



SEALING  
THE  
FUTURE

Prang Ittikul

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## SEALING THE FUTURE

Analysing the impact of Western Influences  
on Inuit Seal Hunting and Food Sovereignty



Auckland University of Technology

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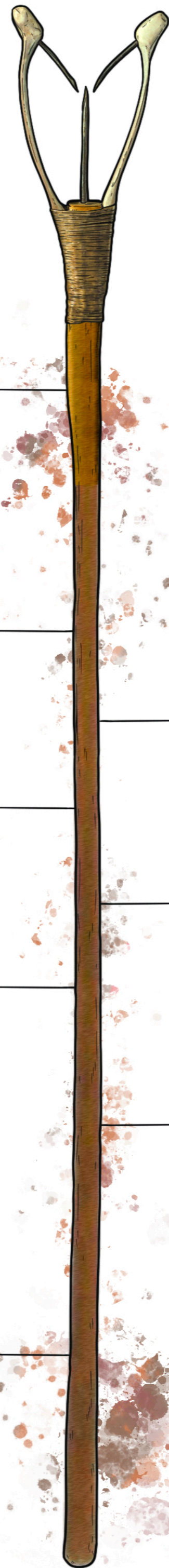
# DEDICATION

To all those who have suffered and borne the burden of survival . . .





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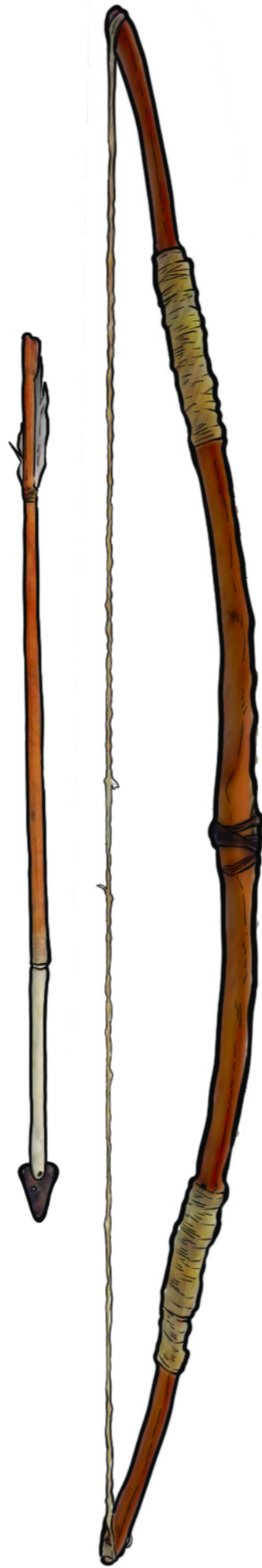
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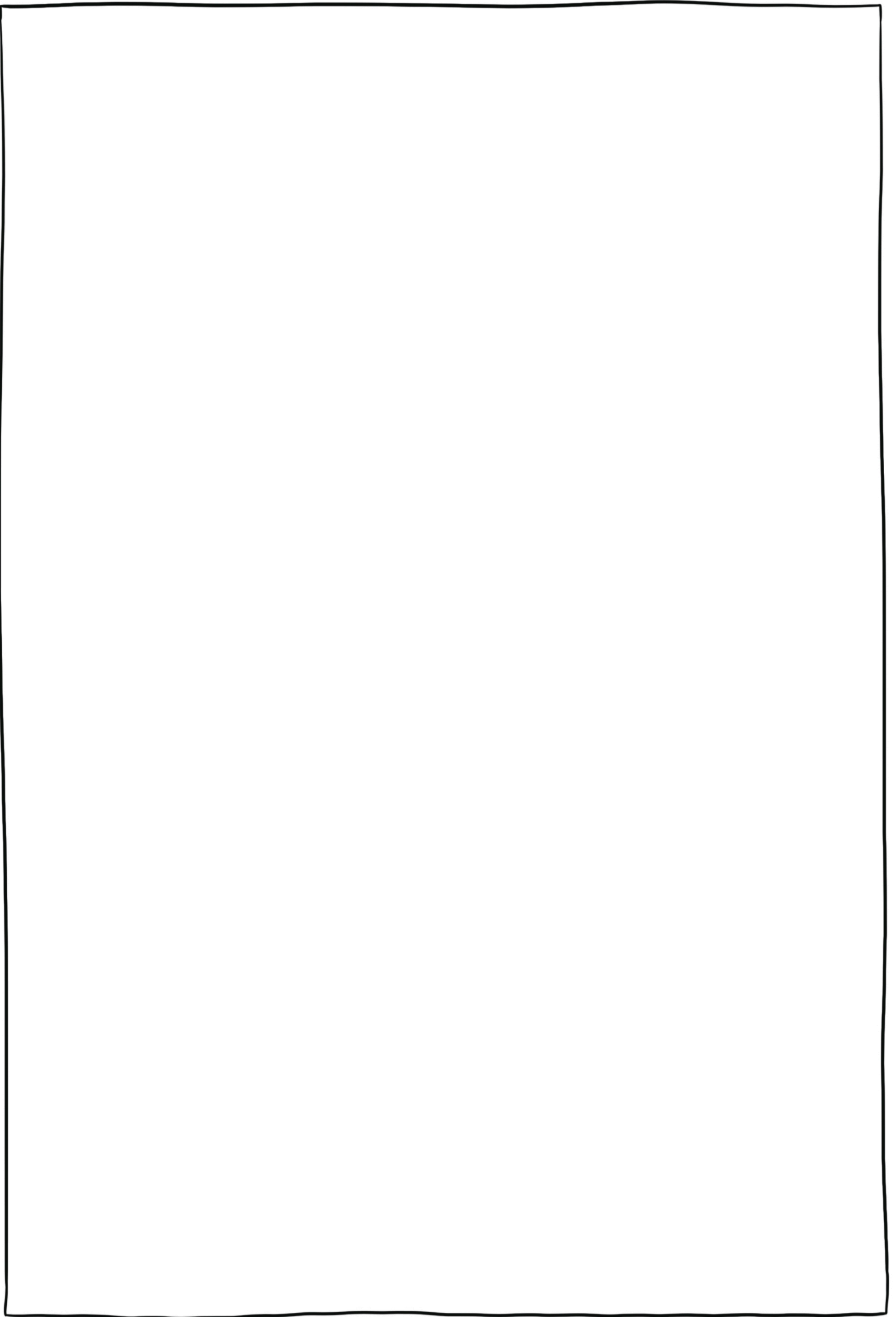
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# PROLOGUE





















Canadian Arctic

In the vast tundra,  
where the frozen land  
stretches as far as the eye can  
see, lies one of the harshest  
environments known to humankind.

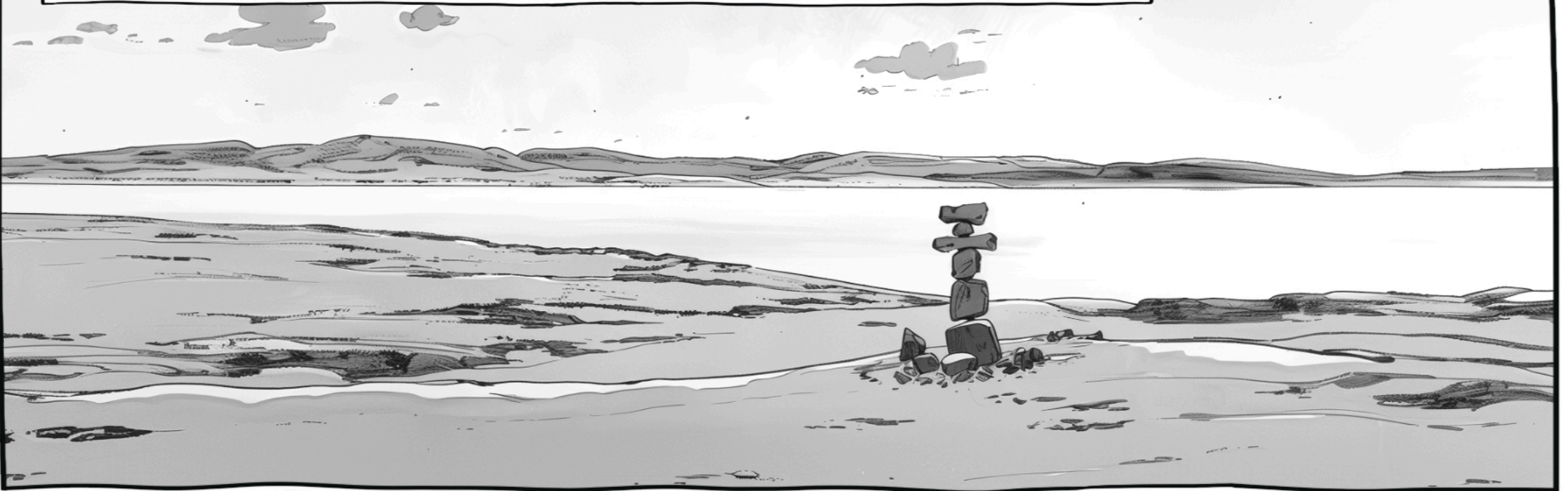
Yet, against all odds,  
... life endures



Before, my understanding of the people of the Arctic and their way of life was limited and shaped by distant observations. To survive in the Arctic seemed to demand extraordinary resilience.



Like many, I had read about this unique land, where every day seemed to be a test of endurance and ingenuity. How, in the face of relentless cold and scarce resources, could a community craft a way of life that honours the land and its rhythms, with a culture in harmony with nature?

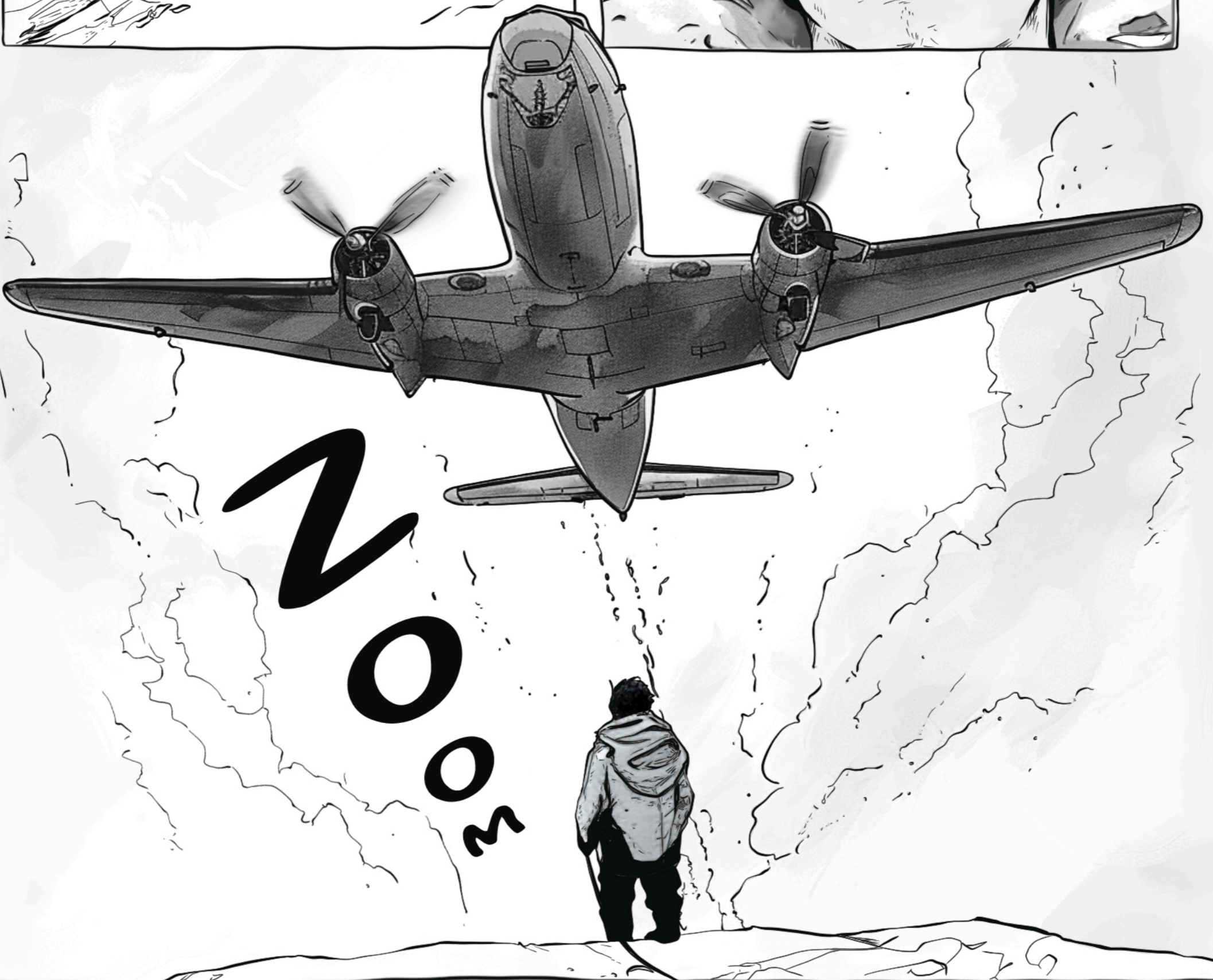


But as I witnessed the complexities of lives, I couldn't shake the feeling that traditions, no matter how strong, might confront the dangerous tides of change.

The true challenge, it seemed to me, lay in the delicate balance of adapting to this peril without losing one's identity.



Especially when many dangers  
loomed on the horizon, echoing  
through the mountains.

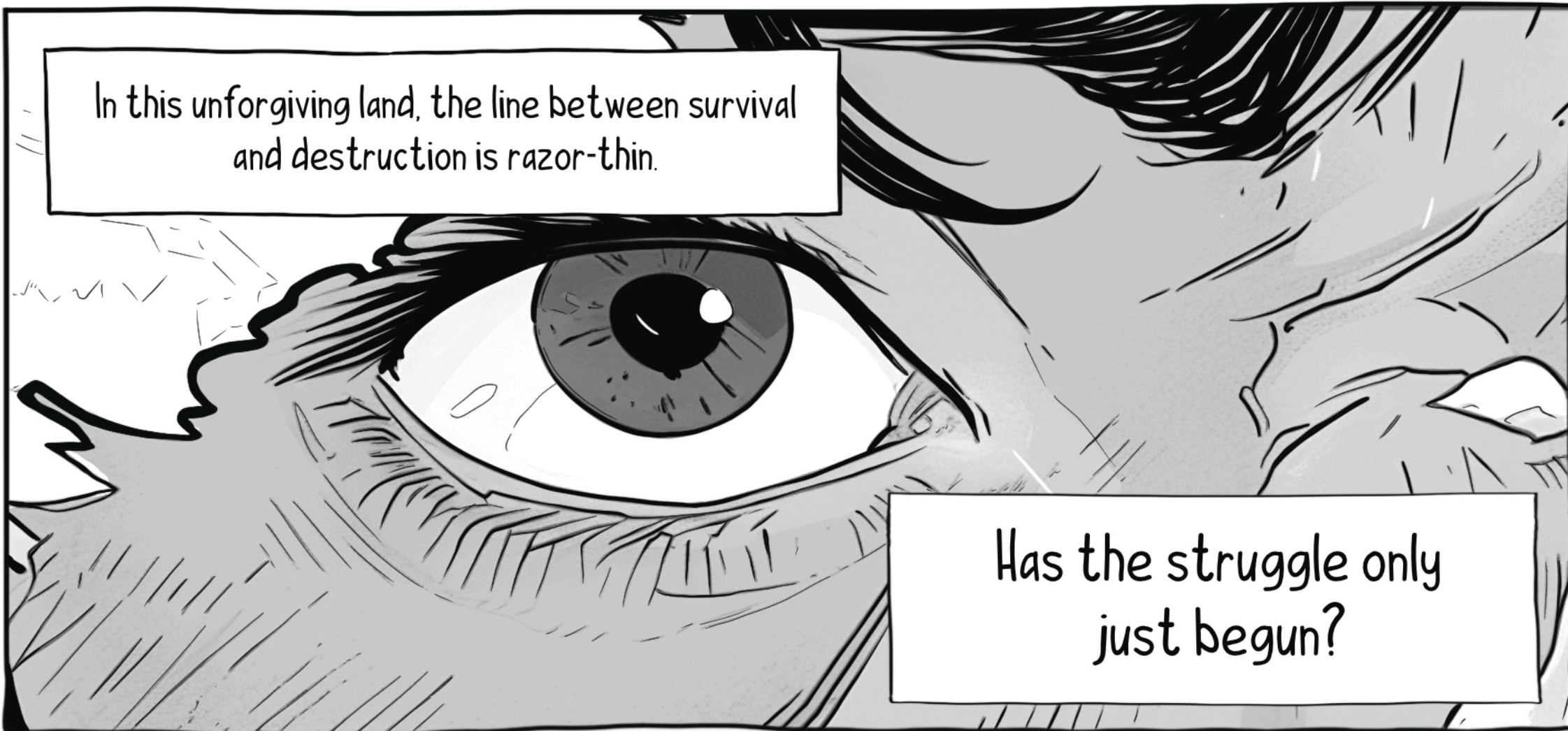




Western influence ...

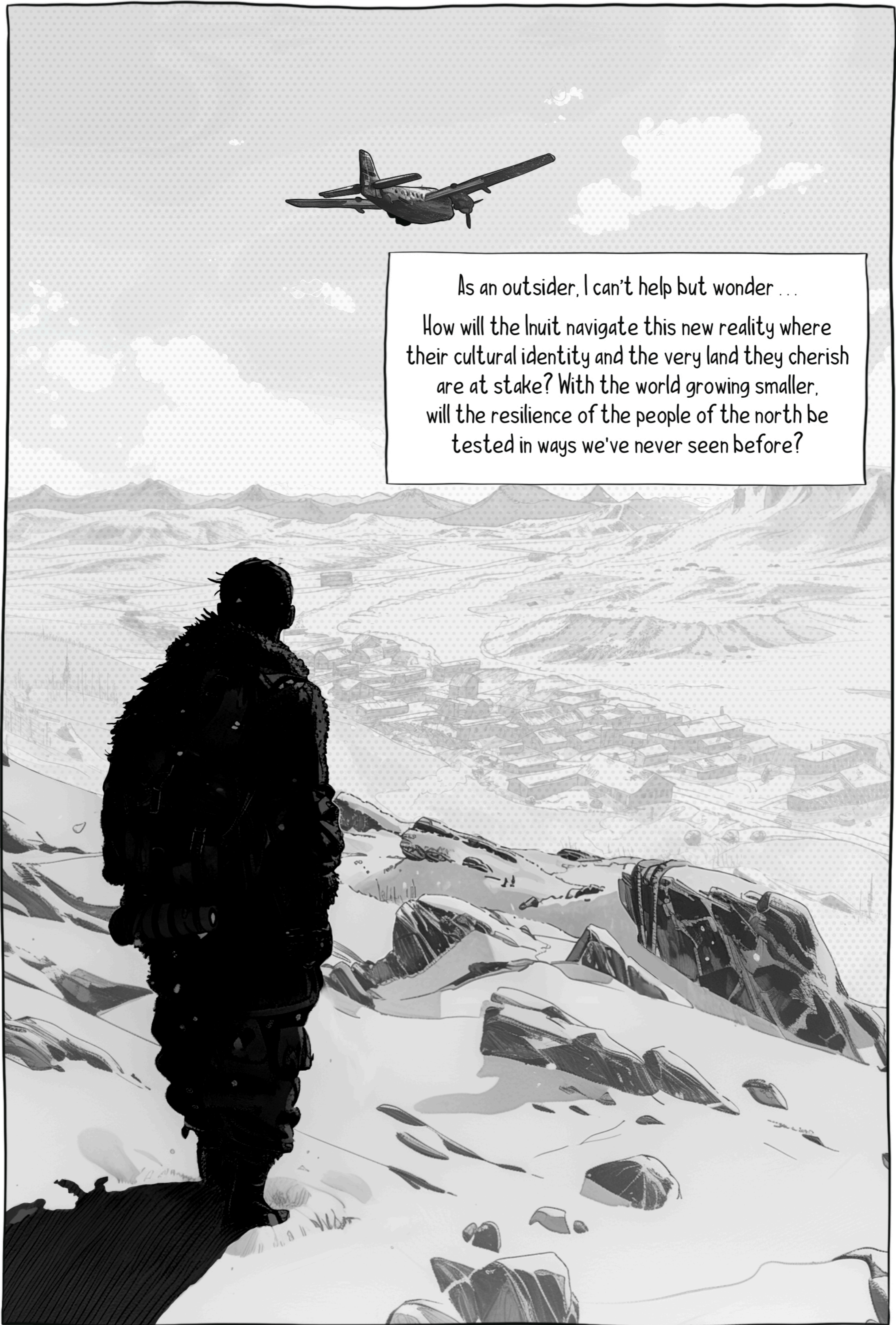
... begins to infiltrate the ice, ...

... bringing change and uncertainty.  
The clash between ancient traditions and  
modern advancements is inevitable.



In this unforgiving land, the line between survival  
and destruction is razor-thin.

Has the struggle only  
just begun?



As an outsider, I can't help but wonder ...  
How will the Inuit navigate this new reality where their cultural identity and the very land they cherish are at stake? With the world growing smaller, will the resilience of the people of the north be tested in ways we've never seen before?

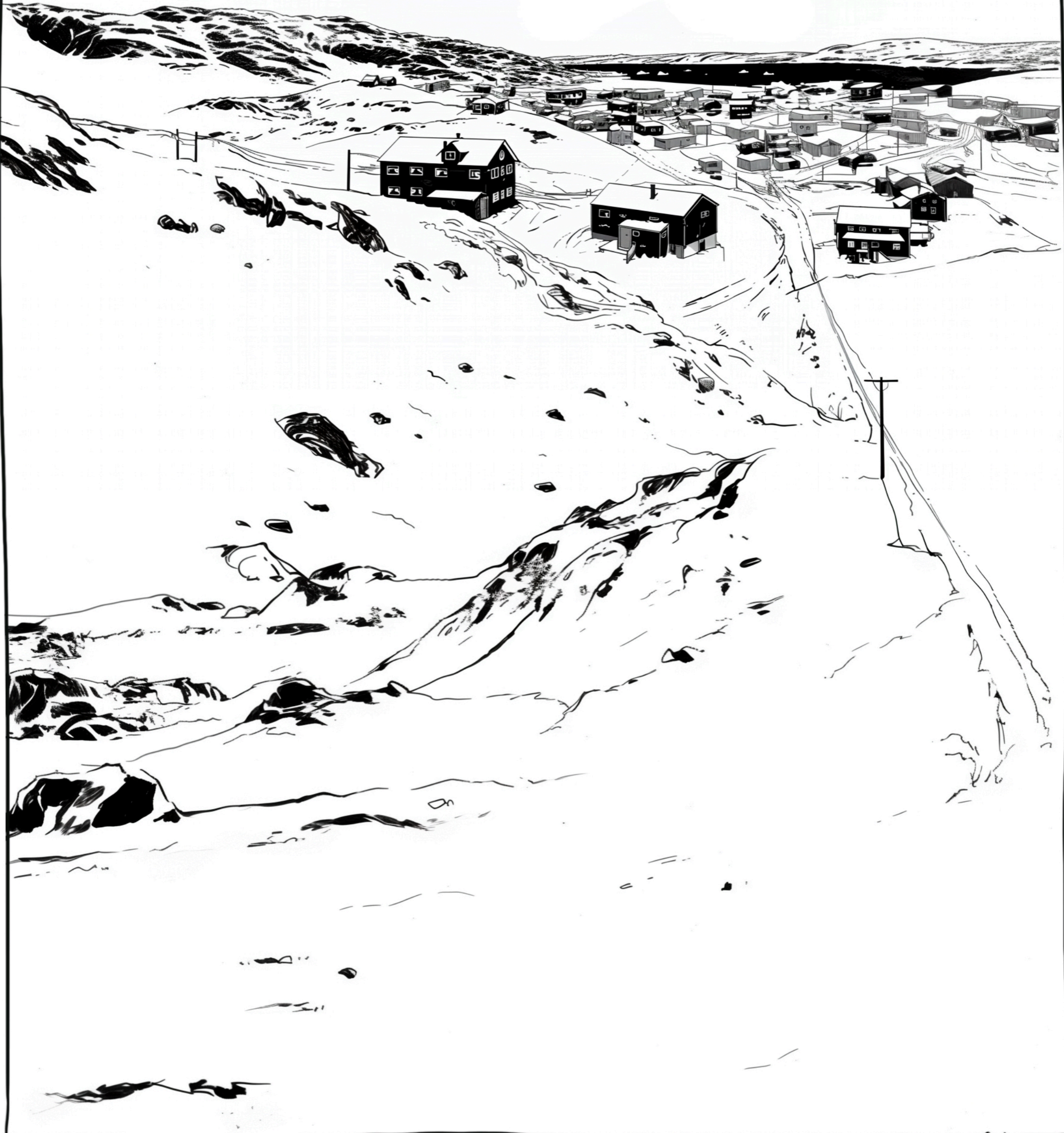


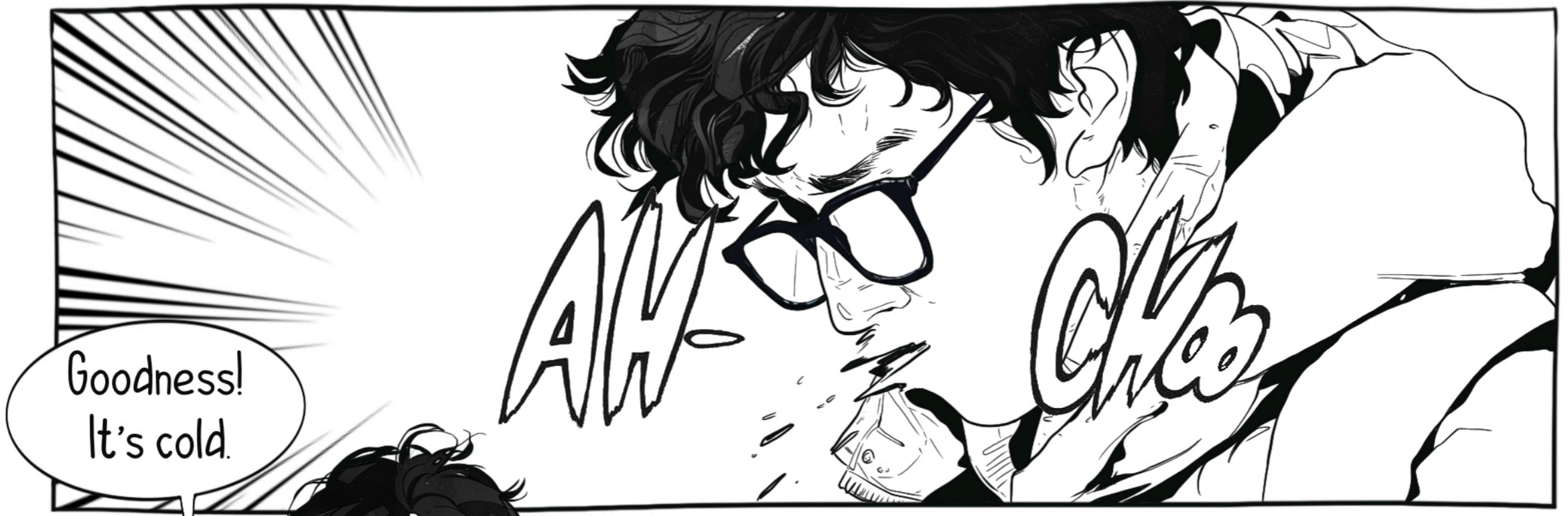
# CHAPTER I





# Iqaluit, Nunavut





Goodness!  
It's cold.

