

Light Novel by **TK**

# XPASS



**VOL.1**  
**Deep Diving**

# NEUR CORE

## N I C



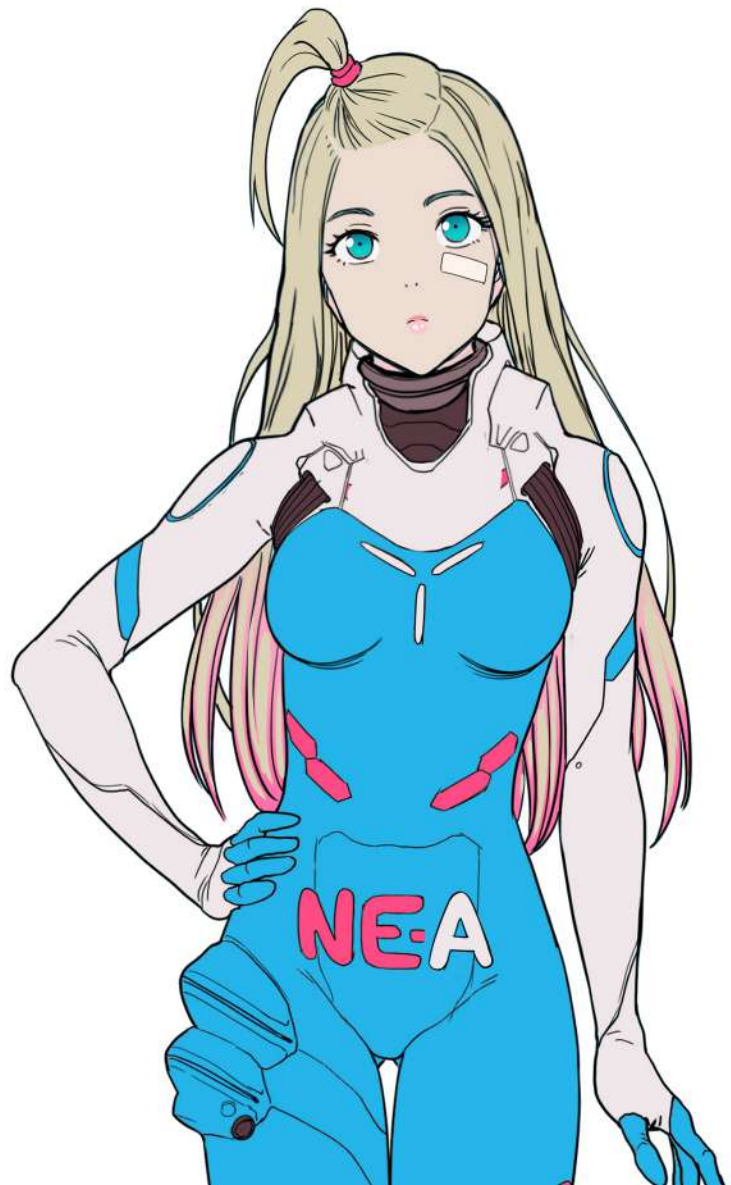
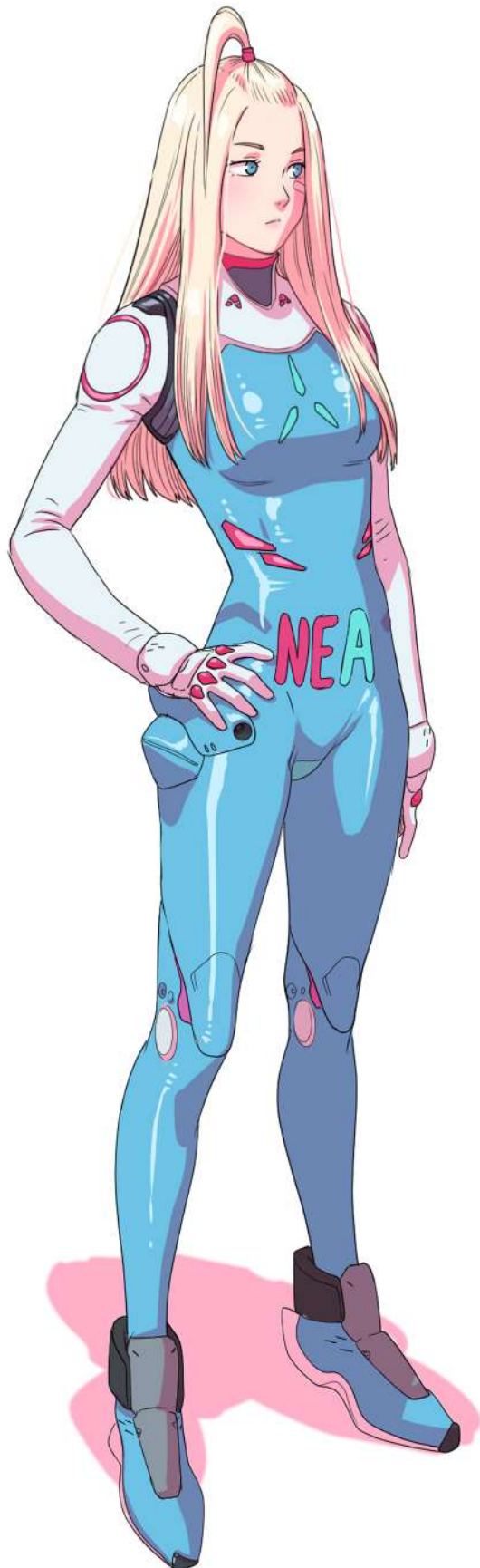
Nic.  
Pilot of the  
Neuroedge-N unit  
Age 18  
Height 1.70 m  
Weight 64 kg



