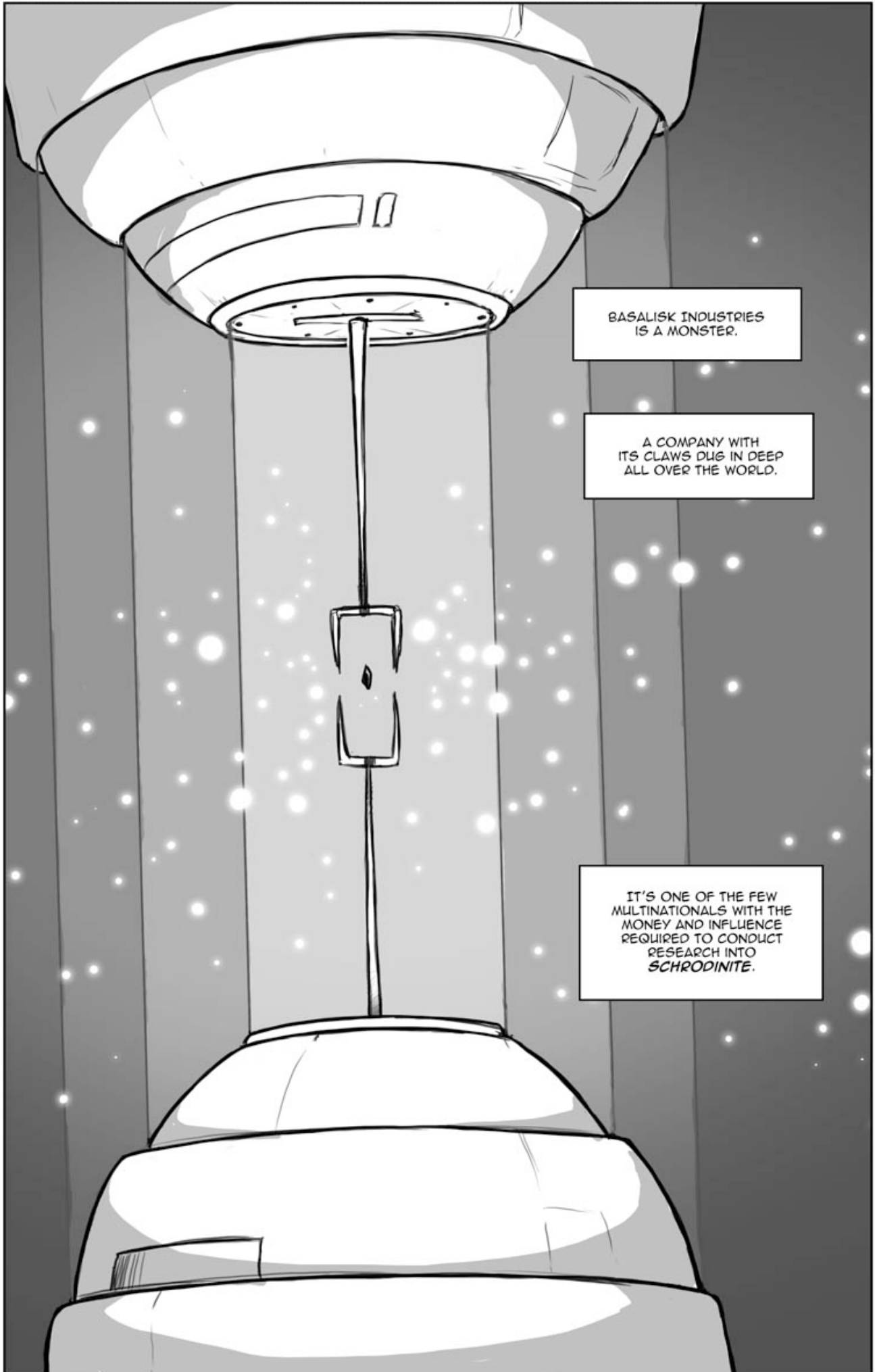


THE
APSARA
PORTFOLIO

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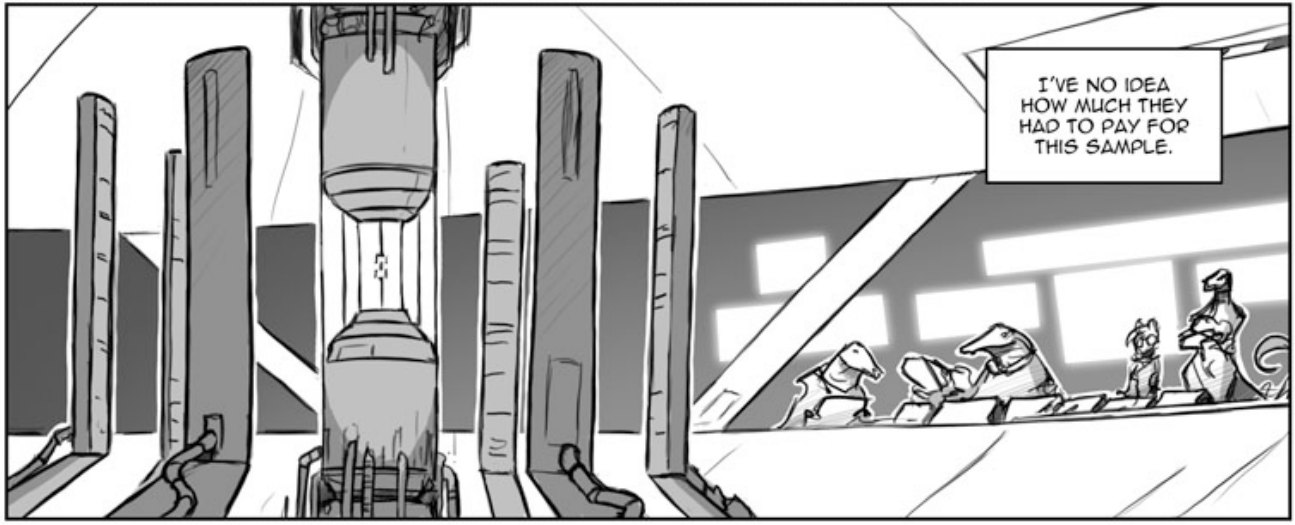
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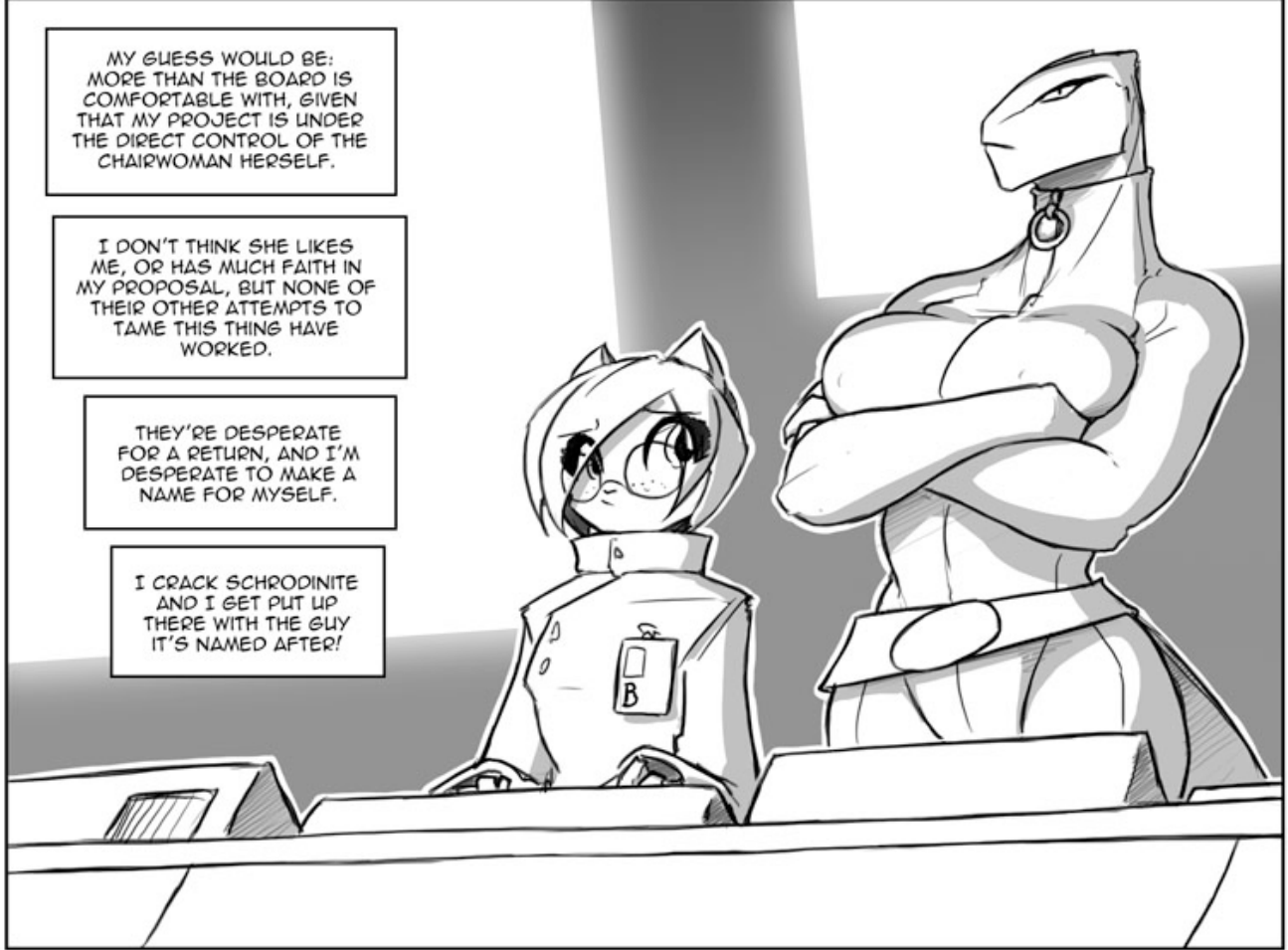
BASALISK INDUSTRIES
IS A MONSTER.

A COMPANY WITH
ITS CLAWS DUG IN DEEP
ALL OVER THE WORLD.

IT'S ONE OF THE FEW
MULTINATIONALS WITH THE
MONEY AND INFLUENCE
REQUIRED TO CONDUCT
RESEARCH INTO
SCHRODINITE.



