

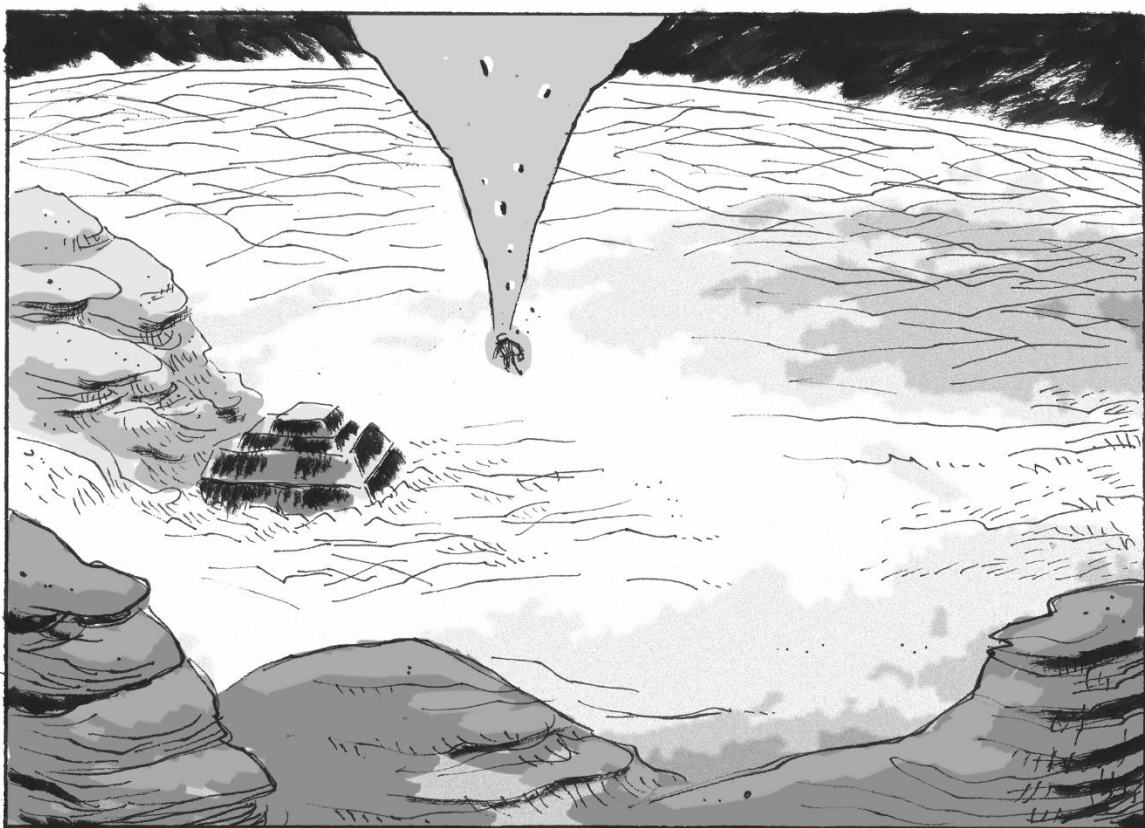
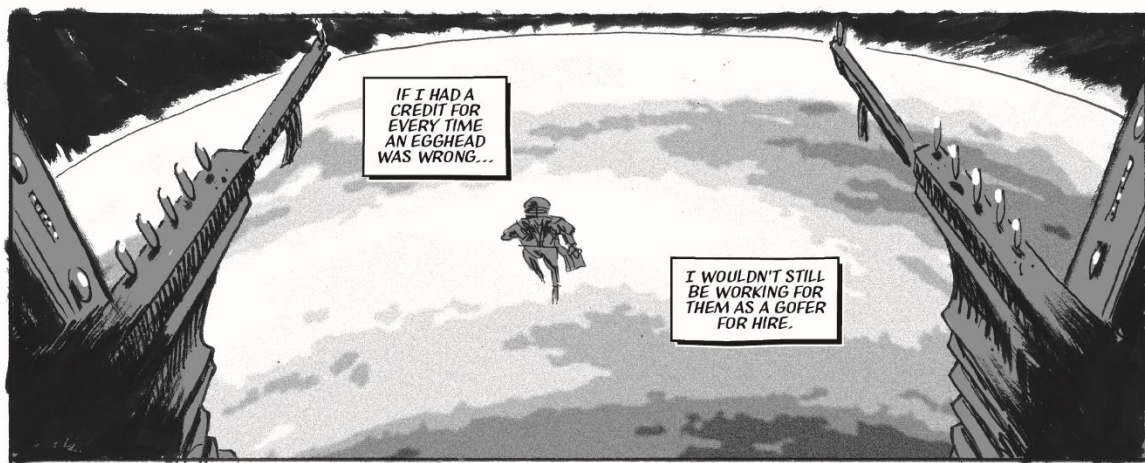
CRYPT ZERO

