

SYMBIONT DAY

ISSUE ONE · THE PROTOCOL





No air pockets. No snags.

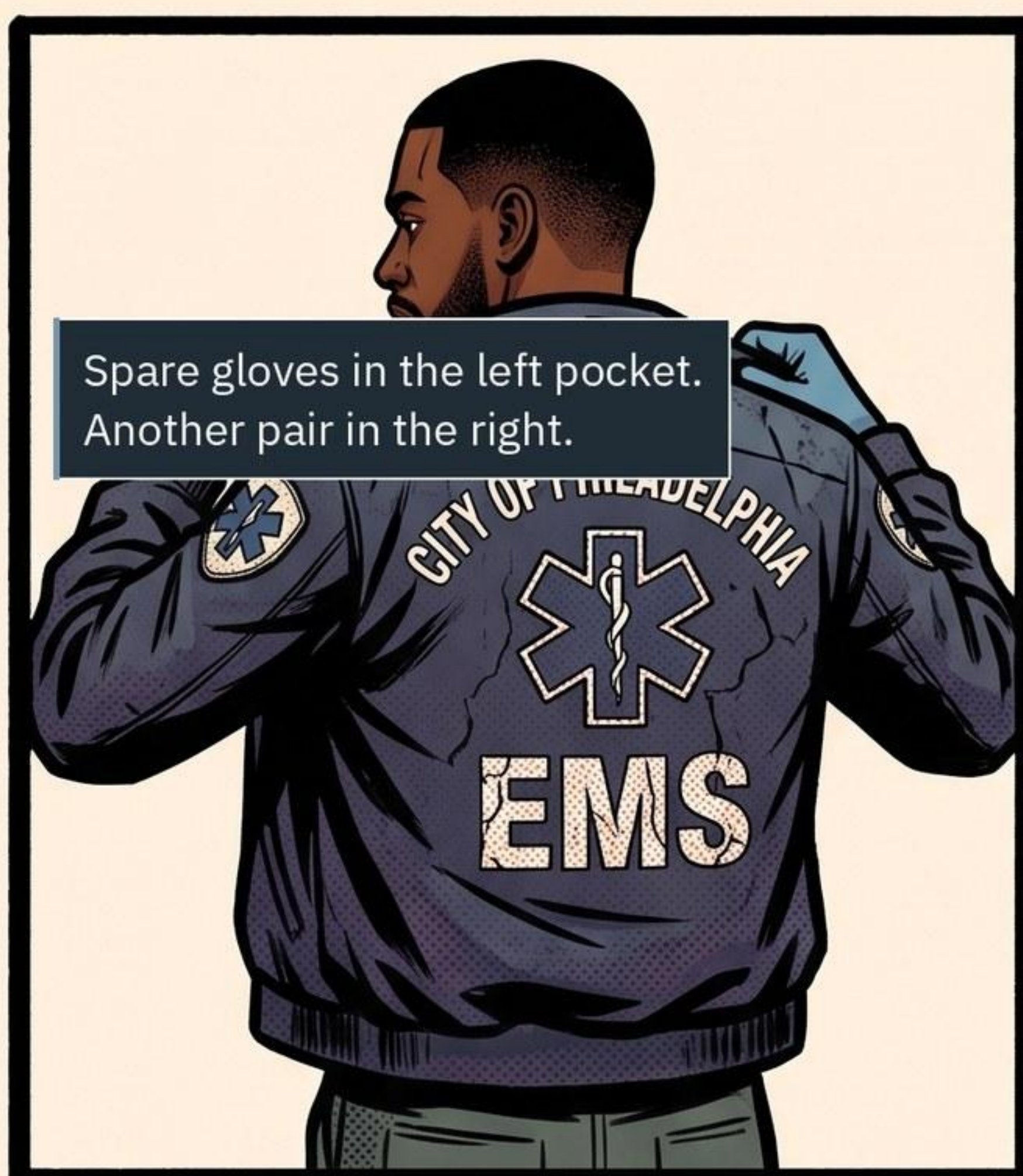


The kind of ritual that scars demand.

Why should I feel discouraged...

