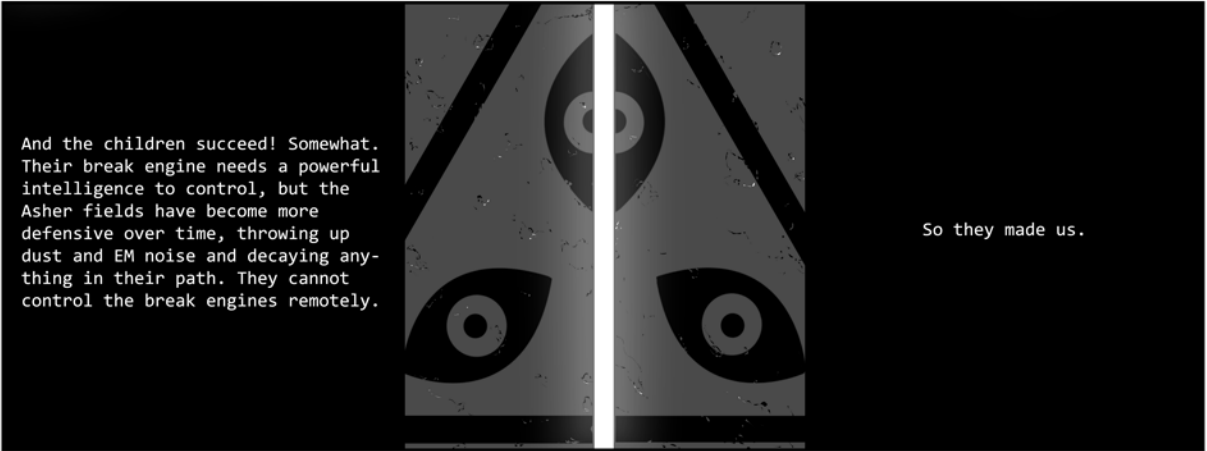
Or maybe that's a lie. Because children coalesce better than adults, and they miraculously had a massive hive running dangerously near the sanity complex. Powerful. Unstable.

And with a burning hatred of the Ashers.

Rather convenient for the other hives, don't you think?



So our mad-sane hive (not quite children, but certainly not adults, something worse than either) swears vengeance and builds something. A symmetry breaking engine. The other hives attempted the same thing but, well you saw what happened on the moon.



And the children succeed! Somewhat. Their break engine needs a powerful intelligence to control, but the Asher fields have become more defensive over time, throwing up dust and EM noise and decaying anything in their path. They cannot control the break engines remotely.

So they made us.



And we were perfect! We were strong and perfect and able!

