



BOOK 1
PARIAH

GALACTIC ORE

CHRONICLES

R. NEO

Galactic ORE Chronicles

Pariah Book 1

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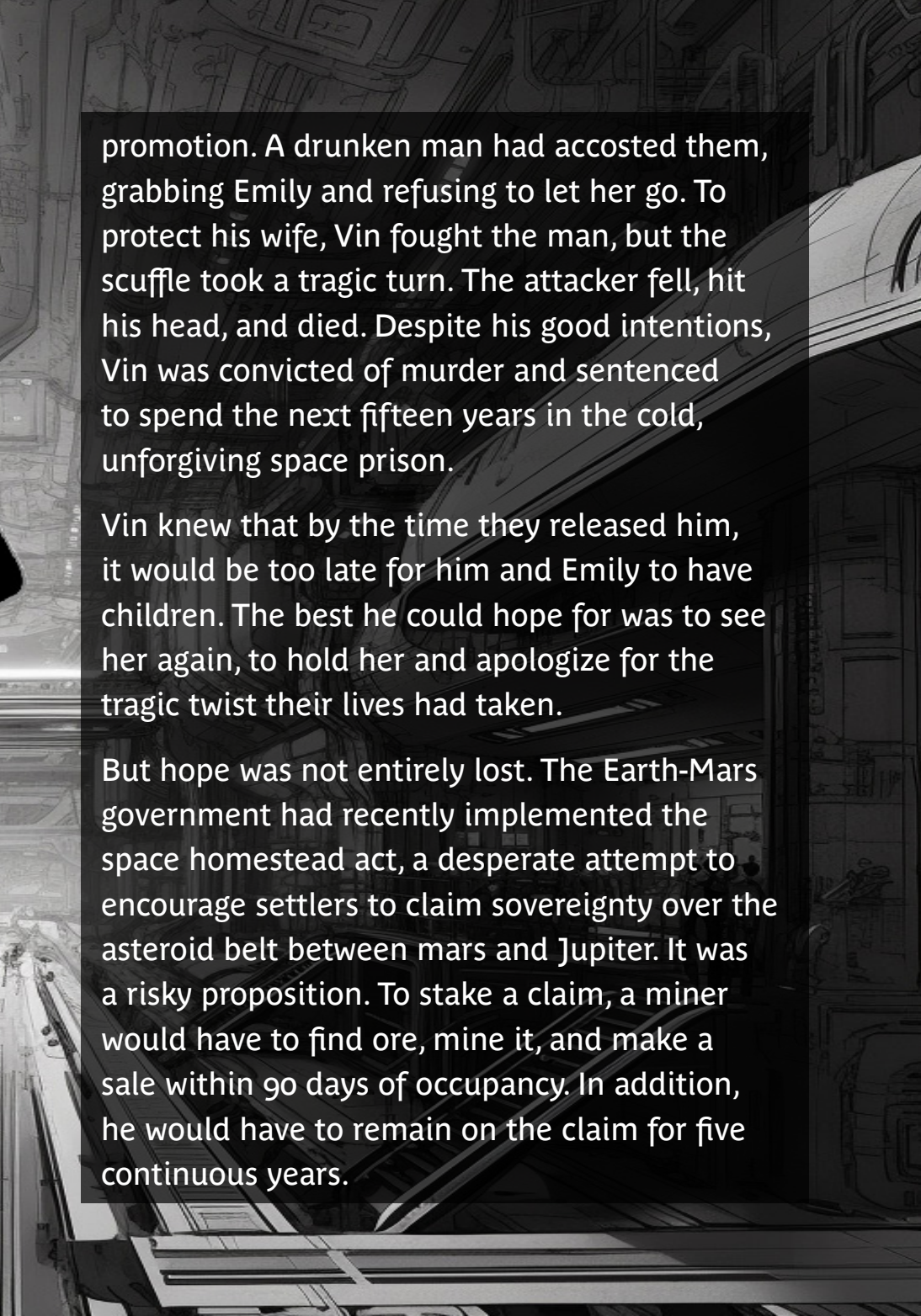
Galactic ORE Pariah

Vin Ranken gazed out of the small porthole in his cramped cell, the darkness of space stretching out before him. He had spent countless hours staring into the void, contemplating the injustices that had landed him in this forsaken place. The space prison, operated by cold, unfeeling robots, was unforgiving and harsh, much like the space law that had sealed his fate.

It hadn't always been this way. Just a few years ago, Vin had been living a peaceful life on Mars with his beloved wife, Emily. He had served honorably in the military, and after his discharge, they settled on the red planet, where Vin worked security for one of space X's Mars cargo operations.

But everything changed that fateful night when he and Emily were out celebrating his

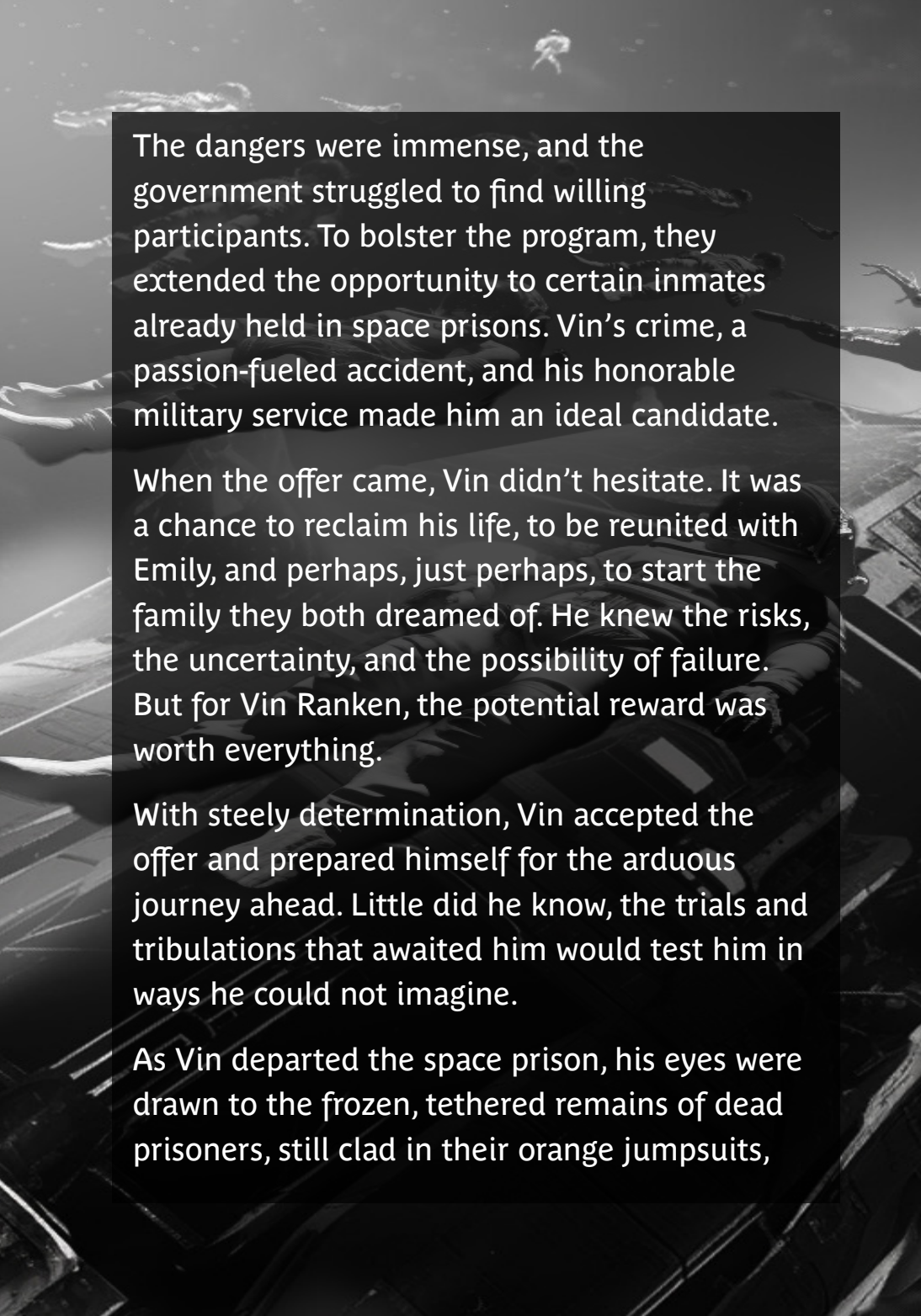




promotion. A drunken man had accosted them, grabbing Emily and refusing to let her go. To protect his wife, Vin fought the man, but the scuffle took a tragic turn. The attacker fell, hit his head, and died. Despite his good intentions, Vin was convicted of murder and sentenced to spend the next fifteen years in the cold, unforgiving space prison.

Vin knew that by the time they released him, it would be too late for him and Emily to have children. The best he could hope for was to see her again, to hold her and apologize for the tragic twist their lives had taken.

