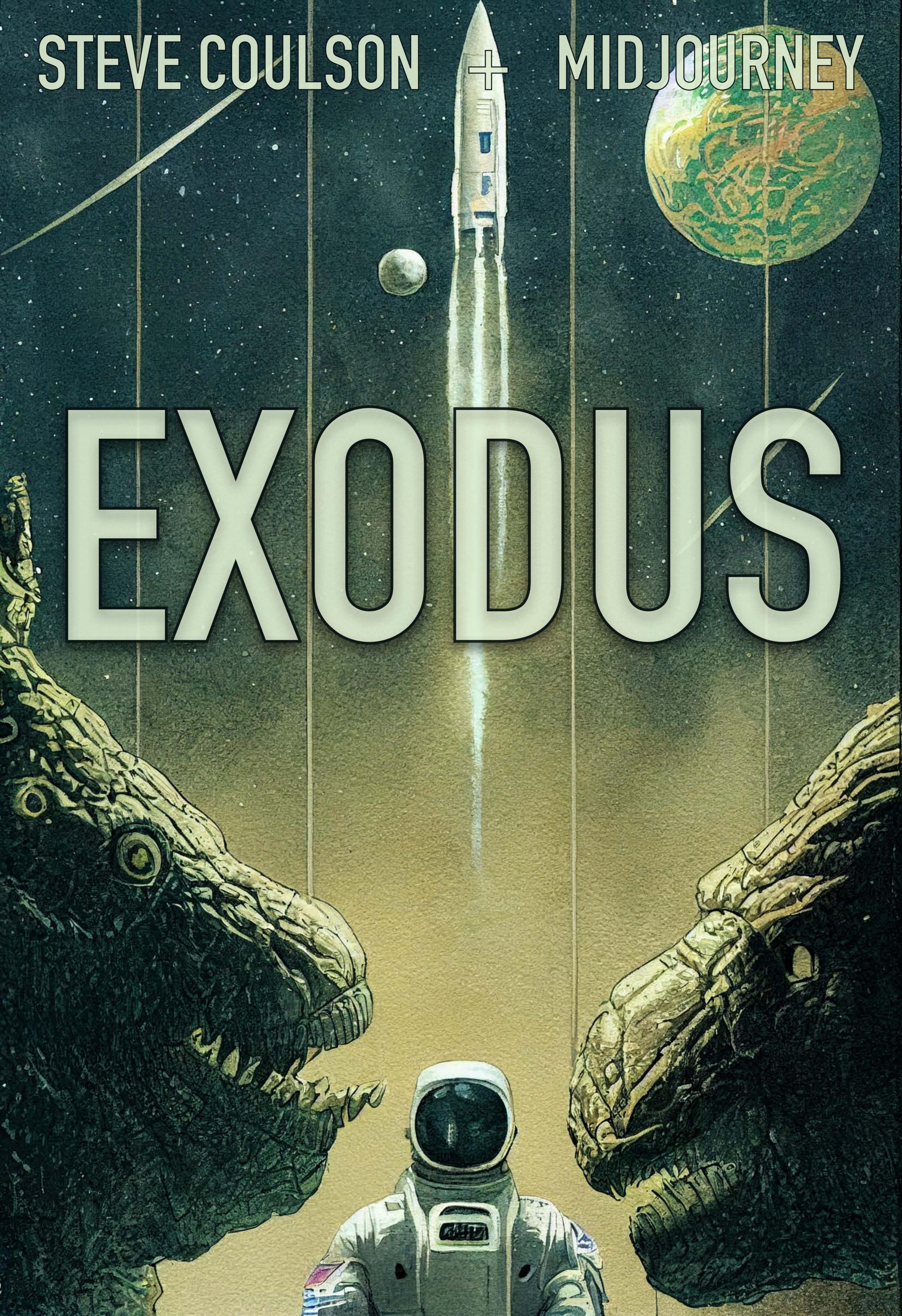


STEVE COULSON



MIDJOURNEY

EXODUS





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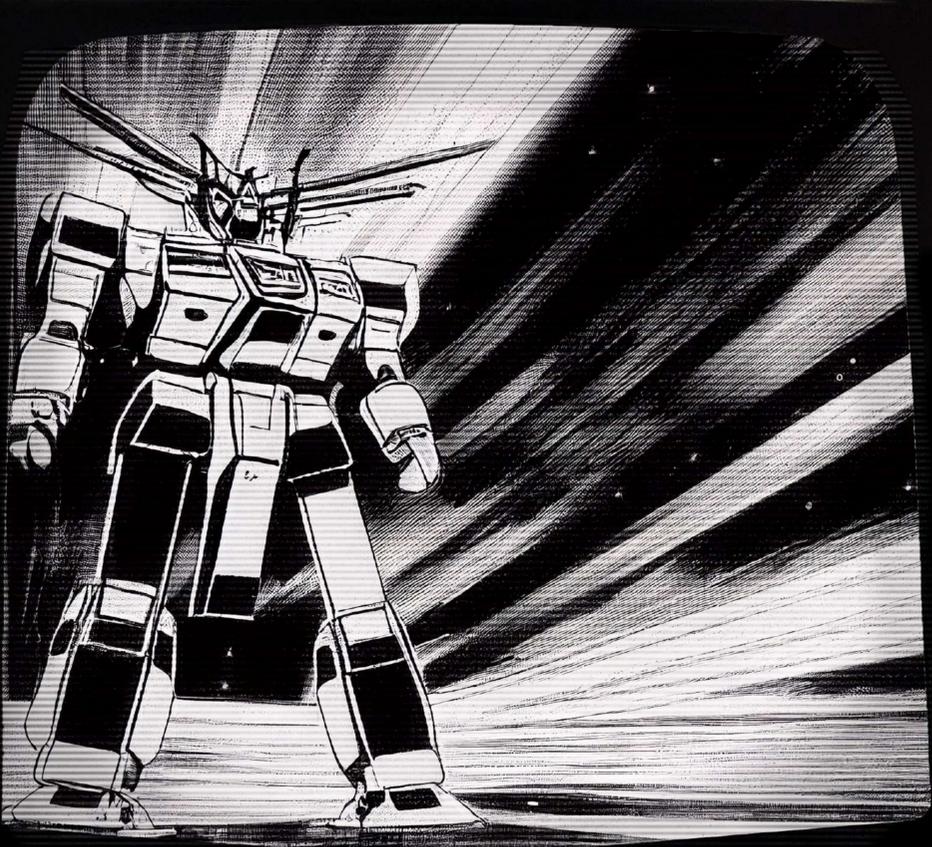
In **1954**, The United States Navy detonated a dry-fuel nuclear device on **Bikini Atoll** in the **Marshall Islands**.

