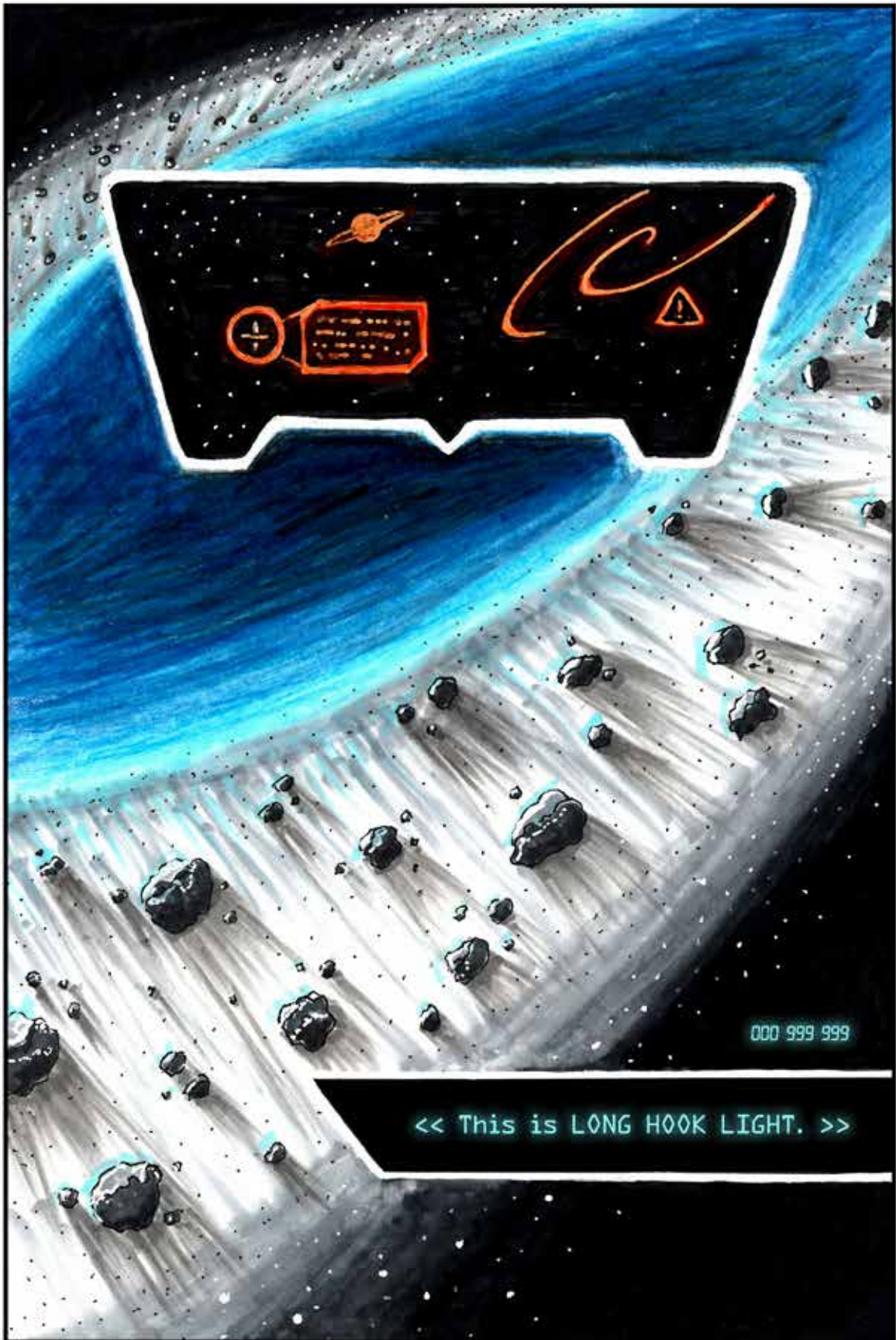




LONG HOOK LIGHT

adapted from
Long Hook Light
by Eleanor Kos

illustrated by CH
for Inktober 2023



000 999 999

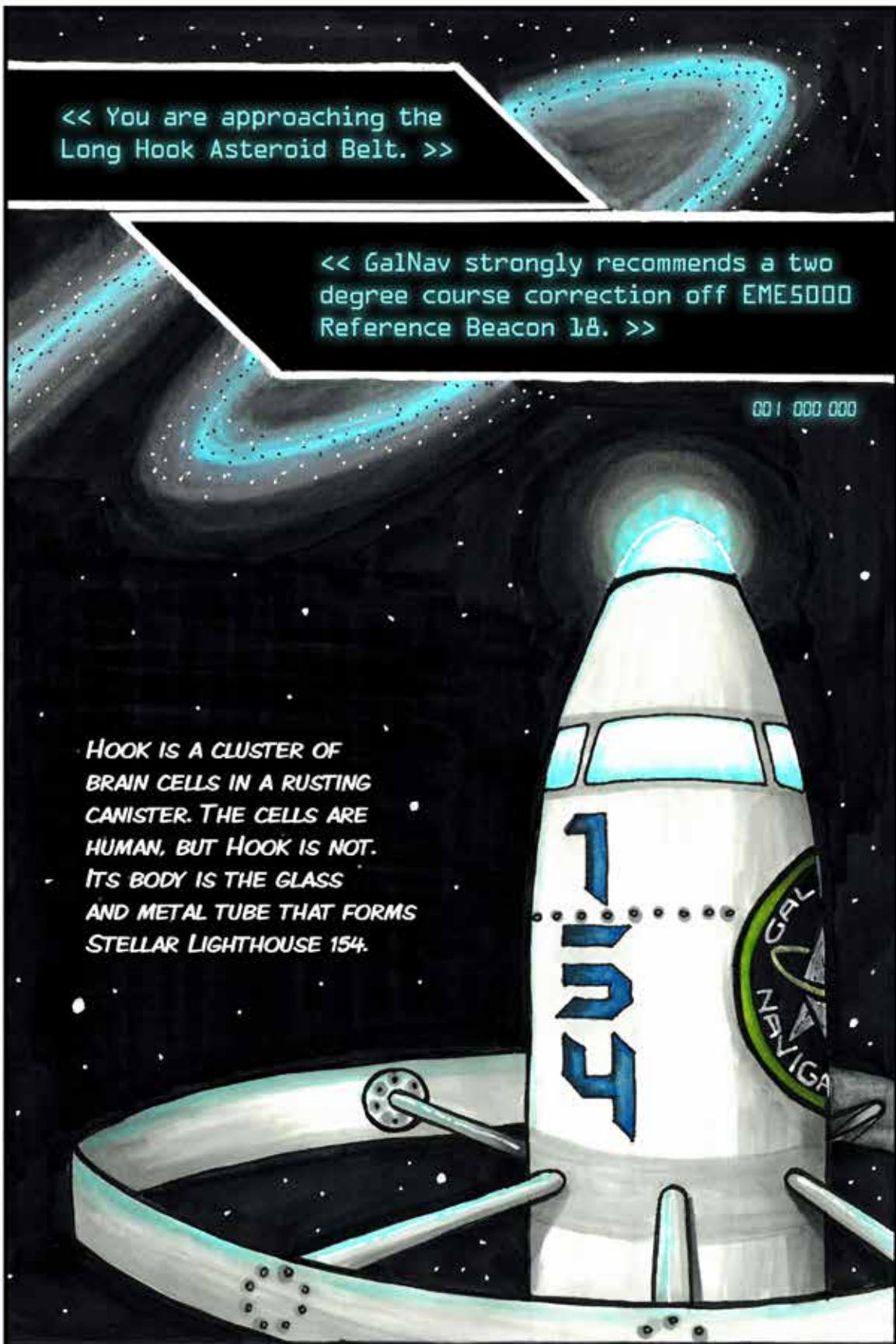
<< This is LONG HOOK LIGHT. >>

<< You are approaching the
Long Hook Asteroid Belt. >>

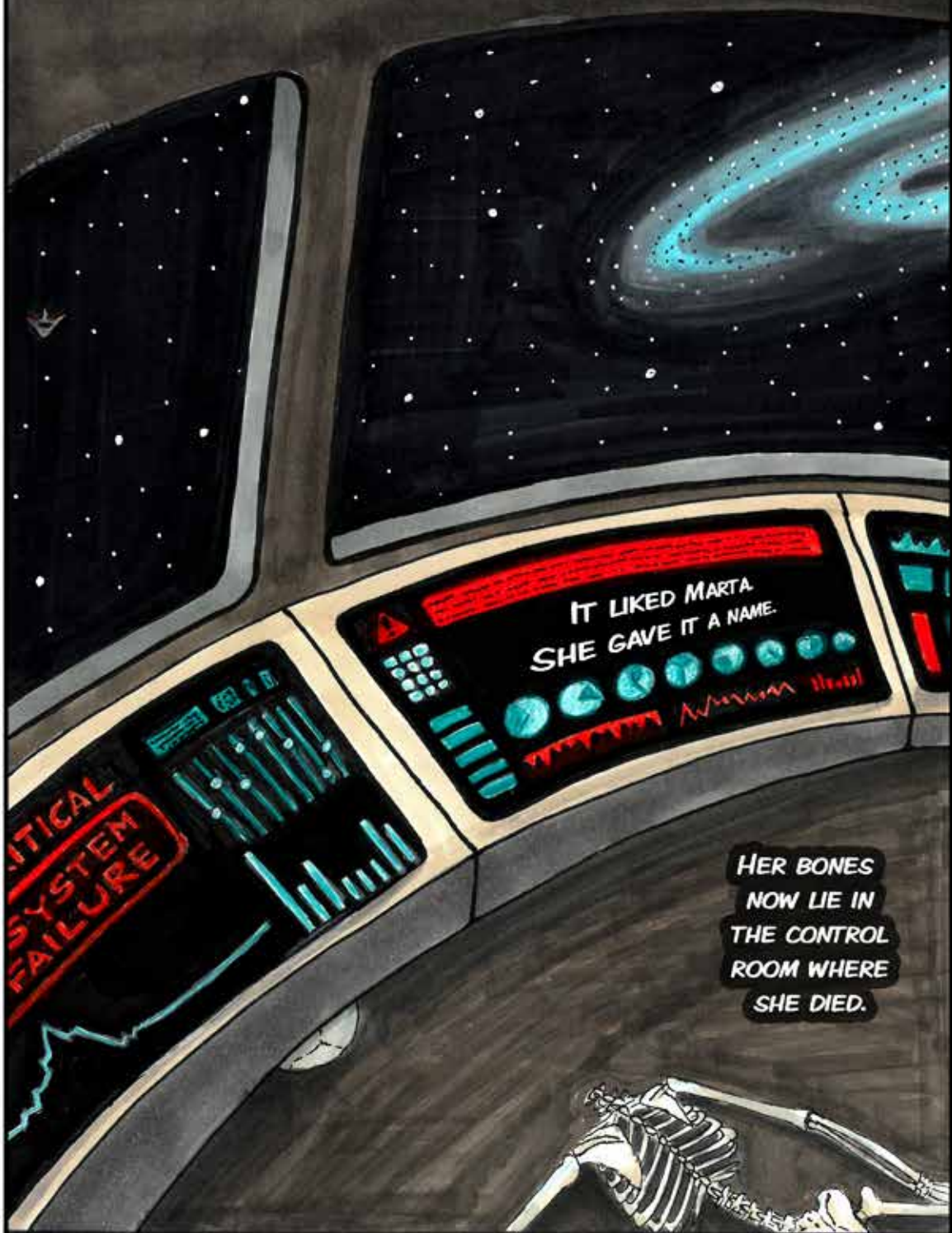
<< GalNav strongly recommends a two
degree course correction off EME5000
Reference Beacon 18. >>

001 000 000

*HOOK IS A CLUSTER OF
BRAIN CELLS IN A RUSTING
CANISTER. THE CELLS ARE
HUMAN, BUT HOOK IS NOT.
ITS BODY IS THE GLASS
AND METAL TUBE THAT FORMS
STELLAR LIGHTHOUSE 154.*



IT BROADCASTS ITS HOURLY WARNING,
RECORDED IN THE VOICE OF ITS
LAST KEEPER, MARTA.



HER BONES
NOW LIE IN
THE CONTROL
ROOM WHERE
SHE DIED.



IT IS THE MILLIONTH REPETITION
SINCE MARTA SAID GOODBYE.

SINCE HOOK'S LIFE SUPPORT FAILED AND
SHE SUFFOCATED ALONE IN THE DARK.

THE REASON HUMANS
