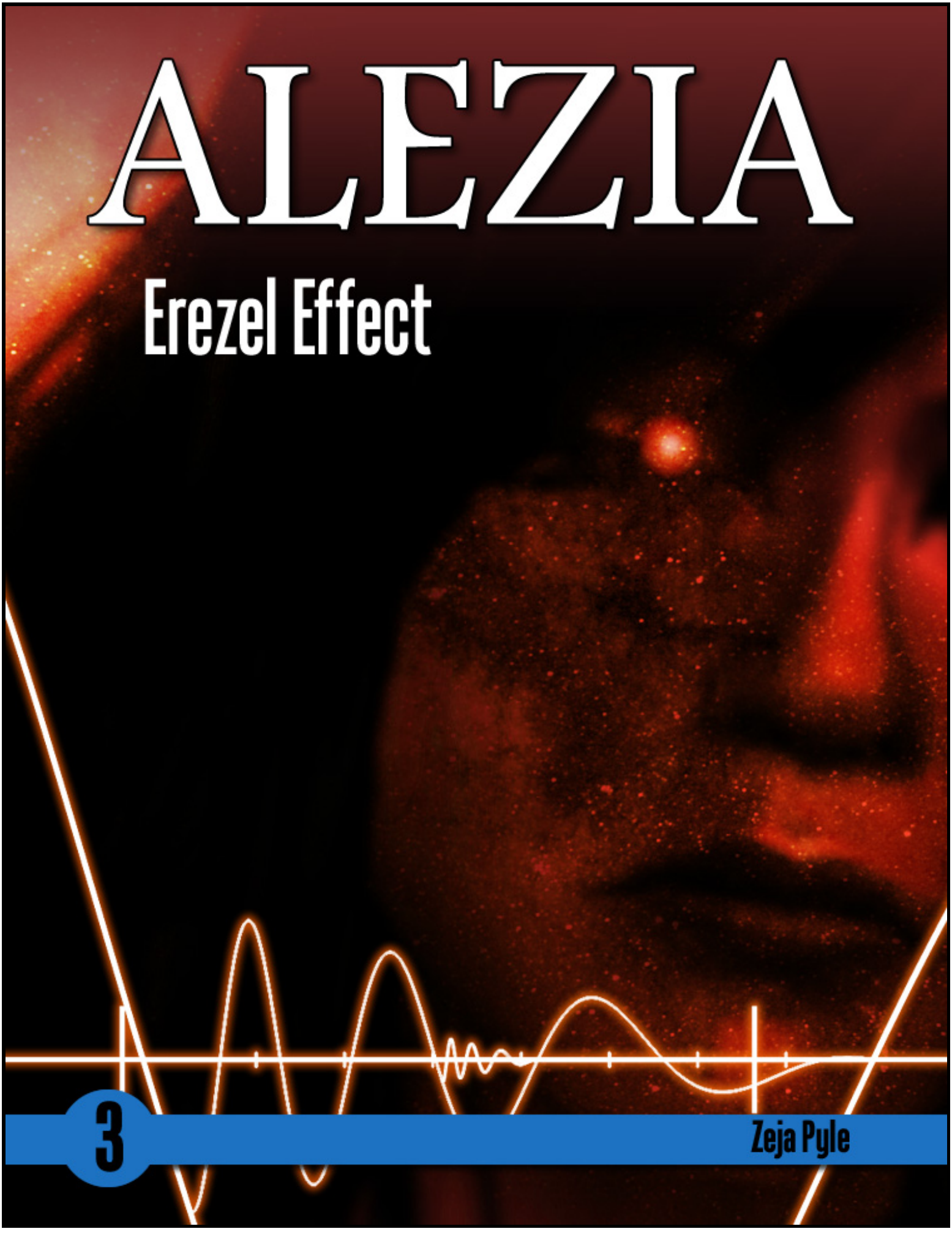
ALEZIA

Erezel Effect



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Zeja Pyle

ALEZIA: Erezel Effect

Zeja Pyle

VirZ
PRODUCTIONS

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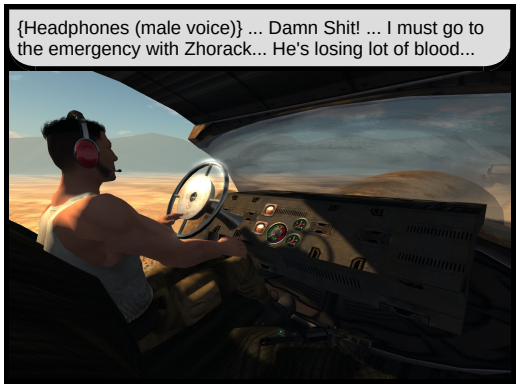

{Headphones (male voice)} ... Damn Shit! ... I must go to the emergency with Zhorack... He's losing lot of blood...


- Did you check if the stock is still there?
{Headphones} ...They took it! ...Oh! Damn!


- I'm running after him!
{Headphones} Him?! There is only one?
VRRRRR !


- I think it is. This fucking bastard will pain! Trust me!


VRRRRR !
VRRRRR !
VRRRRR !

(!)

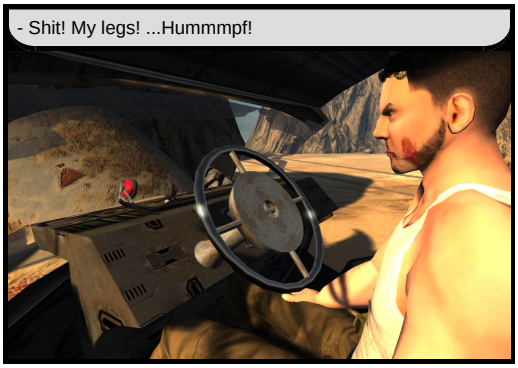

VRRRRR !


BOOM !

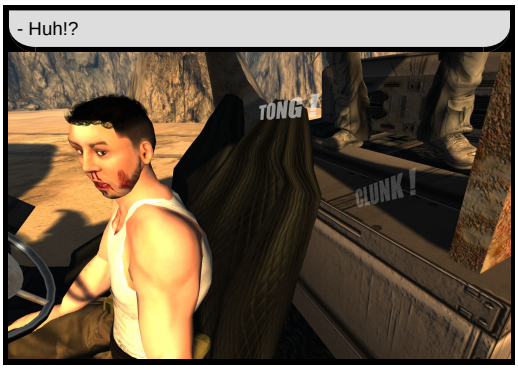

CRUNNNCH !




- Oooh! ...What happened?


- Shit! My legs! ...Hummmpf!


- Karl? Are you still there? ...Damn it! Karl! ...Answer!

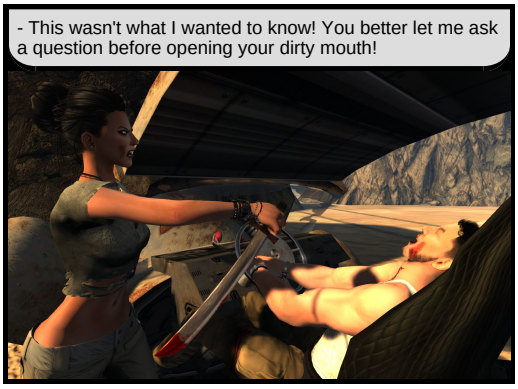

- Huh!?
TONG !
CLUNK !


- Painful, isn't it? Do you remember me?


-- Your hands! On the wheel, please!


-- You? Fucking Bitch!
CRICK !
CLICK !


-- Aaaaah!
FUTCH !


- This wasn't what I wanted to know! You better let me ask a question before opening your dirty mouth!


-- Where is he? Your ignoble captain! Where is Luxor Slonk?
-- Do you really think I will tell you anything? Dirty bitch!
- Oh! I'm pretty sure. Do you know why?
- Hmmph! Aaaarrrg!
TCHAK !
-- ...Because you still have nine other fingers before anything else!
- Where... is... Slonk?!


- Alright!

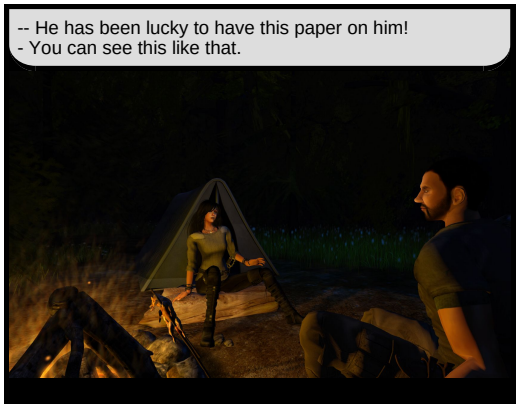

- No, stop! ... Bashora.

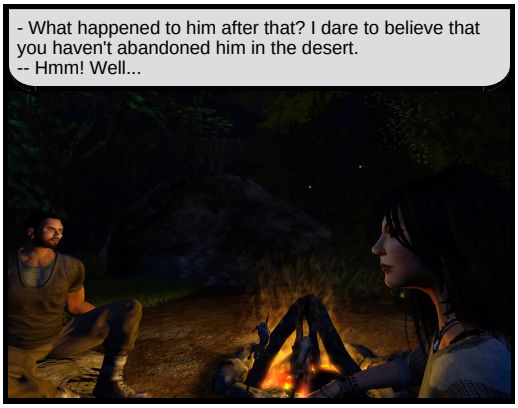

-- What?
- Bashora. He's in charge at Bashora.


-- You lie!
- No, wait! I can prove it!

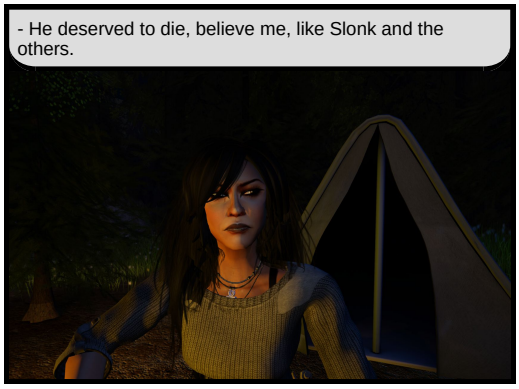

- In my pocket. I have my recall letter to his service, that I received yesterday morning.


- So that's how you learned about Bashora...
-- No, I knew about Bashora before this. There was a lot of rumors about what was happening there.

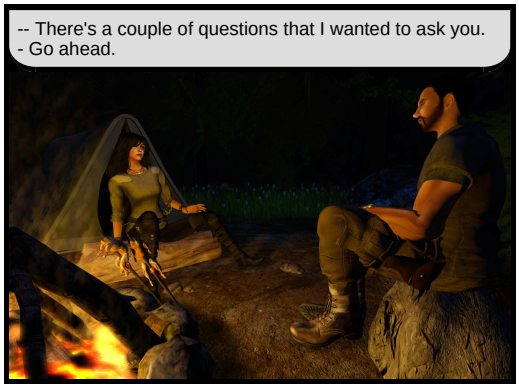

-- He has been lucky to have this paper on him!
- You can see this like that.

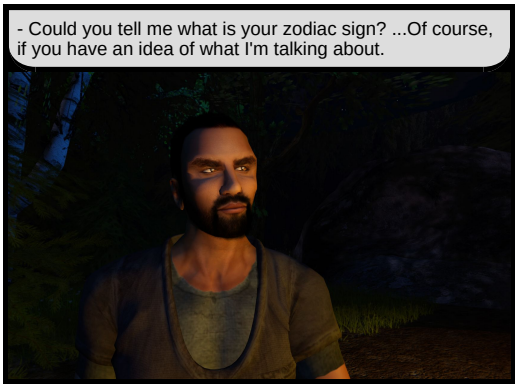

- What happened to him after that? I dare to believe that you haven't abandoned him in the desert.
-- Hmm! Well...

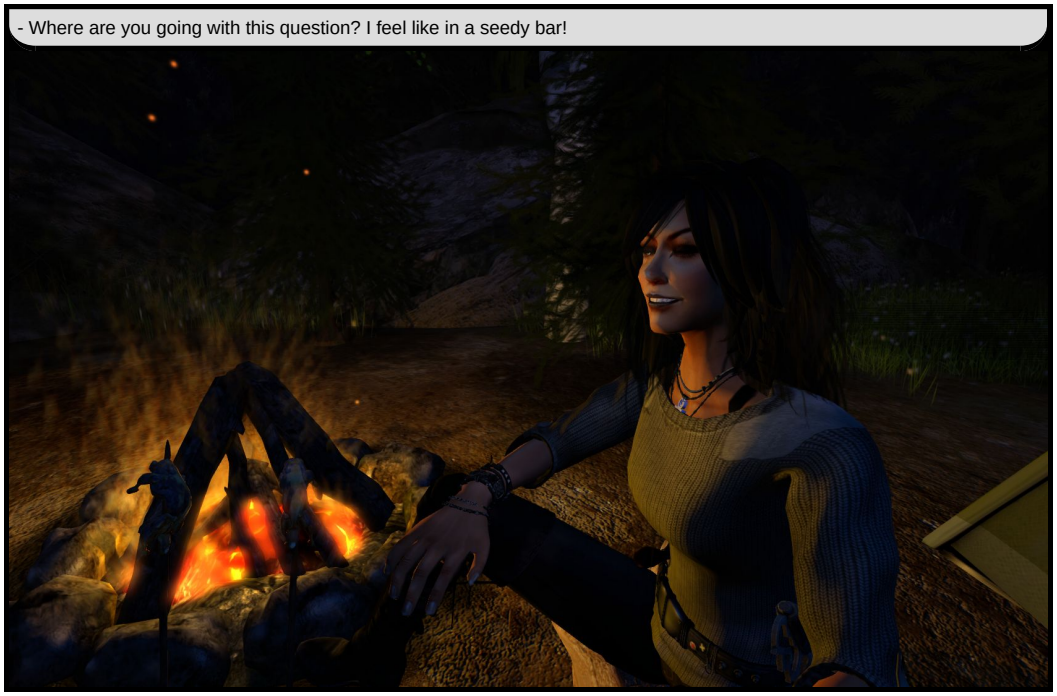

...He was dead before I left. ...Result of the collision... Probably.

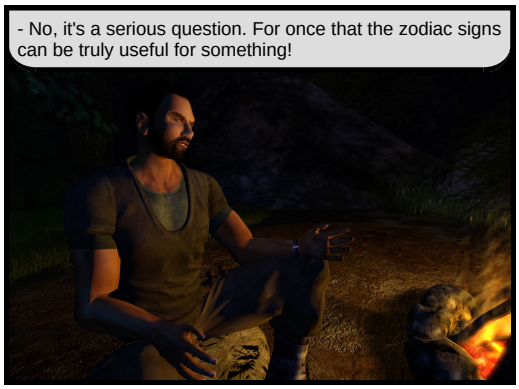

- He deserved to die, believe me, like Slonk and the others.


-- Let's talk about something happier, would you?
- Yeah! I agree.


-- There's a couple of questions that I wanted to ask you.
- Go ahead.


- Could you tell me what is your zodiac sign? ...Of course, if you have an idea of what I'm talking about.


- Where are you going with this question? I feel like in a seedy bar!


- No, it's a serious question. For once that the zodiac signs can be truly useful for something!


-- Well! I'm born the sixth of Fernis, so I'm Crab.
- Oh! Crab? ...Not Scorpio?

- No, Crab.
-- OK. This must be Cancer. I just wanted to avoid any confusion.



- And your birthday, which season was it when you were born?
-- Hmm... Early fall. Why?



-- OK. Could you tell approximately how many days after the fall equinox?
- Uh... Let me think. ...About two weeks after.



- Let me explain. In my time, the spring equinox was falling when the Sun was in Aries on the ecliptic.
-- I see, which was different in my time.



- Exactly! According what you said, the fall equinox was falling for you in the Cancer sign.



- So we can conclude that, in your time, the spring equinox was somewhere in Capricorn.
-- If you say so.



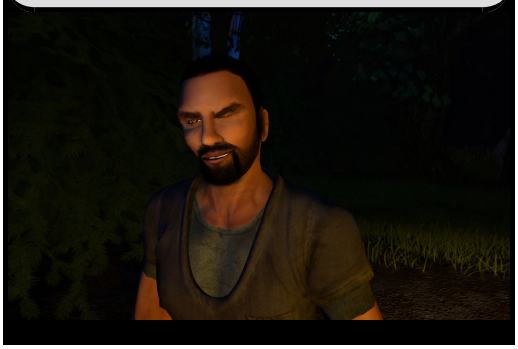
- So that makes us a difference of three signs, which means the quarter of the ecliptic. Knowing that the equinox makes a complete revolution of the zodiac in 26 000 years, we can conclude that a quarter of these 26 000 years separates our respective times. In other words, slightly more than 6000 years!



- Yeah... Or 32 000 years, or maybe even 58 000 years!
-- I doubt it could be more than 6000 years. What we found under the desert near Bashora was too well preserved for 6000 years.

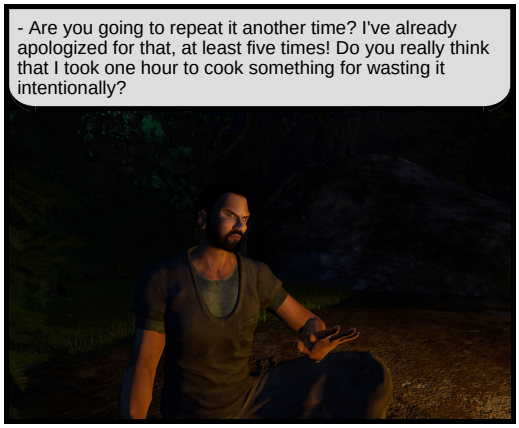


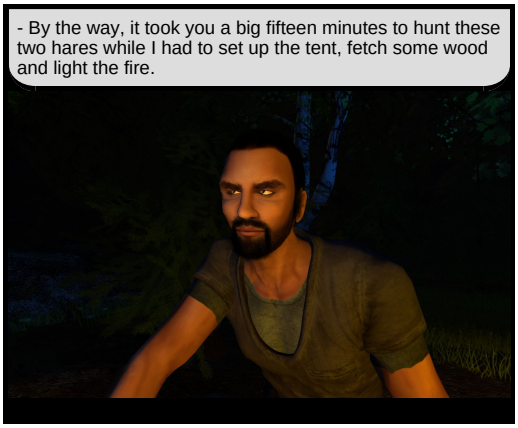
- So if we add the 1000 years that separate us from the Bashora's time, this means that I am at least 7034 years old! ;-)

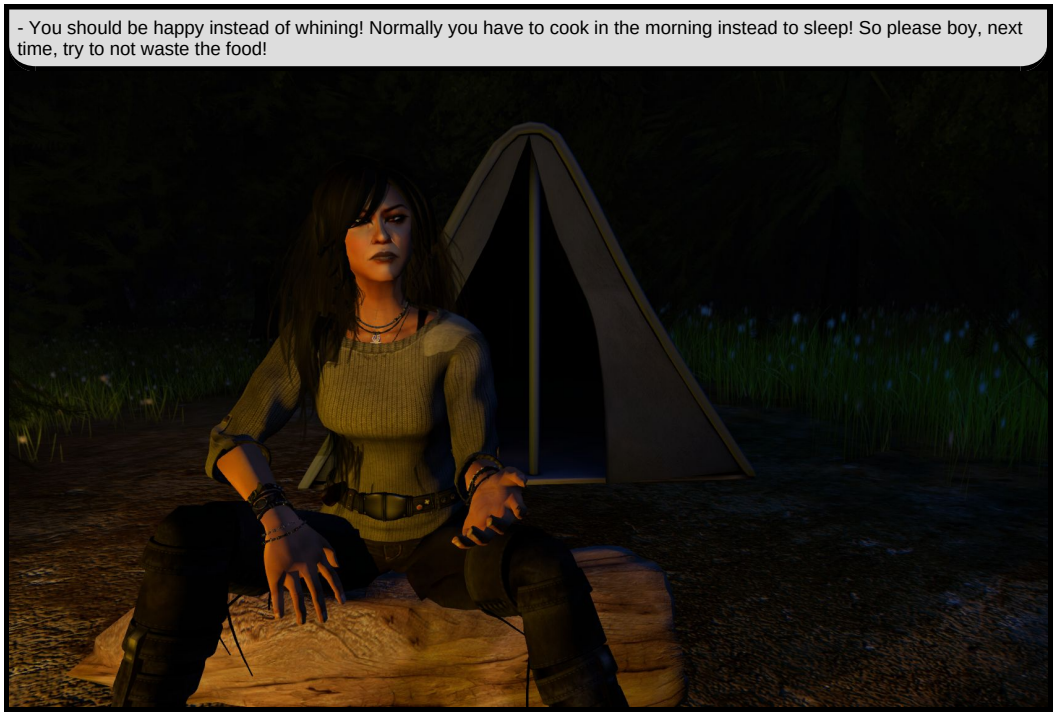


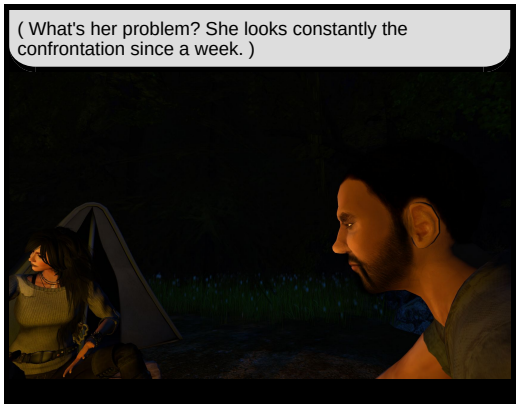
- Oh nice! Instead to do so "useful" calculations that won't change anything to our reality, perhaps you could start learning not to burn systematically all the meat that I provide us!

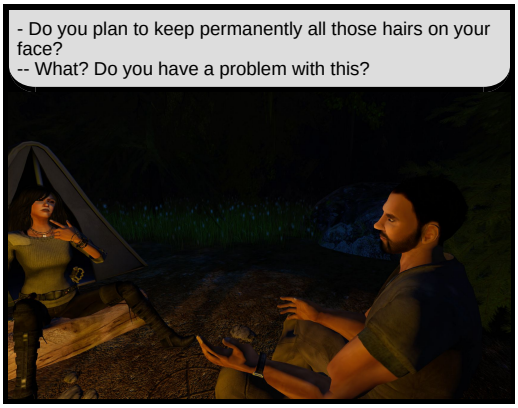



- Are you going to repeat it another time? I've already apologized for that, at least five times! Do you really think that I took one hour to cook something for wasting it intentionally?

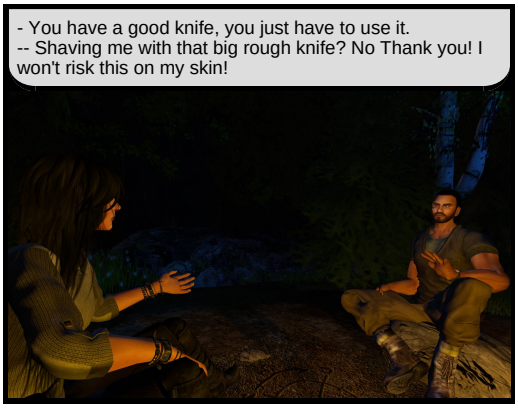

- By the way, it took you a big fifteen minutes to hunt these two hares while I had to set up the tent, fetch some wood and light the fire.


- You should be happy instead of whining! Normally you have to cook in the morning instead to sleep! So please boy, next time, try to not waste the food!


(What's her problem? She looks constantly the confrontation since a week.)

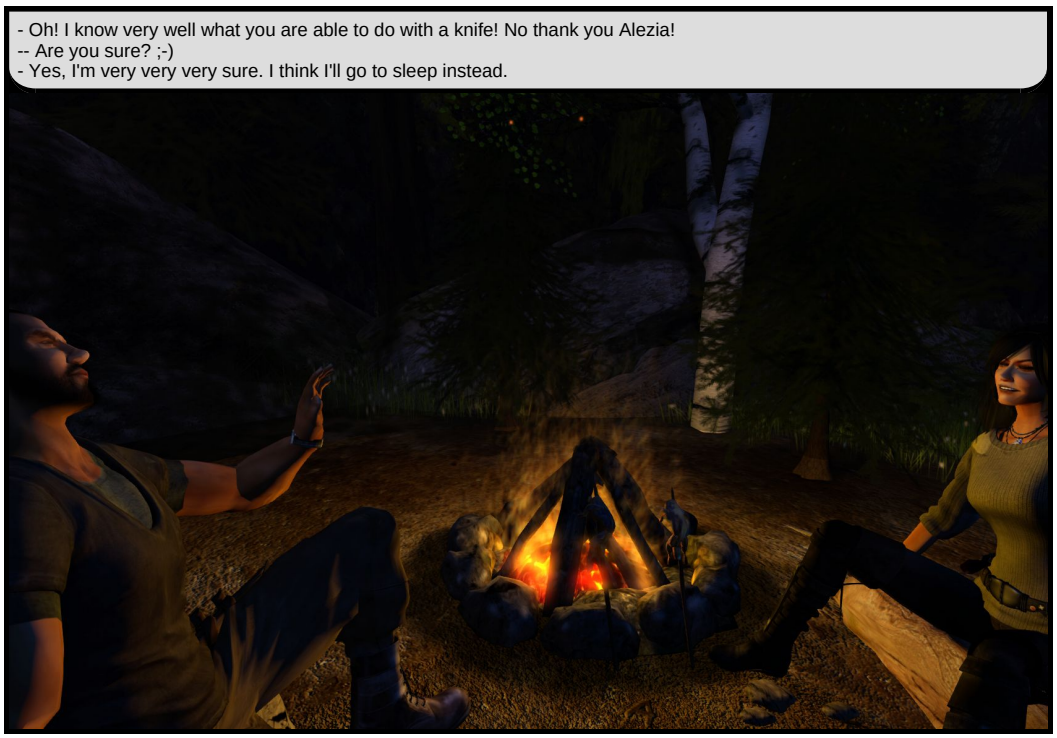

- Do you plan to keep permanently all those hairs on your face?
-- What? Do you have a problem with this?


- You were more handsome without that beard. Why don't you just cut it?
- Cut it with what? Do you see a razor somewhere?


- You have a good knife, you just have to use it.
-- Shaving me with that big rough knife? No Thank you! I won't risk this on my skin!


- Come on! Do you think that nobody did that before?


- You know, a knife, freshly sharpened, this can be very efficient. I can do it for you if you want. I am very skilled with a knife!


- Oh! I know very well what you are able to do with a knife! No thank you Alezia!
-- Are you sure? ;-)
- Yes, I'm very very very sure. I think I'll go to sleep instead.

The next morning...



-- Hey! Come see this.
- ?



- What is it?
-- These fruits, they look like tomatoes. I saw these plants everywhere on the coast.



-- If this is the case, it could significantly improve our meals!
- Well, you said it... These fruits look like tomatoes, but they are not.



- This is an ogeme plant, a very invasive plant that grows everywhere.
-- Ogeme? ...Is it edible?



- Yes, it doesn't taste very good, but it's still a good source of nutrients such as tomatoes. Of course, this is only if you can learn how to cook without burning everything!
((Sigh...))



- They're far to be ripe, it's not yet the season.



- Were they already existing in your time? Or have you learned their existence only during the last years?



- It existed in Rantar. Before the war, people would have done everything not to see them grow in their garden...



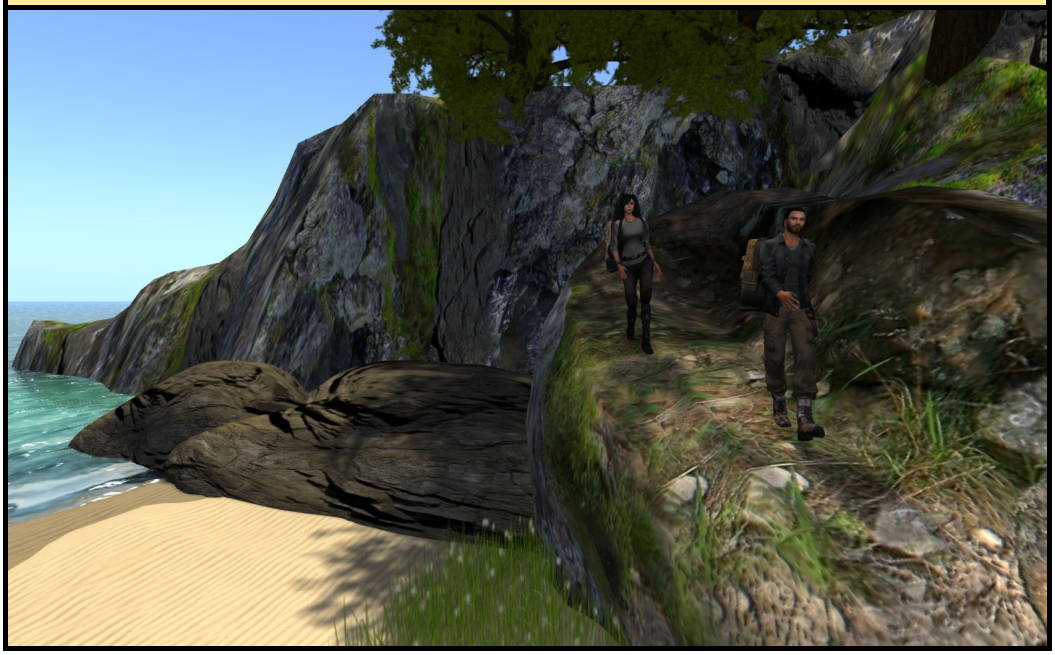
- ...And during the war, people was very happy to have them to eat. I was hoping to never have to eat that again. But well... When we have nothing else...



-- So you've never seen this in your time?
- No, only tomatoes. There must be a common ancestor, it's so similar.



One hour later...



-- Oh wow! look at this! Look that beach! This sand!
- Yes, it's a beach. So what?



-- I declare a break! Come on!



-- Roland, what are you doing?
- I'm taking off my boots, don't you see?



- Oh yeah! It's perfect, just enough warm!
((!))



-- So you've decided that this was a good time for a salt water bath?
- Vacation! It's time to take a vacation...



- Come on! Put down your backpack and come to bathe, the water is perfect!
-- What do you mean by "vacation"?



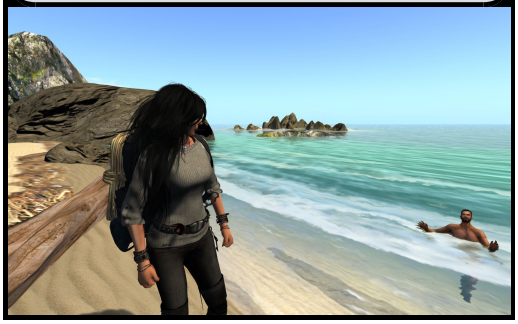
- You know what it means to take a vacation, don't you?
-- Yes, but...



- Alezia, I worked non-stop for the past four months before landing here. We walked day after day for two weeks now. Couldn't we take a day off? I think we deserve it! ...As far as I know, we're not expected anywhere. So...



- A day off ... Hmm ... Here? But we are in an open ground!
-- We haven't seen any probes for weeks. I think we can take the risk to have a swim on this beach. Don't you think?
- All right, if you insist! Let's stay here for today.



-- Good! Come on Miss! In the water!
- Hmm! I'll have to take off my boots... And it's not so warm today...



-- Ah! Ah! Alezia Kurdis, are you too shy to show you naked?
- Grrr! Stop calling me like this!



- I won't give you the pleasure of seeing me naked!



- Or maybe it's my nudity that is disturbing you? Or you fear make rusting your eye?



- No, your nudity is far from impressing me!



-- I give you that, the water is pretty good!
- In my time, people would have paid a lot to have access to a deserted sunny beach like this one.



-- People weren't taking vacation in your time?
- In Rantar, maybe before the war. People had to work hard for a living. We were talking more in terms of "permission" rather than "vacation".



-- But in the eastern cities of Dallusia, the concept of vacation was certainly existing. All the richness was there. I mean, all what they stole from Rantar.



-- This is a good time, isn't?
- It highlights well your tendency to procrastinate.



-- Procrastinate! I'm not like that! ...Ah! Come on! We call this "taking the time to live", it's only that! It's you who don't know how to enjoy life, not me!



-- Don't panic! Instead, why don't you go light the fire?
- Yes, you're right! I'd better go do that! ... By the way, before you complain one more time, I just want to let you know that we're gonna eat the remains of the carbonized hares.



A few hours later...



-- Hum! It's better than yesterday, isn't it?
- Maybe, with a lot of imagination!



- Tell me, did you ever have a boyfriend?
-- Why this question?



-- Uh... Well, you never told me about any. I'm just curious to know.
- Curiosity is not always welcome.



- Oh! Yes. It was just a question. If you don't want to answer it, I'll respect that.



- Ok! It's none of my business. And there was no intention behind this.



- Paal! ...His name was Paal.
-- Oh!



- He has been the only one I could have qualified as a boyfriend. He was a conscript of the Dallusian army. I met him when I joined his unit after the Rantar's annexation.



- He disappeared in the desert during a mission, after have taken care to send me deliver useless documents to the general headquarter. He did that because he didn't want I take part of this mission. Was that to protect me, or maybe he thought I was too possessive? I will never know.



-- What happened to him?
- Nobody knows. They have been declared dead after one month. It was impossible to survive more than two weeks with the equipment they had taken with them.

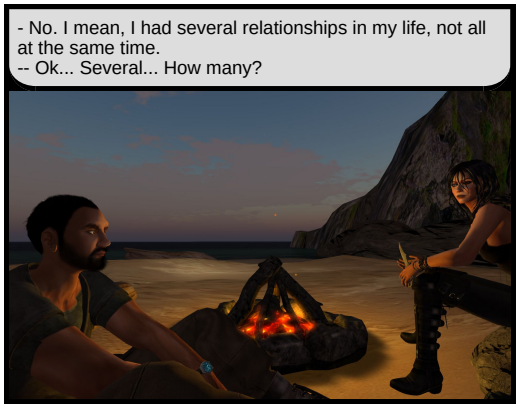


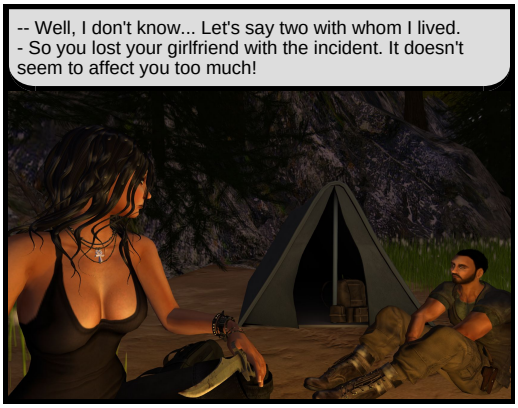
-- You certainly remember the desert? So imagine that the region where they were sent was much worse than what you saw.
- I see. ...So you're possessive, aren't you?




- (Silence) ...But what about you?! Ever had a girlfriend? Or ever been married?


-- Oh, I have been with several women.
- Several! At the same time?


- No. I mean, I had several relationships in my life, not all at the same time.
-- Ok... Several... How many?