# NEUR CORE

## AUDREY

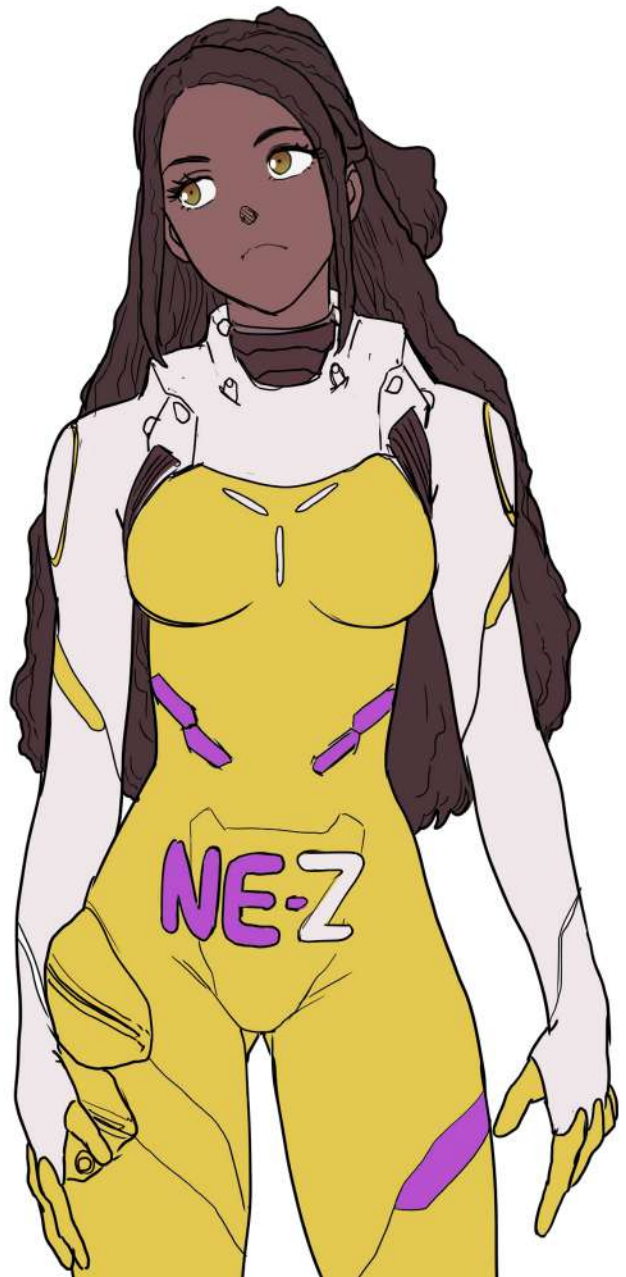
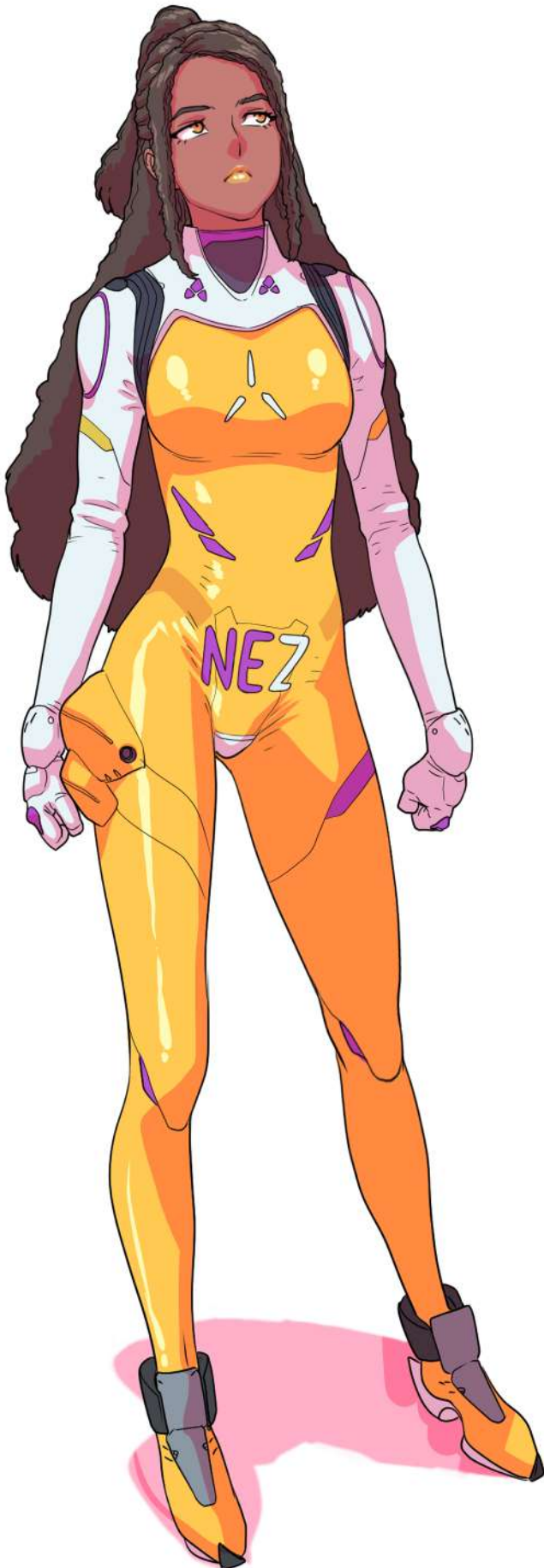
Audrey.  
Pilot of the  
Neuroedge-A unit  
Age between 17 and 18  
Height 1.47 m  
Weight 40 kg



# NEUR CORE

## ZURI

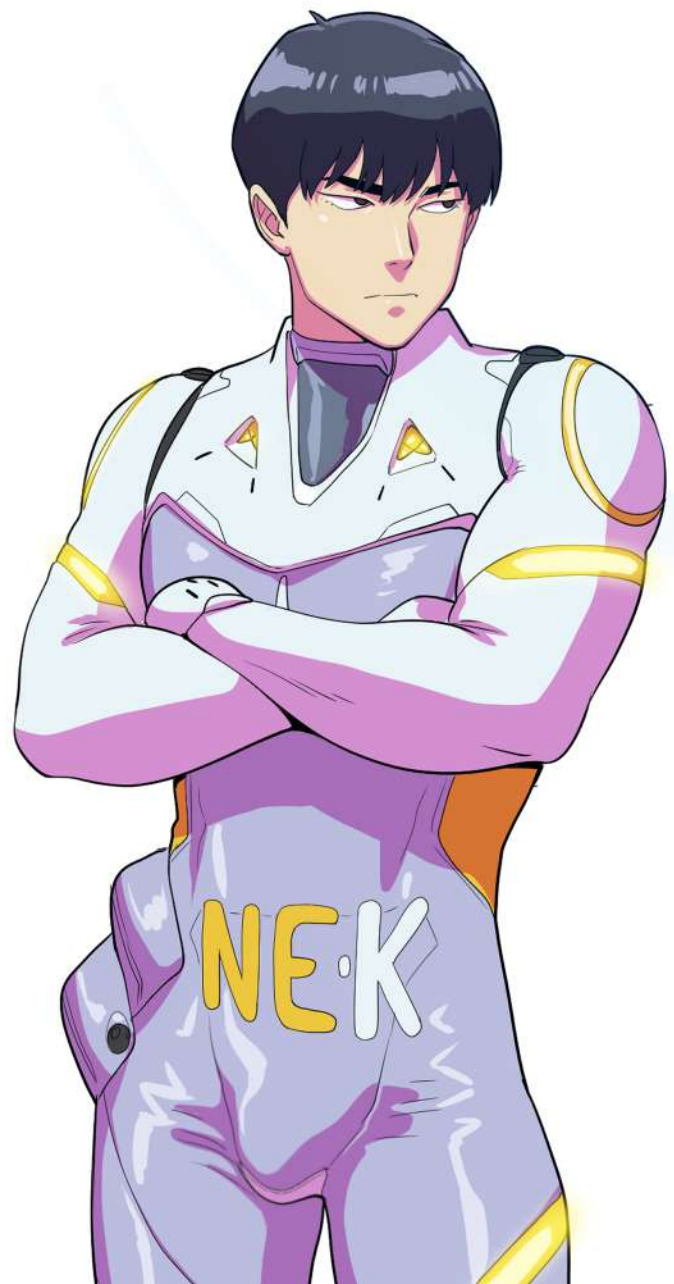
Zuri.  
Pilot of the  
Neuroedge-Z unit  
Age 24  
Height 1.62 m  
Weight 51 kg



# NEUR CORE

## KENJI

Kenji.  
Pilot of the  
Neuroedge-k unit  
Age 20  
Height 1.82 m  
Weight 78 kg



# NEURCORE

## DOUGLAS SCHNEIDER

President of Neurocore  
Industries specializing  
in cybernetic technology  
and artificial intelligence



# NEUR CORE

DR. SANDRA MEYER

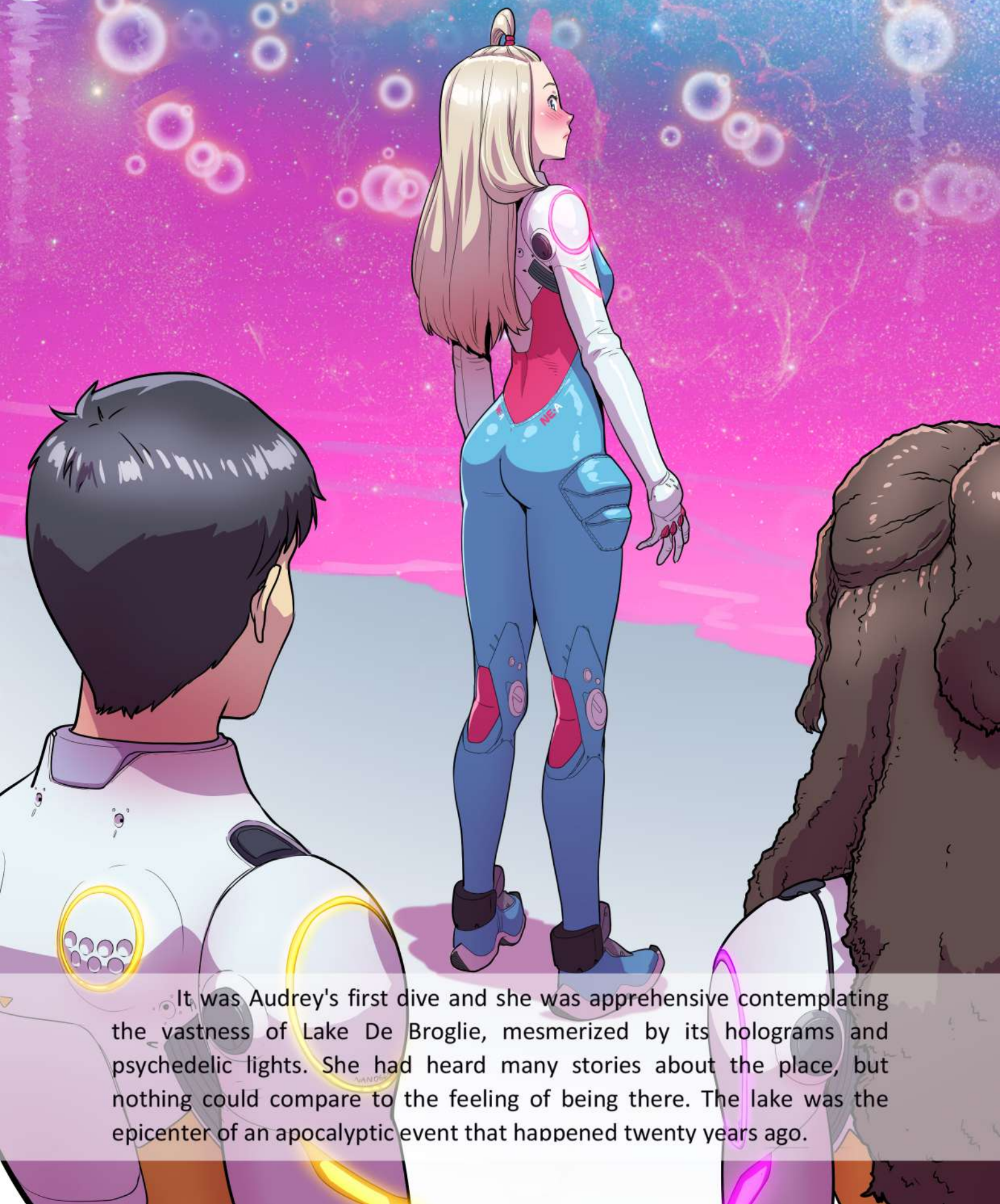
Lead scientist of the  
Neuroedge division in  
deep diving research

