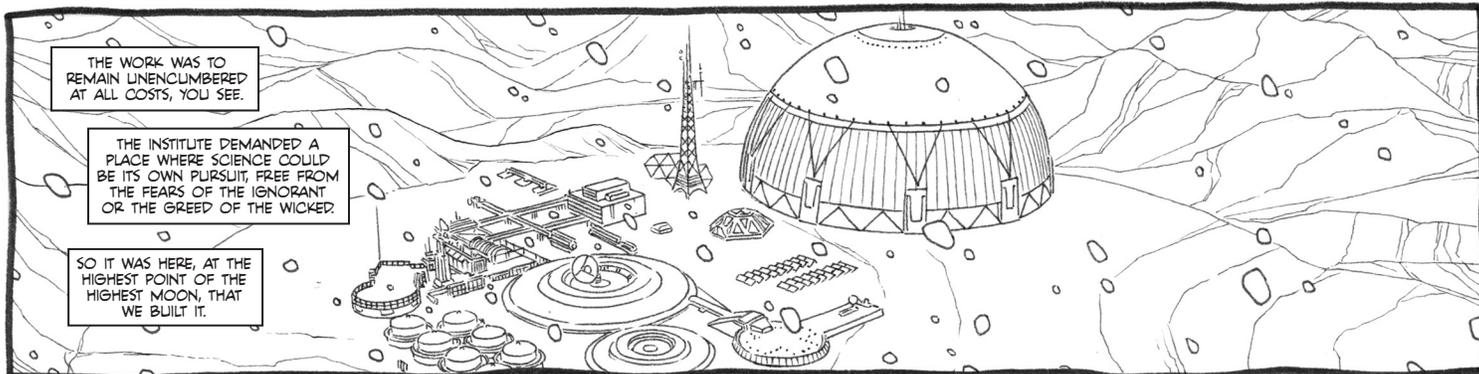




THE LAB





THE WORK WAS TO REMAIN UNENCUMBERED AT ALL COSTS, YOU SEE.

THE INSTITUTE DEMANDED A PLACE WHERE SCIENCE COULD BE ITS OWN PURSUIT, FREE FROM THE FEARS OF THE IGNORANT OR THE GREED OF THE WICKED.

SO IT WAS HERE, AT THE HIGHEST POINT OF THE HIGHEST MOON, THAT WE BUILT IT.



EVERYTHING WE DID, WE DID WITH THE BELIEF THAT OUR DESTINY WAS DETERMINED.

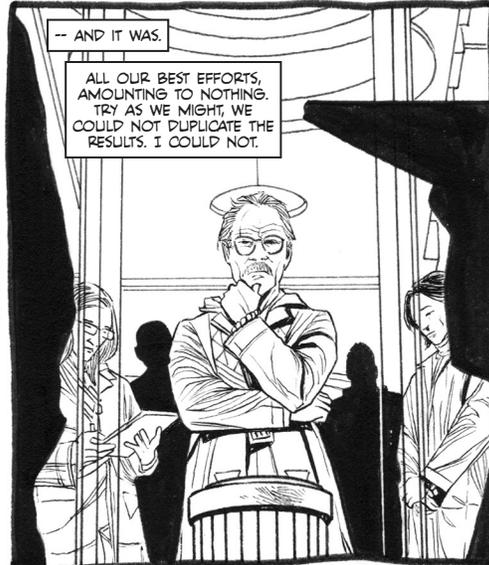
IT WAS HERE WE WOULD UNLOCK THE LOST SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE. AND WE DID --



-- I DID.

