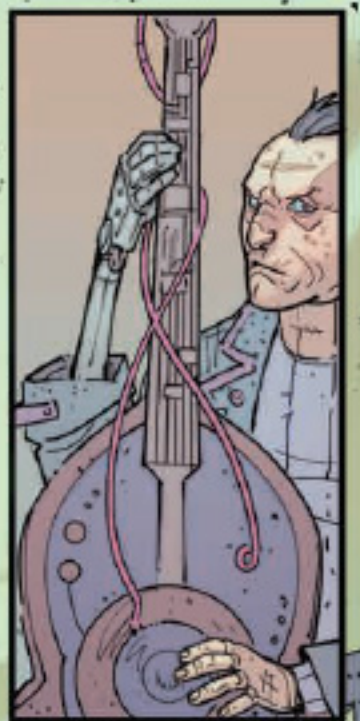


THE PLANET IS  
CALLED TORTUGA.



YOU'LL GET TO  
KNOW IT SOON.

DON'T SAY I DIDN'T  
WARN YOU.





HEY THERE. MY NAME'S EDGAR WILLIAM ZHANG-DOLUX, AND I'M THE NARRATOR OF THIS MESS YOU'RE READING.

MY FATHER--DELUCE-- IS THE LEADER OF THE NEW EGOS. I SINCERELY HOPE THAT'S AS MUCH OF A THRILL FOR YOU AS IT IS FOR ME.

MY DAD ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A HERO.

HE GREW UP HEARING STORIES ABOUT THE COMMANDER--THIS BIG-DEAL CRUISADER OF THE CRUNCH WAR.



WHEN TEENAGE DELUCE FIRST HEARD ABOUT THE ORIGINAL EGOS, HE PRETTY MUCH CAME ALL OVER HIMSELF.

THIS WAS HIS CHANCE. NOW HE COULD PROTECT THE INNOCENT AND GET ACTUAL GIRLS TO HAVE SEX WITH HIM. JUST LIKE HIS IDOL!

WHY AM I TELLING YOU THIS?  
->COUGH->  
BECAUSE RIGHT AT THIS VERY MINUTE, DELUCE-- WHO'S NOW ON THE HIGH SIDE OF FIFTY, THOUGH HE WON'T ADMIT IT--



--IS BEING USHERED INTO A HIGH-SECURITY EARTHG0V MEETING ROOM--

--WHERE HE'S ABOUT TO COME FACE TO FACE WITH--

--(COME ON, YOU CAN FIGURE IT OUT)--





--YEAH.  
HIM.

PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, KID.  
FOLLOWED YOUR LITTLE DUST-UP WITH THE HUNGRY-HUNGRY STAR-CLUSTER.\* THAT TOOK GUTS.

