




WARREN ELLIS

 **AVATAR**

IGNITION

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CITY

#1 of 5



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BERLIN
FEBRUARY 1956





It won't be long there, either, I'm afraid. There's talk in the corridors of power back home about decommissioning the British Space Fleet.

If they could shoot decent photos from orbit, we'd keep 'em around. But the cameras aren't good enough.

My country's not a power anymore, y'see. It'd like to be, but it's not.



And having rocket ships swooping around... it attracts unwelcome attention to a country still trying to pay for a war.

I mean, here you are in Berlin. Everyone knows how the Russians got driven out of East Berlin.



Bloody Russians. I have to go home next week because of the bloody Russians.

Bloody Khrushchev and Bulganin are on a state visit, and they're coming by sea cruiser, would you believe.

Muggins here has been tapped by bloody MI6 once again to go and have a look under her.



And people ask me why I drink before a decent hour of the day.

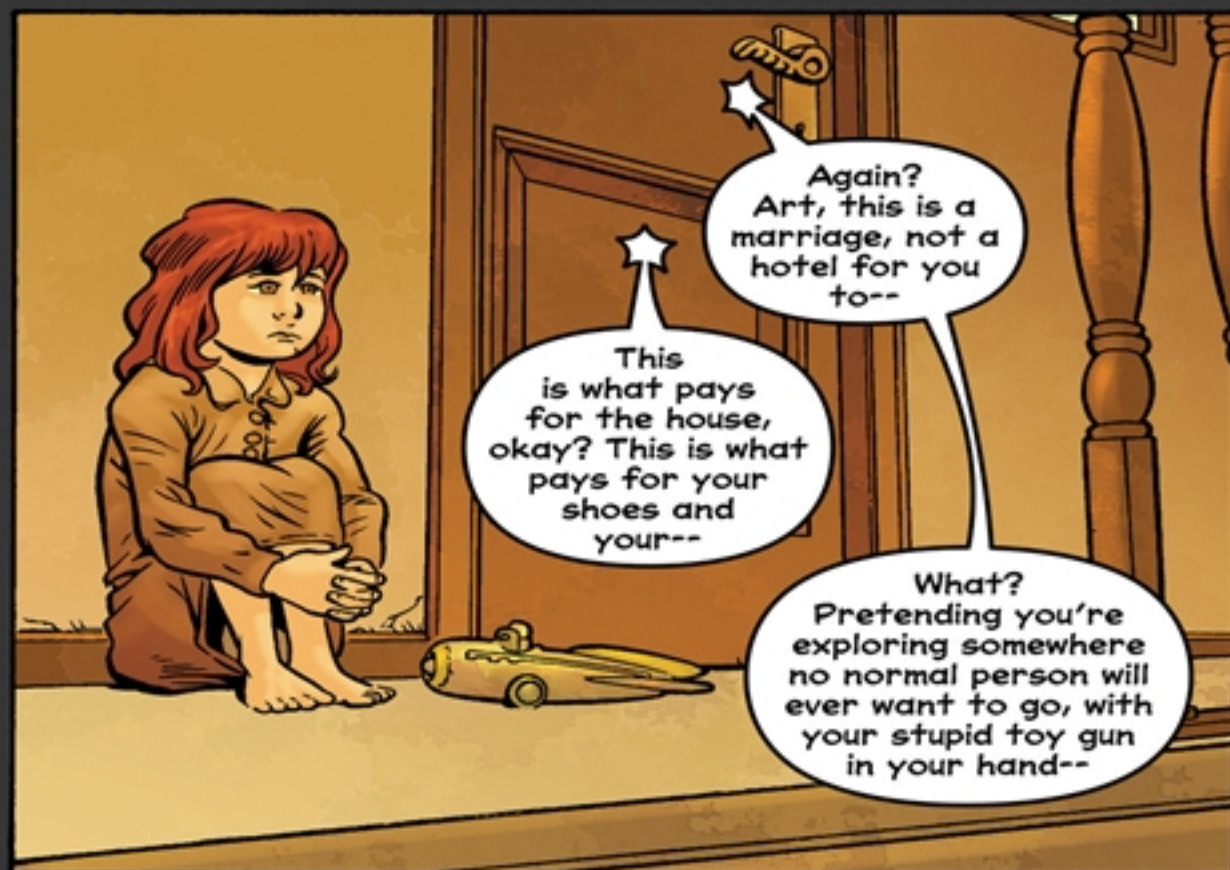
Still. Rather than exploring.

