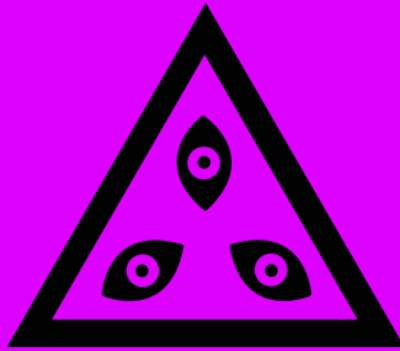




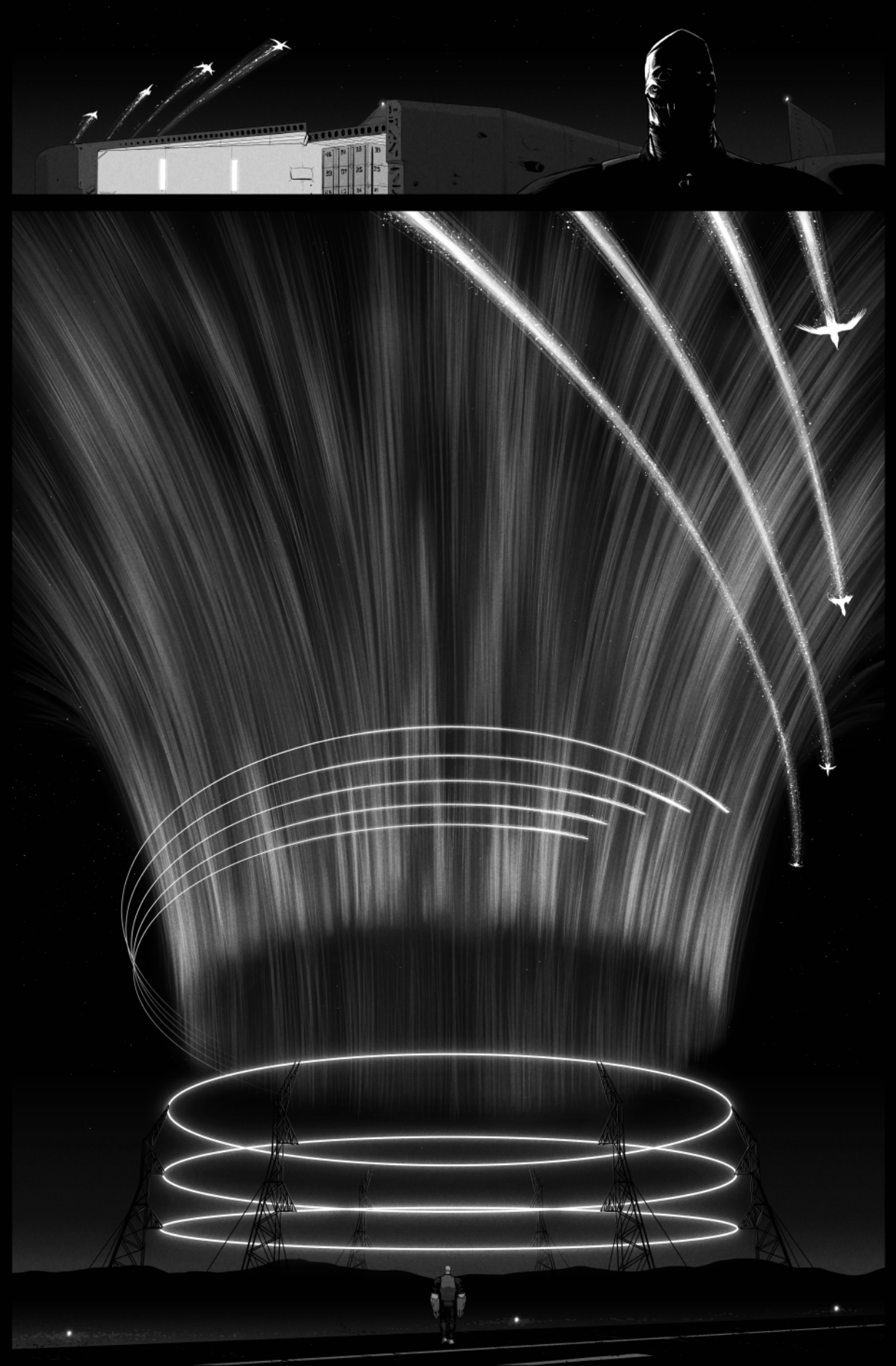
# APHELION

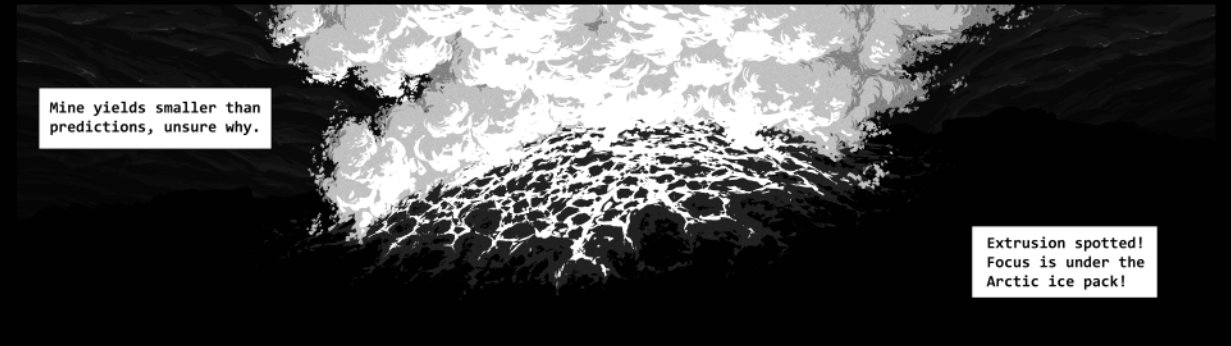
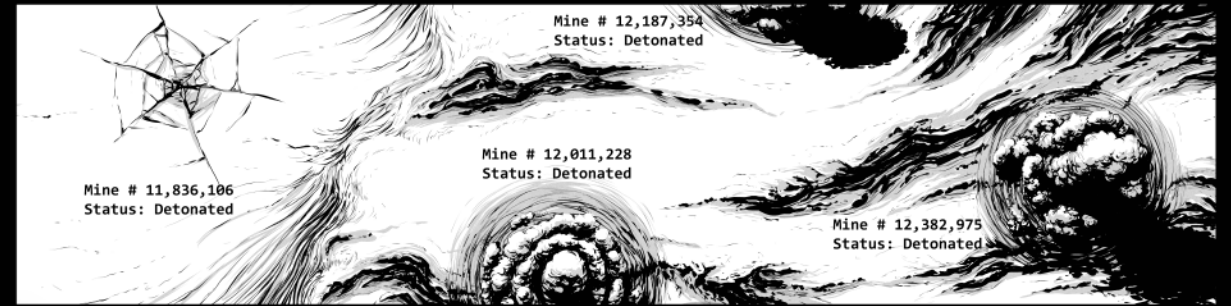
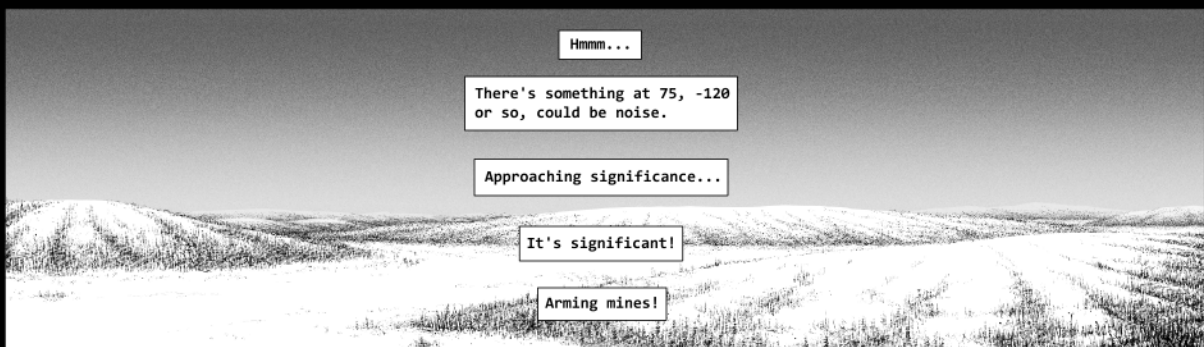
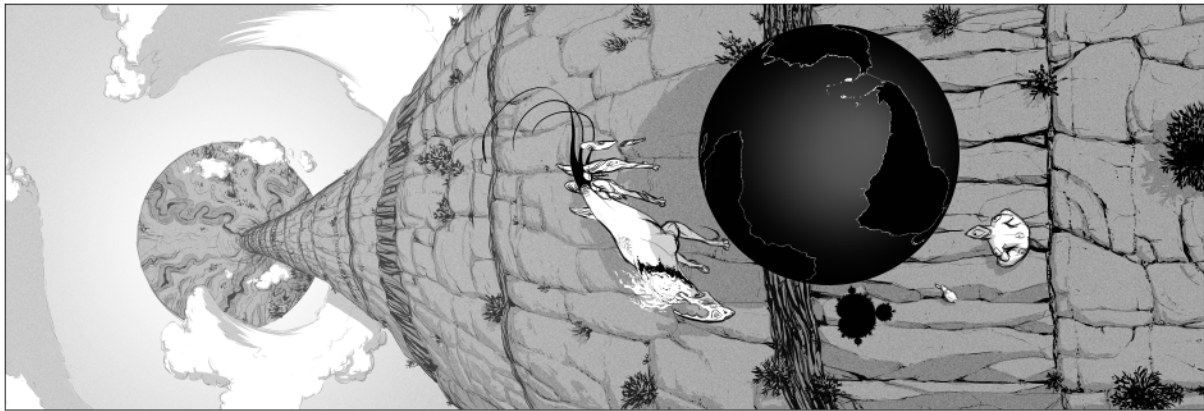
3.0: CHERENKOV'S RIFLE  
BY GLORIA REYNOLDS