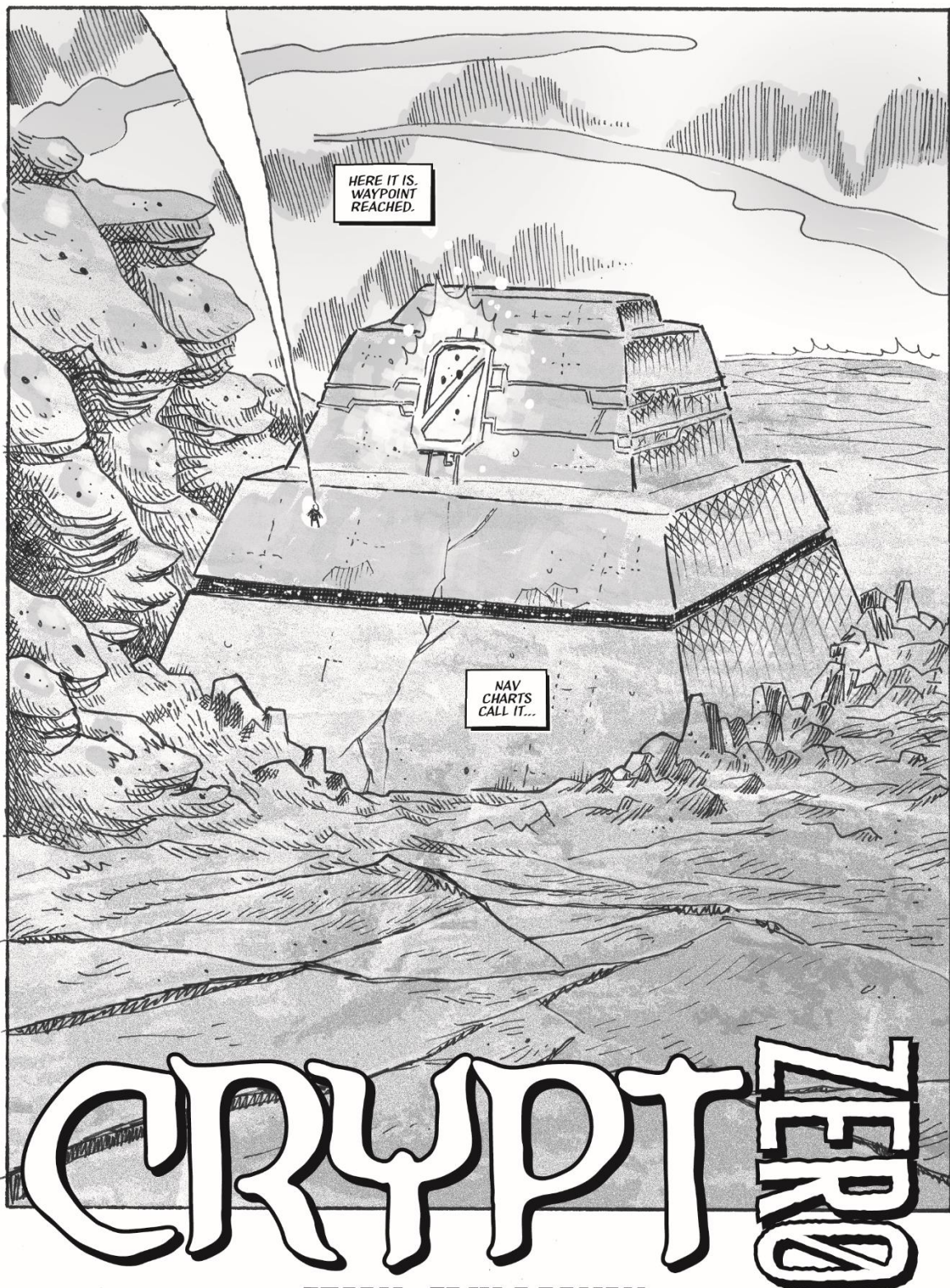
RADVON

CROONENBORGH'S

MYERS



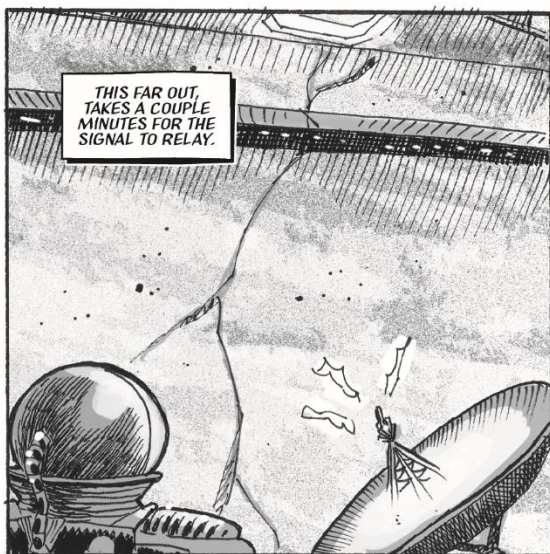




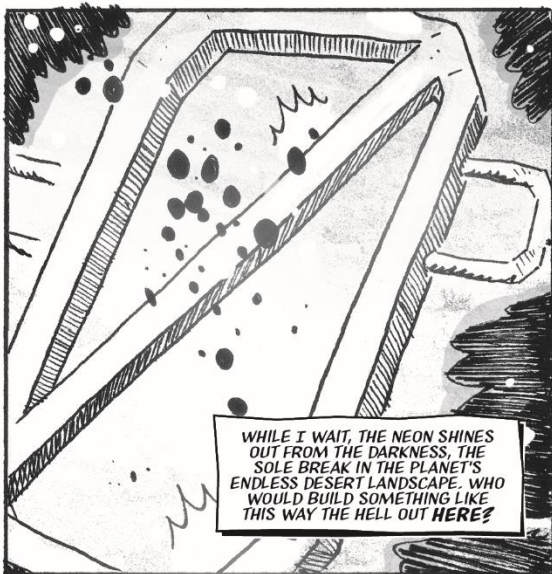
STORY: ERIK RADVON
ART: ROB CROONENBORGH'S
LETTERS: MICAH MYERS



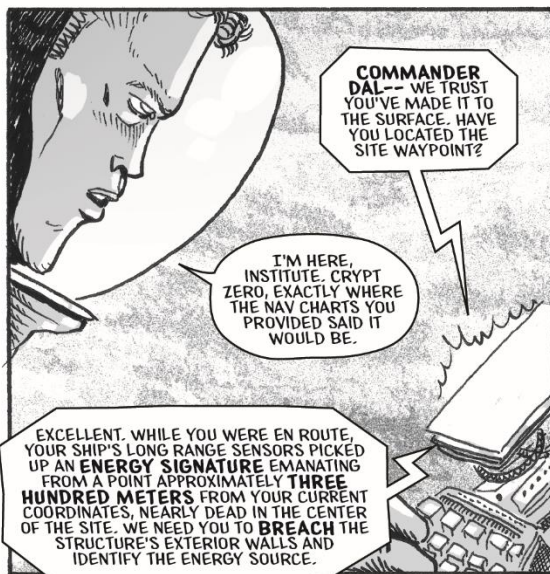
EGGHEADS
REQUIRE THAT
I CHECK-IN
UPON ARRIVAL.