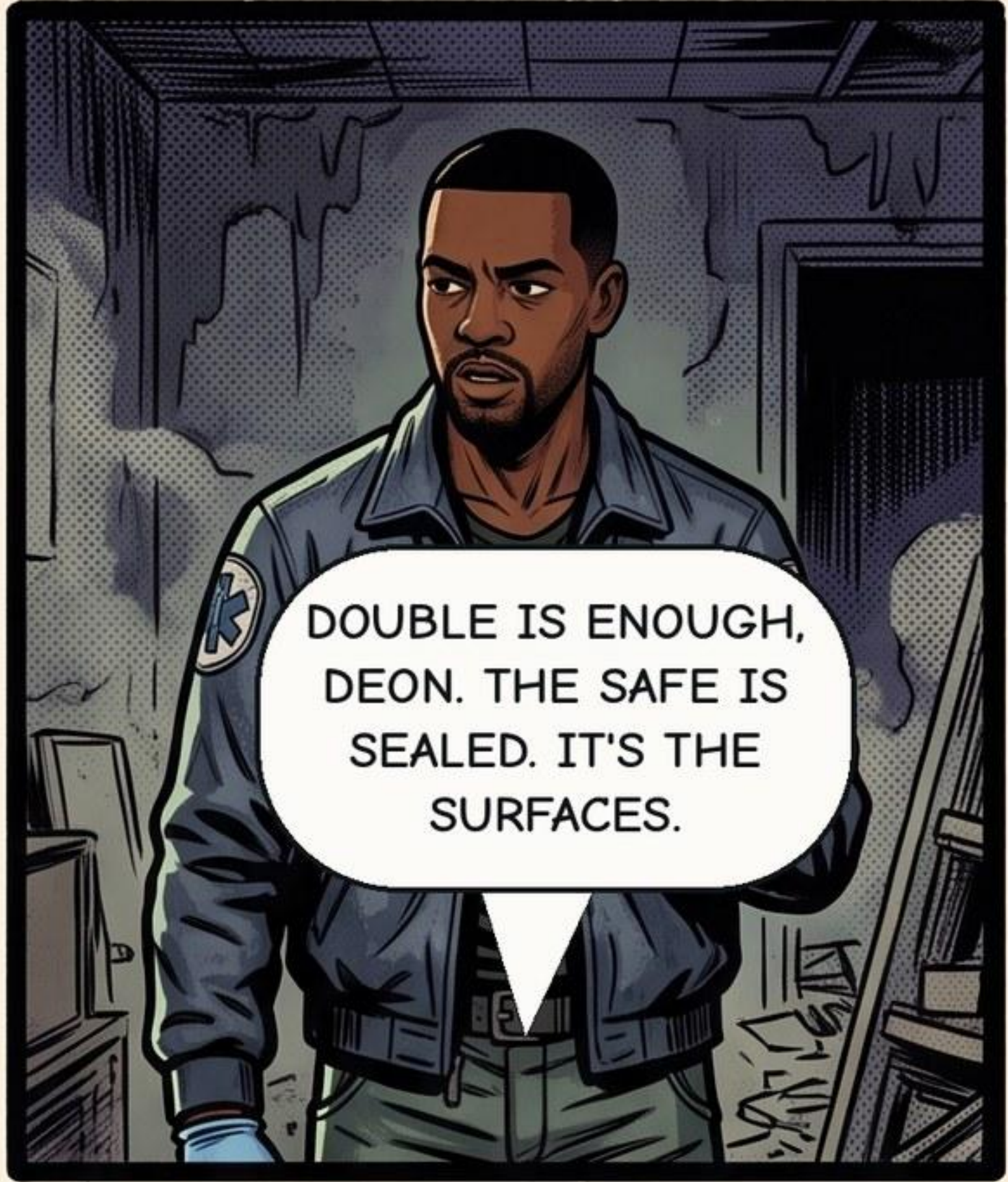


KOF? YOU ABOUT DONE WITH THE CHORES?

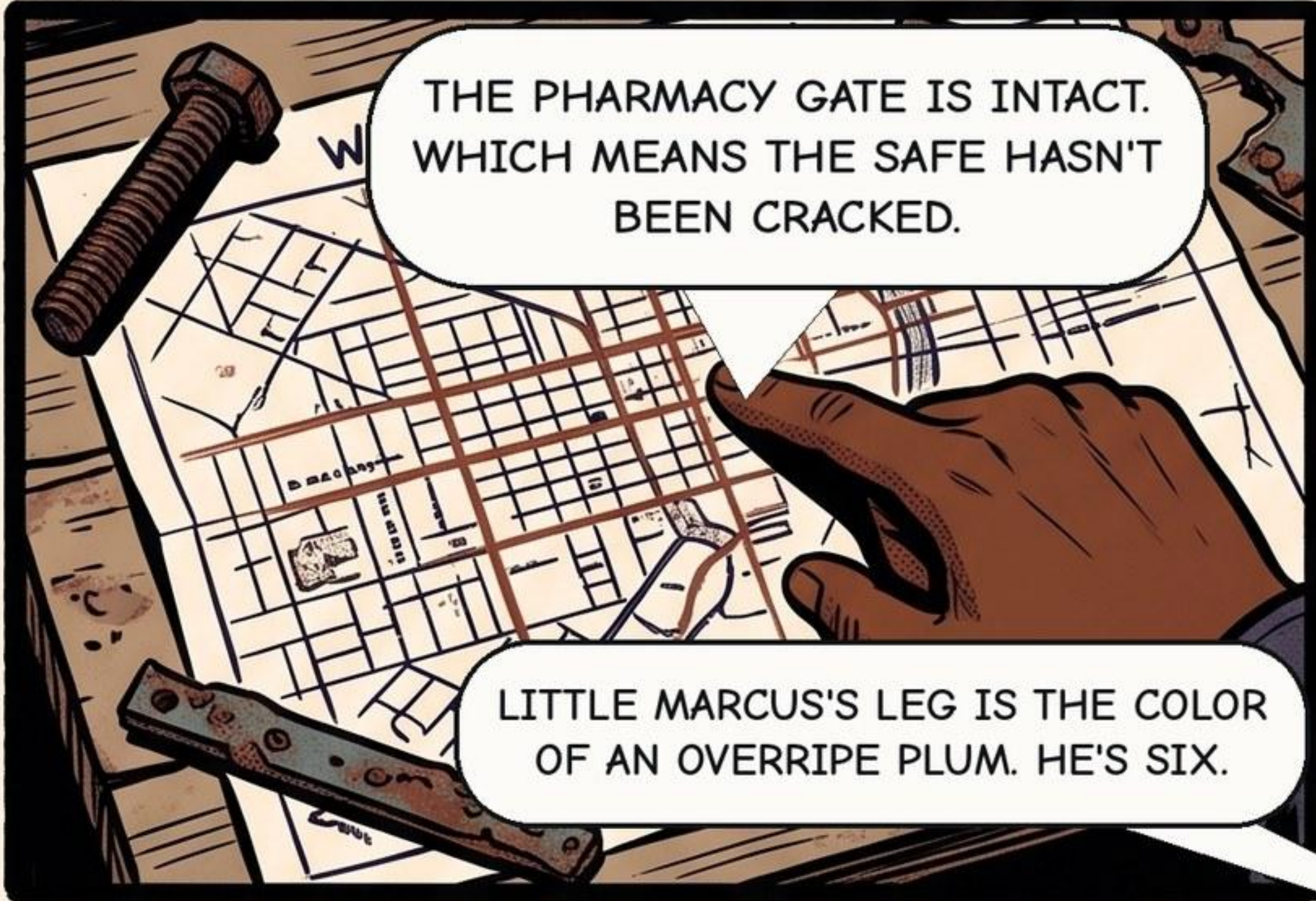




YOU'RE GOING TO BE THE CLEANEST CORPSE IN THIS CITY, KOF.



DOUBLE IS ENOUGH, DEON. THE SAFE IS SEALED. IT'S THE SURFACES.



THE PHARMACY GATE IS INTACT. WHICH MEANS THE SAFE HASN'T BEEN CRACKED.

LITTLE MARCUS'S LEG IS THE COLOR OF AN OVERRIPE PLUM. HE'S SIX.



IS IT THE SYMBIONT?



FIVE FEET APART. CLOSE ENOUGH TO COVER EACH OTHER. FAR ENOUGH THAT ONE OF US BLEEDING DOESN'T TAKE THE REST.



Humid air, like the inside of a mouth.

KEEP THE INTERVALS.



