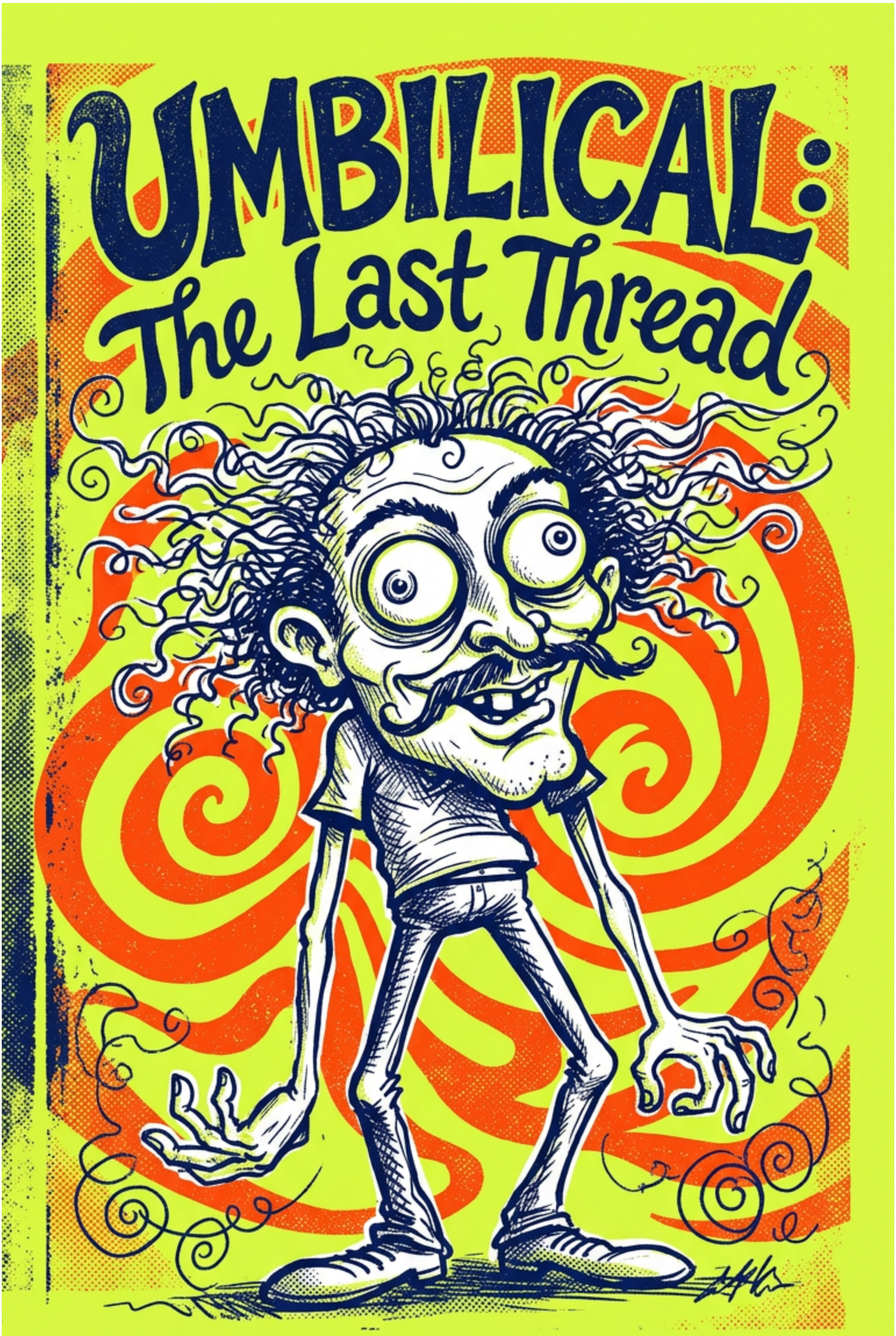
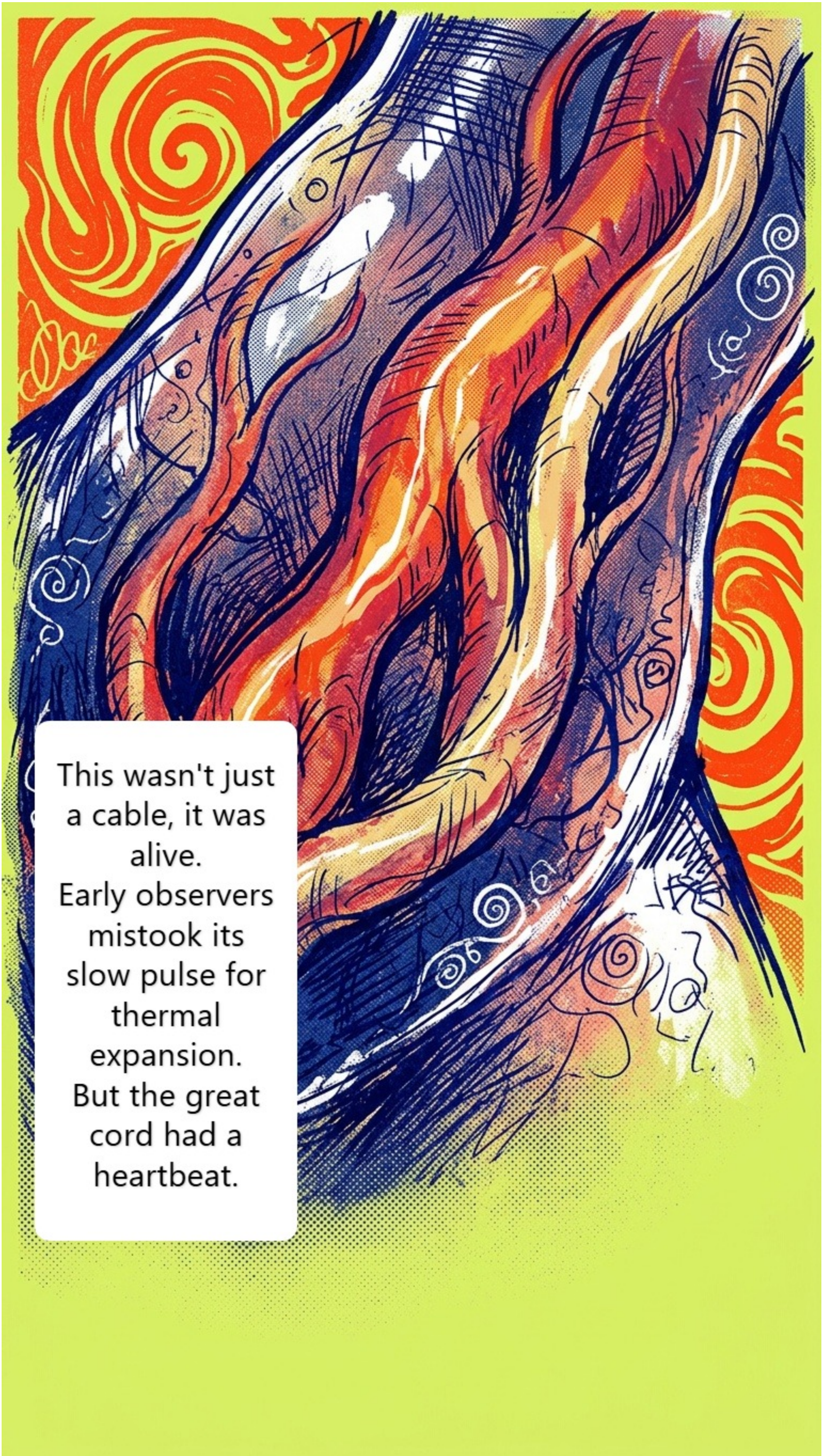


UMBILICAL: The Last Thread



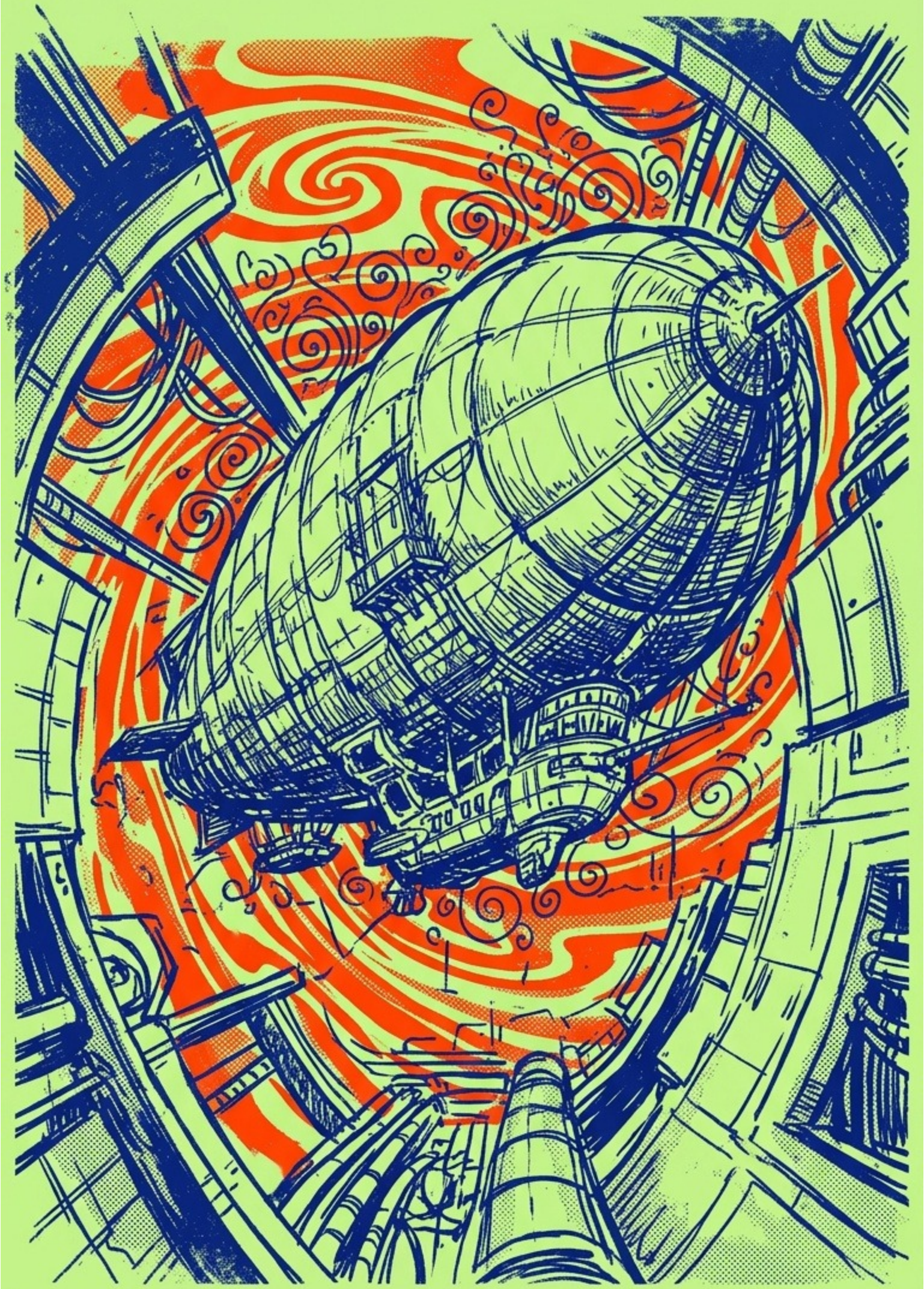
For three hundred years, humanity had relied on the Umbilical.
It rose from Earth, a giant living artery reaching for the Moon.
Through its skin, vast vessels glowed crimson and gold.