But scientists miscalculated the yield. The resulting explosion was **1,000 times** more powerful than both **Hiroshima & Nagasaki**.

Soon after, the **Monsters** arose.

They began to **lay siege** to cities on both the **Atlantic** and **Pacific** seaboard.

Millions perished.



At first, mankind fought back, developing advanced defense systems using **military-grade technology**.

But after a **century** of futile battle, the planet has been left **devastated...**



*This message is a
recording, broadcast
on a continuous loop.*

*By the time you receive
this, it will already be too
late. We will all be gone.*

*It's important that
you understand, we
cannot be saved.*



The illustration depicts a desolate, post-apocalyptic cityscape. Tall, dark, and jagged skyscrapers rise against a pale, overcast sky. Bare, skeletal tree branches are scattered throughout the scene, some reaching across the frame. In the foreground, the wreckage of several cars is visible, partially obscured by dark, tangled debris. On the right side, a rectangular inset shows a close-up of a woman's face, looking slightly to the side with a somber expression. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and muted greens, creating a grim and haunting atmosphere.

*There are monsters
here, amongst the
ruins of this extinct
civilization.*

*There are monsters
everywhere.*



*Attempt no landing.
or evacuation.*

*I repeat, this is not
a distress signal.*

*I am Commander
Maryamu Musa.*



And this is my last testament.