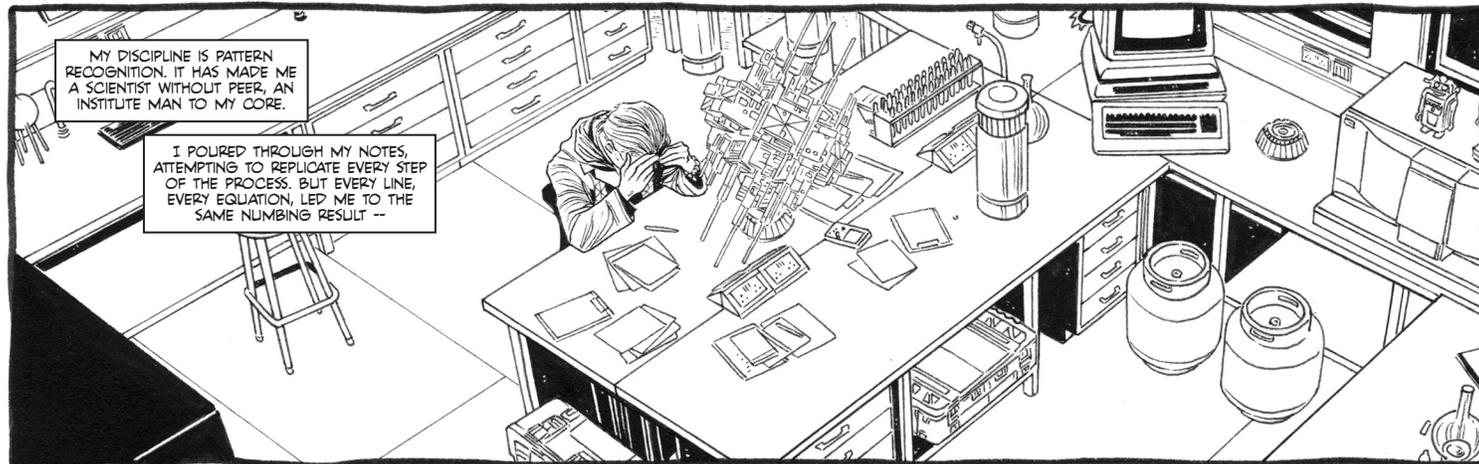
IT CAME SO QUICKLY, THAT FIRST BREAKTHROUGH.

WE SAID IT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING --



-- AND IT WAS.

ALL OUR BEST EFFORTS, AMOUNTING TO NOTHING. TRY AS WE MIGHT, WE COULD NOT DUPLICATE THE RESULTS. I COULD NOT.



MY DISCIPLINE IS PATTERN RECOGNITION. IT HAS MADE ME A SCIENTIST WITHOUT PEER, AN INSTITUTE MAN TO MY CORE.

I POURED THROUGH MY NOTES, ATTEMPTING TO REPLICATE EVERY STEP OF THE PROCESS. BUT EVERY LINE, EVERY EQUATION, LED ME TO THE SAME NUMBING RESULT --



THE EXPERIMENT'S SUCCESS WAS ENTIRELY RANDOM. A SENSELESS MISTAKE IN THE NATURAL ORDER.

SO THE ONLY ANSWER WAS TO PRESS FORWARD. ATTEMPT THE EXPERIMENT AGAIN, AND AGAIN --



-- AND AGAIN.

IT'S A GREAT HONOR, TAXE.

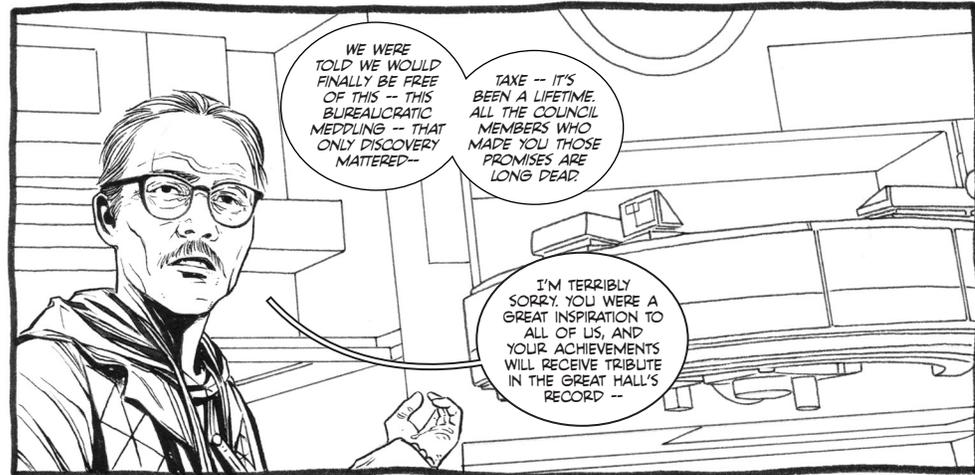
I RESPECTFULLY DISAGREE, HIGHMASTER. DISAGREE AND DECLINE.