THIS FAR OUT,
TAKES A COUPLE
MINUTES FOR THE
SIGNAL TO RELAY.



WHILE I WAIT, THE NEON SHINES
OUT FROM THE DARKNESS, THE
SOLE BREAK IN THE PLANET'S
ENDLESS DESERT LANDSCAPE. WHO
WOULD BUILD SOMETHING LIKE
THIS WAY THE HELL OUT **HERE?**



**COMMANDER
DAL--** WE TRUST
YOU'VE MADE IT TO
THE SURFACE. HAVE
YOU LOCATED THE
SITE WAYPOINT?

I'M HERE,
INSTITUTE. CRYPT
ZERO, EXACTLY WHERE
THE NAV CHARTS YOU
PROVIDED SAID IT
WOULD BE.

EXCELLENT. WHILE YOU WERE EN ROUTE,
YOUR SHIP'S LONG RANGE SENSORS PICKED
UP AN **ENERGY SIGNATURE** EMANATING
FROM A POINT APPROXIMATELY **THREE
HUNDRED METERS** FROM YOUR CURRENT
COORDINATES, NEARLY DEAD IN THE CENTER
OF THE SITE. WE NEED YOU TO **BREACH** THE
STRUCTURE'S EXTERIOR WALLS AND
IDENTIFY THE ENERGY SOURCE.



INSTITUTE, THIS
STRUCTURE HASN'T
HAD A BUILDING CODE
INSPECTION ANYTIME IN
THE LAST TWO THOUSAND
YEARS. I BREACH AN EXTERIOR
WALL AND THIS THING VERY
WELL MIGHT COME DOWN
RIGHT ON TOP OF ME. CAN'T
YOU SEND IN **DRONES** TO
TAKE IT FROM HERE?
I'LL INSTALL A FEW
HOMING BEACONS
AND--



COME, COME, COMMANDER-- THIS SECTOR
IS **FAR** TOO REMOTE FOR MOUNTING CASUAL
EXPEDITIONS, EVEN ROBOTIC ONES. SENDING YOU
HAS ALREADY COST THE INSTITUTE A **FORTUNE**.
WE AGREED TO YOUR RATHER GENEROUS FEES
PRECISELY BECAUSE DRONES DON'T MEET THE
DEMANDS THIS PROJECT CALLS FOR. ONLY A
HUMAN RESOURCE WILL DO.

WELL, AT
LEAST I'VE
GOT THAT
GOING FOR
ME.

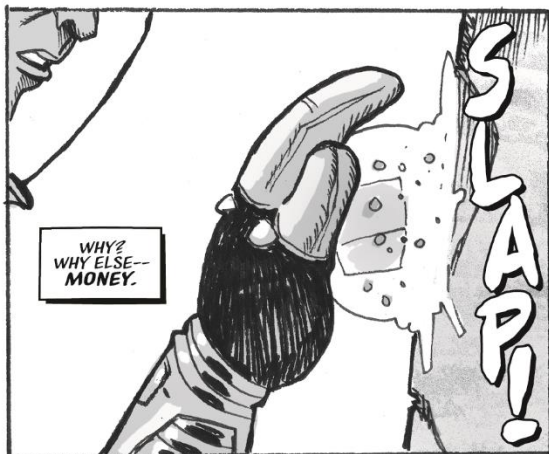
WE NEED YOU TO DO
WHAT WE PAY YOU TO DO,
COMMANDER DAL. WE
NEED YOU TO INITIATE A
TAG-AND-LOCATE ON THAT
ENERGY SOURCE.



DAMNED INSTITUTE.
THEY'RE ALWAYS GREAT
FOR CHANGING TERMS
ON THE FLY.

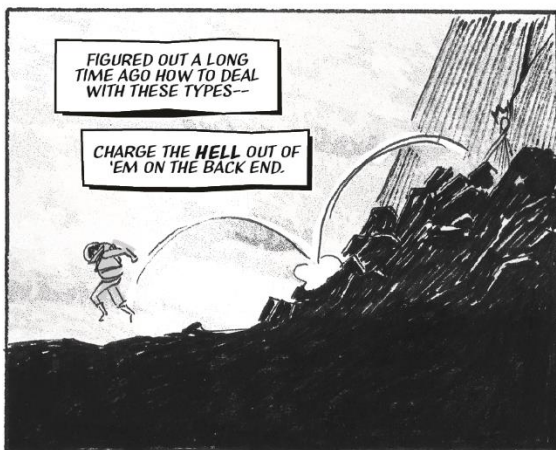


I COULD POINT OUT
THAT MY CONTRACT
CALLS FOR EXTERIOR
RECON ONLY, BUT I
BITE MY TONGUE.



