

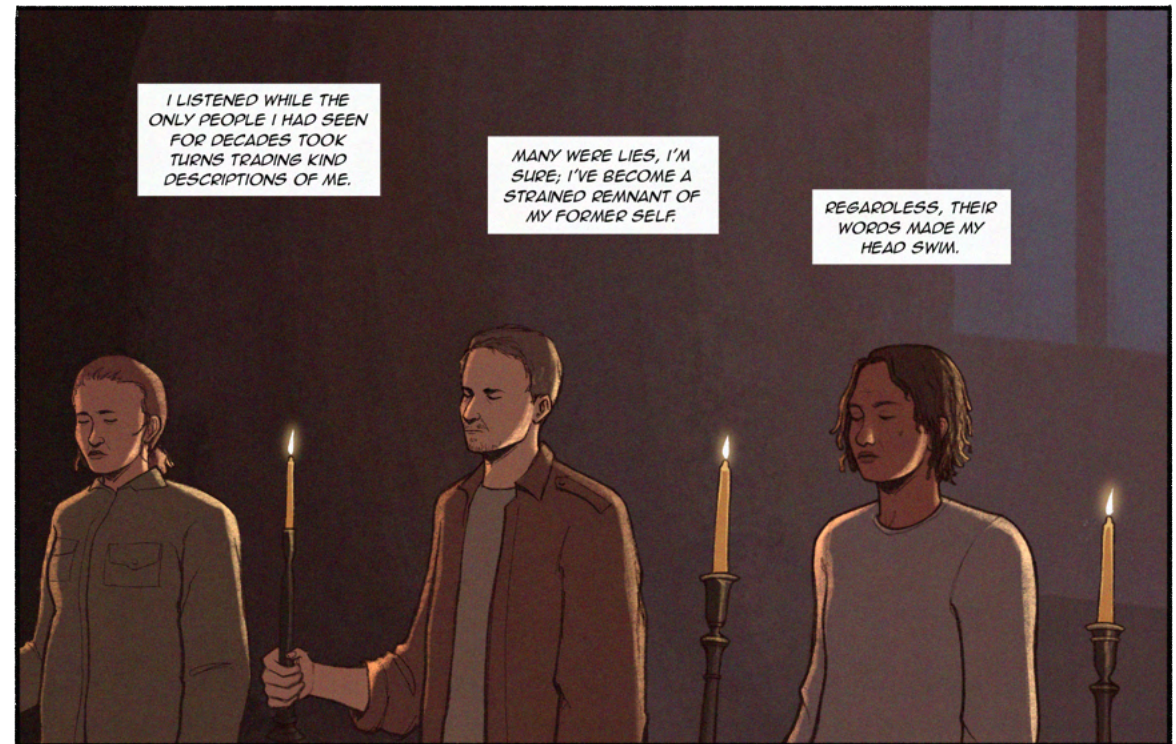
THE MANGROVES

LILLI ELLER





MY FUNERAL WAS YESTERDAY.



I LISTENED WHILE THE
ONLY PEOPLE I HAD SEEN
FOR DECADES TOOK
TURNS TRADING KIND
DESCRIPTIONS OF ME.

MANY WERE LIES, I'M
SURE; I'VE BECOME A
STRAINED REMNANT OF
MY FORMER SELF.

REGARDLESS, THEIR
WORDS MADE MY
HEAD SWIM.

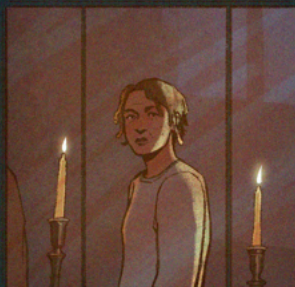


I WONDERED IF I TRULY
WAS DISCARDING
MY LIFE CARELESSLY.



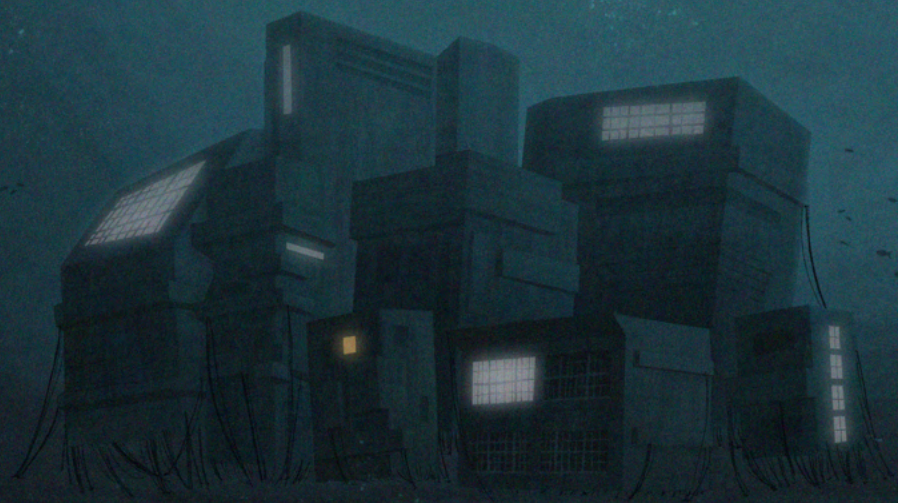
I DECIDED I DIDN'T CARE.

