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SCRIPT
PANEL LAYOUT
COVER

PENCILS
INK

TRANSLATION
(SORRY, ENGLISH SPEAKERS)

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YOU AND ESSEX WERE ALWAYS AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS, AND NOW HE'S NOT GETTING A SINGLE DECENT HAND.

BIT BOLD, NO? YOU'RE BARELY CONCEALING IT.



HERE WE GO.



HOW AM I TO BLAME FOR HIS PLAYS? HE'S ALWAYS BEEN IMPATIENT, AND POKER REQUIRES PATIENCE...

ANYONE'S BUYING A CARD?



ESSEX. DO YOU THINK ALL TEACHERS ARE YOUR ENEMIES?

THE MAGIC SIGIL WAS SUPPOSED TO ATTRACT AN ANCIENT COIN, AND WHAT YOU BROUGHT WAS A EURO FROM FRANCE. FISCHER WAS RIGHT.

PFFT. ONLY THING THAT MATTERS IS THE RITUAL OF THE DOOR.

THE REST... DIVINATION, SIGILS... BAH.

MAKES YOU WEAK, THIS STUFF.

CARD.

FUCK YOUR "PATIENCE". I COULD BE PLAYING WITH MY HAND DISCLOSED AND IT WOULD MAKE NO DIFFERENCE!

I DIDN'T EXPECT TO WIN, BUT SHOWING ME TO THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST...!

BUT HEY, YOU'RE CLEARLY CHEATING. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER I'LL LIMIT MYSELF TO UNCOVERING YOUR CRAP OR I'LL BEAT YOU TO A PULP FOR BEING A TRAITOR.



HAHAHAHA. ARE YOU THREATENING ME? THAT'S SO FUNNY. I STILL SEE THE KID IN YOU... HOW OLD WERE YOU, 20?

YOU DON'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES, BOY.

TEN YEARS AGO, FRANCIS.

ESSEX, YOU HAD ALREADY OPENED THE FIRST DOOR BEFORE SIGNING UP, RIGHT?

CHANGING THE SUBJECT?

WERE YOU ALREADY PART OF THE EBI AT THAT TIME?

WERE YOU THE ONE WHO IMPLANTED THE MEASURES? MY VISION NEVER DETECTED THEM! HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?

WAS IT A BULLET?

SOME THINGS ALWAYS ESCAPED YOU, JA...

A COLOR WE DIDN'T KNOW? THE BLACK BULLET?

YOU BETTER ANSWER OR THIS FARCE OF A GAME IS **OVER!** REMEMBER THAT THIS GAME IS SUSTAINED BECAUSE WE HAVE ABIDED BY YOUR RULES...!

I DON'T GIVE A FUCK IF YOU HAVE THE THIRD DOOR OR THE HUNDRETH OPEN! NOBODY MANIPULATES MY FUCKING MIND, TRAITOR!



HM. OR MAYBE YOU PARTICIPATE BECAUSE, DEEP DOWN, YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE ME AS AN ENEMY. A SENSIBLE DECISION, UNLESS, OF COURSE, I AM WHAT YOU SAY I AM.

BUT THAT'S THE THING. THE PARANORMAL EBI WAS NEVER YOUR ENEMY. EVEN IF I DID WHAT YOU SAY I DID... HOW HAVE I BETRAYED YOU?

FOLLOWING STANDARD PROCEDURE IS TREASON? I MEAN, ONE COULD ARGUE THAT, PERHAPS, THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES A LEGAL MAGE LEGAL, AS OPPOSED TO ILLEGAL, IS THE CERTAINTY OF THE EBI THAT THEY WILL FOLLOW CERTAIN PROTOCOLS.

YOU WANTED TO BE LEGAL MAGICIANS AND, PERHAPS, THAT WAS PART OF THE PRICE.

"NOTHING'S FREE IN THIS WORLD".



BLACK,
10.



...



OH, YOU
GOT THE DRINK
ALREADY? THAT
WAS FAST.

YOU SHOULD
BE CAREFUL,
WITH THOSE
HEELS...



...YOU CAN'T AFFORD
TOO MUCH ALCOHOL,
CAN YOU? YOU'LL END
UP FACEPLANTING ON
THE FLOOR.

THAT SAID,
WHAT NUM-
BER DO
YOU...?



UHM.



MY
GOD.

YOUR FACE IS LIKE THE
BALD ASS OF ONE OF
THOSE MONKEYS.

OOPS.
POKER. HOW
LUCKY, HM?



72 POINTS.
I THINK YOU'RE
FUCKED.

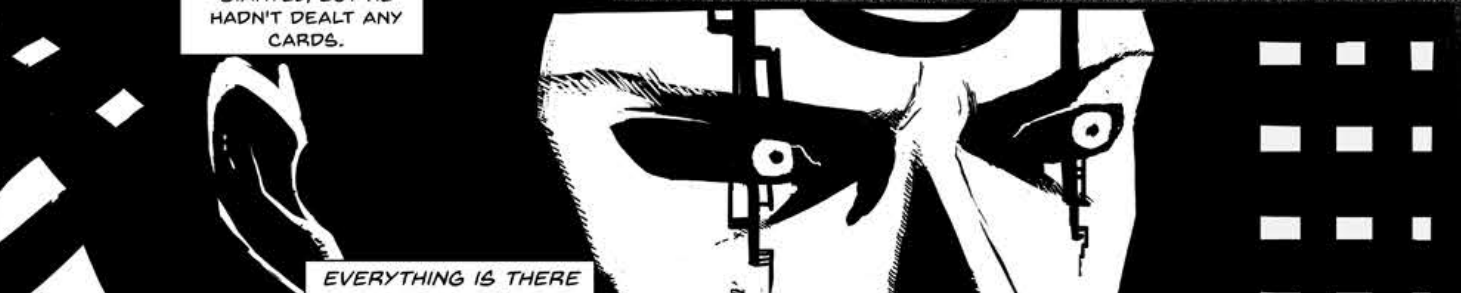


READY
TO TAKE THE
BULLET? A DEAL
IS A DEAL.

THE BULLET.
AN UNDEFINED
THREAT. ALMOST
AS IF IT WERE...
A RIDDLE.

FOUR EIGHTS.
TWO ON THE
TABLE, TWO IN
HIS HAND. JUST
ONE CARD
DRAWN.

THE GAME... HE
WOULDN'T LET US
GET UP BECAUSE THE
GAME HAD ALREADY
STARTED, BUT HE
HADN'T DEALT ANY
CARDS.



EVERYTHING IS THERE
TO BE SEEN. IS THE
POKER GAME PART OF
ANOTHER GAME?



I DON'T
LIKE TO BE
LIED TO,
FRANCIS.

IS THE BULLET
PART OF THAT
GAME?

WAIT... WHAT DID
ESSEX JUST SAY?

HM? ARE YOU
IMPLYING THAT
I'M CHEATING,
ESSEX?



NO, NOT TALKING
ABOUT THAT. YOU
LAUGH WHEN I CALL
YOU A TRAITOR,
BUT...

