

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

VOLUME 2.5, WINTER 2020



DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the organizations for which they work, Marine Corps University, the United States Marine Corps, the Department of the Navy, or any agency of the U.S. Government.

Production of *Destination Unknown* vol. 2 and vol. 2.5 was undertaken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Any similarities to the pandemic are coincidence.

Destination Unknown
Volume 2.5, Winter 2020
Front Cover Artwork:
Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC



CONTENTS

From the Editors

Plan Crimson

Story by Maj Ian T. Brown, USMC

Art by Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC

RECON by Fire:

Welcome to the Bloody Bastards

Story by Maj Adam Yang, USMC

Art by Cpl Cesar Amaya, USMC

Creative Teams Q & A

Destination Unknown Concept Art

Volume 2.5 Edited by:

Maj Adam Yang

Maj Ian T. Brown

Cover Illustration:

Capt Thomas O'Brien

Cover Design:

Isabella Troncoso

Project Mentors:

August Cole and Mark Sable

Writing and Storytelling

Gabriel Pons

Illustration and Design

Partners:

Krulak Center

Marine Corps Information Operations Center

Marine Corps University Foundation

Marine Corps University

TAKING A KNEE

Greetings Friends,

Now that we've successfully published two volumes of *Destination Unknown* (and delved into the realm of web comics with volume 2.5, which you hold in your hands), we felt that it was time to take a knee, adjust our gear, and address a few things on our minds before we step off for Volume 3. This is us channeling our holiday spirit to 1) express some thanks, and 2) share some of the lessons learned from the past two years.

First, we'd like to say thank you to some organizations. The success of this educational project belongs to many. Institutionally, we've garnered official support from the Krulak Center within Marine Corps University, Marine Corps University Press, and the Marine Corps University Foundation. We've also found allies within the Marine Corps Information Operations Center, the Naval Postgraduate School, Naval X, the US Air Force Academy, and various operational units. For volume 2, we were especially privileged to have partners from the Australian Defense College. We're deeply indebted to the support and time these organizations have allocated for our aspirational effort to enhance military education.

We also want to say thank you to the individuals who have encouraged us along this rocky path. Having Commandant Gen Al Gray and Commandant Gen Charles Krulak let us raise the gravitas of this series and brought senior-level attention to our work. The Navy's term for such an individual is sometimes called a "sea daddy." We're also grateful for our mentors - Mark Sable, August Cole, and Gabriel Pons - who have helped us professionalize our processes and improved the overall quality of our products.

Most importantly, we want to thank all our readers, educators, and supporters who have engaged with our stories and our team members. We hope that you have enjoyed the series and found a unique idea or two on the future of national security and military strategy. Without these organizations and individuals supporting this effort this series would simply cease to exist. Through this joint success, we've been able to attract new artists, writers, and partners, and we will do our best to continue providing interesting stories and perspectives on important issues.

...so to everyone mentioned above...THANK YOU!

Second, in the spirit of the “grass roots innovation” effort central to **@EndersGalley**, we offer some insights that may help future innovators who may want to try something similar to *Destination Unknown*. The comments in the following pages are an amalgam of recurring discussions, issues, and insights from our teams. They're in no particular order of importance, but we do feel they are important enough to mention and convey elements of practicality, satisfaction, and frustration. Some riddles have been solved, and some are ongoing. We do not claim to have gotten the secret sauce right on making a military graphic novel, but we've learned a few things and would like to share our experiences with future writers, illustrators, thinkers, and practitioners of war.

Finally, we hope you enjoy the overall content of our “holiday special” volume 2.5, which adds to the spirit of the series with its mixture of narratives, both serious and not-so-serious. For prospective writers and artists looking to contribute to future volumes, we also offer this special issue as a bridge between volumes 2 and 3, and all volumes beyond. The future of conflict and competition is ever-changing, and so there will always be more roads to explore, and many destinations unknown.

All DU Editors

PLAN CRIMSON

(A Nightmare)

SCRIPT:

Maj Ian T. Brown

ART:

Capt Thomas O'Brien



It is 2056.

The world is warmer, and different.

The Northwest Passage is open.

This one fact has changed everything.

He was like this when you picked him up?

Not as bad, but yeah. Like he was kinda out of it. I thought it might be hypothermia at first, but he's in here and it's only gotten worse.

Unbelievable. All the rest of this shit going on, and then he, of all people, shows up outside my wire. No signs he was with a team?

Dex...my grandfather told me...you remember him...real Cold Warrior but he knew...

He knew...it should have been the Russians...when the Berlin Wall fell, first new friend we should have made...been the Russians...

Not so far. I've got patrols and drones out right now doing a wider sweep, but honestly if he's got friends out there, we may not find them. Not if they're wearing the same rig he was. We only found him because his suit seemed to be glitching.

Alright. I'm heading over. I've got my earbuds in—keep talking.

Dex...sorry, no other way...



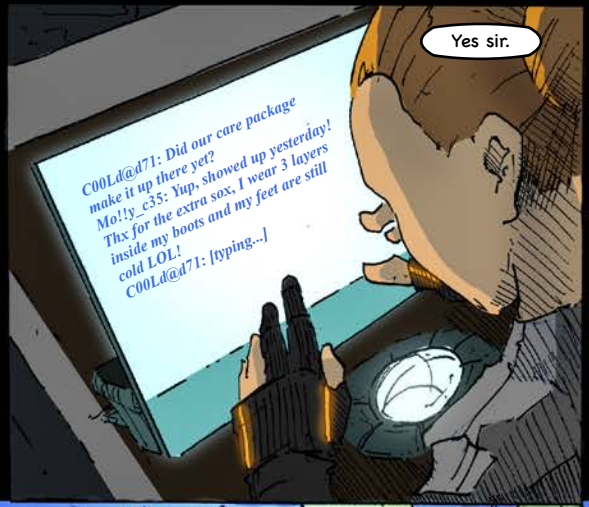


You ever seen anything like that suit?

Nope. Clegg hasn't either. She's down in the armory poking around at it right now, but she doesn't have the tools here for anything beyond a superficial examination.



You put the initial SITREP out on ANGUTA?



Yes sir.

C00Ld@d71: Did our care package make it up there yet?
Mo!ly_c35: Yup, showed up yesterday! Thx for the extra sox. I wear 3 layers inside my boots and my feet are still cold LOL!
C00Ld@d71: [typing...]



Alright.

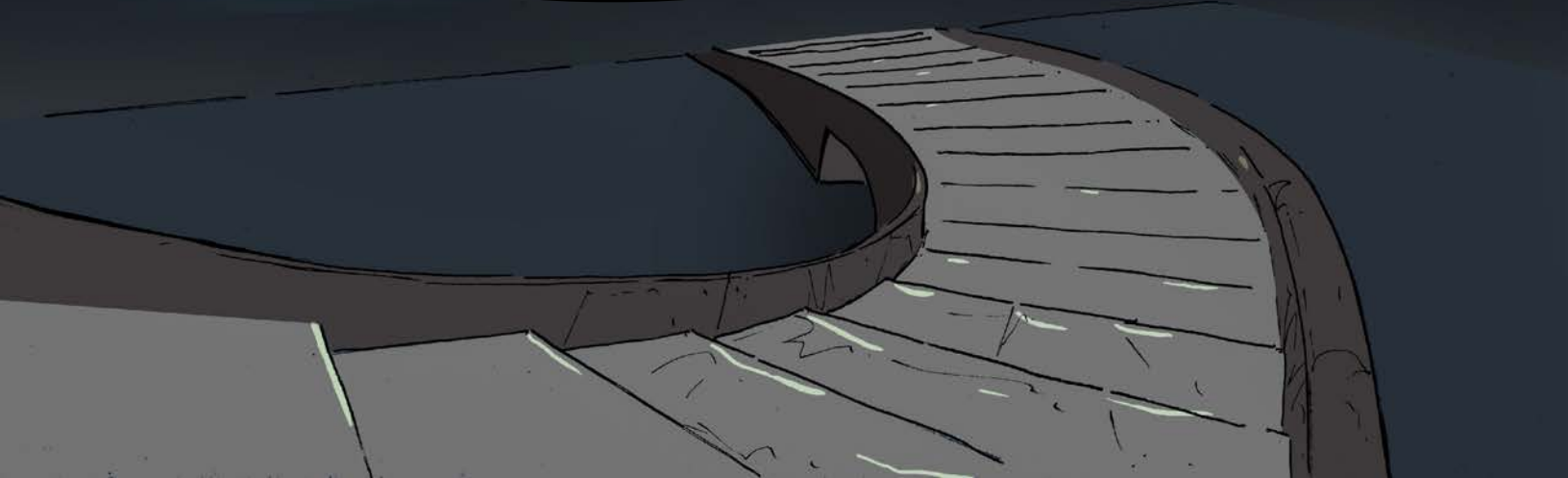


When I talk to him, livestream it out on ANGUTA so higher gets anything useful in real time.



Sir, what about Alert, and Iqaluit, and—

I can spare a few minutes for this. And with him showing up out of the blue, I think our other problems just moved beyond the realm of coincidence. He may have some insights. But whatever happens—





—this night just got a whole lot worse.

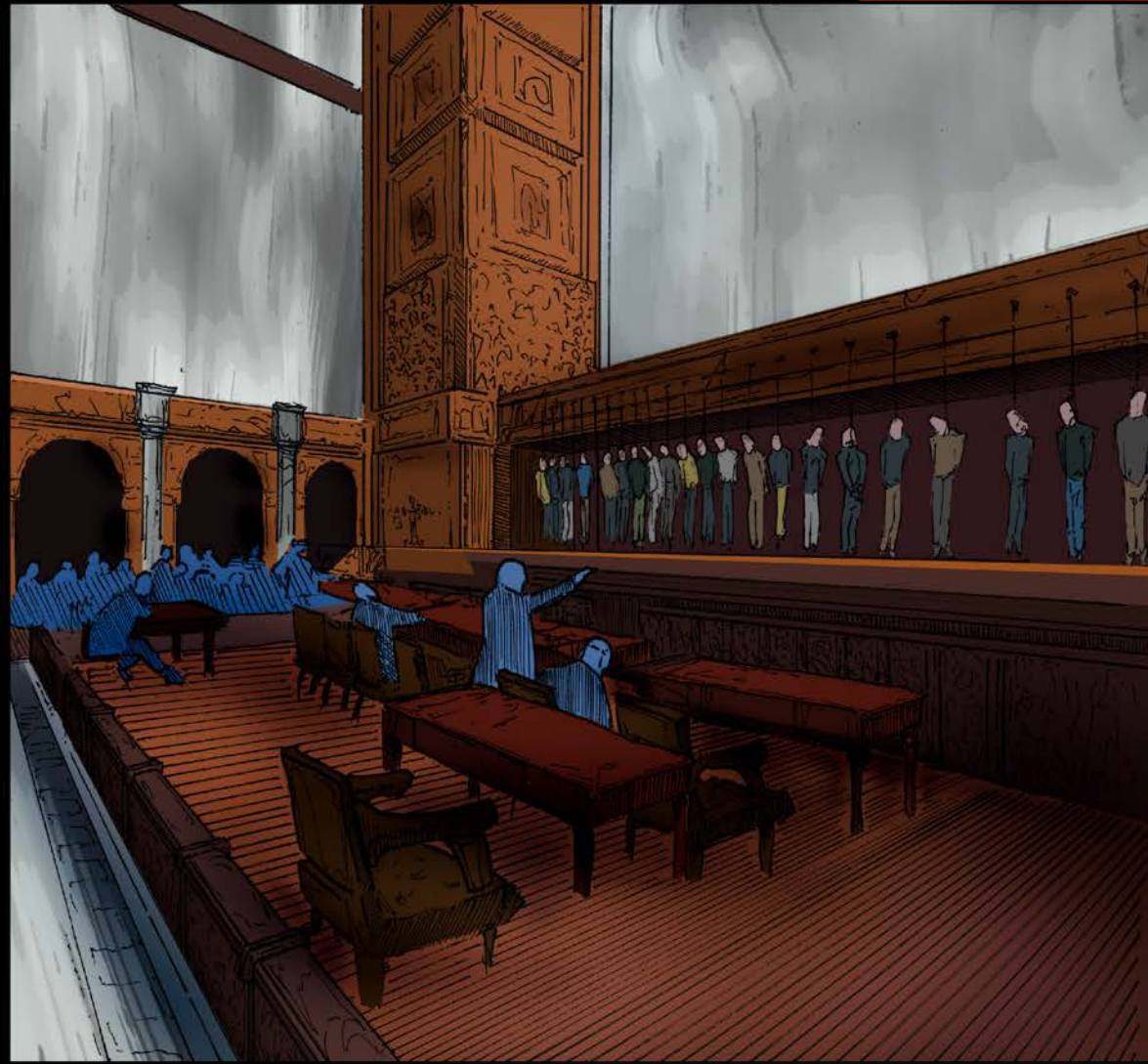


It should have been the Russians, Dex. Hell, we all thought it'd be them sooner or later. When the North melted, we figured that since they finally had the resources to match their ambitions, Russia'd make some big moves.



