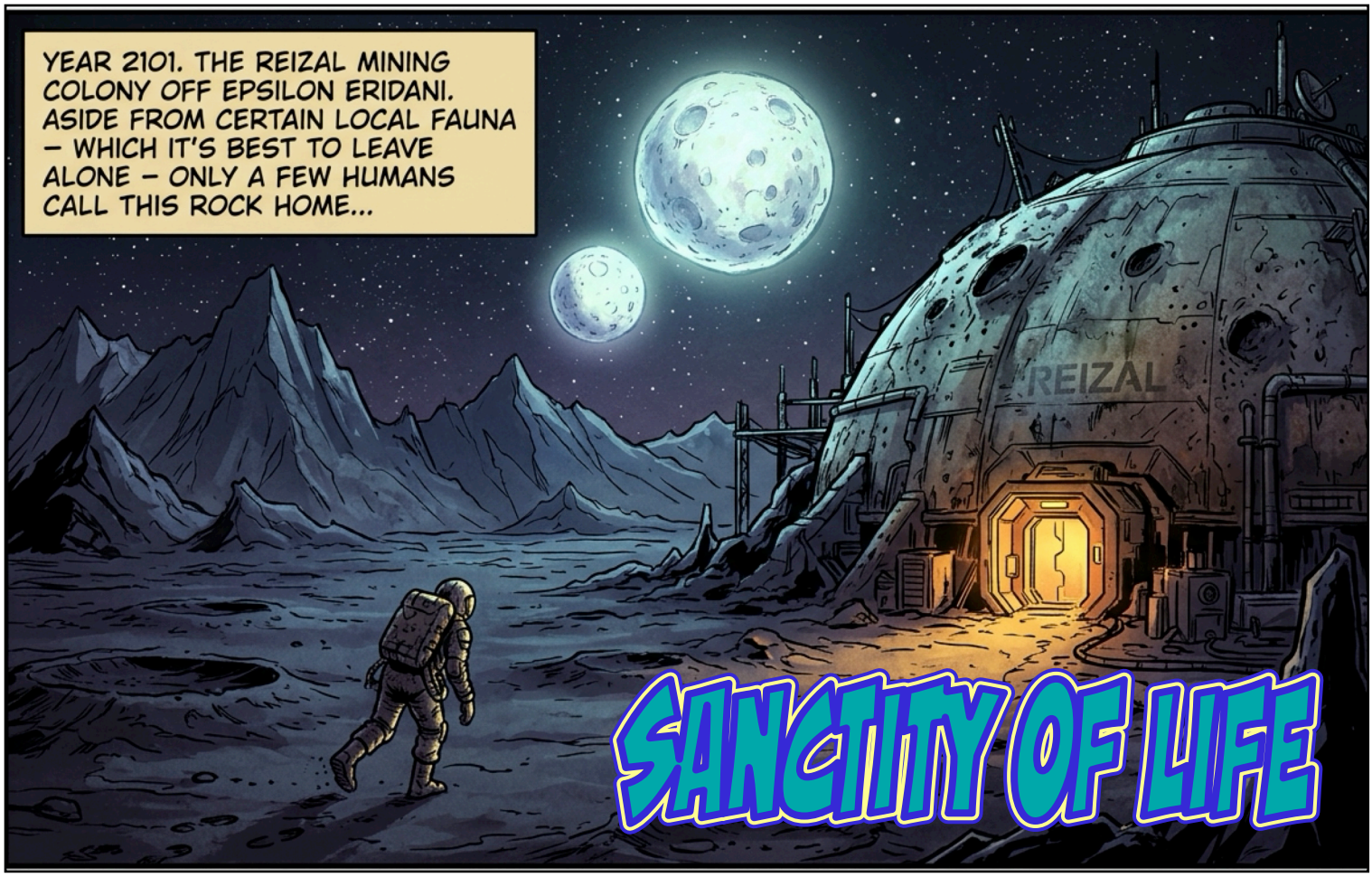

YEAR 2101. THE REIZAL MINING COLONY OFF EPSILON ERIDANI. ASIDE FROM CERTAIN LOCAL FAUNA – WHICH IT'S BEST TO LEAVE ALONE – ONLY A FEW HUMANS CALL THIS ROCK HOME...
REIZAL
SANCTITY OF LIFE




BEEP!
BEEP!
HISS!