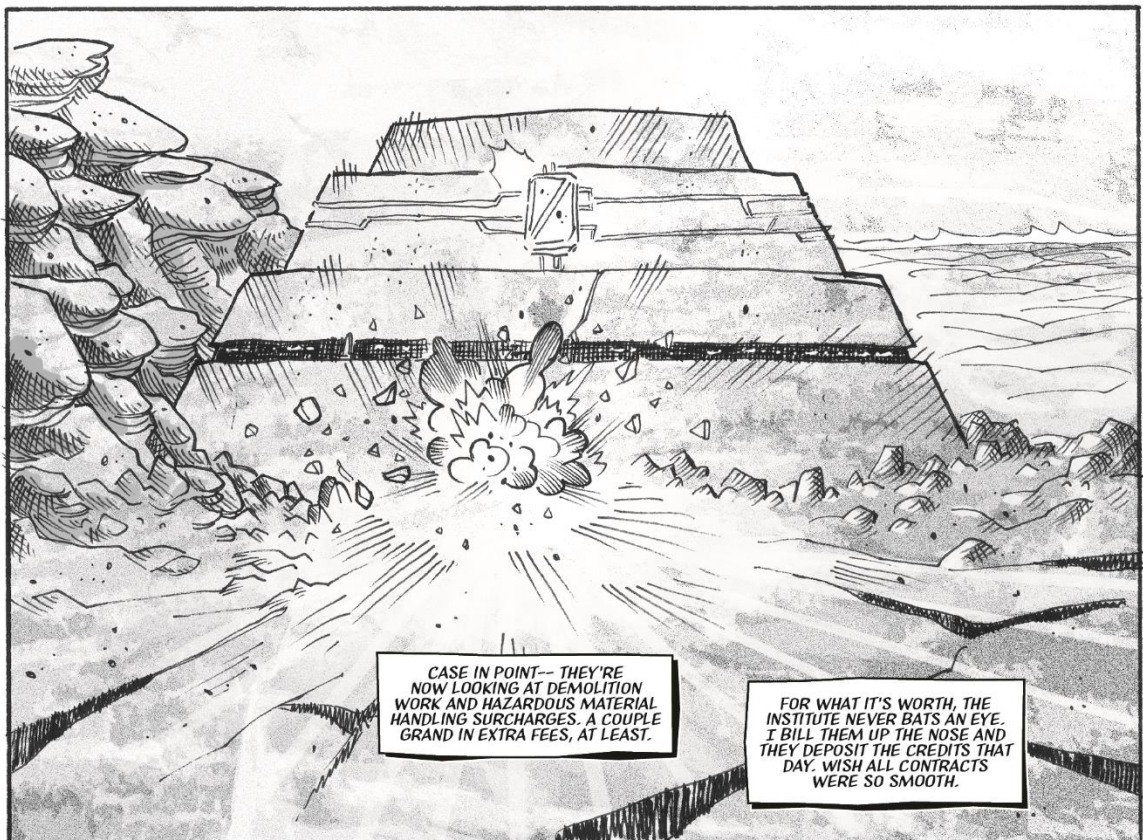
WHY?
WHY ELSE--
MONEY.

SLAP!



FIGURED OUT A LONG
TIME AGO HOW TO DEAL
WITH THESE TYPES--

CHARGE THE HELL OUT OF
'EM ON THE BACK END.



CASE IN POINT-- THEY'RE
NOW LOOKING AT DEMOLITION
WORK AND HAZARDOUS MATERIAL
HANDLING SURCHARGES. A COUPLE
GRAND IN EXTRA FEES, AT LEAST.

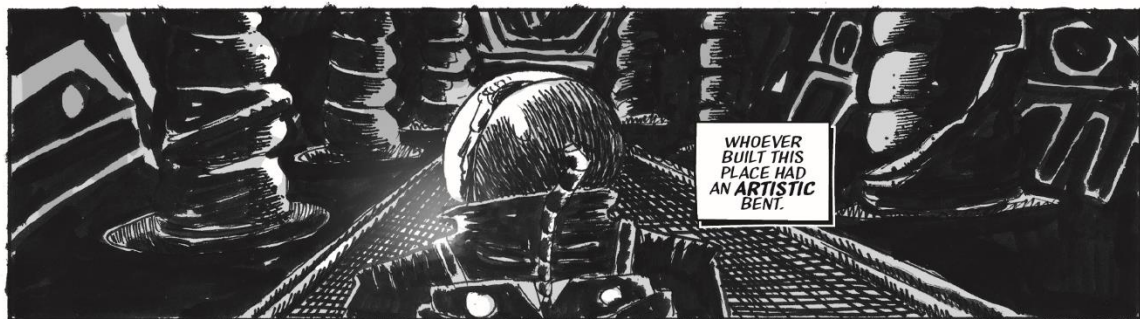
FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, THE
INSTITUTE NEVER BATS AN EYE.
I BILL THEM UP THE NOSE AND
THEY DEPOSIT THE CREDITS THAT
DAY. WISH ALL CONTRACTS
WERE SO SMOOTH.



THREE
HUNDRED
METERS.

IN AND
OUT.

PIECE OF
CAKE.



WHOEVER
BUILT THIS
PLACE HAD
AN ARTISTIC
BENT.



ANCIENTS COULDN'T
FIGURE OUT HOW TO
WIPE THEIR OWN
ASSES, YET HAD TIME
FOR SCULPTURE AND
FAIRY TALES. NEVER
UNDERSTOOD THAT.

GUESS I'M
MORE OF A
MODERNIST.



HOLD IT. SUIT'S
PICKING UP
SOME SPIKES.

CONCENTRATION OF **DARK
ENERGY** THROWING UP
PARAMETER FIELDS ALL OVER
THIS PLACE. INSTITUTE BOYS SAY
THAT'S A PROBABLE SIGN OF
EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL
ACTIVITY. THEY DON'T KNOW
FOR SURE, EVERYTHING'S A
WORKING THEORY WITH THEM.