Ah! Oh!

When I first arrived in Iqaluit, it was definitely colder than I expected, even though I had prepared myself as best as I could. Getting here was no small feat, as it is notoriously difficult. Unfortunately, there are no roads connecting this remote capital to the rest of Canada.



Oh!

Hey!  
Over here.

I had contacted Josh months prior to my visit to arrange a place to stay and to help me navigate this remote part of the world. We agreed that I could stay with him and his family, as I wanted to live with the locals.

Hello.  
You must be Josh

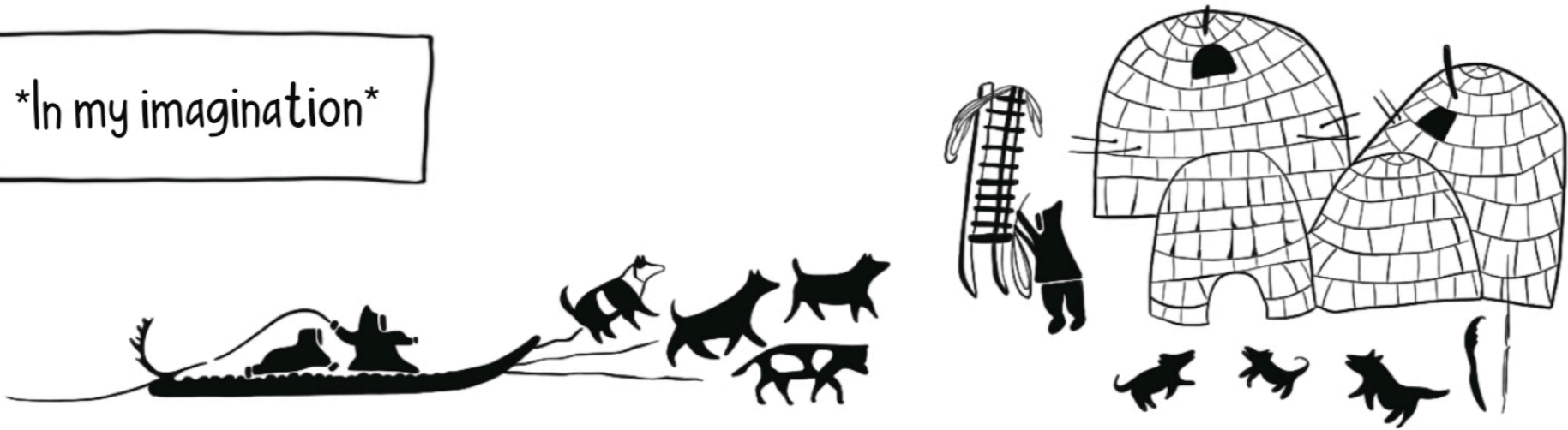
Nice to  
meet you



And you must be Peter.  
Welcome to Iqaluit!

You must be freezing.  
Let's get you out of this cold.

\*In my imagination\*



I was bubbling with excitement as I prepared to stay in an igloo house, just like the ones I had read about in my childhood books.



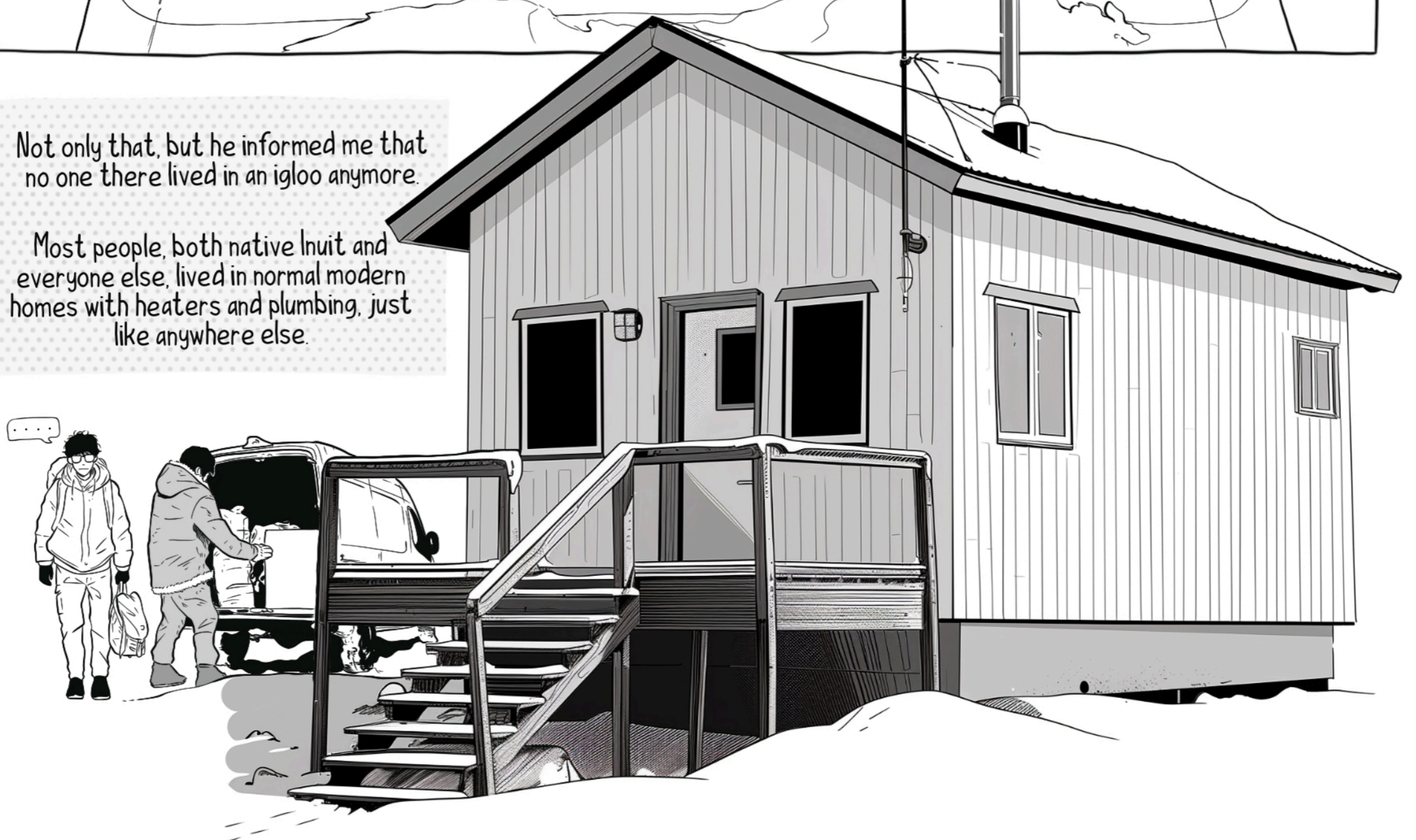
And to top it off, being whisked away by a team of adorable sled dogs to our destination.

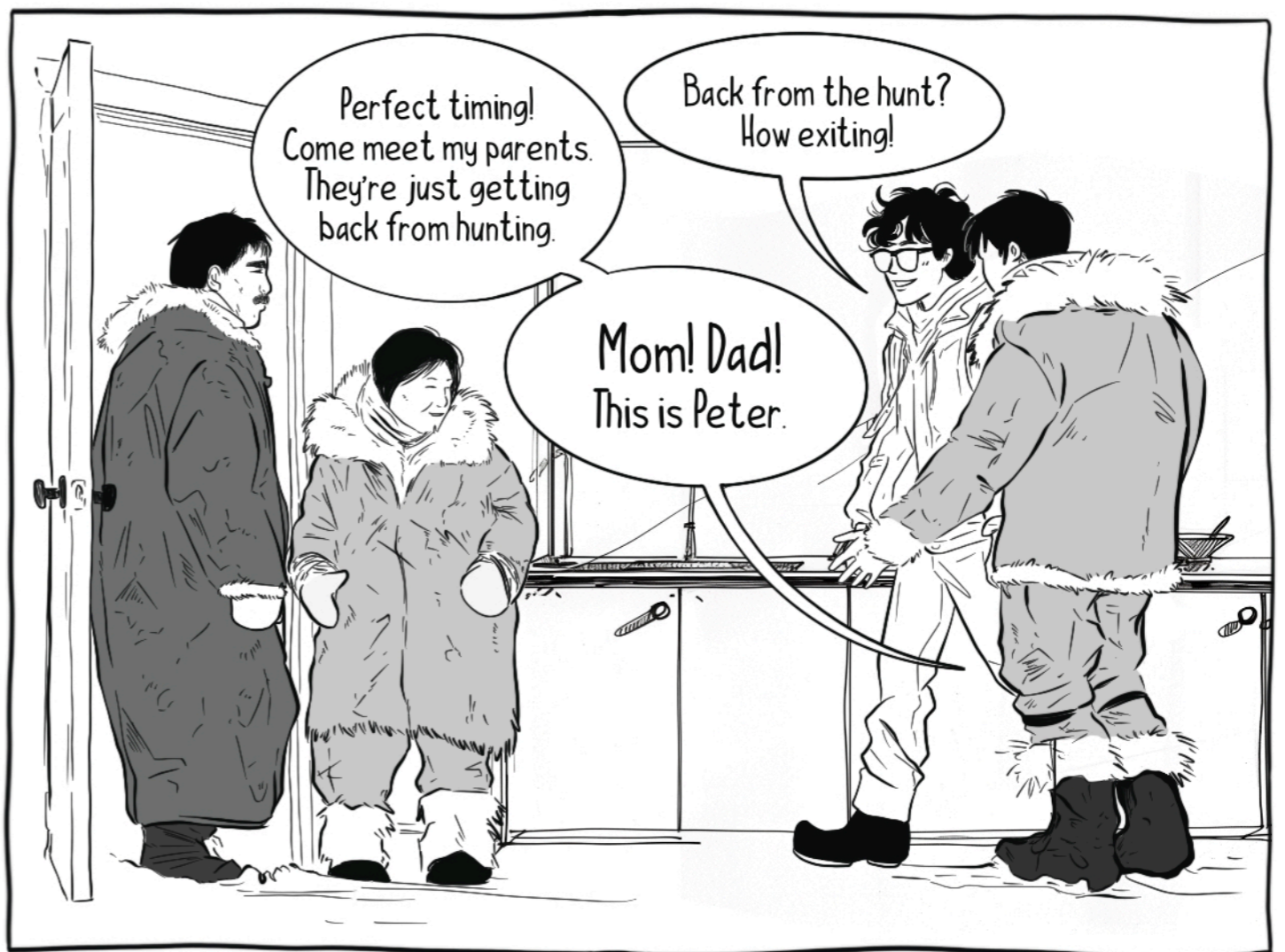
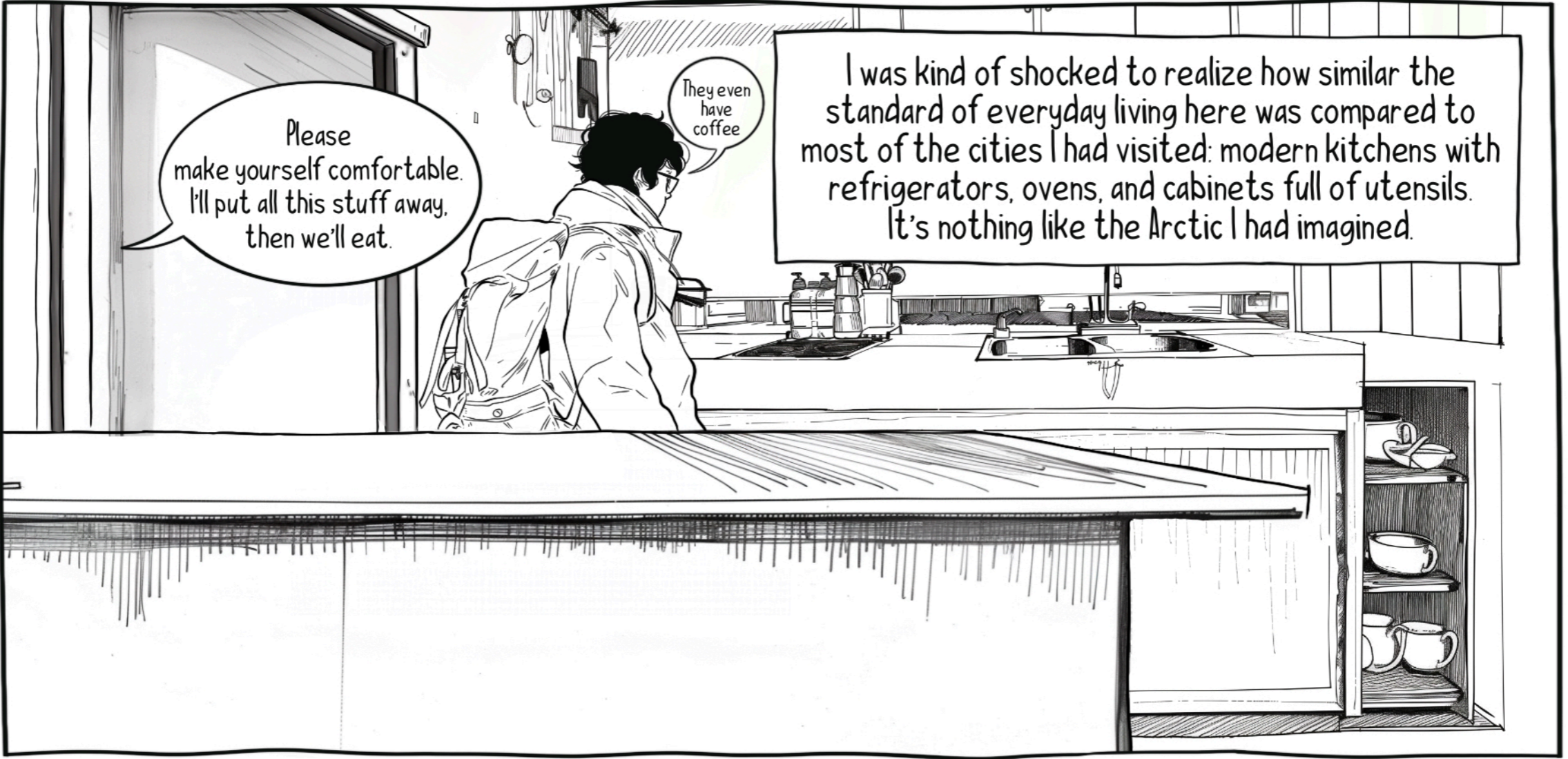
So, you can imagine my disappointment when Josh picked me up in his white van instead.

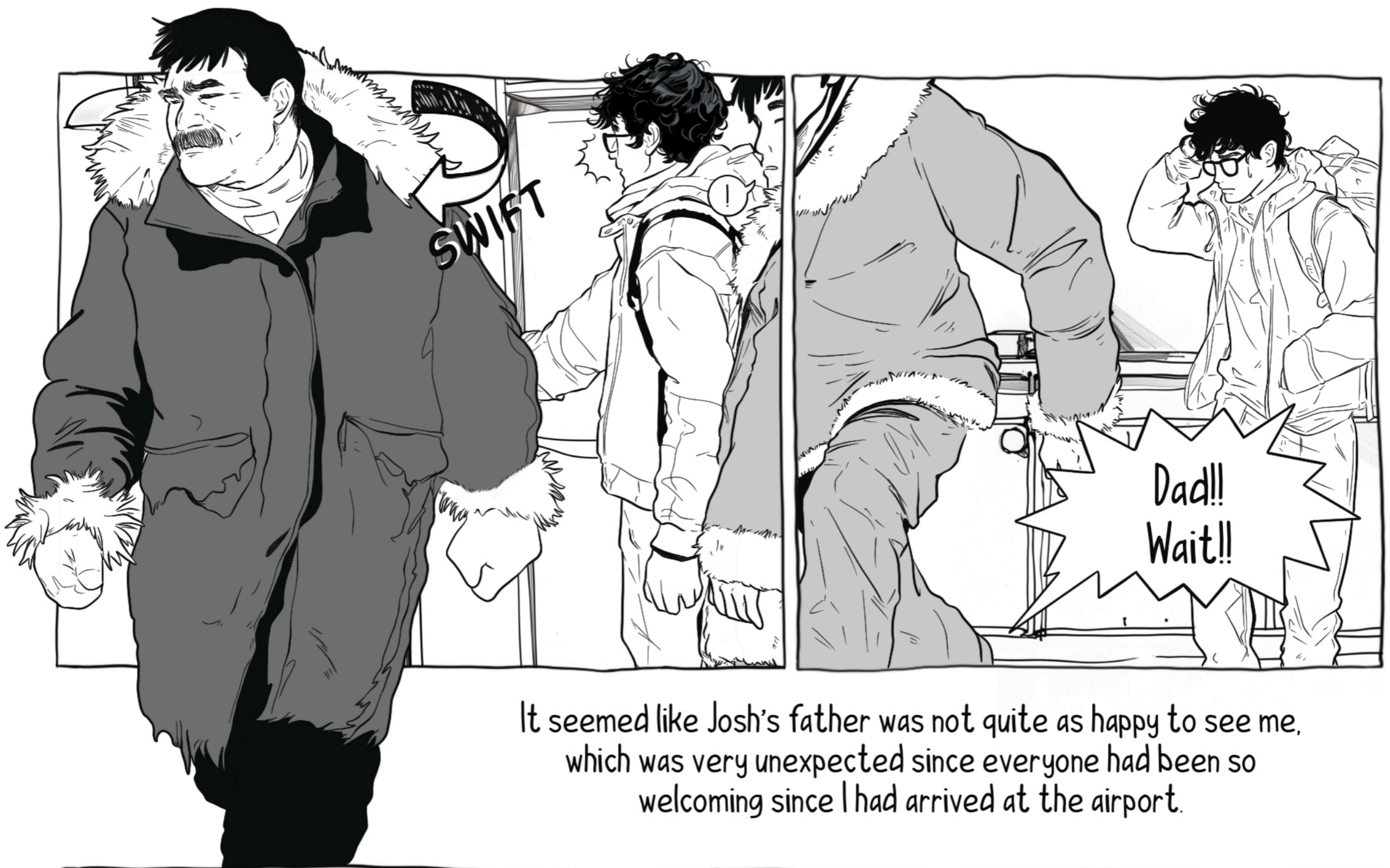


Not only that, but he informed me that no one there lived in an igloo anymore.

Most people, both native Inuit and everyone else, lived in normal modern homes with heaters and plumbing, just like anywhere else.

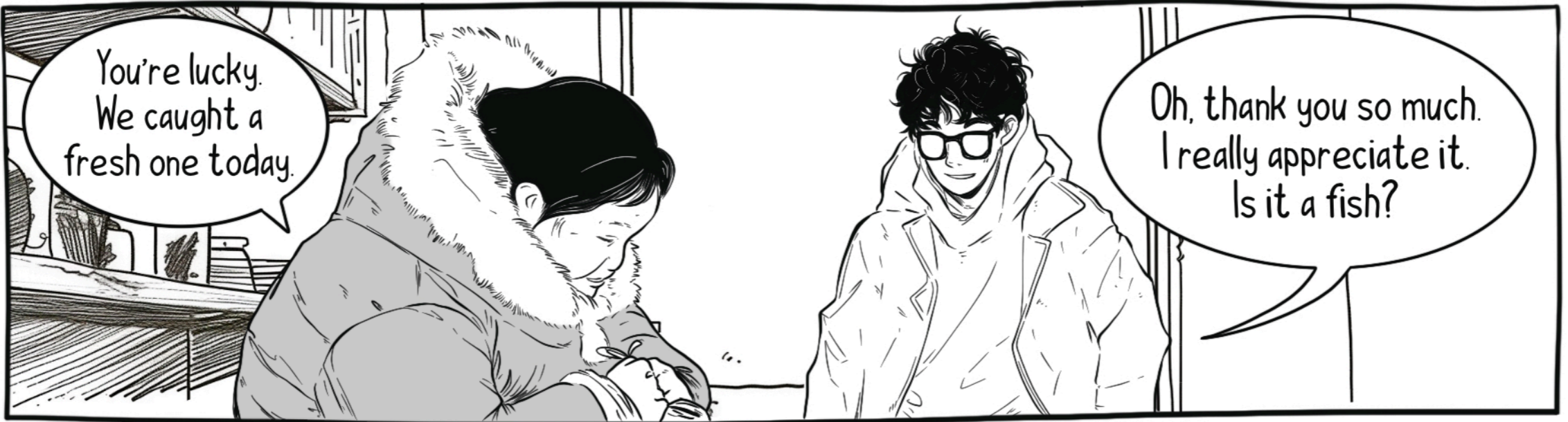






It seemed like Josh's father was not quite as happy to see me, which was very unexpected since everyone had been so welcoming since I had arrived at the airport.





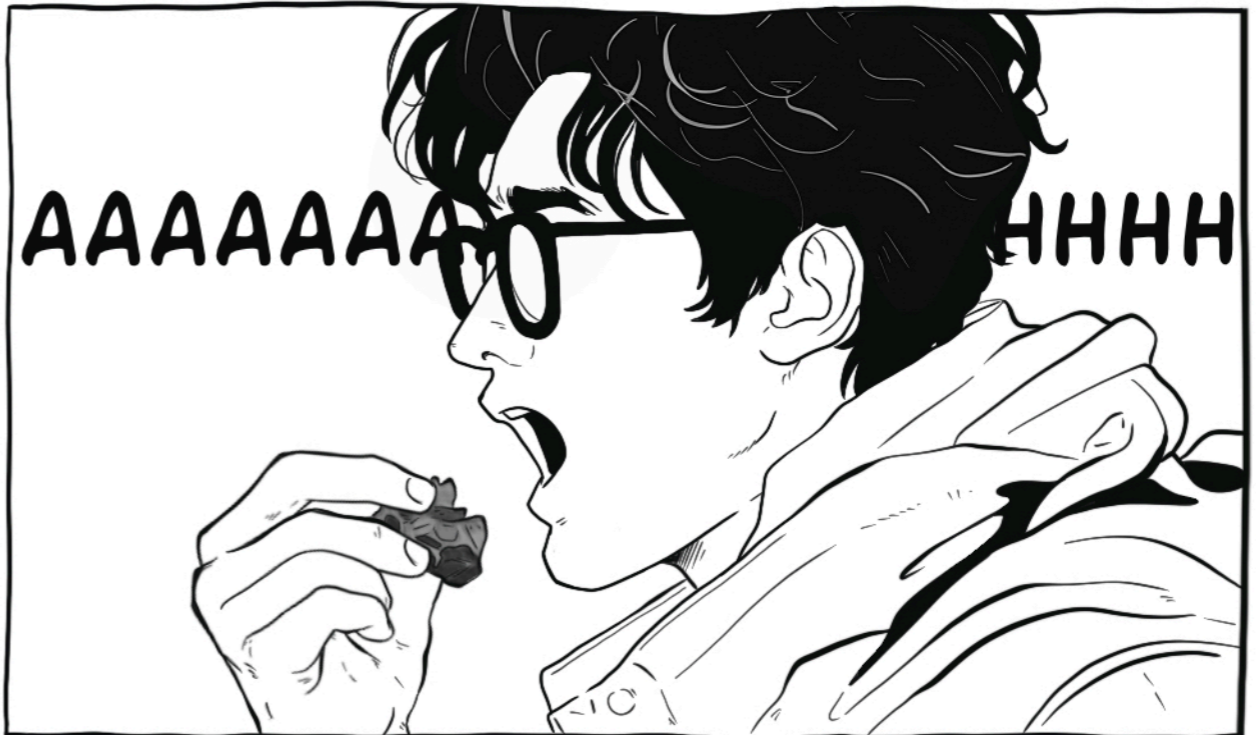


Here you go.



