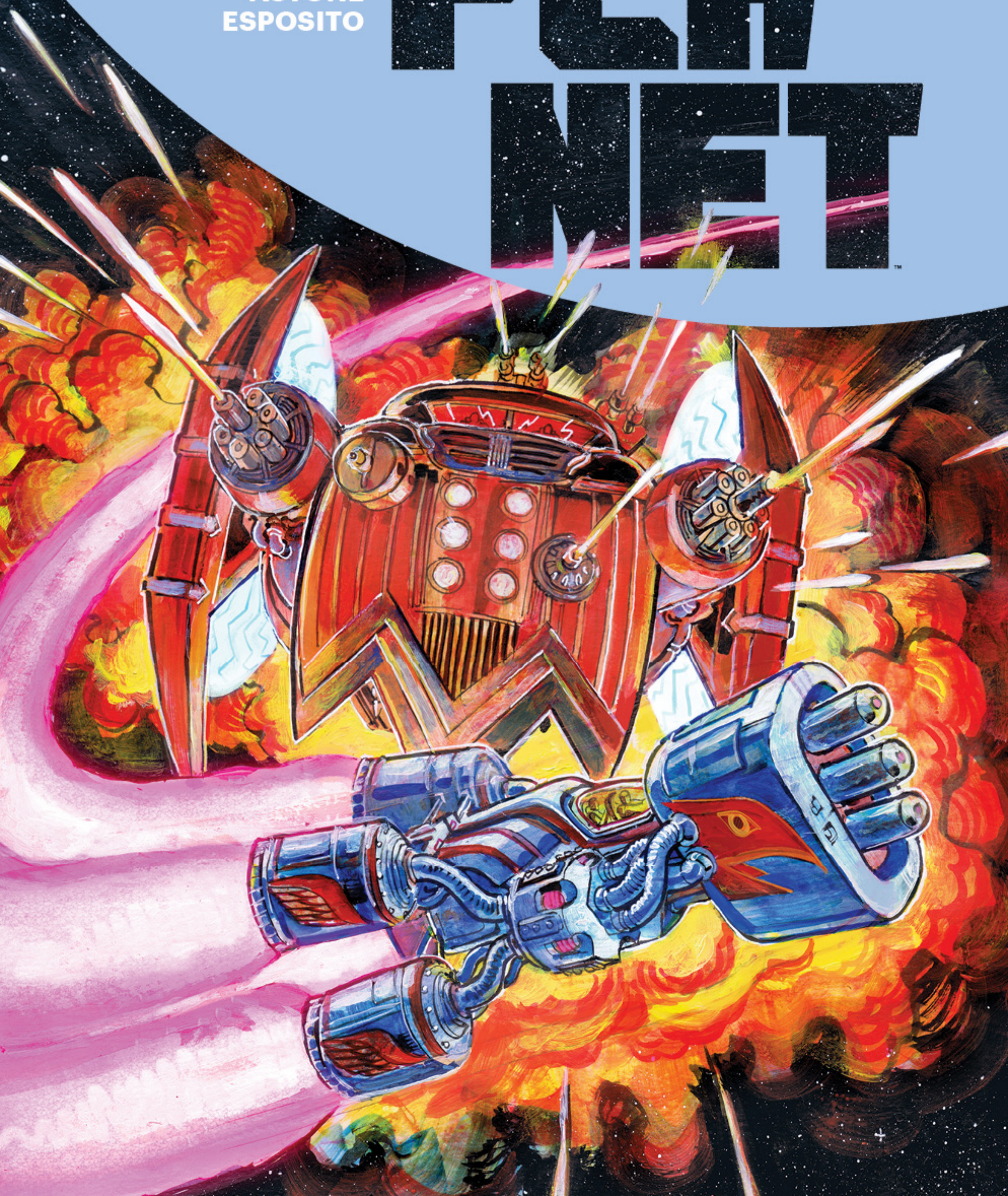




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JUL US

**SITTERSON
DOUGHERTY
ASTONE
ESPOSITO**

FREE PLANET



MARINES!

YOU ARE THE
BEST OF THE
OROURAN EMPIRE.
BUT NOT BECAUSE
YOU ARE UNIQUE.

YOU ARE THE
BEST BECAUSE YOU
ARE OF THE OROURAN
EMPIRE. BECAUSE WE
ARE ALL CHILDREN OF
THE GREAT SUN.

