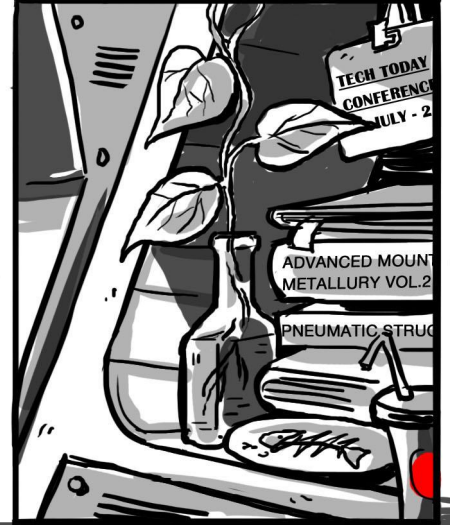
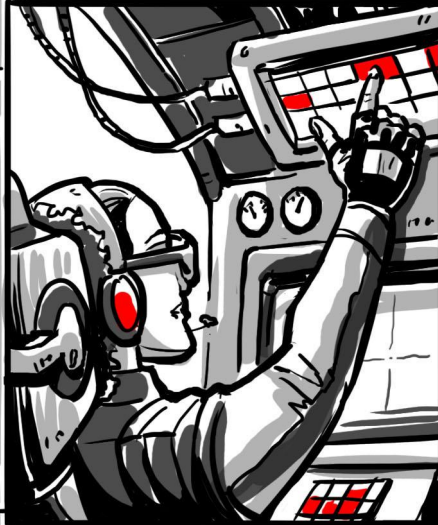
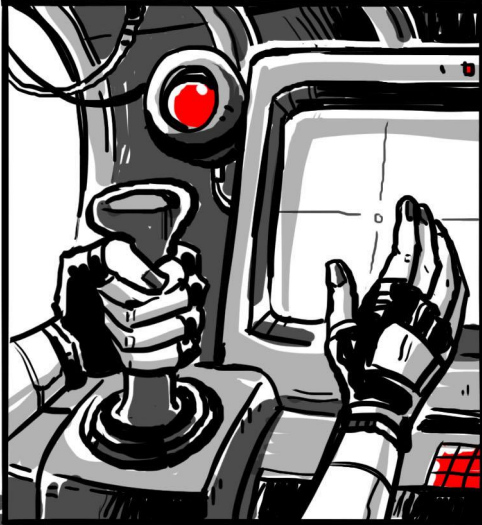
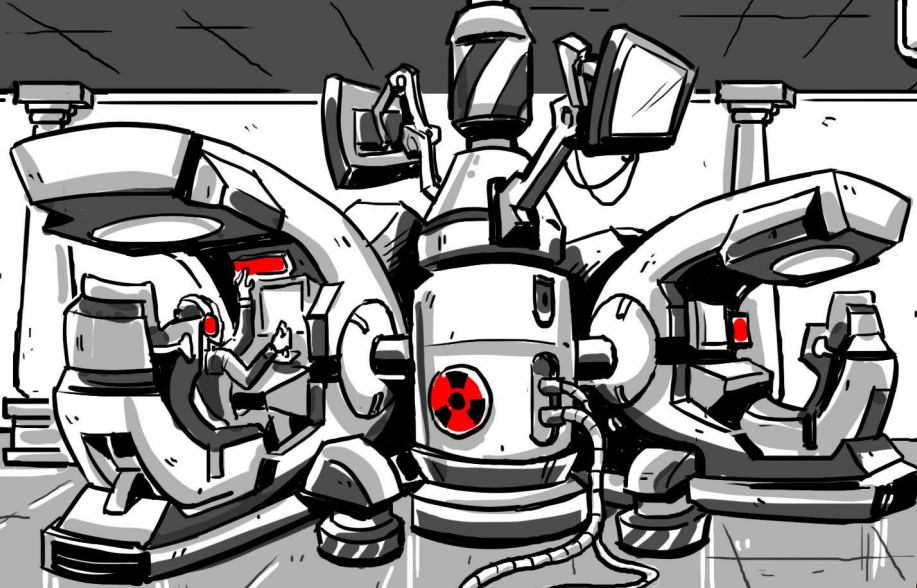


FOR THE LAST DECADE THAT I HAD WORKED AND TRAINED AT THE LAS GOAS CORP., THE OPERATOR POD HAD ALMOST BECOME MY SECOND HOME.



IT HAD BEEN A ROUTINE SHIFT AT THE GOAN COMMAND CENTRE AS I REMOTELY WORKED PIT 1036 WITH THREE LARGE DIGGERS IN SYNCH.

LAS GOAS CORP. NOVO-PANAJI
OPERATIONS DECK 403001



SUDDENLY THE PROBES WERE ABUZZ WITH LOUD ALARMS. SOMETHING WAS NOT RIGHT. I WAITED FOR THE SCANS TO BE TRANSMITTED.

BUT ONCE THEY BEGAN STREAMING, NOTHING HAD PREPARED ME FOR WHAT I THOUGHT I NOW PEERED AT...