Th... Thank you.

Raw?

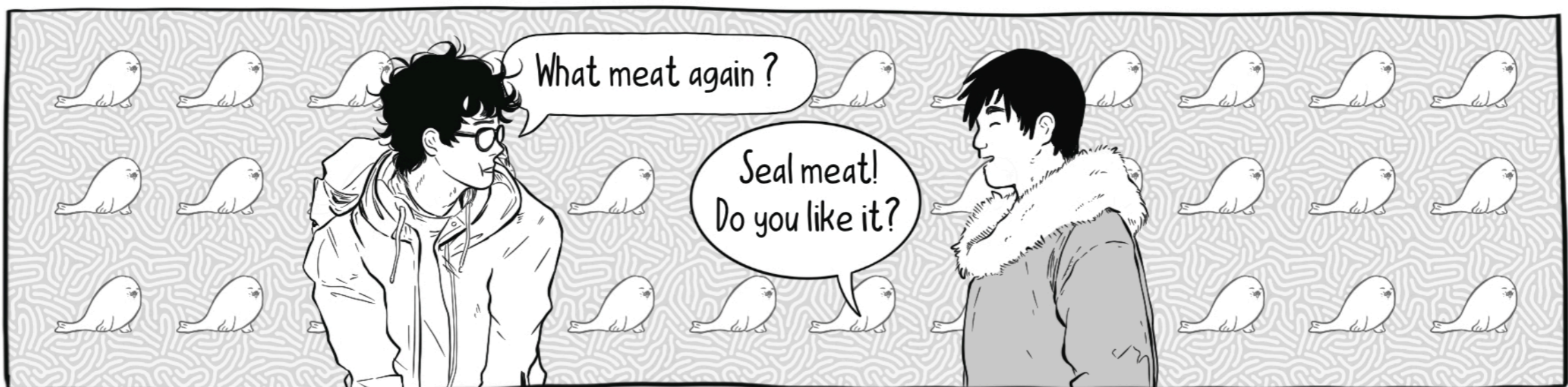
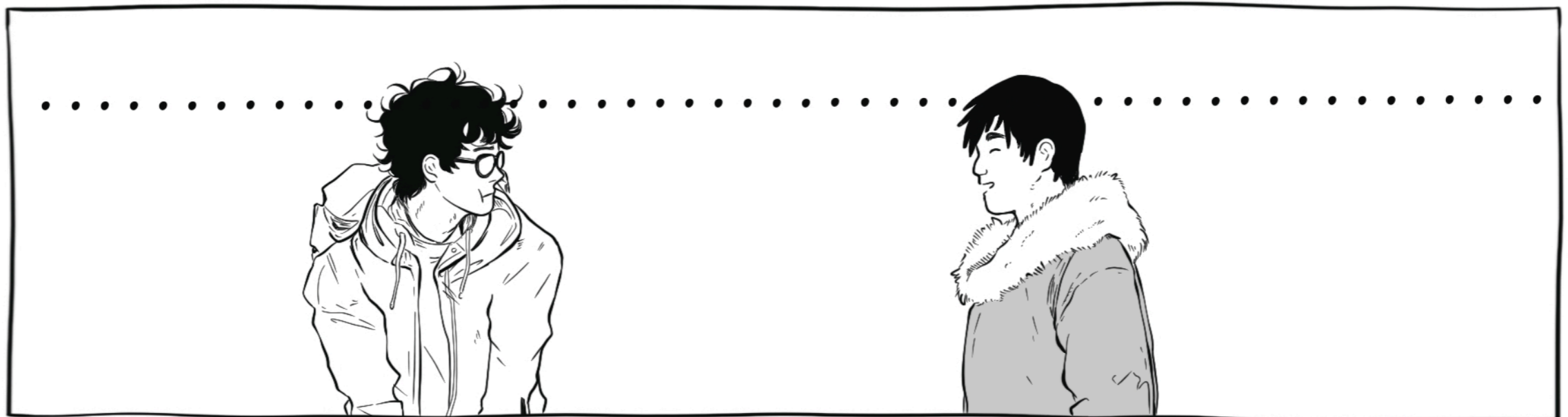


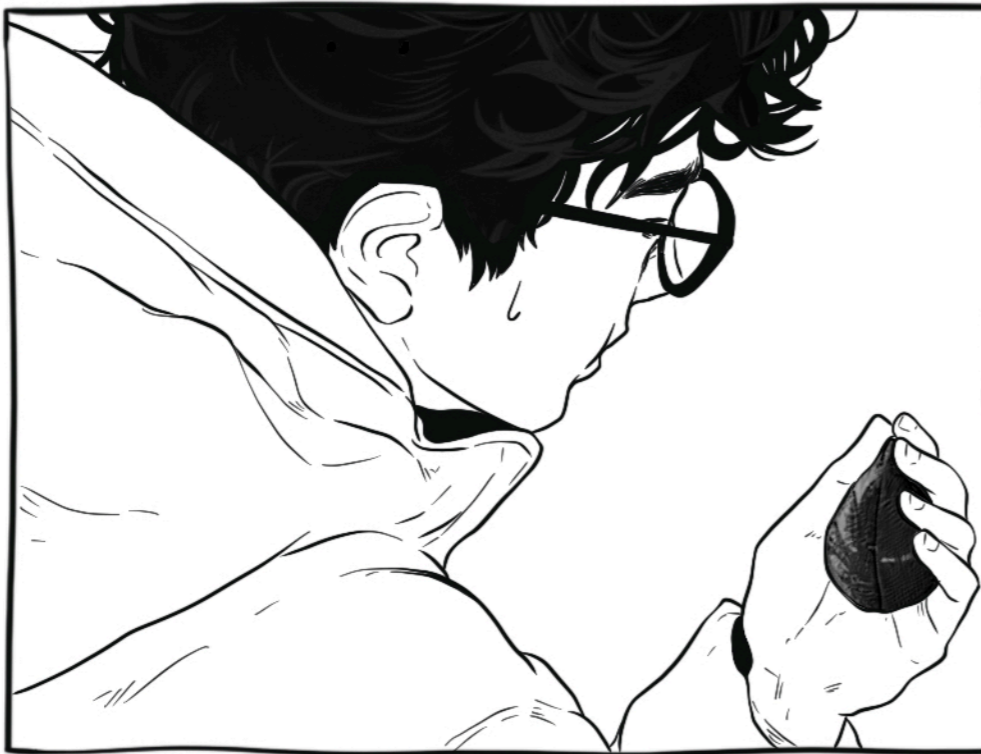
AAAAAAA HHHH



GOBBLE

The meat was unlike any I had ever eaten before. It had an intense, strong, irony flavour that was quite overwhelming. Honestly, I didn't really like it. The taste was just too overpowering. Not to mention that it was completely raw and cold. What in the world is this meat?



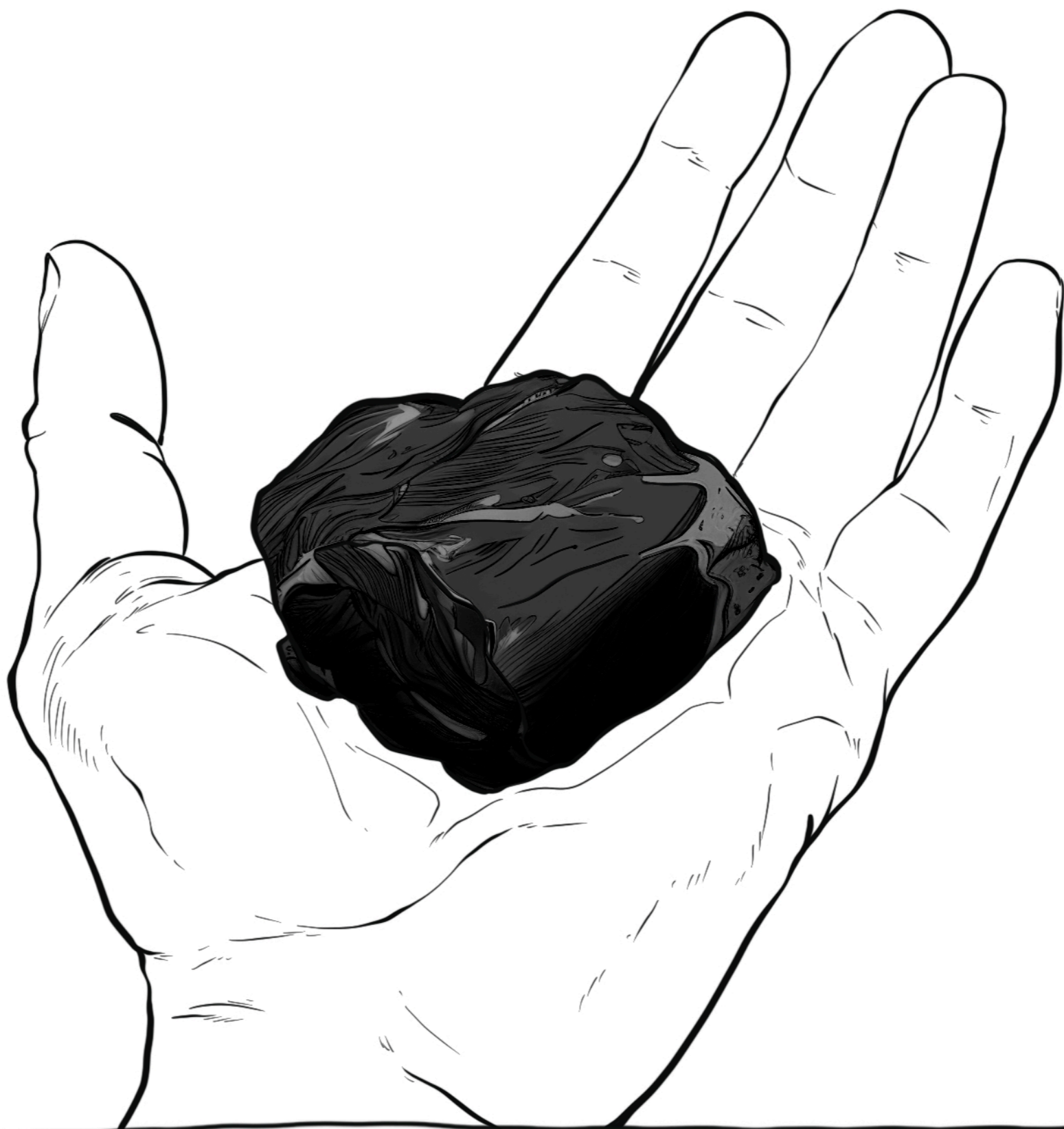


Little did I realize the profound impact seal meat would have on my journey to the north.

Holding that small piece of meat in my hand, it symbolized more than just food; it offered a glimpse into a culture and a way of life still unfolding before me.

The seal meat became a tantalizing introduction to the boundless and intricate world I had stepped into, rich and complex.

As I looked at its deep, dark colour, trying to hide my uncertainty, I had no idea that this moment would challenge my understanding of the seal's importance to the Inuit people and ultimately haunt my thoughts long after I had left this frozen land.



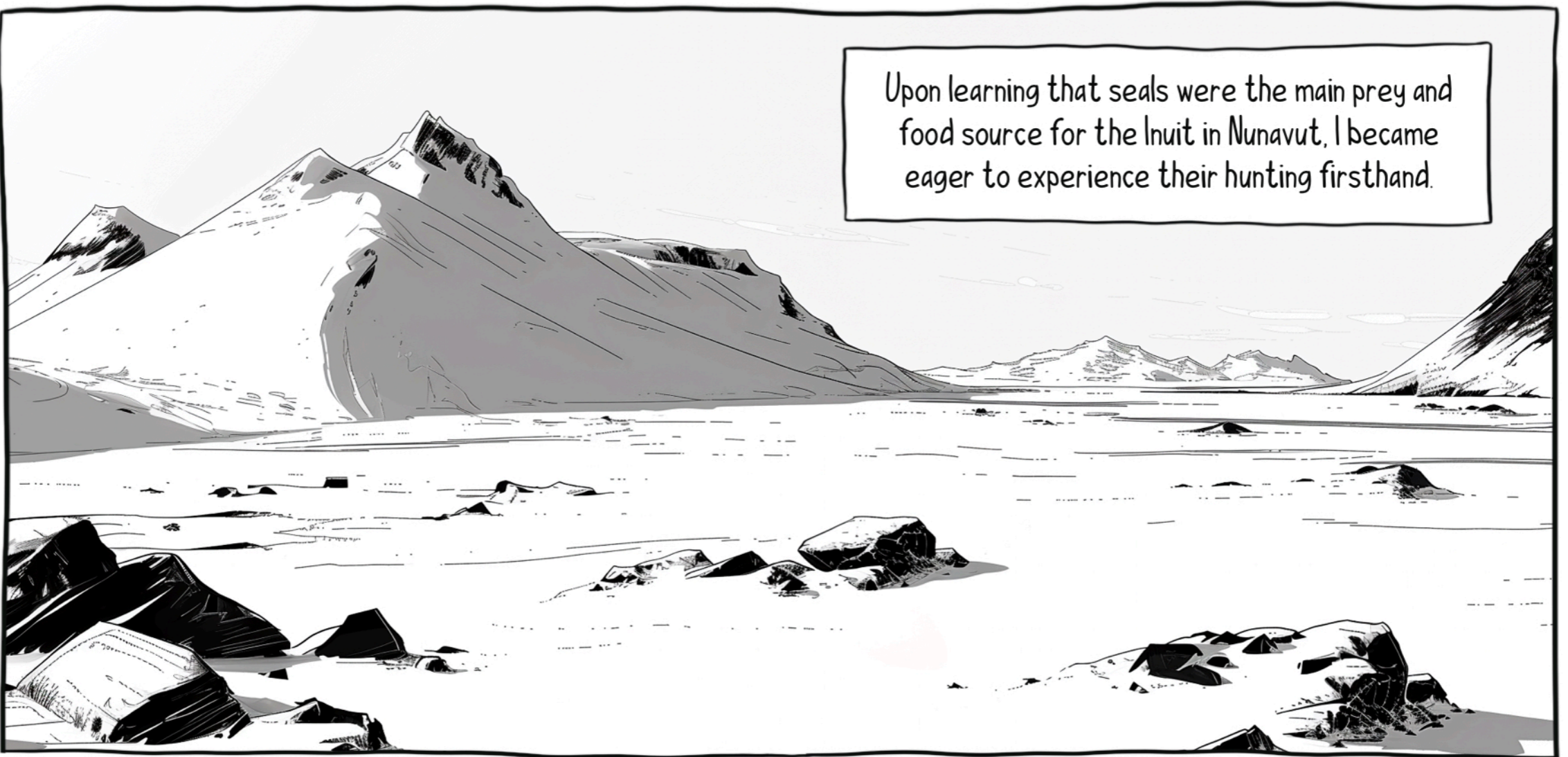


# CHAPTER 2

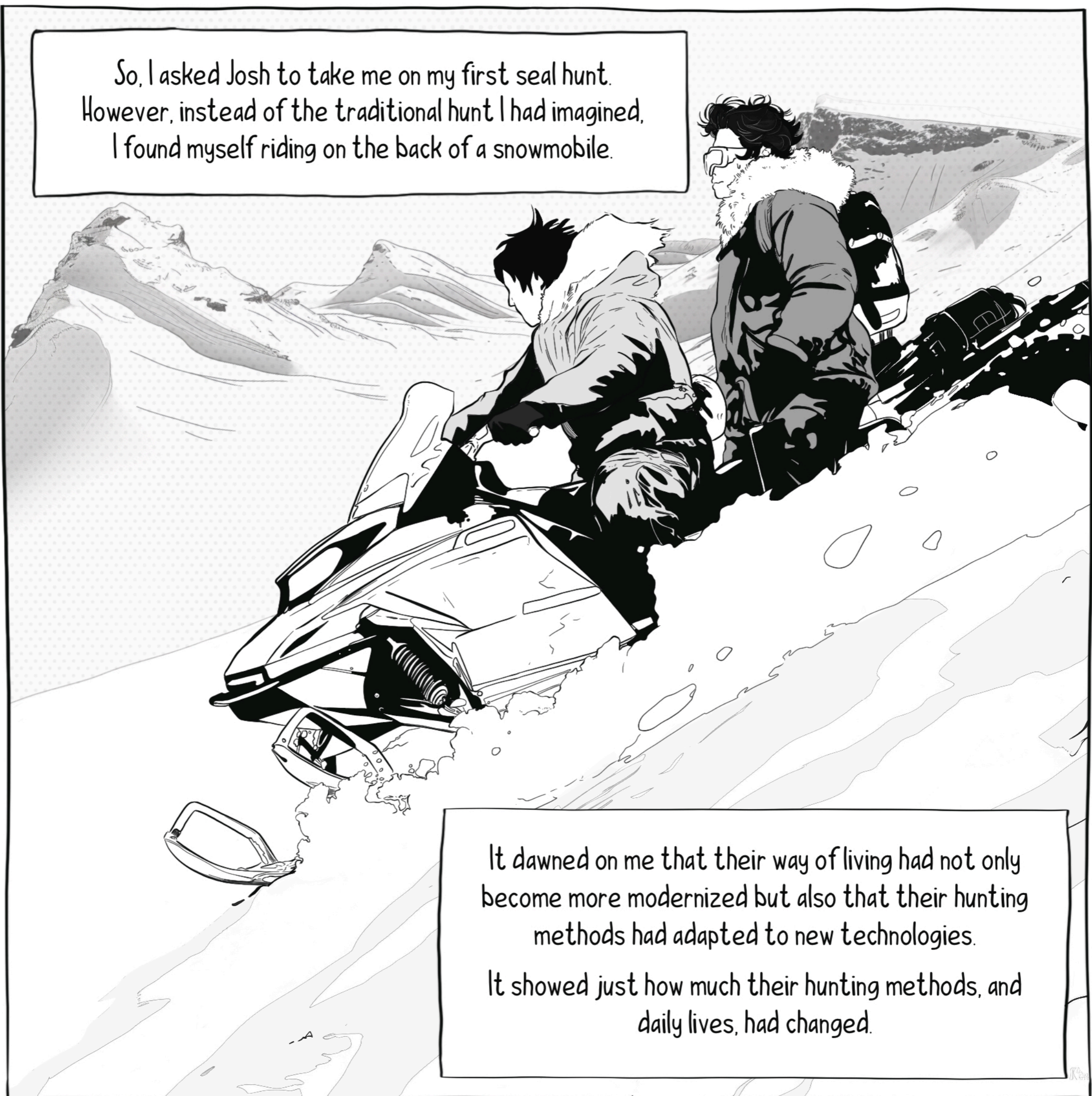




Upon learning that seals were the main prey and food source for the Inuit in Nunavut, I became eager to experience their hunting firsthand.



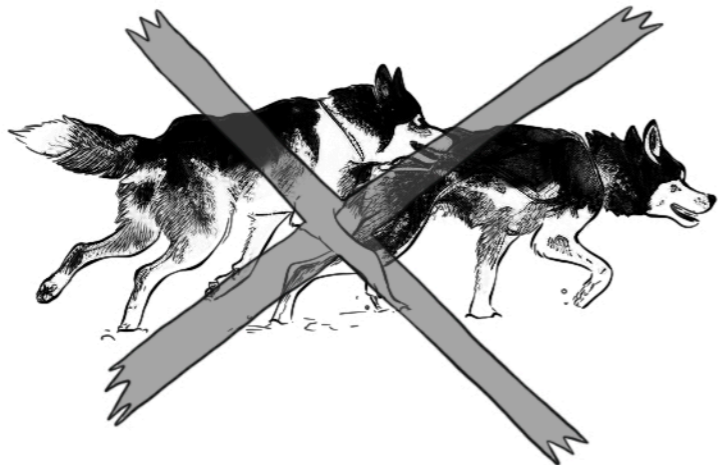
So, I asked Josh to take me on my first seal hunt. However, instead of the traditional hunt I had imagined, I found myself riding on the back of a snowmobile.



It dawned on me that their way of living had not only become more modernized but also that their hunting methods had adapted to new technologies. It showed just how much their hunting methods, and daily lives, had changed.

The use of Inuit sled dog teams as the main source of transportation and hunting has mostly faded.

These days, it's rare to see sled dogs used for hunts. Instead, they are primarily used for tourist rides, and only a few are true Inuit breeds.



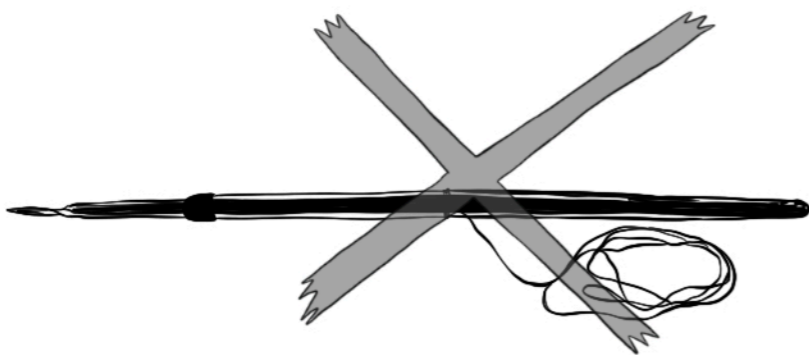
Since the 1960s, the snowmobile, often called the Ski-Doo, was introduced in the Baffin region and quickly gained popularity across the Arctic.

With their greater speed and ability to cover longer distances, snowmobiles have now become the primary mode of transportation.



While harpoons are occasionally used, ...

... hunting rifles have become the primary weapon for seal hunting.



As we headed for a hunting ground outside the city, though I didn't complain about the cold or exhaustion, every two hours Josh paused our travel for hot tea and store-bought cake.

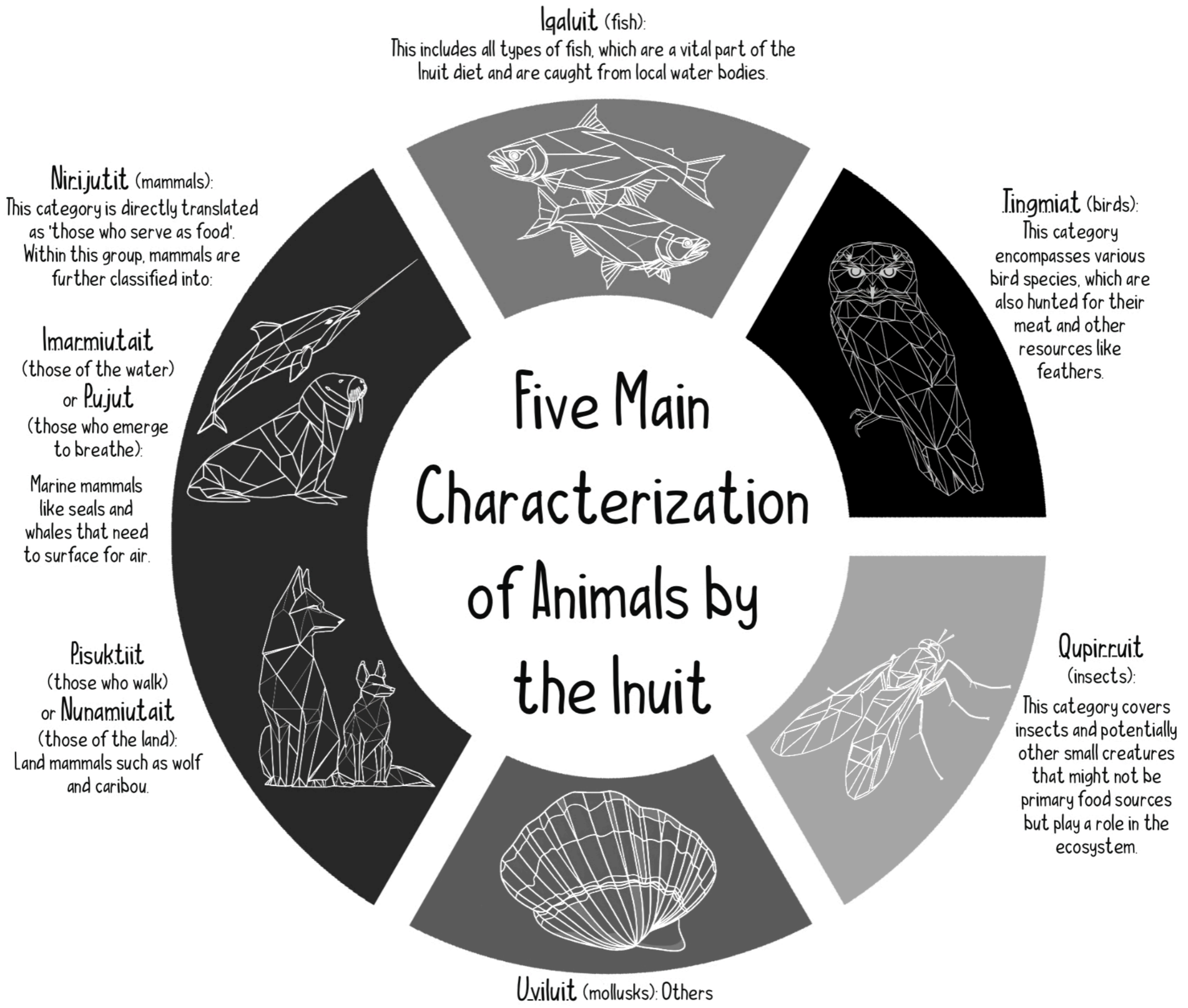
While I snacked and warmed up, he worked on melting snow to get the snowmobile running again.

At minus 30 degrees Celsius, everything froze quickly, even the gas in the tank.

Not to mention, every time we had to push the snowmobile up steep slopes, we had to watch out for rocks that could wreck it. But every time we stopped, Josh shared stories about Inuit history and culture, which was the best part of the trip.



