

FOLLOWER



by bugbyte & delade

CHAPTER ONE:

VELOX

FOLLOWER

chapter one: velox

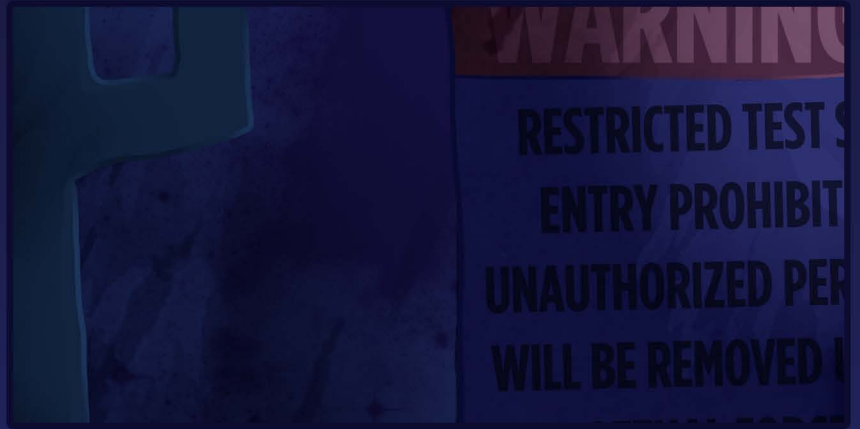


**artwork &
original story concept
by m. "bugbyte" koss
written by delade**

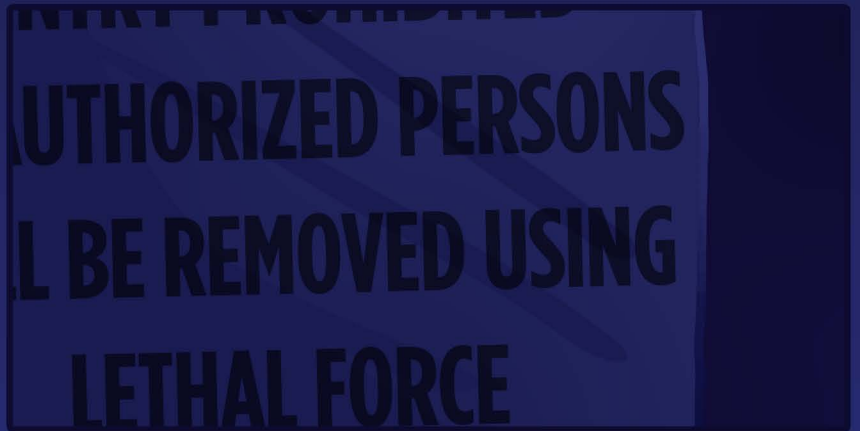
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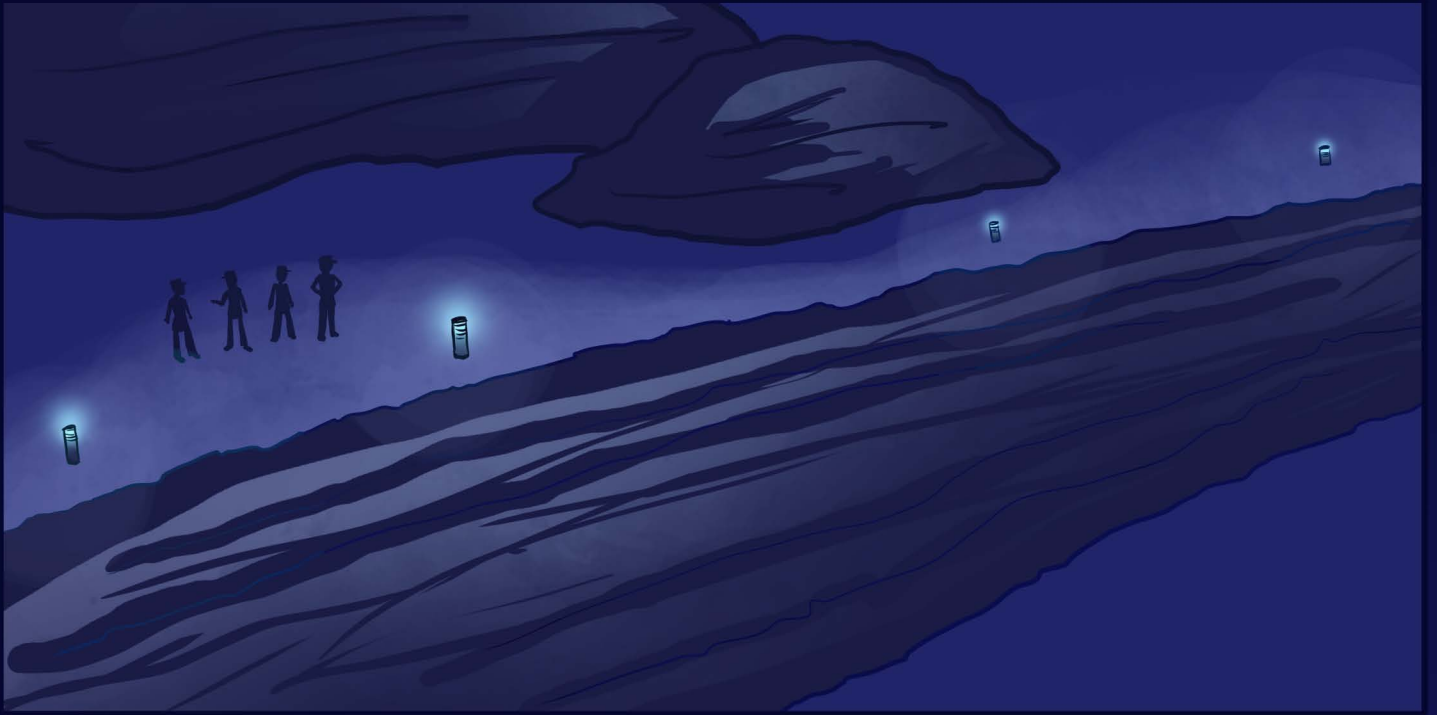
WARNING
RESTRICTED TEST SITE
ENTRY PROHIBITED
UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS
WILL BE REMOVED USING
LETHAL FORCE



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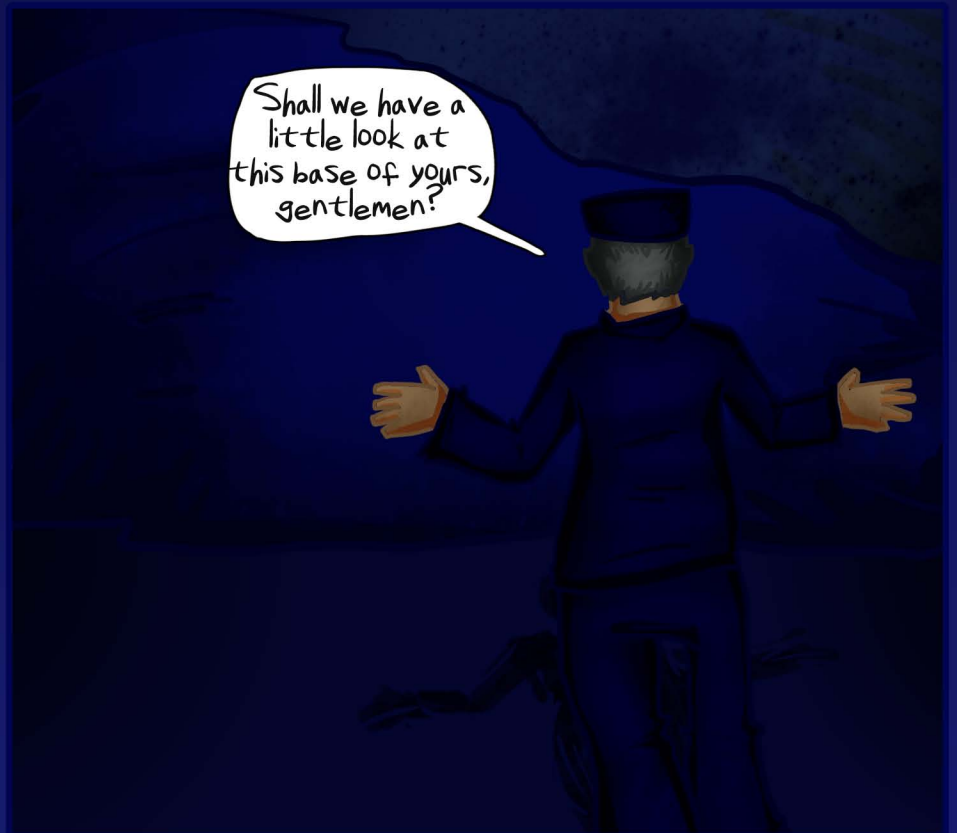


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What's the security status here?

Ground parameters and airspace security is completely covered. Near Earth Aerial Tracking locked onto you as soon as you dropped below 500 feet.




Excellent. It will be nice to get away from all the liberal hubbub that's been going on at the other installation back East. How are the experiments? How are the research teams?



We have a total of 97 *Lepusophus Veloxensis* subjects. Of that, there are 33 male, 34 female, and 30 natural born 2nd generation: 17 female, 14 male. We've broken them into groups and have isolated several of the first generation away from the others for further language research.



Still can't talk to 'em I hear? Heh. Shame.



We can talk to them no problem.
They talk like parrots—
they repeat everything we say
to them, at least the
second generation.