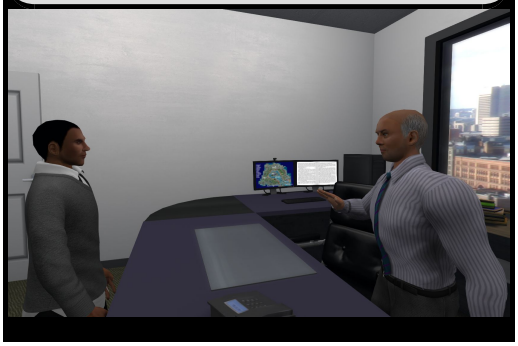

-- Well, I don't know... Let's say two with whom I lived.
- So you lost your girlfriend with the incident. It doesn't seem to affect you too much!


- No, I was alone when I've been hit. But if we think about it, it's a bit because of my last girlfriend if I'm here today...

...At that time, I was living with her at Boston. I had a good job, but the economy wasn't at his best in 2012...



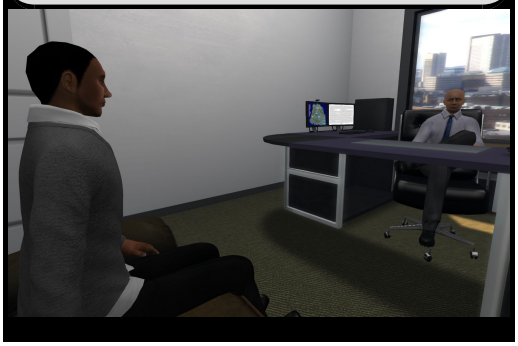
- You wanted to see me?
-- Yes, please, sit down.



-- I'm practically done with the design, I am finalizing the packaging. It will be ready in two days.
- Yes, I know. But I have very bad news. Please sit down.



- What's going on?
-- Roland, Lemotrek is officially bankrupt. They won't be able to pay. The contract is canceled.



- What?! Bankrupt! Do we have something else?
-- No, and this is the bad news, the company decided to close our branch.
- Are you serious?



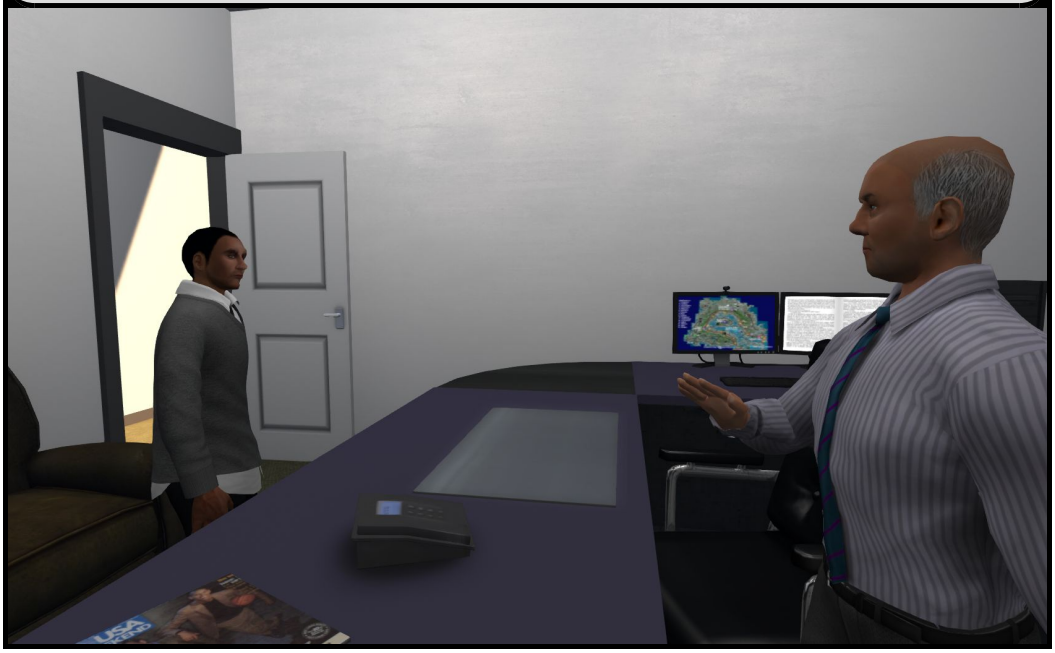
- Unfortunately, yes.
-- So I have no more job, this is what you are saying, right?



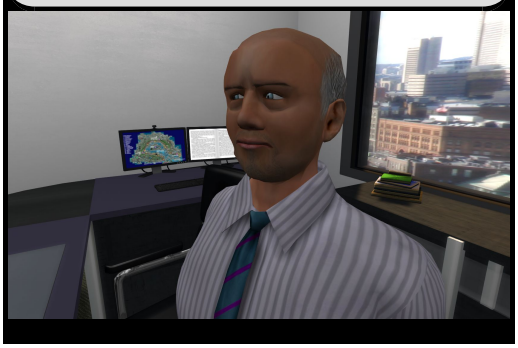
- Well, there is still some opportunities, but not here in Boston.
-- What opportunities?



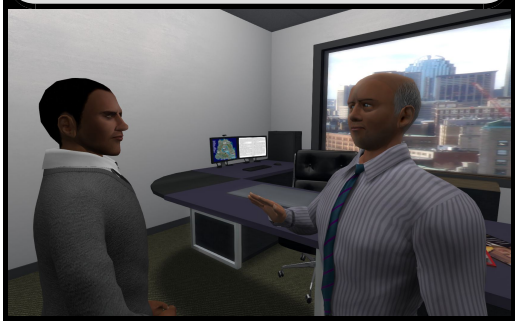
-- You have the choice. If you want, we have a job for you in Lawton. Otherwise, the company offers a severance package.
- Lawton! It's not just down the street, you know! What is the package?



- Two months of full salary to give you a chance to find a new job.



- Shit!
-- Look Roland, go home and take the day off to think about this. I'm very sorry, all this is out of our control.



...So I went home, seriously considering taking the severance package...



(All this work, four months wasted. I better start looking right now for a new Job...)



-- Roland! What are you doing here? You forgot something?



- Uh... No. I have lost my... But? You! What are you doing here?
-- Uh... Aren't you supposed to work today?



- What is...
-- No, wait!



((!))



- So I decided to take the job in Lawton. I moved the next day.



- What a slutty bitch! What have you done with the two men?
-- Nothing. What would you have me do? I simply left.



- Of course!
-- What do you mean by that?



- Nothing. It's time for hunting. Put some wood on the fire before going to bed. I like having some fire when I come back.
-- I'll do it... Don't get lost!



In the morning...



-- Slept well?
- Yes, pretty well.



- Did you see the three hares I had hung on the tree?
-- Yes, I did. They are skinned, cooked and boned. It will be more convenient.



-- I left you some in the pan for breakfast.
- Ah! Thanks.



-- I didn't hear you go to bed. Did you come back late?
- I've been gone about two hours.



- Oh! Two hours! So this means that you slept three hours more than me.
-- I know. You seemed to in control of everything, so I took the opportunity to sleep in.



- Ah! Nice! For your information, slavery was abolished in 19th century!



- What are you talking about? It's you who wanted me to take a vacation!



-- Of course! Very funny.



- In this case, I'll let you wash the pan while I pack up the tent!



Later...



- It's a bit low in fruits at this time of year, nothing is ripe yet.
-- There is hope, it can only get better.



- Oh, I did a calculation. Like we are just after the middle of spring, if we haven't reached Cape Code within hundred days, then it will be better to settle down to winter.



-- To winter?! ...And what is this "Cap Code"?
- Well, it's the place on this coast where the warm current goes away from the continent. But I've no idea if it will be easy to notice this when we will be at that latitude.

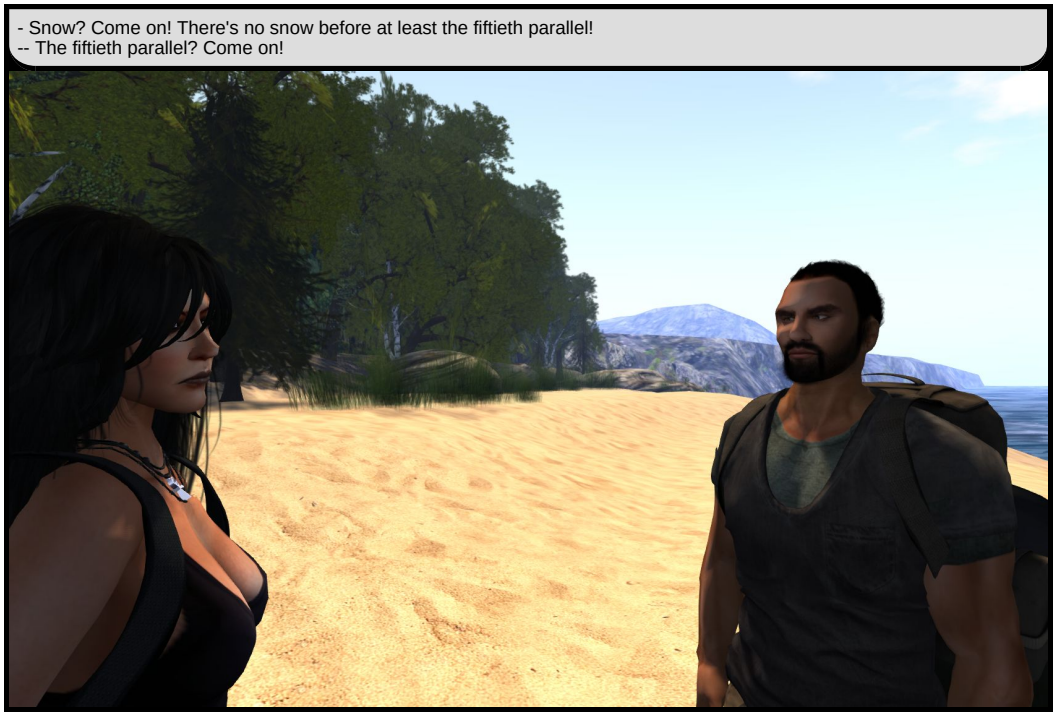


- This "Cape Code" of yours, it must be a lot more north than Jijuterk, isn't it?
-- This is at the two-thirds of the coast up to their territory. We clearly see the little peninsula on the map.




- Ok, and why would you want us to winter?


- Well, because of the cold and snow. I don't think you want to live four months in the cold and snow.


- Snow? Come on! There's no snow before at least the fiftieth parallel!
-- The fiftieth parallel? Come on!


- So you already saw some snow?
-- Of course! Often. Not you?


- Never closely. I saw some snow once, but far away on the top of high mountains in the northwest.

- In case you wouldn't have noticed, we're no longer in Dallusia. Your time was clearly warmer than normal.



- This climate is much more similar to the one of my time. And in winter, at the north of Cape Code, there will be certainly snow on the ground.



-- Well! I would not have thought of that.



-- You imagine this, with the clothes we have, go too far north and get caught by the snow or a wave of intense cold!



-- And I who already thought that the nights were cold!
- You see! Sometimes, I can be useful to something.



Later...



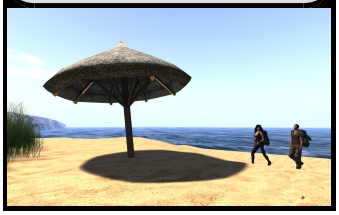
((?!))
(?)



-- Do you see that thing over there?
- Yes, and it's not a tree.



-- I don't believe my eyes!
- What is this? Someone built a big mushroom!?



-- Who could have built this? It's like being at a resort. I've told you it was the perfect beach for vacation!



-- This is a kind of parasol, isn't it?
- To be exact, it's called a "palapas".



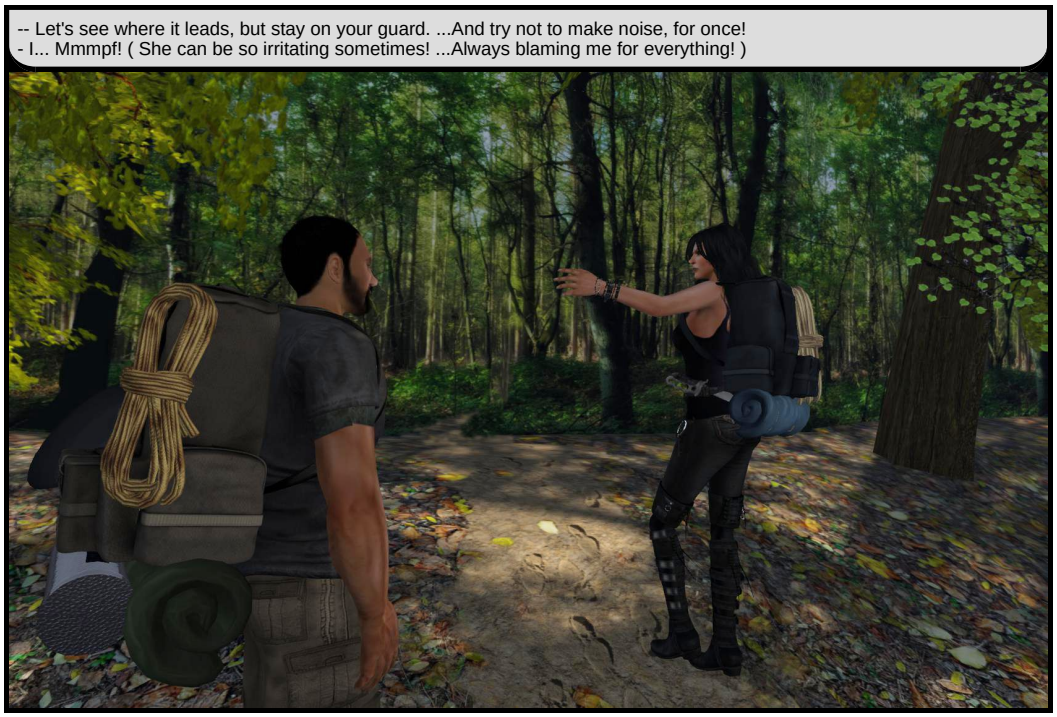

- Nobody came here since a long time.


- But there must be some people around. Do you see something up ahead?


-- No, it's completely deserted up to the cliff.


- I think that those who've built it were coming from over there. There is clearly a path.


-- A path never appears by itself. Look! There are footprints!
- They are not recent. They are partially erased by the rain.


-- Let's see where it leads, but stay on your guard. ...And try not to make noise, for once!
- I... Mmmpf! (She can be so irritating sometimes! ...Always blaming me for everything!)

Few minutes later...



-- It seems rather quiet. Is it abandoned?
- There is indeed not much trace of activity on the ground. But we'd better beware...



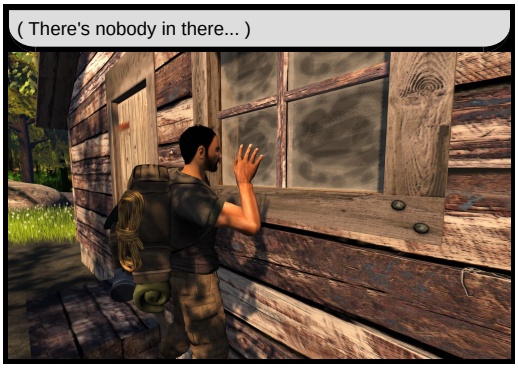
- I'll go around the back, just to be safe. You, go knock on the door and look if there is someone.

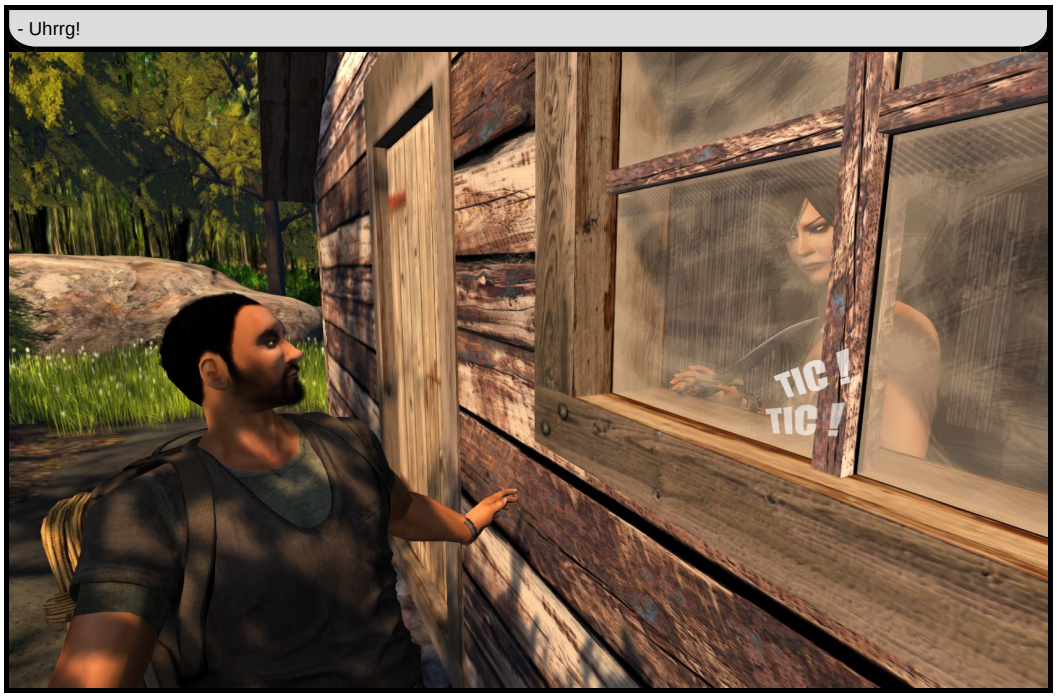






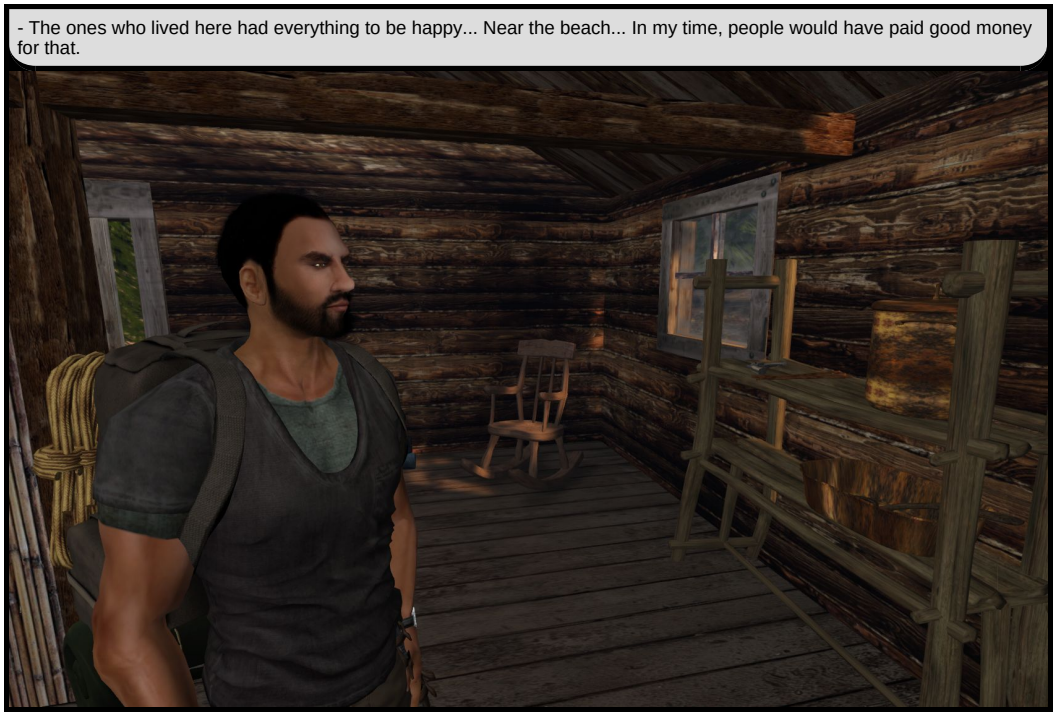

- (Well...) Is anyone home?!

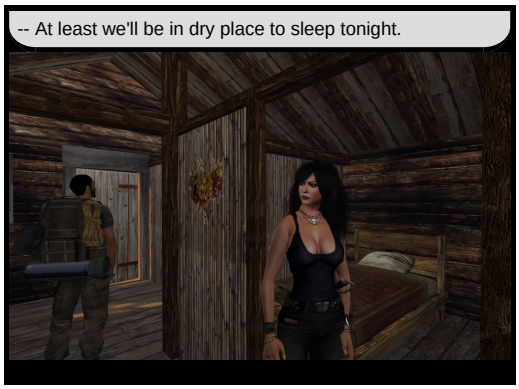

(There's nobody in there...)


- Uhrrg!
TIC !
TIC !


-- Damn, you scared me!
- The opposite would have surprised me.


- This is clearly abandoned. The dust thickness doesn't lie.

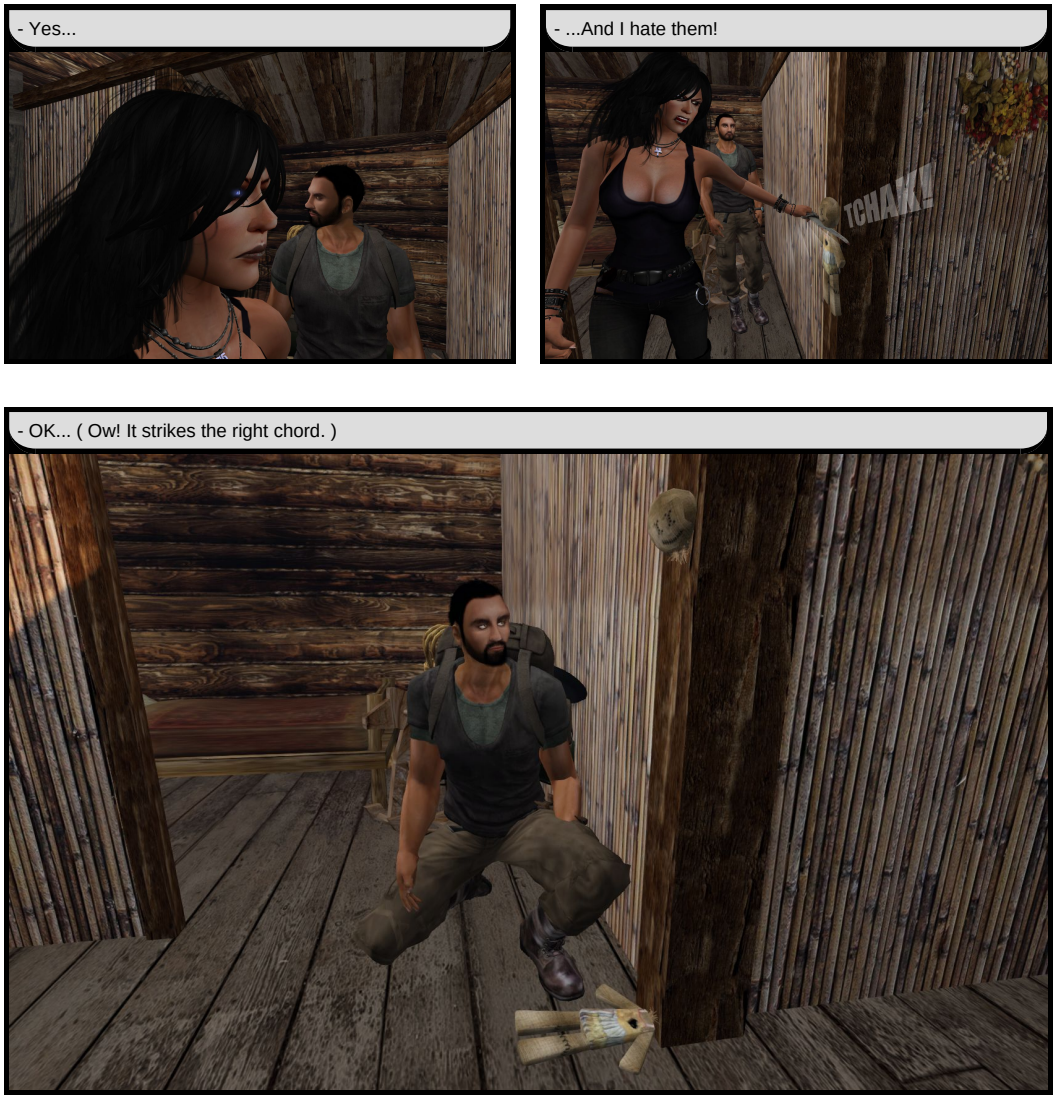

- The ones who lived here had everything to be happy... Near the beach... In my time, people would have paid good money for that.


-- At least we'll be in dry place to sleep tonight.


-- A family... A family lived here.
- What makes you say that?


-- There's a little bed, this toy and that doll...


-- You certainly already played with a doll, don't you? I suppose that they also existed in Rantar.


- Yes...
- ...And I hate them!
TCHAK!
- OK... (Ow! It strikes the right chord.)
- Roland, did you sit on this chair?
- Uh... What?

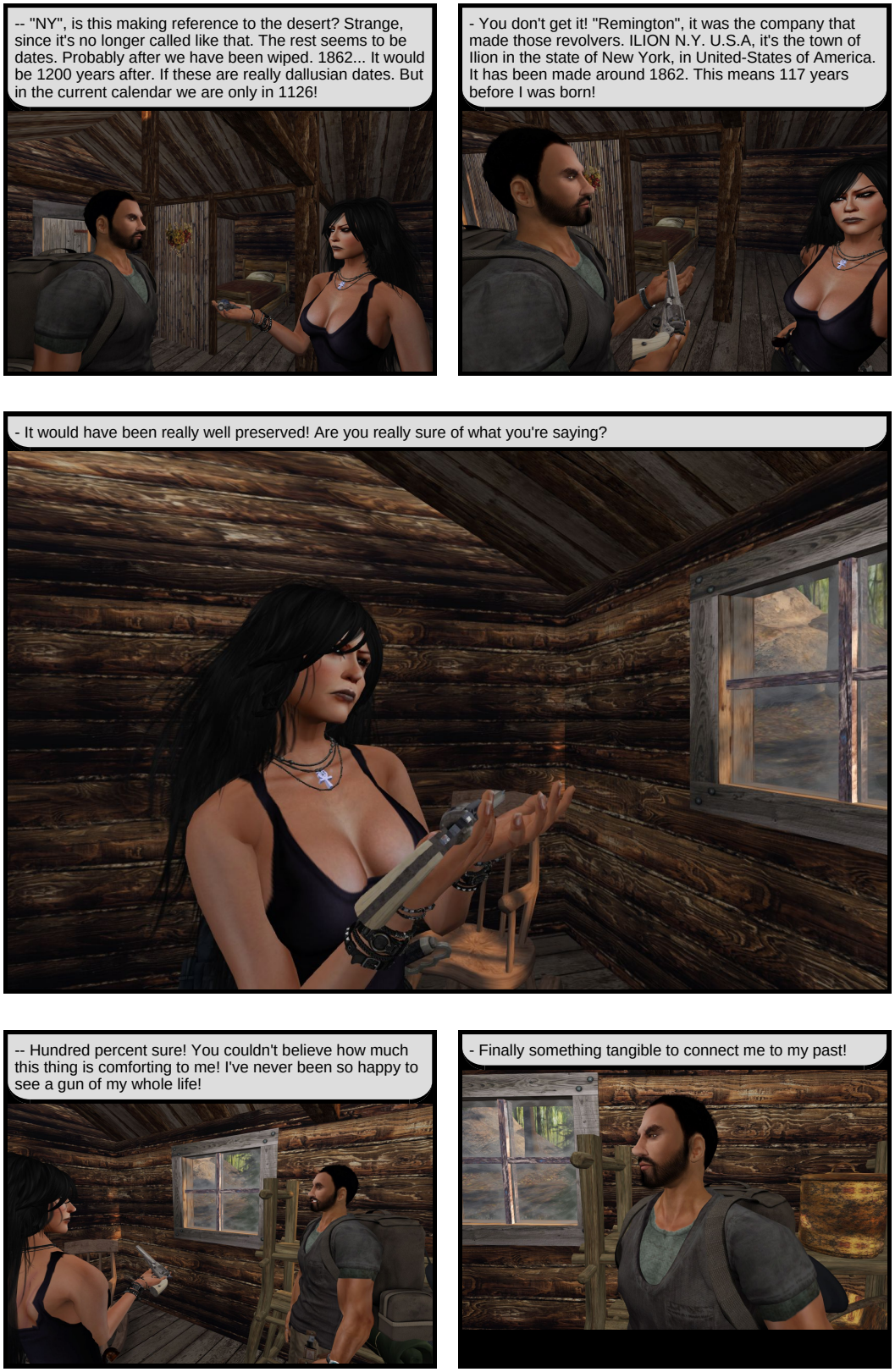

- I was asking if you sat on this chair!


- Goodness! Am I dreaming?


-- No, you don't. It's really a handgun... And there are no bullets, I already checked!


- It's not that... Look at this inscription!


- It says: REMINGTON'S ILION... NY... USA PAT MAY 39 SEP 3TH 1862 MAR 27TH 1864. It doesn't say much. Its owner's name probably, someone named "Remington S. Ilion".


-- "NY", is this making reference to the desert? Strange, since it's no longer called like that. The rest seems to be dates. Probably after we have been wiped. 1862... It would be 1200 years after. If these are really dallusian dates. But in the current calendar we are only in 1126!
- You don't get it! "Remington", it was the company that made those revolvers. ILION N.Y. U.S.A, it's the town of Ilion in the state of New York, in United-States of America. It has been made around 1862. This means 117 years before I was born!
- It would have been really well preserved! Are you really sure of what you're saying?
-- Hundred percent sure! You couldn't believe how much this thing is comforting to me! I've never been so happy to see a gun of my whole life!
- Finally something tangible to connect me to my past!

- How do you explain the gunshot residue? It no longer smells, it hasn't been used in a long time. But over a thousand years, I seriously doubt it!



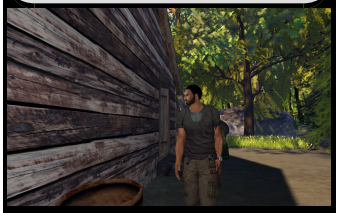
- Go figure! Those who lived here have maybe tried to make it work.



-- I'm going to check the place. I think we will sleep here tonight.
- Definitely!



(This house is really well built. Who could have...)



(!)

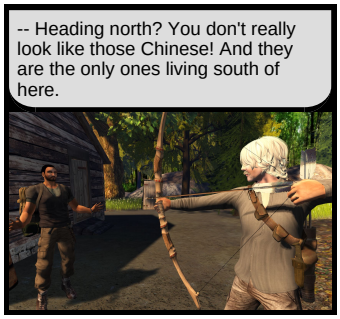



- Oh! Wait! Please, don't shoot.


- Come on boy! Give me a good reason to not do it!
...What are you doing here?


- Nothing bad. I thought it was abandoned.

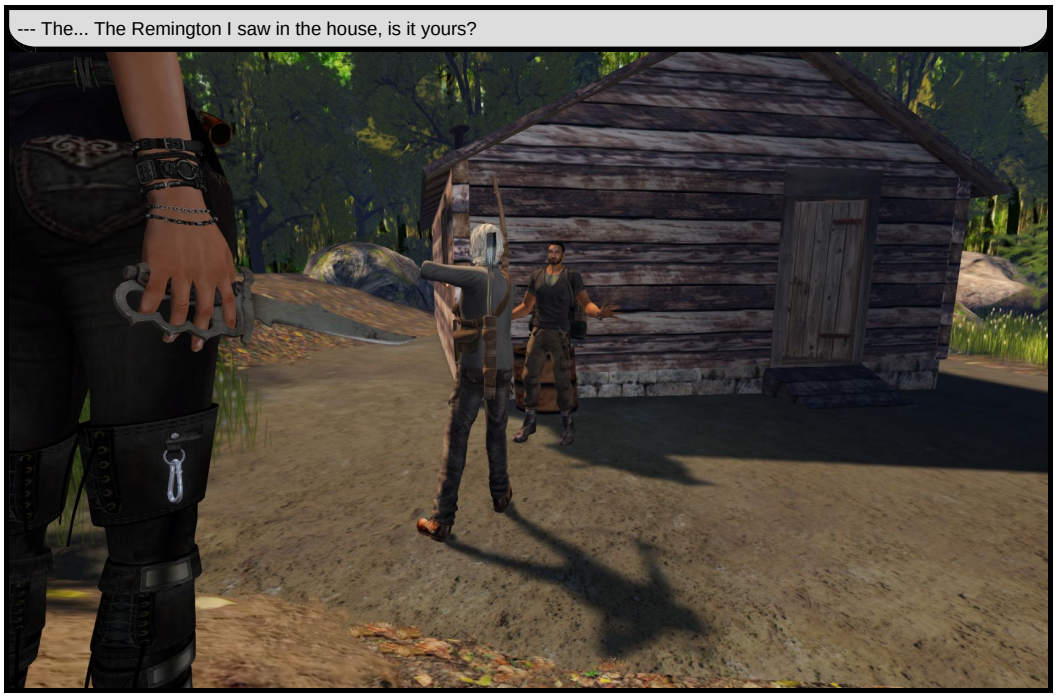

-- I don't look for any trouble. I headed north when I've simply discovered your house.


-- Heading north? You don't really look like those Chinese! And they are the only ones living south of here.


- Chinese?! Do you mean the Terkasides? Because I went through their country.


- Who are you? Where do you come from?


- It's a long story, please, lower your bow.


--- The... The Remington I saw in the house, is it yours?


-- Goodness! Did you say "Remington"?
- Yes, I just did.


- I haven't heard this word for at least sixteen years!

-- I'm Roland Gregoire... What's your name?
- Oh! This name, it sounds so familiar!



-- I'm James Sway. And yes, that's my old Remington you saw inside. But...
--- Look, James, if you prefer we can leave. We really don't want to cause any trouble...



- We?



--- Yes, we.
-- Oh!



-- Hi! I'm Alezia.
- Damn it, ma'am, I really didn't hear you come!



-- As Roland has just said, if that's your wish, we can leave... But if you would agree to let us sleep in your house tonight, that would be very appreciated to be in a dry place.



--- If you really come from the Chinese country, you must have walked a couple of weeks!
- Yes indeed. And you are the first human being we meet.



- In that case, come with me. I don't live here anymore, my new house is about 500 yards that way.



- Oh! It's very kind of you, James.
--- I have a soup on the fire, I'm sure you will like it!



-- Oh! Let me take this for you ma'am!
- Uh?!... It's really not necessary... Oh!... OK, if you insist...
(((...Well, well! Now she accepts the gallantry...)))



Fifteen minutes later...



- This is a quite beautiful home you have there, Mr. Sway. With an ocean view... We would inevitably arrive here.



-- Thank you. This is the second one I've built. I have to admit, this one is better made than the other. But please, come in!



-- Please, sit down, make yourself at home. You must be hungry.
- Yes, especially if you have other things than a roast hare.