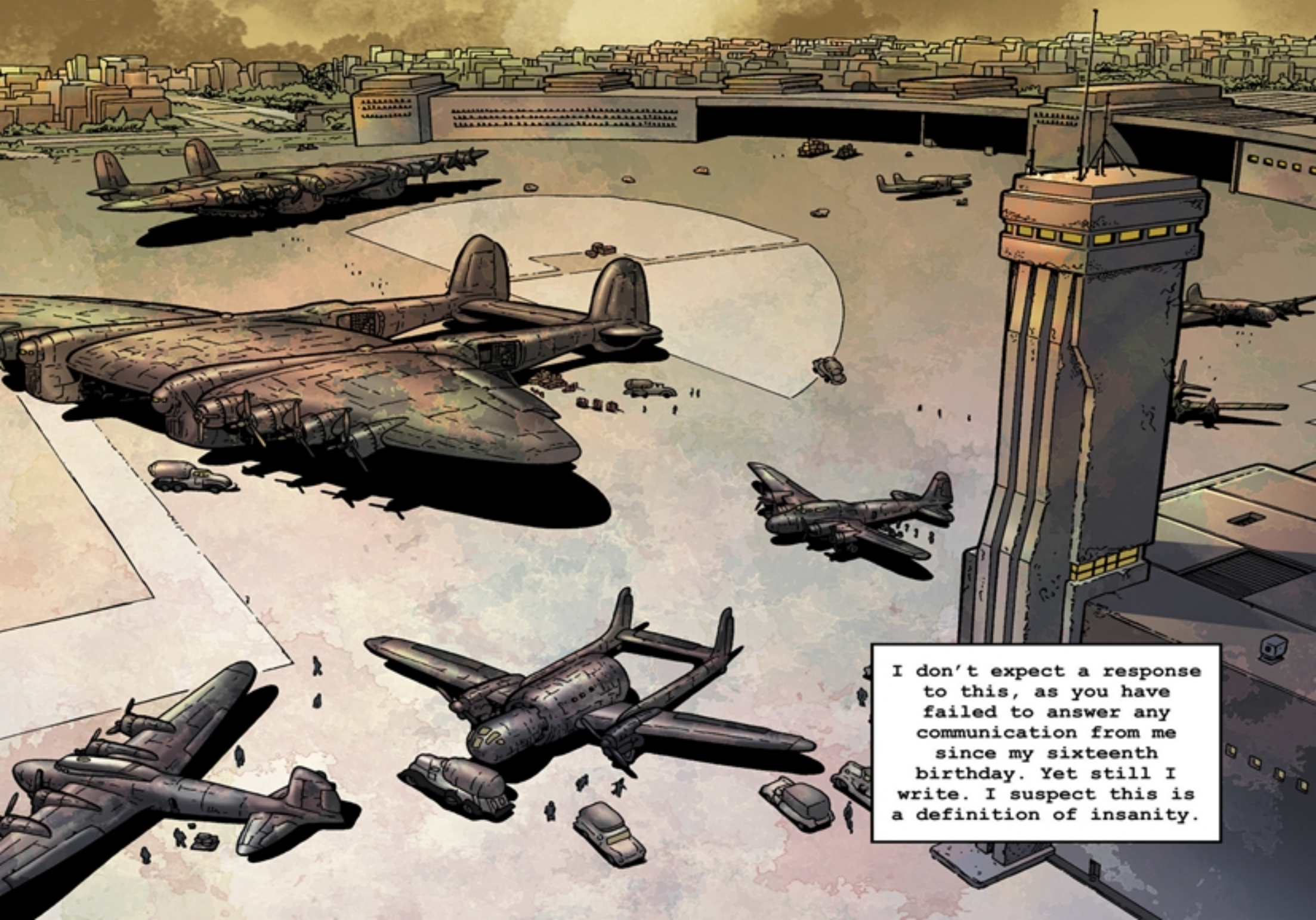
You've given up?











I don't expect a response to this, as you have failed to answer any communication from me since my sixteenth birthday. Yet still I write. I suspect this is a definition of insanity.



By now, the lawyers in New York City will have informed you of my father's death. I wonder how you met the news. Was there an afternoon of quiet consideration? Or a party in the evening?



If you read past the first line, and were not so convulsed with laughter that you could not finish the telegram, it appears that he died in the settlement nested within the interior of Ignition City.



The lawyers couldn't find a reliable agent on Ignition City to recover my father's effects, so I'm flying there myself to obtain them.

