

# GALACTIC ORE

GALACTIC  
ORE  
AND TRADERS  
BOOK 2  
JOVIAN RIF

CHRONICLES



R. NEO

Galactic ORE Chronicles

Jovian Rift Book 2

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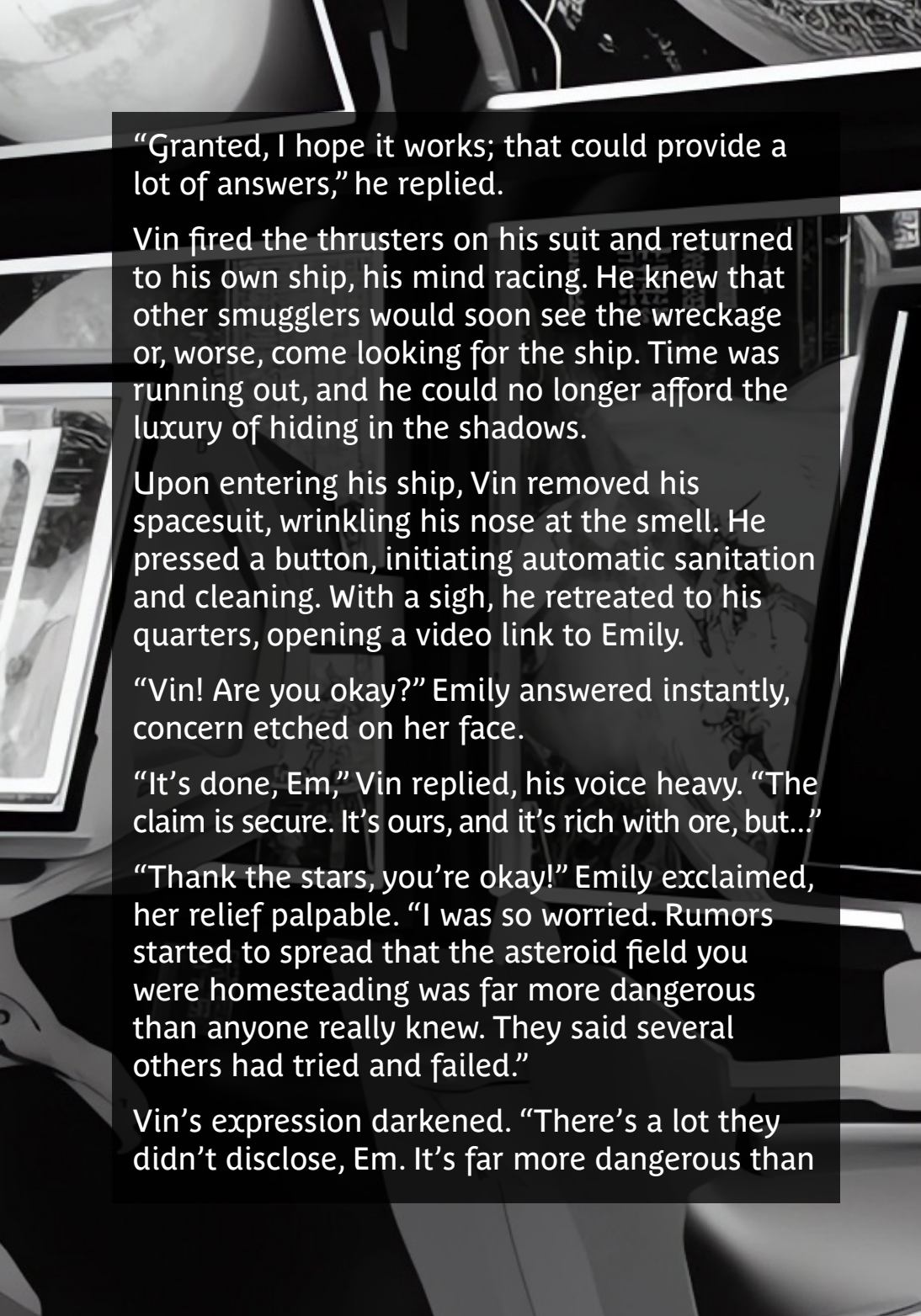
# Jovian Rift

Vin floated silently through the vacuum of space, approaching the gaping hole in the side of the ship. The dim light from distant stars glistened off the exposed metal, revealing the scars of battle. As he inspected the damage, he couldn't help but marvel at how the hull had remained largely intact, save for the blast holes.

The weight of the reality he faced settled in as he pondered his actions. He had done what was necessary to survive, a kill-or-be-killed mentality that seemed to grow stronger with every passing day in this treacherous asteroid field.

"N4," he spoke, his voice crisp and clear, "approach the smugglers' ship from the dark side of the asteroid and cut a hole in the hull. Inventory everything on board, and most importantly, see if you can get the weapons systems online. Have the robots remove any cargo and attach it with nets to the dark side of the asteroid. It should be hidden inside natural depressions in the rock."

"Sir, permission to attempt to attach data and power to the ship to retrieve information from its computers?" N4 asked.



“Granted, I hope it works; that could provide a lot of answers,” he replied.

Vin fired the thrusters on his suit and returned to his own ship, his mind racing. He knew that other smugglers would soon see the wreckage or, worse, come looking for the ship. Time was running out, and he could no longer afford the luxury of hiding in the shadows.

Upon entering his ship, Vin removed his spacesuit, wrinkling his nose at the smell. He pressed a button, initiating automatic sanitation and cleaning. With a sigh, he retreated to his quarters, opening a video link to Emily.

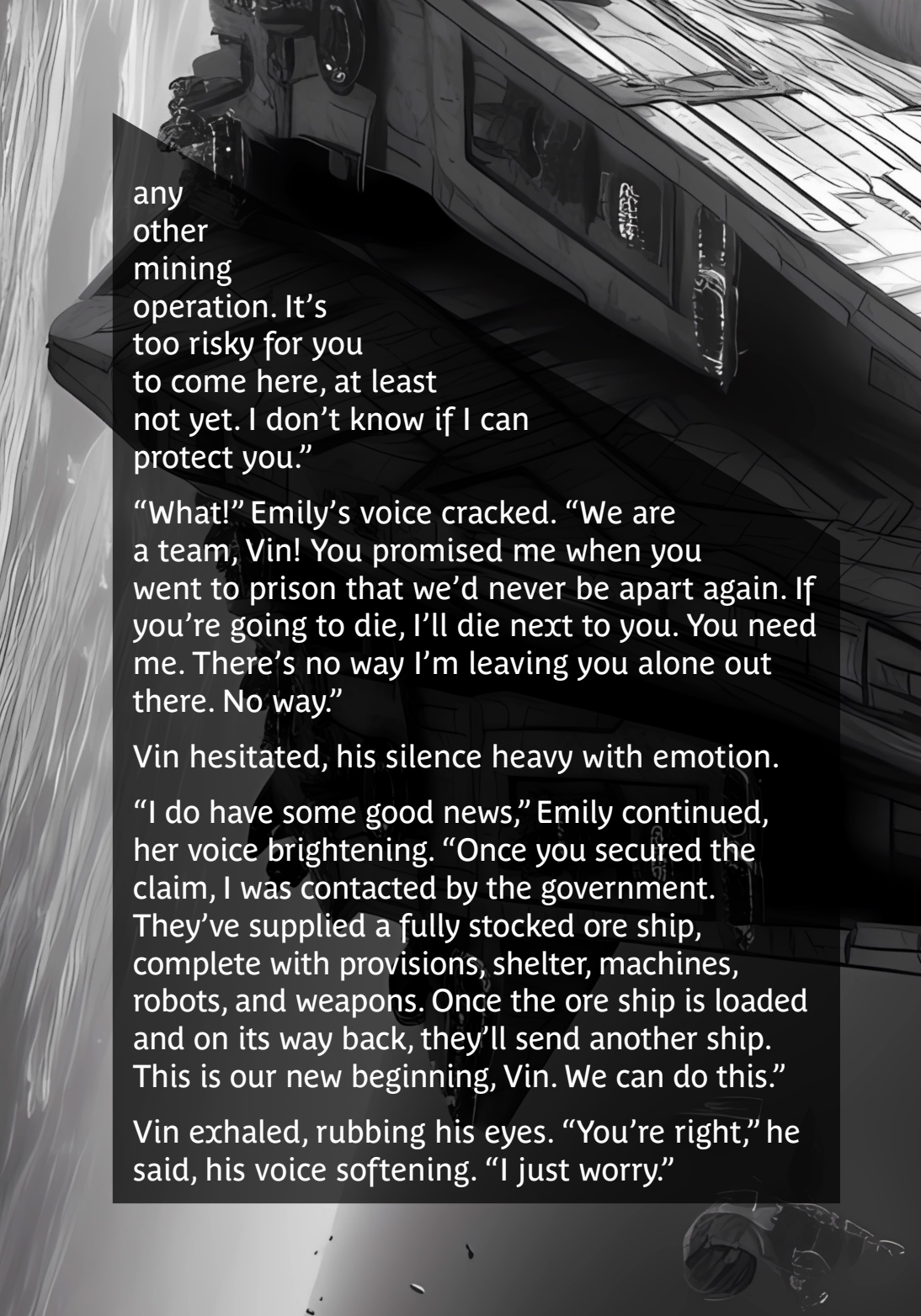
“Vin! Are you okay?” Emily answered instantly, concern etched on her face.

“It’s done, Em,” Vin replied, his voice heavy. “The claim is secure. It’s ours, and it’s rich with ore, but...”