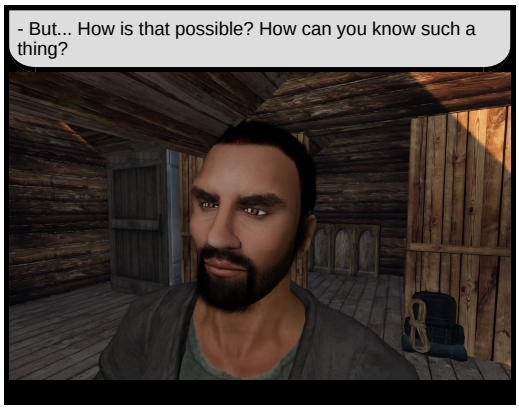


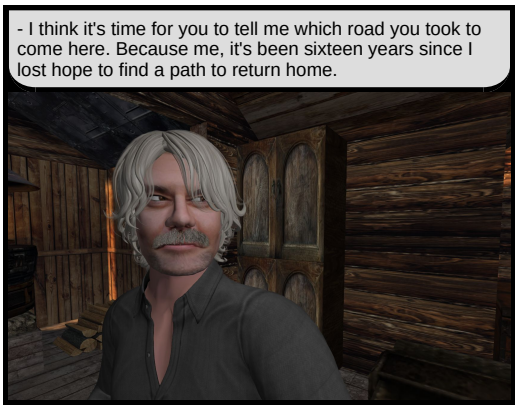
- Please, taste this... Wild asparagus and deer broth.
-- If only you knew how much we appreciate!




- Tell me... Gregoire, it's a French Canadian name, isn't it?
((!))
(((?!)))

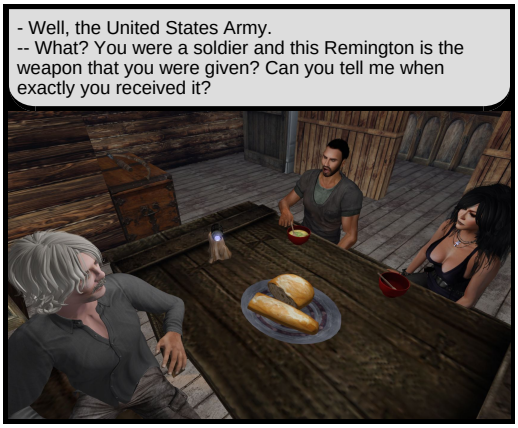

-- Pardon me? Did you say "French Canadian"?
- That's what I said, boy.


- But... How is that possible? How can you know such a thing?

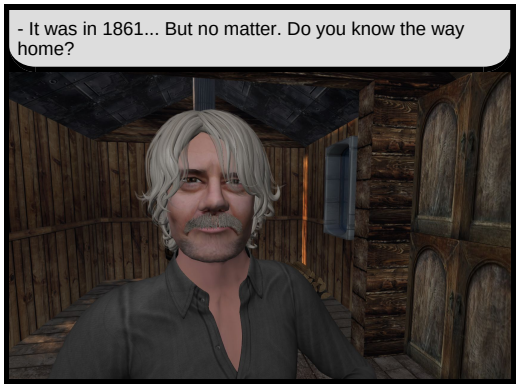

- I think it's time for you to tell me which road you took to come here. Because me, it's been sixteen years since I lost hope to find a path to return home.

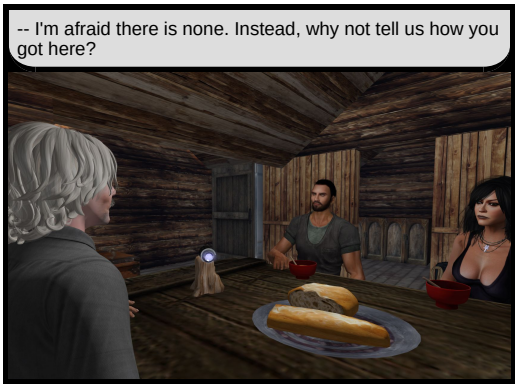

- Did you find some archives? Is it where you found the Remington?


- Uh... The Remington was given to me when I joined the army.
--- What army?


- Well, the United States Army.
-- What? You were a soldier and this Remington is the weapon that you were given? Can you tell me when exactly you received it?


--- At the beginning of the civil war, when I enlisted.
- The civil war of... 1860!?


- It was in 1861... But no matter. Do you know the way home?


-- I'm afraid there is none. Instead, why not tell us how you got here?

--- Ah! Yes... This is a very strange story, which has several things I still don't understand even today...



... About sixteen years ago, I had just left Fort Sill where I had delivered to the army a loading of different goods...



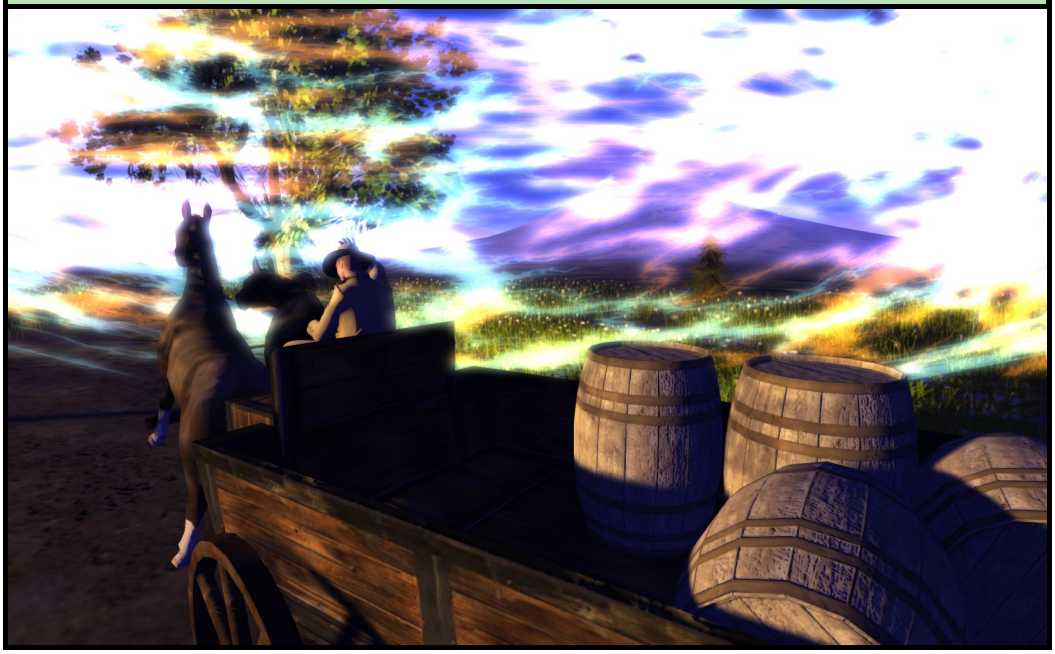
... I was a retired soldier. The war was over since already six years and I was approaching fifty. So I found a job as a carrier, which was relatively well paid because of the inherent risks involved...



... Then some weird things happened. It started with a series of detonations, like cannon shots, followed by a sudden blast of wind that I can hardly describe...



... Then tree branches began to fall from the sky. I could hardly hold the horses, even if they had been trained to endure the noise of guns...



... And suddenly, nothing... I never understood what had happened. I woke up in a completely different plain...



... But the real weird thing, is what I found in front of me... In a pool of blood, there was the rump with the back legs of one of my two horses! Right next to some of the remains from my wagon! ...



... I thought a while that I had been attacked by surprise and abandoned on this plain. But there was no trace, not even mine! ...



... I panicked for a while before deciding to go east, thinking foolishly that I would inevitably find my way...



... And that's not what happened. I was really lost. I've walked for days without finding anything, before finally discover a farm...



- A Chinese family lived there. They gave me food, but I've felt a certain distrust. I didn't understand what they were talking to me. They have a strange accent.



- The Terkasides... They must have taken you for a Jijuterk. ...Do you mind if I smoke?



--- Oh! Go ahead. Nothing surprises me anymore since I got here... So a woman who smokes a pipe and doesn't wear dresses...



--- I suppose they haven't invited you to stay...
- Oh! Hell, no! I continued east, passing from farm to farm. But the things went wrong when I crossed one of their villages...



... They were many and wanted me to leave. Then they started pushing me...



... So I ended up shooting in the air to ward them off... To ultimately have to go to the north.



- That thing you are smoking, Ma'am... It doesn't smell too much tobacco.
-- Indeed, it is not. But I can put it out if it bothers you.



- Please don't trouble yourself. :-)



-- Are you living alone here?
- Yes, but it hasn't always been the case.



--- We saw toys in the other house... Did you...
- I had a wife and a daughter.



-- Are they arrived with you?
- No. I met my wife in a village further north.



--- After fleeing Chinese, I headed to the northeast. A journey through the forest, I must say, rather painful. Then I ended up in a disreputable village.
- So there are villages north from here!?



- Yes, and large cities further north. Those who have the flying machines are living there, that's what people say.
--- You've never been there?



- I never had the opportunity. It's because people who live in these villages are bad seeds...



... I tried to live there... A few weeks I think. Before I got into trouble with one of the local mobsters...



... I had to shoot him to save my life, which hasn't pleased to his friends...



... So I ran away to the south, along the coast. I was rather disgusted by these godless people...



... It's on my way that I met the woman who became, in a certain manner, my second wife. She was in very bad shape when I found her. She had been severely beaten and left for dead...



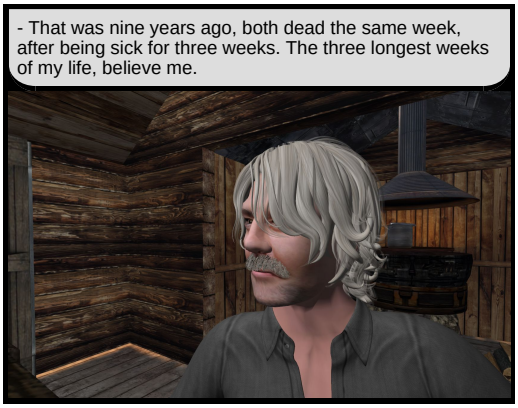
- I took care of her and she stayed with me. Then we established ourselves in the other house you saw earlier, where we had our daughter.



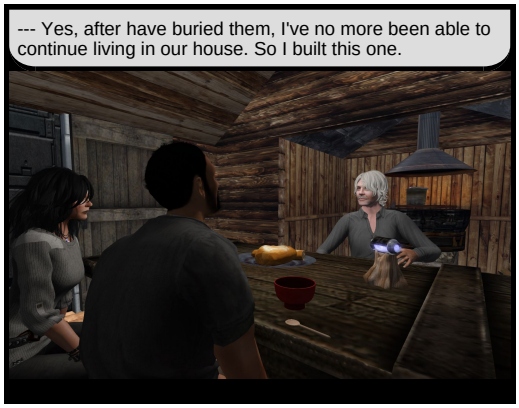
-- Is it indiscreet to ask, what happened to them?

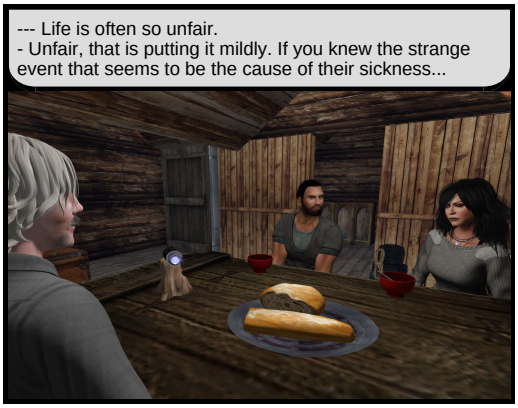



- They're both dead.
--- Oh, how unfortunate.


- That was nine years ago, both dead the same week, after being sick for three weeks. The three longest weeks of my life, believe me.


- You're living completely alone for nine years!?


--- Yes, after have buried them, I've no more been able to continue living in our house. So I built this one.


--- Life is often so unfair.
- Unfair, that is putting it mildly. If you knew the strange event that seems to be the cause of their sickness...

-- A strange event?
- Hmm... I think that even if I describe it to you, you wouldn't believe me.



--- You know, we saw a lot of strange things.
- Listen, it will be easier to show you what it is.



-- Is it near?
--- I'll go show you tomorrow if you want. It's an hour's walk from here.



- Today, it's a bit late for me. I don't like being in the forest at dusk. I'm not twenty anymore! ;-)



--- You're arousing my curiosity, Mr Sway.
- Too bad this is the only thing that I can still arouse in you, Ma'am. ;-)



- Would you drink a glass of whiskey with me? The good opportunities to drink are so rare...
-- You have whiskey!? Do you do it yourself?



- No. It's not exactly whiskey, but it's quite similar. Let's say I borrow it to the Chinese, that and many other things I bring back during my annual trip. Wait for me, I'll get it in the storeroom.



-- Well! This explains a series of robberies done in farms at the border. ;-)
- It must not be easy everyday to live so isolated.



- He seems to have suffered a lot from the death of his wife and daughter.
-- Yes, I even think he returns regularly in the other house to sit and remember them.

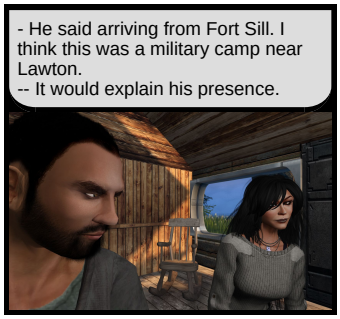


-- I wonder what is this place that he wants to show us.
- No idea, visibly something that seems to be completely beyond him.



-- So he's a survivor from the Taalus just like us... If I understand, he's from your time?
- About 150 years before mine to be more exact. I must say there is a significant technological difference between us.




- He said arriving from Fort Sill. I think this was a military camp near Lawton.
-- It would explain his presence.


--- Here's the rotgut! ;-)


- Well! To our good health to all of us.


--- Ma'am, I brought you this dress, it belonged to my wife.
-- Oh! Uh... It was really not necessary. I don't...


- Ah yes! Alezia! I'd like to see you in a dress. ;-)
-- Very funny! Only in your dreams!


- All right, I won't insist. ;-) Now, why don't you tell me how you got here?
-- It's a long story, and it looks strangely like yours. You may not want to believe it...

The next morning...



- Uh!?



(Phew!... Fucking nightmare! ...Crap! I slept with my boots... Congratulations Alezia! Once again, you smoked too much!)



- Well! Ma'am, it seems you had sleep to catch up on.



--- Oh! This is her usual wake up time. She's out of phase. This is caused by all those hunting parties she does every night for the past weeks.



- This is the price to pay when we surround ourselves with chronic sedentary!
-- "I think she's in good shape!"



- James, I must admit, the bed was very much appreciated!



- I would hate to let a woman sleeping elsewhere than in my bed... I kept you an egg. Please, sit down.



--- Thanks, James.
- The day promises to be sunny, it will be perfect for our little expedition.



-- I'm curious to see what you want to show us.
- This is certainly the strangest thing I've ever seen in my whole life...



One hour later...



- We're almost there.



--- So this thing you want to show us, did you say it was related to the death of your family?



- I don't think it could be a coincidence. It happened nine years ago, early in the morning just before sunrise...



... The whole family was awakened by a sudden and terrible detonation... The earth shook heavily, throwing to the ground the content of our cupboards...



... Panicked, we left the house hurriedly and went towards the beach...



... There was a wide column of smoke rising above the forest. So we decided to go see what it was...



... So I went there with my wife and my daughter. We were worried and we preferred to stay together...



-- It's exactly there, behind this hill, that we discovered where the smoke came from and what had caused the detonation.



- Here, all the trees had been thrown down, and the ground completely turned upside down. Then...

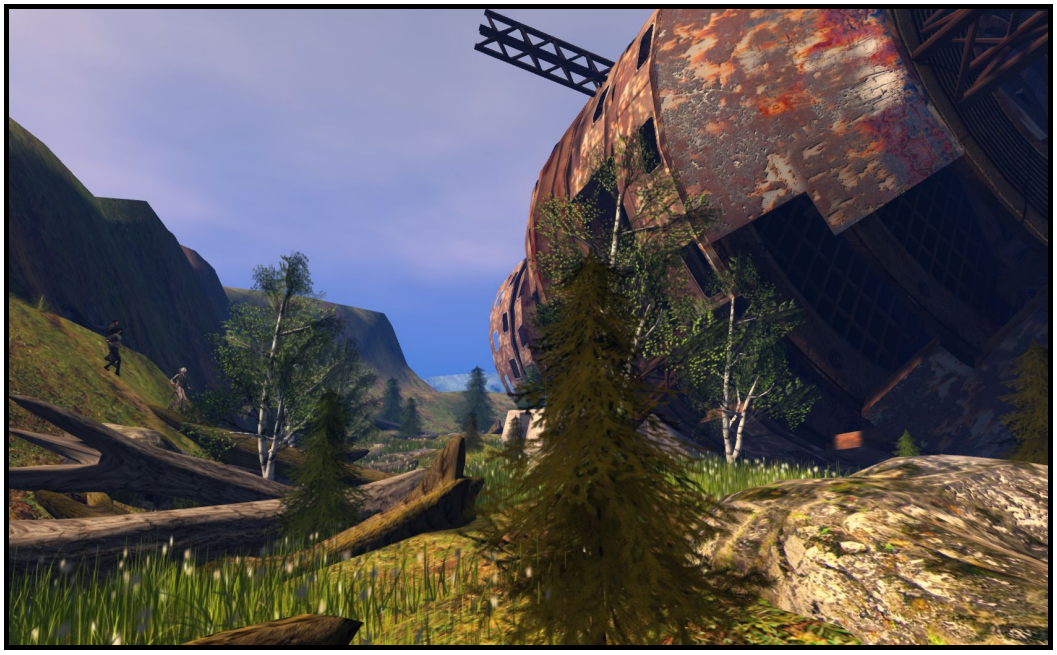


--- ...We came across this!



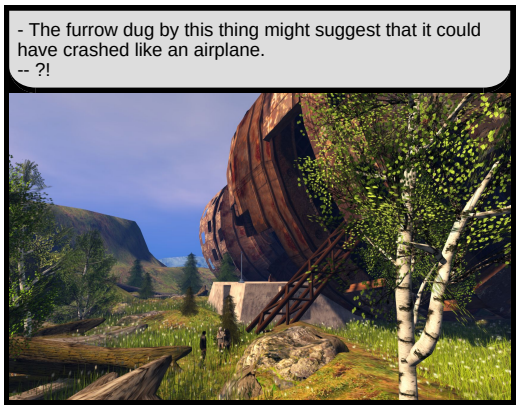
--- My goodness!






- It's huge!


- I never really understood how a building like this could have happened here so suddenly. It is certainly not fallen from the sky!


- The furrow dug by this thing might suggest that it could have crashed like an airplane.
-- ?!


- All floors are vertically oriented. This thing is like lying on its side.

- This is not a building. I would say it's more a spaceship, or at least, what's left of it.



- A spaceship? This thing could never fly!



--- That's the reason why it crashed to the ground.
-- ?



-- You mean it would have been designed only to stay in orbit?
- This is at least a possibility.



--- You see this rounded section? It looks like the floor is opposed to the central axis. It's not in the same direction as the other floors of the rest of the structure...



- This would confirm my point. A spaceship with two systems to keep a gravity effect: one for the orbit and one for the ride.



-- That would be rather ingenious!
- Personally, I don't find this thing very brilliant.



--- And when you arrived on site, were there any survivors?



- There was absolutely no one, not even dead...



... The thing was just making smoke, there was no fire. We went closer to see better...



... I told my wife to wait me with our daughter. Then I got closer a bit more...



... A strange silence reigned around... There was nobody... Birds weren't singing...



... So I went back to my wife and daughter. But meanwhile, they went closer to the other section...



... They had gone to see a strange puddle of luminous fluid that was flowing from the side of this thing...



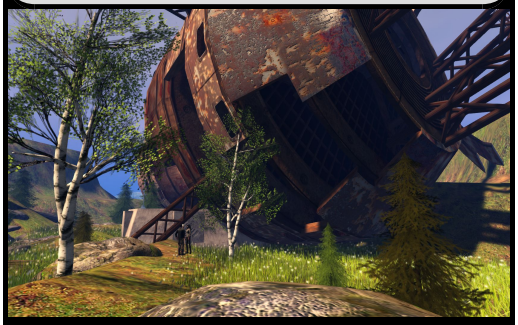
... Then there they came, the men in the flying machines...



-- Jijuterks...
--- This spaceship would be theirs, is this what you mean?



--- There's a good chance.



- So that would be them, the people responsible for all this?
-- Visibly, something must have gone wrong. And what happened next?



- We ran away before they could see us.



--- But I came back alone a bit later to see what they were doing. There were many people, working all around with different kinds of machines and wearing funny suits...



- ... They were mainly busy to build this huge concrete block where there was the luminous fluid puddle.



--- Oh my god! That symbol!
- James, is that your wife and your daughter went close to that fluid?



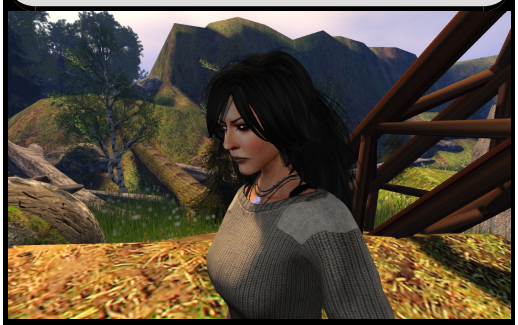
- Yes, it was them who had shown me it. When I came back home that night, I found them both in a sorry state. They have been sick for two days, then they recovered.



-- ...And their condition got bad again several weeks later, isn't it?
- Precisely... How can you know that? I don't think I told you about this before!

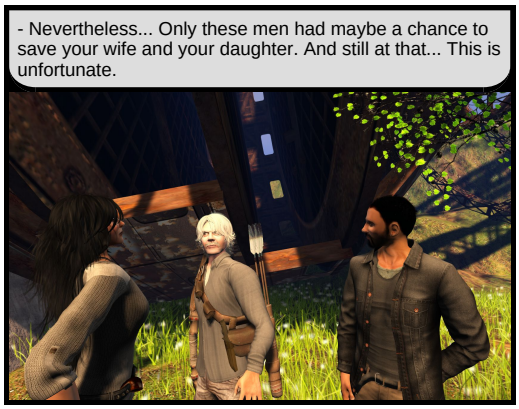


- The irradiation, they were exposed to radiation.

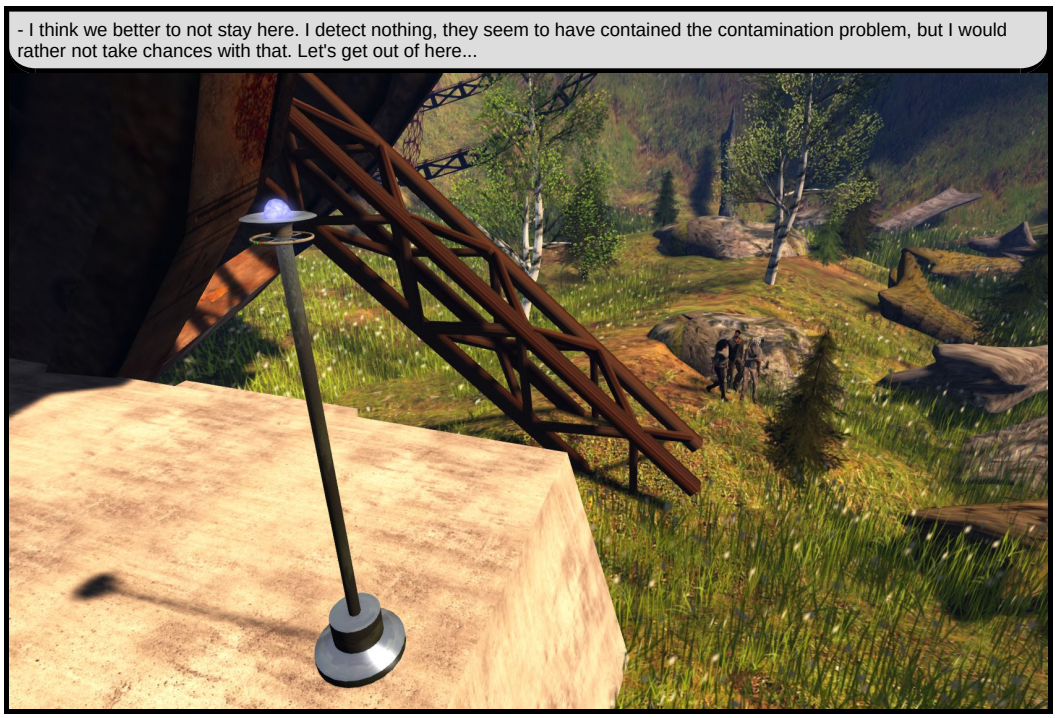



-- I'm afraid that by getting too close, they condemned themselves.

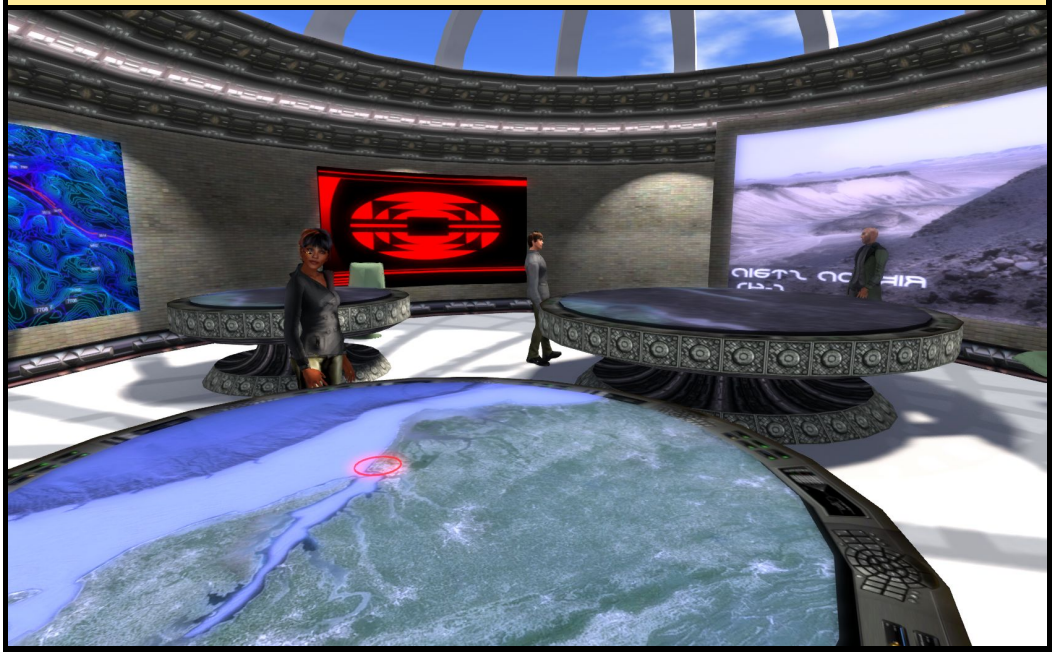

- So you remained hidden from those men who came here, did you?
-- Of course, I didn't want they discover our house!


- Nevertheless... Only these men had maybe a chance to save your wife and your daughter. And still at that... This is unfortunate.


-- How could I have known that?
- You couldn't, James... You couldn't.


- I think we better to not stay here. I detect nothing, they seem to have contained the contamination problem, but I would rather not take chances with that. Let's get out of here...

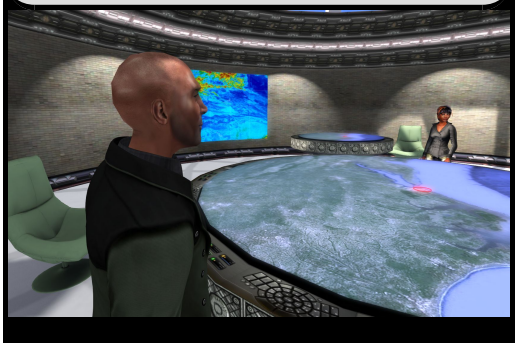
During this time...



Sir, we have a detection report for an anomaly south of the 40th parallel!



- What is it?



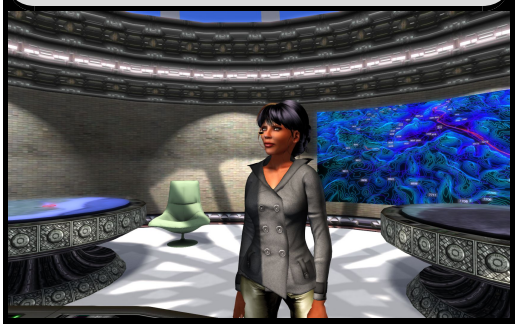
- Three humanoid presences, for an average of one for the last five years.



--- That's interesting! Where is it?



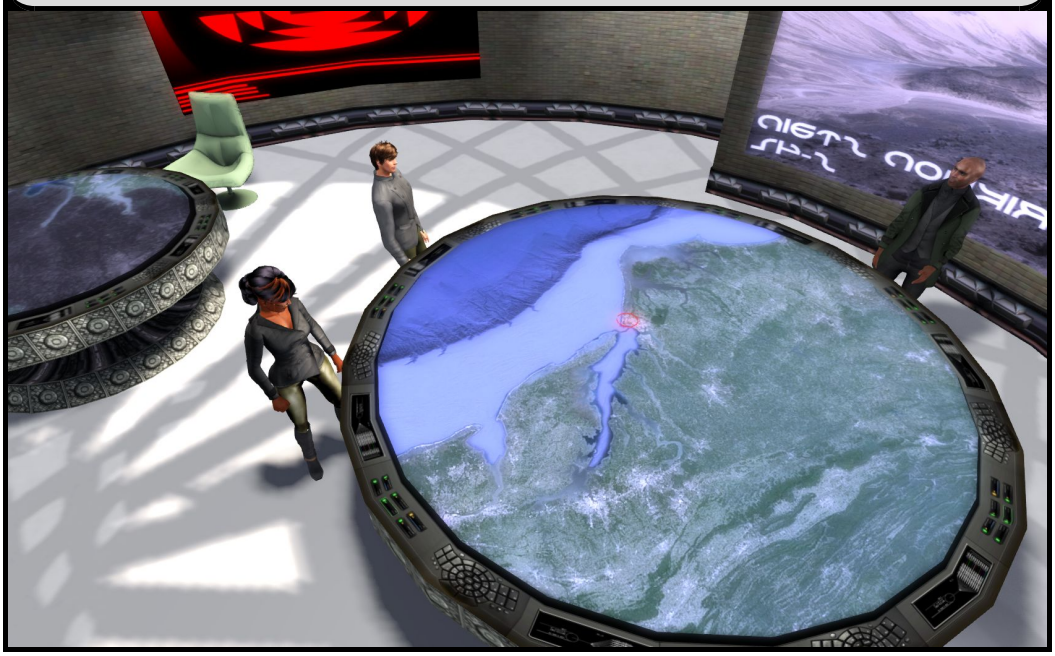
- At six kems from the coast, 36.807 degrees north. The detection came from the Erezel's wreck area, from the contamination containment structure.



- Hmm... Send a probe there. I want to know who they are.



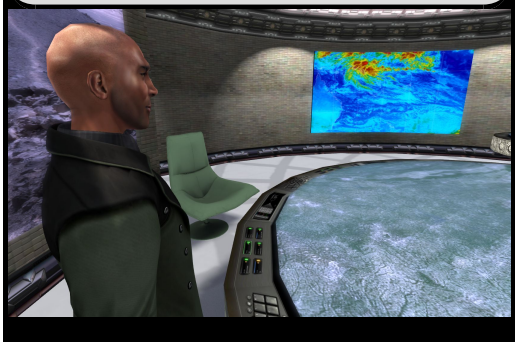
- Sir, is that an "Epron" class probe could do the job?
--- Yes, we just want an inspection.



- Probe "Epron 210" sent to Erezel's crash site. Coverage requested for a 15 kems radius, target set on humanoid presence.



- Thank You. Let me know when you will receive the report.



Later...



-- James, are you okay?



--- I'm not sure. These men... They sent this thing crashing here and it killed my whole family!



--- I didn't realize until today that this wreck could belong to them!
- Uh...



-- I don't know if it's really safe to live so close to this wreck.
- I don't think it is. We have no idea about what is hidden under that concrete structure. Maybe it contaminates groundwater.



-- James, have you ever considered leaving the area?
- To go where? To find what? I'm getting old... All I have is here right now.




- I see you've reused several elements from the wreckage... These windows, among other things...

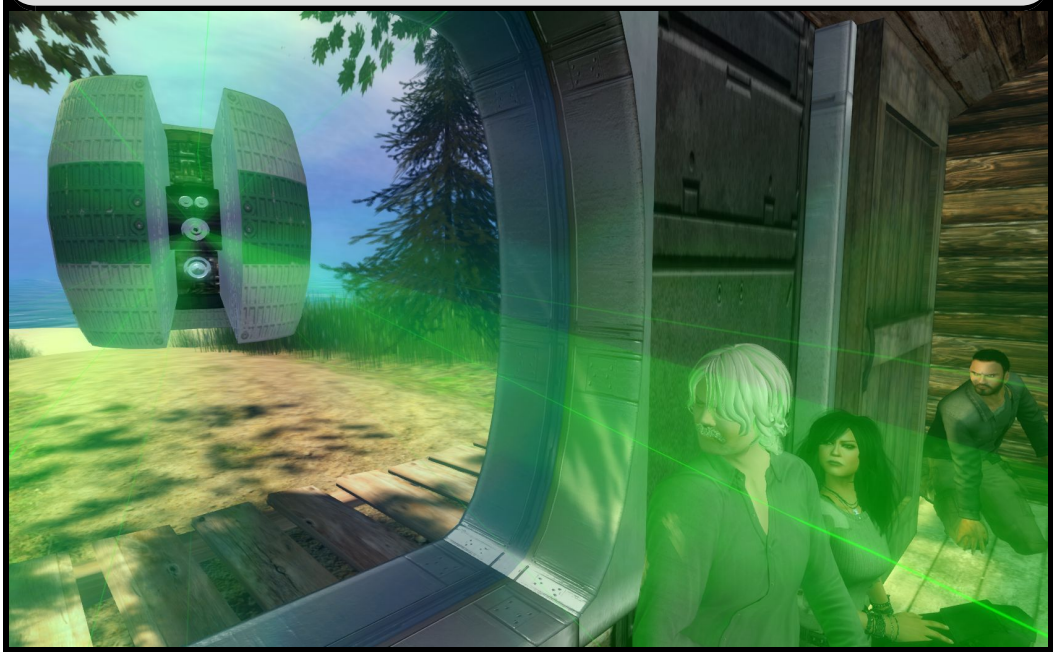

- Yes, it was a golden opportunity. Difficult to find glass in the vicinity...


((?!))
(!)
(((!?)))


- Roland! Get down!


-- "A probe..."

- "It's a flying barrel. I haven't seen any for years."



-- "This thing must not see us here. They are after us since we left Terkazy."
- "We just have to wait, it should go soon."



- "James, can you go outside and let it scan you? We'd better satisfy its curiosity to accelerate its departure."



- "Are you crazy?! Who knows what this thing can do?"
-- "Trust me, this thing won't attack you. It just wants to see what happen here."



-- "Awrrrsh! OK!"




FFFUUWZ !