I'm flying, of course, in the Fat Pigeon, my private aeroplane. As you were doubtless apprised, my rocketship, The Perpetual Teatime, was compulsorily purchased by the US government.

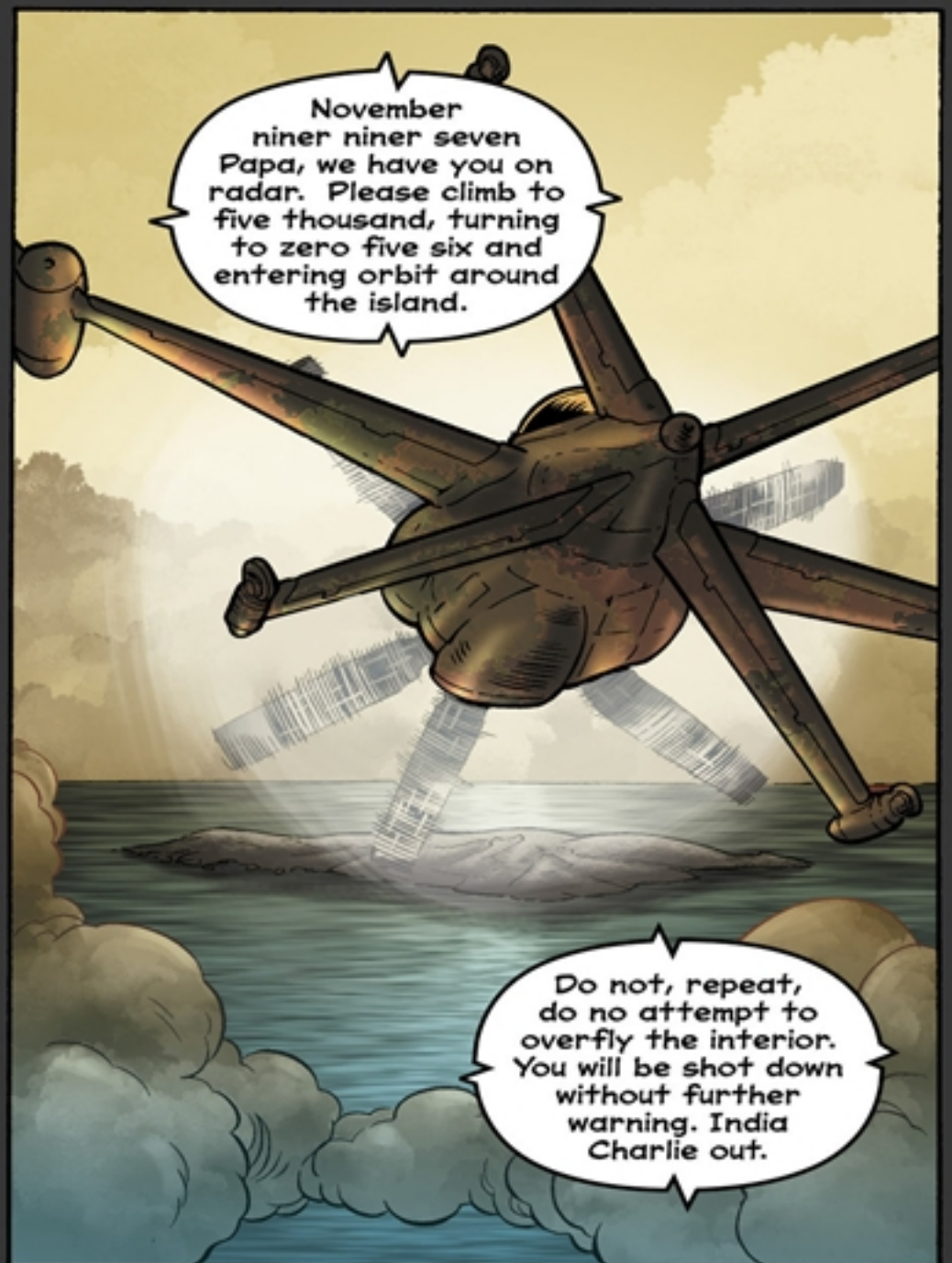


I say "doubtless" because I know you attempted to attach the purchase monies.

India Charlie, India Charlie. This is November niner niner seven Papa on approach from the west, requesting landing protocol, over.



November niner niner seven Papa, we have you on radar. Please climb to five thousand, turning to zero five six and entering orbit around the island.