“Thank the stars, you’re okay!” Emily exclaimed, her relief palpable. “I was so worried. Rumors started to spread that the asteroid field you were homesteading was far more dangerous than anyone really knew. They said several others had tried and failed.”

Vin’s expression darkened. “There’s a lot they didn’t disclose, Em. It’s far more dangerous than





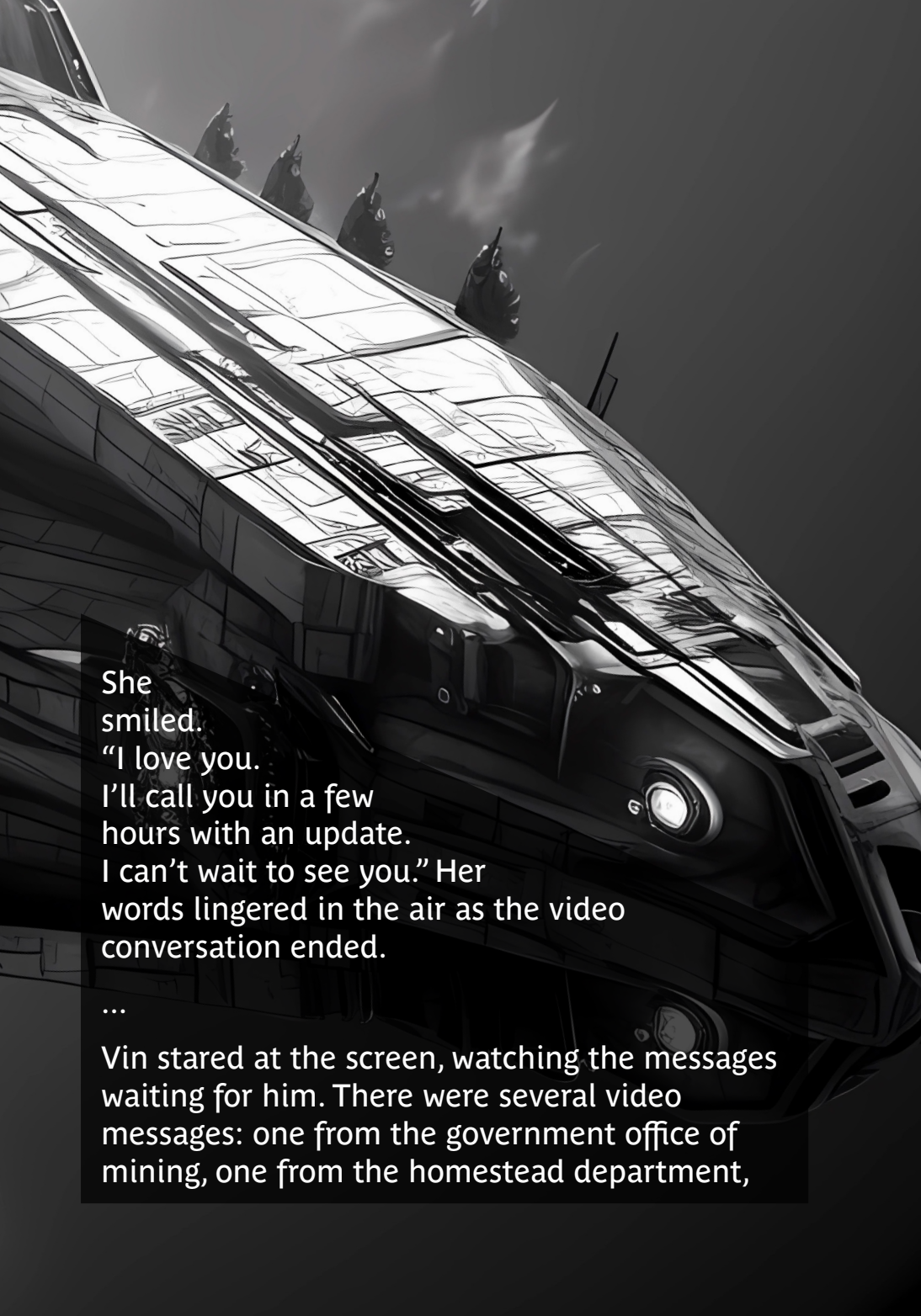
any  
other  
mining  
operation. It's  
too risky for you  
to come here, at least  
not yet. I don't know if I can  
protect you."

"What!" Emily's voice cracked. "We are a team, Vin! You promised me when you went to prison that we'd never be apart again. If you're going to die, I'll die next to you. You need me. There's no way I'm leaving you alone out there. No way."

Vin hesitated, his silence heavy with emotion.

"I do have some good news," Emily continued, her voice brightening. "Once you secured the claim, I was contacted by the government. They've supplied a fully stocked ore ship, complete with provisions, shelter, machines, robots, and weapons. Once the ore ship is loaded and on its way back, they'll send another ship. This is our new beginning, Vin. We can do this."

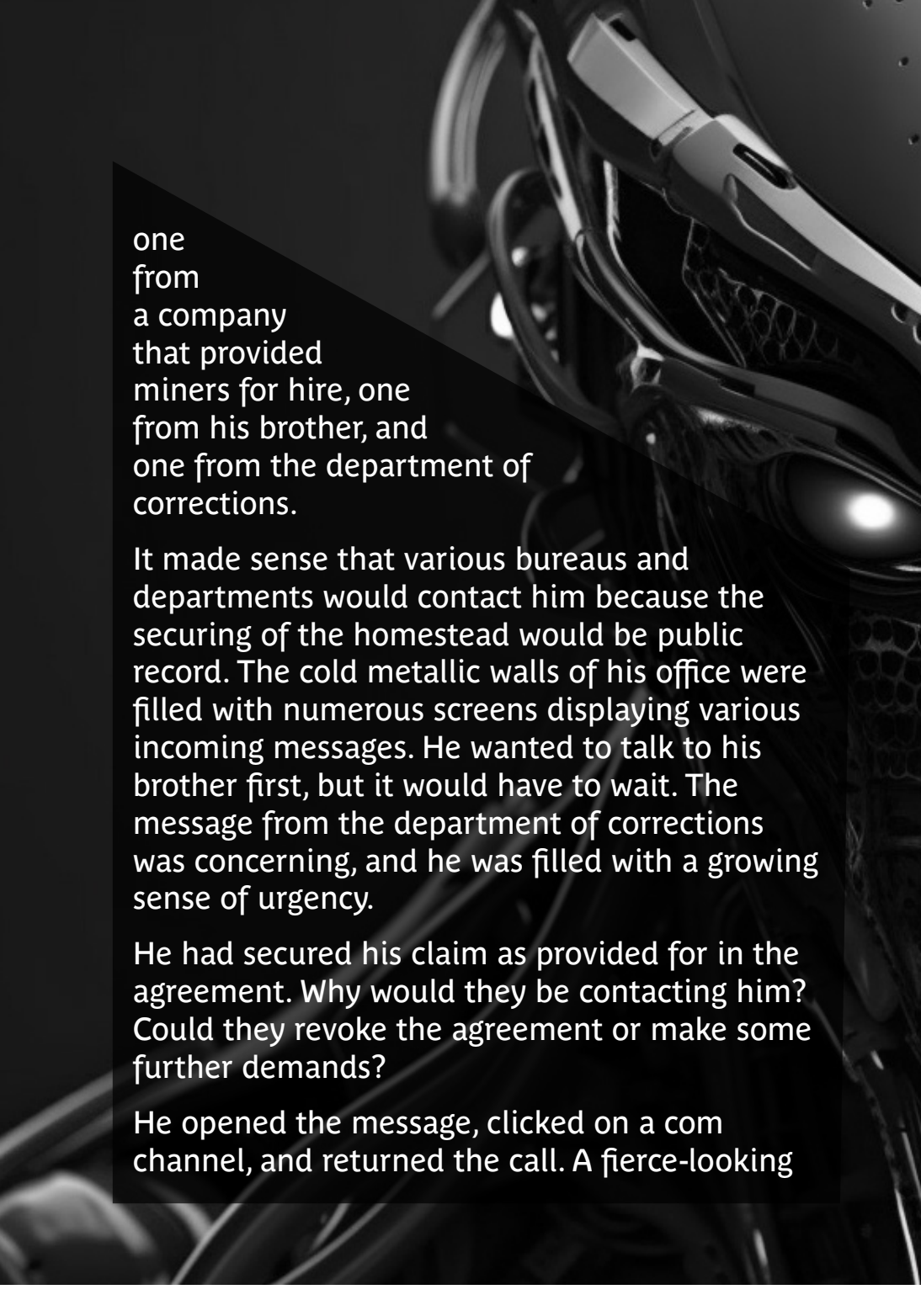
Vin exhaled, rubbing his eyes. "You're right," he said, his voice softening. "I just worry."



She  
smiled.  
“I love you.  
I’ll call you in a few  
hours with an update.  
I can’t wait to see you.” Her  
words lingered in the air as the video  
conversation ended.

...

