

STARGAZER

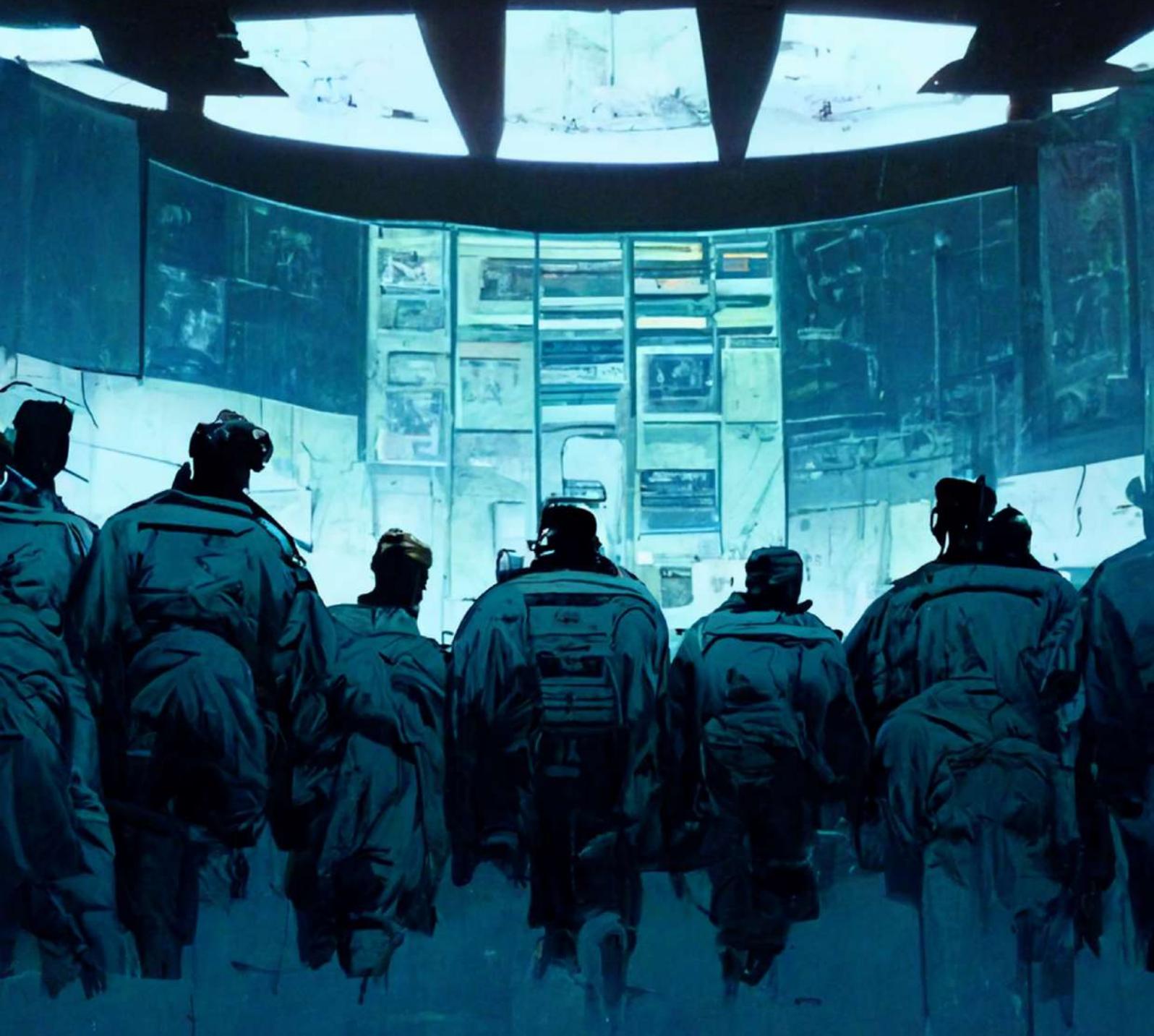
EPISODE ZERO: RING OF FIRE



ADAM J. RODRIGUEZ

STARGAZER

EPISODE ZERO: RING OF FIRE



WRITTEN & CREATED BY
ADAM J. RODRIGUEZ

ILLUSTRATED BY
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A FEW MINUTES AFTER MIDNIGHT...



AT AN 'UNDISCLOSED' MILITARY BASE.