Developer of  
the Neuroedge  
extracortical  
system



# EPISODE 1

## DEEP DIVING



It was Audrey's first dive and she was apprehensive contemplating the vastness of Lake De Broglie, mesmerized by its holograms and psychedelic lights. She had heard many stories about the place, but nothing could compare to the feeling of being there. The lake was the epicenter of an apocalyptic event that happened twenty years ago.



In 2025, a gigantic humanoid creature of unknown origin arrived on Earth, obliterating entire cities with its relentless fury. After a year on its march of global destruction, the creature died suddenly as mysteriously as it appeared. From its remains, a gigantic lake of bizarre matter and continental dimensions was now explored by Neurocore, a megacorporation that had survived the apocalypse and was assembling its top teams to study the phenomenon.

The three pilots were gathered on the shore of the lake, but only Audrey would enter. Kenji stared at her. Thoughtful, she did not notice the indiscreet look that the young man cast on her, admiring the appearance of the shiny latex that molded so well the shapes of the young woman's body.

– Hey, Audrey. You look so hot in this outfit! We should hook up again one of these days.

The girl snapped out of her reverie at the young man's insinuating words, and a blush came over her face.

– Give me a break, Kenji. Can't you see she's fucking anxious? – Zuri retorted angrily.

Audrey smiled awkwardly at Kenji. His words delivered an unresolved matter between the two. She was a little embarrassed by the guilt of being glad that the boy had at least noticed her.

She wanted to get out of there and bury her face somewhere.

– I'm ready. - She reported over the intercom.

The command center was located at the top of the building that stood behind the launch pad of the Neuroedge Unit, a humanoid cybernetic titan about three hundred feet tall, designed to be a kind of submersible for the diver.



– Latches from one to six released. Begin cage opening. –  
announced operator 1.

– Cage unlocked, Neuroedge cleared for Deep Dive – reported  
operator 2.

The interior of the Neuroedge cabin was a gigantic dark sphere and the first obstacle to overcome for anyone applying to become a Deep Diver. Entering its core was like a death dive into darkness. The feeling was of suicide and many candidates, in the past, failed in this selective stage. Audrey had already become a pilot, but this was her first real dive with the Neuroedge unit. She jumped unhesitatingly through the hatch and accelerated with the force of gravity, but as soon as she passed the center of the chamber, she bounced back as if she were bound by rubber bands and a force tried to stabilize her in the middle of the sphere. Then the inner walls of the chamber lit up, revealing the panorama outside. It was as if the pilot was floating freely in the outside environment without the use of any equipment. All instrument graphics and communication channels appeared floating in the air in augmented reality.

The young woman dived with her Neuroedge into the lake causing a large splash and ripples on its surface, as if, in fact, she was diving into water, but the interior did not seem to share the same properties as the exterior. There were no disturbances, it was like a slow plunge into a vacuum.

A diffuse light, like that of a cloudy day, filled the space that unfolded to infinity. The depth marker was advancing fast.

— Here you will begin to feel the first effects of diving, Audrey.



Indeed, it was all as he had been described: Fear slowly turned into serenity. All of her senses seemed to be sharpened, and a sense of pleasure coursed through her body. She seemed strange, energized, her cheeks were warm as if a smile was going to appear at any moment. She felt like she had never felt before.

— Do you think she'll be okay? — Zuri asked as she watched the gigantic guide cable stretching out endlessly as Audrey went deeper and deeper.

— Yes, she's tougher than she looks. What do you think Neurocore is getting out of this research anyway?

— All I know is what was taught in the training and in the weekly open reports, don't you read them? This lake is the result of the Giant's death. These are the remains of it, and within them, there is a hyperdimensional space. It seems that much of what there was of awareness of this animal is still there in the form of data. Autonomous probes and drones are unable to record or transmit any images or data from inside the lake. It takes a human observer to witness the injunction space and validate the data. It's like in De Broglie's wave-particle duality experiment. Or as in Schrödinger's cat thought experiment. — the girl concluded.

— You've explained a lot and I now understand even less. — confessed the young man while scratching his own head. — But then, what do you think they want?



— If you could, wouldn't you want to know where that shit came from and what it wanted? Or even: Does this have evil friends around? And another thing — Zuri continued —, look at the technological leap we've made. It's as if we went from the middle ages to the space age in less than 15 years. Neurocore is having a blast with this research. The first Neuroedge model was just a diving suit. Within a year, Neurocore rebuilt the world's entire telecommunications infrastructure, or what's left of it. People were still living in the rubble, and yet they honed those rudimentary wetsuits into these overdeveloped freaks that we piloted.

— The sky is beautiful today. Do you think it's going to be sunny tomorrow? — Kenji's one-off comment was definitive proof to Zuri that his brain had given up a long time ago.

Audrey let herself be carried away more and more by that feeling of joy, and even though she thought that this feeling could end at any moment, as it always does in the real world, she could not sabotage the feeling of peace and completeness that had invaded her. It's like when you're sedated during a panic attack, your mind is unable to struggle.

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— Dopamine and Serotonin levels reaching an all-time high. We'll block it or you won't want to return. — the controller warned in a sympathetic tone that conveyed confidence at the same time.

Okay. — was Audrey's response.

A sub-bass electronic noise resounded through the cabin. Around her, the pale diffuse light slowly began to turn red.

Is this normal? — Audrey asked with some concern.

— Yes, your Neuroedge is trying to keep both your minds in homeostasis. The link between you is complete and you can now see more clearly into the hyperdimensional space.

The explanation, however, did not convince her. Her heart began to race and there was a feeling that something terrible was going to happen. A searing pain invaded her body and a clear vision of severed limbs and a lot of blood took over her mind! The young woman screamed and thrashed uselessly in despair, but the pain and disturbing visions seemed to have no end.

Douglas Schneider, CEO of Neurocore, watched it all from the back of the control room.





— Mr. Douglas, Audrey's unit is receiving an unprecedented amount of data from the injunction zone.

— Increase the interference of the Neuroedge unit to protect her mind. Hold her there as long as possible.

Increasing power of the Neuroedge module. — the operator commanded.

Audrey's uneasiness seemed to subside enough for her to notice her surroundings again. The infinite space of the interdimensional zone was shapeless, abstract, and empty most of the time, but as one navigated its flow of information, its morphology reconfigured itself, transporting the diver to unimaginable places and landscapes. Audrey noticed a dark spot in the distance below her feet, as if falling into a deep abyss. The depth marker continued to advance. She stared incessantly at that black spot that was getting closer and closer when she noticed something strange: It wasn't the entrance to a deep ditch. The dark spot was becoming clearer and clearer,

and it took on the contours of a misshapen head. A shiver ran down her spine suddenly, and the girl rubbed her eyes in an attempt to confirm what she saw. Evil eyes seemed to stare back at her from within that darkness! The terror suddenly escalated as Audrey recognized more features of what looked like a twisted, wicked face that laughed at her despair.