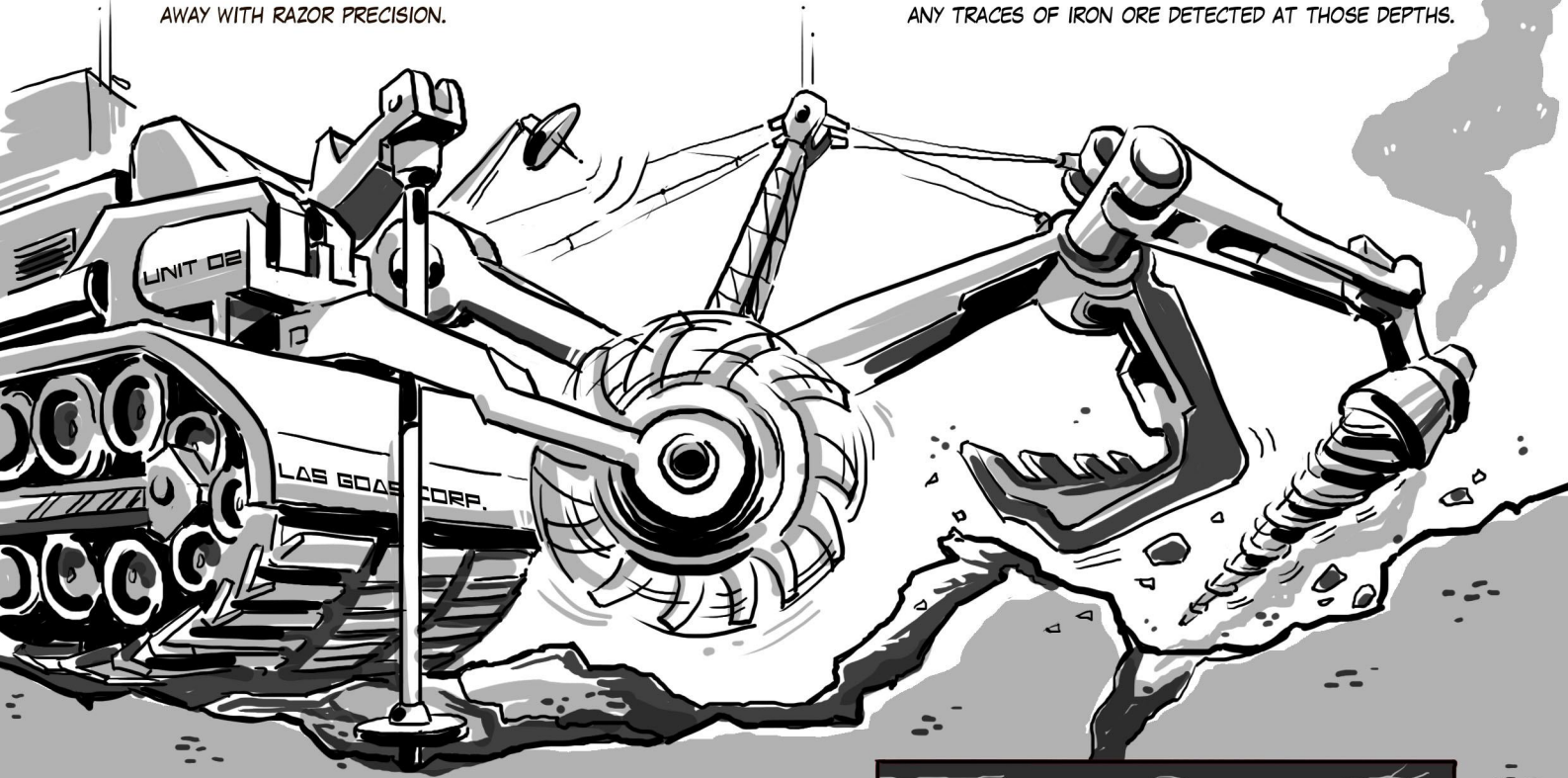


LOST UPRIISINGS

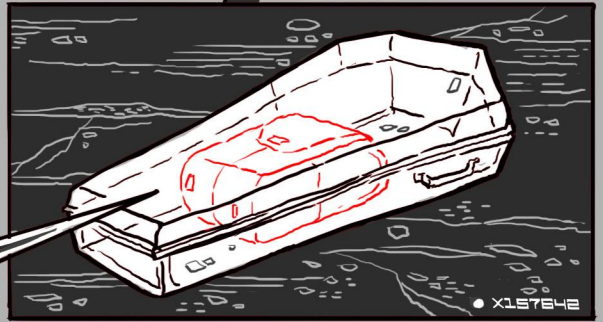
STORY & ART: NIKHIL CHAUDHARY

AS THE DIG INITIATED, EACH UNMANNED MACHINE CHEWED THROUGH THE STRATA ALMOST A HUNDRED KILOMETERS AWAY WITH RAZOR PRECISION.

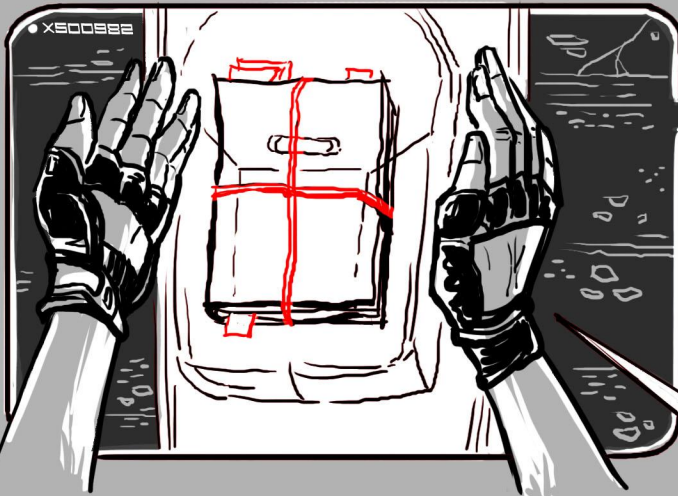
AMID FLYING DETRITUS THAT BLINDED THE SUN, THE TITANIUM CLAWS WORKED EFFICIENTLY TO GNAW OUT ANY TRACES OF IRON ORE DETECTED AT THOSE DEPTHS.



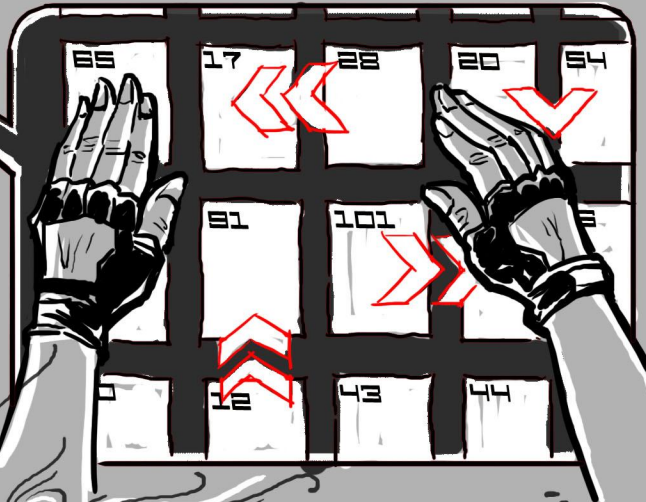
MIDWAY THROUGH THE DIG, THE SONAR PROBES SENSED SOMETHING TOUGHER THAN USUAL. PRELIMINARY SCANS INDICATED A THICK CASSET. INSIDE IT, AN AMORPHOUS BLOCK PRESERVED WELL. WAS THIS FOR REAL?!



INFRA-RED ZOOMS REVEALED A STACK OF PAGES OF WHAT SEEMED LIKE A HANDWRITTEN JOURNAL. THE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE SO RARE, IT FELT LIKE A SYSTEM ANOMALY. CURIOUSLY, I WORKED THROUGH THE HOLOGRAPHS AND PAINSTAKINGLY SEPARATED ALL 109 PAGES.

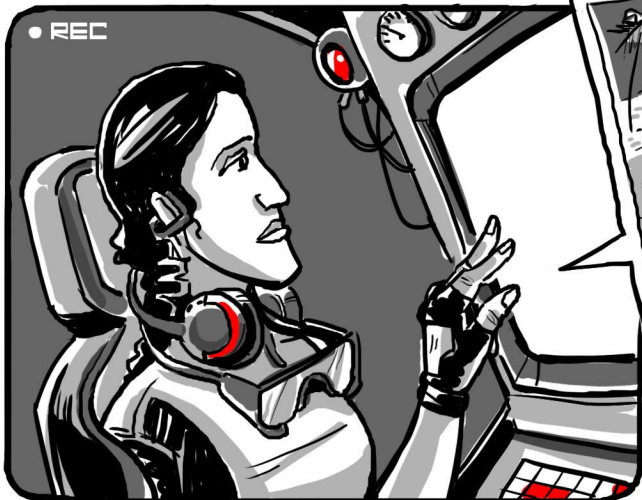


IT ISN'T EVERY DAY THAT ONE STUMBLES ACROSS A LOST ACCOUNT FROM A BYGONE PERIOD. SO I SETTLED IN WITH MY BEVERAGE, TO READ WHAT I HAD JUST UNEARTHED. THE FIRST PAGE HAD A PORTRAIT. THE AUTHOR, MAY BE?