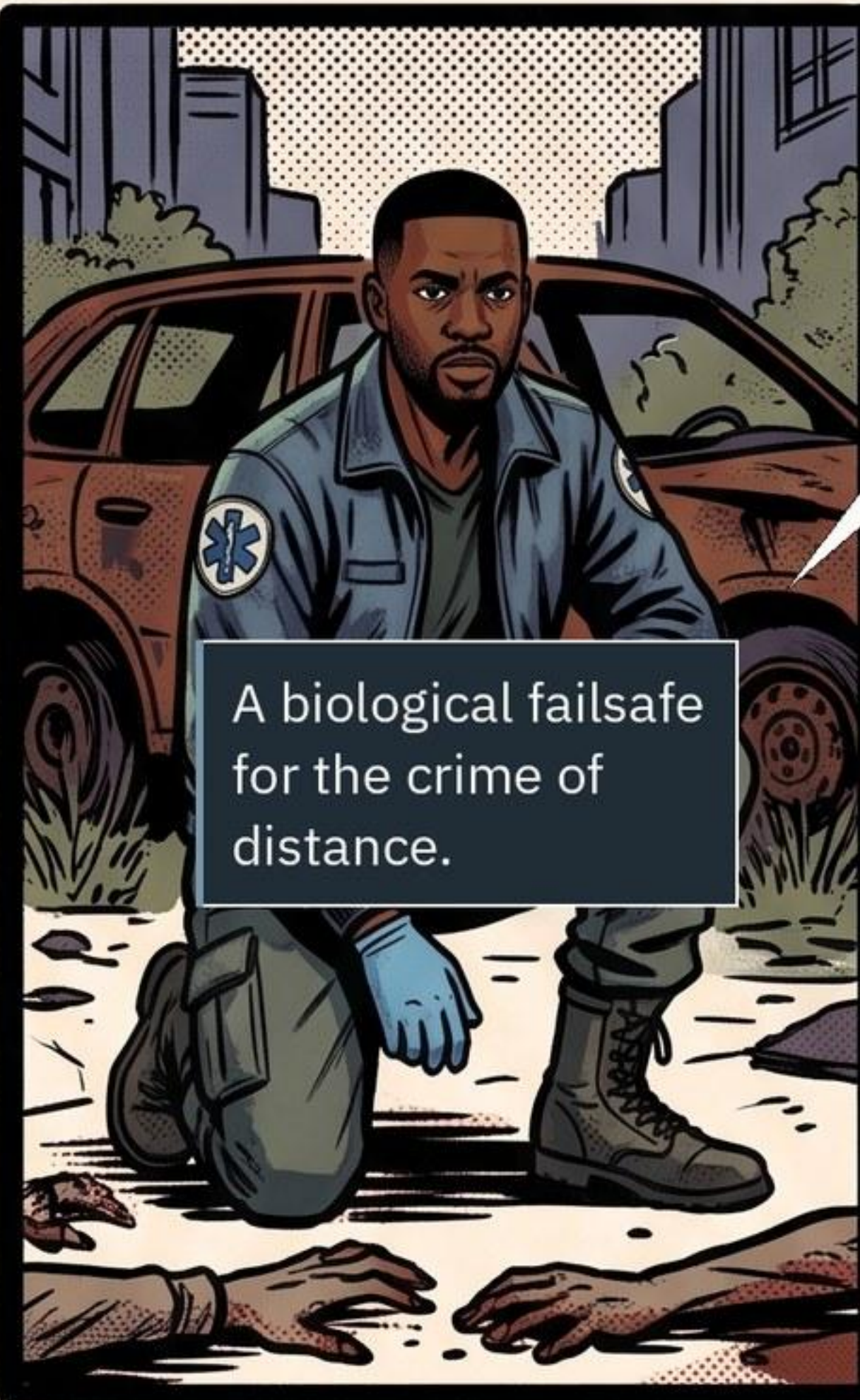
Fingernails. Reinforced. Shucked the door like corn.



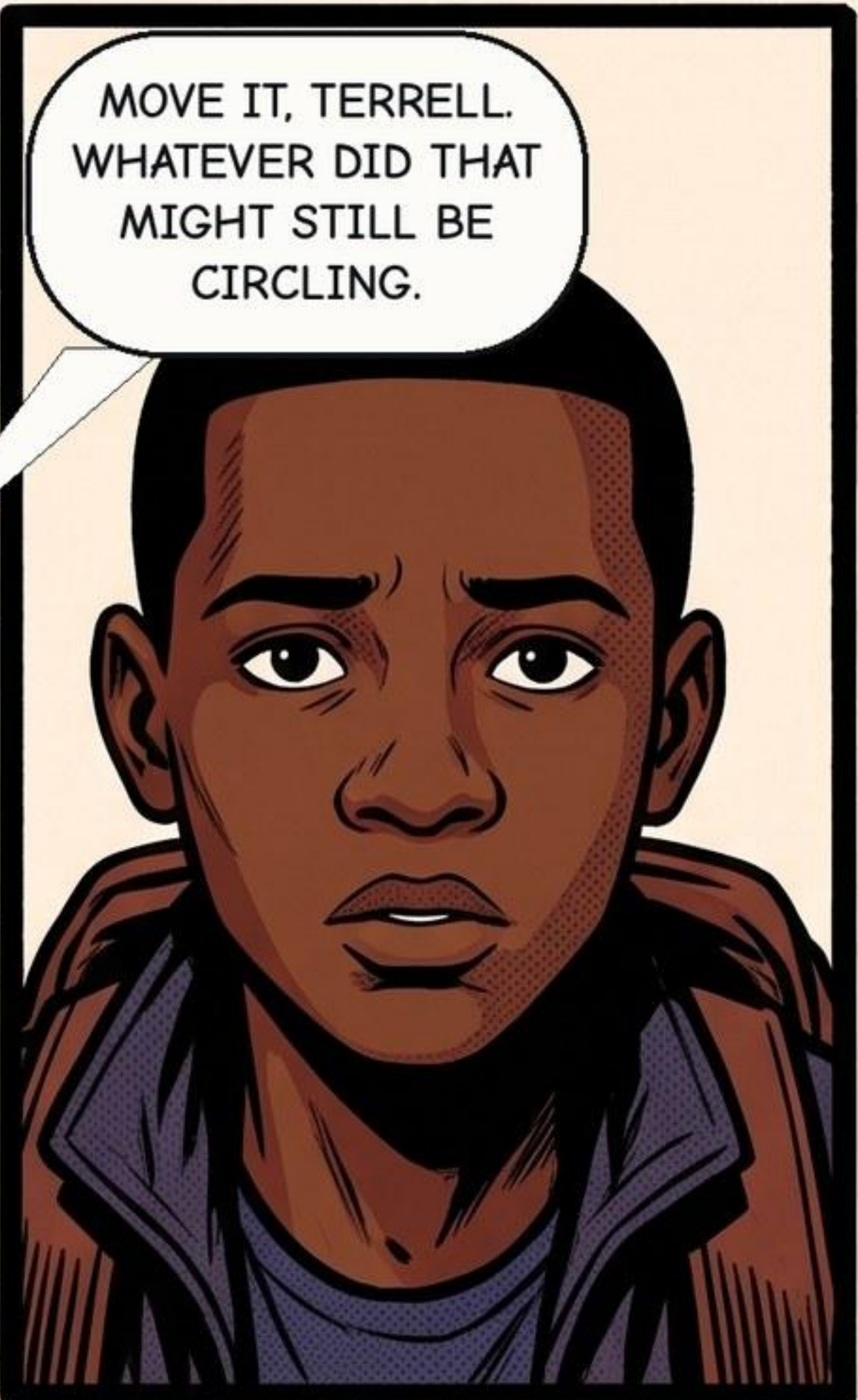


Mid-Crash. Tether broke at ninety meters.