I'M AFRAID IT'S NOT FOR YOU TO DECLINE, OLD MAN. THE LAB'S RESOURCES ARE SPREAD TOO THIN, WITH THE SYNDICATES AND THE CORPORATIONS TARGETING US.

IT'S SIMPLY A QUESTION OF RESOURCES--

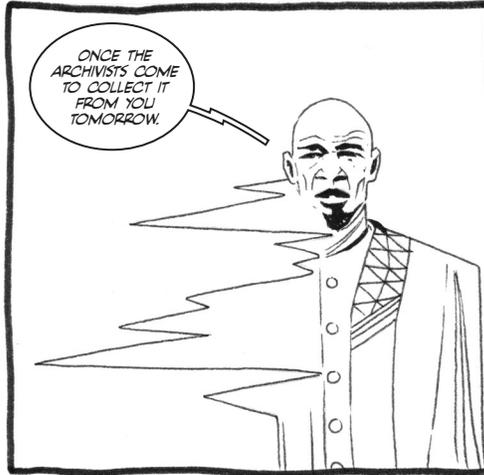
WE WERE TOLD RESOURCES WERE NEVER TO BE A CONCERN!



WE WERE TOLD WE WOULD FINALLY BE FREE OF THIS -- THIS BUREAUCRATIC MEDDLING -- THAT ONLY DISCOVERY MATTERED--

TAXE -- IT'S BEEN A LIFETIME. ALL THE COUNCIL MEMBERS WHO MADE YOU THOSE PROMISES ARE LONG DEAD.

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY. YOU WERE A GREAT INSPIRATION TO ALL OF US, AND YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS WILL RECEIVE TRIBUTE IN THE GREAT HALL'S RECORD --

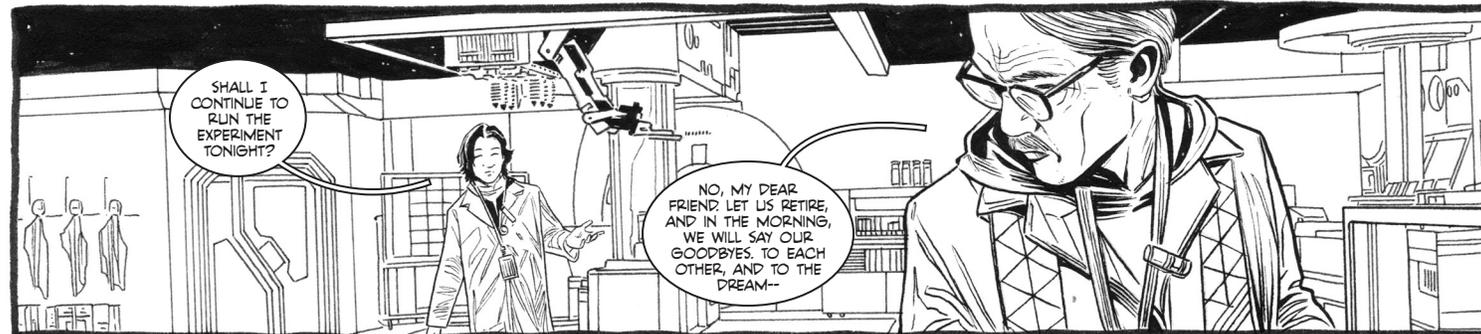


ONCE THE ARCHIVISTS COME TO COLLECT IT FROM YOU TOMORROW.