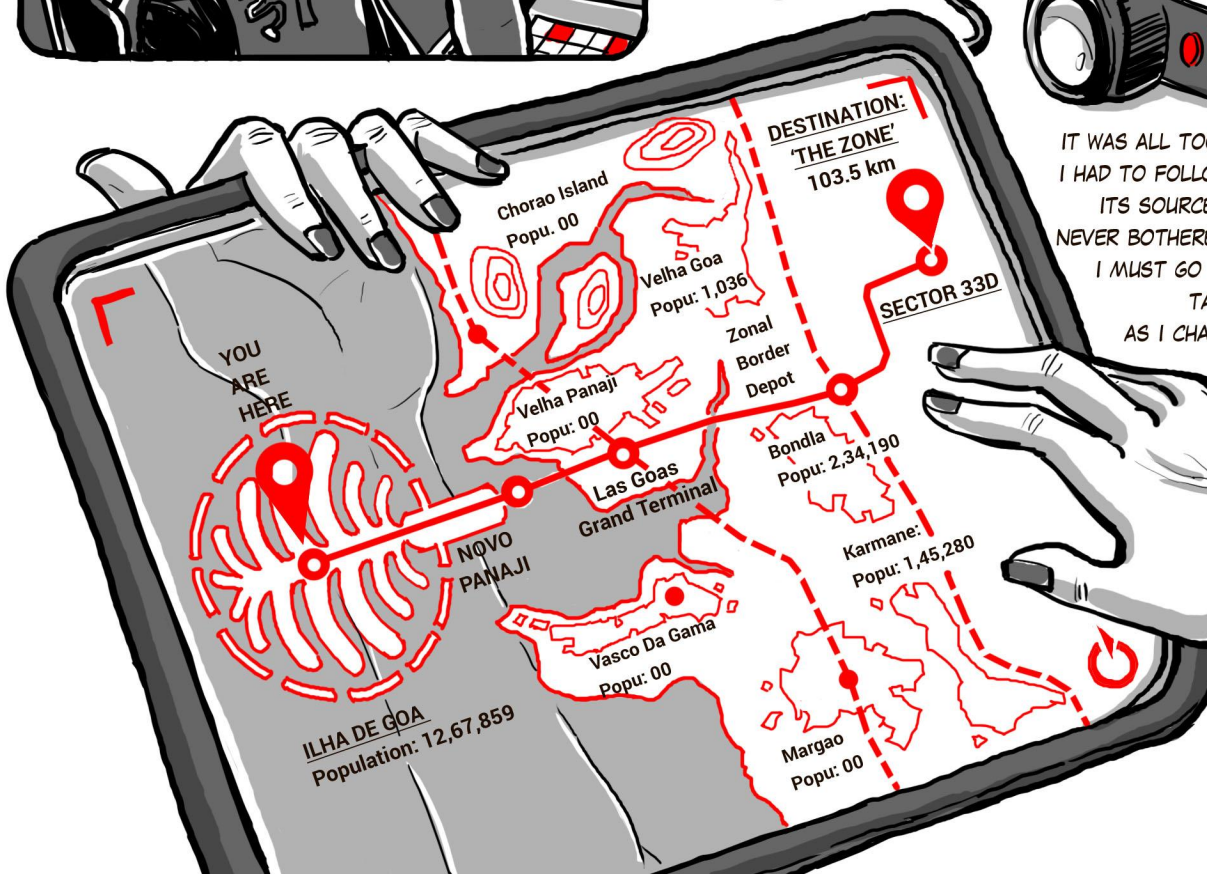
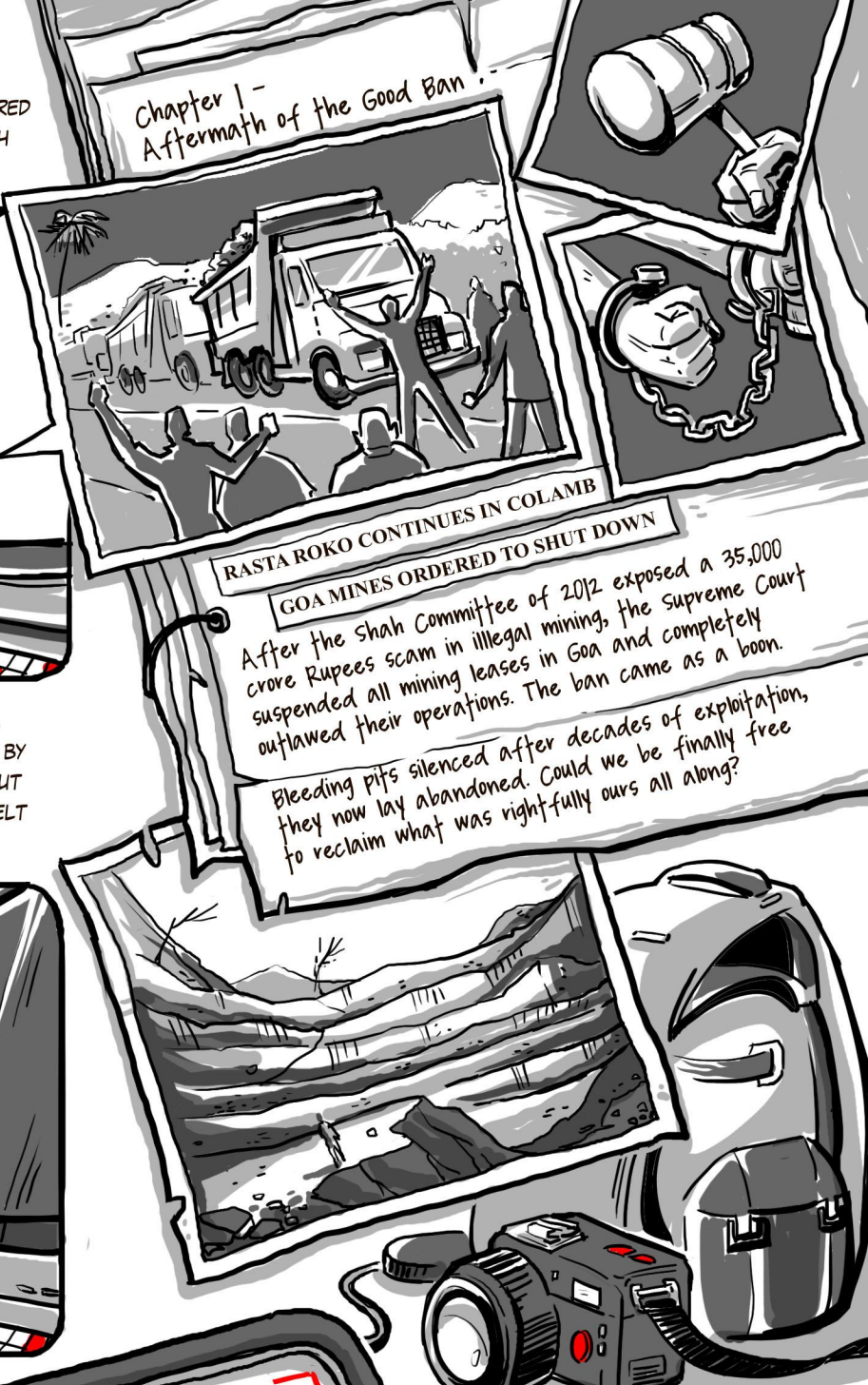


A YOUNG WOMAN, NOT OLDER THAN I STARED AT ME THROUGH BENIGN BUT TROUBLED EYES. COMMUNICATING THROUGH AN UNKNOWN PASSAGE OF TIME AND SPACE.

