TRIUNE WORLDS

CHAPTER 1 — ARRIVAL ON JURSAIC

JURSAIC. EASTERN FRONTIER.

The eastern jungle was not empty terrain between armies. It was part of the war.

Twelve members of the Platinum Core moved beneath the canopy toward a hidden cave entrance.

Their mission was simple: reach the underground, rendezvous with the Tunnel Rats, and begin the first strike against the eastern frontier.




The eastern jungle closed around them until the men seemed to disappear inside it.
Jursaic did not always hunt with teeth or claws. Sometimes it preferred subtler instruments.
Then the scent found them.
It' was sweet. Pleasant. Gentle enough to feel harmless.
By the time discipline noticed the change, the fragrance had already done its work.
Do you smell that?
Hold line.
Marik?
Something waited ahead in the undergrowth—beautiful enough to invite wonder, quiet enough to hide its hunger.

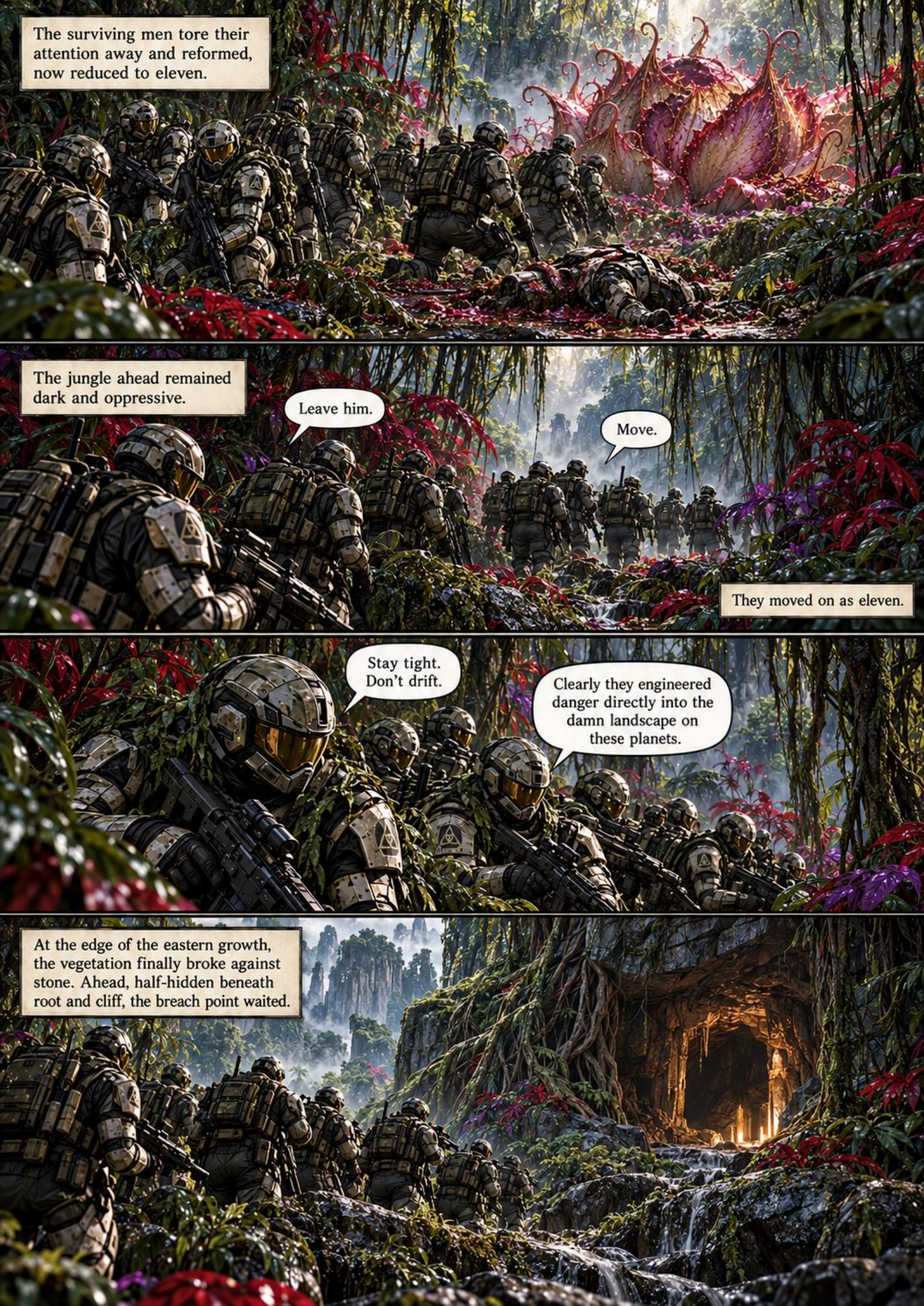

The scent strengthened as Merik moved away from the line.
He did not run. He did not stumble. He simply kept walking.
Merik!


Beauty had done what teeth could not.
By the time the others understood how far he had gone, Merik was already standing within reach.
Merik! Back away!