This wasn't just a cable, it was alive.
Early observers mistook its slow pulse for thermal expansion.
But the great cord had a heartbeat.

Inside, chambers as vast as cities welcomed humanity.
People built docks into the living cartilage.
Entire settlements hung from biological walls that flexed around them.



Then humanity filled its veins with airships.
These enormous craft used helium for lift and small electric propellers for guidance.
They moved slowly, very slowly.

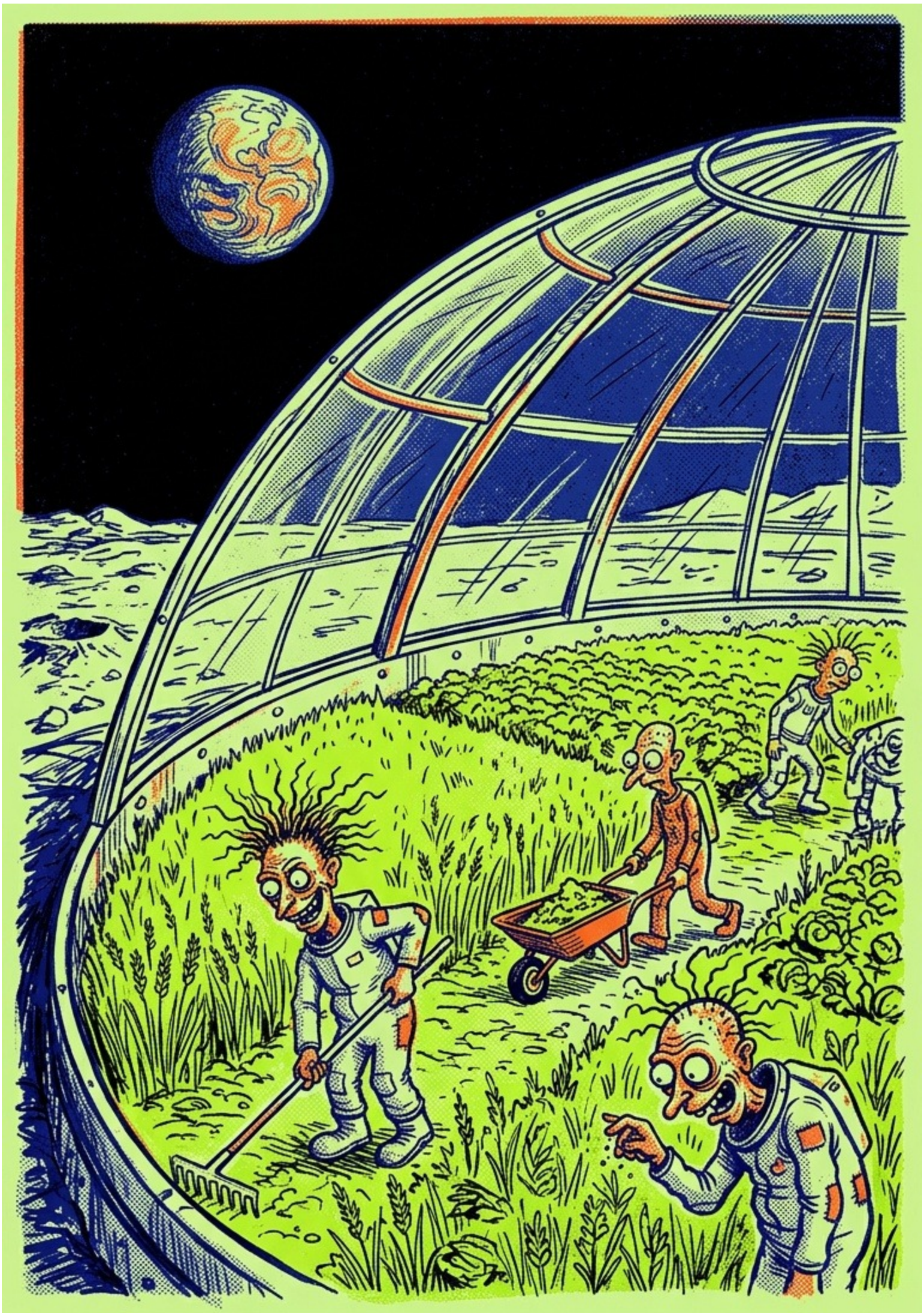




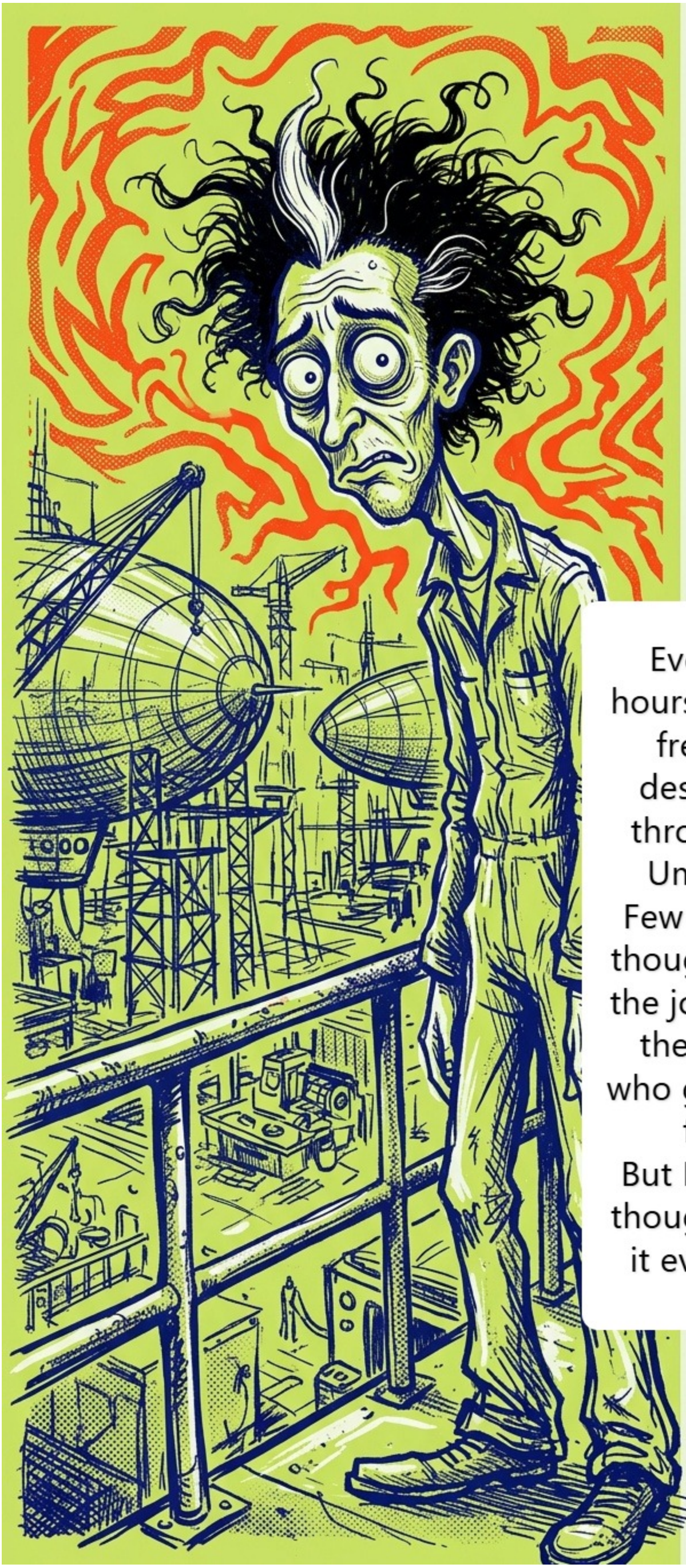
The journey between Earth and Moon took weeks.
Ships became floating villages, with crews born aboard them.
People met, married, and even died between worlds.

Fossil fuels had poisoned Earth's atmosphere.
The planet became brown and scorched.
Rockets were no longer an option.