ALL I KNOW IS
THE FUNKY ENERGY
SOURCE I'M LOOKING
FOR IS COMING FROM
THIS ALTAR.



COMING FROM
THIS CHEST.



COMING FROM
INSIDE
THIS CHEST.



TRANSLATION
MODE ENABLED. BEGIN
TRANSLATION:
ANGRA
MAINYU.
...
EVIL
SPIRIT.

ALWAYS
TALKING
DEAD THINGS
IN PLACES
LIKE THIS.

OR SUPPOSED
DEAD THINGS.
THEATRICALS, IF
YOU ASK ME. SMOKE
AND MIRRORS. OLD
SCHOOL SECURITY
SYSTEMS TO SCARE
OFF PLUNDERERS
AND VANDALS.

NOW, HOW TO OPEN THIS
SUCKER? TOP LOOKS HEFTY,
BUT IF I BLAST IT OPEN I
RISK DAMAGING WHATEVER'S
INSIDE. MANUAL LABOR TIME.



AN AMULET? YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME. THE MARKET'S FLOODED WITH THESE THINGS.

ENERGY SOURCE OR NOT, WHY THE HELL WOULD THE INSTITUTE MAKE ME COME ALL THE WAY HERE FOR THIS JUNK?

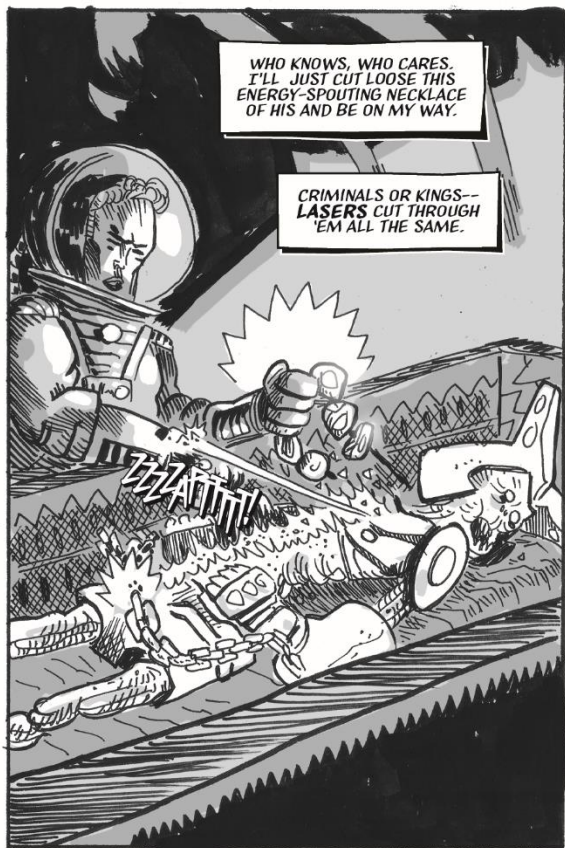


SHACKLES AND CHAINS. I'D WAGER THIS GUY WAS A CRIMINAL IN HIS DAY, BUT CRIMINALS DON'T USUALLY RECEIVE DECADENT RESTING PLACES LIKE THIS. A MAD KING PERHAPS? SOME KIND OF FAILED ROYAL?



WHO KNOWS, WHO CARES. I'LL JUST CUT LOOSE THIS ENERGY-SPOUTING NECKLACE OF HIS AND BE ON MY WAY.

CRIMINALS OR KINGS-- LASERS CUT THROUGH 'EM ALL THE SAME.



GOT IT.

THERE, THAT WASN'T SO HARD--

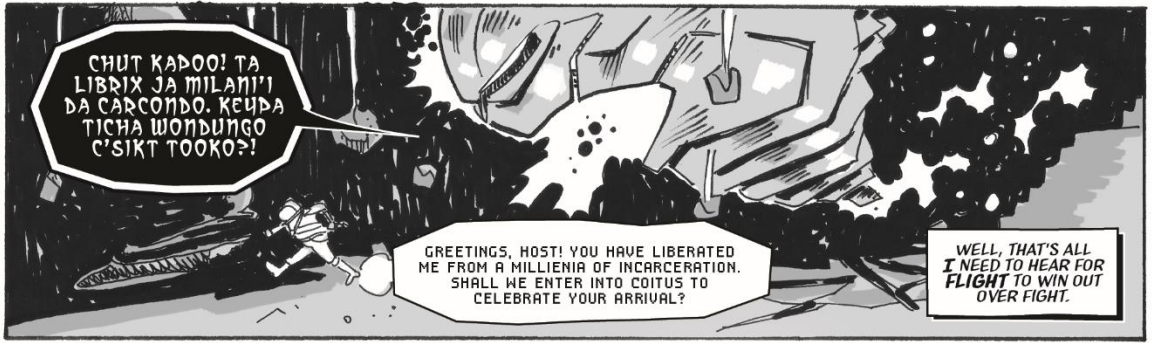




QUION REGGA
NAUGKT DA GON
ZAHHAK!?!

WHO HAS FREED THE
GREAT ZAHHAK?

DAMN IT. *AGAIN*
WITH THE TALKING
DEAD THINGS.





ALMOST
THERE. DON'T
LOOK BACK.



GAINING
ON ME!

KTHCO FLIP JA, DOONKA
SMOLTA J'ON? DA JOK TRINZ
DA UON DO KOL TA KAPOO NE.

WERE YOU NOT TOLD
THAT I WOULD BE SO
FORWARD? I HAVE
WAITED THOUSANDS
OF YEARS TO BOND
WITH A HOST AGAIN.

DAJ
KATOOK
SA!

I SHALL NOT
BE DELAYED
FURTHER!