But hope was not entirely lost. The Earth-Mars government had recently implemented the space homestead act, a desperate attempt to encourage settlers to claim sovereignty over the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. It was a risky proposition. To stake a claim, a miner would have to find ore, mine it, and make a sale within 90 days of occupancy. In addition, he would have to remain on the claim for five continuous years.

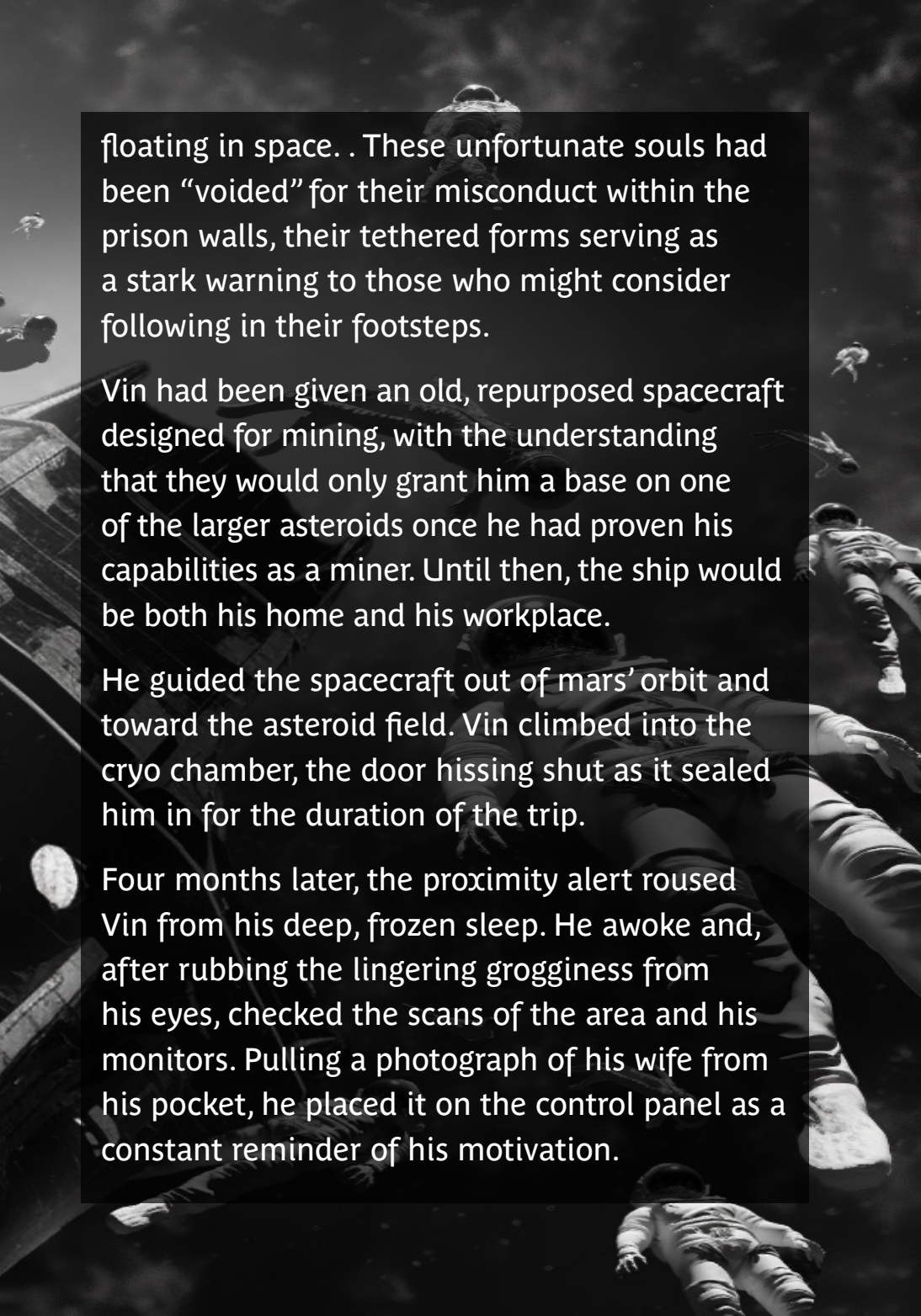


The dangers were immense, and the government struggled to find willing participants. To bolster the program, they extended the opportunity to certain inmates already held in space prisons. Vin's crime, a passion-fueled accident, and his honorable military service made him an ideal candidate.

When the offer came, Vin didn't hesitate. It was a chance to reclaim his life, to be reunited with Emily, and perhaps, just perhaps, to start the family they both dreamed of. He knew the risks, the uncertainty, and the possibility of failure. But for Vin Ranken, the potential reward was worth everything.

With steely determination, Vin accepted the offer and prepared himself for the arduous journey ahead. Little did he know, the trials and tribulations that awaited him would test him in ways he could not imagine.

As Vin departed the space prison, his eyes were drawn to the frozen, tethered remains of dead prisoners, still clad in their orange jumpsuits,

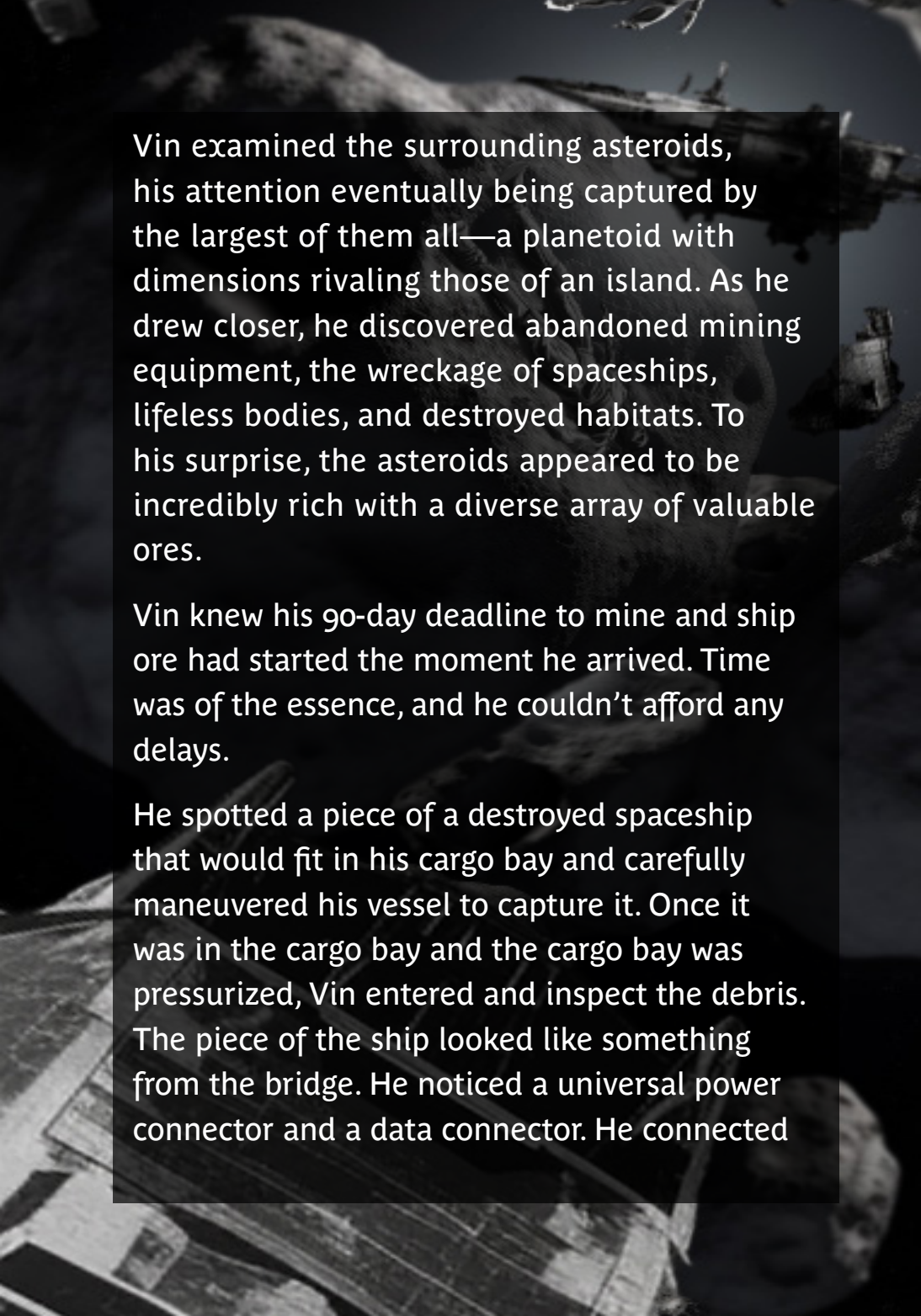


floating in space. . These unfortunate souls had been “voided” for their misconduct within the prison walls, their tethered forms serving as a stark warning to those who might consider following in their footsteps.