The Symbiont turns your circulatory system into a bomb.

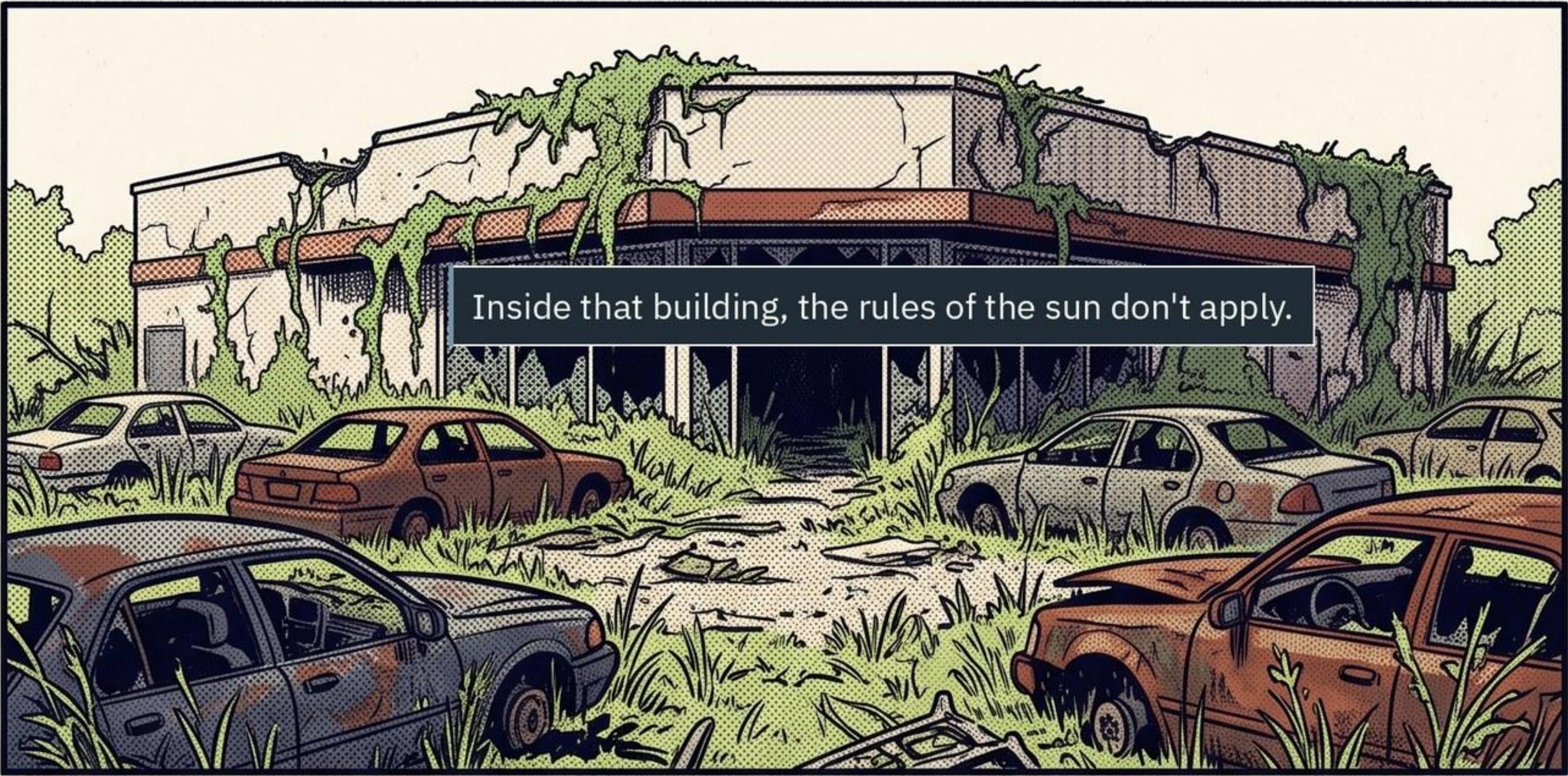


A biological failsafe
for the crime of
distance.



MOVE IT, TERRELL.
WHATEVER DID THAT
MIGHT STILL BE
CIRCLING.