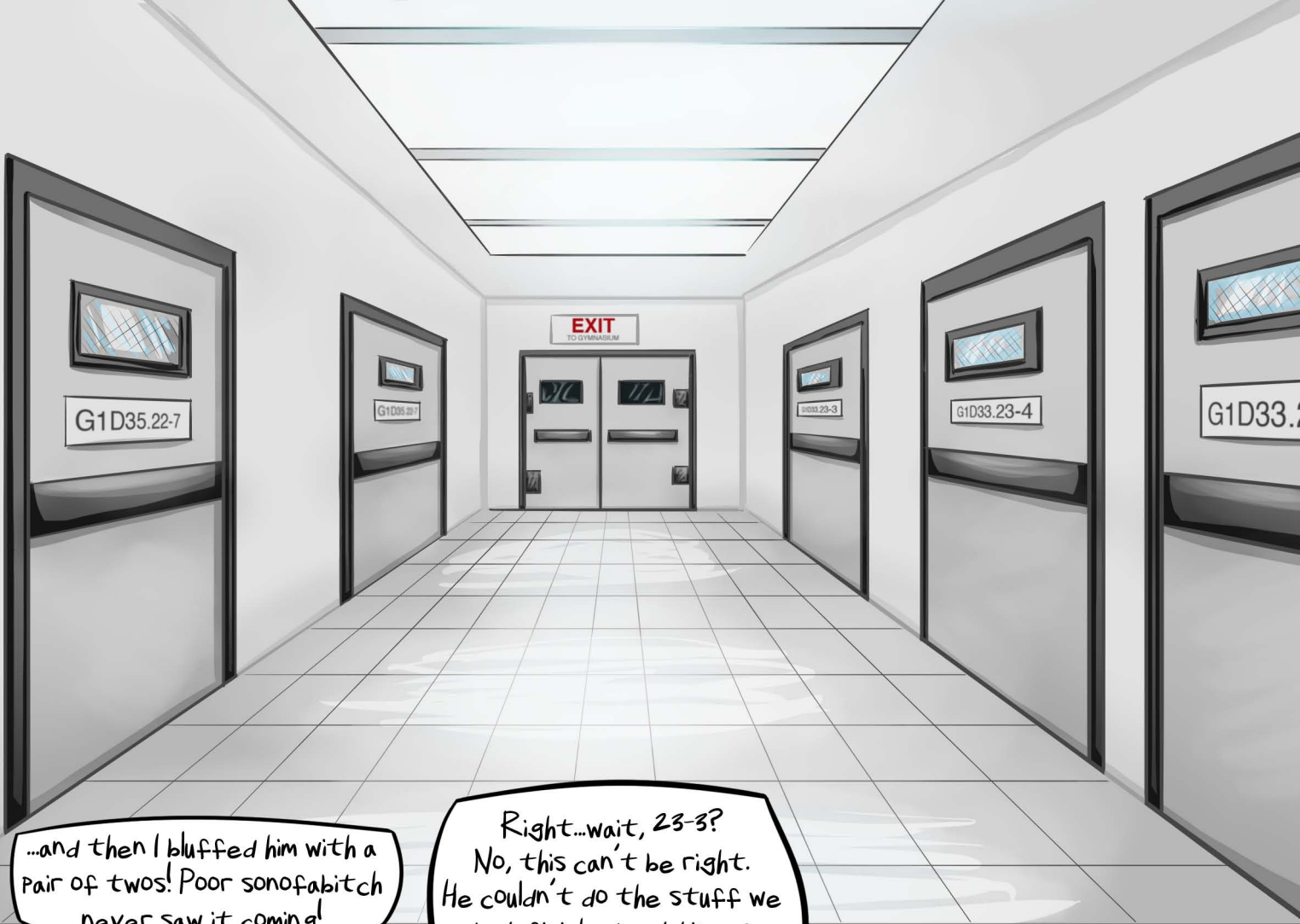
First generation is mute or
just can't comprehend language.

You can't give them
instructions and expect them to
carry them out then,
is that what you're saying?

More or less.





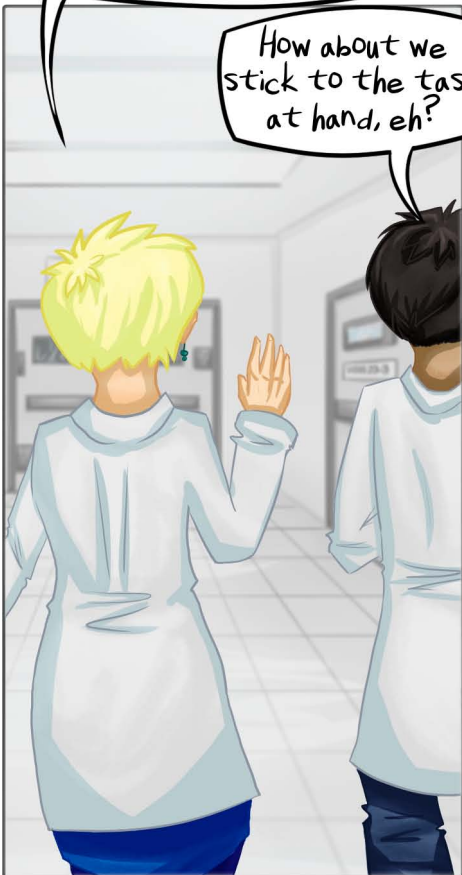


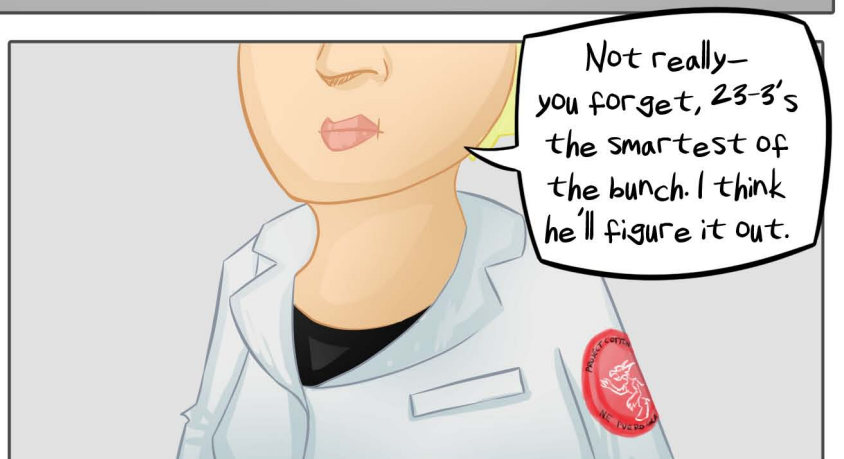
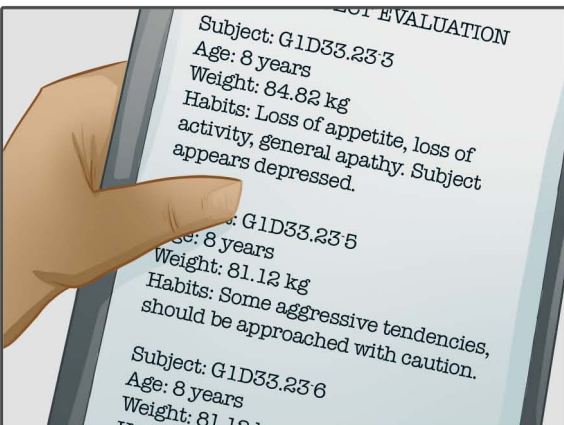
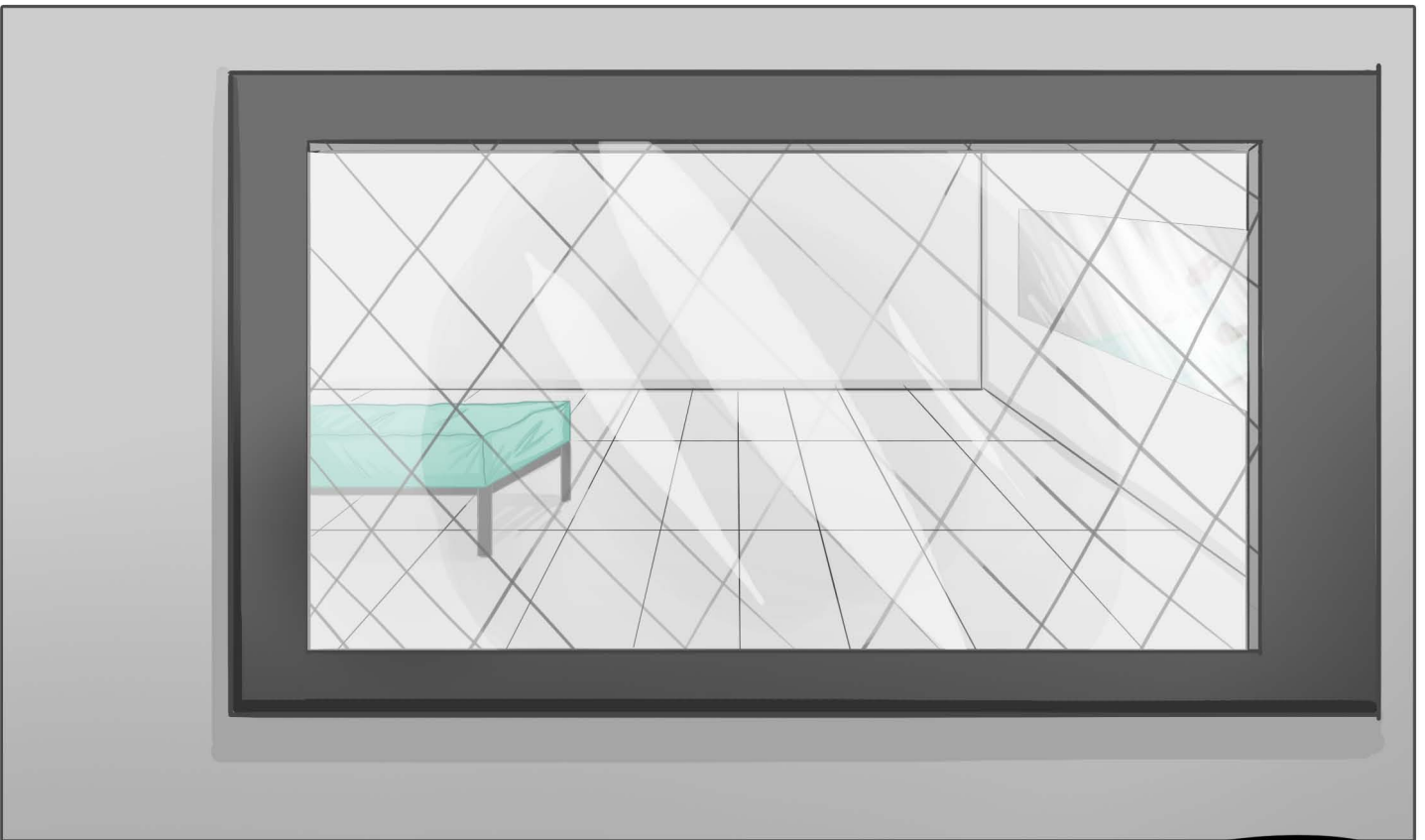
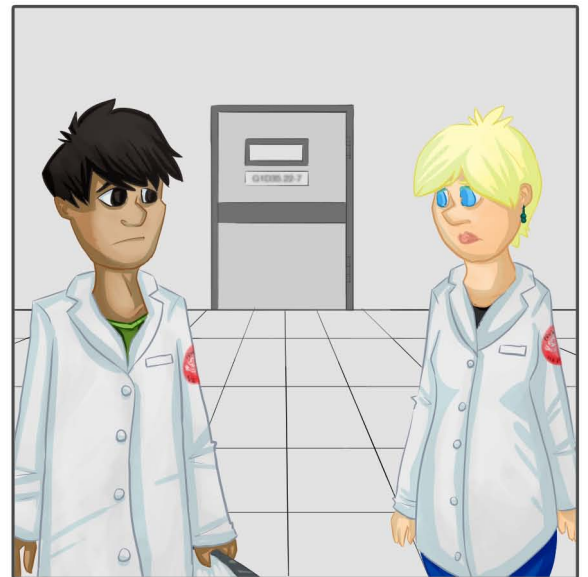
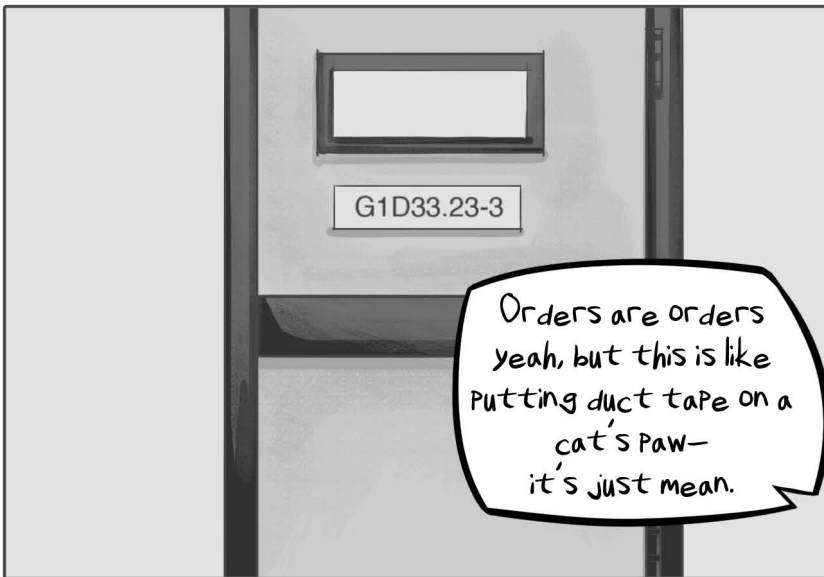
...and then I bluffed him with a pair of twos! Poor sonofabitch never saw it coming!