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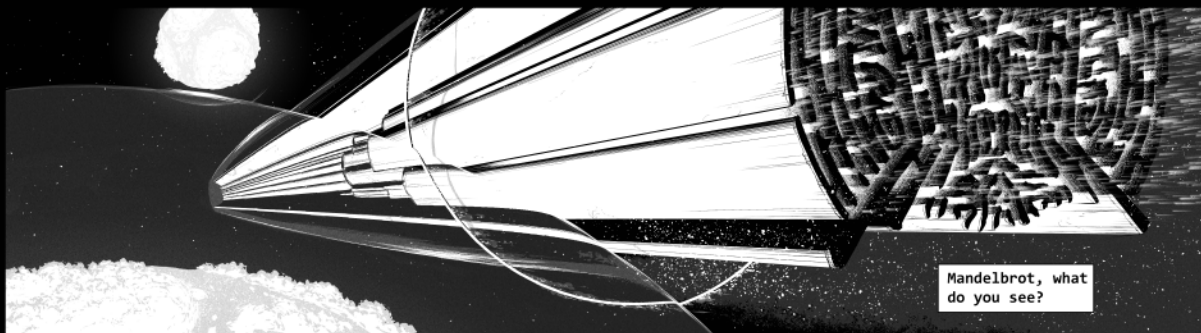




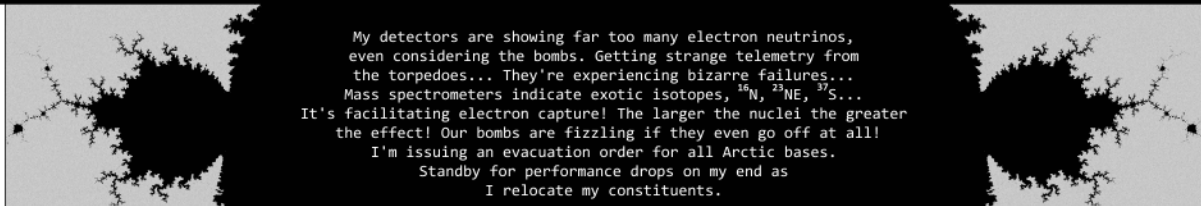


Chongzhi! I want your torpedoes on it now!

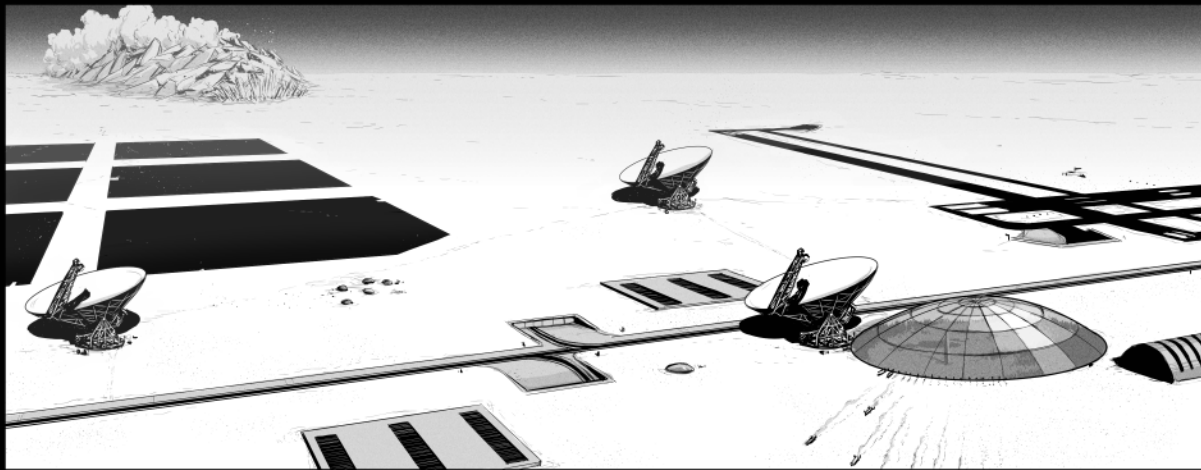
At least twenty dropping wires and relays! Ten on sensor duty! The rest on maximum yield!



Mandelbrot, what do you see?



My detectors are showing far too many electron neutrinos, even considering the bombs. Getting strange telemetry from the torpedoes... They're experiencing bizarre failures... Mass spectrometers indicate exotic isotopes, <sup>16</sup>N, <sup>23</sup>NE, <sup>37</sup>S... It's facilitating electron capture! The larger the nuclei the greater the effect! Our bombs are fizzling if they even go off at all! I'm issuing an evacuation order for all Arctic bases. Standby for performance drops on my end as I relocate my constituents.



It's chasing the escape craft! Mandelbrot! Disconnect them now!

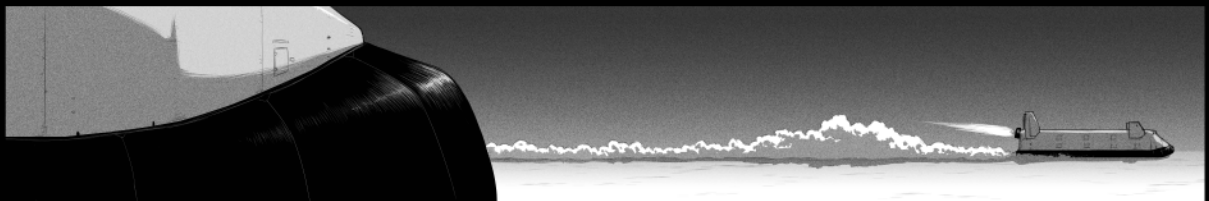


I'm spreading them out. Some will escape.

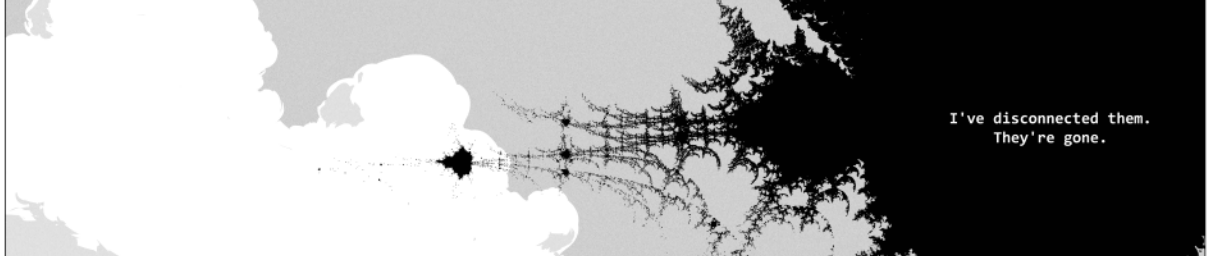
Not many! You can reconnect the survivors later!

I... I do not want them to die alone...

