



DEADWATER

What was left to be forgotten still festers below...

Proof of Concept

NAUTIC-7

Nautilora Deep Sea Research Facility

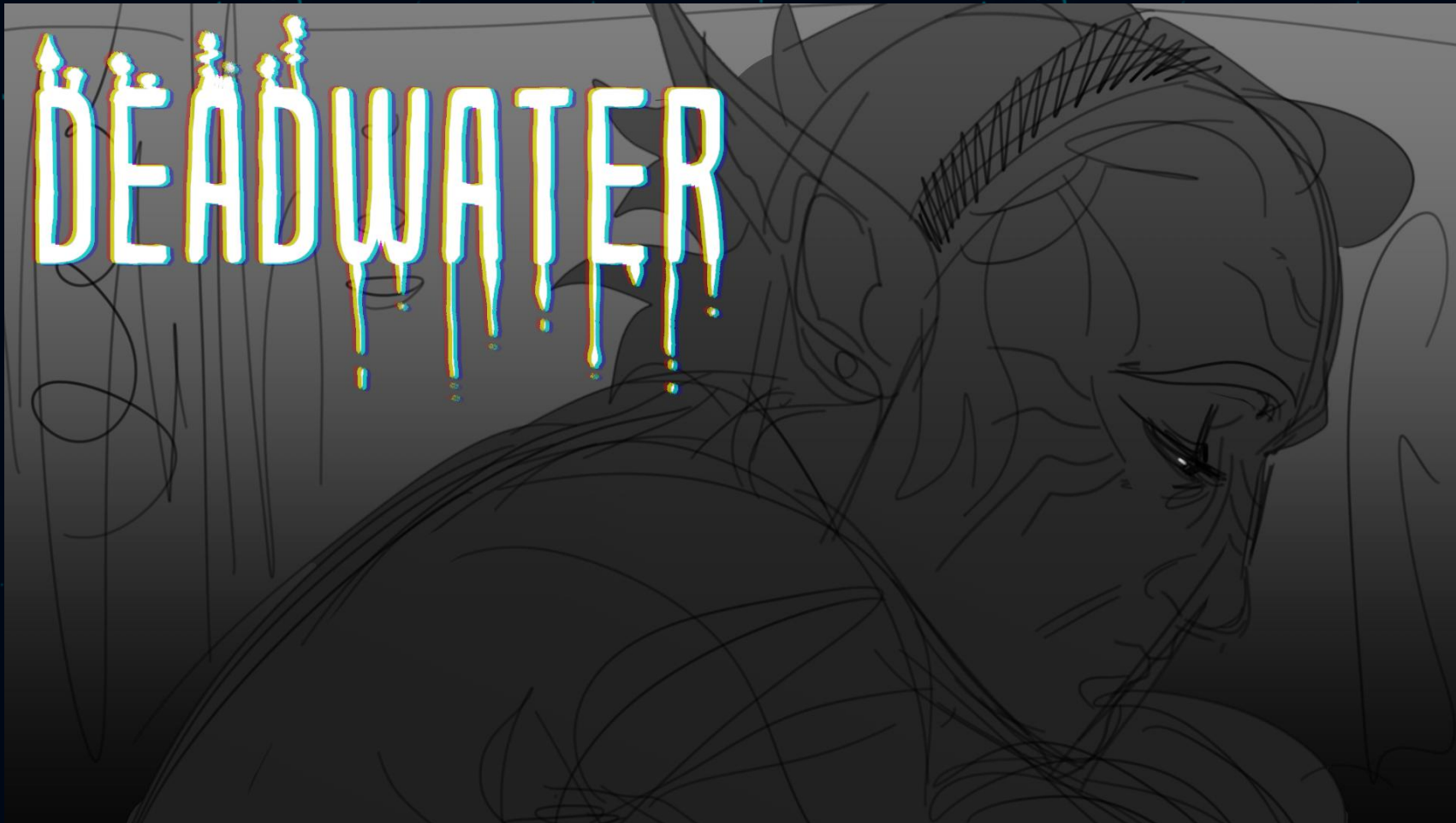
Research Subject: Crystal Power

Crew Members: 9

Captain: Luxanne VanBuren

"Don't forget to rest, Captain. Just like us, you need sleep, too"

You look up to the doorway where your second in command, Arlen, stands. You give him a smile before slinking down to the floor as he walks away. *Ever since my crew and I took post on this station, things have been... off. I guess under our circumstances, such conditions should be expected. With the previous crew disappearing without a trace, this place has only felt haunted. Nautilora higher-ups definitely want us to look into this whole ordeal, even if it isn't on our job description..*



The crew--including myself--have come down with some illness since coming down here. It's strange that anything would have been here after being abandoned for 6 months (at least from what we know..). We've all developed a bit of a cough over the past few days with me being the first to be symptomatic. It's partially why Arlen is so adamant about us getting our rest, haha. I wouldn't be surprised if my son had gotten me sick before I left..



The place was left in disarray when we first got here, but what's even more baffling was that there was no hull damage to any part of the base. The most we found was molding around the main containment unit in the lab. Otherwise.. I guess research has been going as it normally does. The crystals have continued to prove a beneficial power source for the station and the stress tests have been successful so far. We're looking into other properties they could hold.



The previous crew seemed to have begun to make due progress on potential medicinal properties of the crystals, but most of the previous documentation was corrupted or damaged. Without them here, we'll have to look into it ourselves...

We can only hope that the crew rests peacefully, wherever they may be.



Somewhere in the lab, you hear wet footsteps accompanied by a slow drip of water.

Drip

Drip

Drip

Drip



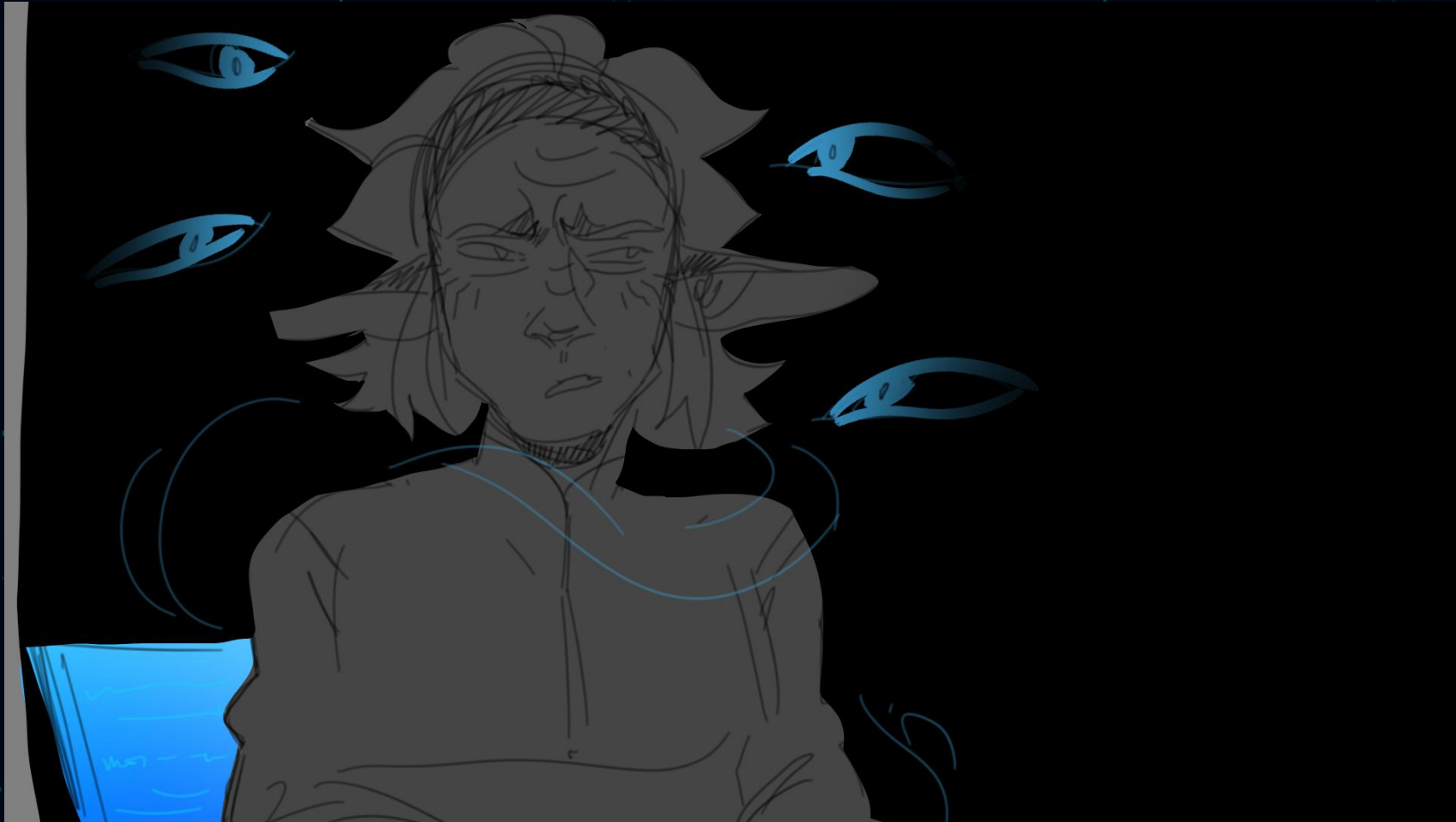
Upon looking around the room, you can't see any sign of another living being. The looming silence returns to the room as you stand there.



As you stand still, you feel a coldness begin to seep into your skin, like an icepack for a wound.

"Hello?"

You pause and wait for a response only to be greeted with nothing once again.



"Hm..."

You can hear the whispers of voices coming from behind you. With each line, a different voice becomes more prominent yet still hardly audible.

"Oh look at her!"

"Does she know?"

"No, no. She needs to learn, she can help"



Eyebrow twitching, you start to turn around to face whatever torments you from behind.

"Whatever you are, sto-aaaAAAA."

You recoil from the window where instead of your own face you are met with an apparition of many faces. The faces, almost melted together and constantly shifting, stare back at you with eager eyes.

"Captain.."

"Captain...."

"Captain....."