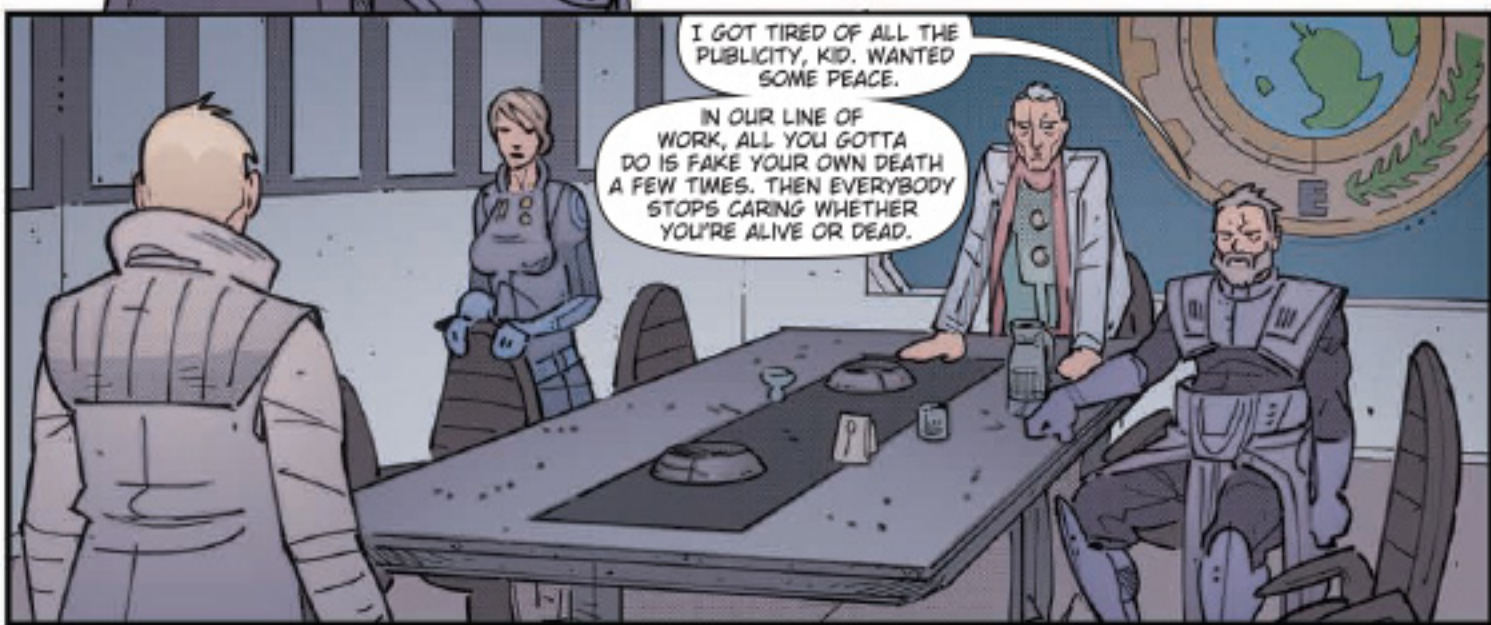
\*EGOs #1-3.



CLOSE YOUR JAW FLAP, SON.  
YOU'RE GETTIN' DROOL ON THE CARPET.



BREATHE, DEUCE.  
IT'S--IT'S AN HONOR, SIR.  
