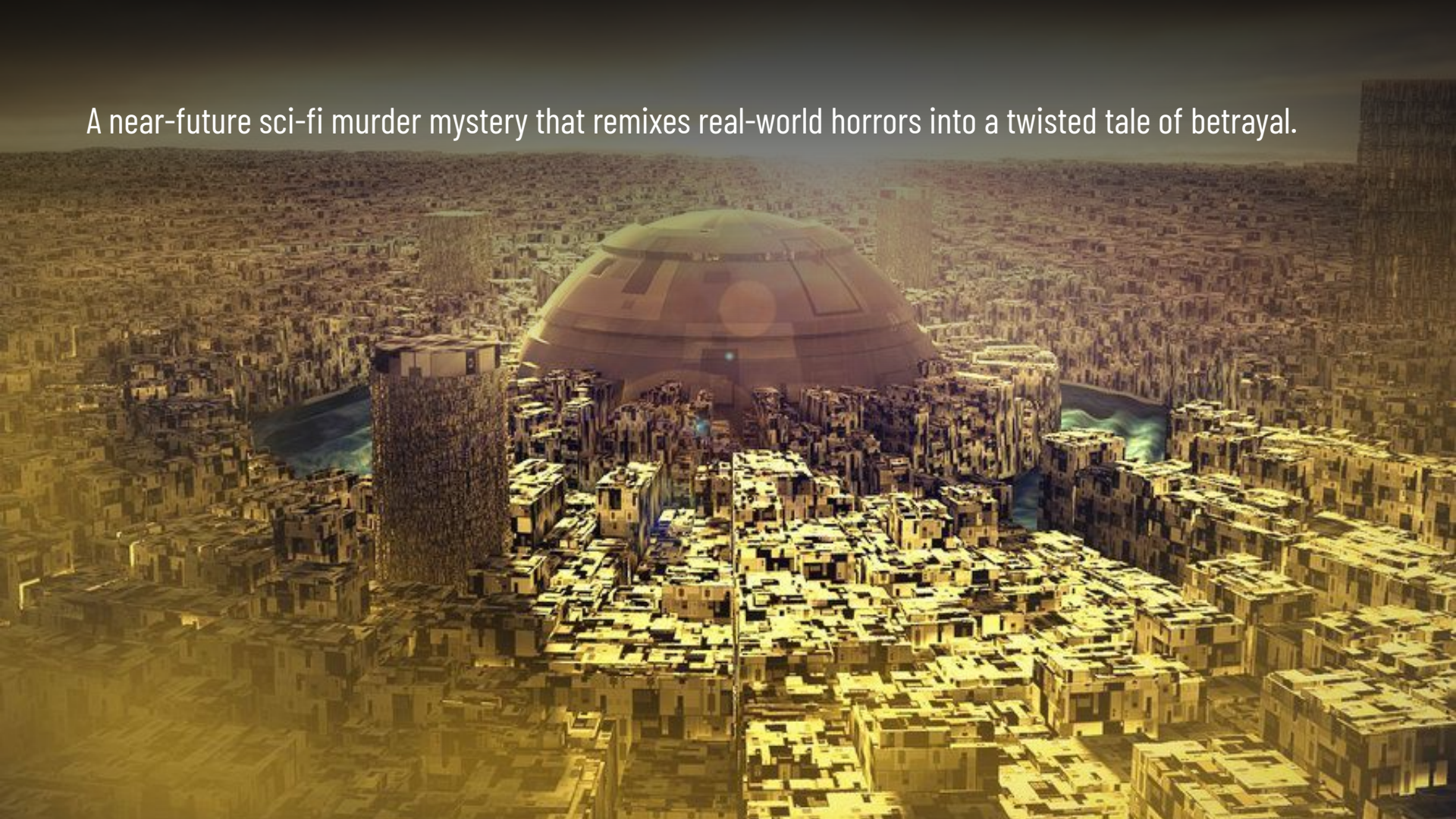
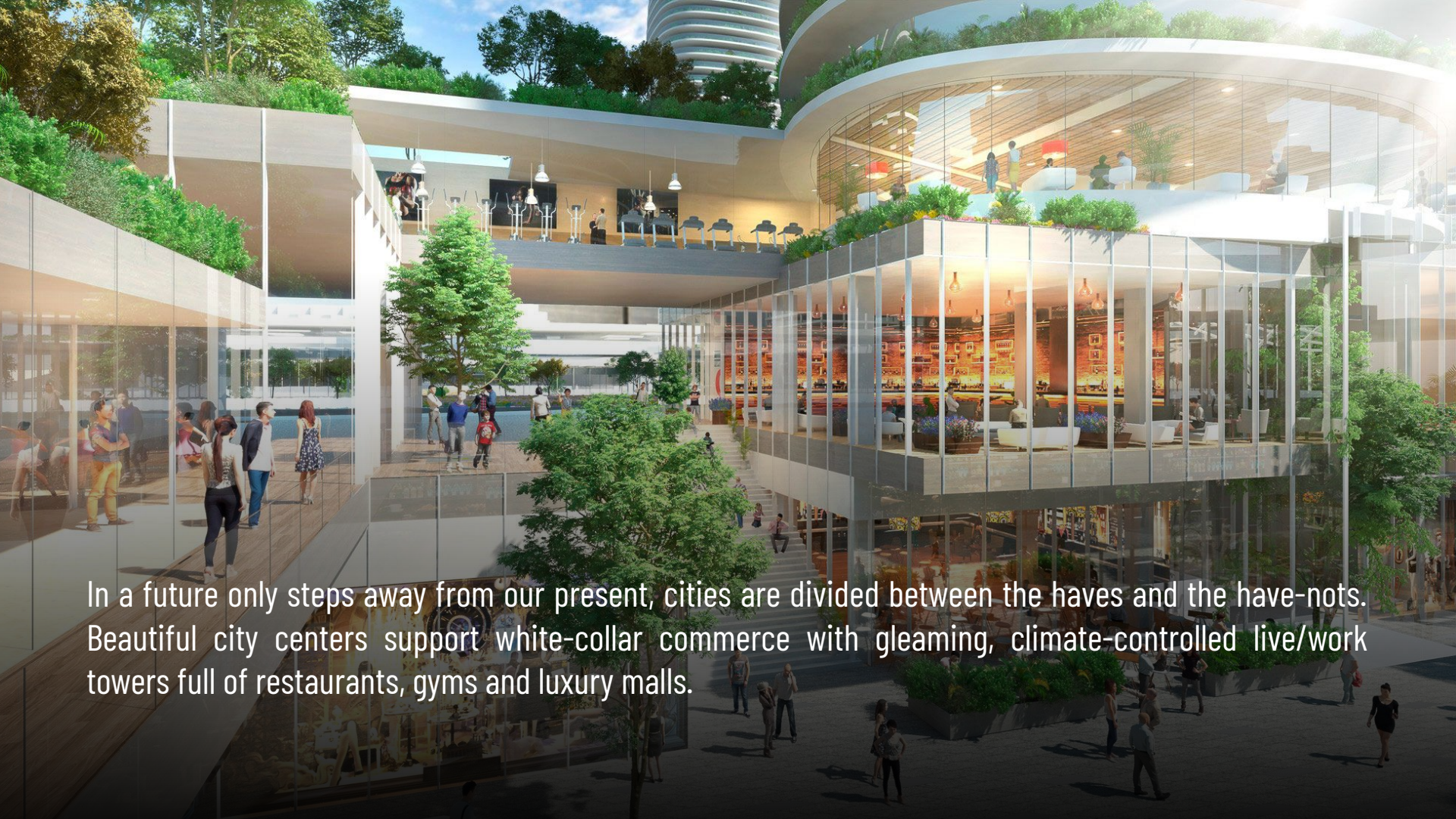