EXODUS

STORY WRITTEN BY
STEVE COULSON

ART GENERATED BY
MIDJOURNEY

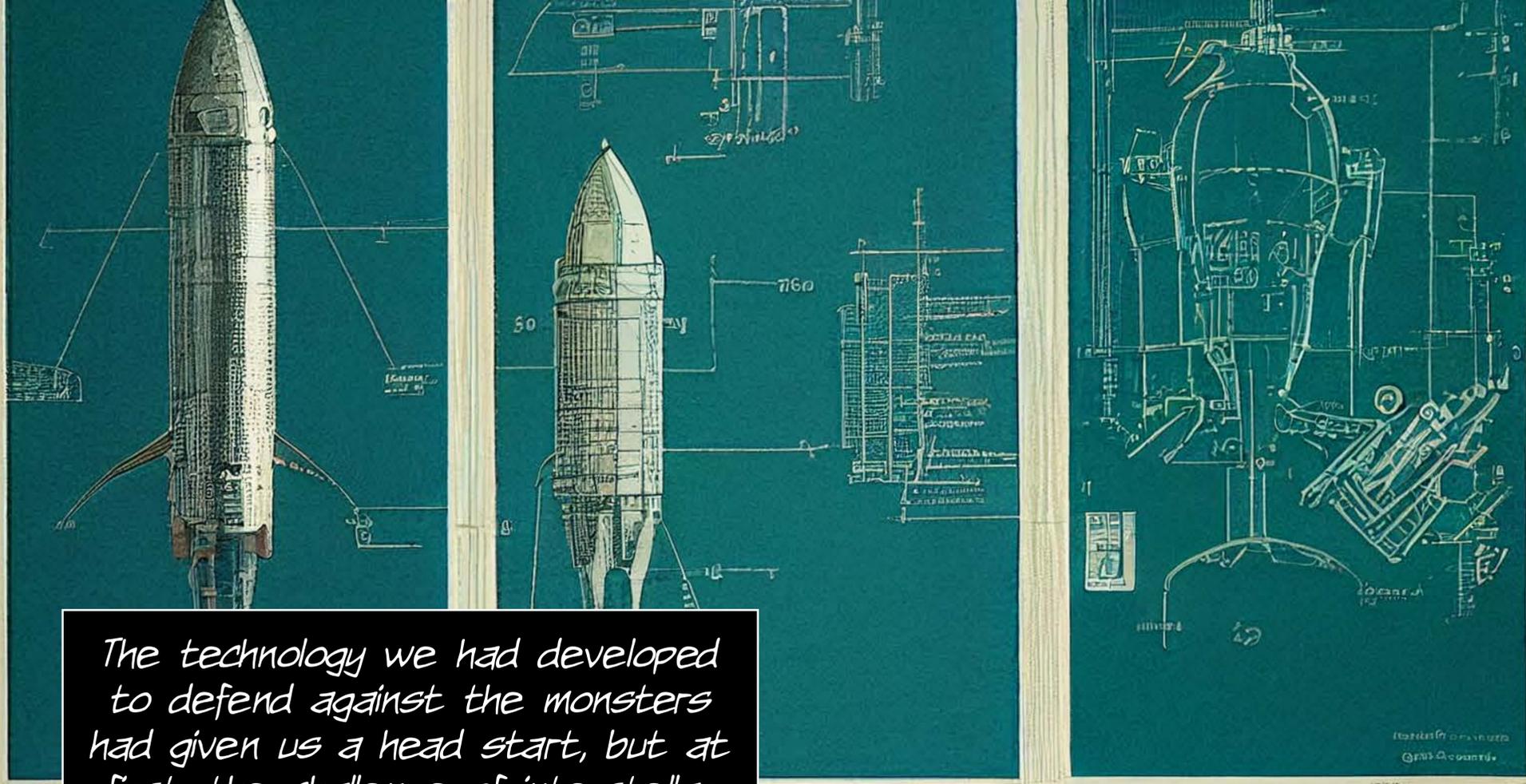


*In 2056, The President
announced a last-ditch
initiative: Project Exodus.*

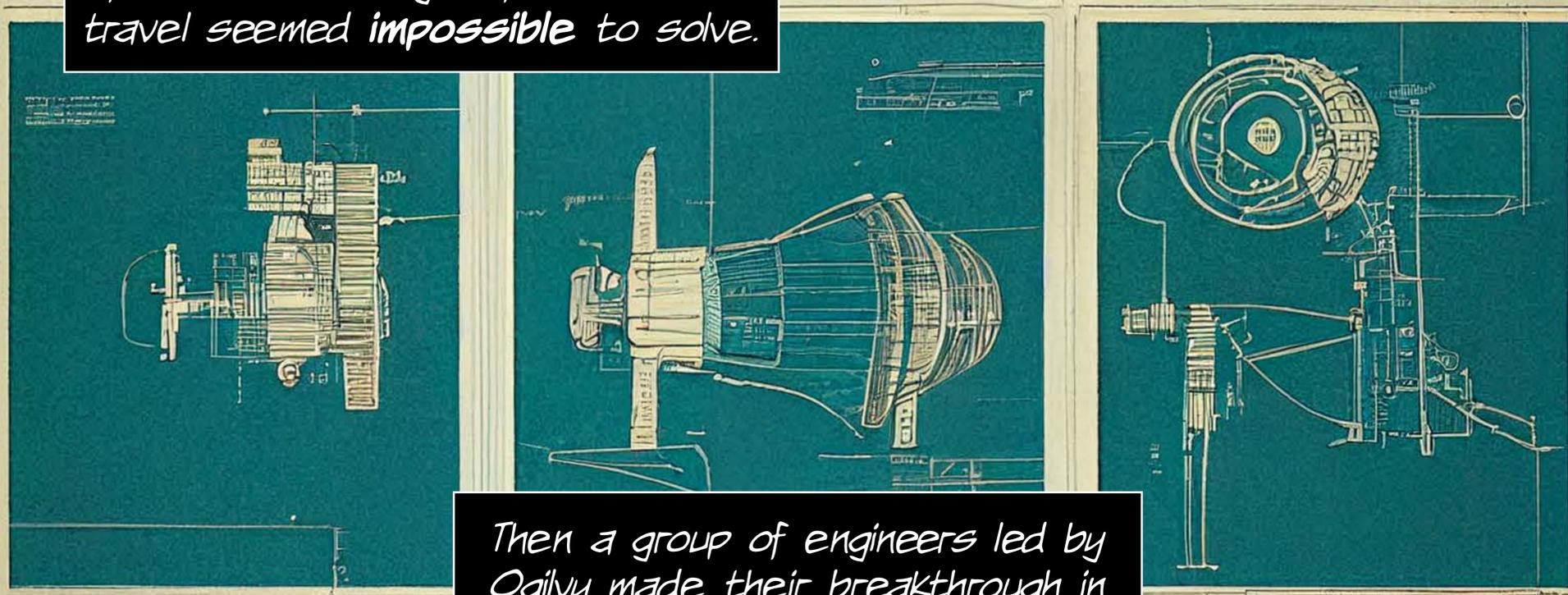
*It was a desperate
attempt to find a
habitable earth-like planet
and to save as many of
us as could be evacuated
on massive ark ships.*