ALL THAT SEEMED TO
MATTER WAS THE PETRIFYING
SENSATION THAT TOOK OVER



EVERY TIME I
LOOKED THROUGH
OUR DINGY WINDOWS

TO SEE THE YAWNING EMPTINESS OF THE OCEAN.



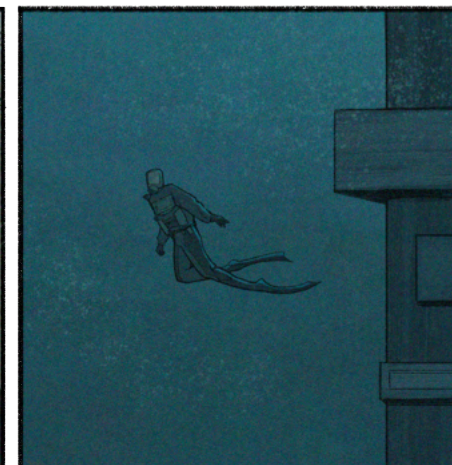
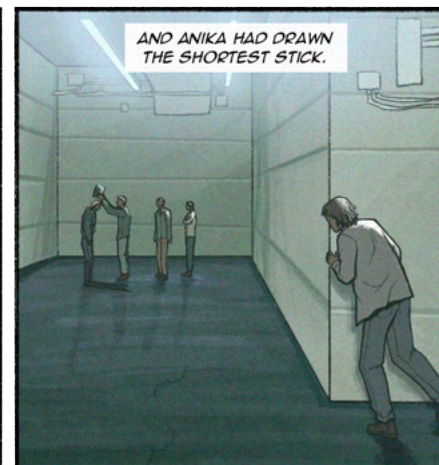
I CLOSED MY EYES, AND THE FLICKERING RED OF MY EYEKIDS GAVE WAY TO MEMORY.



THE LEADERS NEEDED A REAL
TEST OF OUR NEWEST
PROTOTYPE
IN SUIT TECHNOLOGY



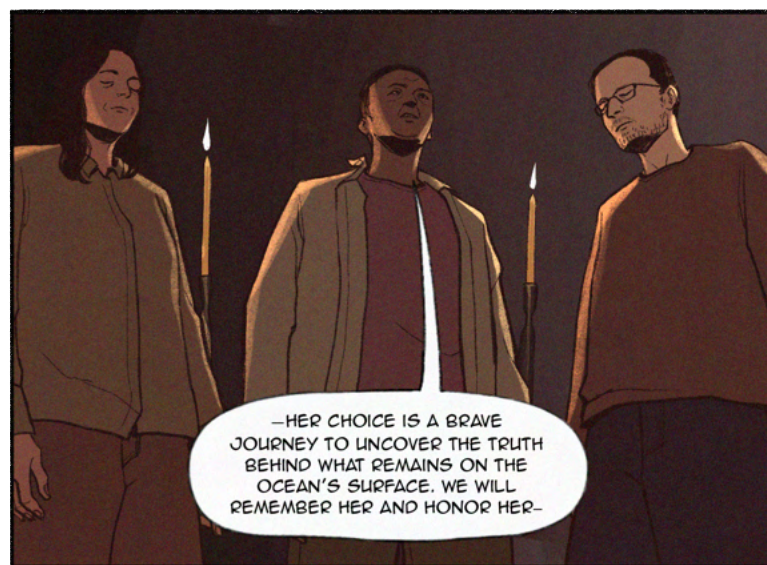
AND ANIKA HAD DRAWN
THE SHORTEST STICK.



I COULD PICTURE HER FALLING AWAY
INTO THE UNRELENTINGLY DARKNESS
JUST AS VIVIDLY EVEN A YEAR AFTER.



YES, I MADE THE RIGHT DECISION IN LEAVING, IF EVER THERE WAS ONE.

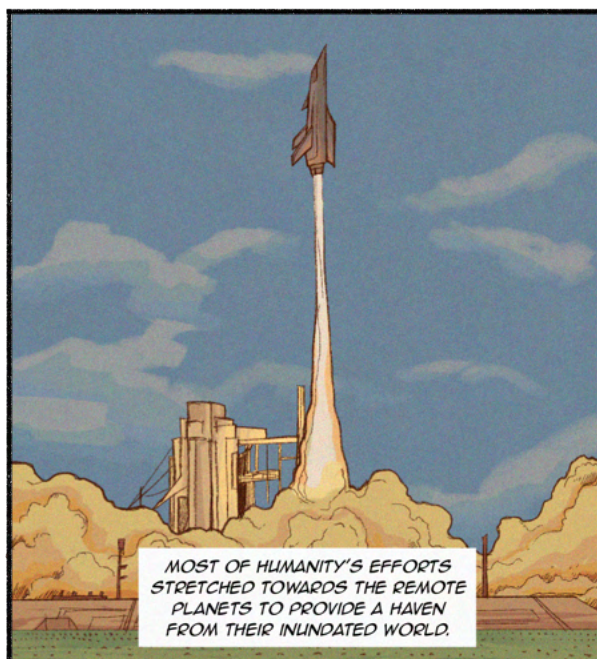


—HER CHOICE IS A BRAVE JOURNEY TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND WHAT REMAINS ON THE OCEAN'S SURFACE. WE WILL REMEMBER HER AND HONOR HER—