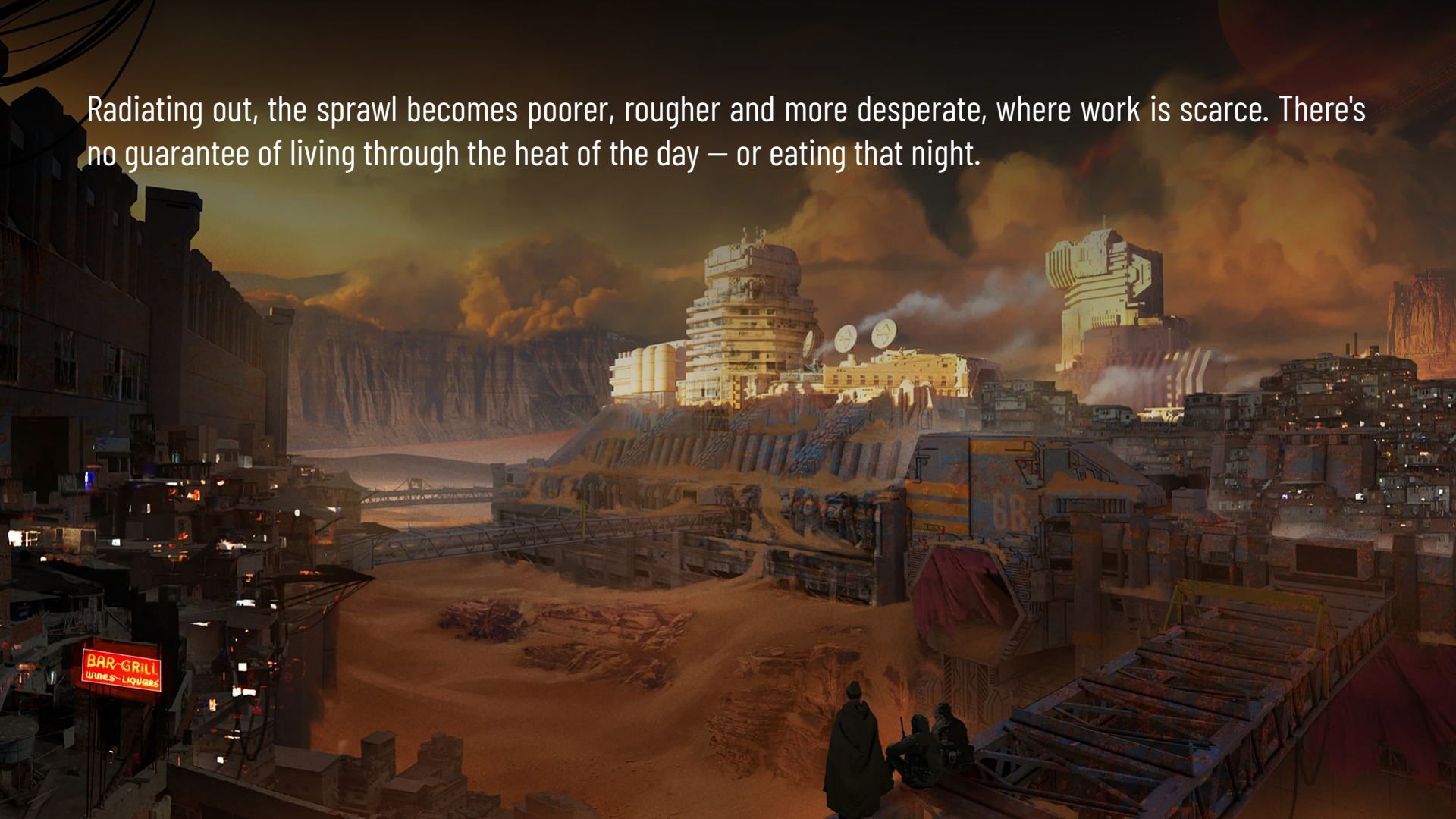
SLUDGE