The Inuit categorize animals based on their ecological characteristics and their relationship to humans.



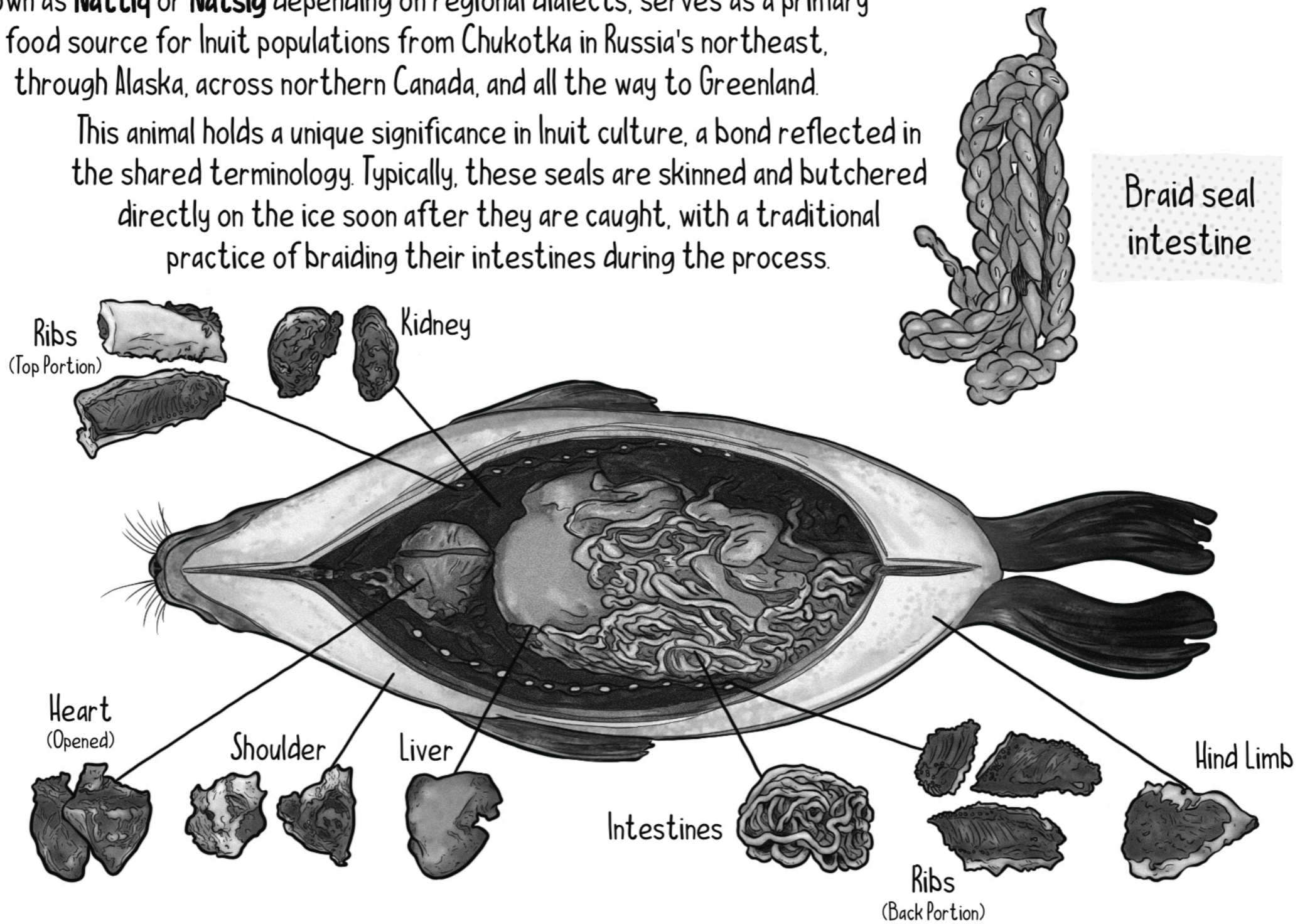
The Inuit's most significant relationship with animals is through Tarniq, a spiritual belief translated as 'soul'.



# The Ringed Seal

Known as **Nattiq** or **Natsig** depending on regional dialects, serves as a primary food source for Inuit populations from Chukotka in Russia's northeast, through Alaska, across northern Canada, and all the way to Greenland.

This animal holds a unique significance in Inuit culture, a bond reflected in the shared terminology. Typically, these seals are skinned and butchered directly on the ice soon after they are caught, with a traditional practice of braiding their intestines during the process.



Inuit seal hunting is divided into two main seasonal methods:

Winter and Spring involve traditional practices like waiting by seals' breathing holes (Mauliqpug) and stalking on ice (ArnEq or Auriaq), crucial for survival during the colder months.

Summer and Autumn hunting transitions to open-water tactics, where Inuit navigate boats through ice fragments, employing both opportunistic shooting and strategic luring of seals, adapting to the unstable ice of warmer seasons.



The indigenous peoples of the Arctic have traditionally used seal meat for food...



... seal skin for clothing ...



...and oil from seal blubber as fuel for light and heat.



Many Inuit visit trading posts to exchange skins for items they cannot obtain locally, such as bread or tea.



Seals form and sustain tiny openings known as 'aglu' or 'agluit' in the comparatively thin ice. They persistently navigate beneath the increasingly thick ice, shifting from one opening to another, first breaking the ice with their heads before chewing and scratching at it to maintain these openings. Hunters position themselves by these holes, anticipating the moment a seal emerges to breathe so they can spear them with harpoons.

The only problem is... they are no larger than the tip of your thumb.



When we finally managed to find one, we had to wait quietly and motionlessly for a seal to come up for air. Josh said that this patience is crucial because it allows the hunter to be ready for the moment the seal emerges, maximizing their chance of a successful catch. So, there's nothing to do but wait.



... and wait ...



... and wait ...



HOW LONG IS THIS GONNA TAKE !!?

Be more patient Peter. Nuliajuk will eventually present the seal to us. You have to respect her.

... and wait ...

I have been patient for hours and hours!!

How in the world can you do this?

And who were you talking about?

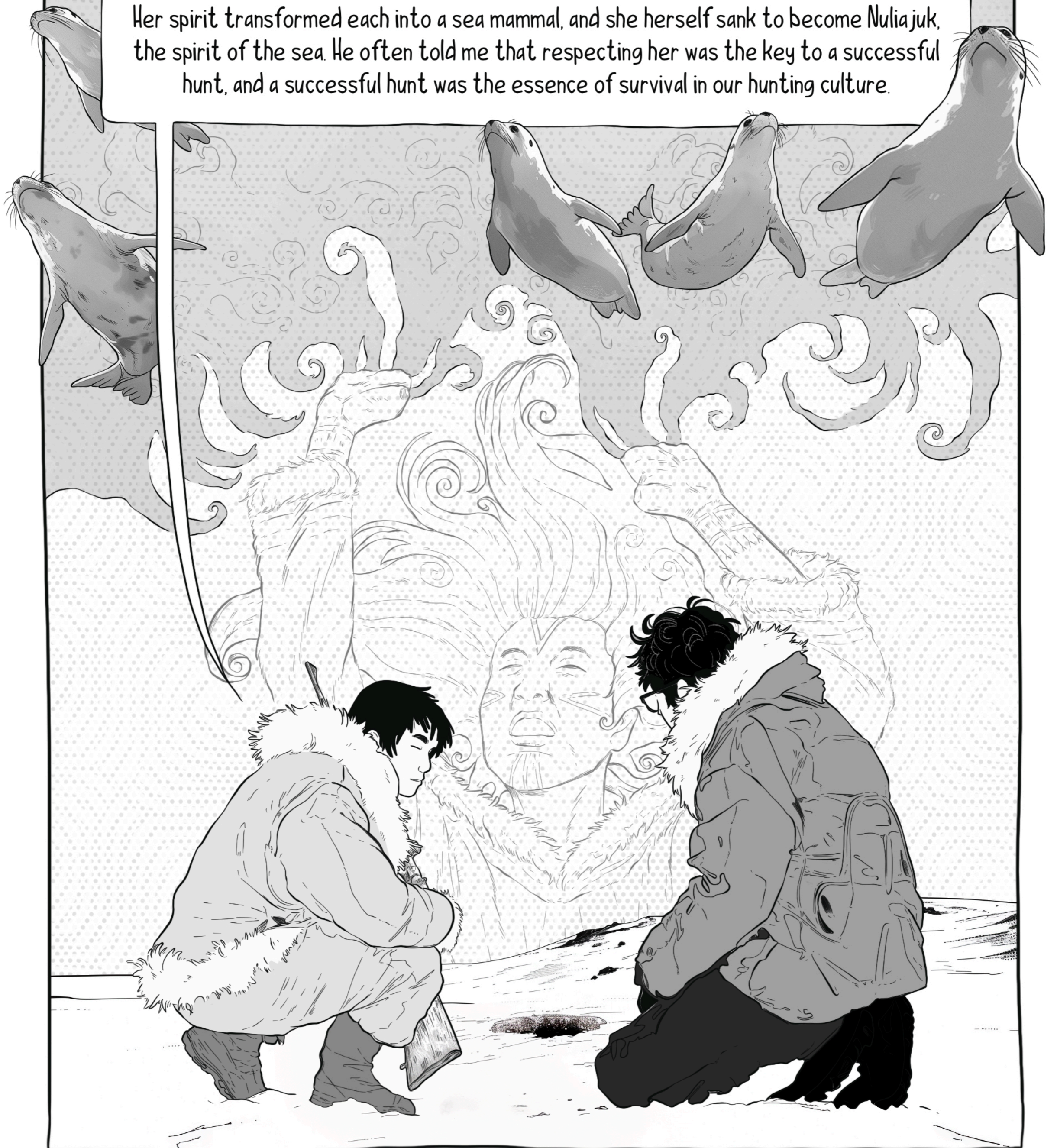
Who is Nuliajuk? And how does respecting her lead to us catching anything?



My father once told me a tale of a young woman deceived by her betrothed, who was a seabird in disguise. When her father learned of this, he sailed across the sea to rescue her. As they fled, the enraged seabird summoned a great storm.

Her father believed the only way to calm the storm was to sacrifice his daughter. He pushed her from the qajaq (boat), severing her fingers as she clung to the edge. From her fingers arose the sea's creatures - ringed seals from the first joints, bearded seals from the second, with other pieces becoming walrus and whales.

Her spirit transformed each into a sea mammal, and she herself sank to become Nuliajuk, the spirit of the sea. He often told me that respecting her was the key to a successful hunt, and a successful hunt was the essence of survival in our hunting culture.

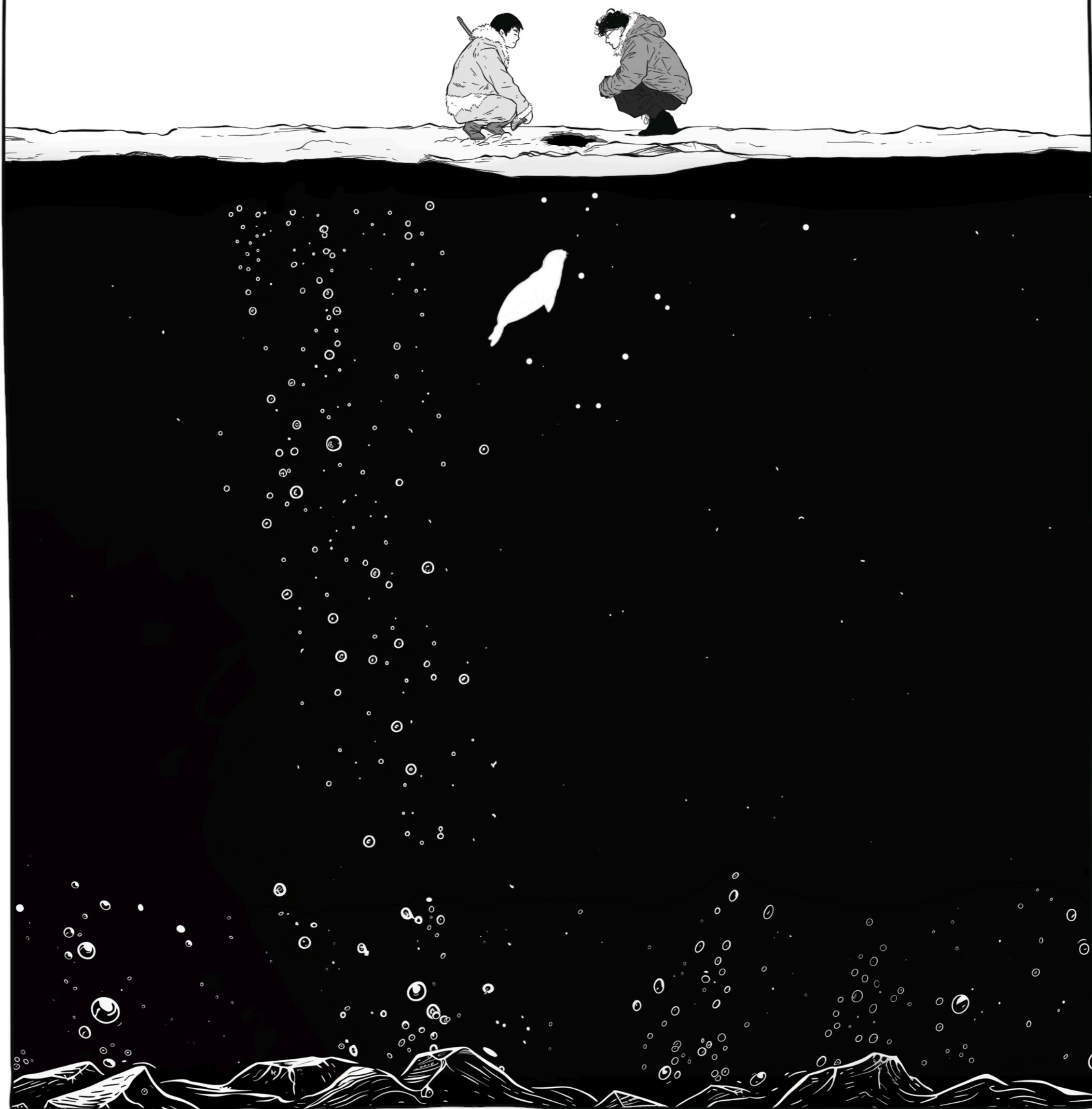


Josh said that his father had told him that as he crouched by the seal's breathing hole, he felt a profound connection to the world around him. For the Inuit, it was a sacred portal, a place where the realms of the living, the spirits, and the ancestors intersected.

The stories Josh had shared began to echo in my mind.

One tale spoke of a hunter who encountered the moon spirit at a breathing hole. Though this waiting demanded great endurance, it was here where hunters communicated with spirits and sought guidance from the world beyond.

It held spiritual significance as a point of connection between this world and the realms below, and even above. Here, a father might seek a sign of his children's fate, or a man might experience a divine revelation leading him to embrace a new faith.



In the end, we hadn't caught anything that day. As we headed back, I began to sense that this was more than just a hunt for Josh. The Inuit approached the hunt with such reverence, a deep sense of respect and awe, knowing that their actions could ripple through the spiritual fabric of their world. Even though I didn't feel that connection myself, I was still amazed by their perspective on the hunt.



We made a brief stop in the town to pick up some groceries from the local store before returning to the house.



Josh and I were walking back when I spotted something in the distance. The signs and banners stood out against the snow, loud and intrusive. I remembered that moment as I felt a knot of unease tighten in my stomach.



# (CHAPTER 3





**STOP  
THE HUNT  
NOW**

**END THE  
SLAUGHTER  
OF BABY SEAL**

**STOP  
THE SEAL  
HUNT**

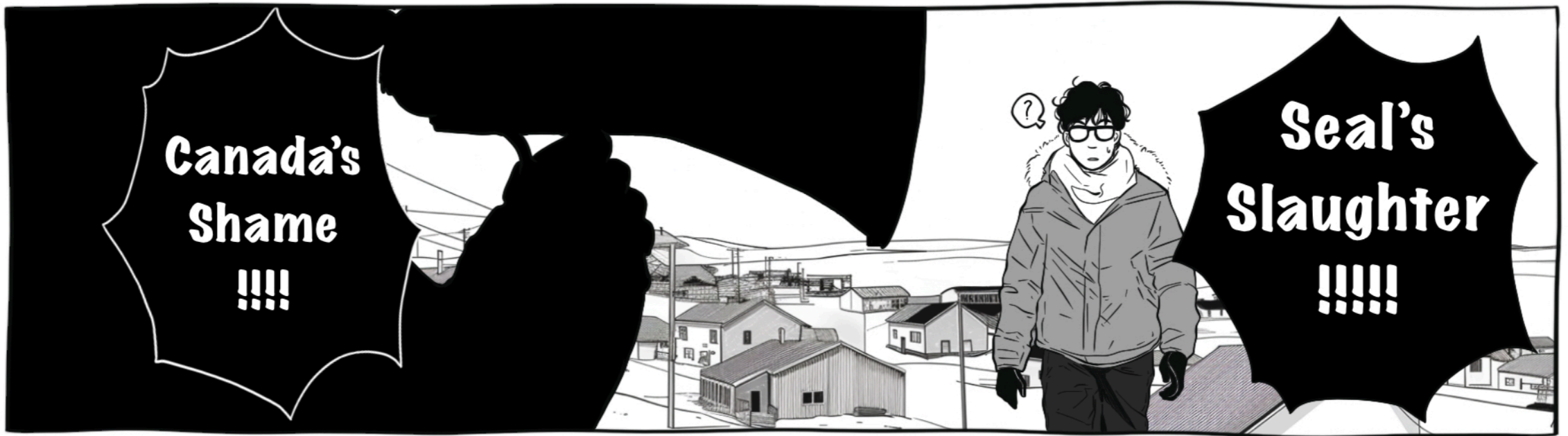
**STOP  
THE  
CRUELTY**

**FUR IS  
KILLING**

**STOP THE CLUBBING  
OF BABY SEALS!**

**SHAME**

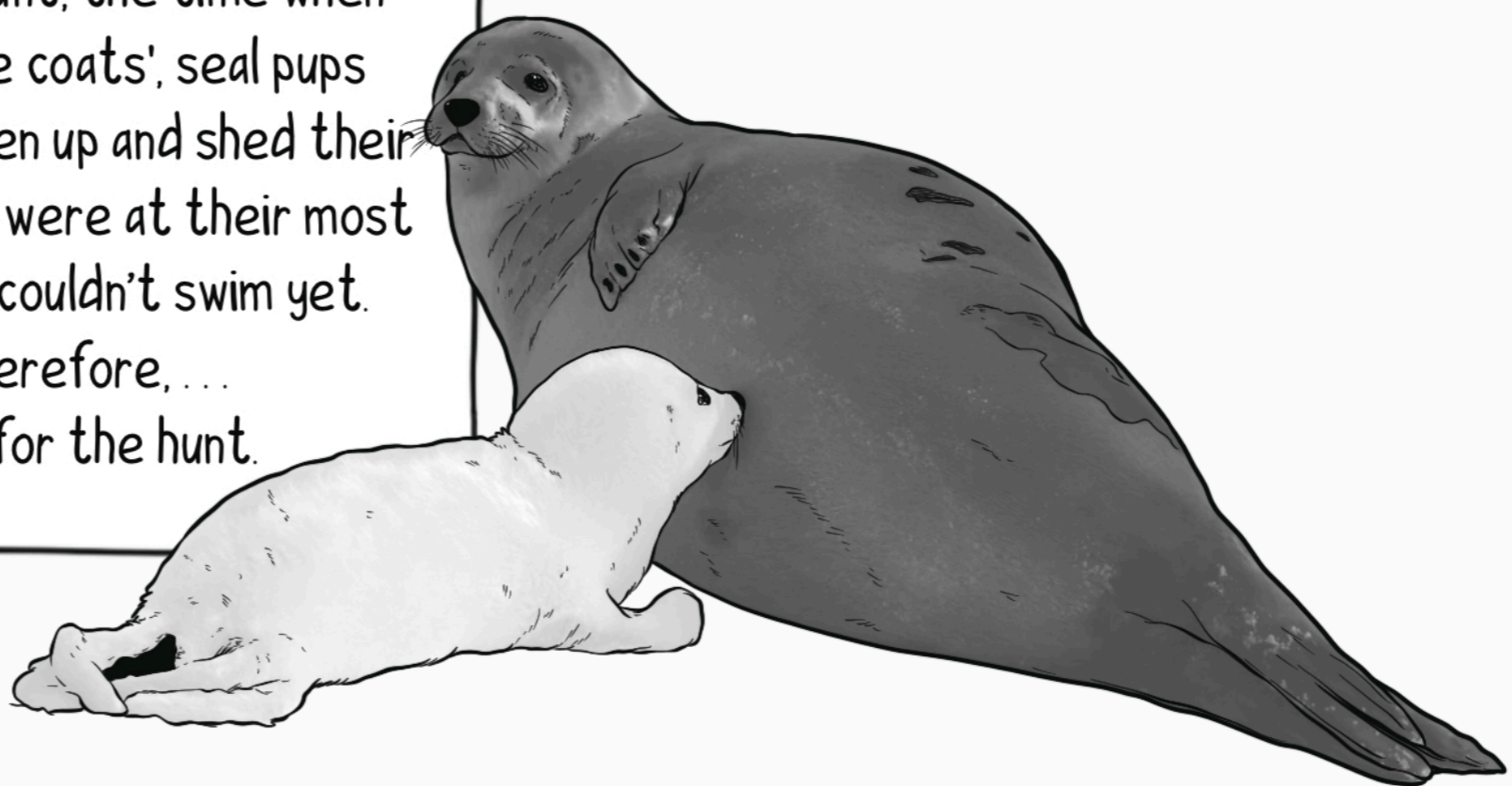




Then I saw it. A group of protestors were shouting and screaming, holding up horrifying images. Photos of seals, their white fur stained with blood, eyes wide with terror. I could almost hear the desperate cries of the animals as they were clubbed to death. The brutality, coupled with the thought that this was what I had eaten, made me feel sick to my core.

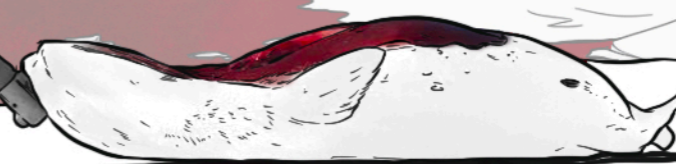
They called it the Spring Hunt, the time when seals gave birth to 'white coats', seal pups that had six weeks to fatten up and shed their fur. During this period, they were at their most vulnerable because they couldn't swim yet.

Seal pups were, therefore, ...  
... perfect targets for the hunt.



Seal hunters didn't have to wait at the breathing holes; they could just walk up to the breeding area and kill them, sometimes skinning them alive. Their mothers would return to the ice, only to crawl over to the skinned carcasses of their young, grieving by their bodies. I looked into the eyes of these seals and saw pain and a desperate sense of suffering, tears forming as if they understood the brutality inflicted upon them. The sight was heart-wrenching, and it left an indelible mark on my conscience. The sealers weren't using rifles; they used a 'Hakapik', a club with a hammer head to hit the seals on the head and a hook to drag them to the boat. Josh had told me that they hunted and ate seals, but what I saw in the protestors' pictures showed a lot of meat being discarded.

They just came for the white fur.

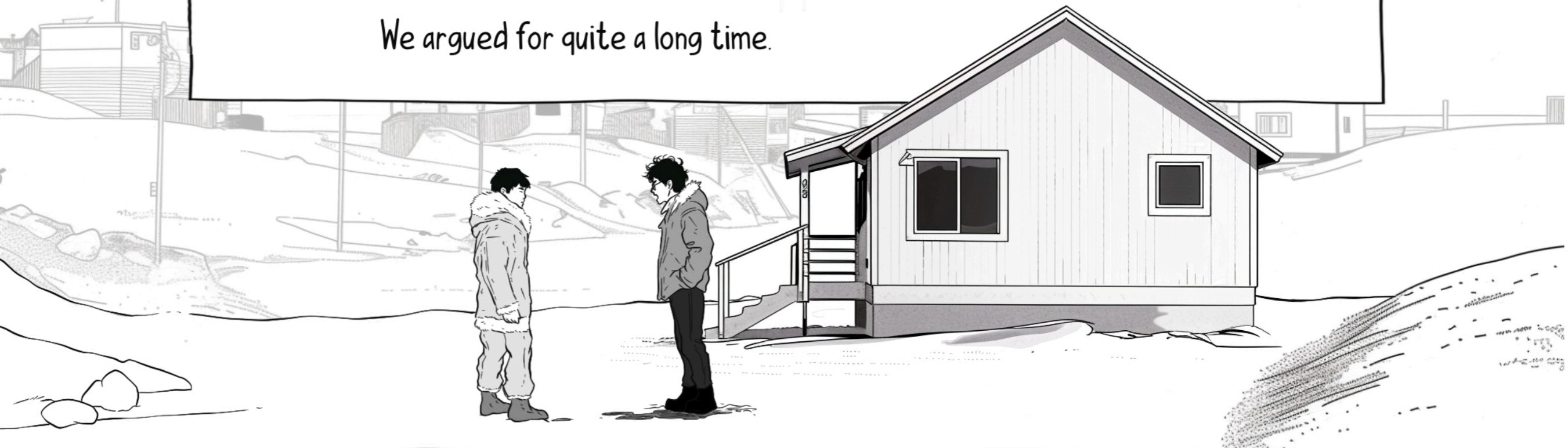


I was confronted with a different reality that clashed with everything I had seen. The feeling of respect for the hunt was diminishing quickly. There was nothing sacred about what I saw ... it was cruel. At that moment, the more I thought about it, the more I felt anger and disgust. It was as if I stood there with blood-soaked hands.



