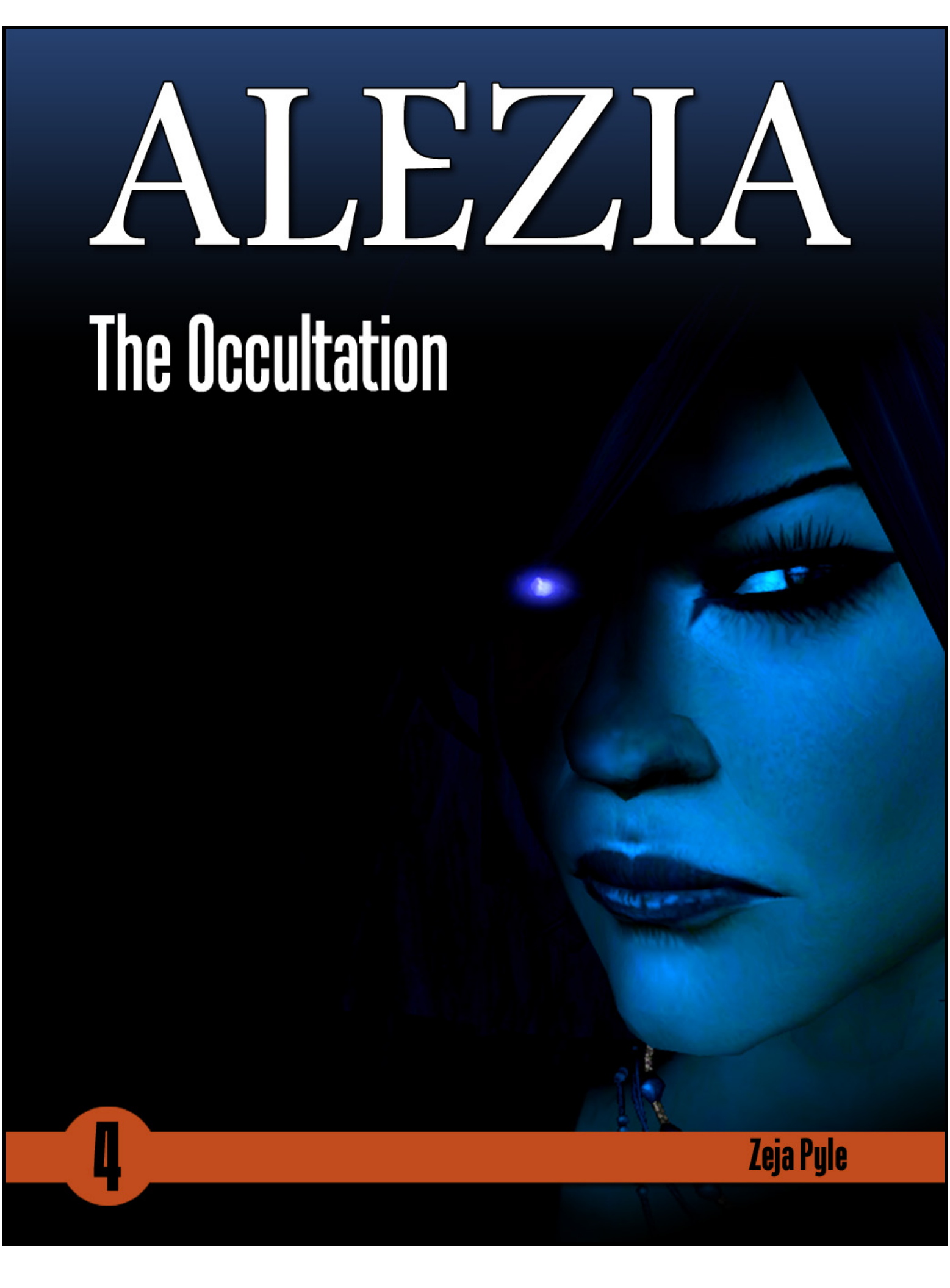
ALEZIA

The Occultation



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Zeja Pyle

ALEZIA: The Occultation

Zeja Pyle

VirZ
PRODUCTIONS

Published in May 2017.
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ISBN 978-0-9937416-6-1

Numeric edition.
Aussi disponible en version française.

VirZ
PRODUCTIONS

VirZ Productions - Editor
Contact Information:

-- Get out!



-- Get out of here, little bastard! No money, no food!
- Ouch! ...But sir, please!




-- I already told you once! I won't tell you a third time!

-- So don't come back here, little thief!
- Ouch!



(Damn fool! ...Ouch! It bleeds a lot...)



-- Bad day, huh?
(!?)




-- It's the reseller, he hurt my hand!

- Where are your parents, little boy?
-- My mother died, and I have no father.



- Don't you have any other relatives?
-- No. She said she wasn't from here.



- What happened to her?
-- She was beaten by thieves, two days ago, during the food distribution.



- Hmm... Do you know why it happened, boy?
-- Why?



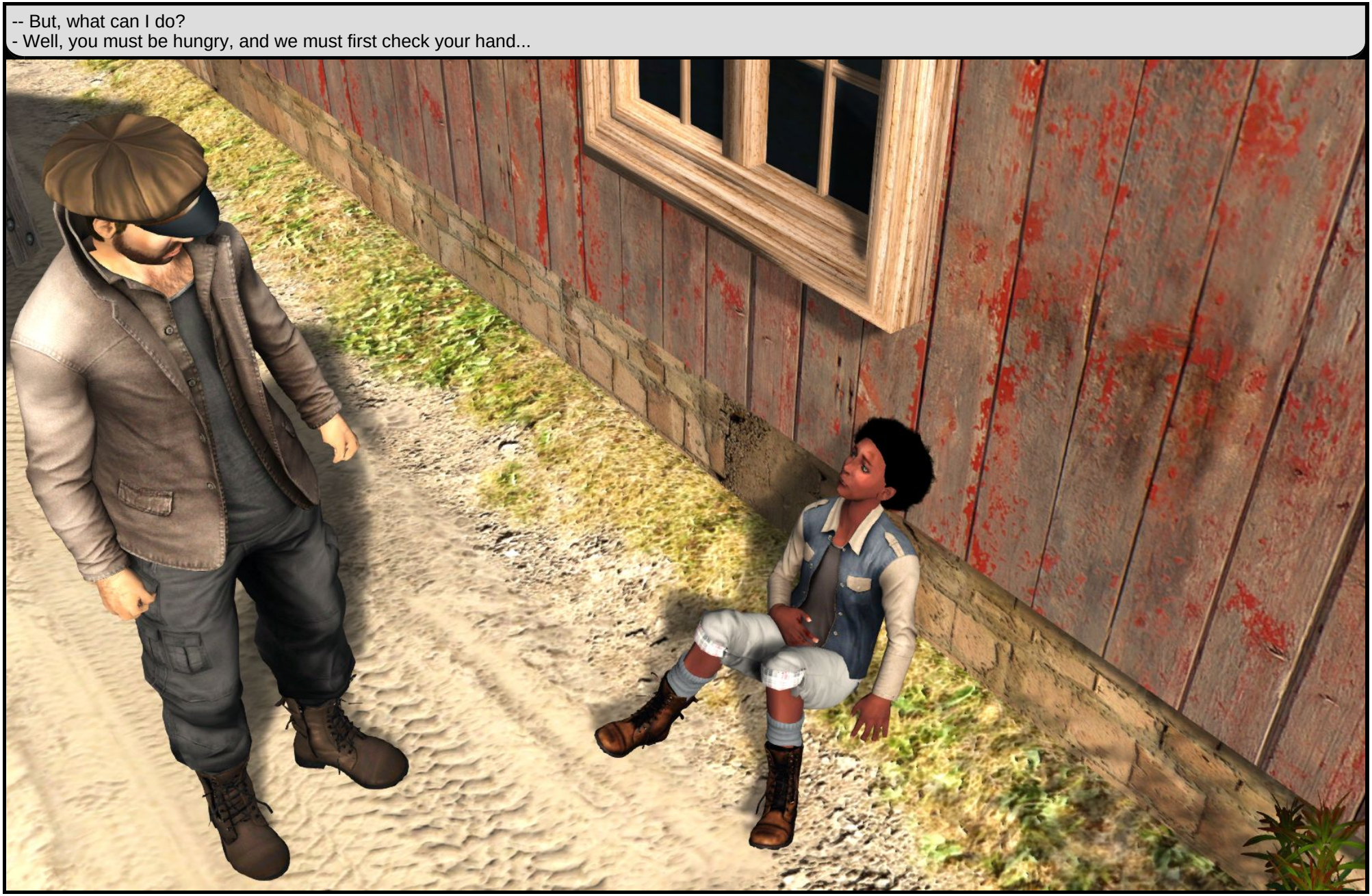
- It's those people in the big cities, they don't want to let us build our world. We are struggling to survive because of them, and some of us turn bad because they need more.

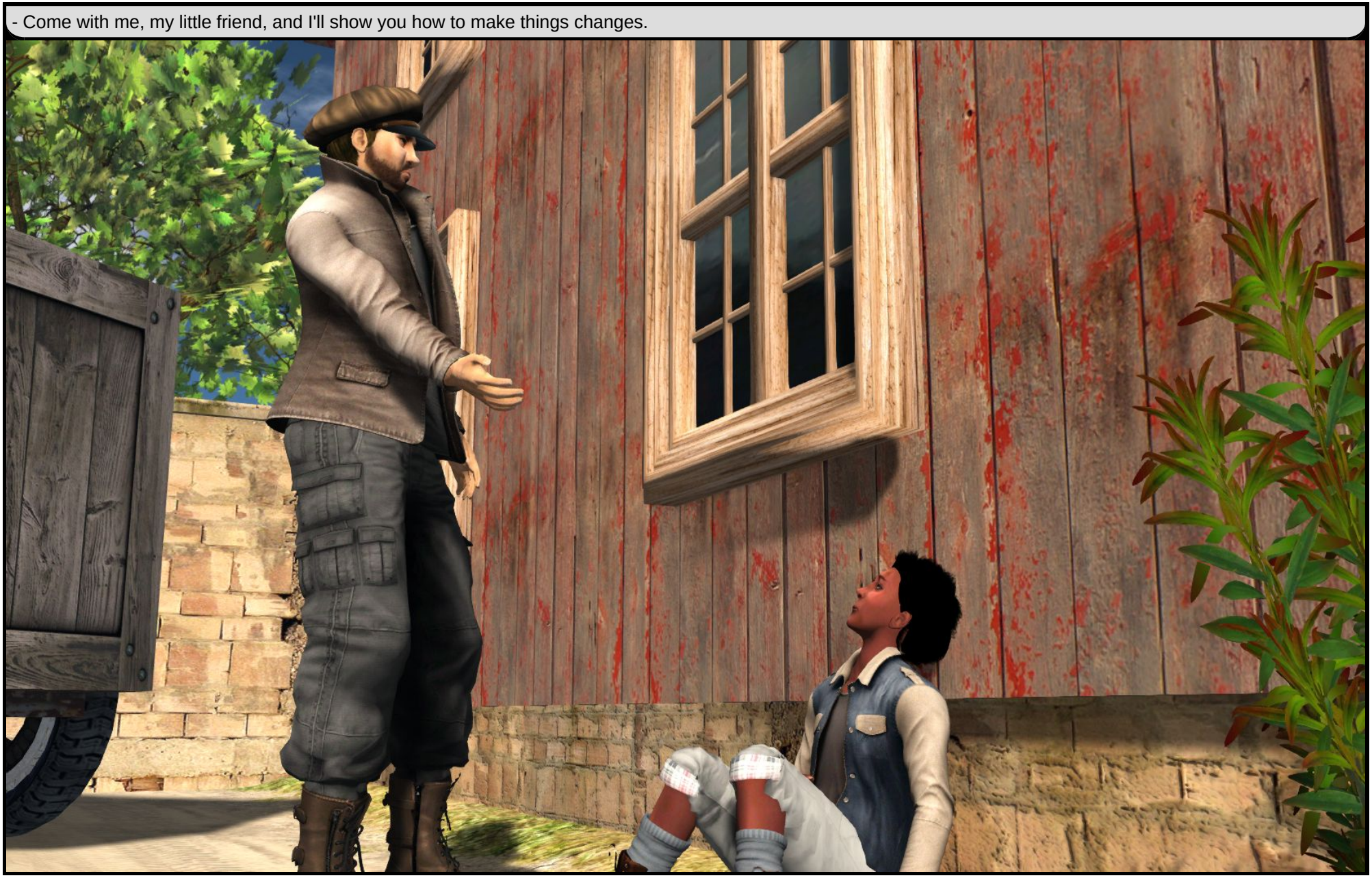



- You see... That's what really killed your mother.

-- Should I turn bad too?
- No, boy. To make things changes, you mustn't.




-- But, what can I do?
- Well, you must be hungry, and we must first check your hand...


- Come with me, my little friend, and I'll show you how to make things changes.

-- What's your name?
- You can call me Vanitan...



Somewhere in the wilderness...



-- What are you doing? Are you sharpening your knife to go hunting? I thought we had enough food with the little deer for still a few days.



-- No, it's for the little pig.
- A pig? You saw a pig?



- Hmm, a kind of.
((?))



- Let me show you. Please, sit down.
((!? ...What's that pig thing?))



- It's right here!
-- Hey!



-- Ouch! What are you doing?
- Be quiet little pig, it's the big day!



-- What big day?
- It's not gonna hurt if you stay relaxed.



-- What the hell is that? ...Oh! No! No! No!
- Aww, you're going to be handsome!



-- You won't use your big knife on my face! Alezia! This is not fun!
- I think you should consider stop moving.



-- And what is that stuff, by the way?
- Hmm... Are you sure you want to know?



-- Of course I want to know!
- Well... The unusable remains of our soap... And a kind of lubricant that you certainly don't want to know the origin.



- This is my face, I think I have a right to know!



-- Oh! Great!



- Now, stop whining and stay put!
-- Oh! sh... (...it!)



- You'll be cute as before!
-- You, creepy woman, don't cut my skin!



- Don't be rude, it's me who has the knife.
-- Hummf...

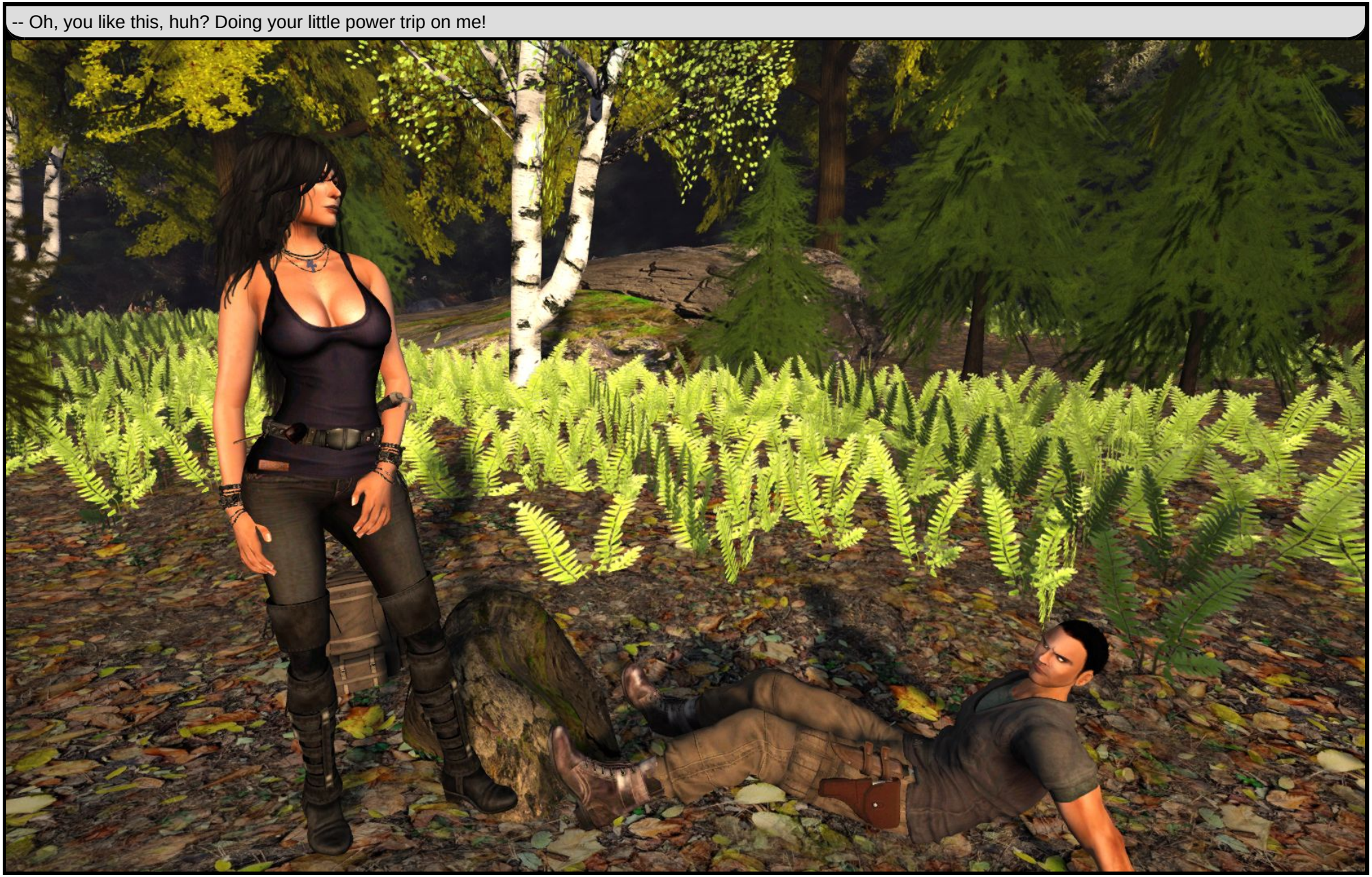


- That's it, I'm almost done!



- You see, it wasn't so bad... Huh?




-- Oh, you like this, huh? Doing your little power trip on me!

- Ah, come on! Stop it, Roland. I could feel your erection while I was giving you the shave!



- Do you know that you stink at least as much as me?
-- Yeah, don't remind me! You don't know what I would give for a hot bath.



-- Not even a little stream for days, it would be a good if we could reach the ocean.
- Apparently, it's further than we expected.



- It would be much faster through the dark lands. That would be like walking on a sidewalk. We could progress at least four times faster than taking by the forest.



- That's right. Maybe we can go directly northeast to reach the ocean. We have the food, probably enough water too. It couldn't be worst than in the desert.



-- So, shall we change course tomorrow?
- Yes, let's do this.



- You were right, it's much better without the beard. Excellent work!
-- I told you at least a hundred times...



The next day...



- I don't like this place. There is something wrong here.
-- Yeah, I see what you mean.




-- There is such a negative vibe.

- At least, it's like we said: "It's easy to walk."



- I don't know what happened here, but even the sky seems affected.



-- Is it only me for whom the air feels weird on the skin?



-- I feel it too, it gives the creeps.



Later...



- Ruins, again. Even the stone is blackened.



- Maybe we are in the trace left by any disaster.



- As after the use of some kind of weapon of mass destruction? I never heard about grounds that stay blackened permanently, did you?
-- No, I didn't.



- Maybe this is another crash site.
-- Hmm, in this case, it would have been gigantic...



- Oh! That, on the other hand, it doesn't bode well!
((?!))



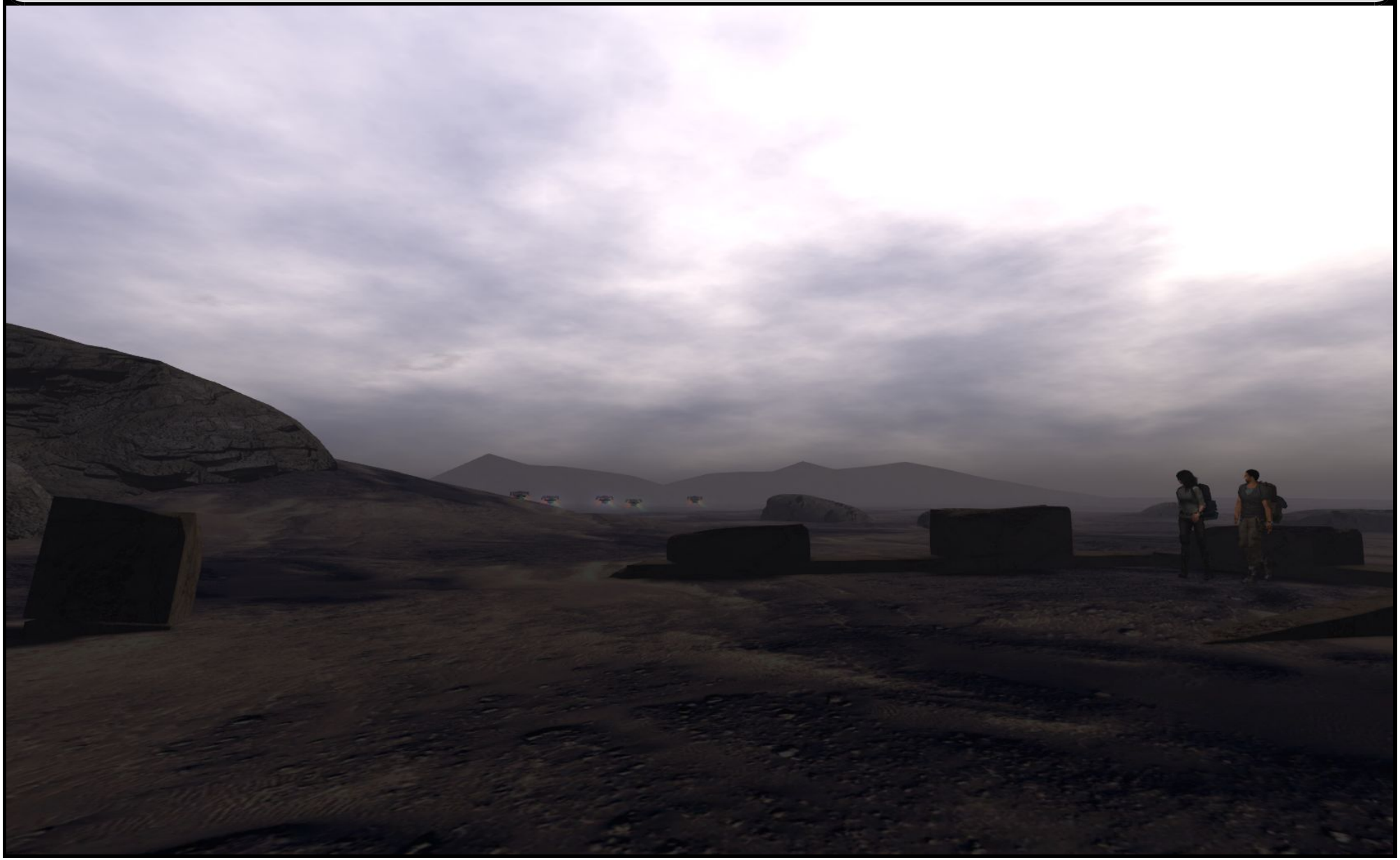
- Is that what I think it is?
-- Yep, and they will be on us very soon.



-- And we're in open ground, which doesn't leave too many possibilities for escape.



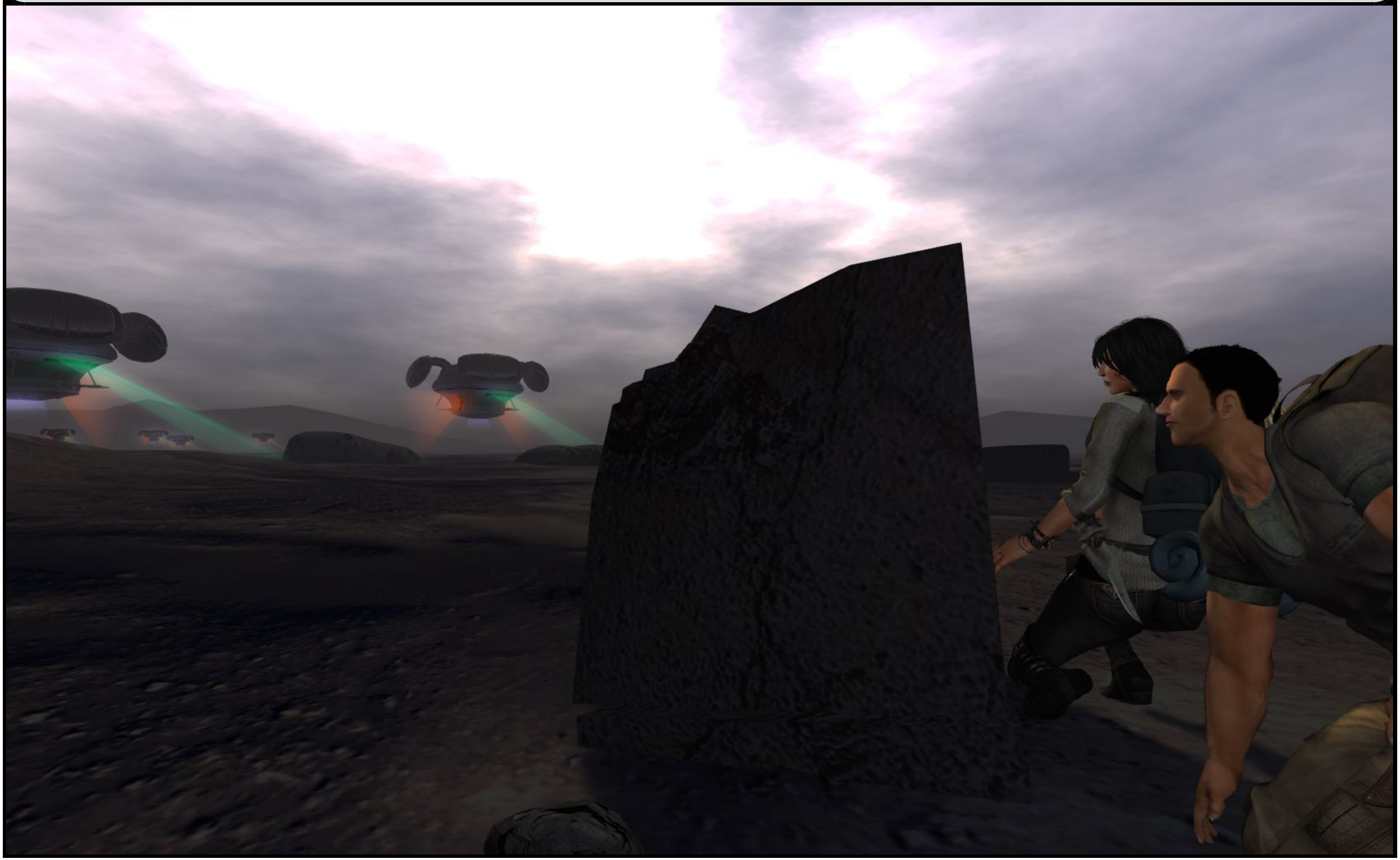
-- It was to happen sooner or later.
- I know... Let's at least hide behind that piece of ruin over there.



-- I highly doubt we can avoid being found by their electric fields detectors.

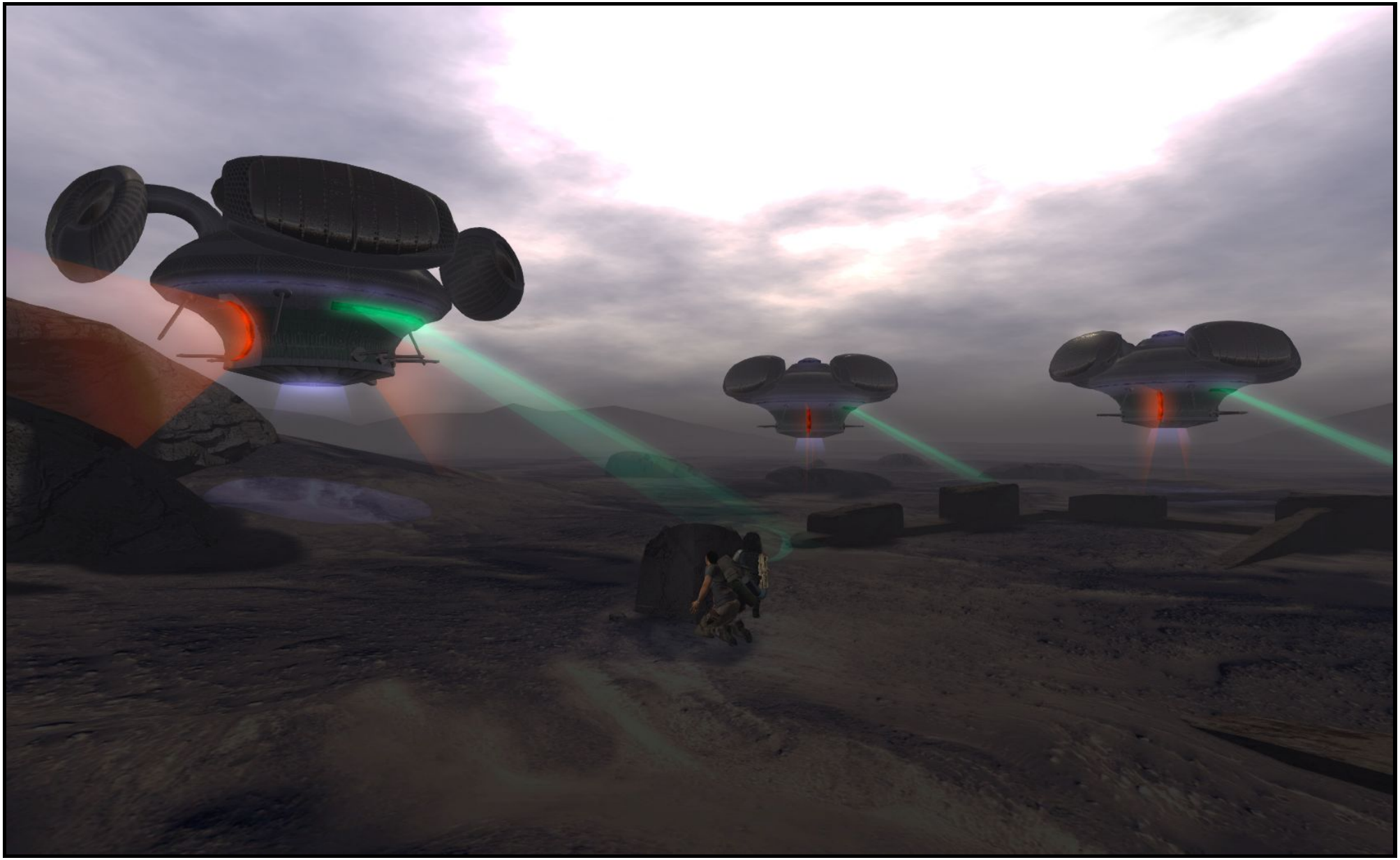


-- How many do you see?
- Many, all a line of them. At least ten or twelve probes.



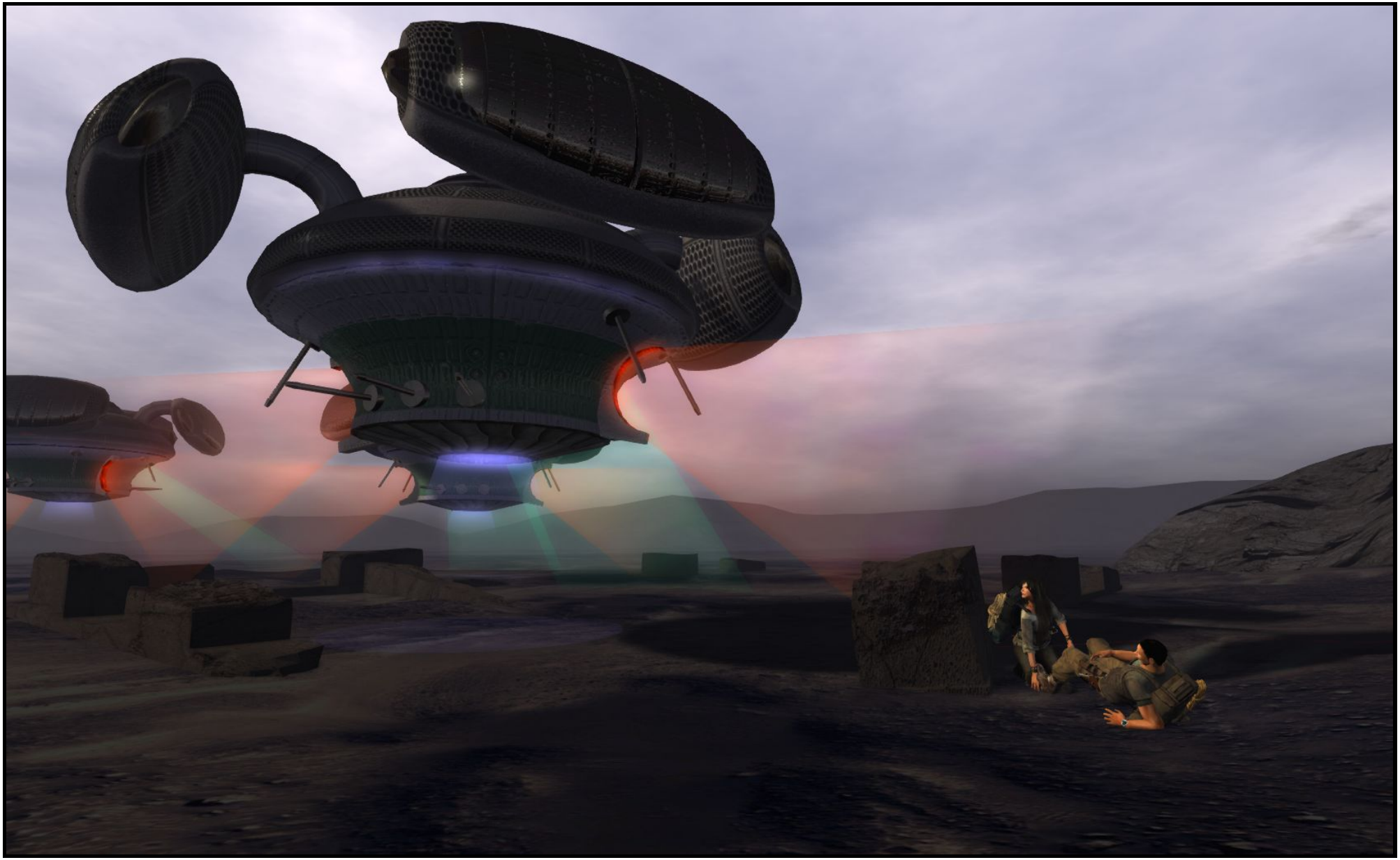
- Do you think they can attack?
-- I don't know. Let's avoid being seen or scanned... Shh! They're coming.





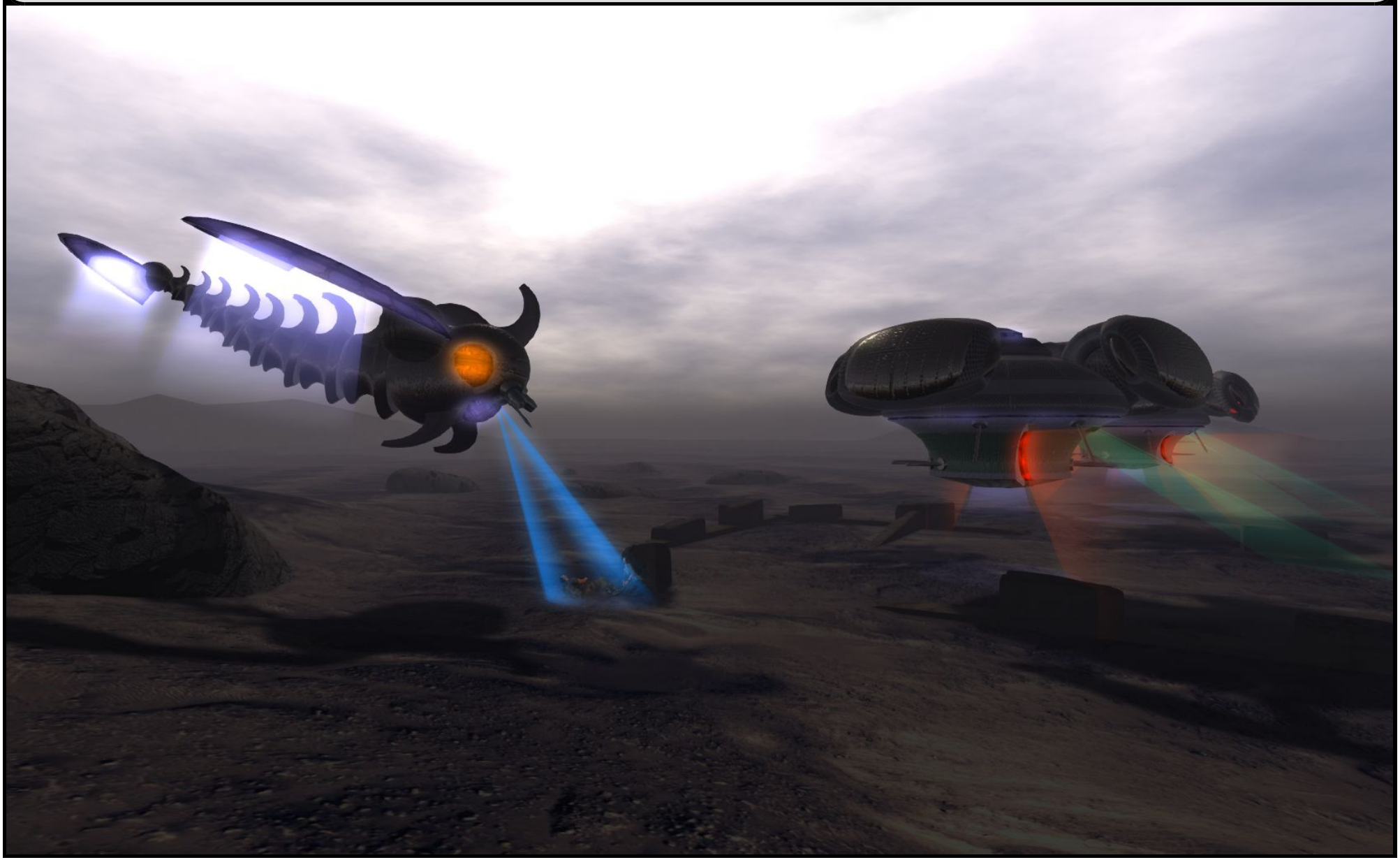



POC !





(!)
((Shit!))





-- Did you see that? It scanned us and it didn't even react!
- Yeah, I saw that! Its clumsiness detector was certainly off!



-- Very funny! It wasn't very easy to hide us both behind this ridiculous small piece of stone!



- But you're right, they seemed to completely ignore our presence.
-- Or it's because they simply alerted any people who will be here very soon.



-- We better move. Maybe we can find a place to hide.
- Yeah, let's not stay here...



One hour later...



- Still no one running after us.
-- It seems we have been completely ignored.



- It's a bit weird. Maybe they were there for other things.
-- Yes, It's always possible...



-- No, no, no... Where is it?
(!)



- Where is what?!
-- My pipe! I lost it! ...Fuck!!!



- Oh! Any idea when you lost it?
-- Hmm... That must be after meeting the probes, I had it on me when we were there.



-- I will retrace my step. You, stay here and take a break.
- Uh... Are you serious? You want to walk back just for that damned pipe?



-- Of course, I will! What do you think? It's made of a rare wood. I won't smoke with a branch of spruce!



- Alright! I'll wait for you here. ...Don't get lost!



(I have to admit, sometimes her sense of priorities defies my imagination...)



(Hmmmm! Let's relax for a few minutes...)



(...What a beautiful morning!)



(Damn! I'm going in the wrong direction! Shit! I will be seriously late! Why didn't I take the bus?...)



- What is that? (These buildings weren't there before. I must have taken the wrong exit... This is not Lawton!)



- Whoa, whoa, whoa! You won't stall here, stupid car!



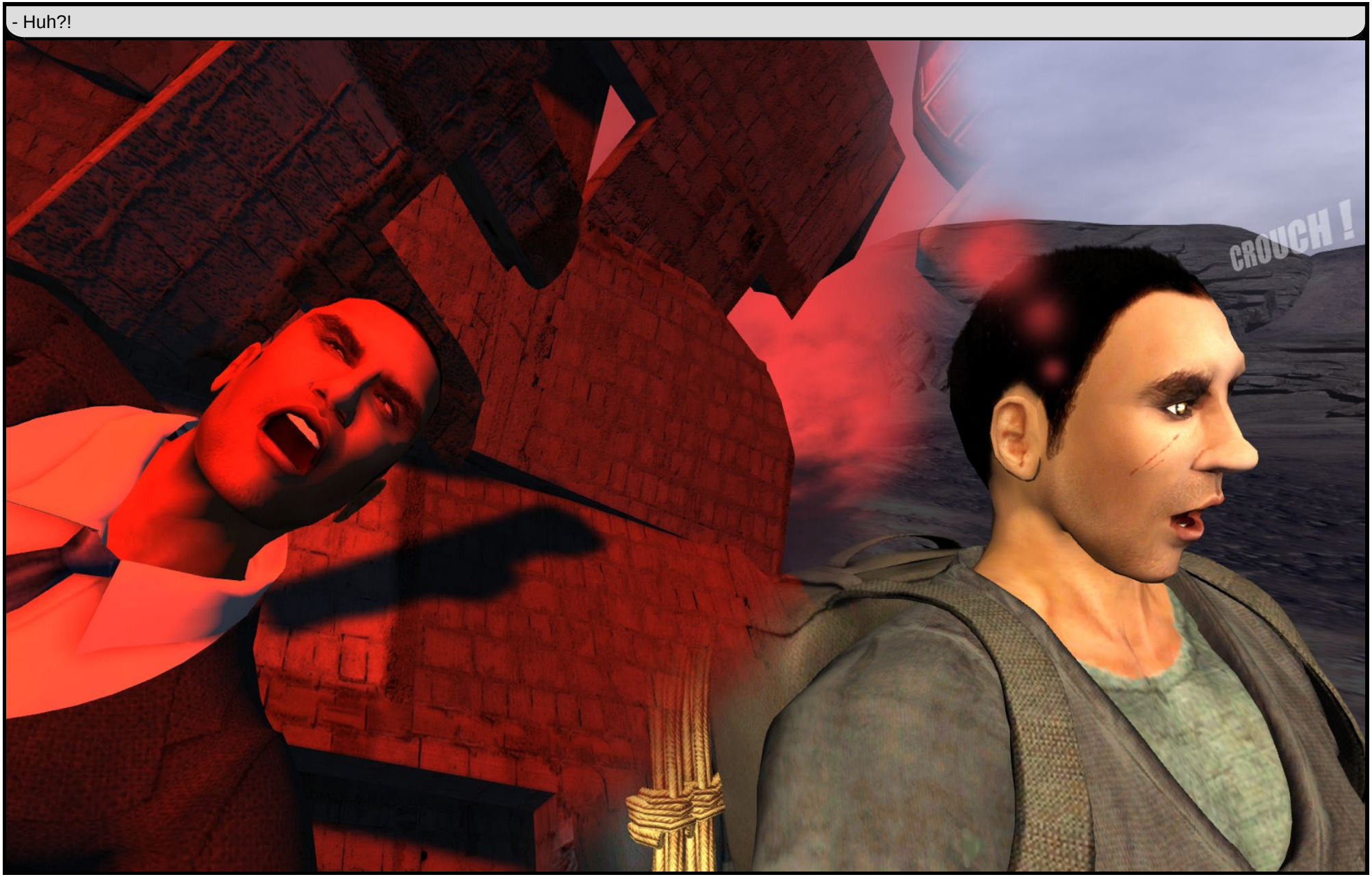
(Oh! That doesn't bode well!)



(Uh!)



- Huh?!



(What was that noise?)



- Alezia? Is that you?



- It's not funny!




GWEEZZZ !

Meanwhile...



(Ah! There you are! ...I promise I'll be more careful from now on...)



(At least, I lost it only fifteen minutes earlier... I better keep it in my backpack.)



15 minutes later...



(Where is he?)



- Damn! What the fuck has he done to my belongings?



- Roland!



- Roland? (Where is he? Such a mess, it's not like him...)



- Hello!
-- !?



-- Who are you?




- Wow! What have we here? A lady, in the middle of nowhere!

- Oh! Nice knife!



- Put the knife down, otherwise, I'll add you a hole!



-- Where is my friend?



- I said: Put the knife down!



- Come on, drop it! I'm gonna shoot, you know?



- Yes... Good girl.



- Eww! You've got a pretty bad eye!



- Now, let's have some fun together, huh?... Why don't you remove those pants, huh?



- I'm serious, girl! Come on, do it!






TCHAK!


GRRR!
TCHONK !


PAF !


PAF !


-- Dirty bastard! You broke my pipe!

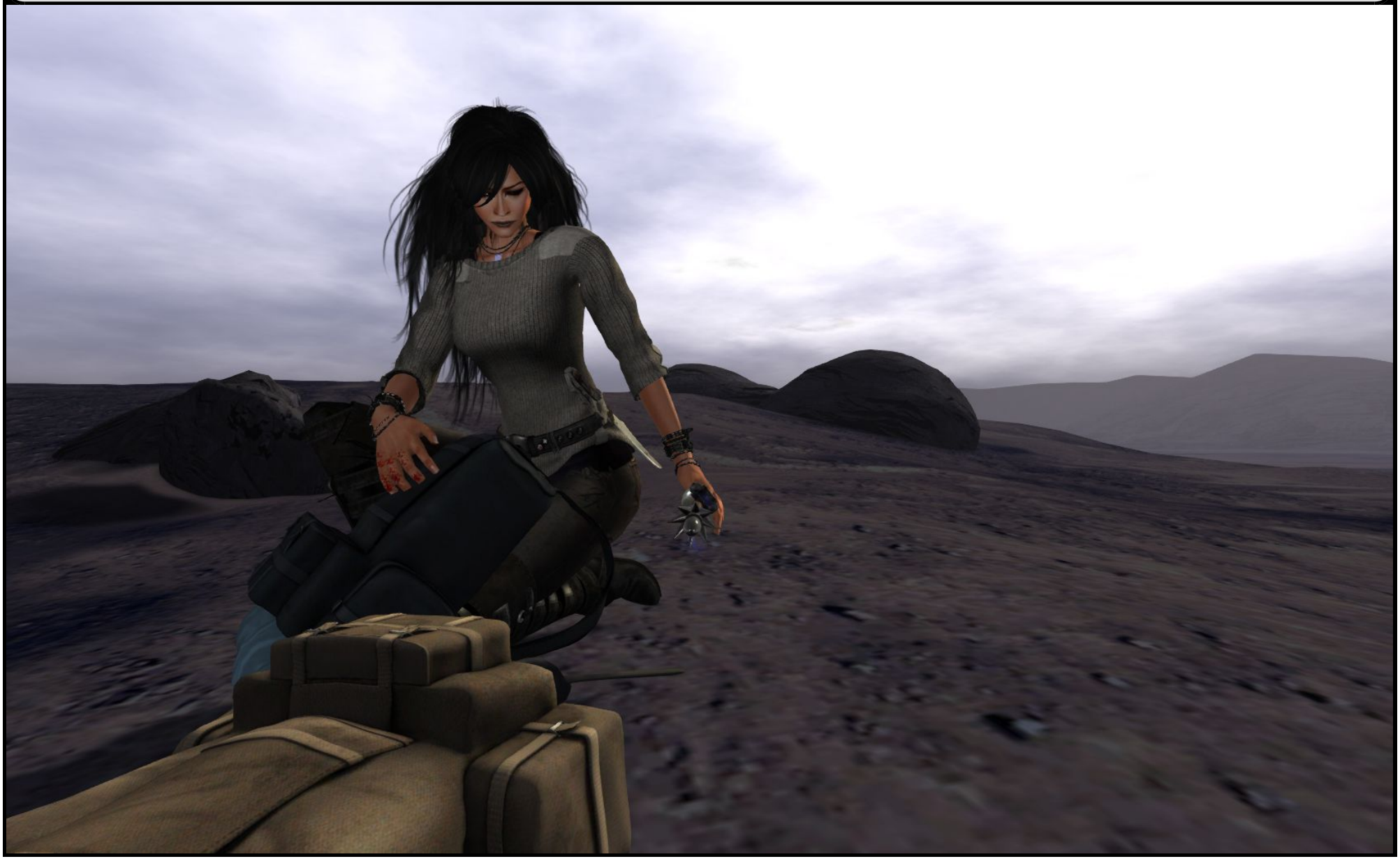
(...Nice work, Alezia! Now you can be sure he won't tell you where Roland is!)



(...They were many, they left their footprints all around. I'd better be careful...)



(...Where's the damn electric baton?... Ah, there it is!)



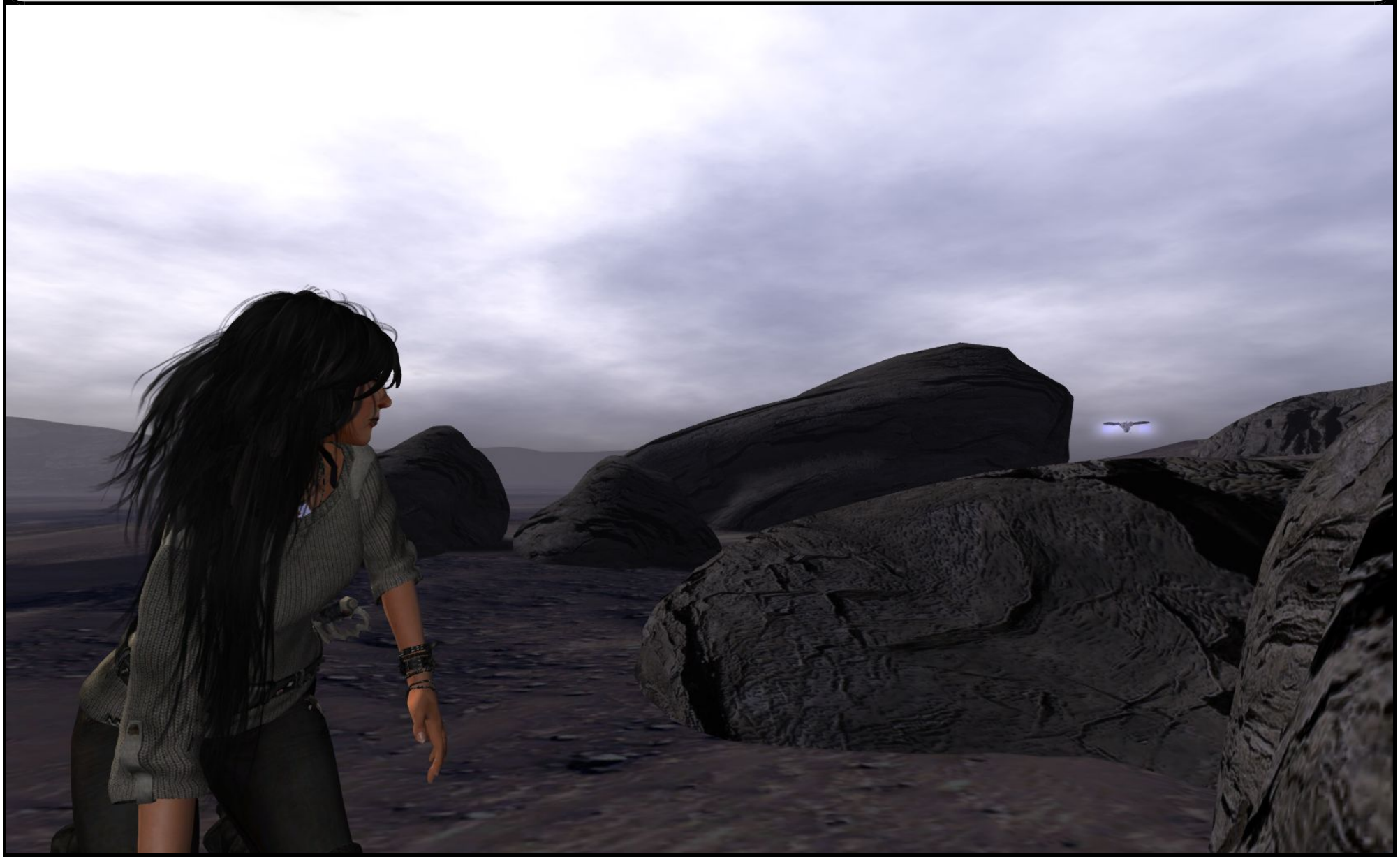
(...Shit! This thing has completely lost its charge.)



(Hmm ...An electromagnetic gun! ...It's not my luck, he shot the last bullet...)



(Aw, of course! ...Another of these stupid probes! ...And it comes directly here!)



- Ho! No, no, no... So, you want to play with me, huh?



Let me show you how it works...








DARRR !!!


DRRR !!!


CLUNK !
STRRR !
DRRRR !!!


SCRAATCH !
PRISHHH !

- Dirty scrap!



(Wow! This thing is lighter than it looks... It's frankly amazing!)



(Hurry, Alezia! ...There, among those rocks, it's not ideal, but at least it's out of sight...)

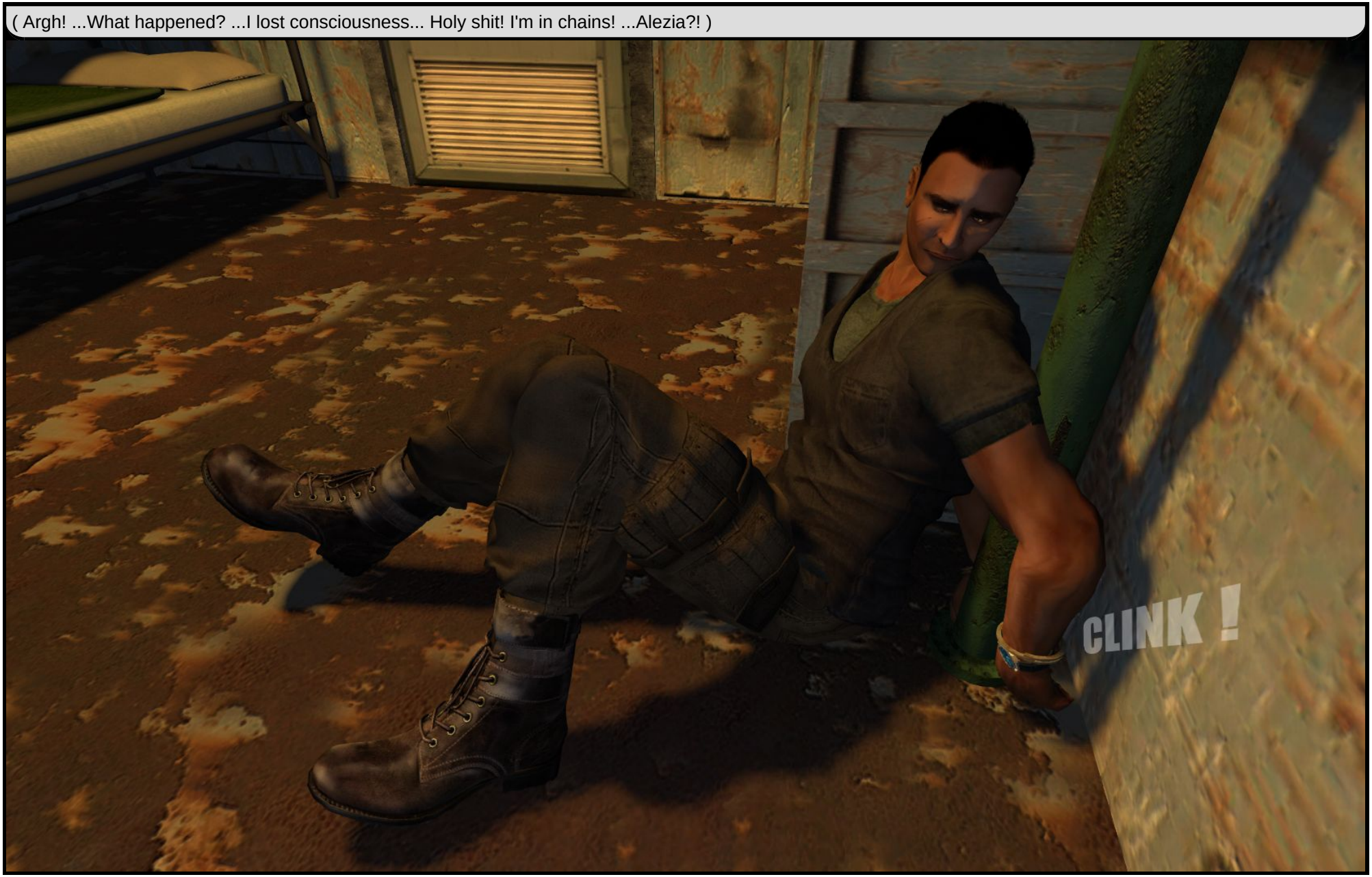


(Now, let's see where those footprints lead... The sooner I find him, the better...)