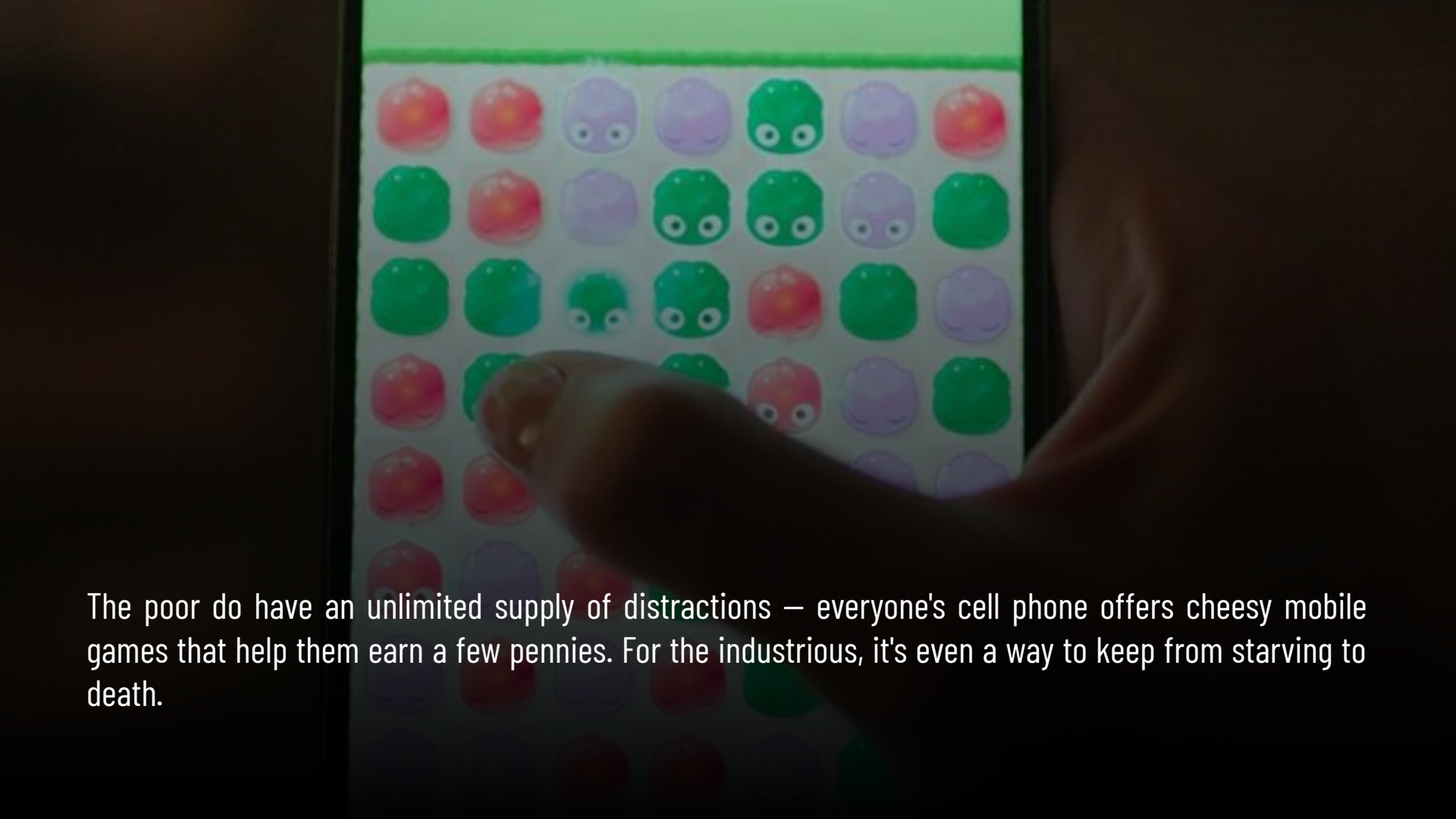

A near-future sci-fi murder mystery that remixes real-world horrors into a twisted tale of betrayal.