Do not, repeat, do no attempt to overfly the interior. You will be shot down without further warning. India Charlie out.

Doubtless, you are also asking yourself why in God's name I would fly to Earth's last remaining spaceport just to collect Arthur Raven's last few scraps.

You will have read about the place, of course: an artificial island on the equator, ringed by launch gantries and landing pads, sending and received spacecraft twelve hours out of every twenty-four.



Think of it this way, dear mother: I lost the last eight years of him, and will never retrieve them. You, I am quite certain, will continue making me sick until the day I die.

Your loving daughter, Mary

Did you read the immigration documents?

Wasn't shown any.

Pffff.

You can't take a firearm into Ignition City. You'll need to fill out a form, and it'll be held in safekeeping for you until you leave.

If you intend to travel off-Earth, you'll need to contact us twenty-four hours beforehand and fill out form 18-X, and--

You're serious.

Very serious, ma'am. We don't let guns into the interior settlement.

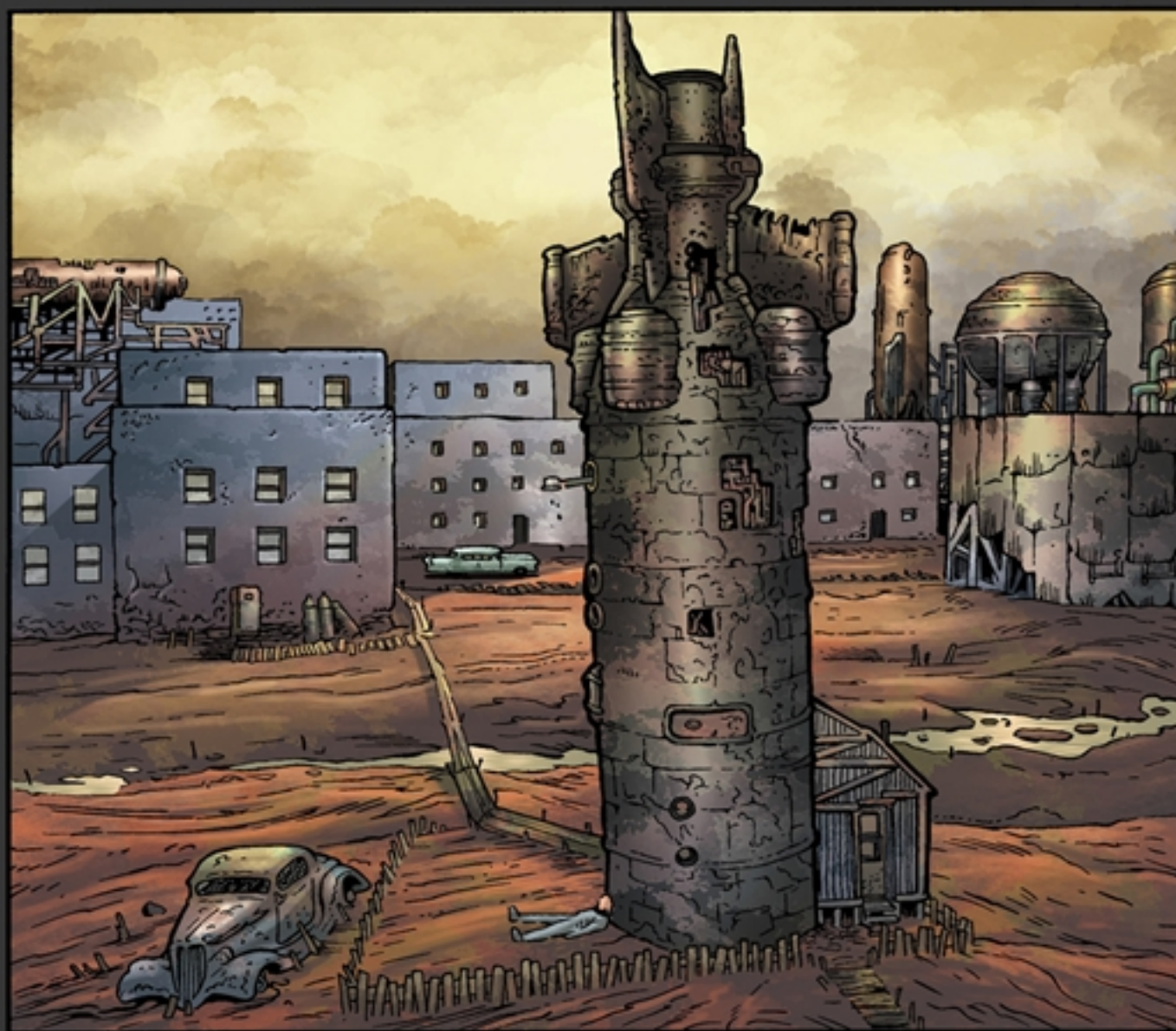
Great. So how do I get into the interior from here?