I'VE NO IDEA HOW MUCH THEY HAD TO PAY FOR THIS SAMPLE.

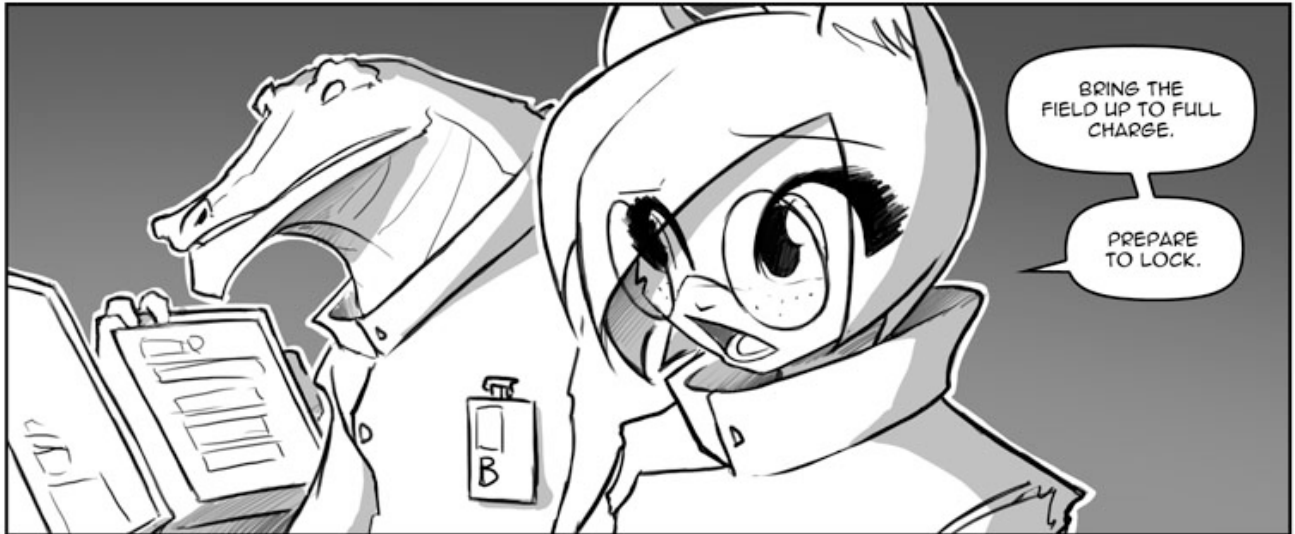


MY GUESS WOULD BE: MORE THAN THE BOARD IS COMFORTABLE WITH, GIVEN THAT MY PROJECT IS UNDER THE DIRECT CONTROL OF THE CHAIRWOMAN HERSELF.

I DON'T THINK SHE LIKES ME, OR HAS MUCH FAITH IN MY PROPOSAL, BUT NONE OF THEIR OTHER ATTEMPTS TO TAME THIS THING HAVE WORKED.