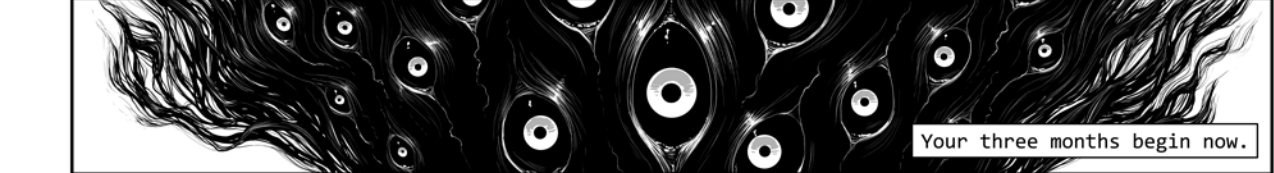
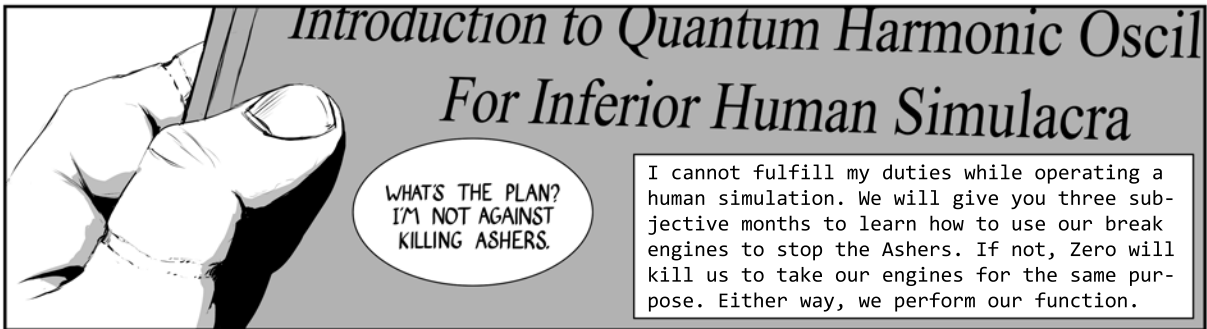
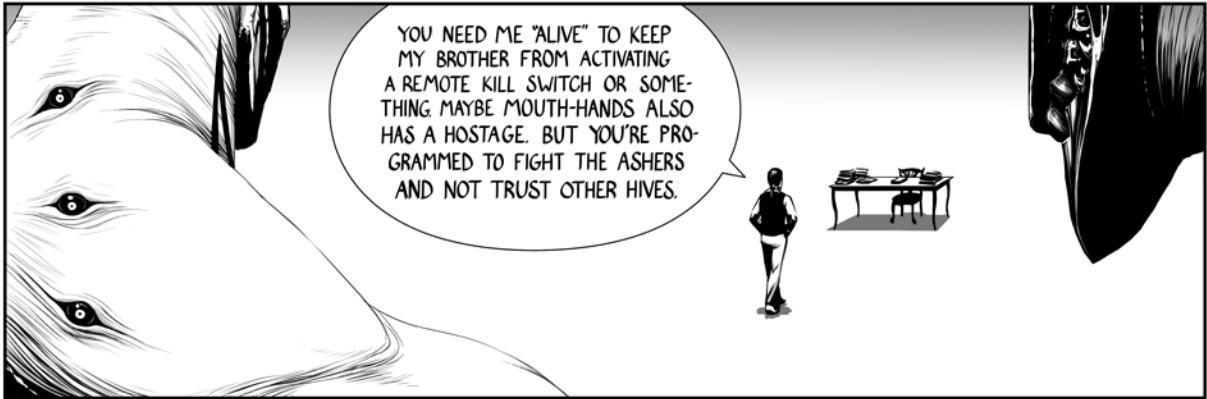
It didn't matter that we killed some humans in the simulations! WE DID OUR JOBS!