Vin stared at the screen, watching the messages  
waiting for him. There were several video  
messages: one from the government office of  
mining, one from the homestead department,



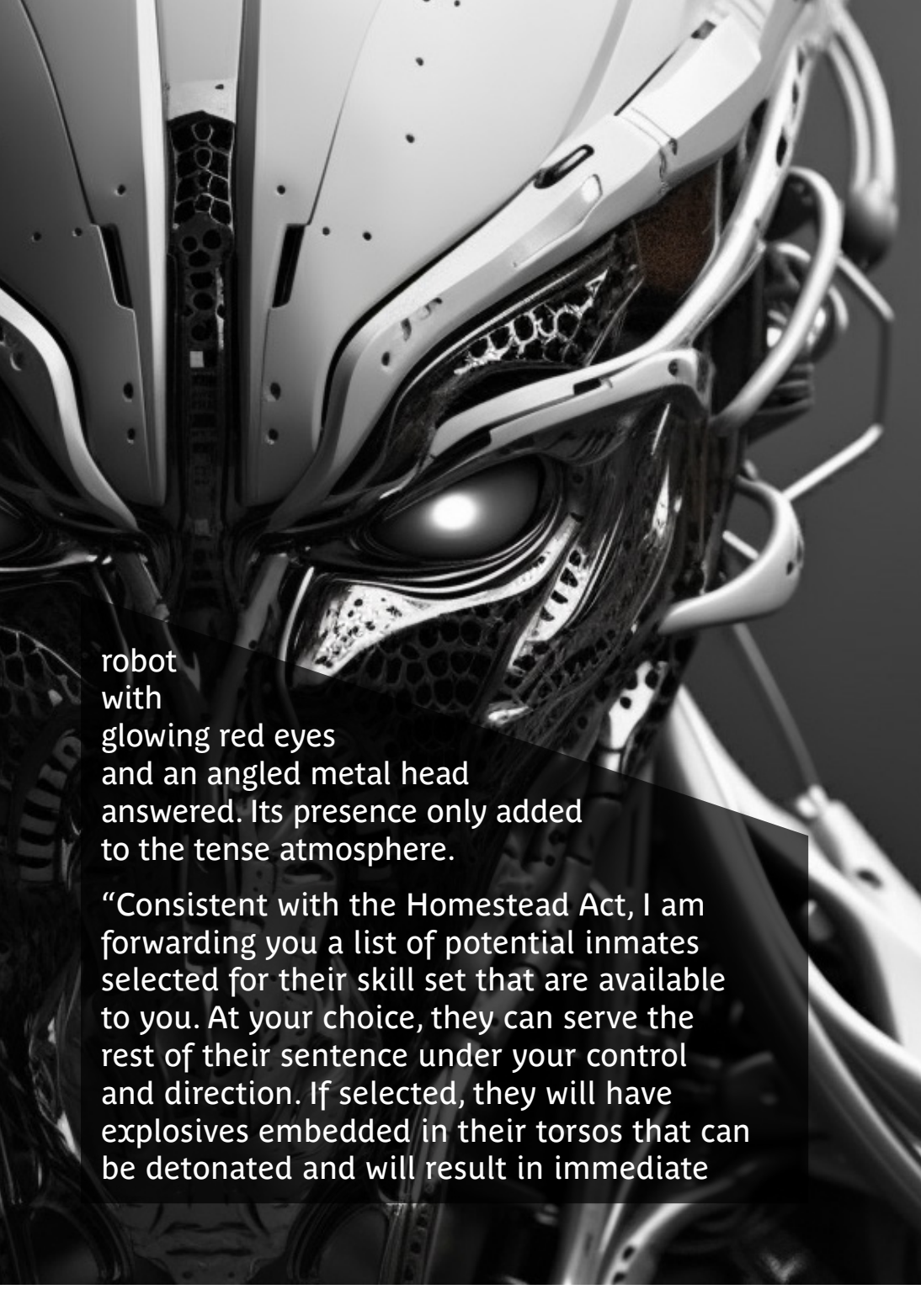
one  
from  
a company  
that provided  
miners for hire, one  
from his brother, and  
one from the department of  
corrections.

It made sense that various bureaus and departments would contact him because the securing of the homestead would be public record. The cold metallic walls of his office were filled with numerous screens displaying various incoming messages. He wanted to talk to his brother first, but it would have to wait. The message from the department of corrections was concerning, and he was filled with a growing sense of urgency.

He had secured his claim as provided for in the agreement. Why would they be contacting him? Could they revoke the agreement or make some further demands?

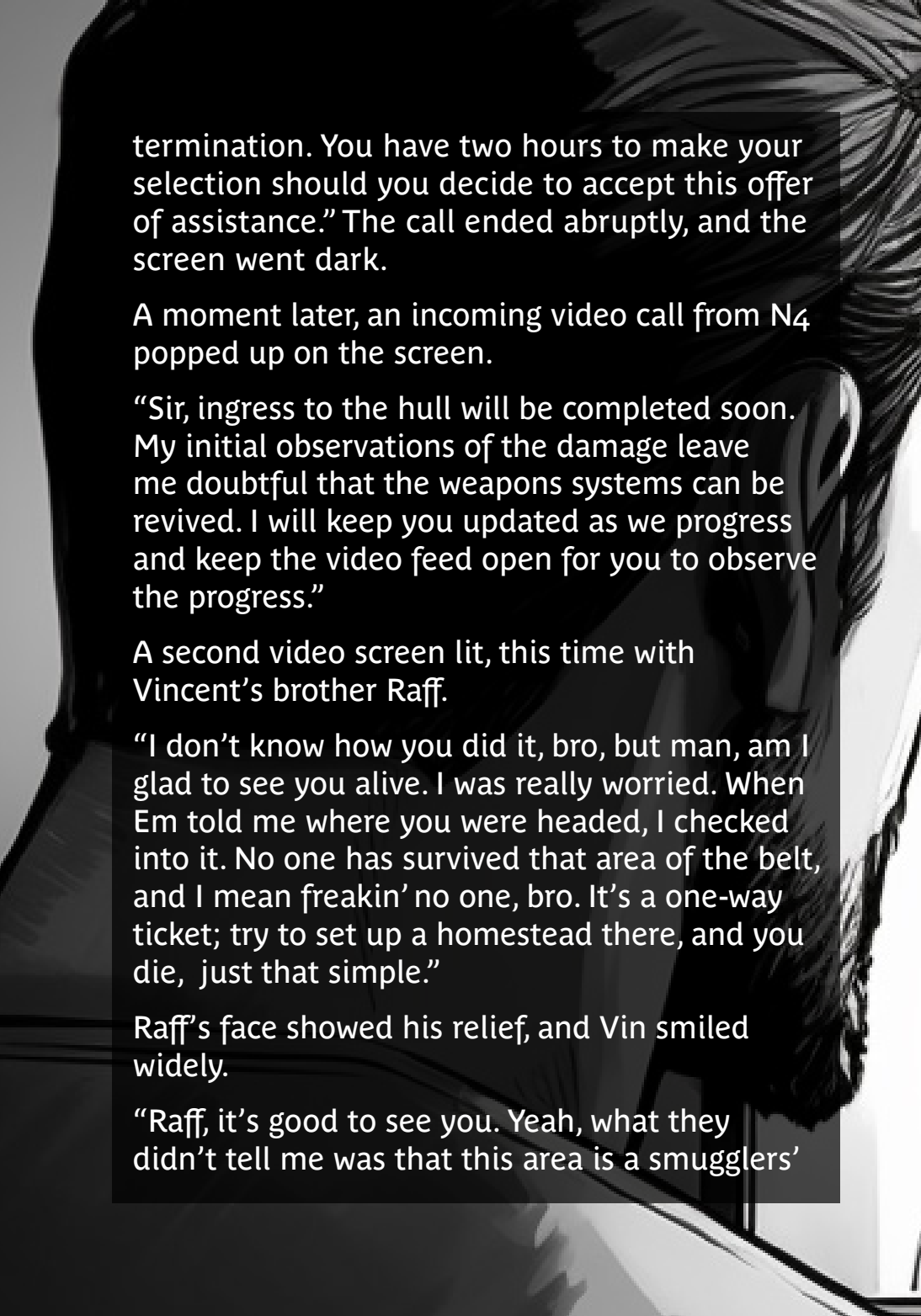
He opened the message, clicked on a com channel, and returned the call. A fierce-looking



A close-up, black and white photograph of a futuristic robot's head. The robot has a highly detailed, metallic, and angular design. Its right eye is glowing with a bright red light, while the left eye is dark. The robot's head is tilted slightly to the right. The background is dark and out of focus, showing more of the robot's body and mechanical parts.

robot  
with  
glowing red eyes  
and an angled metal head  
answered. Its presence only added  
to the tense atmosphere.

“Consistent with the Homestead Act, I am forwarding you a list of potential inmates selected for their skill set that are available to you. At your choice, they can serve the rest of their sentence under your control and direction. If selected, they will have explosives embedded in their torsos that can be detonated and will result in immediate



termination. You have two hours to make your selection should you decide to accept this offer of assistance.” The call ended abruptly, and the screen went dark.

A moment later, an incoming video call from N4 popped up on the screen.