AND AS HIS
SUFFERING PURCHASES
OUR FREEDOM, SO MUST
WE SUFFER FOR THE
SAKE OF OUR SHARED
FUTURE.

Only highly ranking
officers have been
observed with the
Orouuran lance, the
use of which amid
heavy fire appears
to be a display of
honor and courage.

Autopsies of fallen
Orouuran marines have
discovered prefrontal
cortex implants,
presumed to mitigate
the worst effects of
the "warp agony."

In stark contrast
with the Alliance,
which reserves
metals for its
massive ship hulls,
Orouuran weaponry
utilizes lead-based
projectiles and
shells exclusively.

Despite Alliance
researchers' best
efforts, Orouuran
armor, on account
of its strict genetic
coding, will not
activate when
removed from its
wearer.

Orouuran marines
are, on average, 7%
taller than mainline
Terrans and 18%
heavier; some
cadavers have
shown evidence of
apparent limb
augmentation
surgeries.

Among other
benefits, Orouuran
armor confers
added strength and
durability to the
wearer's joints,
bolstering stamina
on the battlefield
and endurance
during warp travel.

Though genetic testing has identified its ultimate origins in one of the countless arks filled with what the leaders of Old Earth referred to as "excess population," the specifics of the Orouran Empire's founding remain obscure.