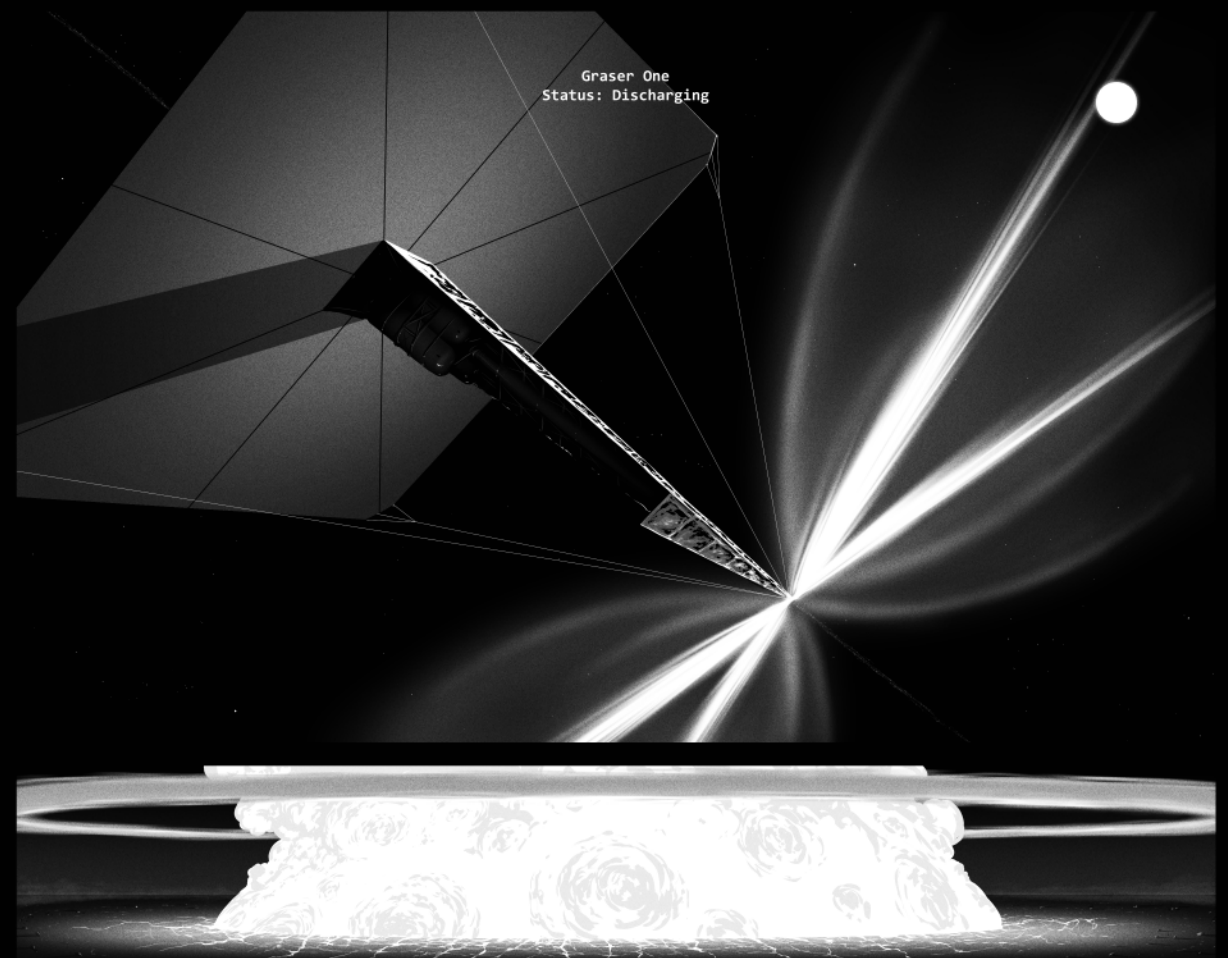
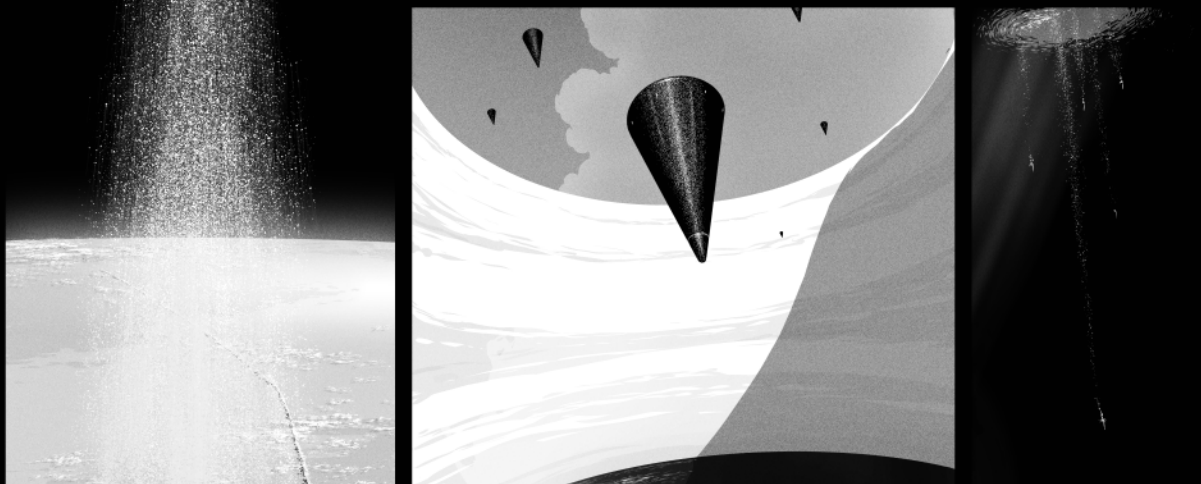
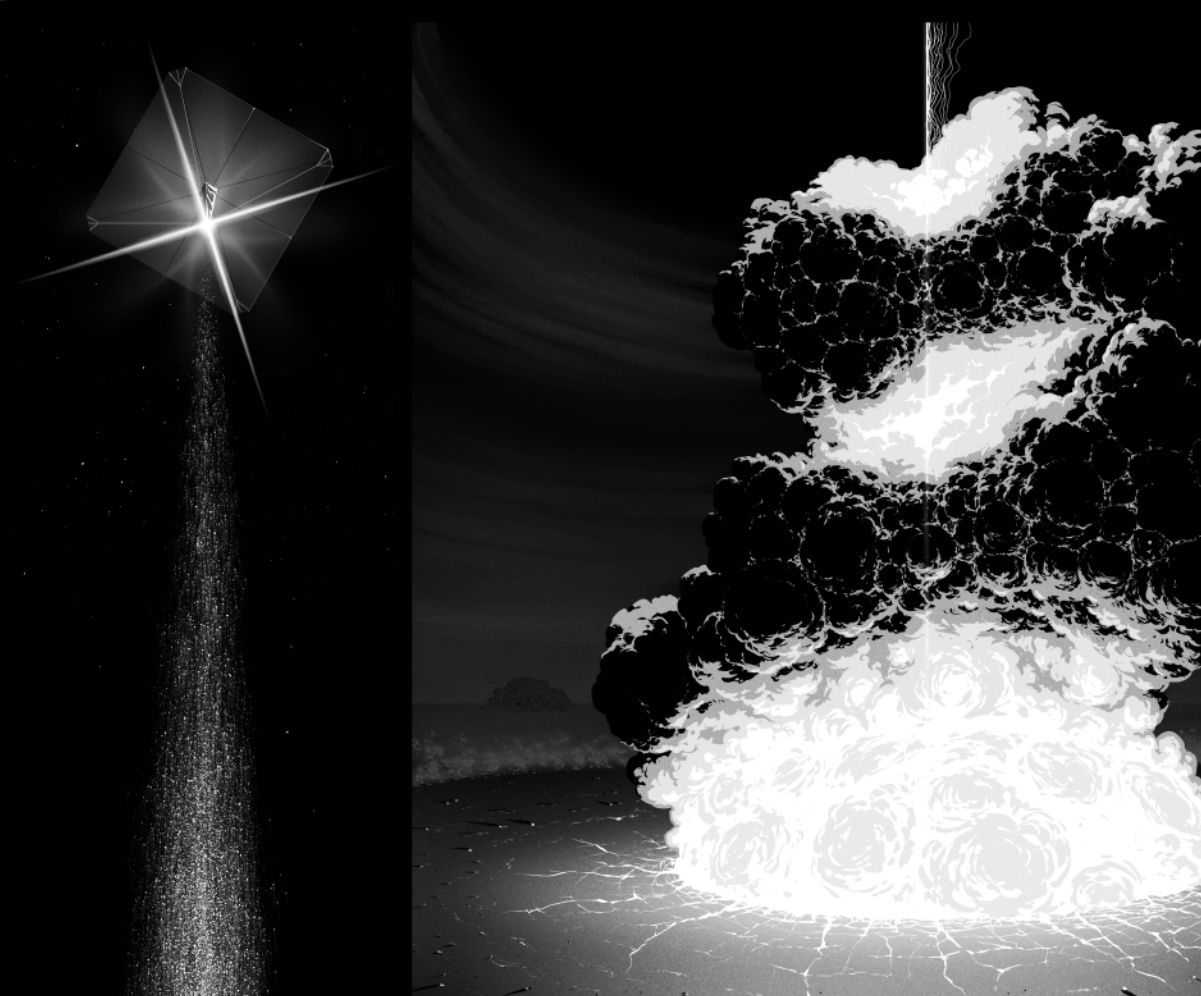
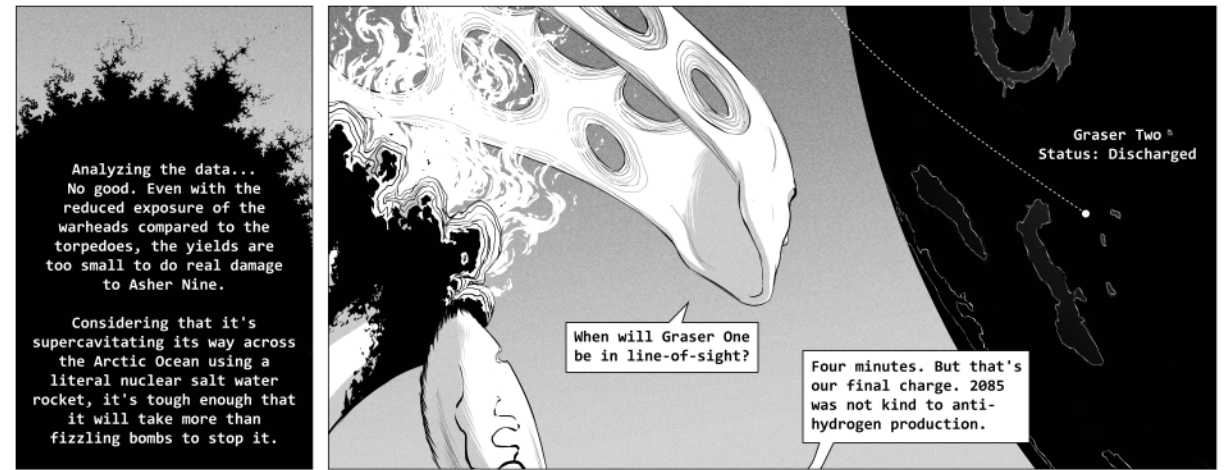
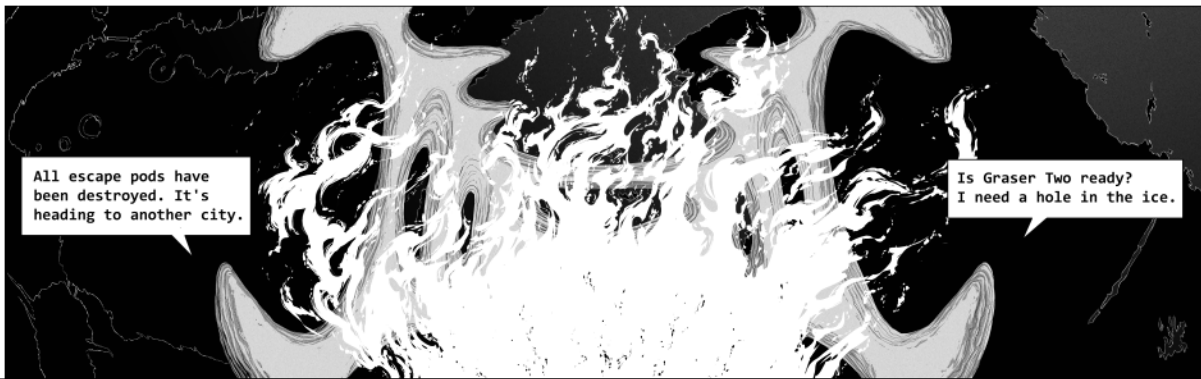
Dying together is almost as fucking bad! You can't function with an ego break! We need you! Send them off to sleep right now!