Trace, we got the alert. What happened?
Mineral deposits in the South Quadrant....
South Quadrant? Jesus Heinlein Christ! You were supposed to sweep it first!
...know a vein when I see one. So I investigated. And stepped in a nest of –
Cerelopods? God no!


Count your blessings, m' love. You're back safe n' sound.
NO – IT'S IN MY SUIT!!


HONEY, I'VE GOT THIS. JUST DON'T MOVE!!

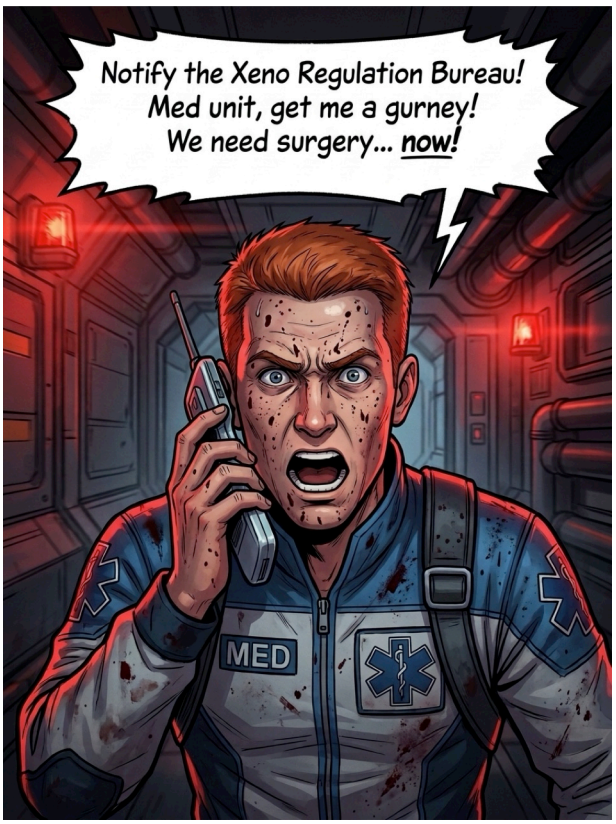

One well cooked Cerelopod, coming up!
BZZT!


WARNING
Conors, what caused this hole?


That's... where it hit me first.
Did it attach to your face at any time? Tell the truth.
Maybe for a *second*, sure?
Doc?


That's all it takes. How do you feel?
Like the shit storm of a millennia just unloaded on my head.
Less existentially, I mean?
MED




Notify the Xeno Regulation Bureau! Med unit, get me a gurney! We need surgery... **now!**
MED


HANG IN THERE, TRACE!
IT BURNS! CUT IT OUT!
I GIVE YOU MY WORD AS A DOCTOR AND YOUR FRIEND. WE WILL!


CLINIC
INCOMING. EVERYONE - MOVE!!