I wasted no time demanding the truth from Josh as soon as we reached the house. I needed answers, and I wasn't going to hold back. Surprisingly, rather than denying any involvement with the spring hunt, he challenged me on my judgment instead.

We argued for quite a long time.



Wait?  
What are you saying?  
It's not the same thing.  
It's just not.



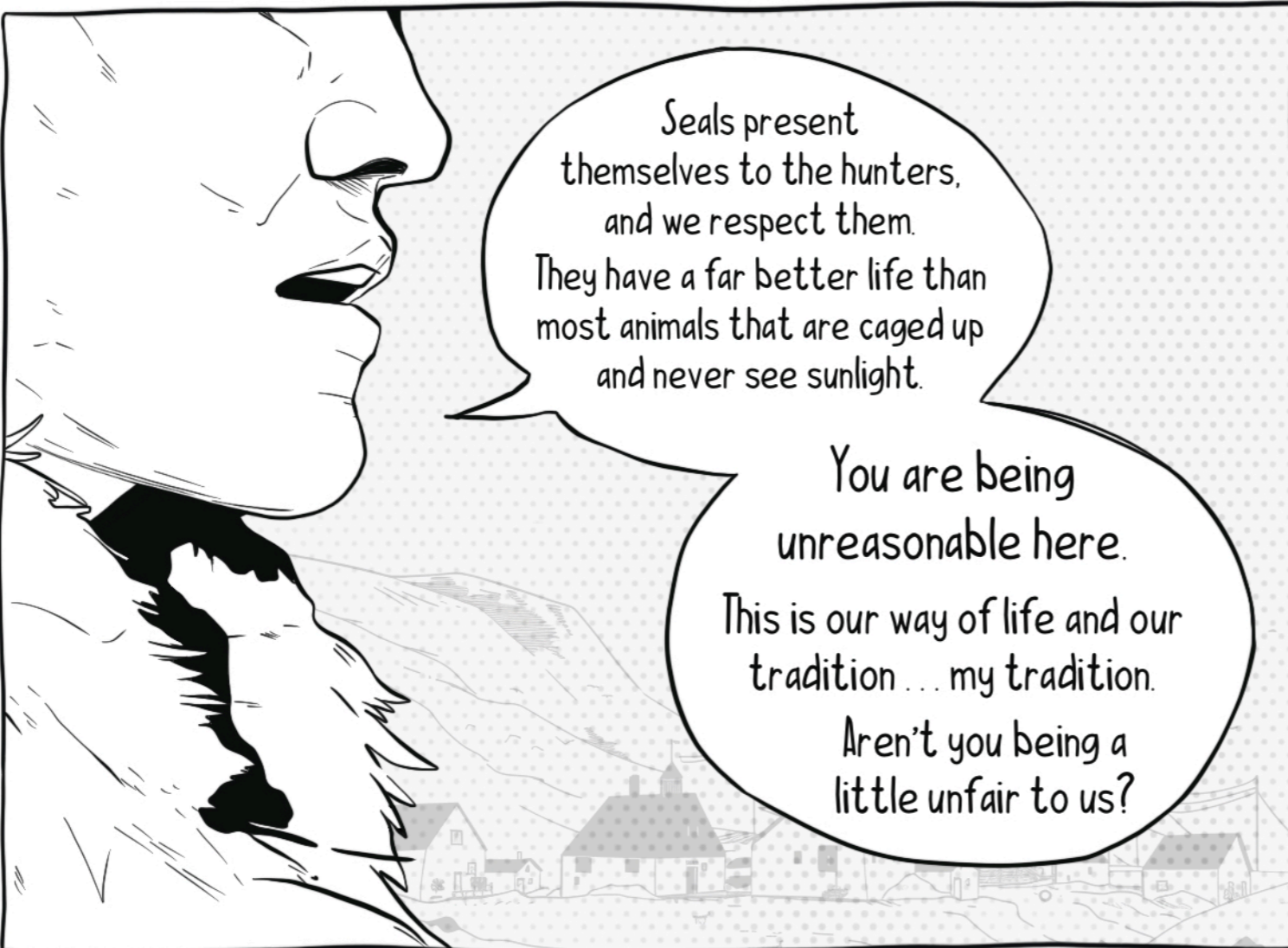
What is this?  
Why are you angry?

How is the killing of these seals any different from other livestock?

Pigs?  
Cattle?  
Chickens?  
Fish?  
Ducks?

Have you ever seen the inside of a slaughter house where your meat comes from?

This doesn't make any sense.  
Why can't you see that this is wrong?  
Stop it.  
Stop talking.



Seals present themselves to the hunters, and we respect them. They have a far better life than most animals that are caged up and never see sunlight.

You are being unreasonable here. This is our way of life and our tradition... my tradition. Aren't you being a little unfair to us?



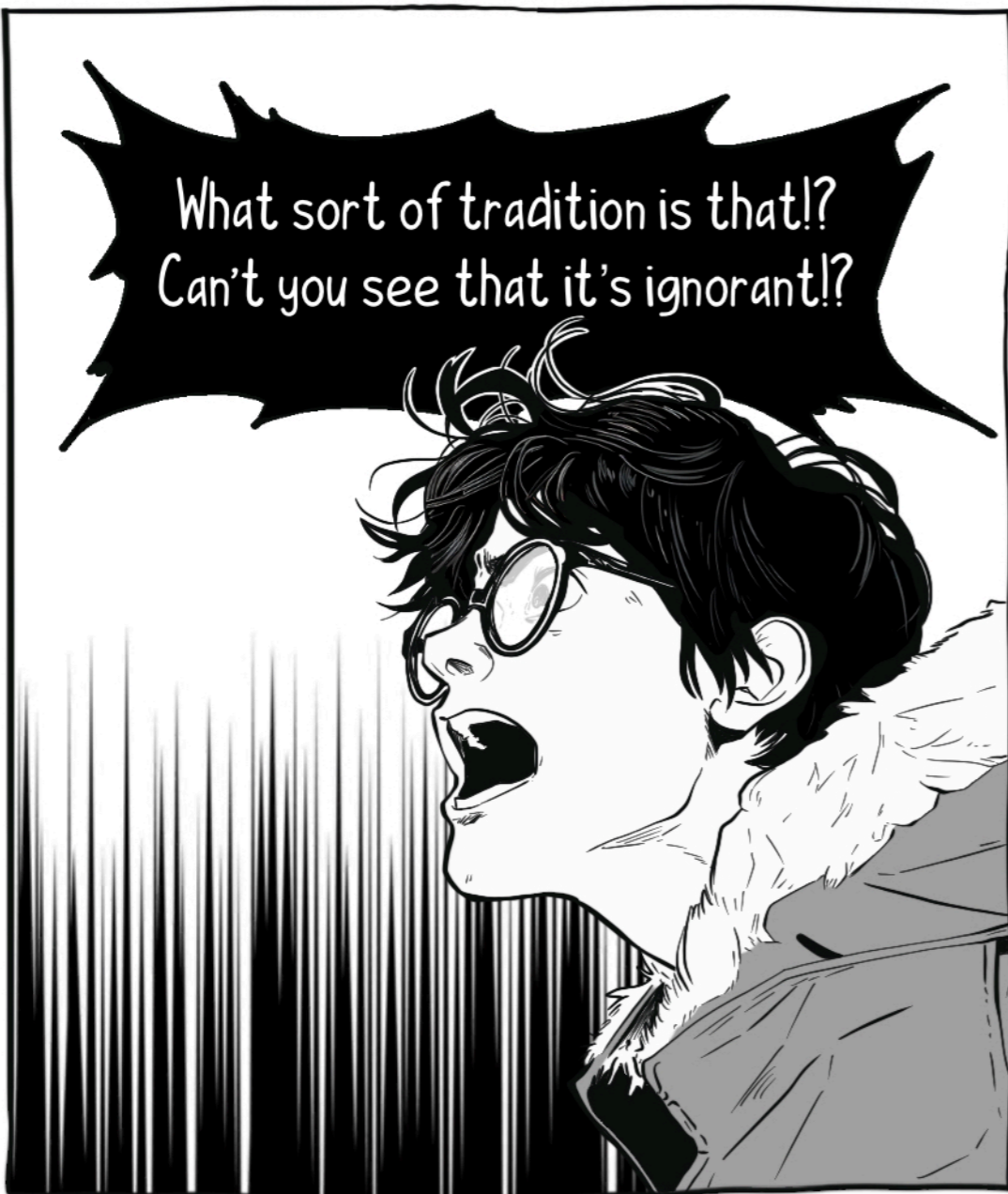


Are they asking to be skinned alive?  
Are you crazy!!?

How could you not feel anything for them? I saw the pictures! They were killed for their fur, and those hunters didn't even touch the meat!

They were clubbed and dragged around, slaughtered in front of their mothers.

Is that your idea of being respectful?!



What sort of tradition is that!?  
Can't you see that it's ignorant!?



You've got some nerve saying that.



That's rich coming from someone who was born with the comfort of the big cities, never know anything about us until setting your foot here a few days ago.



Tell me this, can you see anything growing around here?  
We have to hunt, and that costs us.

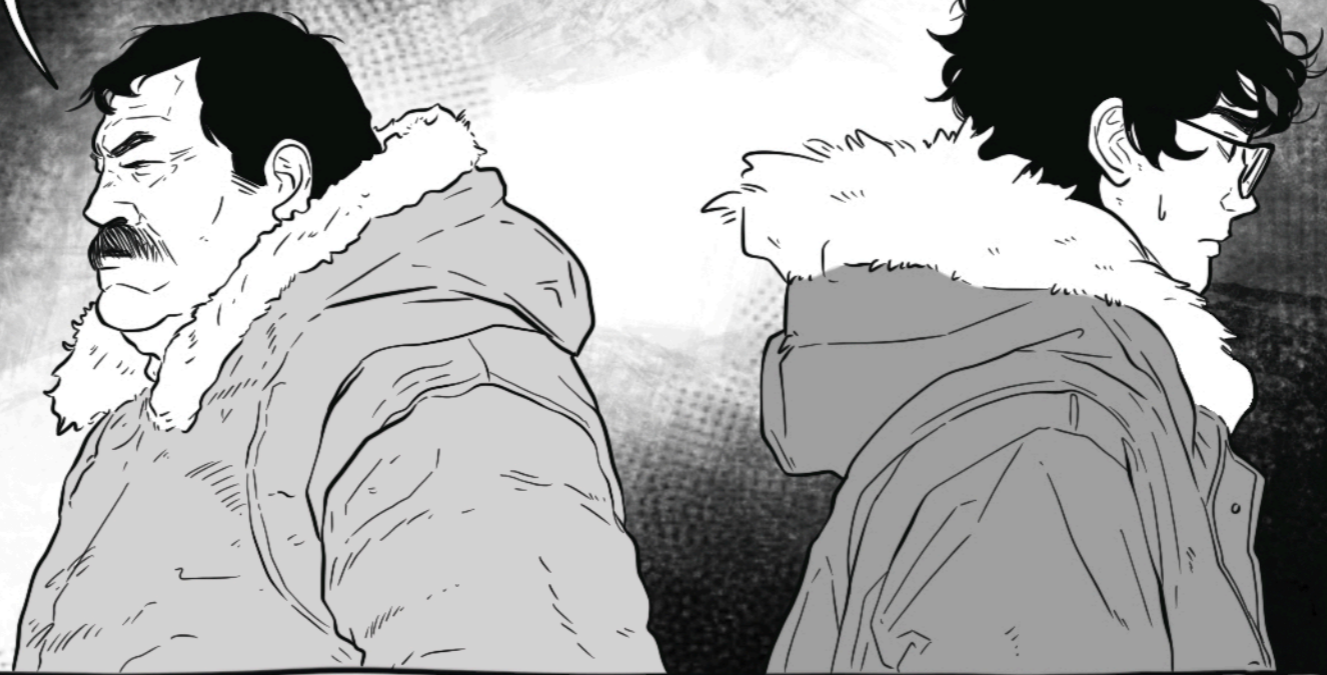
We feed you with our food...  
... pay your government's taxes...

buy gasoline for our snowmobiles, and bullets for our rifles.  
How else are we supposed to do that without any money?

You've stripped us of our ways until we can't survive without these things.  
And now, not only are you making us pay for them, but you're also denying us the means to afford them?



You and your high moral compass.  
Why can't you just leave us alone?  
Haven't your people done enough already?



I couldn't say a word back to Josh's father. I just stood there as his words rang in my ears. It was true what he said; I didn't understand what he meant by 'you people'. What had I done? Wasn't I supposed to be the one offended here?

I started to question what I even knew about the Inuit or their culture. I had taken Josh's words for it when I heard him, and then I was taking the protestors' words for it. What was the truth here?

The Arctic had revealed its harshest truth, and I was no longer just an observer. I was part of the story, whether I wanted to be or not.





# CHAPTER 4



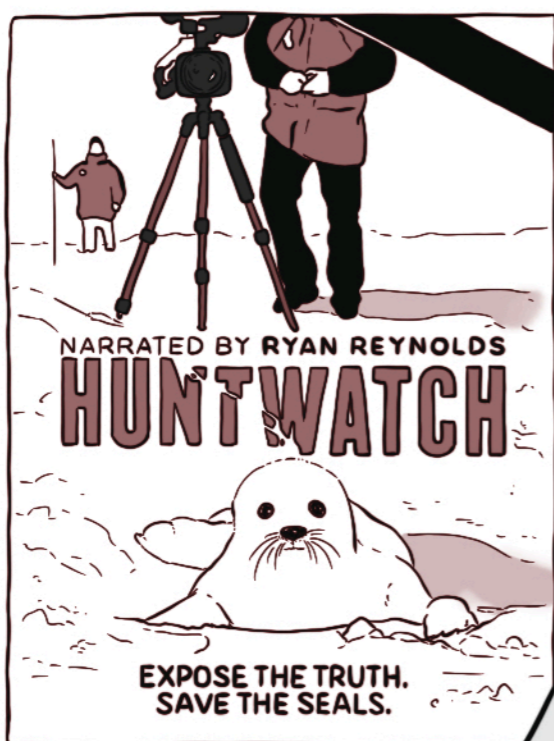


The argument with Josh and his father replayed in my mind, their words cutting deep. I couldn't shake the unease, so I opened my laptop and started researching.

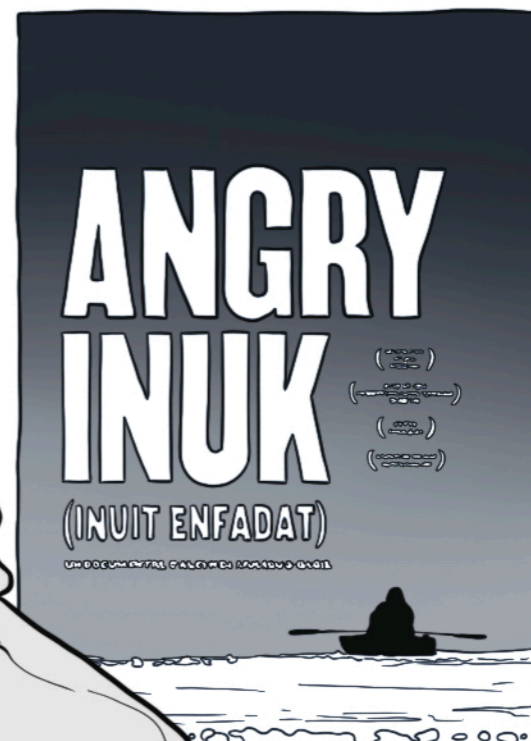
Two films quickly stood out, each encapsulating the main narratives of the opposing sides. **HUNTWATCH** presented the seal hunt from the perspective of animal rights groups, showcasing the brutality and advocating for its end. In contrast, **ANGRY INUK** offered a viewpoint from the Inuit, highlighting the cultural significance and necessity of the hunt for their communities.

Both films had been released in the same year, nearly simultaneously. What struck me was that while **ANGRY INUK** mentioned many animal rights groups, not once did **HUNTWATCH** mention the Inuit. There was no attempt to differentiate between the commercial hunt on the east coast and the Inuit hunt.

## HUNTWATCH



## ANGRY INUK



Most seal hunters in the world are Inuit, hunting across the Canadian Arctic, Alaska, Greenland, and Russia. However, the spring hunt I saw from the protestors' images happened in southern Canada, along the coast of Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At that moment, I had no doubt that if I had learned about the seal hunt from protestors anywhere else without knowing Josh, I would have never known that the Inuit were part of the seal skin market, because the protestors had made no effort to explain that.



The Inuit were caught in the middle of the fight.

Animal rights groups spent years painting seal hunting as cruel and inhumane, not to mention unnecessary for frivolous luxury items like fur. This turned public opinion against the seal hunt without people even knowing about the Inuit.

This realization struck me because when I arrived, that was all I thought I knew about the Inuit - primitive, living in igloos, and hunting for food, like the indigenous people I saw in children's books and television shows.



With many animal rights groups still protesting the hunt and most of the pictures on the protestors' signs depicting white coats, I assumed baby seals were still being clubbed. But it appeared that the ban on killing white seal pups had been upheld by the European Union since 1983.

So why are they still protesting to this day? Are the seals an endangered species?



“Sealers is all about maximizing profit.

The speed, the competitiveness and the environmental conditions are what make it so inhumane. I've been to the hunt myself for 14 years. We don't see a lot of enforcement or regulation by DFO at all as they don't have the resources to monitor it effectively. Seals are still being hooked through the eyes and face and hold on to boats while they are conscious, alive, barking and biting”.

**SHERYL FINK**

Director, IFAW's Seal Program



All the animal rights groups that came out against the seal hunt had plenty to say. They argued that the regulations for the hunt were unrealistic, claiming the practice was so competitive that proper monitoring was impossible. In their view, fur is an extravagant and unnecessary item, and they felt it was unethical to kill animals for such a trivial reason. Some of them also claimed the meat tasted disgusting and that no one would want to eat it.

But they had no comment whatsoever on the unintentional effects their actions had on the Inuit. When directly asked by interviewers or news reporters, they either avoided the topic altogether or claimed that the 1983 ban had exemptions for the Inuit.



**IFAW**  
International Fund  
for Animal Welfare



**GREENPEACE**

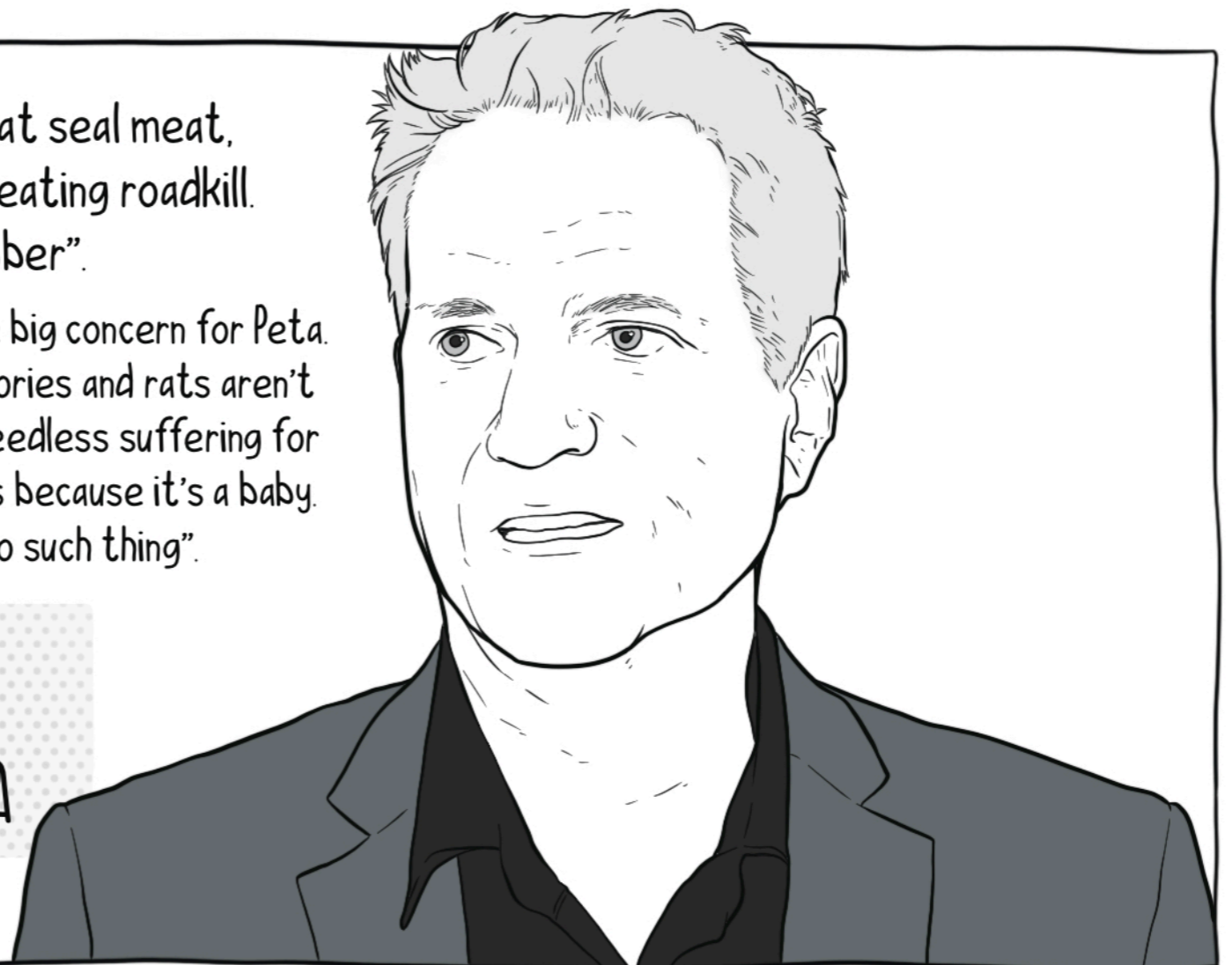


“You don't need a napkin when you eat seal meat, you need a barf bag. It's worse than eating roadkill. It's like an unprocessed rubber”.

“The seals aren't endangered, that's not the big concern for Peta. We are against the abuse of rats in laboratories and rats aren't endangered species. For us it more about needless suffering for vanity items like fur that has few blemishes because it's a baby. There's no humane fur. No, there is no such thing”.

**DAN MATHEWS**

Senior Vice President, PETA



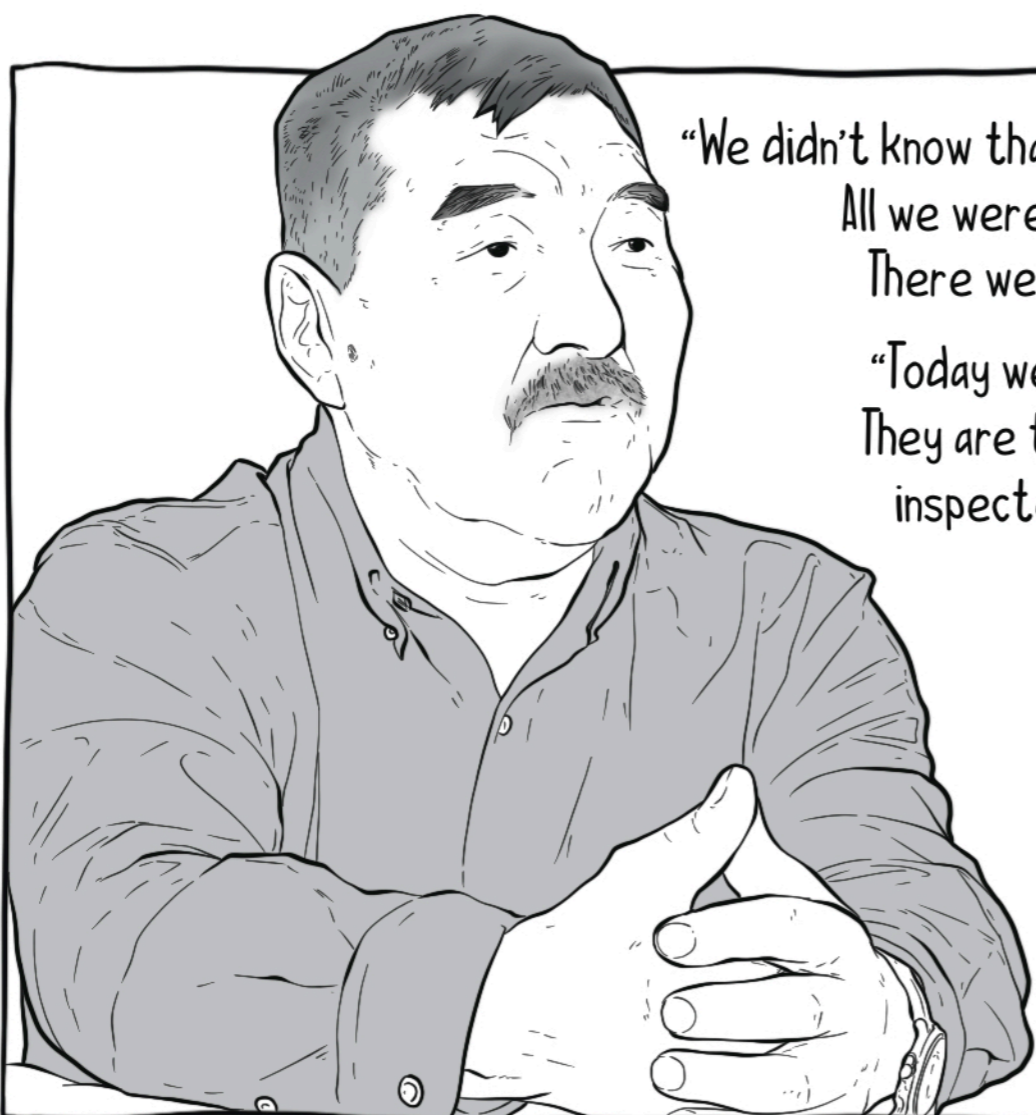


“The animal rights groups could have chosen to lobby for a trade regulation based on international standards for animal welfare and humane killing methods. But instead, they chose to lobby for a draconian ban that they knew would crush the entire market”.

