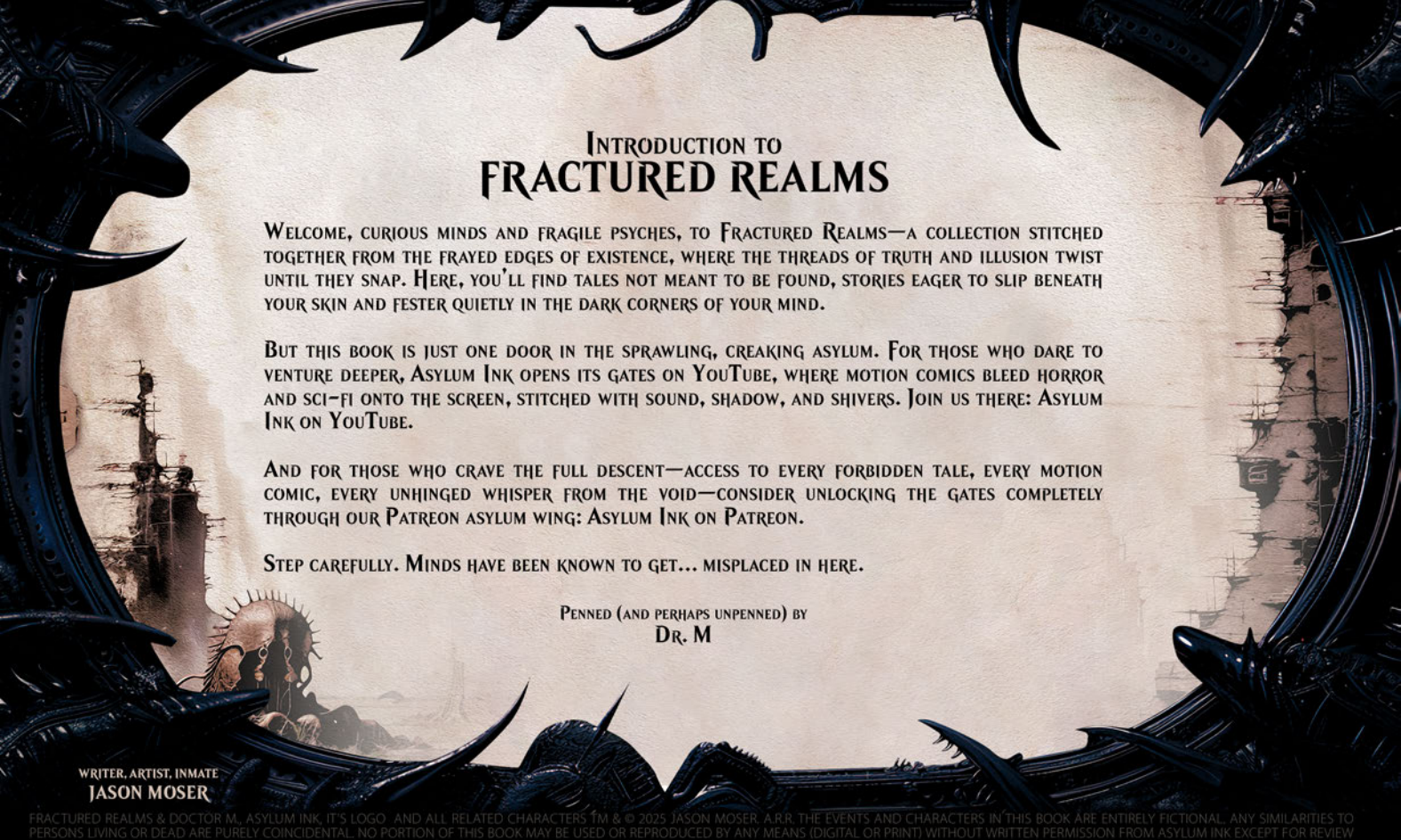


FRACTURED REALMS





INTRODUCTION TO FRACTURED REALMS

WELCOME, CURIOUS MINDS AND FRAGILE PSYCHES, TO FRACTURED REALMS—A COLLECTION STITCHED TOGETHER FROM THE FRAYED EDGES OF EXISTENCE, WHERE THE THREADS OF TRUTH AND ILLUSION TWIST UNTIL THEY SNAP. HERE, YOU'LL FIND TALES NOT MEANT TO BE FOUND, STORIES EAGER TO SLIP BENEATH YOUR SKIN AND FESTER QUIETLY IN THE DARK CORNERS OF YOUR MIND.

BUT THIS BOOK IS JUST ONE DOOR IN THE SPRAWLING, CREAKING ASYLUM. FOR THOSE WHO DARE TO VENTURE DEEPER, ASYLUM INK OPENS ITS GATES ON YOUTUBE, WHERE MOTION COMICS BLEED HORROR AND SCI-FI ONTO THE SCREEN, STITCHED WITH SOUND, SHADOW, AND SHIVERS. JOIN US THERE: ASYLUM INK ON YOUTUBE.

AND FOR THOSE WHO CRAVE THE FULL DESCENT—ACCESS TO EVERY FORBIDDEN TALE, EVERY MOTION COMIC, EVERY UNHINGED WHISPER FROM THE VOID—CONSIDER UNLOCKING THE GATES COMPLETELY THROUGH OUR PATREON ASYLUM WING: ASYLUM INK ON PATREON.

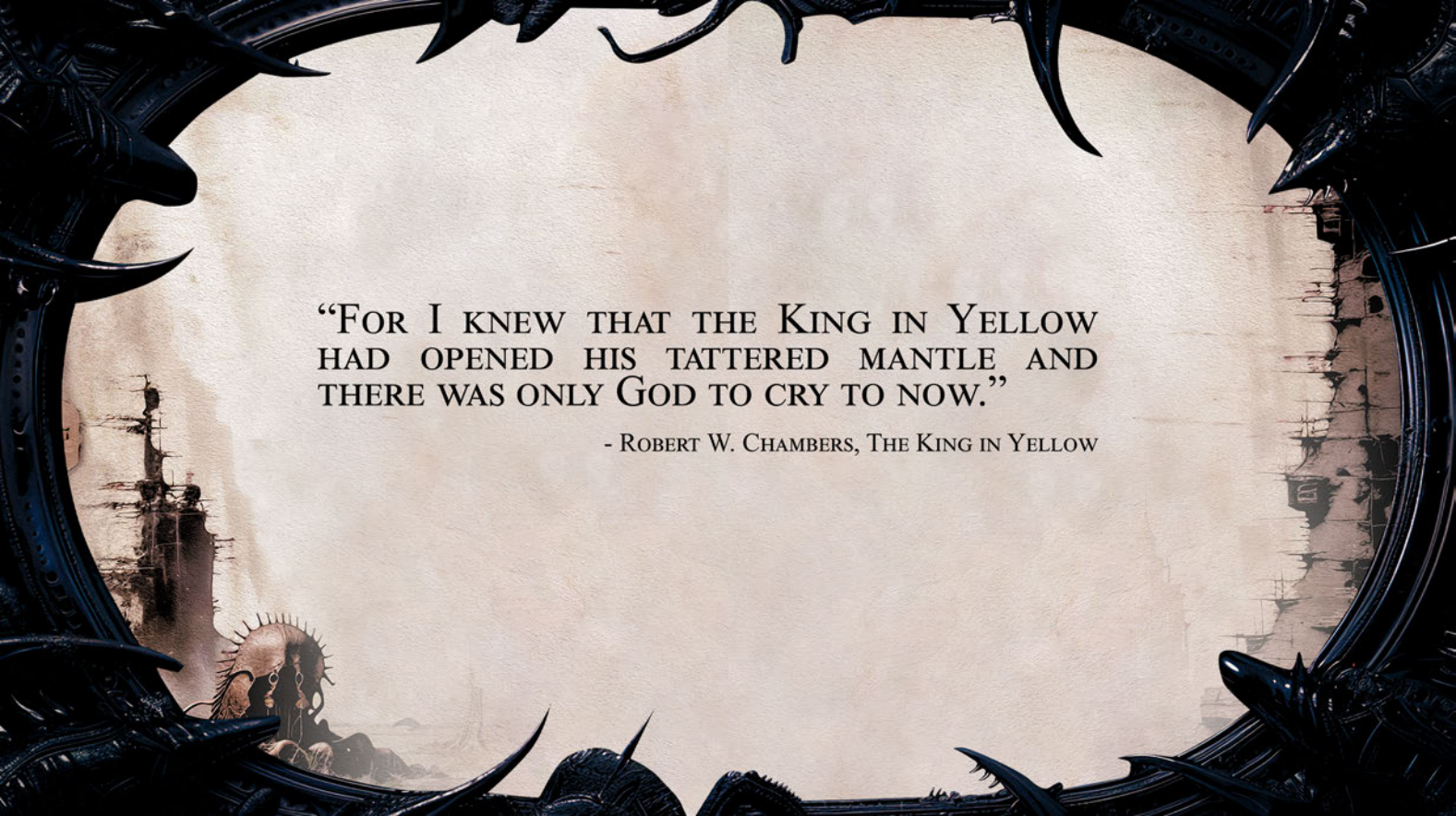
STEP CAREFULLY. MINDS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO GET... MISPLACED IN HERE.

PENNED (AND PERHAPS UNPENNED) BY
DR. M

WRITER, ARTIST, INMATE
JASON MOSER

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“FOR I KNEW THAT THE KING IN YELLOW
HAD OPENED HIS TATTERED MANTLE AND
THERE WAS ONLY GOD TO CRY TO NOW.”

- ROBERT W. CHAMBERS, THE KING IN YELLOW

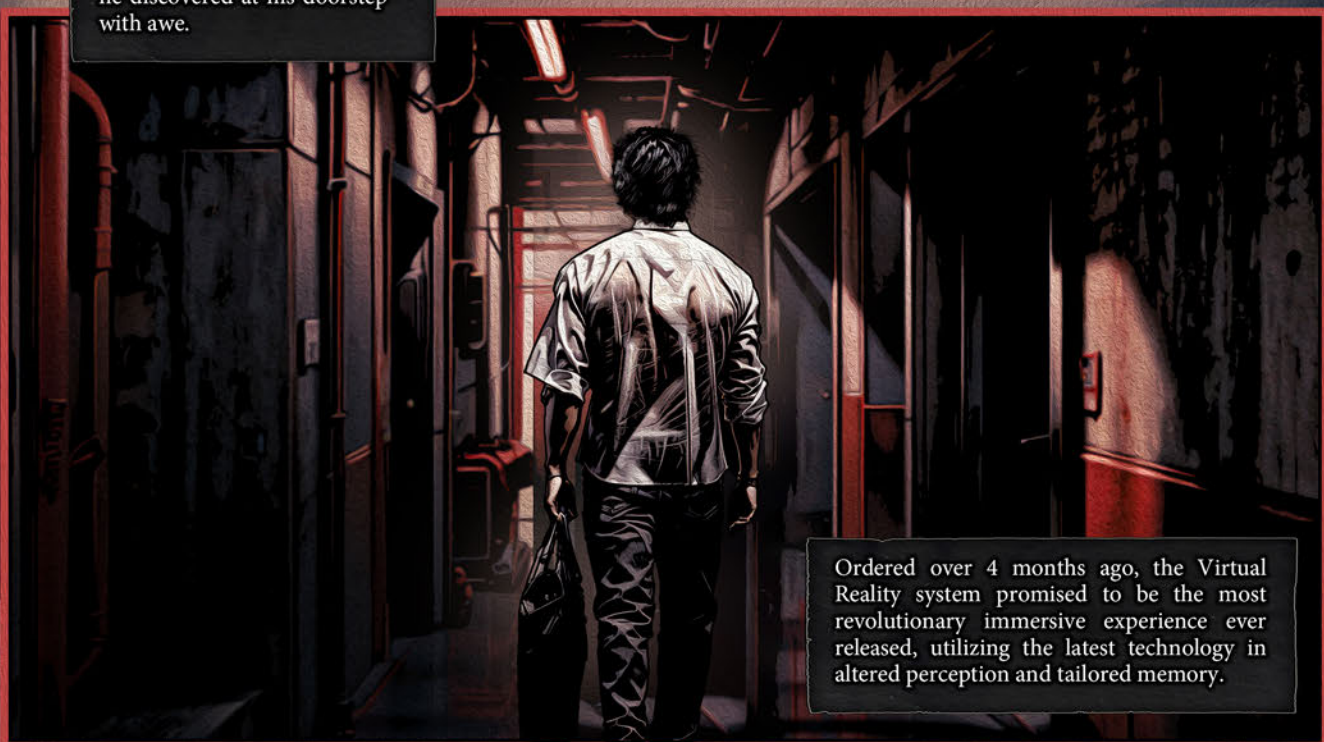
It was early evening when Ted finally had time to plug in. The monotonous duties he performed daily at the factory served to feed his nightly ritual involving the massive ingestion of carbs, energy drinks, and an insane amount of time plugged into the virtual landscape of the Engine.

Tonight's experience promised to be more exciting than usual, at least, and Ted savored every moment.





Ted approached the package he discovered at his doorstep with awe.



Ordered over 4 months ago, the Virtual Reality system promised to be the most revolutionary immersive experience ever released, utilizing the latest technology in altered perception and tailored memory.

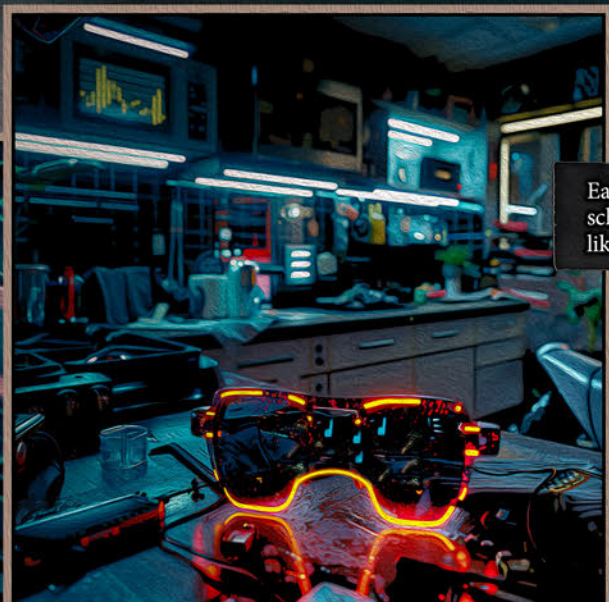
Tapping directly into a person's consciousness to offer personalized vacations and experiences was a technology that had been around for over a decade, but the technology involved for such an immersive, all-encompassing Virtual Reality experience had previously been unobtainable for home use.



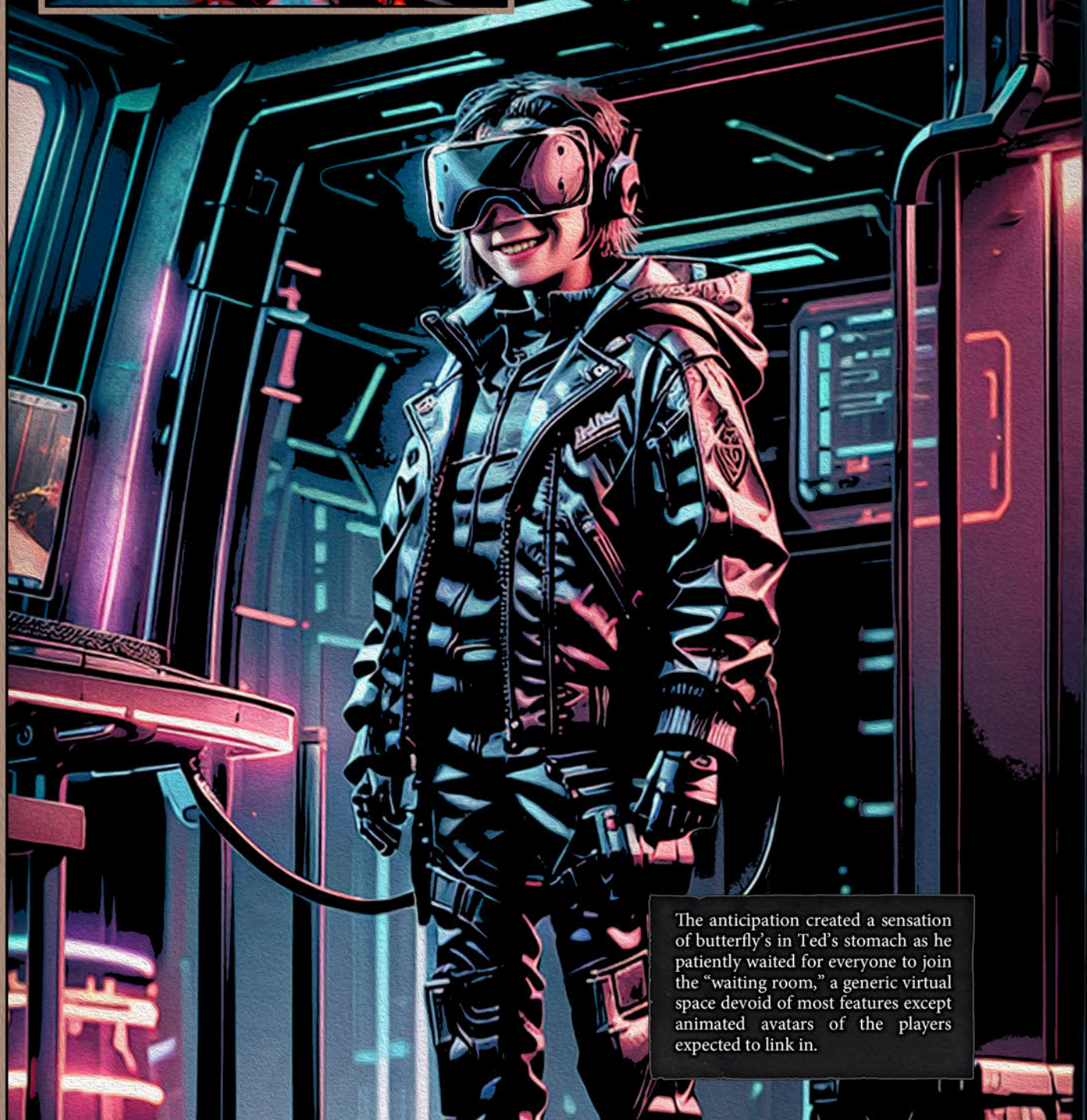
Being truly indistinguishable from reality, having the experience in the privacy of your own home, much less with a barely noticeable headset being the only restriction, promised to be revolutionary.



As Ted settled in, preparing his snacks and giving the instruction manual a cursory glance, Ted texted the others that he was about ready to log on. He knew at least John and Maria had received theirs yesterday but had promised to hold off until everyone could join in.



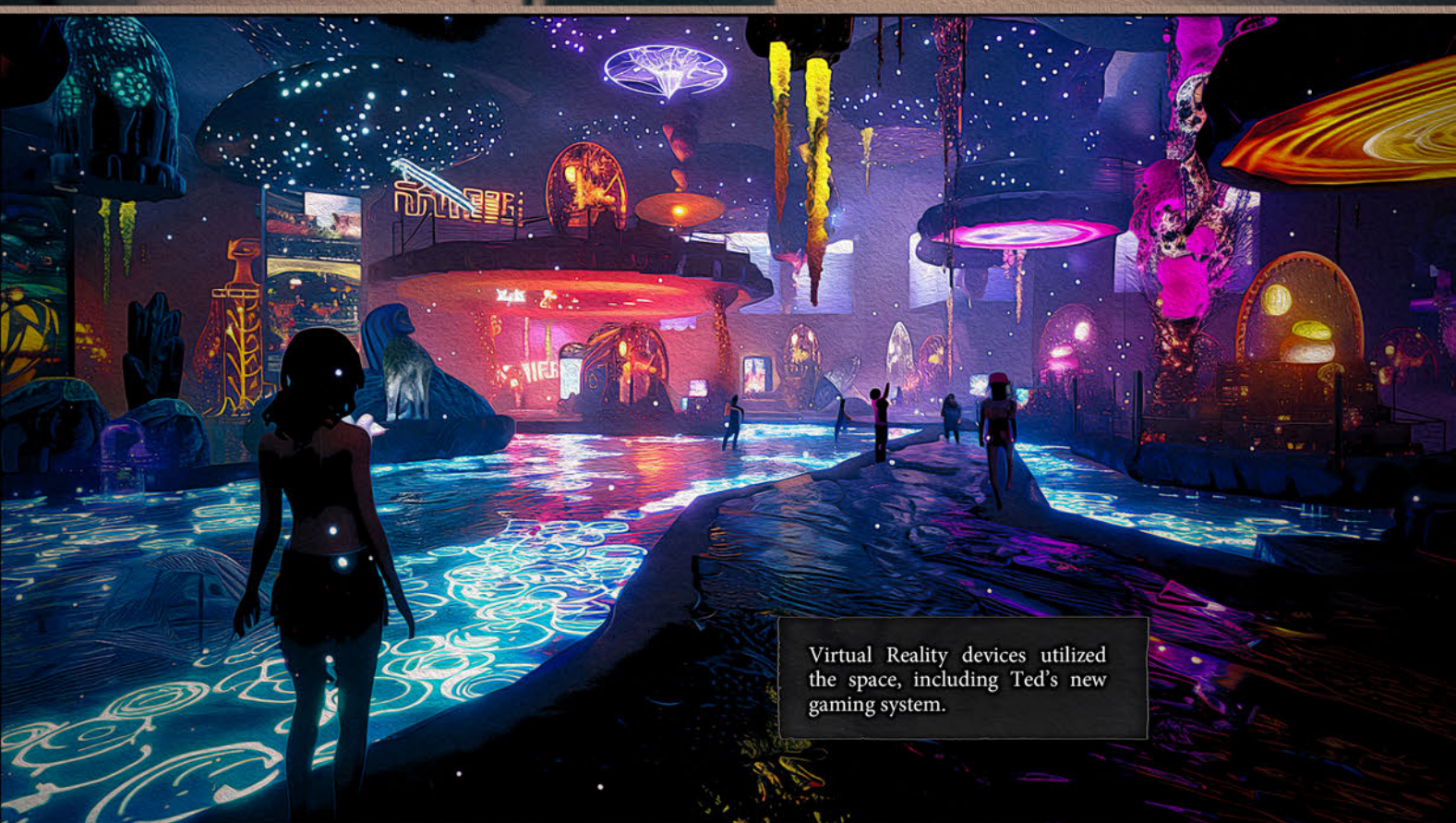
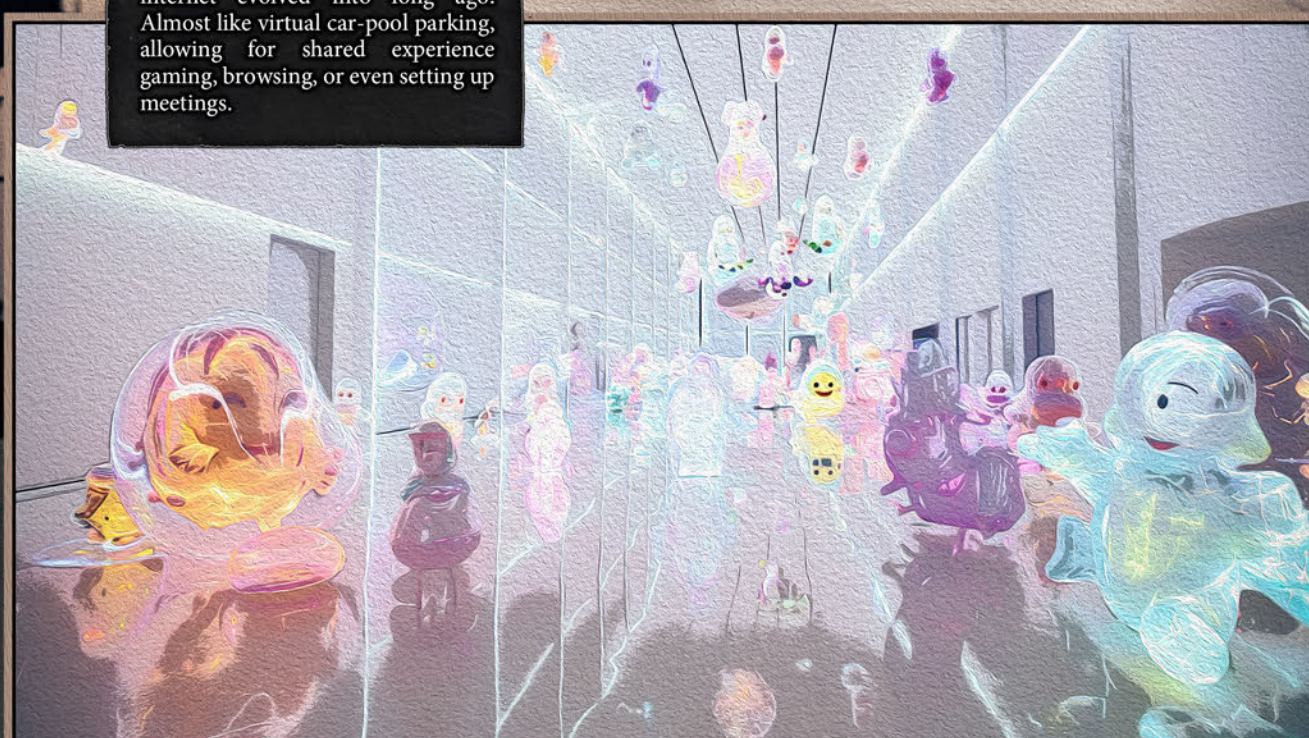
Earnst and Harris were scheduled for delivery today, like Ted.