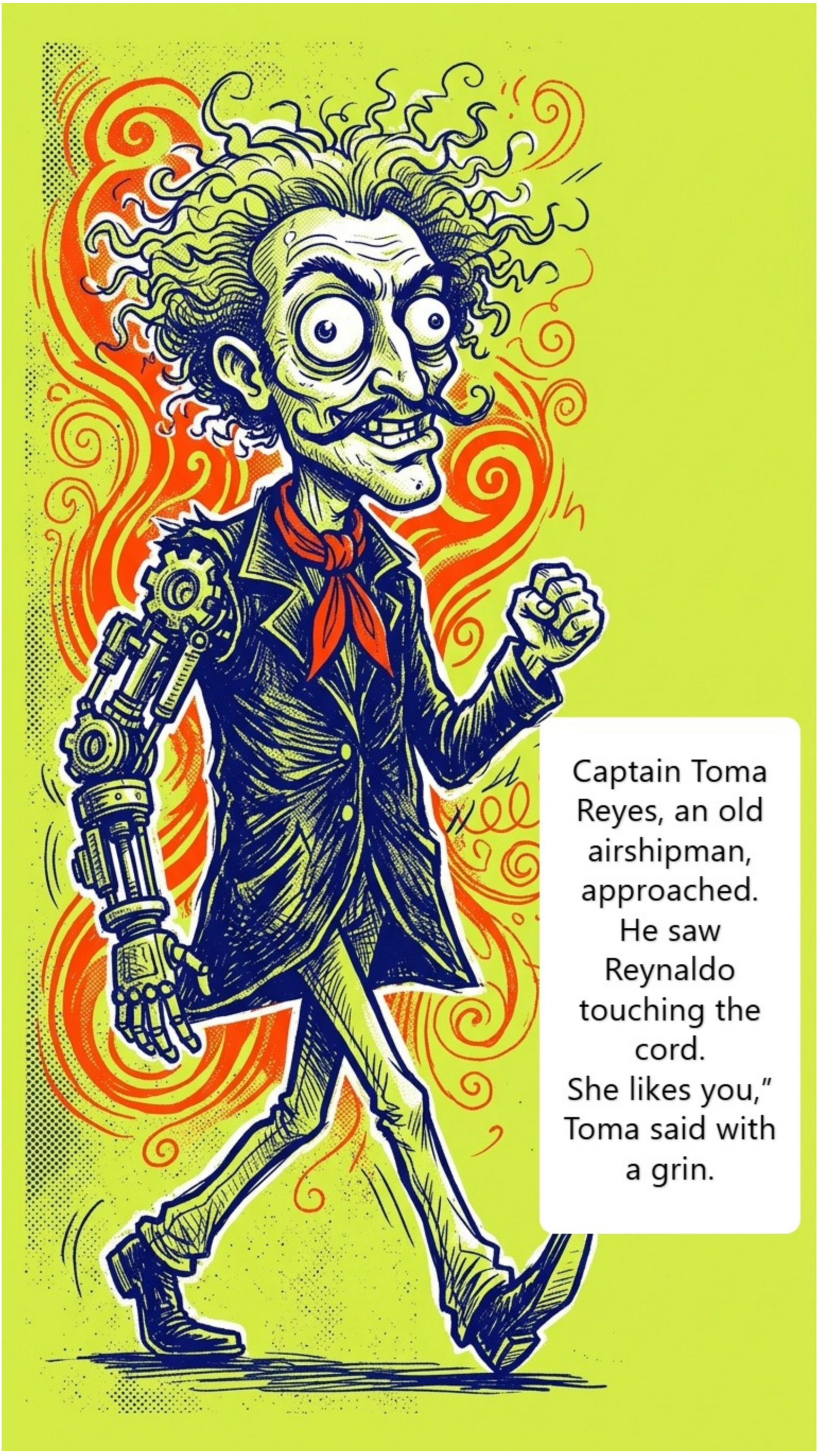
But the Moon had become Earth's farm.
Under great canopies, lunar settlements
cultivated abundant food.
The Moon was green and bountiful.



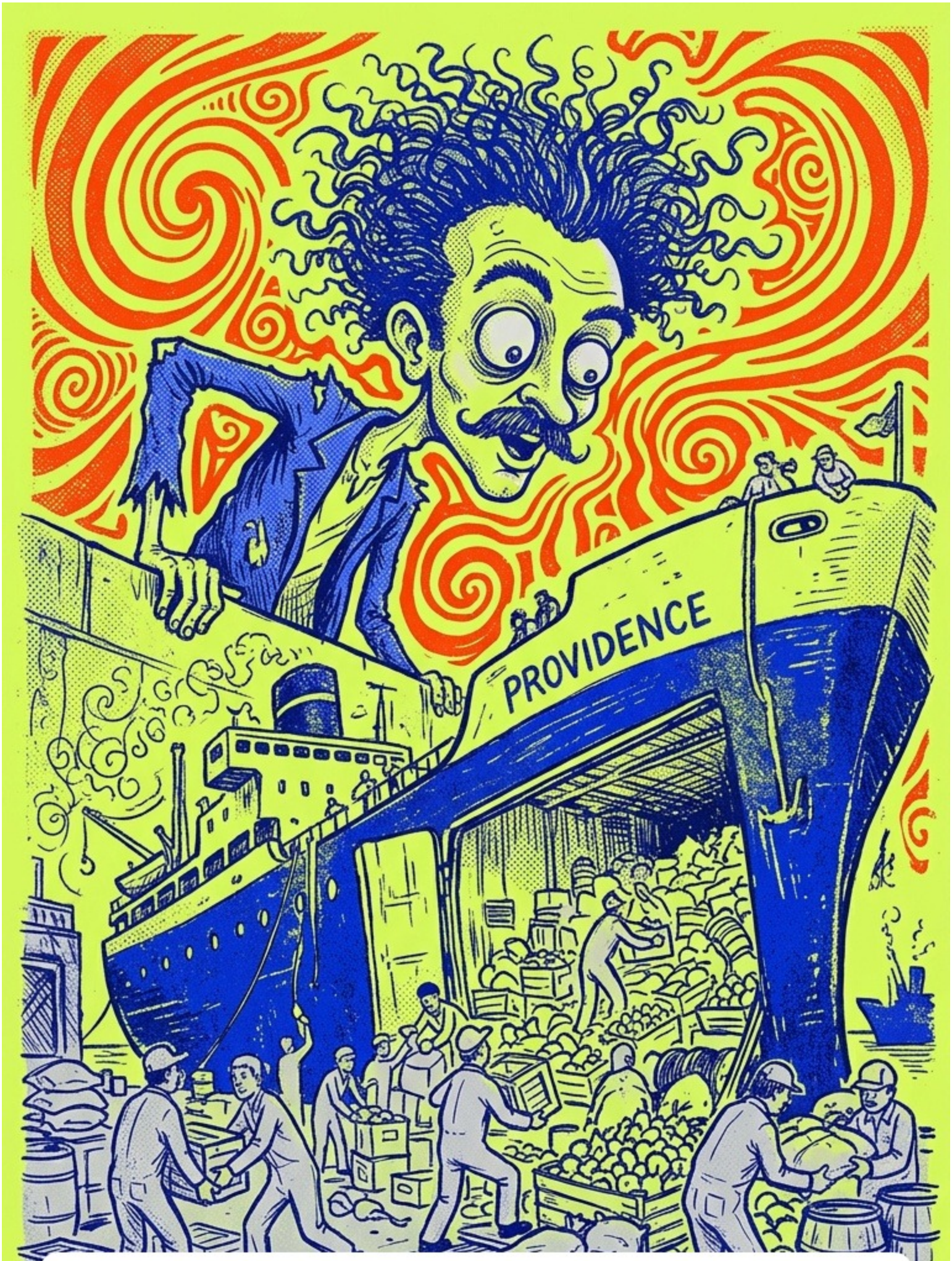
Every few hours, another freighter descended through the Umbilical.
Few on Earth thought about the journey, or the people who grew their food.
But Reynaldo thought about it every day.

Reynaldo stood inside a maintenance gallery. Below him, the great agricultural carrier Providence waited. He pressed his scarred hand against the living wall, feeling its warmth.

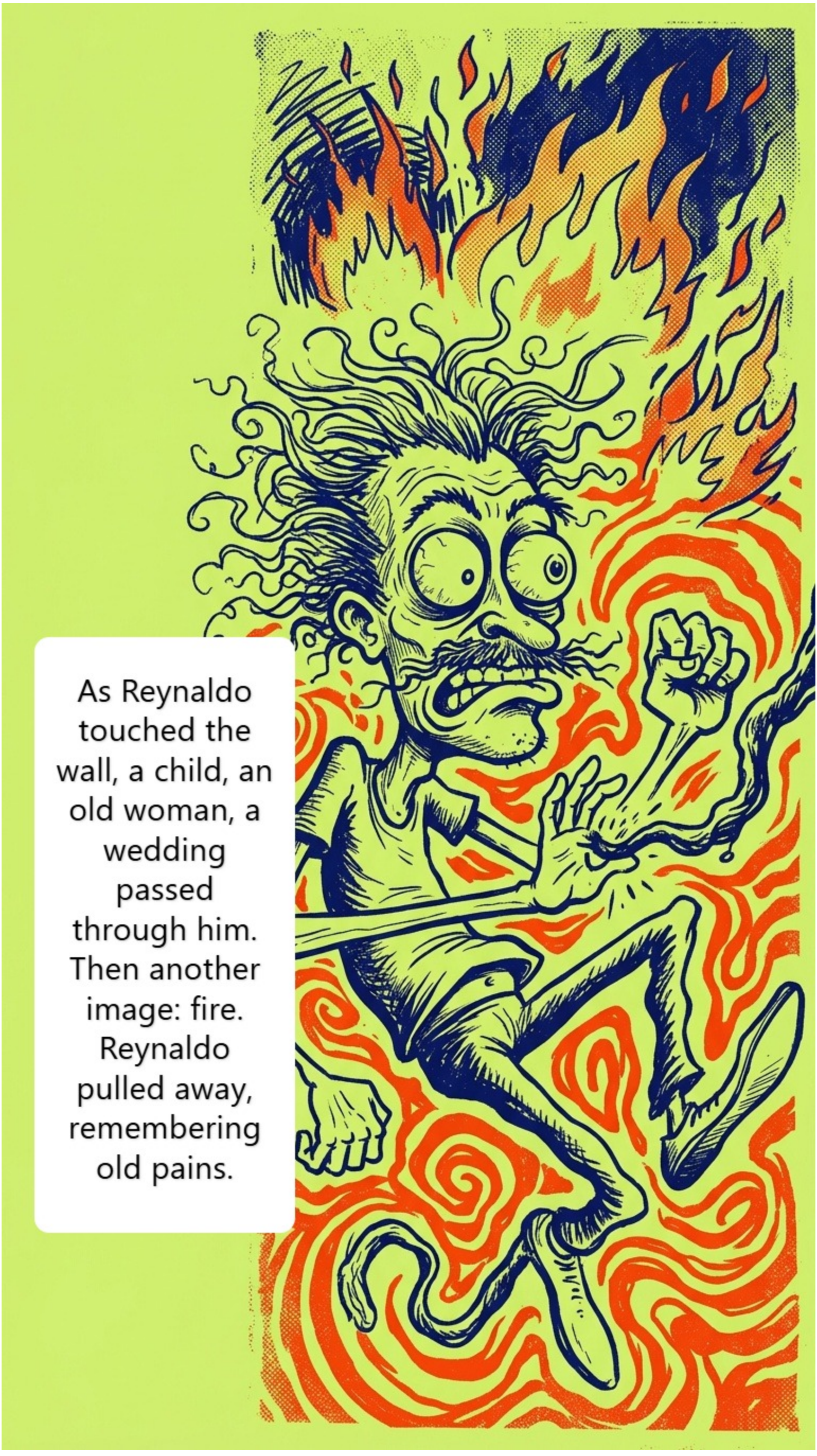




Captain Toma Reyes, an old airshipman, approached. He saw Reynaldo touching the cord.
She likes you," Toma said with a grin.