How about we stick to the task at hand, eh?

Right...wait, 23-3? No, this can't be right. He couldn't do the stuff we just finished setting up. I thought we were doing this for the 2nd gen-

Hey, orders are orders from upstairs. You wouldn't want to piss off Tolo.





You really think he'll be able to navigate a live fire exercise when he's never even seen another one of his own kind?



You'd be amazed what can happen if you use the right stimulus. He's got great problem solving skills, and his critical thinking skills are on par with someone in their 20s. He'll figure it out.



He can't even communicate, though! And we've measured more aggression in the lab mice than we have with 23-3!

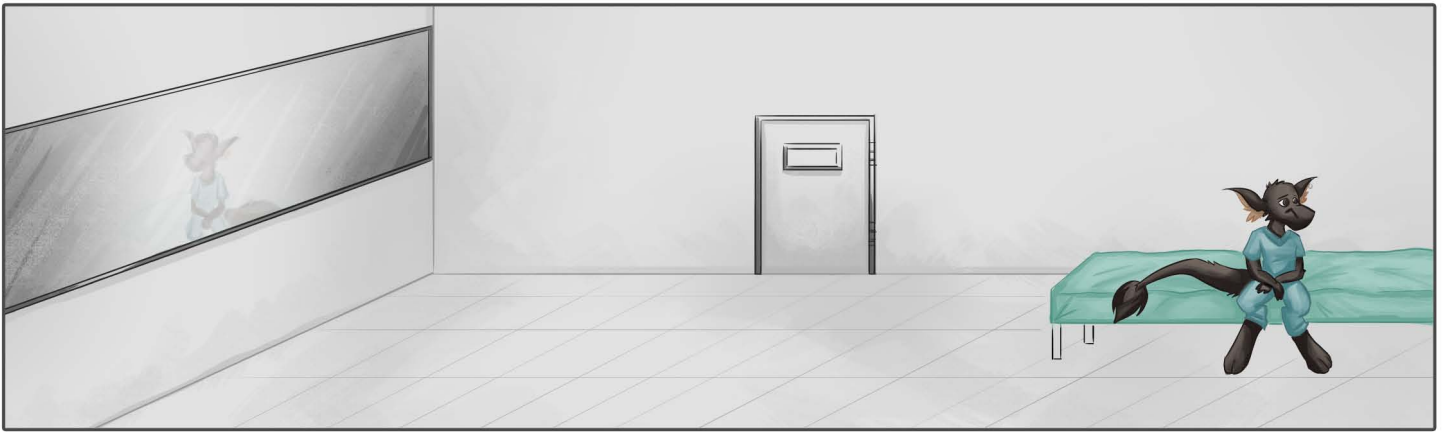


That's his downfall, and that's what we'll be working on...or as soon as we get him eating again. How long has he been like this?

This is the 2nd week we've seen him eat less than 50% of his normal observed intake. Nevermind the food intake, he just spends his days on his bed, staring into the one-way over in the corner. Poor guy... I think he's starting to give up.

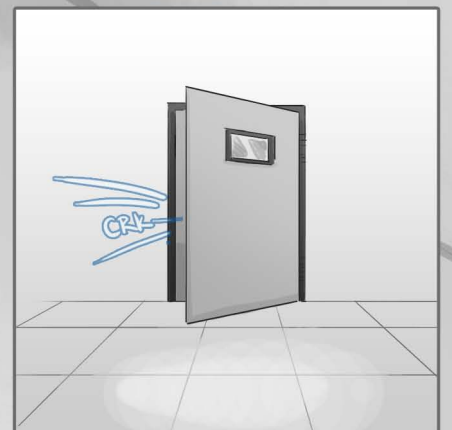


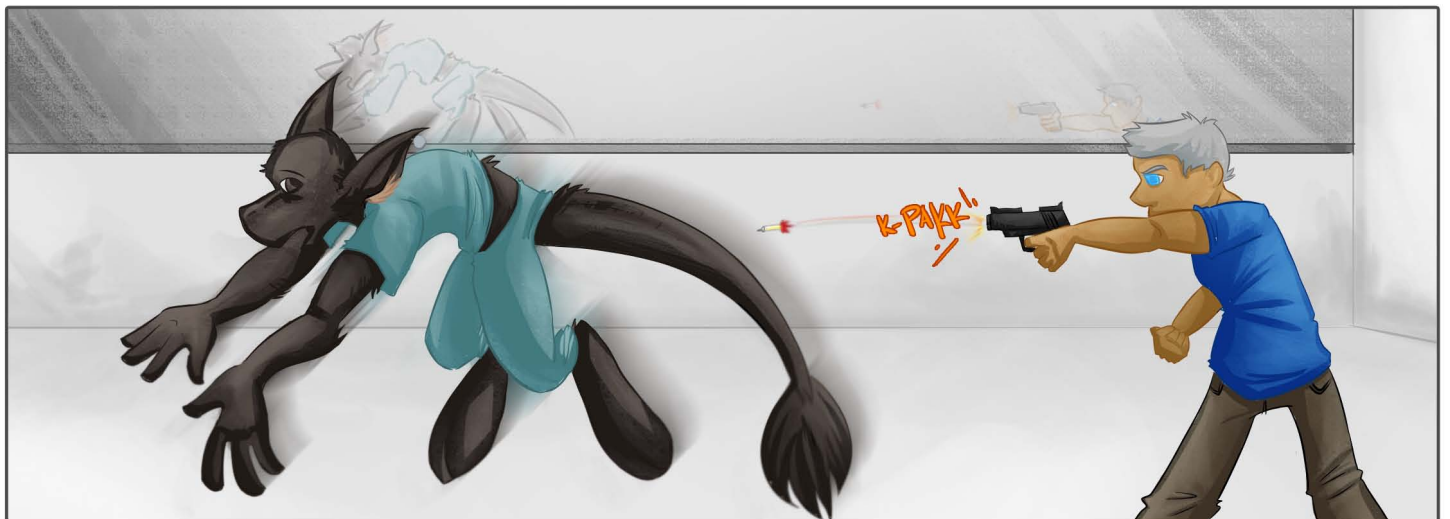
Calway is concerned, though Tolio couldn't give a shit.