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW YOU WERE STILL ALIVE. THERE WERE RUMORS...



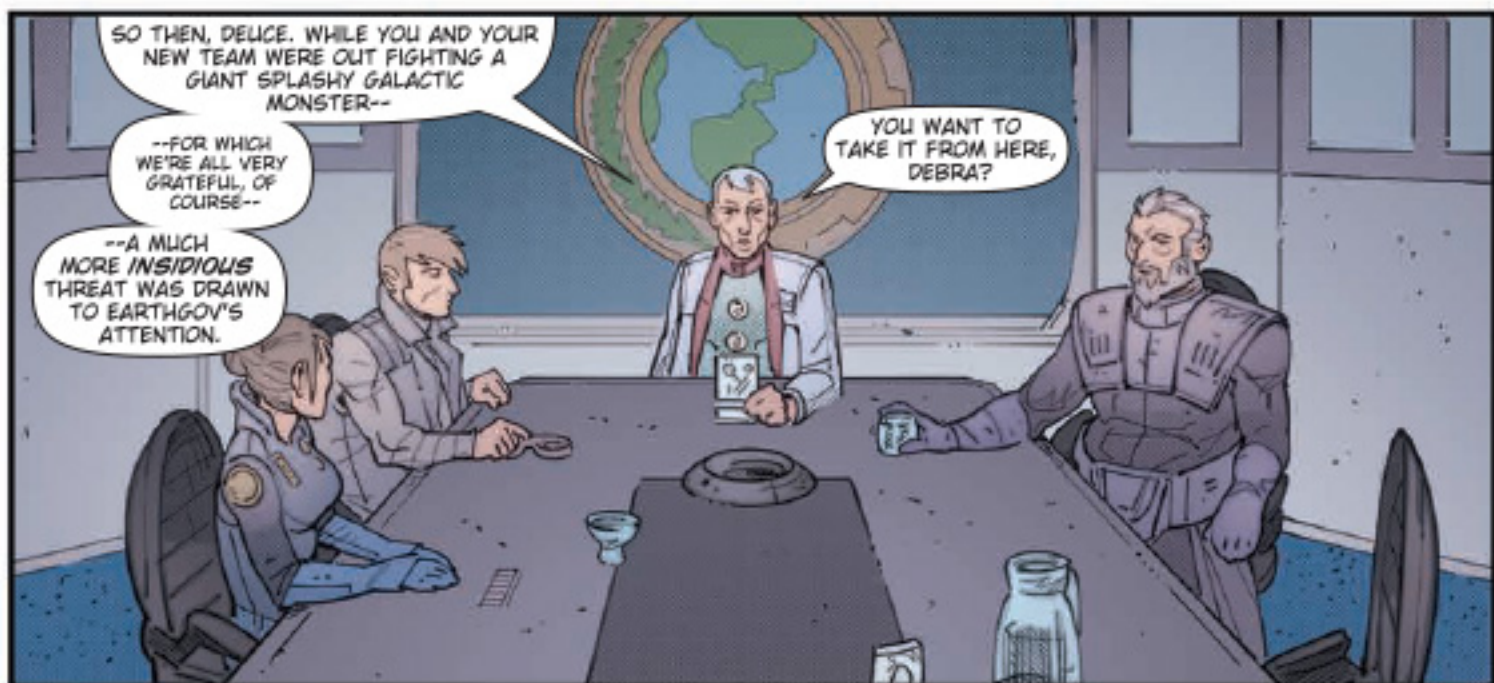
I GOT TIRED OF ALL THE PUBLICITY, KID. WANTED SOME PEACE.