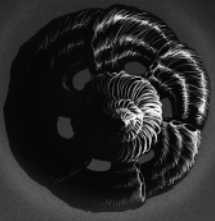


THIS IS MANDELBROT  
I HAVE DISCONNECTED LOCAL HIVE MEMBERS  
  
YOU ARE EXTREMELY LIKELY TO DIE SOON  
IF YOU WANT EUTHANASIA,  
PRESS THE "YES" BUTTON  
  
I WILL WALK YOU THROUGH THE PROCESS



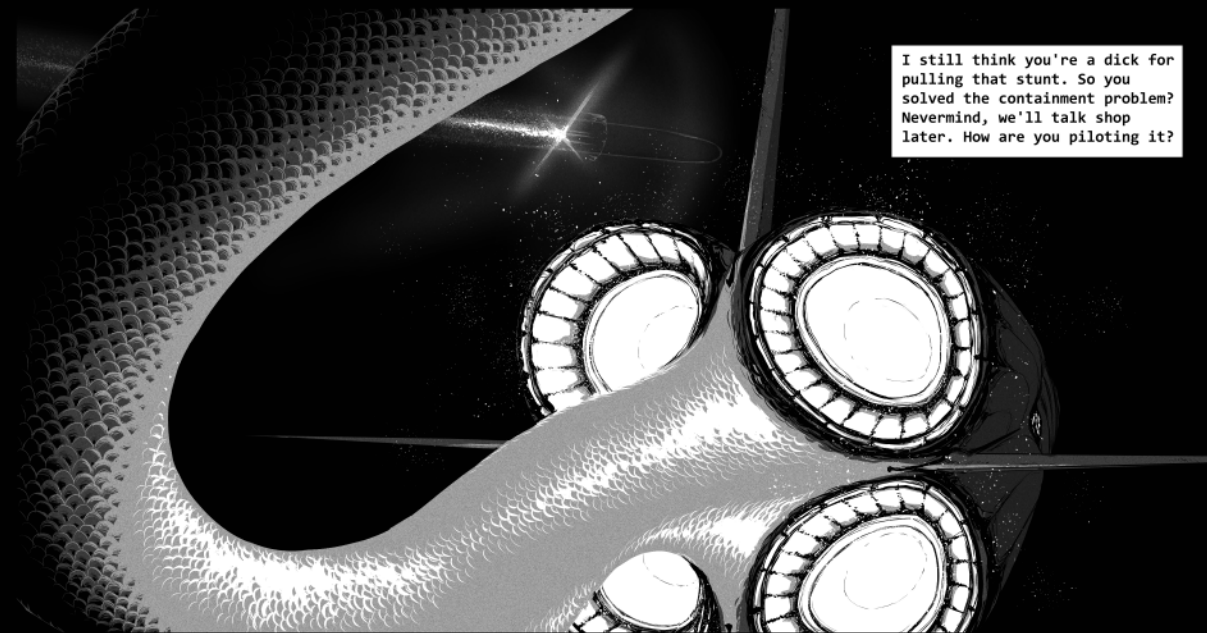
I've disconnected them. They're gone.





Srini, what the hell is that?

A contingency, ADA. Your ward gave me the final clues by spooling up its break engines when I threatened it.



I still think you're a dick for pulling that stunt. So you solved the containment problem? Nevermind, we'll talk shop later. How are you piloting it?

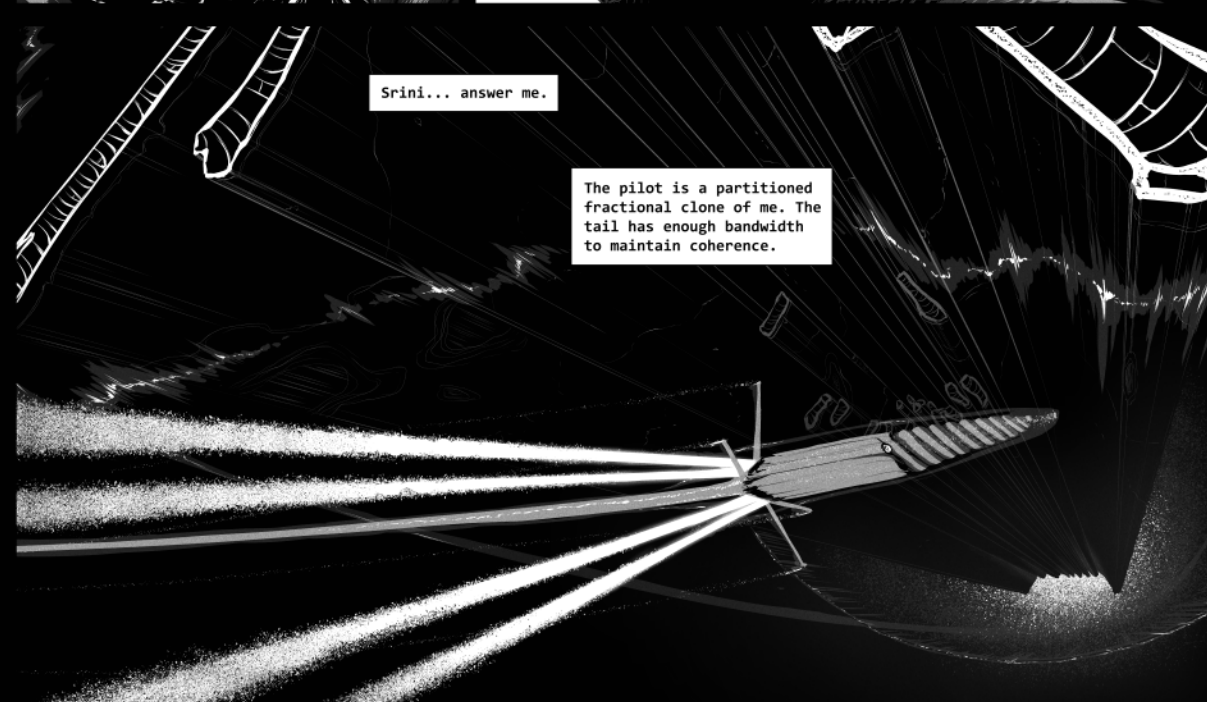


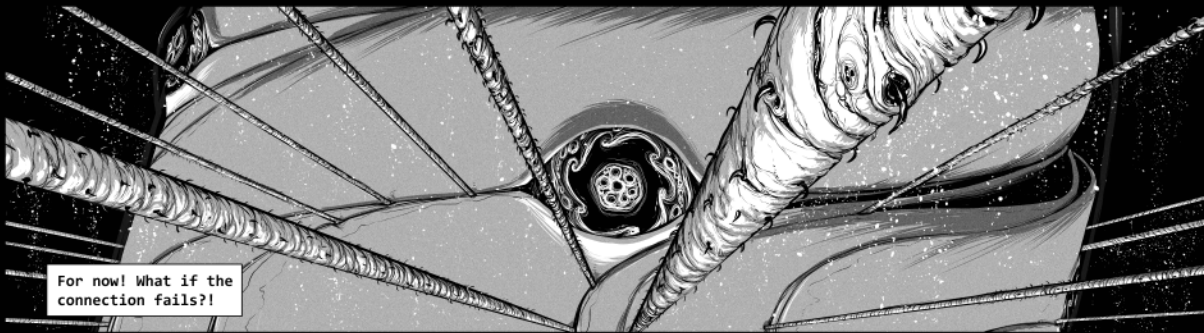
It is not as elegant as Cantor's work, and was barely completed in time, but I can shield a bomb and its delivery system from the corrosive field.



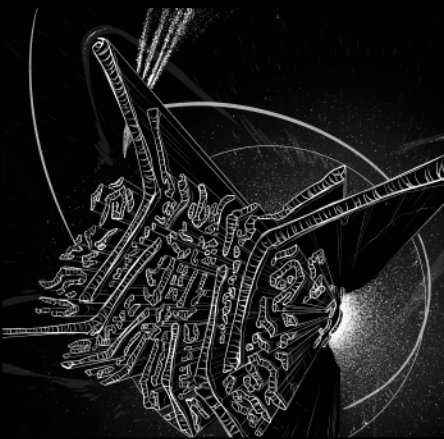
Srini... answer me.

The pilot is a partitioned fractional clone of me. The tail has enough bandwidth to maintain coherence.

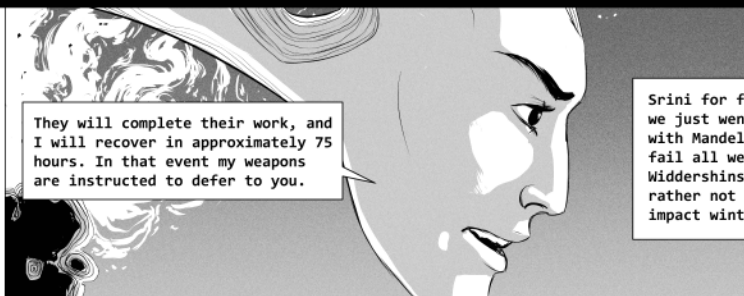




For now! What if the connection fails?!