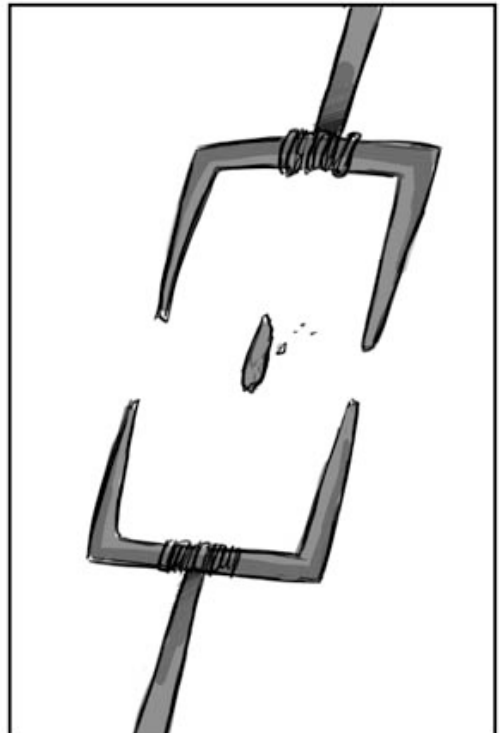
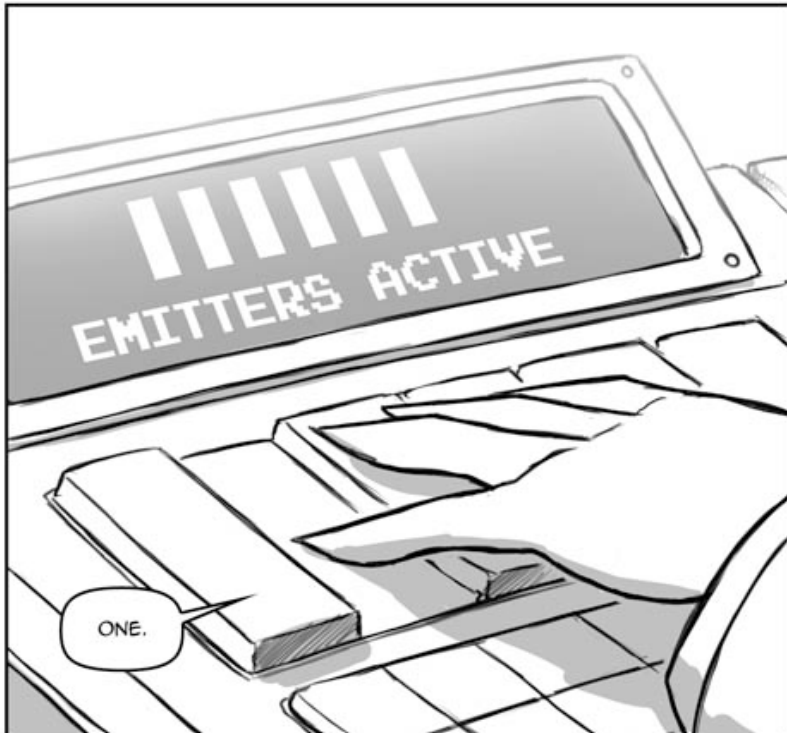
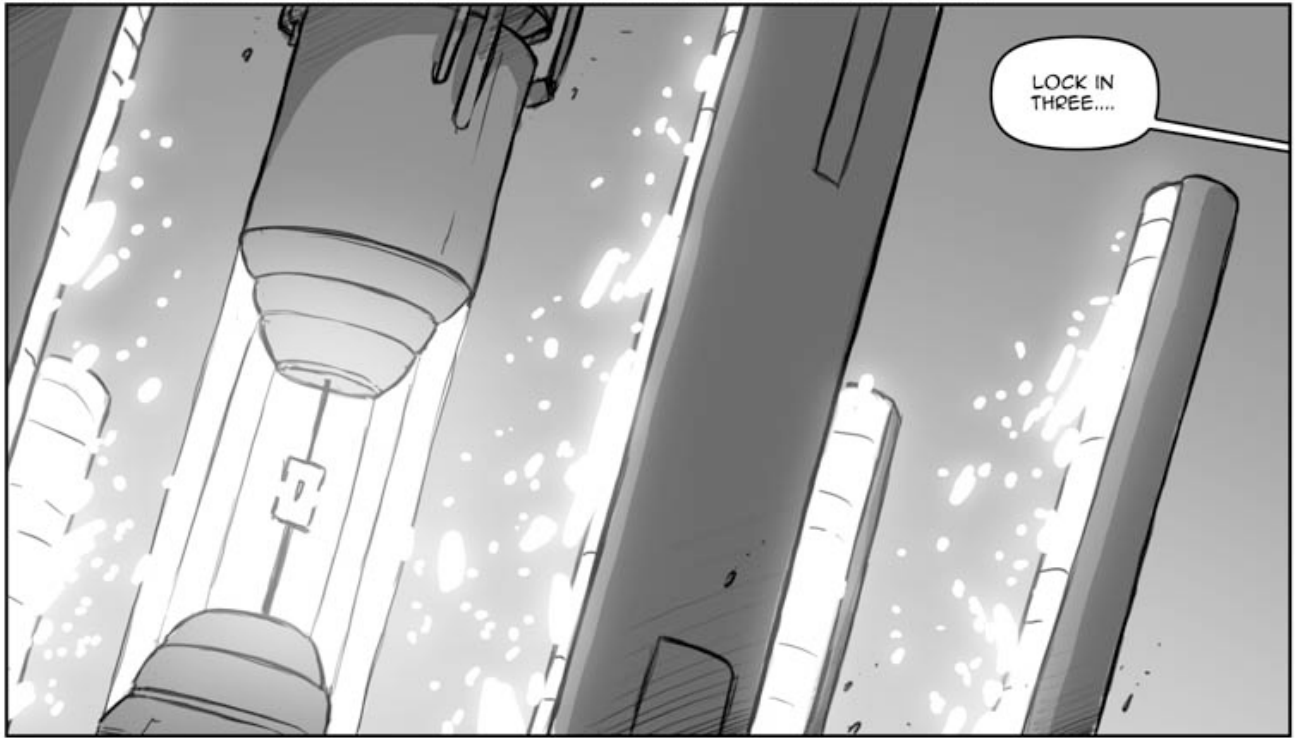
THEY'RE DESPERATE FOR A RETURN, AND I'M DESPERATE TO MAKE A NAME FOR MYSELF.