BREAKING//7 NOV 2048//NEW RUSSIAN PRESIDENT ANNA KALITOVA ADDRESSES...

But then their new president went off a whole different game script, didn't she? "The North offers the chance to raise the Rodina from stagnation to vigor. We will not squander this gift. Our old ways only brought us corruption at home and isolation abroad. From this day forward, Russia does not cover. Russia does not meddle. Russia provides."



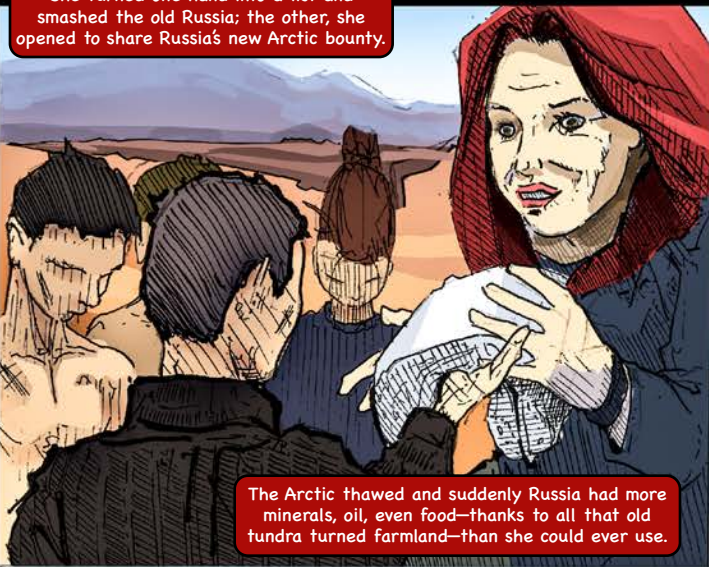
//UPDATE// RUSSIAN REFORMS

- DOZENS OF RUSSIAN ELITES SENTENCED UNDER NEW CAPITAL PUNISHMENT LAWS
- PRESIDENT KALITOVA VOWS NO INTERFERENCE WITH JUDICIARY
- PURGE SWEEPS THROUGH RUSSIAN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS
- DOMESTIC POLLS SHOW VIRTUAL UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR KALITOVA
- INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO MASS EXECUTIONS MUTED
- FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN RUSSIA SURGES

Of course, in America we thought she was full of shit. And at first, the rest of you shared our skepticism. Remember that, Dex? The world wanted proof of a changed Russia.

So she gave it to us. Russian media called it the "Second Oprichnina." The oligarchs, the siloviki, everyone from the old regime that'd grown fat while sucking Russia dry—jail, trial, and very public executions. Oh, the world made noises about the violence, but she was purging the rot we'd all complained about for decades.

She turned one hand into a fist and smashed the old Russia; the other, she opened to share Russia's new Arctic bounty.



The Arctic thawed and suddenly Russia had more minerals, oil, even food—thanks to all that old tundra turned farmland—than she could ever use.

Russia shared it all for a song, and still got rich. And all the things Russia manufactured with those profits, she shared too. Cheap AI, cheap hypersonics, and less cheap entangled particle networks, but all still freely given to those with a few bucks to pay.

And God, was the rest of the world grateful! Fucking giddy! Russia was everyone's new friend. You remember, Dex? All the old foundations were gone.

The Gulf states—world got hotter, wellheads ran dry, and they gave their scorched and destitute kingdoms back to the sands.



China didn't dry up—it burned. The virus burned its way through their country and everyone else's.



By then, the world was sick of the Party's lies. The world pulled out, and the Belt and the Road and every other piece of the whole rotten edifice came crashing down.

Few cared that China regressed to a new Warring States period. Though we did care what those dead-ender Party fuckers did in Panama. If the Party couldn't own the Canal, no one could.

Just like that, the world needed a new shortcut for its merchant ships.

Meanwhile, we clung to our frail lifeline moving Alaska's riches through the open Arctic, and our jealous—and growing—hatred of Russia. The Northwest Passage was our only hope.



The Bering Strait had no ice, but enough Russian—sorry, "Serbian separatist"—pirates that it was unusable. Oh, the Russian president said their navy was doing its best, but there was just too much coastline to control.

We said that was horseshit, but then it wasn't Russia that made us neglect our Navy's shipbuilding program, or flail in the diplomacy with you that could've built a northern railway...no matter. The world cared less about our troubles with each passing day.

America didn't provide—Russia did. All we provided was a frail trade route, and a craziness borne from that fragility. You saw how crazy it made us, remember, Dex? Crazy...and desperate.



Desperate, Dex, desperate...

The suit. Made against Russians. Should have been...

Yes, I talk. Dex, yes, I can...talk. To you. That's why. Here. I'm here. To talk. To you. I can.

No shit, Ellis. Popping up outside my wire, wearing a plastic bag that's flickering like a bunch of broken Christmas lights—that's pretty fucking desperate. What's going on here?

Ellis, I don't know what the fuck's up with you, but I need you to focus. My whole AO's a shit-show right now. You can talk to me, now, or I ship you to Ottawa for a much less friendly conversation with the Public Safety boys. Your call, buddy.

Fantastic. Best thing I've heard all night. So let's talk.



Start with how you made it within a snowball's throw of my perimeter without us picking up your EM signature a thousand clicks away.

The suit, Dex. It was for...against the Russians. So we could fight. Talk. Hide with no signature.

Weird...

What's up, Clegg?

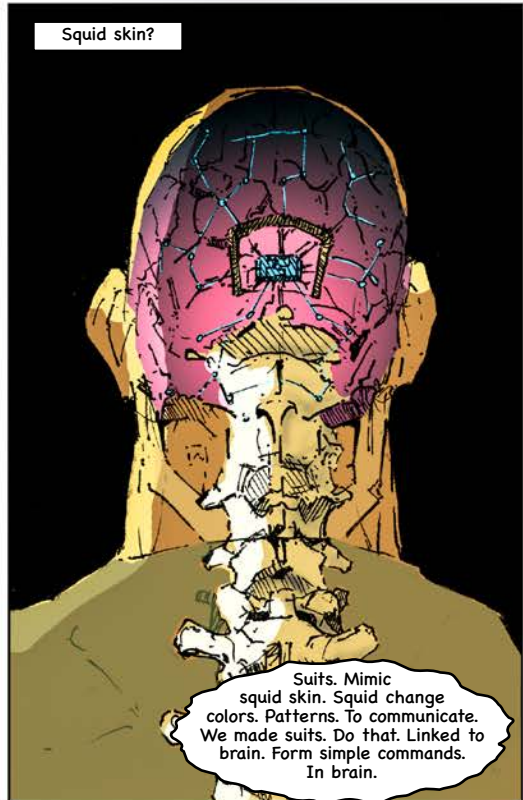


Can't hunt it down if. Doesn't emit. Not even sound waves. Don't even. Have to talk.

The glitch...it stopped.

Oh, come on Ellis, don't tell me that rig makes you all fucking telepaths.

No, not brain. Colors. Use colors. Like...squid skin.



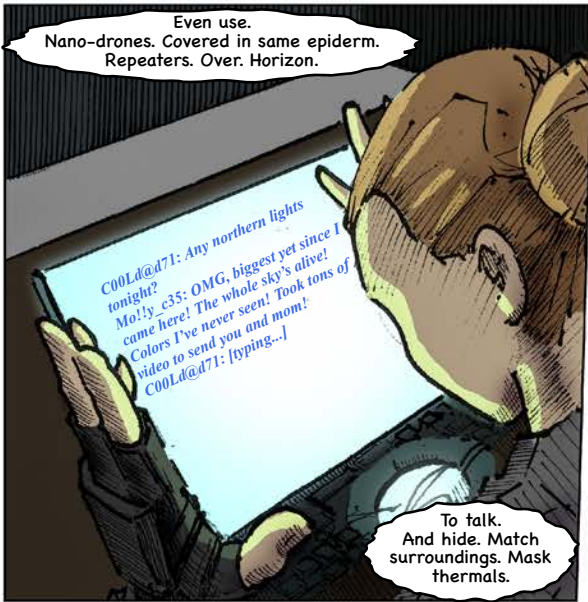
Squid skin?

Suits. Mimic squid skin. Squid change colors. Patterns. To communicate. We made suits. Do that. Linked to brain. Form simple commands. In brain.



Suit changes pattern, teammates' suits. Pick up. Translate into their brains.

No talking, no emitting. Just. Colors. Patterns.



Even use. Nano-drones. Covered in same epiderm. Repeaters. Over. Horizon.

C00Ld@d71: Any northern lights tonight?
Mo!ly_c35: OMG, biggest yet since I came here! The whole sky's alive! Colors I've never seen! Took tons of video to send you and mom!
C00Ld@d71: [typing...]

To talk. And hide. Match surroundings. Mask thermals.



Well. That's a pretty sweet rig. So what the hell happened to yours?

...glitching.



Giving up your position is a pretty shitty glitch to have. So you mind telling me what you were supposed to do with your squid clothes?

Because that's basically all you had on you when we picked you up. You got a cache somewhere I should know about? Or were you going to fight the Russians with nothing but pretty colors?

No. No cache.. Job's not to shoot. Just get close.

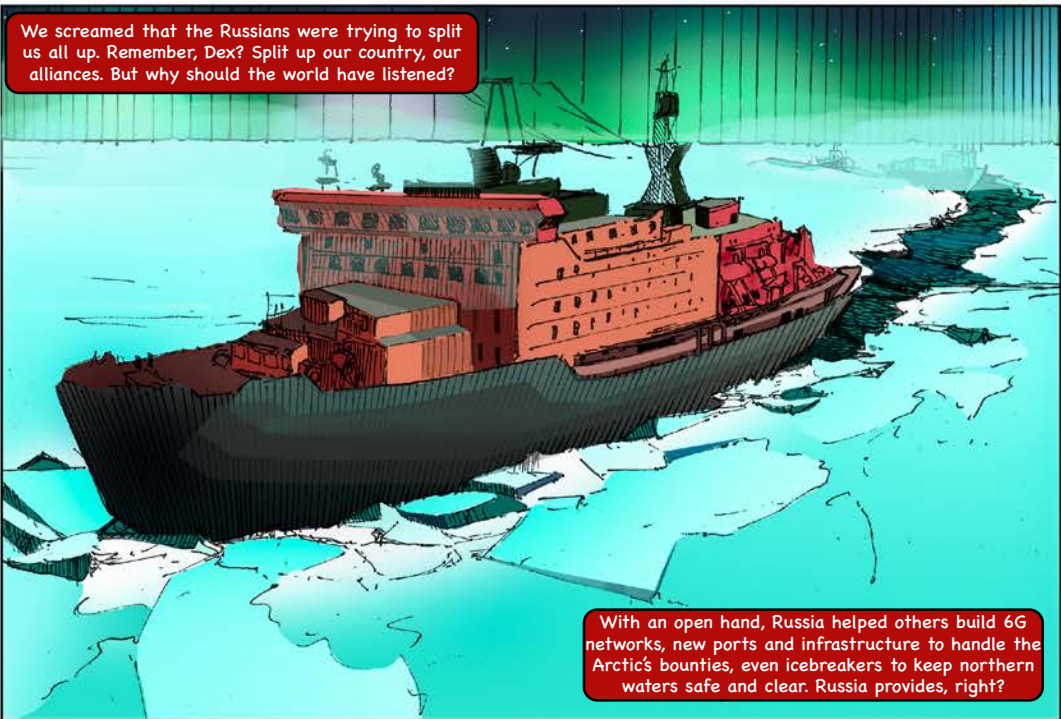
Get close to what?