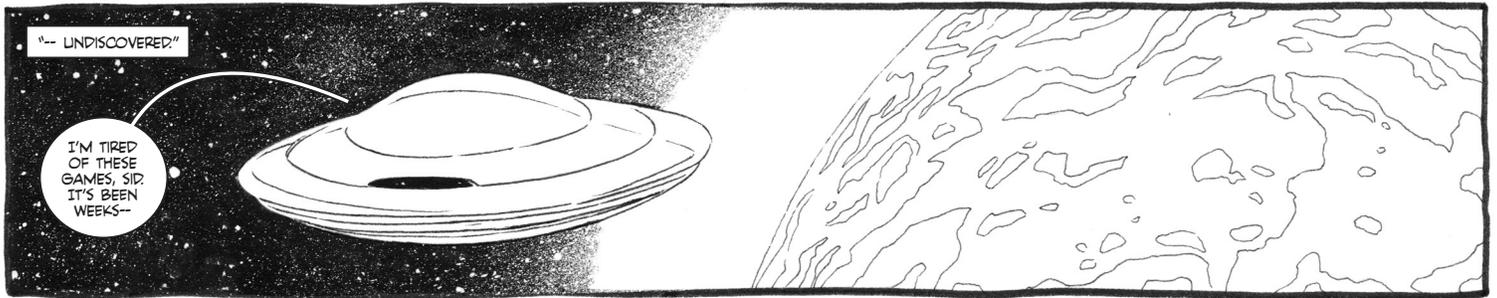
IS THERE NOTHING LEFT TO BE DONE, SIR?

IT APPEARS NOT, MOLA. EVEN HERE AT THE PEAK OF MAN'S REACH, HIS DEPTHS PULL HIM BACKWARD.



SHALL I CONTINUE TO RUN THE EXPERIMENT TONIGHT?

NO, MY DEAR FRIEND. LET US RETIRE, AND IN THE MORNING, WE WILL SAY OUR GOODBYES TO EACH OTHER, AND TO THE DREAM--



"-- UNDISCOVERED."

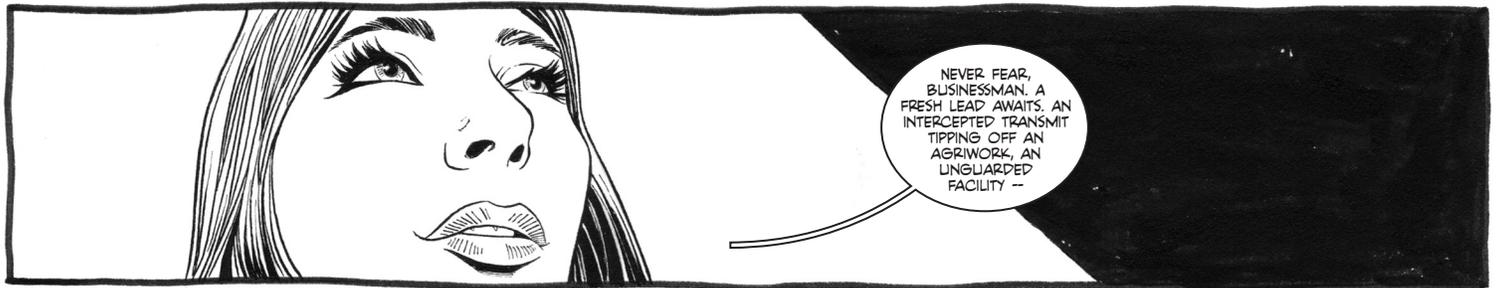
I'M TIRED OF THESE GAMES, SID. IT'S BEEN WEEKS--



-- MY BOARD IS GETTING UNRULY. YOUR COMMISSION WAS CLEAR, YOUR REPUTATION SOUND.

SO WHERE ARE THE LEADS? I WANT WHAT THE LAB HAS. ALL OF IT.

DOESN'T EVERYONE, MR. CHAIRMAN. NECESSITY MIGHT BE THE MOTHER OF INVENTION, BUT AVARICE MUST BE THE FATHER--



NEVER FEAR, BUSINESSMAN. A FRESH LEAD AWAITS. AN INTERCEPTED TRANSMIT TIPPING OFF AN AGRICULTURE, AN UNGUARDED FACILITY --



"AND ONE OF MY BEST MEN."



GO IN CLEAN, NO KNIVES ON SITE.