AS I PLOUGHED THROUGH THE UNFINISHED MANUSCRIPT PAST MIDNIGHT, IT LEFT WITH ME A HUNDRED UNANSWERED QUESTIONS. EVENTS ONLY HALF EXPLAINED - LACED WITH ROILING RAGE, AND INTERMITTENT HOPE.



I HAD NEVER ASKED THE QUESTIONS THAT THE JOURNAL ATTEMPTED ANSWER. BUT NOW KNOWING THEM, PURELY BY HAPPENSTANCE, CREATED A LOT MORE. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VERY CORE OF WHO I WAS. SUDDENLY THIS PLACE FELT DISTANT, ALIENATING.



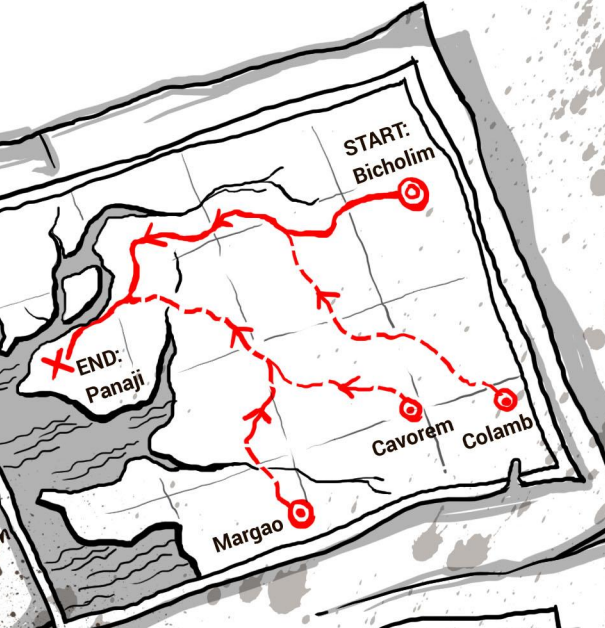
IT WAS ALL TOO MUCH TO TAKE IN... I HAD TO FOLLOW THIS MATERIAL TO ITS SOURCE, MAKE THE TRIP I'D NEVER BOTHERED ABOUT UNTIL NOW. I MUST GO WHERE THIS JOURNAL TAKES ME, I RESOLVED. AS I CHARTED MY ROUTE DEEP INTO THE ZONE.

I DECIDED TO FOLLOW THE ROUTE OF THE 'THOUSAND CO-OPERATIVES MARCH' THAT THE JOURNAL SPOKE OF. MY DIRECTION WAS EXACTLY ITS OPPOSITE, STARTING FROM WHERE NOW STOOD THE LAS GOAS GRAND TERMINAL.



MASSIVE RALLY PLANNED TODAY. HIGH ALERT IN GOA

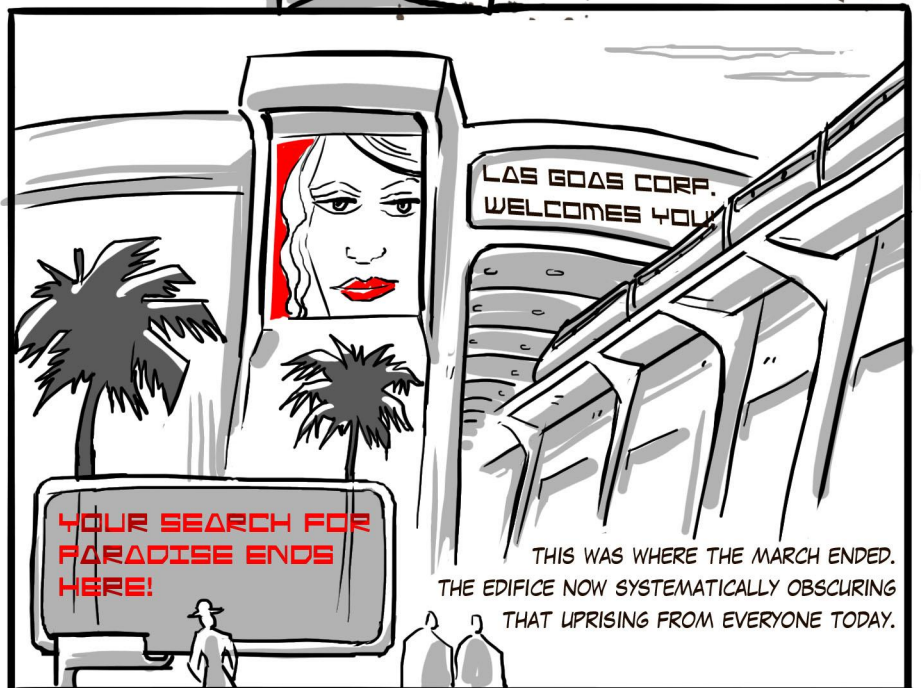
From thinnest streams was formed a raging torrent. Poised to storm through ages of apathy and structural injustice.



I LEARNT THAT THE GRUESOME RIOTS WHICH FOLLOWED THE AGITATIONS PLUMMETED OLD PANAJI FOR WEEKS. DURING A TWO-WEEK CURFEW AND WITH THE MILITARY DESPERATELY CALLED IN, MANY A MARTYR SADLY FELL IN ITS WAKE.



AS I ENTERED THE TERMINAL, I WONDERED WHY I HAD TO FIND A FORGOTTEN ACCOUNT OF DISSENT TO KNOW THIS PIECE OF CRITICAL HISTORY?



THIS WAS WHERE THE MARCH ENDED. THE EDIFICE NOW SYSTEMATICALLY OBSCURING THAT UPRISING FROM EVERYONE TODAY.

THE GLITZ OF THE TERMINAL ERASED EVERY TRACE OF THE PAST AND MASKED THE GHOST-TOWN OF VELHA PANAJI BEHIND IT.