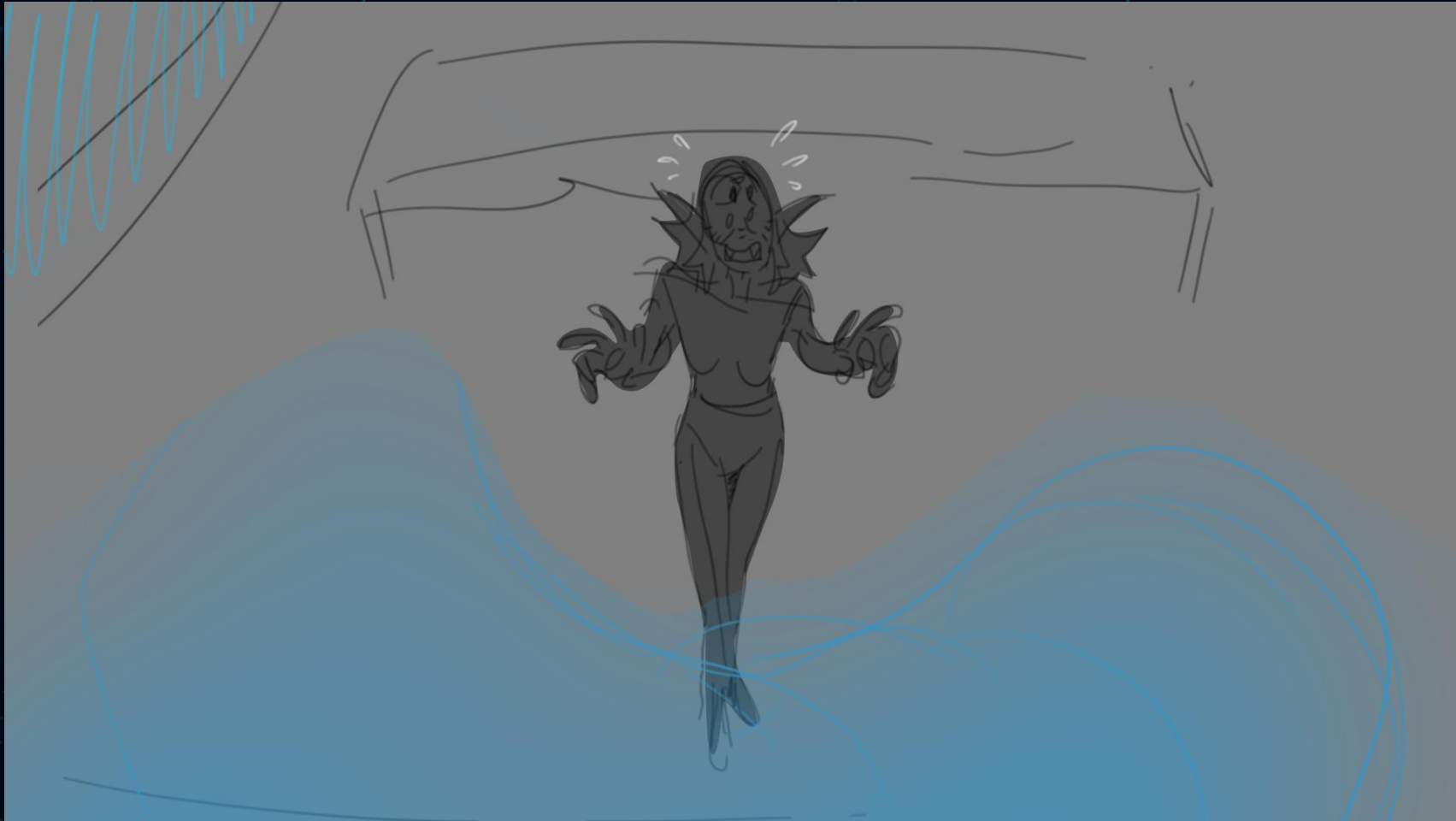
It's voice sounds like a chorus of voices as it speaks. It's tone sad and haunting as it examines your face.



The ghostly figure begins to pull itself from the window, a large, hulking mass looming over you. As it emerges, your start stepping backwards, staring up at the figure.

"WOAH! Hey, hey, hey! Wait up a moment, let's talk, no need to be so.. close and personal!"

Sweat beads on your brow, a few coughs escaping you. The figure halts and makes its form smaller, every eye looking you up and down, squinting.



"There, see?" you laugh nervously. "Now that we're on the same level, we can talk."

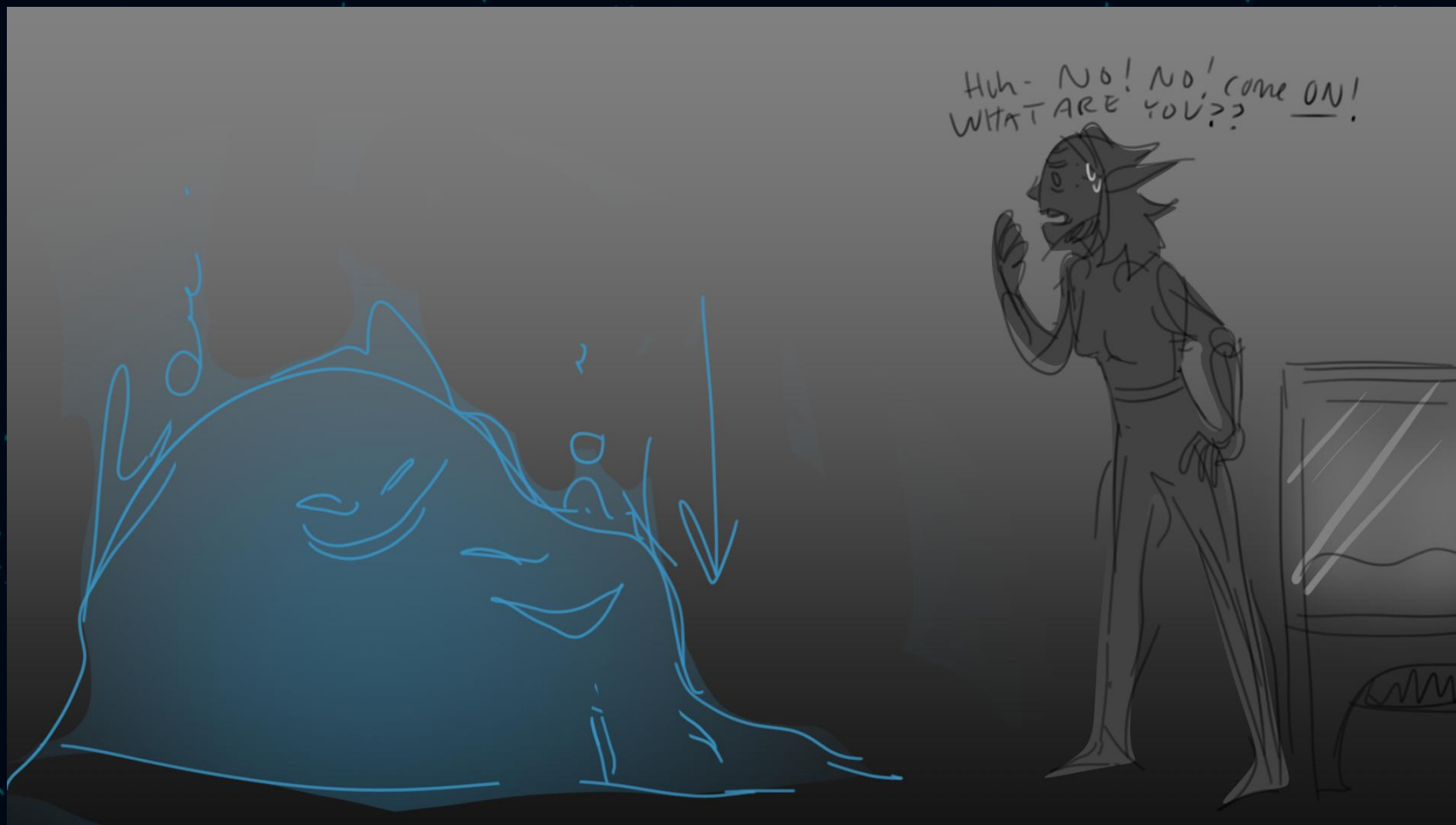
You narrow your eyes at it, taking in the more physical form. "Tell me... What are you? Clearly some sort of.. Ghost? Based off your appearance alone, but..

That shouldn't be possible. How? And who are you? Or... all of you?"

The figure continues to stare as more prominent heads take place. Slowly, its many mouths start to form into an array of grins as you speak.



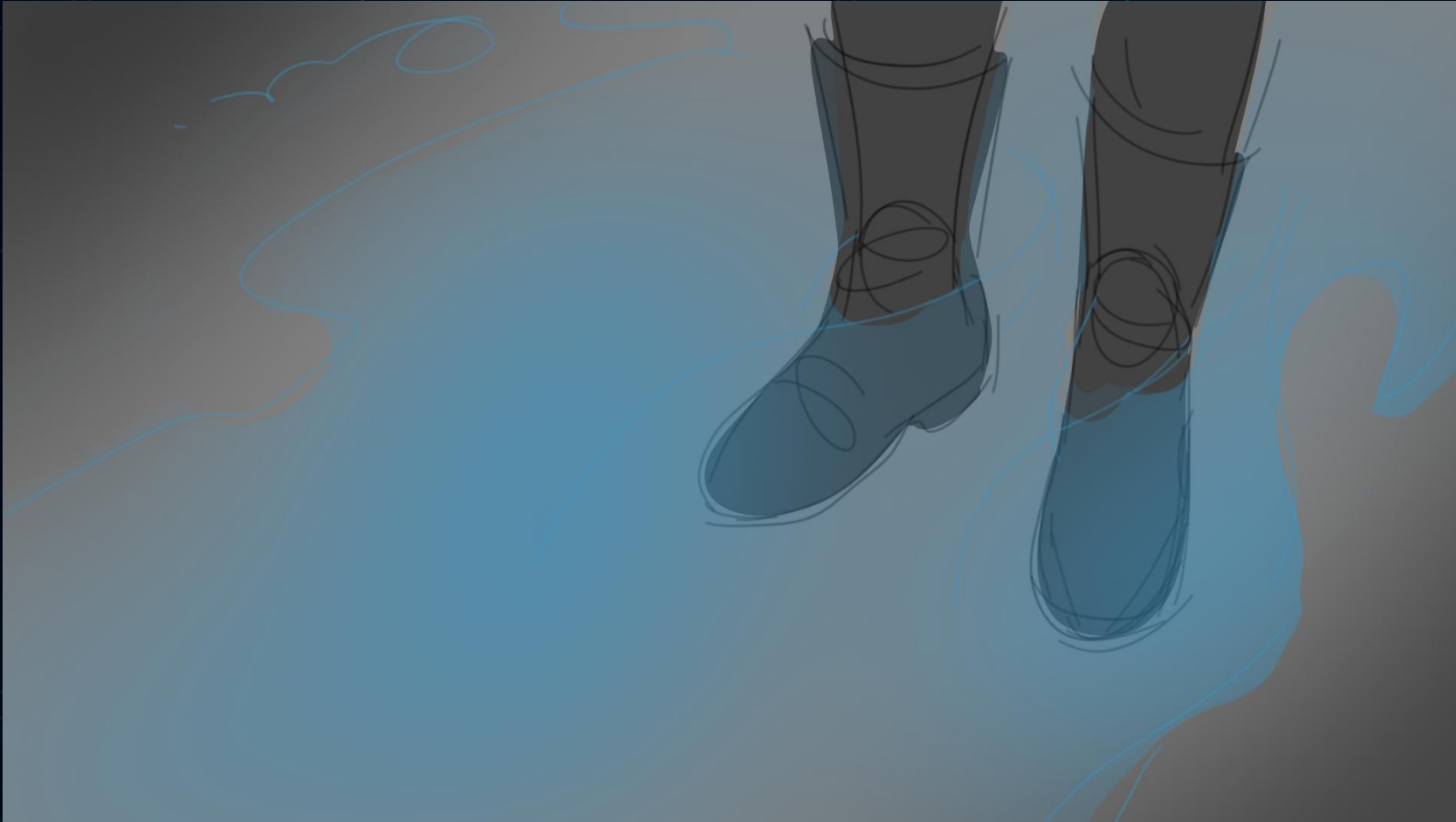
Suddenly, the mass begins to melt towards the ground into a puddle, a quiet humming coming from it.
"Huh-No, NO! Come ON! Just tell me what you are!"



The puddle formed from the spirit propels itself forward, washing between your feet like waves. Just like the ocean, it leaves your feet feeling cold as it washes over you.

"Oh Captain... Captain Van Buren..."Captain!