See Wallace there? Pay him fifty bucks and you can ride in with the day's supply convoy.

Or you can rent a sloat for twenty bucks.

It would be thirty, but they had some bad feed last night, and it's had a kind of apocalyptic effect on their guts.











Look, Bronco. I'm happy to take your money and keep you safe from the leadfoots and all. But you're going to end up making me have to shove your corpse into the recyc.

It's not worth drinking yourself to death over.

That's what you think.



Five hundred years from now I was a hero. I was in love. I was in space.

I get fucked over and shot back here with no way back and no way of even getting back into space.

And you think I shouldn't be drinking myself to death.



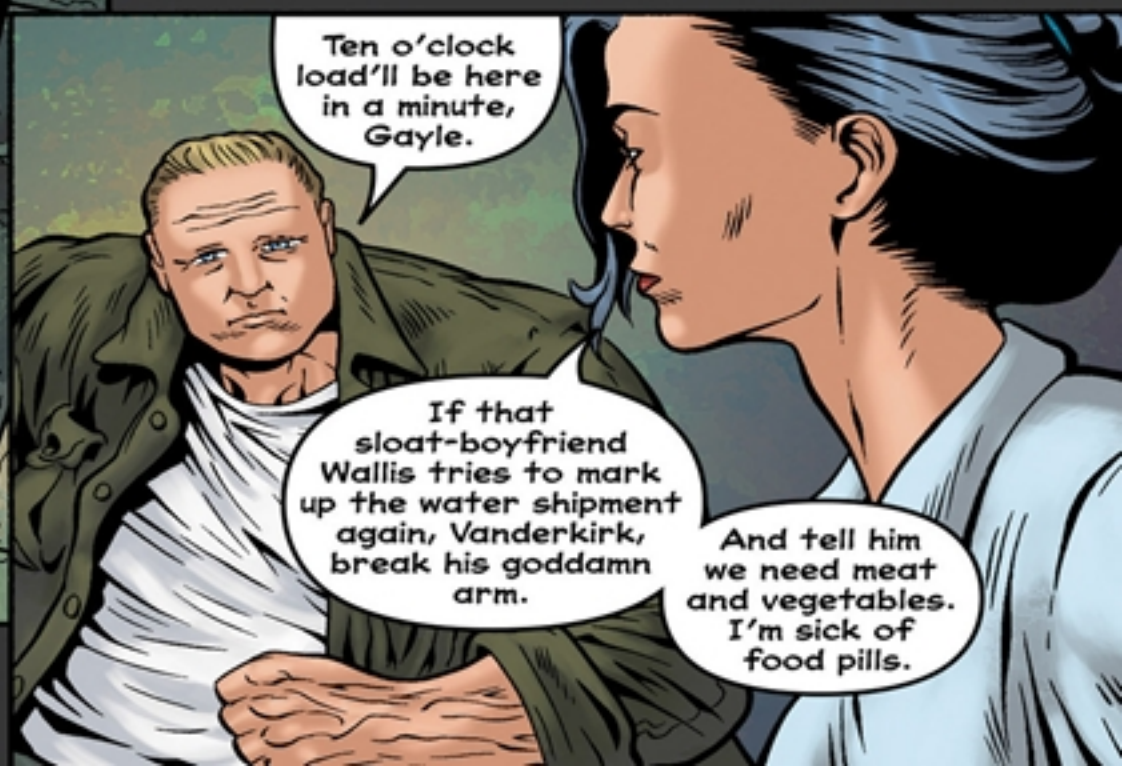
From my position here in the fucking dark ages, Gayle, it's the single thing in my life that makes a lick of fucking sense.



It's going to get worse before it gets better, Gayle.

I've seen it all. From the 25th fucking Century.

And fuck me for being the unlucky asshole who gets to live through it too.