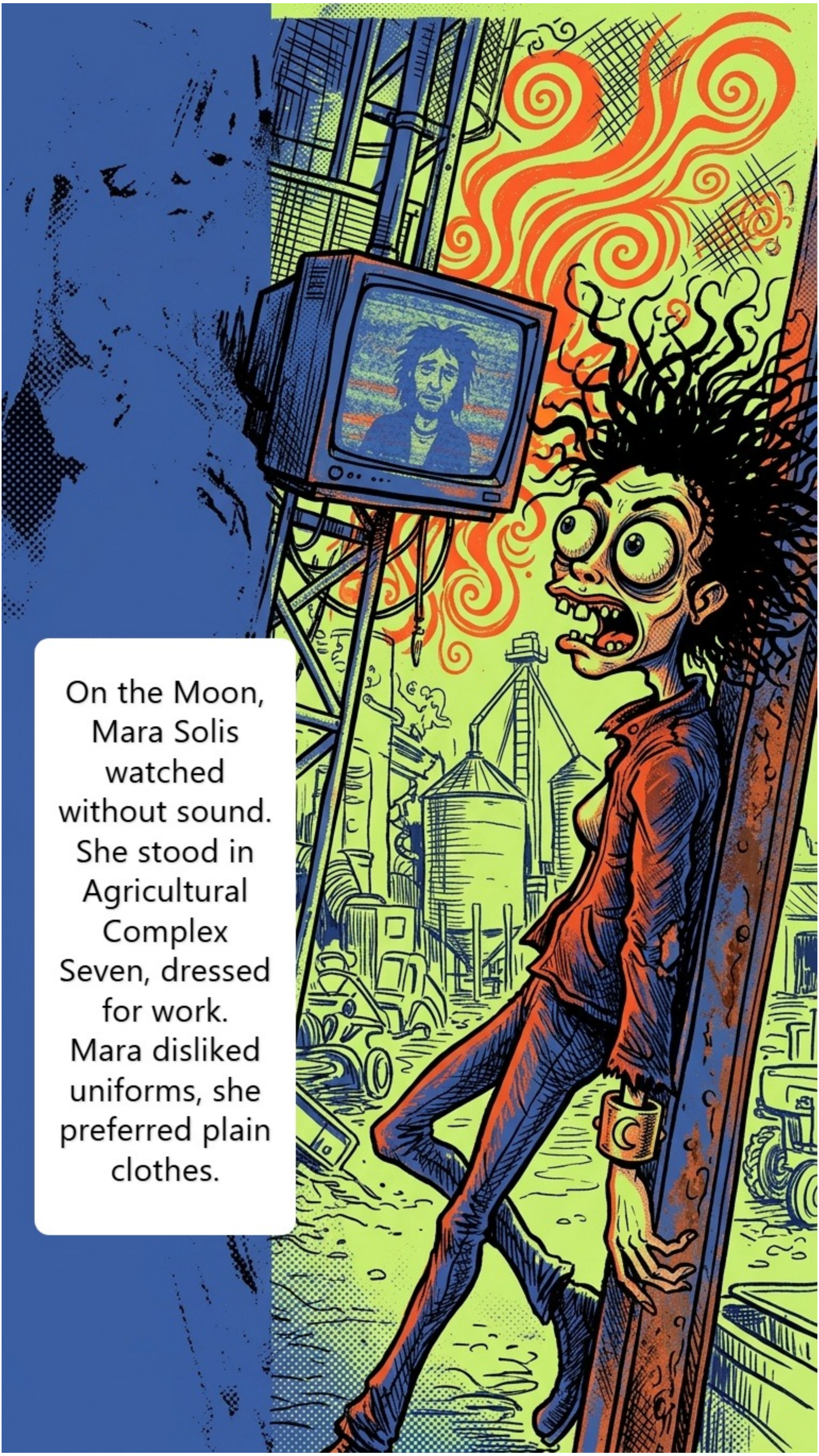
Reynaldo looked down at the Providence, being loaded.
One hundred twelve thousand tonnes of food, a thirty-day journey.
An Earth city could starve while it was halfway through the cord.



As Reynaldo touched the wall, a child, an old woman, a wedding passed through him. Then another image: fire. Reynaldo pulled away, remembering old pains.

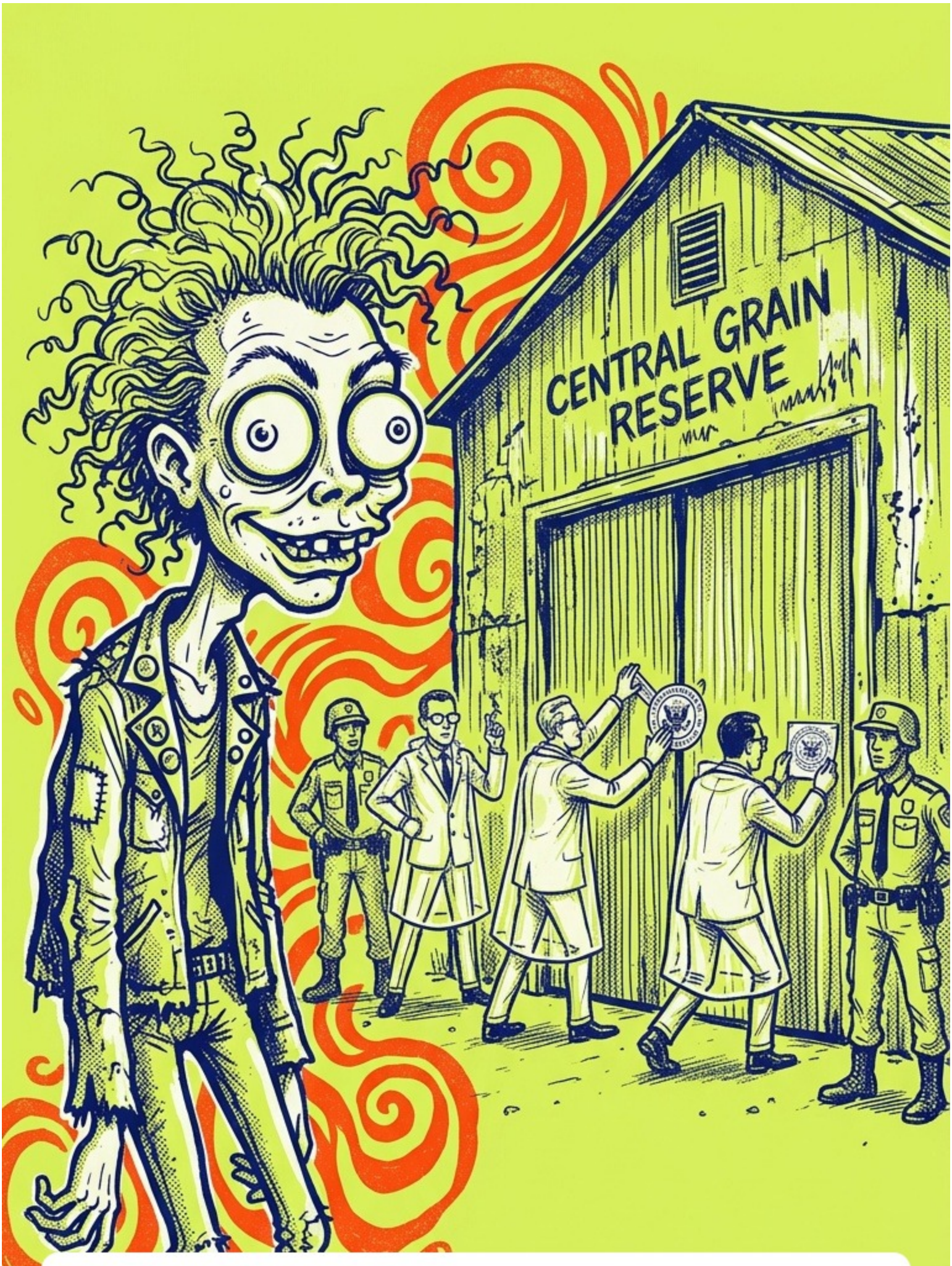


Chancellor Cassian Voss addressed the Earth Assembly. He wore his formal coat and thin black gloves. Food is not politics," he declared, "Food is survival.


On the Moon, Mara Solis watched without sound. She stood in Agricultural Complex Seven, dressed for work. Mara disliked uniforms, she preferred plain clothes.

A crop supervisor told Mara they were taking more food.
Four percent of everything, including the winter reserve.
Mara looked out at beautiful Earth, and it felt like an insult.





At the Central Grain Reserve, Mara watched Earth officers.
They sealed warehouse doors, taking the winter reserve.
Apparently we aren’t humanity,” she said, staring at the grain.



Apparently we aren’t humanity” spread quickly across the Moon.
The first uprising began with people sitting down.
Dockworkers sat, stopping all movement, causing great delay.



Earth broadcasters showed a sad, underweight child.
Then they showed Moon farmers laughing at a party.
The headline screamed: “MOONIE MUTINY.

Cassian Voss authorized compulsory loading. Earth security forces entered the lunar freight port.
Mara stood between them and the seated workers, ready to defend.