People. Their devices. Their weaknesses.

Wait. You telling me—all the shit in my AO right now—

Best way. To degrade adversary. Spread mistrust. Discord. Not killing. Let them. Rip themselves apart.

Poison. Undermine. Russians taught us that. Our plan. Suits. Should have been them...



We screamed that the Russians were trying to split us all up. Remember, Dex? Split up our country, our alliances. But why should the world have listened?

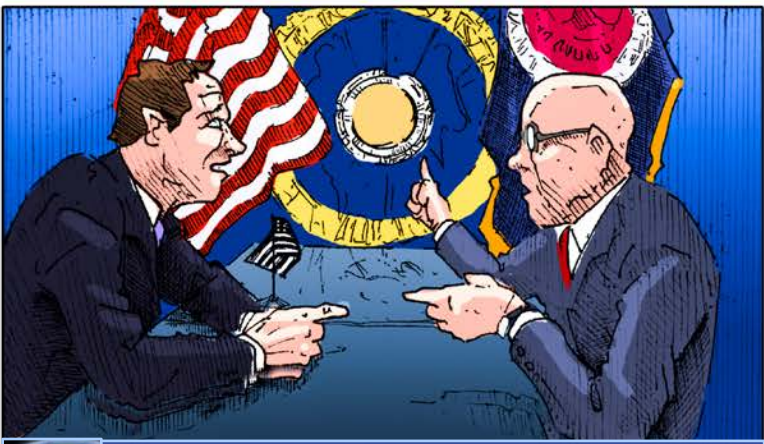
With an open hand, Russia helped others build 6G networks, new ports and infrastructure to handle the Arctic's bounties, even icebreakers to keep northern waters safe and clear. Russia provides, right?



Our hands were at our own throats. And our friends'. Our wellheads ran dry, our farms got scorched and shrank.

It was always the other side's fault.

Or Russia's. Or both. We made it sound like our country was full of nothing but Russian puppets.



BREAKING//5 APR 2053//TURBULENT TALKS OVER NORTHWEST PASSAGE BREAK DOWN...

So we needed to protect what little the Arctic gave us. It was a new feeling for us, Dex: vulnerability. Desperation. And we turned our focus on you.

You always said the Northwest Passage was yours—sovereign territory. Seemed academic, until it melted.



Oh, you weren't selfish. The world gave you transit fees, and you gave them fuel depots, search-and-rescue, crucial weather stations. And we paid, and you let us through, but...

How did we know it would always be that way? Our one lifeline, and it wasn't guaranteed, not completely.



Sure sounds like you got insight into what the fuck is going on across my command.

Am I right?



...deepfake.



Get close enough...

...for wireless signature from PEDs.



...yes.



Swell. Let's start with Iqaluit.

Iqaluit...

I've got a dead base CO, couple other dead bodies, and a full-blown riot among the rest of the living.



Quantum AI hacked. Got in. Photos, social media. Emails, calendars. See person's network.

Then. Fake stories. Tailored by AI. Put. Husband's face. On porn star. Tweet to wife.



Show your girlfriend. Out with someone else. At a party. Never happened.

Christ...but we'd know, Ellis! We'd figure it out!



...maybe. Eventually.

But for now. Can know it's fake. Your mind knows. But.

See your wife and best friend at it. At home.



Can't un-see that.

Even if you know.

You fucker, so you're just spreading lies—



Best lies. Have truth. Your base CO there. AI reported to us. Affair. With XO's wife.

All stationed. Together there. AI found it.

Made nothing up. Just put it. In front of XO, and then...





...base in Alert. Bet you're wondering. Same, but different.

Master warrant officer there—acquitted. Embezzlement. Last year, right?

Yeah...but—



In the news. We saw. So team got close. AI jumped in.

Warrant officer's richer now. All his corporals. Cold and dark in polar night. Now broke too.

I...Jesus, we got ANGUTA traffic that he's barricaded in his office while half the battalion's trying to smash in and you...you did—



What...what about the fires? Cornwallis, Bathurst, Somerset—

...yes.



God, Ellis...what...why?!?



You remember when it all fell apart, Dex. We watched it together, when I was in the last exchange class to Royal Military College.

Right before we got expelled from Five Eyes, which meant I got expelled from R.M.C.

I told you before I left—we felt the desperation.



As a country, the only thing that brought us together was fear of our future hanging on one fragile lifeline from the North.

I told you it would make us crazy. It did.

What we did with Five Eyes was irrationality borne of despair. Using it to spy on our own people—what did we think would happen?

BREAKING//14 AUG 2055//ALLIES VOTE UNANIMOUSLY TO EXPEL U.S. FROM FIVE EYES INTELLIGENCE SHARING...

But our intel community had gotten tickles—not "fake news," but serious indicators—that the Russian president was preparing to lock us out of the Arctic altogether. We were already down—a little more pressure and we'd be out. Russia'd be unopposed. We shouted to the world, but they'd tuned us out years ago. And of course she said, "That is not the Rodina anymore." But the tickles were there—we thought we could use Five Eyes without tipping our hand...

Attempting a FONOPS after that was madness. But we would show the world that no one would keep the Northwest Passage from us.



From sheer hubris we sent our oldest icebreaker through what little ice remained. It got stuck. You still came to help. Because we were friends, right?

POTUS wouldn't have it. No one knows what threats he made to that skipper. But the skipper was ordered: you will accept no foreign help. Get out on your own.



He got out, alright. He plowed through your rescue icebreaker and left the survivors to slowly freeze in the water.

...Russia, as always, would provide.

"Security assistance" to ensure your sovereignty over the Passage.

A few ships to help you patrol.

Advisors and technology to improve your facilities.

You banned our Navy from the Passage. Hardly surprising. But we were in a corner, Dex.

All we had was your word that you'd still let commercial shipping through.

Change that word, and our lifeline's gone. And in the meantime...

You didn't say yes.

But you didn't say no.



Our intel screamed this was Russia's foot in the door, with their boot on our throat to follow.



If we waited, Russia could control both sides of the Passage.

You didn't believe us. Why should you? But we couldn't wait.

They'd only have to halt our ships for "security reasons" for one day to crater what was left of our economy.

We couldn't wait, Dex. We couldn't. It should have been the Russians. All our gear, our strategies...all for them. But...I'm sorry. In the end, it wasn't the Russians.

Why. Mistrust. Discord. Get to your people. Your weaknesses. Draw attention. Look inward. All your bases. On the Passage. So you wouldn't look out. Until—

Until what, Ellis? 'Till it was too late for us to see you stab us in the fucking back?

Too bad, old friend. Your whole sob story's been going out over ANGUTA in real time.

And while you've caused some fucking problems in my AO, we're gonna find your teams and then your party's over before it starts.



NO.

Live in denial all you want, it doesn't change—

Dex. No. ANGUTA. Nothing went out. I'm so sorry...

Bullshit. I don't care what you did to a few iPhones, you can't hack ANGUTA, friend. It's entangled particles. Unhackable.

mo!y_c35: Any news from down south?
C00Ld@d71: No, nothing big. Nothing yet anyway.
C00Ld@d71: But your mom and I worry about you up there. U sure everything's OK?
mo!y_c35: Totally quiet dad. Just the wind. And the aurora. And always cold LOL!
mo!y_c35: [typing...]

So every base, every asset, everything plugged into ANGUTA from here to Ottawa just heard your whole story and is getting ready—

No. Not hacked. Not how you think. Told you. Suit's linked. To our brains. Didn't say how.

What difference does that make?

Because the link. Also. Entangled particles. From suit. To brain. And from brain to. Back home.

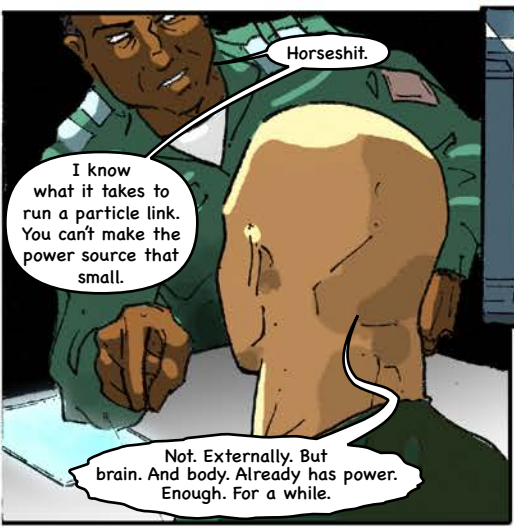
Wh...what?

Home. My home. My commander. POTUS. They see everything. We see. Hear it.

Not. All. The particles do. I have. Extra.

I...why?

For ANGUTA.



Horseshit.

I know what it takes to run a particle link. You can't make the power source that small.

Not. Externally. But brain. And body. Already has power. Enough. For a while.



Christ, Ellis, that's...that can't work, it's not sustainable—

Only doesn't work. If need the body. To survive.

Ellis—

I'm sorry, Dex. We came. For your weaknesses. I. Am yours.

I...I don't understand.

No confusion. Quiet here, right? Just. Me.

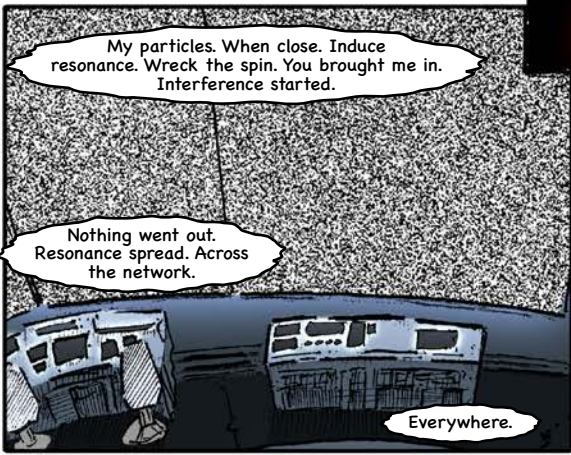
...yes.

They knew. You'd talk to me. So you could ask. The questions yourself.

I. Told them that.

Because. Someone had to get close. To ANGUTA. To work.

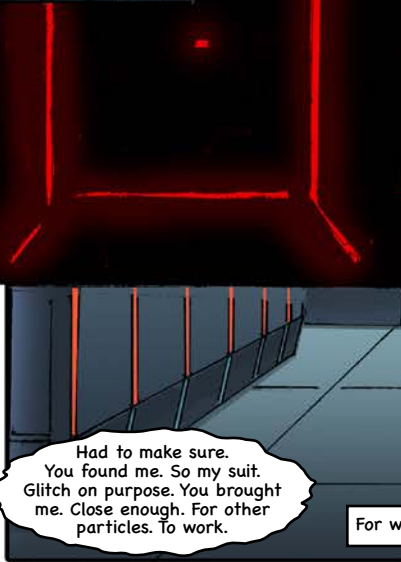
For what...for what to work?