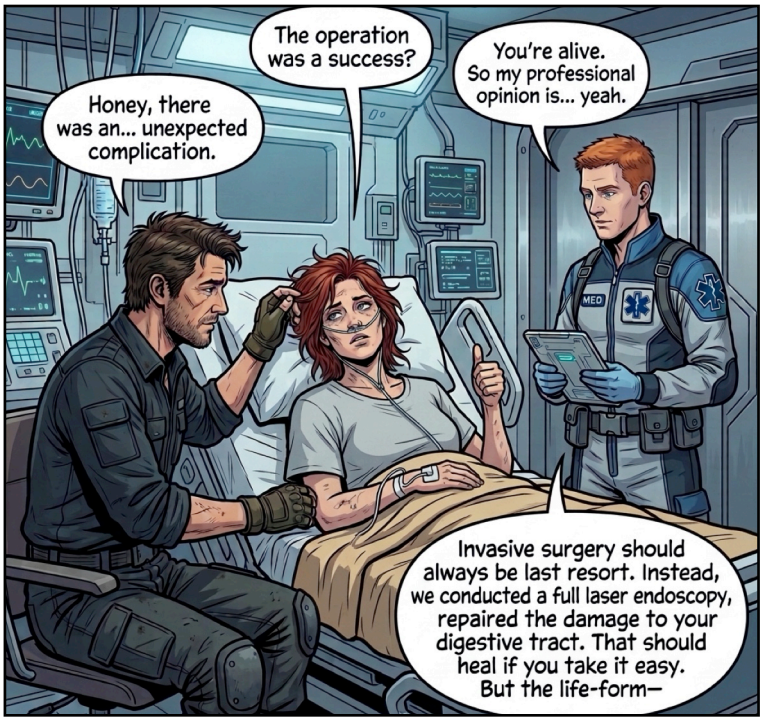

Breathe in deep. Trust me, THIS is the easy part.


EVEN EASIER THAN ADVERTISED...


Finally, you decided to wake up. That's... good.
More like GREAT.


I was covered in Cerelopod goo. Yuck. I hope for both of us they cleaned me up first.


DO YOU FEEL ANY PAIN, CONOR? ANY TENDERNESS... HERE?
ALWAYS THE WISE ASS. SUPER TROOPER, TOO.
N...NO. THOUGH I WISH YOU'D TRIM THOSE FINGERNAILS. THESE SUTURES ARE BRAND NEW.


Honey, there was an... unexpected complication.
The operation was a success?
You're alive. So my professional opinion is... yeah.
MED
Invasive surgery should always be last resort. Instead, we conducted a full laser endoscopy, repaired the damage to your digestive tract. That should heal if you take it easy. But the life-form—


YOU DIDN'T *REMOVE* IT?
I—CAN'T. NOT LEGALLY. REMOVING IT NOW WOULD KILL THE XENO.
NO SHIT, SHERLOCK. THAT'S THE POINT!
IF I COULD. BUT MY HANDS ARE TIED. AND... THERE'S SOMEONE COMING YOU NEED TO MEET.


LATER
The Representative for the Xeno Regulation's en route. Just one more hour til the shuttle lands.
This is none of his fucking business!
Hey – easy there with the meds.
Whatever I eat, it does too. If I can ***overdose*** that bio-squatter – *good!*


Honey, I promise we'll fight this. All the way to the Federation's Highest Court!
Doc promised to help. ***NOW*** look where we are.


BEEP!
BEEEEEEEP...




Rodney? Tracie? This is Councilman Esquaillat, from the Xeno Bureau. He's here to make sure... well, that you're OK.
So, you're the host I've heard so much about!
Host?!? My name is Traci Conor. Senior Colony Mineral Specialist, you motherfuc—
Yes, Traci's the one carrying the parasite. Sir.