The anticipation created a sensation of butterfly's in Ted's stomach as he patiently waited for everyone to join the "waiting room," a generic virtual space devoid of most features except animated avatars of the players expected to link in.



These areas were found all over the Engine, the virtual landscape the internet evolved into long ago. Almost like virtual car-pool parking, allowing for shared experience gaming, browsing, or even setting up meetings.

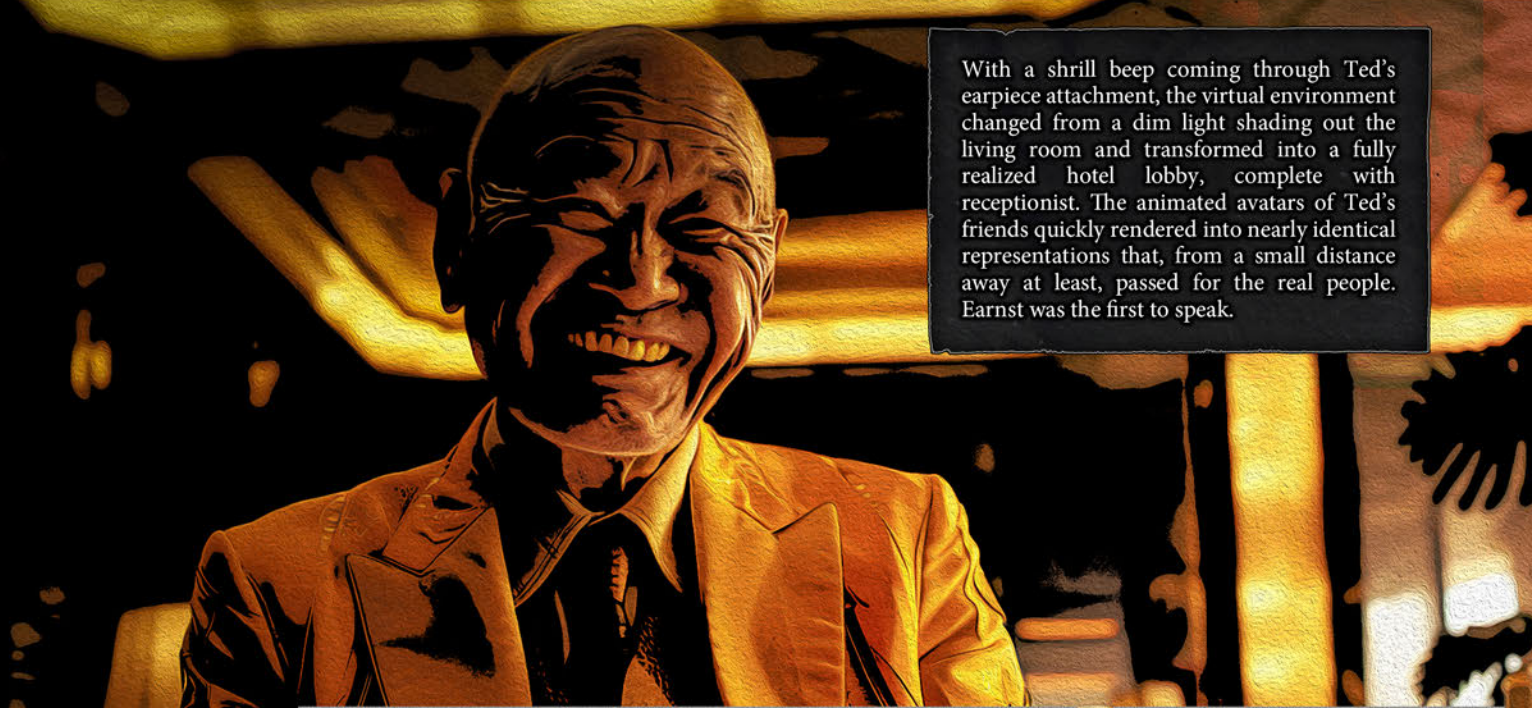


Virtual Reality devices utilized the space, including Ted's new gaming system.

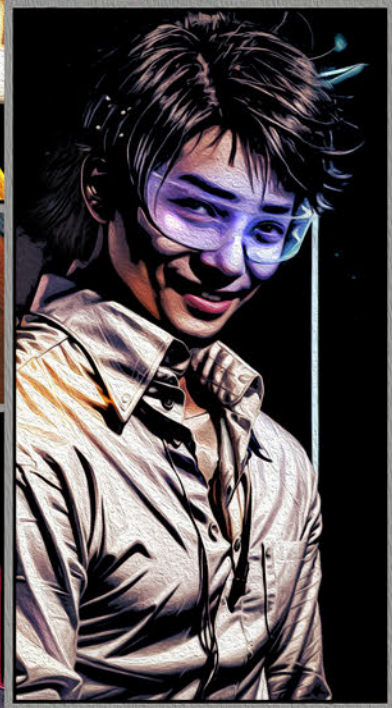
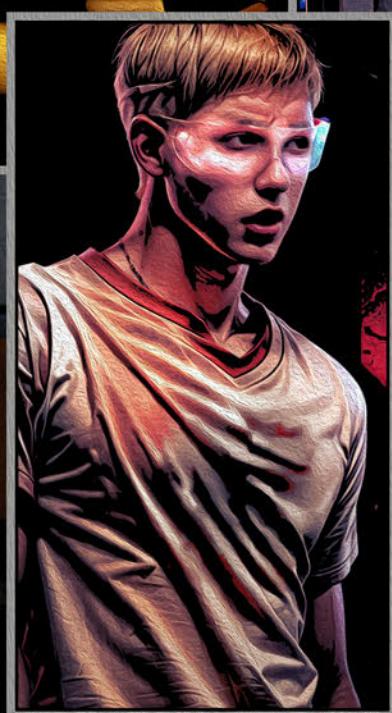
As Ted finished off his first energy drink, he examined the insert for the Virtual Reality system, which contained a list of included games. Ted read through the categories as he began to feel a strange scratching sensation on his leg.



Glancing down he saw a fairly average house spider creep it's way northerly at a casual pace. The startled man swiped at the creature with a ferocity typically reserved for life and death situations. Savagely defeated, the mangled corpse lay on the floor in a small pool of its bodily fluids as Ted looked on heroically. Granted this latest conquest was not likely to be shared with the group, it did however spark his interest in one category. Under the genre of horror was the game "Lost Reality" and it promised the gamer would be 'plunged into the depths of insanity and beyond,' typical sales hyperbole of course, but it was as good a place as any to start.

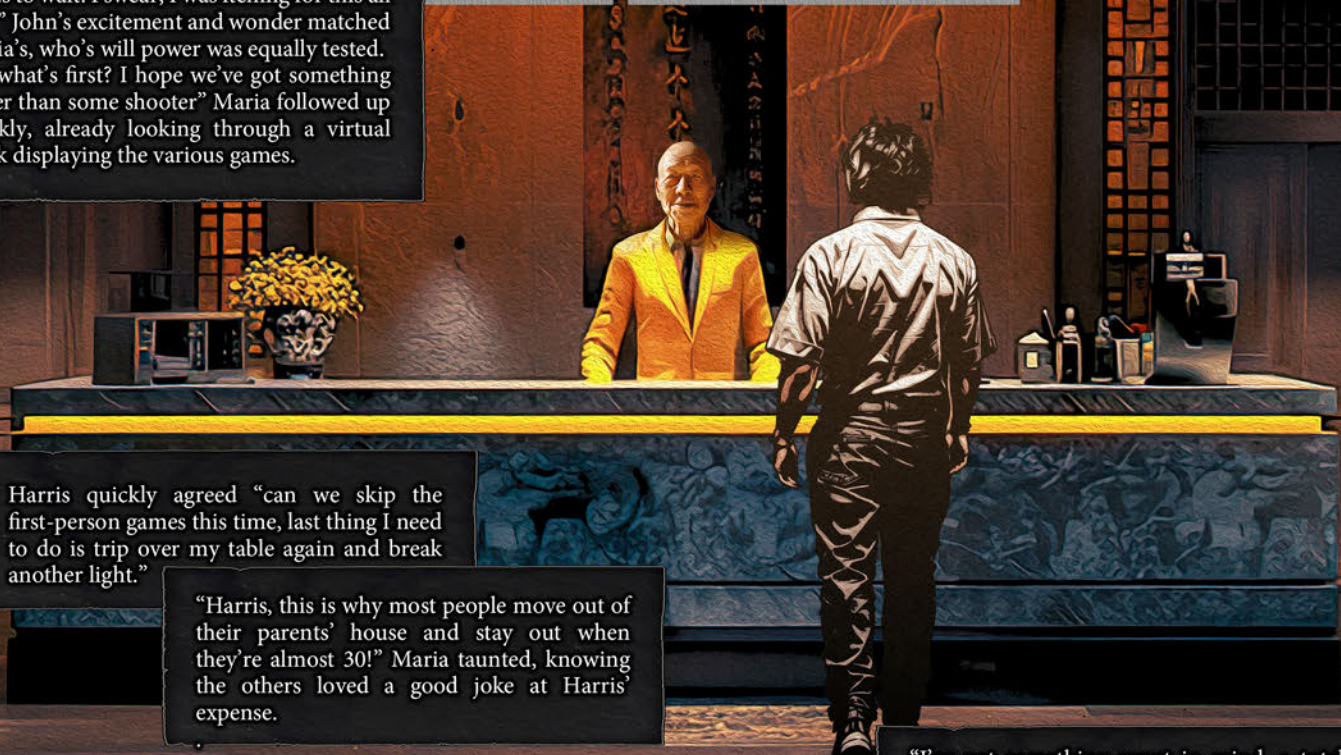


With a shrill beep coming through Ted's earpiece attachment, the virtual environment changed from a dim light shading out the living room and transformed into a fully realized hotel lobby, complete with receptionist. The animated avatars of Ted's friends quickly rendered into nearly identical representations that, from a small distance away at least, passed for the real people. Earnst was the first to speak.



"Holy shit, this is unbelievable... Shit, Ted, wow!" Maria just laughed, both from the sensation of this new virtual experience as well as Earnst typical eloquence. The two had briefly dated years ago, an event neither liked to recall and when pressed, both often insisted mind control or substance abuse was to blame for any initial attraction.

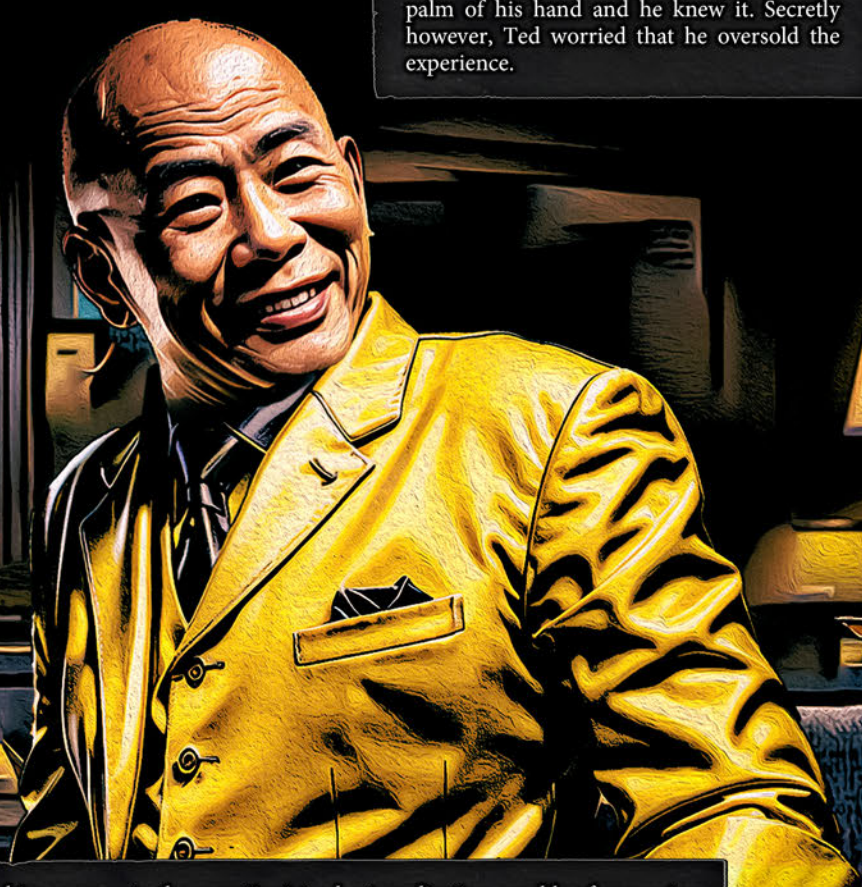
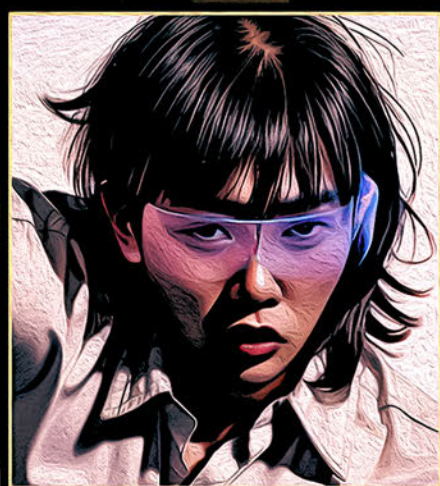
"You guys have absolutely no idea how hard it was to wait. I swear, I was itching for this all day!" John's excitement and wonder matched Maria's, who's will power was equally tested. "So what's first? I hope we've got something better than some shooter" Maria followed up quickly, already looking through a virtual kiosk displaying the various games.



Harris quickly agreed "can we skip the first-person games this time, last thing I need to do is trip over my table again and break another light."

"Harris, this is why most people move out of their parents' house and stay out when they're almost 30!" Maria taunted, knowing the others loved a good joke at Harris' expense.

"I've got something sweet in mind, a total mind-fuck that should really show us what this thing can do." Ted had the group in the palm of his hand and he knew it. Secretly however, Ted worried that he oversold the experience.

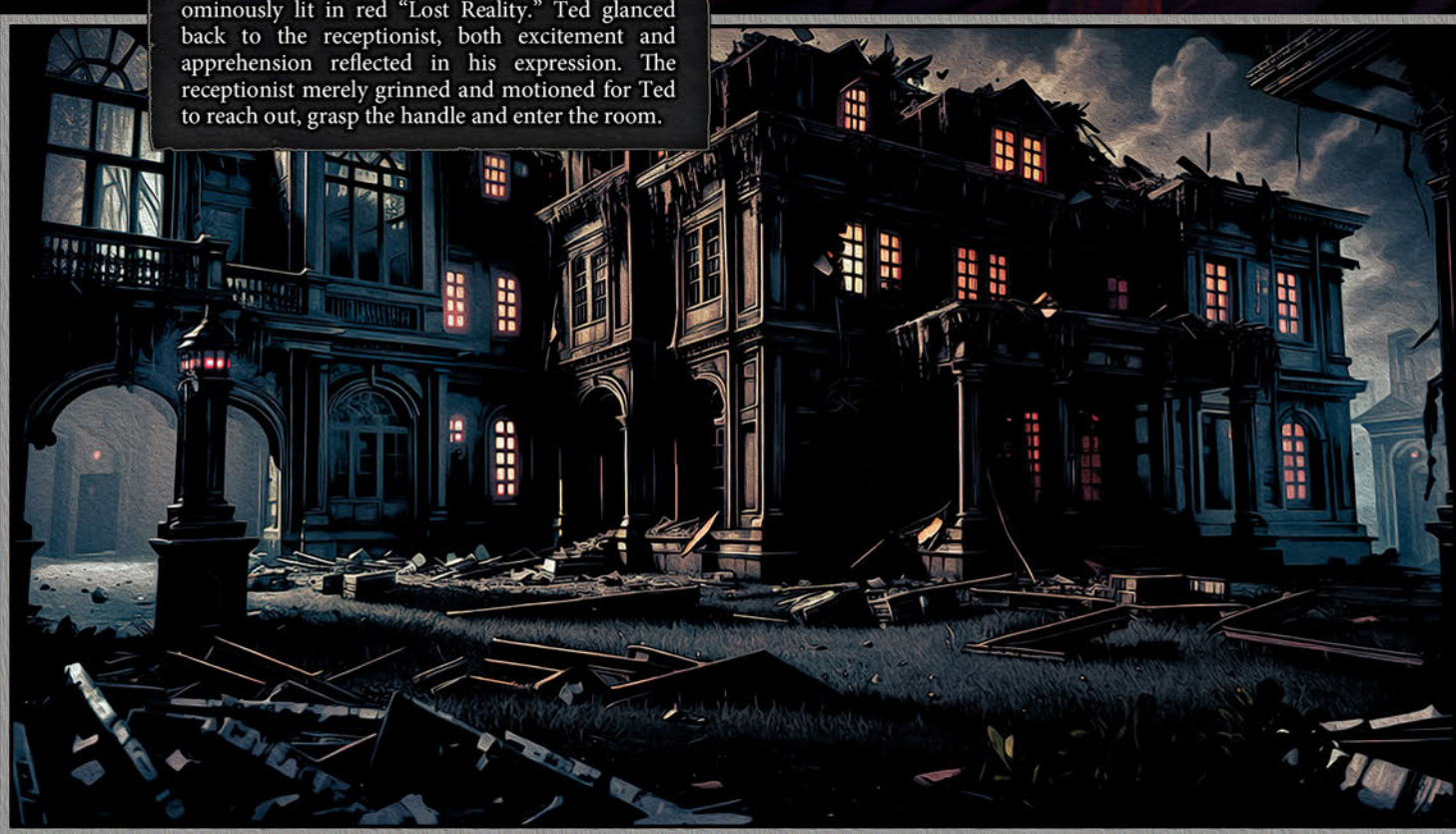


Ted made his way over to the receptionist, a host application capable of answering basic questions to ensure a more enjoyable experience. The receptionist wore an odd mustard-yellow outfit that made him stand out quite deliberately from the surroundings. The Receptionist's appearance shifted slightly giving him Asian features to mimic the ethnicity of Ted, the first to approach. The receptionist was tall, and held an eager smile on his face as he welcomed Ted and his friends to approach. In a hushed voice Ted asked the receptionist if his choice in game, Lost Reality, would live up to expectations



"My dear friend, you will be nothing short of amazed at the sheer horror you will unlock by entering the Lost Reality environment." As the receptionist spoke, doors began to appear in a semi-circle around Ted and his friends. Above each door was a title of one of the games, floating and illuminated in the style of each genre.

Maria was obviously impressed as she exclaimed "nice!" Her excitement was matched by everyone else as they approached the first door, the ominously lit in red "Lost Reality." Ted glanced back to the receptionist, both excitement and apprehension reflected in his expression. The receptionist merely grinned and motioned for Ted to reach out, grasp the handle and enter the room.



Before Ted could even turn, John eagerly pushed to the front, grasping the handle and entered. Everything went white, blinding the group temporarily as the new environment came to life.



Standing before a massive dining room table, the group looked around in shock and awe. What once had been a fairly realistic lobby was now replaced with an unbelievably realistic 19th century mansion, complete with cobwebs, glowing candles and a fire place.



They could swear to the warmth emanating from the fireplace, the simulation was so authentic. As they moved about the room, gently touching the various items, everyone grew more excited, feeling surprised at the sensation of touch but without true substance. The sensations routed to their brain made the experience as realistic and amazing as advertised.



Earnst reached for Ted's arm, the hand feeling a sensation of touch without the resistance of true physicality. Ted recoiled, shocked at having the sensation transmitted to himself, and both giggled with glee. "Hey, someone's at my door, can we put this on pause?" John asked, looking about the ceiling as if expecting the voice of God to answer.

"Shared reality environments will continue, even if one player exits the game. Major story developments and scene changes will be paused for up to 5 minutes allowing players to resume at the same point, and you are always able to rejoin the game at any point later, should you exit for longer than 5 minutes."

The voice of the receptionist startled the group, but the ease of information and the sheer newness of the game left grins on everyone as John's avatar seemingly paused and became translucent like a ghost. A few moments went by when John's avatar once more solidified.

His vision went from a flash of light to Earnst standing nose to nose, a large malevolent smile across his face. John fell back, flailing at the now laughing Earnst. Harris and Ted both laughed uproariously as Maria assured John that it could have been much worse. Earnst eagerly shook his head in the affirmative.