Somewhere...




(Argh! ...What happened? ...I lost consciousness... Holy shit! I'm in chains! ...Alezia?!)
CLINK !

- Hey! Anybody here? ...What is this place?



(I remember... The dark lands, Alezia went looking for her pipe... Then someone came up...)



(...I've been captured!) - HEY!!!



- Shut up!
((!))



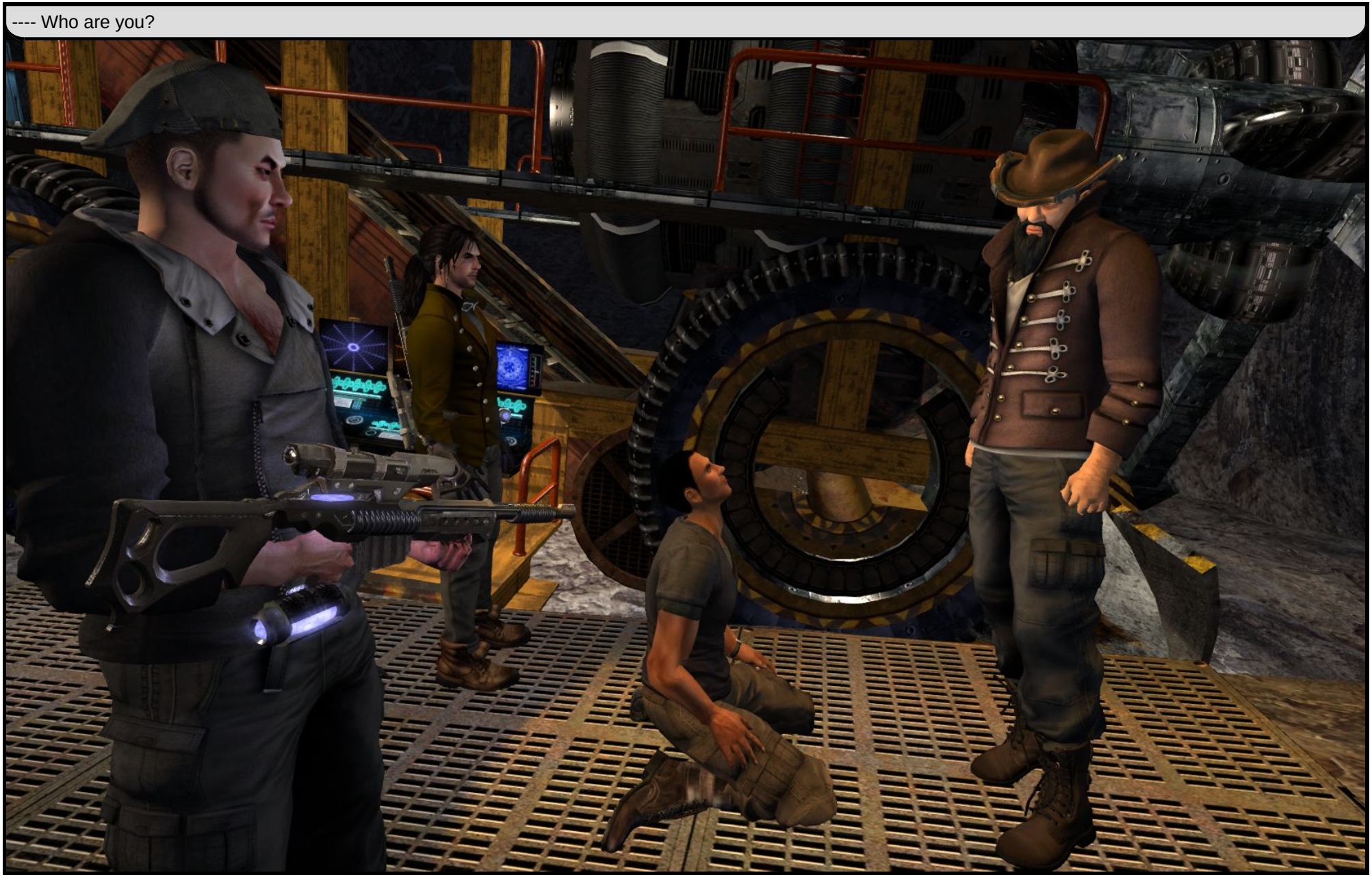
-- Who are you?
- You come with us. But be quiet or we tie you up again!







---- Who are you?



-- I'm Roland. Why was I brought here? Are you Jijuterks?



-- Jijuterks? ...Why? You don't like them!
- How would I know? I've never met any of them!



- What brings you to these lands, Mister... Roland?



---- You better not stay silent.



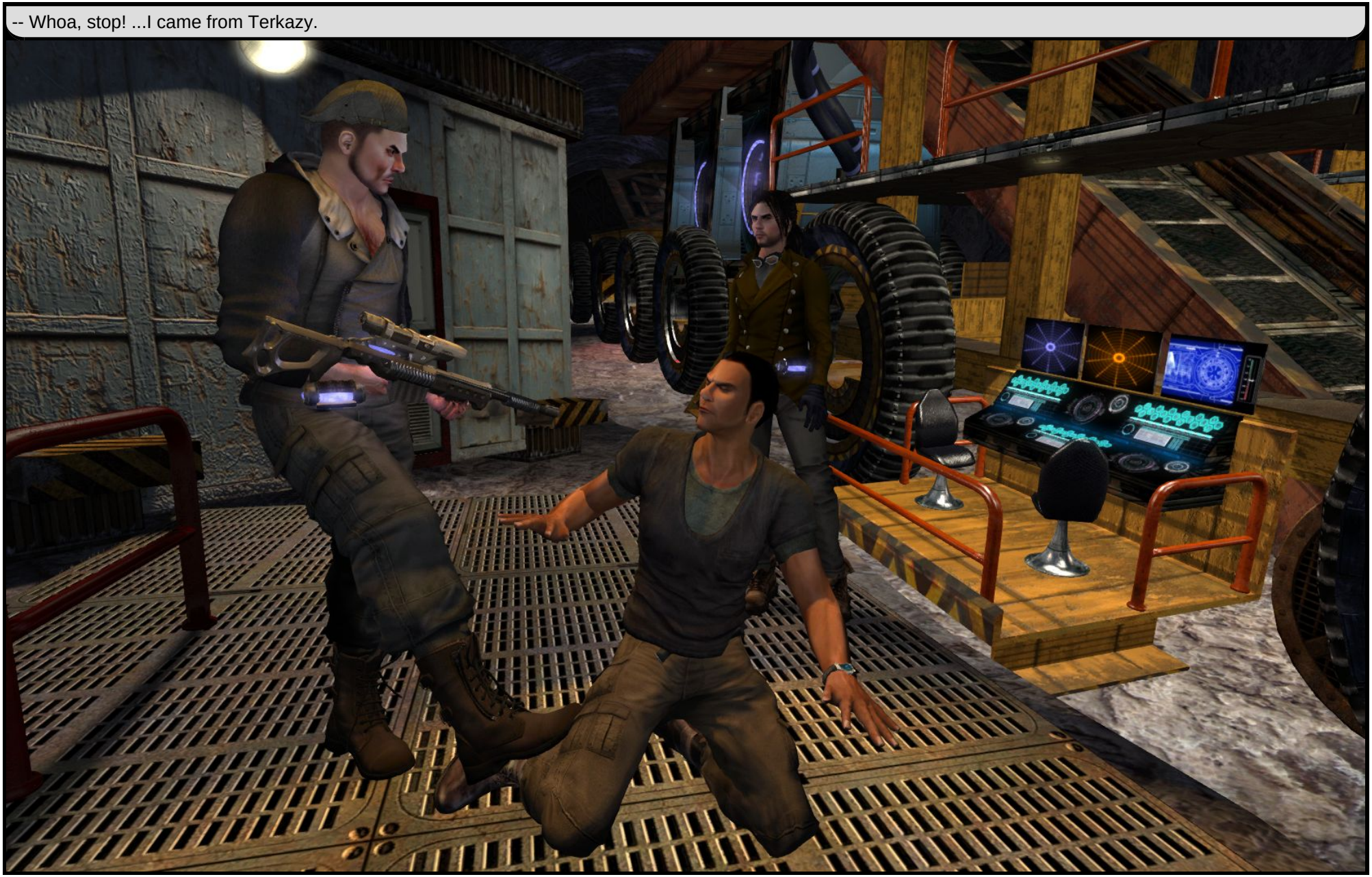
--- I was just passing. I was heading north. I had no other intention.



-- Heading north, huh? From where?
- From south I guess!



-- Whoa, stop! ...I came from Terkazy.



- Really, from Terkazy? That would be quite unusual. You are not from this world, aren't you?



- What do you mean?
-- I think you know exactly what I mean.



-- This is true, this world is not mine.



- You woke up suddenly, in a field, far to the west of here. Isn't it?
--- Is that what happened to you?



- Me? No... But there are many people like you in this country, unable to find their place in this world built by the Jijuterks.



-- Many? How many are we talking about?
--- I've known over a hundred, but I've known a lot more who were their descendants, starting with myself.



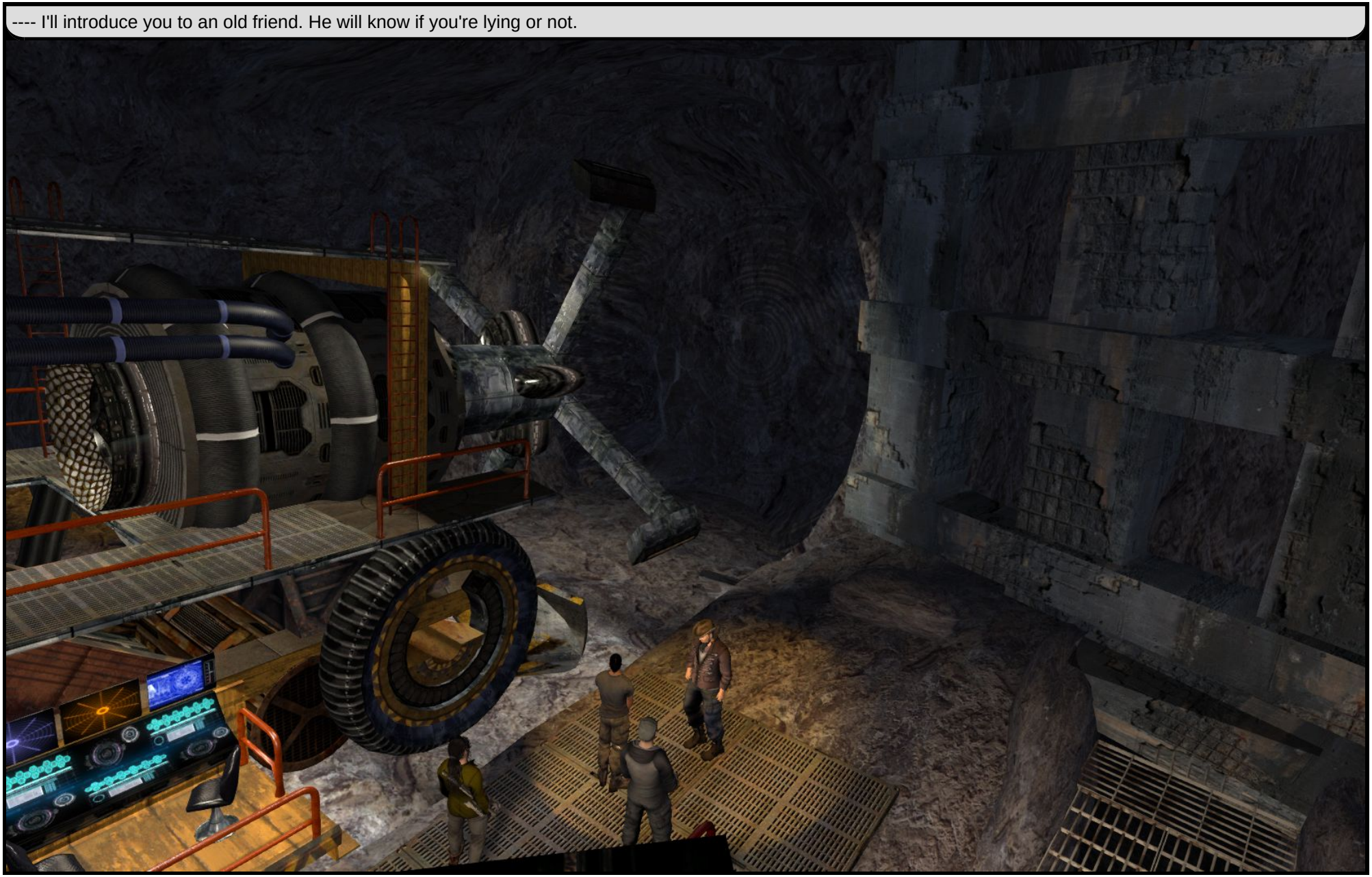
--- And what is this place?
- You're nowhere, I'm afraid. Nowhere until we could really know who you are. ...Stand up!



--- Why are you doing this?
- Precautions, Mr. Roland... Just precautions.



---- I'll introduce you to an old friend. He will know if you're lying or not.



- Widerm! Take him to Alcibiad.



- Sir, Widerm isn't back yet.



---- He's still outside?!
-- Yes, he returned there to search his belongings.



-- Hmm... You! Take him to the old man.
((((!))))



- Come! It's that way.



- Get down! You'll find him there.
(What is this creepy thing again?)



800 kilometers away...



-- Boss! This is happening, we get an anomaly!



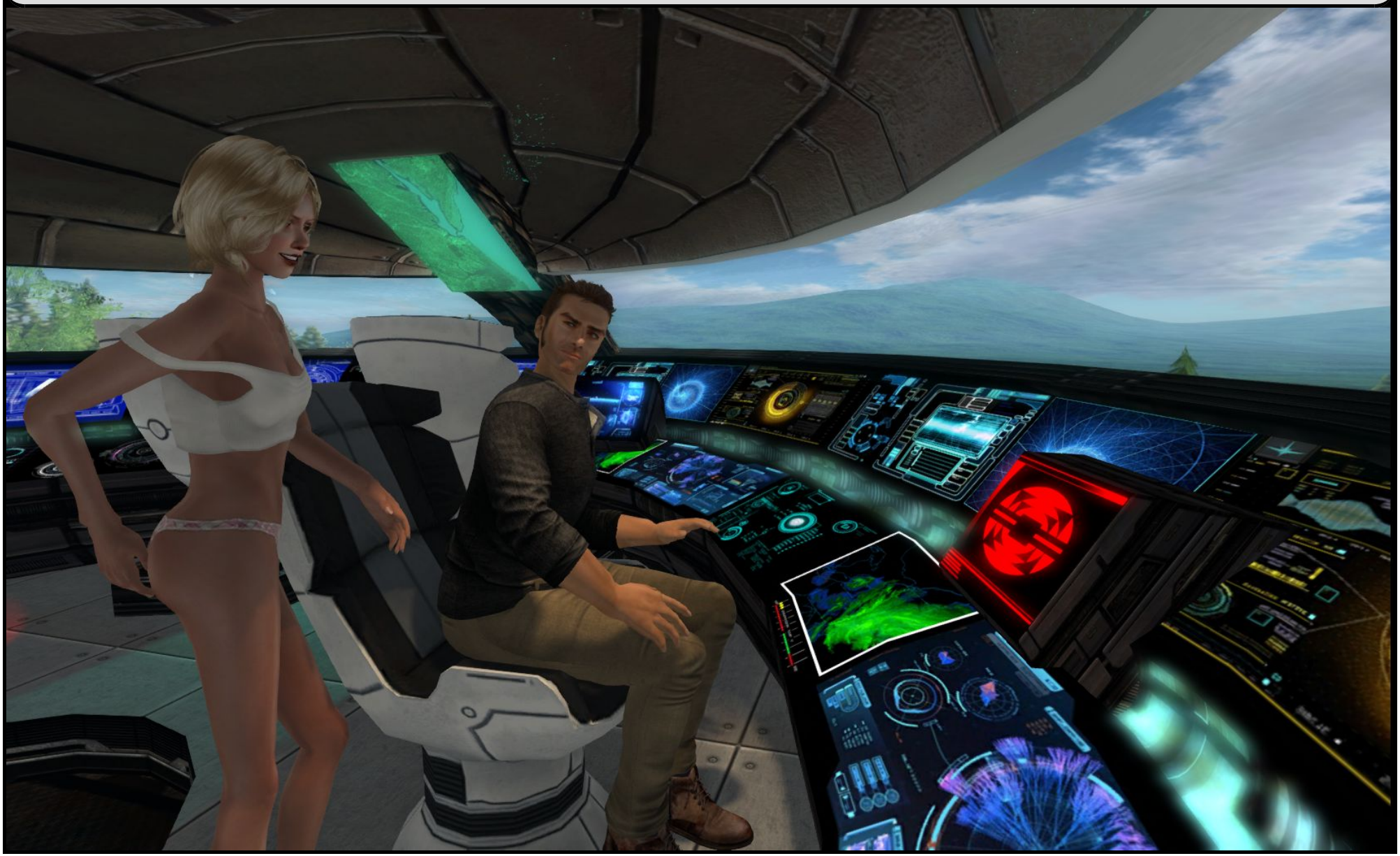
- What? Are you sure? From Rikmon Stain?
-- Yes, come quickly!



-- A probe is no more responding.
- I will contact the command center.



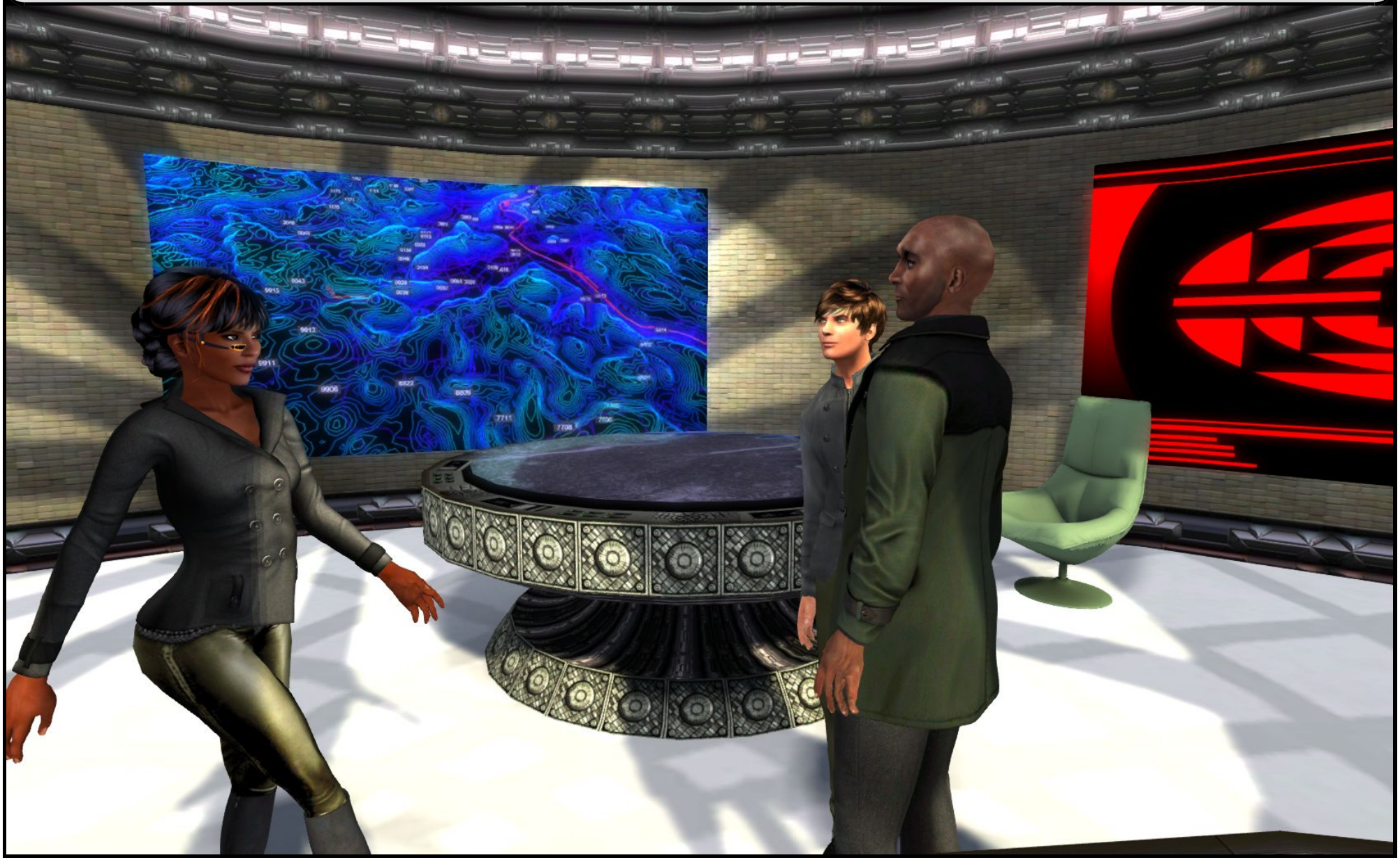
-- Uh... Lauti... Can you get dressed?
- Oh! Yes, of course.



At the same time in Jijuterk...



- Sir, we just received an anomaly report from Rikmon Stain. A probe is missing.



-- Oh? Thank you, I will take care of it.



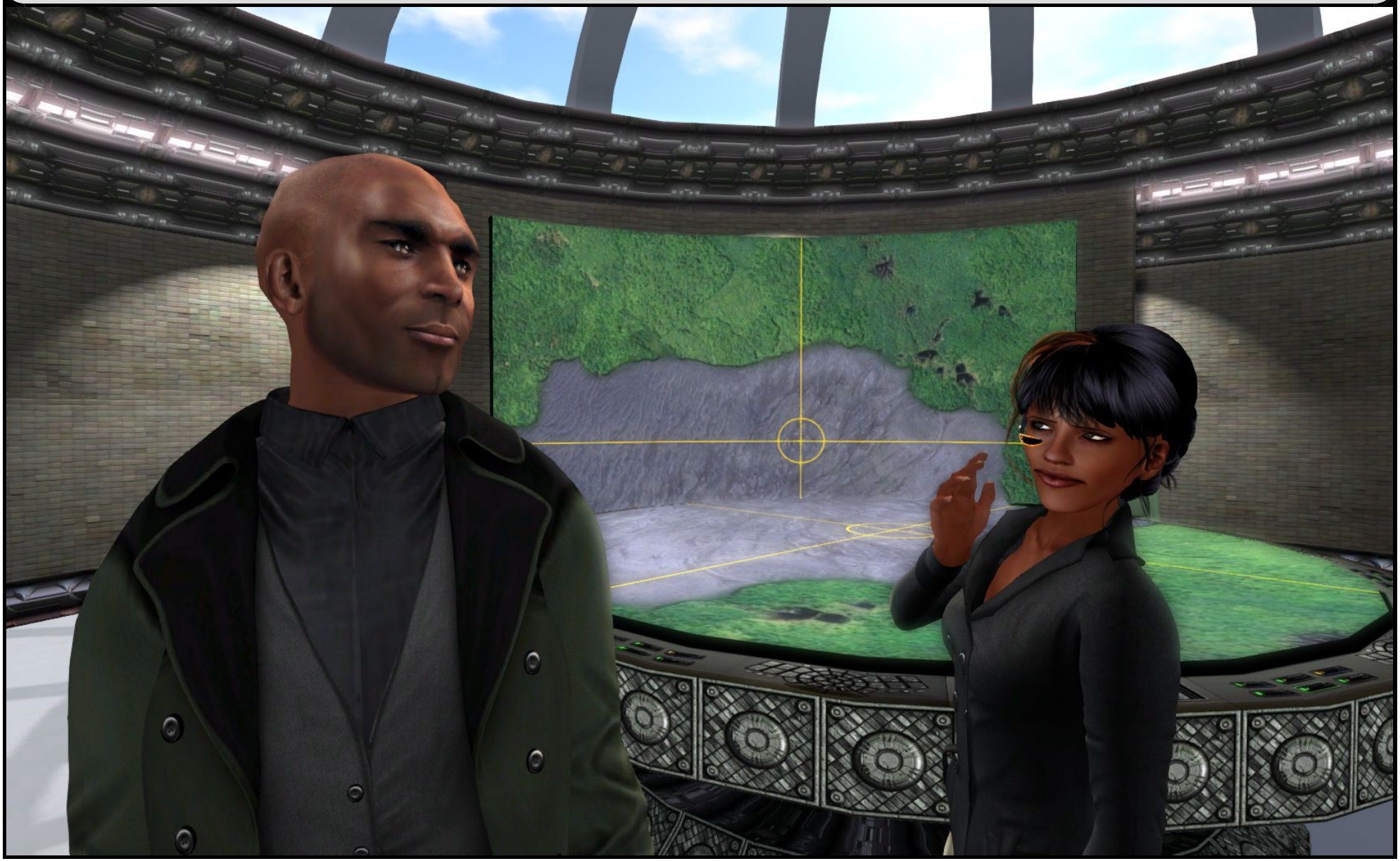
- Reim Tremble just contacted me. They're nearby. He said they will take the case.



-- What? Cancel this immediately!
--- But he says they can be on site within 20 minutes.



- I'll take it. I'll proceed with a probe, it's probably nothing. Please, tell him that we'll take care of this. Alright?
-- Okay.



--- Shenika, your presence won't be required. Director Maguire will take care of this personally.



- But we are close. We will be there even before you could reprogram a probe to go there!



--- Sorry Shenika. The director insists, he wants to manage it.
-- (Sigh) ...Alright.




- I can't believe it! We wait for weeks, and when finally something happens, they don't want us to go investigate!

- Yet, they know that it's the most probable area to see them reappear. A missing probe... It never happens!



- They certainly won't interrupt the surveillance plan for that. Which means that they prefer to send a probe from Jijuterk. It will need two hours when we could make it in half an hour. That's nonsense.

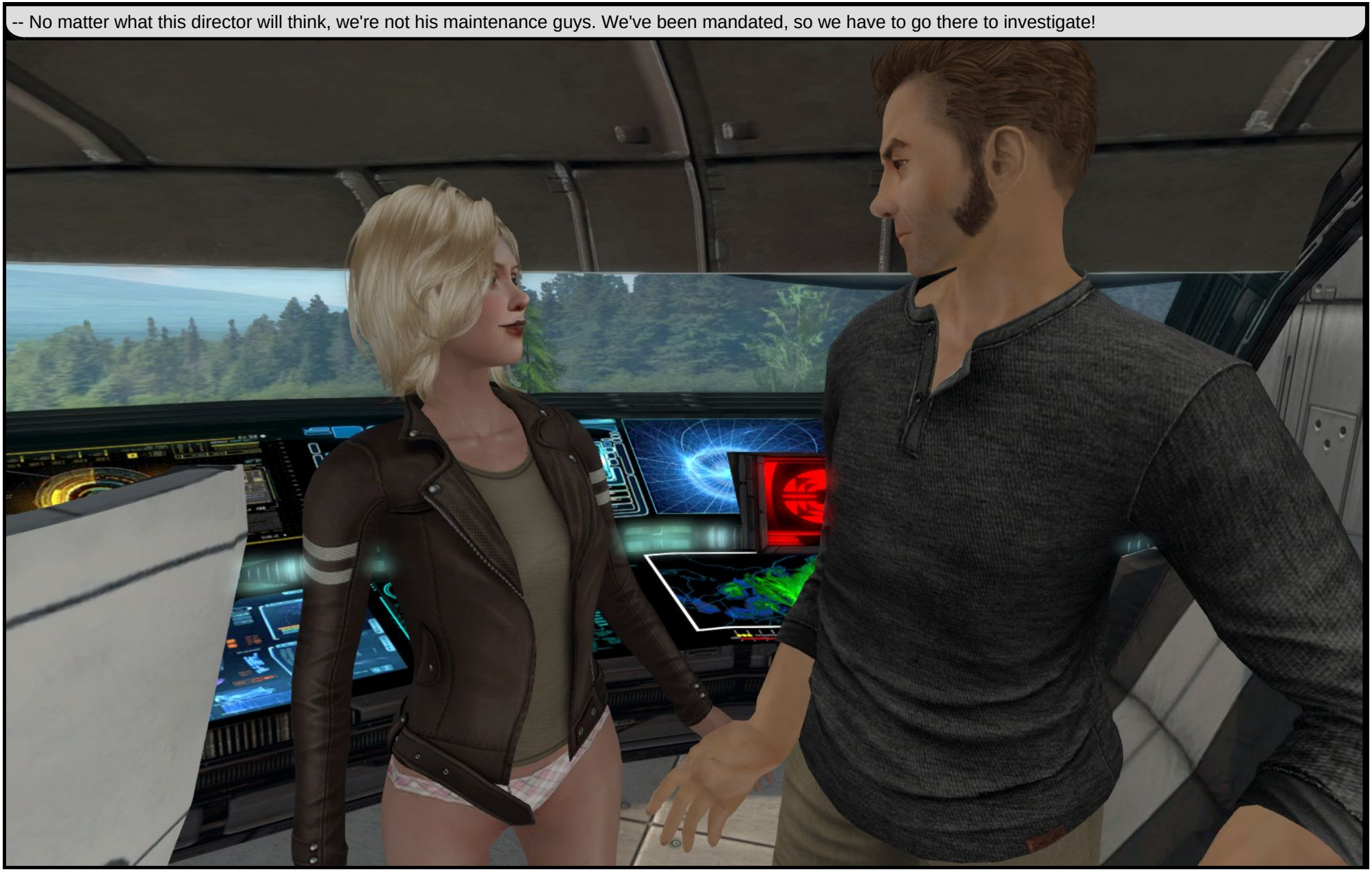


- (Sigh) ...Our transponder is still granted for Rikmon Stain, isn't it?
-- Hmm, yes.



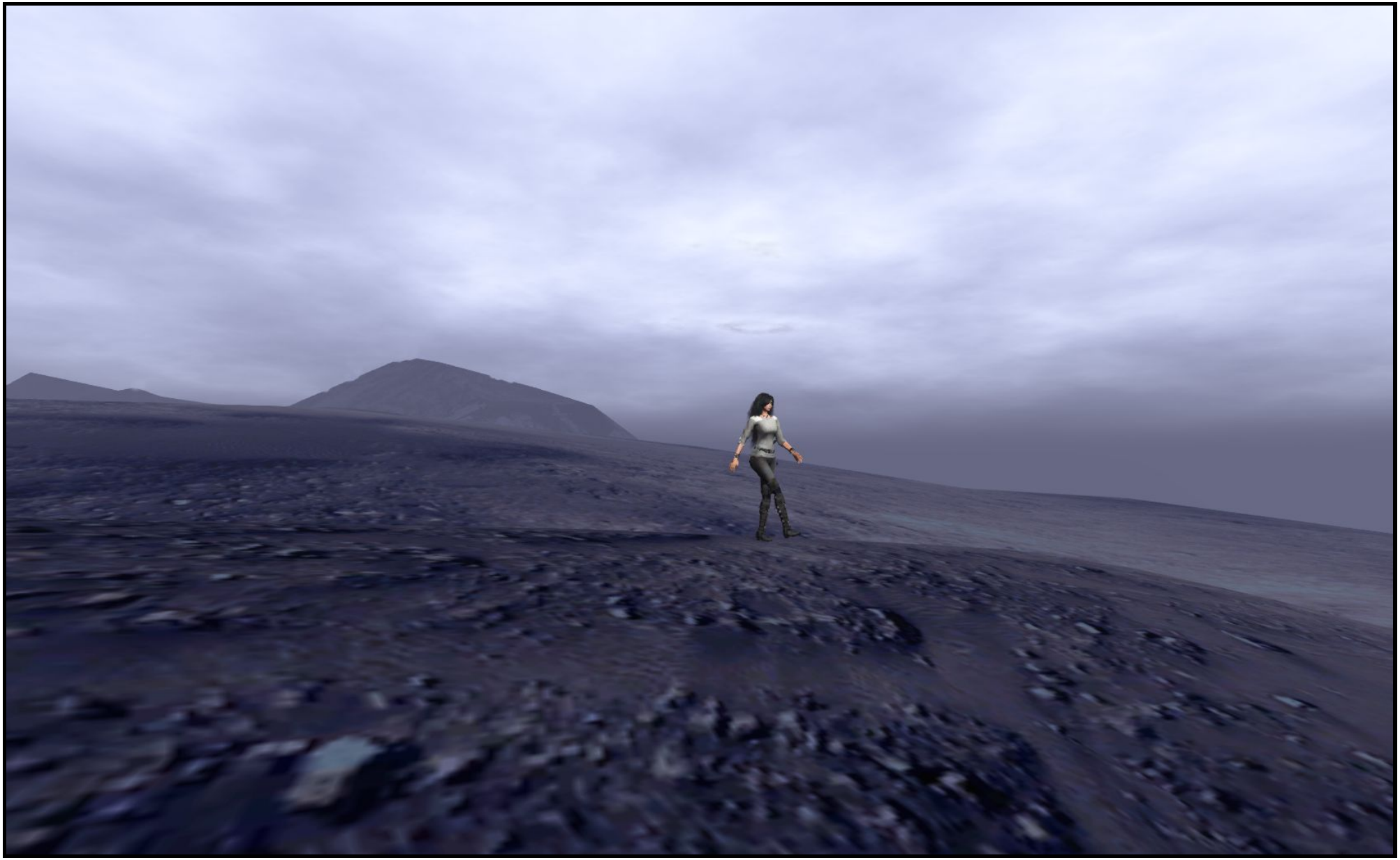
-- Ok, my dear, put your pants on! We're going to go there and take a look.




-- No matter what this director will think, we're not his maintenance guys. We've been mandated, so we have to go there to investigate!

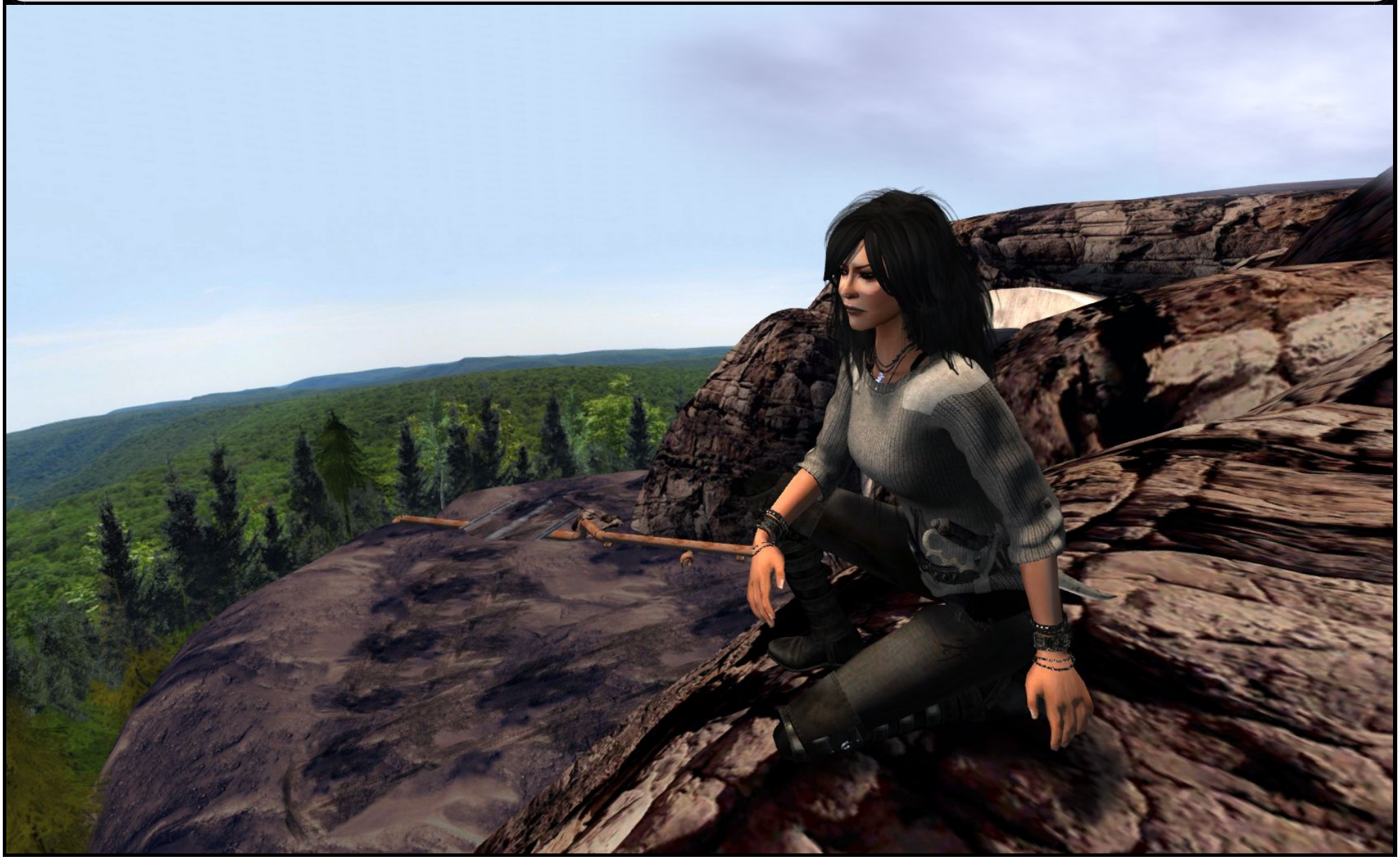
-- That's what I like with you, Boss! ;-)



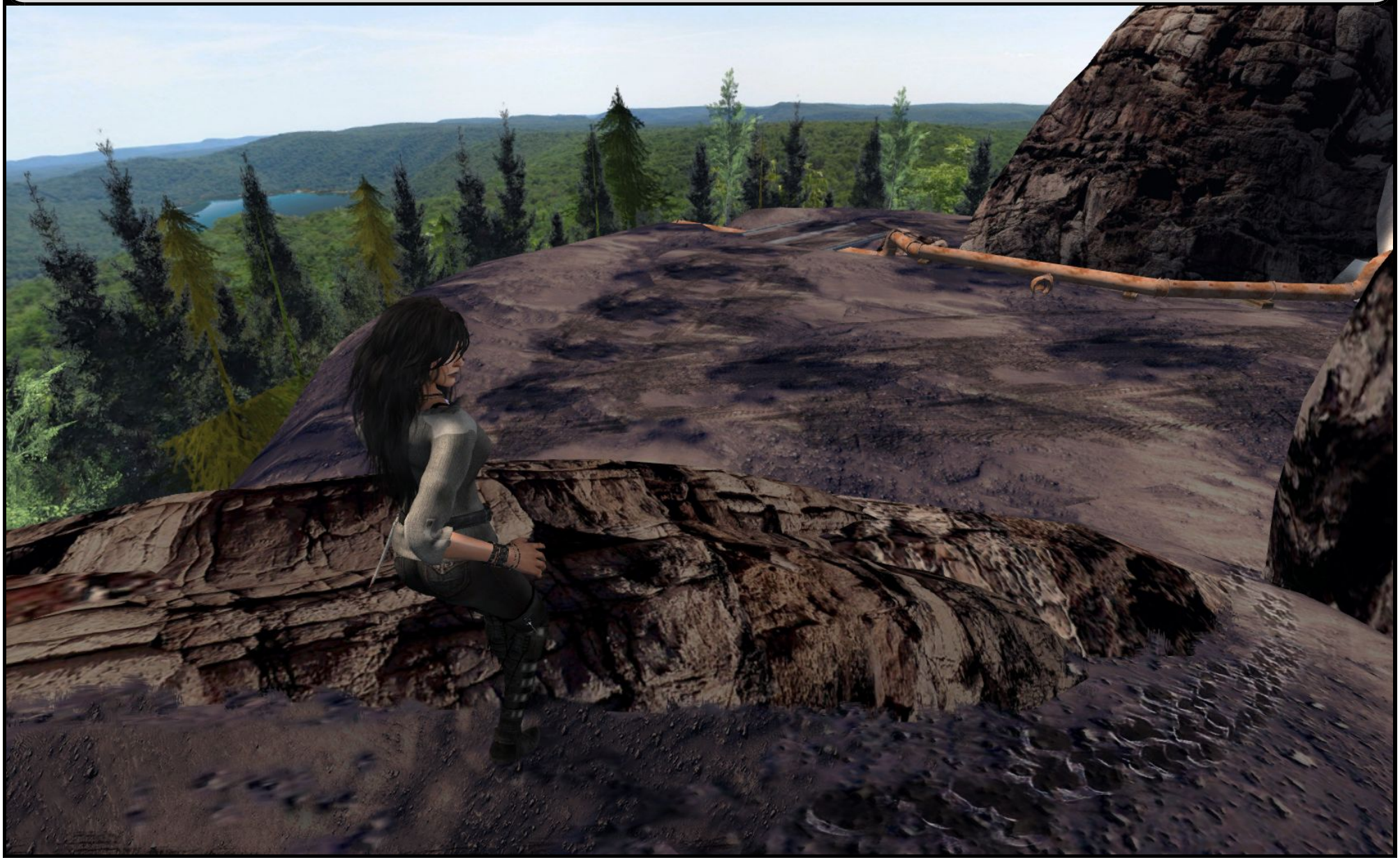




(It's good to see that this weird place has an end.)



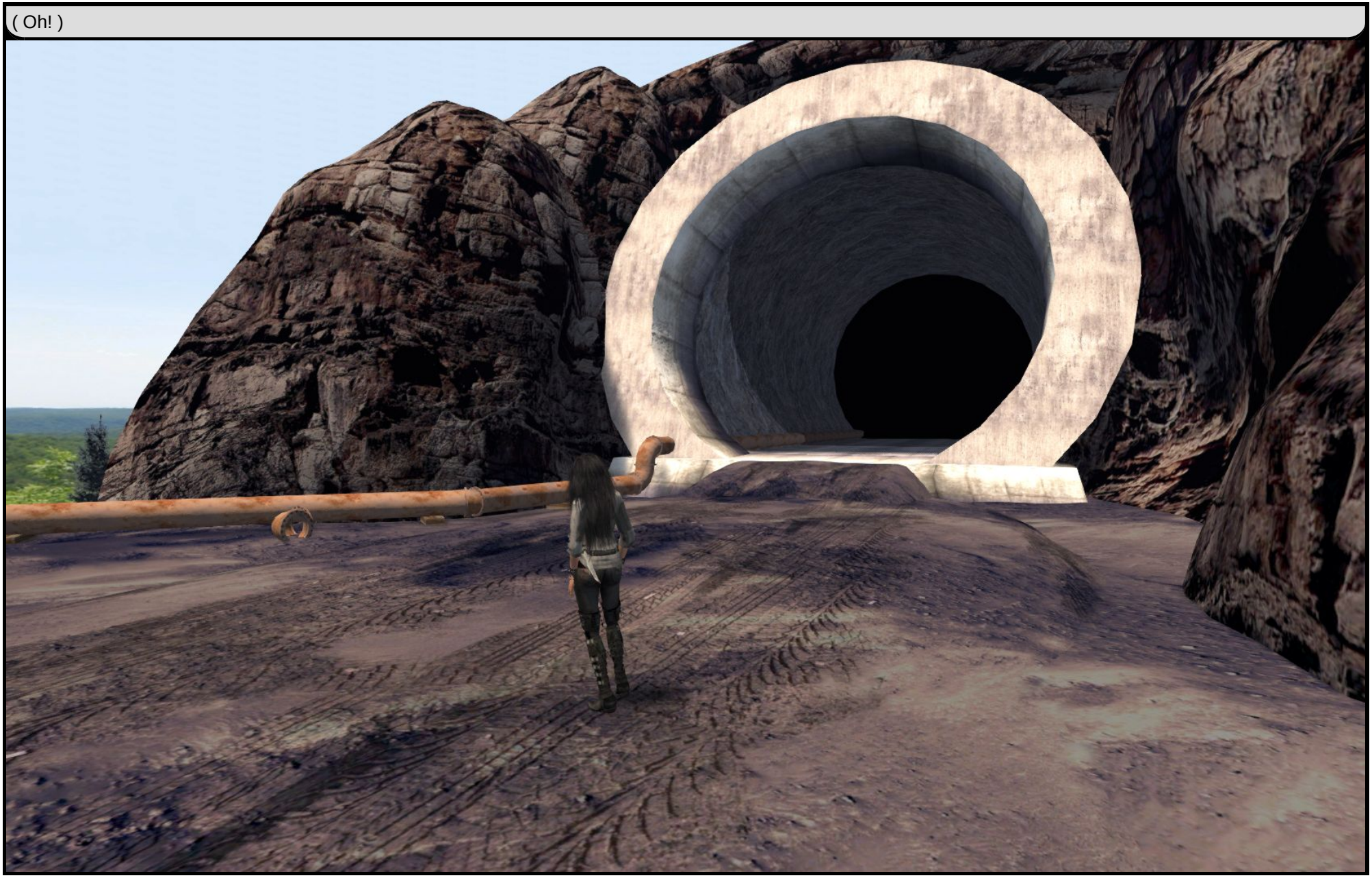
(They walked down here... What is this pipe?)



(Hmm... Mining activity?)



(Oh!)



(I don't know who is in there... But they won't like me!)



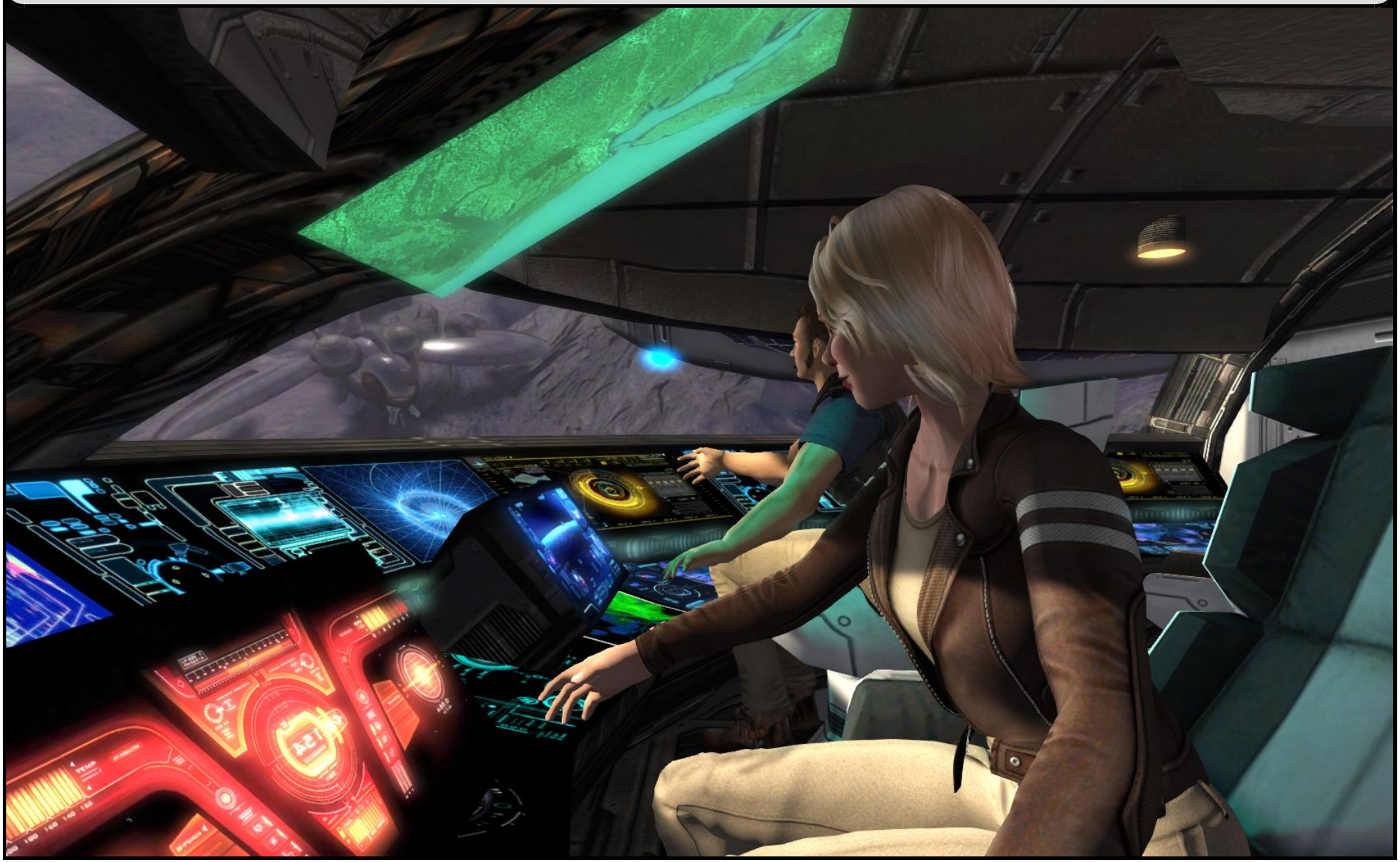
A few kems away...



-- Here we are, Boss, exactly at the transmitted coordinates.
- Do you see something?



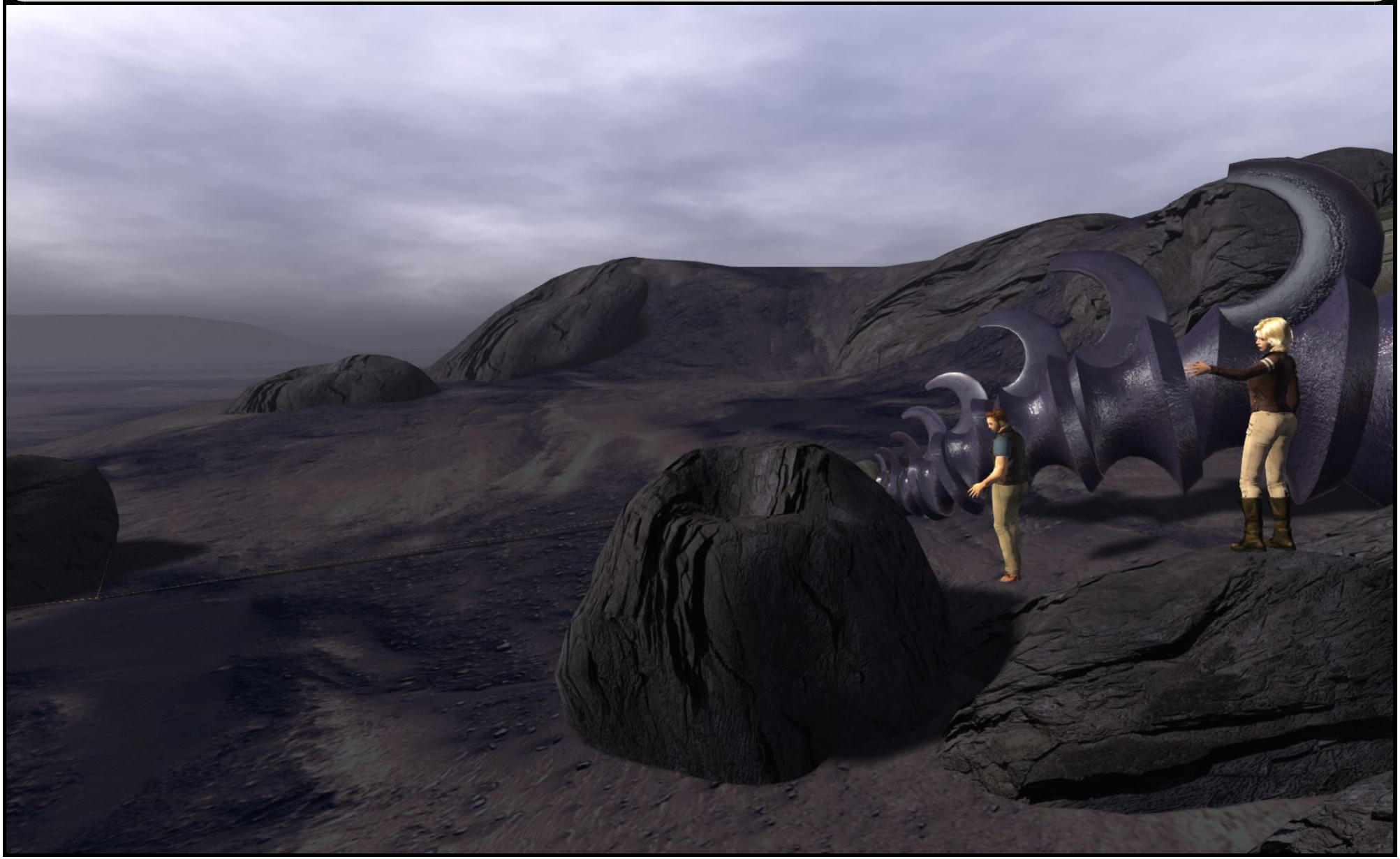
- Ah! Look, just over there!
-- Okay, I see it. I'm gonna land, there is a flat ground nearby.




PFFIIIUU !



-- Is it tied to a rope?



- Yep... And this, it's even more surprising!
-- A frying pan!



- It's not an accident. Someone made it crash.
-- Yes, but it's hard to believe that a Dragon class probe could have let itself be trapped like this.



-- Lauti, can you open a communication channel with the control center?
- Immediately, Boss.



- We're connected now.
-- Jaima, are you receiving me?



- Yes, I do, Reim.



{Reim's voice} ...We're at Rikmon Stain, to the last coordinates transmitted by the missing probe. We found it crashed to the ground.
-- Oh! Really?



- What is it? Is it Reim?
-- Yes, they found the missing probe. Apparently, it would have crashed.



-- What are they doing there? I told them I would handle this!
- I know, but obviously, they ignored the instructions.



-- Are you still there?
{Jaima's voice} Uh... Yes, sorry...



{Reim's voice} Jaima, did you check the latest recordings transmitted by the probe?
-- Of course, I made a thorough analysis of these recordings. The only thing we found there was a sudden interruption.



{Reim's voice} Are you sure? No sign of a human presence detection?
- No, nothing like this.



-- Reim, this is Tee Maguire, I will send a team. Please, continue to investigate, but stay close to the probe.
{Reim's voice} Uh... Okay.



- Ron, you take the operations, I must leave to resolve a case. Zanter will be here in the next hour to take over as usual.
-- Ok Sir.



--- ...Reim, what do you mean by "made it crashed"?



- It was sent to the ground using a rope... with a frying pan tied to it.
{Jaima's voice} A frying pan!?! Come on, those probes can detect a human presence within a radius of several kems!



- I know, I know... We will continue our investigation, I'll let you know if we find something else.
{Jaima's voice} Okay.



-- Do you think it could be our two friends?
- I can't say... But who else may carry a rope and a frying pan so close to the southern border of the Rikmon Stain. Minimally, they can be suspected.



-- How do you think they could have proceeded to fool the probe?
- I would like to know... Maybe the probe was deficient... Hmm...



-- Boss! Can you come here?
(?)



- Damn!
-- Oh, I don't like this!



- Eww! He's been stabbed behind the clavicle with a wooden stick!
-- The body is still warm. This is recent.