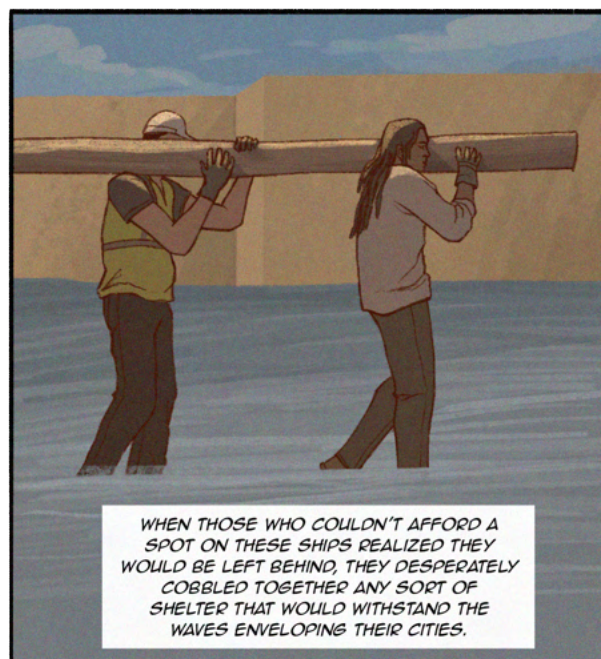


RIDICULOUS, AND THEY KNEW IT

OUR TECHNOLOGY WAS THE DRESS OF DISTANT HUMANITY. I WOULDN'T MAKE IT ANYWHERE NEAR THE OCEAN SURFACE.



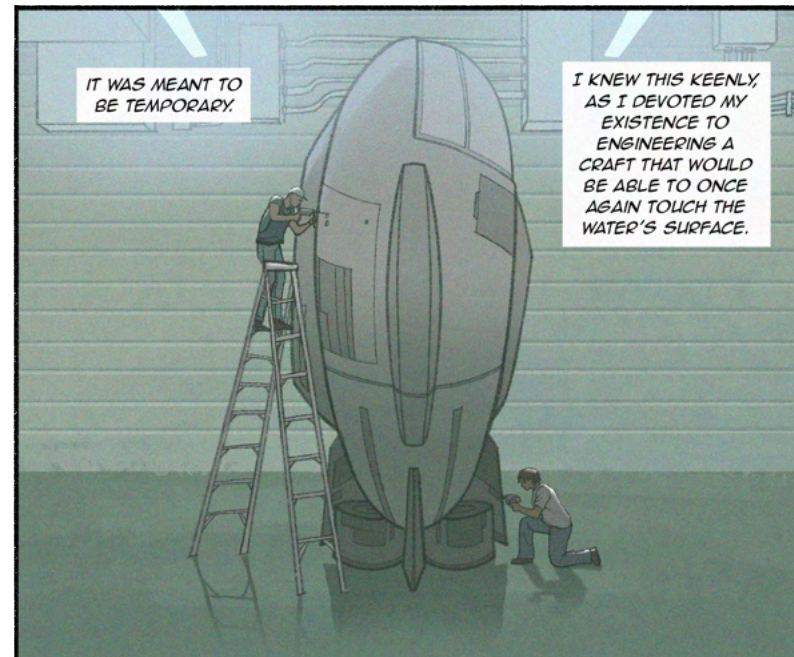
MOST OF HUMANITY'S EFFORTS STRETCHED TOWARDS THE REMOTE PLANETS TO PROVIDE A HAVEN FROM THEIR INUNDATED WORLD.



WHEN THOSE WHO COULDN'T AFFORD A SPOT ON THESE SHIPS REALIZED THEY WOULD BE LEFT BEHIND, THEY DESPERATELY COBBLED TOGETHER ANY SORT OF SHELTER THAT WOULD WITHSTAND THE WAVES ENVELOPING THEIR CITIES.