IN OUR LINE OF WORK, ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS FAKE YOUR OWN DEATH A FEW TIMES. THEN EVERYBODY STOPS CARING WHETHER YOU'RE ALIVE OR DEAD.



THE COMMANDER HAS KEPT LOOSE TIES WITH EARTHGOV FOR MANY YEARS, DEUCE. AND NOW HE'S COME TO US ON A MATTER OF SOME URGENCY.

WON'T YOU HAVE A SEAT?



SO THEN, DELICE. WHILE YOU AND YOUR NEW TEAM WERE OUT FIGHTING A GIANT SPLASHY GALACTIC MONSTER--

--FOR WHICH WE'RE ALL VERY GRATEFUL, OF COURSE--

--A MUCH MORE INSIDIOUS THREAT WAS DRAWN TO EARTHGOV'S ATTENTION.

YOU WANT TO TAKE IT FROM HERE, DEBRA?



OF COURSE, MISTER VESTERGARD. DELICE, I WOULDN'T EXPECT YOU TO KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT GALACTIC ECONOMICS--

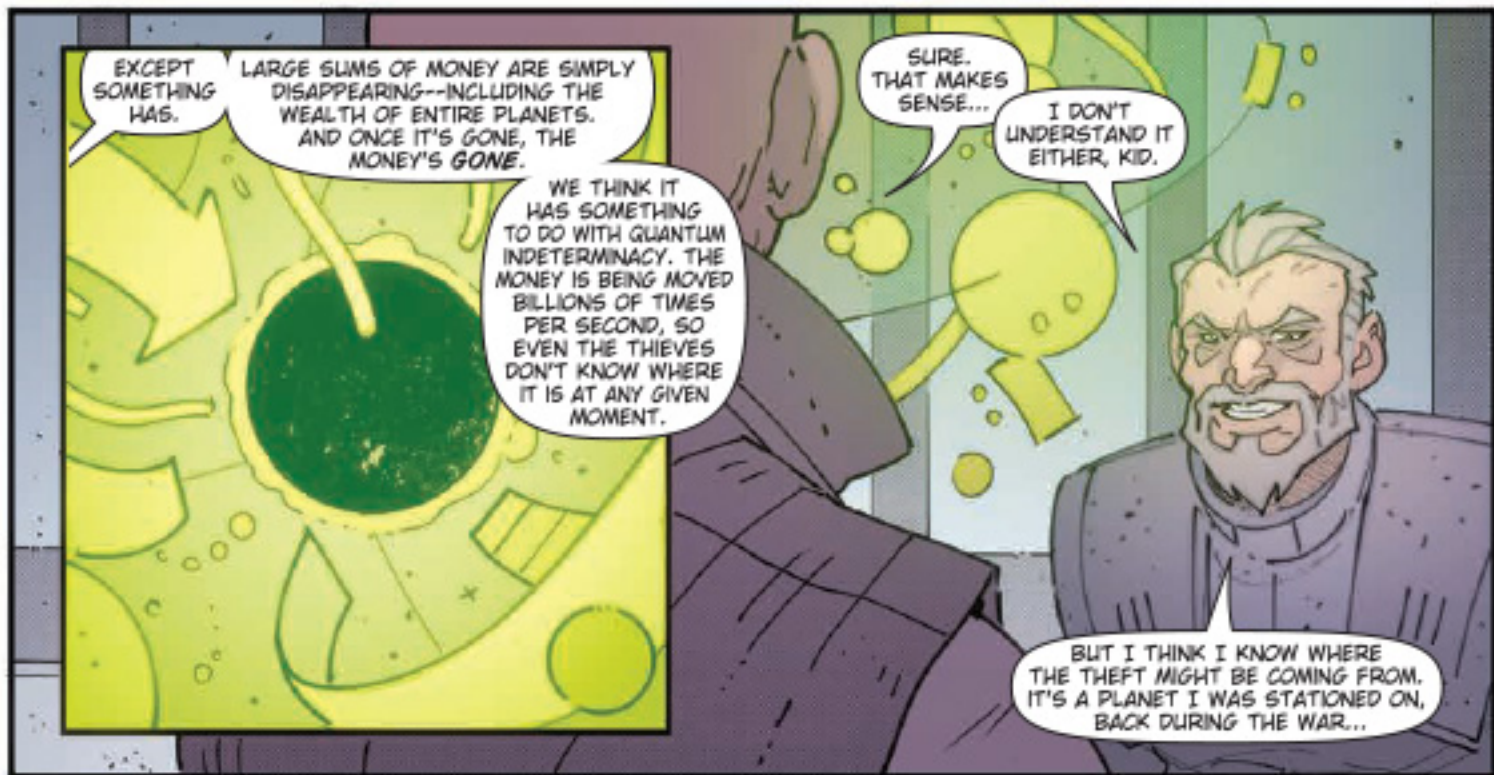
I MIGHT SURPRISE YOU, DEBRA. I'M NOT A COMPLETE IDIOT.