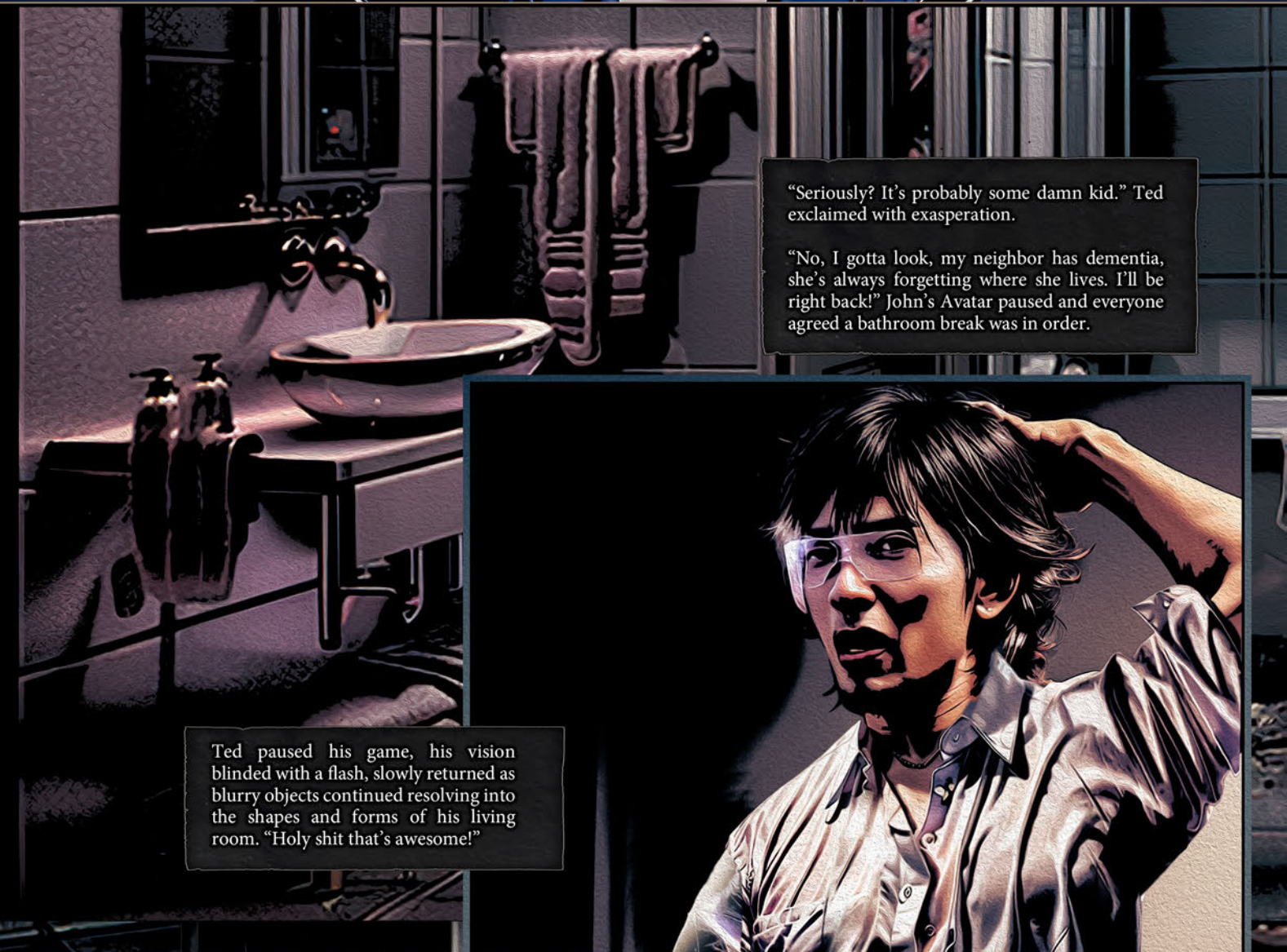
"Did you order pizza? I wonder if we could get a virtual taste!" Ted joked but John merely shrugged, no one was at the door, so the game continued.

Entering the first room, the light began to dim as candle after candle became extinguished. An eerie sensation came across all of them as they felt eyes watching from the dark. An eerie light was seen in the distance as their eyes adjusted. The room was a long hallway filled with doors, each with the name of one of the group. Maria turned and was the first to speak.



"Ok, that's crazy!"

"They must get the names off the user registration, nice touch!" Ted replied. Before they could reach for their respective handles, John shouted out "Dammit! It's the freaking door again!"



"Seriously? It's probably some damn kid." Ted exclaimed with exasperation.

"No, I gotta look, my neighbor has dementia, she's always forgetting where she lives. I'll be right back!" John's Avatar paused and everyone agreed a bathroom break was in order.

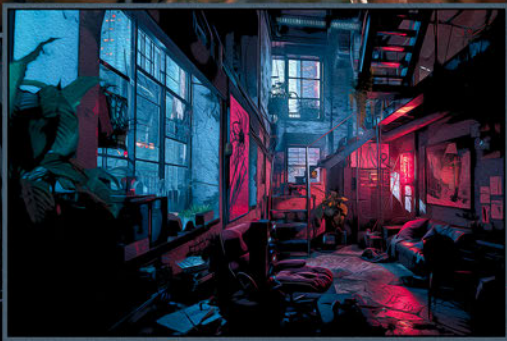
Ted paused his game, his vision blinded with a flash, slowly returned as blurry objects continued resolving into the shapes and forms of his living room. "Holy shit that's awesome!"



Ted stretched his legs; in the game his desire to move forward gave the avatar momentum and direction, but in reality he remained positioned as he was when the game started. Ted thought to remind himself to pick a more comfortable position after he takes a piss.



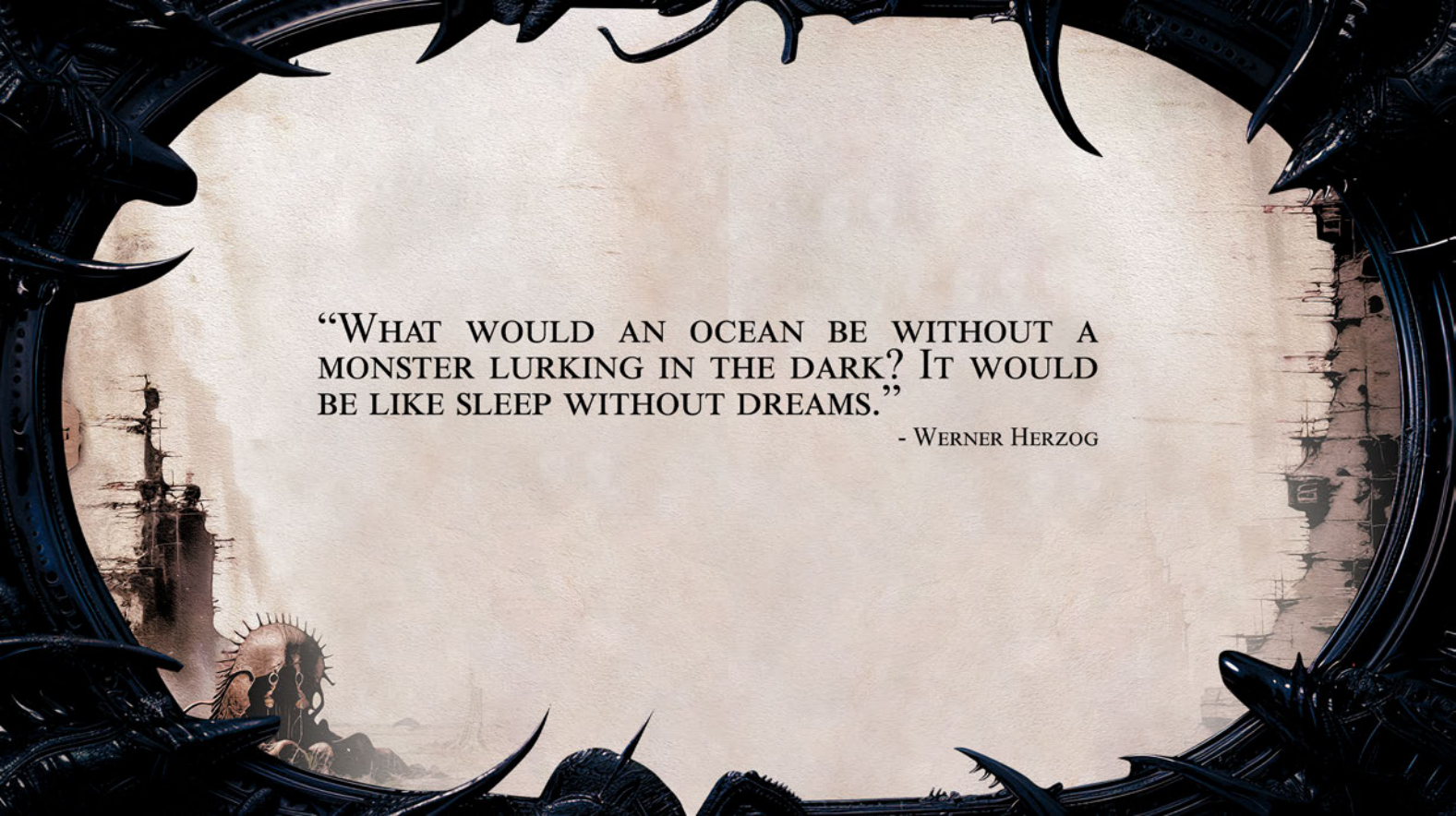
Ted eagerly finished urinating and went to activate the water when another spider crawled out of the faucet, almost landing on his palm. Ted recoiled in horror as he reached for a bottle of soap. The spider, decidedly larger than the last one appeared to stand firm against Ted's shriek. Ted summoned every ounce of courage he could and slammed the bottle down. Ted was certain that the gore pooling under the bottle was an inordinate amount for a simple spider but didn't stick around longer to appreciate the slaying.



Hesitantly Ted descended the stairs to his couch. Each movement or motion in every shadow in his home was certain to have another arachnid, lurking, readying to pounce. Ted was also certain that his friends were right, and that he had a very active imagination. Either way, a call to the buildings management was in order before more of the grotesque monstrosities showed.

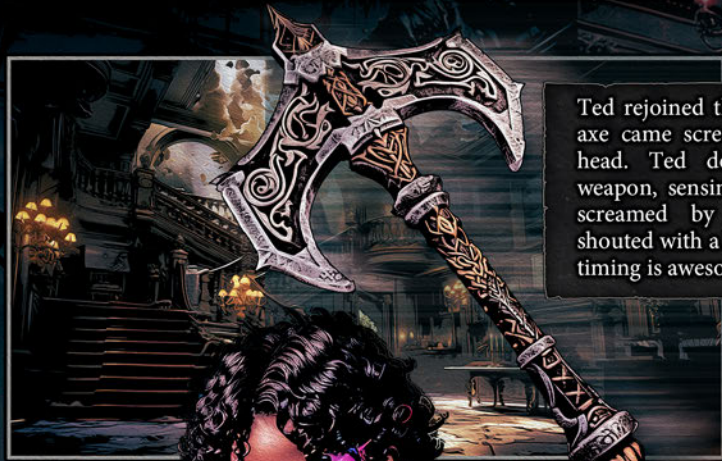
Ted called the building superintendent. The man was hard working but cleanliness was never his priority when maintaining the apartments. The new family a floor below had already been overheard making similar complaints earlier in the week. After two short rings, the super's voicemail activated. Ted left a message, managing to only exaggerate the quantity and size of the ferocious attackers by 30% or so. A swarm sounded like paranoia even to Ted as he made his way to the couch and reactivated the game.



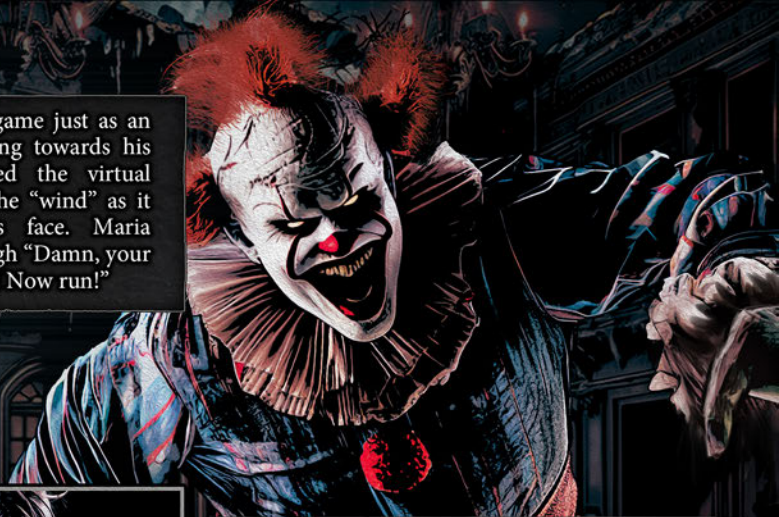


“WHAT WOULD AN OCEAN BE WITHOUT A
MONSTER LURKING IN THE DARK? IT WOULD
BE LIKE SLEEP WITHOUT DREAMS.”

- WERNER HERZOG



Ted rejoined the game just as an axe came screaming towards his head. Ted dodged the virtual weapon, sensing the “wind” as it screamed by his face. Maria shouted with a laugh “Damn, your timing is awesome! Now run!”

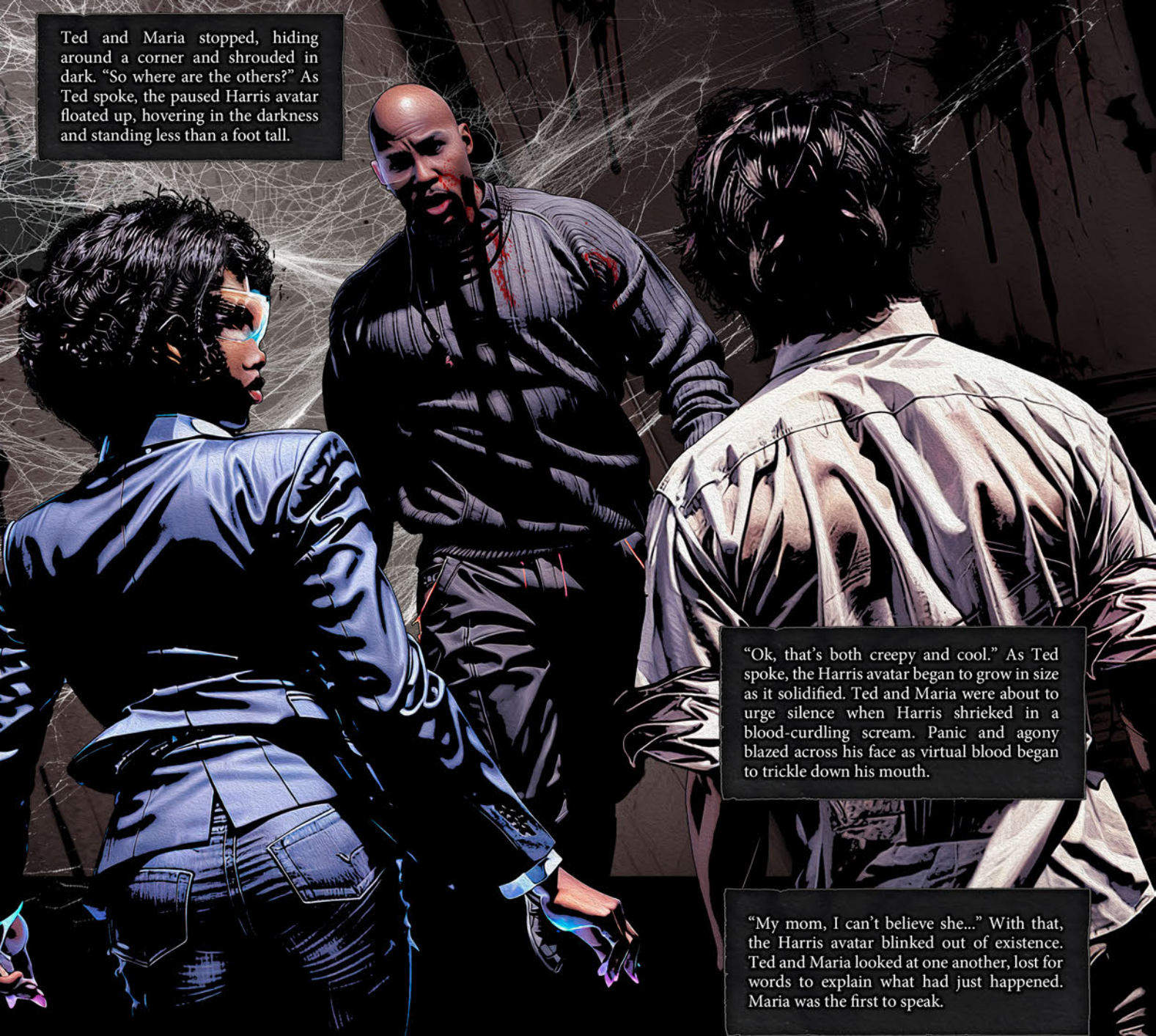


“What the hell, you kept playing? Where are the rest?” Ted ran, catching up with Maria as they ran up the stairs of the mansion.



“You boys have tiny bladders, what can I say! I poked around some rooms then after 5 minutes that thing came through the wall. I ran and your freakish paused self just shrunk and followed, floating along. Then you came to.”

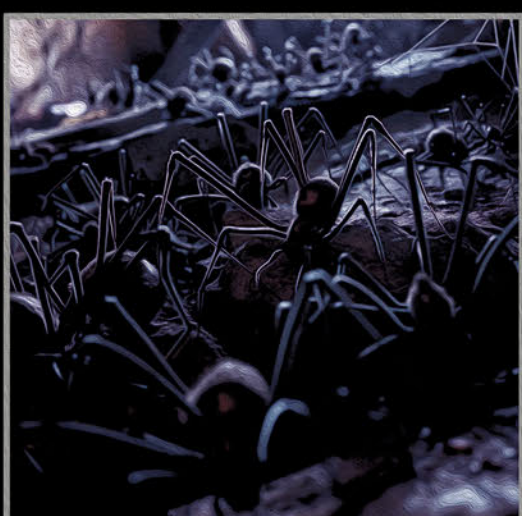




Ted and Maria stopped, hiding around a corner and shrouded in dark. "So where are the others?" As Ted spoke, the paused Harris avatar floated up, hovering in the darkness and standing less than a foot tall.

"Ok, that's both creepy and cool." As Ted spoke, the Harris avatar began to grow in size as it solidified. Ted and Maria were about to urge silence when Harris shrieked in a blood-curdling scream. Panic and agony blazed across his face as virtual blood began to trickle down his mouth.

"My mom, I can't believe she..." With that, the Harris avatar blinked out of existence. Ted and Maria looked at one another, lost for words to explain what had just happened. Maria was the first to speak.



"Ah, Pause. Guy in yellow, what just happened? Where is everyone?" Maria asked to the heavens, awaiting some reply.

The bodiless voice of the receptionist responded in a calming tone. "Player connections have been interrupted. Players will be able to rejoin if they are able."

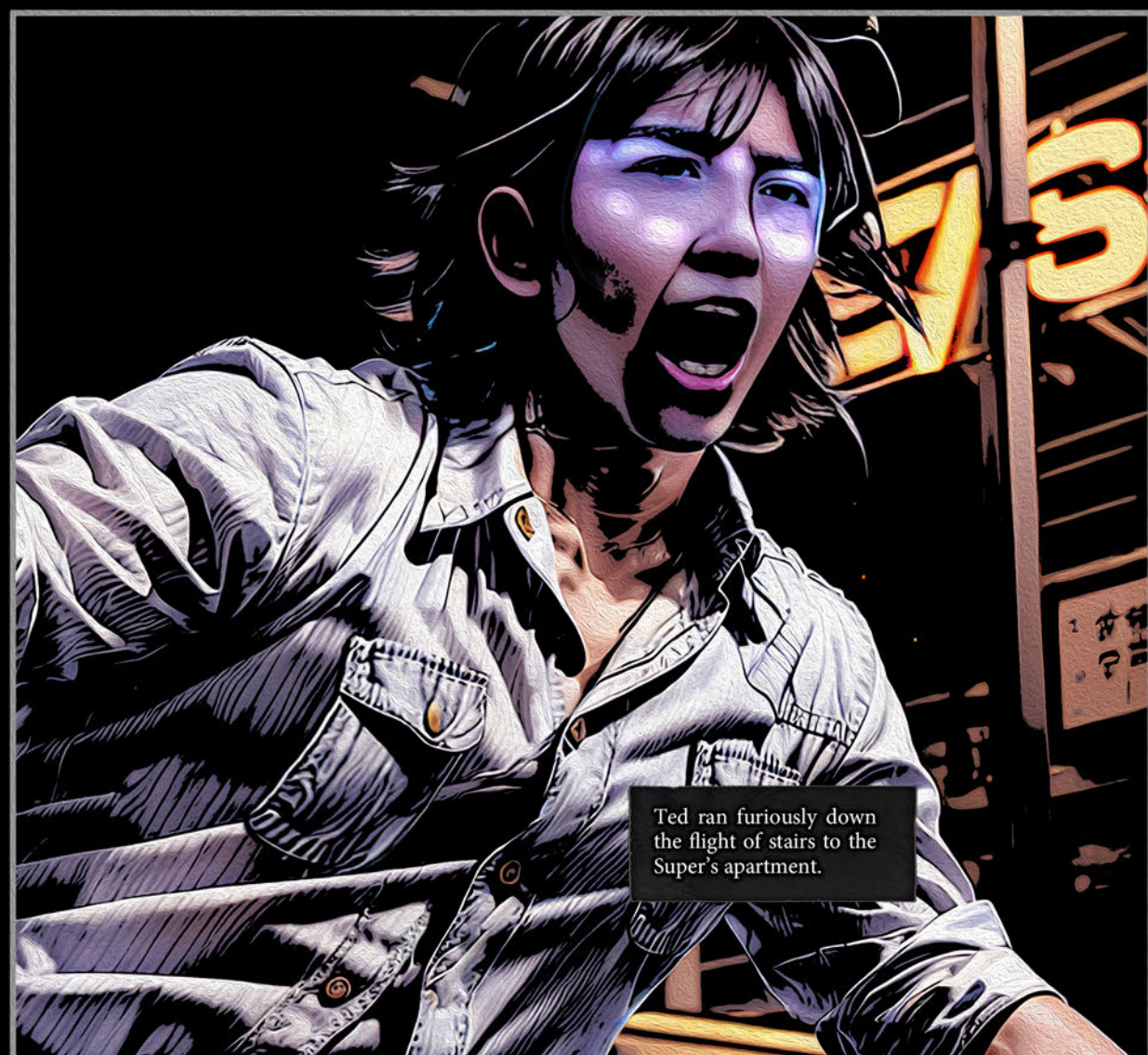
Ted looked nervously at Maria. "I think I should call Harris, that was just weird."

Maria nodded in agreement. "I'll text John and Earnst, see what's holding them up."

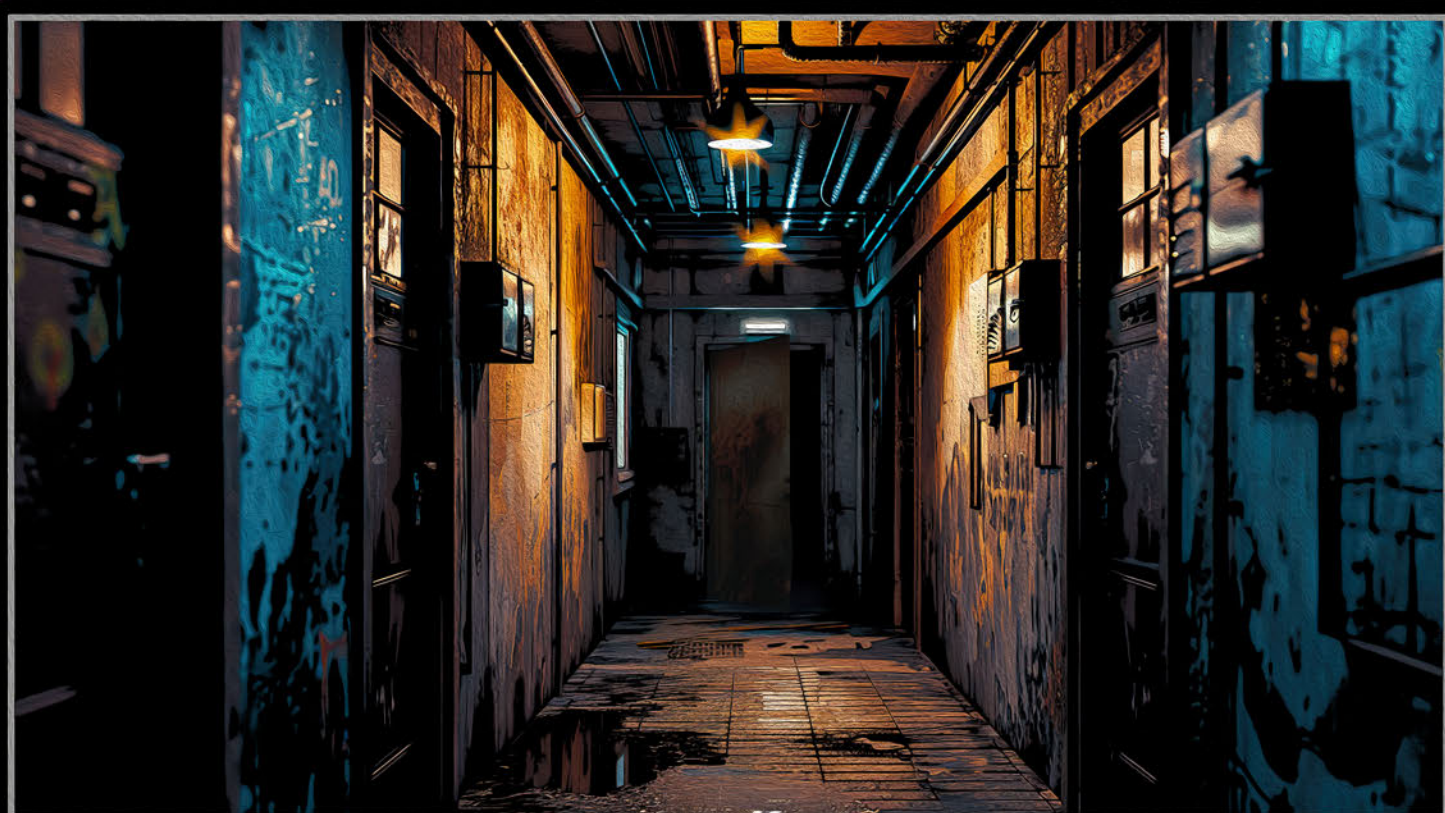
Ted nodded and exited the game. As his vision improved, Ted reached for his phone. Ted's hand fell upon a bristly surface and instinctively Ted recoiled in fear. Ted's face ran white as snow as he sat there, making himself as diminutive as possible, retreating as far as the couch would allow.