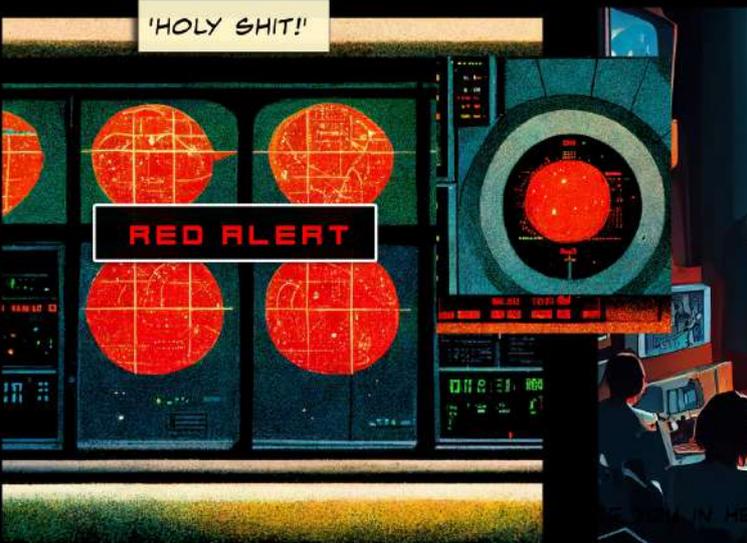
A PLACE WHERE THEY 'LISTEN' TO THE COSMOS.



AND TONIGHT, SOMETHING
JUST AIN'T RIGHT.



'HOLY SHIT!'

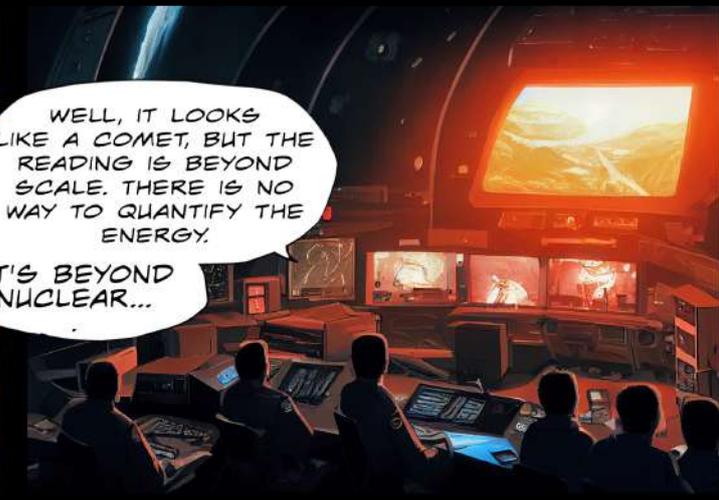


'CAPTAIN, I THINK YOU NEED TO SEE THIS NOW!'





CALM DOWN, AND TELL ME WHAT WE ARE LOOKING AT ON SCREEN.



WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE A COMET, BUT THE READING IS BEYOND SCALE. THERE IS NO WAY TO QUANTIFY THE ENERGY.

IT'S BEYOND NUCLEAR...



BEYOND GAMMA.

WHAT THE HELL ARE WE GOING TO DO?



PUT THE BASE ON HIGH ALERT AND . . .

SEND SOMEONE TO WAKE THE GENERAL.



SIR? GENERAL BANNER?

'ARE YOU IN HERE?'

YES, I AM, PRIVATE DIXX.

GREAT NAME, BY THE WAY, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, I ALREADY KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE.

I'M SURE YOU MAY BE FEELING A PARTICULARLY INTENSE SENSE OF DREAD AT THIS VERY MOMENT.

THAT'S GOOD. FEAR CAN BE A MOTIVATOR.

BECAUSE AS OF RIGHT NOW, WE ARE AT WAR. AND WHILE I'VE ALWAYS BEEN QUITE GOOD AT WAR, THIS IS DIFFERENT.



THE ENEMY IS OTHERWORLDLY AND UNKNOWN.

BUT I HAVE BEEN
WAITING AND
WATCHING.

KNOWING THE RING
OF FIRE WOULD
RETURN.

AND PREPARING
FOR THIS VERY DAY.





I'VE KNOWN IT WAS COMING BACK FOR A LONG TIME NOW.