- And he had a handgun... Out of its holster... What the hell happened here?



- Do you think this man could be "Roland"?
-- Hmm, he doesn't really fit the pictures reported by the probes in Terkazy. This guy is too small, and Roland has black hair.



- There are footprints all around... Maybe it will give us a chance to figure what happened here.



-- Lauti, this is not just a wooden stick...
- What?



-- It's a smoking pipe!
- Huh? ...Boss, all this is increasingly confused.



- You don't understand what it means, do you?
-- I'm not sure.



- The only person I saw use such a thing, in this world, was Erydak in some terkaside recordings.



- Damn! I'm not sure if I still want to meet her. All this is a bit too much for me.



- Let's try to understand what happened. Before the Tee's men land here and destroy all evidence with their big boots!






GIZZ !


CLONK !



- Call: "Blue Furniture"!



{Woman's voice} Hello, Blue Furniture... What can I do for you?



- I would like to place a special order.
{Woman's voice} Ok... What is your order, sir?



- I will need a red umbrella because the black one is now broken.
{Woman's voice} Uh...



{Woman's voice} May I ask you what happened to it?
- It has been dropped to the ground. The rain will pass through.



{Woman's voice} I see... Anything else?
- I'm gonna need a fast delivery.



{Woman's voice} Can you give me the delivery address?
- I'll contact you shortly regarding the shipping address.



{Woman's voice} Ok, thank you for buying with "Blue Furniture". I'll process your order... Have a good day.
- Thank you.



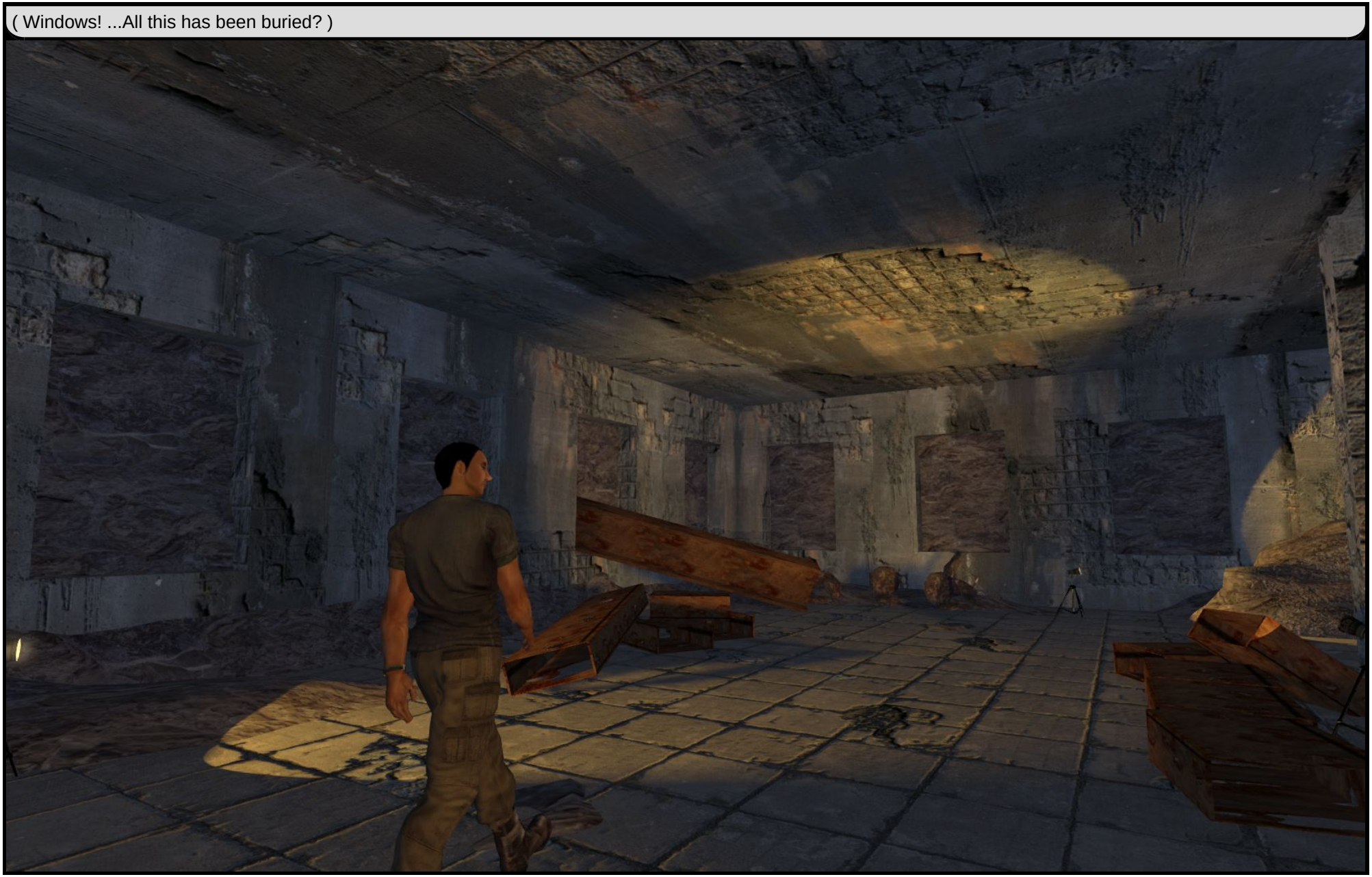
Meanwhile, somewhere...



(What is this place?)



(Windows! ...All this has been buried?)



- Is anybody here?



{Man's voice} Over here!



- Hi! Come here. Please, sit down.



-- You must be Alcibiad, I presume?
- This is correct, Mr. ...Roland?



-- Gregoire, Roland Gregoire.
- Ah, Gregoire, what an interesting name. It's very old and no more in use nowadays.



-- Nice to meet you, but could you explain to me why am I here?



- The reason why you are here with me is simple. Vanitan wants to know if you can be trusted.



-- Where are we? What is this place?
- These are the remains of the old city. I'm still trying to determine what was this building.



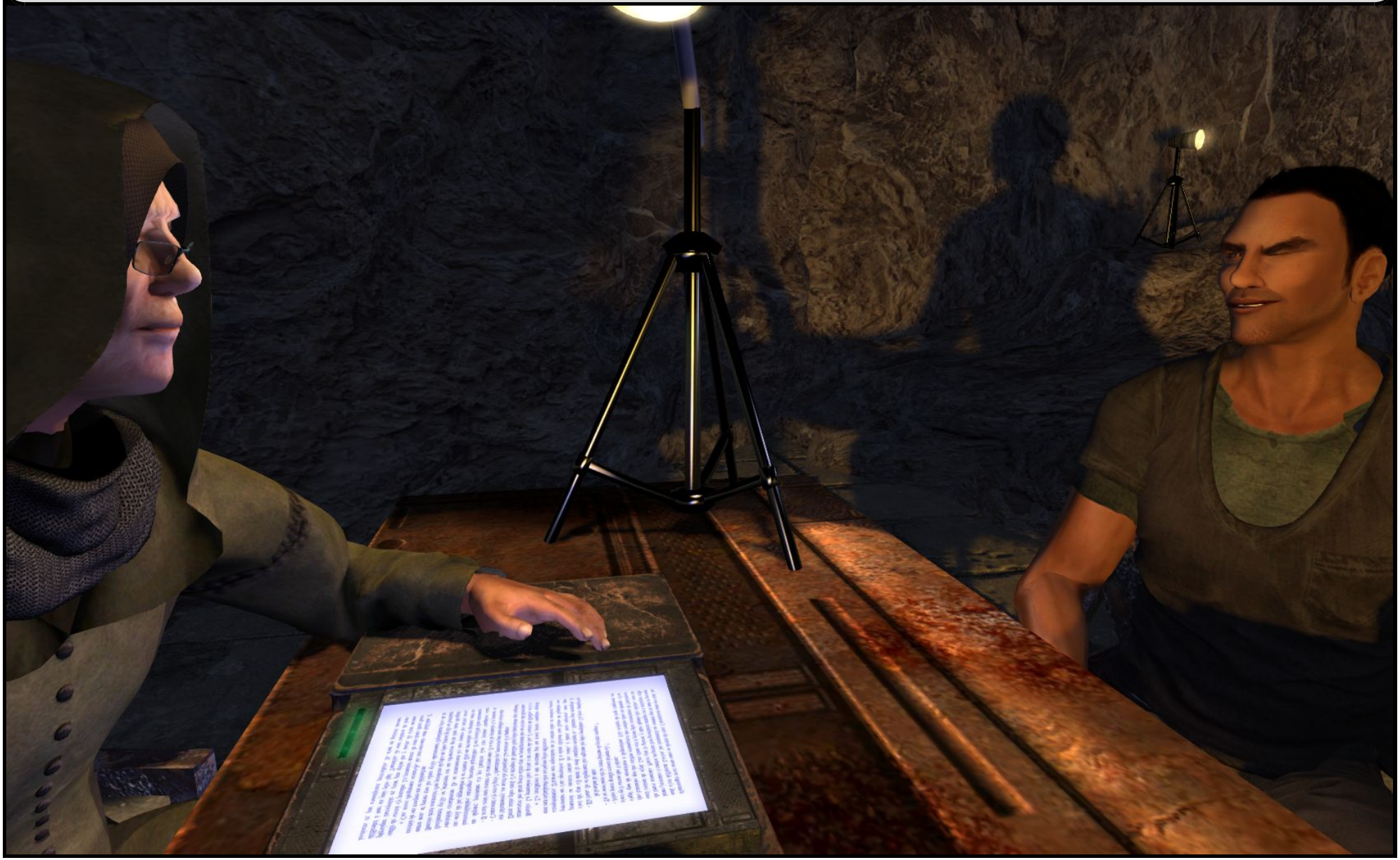
- The old city? A Dallusian city? Or something more ancient?



-- This is the ancient city of Rikmon. But maybe you're right, this building may be older.



- Tell me, Mr. Gregoire, when were you born?
-- Hmm, you might not want to believe me.



- Oh, please, try me. I met a lot of people like you in my life, nothing surprises me anymore.



-- I was born in 1979. Can you deduce the dating system?
- You're not Dallusian, so it has to be before. I would say it is 1979 after the Christian prophet.



-- I see. You seem very aware of the situation. Are you also a survivor from the Taalus?
- I am a historian, Mr. Gregoire. And yes, I'm a survivor of what you call "Taalus".



- I know your time since I was born exactly... hmm... 126 years after you. I lived the "Big Flash", you know?
-- The "Big Flash"?



- Yeah, that famous day of December 2129, where 99% of the electronic systems of the planet were destroyed by the Oklahoma's electromagnetic wave.



- 2129! So this is when our civilization was devastated...
-- Devastated, no, not yet. But the decline started after that. You can't imagine all the consequences of this event.



-- Were you thrown here during this event?
- No, it happened a year later. I lived in Oklahoma and I had the bad idea to go see my parents' house. They lived near Lawton.



-- It must have been difficult to understand what could have been the cause of this "Big Flash"?
- Lawton was immediately identified as being the source. The incidents of 2013 and 2037 left good indications.



-- You said: "not yet". Did you mean that a devastation happened afterward?
- Yes, it occurred 19 years after the "Big Flash".



- I got this information ten years ago, from the son of a survivor. According to him, his father was thrown here while he was traveling near Lawton, shortly after the beginning of the events.



- When the "Big Flash" happened, the system that controlled the access to the fusion power plants, for all the planet, ceased to be operational. The stations got mechanically sealed permanently...



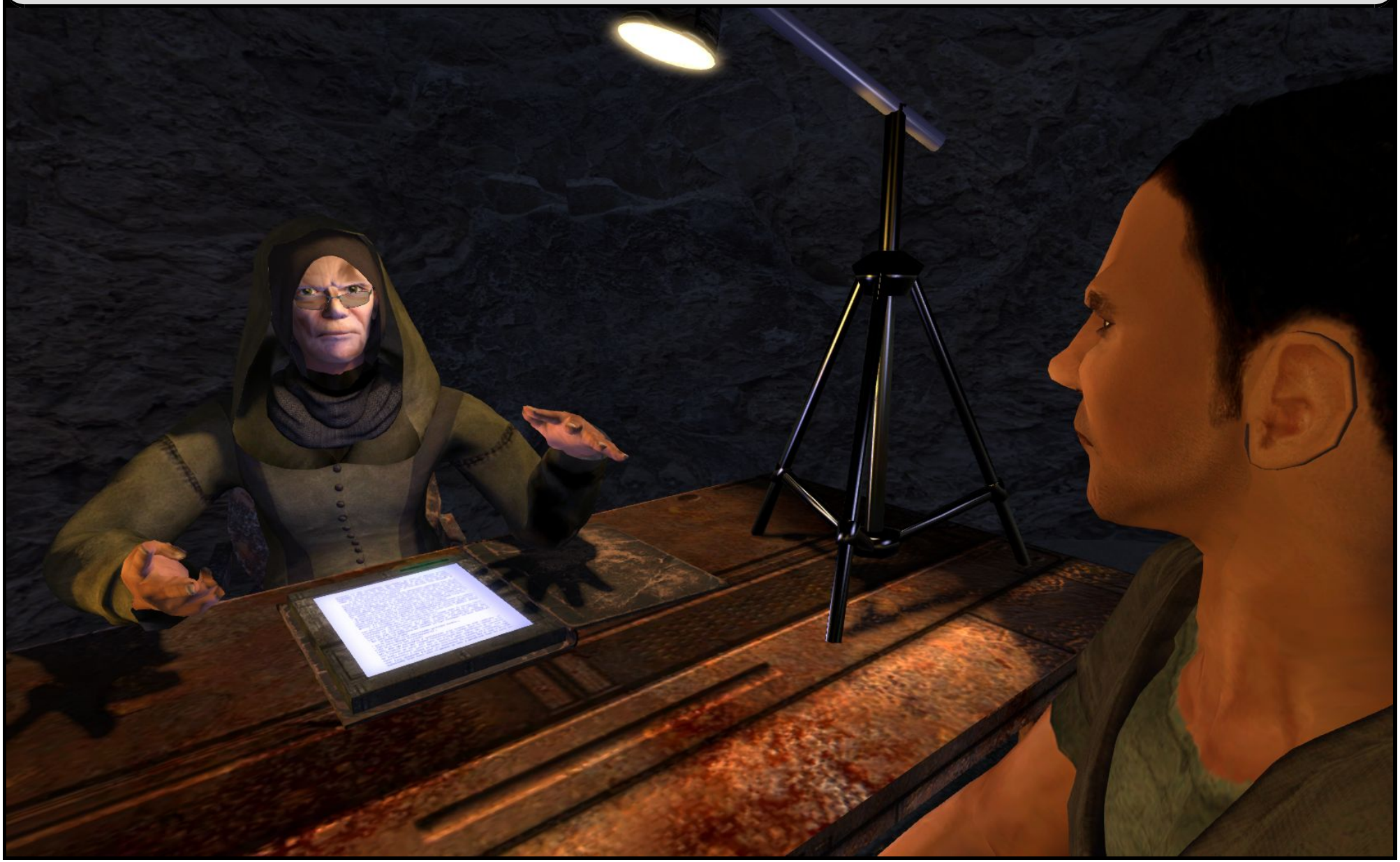
-- The authorities thought that it would be riskier to attempt an action than let the reactors stop by themselves. Everyone was convinced that they were going to stop when their security system would have expired...



- The Internal security systems of the reactors were designed to withstand everything. This is, by the way, why they resisted the "Big Flash"...



-- But when these systems reached their replacement deadline, 30 years after their implementation, instead of just stopping as planned, some damaged components induced an overreaction.



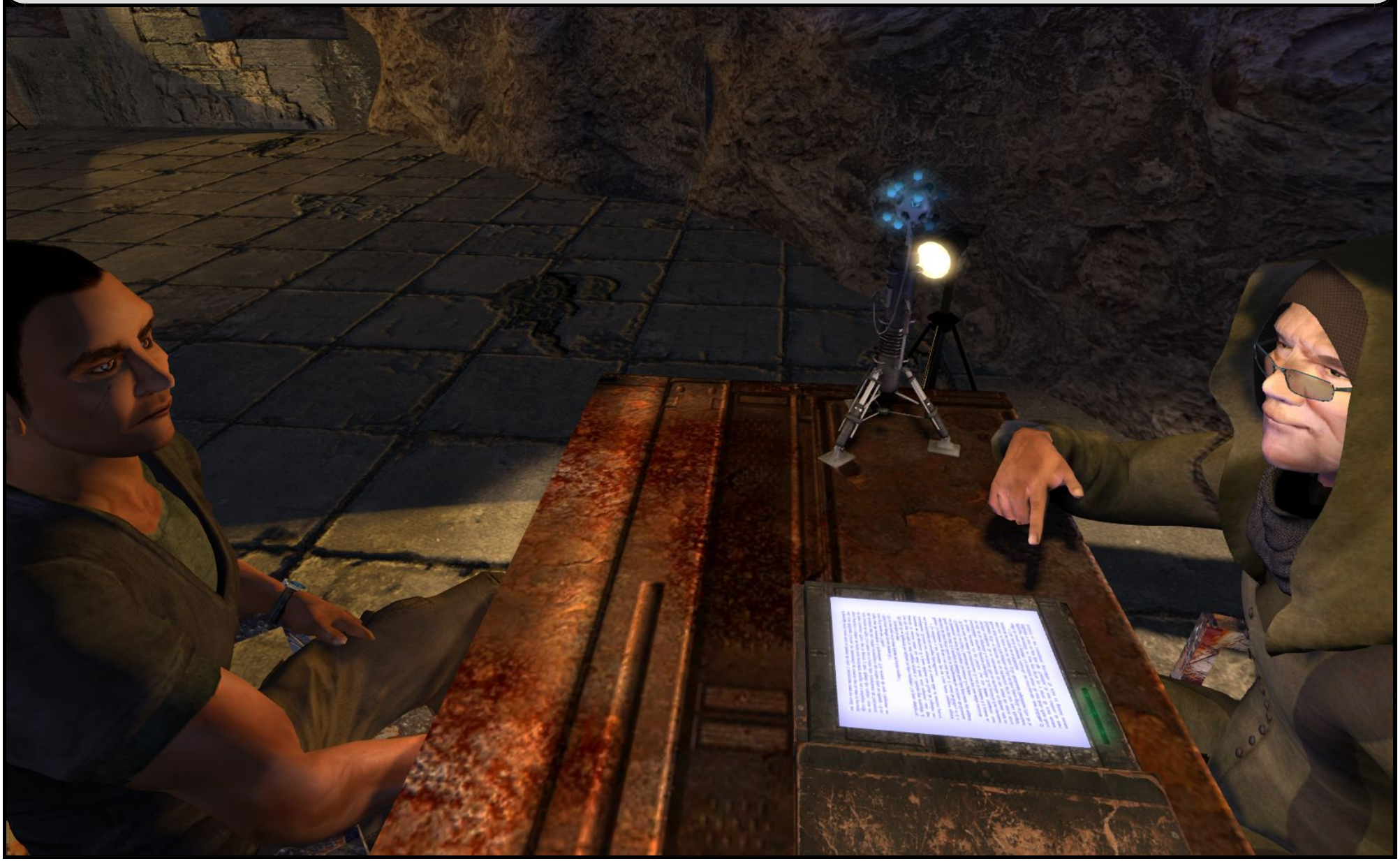
- In 2148, the first central Paris exploded, devastating the heart of the European continent. The others followed over the next two years, in exactly the same sequence as their implementation.



-- So this is how our civilization ended...
- Yes, and it took at least 4000 years to recover a similar technological level.



- You seem to know a lot about the history.
-- I collect piece by piece the information from people like you for more than 50 years now.



-- The Jijuterk cities, have you seen them?
- Of course, I've long time been a Northalian citizen. I had a family there, with two children. Who knows, I may be a grandfather.



-- Why did you leave?
- Because of this. This book, it's the work of my life. To collect the lost history of this world, I had to meet those who lived it. Most survivors are living in the marginal zone, they often have adaptation problems. Come with me...



-- So you never went back home?
- No. I chained myself to a bottle for several years. Then one day, I learned that I was dead. So I never went back. This book is now all that I am.



-- But that still doesn't tell me what you are really doing here? Who is this "Vanitan"?



- Vanitan digs a tunnel. He seeks the arkium reserve of Rikmon.
-- The arkium reserve?



- The Dallusians' arkium was kept at Rikmon, and despite the destruction of the city by Northalia to end the war, it is assuredly still there...



- The color of the soil, the lack of vegetation, this apparent haze in a dry air, these are signs that don't lie. This is here, somewhere beneath our feet, and Vanitan wants it.



-- I don't know what it is, or what he wants to do with that, but for my part, I would simply continue on my way.



- You better think twice, boy! You know many things now that Vanitan wouldn't want to become known. You will have to earn his trust, and even there...



-- Are you his prisoner?
- More or less, he needs me to find the arkium, and it gives me the opportunity to see the buried remains of Rikmon.



-- But is he holding you?
- Let's say that even if I was free to leave, I couldn't go very far.



- But enough talking, let's go up, we better not make him wait...



Not far away...



- So here is what we have. The footprints of five individuals come from the north, stop here, and return north...



-- One of them is the victim.
- Hmm...



-- But that's not all, the footprints of two other people come from the south.
- So they met here, and then something went wrong...



- The footprints arriving from the south, match exactly those recorded at James Sway's camp.
-- Really! So it is them!



- Yes... But there's something weird.
-- Meaning what?



- Well, the footprints of one of the two persons coming from the south, stop here and go nowhere.
-- Okay. This person has certainly not vanished!



--Which one is it?
- Based on the foot size, I would say Roland.



- But as if that wasn't weird enough, the footprints of the other person, who I presume to be Erydak, go in both directions. Some go north, and some go south.



- It just doesn't make any sense.



-- I know, what happened here is really confusing. But there is necessarily an explanation...



-- Lauti, I just found something here...
(?)



-- Their backpacks?
- It could be theirs.



- But tell me, Lauti. If you were in the middle of nowhere like here, would you leave all your camping gear behind?



-- No, unless my intention is to come back shortly.
- They must be nearby.



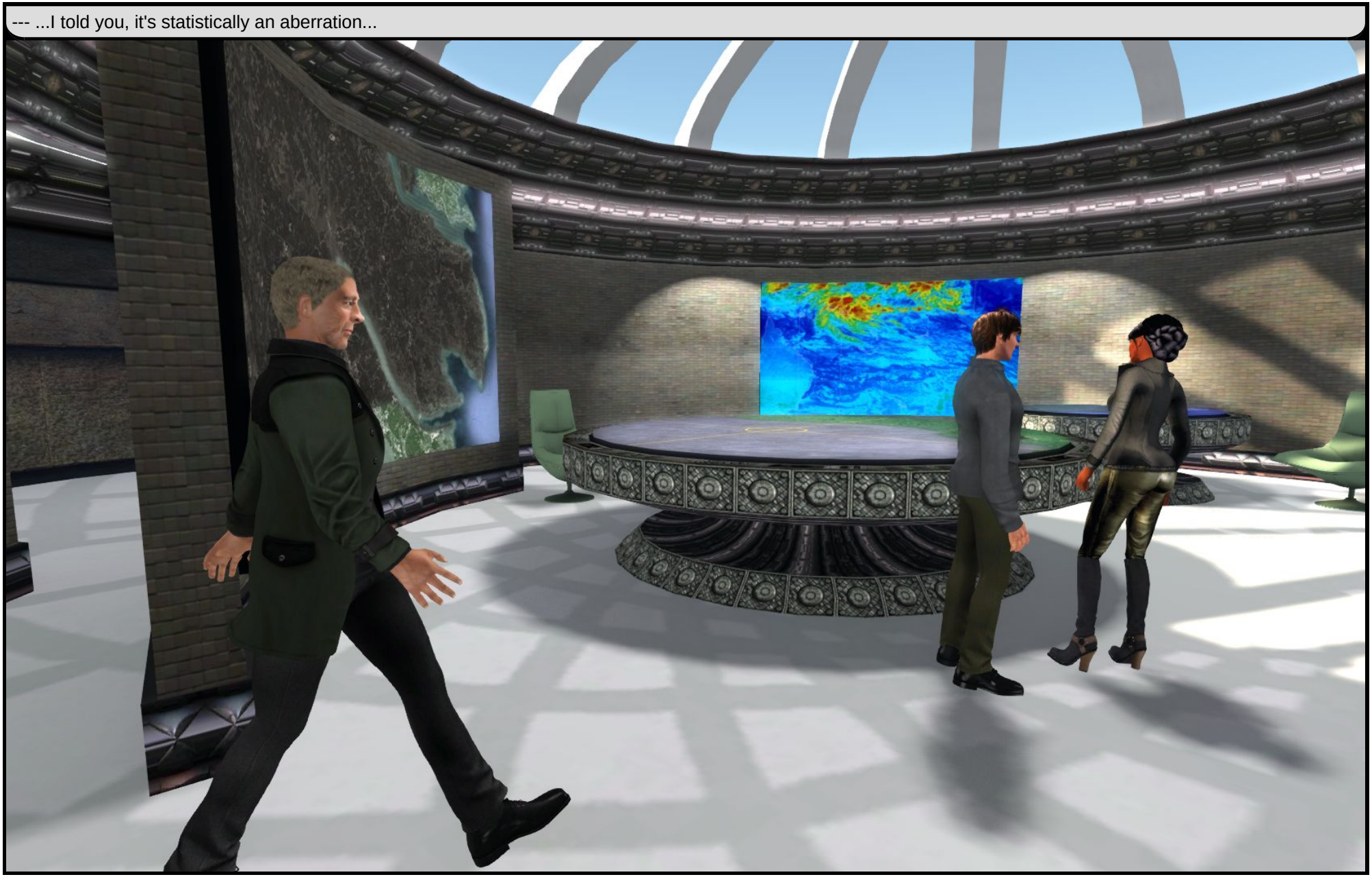
- Let's take the Shenika to record a high-resolution scan of the area. This is a crime scene anyway, it's the procedure.
-- Okay, Boss. I'll scan a larger area. This way, we will have a clear view of the direction that each one took.



- Maybe we should put a white flag, otherwise, they might not dare to come taking their gear.
-- I agree, that's a good idea. If it can also prevent us to get shot...



--- ...I told you, it's statistically an aberration...



- Tee is not here?
-- No, he left about forty minutes ago.



- Mr. Zanter, did you read my report?
-- Yes, I did. There's something wrong with all this.



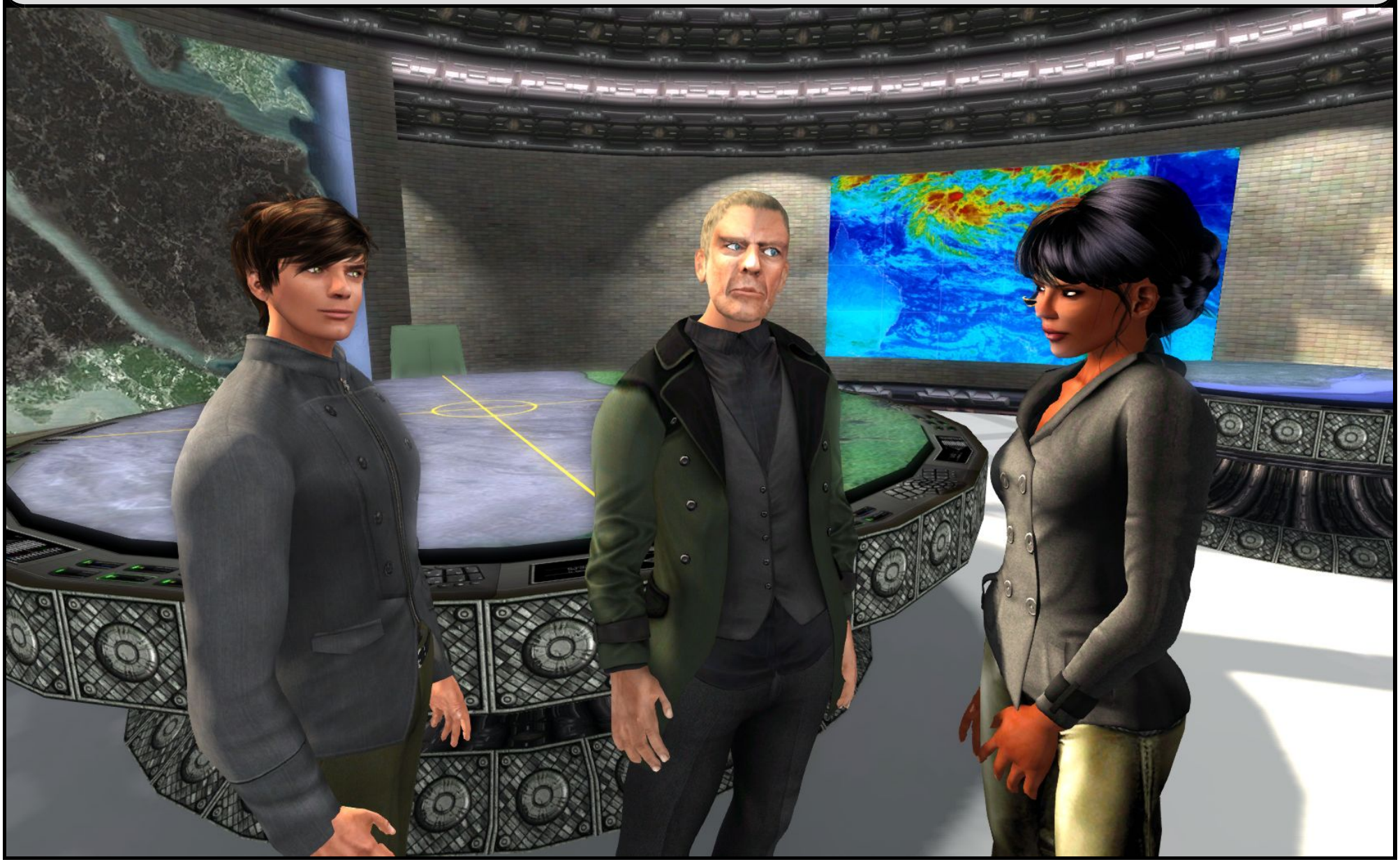
- Reim and Lauti have found a body near the crash site.
-- What?!



- They also found the footprints of six other people.



-- Are you telling me that seven people were present in Rikmon Stain?
--- That's what Reim Tremble said.



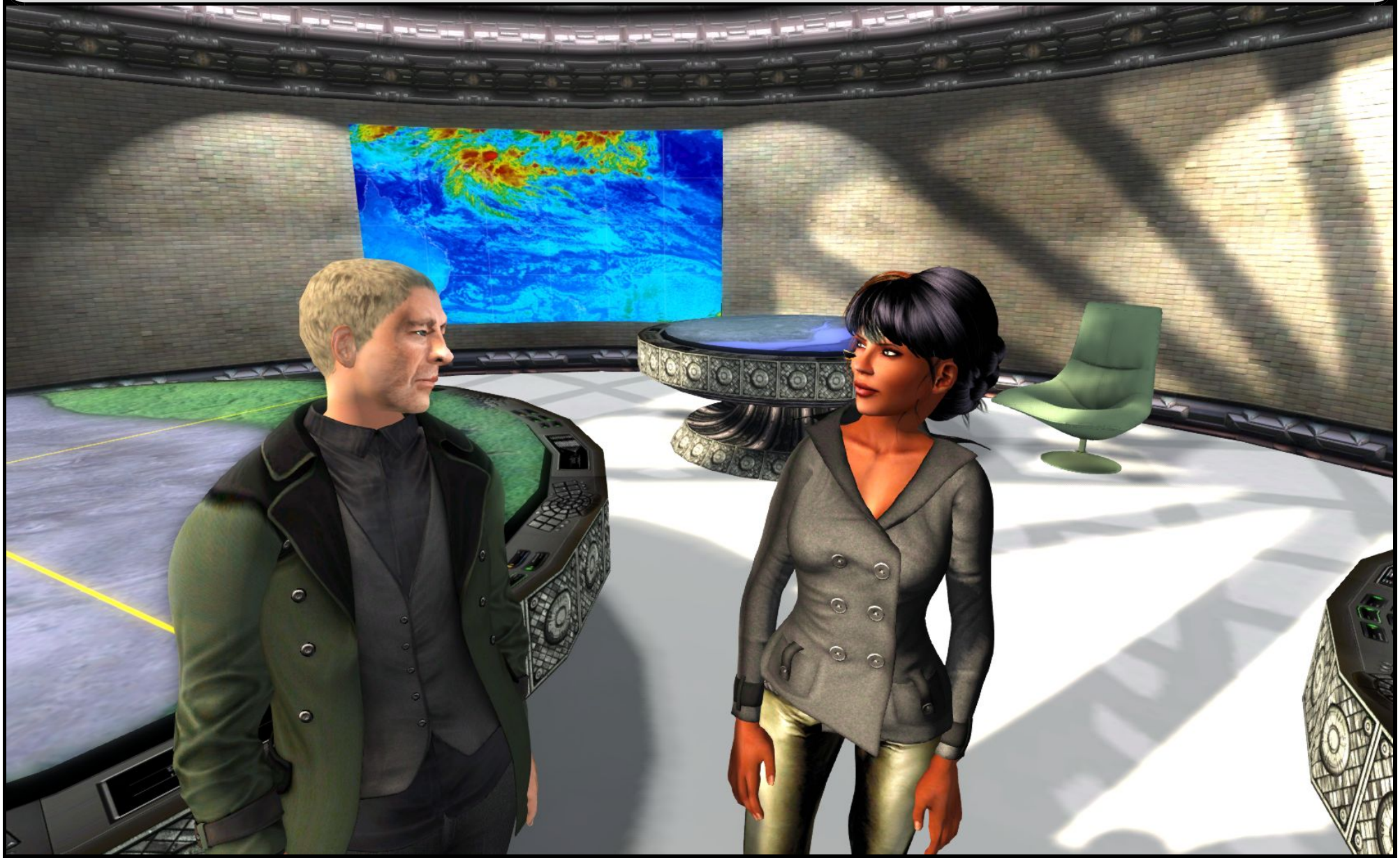
- How could seven people go unnoticed with all the probes assigned to this area? There's something wrong. Who is in charge of Rikmon Stain?



- This is Tee Maguire, Sir. This is a priority 5 area. The only other person who could be in charge of it, it would be you.



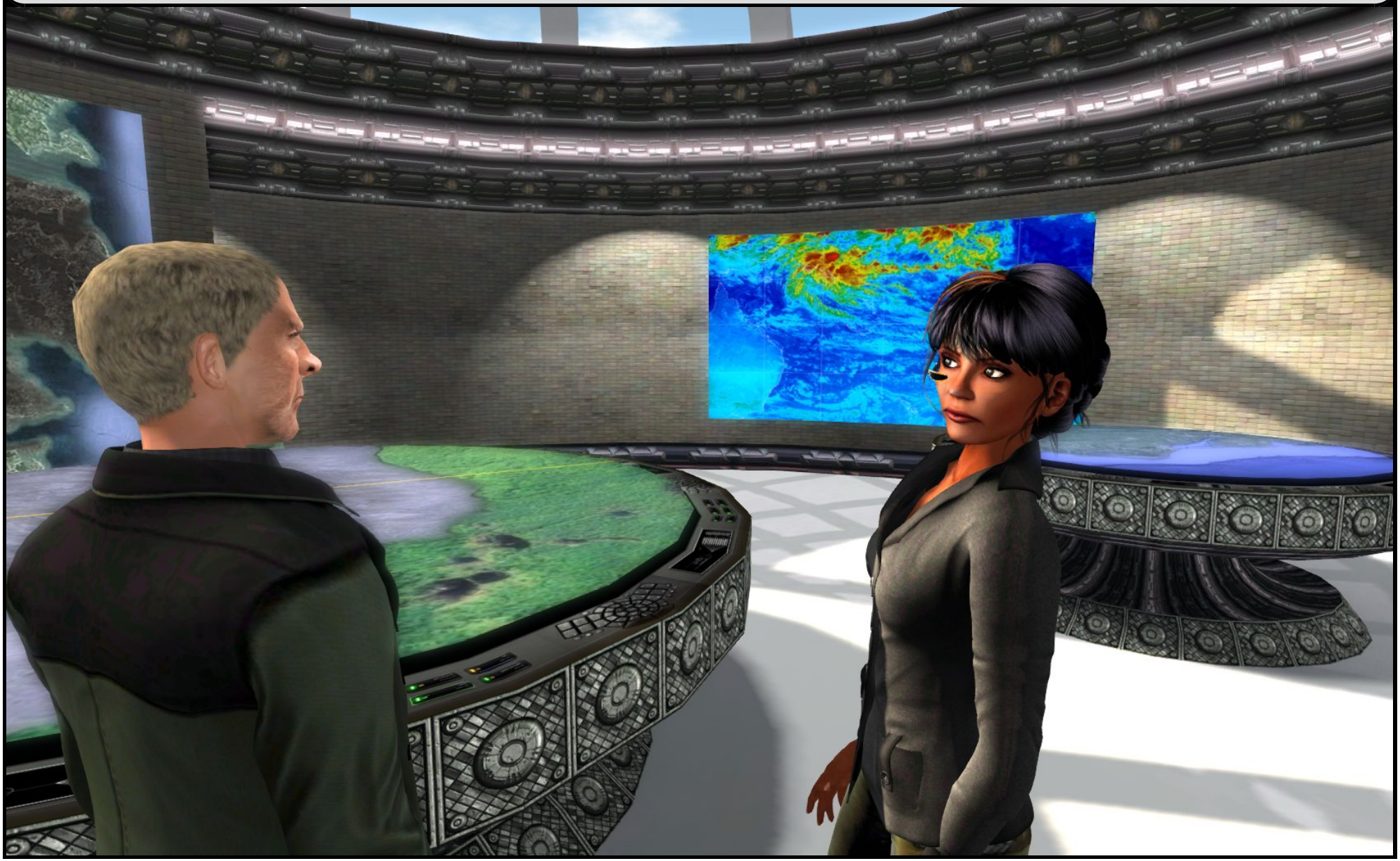
- Jaima, can you tell me when was the last human detection in Rikmon Stain?



- The last detection has been recorded four years ago. It was an isolated case. Before that, we had two or three cases every year.



- So nothing since four years?
-- No, absolutely nothing, not even a deer.



-- System, give me access to Rikmon Stain's surveillance plan.
{System's voice} A priority access level 4 is required. Access is denied.



- Didn't you say it was a priority 5?
-- Yes, it has always been a level 5.



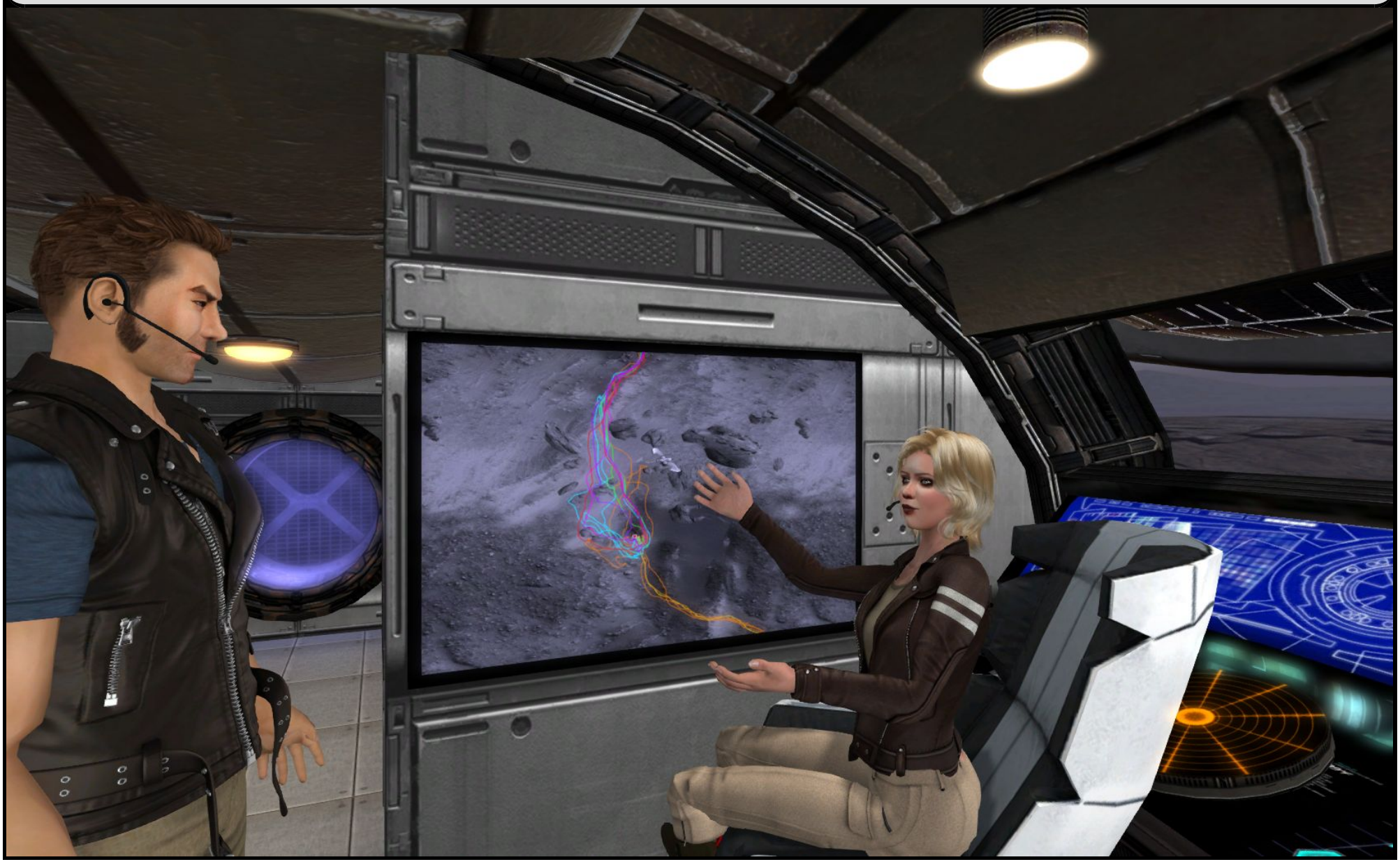
- Sir, I see that the surveillance plan has been set to level 4 fifteen minutes ago by Director Tee Maguire.
-- Huh! Why did he do that?



-- Jaima, find me Oclan Karterz immediately...



-- It's all there, Boss.
- What does it say?



-- I started by excluding our own footprints, then I've executed a pattern recognition procedure to identify the different people. We can clearly see the paths taken by the five people coming from the north.



-- One of them is the victim. The four others returned from where they came from.
- Okay, the victim was following the same path, but he turned back after 100 meters. That leaves several options.



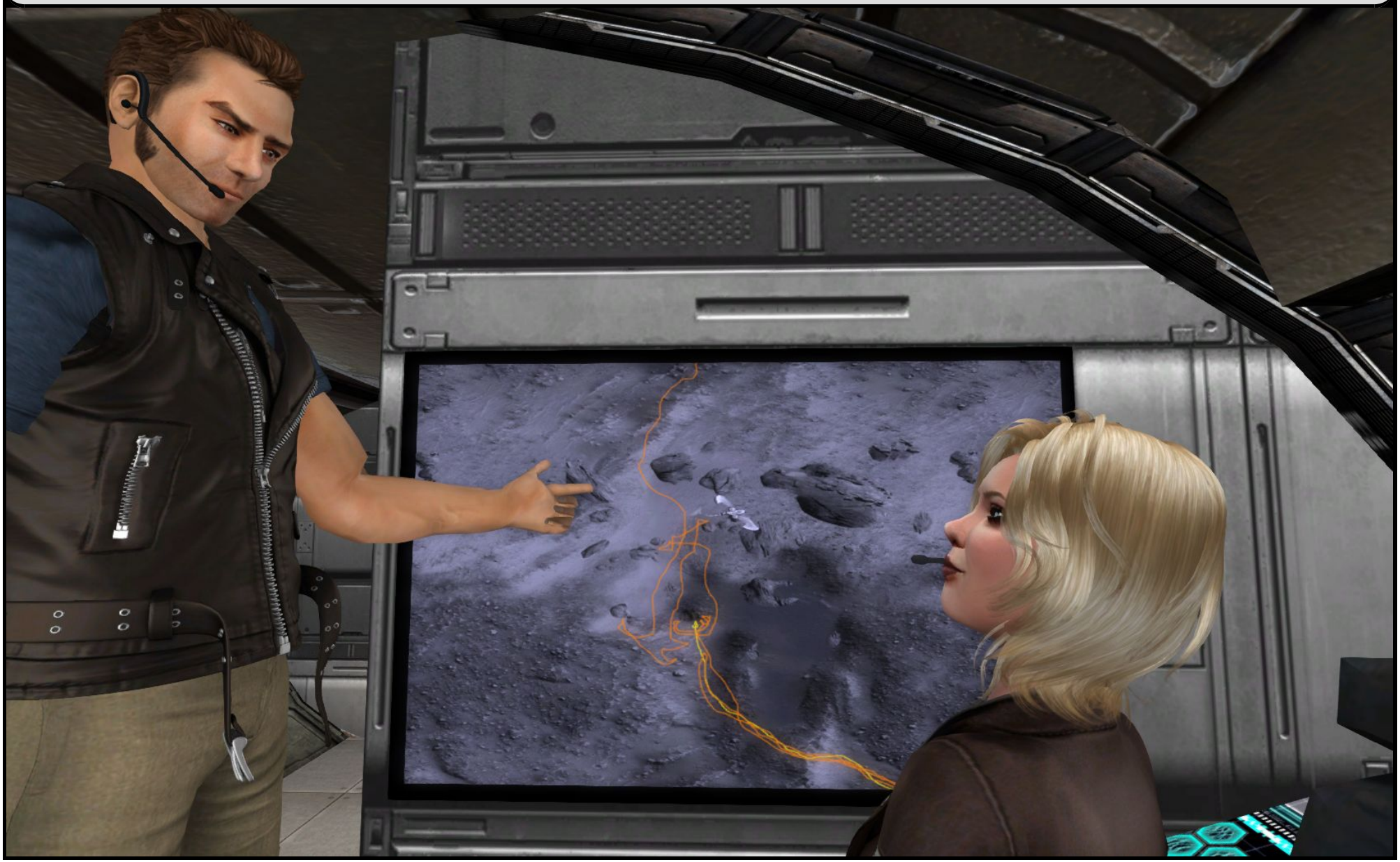
- From the south, we can see Roland and Erydak. Roland stopped here and went nowhere. Erydak, on her side, retraced her steps for about three kems, before returning again.



- Roland has certainly not vanished. That leaves maybe three options. He might have been abducted by air, or maybe these people from the north have carried him. Or Erydak did.



-- It can't be her, I would have found something along her path. Could she have carried him long enough without stopping? Frankly, I doubt it.
- And what about that? Would she go with them?



-- I asked myself that question, and here is what I discovered. Among those who went north, Erydak is the only one who left full footprints.
- What do you mean?



- It means she was the last one who walked on this path.



-- She would have followed them?
- It's more than likely.



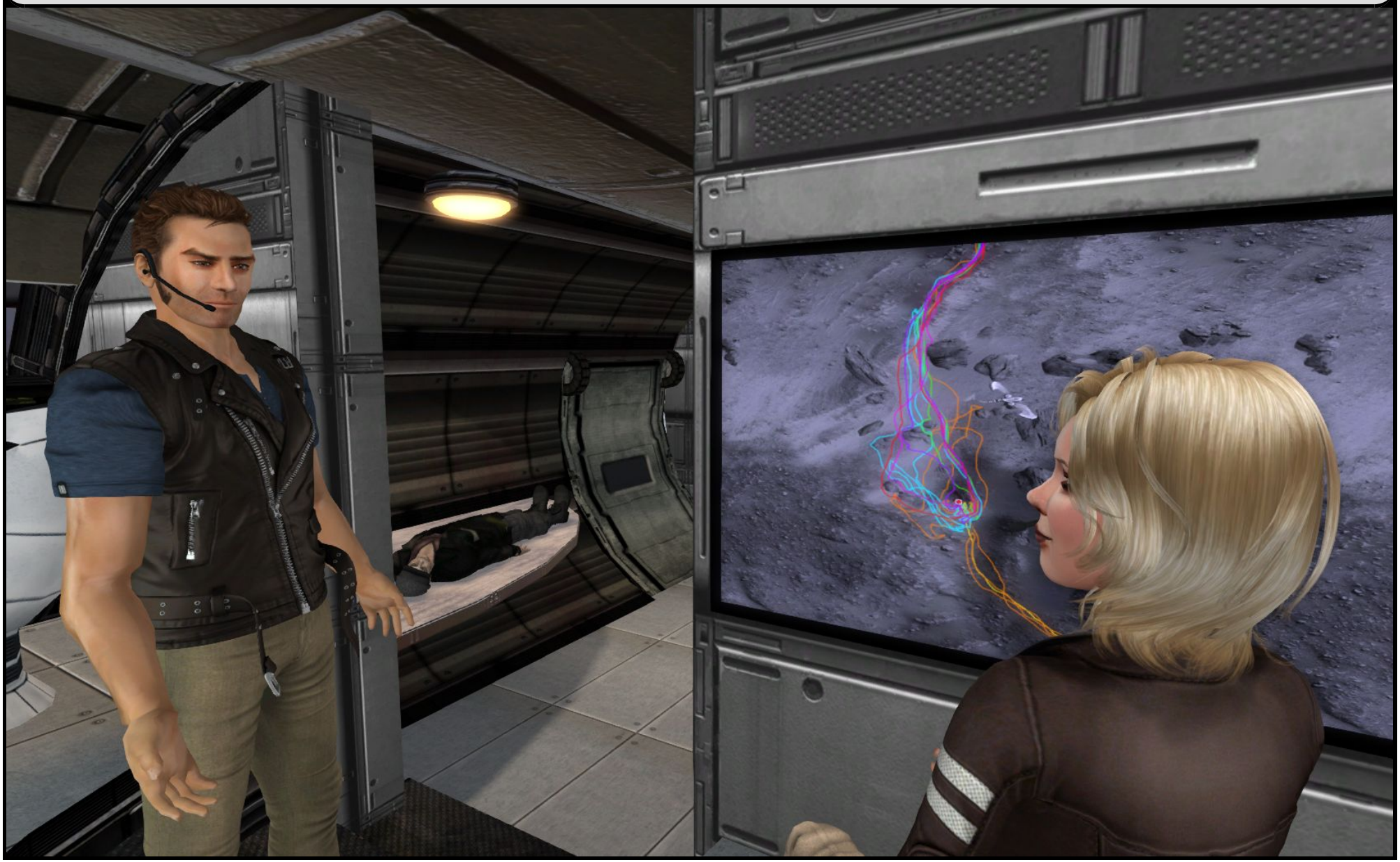
-- She's also the only one who walked near the probe.
- So all the others would have been indifferent to the presence of the probe... Hmm...



- Maybe it's because they were already gone when the probe has been sent to the ground.



- She's after them. It doesn't look good.
-- And there is already one victim.



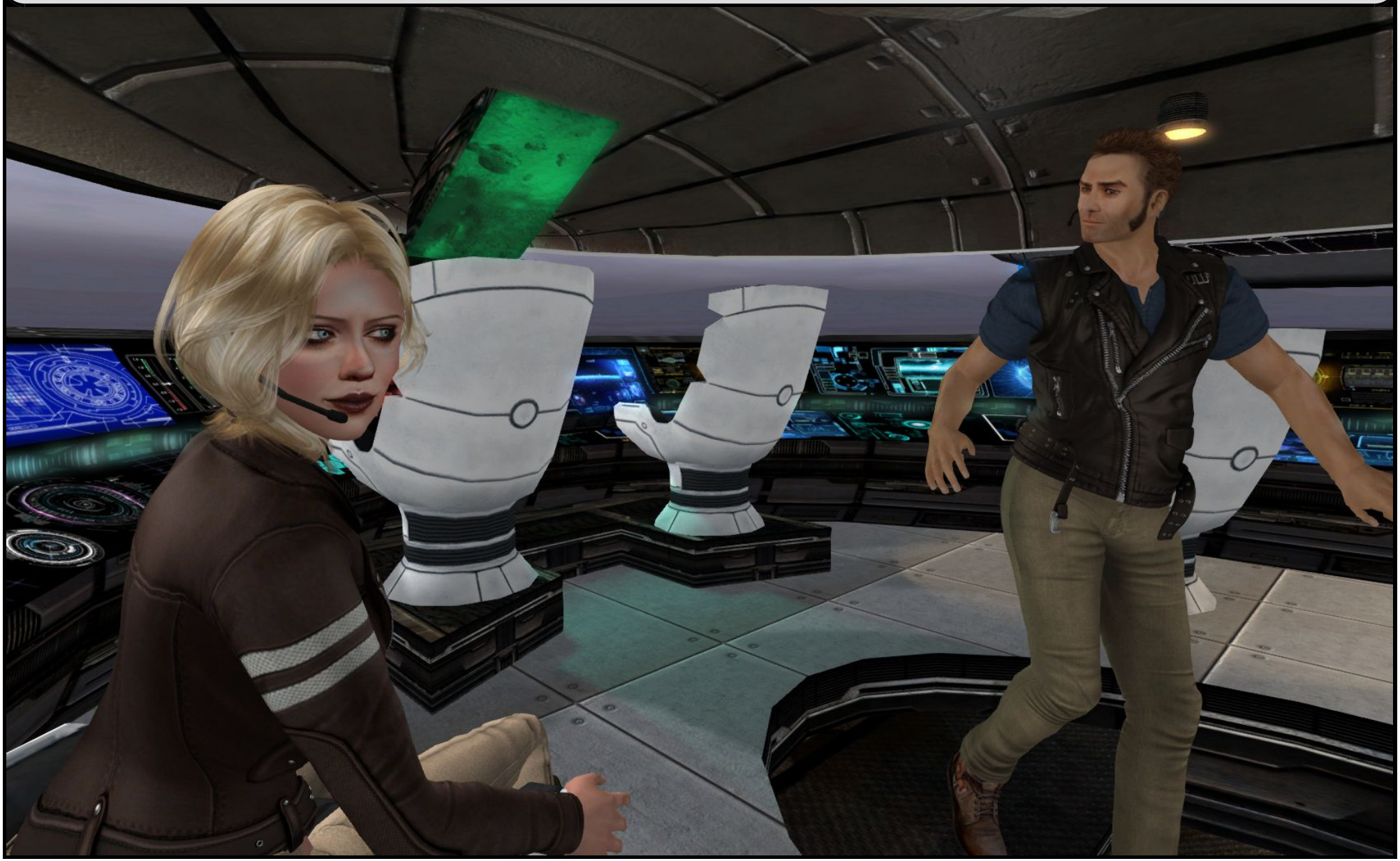
- We need to find out what is going on here. Who are these people and what do they do in Rikmon Stain? Their presence is an aberration if we consider the level of surveillance that is deployed here.



-- So, ready to take off?
- No, we have no idea what we can find over there. I think we should consider doing a more discreet approach.



-- We will follow their trail. Take your weapon. I will go apply the lock.
- Okay Boss, but give me a few minutes, I must first stop the Shenika.



-- Pol, please, open the door.



-- You! You are in big trouble!
--- Vanitan?!
((((!?))))



--- You're working for them!
---- What? I don't work for anyone!



-- Vanitan, this is unlikely!
- Our occultation has been discovered!



-- What happened? It can't be him.
- Just as he entered the Stain! Come on, old man, he can only be one of them!



- I didn't do anything!



---- Zerek, chain him up. I'll deal with him later.



---- What are you doing? You don't have to do this...
----- Come on!



--- Pol, close the tunnel entrance!



-- Are you sure with this? If the engines get burnt under the weight of the door, it could take us months to remove it.
- Do what I say!



- What about Widerm? He's still outside.
-- Seal me that fucking tunnel! Is that clear enough?



- This Widerm, he's never where he should be! Xerca, if you see him, please, make sure that we won't see him again.



- You know what you have to do?
-- I couldn't have waited any longer!