The voice has become a low, rumbling voice. The chorus that once accompanied it gone silent. A faint echo of voices call out after the prominent voice speaks your name, but otherwise an uncomfortable silence falls over the two of you.



The ghost sculpts itself from the ground. Tendrils from it's body loosely wrap themselves around you. While they aren't binding, you can feel them lay against your skin. Around your face, a hand wraps itself under your chin.

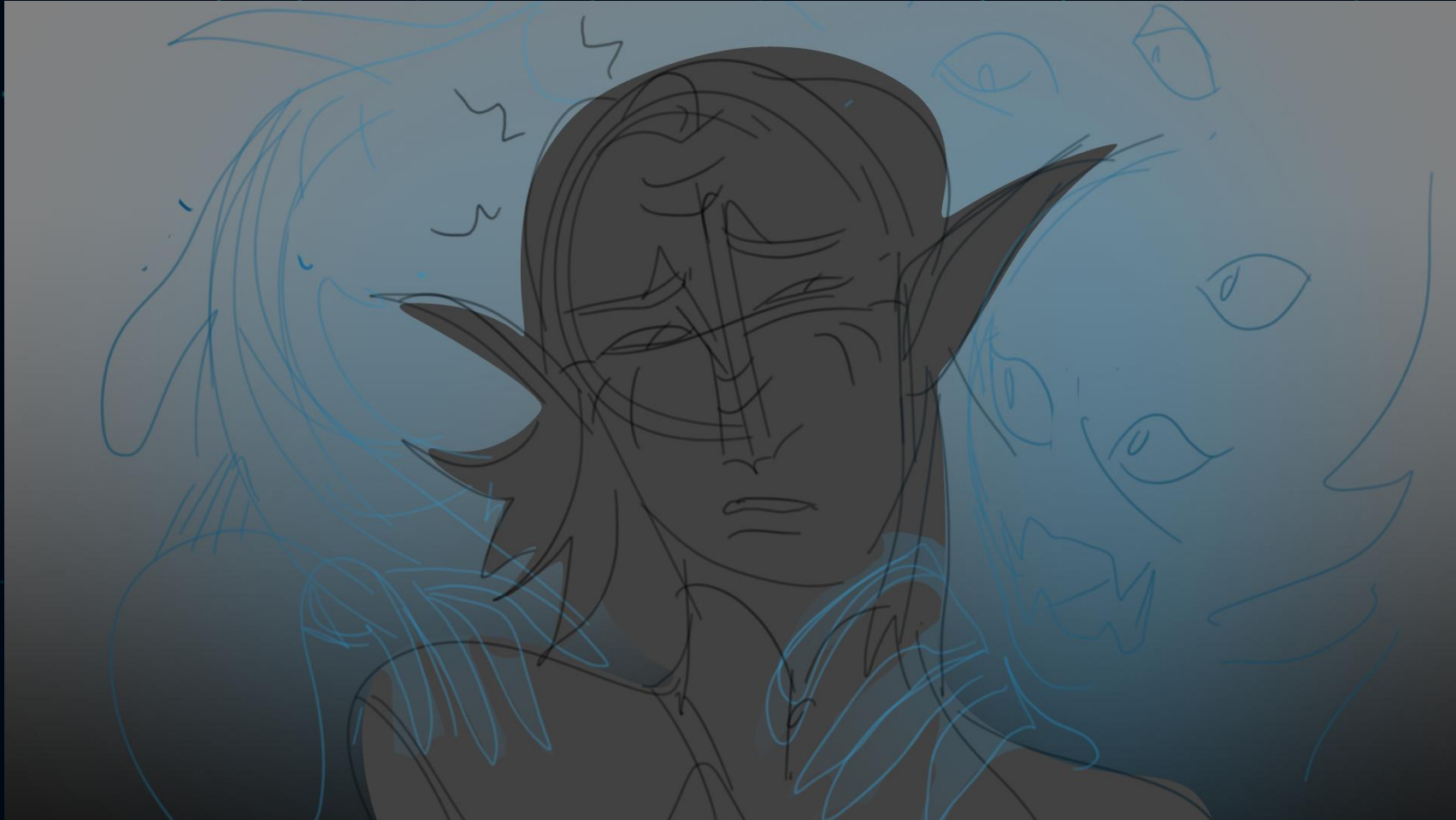
"Oh.. We're just like you. Scientists. Curious minds..." Its face, taking shape of an older gentleman, wraps around to lock eyes with you. His voice gets husky and barks out – "We're here to solve the mysteries of our ocean!"

An echo of voices follow after the outbursts.

"We're sorry.. so sorry..."



The masculine face is ripped away, returning to the amalgamated face you were first introduced to.
We are simply...





Its words echo in your head

Lost Lost Lost Lost

With each echo, your head pounds with pain. Shutting your eyes does nothing to alleviate it, only a shower of color behind your eyelids greeting you. You stumble backwards, catching yourself on the tanks.

When you open your eyes, you are greeted with the shape of the Lost taking shape of a young woman. As she speaks, you recognize the voice from within the many voices the Lost spoke with.

“Captain? Captain Van Schelk, are you ok?”
Van Schelk.. Where have I heard that before...



Your eyes focus in on her, the more you do so the more her form begins to stabilize from the previous apparition of her. Van Schelk rings a bell in your head. Martin Van Schelk was the previous Captain of this station, and apart of the crew that went missing. You look up at her, studying her face.

That must mean...

She clears her throat. "Captain? Hello? It's me, Tina."

Bingo. Professor Von Kelling.

You cough again, nodding your head. "Yes, yes, I'm alright,."



She smiles back at you, her cheery disposition almost fooling you, if it weren't for her eyebrows being tied with worry.
“Well.. We were able to catch a healthy specimen of the fish we brought on board a couple days ago.” She steps towards you, joining you at your side.



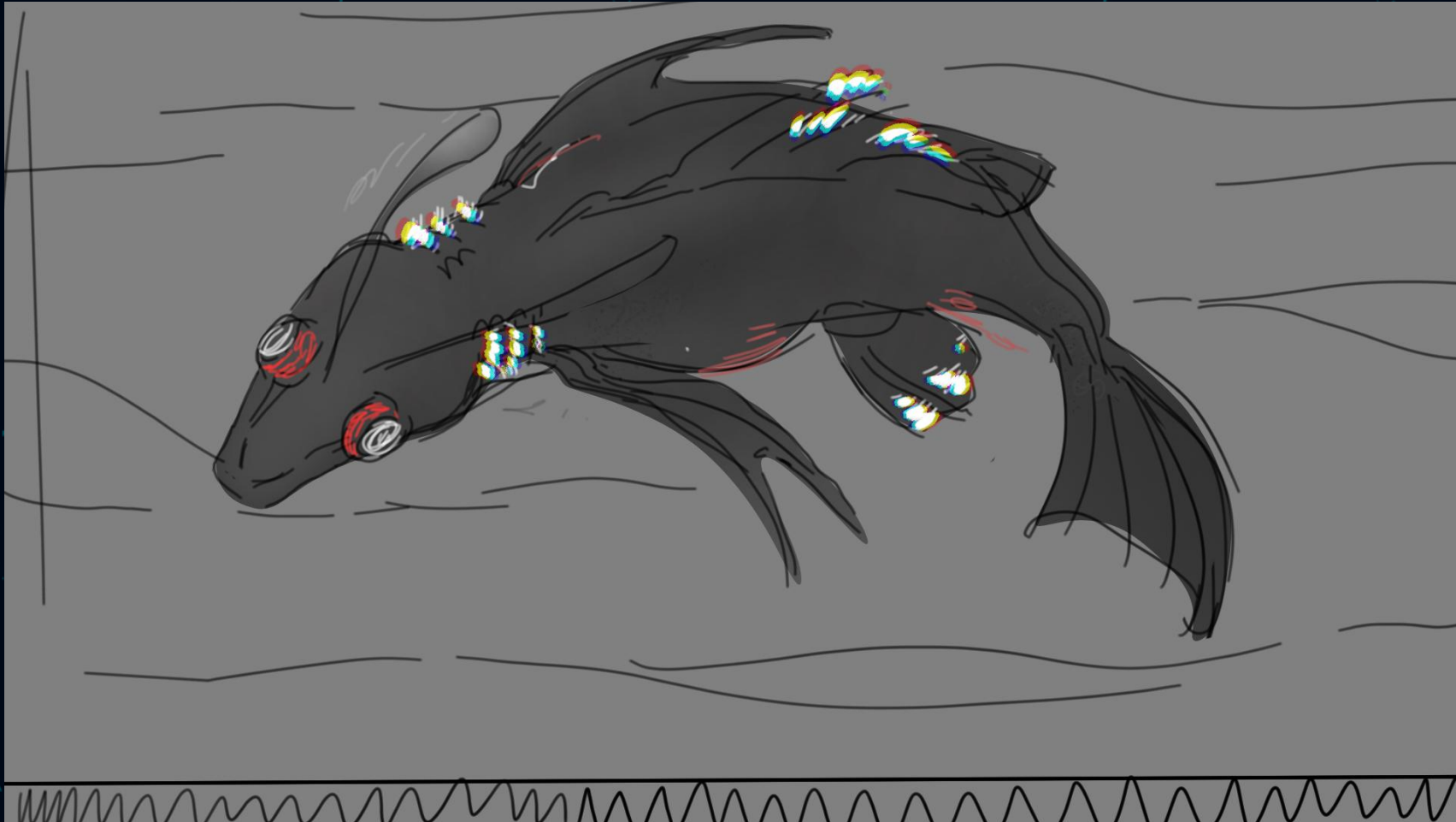
Healthy specimen..?

You turn around and look into the tanks, your hands gripping the edge. Around yourself you see a ghostly shell mimicing an unfamiliar body around yourself.

"The first specimen isn't.. hmm.. looking too great." She sighs. "The ROV has been catching an increase in other sea life just like this one. Lethargic, injured... And the more we study this one, the more we see that have been just like it."