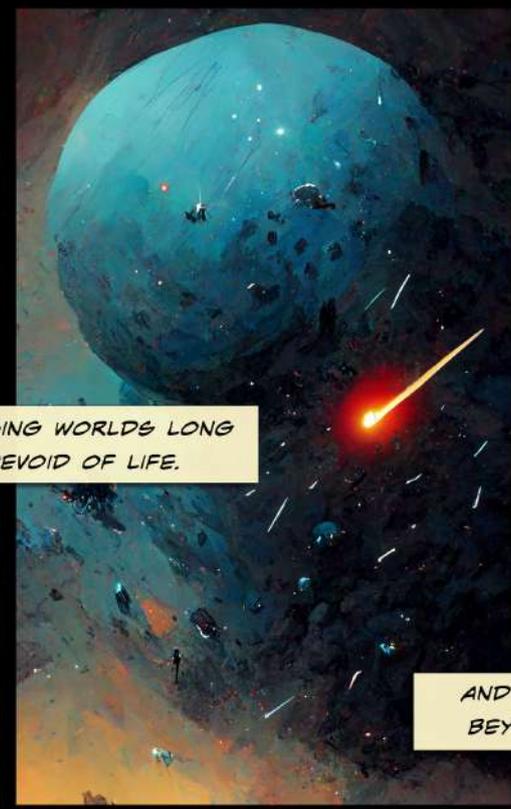
A POWER BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING.

AN INTELLIGENCE FAR BEYOND ANY OF
THE OTHERS WE'VE ENCOUNTERED.

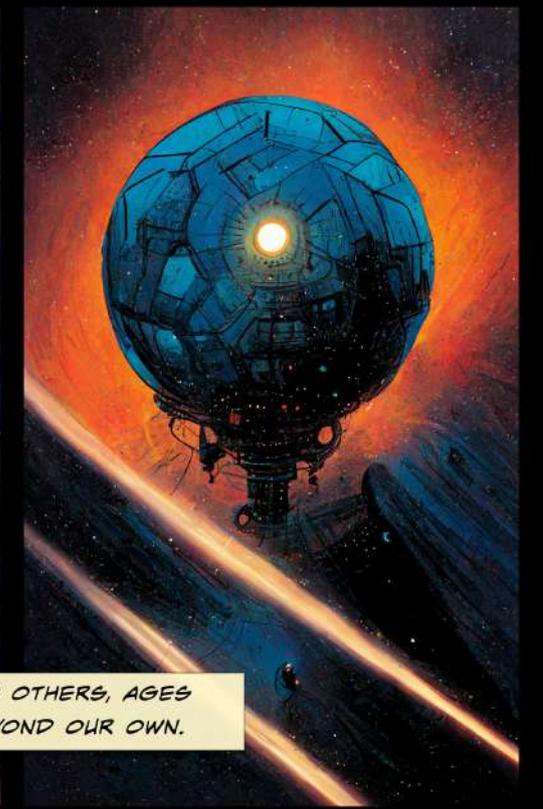
FROM THE MOST ANCIENT CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE.



TRAVELLING ACROSS
UNFATHOMABLE DISTANCES.



PASSING WORLDS LONG
DEVOID OF LIFE.



AND OTHERS, AGES
BEYOND OUR OWN.



UNTIL FINALLY, IT DECIDED UPON THIS LITTLE BLUE ROCK.

A WORLD IT HAS CHOSEN FOR A
PURPOSE, EITHER GOOD OR BAD.

EITHER WAY, I HAVE TO CONTROL IT.

THAT'S MY PURPOSE.



IT ALL BEGAN IN VIETNAM,
WHERE MY ONLY PURPOSE
WAS TO WAGE WAR.

A WAR OF MONSTROUS HORRORS,
FOUGHT IN A LAND OF UNIMAGINABLE
NATURAL BEAUTY.

IN HINDSIGHT, IT WAS A SIMPLE WAR.
POINTLESS, BUT SIMPLE. WE WERE
OCCUPIERS OF A FOREIGN LAND.



ALIEN INVADERS, IF YOU WILL.

WE CAME AT DAWN.
WITHOUT WARNING.



AND LEFT NOTHING BUT FIRE, DEATH AND DESPAIR.

AND STILL, WE CALLED OURSELVES LIBERATORS.

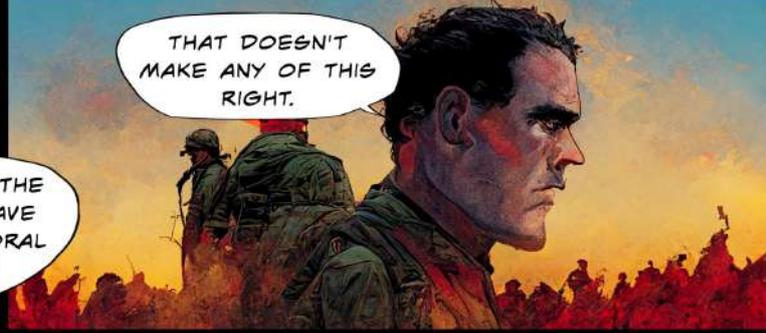
WHAT THE HELL
ARE WE DOING HERE,
BANNER?