IT IS OUR DUTY, OUR PRIVILEGE TO STOKE THE FLAME THAT WILL BANISH THE DARKNESS.

Some experts have posited--based upon the society's rigidly hierarchical structure--that it was birthed from a military ark. This theory, like the majority of those pertaining to the cloistered empire, remains merely speculative.

What can be confirmed, however, is the Orouran modus operandi vis-à-vis expansion, which entailed unannounced blitzes, the rapid annexation of planets, and the prompt cessation of any contact outside the Empire.



OUR SUCCESS IS IMPERATIVE AND WE ARE BLESSED TO PAY ITS COST, NO MATTER HOW DEAR.

Though unique in so much, including their meritocratic autocracy, Orouran strategy would have been familiar even to pre-Dispersion humanity: The clear-eyed use of human life as a resource both renewable and expendable.



THE GREAT SUN THANKS YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.

OROURAN PSALM TO GLORY

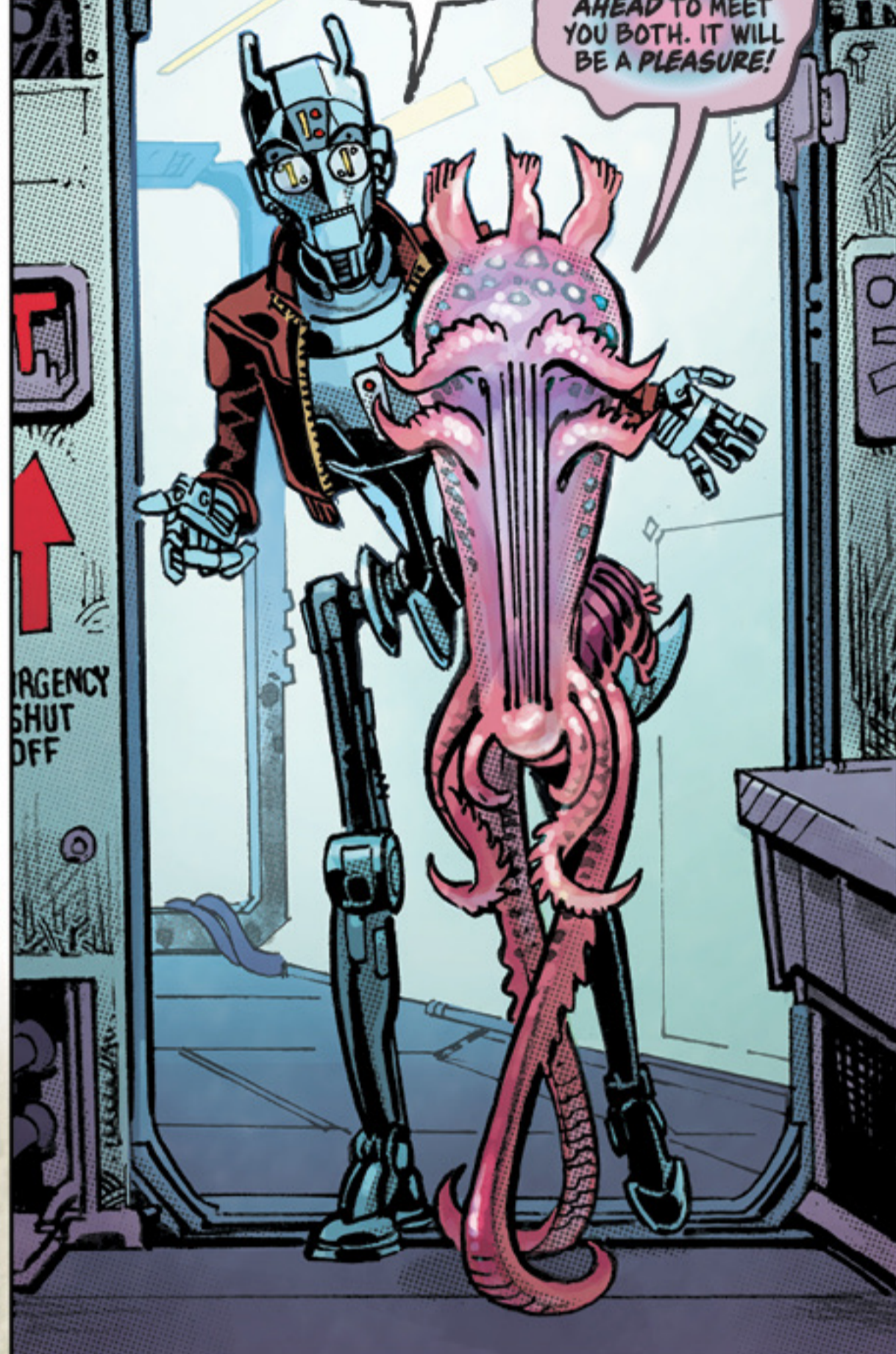
Blessed be the Great Sun,
who binds us in
discipline.
Blessed be the Great Sun,
who frees us from worry.
He trains our hands for war
and our fingers for battle.
He bestows purpose in chaos
and direction in the void.
Who else can endure the
throes of rulership?