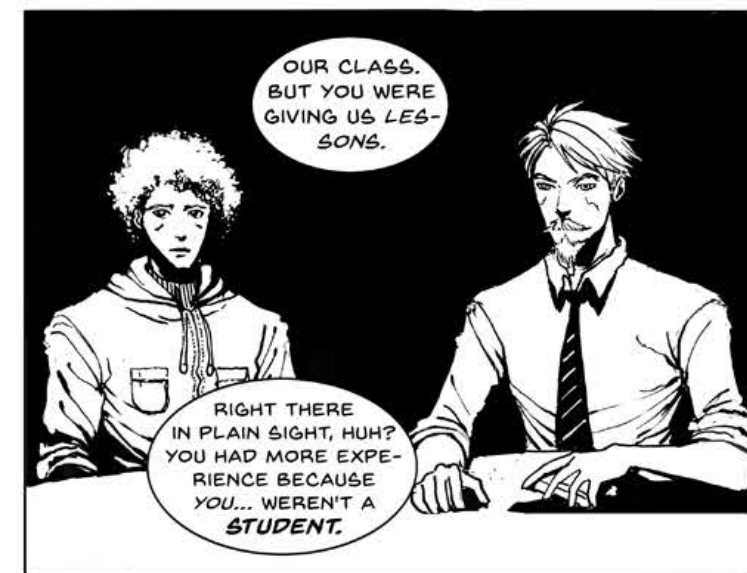
...I'M REMEM-
BERING ALL
THESE MO-
MENTS...



I JUST REALIZED... YOU WERE ALWAYS GIVING US LESSONS, GUIDING US IN OUR STUDIES. AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING OF IT BECAUSE, AFTER ALL, YOU WERE OLDER THAN US...

...BUT, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, WHAT DOES AGE HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR LEVEL OF MAGICAL KNOWLEDGE?

YOU WERE IN OUR CLASS.



OUR CLASS. BUT YOU WERE GIVING US LESSONS.

RIGHT THERE IN PLAIN SIGHT, HUH? YOU HAD MORE EXPERIENCE BECAUSE YOU... WEREN'T A STUDENT.



AND YOU, CRAIG. COLLABORATING WITH HIM.

?
WHAT D-DO I...

DON'T PLAY DUMB!



I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO, BUT I HEAR THINGS, YOU ASSHOLES! YOU DON'T FOOL ME!



I'M HEARING FOOTSTEPS!

NEXT ROUND.

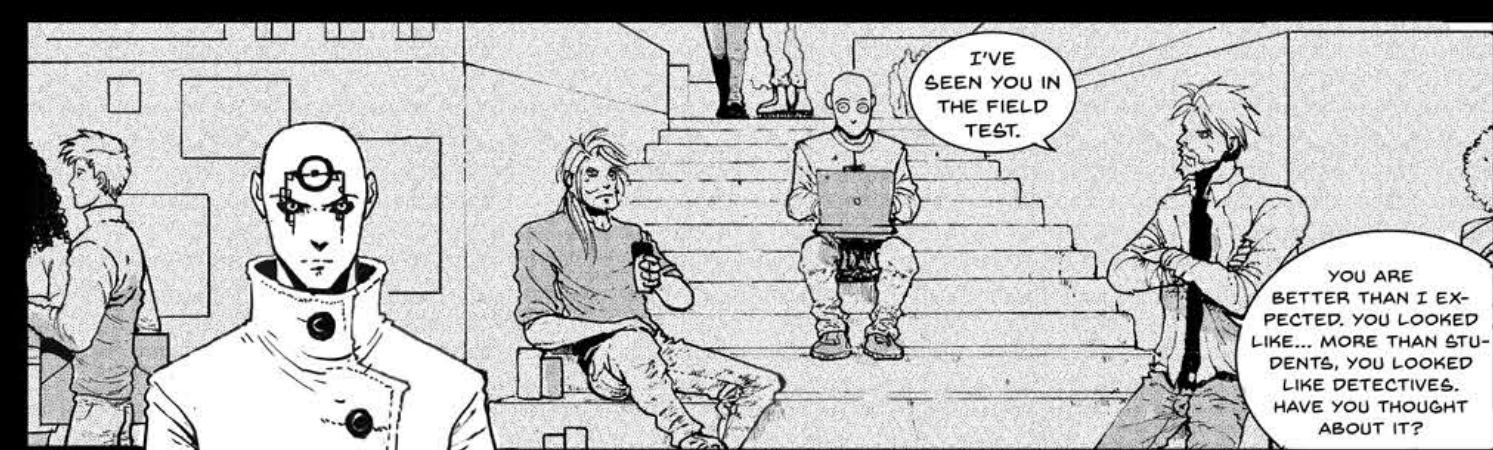
WE COULD NOT GET UP FROM THE TABLE BEFORE THE GAME HAD STARTED.

IN ORDER TO MAKE PEOPLE WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN A GAME, YOU NEED TO MAKE WINNING ATTRACTIVE...

...OR MAKE THEM FEAR DEFEAT. THE THIRD DOOR.

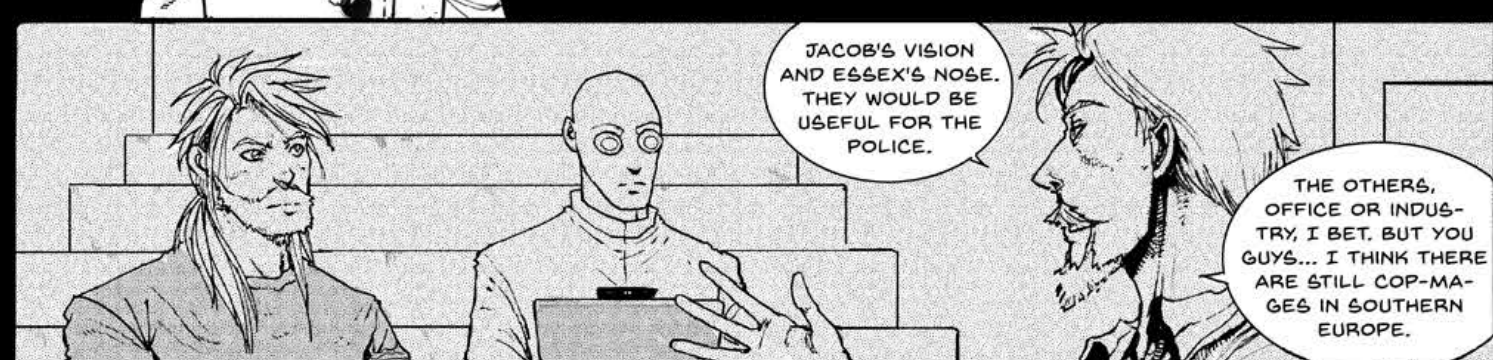
"YOU TWO HAVE TALENT".

THE WAY HE'S TREATING ESSEX. THE BULLET. THE THIRD DOOR.



I'VE SEEN YOU IN THE FIELD TEST.

YOU ARE BETTER THAN I EXPECTED. YOU LOOKED LIKE... MORE THAN STUDENTS, YOU LOOKED LIKE DETECTIVES. HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT IT?



JACOB'S VISION AND ESSEX'S NOSE. THEY WOULD BE USEFUL FOR THE POLICE.

THE OTHERS, OFFICE OR INDUSTRY, I BET. BUT YOU GUYS... I THINK THERE ARE STILL COP-MAGES IN SOUTHERN EUROPE.