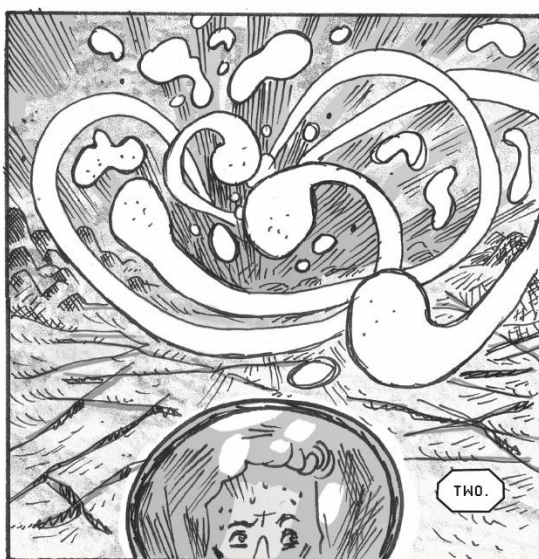
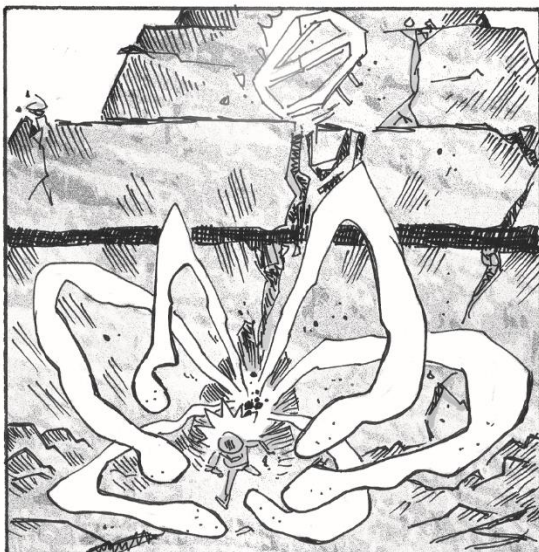
G'NEEEEEEEEEEE~*~*

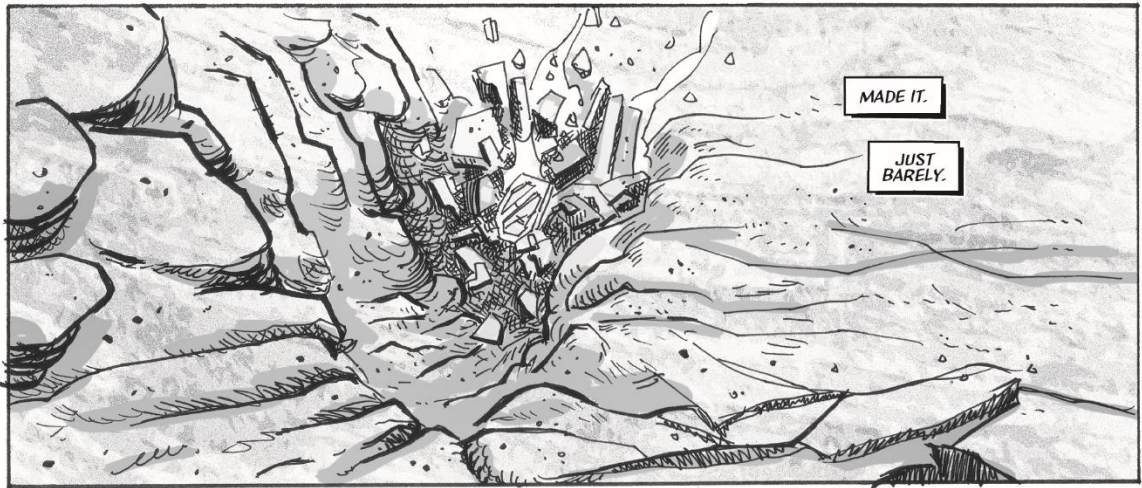
YESSSSSSSSSSS~*~*

RUN,
DAMN IT,
RUN!

BOOST!

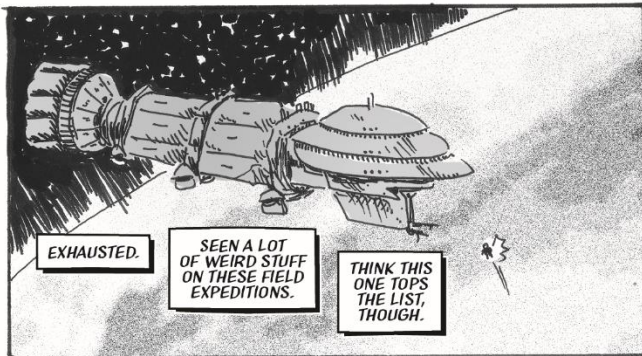






MADE IT.

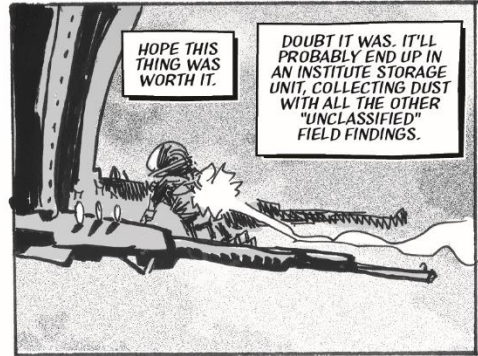
JUST BARELY.



EXHAUSTED.

SEEN A LOT
OF WEIRD STUFF
ON THESE FIELD
EXPEDITIONS.

THINK THIS
ONE TOPS
THE LIST,
THOUGH.



HOPE THIS
THING WAS
WORTH IT.