Panicking and with the pain of a dagger in her brain, the young woman screamed and struggled inside the Neuroedge unit!



— AAAAAAARGH!

— We found it! — Douglas celebrated.

— Sir, the pilot is one step away from the point of no return, her mind is about to collapse.

— Bring her back safely, we've found what we needed.



### **Defense Protocol**

Audrey was taken unconscious to the facility's intensive care unit. Her condition caused concern in everyone. Zuri and Kenji stood in the waiting ward of the ICU waiting for any updates on their friend's health without getting any response. The pilots were asked to wait for news in their living quarters, Kenji agreed to go, but Zuri refused and spent the night in the medical wing.

The next day, in the morning, they were summoned through the intercoms to meet in the command room.

The hall was hexagonal with half of it reserved for row seating in an auditorium style. On the opposite wall, a curved panoramic monitor that stretched from one wall to the other, and on the central section, a console for the operation of schematic projections, holograms and augmented reality.

Zuri and Kenji settled into the auditorium, and soon after, a group consisting of Douglas Schneider, Dr. Sandra Meyer, chief scientist and developer of the Neuroedge extracortical system, an unknown boy, and two army officers entered the room.

Douglas took the stage and began the presentation.

— Good morning, dear Neuroedge pilots Zuri and Kenji. I would like to begin the conference by relieving you and reporting on the condition of pilot Audrey. She is already awake and recovering very well. There were no after-effects in her brain. The operation was a success. We are very pleased with her performance and as soon as the doctors discharge her, it will be a great pleasure to return her to the team. Once we're done with the following briefing, you can go talk to her. Here next to me are Dr. Hayes, acting pilot Nic, and two military officers. They are here to formalize the handover of command of operations to our care. In light of the latest findings, we are entering a global state of emergency with defense protocols that are under our management as of now. The doctor will continue the briefing by updating you on the facts.

— Thank you, Douglas. Pilots, Neuroedge team, welcome. The Deep Dive carried out yesterday by pilot Audrey obtained an unprecedented affinity index with the Neuroedge module. The data collected from her incursion into the De Broglie liminal space was submitted to the united government and the military. They are under protection at the highest level of secrecy; however, the following information is up to the sector of these gentlemen — She took a preparatory pause for the sentence that followed.

— We are being invaded. We don't know who the invader is, but the Deep Dive of the Neuroedge unit predicts the arrival of the second giant on the 14th at 1 pm.

— Tomorrow?! Another one of those? — Kenji asked in shock. — All I've been taught since I was little is that this thing was a destroyer of humans, or a devourer of worlds. If something like that gets here, if this data is real, it will be the end of us!

— Mr. Kenji, we cannot yet confirm the nature of the invader, nor confirm the predator or devourer of worlds theories. What we can say is that your Neuroedge units are cyborgs based on the physical structure of the first one. My team was responsible for the manufacture of a contingent of Neuroedge units capable of not only diving into the De Broglie hyperdimension but also resembling the first invader in its morphology.

— What do you mean? — Zuri asked — Do we have to go into our Neuroedge units and fight off the invader?

— Was that the reason for the combat training? — Kenji added to the questioning.

— We needed to get ahead of the curve in case there were more invaders, so yes — explained Dr. Hayes. — We don't know anything about the new invader, but we have a hope based on the good results you've had operating the mechs in simulated combat situations. The three of you are Humanity's only chance of survival.

— The three of us? — Zuri was confused — We are short-handed. Audrey is hospitalized and we don't even know her condition.

— She's fine, and I assure you: If we survive, she'll have her job restored, but for the moment you'll have to work with a substitute.

The young man who came with the entourage didn't look a day over nineteen years old. He takes a step forward.

— I present to you Nic, Audrey's substitute pilot — the doctor announced.

Nic was very young, but his gaze seemed to carry a lot more weight than was compatible with his age. Maybe that was the reason he was there, after all the only ones able to endure the hyperdimensional dives were the people with terrible mental scars.

— From now on, we are in charge of global security — Douglas announced solemnly —, that is why these praiseworthy gentlemen of the army are present here at this passing of the torch. We are officially given special powers to defend our planet. Time is short, so get ready. We're counting on you.



The meeting cast a shadow of uncertainty not only over their own fates, but that of all humanity. With no time to digest the situation, they rushed to see their friend.

Audrey had just woken up and was surprised by the visit. She seemed to be in perfect clinical condition, just a little disoriented.

— Hi, how long have I been sleeping?

— About twelve hours. — Zuri replied — They said you'll be discharged the day after tomorrow.



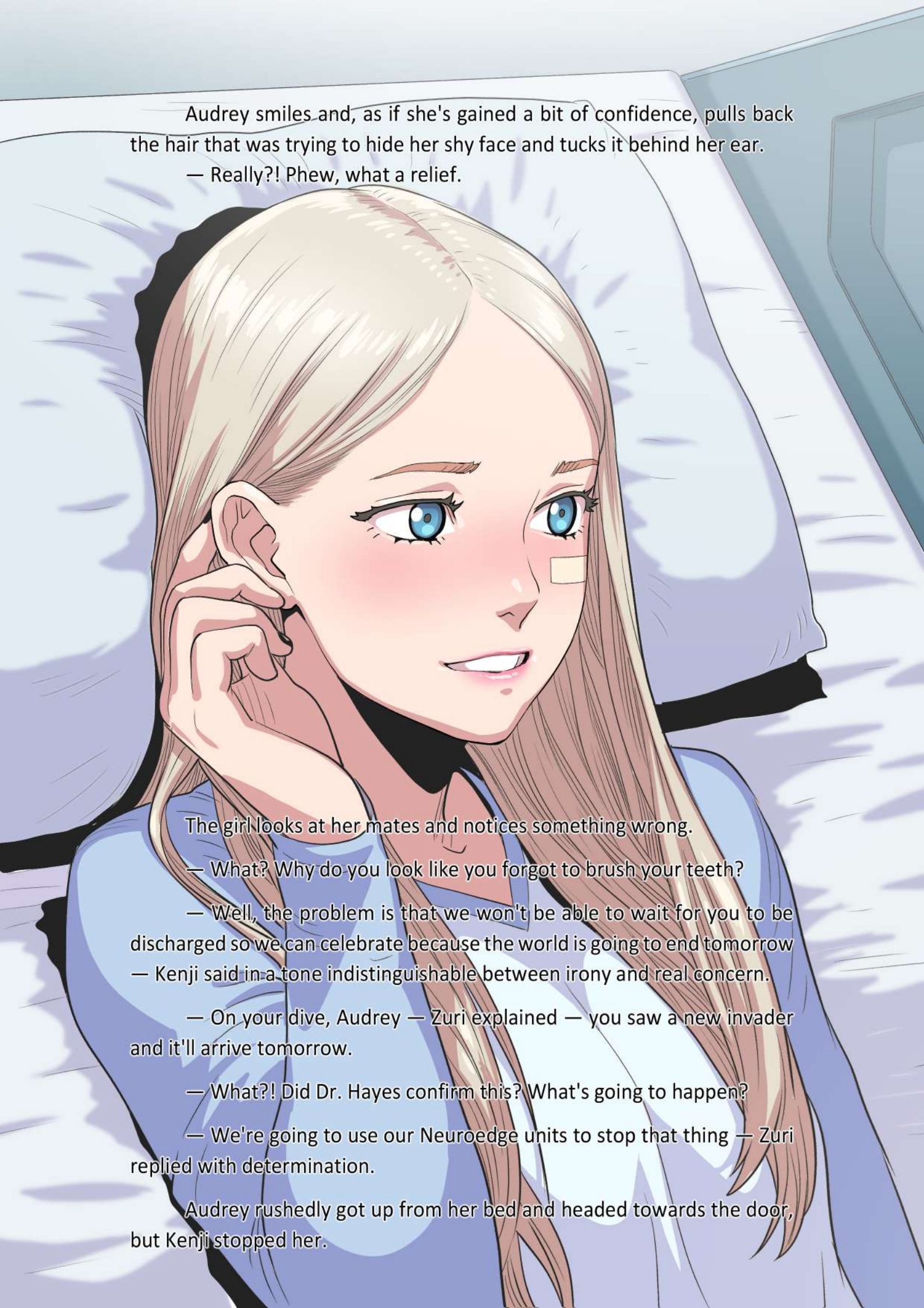
— Have you been here waiting for me all this time?