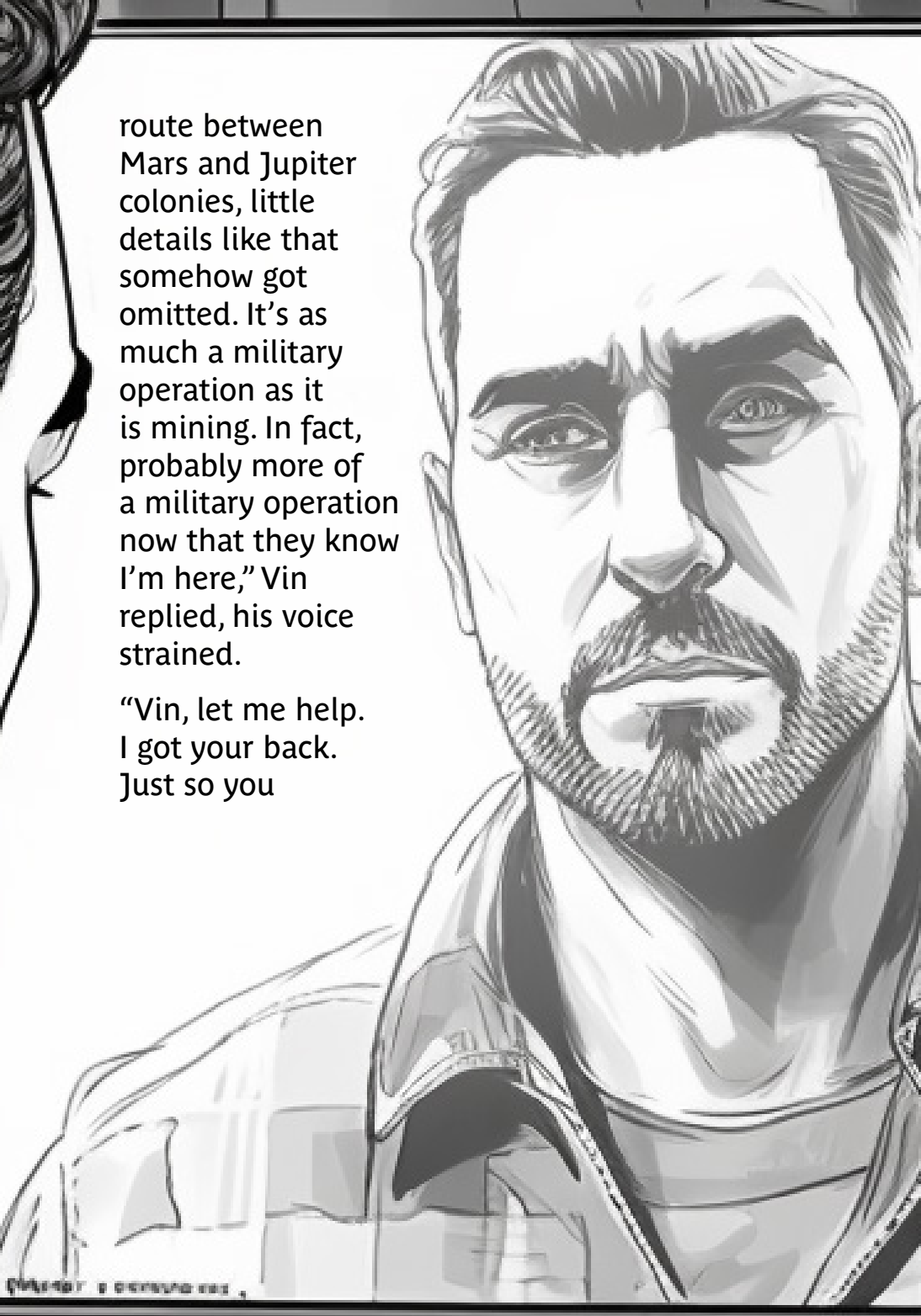
“Sir, ingress to the hull will be completed soon. My initial observations of the damage leave me doubtful that the weapons systems can be revived. I will keep you updated as we progress and keep the video feed open for you to observe the progress.”

A second video screen lit, this time with Vincent’s brother Raff.

“I don’t know how you did it, bro, but man, am I glad to see you alive. I was really worried. When Em told me where you were headed, I checked into it. No one has survived that area of the belt, and I mean freakin’ no one, bro. It’s a one-way ticket; try to set up a homestead there, and you die, just that simple.”

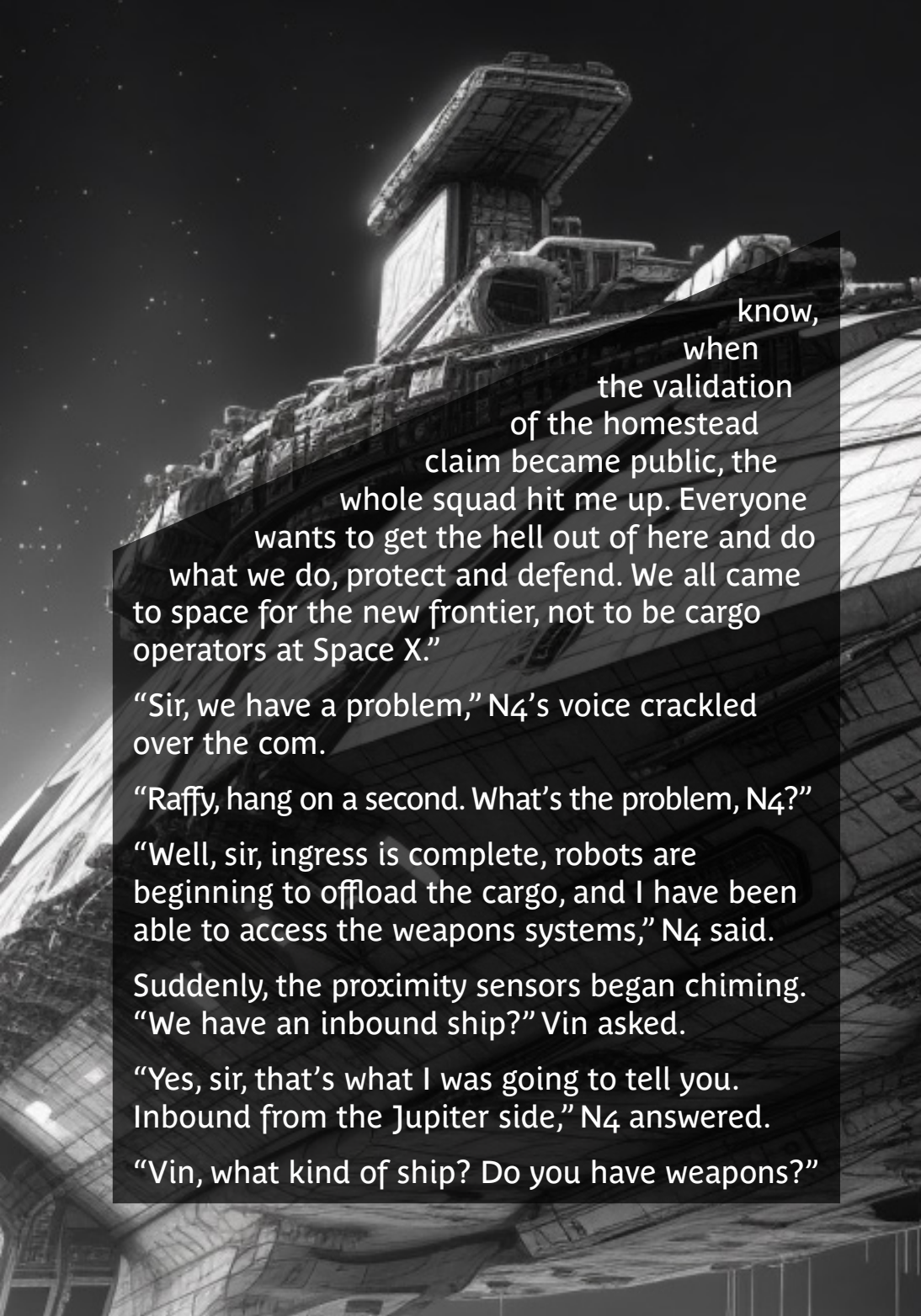
Raff’s face showed his relief, and Vin smiled widely.

“Raff, it’s good to see you. Yeah, what they didn’t tell me was that this area is a smugglers’



route between Mars and Jupiter colonies, little details like that somehow got omitted. It's as much a military operation as it is mining. In fact, probably more of a military operation now that they know I'm here," Vin replied, his voice strained.

"Vin, let me help. I got your back. Just so you



know,  
when  
the validation  
of the homestead  
claim became public, the  
whole squad hit me up. Everyone  
wants to get the hell out of here and do  
what we do, protect and defend. We all came  
to space for the new frontier, not to be cargo  
operators at Space X.”

“Sir, we have a problem,” N4’s voice crackled  
over the com.

“Raffy, hang on a second. What’s the problem, N4?”