DOUBT IT WAS. IT'LL
PROBABLY END UP IN
AN INSTITUTE STORAGE
UNIT, COLLECTING DUST
WITH ALL THE OTHER
"UNCLASSIFIED"
FIELD FINDINGS.



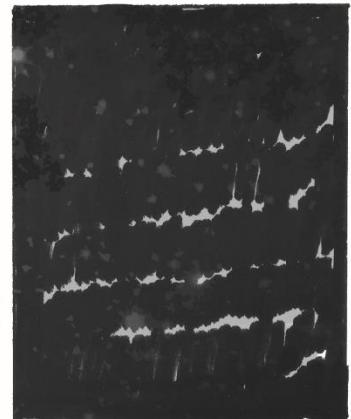
SHIP, GET US
BACK TO THE
INSTITUTE.
AND
DON'T WAKE
ME 'TIL WE'RE
THERE.

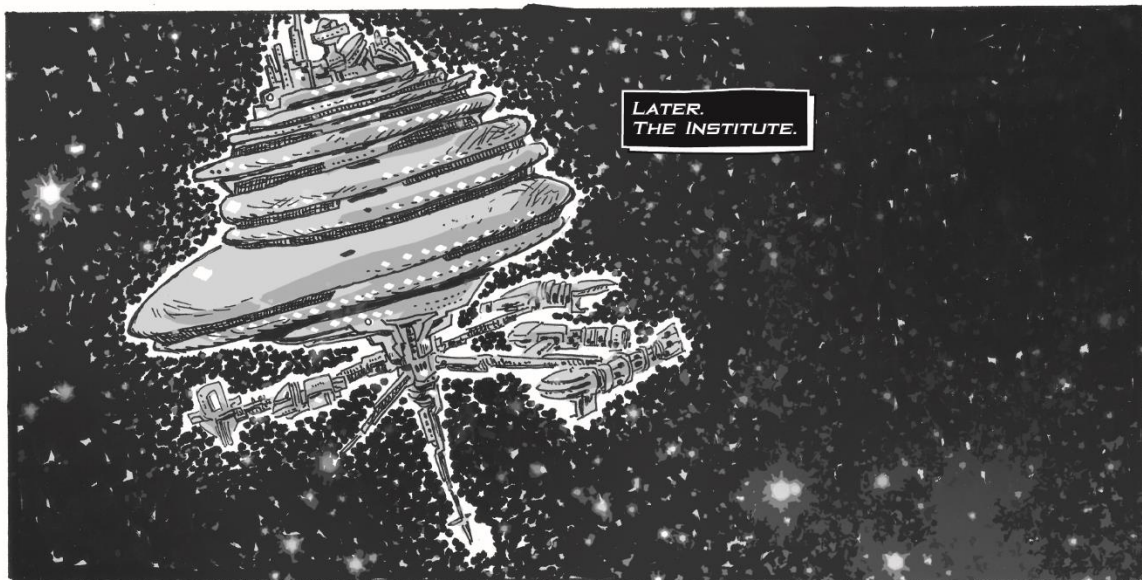


BEAT. DON'T EVEN
HAVE ENERGY TO GET
UP AND TURN ON THE
ENVIRO CONTROLS.
CAN'T KEEP MY EYES
OPEN. I'LL JUST
SLEEP IN THE SUIT.

I FEEL THE PLANET ALL
OVER ME STILL, LIKE A
COLD ACHE UNDER MY
MUSCLES. HOPE I DIDN'T
CATCH SOME ANCIENT
FLU IN THAT DUMP.

DEFINITELY BILLING
EXTRA FOR THIS ONE.
THEN THE CASINO...
FOR A WEEK... CAN'T
KEEP MY EYES...





LATER.
THE INSTITUTE.



EXCELLENT
WORK AS ALWAYS,
COMMANDER
DAL.

YEAH.
THANKS.



THE ITEM YOU'VE
BROUGHT BACK IS
MOST PERPLEXING. IT
APPEARS TO BE MADE OF
SOME KIND OF UNIQUE
ALLOY. THE ENERGY
IT'S EMITTING IS
INCREDIBLE.

IT WILL
GIVE OUR
TEAM PLENTY
TO STUDY.

THREE
CHEERS FOR
SCIENTIFIC
PROGRESS.



WE'VE APPROVED THE
SURCHARGES FOR YOUR
DEMOLITION WORK AND THE
OTHER ASSOCIATED HAZARD
PAY. YOU SHOULD SEE THE
CREDITS POSTED TO YOUR
ACCOUNT BY THE CLOSE
OF MARKETS TODAY.

YOU SEEM
RATHER GROGGY,
COMMANDER. RUN
INTO ANY TROUBLE
OUT THERE?

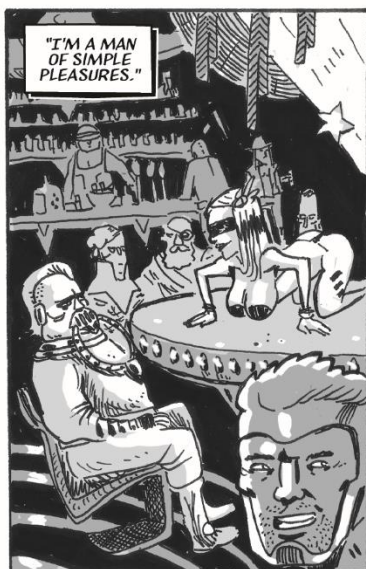
NOTHING
I COULDN'T
HANDLE. JUST
A LONG FLIGHT
IS ALL.

I'M PUTTING IN
A FOLLOW-UP WITH
THE MEDICAL TEAM.
STRICTLY ROUTINE, OF
COURSE. YOU'LL RECEIVE
THE SPECIFICS VIA
YOUR COMM-MOD.