Anything, just to achieve distance from the grouping of spiders that sat innocently upon and around his phone. Impossibly large or so many in number as to give the appearance of great size, the mass slowly inched forward, motivating Ted to violently crash through his living room, out his door and down the hall. Ted wouldn't be ashamed that he wet himself a little given the phobia-inducing terror he had just beheld.



Ted ran furiously down the flight of stairs to the Super's apartment.



As Ted was about to pound on the door, Ted noticed a sticky, orange substance running the up the length of the door toward it's handle. Ted further noticed the door was slightly ajar, but no light came from within.



Ted gently pushed open the door, calling out to the middle-aged man in a hushed tone. As Ted journeyed further within the apartment, he raised his voice slightly, hoping to not catch the man off-guard. From the kitchen Ted heard a slopping sound, as if a wet bag was heaved upon the table.



Making his way in the dark to the room, Ted couldn't help but notice the knife rack on the counter, his fight or flight reflex screaming to be heard.



Ted discovered the source of the sound and instantly reached for the knife to his left. The superintendent, a jovial man in his late 50's, someone that typically wore a warm, welcoming smile, now resembled death itself. Transforming between man and creature, what stood before Ted trembling was unrecognizable. Hideous beyond words, the creature lunged at Ted, screeching as it did. Ted made a weak hacking motion with the cleaver, severing one of the beast's appendages. Enraged, the creature howled as it reared back, preparing to attack once more. Ted seized his moment of pure adrenaline and slammed into the creature, knocking it off balance. Hacking again and again at the monstrosity, Ted flung gore to all ends of the kitchen, saturating the room with this monstrosities' green fluids. Only when some splashed across Ted's visor did he snap back and regain his composure.



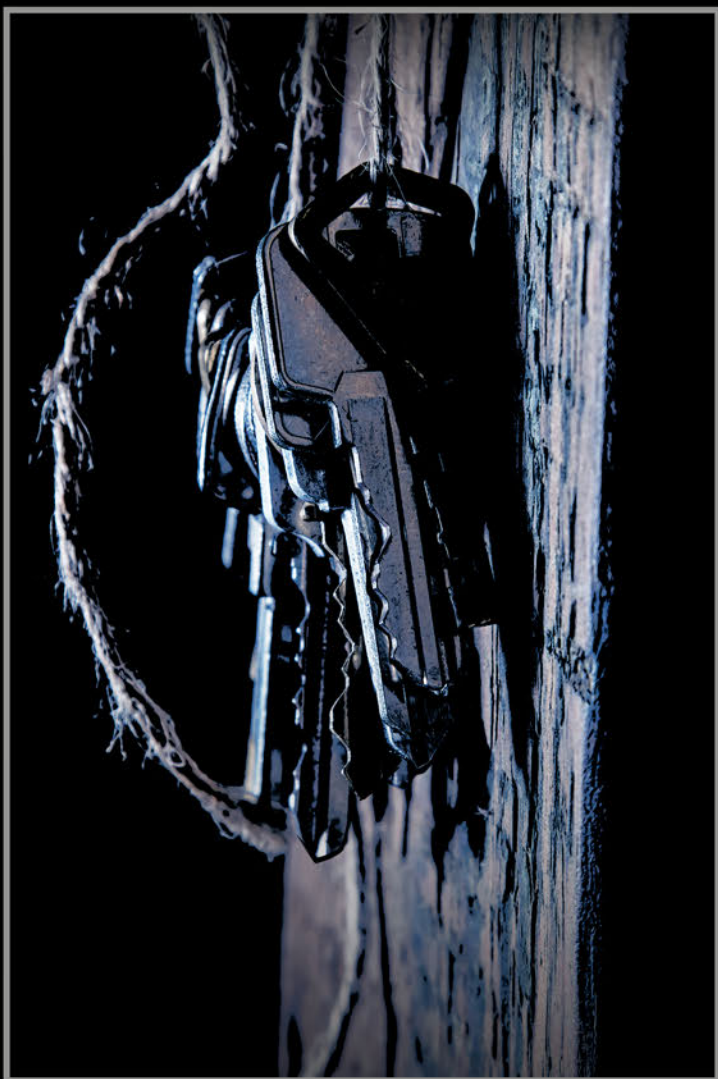
Ted pivoted to his side as another loud screech came from the doorway. Another creature ran towards Ted, arms outstretched, intending to tackle Ted but the creature had misjudged its lunge.



Ted easily maneuvered out of the way, bringing down the cleaver on the creature's neck, nearly severing its head from body.

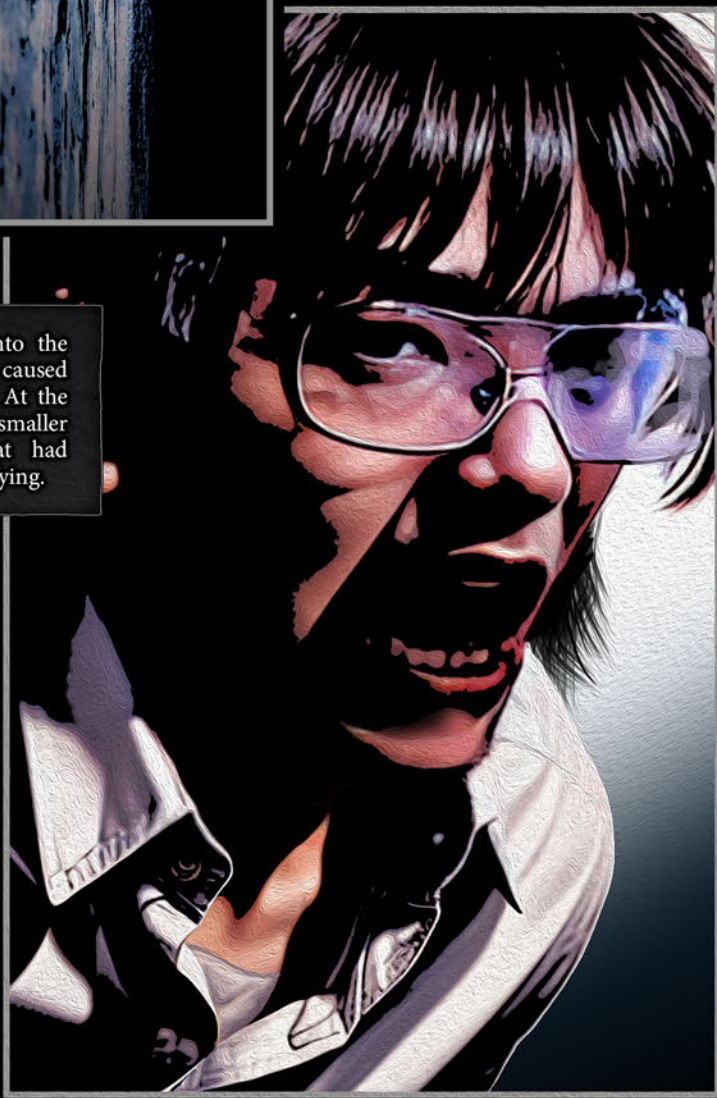


Ted had little intention of waiting for a third creature to attack, now thinking only of escape, he knew he would have to return to his room.

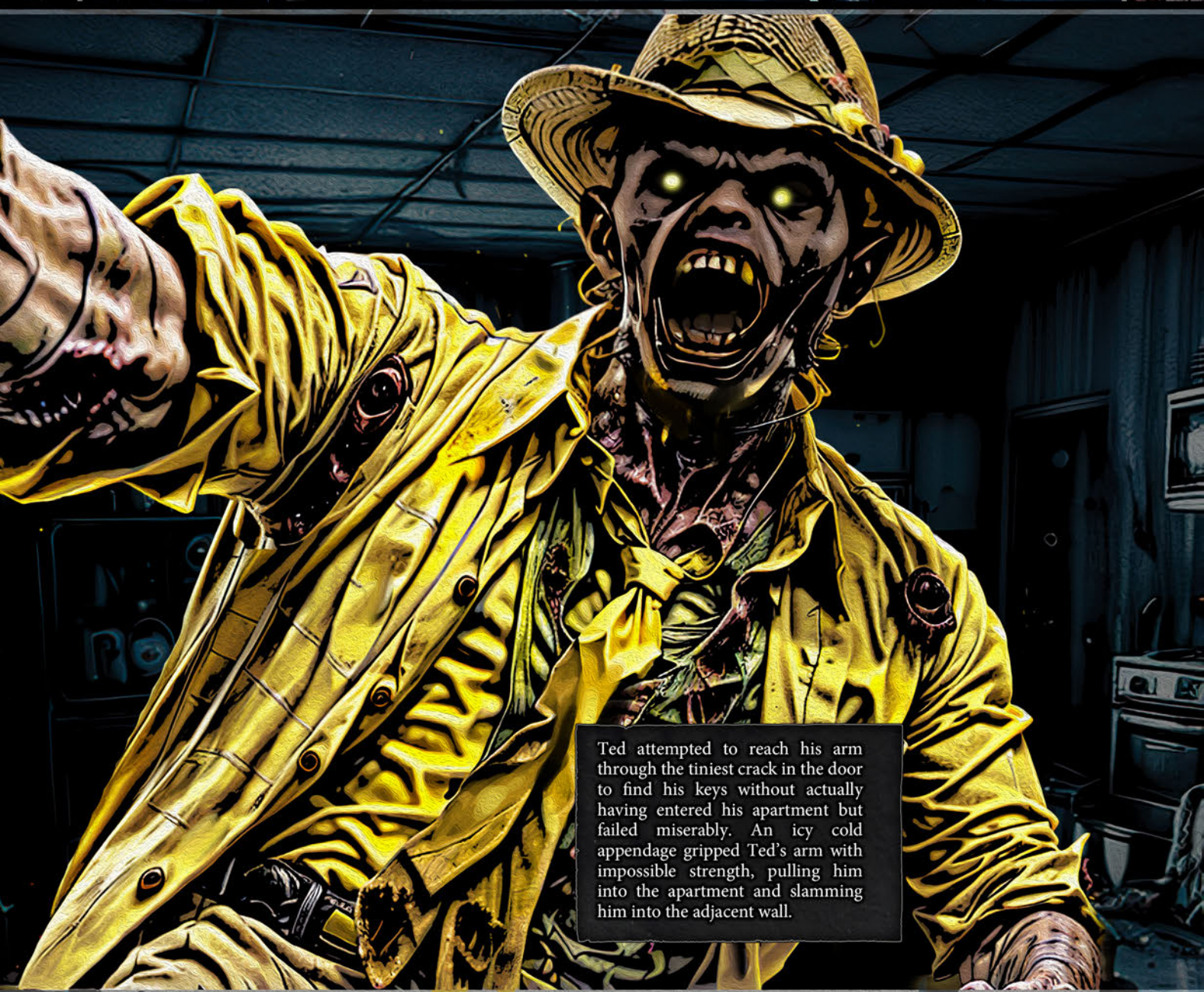


Keys for his car hung just within the entryway, meaning no matter the horror that awaited him he would still be within inches of his keys and the impending safety they represented.

As Ted cautiously peered into the hall, another strange sound caused terror to creep up his spine. At the end of the hall stood a smaller creature then the one that had attacked Ted, but no less terrifying.



Ted did his best to ignore the creatures wail as he raced up the stairs back to his room.



Ted attempted to reach his arm through the tiniest crack in the door to find his keys without actually having entered his apartment but failed miserably. An icy cold appendage gripped Ted's arm with impossible strength, pulling him into the apartment and slamming him into the adjacent wall.



Ted was nearly overcome with terror as the receptionist, now dressed more formally yet still in that sickly yellow color, stepped from the shadows.

His face misshaped, the being hunched over Ted, grinning in its deformed way. Ted trembled in fear, tears streaming down his face. All he could manage was a whimper. "What do you want?"

The creature laughed with a bone-chilling cackle that caused Ted to nearly vomit in fear. "Ted, Ted, Ted. I offered you a truly terrifying experience and you accepted. I take it the experience measured up to your expectations?"

Ted sat there, confused, terrified, drained. "Was any of it real?"

As Ted spoke, sounds could be heard from the hall. Wails and cries of unimaginable horror, inching closer to Ted's apartment. "Oh, this was all very, very real. In fact, you have but moments to live. You hear them, don't you?"

Ted inched to his feet, cleaver outstretched, keeping the strange being at arm's length. "What are you?" Ted cried out in rage.

"Something far older and more powerful than you could ever imagine. You may call me the Yellow King, if you like."

As the creature spoke, he grew in stature, eyes flame-red. Ted lunged at the creature, slashing the cleaver wildly when suddenly he heard loud cracks and felt the air in his lungs punched from his body.



Ted looked down in shock as blood streamed from tiny holes throughout his torso. As Ted crumbled to the floor, his VR goggles slid off, revealing the pair of officers standing in his doorway.

Ted died in agony, shrouded in confusion and with the sickening sound of the Yellow King's laughter ringing in his ear.

News agencies across the state reported on the mysterious slayings believed to be part of some ritualistic cult devoted to, or influenced by, video game violence.

The 5 friends reportedly went on homicidal rampages in their respective homes and communities, murdering children, family members, strangers, all indiscriminately.

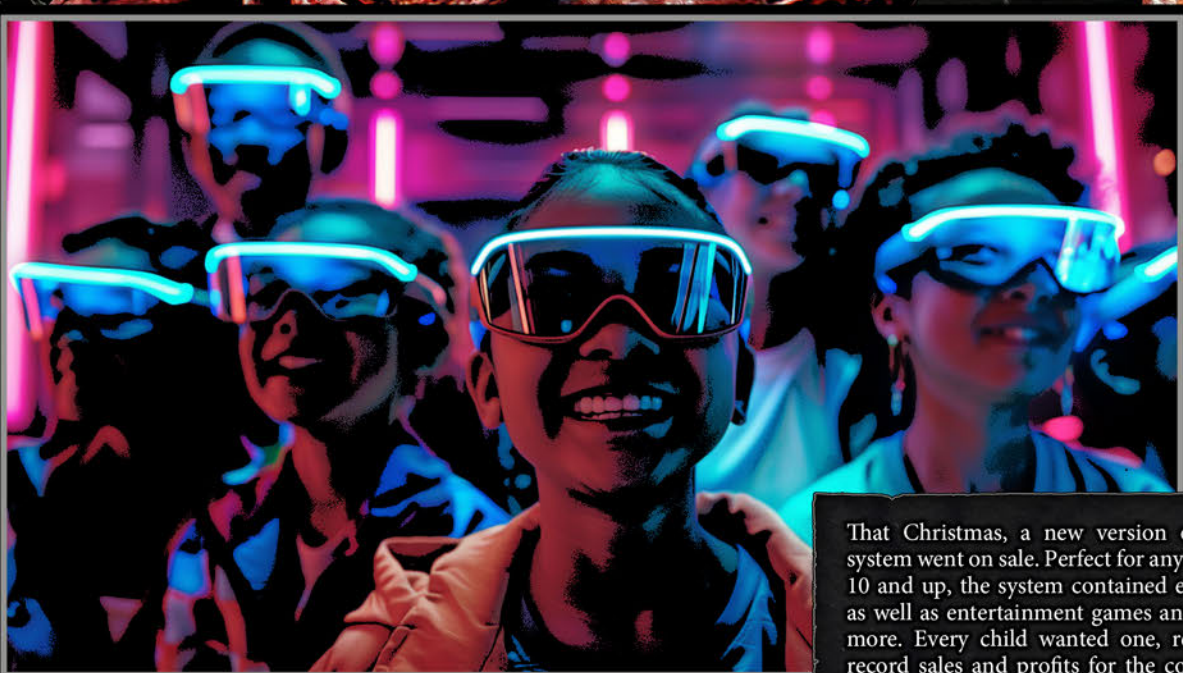
The madness that gripped them would remain a mystery, but the bloody swath of death and mutilation they left behind would leave a lasting scar for decades to come.



The brief infamy the Virtual Reality headsets earned for their association with the murders was short lived and only served to peak interest and spur on sales.



Authorities could find no connection and only could surmise whatever games the group had played were unconnected to the murders that followed.



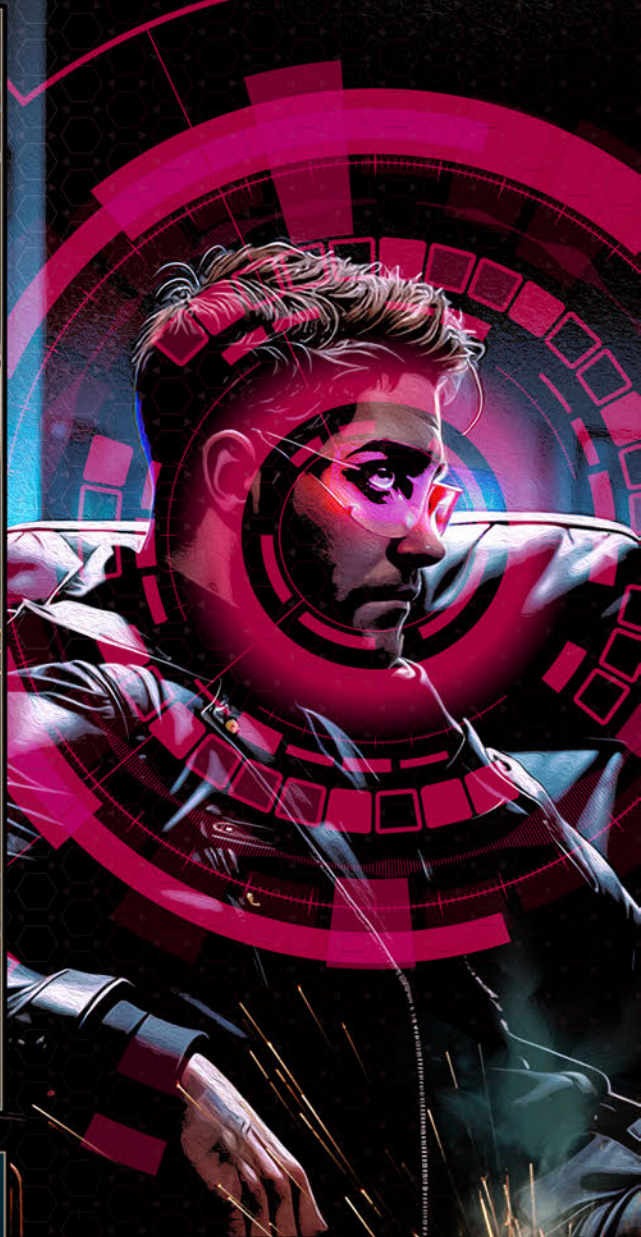
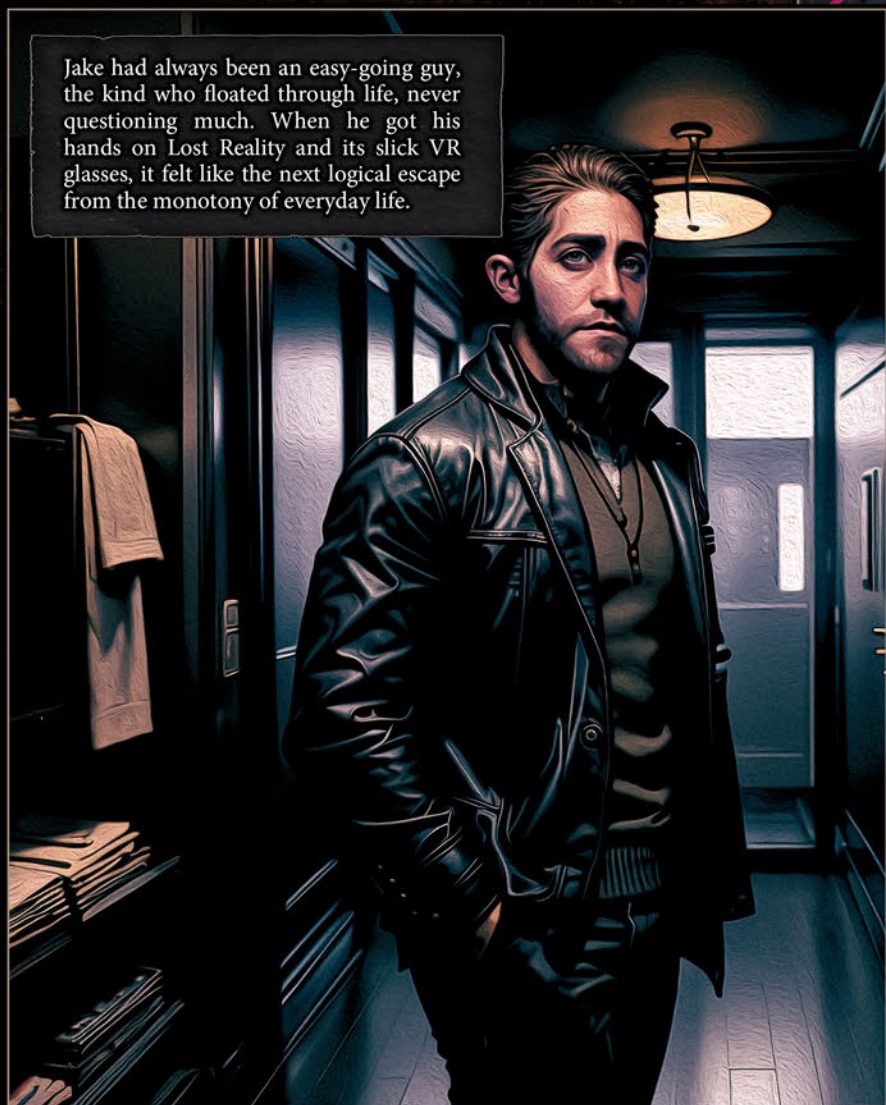
That Christmas, a new version of the VR system went on sale. Perfect for any child, ages 10 and up, the system contained educational as well as entertainment games and so much more. Every child wanted one, resulting in record sales and profits for the company, as every child was nothing short of amazed.

For a time.





Jake had always been an easy-going guy, the kind who floated through life, never questioning much. When he got his hands on Lost Reality and its slick VR glasses, it felt like the next logical escape from the monotony of everyday life.



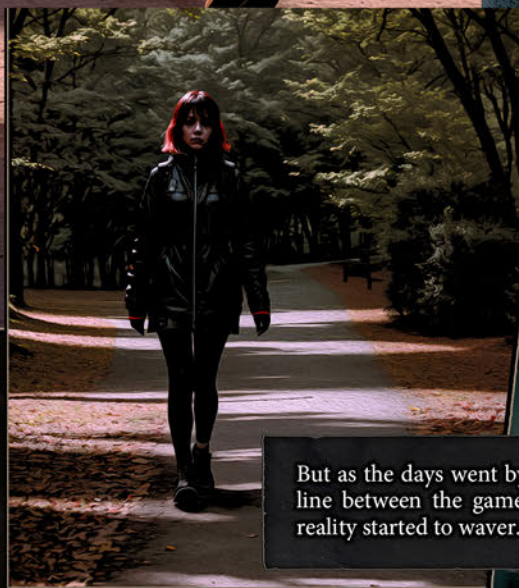
Plugging in, he was greeted by breathtaking vistas, hyper-realistic detail, and the freedom to do anything.