Vin had been given an old, repurposed spacecraft designed for mining, with the understanding that they would only grant him a base on one of the larger asteroids once he had proven his capabilities as a miner. Until then, the ship would be both his home and his workplace.

He guided the spacecraft out of mars’ orbit and toward the asteroid field. Vin climbed into the cryo chamber, the door hissing shut as it sealed him in for the duration of the trip.

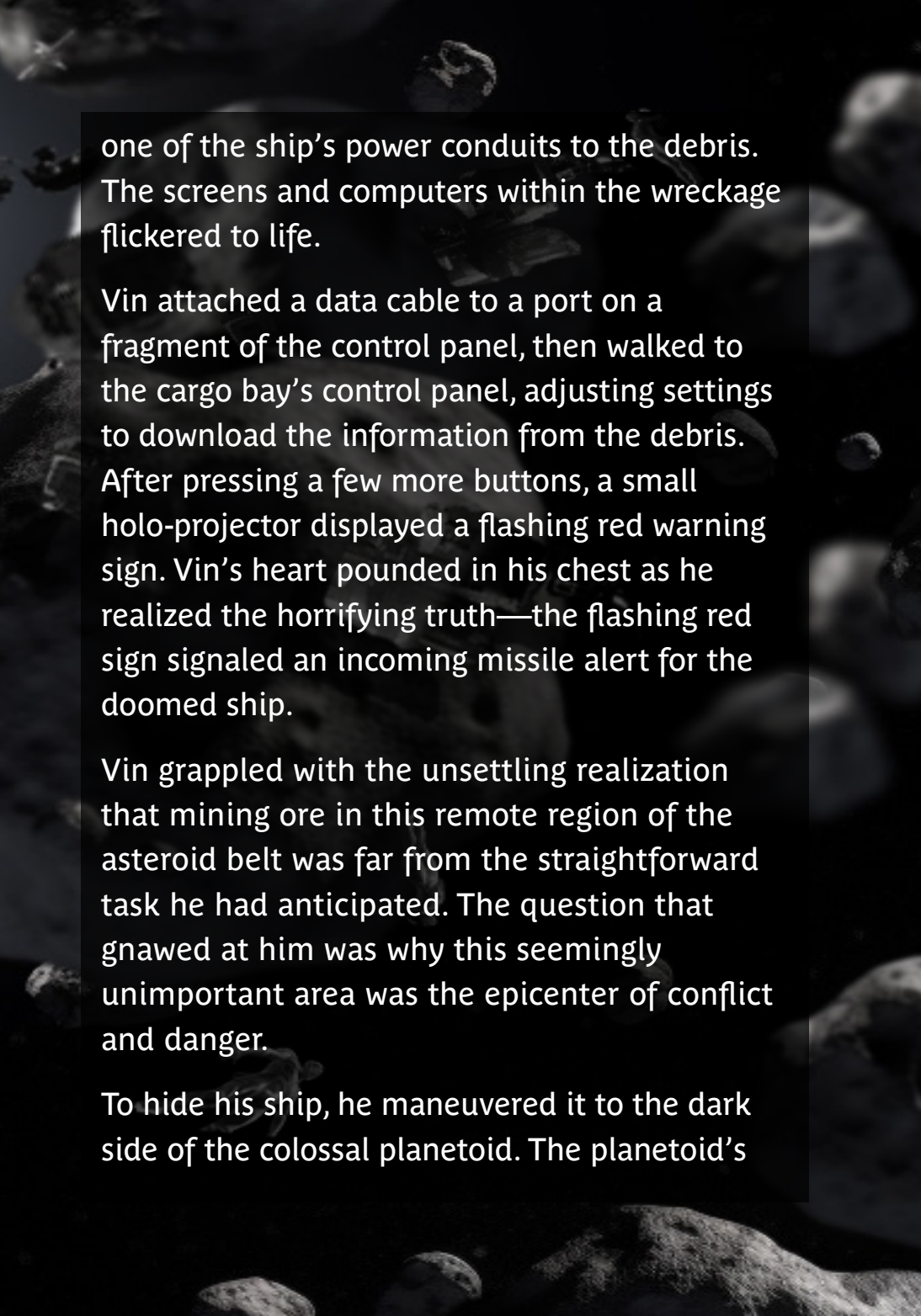
Four months later, the proximity alert roused Vin from his deep, frozen sleep. He awoke and, after rubbing the lingering grogginess from his eyes, checked the scans of the area and his monitors. Pulling a photograph of his wife from his pocket, he placed it on the control panel as a constant reminder of his motivation.



Vin examined the surrounding asteroids, his attention eventually being captured by the largest of them all—a planetoid with dimensions rivaling those of an island. As he drew closer, he discovered abandoned mining equipment, the wreckage of spaceships, lifeless bodies, and destroyed habitats. To his surprise, the asteroids appeared to be incredibly rich with a diverse array of valuable ores.

Vin knew his go-day deadline to mine and ship ore had started the moment he arrived. Time was of the essence, and he couldn't afford any delays.

He spotted a piece of a destroyed spaceship that would fit in his cargo bay and carefully maneuvered his vessel to capture it. Once it was in the cargo bay and the cargo bay was pressurized, Vin entered and inspect the debris. The piece of the ship looked like something from the bridge. He noticed a universal power connector and a data connector. He connected

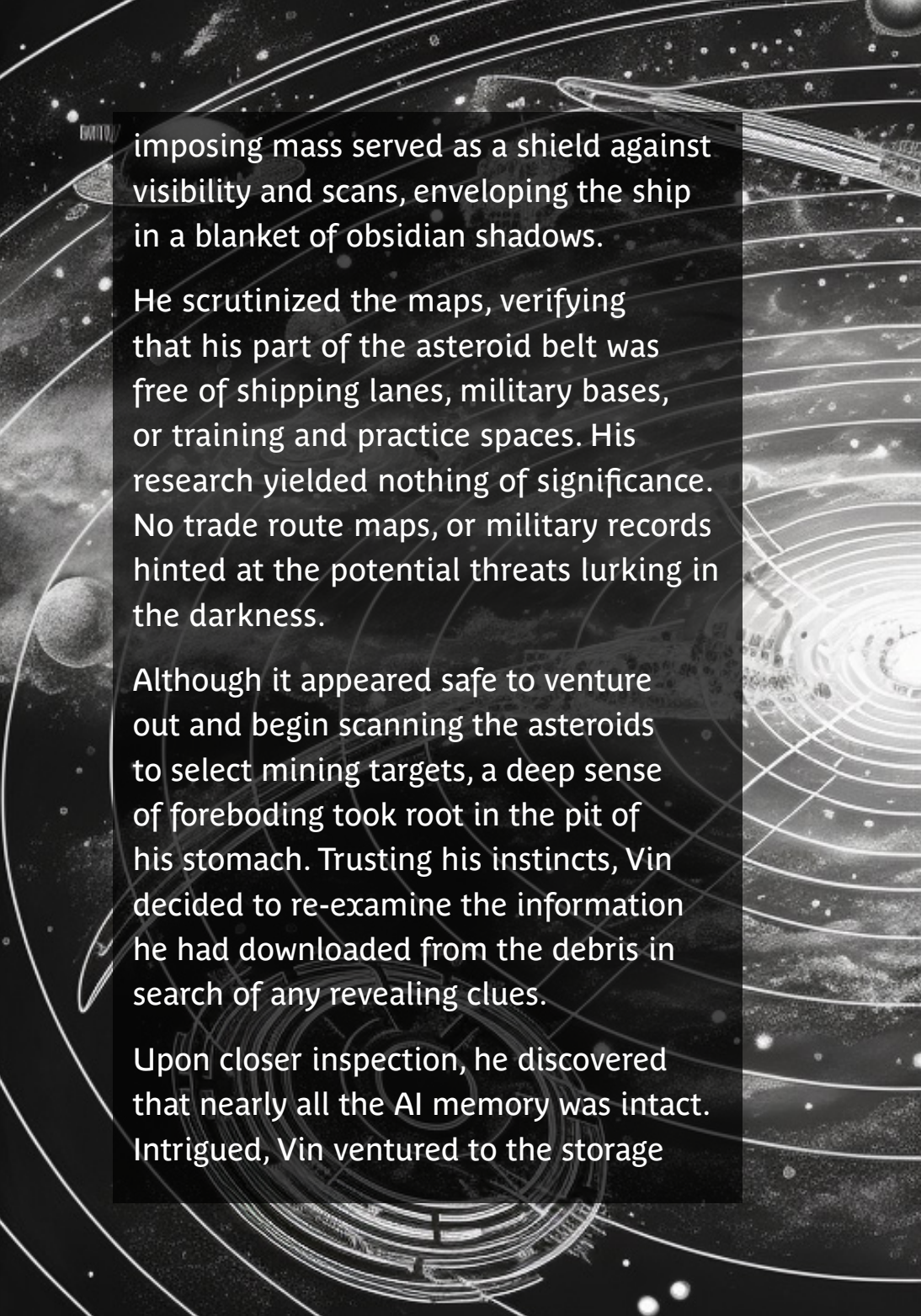
The background is a dark, monochromatic scene of an asteroid field. Numerous asteroids of various sizes and shapes are scattered across the frame, some appearing as bright, textured spheres while others are dark, jagged fragments. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the rough surfaces of the rocks against the deep black void of space. A semi-transparent dark rectangle is centered on the page, containing white text.

one of the ship's power conduits to the debris. The screens and computers within the wreckage flickered to life.