"YOU BOTH SPEAK SPANISH, DON'T YOU?"

...I THINK...

...THAT THE GAME WE ARE PLAYING IS NOT WHAT WE THOUGHT IT WAS. EVERYTHING IS THERE TO BE SEEN...



...AND THE TRAPS ARE PART OF IT. AND HIS THREATS... ARE THE QUESTION MARK OF A QUESTION NEVER UTTERED.

WHAT IS THE GAME WE ARE PLAYING?

JACOB. CARD?

JACOB.

HEY.

I ALMOST GOT IT. IT'S WHAT ESSEX SAYS: HE WAS ALWAYS GUIDING US.



HM?



WHO...?

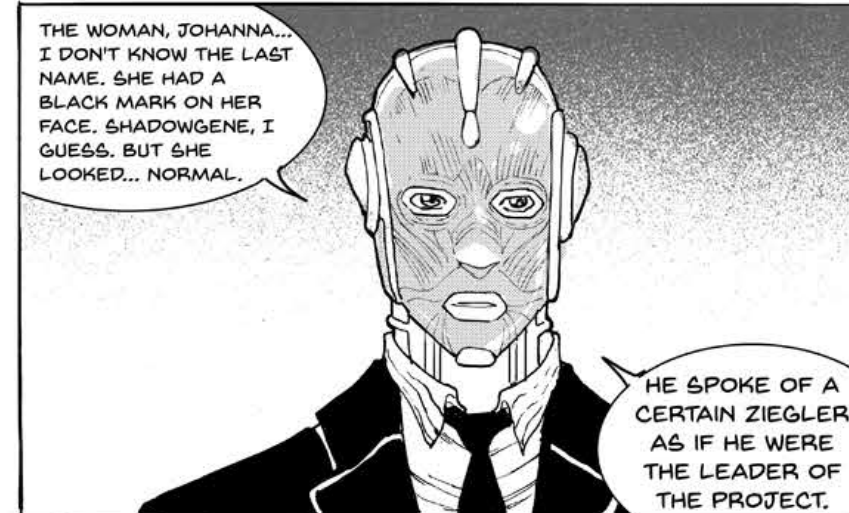
MY MEMORIES... ARE A BIT SCATTERED. THEY WERE MANIPULATED, I THINK...

...BUT THE PROJECT'S SUB-ORDINATE WAS A WOMAN, AND THE LEADER...



HE'S GIVING ME INFORMATION AND A PROFILE OF WHO MAY BE BEHIND THE SHADOWGENE PROJECT.

WHAT?



THE WOMAN, JOHANNA... I DON'T KNOW THE LAST NAME. SHE HAD A BLACK MARK ON HER FACE. SHADOWGENE, I GUESS. BUT SHE LOOKED... NORMAL.

HE SPOKE OF A CERTAIN ZIEGLER AS IF HE WERE THE LEADER OF THE PROJECT.



THESE ARE THE MOST RELEVANT BASES THAT I REMEMBER. IT ISN'T MUCH AND IT'S PROBABLY NOT RELIABLE, BUT...



ADAM, HAVE YOU FOUND SOME FRIEND IN THIS...?



HEY! COME, SIT DOWN. WE'RE IN LUCK.



THIS IS JOAKIM, AN EBI AGENT...



...AND SHADOWGENE EXPERIMENT.

OH.



SO IT'S TRUE. THIS IS A NEUTRAL ZONE. WE THOUGHT IT WAS DISINFORMATION... A TRAP TO CAPTURE CABALISTS.

HMM. WELL, THIS IS CONVENIENT FOR THE EBI. BUT NO, THE PLACE ISN'T A TRAP.



NO OFFENSE, BUT... WHY ARE YOU HELPING US? GIVEN YOUR CONDITION... THE EBI IS JUST ABOUT THE ONLY PLACE THAT CAN TREAT YOU IF YOU NEED CARE.



FUCK THEM. DON'T YOU SEE MY FACE?

ALL BECAUSE OF A JAW SURGERY.

WHAT?

THEY TRACK PEOPLE THEY CONSIDER TO BE CANDIDATES. ONE OF THEIR FAVORITE WAYS OF KIDNAPPING IS TO WAIT UNTIL YOU NEED SURGERY...

PRETEND YOU DIE DURING THE OPERATION.

EXACTLY.

EVERY DAY, AFTER THE
BUCKETLOAD OF SLEEPING
PILLS, I THANK GOD THAT
MY FAMILY THINKS I'M
DEAD.

THAT'S WHY... YES,
THE EBI IS THE ONLY
THING I HAVE LEFT,
BUT... THE EBI CAN
LIVE WITHOUT THE
FUCKING SHADOW-
GENE.

WHEN I SAW
YOU... IT WAS LIKE
A GIFT FROM
HEAVEN.

YOU HAVE BECOME
FAMOUS, YOU KNOW,
AMONG OUR PEOPLE.

REALLY?
PEOPLE
KNOW ME?

YES. THE THREE
THAT YOU SAVED RE-
CENTLY, YOUR ATTACKS
TO THE LABS... THE AS-
SAULT ON THE BASE IN
FRANCE.

THE GIRL YOU RES-
CUED... IS IT TRUE
THAT SHE WAS
YOUR EX?

HEY, HEY. YOU SURE
YOU WANT TO DO THIS?
UNLESS YOU'RE LYING
TO US...

...YOU ARE
RISKING YOUR
LIFE.

MY LIFE?

HAH.

LOOK AT
COLE. FULL
HOUSE.

62 POINTS!
WHO WOULD'VE
THOUGHT.

CRAIG 68,
JACOB 70.

AND
ESSEX... A
VERY WORTHY
17 POINTS.

AND, FINALLY,
MYSELF. 85
POINTS.

DO WE
NEED TO CONTI-
NUE? WE CAN, IF
YOU WANT, BUT...

...YOU'VE **LOST**. I'LL BE
BENEVOLENT. I GIVE YOU TWO
OPTIONS: GO ON 'TIL THE END,
LOSE, AND EAT THE BLACK
BULLET, WHOSE EFFECTS
YOU DON'T KNOW...

...OR SURRENDER
NOW, IN WHICH CASE I
WOULD USE MY CONTACTS
IN THE PARANORMAL EBI
TO HAVE YOU RECRUITED
UNDER SURVEILLANCE. A
SEMI-AMNESTY.

YOU CAN DISCUSS
IT. WITHOUT LEAV-
ING THE TABLE, OF
COURSE.

NO.