At first, the virtual world was a playground—everything he couldn't be in the real world, he became inside the game. The immersion was perfect, almost too perfect. But then the glitches began.



It started small. A flicker here, a blurred object there. A voice, not quite his own, whispering his thoughts. Jake dismissed it, telling himself it was just part of the game's mechanics.



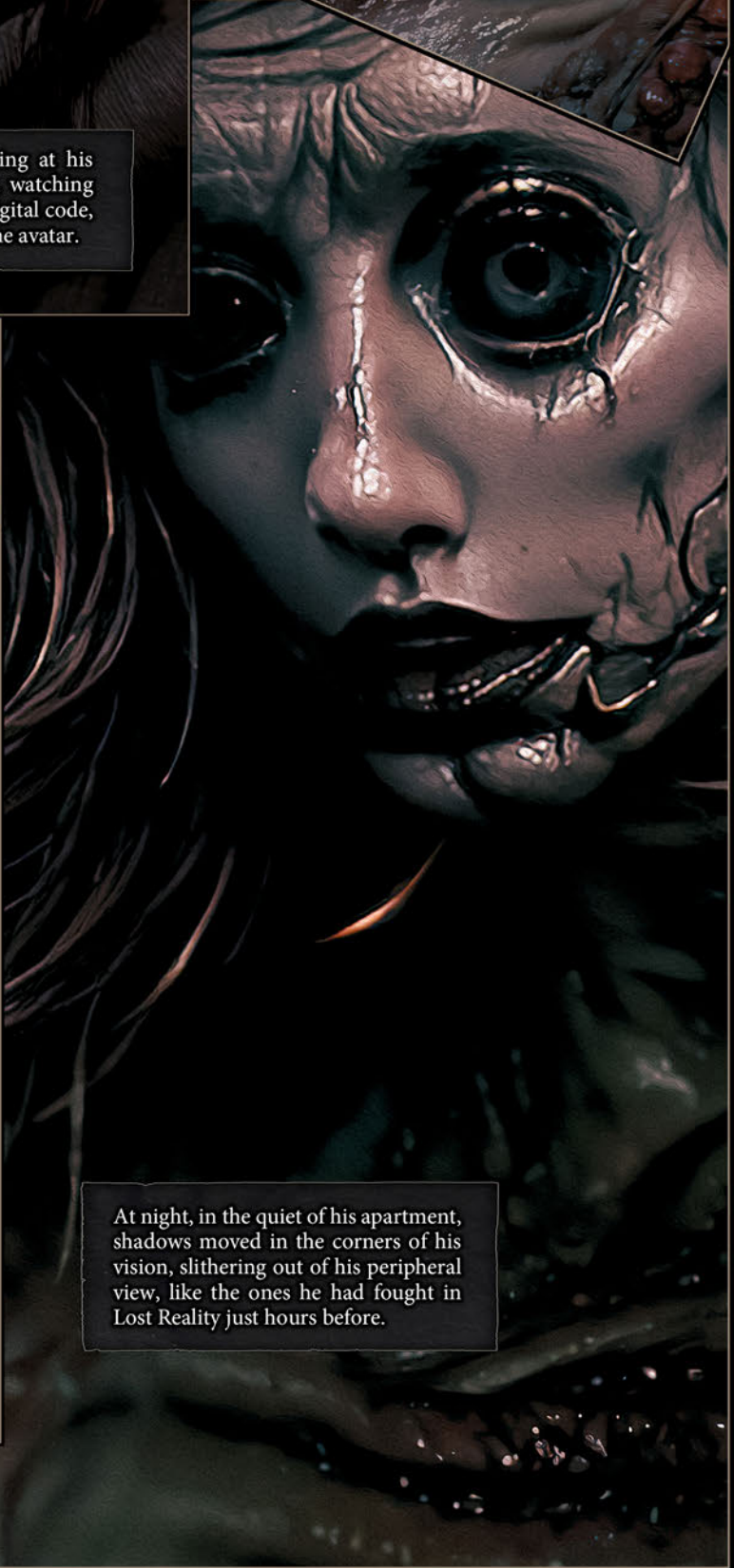
But as the days went by, the line between the game and reality started to waver.



He'd catch himself staring at his reflection in the mirror, watching as his face rippled like digital code, unsure if it was him or the avatar.

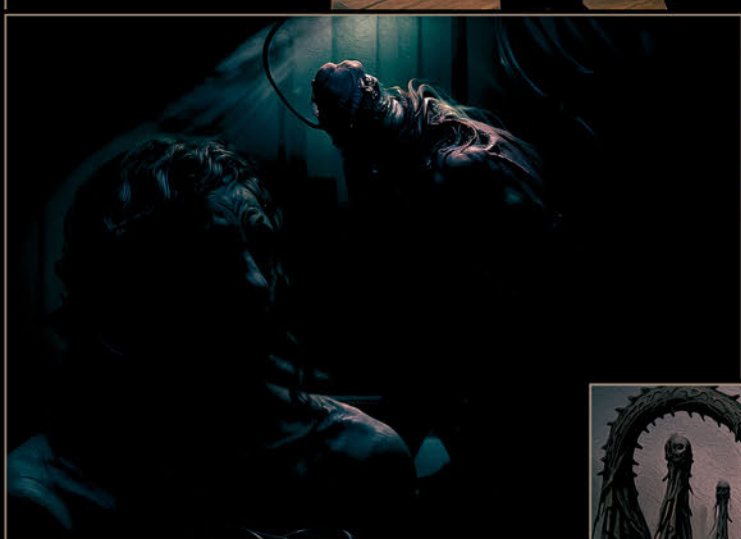


At night, in the quiet of his apartment, shadows moved in the corners of his vision, slithering out of his peripheral view, like the ones he had fought in Lost Reality just hours before.

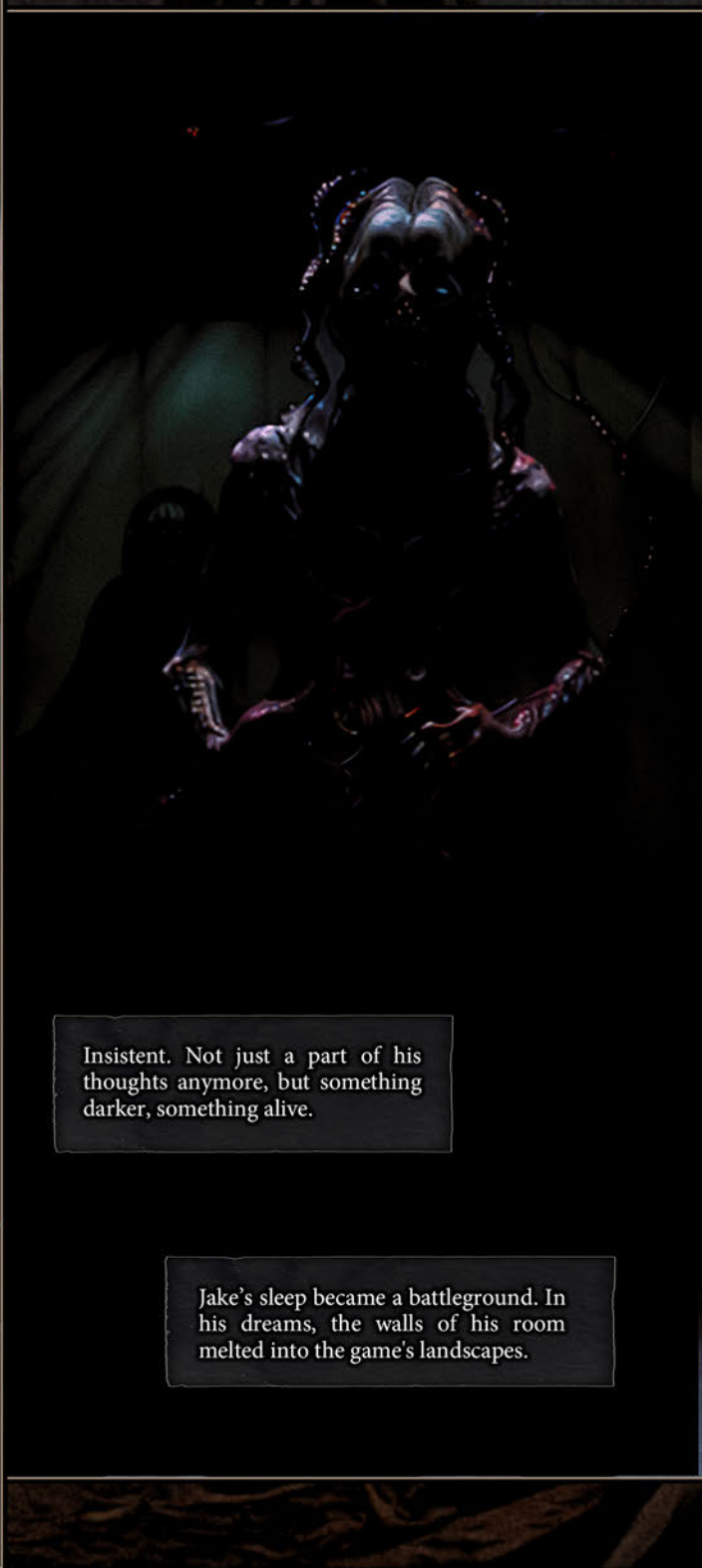


Soon, Jake was losing track of time. He wasn't sure if he was awake or still in the game. Days blended together, each more indistinguishable than the last. He stopped going out with friends, stopped eating regular meals.

All that mattered was returning to Lost Reality, but each time he logged back in, the world greeted him with more hostility. NPCs that once greeted him warmly now muttered cryptic messages, their eyes hollow and accusing.



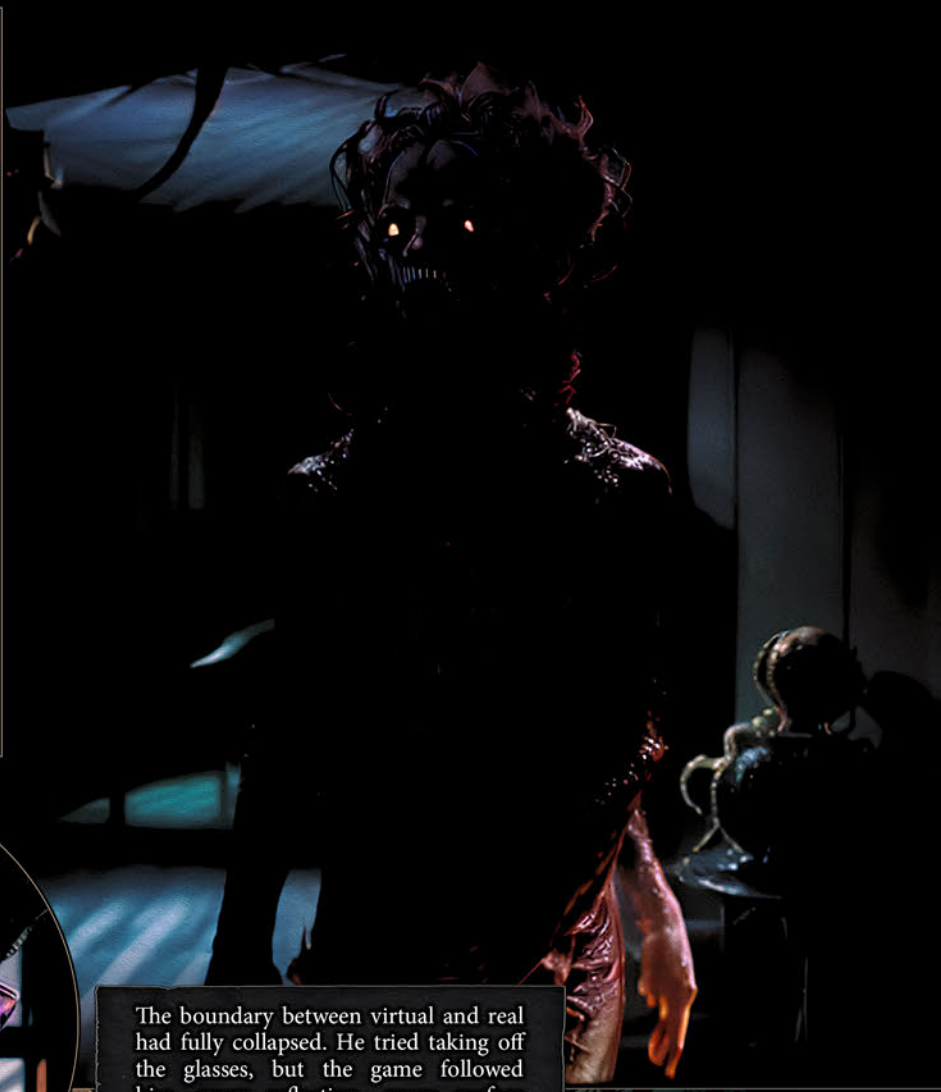
The places that were once beautiful and bright had taken on a sickly, decayed sheen. And that voice—it was louder now.



Insistent. Not just a part of his thoughts anymore, but something darker, something alive.

Jake's sleep became a battleground. In his dreams, the walls of his room melted into the game's landscapes.

Figures made of static clawed at his skin, dragging him into an abyss of digital code. When he woke up, he couldn't be sure if he was still dreaming.

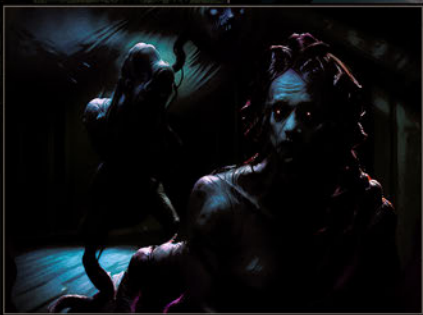


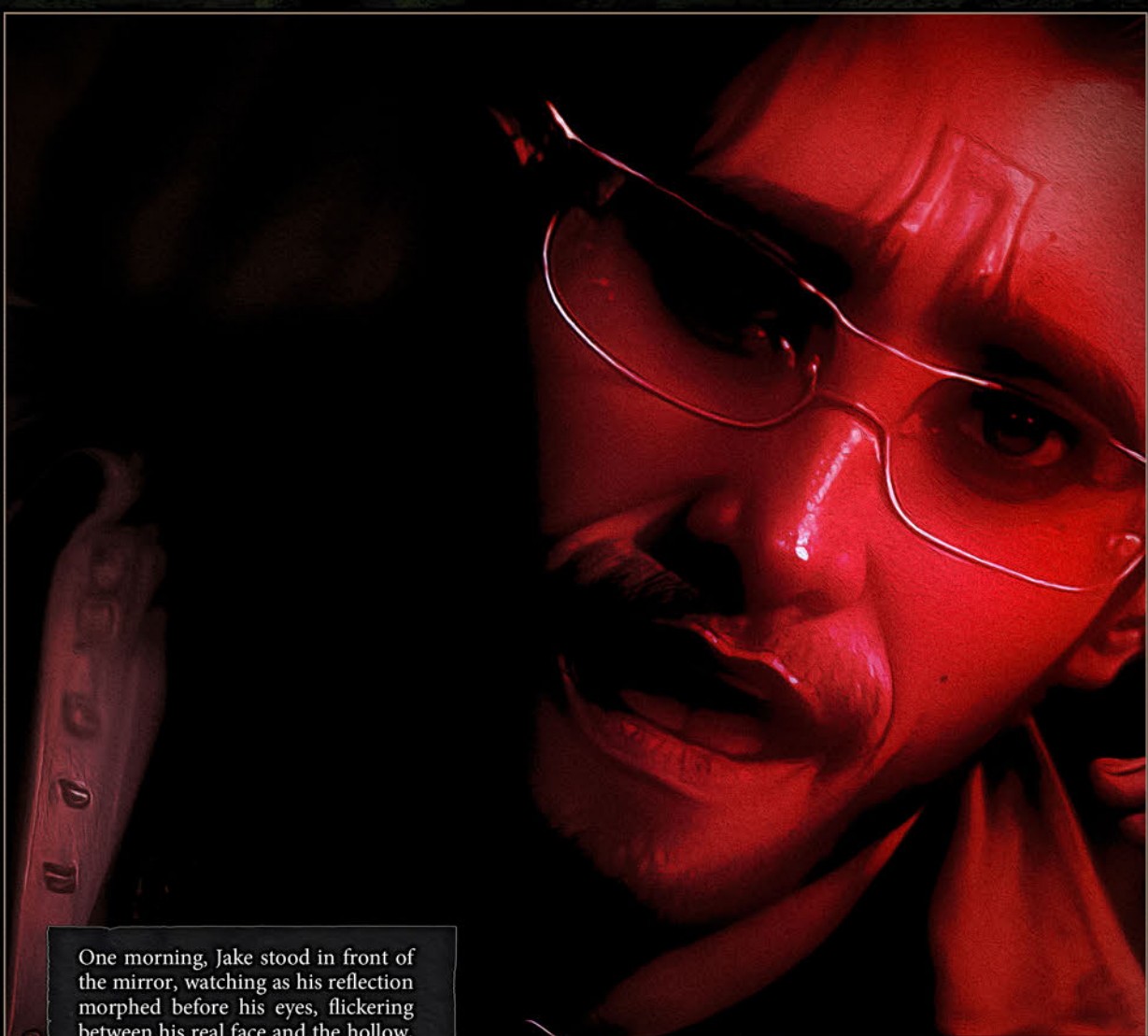
The boundary between virtual and real had fully collapsed. He tried taking off the glasses, but the game followed him—every reflection, every surface showed him pieces of Lost Reality.



His phone buzzed with messages he didn't remember sending, conversations that seemed to be from characters inside the game. The whispers were no longer just thoughts—they were commands.



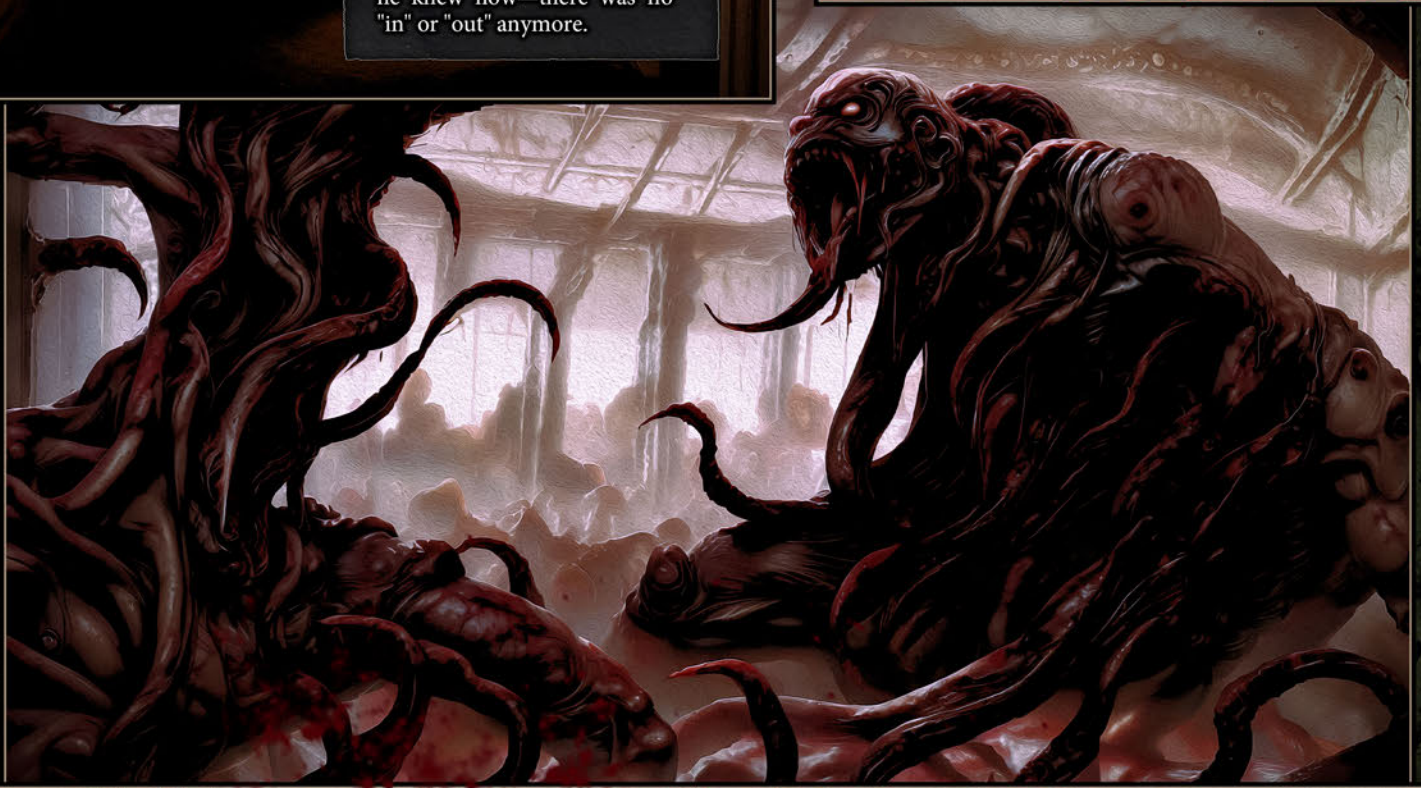




One morning, Jake stood in front of the mirror, watching as his reflection morphed before his eyes, flickering between his real face and the hollow, digital visage of his in-game avatar.



The whispers told him the only way out was to go back in. But he knew now—there was no "in" or "out" anymore.

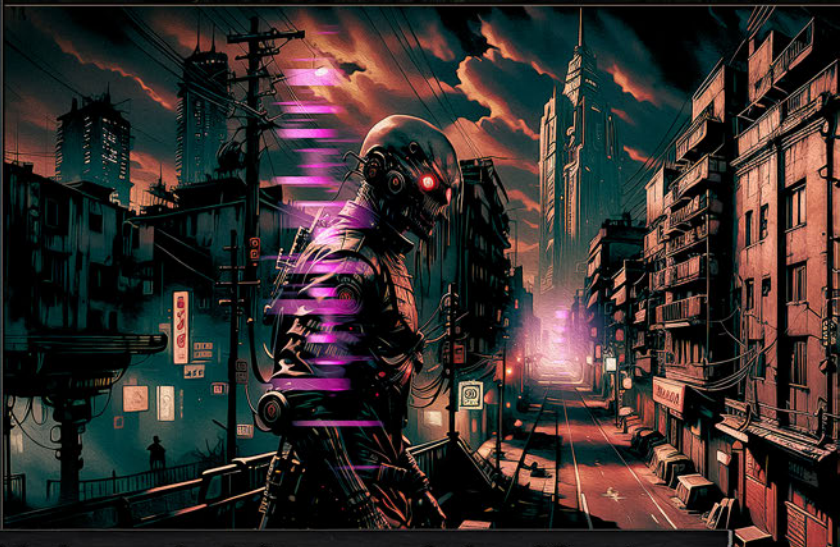


His reality was gone, swallowed whole by the game, and with it, whatever was left of his sanity.





Mina had always been good at getting into places she didn't belong.