Vin attached a data cable to a port on a fragment of the control panel, then walked to the cargo bay's control panel, adjusting settings to download the information from the debris. After pressing a few more buttons, a small holo-projector displayed a flashing red warning sign. Vin's heart pounded in his chest as he realized the horrifying truth—the flashing red sign signaled an incoming missile alert for the doomed ship.

Vin grappled with the unsettling realization that mining ore in this remote region of the asteroid belt was far from the straightforward task he had anticipated. The question that gnawed at him was why this seemingly unimportant area was the epicenter of conflict and danger.

To hide his ship, he maneuvered it to the dark side of the colossal planetoid. The planetoid's

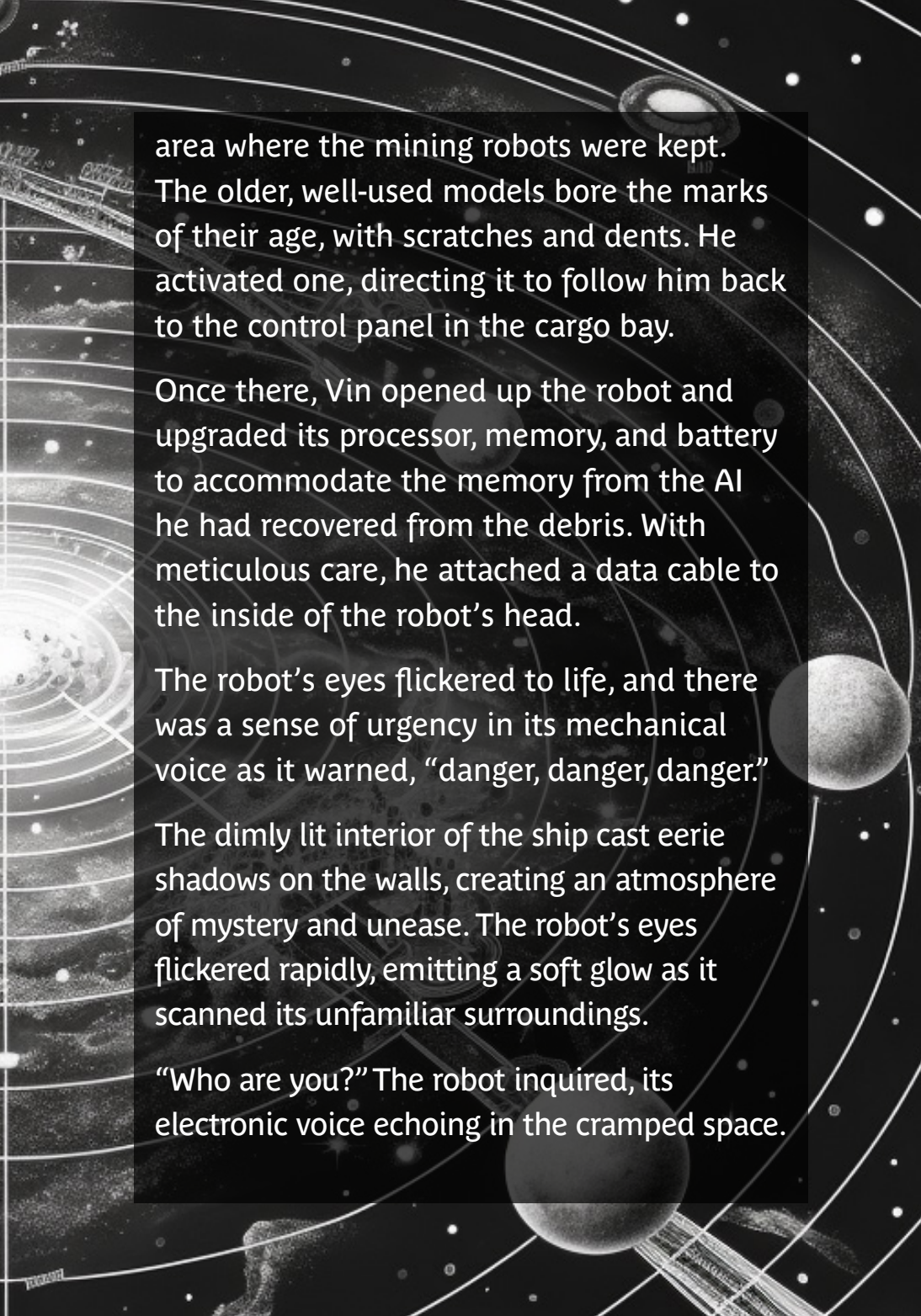


imposing mass served as a shield against visibility and scans, enveloping the ship in a blanket of obsidian shadows.

He scrutinized the maps, verifying that his part of the asteroid belt was free of shipping lanes, military bases, or training and practice spaces. His research yielded nothing of significance. No trade route maps, or military records hinted at the potential threats lurking in the darkness.

Although it appeared safe to venture out and begin scanning the asteroids to select mining targets, a deep sense of foreboding took root in the pit of his stomach. Trusting his instincts, Vin decided to re-examine the information he had downloaded from the debris in search of any revealing clues.

Upon closer inspection, he discovered that nearly all the AI memory was intact. Intrigued, Vin ventured to the storage



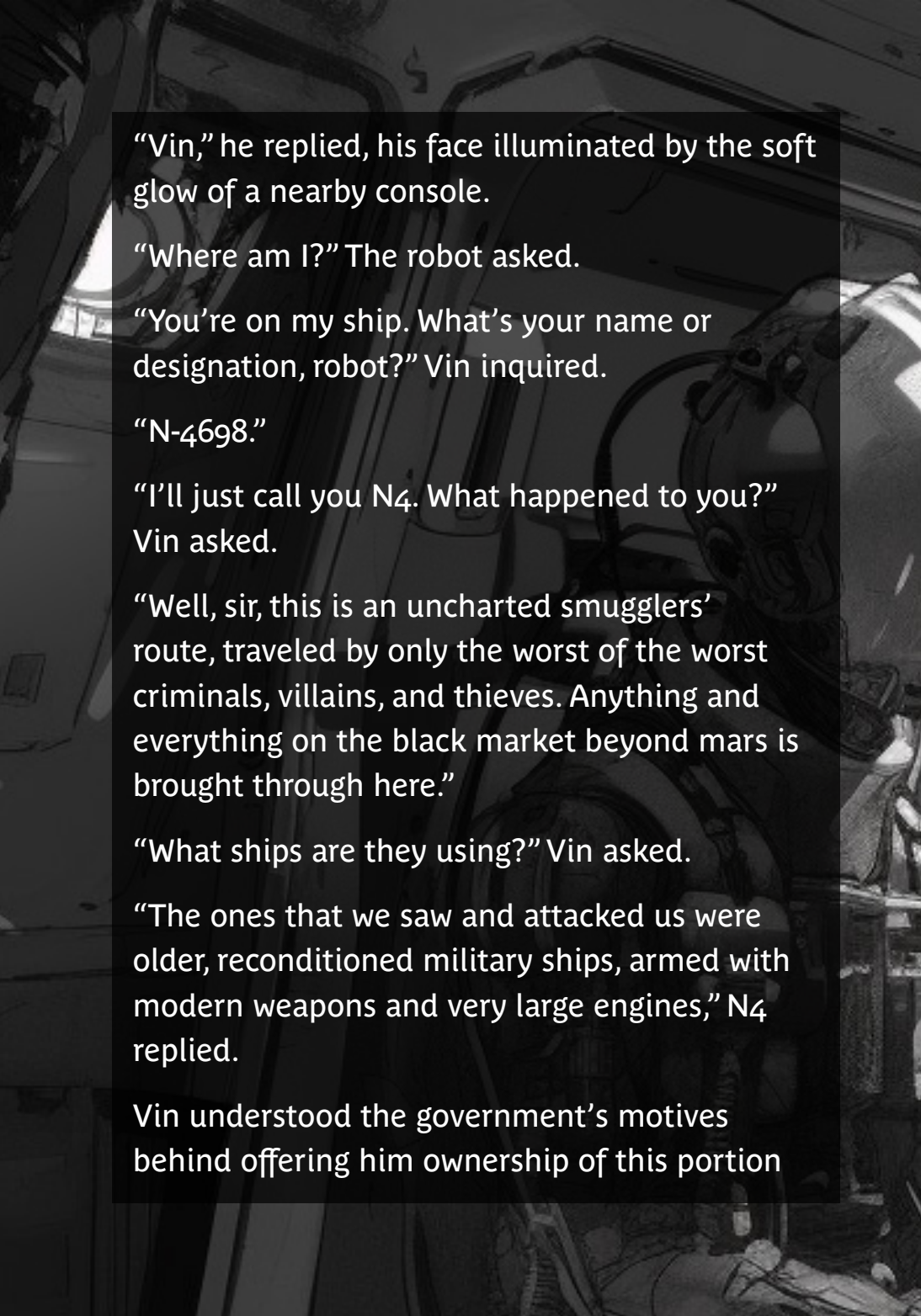
area where the mining robots were kept. The older, well-used models bore the marks of their age, with scratches and dents. He activated one, directing it to follow him back to the control panel in the cargo bay.