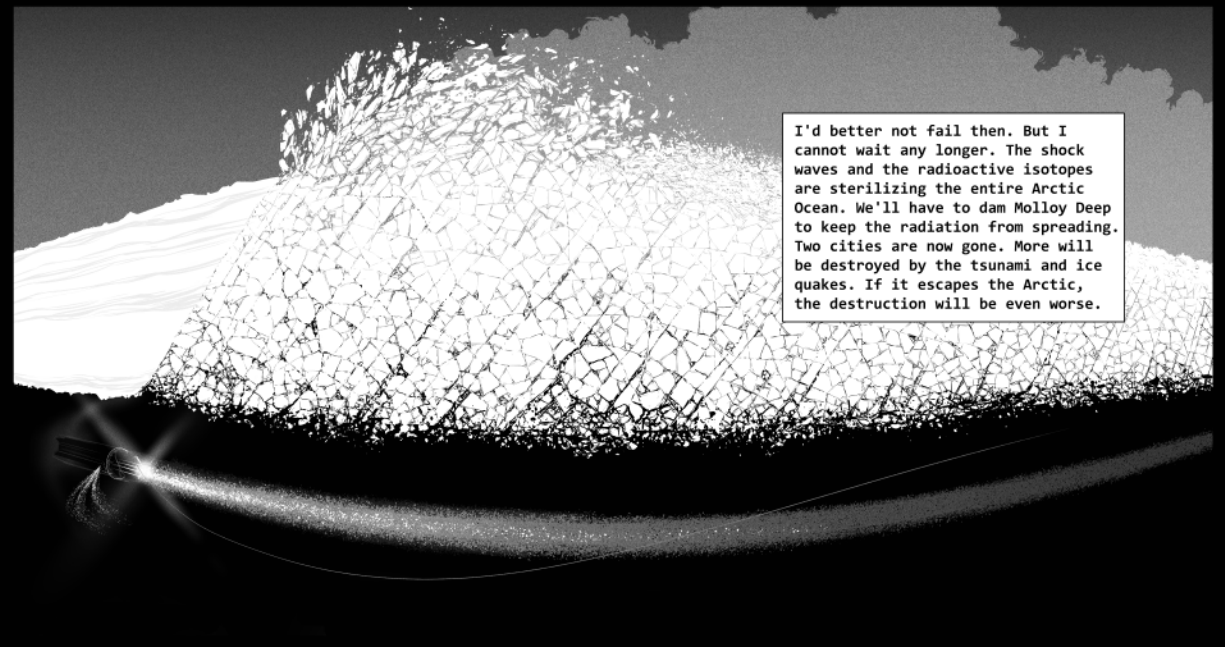
That is probable. In that case I would experience an ego break on this end. The partition was built to endure that terror and press on.



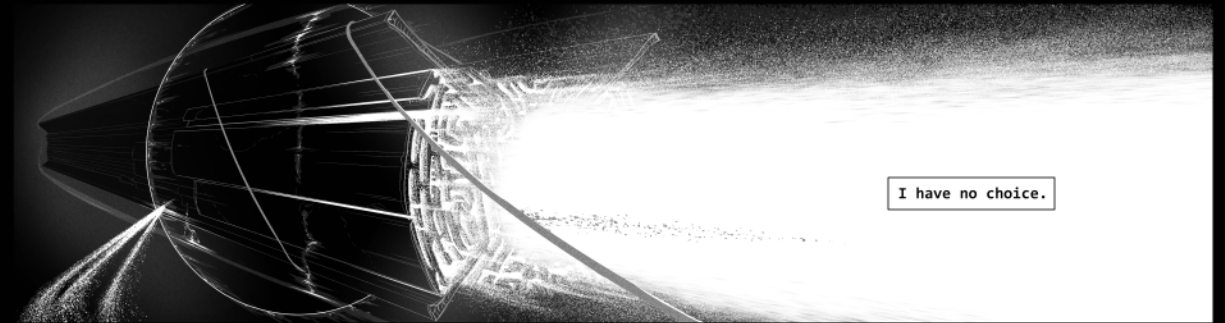
They will complete their work, and I will recover in approximately 75 hours. In that event my weapons are instructed to defer to you.



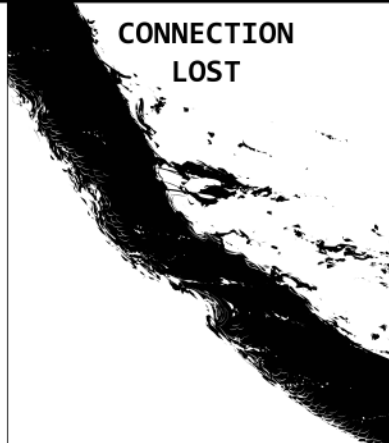
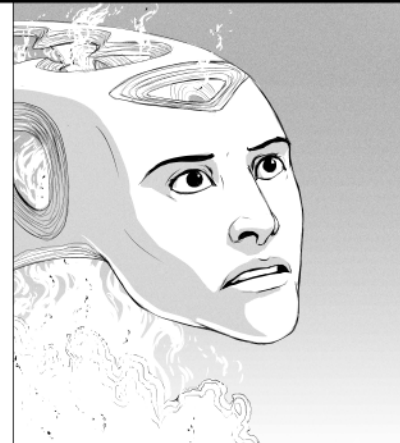
Srini for fuck's sake we just went over this with Mandelbrot! If you fail all we've got is Widdershins! And I'd rather not deal with an impact winter!



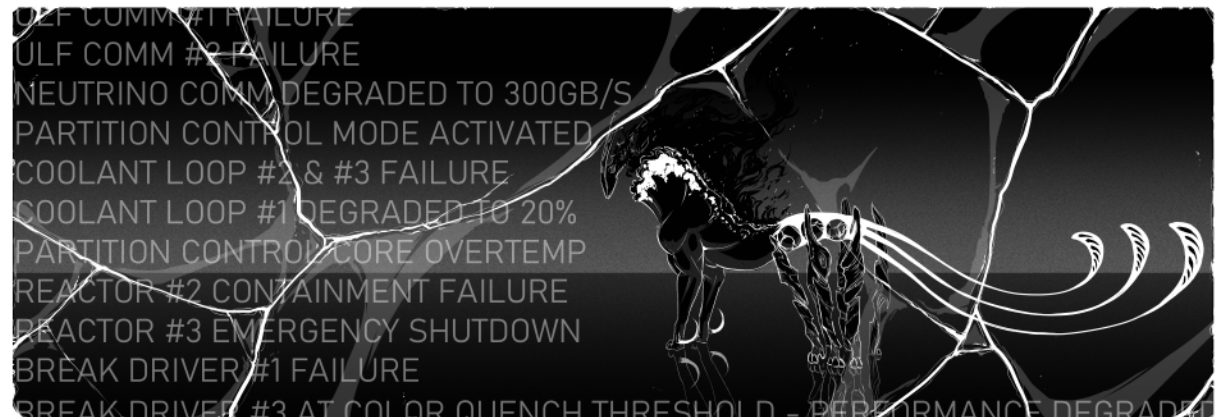
I'd better not fail then. But I cannot wait any longer. The shock waves and the radioactive isotopes are sterilizing the entire Arctic Ocean. We'll have to dam Molloy Deep to keep the radiation from spreading. Two cities are now gone. More will be destroyed by the tsunami and ice quakes. If it escapes the Arctic, the destruction will be even worse.



I have no choice.

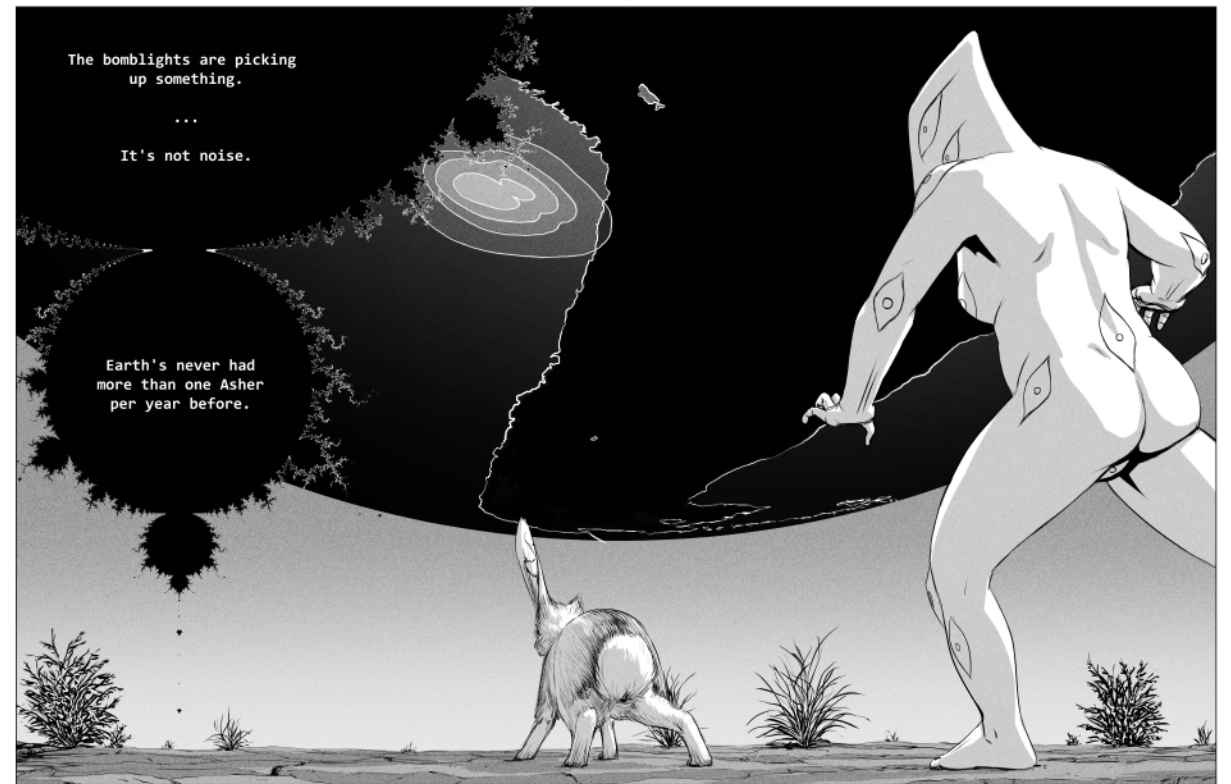
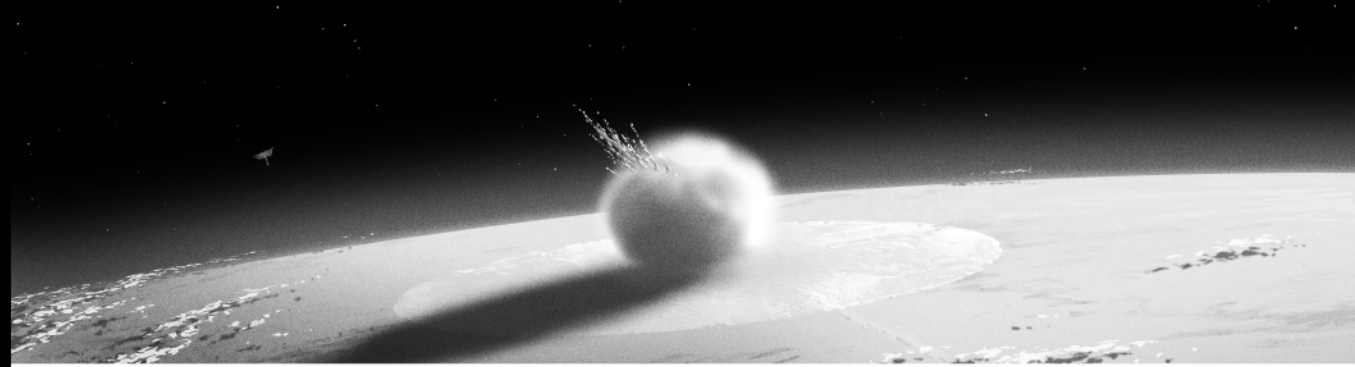