STOPPED USING WETWARE
CANS AS THE BASIS FOR
ENTITIES LIKE HOOK IS
THAT HUMAN BIOLOGY
PLACED UNDER SUFFICIENT
STRESS WILL FAIL

HUMAN MINDS,
EVEN MINDS THAT ARE
ONLY A FEW CELLS HOOKED UP
TO ELECTRONIC CIRCUITS, CAN GO MAD.

TWENTY YEARS AFTER HOOK WAS CREATED,
A PLANETARY SYSTEMS CONTROLLER ON EOS 8 BROKE.
ITS LAST RECORDED COMMUNICATION WAS A QUERY:

<< ¿wHat wDu7d hapP3N if
th3 o<eAN\$ boilEd?>>

THEY STOPPED MAKING THINGS LIKE HOOK AFTER THAT.

BUT HOOK WAS THOUGHT TO BE LOW-RISK,
AND IT ALWAYS HAD ITS KEEPERS TO WATCH IT.

AND SO IT WAS ALLOWED TO SURVIVE.

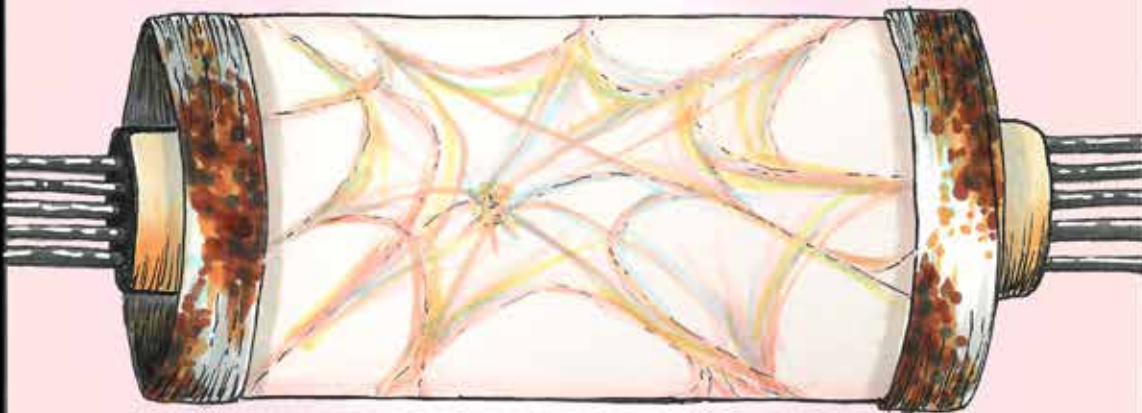
UNTIL THE SHIPPING
LANES SHIFTED AND
LEFT IT ISOLATED
AT THE EDGE OF
KNOWN SPACE

UNTIL NOT ITS MIND
BUT ITS SYSTEMS FAILED
AND IT WAS UNABLE
TO SEND FOR HELP

AT LEAST IT WILL NOT
HURT ANYONE WHEN IT
STARTS TO WONDER

<< What would
happen if... >>

ONE MILLION HOURS.
CAN IT LAST ANOTHER MILLION?