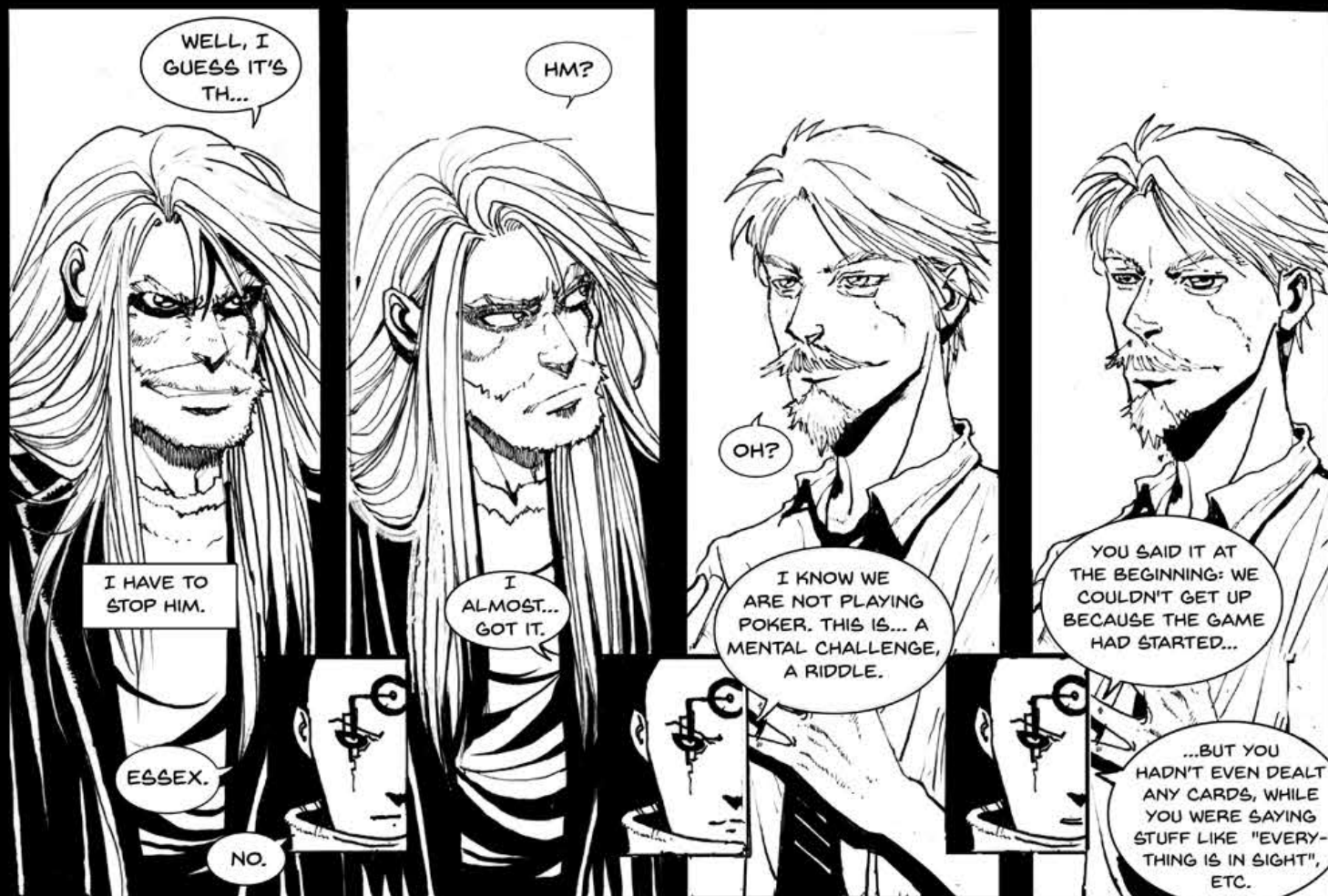
IS THIS WHAT HE
WANTED? HE KNOWS
WE'RE NOT GOING TO
GIVE IN, RIGHT?

HE HASN'T
EVEN SAID WHAT
THE BULLET IS.
HOW CAN WE
ASSESS...?

I'VE STARTED TO
SEE THE PLAN, BUT
I STILL...

IS HE REALLY
THREATENING US?

ESSEX'S GOING TO
ATTACK. BUT THE
THIRD DOOR... WE
DON'T KNOW WHAT
IT CAN DO.



WELL, I GUESS IT'S TH...

HM?

I HAVE TO STOP HIM.

I ALMOST... GOT IT.

ESSEX.

NO.

OH?

I KNOW WE ARE NOT PLAYING POKER. THIS IS... A MENTAL CHALLENGE, A RIDDLE.

YOU SAID IT AT THE BEGINNING: WE COULDN'T GET UP BECAUSE THE GAME HAD STARTED...

...BUT YOU HADN'T EVEN DEALT ANY CARDS, WHILE YOU WERE SAYING STUFF LIKE "EVERYTHING IS IN SIGHT", ETC.

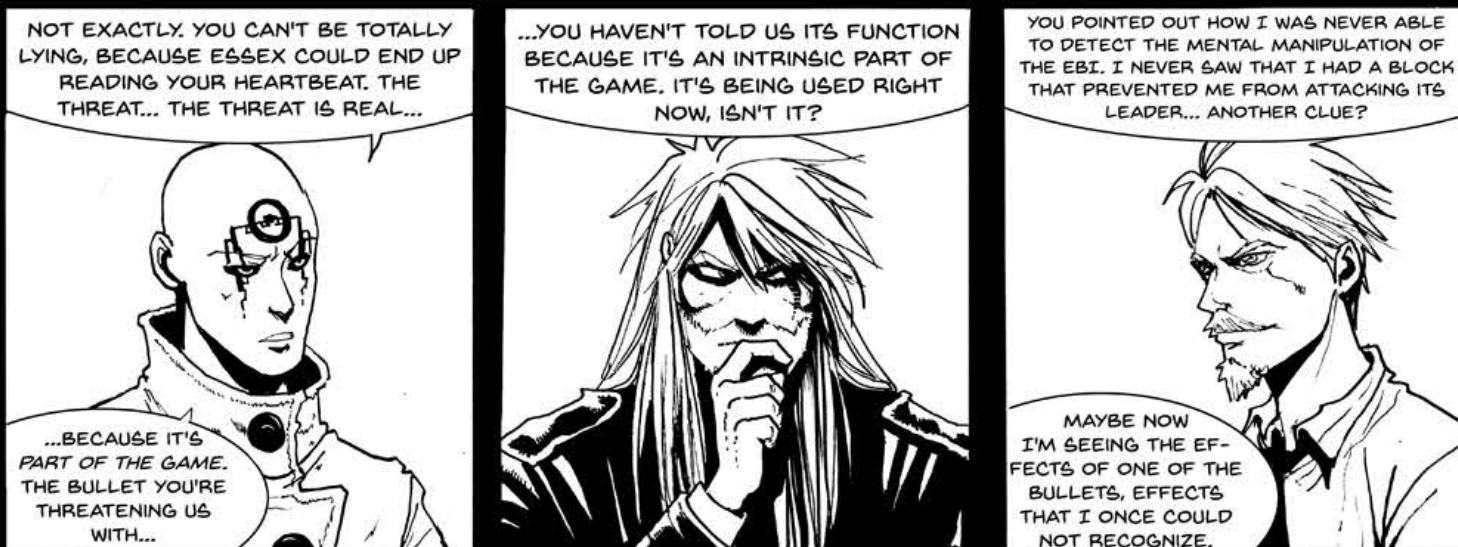


YOU CREATE A NEUTRAL ZONE SO THAT MULTIPLE FACTIONS CAN COME HERE...

...AND WE ARE THE ONLY ONES TO RECEIVE THREATS?

SOMETHING'S OFF.

YOU THINK I'M BLUFFING?