— Zuri stayed up all night on that chair outside. I was tired and went to my dorm — Kenji shrugged.

— At least someone here cares about their comrades — Zuri mumbled. — How are you feeling?

— Great! It's weird, I feel more excited, lighter. This was better than therapy sessions or antidepressants — she now proceeds with a more serious expression. — Down there I felt a force oppressing me, it felt like something evil lurking in me. After that I blacked out, but I didn't get a bad feeling after what I saw. On the contrary, it had been a long time since I woke up in such a good mood. But there's something that's making me worried. My Deep Dive flopped, didn't it? Will they get me out of the project? Like, that's all I've got.

— That's not what we heard. According to the CEO himself, your data collection has broken all records. Your first dive was a huge success.



Audrey smiles and, as if she's gained a bit of confidence, pulls back the hair that was trying to hide her shy face and tucks it behind her ear.

— Really?! Phew, what a relief.

The girl looks at her mates and notices something wrong.

— What? Why do you look like you forgot to brush your teeth?

— Well, the problem is that we won't be able to wait for you to be discharged so we can celebrate because the world is going to end tomorrow

— Kenji said in a tone indistinguishable between irony and real concern.

— On your dive, Audrey — Zuri explained — you saw a new invader and it'll arrive tomorrow.

— What?! Did Dr. Hayes confirm this? What's going to happen?

— We're going to use our Neuroedge units to stop that thing — Zuri replied with determination.


Audrey rushedly got up from her bed and headed towards the door, but Kenji stopped her.

— Hey, girl, where do you think you're going like that? You need to rest.

— I need to talk to the doctor, I need them to allow me to fight with you.

The door to the infirmary opened, and Nic entered the room.

— It won't be necessary. I was assigned to go in your place.



The girl was caught off guard by the intrusion of the substitute pilot and did not have time to modulate her reaction. His face was bright red with a mixture of shyness, surprise and indignation.

— In my place? Who are you?

Nic felt himself in a delicate position.

— Sorry for the intrusion, miss — he continued unsure and hesitant, trying to keep some composure. — I didn't come to replace you, I was assigned to go on this mission while you recover. We are on high alert for imminent attack and we are the only chance to contain the invader.

— He's right, Audrey — Dr. Sandra Meyer said as she entered the infirmary. — Although you are already feeling well, it takes one more day of hospitalization for you to be fully recovered and we do not have that time. Audrey, this is a defining moment and you are a part of it. If it wasn't for your Deep Dive, we wouldn't be able to get ahead of this attack. You were instrumental in this operation. Now rest while we take care of everything. Hurry up, we have to go to the central base of operations and start preparations.

The pilots said goodbye to their friend. The doctor's last words are reassuring. Audrey watches her friends walk out the door, and when she locks her gaze with Nic's, she ensures to make it clear that she feels **he's** the invader.



## Raging Beast

The hover took off towards the central base. Nic watched the great Lake De Broglie get smaller and smaller until it was lost in the distance. Zuri and Kenji stared at the boy suspiciously.

— You mean you're going to replace one brat with another? — Kenji questioned the doctor — I was hoping you guys were preparing some tougher pilots. That way we'd better surrender right away.

Hayes regarded the boy's tantrum as a mother who's used to her son's.

— Kenji, you know that being tough is not the requirement we seek for pilots.

Zuri responded mockingly to her colleague's petulance.

— Neither is brains, apparently.



The central base at Neuroedge put others to shame due to the colossal size of its facilities. Here the pilots and technicians did not only have living quarters, but individual houses in a miniature city planned for their conviviality and convenience.

The hover landed on the platform and the crew were rushed to the operations room where they were to receive the battle briefing.

In the large conference room, the entire technical team, including operators, engineers, the high command and the presidency were gathered.

Dave, chief engineer in charge of the Neuroedge units and armaments, elaborated on the plan.



— The Z and K units will be equipped with laser beams and 37 Armcore mortars. The Duratron antimatter rifle has been completed and will equip the N unit. The target will arrive at the point of contact at 1 hour and 45 minutes in the afternoon. Nic will be cloaked, positioned as a sniper, waiting for the moment of contact. Zuri and Kenji will flank the target, also hidden. The coordinates for the shot are already locked on the rifle, but in case of any unforeseen circumstances, Nic will be able to make adjustments and correct the shot. Z and K units come into play in case Nic misses his target. He will need a minute to reload, so you'll rain down a torrent of mortars to distract the invader. Nic must remain hidden, the enemy must not know what is hitting him. The antimatter beam is composed of antiprotons, anti-neutrons, and positrons; there is nothing composed of ordinary matter that can resist its deadly touch. When the mortars run out, the lasers will take care of the rest, until the batteries run out, but there won't be time for that. Nic, you'll always be looking for the fatal shot. Mr. Douglas.

— Gentlemen, do not see this as a life-and-death crisis, but rather as a chance. A chance to face our greatest enemy, to avenge ourselves for all the pain it has caused us and to prepare ourselves so that any other invader who tries to set foot on our planet will think twice before doing so. Rest and prepare for tomorrow.





A long-suppressed memory emerges with a sharpness similar to that of a present moment. Audrey's Deep Dive had unlocked a long-lost memory. She awoke from her very brief sleep crying uncontrollably.

— *There seems to be no end to human wickedness, doesn't it? Just look at her state. She's only 6 years old.*

— *Yes. People justify the worst atrocities under the guise of sacrifice for the greater good. That's what happens mostly to these fanatics.*

— *It is unacceptable that such an innocent little creature should have to go through such an ordeal.*

— *In the world we live in today, perhaps the greatest achievement is to survive to adulthood.*

— *Do you think all the love in the world could heal these inner scars? You know? I wanted to bury her in that love and take that pain out of her with my own hands.*

— *Honestly... No. But I think love helps build a lot of good things out of ruins.*

Audrey had grown up in the facility at Neurocore and that was the only world she knew. Orphaned and deeply traumatized, it took a lot of therapeutic work to give her a modicum of structure. That was a good thing about Neurocore. They needed to attract many young people to their project, but they took care of them with total devotion.

