

The Beginning Is the End: Prologue

By Brooke Jaffe

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Panel 1

A long flat expanse of desert wasteland unspools into a radiation-red horizon pockmarked with ruins and dust and some kind of solar panels. The panels are the only thing offering shade from the violent glare of the sun and the stinging whip crack of the winds. There are no tumbleweeds, no plant life to speak of: just dead, pink earth.

CAP (handwriting, messy and scrawled on a page. This goes for all Caps in this scene): Hey Haze--

Panel 2

We follow footsteps in and out of shadows cast in the silhouette of the solar panels, the steps themselves stamping into the dirt uneven shapes that seem to suggest shoes that are either so in disrepair as to be malformed, or that are made of something never intended to be shoes. They drag and lurch beyond the border of the image, and we trail them.

Panel 3

The footprints are being made by something—someone—walking in a bundle of thick, rough fabric. It's hard to tell anything about the person at all through so many layers, only that their steps are restricted by necessity and that they are moving towards a partially-submerged, destroyed metal building that has a small hatch door sticking up towards the sky. Beyond the hatch in the background are more ruined buildings, blown-out windows like maws of mutant monsters open and waiting for something to curb their hunger. They have been waiting a very, very long time.

CAP: If you're reading this... Well. That means something's wrong.

CAP: So I hope you're not. But if you are...

Panel 4

Upon reaching the hatch the figure kneels, one hand covered in an industrial glove three sizes too large emerging from the cocoon of fabric to rhythmically rap in a specific place: along the hatch's rim is a small console with a red light. Arrange the text so as to highlight that the figure is knocking in a pattern. Somewhere on the hatch a half-scratched off logo for Sunspeck Industries is almost unreadable. Almost.

SFX: Tng tng, tng, tng, tng tng tng

Panel 5

Small panel, a close-up on the console next to the hatch. The light turns green.

SFX: Bzzzzzzzzz

Page 2

Panel 1

Now we see a cross-section of a small segmented metal tunnel lit by dim, bare bulbs. The figure in the cloth enters on the left, walks to the right, and starts peeling layers away from themselves. They do this as they move through the tunnel, passing through each door and leaving a piece of their clothing on a hook in each section. By the time they get to the last door they are wearing what looks like a flame-retardant jumpsuit zipped all the way with a hood over their head, and a big pair of goggles over their eyes. Over their nose and mouth is a scarf.

CAP (Entrance side of the tunnel): I'm trusting you with something really important, okay?

CAP (Center): I wouldn't entrust this to anyone else.

CAP (Right): And you might not believe me. But you have to.

Panel 2

The interior of a dark room, mostly lit by the glow from a bank of monitors in the foreground, facing away from the viewer. At the chair is a man (Theo)-- early 30s, dark-skinned, tired but warm brown eyes, short curly hair cropped close. His knit fisherman's sweater has seen far better days. He glances over his shoulder at the figure (our layered friend) entering.

Theo: It's fixed?

Panel 3 (can be split into multiple at artist discretion)

The person in layers pulls off their goggles and hood, pulls down the scarf. Beneath all that covering is a pale woman (Prudence, late 20s) with freckles, brown eyes, red hair. Under the goggles she's wearing a pair of thick black glasses with a crack running through one lens. The dark circles under her eyes match Theo's—they have both been working tirelessly for some time now.

Prudence: Yeah, some of the wire casings melted a little and I had to jury-rig the thing, but it should be fine.

CAP: I've put Mom's ring in here to prove it's really me. If you try to ask me about this package when you get it, I won't know. But that doesn't make this not-real.

Panel 4

Theo turns back to the bank of monitors, and now that we are looking at it from a different angle (viewer looking out from around where the door is) we can see a behemoth of a machine to the right of where Theo is sitting. Its bulk extends into the earth—we can't see how far it goes down. Prudence unzips her jumpsuit and ties the arms of it around her waist, revealing a strangely put-together sunny yellow blouse with cap sleeves and a Peter-Pan collar, dirtied and worn but obviously she has attempted to maintain some sort of cleanliness and style in her dress. With how incongruous it is to the environment, one is left to wonder if maybe that's a point of neurotic concentration: the world around her has fallen apart, but this is one thing she can take care of.

Theo: Alright then, I guess if the power is up then now is as good a time as any.

Theo: You want to do the honors?

Prudence: Yeah.

Page 3

Panel 1 (2/3 of the page)

Camera looks down on the machine, which we can now see descends so deep beneath the ground that the farthest parts of it are obscured in darkness. The whole thing is a knot of wires, tubes, tangles—and in its center is a hub. The size of it dwarfs Prudence, as she is little more than a speck standing on a metal catwalk leading into its center. She's holding a box in her arms. The machine glows with a purple-cyan light that casts everything in long shadows.

CAP (top left): I fucked up. *We* fucked up. And the only way to fix it...

CAP (top left): Is to make sure it never happened in the first place.

CAP (bottom right): This is all I can send back to you. I wish I could do more, but already we only have enough energy stored up for one transfer.

CAP (bottom right): So take this. Bring it to me. If you do...

Panel 2

Prudence's face. The glow of the machine and the intricate arteries of its mechanisms are reflected in her glasses. There's desperation there—but couched in that is hope. This is a chance to make things right.

The bottom of this page is just a fade from the Machine's light into blackness.

(O.P) Prudence: Ready.

Page 4

One Page Splash

We're back outside in the desert, now looking over the vast stretches of wasteland that were pink in the golden-hour glare of the sun and are now a sickly silver-blue in the moonlight. Or rather, they would be—if not for a GIANT column of purple-cyan light that erupts out from where the hatch is. There's an air pressure that expands outwards and sends dust and sand kicking up in concentric circles from the blast. In the distance we can see the field of ruined civilization like a deserted concrete jungle decomposing on and on until it's too small to see on the horizon.

SFX: PCHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMM

CAP (Top Left): We can save everyone.

CAP (Bottom Right): Your loving sister, Pru

End of Prologue.