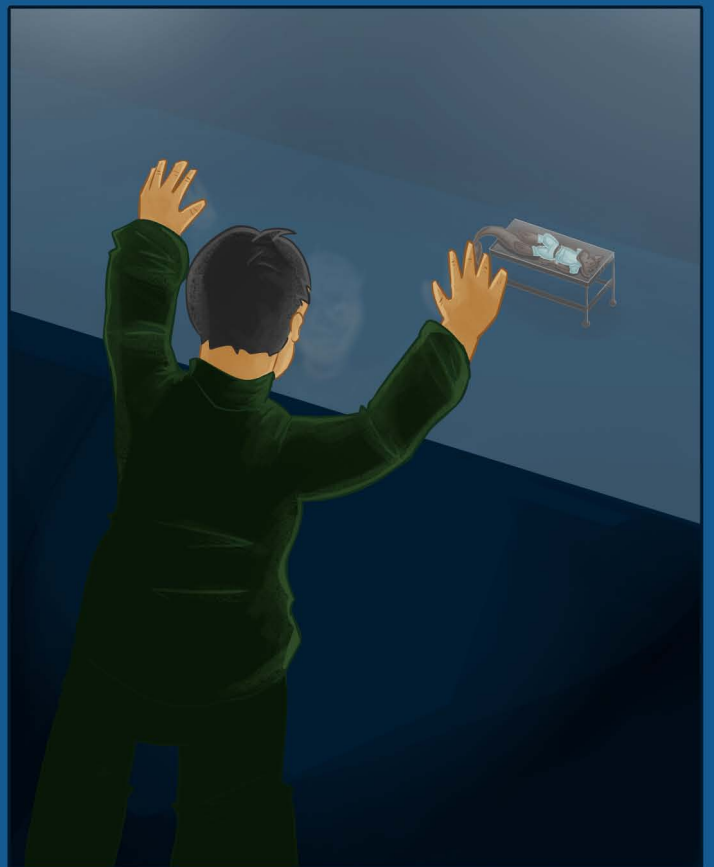
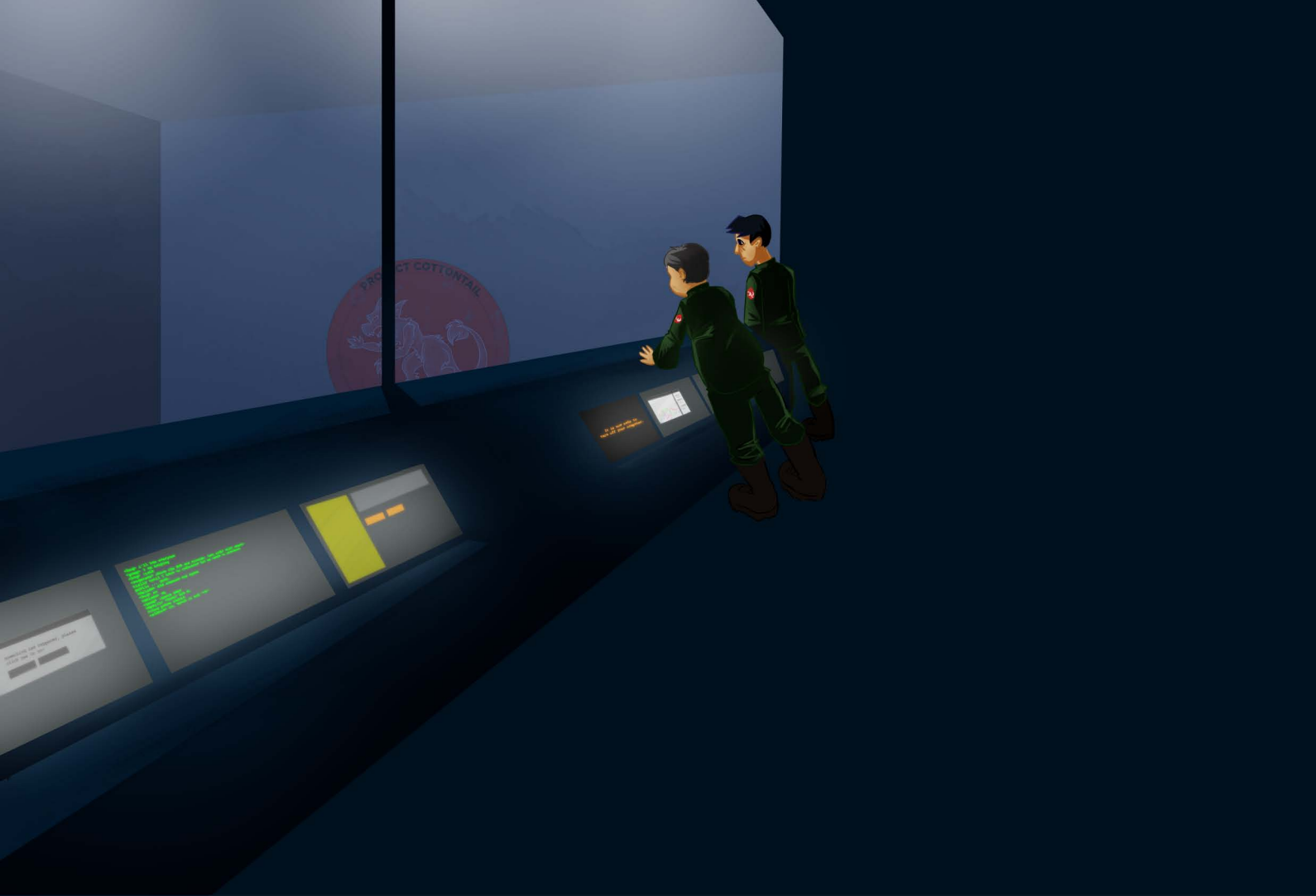



...the days just
keep going...








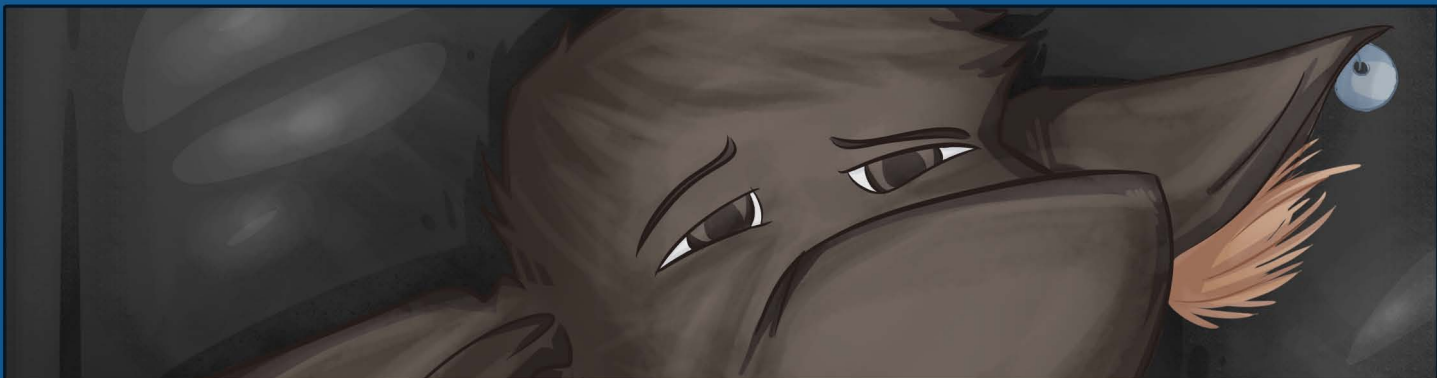




Sir, I only mentioned it because I wasn't aware you made those preparations. I meant no disrespect.



Relax, John. Mr. Carvan is a special acquaintance of mine. I didn't mean any disrespect towards you or your team by his sudden accompaniment to collect this fine specimen below us. I just wanted to see how things were run by someone I trust.



I...see, Frank. Thank you for being direct.

"General" will do just fine, John. Thank you.

My thoughts? Everything went according to plan. Your project won't fight, and there is nothing you can do about it.



23-3 is our smartest, but even this was probably just too much for him too quickly.

We made—and need—these things for combat. That thing acts like it belongs in a dog and pony show. I want better results.

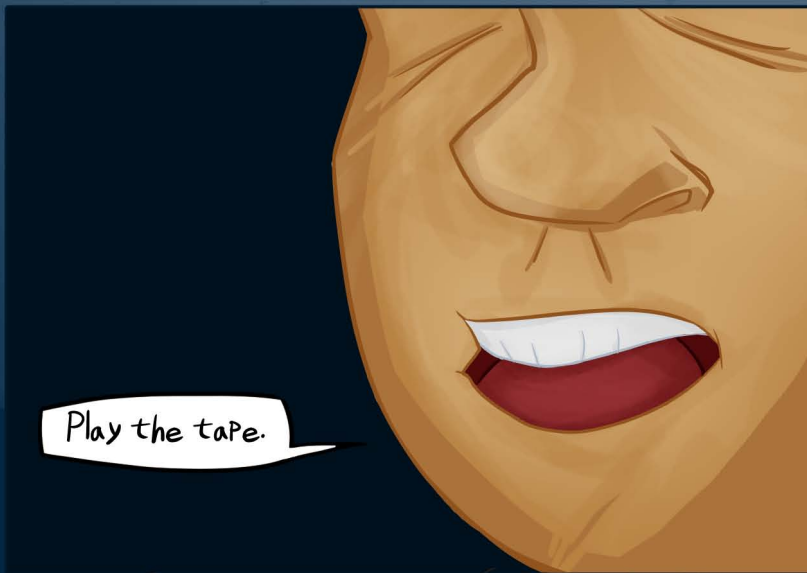
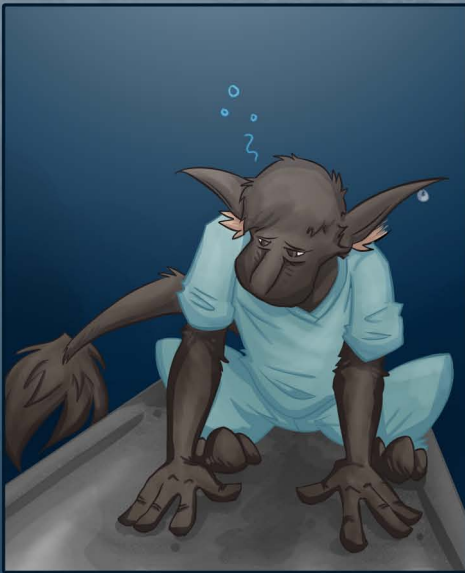


There is a war at home and American soldiers are dying. You have one week to give me a successful test run, or you'll be through here like crap through a goose—understand me?