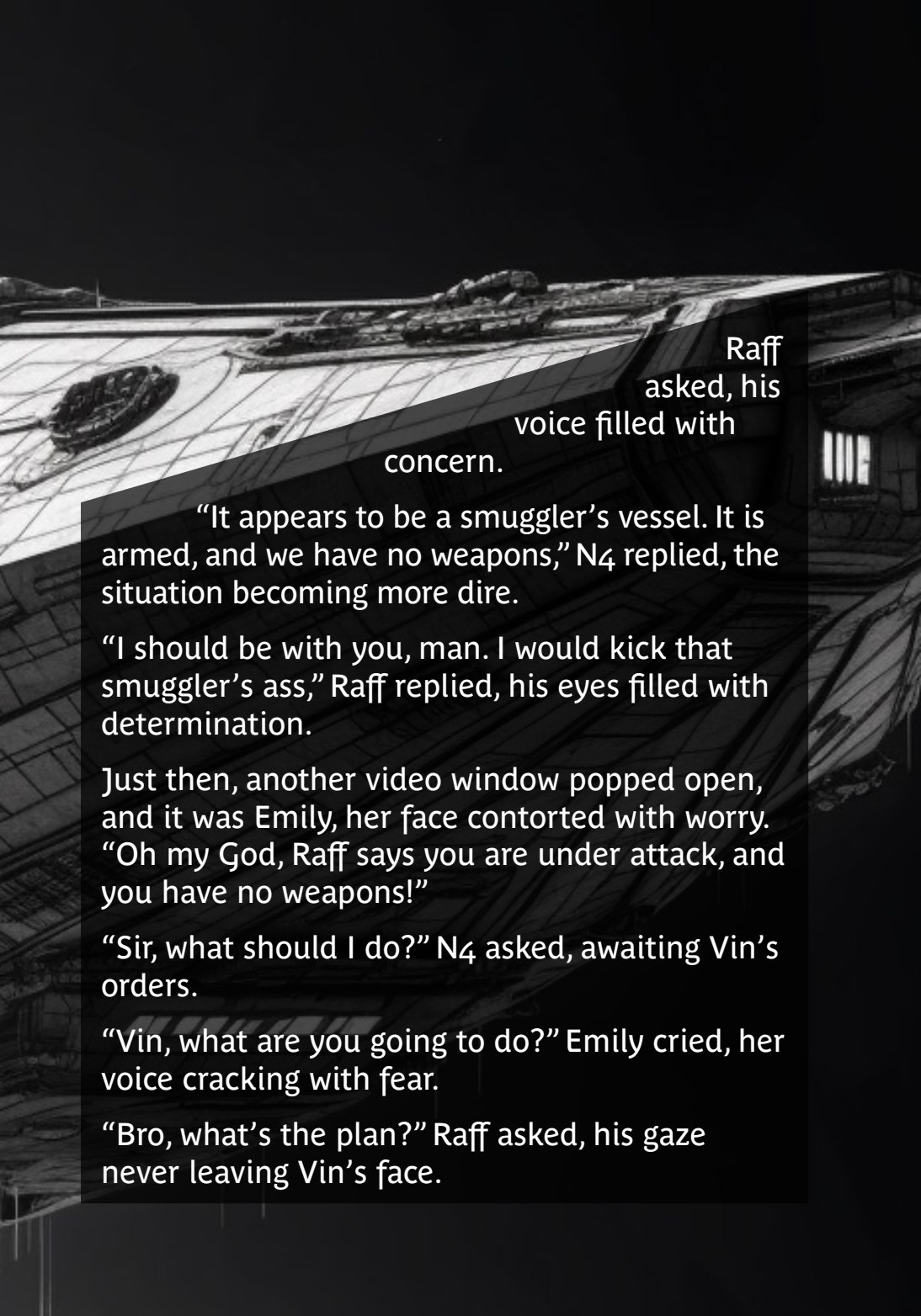
“Well, sir, ingress is complete, robots are  
beginning to offload the cargo, and I have been  
able to access the weapons systems,” N4 said.

Suddenly, the proximity sensors began chiming.

“We have an inbound ship?” Vin asked.

“Yes, sir, that’s what I was going to tell you.  
Inbound from the Jupiter side,” N4 answered.

“Vin, what kind of ship? Do you have weapons?”



Raff asked, his voice filled with concern.

“It appears to be a smuggler’s vessel. It is armed, and we have no weapons,” N4 replied, the situation becoming more dire.

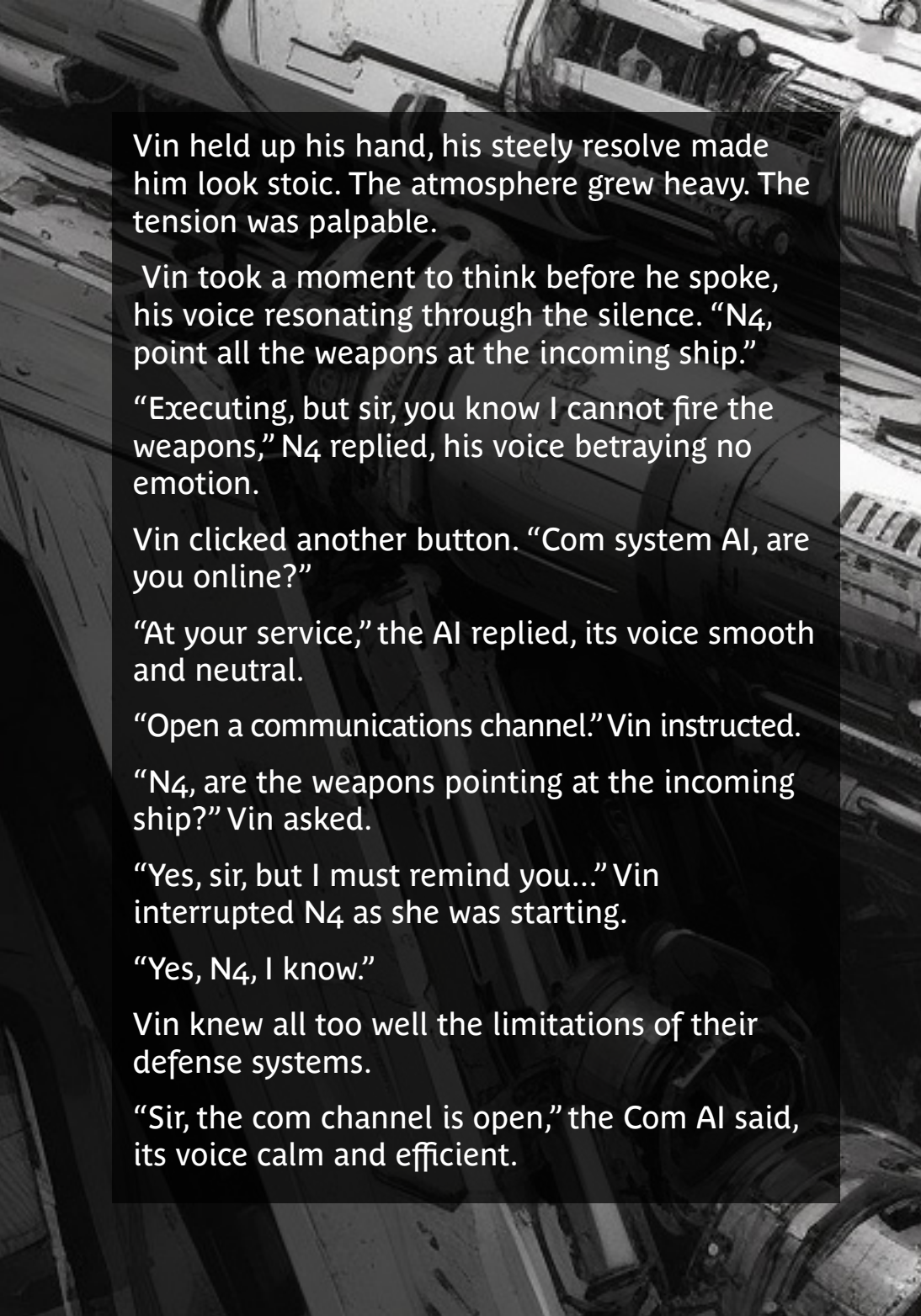
“I should be with you, man. I would kick that smuggler’s ass,” Raff replied, his eyes filled with determination.

Just then, another video window popped open, and it was Emily, her face contorted with worry. “Oh my God, Raff says you are under attack, and you have no weapons!”

“Sir, what should I do?” N4 asked, awaiting Vin’s orders.

“Vin, what are you going to do?” Emily cried, her voice cracking with fear.

“Bro, what’s the plan?” Raff asked, his gaze never leaving Vin’s face.



Vin held up his hand, his steely resolve made him look stoic. The atmosphere grew heavy. The tension was palpable.

Vin took a moment to think before he spoke, his voice resonating through the silence. “N4, point all the weapons at the incoming ship.”

“Executing, but sir, you know I cannot fire the weapons,” N4 replied, his voice betraying no emotion.

Vin clicked another button. “Com system AI, are you online?”

“At your service,” the AI replied, its voice smooth and neutral.

“Open a communications channel.” Vin instructed.

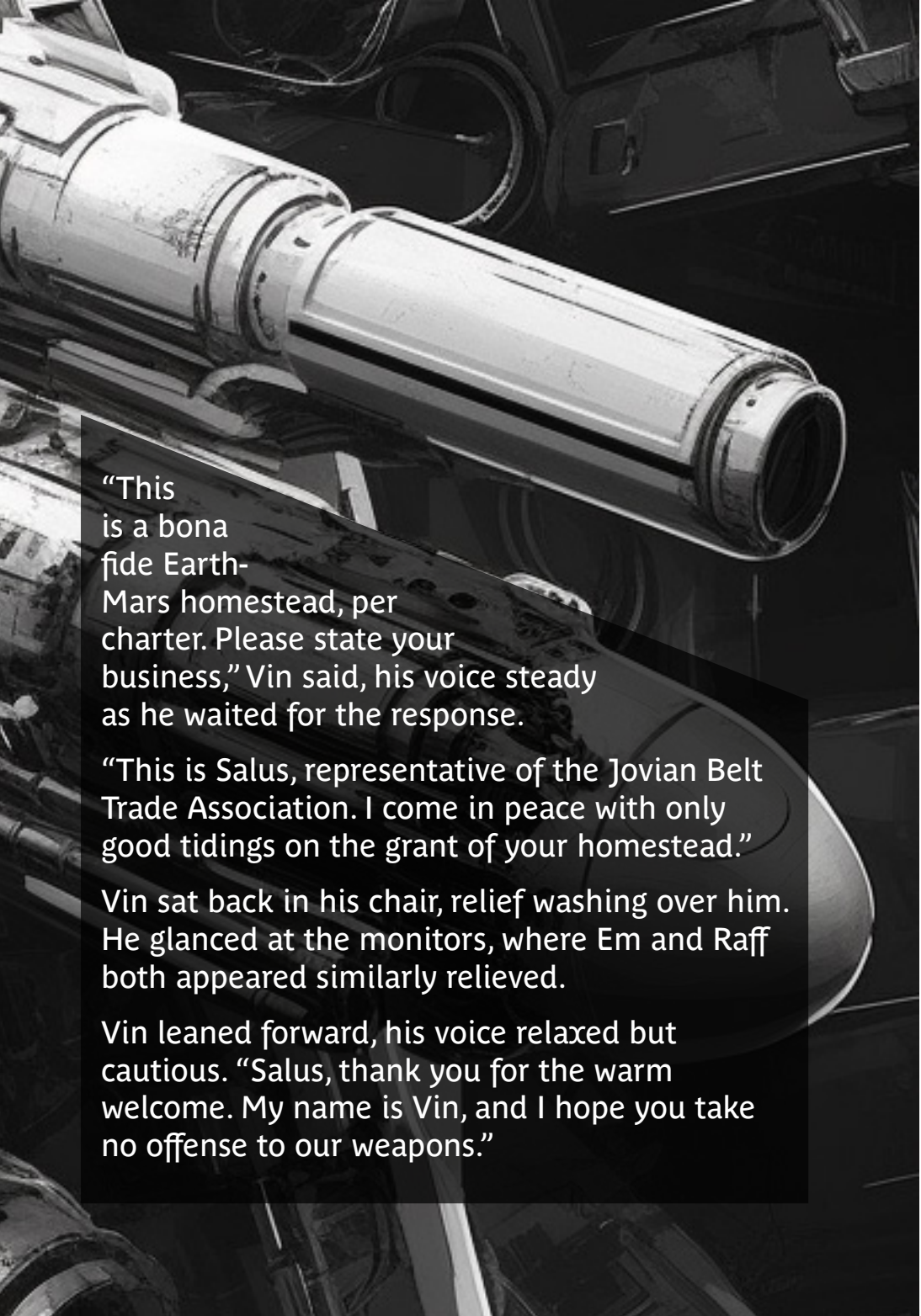
“N4, are the weapons pointing at the incoming ship?” Vin asked.