Once there, Vin opened up the robot and upgraded its processor, memory, and battery to accommodate the memory from the AI he had recovered from the debris. With meticulous care, he attached a data cable to the inside of the robot's head.

The robot's eyes flickered to life, and there was a sense of urgency in its mechanical voice as it warned, "danger, danger, danger."

The dimly lit interior of the ship cast eerie shadows on the walls, creating an atmosphere of mystery and unease. The robot's eyes flickered rapidly, emitting a soft glow as it scanned its unfamiliar surroundings.

"Who are you?" The robot inquired, its electronic voice echoing in the cramped space.



“Vin,” he replied, his face illuminated by the soft glow of a nearby console.

“Where am I?” The robot asked.

“You’re on my ship. What’s your name or designation, robot?” Vin inquired.

“N-4698.”

“I’ll just call you N4. What happened to you?” Vin asked.

“Well, sir, this is an uncharted smugglers’ route, traveled by only the worst of the worst criminals, villains, and thieves. Anything and everything on the black market beyond mars is brought through here.”

“What ships are they using?” Vin asked.

“The ones that we saw and attacked us were older, reconditioned military ships, armed with modern weapons and very large engines,” N4 replied.

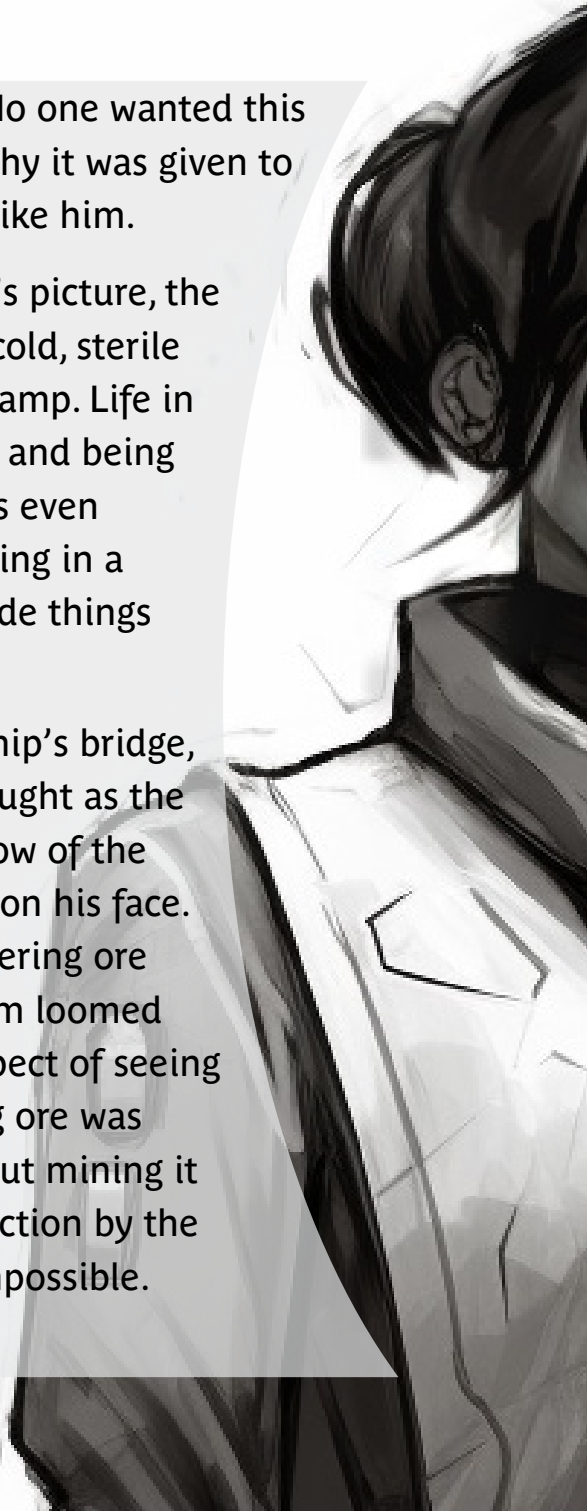
Vin understood the government’s motives behind offering him ownership of this portion



of the asteroid belt. No one wanted this territory, and that's why it was given to a convicted criminal like him.

He looked at his wife's picture, the image bathed in the cold, sterile light of a nearby led lamp. Life in space was dangerous, and being an asteroid miner was even more perilous. But living in a war zone like this made things exponentially worse.

Vin returned to the ship's bridge, sinking into deep thought as the faint, multicolored glow of the console lights played on his face. His deadline for delivering ore and retaining his claim loomed large, as did the prospect of seeing his wife again. Mining ore was challenging enough but mining it secretly to avoid detection by the smugglers seemed impossible.



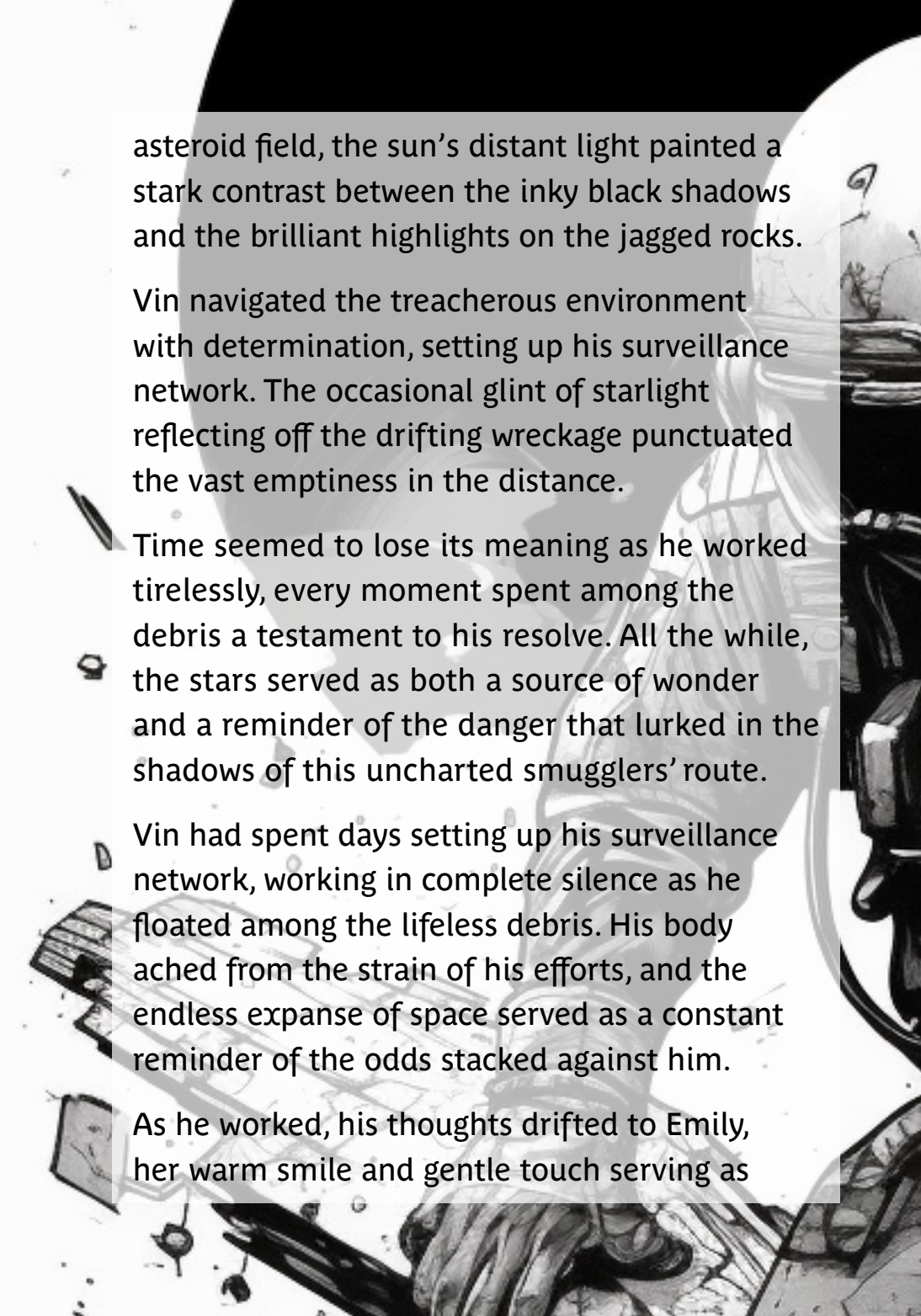


Vin deployed several small drone ships, positioning themselves to float among the debris and abandoned mining equipment for clandestine observation and warning of incoming ships.