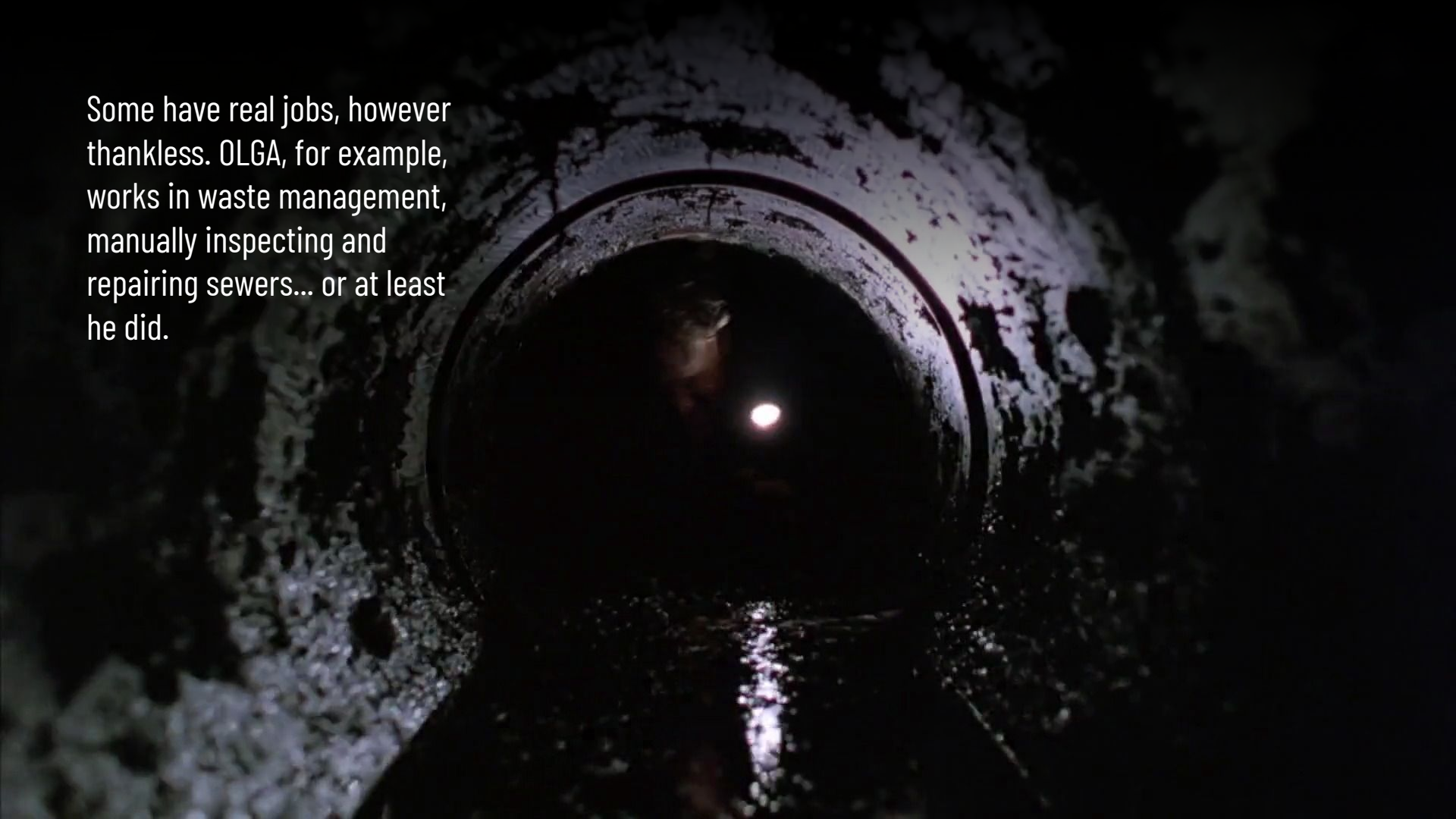
In a future only steps away from our present, cities are divided between the haves and the have-nots. Beautiful city centers support white-collar commerce with gleaming, climate-controlled live/work towers full of restaurants, gyms and luxury malls.



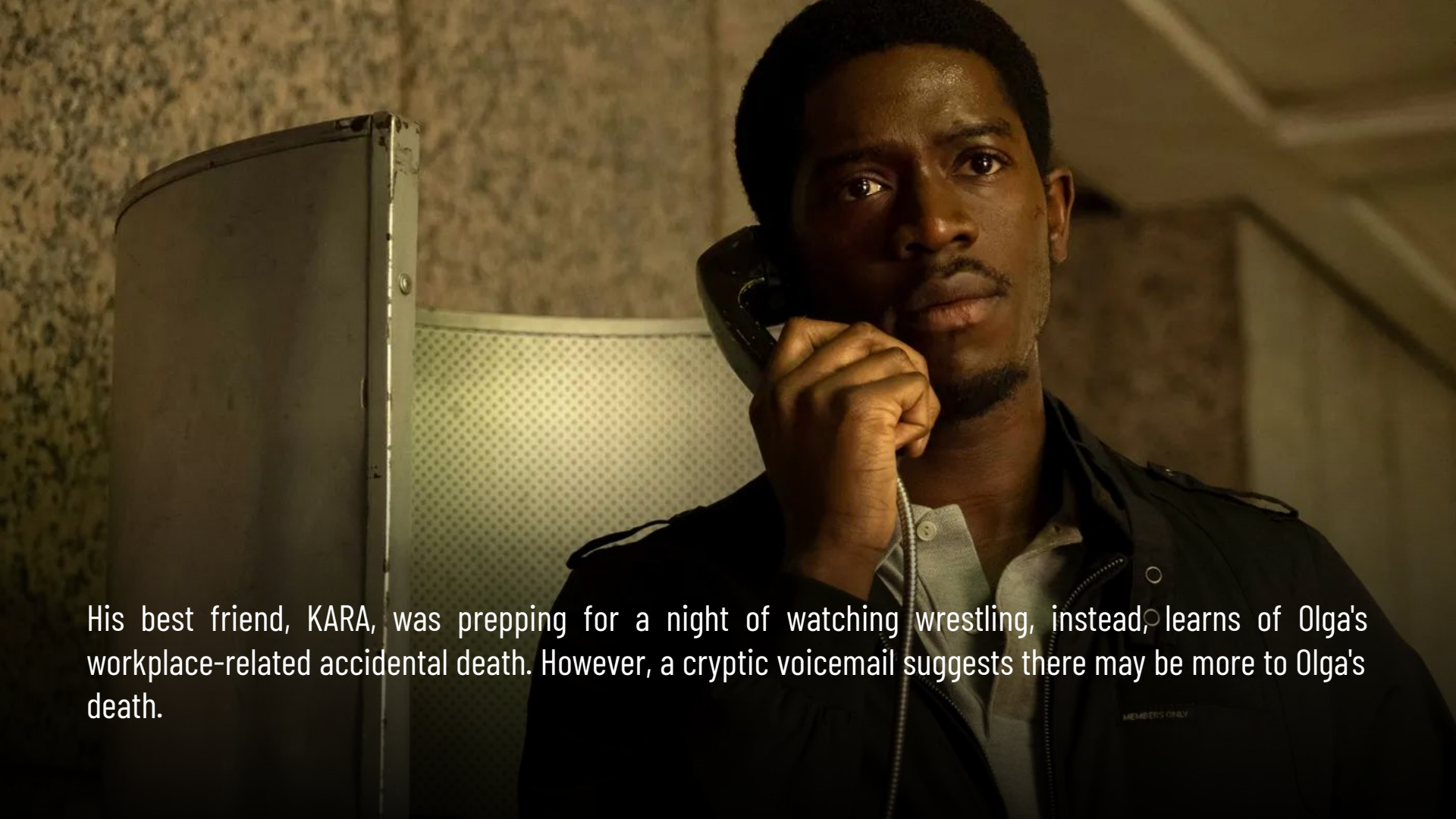
Radiating out, the sprawl becomes poorer, rougher and more desperate, where work is scarce. There's no guarantee of living through the heat of the day — or eating that night.