“Yes, sir, but I must remind you...” Vin interrupted N4 as she was starting.

“Yes, N4, I know.”

Vin knew all too well the limitations of their defense systems.

“Sir, the com channel is open,” the Com AI said, its voice calm and efficient.

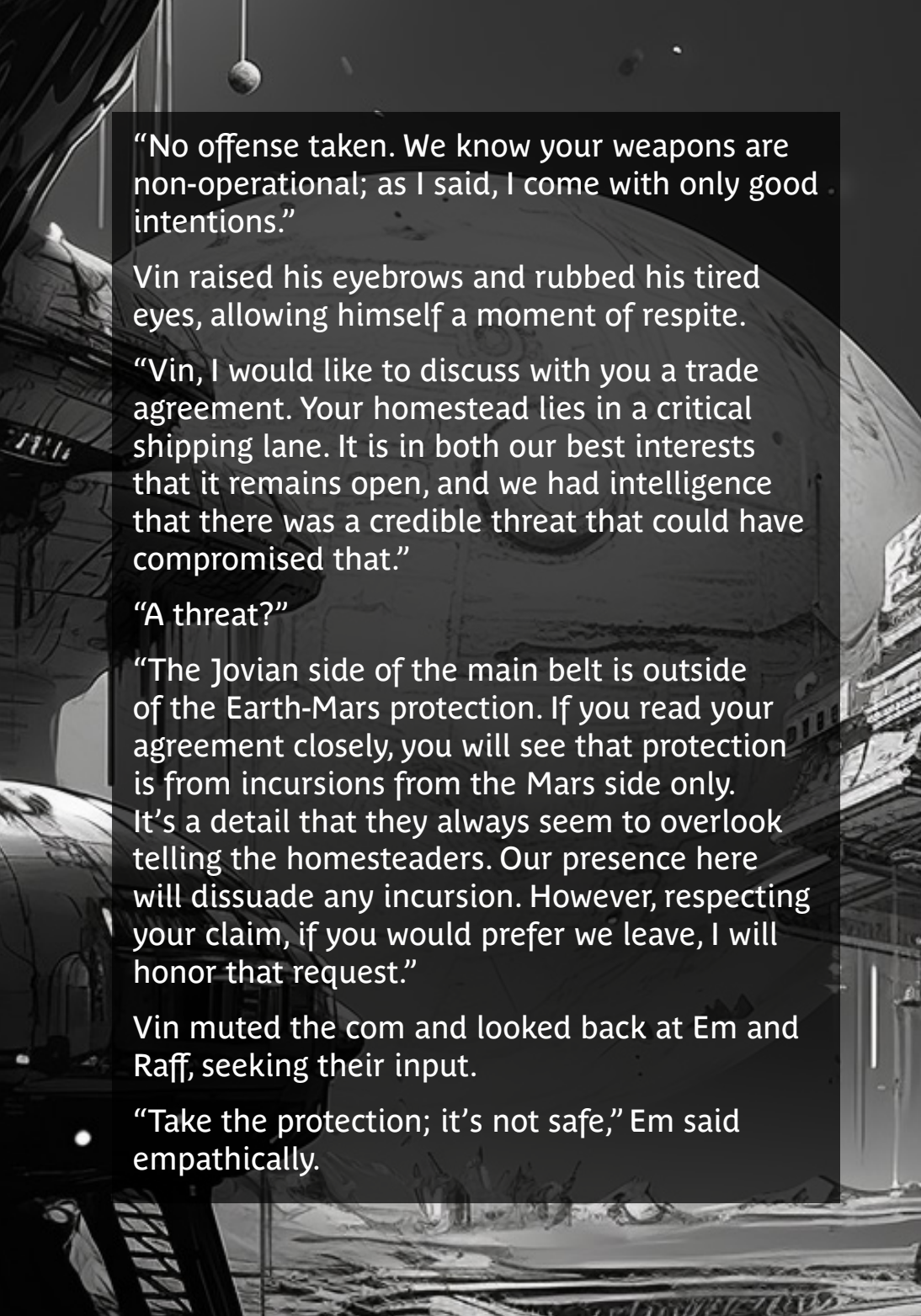


“This is a bona fide Earth-Mars homestead, per charter. Please state your business,” Vin said, his voice steady as he waited for the response.

“This is Salus, representative of the Jovian Belt Trade Association. I come in peace with only good tidings on the grant of your homestead.”

Vin sat back in his chair, relief washing over him. He glanced at the monitors, where Em and Raff both appeared similarly relieved.

Vin leaned forward, his voice relaxed but cautious. “Salus, thank you for the warm welcome. My name is Vin, and I hope you take no offense to our weapons.”



“No offense taken. We know your weapons are non-operational; as I said, I come with only good intentions.”

Vin raised his eyebrows and rubbed his tired eyes, allowing himself a moment of respite.

“Vin, I would like to discuss with you a trade agreement. Your homestead lies in a critical shipping lane. It is in both our best interests that it remains open, and we had intelligence that there was a credible threat that could have compromised that.”

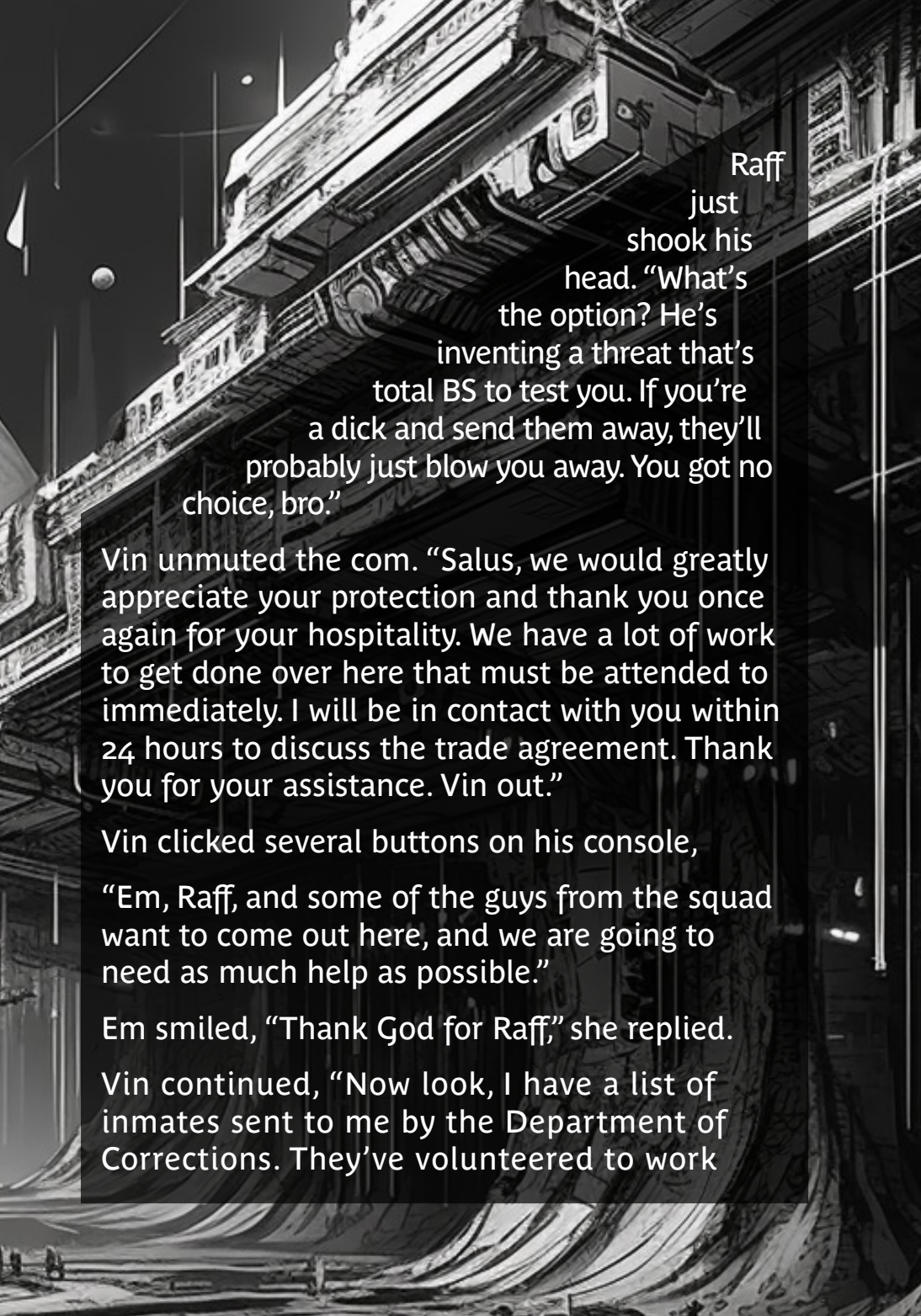
“A threat?”