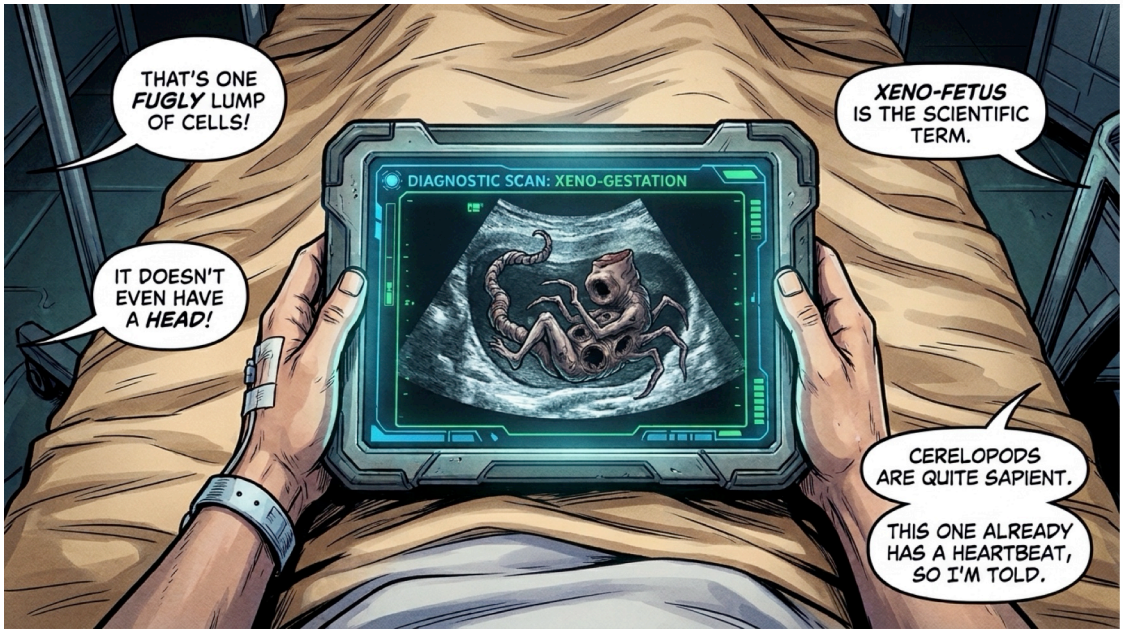

In the Bureau, we avoid the word parasite. That's dehumanizing.
But, it's not human. Is it?
Quite human-centric of me, mea culpa. We prefer the term independent life-form.
It's imbedded in my intestines. That doesn't sound independent to me!


What Ms. Conor and I must discuss is sensitive. If you could leave us alone...
I'm Tracie's fiance! Hell no, I won't!
The Bureau feels it crucial I make our position clear: that life-form she carries is but a *temporary inconvenience.*
Gestation takes 7 months. Before you know it, the two of you can be on your way. No harm no foul, as the maxim goes.
"No harm"? That's easy for you to say. It's inside me... *not you!*


You want this creature to feed off my wife?
Your fiance, unless I misheard?
Well, it detaches naturally. C-Section could work.
OW!
Don't split hairs, bureaucrat. How are you gonna get it out, without killing her?!


CUT HER OPEN *NOW*, GET IT OVER WITH!
ABSOLUTELY NOT. IT IS ILLEGAL – AND IMMORAL – TO KILL THE LIFE-FORM BY REMOVING IT BEFORE VIABILITY'S REACHED.
WHAT'S **IMMORAL** IS COMMANDEERING TRACI'S BODY AGAINST HER WILL!


Doctor, would you show the hos- I mean, the ***patient*** your imaging, please?


THAT'S ONE ***FUGLY*** LUMP OF CELLS!
DIAGNOSTIC SCAN: XENO-GESTATION
XENO-FETUS IS THE SCIENTIFIC TERM.
IT DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A ***HEAD!***
CERELOPODS ARE QUITE SAPIENT.
THIS ONE ALREADY HAS A HEARTBEAT, SO I'M TOLD.


I DIDN'T ***CONSENT*** TO THIS!
AS FOR ITS SOUL, WHO KNOWS? BUT BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY, NO?
DIAGNOSTIC SCAN: XENO-GESTATION
YET IN A WAY, YOU DID. I'M TOLD YOU VISITED THE SOUTH QUADRANT VOLUNTARILY. NO PRECAUTIONARY BIO-SCANS. AS SENIOR COLONY MINERAL SPECIALIST, YOU OF ALL PEOPLE KNEW THE RISKS.


I DIDN'T INVITE THAT THING TO SHOVE WHATEVER THAT WAS DOWN MY THROAT!
That life you carry didn't commit that trespass. The Cerelopod he killed did. Which was tragically self-defense. But one cannot blame the sins of the... father, for lack of a better term, on a child.
CRASH!


GIVE ME A SCALPEL! IF YOU WON'T DO THE RIGHT THING, I'LL KILL THIS ONE TOO!
I KNOW THIS IS ALL QUITE SUDDEN. BUT THE FEDERATION CAN'T ALLOW ANY POTENTIALLY SENTIENT LIFE-FORM TO COME TO HARM. THAT'S WHY WE'VE BROUGHT THIS...
CALM DOWN!