“They have been told repeatedly by Inuit leaders that a ban would crush the market for Inuit as well and that we’re very depended on it. So, they knew what they were doing when they got these bans passed, they knew very well. They can’t deny that”.

**ALETHEA ARNAQUQ-BARIL**  
Inuit Filmmaker

The Inuit, however, claimed that they had been trying to warn the animal rights groups that the exemption wouldn’t protect them, as the market would already crash, and they were selling the seal skins commercially. They also questioned the animal rights groups’ intentions, pointing out that these groups profited more from donations for the seal-saving campaigns than for any other endangered animals. It seemed possible that they avoided discussing the Inuit because they didn’t want to explicitly say they disapproved of the Inuit profiting from the commercial aspect of the seal hunt. One former member of the IFAW even accused the organization of firing her when she tried to broker a deal with the sealers to adopt a full utilization hunt.



“We didn’t know that we would be charged for water from the land where we live. All we were living for was to survive, to have enough food to live. There were no complications, or any barriers in lief back then”.

“Today we are experiencing hardships from our government’s side. They are telling us: you cannot eat your country food until it’s been inspected for any diseases. It will have big impact in the future.

As well as Green Peace, which is getting stronger and stronger in trying to control our way of life”.

**JOSHUA KANGO**  
Head of the Iqaluit Inuit Hunters Association

Not only were seals never an endangered species, but their population has been increasing since the 1983 ban. As I researched more about the issue, I wondered why animal rights groups never mentioned the Inuit commercial side of seal utilization beyond food.

## The Inuit Seal Hunt

### Purpose

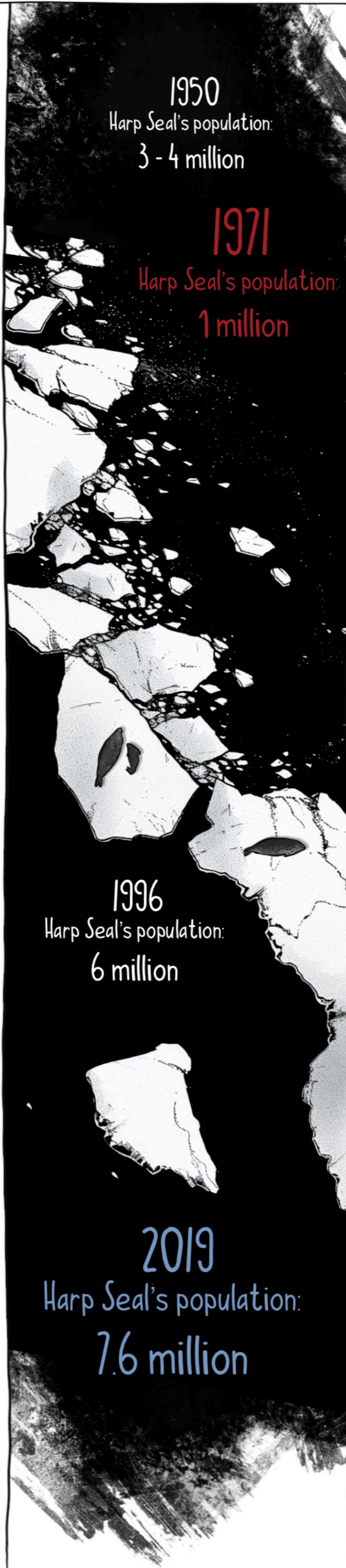
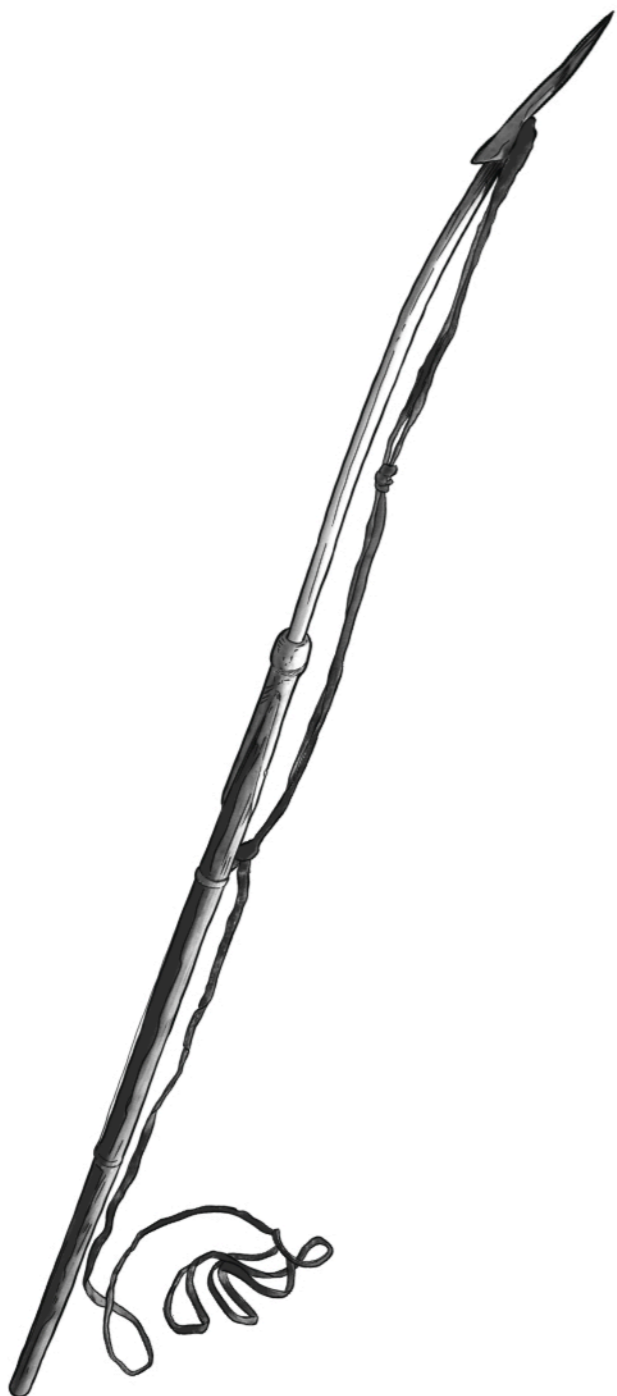
It holds cultural importance and provides subsistence, with surplus pelts sold commercially.

### Practice

Adult seals are targeted individually on the ice and are quickly killed using rifles or harpoons. Around 16,000 seals are hunted each year.

### Regulation

It is protected by Aboriginal rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act 1867, and is regulated by the Nunavut Wildlife Act.



## The commercial Seal Hunt

### Purpose

The main goal is to obtain seal pelts for international trade, with the meat often left behind on ice floes.

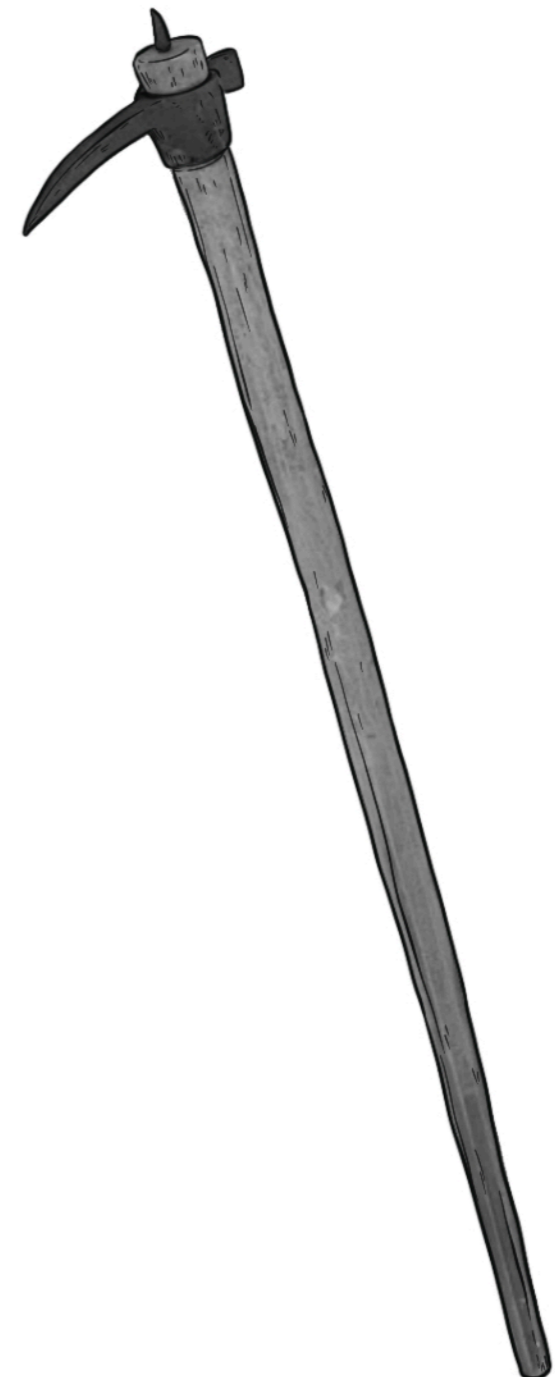
### Practice

Seal pups are hunted from boats using a three-step process: striking, checking, and bleeding.

Annually, approximately 250,000 to 300,000 seals are hunted.

### Regulation

It is governed by The Marine Mammal Regulations under the Fisheries Act 2011 and the Atlantic Seal Management Plan.



The deeper I dug, the more I uncovered about the long-standing controversy. It had roots stretching back to the 1950s, with the Inuit facing relentless obstacles. Each step they took seemed harder than the last, like a climb to a summit that was always just out of reach.

What truly shocked me was realizing that even after the 1983 ban had allowed the seal population to rebound and led the Canadian government to regulate and set quotas for the hunt, animal rights groups were still pushing for more. What came after was the final nail in the coffin.

1989 The EC votes for an indefinite ban of sealskins.

1985 European Community renews its boycott and The Home Rule government of Greenland asks Greenpeace to differentiate publicly between Inuit and commercial sealing. Greenpeace declines.

1984 Canada forms a Royal Commission to investigate the sealing controversy.

1983 The European Community agrees to a binding two-year ban on harp and hooded seal imports.

1977 Greenpeace's seal policy explicitly encompasses Inuit.

1972 The US passes the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

1971 Canada imposes harp seal quotas.

1967 A 'Save the Seals' campaign is launched.

1955 Observers report on the inhumane killing of harp seals.

1955 Observers report on the inhumane killing of harp seals.

In 2009 the EU seal regime which is the general ban on the placing of seal products on the EU market was put in place

This ban sealed the Inuit's fate in the commercial aspect of their hunting tradition within the modern economy. The market, which had already crashed in 1983, worsened due to this ban as it extended to all seal products. After seeing the devastating impact of the white coat ban on the Inuit, it is disturbing to me that they still pushed for this broader ban to pass.

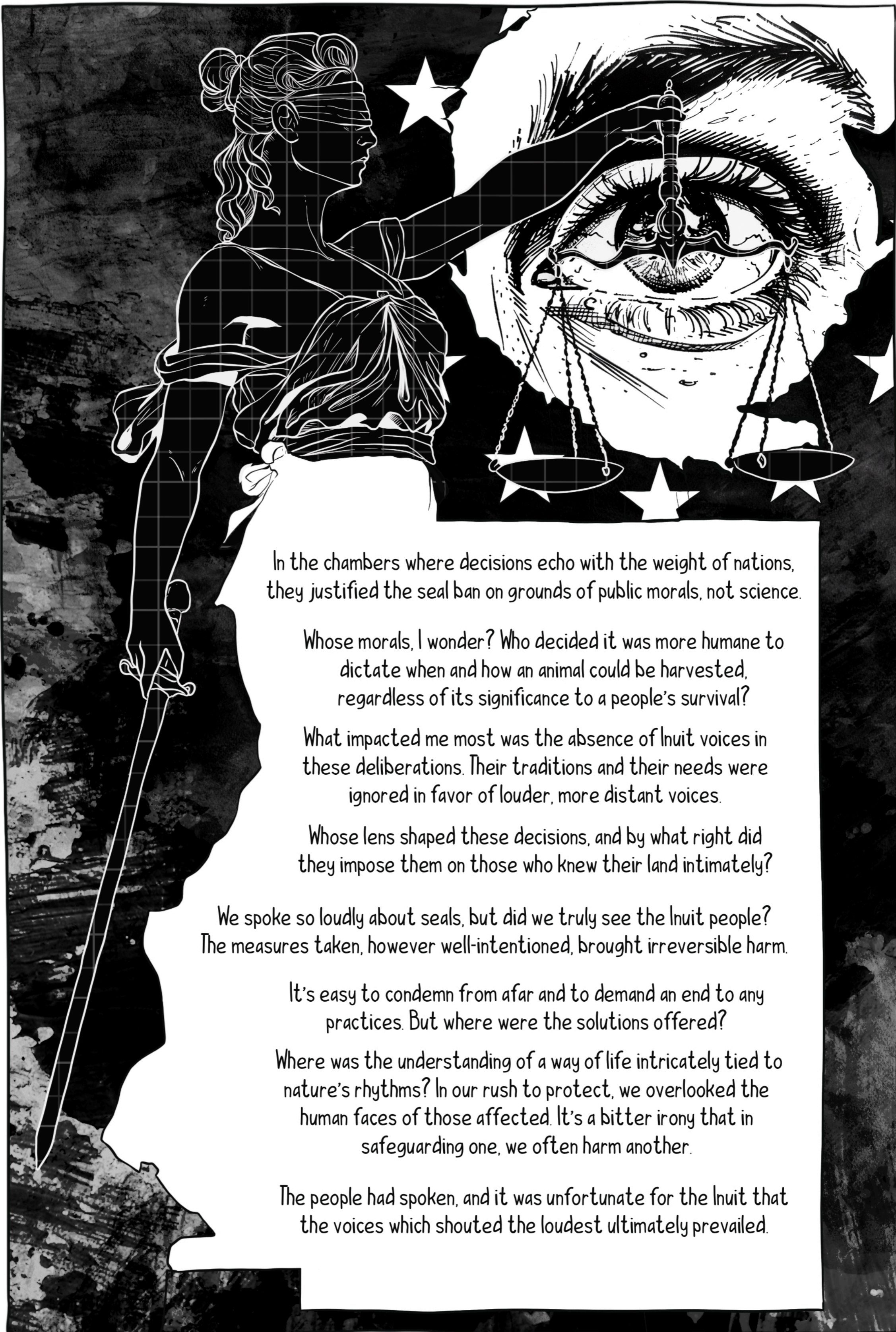
Greenpeace has issued an apology to the Inuit for their role in the consequences and even responded to the Clyde River Inuit community's plea to help stop the seismic underwater testing that threatens the welfare of all Arctic marine animals.

Yet, I found only a few references to seismic testing on the IFAW page and nothing on the PETA page. However, if I typed the word 'seal' on both sites, I could find between 100 and 1,000 results.

"In 1974 explosions were being done in the deep ocean. Afterwards, Inuit noticed when they shot at seals, it seemed they couldn't hear anything".

"We hunt the animals for food, but we still care about them. We have to protect them".

Niore Iqaluk juak  
Clyde River Inuit community



In the chambers where decisions echo with the weight of nations, they justified the seal ban on grounds of public morals, not science.

Whose morals, I wonder? Who decided it was more humane to dictate when and how an animal could be harvested, regardless of its significance to a people's survival?

What impacted me most was the absence of Inuit voices in these deliberations. Their traditions and their needs were ignored in favor of louder, more distant voices.

Whose lens shaped these decisions, and by what right did they impose them on those who knew their land intimately?

We spoke so loudly about seals, but did we truly see the Inuit people? The measures taken, however well-intentioned, brought irreversible harm.

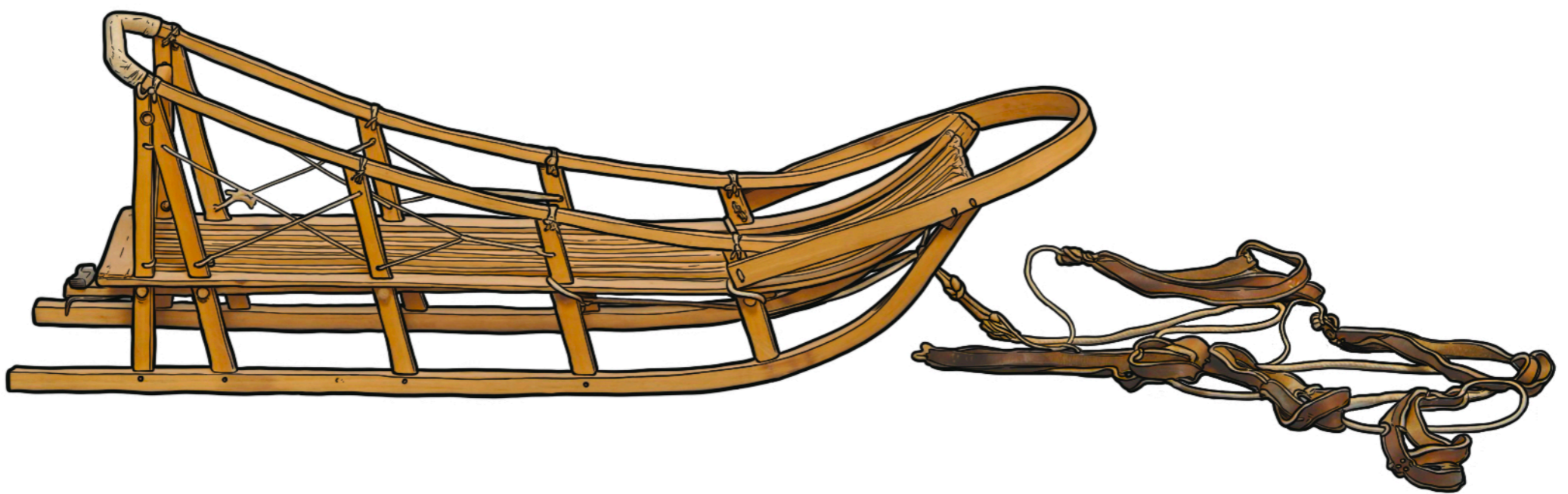
It's easy to condemn from afar and to demand an end to any practices. But where were the solutions offered?

Where was the understanding of a way of life intricately tied to nature's rhythms? In our rush to protect, we overlooked the human faces of those affected. It's a bitter irony that in safeguarding one, we often harm another.

The people had spoken, and it was unfortunate for the Inuit that the voices which shouted the loudest ultimately prevailed.



# CHAPTER 5

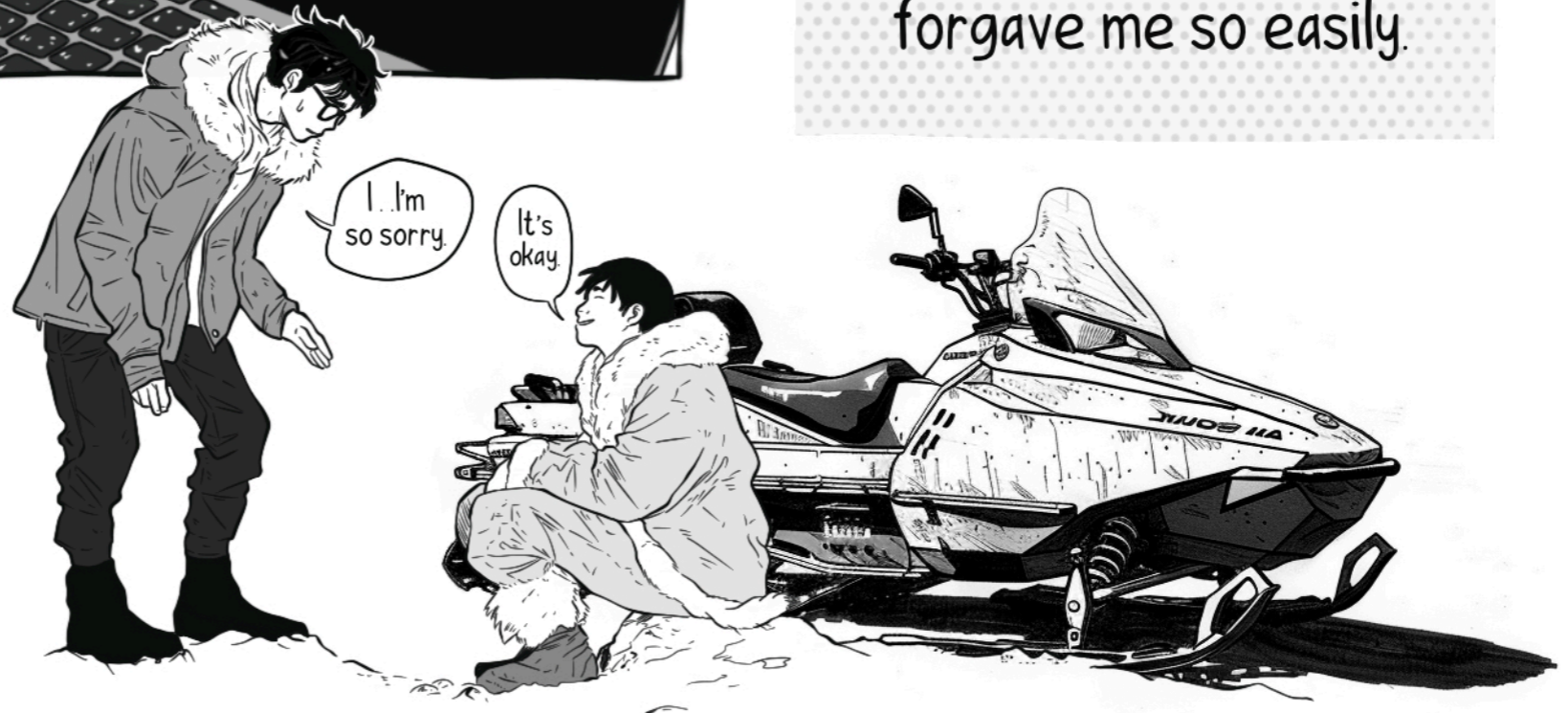




As I closed my laptop, a deep sense of guilt and shame settled in my chest. My anger and accusations towards Josh and his father now seemed so misguided and ignorant, just as I had been accused.

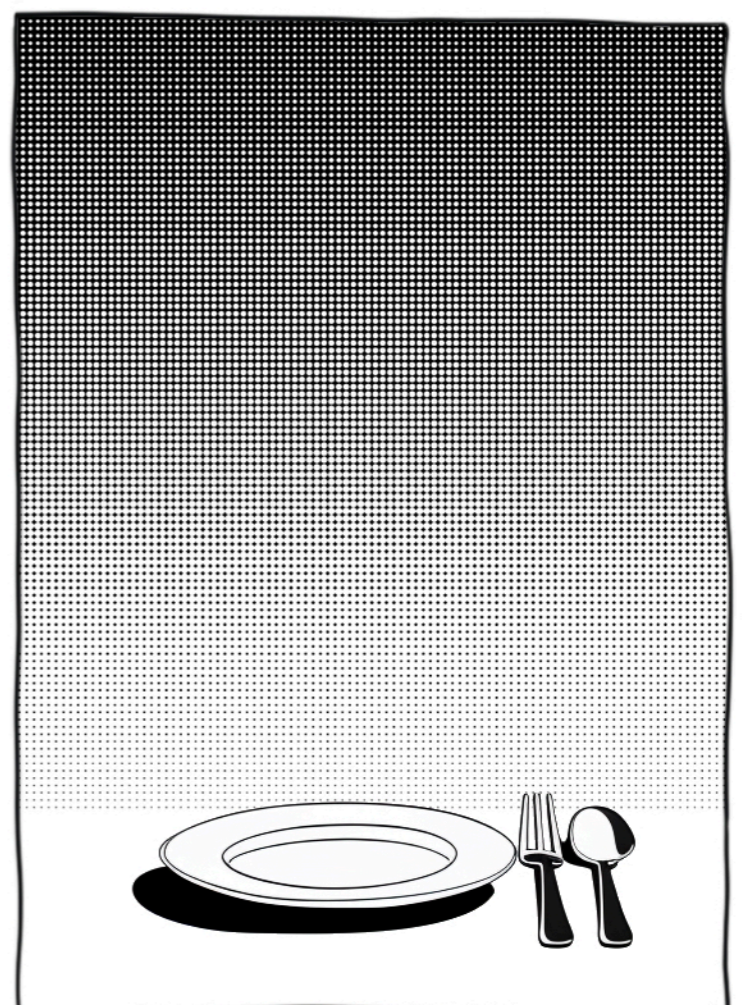
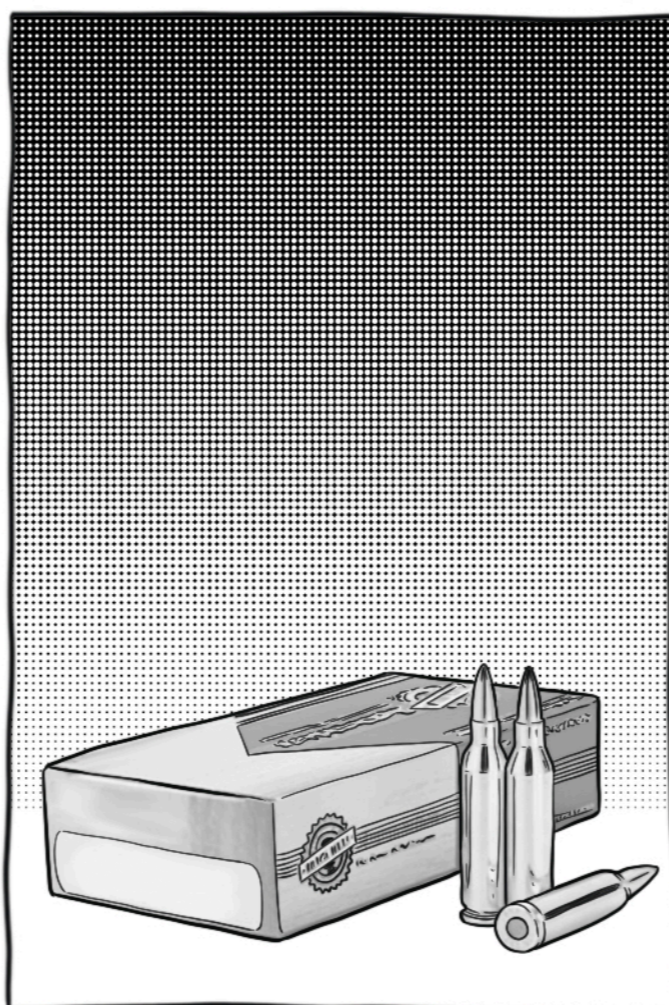


I apologized to Josh as soon as I could, and it saddened me even more that he wasn't angry and forgave me so easily.