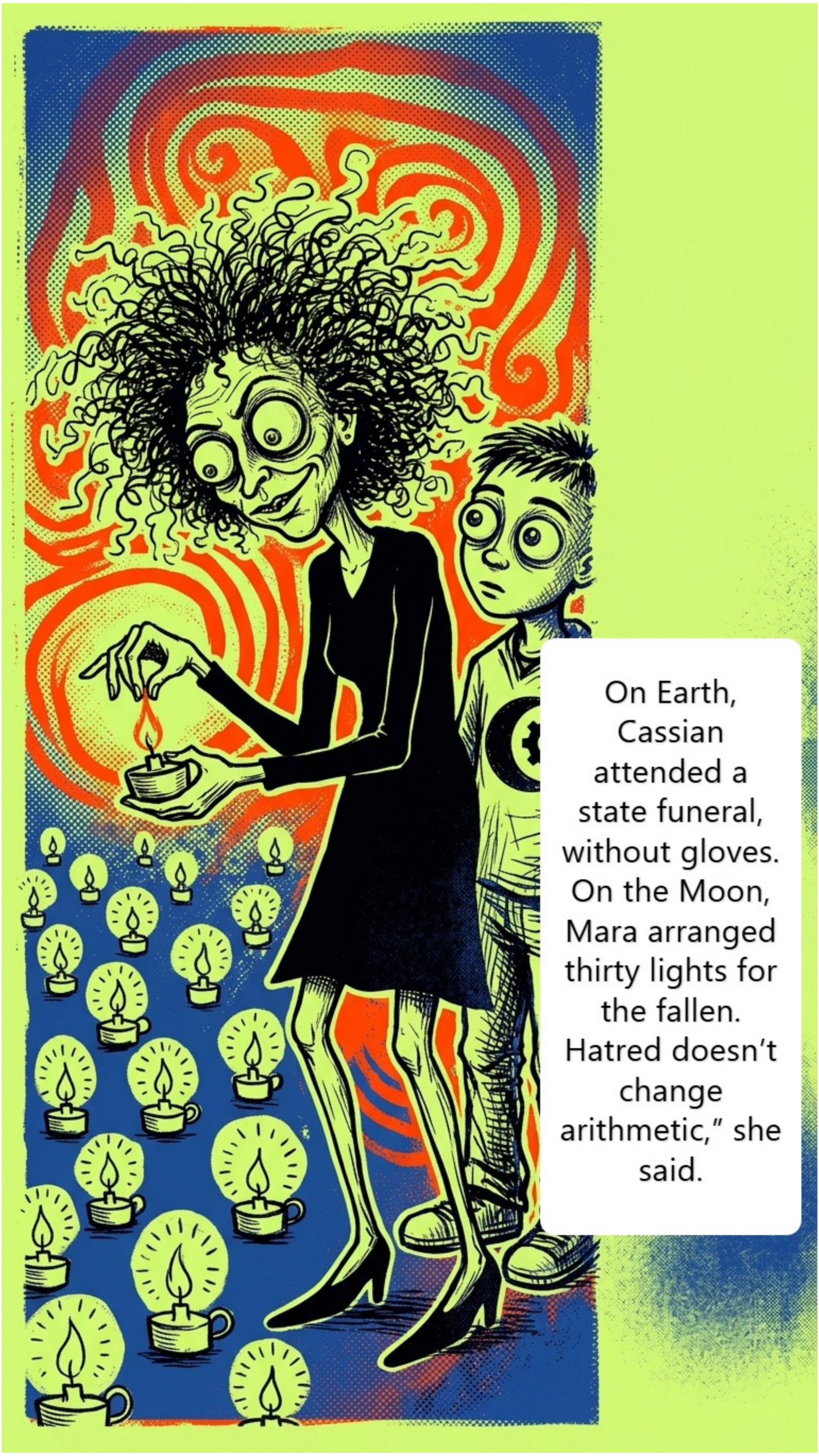


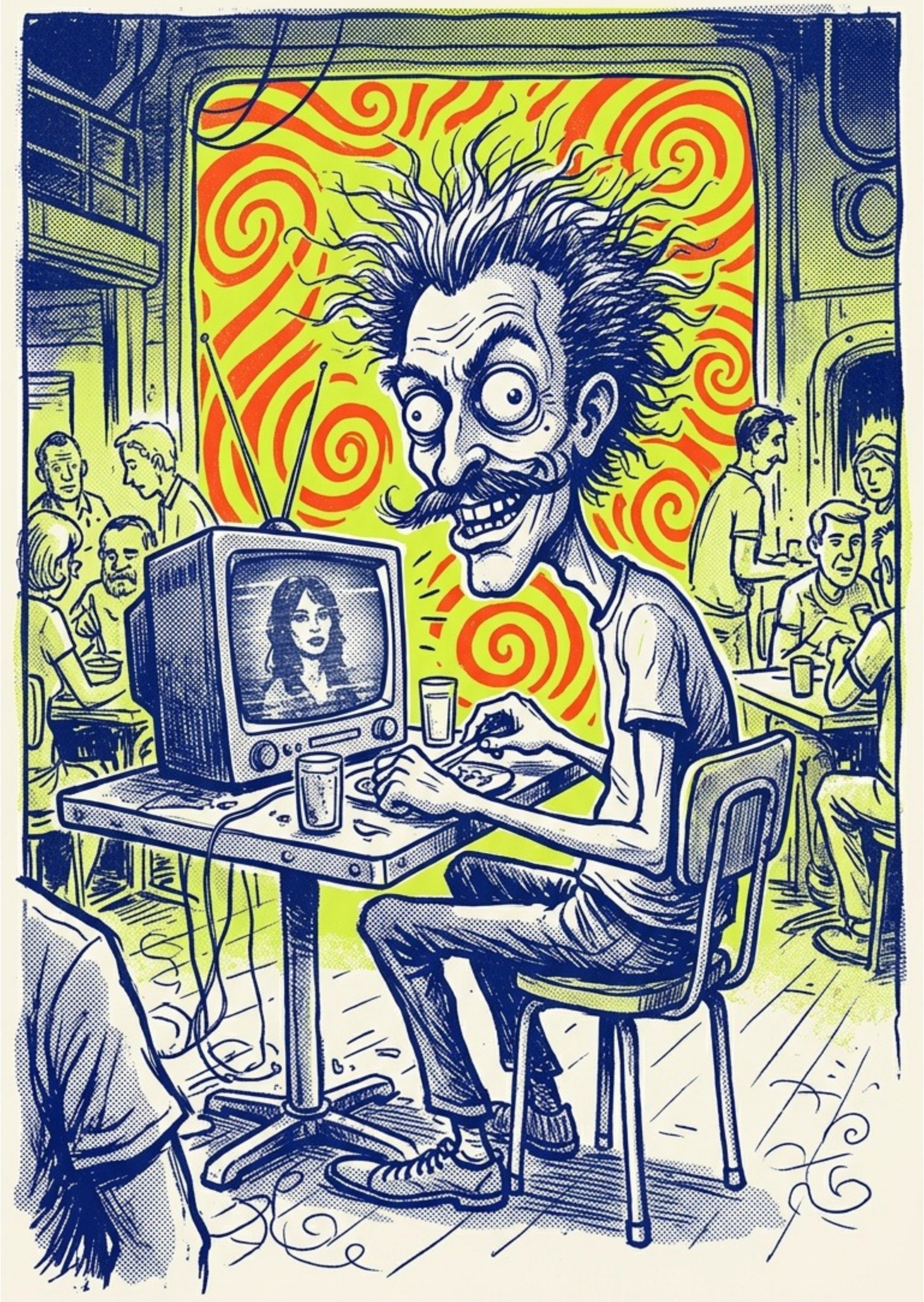
A soldier shoved an old farmer, and a stone was thrown.
In lunar gravity, it sailed slowly toward a helmet.
Then, a rifle fired, then another, then several.



The crowd became a stampede, workers ran.
A container burst, and thousands of oranges floated upwards.
Twenty-seven lunar workers and three Earth officers died.




On Earth, Cassian attended a state funeral, without gloves. On the Moon, Mara arranged thirty lights for the fallen. Hatred doesn’t change arithmetic,” she said.

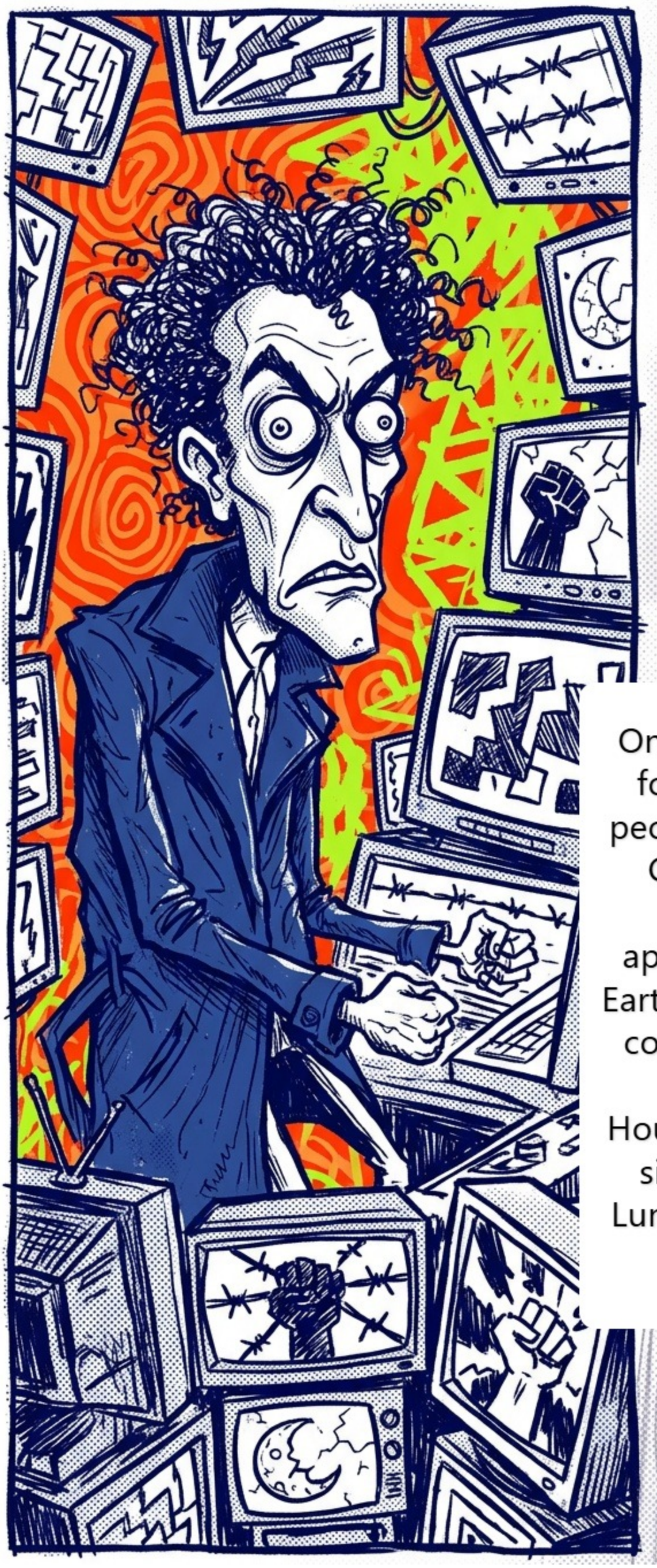


Reynaldo watched the transmission from the Providence.
The ship was six days into its descent to Earth.
Toma sat beside him, asking about Mara.