*A new start in
a new Eden.*

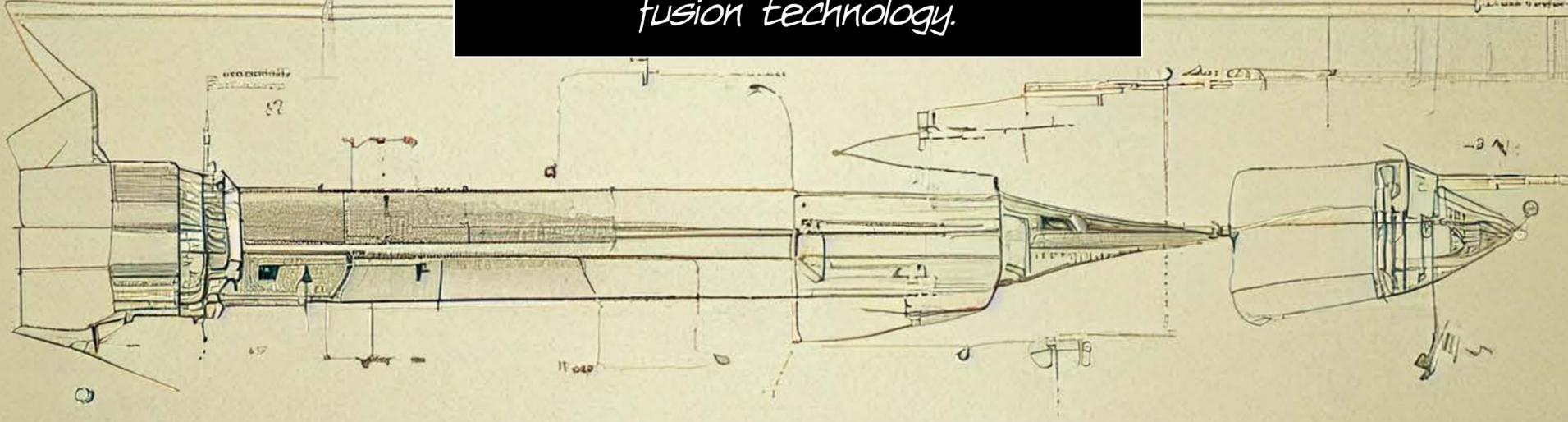




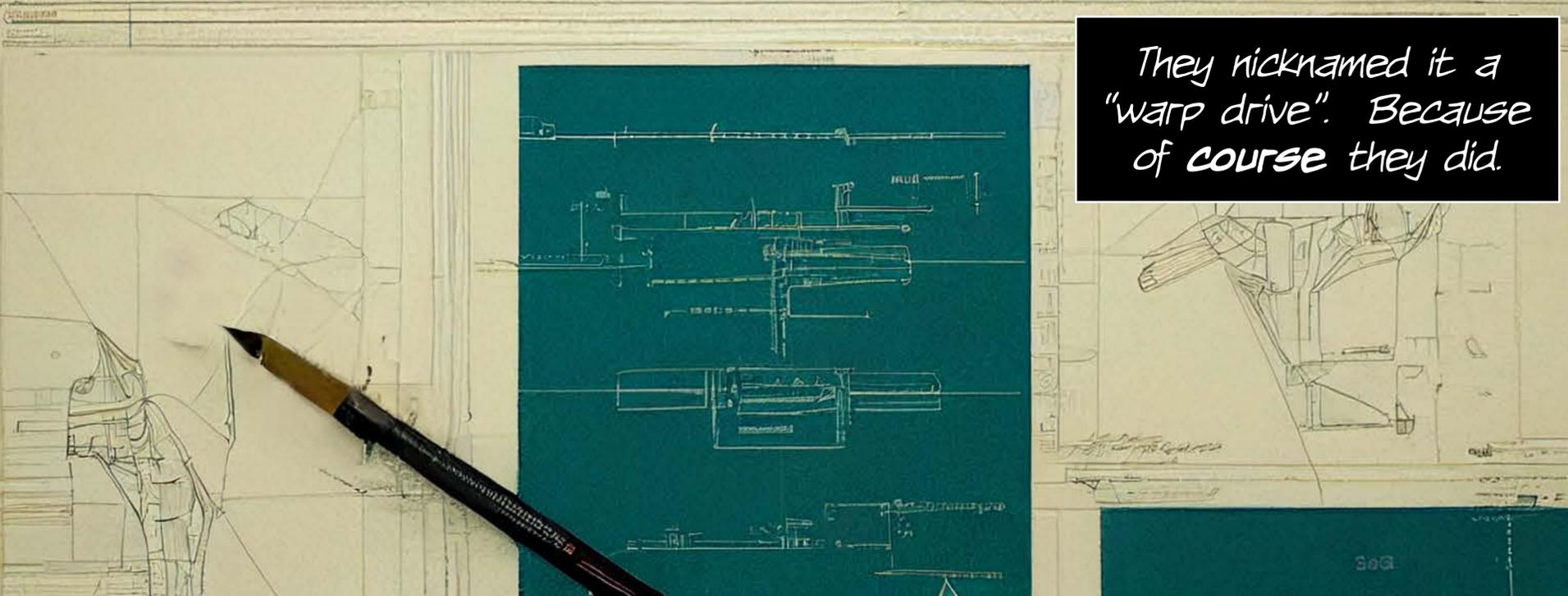
The technology we had developed to defend against the monsters had given us a head start, but at first, the challenge of interstellar travel seemed impossible to solve.



Then a group of engineers led by Ogilvy made their breakthrough in fusion technology.



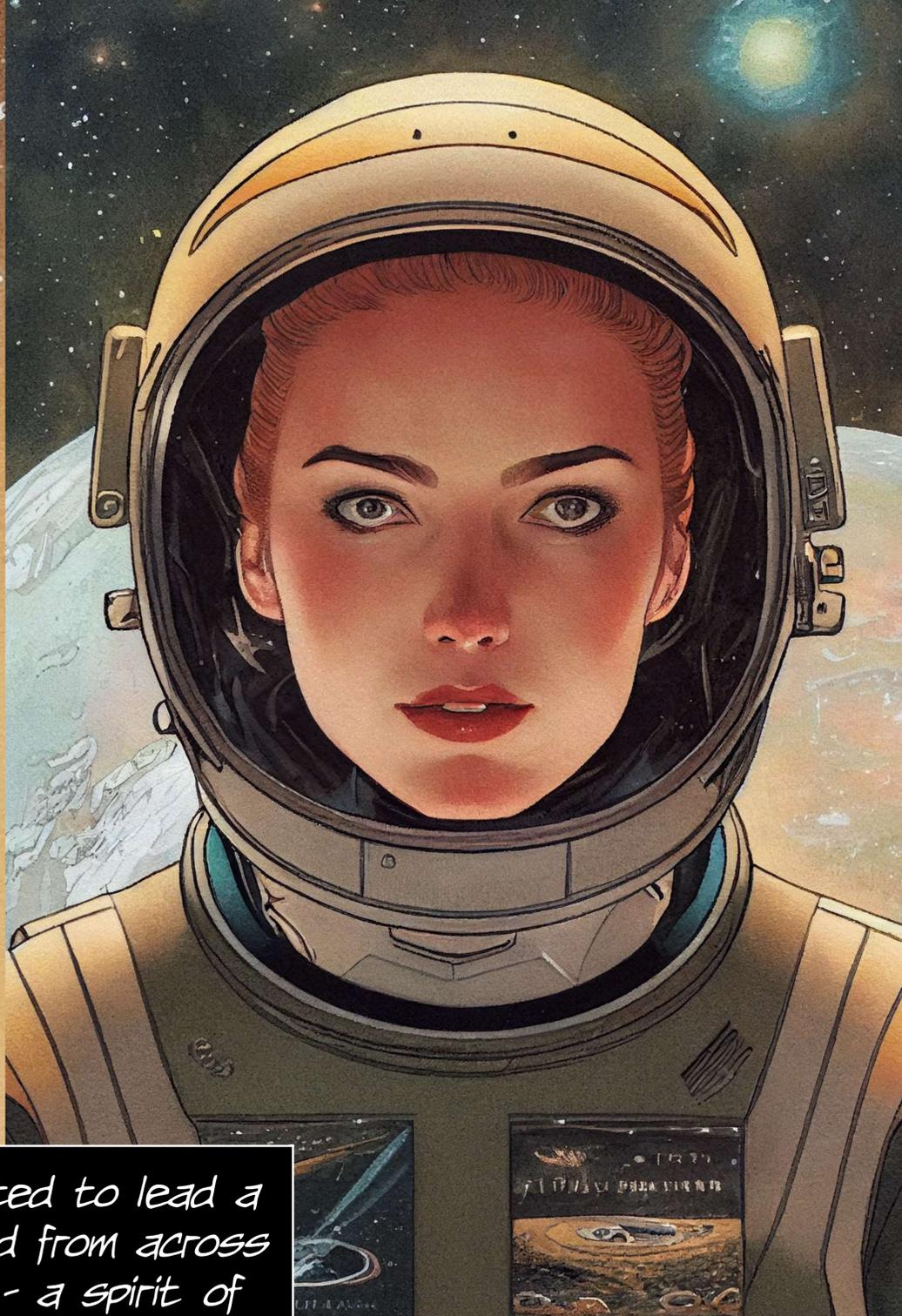
They nicknamed it a "warp drive". Because of course they did.