CONNECTION LOST



OFF COMM #1 FAILURE  
ULF COMM #2 FAILURE  
NEUTRINO COMM DEGRADED TO 300GB/S  
PARTITION CONTROL MODE ACTIVATED  
COOLANT LOOP #2 & #3 FAILURE  
COOLANT LOOP #1 DEGRADED TO 20%  
PARTITION CONTROL CORE OVERTEMP  
REACTOR #2 CONTAINMENT FAILURE  
REACTOR #3 EMERGENCY SHUTDOWN  
BREAK DRIVER #1 FAILURE  
BREAK DRIVER #3 AT COLOR QUENCH THRESHOLD - PERFORMANCE DEGRADED





GOIR-271 1.2µm

DESIGNATION:  
ASHER TEN

To summarize:  
primary extrusion is  
generating an eastbound supermassive  
cyclone. Similar to Asher Nine, Asher  
Ten facilitates electron capture around  
itself, intensifying at the main body.  
At the edges of this diffuse field, it can  
concentrate the electron capture effect into  
an unpredictable local maxima, targeting  
HKKVs, heavy nuclei, CNT flywheels, SMES,  
etc. Slower, inert KKV's penetrate but are  
ineffective. A cable powered pinch fusion  
bomb got close but was destroyed in the  
central field. I believe that Widdershins  
would overwhelm these defenses, but  
the damage to South America and  
the impact winter would be  
catastrophic.

Any  
ideas?



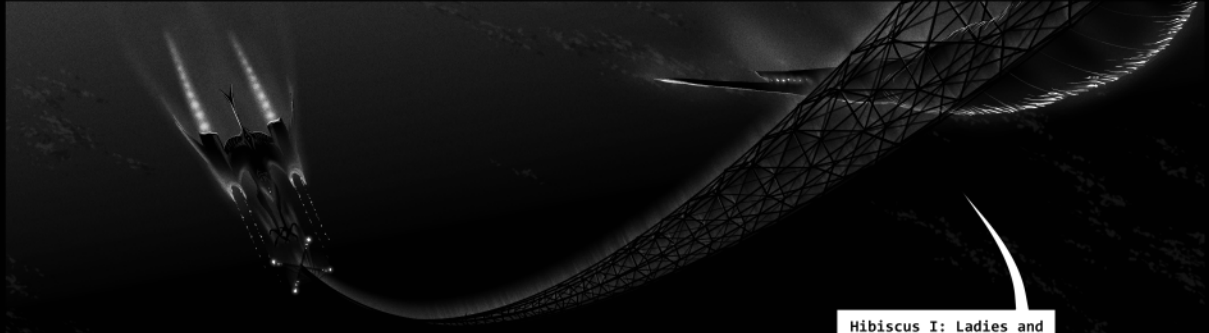
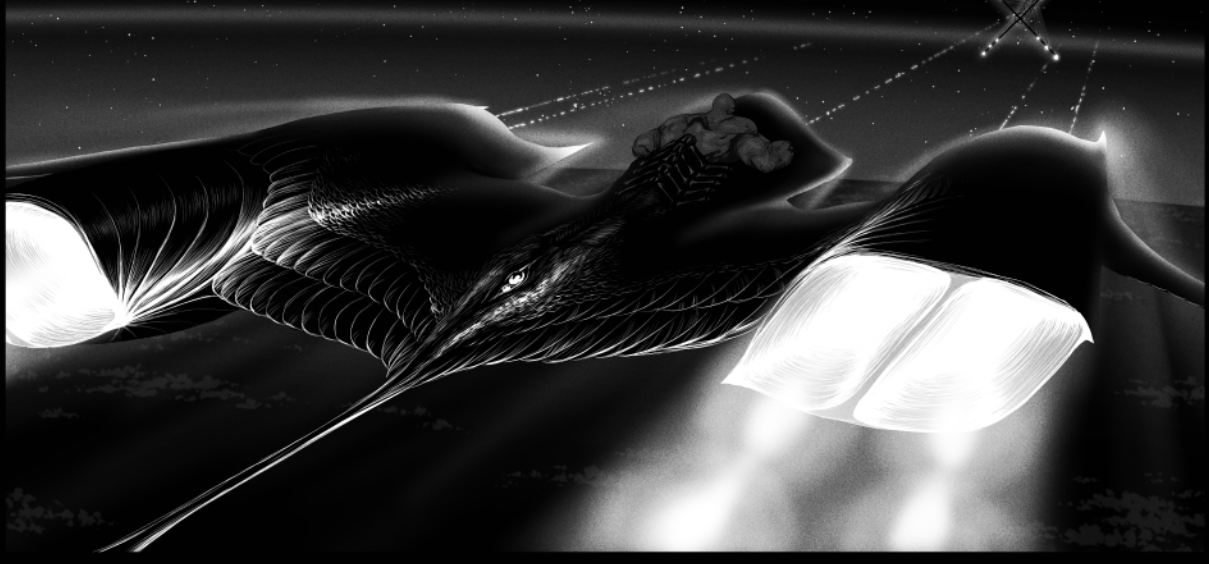
So, are you in?

Well, not quite that fast,  
especially after you descend.  
Nerium's speed *should* be low  
enough to avoid tripping its  
defenses.

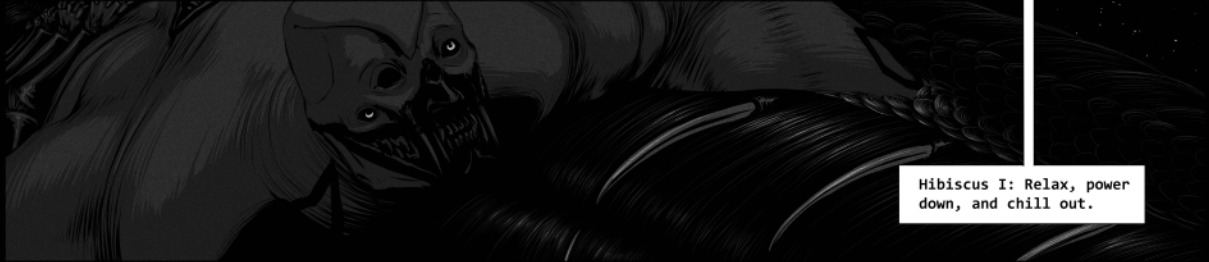
"Should be?"

Do you want  
me to lie?


Let me get this right. You want me to fly up to a skyhook alongside a dozen extra-tough Hellflowers, power down, get dipped into the eye of a radioactive cyclone, recharge with the help of the world's longest extension cord, and hope the other Hellflowers survive long enough to distract the Asher so I can guide and shield Nerium as she flies at 3600 meters per second to chuck a bomb at it.



Hibiscus I: Ladies and  
gentleman! Welcome to  
the after party!



Hibiscus I: Relax, power  
down, and chill out.



II: Rise and shine. Power dump in progress. Pinch fusion bomb prepped. You're up little guy. Let us know if you see anything, and try to keep the bomb and me from crispy-frying.




On it.



What?!

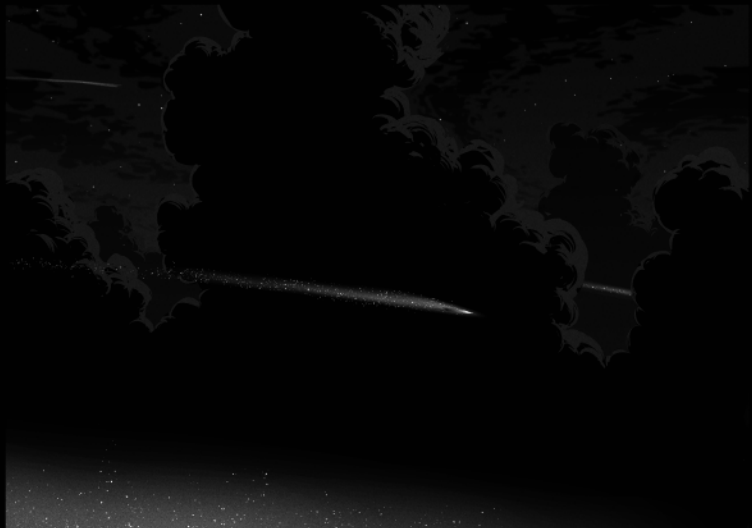


Eject!  
Eject!  
Eject!