I, UH, ONLY MEANT THAT VERY FEW PEOPLE REALLY UNDERSTAND HOW THE QUANTUM TRUST WORKS.



ESSENTIALLY, IT COORDINATES CURRENCY EXCHANGES THROUGHOUT KNOWN SPACE. MONEY IS DEPOSITED, WITHDRAWN, AND VERIFIED BY LOCAL NETWORKS ALL OVER THE GALAXY.

THESE NETWORKS ARE HYPERLINKED BY TECH VERY SIMILAR TO THAT USED IN YOUR OMNICEIVER. IT'S FASTER THAN LIGHT, FASTER EVEN THAN HYPERSPACE TRAVEL--WITH SO MANY REDUNDANCIES BUILT IN THAT NOTHING CAN EVER GO WRONG.



EXCEPT SOMETHING HAS.

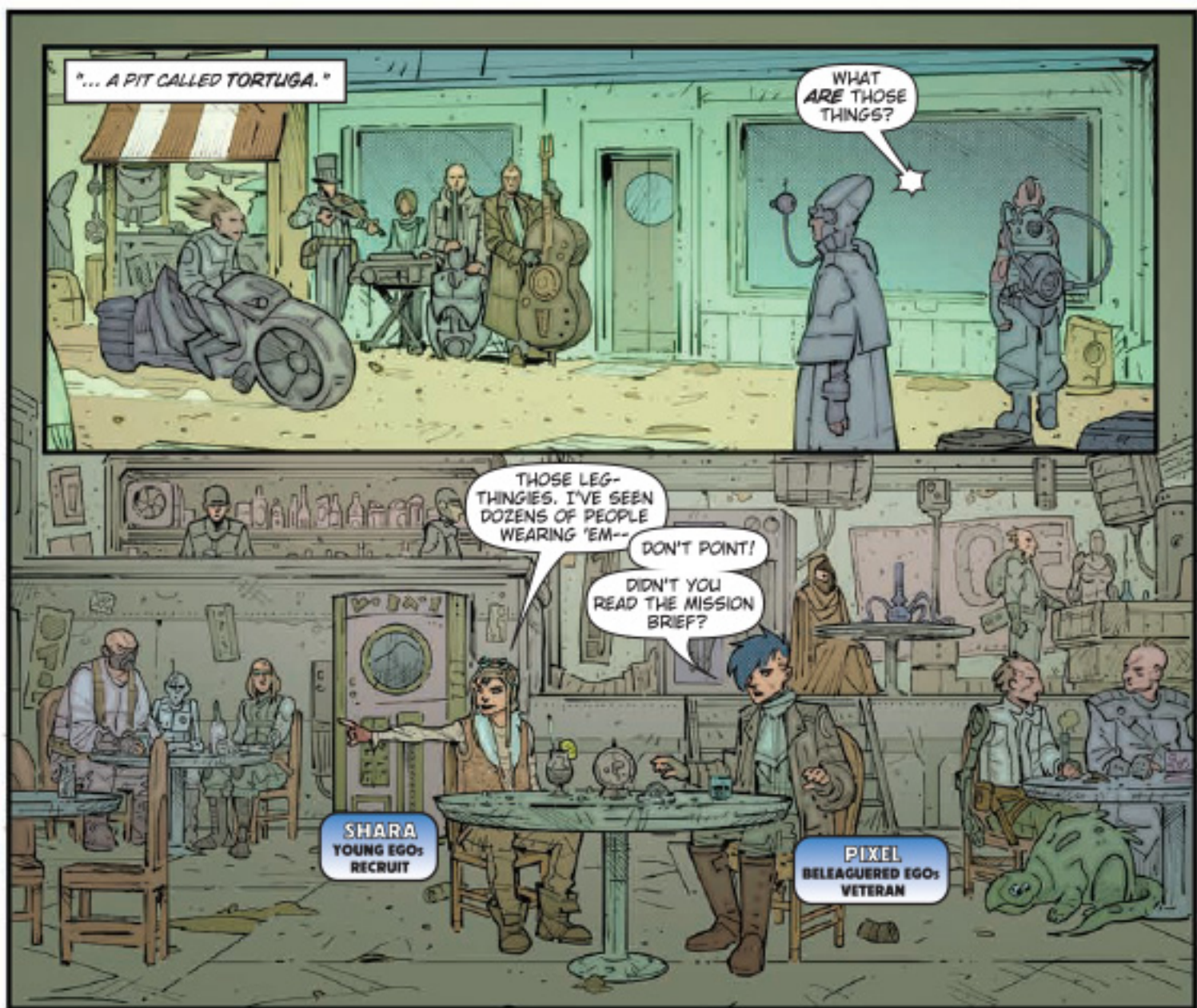
LARGE SUMS OF MONEY ARE SIMPLY DISAPPEARING--INCLUDING THE WEALTH OF ENTIRE PLANETS. AND ONCE IT'S GONE, THE MONEY'S GONE.

WE THINK IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH QUANTUM INDETERMINACY. THE MONEY IS BEING MOVED BILLIONS OF TIMES PER SECOND, SO EVEN THE THIEVES DON'T KNOW WHERE IT IS AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT.

SURE. THAT MAKES SENSE...

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT EITHER, KID.

BUT I THINK I KNOW WHERE THE THEFT MIGHT BE COMING FROM. IT'S A PLANET I WAS STATIONED ON, BACK DURING THE WAR...



YOU--ARE YOU TASHA'S CONTACT? THE MAN SHE SENT US TO SEE?

I AM MANY THINGS. I CONTAIN MULTITUDES.



FORGIVE ME, BUT--TASHA SAID OUR CONNECTION WOULD BE A WAR VETERAN.

OH, I FOUGHT IN THE WAR.

YOU DON'T SEEM OLD ENOUGH FOR THAT...

THAT'S WHEN THEY TOOK IT AWAY FROM ME. MY NAME.



THEY SENT ME HERE, TO A DARK HOLE ON A DARK WORLD. AND WITH A SINGLE KEYSTROKE THEY CHRISTENED ME PRISONER SEVEN.

BOTH SIDES SHIPPED SOLDIERS OFF TO TORTUGA, DID YOU KNOW THAT? THEIR TROUBLEMAKERS, THEIR WHISTLEBLOWERS, ANYONE THEY CALLED TRAITOR.



THOSE WERE DARK DAYS, FOR THOSE OF US HERE, OBVIOUSLY; BUT THE CANCER FED ON CIVILIANS, TOO.

THEIR SELVES, THEIR INDIVIDUALITY: ALL STRIPPED AWAY. ONE LAYER AT A TIME.



SOMETIMES THEY DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE UNTIL IT WAS GONE.



OOO-KAY...

YES. WELL.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR--

WHAT?