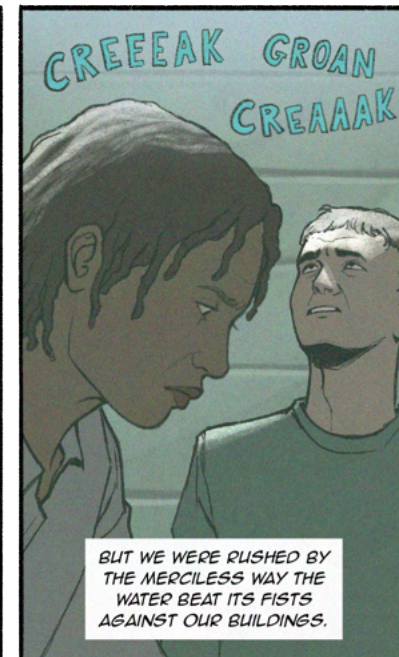


THEY WERE DRIVEN UNDERWATER, AND WE REMAINED A CIVILIZATION CONSTANTLY SWAYING, ANCHORED TO THE OCEAN FLOOR.



IT WAS MEANT TO BE TEMPORARY.

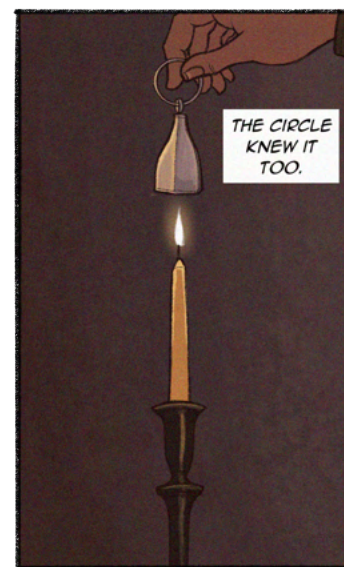
I KNEW THIS KEENLY, AS I DEVOTED MY EXISTENCE TO ENGINEERING A CRAFT THAT WOULD BE ABLE TO ONCE AGAIN TOUCH THE WATER'S SURFACE.



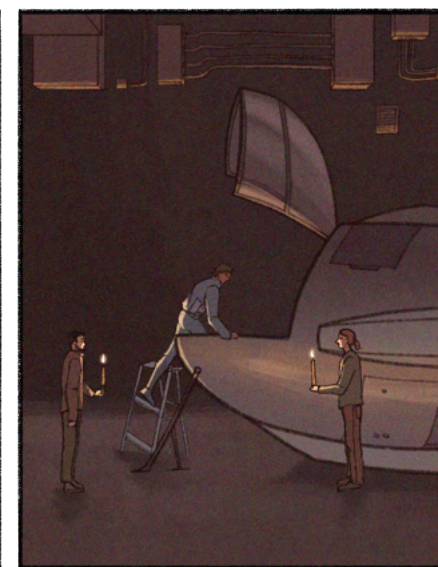
CREEEAK GROAN CREEAAK

BUT WE WERE RUSHED BY THE MERCILESS WAY THE WATER BEAT ITS FISTS AGAINST OUR BUILDINGS.

IT WAS TOO EARLY, AND SEALING MYSELF AWAY IN THIS POD WOULD BE ENTERING MY COFFIN.



THE CIRCLE KNEW IT TOO.



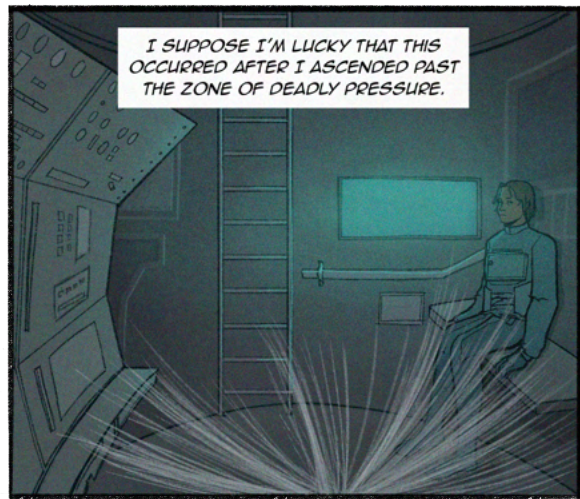
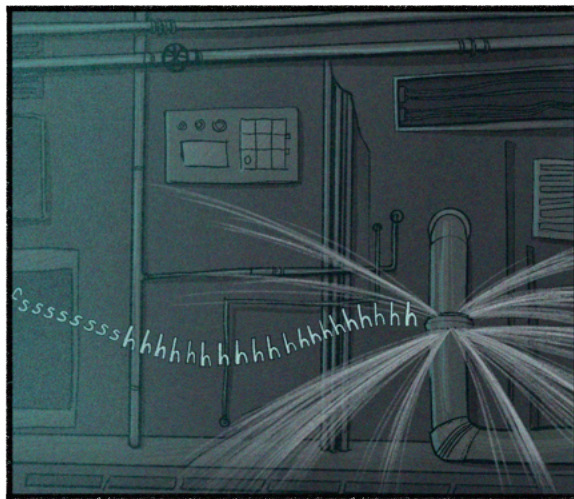
THEY STALNCHED THEIR GUILT ABOUT NOT JOINING ME

THROUGH THIS FUNERARY PAYMENT OF RESPECT.



BUT I WELCOMED MY IMMINENT DEATH.