IS THIS REALLY THE
MOMENT YOU HAVE
CHOSEN FOR MORAL
REFLECTION?



FOR CHRISSAKES,
LT. SKYLER, WE ARE
AT WAR!



THAT DOESN'T
MAKE ANY OF THIS
RIGHT.



MIGHT MAKES
RIGHT. AND WE ARE
THE MIGHTY.



BUT I WAS WRONG.
WE WERE ABOUT TO FIND OUT HOW
INSIGNIFICANT WE REALLY WERE.

'MAN OVERBOARD!'



SKYLER!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?

OH MOTHER,
TELL YOUR CHILDREN.
NOT TO DO WHAT I
HAVE DONE. . .

OH, I'M JUST
TAKING A LITTLE SWIM.
IT'S QUITE BEAUTIFUL.
YOU SHOULD JOIN
ME.



IT GETS SOME OF
THE BLOOD OFF. MAYBE WE
CAN BOTH WASH OUR SOULS
CLEAN.
JUST A LITTLE BIT . . .



BUT I
DOUBT IT.

I DON'T NEED
TO BE
FORGIVEN.



OR CLEANSED.
WE CHOSE THIS
LIFE.

NO. I CHOSE AN
HONORABLE LIFE, IN
THE SERVICE OF A
COUNTRY I LOVE.



ONE DAY YOU WILL OPEN
YOUR EYES AND SEE HOW
FAR WE HAVE DRIFTED
FROM THAT IDEA. BUT IT
WILL BE TOO LATE THEN
TO SAVE OUR SOULS.

MAYBE SKLYER WAS RIGHT.
BUT WE HAD MORE PRESSING
MATTERS TO DEAL WITH.

THE ANOMALIES BEGAN APPEARING IN THE DAYS AND NIGHTS THAT FOLLOWED.



AND SUDDENLY THE WAR WE WERE FIGHTING HERE WAS IRRELEVANT.

THERE WAS A NEW ENEMY.



BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING.



ARE YOU STILL FEELING MIGHTY NOW?

GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR BANNER!

BECAUSE I AM FEELING VERY SCARED.

SKYLER WAS RIGHT TO BE AFRAID, BUT THE MEN HAD TO FOCUS ON SURVIVING.

AND I DID NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF FEAR.



READY FOR WHAT? THERE IS NO WAY TO FIGHT THIS GOD-FORSAKEN THING.

SKYLER, GET THE MEN READY TO MOVE OUT.



AND THERE'S NO PLACE TO RUN, EITHER.





WE MOVED OUT AND CAME INTO A SMALL VILLAGE THE MORNING AFTER THE ANOMALY ARRIVED.



WE FOUND ONE LONE SURVIVOR.



GONE... ALL GONE...
BROTHER, DAUGHTER, RIKA, BAO,
HANH . . . ALL FALLEN INTO THE
STARS. EVEN MY WIFE, OH MY
GENTLE, SWEET ROSE!

TAKE ME NOW,
LORD.
PLEASE!



TELL ME WHAT
HAPPENED
HERE.

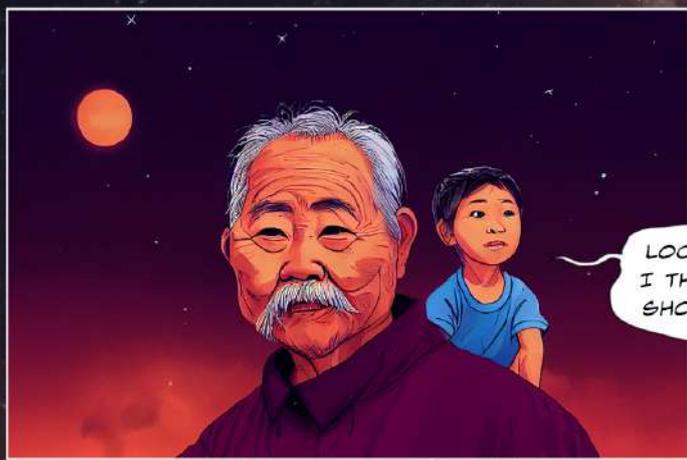


YOU WANT KNOW
WHAT HAPPENED?
FOR ONCE, IT
WASN'T YOU.