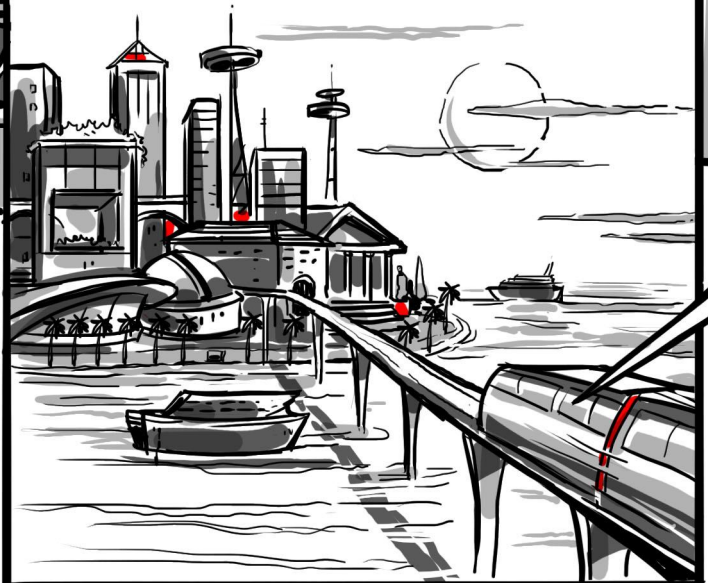
THE ONLY GLIMPSE INTO THAT BYGONE ERA WAS NOW RESTORED AND ENCLOSED IN 24 MM THICK PLEXIGLASS.



ODDITIES TO BE CASUALLY GLANCED AT WHILE BOARDING THE ONLY MAINLAND CONNECTION... WILD HORDES OF RETURNING TOURISTS CLAMBERING FOR SPACE ALONG WITH THE LOCALS.



EVERYONE CRAMMED TO RETURN FROM THE CROWDED MAN-MADE ISLAND WITH SEA-CASINOS... WHICH WAS ALL "GOA" NOW MEANT.



AFTER A COUPLE OF STATIONS, I WAS LEFT WITH THE LAST RUNG OF THE ILHA'S MENIAL WORKERS - WINDOW CLEANERS, HOUSE-KEEPING STAFF, PLUMBERS, MECHANICS AND DELIVERY BOYS.



I FIND IT HARD TO IMAGINE THE ANCESTORS OF TODAY'S URBAN GOEMKARS AS STAUNCH MEMBERS OF THE ONCE BOOMING VILLAGE CO-OPERATIVES.

CHAPTER 4 - BIRTH OF THE CO-OPERATIVES

After endless legal hurdles, today we registered the first ever small-scale mining co-operative in Cavorem.

The joy amongst the ousted farmers occupying abandoned pits is evident. Finally can they now heal their wounded lands after decades of abuse...



To respectfully earn a living with a path of their own. And atone for decades of disrespect of their revered deities by restoring a barren landscape.

And thus, the co-operatives boldly spurned the act of mining, and collectively chose to do what they always had.



AS WE APPROACHED THE BONDLA STATION JUST BEFORE THE ZONE, THE TRAIN ALMOST EMPTIED OUT. A FACELESS WORKFORCE TRUDGED TOWARDS THEIR PRECARIOUS DWELLINGS.



YET ANOTHER CONFOUNDING MOMENT IN THIS JOURNEY. TO THINK OF THE BOUNTIFUL NATURAL WEALTH THAT ONCE EXISTED RIGHT HERE... THE TEEMING BIRDS, BEES AND BROOKS.



FORESTS NOW TURNED TO FAVELAS.

ONLY AUTHORISED LAS GOAS CORP PERSONNEL
ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT. PLEASE KEEP YOUR
ACCESS CARDS READY AT CHECK-POD. THANK YOU
AND HOPE YOU HAD A PLEASANT JOURNEY!

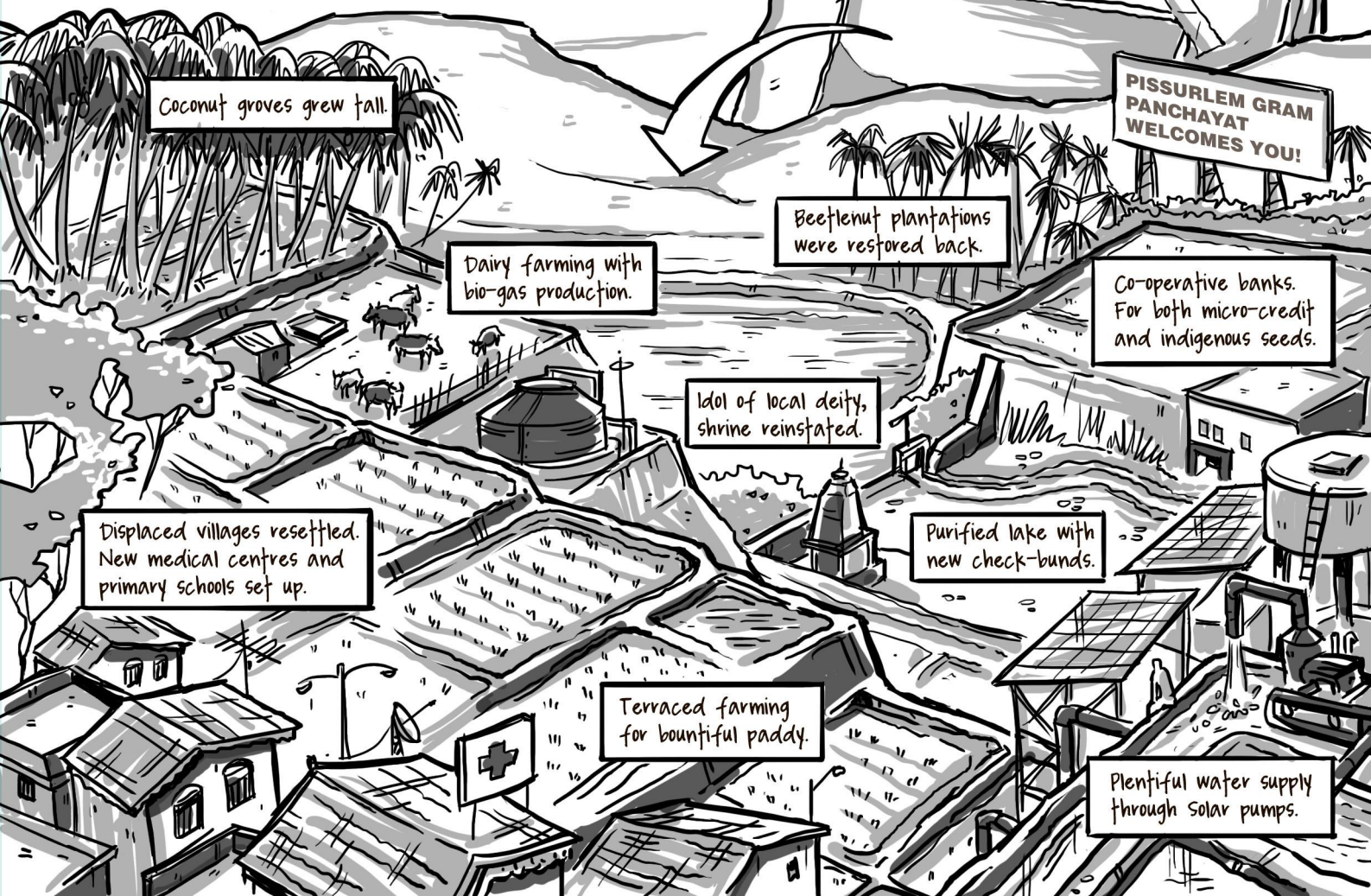


AS I APPROACHED THE END OF THE LINE, I HOPED MY APPREHENSION
WASN'T APPARENT. THE EVER SUSPICIOUS GATEKEEPERS WAITED AT
THE COMPLEX AHEAD. READY TO POUNCE ON ANY STRAY TRESPASSERS.