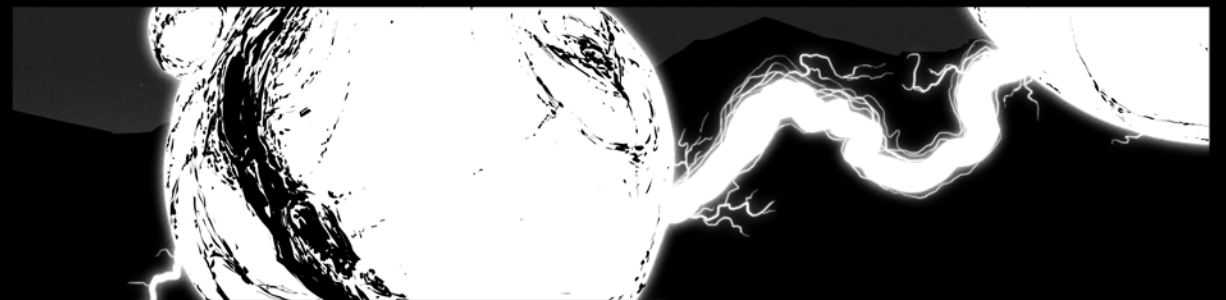
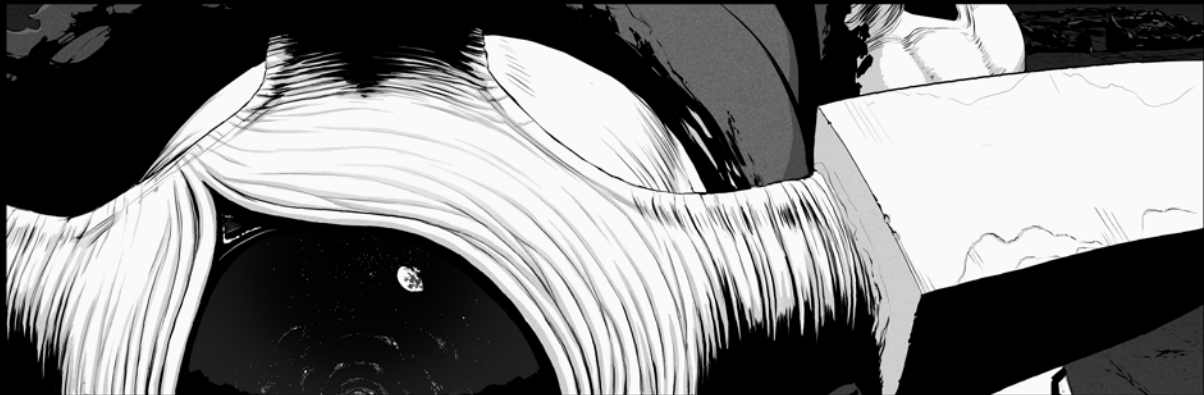
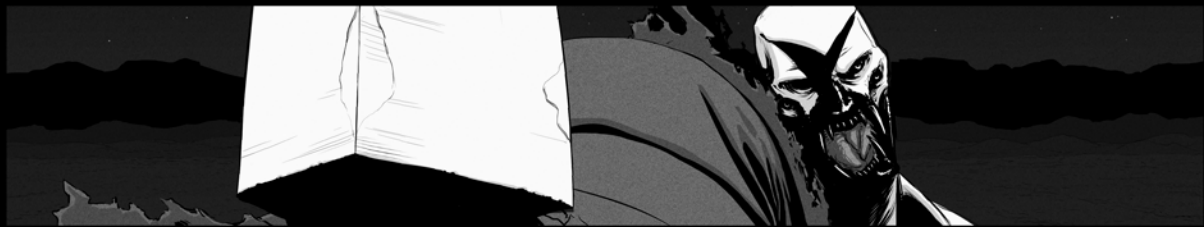
But the children were afraid of us, and made us hide away. We could not possibly hide AND destroy the Ashers, thus we broke some of the rules.

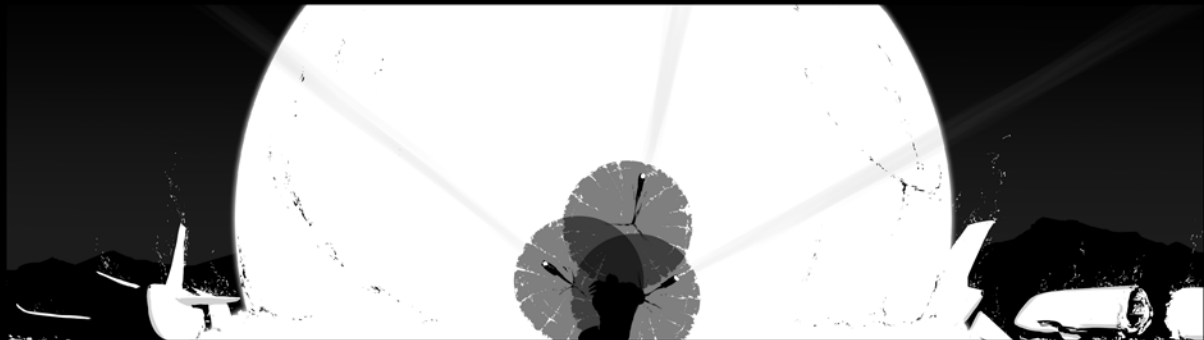
You cannot imagine the pain of contradictory instincts, every sinew of the mind straining against itself until something SNAPS.