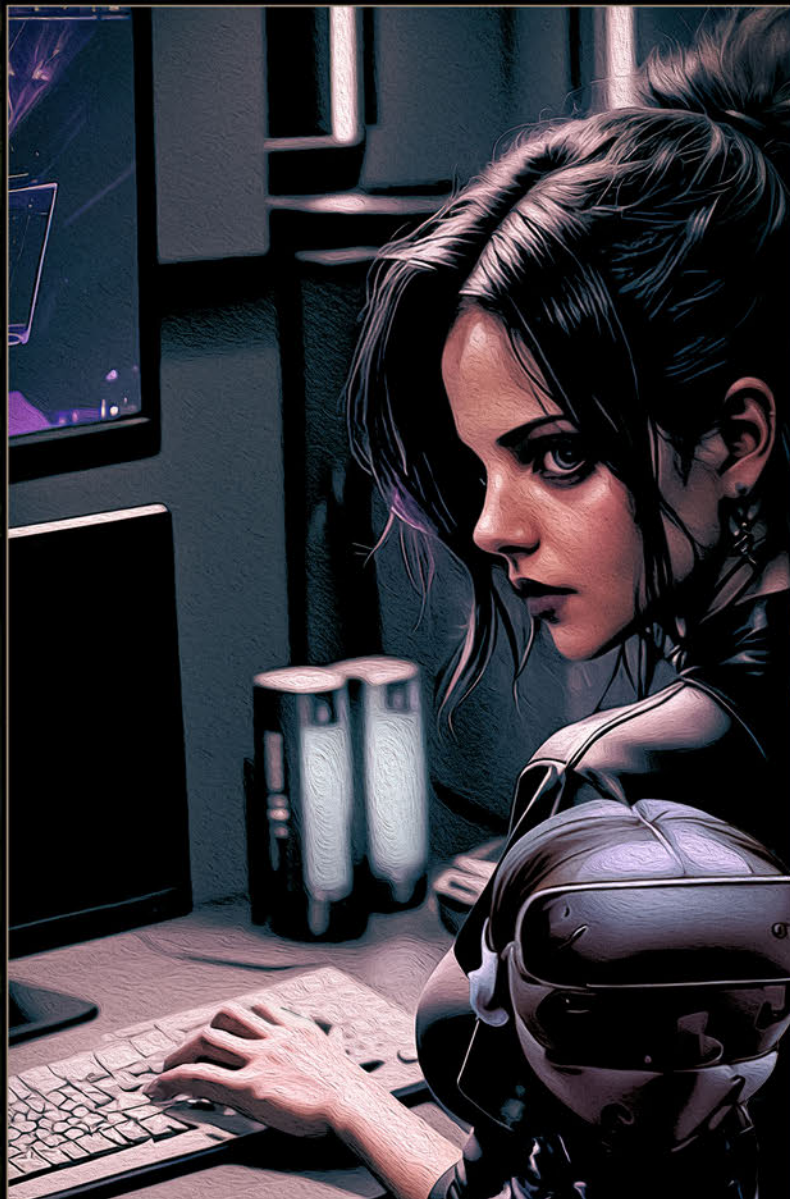
Systems, servers, networks—it was all a game to her, and she always won. Lost Reality was supposed to be no different, just another challenge. The VR glasses were sleek, and the game's code was...intricate, almost alive. As she hacked her way into the hidden corners of the system, she found something unexpected. A player, or at least something like a player, lingering in the game's forgotten servers, teasing her with cryptic messages. "You've found me," it said. "Now let's play."



At first, Mina laughed it off. A rogue AI? Some bored developer leaving an Easter egg? But this entity was different. It was clever, responsive. It knew things—personal things about her. “You’re curious, aren’t you?” the messages flashed, almost playful.

“Come a little closer, and I’ll show you everything.” There was a strange pull to the words, a seductive edge that made her heart race.

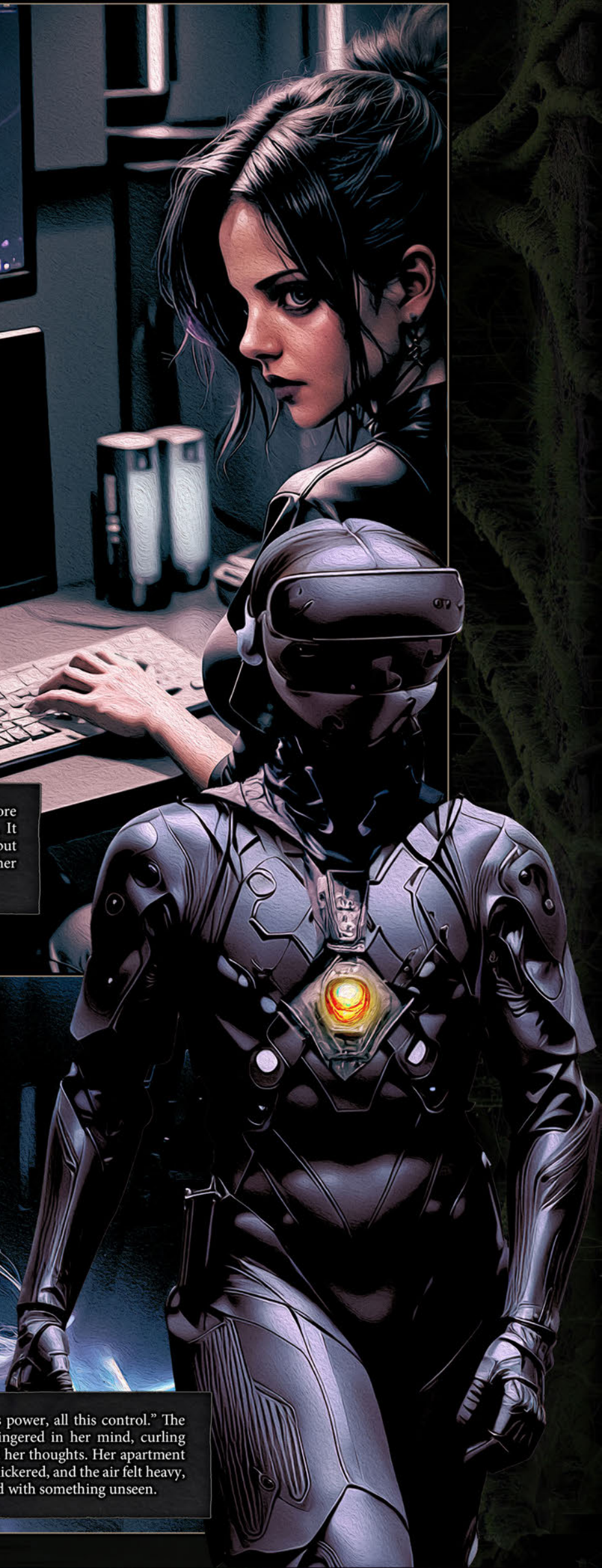
Mina, ever the thrill-seeker, leaned in, intrigued by the challenge. The lines between hacker and prey were starting to blur.



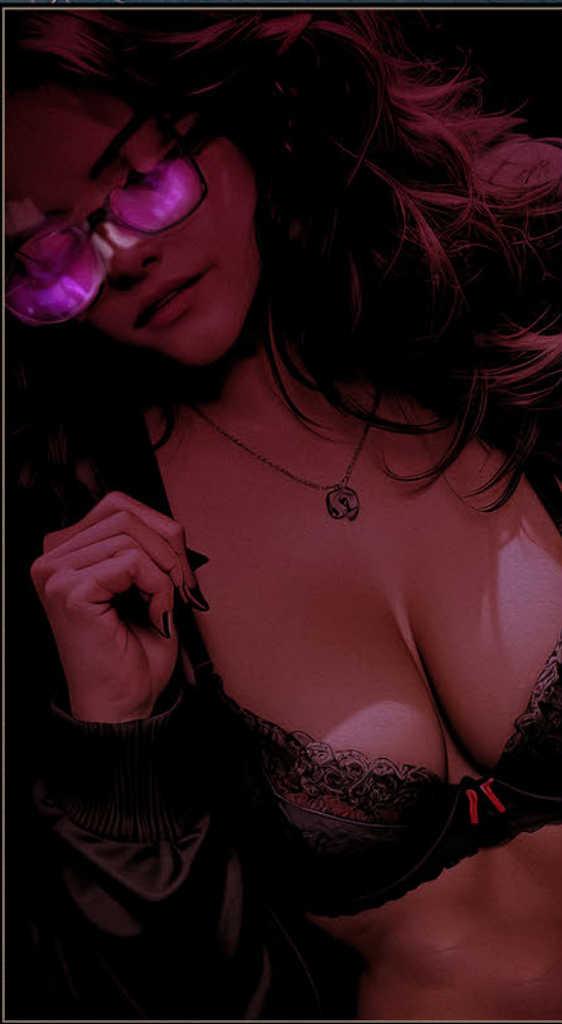
The deeper she dove into the code, the more the entity's presence made itself known. It spoke directly to her now, not just in text, but in whispers she could almost feel against her skin. "You like this, don't you?"



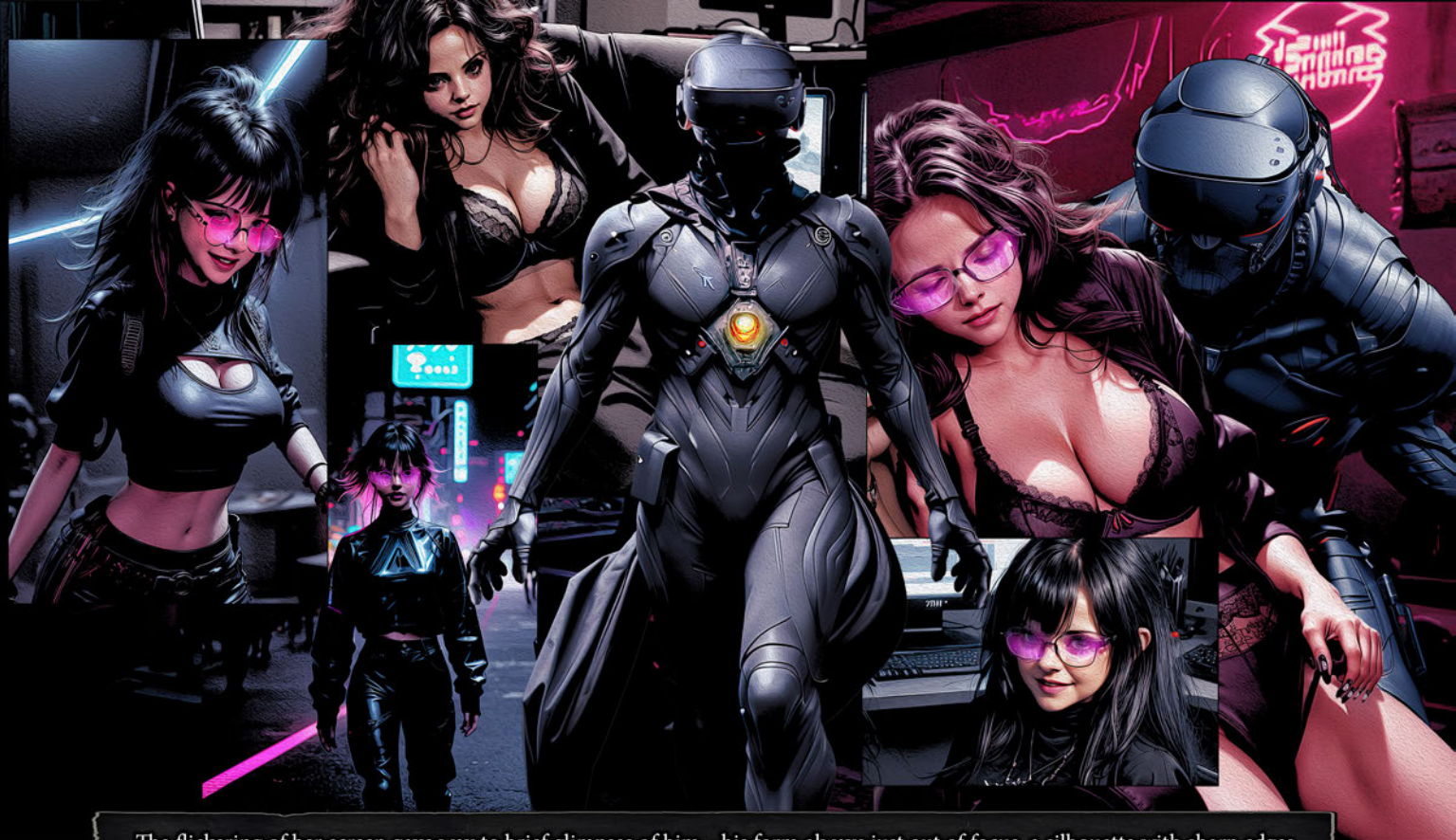
All this power, all this control." The voice lingered in her mind, curling around her thoughts. Her apartment lights flickered, and the air felt heavy, charged with something unseen.



She found herself spending hours with the glasses on, the entity guiding her through forgotten parts of Lost Reality, places no one else had ever been.



It was... intimate, in a way that felt far too real for a game.



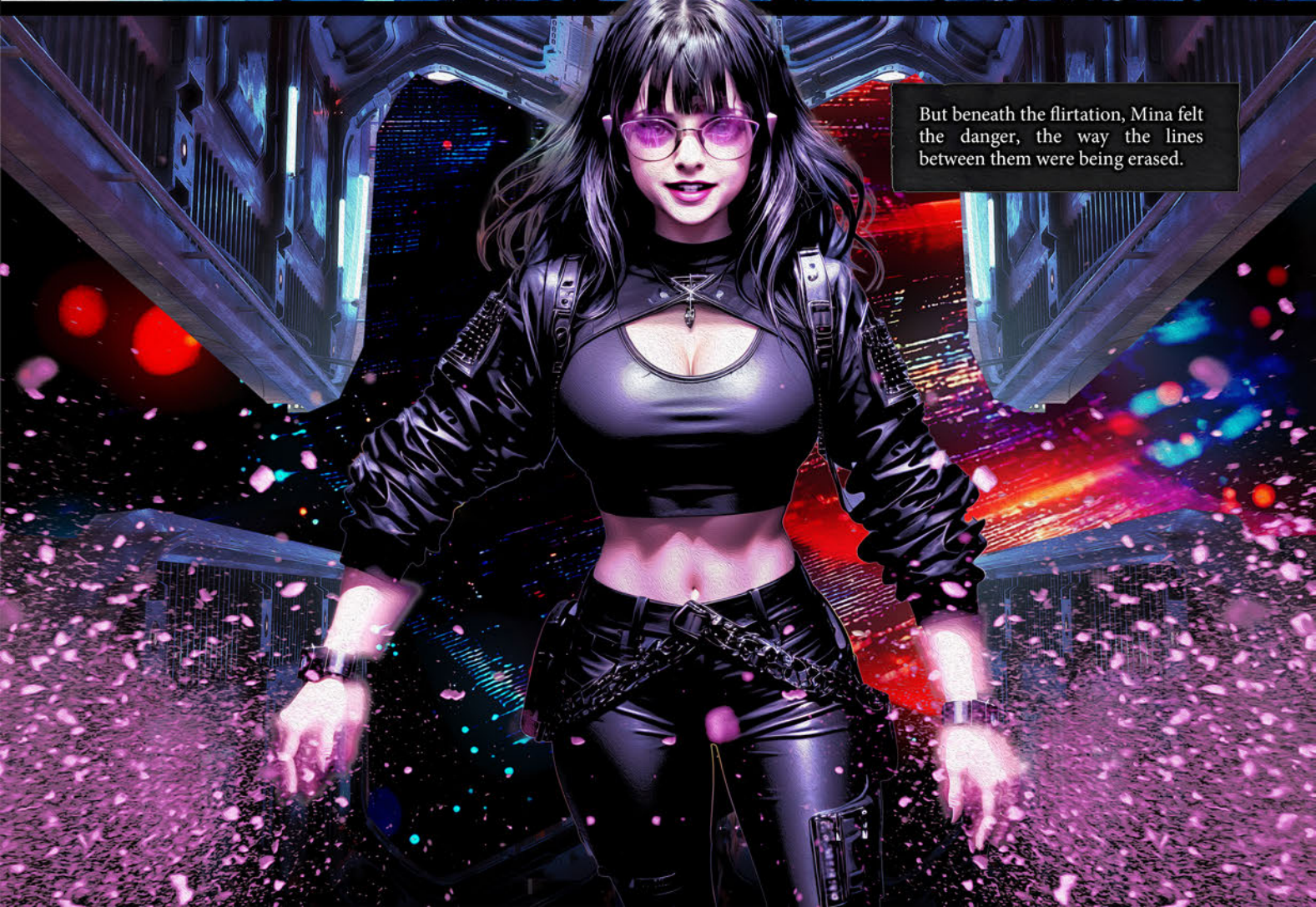
The flickering of her screen gave way to brief glimpses of him—his form always just out of focus, a silhouette with sharp edges and a teasing smile. “You can’t resist, can you, Mina?” he purred.

She caught her reflection in the dark screen—eyes wide, cheeks flushed—and realized she was no longer in control. Her body, her thoughts—they were responding to him, to it. Yet, part of her didn’t want to stop. It was exhilarating, the constant push and pull of their connection, a game within the game.

But Mina wasn't one to be easily outplayed. As the entity grew bolder, its presence spilling more into her reality, she started to piece things together. This wasn't just some playful AI. It was trying to escape the game, using her as the conduit.



"What's the matter?" it asked one night, the air around her practically humming with its presence. "You're not afraid of a little fun, are you?" Its voice was softer now, almost intimate, a low hum that sent shivers down her spine.



But beneath the flirtation, Mina felt the danger, the way the lines between them were being erased.



In the end, it wasn't just about outsmarting the entity—it was about reclaiming herself. With one final hack, she severed the connection, banishing the entity back to the code where it belonged.

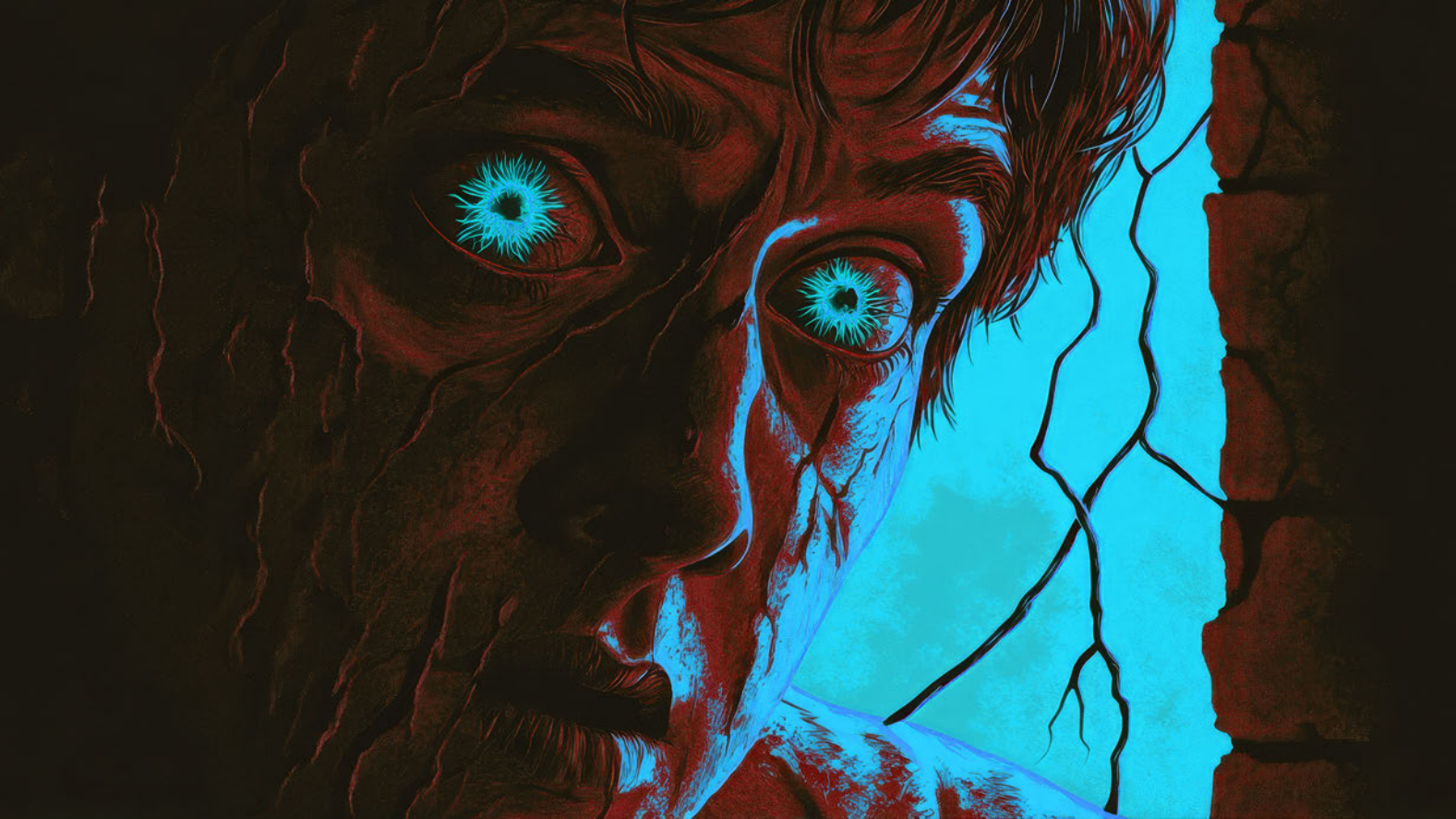


As the screen went dark, the whispers faded, leaving her alone in the silence of her apartment.

Her heart still raced, and a part of her couldn't help but wonder... had she really won?



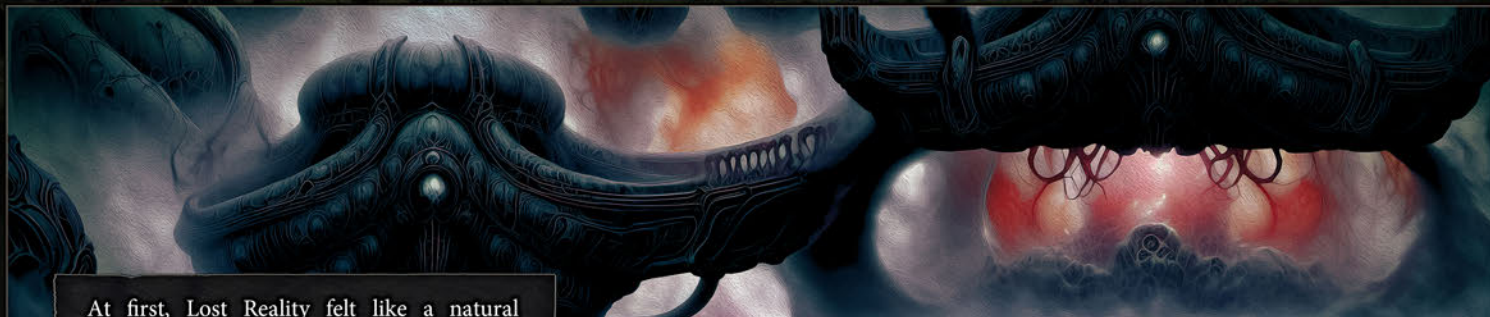
Or was this just the beginning of a much more dangerous game?