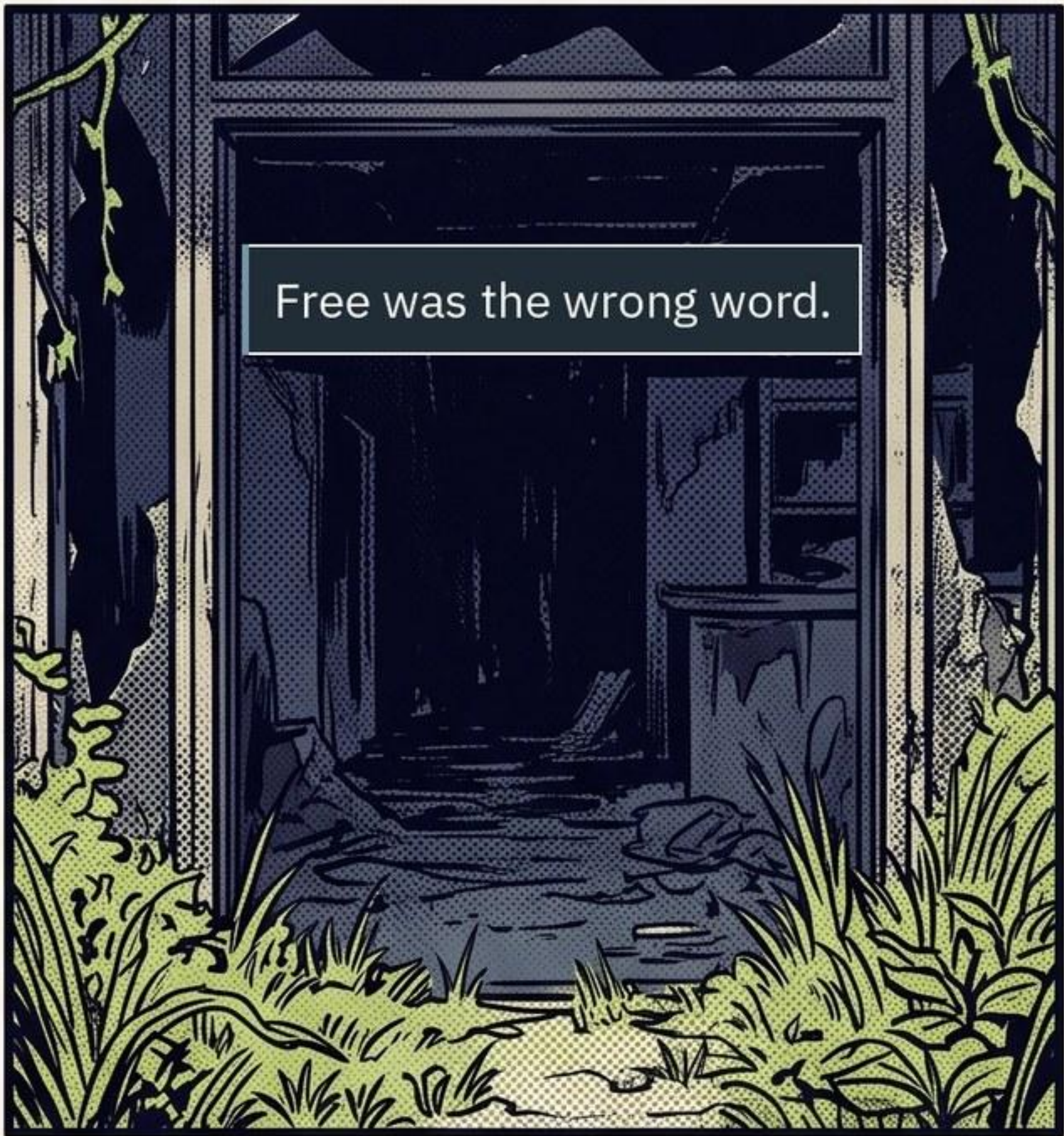




Inside that building, the rules of the sun don't apply.

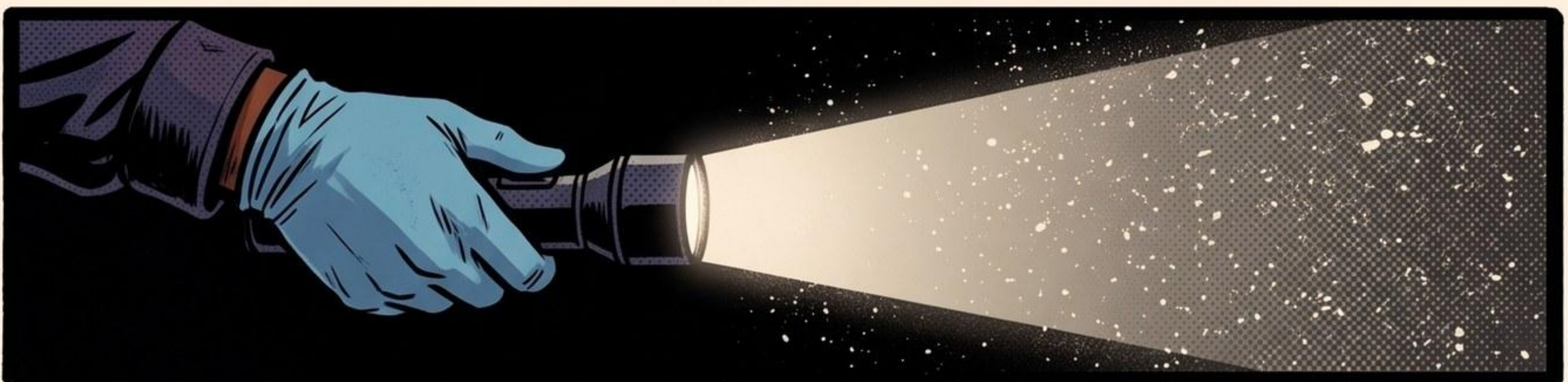
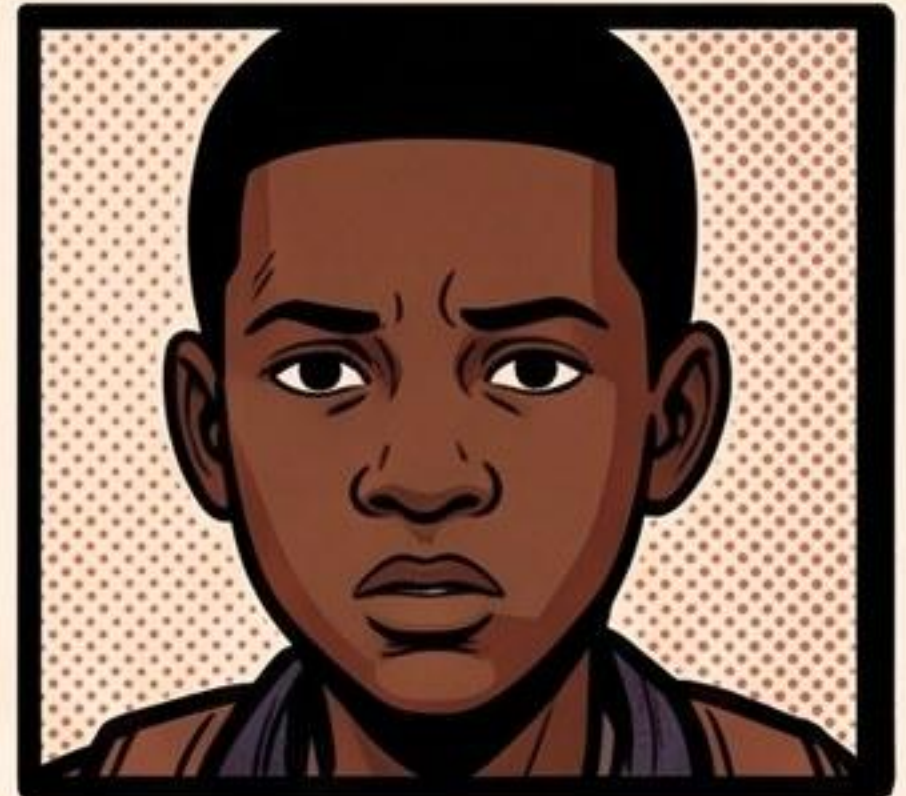


I sing because I'm happy...