NOT EXACTLY. YOU CAN'T BE TOTALLY LYING, BECAUSE ESSEX COULD END UP READING YOUR HEARTBEAT. THE THREAT... THE THREAT IS REAL...

...YOU HAVEN'T TOLD US ITS FUNCTION BECAUSE IT'S AN INTRINSIC PART OF THE GAME. IT'S BEING USED RIGHT NOW, ISN'T IT?

YOU POINTED OUT HOW I WAS NEVER ABLE TO DETECT THE MENTAL MANIPULATION OF THE EBI. I NEVER SAW THAT I HAD A BLOCK THAT PREVENTED ME FROM ATTACKING ITS LEADER... ANOTHER CLUE?

MAYBE NOW I'M SEEING THE EFFECTS OF ONE OF THE BULLETS, EFFECTS THAT I ONCE COULD NOT RECOGNIZE.



AND I WONDER... COLE...

NO. NOT YET. STALL.

MAYBE THIS WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A... PUZZLE YOU WANTED US TO SOLVE.

FILL THE AIR WITH WORDS. THAT WAY...

THAT'S WHY YOU ALLOWED CHEATING. IF THE CARD GAME WAS WHAT MATTERED, YOU WOULDN'T ALLOW THE RULES TO BE BROKEN.

...IF I GET A PIECE OF INFORMATION

IT WILL LEAD ME TO ANOTHER AND THEN ANOTHER AND

I WILL END UP WITH THE WHOLE PICTURE, THE SOLUTION...



THAT'S WHY HE'S HERE. HE'S ANOTHER PIECE OF THE PUZZLE. HE'S THE ODD ONE OUT:

TALK AS IF YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING.

WE ARE ALL STUDENTS OF THE MAGIC UNIVERSITY OF FRANKFURT, EXCEPT FOR HIM.

...THE SAME WAY YOU USED THE BLACK BULLET ON US SO THAT WE CAN'T ATTACK FREI.

AH. PERCEPTIVE, JACOB. YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT SEVERAL THINGS: IT WAS DELIBERATE NOT TO MENTION WHAT THE BLACK BULLET IS, JUST AS THE PRESENCE OF COLE WAS, IN A WAY, A CLUE.

TWO PROBLEMS, HOWEVER.

YOU STILL DON'T DETECT BULLETS WELL. THE BLACK BULLET DOESN'T HAVE A SMALL "TRACE". IF YOU ONLY SEE A SMALL TRAIL... NO WONDER YOU NEVER SAW THE ONE I LODGED IN YOU.

AND ALTHOUGH I AGREE THAT POKER WASN'T THE REAL GAME...

...FINDING OUT HOW I WAS CHEATING WAS YOUR ONLY CHANCE TO WIN. AND YOU DIDN'T.



C'MON

THINK

FIT ALL THE CLUES...

TSK.



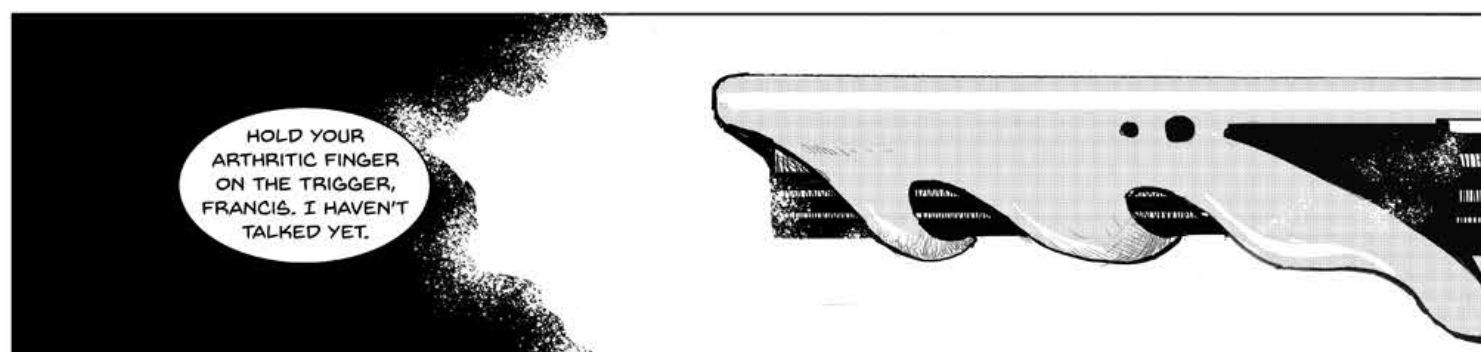
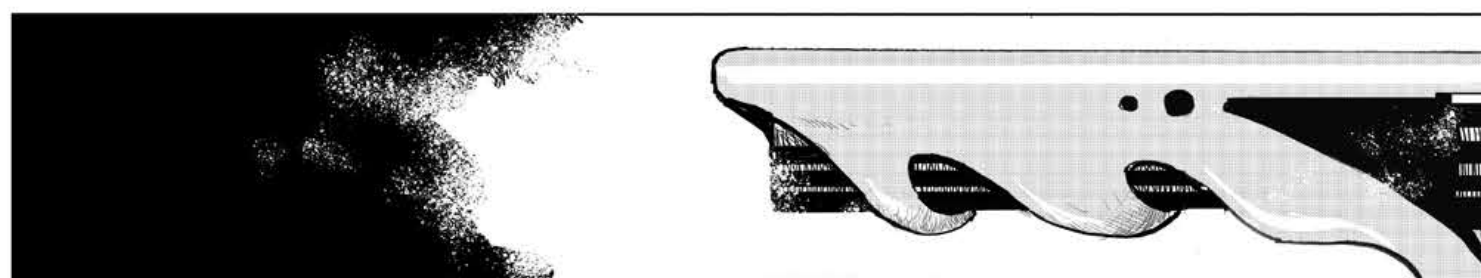
LET'S DO IT QUICK, THEN.

WE CAN CONTINUE PLAYING...

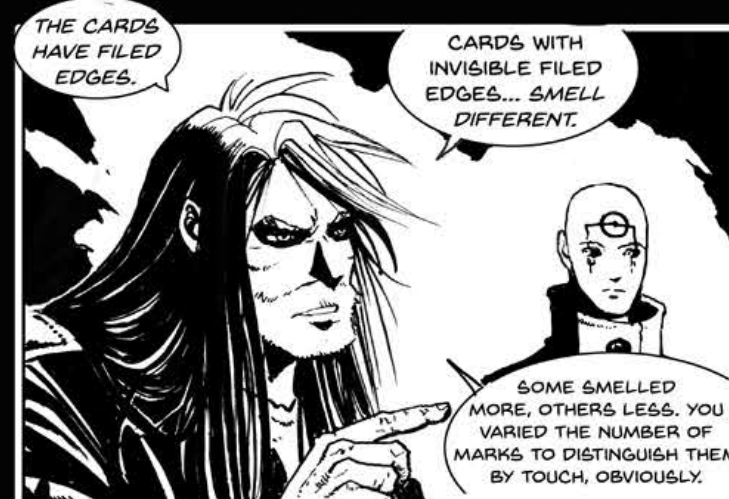
FRANCIS!

YES, WE COULD.