Who else can relieve us
from the burden of
existence?
Through his benevolence,
our freedom is assured.
Through our sacrifice,
his rule endures.
We shall defy every foe,
We shall suffer every horror,
For we do so in his
radiant light.

Despite its unique and startling idiosyncrasies, the Orouran Empire remains a variant of mainline Terran society, with clear antecedents in pre-Dispersion humanity. By way of contrast, the Quadros are utterly alien.

GLORIA
ASKED ME TO
SHOW AMBASSADOR
YRL-KEN AROUND
THE AEGIS.

I LOOKED
AHEAD TO MEET
YOU BOTH. IT WILL
BE A PLEASURE!



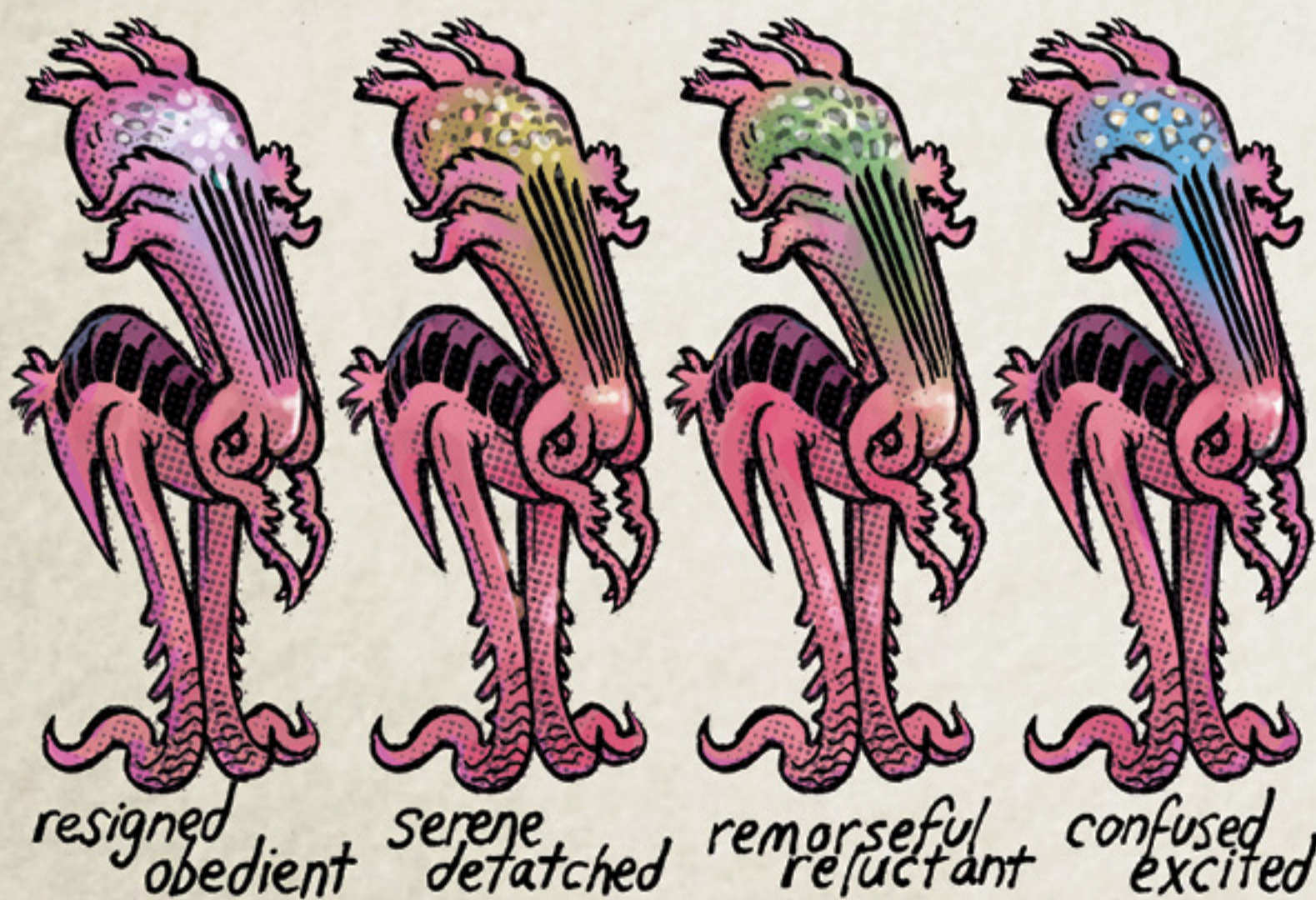
Differences extend beyond the obvious, touching on every aspect of Hive society, with experts viewing the contrariety as an outgrowth of the Quadros' alleged prognosticative abilities.

AMBASSADOR!

BELIEVE ME,
THE PLEASURE
IS MINE.

I'M EAGER TO
LEARN MORE ABOUT
QUADROJAUNTING.
THE ORCHALEUM
SAVINGS ALONE--

I AM AFRAID
YOU HAVE BEEN
DESTINED FOR
DISAPPOINTMENT,
KATJA.