- Vanitan, please, listen to me...
-- Go back to your work, old man!



- I'm very sorry.



Meanwhile...



-- I thought industrial activity wasn't permitted in the whole wilderness area.
- It's not allowed. This is somewhat unexpected, especially here, in Rikmon Stain.



- What are they doing here? Mining?
-- For sure, they dug a tunnel... A very big tunnel.



- They must be heavily equipped to achieve that.



- Such thing couldn't have been undertaken without any involvement from the Northalian government.
-- There's clearly something fishy going on.



-- The footprints lead right to the tunnel.
- Let's go take a closer look.



- This reminds the utility conduits that were drilled to connect the two shores at Morial.



- Boss, are you sure you want to enter this tunnel? It's terribly dark in there.
- Let's at least take a look.



- Don't turn on your lamp, someone might spot us.



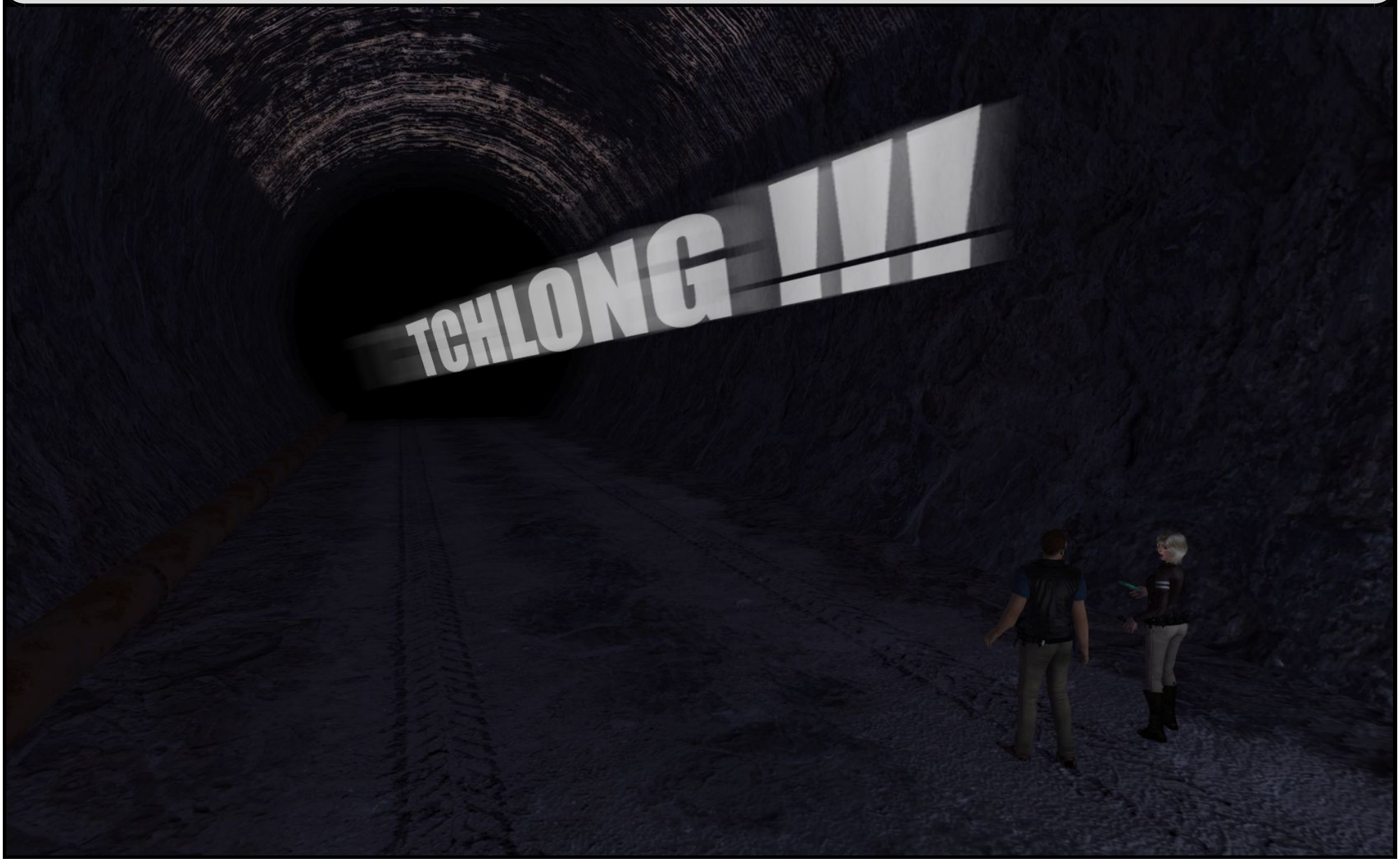
- I really don't like this.
-- Patience, our eyes will adjust.



-- That seems rather deep.
- Indeed, we see no light. Or it's deep, or it's a dead end...



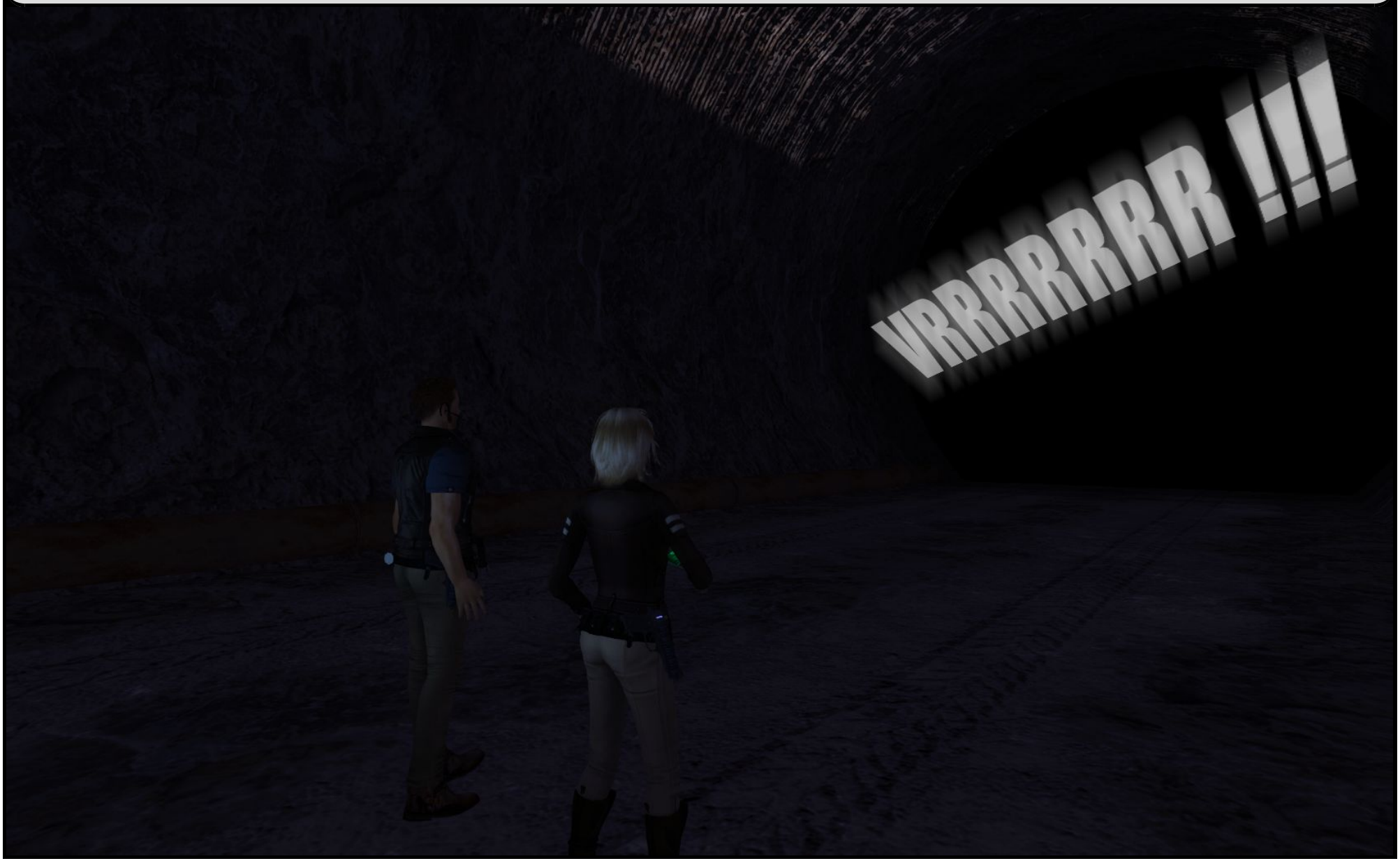
(!?)
((!!!))


TCHLONG !!!

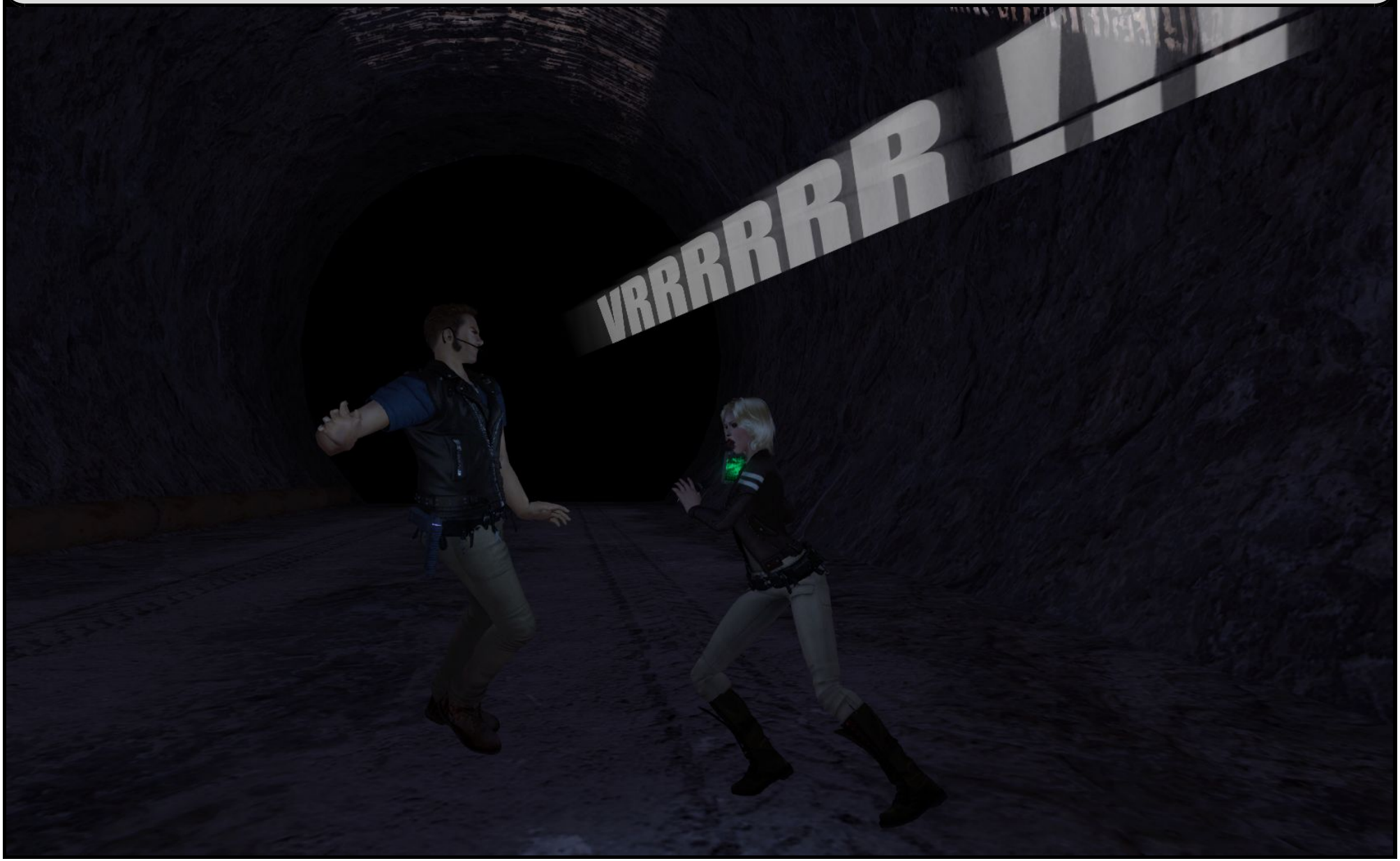
- What was that?
-- I don't know, but maybe we'd better get out of here.



(!)
((!))


VRRRRRRR !!!

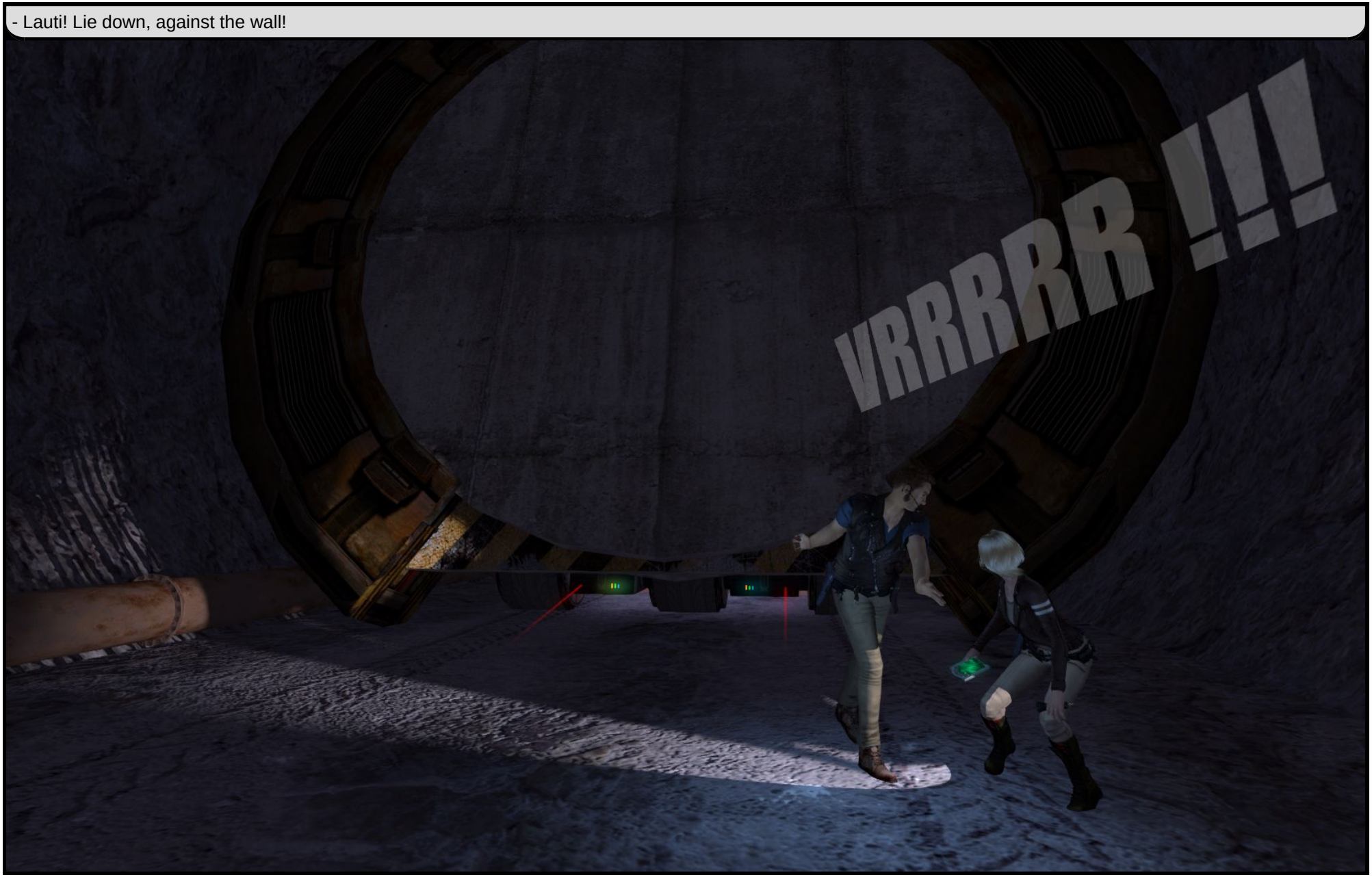
-- Holy hell! Boss, it's coming toward us!
- Yeah... It's time to run!



-- Boss, we won't make it!

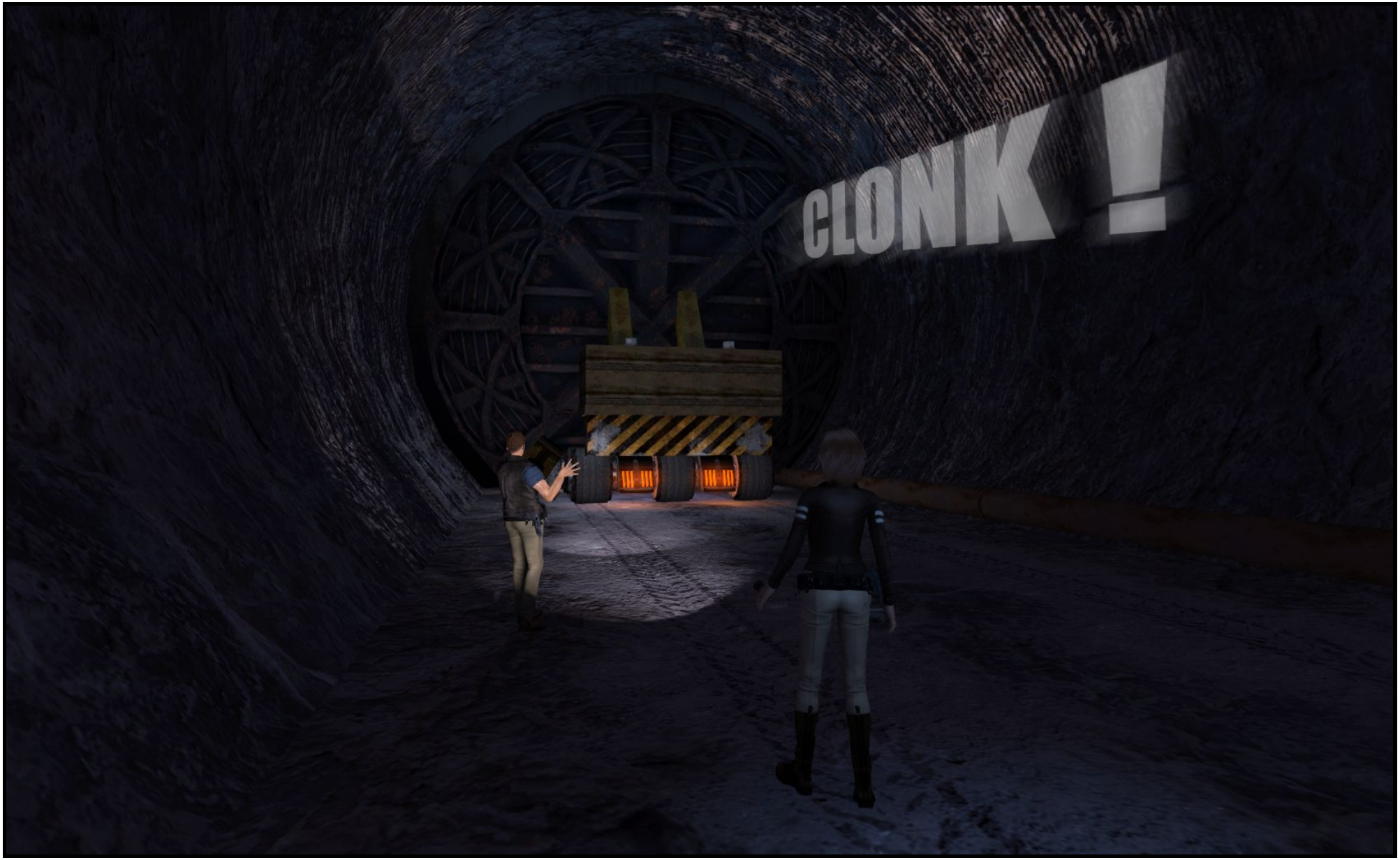


- Lauti! Lie down, against the wall!




VRRRRR !!!


VRRRRR !!!


CLONK !

- Are you okay?
-- I can't say.



- We're trapped in this hole!
-- Relax, this is no time to panic.



- Let's see that door, maybe there's a way out.
-- Yeah...



- I don't see any opening mechanism. We're trapped.
-- It means that it is maybe outside or somewhere deeper in this tunnel.



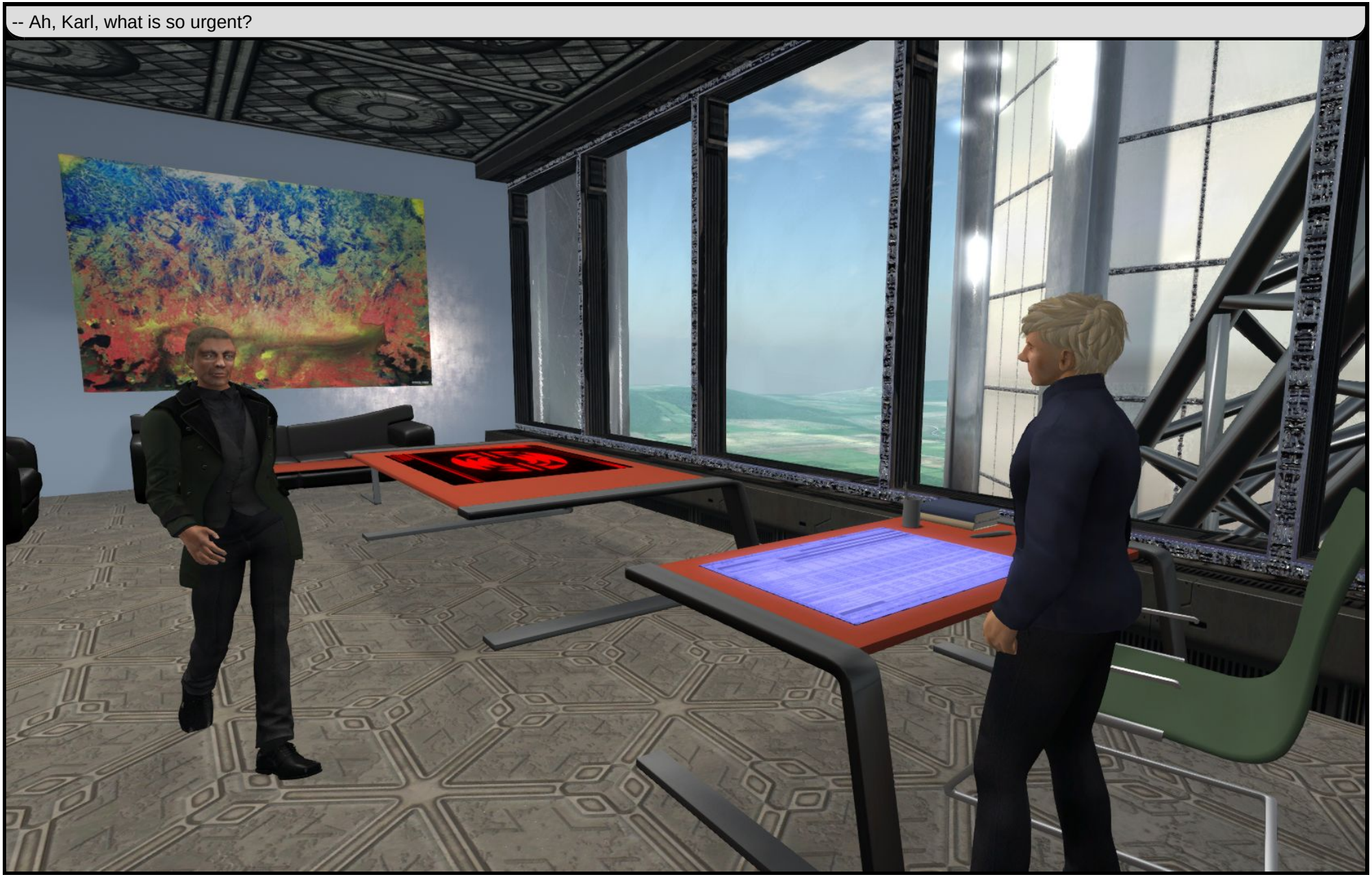
- It doesn't leave us many options. Let's see what lurks in this tunnel.



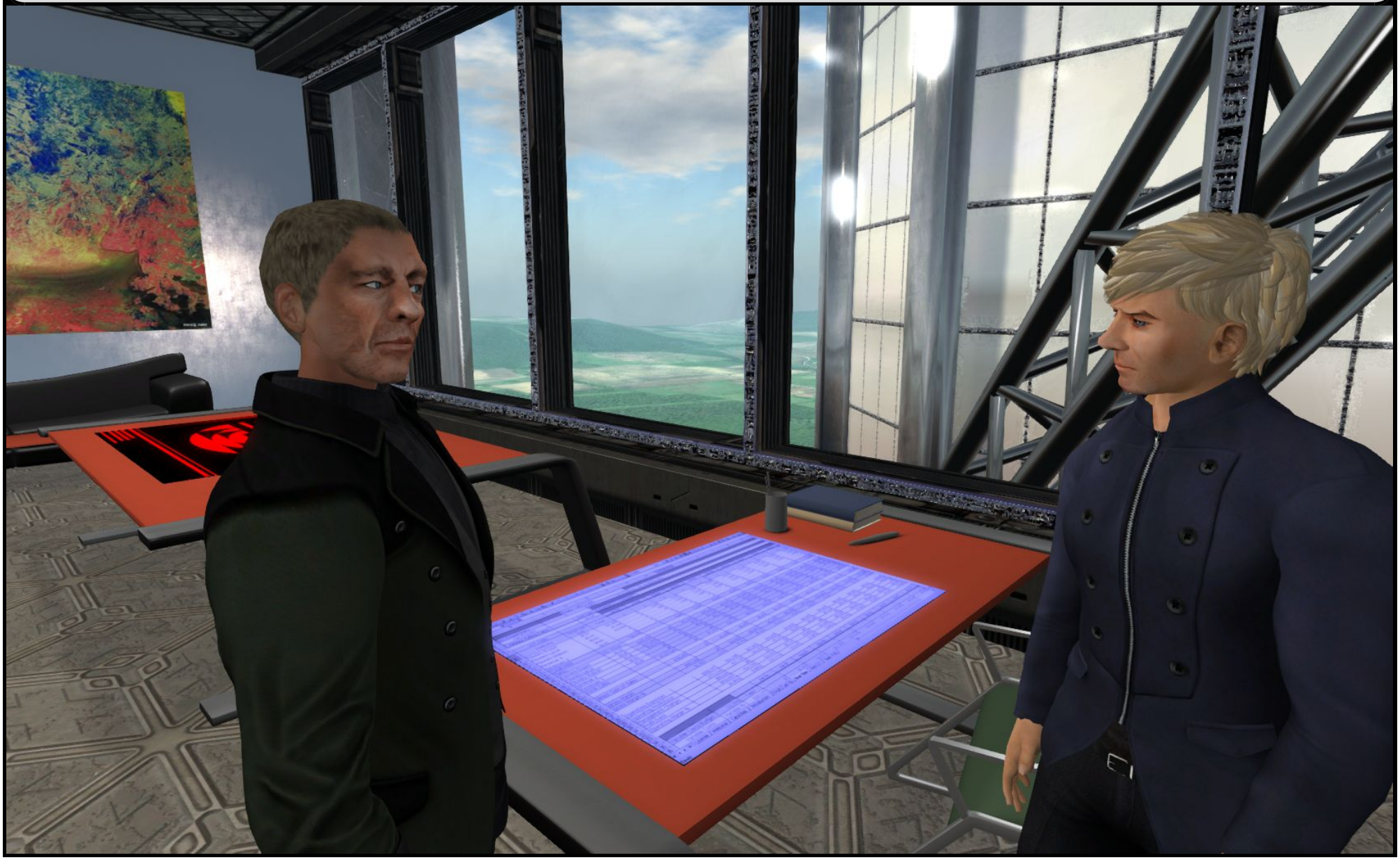
- Okay, but if you don't mind, I'll keep my lamp on.
-- I agree, but let's keep our beams pointed down to not be seen.



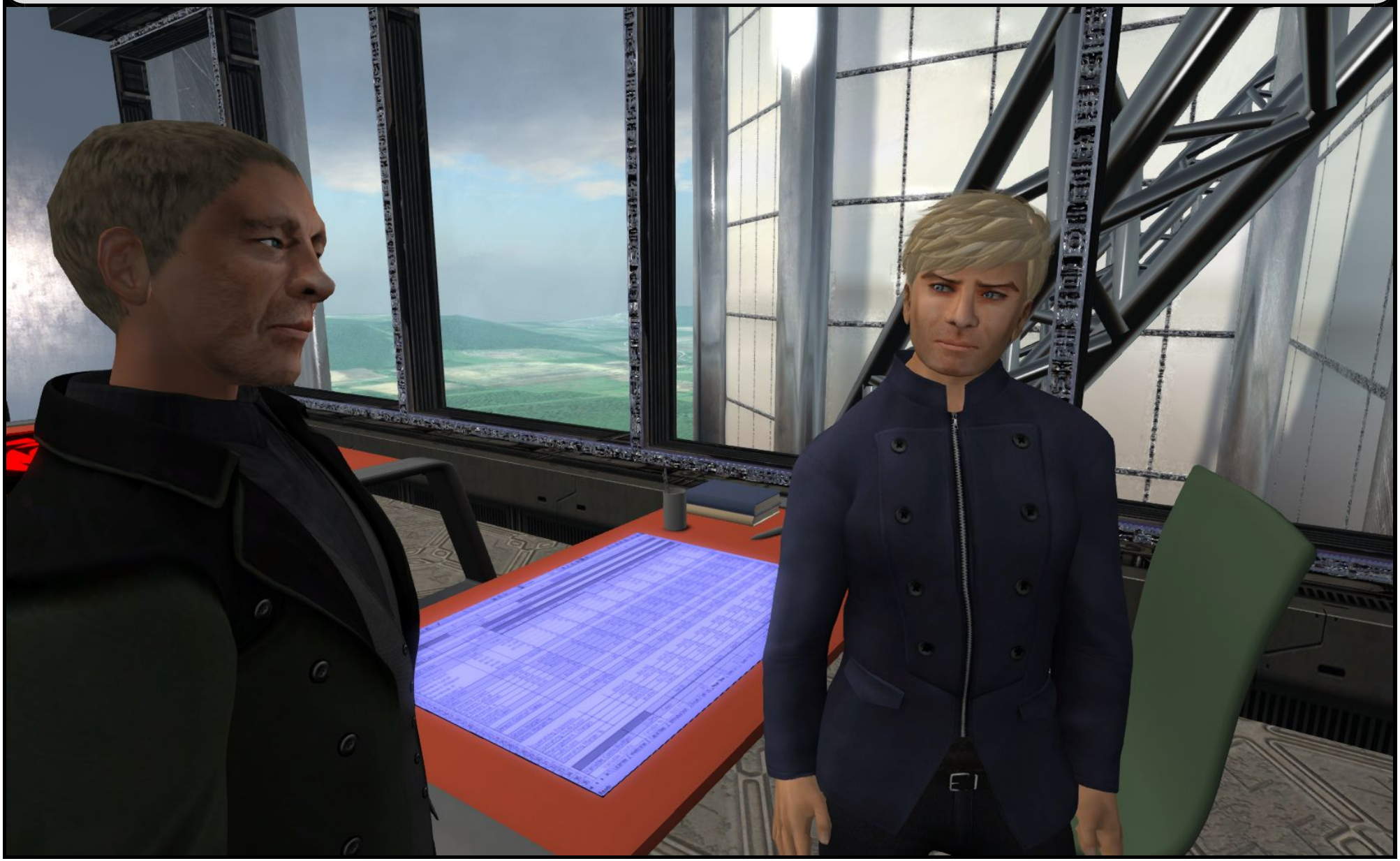
-- Ah, Karl, what is so urgent?



- Oclan, were you aware of this change done on the security level of the Rikmon Stain surveillance plan?



-- Absolutely not. Did you ask Tee why he changed it?
- We aren't able to contact him. He abandoned his post just after changing the security level.



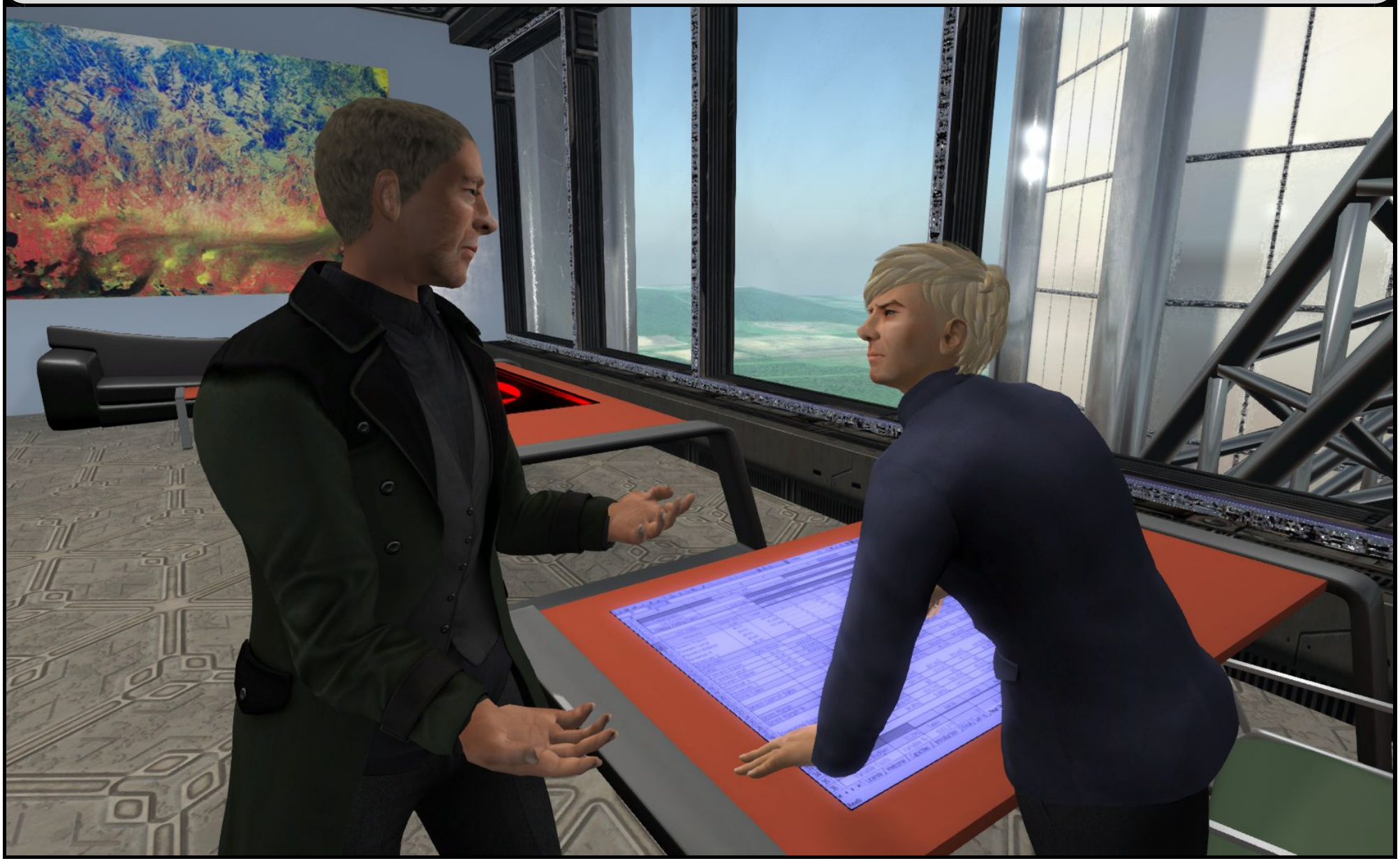
- Karl, I know Tee Maguire very well, he certainly has good reasons to justify this change.



- We have an intrusion in Rikmon Stain that no probe has detected. And exactly when we notice, Tee Maguire changes the security level and leaves the control center! ... Wow!



- I believe there is irregularity, don't you think?
-- I see... Okay, yes. I will reset the surveillance plan to level 4. So you will be able to investigate.



- That's it, access granted, I assigned you as the plan manager.
-- Thank you. Now, let's try to understand why the detection failed.



- Jaima, I'll give you access to detailed records of Rikmon Stain.
{Jaima's voice}: Thank you, I'm going to start the analysis.



- I saw that Tee sets up a derogation on the behavioral rules, I'll start there.
-- He would have changed the probes' behavior? That sounds suspicious, doesn't it?



- Hmm... Not necessarily, derogations are not uncommon, especially on such specific surveillance plans. But when there is a problem with the detection, this is among the first things to investigate.



In the tunnel...




(Shit! This thing has closed the tunnel! ...Oh great, Alezia! You'd better find a way out of here!)

(I'd better use "diplomacy" if I find the one who can open this door... If, of course, I'm not completely alone in this rat hole...)



(Oh! Finally, someone's coming...)





- Our communicators are completely ineffective, I can't relay to the Shenika.
-- There is certainly too much rock above us.



- It's still her footprints, still over the same four others.
-- That's the positive point, we're probably not alone to be trapped in this tunnel.




- Boss, I think it will take more than that to make me feel safe!
-- You can't say I'm not trying.

- Oh! Boss, look at this. This footprint matches those from Roland.
-- Are you sure?



-- Yes, one hundred percent. But there's only one.
- Only one? So that confirms they transported him...




-- Did you hear that?
- What?
TIC !

-- There's something here with us!
- I didn't hear anything.



--- Aaaah!
(!!!?)

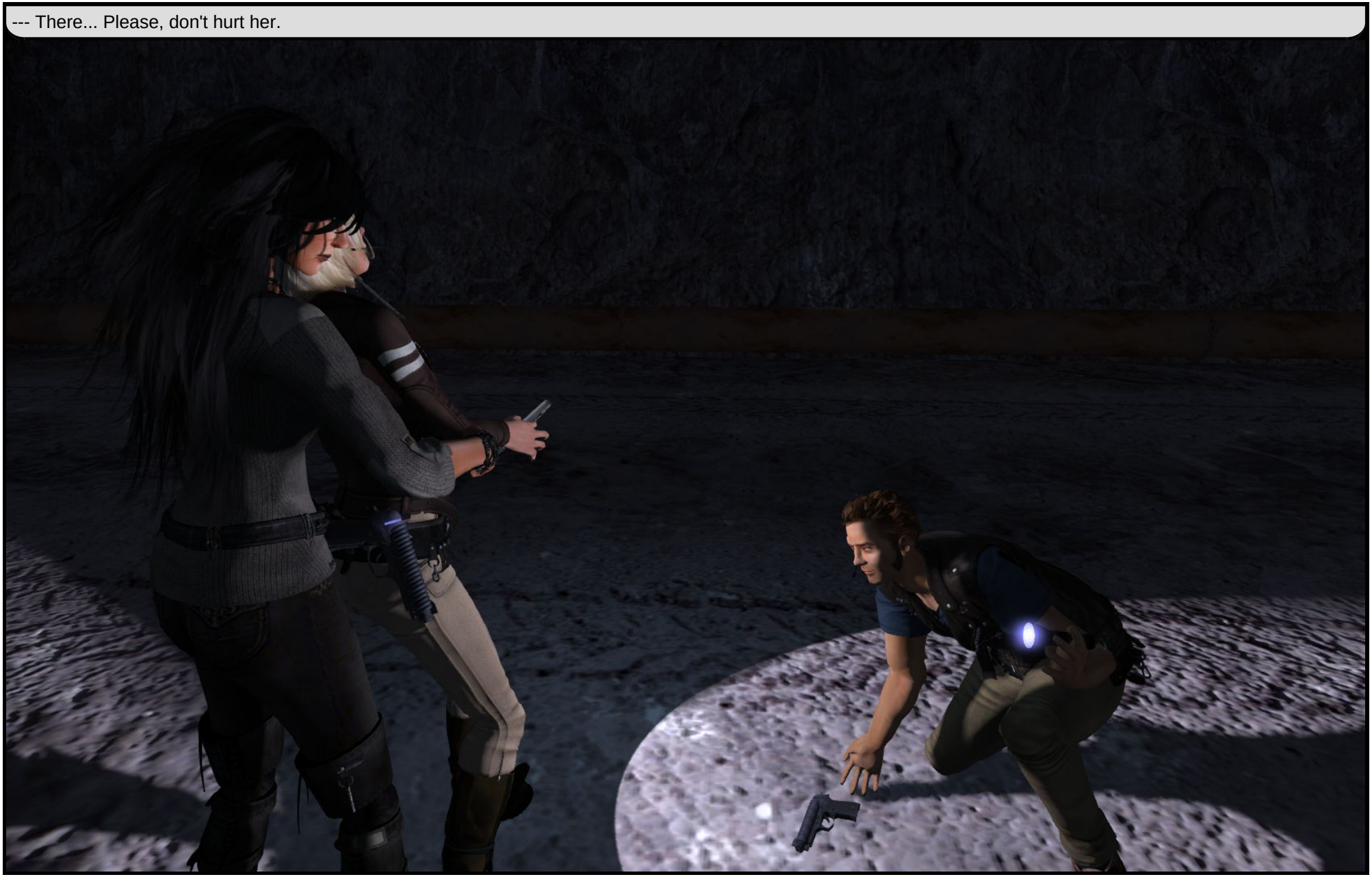



- Drop your weapon now or I'll cut her little throat!

- Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! ...Don't do that. It's okay, I'll put my gun down.



--- There... Please, don't hurt her.



- Now, move back!
--- Ok, ok, we're not here to hurt anyone.



-- Ouch!
- Move back a bit more!



--- Don't move or you're dead!



- Now, where's my friend?



- You mean Roland?
-- Yeah, where is he?



- This is precisely what we're trying to find out. You must be Erydak, I'm Reim and this is Lauti.
--- Hmm, you must have talked with Roland...



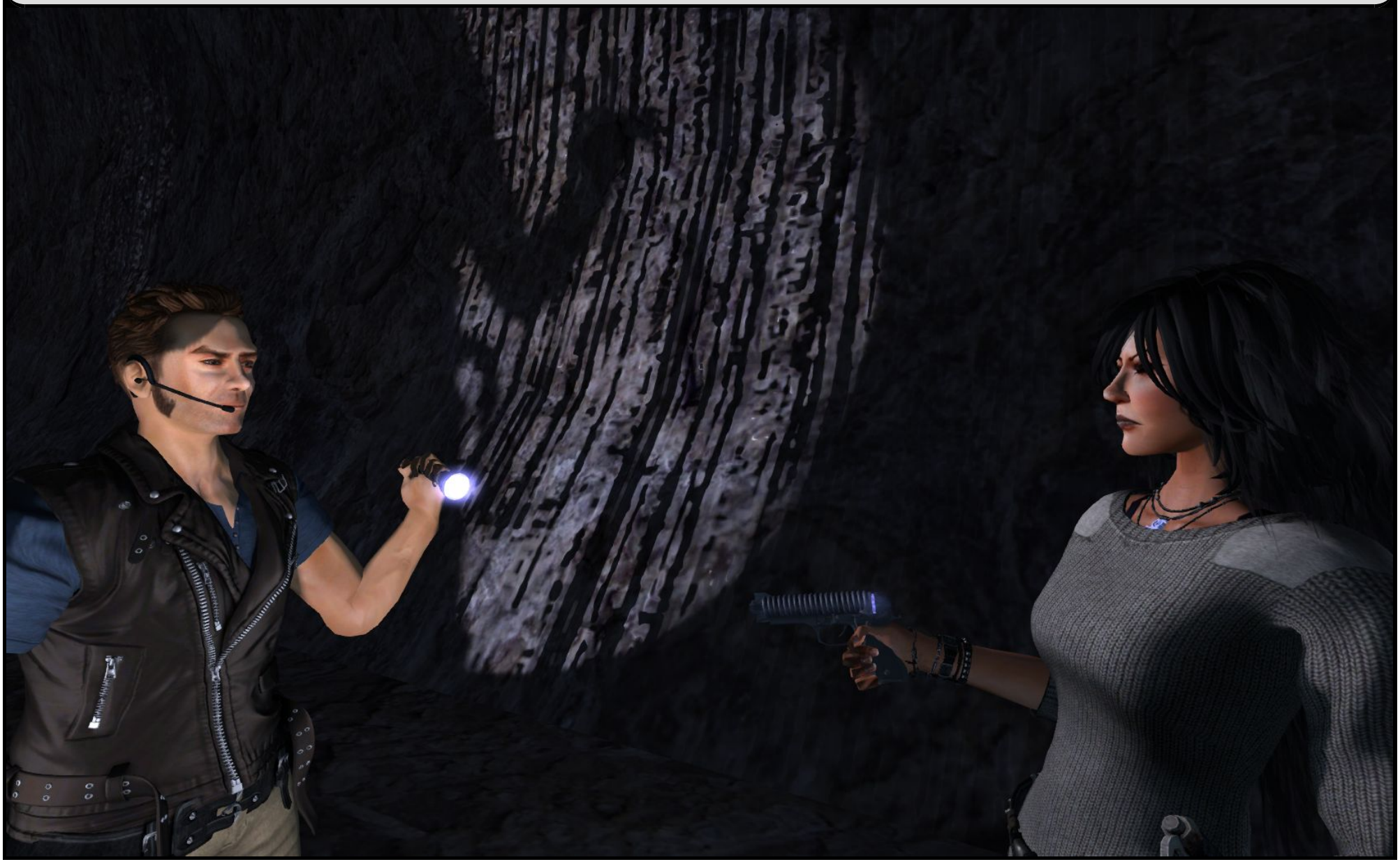
- No, but we found the crashed probe and a dead body. We followed your footprints up to here. We were looking for you for months. And regarding these people that you were following, we still don't know who they are.



-- You were looking for us? Who the hell are you?
- We've been sent to find you, just after you left Terkazy. We simply want to initiate contact between you and our government.



-- What government? Jijuterk?
- Yes, the Northalian government based in Jijuterk.



-- What is this place, this tunnel?
- I would like to know. We don't know who built it. Those people you follow, maybe they know. Did you see them?



- I saw only one of them. I think you have already found his body.
--- Yes, we did. What happened?



- He put his gun against my head, I wasn't willing to take more chances. The discussion was over.



- Okay, enough talking! The only thing that I care about right now is to find Roland and get out of this hole...



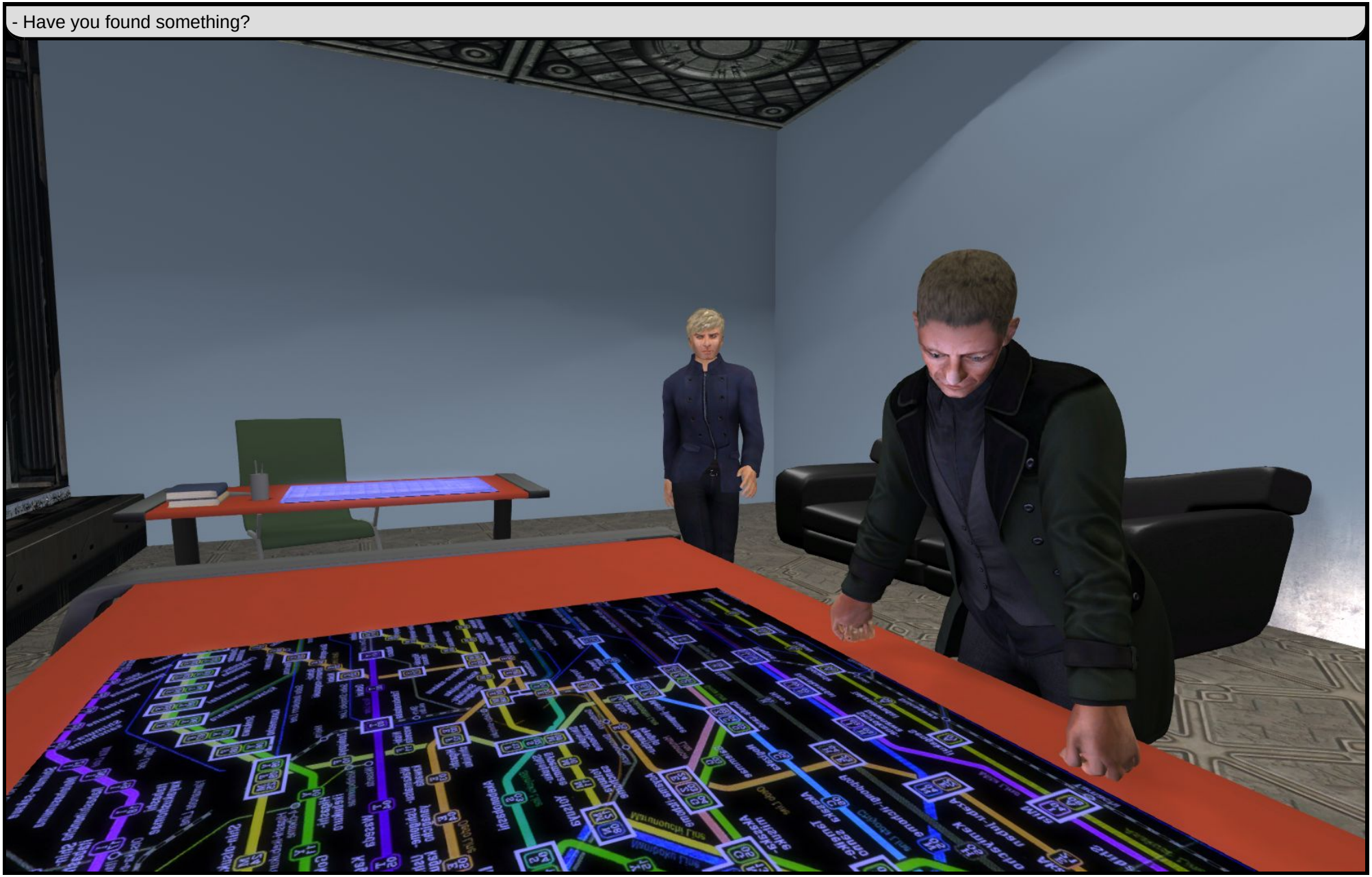
-- You go first.



--- You too blondie... Oh! I think you pissed on yourself.
- Oh! You're so...
--- Come on, move!



- Have you found something?



-- Hmm... Maybe. There is at least one behavioral derogation that I'm still not sure what it exactly does. But it could be related to the detection range.



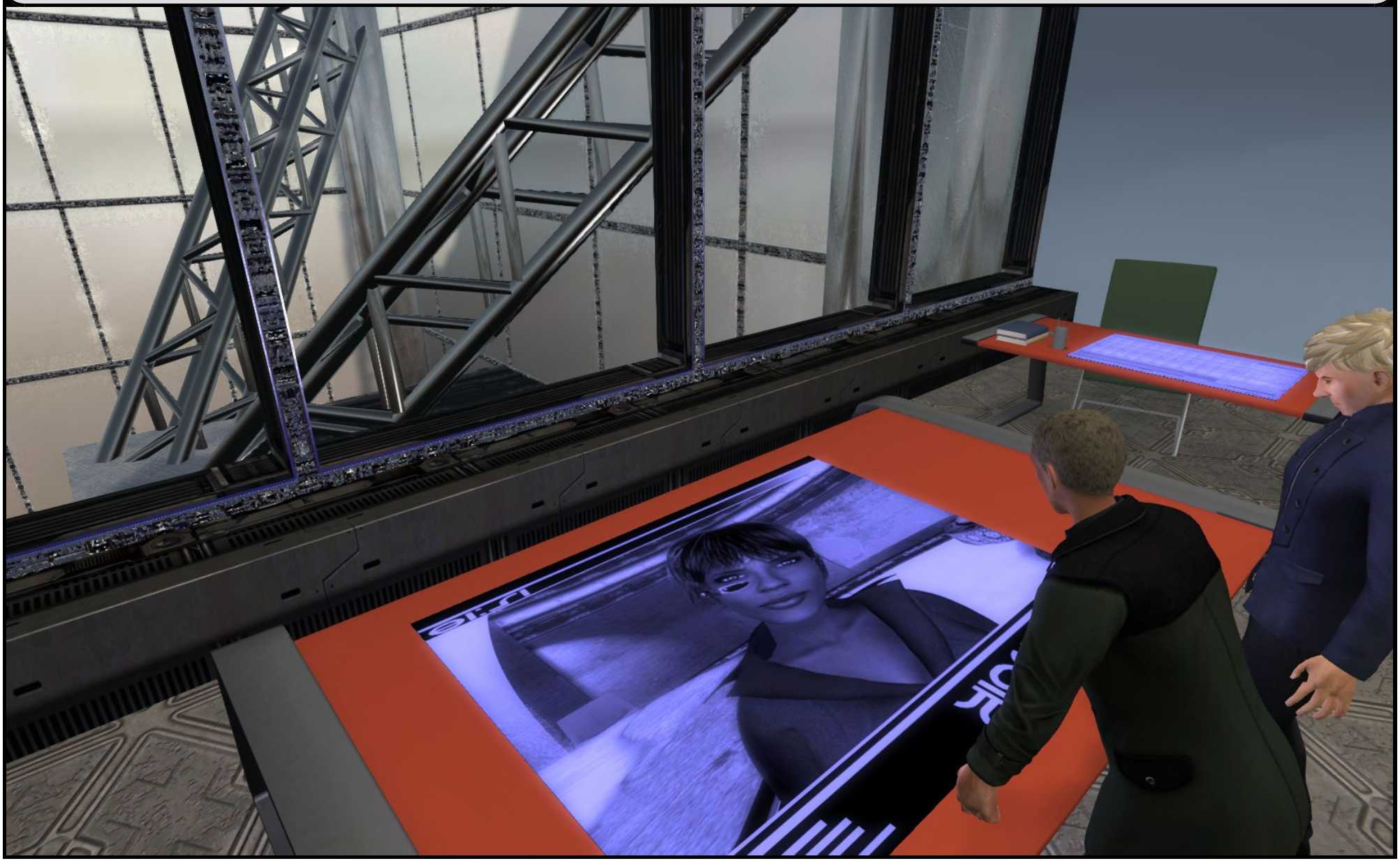
-- I'm still unable to contact Tee. This is rather unusual.



{Jaima's voice} Sir, I think I found something.
-- What have you found?



{Jaima} All the records from the last four years appear normal. If we look only the detection, nothing has been detected in four years. But if I take a segment detection curves and I run a pattern recognition on the records of the last four years, it returns a very telling number.



- Some redundancy?
{Jaima} Well, I found the segment 6574 times over the past three years.



- What does it mean?