The same couldn't be said about his father, though.

Before I knew it, Josh realized they were running low on bullets for hunting and food supplies. To make amends, I offered to go to the shop and buy groceries for the night. It was a small gesture, but it felt like the right thing to do.





Orange Juice \$13.72  
From \$4.48 - \$6.49

Orange juice for \$13.72 (CAD)?

Seriously? For what normally costs around \$4.48 to \$6.49, I was paying 100 - 200% more! I couldn't believe it. How could it be this expensive?

Not only that, but other everyday condiments like mayonnaise and even vinegar cost much more than I would normally pay at my local grocery store anywhere else. I shuddered to think about what it would cost if I had to buy enough to feed a family of 3-4 people.



Mayonnaise \$13.59  
From \$5.77 - \$6.49



White Vinegar \$21.09  
From \$2.27 - \$2.49

And that's when it hit me.

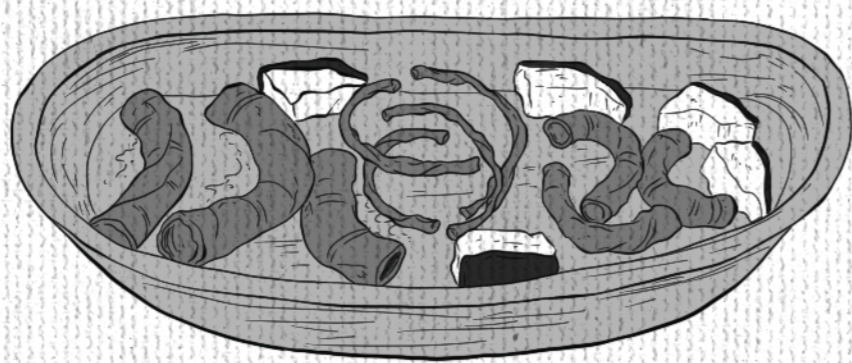
All of the groceries sold here were imported by plane, and they were sold at inflated prices due to the high transportation fees. Not to mention, this was only about food. What about their heating or water bills? What if they needed to go to the hospital? That is why the seal skin trade is one of, if not the only, lifeline they have as a career to generate essential income.



The more I thought about it, the clearer it became ...

... You couldn't grow anything here.

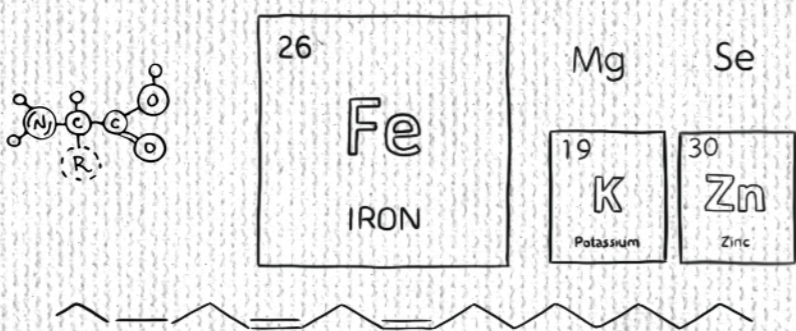
In this frozen land, where could you find vegetables, fruits, or flour? It never occurred to me how much I took for granted. Things like groceries were not sustainable here. Not to mention the health benefits from eating local food. The Inuit relied on their traditional foods not just out of necessity, but because it was healthier for them than imported, processed foods.



## Traditional Food

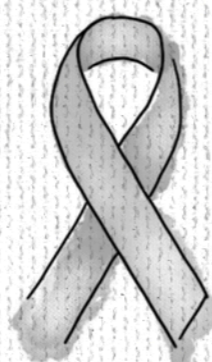
### Nutrient Density

- Protein: High levels
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Abundant
- Vitamins: Rich in A, several B-vitamins
- Minerals: Iron, zinc, magnesium, potassium, selenium
- Omega-6 to Omega-3 Ratio: Optimal balance



### Health Benefits

- Lower rates of breast and prostate cancer



## Non-Traditional Food

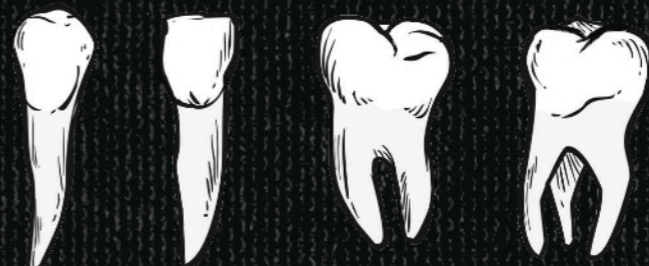
### Nutritional Decline

- Increased sugars and saturated fats  
Rise in obesity (64% of Nunavut's population)
- Health Risks: Higher incidences of coronary heart disease, hypertension, type II diabetes, various cancers



### Dental Health

- Poor dental health among children: Linked to consumption of soft drinks, snack foods, and processed meats



But it wasn't just about survival, it was a rite of passage, a way to prove oneself and contribute to the well-being of the entire group. Hunting defined what it meant to be a man. The journey from boyhood to becoming a valuable part of the Inuit culture was wrapped up in the act of hunting for their community.



Seal hunt also gave a crucial role to Inuit women as well. While the men were the hunters, the women were the ones who transformed the seal skins into clothing. The women's work was a vital part of the community's survival, and it was a skill passed down through generations, preserving their cultural heritage. The seal hunt was a cornerstone of their way of life, providing both sustenance and a sense of purpose for everyone involved.



Hunting seals for traditional food was more than a necessity; it was an act that bonded generations together and preserved their way of life.

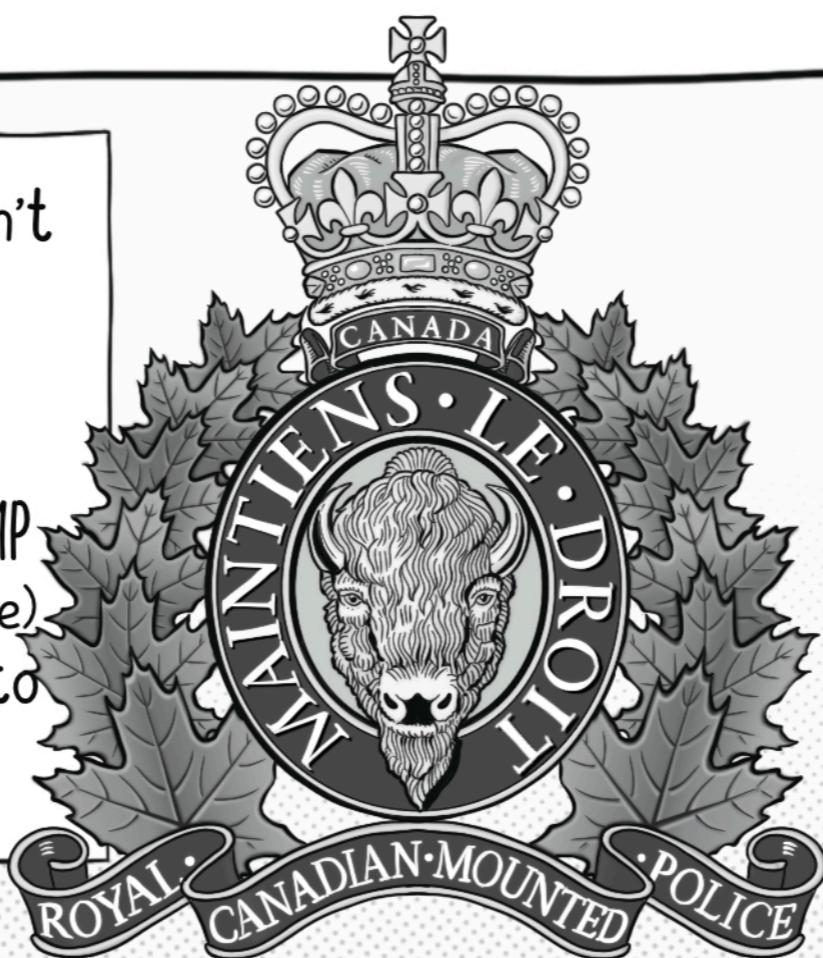
Hunting together, eating together, living together as a family, it strengthened their bonds.

It was a way for Inuit communities to maintain their cultural identity and autonomy.

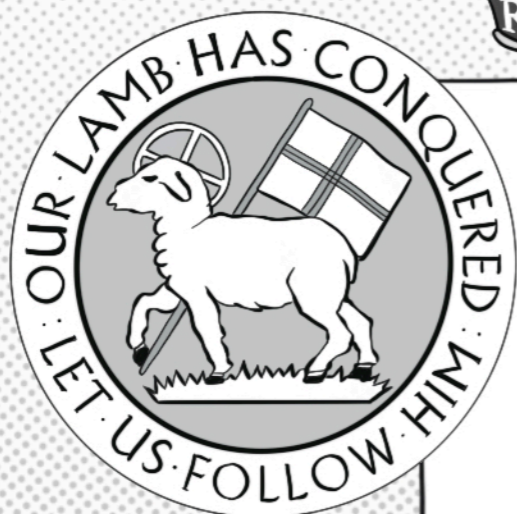
It allowed them to take care of their environment and keep their traditions alive.



As I learned more, I couldn't ignore the shadow of colonialism that had loomed over Nunavut. Whether it was the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) policing from the 1920s to the 1970s ...



... the Hudson's Bay Company's truck and credit system designed to control and maintain the dependence of Indigenous peoples on traders, ...

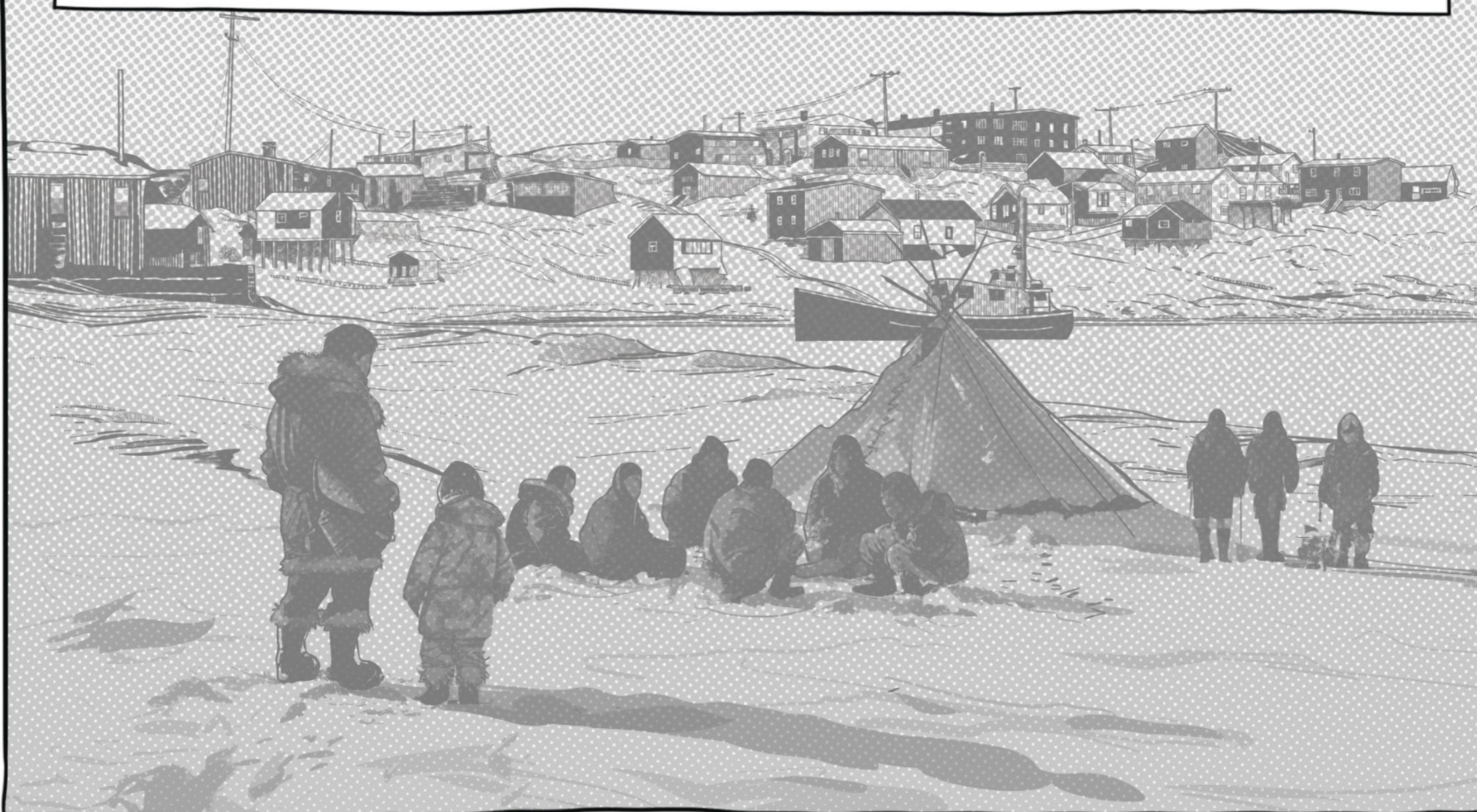


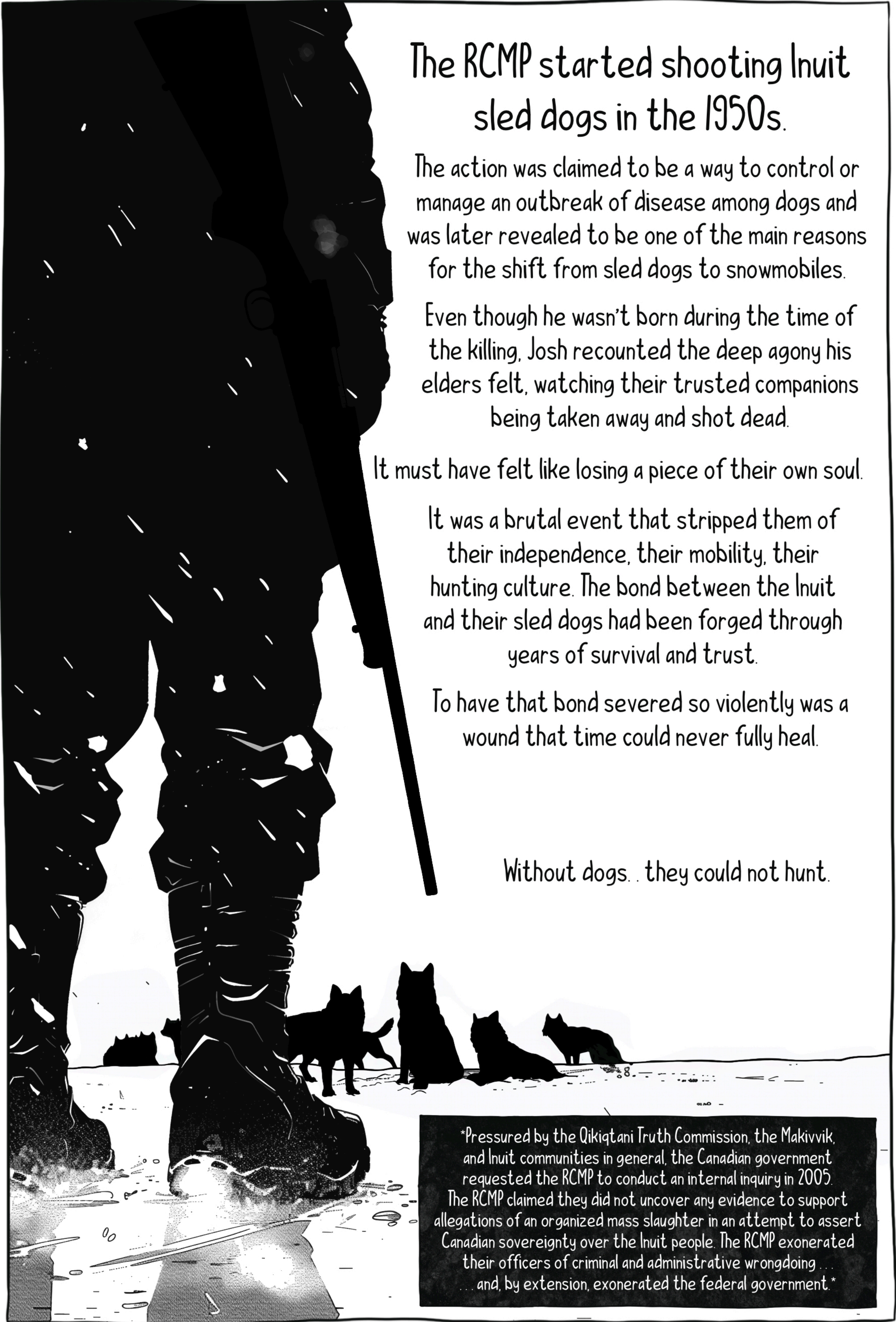
... or the Moravian missionaries imposing modern tools like seal nets and rifles on traditional hunting practices.



Despite the intense control and domination, the Inuit found ways to assert a degree of autonomy. They continued to organize and conduct their hunting and semi-nomadic way of life, following familiar hunting routes. Their movements adhered to a seasonal cycle of harvesting based on weather conditions, animal migrations, and cultural traditions. However, the influence of outsiders who knew little about the Inuit and their ways often led to devastating actions that caused deep harm.

And it started with the killing ...





## The RCMP started shooting Inuit sled dogs in the 1950s.

The action was claimed to be a way to control or manage an outbreak of disease among dogs and was later revealed to be one of the main reasons for the shift from sled dogs to snowmobiles.

Even though he wasn't born during the time of the killing, Josh recounted the deep agony his elders felt, watching their trusted companions being taken away and shot dead.

It must have felt like losing a piece of their own soul.

It was a brutal event that stripped them of their independence, their mobility, their hunting culture. The bond between the Inuit and their sled dogs had been forged through years of survival and trust.

To have that bond severed so violently was a wound that time could never fully heal.

Without dogs... they could not hunt.

\*Pressured by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, the Makivvik, and Inuit communities in general, the Canadian government requested the RCMP to conduct an internal inquiry in 2005. The RCMP claimed they did not uncover any evidence to support allegations of an organized mass slaughter in an attempt to assert Canadian sovereignty over the Inuit people. The RCMP exonerated their officers of criminal and administrative wrongdoing... and, by extension, exonerated the federal government.\*

NORTH POLE ★

## High Arctic Food: Seals and Polar Bears



As if they hadn't been through enough, the forced High Arctic relocation between 1953 and 1955 rubbed salt on their wounds.

Many Inuit families from Inukjuak were forced to relocate to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay.

While the government framed the relocation as a means to reduce relief payments and maintain the Inuit's economic independence, many believe the main reason was to assert Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic region during the Cold War.

The relocation was traumatic. Families were torn apart.

They were promised abundant resources and better living conditions, but they found themselves in a desolate, unfamiliar environment with far fewer resources.



## Inukjuak Food:

Caribou, Arctic Char, Geese, Clams, Oysters, Cloudberries

The climate was harsher, the hunting grounds were different, and the sense of isolation was overwhelming. The Inuit from Inukjuak, who came from a warmer climate and hunted a variety of wildlife, struggled to survive on a forced diet of only seals.



These events created generational trauma that echoed through the years. The forced relocations, the loss of their sled dogs, and the impact of residential schools led to deep psychological scars. The suicide rate among the Inuit spiked as despair took hold. Among those lost was Josh's uncle. Learning this, I finally understood why Josh's father was so distrustful of me. His brother's death wasn't just a personal loss but it was a symbol of the suffering inflicted upon his people.



**GRISE FIORD MONUMENT** by Looty Pijamini

"In memory of Inuit who landed here in 1953 and 1955, and those who came after. They came to these desolate shores to pursue the Government's promise of a more prosperous life.

They endured and overcame great hardship, and dedicated their lives to Canada's sovereignty in these lands and waters".

- John Amagoalik, Inuit politician



Apologies were made, monuments were built, and then the government moved on. But in the end, the impact of colonialism will forever have a lasting effect on the transmission of historical trauma within the Inuit community.

These actions reveal the heartbreaking reality of how Inuit people have been used as symbolic representatives to assert Canada's sovereignty. Yet, despite their sacrifices, they are denied sovereignty over their own traditional foods and ways of life.

As I pieced together the history and struggles of the Inuit, one thing became painfully clear ... the seal hunting controversy had put Inuit practices under scrutiny yet again, held against an unrealistic standard of tradition and self-sufficiency, thus marginalizing their current realities and undermining their cultural sovereignty. The parallels between these incidents, the survival and dignity of a people who had endured so much, were impossible to ignore.



# TWICE COLONIZED

“What would you like us to do?  
Do you want us to be sustainable and traditional  
or do you want us to be the part of the modern economy?  
Guess what ... It is our choice”.

- Aaju Peter



# CHAPTER 6

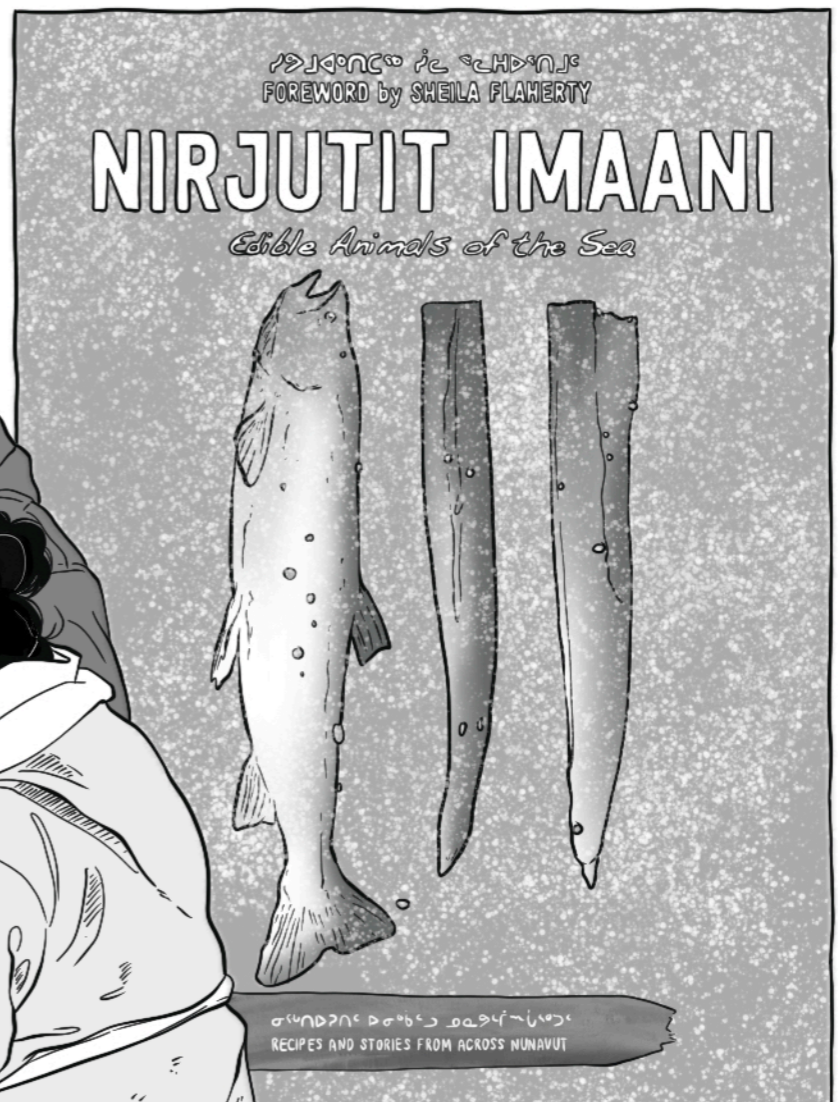




In the days that followed, I found myself wanting to help more and more. I spent most of my time in the kitchen, helping Josh's mother with the cooking and discovering new recipes that utilized seal meat.

I still couldn't warm up to the taste of raw seal meat, but when it was cooked in a stew, it was much better for someone like me. Josh's mother told me about the many programs developed by the locals to provide traditional food to low-income families, helping to fight food insecurity and the high cost of food.