WITHOUT ANIKA THERE WAS NOTHING FOR ME.

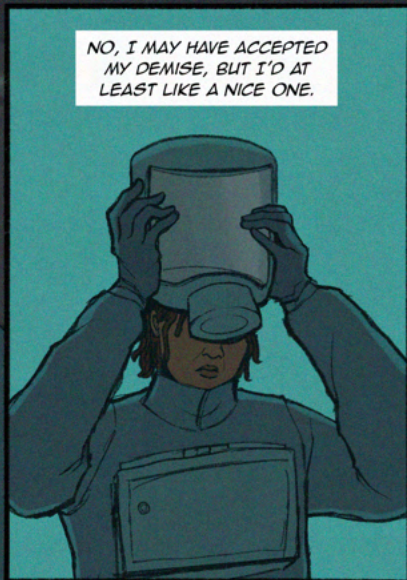
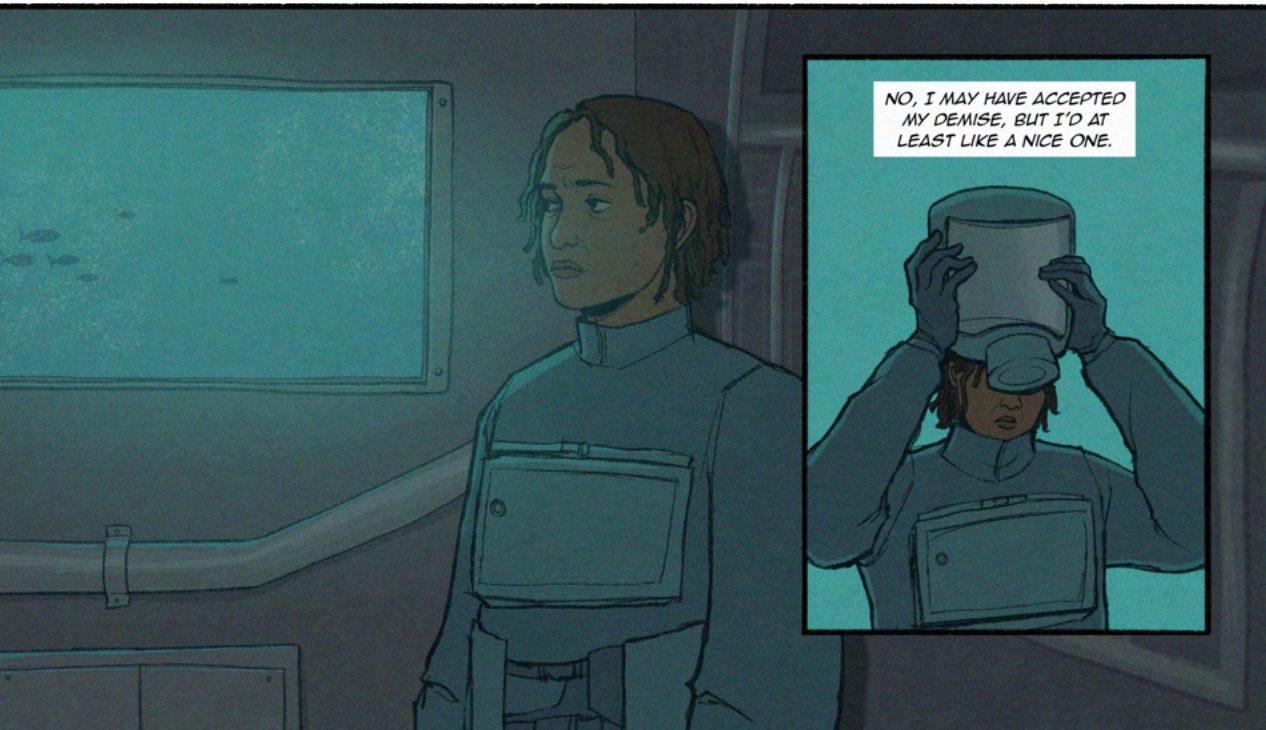


I SUPPOSE I'M LUCKY THAT THIS OCCURRED AFTER I ASCENDED PAST THE ZONE OF DEADLY PRESSURE.



I WONDER IF I SHOULD STAY, LET THE SUBMARINE FILL UP WITH WATER.