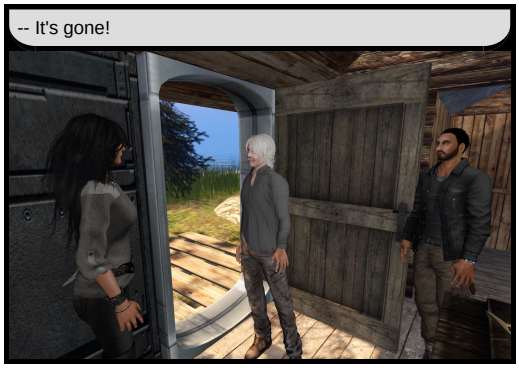

FFFUUWZ !


-- "Are you sure with this?"
- "Shut up!"


- Yah!!! Go away!
FFFUUWZ !

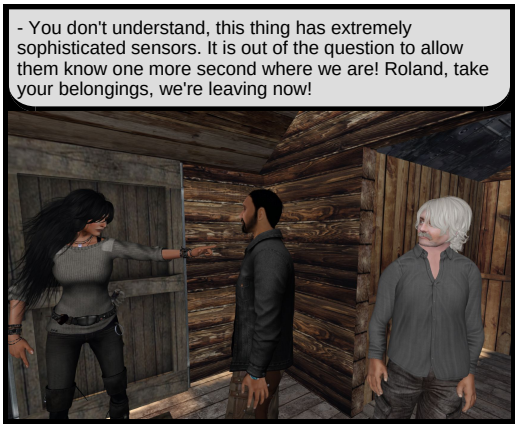

- I told you to clear off, stupid barrel!
FFFUUWZ !


- And don't come back, dirty flying trashcan!
FFFUUWZ !


-- It's gone!


- Roland, we must leave!


- Now?
-- It hasn't seen you, ma'am. I think you're safe now.


- You don't understand, this thing has extremely sophisticated sensors. It is out of the question to allow them know one more second where we are! Roland, take your belongings, we're leaving now!

- Ok! In that case, let's go... But do you really think we can outrun them without being detected?



-- James, do you know somewhere we can hide? ...I don't know, something that is not a building...



- Uh... Well... There is a small cave about two miles north of here. It's very small for two, but you wouldn't be exposed. But take care, in winter, it's a snakes place.



-- Two miles? Roland, can you convert this in kems? Those old miles don't fit the dallusian ones.
- Yes, that's about three kems.



-- This cave, is it easy to find?
- If you follow the trail, northwest direction, you can't miss it.

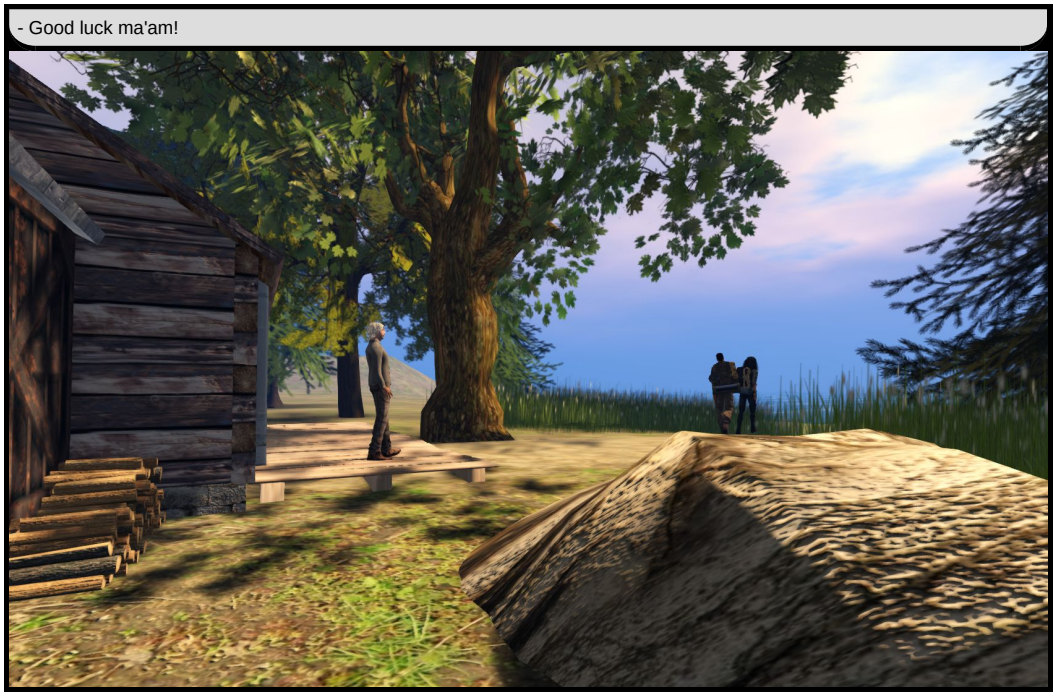



-- James, if someone comes here to find us, tell them we're headed southwest, to return in Dalsa.

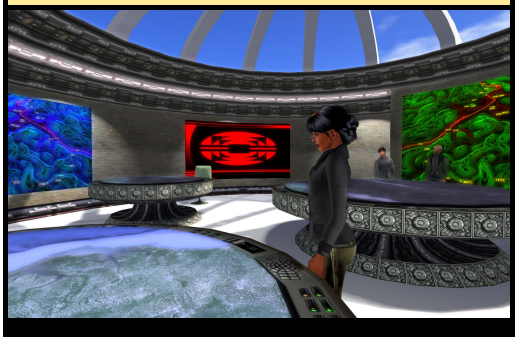

- They won't set foot in here! This, I can guarantee you!


--- Roland! Let's go.
-- Thanks for everything, James. Take care.

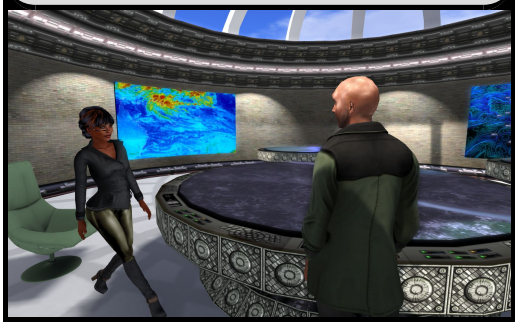

-- Goodbye James. And please, stay away from this wreck, it's not good for you.


- Good luck ma'am!

Meanwhile...



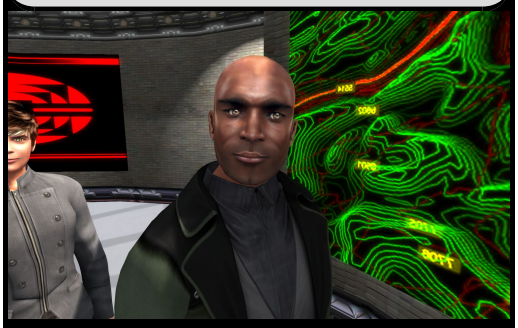
- Epron 210 sends us its report, sir!
-- Oh?



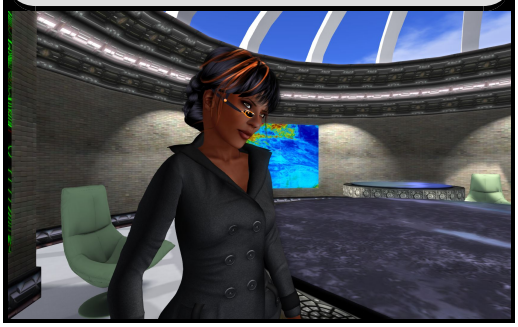
- Three people were detected in a wooden building near the shore. One of them has been identified as corresponding to the recording 2364463992. The two others have been detected inside the building, but the probe has not been able to get more data.



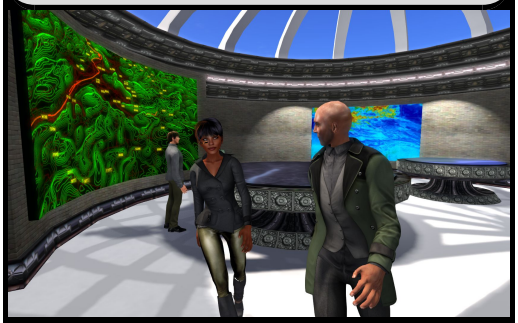
-- So this matches the detection report from the Erezel's wreck area. What do we have about the identified one?



- Male human being, he appears in 46 detection reports in the Erezel sector. We find him also in six probe observations, all in the same area for the last eight years. Each time alone, his status has been set to: "Negligible impact".



--- Okay... So this is an isolated permanent resident we tolerate in the wilderness area.



- There was no detection system in that sector before the crash. It was installed to secure the Erezel's containment structure, eight years ago.
-- It makes sense.



- So we have maybe there, two persons hiding from the probe, in the house of an isolated resident. This is maybe what we were waiting for.



- {Screen} Yes?
-- Oclan, I just sent you a detection report. It's not a direct observation, but I think he could be our fugitives.
- Let me check...



-- I see... Finally, we have maybe something! Please, Tee, come here.
- I'm coming!



A few minutes later...



- Ah, Tee, this is a very good news! If this is really Erydak, I know an ambassador who will be very happy to release the pressure on the Terkasides.



- Yes, but for now, it's only based on deductions.



- Let's contact Reim. I'll send him directly on site for investigating.



- Reim Tremble? Is he the good choice for this?
-- Why not? He's the best man we have on the ground to handle this kind of situation. I though we were on the same page about this?



-- Well... Yes, but this is on the Erezel's crash site.
- Is there a problem with this?



-- He was on the Erezel when it crashed.
- Seriously?



- Yes, he lost many friends in this disaster. I'm not sure he will be pleased to hear about the Erezel once again.



- I didn't know that. I was not even aware of the existence of this crash site, it happened under the previous administration. I thought the Erezel crashed in the ocean!?



- It broke into several sections on impact with the ocean. The prow went crashing to the continent.

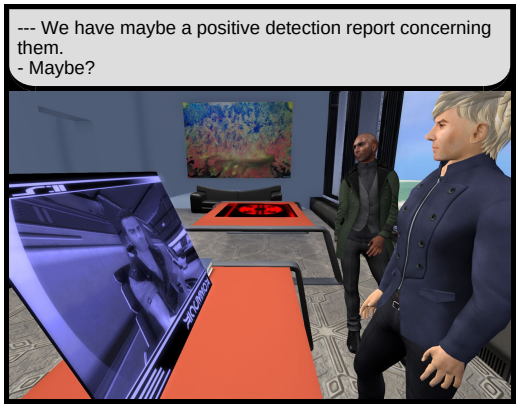


-- I see... I will ask him if he's comfortable with that. But between us, Tee, I really don't see who else I can send to approach Erydak.
- Indeed, This is rather delicate.

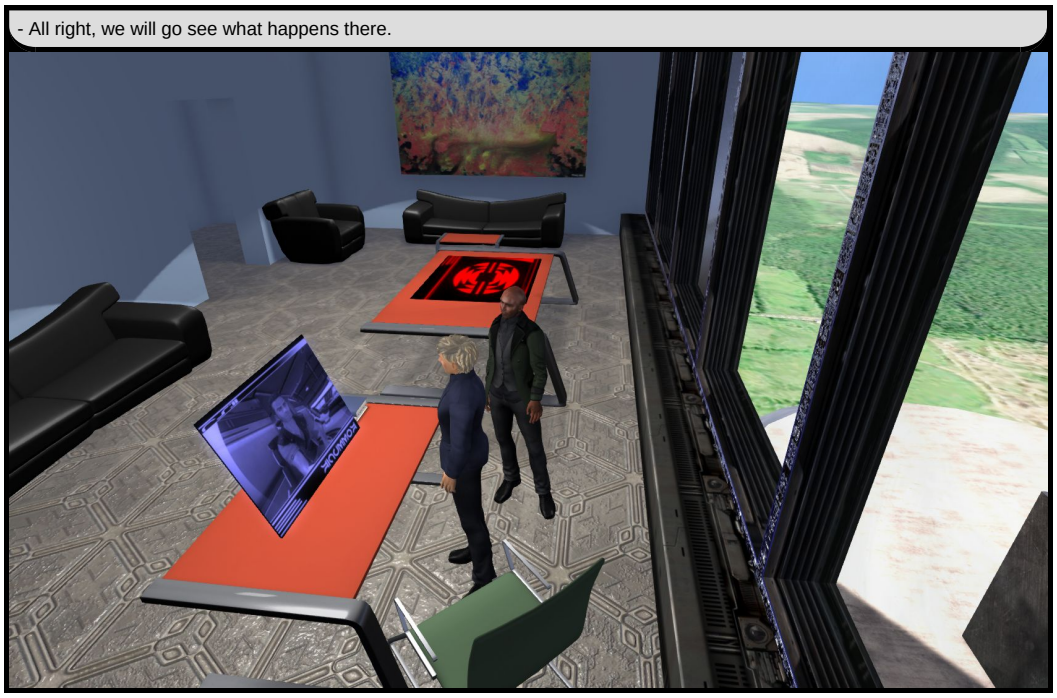



- Mister Tremble! How are you today?

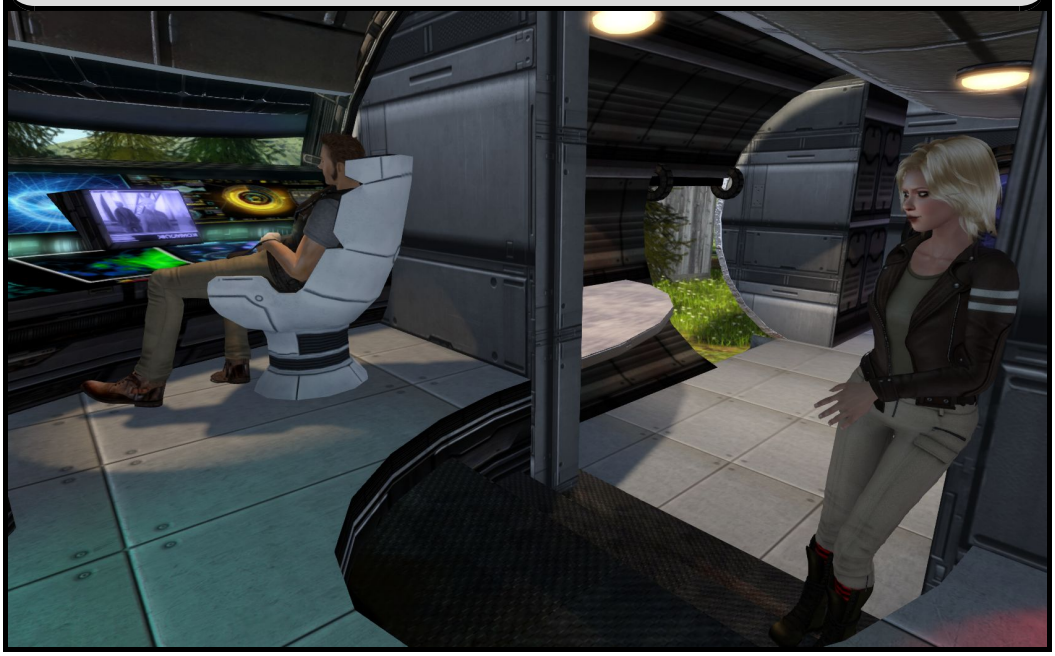

-- Not bad, Commissioner. Still no sign of our fugitives. We plan to return to Jijuterk tomorrow.


--- We have maybe a positive detection report concerning them.
- Maybe?


- Yes, there is no direct observation, but we have good reason to believe that it could be them. I just sent you the report.


- All right, we will go see what happens there.

- But, Reim, there is one thing you need to know. This is in the area of the Erezel's crash site.
-- Oh! Great!
(((?)))



- Are you comfortable with that?
-- Yeah, that will be OK. Decidedly, this thing is never done with me!



- Anything else I should know about this place?
-- All the details are in the report.



--- Reim, at the risk of repeating myself about Erydak, you should under no circumstances enter into a confrontation with her. Do not take any other men with you to attempt to approach her.



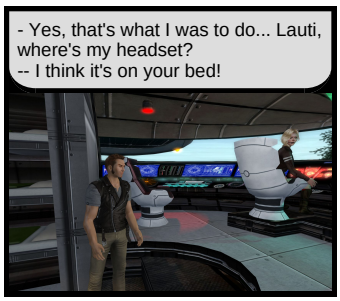
- Use extreme caution. Do not take them by surprise, especially in any dark environment or at night.
-- Understood. We take off in a few minutes.




- Thank you, Reim. Ah! And say hello to Lauti for us.

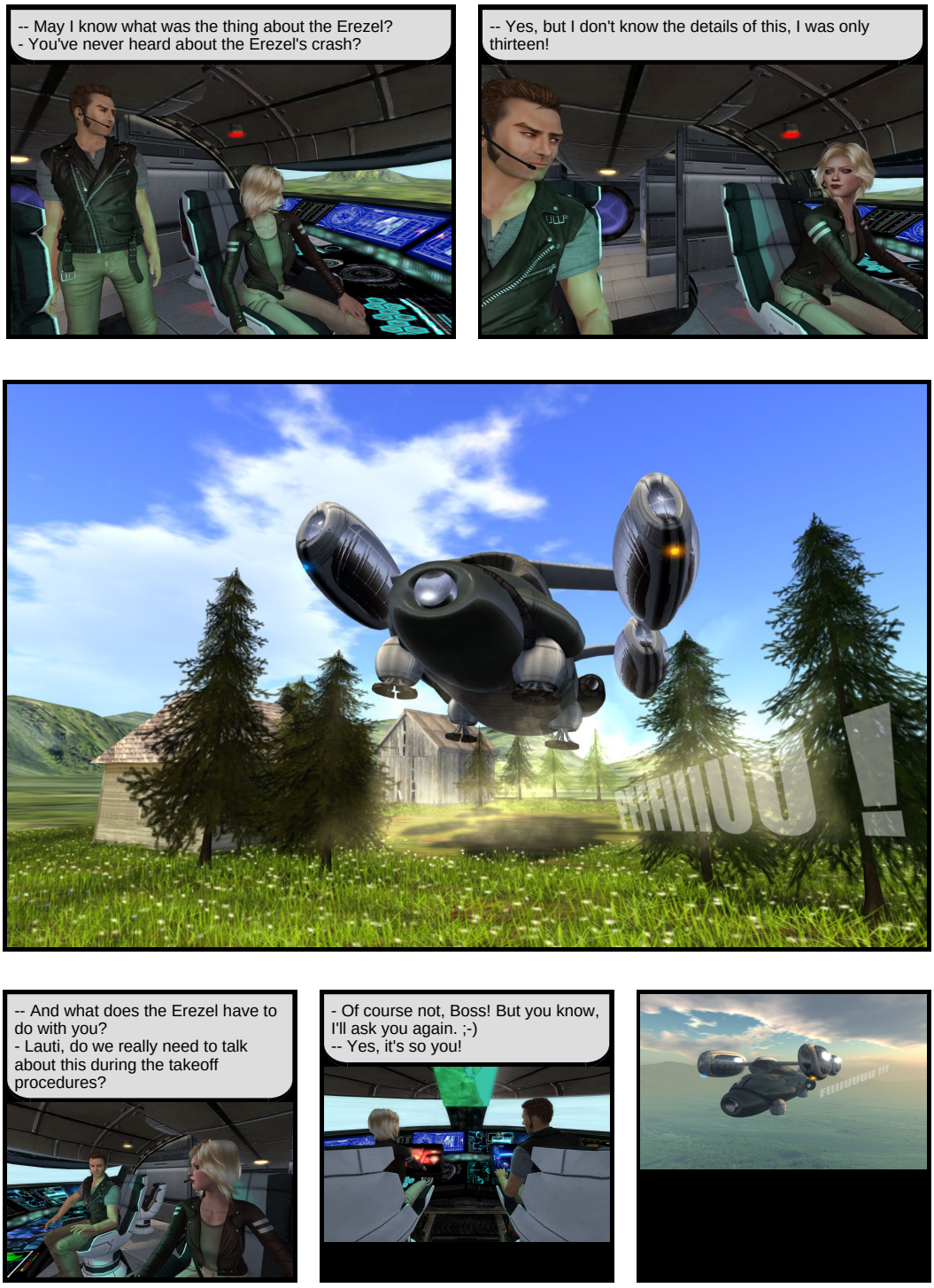

-- Well! It seems it's time to take off.
- Did you forward me the coordinates?
-- I just did.


- Hey, Boss! Will you remove the lock?


- Yes, that's what I was to do... Lauti, where's my headset?
-- I think it's on your bed!


- I think we should find another spot to hide the system lock. We overused this one!


{Lauti voice} I agree, this one is too easy to find... The system is on, Boss. We can go!


-- May I know what was the thing about the Erezel?
- You've never heard about the Erezel's crash?
-- Yes, but I don't know the details of this, I was only thirteen!
FIIIIUUU !
-- And what does the Erezel have to do with you?
- Lauti, do we really need to talk about this during the takeoff procedures?
- Of course not, Boss! But you know, I'll ask you again. ;-)
-- Yes, it's so you!
FIIIIUUUU !!!

Two miles later...



- There! That must be the cave that James was talking about.
-- Osh! It seems to be indeed very small!



- I'm going to inspect it... Stay here.

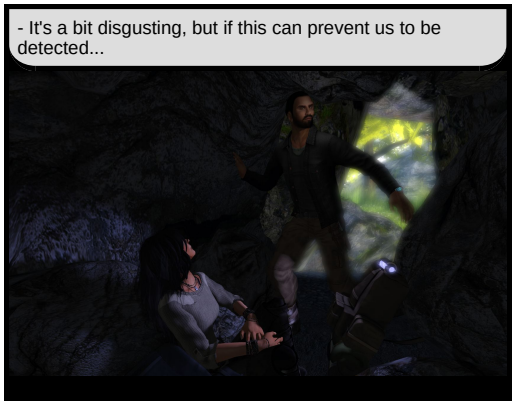


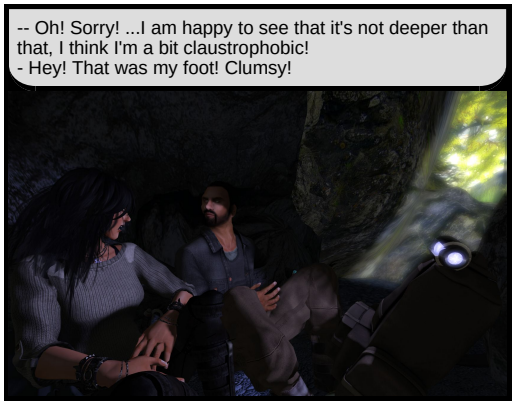
(Why the hell does she want absolutely that we hide in this hole? It would be better to walk away while we still have time!)

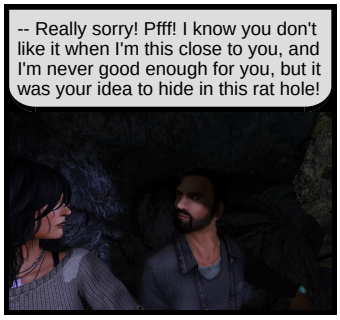


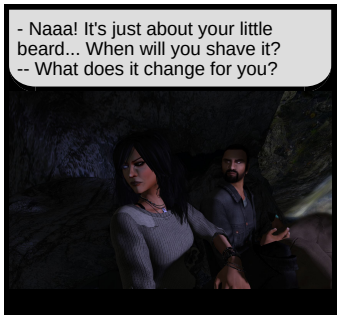
-- All clear! Come in!

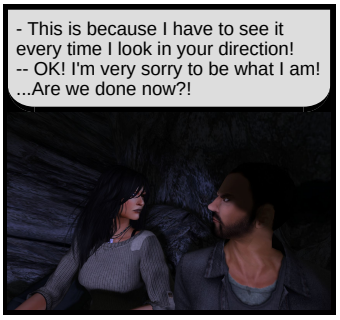


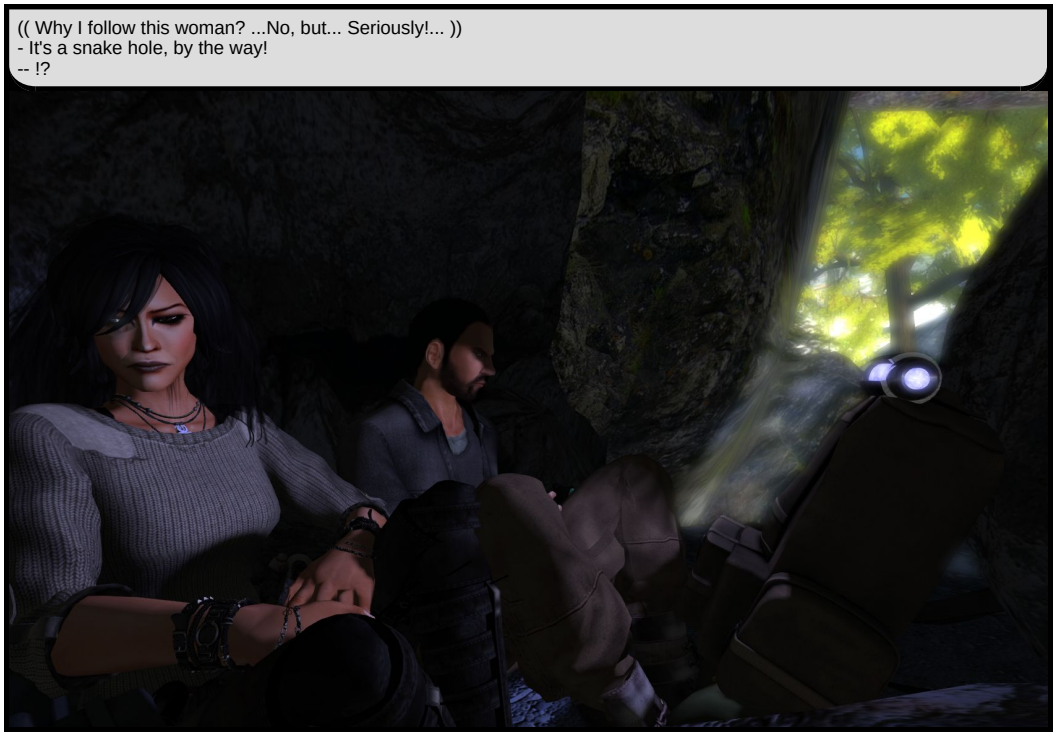

- It's a bit disgusting, but if this can prevent us to be detected...

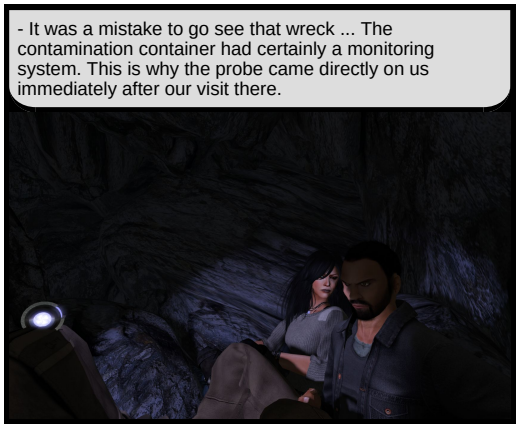

-- Oh! Sorry! ...I am happy to see that it's not deeper than that, I think I'm a bit claustrophobic!
- Hey! That was my foot! Clumsy!


-- Really sorry! Pfff! I know you don't like it when I'm this close to you, and I'm never good enough for you, but it was your idea to hide in this rat hole!

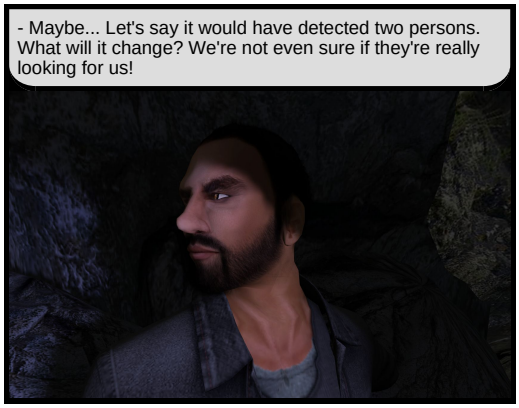

- Naaa! It's just about your little beard... When will you shave it?
-- What does it change for you?

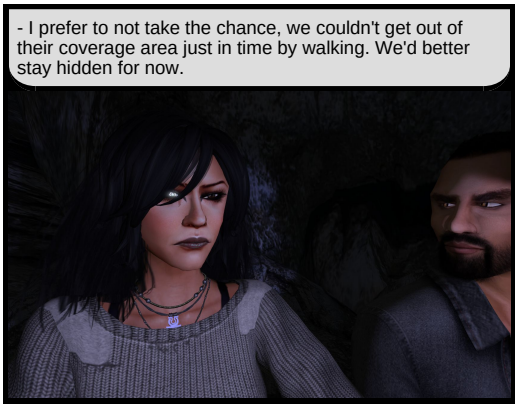

- This is because I have to see it every time I look in your direction!
-- OK! I'm very sorry to be what I am!
...Are we done now?!

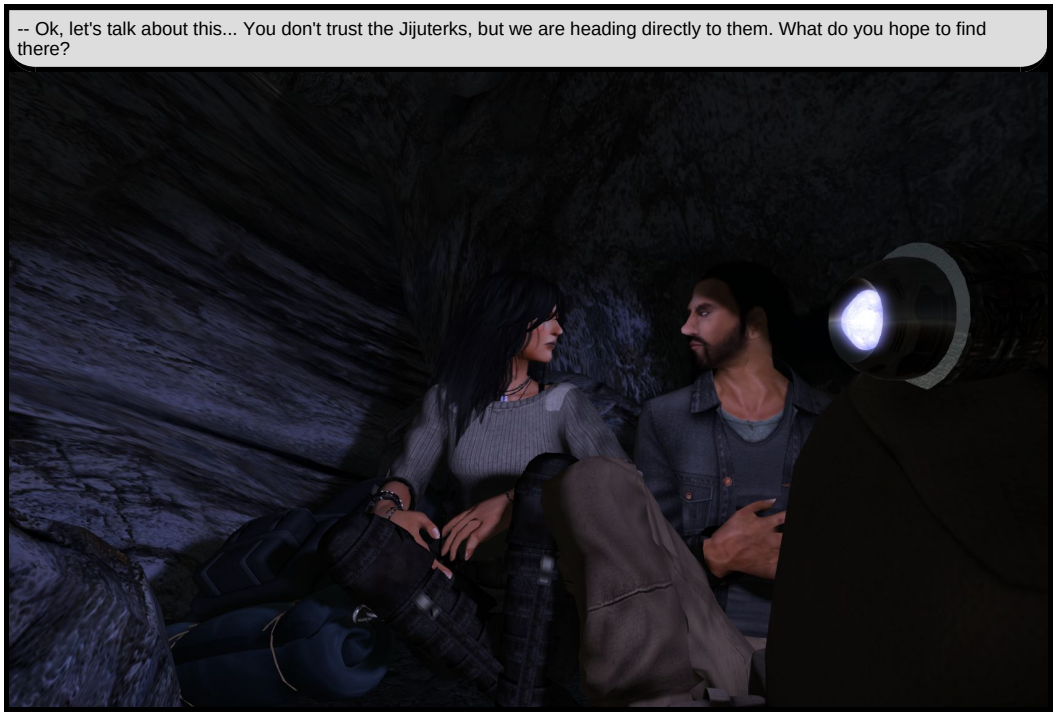

((Why I follow this woman? ...No, but... Seriously!...))
- It's a snake hole, by the way!
-- !?

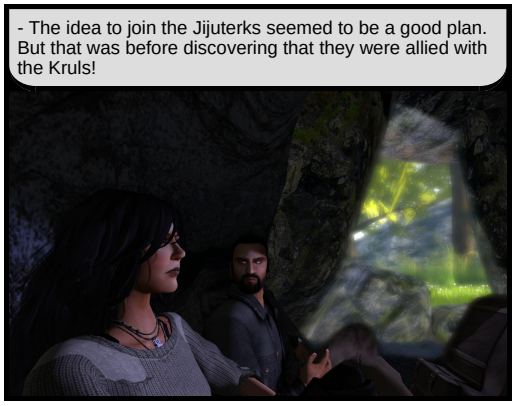

- It was a mistake to go see that wreck ... The contamination container had certainly a monitoring system. This is why the probe came directly on us immediately after our visit there.

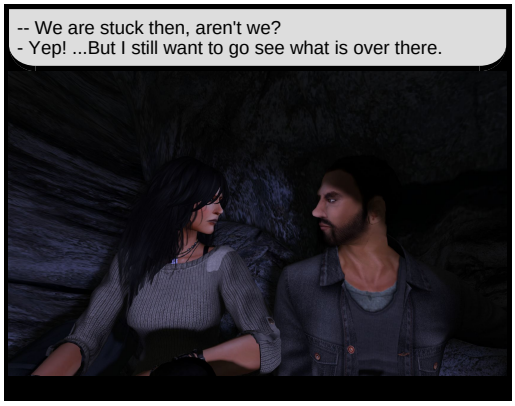

-- At least the drone didn't see us.
- Are you sure of this? They have very accurate sensors.


- Maybe... Let's say it would have detected two persons. What will it change? We're not even sure if they're really looking for us!

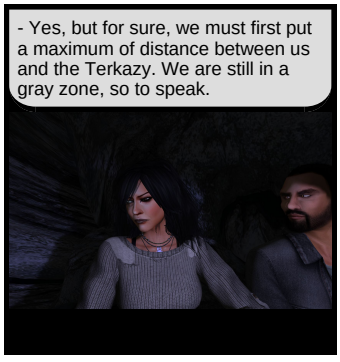

- I prefer to not take the chance, we couldn't get out of their coverage area just in time by walking. We'd better stay hidden for now.

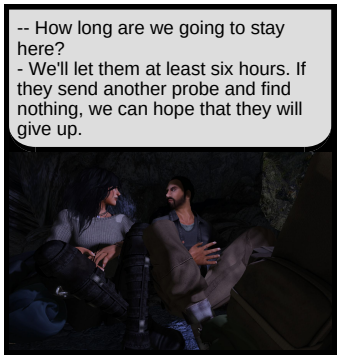

-- Ok, let's talk about this... You don't trust the Jijuterks, but we are heading directly to them. What do you hope to find there?

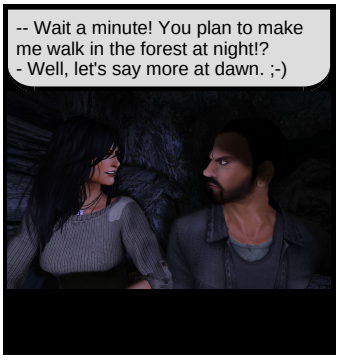

- The idea to join the Jijuterks seemed to be a good plan. But that was before discovering that they were allied with the Kruls!


-- We are stuck then, aren't we?
- Yep! ...But I still want to go see what is over there.


-- So we have to choose between living isolated as James Sway, or see if there is something better for us out there, risking our freedom for discovering it.


- Yes, but for sure, we must first put a maximum of distance between us and the Terkazy. We are still in a gray zone, so to speak.


-- How long are we going to stay here?
- We'll let them at least six hours. If they send another probe and find nothing, we can hope that they will give up.