I TOOK MY GRANDSON HANH
OUT TO WATCH THE NIGHT SKY.

WE WERE BLESSED WITH A
BEAUTIFUL AND PEACEFUL NIGHT
- A SIMPLE BUT RARE THING.

NO HELICOPTERS, NO BULLETS.
ONLY THE GREAT SYMPHONY OF
CICADAS SINGING.



LOOK GRANDPA,
I THINK I SEE A
SHOOTING STAR!

DO NOT MAKE A
WISH, MY BOY. WE
BELIEVE THE STAR IS
A SIGN OF SOMEONE
PASSING INTO THE
NEXT WORLD.

OK, PAPA. BUT
YOU'RE NOT
LEAVING ME, RIGHT?





I WISH I HAD BEEN TAKEN, AND ALL THE OTHERS SPARED.

ESPECIALLY HANH - HE BROUGHT LIGHT TO THIS WORLD.



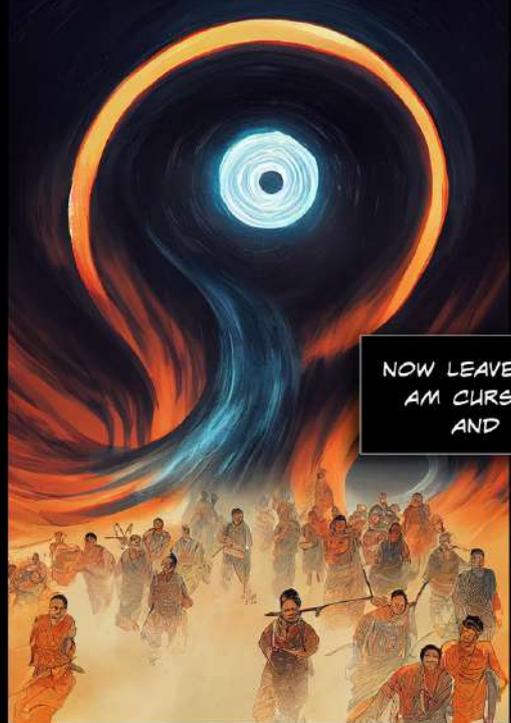
I TRIED TO SAVE HIM, BUT I COULD NOT FIGHT THE HEAVENS.

AND NOW, HE IS GONE. EVERYONE I EVER KNEW OR LOVED IS **GONE.**



I WEEP FOR THEIR GHOSTS NOW. BUT ALSO FOR YOU.

FOR ONCE, YOU ARE NOT THE ONES WHO BRING DEATH. NOW YOU WILL SUFFER AND BE HUNTED. AS WE HAVE.



NOW LEAVE ME TO MOURN. I AM CURSED TO REMAIN - AND REMEMBER...



NOW YOU WILL SEE THAT ALL OF YOUR POWER..



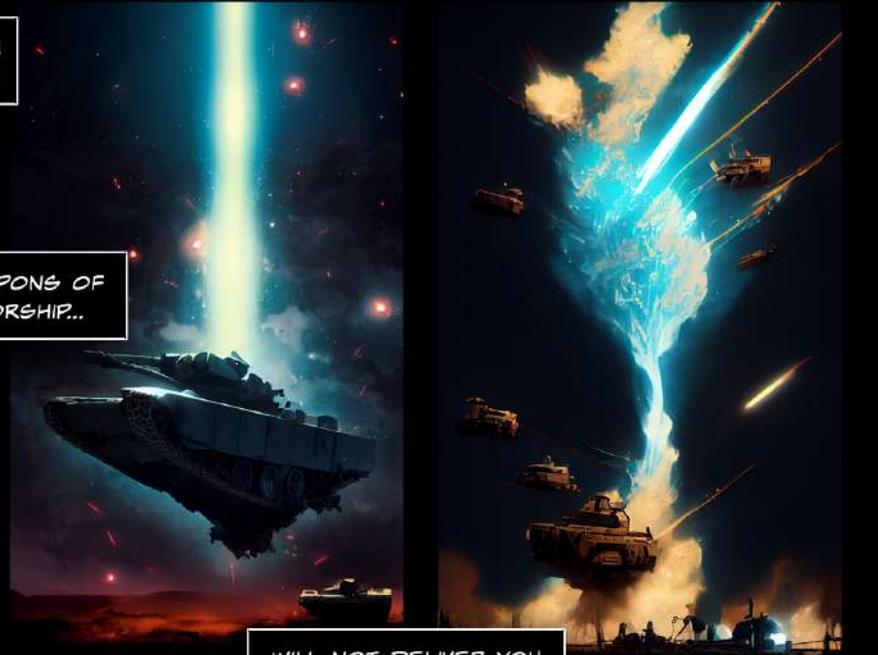
MEANS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING AT ALL.