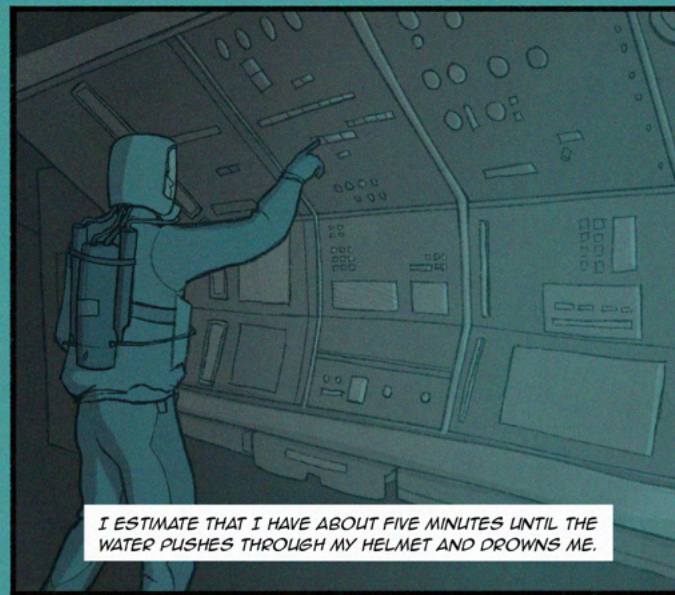
WHAT WAS THAT BYGONE SAYING? THE CAPTAIN GOES DOWN WITH THE SHIP?



NO, I MAY HAVE ACCEPTED MY DEMISE, BUT I'D AT LEAST LIKE A NICE ONE.



IN WHAT SEEMS TO BE OUR CIVILIZATION'S SIGNATURE, THIS SUIT IS HASTILY ASSEMBLED FROM ANY MATERIALS WE MANAGED TO SALVAGE FROM PRE-SUBMERGED CIVILIZATION.



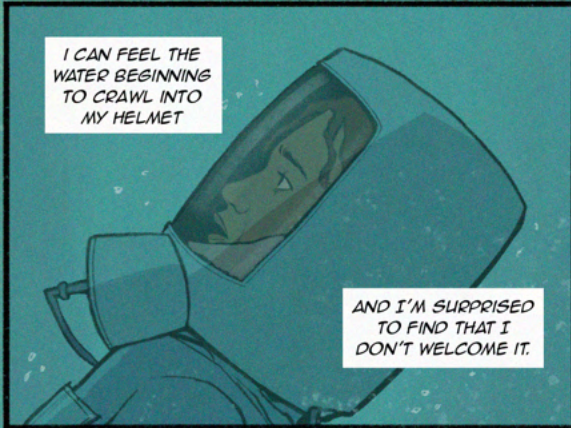
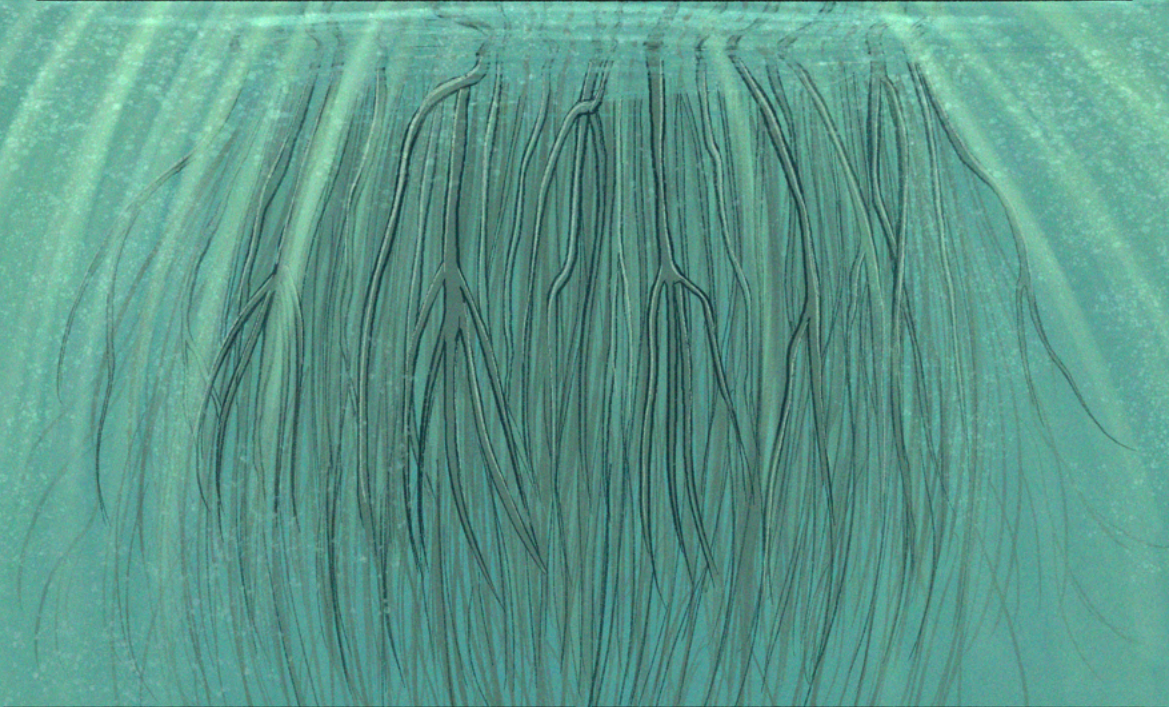
I ESTIMATE THAT I HAVE ABOUT FIVE MINUTES UNTIL THE WATER PUSHES THROUGH MY HELMET AND DROWNS ME.