The Cordside Fire began eleven days from Earth.
A settlement of Moon-born immigrants, it burned with fury.
Fire reached the biological wall, and the Umbilical burned.
LUBRICANTS



Aboard the Providence, Reynaldo collapsed.
The biological surfaces around the ship flushed crimson.
He felt children screaming, tissue constricting, and immense pain.



One hundred forty-three people died in Cordside. Cassian appeared on Earth networks, condemning hatred. Hours later, he signed the Lunar Security Act.


Mara stopped asking for reform.
She addressed the farmers, wearing her recognizable jacket.
They don’t want partners,” she stated, “They want a plantation.

The Lunar Independence Front was born.
Its second bombing destroyed a commuter tram.
Forty-nine people died, and blame flew between worlds.

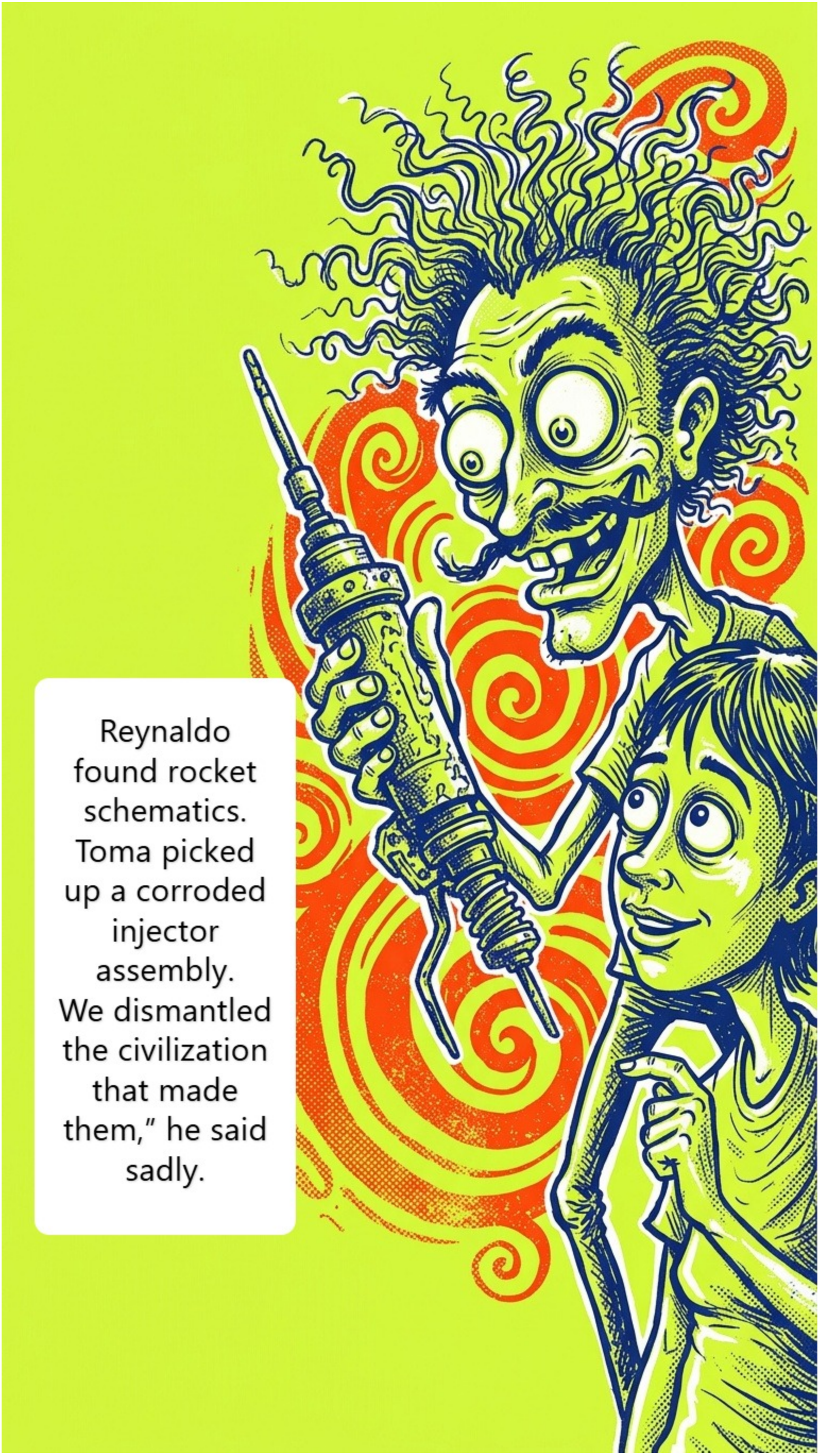




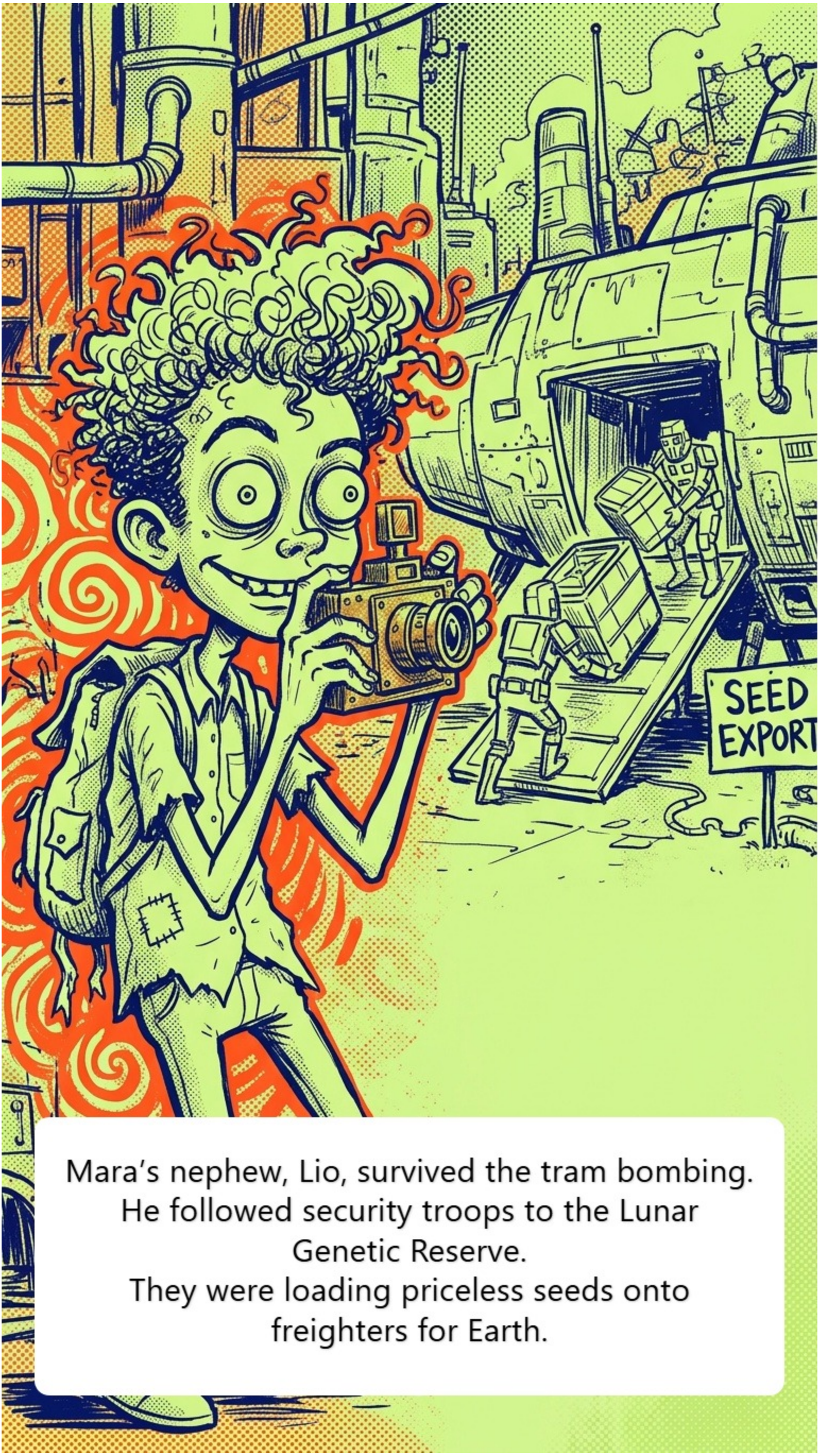
Reynaldo arrived on Earth and left the Providence. He traveled to the damaged tram connection. Touching the tissue, he saw glimpses of the bombing.



Toma took Reynaldo to an abandoned archive station.
Inside, they found the remains of Asterion Aerospace.
Schematics, records, the past of independent space travel.