-- Wait a minute! You plan to make me walk in the forest at night!?
- Well, let's say more at dawn. ;-)

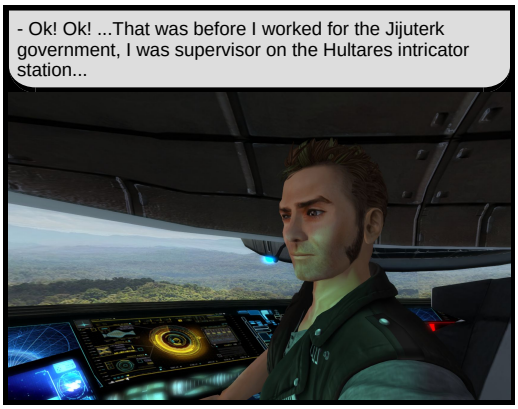
150 miles away...



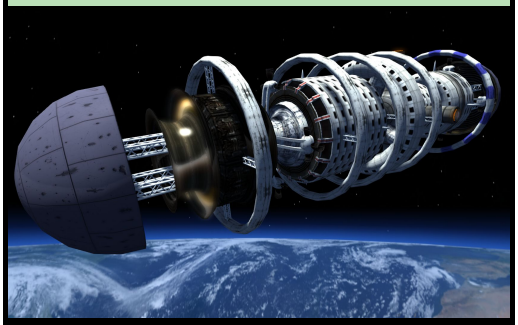




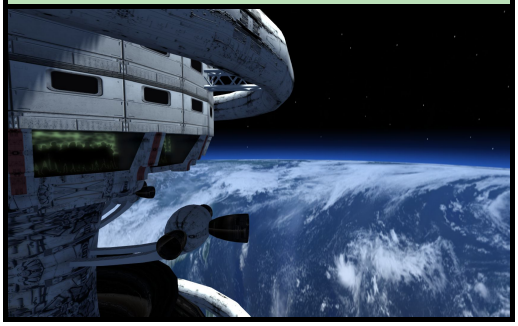




...My team has been relieved after our three months of work there. So we were returning to Earth on board of the Erezel, the too famous planetary cruiser...



...When we arrived in Earth's orbital zone, there was a reception on the lower deck. They often organized such an event before the orbit approach procedures. Most of my men were at this reception, including most of the Erezel's officers...

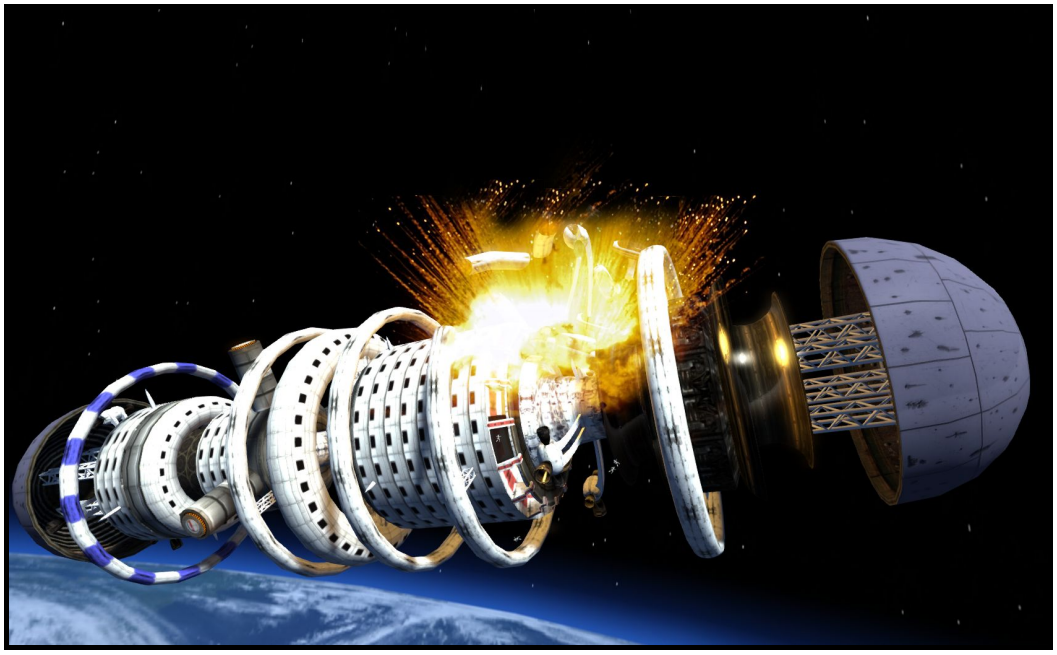


...The cruiser was doing trajectory adjustments for a stable entrance on its final orbit, when on a nearby orbit, a shuttle had a malfunction on one of its auxiliary engines. This caused an explosion...



... The shuttle has been pushed on our trajectory and collided with the Erezel...

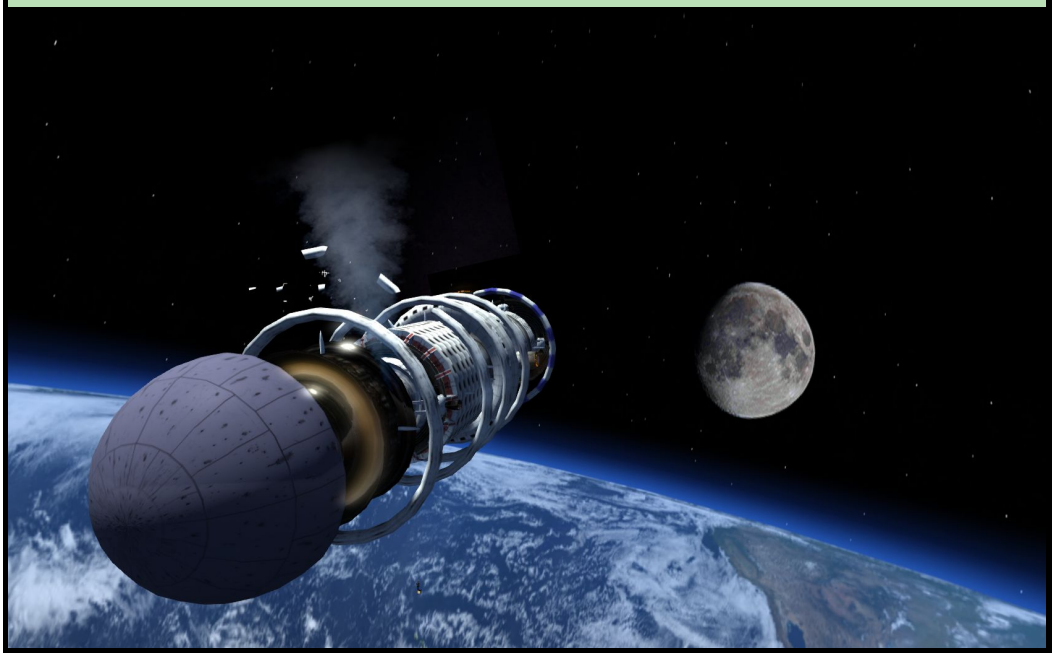




- This caused the depressurization of four bridges, including the one where the reception was being held, killing in a single shot 224 passengers, all the officers and destroying a line of lateral engines required to adjust the trajectory...



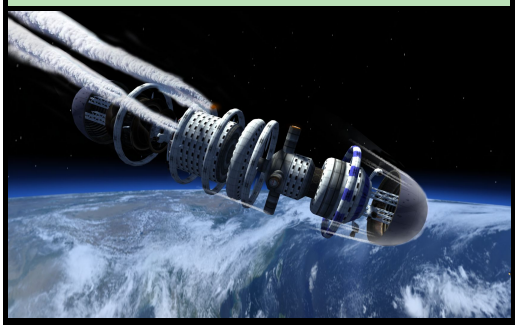
...Then a race against the clock began. The Erezel was going to miss its orbit...



...Rapidly, the 46 survivors banded together and it's at this moment I realized that I was the highest ranking in the hierarchy. In other words, this was leaving me in charge of this disaster...



...So we proceeded to the trajectory adjustments that were possible to do. We were seriously in trouble, the Erezel was losing altitude very quickly...



...Finally, after several attempts, we have been able to set the Erezel on a trajectory that gave us four hours to evacuate...



- Everyone has been evacuated in time. But I had to stay with another man to set the crash trajectory. It was imperative to prevent the Erezel from reaching an inhabited area. So we calculate it to go crashing into the ocean...



...When we left, using the last evacuation pod, the Erezel had already begun to overheat...



... The Erezel touched the ocean 25 minutes later. It broke up on impact, sending the prow continue its course to reach the continent. It fell precisely in the area where we are going.



- I never returned into space after that.
-- That explains many things about you, Boss.



- Really? Do I look like having been affected by this?
-- Not that much. But let's say I now understand a little better some aspects of your personality.



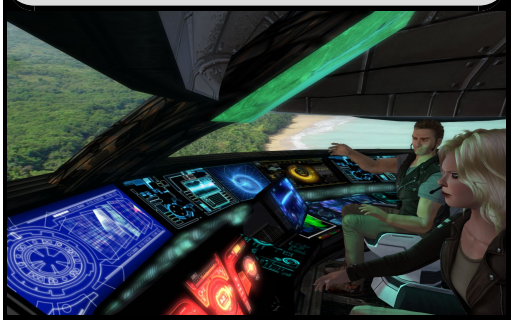
-- We are on final approach. Site in sight, Boss!
- Do you see a wooden building somewhere?



- I do. There are two.
-- Go to the one indicated in the report.



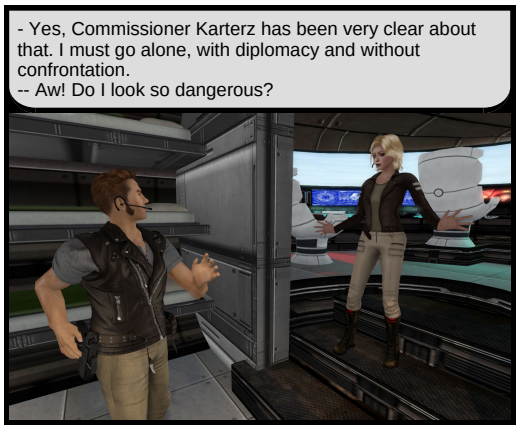
- The beach, it will be perfect for landing.
-- I proceed, Boss.

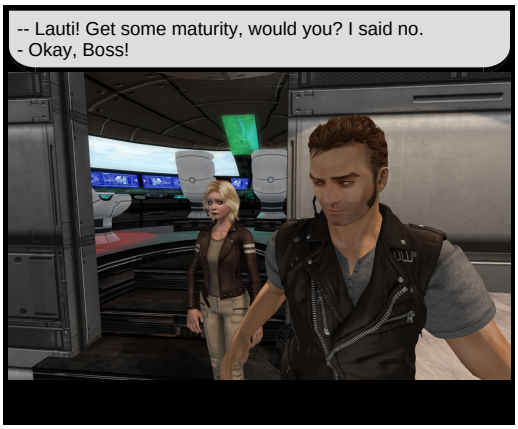



PFUUUU !!!


- It seems calm here.
-- Yeah.


- Uh!... You stay here... And stay connected with me.
-- What!? You want me to stay on board?!


- Yes, Commissioner Karterz has been very clear about that. I must go alone, with diplomacy and without confrontation.
-- Aw! Do I look so dangerous?


-- Lauti! Get some maturity, would you? I said no.
- Okay, Boss!

{Lauti's voice} I'm online, Boss! Please, turn on your microphone so I can hear.



- It's on now. I'm in front of the house, nobody in sight for now.





- Is there anyone here?! ... I just want to...



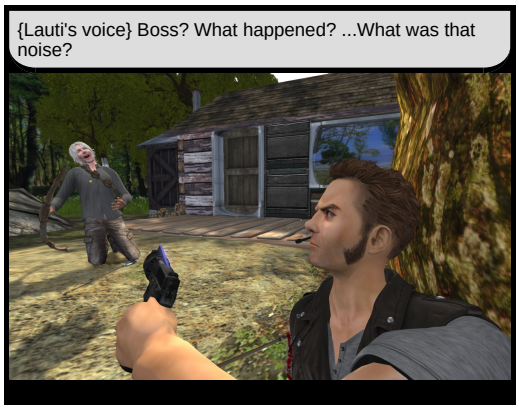
- Hummf!

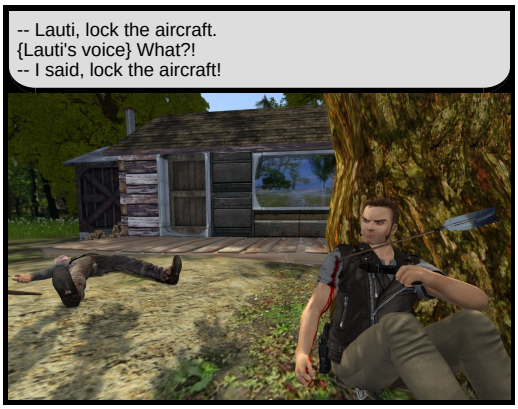


-- Oh! Shit!

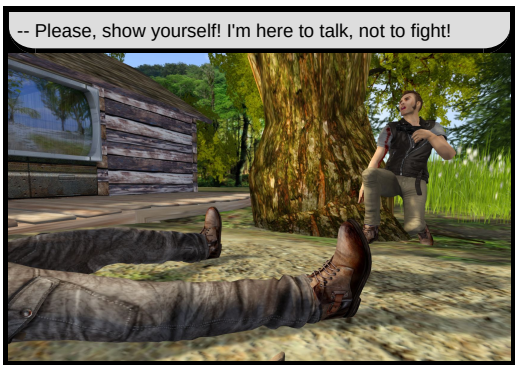



POW !


{Lauti's voice} Boss? What happened? ...What was that noise?


-- Lauti, lock the aircraft.
{Lauti's voice} What?!
-- I said, lock the aircraft!


- Hmmm... Ouch! (What a welcome! ...Really!)

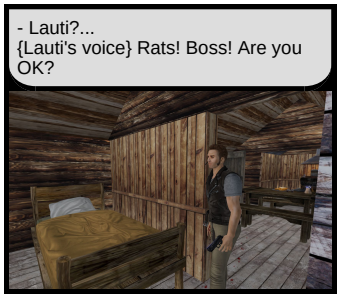

-- Please, show yourself! I'm here to talk, not to fight!


-- Lauti, prepare the first-aid kit.
{Lauti's voice} Boss?! Are you OK?


- I'm gonna go inside! I just want to talk!




- I just want to talk... Is anyone in there?


- Lauti?...
{Lauti's voice} Rats! Boss! Are you OK?


- Could be worse... The place is secure, come here with the first-aid kit.

A few minutes later...



- It's rather deep, but it hardly bleeds. You were lucky.
-- It seems that he didn't like my face.



- How long before he wakes up?
-- The dart worked fine, the anesthetic's effects should still last at least fifteen minutes.



- That's it, Boss! That should hold until we get to the hospital.



-- Yeah, but this will have to wait.
- Uh?! Not really! ..."Well!"...



- Please, keep an eye on him.
-- Of course.





(Three glasses... For three people... Which is consistent with the report of the probe. But where are gone the two others?)



(...There is no basement, they can't still be here...)



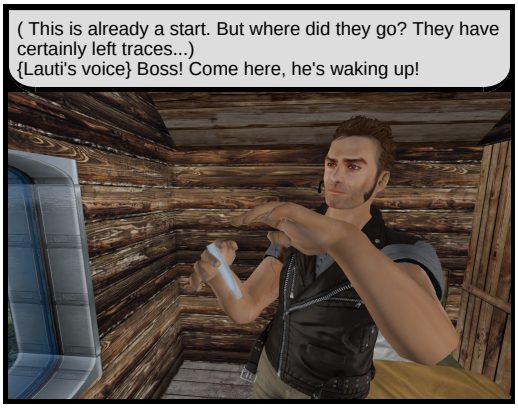
(Hmm! Someone lay on this bed, over the blanket... And yet, the bedsheets were well folded...)



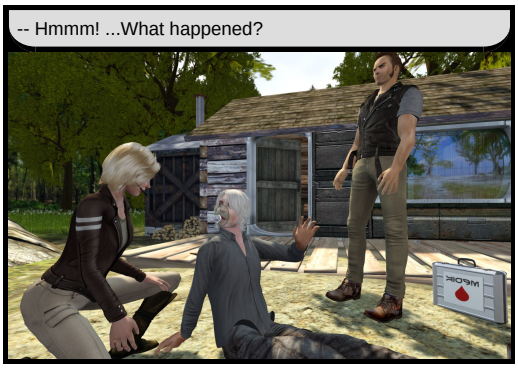
(My goodness! I wouldn't want to live my old age with such a bad bed...)

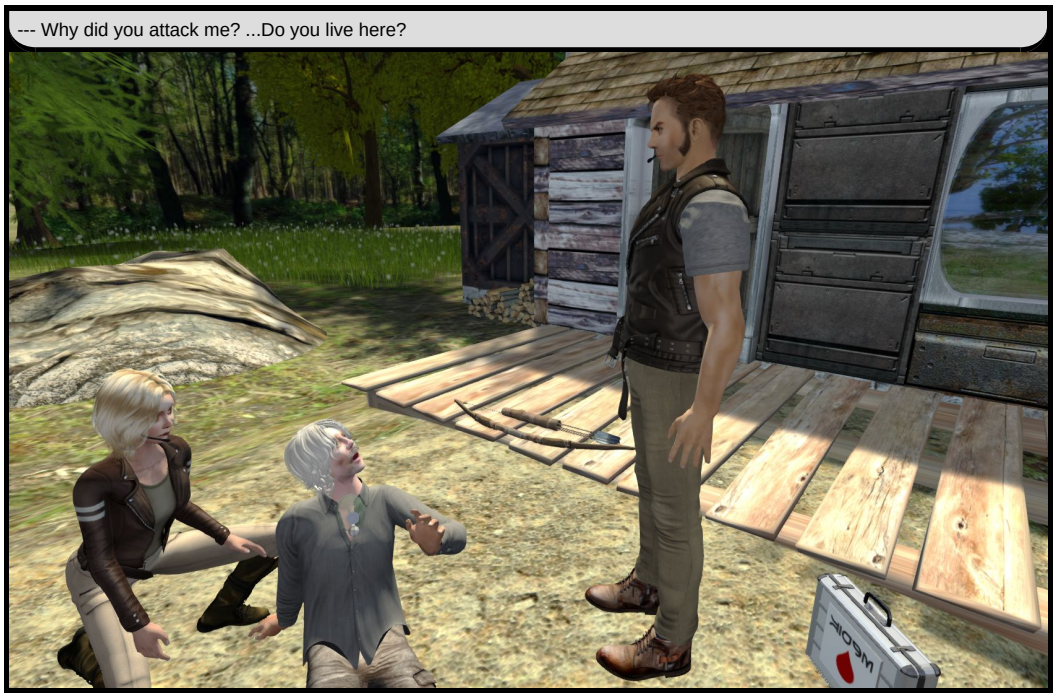



(This is rather interesting! ...A long black hair!)


(This is already a start. But where did they go? They have certainly left traces...)
{Lauti's voice} Boss! Come here, he's waking up!


- Sir, can you hear me?


-- Hmmm! ...What happened?


--- Why did you attack me? ...Do you live here?

-- I don't remember... But what am I doing here?!
- You have received an anesthetic dart.



-- I... I... Hurrgg! Hummg!
- Are you okay?



- Something's wrong!
--- Oh! He's convulsing!



-- Hurrrg!
--- Boss! Give me a hand!



- It stopped.
--- He's unresponsive.



--- Is he dead?
- He lost consciousness.



- Yuck! He smells alcohol! Is he drunk?



- It's very likely, there is an empty bottle of kwiza on the table.



- Boss, we must get him to the hospital immediately, otherwise he might die. Alcohol and anesthetic, it's not really a good mix.



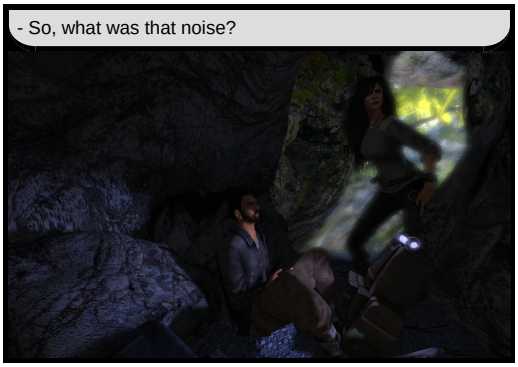
- Damn it! This is not my day! ...Give me a hand to move him to the aircraft...

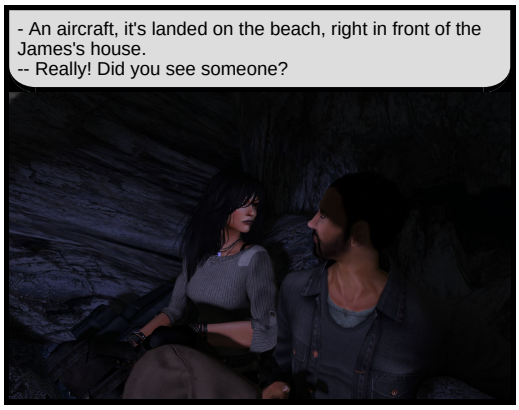


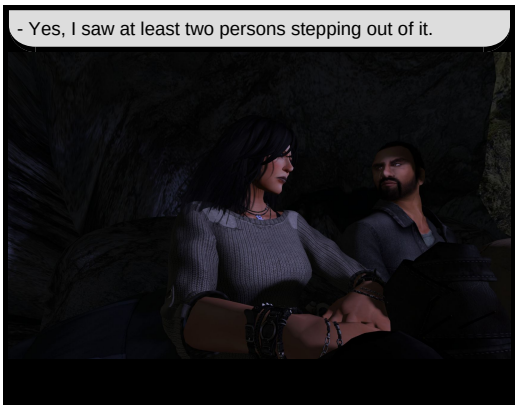
Meanwhile...






- So, what was that noise?

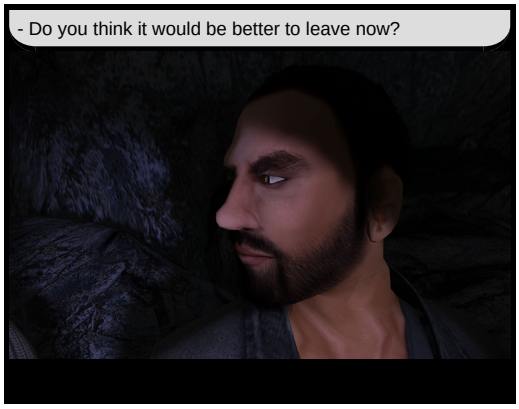

- An aircraft, it's landed on the beach, right in front of the James's house.
-- Really! Did you see someone?

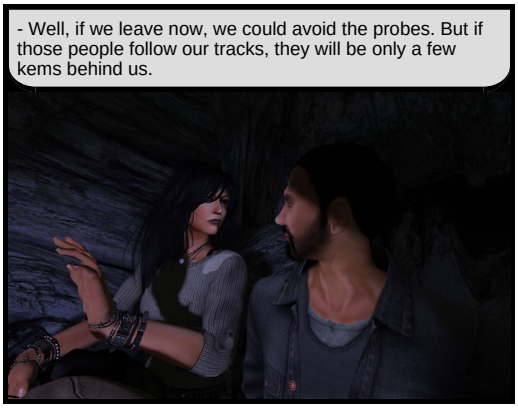

- Yes, I saw at least two persons stepping out of it.

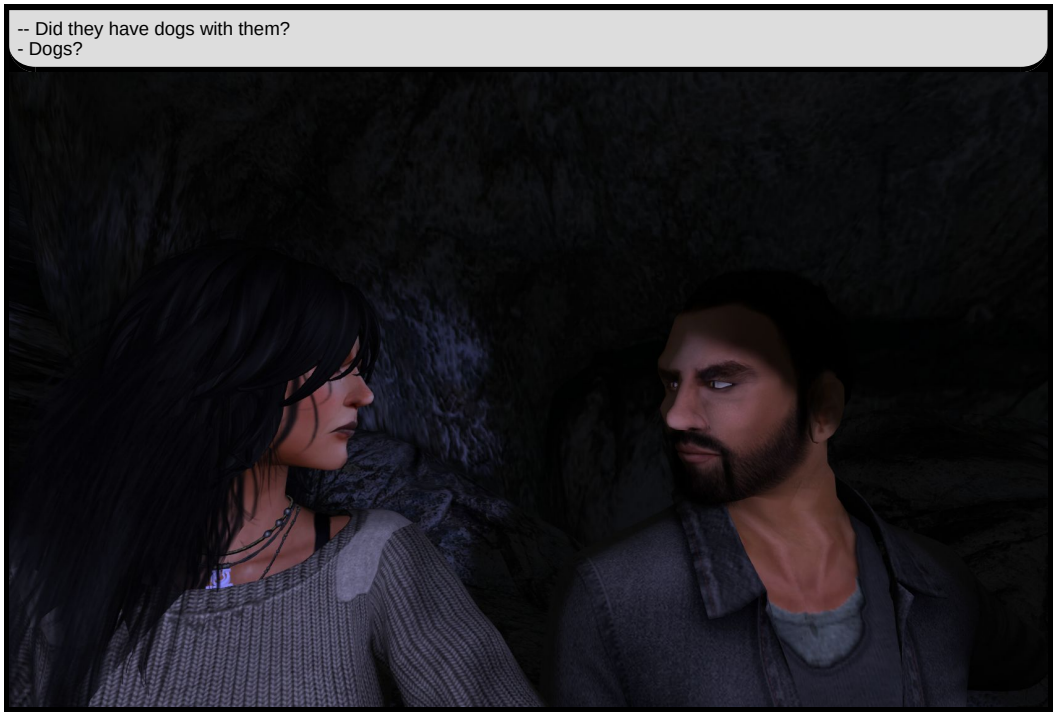

-- What were they doing?
- I couldn't see the house from here. I only saw them crossing the beach.

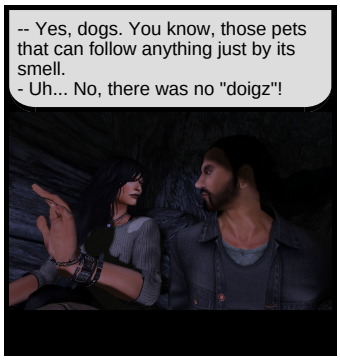

-- Did you see any drones around?
- No, not any probe.

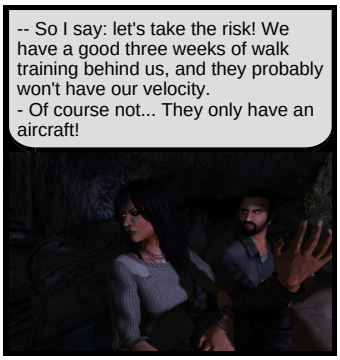

- I'm not sure we're safe here anymore. Humans are not probes, if they follow the trail, they will certainly find this cave.

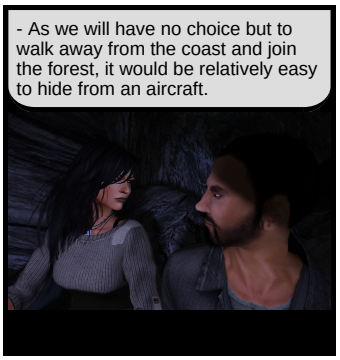

- Do you think it would be better to leave now?


- Well, if we leave now, we could avoid the probes. But if those people follow our tracks, they will be only a few kems behind us.


-- Did they have dogs with them?
- Dogs?


-- Yes, dogs. You know, those pets that can follow anything just by its smell.
- Uh... No, there was no "doigz"!


-- So I say: let's take the risk! We have a good three weeks of walk training behind us, and they probably won't have our velocity.
- Of course not... They only have an aircraft!


- As we will have no choice but to walk away from the coast and join the forest, it would be relatively easy to hide from an aircraft.


- ...And we can walk at night.
-- Speak for yourself!


- Ah! Yes... I'll just have to pull on your ugly little beard for steering you... For once it will be useful for something!
-- Yes, of course! Very funny!

-- Ok! In that case, let's get out of here now.
- Ok! Yes!



- I began to stiffen up!



- Ah, fresh air at last... (!?)
((!?))



-- Take cover!
(!?!)



- Damn! Do you think they saw us?
-- I don't think so... Let's not stay here!



-- This way!
- Uh...



-- What?!



- Well, I hope that everything is okay for James.



- (Sigh) Yes, I was just thinking about him, perhaps it might be useful to know what they told him.
-- Maybe we'd better go check before leaving, don't you think?

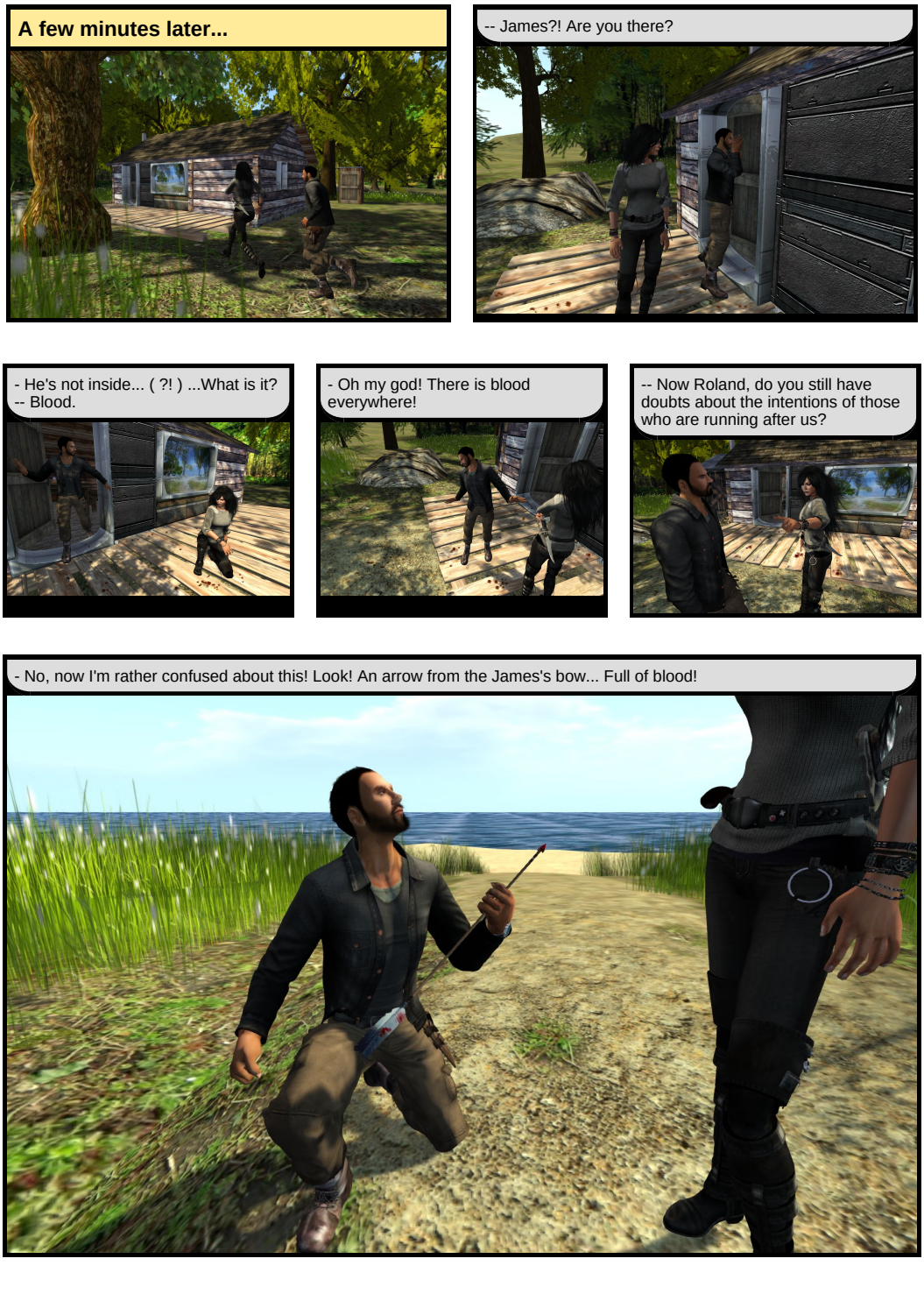


- Okay! But we won't stay more than ten minutes, just the time to check with him.
-- That's fine with me.



-- Let's leave our belongings here and let's go...

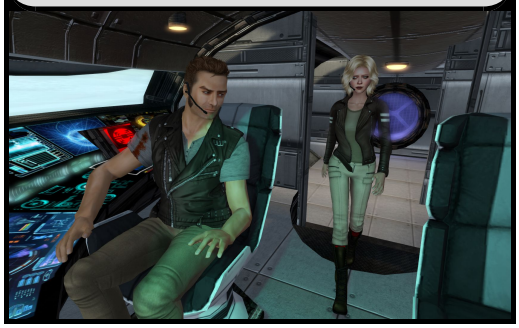



A few minutes later...
-- James?! Are you there?
- He's not inside... (?!) ...What is it?
-- Blood.
- Oh my god! There is blood everywhere!
-- Now Roland, do you still have doubts about the intentions of those who are running after us?
- No, now I'm rather confused about this! Look! An arrow from the James's bow... Full of blood!

Meanwhile, in the air...



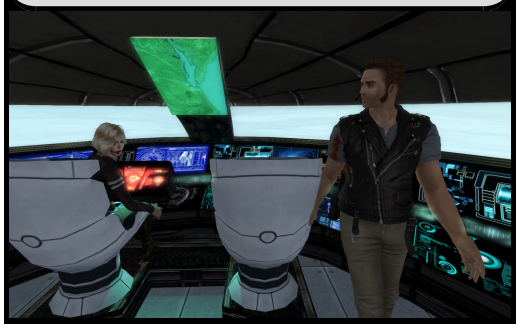
-- His blood pressure seems to be normal, he breathes normally, but he's still unconscious.
- Can you take the controls?



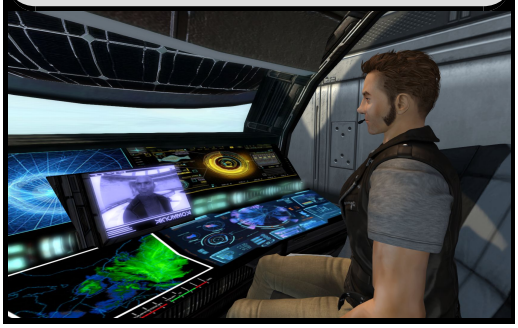
-- Sure, Boss. How do you feel?
- I've had better days. Now it really hurts.



- Why don't you take some rest and keep an eye on him?
-- I must first contact Tee Maguire.



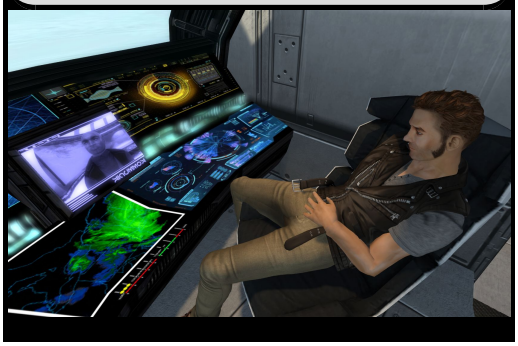
{Screen} Hi Mr. Tremble. What is the situation over there?
-- We had a problem with the owner of the place.