YOU SAY THAT, BUT THERE'S ALWAYS A KNIFE.



I TRY TO IMAGINE WHAT LIFE WILL BE LIKE IN THE MORNING. WHEN THE WORLD ARRIVES --

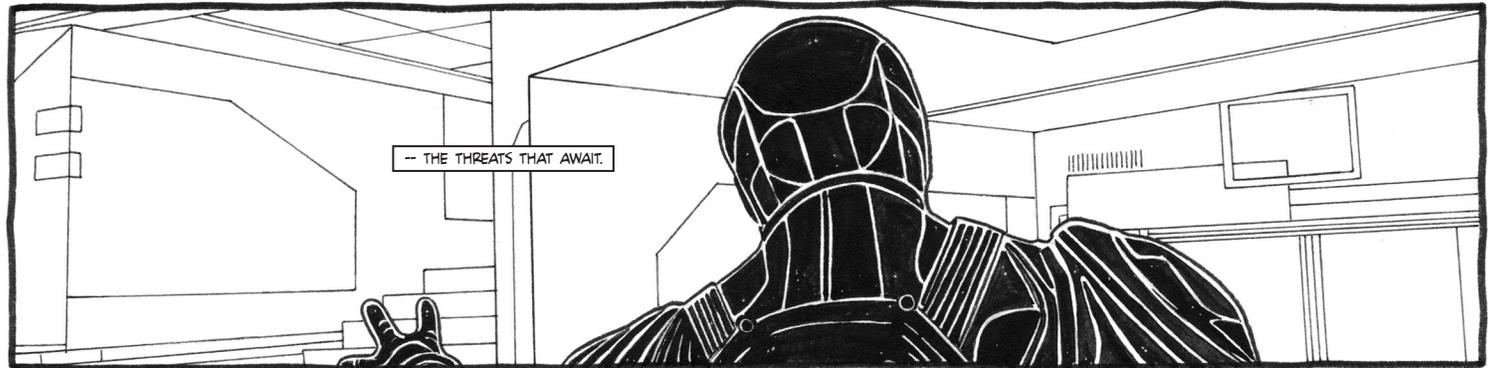


-- SO MUCH SOONER THAN I'D WANTED.



I THINK OF MOLA, AND WHAT WILL BECOME OF HIM. MY PROTEGE, MY LOYAL LIEGE.

HE HAS NEVER KNOWN A LIFE WITHOUT MY PROTECTION. HE CANNOT POSSIBLY UNDERSTAND --



-- THE THREATS THAT AWAIT.



HOW I YEARN TO CONTINUE ON WITH HIM.

I LET MYSELF DREAM...



DREAM OF WHAT WE COULD STILL ACCOMPLISH TOGETHER.

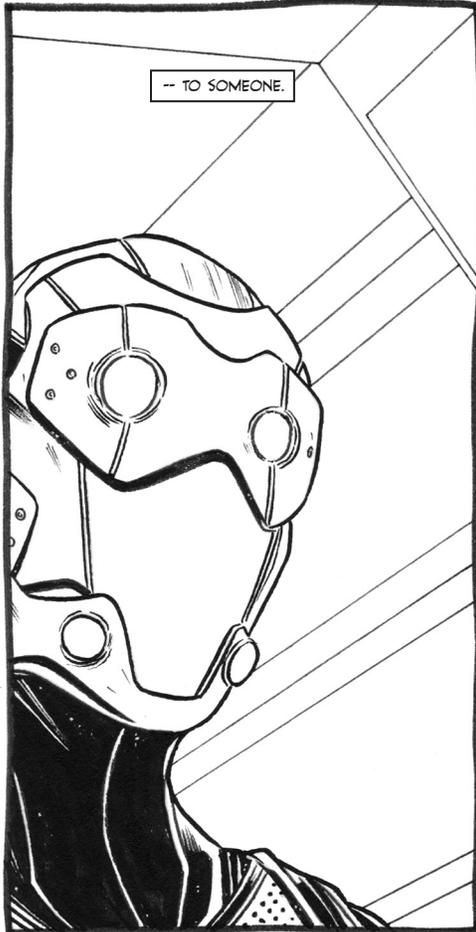
IF ONLY THEY WOULD JUST HONOR THEIR COMMITMENTS, WE COULD SEE THROUGH TO OUR AIMS--



-- AND GIFT THEM ACCORDINGLY.