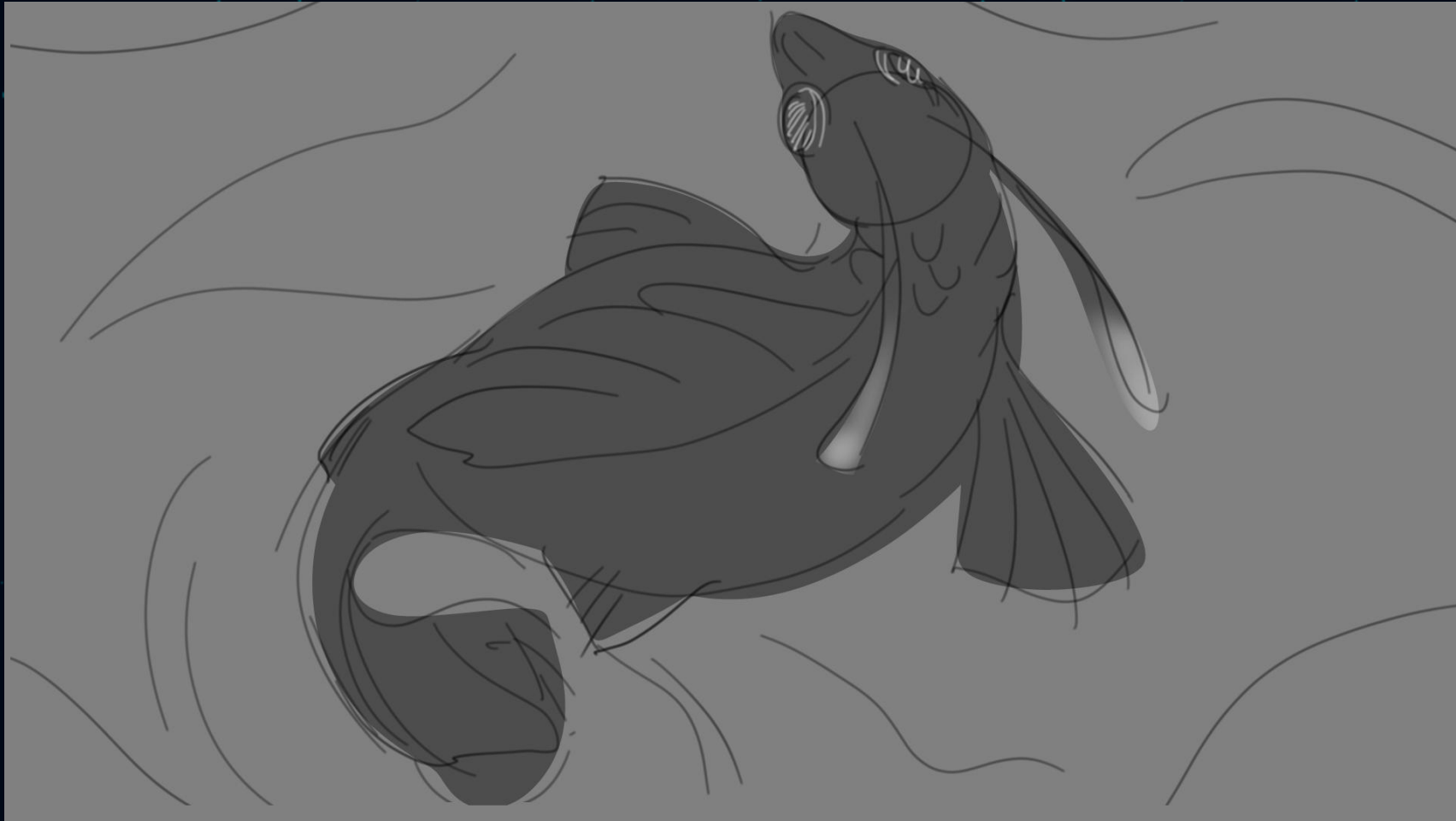
You stare down at the grotesque fish, which lazily drags itself across the sandy bottom. Around its body, growths of a fuzzy substance has begun to grown out of it, most prominently at its gills. The fins have begun rotting away and the normally milky eyes of this creature have gone red. Any spot of injury on its body opens way to the growths being revealed under their scales.



In a separate tank to the left, another fish swims contently in the water. Its fins are full and it looks perfectly healthy.

"What.. what is that? What made this fish so sick?"

"That's what we're trying to figure out. We saw her swimming by the the ROV a couple days ago... caught her, brought her in, and have been observing her since. This isn't like anything we have seen before, and if there's more.... We don't want this spread to the fish we eat."



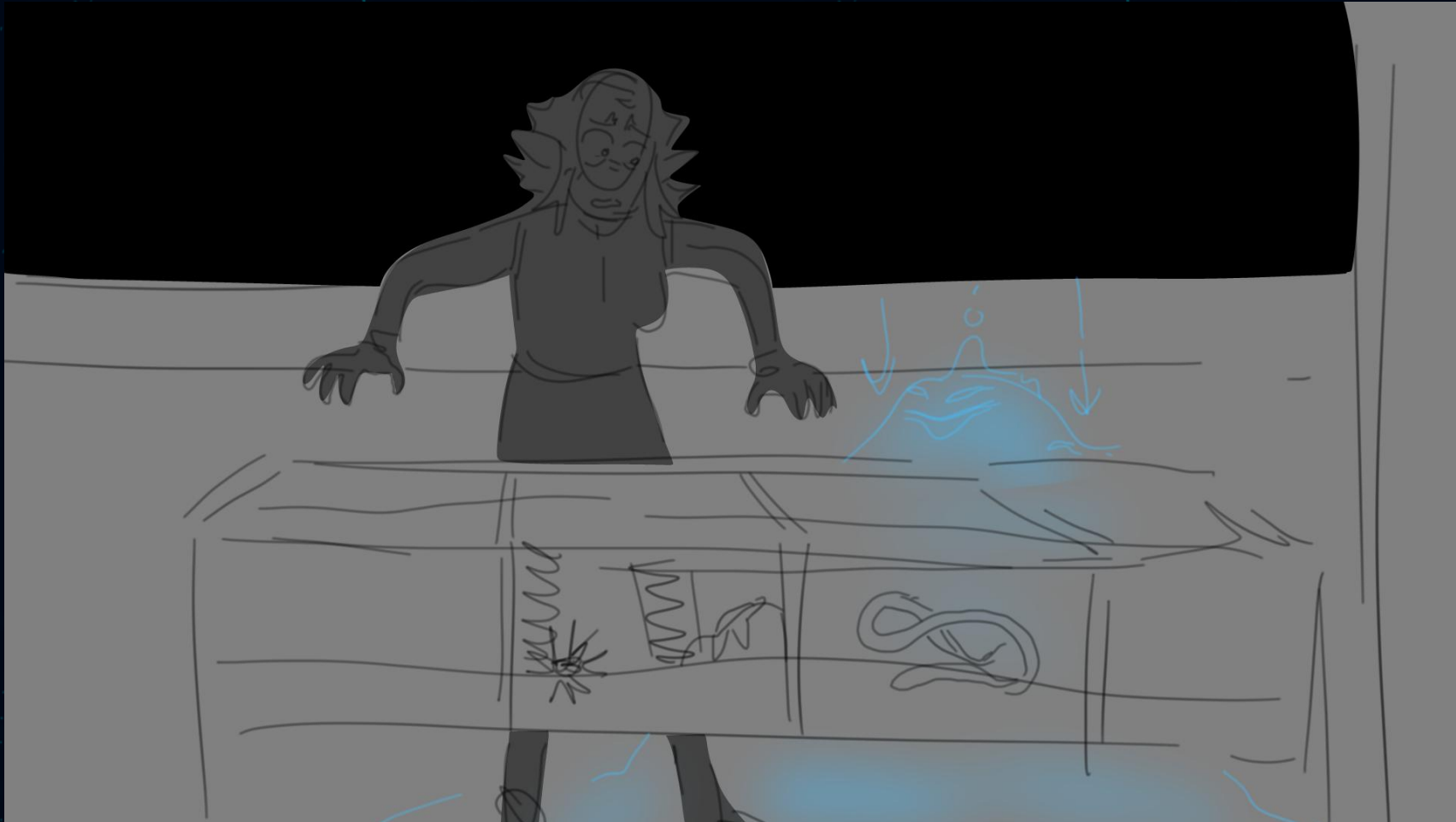
You quizzically watch the two fish in their tanks until you feel the dull pounding in your head again. Wincing, you put your hand to your head as the woman to your side morphs between the stable, corporeal form and the ghostly figure.



Eventually, the headache subsides and you turn to look at the Lost once more. It gazes at you in it's amalgamated form, watching you settle back in. A few of its eyes narrow at you before it smile spreads across its face once again.

"Come, come! We have something to show you!"

It melts to the ground, diving between your feet and grabbing your ankles.

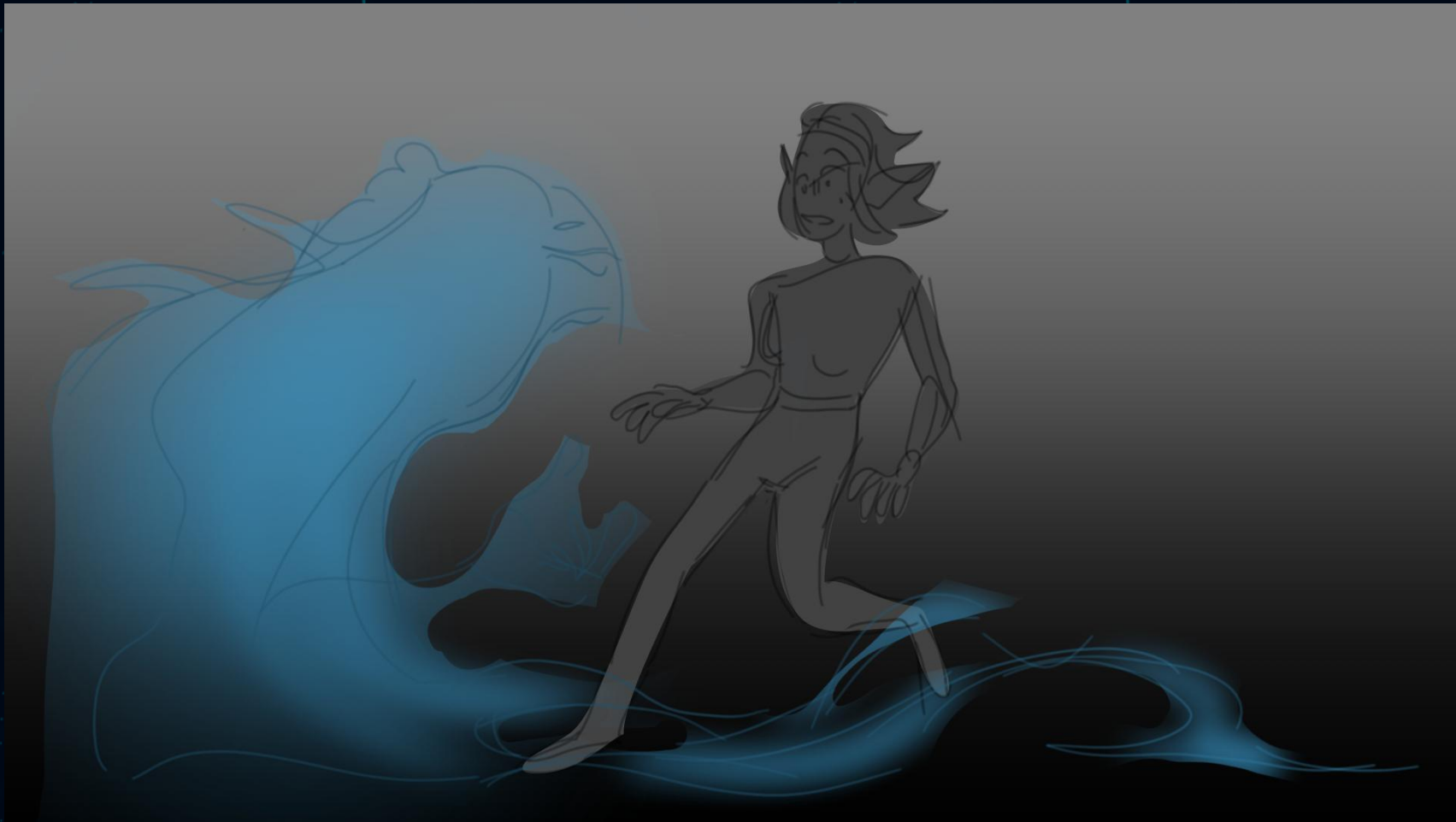


Passing around your feet, the Lost drags you along as it moves.

"Huh- alright, alright! I'm coming—"

You stumble as it takes you along, motioning with its hands towards the units behind it.