Yes sir.





...ty of We - ons: knive...
...g the ble with... ty of We - ons: kniv...
...ny, but hydese is most...
...You may be a when ready...
...ment... day...



gh' is h'r wil ra r. tyo, wec' on's, n' r'es words, and automatic v. c'ions.
To you, r'ig' it's t'able, with a variety of weapons: knives, r'ons, and automatic r'ions. You
se' /r' the e' r'is, r'ost n' u' r' and d' s' r'or, s'u to grip, you may begin, r' r'
mu' r'ob, that r' r'is most n' r'al and easi' for you to g' r'o. You may be j' n' when rec'



Sir, if I may? 23-3 is from the first generation of Vloxen. He doesn't understand any English or verbal communication that we can see from our tests-

Let's hit him with Victor.



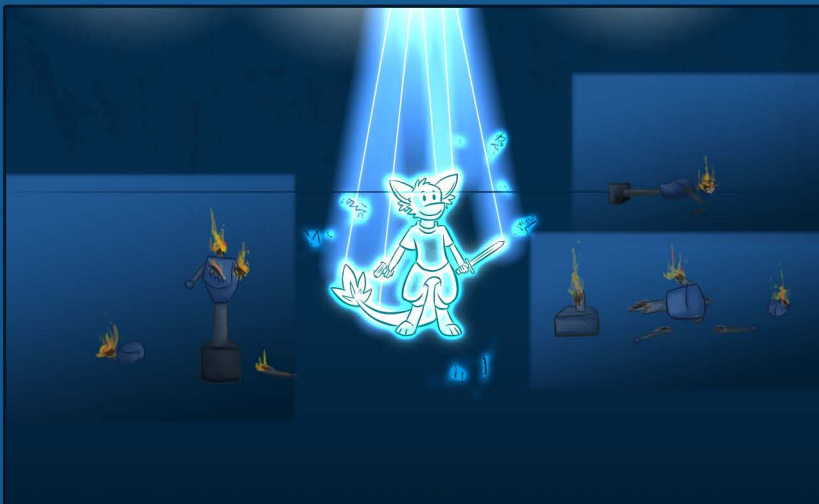
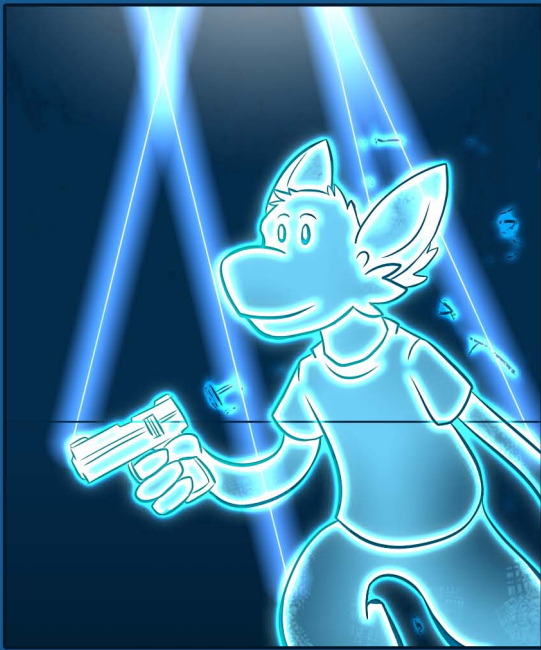
I know. I read your research.

I wanted to see what this one would do when he hasn't had a chance to figure out what is going on.



B-but, sir!





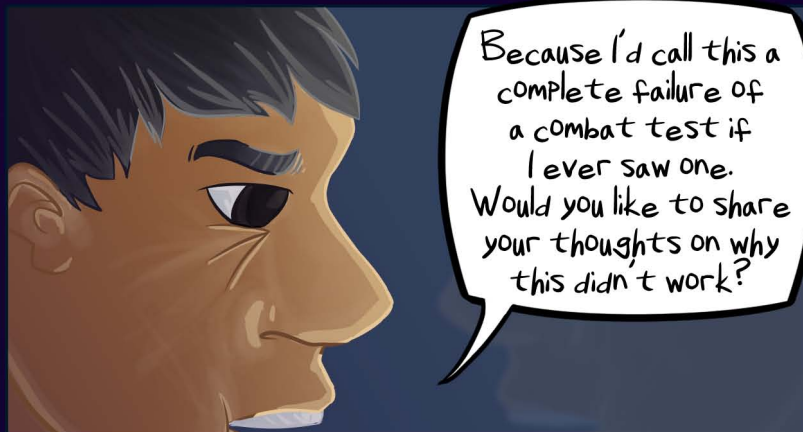
This is—



This is what, Doctor?



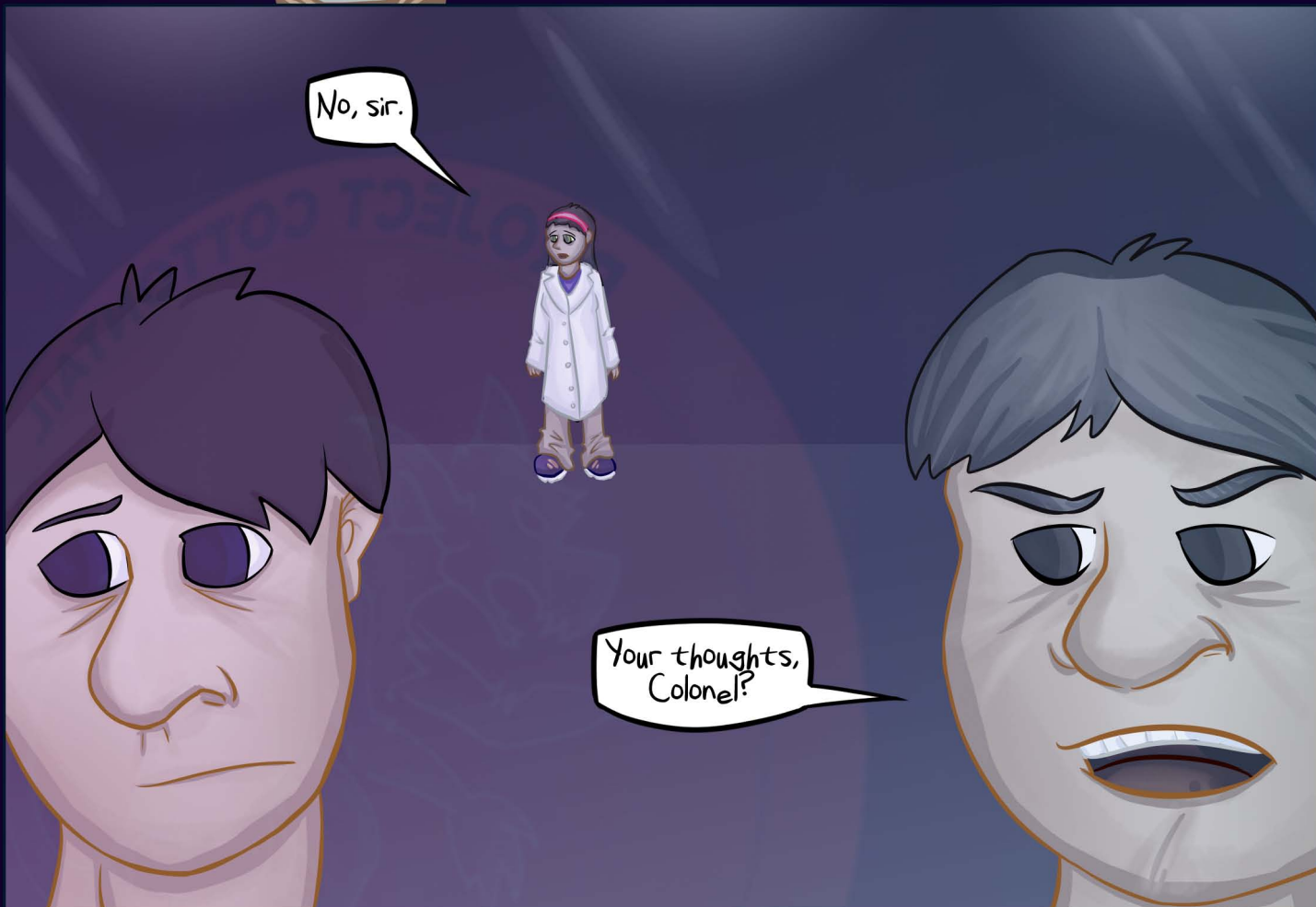
Because I'd call this a complete failure of a combat test if I ever saw one. Would you like to share your thoughts on why this didn't work?