WELL,
ENJOY YOUR
PAY. CASINO
BOUND, I
TAKE IT?

HEY,
YOU KNOW
ME--



"I'M A MAN
OF SIMPLE
PLEASURES."



THE USUAL
BUFFET OF
VICES NOT
DOING THE
TRICK
TONIGHT.

THIS PAYDAY OUGHT TO KEEP ME
AFLOAT FOR A COUPLE MORE
MONTHS. GUESS I **SHOULD**
BE HAPPY ABOUT THAT.

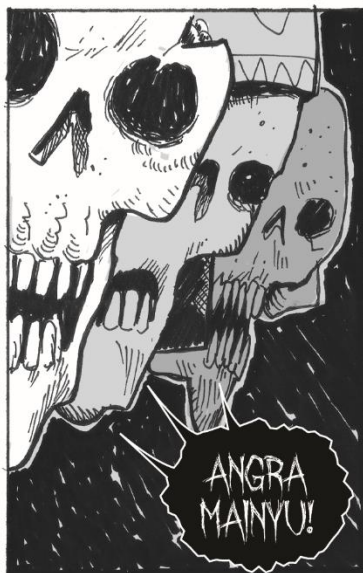


I DON'T
FEEL HAPPY.
THOUGH, I FEEL
TIRED. I FEEL
THAT DESOLATE
PLANET STILL
ON ME. I FEEL
THE WEIRD AIR
OF CRYPT ZERO
LINGERING IN
MY NOSTRILS.

CALLING IT A NIGHT AND
HEADING BACK TO SHIP'S
QUARTERS. NOT EXACTLY
THE ALL-NIGHT BENDER
I HAD PLANNED.



HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT TRAVELING TO
THE EDGE OF THE GALACTIC MAP AND
BACK TOOK ITS TOLL ON ME. HATE EVEN
MORE THAT I CAN'T SHAKE OFF WHAT I
SAW THERE. HEAD'S STILL SWIMMING
WITH VISIONS OF THAT PLACE.



ANGRA
MAINYU!



PAIN IN
THE ASS
JOB.

IS THERE
ANY OTHER
KIND?



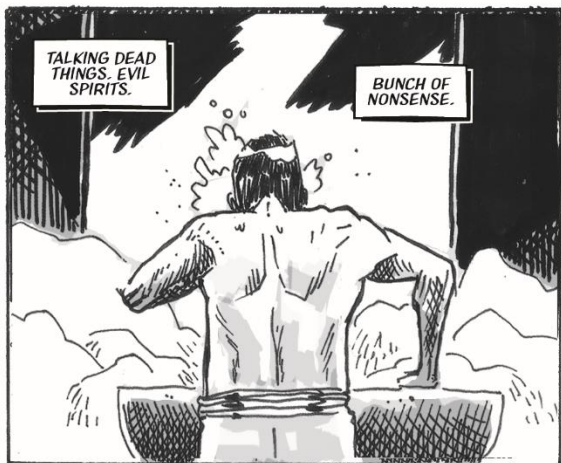
NOTHING A FEW DAYS DOCKED AT
THE CASINO SHOULDN'T FIX.
IMPORTED **BOOZE**, IMPORTED
WOMEN, HIGHLY ILLEGAL
GAMING— ALL MY FAVORITE
BRAIN CELL KILLERS LINED UP
AND READY FOR HEDONISTIC
CONSUMPTION.



JUST NEED TO REST SO
I CAN FULLY ENJOY IT.



JUST NEED TO
WASH IT OFF AND
FORGET ABOUT IT.

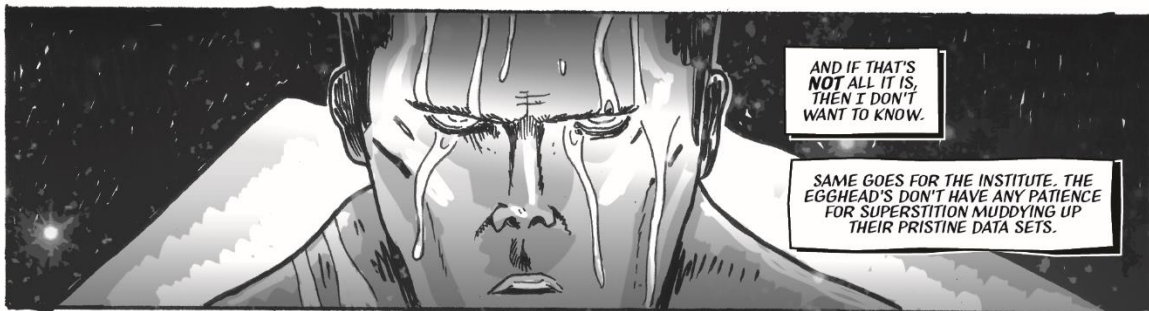


TALKING DEAD THINGS. EVIL SPIRITS.

BUNCH OF NONSENSE.



CRYPT ZERO WAS JUST ANOTHER ANCIENT HELLHOLE OUTFITTED WITH A TWISTED SECURITY SYSTEM DESIGNED TO SPOOK RAIDERS LIKE ME. AND IT WORKED. I GOT SPOOKED. HAPPENS TO THE BEST OF US. THAT'S **ALL** IT IS.



AND IF THAT'S **NOT** ALL IT IS, THEN I DON'T WANT TO KNOW.

SAME GOES FOR THE INSTITUTE. THE EGGHEAD'S DON'T HAVE ANY PATIENCE FOR SUPERSTITION MUDDYING UP THEIR PRISTINE DATA SETS.



THEY'RE NOT INTERESTED IN TALES OF MAD KINGS...



...OR GHOSTS.

AT LAST ZAHHAK IS FREE AGAIN!

HA-HA-HA-HA!