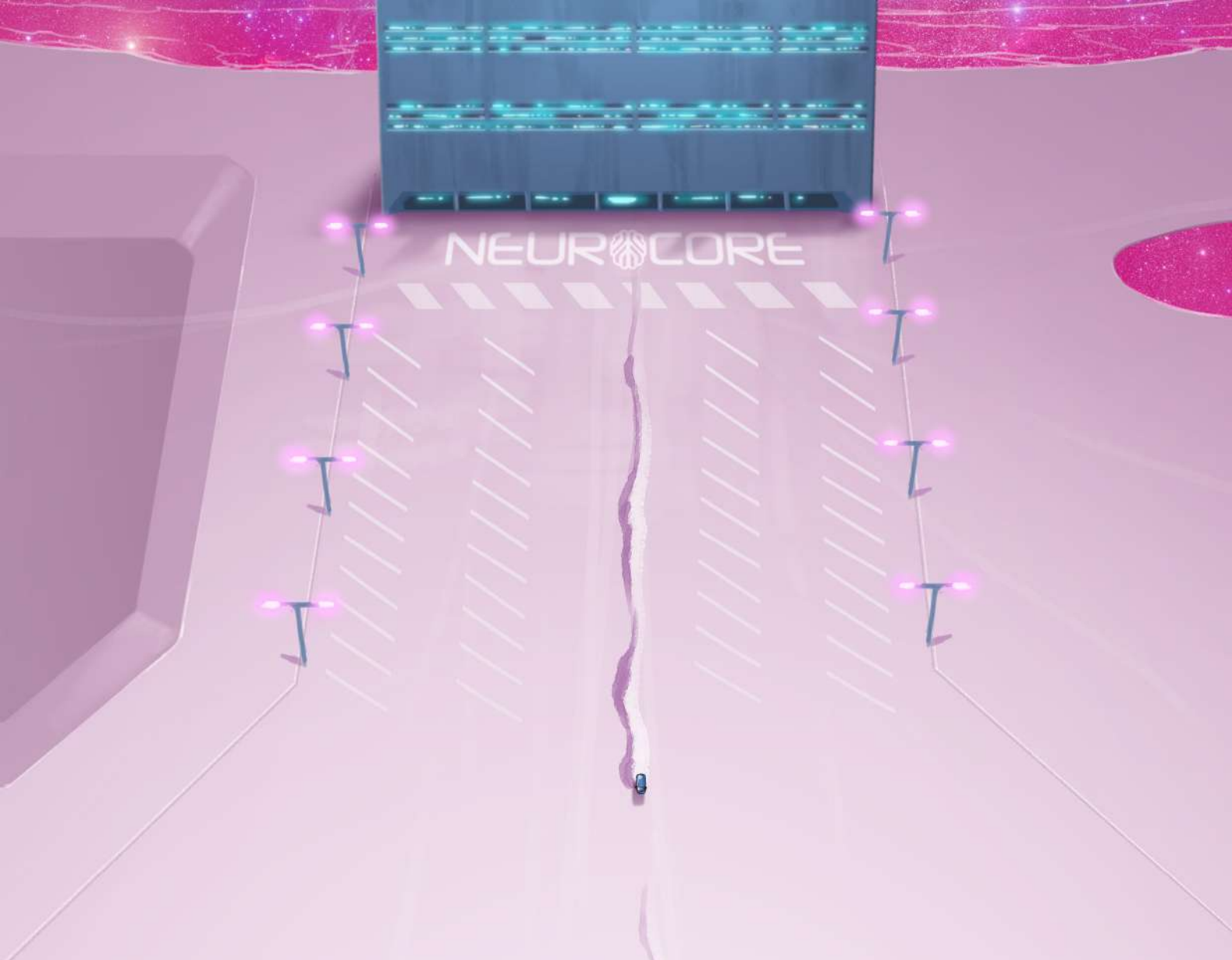
The internal conflict between her shy, hesitant nature and her natural instinct to navigate inexorably through turmoil kept Audrey awake for most of the night. She feared pain, but she also knew that it was her only companion. She couldn't stand to wait passively for the situation to be resolved, nor did she feel able to contradict her withdrawn nature and to rebel in an attempt to catch up with her friends.

There was a vibe of delusion about impending death that was already being embraced by some base staff. Some were barely able to perform their duties. It wasn't like they were at war and there was a chance to fight, it was like an asteroid was on a collision course and the only thing left was to think about the unfulfilled dreams and unlived love.

The cry of the level 1 warning siren informed that the fate was about to be decided.

It was time to choose between being nice and doing what everyone expected, or being audacious and acting according to her convictions. After all, if the world was going to end, what else mattered? In a sudden burst she decided to take advantage of the lethargy that had struck some and the commotion of the alarm signal. In a breach she escaped from the dormitory and snuck through the corridors of the medical ward.

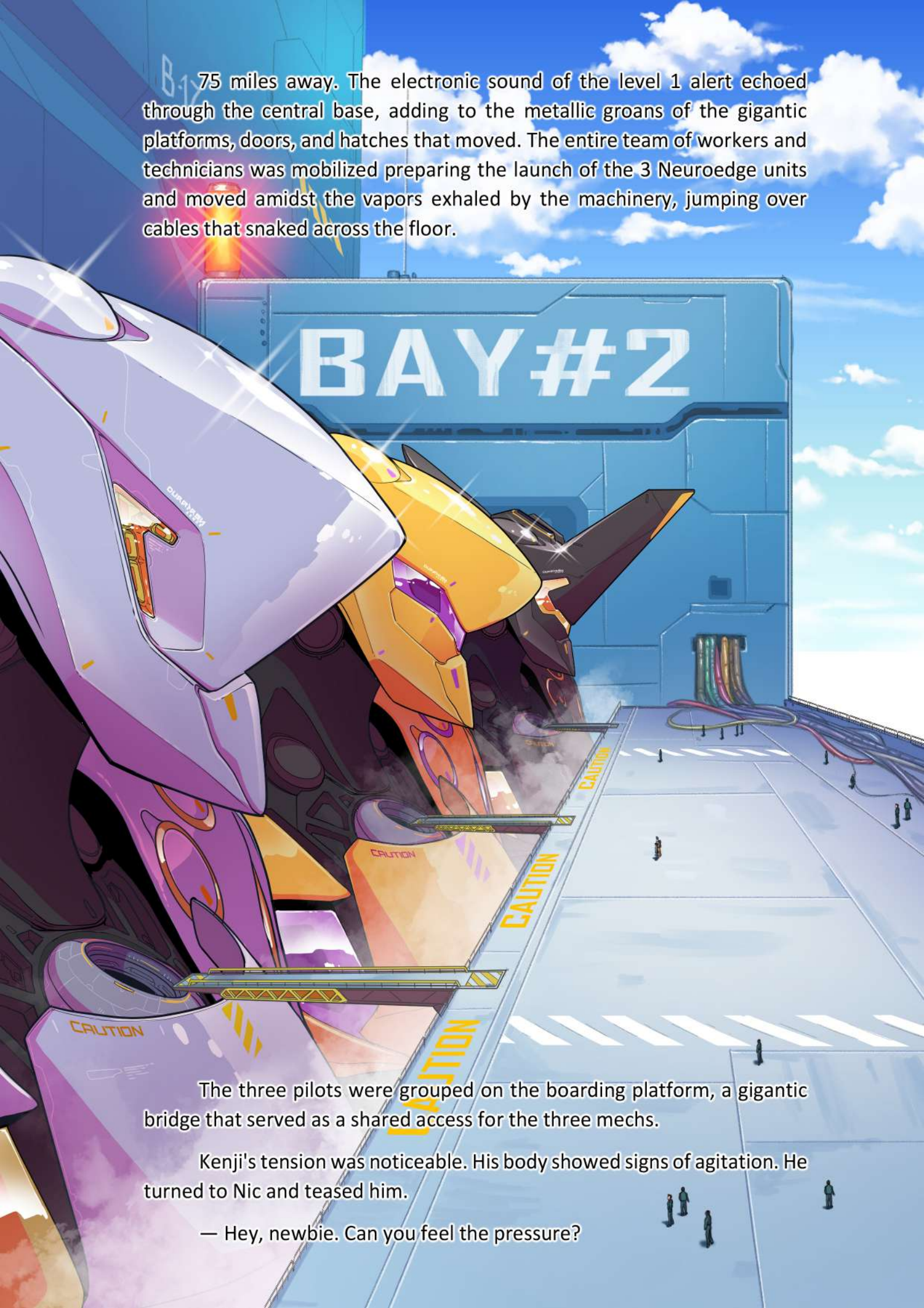
Not that escape was impossible, after all she wasn't a prisoner, but in just under 5 minutes, she was already in the parking lot starting a supply transport van and speeding towards the base's exit gate.



— You can do it, Audrey — she spoke to herself in a gesture of self-appeasement.

The GPS showed the 75-mile route to the central base, and Audrey flew past the parking gate. She was now outside, an immense empty space that stretched from horizon to horizon, but she was no longer alone. A patrol car was now on her heels and she knew what they wanted.





75 miles away. The electronic sound of the level 1 alert echoed through the central base, adding to the metallic groans of the gigantic platforms, doors, and hatches that moved. The entire team of workers and technicians was mobilized preparing the launch of the 3 Neuroedge units and moved amidst the vapors exhaled by the machinery, jumping over cables that snaked across the floor.

The three pilots were grouped on the boarding platform, a gigantic bridge that served as a shared access for the three mechs.

Kenji's tension was noticeable. His body showed signs of agitation. He turned to Nic and teased him.

— Hey, newbie. Can you feel the pressure?

There was no energy in Nic's words or gestures. It was as if he was tired.

— I don't know what I'm feeling. Now that things are close to being over, I feel like I want to keep going. But I don't know if this feeling is stronger than a certain longing for the end. I think that, from this point of view, it is very easy to deal with the situation because both outcomes bring me a happy ending.