The poor do have an unlimited supply of distractions — everyone's cell phone offers cheesy mobile games that help them earn a few pennies. For the industrious, it's even a way to keep from starving to death.

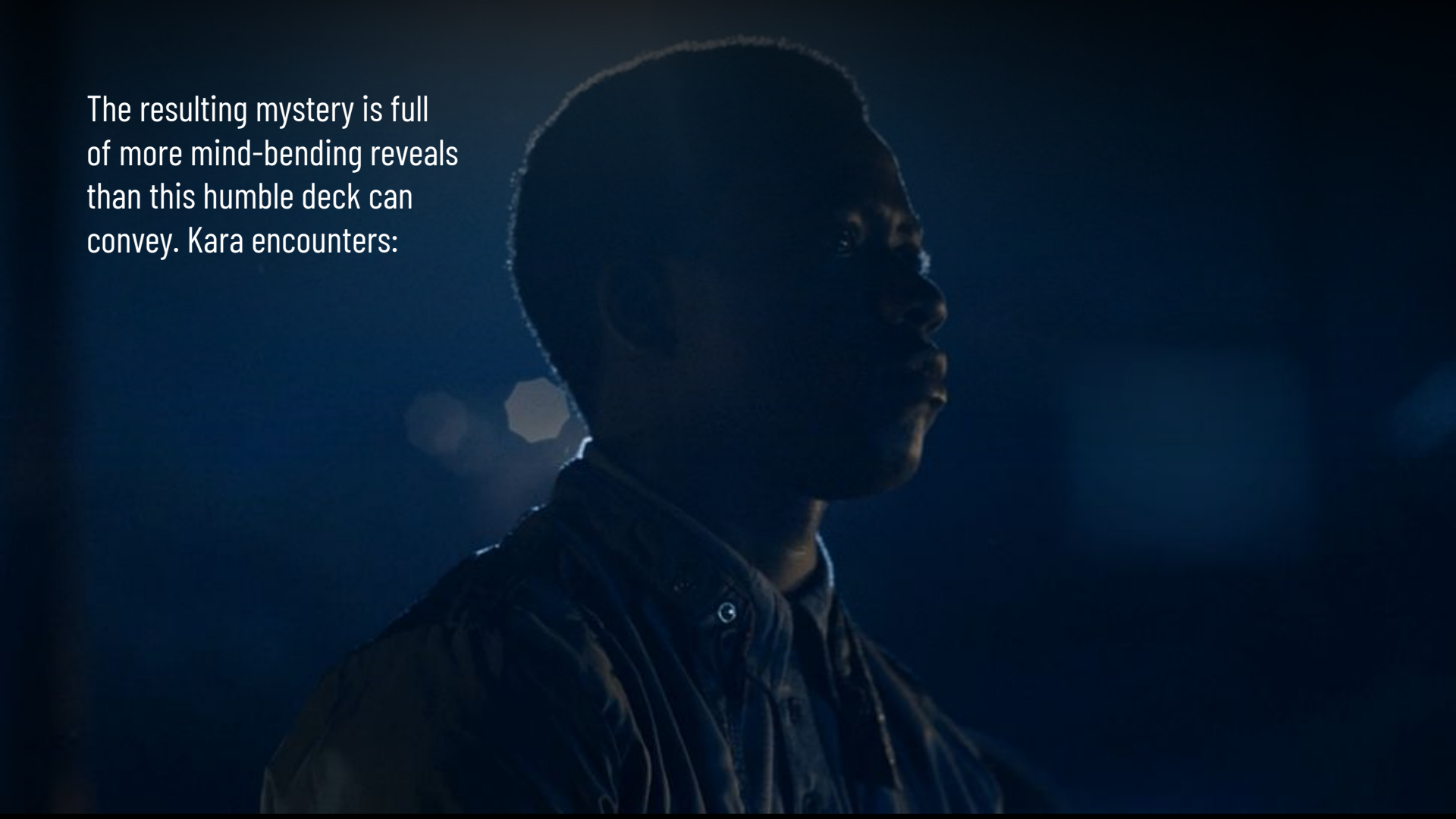


Some have real jobs, however thankless. OLGA, for example, works in waste management, manually inspecting and repairing sewers... or at least he did.



His best friend, KARA, was prepping for a night of watching wrestling, instead, learns of Olga's workplace-related accidental death. However, a cryptic voicemail suggests there may be more to Olga's death.