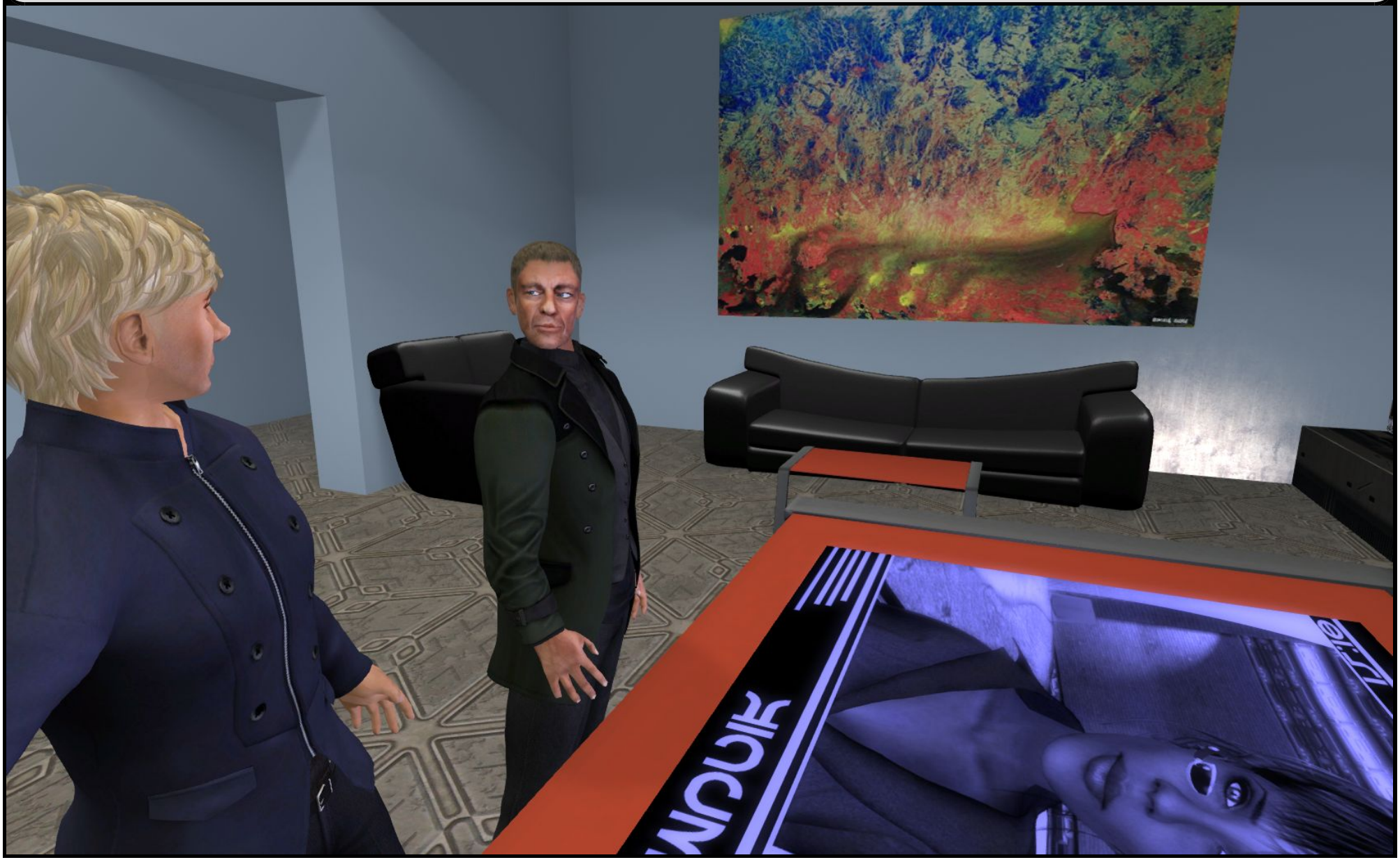



-- It means that the detectors of the Rikmon Stain's probes have recorded the exact same thing, many time per day, each day for the last three years!

--- Precisely, it's impossible to obtain such a redundancy with a detector. The only way to get this would require a program to replace the detector data before the recording.



-- Tee Maguire deliberately configured the Rikmon Stain's probes to not react to human presence. His rules exclude everyone, instead of only the members of our staff.




- So you're telling me that Tee Maguire, for an obscure reason, would have made the Rikmon Stain's surveillance plan completely inoperative?

-- It's more than that, Oclan. He deactivated it and made this deactivation invisible to all of us!




- Why would he do such a thing?

-- I don't know, maybe to hide something.



- He would have done that to allow free access to the Rikmon Stain's territory... Would that be possible?
-- I can't see anything else. The big question is now to know for whom he did it.



- I can't believe it... What else has he hidden? ...Or done?

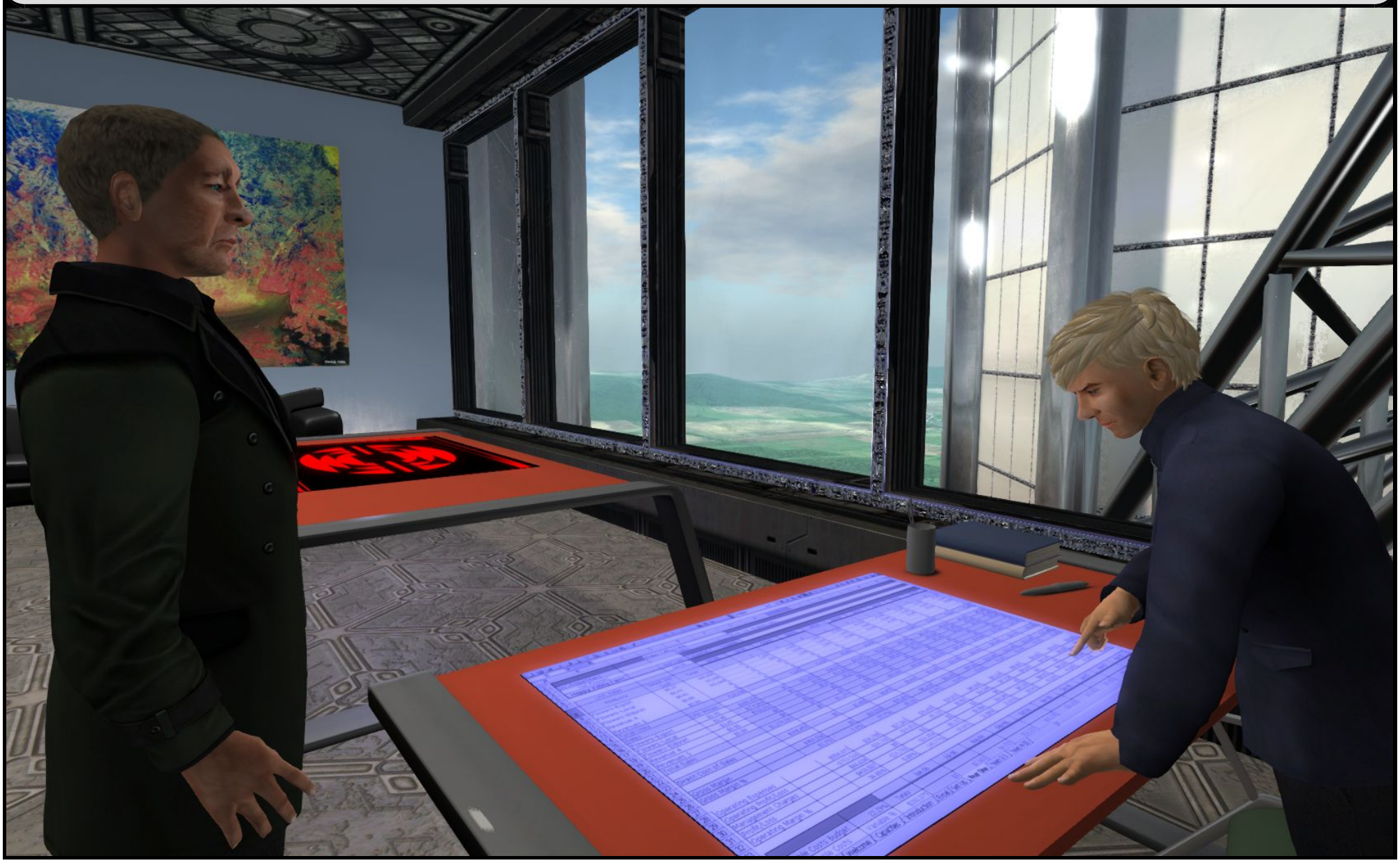


- Jaima, I want a report of everything that Tee Maguire had access for the past three years.
{Jaima} Okay, I'm working on it.

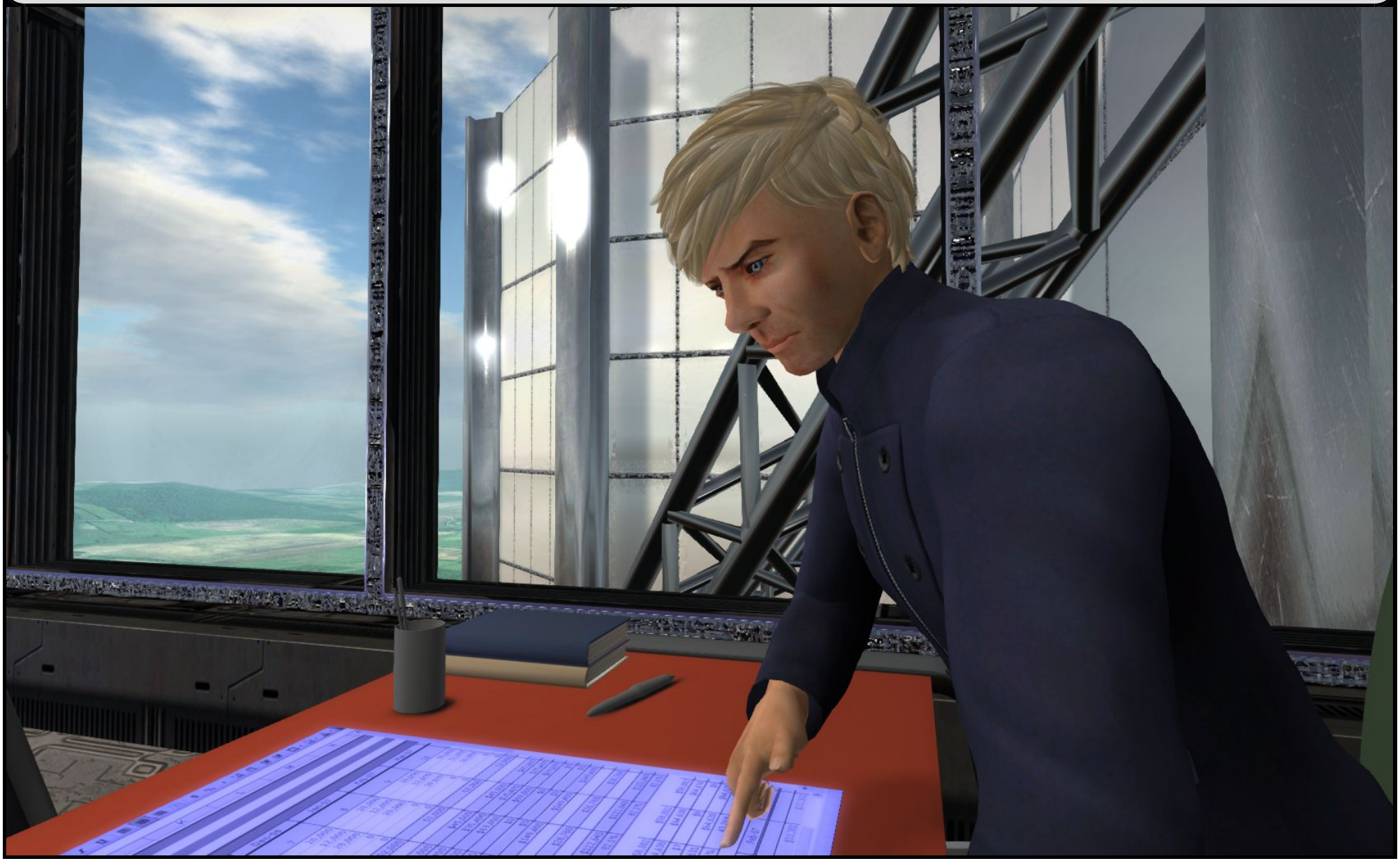



- So in that case, it would mean that... He's trying to escape!

-- Officer Sigul?
{Man's voice} Yes, commissioner...
-- You must find and arrest Tee Maguire immediately. He must be intercepted before he leaves Jijuterk. Do you copy?



{Voice} The director Tee Maguire?
- Yes, that same Tee Maguire...



In the meantime...



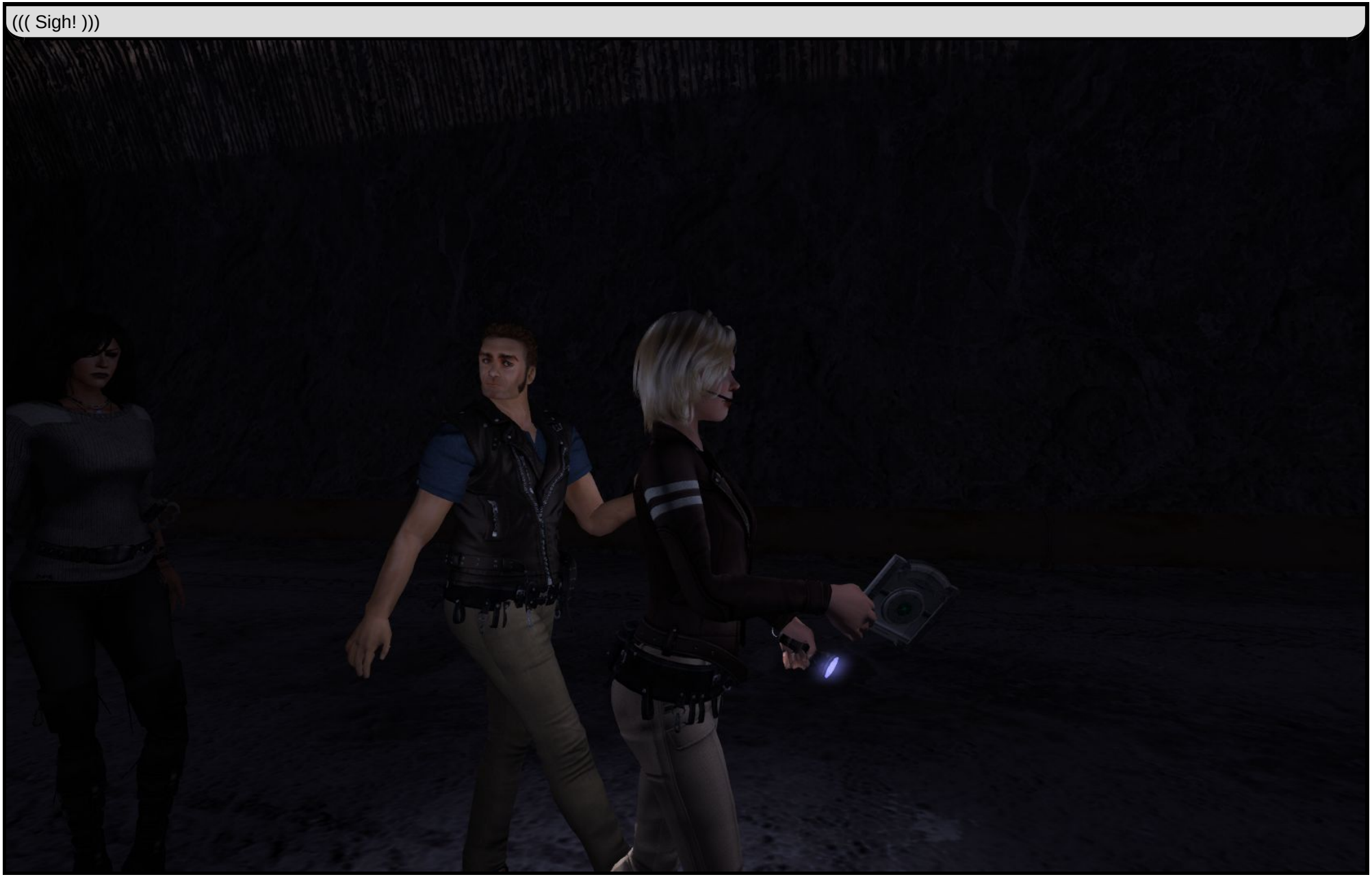
--- Don't worry blondie, I'm still here. Come on, move!
-- Yeah, unfortunately, you're still there!



--- Lauti, in case you didn't know, she sees us very clearly.
- I had already noticed, can you imagine?
-- No, but... Could you shut up?



(((Sigh!)))



- "Slow down."
((!?))



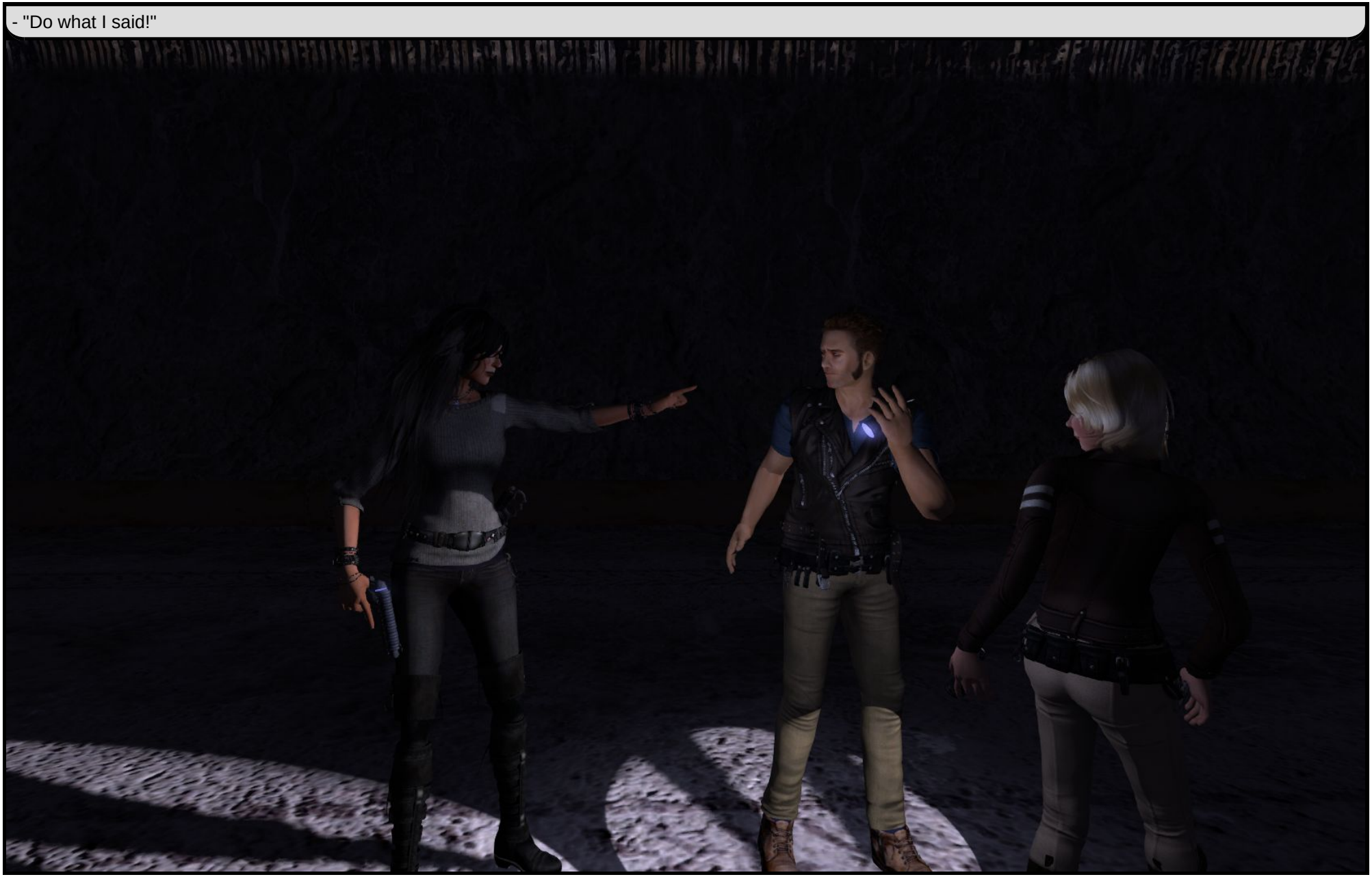
- "Ambush... In about 50 meters."
-- "Huh! What?"
(((?!)))



- "Keep going and don't reveal them my presence if you want to live. Is that clear?"
-- "Are you quite sure of what you're doing?"



- "Do what I said!"



- "She's using us as bait!"
-- "It doesn't bode well..."



-- "I see light over there."
- "Yes, I see that too."

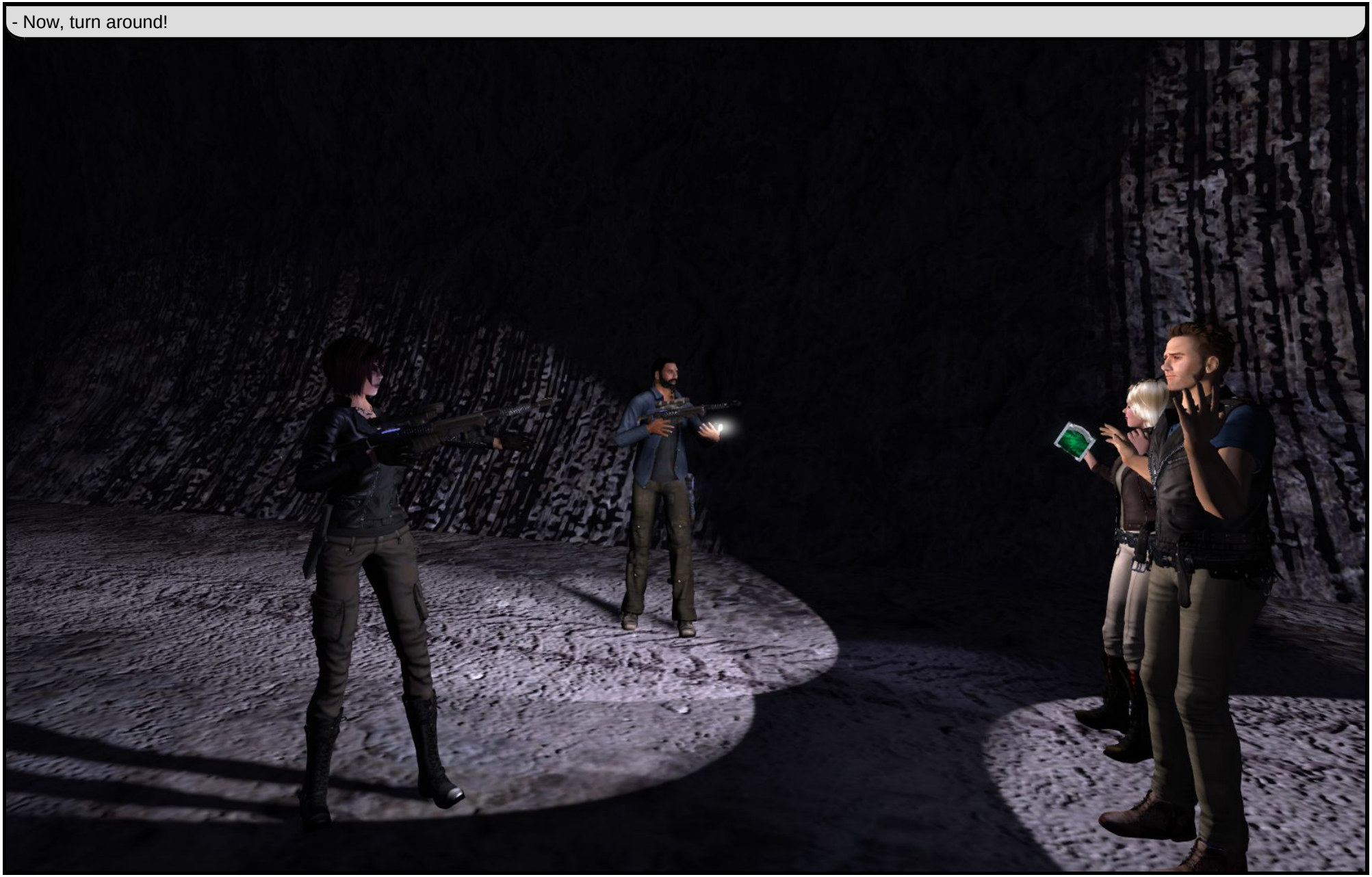



TSLAK !

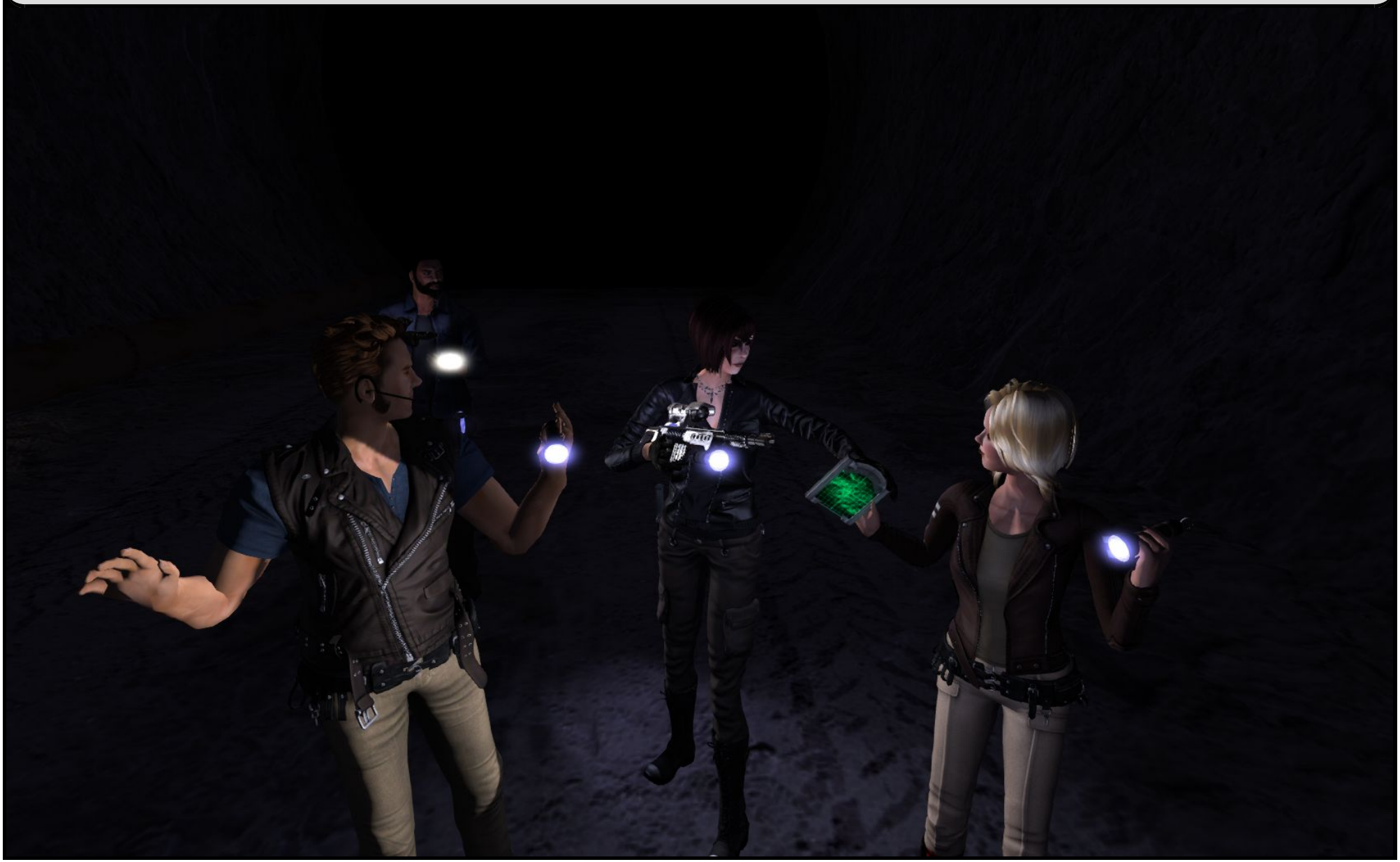
--- Stay where you are! Keep your hands up!



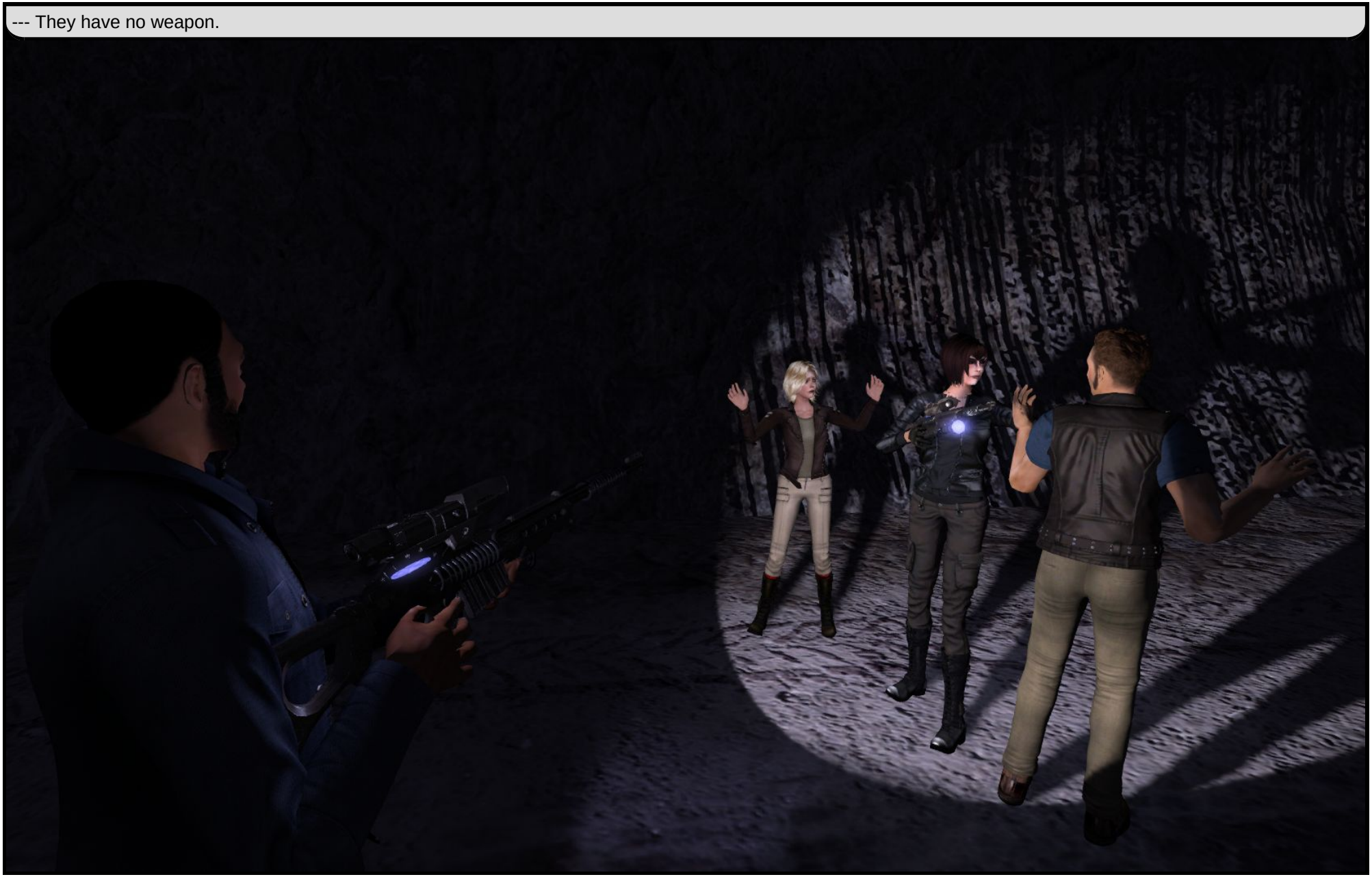
- Now, turn around!



--- What is this?
---- This is only a superficial scanner.



--- They have no weapon.



---- You've ventured up to here without weapons! You must be a bit stupid!
--- We didn't come here to fight.




---- Ok, shut up! We go that way! You, little Jijuterk's bitch, walk ahead!









-- What have we here? Definitely, we have visitors today!



- Zerek, why haven't they been detected?



--- Widerm is still outside, the sensors are off.
- Of course! Widerm, again!



- They are Jijuterk's bastards! They are government agents, they have badges.



- So this is you, the source of all our problems!
----- Oh please, explain to me how we could be the problem here.



-- Why are you here?
- For an investigation!



-- And what is the reason for this... investigation?
- It's about the crashed probe.



-- What probe?
- The one that crashed at less than one kem from here.



- A crashed probe! So this is why Jijuterks are aware. But that still doesn't explain how you got here.
---- We simply followed the trail left by your men.



------ There's way too much coincidence, starting with you!
- Me! But I don't even know who these people are!



----- Xerca, get them to talk. I have to go talk with the old man, we don't have much time.



-------- Joc, cuff him with the other.



-- You little shit, come with me! I'll make you talk!
---- Let her out of this! She's only my pilot!



- You, shut the fuck up! ...We go that way!
-- Ouch!



-- Old man, I need the coordinates, now!



--- I already told you, Vanitan. The only thing I can give you now is only based on assumptions. Do you really want to dig blindly?



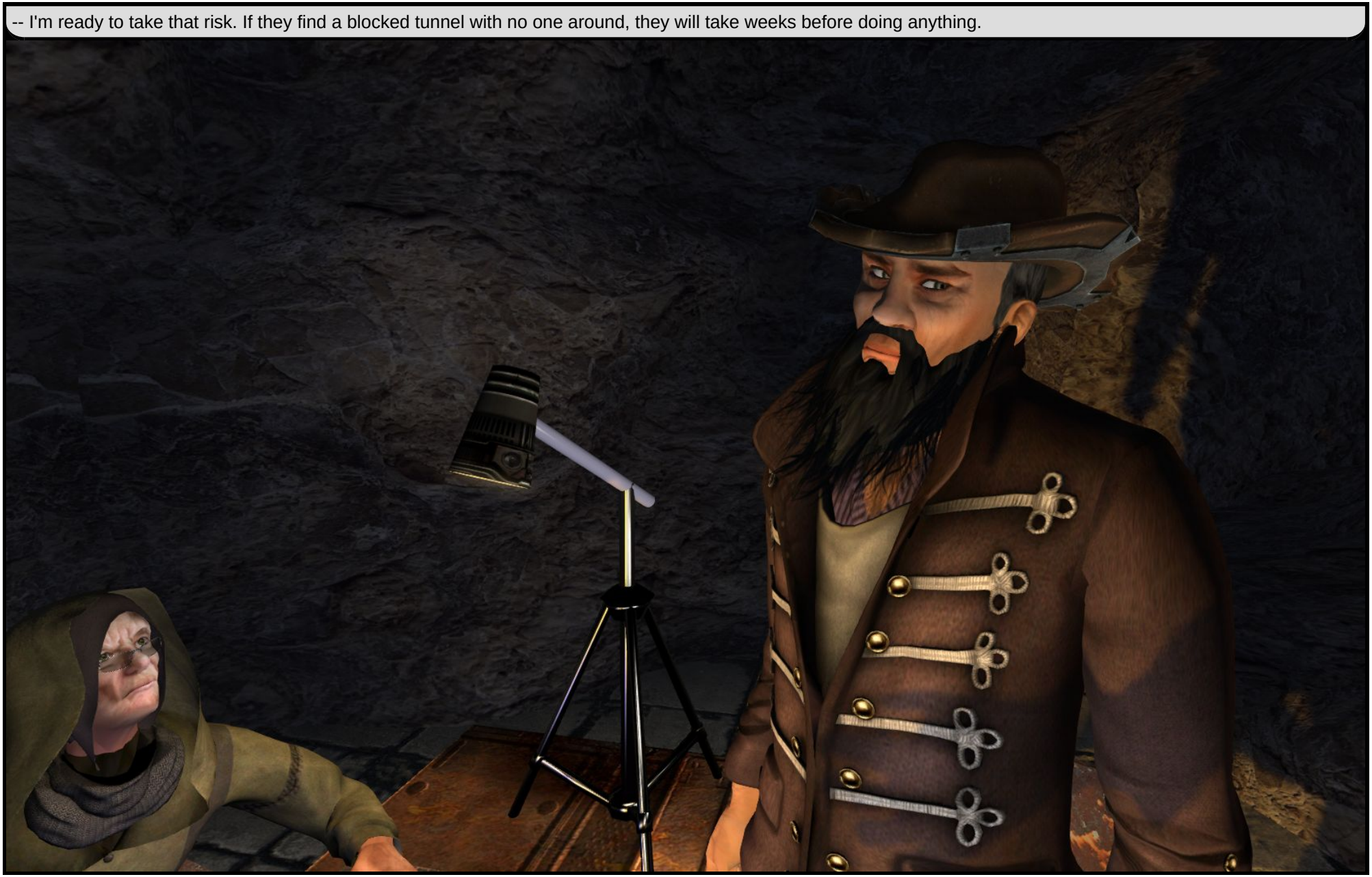
-- I'm afraid we can't wait any longer. Jijuterks can land here at any moment. We need to dig deeper and seal the tunnel behind us.



- Sealing the tunnel! Are you seriously considering this? If they cut off the water supply, we might never get out of here!



-- I'm ready to take that risk. If they find a blocked tunnel with no one around, they will take weeks before doing anything.



-- And what about the steam? It's a quite visible when it exits through the vents!
- We'll dig during the night!



-- Now, please, can we have these coordinates?
- If you insist, but you've been warned.



- I retained two possible identities for this building. I suspect it could have been part of the Central Bank. But it's also possible that it is the Department of Finance, which has already hosted the Central Bank.



--- In both cases, if you dig toward degree 308, you can hope to progress without any problems for at least 350 meters.
- Well, we'll start with that.



-- But if this is another building, we might be seriously out of the target. This will be your decision, Vanitan.



- You must be Roland, isn't it?
-- Yes, I am... How can you know that?



- We've been looking for you for months.
-- Really? Is this a good or a bad thing?



- We met Erydak in the tunnel, she literally vanished when we got captured by these people.
-- She's here!?... Oh shit!... The situation could become explosive!



-It's dark everywhere around here, she's in her element...



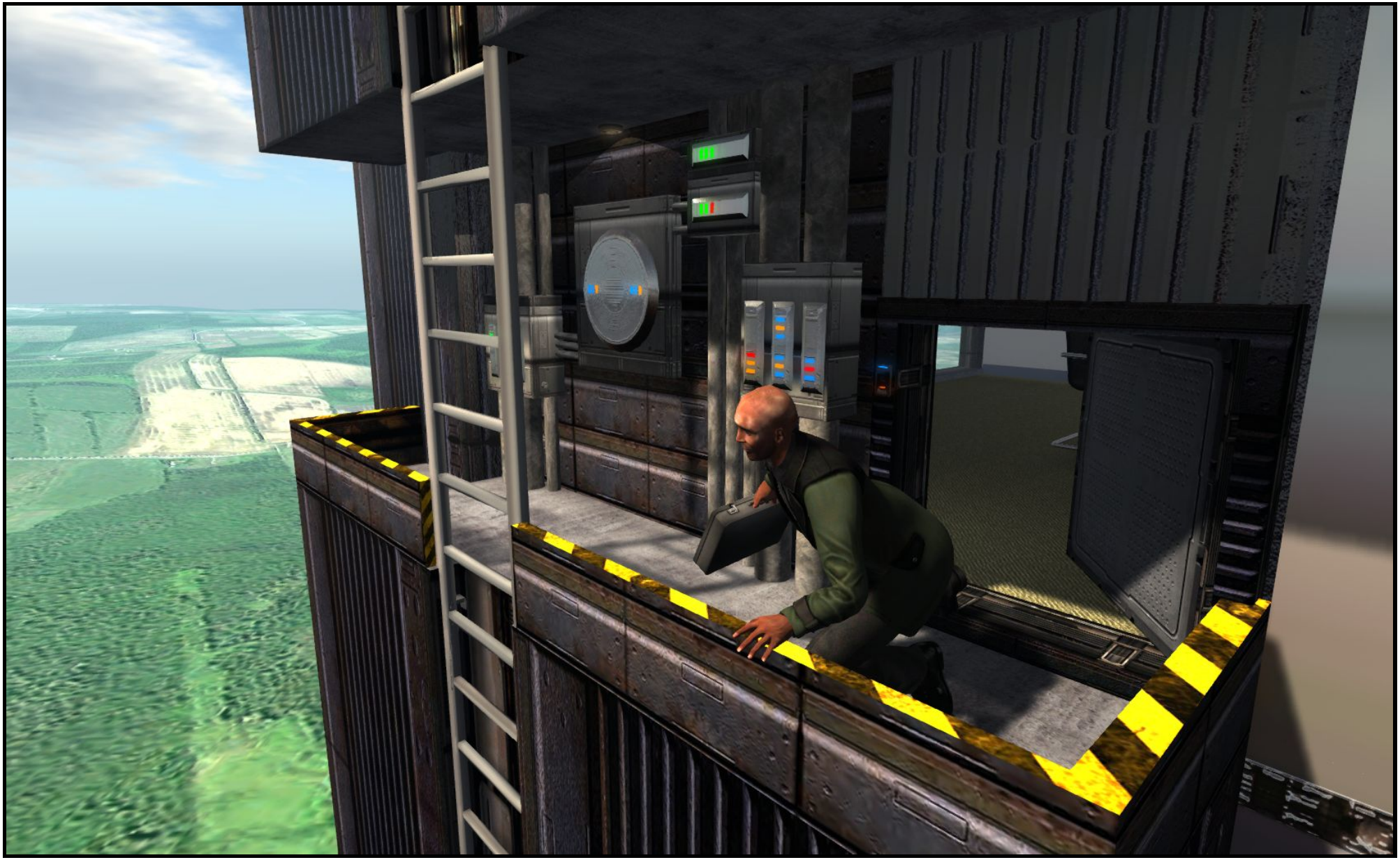

- And she has our guns...

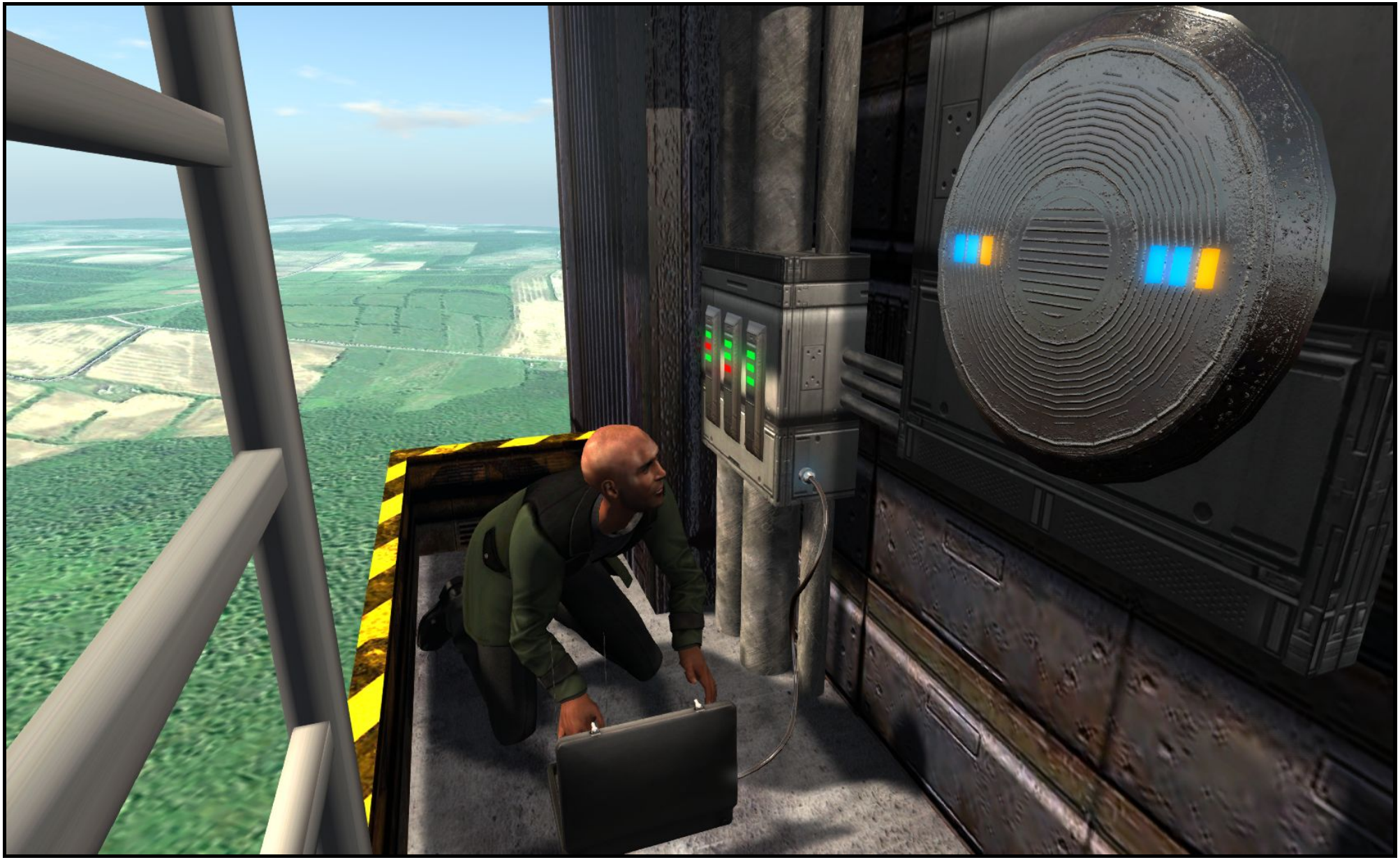













BEEEE!
BEEP!

- Network 3587. Access priority level 4.
{System} Access granted, Mr. Black.



- Redirect transponder "Elgide69" to Morial, until 2200 hours.
{System} Redirection in effect in 30 minutes.



- Accept transponder "Blackship808", until 2200 hours.
{System} Jijuterk access for transponder "Blackship808" in effect in 30 minutes.



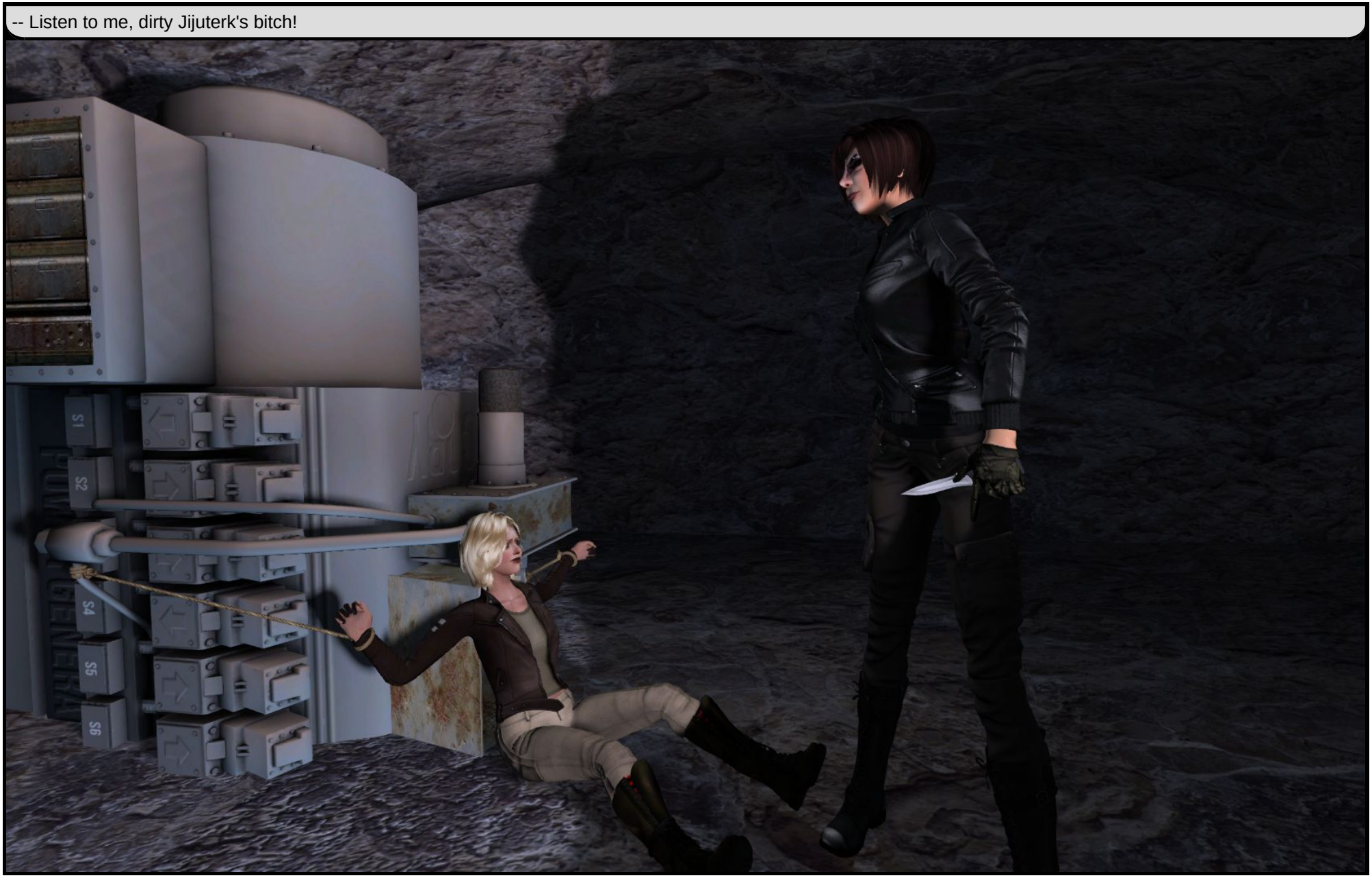
- Assign access to level 3.
{System} The access has been assigned to level 3. Session terminated.

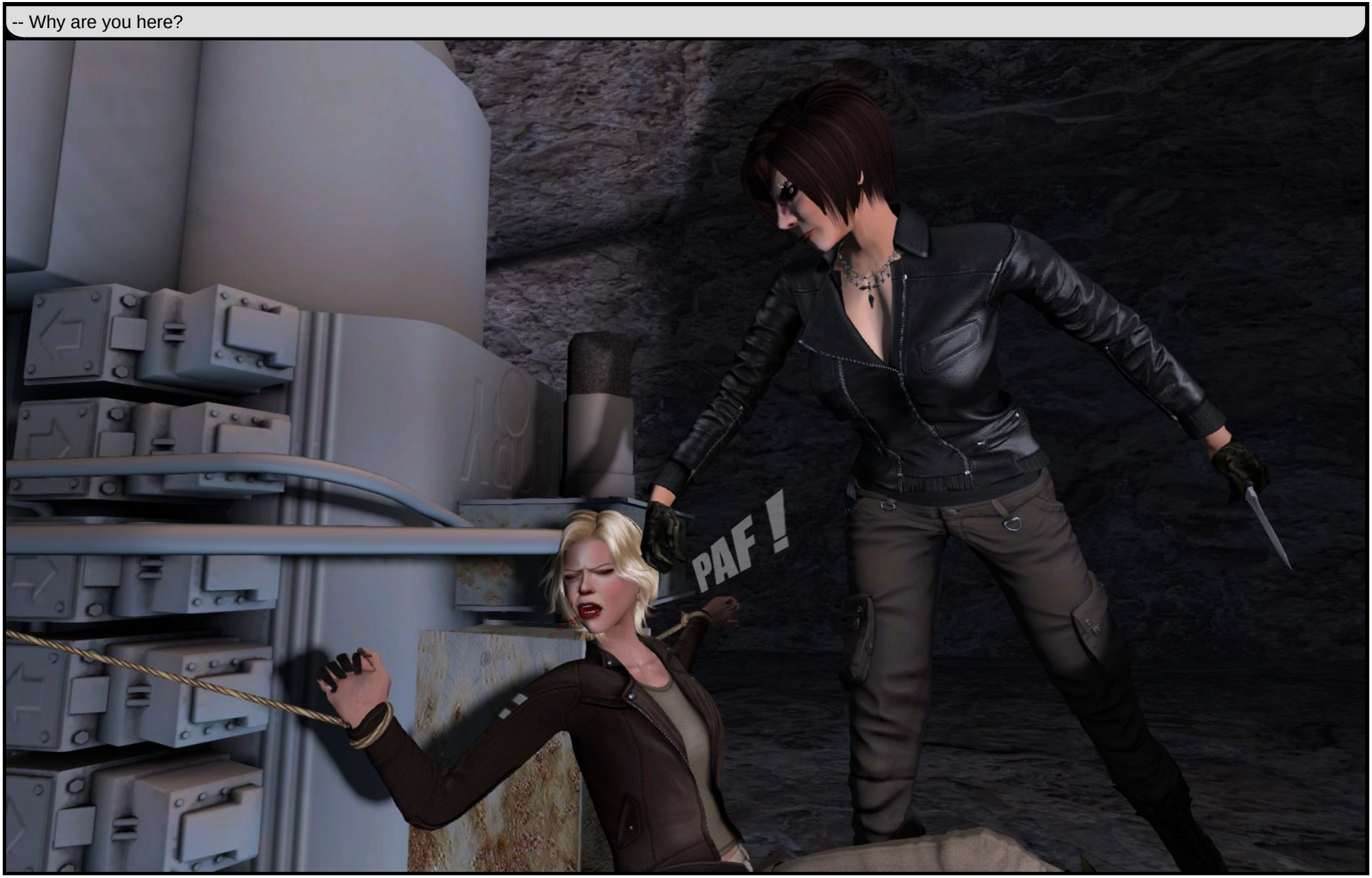


Under Rikmon Stain...



-- Listen to me, dirty Jijuterk's bitch!




-- Why are you here?
PAF !

- Please, stop...
-- Okay, in that case, let's try harder...



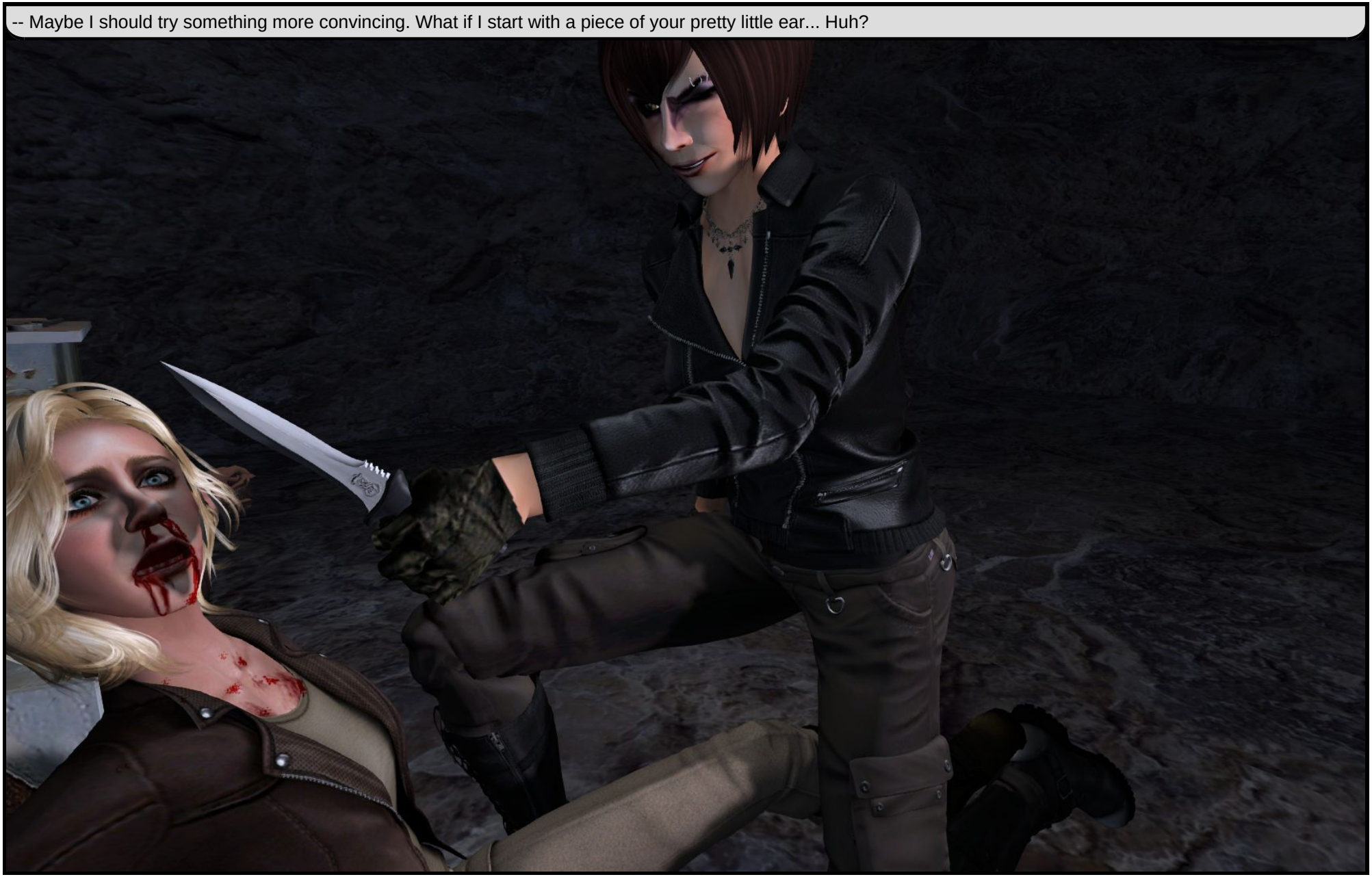

-- No! Wait! ...Erydak! We were running after Erydak.