“The Jovian side of the main belt is outside of the Earth-Mars protection. If you read your agreement closely, you will see that protection is from incursions from the Mars side only. It’s a detail that they always seem to overlook telling the homesteaders. Our presence here will dissuade any incursion. However, respecting your claim, if you would prefer we leave, I will honor that request.”

Vin muted the com and looked back at Em and Raff, seeking their input.

“Take the protection; it’s not safe,” Em said empathically.





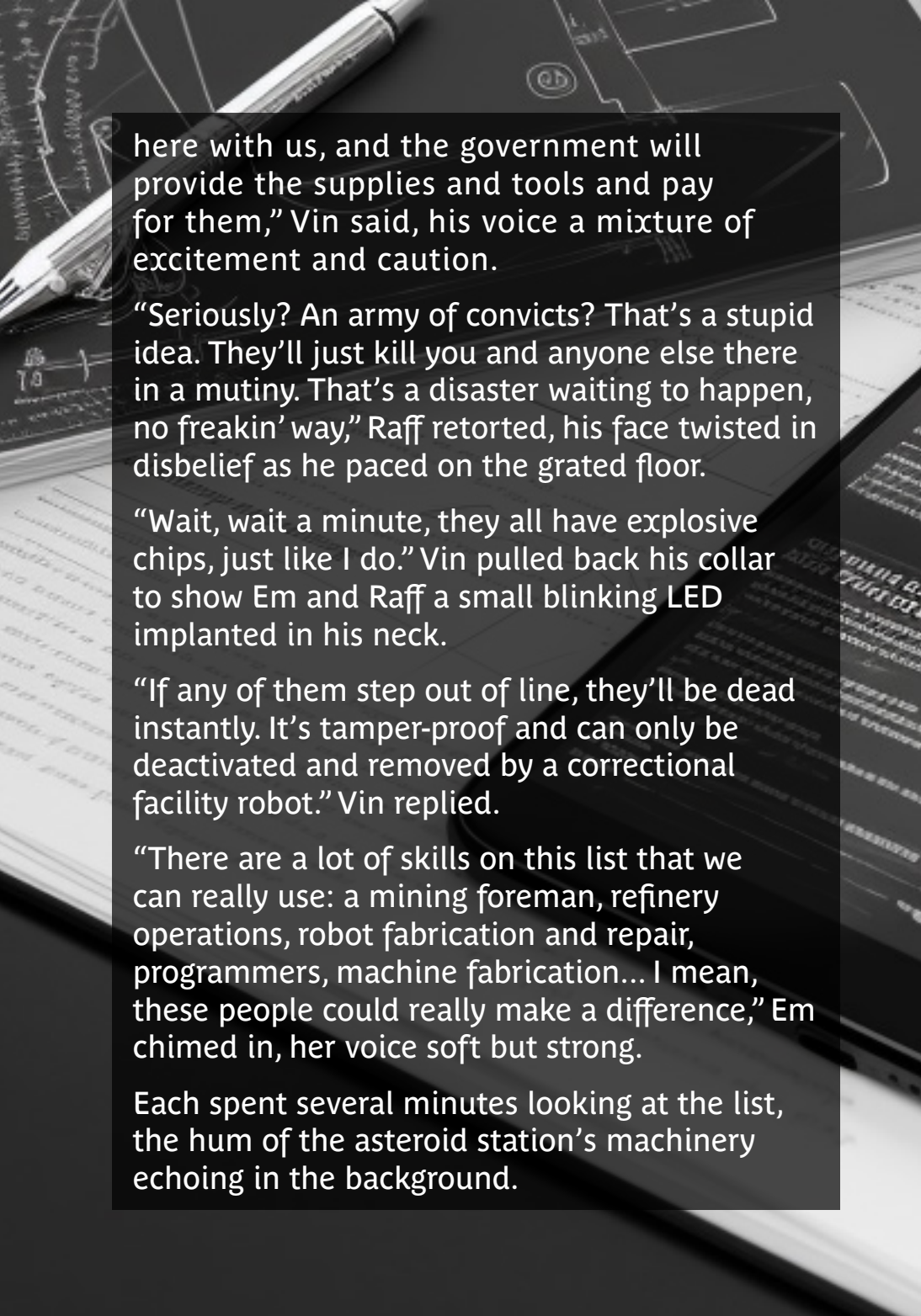
Raff  
just  
shook his  
head. “What’s  
the option? He’s  
inventing a threat that’s  
total BS to test you. If you’re  
a dick and send them away, they’ll  
probably just blow you away. You got no  
choice, bro.”

Vin unmuted the com. “Salus, we would greatly appreciate your protection and thank you once again for your hospitality. We have a lot of work to get done over here that must be attended to immediately. I will be in contact with you within 24 hours to discuss the trade agreement. Thank you for your assistance. Vin out.”

Vin clicked several buttons on his console,  
“Em, Raff, and some of the guys from the squad want to come out here, and we are going to need as much help as possible.”

Em smiled, “Thank God for Raff,” she replied.

Vin continued, “Now look, I have a list of inmates sent to me by the Department of Corrections. They’ve volunteered to work



here with us, and the government will provide the supplies and tools and pay for them,” Vin said, his voice a mixture of excitement and caution.

“Seriously? An army of convicts? That’s a stupid idea. They’ll just kill you and anyone else there in a mutiny. That’s a disaster waiting to happen, no freakin’ way,” Raff retorted, his face twisted in disbelief as he paced on the grated floor.

“Wait, wait a minute, they all have explosive chips, just like I do.” Vin pulled back his collar to show Em and Raff a small blinking LED implanted in his neck.

“If any of them step out of line, they’ll be dead instantly. It’s tamper-proof and can only be deactivated and removed by a correctional facility robot.” Vin replied.

“There are a lot of skills on this list that we can really use: a mining foreman, refinery operations, robot fabrication and repair, programmers, machine fabrication... I mean, these people could really make a difference,” Em chimed in, her voice soft but strong.

Each spent several minutes looking at the list, the hum of the asteroid station’s machinery echoing in the background.

“We have to give this thing our best shot. That means we need people here. Besides, Raff, you’ll be here watching our backs.” Em finally said.

Vin said his goodbyes to Raff and Em and reviewed their recommendations for prisoners to accept. He then compiled the recommendations from Em and Raff, along with his own, and sent them back to the correctional department. He immediately began checking for system data connectivity to the smuggler’s ship, N4’s update on the weapon systems, and the status of the robots offloading cargo.

...

N4 had been chasing wires and power lines in the smuggler’s ship, examining each junction and section for damage.

“Sir, the weapon systems should be fully functional. However, they rely on the engines for power, and the engines are not operational yet. I have checked to see if they could be powered by the engines on your craft. Unfortunately, that is not an option, as it would deplete and disable all other systems on the ship, including life support and communications.”

Vin listened intently to N4. He needed protection, time for Em and Raff to travel, and

credits to keep things going until the mining was fully operational. The best way to do that was to come to an agreement with Salus, even though he knew in his gut it was very risky to align with anyone or organization on the Jovian side of the belt without even knowing the people, companies, and politics involved.

“Sir, you have several messages in queue, including several additional ships that have just arrived on the Jovian side of the belt. All are seeking a discussion of trade agreements and alliances,” the Com AI robotic voice announced, resonating through the metallic chamber.