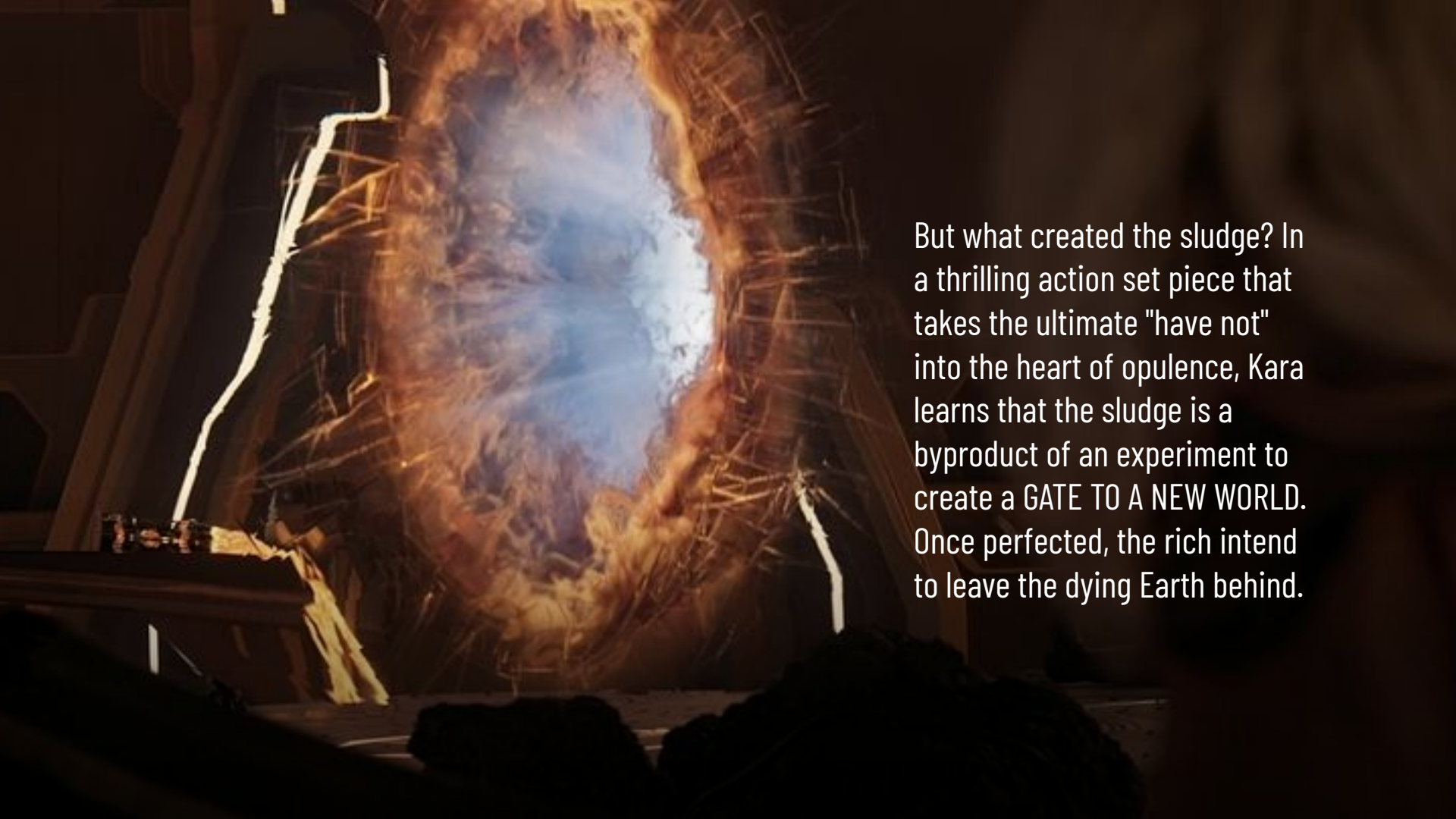
After being stymied by a bureaucratic nightmare, Kara plunges into a truly foreign land — the sewers — to discover the truth.



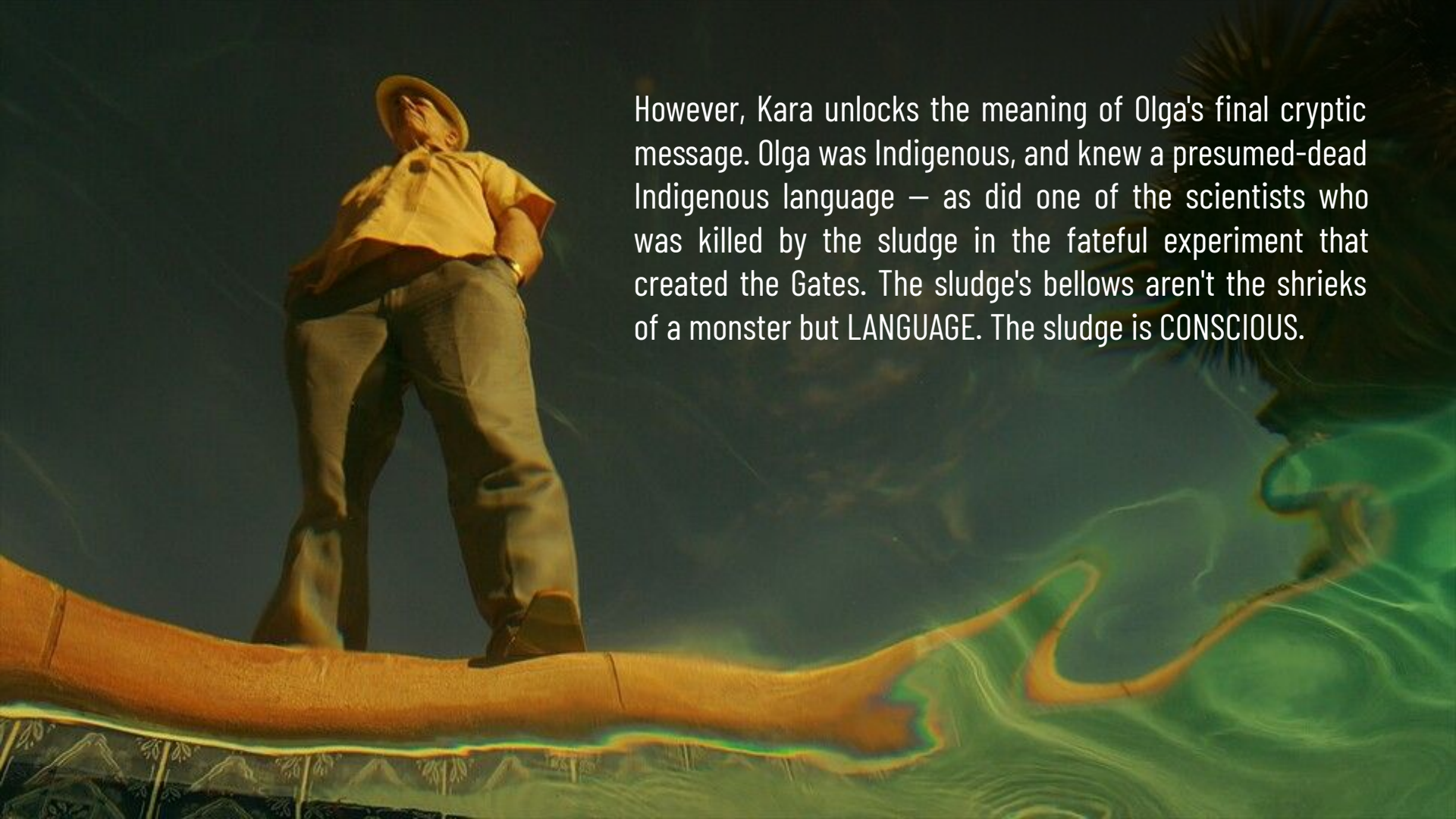
The resulting mystery is full of more mind-bending reveals than this humble deck can convey. Kara encounters:

Predatory "sludge" that roams the sewers, created by underground, illicit scientific testing...

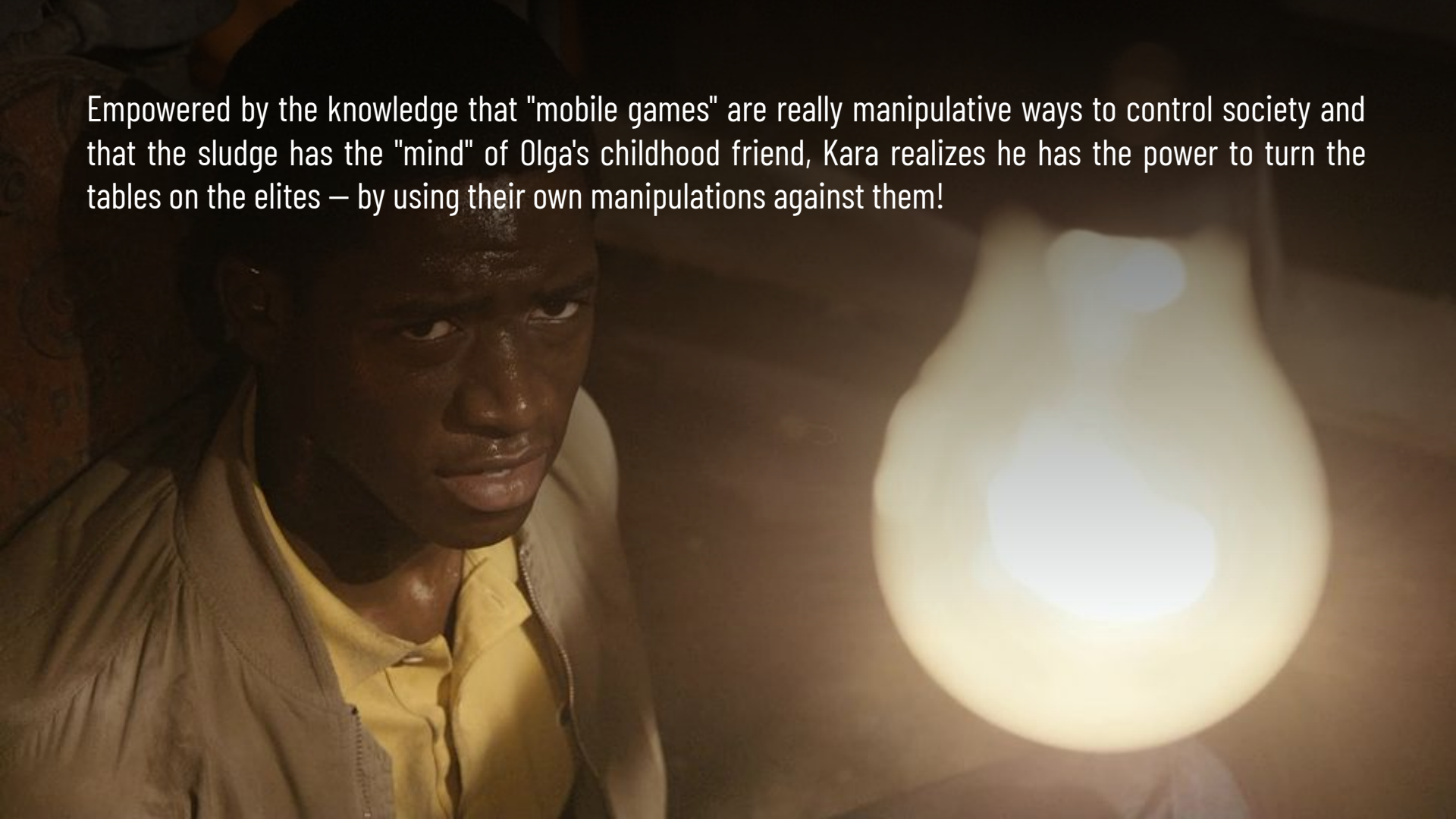
A mechanized system to control and redirect the sludge... controlled by the very mobile games used to mollify the poor. The games have been secretly weaponized so that the poor unwittingly regulate their own demise via the games... meaning that, VIA GAMEPLAY, KARA KILLED HIS OWN BEST FRIEND.



But what created the sludge? In a thrilling action set piece that takes the ultimate "have not" into the heart of opulence, Kara learns that the sludge is a byproduct of an experiment to create a GATE TO A NEW WORLD. Once perfected, the rich intend to leave the dying Earth behind.