MEANWHILE, FOR A CHANGE, THE JOURNAL
TURNED TO A POSITIVE BEAT.

Chapter 9 - The utopia We Thought
would Last Forever

And so, for a couple of years, the healing
of age-old scars was underway.
The mines slowly transforming into a
cauldron full of thriving life...



Coconut groves grew tall.

Dairy farming with
bio-gas production.

Beetlenut plantations
were restored back.

PISSURLEM GRAM
PANCHAYAT
WELCOMES YOU!

Co-operative banks.
For both micro-credit
and indigenous seeds.

Displaced villages resettled.
New medical centres and
primary schools set up.

Idol of local deity,
shrine reinstated.

Purified lake with
new check-bunds.

Terraced farming
for bountiful paddy.

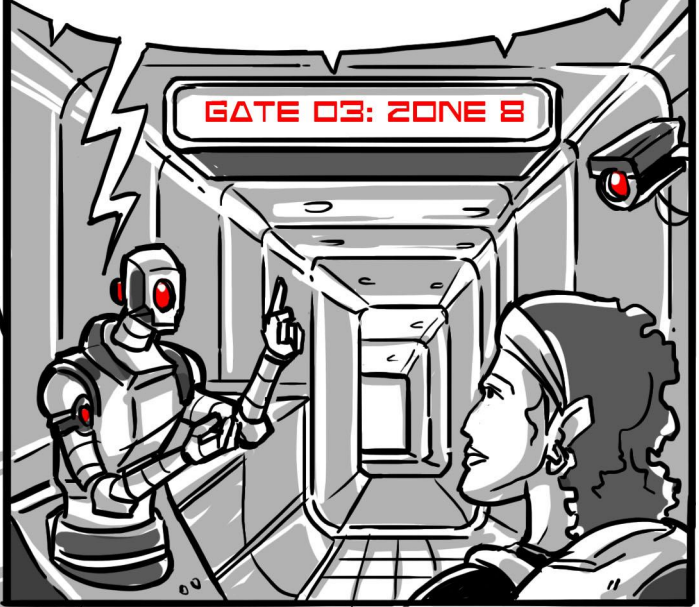
Plentiful water supply
through solar pumps.

After a few years, the Pissurlem Co-operative even won a United Nations Award for their Local Seed Bank. The movement had spread like the smell of fresh rains.

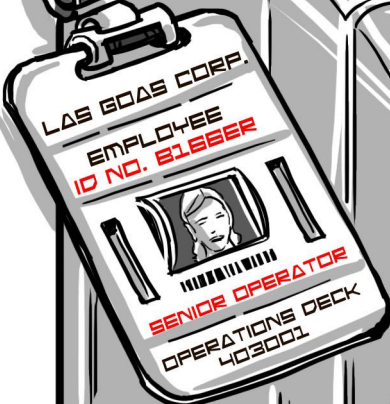


One by one, most villages in the region formed their own cooperatives. Poised for prosperity few had only dreamed of. But as the cliché goes, dark times were just around the corner...

PLEASE DISCLOSE ANY UNAUTHORIZED OBJECTS BEFORE THE SECURITY SCAN. YOUR SAFETY IS IMPORTANT TO US.



I STEPPED OUT FROM THE CHECK-POD, WHEN IT FINALLY HOVE INTO MY VIEW - THE OUTER RIM OF THE ZONE.

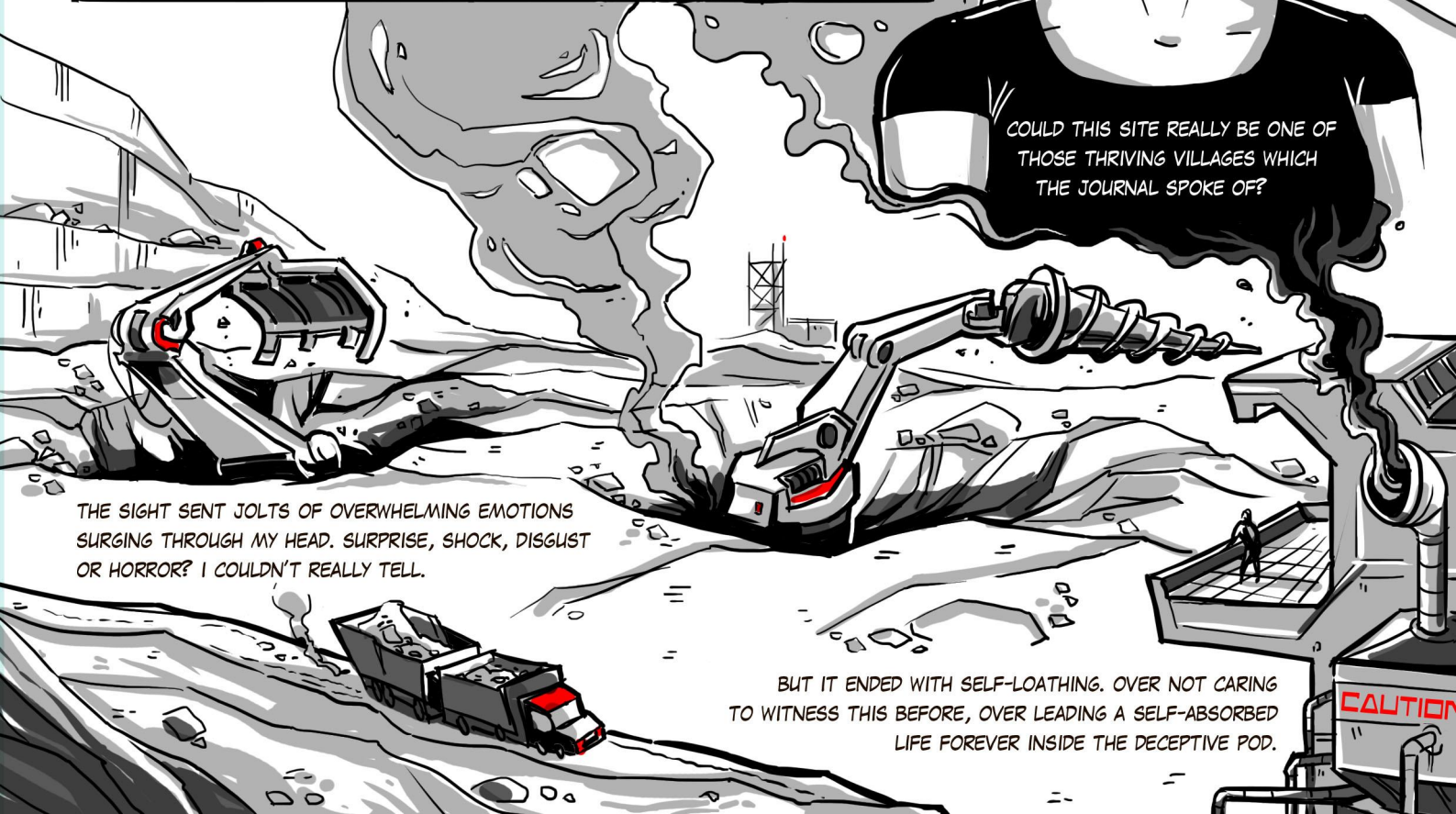


I PASSED BY UNDETECTED. SADLY I WAS AFTER ALL, ONE OF THEIR OWN.