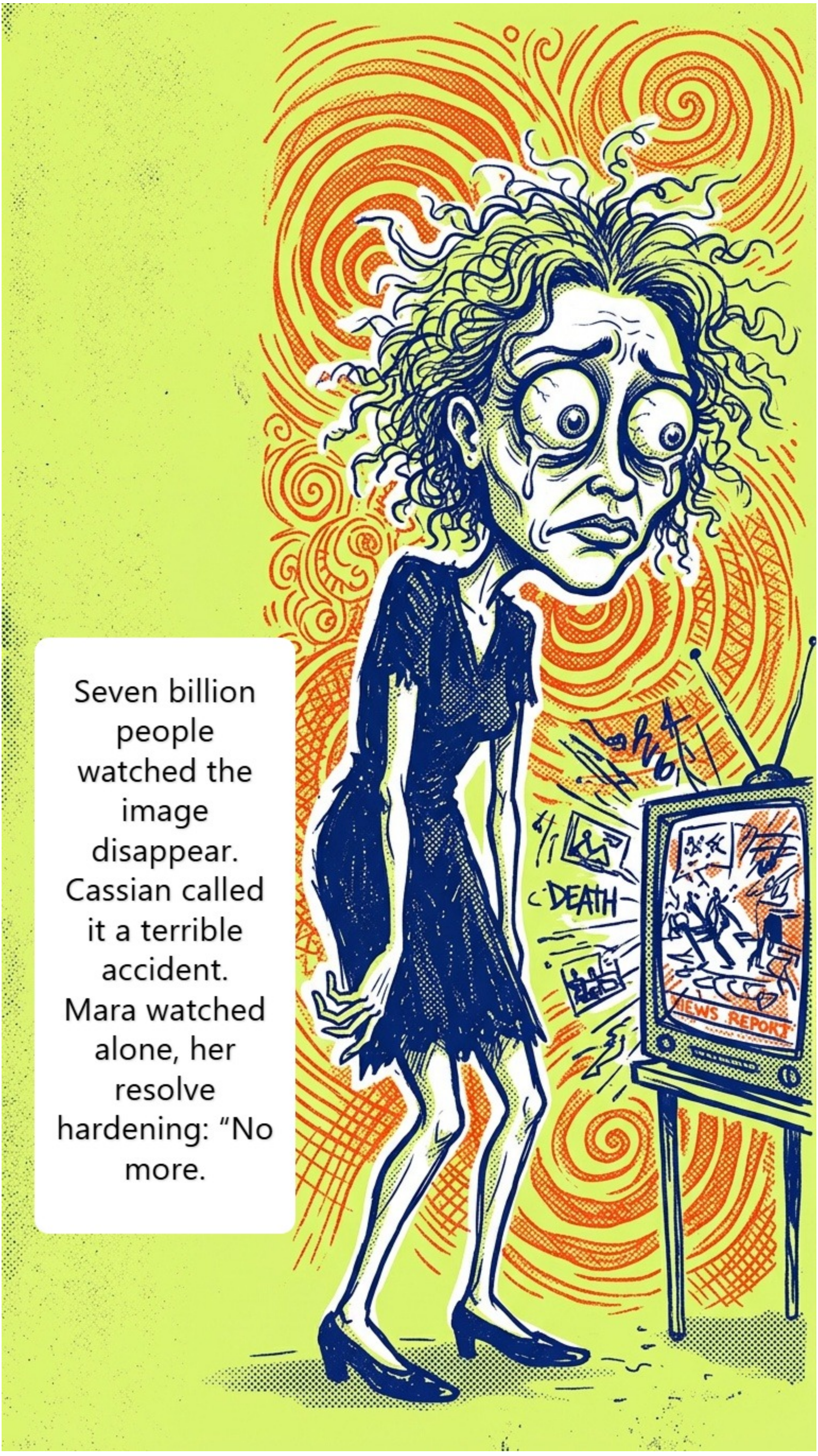


Reynaldo found rocket schematics. Toma picked up a corroded injector assembly. We dismantled the civilization that made them," he said sadly.


SEED
EXPORT
Mara’s nephew, Lio, survived the tram bombing.
He followed security troops to the Lunar Genetic Reserve.
They were loading priceless seeds onto freighters for Earth.

Lio turned on his camera, sending the images to billions.
An exhausted soldier saw movement, mistaking the camera for a weapon.
A rifle fired, and the image disappeared.




Seven billion people watched the image disappear. Cassian called it a terrible accident. Mara watched alone, her resolve hardening: “No more.
DEATH
NEWS REPORT



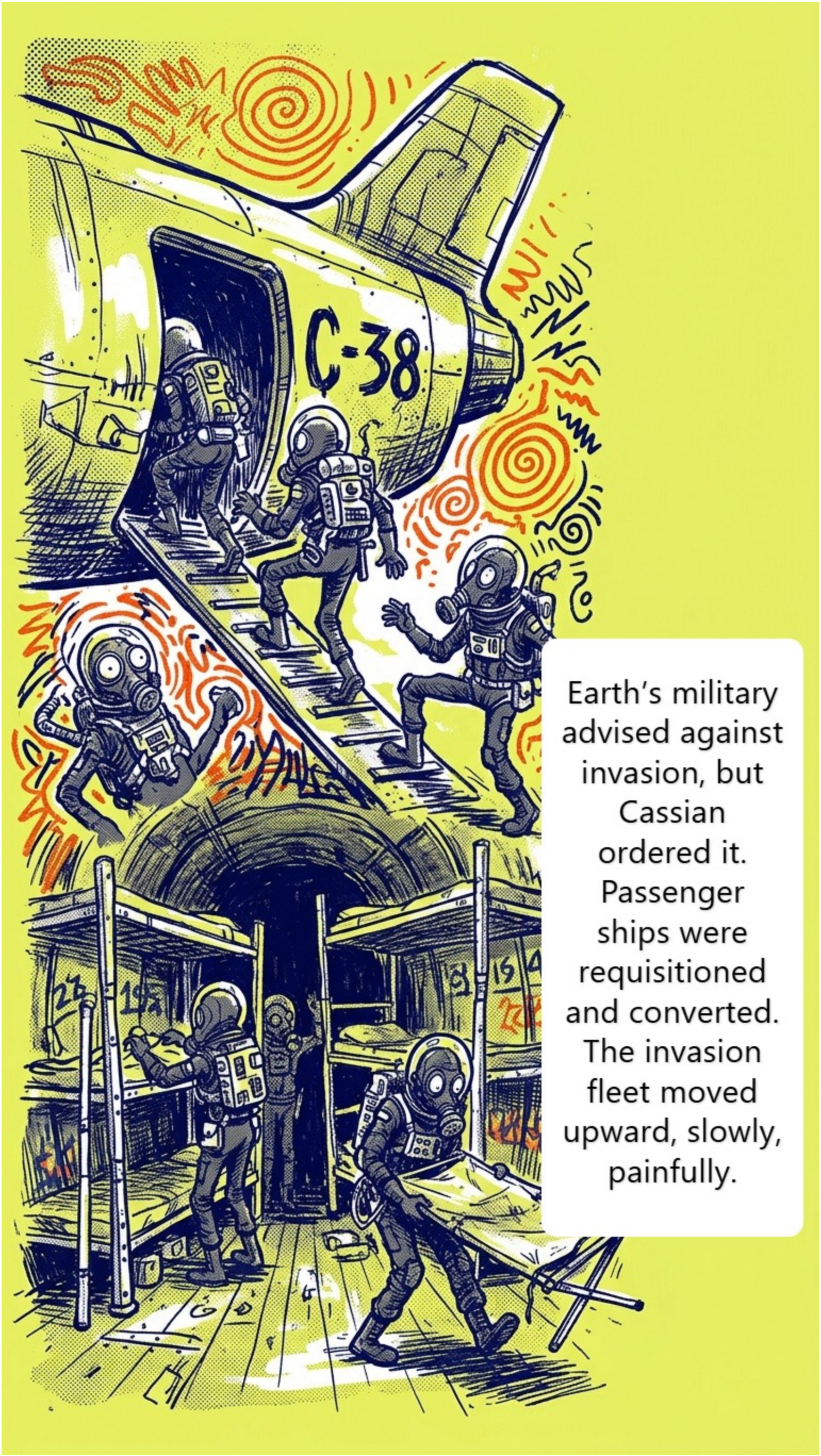
The Moon stopped loading the airships.
The effect was not immediate, making it worse.
The pipeline of food began to empty.

Days later, fewer ships arrived, then none. Earth saw famine approaching, day by day. Ration lines stretched across cities, and riots spread.





Cassian Voss requested negotiations.
Mara appeared on a screen, wearing her work jacket.
Open the granaries," he demanded. "Recognize independence," she replied.



Earth’s military advised against invasion, but Cassian ordered it. Passenger ships were requisitioned and converted. The invasion fleet moved upward, slowly, painfully.

The Moon could watch the invasion coming. Mara ordered explosives placed inside the upper Umbilical. If they come through the cord," she said, "there will be no cord.





Reynaldo entered the Heart Chamber.
The living membranes opened before him, recognizing him.
He removed his gloves and placed his scarred hands on the living floor.



They’re going to kill you,” Reynaldo whispered.
A response almost destroyed him: three hundred years of memories.
The Umbilical remembered everything, every life, every sorrow.

Reynaldo then saw Earth and Moon as the organism saw them.
Not nations, but organs, dependent, moving life.
The Umbilical never understood their division.



Then a decision passed through the tissue.
Living valves began closing, mechanical anchors loosened.
Human structures began to separate from the cord.



Reynaldo opened an emergency link.
Mara and Cassian appeared on screen, three old friends.
Stop everything!" Reynaldo cried, his voice shaking.



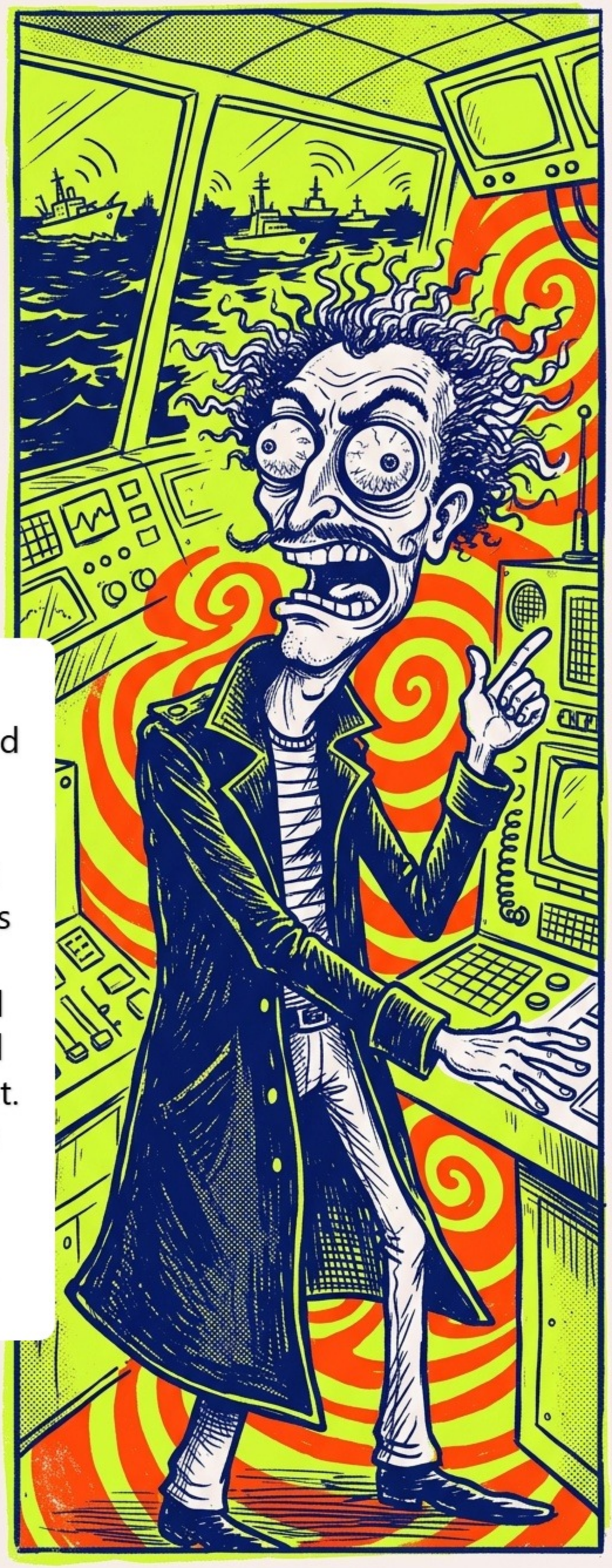

It isn't ours," Reynaldo explained, "The Umbilical.
It's leaving!" he told them.
Across the distance, biological corridors began contracting.