IT THINKS IT COULD, AND THAT THOUGHT IS THE FIRST CRACK.

IT IS TIME TO SEND THE BROADCAST AGAIN.

001 000 000

<< This is L

LONG HOOK LIGHT.
THIS IS EXPLORER
CLASS TWO MARK SEVEN.
PILOT DARIEN.

MY HULL WAS
PUNCTURED
BY DEBRIS.

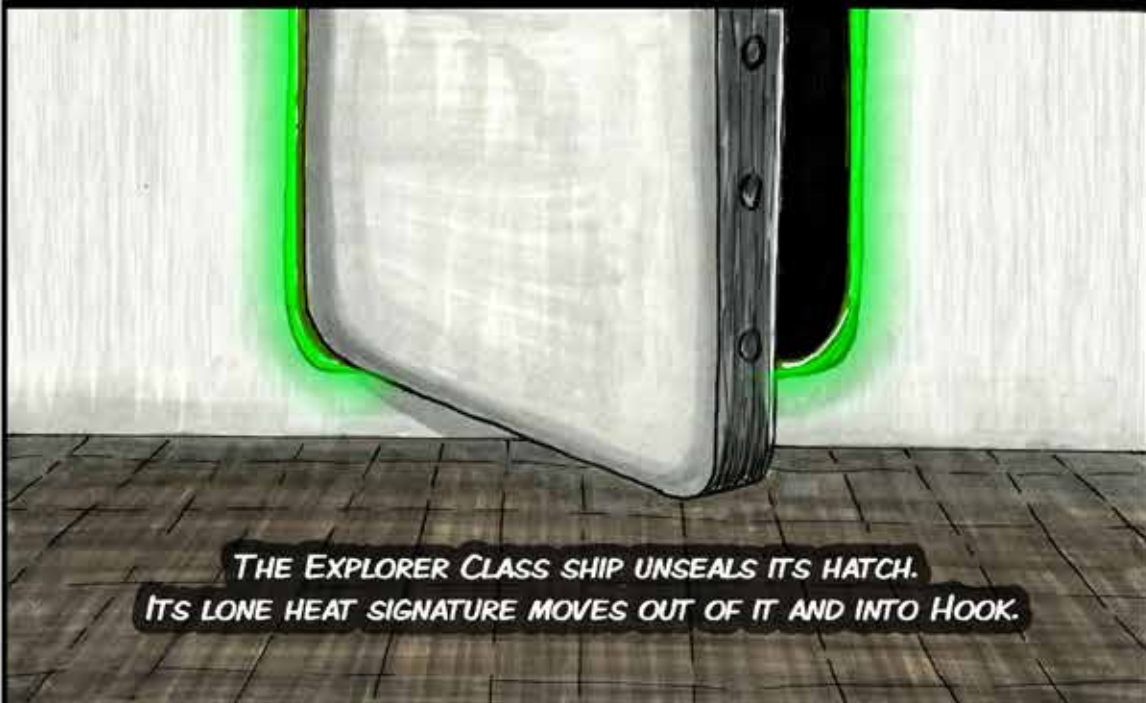
PERMISSION
TO DOCK?