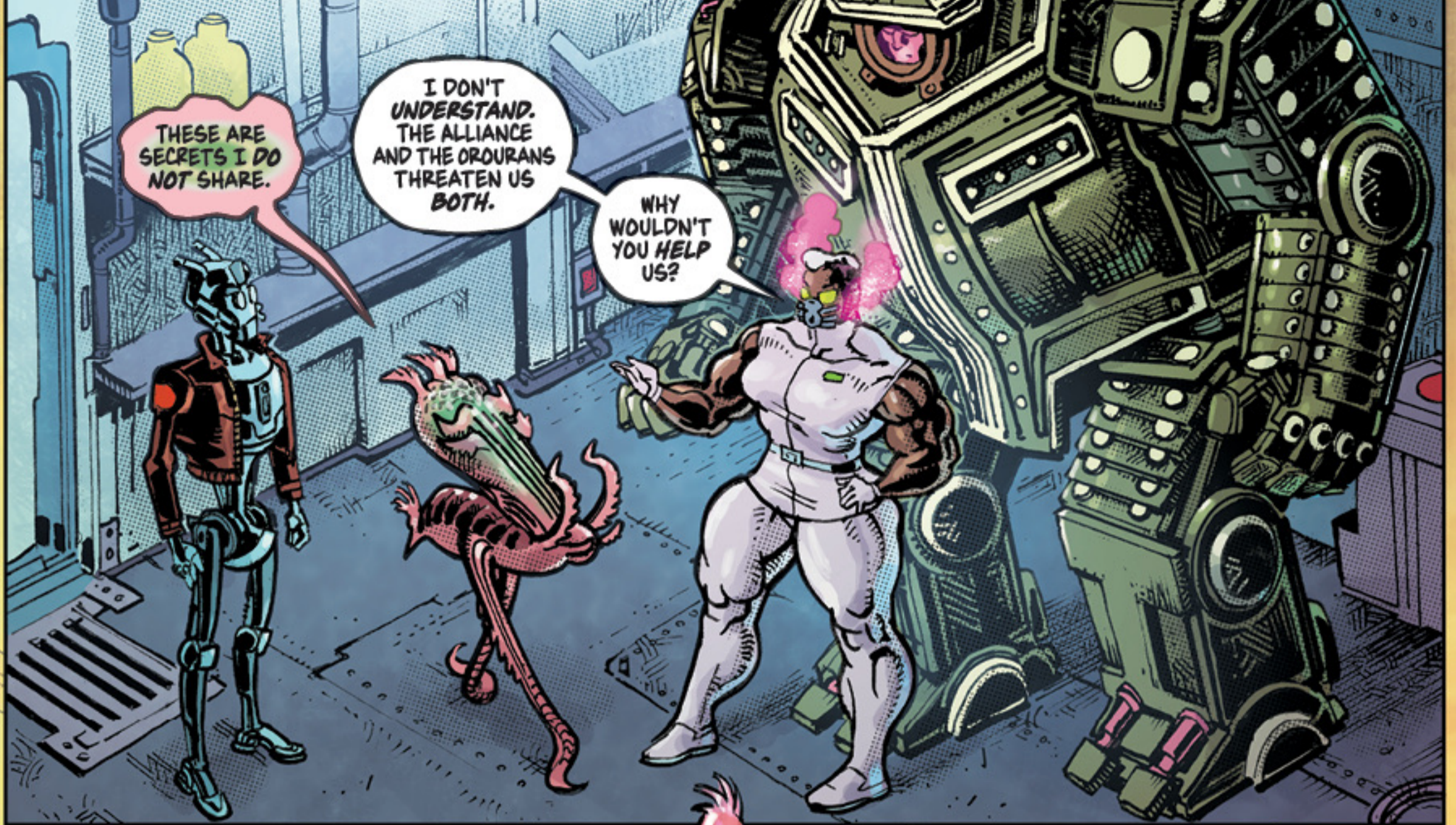


With no expressions detectable by human eyes, the discovery of the Quadros' emotive coloration constituted a breakthrough in intergalactic relations.

While attempting to map these colors to standard human emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger) is an exercise in futility, extensive cross-cultural dialogue has produced some broadly accepted interpretations.

Each color appears to communicate a pair of emotional states that, taken together, would seem appropriate to a race capable of glimpsing the future.

This fact is frequently referenced by those arguing in favor of the controversial notion that the Quadros' self-proclaimed ability to see in four dimensions is, in fact, legitimate.



THESE ARE
SECRETS I DO
NOT SHARE.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND.
THE ALLIANCE
AND THE OROURANS
THREATEN US
BOTH.

WHY
WOULDN'T
YOU HELP
US?

YOU WATCHED A WINDING RIVER.
IT GOES AROUND A TREE, OBSCURED.
YOU CLIMBED THE TREE, SAW FURTHER;
THE RIVER BENDS AGAIN.
YOU SCALED A MOUNTAIN;
THE VALLEY, SHROUDED IN MIST.
YOU SEE DISTANCE, HEIGHT, WIDTH
BUT NOT WITHOUT LIMITS.

SHARING OUR SECRETS WILL PUT THE HIVE AT RISK;
A COMMITMENT TO THE LUTHERIAN CAUSE.
BUT THAT IS FURTHER DOWNRIVER,
PAST THE TREES, SHROUDED IN MIST.
WE COULD NOT MAKE THE COMMITMENT
UNTIL WE KNEW IT TO BE
A COMMITMENT WE WILL MAKE.
THAT WE DO MAKE.
THAT WE HAVE MADE.

DO YOU SEE?



I SEE RHETORIC
MASQUERADING AS
LOGIC. A CLEVER
PARADOX.

SEEING TIME,
YOU REALIZE
THERE WERE NO
PARADOXES, ONLY
WHAT MUST HAVE
BEEN.

SPEAKING
OF...

...WE
GO TO THE
BRIDGE.

BACK TO
THE BRIDGE?
WHY?

BECAUSE IT
IS WHERE WE
WENT.