To my surprise, this seemed to win over Josh's father a little. He began to offer me more seal meat every time he saw me eating. (Which I'm not going to lie, it felt great)



Cookbooks like NIRJUTIT IMAANI: Cooking with fish and Seal provided many recipes, both traditional and modern, showing the Inuit's openness to embrace new ways while preserving their roots when given the chance.

Josh's father also taught me about the extensive rehabilitative programs, especially the 'On the land' program.

This program reintroduced inmates who suffered from a dual identity due to the loss of their culture, helping them reconnect with hunting and the elders.

These practices were not only preserving their heritage but also providing a path to rebuild their lives.

In this programme, women were taught fishing techniques, seal skinning, sewing, and how to prepare and craft clothing from the skins. Men received training in wildlife hunting and survival skills, fostering a connection with nature and enhancing their self-esteem.



It wasn't just about rebuilding lives, but protecting them. The act of hunting together as a community and sharing food proved to be a crucial factor in bringing down suicide rates in Nunavut. With the support of the community and the preservation of cultural identity, advocating for these practices became essential. It was clear that these traditions held the power to heal and sustain the Inuit people, offering hope and resilience in the face of adversity. This may be the only way to break the chain of struggle they're facing, providing a path towards a brighter and more self-sufficient future.

## SUICIDE RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR INUIT IN CANADA

### Risk Factor

#### Historical Trauma

Impacts of colonialism, residential schools, relocations, dog slaughter



#### Community Distress

Social inequities, crowded housing, food insecurity



#### Acute Stress or Loss

Recent loss, intoxication, access to means, hopelessness, isolation



### Protective Factor

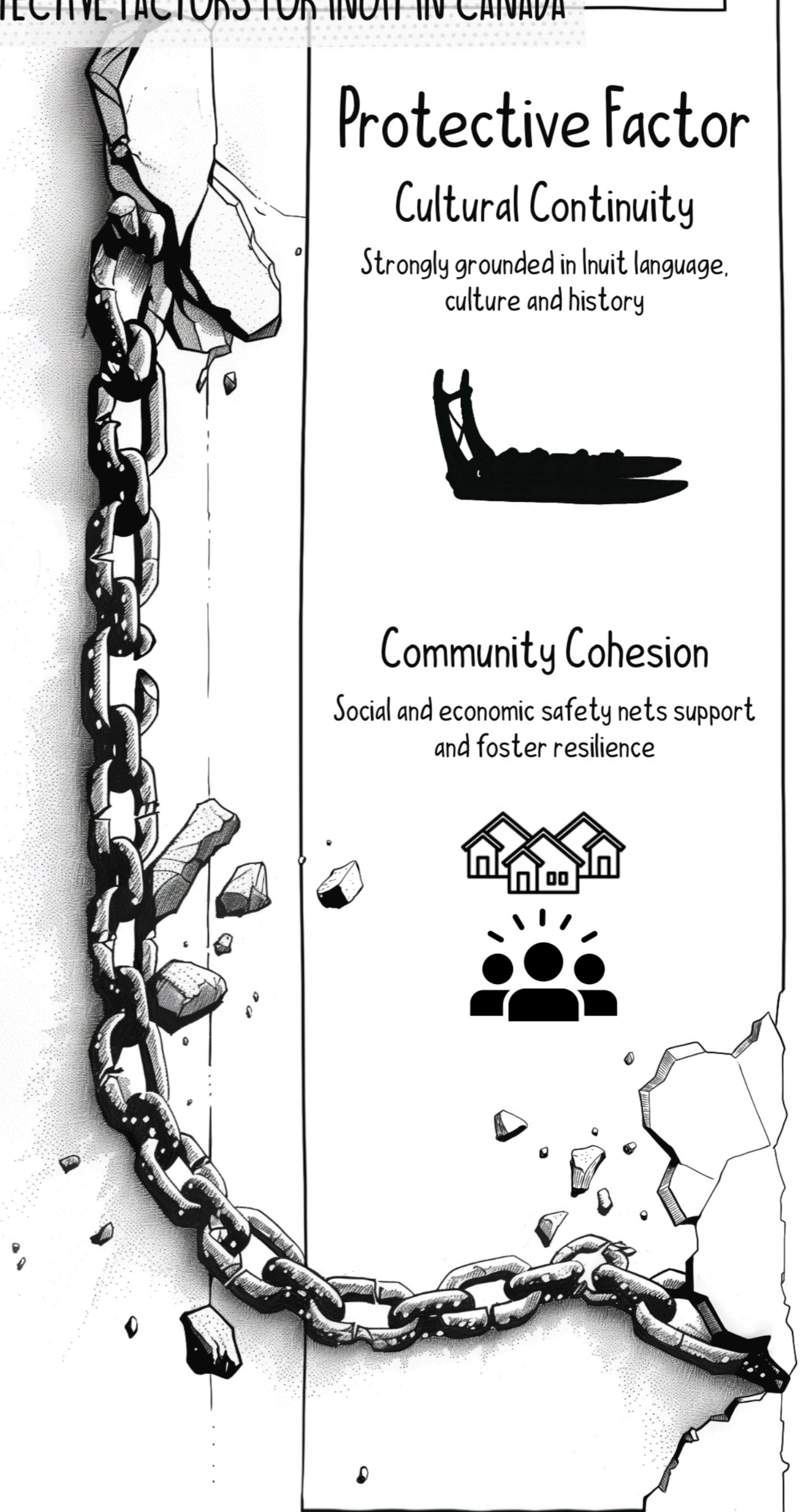
#### Cultural Continuity

Strongly grounded in Inuit language, culture and history





#### Community Cohesion


Social and economic safety nets support and foster resilience



But when I looked at the public reaction, it was not promising. Few people knew about the role seals played in Inuit life, and even if they did, some still opposed it. Some of the Inuit even received death threats for killing seals.

 @cindynoh8394  
Those poor creatures... Seal hunters need to be sent to Hell and never come back!!! THEY SHOULD SEE HOW THEY LIKE BEING TREATED LIKE THE SEALS!!!!  
👍 316 🗨️


 @tart410  
shame on those killers  
they should be a seal and see how it feels  
👍 58 🗨️

 @iwashere2862  
Poor seals... I ALWAYS LOVE THEM IF I WAS WITH THE HUNTERS I WILL FUCKING KILL THE SHIT OUT OF THEM!!!!?  
👍 35 🗨️

Michael @ Canine\_Rights:  
Another Inuit tradition we are supposed to be OK with?  
They are savages plain and simple.

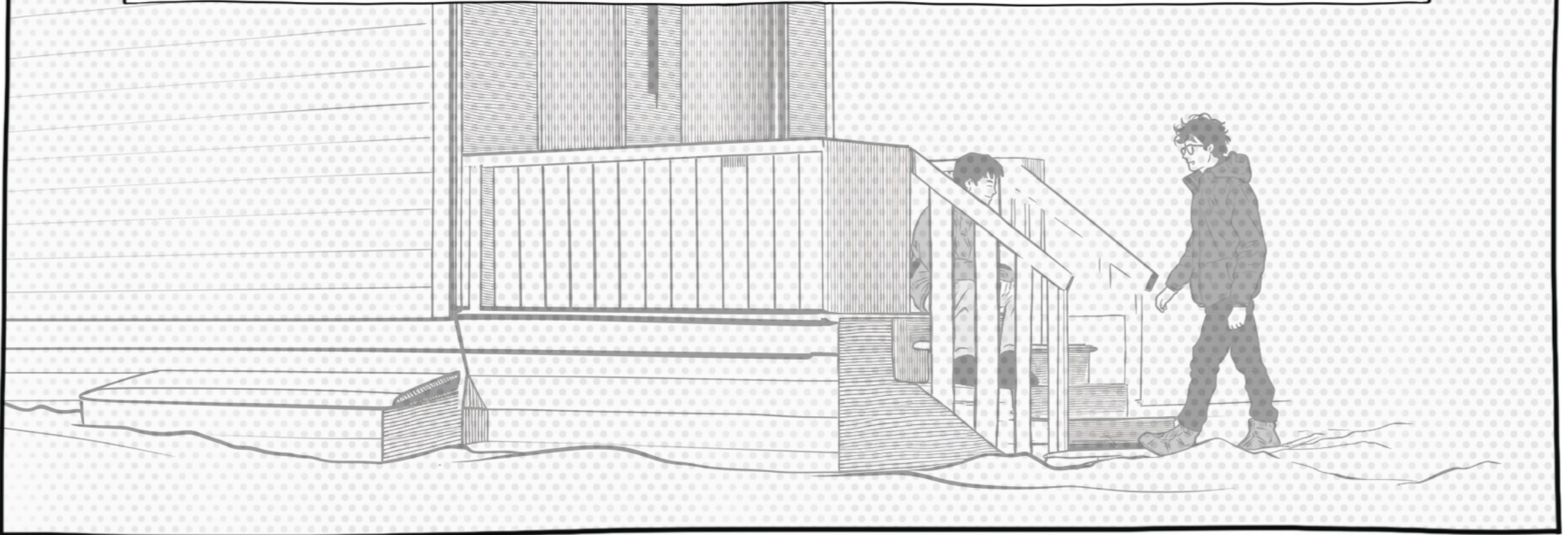
 @garbrex7886  
shame on seal hunters  
👍 194 🗨️

 @ljohns9143  
That's animal abuse! STOP THE SEAL HUNTERS FROM HURTING THE PUPS!!!!  
👍 136 🗨️

 @xlisabl7  
Terrible!!!  
Go to hell seal hunters!!!  
Why would you do that?!  
👍 122 🗨️



It was my last night in Iqaluit, and I still felt restless. I couldn't stop thinking about how the public could learn more about the Inuit and how the ban and protests on the seal hunt were affecting them. Something had to be done, but how could we make people understand? I sat down with Josh, hoping to convince him that we needed to take action.



Josh, we need to find a way to share your stories.

The ban on seal products and the protests... they're hurting your community so much. Can we show the world what the seal hunt truly means to the Inuit?

What if we create a platform? Something that allows your community to share their experiences.



We can start by interviewing elders and community leaders. We can share traditional recipes that use seal's meat.

Show the craftsmanship that goes into making clothing from seal skins. We can even invite outsiders to visit, to see for themselves.





We are still here.  
It isn't easy to find  
things to hold onto,  
especially when it  
feels like the world  
is against us.

My people have  
endured so much.  
Yet, when I look at them, I see  
resilience in their eyes.  
That's why I still have hope.  
It might not happen now,  
but just like how the seals  
present themselves to us,  
a way out will eventually  
come to us.



That night, Josh and I sat outside, talking until the stars began to fade. The quiet of the night created a sense of peace that I hadn't felt in a long time. We talked about the future, his hopes, and dreams for the community.

As I listened to Josh, I felt a renewed sense of optimism. Despite all the challenges, there was a palpable strength in his words.

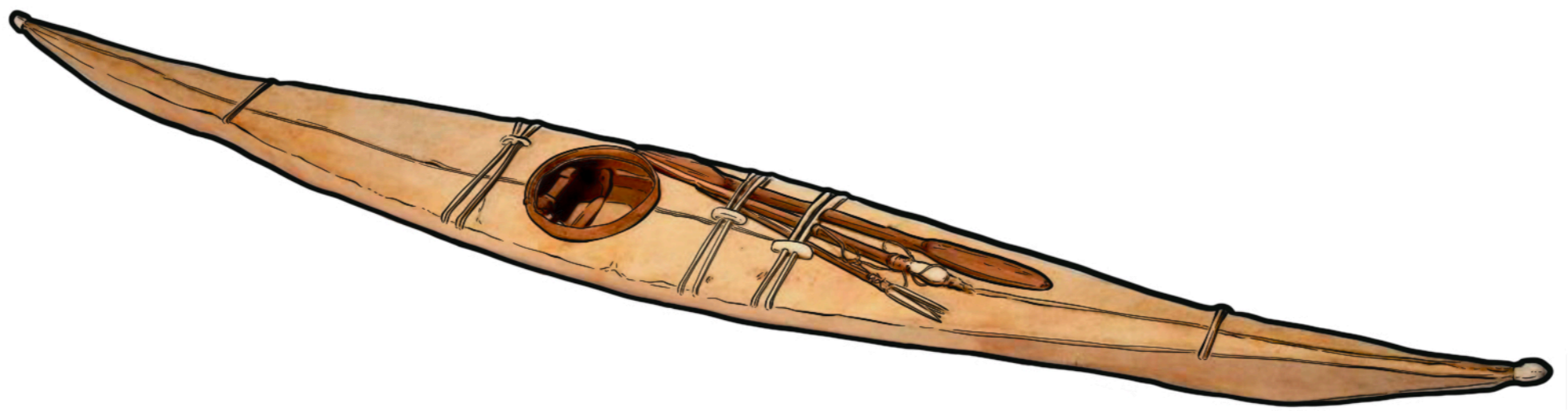


The morning of my departure, Josh said his farewell, and his father even offered to drive me to the airport. Josh jokingly said I might as well stay since his father seemed to like me already.



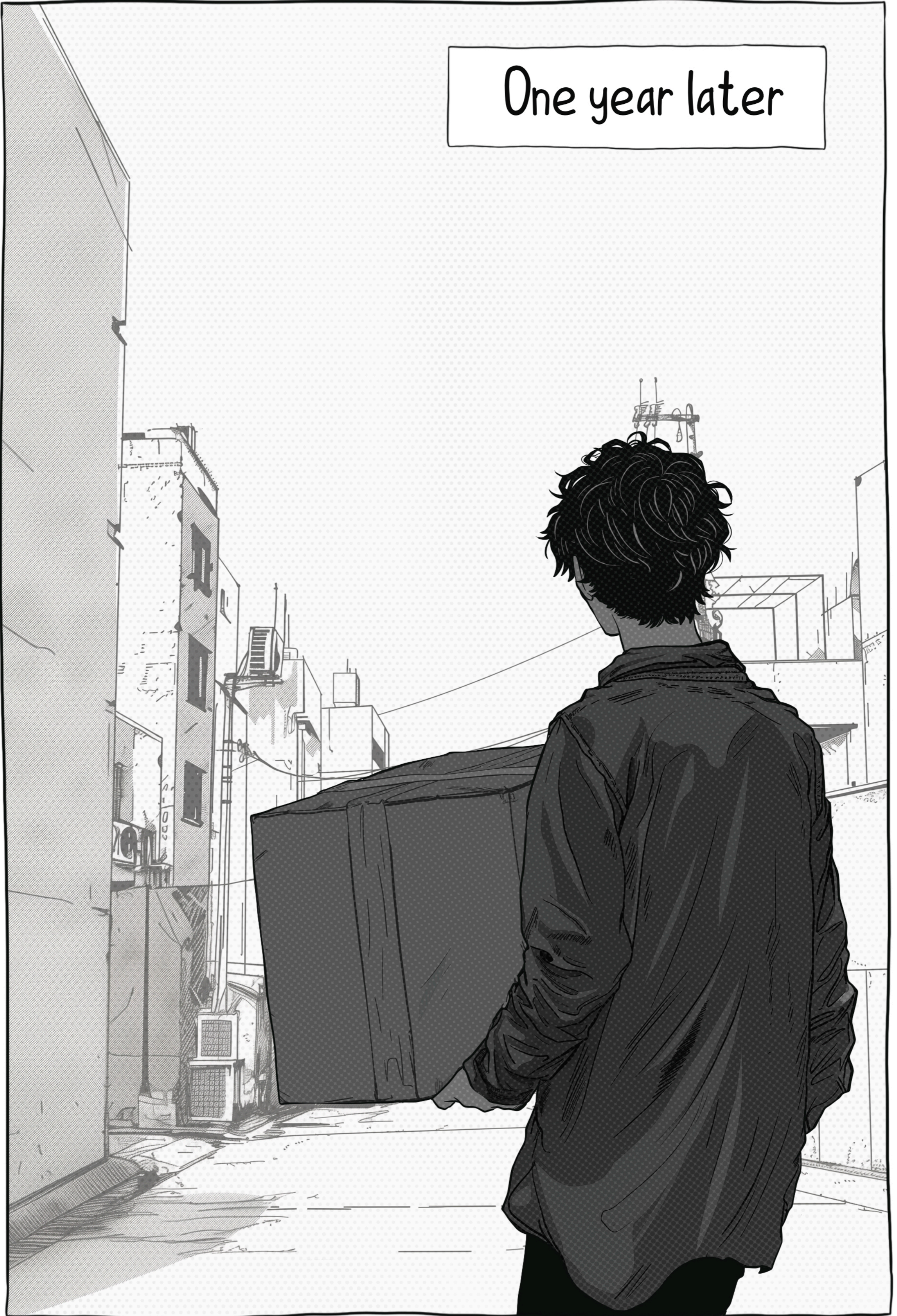


# EPILOGUE





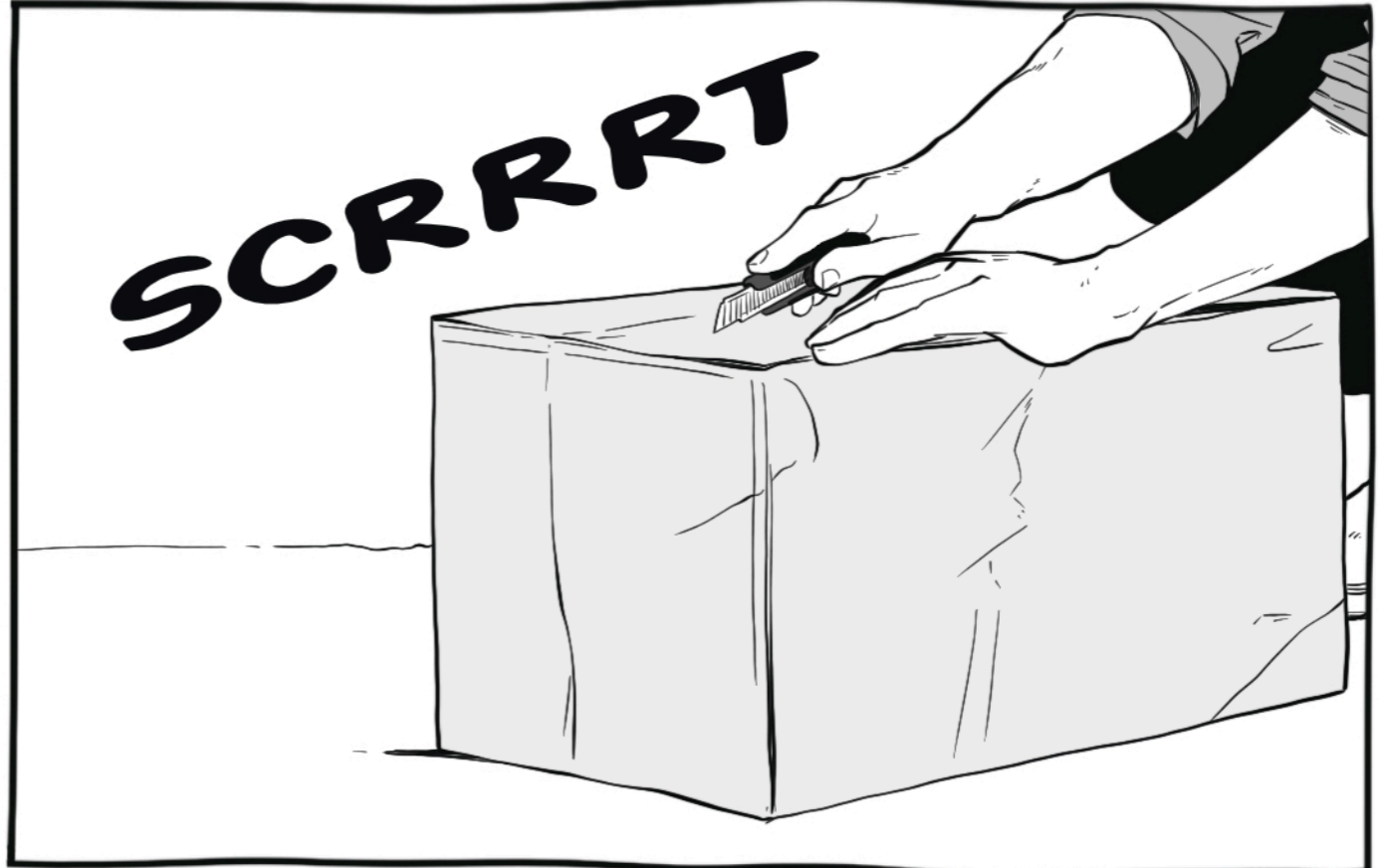
One year later



A year has passed since I left Iqaluit. The world seems to go by as it always does, oblivious to Josh's absence. Time has a way of moving forward, even when it feels like everything should stand still. Since I received the news about Josh, I've worked tirelessly to find a way to honor his memory. It hasn't been easy. There are days when the weight of it all feels too much to bear, but then I remember Josh's words and I find the strength to keep going.



I returned to Iqaluit several times, knowing I needed permission from Josh's family and community to tell his story. I wanted to ensure my efforts were respectful and guided by those who knew him best. This wasn't just my story to tell, but theirs, and I was merely a conduit.



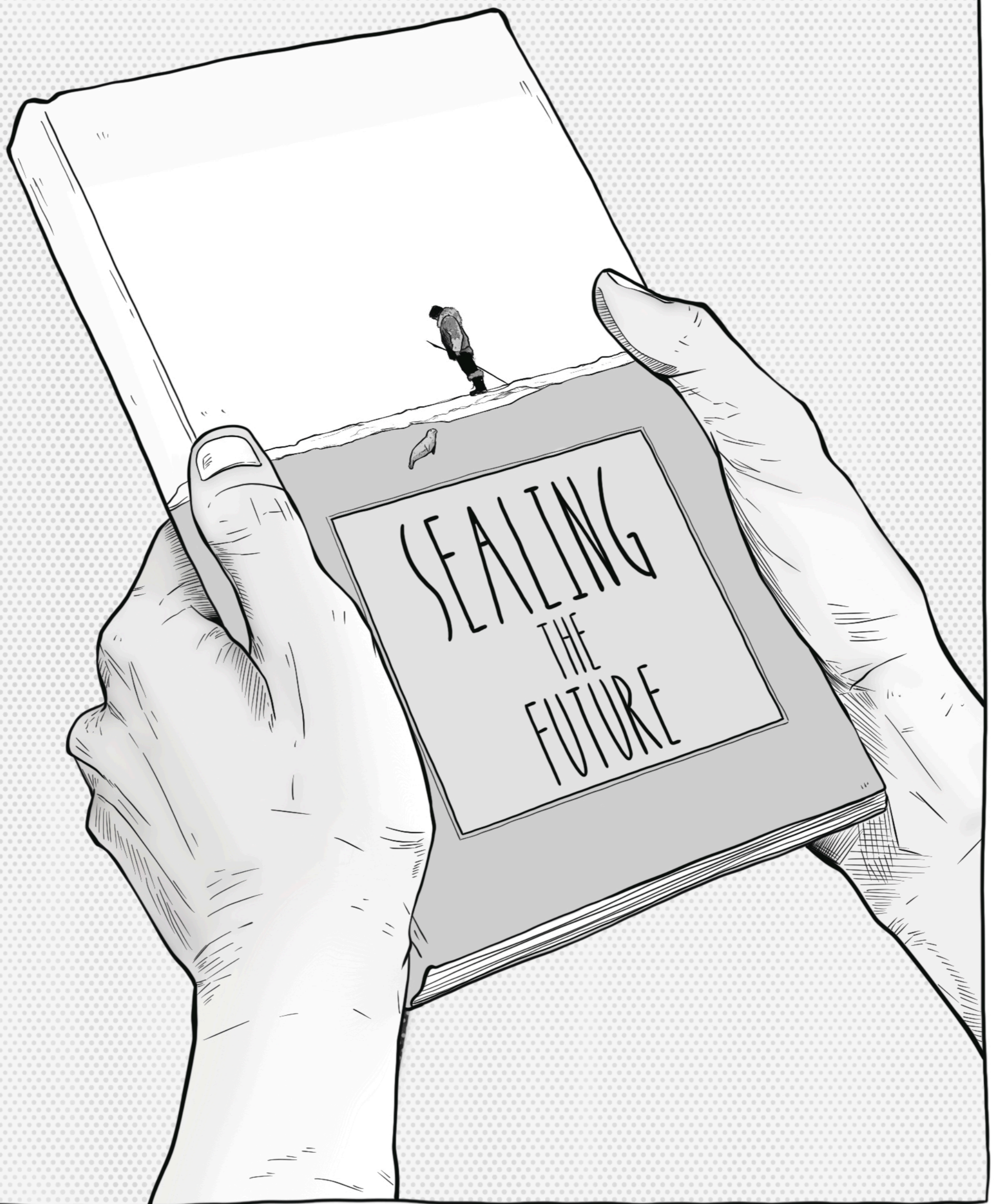
Now, looking back, I reflect on the complexities of the issue and the part I might have unintentionally played in it. There were moments when I questioned my involvement. Was I really helping, or was I just another outsider trying to impose my understanding on a culture I was still learning about? I knew that bringing these stories to light was important, but I also knew that my role was to listen, learn, and support, not to overshadow their voices with my own.



What happens when actions create a culture that exploits brutality and sensationalizes events out of context.

What happens when those crafting policies and campaigns fail to research properly before imposing their will on others?

In the end, what have the western animal rights campaigns and international bans on seal products done to the Inuit seal hunt and their food sovereignty in Nunavut?



I know I'm not in any position to answer that  
but maybe this is what it looks like

It looks like a community of survivors who carry deep wounds.

A community that bears scars which will never fully heal.

It was a call to action for all of us to seek understanding and empathy, and to ensure that our efforts to protect one form of life did not come at the cost of another.



Understand the incredible failures that led to this day ...  
... and do it better the next time.