An exhaustive search of nearby stars had yielded several candidate exo-planets. Proxima Centauri b was chosen as our target.

*We knew it was to be a **one-way journey**, a scouting mission to confirm suitability of the biosphere.*



I was selected to lead a team gathered from across our nations - a spirit of co-operation rarely seen except in the face of global disaster.





A hundred years of continuous war against the monsters had decimated our military, and our space programs were now dominated by women. I couldn't have wished for a more capable crew.



A vertical rocket launch is depicted against a dark, starry night sky. The rocket is positioned centrally, with a bright, glowing plume of fire and light extending downwards from its base. This light illuminates the Great Pyramid of Giza, which is the central focus of the lower half of the image. The pyramid is shown in silhouette against a dark, textured desert landscape. The overall scene is a conceptual illustration of a spaceport located in the middle of the Sahara desert.

The coastal cities had long been devastated, including Cape Canaveral, attacked in 2028.

So a spaceport was built in the middle of the Sahara, near Giza, the cradle of civilization.

Dry and inhospitable, it was the furthest point from the sea where we could still viably achieve escape velocity.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a detailed space helmet and suit, is shown in profile, looking out at the Earth from space. The Earth is a large, curved horizon line with a thin atmosphere, set against a dark background of stars. A bright yellow light source is visible on the horizon, creating a lens flare effect. The woman's helmet has a clear visor and various mechanical details. The overall scene is a dramatic representation of space exploration.

As we left Earth's atmosphere, the President addressed the World, with a poem written by John Keats a hundred and fifty years before the coming of the leviathans.

*"Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold."*



*"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific--and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise--
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."*



We were to remain in hibernation chambers for the first 18 months of the voyage as we made our way to our target.

In dreams, the loved ones we'd left behind came to us, with the **promise** of being reunited on the new World.

As the family of Astronauts, their place in the lottery was **secure**, and an **incentive** for all of us aboard the **TURING**.



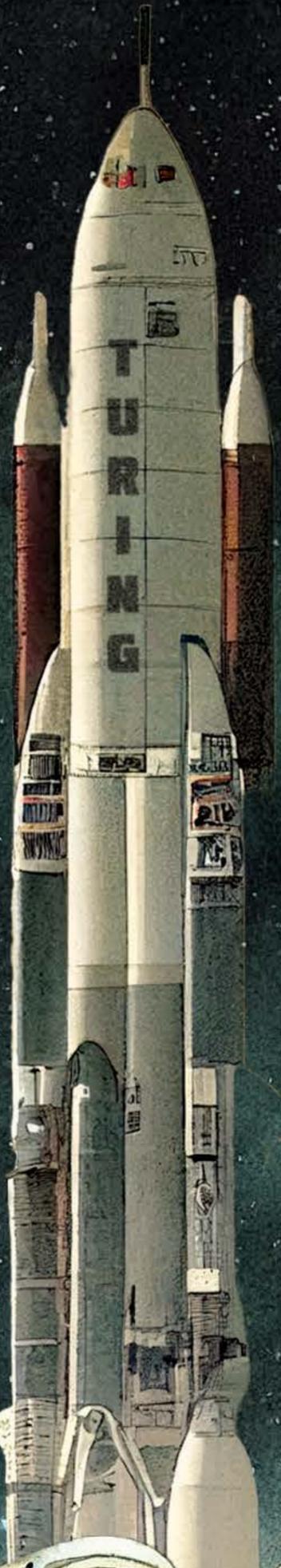
On occasion one of us would be woken from our induced slumber midjourney by the onboard AI, to perform some menial maintenance task.

How seldom that happened only served to remind us that we remained the small but necessary wetware component in a larger, more sophisticated machine.

A full-page illustration from a comic book showing four astronauts in green suits and white helmets standing on a reddish-brown, rocky planet surface. They are looking towards a large, dark crater in the distance. The sky is a deep blue with a crescent moon in the upper right corner. The astronauts are wearing brown boots and have various patches and equipment on their suits. The overall scene is set against a starry black background.