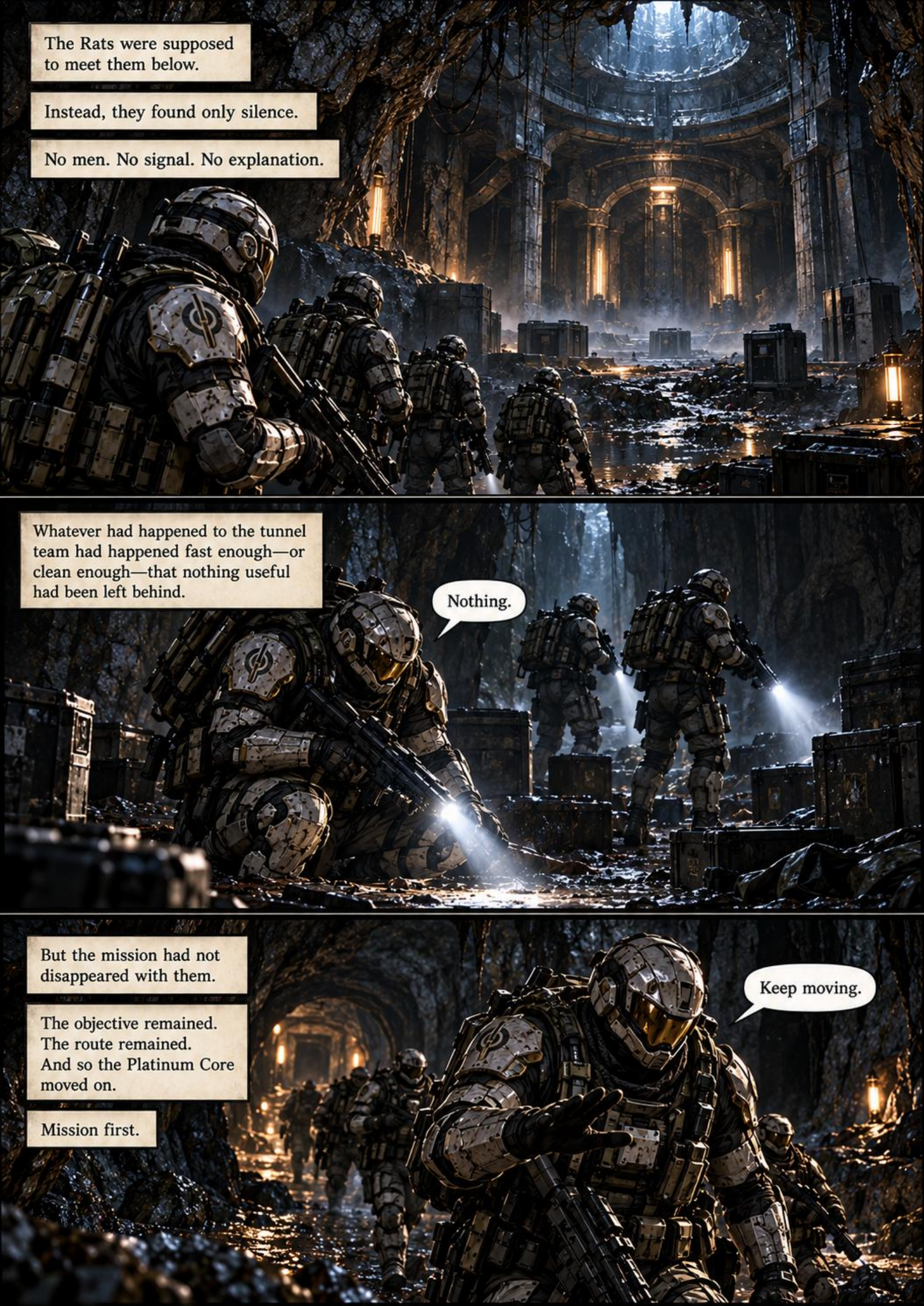





I'm switching to incendiary!
NO! We don't know if there is a pocket of gas here! You could light us all up!


The surviving men tore their attention away and reformed, now reduced to eleven.
The jungle ahead remained dark and oppressive.
Leave him.
Move.
They moved on as eleven.
Stay tight. Don't drift.
Clearly they engineered danger directly into the damn landscape on these planets.
At the edge of the eastern growth, the vegetation finally broke against stone. Ahead, half-hidden beneath root and cliff, the breach point waited.


The breach point opened beneath root and stone, swallowing the light behind them.
The Rats are supposed to meet us in one kilometer.
Let's move.
Stay tight. Form up against the walls. We don't know what could be down here yet.
The signs began almost at once. Scale marks. Deep scrapes. Mud torn raw across the walls. And something else— something hard and heavy dragged through the passage.
Whatever had passed through the tunnel had not moved gently.
Look at this.
What the hell could that be?
What does it look like?
Behind them, the entrance was already shrinking into darkness.
Let's get moving. The sooner we finish the mission, the sooner we get the hell out of here.


The Rats were supposed to meet them below.
Instead, they found only silence.
No men. No signal. No explanation.
Whatever had happened to the tunnel team had happened fast enough—or clean enough—that nothing useful had been left behind.
Nothing.
But the mission had not disappeared with them.
The objective remained.
The route remained.
And so the Platinum Core moved on.
Mission first.
Keep moving.