AT LEAST THIS WAY I'LL FOLLOW ANIKA'S PATH.

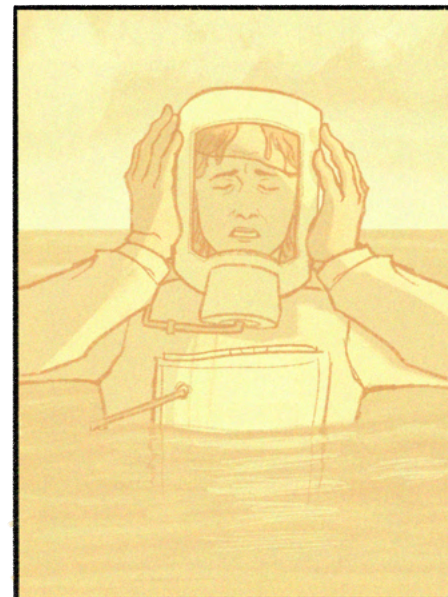
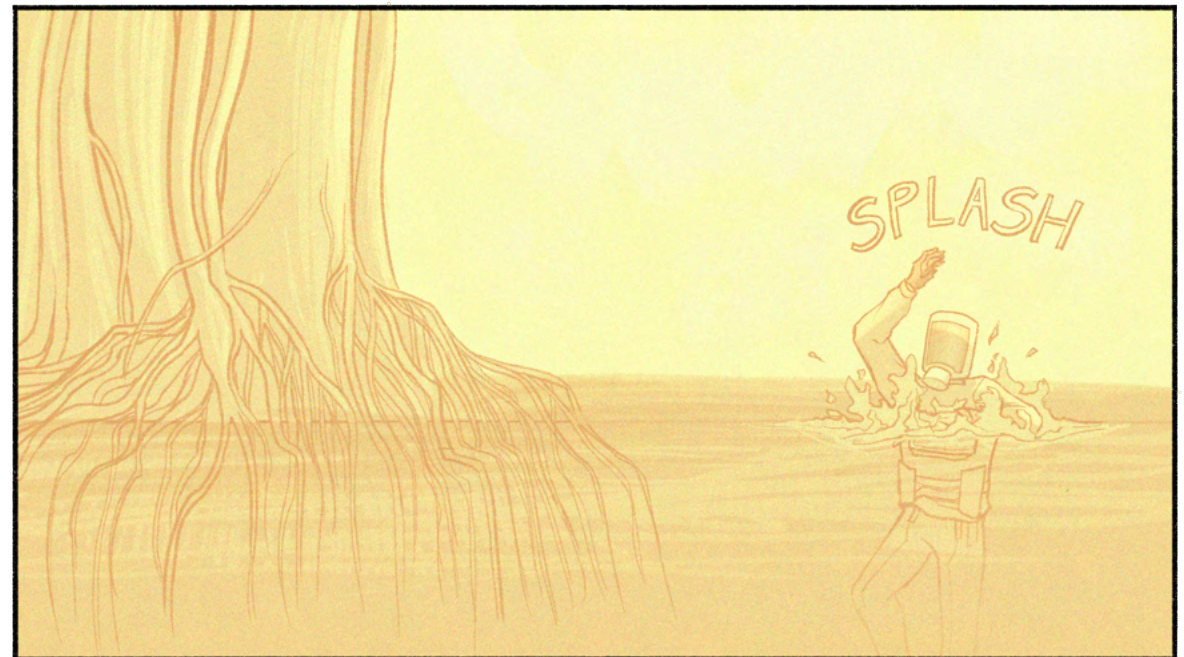
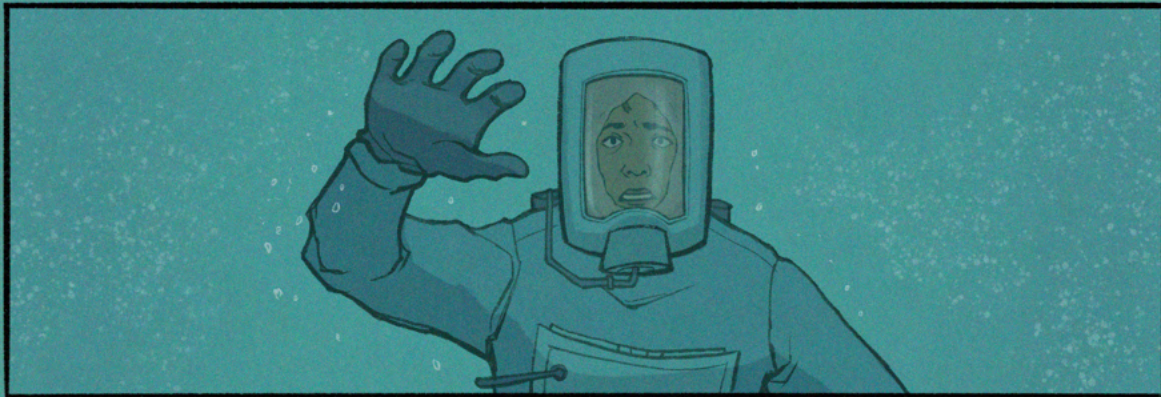
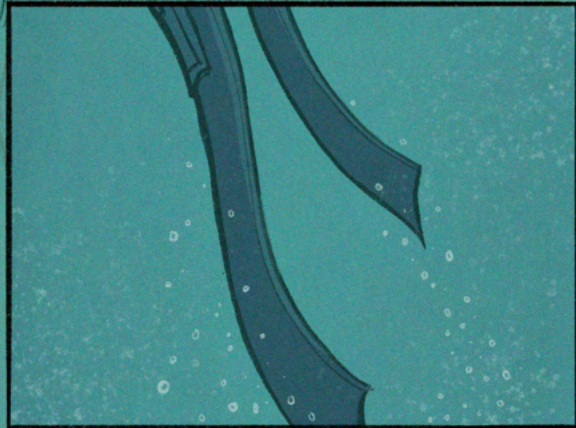
IT'S ALMOST POETIC.