Free was the wrong word.







His eye is on the sparrow...

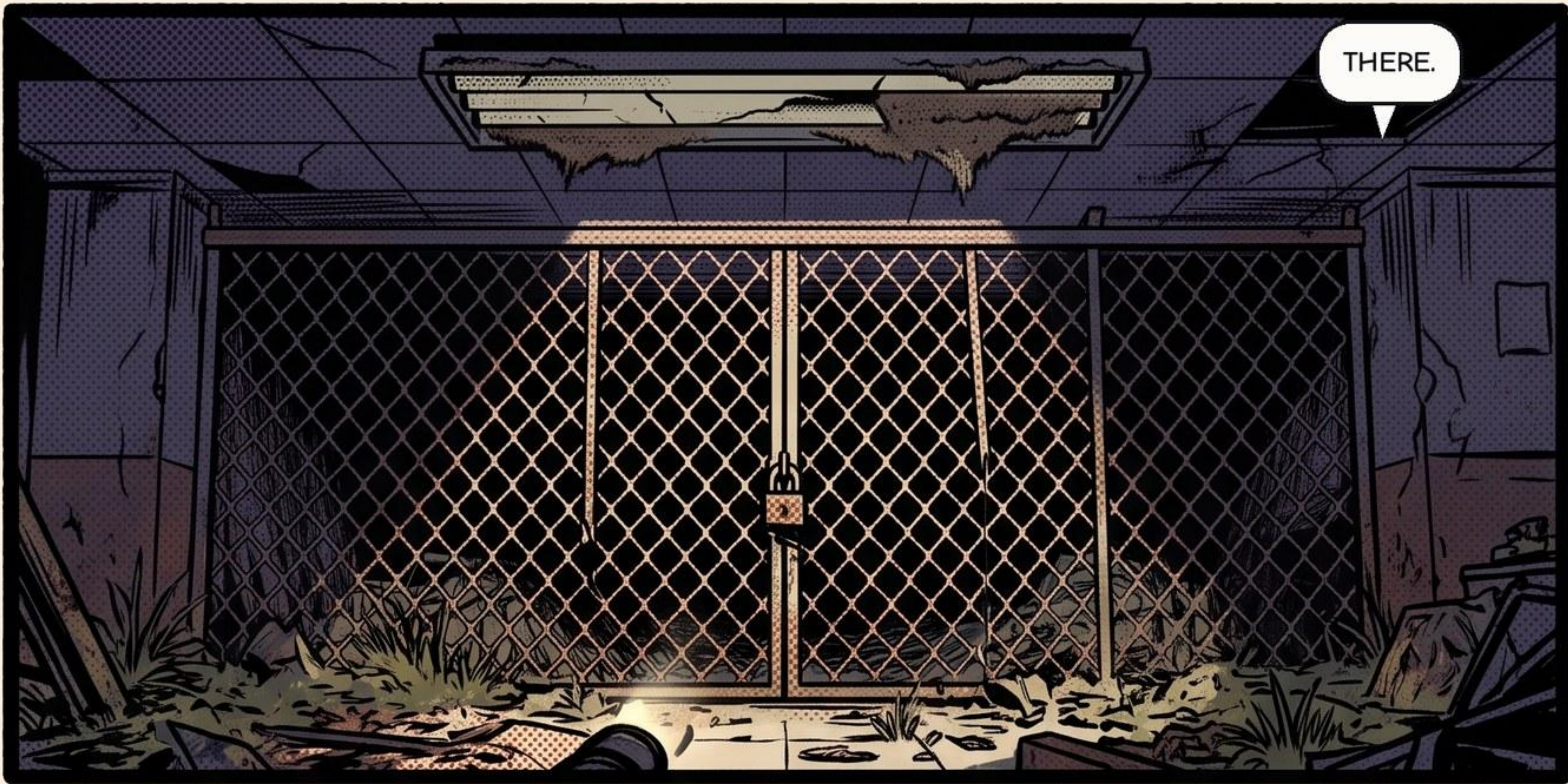
Feral Dyads.



WATCH YOUR STEP.

They won't see us first.
They'll hear the valves of
our hearts.





THERE.



FASTER, TERRELL. WE'RE LOUD.



KOFI. I... I HEAR SOMETHING.

The gate wasn't locked to keep them out.



CK-CK-CK

FASTER, TERRELL. WE'RE LOUD.

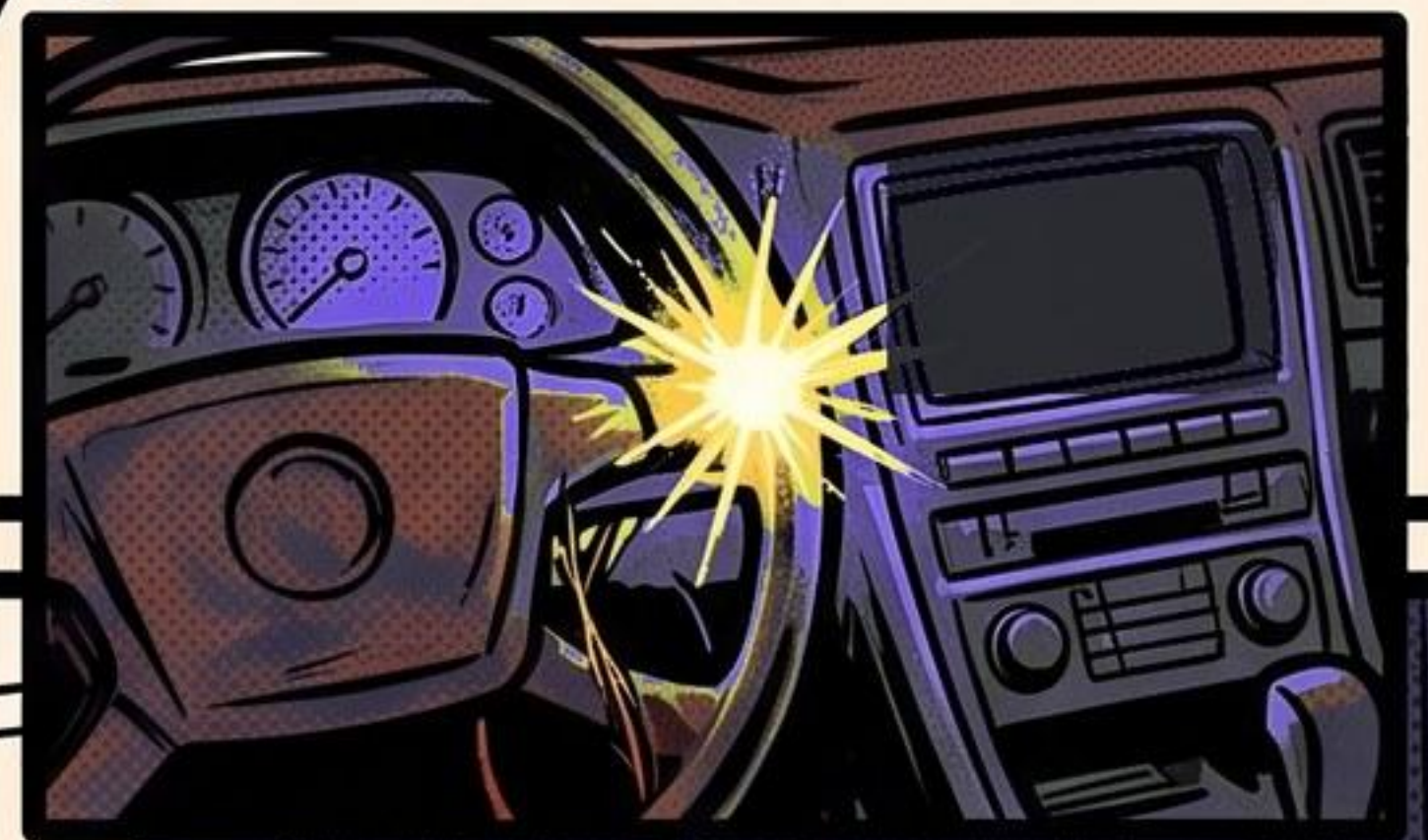
Sweat makes the grease feel like armor. Proof I'm still moving.