My particles. When close. Induce resonance. Wreck the spin. You brought me in. Interference started.

Nothing went out. Resonance spread. Across the network.

Everywhere.



Had to make sure. You found me. So my suit. Glitch on purpose. You brought me. Close enough. For other particles. To work.



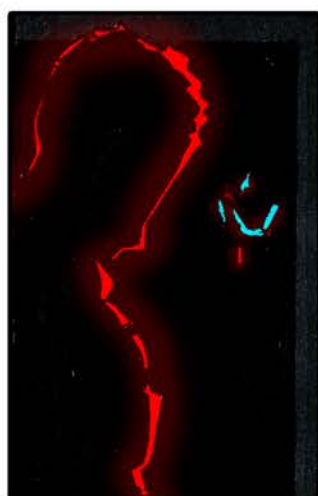
Wrong spin. Wrong resonance. Now. Work's done.

Ellis—



Sir! ANGUTA, it's—

Oh God.

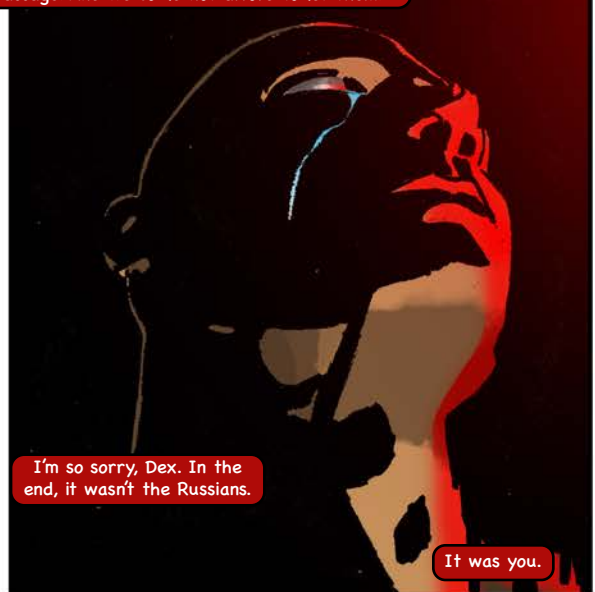


It should have been the Russians. They weren't on your bases yet. All those bases that control the Passage. And we could not afford to let them.



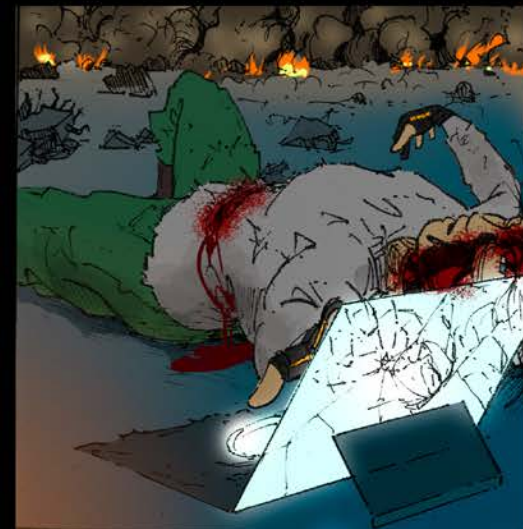
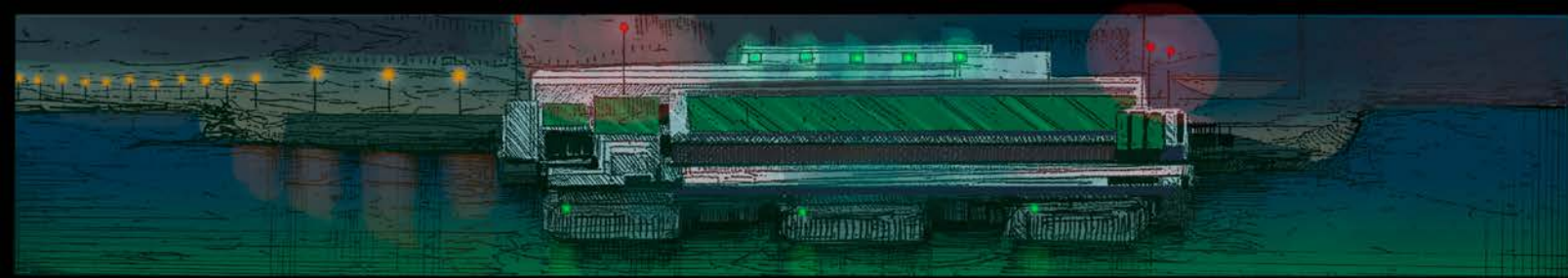
We could not abide it, Dex. We could not risk them snapping our lifeline.

You hadn't said yes. But you hadn't said no.



I'm so sorry, Dex. In the end, it wasn't the Russians.

It was you.



mo!!y_c35: CAN'T MOVE, SHOOTING EXPLOSIONS EVERYWHERE

C00Ld@d71: I love you get somewhere safe let me know you're safe soon as you can!

C00Ld@d71: molly talk to me, did you move are you safe? What's happening now?

mo!!y_c35: [typing...] [typing...]

C00Ld@d71: where are you!!!! talk to me!!!!

[user mo!!y_c35 has left the conversation]



Plan Crimson

Discussion Questions:

Note: This story took inspiration from two actual historical events. The first was "War Plan Red," a pre-World War II contingency plan by the US military for a preemptive invasion of Canada. The intent behind "War Plan Red" was to deny Canada's resources to Nazi Germany in the event the Third Reich successfully forced Britain's capitulation (in the plan, Canada was color-coded as "Crimson"). The second event was the 1956 Suez Crisis, which was partly caused by British concerns over the threat to their security interests in the Middle East and loss of access to Arabian oil. The Crisis caused a severe rift between the US and its NATO allies France and Britain. In both cases, existing alliances were challenged by "worst case" scenarios or unexpected events. Consider these events when discussing questions 1 and 2.

- 1) Plan Crimson describes a radical realignment of trade routes and resource availability—new options suddenly open up, and traditional ones decline or are eliminated entirely. How would this potential future reality affect old economic, military, or diplomatic organizations?
- 2) Climate change plays a crucial role in this story, empowering some nations while diminishing the influence of others. What are the implications of climate change on geopolitical relationships and alliances? What changes might the US see if it has to grapple with the idea that "there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests?"
- 3) John Boyd, one of the architects of Marine Corps maneuver warfare, once said the best way to destroy an organization is through "mistrust and discord," and the American battle plan in this story follows this approach. What differences in training and education, if any, would it take to successfully execute this strategy? Could a single military entity be capable of employing both non-kinetic mental/moral attack and conventional kinetic operations?
- 4) An aspect of the "mistrust and discord" approach in Plan Crimson is the weaponization of military members' personal digital networks as points for attack—draining bank accounts, exploiting social networks, and hacking intimate personal data to create disorder and confusion. Is the US military sufficiently aware of and resilient enough to absorb such attacks? What are the moral, ethical, and Law of

Armed Conflict implications if the US used similar methods of attack against adversaries?

5) At the end of the story, it becomes clear that the character "Ellis" has allowed his very body to be leveraged as a platform to take down the fictional ANGUTA network. Augmentation of the human body and mind are areas of increasing scientific exploration, and militaries are looking at bioaugmentation as well. What ethical questions are raised by enhancing the actual physiology of warfighters as weapons, as opposed to the traditional approach of equipping the warfighter with external weapons? What would the implications be to military success if the US military refused to implement bioaugmentation but adversary nations did not? What other areas besides bioaugmentation should the US military explore for future battlefield advantages?

Plan Crimson Creative Team

Author - Major Ian T. Brown, USMC

Major Ian "J.Lo" Brown is a CH-53E helicopter pilot by trade, lifelong sci-fi geek by choice. Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, he is an adoptive New Englander #gopats. He is old enough to remember "M.A.S.K." on TV and that Han shot first. Though he has written nonfiction pieces on future war and military history, this is his first graphic novel script. He currently serves as the operations officer for the Krulak Center. He owes special thanks to: Dr. Yuval Weber for story consultation; Capt O'Brien for the fantastic artwork that brought this story to life; and his long-suffering wife Brianne who again contributed her editorial skills to one of his projects pro bono. You can't take the sky from me.

Illustrator - Captain Thomas O'Brien, USMC

Captain Thomas O'Brien is a 1302 Engineer Officer. He is also a Combat Artist for the United States Marine Corps Museum and a traditional landscape painter with professional training in traditional art mediums from the University of New Mexico. This is his first time working with the Destination Unknown project. Capt O'Brien completed his artwork while stationed aboard MCB Quantico attending resident Expeditionary Warfare School. He is currently stationed in Okinawa, Japan.

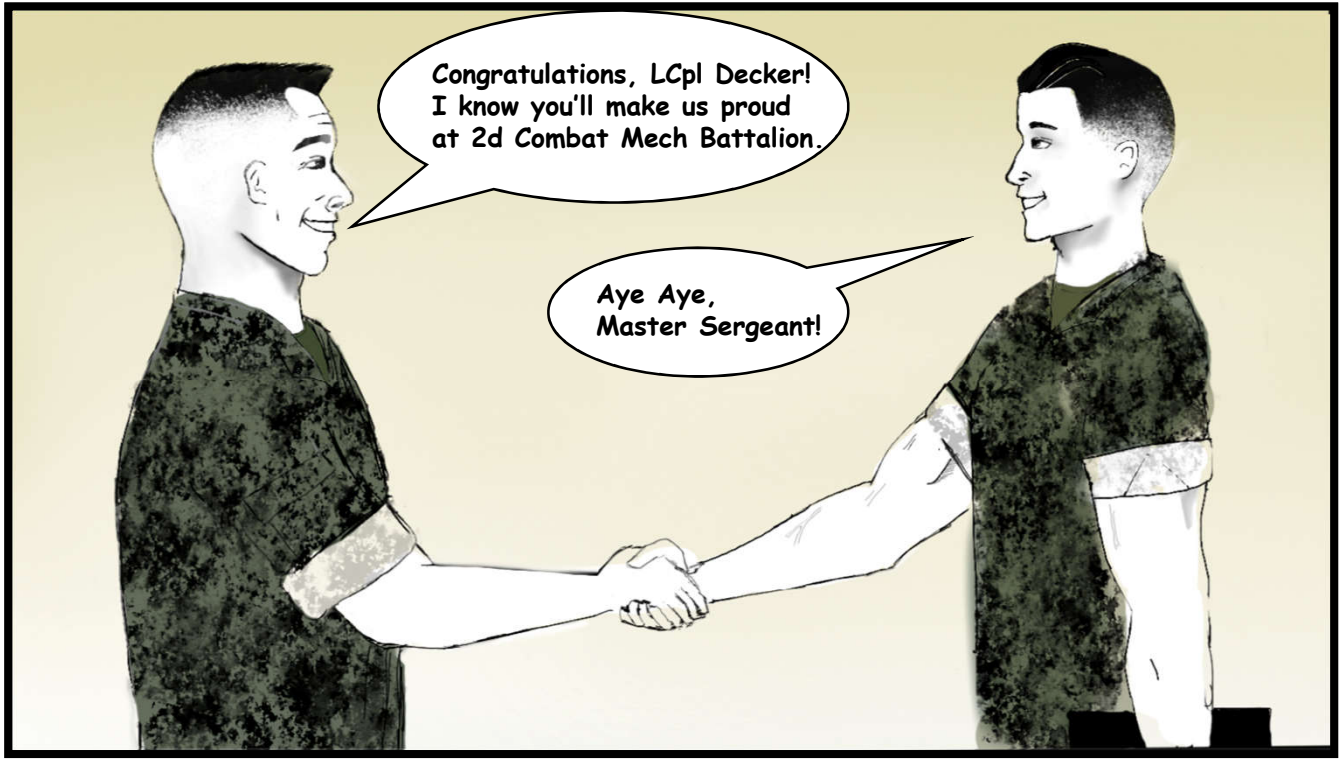
RECON BY FIRE:

Welcome to the Bloody Bastards



Written By: Major Adam Yang, USMC
Illustrated by: Corporal Cesar Amaya, USMC

Marine Corps Multi-Domain Supply School...Camp Lejeune, NC...Class 2080-3 graduation...