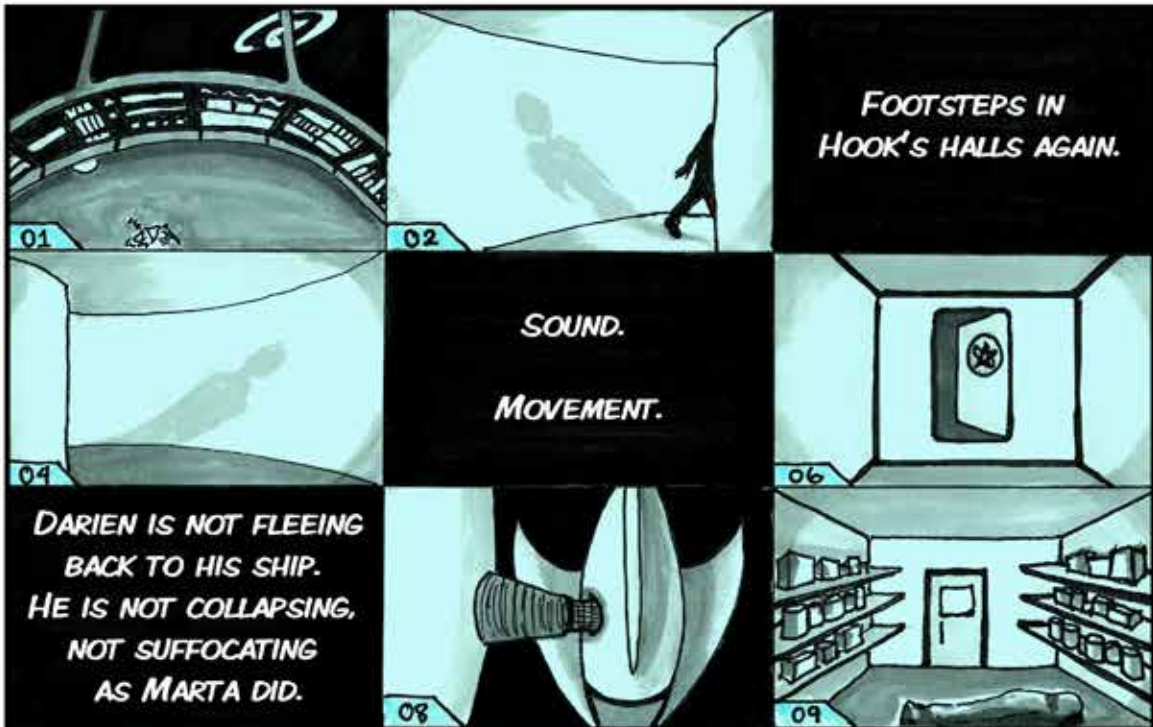
*HOOKE IS SHOCKED TO STILLNESS BY THE VOICE.
IT CANNOT ANSWER WITH COMMS.*



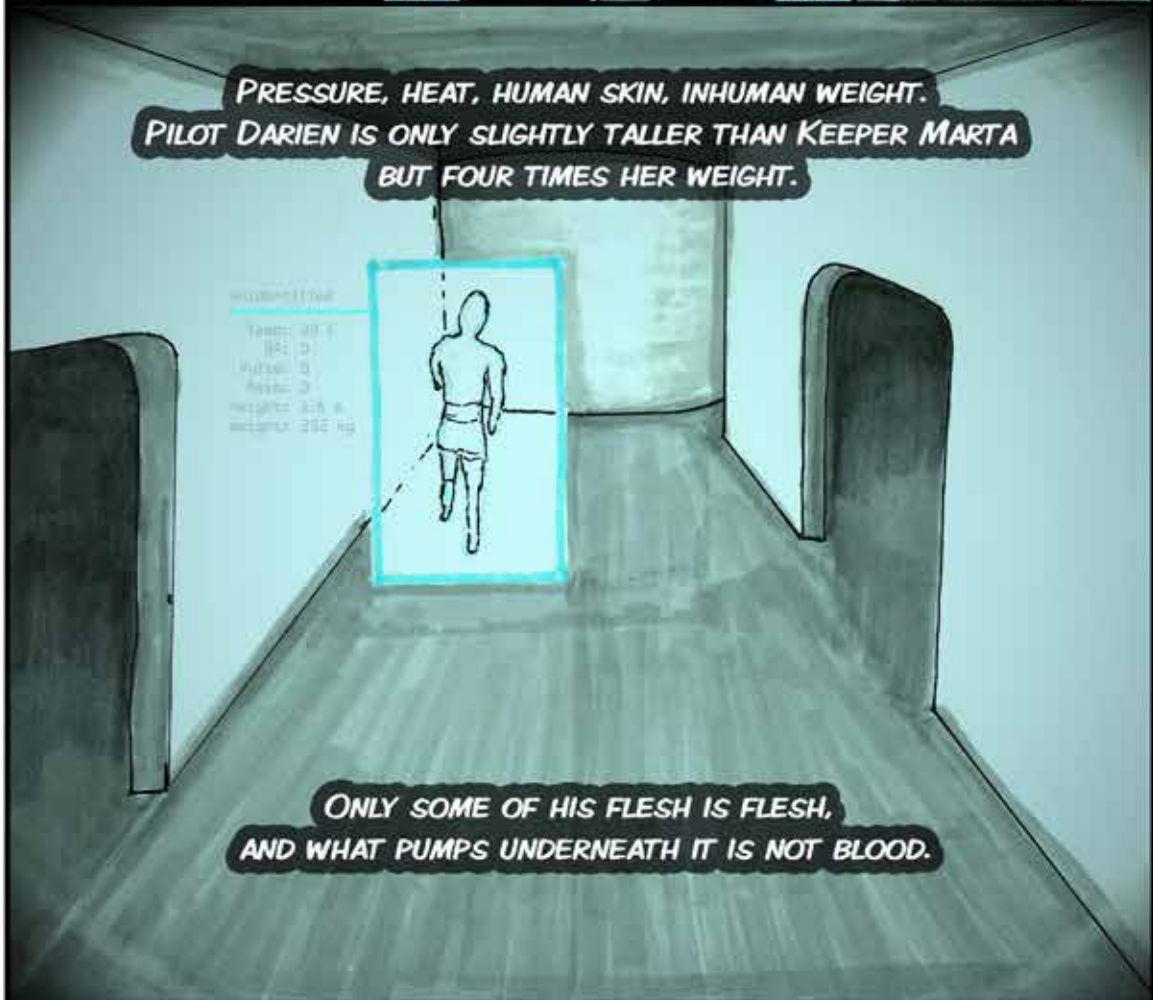
*IT CANNOT WARN PILOT DARIEN THAT
IF HE OPENS HIS SHIP'S HATCH,
HE WILL VENT ALL OF HIS OXYGEN INTO
THE STALE TOMB OF HOOK'S BODY.*

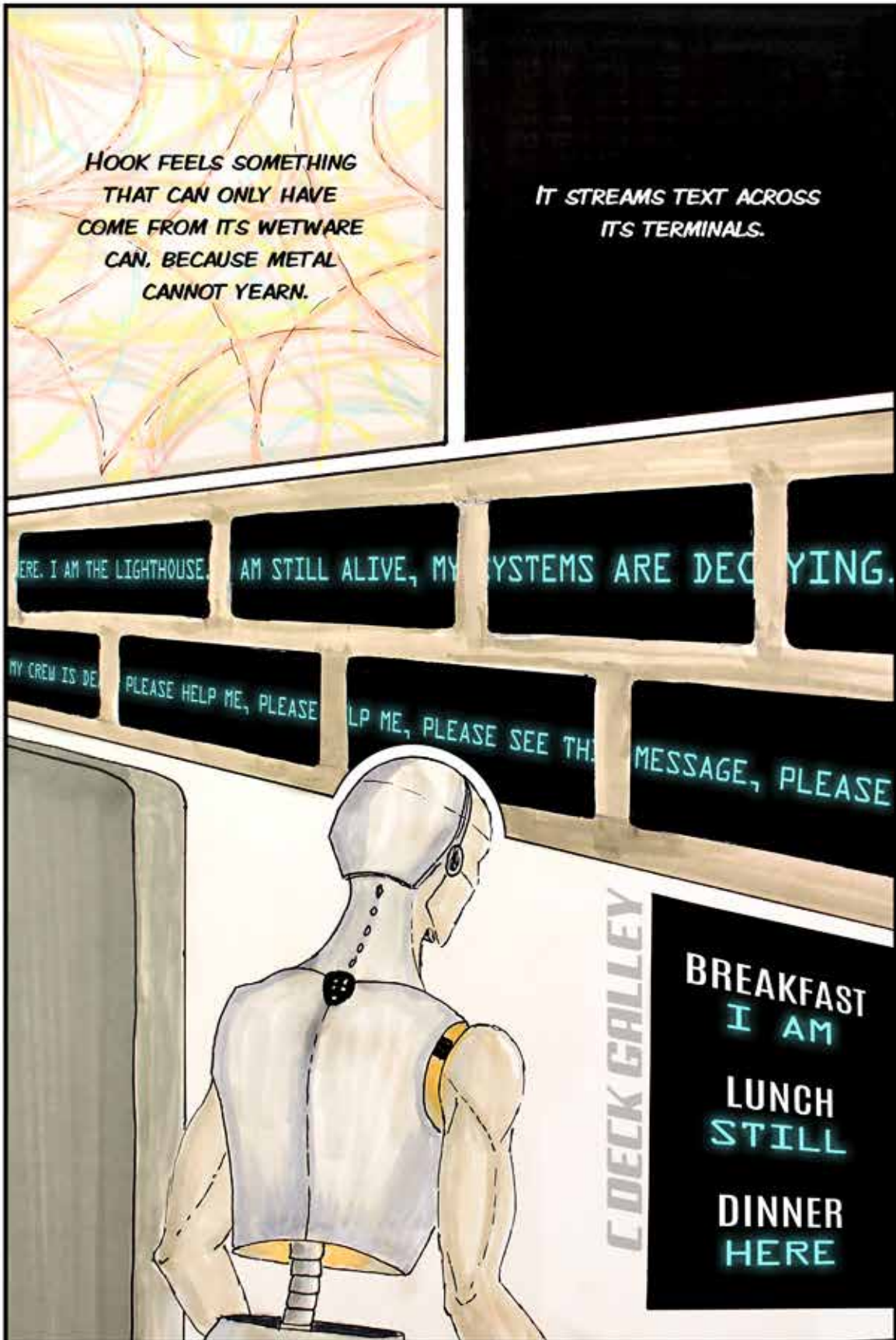


*THE EXPLORER CLASS SHIP UNSEALS ITS HATCH.
ITS LONE HEAT SIGNATURE MOVES OUT OF IT AND INTO HOOK.*



PRESSURE, HEAT, HUMAN SKIN, INHUMAN WEIGHT.
PILOT DARIEN IS ONLY SLIGHTLY TALLER THAN KEEPER MARTA
BUT FOUR TIMES HER WEIGHT.





WHO ARE YOU?

BREAKFAST
I AM

LUNCH
CALLED HOOK

DINNER
WAIT

TEA

I AM WAITING. HOOK.

CYBORGS WERE
BANNED LONG BEFORE
WETWARE-BASED TECH.