People stopped moving, placing hands against the walls.
The biological tissue glowed around every hand.
They felt something, not language, but goodbye.



Mara ran toward the mining chamber, helmet sealed.
Remove them!” she commanded, tearing a cable free.
She touched the Umbilical with bare skin, and it brightened.



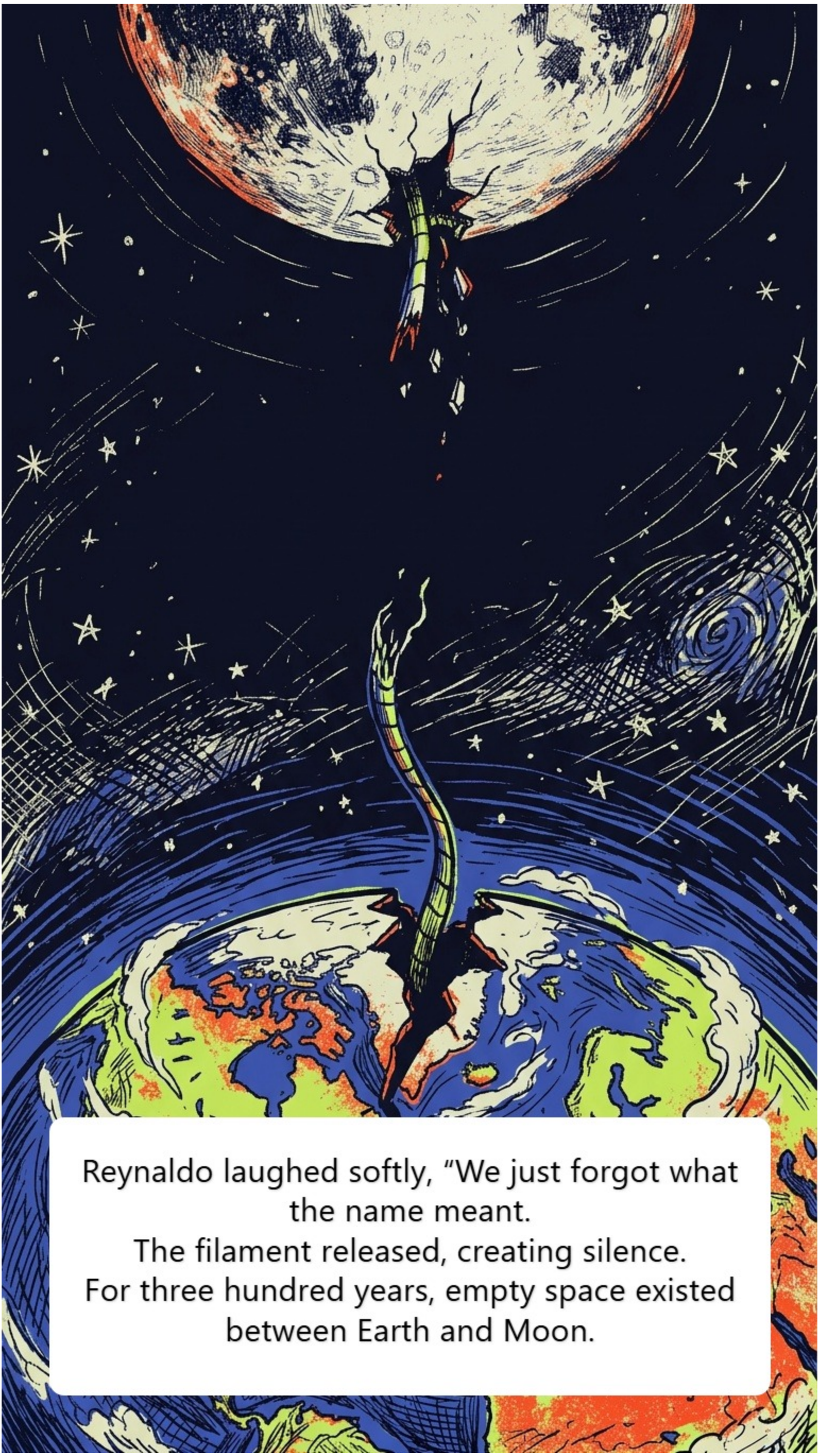
On Earth, Cassian stood in the command room, coat open, gloves off.
He watched the trapped invasion fleet.
Bring them back," he ordered, "Everyone.

The fleet reversed course, but it was too late.
The Umbilical began to constrict at its midpoint.
It happened like a birth, living vessels sealed.



Reynaldo watched through the Heart Chamber.
Earth below, Moon above, Mara and Cassian on screen.
The final living filament between the worlds narrowed.




Reynaldo laughed softly, “We just forgot what the name meant.
The filament released, creating silence.
For three hundred years, empty space existed between Earth and Moon.

On Earth, billions looked toward the sky.
They understood: the last shipments had arrived.
There would be no next airship.

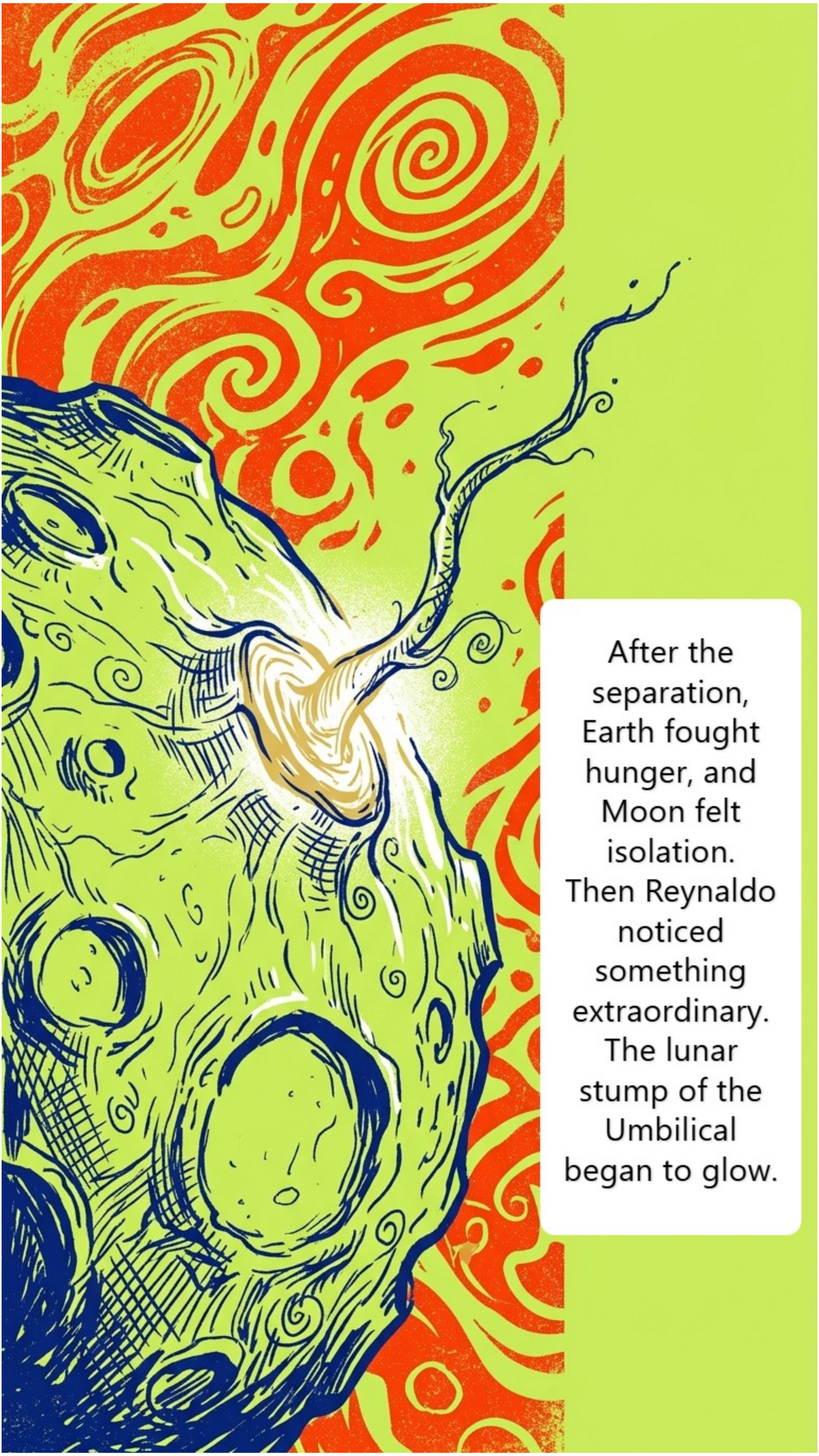


On the Moon, billions looked toward Earth.
They understood that independence had become absolute.
We won," Mara whispered, but without triumph.



Nobody did," Cassian said, looking older. Reynaldo pressed his scarred hand against the wall.
There was no pulse now; "We were the children," he sighed.




After the separation, Earth fought hunger, and Moon felt isolation. Then Reynaldo noticed something extraordinary. The lunar stump of the Umbilical began to glow.



Mara saw it too, standing with Reynaldo.
A pale golden growth emerged, a new tendril.
It extended slowly into the darkness, not toward Earth, but away.



Where is it going?" Mara whispered. Reynaldo watched the tip turn beyond the Moon. He placed his hand on the tissue, feeling anticipation, and smiled.

The Umbilical had not died.
It had finished raising its children.
Now it was growing toward something else, into the darkness.



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