

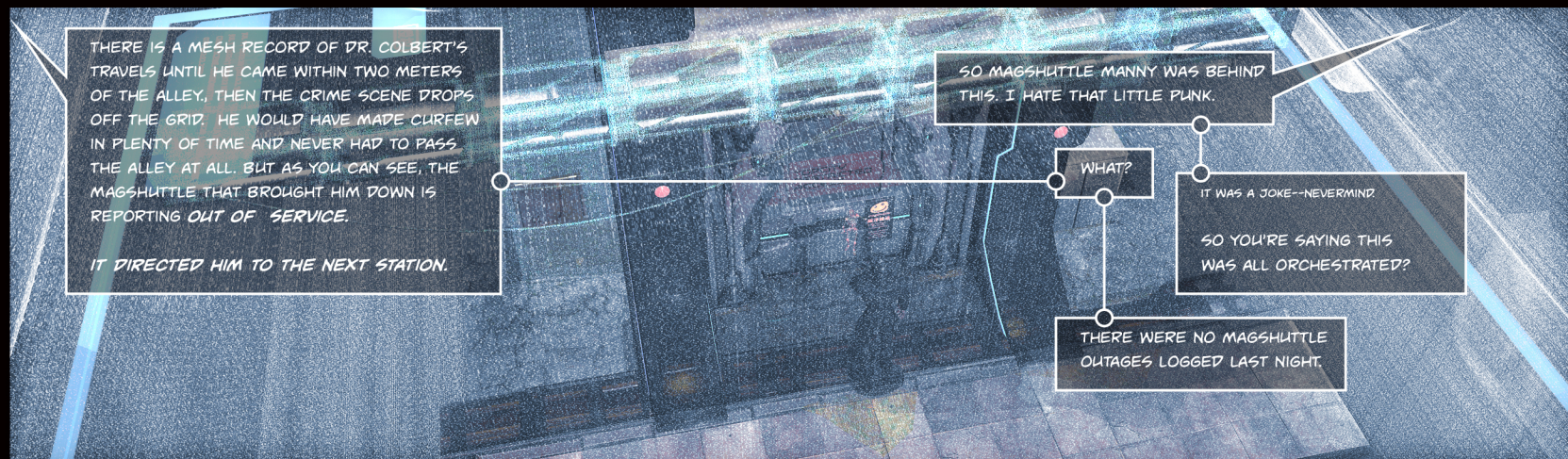


THERE WAS NO MESH RECORD OF THE ATTACK, AND THE LOGS SHOW NO OUTAGE IN SECTOR NINE. SECTOR OUTAGES ARE NOT THAT UNCOMMON, BUT ISOLATED TO A CRIME SCENE--THIS IS UNUSUAL.

THERE'S NO MESH RECORD ON ANY OF THESE CASES. MAYBE THERE'S SOME KIND OF JAMMING DEVICE OUT THERE.

THOSE HAVE BEEN OUTLAWED SINCE THE TWENTIES.

OH, OKAY. WE WOULDN'T WANT ANYONE BREAKING THE LAW.



THERE IS A MESH RECORD OF DR. COLBERT'S TRAVELS UNTIL HE CAME WITHIN TWO METERS OF THE ALLEY, THEN THE CRIME SCENE DROPS OFF THE GRID. HE WOULD HAVE MADE CURFEW IN PLENTY OF TIME AND NEVER HAD TO PASS THE ALLEY AT ALL. BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, THE MAGSHUTTLE THAT BROUGHT HIM DOWN IS REPORTING OUT OF SERVICE. IT DIRECTED HIM TO THE NEXT STATION.

SO MAGSHUTTLE MANNY WAS BEHIND THIS. I HATE THAT LITTLE PUNK.

WHAT?

IT WAS A JOKE--NEVERMIND. SO YOU'RE SAYING THIS WAS ALL ORCHESTRATED?

THERE WERE NO MAGSHUTTLE OUTAGES LOGGED LAST NIGHT.



MAYBE IT WAS A MOMENTARY GLITCH.

MAYBE HE WAS JUST IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME. I MEAN THE KID DOES FIT THE PROFILE PERFECTLY.