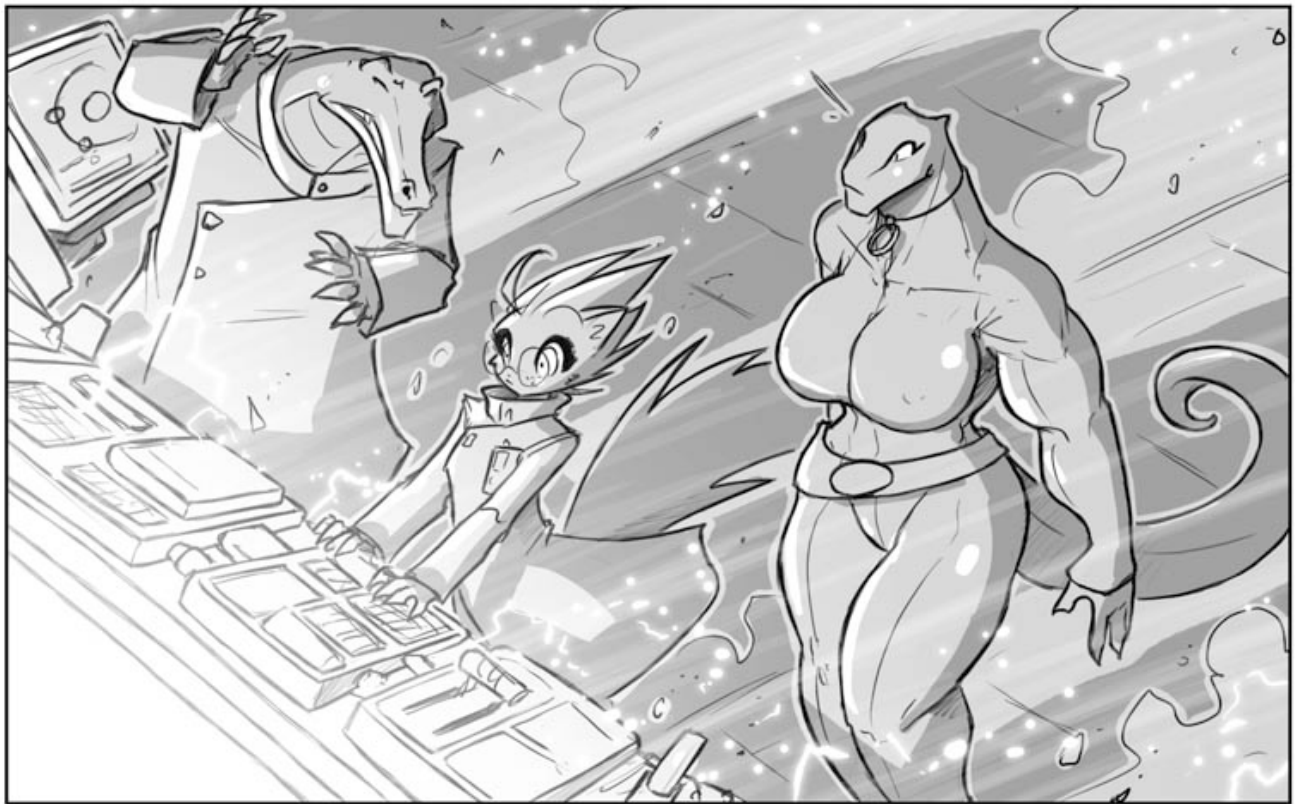
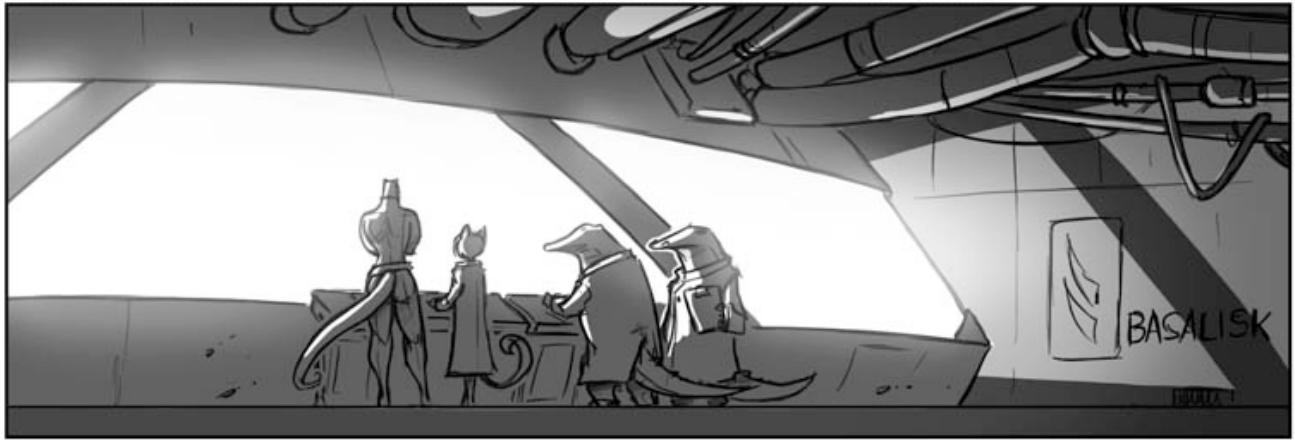
I CRACK SCHRODINITE AND I GET PUT UP THERE WITH THE GUY IT'S NAMED AFTER!