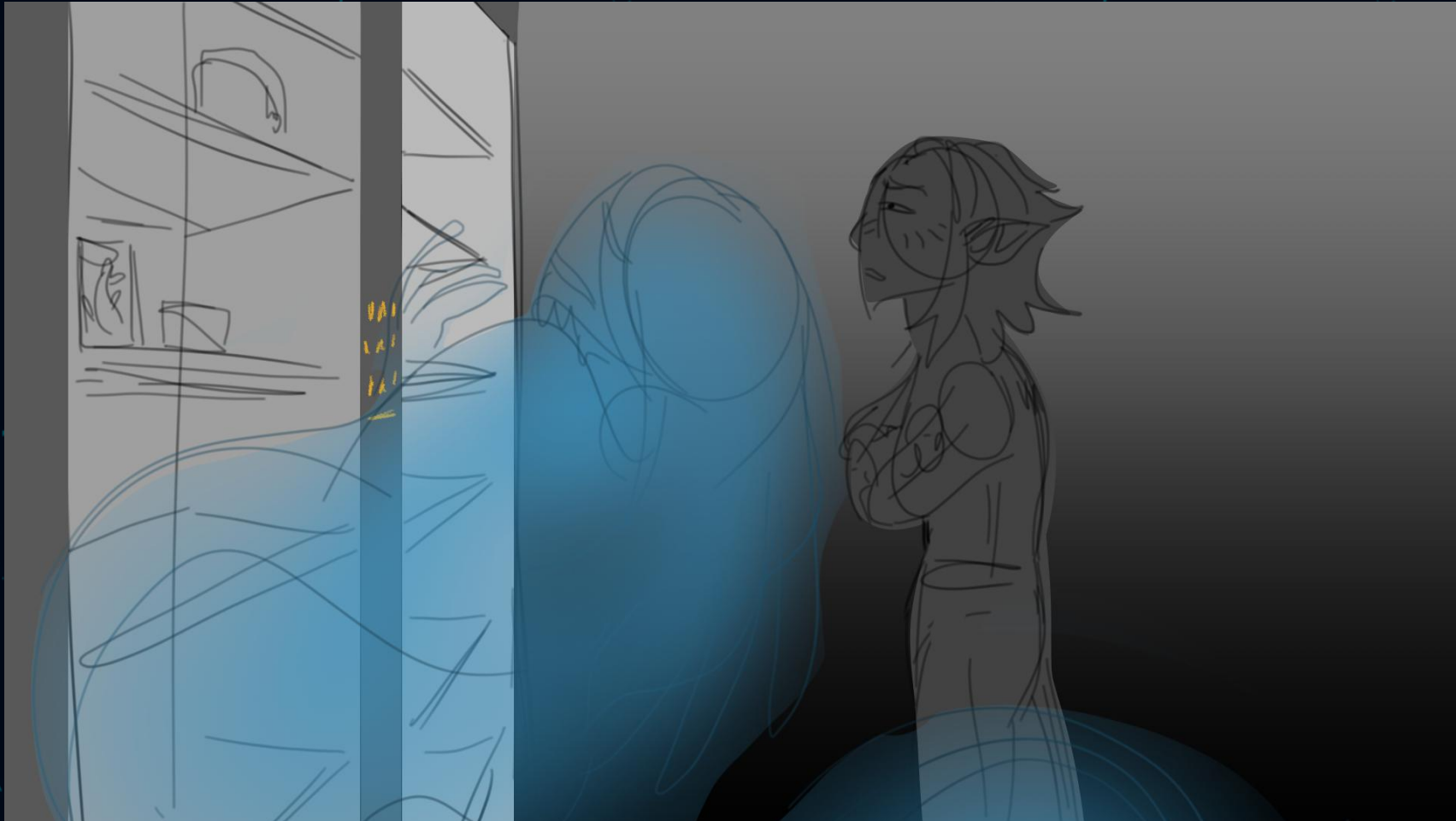
"We were able to collect a sample to study out of water"



As you look into the unit, there's nothing aside from the usual storage of items that you remember putting there yourself.

"What... am I supposed to be looking at exactly..?"

You begin to hear faint whispers again as you stand looking at the containment unit.



You peer behind you and perk your ears as you focus in on what they're saying.

"Please get out of here..."

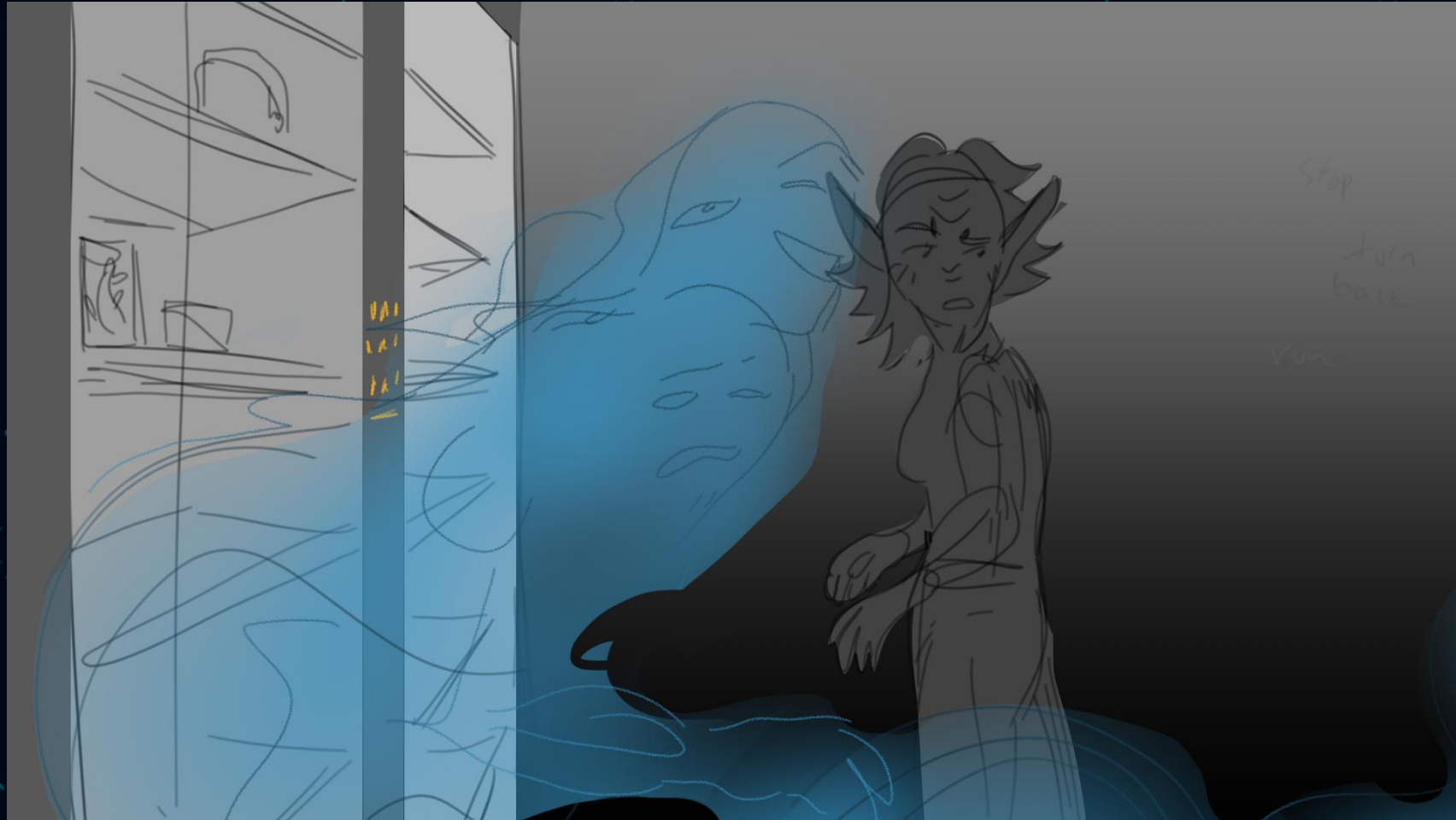
"Run, he wants you.."

"Turn away while you can.."

Their voices are tangled with worry, but the low voice cuts through the chorus of voices as it starts to speak once more.

"Don't fret yourself with those, Captain." It lowers its voice a little before speaking back up. "It must be getting to you, too.. Come, come. Look here"

It reaches its hand up and pulls your face back towards the unit in front of you.



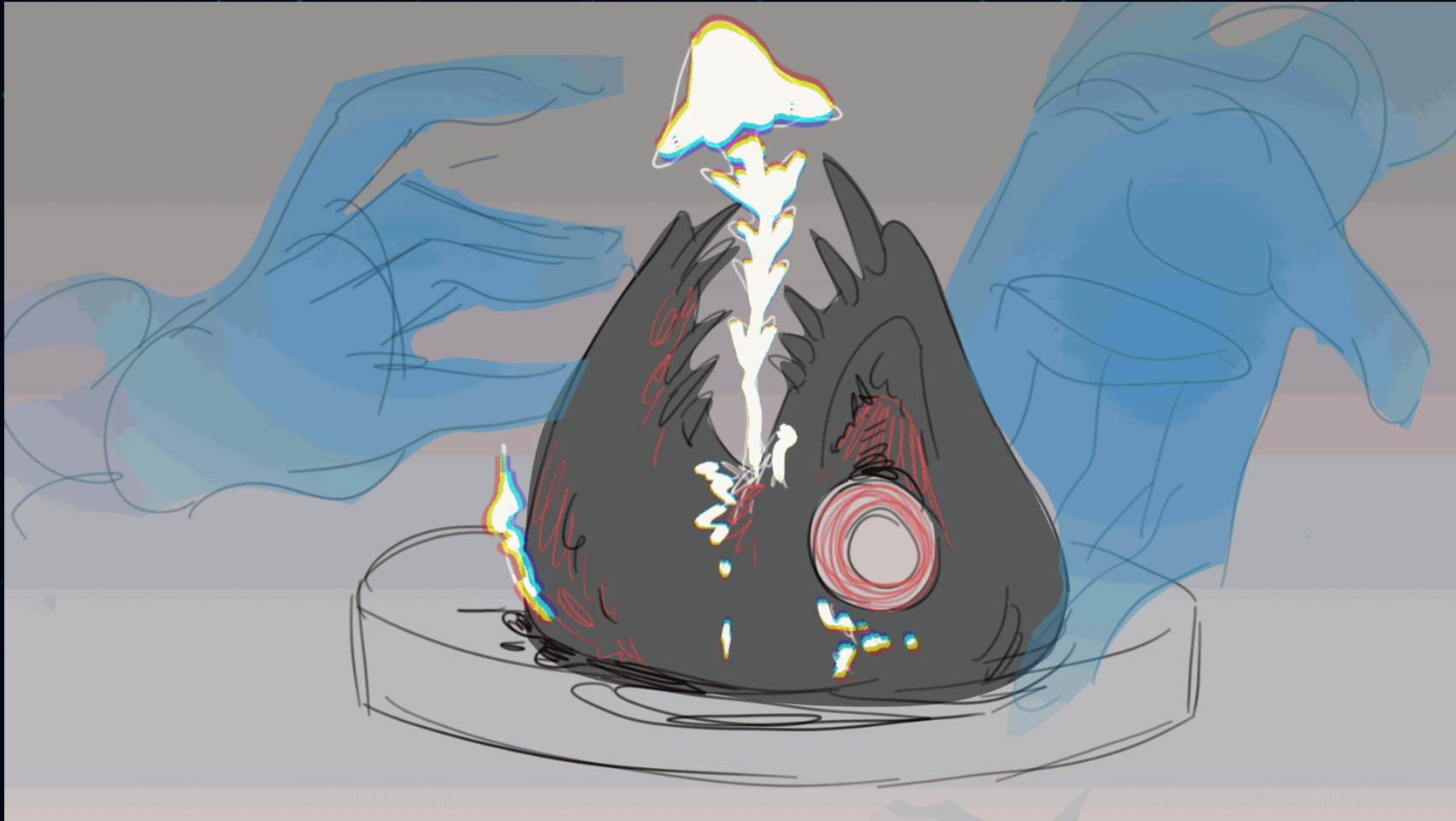
As you reach to open the unit, the contents change. Instead of the familiar storage containers and test tubes, a singular, large fish head sits in the middle with the same white fungus growing out of its mouth. It's dead, red eyes peer back at you. Below it, a puddle of blood has formed where the head itself the blood becomes contaminated with a black substance.