He pressed a few buttons on a control panel next to a screen, pulling up a copy of the document he had signed and checking the manifest to see his available resources.

After packing some equipment and donning his spacesuit, Vin turned to N4. “Monitor all sensors and communications. If any ships are detected, inform me immediately.”

He then left the ship, venturing into the darkness of space, using the thrusters on his suit for movement. As he drifted among the



asteroid field, the sun's distant light painted a stark contrast between the inky black shadows and the brilliant highlights on the jagged rocks.

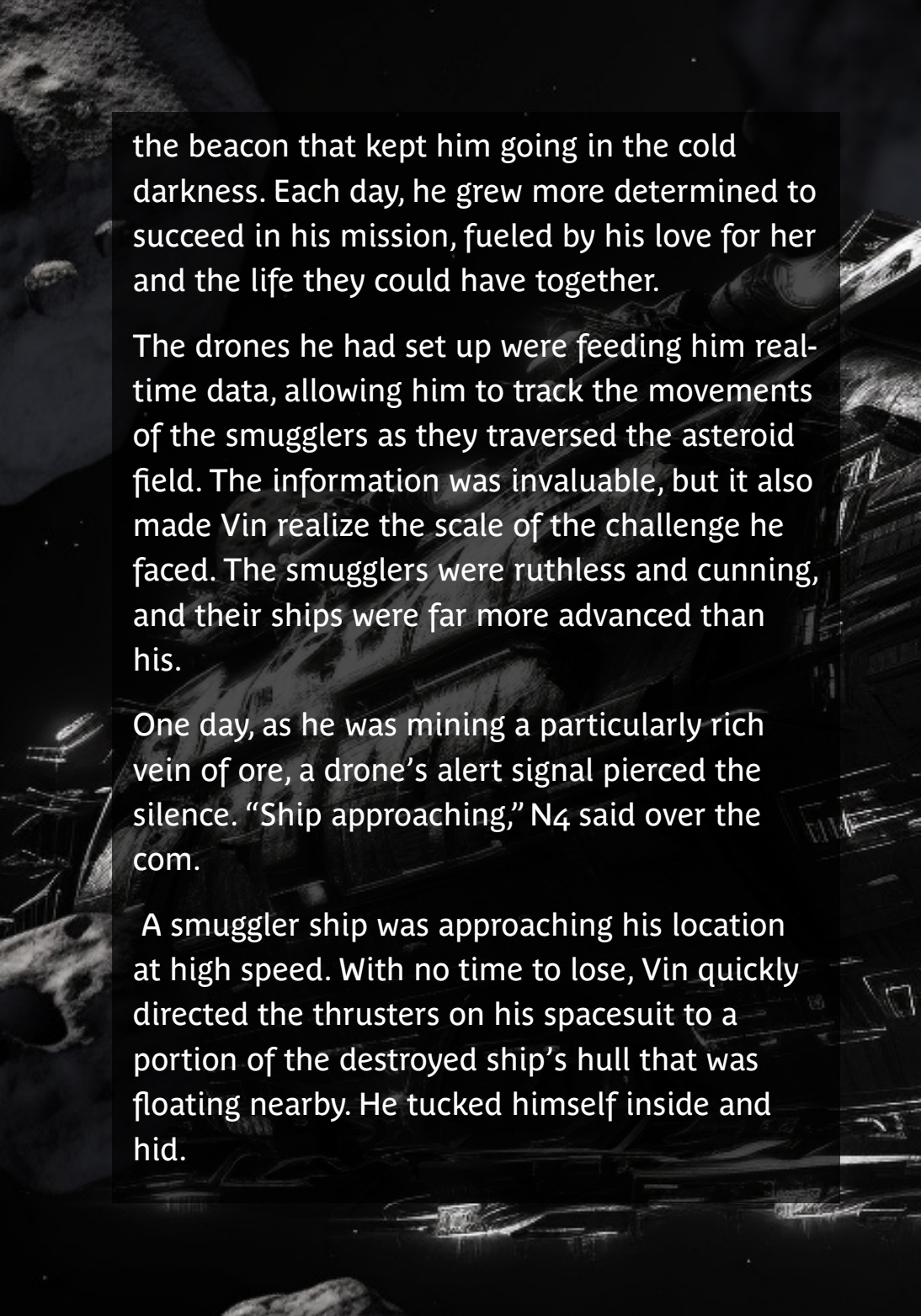
Vin navigated the treacherous environment with determination, setting up his surveillance network. The occasional glint of starlight reflecting off the drifting wreckage punctuated the vast emptiness in the distance.

Time seemed to lose its meaning as he worked tirelessly, every moment spent among the debris a testament to his resolve. All the while, the stars served as both a source of wonder and a reminder of the danger that lurked in the shadows of this uncharted smugglers' route.

Vin had spent days setting up his surveillance network, working in complete silence as he floated among the lifeless debris. His body ached from the strain of his efforts, and the endless expanse of space served as a constant reminder of the odds stacked against him.

As he worked, his thoughts drifted to Emily, her warm smile and gentle touch serving as



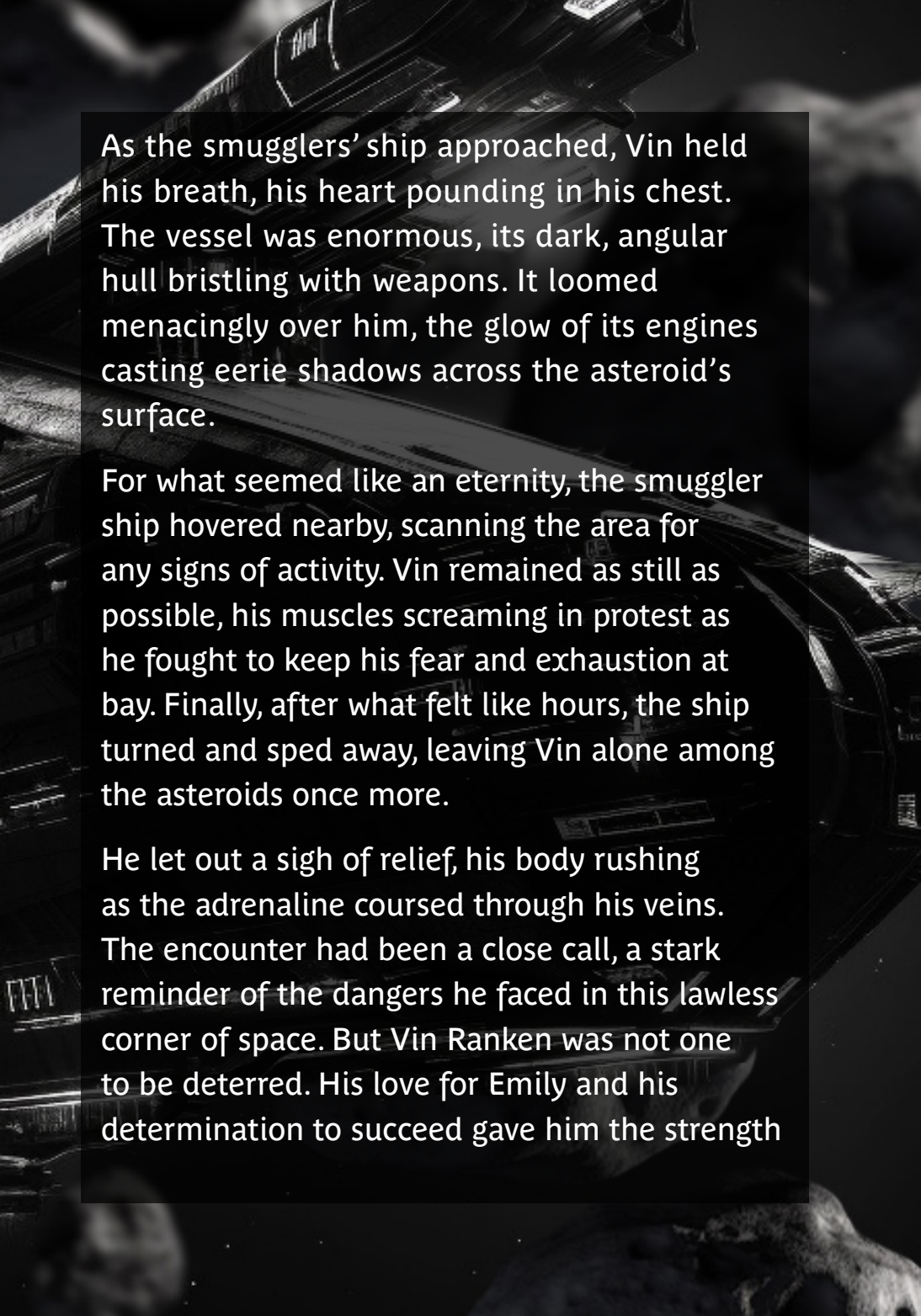


the beacon that kept him going in the cold darkness. Each day, he grew more determined to succeed in his mission, fueled by his love for her and the life they could have together.