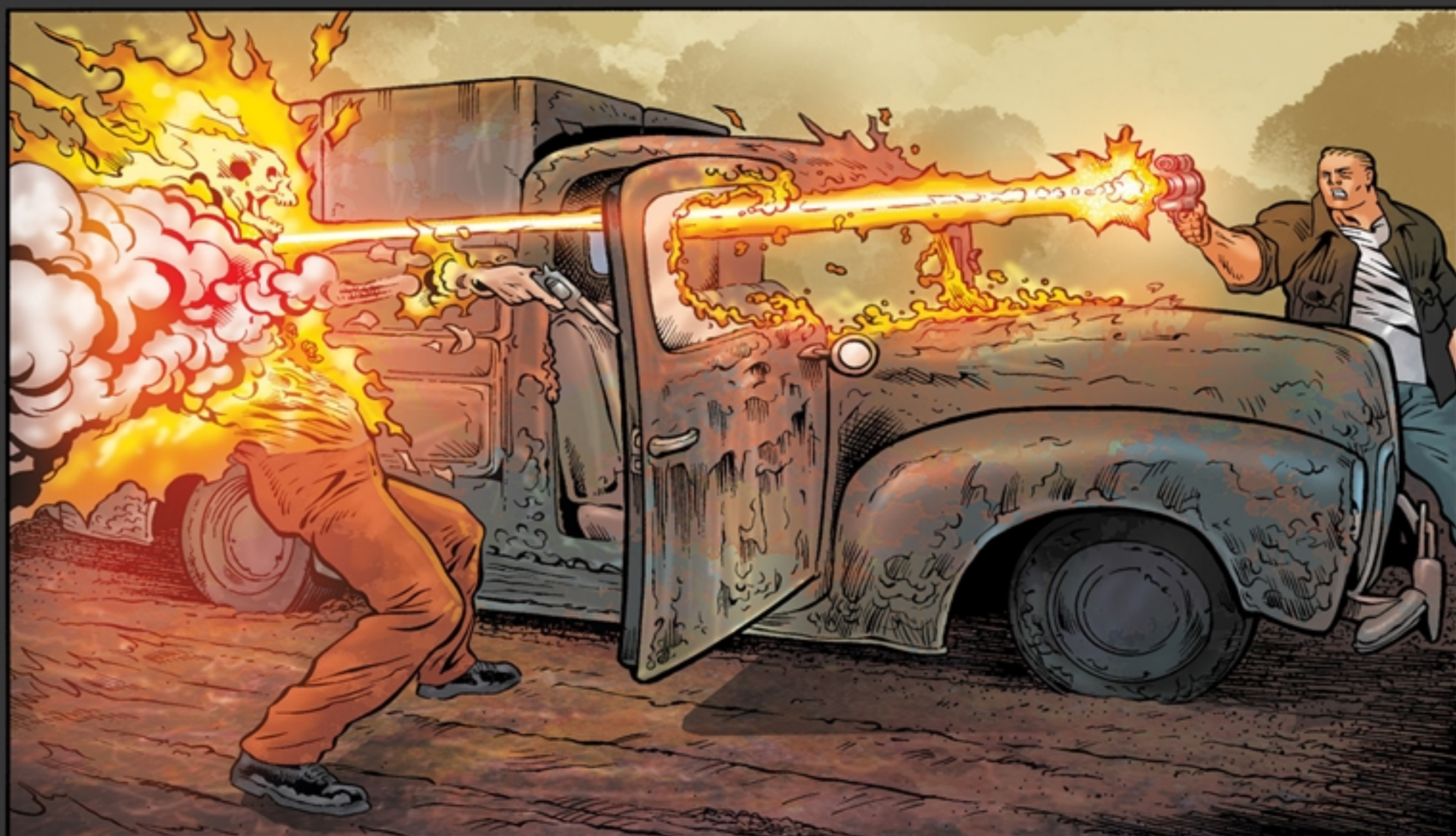


Ten o'clock load'll be here in a minute, Gayle.

If that sloat-boyfriend Wallis tries to mark up the water shipment again, Vanderkirk, break his goddamn arm.

And tell him we need meat and vegetables. I'm sick of food pills.









Excuse me.

What'll it be, honey? Painkiller from the drive into town?

Not the worst idea I ever heard. Whisky.



One dollar.

I'll give you ten if you answer me a question.

Just the dollar. You might not like my answer.



I'm Rock Raven's daughter. I want his things, I want to see his body, and I want to know where he was staying.

I'm not expecting to like anything you have to tell me.



Oh, honey. You're Rock's kid?

He was proud of you, you know. Talked about you a lot. Mary, right?

I'm Gayle. Your pa used to drink here. And you're not going to like a goddamn thing I have to say.