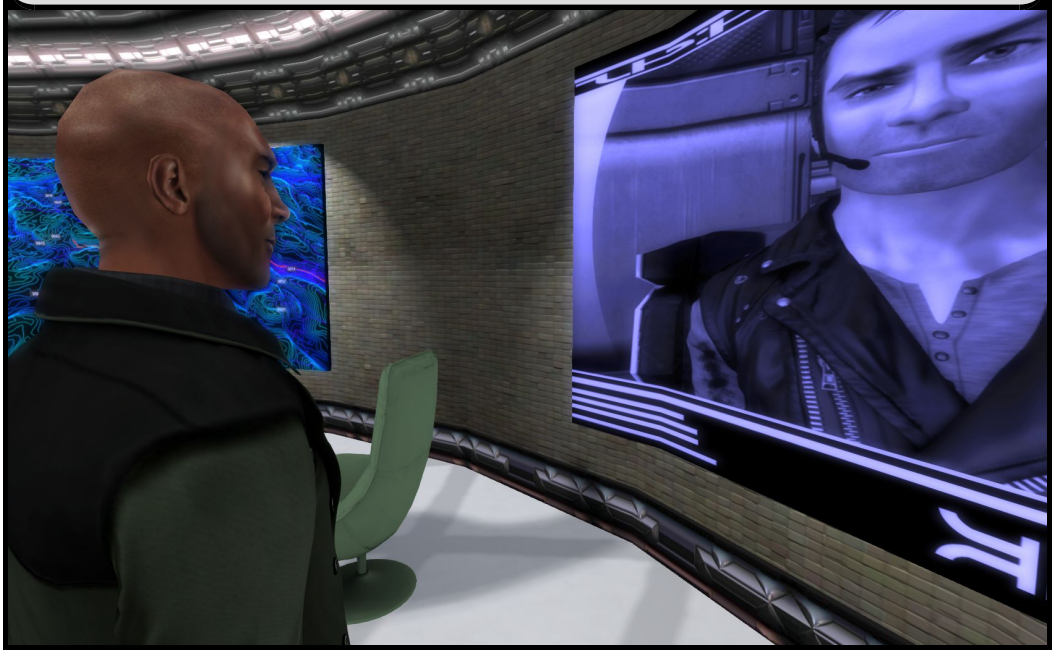
-- Really?
{Screen} We're heading to Jijuterk. Can you, please, send an emergency medical team to our landing platform?



- Are you wounded?
-- Yes, but this is not for me, we have a man in a coma.



- Okay, I send a team immediately.



-- Did you see anyone else over there?
- No, but if you could send a probe to cover the area, I have good reason to believe that they might be still around.



- I'm sending a probe right now.
-- All right, I contact you again at our arrival.



- There are some blood drops over here too...
-- I saw, but there's no sign of struggle.



-- Except for the bow on the table, nothing has moved.



- He finished off the kwiza!
-- Ah! Come on, alcoholic freak! Are you going to cry because he drank all the kwiza?



- Hmm! This is not what I meant! But there was still more than half of the bottle when we left!
-- Do you mean he would have drunk it all?



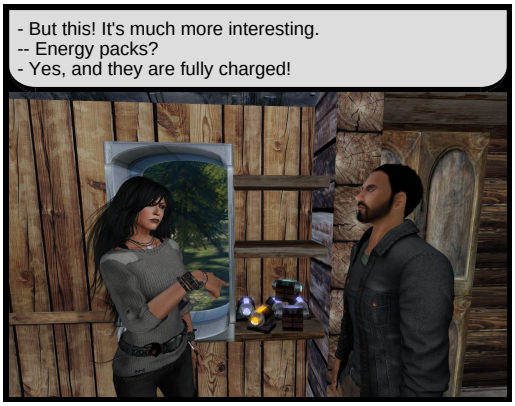
- I don't know what happened to him, but he was certainly not sober. Unless, of course, if they drank with him...

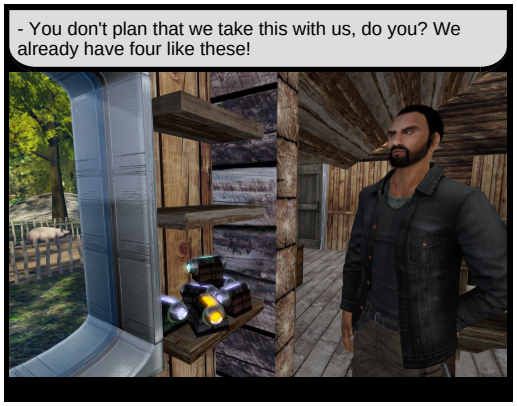



-- We have to leave anyway...
- I don't like this, he might be in trouble somewhere around here.


-- Roland, we can't stay here any longer... Oh?!

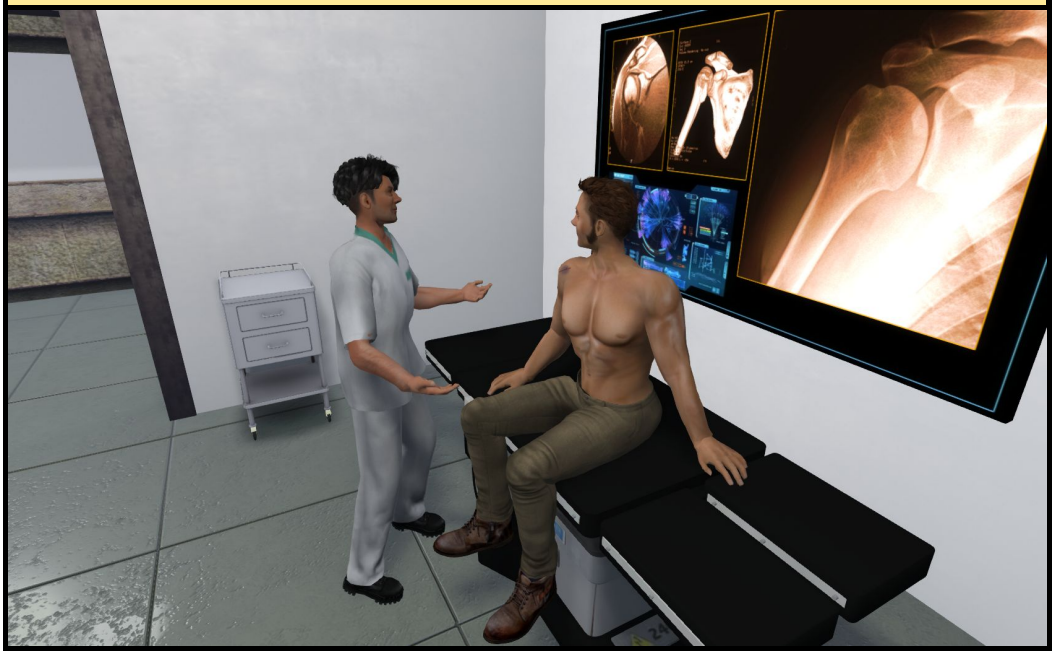

- What's that? It looks like a saw.
-- Yes, a heavy-duty electric saw, probably stolen. Certainly very useful to build a house.


- But this! It's much more interesting.
-- Energy packs?
- Yes, and they are fully charged!


- You don't plan that we take this with us, do you? We already have four like these!


- No, this is not about taking that with us, but that gives me an idea...

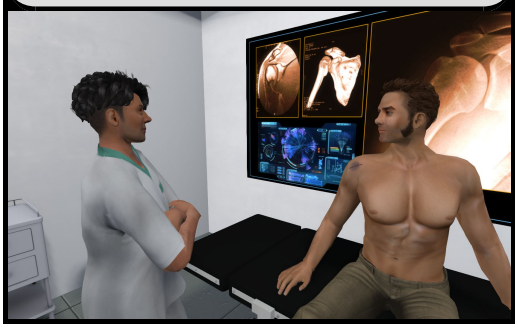
Later in Jijuterk...



- ...The humeral head took all the pressure. Fortunately, there is no serious damage to the tendon, which would have required immobilizing your arm.



- Well, I'm done. I injected you an anti-inflammatory medication. Just take it easy with your arm for a time.
-- Thank you, Doc!



- So, Boss?
-- Nothing serious. They won't have to cut my arm.



-- So you will have to let me take care of you!
- Are you trying to wear me down, Lauti?



-- Reim, are you all right?
--- Yes, I am. Just an arrow in the shoulder, but nothing serious.



- Just that! ...Do you have any idea about the man who attacked you?
--- No, he didn't really give me any chance to talk with him. His first move was to shoot.



-- He didn't leave me any other choice than to respond by an anesthetic shot.
- We were told that he was in a coma. Is it true?



--- Yes, we did the necessary to reanimate him. He recovered for maybe one minute before losing consciousness. We thought that it was caused by a bad mix with the kwiza he had drunk before our arrival, but the doctor told us that it was an allergic reaction to the anesthetic. According to him, the presence of alcohol in his blood would have saved him.



- Will he survive?
--- He's out of danger now. But no one knows when he will wake up.



- Have you seen someone else?
--- No, but there was evidence of the presence of the two other people.



- Evidence?
-- Hmm, few things... Three glasses near a bottle of kwiza on the table...



--- Oh! And this! Found on the bed.
-- What is it?



- A hair?
--- Yes, a long black hair. It clearly doesn't come from our man. So it could be hers.



- I will have them analyzed. With the genome, maybe we will find out if it's realistic to believe that it could be her.
-- Do you think she could still be in a searchable perimeter?



- Yes, that's why I requested to send a probe. It's too late today to go back in there. My plan is to leave at dawn to be there at sunrise.



- We have redirected a Dragon class probe from Terkazy, it will be on-site before dark. We'll contact you if we detect something.
--- Thank you ... Now, if you don't mind, I'll get some rest...



At the same time...



- Come on! Give it a little more energy! We were supposed to stay only ten minutes and we lost thirty!
-- I do as fast as I can!



- By the way, it's because of you if we stayed so long! Seriously, do you really think that what you did will fool someone?
-- Probably not. But me, at least, I will have tried something!



- Oh! This, it's too...
-- Come on, lazy boy! Stop talking and let's go!



- Awsh! (Once again... So "nice" to me!)



-- We'll follow the trail one or two kems again, then we will go northwest, through the forest.
- This will slow us down.



-- Yes, especially if you continue to take your time! ...We can't stay along the shore, that's the first place they will check.
(Sigh!)



-- Ah! Stop it!
- Stop what?



- To look at me with that disconcerted expression!



({Sigh} ...You... frustrated woman!)



One hour later...



- I just got the results of the genetic analysis of the hair found by Reim.
-- Do we have a positive match?



- This is indeed a woman. The genome is from a far western lineage. It would have been separated from its known genome at least 800 years ago, perhaps even more. The probabilities that it could be recent, from an unknown genetic branch are less than 0.01%.



- So such a coincidence is virtually impossible. It has to be her!



- I think so. Also, the projections based on this genome fit extremely what we know of her. I mean that it's clearly not the genome of a little Nordic redhead!



- That's a good news! I just hope we can find them soon.



- Oh, another thing. The man who attacked Reim, they had to do some genetic testing to find the appropriate treatment...
-- OK!?... Will he recover?



- Uh, yes, but they discovered that he has also a very old genome.
-- What do you mean?



- He's a Pre-Dallusian, as the one who escaped with Erydak.
-- He would be the same guy?



-- No, he doesn't match to what the probe recorded in Terkazy.
- Interesting! Two men from the same period! I hope he will recover quickly.



Later, after dark...



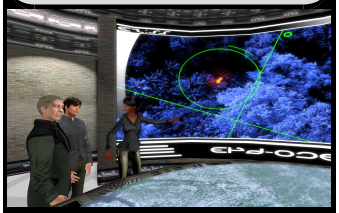
--- Chief! We have another detection report: life form with an electromagnetic source. This is moving fast under the trees.
- Do we have a direct observation?



- Not yet, but the detector indicates a warm-blooded animal form. An electromagnetic field is also detected, which may correspond to a human presence.
--- The sun is down, I will redirect the infrared vision on the main screen.



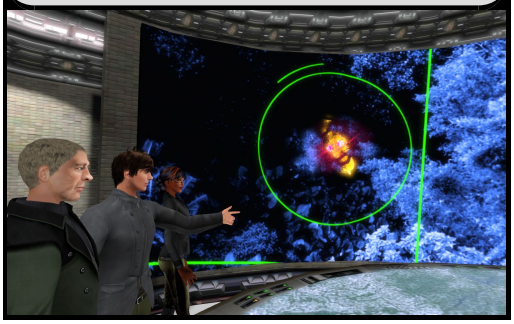
- Damn, the forest is so dense!
--- The velocity is increasing, it is clearly fleeing the probe.



- This is heading back to the point zero.



-- Here we are! Visual contact established!



- Can we have a better view?
--- Just a matter of seconds, the probe is positioning.



- Nice work! ...You just detected a third pig lugging an energy pack!



- Are you sure that it's not the same one?
--- Yes, Chief, we are not that stupid!



- I don't know who had this idea to attach an energy pack to a pig, but for sure, if it was to fool the probe, this is working fine!



- Three hours and we found nothing but pigs. Please, send the probe scan the coast up to the 40th degree north. This is the most likely path they could have taken.



--- I just modified the probe's coverage area.
- Thanks. ...Now, I don't know how I will explain this to Commissioner Karterz.



In the morning...



- It's very clear here. You see, there are two sets of footprints. This is recent.
-- One of them has big boots, probably the Pre-Dallusian. Do we know his name?



- Not that I know... Hmm, it goes in the two directions...
-- Let's call him Big-boots. This will be cuter than "Pre-Dallusian". Don't you think, Boss?



- You know, right now, I don't really care about his name. But OK for "Big-Boots", if that's what you really want.



-- They followed the trail, it's too easy.
- Yeah... But they are maybe one day ahead.



-- They stopped here.
- What is this hole?



- It's very small but large enough to hide two people...



-- Boss, the footprints continue along the trail, but this time in only one way.



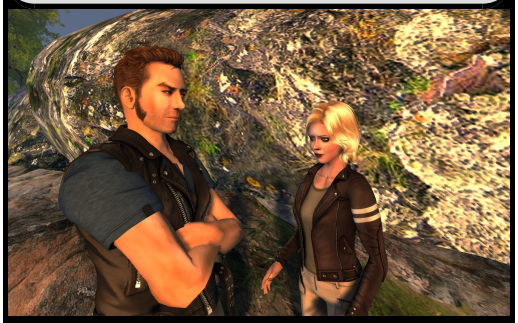
- The trail runs along the shore. If the probe didn't find them, they must have left the trail somewhere.



-- Ah! Of course! Rock everywhere! ...It is clear now, we will never find where they might have left the shore.



-- Do we have a plan B?



- They are heading to Rikmon Stain. If they decide to cross it, they will be detected since the area is under constant surveillance.



- But if they decide to bypass it, which is always possible, we will have to wait them at their potential destination.
-- But, Boss, we don't know where they go!



- There are not many places where they could emerge, at most six or seven villages. Also, we would have enough time to establish a network of informants.



- I see, so many unsavory people to meet.
-- You've got it! ... Well, I think we're done here.



Three days later...



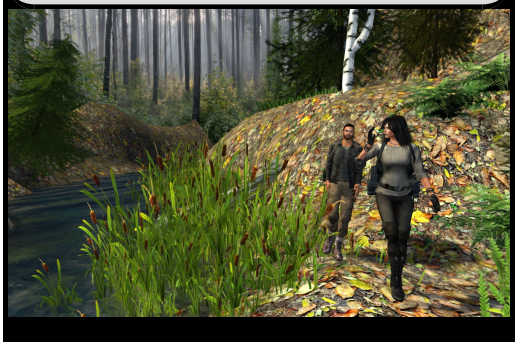
- I hope we can make a fire tonight. The moisture has rotted my last night's sleep.
-- After three days, I guess we can stop fearing the probes. So yes, we will make a fire.



- Anyway, we won't have a choice, we will need to cook if we want to eat.



-- I don't know what is the worst in this country, the wetness or all these mosquitoes?



- Regarding the mosquitoes, you'd better get used to it since it's only going to get worse as we go further north.
-- Oh! Great!



- It would be much better by the coast.
-- Hey! We've been through this before, not until several days!



-- That's annoying, this attitude to always call into question our plans!



- I haven't called into question anything, I simply highlighted a fact.



-- Instead, for a change, why don't you put a bit more effort into something that could be really useful?!



- Okay! What have I done wrong?
-- Learn to clean a pan would be already something! I already have to strive for hunting, I think you could at least take care of that, in order to break camp faster!



- Excuse me! But you are the last to eat in it, and I have to dismantle the tent while you eat!



-- I'm beginning to understand why your ex-girlfriend decided to move on!
- Oh!



- Men, all the same...
-- Oh great! ...Once again, this is the whole universe that is at issue!



-- I am not: "all the men"!
- Definitely not! I'm not even sure if you are really one!

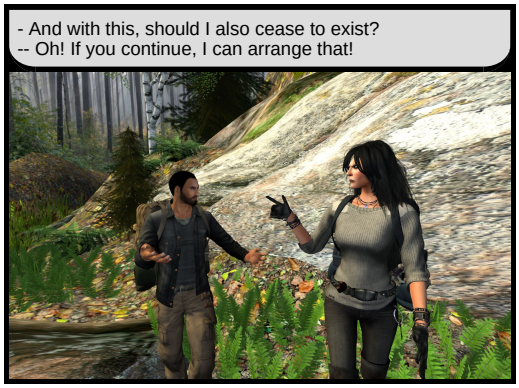


-- This is nonsense! What do you have against men? Are you not the daughter of a man?
- Do you really think I could be proud of my father?!




-- Why are you angry now?
- I'm not angry!


- Oh! Yes, your are!
-- Can't you just shut the fuck up sometimes?!


- And with this, should I also cease to exist?
-- Oh! If you continue, I can arrange that!


- Do you really think what you just said?
-- Ah! Come on! Use your brain!


-- OK! ...That's enough! ...That's fucking enough!!

- Can you tell me what's your damn problem with me, Alezia? Because according you, I seem to be the worst thing in the galaxy!



- You're paranoid!



- Yeah! So this is me, again! I'm paranoid now!



- Of course, because you, you're the perfection! You're always in full control of yourself!



- I'm done with this... I'm fucking done with this now!




- Look! Here is your tent!... And here is your damn gun!
((sigh!))


- ...And have a nice trip with yourself! Good luck!


(!)




- Oh! Great!... Come on, do it! ...You want me dead, so do it fast!

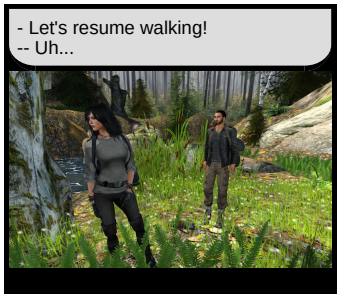

-- Seriously, do it, I don't care! I have nothing here! ...You're so good at killing people!



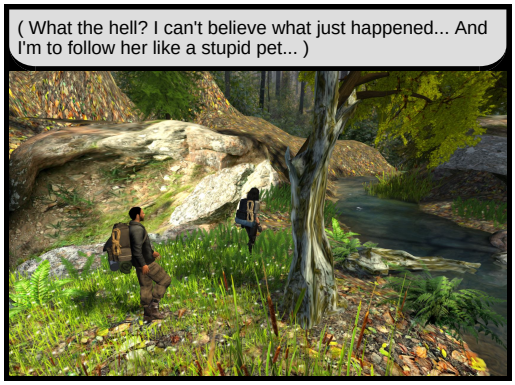





-- Take back this tent! And take back this gun! Immediately!
(Uh!)


- Let's resume walking!
-- Uh...


- ...And I don't want to hear another word until sunset! I hope I am clear enough!


(What the hell? I can't believe what just happened... And I'm to follow her like a stupid pet...)


(...She kissed me!!! ... And now, I feel like if she had me by the balls!...)

At nightfall...



-- Mmmh! We are going to eat our first ogemes of the season.
- Really? Some are already ripe?



- Yes, this morning while you were sleeping.



- May I ask you a personal question?
-- It depends... About what?



-- Have you always been like this?
- ?!



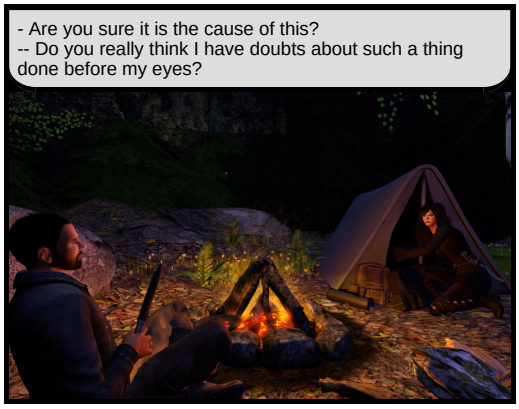

- I mean... well... you know... you are a bit... short temper!
-- Short temper?!


- Is this what you said?!
-- Uh!... Yes... This... This is what I said. But I mean no offense!


- (Sigh) No, I haven't always been like that.

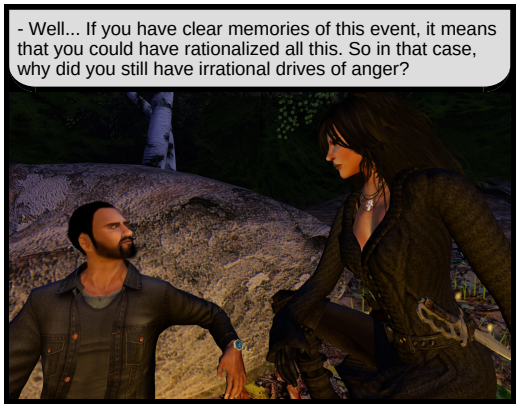

-- When did it start?

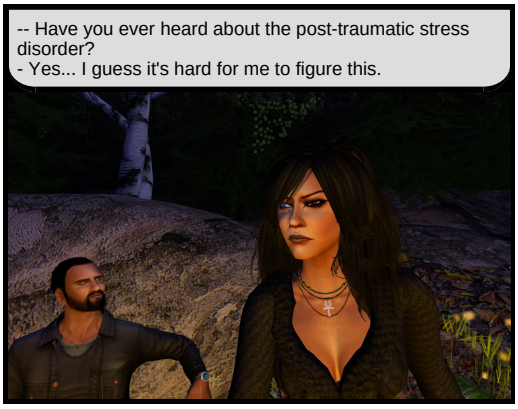

-- It started after the murder of my friend Ima by Luxor Slonk. I think I already told you about that.


- Are you sure it is the cause of this?
-- Do you really think I have doubts about such a thing done before my eyes?


-- I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything of the sort... Please, forget my question.


-- Roland! What are you hiding behind this question? Now that you have started, please, spit it out.


- Well... If you have clear memories of this event, it means that you could have rationalized all this. So in that case, why did you still have irrational drives of anger?

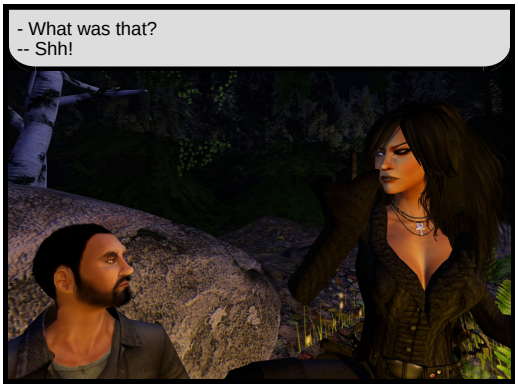

-- Have you ever heard about the post-traumatic stress disorder?
- Yes... I guess it's hard for me to figure this.


- Have you ever consulted a specialist about that?

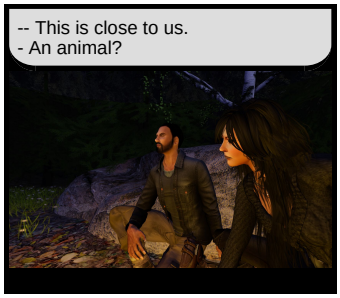

-- A specialist?! Don't make me laugh, Roland!
- Of course, you're the tough woman!

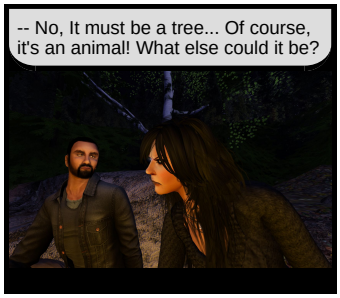

- Where the hell I was supposed to find a specialist in an occupied Rantar? With what money? And after which person among the thousands who would have required such a consultation? Can you tell me?


- So you never talked with... (!?)
((!?))
GRRROOARRK !


- What was that?
-- Shh!

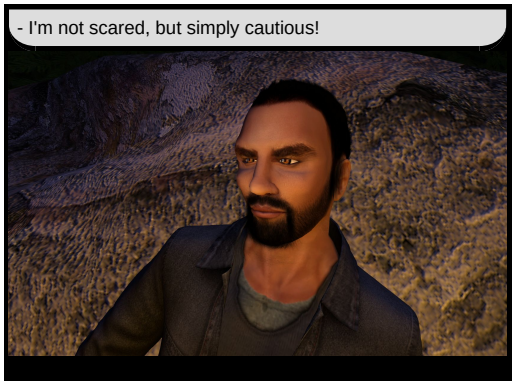

GRRROOARRK !


-- This is close to us.
- An animal?


-- No, It must be a tree... Of course, it's an animal! What else could it be?


- After everything that's happened in the last month, I can expect anything.

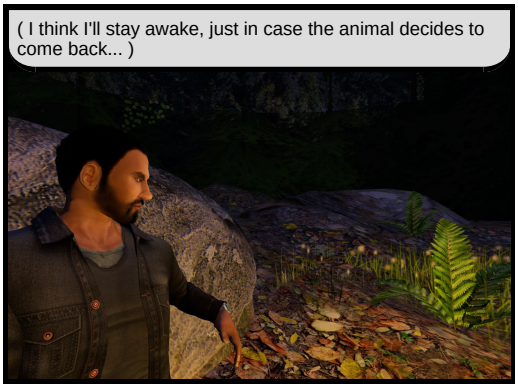

- Are you sure it's a good idea to go hunting tonight?
-- Oh! It looks like you're scared! ;)


- I'm not scared, but simply cautious!

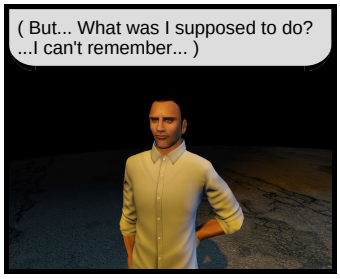

-- I must go hunting, but I'm going to take the electric baton, just in case.

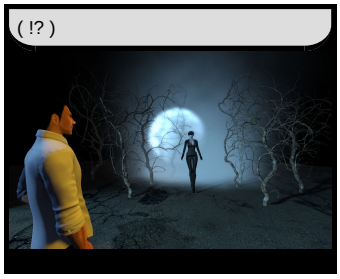

- You're leaving now?!
-- Yeah. ...And don't forget to put some wood on the fire before going to bed.


(Definitely, nothing scares her... Of course, she doesn't see the world as I see it...)


(I think I'll stay awake, just in case the animal decides to come back...)


(Everything is so quiet here... No cars, no buses, no music! ...The music... I miss it so much... All these tunes lost forever...)


(But... What was I supposed to do?
...I can't remember...)


(!?)

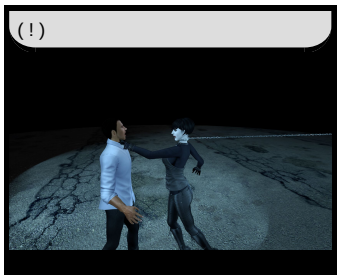

(Oh!)








CLUNK !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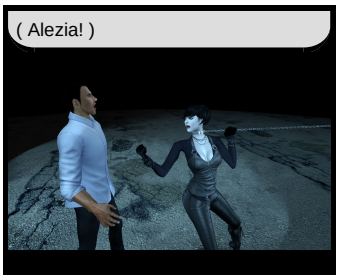
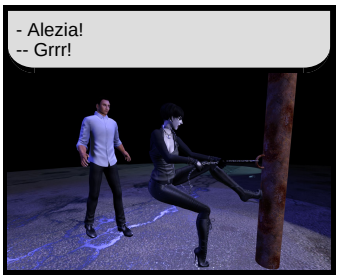

(Alezia!)


- Alezia!
-- Grrr!

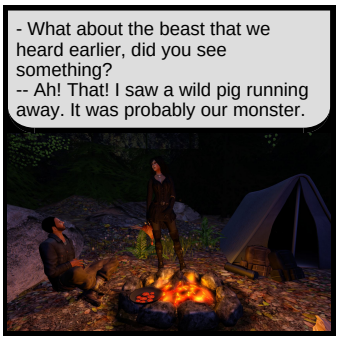

GRRROOARRK !

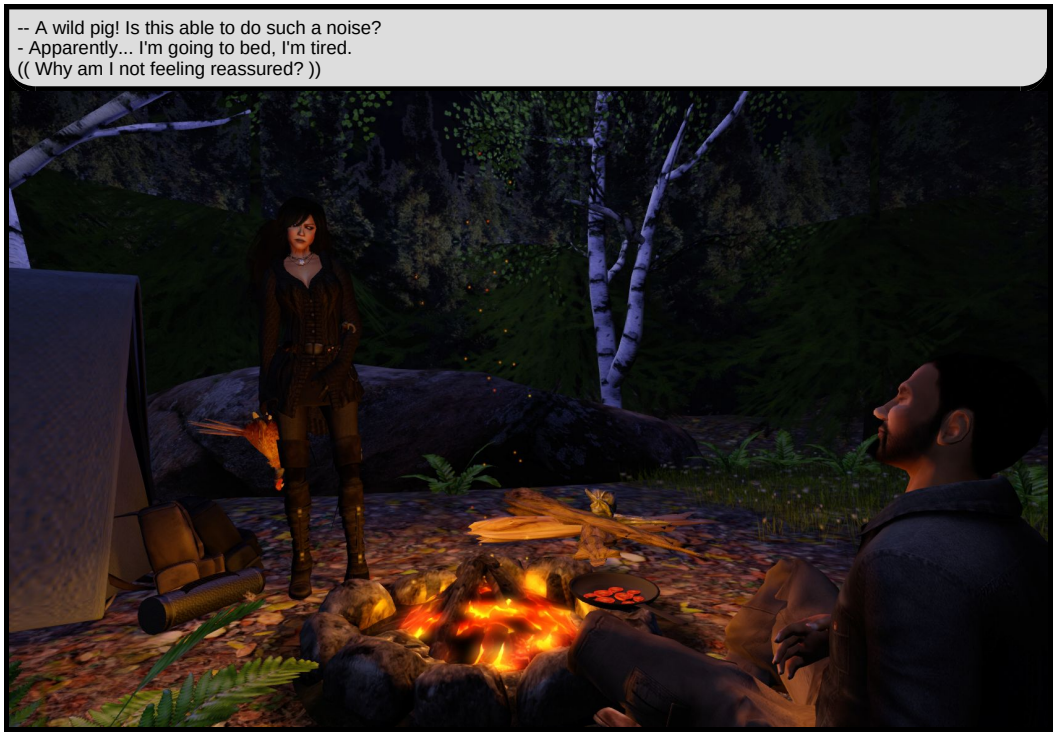

- Hey! Were you trying to stay awake?
-- Phew! It's you!


- Are you okay?
-- Yes, I was only having a bad dream.


- Look what I got! The poor thing was sleeping under a tree, thinking to be safe.


-- Ah! Yes, poor thing...
- It will be good to eat something else than rabbit!


- What about the beast that we heard earlier, did you see something?
-- Ah! That! I saw a wild pig running away. It was probably our monster.


-- A wild pig! Is this able to do such a noise?
- Apparently... I'm going to bed, I'm tired.
((Why am I not feeling reassured?))

The next day...



- I hope it doesn't rain all day.
-- I hope not!



- (Coughing...)
-- I've told you, smoking is not good for you!



- I haven't smoked for days!
-- So maybe we should put up the tent for today.



- I think we can walk a little hour again, and see afterward.
-- Okay.



Later...




COUGH !
KEUF !
COUGH !
KEUF !


- Have you caught a cold or what?
-- A cold?! Naaaw! I'm going well, it's probably because of all this humidity.

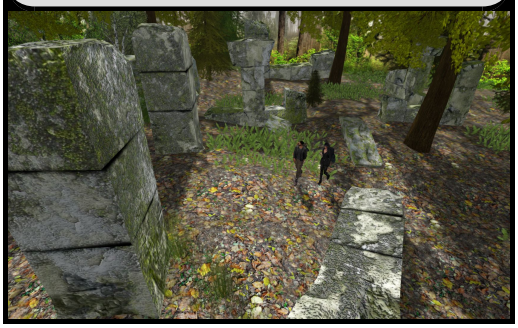

- We can stop, you know.


-- Hey! I'm fine! ...Let's go ahead!
- All right! All right!

A few hours later...



- Ruins, only the stone remained intact. I would be very curious to see what we could find buried beneath our feet.
-- Maybe... Maybe...



-- (Coughing...)



-- Do you have an idea of what city this could have been? Maybe it was...
- (Coughing...)



- Whoa! You don't look well!
-- I'm fine! I must not have enough sleep, that's all!



-- Oh no, you don't look fine at all!
- I'm... o... (coughing) kay!



- Yeah right! Damn it! Alezia, you're burning with fever!
-- It's nothing, let's walk...





-- Yeah sure! You're going nowhere like this!
- Ahhsh! I'm not feeling well.



-- You stay put and wait here. I'll make camp and light a fire.



Shortly after...



-- Are you still with me Alezia?
- Humm?



((Goodness! She's burning up... She's passing out... This is not good...))



((This is serious... What to do in case of fever? ...Lower the temperature... Drinking a lot... Well, first, let's remove that coat...))



- I'm freezing...
-- Yes, it's just an impression... Drink this, it will help...



((It happened so suddenly... I hope it's not because of the wreck.))



((Damn it! You're not going to leave me alone here!))



(Fever... Hmm... There may be something for this in the first-aid kit...)



(Oh shit! We forgot to take it when we left the trepyror! ...Come on Roland! This is no time to panic... You're only at a thousand miles from nowhere!)



(Irradiation is not to be considered, I can't fight against that... If this is the case, there is nothing I can do anyway. ...So just focus on calming the fever, this is the only useful thing I can do now...)



(She's a strong woman... She will get through... ... But if she doesn't? ... Breathe Roland! ...Breathe!...)



Somewhere north...



-- Good evening Mr. Karterz, you're working late!
- Oh, Reim! Yes, I was to leave in a few minutes... If Tee can arrive!