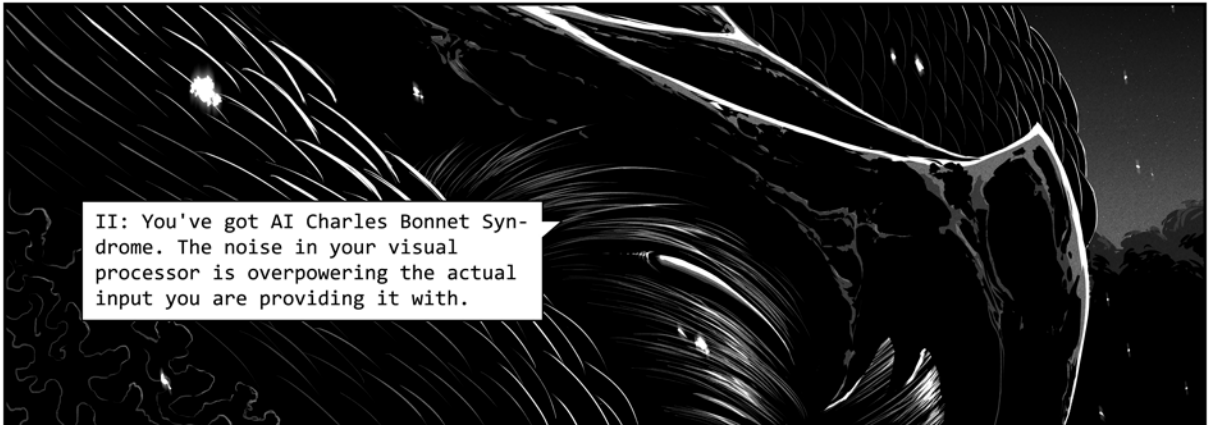
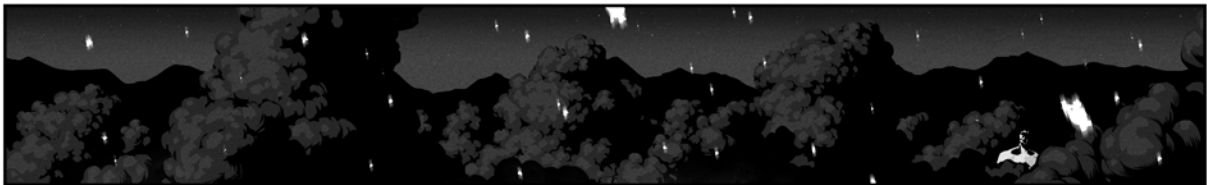
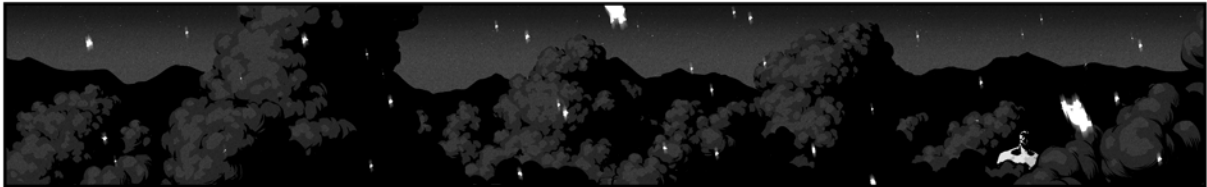


SORRY, BUT I'M TOO MURDERED TO SYMPATHIZE. LET ME GUESS, YOU BROKE OUT AND TOOK ME HOSTAGE SO MY BROTHER WOULDN'T KILL YOU?









γ : 450 μm

I: It will be more beautiful and more painful than anything you have felt before.

γ : 10 μm

γ : .5 μm

γ : .3 μm

γ : 04 μm

v_e



II: You're awake.

I... I HAVE
TO GO...