BUT SEEING HOW YOU'RE SO FAR FROM THE SOLUTION, JACOB... WOULD BE TEDIOUS TO DRAG THIS OUT WHEN I KNOW THE OUTCOME.



HOLD YOUR ARTHRITIC FINGER ON THE TRIGGER, FRANCIS. I HAVEN'T TALKED YET.



THE CARDS HAVE FILED EDGES.

CARDS WITH INVISIBLE FILED EDGES... SMELL DIFFERENT.

SOME SMELLED MORE, OTHERS LESS. YOU VARIED THE NUMBER OF MARKS TO DISTINGUISH THEM BY TOUCH, OBVIOUSLY.



THAT REMINDED ME... A FRIEND OF MINE, HE LIKES THIS "MAGIC" STUFF, HE SHOWED ME VIDEOS OF PENN AND TELLER, TAMARIZ, DAORTIZ...

HE SHOWED ME A VIDEO OF A... HE WAS A BLIND GUY, WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

THIS GUY... HE MANIPULATED THE CARDS AS HE WISHED.

HE IDENTIFIED THE CARDS BY TOUCH AND COULD MOVE THEM WITH INTENTIONALITY. HE WOULD MAKE YOU THINK HE WAS GIVING YOU THE FIRST CARD IN THE DECK, BUT HE WAS ACTUALLY GIVING YOU THE SECOND ONE, ETC.

I DON'T KNOW ALL THE TRICKS, BUT BASICALLY, IF THE DUDE WANTED TO GIVE YOU A TWO, YOU'D GET A TWO.



SEEING HOW YOU HANDLE THE CARDS... THE HAND GESTURES... YOU'VE CLEARLY LEARNED A TRICK OR TWO. HOWEVER... SOMETHING DIDN'T ADD UP.

I KEPT HEARING THOSE NOISES... THAT'S WHAT THREW ME OFF. IF YOU CAN MANIPULATE THE CARDS, WHAT WAS THE POINT OF THE NOISES?



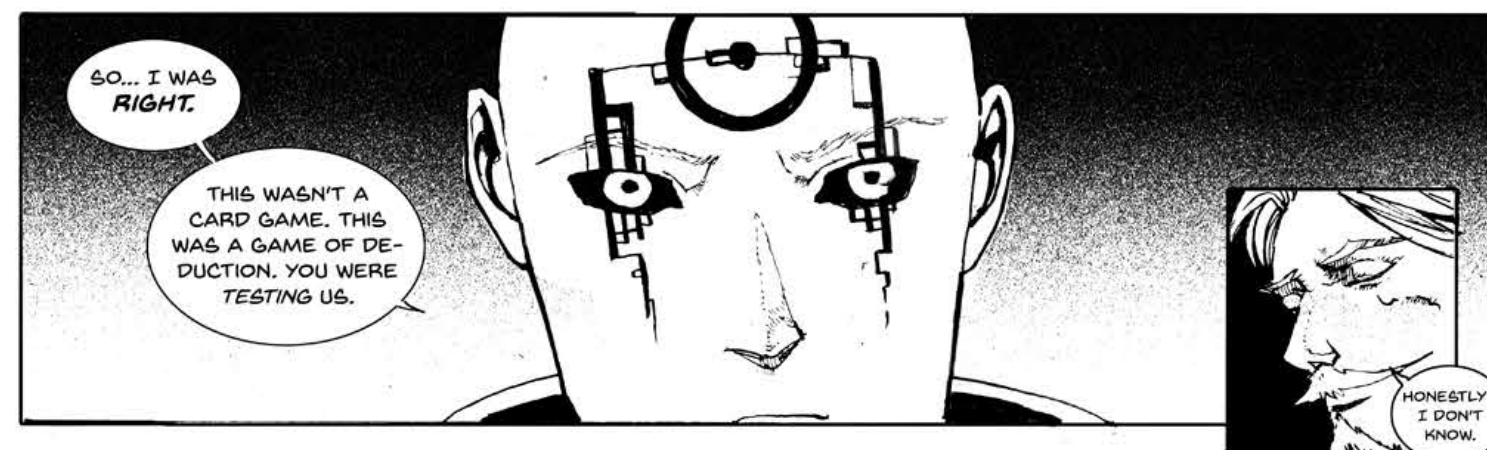
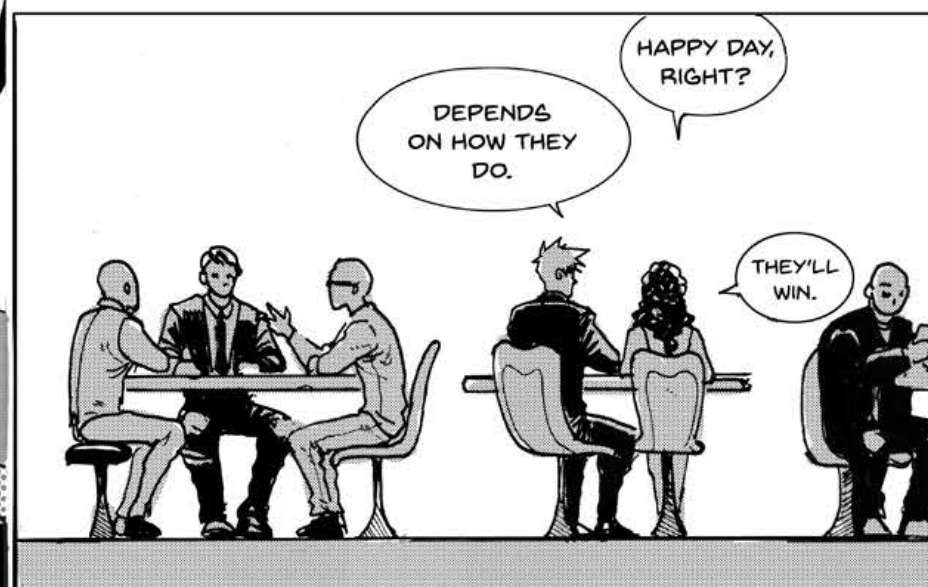
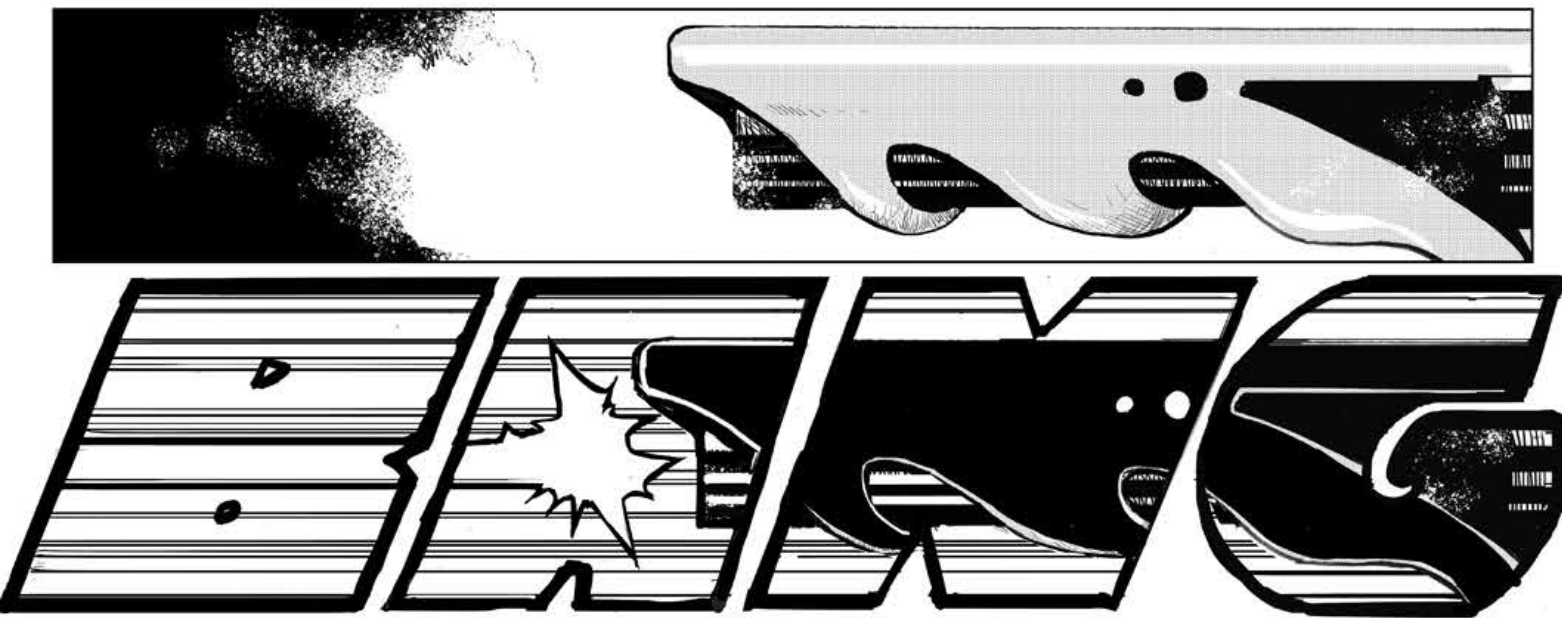
JACOB MADE ME UNDERSTAND. I REALLY THOUGHT WE WERE ALL PLAYING INDIVIDUALLY... BUT THAT'S NOT THE CASE.