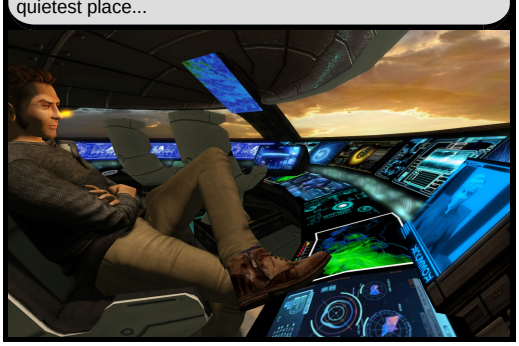
- I have the Minister at my heels, once again, you know how she is!
-- Yeah, too many resources involved I guess, as usual.



-- Exactly! But you're certainly not calling to hear me complain about politics, aren't you?
- That's right. It was just to keep you informed of our plans.



- We're landed near the coastal village of Salm. This is one of three possible places where our fugitives could potentially reappear.
-- Salm? Let me check... OK! As I can see, It's not the quietest place...



-- It's indeed not a very safe place. We made a deal with some people here. They will be our eyes and ears.
- What kind of deal?



- Well, a cheap payment, but valuable for them, to ensure from them a commitment to help us. And a good reward for whom will report a positive observation.



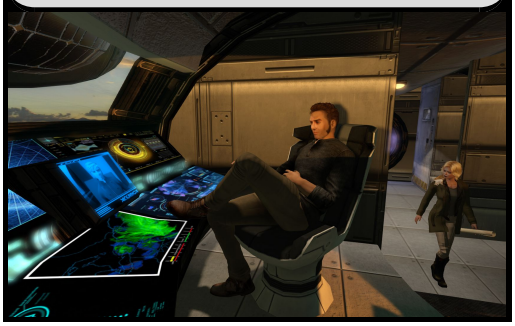
- But don't worry, I pay them with goods, nothing to ruin your budget.
-- Good!... But tell me, Salm, is it not much further north than the Erezel crash site?



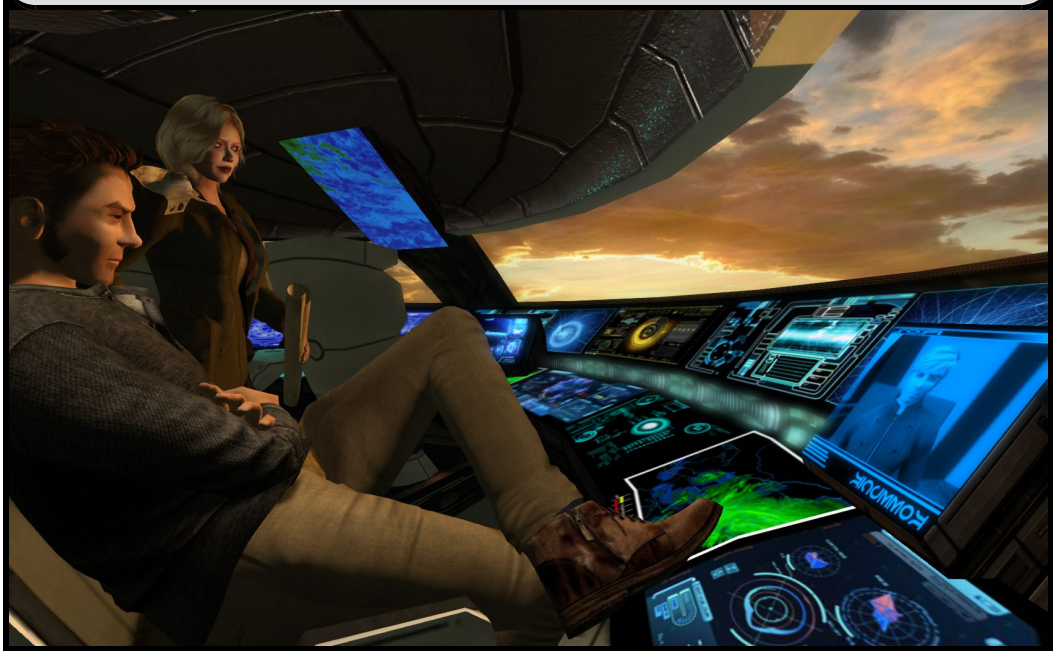
- Yes, that's why we plan to do the same thing at Pogh and at Surybu. I doubt they will choose to cross the mountains.



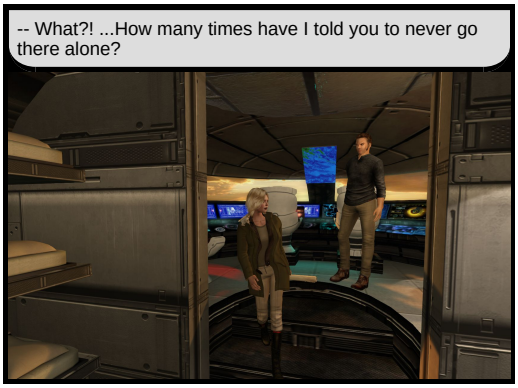
- They might take a certain time to reach one of these villages.
-- Yes, I don't expect them before at least one month. Of course, this is only in the case where they would bypass the Rikmon Stain.



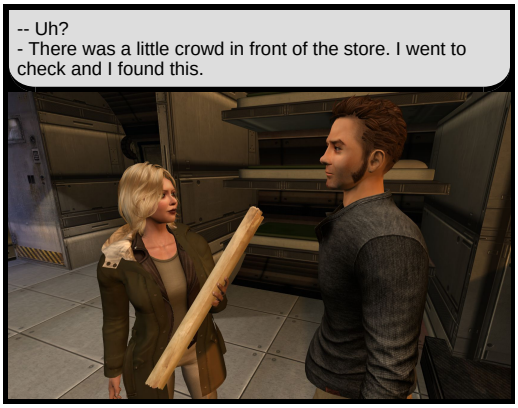
--- Yes, of course, they might decide to avoid it. The Stain is not very inviting. I think it's a good plan.
- I think it is. I will contact you again in a few days. On this, have a good evening, Oclan.
--- Thank you, Mr. Tremble. Have a good evening.

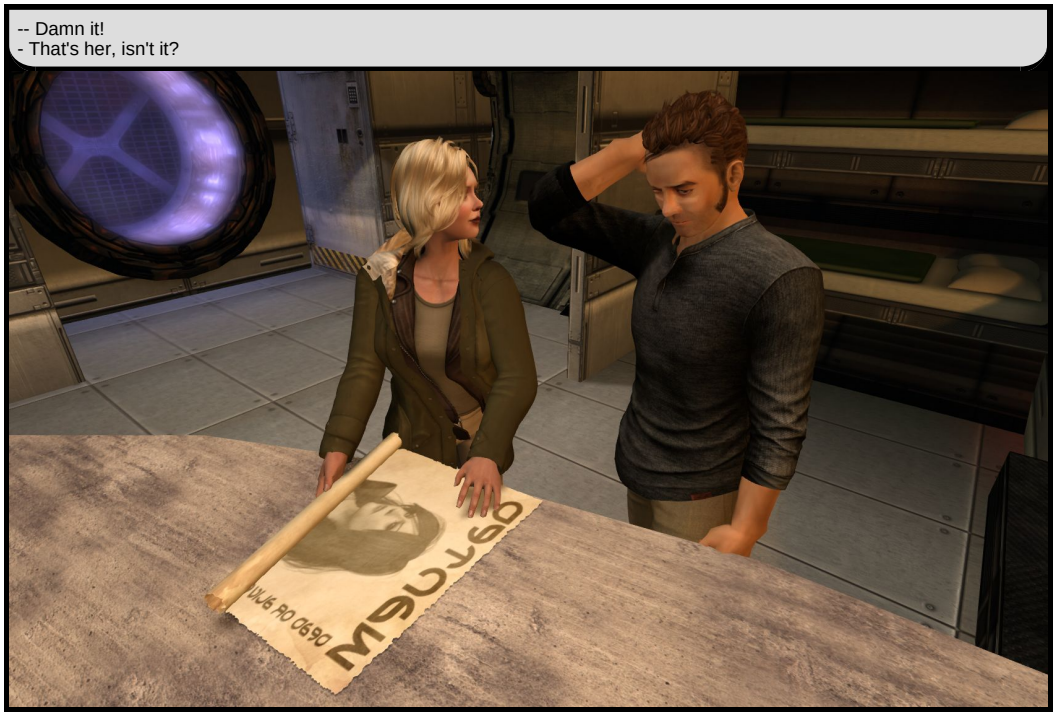


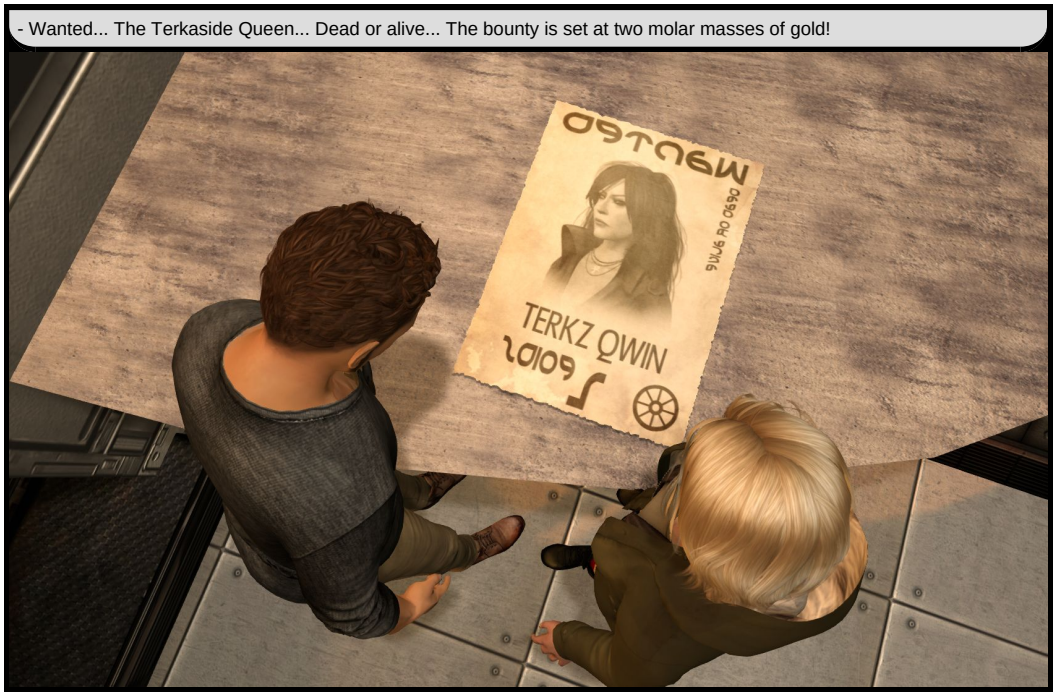

- Where were you? I was getting worried!
-- In the drinking places sector.


-- What?! ...How many times have I told you to never go there alone?

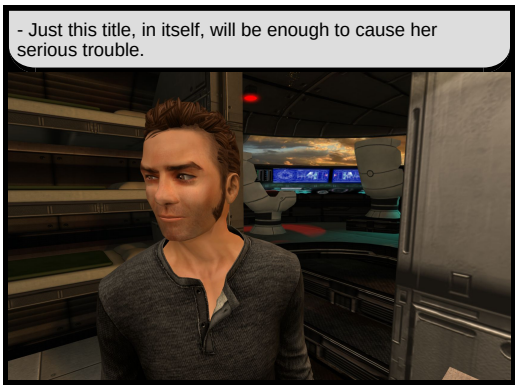

- Relax Boss! I found something!

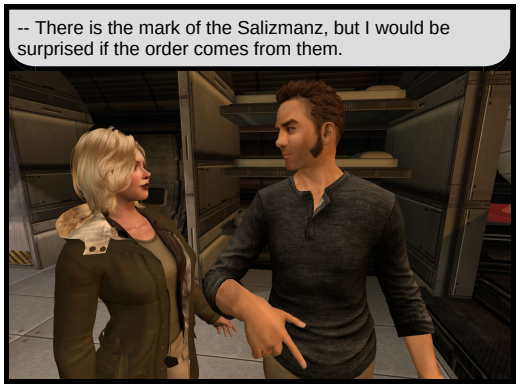

-- Uh?
- There was a little crowd in front of the store. I went to check and I found this.

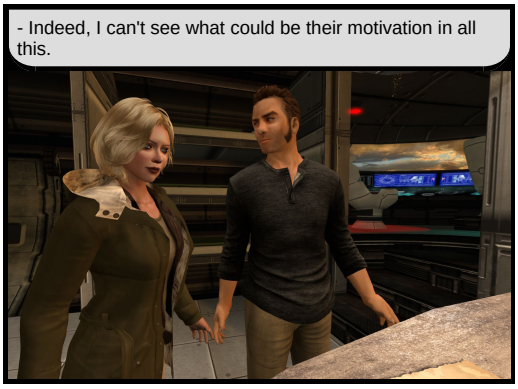

-- Damn it!
- That's her, isn't it?


- Wanted... The Terkaside Queen... Dead or alive... The bounty is set at two molar masses of gold!
TERKZ QWIN


- It's a good amount of gold! This might interest a lot of people!

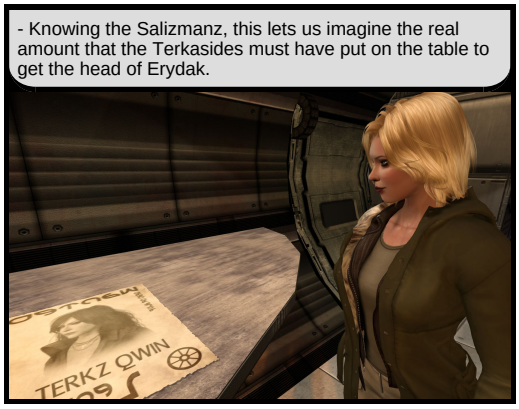

- Just this title, in itself, will be enough to cause her serious trouble.

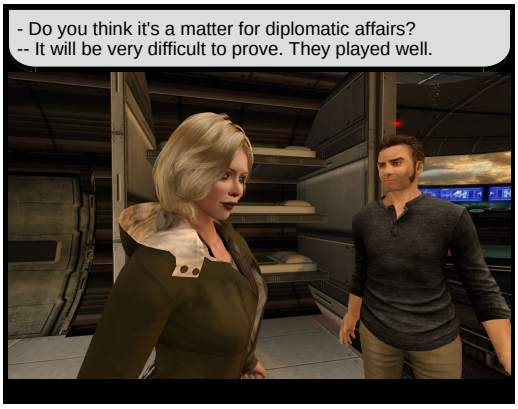

-- There is the mark of the Salizmanz, but I would be surprised if the order comes from them.

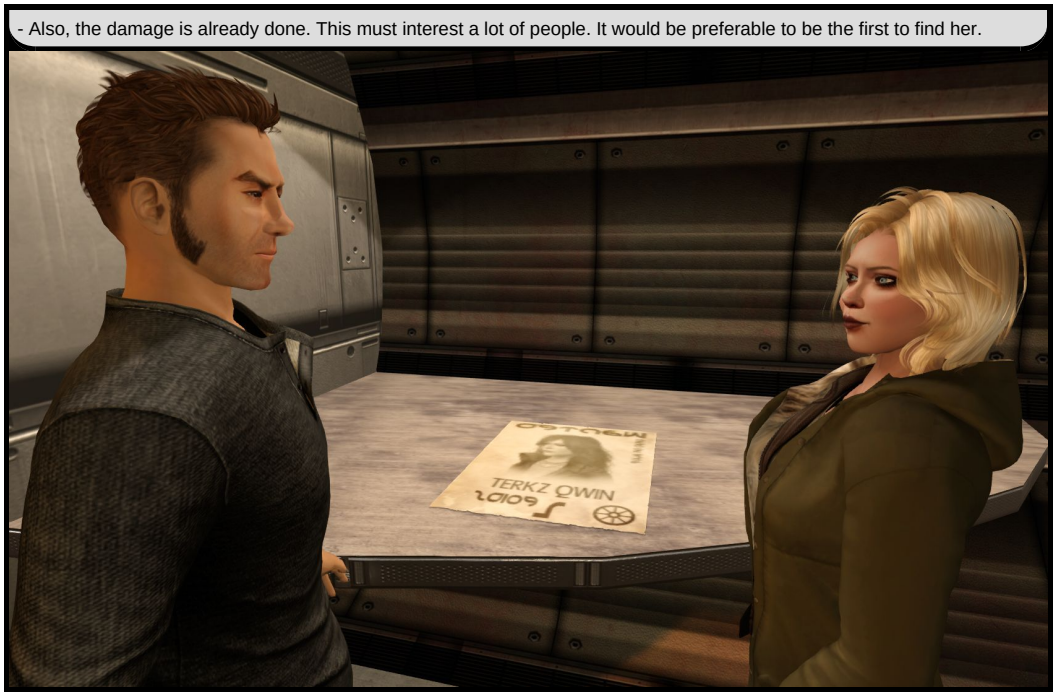

- Indeed, I can't see what could be their motivation in all this.


- They took great care to not write her name but to use a racist title instead of it.


-- A contract from our southern friends?
- It's more than likely.


- Knowing the Salizmanz, this lets us imagine the real amount that the Terkasides must have put on the table to get the head of Erydak.
TERKZ QWIN


- Do you think it's a matter for diplomatic affairs?
-- It will be very difficult to prove. They played well.


- Also, the damage is already done. This must interest a lot of people. It would be preferable to be the first to find her.
TERKZ QWIN

At dawn...



((Oww! My back... Great! I slept in this position... Oh! Alezia?))



((She's still feverish...))



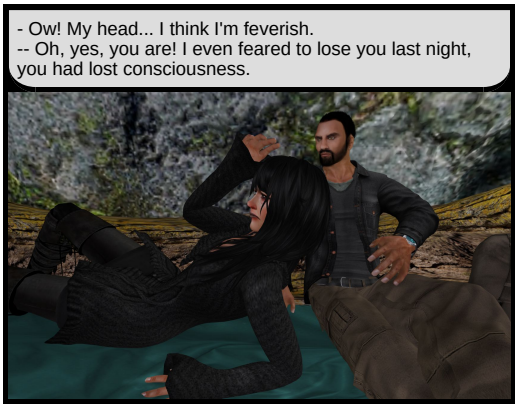
- Uh? ...Where am I?
-- Good morning! It's good to see you alive!



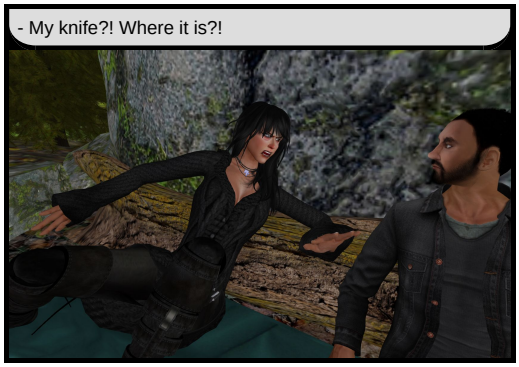
- How do you feel?
-- Hmm... Not good.




-- Uh... Is my head is resting on your thighs?
- Yeah! :-)

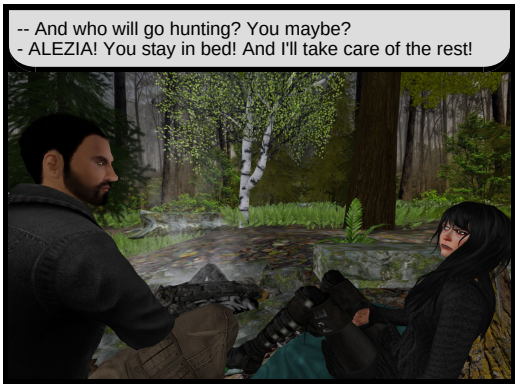

- Ow! My head... I think I'm feverish.
-- Oh, yes, you are! I even feared to lose you last night, you had lost consciousness.


- Ow! It's not good.
-- You'd better stay in bed.

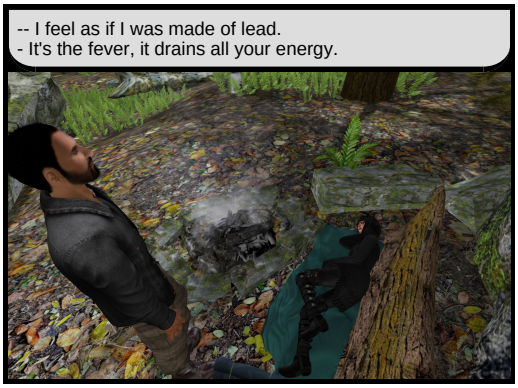

- My knife?! Where it is?!

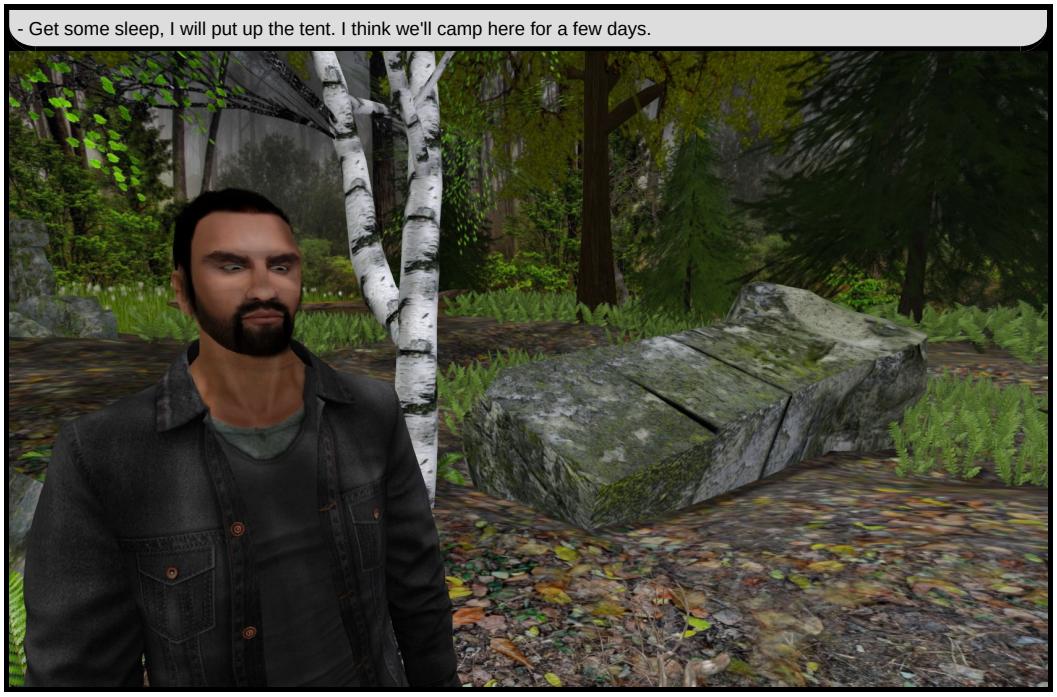

-- Relax! It's right here. I didn't want you to cut yourself.


- Never hide my knife! Is that clear!
-- Yes! Understood! But for now, you need to recover.
TOC!


-- And who will go hunting? You maybe?
- ALEZIA! You stay in bed! And I'll take care of the rest!


- Alright! No need to shout.


-- I feel as if I was made of lead.
- It's the fever, it drains all your energy.


- Get some sleep, I will put up the tent. I think we'll camp here for a few days.

Later...



-- Ouch! Have I slept long?
- At least four hours.



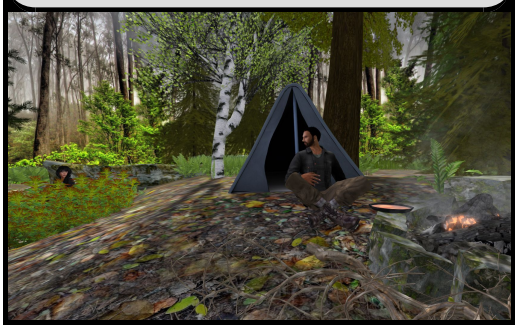
- What are you doing?
-- I'm preparing a soup with the remaining pheasant. You must be hungry. Aren't you?



- Yeah, but first I have to pee.
-- Uh, yes... Don't go too far.



-- I haven't asked, do you feel better?
- Not really!... But, could you please look somewhere else?



-- This sudden fever, do you think it could be related to our visit near the wreck?



-- Are you serious with that question?
- Well, we went there and you got sick, exactly like the James's wife and his daughter.



-- Roland! I've not been irradiated! Nor you, by the way!
- How can you so sure of that?



-- If it was the case, James would be death for years.
- Hmm... Maybe...



- Don't tell me you have no idea why I'm struck by this fever!
-- No, but please, enlighten me.




- That's because I put my tongue in your mouth! That's why I'm sick!
-- Oh! I haven't thought about this.
- You passed me one of your prehistoric viruses against which I had no defense! That's what happened!


- Really... So this is a good news.
-- What?! I could have died and you consider this as a good news!
-- Uh, no! This is a good news because, now, it will be settled for doing it again. ;-)
- Sure! In your dreams!
- So it was just a manipulation of yours to prevent me from leaving. Is that right?


-- Hmm... So? What have you put in that soup?

-- Pheasant and ogemes stock. Full of good things for you. Careful, it's hot.



- This is good... Too bad we only have a frying pan for cooking.
-- I agree, a saucepan would be more useful.



- I would be curious to know what were those building around us. It seems that only the stone has stood the test of time.

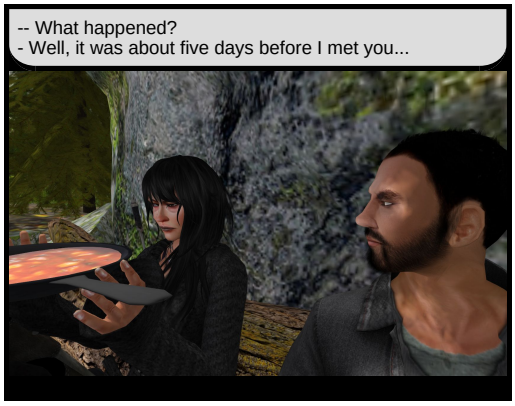


- This is probably Dallusian. It must have been an important building to deserve being built of stone. It reminds me of the ruins where I was when that silly camel abandoned me.



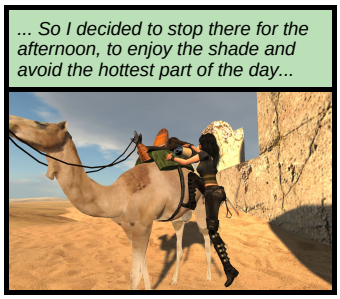
-- A camel? You were serious with that? It wasn't a joke? - No, it wasn't. This dirty beast has really pissed me off.




-- What happened?
- Well, it was about five days before I met you...


... I was crossing the desert, coming from Teris where I had "borrowed" a camel. It was the ideal means of transportation to avoid long-range detection systems...


... The crossing went well until I came across a group of ruins in the middle of the driest part of the desert...


... So I decided to stop there for the afternoon, to enjoy the shade and avoid the hottest part of the day...

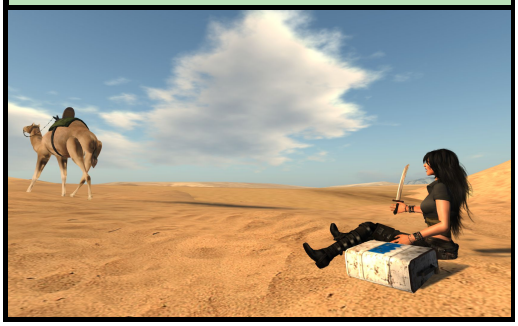

... I began to unload the camel, starting with my bag...


... When suddenly, the silly beast became agitated...

... I tried to restrain it, but it was pulling harder and harder...



... I was lucky to cut the strap to take my tank of water just before it ran away.



- I was really angry to see it run away with my machine gun still hooked to the saddle.
-- Did it come back?



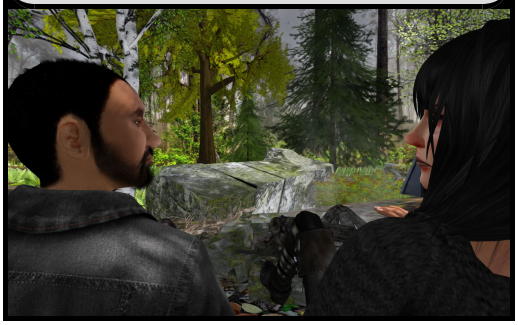
... No, and about one hour later, I understood why he wanted to leave...



... A sandstorm swept across the desert... But fortunately, I still had my Kronwey's tent...



- A Kronwey's tent?
-- Yes, It's a safety tent, specially designed in case of sandstorm.



... This is a small conical tent, with rigid base without a floor, and four handles inside...



... I don't know if I would have survived without it. I had to lift it several times to avoid being buried alive...



... The next day, I found the camel's body half buried. But no trace of my machine gun...



- You still have fever.
-- Yeah, I better try to sleep.



At nightfall...



- Looks like it's gonna be a cold night. It's still spring.
-- Yeah, but with that wall behind, this is quite comfortable.



-- Uh! Wait a minute... Are you serious?
- About what?



- You're not gonna smoke with the fever you have!
-- Of course I'm gonna do it! I do need to sleep.



-- Come on! You're not helping your body to recover!
- You're not going to decide for me! So shut up!




- Oh! ...Alright! ...In that case, I'll smoke too!
((!))

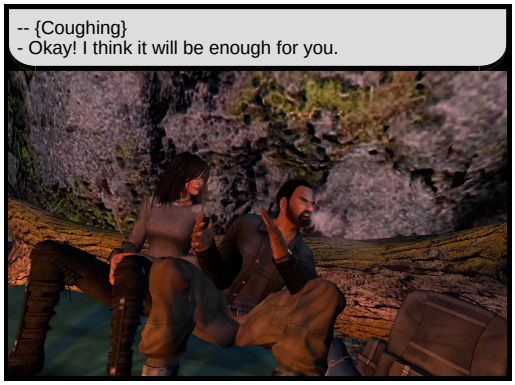

- Roland, what are you doing?
-- I'm going to smoke with you.


- But, you don't want to do this!
-- Oh yes! You're not reasonable, so why should I be too?

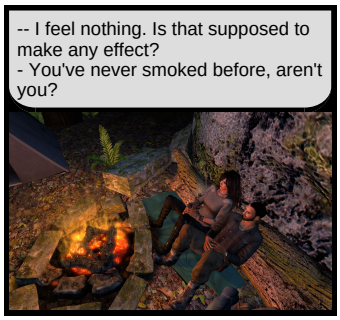

- Alright then, if you really want to do this...

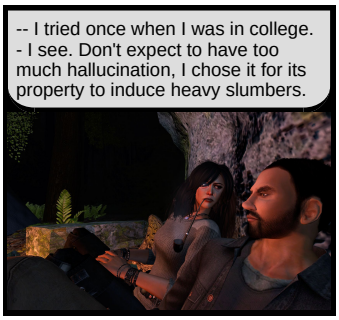

-- This is not any opiate, isn't it?
- No, it's not.

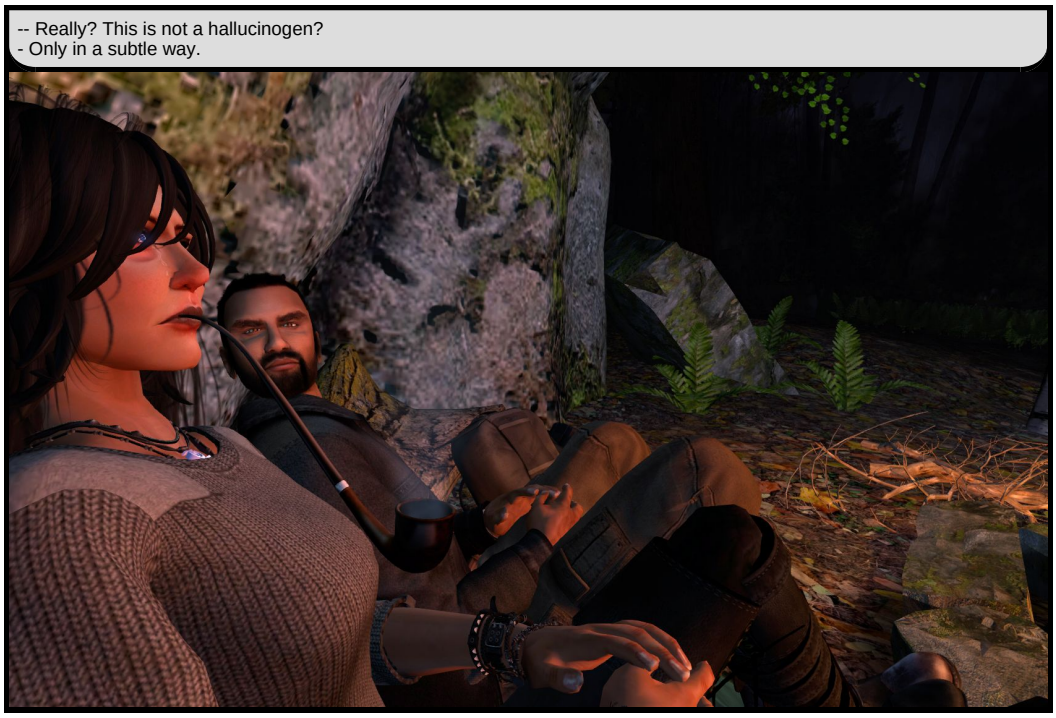

- Take it easy.


-- {Coughing}
- Okay! I think it will be enough for you.


-- Ouch! I almost ripped my lungs!


-- I feel nothing. Is that supposed to make any effect?
- You've never smoked before, aren't you?


-- I tried once when I was in college.
- I see. Don't expect to have too much hallucination, I chose it for its property to induce heavy slumbers.


-- Really? This is not a hallucinogen?
- Only in a subtle way.

Fifteen minutes later...



-- Alezia, are you sleeping?
- Hmm? No... I don't think so...



-- That friend of yours...
- Friend? ...What friend? ...I don't have any friends...



-- ((?!)) Yeah, you know, the one you said to have been killed by Slonk...
- Ah! ...Ima ...Yes, she was my friend...



-- Do you remember the morning of that day when it happened?
- (!) Of course I remember, why are you asking?



-- What did you do that morning?
- Uh... Well... I was with her in her new apartment.



-- Please, tell me what you did that morning.
- Hmm... We got up late...



... I had helped her to move into a new apartment, I was staying to prevent a relapse. The last weeks had been particularly difficult, she was completing a withdrawal from heroin...



...So we got up around ten o'clock, then took a too light breakfast.



-- And then what did you do?
- Hmm... Well...



...We decided to go to the market together. I had the time, I was on leave for the whole week...



...We bought what we needed for the next days. It was a very nice sunny day...



...But while we were returning to the apartment, we were waited in the alley. Four of the Slonk's bastards had found us...



...They didn't give us any chance. They hit me first, quickly and strongly... I lost consciousness...



...When I regained my senses, a man was chaining me up to a wooden pillar...



... Ima was chained up on a crate in front of me, lying on her back... We were in some kind of warehouse... Several men were present...