The drones he had set up were feeding him real-time data, allowing him to track the movements of the smugglers as they traversed the asteroid field. The information was invaluable, but it also made Vin realize the scale of the challenge he faced. The smugglers were ruthless and cunning, and their ships were far more advanced than his.

One day, as he was mining a particularly rich vein of ore, a drone's alert signal pierced the silence. "Ship approaching," N4 said over the com.

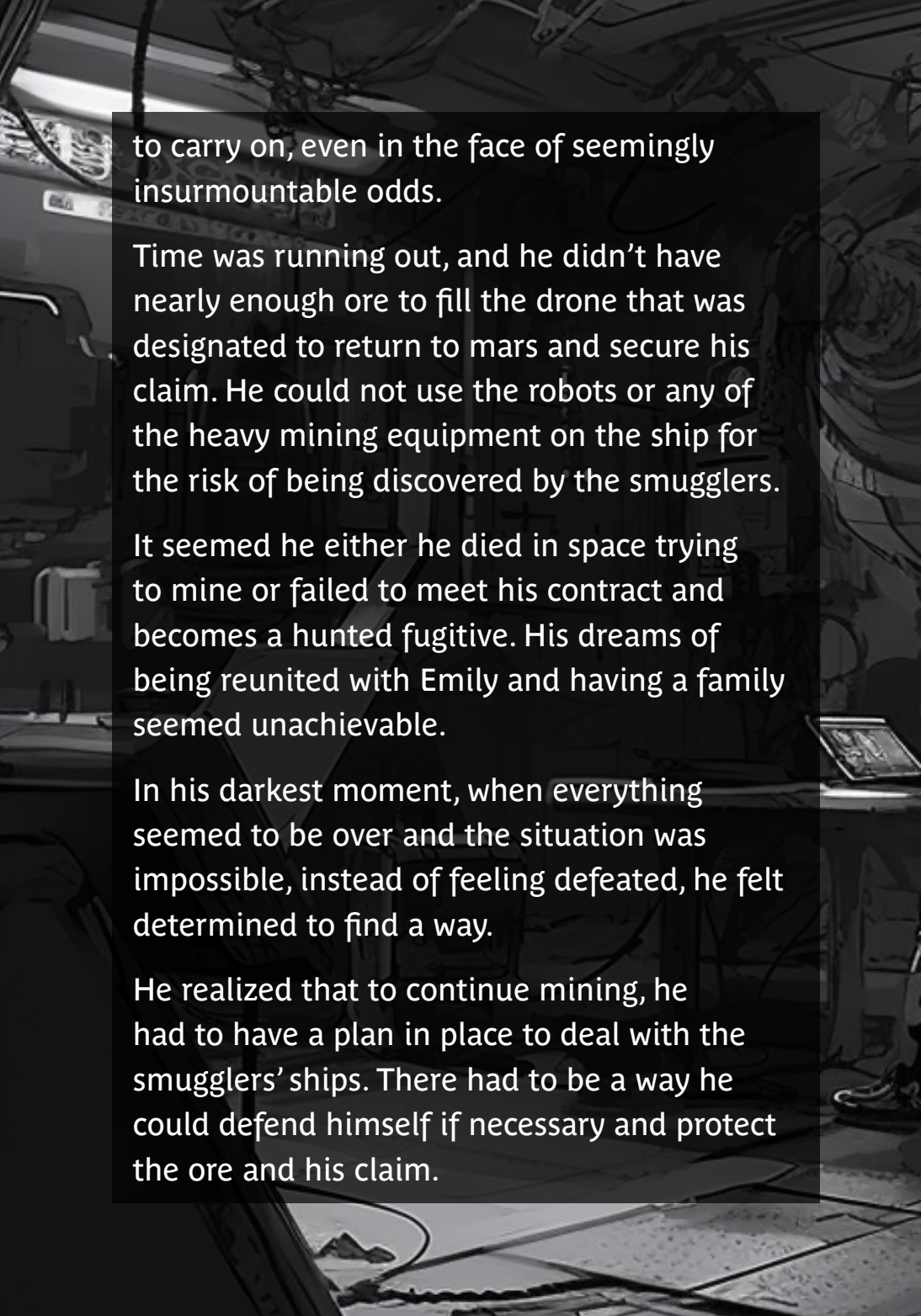
A smuggler ship was approaching his location at high speed. With no time to lose, Vin quickly directed the thrusters on his spacesuit to a portion of the destroyed ship's hull that was floating nearby. He tucked himself inside and hid.



As the smugglers' ship approached, Vin held his breath, his heart pounding in his chest. The vessel was enormous, its dark, angular hull bristling with weapons. It loomed menacingly over him, the glow of its engines casting eerie shadows across the asteroid's surface.

For what seemed like an eternity, the smuggler ship hovered nearby, scanning the area for any signs of activity. Vin remained as still as possible, his muscles screaming in protest as he fought to keep his fear and exhaustion at bay. Finally, after what felt like hours, the ship turned and sped away, leaving Vin alone among the asteroids once more.

He let out a sigh of relief, his body rushing as the adrenaline coursed through his veins. The encounter had been a close call, a stark reminder of the dangers he faced in this lawless corner of space. But Vin Ranken was not one to be deterred. His love for Emily and his determination to succeed gave him the strength



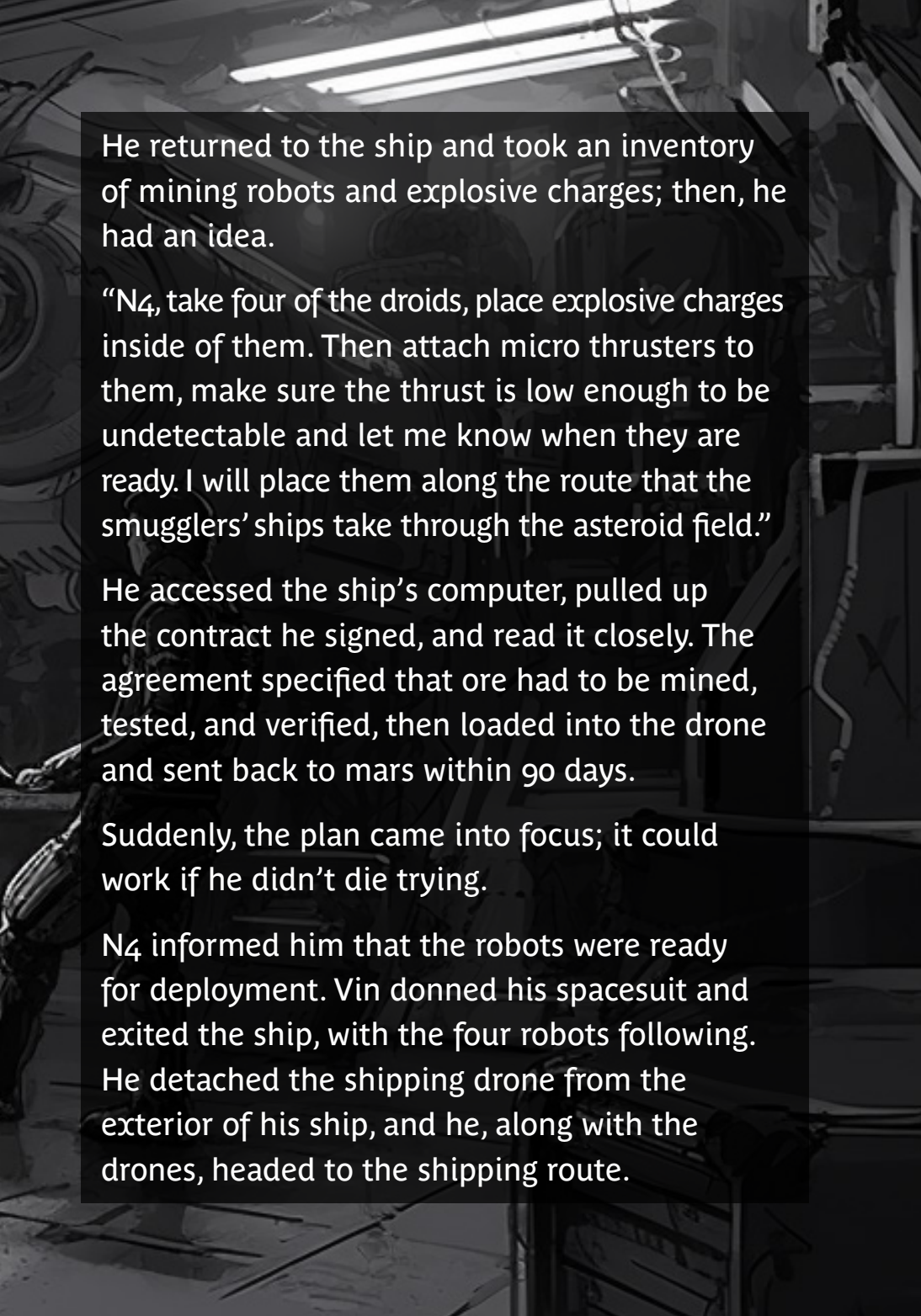
to carry on, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Time was running out, and he didn't have nearly enough ore to fill the drone that was designated to return to mars and secure his claim. He could not use the robots or any of the heavy mining equipment on the ship for the risk of being discovered by the smugglers.