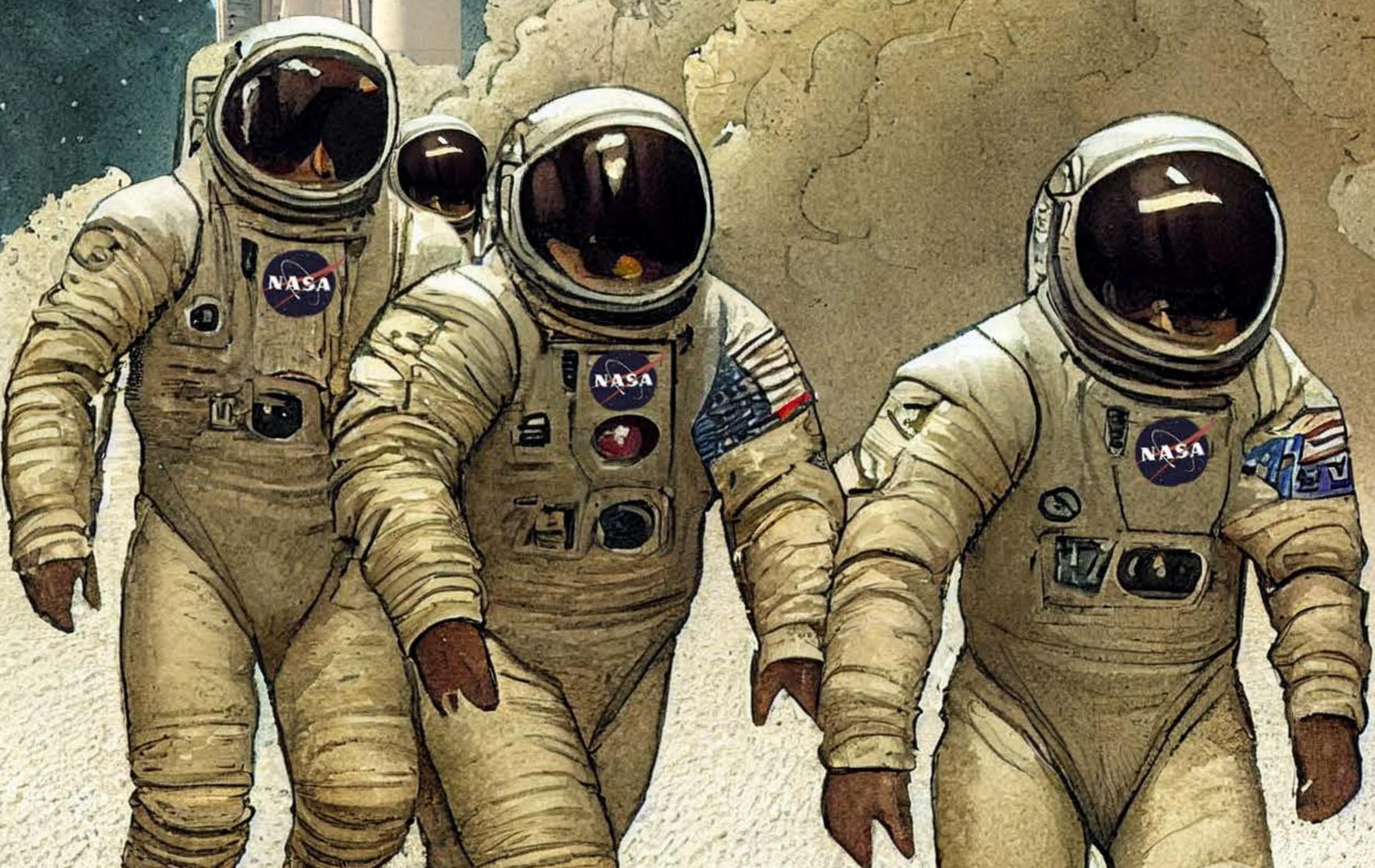
Our first view of the planet yielded little hope- a never-ending surface of rock, sand and thick cloud cover.

Except for a deep sinkhole, a 1000-mile wide crater that showed signs of Oxygen and Carbon Dioxide. We named it "Vallis McCarthy".



For the next five rotations, we waited for surface visibility to clear enough to identify a landing site close to the rim, but with little success.

So on the sixth rotation, we landed 25 clicks south of McCarthy, suited up in all-terrain protective suits and made way on foot.





*As we walked together
towards the rim, the
demons we'd left behind
continued to haunt us.*

Nightmare visions in the dust clouds, diffused from the random particles by our own pareidolia. Of the Mighty Golgoth, Of Nalka from the Silent Depths.

And of Douz'itrush, the destroyer of London.



A sci-fi illustration of a crater landscape. The scene is viewed from the edge of a crater, looking down into a valley. The sky is a deep, dark blue with scattered white stars. The valley floor is a mix of dark and light brown, with winding paths and some small structures. In the distance, a large, dark, conical mountain rises against the sky. The overall style is reminiscent of classic pulp magazine illustrations.

We paused at the edge of the crater to survey the vista presented. Hidden below the storm clouds and sheltered by the sinkhole lay a lush valley.

And in the distance, a tower that seemed.. geometric. Constructed, even.



When I was a child, my grandfather used to play an old worn 78 record over and over, so many times the words are **still** ingrained in my memory.

it was a children's story, narrated by a famous Hollywood movie star. The story was about a sailor.

One day, when the sailor was on shore leave, he fell down a hole and found himself in a strange land that looked "just like a page out of a story book.."



The land was ruled by an unjust king. The sailor asked "Where does this King live?."

A wise talking owl replies "In yonder castle. But none can reach it."

The sailor starts to sing "Well, trust in me my honored friend, I'll bring your sadness to an end."

And after a long trial, the sailor finally reaches the castle walls.





He recounts "I shimmied up the turret and climbed a rainspout until I came to a huge window."

"And I looked in..."



"And what do you think I saw?"