...oh, and OUR chowhall is by the mini-exchange. The grunt chowhall is by the armory. Take my advice, just stay away from there. Got it?



Um...aye aye, Corporal...



Our supply chain is critical, which means YOU ARE critical. Do your job, do it well, and know your place in the bigger picture.

Aye Aye, Sgt. Major!





Lucky you, Decker. You're getting assigned to Charlie Co.



...we'll go see the 1stSgt and then we'll stop by at...
OH SHIT, it's open. Let's take a look!









Oh shit! Er..that never happened, got it? Let's go see 1stSgt now...

...aye aye, Corporal...

Recon by Fire

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What do you think of the command climate for the 2nd Combat Mech. Battalion?
- 2) Think about your experience as you transitioned from your first MOS school to the operational forces. What were some of the do's and don'ts for your specific unit? Who taught that to you?
- 3) In this story, future grunts fly mech-suits from a chair. Consider your branch of service. What does the future warrior look like in your mind? How are they different from today's warrior?
- 4) In military organizations, each member has a defined role and function. The POGUE or POG (person other than grunt) is a pejorative term used to describe "non-combat" related members of the military.
 - Why is there such distinction between the combat warrior and everyone else?
 - How does your "future warrior" change the concept of the POGUE?

Recon by Fire

Creative Team

Author - Major Adam Yang, USMC

Major Yang is a returning author and original creator of Destination Unknown. He is a native of Brooklyn, New York, and his interest in science fiction and fantasy has extended from his childhood to the present. With a background in communications and information operations, he currently serves as a doctoral fellow for the Commandant of the Marine Corps' Doctor of Philosophy Strategist Program in the School of International Service at American University in Washington, DC. He's a staunch advocate for grassroots innovation within the Service, and cofounded the #Ender'sGalley innovation community at Marine Corps University.

Illustrator - Corporal Cesar Amaya, USMC

Corporal Cesar Amaya is new to graphic novel illustration. In the past, he has worked with oil and acrylic paints, clay sculpting, and pottery. He is originally from Maryland and currently serves as a supply specialist for the Marine Corps Information Operations Center. Studio art has been a passion of his since childhood and finds it to be relaxing. He intends to continue learning about visual arts and exploring different mediums to inspire the work of others.

Creative Teams Q & A Writers

What was the inspiration for your story? How much time do you think you spent writing your story? What impact did the writer mentor workshop have on your story development?

Maj Ian T. Brown: I answered these three questions together, since the writer mentor workshop took the initial kernel of an idea and radically changed its trajectory!

My initial story plan was to adapt a written piece I'd developed for an entirely separate science fiction writing contest. The contest asked for entries discussing U.S. intervention in a future near-peer conflict between an ally and a fictional aggressor. I figured it would be relatively simple to change the countries from fictional belligerents to real-world actors, add a little more dialogue, and be off to the races. But I wanted to retain the central theme in the larger tale of near-peer conflict: imagining a way that U.S. forces could gain an advantage in an expeditionary conflict, with a smaller number of forces brought to bear than their adversary, and also do so in a way entirely contrary to how we have operated in wars over the last twenty years. Namely: not radiate our communications and data links all over the electromagnetic spectrum in a fashion that any semi-competent adversary could use to track, target, and destroy our forces.

A science article I'd accidentally stumbled across while awaiting a flight in an airport provided the first component of this unconventional communications solution—it described how scientists were beginning to understand how squid could control the colors and patterns of their skin to communicate with each other in a rudimentary fashion. A second component came from my casual tracking of a separate, slowly unfolding understanding of the relationships between particles linked by quantum entanglement. The concept itself wasn't new to science fiction—*Ender's Game* and its ansibles used it as a vehicle for instantaneous communication across vast stellar distances—but to me it seemed like the science was starting to catch up. I put these two together as a "squid skin" suit worn by U.S. forces, which used data embedded in visual patterns generated by the wearer to communicate silently and completely outside the EM spectrum. The wearer controlled these suits via an implant containing entangled particles, with the suit itself having the other connected particle, and thus the user could pass instructions along the particle link simply by thinking about it. Other entangled particle connections were embedded in the implant to allow immediate, over-the-horizon, and non-electromagnetic communication with higher headquarters, as well as receive data streams from ISR sources.

But the squid skin and particle links were just tools to try and gain a deeper advantage in near-peer conflict: using them to allow U.S. forces to penetrate their adversary's mental

and moral cohesion and cause sufficient internal disorientation that the adversary could not use their superior numbers to effectively counter the American response to their aggression. These were the essentials of my original story—again, my thought was to change the “Narnia” countries from the previous writing contest prompt to something real-world (i.e. China and Taiwan), tinker around the edges, and voila, my story was practically written.

The writer mentor workshop shredded that plan (in a good way!). First, our group brainstorming session, and then individual discussions with August Cole and Mark Sable, made me realize that while perhaps the “chrome” of my story—squid skins and quantum entanglement—was somewhat unique, the future conflict scenario was not. The Marine Corps and American national security establishment as a whole have killed forests in their discussions of potential conflict with China (not to mention, variations on this future conflict were quite ably covered in *Destination Unknown* vol. 1). While that remains a very real, and valid, area of concern, if history has taught us anything it’s that the conflicts which DO come down the pipeline rarely resemble the ones we plan for. So, based on the challenges laid out by August and Mark, I started thinking: what’s the polar opposite of fighting an adversary who so many people seem to agree is indeed our likely future adversary? The answer that came back from the right-hand side of my brain was: fighting a friend. Given some of the shifts in geopolitical alignments the last few years, it seemed not unreasonable to postulate that you could not take for granted that yesterday’s ally would necessarily be tomorrow’s ally. But to really “twist the knife” of the story’s impact, today’s friend/tomorrow’s adversary in my story really needed to be the last one you’d expect. It needed to be someone intimate, someone with a well-established history of amity, someone right next door. I looked at America’s immediate neighbors, and my eyes shifted north.

That the United States and Canada could ever be anything BUT friends seemed preposterous at first glance, but...as the idea bounced around my mind, I recalled there was some historical precedent for friction—even potential conflict—between America and its closest NATO allies, and in not-too-distant memory. Exhibit A: before the U.S. entered World War II, among its many-colored war plans was one that envisioned Great Britain invaded or otherwise knocked out of a European war by Nazi Germany, which could potentially cause a forced realignment of Commonwealth countries against America. War Plan Red was the contingency to secure vital Canadian resources and transportation hubs to keep them from being used against the U.S. The plan never really went beyond being a paper exercise and was ultimately shelved when it became clear that Britain would never willingly surrender to Nazi aggression. But as a historical “what if,” it was still pretty shocking that my grandparents’ generation did not take a secure northern border as a given.

Exhibit B: in the 1956 Suez Crisis, Britain and France—NATO allies of the U.S.—supported an Israeli invasion of Egypt to secure control of the Suez Canal. The operation caused deep fissures in the NATO alliance, including the military withdrawal of France from NATO, and was another instance when the alliances we take for granted today appeared very much in danger.

So there was historical precedent for our friends not always being looked at as friends; but what specifically might drive such a radical shift in relations with Canada? Here the “polar” in the “polar opposite” narrative shift literally came to the fore: climate change, its impact on transiting the Northwest Passage, and what geopolitical realignments might take place among all those major powers who bordered the Arctic.

I decided to explore a world where, suddenly, Canada and Russia found themselves able to exploit the many natural resources currently locked under Arctic ice, with the U.S. now lagging behind. What if Russia—in public, at least—used these riches to become a benign global benefactor? What if Canada suddenly became the custodian of a hugely lucrative trade route through the Northwest Passage? And what if the U.S., through its own domestic divisions and lack of strategic foresight (ice-breaker hull count, anybody?), risked losing out on the bonanza and alienated long-time friends in the process?

This new narrative was definitely 180-out from “future war=war with China.” In fact, I ended up deliberately removing that “escape hatch” from the story entirely, by having global backlash from misinformation surrounding COVID-19 collapsing China’s overextension via One Belt/One Road and causing sufficient internal political turmoil that China was no longer a global player.

This was the first destructive/creative output from the writer mentor workshop. The second was the mentors getting me to shift perspective from this being just “my” story, to being a truly joint story-telling effort with my artist, Captain Thomas O’Brien. I considered myself extremely fortunate in having Captain O’Brien assigned as my artistic partner by the DU editorial team. Generals have commissioned him to paint their retirement portraits—I knew that anything I imagined, he could bring to life visually. But the mentor workshop brought home the truth that, for a graphic novel story, the artist isn’t just there to draw what the writer tells him or her to. The writer needs to offer opportunities for the artist to express their own talents and bring new visions to the overall story that the writer might never have considered.

I’d thought the whole “squid skin” concept was visually cool enough in its own right without needing further improvement. But if I was already shredding the China conflict narrative, I should also open the aperture for Captain O’Brien to do more than just draw and illustrate a colorful set of clothes. And shifting the story away from China and to a different geographical and geopolitical setting unlocked a much wider array of

possibilities. Instead of writing a story for him to draw, I started thinking of places I could send the story so the readers could really appreciate the fullness of his talent.

Captain O'Brien wound up taking us around the world. He took us to the Panama Canal, burning and ruined by the death throes of One Belt/One Road. He took us to Middle Eastern deserts rendered uninhabitable by climate change, to a Bering Strait closed by piracy, to a new Russia that had left its habit of meddling behind it (or had it?). My favorite panel is the landscape spread of Nanisivik Naval Base, on Baffin Island, Nunavut Territory. I basically gave him the name of the place, asked him to add a few buildings to the existing geography, and throw some northern lights on top. He turned those rudimentary instructions into a beautiful (and geologically accurate!) rendering of a Canadian base, emblematic of a growing regional power in the newly unlocked, and very alien, world that exists above the Arctic Circle.

The seeds of all these changes were born from the writer mentor workshop, and I'm pretty sure that that very evening, I went home and started madly making changes to my original concept. I worked through my off-hours for a few days to lay out the framework of what would become the "Plan Crimson" story. I consulted the Krulak Center's Russia Chair, Dr. Yuval Weber, for background and plausible dynamics of Russian history that could potentially lead to a new future where "Russia provides." We didn't have a hard deadline for finishing the script, but I think it was inside of a month that I had a revised—and radically different—story ready to tell. I wanted to get the words done because the words themselves were no longer the most important part of the story. I was excited about the new direction overall that the writer mentor workshop had unlocked, and I wanted to get the words done so I could get them to Captain O'Brien, and see what new world he could create with them.

One final comment: the story's called "a nightmare" for a reason. There is nothing desirable in the least about "Plan Crimson's" future. But the words "I can't imagine X would ever happen" should not be in the military professional's vocabulary. If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that very little is outside the realm of the possible.

Capt Walker Mills: (Note: Capt Mills was a 1stLt at the time he wrote his story for volume 1 of *Destination Unknown*, "The Best Seat in the House")

I used the prompt and riffed off an idea about using line-of-sight lasers for high-speed communications that I thought was cool. And I wanted to use an unconventional story telling method, so I picked an interview/testimony. That was inspired by the book *World War Z* which is just a fantastic example of unconventional storytelling. I probably wrote the first draft over one week and then kept making small adjustments until I had to submit it for the project.