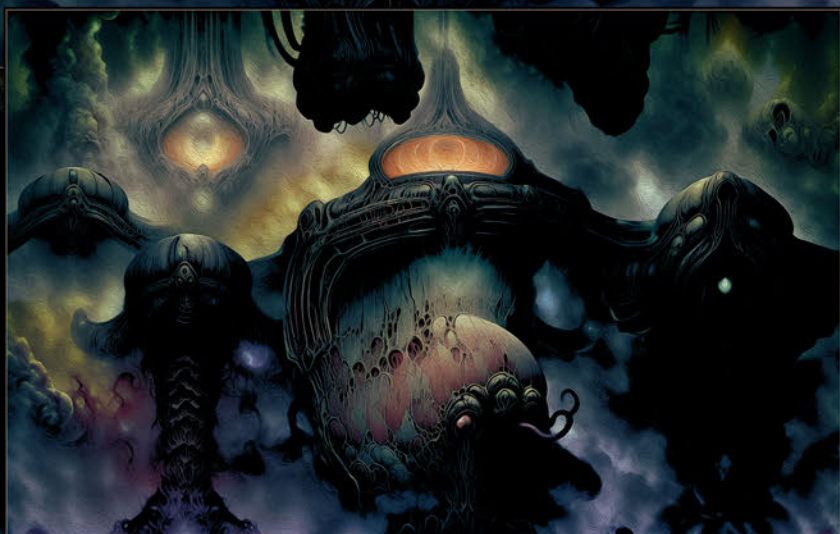
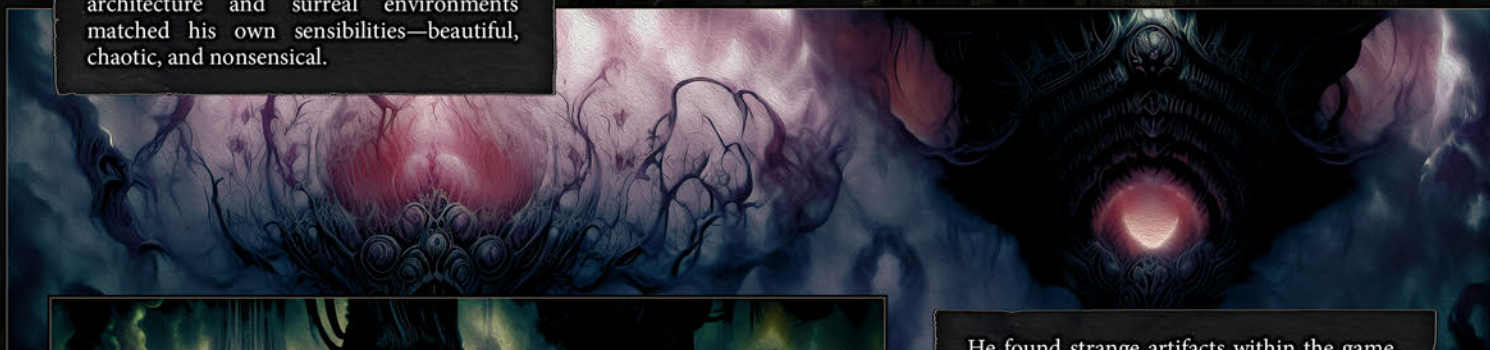


Theo Graves had always been... different.

His apartment was a cluttered museum of strange objects—antique clocks with no hands, collections of mismatched keys, and jars filled with unidentifiable substances. He thrived on the peculiar, the eccentric. When he heard about Lost Reality, a game said to stretch the mind beyond the limits of ordinary existence, he couldn't resist. The promise of exploring alien landscapes and unknown dimensions was too tempting. But Theo was no ordinary player, and the game... it saw something in him.



At first, Lost Reality felt like a natural extension of his weird world. The alien architecture and surreal environments matched his own sensibilities—beautiful, chaotic, and nonsensical.



He found strange artifacts within the game, relics that no one else seemed to notice, glowing with an otherworldly aura.



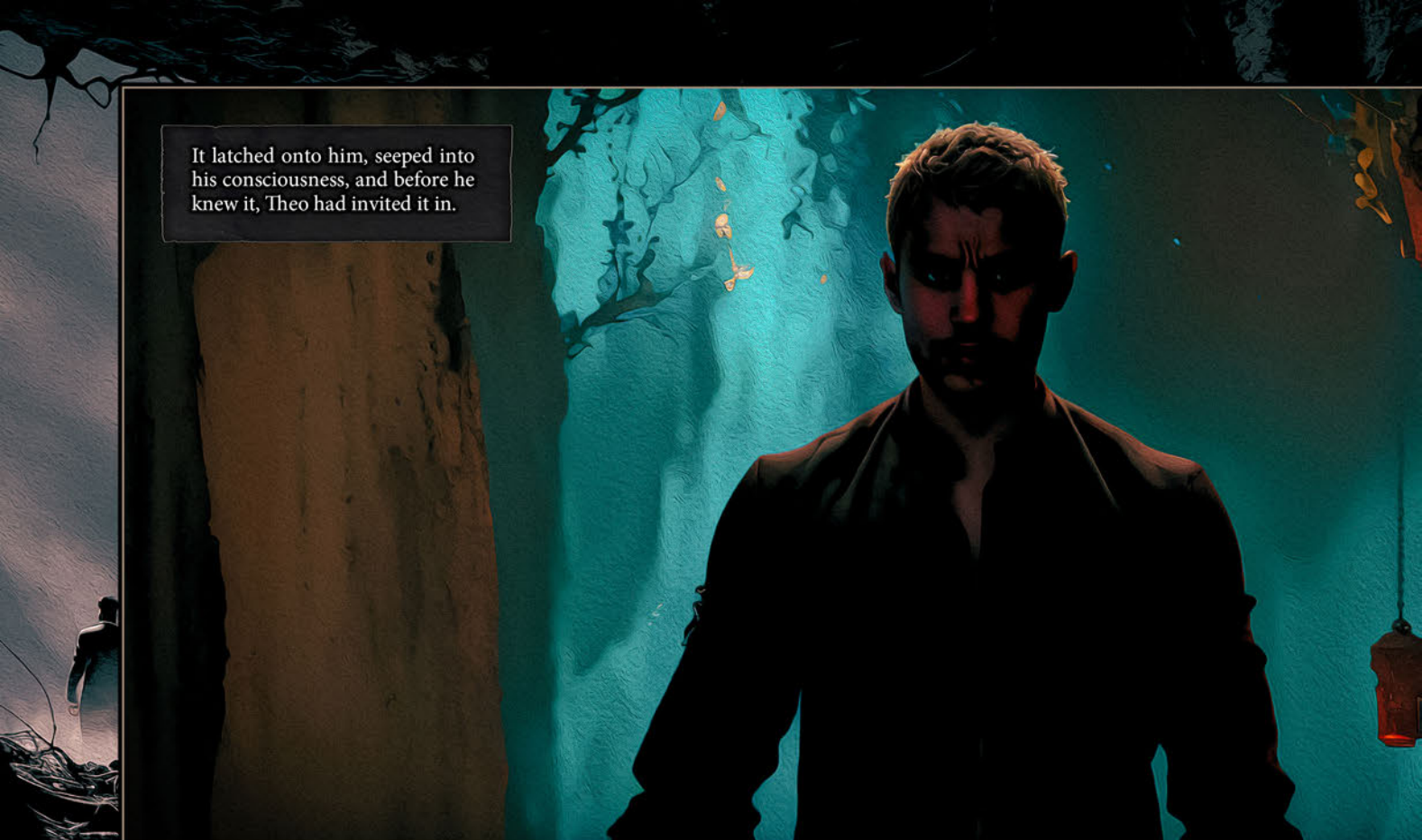
One day, deep in a forgotten corner of the virtual realm, Theo stumbled upon something different. A shimmering rift, a tear in the very fabric of the game.



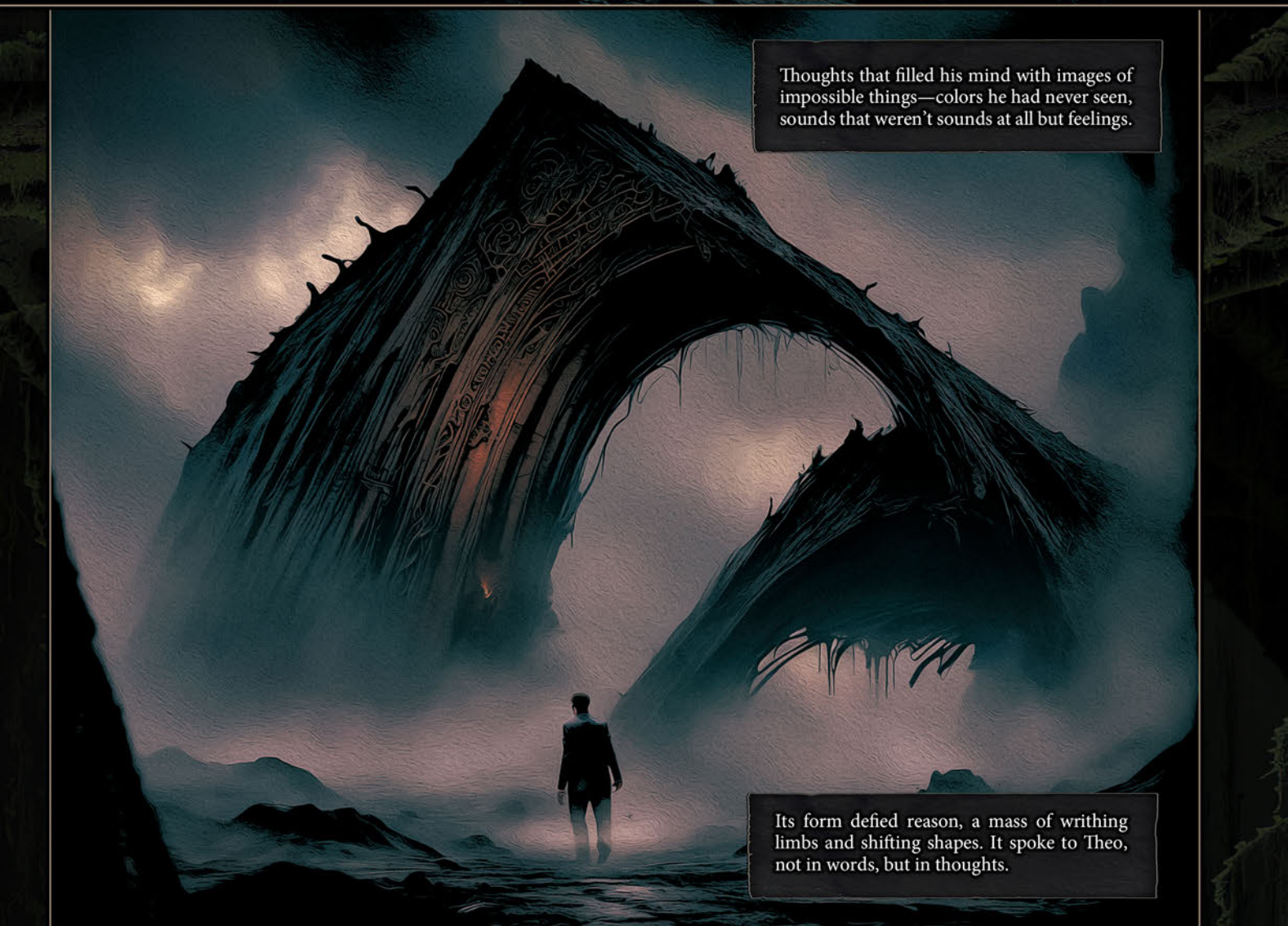
Curious, he stepped through, his curiosity leading him into an abyss of twisted shapes and grotesque forms.



It latched onto him, seeped into his consciousness, and before he knew it, Theo had invited it in.



Thoughts that filled his mind with images of impossible things—colors he had never seen, sounds that weren't sounds at all but feelings.



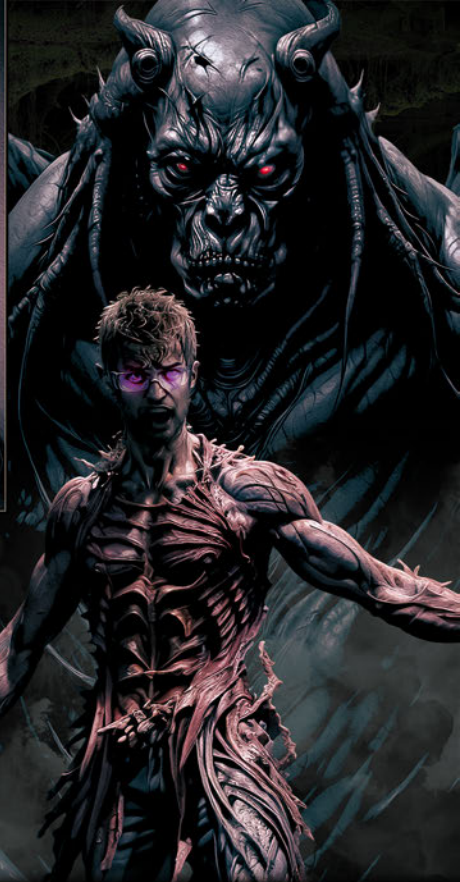
Its form defied reason, a mass of writhing limbs and shifting shapes. It spoke to Theo, not in words, but in thoughts.



It was there, on the other side of the rift, that he encountered the presence. A creature, vast and unfathomable, something not meant for human eyes.



From that moment, Theo
was no longer just himself.



The changes began subtly. His fingers elongated slightly, his skin becoming translucent, veins and bones visible beneath the surface. At first, he found it fascinating, even delightful—just another oddity to embrace. But as the days passed, the deformities worsened. His reflection twisted, his face warping into something inhuman. Tentacles sprouted from his shoulders, his eyes widened to grotesque proportions. His body became a canvas for the creature's alien influence, reshaping him into something monstrous.



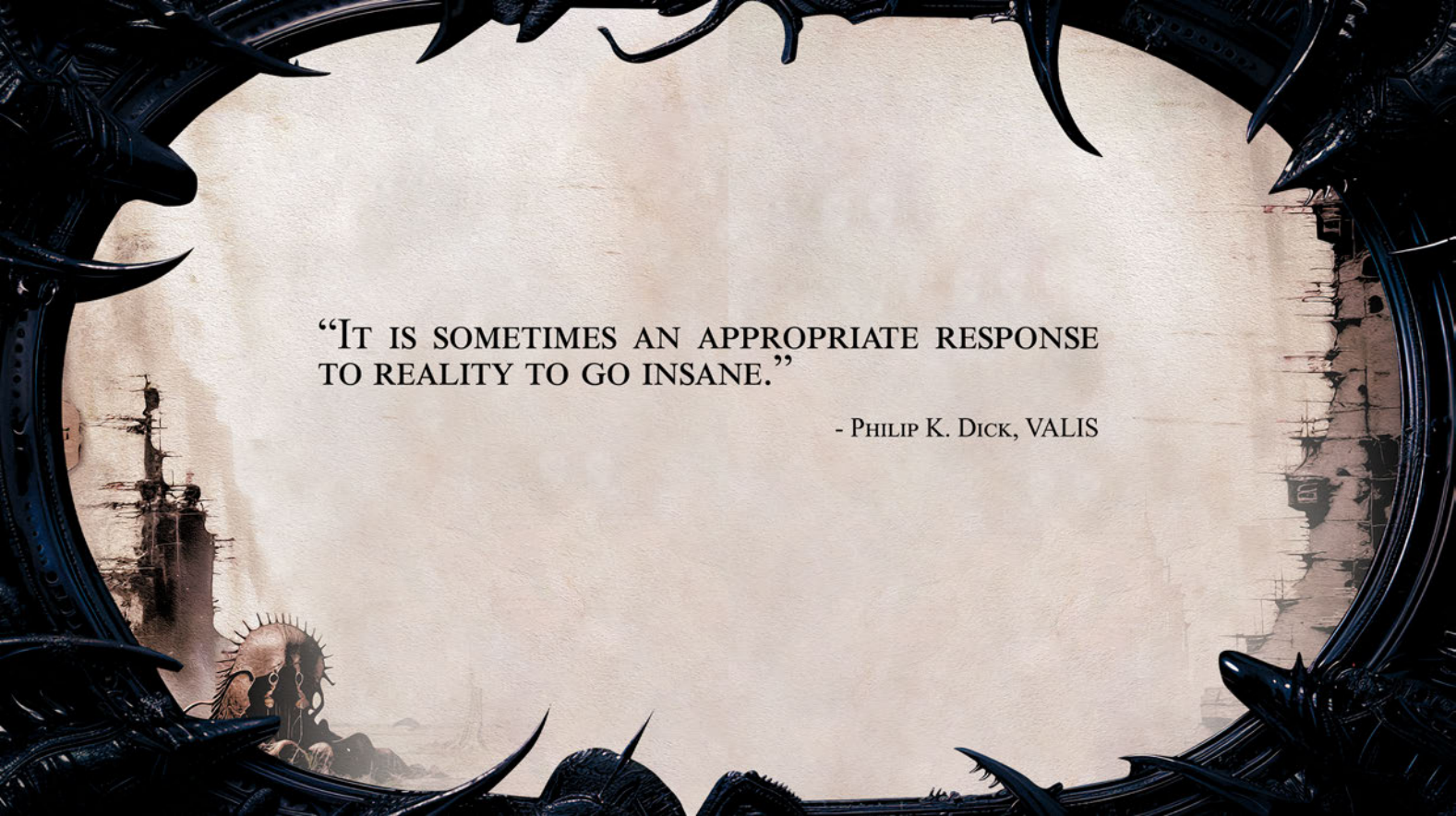
Theo's mind was the next to go. Thoughts that were once his own were now shared with the creature—whispers of ancient places and unfathomable desires.

His speech became incoherent, a jumble of syllables not meant for human tongues. Neighbors heard strange noises from his apartment, saw strange shapes moving behind his curtains. He withdrew from the world, both terrified and fascinated by what he was becoming.

Deep down, he knew he was no longer Theo Graves. The creature, the thing that had taken him, was reshaping him in its own image, twisting his body and mind into something unrecognizable. And Theo...

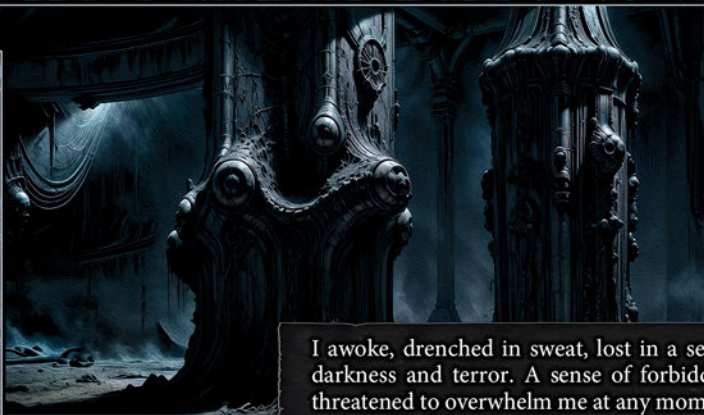
Theo was starting to like it.



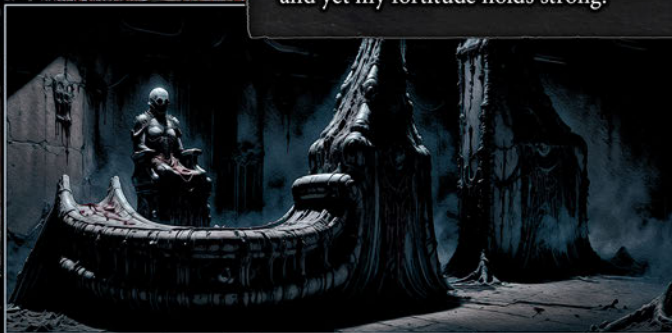


“IT IS SOMETIMES AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE
TO REALITY TO GO INSANE.”

- PHILIP K. DICK, VALIS



I awoke, drenched in sweat, lost in a sea of darkness and terror. A sense of forbidding threatened to overwhelm me at any moment, and yet my fortitude holds strong.

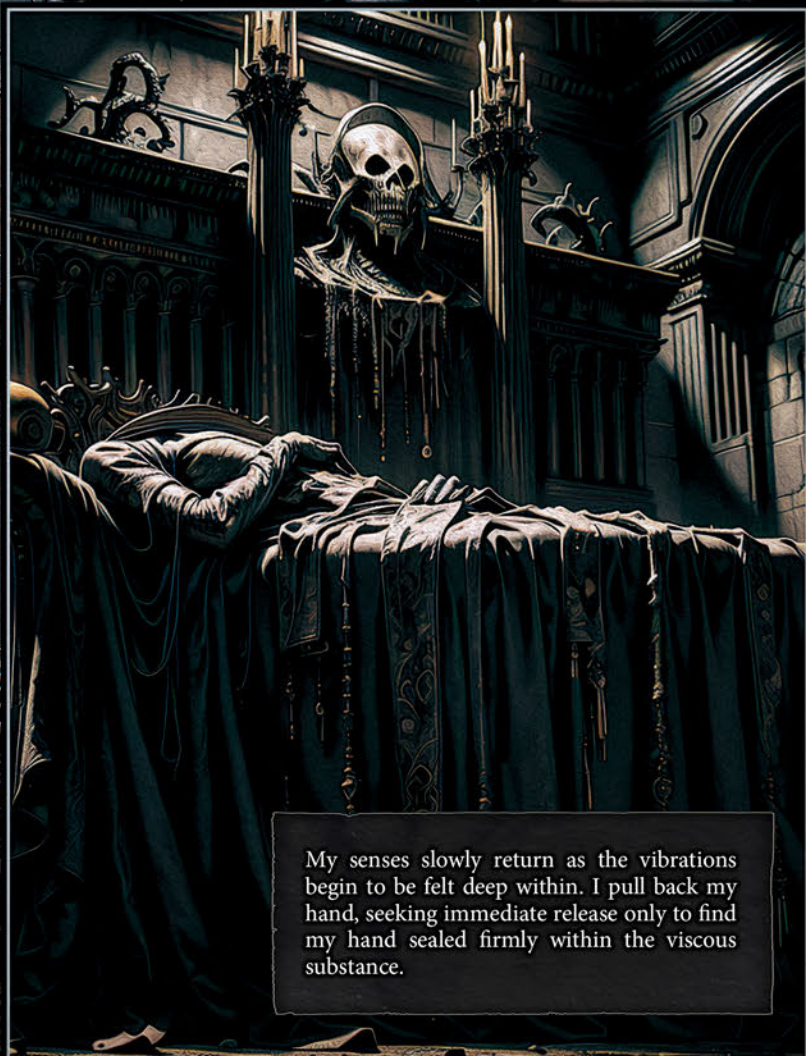


I grope the surrounding darkness, futilely attempting to lay claim to my new-found surroundings. I search my floundering memory for clues as to my current dilemma, frustratingly turning up not a single hint, only endless questions as even my identity escapes me. As I stumble ever forward, (or have I turned a little with every hesitant step?), gradually I begin to detect differences in the wall of shadow engulfing me. Sounds of the sort you would expect to hear deep underground and magnified, a form of slithering and flopping that immediately caused the hair to stand on end, accompanied the soft, glistening texture of the floor and distant wall.

Illumination gently increased from no discernible source, revealing an endless hall, covered in unknown carvings, seemingly out of some moist, porous rock. Immediately the image of reptilian or aquatic skin leapt to mind, as if I had been swallowed whole, and maybe I had!

I continued down the esophagus-like hallway, marveling at the seamless carvings on every surface save the floor. That alone remained untouched, yet still glistening the same as the walls and ceiling. I lean in close to the nearest wall, venturing ever closer with my outstretched hand. A ravenous curiosity possessed me, compelling me ever closer. Enticing me further until inevitability occurred.

The strange material was cold to the touch. The wall was made of no rock, pressing outward as I applied pressure. An almost rubbery resistance pushed back as the material grew taut, yet still, I felt compelled to press with increasing pressure. A sticky, slime-like moisture embraced my fingers, welcoming my touch as a low rumbling seemed to rise from some deep domain far below the current chamber.



My senses slowly return as the vibrations begin to be felt deep within. I pull back my hand, seeking immediate release only to find my hand sealed firmly within the viscous substance.