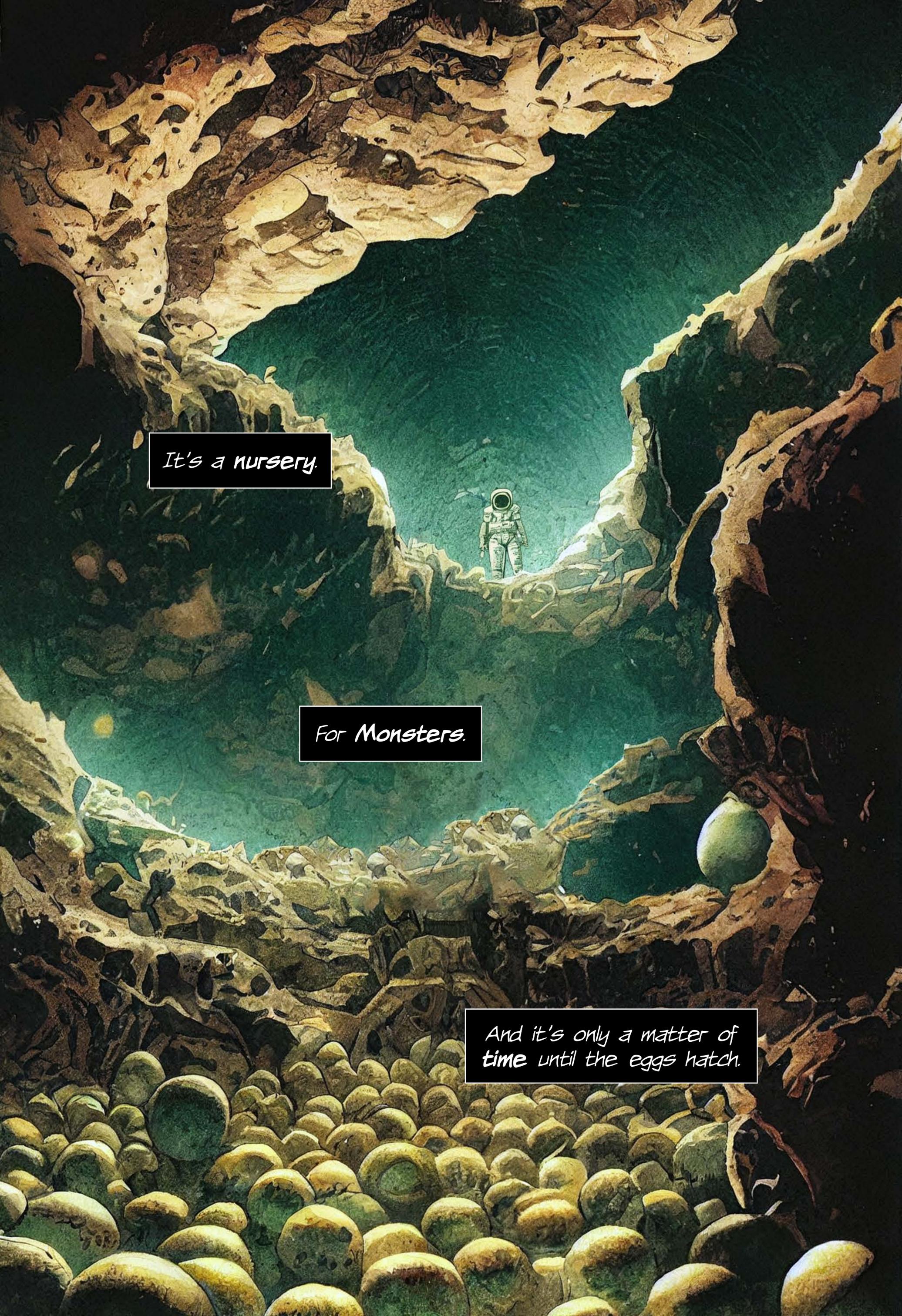
*I think about that record
- and of the sailor - more
often than I should.*



*It's how the mind protects
you from the horror of
reality. By distraction.*

*Because as I descended
into the interior, a **terrible
truth** unfolded, one unfit for
any children's storybook.*

*This place, this **ancient
pyramid**. It's not a tomb...*



It's a nursery.

For Monsters.

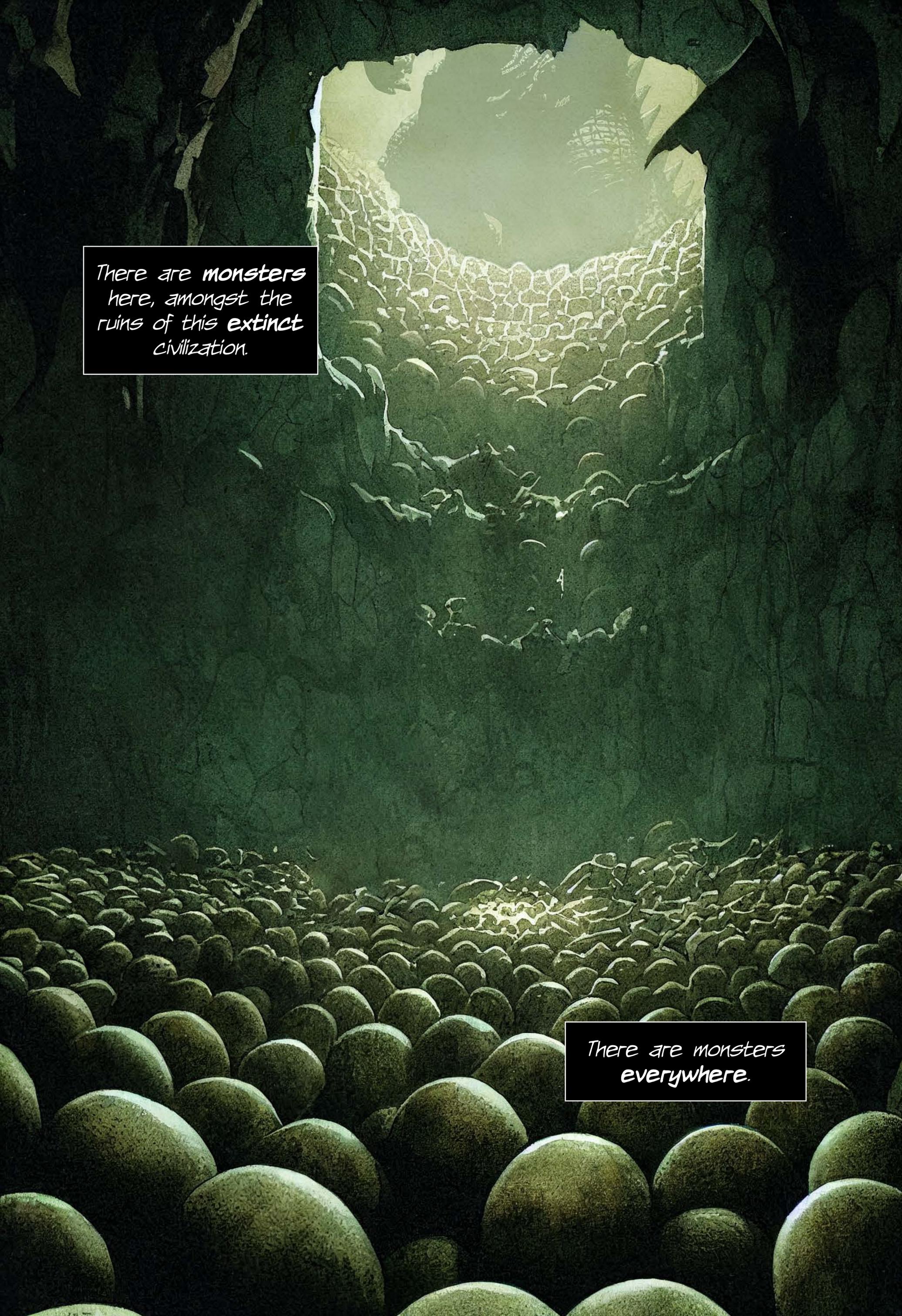
*And it's only a matter of
time until the eggs hatch.*