What were some of the surprises or challenges you had working with your artist?

I didn't realize how willing he was to illustrate my story. I expected a kind of equal partnership but in the end the author writes the story and the illustrator illustrates the story the author has written.

If you did this project again, what would you do better?

I would be much more clear with the illustrator about what I wanted him to draw. Looking back on it, I thought that I was giving him artistic freedom but I think I was making his job more difficult, and the illustrator's freedom should come in how they depict the story as it is described to them. [That said,] I am so thankful that I got to work with CJ [Baumann] after seeing the other artwork.

Is there anything the editors or the Krulak Center could have done more to assist your work?

I think I would have liked to come up with my own prompt. I think that would have been allowed but I felt like what was being asked of us was to respond to the prompts we were given which was a bit limiting.

Artists

What was your artistic medium (pencil, water color, paint, digital, etc.) and why did you choose it?

TSgt Macey Valentine, USAF ("Ransom"): Pencil, paper, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Autodesk Sketchbook Pro

Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC ("Plan Crimson"): Pencil, pen, digital color. Pen and ink is naturally comfortable for me; I have formal training in it. Color I am not formally trained in, but the prospectus or prompt suggested color be used if possible, so I made the attempt to color. Took a long time to get the hang of it, and expensive hardware/software as well. The product came out beautiful

What was your experience working with your author to illustrate the story? Did you simply "draw the text" as you saw fit - or did you have to go back and forth with your writer?

TSgt Valentine: We went back and forth, but there were some artistic liberties taken throughout. Some portions of the story I didn't feel like I could do justice, while others I felt like I could add more to enhance the story. I feel like there was a good balance and we worked really well together!

Capt O'Brien: My experience was very limited, but there was a natural understanding that communication back and forth was absolutely necessary and expected. We did just that.

What were some of the surprises or challenges you had working with your writer?

TSgt Valentine: Realizing the limits of my artistic capabilities regarding elements to the original story. For instance, I'm not great at drawing men or environments/backgrounds, so there was some anxiety with making sure the story could still be told within the constraints of my abilities as an artist.

Capt O'Brien: The challenge is establishing trust. The writer should have confidence that the Artist can do the story justice. The artist has to translate the work on paper, translate what the writer thinks it should look like, translate what the industry expects decent work to look like, and then make it happen. The challenge is just getting the project off the ground and gaining momentum.

How much time do you think you spent illustrating your story?

TSgt Valentine: No clue, honestly... on and off for about 3 or 4 months, I think.

Capt O'Brien: Over 80 hours, easy. Probably more. I mean, like pure 80 hours with pen to pad, ink to graphic. Again, probably more.

Did the Destination Unknown staff or project mentors influence your art in any way?

TSgt Valentine: Absolutely. I was determined to make sure our story and my art was comparable to the other pieces that were included. I didn't want ours to appear careless or thoughtless.

If you did this project again, what would you do better?

TSgt Valentine: I would manage my time better. I was juggling school, work, my family, and COVID had come along toward the end during my time working on this addition, so making sure I had the time set aside to focus just on his project would help a lot.

Capt O'Brien: All of it, more ink, more pencils, more color, more education, more communication, MORE. EVERYTHING I WILL DO BETTER, that's the expectation, no, THE MANDATE, thou shall do EVERYTHING BETTER.

Is there anything the editors or the Krulak Center could have done more to assist your work?

Capt O'Brien: Ensure the original product is unadulterated, ensure the quality and content is safeguarded from anything that would corrupt the product in any way. The way the writer and artist wants to present the product should be exactly the product the world sees. NO ONE ELSE'S MITTS SHOULD TOUCH THE WORK without authorization.

Some Comments from the Editors

Writers. Writing graphic novels is a bit different from what our writers are used to. For those not accustomed to this format, you often have to write a base story to get something going, simplify it down to fit a comic format, and possibly rewrite the story again as they work with their artists. Comic writing is iterative to say the least. All good advice on writing interesting characters and stories still apply.

Artists. Drawing comics is tough. Most of the time, our artists have never illustrated in tandem with a writer, nor have they illustrated in the comic format. However, all of our artists are super talented and super motivated and that helps the process out a lot. We recommend to the artists that they may not want to "go all out" on every single drawing. This is especially challenging for artists who have done big elaborate pieces in the past. We ask our artists to do their best in finding an acceptable and consistent quality for their illustration, without trying to make every single panel super detailed and perfect. And for the overall process, the artistry is the "long pole in the tent" to say the least. Drawing... say 20 images...can easily consume up to 40 hours!

Time management. The work-life balance for the Destination Unknown team is tough. For everyone involved in this project, it is a labor of love. Late night conference calls, lots of emails, weekend calls, and a busy WhatsApp group is part of this production process. Remember how this comic is "by the warfighter for the warfighter?" Everything you see in our volumes is additional work and time our team members have dedicated on their own accord.

Networking. One of the best parts about completing a volume is that it becomes a "calling card" to engage other writers, artists, and military leaders. It is an easy talking point and surprisingly effective means to engage other organizations for partnerships or other business. For instance, we were recently able to capture the attention of some members from the US Air Force Academy. They liked what they saw and now we're planning on having some cadets involved for Volume 3 (fingers crossed)!

BRUTE KRULAK CENTER FOR INNOVATION
AND CREATIVITY

PRESENTS SUMMER 2020

DESTINATION UNKNOWN



ENDER'S GALLEY PRESENTS *DESTINATION UNKNOWN*, VOL. 2

PRODUCED BY THE BRUTE KRULAK CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY - MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY

ALLIED SUPPORT AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE COLLEGE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY PRESS

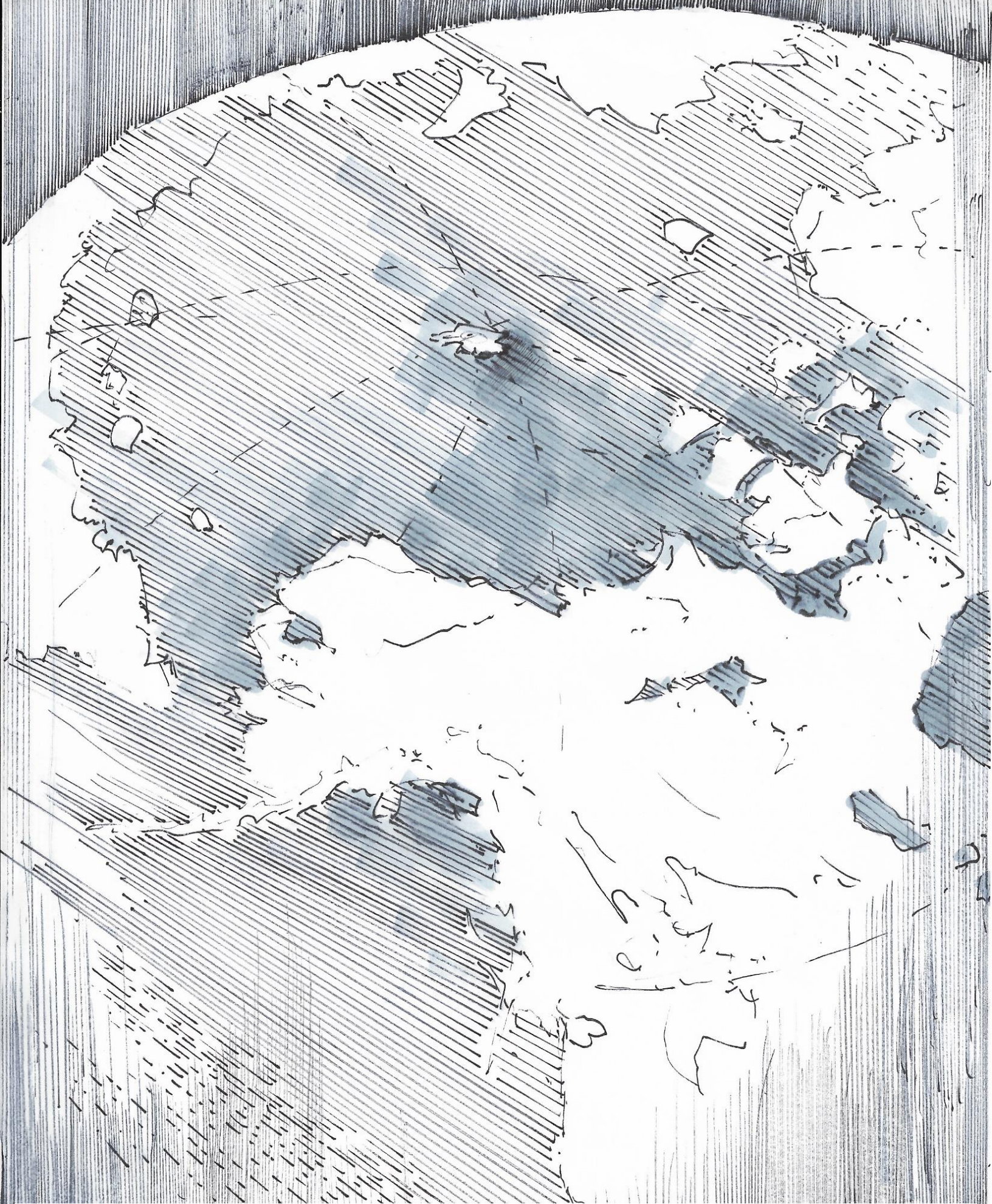
SPECIAL APPEARANCE BY GENERAL ALFRED M. GRAY

WANT TO JOIN THE FIGHT?
endersgalley@gmail.com

Destination Unknown vol. 2 unused cover concept (Marine Corps University Press)



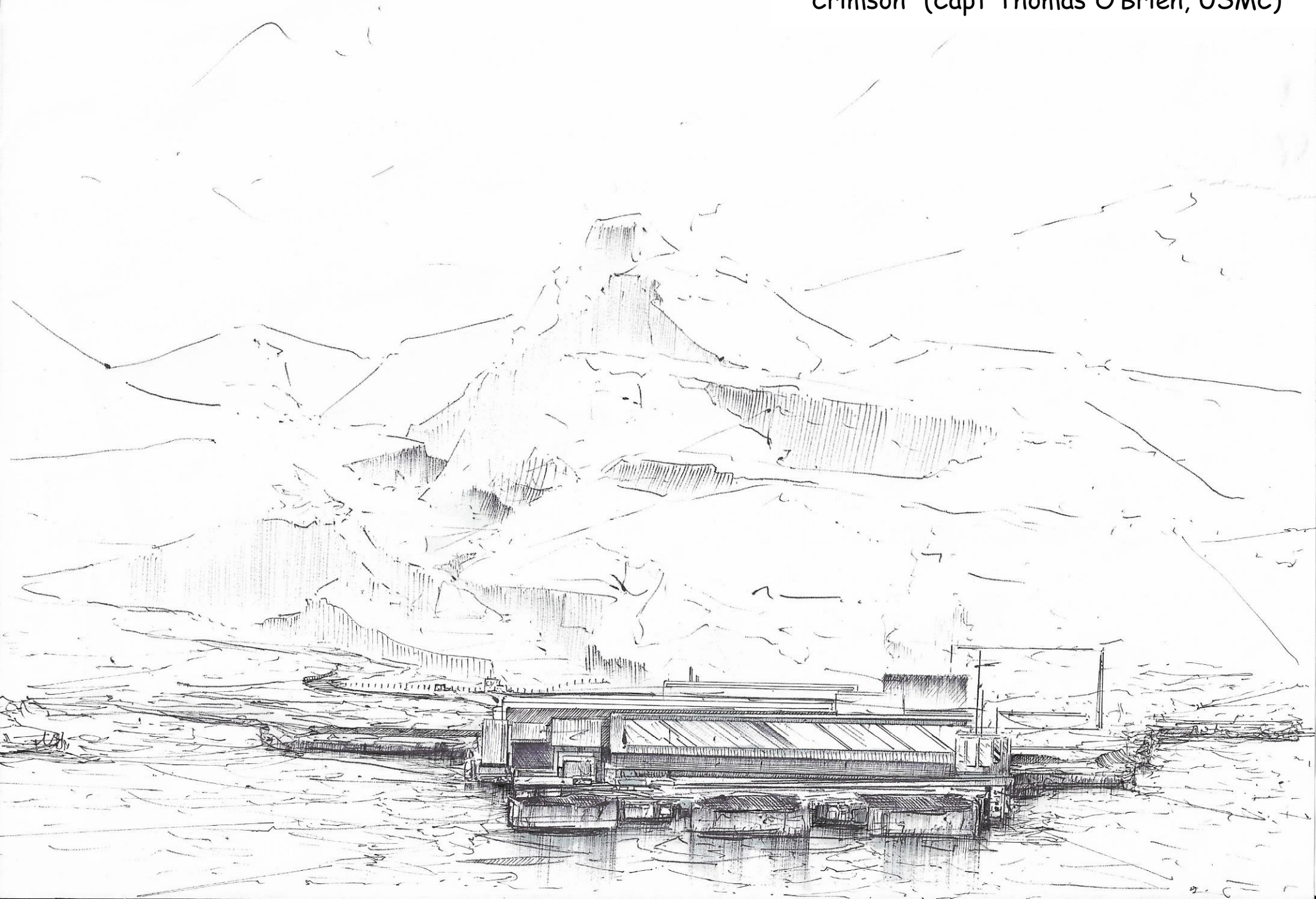
Destination Unknown vol. 2 unused cover concept (SSgt William Bradley, USMC)