WE COULD CHANGE THE WORLDS. THAT MUST MATTER--



-- TO SOMEONE.



BUT I FEAR THEIR EVIL IS TOO GREAT NOW--



-- AND ONLY PAIN AWAITS.





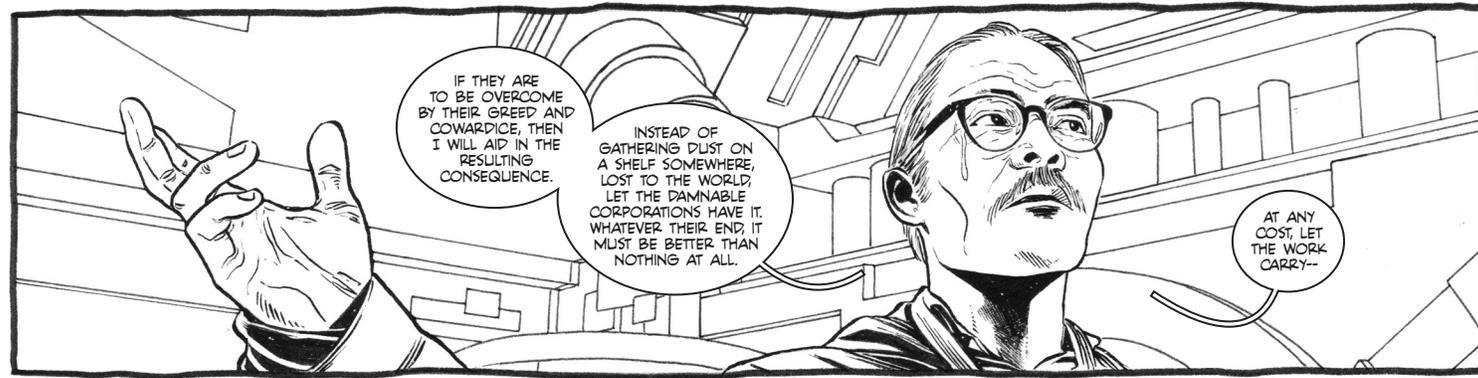
H-HE WOULD UNDERSTAND. HE WOULD NEVER ALLOW IT, BUT HE WOULD UNDERSTAND.



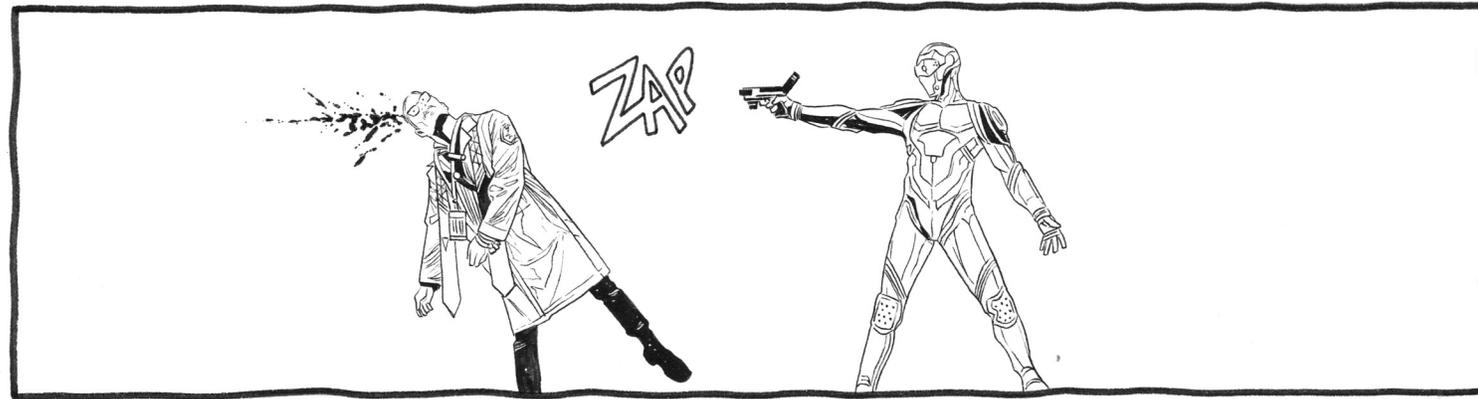
THE GREAT HALL. AN HONOR, THEY CALL IT. THE EXPERIMENT, LOCKED AWAY IN SOME VAST CATACOMB. FOR POSTERITY, I COULDN'T LET THEM...