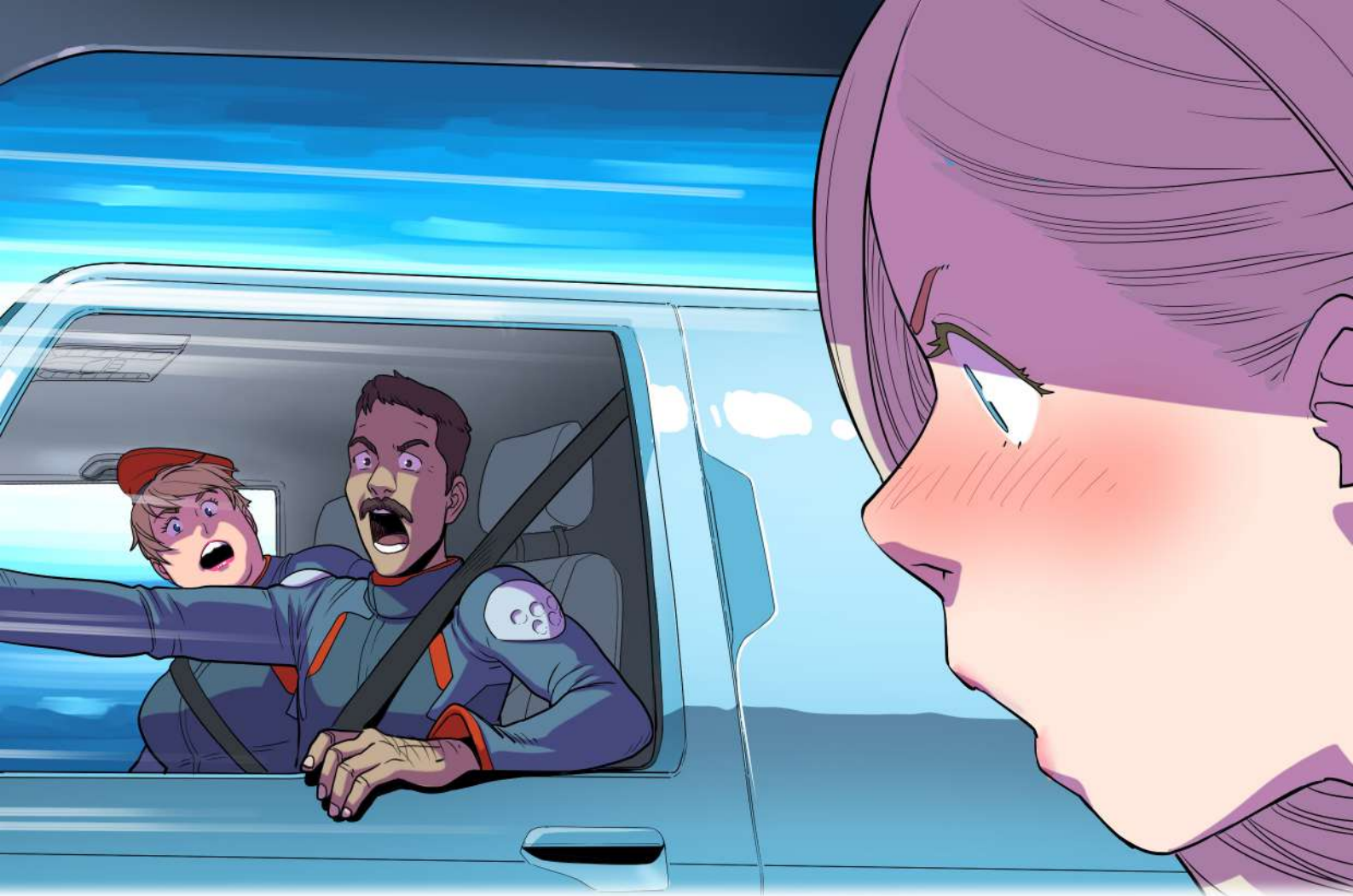
Zuri swallows hard, as if the boy's words reveal a feeling she herself didn't know she possessed.

Kenji, jaw dropped, stares at Nic incredulously. He reflects for three seconds and comments, more to himself than to others.

— You just had to ask.

On the bridge, Sandra receives the call letting her know: Patient Audrey has stolen a van and is fleeing towards the central base.

— Audrey did *what*? Get the pilot back **immediately!** Protect her at all costs — the doctor ordered screaming as if she were going to pass out.



There were already five vehicles in pursuit of the fugitive and one of them risked a maneuver to get closer to Audrey's window.

— Miss, come back with us to the base. You are at serious risk of death, if you don't stop we will be forced to intercept you.

Audrey had already made up her mind and there was no more room for doubt, so she sped up.

— Try that bluff again next week. I'm a very important asset of Neurocore and you can't risk causing damage to a single hair on my body. I'm going to the base and if you won't stop me you better escort me — she finished by forcing rebellion in the form of a grimace.

The security guard, who was old enough to be the girl's father, was baffled by the brat's naughtiness. Then he replied something similar to what a legitimate father of a teenage girl would say.

— All right, young lady. So I'm going to do everything I can to get you to your destination safely.

The vehicles continued their accelerated course towards the base that was already in line of sight and, at mid-distance, the area marked for the reception of the enemy who could already be seen penetrating the Earth's atmosphere.



A matter of life and death

The target was twice the expected size. Its menacing looks sent signals of fear that froze the souls of all the people who witnessed its arrival. It was like a materialization of fear and hopelessness, like staring directly into death and dread.

Zuri was paralyzed and Kenji almost choked, he had forgotten to breathe. Nic took aim, but the creature's behavior was very different from what he anticipated. It trembled and pulsed rapidly. Its vibration was so frantic that it seemed to be in two places at once. It was impossible to get a shot with one hundred percent acuity, he hesitated.

The intruder hits the ground sending shockwaves within a 3-mile radius, hurling the cars of the entourage escorting Audrey off the road. Kenji, noticing the small convoy that had been hit, zooms in on the image and sees Audrey climbing out of the window of her overturned van.

— Audrey! — He leaps from his hiding place, revealing his position, and fires a volley of beams at the monster. The laser appears to cause superficial wounds that release some kind of blood. The monster's pulsating pattern ceases and its attention obsessively fixates on the now exposed K-unit.

Like a photon, the creature disappeared from its position to immediately appear on top of Kenji, subduing the mech, which is half its size. The monster watched the Neuroedge unit curiously, as if recognizing it. Before Nic had time to re-aim, the attacker split the K-unit in half as if it were a piece of paper.

— Kenji! — The first torrent of mortar fire was fired by Zuri, who was screaming in panic. The invader jumped vertically at an impossible acceleration, the mortars tried to follow it, but again, the position of the monster began to oscillate in a supersonic vibration confusing the projectiles that exploded in the air in vain.





Zuri displayed a lot of skill and alternated her attacks between torrent of mortars and a curtain of beams. Some hit the creature, others hit the projectiles themselves that exploded in its face, injuring the invader and knocking it to the ground..

— Now! — Nic shouted, firing his antimatter cannon, not counting on the creature's agility and determination to fight back. It teleported again, the shot passed into the void evaporating a thousand square foot lot right behind and it reappeared in Nic's face changing the target of its counterhit. The monster fired a point-blank energy blast that launched his mech hundreds of yards away. Stunned, Nic tries to recover from the blow. The beast seemed to be in a frenzy. The operators on the bridge began to lose hope.

Audrey watched in disbelief. The creature appeared to have a momentary blackout and froze. Suddenly, there was a feeling as if the very fabric that makes up the universe was about to break. Reality seemed to distort around the invader. Incredulous, the operators huddled on top of the bridge's monitors.

— Doctor, we are detecting changes at the subatomic level — reported one of the operators. — It's as if, within the creature's perimeter, the fabric that holds atomic structures together has disappeared.

— It's distorting our reality — Dr. Hayes concluded.

The surrounding trees began to rejuvenate until they became small seedlings.

A vision took over Audrey's mind as she watched the battle. A blurred vision that seemed to be out of sync with reality. Audrey saw, in this kind of dream, Zuri shooting at the creature that had awakened from its hibernation state, charging at her, furiously devouring her friend's mech. Suddenly, the reverie was dissolved and her mind returned to the present moment.

Nic reached for his rifle while Audrey finally seemed to have figured out a plan of action. She ran to the security agents who were escorting her and took shelter behind their patrol cars.

— I need to contact Dr. Hayes! — she shouted to the father figure who had offered her an escort.

Reality was melting all around her. The floor became rubber, and a gigantic spiral staircase separated her from the group that had previously been only 5 yards away. At great cost she finally caught up with them.