COULD THIS SITE REALLY BE ONE OF THOSE THRIVING VILLAGES WHICH THE JOURNAL SPOKE OF?

THE SIGHT SENT JOLTS OF OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS SURGING THROUGH MY HEAD. SURPRISE, SHOCK, DISGUST OR HORROR? I COULDN'T REALLY TELL.

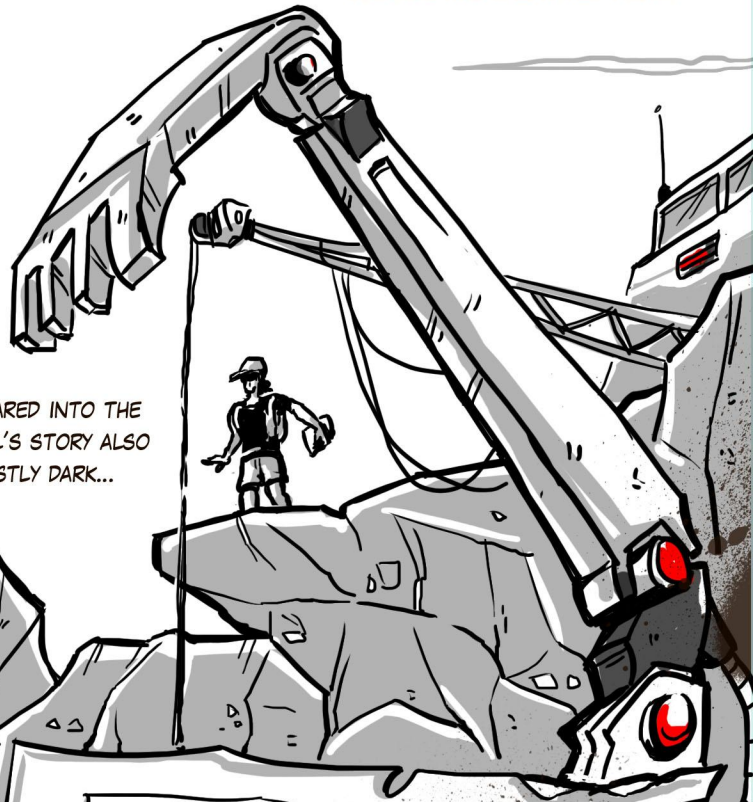
BUT IT ENDED WITH SELF-LOATHING. OVER NOT CARING TO WITNESS THIS BEFORE, OVER LEADING A SELF-ABSORBED LIFE FOREVER INSIDE THE DECEPTIVE POD.



I WALKED FOR HOURS IN THE FLAT DEAD ZONE, AN UNNATURAL WASTELAND. I TOOK IT ALL IN, LET IT SINK.



I CAME UP WHERE PIT 1036 WAS. THE MACHINES LAY DORMANT - WAITING TO RAISE HELL AT THE NUDGE OF A JOYSTICK BACK AT THE COMMAND CENTRE. THESE WERE THE VERY COORDINATES WHERE THE JOURNAL WAS UNearthED FROM.



AS I STOOD AT THE PRECIPICE AND STARED INTO THE GARGANTUAN PIT, THE JOURNAL'S STORY ALSO LEAPT INTO THE DEEP GHASTLY DARK...

Chapter 13 - Of Infiltrations and Explosions

On a black Monday of the early monsoons, three vicious events toppled our hard-earned haven like carefully laid dominoes.

COLAMB VILLAGE FIRE LEAVES 41 DEAD

A gruesome blaze spread through the Colamb village at beginning of this harvest season, killing 41 villagers and injuring hundreds others. Police investigations prove that the fire originated from a methane leak at the bio-gas plant run by the co-operative's office.

Multiple allegations are doing the rounds. But the most prominent one concerns the glaring negligence and gross incompetence with which the co-operatives run their multiple agro-based operations in the region.



Mother earth wept tears of blood that day. The conspiracy crafted by the erstwhile mine-lords was blatant. Why wouldn't they just let us be?



And then came the outrageous insult,
followed by the final injury.

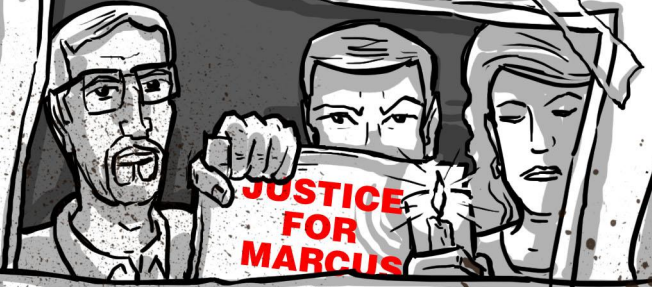
COLAMB INFERNO: CO-OPS DEEMED ILLEGAL



In a unanimous decision by the high powered committee, all rural co-operatives have now been dissolved. Their agricultural operations were banned after the committee deemed them unsafe for public. All their assets have been ordered to be sealed with immediate effect, including the farmlands and water reservoirs they were leased.

Chapter 17 - The Invisible Hand Rules

Their dominoes had begun to topple over us. The ban was the last spark to fire our haystack of seething discontent.



ACTIVIST-PRIEST FATHER MARKUS FOUND DEAD

The body of Father Markus Diego, who was about to launch protests against alleged land-grab by the mining companies was mysteriously discovered on the banks of Mandovi river. The incident has shocked the local civil society and sparked many conspiracy theories. Vigils were held across rural Goa.



This was it. With nowhere to go and no one to turn to, all the panchayats united in an unprecedented wave.

AS THE JOURNAL RECOUNTED THE TURN OF EVENTS, I WATCHED THE SCABBED UP RIVERS AND CANALS THAT WERE ONCE THE LIFELINES OF THIS REGION.



The villagers descended upon Bicholim - the epicentre of this last resistance. For the largest Gram Sabha we had ever witnessed. The agitations had begun.