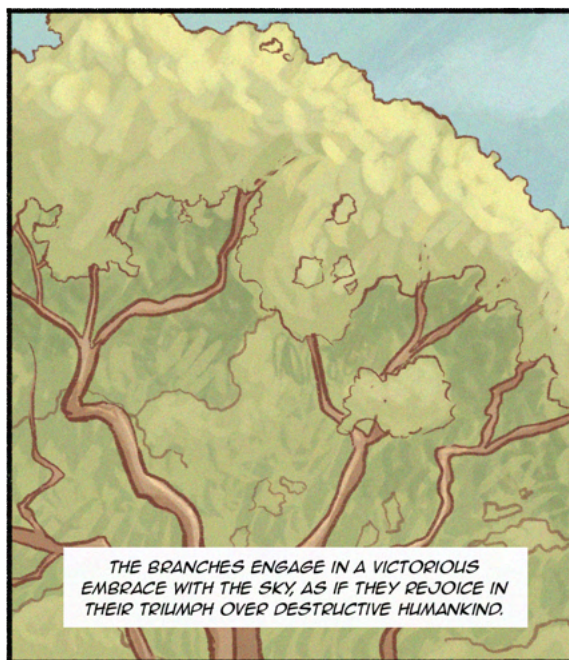
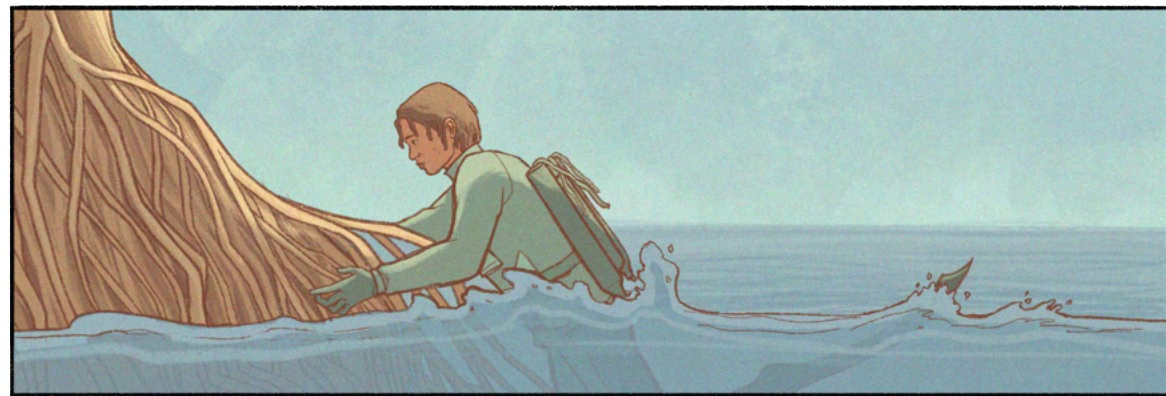




I CAN FEEL THE
WATER BEGINNING
TO CRAWL INTO
MY HELMET

AND I'M SURPRISED
TO FIND THAT I
DON'T WELCOME IT.





THE BRANCHES ENGAGE IN A VICTORIOUS EMBRACE WITH THE SKY, AS IF THEY REJOICE IN THEIR TRIUMPH OVER DESTRUCTIVE HUMANKIND.



PERHAPS WE DESERVE OUR FATE OF FORLORN EXILE.

WE HAVE CAUSED SO MUCH PAIN.



NATURE MOVES ON WITHOUT US, BRAIDING ROOTS INTO AN INTRICATE NEW WORLD.

EVENTUALLY I WILL SUCCEMB TO ANGLISHED
THOUGHTS OF MY COMPLETE AND LITTER SOLITUDE.



BUT FOR NOW, I TOUCH MY CHEEK AGAINST
THE ROUGHNESS OF A TRUNK, TAKING
BOUNDLESS COMFORT IN ITS SOLIDITY.