The Lost moves inside of the unity, gesturing to the fish head and prodding it.

"We took one of the dead infected and lopped off it's head for examination. Stored it away to observe.. and as it sat more fungus grew, almost memorializing the head as it took spread quickly."

You see as a mass of fungus flashes into your vision. The once sparingly covered fish now overgrown as it spills over the edges of the dish it rests in.



"eeuGH--"
You grimace at the sight.
"How long was it like that..?"



Behind you, you catch a glimpse of two shadowy figures hunched over the containment unit. The sound of a coughing fit muffled but there, merely and echo of what was.

The low voice begins to speak again after the coughing subsides, all other voices returning to silence.

"It only took a couple days to get.. that bad. We took samples of the fungus from in there, looked at it under microscopes.. and saw that the cellular structure was almost crystalline, unlike anything we had ever seen. What we put into the fridge was something different than what was just on the fish."

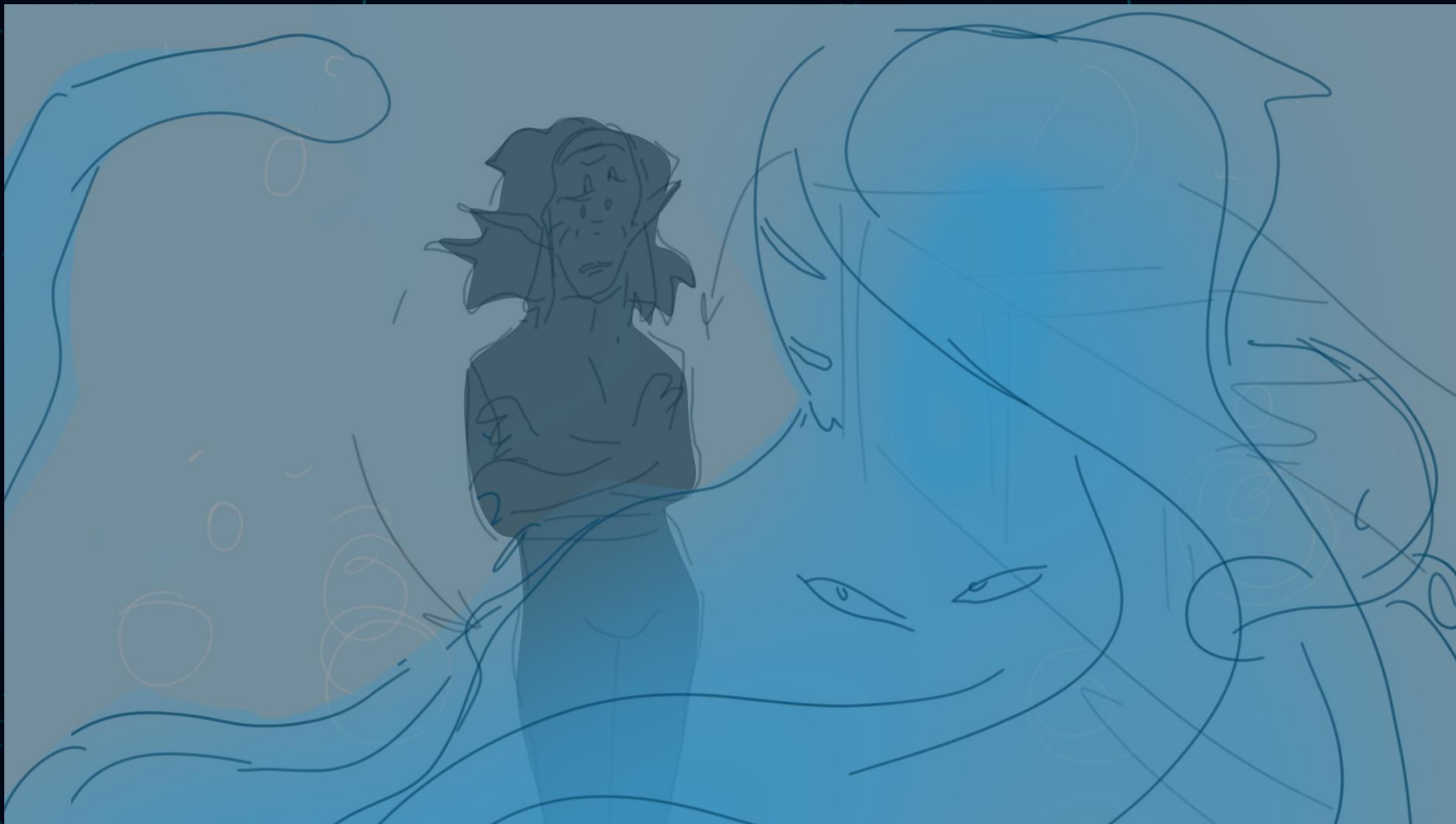


"I don't get it.."

"Hm?"

"You're showing me this. All of this... But there wasn't anything on board when we came here. The most we had was--I guess-- the aftermath of your 'fridge incident,' but even remains were left there."

You recall seeing the fish bones inside the fridge as you were cleaning it out. While the fungus had overrun most of it, there was still something.



The Lost opens its arms wide, a mistiness from its body rising up and taking form a large, armored creature.
"My crew wanted to help. After seeing that this wasn't an isolated incident, they wanted to do what they could to figure out the problem.. We sent word for supplies, but everything went so wrong so fast. What seemed to be just a small fungal infection was actually something.. worse."

The Lost raises it's arms
"After coming into our care, it didn't just deteriorate over time."



It pulls its hands onto its head, holding it as it stares back at you with wild eyes.

"It morphed.. it rotted faster than I've ever seen before... What was once a beautiful creature was turned to a husk of what it was, and we couldn't do anything about it! It was being eaten alive by whatever was infecting it, and it was only a matter of time before it got to US!"

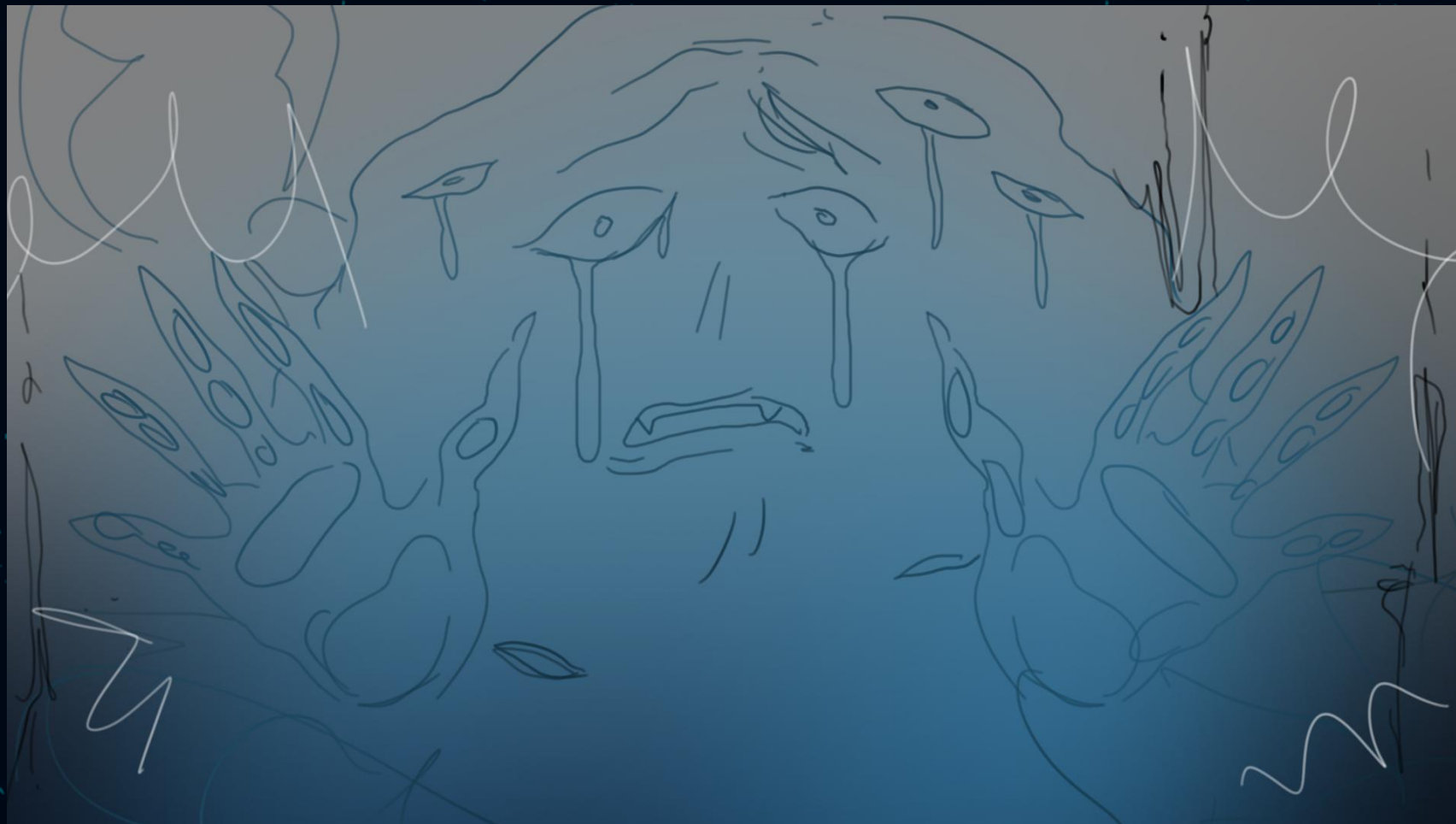
Before you, the creature, only slightly impacted by the infection, rots. Its body breaks apart, its movements slow, and it eventually begins sinking.



The Lost launches itself at the glass, slamming its palms against it in a loud **THUD**. Tears black as tar start to stream from its many eyes, its form becoming more and more unstable. It's many eyes twitch, it's face twisting between sorrow and anger.

CRACK "We were sent here to study the crystals! To help Elaria!" **POW** "But instead we found ourselves helping the wildlife!"

BOOM "Interfering with nature!" **BAM** "and our curiosity came and bit us back!"