Vin pulled up the messages in the queue and viewed the oldest ones first. The Homestead Department was simply confirming that his homestead was recorded in the public records and had attached written verification to prove it. The second was from the government Office of Mining, informing him that he would have to pay taxes on the sales of his ore on a sliding scale, starting low to facilitate his operations. There were seven messages from ships congratulating him on his homestead and requesting a meeting to discuss alliances and trade agreements. He immediately pressed several buttons on the console to bring up the video feeds. In the cold void of space, near

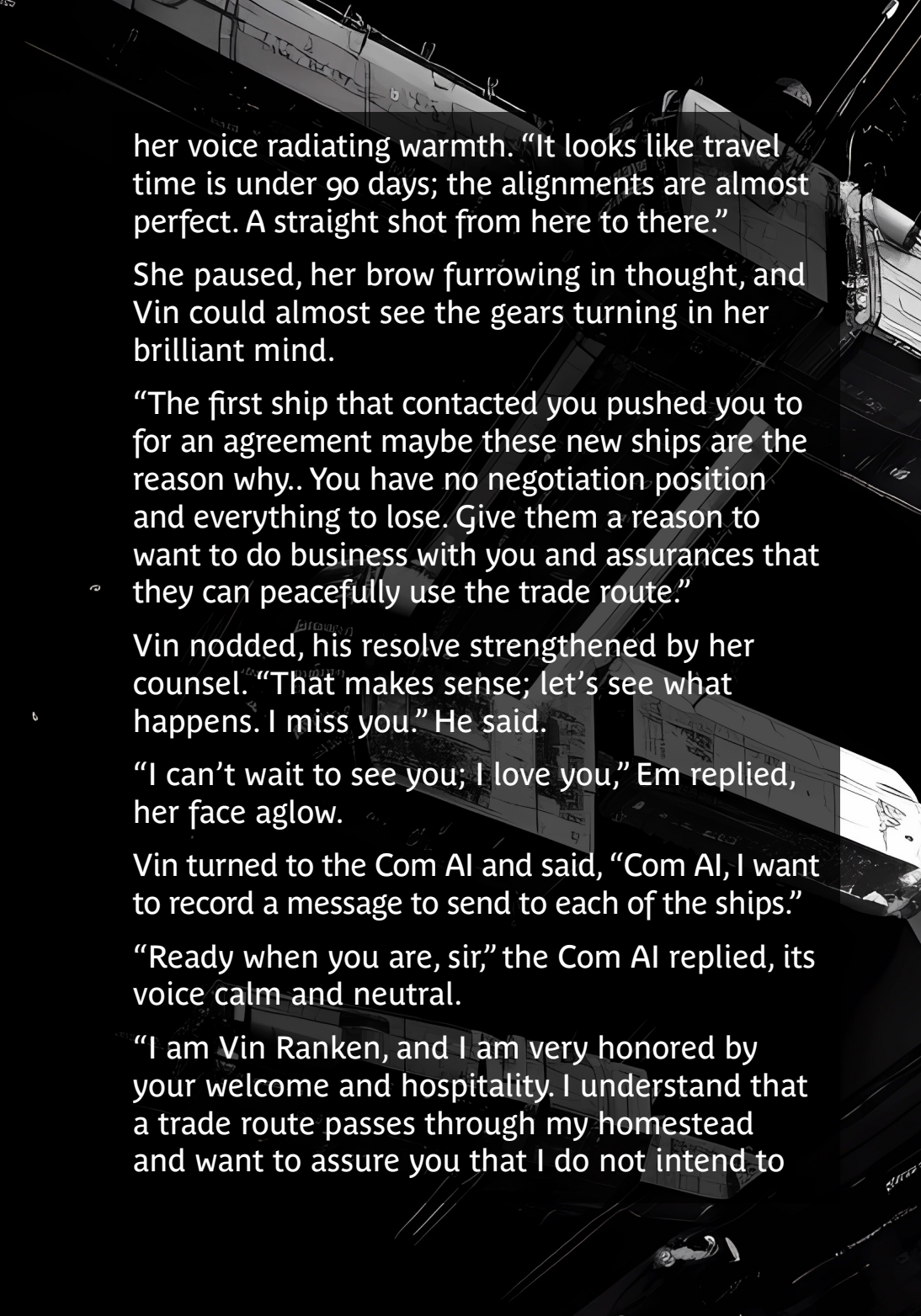
the Jovian border, floated a total of seven silent ships. Among them was Salus's vessel, which just moments ago seemed to be the only concern for Vin Ranken. The situation had changed, and the clarity Vin once felt had dissipated into the uncertainty of the unknown. What could the presence of these other ships mean?

Vin rose from his chair, feeling the unease of the situation settle into his bones. He paced the floor of his small but functional command center, musing on the possibilities. Aligning with Salus could alienate the others, or worse, he could unknowingly be siding with an enemy. The wrong decision here could be the end of everything.

The video screen on the far wall flashed, signaling an incoming call from Em. Vin crossed the room and pressed the button to accept it, eager to share his predicament with his confidant and beloved partner.

"You're not going to believe this," Vin said, his voice strained with worry. "There are seven different ships that want to talk about a trade agreement and offer congratulations on the homestead."

Em's smile shone brightly, a beacon of hope in the darkness. "I have good news as well," she said,



her voice radiating warmth. “It looks like travel time is under 90 days; the alignments are almost perfect. A straight shot from here to there.”

She paused, her brow furrowing in thought, and Vin could almost see the gears turning in her brilliant mind.

“The first ship that contacted you pushed you to for an agreement maybe these new ships are the reason why. You have no negotiation position and everything to lose. Give them a reason to want to do business with you and assurances that they can peacefully use the trade route.”

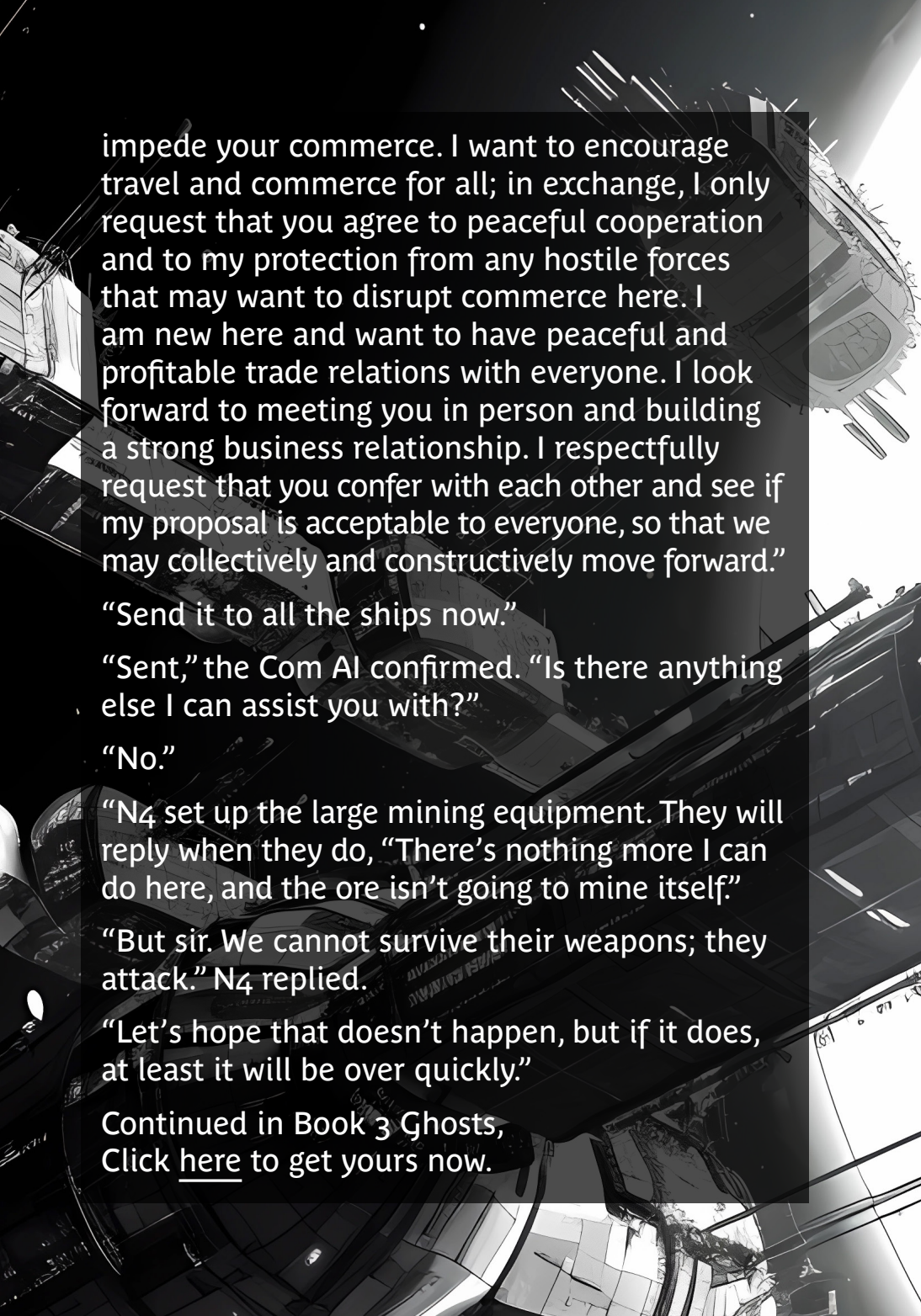
Vin nodded, his resolve strengthened by her counsel. “That makes sense; let’s see what happens. I miss you.” He said.

“I can’t wait to see you; I love you,” Em replied, her face aglow.

Vin turned to the Com AI and said, “Com AI, I want to record a message to send to each of the ships.”

“Ready when you are, sir,” the Com AI replied, its voice calm and neutral.

“I am Vin Ranken, and I am very honored by your welcome and hospitality. I understand that a trade route passes through my homestead and want to assure you that I do not intend to



impede your commerce. I want to encourage travel and commerce for all; in exchange, I only request that you agree to peaceful cooperation and to my protection from any hostile forces that may want to disrupt commerce here. I am new here and want to have peaceful and profitable trade relations with everyone. I look forward to meeting you in person and building a strong business relationship. I respectfully request that you confer with each other and see if my proposal is acceptable to everyone, so that we may collectively and constructively move forward.”

“Send it to all the ships now.”

“Sent,” the Com AI confirmed. “Is there anything else I can assist you with?”

“No.”

“N4 set up the large mining equipment. They will reply when they do, “There’s nothing more I can do here, and the ore isn’t going to mine itself.”

“But sir. We cannot survive their weapons; they attack.” N4 replied.

“Let’s hope that doesn’t happen, but if it does, at least it will be over quickly.”

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