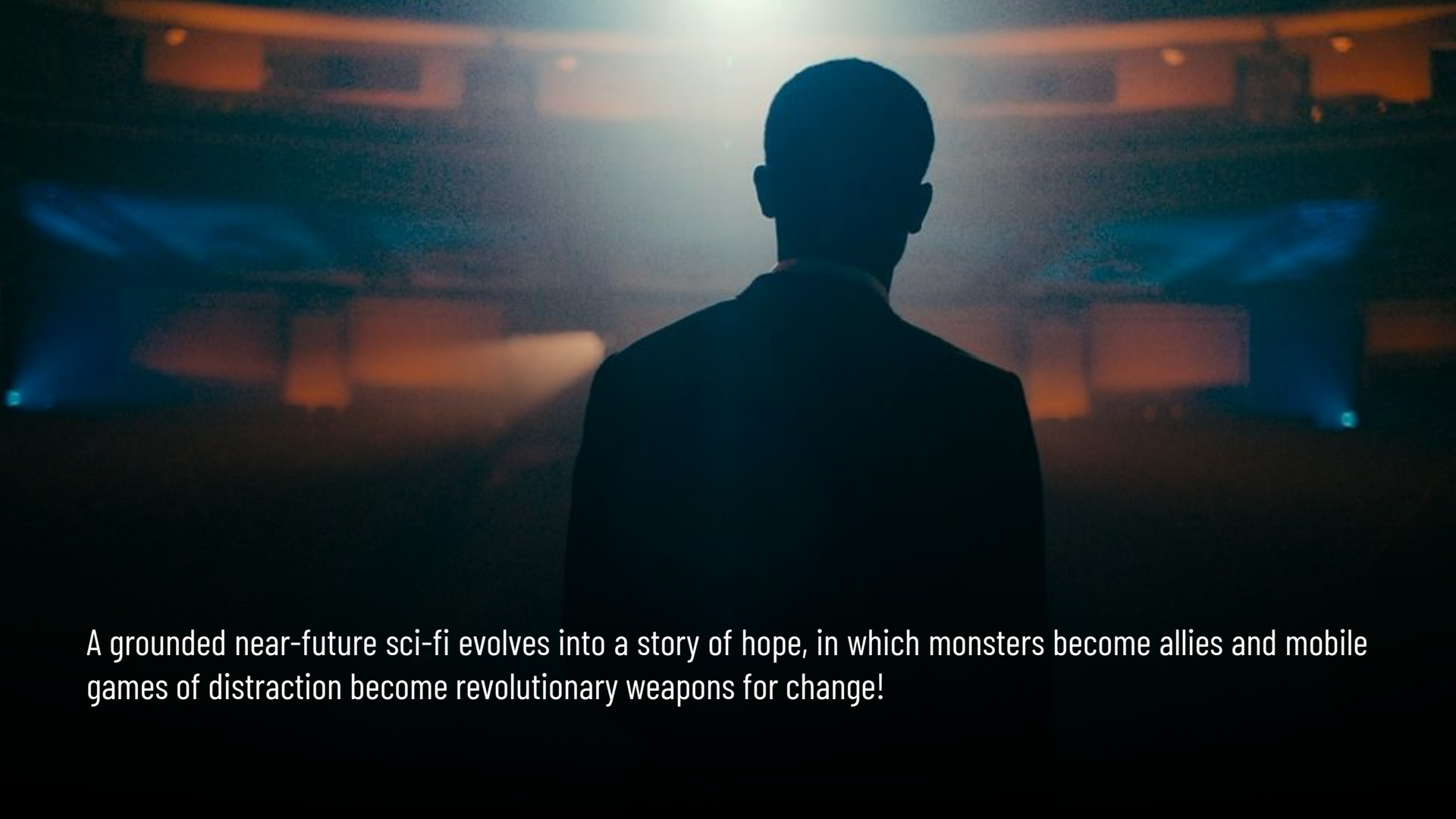
However, Kara unlocks the meaning of Olga's final cryptic message. Olga was Indigenous, and knew a presumed-dead Indigenous language — as did one of the scientists who was killed by the sludge in the fateful experiment that created the Gates. The sludge's bellows aren't the shrieks of a monster but LANGUAGE. The sludge is CONSCIOUS.



Empowered by the knowledge that "mobile games" are really manipulative ways to control society and that the sludge has the "mind" of Olga's childhood friend, Kara realizes he has the power to turn the tables on the elites — by using their own manipulations against them!

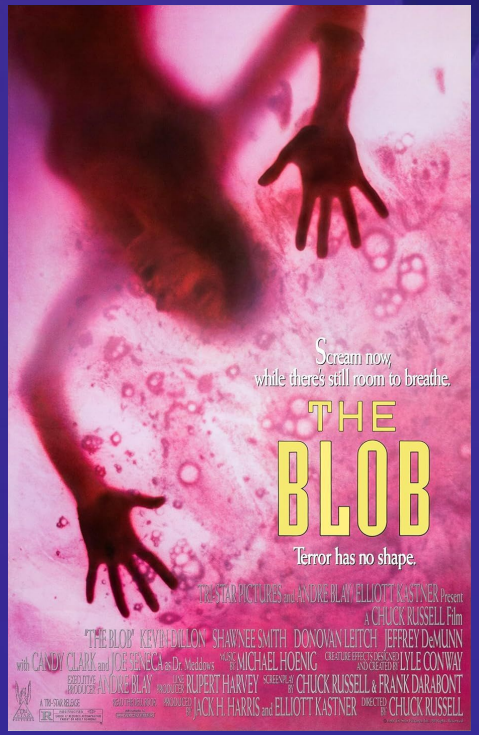
Using the mobile message board, he coordinates "missions" to open the climate-controlled city center and directs the Sludge to the Gate.

— through which will be a cool, clean world with food and water FOR ALL.



A grounded near-future sci-fi evolves into a story of hope, in which monsters become allies and mobile games of distraction become revolutionary weapons for change!

A dark clash between a gamer who has more power than he thinks and a monster that threatens to overpower everyone, united by their common enemy.



SLUDGE

Stories worth the binge Manta