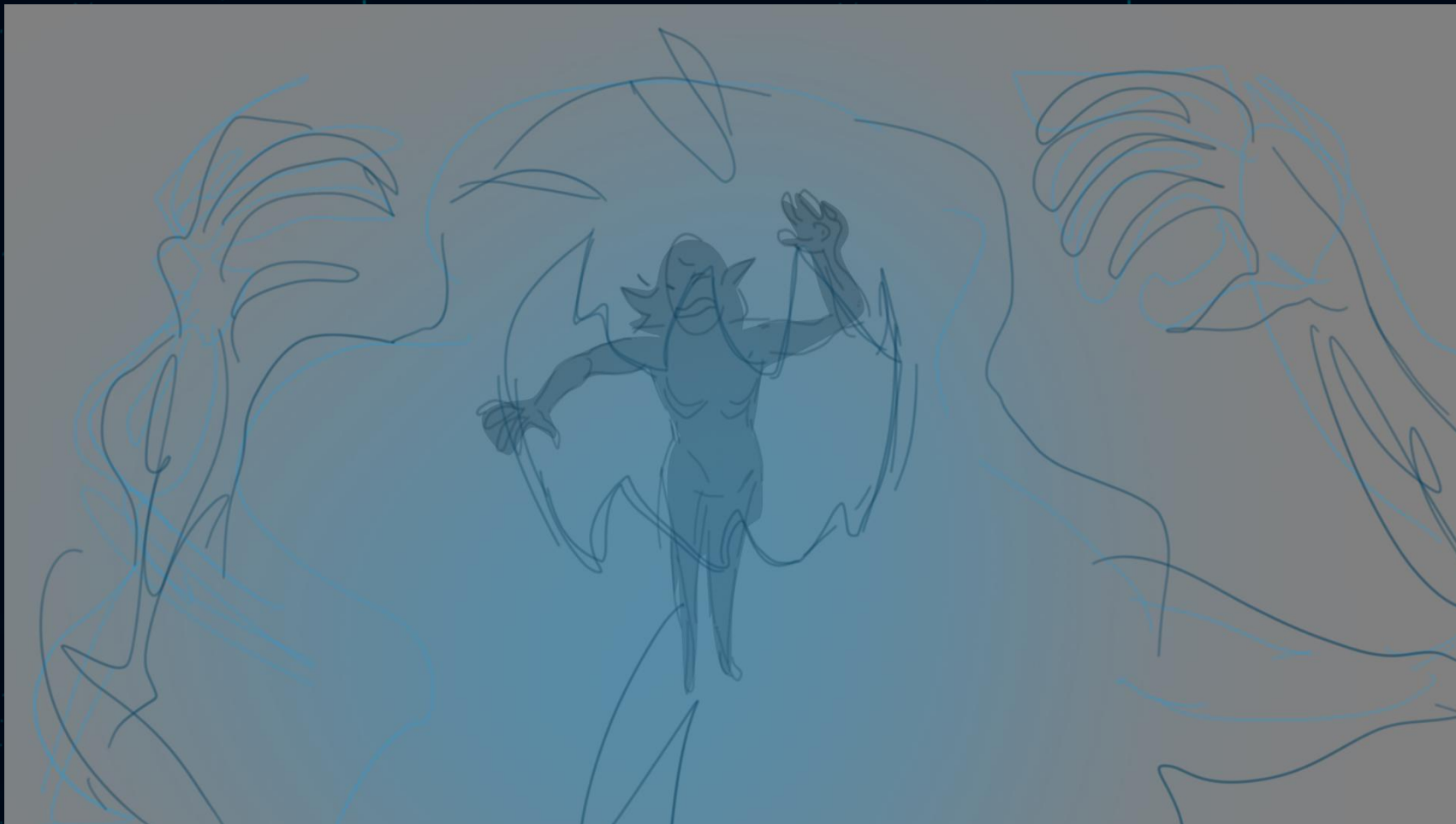
"AND IT FELL ON ME! I WAS THE ONE TO TAKE IT ALL ON!"

The form of the ghost morphs into that resembling a sea leviathan, rearing back to strike.



"I SAVED US!"

It pushes itself up and lunges through the glass of the tank, forcing itself down upon you.



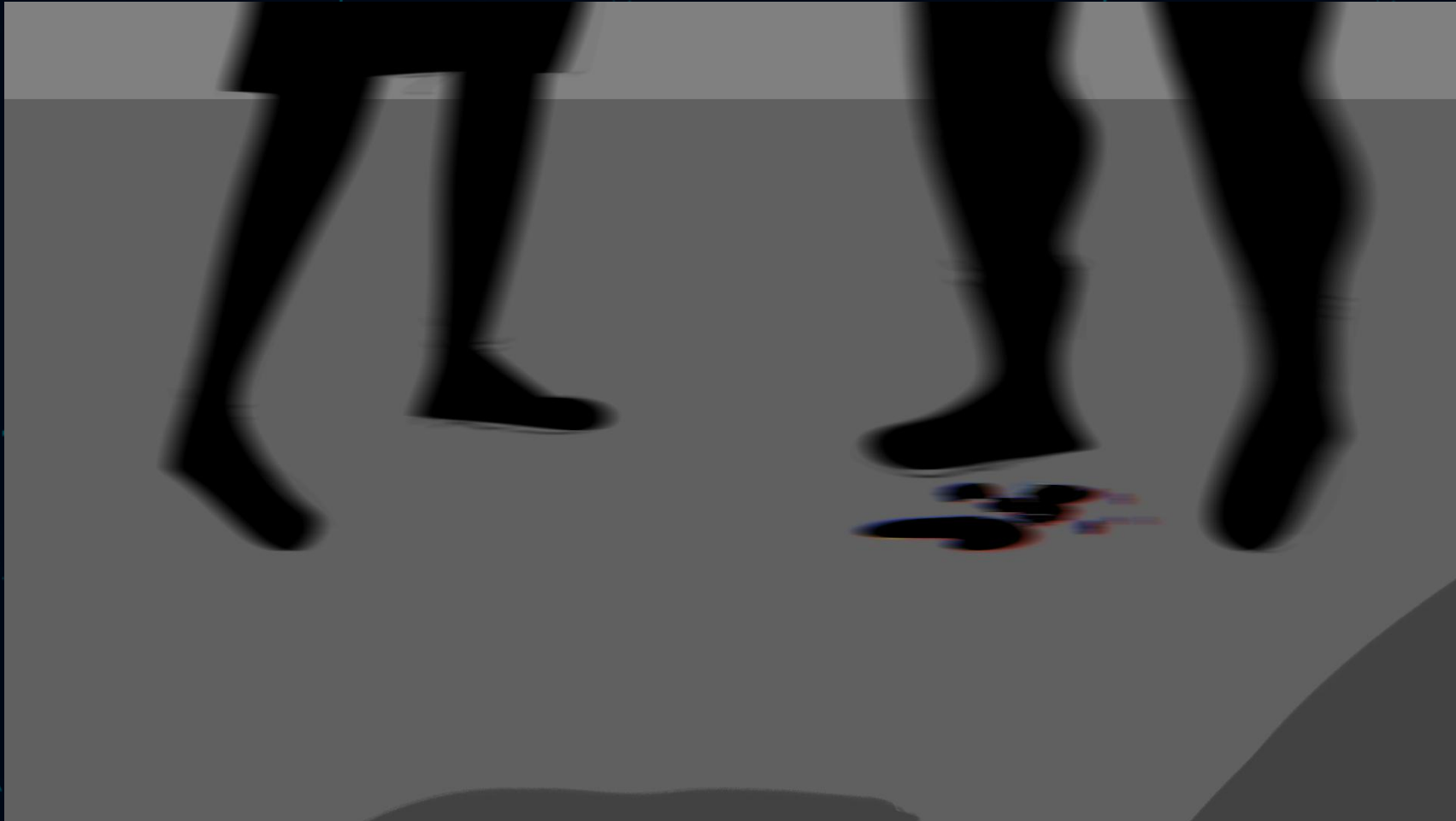
It passes through you, a bitter cold biting at you as it does. The shock of it sucks the air from your lungs, and the force knocks you back.



Your head strikes the ground as you fall over. Helpless on the ground, you lay there for goddesses knows how long, your head pounding with a sharp pain. Eventually, you bring yourself to look forward, a familiar, dull pain ticking behind your eyes until the world around you shifts and blurs.



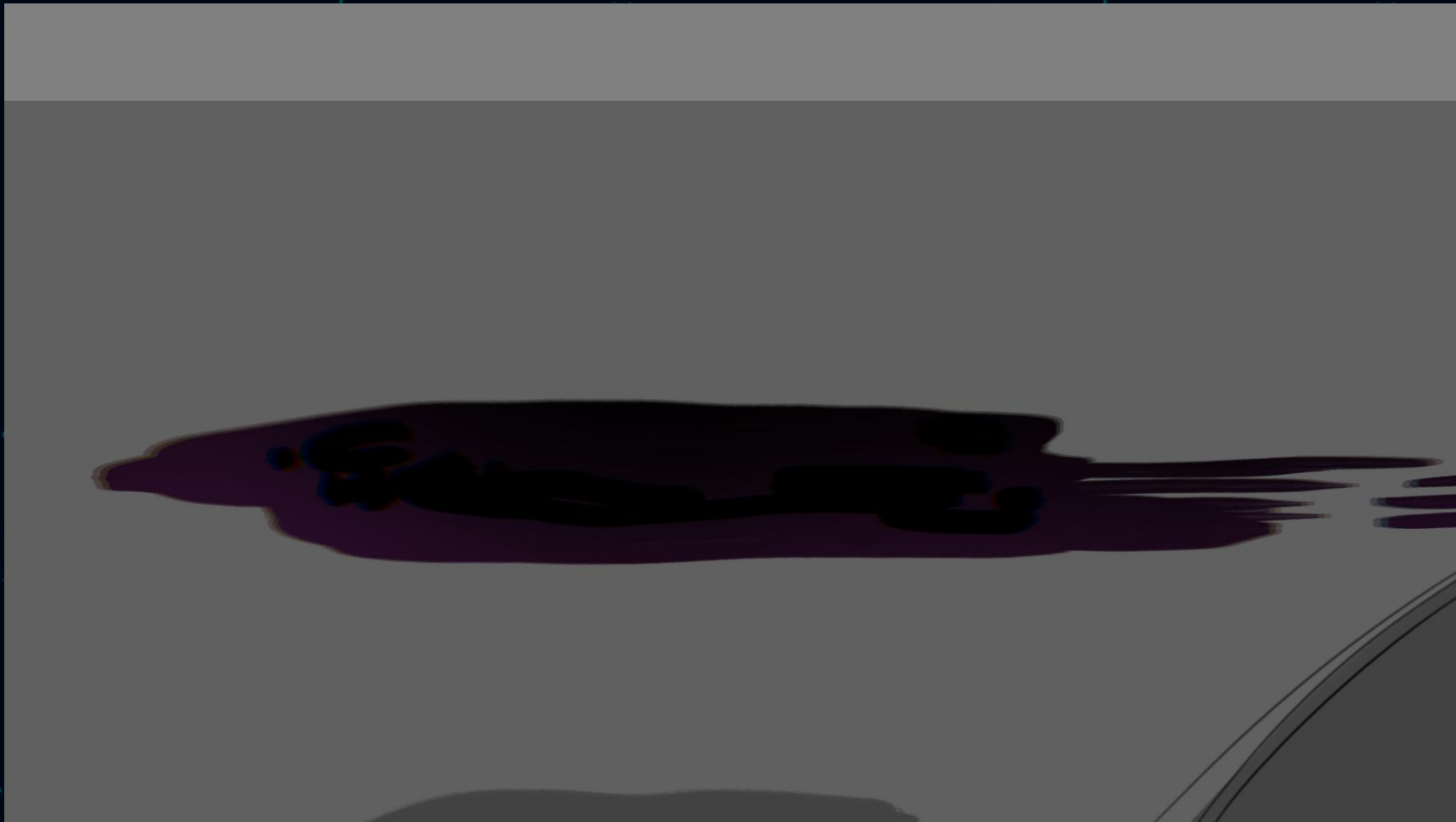
As you gaze forward, you can see two shadowy figures stand in front of you but unable to focus your eyes you can only listen to what they have to say
Cough Cough "Captain--Oh goddesses, you're bleeding.. Captain.. We need to go back to the surface. We need.." Cough Cough Cough "we need help!"
"We can't do that. I've told you this." You can hear rustling and clicking as something moves.
"None of use are doing well. We should just—" The larger figure on the right quickly shifts.