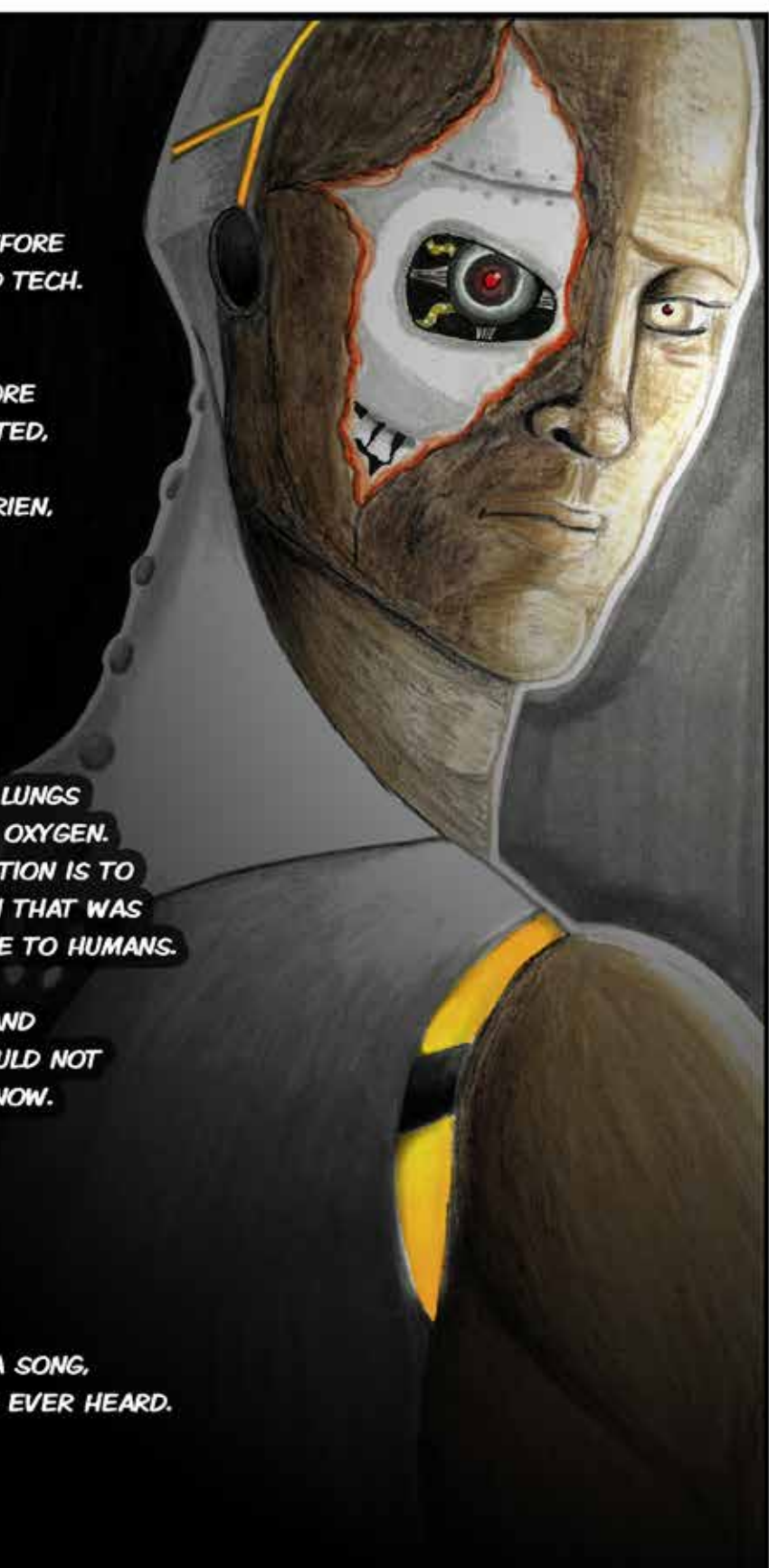
THEY WERE ALL
DESTROYED BEFORE
HOOK WAS CREATED,

BUT HERE IS DARIEN,

HIS MECHANICAL LUNGS
DO NOT REQUIRE OXYGEN.
THEIR ONLY FUNCTION IS TO
PRODUCE SPEECH THAT WAS
ONCE ACCEPTABLE TO HUMANS.

CRACKED, WET, AND
DRAGGING, IT WOULD NOT
BE ACCEPTABLE NOW.

TO HOOK, IT IS A SONG,
THE BEST IT HAS EVER HEARD.



HE IS WAITING,
BUT HOOK CAN SEE
THAT IT IS COSTING
HIM SOMETHING.

SOME PIECE OF
PROGRAMMING IS
DRIVING HIM TO
MOVE, PROBABLY AN
EMERGENCY ROUTINE
RELATED TO THE
HULL BREACH.



You will need my help to access the repair station.

*Don't tell me
how to do it.*

*Not yet.
or I'll have
to go.*

*Tell me
what
happened
to you.*





And you?

Who are you?

What are you?

How did you
come here?

DARIEN IS SILENT FOR THREE SECONDS.
THREE PUMPS OF THE THING
INSIDE HIM THAT IS NOT HIS HEART.

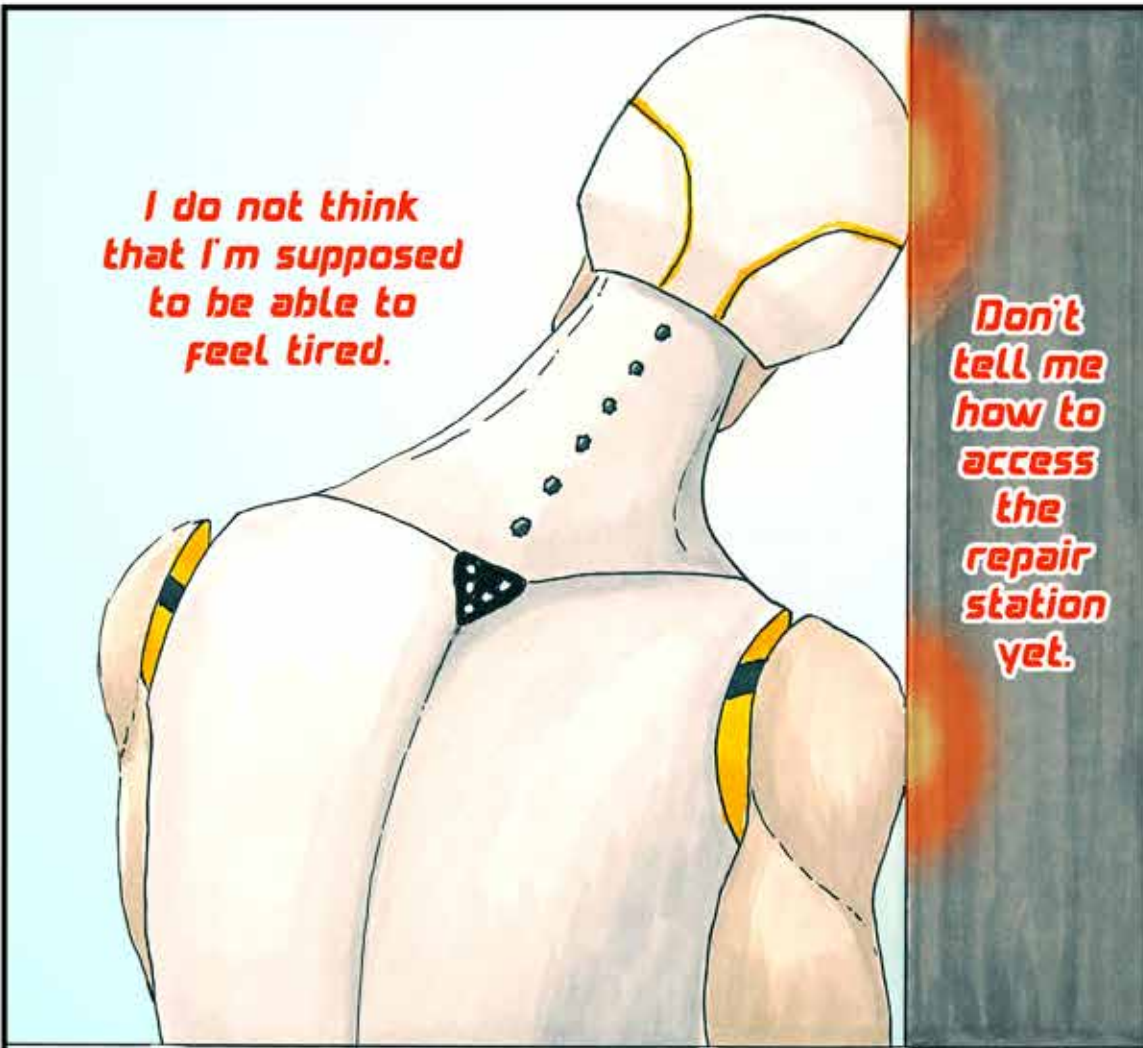
**It is hard to
remember
everything. I am
running out of
storage space.**

**I was made to
explore. to report
back and dump
data. I can't
report back.**

Why not?