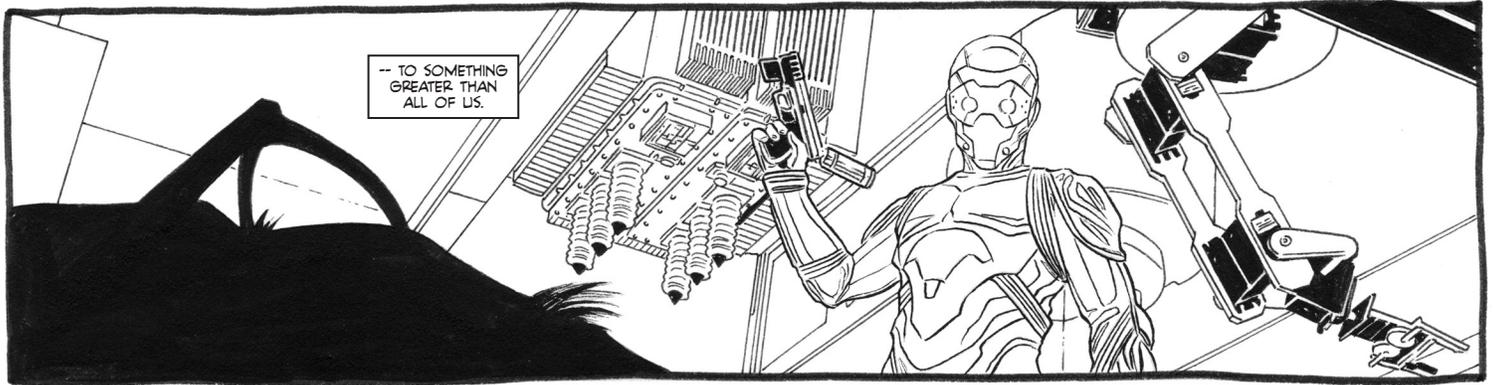


MY TALENT IS PATTERN RECOGNITION. SO I DEvised A PATCH-THROUGH THAT WOULD SEEM ENTIRELY RANDOM-- -- LEAVING MY TRANSMISSION WITH THE INSTITUTE SUSCEPTIBLE TO INTERCEPTION. TO YOU.



IF THEY ARE TO BE OVERCOME BY THEIR GREED AND COWARDICE, THEN I WILL AID IN THE RESULTING CONSEQUENCE. INSTEAD OF GATHERING DUST ON A SHELF SOMEWHERE, LOST TO THE WORLD, LET THE DAMNABLE CORPORATIONS HAVE IT. WHATEVER THEIR END, IT MUST BE BETTER THAN NOTHING AT ALL. AT ANY COST, LET THE WORK CARRY--







From the Desk of Chairman Liphus Sero,
Prospero Enterprises, LTD.

Addressed to:
Antony Korta
Senior Director of Operations
MPR Solvables

Antony:

It is with no shortage of regret that I must submit, following a 12-1 vote of our board, the termination of our contract with your firm. As it turns out, we will no longer need the establishment of a new shipping channel for sustenance rations.

The requisitioned agriwork we discussed was indeed a tremendous success. A previously barren stretch in the Caliphay Valley responded positively to the treatment, irrigation became possible, and vegetation followed, more than enough to feed all nine of the test communities.

Unfortunately, the vegetation proved to have somewhat harmful side effects, leading to the near-term destruction of eight of the nine test communities.

Clearly, more testing is needed before we can go to market.

You win some,

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Liphus