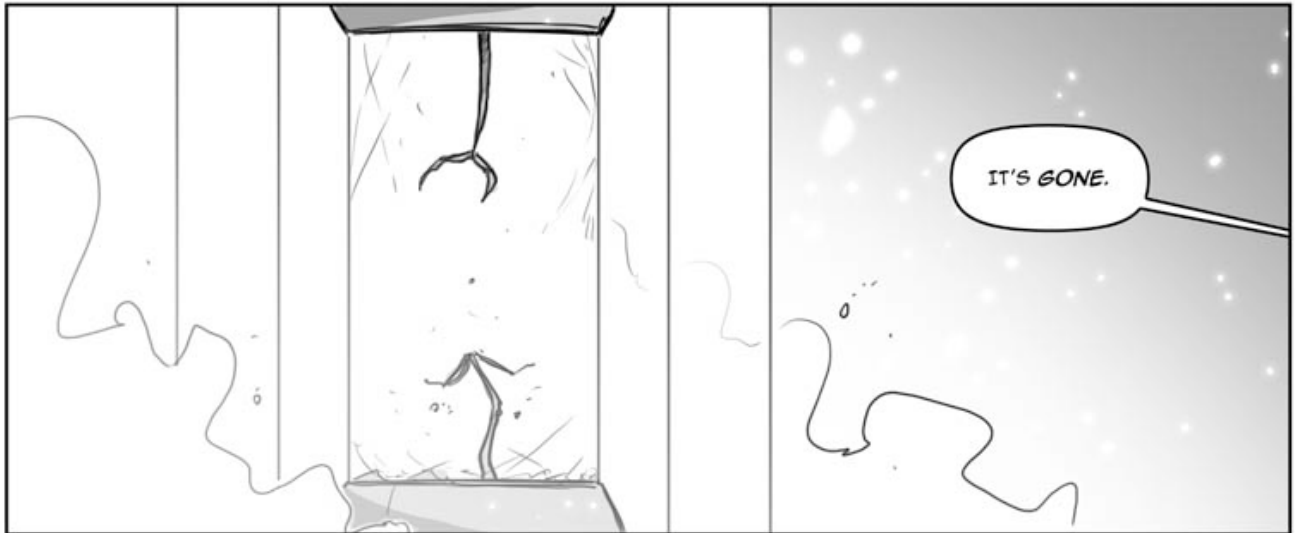


BRING THE FIELD UP TO FULL CHARGE.

PREPARE TO LOCK.









months later.



I WANTED TO MAKE A NAME FOR MYSELF.

I SUCCEEDED.

EVERYONE IN MY FIELD KNOWS IT, NOW, AND NO ONE WILL EVER LET ME SET FOOT IN A LABORATORY AGAIN.

BASALISK'S CLAIMS OF MY INCOMPETENCE SEE TO THAT.



I'M NOT INCOMPETENT.

I'M JUST NOT PSYCHIC!

FEEDBACK COULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATED, CERTAINLY NOT AT THAT LEVEL.

WITHOUT THE DATA FROM THE TEST, I'LL HAVE TO USE GUESSWORK TO COME UP WITH A COUNTERMEASURE.

SOME KIND OF DAMPENING SYSTEM THAT WORKS IN TANDEM WITH THE EXISTING EMITTERS? IT'LL REQUIRE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENTIRELY NEW TECH....

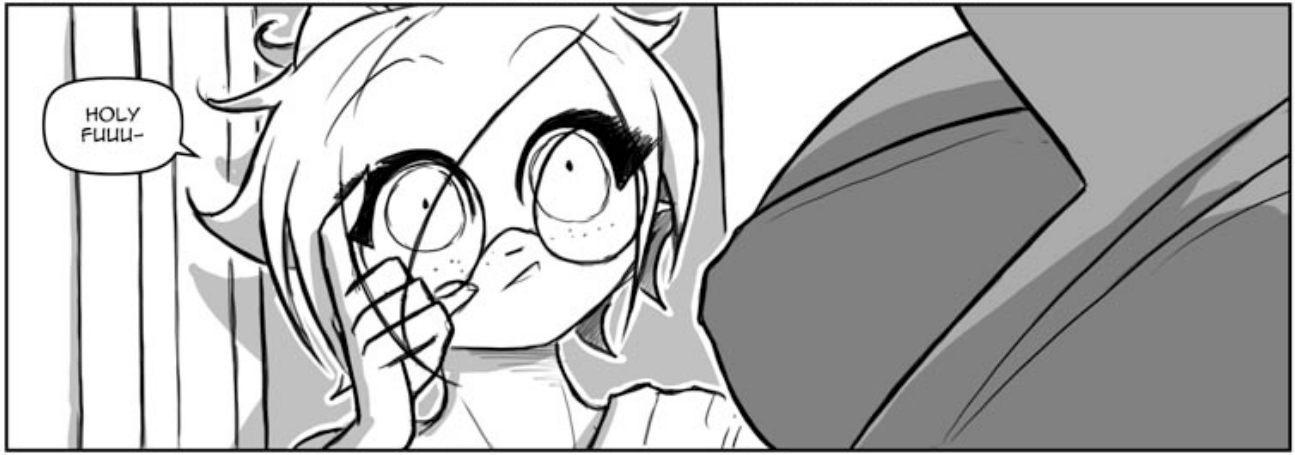


...OH, WHAT'S THE POINT?

STOP TORTURING YOURSELF.

YOUR METHOD IS NOW CONSIDERED A DEAD END, COSTLY TO FIND, AND NO ONE IS GOING TO GIVE YOU MORE SCHRODINITE TO TRY AGAIN.







.....SO THERE I AM, HALFWAY DOWN THE SEINE, ENJOYING ONE OF THE BETTER GATHERINGS THAT'S TAKEN PLACE DURING THIS SEASON'S FASHION WEEK, WHEN I GET THE CALL THAT ONE OF MY LITTLE "IMPULSE BUYS" HAS BEEN FINALISED.

TOOK A LITTLE LONGER THAN I'D HOPED.

I WAS SO EXCITED THAT I JUST HAD TO COME STRAIGHT HERE!

THE POSSIBILITIES IT OPENS UP, ASSUMING YOU CAN GET IT WORKING CORRECTLY....