NOT QUITE. PREVIOUS VICTIMS WERE YOUNG, WHITE, AND BLOND, BUT ALL WERE ALSO REGISTERED SEX WORKERS.



STILL, IT FITS A STANDARD HUMAN-SYNTHETIC RAPE M.O. WHERE THE SYNTHETIC ASSAULTS THE VICTIM WHILE THE HUMAN OBSERVES.

TAG TEAMS.

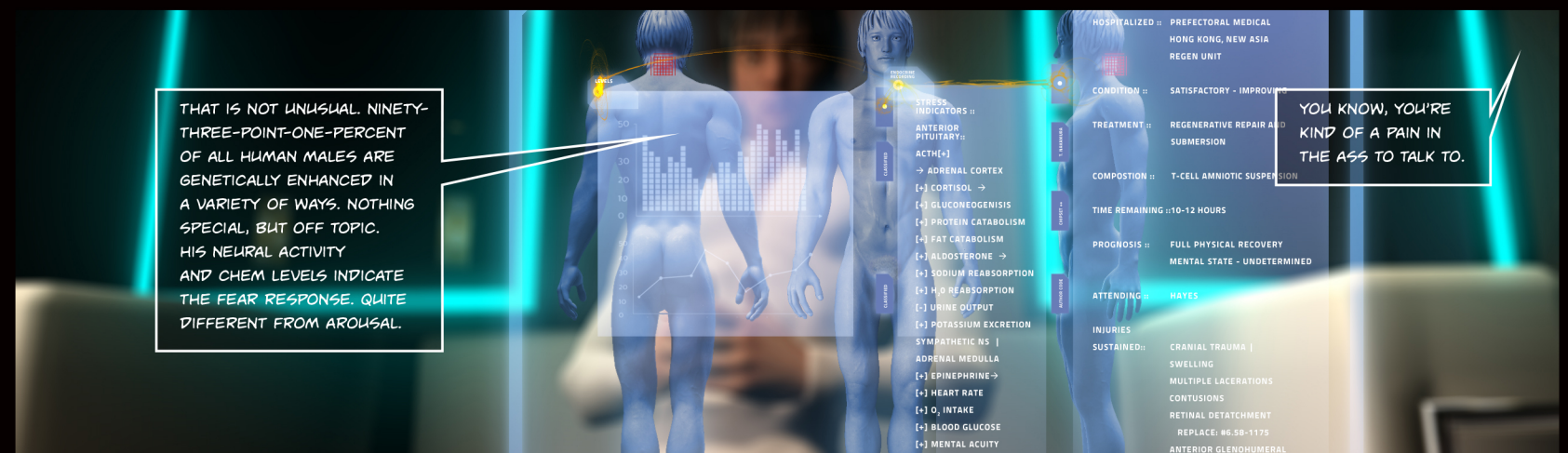
YES, EXCEPT THAT SURELY THEY KNEW WHO HE WAS. A BASIC CHIP SCAN WOULD HAVE IDENTIFIED DR. COLBERT. THE COMMON DOWNTOWN TAG TEAM WOULD HAVE PASSED OVER HIM AS A HIGH-RISK MARK.



YOU SOUND LIKE CLUTTER. MAYBE THEY WERE JUST STUPID OR MAYBE THE KID ISN'T MR. PERFECT AFTER ALL.

MAYBE HE WAS DOWNTOWN LOOKING FOR A LITTLE KINKY. LIKE HE ARRANGED IT -- SO, YOU KNOW, AN ASPIRING SEX WORKER.

I MEAN, HE HAS IMPRESSIVE ENGINEERING.



THAT IS NOT UNUSUAL. NINETY-THREE-POINT-ONE-PERCENT OF ALL HUMAN MALES ARE GENETICALLY ENHANCED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. NOTHING SPECIAL, BUT OFF TOPIC. HIS NEURAL ACTIVITY AND CHEM LEVELS INDICATE THE FEAR RESPONSE. QUITE DIFFERENT FROM AROUSAL.

YOU KNOW, YOU'RE KIND OF A PAIN IN THE ASS TO TALK TO.