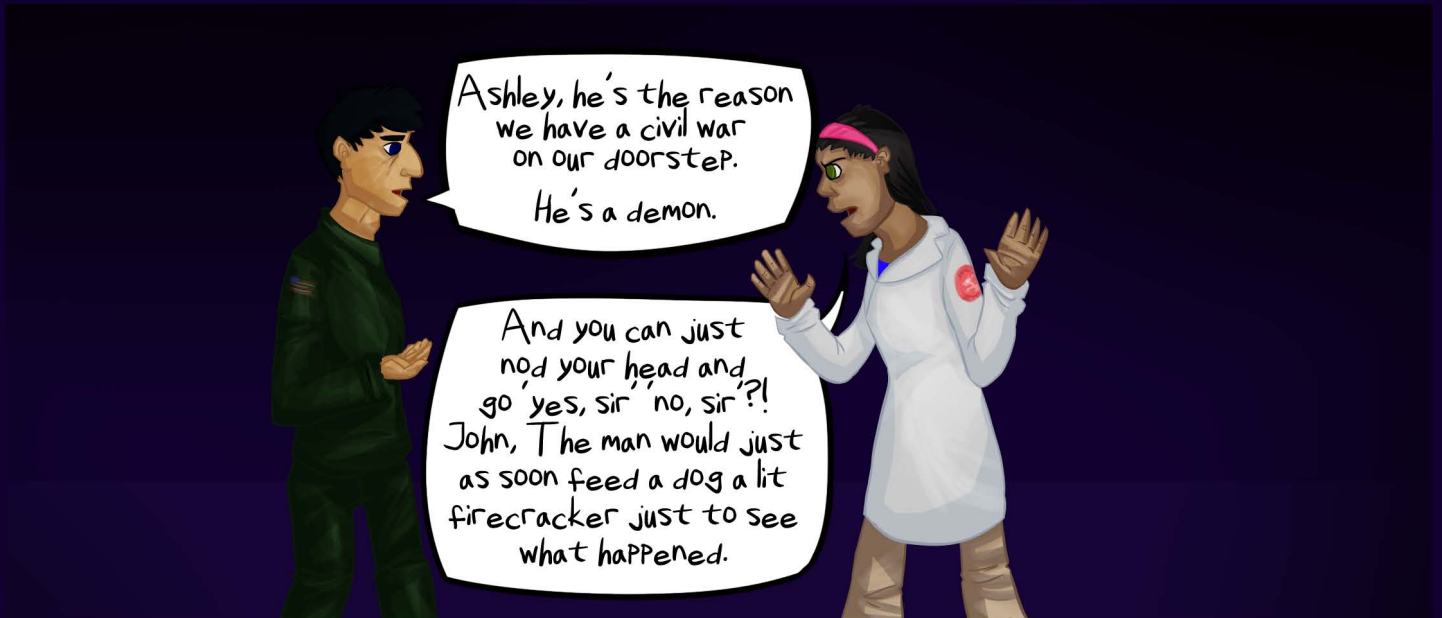


No, sir.




Your thoughts, Colonel?












But isn't that what he wants?
I'm all for giving these guys a fighting chance, but this is still a military weapons project— if it works out, it will give him exactly what he wants: expendable, loyal soldiers!



Yeah, but they won't be sitting ducks when he inevitably decides to throw them into the fire. Him or that Carvan fellow from the test room.



Make it happen. Call it a... a language socialization experiment. Do whatever you want to do. If he questions it, I'll support it.



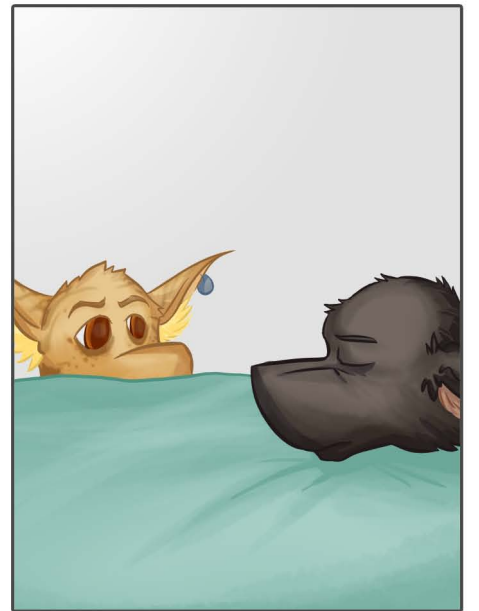
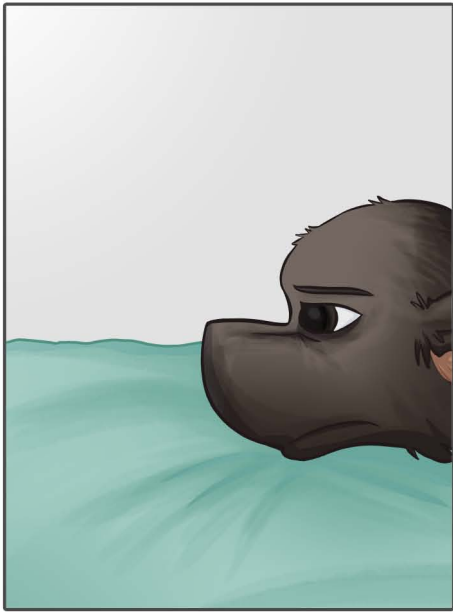
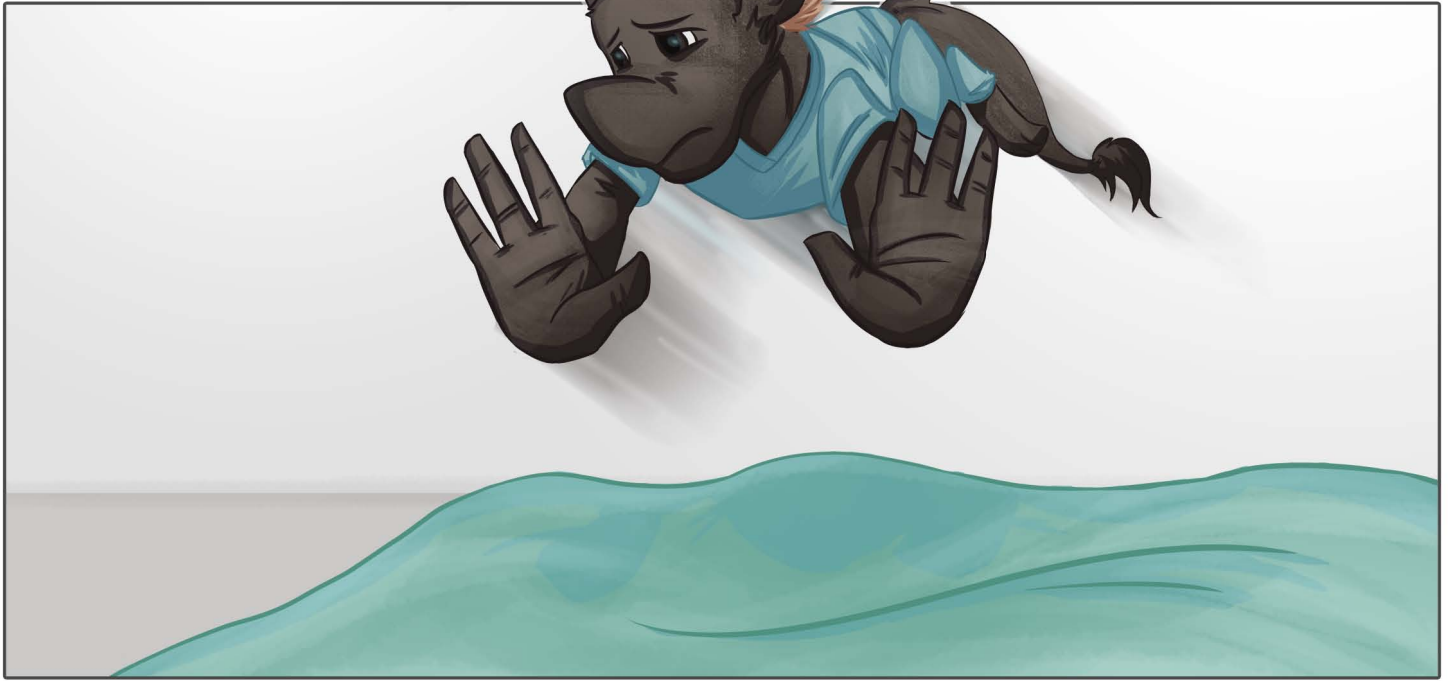
I'll have one of the second generation Vloxen waiting for 23-3 inside his cell when he gets back. Meanwhile...let's let this poor guy go.

I hope he likes his new friend.

I just hope he learns something from it.

Feed 07
23:12:06

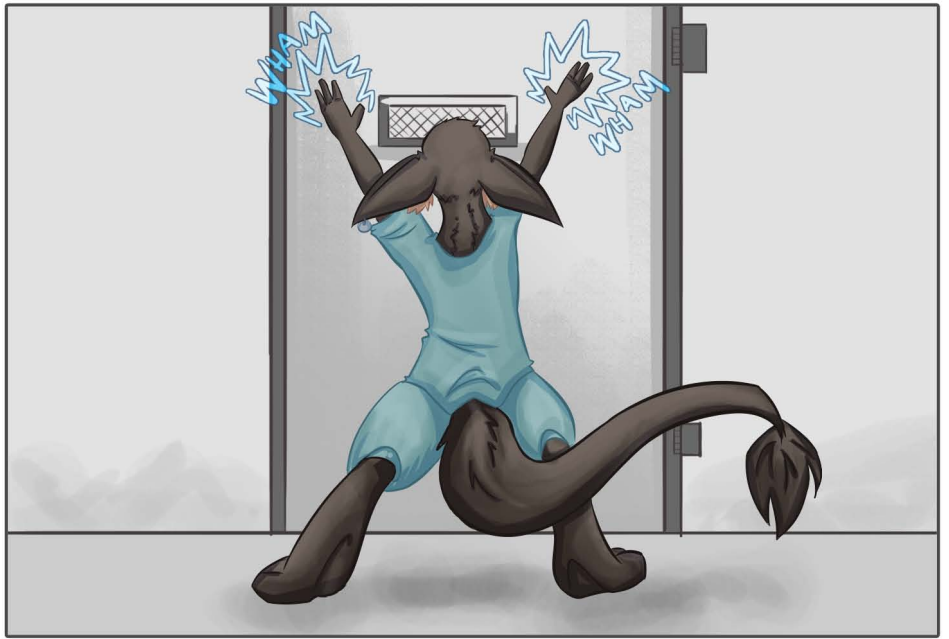






Hi there!