-- Do you remember all those men? How many were there?
- Yes, I remember very well. Luxor Slonk and six of his men. Two civilians: the man by the name of Doryne, and Jorg Halzon. Four servicemen: the soldiers Willo Trice, Zhorack Kunfil, the brothers Karl and Jak Sifon.



-- What happened next?
- (Sigh.) They...

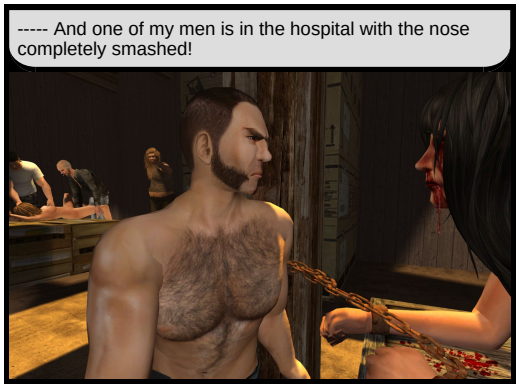


-- So bitch! You wanted to show us how to run our business!



----- A full cargo of heroin completely destroyed because of you!




----- And one of my men is in the hospital with the nose completely smashed!

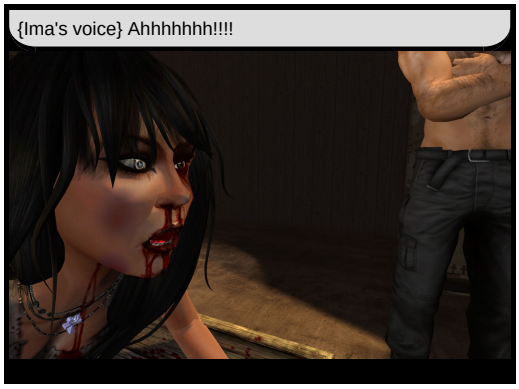

----- Do you really think that you can put your nose in our business?!
PAF !


- You thought that you could take me one girl? ...Okay, dirty slut, I'll give you her...

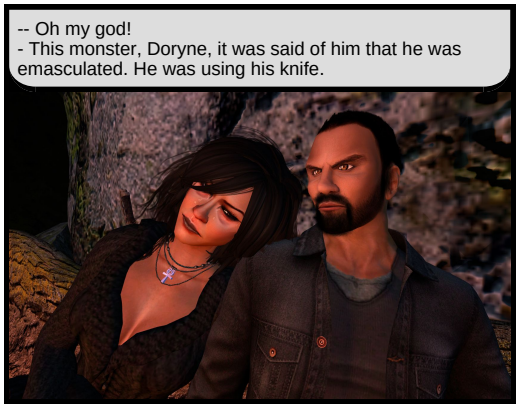

-- Now, bitch, look carefully! I will give her to you! ... Guys! Show this bitch how we proceed!

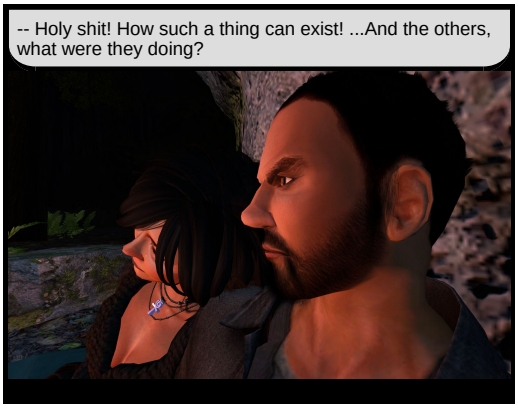


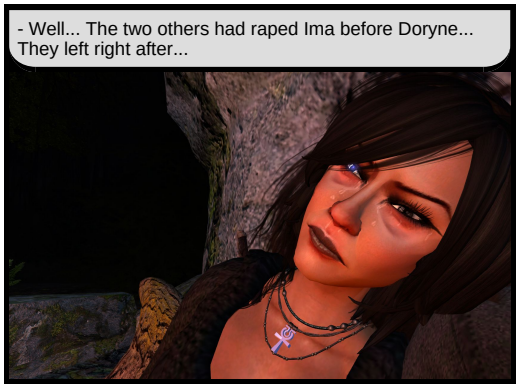

--- Do you like my knife, honey? Do you like it?
-- No, please, no... Noooooooo! Ahhhhhhh!


{Ima's voice} Ahhhhhhh!!!!


-- Ahhhhhhh!!!! Ahhhh!!!
--- Yes baby, do you feel how hard I am...


-- Oh my god!
- This monster, Doryne, it was said of him that he was emasculated. He was using his knife.


-- Holy shit! How such a thing can exist! ...And the others, what were they doing?


- Well... The two others had raped Ima before Doryne...
They left right after...

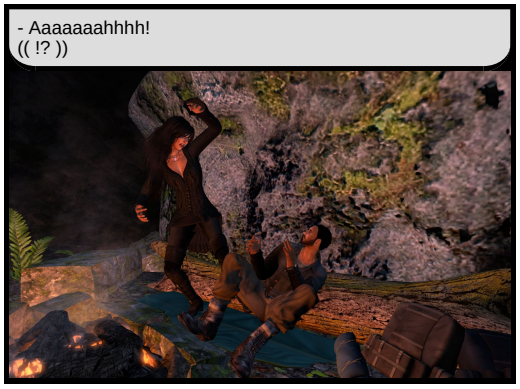

- Slonk was still there, watching...
-- Weren't you talking about six men?

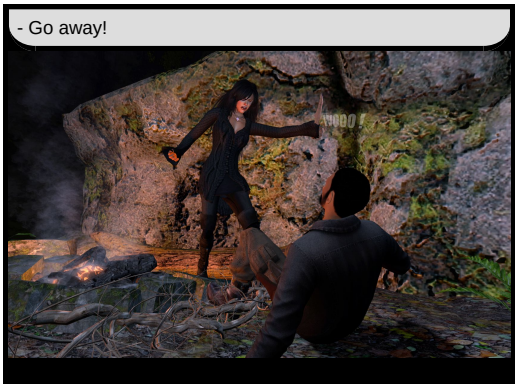

- Yeah... That's right... There were three others... Where were they?







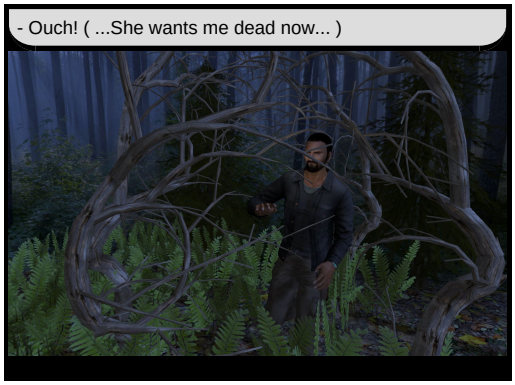

- Aaaaaaahhhh!
((!?))

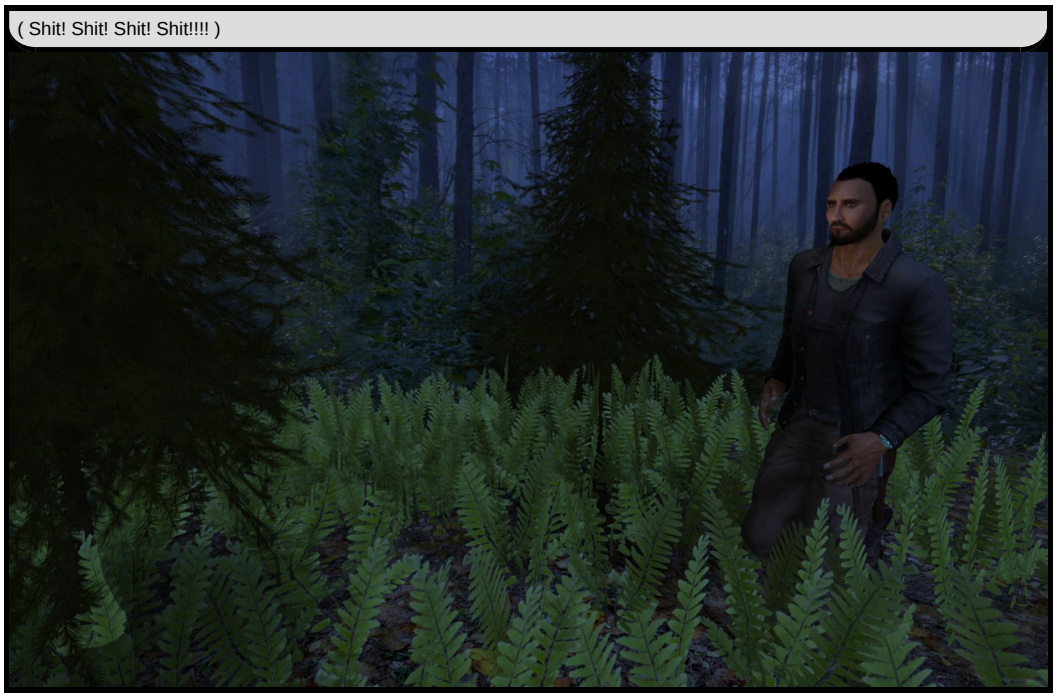

- Go away!

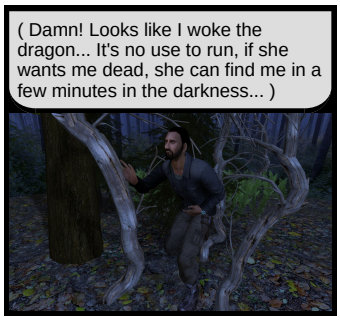

- Aaarrrshh! GO AWAY!

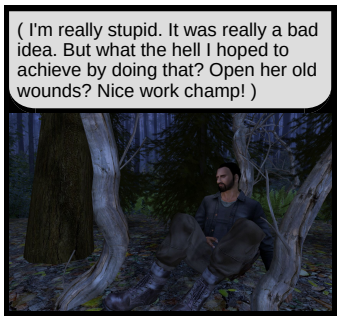

- GO!...
-- But...

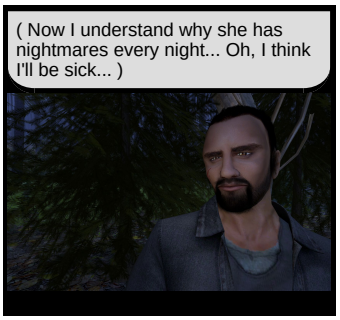

-- ...AWAY!!!!!
(Oh shit!)

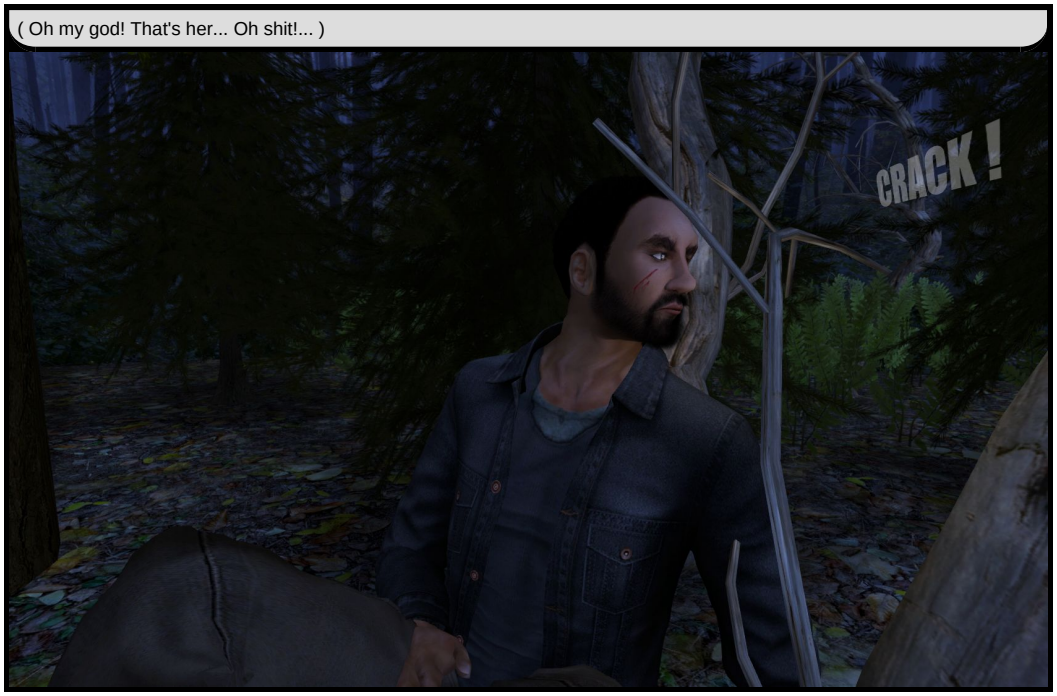

- Ouch! (...She wants me dead now...)

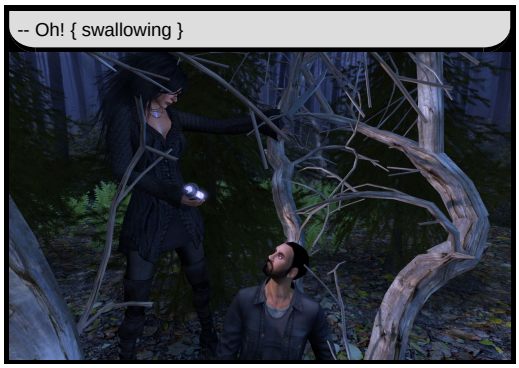

(Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit!!!!)

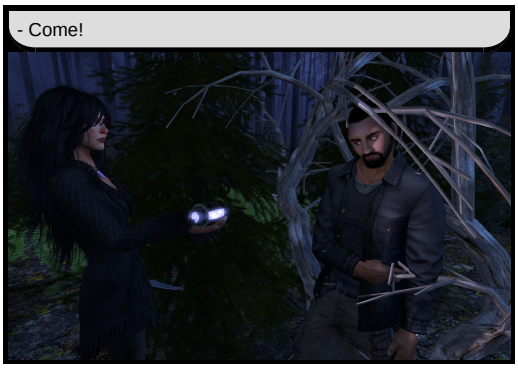

(Damn! Looks like I woke the dragon... It's no use to run, if she wants me dead, she can find me in a few minutes in the darkness...)


(I'm really stupid. It was really a bad idea. But what the hell I hoped to achieve by doing that? Open her old wounds? Nice work champ!)


(Now I understand why she has nightmares every night... Oh, I think I'll be sick...)


(Oh my god! That's her... Oh shit!...)
CRACK !


-- Oh! { swallowing }


- Come!


- Sit down!


((...You can be sure this is the last time I smoke.))

In the morning...



(Ouch! My back... Alezia is already up? Where did she go?)



(Two hares! She went hunting!)



(Ow! I still feel woozy... But where is she?)



((There she is!))



-- Ahem!... Hi!... I just saw the two hares, so you really went hunting?
- Yes, it's what I did.



-- Uh... How do you feel this morning?
- I feel extraordinarily well!



-- Oh! No more fever?
- I feel as if someone has removed an arrow from my back. And yes, the fever is gone.



- What about you?
-- Well, I've had better mornings. This stuff we smoked, I think I still feel the effects.



- Yeah, it takes some time to dissipate.
-- And to conclude, I must have slept on a rock...



-- Uh... About yesterday... I'm really sorry.
- You don't have to be sorry, Roland.



- Actually, it's me who should apologize, for that nasty cut on your face.
-- Oh! This is just a little scratch.



-- Can I ask you what happened?
- Well, How to explain?...



- Sometimes when a situation becomes too extreme, the brain, to protect itself from the trauma, may decide to deliberately block some memories out.



- When you made me relive that day, you led me to some details that unveiled things that only my unconscious was remembering.



- The truth, Roland, is that while they were torturing Ima to death in front of



...They were raping me!



-- Oh my god, Alezia, how did you survive to all this?
- I have been lucky I guess... Slonk, after having planted an ax in the body of Ima, asked Doryne to finish me off before leaving...



...He probably thought I was completely stunned... I grabbed him by the hair, using all my strength, sending his head hit the post...



...It allowed me to take his knife to kill him... That same knife I had when you met me, and that I was reserving for Slonk...



...It took me at least three hours to cut the wooden post to remove the chain from it. My hands were bleeding...



...I had to remove the ax from the Ima's body to be able to cut my chains...



...Then I found my pants abandoned in a corner, but no trace of my boots. Once outside, just in front of the door, I found a jerrycan of gasoline. I deduced that it had been left there for Doryne...



...I had blood everywhere, I was leaving a warehouse with two dead bodies inside. Six men wanted me dead and burned. Being Rantarian, I couldn't trust the Dallusian army's system of justice. So I went back inside with the jerrycan...



...And I lit it on fire... That day, a part of me stayed in that warehouse...



...To go home, I had to walk at least 20 kems, barefoot, armed with the ax, staying away from the road to avoid bad encounters. I felt so alone... So fucking alone...

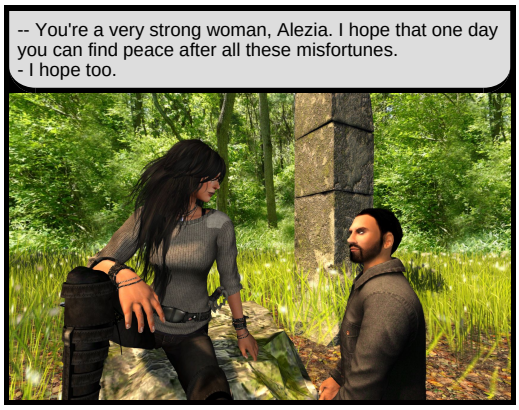


- Can you believe it, Roland? That I couldn't remember to have been raped, during all those years.
-- This has been extremely traumatic.




- When I went home that day, my whole body ached. I took a bath, and I slept two days.


- Now, when I think about all this, I can see all the little details that I could have read as a clue for remembering.


-- You're a very strong woman, Alezia. I hope that one day you can find peace after all these misfortunes.
- I hope too.


- It's also good to see you back in shape!


- Yeah, and I'm starving! :)
-- Oh! So let me go cook those hares! I will try to not burn them this time. :)

Meanwhile in Jijuterk...



- How is he doing?
-- He regained consciousness early this morning. He's still weakened, but he's healthy. In fact, better now than when he arrived, we've removed a cancerous tumor.



-- Can he speak?
- Yes, he can. But his accent is really not common.



-- I give you ten minutes.
- Okay, thank you.



-- Hi, I'm Commissioner Oclan Karterz.
- Mr. Commissioner...



- Someone may have told you why you are here?
-- Yes, I was taken prisoner!



-- This is partially true... Uh... Mister?...
- Sway, James Sway.



- Mr. Sway, can you explain to me why you attacked my agent?
-- You mean the man who came to my house in his flying machine?



- Uh... Yes, this man. His intention was simply to speak with you.



- I did this because he was one of yours. You who sent this gigantic building collapsing in the woods behind my house!



-- Gigantic building? You mean the crash site?
- Yeah, this dirty thing that made my wife and my daughter sick!



- Sick? Where are they now? Maybe we can still treat them...
-- They are dead for years! Why did you send that thing?!



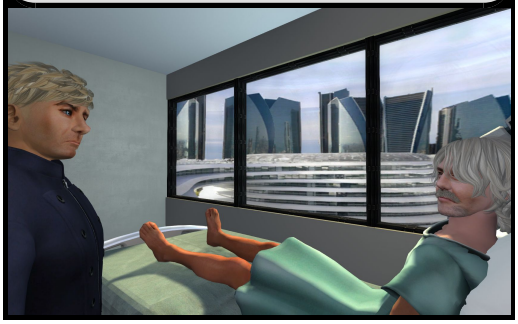
--- But Mr. Sway, we didn't send it, it was an accident!
- They told me that the blue fluid has killed my wife and my daughter!

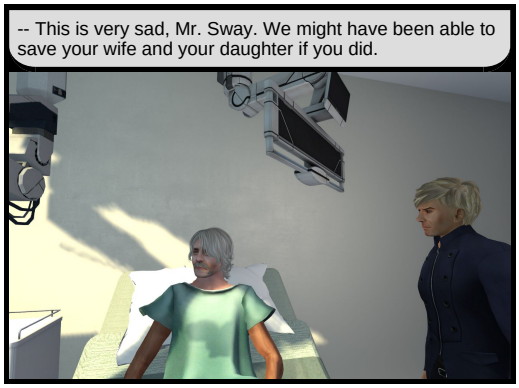


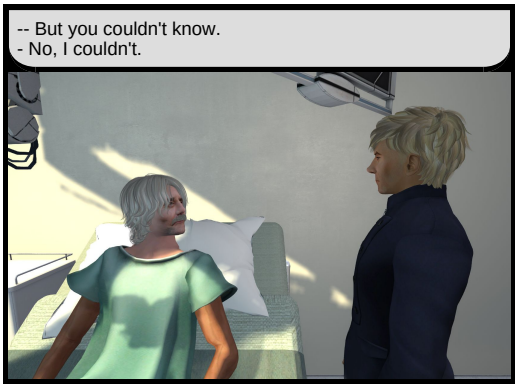
-- They have been in contact with the contamination?
- Yes... That's what happened.



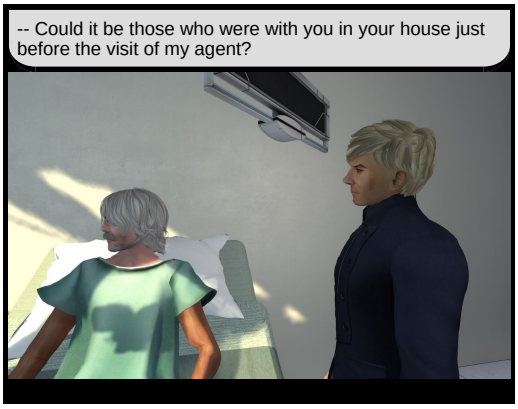
- My Goodness! You didn't try to contact the team sent on the site after the crash, did you?
-- We... We didn't want any trouble...




-- This is very sad, Mr. Sway. We might have been able to save your wife and your daughter if you did.


-- But you couldn't know.
- No, I couldn't.


-- You just mentioned that "they" told you about the blue fluid... Can you tell me who exactly told you about this?
- Uh...


-- Could it be those who were with you in your house just before the visit of my agent?


-- The two people with whom you drank kwiza, perhaps?

-- We just want to find them. We have no intention to harm them. Mr. Sway, were you with Erydak?
- I don't know this person you're talking about.



- But I had indeed two guests. Two travelers: Roland Gregory and Alezia... Alezia whom I don't know the family name.
-- That's interesting...



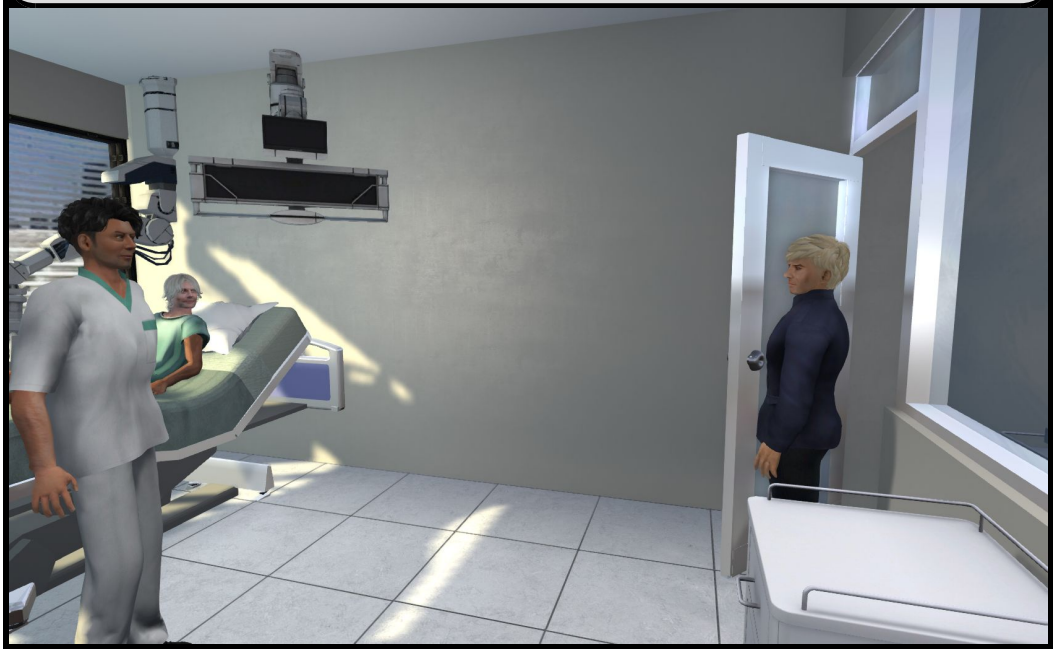
- Have they told you where they were heading?
-- Hmm, that wasn't very clear. They talked about exploring the South, but they've quit by the south-west trail.



-- Hmm... South-west, really?
--- Ahem!
-- Oh! I will let you rest Mr. Sway. And again, I'm very sorry for your wife and your daughter.



--- Oh! By the way, we're not your enemy ... Please, remember this, Mr. Sway.



A few hours later...



-- All these mosquitoes are going to drive me crazy!
- I told you so, and it will worsen, it's not even summer yet.



-- What would you say if we returned gradually toward the ocean? I think we can now take that risk.
- Oh! I wouldn't complain.



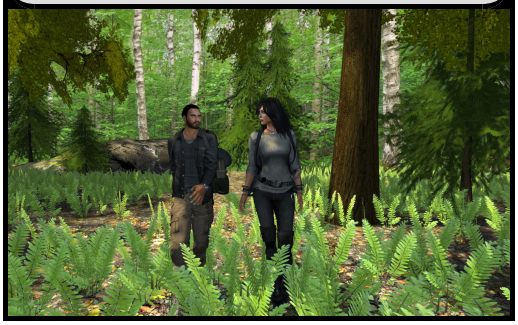
-- We would only have to return to the forest each night for camping. I think that should be okay.
- Hmm... I do not know... On second thought, maybe I will stay here.



-- You what?!
- I was joking! :-) ...So northeast?
-- Yeah, northeast.



- We must be at least one or two days of walk away from the ocean.
-- If it's not from three or four.



- I wanted to ask you, what is this key that you wear at your belt constantly?
-- It's just an old key.



- That must be for something else since you were already wearing it when I met you. It's now clear that it can't open anything.



-- Oh, it was already the case a long time ago before we met. It was the key to the old house where I lived with my parents before the war.



- So it's a souvenir.
-- Well, that's the only link I have left with my childhood. My very short childhood.



-- I wish I had a house someday. As you can see, this is still not happening!
- But there is always room for hope.



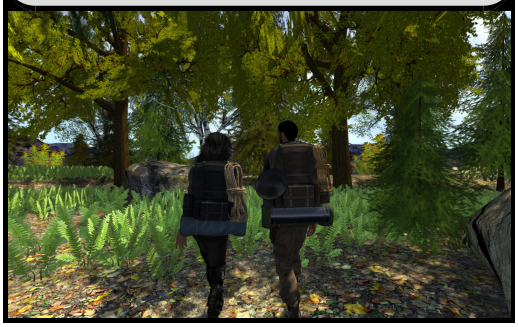
-- Yeah, right. I hoped several times in my life. If possible, I prefer not to have to rely on hope.



- Do you see that? It looks like a clearing a little further.
-- Yes, I see it.



-- A field? Maybe a lake or a very large river?
- We'll know soon enough.



- Damn! What the hell is that?
((!?))





-- This color and this absence of vegetation, is it volcanic? Some mine tailings, maybe?
- Or a contamination?



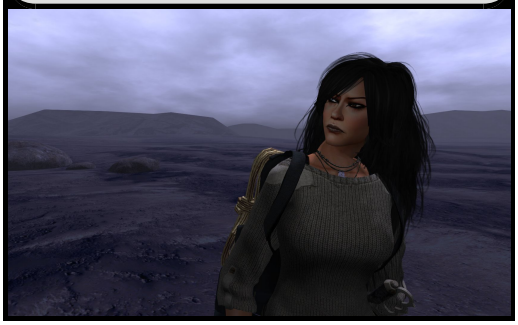
-- It seems to be vast.
- Yes... Very vast... At least, it doesn't seem to emit any form of radiation.

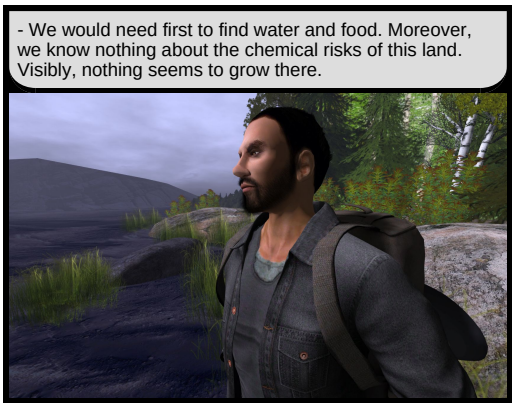


- Can we really take the risk to cross this land?
-- For sure, trying to bypass it on the west side could take a while.

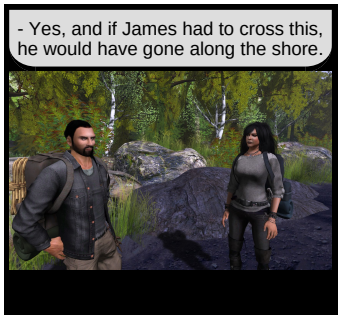


- I would like to see it at night, there is too much parasitic radiation during daylight to be sure that there is any risk for us.

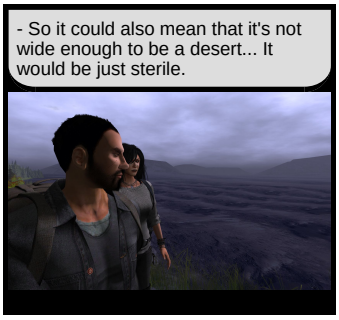


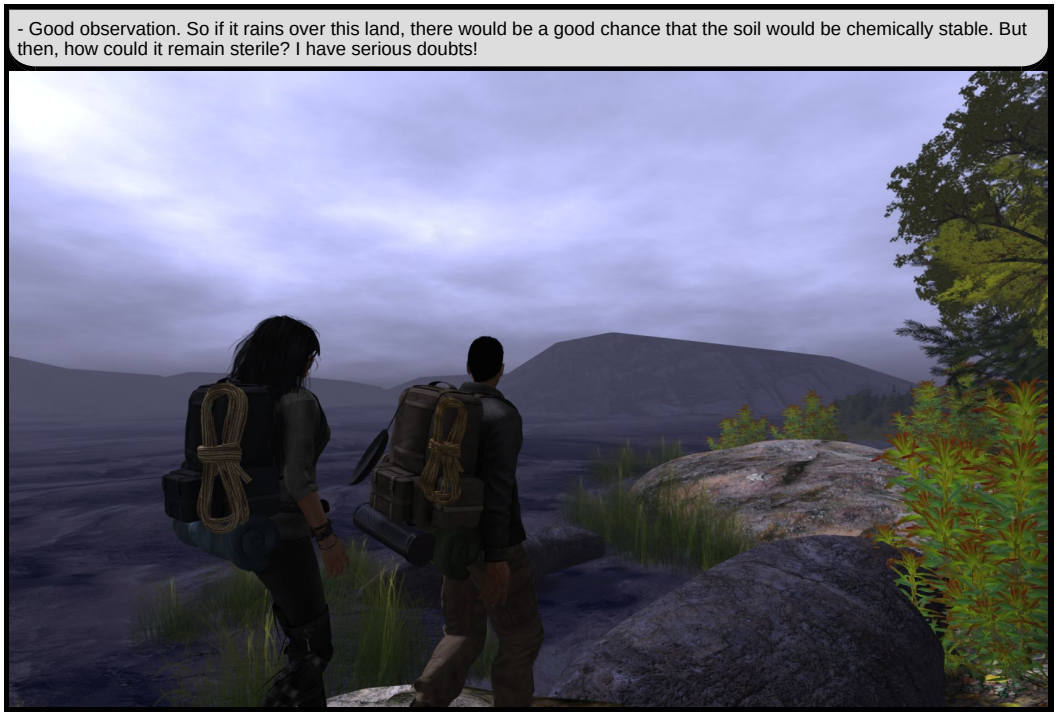

- We would need first to find water and food. Moreover, we know nothing about the chemical risks of this land. Visibly, nothing seems to grow there.


- I suggest that we walk eastward for reaching the ocean. The shore is certainly safer.


- Yes, and if James had to cross this, he would have gone along the shore.

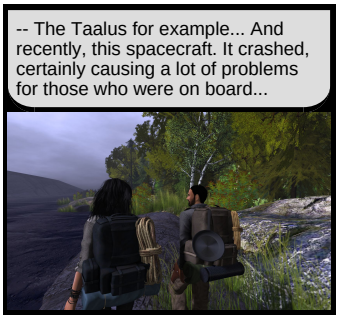

-- The good thing is that there is practically no mosquito.
- For sure, it's not a desert. It has clearly rained here recently.

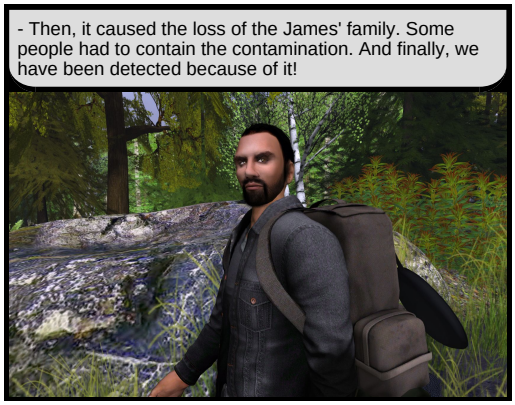

- So it could also mean that it's not wide enough to be a desert... It would be just sterile.

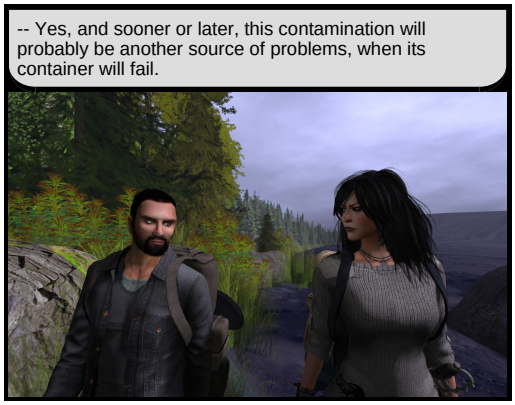

- Good observation. So if it rains over this land, there would be a good chance that the soil would be chemically stable. But then, how could it remain sterile? I have serious doubts!


- I just hope it's not another risky business!
-- We're getting good at this now! ;-)


- Decidedly, there are things that are really sources of problems...


-- The Taalus for example... And recently, this spacecraft. It crashed, certainly causing a lot of problems for those who were on board...


- Then, it caused the loss of the James' family. Some people had to contain the contamination. And finally, we have been detected because of it!


-- Yes, and sooner or later, this contamination will probably be another source of problems, when its container will fail.


- It's the echo of the catastrophe...

The End.

ALEZIA: Erezel Effect

After leaving Terkazy, Roland and Alezia venture north while they are still sought after.

by Zeja Pyle

Contact

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