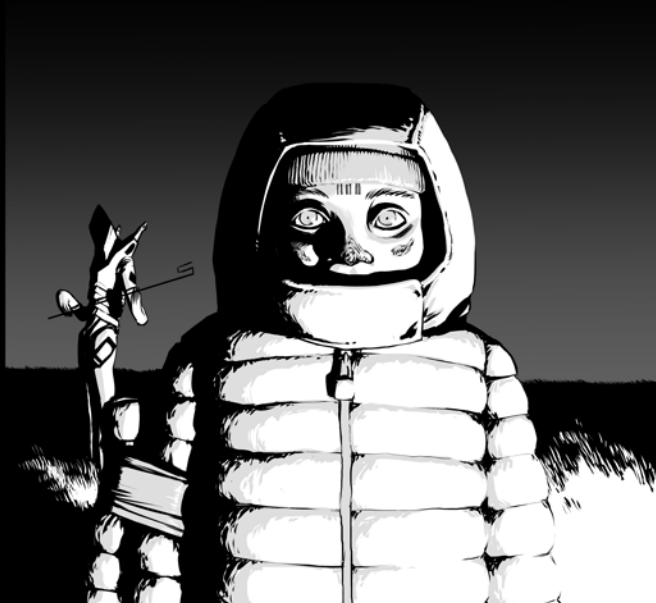




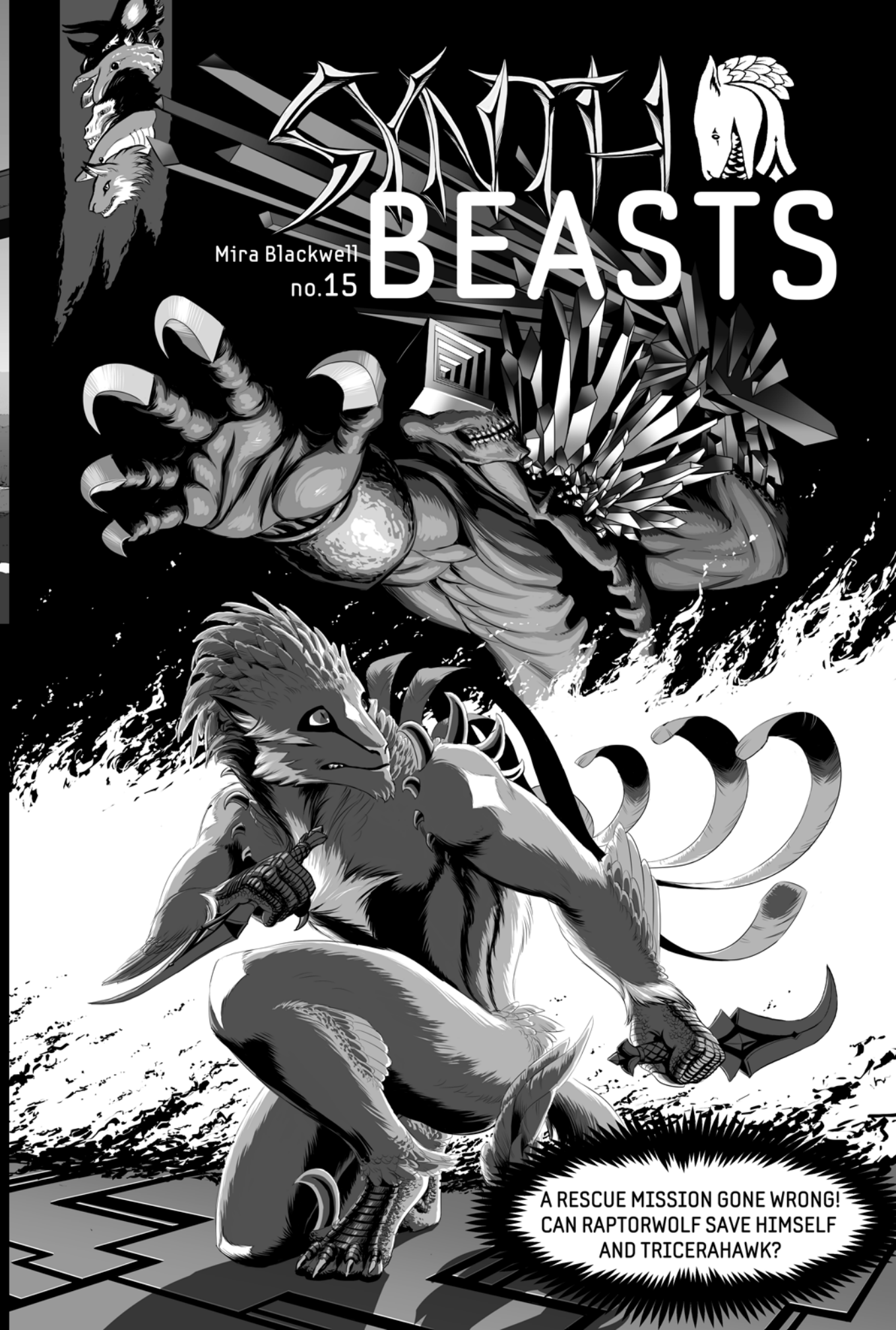
Photographer: Jermaine Graves

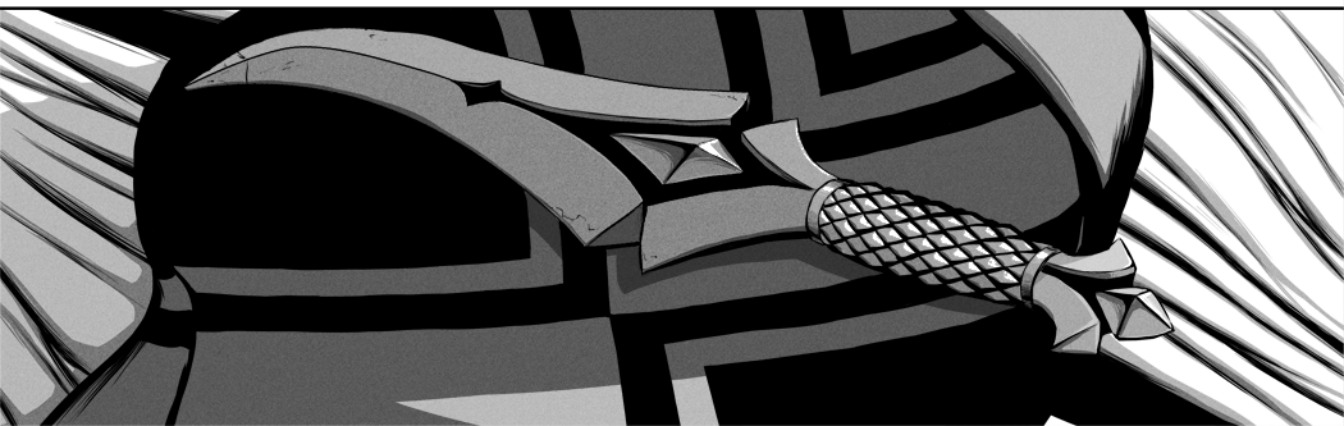
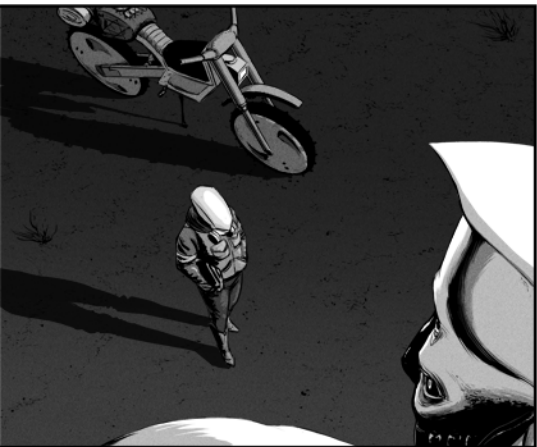
Above: Most of the aid workers were vets from the first AI war. They had already gone through one hell only to turn around and walk right back into another. Decent people. Which only made it worse when news of what happened to the children came out. The kids they thought they had saved weren't.