It's not supposed to be able to attack this close to the body! What happened?

II: We're working on it. Keep your eyes peeled.



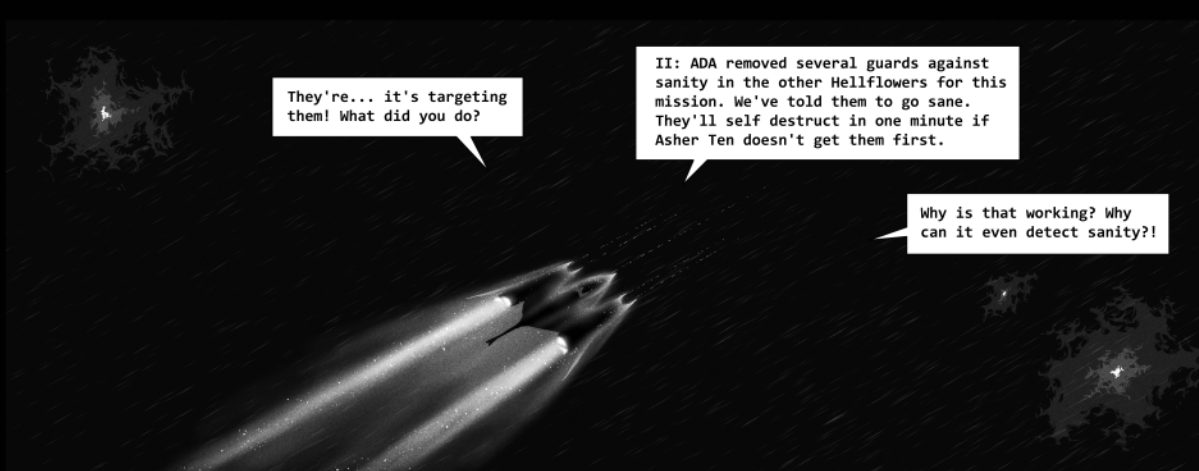
II: There go the last girls. I don't know how deep it's willing to deploy those arcs. Stay focused.



It's only going after us!

II: Well. Shit. I was worried about that.

I: My sisters, activate protocol Last Gasp. Disable all comms. You have my love. III: Good luck my fine bitches!!!



They're... it's targeting them! What did you do?

II: ADA removed several guards against sanity in the other Hellflowers for this mission. We've told them to go sane. They'll self destruct in one minute if Asher Ten doesn't get them first.

Why is that working? Why can it even detect sanity?!



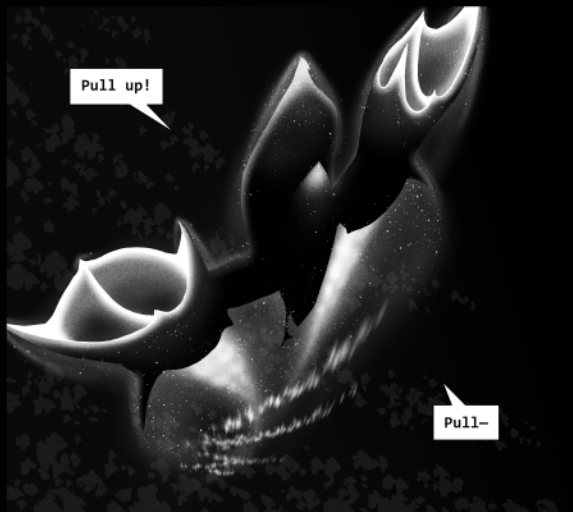
II: We've kept this confidential to avoid spooking them into scattering, but Chongzhi and ADA expect that they've figured it out by now. So fuck it. I'm telling you. We believe the Ashers emerge specifically to target the remnants of the Sane AI from the Automatic War. We have less of a handle on the situation than officially reported. Ashers focus on the bigger sanity complexes, but smaller Sane AIs can bait them sometimes. I thought Mandelbrot tested for this but you got it riled up.

They've been killing off Sane AI for us?

I: Embarrassing, isn't it? We might be overrun if it weren't for the Ashers.



Go right!

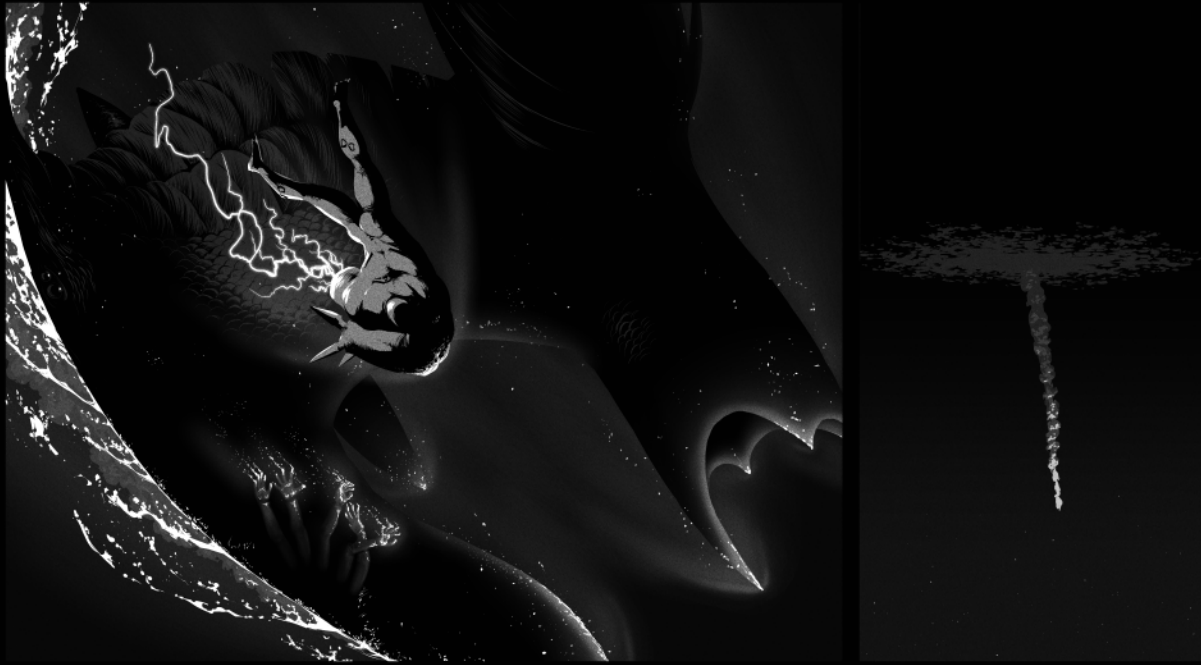


Pull up!

Pull-

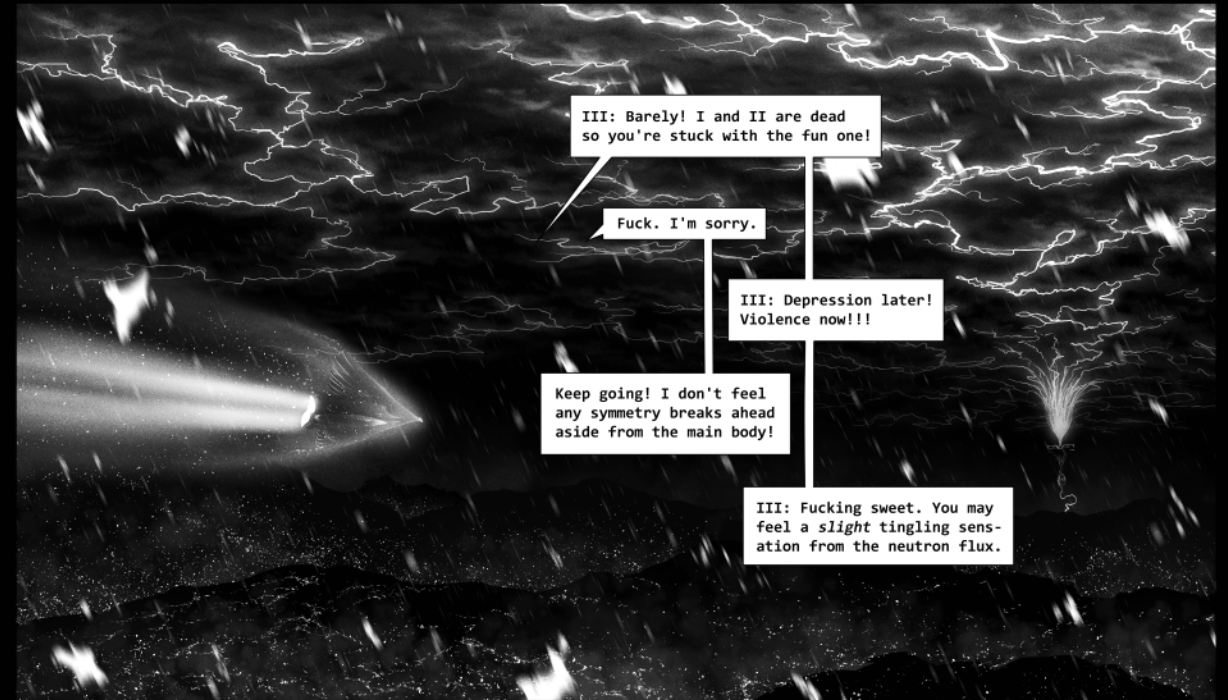


I: CONNECTION LOST  
II: CONNECTION LOST  
III: ERROR



III: Sorry to ruin your heroic suicide but I am not letting this bomb go to waste!

You're alive?!