Chapter 21 - The Thousand Co-operatives March

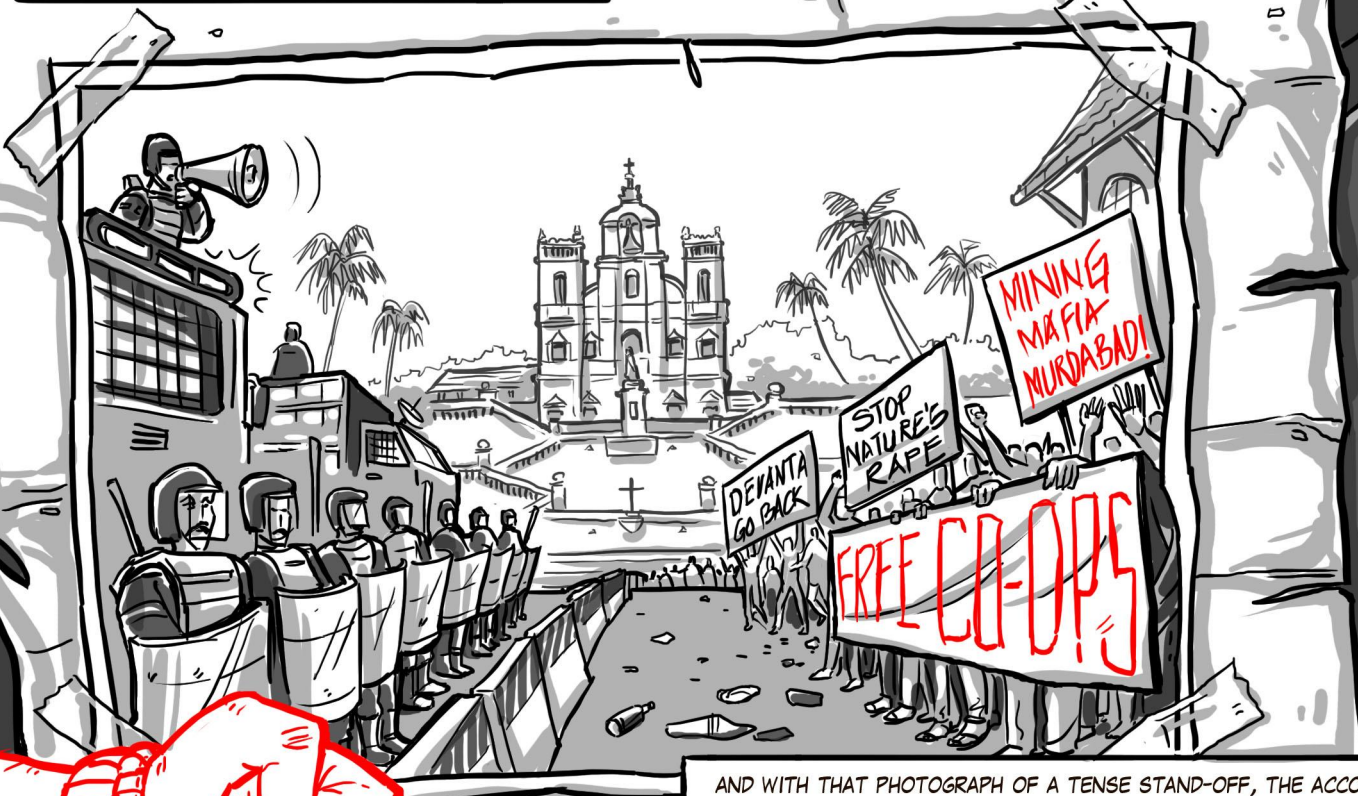
From the remotest corners of Goa they heeded our call. They came fearlessly. As we stood under the great banyan, we spoke to the sea of humanity with pride and awe...

"Comrades, today we stand against the powerful hands that refuse to let live. Those who seek to snatch every grain from our fields, let alone helping us feed ourselves..."

"We claimed what was rightfully ours, nurtured our lands with our blood and sweat. But they couldn't stand that too. Today we demand for the least a human being deserves. Onward comrades. Today we march in peace. To the powers that be."

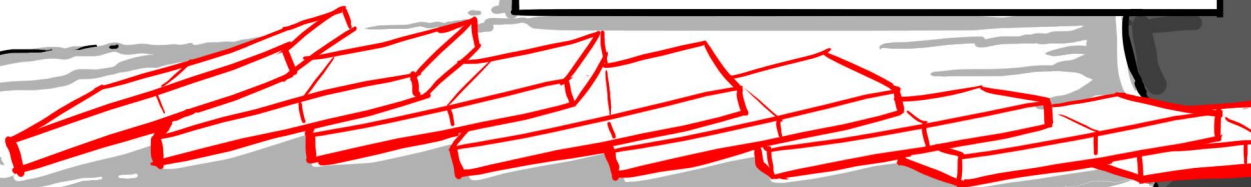


I FELT LIKE ONE OF THE THOUSANDS OF LISTENERS OF THIS HISTORIC SPEECH ON THAT FATEFUL MORNING. IN SOLIDARITY. IN TEARS.

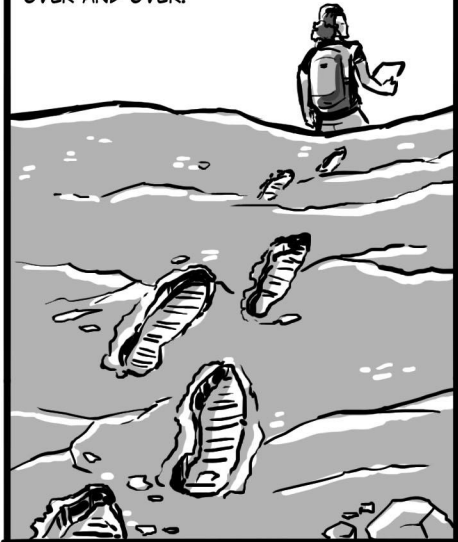


AND WITH THAT PHOTOGRAPH OF A TENSE STAND-OFF, THE ACCOUNT ENDED. PERHAPS THE PROVERBIAL DOMINOES LAY SILENT THEREAFTER.

I FELT EXHAUSTED, REELING UNDER A BARRAGE OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION. WAS I DESTINED TO READ ALL THIS? OR WAS THIS FICTIONAL? SURELY THE EVIDENCE WAS ALL THERE.



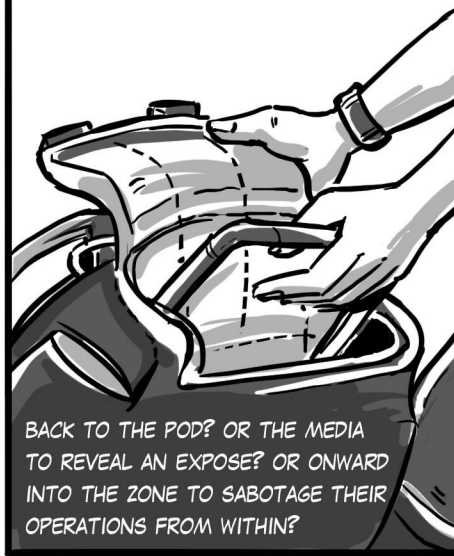
I CAME IN SEARCH OF CLUES, BUT THE LANDSCAPE HAD CHANGED BEYOND RECOGNITION. A SLATE WIPED CLEAN OVER AND OVER.



BUT MY CONNECTION WITH THE UNNAMED AUTHOR, HOWEVER DISTANT, FELT REAL ENOUGH. THIS WAS GROUND ZERO.



AND WHERE DOES MY RENEWED SELF GO FROM HERE?



BACK TO THE POD? OR THE MEDIA TO REVEAL AN EXPOSE? OR ONWARD INTO THE ZONE TO SABOTAGE THEIR OPERATIONS FROM WITHIN?

ON THE HORIZON LAY THE LITERAL HEART OF DARKNESS. BEHEMOTH, OMNIPRESENT, MOCKING.



ONE JOURNEY ENDS, ANOTHER ONE BEGINS.

THE END