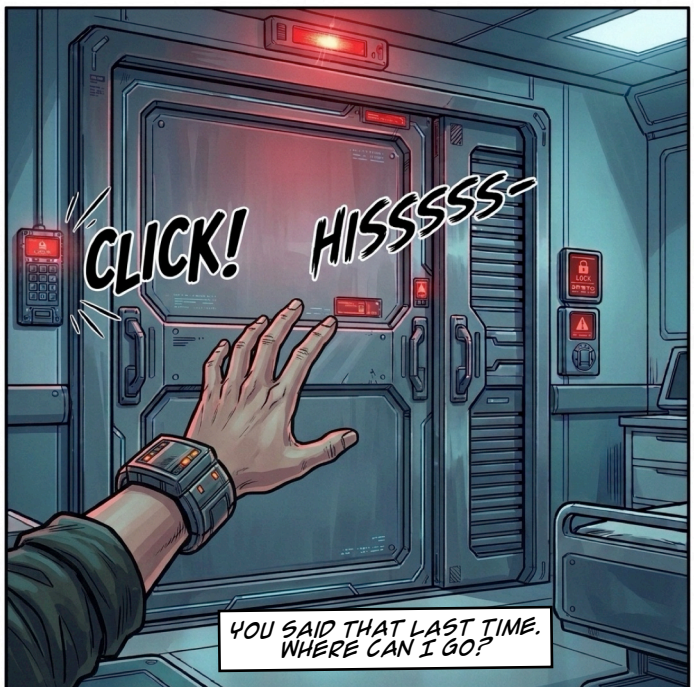

BZZZZT...!


What in Bode's Galaxy is *that*?!?
Hey!
A biometric monitor. It will keep track of both *YOUR* life-signs, and that that of the being you so graciously host now.
CLICK!
I'm not the Bureau's incubator. *Fuck you!*


Not so fast, Councilman! Reconsider that report or we'll sue!


A small sacrifice for the greater good. As I'm sure you will realize once you've had time to calm down. You and your fiance would surely like some privacy. I'll remain on the surface overnight. But for now, excuse me. Paperwork calls.
Trace, I'm so, so sorry. I asked them to consider your needs as my patient, but –

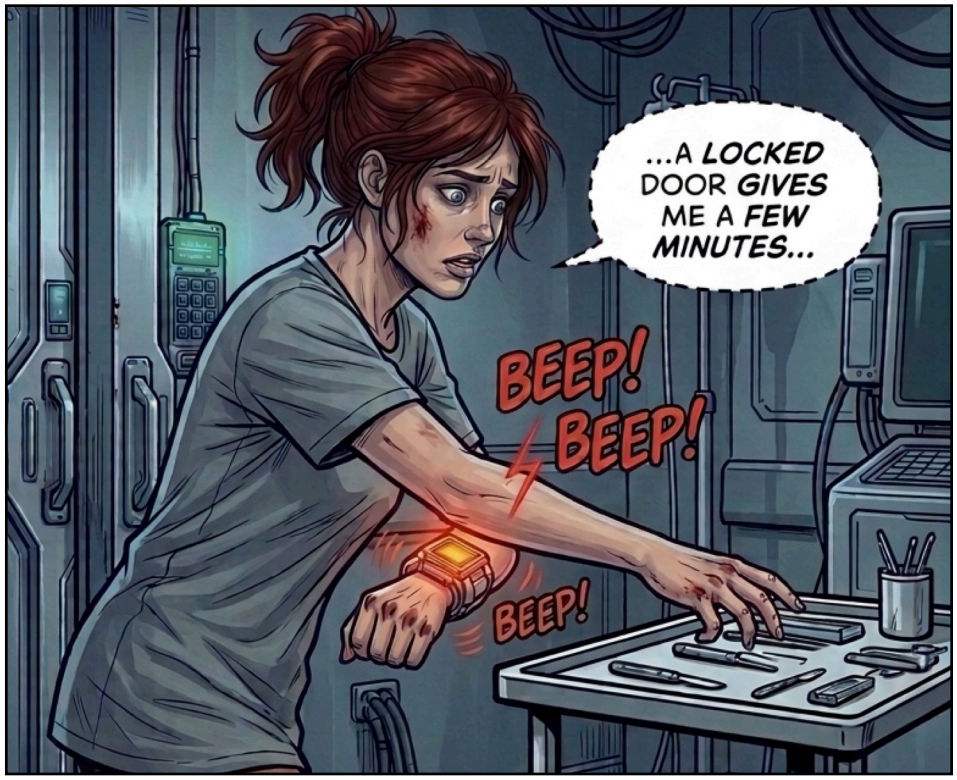

Honey, I'll be right back. Don't move!