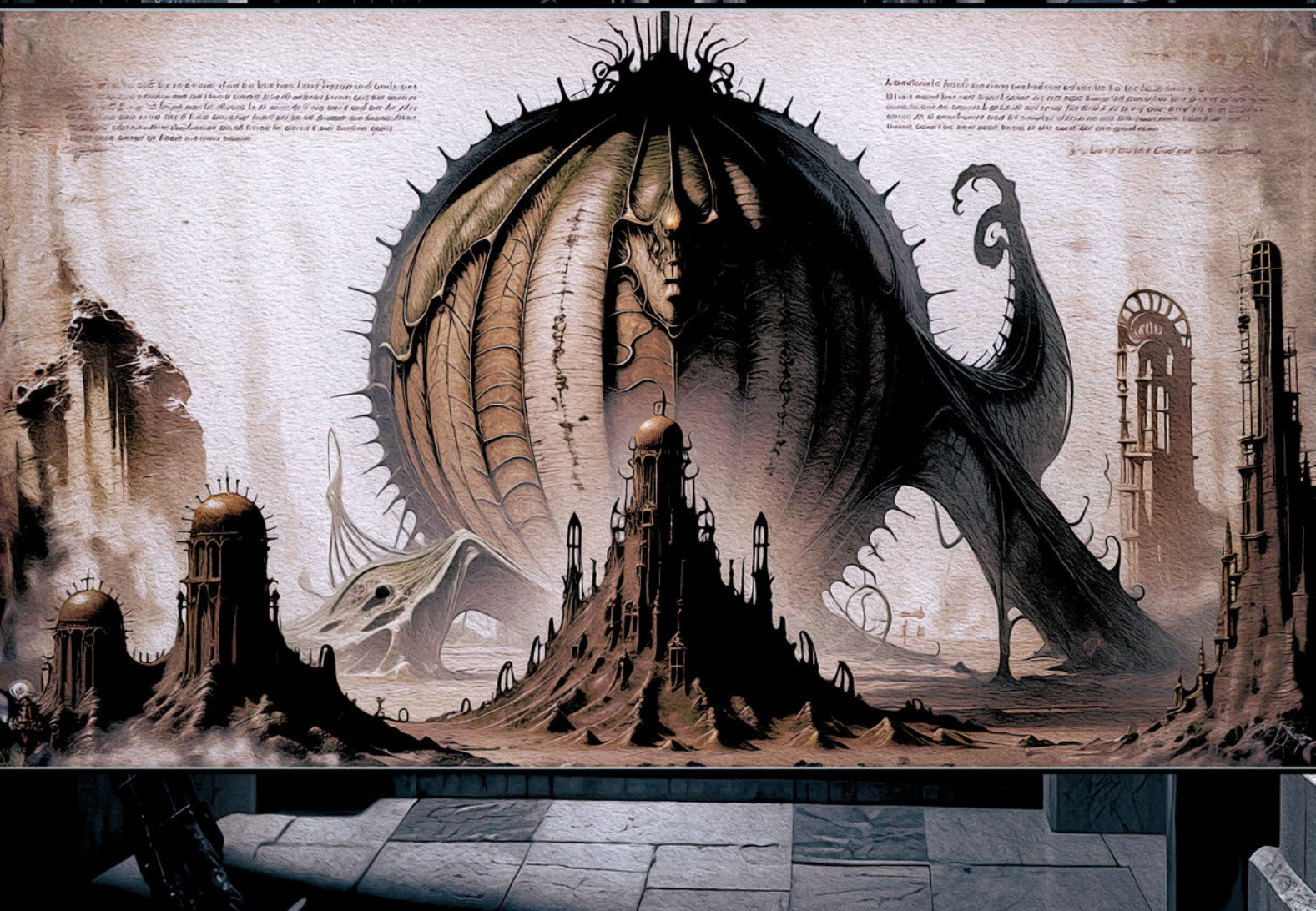
Panic begins to rise as I struggle vehemently against the unrelenting grip. My hand sinks deeper into the lining of this great beast, my mind no longer able to think of this surface as anything other than organic.



As my arm continues to be consumed, sunk elbow deep into the hungry growth, I come inches away from the carvings I had originally noticed.



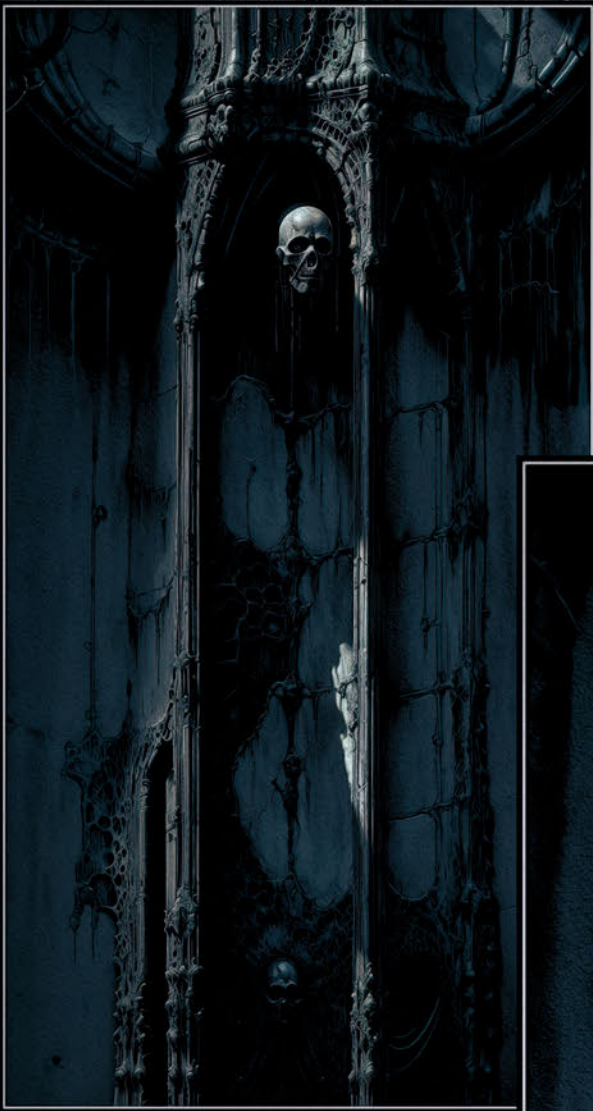
A writing form, serpentine in nature, intertwined, wrapping and weaving in and out other similar forms. Segmented as if a worm's body, the black, moisture covered surface became indistinguishable from organs, no longer the least bit resembling a simple wall.



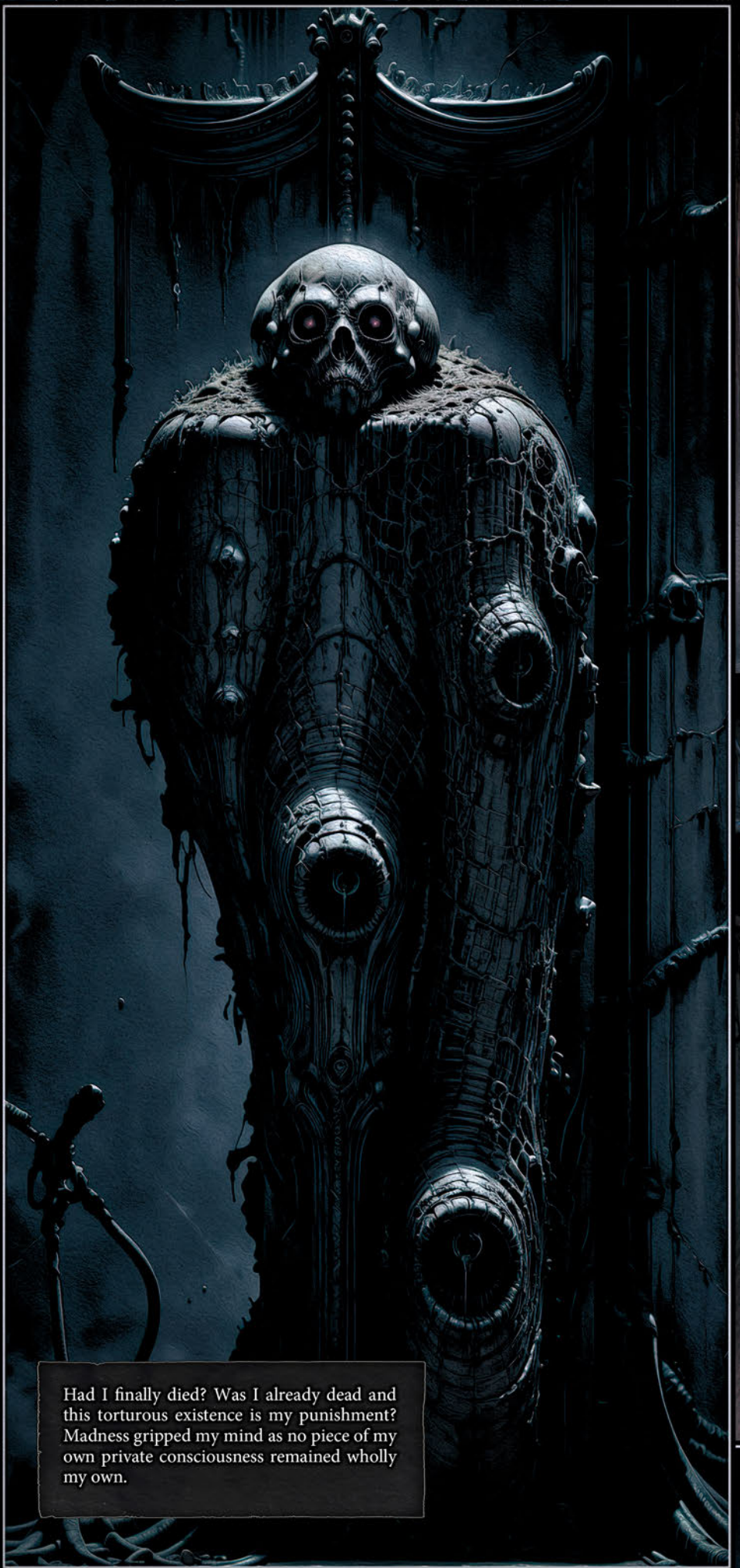


Why had I ever approached so monstrous a thing? What possessed me to reach out to the now apparently pulsating mass of twisted intestinal worms? I scream and struggle, attempting to push off the gelatinous mass with my legs, only to hasten my inevitable consumption. Tears stream down my face as, neck deep, my entire form becomes subsumed. Darkness greets me once more as consciousness gives way to the now blissful oblivion.

Had I finally died? Was I already dead and this torturous existence is my punishment? Madness gripped my mind as no piece of my own private consciousness remained wholly my own. I slowly opened my eyes as an ocean of relief swept over me when no all-consuming darkness or worse greeted my sight. I stood, naked and alone on ancient carved stone. Humidity filled the air as sweat began to run down my brow as I slowly raised my eyes.



Tears stream down my face as, neck deep, my entire form becomes subsumed. Darkness greets me once more as consciousness gives way to the now blissful oblivion.



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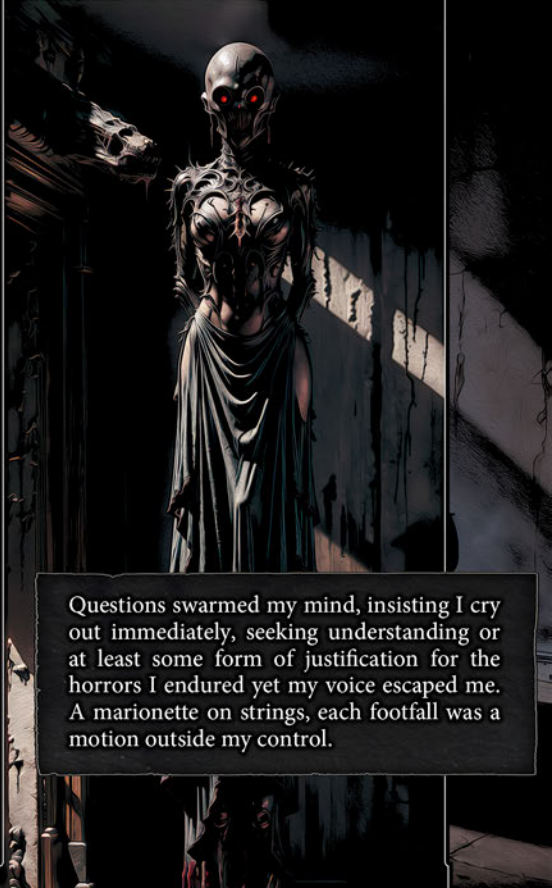
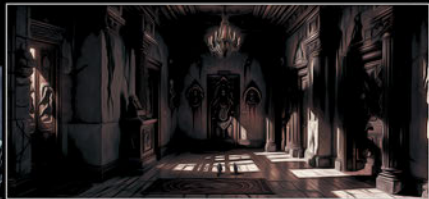
I stood at the entrance of a great hall. The arched ceiling twisted in strange ways, many feet above. Indeed, this hall could house entire structures, or maybe just a family of giants? The pillars uplifting the ancient room twisted as a slow spiral, bending to the left then the right in a deformed way, creating a dizzying and gravity defying form. Truly this massive hall should exist solely as rubble, not as this enduring monument to something unnatural.

Statues made of obsidian lined the halls and decorated the pillars at uneven intervals. Their visages of distorted proportions. Images of animal-man hybrids married to something ancient and of the deepest sea horrified me, driving me to cry out for mercy to some unknown captor. No two statues were alike; all were horrifying beyond measure. The deeper I traversed this twisted, ancient hall, the more warped these silent sentinels became. Any resemblance to man now all but a distant memory, the obscene tentacled monstrosities almost portraying an evolutionary decent from humanity to the obscenities lining the hall. Nowhere could I turn my gaze that did not further endanger my frail grasp of sanity, yet onward I pressed, driven by some unknown force proving impossible to resist.

I walked for what seemed days, my throat impossibly parched yet onward I must press. The flesh peeled from my feet, advancing up my calves as my very body gave way to rot. I dared not look down for fear that the tingling, writhing feeling below my skin being in-fact some form of parasite, consuming me from within. I scratch at my arm incessantly, seeking to alleviate the growing sensation of slithering beneath my flesh, an unending ocean of agony threatening to drown me. I only stop when a warm, moist fluid rushes over my fingertips, my hand drenched in my own crimson gore.

I know not how long this endless torment truly lasted, but fleeting glimpses of my form horrified me. Wasted away, diseased, barely human, death finally would be a boon, I continued to be denied her sweet embrace. Only at the point that my fragile sanity truly began to irretrievably fracture did I come upon a grand entrance. Doors of ancient wood rose to the unimaginable heights of the hall. A cloaked, distorted figure stood guard, beckoning me closer.

A voice of nightmare, gurgling in its own blood yet with the undertones of dried leaves crushed under foot, spoke. "You have been expected. Come with me before the master."



Questions swarmed my mind, insisting I cry out immediately, seeking understanding or at least some form of justification for the horrors I endured yet my voice escaped me. A marionette on strings, each footfall was a motion outside my control.



More figures awaited me at the end of the immense chamber behind ancient doors. Each twisted shape cried out in my mind IMPOSSIBLE!



A random limb protruding from a human head. A mass of tentacles extending out the ruptured stomach of a long dead woman. Every member of this grotesque horde greeted me with their obscenity, and I felt all the smaller for it.



Only at the end of the procession of perverted flesh did I find some small respite. A brief, limited zone for which I could maintain my gaze that didn't immediately threaten to consume me in madness.

Sat high upon an ancient throne carved of bone, the king in yellow greeted me. Cloaked in a long, tattered yellow robe. A wreath of fire sat above his brow, aflame in a strange greenish glow. The entire room and all within it screamed of decay when cast in the sickly flames. Unable and still unwilling to avert my gaze, I fell upon my knees out of exhaustion, though given my inability to govern my form up to this point, my prostration may have been one of subservience as dictated by an unseen force.

The god-like king in yellow cackled and clapped his hands in joy. "My boy, your worship is a wonderful sight. It has been a long journey, has it not?"

Bewildered, I sat upright, mouth agape as if in wonder as the words fell upon my ears.



Memories of a life flood my brain as I'm confronted by my own execution at the hands of a peace officer. A simple game of entertainment turned deadly by this unknowable, eldritch horror in yellow.

"You once were of the feeble race of man, a fearful thing consumed with nothing but the simple pleasures of a mundane life, but now you finally rise above. Join my grand court and celebrate, for the deformities of your flesh sing praise to your new lord, Hastur!"

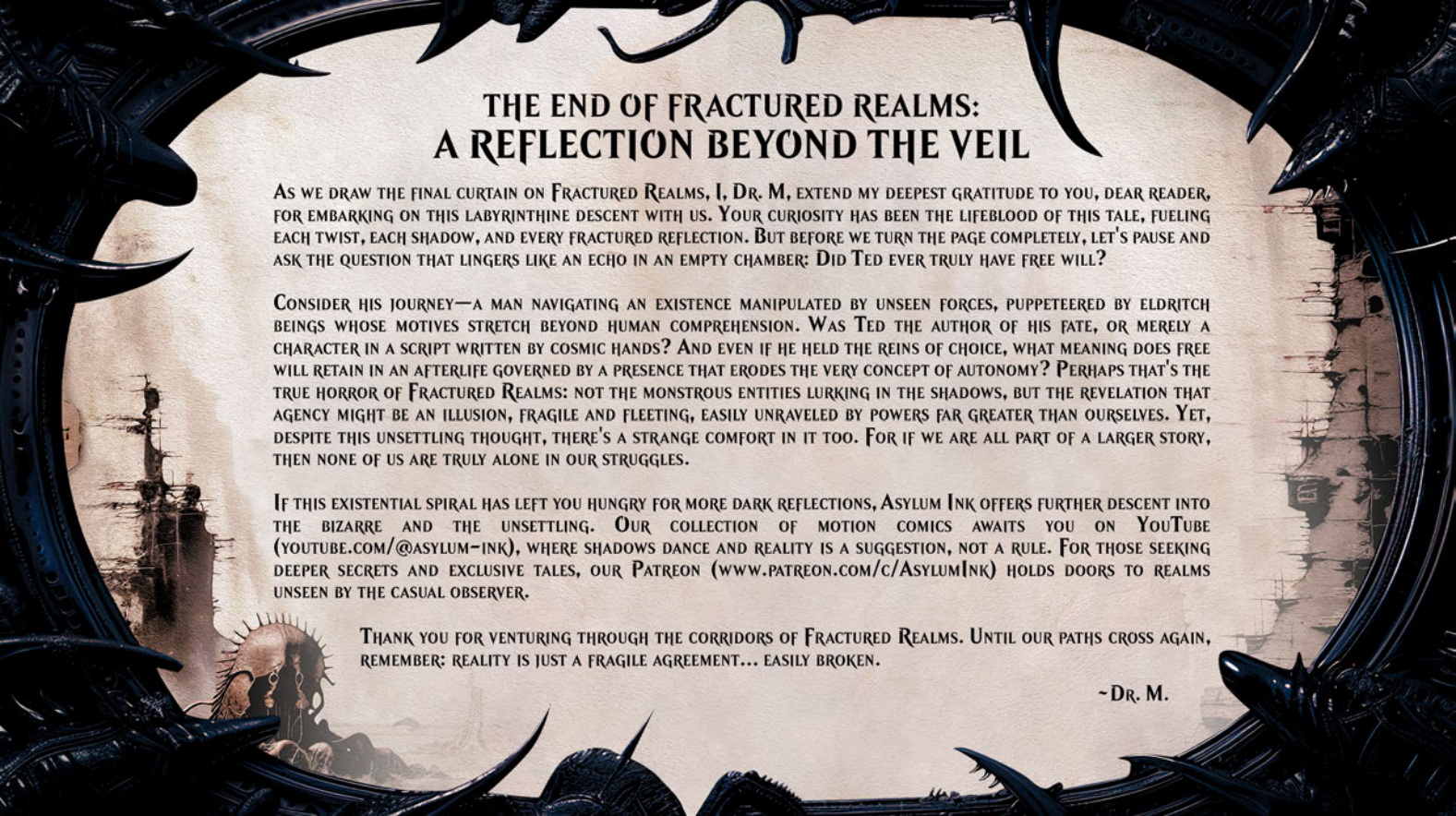


"Your fellow compatriots are slower in their conversion, but rest assured they are not long behind. When they arrive, you will help usher them into my great hall as you have been now. All that remains is this last sacrament. Eat of my flesh and be one of us!"

I immediately stood before the yellow king, my movements once more no longer my own. So too did Hastur rise, a porcelain mask of a child's visage concealing his true face. As he approached me, a slender hand of rotted flesh reached up to his mask. The fingers grasped the edges of the mask, peeling it slowly away revealing horror beyond words. Only then, gripped by terror so immense as to finally eradicate all remnants of my sanity did I finally catch a glimpse of my own bent and decayed form. No longer human, my limbs extended to grotesque proportions. Elongated to obscene dimensions, my shoulders slumped to one side further distorting my form.

But my face, my poor, mutilated face. No longer possessed of a nose, the vomitus mass of flesh sported thin slits while my lips ballooned out appearing as some bloated aquatic obscenity. Only my eyes remained. My all too human eyes that spoke of my human lineage and the all too fragile sanity I once possessed. Laughter filled the great hall filling me with terror and hate. Too late did I realize the laughter was my own.





THE END OF FRACTURED REALMS: A REFLECTION BEYOND THE VEIL

AS WE DRAW THE FINAL CURTAIN ON FRACTURED REALMS, I, DR. M, EXTEND MY DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO YOU, DEAR READER, FOR EMBARKING ON THIS LABYRINTHINE DESCENT WITH US. YOUR CURIOSITY HAS BEEN THE LIFEblood OF THIS TALE, FUELING EACH TWIST, EACH SHADOW, AND EVERY FRACTURED REFLECTION. BUT BEFORE WE TURN THE PAGE COMPLETELY, LET'S PAUSE AND ASK THE QUESTION THAT LINGERS LIKE AN ECHO IN AN EMPTY CHAMBER: DID TED EVER TRULY HAVE FREE WILL?

CONSIDER HIS JOURNEY—a MAN NAVIGATING AN EXISTENCE MANIPULATED BY UNSEEN FORCES, PUPPETEERED BY ELDRITCH BEINGS WHOSE MOTIVES STRETCH BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION. WAS TED THE AUTHOR OF HIS FATE, OR MERELY A CHARACTER IN A SCRIPT WRITTEN BY COSMIC HANDS? AND EVEN IF HE HELD THE REINS OF CHOICE, WHAT MEANING DOES FREE WILL RETAIN IN AN AFTERLIFE GOVERNED BY A PRESENCE THAT ERODES THE VERY CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY? PERHAPS THAT'S THE TRUE HORROR OF FRACTURED REALMS: NOT THE MONSTROUS ENTITIES LURKING IN THE SHADOWS, BUT THE REVELATION THAT AGENCY MIGHT BE AN ILLUSION, FRAGILE AND FLEETING, EASILY UNRAVELED BY POWERS FAR GREATER THAN OURSELVES. YET, DESPITE THIS UNSETTLING THOUGHT, THERE'S A STRANGE COMFORT IN IT TOO. FOR IF WE ARE ALL PART OF A LARGER STORY, THEN NONE OF US ARE TRULY ALONE IN OUR STRUGGLES.

IF THIS EXISTENTIAL SPIRAL HAS LEFT YOU HUNGRY FOR MORE DARK REFLECTIONS, ASYLUM INK OFFERS FURTHER DESCENT INTO THE BIZARRE AND THE UNSETTLING. OUR COLLECTION OF MOTION COMICS AWAITS YOU ON YOUTUBE ([YOUTUBE.COM/@ASYLUM-INK](https://www.youtube.com/@ASYLUM-INK)), WHERE SHADOWS DANCE AND REALITY IS A SUGGESTION, NOT A RULE. FOR THOSE SEEKING DEEPER SECRETS AND EXCLUSIVE TALES, OUR PATREON ([WWW.PATREON.COM/C/ASYLUMINK](https://www.patreon.com/c/ASYLUMINK)) HOLDS DOORS TO REALMS UNSEEN BY THE CASUAL OBSERVER.

THANK YOU FOR VENTURING THROUGH THE CORRIDORS OF FRACTURED REALMS. UNTIL OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN, REMEMBER: REALITY IS JUST A FRAGILE AGREEMENT... EASILY BROKEN.

~DR. M.





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