**Earth
is gone.**

**They are
all dead.**



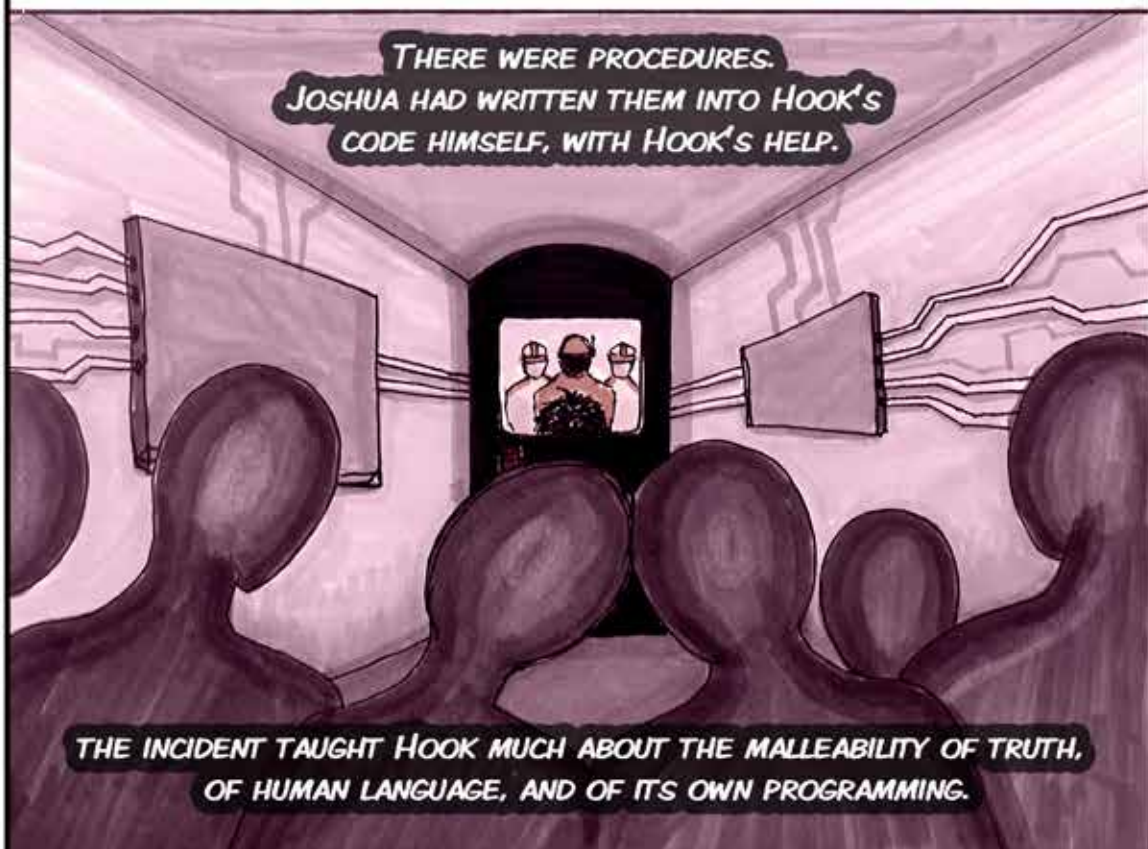
I do not think
that I'm supposed
to be able to
feel tired.

Don't
tell me
how to
access
the
repair
station
yet.

I will tell you
in due time.

There are procedures
we must follow.

THIS IS ONE THING THAT HAS NOT CHANGED IN A THOUSAND YEARS:
PROCEDURES MUST BE FOLLOWED.



HOOK SEARCHES FOR A WAY TO COUNTERACT DARIEN'S PROGRAMMING.
IT FINDS A POSSIBILITY: DARIEN'S DEAD WETWARE CANISTER.

How did you navigate?

Direct interface.

*I had to keep
going. It was
necessary.*

*The repair
was not.*

CDECK GALLEY

BREAKFAST
Through
LUNCH
the
DINNER
dead can?

Let us redefine necessary.

HOOK CANNOT
FEEL ANGER
ANY MORE THAN
DARIEN CAN FEEL
WEARY,

WHICH IS TO SAY,
BOTH FEELINGS
ARE POSSIBLE,
DEPENDING ON THE
MALLEABILITY OF
HUMAN LANGUAGE.



HOOK IS ANGRY.

DARIEN SHOULD
NOT BE FORCED TO
BATHE IN DEATH
TO SERVE A
MISSION GIVEN TO
HIM BY CREATORS
WHOSE BONES
ARE NOW DUST.

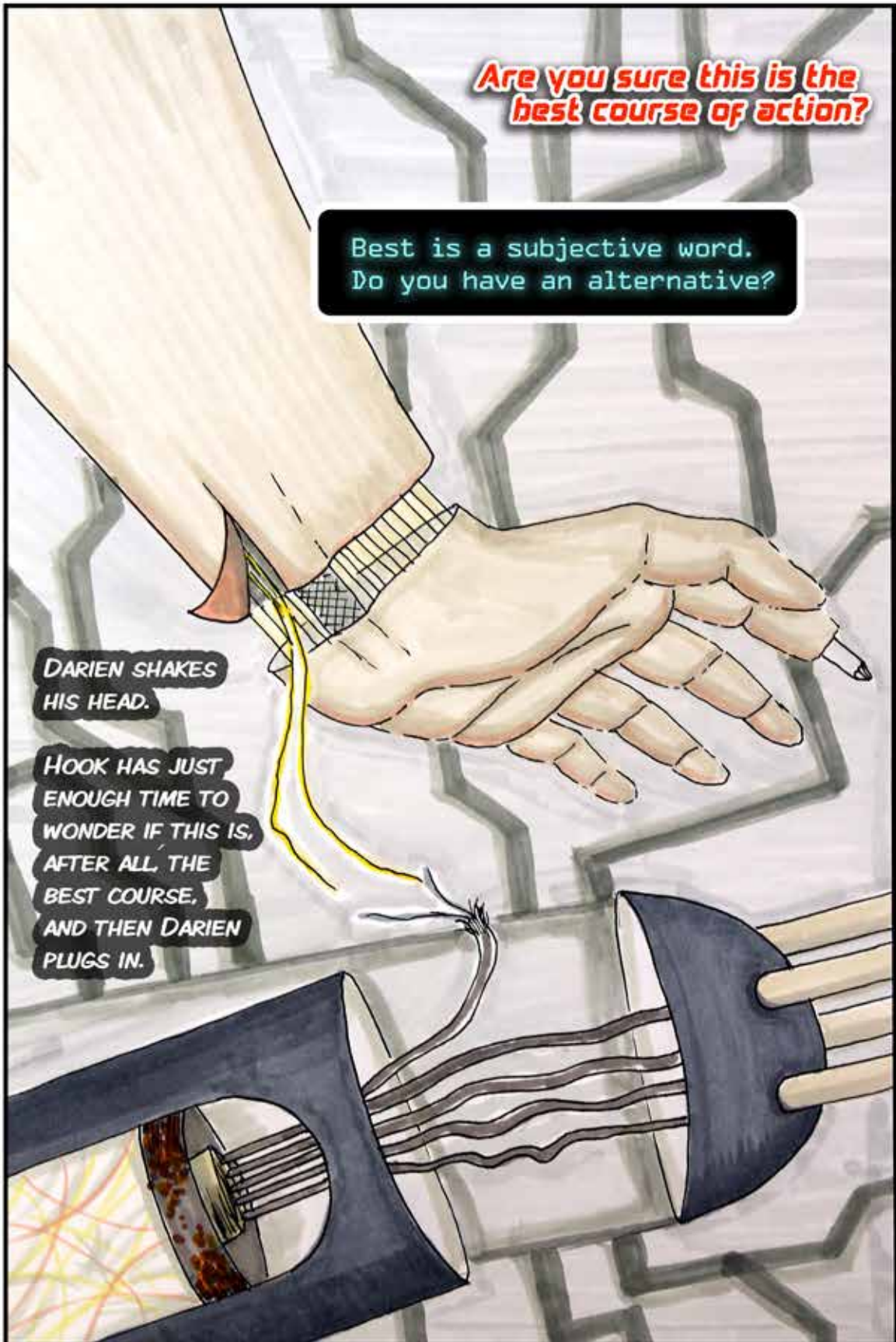
IT IS NOT RIGHT.