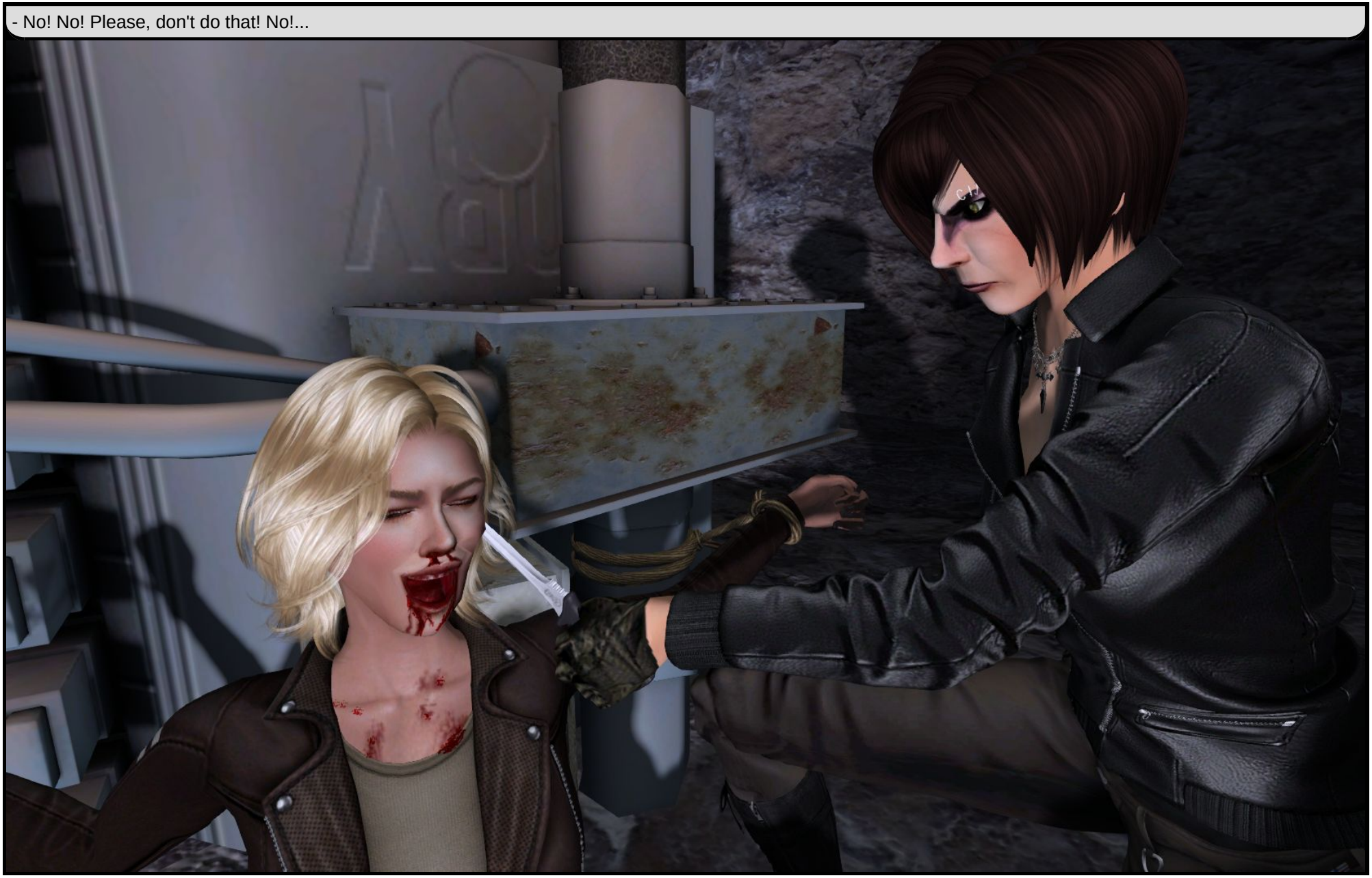

-- Erydak?! ...Who the hell is Erydak?
S1
S2
S4
S5
S6

-- It has nothing to do with you.




-- Stop bullshitting me!
PAF !


-- Maybe I should try something more convincing. What if I start with a piece of your pretty little ear... Huh?


- No! No! Please, don't do that! No!...

-- Zerek, we resume the drilling! Direction 308, minus 8.



- Resume now, without any exploratory shaft?
-- It's now or never, Zerek. They could be here any moment, we don't have much time.



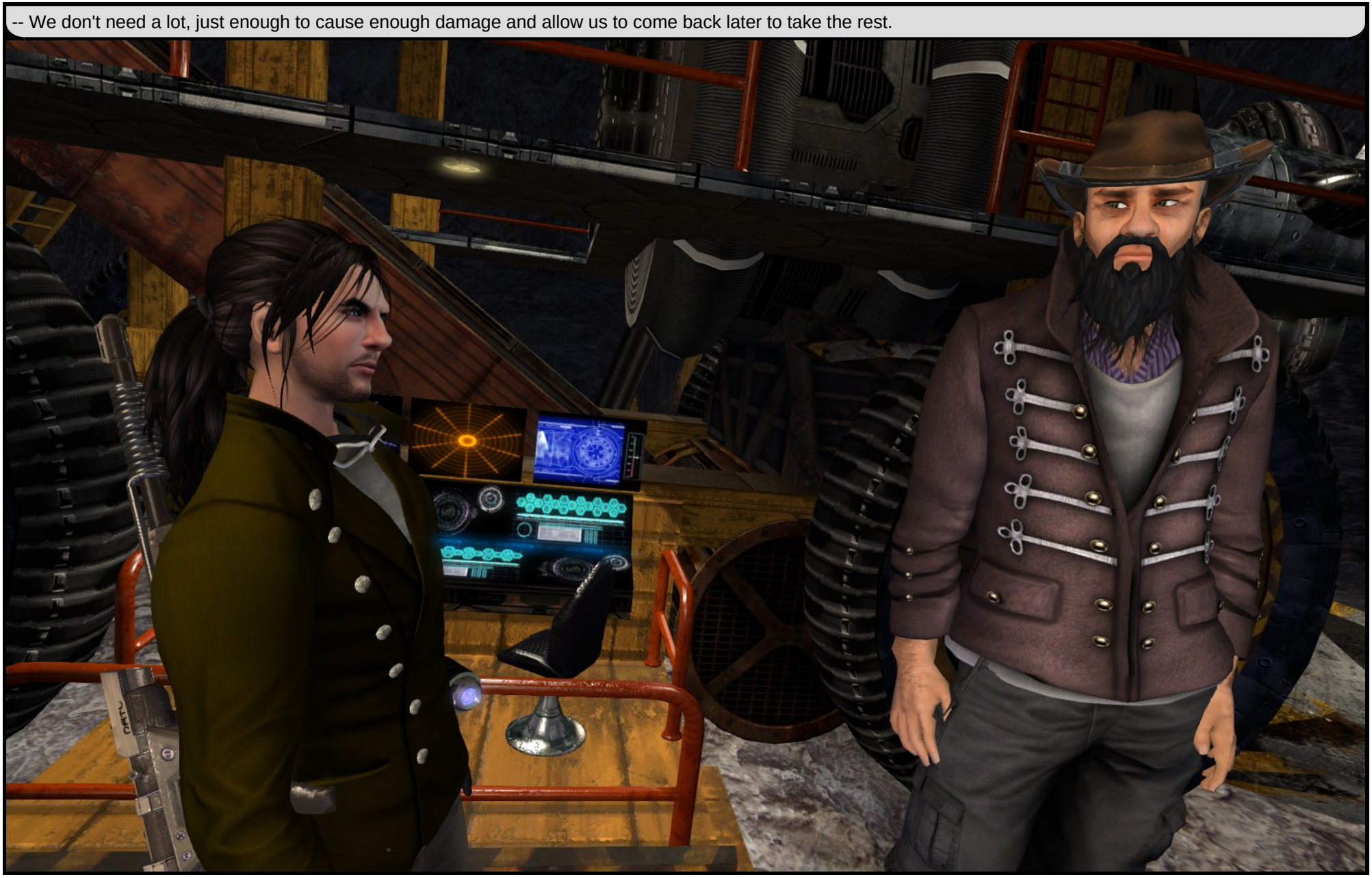
- Pol, go with Joc and set the charges in the section of the tunnel where the pipe is buried.



- Even if we reach it, we will never be able to take all the arkium.



-- We don't need a lot, just enough to cause enough damage and allow us to come back later to take the rest.



- So this is it! All this tunneling... It's to recover the arkium's storage!



--- What did you think we were doing here? Archaeological excavations?
- You're just a degenerate!



---- Shut up!



- What is this "arkium" thing?



- The arkium, it's a crystal having as particularity to maintain isolated an antimatter particle at the very heart of its structure.



- Their objective is certainly the same as those who created it.
-- Meaning what?



-- To make bombs... By the way, it's a bit because of the arkium if you are here.



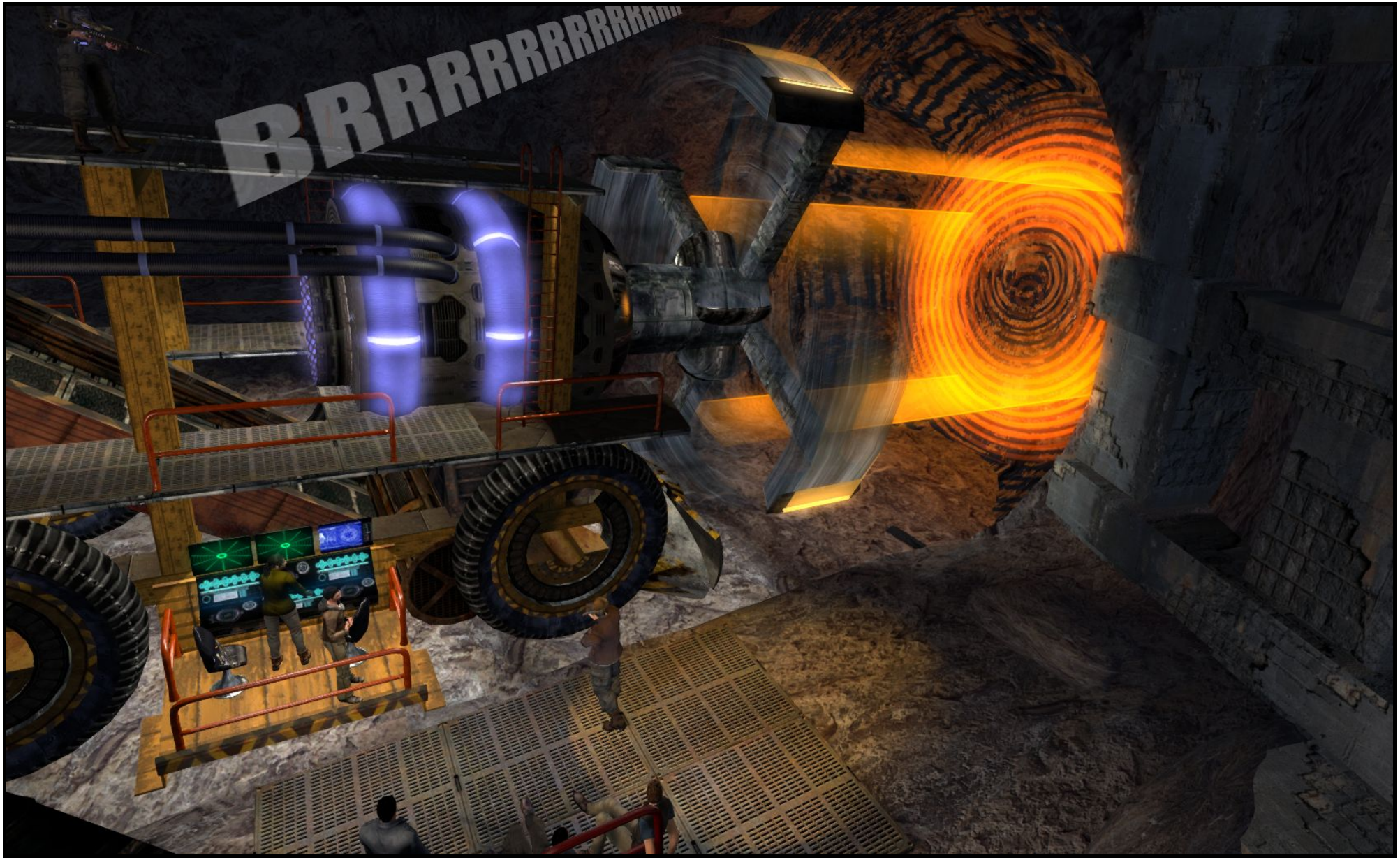
-- How so?
- Its production was the ultimate goal of the taalic systems like the one that sent you in our time.



-- What about Alcibiad?
- To hell with Alcibiad! Zerek, start the tunneller!




DVVVRRRRRRRRRRRRRR


BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR


PSSHHHHH !!!

--- Joc, I'm done with these gentlemen. They must disappear... Get rid of them in the digging flow.





- Holy shit!



-- Oh my god! She's going to do it again...
(!?)




CLUNK !
CLUNK !
CLUNK !


BANG !
BANG !
BANG !
BANG !


BANG !
TCHAK !

----- Drop your weapons!



- Okay, I did!



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



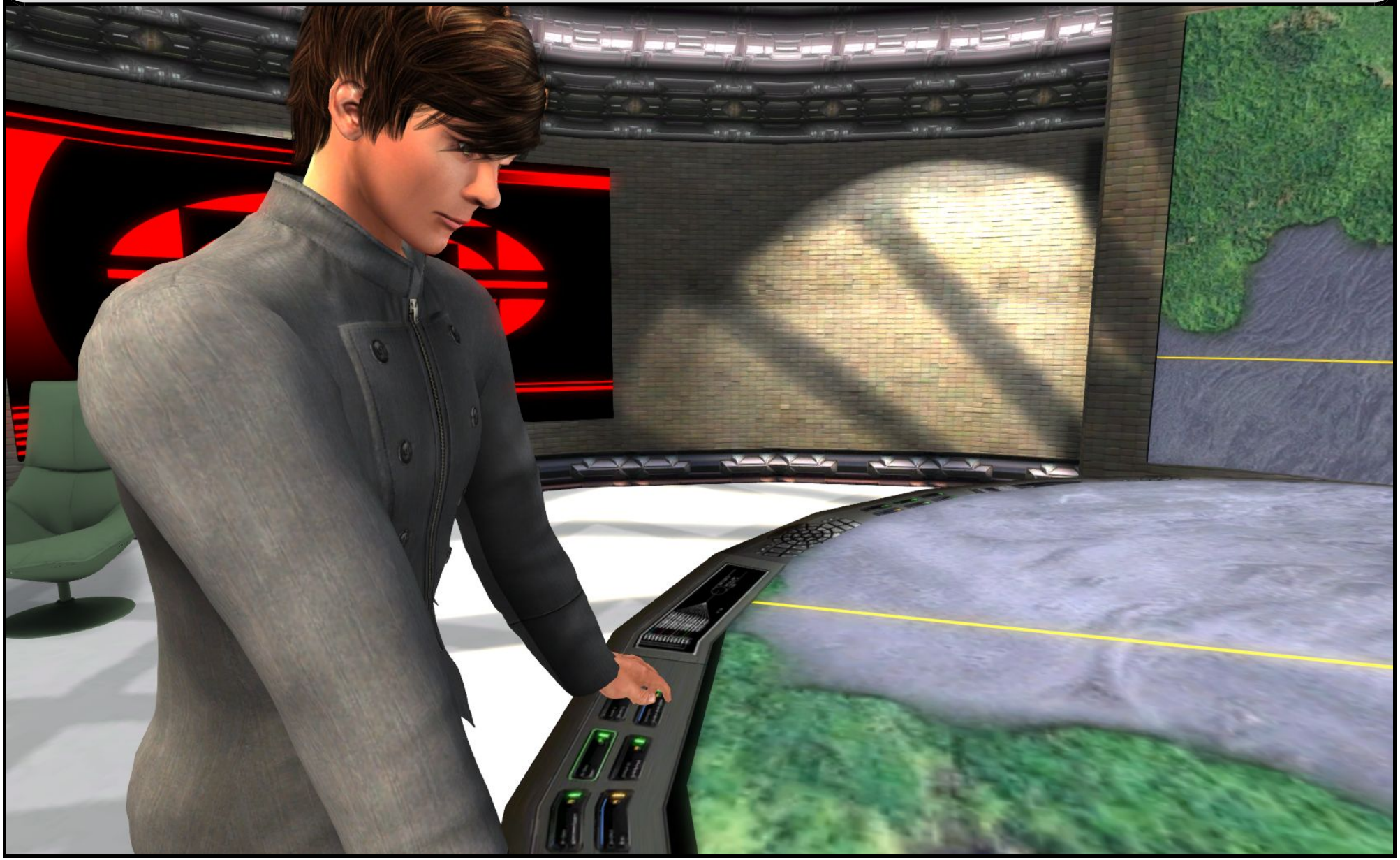
- The dispatcher is redirecting all the flights to Morial!
-- What? Are you serious?



-- Look for yourself.
- You're right! Something is wrong.



- Our transponder code is no longer accepted in Jijuterk.



- I confirm that someone has modified the configuration...



- Do you know someone named Allan Black?



--- Here is the last image captured of Tee Maguire. He crossed the 76th floor, about forty minutes ago.



-- After that, nothing.
- Come on, he hasn't vanished into thin air!



- If he had left the building, we would have detected him.



- So he's still around, hidden somewhere.
-- But what does he have in mind?



- I sent eight agents, they will search the building starting with the 76th floor. If he shows up somewhere, we should detect him quickly.



- I can't believe what is happening.
--- That's troubling, to say the least.

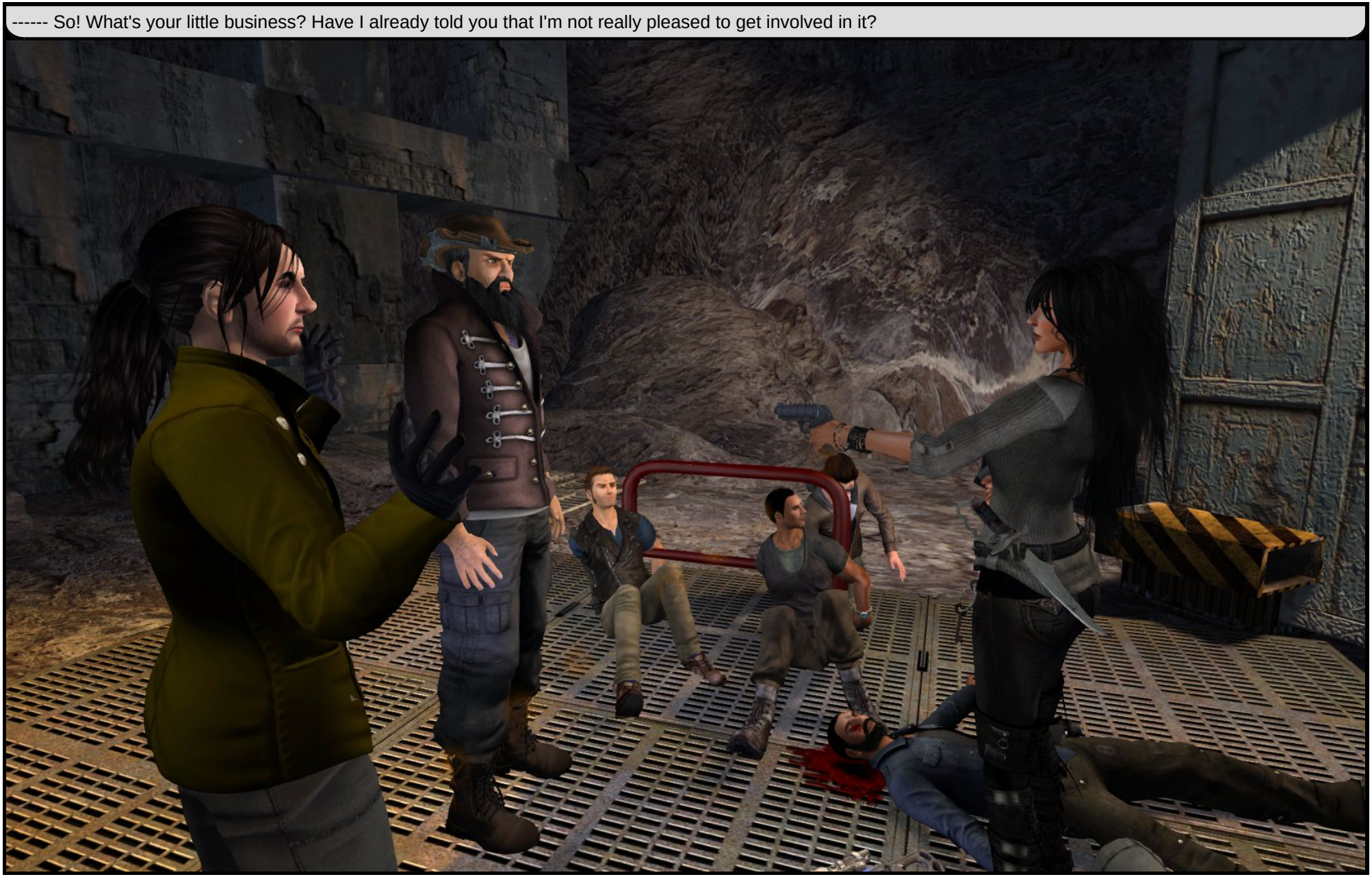


----- You! Untie my friend!



----- Come on! Don't spend the whole week!




------ So! What's your little business? Have I already told you that I'm not really pleased to get involved in it?

- They dig to find the arkium's storage that is somewhere under our feet. That's what they are doing!



----- Arkium? And what is arkium?



- A substance that can hold antimatter, in order to build a weapon of mass destruction! You saw how this is up there, it lets presume that it might be true.



- That's the truth... Jijuterk's government control must disappear! This planet is also ours and we want to live free!



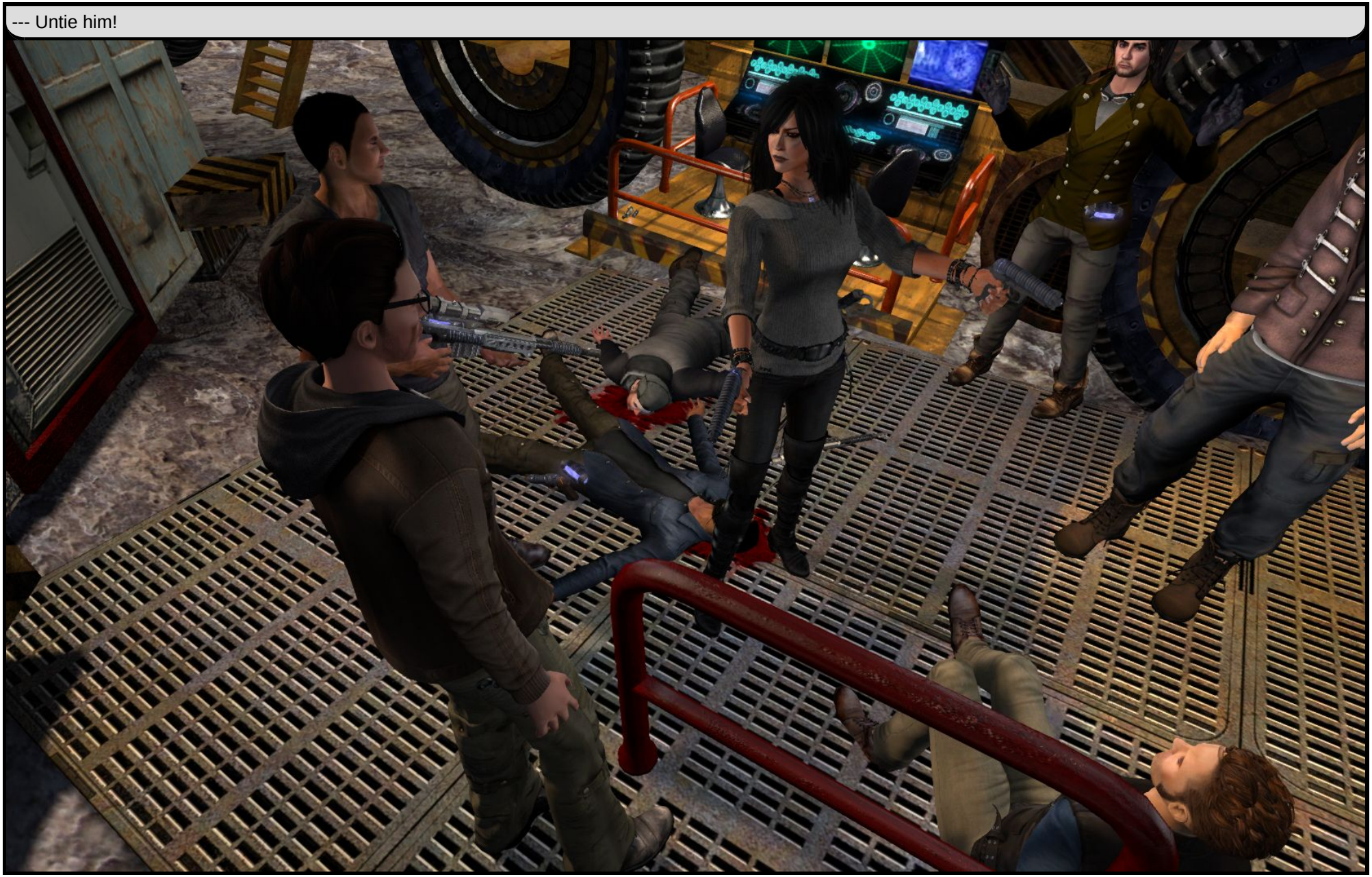
- Yeah, right! Free to the point of destroying it completely! We already saw that in the past, it was really shameful. Your vision of the world leads to a catastrophe in one way or another!



---- OK! Stop it!



--- Untie him!



- Uh! Sorry, but I can't.



- What?!
---- Whoa! I don't have the key, these are the Xerca's cuffs.



- Who is Xerca?
--- It's the woman who captured us. She took Lauti to question her. You remember "blondie", don't you?



----- Yeah... Xerca...
(?)
(((!?)))
((?))



-- Xerca! Xerca! Listen to me, Xerca!
{Xerca's voice from a communicator} Yes?



----- Get ready to blow up the pipe! Now!
{Xerca} Huh?



- Humpf!



----- Vanitan! Have you lost your mind? You want to kill us all!



--- You're going to let me go. Otherwise, we will all die here together!



--- The Pipe? What pipe?



-- Damn! What the hell are they doing?



- You, little bitch, I'll come back in a few minutes to finish with you!

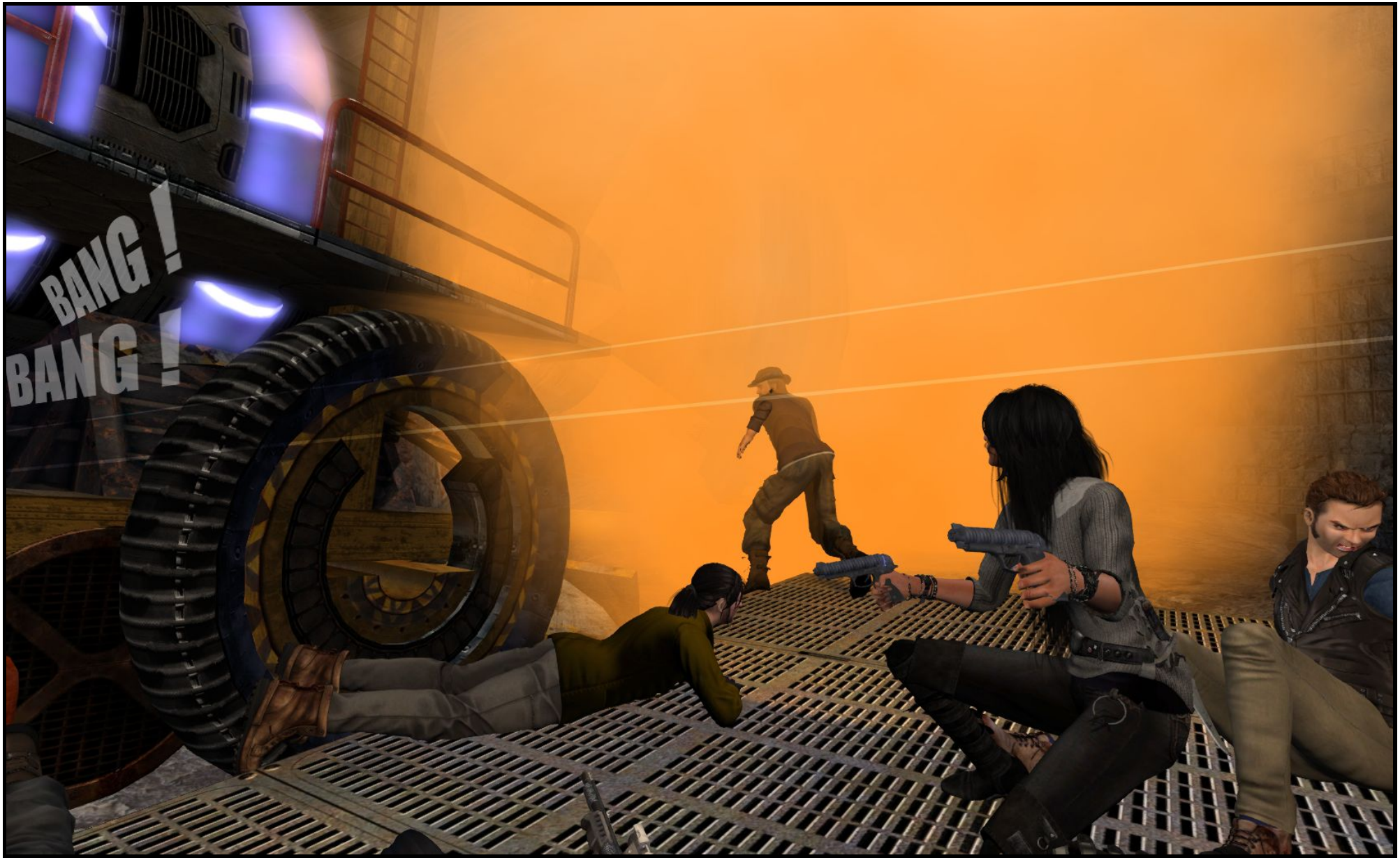







BANG !
BANG !
BANG !


TCHONK!
TCHONK!


BANG !
BANG !


VRRROW-VRRROW-VRRROW-VRRROW


BANG !
BANG !
BANG !

-- Give me that grenade!
(?)



- Are you serious?!
-- It's too late, we have been discovered. We won't leave any witnesses.



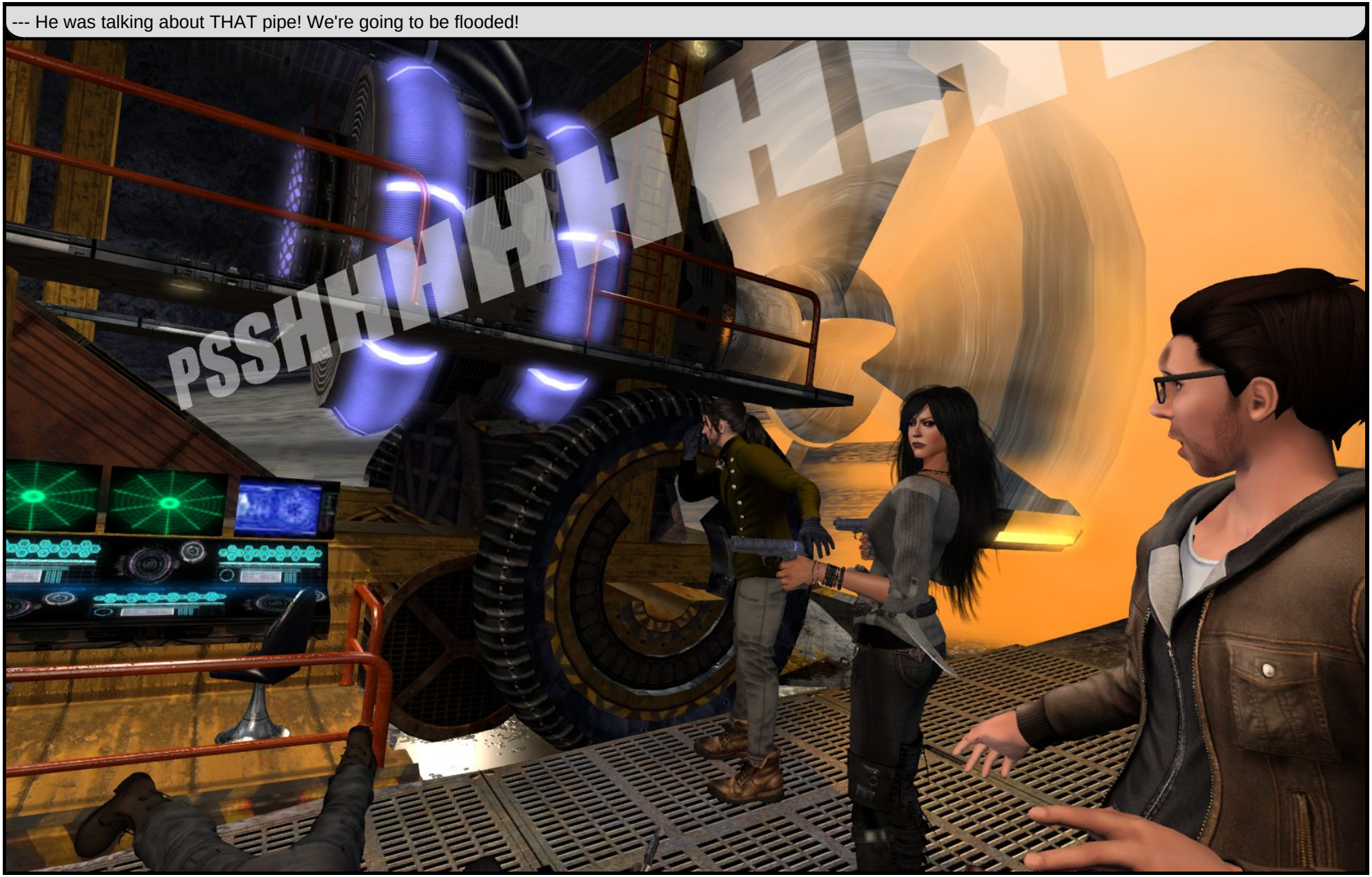
- Come on! Let's get out of here!

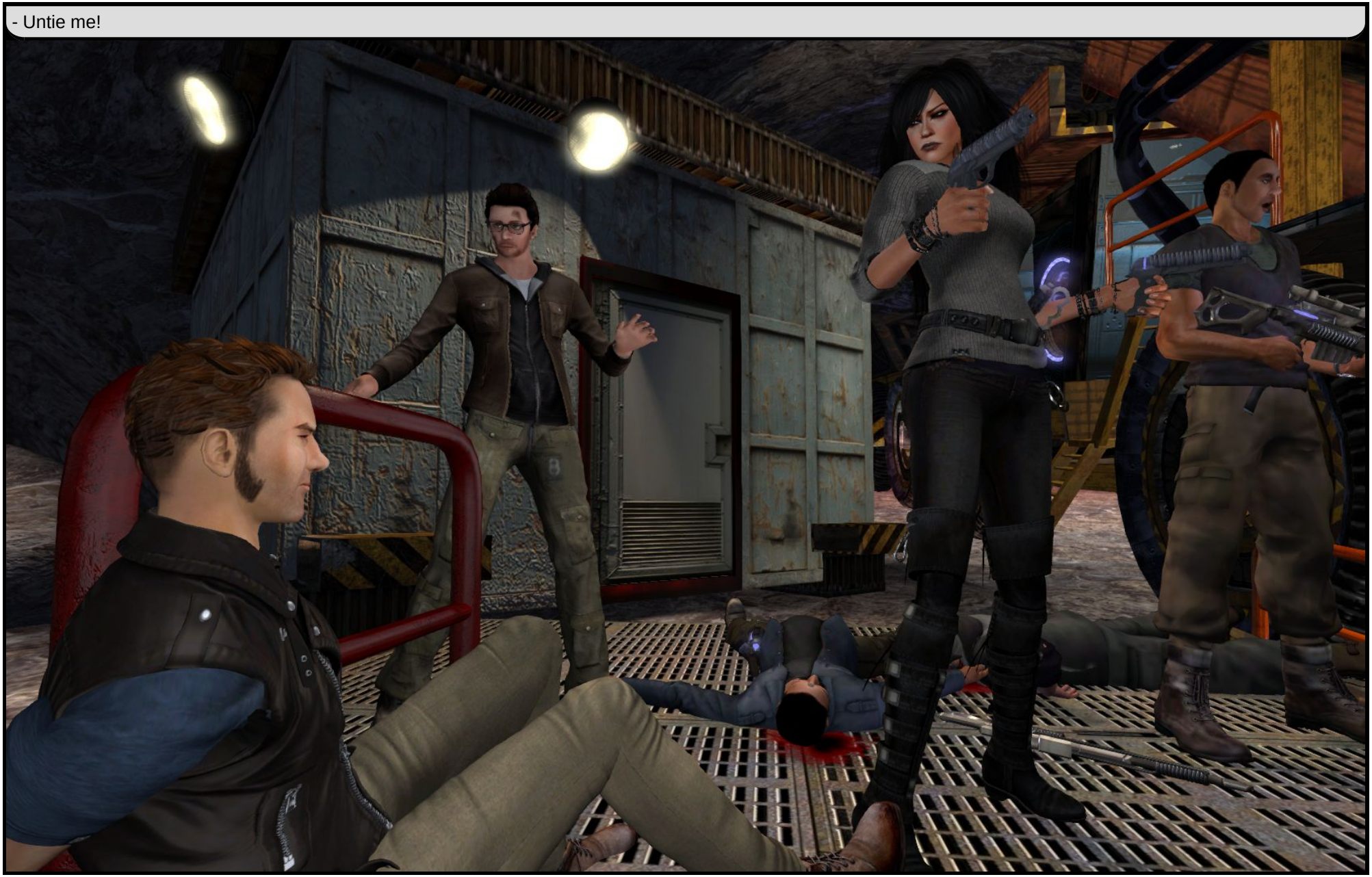



BOOM!


PSSHHH!!!

--- He was talking about THAT pipe! We're going to be flooded!




- Untie me!

---- We need bolt cutters or a saw!



---- Move over!



- Whoa!



-- Thank you... Oh shit! Lauti! I must go and find her!



-- You stay with Roland! I'll get her. You won't make it in the darkness, but I will. ...Take this.



-- I'm going with you...
--- No, you stay! Make them open that fucking door and get out of here!




PSSHHHHH


PSHH!

---- Are you going to open that door?
- I'm working on it, I'm working on it!



- I just hope that the doors' engines won't burn. We'll know only halfway in the tunnel.



--- Is there a manual opening mechanism?
- Except pulling the door with heavy machinery, no, there's none.



--- The best would be to use the dumper to get out of here.



- I must absolutely stop the generator...
--- The water is rising quickly, don't you think it would be better to focus our energies on the door?



- You don't understand! The generator takes nearly thirty minutes to stop its reaction. If the water reaches the chamber, it will breach and could blow up the whole tunnel.



--- Zerek! We must get out! The water will reach it well before thirty minutes!
---- I have to stop the digging, the nozzles could blow up!



-- Is the flow really that strong?



-- The pipes we were able to find are 40% too large to be safe and secure. We are 35 meters below the level of the lake that supplies us. It will fill the tunnel and reach the generator in less than fifteen minutes.



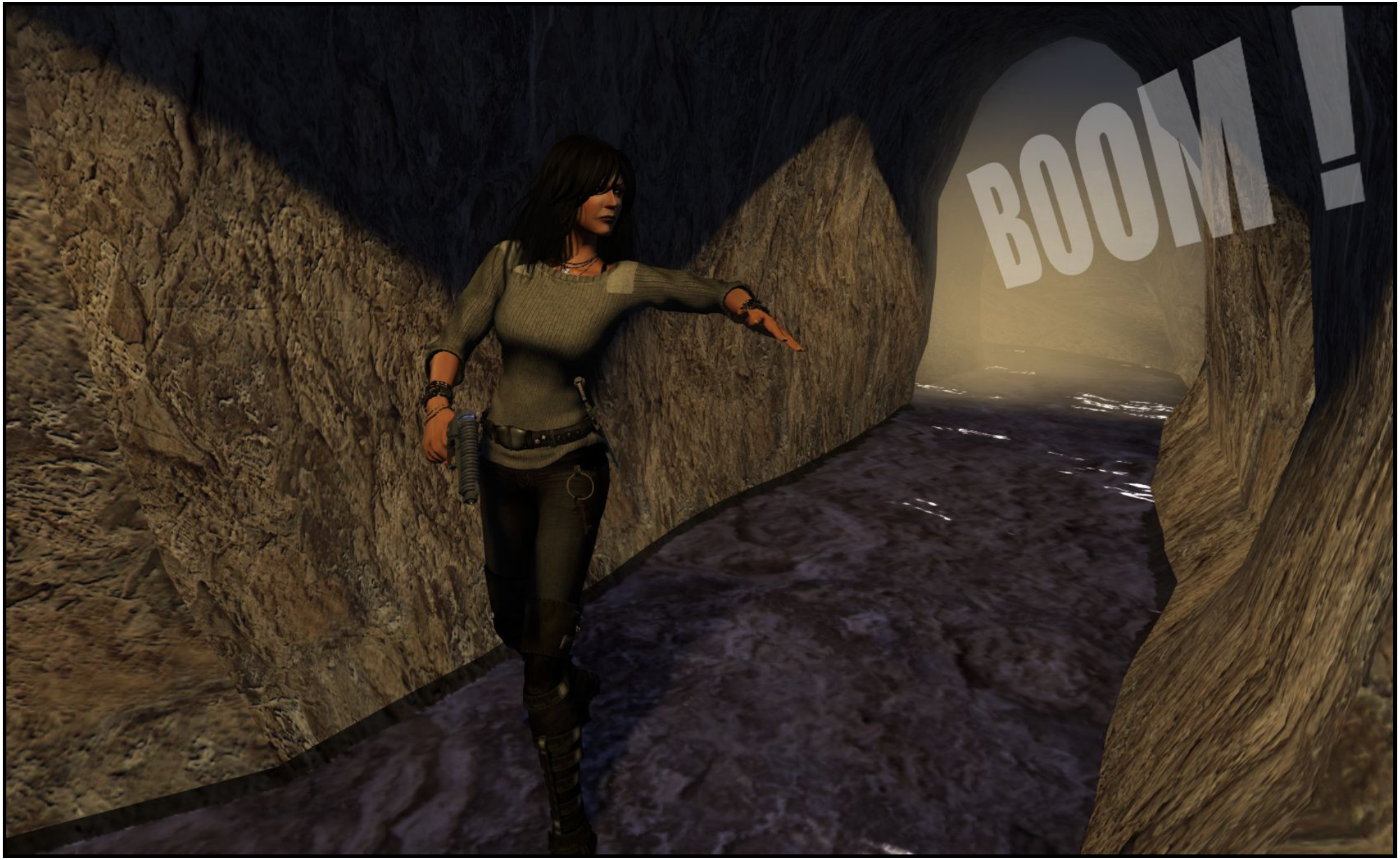
- Oh! Nice work!
--- We don't follow the government's labor standards! This venture is a risky bet!



---- We'd better get out of here!



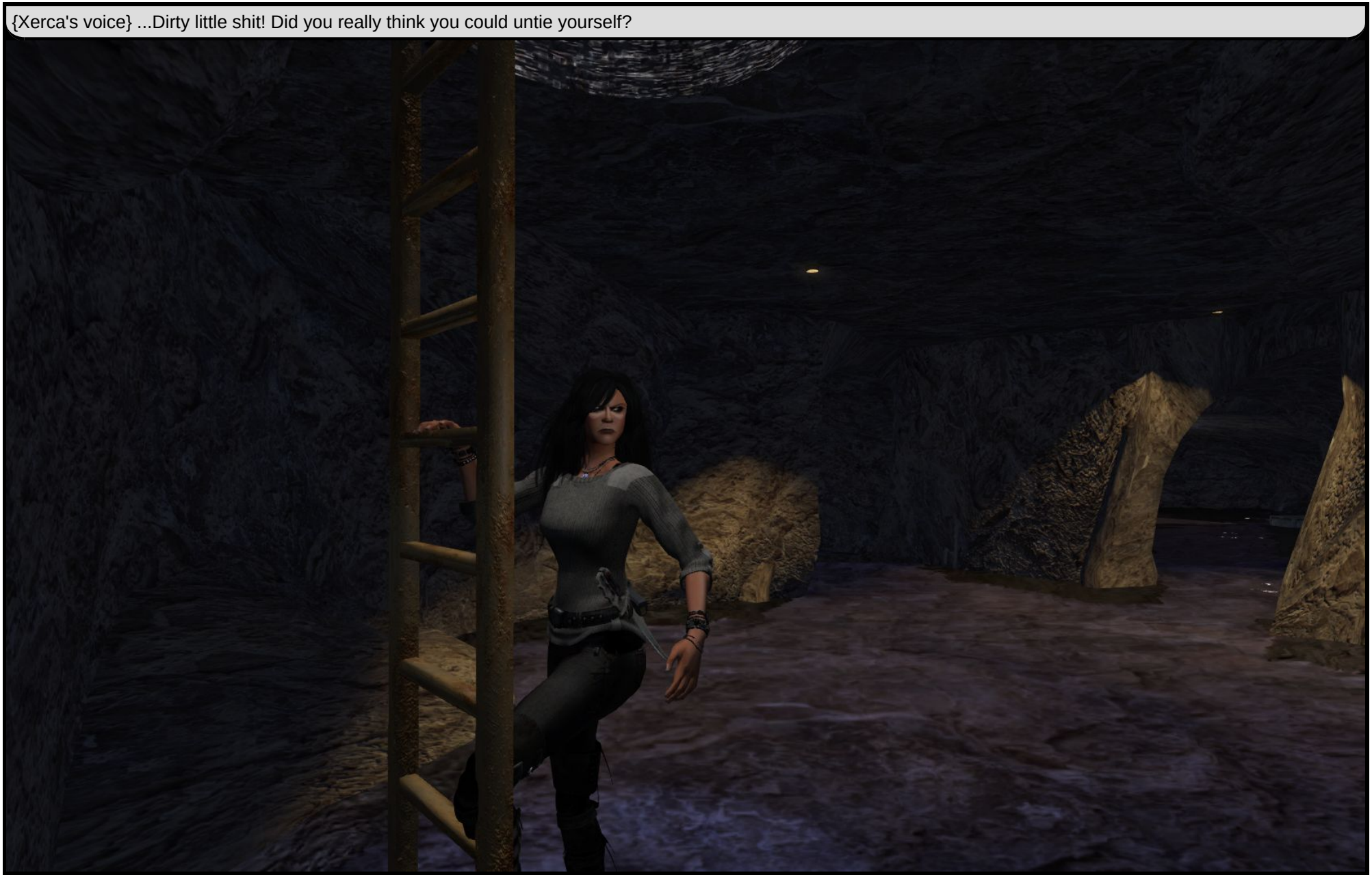

BOOM !!!


BOOM!


CLINK !
CLANK !



{Xerca's voice} ...Dirty little shit! Did you really think you could untie yourself?



{Xerca's voice} ...I'm going to smash your little face in!



-- Come on! Give me your boots! It would be a shame to let them waste here!



- Vanitan?



- Aaah!



-- Fucking shit! Show yourself!



-- Uuuurh!







- Come on, we must get out of here.



- Are you going to be okay?
-- I'm not sure...



- You'd better, otherwise we will die drowned in this hole.



- The guy they call Vanitan escaped through this well. We'll follow him.



- This is pretty high. I'll go first. And please, not a noise ...
-- What about Reim and Roland?



- I hope they're already near the exit right now. Come on, climb!



--- Damn it! Is it the generator that just exploded?
- No, it was only a plasma nozzle. ...Oh my god! Zerek!



--- Zerek!



-- I'm sorry, he didn't survive... Come on, we must get out of here.



--- Oh shit! Alcibiad! The old Alcibiad is in there. Give me a hand!



---- Can you open the gate?
--- The gate is blocked! Help me, we must get him out of there.



---- We would need a lever!



--- It's no use, it doesn't move!



--- We won't make it.
---- Shit, there's only a third of a meter left!



- Mr. Gregoire, it's clear now that I won't get out of here. So take this!
--- Come on, we're not going to...



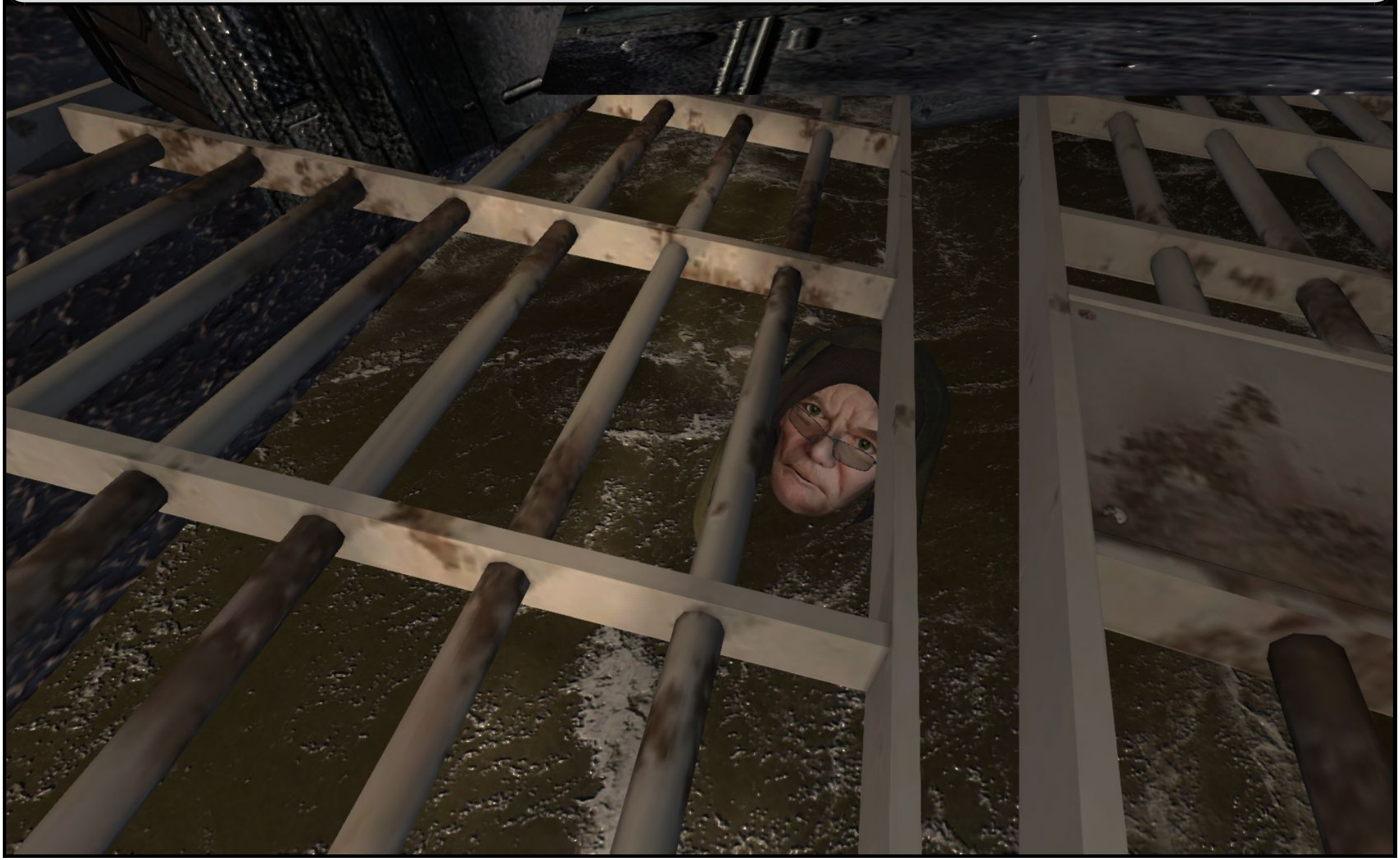
- Take this book and bring it back to Northalia. This must not die with me.



- I've invested all my life in this book. It contains what remains of the history of the world that you and I have known.



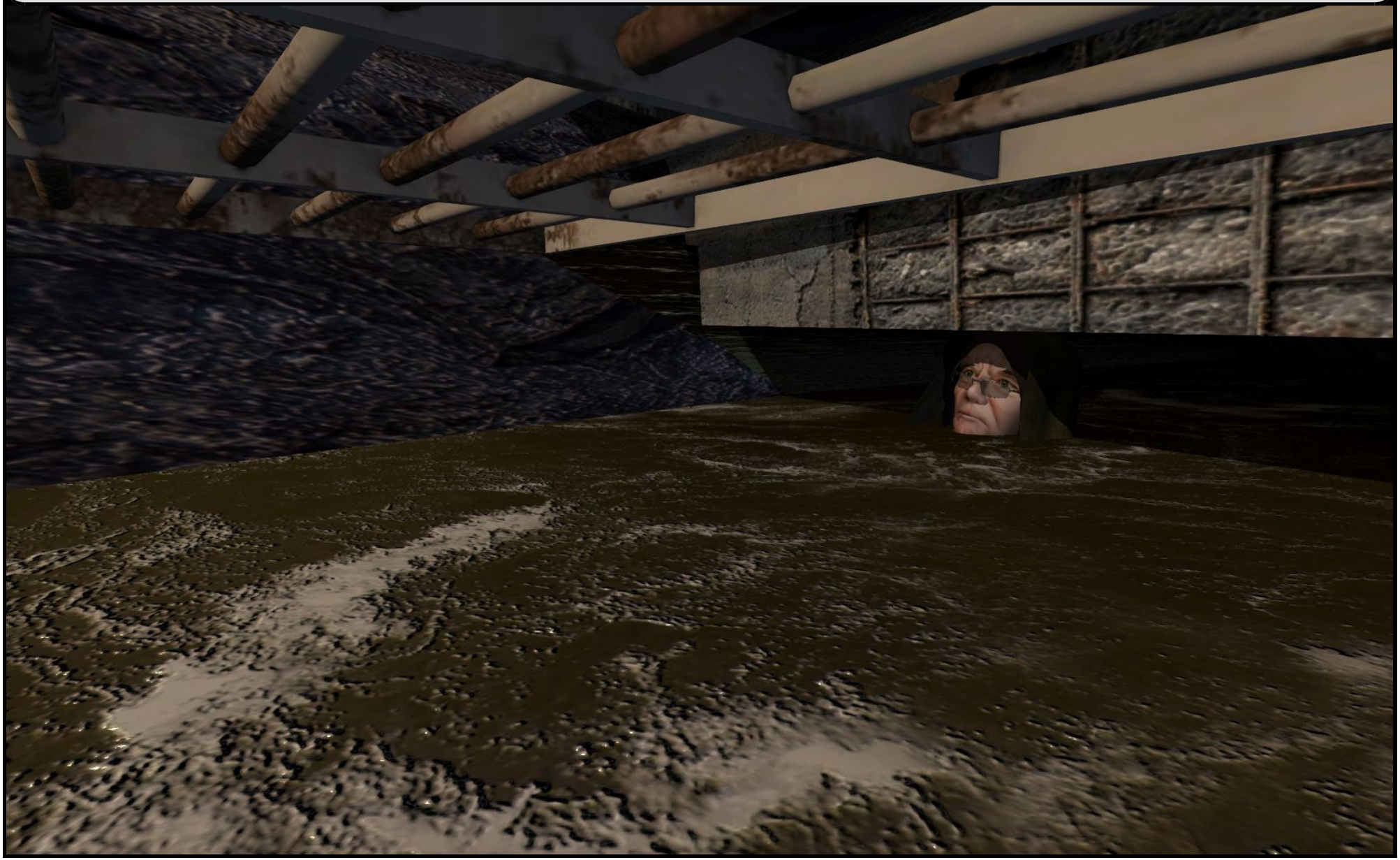
- You know better than anyone what it is worth, Mr. Gregoire. Promise me you will do it.