This message is a recording, broadcast on a continuous loop.

By the time you receive this, it will already be too late. We will all be gone.

It's important that you understand, we cannot be saved.



*There are monsters
here, amongst the
ruins of this extinct
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*There are monsters
everywhere.*



*Attempt no landing.
or evacuation.*

*I repeat, this is not
a distress signal.*



*I am Commander
Maryamu Musa.*

And this is my last testament.

Welcome back to my growing mythology, a world where monsters roam unfettered.

If you're a new reader, go check out my first story *SUMMER ISLAND*, which takes place 75 years before *EXODUS*.

That comic was created long, long ago, in a time when Artificial Image generation was in its infancy.

In other words, about four weeks ago.

That's how fast things are moving right now. It's like a technological adrenaline rush for creative storytelling.

Almost as soon as I had finished *SUMMER ISLAND*, the system I'd been using - Midjourney - received a significant upgrade, and I realized I could now generate really stunning imagery. It also took me about 48 hrs to realize I needed to rethink the way I created an AI comic.

EXODUS is the result, and was written and designed to show off the potential of this new technology for sequential stories. Every image in this comic book was initially generated by Midjourney's integration of Stable Diffusion, then manipulated in Photoshop as needed, before final layout using Apple Keynote. All in all, *EXODUS* took about 4 weeks to produce in my spare time.

This story was developed using the "Marvel Method" originally developed by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (and rarely used these days). Lee would provide a bare bones plot synopsis to Kirby, who would then create all the amazing art. At the end, Lee would add the dialog and captions, fleshing out the narrative along the way.

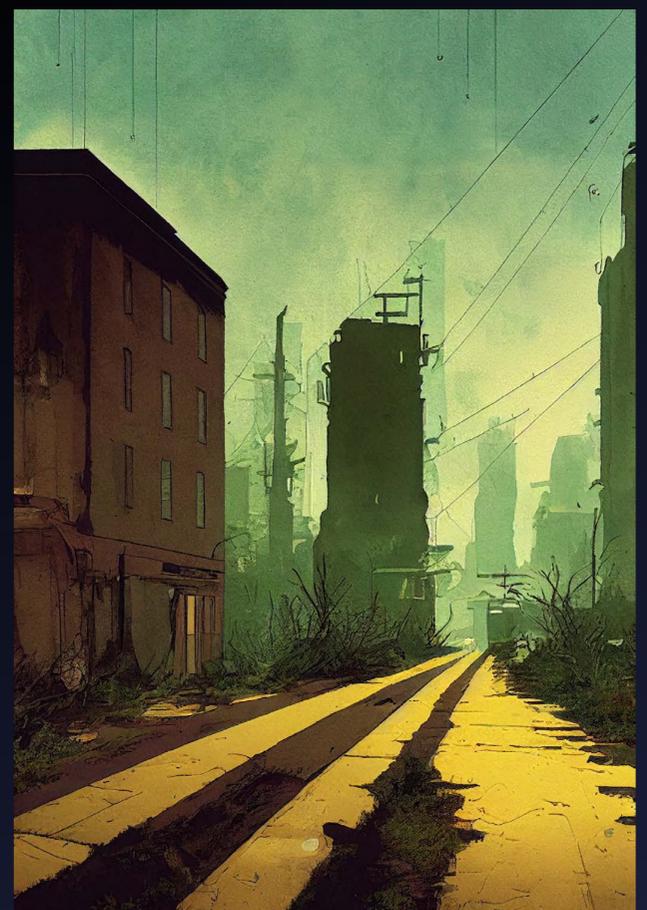
So for this story, I had a basic plot in mind, when I began but as the images were generated, it went in completely new directions. Consequently, the story of Maryamu only came into focus towards the end. The speed that the technology works, iterating almost instantly around a written prompt allows you to create visual stories in a very different way, almost like improv jazz.

The debate around whether or not AI art is even art at all has only just begun, and I'm not sure this comic helps us get to the answer any quicker, but hopefully you enjoyed the trip to Proxima Centauri. I'd love to hear your thoughts

Email: scoulson@campfirenyc.com



Prompt: "comic book panel of a beautiful African female NASA astronaut, cinematic interstellar movie, olive-green and sepia and teal Tritone print on watercolor paper"



Prompt: "comic book panel of post-apocalyptic London street, overgrown with vegetation, olive-green and sepia and teal-blue Tritone print on watercolor paper"

ALSO AVAILABLE AS
A FREE DOWNLOAD



Set in the same storyworld as *EXODUS*, this folk horror comic follows a photojournalist on assignment to a remote Scottish village, one where the townsfolk harbor a dark secret.

“A harrowing, multi-layered illustrated fable”

Muse By Clio

<https://campfirenyc.com/summer-island/>



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