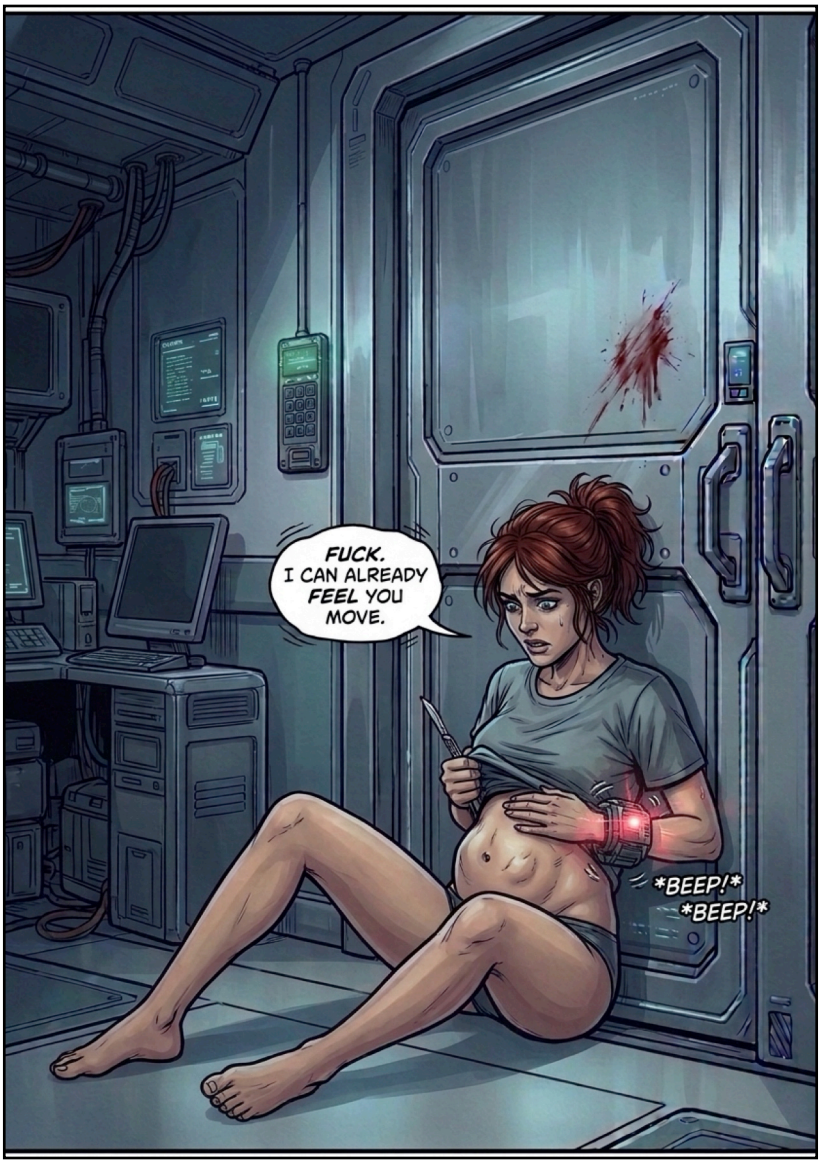

CLICK!
HISSSSS-
YOU SAID THAT LAST TIME. WHERE CAN I GO?


WHAT AM I, A FUCKING PRISONER?!?


SHIT. IT'S LOCKED! COME BACK, YOU BASTARDS. LET ME GO!


TATTLETALE. MONITORING MY EVERY MOVE. WHILE IT FEEDS ON ME... FOR SEVEN MONTHS?
BEEP!
BEEP!


...A LOCKED DOOR GIVES ME A FEW MINUTES...
BEEP!
BEEP!
BEEP!







2026 – J.E. CLARKE