It seemed he either he died in space trying to mine or failed to meet his contract and becomes a hunted fugitive. His dreams of being reunited with Emily and having a family seemed unachievable.

In his darkest moment, when everything seemed to be over and the situation was impossible, instead of feeling defeated, he felt determined to find a way.

He realized that to continue mining, he had to have a plan in place to deal with the smugglers' ships. There had to be a way he could defend himself if necessary and protect the ore and his claim.

The background is a dark, industrial setting, possibly the interior of a spaceship. A person in a spacesuit is visible in the background, standing near some equipment. The lighting is dim, with a few bright spots, possibly from overhead lights or monitors. The overall atmosphere is gritty and technical.

He returned to the ship and took an inventory of mining robots and explosive charges; then, he had an idea.

“N4, take four of the droids, place explosive charges inside of them. Then attach micro thrusters to them, make sure the thrust is low enough to be undetectable and let me know when they are ready. I will place them along the route that the smugglers’ ships take through the asteroid field.”

He accessed the ship’s computer, pulled up the contract he signed, and read it closely. The agreement specified that ore had to be mined, tested, and verified, then loaded into the drone and sent back to mars within 90 days.

Suddenly, the plan came into focus; it could work if he didn’t die trying.

N4 informed him that the robots were ready for deployment. Vin donned his spacesuit and exited the ship, with the four robots following. He detached the shipping drone from the exterior of his ship, and he, along with the drones, headed to the shipping route.

When he arrived, he deployed the robots at predetermined points. Then he took the drone to its launch location for its trip back to mars and opened its cargo bin doors to put the ore in.

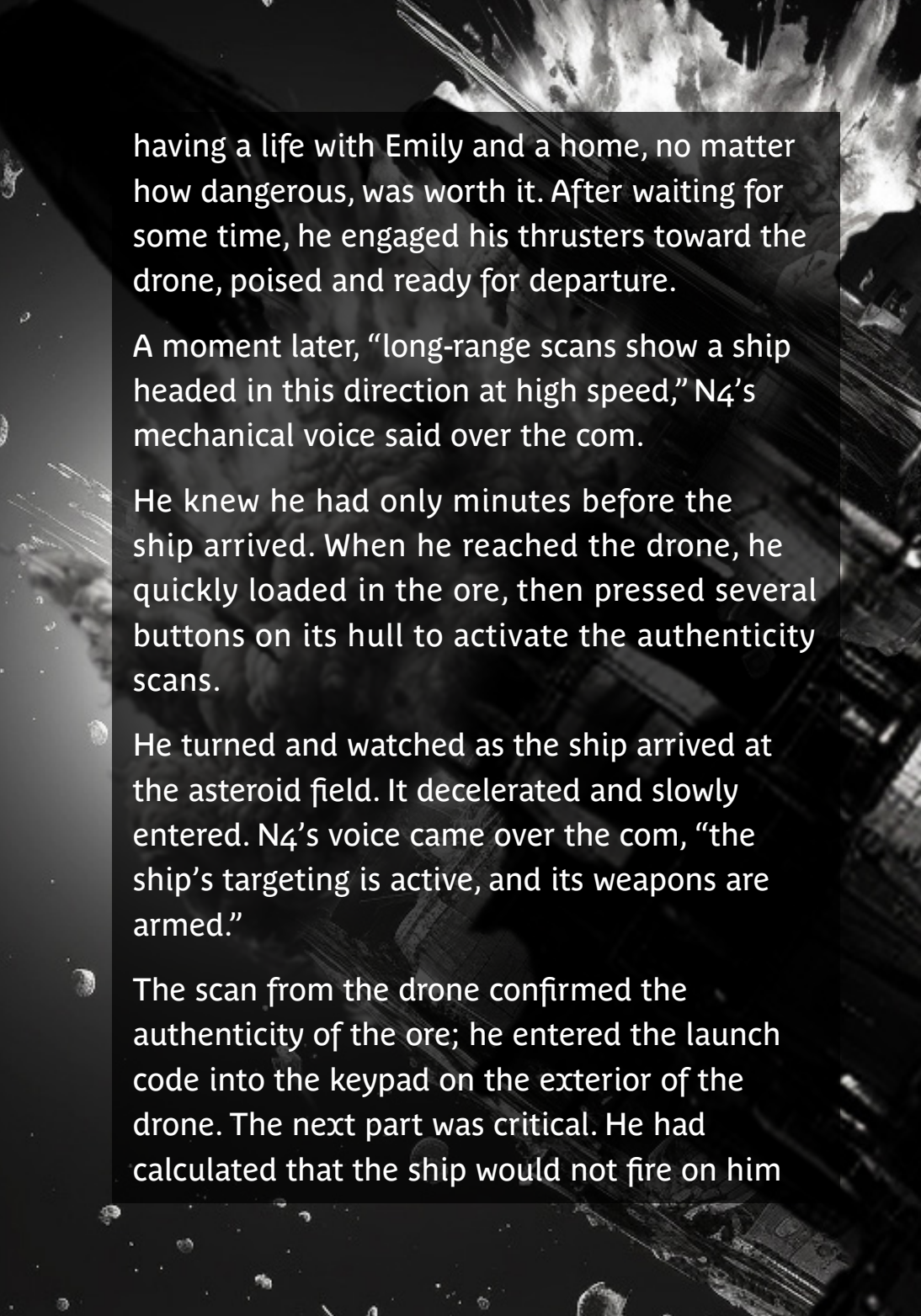
He looked around at the stars, the asteroids, and the vast emptiness of space. It was time to implement his plan. This was it, all or nothing, live or die.

He floated over to where he had hidden the mined ore and untied it; then, while holding the ore, he floated directly into open space. He needed bait to draw any ships that might be watching with long-range scans, and he was the bait.

He knew he was gambling everything, but the possibility of







having a life with Emily and a home, no matter how dangerous, was worth it. After waiting for some time, he engaged his thrusters toward the drone, poised and ready for departure.

A moment later, “long-range scans show a ship headed in this direction at high speed,” N4’s mechanical voice said over the com.

He knew he had only minutes before the ship arrived. When he reached the drone, he quickly loaded in the ore, then pressed several buttons on its hull to activate the authenticity scans.

He turned and watched as the ship arrived at the asteroid field. It decelerated and slowly entered. N4’s voice came over the com, “the ship’s targeting is active, and its weapons are armed.”

The scan from the drone confirmed the authenticity of the ore; he entered the launch code into the keypad on the exterior of the drone. The next part was critical. He had calculated that the ship would not fire on him

and risk destroying the ore, but he needed it to come closer to him. He peered over his shoulder and watched it slowly approach.

“Position the robots near the hull,” he said to N4.

“Sir, they have a target lock on you.”

The ship moved closer.

“Sir, they have a...”

Yes, I heard you N4. Are the robots in place?”

“Yes.”

“Detonate.”

An instant later, all four drones detonated. The ship shuddered for a moment as Vin launched the drone with the ore and ducked behind an asteroid.

The charges were not enough to destroy the ship, but they were enough to rupture the hull. It worked. The hull vented to space, and with it, all of its occupants.

Vin watched them momentarily struggle in the vacuum as they drifted to their doom.

“Sir, the drone has cleared the asteroid field, and we have just received confirmation of the receipt of the authentication of the ore in the shipment. It appears that the shipment is significantly smaller than was anticipated.”

“N4 tell them the contract requires the ore to be mined, and shipped within the allocated timeframe but does not specify the size or weight of the initial shipment required to secure the claim. My obligations are met; the claim is mine.”

He knew he was betting on a technicality and that they were expecting the cargo hold in the drone to be full. With a button press, they could destroy his ship and leave him to die in space. Minutes seemed like hours until finally, N4’s voice crackled over the com.

“Congratulations, sir. The claim is yours.”

Vin exhaled. He looked at the derelict ship, now floating lifeless. Was it a foreshadowing of what was to come or a tangible result of his determination?

Only time would tell...

The adventure continues in the Galactic Ore Chronicle series.

Galatic Ore Continues

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