Original front-piece sketch for "Plan Crimson" (Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC)

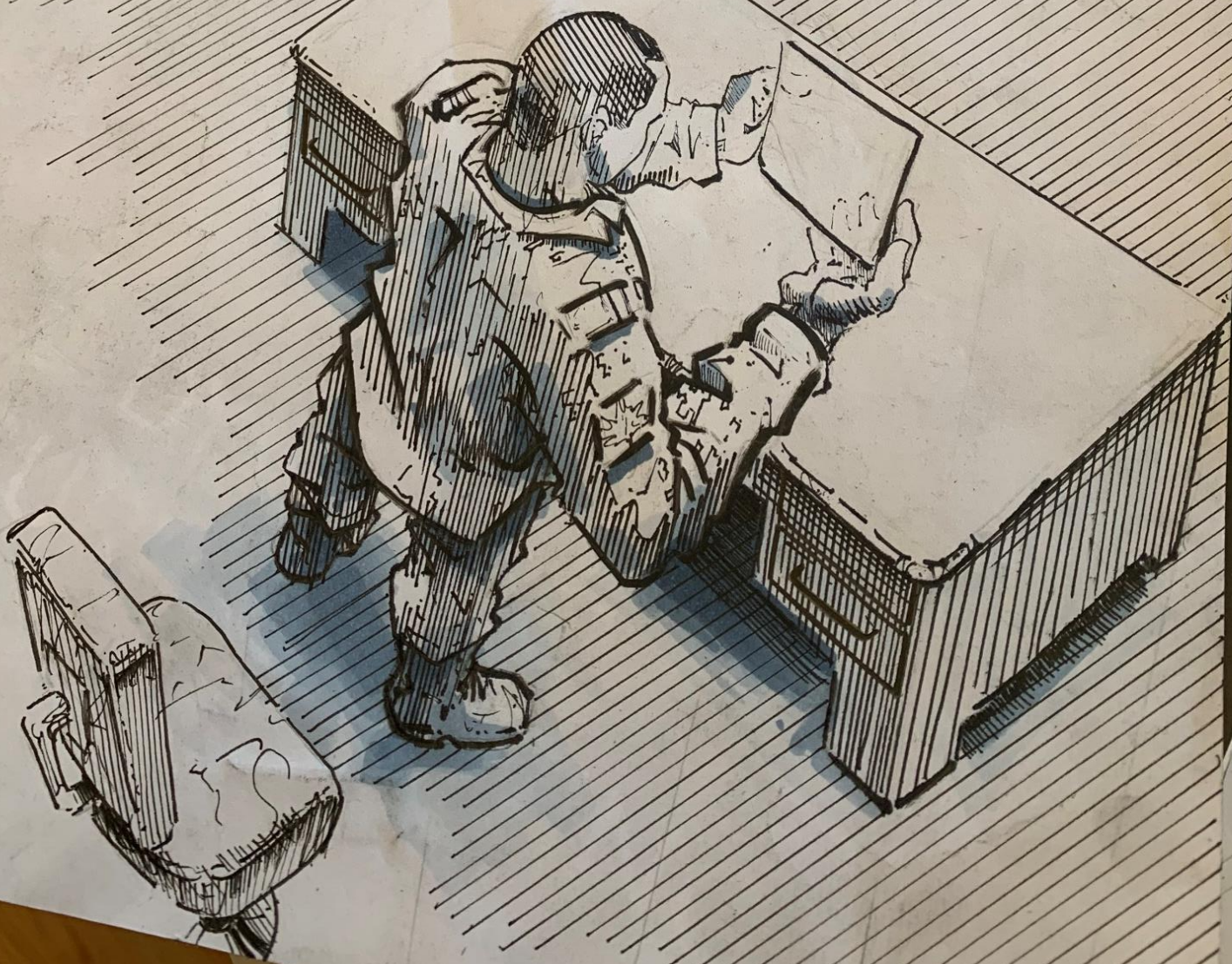
Baffin Port Facility

Original concept sketch for Nanisivik Naval Base, Baffin Island, Nunavut, from "Plan Crimson" (Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC)





Early concept sketches for Ellis (upper left) and Dex (lower right) from "Plan Crimson" (Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC)

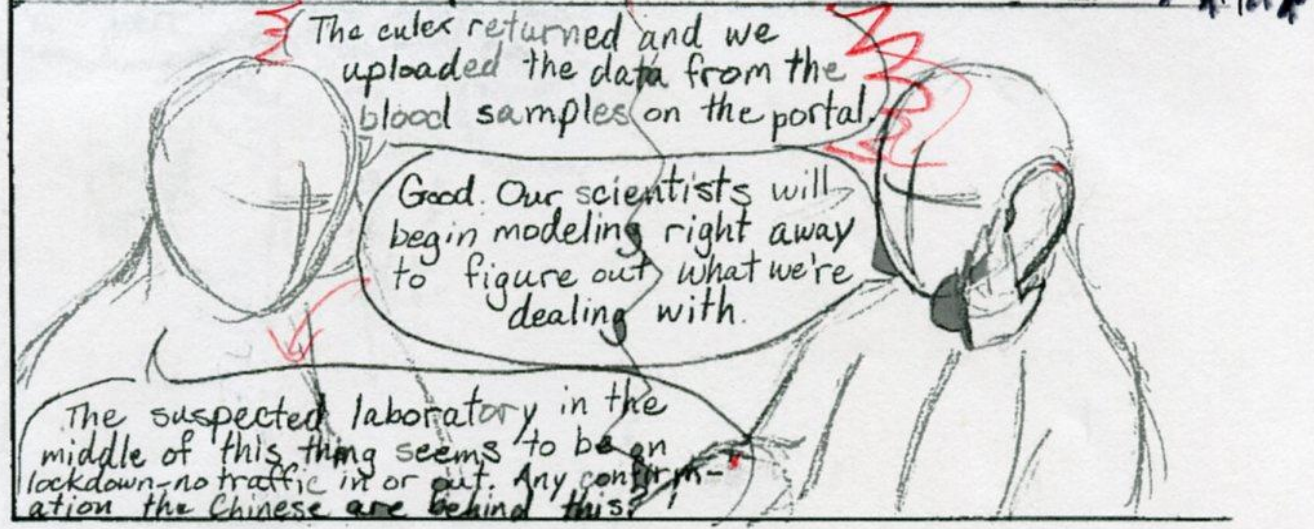
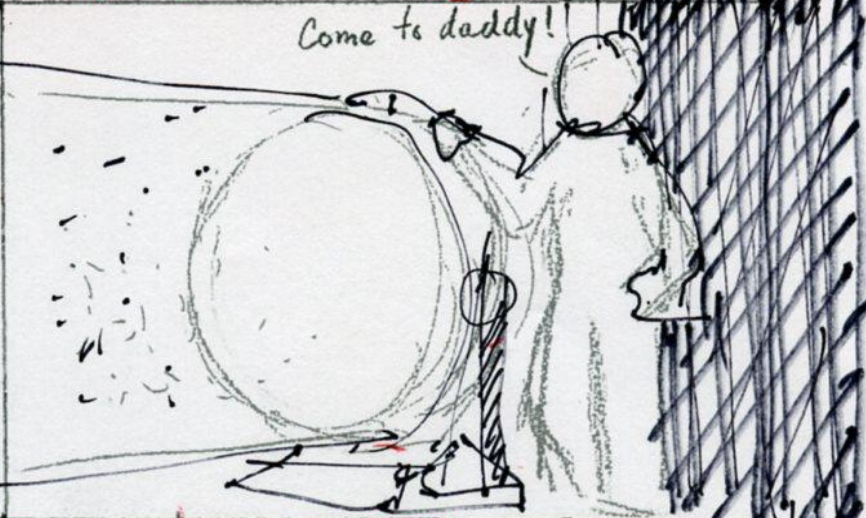
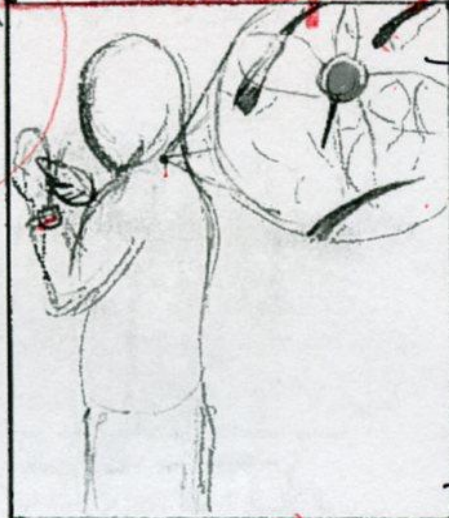


Original sketch for opening scene from "Plan Crimson" (Capt Thomas O'Brien, USMC)

viewpoint
from below
crowded
city street
filled with
nanobots
in sky.