-- I promise you, Alcibiad... I will do it.



- Now go, while there's still time.



- Come on, we must go.





-- Erydak doesn't come back, I'd better go get them...



- I don't think it's a good idea. The tunnel she used is on the same level as the one where we have just lost Alcibiad. It is certainly already flooded.



-- And you let her go there alone without warning!
- Vanitan and Xerca must have escaped by the safety shaft. If your friends survived then they may have been able to get out that way.



- What? There was another exit!
-- And you couldn't tell us that before!?



--- To go get shot by Xerca, trying to climb a 40 meters long ladder, in a one-meter-wide hole... huh? No, thank you!



-- I hope at least that this machine works.
--- Me too, believe me!



- The water has already reached us!
--- Hang on tight!



-- How long till we reach the exit?
- A little less than ten minutes, it won't give us too much time.



Long stressful minutes later...



--- The door! We see the daylight, that's a good sign!



- Well, it's half-open. We're lucky, considering that the door's engines have burned trying to pull it out.
-- Let's get out of here.





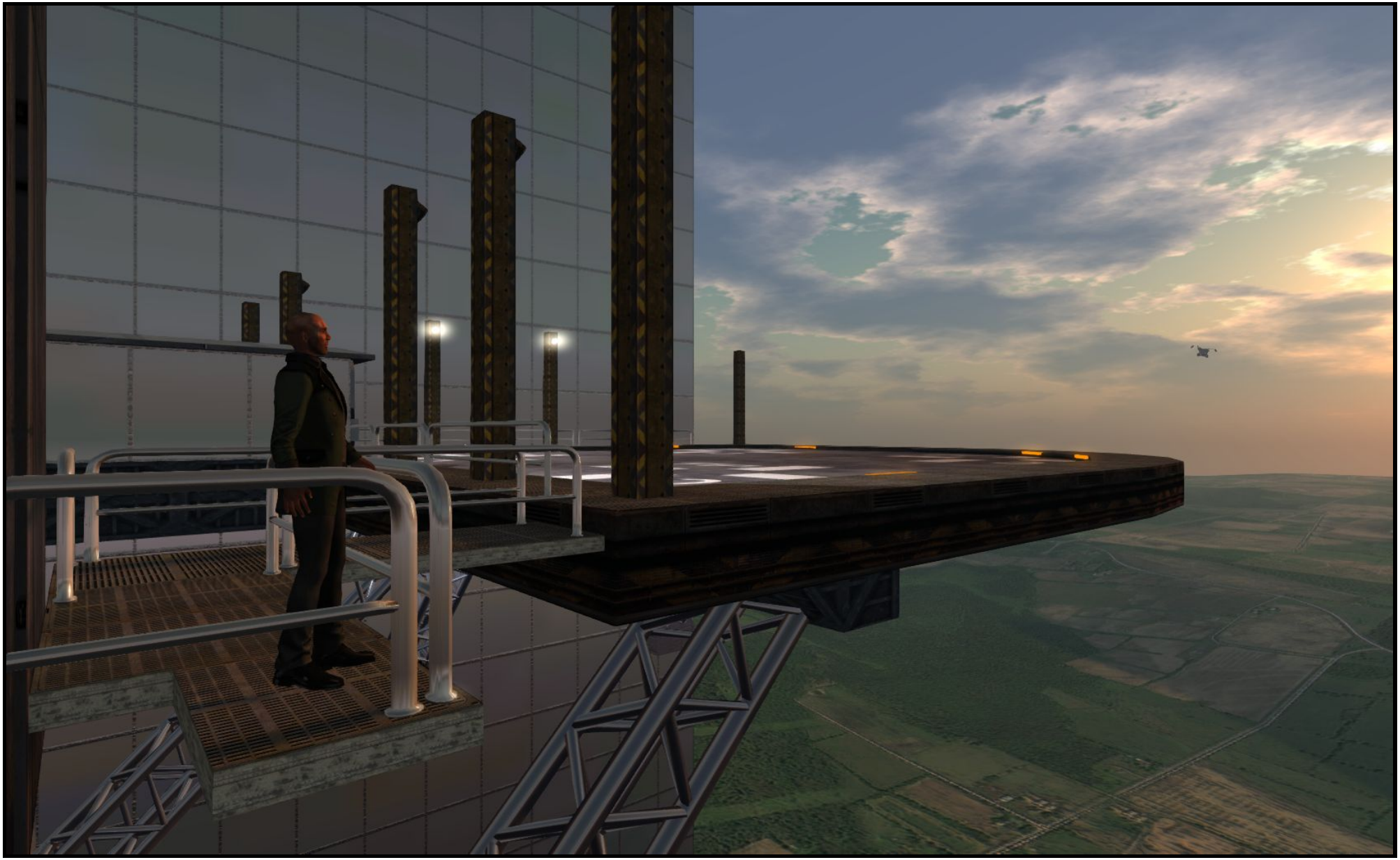
{System} Beep! Transponder "Blackship808" detected.
(!)



{System} Transponder "Blackship808", on approach.







{Jaima's voice} Commissioner, we found Tee Maguire. He's on the landing area 66-C.
-- Oh, finally! Thank you, Jaima.



-- They found him! ...Landing area 66-C.
---- You, call for reinforcements.

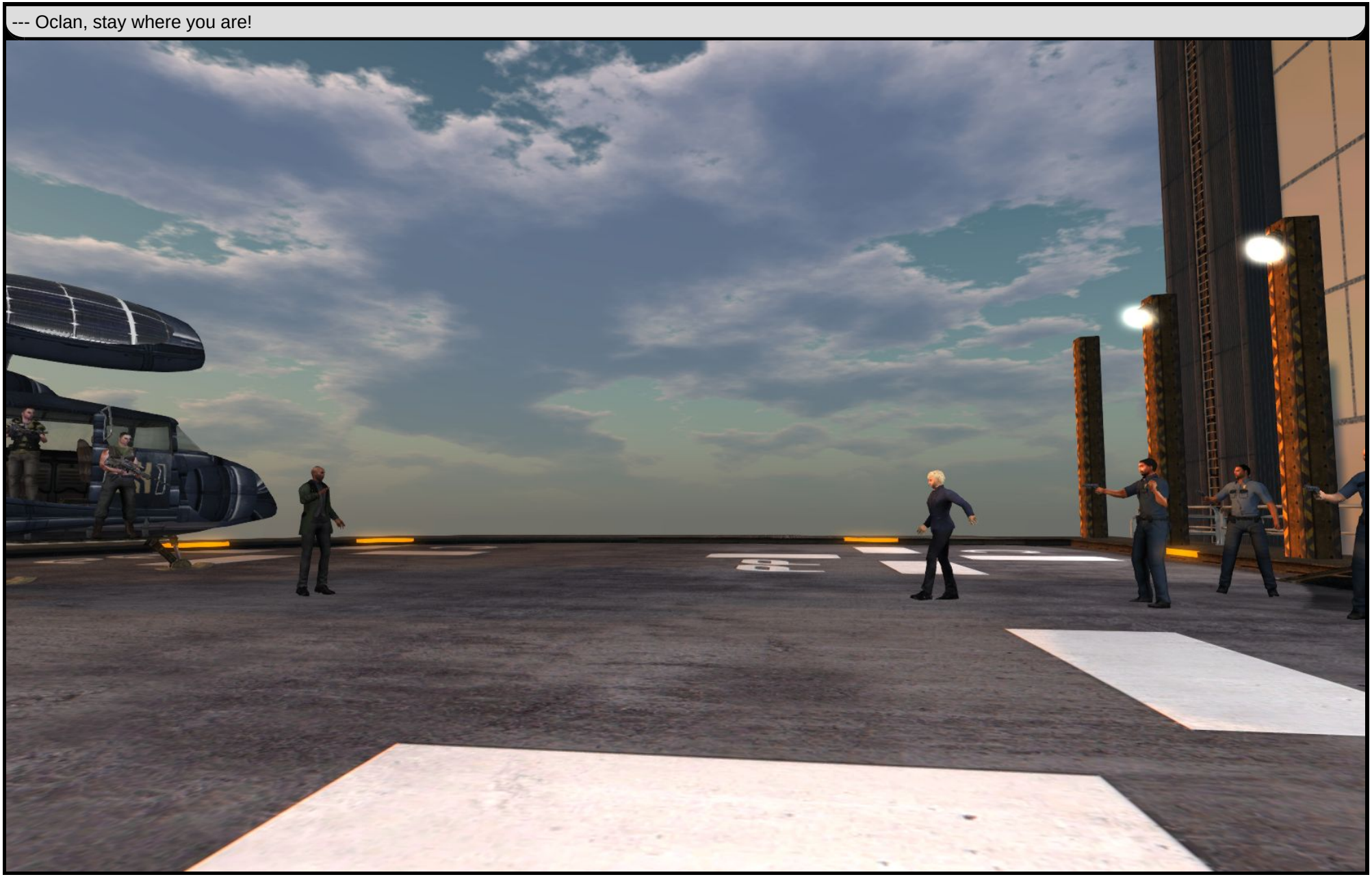



FOOOOOO !!!

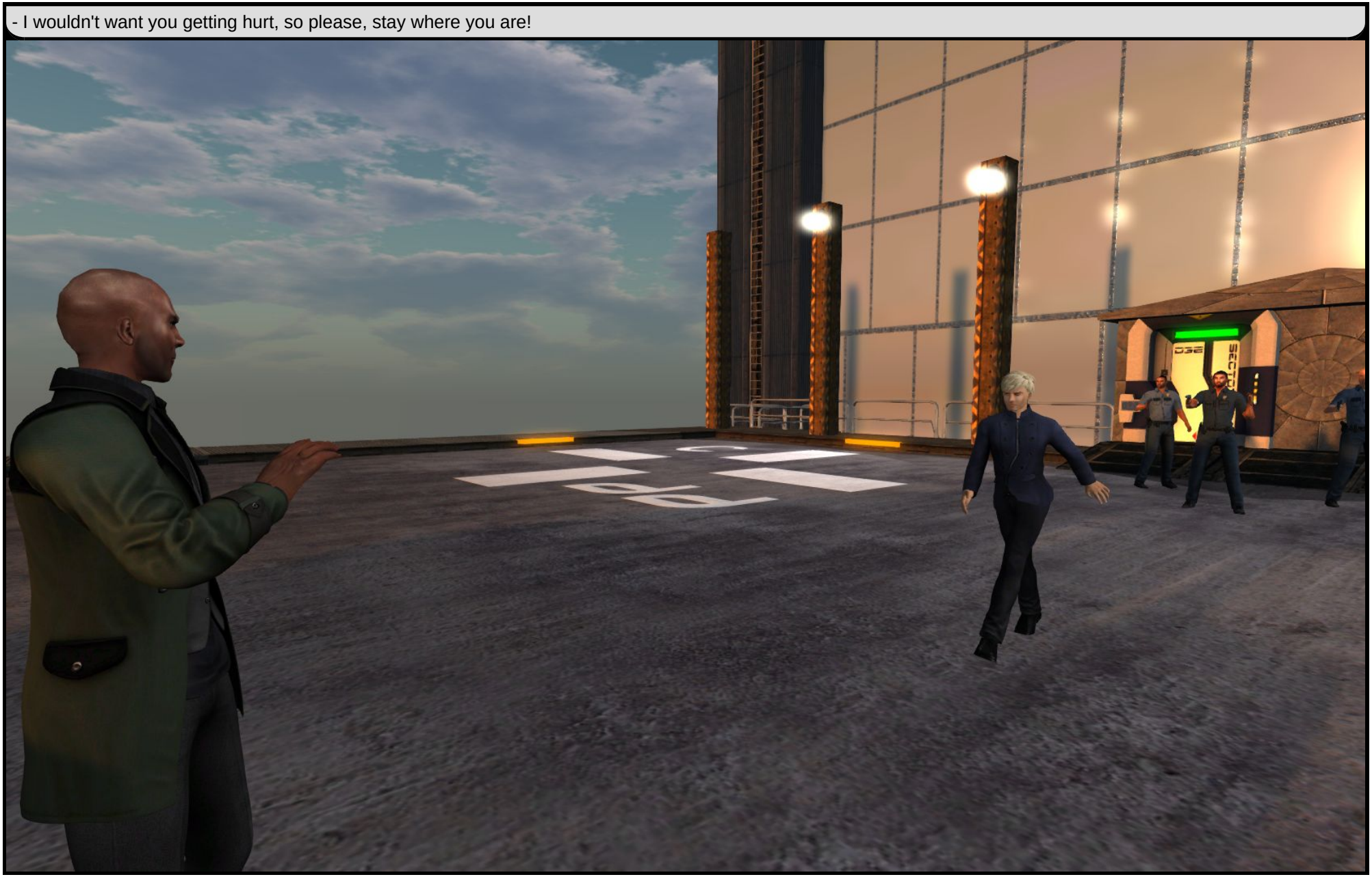
- Tee!!! What are you doing?!



--- Oclan, stay where you are!



- I wouldn't want you getting hurt, so please, stay where you are!



---- Tee, what are you doing?
--- I did what I had to do. I have to leave now.



- All that we fight for, did it mean nothing to you? I thought we were friends!
-- My real fight is elsewhere. It's not against you personally.



---- And now you want to destroy all this? I don't understand!



- It's precisely about that, Oclan, you can't understand. You all can't. There is another way of seeing this world, and your government has clearly forgotten it!



---- I can't believe what I hear, Tee. Do you want us to go back where we failed before? You lied to us all these years. You were an infiltrator, but for whom?



-- I'm sorry, Oclan...
--- Not as much as me.



- Farewell, my friend.




FOOOOO !!!



- Commissioner, should we hunt them down?
-- (Sigh) No. ...Let them go.



- ...Please, answer! ...Do you hear me?...
{Male voice} ...We hear you, Dark Lands...



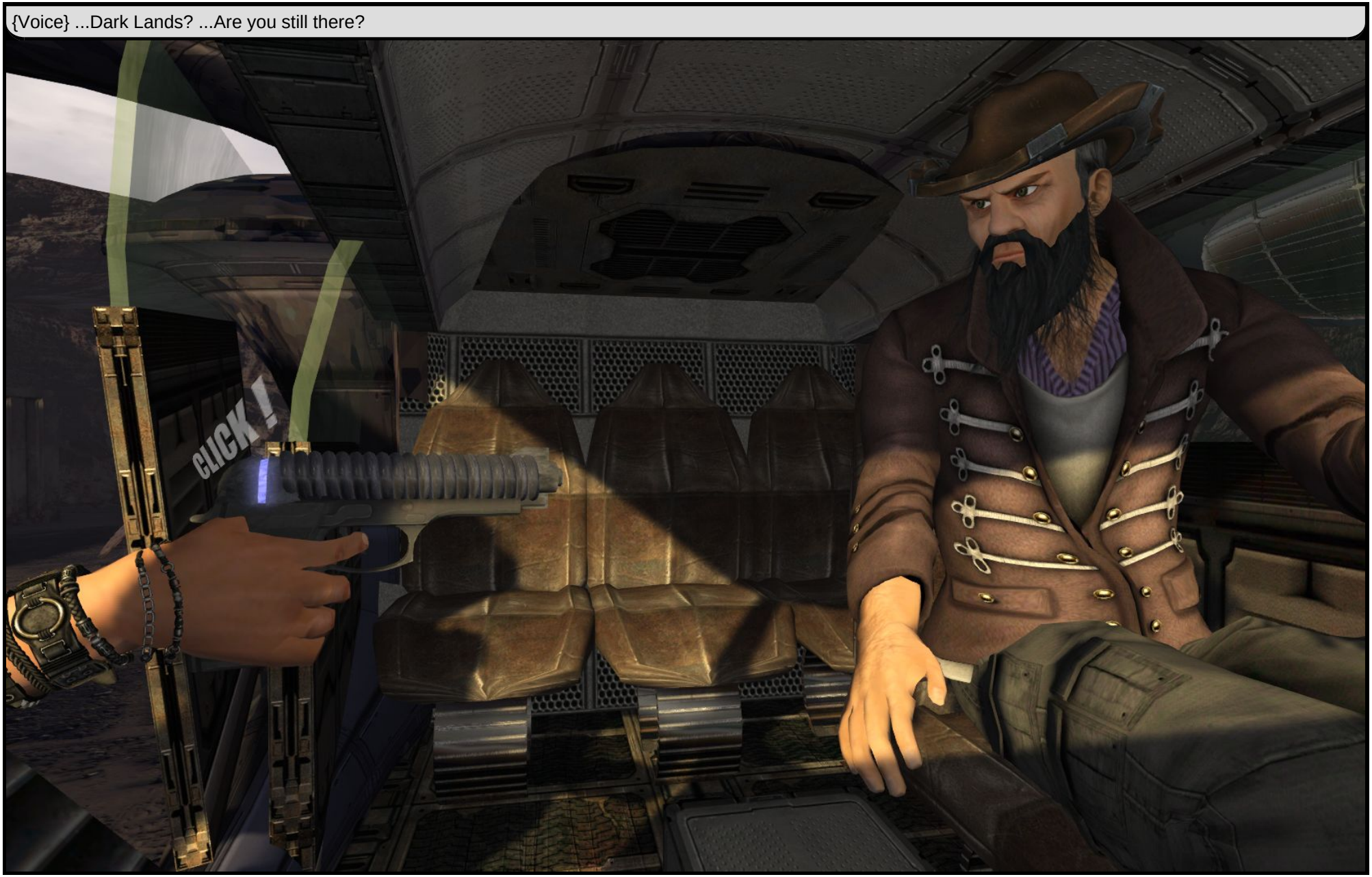
-- ...You must contact the western division immediately. Let them know that external elements have exposed our occultation prematurely...



{Voice} Dark Lands, are you in a position to control an evacuation? Do we have any embarrassing witnesses?
- Negative, for now, everything is under control.



{Voice} ...Dark Lands? ...Are you still there?




-- Hang up!

--- Let's go, do it... Shoot!



-- There have been enough deaths for today, don't you think?
--- The day is not over yet.



-- Come on! Get out of there, we will join the others at the tunnel entrance.



- In this case, there's no need to go there on foot. I fly this kind of aircraft every day.




-- Really? They let the kids pilot in this country.

--- You would be surprised to see my score. ...And at 22 years old, people are no more kid.



-- Alright, so in that case... You! Go behind and keep the chin on your knees and the hands on your head!



- I hope you really know how it works.



- Judge by yourself!




FOOOOO !!!



-- Phew, I thought we would never get out.



-- Alezia is still in there. We should go to the safety shaft.

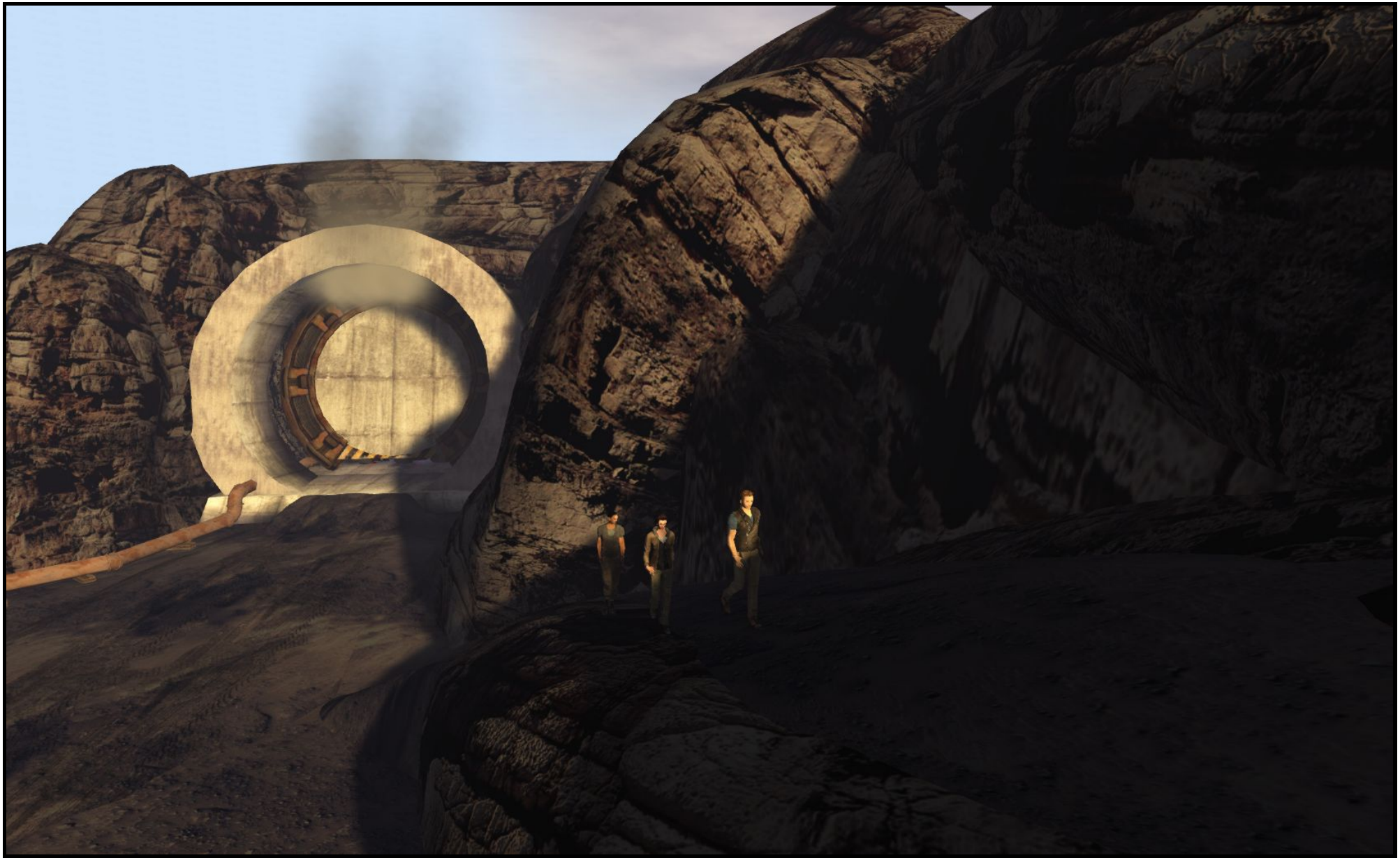


-- I was just thinking the same thing.



--- Going there would be madness. Just staying close to this tunnel is extremely dangerous.
-- That's right, we shouldn't stay here.





-- Is there a valve to shut off the water supply?



--- Yes, there is one near the pump, down there, toward the lake. You'll find it easily by following the pipeline...



- ...On my side, gentlemen, I'm sorry, but I don't intend to end up in jail. So I'll slip away!
(((!)))
((?!))



- You let him go?



- Yeah... We must know how to choose our fights. This one doesn't worth it.



-- I only hope he knows what he will do in the middle of nowhere.




BOOM!!!

(!!!)
((!!!))



- Oh my god, Alezia!
-- Lauti!



--- Whoa! Did you feel this shock wave?



-- The tunnel! ...The tunnel has just exploded!

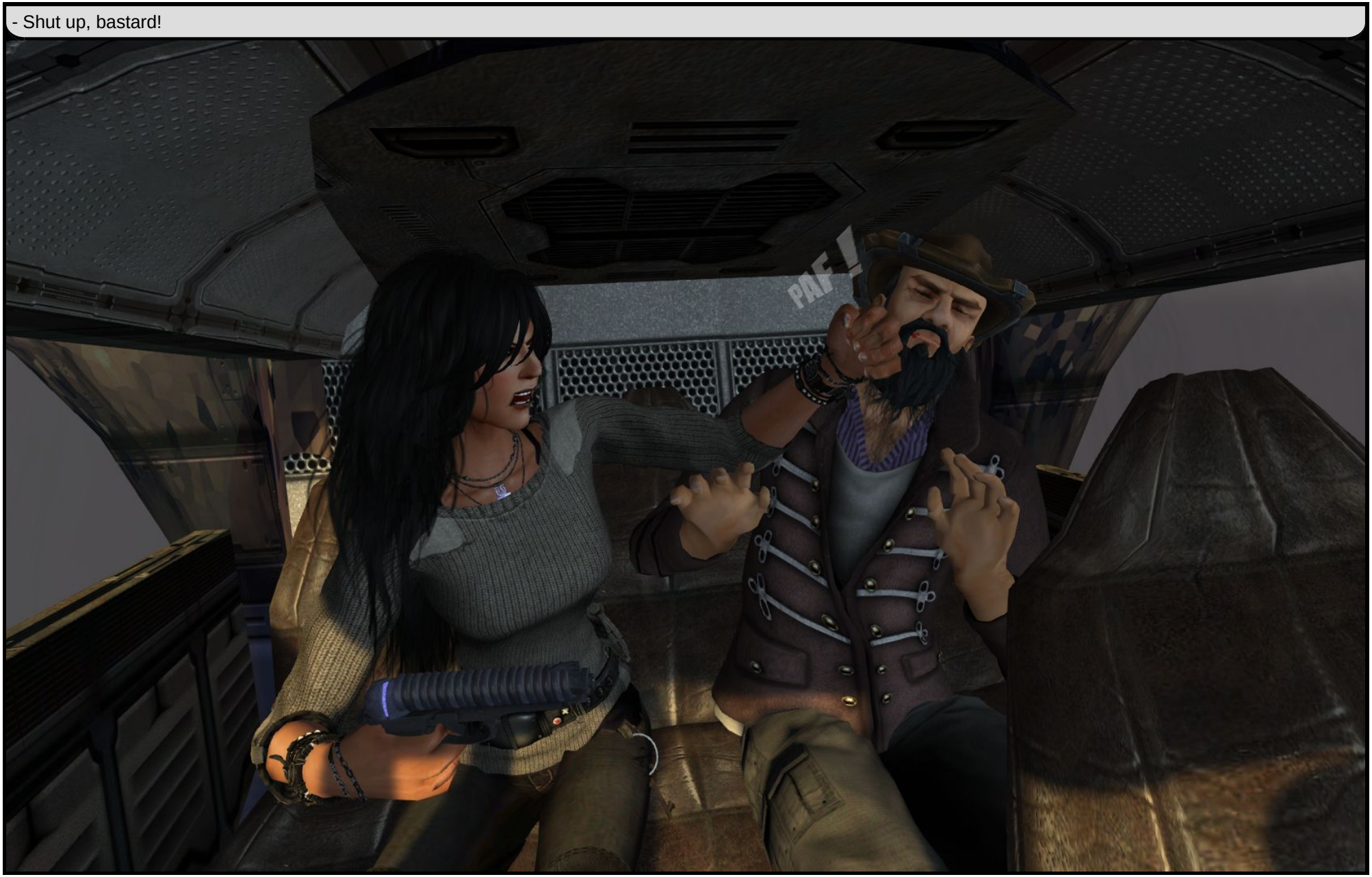



-- Oh my god! No... Reim!

-- The generator exploded. Your friends are surely all dead by now! I told you that this day was not over!



- Shut up, bastard!



-- Reim! Oh no...
- Keep your cool, blondie! This is not the time to give up!



- Look! Over there!



- Do you have any idea who it might be?
-- One thing is sure, it's not one of ours.

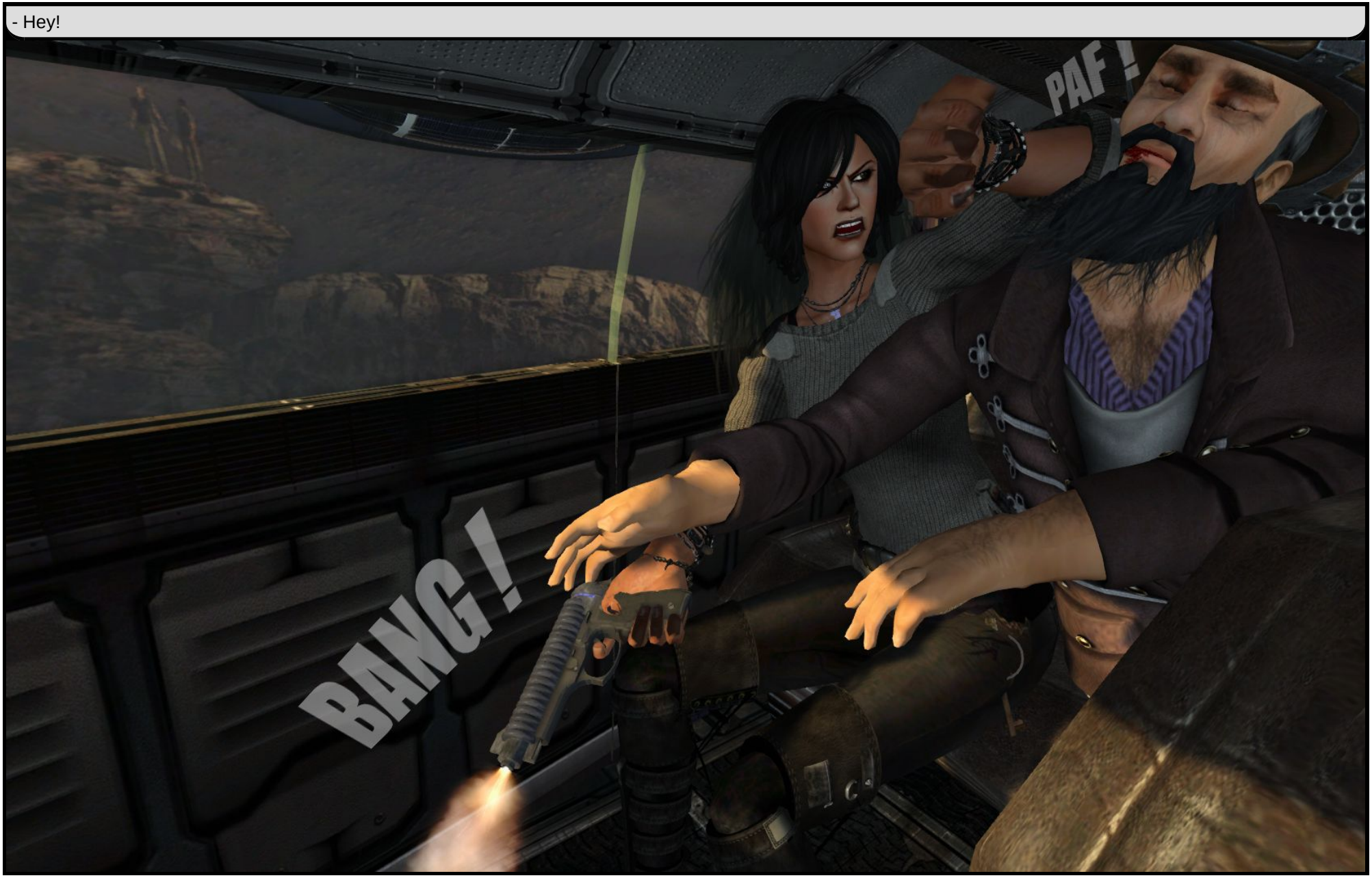


-- Oh! Look over there! They are there, they were able to get out in time!
- Yeah, that's our two friends!



-- Fucking Northalians!
(!)




- Hey!
PAF !
BANG !

- Eeep! ...Shit! Fuck!



-- It's Lauti and Alezia! Something is wrong!
- Vanitan is on board!




FOOOOOO!
SCRATCH!


FOOO!!!

- Phew! That was close!Some of the controls are not responding, we won't stay in the air for very long!



- Can you land?
-- In this forest? I'm not sure we can survive that!



--- Is there anything we could try?



- You, big asshole, one move and I blow your head off before using you to cushion our fall!



-- There! There is a lake. I will try to reach it. I hope you can swim!





- They don't come back, I don't like that.
-- I'm afraid they crashed near this lake.



-- Shit, we won't be there before nightfall!



- If we hurry, we can be at the Shenika within twenty minutes.
-- Shenika?



- Yes, our aircraft. It's not far from here. How did you think we got here?



-- I only hope we won't be too late!



--- Blondie?



(((... Damn, this water is cold!)))



-- Come on, blondie! Wake up! You're way too young to give up.



- (Coughing) Huh! What is that?
-- Calm down, calm down, you're safe. We're almost at the shore.



- Ah, yes... We crashed in the lake... What happened?
-- You lost consciousness with the impact.



-- I could have drowned. You save my life twice today!
- Yeah, I know.



-- And Vanitan?
- Just over there, on the other side...



- He took the opportunity to run away.
-- What a coward!



- I only hope that our men are safe.



- They're alive. I guess Reim will go back to our aircraft and try to locate my beacon.



- Really? You have a tracking device on you!
-- Yep, for my safety. We often have to deal with unsavory people. It's subcutaneous.



- What happened to that probe?
-- Ah, it's a long story... Let's go, it's unlocked.



-- Damn!

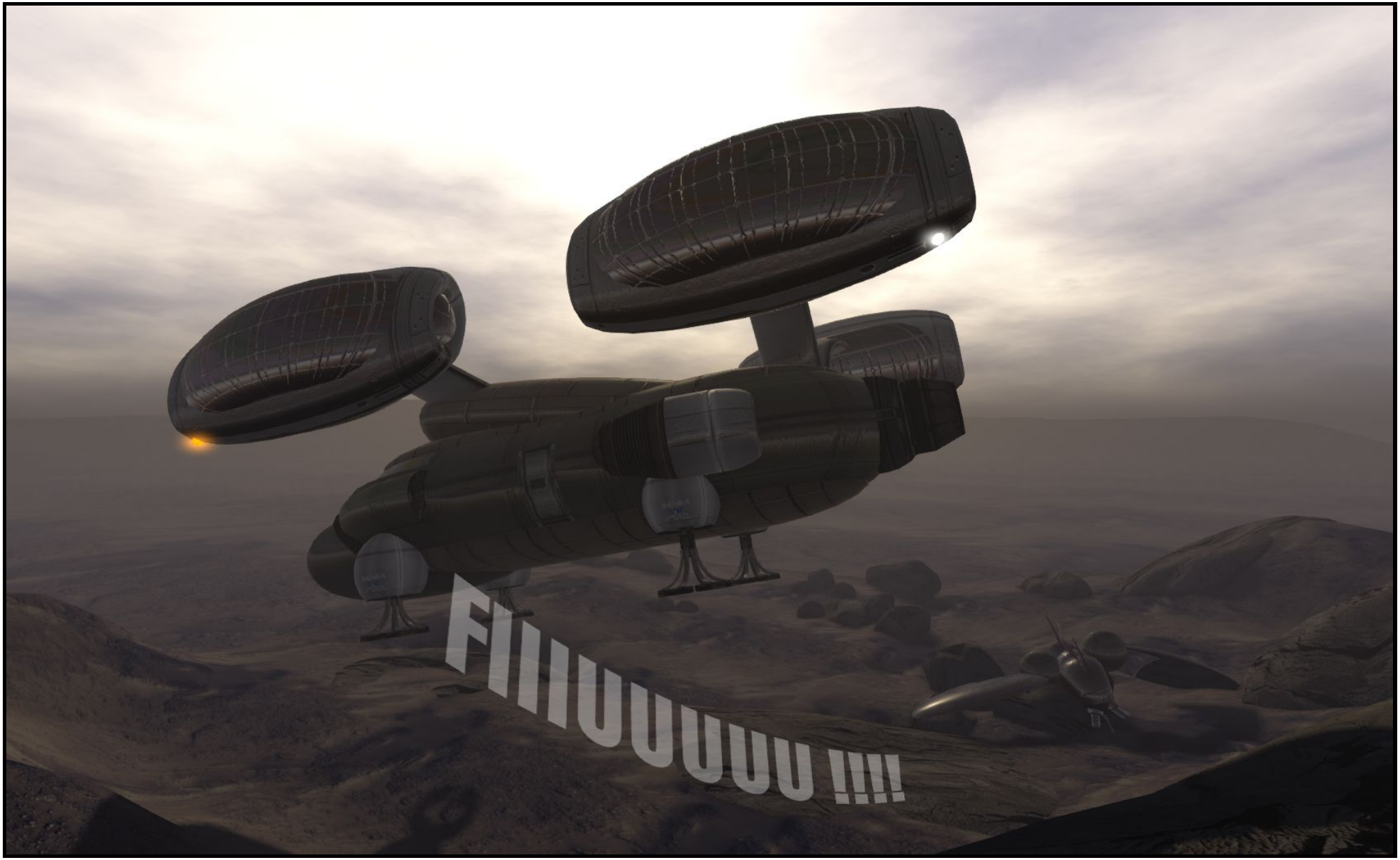


- Who was this man?
-- Someone left behind by your friend.

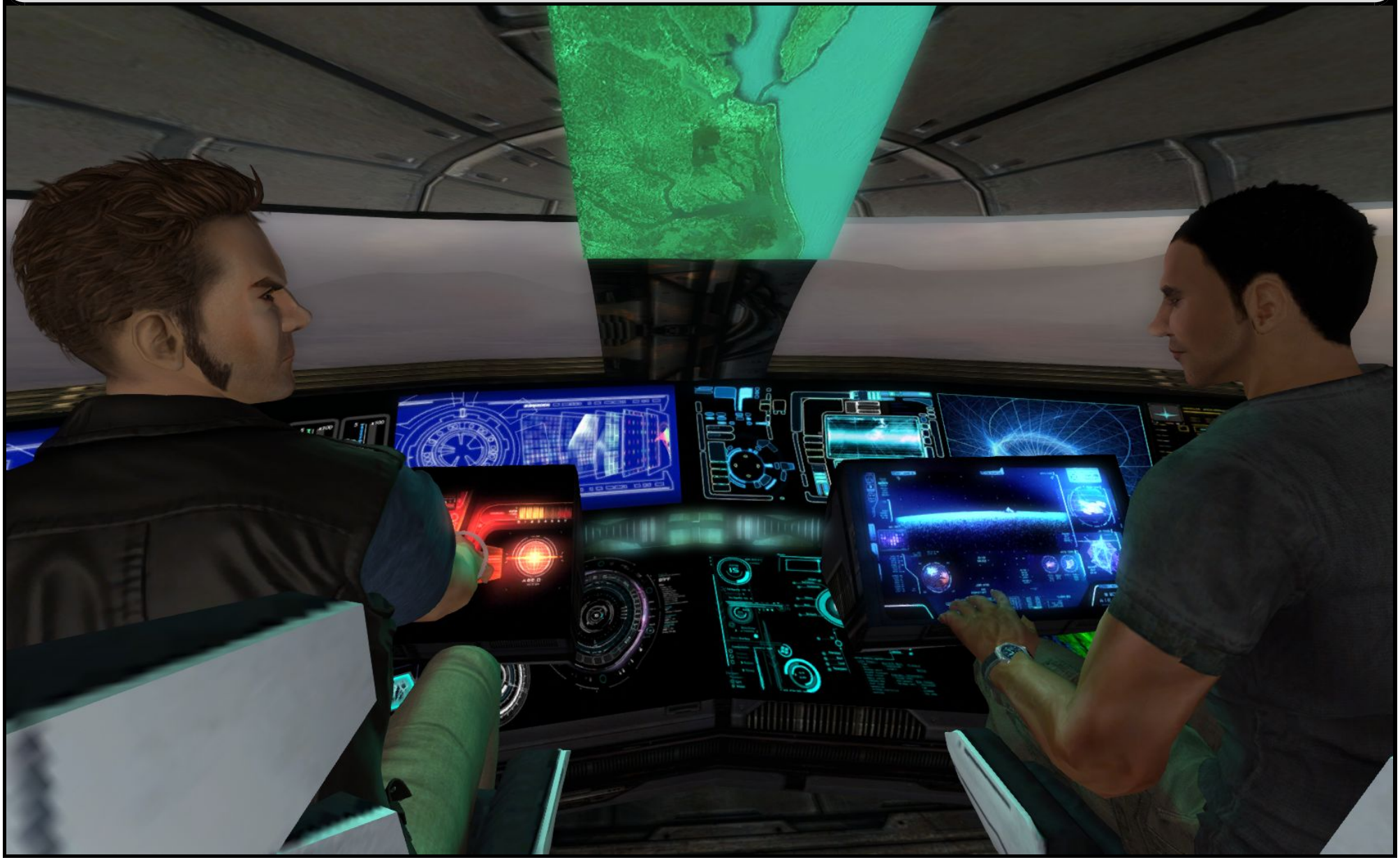


-- Apparently, she didn't appreciate his manners. He threatened her with a gun, so she killed him... with a wooden pipe!
- Damn! I'm glad to see that she finally decided to quit smoking!



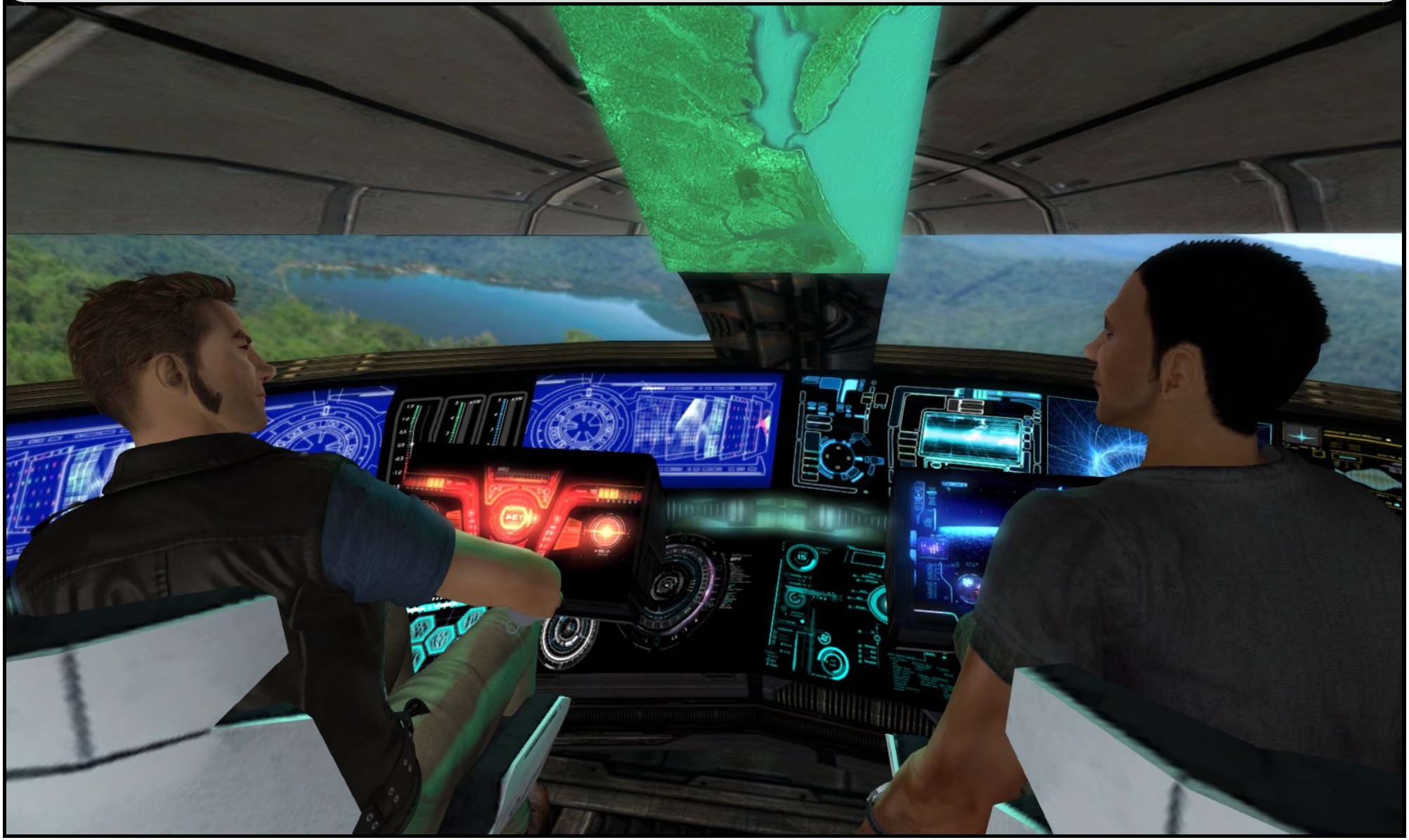

FIIIUUUUU !!!!

- I'll try to locate Lauti. Normally we should pick up her signal if we are inside one kem.




FIIIUUUU !!!

-- Do you see anything?
- No, and there is not really any place to land around this lake.



-- No trace of an aircraft. This lake looks deep, it could have sunk.



- I'm getting a signal! She's somewhere around.



- Does it mean they are alive?
-- I can't say.



- Just over there! There's a clearing, I'll land there.




FIIIUUUU !!!

- That seems a bit tight.
-- Yes, it is. I better not scratch the paint, Lauti won't forgive me!



Three minutes later...



- The signal comes from over there. Let's go.




-- Shit! They didn't see us!

- Yes, but they were slowing down. They may have landed a little further.



- It may not be safe to go into this forest. It's not a good time to get lost.



-- That's your opinion... We go in that direction. Come on!



- Uh! ...What? ...Can I object?
-- Not really.



- Oh no! I'm not going anywhere!



-- What is it that you don't understand? Just in case you haven't realized yet, you're my bargaining chip to get my friend back!



-- What? I'm your hostage!
- You can call it like that if you wish.



- So you've saved my life just for that purpose?
-- Stop saying stupid things!



-- Are you serious? Do you really think we're going to get you in troubles?




- Look, blondie! To survive today, I had to take four lives! So I'm very sorry, but I'm running low on trust right now. Is that okay with you?!

((...Now I understand what they meant by "Take it easy with that woman"...))



- Lauti... My name is Lauti.
-- (Sigh) ...Nice to meet you.



-- ...And sincerely, thank you again for having got me out of trouble.
- Couldn't we just "walk"?



-- Yeah... How can you be sure we are going in the right direction?



-- Because I can see the aircraft from here, in the shortest frequencies of the ultraviolet.
- Oh!

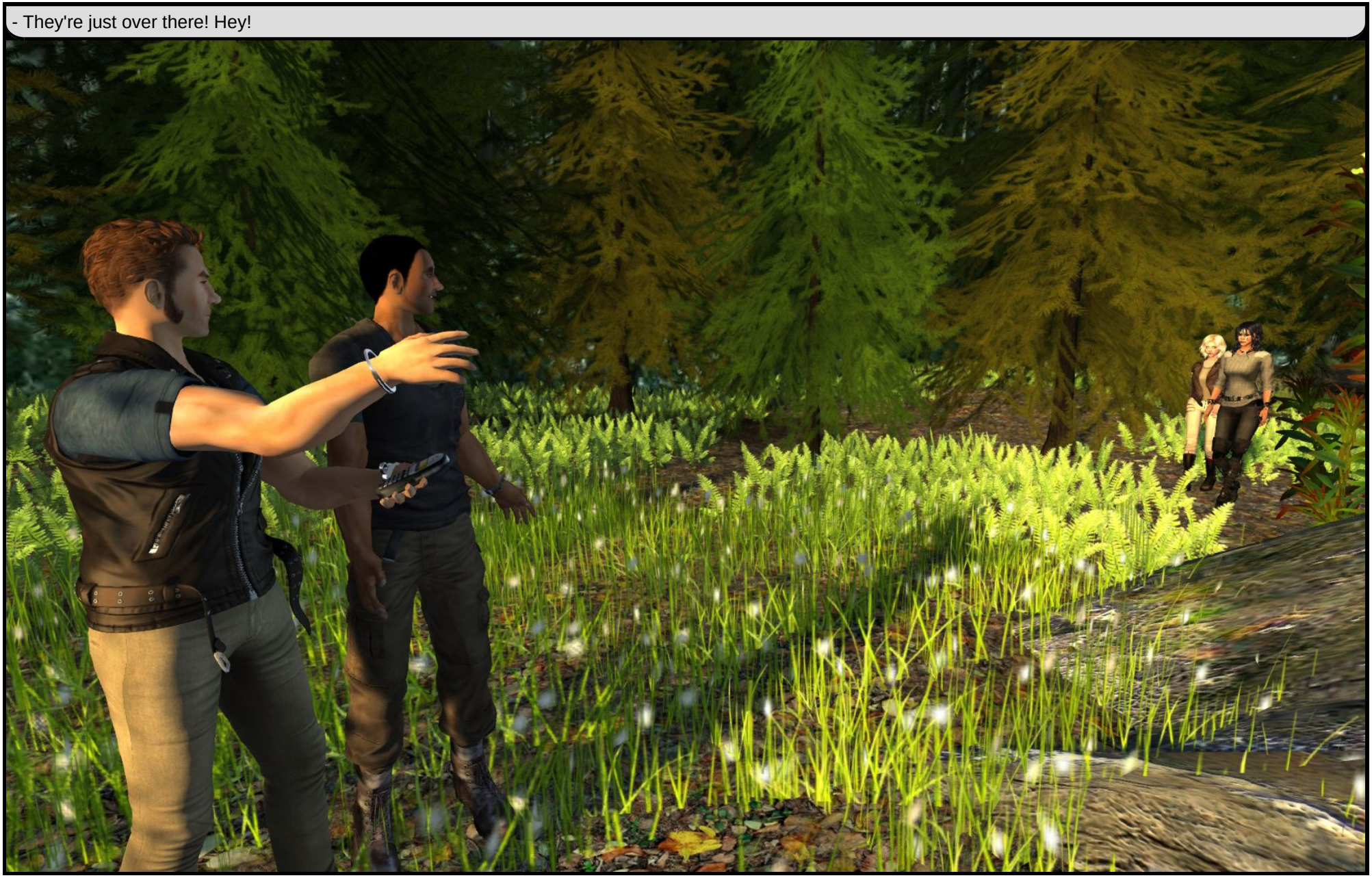


-- Lauti should be within 50 meters.



-- Shh! Did you hear that?




- They're just over there! Hey!

-- Good to see you! Are you alright?
--- Yes, we're whole.



- Thank heavens, you're alive!



- The Shenika is over there.
-- Boss, I really feared the worst...



- What happened to Vanitan?
--- He ran away by the other side of the lake. I had to bring your friend back to the shore, she was knocked out.



--- Do you trust them?
---- For now, yes.



- I think we have an unfinished chat!
--- Yes, that's right. Do you prefer we do this here or inside?



- Here would be fine. Why were you looking for us?
---- Our mission was to find you and convince you to come with us to Jijuterk.



- Convince? Are you sure you don't mean "arrest"? Or worse?
---- Absolutely not. Our objective was to get you out of the wilderness and avoid trouble in the marginal area.



- The Jijuterk government is working with the Kruls against me, and you want to make me believe that you want to avoid us trouble?!



- If it was the case, do you really think they would have sent two simple agents on a mediation mission? Trust me, we aren't here for other things.



- Of course... And what guarantee would we have that we won't be put in custody once there?



---- Hmm... I'm not the one who can give you such guarantees. But if you don't trust the government, then I can arrange a meeting in a neutral place with someone who can speak on their behalf.



- A neutral place? If they come with an army, it won't stay a neutral place.



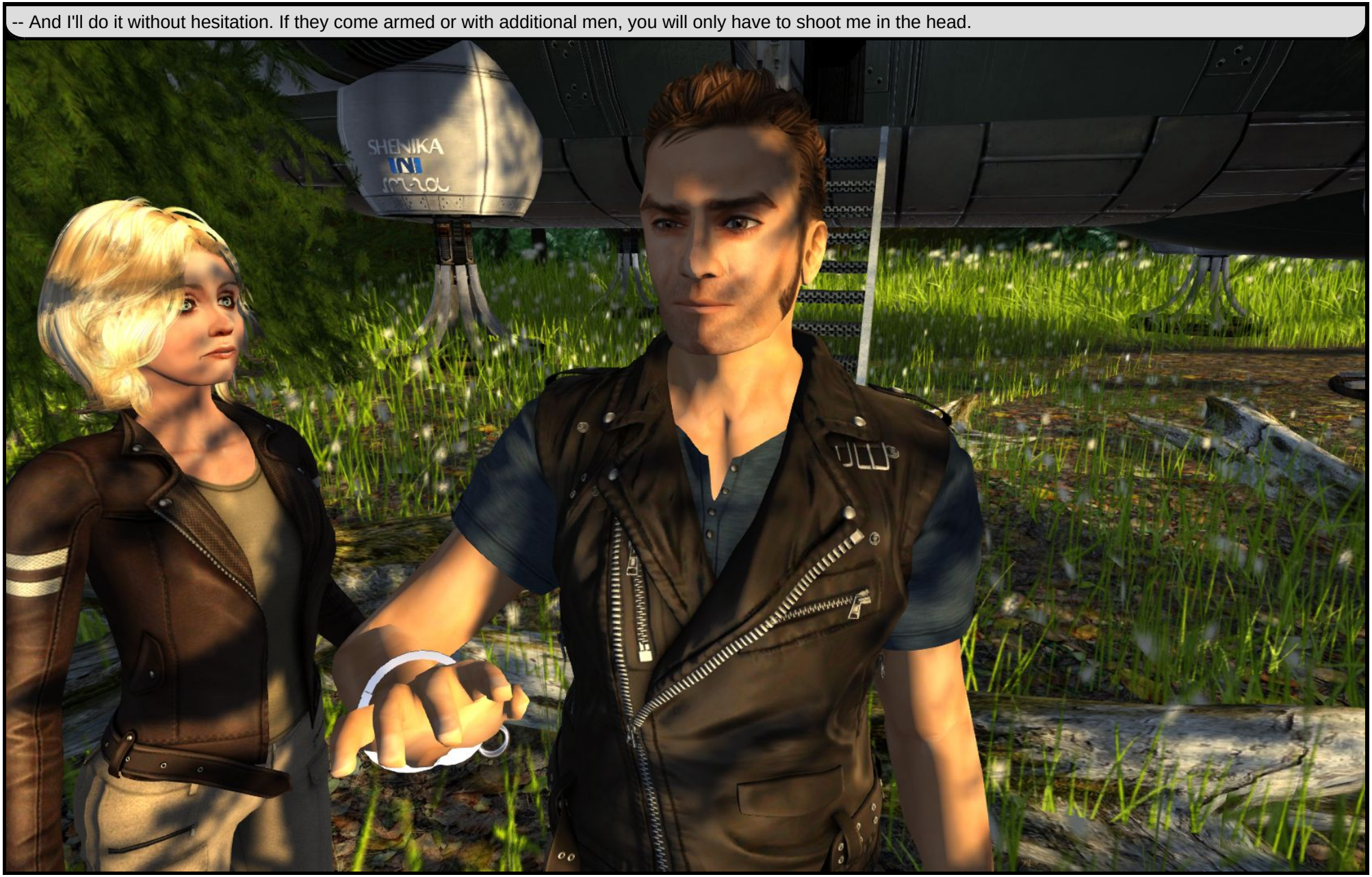
---- Hmm, yeah. I understand your suspicion... In that case, okay, I'll give you the guarantee of the neutrality of the place.



- How are you gonna do that?
---- By putting my own life in your hands.
--- Boss!



-- And I'll do it without hesitation. If they come armed or with additional men, you will only have to shoot me in the head.