COME ON, YOU UGLY BITCH.
GIVE ME SOMETHING.



Metallic. Sharp on the tongue.



Alone. The way I like it. Solo is the only way to stay clean.



VRM





Pendejos. You think those gloves will save you?



Double gloves. Checking them like a nervous tic. That's not a scavenger. That's a man who used to have a hospital.



Too many to fight.



Mierda.



CK-CK-CK



The Clock. If you hear it, your time's up.



One organism. Twice the reach. No hesitation.



COME ON THEN, HIJOS DE PUTA.



The quiet right before metal meets bone.



CONTACT!

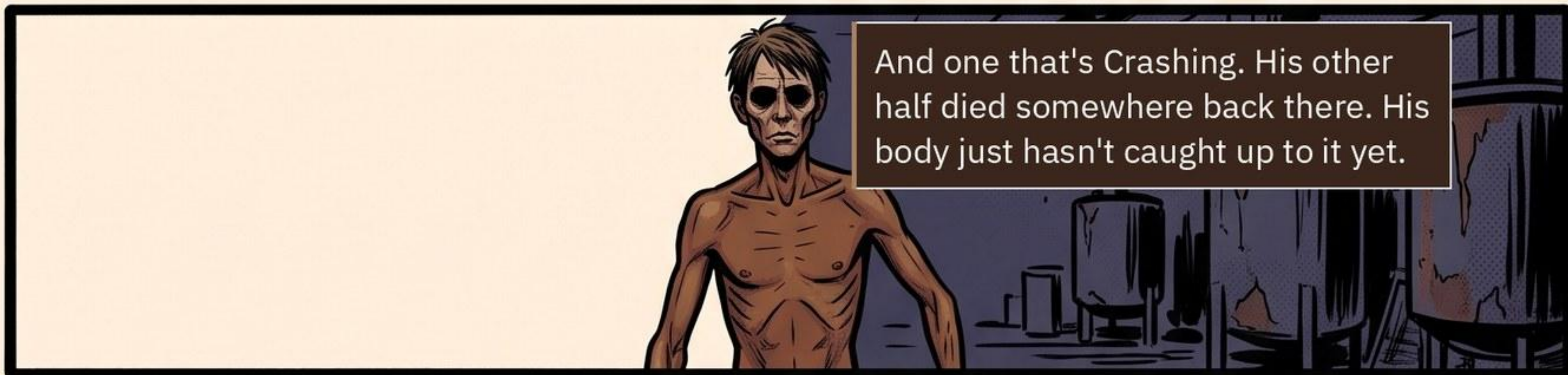
Three.



Two halves of one machine. Synchronized down to the twitch.



And one that's Crashing. His other half died somewhere back there. His body just hasn't caught up to it yet.

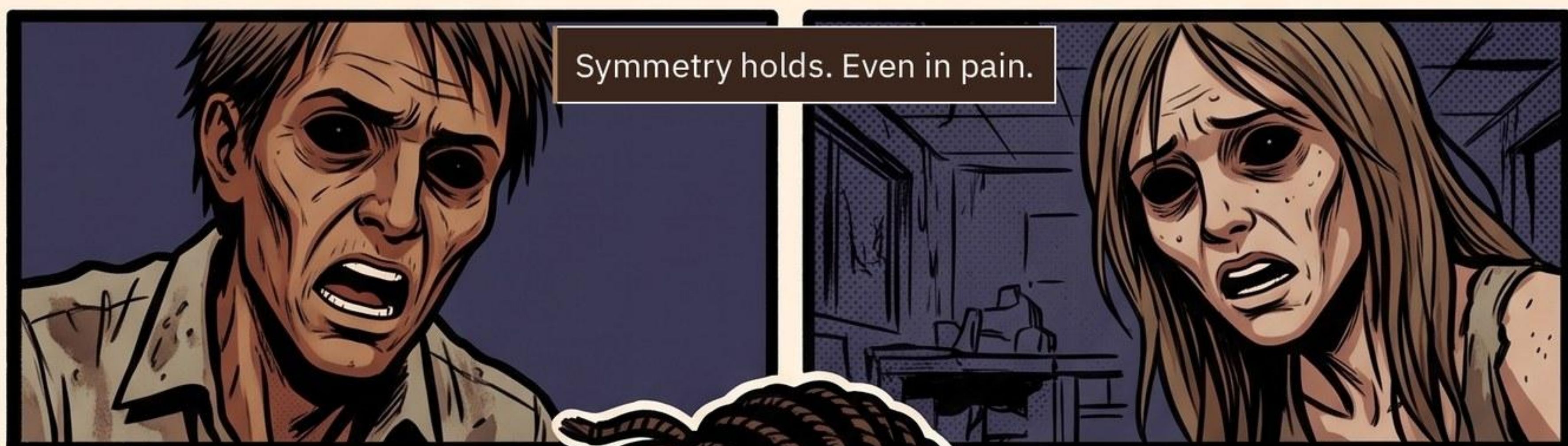


A dying engine doesn't stall quiet. It explodes.