The woman from the right falls to the ground. She tries to call out for before another crack echoes. She lies motionless. The only recognizable feature from her figure being the red eyes. Below her, blood begins to pool in its rich, violet color. It only take a few moment for that inky darkness to begin spreading through the blood.



Slowly, her arm is grabbed by the larger figure, dragging her away from the scene. You close your eyes momentarily and take a deep breath. You hear ragged breathing that isn't your own. With effort, you open your eyes once more.



Below you are unfamiliar hands. Meaty, strong, and covered in blood. Some of the flesh has begun blackening and revealing open wounds. Just like the fish, fungus creeps its way out from the edges of the wounds. The hands shake and you can feel hot tears welling up in your eyes. You blink and see your own hands momentarily. Clean and yours. Again, you shut your eyes tightly.



When you open your eyes once more, you find yourself standing in front of the escape sub. The lights above you are red. A voice echoing throughout the station.

"EMERGENCY SUBMERSIBLE PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE"

Looking behind, you see the body that was previously lying in front of you laying there, staring at the ceiling with her wrist in your hand. You hear heavy footsteps sounding from somewhere in the facility, yells you know to be your crewmates.



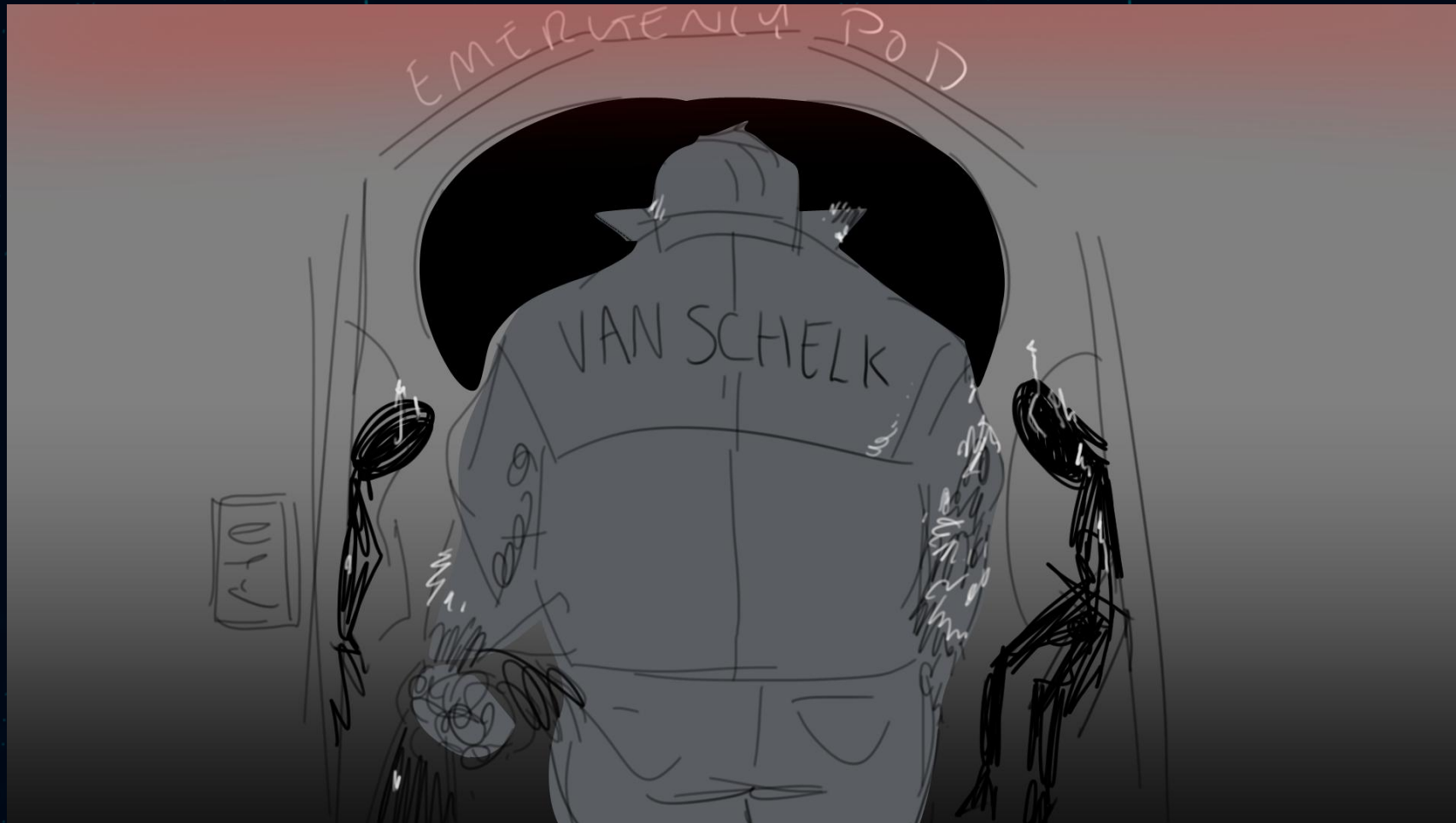
But still, you heave a heavy sigh. As if on autopilot, you start walking into the sub, dragging the body with you. Everything hurts. It hurts to breathe, it hurts to move your arms, it hurts to walk. But you push through it, buckling the corpse into the remaining passenger seat. Finally, you slump into the captain's chair, falling back helplessly as you shut the doors.

As you find yourself falling back into darkness, you hear yells from behind.

"CAPTAIN! CAPTAIN VAN BUREN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

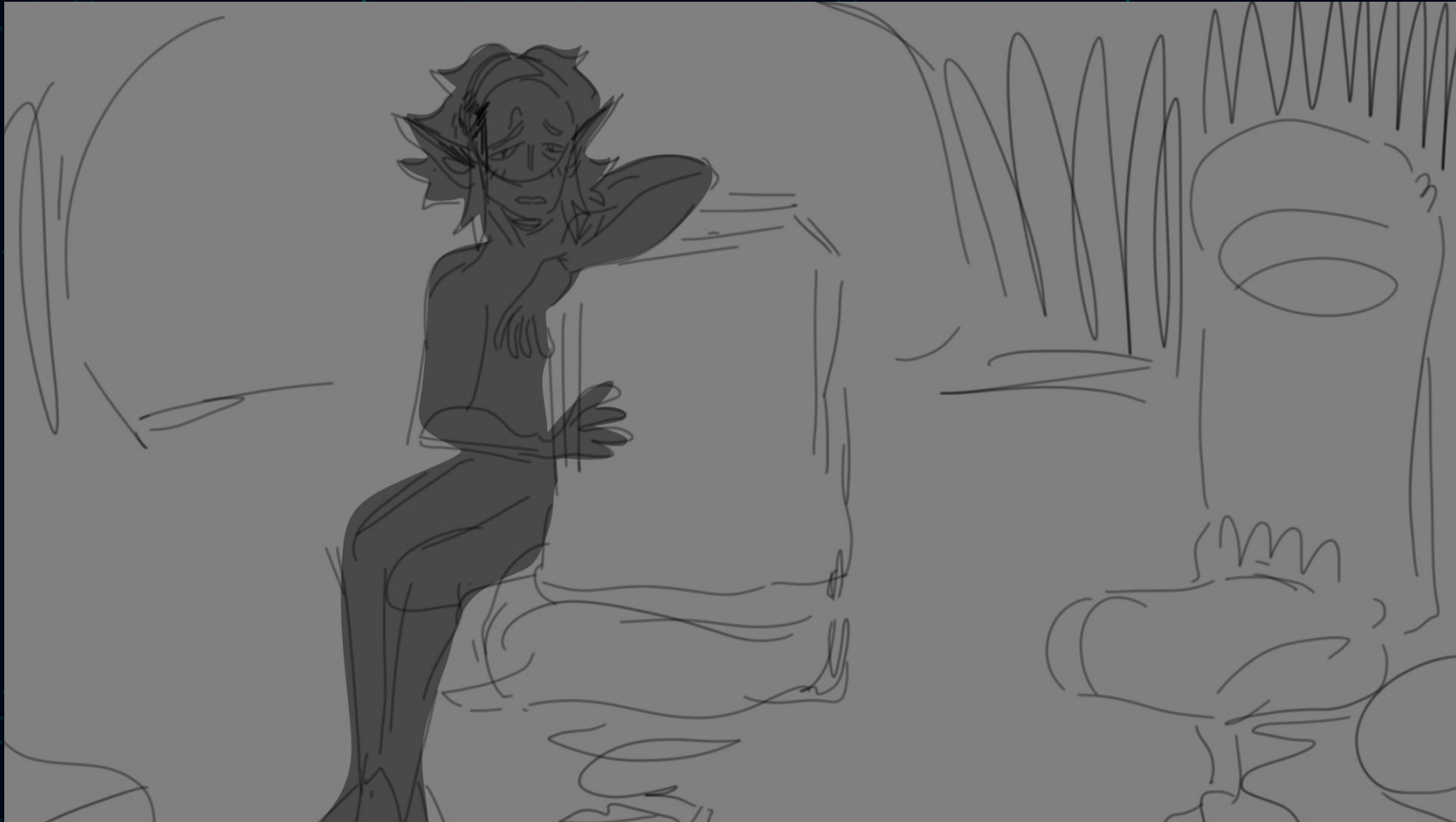
"STOP! WHERE ARE YOU--"

Until they are abruptly cut off by the shutting door, the sub launching out into the darkness of the ocean.





Your mind swims as you finally lose consciousness. Everything felt so dreamlike. You hope it was all a dream. You don't know how long passes until you finally wake up. As you open your eyes, you see the control panel of the emergency sub in front of you. Outside the window, the bright blue water of the Nautilora moon pool illuminates the interior of the sub. You look behind you towards the exit door and see the passenger seats empty around you.



You shake your head, reminding yourself of the sharp pain in your head. You press your hand into the side of your head and feel a sticky crust. Looking at your hand you see a mixture of blood blackness. You frown and wipe your hand on your pant leg, getting up and pushing the submersible's door open.



Outside, you quicken your pace to the nearest restroom. You throw the door open and look in the mirror, seeing a sticky paste mixed with you hair.



With some paper towels, you begin to dab away at the wound on the side of your head. As your hair clears of the blood, you start to see a wound on the side of your head. When you dab away the last bit of blood, you see a familiar growth peering out from beneath the skin. Small, white tendrils poke out of the wound, stinging the air exposed wound.



Your hand shoots to cover your mouth. Your eyes are wide with panic as you realize what has happened. Whatever the crew discovered below, you contracted. Whatever it grew down there was bad enough to cause Captain Van Schek to take his crew out. Outside the door, you hear people entering the moon pool, calling out your name.

"Shit..."



END