I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean to -
it's just that you scared me
and - and -



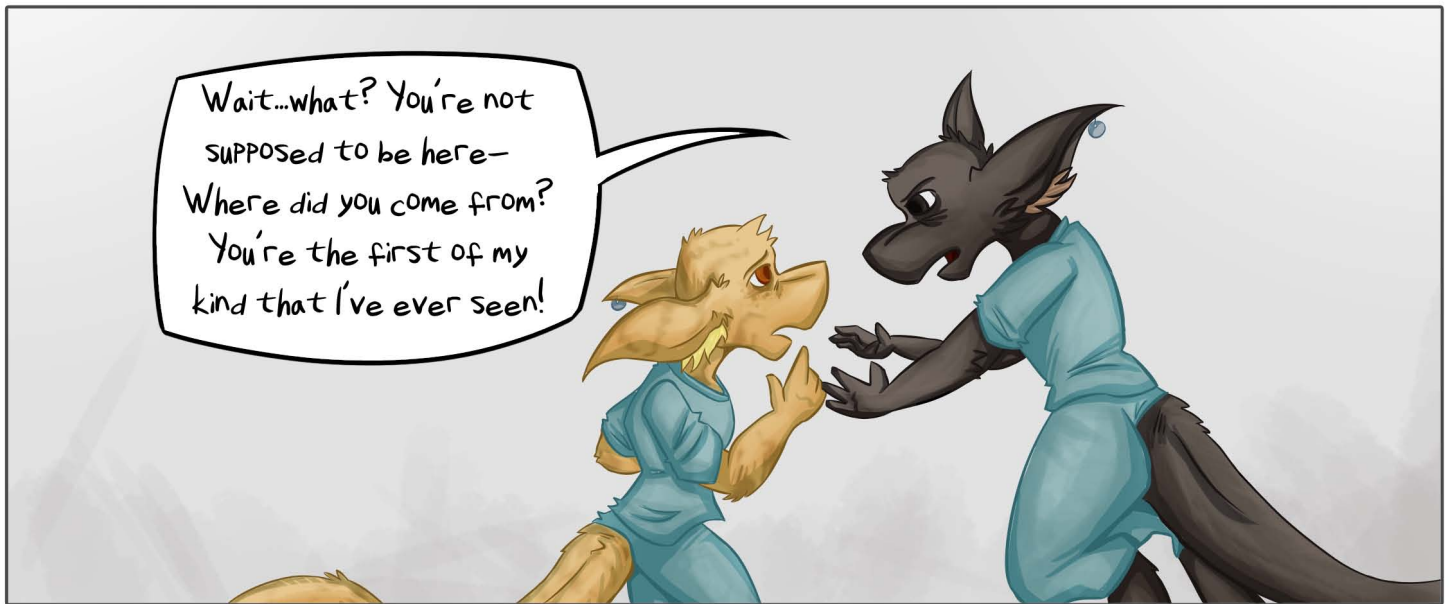
Why would I try
to scare you?!
Everyone says hi
to everyone!

I've never met
you before.
What's your
name?
Mine is Dia.



Nice to meet
you!

What is this
place?
Where did you
come from?



There were 17 of us down
in The Cave.

I was the oldest. I got to pick what
toys I got to play with and what
games we played.

I love playing hide and seek with...
Dok-ter Kal-way.
What's your name, again?

Aa



Alpha

Bb



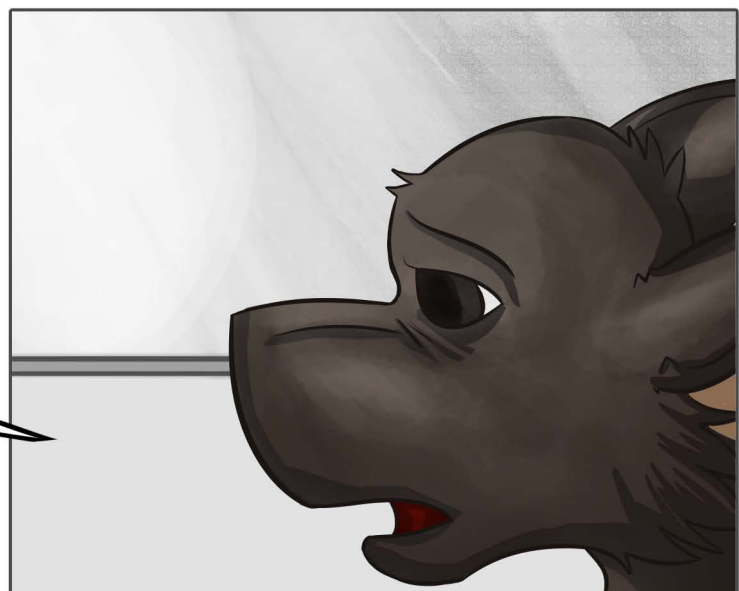
Bravo

Cc



Charlie



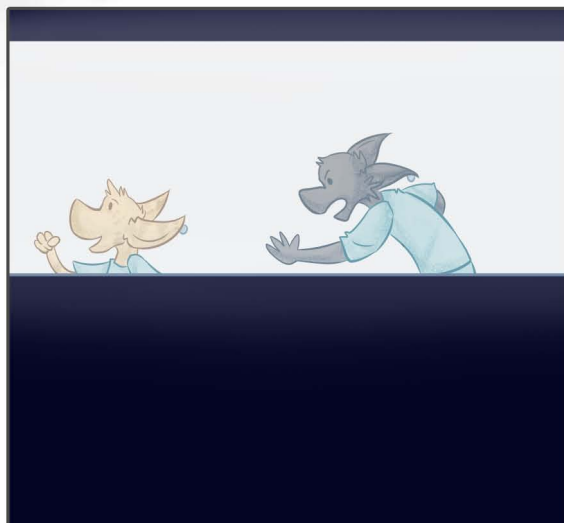
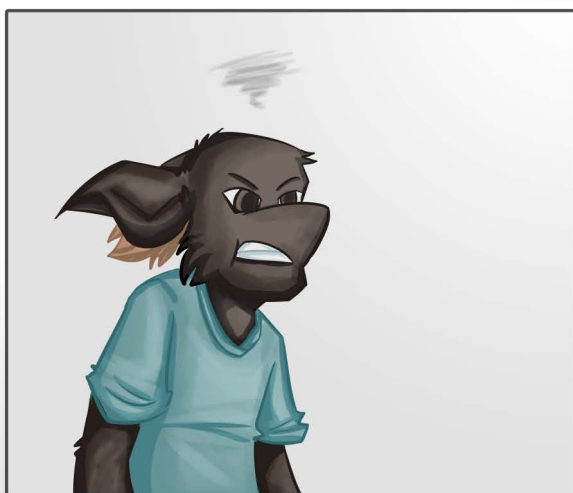







Nuh-uh! The stupidest name ever is Dok-ter Kal-way. It's just hard to say, I don't know why she picked that one for herself. Can you say it? I can barely say it and it just comes out weird. She looks so silly in that white jacket too.








Can you believe this?




...It's like a natural communication skill. I thought it was something they taught each other in the second generation wing between them but for a first generation to know the same thing naturally? Oh this has Nobel written all over it. How can they do that? Is it something in their frontal lobes that allows for a language reflex?



...you are recording this, right?



I started as soon as 23-3 got back. I'm curious to analyze where the argument began and what it is they're doing...she looks happy, but he doesn't.



Indeed. I'll go start up another pot of coffee. This is going to be a long night.

End Chapter One



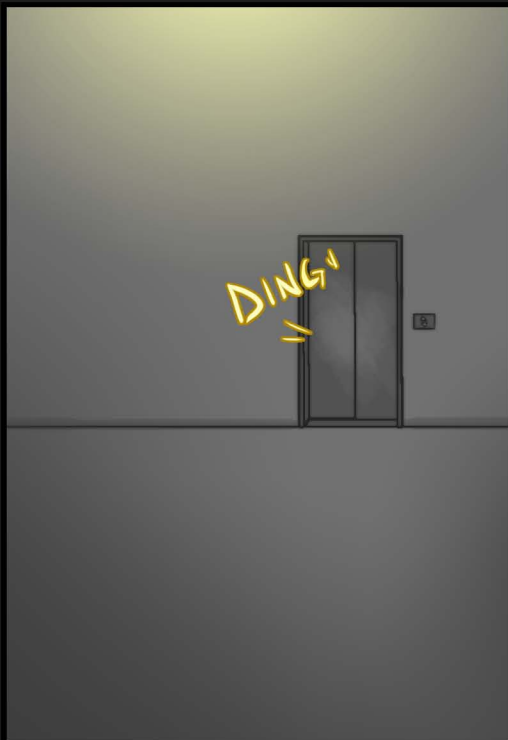
No, not this time. The General wants to see the capabilities of the Vloxeen in a more... combative role.