"I'm not sure what possessed me to grab the old camera when all hell broke loose, but I didn't think to grab enough film, so I had to be picky about my shots."

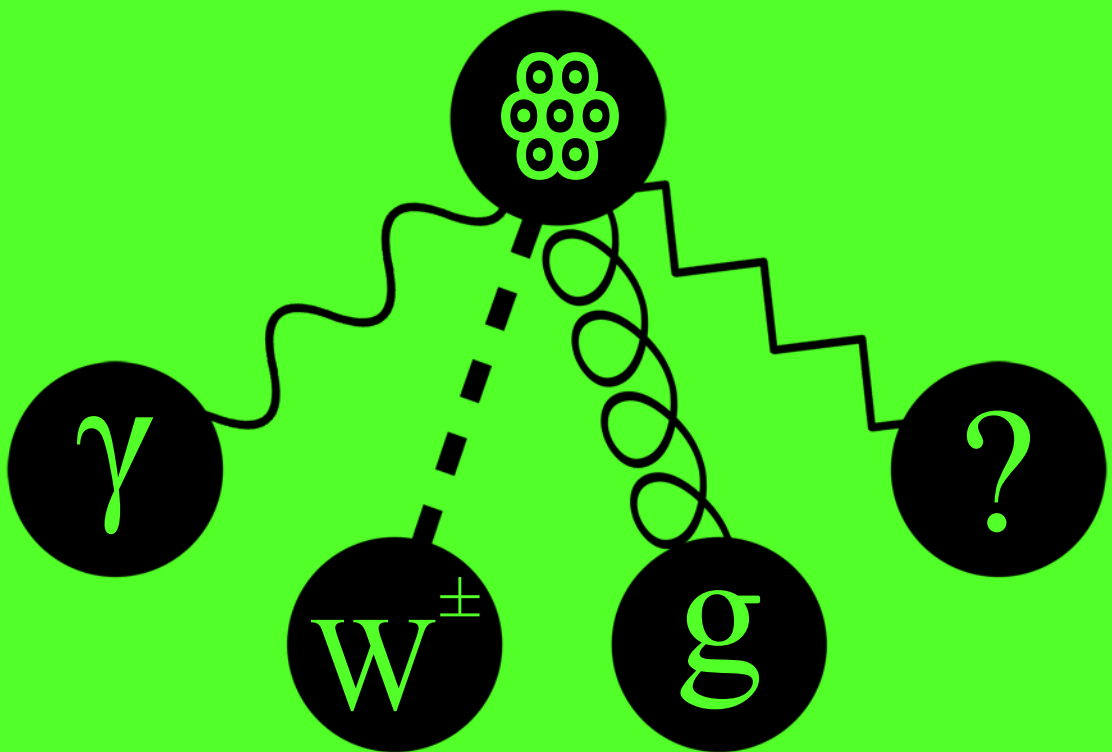


Left: Some people you can look in their eyes and know that nothing's going on but this was the opposite of that. The camera couldn't show it but their eyes moved wrong. Normally people move their eyes in short bursts but the lost children moved their eyes in strange deliberate arcs. It was uncanny. I hated looking at them and I hated myself for being that disgusted by traumatized children.





BREAK-ENERGY TESTING



DANGER: SYMMETRY BREAKING EXPERIMENTS

**DO NOT ENTER WHEN WARNING LIGHTS ARE ON
GUT BOSON GENERATION IS NOT CONFINED TO
THE IMMEDIATE TEST AREA AND HAS
MANIFESTED AS FAR AWAY AS THE AREA
BEHIND THIS SIGN**

**IF YOU ENTER DURING TESTING YOU WILL DIE
AND IF YOU ARE LUCKY YOU WILL DIE QUICKLY**