- You know that I won't have anything to lose and that I'm very capable of doing it, don't you?
---- Yes, but I'm willing to take the risk.



- All right, but I will add another condition to this.
---- What do you have in mind?



- She will drop us off at the rendezvous point, and Roland will stay on board with a gun pointed at her!
-- Holy shit!
--- Oh, great!



---- I accept.
- Good.



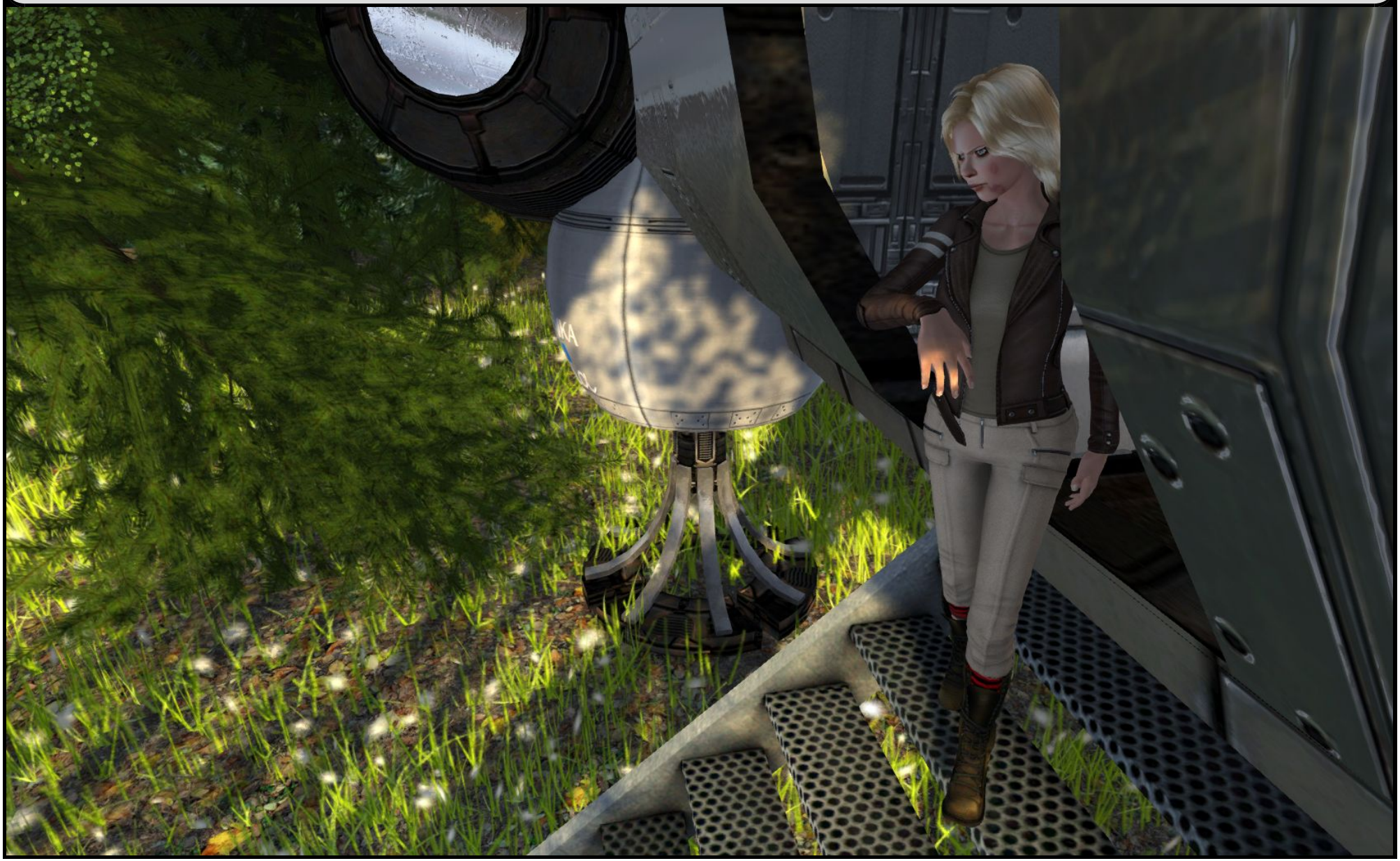
---- Boss! What have you done to my aircraft?! You landed in the trees!
--- I did what I could! There were not too many places to land around here...



-- You're tough in business. And I don't like this deal.
- Yeah, I know.



- Boss, can we find a better place before dark? The ground is too soft for the aircraft here and I won't be able to sleep knowing that Vanitan is around. And I would really like to have a shower as soon as possible!

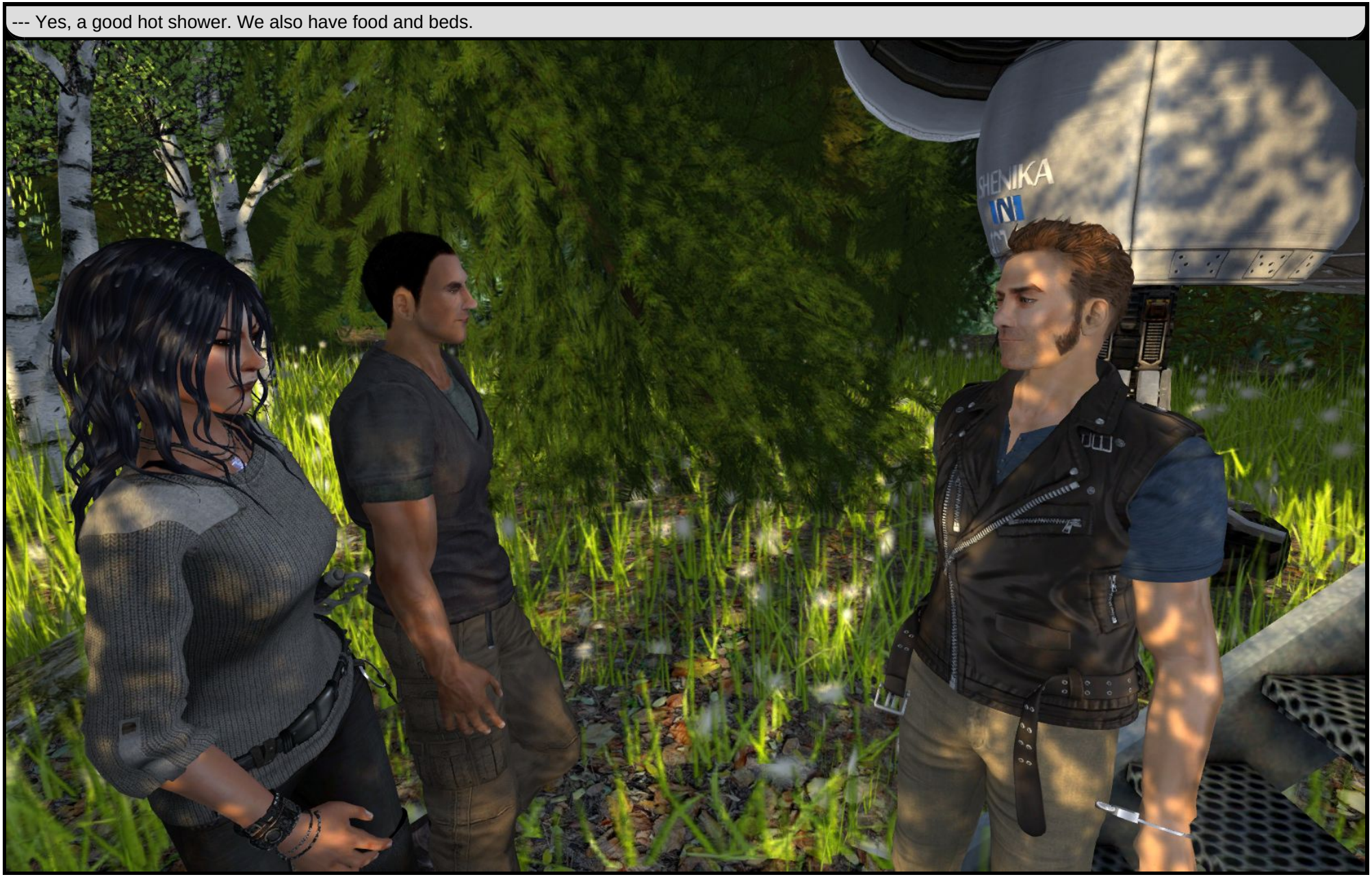


--- Can you trust us for a short flight to a more reliable place?
- Oh, you have a shower?!

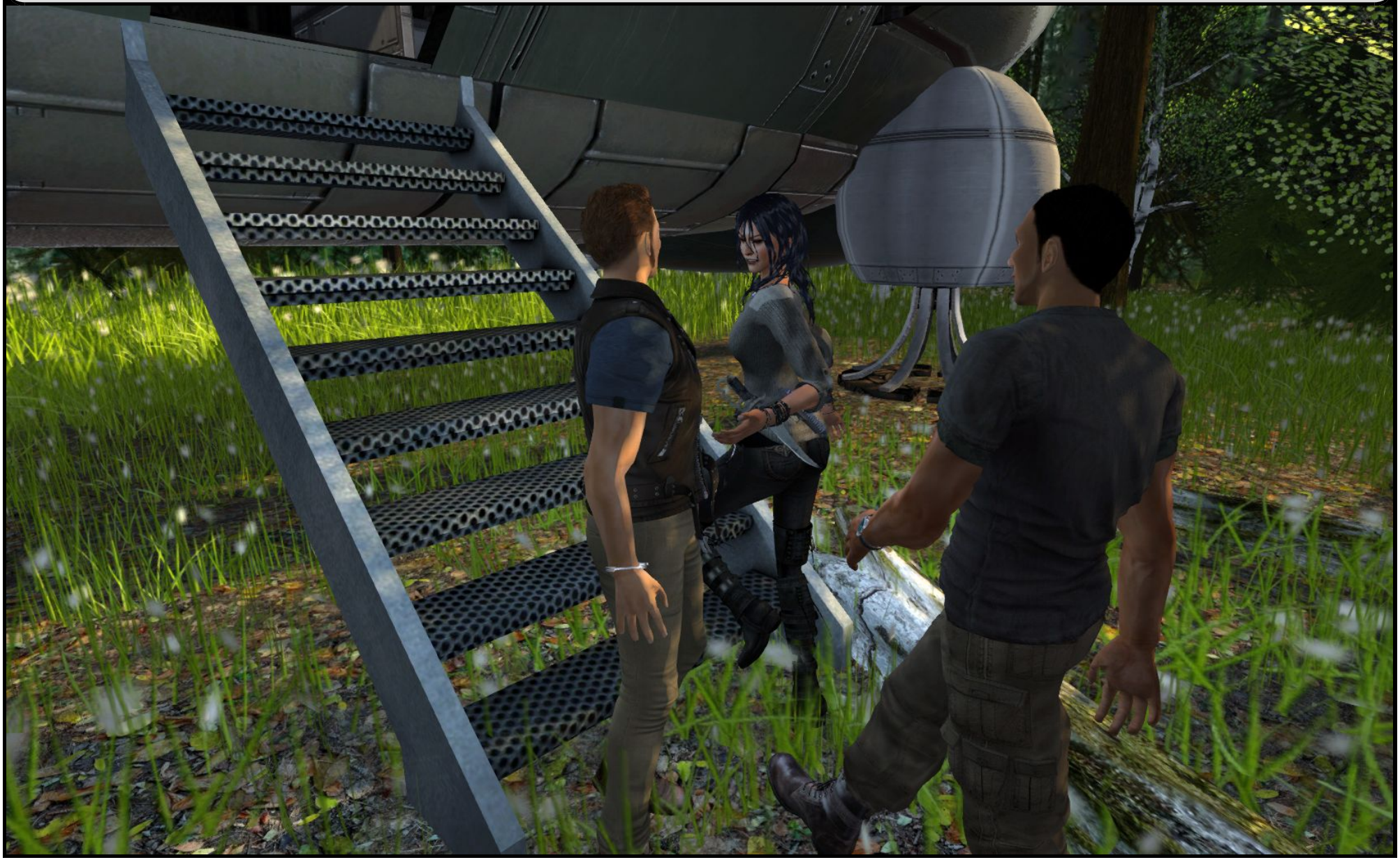



- They have a shower!
-- We've been dreaming about this for weeks!

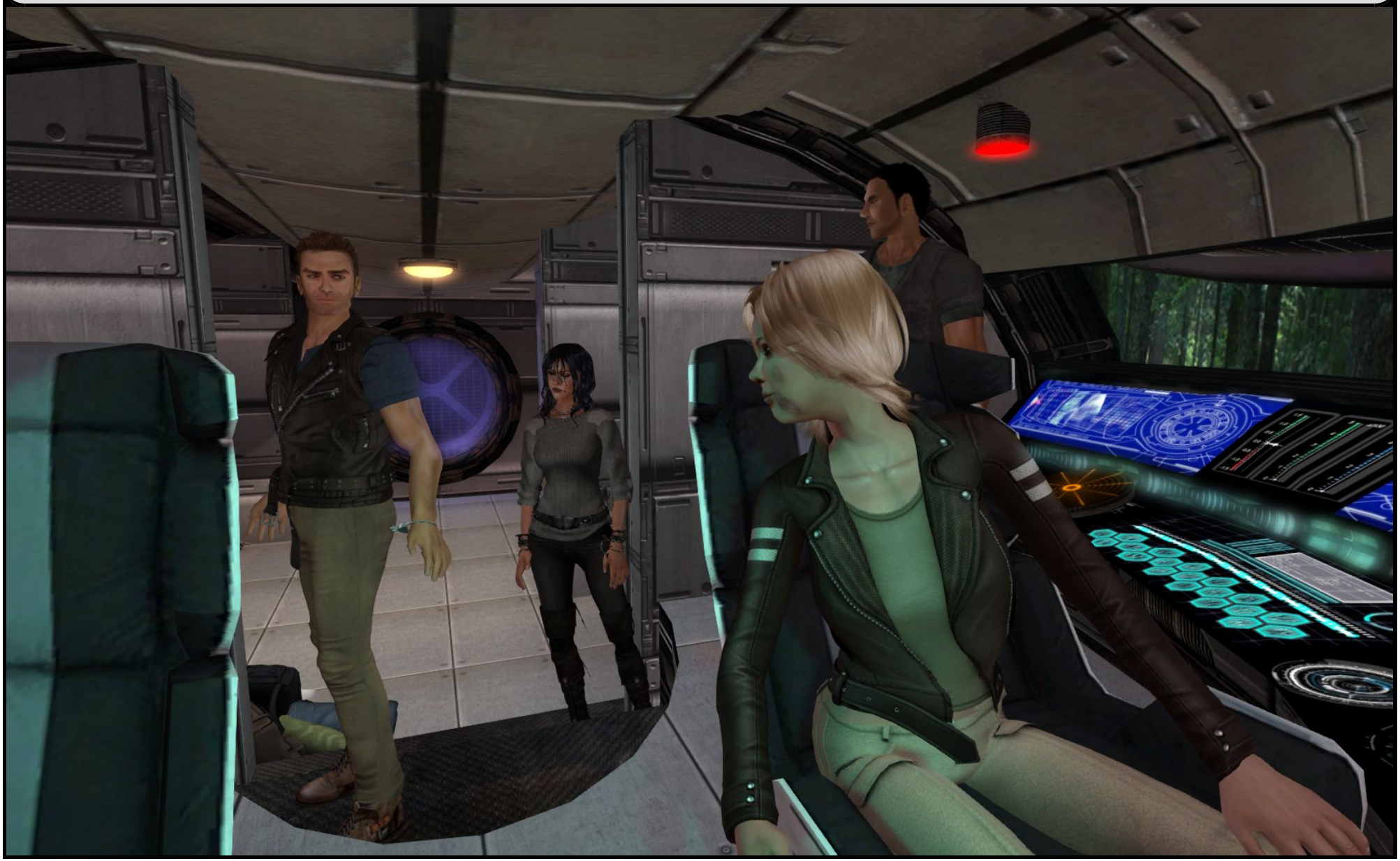
--- Yes, a good hot shower. We also have food and beds.



-- In that case, what are we waiting for? :-)



- Lauti, contact the control center and tell them we won't return to Rikmon Stain.
--- Yes, Boss, I'll do it. I'm heading to our usual spot.



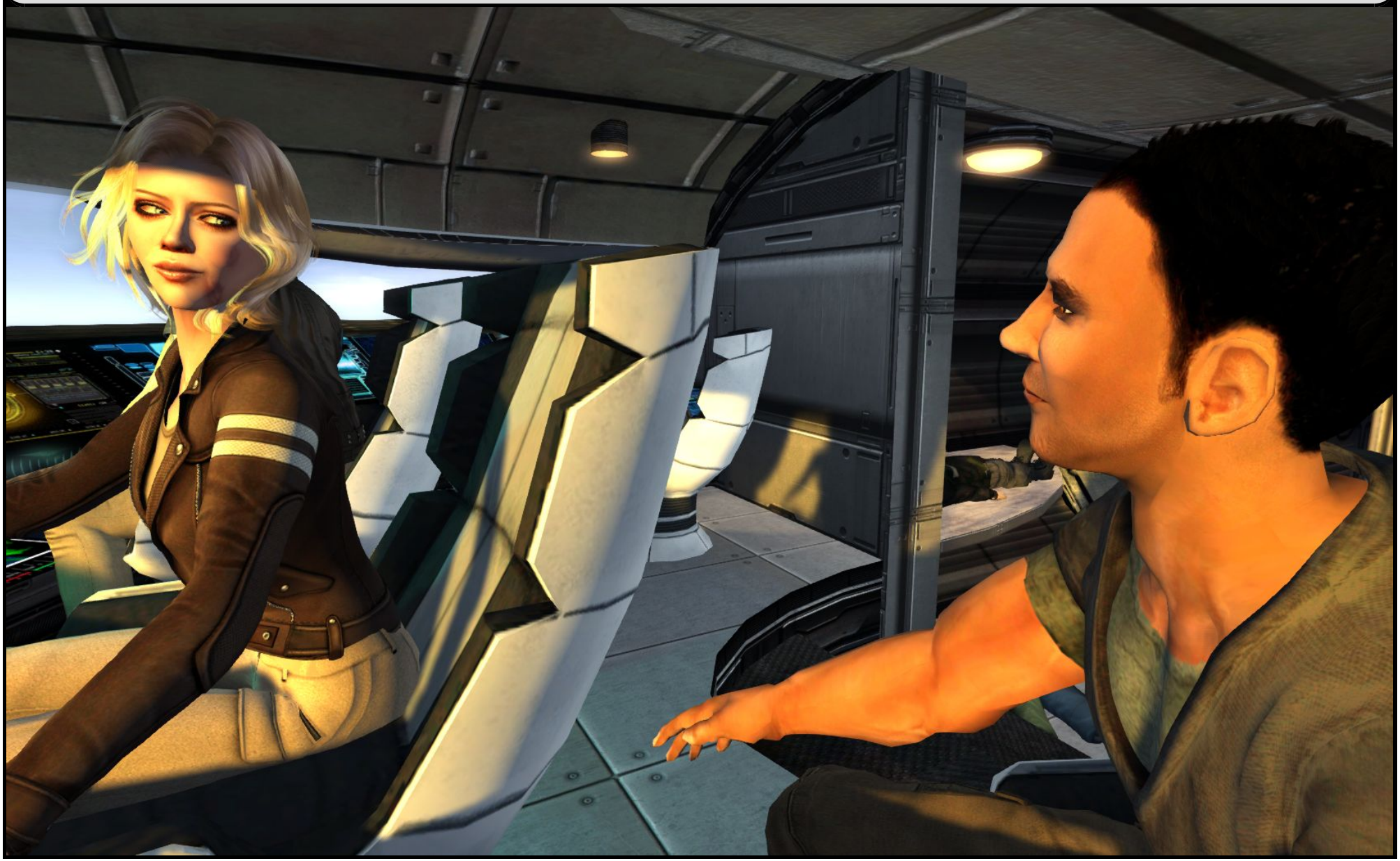
Five minutes later...



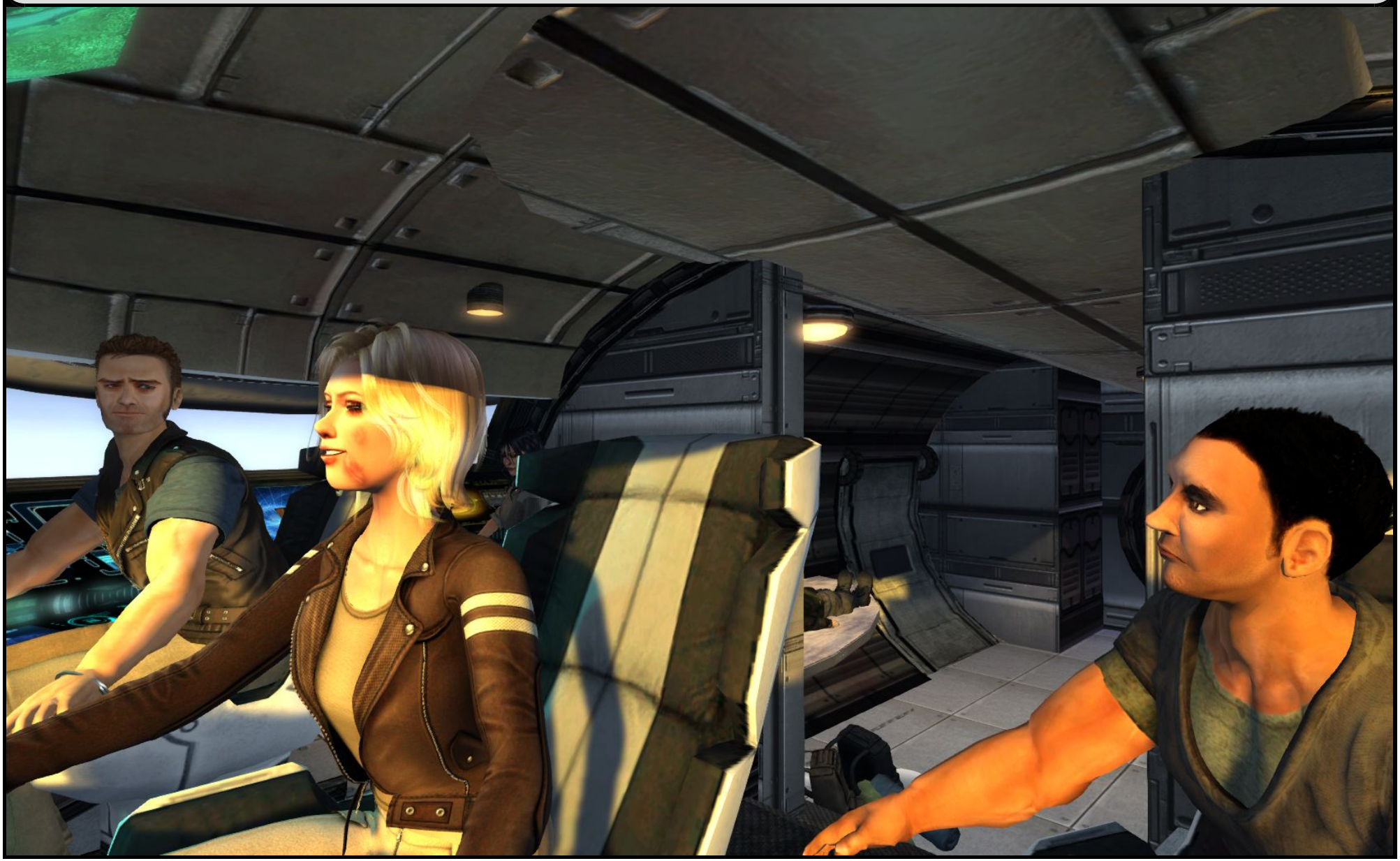
---- Tell me, how does this aircraft fly? Is it electricity?
--- Yes, in fact, we're talking about electro-magneto-hydro-dynamics.



-- It must take an astronomical amount of energy!
- Yes, close to 16 GigaYull. It's pushed by a type 880 fusion generator.



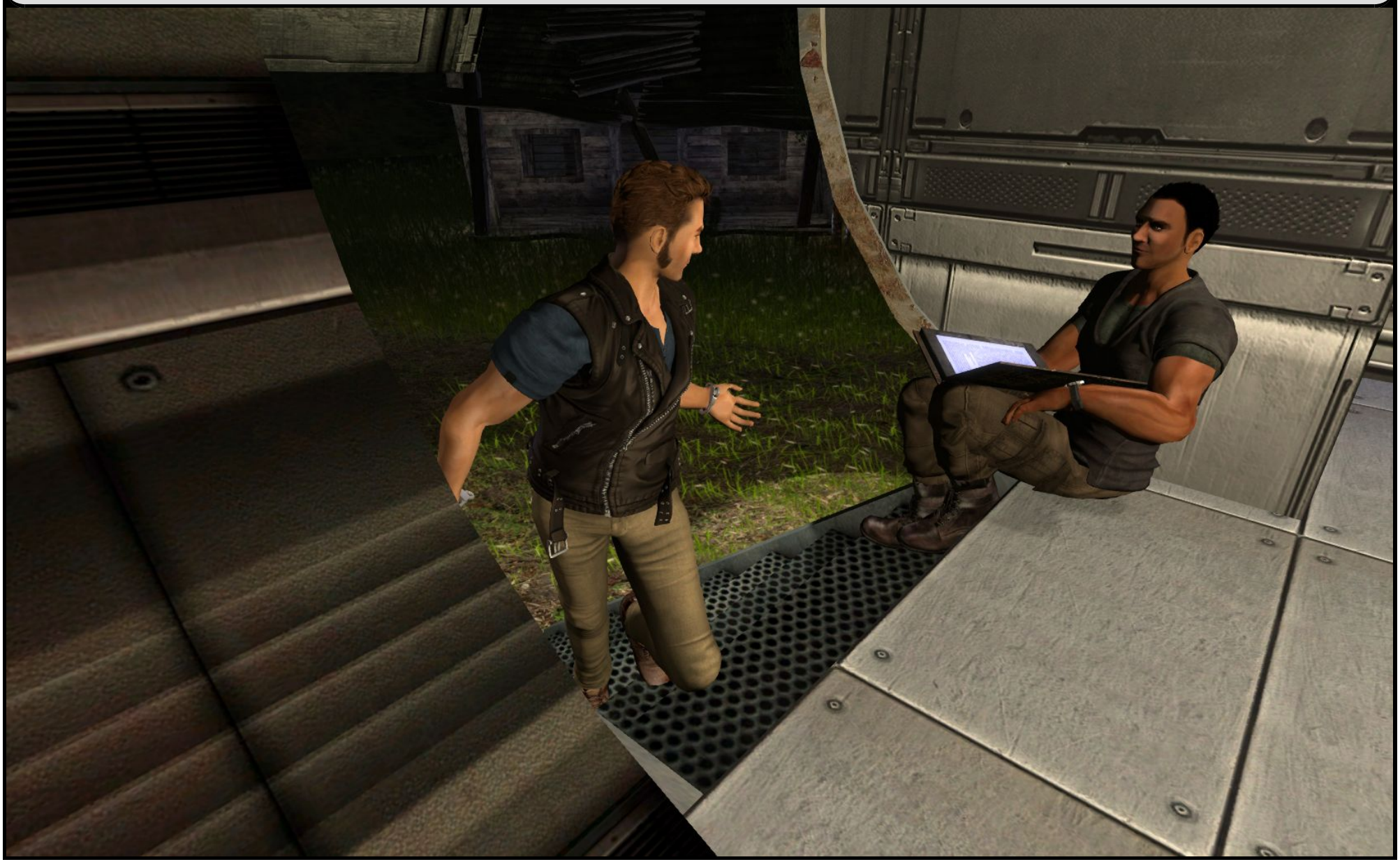
--- That seems dangerous.
-- Naaaa... Unless you do stupid things with it. Like landing in the trees! Otherwise, it's a very good machine. ;-)



One hour later...



- So, what's in the book?
-- Apparently, an amazing quantity of historical details.



-- 3673 historical events or descriptions. It covers over 9000 years!
- Seriously?



-- The old man, Alcibiad, this was the work of his life. He's gathered the stories of an impressive amount of people.
- "Human History" by Alec Drey.



-- Drey? Hum... That's a rare name. I wonder if there is a kinship relationship with Jaima.
--- Maybe, who knows? It's indeed not very common.



--- This is priceless! There are details about periods that we know practically nothing about!
- That's what I think too.



- This information shouldn't stay in this unique container. Can you make a copy?
--- Possibly. But this case is old and in poor condition, I would prefer to let an expert take care of it.



-- Hot water, what a wonderful sensation after all these weeks!
- Oh! It's my turn!



- Hmm... There's something I need to show you.
((?))



- I thought you should be aware of this...



-- Oh! I'm popular! Who wants my head?



- A criminal organization is behind this, the Salizmanz. But we think they do it for someone else.



--- The Kruls? ...Or maybe more Hystazi?
- It's very likely.



-- You won't be safe in the marginal zone.
--- Yeah, that's what I figured.



-- At least I'm worth a respectable price. :-)



Later...



- Well, I've been carrying this bottle of kwiza since we left Terkazy. I think it's a good time to open it.



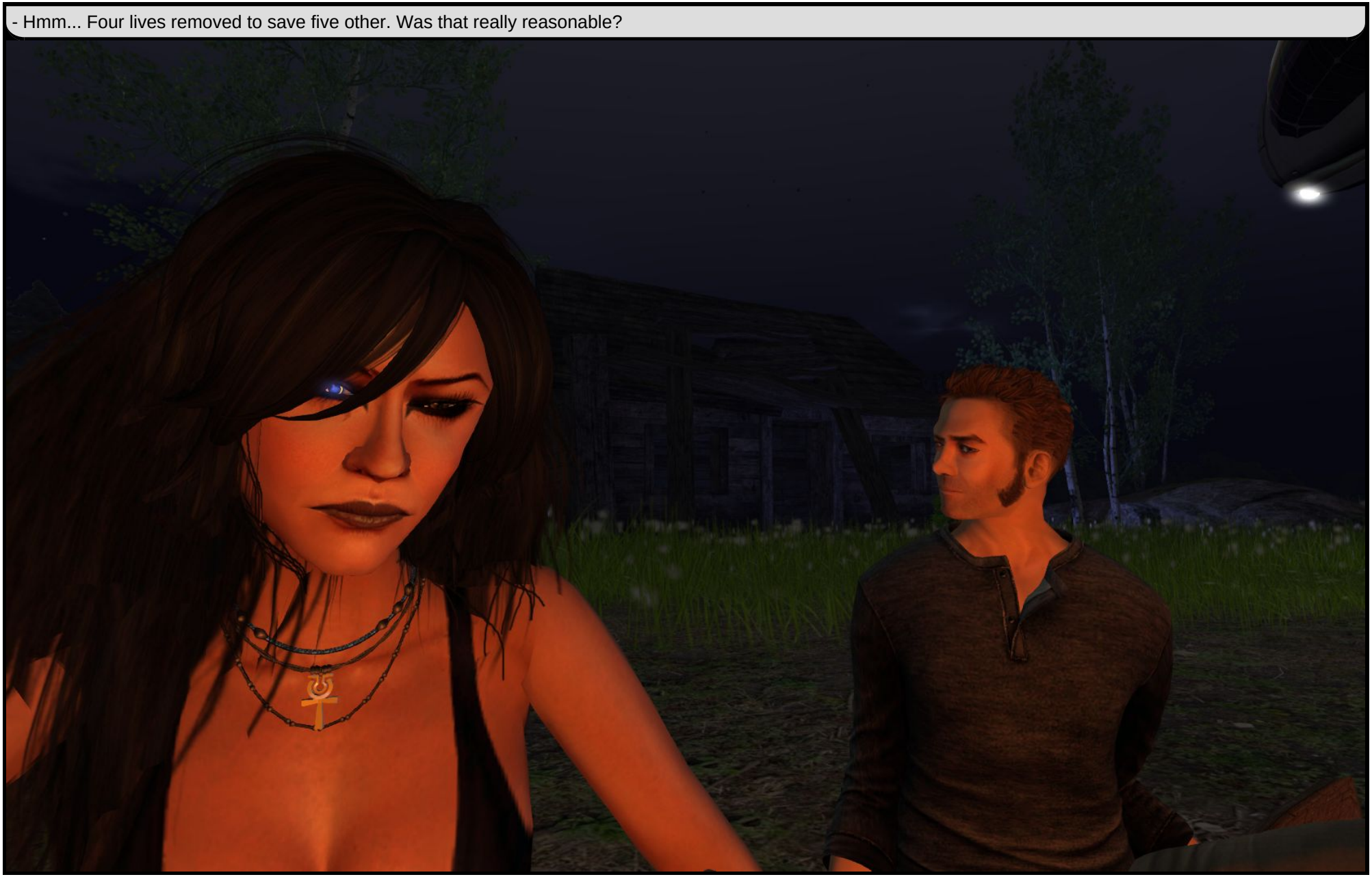
- It has been a rough day, to say the least.




-- Yeah, a rough day. Another one with too many dead people. Sometimes, I wish I could pass my turn.

--- Alezia, without you, I wouldn't be here tonight. I'll drink to that!




- Hmm... Four lives removed to save five other. Was that really reasonable?


- I understand how you feel, but they haven't left us many options. They were going to kill us all.

--- I think we are all tired... Let's call it a night.
-- I agree.



A few minutes later...



- We only have three beds. You can take one each. Reim and I are going to sacrifice ourselves and take only one. ;-)



---- Are you sure that both of you are in compliance with your government code?
--- Hmm... Not that much. ;-)



-- It's a bit cold tonight, isn't it?
- Yeah, let's not take a chance.
(((?!)))



- We deserved our sleep.
-- Definitely.



(What? ...You didn't know?...)



... It began a few days after she recovered from her fever. She was hunting during a very rainy night...



... She had made a good hunt and had to stay late to bring back her prey to the camp...



- Is it just me or it is late?
-- I got a little deer! That's why I'm later than usual.



- Really? Oh my god, you're completely soaked!
-- I hung it from a tree. It's already eviscerated, you shouldn't miss it when you will get up.



- I'll have to figure out how to carve it. It will be a big waste anyway, we will lose a lot of the meat before we can even eat it.
-- I know, but it will change from the hare meat for a while.

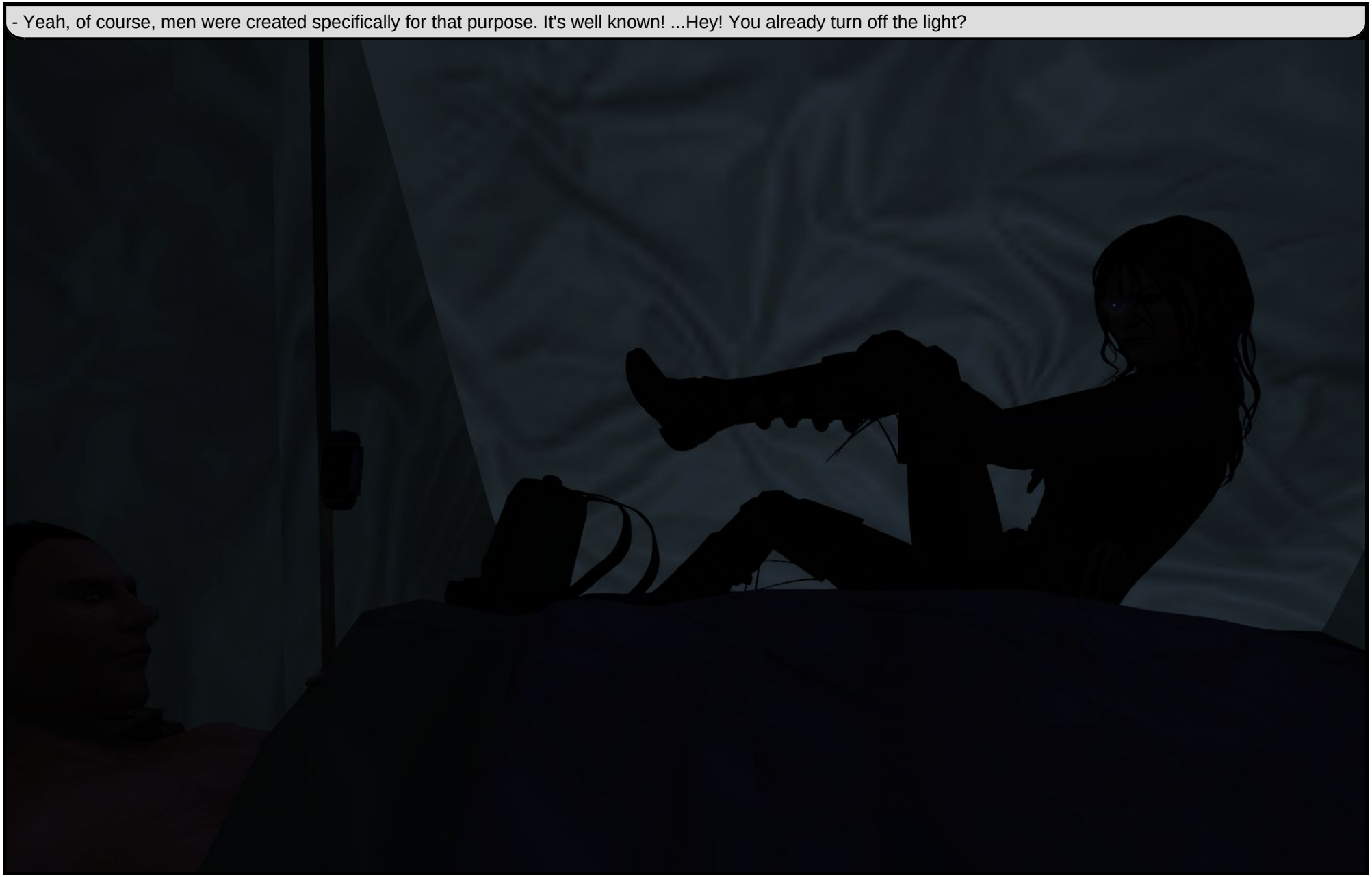


- Are you shivering?
-- I'm completely frozen... I can't practically feel my fingers.



- Uh... What are you doing?
-- You're a man, huh? And men were made to generate heat, didn't they?




- Yeah, of course, men were created specifically for that purpose. It's well known! ...Hey! You already turn off the light?

-- Yes, I did. And that said, I'm not leaving you the choice. I'm going to use you.
- What?



-- Come on, move. Let me in.
- Oh! You are serious.

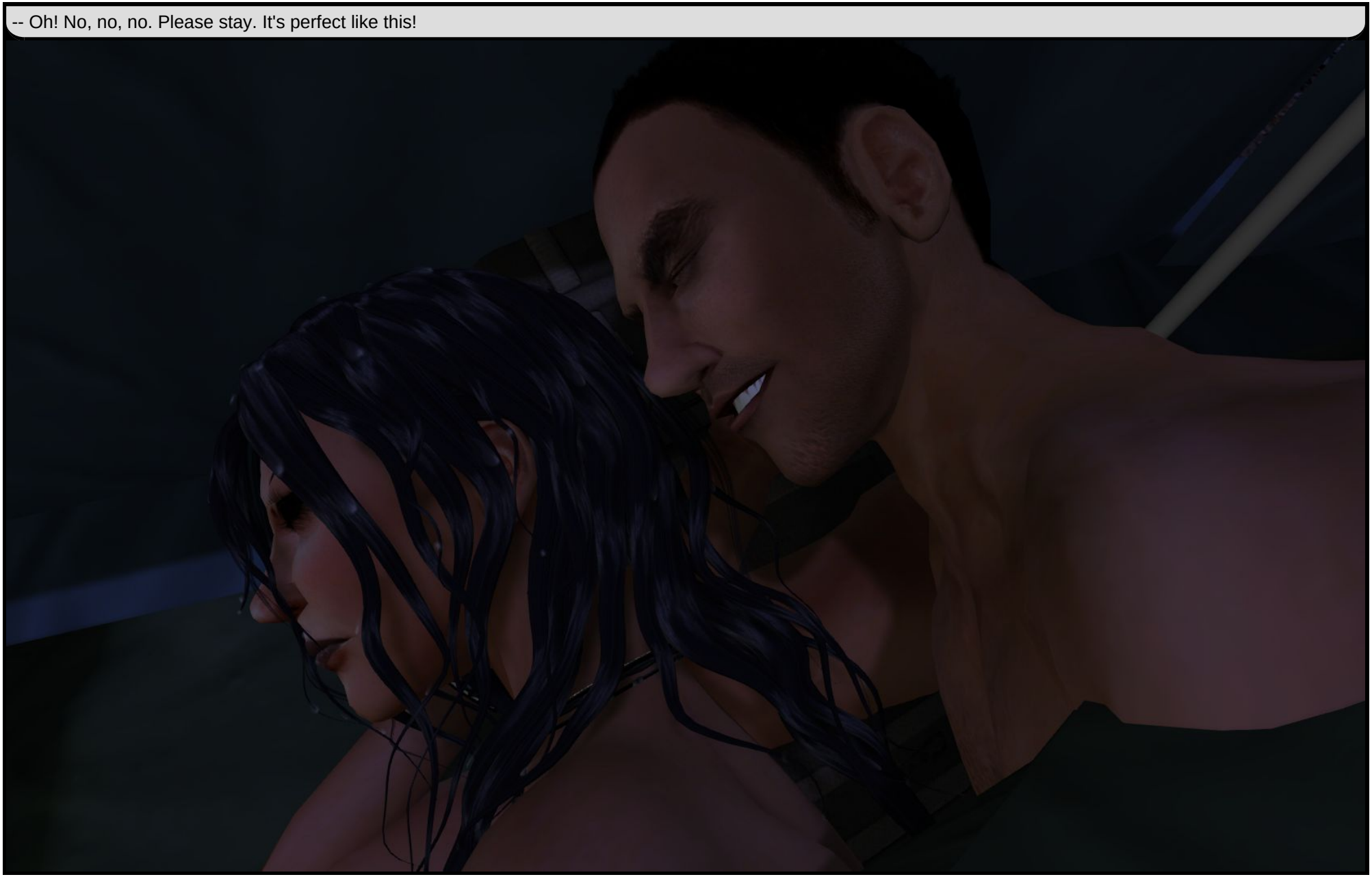


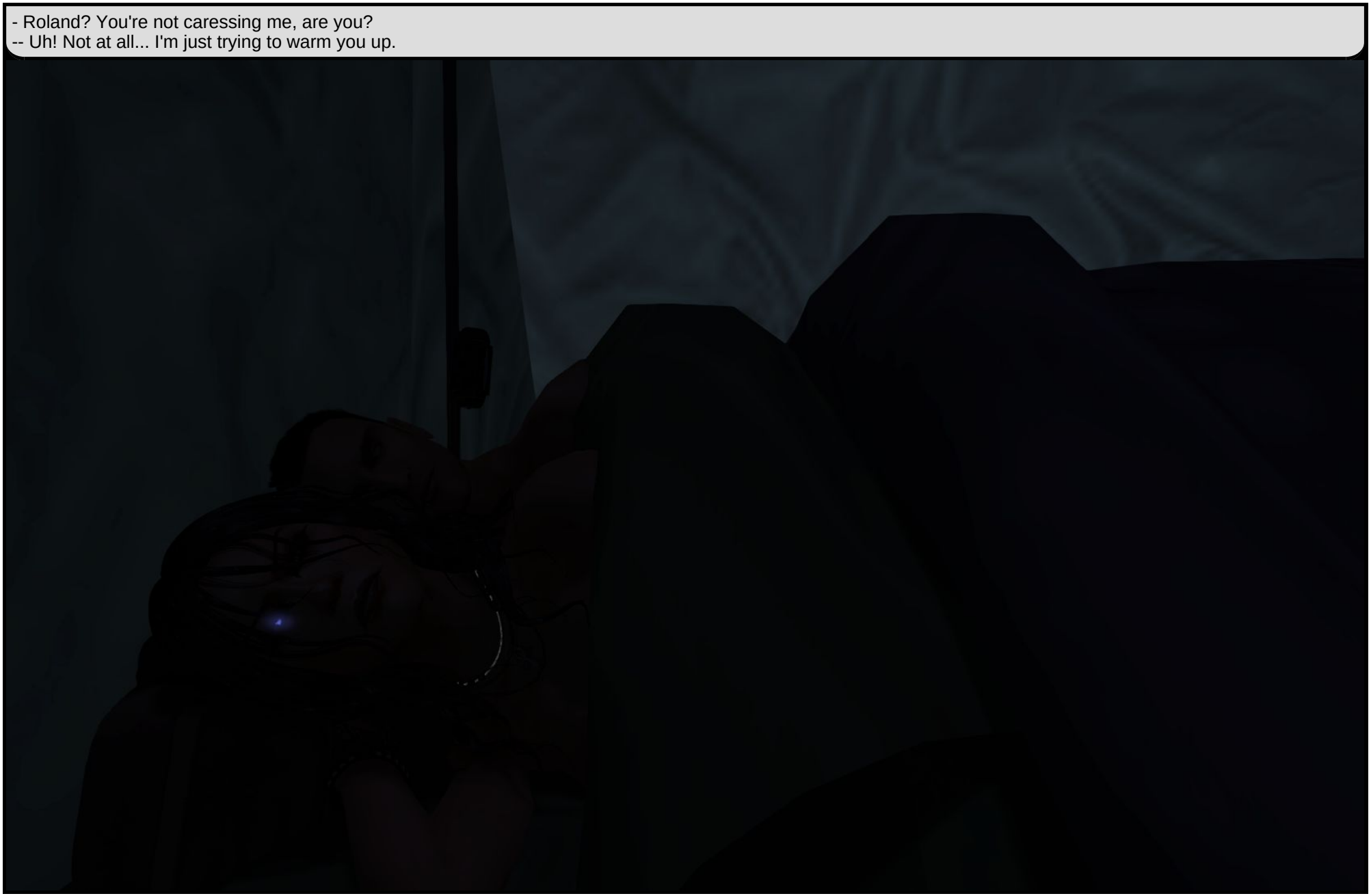
-- Ahhh! You're damn cold!
- Yes... Awh! This is really good! ...So it's still true about men.



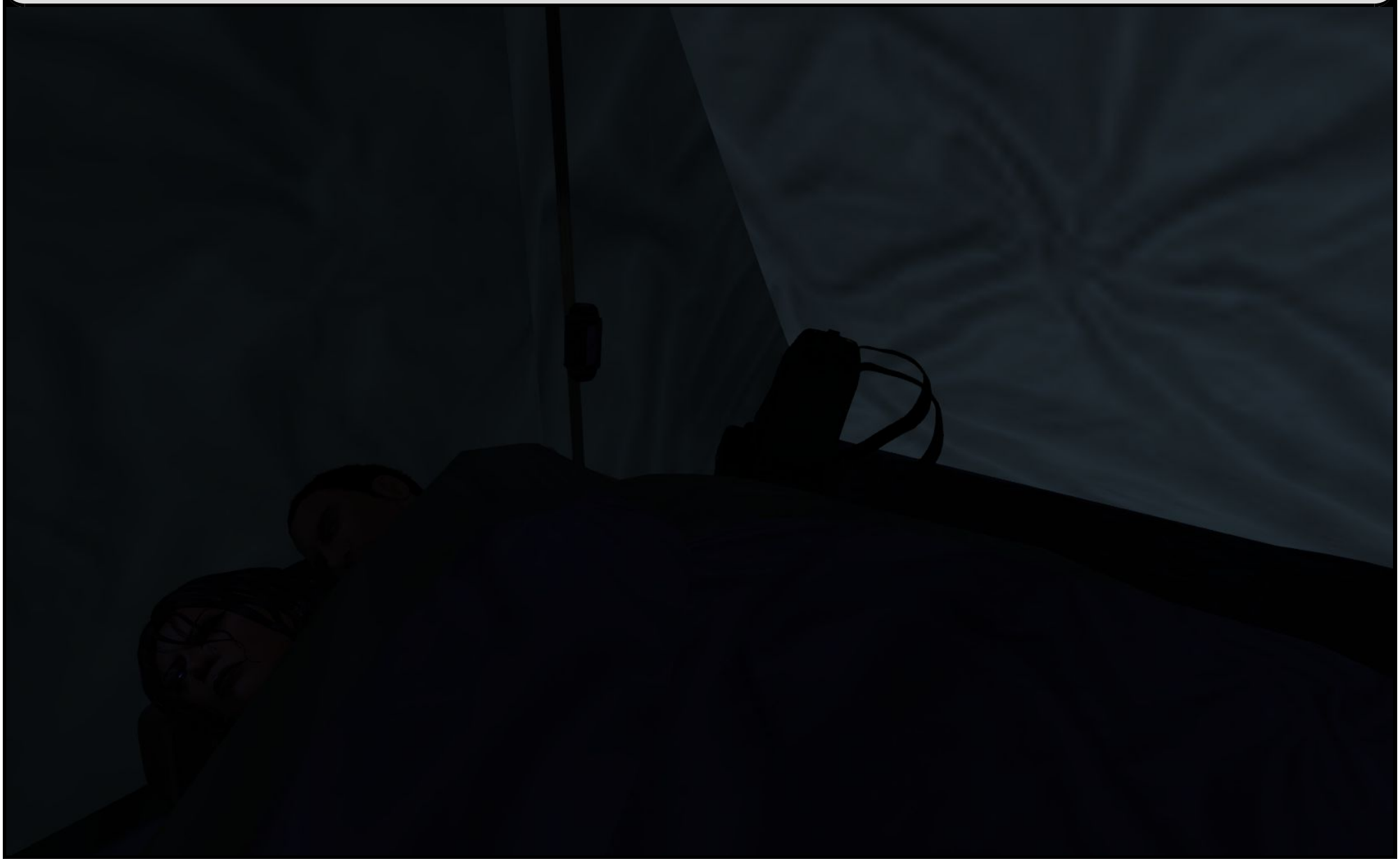
-- Oh! But you're... completely naked!
- Yep, my clothes are completely soggy. If it disgusts you, I can go back to my sleeping bag.




-- Oh! No, no, no. Please stay. It's perfect like this!


- Roland? You're not caressing me, are you?
-- Uh! Not at all... I'm just trying to warm you up.

-- I'm sorry... Please, don't be upset, but it's possible that my... body... uh... react to your presence.
- Hmm... I'd noticed... I guess I took that risk by putting my thigh in between yours.



...It rained for two days, I'll let you imagine what happened. After that, the nights were apparently all too cold for her.



((... I think she likes me.))
- Hmm? Uh... Good night.



The next day...




SHENIKA

-- We're on the ground, Lauti. You can take off.



-- All right, Boss. We stay in contact.



-- This gun, it's so not like you.
- Yes, I know.



- The view is striking!
-- Yes, this is one of our favorite places to lunch in peace.



-- Is that Jijuterk over there?
- No, that's the city of Morial. Jijuterk is further west, near the lakes.



-- He should be here in a few minutes.
- I confirm. I see an aircraft coming towards us.



- Really? I don't see anything.
-- It's coming from the west.



-- I'm impressed.
- Yeah, I know... Now, it's time to take your position.



-- I hope for you that he will have followed the instructions.
- And I hope you won't shoot me accidentally!





-- That's him. He is alone as promised.




FIIUUU!!!

-- I feel better suddenly.
--- Don't worry, the gun was locked. I'm not stupid, just very fast to unlock them. ;-)



- Hello! Very nice place for a meeting.
-- Commissioner Karterz, I am really happy to see you here!



- Erydak, I'm very happy to finally be able to talk to you. We try to contact you since you left Terkazy.
--- Nice to meet you, Commissioner.



- Perhaps I should call you Alezia?
--- Yes, that's my real name.



- Reim must have explained to you that we have been trying to repatriate you to Jijuterk since the recent turn of events in Terkazy...



-- Yes, he told me. ...But tell me, Commissioner, I have the strange impression of having seen you before. Have we ever met?



- It's not only an impression, we've met before. It was in Terkazy, three years ago. But it's possibly not very clear in your mind, considering your condition when it happened.



--- So it was you, the day before the death of the 26?
- Exactly.



-- I think you owe me a serious explanation. What were you doing at Hystazi's home?



- Well, when the Dallusian tyrants snatched the power from the Kruls, our government realized the gravity of the situation. It was imperative for us to restore the Terkaside government. I was sent to contact the Terkaside resistance, which I found in Kentor, organized around Hystazi.



--- Why your government didn't take any direct action against the tyrants?
- We hoped that a solution would come from the Terkasides before considering a military operation that would have been very unpopular.



- A military operation? Why didn't you simply send your probes to do the dirty work?



-- None of our probes have weapons. Autonomous systems never have weapons, for evident security reasons. Lethal drones are forbidden in all our treaties for centuries.



- But well, you appeared in our world, and that's why we met that day.
--- These memories are very confused. I saw you, what, maybe five minutes?



-- I'm not surprised that your memories are blurred. You were heavily drugged.



- I learned your existence that day. The Hystazi's plan was to condition you for an undercover mission. To achieve this, she was using drugs on you, apparently for many weeks.
-- And you let her do that to me?!



- Well, not really. In fact, I didn't even have time to react. Nothing went as Hystazi expected. The same night, while we were sleeping, you decided to proceed by yourself. And it hasn't been really an undercover mission, as you know. You have been a little more efficient than expected.



- She cranked me! She instilled that objective into me! She manipulated me! ...Osh! She couldn't understand what these men really meant to me!



-- Everyone was very surprised. This event solved the situation better than any military operation we could have imagined. The case was considered closed until the day you became their military leader, which was for us a new situation to watch. So we make a surveillance deal with the Kruls.



--- That explains why they can control your probes...
- Actually, they didn't control them. They had only access to the data flows captured on their territory. This included your constant surveillance.



--- So this is it! I am now the dangerous thing to eliminate after using me to solve your problems!
- On the contrary, the three years you've been in charge have proved that you can be a well balanced military leader.



-- The measures you put in place to control the newcomers were harsh but necessary. Especially if we consider what the Dallusian soldiers were capable of. Who could be better than a Dallusian to recognize another?



- You certainly make reference to Berigine Tyriam, who paid with her life for the irritation of the Kruls towards me.



-- Yes, this was more than unfortunate. We also really feared for your life.



- I don't think it could have lasted any longer. A human governing Terkazy, there was very little chance that it would be a long-term solution for them.
--- That's right, and I clearly felt the end.



--- That's fine, but what's next?
- Well, you can't stay in the marginal zone. Did Reim tell you that you have a bounty on your head?



--- Yes, but I don't intend to follow you if I'm to face any justice system for what happened in Terkazy or in this country during the last days.



-- I can certify you that the Northalian Government, which I represent, won't initiate any form of lawsuit against you. Neither for what happened in Terkazy, because we share a part of the responsibility. Neither for what happened in the last few days. We have evidence and witnesses to testify in self-defence.



- Your place is with us, Alezia. ...And I think you know it.



- I would have a job for you if you want.
--- A job? Are you sure?



- It seems that since yesterday, we have a group of terrorists to fight. I think this is a domain where you are more than qualified. More than most of us.



- Would I earn enough to buy a house?



- You will have the house of your choice, Alezia. As well as a decent salary including significant compensation for the risk factor.



-- Can I trust this guy?
- I think you can ... Definitely, you can.



-- Reim, you know what? ...The gun, it wasn't loaded.
- I know.



--- Well, Commissioner, I think we have a deal!



{Reim's voice} Lauti, we have a deal!
-- Yes! That's a damn good news, Boss!



-- I'm taking off, Boss. I'll pick you up in a few minutes, then we head to Jijuterk.



- Do you think I'll like Jijuterk?
-- I think so. The citizens are rather open-minded.



- I'm really glad you accepted my offer. Welcome in our organization, Miss... Uh?



--- Kurdis, Alezia Kurdis. That's my name.



The End.

ALEZIA: The Occultation

Even the sun seems to avoid shining on the enigmatic, dark and barren lands. Alezia and Roland were hesitant to venture there, but the detour appears to be endless.

by Zeja Pyle

Contact

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ISBN 978-0-9937416-6-1

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