— Doctor, I need you to put me in touch with Nic NOW. Nic reached for his rifle and began aiming at the intruder. He didn't realize it, but Zuri was also trying to do the same, aiming her laser beams at the demon.

— Nic, whatever you do, don't pull that trigger! — Audrey yelled over the intercom.

— *Audrey* — he is surprised by his colleague's interference. — I have almost perfect conditions for shooting.

— You're going to miss that shot. I beg you, trust me. You have to aim 100 feet above the head of Zuri's Neuroedge.

— What do you mean?

— Just trust me, or it will be the end of us.

He shifted his sights to the indicated spot and then heard a shot. Zuri unloaded her laser blasts towards the creature which evaporated into thin air to reappear on top of her.

In a split second, a succession of events that seemed to take forever. Zuri watched in disbelief as the demon stared at her closely, she had nothing else to do but see that evil figure staring at her. She surrendered, but was saved at the last minute by the antimatter beam precisely fired by Nic.

The creature staggered away as its blood of a bizarre matter squirted everywhere, flooding the battlefield terrain. Reflexively, the subdued invader walked awkwardly for a few more meters, washing the soil with the supernatural liquid, the same that made up Lake De Broglie. The beast fell inert to the ground.

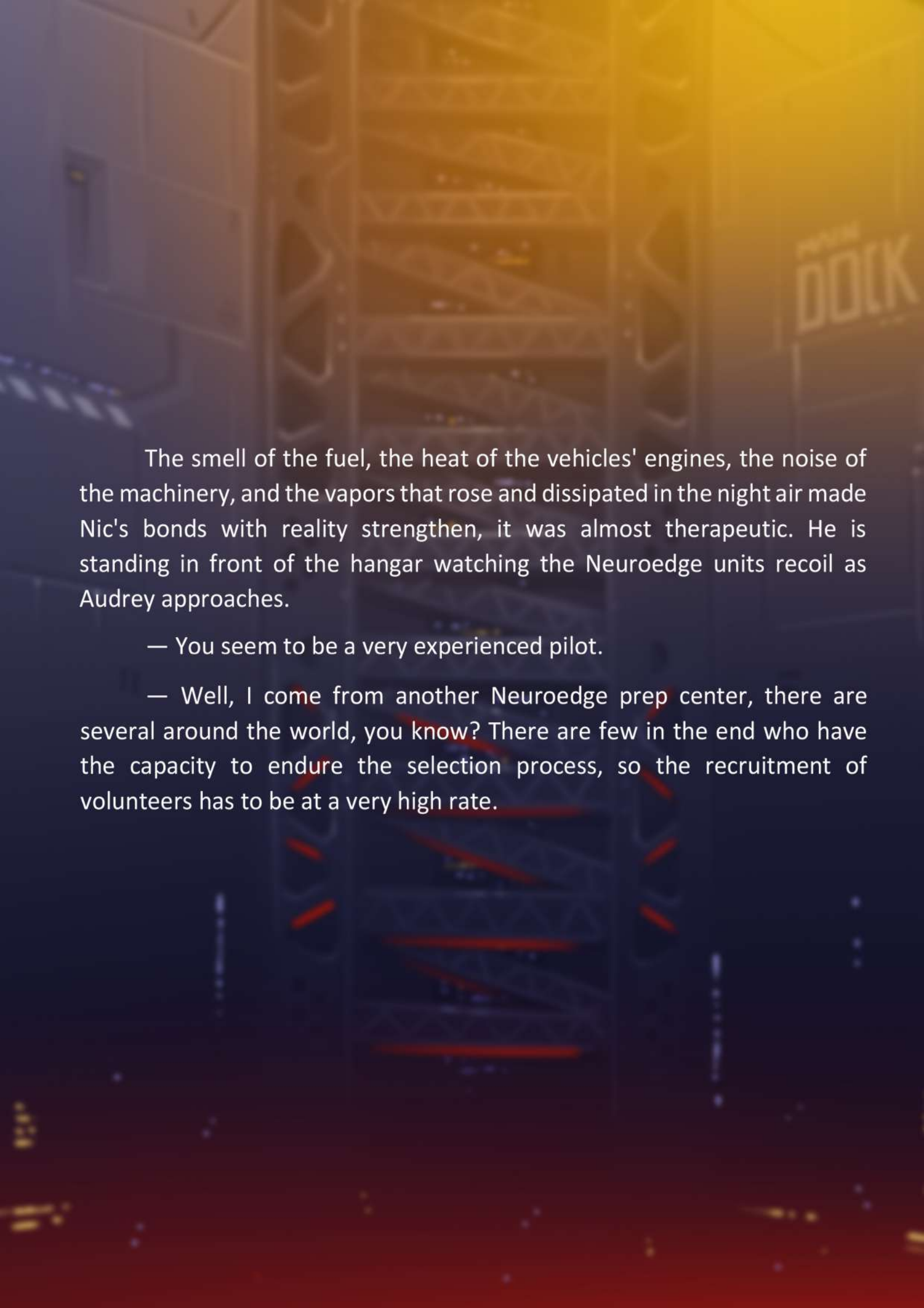
— I can't believe it, we won! — Zuri shouted excitedly — Kenji, are you okay? — sShe asked via intercom.

— Yeah, I'm alive — the answer came by audio.

— Thank you Nic, it was a close call. You saved me.

— No, Zuri. It was Audrey.

Audrey smiles at Nic's words amidst the unusual troupe of guardians that has formed as a result of her escape.



The smell of the fuel, the heat of the vehicles' engines, the noise of the machinery, and the vapors that rose and dissipated in the night air made Nic's bonds with reality strengthen, it was almost therapeutic. He is standing in front of the hangar watching the Neuroedge units recoil as Audrey approaches.

— You seem to be a very experienced pilot.

— Well, I come from another Neuroedge prep center, there are several around the world, you know? There are few in the end who have the capacity to endure the selection process, so the recruitment of volunteers has to be at a very high rate.

A young man with spiky blue hair and blue eyes, wearing a white and purple futuristic suit with a yellow circular emblem on his shoulder, stands on the left. He has a concerned expression. A woman with long, straight blonde hair and a purple top stands on the right, looking at him with a sad expression. They are in a futuristic, metallic environment with a sunset visible through a window in the background. A green light beam is visible in the upper left.

Audrey wore an expression of dismay.

— Well, I guess that's the end of me. After what you demonstrated there, there will be no more room for me in the team.

— You're kidding, right? You saved us all! You escaped from internment, stole a vehicle to infiltrate the battlefield, and mentored us. I didn't see that Zuri was going to shoot. The intruder noticed and dodged, if I had shot at the same time I would also have missed and would not have had the chance for another shot — he puts his hand on Audrey's shoulder — You were awesome!

— Neuroedge is all you've got, isn't it? To deal with that pain. I understand you. I feel the same way.

— Neuroedge is all you've got, isn't it? To deal with that pain. I understand you. I feel the same way.

The two were interrupted by Kenji and Zuri.

— Look at that, you naughty kids — Kenji smiled ironically —, there wasn't even time to celebrate the victory and the two are already starting to bond!

Audrey took a step away from Nic and her blush became even more evident.

Audrey took a step away from Nic and her blush became even more evident.

— Well, you've got credit, Audrey. You saved the day — Kenji eased her.

— You were amazing, Audrey! We owe our lives to you. And you, Nic. Congratulations on that shot, you fought really well, I'm impressed with your skills.

— It was pure luck. My only merit was following Audrey's instructions.

Kenji nodded.

— That's right. And thanks to you we have the chance to live our miserable lives in anguish for a little longer! Let's drink, it's on me.

The site of the raider's fall was now taken over by reflectors, cranes, bulldozers, and heavy machinery. Workers were operating at a rapid pace on a structure set up at lightning speed.

Douglas was with Dr. Sandra Meyer looking at charts on monitors.

— There's more of that stuff coming. Their power is fractioned and disproportionately distributed among individuals. That's why the damage wasn't so great this time — Sandra commented on the data collected.



— At that moment, it was clearly interfering with the matter and time around it, as if it was nullifying the effects of entropy — Douglas added in a grave tone — There's no denying that this data revealed a story that's already been told. We're looking at chunks of a timeline in random order. That was just another small piece of the puzzle.

— These things need to be baptized. From now on, the enemy will be called Type 6.

End of episode 1.