UH....WHAT?

ME?

WHAT'S.... WHAT?



SORRY. MOVING TOO FAST. I'M TOLD I DO THAT.

LET'S SWITCH TO YOUR SPECIALTY SUBJECT.

DOCTOR, TELL ME EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT SCHRODINITE.



IT WAS FOUND IN THE ACCELERATOR AT CERN EIGHT YEARS AGO.

AT THREE MORE ACCELERATORS BETWEEN THEN AND NOW.

IT'S POSSIBLY THE MOST VALUABLE PIECE OF MATTER ON THE PLANET.

IT'S ALL THINGS, ALL AT ONCE, UNTIL OBSERVED. HENCE IT'S NAME. YOU CAN LOOK AT IT ONE MOMENT AND IT'S A BIT OF PURE CARBON. LOOK AWAY AND LOOK BACK AND SUDDENLY IT'S A PIECE OF GOLD.

IT'S... IMPOSSIBLE. IT CANNOT BE, BUT IT IS.

SOME SUGGEST THAT IT'S PROOF MULTIPLE REALITIES EXIST, AND THAT SCHRODINITE IS SOME SORT OF TRANSIENT SUBSTANCE THAT CROSSES BETWEEN THEM.

IS THAT WHAT YOU BOUGHT? SCHRODINITE?

IT'S SO RARE, I DIDN'T KNOW ANYONE WAS SELLING.



EVERYONE SELLS IF YOU MAKE THE RIGHT OFFER, BUT NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I PURCHASED.



THE EMITTERS I DESIGNED FOR BASALISK?!

I ACQUIRED THE PATENTS.



AND THAT'S AN "IMPULSE BUY"??!

VIVIAN BASALISK SEEMS TO THINK SHE MANAGED TO SELL ME SHODDY GOODS AND WAS EAGER TO RECOUP "LOST CAPITAL".



THE WIDER WORLD CONSIDERS YOUR PARIS EXPERIMENT A FAILURE, BUT PEOPLE I TRUST STILL BELIEVE A QUANTUM ISOLATION FIELD TO BE THE ONLY PLAUSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE SCHRODINITE PUZZLE.

I WANT TO HIRE YOU, MAXINE.

I WANT YOU TO PICK UP YOUR WORK WHERE YOU LEFT OFF.

I'LL PROVIDE YOU WITH ALL THE FUNDING, MATERIALS AND WORKSPACE YOU NEED, AND GIVE YOU FULL AUTONOMY TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH IN WHATEVER MANNER YOU SEE FIT.



YOU'RE SERIOUS?!



MY OFFERS ARE ALWAYS SERIOUS.



OHMYGOD!
YE--



BUT BEFORE
YOU ANSWER,
UNDERSTAND
THIS:



MINE ARE
THE WRONG
HANDS.

YOU DON'T NEED
TO PROVE YOURSELF
TO ME, BUT YOU
WOULD TO OTHERS.

YOU WOULD TO
PEOPLE WHO MIGHT
MAKE BETTER USE OF
YOUR DISCOVERIES.

WORK FOR ME
AND YOU'LL HAVE
EVERY WHIM CATERED
FOR, AND WE'LL BOTH
REAP THE REWARDS,



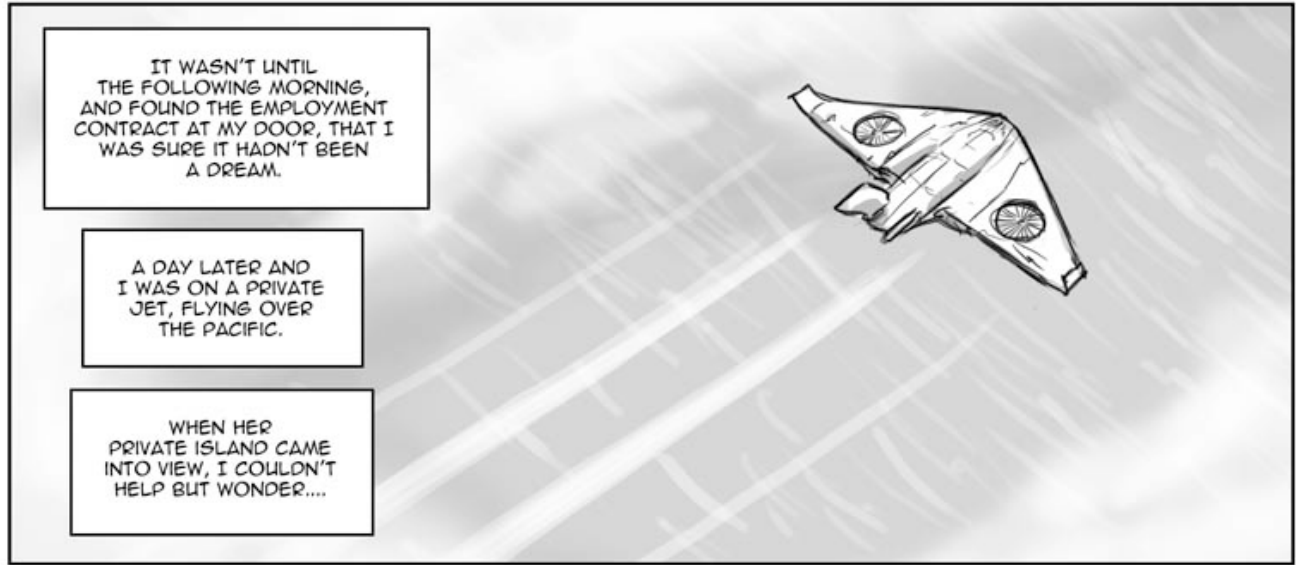
BUT MINE.
ARE.
THE.
WRONG.
HANDS.