FIRE!

YOUR BLIND PATRIOTISM AND PRIDE WILL BLEED.

AND THE WEAPONS OF WAR YOU WORSHIP..



WILL NOT DELIVER YOU FROM JUDGEMENT.

YOU MAY FACE THE UNKNOWN BRAVELY.



YOU MAY FIGHT AND RAGE AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT.

BUT STILL, YOU WILL FALL INTO THE BURNING RING OF FIRE.





HOLY SHIT!
THE GEIGER
IS BLOWN.

DO YOU HAVE ANY
READINGS FOR ME,
SOLDIER?

YOU WANT
READINGS?
WE'VE ALREADY
LOST MOST OF
OUR DAMN
BATTALION.



THE RING OF
FIRE IS HERE
FOR US ALL.
JUST LIKE THE
OLD MAN SAID.



SPARE ME. I HAVE
TO KNOW MY
ENEMY, NO MATTER
WHAT IT TAKES.



UH, GUYS. THIS
SUCKER IS
OPENING UP.



I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT
JUST BE A HARD-HEADED
BASTARD, BUT IT'S WORSE.
YOU'RE A
MADMAN!



TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE,
RAMIREZ.

REPORT, RAMIREZ.
REPORT!



I SEE
NOTHING AND
EVERYTHING.

NO, RAMIREZ.
GET THE HELL
OUTTA THERE!



I CAN'T.
IT'S TOO
STRONG.



TELL MY WIFE I...

A HOLLOW ECHO
OF DESPAIR AND THEN AN
AWFUL SILENCE.

AND RAMIREZ VANISHES
INTO THE VOID.

HE WAS A
GOOD MAN.
THEY ALL WERE.

AND NOW WE
MUST HONOR THEIR
SACRIFICE.

BY FINDING A
WAY TO DESTROY
OUR NEW ENEMY.
AT ANY
COST.

YOU SHOULD'VE HONORED
THEM WHEN THEY WERE ALIVE
BY PULLING THEM BACK. THEY
CAME HERE BECAUSE THEY
HAD TO. NOT BECAUSE THEY
LOVE IT. LIKE YOU.

HAVEN'T YOU
DESTROYED
ENOUGH LIVES
ALREADY?

WHAT ARE YOU
GONNA DO?
DROP A NUKE ON
IT?

HOW DID YOU
KNOW?

COLONEL BANNER,
THE PACKAGE HAS
ARRIVED.

AND SO BANNER BEGAN
TO PLAN ONE LAST ACT
OF WAR.

A DESPERATE ACT OF
FUTILE LUNACY.

WE CALL THESE
LITTLE BAD BOYS
THE TOURISTS.

BECAUSE YOU CAN JUST
CARRY THEM AROUND LIKE
LUGGAGE, LEAVE THEM IN THE
MIDDLE OF A HIGH VALUE
TARGET AND CASUALLY WALK
AWAY.

NIXON WAS SENDING
THEM TO HANOI BEFORE
THE ANAMOLY
SHOWED UP.

SO NOW WE JUST
NEED TO TAKE ONE
INSIDE THE FREAKIN'
VORTEX OF DEATH.

AND WHO THE
FUCK IS GOING TO
VOLUNTEER FOR
THAT SWEET
LITTLE SUICIDE
MISSION?

I ALREADY KNEW THE
ANSWER. I COULD NOT
LET BANNER SEND AN
INNOCENT MAN TO DIE.

A soldier in a dark, futuristic environment. A large, glowing orb is visible above the soldier. The soldier is wearing a helmet with a headlamp and is holding a green thermos. The background is a mix of red and blue light, suggesting a space or alien environment.

*IT HAD
TO BE ME.*

*TO BE
CONTINUED...*



SAY A
PRAYER
FOR
THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

This experimental comic book was written by Adam J. Rodriguez and the artwork was generated using Artificial Intelligence. No real artists were harmed during the making of this story.

The Stargazer comic series began and ended as a single issue drawn by an actual human illustrator several years ago and will be reissued soon alongside an ongoing series.