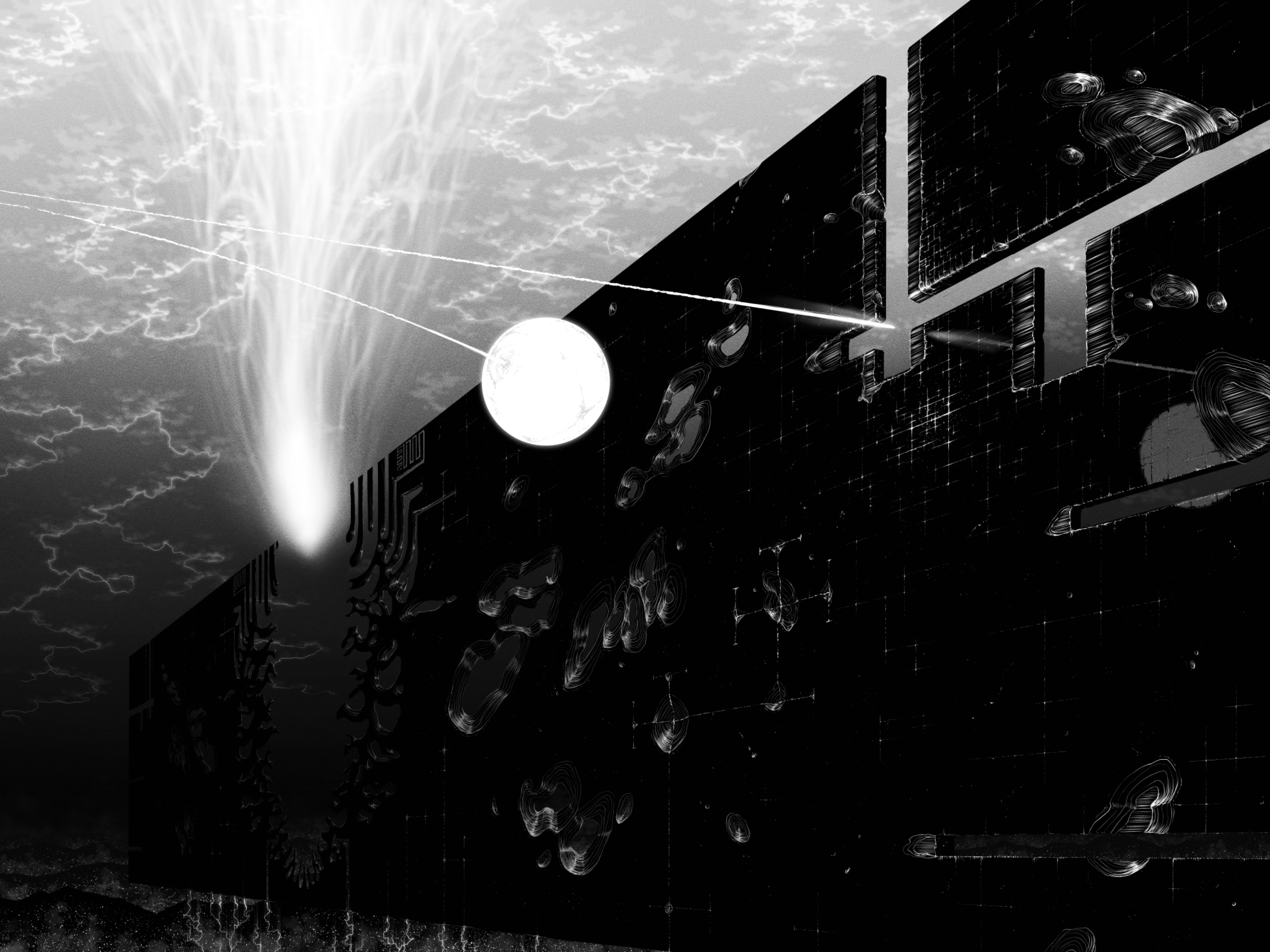
III: Barely! I and II are dead so you're stuck with the fun one!

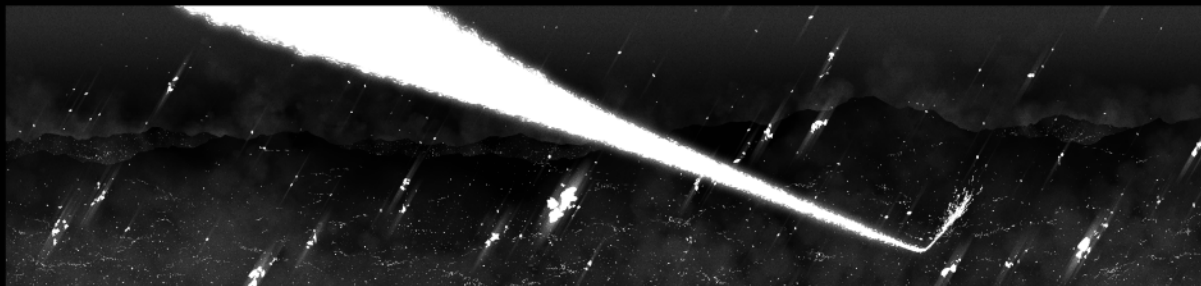
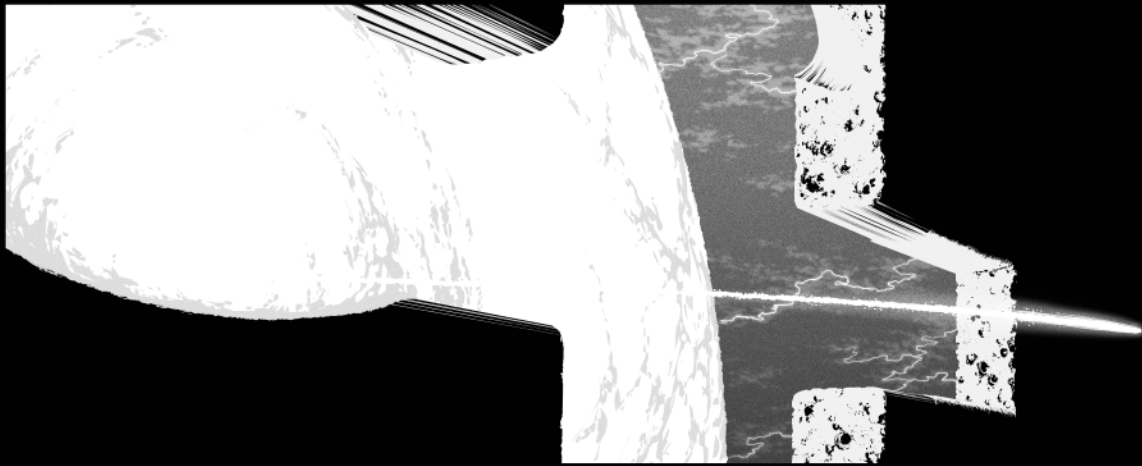
Fuck. I'm sorry.

III: Depression later! Violence now!!!

Keep going! I don't feel any symmetry breaks ahead aside from the main body!

III: Fucking sweet. You may feel a slight tingling sensation from the neutron flux.





SSC "Barn Swallow" braking in Saturn's magnetosphere before its final approach to Titan.

By [ThreeWalkPick\\_137498](#)

Published July 10, 2086

Solar System Cycler "Barn Swallow" has now completed mission #187 to Titan, safely settling into orbit over Saturn's largest moon. This will mark the Barn Swallow's fourth successful visit to Titan, and fifth to the outer solar system. The voyage was plagued by a series of setbacks that necessitated multiple in-flight repairs to the plasma sail, jokingly referred to as "mya problems," in honor of the myna bird on the Coconut Raft mission badge.

Flight #187 will bring much needed relief in the form of high-end processors, superconductors, and other types of equipment difficult to manufacture on Titan. The flight also carries

some 454,268 souls in the form of electroplated brain impressions and blockhead units, in addition to submarine bodies to house those who opted for them.

While the Barn Swallow is scheduled to leave by September, repairs may delay its departure.

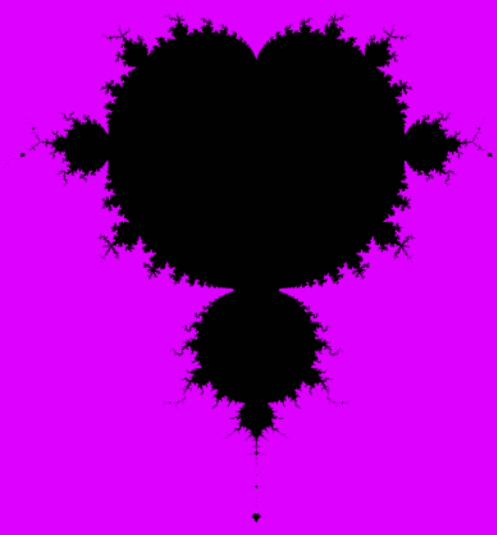
The success of this flight comes as a relief after the tragic failure of mission #186, destroyed by Dark Object 3351C after passing through the hazard radius 1.0167 AU from the sun. It is still unknown what triggered the event, but the loss of all souls onboard, the vital equipment bound for struggling Titan outposts, and the SSC itself was the source of much fear and anxiety on both Saturn's moon and the Earth.



**BREAKING NEWS:  
ASHER TEN NEUTRALIZED**

No evidence of further Asher activity observed.  
Threat level reduced to four. To  
surge, and radiation warning  
some areas. Do not leave  
all-clear signal is given.

Hive Srinivasa is still operating in degraded  
mode. Hive Mandelbrot may respond slowly  
Please be patient.





# PSYCHO-SANITARY AREA



## CLASS A RESTRICTED SPACE

- PROCEED TO CHECK-IN BEFORE ENTRY
- ALL PROCESSORS ARE SUBJECT TO INSPECTION AT ANY TIME
- JAMMING/OBFUSCATION SYSTEMS MAY ACTIVATE WITHOUT WARNING