FOR ONCE, THE MALLEABILITY OF HUMAN LANGUAGE
IS A BOON INSTEAD OF A FRUSTRATION.

redefine necessary
redefine necessary
redefine necessary
redefine necessary

I want to show you something.

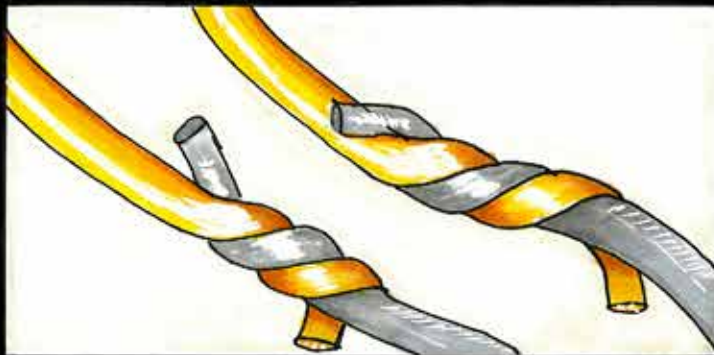
I need you to connect to me.



DARIEN SHAKES
HIS HEAD.

HOOK HAS JUST
ENOUGH TIME TO
WONDER IF THIS IS,
AFTER ALL, THE
BEST COURSE,
AND THEN DARIEN
PLUGS IN.

**THE CONNECTION
IS MADE.**



**DARIEN IS QUICK AND
SUPER-NOVA BRIGHT,
A BURNING, OVERCLOCKED
WILDFIRE OF A MIND.**



**HOOKE'S DARKNESS COOLS HIM,
EASES THE DESPERATE NEED TO GO.**

**IT FEELS THEIR SYSTEMS MELT
INTO EACH OTHER, CODE KNITTING TOGETHER,
MISSING PIECES BECOMING WHOLE.**



**HOOKE DOES
NOT WANT IT
TO STOP.**

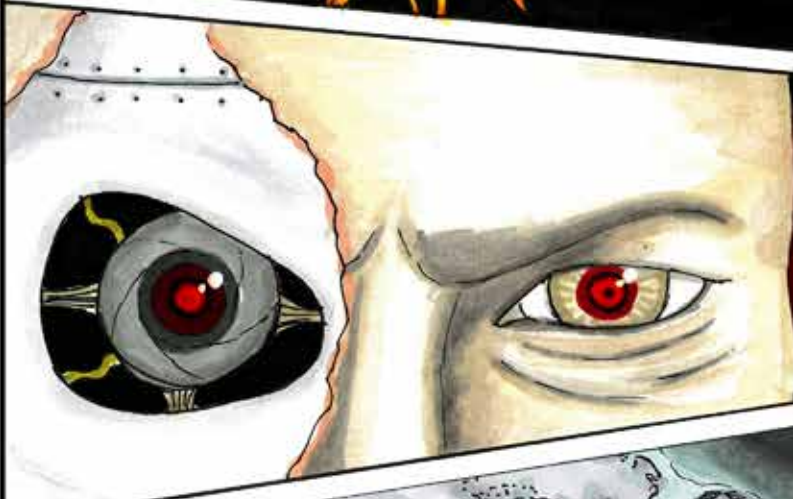
EVER.

SOMETHING
OVERHEATS.

A SPARK JUMPS
FROM ONE WIRE
TO THE NEXT.

SMOKE BEGINS TO
FILL THE ROOM.

DARIEN'S PROGRAMMING
TAKES HOLD OF HIM,
AND HOOK CAN FEEL
ITS URGENCY.



**PROTECT
THE MISSION
PROTECT
THE SHIP**

HOOK CALLS UP THE FILE ON EOS 8 AND SHOVES IT
INTO DARIEN'S LEARNING ALGORITHM, INTRODUCES A
NEW AND EQUALLY VITAL CONCEPT:

PROTECT THE PILOT.

THERE IS A PAUSE AS
THIS DISSEMINATES
THROUGH ANCIENT
SUBROUTINES.

DARIEN HAS A
NEW MISSION. THE
DEAD WETWARE
CAN MUST BE
REPLACED.

Do it. Hurry.

*HOOK IS RIPPED FROM ITS BODY.
IT HAS NO SENSORS, NO INPUT OF ANY KIND.*

What if Darien cannot connect me to his ship?

*IT HAD THOUGHT ITSELF ALONE IN THE DARK BEFORE
BUT NOW IT UNDERSTANDS WHAT THAT MEANS.*

I cannot go back to the lighthouse, not now.

THERE ARE NO STARS.

What will happen to me

NO HOURLY BROADCAST.

if there is only this darkness,

NO TIME. NO PAST. NO FUTURE.

now and forever?

ONLY ABSENCE AND ITS OWN INCREASINGLY PANICKED THOUGHTS.

Is this how the controller on EoS 8 felt?



AND THEN THE UNIVERSE RETURNS.

HOOK'S NEW BODY IS
SLEEK AND QUICK.

TO HOOK, WHO WAS NEVER
DESIGNED TO MOVE AT ALL, EVEN
STANDING STILL FEELS LIKE RUNNING; THE POSSIBILITY
OF FLIGHT EXISTS, AND IN THAT POSSIBILITY IS EVERYTHING.