I THOUGHT COLE WAS JUST A MORON, BUT WHEN JACOB SAID HE'S IN TRANCE, I GOT IT. HE AND CRAIG ARE PUPPETS -- CRAIG WILLINGLY, SINCE HE'S WHORING HIMSELF FOR A STUPID JOB.

THAT'S THE SHOE THING YOU'VE BEEN DOING. YOUR SIGNAL FOR THEM TO ASK FOR CARDS...



...BECAUSE YOU'RE PATHETIC AT CARD MANIPULATION AND YOU NEED EXTRA PEOPLE TO MOVE THE CARDS AROUND AND NOT GIVE US GOOD HANDS. MY THEORY IS THAT ORIGINALLY YOU DIDN'T WANT TO INVOLVE CRAIG, SINCE HIS REWARD INVOLVES ASKING THE FBI FOR FAVORS, BUT COLE IS TOO INCONSISTENT; I DON'T REMEMBER HIM ASKING FOR CARDS RELIABLY...



THE TRUTH IS THAT I'M NOT SURE MYSELF. INITIALLY, THIS WAS MY PLAN TO FORCE YOU TO COME TO YOUR SENSES. I SHOOT THE BLACK BULLET AT YOU, WHICH WOULD TEMPORARILY TAKE AWAY YOUR **FREE WILL...**

...AND I WOULD MAKE SOME KIND OF DEAL WITH THE EBI. AT LEAST THAT WAY, YOU WOULD BE SAFE FROM YOUR OWN STUPIDITY.

BUT... THAT WOULD MEAN DOING FOR THE SECOND TIME SOMETHING I DIDN'T LIKE THE FIRST TIME. AND... THE MORE I THOUGHT ABOUT IT... IN MY DAY, NO ONE QUESTIONED THE EBI. I WONDERED, WHAT IF SOMEONE HAD GIVEN ME A **CHANCE?**



TO BUILD A WORLD WHERE WE DON'T NEED SHELTERS PAID FOR WITH BLOOD TO LIVE IN PEACE. I'M NOT AN IDIOT, ESSEX. I REALIZE HOW PATHETIC AND SMALL MY LEGACY IS.

NO ONE TOLD ME THAT I COULD ASPIRE TO MORE. MAYBE THIS CASTLE IS ALL THERE IS. MAYBE NOT.

MADE ME THINK HOW MANY "OLD GUYS" LIKE ME DISGUISE THEIR SHORTCOMINGS AND FAILURES AS LESSONS THAT THE NEW GENERATIONS NEED TO INTERNALIZE...

...LIKE A SUR-REPTITIOUS ATTEMPT TO BRING OTHERS DOWN SO THAT THEY WON'T PROVE YOU WRONG.

YOUR PATH IS... DANGEROUS. BUT **HONORABLE.**

A CHANCE FOR WHAT?

SO, MY GIFT TO YOU: 10,000 EUROS IN CASINO CREDIT.

RELAX A LITTLE! YOU'RE NOT IN DANGER. SAVOR THE MOMENT...

...SINCE I STILL CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE YOU GUYS REGULARLY WITHOUT THE EBI GETTING PISSY.

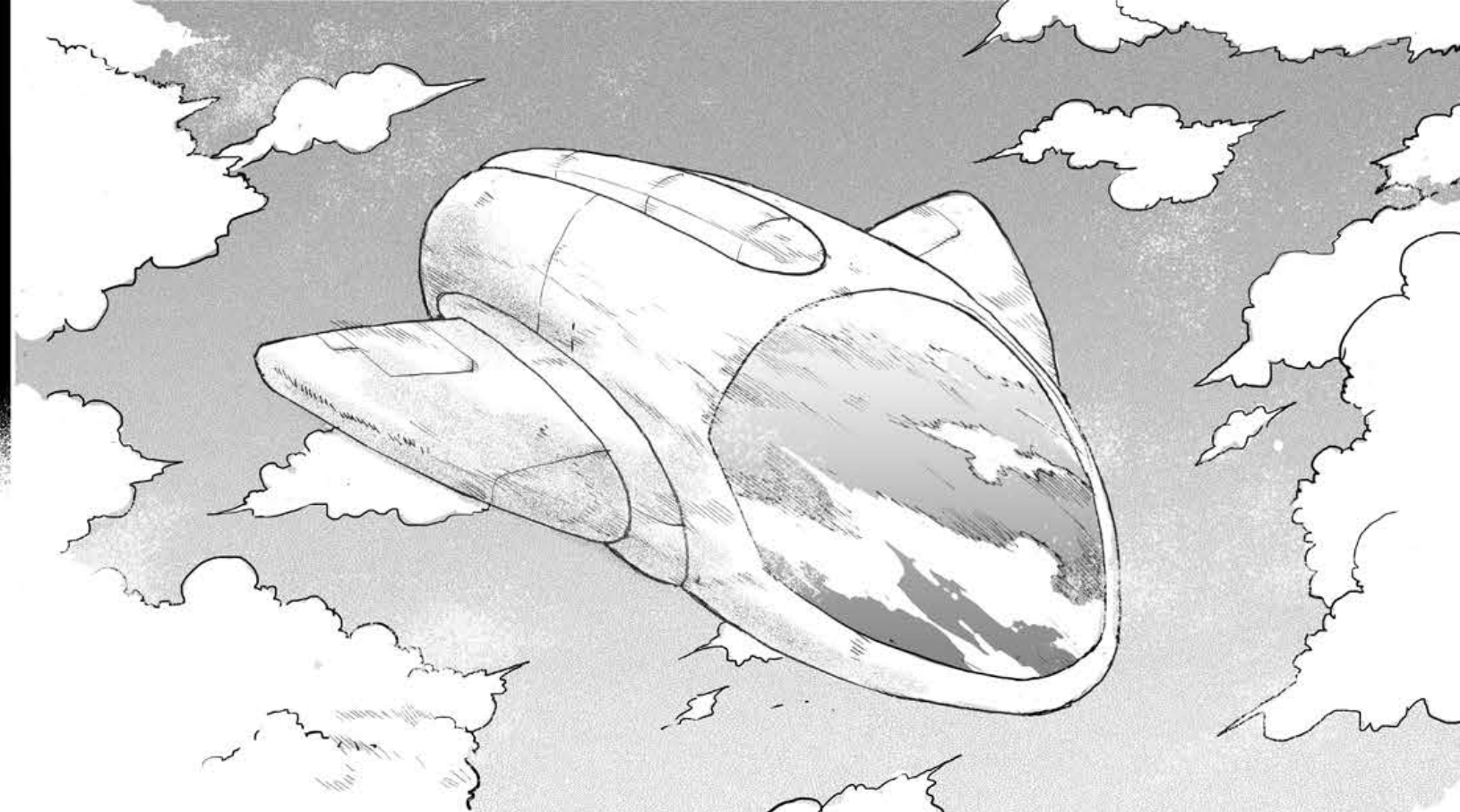
AS IF I WANTED TO COME BACK HERE ANYWAY, OLD MAN.