I HAD NO IDEA WHAT SHE MEANT BY THAT.

TO BE HONEST, ALL I HEARD AFTER THE PROMISE OF BEING GIVEN LIMITLESS RESOURCES WAS WHITE NOISE.

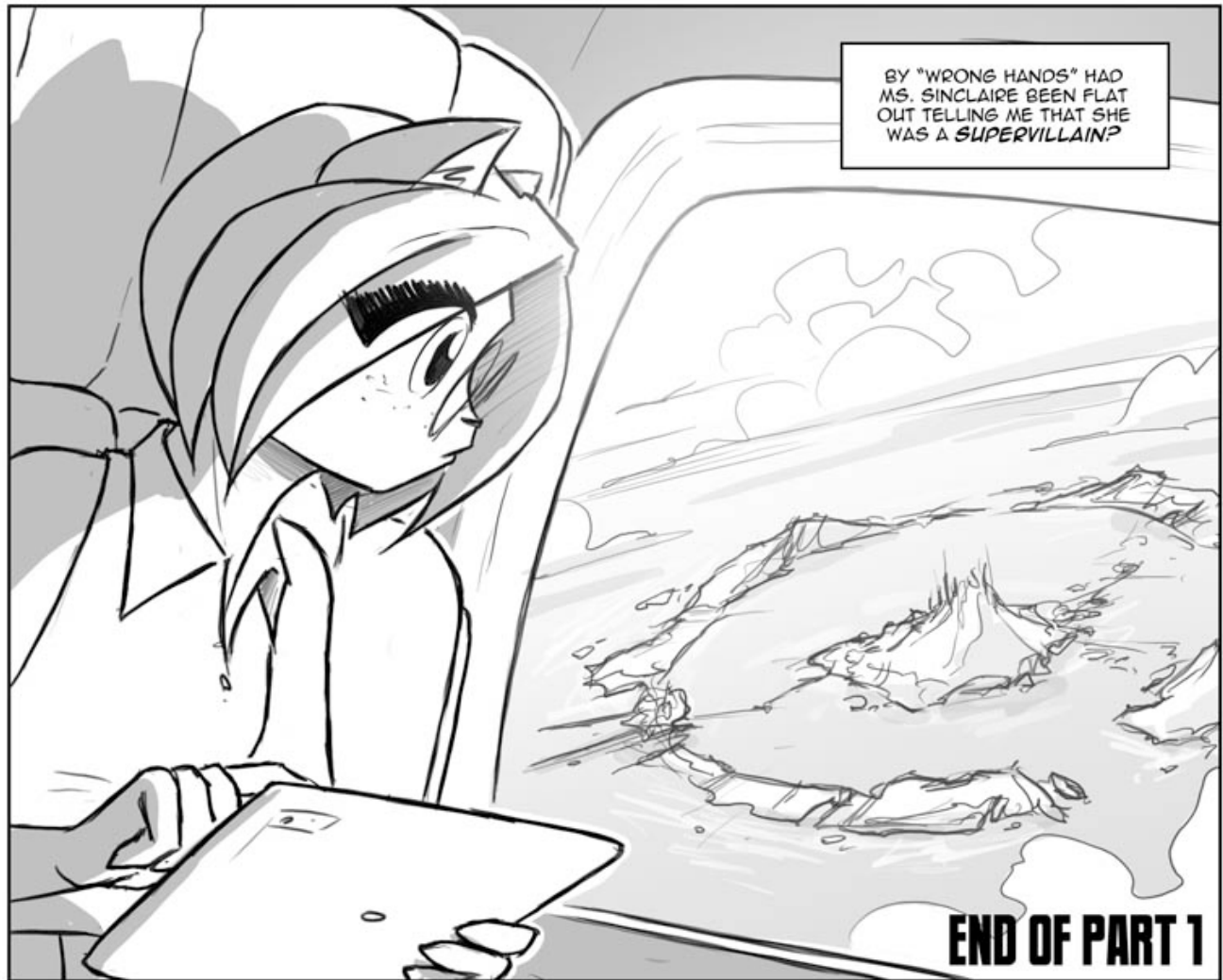
I SAID "YES" AND MY NEW BOSS GLIDED OUT OF MY CRUDDY APARTMENT AS QUICKLY AS SHE HAD ARRIVED.



IT WASN'T UNTIL THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AND FOUND THE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT AT MY DOOR, THAT I WAS SURE IT HADN'T BEEN A DREAM.

A DAY LATER AND I WAS ON A PRIVATE JET, FLYING OVER THE PACIFIC.

WHEN HER PRIVATE ISLAND CAME INTO VIEW, I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER....



BY "WRONG HANDS" HAD MS. SINCLAIRE BEEN FLAT OUT TELLING ME THAT SHE WAS A SUPERVILLAIN?

END OF PART 1