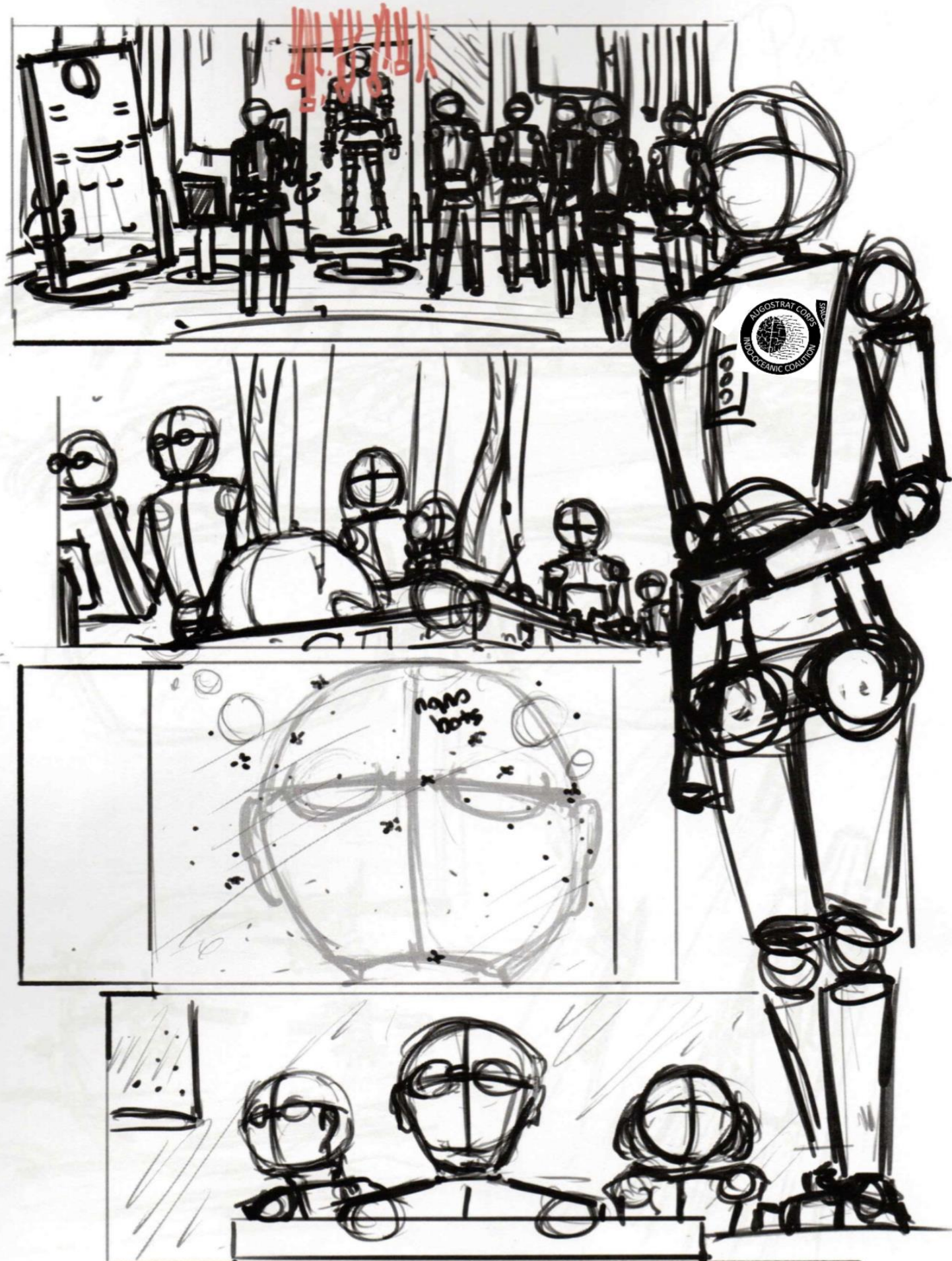
Google
Search
"Philippine
cityscape"

now filled with
cod on nanobot
closeup.

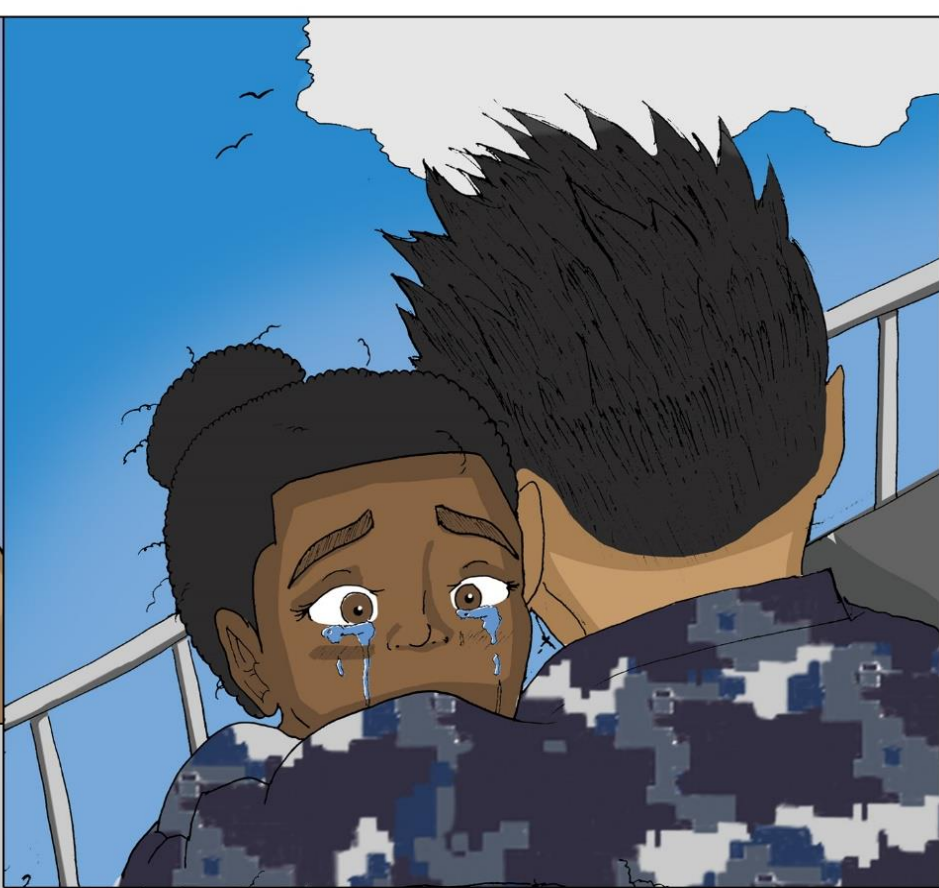
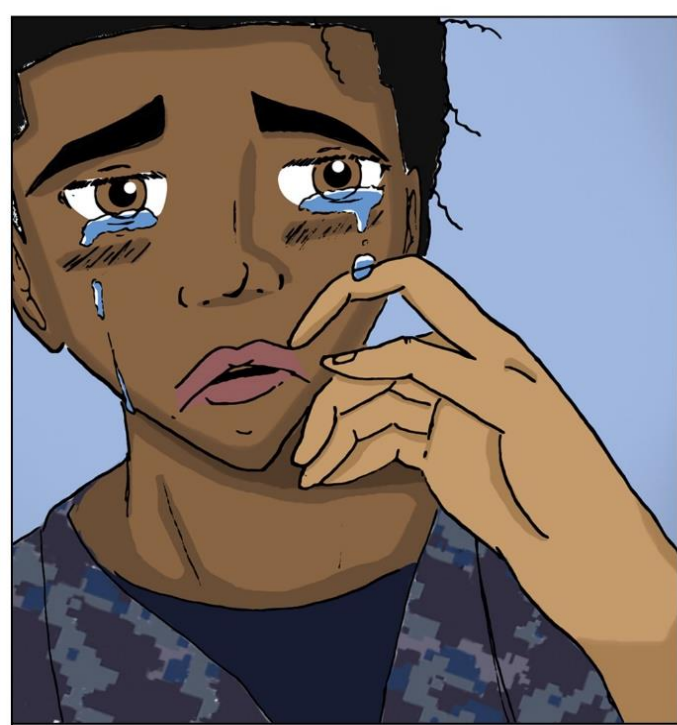


(4)

Original sketches for "China's Engineered Emergency" (SSgt Shannon Winslow, USMC)



Early layout sketches for "Urquhart Redux: A Story from the AugoStrat Corps Saga" (Midn Alvin Do, AUS, and OCdt Natasha Silver, AUS)



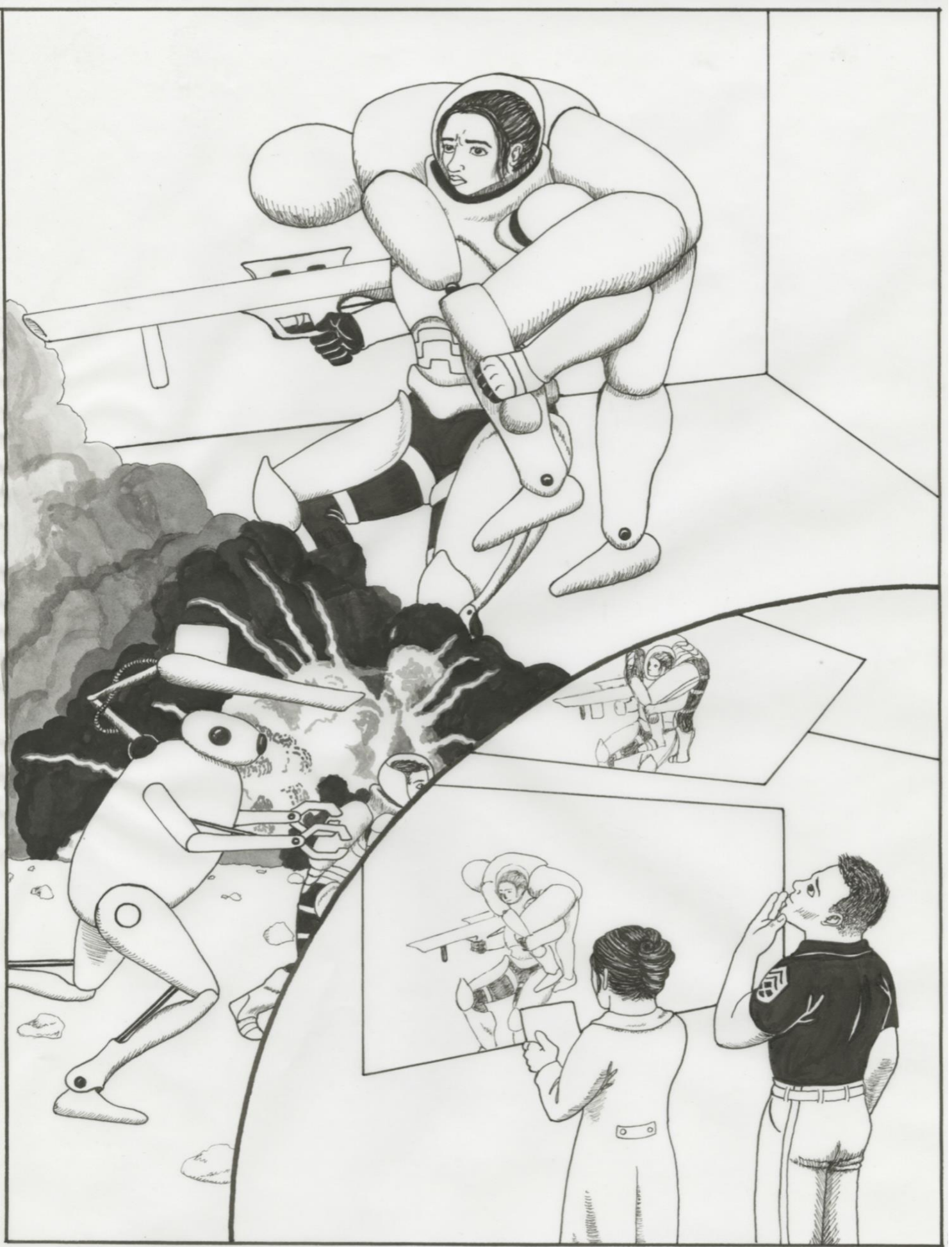
Early page layout for "Rock the Boat, Sink the Ship" (Cpl Jerrod Moore, USMC, GySgt Daniel K. Brown, USMC, Sgt Trentin Dunn, USMC, and Cpl Garrett Jones, USMC)



Original art for "Ransom" (SSgt Macey Valentine, USAF)



Original art for "Still First to Fight" (SSgt William Bradley, USMC)



Original sketches for "A Second Chance with ARIA," *Destination Unknown* vol. 1 (SSgt Shannon Winslow, USMC)

Keep following the work of the *Destination Unknown* team:

@TheKrulakCenter

@EndersGalley

@MarineCorpsU

@MCUFoundation

<https://innovatedefense.net/the-landing>

<https://innovatedefense.net/endersgalley/>



ENDER'S
GALLEY