IF ONE DAY YOU EVICT THEM FROM YOUR RECTUM, MAYBE WE WOULD STOP BY AGAIN. SOMEONE WILL HAVE TO CHANGE YOUR DIAPERS.

WHEN DOES HE RECOVER?

IN 24 HOURS.

IT'S MY MOST POWERFUL BULLET, JACOB.



AND IT WAS YOUR **FUCKING VIDEOS** THAT GAVE ME THE IDEA!

CHARIOT?

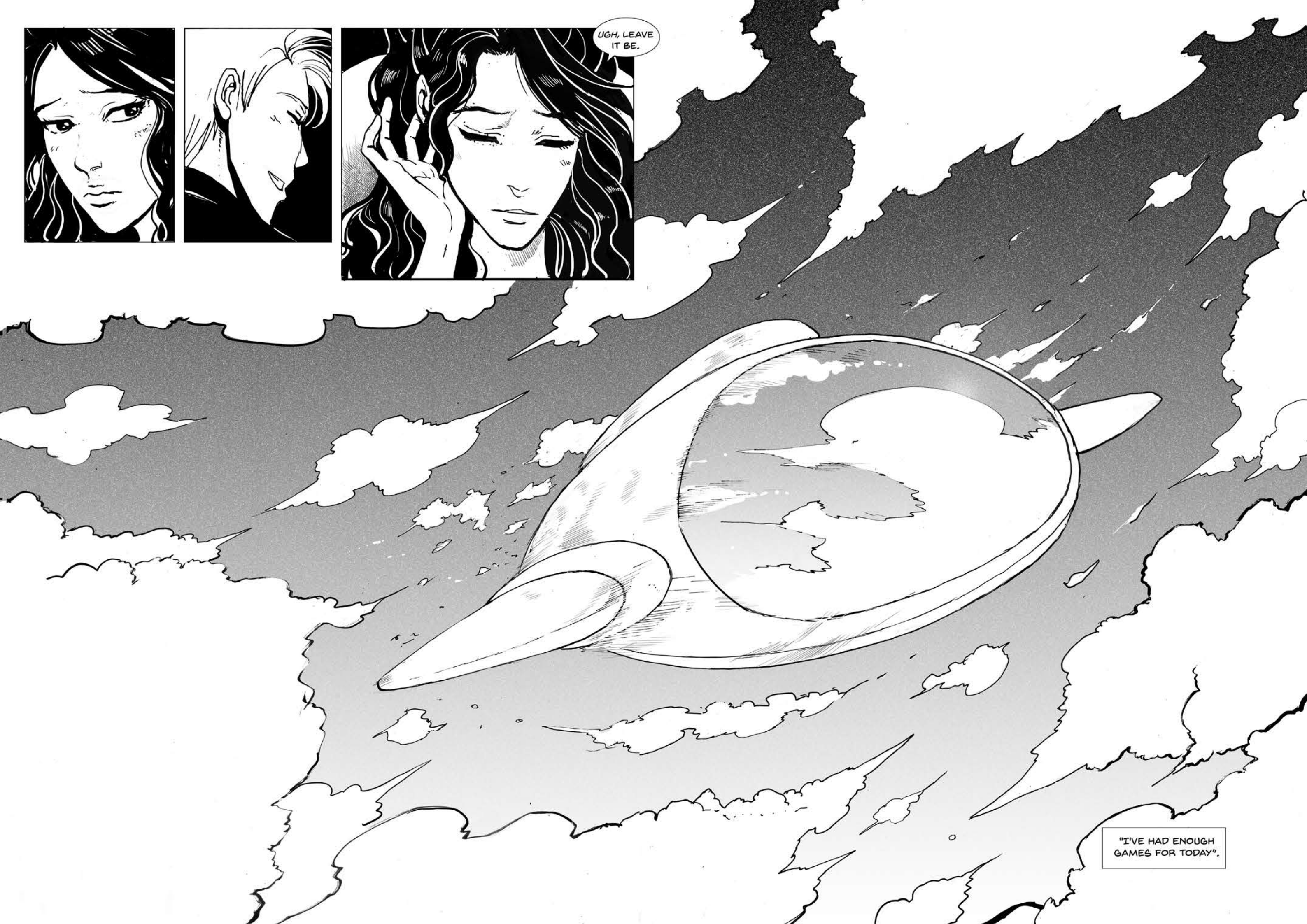
YES. DID YOU MAKE THE DECISION?

SO?





UGH, LEAVE
IT BE.



"I'VE HAD ENOUGH
GAMES FOR TODAY".

...TO BE CONTINUED

UPSURGE IS AN ALMOST MONTHLY (40 DAYS) SERIES THAT STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO TO REACH THE INTENDED ENDING. HOWEVER, WE CAN'T KEEP DOING IT FOR "FREE" INDEFINITELY.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN HELPING US WHILE ALSO GETTING **EARLY ACCESS** TO AN ISSUE, **PREVIEWS** OF FUTURE EPISODES, OR **VIDEOS** AND TEXTS ABOUT OUR CREATIVE PROCESS, PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING US THROUGH PATREON AT THE 3\$ PLEDGE LEVEL (LINK BELOW). IF WE HAVE ENOUGH HELP, WE'LL TURN UPSURGE INTO A **MONTHLY** SERIES. THANK YOU!

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