Against a Pair, you break the symmetry.





Symmetry holds. Even in pain.



Split my knuckles open on the first one. Adrenaline mutes it. For now.



Its heart stopped because its partner's heart stopped.

A tether. A lifeline. And a death sentence.



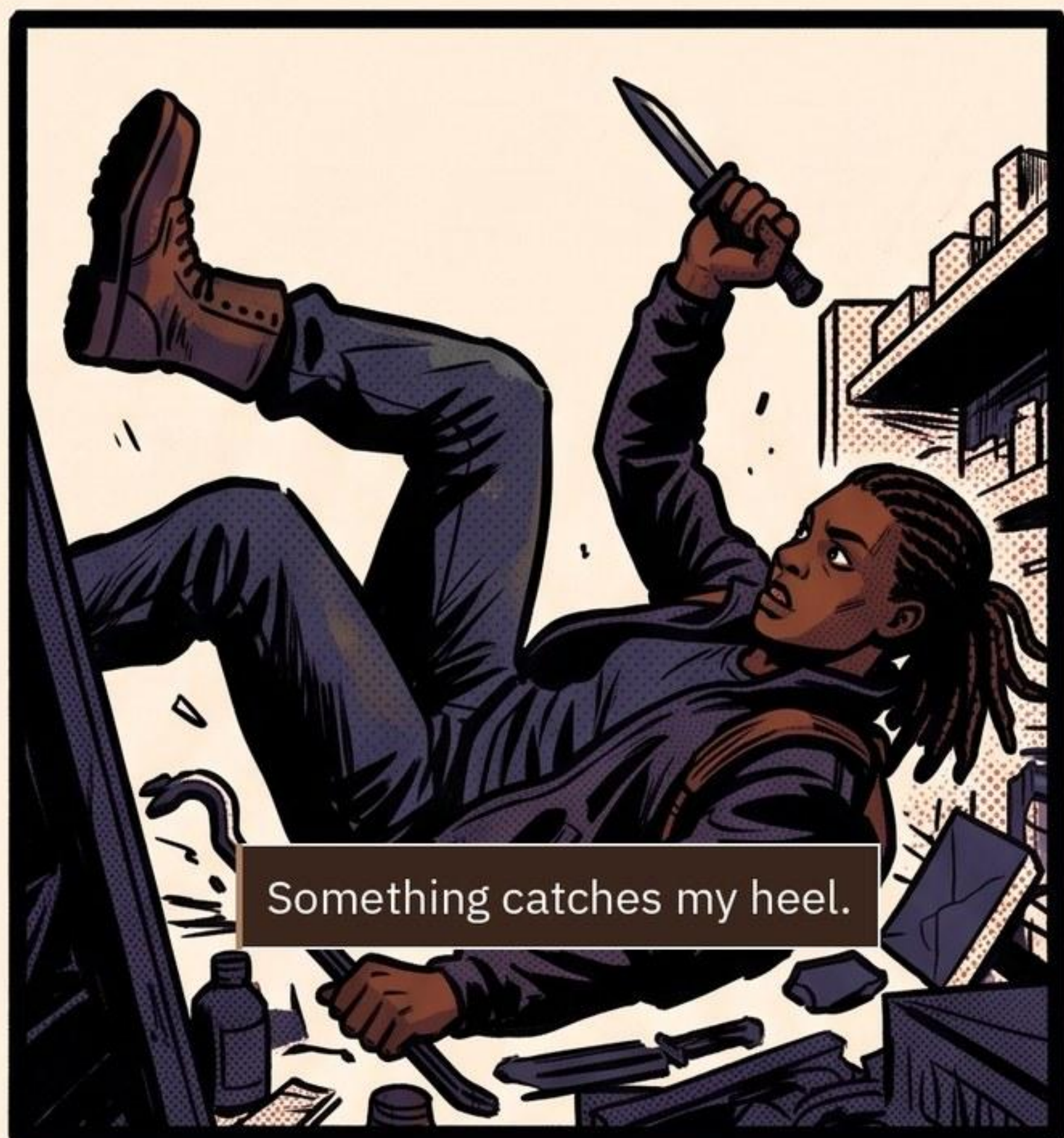
KOFI! DEON'S HIT, HE'S BLEEDING OUT!



Scavengers.



Move.



Something catches my heel.

My knife is still in my hand. I never decided to draw it.



Three years of ritual.





Outer glove: through. Inner glove: through. Laceration, ventral forearm, seven centimeters.



Blood loss: minimal. Arterial involvement: negative.



I didn't mean to. I was just falling.



Physics doesn't care about intent.



Contamination risk:

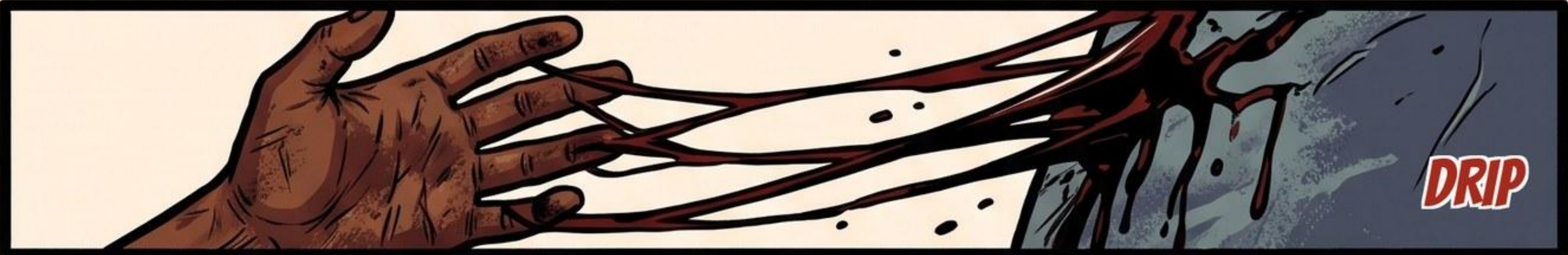


CRITICAL.



When the two fluids touched, the world turned bioluminescent.

A web of glowing indigo veins erupted from the point of contact, stitching them together.



A woman with dreadlocks, wearing a denim vest over a tank top and jeans, is running out of a damaged building. The building has a broken door and peeling paint. She has a determined and slightly distressed expression.

Your blood went into my arm. You tied us together.

Twenty-four hours to the fever. Forty-eight to the Lock, when the Symbiont finishes stitching two nervous systems into one.