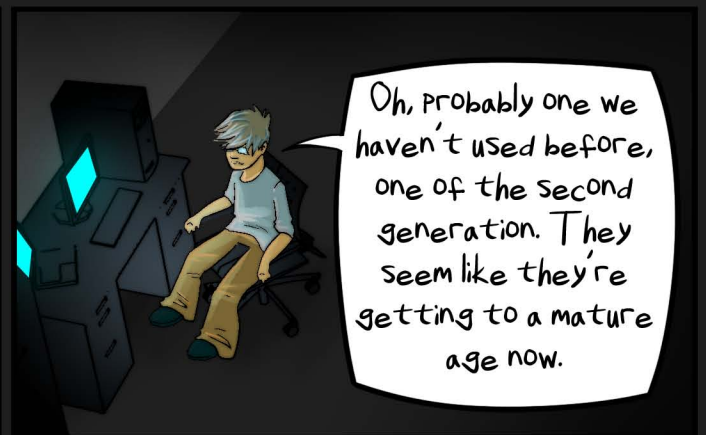
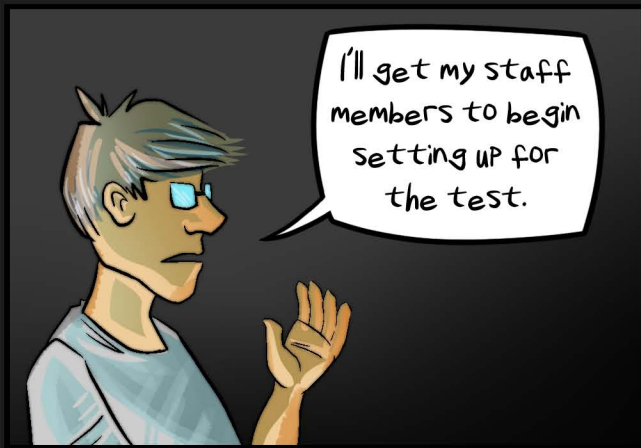
FOLLOWER

the setup

story by delade • art by bugbyte









Oh? Which one?



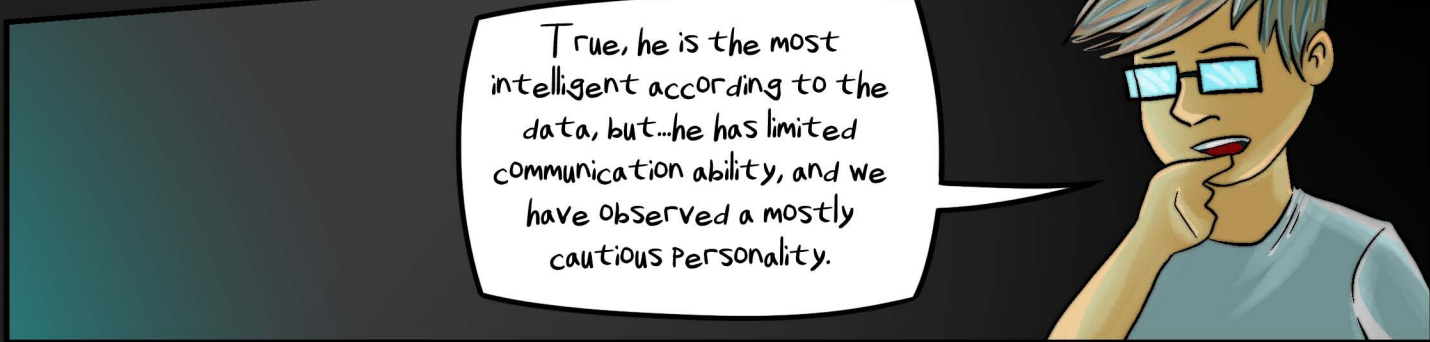
I want you use test subject 23-3.



That's an...interesting choice...why that one?



He's the most intelligent one out of both your and Dr. Calway's research according to the maze and logic reasoning tests.



True, he is the most intelligent according to the data, but...he has limited communication ability, and we have observed a mostly cautious personality.



Nevertheless, I want you to test it.



I... Alright, Colonel. I will arrange for 23_3 to be picked up from his cell.

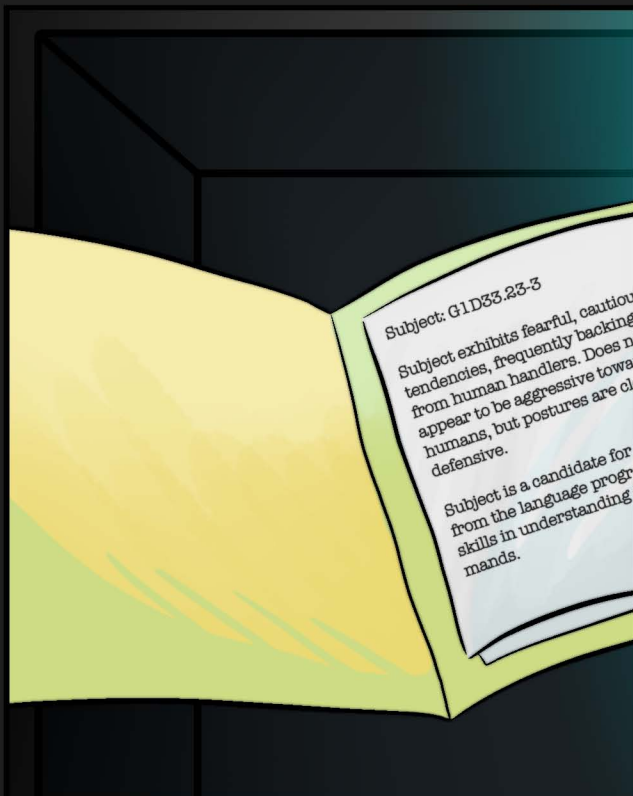
Thank you, Doctor.



Subject: G2D12.57-17

Observation Notes:

Subject demonstrates remarkable ability exhibiting a strong memory for a variety of
Subject has an unusually broad vocabulary for a Vloxen, and should be considered for testing including spoken commands.



Subject: G1D33.23-3
Subject exhibits fearful, cautious tendencies, frequently backing from human handlers. Does not appear to be aggressive toward humans, but postures are often defensive.
Subject is a candidate for from the language program skills in understanding commands.



Splendid.

colonel harren



**Occupation: Commander,
US Army-DARPA Installation [Classified]**

Fascinated by the ocean as a child, John Harren joined the US Army to help pay for college and study oceanography. In the late 2030s, Harren was tapped to help manage a biomedical program run through a joint US Army-DARPA-Lenore Biotech project. He is a man of conscience, character and science.

capt. eli bash



**Occupation: Security Chief,
US Army-DARPA Installation [Classified]**

Captain Bash is Colonel Harren's right hand man, always prepared to do whatever it takes to accomplish the task. He is young, eager, resourceful and energetic, but rarely sloppy or unprofessional.

general richart



**Occupation: Flag Officer,
US Army-DARPA Installation [Classified]**

Well respected for his devastating tactical abilities and manipulation of enemy forces, Richart is responsible for initiating a joint project between the US Army, DARPA and Lenore Biotech that was originally supposed to produce ready, reliable organs for use with injured soldiers while providing similar services to civilians. He is a shrewd, clever and manipulative individual who does not like to lose.

subject 23-3

G1D33.23-3 / "Geedey"



An isolated Vloxen, 23-3, or "Geedey," is regarded to be the most intelligent and inquisitive in the program. He is also known as the most cowardly, running from conflict and preferring isolation and shelter to the outside world. This is, however, catching up with him as he attempts to wrestle with his own existence.

cast of characters

dr. ashley calway



**Occupation: Chief Researcher,
US Army-DARPA Installation [Classified]**

Like so many young children, Ashley fostered a strong love of animals at an early age. She volunteered at local shelters and was a top language and biology student in high school. She accepted a full ride scholarship to MIT, where she worked closely with marine and avian species in an effort to expand on decades old research with advanced technology.

aaron carvan



**Occupation: Civilian Contractor,
US Army-DARPA Installation
[Classified]**

After an arrest in Kansas City, he was given a choice: enlist or go to jail. Aaron enlisted. He was shown to be very effective in combat situations and was scored as "gifted" in natural intelligence and comprehension, leading to a chance encounter with a young Lieutenant Frank Richart. Richart saw potential in the young man; Aaron saw someone who could respect his space and interests.

dr. kyle wolzarski



**Occupation: Researcher,
US Army-DARPA Installation
[Classified]**

What started out as a promising high school football career was cut tragically short when his leg was broken in 4 places while tackled--he would never play again. While recovering, Kyle focused heavily in his math and chemistry studies, eventually being accepted to The University of Alabama as a chemical engineering student. After he earned his PhD at the University of Chicago, he was offered a job working with the Army's artificial organ program.

subject 57-17

G2D12.57-17 / "Dia"



Rambunctious, creative, playful and youthful, 57-17 (or "Dia" as she calls herself) is the oldest of the second generation Vloxen. Unlike the 1st generation, Dia was born naturally between two first generation parents; she and her generation are under close scrutiny by the research staff to see how quickly they mature, develop and can rationalize their world.

ABOUT THE CREATORS



Delade & Bug

Bugbyte is a pro graphic designer by day, and the artist for **Follower** by night, and is a 10-year veteran of webcomics. She has created and published **Messenger** online since 2004. Sometime after that, she was able to con Delade into helping work on Follower, which was created as a prequel to the events of Messenger. Bug likes video games, running marathons, and all things creative.

Delade is a relative newbie to the webcomic world. Like Bug, comics are a hobby in his off-hours but what he lacks in artistic ability (stick figures are cool, right?) he tries to make up for in the writing and scripting of the Follower series. A fan of science fiction and games, Delade also enjoys learning new ideas, concepts and the mechanics behind the latest science discoveries, and is fascinated by space and the cosmos.

Bug and Delade are married, and spend lots of time working on comics together, going on road trips, and debating the finer points of sci-fi.

BEFORE YOU CAN LEAD, YOU MUST LEARN TO FOLLOW.

Deep in the desert, underneath sand and sun, a secret military project seeks to disrupt a brewing Second Civil War in the United States by creating the most efficient, combat capable group of soldiers the world has ever seen.

A departure from autonomous drones, these warriors are grown and bred in a laboratory, carefully designed from the genes up-- but results so far have been very unexpected: what happens when these genetically engineered chimeras can't understand a single word?

Contains the first chapter of Follower, along with 6-page bonus story, "The Setup."



**follower.messenger-comic.com
induljharder.com**