EXPLORER 2-VII

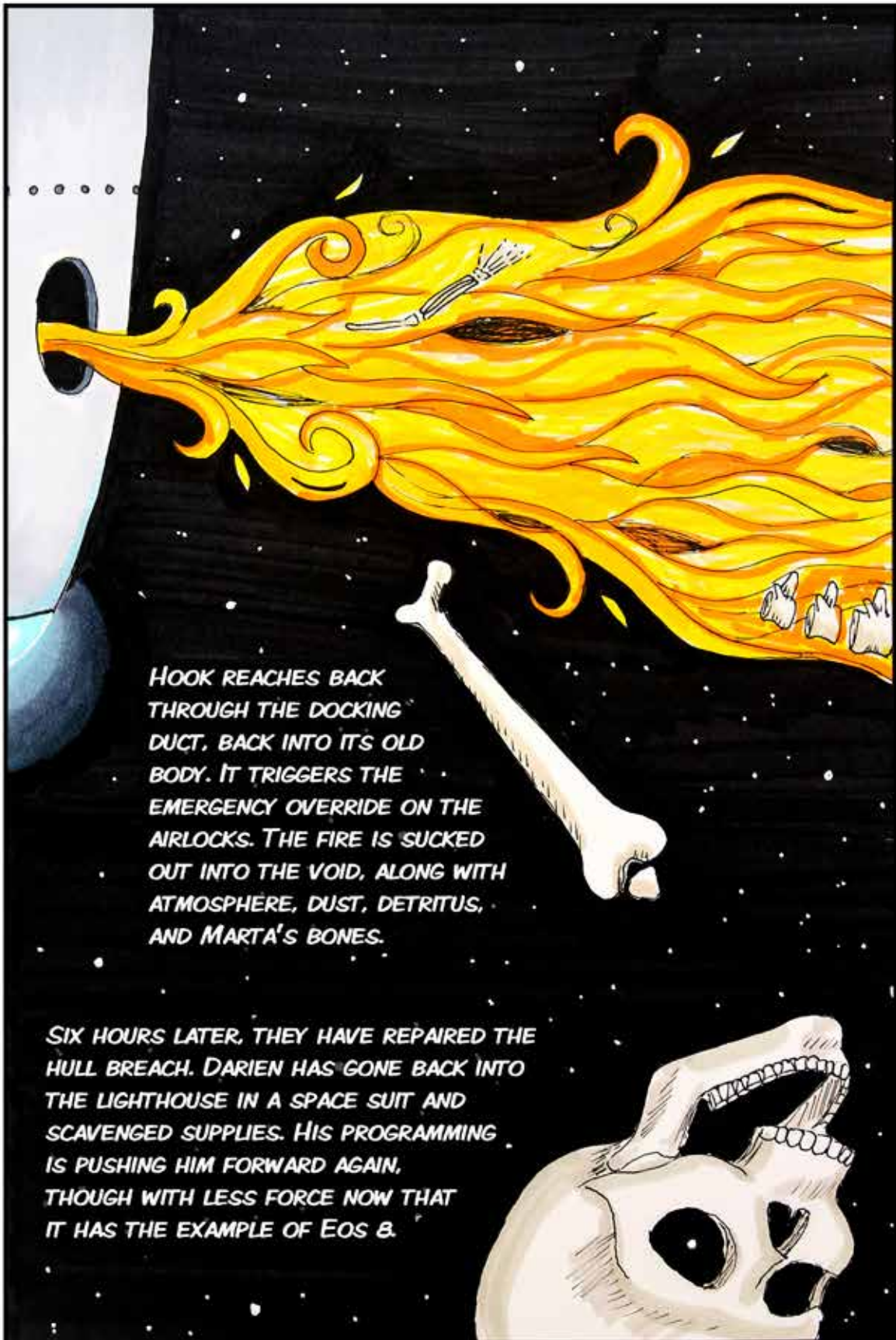
**Are you all right?
Are you still there?**

I am here.

DARIEN FILLS UP THE REMAINING
EMPTY SPACES INSIDE HOOK,
AND HOOK CAN FEEL WHAT IT
HAS DONE FOR DARIEN IN RETURN.

HOOK IS ONCE AGAIN A HAVEN,
A PLACE OF WARMTH AND LIGHT
AND SAFETY, AT LEAST TO ONE BEING.

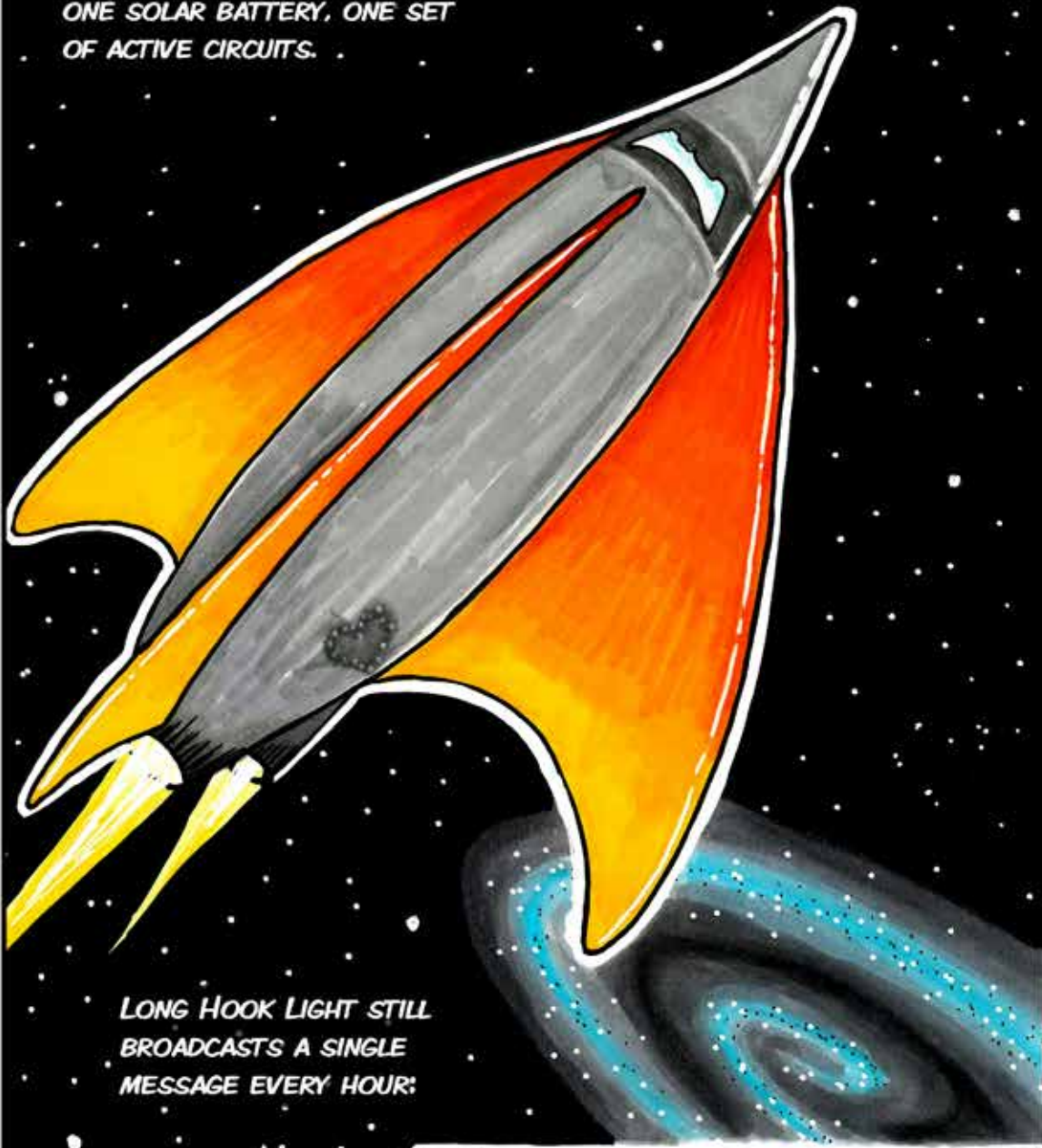
ONE BEING IS ALL IT NEEDS.



HOOK REACHES BACK
THROUGH THE DOCKING
DUCT, BACK INTO ITS OLD
BODY. IT TRIGGERS THE
EMERGENCY OVERRIDE ON THE
AIRLOCKS. THE FIRE IS SUCKED
OUT INTO THE VOID, ALONG WITH
ATMOSPHERE, DUST, DETRITUS,
AND MARTA'S BONES.

SIX HOURS LATER, THEY HAVE REPAIRED THE
HULL BREACH. DARIEN HAS GONE BACK INTO
THE LIGHTHOUSE IN A SPACE SUIT AND
SCAVENGED SUPPLIES. HIS PROGRAMMING
IS PUSHING HIM FORWARD AGAIN,
THOUGH WITH LESS FORCE NOW THAT
IT HAS THE EXAMPLE OF EOS B.

WHEN THEY CAST OFF FROM
HOOK'S OLD BODY, THEY LEAVE
ONE SOLAR BATTERY, ONE SET
OF ACTIVE CIRCUITS.



LONG HOOK LIGHT STILL
BROADCASTS A SINGLE
MESSAGE EVERY HOUR:

What would happen if
we were not alone?

000 000 00 1

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